The Swedish post was formally founded in 1636, nominally by Queen Christina, in fact by her minority government. The first post ordinance was drafted and signed by Axel Oxenstierna, the chancellor of the realm. The post was thus just one of many different Crown institutions that Oxenstierna set in train during his time in office (1612–1654). He had, however, also developed the previous postal organization in 1624, which proved an immediate failure. Oxenstierna may have gone on to learn far more about postal operations while he was on the Continent (1626–1636), yet come 1636 he was still hardly in a position to set up a postal organization on his own. Instead, the necessary expertise had to be sought elsewhere, mostly abroad, and a slew of foreign experts immigrated to Sweden, with Oxenstierna’s approval or at his request, to control the post in its formative period.1

The exact influence of the Crown or the chancellor on postal affairs is therefore hard to pin down. The Crown’s interests were most likely limited to cheap and reliable letter transport; its efforts, to overall supervision. Regular news from the Continent was crucial in times of Sweden’s growing engagement in foreign affairs. Keeping up a ‘good correspondence’ within the Swedish realm and with Swedish diplomats on the Continent was a recurrent phrase used to describe the Crown’s interest in news. It was impressed on postmasters as well as diplomats as their primary task. The Crown had an enormous appetite for news and was frantic to obtain intelligence of all kinds, yet had insufficient financial means to do so. The Crown’s influence on the post, therefore, was that of a principal who commissioned a service that it was unable to pay for.

It was left to the postmasters, in particular those in Stockholm and other central nodes of the fast growing Swedish postal network (Riga, Stralsund, Hamburg, Helsingør), to finance and organize this new institution in detail, while the Crown in return offered them protection from competitors. The form the post’s administration took was thus determined by individual postmasters’ expertise and their financial means. They shaped the post’s organization as they saw fit,

1 The pioneers in researching Sweden’s seventeenth-century postal history were Teodor Holm and Nils Forssell. It is impossible to refer to their works sufficiently often to do them justice.
while meeting the Crown’s needs. At the same time, postmasters had to consider the needs of other users, and above all the merchants, who had to pay for their services, and in so doing financed the post. However, the post was not only about letters. In the seventeenth century, news itself was commoditized and put on public sale. The editing of newspapers and the distribution of news as well as letters were lucrative businesses; businesses that substantially changed the modes of international trade.² In Sweden, the business of news was tightly linked to the post. It was part of the postmasters’ economy. Neither were post and newspapers merely perceived as two sides of the same coin, for, as Johann Peter von Ludewig argued in 1700, there was a causal link between the merchant’s interest in newspapers as the prerequisite for a postal organization, and the post’s introduction by princes in order to have their correspondence delivered for free:

However, as soon as Germany discovered the arcanum of the post, which allowed the princes to have their correspondence paid for by strangers, the to and fro of writing newspapers began.³

The particular organization of the early post was typical of Europe’s emerging bureaucracies, and has been analysed by Anthony Giddens in terms of an expert system.⁴ The expert answers for a certain expertise and the credit with which to run a business on behalf of the government – and under its protection. In exchange for the expert’s investments, the government commonly granted a monopoly. It was the experts who gained most of the profits, which under normal circumstances remained where they were generated.⁵ The postmasters in the bigger cities obviously succeeded in extracting substantial incomes, although the sums involved are vague at best; neither is there a clear picture of the situation in the minor post offices in small provincial towns. We do know, though, that postmasterships almost always attracted a substantial number of applicants.⁶

The post’s formative period lasted until the late 1670s, at which point it was drawn into the general reform process set off by Sweden’s defeat at the hands of Denmark and Brandenburg. This war had finally convinced the Swedish nobility as well as the other three estates that after decades of internal dispute they would have to bow to their king, Charles XI, in his elaborate reform of Crown affairs and the state’s finances. The needs of the state, in particular the necessity of financing a standing army, were provided for by the indelningsverk, a military te-

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³ Ludewig 1705, p. 92.
⁴ Giddens 1991.
⁵ According to an account for 1669 and 1670, these incomes could be substantial. Whereas the office in Stockholm in 1669 had revenues of about 15,417 dr sm, the post offices in Jönköping earned 420 dr sm, Kalmar 708 dr sm, Göteborg 1,227 dr sm, Falun 380 dr sm, Piteå 8 dr sm, and Åbo 400 dr sm (Kanslikollegium, G II a, vol. 1, RA).
nure system by which the soldiery were provided for in kind, receiving farms to recompense them for their service. This reform was accompanied by the compulsory restitution of alienated Crown land, and an investigation into the work of the minority government for Charles XI. The king’s *envälde* (lit. ‘autocracy’), a kind of royal absolutism that ostensibly required that the monarch consult with the estates, included a thorough transformation of the Crown institutions, which were bound ever closer to the king’s will and the central bureaucracy. These institutions thus experienced a huge step forward in terms of bureaucratization, not least with the introduction of stricter financial controls: the institutions’ budgets (*stater*) were increasingly standardized, and income and expenditure were monitored closely in an attempt to maximize the Crown’s resources.

The process of bureaucratization and incorporation was thus far from being unique to the Swedish post, but it came at different times and advanced at different speeds, for whereas postal reform in Sweden proper started in the late 1670s, the Baltic provinces only followed suit in the late 1680s, and the German provinces in the 1690s and in the early 1700s. Yet despite these differences, the thrust of the changes was always the same, for they were intended to strengthen Crown influence on every aspect of the post. Like many other European governments, the Swedish Crown had discovered that the post promised substantial incomes: it now demanded its share. Unlike most other Crown institutions, however, the post remained comparatively independent, with its own budget and archive, although it was closely monitored by *kanslikollegium*, the Chancery Board, of which the postmaster general was a member.

The reforms inevitably curtailed the postmasters’ ability to organize postal affairs as they saw best. The early, relatively independent postal organization increasingly became a full state institution. Still, the reforms clearly did not put an end to the postmasters’ privileges and influence. The Chancery Board and the postmaster general had reason to listen, as they usually did, to the postmasters’ suggestions and schemes. But the Chancery Board’s approval and signature was necessary for almost every appointment or organizational reform. Probably the larger problem for the postmasters was that their financial interests were not served by the Crown introducing regular budgets and tighter financial controls. All postmasters had to render an account of their income and expenditure regularly, and any surplus had to be transferred to Stockholm.

The guidelines and budgets were similar to those of other Crown institutions. The first post budget was introduced in the 1670s, with hardly any effect. Subsequent efforts were more successful, and from the 1690s onwards the post

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7 The post budget for Wismar was introduced in 1699, on occasion of a new postmaster, Christian Wankijff (Wankijff to Schmedeman, Wismar, 8 March 1706, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 180, RA).

8 According to the post director’s archive, the post’s surplus amounted to 30,000–40,000 dr sm per annum in the last two decades of the seventeenth century (Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA).
budgets clearly outlined the income of every post servant, starting in Stockholm and working down to the smallest post office in Sweden proper and in its provinces.\(^9\) The postmasters understood that this official statement of income severely limited their financial opportunities. In about 1680, postmaster general Johan Gustaf von Beijer still called the Stockholm post funds his ‘pledge’.\(^{10}\) He obviously considered the Swedish post to be a part of his private economy. The new budgets therefore profoundly affected the postmasters’ ability to influence their work according to their essentially private interests.

Von Beijer was not slow on the uptake. He wrote to governor-general Henrik Horn in Stade that he heard about the changes to the post in the city of Hamburg. According to him, the Swedish post was about to recover after the war against Denmark and the death in June 1681 of Bernhard Böse (the Swedish postmaster in Hamburg), if:

it were left unhindered and kept in its old form. In this case, there would be no lack of experienced staff and the necessary means to run the post. Unfortunately, things have changed. In future, the post will be considered a regular income for the Crown. As such it is obliged to contribute to the state as well as to its most pressing expenses far beyond the post’s revenues in these hard times. The post will thus be subject to the Chancery Board’s finances, and will consequently fall into disorder and a lamentable state, which is why not only the late Böse but also I have very good reason to complain in higher places. The necessary means to run this business [the post], which hitherto derived from it, are now taken out of our hands. We will be forced to apply and solicit endlessly for every single demand in the Royal Chancery Board and the Treasury to ensure our bare necessities.\(^{11}\)

Von Beijer and his fellow postmasters tried a variety of ploys to ward off all reform, for example by claiming that they were unaware that they required the Chancery Board’s final approval, or that they had to provide sureties, regular accounts, and so on.\(^{12}\) The Chancery Board had some difficult years imposing reforms such as it having the sole right to appoint postmasters.\(^{13}\) By 1700, however, its archive clearly shows signs of its success, not least in the exponential growth in the paperwork it produced.

\(^9\) The term post servant is used to denote everybody employed by the Swedish post; the first post budgets did not mention any salaries outside Sweden proper, except for the post commissars (see n. 37 below) in Hamburg and Helsingør. The provincial postal systems, with exception for Bremen-Verden, were considered in later post budgets; see ÖPD, Postkammarrs arkiv, E 1 B, vol. 1, RA, the post budget for the year 1686.

\(^{10}\) Undated letter of Johan Gustaf von Beijer to the Chancery Board, Kanslikollegium, G II a, vol. 1, RA (Pfand).

\(^{11}\) Rep. 5a, Fach 242, Nr. 6, Staatsarchiv Stade, undated, but probably summer 1681.

\(^{12}\) See Enn Küng’s chapter in this volume on strategies to avoid this kind of control.

\(^{13}\) Consider the new postmastership in Mariestad 1684, where the candidate of the Chancery Board, Jonas Justus Aurell, found that Johan Gustav von Beijer had promised the position to his own candidate, without even informing the Chancery Board (Kanslikollegium, E I C, vol. 1, RA, Stockholm, 27 November 1684).
There is just one problem. The post budgets describe regular incomes for the post servants, in particular the postmasters, which are clearly insufficient to explain the postmasters’ interest in this service. Conditions of employment for the various post servants – postmasters, stagecoach-drivers, messengers, and clerks – varied, as did their wages. This is also true of the Swedish provinces, where other professions were also involved in public communications, not least because the post in the German provinces had a far stronger position in the diligence business. On the whole, however, official wages were low. A substantial number of post servants did not get any wages at all; this was attributed to the smallness of the incomes that their offices generated. What is more, a postmastership in particular required an initial investment, which was not reimbursed by the Crown. Thus the financial situation of the post servants was at best complicated given that it depended on their own private assets, which were not part of the Chancery Board’s financial system; the number of their complaints about financial problems was legion. Despite this, the position of a post servant was attractive; the number of applications remained high, even after Charles XI’s reforms had been implemented. Indeed, the sheer number of applicants seems to be the only constant when it came to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century postmasters’ finances. We can be reasonably sure that contemporaries thought postmasterships lucrative. There is no proof, however, that it was the wages per se that attracted them.

In other words, the image of a Swedish post diligently monitored by the Chancery Board does make sense. The Chancery Board’s archive gives ample evidence to bear it out. In consequence, previous postal historians could use the Chancery Board’s archive to their advantage, but in doing so, they placed themselves in the Chancery Board’s position and took its archive as the template for the post’s organization – as it should have been. Postal history thus resembles the historiography of early modern bureaucracies in general. Based on a more-or-less outspokenly Weberian model of ongoing bureaucratization, historians have highlighted obstacles, failures, corruption, sometimes even greed on behalf of the post servants. Certainly, the post historian Teodor Holm ascribed institutional success and individual failure according to this template. However, when it comes to the postmasters’ wages, Holm was somewhat stumped by the problems outlined here. He devoted just a few pages of his study to the subject, which he obviously thought of little significance. He simply counted on the postmasters’ ability to take care of their income in a more or less legal manner.

The purpose of this chapter is not to improve on Holm, nor to correct him. His command of a very rich material cannot be much bettered, and it was not in

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14 Holm 1906–1929.
15 See Holm 1906–1929, v. pt. 2, pp. 356–357, where he discusses these problems. The chapter is titled ‘Misappropriation of revenues’, which leaves the reader in little doubt that he believes the postmasters were corrupt.
the nature of those sources to prompt his interest in the post servants’ income. Instead, this chapter will present a different reading – another perspective on postal history – that is all the more relevant as postmasters experienced the same kinds of problem as other Crown servants. Moreover, postmasters were not only comparable to other civil services groups; they frequently held several such offices (mayor, town councillor, customs officer, a clerkship) simultaneously or consecutively. Thus they were part of a small elite of bourgeois Crown servants, situated in a local context of often interrelated families. Of these positions, that of postmaster was usually considered superior, while few men surrendered a postmastership in favour of another Crown office. Despite differences in the administration of Crown resources, these positions seem to have been shaped by similar financial conditions. Their remuneration has consequently been examined by a number of historians, but without a convincing answer to the problems noted here.

The financial situation of the lower ranks of post servants offers a point of comparison for the postmasters’ circumstances. The well-documented appointment of a postmaster in Kalmar will here be used to chart the different rules the Chancery Board applied in its negotiations with postmasters. (In that particular case, a widow was appointed unofficially, obviously in order to protect her and her household’s interests.) The postal organization in the Swedish provinces differed from Sweden proper by reason of the nature of the conglomerate of states that constituted the Swedish Crown. In all of these examples, privileges, traditions, the postmasters’ investment, and the patrimonial care of the Crown affected the day-to-day practice of the post, despite intricate bureaucratic routines. Each postmaster’s household was interlaced with the Crown in ways that thwart the seemingly obvious distinction between public and private spheres in early modern societies. The state’s archives offer little in the way of information on the postmasters’, or indeed other Crown servants’, personal finances. This chapter will therefore conclude by discussing why this was the case. How did Crown servants negotiate their private interests, and what other sources are there for the study of their finances?

The starting-point for this investigation is therefore that postmasters commanded not only official incomes, but also unofficial incomes that were associated with the post, and that were sufficiently reliable to explain the huge interest in postmasterships. These incomes were considered legitimate; in other words, the postmasters did not primarily rely on corruption, embezzlement, extortion, and the like, for although such illegal behaviour existed – and still does – it can hardly explain the postmasters’ circumstances, not least because the sources present the post as a public institution of high repute. Instead, we are faced with a complex situation, which cannot be described using the Chancery Board’s archive alone. The findings presented here point to a different type of organization altogether, one that was neither a rational bureaucracy in the
Weberian sense, nor its illegitimate counterpart. The nature of Sweden’s civil administration was more complicated than the image of a steadily advancing modern bureaucracy would lead us to suppose.

Sources

In this, much comes down to the reliability and scope of the archives. There is clearly no reason to doubt the archive material’s authenticity; in doubt is rather its range, its ability to describe the post servants’ working lives, in particular the postmasters’ personal finances. There simply is no archive collection that tells us of a post servant’s various sources of income other than his official wages. Consequently, this chapter will argue its case with the help of one-off or incidental information and assumptions based on other sources or for other kinds of Crown servant.

In this effort, the archives’ silence is more than just an obstacle. It tells us something not just about the post servants’ perception of their service, but the Crown’s perception as well. Instead of deploring the archives’ silence and omissions, we have to understand its underlying message. What information was deemed relevant for inclusion in the archive? The postmasters’ efforts to promote their interests were based on arguments that were considered legitimate or meaningful to some degree; other arguments were not. In consequence, some things were mentioned openly, others not at all. Was the Chancery Board of the same mind, or were there ways to negotiate this in a different way, possibly outside the official correspondence, using back channels? Before we can answer these kinds of question, we have to look at the available sources.

Overall, the archive situation is rather good for the time around 1700, as there is the archive of the Chancery Board as well as the postmaster general, both of which are well preserved and methodical. These archives, however, only show one side of the picture, the picture that the post servants presented to the Chancery Board and the postmaster general. The archive also contains the Chancery Board’s discussions and the measures it took. We might call this the official, legitimate side – from which substantial parts of postal history are missing. Unfortunately, we have hardly any additional material about the post servants, their finances, and their position in their respective communities. There is not a single surviving post servant’s private archive, although the Chancery Board explicitly demanded that deceased postmaster’s papers had to be registered and secured.

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16 See Magnus Linnarsson’s chapter in this volume on the Chancery Board and the post’s archives.
17 For unknown reasons, even the most important figures in Sweden’s early postal history, the regional directors von Beijer, Jakob Becker, Statius Stein, Joachim Vatky-Rosencreutz and others left virtually no material; Kanslikollegium, G II a, vol. 1 and 2, RA, might be the remains of Johan Gustav von Beijer’s archive, which also contains some of his father’s papers.
There are, however, some differences between the situation in Sweden proper and its provinces, which can be explained by the complicated structure of the Swedish realm. The Swedish king ruled over a conglomerate of states, with different sets of laws and forms of political agency. There were efforts to unify the rule of these territories, albeit with mixed results, before Sweden lost most of its provinces in the Great Northern War (1700–1721). The Chancery Board treated the post in the Swedish provinces differently, because their constitutional rights as well as older customary laws needed to be taken into consideration. Besides, until the 1680s the Chancery Board had no clear picture of the postal organization in its provinces, hence several long investigations by post Secretary Johan Lange in the late 1680s and mid 1690s that were the basis for consecutive reforms. Still, the Chancery Board’s influence on postal matters outside Sweden proper should not be overestimated. Until the late seventeenth century, in the case of Bremen-Verden even up to the early eighteenth century, the Chancery Board had only a pretty rough picture of how the post was organized.

In Sweden proper, the post was introduced in 1636. It did not replace any previous organization, with the exception of an unwieldy system of carriage traffic (skjutsväsendet). Even local transport systems such as häradsposten and klockarposten (official messengers, distributing official mail within a parish or region) seem to have continued unaffected. The post servants were not organized in any way in their various groups, and almost all of their contacts and deliberations are lost. We find small pieces of information about their lives, such as several probate inventories (bouppteckningar) that give reasonably detailed descriptions of the relevant postmasters’ possessions. 

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18 Gustafsson 1988 has described Sweden as a conglomerate state, and although I agree on the broad outlines, I would differentiate between a conglomerate Crown and a conglomerate of states. The notion of ‘the state’ in Swedish historiography is often used anachronistically, perhaps because substantial changes in the state’s development between 1500 and 1750 are not sufficiently taken into consideration.
19 These differences can be explained by the different ways in which the territories were integrated into the Swedish realm. The Livonian estates, for example, had far fewer privileges than the Estonian or Pomeranian because Livonia was acquired by military conquest.
20 In 1698, the Chancery Board wrote to Charles XII about the post in the German provinces: ‘we have to follow the German order. The post therefore cannot be administered in the same way as the Swedish’ (Stockholm, 24 October 1698, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA).
21 See Enn Küng’s chapter in this volume.
22 It is reasonable to assume the postmasters did have regular mail contact, as they had the right to send letters free of charge. They also had an interest in regular news, which they received from their colleagues. Almost all of their correspondence of this kind is lost.
23 Of the various archives that hold probate inventories, the county record office in Uppsala is perhaps the most useful for postal historians, as it holds several probate inventories for postmasters of the Lake Mälaren area (see Rådhusrätt för Arboga, Eskilstuna, Köping, and Uppsala, Landsarkiv Uppsala).
The situation was far better for the Swedish provinces, especially Pomerania and to a lesser extent Bremen-Verden. Even here, the official, legitimate face of the post dominates. In the provinces, however, the post was also involved in the diligence traffic, an enterprise already established before the Swedish post was set up, and the result was a series of legal and political deliberations. Even more important was the fact that there were competing postal organizations, the most important being the Hamburg–Danzig and Hamburg–Amsterdam messenger routes. These were run by the cities’ merchants and were fully developed long before the Swedish post started up in Pomerania and Bremen-Verden. Four of the more important post offices in Pomerania (Demmin, Anklam, Ückermünde, and Stettin) already existed as part of the messenger route and remained so even after Sweden had introduced its own post. The postilions wore the Swedish colours; the organization as well as the profits still belonged to the major cities’ merchants.

The Hamburg–Danzig messenger route was by far the most important competitor, but there were also postal services run by Denmark, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg, and of course the Imperial Post of Thurn und Taxis. In addition, there were smaller organizations, such as the messenger post run by the Lübeck-based ‘merchants in Skåne’ (Schonenfahrer), and the ‘purveyance post’ that catered to individuals (such as governor-general Nils Bielke). They all added to the Swedish post’s complications, and were the cause of further deliberations; a debate that was wholly redundant in Sweden proper as there was simply no other political agent to compete with the Crown’s post or the Chancery Board.

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24 For the post in the Baltic provinces, see Enn Küng’s chapter in this volume; for the German provinces see Engelhardt 1926; Roessner 1986; and Droste 2009a.
25 The messenger route between Hamburg and Gdansk was not a ‘post’ in a formal sense, because neither city had the necessary right to operate a post – the ius territoriale, which in the Peace of Westphalia was only granted to sovereign governments – and therefore could not open their own post offices, and had to employ Pomeranians as messengers, clad in Swedish colours. The organization, however, remained in the hands of the Hamburg merchants, as did the profits. The messenger route between Hamburg and Amsterdam worked along the same lines.
26 On the Hamburg merchants’ messenger routes, see Ahrens 1962.
27 The special privileges, not to mention the profits, of the Hamburg merchants’ messenger service were much debated by the Chancery Board (Chancery Board to Charles XII, Stockholm, 24 October 1698, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA).
28 Purveyance post (Küchenpost, lit. ‘kitchen post’) was the popular name for the weekly coach traffic between cities or princely courts and the entrepôts of conspicuous consumption (in Northern Germany, Hamburg). In the second half of the seventeenth century, several purveyance posts were allowed to operate, if only because it was well-nigh impossible to deny this privilege when requested by a prince or a member of Sweden’s high nobility. However, it was assumed the coach-drivers were prepared to carry letters and passengers as a side-line (see Bernhardt 2009).
29 In the late 1650s, Johan von Beijer set up a competing postal route between Stockholm and Hamburg after he had been dismissed as director of the Swedish post. This route was said to have been faster and more reliable than the official postal service, yet was abandoned when von Beijer was reinstated as director in 1662 (Kanslikollegium, G II a, vol. 2, RA).
The archive situation for the Baltic and German provinces is much more fragmented, not least because the Chancery Board needed much more time to implement its firm rule over postal matters. Its achievements were patchy, particularly in Bremen-Verden, where the Swedish postal organization was never introduced. The Swedish post in Pomerania was something of an exception, due mostly it seems to the assiduousness of Joachim Vatky (in 1705 ennobled under the name of Rosencreutz). The archive situation is thus more colourful, offering a greater variety of perspectives, and benefiting from a certain amount of court records. Contrary to the situation in Sweden proper, powerful cities and equally powerful estates partook in public affairs. The city magistrates were more independent of government control than in Sweden. Even the estates put forward legitimate claims to participation in postal matters. The Pomeranian estates, for example, doubted the need to extend the post in Pomerania beyond a half-dozen cities. They argued that the quantity of letters was too small, and that every new post office first of all served the private interests of its postmaster, namely enrichment in order to display a certain social standing. It is not clear if this position gained much of a hearing, but it certainly took far longer to introduce a post in the less populated areas of Pomerania than in Sweden proper, where by 1700 every small town, however distant and insignificant, harboured its own post office.

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30 When Christian Wankijff took over the post office in Wismar in 1699, he described his predecessor’s work as ‘private’, in that von Treuenfels never sent any accounts or money to the Chancery Board (Wankijff to Åkerhielm, Wismar, 11 November 1702, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 180, RA).

31 The Swedish post in Bremen-Verden was actually granted as a hereditary fief to a foreign nobleman, Franz Ernst von Platen, who organized a post service that was Swedish in name only (Roessner 1986).

32 The Chancery Board’s direction of the post in Pomerania was largely implemented thanks to Joachim Vatky. He started as a postmaster in Stralsund in 1684, and subsequently rose to the position of post director for Pomerania. He used his good relations with the Chancery Board in Stockholm to secure his position in Stralsund, and in the process asked for the Chancery Board’s intervention and reported continuously to Stockholm (see his numerous letters in ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 135 and 136, RA); Christian Wankijff, postmaster in Wismar since 1699, also relied heavily on the Chancery Board’s support (ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 180, RA).

33 The city archives of Riga and Stralsund offer important material for Swedish postal history. Stralsund felt so strong in relation to the Swedish king that the council asked for the return of the post office to their control (undated memorandum (about 1700), Rep. 4: Nr. 685, Stadtarchiv Stralsund).

34 Memorandum by the Pomeranian estates addressed to the government, 1 April 1700, Handschriften HS 654, Stadtarchiv Stralsund.

35 Vatky-Rosencreutz wrote to Schmedeman that he had misgivings about opening more post offices in Pomerania. Even with the inducement of keeping all the income, he doubted he would find anyone willing to take on a post office without an additional salary (28 February 1708, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 136, RA).
The post servants’ wages in perspective

To understand the flaws in the post budgets at the turn of the eighteenth century, we have to consider different conditions of service and wages. At the top of the post budget we find the post office in Stockholm and several of the larger offices inside and outside the Swedish realm. The offices in Riga and Stralsund, and the commissars in Hamburg and Helsingør earned as much as 400–700 dr sm per annum.36 The bulk of the post offices earned substantially less, between 15–150 dr sm. About a dozen offices did not have any regular income at all. Instead, their postmasters were allowed simply to keep any revenue that their office generated. Even then, they were obliged to send in regular accounts of their income, as was mandatory for salaried postmasters, but it seems that they were monitored rather loosely.

The higher incomes might sound reasonable enough at first. To put them into perspective, however, we have to consider the necessary costs. A commissar in Hamburg or Helsingør had to represent the Crown in different ways, the post being just one of them. Subsequently, they needed a house and staff to do their job as well as to display their status.37 An annual income of 600–700 dr sm was by no means sufficient to do that. Post commissar Barthold Huswedel in Hamburg not only invested in a diligence route to Bremen, together with Stralsund’s post commissar Vatky-Rosencreutz, he also acted as a financier on behalf of the Crown, cashing huge bills of exchange, and distributing money to the Swedish army and the Pomeranian government. He was said to have been rich before he entered Swedish service. But the financial transactions and his credit line clearly far exceeded his wages. Huswedel finally went bankrupt, for unknown reasons.38

A similar example offered by Johann Balthasar Birnbaum, a Pomeranian merchant, who early in the century offered to lease all the Pomeranian post for 2,000 rdr per annum.39 He was turned down, only to become postmaster in Anklam in 1705, a smaller, rural town with a post office worth 80 rdr in annual income. According to Vatky-Rosencreutz, Birnbaum had boasted that he would travel to Stockholm to make sure he got the position and that he would take 2,000 rdr with him.40 In 1710, Birnbaum became postmaster in Stettin. By 1714,
Birnbaum claimed that he had lent the Crown more than 100,000 rdr of his own money or with the help of his credit.\footnote{Birnbaum to the Chancery Board, Stettin, 14 August 1714, Kanslikollegium, G II d, vol. 6, RA.} In the same year, he designed a state lottery, at that time a very successful way of financing entire countries and not only cities. Birnbaum claimed that his lottery would pay out 5 million rdr, bringing the Crown a substantial income. All of these plans ultimately failed, and Birnbaum left the post altogether in 1715. Still, how was he able to bandy about such large sums of money? And if he was able to do this independently of his postmasterships, why did he take them on in the first place?\footnote{According to Vatky, Birnbaum had to borrow the 2,000 rdr and could not risk to lose the position (Vatky to Schmedeman, Stralsund, 13 April 1705, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 136, RA).}

What the postmasters who had no official wages lived on remains unclear. If it were true that their offices handled just a handful of letters now and then, the profits would have been far too small to make it worthwhile, even when other services were factored in. The postmaster in Greifswald, Johann Palthenius, lived in a small town in Pomerania with an even smaller university and a handful of government institutions, all of which had the privilege to send letters free of charge. Palthenius claimed that there were exactly three merchants in town who regularly corresponded with merchants outside Greifswald.\footnote{Undated paper by Palthenius, appendix to the report by Johan Lange to the Chancery Board on the status of the post in Pomerania, 1694, Kanslikollegium, G II f, vol. 2, RA.} The income from these letters should have been far too small to make this position attractive, yet that is exactly what it was: Palthenius received the postmastership as unsalaried remuneration for his poorly paid work as a clerk of the court of appeal (hovrätt) in Greifswald.\footnote{Palthenius applied for the postmastership through Johan Rabel, secretary to governor-general Otto Wilhelm von Königsmarck (Johann Palthenius to Johan Rabel, Greifswald, 9 November 1684, Rydboholmsamlingen, E 7930, RA). In the 1690s, the Chancery Board debated transferring the post in Hamburg from Huswedel to the resident, Henrik Gabriel Rothlieb, in order to improve the latter’s poor salary (Stockholm, 3 June 1690; Kanslikollegiets protokoll, A II a, vol. 8, pp. 234–235, RA; Stockholm, 6 October 1692, Kanslikollegiets protokoll, A II a, vol. 10, pp. 516–518, RA).} He stayed in office for decades, receiving no wages for the first fifteen years, and only a small one afterwards. And he did not only merely hold office; he did something with it, introducing two diligence routes from Greifswald to Stralsund and to Wolgast, putting up the initial investment and standing all the financial risks involved. How was he able to do so?

The situation is different for the smaller post offices in Sweden proper, for the material is even more scarce. The official duties of the postmasters were most likely limited to just the postal business, which only took one or two days’ work a week. But even then, an income of anything from 15 to 100 dr sm hardly suffices to explain why the post office almost always attracted the town elite – mayors, customs officers, and members of the council. In their case, the post office wage
was just one of two or more official salaried appointments, which may well have added up to considerable sums.\textsuperscript{45}

However, in the bigger cities this accumulation of services was called into question.\textsuperscript{46} Gabriel Thelin, clerk at the post office in Stockholm with an annual wage of 300 dr sm, applied in 1685 for the postmastership in Viborg, with an annual income of 150 dr sm, a substantial drop. On top of that, the application entailed moving from the very centre of the Swedish realm to one of its remotest towns.\textsuperscript{47} And as postmasters usually died without any further promotion, he probably did not choose the post office to further his career in Viborg. Still, six years later, in 1691, he received the position of a customs officer in Viborg, because his wages were considered too low. In 1694, however, he had to give up the post office, because it was thought he should not hold two positions at the same time.\textsuperscript{48}

To make things even more complicated, we have to consider the investments that preceded the appointment of a postmaster. They were often substantial, especially when we consider the meagre income in the smaller offices. Ernst Grape mentions several candidates who openly offered money to get the position they wanted.\textsuperscript{49} Not all of them went so far as to offer sums in the thousands, like Birnbaum, who according to Vatky-Rosencreutz had to borrow the money, yet they often equalled an annual wage or more, and at least indicate that the income from the position was larger than we can see in the archive material.\textsuperscript{50} Another form of investment was involved, when postmasters offered to take over the post after the postmaster’s death, although the first year’s income was usually granted to the late postmaster’s widow as her year of grace (nådeår). Did the postmasters really work for free for a year to guarantee a rather poorly paid position afterwards?\textsuperscript{51} Other investments mentioned regularly in the postmasters’ letters were in horses, furniture, and all kinds of material necessary to start work. For reasons that will be discussed later, the postmasters were uncommonly vague about these investments. They simply refer to them, without giving any figures. Again, we can only assume that these investments were indeed substantial, if this argument could hope to gain a hearing.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Olsson 1979, pp. 31–34 publishes a letter from Samuel Agriconius Åkerhielm to Josias Cederhielm, Stockholm, 11 June 1701, on the financial circumstances of the postmastership in Skara, a small town with low postal revenues.
\item[46] Peter Nordström discusses the salaries and conditions of servants in the Board of War. Official salaries were clearly too low, but Nordström cannot find any clear evidence of other sources of income, and concludes that many servants took on other work, outside Crown service, thus neglecting their official duties, Nordström 2008.
\item[47] For Thelin, see Kammararkivet, Likvidationer, serie 52–53, bunt 2, RA; and the biographical note in Grape 1951, pp. 864–865.
\item[49] See below, the discussion of the Kalmar postmaster’s appointment in 1703.
\item[51] The Crown did not have any costs during a year of grace, ‘as the state is not burdened with any additional expense, although the office is performed properly’ (Chancery Board to Charles XII, 14 April 1698, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA).
\end{footnotes}
We also have to consider the staff that the postmasters employed to assist them in their work, or who simply acted as their substitutes. In some cases the postmaster’s wife acted on his behalf, in others some unknown clerk. Only rarely did the Chancery Board grant any additional expenses to pay for these stand-ins. They remained anonymous – where they did not succeed in taking over the service after the postmaster’s death. In consequence, the payment of substitutes had to be found from the postmasters’ official wages. Johann Vatky claimed that his clerk in Stralsund cost him at least 100 rdr per annum, plus living expenses. One clerk in the Stockholm post office received an even higher wage, 200 dr sm according to the post budget. A clerk’s life in a provincial town might have been cheaper, yet even so, paying for a clerk would leave little income in the hands of the postmaster, as was the case with postmaster Olof Törnberg in Eskilstuna. In 1718, he asked permission to resign because he claimed that because of his other duties he could not reside in Eskilstuna. Besides, he could not find a clerk to work for him without a wage. The postmaster in Eskilstuna received 30 dr sm per annum. In this light, Törnberg’s refusal to pay his clerk is quite understandable. But who would be willing to work without wages? And why?

One part of the post’s business, and thus one of a postmaster’s duties, was to collect and distribute news. This news services probably brought some income to the postmaster, which will be seen, but ahead of any possible return, the news business also required the postmaster to invest. Again, it was not an item in the post budget. Gabriel Hilletan became postmaster in Helsingborg in 1675. He immediately started to correspond with the chancellor of the realm, Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, sending handwritten news sheets that were based on Hilletan’s incoming correspondence. To keep this news correspondence up, Hilletan had to employ two clerks – in other words, De la Gardie was hardly his only news customer. On top of these expenses, Hilletan complained that he had to bribe an officer to get hold of the letters from England that were necessary for his work as a correspondent. Hilletan reckoned all these costs – two scribes,
reams of paper, a 1 rdr backhander or some wine for the officer every week – to be part of his work, for which he received a wage of 140 dr sm per annum. The costs of his news business alone exceeded that. Still, Hilletan not only continued the work, for which De la Gardie most likely never paid him.\(^{58}\) He also asked De la Gardie for a higher income, pleading to his inadequate wages. But did he really expect De la Gardie to consider his official wages to be his only income?

There are more examples, but as eloquent and voluble as the postmasters’ complaints were about their wages and investments, as silent were they about the figures involved. Instead, rather than ask for a specific change to their wages, or reimbursement for the money invested, the postmasters were at best imprecise, painting a general picture of the supposedly unsatisfactory payments. Their purpose must be seen in a different light altogether. The example of Joachim Vatky-Rosencreutz provides some useful pointers.

Joachim Vatky was born into a bourgeois family in Mecklenburg. He studied at various universities and travelled for some years, a major investment on the part of his family.\(^{59}\) He arrived in Sweden in 1677, having served at the courts of Brandenburg and Saxony, and began by serving in various noble households before embarking on a military career, which ended prematurely when he sustained a permanent injury in a fall from a horse. In 1684, he became postmaster in Stralsund, and later post commissar in Swedish Pomerania.

Vatky’s career up to 1684 shows no sign of lucrative offices. He might have had assets of some kind, but both his university education and peregrinations were expensive. Moreover, his court services were poorly paid, and most likely the acquiring of them had involved at least some investment. Even his military career was short – and a failure. Still, once he had begun to work for the Swedish post, he slowly but steadily acquired more and more side-lines that often required substantial investments or credit on his part. In his case, these side-lines related to the post and the diligence traffic: he organized the sea-mail between Stralsund and Ystad; set himself up in the diligence business between Stralsund and Hamburg; and built a hotel in Stralsund to accommodate travellers.\(^{60}\) He got involved in the Hamburg–Bremen diligence route, which would

\(^{58}\) This news service was very common among diplomats and postmasters, as the private archives of the high nobility demonstrate. There is no evidence that news was paid for on a regular basis. It is instead described as a token of friendship and service. News was considered a gift in a personal relationship (see Droste 2006b, chapter 4). Hilletan himself described this service as a form of attendance (Hilletan to De la Gardie, Markaryd, 22 November 1676, De la Gardieska samling, E 1439, RA).

\(^{59}\) The costs for these Grand Tours were usually so high that many families could only afford to send their eldest sons (see Brakensiek 1999, pp. 243–275).

\(^{60}\) The accommodation of passengers was traditionally believed to be good business. Postmaster Palthenius in Greifswald claimed that his predecessor’s widow had a safe income, because she accommodated the passengers who Palthenius always directed to her house (Palthenius to Samuel Rabel, Greifswald, 9 November 1684, Rydholmsamlingen E 7930, RA).
turn out a monumental and expensive failure.61 And these are just the dealings that he considered part of his Crown office and that he was prepared to commit to paper – although without giving any information on the income they drew in (except complaining endlessly that there was none). Neither is there any record of other income that he might have expected. So, why are we concerned with his finances here?62

Vatky referred to all these investments when in 1705 he set out to secure his ennoblement.63 Customarily, in being ennobled the applicant’s work and investment in the Crown’s service, which included education and previous, often unpaid services, were explicitly listed as qualifications. Both Vatky and the Crown considered his previous work as a regional director sufficient for his ennoblement. The king’s letter gives an extensive description of Vatky’s education, based on Vatky’s own statements.64 It seems that the Crown also thought the money he had invested a necessary precondition for his social upgrade. In a way, he did pay for his title – and did so openly. His request was granted almost immediately. This kind of bargain was common among the various groups of Crown servants, in the military, and among diplomats and Crown merchants (factors). But even if we consider Vatky’s financial arguments part of a conscious strategy to secure his ennoblement, we still have to figure out how he paid for all of this on such a meagre wage.

Most postmasters certainly never aspired to the peerage. But they applied for a second position within their social reach, in the customs office or city council say, and above all they were intent on keeping their postmastership in the family. Post offices regularly ran in families, irrespective of the actual wages involved. The post was as nepotic in its organization as most other administrative institutions, be they in Sweden or the rest of Europe. This hereditariness was often achieved by marrying the late postmaster’s widow. The recurrent complaints about insufficient payments and costs should therefore not be taken too literally, and should instead be understood as the postmasters reminding the Crown’s of its debt. And the Crown did acknowledge her ‘debts’, when assuring the postmaster and his family of the postmastership.

There is one final observation. The post budget not only described the postmasters’ wages, it also determined what the postilions were paid. And their payment is astonishingly high compared to the postmasters’ wages. In 1698, the

62 Of all postal officials, Vatky-Rosencreutz is unusually forthcoming about his work (see ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 135–136, RA).
63 On 6 July 1705, Vatky wrote to the Chancery Board to presented himself, his services to the Crown, and his request to be admitted to the Swedish nobility (Kanslikollegium, G II d, vol. 10, RA). On 2 August 1705, he was ennobled with the name Rosencreutz.
64 Ennoblement, 2 August 1705, RR, RA; on 6 July 1705, Vatky sent a ‘memorandum’ to Schmedeman, supposedly at the latter’s request, which contained the necessary information for his ennoblement (ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 136, RA).
postilions in the Baltic provinces were paid essentially the same as the postmasters. Each postilion on the Wismar–Hamburg route and Hamburg–Assen (on the Danish border) received about the same as the post commissar in Hamburg, although their work, not to mention their social position, was far from being comparable. The difference can be explained by distinguishing between wage and remuneration. Whereas the postmaster was paid a wage for his time and service, the postilion was paid for his expenses, horse, clothes, food, time, and service. Even the postmasters received additional payments for expenses such as ink, sealing-wax, and paper, but they rarely amounted to more than a tenth of their wages, and can therefore hardly have been more than a rough – and pretty low – estimate of their real costs. Whereas postmasters received little money for their expenses, the postilions had low wages, in contrast to comparatively high expenses. When Christian Wankijff in 1700 proposed a new riding postilion route between Wismar and Parchim, he estimated the total annual costs would be 180 rdr. The postilion’s wage was set at 1 rdr per month, less than 10 per cent of the total costs, and hardly sufficient to earn a living.

The distinction between wages and remuneration marks hierarchical positions and thus the social stratification of the post. Wages and remuneration are not just two different ways to recompense post servants for their work; they indicate a difference in relationship between the post and its servants. It is this distinction that will be analysed in detail here, looking at Crown payments, the post servants’ financial situation, and their reasons for becoming post servants in the first place. We will start with the post-farmers, postilions, and others involved at the lower end of the royal post.

Wages and income

The second mailbag

Starting at the bottom of the postal organization, we find very different groups of post servants and modes of transportation. The post in Sweden proper mostly relied on the use of post-farmers, whereas the post in the Baltic and German provinces mostly used postilions (riding or coach). These different ways of transporting letters resulted in different payments. The Swedish post used post-farmers in Sweden proper as well as in parts of Finland, as it was by far the cheapest way to transport letters. There was little in the way of wages involved, although there are infrequent references to very small sums in cash. Remuneration instead consisted of farmland that was given to the post-farmer. Not only was the land

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65 Post budget for 1697, 19 October, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA.
66 Proposal by Wankijff to Samuel Åkerhielm, Wismar, 28 April 1700, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 180, RA.
67 The Royal Ordinance of 1636, 20 February, Stockholm, Förordning om Post–Bådhen.
exempt from taxation, but the post-farmer enjoyed also certain privileges, such as exemption from conscription. Thus the Crown did not have to pay the post-farmers in cash, but there certainly was a price the Crown paid in the shape of reduced income. The land registers (jordeböcker) for the Swedish provinces list the post-farms. A reform of the system was mooted at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but it stayed in place long after.

The major disadvantage of this kind of letter transport was that it was not the post-farmers who kept tabs on the contents of the mailbag as listed in the accompanying manifest: this was the duty of each postmaster in the towns and cities through which the mailbag passed, the moment the mailbag arrived. If a letter disappeared on the road, it was almost impossible to determine where. In consequence, the post-farmers’ transportation system could not guarantee the safe delivery of money or any other objects of value, something that was not only possible but common in other postal systems. Even in Sweden proper, therefore, riding postilions were introduced on certain core routes, especially between Stockholm and the Danish border. This system guaranteed the safe and certain transport of every kind of letter. However, it was far more expensive.

This system, which was simple enough for Sweden proper, was far more complicated in the provinces. In Pomerania, coach traffic supplemented the regular postal routes, the most important running between Hamburg and Stralsund, and then on by post-ship to Ystad. Both coach and ferry were introduced in 1683 and seem to have been a financial success right from the beginning. The Swedish post paid for the post-ship’s construction, whereas the ferry and coach traffic were organized and financed by various Crown servants, most prominently Vatky in Stralsund, Martin Klinckowström in Stettin, Barthold Huswedel in Hamburg, and Johann Cannolt (ennobled Treuenfels) in Wismar. Moreover, they not only organized the traffic, they employed the necessary staff and paid their wages. At the same time, they had to negotiate with the existing coach-drivers in the cities, who of course suffered financially from the introduction of a new, official coach line that not only enjoyed the protection of the Crown, but also had a much better chance of establishing its services than individual coach-drivers did.

Low-wage, high-cost riding postilions and horse-keepers rarely limited themselves to one source of income. The post did not go every day. Vatky and Klinckowström employed different postilions and horse-keepers at certain

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68 In 1671 commissar Palmquist produced an ‘abstract’ of the financial accounts for the period 1665–69 to detail the ‘freedoms’ of the post-farmers county by county, probably in order to give an impression of the ‘costs’, which amounted to 3,333 dr sm (opå Påståndernes friheeter uthj underbemelte Landskaper), Kammararkivet, Postverket, vol. 5, RA).

69 Stähl 2007.

70 In Pomerania it was forbidden for all other coaches to offer their services on post days.

71 Memorandum of the Pomeranian estates addressed to the government, 1 April 1700, Handschriften HS 654, Stadtarchiv Stralsund.
places along the diligence route between Stralsund and Hamburg. In 1698, Klinkcowström tried to change this route between Wismar and Hamburg, and to transfer a post station in the process. The horse-keeper, one Franz Erdmann Jonas, refused to do so because he had another business there, brewing beer. Klinkcowström dragged him to court, where Jonas had to admit that the first paragraph of his contract explicitly stated the possibility that post stations might have to be altered. Jonas probably saw things rather differently, given the mail only arrived twice a week, leaving him plenty of time to operate a profitable sideline as a brewer. He does not say so, but it is evident that he could not live on the wage that Klinkcowström paid him for his work, 16 rdr per annum. We have to assume that such additional sources of income were common. After all, postilions usually found positions in their home areas, where they were already established.

There is not much information to be had on these side-lines; what little there is, is associated with the postal service. The most common was for messengers to deliver letters that were not on the mailbag manifest, accepting letters along the way, if not taking a detour to collect them, and delivering them direct to the addressee or on to the next postilion or post-farmer, and so on. These letters were transported in a second mailbag, unlisted, unsealed, and thus clearly illegal. The same kind of illegal practice was said to be customary for the diligence coaches between Hamburg and Stralsund.

These side-lines must have been routine, as second mailbags could only have worked where postilions and messengers were in cahoots. Contemporaries expected there to be a second mailbag, because the postilions needed the additional income. The second mailbag’s users in their turn saved a great deal of money and thus reduced their costs, probably substantially. This ‘second’ way to transport letters seems to have been common on almost all levels of the postal organization.

Naturally, the Chancery Board and the postmaster general were concerned about the loss in postal revenues that this behaviour caused, but they were exercised at least as much by the fact that it might slow the postal traffic considerably. The letters had to be fetched and delivered outside the post-house, outside town, or even at a distance from the post route. Moreover, there was analogous behaviour on the part of the post’s primary customers, the Crown servants privileged to send official letters free of charge in the official mailbag. It reduced

72 Tribunalsakten, Nr. 9989, Stadtarchiv Wismar.
73 Germanica, vol. 1040, RA, contains long deliberations on the subject by emissaries in Stockholm of the city council of Hamburg in 1699 and 1700, the Swedish diligence to Stralsund, and violence against the Hamburg messengers; see Kongelige och andra wederbörandes förordningar angående postväsendet (1707), pp. 33–34 for a statute that forbade yachts plying the route between Stockholm and Uppsala to transport letters, Stockholm, 29 May 1703.
74 There are no figures for the prices of these illegal services.
75 Undated, probably 1695, memorandum on the post in Uckermünde, Pomerania, Kansli-kollegium, G II f, vol. 2, RA, in which Lange stresses that the postilions slow the post by accepting letters on the side.
information costs for many Crown servants, especially the postmasters themselves. Mirroring the efforts to forbid the second mailbags, there was a long debate on the misuse of the privilege of sending letters gratis, which met with a similar degree of success. In consequence, the majority of the post’s customers probably found ways of reducing their mail expenses.

Of course, we could limit ourselves to observing that the messengers’ side-lines and the misuse of gratis postage were illegal, and that in the long run the attempts to stop both were successful. But that would be to simplify the problem, for both were very widespread phenomena, and clearly more than just expressions of individual failings. They existed for at least the whole of the post’s first century, and have to be considered an integral part of a public institution that did not pay its servants adequately. The Chancery Board hardly encouraged this illegal behaviour, but neither did it do everything to prevent it. As long as the second mailbags did not threaten the post proper or exceed a certain, by and large accepted level, they were tolerated.

Which letters were transported in the second mailbag? No manifests survive, naturally; we can only guess at the possible kinds of letters and customers. Unlike the manifest, which effectively guaranteed all letters would be delivered, the second mailbag offered no security at all. In contrast, the official mailbag’s inherent insurance seems to have been very important. As long as the letter transport was not altered by war, customers obviously relied on their letters’ safe delivery. When Johan Rosenhane asked post commissar Huswedel in Hamburg how to send jewels to Sweden, he was reassured: ‘I don’t think it would be particularly hazardous to send them via mail. In the twenty-four years that I have managed the post no letter has been stolen or lost.’ Huswedel claimed, with good reason, that the Swedish post was reliable when it came to letters in the official mailbag, which was carried by postilions rather than by post-farmers. The rare investigations into the loss of particular letters show that every time it was taken very seriously. The second mailbag, therefore, most likely contained less important, less urgent, and less valuable letters that did not have to arrive by a certain date.

76 This privilege was limited to official letters, but obviously was used for other letters too.
77 Olsson 2006.
78 Schmedeman ordered post director Grön in Riga to abolish the numerous Crown servants’ privilege of sending correspondence free of charge, because they were abusing the privilege by sending newsletters to correspondents in Sweden (13 May 1703, Kanslikollegium, B I a, vol. 6, RA).
79 It is thus only the exceptions to this rule that were singled out, such as the postmaster in Anklam, who almost only delivered letters free of charge while the postilions took care of all the other letters (Vatky’s memorandum on the post in Pomerania to the Chancery Board, undated but probably 1699, OPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 135, RA).
80 Barthold Huswedel to Johan Rosenhane, Hamburg, 20 May 1705, E 524, UUB.
81 It was therefore forbidden to send any kind of jewellery in the mail in Sweden proper (Kongl. Cantzlie Collegii Förordning, angående penningar, juvelers och dess like kostbare sakers sändande uti pástbrefwen, Stockholm, 14 October 1692).
The daily violation of postal ordinances evidently did not alter the idea of a state-controlled, reliable, and well-ordered postal traffic, at least not in the eyes of contemporaries. They fell into three groups of user. First, there was the state and its bureaucratic institutions, which used the post for free. Second were the merchants, who needed a reliable, fast, and secure letter transport. It was the merchants’ letters that ‘answered for most of the profit’, and that thus paid for the Swedish post. In all discussions if postal revenues, the ‘merchants’ or ‘commerce’ were the common metaphors for this group of user. In 1660, Johan von Beijer proposed that the post be incorporated into the body that cared for Swedish trade interests – the Board of Trade. He considered the post a natural part of Swedish trade. The ‘merchants’ were thus the backbone of a Crown institution. The Crown – in the shape of the Chancery Board – did not pay for the post; instead, it administered the right to live on the income the post generated.

Third, apart from these primary users, the post was open to everyone who could afford its services. That said, the official post was by no means the only available method available: letters were sent with merchant ships, with the help of servants, students, family, and friends, and in the second mailbags. These alternative modes of transportation were less reliable, probably slower, and certainly much cheaper. It seems obvious that all these modes of transportation co-existed for a long time, familiar to everyone, in part illegal, but common all the same, despite the Chancery Board’s efforts to implement its organizational ideas and assert its authority.

The Chancery Board’s statutes have to be considered meaningful, although lost to us. Various brands of financial logic lay behind the everyday practices of the early modern postal system, just as they underpinned the civil administration as a whole. There were both official and less official – but still regular – incomes for post servants that we cannot see in the Chancery Board’s accounts. The Chancery Board’s appointments to postal positions thus not only offered a basic wage, they opened the door to a privileged Crown service, which brought with it additional assets and incomes. Due to the nature of surviving primary sources, we can scarcely qualify or quantify these additional means, but it is vital to bear in mind that an official appointment was given in fief, often by inheri-

82 The quickness with which a letter was delivered was the single most important factor in the early development of the post, as it promised a competitive advantage for merchants: see Örjan Simonson’s chapter in this volume.
83 Heinrich Schute, Swedish agent in Hamburg, to Crown secretary Anders Gyldenklou, undated but probably 1642, Kanslitjänstemäns koncept och mottagna skrivelser, vol. 17, RA.
84 ‘The importance of the merchants’ letters was undoubted, as ‘only the merchants’ letters bring in income’ (Jochim Brun, postilion between Lübeck and Wismar, to postmaster Christian Wankijff in Wismar, undated but probably in 1699, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 180, RA).
85 Von Beijer’s memorandum, 1660, Kanslikollegium, G II a, vol. 2, RA, refers to the post ‘alß eine die Commercien fünnemblich touchirende Sache’.
tance, and so offered the chance to get a toe-hold in a Crown institution and to tap its various assets.  

When it came to post-farmers and postilions, the second mailbag seems to have been the principal asset alongside official wages, which in the case of the post-farmers mostly consisted of a piece of land and privileges that went with it. However, there were other people operating in the postal business who only had a rather small income or none at all. Their gains were different once again.

The privilege of demanding gratuities

The *Litzenbrüder* (‘packers’) were a guild-like organization that existed in Pomeranian cities as well as in Hamburg and elsewhere. They were not directly associated with the post, but were dependent in part on the postal traffic, for they had the sole right to load and unload diligence coaches. The diligence between Hamburg and Stralsund, a section of the postal route to Sweden, had simply to accept the *Litzenbrüder*’s claims: no one was allowed to take care of his luggage himself; and the *Litzenbrüder* were paid a small fee for each item they handled. The number of *Litzenbrüder* was restricted, and every vacancy was filled by the city council, which chose a suitable candidate. Here it was neither the Crown nor the Chancery Board, but the public authorities who gave away a privileged position, which was duly protected against competitors. The authorities acted according to their duty to consider the needs of poor citizens, in an act of clemency or grace. The appointments themselves did not involve any direct costs to the city council. Instead, the costs of the *Litzenbrüder* were socialized. It was the citizens and customers who were formally obliged to employ the *Litzenbrüder*, however unnecessary their ‘help’ might seem in their, or our, perspective. They had to pay a certain fee that clearly secured the packers a decent living, as the number of applicants for every vacant position demonstrated.

A similar practice can be seen in the case of the Stockholm messengers, who delivered letters within the city. The post budget for 1698 mentions two

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87 Called ‘*Litzenbrüder*’ for the ‘*Litze*’, cord or twine, with which they attached packages to the coaches (*Grimms Deutsches Wörterbuch*, <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/DWB>, s.v. ‘*Litzenbruder*’, accessed on 13 December 2008).
89 In 1651, an Imperial statute organized the diligence traffic between Hamburg and Lübeck, § 16 of which abolished, albeit with little effect, the *Litzenbrüders*’ sole right to handle luggage as well as letters (Mainzer Erzkanzlerarchiv, Postalia, Faszikel 5, Nr. 25, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien).
90 Rep. 3: Nr. 4645, Stadtarchiv Stralsund, contains a number of applications for the post of *Litzenbruder*.
messengers, one of them paid 80 dr. sm, the other 70 dr. sm a year. This wage was hardly adequate to live a decent life in Stockholm. Moreover, in the late seventeenth century there were more than these two messengers, and all were competing for the best letters. Tobias Sparff, who was employed as a messenger between 1681 and 1686 if not longer, complained years later that he had been forced to resign by postmaster general von Beijer, who wished to help another messenger. Sparff continued to go to the post-house in Stockholm, trying to get hold of some letters to distribute. He accused the other messengers, however, of taking the best ones, leaving him with the worst. That can only mean that the better letters promised a better fee or gratuity. Sparff was finally ordered to stay away from the post office; this order was reiterated several times. In 1694, he applied for the next free position of a messenger, receiving instead a pension of about 15 dr. sm per annum.

Although there were official salaries in the case of the messengers, the system was similar to the Litzenbrüder arrangement in Pomerania. The substantial part of the income, the one that the restricted number of post servants fought over, came with the job. It was paid by the customers, in the case of the Litzenbrüder probably involuntarily and at fixed rate; in the case of the messengers less strictly organized, but still involving a standard gratuity. There is another important point here. The authorities had the right to appoint each servant, who was then sworn into his job. The position was coveted; the candidates often had ties to their predecessors or other officials. Tobias Sparff was uncle to Johan Jacobsson Eremith, accountant at the Stockholm post office during the years of Sparff’s employment. In their applications for the job, the Litzenbrüder refer to kinship.

The lower ranks in the postal system thus received minimal wages or remuneration. These positions were held by people of a lower social standing, with no aspirations or prospects of rising through ranks. There is no example of a post-farmer or postilion eventually becoming a postmaster. Instead, most were employed where they already lived, along the postal routes, in their home-towns. Probably all of them regularly supplemented their income by taking on a variety of side-lines, correspondingly local in nature, and as part of which people need to know the post servant personally. This local context usually was far away from Stockholm; it does not feature in the archives. As long as these extra-official

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91 Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA.
92 Tobias Sparff to K. Maj:t, 1696, Kammararkivet, Likvidationer, serie 52–53, bunt 1 (Eremith), RA, "The messengers choose the best letters on the post’s arrival, mostly those that might earn them a penny. They begrudge me a bread penny. Therefore I beg Your Royal Majesty graciously to help me as a poor man and give me a letter of recommendation to the Royal Chancery Board and secretary Åkerhielm, who then will give me a letter of referral to the post office that I might take letters like all the others, who enter the office whenever they want to."
93 Chancery Board to post director von Beijer, 28 November 1697, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 5, RA
94 Draft of the post budget, 1694, Kanslikollegium, G IV, vol. 1, RA.
95 Rep. 3: Nr. 4645, Stadtsarchiv Stralsund, oath by Litzenbruder Jochim Reimer, 28 May 1664, who promised to deliver letters and other articles, honestly, diligently, and without favour.
activities did not exceed a certain quantity or time, and did not affect the general functioning of the post, the Chancery Board probably saw no reason to react decidedly. There is no indication that the Chancery Board or any other institution took conclusive measures to abolish customary side-lines or the second mailbags. There are no examples of a postilion or post-farmer being severely punished or dismissed because of irregularities relating to the second mailbags.

The situation for the postmasters was similar in that they, too, frequently had strong local ties before acquiring the postmastership. There is vague evidence that they engaged in similar side-lines, sending letters that were left off the official manifest and thus not included in their official accounts. They also received perquisites, which will be discussed below. But both of these activities seem too restricted and uncertain to serve as a reason for their interest in working for the post. The postmasters’ incomes therefore have to be explained differently. To start with, it is worth looking at one particular appointment: the postmastership in Kalmar in 1703. This case-study highlights certain aspects that are vital in understanding the postmasters’ finances.

Rules of appointment – the Kalmar postmastership, 1703

The search for a successor for Hans Wölck, postmaster and post inspector in Kalmar, shows both the social and financial aspects of these positions well. Kalmar’s post office was number five in Sweden proper, after Stockholm, Gothenburg, Jönköping, and Norrköping, with an annual wage of 260 dr sm. The well-documented application process offers insight into the administrative routines – and touches on the question of the postmasters’ merits prior to their employment.

Wölck’s case is particularly suitable for our purpose as many of the letters explicitly set out the various problems associated with the position. These include the rules under which the postmaster would operate, which were mentioned frequently, probably in an effort to change them. A number of candidates contemplated travelling up to court in Stockholm in order to present their case in person. Despite all the bureaucratic routines, the court was still perceived as an important meeting-place that heavily relied on physical presence. Even the possibility of greasing the odd palm, and how to go about it, were openly

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96 See especially Kongelige och andra wederbörandes förrådningar angående postväsendet (1707), post statute of 16 February 1707, pp. 257-260, which spells out the importance of the official manifest. This may be a reference to postmasters who dispatched letters under the counter, but there is no evidence with which to analyze such illegal behaviour.

97 This list refers to the post budget for Sweden proper. In the Swedish provinces, there were a number of large post offices: Riga, Reval, Stettin, Stralsund, Hamburg, and Helsingborg. Teodor Holm collected all available information on the revenues of the Swedish post offices, starting in 1681 (Manuskriptsamlingen, vol. 201, RA).

98 The possible effects of such journeys are not discussed here as any source material is not held in the Chancery Board’s archive.

discussed.100 In light of this frankness, it is all the more surprising that possible concerns about the postmaster’s wages and other sources of income were not mentioned at all. Every candidate seems to have been confident that the financial aspects of the position would be satisfactory, at least.

Applying at the right moment, the right way
On 16 February 1703, post clerk Anders Palm wrote to postmaster general Johan Schmedeman. He had learned that Hans Wölck ‘seems to be afflicted with a severe disease’.101 Palm petitioned to be appointed in his place, ‘if something fatal should happen to him’. He was aware that there would be a lot of candidates, but was all the more certain of success, because he depended on Schmedeman’s promotion, who was well-known for showing his servants a ‘commendable affection’. Palm went on to refer to his nine years ‘in waiting’ at the post office in Stockholm as a clerk.

Crown offices were assigned for life. In consequence, the death of a Crown servant sparked a fierce competition for the succession, not least because the Crown had an interest in filling the office as soon as possible. It was therefore essential to react to rumours of a Crown servant’s imminent death. In return, a great many Crown servants tried to prepare themselves for their deaths by handing on their offices within the family during their lifetime. Wölck, however, did not have a son who could take over his position: his son Hans was a year old, if that.

Wölck duly died on 1 March 1703. The ensuing process to choose his successor as postmaster, a position for which about a dozen candidates applied, also involved a huge number of additional actors. The right of appointment was the Chancery Board’s, including the postmaster general and a number of high-ranking officers in the post. Then there were the civil servants and ‘friends’ if the candidates, who tried to influence the process to suit their own particular interests. The result was often an unexpected and – for most spectators – random decision, because they could not determine what had been decisive in the long run.

It was advisable to apply in good time for a Crown office. Palm’s application was actually the first to arrive, almost a full fortnight before Wölck’s death. Most other candidates waited until he was actually dead. In order to be able to react fast, they had to be in Kalmar or to enjoy good relations with possible corres-

100 Hermann Müller enclosed an assurance with his application that read, ‘If Mons. Hermann Müller is obliged with the vacant position of a postmastership in Kalmar, I will immediately pay the bearer of this paper 60 ducats in coin, Stockholm, 13 March 1703, Joh. Torstenson.’ (ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA).

101 Here and hereafter, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA.
pondents who were both reliable and close-lipped. Palm lived in the capital, but he obviously had a news source in Kalmar.

There was another application from Stockholm, written two days before Wölk died. Samuel Fagrell had worked for many years in Elisabeth Oxenstierna’s household. He was therefore unable to refer to previous Crown service, a serious flaw for the most part. But he could balance this with a letter of recommendation from Elisabeth Oxenstierna, grand-daughter of chancellor Axel Oxenstierna and so a member of one of Sweden’s finest houses. Elisabeth Oxenstierna wrote of Fagrell’s aptitude and his previous service for herself and her late husband, without giving any details. She added that Fagrell had asked her to write at this time: ‘because he hopes to be able to forestall other applications’.

The first two weeks after Wölk’s death demonstrated the need for haste. In short order, ten applications made their way to the Chancery Board or to Schmedeman, most of them having originated in Kalmar. Schmedeman, who was a member of the Chancery Board, was believed to have a strong influence on the appointment, as was openly stated by Palm and other candidates. They wrote to convince Schmedeman to prove their belief in his influence to be true. However, Schmedeman could not possibly appoint all of ‘his’ candidates: there were far too many candidates counting on his influence and their good relationship with him. Besides, he was just one, albeit pre-eminent, player in this game.

The candidates usually opened their letters by announcing that the postmaster in Kalmar had recently died. There was some appropriate expression of surprise at this, although they most likely were well prepared. It was not only advisable to send in an application straight away; it was equally important to send a letter of recommendation, as about every second candidate did. On 5 March Lars Collijn, treasurer in Kalmar, asked his superior, baron Hans Clerck, admiral and county governor, for a letter of recommendation, excusing himself for being late because he had been in the country and thus missed the post day. Since 1 March was a Monday, and the post left Kalmar twice weekly, most likely on Tuesday and Friday, sending in a letter of recommendation thus required diligent preparation, especially to activate high-placed friends and superiors. On

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102 Elisabeth Oxenstierna (1655–1721), widow of Gustav Adolf de la Gardie (1641–1695), had been maid of honour at the court of queen dowager Hedvig Eleonora.
103 As there were two different addressees, the application papers are currently held in different sections of the national archives: Kanslikollegium, G II h, vol. 3, RA, for letters to the Chancery Board; and ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA, for letters addressed to the director general.
104 These petitions are for the most part undated, but given the date of their presentation they were presumably written on 2 or 3 March 1703.
105 The postmaster’s widow in Skara complained about his successor Lars Trana. Even before her husband had ‘surrendered his soul, Trana had secretly made his way to Mariestad’ in order to receive a letter of recommendation from the county governor (Grape 1951, p. 433).
106 Several petitions refer to letters of recommendation that have either been detached or were never delivered in the first place.
top of this, the candidates’ interest in ensuring the correct phrasing of their recommendation makes it probable that they drafted (if not wrote) the letters themselves in advance. It usually described the candidate in much the same way as the application. In addition, it contained a short evaluation of the candidate’s character, enumerating his virtues, and how well or for how long the writer had known the candidate.

These letters carried weight. It was not easy to succeed without a recommendation; all it took was for one other candidate to send in one. The recommender announced his interest in the position, although not for himself. The result was that the candidate’s merits were improved upon, because he could reinforce his own interest with that of his benefactor. The latter’s social status and influence at court was thus of the utmost importance. On the other hand, there were often several recommenders whose efforts had little noticeable effect. All this contributed to the general lack of transparency in the appointment process. The Chancery Board could not ignore them without running the risk of irritating their writers.\(^\text{107}\)

Most of the applications were framed as petitions. Their rhetoric was exceedingly humble and stressed the candidate’s subservience. The petitions were mostly undated. Instead, the day of their presentation in the Chancery Board was noted on the letter. As most of the petitions were not presented in person, they were most likely attached to another letter, sent to a carefully selected contact at the Chancery Board, who was expected to present the petition to the Chancery Board at the right moment. More often than not this contact was the postmaster general, but it could also be a secretary or any other Crown servant deemed influential enough in these matters.\(^\text{108}\) Despite an elaborate bureaucratic routine, in almost all public matters contemporaries put a great deal of trust in these personal contacts. And they did so openly, naming their friends and benefactors in high places in their applications. Moreover, it was not customary to write to the institution itself without first ensuring the letter’s delivery through personal channels. The attached recommendations not only served to prove the candidate’s aptitude; they were primarily meant to ensure that the letter would receive the necessary attention and favourable reception in the Chancery Board.

Consequently, former post clerk Hindrich Diurbom excused himself in his letter to Schmedeman for being unknown to him. Most candidates went out of their way to emphasize the fact that Schmedeman had known them for a long time, and that on several occasions he had assured them of his good wishes. There were also candidates who did not mention any such personal contacts at

\(^{107}\) Samuel Åkerhielm to Josias Cederhielm, Stockholm, 11 June 1701, in Olsson 1979, pp. 31–34, on the difficulties of dealing with various recommendations and interests.

\(^{108}\) This is the most likely explanation for today’s division of the material. The archive of the director general was a mixture of private and institutional archive.
all. They were mostly without any real prospect of being appointed: their letters are often devoid of any kind of annotation. The application process was therefore a mixture of bureaucratic routines, comparable to today’s appointments, and different efforts to bypass competitors with the help of friends. The latter approach not unknown today, of course, but it is frowned on now in a way that was unknown three centuries ago.

According to the Chancery Board’s routines, all application papers were bound together. On the wrapper, all candidates were listed, together with short remarks on their most important merits. This particular list finally contained fourteen names. Several candidates were not included in the list, some because their applications simply arrived too late, some perhaps because they could not convince anyone to present their petition to the Chancery Board.

The petitions followed a common structure. The applicant described his previous services for the Crown, either in an office in Kalmar or in Stockholm, in which case he had mostly worked for the post. However, most of the candidates lived in the deceased postmaster’s community or nearby. Their previous services did not follow any particular pattern. Among Sweden’s postmasters there were a variety of professions, although there were some clear favourites. Many postmasters were already employed as customs officers, councillors, or mayors. In the smaller towns, these positions were as a rule held concurrently, and were taken up simultaneously. A number of candidates applied for the Kalmar postmastership after having worked as a post clerk for some time. That was considered an advantage because the Chancery Board honoured previous experience. In the present case, the candidates included a cashier, a clerk, a treasurer, a councillor, and several post clerks; there was also a former post clerk and other low-ranking servants. All of them expected the appointment would be a substantial improvement for them, financially as well as socially. Moreover, the position was thought of as a reward for previous commitments to the Crown. Deliberations about this element of reward were prominent. Post treasurer Lars Skragge recommended his old clerk Hindrich Diurbom in light of the good example his promotion would give to young clerks, who as a result would be encouraged to ‘work with the greatest assiduousness to be remembered and promoted later on’.

Many candidates wrote in detail about their present positions. In the present case, they mostly emphasized their poor wages as well as the fact that they had a

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109 Undated, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA. The list contains information from 1704, indicating that it was maintained for some time. Not all applications mentioned in the list can be found in the file; it is not known when the applications were divided between the director general’s and the Chancery Board’s archives.

110 The following statistical data is taken from the study by Grape 1951.

111 This was how Skragge framed his argument to the director general to the Chancery Board. Skragge had written an extensive memorandum for Diurbom, Stockholm, 13 January 1704, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 A, vol. 1, RA.
family and many young children. The business of describing their financial and private problems was an appeal to the Chancery Board’s obligation to take care of Crown servants. In consequence, complaints about financial distress in Crown offices were rather common. It was a valid argument, which probably tallied with the Chancery Board’s expectations. An appointment was perceived to be a reward for previous service, where the servant had adhered to the office even though the wage was supposedly too small to support a family.

Besides, there was an expectation that the Crown should graciously look after those of its servants who could no longer perform their duties properly due to advancing years or sickness. Anders Skragge had been post clerk in Stockholm for almost thirty years. He applied for Wölck’s postmastership by explicitly describing his declining health and his problems working the night shift. His application was accompanied by a memorandum penned by Stockholm’s postmaster, Hans Köhn, his superior. In January 1703, Köhn had finally decided to alert Schmedeman to the many mistakes and ensuing problems that Skragge’s disease had been causing for a number of years: Skragge should be retired on half wages, the other half to be paid to a young clerk, who could replace Skragge after his death. Skragge himself asked that he might not be retired, but instead appointed to a vacant postmastership. This request was taken seriously, and explains why Köhn’s memorandum is today among the application papers. Neither sickness nor old age was sufficient reason to remove a servant from his office, while a pension must be considered an exception rather than a rule.

Moreover, Anders Palm wrote on 12 March, a mere week after most of the candidates’ applications had arrived in Stockholm, to apply to succeed Anders Skragge as post clerk, because he was supposed to become postmaster in Kalmar. We cannot determine where Palm got this (erroneous) information, but he obviously deemed it plausible, although he knew Skragge personally and was well aware of his failing ability to do his job. The postmastership was a reward; another person, paid by the postmaster himself, could then execute the work.

As well as the candidates who already held Crown positions, there were several candidates who were ‘external’. Their applications were often framed differently because they had to gloss over this obvious deficiency. Samuel Fagrell

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112 It is not clear whether Anders Skragge was in any way related to Lars Skragge. The archive shows no evidence of Lars making any effort to promote Anders, which would have been normal if they had been relatives.

113 Around 1700, the postal administration paid two pensions within Sweden (to the widow of the postmaster in Åbo and to a former messenger) and a small number of pensions for former servants in the provinces or for people who had been affiliated to the post in different ways (see the post budget of 1694, Kanslikollegium, G IV, vol. 1, RA).

114 Grape’s catalogue of postmasters occasionally mentions employees who performed postal services in the postmaster’s name, especially when the postmaster could not fulfil his postal duties because he was away or was busy about his other official business. We can assume that this kind of arrangement was actually far more common, but the postmasters had no reason to mention it to the director general, because each had to pay his stand-in out of his own pocket.
is strikingly vague about his previous service and merits. He relied totally on the recommendation of Elisabeth Oxenstierna, according to the Chancery Board’s list of candidates his only qualification: ‘Samuel Fagrell, was particularly recommended by countess Oxenstierna.’

Joachim von Faltzow, a Kalmar merchant, referred to the fact that he had been a citizen of Kalmar for about two decades and that he had paid his taxes in all these years. He then stated that his ‘small luck’ had deserted him when French privateer seized the ship in which he had invested all his fortune. von Faltzow threw himself on the Crown’s mercy and compassion. Other petitions emphasized ties of kinship. Councillor Mathias Morin was Wölck’s brother-in-law; Alexander Möllenbrock was son of Kalmar’s former mayor. In both cases, kinship ties were mentioned in combination with other merits, in Möllenbrock’s case a poorly paid position in the tar company (which was a Crown office). Finally, there are some applications that do not mention any merits at all. Instead, they offer a specified amount of money as ‘a token of my gratitude’. These financial gifts varied in size, but were as large as 200 drs, which amounted to the most part of the first year’s wage.

The widow’s maintenance

Within two weeks of Wölck’s death about a dozen applications had reached the postmaster general and the Chancery Board. Still, in the following weeks nothing seems to have happened. The first formal decision was taken on 25 March, when the Chancery Board conceded that the widow might enjoy her year of grace. It was customary to support the widow and her children for a certain period of time. It was not unknown for a widow’s petition to emphasize this obligation, noting that the Chancery Board ‘used to consider the conditions of mourning widows’. Wölck’s widow accordingly promised to provide sureties and to employ a diligent man.

Up to the end of the seventeenth century, many widows had taken over their husbands’ postmasterships themselves, instead of being reduced to relying on the year of grace as a means of providing for themselves and their families. They became postmasters with the permission of the Chancery Board or its implicit

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115 Kanslikollegium, B I a, vol. 6, RA.
117 Lars Spylhammar to Schmedeman, Stockholm, 1 March 1704, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA.
118 Ånka Engula Ercken, Pernau, 13 June 1699, to general post director Åkerhielm, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 117, RA: ‘that the tears of widows and orphans, their prayers and sighs, will not go unheard’.
support.\textsuperscript{119} This possibility disappeared eventually once women were deemed incapable of running these businesses, especially when it came to the necessary control of male employees and post-farmers. On 16 June 1691, Charles XI decreed that ‘in particular in the most important post offices it was necessary to employ competent and brave men, and that a great confusion had occurred in the office, because many widows have been retained in its administration.’\textsuperscript{120} He ordered that no widow should be allowed to administer post offices. It took a few decades to fully implement this decision, but between 1722 and 1874 there were no female postmasters in Sweden, at least officially.\textsuperscript{121}

Still, even afterwards there remained a number of opportunities for widows to hang on to their positions, for example by marrying their late husband’s successor, in the which case the postmastership became a kind of dowry. The year of grace marked the expected period of mourning before the widow could remarry.\textsuperscript{122} In the present case, Wölck’s widow, Helena Collin, was about twenty-nine years old. She was a given candidate for a second marriage, if only because next to the post office itself she probably represented a major source of capital in the Kalmar post business.\textsuperscript{123}

Normally, the decision to grant the year of grace did not imply a decision on any successor, who was simply expected to account for the widow’s rights – to wait for one year, or to maintain the widow during that time. However, a successor was often appointed shortly afterwards. In this case, it took the Chancery Board two months to arrive at a decision: on 12 May Samuel Fagrell was granted the postmastership, in view of his glowing recommendations.\textsuperscript{124} However, it was conditional upon him choosing ‘to celebrate a Christian marriage’ with the widow. Fagrell was ordered to travel to Kalmar and to ‘search for an agreement thereto’. The Chancery Board assured him that it would be willing to supply him with the appropriate authorization – post facto. Fagrell thus received combined assurances for both widow and position. Neither then nor later did the Chancery Board give any explanation for tying the widow’s maintenance to the succession.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{119} According to an analysis by Lundgren 1987, 7–8 per cent of all postmasters in the seventeenth century were women, all of them postmasters’ widows.
\textsuperscript{120} 16 June 1691, RR, RA, quoted in Lundgren 1987, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{121} Lundgren 1987, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{122} In a memorandum, Skragge recommended that the widow of postmaster Olof Andersson in Strängnäs should receive a year of grace so that she could find another ‘brave man’ in place of her husband (Skragge to Åkerhielm, Stockholm, 14 May 1702, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 A, vol. 1, RA).
\textsuperscript{123} The post office in Kalmar was one of the largest in Sweden, with a large income. On top of that, Collin was the daughter of the mayor-cum-postmaster of Vimmerby.
\textsuperscript{124} The Chancery Board explained their decision in ‘Recommendations and testimonies, which have been made about foreman Samuel Fagrell, his capabilities and conditions’ (ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA).
\textsuperscript{125} This was particularly common for priests’ widows (Olsson 1979, p. 31).
Fagrell travelled to Kalmar and ‘publicized’ the Chancery Board’s pronouncement in order to end the competition for the postmastership. The other candidates were forced into silence, for the time being. Unfortunately, all of Fagrell’s attempts to approach the widow and to persuade her to marry him were fruitless. She obviously had not the least intention of doing so. Fagrell wrote several times to Schmedeman to tell him about his efforts. Other than a positive answer from the widow’s father, Nils Collin, mayor of the nearby town of Vimmerby, who according to Fagrell was well disposed towards him, everything had gone wrong:

I talked to the widow in person and visited her several times with my letters. Furthermore, I send an honourable priest to ask for a positive answer, but so far she has kept me waiting with mere words, as if her lamentable position and the memory after her late husband would not allow her to give any certain answer in these important matters after such short time.126

Fagrell seems to have interpreted the widow’s answer as a mere subterfuge. According to him, she had even applied for an extension to her year of grace.127 In consequence, Fagrell asked Schmedeman to order him to send in his sureties, which was considered a certain sign of his imminent assumption to the postmastership. Fagrell obviously hoped that the widow would realize that he really was going to take over. In the summer of 1703, the first rumours about Fagrell’s failure became public. Johan Dahlman, treasurer of Kalmar’s fortifications, wrote in August 1703 that he had heard that the widow would keep the postmastership ‘until she could be provided for by way of a marriage’. He then offers to enter into marriage with her, adding as an explanation:

We not only are close neighbours. I used to stand in good friendship and particular trust with the house of the late Wölck for a long time. For this reason, I am sure that the widow will ponder much more on my person, who for a long time and still holds an honourable Crown office, than on any other person, who might be of less merit, or on Monsieur Fagrell, who everywhere spreads the news that he had received an affirmation of the widow and the office, although in this city he has only small countenance.128

Dahlman also writes about his other merits, and adds a letter of recommendation by one captain Brunian. Already several weeks before this letter, Dahlman’s brother-in-law, Gustav Otto Lindbladh, captain at the Gothenburg

126 Samuel Fagrell to Schmedeman, Kalmar, 8 October 1703, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA.
127 ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA. She applied on 24 September 1703; it seems that she did not receive any reply to her request.
fortifications, had approached Schmedeman with a letter recommending Dahlman, and claiming that he had been informed of the widow’s flat refusal to marry Fagrell.

The widow never explained herself, either in regard to her rumoured suitors or her reasons for not remarrying. We can therefore only make assumptions about her behaviour. As her private reasons had little bearing on the Chancery Board’s decisions, her romantic feelings will have to be passed over in silence. The Chancery Board tried to arrange for her maintenance; the candidates wanted to lay their hands on a desirable office that had been tied to the widow’s marriage bed. There was hardly any margin for romantic ideals about love in the Chancery Board’s way of handling the situation. However, the widow’s maintenance assumed a decisive role in the application process. The Chancery Board could have appointed a successor without recognizing the widow’s interests, as it had frequently done before. It obviously did not want, or did not dare, to force the widow into marriage. There are several observations to be made here. For one, Fagrell had the financial means to invest a great deal of time in the pursuit of his interests. Two, he must have had high expectations regarding the possible income that the post office would generate, given that he offered the postmaster general 200 dr sm if his application was successful. Three, the Chancery Board approved of the widow’s pretensions to a position to which she could not be appointed officially. This recognition obviously referred to the financial side of the postmastership, not its legal ramifications, because as a widow she was not expected to have legal pretensions.

Due to Fagrell’s well-known problems, several new or updated applications arrived at the beginning of 1704. Instead of mentioning the late postmaster’s death, they now wrote that they had heard about the ‘position still being vacant’. Treasurer of the post, Lars Skragge, twice sent a strong recommendation for his former clerk Hindrich Diurbom, who had served as a clerk in Stockholm’s post office for nine years. Diurbom had already sent his application, relying heavily on the recommendation by Skragge, who determinedly promoted his application for the postmaster general: ‘My honourable brother will most likely want to help Diurbom in the light of my intervention, as this is the first time ever I recommended someone.’ This was perhaps not the best way to work on Schmedeman, as every recommendation intruded on someone else’s interests.

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129 Only two years before another widow had tried to prolong her service beyond her year of grace, referring to other widows who had succeeded in doing so (Maria Elfvendahl to Samuel Åkerhielm, Narva, 14 July 1701, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 107, RA).

130 ‘If the widow of the late post inspector in Kalmar, Hans Wölck, could be assisted to a brave husband who were to succeed the last one in service and bed, she would benefit hugely.’ Skragge to Schmedeman, Stockholm, 28 November 1703, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 A, vol. 1, RA.

131 Fagrell to Schmedeman, Stockholm, 14 March 1703, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA.

132 Director general Schmedeman and Skragge finally had a major falling out in 1704–1705 over Skragge’s efforts to interfere with Schmedeman’s work (Holm 1906–1929, v. pt. 1, pp. 93–94).
Only now, 6 March 1704, one year after Wölck’s death, did the application arrive that ultimately would be successful. Lars Eriksson Rosenlund applied to continue with the postmastership, which he already had had for thirty-four years. Rosenlund was the late Wölck’s stepfather. He had assigned his postmastership to Wölck in 1692, with the Chancery Board’s approval, to ensure the maintenance of his stepson and family.

Lars Rosenlund was probably born in 1629 and took on the postmastership in Kalmar in 1658. He was also mayor and town treasurer, thus holding several offices and most likely substantial incomes. His wife, Catharina Hindrichsdotter Welsyn, had at least one child from a previous marriage: Hans Wölck. When Rosenlund in 1692 assigned his postmastership to Wölck, he tried to keep it in the family. Wölck received the postmastership, but not for free. A memorandum attached to Rosenlund’s petition in 1704 mentioned that Rosenlund ‘received some support and allowance’ from Wölck. He kept a part of the revenues, without having to bother with the post at all.

There are several examples of similar contracts in the same family that assured the old postmaster of a substantial part of the revenues. They, too, demonstrate that Rosenlund perceived the position as his private property that he was able to ‘sell’ under certain conditions and with the Chancery Board’s approval. These contracts lasted for the old postmaster’s lifetime; only then would the postmastership be assigned for good to his successor. Everybody involved in this kind of contract clearly counted on the principal’s death. Even Rosenlund did so quite openly in 1704, when he applied to be restored to his previous office. He mentioned both his old age and the fact that he probably had only a few years to live. He, too, asked that the widow might keep the postmastership, which she offered to have operated by an acting postmaster under Rosenlund’s supervision. By these means he sought to allay his greatest fear: ‘I and my relatives will be locked out from office by someone unknown’. His own family played a decisive role in his petition. Both he and his stepson had invested in the position, the post-house, the gear, and the like. His house had accommodated the post for almost fifty years. Hans Wölck obviously had lived at his stepfather’s home even after he had married Helena Collin. And she lived with her stepfather after Wölck’s death.

It was fairly common for a postmastership to be handed down within a family, or for the old postmaster to be restored in those cases where a chosen

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133 All information on Kalmar’s postmasters is taken from Grape 1951, p. 207. Grape has Wölch instead of Wölck; Holm 1906–1929, v. pt. 1 describes this episode in Kalmar’s postal history, and duly refers to him as Wöllsch.

134 Rosenlund went on to do this again, in 1707, when he transferred his postmastership to his successor Olof Reppler, keeping half the salary for himself (Grape 1951, p. 207).

135 Rosenlund elaborates on this idea in the undated memorandum attached to his similarly undated letter to the Chancery Board, presented on 6 March 1704, in which he asked for his maintenance (Kanslikollegium, G II h, vol. 3, RA).
successor predeceased him. What was unusual in this case, however, was that Rosenlund’s petition arrived so late, and that the Chancery Board did not consider his interests before that point. Rosenlund might have concurred with the Chancery Board’s efforts to maintain the widow with the help of a new marriage, and only announced his interest when there was no hope of a marriage with Fagrell or any other candidate. His move certainly safeguarded the widow’s control of the position as well as his share of the revenues, albeit only for his remaining lifetime. It also enabled Helena Collin to avoid remarrying altogether. She was to die a widow on 8 August 1711, together with her then nine-year-old son Hans Wölck and her mother Margareta Prytz, most likely of the plague.136 She died in Vimmerby, to where she obviously had returned. Her father, Nils Collin, was still mayor there.

The somewhat complicated arrangement by which Rosenlund set out to regain his hold on the postmastership, only to have it run by his stepdaughter, who in turn employed a ‘diligent man’ to operate it, was openly presented for the Chancery Board. A widow could not be appointed postmaster, although she could perform the duties of office all the same; Ernst Grape mentions a number of examples where the postmaster’s wife had the day-to-day running, or where he was forced to surrender the position after his wife’s death because he himself could neither write nor read.137 The Chancery Board saw no obstacles to Rosenlund’s proposed solution, and made it official on 24 September 1704. At this point Rosenlund was already seventy-five years old and, according to his own testimony, physically disabled, frail, and thus incapable of performing his postal duties, or any other come to that.

Rosenlund ‘performed’ the office of postmaster – or rather disposed of its revenues – for three years. When he assigned it to a new postmaster, Olof Reppler, in 1707, Helena Collin was not mentioned at all, although she was still alive.138 Even Fagrell was not considered, although the Chancery Board had renewed its affirmation of his succession in 1704, under which he was to take over the position after Rosenlund’s death.139 The whole time Rosenlund’s death was thought to be imminent, and with it the end of the widow’s tenure. Fagrell, however, could not afford or did not want to wait. He never became postmaster in Kalmar. He died in Halltorp on 20 May 1740, as an inspector in Södra Wärneby, 20–30 kilometres south of Kalmar. It is unclear why Rosenlund gave up the service during his lifetime. There is no information on Reppler, be it his

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137 Grape 1951, p. 783. This explanation was offered in a petition by Peter Ohrn, who wished to succeed postmaster Michael Eckerman on Åland (undated, probably 1709, OPD, Huvudarkivet, E 4, vol. 1, RA).
138 There was no reason given for Reppler’s appointment, who most likely was chosen by Rosenlund himself. He was not on the list of applicants in 1703–1704.
139 3 September 1704, Kanslikollegium, A IIa, vol. 22, RA.
birth, previous service, or merits, neither do we know the Chancery Board’s reasons for appointing him. Rosenlund’s wish was enough to secure Reppler’s appointment. It is likely that Reppler had been the acting postmaster since 1704.

Other than the issue of the Chancery Board’s duplicity in discussing the succession, which will be addressed later, the appointment of Rosenlund thus highlights different notions of merit and qualification. Crown servants and their families’ interests were upheld come what may, even if that meant employing a seventy-five-year-old man in poor health and a thirty-year-old widow who refused to bow to the Chancery Board’s efforts to marry her off in order to keep her in business. This is all the more surprising since Rosenlund’s appointment cannot have been anything but temporary. It meant ignoring a number of younger and more qualified candidates who might have enjoyed the position for a long time. This decision neither coincides with notions of a modern bureaucracy nor reflects the Chancery Board’s discussions about candidates’ necessary qualifications. There was a clear call for language skills, industry, previous service, and the like; language skills in particular were highly treasured in light of the necessary correspondence within and outside Sweden. However, ties of kinship and the maintenance of the late postmaster’s family weighed heavily, too. This patrimonial care for Crown servants was not an absolute priority, but it was certainly a strong argument – and it was by no means limited to poor servants.¹⁴⁰ There is no indication that the Chancery Board perceived this modus operandi as an obstacle in its efforts to improve the postal organization. The interesting question is whether these additional arguments follow one or more distinct lines of reasoning, or whether they have to be considered unsuitable in light of the interests of the Chancery Board and the post.

Wages, honour, and privileges

The appointment in Kalmar shows distinct similarities to proceedings for other post servants, indeed for other Crown servants. In seeking appointment, the postmasters built on existing social relationships in their localities. These social relationships probably had a financial element to them as well, which would explain why merchants who were not their kin often stood surety for them. However, postmasters did not discuss the financial conditions of their service in detail, merely complaining about the size of the sureties required, whereas the Chancery Board frequently deemed them insufficient or invalid.¹⁴¹ The Chancery Board’s ordinances simply stated that the postmaster ‘in order to be able to fulfil his office, shall enjoy the wages and income that are mentioned in the post

¹⁴⁰ Widowhood was associated with poverty in the popular mind, because a widow lacked the protection a husband offered, not to mention his financial support.
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budget, together with the honour and privileges that are part of the office.\textsuperscript{142} What these ‘honour and privileges’ might be, and whether they implied anything more than an official recognition of the postmaster’s social position, is unclear. It is possible it referred to a tax exemption, which was still customary in Pomerania in 1695 when Lange conducted his tour of inspection.\textsuperscript{143} Yet these were the tax exemptions that had caused trouble in Sweden – with towns complaining about the fact that it was only their richest citizens who became postmasters and who thus inflicted a substantial loss on the town – and were no longer customary. The ordinances mention no details.\textsuperscript{144}

A profitable marriage – cashing in symbolic capital

One explanation that was mentioned repeatedly in discussions about the Crown servants’ somewhat obscure finances was a profitable marriage.\textsuperscript{145} This argument relies heavily on the assumption that Crown servants already had at their disposal a substantial \textit{symbolic} capital that made them extremely eligible. Marriage would bring the \textit{financial} capital that a Crown servant did not himself possess. The most likely marriage partner was the infamous ‘rich merchant’s daughter’ or – less common – the rich merchant himself, marrying the late postmaster’s daughter or widow.\textsuperscript{146} Even if we temporarily ignore the nagging question of whether there were enough rich merchants to go round, willing and able to provide their children with dowries large enough to compensate for the postmasters’ unsound finances, we have to assume that there must have been a financial advantage for them as well: it does not seem much of an investment to stake a fortune on a postmaster’s career if this position was usually the pinnacle of a man’s career. And true, most postmasters remained in service for life, preferably handing it on to their eldest sons.\textsuperscript{147} A handful of postmasters in the capital cities were eventually ennobled (von Beijer, Vatky-Rosencrut, Cannolttreuenfels), but in the normal run of things it was rare for postmasters to be ennobled – or promoted. Neither did postmasters’ families experience a rise in social standing in the next generation. No, a postmastership was coveted for returns that were in and of itself.

In his work on the Swedish and Danish military command in the eighteenth century, Fredrik Thisner makes a similar argument for the role of marriage in

\textsuperscript{142} This is the usual phrasing in the Chancery Board’s archive, in this case for postmaster Lars Winge in Örebro, 23 March 1685, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 1, RA).
\textsuperscript{143} Postmaster Palthenius to post inspector Lange, Greifswald, 7 January 1695, extract by Lange in his report to the Chancery Board, Kanslikollegium, G II:f, vol. 2, RA.
\textsuperscript{144} Stockholm, 16 February 1707, Kongelige och andra wederbörand es förordningar angående postväsendet (1707).
\textsuperscript{145} Brakensiek 2000.
\textsuperscript{146} In the latter instance, it was often a widower who married widows.
\textsuperscript{147} Grape 1953 offers many examples of this kind of inheritance.
the equally unreliable incomes of Swedish military officers.\textsuperscript{148} However, he does not seem to be entirely convinced himself. Military service was even more prestigious than the post, but it seems a bit far-fetched to assume that every new generation of officers was obliged to safeguard their finances by marrying well, while everyone knew their financial situation to be precarious. Certainly there was a symbolic gain involved, both in acquiring a postmastership and in marrying well, and this gain amounted to what the postal ordinances would have viewed as honour, while it obviously served as some kind of credit; yet be that as it may, this credit had to be displayed in public life, every day. This display of credit and reputation depended on the financial resilience of the individual Crown servant – for which the Crown did not pay.

The marriage argument therefore seems somewhat strained, for although a number of postmasters did marry into merchant families, that was hardly unique for members of a local elite in Europe. Moreover, it was Helena Collin who had been the financially attractive party in the various candidates’ marital plans, and while not a single one went into the details, the Chancery Board’s goal was obviously to keep her in office. The candidates themselves perceived the marriage as part of a reward for services rendered.

Perquisites

The system of perquisites appears in many respects to be old-fashioned and arbitrary.\textsuperscript{149}

There was another element in civil servants’ incomes that is of importance here – perquisites (\textit{sportler}). This system was common in most early modern states, despite occasional complaints as to their number. Björn Asker and other historians emphasize that this was a legal way of improving wages in Sweden as elsewhere; yet their analysis is somewhat flawed by their misgivings. Asker depicts perquisites as an outmoded, unpredictable system, and given his interest in bureaucratic modernization, of which Sweden is thought a shining example, it is true that perquisites do not quite fit with the broader picture. Pär Frohnert shares this perspective, using Weber’s bureaucratization paradigm as a template in which perquisites have the features of a ‘pre-bureaucratic pattern’.\textsuperscript{150} Frohnert depicts Sweden as a comparatively modern bureaucracy that had retained perquisites and other features of the ‘pre-bureaucratic’ state (the sale of offices, nepotism, and offices’ heritability). He explains these ‘leftovers’ by referring to

\textsuperscript{148} Thisner 2007; Frohnert 1993, pp. 89–90, discusses the same problem with regard to civil servants.

\textsuperscript{149} Asker 2007, p. 230: ‘Systemet med sportler förefaller på många sätt ålderdomligt och nyckfullt.’

\textsuperscript{150} Frohnert 1993, p. 89: ‘förbyråkratiskt mönster’.
the low wages and the lack of a pension system, which was introduced only in 1770. Asker and the others seem to be disturbed by the perquisite invisibility. Why ‘hide’ them in the archives, if they were legal? And how important were they for Crown servants?

In 1966, Göran Rystad published the first study on offices and salaries in Sweden’s Age of Liberty (1718–1772), in which he analysed different perquisites as well as the civil administration’s rules for distributing them among its personnel. Maria Cavallin has continued his line of reasoning, and has arrived at some precise figures. Unfortunately, however, the sums involved fall below the level of income that she defines as the subsistence minimum. Furthermore, she has doubts over Rystad’s conclusion that perquisites could augment wages by as much as fifty per cent, agreeing instead with Frohnert, who takes a less optimistic view, not least because there have been institutions with only a few perquisites, or none at all.

The calculations by Rystad and others cannot claim to be representative for the Swedish administration on the whole. Frohnert states simply that it is impossible to put a specific figure on the sums involved, and although Asker and Cavallin share this insight to varying degrees, their conclusions differ substantially. Cavallin and Rystad do at least imply that the Crown servants’ finances depended on illegal assets, while Asker states that the regulation of perquisites does not mean that bribery was abolished. Cavallin writes that the resources that Crown servants administered on behalf of the Crown and that they disposed of for their own benefit were not clearly delimited – that is, they took advantage of public money. Rystad first claims that the fact that a number of Crown servants did not have official wages did not mean that they had no income. He then distinguishes between perquisites that were legal and official, and those such as gifts, bribes, and so on. The Chancery Board ordinances strictly forbade the latter in 1720, and again in 1773. Rystad stops short of claiming that Crown servants usually lived on illegal perquisites, but that in effect is what he is saying.

The assumption that Crown servants’ finance were largely based on regular illegal incomes and that this system stayed intact for several centuries does not convince Frohnert, though. His inference is that perquisites amounted to considerable sums – although there is hardly any trace of them in the sources. He has obviously no evidence for such a ‘solution’, but seems to reject the notion of an inherently corrupt bureaucracy on basis of its inanity. A corrupt bureaucracy, to give it its true name, that for centuries succeeded in living up to highest

151 Rystad 1966.
152 Cavallin 2003, p. 63.
154 Cavallin 2003, p. 65.
156 Rystad 1966, p. 164.
157 Frohnert 1993, pp. 86–87.
expectations with regard to efficiency and rationality simply does not make sense to Frohnert. It is hard to argue in the total absence of evidence, but there ought to be many more complaints about perquisites and corruption in the civil administration than we have in early modern Sweden. Asker’s example – about excessive administrative fees – dates from 1654, a time when most offices did not pay fixed and reliable wages. Corruption existed, but there is no indication that it accounted for a substantial and reliable part of the Crown servants’ income. Perquisites were legal; they cannot simply be written off as corruption.

Although we have to assume that perquisites played a role in the postmasters’ finances, there remains one major problem. There is little indication of the kind of perquisites postmasters were able or allowed to charge. They are mentioned occasionally, and seem to have applied to every single letter. But how? Is it possible that postmasters regularly received an additional fee for registered letters?\(^{158}\) In this case, customers wanted to make sure that their letters were treated preferentially. This argument implies that an ordinary letter would be at a disadvantage of some sort to make preferential treatment meaningful. What could such treatment involve, when there were just one or two days of mail traffic a week? The archive does not give any answers.

The importance of perquisites might be guessed at from post commissar Schneider’s bitter complaint about his insufficient wages in Helsingør. His 400 rdr a year were not paid regularly, and, on top of that, he did not receive any perquisites at all.\(^{159}\) This lack can be explained by his position in Helsingør, for while he had a vital role in Sweden’s international contacts, his work as a Swedish postmaster in Denmark meant he was forbidden to take in letters for posting: they had to be posted with the Danish postmaster.

A civil tenure system

Schneider not only lacked the perquisites that other postmasters obviously counted on. He asked the chancery board for the reimbursement of his claims on the Crown because he had not received his wages for a number of years, although the costs of living as befitted a Swedish commissar in Denmark were substantial. What was Schneider living on? He does not mention any kind of income. The estate inventories for the county of Malmöhus, however, show that he held several Crown estates in the province of Skåne that were probably the basis of his finances.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{159}\) Kammararkivet, Likvidationer, series 52–53, vol. 1, RA, gives details of his losing balance sheets.

\(^{160}\) Schneider was granted estates in Salerup on 25 May 1658, (Kammararkivet, Jordeböcker, Malmöhus län 1665, RA). The grant is mentioned in the index to Riksregistraturet (the royal chancellery’s letter-books of outgoing correspondence), but not in Riksregistraturet itself.
Schneider is not a particularly helpful example because he was anything but an ordinary postmaster. Moreover, he was active in the 1660s and 1670s, before any reliable form of government wage was introduced. However, the post budgets did not put an end to the postmasters’ financial problems. Instead, they seem to have exacerbated them by reducing the postmasters’ incomes. The question is then whether postmasters continued to receive Crown land in exchange for their services, in a civil tenure system (*civila indelningsverket*) similar to the post-farmers’, or indeed to the military tenure system.

The idea is striking, the evidence inconclusive at best. First, previous post historians do not mention such grants of land. Second, the Crown’s ordinances did not mention them either, although the ‘honour and privileges’ might at a pinch include them. Even in Wölck’s case, there is no reference to any form of landed property involved. Third, random samples of the Crown’s cadastral register (*jordeböcker*) have not produced any evidence of postmaster land, even though amidst the huge quantity of military land, there is some that was linked to a treasurer, a priest, and the like. But even if we could find any examples, why are they not mentioned in the postal archive or in connection with the postmasters’ appointments? In 1685, the Chancery Board appointed eight postmasters. Their letters of appointment are identical and highly formalized. They give no details about the postmasters’ payments, except for the usual phrase about honour and privileges. Neither do other records from that period. And if the new postmasters had such land at their disposal, why was it not referred to in their probate inventories? On the whole, it seems unlikely that a civil tenure organization did play much of a role in the postmasters’ finances.

The postmasters’ side-lines

All the evidence points to the fact that the postmasters’ income to a substantial degree came with the job. It was an income that did not come from the Chancery Board; neither did it have the Board’s explicit approval, although most likely its knowledge. It cannot have been levied arbitrarily; the post would not have been that popular otherwise. In 1672, Gottfried Albinus, an unemployed secretary in the Pomeranian government, complained about his financial problems by contrasting his situation to that of the postmaster in Stettin, Andreas Thomas

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161 See the quote by von Beijer above, n. 10.
162 The cadastral registers do not usually give the name of the estate-owner. We cannot be sure that postmasters were provided for, even if the register for the county of Jönköping in 1703 mentions several estates as *posthemman* or ‘post-households’. A lengthy examination of the cadastral registers, which, incidentally, do not have indices of any kind, might come up with some evidence.
163 The Chancery Board’s registry, Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 1, RA.
164 Neither Riksregistraturet nor the Chancery Board’s archive lists any enfeofments in connection with these postmasters’ appointments.
Hildebrand. According to Albinus, Hildebrand had a number of additional incomes on top of his job as a postmaster: in the previous year, he had sold grain to the granary in Stockholm; he had a number of estates with high revenues; and as well as his wage, ‘which he receives properly’, he had ‘perquisites, from which he manages to wring a fair bit, his seat in the chapter, in all an abundance of incomes to live on luxuriously with his family.’

This is more than a description of the numerous side-lines of a postmaster who came from a merchant family. It also shows that Albinus, who used Hildebrand as an example of what he hoped would soon be his proper payment, saw a connection between the postal business and regular merchant activities. He assumed, too, that a considerable part of Hildebrand’s income consisted of perquisites. Albinus was not the most impartial witness, of course, and he had good reason to exaggerate Hildebrand’s income, but that does not affect his trustworthiness as a whole. And he saw a clear connection between Hildebrand’s postal services and his business activities.

There are other examples of postmasters’ enterprise, although most describe dealings with the Crown. Post director Statius Stein in Riga traded in ship mastings; post commissar Huswedel in Hamburg supplied the Swedish high nobility with luxury goods from the Continent. Both involved substantial sums of money; both involved largely open trade between important harbours in and beyond the Swedish realm: they are hardly representative of postmasters’ unofficial activities in smaller towns. These are mostly invisible due to the lack of any private or merchant archive from that time. However, a royal ordinance of 1707 stipulated that postmasters were allowed to have additional sources of income for their own benefit, as long as it did not interfere with their work.

Stefan Brakensiek has studied civil servants in Hesse. He gives examples of the officials’ substantial involvement in the local credit market, thanks to the financial resources that they controlled as part of their work. Likewise, the Swedish postmasters administered the revenues of their post office. True, they were obliged to transfer these revenues to Stockholm eventually, after subtracting their wages, but most of them kept substantial sums in their post offices for their own benefit, as long as it did not interfere with their work.

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165 Gottfried Albinus to governor-general Carl Gustav Wrangel, Stettin, 25 June 1672, Skokloster samlingen, E 8191, RA.
166 Hildebrand was the son of Friedrich Hildebrand, postmaster in Elbing until 1657. Hildebrand senior had been an important merchant in Nuremberg, doing business with the Swedish army in the 1640s.
167 See Huswedel’s letters to Johan Rosenhane, E 524–527, UUB.
168 There are several letters by mayor and postmaster Petter Hummel in Varberg to governor-general Reinhold Johan von Fersen, 1707–1708 (Stafsundsarkivet, vol. 17, RA). While they confirm their business relationship, these sporadic letters are insufficient to describe Hummel’s side-lines in more detail.
for long periods, often for several years. It was clearly illegal to use the Crown’s resources for private gain, but there are a number of indications that it occurred regularly, albeit not without risks.\footnote{Cavallin 2003, p. 65, discusses this behaviour.}

In 1705, Johan Söderberg, postmaster in Anklam, was dismissed for being incapable and unreliable. In a letter to Schmedeman, post commissar Johann Vatky accused Söderberg among other things of threatening his wife when she refused to hand over the post’s cash-box.\footnote{Vatky to Schmedeman, Stralsund, 30 March 1705, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 136, RA.} His wife not only seems to have run the post, which being Vatky’s daughter she probably knew inside out, she was also able to protect the post’s revenues from her husband, who in his work handling postage had embezzled public money. This example could be interpreted as an argument for a clear distinction between the public and the private resources of civil servants. However, when the Chancery Board in 1708 tried to change the reimbursement for gratis letters, Vatky-Rosencreutz gave an interesting explanation of why this would not work. According to the Chancery Board, Crown servants were supposed to pay for these letters in advance, and only afterwards would they be reimbursed, according to their accounts. Vatky-Rosencreutz responded that most Crown servants simply refused to do so, because they claimed that they could not afford it. Some maintained that they did not have any money available in their work to use for this purpose; others said that they were not allowed to use these resources. The Chancery Board obviously assumed that Crown servants regularly invested Crown revenue to other ends. Vatky-Rosencreutz decided to advance the money himself and send a balance to the Crown later. However, he gave up on this idea very quickly because the Crown did not pay him for months.\footnote{Vatky-Rosencreutz to Schmedeman, Stralsund, 15 December 1708, ÖPD, Huvudarkivet, E 3 D, vol. 136, RA.} It seems as if neither the Crown servants nor Vatky-Rosencreutz had reason to rely on the Chancery Board’s credit.

When postmaster Nils Collin in Vimmerby took over the service after his son’s death in 1711,\footnote{Grape 1951, pp. 646–647, gives 5 August 1711, but the Vimmerby parish register gives 15 August.} he explained his request by that he had some postal revenues lent out in the surrounding area.\footnote{Grape 1951, p. 647.} He stayed in office for one more year to make his debtors repay the money they had borrowed from him. It is particularly interesting, that Collin openly used his involvement in the credit market as an argument in favour of his being reinstated as postmaster.

In the late 1690s and early 1700s there are a number of postmasters who were unable to balance their accounts. It is reasonable to assume that they had invested the revenues improperly or simply without success. In a number of cases, this imbalance led to the postmaster’s dismissal, although usually only
after years of correspondence with the Chancery Board. The latter, in fact, showed a great deal of patience and understanding, eventually reinstating some postmasters who had been downgraded for several years because of their financial failures. The sums involved must have been quite substantial, as they not only exceeded their wages but also the much higher sureties, which were more closely connected to the expected income. If any Crown servant of this standing died within a few years after taking a new position, his family was likely to encounter severe financial problems, something that in the postmasters’ case indicates that there was some kind of calculation on their part, based on the fact that Crown positions were granted for life and that they would stay in office long enough to offset the first years’ investments and the sureties.176

News as commodity and source of income

Why should postmasters in particular have had an important position in local credit markets? They were hardly the only Crown servants with access to Crown revenues, although many postmasters had more than one position and thus access to different kinds of revenue. The postmasters could use this credit to better effect as they held another important advantage: most of them lived and worked in a large house in the centre of their town or city, the personification of their community’s news node. The post-house was also the place where all travellers arrived, which itself promised a much sought-after source of income.177 The upshot was that the postmaster was the first to hear news from other places. We can therefore assume that postmasters were (on paper) perfect business partners, not least because they enjoyed the Crown’s protection and controlled regular, reliable, and cheap contacts with other merchants and the government. This information advantage should have easily translated into financial gain, because they would have had by far the lowest transaction costs with regard to regional and international business relations.178 When post inspector Lange discussed the working conditions of a postmaster on the island of Rügen, he valued the reputation of the postmaster higher than the possible wages: ‘He will

176 There are frequent complaints about these investments (houses, furniture, horses, and so on). Asker 2007 p. 230, stresses the importance of these investments prior to the first payments; see also Frohnert 1993, p. 87; Frohnert 1993, pp. 74–76, discusses the problem of sureties.
177 Undated memorandum by Lange, Kanslikollegium, G II f, vol. 2, RA. When a new postmaster was appointed in Uckermünde, post commissar Lange discussed the fact that there would be no salary attached to the job. Instead, the postmaster would be allowed to keep the post office’s revenues, while the diligence coach would stop at his house, which would be used by the travellers; it should be noted that postmasters were actually obliged to live in town and centres (royal ordinance, Stockholm, 16 February 1707, Kongelige och andra wederbörandes förordningar angående postvisendet 1707, p. 251).
178 In her chapter in the present volume, Kekke Stadin underlines the role of postmasters in the business of international credit.
earn more with his name than the salary, because there is an outward reputation included in the position.”

Gerd Grön, post director in Riga, was criticized in 1706 for trading as a merchant on the side, and had a substantial advantage because he received the mail long before all the other merchants. At this point, Grön had been in office for more than a decade, and was far from being the only postmaster active as a merchant. Still, given that the complaint was expected to hold water, it must at least have echoed contemporary perceptions.

It was not only the news advantage that was financially interesting: selling news also belonged to a postmaster’s expected income. Statius Stein, Grön’s predecessor in Riga, complained about a privilege granted to Christoph Prescher in 1681 that allowed him to publish a Riga newspaper and to sell foreign newspapers. Stein claimed that this privilege had always stayed with the post, although he had never made any real effort to publish a newspaper himself. Still, he obviously considered the distribution of newspapers a substantial part of his income. The same was true of the regional directors in Stockholm and elsewhere. The sale of newspapers or distribution of manuscript newsletters often went with the postal business. In Sweden, there was only one printed newspaper, three copies of which were sent free to every postmaster in Sweden. But there were manuscript newsletters, too, which offered much higher incomes. In 1693, Charles XI ordered the Chancery Board to lower the postal rates between Hamburg and Helsingør because post commissar Peter Barchman ‘without doubt sends newsletters (avisser) to different persons in our realm’. The higher Swedish postal rate would otherwise make him use the Danish post.

A number of assumptions about the postmasters’ financial opportunities as well as their advantages in the news market have been made that necessarily remain vague. Detailed research on the postmasters’ local context, taxes, property, and social relationships in terms of marriage, christenings, and credit relationships could add to the picture. So far, our knowledge of the local credit market in Sweden is thin, and there are only few reliable facts. Research from different parts of the Holy Roman Empire indicates, however, that this local credit market played a major role in economic transactions. Yet even the study by Braken-
siek, who for years worked on several hundred local officials in Hesse-Kassel, cannot offer more than a few examples. An investigation into the sureties the postmasters put up might offer some evidence; the first impression is that the postmasters generally did not turn to their own kin to stand surety, but to local merchants. Perhaps the more interesting question is why we do not have this kind of information in the first place. Why does a well-preserved archive like the Chancery Board’s not contain any information on the postmasters’ finances, their economic position in a local context, or their perquisites? Why did the Chancery Board avoid this subject, when at the same time it was so interested in the minutiae of even the smallest post office’s accounts of its revenues and sureties?

Conclusions – the nature of Crown service

Many questions remain unanswered because the Chancery Board and the postmasters perceived postmasterships differently. The Chancery Board administered a *jus regale*, the postmasters saw themselves as part of the news business. Not only did it offer them a number of additional options, they could dispose of the office as their private property, give it to their son or daughter, and even sell it to a successor. In Kalmar, Rosenlund did all that – and he was no exception. To top it off, the postmaster could invest the post’s revenues for his own gain. That was probably common, albeit illegal.

Most interesting for our understanding of postmasters as Crown servants is the fact that Rosenlund’s appointment, with its complicated background, was openly discussed by the Chancery Board. However, this was definitely not the version the Chancery Board wrote or arranged for officially. Instead, Rosenlund was addressed in a standard letter written on 24 September 1704, by which the Chancery Board appointed him as postmaster. The widow received an equally impersonal letter, signed on the same day, in which she was ordered to give up her office at the end of her year of grace and transfer it to her ‘successor’. She was supposed to make an inventory of all papers in her possession and hand it over to Rosenlund.187

The decision to transfer Rosenlund’s service to Olof Reppler in 1707 had been proposed by Rosenlund himself, who wanted to retire. The handover was motivated by the Chancery Board in consideration of ‘his old age and hence his frail health’.188 These were in fact the very same grounds that Rosenlund had given the Chancery Board in 1704 for why he could not administer both offices, but intended to put his daughter-in-law in charge. As early as 1692 he had mentioned his frail health and old age as reasons to transfer his office to his stepson. It is his phrasing the Chancery Board used repeatedly in its delibera-

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187 Kanslikollegium, B I a, vol. 7, 24 September 1704, RA, for both letters.
188 Kanslikollegium, C II, vol. 11, RA.
tions. The official appointment, however, made no mention of the widow, the post-house, the family’s maintenance, or Rosenlund’s previous service, neither was there any reference to any kind of arrangement concerning the ways in which the office would be performed. Instead, the Chancery Board acted as a Crown institution, speaking with its regal, sovereign, and authoritative voice. The Chancery Board appointed a new Crown servant, and the position entailed a certain amount of work and wages. Full stop.

The Chancery Board’s actions have to be understood in light of the widow’s interests. There was no possibility of employing her officially, yet at the same time, all parties to the appointment process were well aware that she was capable and could administer the Kalmar post office for years to come because she had known the duties of a postmaster since her childhood. Her father the mayor had been postmaster in Vimmerby between 1676 and 1708.

Britta Lundgren has discussed the particular problems of seventeenth-century female postmasters. She sets out to explain why some eight per cent of all postmasterships in the seventeenth century were operated by widows (often for many years, and with the Chancery Board’s explicit approval) and why these widows disappeared from post offices in early eighteenth century. The pension scheme that was set up in Sweden certainly acknowledged the interests of the widows, but as this system was only introduced in the second half of the eighteenth century, Lundgren does not assign any particular importance to it. She then notes the fact that the early postal system’s wages were pretty low, which made these positions less interesting for men, not least because the wages were not paid regularly. The widows’ activities were thus approved against the background of the low-paid work involved. This argument is borne out by the 1691 ban on widows retaining postmasterships, in the beginning clearly aimed at the bigger offices. On the other hand, the main post offices have always had their fair share of widows.

Lundgren also emphasizes that it was increasingly thought problematic that women did not have the necessary authority to administer an official post service, in particular when they had to supervise male servants in the shape of post-farmers. This argument was part of contemporary Lutheran theology, matched by a patriarchal world-view that welcomed women’s subordination to men’s domination. Still, for much of the seventeenth century it was possible for women to work for the Crown on a lower level, succeeding their late husbands. Official politics notwithstanding, it was clearly permissible in Collins’s case to allow her to run the post unofficially.

Patriarchal society accorded women certain roles in society. A woman was expected to organize the household, bear and raise children, and support her

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189 Only rarely are acting postmasters mentioned in the archive material.
190 Olsson 1979, pp. 31–32.
191 Lundgren 1987, pp. 23–34.
husband in his duties. Her place was in the home, whereas her husband was expected to act in the public sphere, which gave her a distinct standing.\footnote{The wife of Johann Harms, the newly installed postmaster of Bergen on the island of Rügen, was accused of wearing a fontange (tall head-dress) in the city. Harms claimed that she did not wear it in church, and that he considered it appropriate attire in light of his position as a Crown servant (Haas 1893, pp. 93–94).} When it came to a postmaster, however, his office was part of his household. There were hardly any public post offices. On the contrary, his appointment transformed the postmaster’s private house into a public post-house. And in this post-house, the postmaster’s wife had clear responsibilities, meaning she had to share in her husband’s public role; in consequence, she could act in the town’s public sphere. That was particularly obvious in the case of a widow, who after her husband’s death became the principal of the house. She could act on her own behalf as long as she did not remarry, which, however, was what society expected of her; a widow could own and trade property, and she could be a member of a guild.\footnote{See Stadin 2004, pp. 88–94, on the role and options of widows in early modern Sweden.}

Despite this obvious engagement in public office, a widow’s chances of retaining her husband’s Crown office were increasingly limited after 1700. However, even then the married woman formed a ‘working couple’ with her husband, and took part in his public activities.\footnote{This expression was coined by Heide Wunder to describe women’s role in feudal society.} Her contribution remained important, not least if she had been the one to grow up in a postal household and if it was she who was literate. It was only in the nineteenth century that a wife’s responsibilities were further restricted and patriarchal notions reinforced, for it was only then that a Crown servant’s official and private household were more clearly separated. In consequence, women were almost invisible in the public sphere, much more so than in early modern times. This later development finally reduced the bourgeois women’s space to a private and mostly invisible sphere.\footnote{Brakensiek 2000.}

This was a long-term development. There was another that took much less time: women became invisible in the postal administration’s archive. Wölck’s example shows that there were clearly two different ways of writing and thinking about the appointment of a new postmaster. When the Chancery Board discussed Helena Collin’s support, it was obvious that she knew her way around the post and that she would continue to operate the post office in Kalmar in future, whether she remarried or not. The Chancery Board had good reason to keep her in that position and maintain her family.

This family, however, was not clearly defined. Whereas Helena Collin’s pretensions were accepted without hesitation, the same was not true of other candidates. According to the list of applicants, one, Mathias Morin, was related to Wölck. Informing the Chancery Board about their kinship was supposed to increase his chances – but it was not Morin himself who provided the information, at least not in his application. It was probably inserted into the delibera-
tions by whoever presented his application to the Chancery Board. Being the relative of a former postmaster was possibly of doubtful merit, especially if the postmaster in question did not mention this connection himself, so ‘making’ Morin a relative. Kinship was by no means evident or natural. A postmaster’s ‘family’ was not the same as a family in today’s sense. The term in Swedish is a French loan-word that only arrived later in the eighteenth century, and until then the Latin word ‘familia’ referred to the household, encompassing all the people under the dominion of the patriarch: wife, children, and servants. It was a term that had both social and economic ramifications, and referred to the household as a financial unit.

The postmaster’s household as a part of the Crown’s economy

Contemporary notions of the Crown’s dominion were strongly influenced by Aristotelian philosophy, which was believed to correspond to Christian ideals. Social relationships were defined as different forms of friendship. That included kinship. The household was the smallest unit in this dominion, in which all parts functioned according to the same patriarchal model. The household of the prince, his court, thus equated to the household of his subjects. The prince’s dominion over his realm was equally patriarchal as the father’s over his household and estate. The prince’s care for his servants equalled the father’s for his wife, children, and servants.

When the Crown supported a postmaster’s household, it thus protected the foundations of its own economy. In the feudal economy, the prince’s household was in many ways intertwined with the Crown servants’ economy. Wages constituted just one aspect of this mutual relationship, which spanned far more than financial considerations. The Crown servant invested far more than just his knowledge and time in his service. He had also acquired a certain education, and arranged an appropriate education for his children so that they could take over his or any other Crown office. Moreover, the Crown servant embodied the Crown’s credit in the local community. He invested in his office’s gear: the horses, the house, and other equipment. He is perhaps best understood as the Crown’s ‘co-enterpriser’.

Positions in the post office were repeatedly described as remuneration for previous service, which in turn was often poorly paid or even unwaged. Many candidates had already started a family, including a number of young children, who they mentioned in their applications, although at the same time they claimed that their previous position had been so poorly paid: the new position would relieve their pitiable state with the help of a wage. On top of that, the new postmaster received a position for life that might well stay in his family – and

197 For the concept of the ‘co-enterpriser’, see Moraw 1988, p. 4.
thus in his private house. Rosenlund mentioned that the post had been run from his house for almost fifty years, which was obviously meant to convince the Chancery Board to keep it that way. Similar ideas can be found in many applications. Palm describes his service at the post office in Stockholm as being ‘in waiting’. In reality, his service was based on a written contract, and although he was ‘waiting’ for tenure, he did get a wage that was almost as large as that of the postmaster in Kalmar. Palm, however, perceived the position in Stockholm as a means to an end – a postmastership. This would not only ensure slightly higher wages, but a totally different kind of service. His private house, which thus far had no official function whatsoever, would be transformed into a public post-house that displayed the Crown’s colours and emblems, and was protected by the Crown.

The Chancery Board cannot be said to have chosen the most qualified candidate for the Kalmar postmastership: the merits of the seventy-five-year-old on whom their choice fell were not overly convincing, while those of his successor, Olof Reppler, were not even mentioned. Instead the Chancery Board obviously felt an obligation towards the old postmaster and his family. This obligation was not only about money. It was about a position in a local community that offered further gains, be they social, financial, or symbolic: whatever they were, they were not the Chancery Board’s immediate responsibility. What is more, they are invisible in the Chancery Board’s archive, and were obviously linked to activities that at least in part must have been considered illegal – according to the bureaucratic rules. The Chancery Board, however, was remarkably indulgent when it came to these extra-official activities. Few postmasters were ever dismissed for embezzlement, and only then after years of correspondence with the Chancery Board, which offered to wait for the postmasters’ explanations and arrears.

The Crown’s credit

More important than the postmasters’ credit, which incidentally rarely failed them, was the issue of the Chancery Board’s credit – and the Crown’s credit. The Chancery Board not only had problems maintaining its own credit, and therefore was forced to rely on the private investments of postmasters; it often relied on private credit to introduce improvements to the post. These investments were almost always mustered by the postmasters themselves, who in return asked for a guaranteed monopoly on the income from that particular service for a number of years.

198 These schemes have left an interesting and thus far neglected source material. Johann Biermann offered to introduce a so-called flying post in Pomerania (23 January 1665, Kammararkivet, Postverket, vol. 5, RA). Similar schemes by Vatky-Rosencrutz, Huswedel, and Birnbaum have been mentioned above.
In so doing, the Crown thus avoided financial risk, especially at the beginning of a postmaster’s service, when like other Crown servants he invested his own money to establish himself. Yet even later on, where postmasters chose to go into trade as merchants, despite their being Crown-privileged servants the immediate financial risk remained with them. At the same time, the Crown obviously abstained from substantial incomes. It not only socialized the risks, transferring them to the postmasters, it also socialized the gains. Why?

The most important advantage for the Crown was that its finances became much more predictable this way. Moreover, the patrimonial understanding of early modern rule, so much in evidence in the nepotism of the local administration – the prince’s mercy and his care for widows – also had two financial dimensions. One was the role of private money in public office: the postmaster’s investments in his job, which created a long-lasting, possibly transgenerational bond between Crown and servant. The other was the contemporary idea that the wealth of the prince’s subjects was synonymous with the wealth of the realm. The beauty of the cities, the well-being of the prince’s servants, were marks of his success and thus of the mercy of God. The numerous travel descriptions of early modern Europe exemplify these ideas.

Considering this understanding of public wealth and the Crown’s credit, the Chancery Board’s archive is not representative of the Crown’s finances. Instead, it focuses on certain aspects that were formalized and accountable. Everyone was aware that these were not to be confused with the Crown’s assets, or indeed the Crown servants’ assets. The major problem of early modern rule was not cash flow, but credit, not least in relation to the Crown servants. Credit depended on an idea of justice in Crown affairs. It was furthered by Crown institutions such as the Chancery Board, which were run according to certain legal and administrative procedures and which were legitimized – for all Crown servants to see – by the accuracy with which they followed these procedures. The state of public administration was thought to mark the Crown’s reliability and justice.

This state of affairs, however, should not be confused with social practice, because regardless of the Chancery Board’s internal logic and the wisdom of early modern cameralism, the prince also had other niceties to observe, patrimonial in nature rather than cameralistic, and irreconcilable with the financial logic of the Chancery Board. The state still revolved around the royal court, which in turn was structured with the help of social relationships and the patrimonial care of the king for his servants. The Weberian perspective is therefore misleading. It interprets the obvious advantages of a so-called pre-modern bureaucracy as tokens of failure and corruption.

The Chancery Board, at least in part, did act like a modern bureaucracy. Many historians have tried to describe the Swedish power state as an unusually

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199 Hallenberg 2008.
modern state, unfortunately still encumbered with a number of flaws. The Chancery Board’s archive corresponds to this notion, not least because several generations of archivists have tried to ‘re-establish’ its rightful structure. In its pages the Chancery Board administered postal affairs in Sweden in the form of a state institution; appointed capable and well-merited postmasters; and paid them properly in exchange for the appropriate sureties, regular financial accounts, and payment of the postal revenues. The archive exemplifies the Chancery Board’s pretensions, which were based on the idea of a just bureaucracy – that everyone knew did not work that way in reality.

As we have seen, this picture was far from the truth, if only because the Chancery Board’s financial and bureaucratic clout was not sufficient to implement it. A postmastership was still so much more than a simple office, even though the official letter of appointment treated it as such. Even the postmaster in a provincial town was thought of as one with the Crown, not least because he was representing the Crown there. This explains too why Crown servants were preferred over other candidates for the position of postmaster.

The postmaster vested his own money and education in the service of the Crown; in other words, he was the Crown’s co-enterpriser. His investments had to cover his requirements for a respectable house, clothing, social standing, marriage, public office, and so on. The Crown had reason to bow to these needs, which were satisfied with the help of perquisites and extra-official activities. These additional incomes bound the postmaster ever tighter to the interest of the Crown, even in subsequent generations. In a nutshell, the postmaster was left bargaining with the Crown, submissive, without legal pretensions, and certainly not on an equal footing. Yet all the same, most postmasters were effective in securing their own financial needs and interests.