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# Early Modern Morals

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## Napoleon in Central Finland

### The Fashion of Giving Children Rulers' Names

When I was reading the sources for my research on the history of naming practices some years ago, I realized there was a famous forename given to a baby in rural Central Finland in the early nineteenth century: "Napoleon". The son of the acting preacher of Karstula parish, Carl Gustaf Björklund, was baptized with the names "Napoleon Styrbjörn". However, none of the other rural children were immediately given the same name, although the local children had at least from the eighteenth century on already been given numerous royal names, such as the Swedish "Lovisa", "Ulrica" and "Gustaf". Even so, forenames of the Russian imperial family of the House of Romanov, such as "Alexander", "Nicholas" or "Olga", did not become especially popular in the area studied except during a short period at the end of the nineteenth century. Of course, some Finnish boys had for example been named Alexander already during the age of Swedish rule, so these kinds of names were not necessarily regarded as distinctively Russian names by rural people, but rather as hereditary forenames handed down in their own families from their forefathers.

Giving rural children the names of members of royal or imperial families was generally quite rare. For the people of the Finnish countryside, the most important and most enduring naming practice was to christen their children with names inherited from their own family members. Over the centuries, these came to form an important part of the family and kin identity. This can be seen by analyzing large collective biographical databases and employing a genealogical approach. Such an approach is essential in studying the name choices of rural

## Early Modern Morals

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people (who, until to the end of the nineteenth century, were mainly illiterate). Royal families have their own naming traditions, which are also based on the inherited forenames of relatives, and royal family trees have over the centuries been studied carefully. On the other hand, by using the genealogical method we can elucidate some of the reasons behind the name choices of rural people, which would otherwise be impossible to ascertain since there exist no autobiographical sources to shed light on the matter.

Some of the rural parents were bolder than others in adopting the naming fashions of their time or names which were otherwise unknown and foreign to their forefathers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the name "Napoleon", a very rare forename in Finnish naming culture, was given again to boys in northern Central Finland. For example, the son of a farmer in Kivijärvi was pompously named "Jeeli Arthur Napoleon". It would seem that his name was carefully planned: Jeeli, i.e. the Joel of the Old Testament, King Arthur and Napoleon, the Emperor of France. When the boy was baptized, it was still rare for a farmer's son to get three forenames. The name was a symbol of the mighty man his parents hoped he would grow into as an adult. Why did the uneducated name-givers, who were mainly Finnish-speaking, give these royal and imperial names to their children instead of the traditional names of their families that were usually chosen? What were these name-givers of the remote countryside actually thinking of? Certainly, they gave true consideration to the choice of their children's names and in doing so also actively developed the naming cultures of their local communities.

The choice of a ruler's name for a child indicates not only a desire to follow the naming trends of the time and the wish to give a child a fine name after a royal model, but also the parents' trust in and respect for the regime and the ruling family. In Nordic society, for the subjects the person and name of the monarch

had for centuries symbolized the legal authority of the crown and represented the whole realm. Moreover, the traditional freedom of the peasants was dependent above all on the justice of the monarch on the one hand and on the subjects' loyal obedience to the ruler on the other. For this reason, it is very understandable that the forenames of former Swedish rulers continued for a long time to be used in the Finnish countryside, although Finland was annexed to the Russian Empire in 1809 as a consequence of war and became an independent state in 1917.

The long history of a family's inherited names may sometimes be challenging for the parents when choosing a name for their baby; this act is always a kind of demonstration of their desire to respect their ancestors and an indication of what they regard as significant with regard to their child's future and as suitable to symbolize his or her nature. Whatever name the parents choose, it will not always be only admired and indeed may be criticized by relatives, friends or neighbours who would also have wished to influence the decision. This was also the case in earlier centuries, when traditions were usually valued more than rare or unique names. The Swedish journalist and author of several popular books on Swedish history, Herman Lindqvist, immediately commented on the choice of the names given to the future heir to the Swedish throne, Princess Estelle Silvia Ewa Mary, born in February 2012, saying that they were unsuitable for a future queen. He considered that the first name, given after the forename of the American wife of Count Folke Bernadotte (who was related to the Swedish royal family), was contrary to the royal tradition. He also considered that Ewa was not a royal name, and that Mary should be in the more Swedish form "Maria". Before the new heir to the throne was born, it was presumed that at least one name connected to the earlier history of the House of Bernadotte, such as "Désirée" or "Oscar", would be chosen.

## Early Modern Morals

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On the other hand, there is also something very traditional in this choice of names: the first-born princess was named after both her grandmothers. She also has the name of her probable godmother, Mary, Crown Princess of Denmark. However, "Estelle" is a new and fresh addition to the nomenclature of the Swedish royal family. In February 2012, before the birth of the Swedish princess, for example in Finland only 49 girls born after 1999 received the name "Estelle" (Finland's Population Register Centre, Name Service, 20/2/2012, Statistics of Forenames: Estelle, <http://verkkopalvelu.vrk.fi/nimipalvelu>). The Finnish media and the people were extremely interested in the news of the birth and the choice of a name for the new princess. It is very likely that numerous girls born soon after Princess Estelle will be given her name, not only in Sweden, but also in the other Nordic countries. In this way, the 21st-century Swedish court will become an important onomastic trendsetter, as its predecessors were in earlier centuries. The interest in royal forenames shows that the long-term mentalities attached to naming practices change only slowly. But when they do, there is always something fashionably rebellious in the air – just as in the days of Napoleon.

### References:

Kotilainen, Sofia, *The Genealogy of Personal Names: towards a more productive method in historical onomastics*. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1/2011 (36), 44–64.

For more on the names of the royal families of Sweden and Russia and their influence on rural Finnish naming practices, see:

Kotilainen, Sofia, *Namngivningspraxis och attityder: val av kungliga och kejserliga förnamn hos den finskspråkiga allmogen efter år 1809*". – *Folkmålsstudier* 47, *Språket i historien – historien i språket*. Meddelanden från Föreningen för nordisk filologi. Helsingfors 2009, 27–44.

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## Healing and the Concepts of Illness in Early Modern Finland

The research project aims to study early modern conceptions of illness, health, and healing. I will also analyse the relation between these concepts and morality; how moral evaluation influenced the diagnosis of an illness on the one hand and the relationship between healer and patient on the other. My study concentrates on dealings between individuals and thus proceeds from the occasional or case-specific to generalisations.

I am not interested in studying illness as a physical or bio-medical phenomenon, but rather as one that is culturally and individually defined and experienced. I argue that because knowledge and reality are always cultural and social constructions, many real lives can exist simultaneously. This reality is constructed through the narratives or stories people use to structure and analyse their own experiences and everyday lives, to engage in interaction and to create and reinforce significant normative structures. From this point of view, illnesses were not only psycho-physical states or objects of medical diagnosis, they were also subjects for narratives or stories through which people tried to understand what had caused their illness, and why it was happening to them. Here personal experiences and an understanding of one's life situation intertwined.

The narratives related to diseases also expressed the morality and the social life of a community. It was primarily a patient's way of life that was evaluated. Questions concerning the healers' morality were more complicated, and they

## Early Modern Morals

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were connected to their ability to offer a culturally and socially acceptable explanation for an illness on the one hand and their ability to conduct the process of healing to a satisfactory end for the patient on the other.