

Swedish seafarers' letters in the prize papers: epistolary strategies of the 1690s

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In late December of 1695, in the midst of the War of the Grand Alliance, a Swedish warship was convoying a fleet of Scandinavian merchant ships to Spain, many of them looking to buy Mediterranean salt.¹ The navy ship was the *Lyfland* or *Livland*, a mid-sized ship of the line under the command of one Per Olofsson.² Somewhere in the Channel the convoy encountered two English navy ships and there was an altercation over whether the *Livland* should salute the English ships by striking its colors.³ Olofsson initially refused and shots were exchanged; one Swedish sailor was killed outright, another was mortally wounded, and the *Liv-*

¹ Many people have helped me to make sense of these letters. I want especially to thank Amanda Bevan, Simon Berggren, Karin Ehnberg of the Blekinge Museum, Sigrid Ejemar, Oliver Finnegan, Fredrik Kämpe, Janne Lindegren, Andreas Linderöth, Leos Müller, Beverly Tjerngren, Henrik Ågren, Maria Ågren, Gustav Ångeby, and the National Maritime and Transport Museums. Research for this essay was supported in part by the Swedish Research Council, diarienummer: 2018-01167 "In Pursuit of Global Knowledge: Scandinavian Ocean Travelers 1650–1810" principal investigators: Margaret R. Hunt & Leos Müller.

² For convoys see Ernst Holmberg, "Konvojexpeditioner under Karl XI:s Regeringstid", *Tidskrift i Sjöväsendet* 92:5 (1929) p. 251–269; Gunnar Unger, "Bilder från Svenska Flottans Konvojttjänst i Avlägsnare Farvatten", *Tidskrift i Sjöväsendet* 104:1 (1941) p. 33–55; and Fredrik Kämpe, "Konvojsystemet, den Seglande Flottan och Kungl. Konvojkommisariatet", *Forum Navale: Sjöhistoriska Samfundets Tidskrift* 70 (2022) p. 112–158. The *Livland*'s dimensions, ideal size of crew (280–350), gun complement (56–64) etc. are indicated for various years in MS. Nordin 134 (Carl Gustaf Nordin, Handlingar Rörande Svenska Flottan 1619–1764, Samt Hamnar och deras Fästnings Werk) Uppsala University Library Special Collections, del 16, fol. 129; del 19 fol. 180; and del 23–24, fols 212–214.

³ For flag conflicts see Jakob Seerup, "Danish and Swedish Flag Disputes with the British in the Channel", in N. A. M. Rodger, J. Ross Dancy, Benjamin Darnell, & Evan Wilson (eds), *Strategy and the Sea: Essays in Honour of John B. Hattendorf* (Martlesham 2016) p. 28–36 and Fredrik Kämpe, "On the Honour of the Naval Ensign: The Swedish Navy and the Symbolism of Naval and Merchant Flags, c. 1700–1950", in Simon Ekström & Leos Müller (eds), *Facing the Sea: Essays in Swedish Maritime Studies* (Lund 2021) p. 127–62.

land suffered damage before Olofsson backed down.⁴ At that point, the convoy was forcibly diverted to Plymouth, possibly because the English thought they might be able to claim the Livland as a prize. In Plymouth harbor the Livland and its convoy joined a number of other Swedish and Danish merchant ships that had taken shelter there from bad weather, including a second Swedish convoy under the protection of the warship Gotland. After some weeks cooler heads prevailed – Sweden was, after all, a neutral power – and the Livland and her convoy got leave to depart.

But then for a time the winds continued unfavorable, and as the men sat in Plymouth harbor, chafing at the delay, an unexpected opportunity arose. A Danish flyboat called the Sankt Jakob (St. Jacob in the English sources) had also been driven into Plymouth by force of weather.⁵ Its captain was a Norwegian from Kristiansand named Daniel Lauredson Turmand, and he was known to several of the other Scandinavians. The Sankt Jakob had just come from Bordeaux with a cargo of wine, brandy, molasses, prunes and other valuable goods. However, unlike the other ships, which were headed south, she was on her way back to Copenhagen and would be stopping at Helsingør (Elsinore) which, though Danish, was a major way station for the Swedish post coming from the Continent. Someone suggested that Captain Turmand carry some letters with him and terms were worked out – presumably some kind of commission. Turmand's offer must have seemed reasonable because at least eighty Swedes, Danes and Norwegians seized the opportunity to write letters home – in some cases several letters – or got others to write for them. Scores of others sent word to relatives by dictating a line or so to be inserted into other men's letters. Around one hundred letters in total, almost all dated between January 13 and 20, 1696, were then given over to Captain Turmand, carefully divided into thirty-eight parcels containing between one and eight letters each.⁶

None of the letters ever arrived. On 30 January, while the Sankt Jakob was still lying at anchor in Plymouth harbor, the captain and crew of an English Royal

⁴ Holmberg (1929) p. 259–260; AnnaSara Hammar, *Mellan Kaos och Kontroll: Social Ordning i Svenska Flottan 1670–1716* (Lund 2014) p. 140. Olofsson is also referred to in some of the Sankt Jakob letters and in other records as Olsson or Ohlsson.

⁵ Flyboats (fluyts or fluit ships) were the workhorses of seventeenth-century Northern European sea and ocean trade. For the Scandinavian adoption of what was, originally, a Dutch design, see Niklas Eriksson, *Urbanism Under Sail: An Archaeology of Fluit Ships in Early Modern Everyday Life* (Södertörn 2014).

⁶ The letters are at the British National Archives (INA) in the High Court of Admiralty papers, HCA 32/1889/3. National Archives cataloguers have assigned a part number to each packet, e.g., Pt1/30. Usually the cover-letter has the unadorned part number while enclosed letters are assigned a letter, or a letter plus a number if there is a letter within a letter within a cover-letter, e.g., Pt1/30a, 30b, 30c, 30c(i) etc.). Like England, the seventeenth-century Scandinavian kingdoms followed the "old-style" Julian calendar. However, their year officially "turned over" on January 1, unlike in England where, prior to the calendar reforms of the mid-1700s, the year officially turned over on March 25. These letters were dated in the Swedish and Danish fashion meaning that January dates were assigned to the year 1696 just as they would be today. That is also the convention followed in this essay.

Navy fireship boarded her and claimed her as a prize.⁷ The Sankt Jakob was a target primarily because of her rich cargo, though Turmand's French-sounding last name may also have played a role. Following standard procedure, the captors immediately seized all the papers they could find, including the packet of letters, in case they should be needed as evidence in Prize Court. It is unclear whether the Sankt Jakob's owners ever got their ship and cargo back, though the case did go to appeal. Either way, the letters were never returned. They lay abandoned and unread for over three hundred years amongst the records of the English High Court of Admiralty Prize Court before turning up in 2015 in a search for Scandinavian ships.

Early modern letters and correspondence networks

The Sankt Jakob letters are unusual because the majority seem to have been sent by ordinary seamen. Hundreds of thousands of personal letters have survived for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe but most of them come from members of the social, political or intellectual elite. Granted, this elite was more heterogeneous than used to be thought; for example, many women were active letter-writers,⁸ and some early modern intellectuals were neither rich nor well-born. Still, there are few surviving personal letters from ordinary European workingmen and women for this period, and while this is partly the product of low literacy rates, the high cost of paper and ink, and so on, it is also because letters to and from non-elites were seldom gathered into family, regional or state archives in the way that letters from better-off or better-known people were. This imbalance has affected the scholarship, both in methodological and content terms. Thus, several recent projects have focused on early modern letter-writers, correspondence networks, and the like, helped by the push to digitize many historic letter collections.⁹ However, with only a few exceptions, non-elites are little

⁷ The details of the capture and the seizure of the letters and other papers are given in TNA HCA 42/5/3, the examination of Daniel Lauredson Turmand, the original examination having been filed with the appeal papers. For prize taking and the Prize Court process see Margaret R. Hunt, *How to Research Scandinavian Ships and Seamen in the Prize Papers of the British National Archives* (Uppsala 2023) <https://doi.org/10.33063/diva-503969>.

⁸ See e.g., James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford 2006); Julie D. Campbell & Anne R. Larsen, *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters* (Farnham 2009); and James Daybell & Andrew Gordon (eds), *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1690* (London 2016).

⁹ A discussion and partial list of older and more recent projects involving collections of letters can be found in Howard Hotson & Thomas Wallnig, (eds), *Reassembling the Republic of Letters in the Digital Age: Standards, Systems, Scholarship* (Göttingen 2019) p. 209–220. Though this project explicitly focuses on "learned" correspondence networks, most other collections or projects, including digitization projects, also, in practice, exclude the less learned and non-elites in general – primarily because they are so dependent upon compilations of letters done in the eighteenth or nineteenth century and that reflect the social prejudices of those times.

represented in the increasingly sophisticated scholarship these projects have begun to generate.¹⁰

In fact, a number of non-elite letters from the early modern period do survive in the archives. However, they are of a particular kind – letters of petition. This means that they are, almost by definition, directed to people or bodies of a higher status than the person writing or dictating the letter: a judge, a colonial governor, a nobleman or woman, a military authority, a parliament, or a king or queen. Letters of petition often contain valuable information about the letter-writer, and they have generated a significant scholarly literature, but they are manifestly quite different from letters exchanged between family members and relative social equals.¹¹

The fact that the Sankt Jakob letters are *not* petitions makes them especially noteworthy. Though there is some social spread,¹² the majority of the letters appear to be from ordinary navy and merchant sailors, and a very high percentage of them (close to 70 per cent) are addressed to wives, with the rest going mainly to parents and siblings. Because they were intended for relatives and not for social superiors, they adopt a very different tone from letters of petition. Another unusual feature of these letters is that they were almost all penned in the space of about one week. They show us a number of people responding to what was essentially the same set of recent events, but each person does so in his own way.¹³

These letters offer insights into family relations, the history of emotions, social hierarchy, gender, early modern trade, life at sea, and many other topics. Most of these interesting issues will not, however, be taken up in this essay; instead, the aims are more basic and more modest. First, this essay considers the logistics of

¹⁰ An exception is the "Letters as Loot" project at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, which has digitized around one thousand early modern Dutch letters, including over two hundred personal letters from the period roughly 1660 to 1720 written or dictated by lower-middle or lower-class men and women. These are part of a historical linguistics project, and the letters themselves, like those in the present essay, come from the British Prize papers. (See <https://brievensals-buit.livdnt.org/> accessed 11 July 2024). See also Jelle van Lottum & Sølvi Sogner, "Magnus og Barbara. Mikrohistorie i Nordsjø-Regionen på 1600-tallet", *Historisk Tidsskrift* 85:3 (2006) 377–401; and Sølvi Sogner & Jelle van Lottum, "An Immigrant Community? Norwegian Sailors and Their Wives in 17th-Century Amsterdam", *The History of the Family* 12:3 (2007) p. 153–168, both of which are based on letters from Norwegian sailors and their wives living in the Netherlands, again from the English Prize Papers. This is not to imply that the class (and race) of letter-writers has gone unnoticed or unanalysed. See especially Sarah Goldsmith, Sheryllyne Haggerty, & Karen Harvey (eds), *Letters and the Body, 1700–1830: Writing and Embodiment* (London 2023).

¹¹ See e.g., Tim Hitchcock, Pamela Sharpe, & Peter King (eds), *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640–1840* (London 1997); and, more recently, with a strong colonial and indigenous focus, Miguel Dantas da Cruz (ed.), *Petitioning in the Atlantic World, C. 1500–1840: Empires, Revolutions and Social Movements* (Cham 2022). A significant recent contribution to the Swedish literature is Jezzica Israelsson, *Making Themselves Heard: Women's and Men's Voice through the Regional Petitioning Process in Sweden, 1758–1880* (Uppsala 2024).

¹² Three of the letter-writers (Zacharias Kraak, Johann Mallyn and R. Leimontin) were not "non-elites" but rather the young sons of prominent Karlskrona, Kalmar and Växjö families, and Kraak and Mallyn were most likely commercial travellers rather than sailors (Leimontin's status is unclear). Together they were responsible for seven out of the forty-seven letters bound for Sweden.

¹³ A few letters were dated in December of 1695, presumably because the senders lacked the means to get them to their recipients. These letters were simply bundled in with the rest.

composing and sending a letter, especially for sailors who were not literate enough to pen their own letters. Second, it looks at the bundling of the letters, and what that tells us about the social and other factors that would have shaped their transit and ultimate delivery. The paucity of the evidence about these people means that the elaborate networking models some recent letters projects have been able to mount are not feasible here.¹⁴ On the other hand, there are some rather simple neighborhood, family and shipboard linkages visible in the letters, and this essay assesses and tries to explain the significance of these. Finally, the essay looks at the problem of locating recipients of letters, especially if they lived in a city, thereby gesturing to Dag Lindström's own contributions to the fields of early modern urban history and war and society, but also to questions about non-elites' access to the new or relatively new postal systems of the seventeenth century and the role of sailors' wives in networks of communication. The overall aim of the essay is to better understand the social logistics of non-elite long-distance communication in the late seventeenth century and to begin, in a preliminary way, to chart the epistolary culture – or, at very least, the strategies – of 1690s Swedish sailors and their kin.

Sailors sending letters

As material objects, the letters are unprepossessing. When folded most of them are only 5 cm by 6 cm (around half the size of a postcard). They were found with their wax seals still intact in a small gray bag with "St. Jacob of Copenhagen" and Turmand's name written on it. The seals begin to suggest something about the collection's social spread. Several of these seals, in letters from some naval officers and a few men who may have been business travellers, bear coats of arms or initials and were likely stamped using custom-made stamps or signet rings. However, the majority were of generic design and probably cheap. People also swapped them around. For example, several sailors sealed their letters with a rather crudely rendered stag or reindeer stamp; others with a simple design of interlaced lines. It is anyone's guess whether the design came from a cheap signet ring, or from some other embossed object (e.g. a piece of embossed glass such as one might find on a wine bottle, or even a cork).¹⁵ Others used stamps with initials that were not their own, perhaps borrowed from a clerk or from a higher-ranking person.¹⁶

¹⁴ See e.g., Bronagh Ann McShane, "Visualising the Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Nuns' Letters", *Journal of Historical Network Research* 2 (2018) p. 1–25. For the state of the field see Hotson & Wallnig (2019). The majority of the senders and recipients of the Sankt Jakob letters left no other imprint in the sources, hence there is virtually no biographical data about them save what we find in the letters themselves. Moreover, most senders and recipients feature only once – or, at most, twice – across the collection.

¹⁵ Personal communication, Gustav Ångeby.

¹⁶ See e.g., Olof Andersån Kwärka to his wife, Kjärstin Jöransdotter in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/19a) for one of several iterations of the reindeer/stag seal.

The Sankt Jakob collection contains letters meant for destinations in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. However, this essay focuses only on the forty-seven letters sent to Sweden, the majority of which were directed to persons in Karlskrona, Kalmar and Stockholm.¹⁷ These forty-seven letters were written by thirty-eight men (several wrote more than one letter) and in all except one of the letters the sender is identified by name. In addition, a little over half of the letter-senders also indicate their ship. Eighteen of the Swedish letter-senders came from the Livland itself, which likely would have had a crew of at least 200 men,¹⁸ and among those letter-senders were three under officers, all master gunners (*konstaplar*). There was also another letter-sender who was probably an under officer but whose rank is unknown. No over officers appear to have written letters. There were also two "volunteers" (*volontärer*), a better paid and generally more experienced subset of the regular crew; the remaining twelve Livland letter-senders were, most likely, ordinary crew members (*båtsmän*).¹⁹ Another twenty men appear to have been from merchant ships (*køfferdijsartyg*) though there is room for some doubt since, in most cases the name of their ship is not given.²⁰ An exception to this is that five men came from a kofferdi ship called the Sophia Lovisa. The rank or role of the men from merchant ships is never stated in their own letters but in a few cases, it can be ascertained indirectly.

Though the circumstances surrounding this collection of letters were out of the ordinary there is no suggestion that it was unusual for sailors to exchange letters with people on shore. In fact, some sailors clearly wrote a great many letters. When navigation officer (*styrman*) Johan Stenwald, probably from a merchant-ship, wrote to his wife, Maria Larsdotter in Stockholm, he mentioned the fact that, when the ship reached the Sound, he found two letters from her waiting for him; he himself had written four letters to her from the Sound "on day 17, day 23, [and] day 30 of November and day 4 December" (*af dato d 17, d 23, d 30 November och d 4 Decembr*) though he was slightly displeased that he had received no answer back from any of those letters before the convoy headed south.²¹ Stenwald was an officer so presumably he could afford to send more letters than an ordinary crew members would. But at least fifteen other letter-senders mention letters received and sent or advise

¹⁷ Of the 47 letters 23 were to be sent to Karlskrona, 10 to Kalmar, 8 to Stockholm, 2 to Växjö, 1 to Göteborg, 1 to Helsingborg, 1 to Marstrand and 1 to Västervik. There are also several letters in Swedish directed to locations in Denmark, but these are not included in the present study.

¹⁸ The manning figures listed in Nordin 134 (see note 2 above) were likely goals rather than a reflection of reality, and the peacetime complement was probably lower.

¹⁹ For status and rank in the seventeenth-century Swedish Navy the most detailed source is Patrik Höglund, *Skeppssambället: Rang, roller och status på örlogsskepp under 1600-talet* (Södertörn 2021) p. 161–188 (underofficerare), p. 189–206 (specialister) and p. 209–260 (de gemena ombord). See also Hammar (2014) p. 65–133. It is possible that some of the remaining twelve could have been specialists, but if so, this is not indicated in any way.

²⁰ They could have been from the Livland but did not say so. At the time, the Swedish warship Gottland was also in Plymouth with its own convoy.

²¹ Navigation Officer Johan Stenwald to Maria Larsdotter, 20/1/1696 (Pt1/28a). It is possible that Stenwald was an officer on the Livland but more likely he was from a ship that the Livland was convoying.

their correspondents on where to forward future letters. We also find men making excuses for not having written earlier or for sending greetings in other men's letters instead of sending a letter of their own.²²

Letter-sending seems already to have acquired some vernacular elements, which adds to our impression that it had ceased to be unusual. There is the already mentioned resort to cheap signet rings or stamps which, even when swapped around, show the sender's (or his community's) familiarity with the material culture of the letter. It is also telling that at least fourteen Swedish letters use the word "vale" (equivalent to "fare thee well"), usually in a postscript, and in some cases spelled phonetically (e.g., "walee"). This originally Latin word was used by *Dutch* seafarers at least by the 1650s to refer to farewell toasts and gun salutes at sea. By the 1660s Dutch sailors were also using it to close their letters, and by the 1690s, as the Sankt Jakob letters show, Swedish and Danish/Norwegian seafarers had taken it up as well.²³ "Vale" signals a popular identification both with things maritime and with the act of communication across oceans and seas. It adds to the impression that familiarity with letters, including both sending and receiving them, had already moved down the social scale, at least among men employed as sailors.

To what extent did illiteracy, or only partial literacy impede this process? Many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedes were able to read print (such as a printed catechism or bible) but were unable easily to read other people's handwriting or to write themselves.²⁴ However, it is clear that techniques had already been developed to cope with this problem. For example, two volunteers from the Livland named Anders Spenner and Jacob Wasberg both sent letters to their wives, but the letters were penned by the same person. Moreover, the two letters contain a lot of overlap in terms of content. It is just conceivable that one of the men composed the letter and then obligingly copied out much the same letter for his friend. But more likely, because the hand has the generic quality common to people who write for a living, the two of them paid for a third person, presumably a ship's clerk or scrivener, to write the letters for them. Two other men,

²² See among others Anders Lilliaquist to Maryia Jonsdotter (Pt1/32a, especially the greeting from John Hall); Niclas Lorick to his brother (Pt1/05); and Samuel Bagge to Cristina Strom (Pt1/32b). The same is true of the Danish letters. See letters from Otto Bülge (Pt1/30); Esia Johanssen Erdtman (Pt1/10); Jöns Jonson (Pt1/1) and Jürgen Sörensen (Pt1/07).

²³ My thanks to Gustav Ångeby for drawing my attention to the "vale" issue and for the reference to Olof Eriksson Willman, *En Kort Beskrifning på en Resa till Ostindien och Japan*, (ed.), John Bernström & Tore Wretö. *Litteraturbanken.se*, 1992 [voyage, 1651–52; first published 1667]. For "shooting and drinking valet" on a Dutch ship see p. 17. For "vale/valete" in antiquity see Ethel Stuart Murray, "Formulae of Greeting and Farewell in the Ciceronian and Augustan Ages" M.A. Thesis, University of Illinois, (Champaign, 1917). By at least the sixteenth century "vale" was in fairly common use among humanists who corresponded in Latin. However, its adoption into vernacular languages and among the laboring classes is more surprising. The Letters as Loot database, <https://brievensalibuit.ivdnt.org/> shows its use by Dutch seafarers. A hundred years later, Carl Michael Bellman used it in several poems but in a faux Classical idiom rather than as a reference to seafaring.

²⁴ Egil Johansson, *Kvantitativa Studier av Alfabetiseringen i Sverige: Exempel på källmaterial, metoder och resultat*, Pedagogiska Rapport 7 (Umeå 1969).

Anders Person Lustig and Anders Ällsman, sent a single letter between them addressed to two different women (each got one side of a piece of paper) but the whole letter was penned by a single scrivener, again, with a lot of repetition.²⁵ Many other letters in the collection – especially those sent by Livland sailors – are written with a rather rote attention to the conventions of salutations and closings, a lot of repetition in the body of the letter, and in a style of cursive that suggests professional clerks.²⁶

Duplication was especially common when it came to descriptions of the flag dispute that sent the Livland and her convoy into Plymouth harbor. Indeed, one gets the distinct impression that some of scribes were working off a kind of template, though one sees repetition even among men who probably penned their own letters. Perhaps the higher officers were trying to limit the damage from the embarrassing flag incident. But it is also possible that some sailors had a difficult time describing past experiences, especially ones that were out of the ordinary, and that it was easier for them to copy from others than it was either to dictate or to write out "original" accounts of what they had gone through.²⁷ For ships' clerks (or anyone else), copying from another letter may simply have been a way to save time and mental energy – and presumably it also lowered the cost for the person "dictating" the letter.

This does, however, point to some of the potential drawbacks of relying on a scrivener as opposed to penning one's own letters. In his studies of political communication to and from members of the peasant estate in (mostly) the mid-1700s, Nils-Erik Villstrand has argued that reliance on scribes encouraged an "accessive" rather than "possessive" relationship to the written word. Villstrand is not positing a simple binary, especially in his later writings; thus he suggests that the same person's relationship to literacy could be both "possessive" and "accessive"

²⁵ Anders Spenner to his wife Maria Månsdotter (Pt. 1/30b(i) and Jacob Wasberg to his wife Lena Olofsdotter (Pt1/30b). Anders Person to his wife (unnamed) in Karlskrona, via the handelsman Jönas Hoobärg, 16/1/1696; on the other side is Anders Ällsman to his wife Sofala Persdotter in Karlskrona, 16/1/1696 (Pt 1/23a). See also Per Jönssån Gröndal to his wife Susanna Jönsdotter in Karlskrona, 16 Jan. 1696; and, on the flip side, Jöns Jönssån Lusty to his wife Sara Sandersdotter in Karlskrona, 16/1/1696 (Pt1/19).

²⁶ The fact that a letter was written out by a scribe does not necessarily mean the person whose letter it was could not read or write. For cultures of dictation see Ann Blair, "Early Modern Attitudes toward the Delegation of Copying and Note-Taking", in Alberto Cevoloni (ed.), *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2016) p. 265–285.

²⁷ The emergent history of experience might also be relevant here since it is often occupied with collective experience(s) and what can and cannot be easily expressed with respect to them. See especially the Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences (HEX) at Tampere University, Finland, especially the co-edited *Digital Handbook of the History of Experience* (<https://sites.tuni.fi/hexhandbook/>). Lucas Haasis, "The Writing Seaman: Learning to Write and Dictating Letters on Board the Bremen Ship 'Concordia'". In *Das Meer: maritime Welten in der frühen Neuzeit = The sea: maritime worlds in the early modern period*, edited by Sünne Juterczenka and Peter Burschel, Frühneuzeit-Impulse, Band 4 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2021), p. 297–310, working with a body of letters penned a half century later, also finds a substantial amount of repetition between letters.

depending upon the context and the skill.²⁸ Nevertheless, the implication is that the lack of an ability to write (or, in some cases, to read others' handwriting) could result in diminished agency and a certain poverty of expression.²⁹

The Sankt Jakob letters predate the bulk of Villstrand's source-material by over half a century and they are not political communications but private letters, consciously composed and sent. Therefore, they do not easily fit either the "accessive" or "possessive" model. That having been said, it seems clear that reliance on scribes encouraged repetition and perhaps a narrowing of expressive scope. There is more variety and freedom of expression in the autograph letters (in so far as we can identify them) than in the ones that were probably penned by scribes. They also tend to be longer. Still, the belief that a letter should be personally revealing and "unique to the sender" probably would have made little sense to many of the men who dictated letters, especially if one of their aims was to keep down the costs.³⁰ Moreover, even non-autograph letters had agentic and aspirational elements. Men chose to write, they chose who to write to, and they certainly "personalized" their letters to some degree even when the letter was partially composed by a scribe. We also see other subtle signs of people forging new and presumably more agentic relationships with the written word. For example, some sailors appear to have inserted their personal signatures into letters that were penned by other people.³¹ The ability to write one's own name – even if it was the only thing a person could write – carried a certain prestige, and it may also have implied familiarity with sending letters – one of the obvious places to demonstrate that particular ability. In short, these men's relationship to correspondence was often mediated, but they did have some agency, and their communicative strategies fit their time and circumstances.

Sailors sending greetings

One of the commonest and cheapest ways for sailors to get word back to their relatives was to get a greeting inserted into someone else's letter, and almost half the letters contain at least one "proxy" message of this kind. In some cases the proxy messages not only take up a great deal of the space on the page, but appear to represent the main *raison d'être* of the letter. These letters exemplify what Gary

²⁸ Villstrand 2014, p. 221–222. See also Nils Erik Villstrand, "Bokstäver, bönder och politik. Muntligt och skriftligt i 1700-talets politiska kultur", in Peter Danielsson, Håkan Nordmark, & Jan Samuelson (eds), *Att Komma till Tals: Nedslag i den Nordiska Historiens Vardagslunk och Konflikter* (Växjö 1999) p. 89–150.

²⁹ For a more positive view of seventeenth-century literacy and writing see Christoffer Åhlman, *Mötet med det skrivna ordet: Kvinnors läsande och skrivande under 1700-talet* (Uppsala 2019). See especially p. 17–19 and Åhlman's critical discussions (p. 190 and p. 206) of James Collins & Richard Blot, *Literacy and Literacies: Text, Power and Identity* (Cambridge 2003).

³⁰ That is not to say that these are only modern conceits, as many "literary" (and, usually, elite) letters from this period clearly show.

³¹ See e.g., Anders Ållsman to his wife Sofala Persdotter (Pt1/23a).

Schneider has called "the collective nature of letter-writing, transmission and reception" in the early modern period.³² In Master Gunner Anders Lilliaquist's letter of 15 January to his wife, Maryian Jonssdotter in Karlskrona, no less than six men took the opportunity to send greetings to their relatives, and combined with Lilliaquist's own greetings to people other than his wife they took up more than half the letter.³³ Most of these greetings were formulaic; their purpose was to convey the information that the sailor in question was alive, and to express his hope that the same was true of his loved ones: "Micke Råbock, carpenter, sincerely wishes his dearest wife 1000 joys and he is in good health" (*Micke Råbock, timmerman, låter flitigt hälsa sin ker[asta] bustru 1000 fröjder och han är vid hälsa*) reads a typical greeting from Lilliaquist's letter.³⁴ Still, these greetings are different enough one from another to show that they flowed from conscious speech acts. Thus, at one point in Lilliaquist's list of greetings, the writer (Lilliaquist or his scrivener) shifts in mid-stream from the third person to the first: "Thomas Råcka wishes his father and mother 1000 joys, [I] wish my little children a thousand good days and nights..." (*Thomas Råcka hälsa sin fader och modber 1000 fröjd, hälsa mina små barn tusend goda dagar och nätter...*) which surely reflects the fact that Råcka actually dictated his greeting to the writer, who wrote down the first phrase in the third person, but the second phrase in the first person, just as he heard it. It is possible that men paid some token amount to get their greeting into other people's letters, but it seems more likely that the practice of sending greetings on behalf of crew members was a kind of patronage that was expected of under officers in particular (non-officers did it too, but not on such a scale).³⁵ For the ordinary sailor this agreeable practice would have offered an opportunity to stay in touch with his family even if he could not – or could barely – read or write or did not have the money to buy paper and employ a scrivener.

As we have seen, the majority of sailors' letters were sent to wives. Thirty-two out of the forty-seven Swedish letters (close to seventy percent) were addressed to or intended for wives, and the percentage of men sending greetings to their

³² Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark 2005).

³³ Master Gunner Anders Lilliaquist to his wife Maryian Jonssdotter in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/32a); See also Master Gunner Börish Spring to his wife (unnamed) in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/04); Officer had more but men who appear not to be officers also did this. See Abram Petersson Rytter to his wife Catrina Olafsdotter in Stockholm, undated (Pt1/20c), Johan Adernson Lindsz to his brother, Påhe Anderson in Stockholm, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/20b), Olof Andersån Kwärka to his wife, Kiärstin Jöransdotter in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/19a), Håkan Liungberg to his wife Britta Månsdotter in Kalmar, 13 Jan. 1696 (Pt1/14a) and Jöns Mickalsson to his wife, Cherstin Holiensdotter in Kalmar, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14b)

³⁴ On the complexities of the word "hustru" see Christopher Pihl & Maria Ågren, "Vad var en Hustru? Ett Begreppshistoriskt Bidrag till Genushistorien" *Historisk Tidskrift* 134:2 (2014) p. 170–190.

³⁵ Master Gunnars and other under officers were responsible for running training exercises with the crew which may have bred greater familiarity. See Höglund (2021) p. 116–117.

wives in other men's letters was also high.³⁶ The many married letter-senders and greeters may reflect the fact that married men had, on average, slightly more confidence with respect to the written word, though, as we have seen, this did not necessarily extend to penning their own letters. Sending letters or greetings may also have been normative, and to have reflected an expectation that married men would and should keep in touch with their families more than other men did. In early modern Sweden married people enjoyed a higher status than unmarried ones³⁷ and the prevalence of married men among letter-writers and greeters may imply a kind of fellowship or circle of patronage that extended more readily to married men than to the (presumably) significant numbers of unmarried men amongst the regular crew. As we will see, married *women* would also have a rather significant patronage role at the other end of the chain of postal transmission.

Letters in transit

Today a personal letter generally means a private communication between two individuals. One person writes it and another person receives it. Gary Schneider has called this "the traditional dyadic model of letter exchange." As he and others have argued, this model is poorly suited to understanding the epistolary cultures of the early modern period.³⁸ These were characterized – at least in England, which is Schneider's focus – by collective letters, letters shared between several letter-writers, and letters (sealed and unsealed) enclosed within other people's letters. As we are already beginning to see, this was also true of these Swedish letters.

The transit of the letters also had some features that sit in tension with another aspect of the dyadic model: the notion of a clear trajectory from sender to recipient. Military letters in particular (as many of these were), tended, in the seventeenth century, to move in complicated and indirect ways across space, utilizing civilian mail networks, both foreign and domestic, dedicated military transport of various kinds and a variety of ad hoc measures that often included "collective" elements.³⁹ Sending letters via the Sankt Jakob certainly was an ad hoc solution – she was not a post boat but a private freight-carrier – and the whole drive for letters was very much a collective project. However, since the letters went no further than Plymouth harbor, any conclusions about what would have happened later on must depend on the evidence of the packets themselves. Luckily, they

³⁶ The percentage of letters to wives rises to 80 per cent if one leaves out the seven letters written by three young and unmarried men from elite families, at least two of whom probably were commercial travellers rather than sailors. See below.

³⁷ Jonas Lindström, Karin Hassan Jansson, Rosemarie Fiebranz, Benny Jacobsson, & Maria Ågren "Mistress or Maid: The Structure of Women's Work in Sweden, 1550–1800", *Continuity and Change* 32:2 (August 2017) p. 225–52. Hammar (2014) p. 78, 85–87 discusses some of the complexities of marriage for Navy men.

³⁸ Schneider (2005) 22.

³⁹ Paul Gerhard Heurgren, *Svensk militärpost i krig och fred från 1600-talet fram till andra världskriget* (Stockholm 1961) p. 53, 57–58, 61, 63–66, 67–72.

offer plenty of clues. It appears that, once the Sankt Jakob arrived at the entrance to the Sound, the intention was for some of the Swedish letters to be given over to the Swedish post-office (*Svenska postkontoret*) in Helsingör where the postage would be paid and the letters sent on into Sweden.⁴⁰ Other letters appear to have passed through the Commissariat for the Swedish Navy in the Sound. It further appears that, once cleared and paid for (or approved as postage-free, about which more in a moment) the intention was that some individual letters would go straight to their intended recipient; others, often bundled into packets of two to eight letters, would take a more circuitous route that reflected the desire to save on postage fees, the workings of military patronage, networks among both senders and recipients, and a variety of personal motives.⁴¹

So, for example, five letters, written by two young elite men – possibly super-cargos and probably related to one another – were sent by one Zacharias Kraak bundled into one envelope and directed initially to his brother, or perhaps brother-in-law, the "honored and highly learned master" (*byvärdiga och lärda Magister*) Erich Malyn in Kalmar. This was probably the same Erik Malyn or Melin who was a theological lecturer and pastor in Ljungby, Kalmar from some time in the 1690s until his death in 1711.⁴² The four letters sealed in with Kraak's cover letter including a second letter from Kraak addressed to the career soldier and prominent state official, Abraham Cronhiort at Växjö;⁴³ and three letters from a man named Johann Mallyn who was probably a close relative both of Kraak and Magister Malyn. Johann Mallyn wrote one letter to his mother, which was enclosed within the letter to Cronhiort for him to hand deliver; a second letter to be hand delivered to a merchant in Kalmar (whom Johann Mallyn refers to as his "dear patron") and a third letter to be hand delivered to the Lieutenant Colonel and Commandant at Kalmar.⁴⁴ Possibly, part of the intention was to get the passage of the letter from the Sound to Kalmar covered by someone's *fribrevsrätt*,⁴⁵

⁴⁰ For the Swedish postal network's use of (Danish) Helsingör see Magnus Linnarsson, "Postal Service on a Lease Contract: The Privatization and Outsourcing of the Swedish Postal Service, 1662–1668", *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37:3 (2012) p 296–316 especially p. 297, 300, 303–304, 306 and 311 n. 4. See also Teodor Holm, *Sveriges Allmänna Postväsen: Ett Försök till Svensk Posthistoria*, vol. IV:2 (1677–1697) (Stockholm 1916) p. 223, 225.

⁴¹ On the social significance of letter-bundling, though primarily among elite letter-writers and only for England, see Schneider (2005).

⁴² Erik Malyn/Melin (1659–1711) took his master's degree from Uppsala in 1689 and was afterwards associated with Ljungby parish in Kalmar as a theological lecturer and pastor. I am grateful to Beverly Tjengren for identifying him.

⁴³ Lenn Jacobson, "Abraham Cronhiort", *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* urn:sbl:15682 (accessed 2024-08-03).

⁴⁴ Zacharias Kraak to his brother [or brother-in-law?], Magister Erich Malyn in Kalmar 14/1/1696 (Pt1/11); Zacharias Kraak to Colonel (Öfversten) Abraham Cronhiort in Växjö, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/11a); Johann Mallyn to his mother, Bengtha Håkonsdotter in Växjö 14/1/1696 and enclosed in the letter to Cronhiort (Pt1/11a(i)); Johann Mallyn to Krisstan Witt, merchant (*kaufman*) in Kalmar 19/1/1696 (Pt1/11b); Johann Mallyn to Lieutenant Colonel and Commandant (*Öfverste Lieutenant och Comidant*) in Kalmar 20/1/1696 (Pt 1/11c).

⁴⁵ The *fribrevsrätt* was the right of some officials and high military offices to free postage. It is unclear to what extent the navy of the 1690s used the regular post, availing itself, when possible, of *fribrevsrätt*, and to what extent it sent letters back to Karlskrona and Kalmar under its own transport.

though if this was the case the choice of Magister Malyn as the recipient of the cover-letter seems odd; either Cronhiort or the Commandant at Kalmar would be more likely candidates.⁴⁶ Since these letters never even got into the system we cannot know for sure. What is most important for our purposes is that the bundling of letters and hand delivery both confirmed and put on display the two letter-writers' links – based in part on kinship – to the ecclesiastical, military and mercantile elite of Kalmar and Växjö.

Obviously, most of the 1696 letter-senders were not members of the elite, and other packets of letters display more social diversity and suggest a different set of motives than was the case with the Magister Malyn group. For example, four letters were to be sent in one envelope to Lars Wetterhamn, company clerk (*companie skrivare*) in Karlskrona. Wetterhamn seems to have been a clerk for the Admiralty rather than one of the *båtsmän's* companies; he was also the father of a member of the Livland crew, one Anders Pärsson, who presumably organized the packet. This group included the two volunteers, Spenner and Wasberg, who, as we have seen, paid a clerk to pen their very similarly worded letters. The idea may have been that this packet would travel free or at low cost from the Sound via some sort of military channels, and it is very possible Wetterhamn possessed or otherwise had access to *fribrevsrätt* via the Admiralty. Anders Pärsson also had an additional motive for routing a letter destined for his wife through his father. Evidently his wife was having some financial difficulties and he asked Wetterhamn to help her while he was at sea: "Dear father would you be so good as to get the enclosed letter to my wife, and if possible I would ask you humbly if you would help her with some money while I am away" (*k[ära] fabr att i ville vara så god och låta detta innelygte bref komma till min hustru, och om möjligt vore beder jag tianstl[igen] att i ville förhjälpa henne med några penningar så länge vi är borta*).⁴⁷ Enclosing the envelope for his wife in the envelope for his father ensured the two would have to meet, at which point the issue of money would be hard to avoid.

One of the larger packets consisted of eight letters, most of which were directed to recipients in Kalmar. Many of the senders came from the merchant ship the Sophia Lovisa and most appear to have been relatively humble people. The packet was put together by a man named Henrick Wattson, who evidently was not born in Sweden since his letter is written in a mashup of German, English, Dutch and Swedish. Wattson tasked his wife with distributing the letters once they arrived in Kalmar. However, the letters were not packaged in an especially

According to Holm (1916) p. 267, Karlskrona's use of the fribrev was declining between 1693 and 1695 but in 1695 the value of fribrev reimbursable to the post office was still a sixth of the total value of the town's postal receipts.

⁴⁶ See Magnus Olsson, "Kampen mot Missbruket av Fribrev", *Posttryttaren – Årsbok för Postmuseum* 57 (2007) p. 71–86.

⁴⁷ The main letter is Anders Pärsson to his father Lars Wetterham in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/30). Perhaps Wetterham was Pärsson's stepfather which would explain the divergent patronymic. See also Anders Pärsson to his wife and little daughter (both unnamed) in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/30a). These letters are bundled together with the letters from Spenner and Wasberg.

straightforward manner; instead it was letters within letters, like Russian dolls. Three of the letters went to other sailors' wives, one of them via a businessman (*handelsman*) named Christoffer Lambrick who may have been an employer or a landlord or may simply have been a literate person who could read the letter in the event that the recipient could not (this issue is discussed in more detail below). In addition, two of these women's envelopes contained sealed letters for two more sailors' wives, living at different addresses, that the first two recipients were evidently supposed to hand deliver. There were also two more letters in this package for company clerk Lars Wetterhamn in Karlskrona. The first of these was from Wetterhamn's brother, Niels Haagh, also a sailor on the *Sophia Lovisa*, and the second (enclosed in the first) was a letter that Wetterhamn was supposed to pass on to Niels's wife, Britta – with a further suggestion that he (Wetterhamn) might use his influence to help her with some bureaucratic problems she had recently encountered. Perhaps the intention was to send these letters through military channels down to Karlskrona, or perhaps Henrick Wattson's wife would simply have paid for the regular post.⁴⁸ It is difficult to know exactly what the logic was here. Clearly, sending all eight letters under one cover was a cheaper way to get from the Sound to Kalmar, and most of the senders belonged to the same ship (the *Sophia Lovisa*). But routing letters for Karlskrona through Kalmar seems odd, and it is hard to divine why the duty of hand delivering the letters was divided up in such a complex way apart from the obvious point that Wetterhamn was a key nodal point both for communication and influence. For their part, the Kalmar addresses are especially hard to translate into modern-day locations (a topic to which we will return) which makes it difficult to tell whether the criterion for hand delivery was proximity, kinship, friendship, encouragement to network with other wives, a mark of respect for the wives of higher-ranking persons, patronage to a lower-ranking person, or something else entirely.

In addition to these informal routes, there seems to have been a more formal conduit through the Karlskrona Admiralty for some under officers' personal mail, though it may have been the case that the arrangement for under officers only applied to this voyage. Thus, Master Gunner Borrie Spring informed his wife that she should seek his letters at the Admiralty because the Commander, Chief Commissioner (*Öfversta Commissarien*) von Otter – who surely did enjoy the *fribrevsrätt* – had agreed to receive them. However, Master Gunner Spring also warned her not to bother the Commander too often because the latter had

⁴⁸ The main letter is Henrick Wattson to his wife (unnamed) in Kalmar, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14). Three of the enclosed letters, Class Nielssen to his wife (unnamed) in Kalmar but addressed to one Christoffer Lambreck, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14d), Niels Haagh to Lars Wetterhamn in Karlskrona 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14e), and Niels Haagh to his wife Britta Haagh in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/14e(i)), are written by the same person in a generic clerk's hand. Two letters, Håkan Liungberg to his wife Britta Månsdotter, 13 Jan. 1696 (Pt1/14a) and Jöns Mickalsson to his wife, Cherstin Holiensdotter, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14b) both enclose other letters to be delivered to two additional men's wives.

already been so gracious as to personally promise to have her mail hand delivered. Clearly, he wanted her to be tactful to their patron.⁴⁹

The negotiation of patronage was also a consideration in a package destined for Stockholm that was organized by Johan Olofsson, who appears to have been a carpenter on a merchant ship. The first of these was his own letter to his wife, Chatarina Mattsdotter; the second, enclosed in the first, was from navigation officer (*styrman*) Johann Stenwald to his wife, and the third, enclosed in Stenwald's letter, was from a member of Stenwald's crew, one Johann Blom, and intended for *his* wife. In the first (cover) letter, Olofsson reports with some enthusiasm how agreeable Stenwald has been to him, including sending an extremely friendly greeting to Chatarina herself (the two men had apparently been spending a good deal of time together while their respective ships were trapped in Plymouth harbor). Olofsson gives careful directions to his wife to personally deliver Stenwald's letter to his wife, Maria Larsdotter, along with what appears to be a recommendation to cultivate her friendship. Stenwald also asks *his* wife to deliver the letter for Johann Blom's wife, described as "our *båtsman's* wife" (*vår båtsmans hustru*), thus making it clear that Blom and his wife are of lesser status. The bundling of the three letters, coupled with hand delivery, seems to have been intended in part to help build connections between a specialist (Olofsson) and someone of a higher status (Stenwald) through their wives, but it also gave Stenwald an opportunity to double the impact of his own patronage by having his wife personally oversee the delivery of a letter to a subordinate's wife.⁵⁰

Less well-connected Stockholmers also bundled their letters, as in the case of an unnamed sailor who sent five letters to Stockholm inside a single cover-envelope. His wife, Kiärstin Jöransdotter in Södermalm was the main recipient, and the intention probably was the standard one of saving postage.⁵¹ However, there was at least one additional motive at play. The cover-envelope, once opened, also bore the legend "This little letter [apparently meaning the whole packet] to be delivered to Erick Jansey on Hornsgatan" (*Dät lilla brevet levereras hos Erick Jansey på Hornsgatan*).⁵² Having Jansey as the secondary addressee most likely was a way to ensure that there was someone at the point of delivery who could actually read the letters as well as help direct their disposition. Several other men sent letters to their wives but addressed them to other people who lived nearby, usually local businessmen. Probably this was because their wives would have had difficulty reading the letters on their own. This is particularly clear in the case of Anders Person Lustig and Anders Älssman from the ship Livland, apparently ordinary

⁴⁹ Master Gunner Borrie Spring to his wife (unnamed) in Karlskrona, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/04).

⁵⁰ Johann Olofsson to his wife, Chatarina Matsdotter in Stockholm, 17/1/1696 (Pt1/28). The other two letters are Johan Stenwald to his wife Maria Larsdotter in Stockholm, 20/1/1696 (Pt1/28a); and Johan Blom to his wife Liskin Mattdotter in Stockholm, 20/1/1696 (Pt1/28a(i)). *Båtsman* usually meant an ordinary sailor.

⁵¹ For differences in cost between a single envelope and letters bundled together see Holm (1916) 219–221.

⁵² An unknown sailor to his wife, Kiärstin Jöransdotter, in Stockholm (Pt 1/20).

members of the crew (*båtsmän*). As mentioned above, Lustig and Ällsman wrote a shared letter to their wives and they employed someone else to write it. Then they proceeded to address the cover-envelope to businessman (*handelsman*) Jönas Hoobärg in Karlskrona. However, the letter clearly is meant to be read out to Lustig's wife, because, while it opens with a salutation to Hoobärg, it immediately moves to family news and closes in a conventional way with "your dearest husband till death" (*din k[ära] man i döden*). The other side of the page is entirely addressed to Ällsman's wife and it seems likely that Hoobärg was supposed to read out her letter also.⁵³

Sailors' wives and the task of distributing greetings

The lists of greetings inserted in other men's letters do not comport well with modern, individualized notions of what a letter is. Making this form of patronage work relied heavily upon what Schneider calls "multiple party access," which is to say that such letters were neither written by nor intended for just one person, but were, rather, a kind of collective letter to which dozens of people had access. As we have seen, the most extensive lists of greetings are in under officers' letters, though letters by (apparent) members of the ordinary crew also sometimes include them, such as Anders Lustig's letter, mentioned above, which has several greetings from other men written down in the first person. Whereas the cover-letters of packets were addressed in roughly equal proportions to women (almost always married women) and to men who might reasonably have been thought to have access to military communications systems, to *fribrevsrätt* or just to the ability to read handwriting (such as a local businessman), the long lists of greetings to be conveyed were most often found in letters addressed to wives. Getting word to up to a half dozen or more men's families was not a small task. It would have involved locating these people's lodgings (some of the greetings say where people lived though many do not) and going there or sending a message to summon them to one's own lodging, reading the greeting and quite likely, the whole letter out to them, and probably offering or accepting food and drink. It would have involved time, expense, moving around the city, and making inquiries about people's whereabouts. Evidently, the whole system of sending greetings in other people's letters relied on the primary letter-sender having a wife who was prepared to get the word out once the letter arrived. It shows how a married couple – ideally with a wife who could read handwriting – could span the chain of communication, double the effectiveness of the original letter-sender's patronage and, probably, enhance the couple's prestige.

⁵³ Anders Person Lustig to handelsman Jönas Hoobärg in Karlskrona, 16/1/1696 (Pt 1/23 and 23a). See also Class Nielsson of the merchant ship, Sophia Lovisa, to his wife in Kalmar, 14/1/1696 (Pt 1/14d) which is to be delivered to handelsman Christopher Lambrick but is intended for Nielsson's wife.

Wives, perhaps especially officers' wives, evidently had an important role in facilitating communication between ship and shore, though wives of lower-ranked men also sometimes delivered both letters and oral messages. This is still another kind of women's work to add to the growing list of responsibilities of sailors' wives and kin.⁵⁴ Wives' managerial agency and their role as family representatives on shore were clearly important to naval as well as mercantile operations; their involvement in the relaying of mail and messages would have helped to build loyalty, to promote *esprit de corps* among crewmembers and their families, and to smooth over the logistical challenges of having family members – and wage-earners – away for months at a time.

Finding a mail recipient in the city

This system relied heavily on the ability not just of paid postal-deliverers but of ordinary people – including women – to find other people in the city. The physical letters themselves often had some kind of address with what passed for spatial coordinates on them, though these varied a good deal in terms of their degree of specificity. When the destination was a relatively small town, such as Västervik or Marstrand, simply putting a name on an envelope was apparently sufficient. In larger places the social status of the recipient became significant. The whereabouts of prominent people – for example, Magister Malyn of Kalmar – were apparently known to everyone; there was no need to supply additional coordinates. Similarly, Lars Wetterhamn was well-enough known in Karlskrona (and probably at the Sound), at least by navy people, that there was no need to specify his place of residence or work, though his title was given. Recipients who appear with honorifics suggesting high status or nobility were also less likely to need other spatial locators than people without honorifics, though they were also more likely to have their letter hand delivered by someone who, presumably, already knew where they lived. This was also true of four of the five women recipients of letters (out of thirty-four women recipients) who bore honorifics next to their names suggesting somewhat higher social rank.⁵⁵ Under officers' wives who resided in Karlskrona, whether high-born or not, did not require an address other than their name (or their husband's name) which probably means either that they had an unofficial right to have letters sent through the admiralty (see above), or that it was assumed that everyone knew where they lived.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Margaret R. Hunt, "Women and the Fiscal-Imperial State in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries", in Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (New York 2004) p. 29–47; Marie Lennersand, Jan Mispelaere, Christopher Pihl, & Maria Ågren, "Gender, Work, and the Fiscal-Military State", in Maria Ågren (ed.), *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society* (New York 2017) p. 178–202.

⁵⁵ Common ones were "high ranking" (*högtärade*), "well born" (*välborne*), and "honorably born" (*ärborne*).
⁵⁶ Lilliaquist, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/32a); Frank, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/32 and 32c) and Spring, 15/1/1696 (Pt 1/04).

Spatial coordinates grew more complex as the recipients moved down the social scale. However, street numbering was far in the future, and even street names were less in evidence than one might expect. In the case of Karlskrona, to which the largest number of letters – twenty – were directed only two letters specified a part of town, in both cases Västerudde. Västerudde was an area in the western part of the island, sandwiched between the main admiralty buildings and what would later become the famous five fingers dry docks. But there were no other part-of-town references in any of the Karlskrona letters – and, notably, not a single reference to a quarter. Most likely the quarter system that appears prominently on the well-known Karlskrona map of 1718 had not yet been instituted in 1696; if it had been no one was using it for the purposes of directing mail.⁵⁷ Across twenty Karlskrona-bound letters there were only two references to streets, both to a street named "Gamla Bräbogatan" which does not appear on any historic maps or lists of historic Karlskrona street-names. Landmarks such as notable buildings or military sites were somewhat more common. Andreas Pärsson located his wife, Anna Olafsdotter "on the Western peninsula by Master Jönss's windmill" (*på Västerudde vid Mast. Jönss väderqvarn*). One of Johann Ropper's correspondents lived in the "old apothecary's" (*gamla apotekets gård*) while *volontären* Anders Spenner's wife, Maria Månsdotter was "currently living in Karlskrona by the shipyard" (*nuförtiden boendes i Carlskrona vid varvet*). Thomas Råcka's father, Olaf Larsson Råcka, described as a sawyer (*sågare*), was also said to live "by the Royal Naval shipyard" (*vid kongl. Ammiralitetets varvet*).⁵⁸

Far and away the most common way to locate someone in Karlskrona was by reference to some other person – other than the addressee that is – who was associated with a particular part of town, a property or a building. There are twelve Karlskrona letters where more information is given than just the name of the addressee alone. Ten of these involve a reference to some notable person in the vicinity of the addressee. Recipients of letters lived "in the house or household of" (*hos*); "across from" (*mitt emot*); "by" (*vid*); "right next to" or "right by" (*strax vid*); or "in" (*uti*) locations or buildings currently or formerly inhabited by other named persons. Jonas Håkansson's wife, Malena Hänssons dotter, was living "right next to Pär Furnett" (*strax vid Pär Furnett*); Anders Persson Lustig's letter to his wife, sent via businessman Hoobärg, located the latter "up on Gamla Bräbogatan right by Biurn Khällman" (*uppå Gambla Bräbogatan strax vid Biurn Khällman*). Ropper's letter to his wife mentioned that she lived "across from the counselor's daughter" (*mitt emot Rådmans dotter*). One reference invoked a person now dead, but who was apparently still popularly associated with a particular

⁵⁷ "Plan af staden Carlscrona uti Tingui Quartier" (1718) Krigsarkivet, SE/KrA/0424/063/145a. I am grateful to Karin Ehnberg of the Blekinge Museum and Fredrik Kämpe and Andreas Linderöth of the National Maritime and Transport Museums for advising me about early maps and streets of Karlskrona. For historic street names see Leif Karlsson, *Historiska Uppgifter kring Gatuvägnamn och Kvartersnamn i Karlskrona* (Karlskrona: Blekinge museum, 2006).

⁵⁸ For Västerudde see Pt1/30a and Pt/30b. The two Gamla Bräbogatan addresses are Pt1/23a and Pt1/32b. For the apothecary see Pt/06a. For the shipyard see Pt/30b(i) and Pt1/16.

space. Samuel Bagge's wife Cristina Ström was to be found in "the blessed [that is, deceased] Lieutenant Svän Hanson's homestead" (*uti sabl[ig] Lieutna[n]t Svän Hanson[s] gård*).⁵⁹

Addresses for people in Kalmar were fewer in number but they looked very like those in Karlskrona. There was only one reference to a street in all of the Kalmar letters, and that came from Henrick Wattson, a foreigner, who lived (or his wife lived) on what he called "di st[r]at Libeck" (i.e., Lübeckvägen). In addition, one letter referred to a part of town (see below) and one referenced a building, the Kalmar hospital, where the addressee served as chaplain. All the other addresses for which more information is offered than just the name of the addressee center on other people with an association to a particular place or space. Håkan Liungberg's wife, Britta Månsdotter, was "living in Bårans' property" (*boandes i Bårans gård*) while Jons Mickalsson's wife, Cherstin Hollendotter, could be found "living by the Commandant's residence" (*boendes vid Commendanteur*). Jaban Matdsson's wife, Chatarina Jönsdotter lived in "Jöns Lambrick's property" (*Jöns Lambricks gård*) and Nils Matsson's wife, Maria Trulsdotter, lived "Up Clanad's Point at Sven Svenson's property" (*op Clanads udden vid Sven Svensons gård*). "Clanad's Point" and "di st[r]at Libeck" are the only non-person-focused spatial reference to be found in the Kalmar addresses.⁶⁰

Both in Karlskrona and Kalmar, then, spatial referents largely derived from people. Of course, these were not just any people. Sometimes they were locally prominent people, associated with the military or the city elite, or they could be prominent people now dead, but who were still associated in people's minds with a particular space (the blessed Lieutenant Svän Hanson for example). Presumably many of the people who functioned as referents for particular locations in the city were long-standing residents and property owners, which would have contrasted with the intended recipients of the letters who were often more recent arrivals in the town and often of a lower social status.⁶¹ The transient status of a good many of the addressees is reflected in the addresses, which fairly often use phrases like "presently residing" (*nuförtiden boendes* or *strax boendes*), thus marking the recipients, most of them women, as recent arrivals or temporary residents.

The low regard for street names in both towns is striking because both cities were, in some sense, new. Karlskrona was actually founded in 1680 and Kalmar, though long-established, was rebuilt in an entirely new location in the 1650s.⁶² One would think that the inhabitants of a "new" city or town would be more attuned to street-names. However, evidently, both Karlskrona and Kalmar were

⁵⁹ Håkansson, 16/1/1696 (Pt1/18); Lustig, 16/1/1696 (Pt1/23 and 23a); Ropper, 16/1/1696 (Pt1/06); Bagge, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/32b).

⁶⁰ Wattson, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14 and 14c); Leimontin (the Kalmar hospital) 16/1/1696 (Pt1/21b); Liungberg, 13/1/1696 (Pt1/14a); Mickalsson, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14b); Matdsson, 14/1/1696 (Pt1/14b(ii)); Matsson, undated (Pt1/14a(i)).

⁶¹ Aske Laursen Brock & Jelle Van Lottum. "Rural Maritime Labour Migration to Copenhagen and Stockholm (1700–1800)", *Continuity and Change* 34:2 (2019) p. 231–252.

⁶² My thanks to Göran Tagesson for informing me about the history of Kalmar.

small enough, and, perhaps, socially and militarily stratified enough for this personalized method of locating people to work. Finding people in this way must have required a fair amount of social interaction though; people may not have paid much attention to street names, but, as much recent scholarship has shown, the *space* of the street played a crucial role both in forming the identity of a neighborhood and in mediating and traversing the fluid boundaries between street and home, or, as they are sometimes imprecisely called, the public and the private. A piece of mail was a material object that arrived from somewhere distant and unknown, yet, in the majority of cases, it was a message from a husband to a wife – that is, a space of intimacy and familiarity.

In order for this traversal to work, either someone had to have a fair amount of knowledge of the neighborhood and its people, or a negotiation had to take place in which a person who was not from that immediate locale gained access to local knowledge about who lived where, who worked for whom, who was new in the neighborhood, who was renting out part of their property to a lodger, who was married to whom, who had taken over a place that used to belong to someone else, and who would be likely to read out the letter if the main recipient could not.⁶³ This system relied upon and rewarded people, many of them women, who had the ability to match the names of notables to specific parts of the city, and who possessed the energy and confidence to move around the city in a purposeful way.

Stockholm, however, was a different story. In the capital city, at least by the 1690s, it seems that personalized conceptions of urban space had ceased to work on their own without other referents. There were only eight Stockholm mail recipients, but seven needed spatial referents other than a simple name, a much higher percentage than elsewhere. The most unusual feature of the Stockholm addresses is the sudden appearance of multiple spatial indicators. Parts of the city or suburbs, landmarks, streets, squares, even, in one case, the building material and color of the intended recipient's house, suddenly became significant. Addresses grew more visual, as in Martin Beck's letter to his wife, Britta Erichdotter, which located her in Södermalm "in the stairs to St. Catherine's church" (*i trapan till Sankt Catarin kyrka*). They also tended to pile descriptors on top of each other: Båtsman Johan Blom's wife, Liskin Mattsdotter, was described as "living in Stockholm on Södermalm in Pihl gatan in Hoggens backyard" (*boendes uti Stockholm uppå Södermalm uti Pyhl gathan uti Hoggens bakgård*). Johan Anderson Lindsz's brother, Påhe Anderson, lived "by Packar torget in the house of the gauger Anders Rosing" (*vid Packar torget hoos palmmätare [i.e., parmmätare] Anders Rosing*). An unnamed sailor from a merchant ship, writing to his wife, Kjärstin Jöransdotter, describes her as living "on Södermalm on the Maria side on Tahvast

⁶³ On the early modern street as a negotiated space see Riitta Laitinen & Thomas Cohen, "Cultural History of Early Modern Streets – an Introduction", *Journal of Early Modern History* 12:3–4 (2008) p. 195–205; and Riitta Laitinen & Dag Lindström, "Urban Order and Street Regulation in Seventeenth-century Sweden", *Journal of Early Modern History* 12:3–4 (2008) p. 257–287.

street by the Skinner bay” (*på Södermalm på Maria sidan på Tabvast gatan vid skinner viken*).⁶⁴ These addresses offer a new level of geographic specificity. Referents based on people still played a role though; in fact, as with visual referents, there was a tendency to name several in one address, dead and alive. Carl De Besse located his wife, Marika Kroger, ”in the home of the notary, Hen[ry] Wederberg, living in Järn Kranssen’s property on Hornsgatan” (*hoss Notarn Hen. Wederberg, boendes hos Järn Kranssens gård på Hornsgatan*). Johan Olofsson’s letter to his ”honorably born and virtuous” (*äreborna och dygdiga*) wife, Catharina Matsdotter, similarly names several people and multiple spatial referents. His wife lived at ”Munthers in the blessed [i.e., deceased] counselor Mr. Portman’s gray wooden building in Södermalm by the bridge” (*Munthers uti sabl[ig] rådman Herr Portman[s] grå träbyggning på Södermalm vid bron*).⁶⁵ No address as complicated as these ones appears on the letters intended for Karlskrona, Kalmar or anywhere else. Still, it would be unwise to assume from this that local or collective knowledge had ceased to matter in Stockholm. Letter-writers (including Olofsson) still expected their wives to move around the city with letters and oral messages, but the project of finding people had begun to require a more elaborate framing.

Conclusion

In recent years the old belief that early modern ships were little worlds of their own, floating cultural islands with few connections to land, has come under critical scrutiny.⁶⁶ This essay contributes to that reconsideration by means of a unique collection of letters sent by sailors to family members back in Sweden in the middle of the 1690s. It shows, first, that attempts to keep in contact with family members were not limited only to men who were comfortable writing their own letters, though married men may have enjoyed more opportunity (and felt more pressure?) to send letters and messages than unmarried men did. There were several strategies for overcoming inexperience at writing or, indeed, full illiteracy, and sailors were far from passive in relation to long-distance communication, even when they paid someone else to pen their letters. Efforts to communicate at distance were encouraged by practices of shipboard and military patronage as well as by older traditions that viewed letters and letter-writing more as a collective enterprise than a ”dyadic” and private one. The most striking indication of the latter is the fact that letters often included fairly long lists of greetings, dictated at source and intended to be delivered orally when the letter arrived

⁶⁴ Beck, 16/1/1696 (Pt1/20d); Blom, 20/1/1696 (Pt1/28a(i)); Lindsz, 15/1/1696 (Pt1/20b); Unnamed to his wife Kjärstin Jöransdotter, undated (Pt1/20).

⁶⁵ De Besse, 20/1/1696 (Pt1/20a); Olofsson, 17/1/1696 (Pt1/28).

⁶⁶ Lisa Hellman, ”Ett ensamt skepp på öppet hav? Kopplingar, kontakter och utbyten ombord på svenska ostindiefarare”, *Historisk Tidskrift* 134:3 (2014) p. 357–384; Margaret R. Hunt, ”An English East India Company Ship’s Crew in a Connected Seventeenth-Century World”, *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 46:3 (2022) p. 333–344.

at its destination, almost always by the main letter-sender's wife. The written and the oral lived side by side in the epistolary culture of late seventeenth-century Scandinavian sailors.

The transit of letters and greetings over space and time presented logistical challenges as well as many "collective" elements. Here issues of privilege (especially the privilege accorded to military officers), patronage, and, perhaps, nepotism, came to the fore. These would have begun with the bundling of letters back in Plymouth, as some men sought to use the mail and hand delivery of post to strengthen existing elite networks while others tried to parlay kinship or other connections into cheaper and presumably more secure forms of mail-delivery, or even into financial assistance for their wives. The essay also shows how non-elite networks and couples managed the fact that some of the women could not read their husbands' letters, namely by enlisting the aid of more literate people in the neighborhood where the wife lived. Similarly, the long lists of greetings inserted, in most cases, into officers' letters, relied upon the generosity, sociability and literacy of under officers' wives, whose job it was to find each greeter's family and convey the greetings, ideally in person.

The essay has also delved into how people located their correspondents within the dynamic urban spaces of late 1600s Sweden. In Karlskrona and Kalmar prominent people were often invoked to "signpost" buildings or properties in or near where letter recipients lived; people were significantly more important than other markers such as street names. In Stockholm, by contrast, while there continued to be abundant use of person-based referents they no longer sufficed on their own. Instead, addresses made use of geographical markers, street names, and visual descriptions of places and spaces, and they often piled these markers on top of one another. It is not exactly news that things worked differently in Sweden's largest city than they did elsewhere, but it is interesting to see just how stark the contrast was. Still, women in Stockholm, especially officers' wives, continued to be tasked with conveying messages and hand-delivering letters to other wives, just as they were in smaller cities.

As indicated earlier, few personal letters survive from non-elite people for the seventeenth century (or, indeed, for the eighteenth). The Sankt Jakob letters are a striking exception, but they were all sent by sailors or people with a close connection to the maritime world. That leaves us with a problem. It could be that the sailors' letters discussed in this essay are the residuum of a broader culture of non-elite letter exchanges which has left few traces because of the exclusionary collecting practices of eighteenth and nineteenth-century archivists and curators. On the other hand, it could be that sailors and their wives really were the only non-elite occupational group to send significant numbers of personal letters in the seventeenth century, and that we are witnessing epistolary strategies born of the distinctive challenges of life at sea. More and broader research is needed on

this question using both "accidental archives"⁶⁷ and chance survivals from more curated collections. The present essay is but a preliminary contribution to what one hopes will blossom into a broader effort.

The Sankt Jakob letters are so full of engaged efforts to connect with people far away – often people the sender of letters or greetings loved – that it is easy to forget that all these efforts came to naught. It is a bit sad to think that these letters never reached the people they were intended for. Still, their loss is the historian's gain, because this collection offers a unique window into the communicative strategies of a social group about which relatively little is known, especially at this early a date. The letters never arrived but they left a trail of evidence we can still follow.

⁶⁷ The term was coined by Harvey Deneroff and is often used to describe minimally-curated archives that were preserved by chance – like the British Prize Papers. The term's genealogy is discussed in Nadine Akkerman & Pete Langman, "Accidentally on Purpose: Denying Any Responsibility for the Accidental Archive", in Andrew Prescott & Alison Wiggins (eds), *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction* (Oxford 2023) p. 323–336, here 323. The Brienne collection at the Museum voor Communicatie in the Hague and the Cairo Geniza (scattered across a number of archives with the largest group at the Cambridge University Library) are two of the better-known examples.

