

## LITERARY RECEPTION OR LINGUISTIC REPRODUCTION ?

On Johannes Bureus and the rise of Swedish medieval philology

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It is the fantasy, the magnificent madness, that has formed the conception still prevailing of the "Geatish" tradition of science and learning in 17th century Sweden - a tradition dominated, at a cursory glance, by Rudbeckians and kindred spirits, the grand forerunners like Stiernhielm and Verelius not to be forgotten.

The constituent elements of this conception are well known - all traceable to the bizarre identification of Geatish and Swedish, wherever occurring in fact or fiction: the notion of the runes as bearers of the original script, invented in Sweden; the idea of a "Geatish" language, one of the original tongues of the world, identical with Swedish and to be found even in later, medieval hand-written documents, like the sagas and Eddas on Iceland, and the provincial laws in Sweden and Denmark; the senior Rudbeck's grandiose constructions in the "Atlantica" in the last decades of the century.

References to this standard picture of the Rudbeckian era have recently been used as a crushing weapon against the "Västgöta school", raging today in the western parts of Sweden, and its dashing historical conclusions, unconcerned of fact and consistency.<sup>1</sup> This parallel is striking, and apparently well founded. It draws its power, however, from a substantially simplified conception of an important epoch in the history of Swedish learned culture.

The 17th century advance of antiquarian, historical, and philological research in Sweden will, on just slightly closer inspection, present an unmistakable Janus face. The bizarre and speculative sides are made up for by other, more sober-minded and matter-of-fact approaches, characterized by precision and acumen. Neither in Stiernhielm nor in Verelius - nor even in Rudbeck himself for that matter - has it been possible entirely to deny the presence of these other valuable qualities. Most obvious, however, is the splitness in the oldest important, though perhaps somewhat less renowned, representative of the epoch: *Johannes Bureus* (1568-1652).

This early prominent figure in the late flourishing Swedish Renaissance culture rather unequivocally stands out as the great pioneer in a remarkably wide range of science in Sweden, during a considerably long period of time. His influence on antiquarian, historical, and linguistic thinking is, undeniably, easy to recognize in the great fulfillers of the tradition that he immediately initiated - i.e. in men like Stiernhielm, Verelius, and Rudbeck. But even scholars of the Caroline period, like e.g. the pioneers of grammar and language planning (Aurivillius, Salberg, Tiällmann, and, in a way, more extensive spirits like Hjärne, Swedberg, Spegel), are still deeply marked by the Burean tradition - though, partly, in a negative sense, as a powerful but

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<sup>1</sup>Lars Lönnroth in the Svenska Dagbladet 4.4.1991.

antiquated pattern of thinking, something distinctly to oppose and to dissociate oneself from.

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Johannes Bureus (or *Johan Bure*, as his name reads unlatinized) belonged to an old and famous learned family. He was the son of a clergyman and a native of Åkerby in Uppland. In 1590 he entered the royal secretariat and was early entrusted with several honourable commissions: he was appointed clerk at the Uppsala meeting 1593 and tutor to the crown prince Gustav Adolf, and he supervised the reprint of the Reformation Bible that resulted 1618 in the so-called Gustavus II Adolphus Bible.

Bureus was a complex nature, perhaps even more so than his like-minded successors. He appeared publicly as a mystic and a visionary, partly in the Geatish spirit of contemporary Renaissance culture. At the same time, and equally undisputably, he was an unbiased observer and a sharp-sighted registrar of empirical data. During his long life, he built up a many-sided personal position in Swedish culture: within his activity was room for apocalyptic speculation, including the absorption in dreams that came true and in revelations; as a mystic and prophet in a Swedish tradition Bureus has been compared to celebrities like St. Bridget and Swedenborg. But he was also occupied with very tangible enterprises, like preserving and thoroughly documenting relics of Swedish antiquity, particularly runic inscriptions, and accurately editing medieval Swedish text. Bureus is generally referred to as Sweden's first "Custodian of National Monuments" ('riksantikvarie'): to him posterity owes the saving from oblivion and extinction of large numbers of medieval manuscripts. His edition of the classical Old Swedish work *Konungastyrelsen* ('The Rule of Kings') 1634 is our first scholarly text edition to appear in print; it was to become Bureus' only achievement as a philological editor.

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In this context - concerning the reception of early Nordic texts - Johannes Bureus is relevant particularly in two capacities: as a *runologist* and as a *textual philologist*; in both he was a great pioneer.

In the first capacity he began earliest and was active longest. The royal commission to travel round the country, with the aim of reproducing runic stones and interpreting their inscriptions, engaged him throughout his life. Duke Karl's passport for the purpose, issued in Bureus's name 1599, has been preserved.

It is in fact Bureus the runologist whose achievement has attracted most attention from posterity. It is hardly surprising; in this field his accomplishments were extensive, in a quantitative as well as in a qualitative sense. Bureus (and his assistants) described, very sharply and accurately, more than 600 Swedish runic inscriptions; that makes a rough quarter of the material known today, some 350 years later.

Burean runology covers the entire range in contemporary learning: from bizarre fantasy and impenetrable mystification, to clear-sighted observing, sharp conclusion, and rational systematizing. Besides, there is an unmistakable personal dash of artistic elegance, particularly to be enjoyed in the extensive work of

reproduction: in numerous drawings, woodcuts, and copperplate engravings. - As the undisputed founder of runological research, and even, for remarkably long, as its unsurpassed Nestor, Bureus has retained the authority of his example almost up to modern times.

As a textual philologist, Bureus is less renowned. His achievement in this field is no doubt a more modest one. Nevertheless, it is far from insignificant. - Bureus chose, as mentioned, for publishing in print, out of all medieval texts available, the *Konungastyrelsen*. This work, probably conceived about 1330, is the East Norse counterpart to the older Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* (from which it is not influenced) and has been traced back to a Latin original (Egidius Romanus' *De regimine principum*). It is one of the great, "classical", literary documents of the Middle Ages in Sweden - in today's opinion, mind you! With his choice, Bureus became (unawares, we may presume) a pioneer in giving substance to that very opinion. He supported it, too, by warmly praising the work in an eloquent preface.

Accordingly, Bureus was one of the first to contribute to building up the standard evaluation of the epoch of *chivalry*, the so-called Folkunga period (late 13th and 14th centuries) - with its uniform, aristocratic culture - as the "golden age" of Swedish medieval literature. The contrast to the later, socially and culturally more turbulent "Union period" (from the late 14th to the early 16th century) is, by Bureus' editorial achievement, indirectly anticipated. - The literary production of the Union period is characterized rather by bourgeois and democratic tendencies. This, according to traditional assessment, makes it more commonplace, in certain genres even stylistically coarse and vulgar.

It is this philological side of Bureus' work (irrespective, though, of its general ideological implications) that we are going to take into a bit closer consideration below.

### The first philologist

Bureus' sole, but the more important work as a textual philologist, the edition of the *Konungastyrelsen* (referred to below as *KS*), appeared at Eskil Mattson's printing office at Uppsala in 1634, thus entitled: *En nyttigh Bok, om Konunga Styrilse och Höfdinga, Fordom för någre hundrade år, af en förståndigh Swensk man skrifvin, ock nu nyliga framkommen, Ock vtaf framlihdne salighe hoos Gudhi Martyren, ... Den Stormechtigeste Höghorne Förste och Herre H.GVSTAF ADOLF den Andre och Store, ... först öfwerläsin, Och efter H.K.M:s nådige befalning, strax ord från ord trykt blifvin, och sedan i medler tijdh medh torftige Register förbettrad, och nu publicerat.*<sup>2</sup>

This extensive title contains some information substantial to our understanding of the genesis of the edition text. We learn for instance that Gustav Adolf in person read the medieval book and ordered it to be printed off word for word; in his preface, Bureus dwells at length on the king's devotion to the matter.

The printed volume is introduced with an obsequious dedication to the young queen Kristina, dated June 20th; Axel Oxenstierna's ten-year-old son Erik has written

<sup>2</sup>Literally something like: 'A useful Book, about the Rule of Kings and Princes, In times past, some hundreds of years ago, by a wise Swedish man written, and now recently emerged, And by the late blessed with God Martyr, ... The Magnificent Honourable Prince and Master H.GVSTAF ADOLF the Second and Great, ... first perused, And after H.R.M:s gracious command, soon word by word printed, and then in the meantime with necessary Indexes improved, and now published.'

his name in a preserved copy on June 30th. The dates mark the *termini post quem* and *ante quem* for the edition to have left the printing office. - During these very days of early summer 1634, the Riksdag was gathering in Stockholm, for Gustav II Adolf's funeral and for making necessary arrangements for the Government during the period of young Kristina's regency. The coincidence is hardly accidental.<sup>3</sup>

Before the text proper, one reads Bureus' preface to "den skönsame läsaren" ('the judicious reader'), dated June 26th 1630. At that time (i.e. more than two years before the king's heroic decease, and four years before the edition was published), the text of the book, it appears, was already set up and printed. The delay in publishing was probably due to the work with the preparation of the "torftige register" ('necessary indexes') announced in the title. From diary notes preserved, it is evident that Bureus had actually been working with the KS edition since the early 1620's, at least. - Consequently, when it was finally presented to the public, we have good reasons to expect a piece of solid philological workmanship.

This observation has a certain relevance in view of a lengthy debate on the authenticity of the edition text, that seems to have begun just shortly after its publication. The question was not settled until the middle of the last century. - According to his own statements in the edition title (as well as in some other texts preserved), Bureus used for his edition one medieval manuscript. It was the only one known at the time, possessed and placed at the editor's disposal by his friend and colleague Johan Skytte. This manuscript is not preserved today; in fact, it seems to have been lost very soon after its employment by Bureus.

In the third reprint of the edition, appearing 1669 (the second came out 1650), the editor Johannes Schefferus - who apparently had no access himself to any medieval manuscript - mentions that some people have called the existence of such a document into question, suspecting the KS to be a fake. Bureus was accused of having - acting in collusion with the king and Skytte - cleverly transposed the language of some obscure recent document into convincing Old Swedish. - The erudite old antiquarian and runologist enjoyed a solid and lasting reputation as a notorious mystificator.

Admittedly, in view of Bureus' prophetic ambitions, publicly proclaimed, as well as his vivid interests in apocalypsis and cabbala and the like, these suspicions may not have been entirely unwarranted; in any case, appearances were against him. For two centuries, several scholars persisted in their scepticism. - It should be noted, however, that neither Schefferus himself, nor qualified philologists of the 18th and early 19th centuries (like e.g. the Law editor C.J. Schlyter, or J.E. Rydqvist, the grand old man of later Swedish philology), gave any credence to the malicious rumours.

As mentioned, the question was settled in the 19th century: with the emergence of the final positive evidence in favour of authenticity. In 1867, at the Imperial Senate Archive of Helsinki, one came across two leaves of parchment, displaying a minor part of the Old Swedish KS text. This tiny fragment (a few pages in modern print) has been dated, with a satisfactory degree of certainty, to the 1430's; it

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<sup>3</sup>Moberg 1964: 5 f.

apparently belongs to another stemmatic branch of the manuscript tradition than did Bureus' lost original.<sup>4</sup>

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Clearing away the doubts concerning authenticity has, as might have been expected, just left room for new intricate problems. Problems related to textual history, language and style of the KS in Bureus' edition and in the Helsinki fragment have aroused great interest among scholars of the field. - The first investigation on the basis of all material known was carried out by G.E. Klemming, already one year after the decisive finding.<sup>5</sup> Latest, these problems have been very thoroughly dealt with in an exhaustive monograph by L. Moberg (1984).

The questions relevant in this context are of course those concerning Bureus' way of working in his capacity as an editor of medieval Swedish text. Which principles and ambitions may have guided him? - Even Moberg, in his deep-going investigation mentioned above, devotes considerable attention to these questions.<sup>6</sup> In the following, I will touch upon some central elements of the complex, leaning mainly on Moberg's exposition, completed with some observations of my own - trying, though, to bring its results on certain points a bit closer to some kind of synthesis.

In his six-page preface to the reader Bureus himself devotes eleven lines to - among other things - an account of his proceeding. These lines read:

Och ärät klart af thet samma exemplaret, som thenna boken är tryckt efter, af flere sådanna exemplar hafva fordom skrifne varit, af ty förnämligast at then thetta rent skref, hafver thet icke wäl läsa kunnat thet som han före sigh hadhe och efter skref, som man nogh skönja kan af thet ordet aldor, ärfdaråd och iuiruåtes och flera. Ther före iagh mångstādhes medh ymtan och gissning måste vileta lijkligeste meningen, såsom af natskäwa wett och Räsunga koster och flere sådana ord Såsom them skönsamma Läsaren warder wäl finnandes i Lålsningenne /sic!/, ther något feel kan ännu finnas.<sup>7</sup>

It appears from these statements, first, that Bureus has based his edition on one sole original; second, that this original of the edition is not the original of the literary work, but a copy, suffering from different kinds of clerical errors and misread forms of words.<sup>8</sup> Third, we learn that the editor "in many places" has found himself compelled to construct a readable text where the original failed; in other words, he

<sup>4</sup>Moberg 1984: 14 f, 42 ff.

<sup>5</sup>Klemming 1868: 1-15.

<sup>6</sup>Mainly in the first chapter of the monograph (1984: 17-55 passim).

<sup>7</sup>Literally: 'And it's evident from the same copy, which this book is printed after, that more such copies have in times past been written, from that mainly that the one who copied this, has not been able to read that well that he had before himself and wrote after, which one can see enough from that word aldor, ärfdaråd and iuiruåtes and more. Therefore I in many places with assumption and guessing must hunt out the most probable meaning, like of natskäwa wett and Räsunga koster and more such words As the judicious reader will well find in the reading, where some fault may still be found.'

<sup>8</sup>Modern philologists claim to have dated this non-existent manuscript to the later 15th century (Moberg 1984: 17).

has not been too afraid of making conjectures. He omits, however, to account for them in a commentary - thus depriving his readers of the possibility of discerning the Burean elements in the text from the medieval. According to modern philological standard, his conduct is unforgivable, not to say unthinkable. To blame Bureus would, of course, be grossly anachronistic; we can just state that he, following the standard of his time, considered himself free, if required, to improve the text on his own responsibility, and without ideas of any obligations to render account of it. Obviously, too, this was required relatively frequently.

A tangible hint of the character of such improvements is offered by a preserved Burean manuscript, containing the draft of the glosses (the "registers") that were added to the edition before printing.<sup>9</sup> Bureus here lists, with explanations, a considerable number of words of the KS text which he considers obscure to the contemporary normal reader, and, accordingly, to be taken up in the printed glosses; in some cases, too, he informs of the readings in the manuscript, changed by him. In the same work, Bureus accounts even for different data on orthography and word forms in the manuscript.

With this, one might compare the words of the edition title, quoted above: "by the late blessed with God Martyr, ... The Magnificent Honourable Prince and Master H.GVSTAF ADOLF the Second and Great, ... first perused, And after H.R.M:s gracious command, soon word by word printed". It seems obvious that the king, after reading the Old Swedish text, impressed by its contents, ordered it to be printed off literally; further, that Bureus as the editor has been eager to emphasize his fidelity to the original.

There is no necessary contradiction between these statements in the edition title and the declarations in the preface concerning the need to improve the text. To Bureus it has been the matter of producing a text for use in practical life, primarily with didactic purposes. He has had - like the king, presumably, who was a highly literate sovereign<sup>10</sup> - a genuine feeling for the sober, "classical", style of the document's Old Swedish language, and he has endeavoured to do it justice. The fundamental means has been *carefulness* in rendering the language of the original: fidelity in form, as a matter of principle, combined with cautious retouching and completion when necessary.

The crucial question, then, is how far Bureus actually went in *exactly* copying the medieval linguistic form that he had before his eyes. - This question is important for two reasons. First, it concerns the evidence of the KS as a source of the history of Swedish language. Which language does it represent: that of the early 14th or that of the 17th century? - just to mention the extremes. Second, Bureus' way of working and his attitude to his task may provide interesting glimpses of his and his contemporaries' conceptions and values.

The problem concerning the historical evidence of the edition language is a very complex one. - To begin with, the two extremes cannot be isolated: the Burean original was not, as we know, the original of the medieval work, prepared in the early

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<sup>9</sup>Stockholm, Royal Library F a 13; see Klemming 1868: 4 ss and Moberg 1984: 17 ss.

<sup>10</sup>Besides, he had been educated by Bureus himself.

14th century, but a late 15th century copy. The copyist's own language, characterized by younger, late medieval features, is quite likely to have left its mark on his product. - Further, the editor's ambitions may have varied at different levels of language: in spelling, word forms, choice of words, syntax. - As regards the ambition accurately to reproduce the linguistic form of an original, one has to distinguish, too, between the editor's "ideology", i.e. his deliberate intentions or his unreflecting attitudes, and his "acriby", i.e. his accuracy in performing. (What does he think he *should* do, in principle - and what does he have the capability, the strength, the time, the inclination actually to do?) The last distinction involves even variations in ideology: efforts at rendering the text exactly can be replaced by contradictory tendencies - either towards modernization or towards archaization; in the latter case, what appears to be good Old Swedish in Bureus' edition might be the result of more or less deliberate reconstruction.

It seems obvious, particularly in the light of Moberg's penetrating analysis, that the linguistic form of Bureus' edition text is unequivocally medieval only at the lexical, syntactic, and stylistical levels of language - i.e. in the choice of words, and in phraseology and sentence structure. As regards the grammatical flection of the words chosen, as well as, to an even larger extent, their spelling, the picture is harder to judge. At the latter levels, one has, as a principle, to take possibly modernizing as well as slightly archaizing tendencies into account.

Moberg arrives at these conclusions after comparing the language of the edition text to that of some manuscripts of Bureus' hand, especially in extracts quoted from other medieval works. In some cases the sources are preserved, and Bureus' way of writing is controllable. Another instance of control presents itself in the printed edition of king Magnus Eriksson's 'Public City Law' ("allmänna stadslag", from the mid14th century), that was prepared by Bureus' cousin Jonas Bureus in 1617 - perhaps some years before the work on the KS edition began. The manuscript original of the law edition is preserved, and the relation between original and edition has been investigated.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, modernization of linguistic form - i.e. adjustment to 17th century, more stable writing conventions, and in that respect a kind of normalization - can be proved in some orthographical details. A high-frequency case of variation in contemporary written Swedish is e.g. the notation of the *d*- and *g*- sounds: in the edition we find *dh* and *gh* after vowel, *d* and *g* after consonant (*godhom*, *medh*, *dyghd*, *lagh* as opposed to *hafde*, *ord*, *stadhga*, *konung*). At Bureus' time, this is the normal distribution (possibly supported by the actual pronunciation, at least in central provinces of the country). In medieval text usage varies, often irregularly within the same document; even Bureus himself does not observe the regular distribution of his time in his reproduction of other medieval documents (where he seems instead rather consistently to replace *dh* and *gh* with *d* and *g*).

To non-philologists, questions of orthography normally seem exceedingly trifling, and the serious treatment of them in a discussion of, say, an important literary work, involves the risk of appearing a parodical petit-maitre. This is due, of course, to a regrettable error of judgement.

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<sup>11</sup>By C.I. Stähle; see Moberg op.cit. p. 22 s.

In this particular case, it is evident that the normalization of spelling, according to the contemporary standard, in the edition text may possibly suggest what was Bureus' attitude. The care of a polished orthography, he probably meant, is part of an editor's duty - in which the objective is adjustment to the modern norm, aiming at making the text readable and appetizing. Respect for the text was not foreign to Bureus; this is clearly indicated by his glosses on obscure words: he explains them, without replacing them (unlike his cousin, editing a legal document). But his respect concerned the choice of words and other apparent essentials in the language; it did not extend to the seemingly trivial level of orthography.

How, then, do matters stand at an "intermediate" level, the one where grammatical inflection and word forms are concerned? - To all appearances, Bureus here faithfully reproduces the readings of the manuscript, without attempts at either archaizing or modernizing. This is quite evident from the examples brought forward by Moberg. A striking instance is the inflection of adjectives. It shows the entire confusion of forms that is so typical of late medieval Swedish: in the strong plural declension e.g., both the suffixes *-e* and *-a* are used irregularly (*wise* and *wisa* /*mån*/), regardless of the grammatical distribution (according to gender and case) which still was fairly consistently maintained in the older, "classical", language of laws and legends - like, reasonably, in the original version of the KS.

An archaizing tendency in the edition would have meant - at the level of grammatical inflection - normalizing according to this classical Old Swedish system, of which Bureus had a good command. A modernizing tendency, on the other hand, would probably have appeared in normalization according to 17th century usage; this was not at that time as strictly regulated as it is today, but, nevertheless, it was gradually stabilizing in forms considerably more fixed than those of Old Swedish. - Now neither occurs. The language reproduced by Bureus in his edition is, at this point, whether deliberately or not, marked by a late medieval copyist's modes of expression, formed at a phase of the history of the Swedish language that is younger than the age of the original writer, older than that of the modern editor.

In rough outline, we may discern a pattern here of two different, logically independent but correlating sets of strata in the material in question. Both concern the linguistic form of the printed edition text, and both result in three levels. One stratification relates to the origin of this linguistic form in the different phases of the genesis of the text: literary conception, copying, printed edition. The other relates to the same linguistic form observed at different levels of language analysis: lexicon and syntax; morphology; orthography.

The linguistic form of Bureus' text in his edition of the KS, then, reflects usage typical of the time of *literary conception* in the choice of words and in the forming of phrases, clauses, and sentences; it is equally typical of the time of *copying* in the way of grammatically inflecting the words chosen; it is significant of the time of the *edition itself* in spelling.

As mentioned, the pattern is sketchy. Contradictory instances are probably numerous, even in this only edition. Still, supporting myself on facts observed (though just in a few cases accounted for here), I confidently put forward the hypothesis. - Possible wider implications would involve more comprehensive studies of textual editorial strategies in early philology. But that is another story.



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En nyttigh Bok / om

# Rommiga Styrlise och Höfdinga/

Fordom för någre hundra år / af en förständig  
Swenskt man skrifvoin / och nu nyliga fram-  
kommen /

Och utaf framtidne salighe hoos Gudhi Martyren / högtlof-  
 sigg hos oss och vithi hele Christenhetenne i  
 äminneise.

Den Stormechtigeste Höghorne Förste och Herre

## H. GVSTAF ADOLF

den Andre och Store /

Sveriges / Göthes och Wendes Konung / Storförste, til Fin-  
land, Hertigh vithi Estland och Carelen / Herre vithi Sver-  
getmanland / ic. Fordom alles vithi nädigeste  
Konung / ic. förest d'fverlöfva /

Och efter H. K. M. s nädige befalning / strax ord från ord tryck blifvoin /  
 och sedan i medler tidh medh rorlige Register förbetrad /  
 och nu publicerat.

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