The Death of King Charles XII–It was Murder[1]

By Carl O Nordling

Abstract

King Charles XII of Sweden was killed in 1718 during his siege of the Danish fortress of Fredriksten. For 276 years it remained an open question whether the lethal bullet came from the enemy or from a Swedish assassin. Now a treatise publish by a Swedish historian finally proves that the King's death was a case of political murder. Ballistic circumstances and the Danish ammunition then available are incompatible with a random shot from enemy quarters. Major-general Carl Cronstedt possessed eminently the expertise needed for making an assassination look like a war casualty. It appears that the King might have been shot with a makeshift-jacketed bullet long before jacketed bullets came into common use.

Background

In November 1718, Sweden was at war with Russia and Denmark. As King of Sweden the 36-year-old Charles XII was the absolute ruler of one of the Great Powers of Europe. The Great Nordic War had lasted all his adult life, and so far he had managed to make peace with two of Sweden's enemies, Poland and Saxony. His counsellor and un-official Minister of Finance, Baron Goertz (1668-1719) was on Eland in the Baltic, negotiating for peace with Russia. King Charles himself was leading an attack on the Danish fortress of Fredriksten in southern Norway, close to the Swedish border.

On November 30, one of the three outer fortifications had already been taken by storm. The final assault on the main fortress was under preparation. All the evening, King Charles was supervising the digging of the most advanced trench from a position in the newly completed trench next behind. His head and shoulders were visible above the breastwork. (The enemy illuminated the field with fires on the walls, and the moon was up.) Baron Goertz was expected to return any day with a report on Czar Peter's attitude towards Sweden's proposals for peace and alliance. The fortress was generally expected to fall within a week and this would open the way towards Christiania (*Oslo*), and another Swedish army was advancing towards Trondhjem (*Trondheim*) to the north. From a military and diplomatic perspective it was a critical week in the history of Sweden and Denmark. At this very stage, about ten o'clock p.m., a bullet hit King Charles, piercing his hat and head. The King died instantly.

The death of King Charles precipitated an abrupt change in Swedish policy. The initiator was Count Frederick of Hessen-Kassel (1674-1751), the Swedish generalissimos and brother-in-law to the King, who had taken over the reigns of the Government (in the name of his Royal consort). The assault on Norway was suspended, both armies were ordered to retire, the negotiations with the Czar were discontinued, and the much-hated Baron Goertz was arrested and soon executed after a sham trial. The newly promulgated capital tax, intended to confiscate 17 percent of

all revenue, was rescinded before coming into force. King Charles was succeeded by his sister, Ulrica Eleonora, who 15 months later abdicated in favour of her husband, the same Count Frederick. King Charles's death at this crucial political moment, felled by a bullet to the side of his head, has led historians to suspect assassination. This interpretation is based on reminiscences of persons involved and finds support in recent ballistic and forensic evidence.

Count Frederick himself was the first to comment on the King's death. In one of his three surviving letters from the occasion he speaks about a "cartouche bullet", which would imply an enemy shot. Other early sources agree on this point. Early reports from Stockholm speak about a shot from the right side, which would hint to an assassin, if anything. In addition, the Stockholm gossip mentions "a small bullet" or "a musket bullet". An assertion that just one single Danish bullet was fired on the night in question has cropped up at a few occasions, but reliable sources, such as the diary of the governor of Fredriksten, confirm that shelling and bombardment were in fact massive. The first two innuendoes about assassination stem from February 26 and 27, 1719, and occur in funeral and commemorative poems[2].

The controversial issue

The skull of King Charles is extant and the bullet holes are convincing enough as to the cause of death. The King's hat with the 19.5-mm bullet hole is on permanent display in the Royal Castle of Stockholm. But where did the bullet come from? Was it just a random bullet from the fortress or was it fired off by an assassin from near by? This has been a controversial question for almost 300 years. Many books and articles have been published, advocating each of these theories. The latest Swedish national encyclopaedia says that "the persistent rumours about Charles having been assassinated may now be dismissed"[3] referring to an article by Gunnar Grenander from 1988[4], which alleges that "a ballistic and topographical investigation" has put to rest the idea that the King was killed by Swedish fire.

The present writer asserts that, on the contrary, enough evidence exists to show that the fatal bullet did not come from any of the guns on the fortress or on its outer fortifications. It is also extremely unlikely that it came from an enemy musket. Rolf Uppstrцm and I are agreed that a ballistic analysis supports the probability of assassination, that there was ample motive, and that the King's headquarters contained at least one officer capable of making an assassination look fairly like a random shot from the enemy[5].

The random shot theory

According to Grenander, King Charles was hit by one out of a swarm of spherical leaden bullets from an enemy cannon. This cannon would have been placed on the outermost fortification, the "Overberg", about 620 meters to the left of the King. Grenander, who was an expert at ballistics, calculated the impact velocity for such a bullet at the distance at issue to be 114 meters per second (m/s). He considered this velocity to be barely sufficient for a 19 mm leaden bullet to pass through the King's

hat and head. Grenander also calculated the angle between the missile trajectory and the horizontal plane at the point of impact to be 9.7° and concluded that the King must therefore have tilted his head about 10° to the *right*. (It is noteworthy that both of the King's gloves are bloodstained as if he had leaned his head towards his *left* hand when some blood was shed also from the entrance wound.) Grenander also concluded that on November 30, 1718, the gunners at Overberg must have used "cartouches", i.e. cannon shells filled with (leaden) grape shot. This conflicts, however, with the finding of C.O. Munthe that all the light guns (that could have used grape shot of a calibre near 19 mm) were furnished with cannonballs only[6]. The heavier guns used grape shot of considerably larger calibre.

The probable impact velocity of the bullet

Grenander based his opinion that an impact velocity of 114 m/s would be sufficient for a 19 mm leaden bullet to pierce a human head on a ballistic-medical investigation by Medical examiner Dr. Gustaf Hultkvist, published in 1937[7]. At the end of his article, Hultkvist jumps to the following conclusion: "[I]t is inconceivable, that the [lethal] bullet had a velocity such as 300 to 400 m/s, and therefore it cannot have come from a musket with a normal powder charge fired within 25 meters from the King. [...] The bullet that hit Charles XII at the Fredriksten castle, which was of the size of a musket bullet of that time, did not come from a shot fired within the Swedish lines."[8] What his preceding investigation actually shows, does not justify the latter part of this conclusion. Among other things he found that bullets hitting a dummy head with a velocity of 110 m/s sometimes penetrated the dummy and sometimes did not. Hultkvist's summarizing analysis presented in a diagram[9] shows, however, that an impact velocity of 150 m/s would be necessary for a 19 mm leaden bullet to penetrate 13 cm into human brain tissue (i.e. the breadth of the King's head). On the other hand, Hultkvist found that an impact velocity above 225 m/s would cause the bullet to blast the head to pieces. The initial velocity of a musket bullet, about 400 m/s, was more than enough for this effect, which seems to have brought about Hultkvist's rash conclusion. However, a leaden bullet hitting with 114 m/s (as calculated by Grenander) could obviously not have penetrated both the hat and the head from temple to temple. The resistance offered by the hat would certainly require some more speed than the 150 m/s that was found to be enough for a naked head. Apparently Grenander did not pay close attention to Hultkvist's actual *findings,* shown in his diagram. Instead, he took his stand on the prejudiced (or perhaps opportunist) conclusion drawn by Hultkvist.

Finally Grenander made light of the important finding about leaden bullets by Doctor Sam Clason[10]. The latter discovered that an ordinary leaden bullet couldn't pass through an animal or human skull without leaving a number of small splinters behind. The smallest of these will wedge into the bone and cannot be removed even by flushing the empty skull. The X-ray plates of King Charles's skull indicate that the skull contains no such splinters, although there are many in his foot, which was hit by an ordinary leaden bullet in 1709. There remains the possibility that the lethal bullet was made of iron or silver or that it was a jacketed bullet. More recently, however, the

writer Peter From has proved by refined methods that leaden bullets might after all pass a human skull without leaving splinters in the bone. Therefore we are now forced to accept the possibility that the lethal wound could have been caused by a leaden bullet as well.

Another recent investigator, Svante Stehl, rejects Grenander's speed data altogether, and asserts that even an iron bullet from 620 m distance could have hit the King with a velocity of more than 150 m/s – even after ricocheting from the ground. This is a rather bold assertion, considering that Grenander was a highly qualified in ballistics. So far there is no conclusive proof of the assertion. In any case, the probability of a hit from such a ricochet remains minimal, since the thrown up earth of the breastwork beside the King would not have been likely to cause ricochets at all.

Jacketed bullets and silver bullets were certainly not used by the Danish (or any) Army at the time. Only an assassin would employ such extraordinary ammunition. Iron bullets were employed as grape shot but were not used as musket ammunition. Could King Charles have been hit by an iron bullet from a cannon on the main fortress or on "Stortaarnet"? According to Sam Clason, the Danish Army did not use iron bullets of any such calibre as 19 or 20 mm[11], and he was sure that the smallest iron bullets found measured 21.9 mm, and even these were exceptional[12]. Stehl asserts, however, that the fortress garrison used also 20 mm iron bullets for their cartouches. The bullet that killed the King left a hole in his hat with a diameter of 19.5 mm. As noted above, the lighter guns were probably furnished with cannonballs only and it is therefore most likely that the cartouche bullets had a calibre larger than 30 mm. There remains, however, the certain possibility of an ordinary bullet from a musket on the main fortress.

The bullet hole through the King's skull points in the direction of Overberg. As shown above, it is extremely unlikely that a bullet from there could really have killed the King. If the lethal projectile is assumed instead to have come from the main fortress, we must also assume that the musketeer did not aim at his natural target, the trench diggers at a distance in front of King Charles. Aiming a little higher would anyway have occurred occasionally by mistake, of course. Further, we must assume that the King not only turned his head to the right but also leaned it about five degrees to the right at the very moment when the bullet hit. Even that would have happened some times during his stay in the trench. The probability of a random misdirected shot scoring a bull in the King's head at the very moment when he looks aside and tilts his head is of course extremely low.

The probability of regicide

Is it likely then that someone on the Swedish side would have murdered his King? It certainly is. To be Head of State poses a risk in itself. In Sweden alone, King Erik XIV, King Gustav III and Prime Minister Olof Palme have been murdered. Four out of the first 40 presidents of the United States of America were murdered in office (Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley and Kennedy). A lengthy war involving heavy losses is apt to turn the opinion against those in power. This was the reason why Czar Nicholas

II, Kaiser William II, and Duce Mussolini were forced to abdicate. It was also the reason for the abortive assault on Hitler's life in July 1944.

In Sweden of 1718, after 18 years of burdensome war, the discontent was directed against Baron Goertz in the first place. As acting Minister of Finance he had levied higher and higher taxes on the people of Sweden. Most public officials and many noblemen hated him. Goertz was seen as the intriguing foreigner who prompted the war, destroyed the currency, and confiscated private property. On November 20, 1718, he had promulgated a new and rather bankrupting tax. But Goertz stood high in King Charles's favour and his enemies had no possibility to remove him. To murder him was no easy matter and would most probably have lead to heavy reprisals. By getting King Charles out of the way, however, Baron Goertz would suddenly become fair game. Without any official position, he could be arrested out of hand. A sham trial with a death sentence would gain popular support and meet little opposition. Therefore, regicide was an obvious solution of the "Goertz problem". And since the King constantly exposed himself to enemy fire, the possibility to disguise a murder as a battle casualty presented itself.

A hypothetical disguised murder

But even if the possibility to disguise the murder existed, it required considerable skill to make it work. It was crucial that a single shot kill the victim immediately. To shoot the King from behind would immediately suggest murder. To take aim from the front risked discovery beforehand. To shoot from the right side was not safe either. The new trench went in that direction and the King therefore was likely to look to the right occasionally. Also there were no enemy guns in such positions as to acquire the obvious blame for a shot from the right. The safest position for the assassin was thus on the left side of the King.

The perpetrator could place his musket on top of the breastwork of the new trench near its point of departure. This was probably some five or ten meters to the left of the King. The assassin could wait for the sound of a gunshot from the fortress and fire when he heard it. The muzzle flash from his weapon would be hidden from the officers standing down in the old trench beside the King and the sound of the shot would mingle with the cannon rumble. In order to reduce the muzzle flash and to muffle the report from the musket, it would be necessary to charge it with only three or four grams of powder instead of the usual 16. (This would also make the kinetic energy mimic that of a long distance shot.)

If a murder plot like this was carried out and the King died, no one would be able to say for certain where the shot had come from. It would take an expert and a thorough investigation to reveal how it really happened. Superficially, it would seem that the King had been hit by an enemy bullet. Actually twenty-two of his soldiers were hit by enemy fire on the night of his shooting, so another stray bullet would not be surprising.

The expert post-mortem examination

Unfortunately, three centuries ago, the possibility of a consummate forensic autopsy did not exist. But we are lucky to possess the next best thing. We have reflections written down by a competent army surgeon after his careful post-mortem examination of the royal body. The German Melchior Neumann (1670-1741), Surgeon-in-ordinary to King Charles, was present at the royal headquarters at Fredriksten, and an eyewitness reports that he examined the King's body within an hour or two after the lethal shot[13]. Some weeks later Neumann embalmed the body before it was carried to Stockholm for the solemn state funeral. Neumann had served as an army surgeon from the beginning of the war until his promotion to Surgeon-in-ordinary in 1916, so he would have had opportunities in abundance to study bullet wounds caused by a variety of weapons.

About 1720 Neumann wrote a memorandum about the King's wound on the inner side of the cover of one of his books. The concluding sentence of which reads: "To God is best known if the bullet came from the fortress or from some other quarter"[14]. Apparently Neumann did not subscribe whole-heartedly to the official version about an enemy bullet. What he really had concluded, he apparently did not dare express in plain language.

Below the memorandum, however, Neumann wrote down the content of a dream that he had on April 14, 1720[15]. In this dream he saw the dead King before him on the embalming table. Then the King regained life, took Neumann's left hand and said: "You shall be the witness to how I was shot." Agonized Neumann asked: "Your Majesty, graciously tell me, was Your Majesty shot from the fortress?" And the King answered: "No, Neumann, one came creeping." *("Es kam einer gekrochen.")* After the account of the dream, Neumann added these fateful words: "Only, Thou, great almighty God [...], Whose Eye sees everything, to Thee it is most well known, and one day all shall be made evident..."

An eyewitness

This assessment and the cautious form in which it is expressed reminds one of the deposition about King Charles's death that was left by Fortification Engineer Bengt Vilhelm Carlberg. This deposition was written "on superior orders", and is generally considered to be detached and as having a high degree of veracity[16]. Carlberg says that he was among the officers standing next to the King at the fateful moment. He remarks: "The place from which this unhappy shot came, whether it was from farther away or from near by, none of us who stood down on the bottom within the breastwork could, [...] with right certainty indicate". (*Stȯllet hwar ifren detta olyckeliga skett kom, om det skiedde fren et lȯngre bort, eller nȯrmare hell, det kunde ingen af oss som stodo legt neder inom brųstwȯrnet, under ett se starckt skiutande utur Canoner och Handtgewȯr, ogųrligen, med rȯtt wisshet utmȯrcka.*) Carlberg emphasizes the heavy firing from cannons and handguns that was going on. He also says that some of those who were working in the new trench would have been able to see the head of His Majesty above the breastwork of the old trench. And he adds: "This circumstance I regard as important and thus to be mentioned." (*Denna omstȯndighet anser jag fųr betydelig at hȯr anmȯrcka.*) In a very careful way

Carlberg thus draws the reader's attention to the fact that it would have been possible to aim at the King from the new trench (or from some place close to it).

Carlberg concludes his narration with the following significant remark: "There could no doubt be a few things more to remark in connection with this most lamentable death, that happened this unfortunate night, but I have chosen to tell nothing but that, to which I, to my regret, myself have been an eyewitness." (*Det kunde wȯl wara ȯnnu et och annat mera at anmȯrka wid detta Hųgsbedrųfweliga dųdzfal, som denna olyckeliga Natt hȯnde, men iag har intet welat berȯtta annat ȯn endast det, hwar til iag, beklageligen, sielf warit et esyna wittne.*)

British historian William Coxe visited Gothenburg a month after Carlberg's death. He reports in his travel book: "The next evidence [about the death of King Charles] is Captain Carlberg, who assisted in conveying the body from the trenches [...] and in repeated conversations with several English merchants, from whom I received the anecdote, constantly asserted that the wound was given by a musket or a pistol."[17] If Carlberg expressed himself in these terms, he must have felt pretty sure that the shot had been fired from close at hand. And certainly Carlberg did not suspect the Norwegian garrison to have used *pistols* at Fredriksten!

A possible instigator of a regicide in 1718

We have seen that King Charles was not hit by an ordinary leaden bullet, nor by an iron bullet from a cannon shell. We also have seen that the reconstructed scenario required a skilled marksman who was experienced in the effects of various types of ammunition and charges. If the killer was a little bit superstitious and did not trust an ordinary bullets to kill the presumably "hard" King Charles, he may have used either a silver bullet or a "magic" bullet of some kind. A silver bullet or a "magic" leaden bullet with a hard envelope and with the right charge would pass through the head and leave no trace of lead in the skull, not even at the expected autopsy by the royal Surgeon-in-ordinary. Thus, there would be no proof that a handgun had been used. The wound would look like a wound from enemy grape shot. Jacketed bullets were, however, not introduced for common use before the middle of the 19th century.

There was just one man in the Swedish Army who possessed the necessary expertise for the assumed scenario. This man was Major-general Baron Carl Cronstedt (1672-1750), Chief of the Artillery and inventor of a number of improvements in the field of armament[18]. He was probably one of Europe's foremost experts on ballistics. He would have realized the advantages of a jacketed bullet, and he would have known the amount of powder needed to make a short range shot hit like a long-range enemy shot. He probably knew rather exactly how much kinetic energy it took for a certain bullet to penetrate a human head and thus to kill the victim infallibly without blowing the head into pieces. If anybody in the Army could arrange an assassination disguised as an enemy shot, it was certainly Baron Cronstedt.

But is it possible that one of King Charles's generals who had served his King loyally throughout the war should suddenly decide to murder his superior, the ***Lord's***

Anointed? In the case of Cronstedt, it is. Voting for the conviction of Goertz in January 1719, Cronstedt focussed on "the deleterious Norwegian war"[19]. Apparently he was one of those who wanted to terminate the campaign and realized that it required the death of the King. Besides, it was not the first time that Cronstedt took a definite position on the war policy. When a Swedish army under Field-marshal Count Magnus Stenbock in 1713 was surrounded and besieged by the enemy, Cronstedt proposed that Stenbock capitulate despite the fact that the latter had strength and resources enough to hold out for several months[20].

Furthermore, this same Baron Cronstedt is the subject of a rumor about regicide confession that has come down to our time in five versions of independent origin[21]. These versions became public in 1768, 1772, 1776, 1847, and 1862 respectively. According to three of the versions Cronstedt confessed, a short time before his death in 1750 that he had shot King Charles. The 1768 version has it that Cronstedt admitted that he had charged the musket intended for the regicide. The shot would then have been fired by a certain Magnus Stierneroos (1685-1762, then a "Corporal of the Bodyguard", eventually promoted to General). The 1862 version says that Cronstedt *loaned* the gun to Stierneroos, who fired the lethal shot. Four of these traditions were passed on within separate families before they became public. The fifth version was picked up by the German Professor A.F. Bьsching, who did not mention his source when he published the story in 1776[22]. In the Bьsching version the repentant regicide is called "a certain *von Cr.*"

An extraordinary missile

Given that King Charles was assassinated and that no trace of lead was found in his skull, what kind of projectile killed him? The regicide would probably not have chosen an iron bullet even if iron bullets of musket calibre had been at hand. Considering the total absence of lead in the skull it is rather probable that he used either a silver (or bronze, brass) bullet or a jacketed leaden bullet. A silver bullet would have been effectual indeed because of its weight. But it would have required a special casting, since massive silver balls were probably not produced for any common purpose. (Nor were bronze or brass balls made for any known purpose.) Leaden balls with brass jackets could, on the other hand, have been produced for two different purposes. The standard bricklayer's plummet of the period probably consisted of a spherical brass envelope filled with lead. In Poland (and perhaps in other parts of Europe) brass-leaden buttons were in use, moulded just as the plummets[23].

Consequently, the odds are in favour of a jacketed leaden missile. Such objects ought to have been available, and with a little bit of luck the regicide-to-be might have found one of a calibre matching a suitable weapon. As a matter of fact, we know that buttons/plummets of calibre 19.5 mm existed. One such specimen is on display in the Varberg museum in Sweden. It cannot be determined with certainty whether it was originally intended to be a plummet or a button. The lead in the button has been analyzed for its content of various isotopes. The composition of isotopes shows that the metal probably comes from some German or Czech mine[24]. Therefore, it may have

landed up in Sweden as a button for a soldier's uniform. Many Swedish soldiers had been abroad, as had their King. The specimen (which we shall assume was a button) may even have belonged to one of King Charles's own uniforms!

Also, the button is connected with a rather remarkable tradition.[25] It was found in 1924 among gravel from a pit in Цхnevalla parish, 50 km SE of Gothenburg. According to a tradition in the parish, an Цхnevalla soldier had brought a uniform button with him when he came home from Fredriksten in 1718. He reportedly told his neighbours that his button was the very projectile that had killed the King. Some time later he felt worried by the possession of the bullet and consulted his vicar. The priest advised him to throw away this root of his anxiety, which he presumably did in a slope of a moraine ridge--actually at the place where the gravel pit was taken up about two centuries later. The soldier's name was given as Nordstierna, a name that has later been verified as belonging to every successive soldier entrusted with a certain holding in Цхnevalla until 1762[26].

According to the same tradition, Nordstierna was on the battlefield not far from the King on the night of November 30 and found the button and picked it up (presumably after having heard it hitting the ground). Admittedly, this story is rather fantastic, but it is not outright impossible. True or not, it guaranteed the preservation of the recovered Цхnevalla button as a museum specimen. Thanks to this, we have now a palpable object of the type and calibre that could have killed King Charles.

The DNA analysis

In June 2002, about five years after the above was written, the year-long DNA analysis of the Цхnevalla button was finally completed. Marie Allen, Doctor of Medical Genetics at the Uppsala University, had been able to find DNA fragments from two persons on the button. One person had left fragments in the joint between the two brass shells and at the loop, another on the smooth brass surface. The former fragments matched part of the DNA found in the blood on King Charles's gloves. One percent of all Swedes have this same fragment in their DNA. Obviously, normal fingering of a tiny relic would hardly cause tissue fragments to be squeezed into dents on an otherwise smooth surface. The place where the glove blood type DNA was found indicates that the button may have received these fragments in connection with stronger forces than just clasping or pinching. It is also noteworthy that no more than two persons had left detectable traces on the button - considering the number of people who are likely to have handled it. In case the button was in fact the bullet that killed the King, we must assume that the assassin also chose his weapon with care, perhaps a hunting gun or a worn musket of somewhat enlarged calibre.

Conclusion

Given the factual and circumstantial evidence noted here, how can Grenander's and From's statements that it has been proved that Charles XII was felled by an enemy shot be sustained? How could anybody prove such a thing under the circumstances? The King was not hit at an angle from above, which would have

indicated an enemy mortar. Nor was he hit by a cannon ball. Nor was he shot straight in his face. For all other types of hit, the effects of a 19 mm bullet from a flat-shooting enemy weapon or even from a ricocheting grape shot could be fairly well imitated by an artful assassin. Therefore, the possibility to prove that King Charles was struck by enemy fire has never existed.

However, because the assassin actually achieved only a faulty imitation of an enemy shot, it is possible to prove that the King was murdered. The experienced soldiers and officers on the spot should have been aware of these faults. Many of them said as much, either openly or in a roundabout way, e.g. Melchior Neumann, Bengt Carlberg, the soldier Nordstierna, Baron Carl Gustaf Dьcker (1663-1732)[27] and Count Hans Henrik von Lieven Jr. (1704-1781). Dьcker gave his opinion in 1730, and Lieven, who had been a page to the king, revealed his thoughts in 1774 before Sir Nathanael Wraxhall[28]. The instigator of the crime apparently estimated that even a flawed imitation would do, that it would suffice to let the regicide(s) pass with impunity, exposing Goertz to liquidation and paving the way for Count Frederick to assume the Throne. As long as Frederick was alive, and sovereign of Sweden, an impartial forensic investigation of the death of King Charles would have been out of the question. When Frederick died in 1751, more than 32 years after the event, the question of guilt would have already lost most of its interest.

Today, it is definitely too late to determine the identity of the culprit with any certainty. Even if there is much circumstantial evidence pointing at Cronstedt and Stierneroos, there are other suspects as well. At an early stage suspicion was directed towards the French Aide-de-camp-General Andrй Sicre, who served as a secretary to Count Frederick. Sicre even "confessed" the assassination during a sudden fit of delirium. After regaining his health, he retracted the confession. Moreover, one cannot rule out the possibility of a conspiracy behind the regicide.

There is, as a matter of fact, a single source hinting at the existence of a conspiracy involving Count Frederick. The task allotted to Sicre was apparently a minor one--if the conspiracy existed. The source referred to is a narrative by Major-General Baron Schering Rosenhane (1685-1738). Taken at face value, it sheds some light on Sicre's and Count Frederick's behaviour on November 30, 1718. Rosenhane had been an Aide-de-camp-General to Count Frederick together with Sicre and he had stayed with the Count throughout the night of November 30. He reported that Count Frederick was extremely nervous all the afternoon, and that about eight o'clock he sent Sicre to the King's quarters. Only when Sicre returned about eleven o'clock with the news of Charles's death, did Count Frederick regain his composure[29]. One must treat Rosenhane's narrative with care, though, since it was written down about 35 years after his death. Also, Rosenhane's truthfulness cannot be established.

This much is certain: Count Frederick was the one who really profited from the regicide and the seizing of Baron Goertz. There were in November 1718, two pretenders to the throne on a par with each other. Beside Charles's sister, Ulrica Eleonora (Frederick's consort), there was Charles's nephew, Duke Charles Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp (1700-1739). Baron Goertz was suspected to be on the point of

proclaiming the Duke as successor to the throne--possibly in connection with a betrothal between the Duke and the daughter of Czar Peter. This scheme, if it existed, was utterly thwarted by the regicide. Duke Charles Frederick left Sweden and looked after his interests from abroad. He died before the throne of Sweden became vacant anew. Count Frederick acquired the crown of Sweden but he had to give up substantial parts of its territory in the peace treaty that eventually followed. To secure his succession, he had to sacrifice the most skilled negotiator that had served any King of Sweden, the man who might have been able to get better peace terms. Did he perhaps sacrifice his own brother-in-law as well?

References

1) The present article is based largely on the licentiate dissertation by Rolf Uppstrцm, *Mysteriet Karl XII:s dцd,* Gцteborg 1994 (’The mystery of the death of Charles XII’). Before this appeared, the present writer had arrived independently at the same conclusions as those presented in the treatise. Since the two of us had treated the subject a little bit differently, our studies supplement each other. Because the thesis is available only in Swedish, Rolf Uppstrцm and I have agreed that I should render surveys of the crucial results of both our studies to the international public. I have therefore published two articles with essentially the same content as the above, one in *Forensic ScienceInternational,* Vol. 96, p. 75, and the other in *Scandinavian Studies,* Vol. 71, p. 81.

2) Uppstrцm, op. cit., p. 25-34.

3) *Nationalencyklopedin*, Vol. 10, Нцгандs 1993, p. 447.

4) Gunnar Grenander, "Karl XII:s dцd. Ett цgonvittnes berдttelse bekrдftas". *Meddelande XXXXVIII Armйmusйum* 1988, p. 65-80.

5) With a few exceptions, the narrative sources will be passed over in the present paper. These sources have been thoroughly treated by Uppstrцm, p. 25-78, and found to be of little value (except for one). The decisive argumentation should, of course, be based on physical remains and documents drawn up for independent purposes, whenever possible. Fortunately, this type of evidence is available and offers a solution to the death of Charles XII that is beyond reasonable doubt.

6) C.O. Munthe, *Frederikshalds og Frederikstens historie indtil 1720,* Kristiania 1906, p. 765. See also *Halden, Festningen og byen,* Oslo 1963, p. 121.

7) Gustaf Hultkvist, "Skottet vid Fredrikshald". *Svensk Tidskrift* 1937.

8) Ibid. p. 637, 641.

9) Ibid. p. 625.

10) Sam Clason, "Baneserets vittnesbцrd om kulan". *Carl XII:s dцd,* Stockholm 1940, p. 354.

11) Ibid., p. 142-145.

12) Ibid., p. 151.

13) Samuel Bring, "Bidrag till fregan om Karl XII:s dцd", *Karolinskafцrbundets ersbok* 1920, p. 222-237.

14) *Historiska handlingar*, part IV, Stockholm 1864, p.190.

15) Ibid., p. 191.

16) Bring, loc. cit., Weibull, Lauritz, "Carl XII:s dцd", *Scandia* 1929.

17) William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark,* vol. III, London 1790, p. 358

18) *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon,* vol. 9, Stockholm 1931, p. 273.

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