



Seminar

MARIA ÅGREN

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*Serving Others:  
The Gendered Ideals and Realities of Service  
in the Early Modern World*

Tuesday, 16 February, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT MARIA ÅGREN

Maria Ågren received in 1992 her Ph.D. in History at Uppsala University, where, since 2002, she has held a professorship in history. In 2009, she was appointed Wallenberg Scholar, and in 2013, she received an honorary doctorate from the University of Jyväskylä. She has been a panel chair at the Swedish Research Council and has represented Sweden in the European Science Foundation.

Her research interests lie at the intersection of legal, social, economic and gender history. Her monograph on conceptions of property, in particular immemorial prescription, in seventeenth-century Sweden has been positively received by both the American Society for Legal History and modern lawyers. In 2009, her book *Domestic Secrets: Women and Property in Sweden, 1600 to 1857* (the University of North Carolina Press) came out.

Between 2010 and 2014, Ågren was the leader of the large 'Gender and Work' project, the main results of which will soon appear under the title 'Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern Society'. She is currently finalising a monograph on the households of lower civil servants and the effects of their entanglement with their master: the state. She is also the founder of the Gender and Work database, which provides an example of digital humanities.

She is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities.

## ABSTRACT

In times of rapid societal change, people often use well-known organizations as models for the new institutions that change requires. It is well-known, for instance, that the household was used as a model for large-scale production units in the early modern period (here understood as approximately 1500 to 1800). In my talk, I will discuss another example: How early modern state administration was modelled on old and widespread ideas about service. At the same time, new components were introduced precisely in this period by the exigencies of state formation. Sweden is a good place to look for these processes, and customs administration is a good part to focus on since its office holders were in the first line of the battle, if I may use that metaphor.

The first part of my talk will show, briefly, that notions about "the good servant" permeated religious discourse and were nourished by people's everyday experiences of what servants were and did.

The second part will discuss the conditions under which lower state servants (and customs officials in particular) actually worked. I will compare their working lives with three aspects identified by Max Weber as crucial to modern rational bureaucracy: relevant competence, full-time employment, and separation of professional life from private life. I will then use these three aspects to explain why wives were by necessity involved in the work of their husbands. State service was, therefore, not yet a man's job only. However, these three aspects will also, I hope, allow me to say something about why state service would eventually turn out to be seen as the typical job of men. By conclusion, I will argue that not only state administration but also notions of service were transformed in this period.