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# “OPTIME EDUCATUS”:

## Book historical perspectives on Prince Sigismund’s education in sixteenth-century Sweden



By Susanna Niiranen\*

*The article analyses some aspects of writing in Prince Sigismund Vasa’s (1566-1632) education in the latter half of sixteenth-century Sweden. The focus is on the rare, hand-written material of his youth, which reflects the educational ideals, practices and strategies in the inter-confessional Jagiellon–Vasa family and at their court(s) in the context of a complex political situation. One example is young Sigismund’s salutation to the Pope included in her mother’s, Catherine Jagiellon’s (1526-1583), letter. In addition, two letters held at the Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), Stockholm, categorized as “royal autographs” are explored and transcribed for the first time.*

### Introduction

Prince Sigismund was born in 1566 to Duke John Vasa of Finland (1537–92) and Duchess Catherine Jagiellon (1526–83) in Gripsholm Castle, Sweden, where his parents were kept prisoners by John’s brother, King Eric XIV (1533–77). After a fratricidal power game, the situation overturned in 1568, when Eric XIV was dethroned and thrown to jail, whilst John was crowned the new king of Sweden as John III. Sigismund’s mother, Catherine, descendant of the Polish–Lithuanian dynasty of the Jagiellons and the Italian Sforzas, became the Roman Catholic queen consort of a recently reformed Lutheran country, which, along with the fact that Sigismund received a Catholic education, had large-scale, transformational long-term consequences on the politics of the region of the Baltic sea.

This article analyses Prince Sigismund’s education in the context of this complex political and confessional situation. The focus is on book-historical evidence, which has been previously underexplored and which may shed new light on the educational ideals, practices and strategies in the royal Jagiellon–Vasa family and at their court(s) in the latter half of sixteenth-century Sweden. Two letters held in the Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), Stockholm, categorized as “royal autographs” are explored and transcribed for the first time.

### Educational family background

Sigismund’s modern Swedish biographer, Stefan Östergren, has stated that “the young prince’s [Sigismund’s] schooling is not particularly well known”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many details are not discernible because of the lack of sources, but the general view may be completed by combining existing knowledge and exploring some new sources (see below). It is often repeated that his parents were well educated compared to other contemporary royal and princely persons. John (as well as Eric and their other siblings) received a first-class international humanist education, which their father Gustavus Vasa considered seminal for the new ruling dynasty of the Vasas. Apparently, John had some talent for and interest in foreign languages, which is emphasised in contemporary sources.<sup>2</sup> Rather obviously, Catherine would have spoken Polish to her Polish retinue and the children. Whether she used German, Italian, Swedish, Polish or Latin with John and other people at the Swedish court is more or less enlightened guesswork. The book collection that Duke John took to Gripsholm from Finland upon his imprisonment contained the essentials of various fields of intellectual and religious literature typical of a Renaissance humanist library, mostly in Latin but also in German and English, as well as a New Testament in Finnish and a Hebrew dictionary. As for Duchess Catherine, only her missals and prayer books, “papistiska böcker” (papist books), are mentioned in the inventories, which does not necessarily mean that she did not read any other books.<sup>3</sup>

Catherine’s mother, Bona Sforza (c. 1494–1557), had been surrounded by leading humanist scholars and had received private teaching from such individuals as Crisostomo Colonna (1455–1528), who had taught her to read and write “in the most learned way”. According to Colonna, she read the works of Roman authors such as Vergil and Cicero various epigrams and a

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<sup>1</sup> “Den unge prinsens skolning är inte särskilt väl känd”, Östergren 2005, 24.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the accounts of John’s good spoken Latin by William Cecil, state secretary to Elizabeth I of England, and the Frenchman Hubertus Langetus, during the duke’s visit to England in view of marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and John’s brother Eric in 1559–60, Ericson 2004, 63, 70; Ragauskienė 2014, 102–119.

<sup>3</sup> Several versions of Duke John’s and Duchess Catherine’s inventories from the year 1563 are included in Stockholm, Slottsarkivet, Kungliga och furstliga personers enskilda egendom 3, 1556–1594.

lot of Italian literature, including the writings of Petrarch that she knew by heart.<sup>4</sup> Whilst visiting young Bona and her mother Isabella of Naples at the Milanese court for marriage negotiations with Sigismund I “the Old” (1467–1548), Polish envoys reported on Bona’s good education (together with her remarkable dancing skills) as an asset for a future queen.<sup>5</sup> From her own experience of marrying the King of Poland, Bona knew that education helped find an influential spouse and establish a prominent position at the court. Bona and Sigismund I ensured that the youngest princesses, Anna (1523–1596) and Catherine, received a proper education, although probably not as thorough as that of their elder siblings, Isabella (1519–1559), Sigismund Augustus (1520–1572) and Sophia (1522–1575).<sup>6</sup> Both Sigismund Augustus and Sophia put together remarkable libraries. As a result of the Italian entourage of their mother, the royal children were fluent not only in Polish but also in Italian. In international communication, they used Latin and Italian, probably some German as well. With this cultural background in addition to John III’s political ambitions regarding his only legitimate son, Sigismund’s education was obviously taken very seriously by both his parents.

As education is never merely an individual choice (and even less in sixteenth-century royal families) but incorporates societal ideologies and cultural values, European Christian ideas of educating a prince guided educational measures in practice. Erasmus’ *Institutio principis Christiani* (1516) was one of the most influential works of advice for princes. Several other works, such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (written in 1519, published in 1532), discussed the education and virtues of rulers, but their reception and use in the education of contemporary princes are not quite clear or evident. In sixteenth-century Poland – exchanging intensively with Italian humanists, thanks to Queen Bona and her contacts, as well as to pre-existing cultural and economic connections with Italy and the rest of Europe – the topic was touched upon in many treatises concerned with more general matters.<sup>7</sup> The most important pedagogical work was Erazm Glicznier’s (Erasmus Glitznerus) *Books about children’s upbringing* (1558).<sup>8</sup> One of his key principles was the teacher being a good example for the young. He advocated this method because a child was considered to have the natural tendency to imitate what they

<sup>4</sup> Bogucka 1989, 38; Cioffari 1987, 71–74.

<sup>5</sup> Przewdzicki I 1868, 59.

<sup>6</sup> Bogucka 1989, 143.

<sup>7</sup> Mikołaj Rej (1505–1569), Martin Kromer (Marcin Kromer, 1512–1589), Łukasz Górnicki (1527–1603) and Sebastian Petrycy (1554–1626), just to name a few Polish authors writing on educational matters.

<sup>8</sup> Glicznier 1558; I am grateful to Dr Ewa Cybulska-Bohuszewicz for pointing out Glicznier’s significance for Poland.

experience. That is why education at home was crucial. The father, in particular, was to be a decisive influence on his children through example.<sup>9</sup> Introducing these ideas in Poland, Gliczner followed earlier humanists, such as Leon Battista Alberti, who, in his treatise *Della famiglia* (1433–1440), had suggested that the natural place for education was the home and who had underlined the importance of the father in the educational process.<sup>10</sup> Besides Christian values and pedagogical issues, classical ideals, which interested humanists, included the importance of public and private virtue, Latin grammar, techniques of rhetoric, history, conventions in literature and poetry, and moral philosophy. In Sweden, Count *Peter Brahe* the Elder (1520–1590) wrote the manual *Oeconomia eller Hushållsbok för ungt adelsfolk* (Household book for young nobles) in 1581. He is said to have been “the leading brain” behind the first state budgets under John III.<sup>11</sup> He had studied at German universities and suggested in *Oeconomia* that young nobles should improve the Christian ideals by reading Philip Melanchthon, and enhance their Latin skills by reading Cicero, Quintilian and Erasmus; however, Brahe’s attitude towards the humanistic canon of authors was practical, or at least more instrumental, compared with that of the previously mentioned educational writers.<sup>12</sup> Much emphasis was put on economy and civil service, the latter suffering from the lack of trained professionals in Sweden. Just as in Poland and Russia, all high offices in Sweden belonged to nobility, but all office holders were not educated, capable and willing enough to work in administrative offices. With only one university (the University of Uppsala, established in 1477), the situation was different from that of Central and Southern Europe where the university network was relatively dense and university education was more readily at hand.<sup>13</sup> Brahe’s work spread initially in small circles until it was printed in 1677.<sup>14</sup>

### Early preceptors

During his early childhood, Sigismund spent time at his mother’s court. It seems that Catherine favoured Polish *familiares* until the end of her life in Sweden, although her court was characteristically international, as early

<sup>9</sup> Roszak 2010, 458.

<sup>10</sup> Alberti 1908, 55, 72, and 161.

<sup>11</sup> Sandelin 1991, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Brahe 1971; also see Eriksson 2008; Melanchthon’s *Loci communes*, of which Duke John had a copy in his library, was an important textbook in the Lutheran system of education; also see *Krēsliņš* 1992, 111–115; *Pade* 2020, 47–62.

<sup>13</sup> Hakanen & Koskinen 2017, 38.

<sup>14</sup> According to Ohlson, *Oeconomia*’s principles guided the teaching of the heir apparent and the teaching at the royal court, Ohlson 1941, 9.

modern courts usually were.<sup>15</sup> The younger sister, Anna, was born in 1568 just after the parents’ release from prison. Thanks to John III’s intense work to promote his son’s hereditary claim to the Swedish throne, Sigismund became the Crown Prince of Sweden at the age of three in 1569. According to the marriage contract, Catherine was allowed to raise her children as Roman Catholics,<sup>16</sup> which she did. Anna later converted to Protestantism. Catherine’s Polish handmaid and confidant named Doska<sup>17</sup> was responsible for nursing the children; in a letter she told that she slept in the same room as the children. In the same letter, Doska describes Sigismund as follows: although they play and run a race, Sigismund remains attentive to Doska, a person of short stature.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the basis of the prince’s Polish skills was grounded in his early childhood spent in the company of his mother and her Polish courtiers. It is plausible that Catherine and her Italian courtiers also taught Italian, Catherine’s second mother tongue, to the children. While the father had a central position as an early modern *pater familias* in control of the intellectual education of their children, the mother assumed the responsibility for her children’s religious and moral instruction.<sup>19</sup> In international cross-confessional royal families, such as the family of Catherine Jagiellon and John III Vasa, gendered borderlines were not so clear-cut; the mother was involved in teaching languages (at least orally), and the father engaged in religious instruction, as it was also a decisive political matter in his plans for his son’s future.

Around 1571, when Sigismund was five years old, it was time to employ an official preceptor. The formal education of noble children began at this age.<sup>20</sup> According to *Oeconomia* and other contemporary manuals of education of nobles, the choice of a preceptor for one’s own children was strategic. Sigismund’s first preceptor was Nicolaus Mylonius (*fl.* 1570–1580s), Catherine’s chaplain, also known as “theologus germanus”, although he was probably originally from the Netherlands. However, the contract was rescinded at the request of the Estates because of Mylonius being a Catholic. He is known to have worked actively with Jesuits.<sup>21</sup> The following preceptor

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<sup>15</sup> On the international counsellors at John’s and Catherine’s court, see Niiranen 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Copy of the marriage contract, Stockholm, Riksarkivet, K 73, Svenska drottningar under 1500-talet; Katarina Jagellonica (microfilm).

<sup>17</sup> On Doska’s position at Catherine’s court, see Niiranen 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Wester 1909, 120.

<sup>19</sup> Heller 2011, 19.

<sup>20</sup> In the seventeenth century, the noble Gyldenstolpe brothers began their Latin letter writing exercises around the age of five, Sarasti-Wilenius 2015, 46]

<sup>21</sup> Ohlson 1941, 3; Mylonius may have contributed to the Swedish translation and printing of Petrus Canisius’ (1521–1597) important Catholic work, *Institutiones christianae pietatis seu parvus catechismus catholicorum* (1561), officially translated into Swedish as

was a proper Swedish protestant, Nils Blasii Rasch/Rask, educated in Rostock and Greifswald. He taught Sigismund around 1573–1575. There is no information on why he did not remain longer in that position. Nevertheless, his relationship with the family seemed unproblematic; later, he was ennobled. Rask stayed at Sigismund's Polish court and remained a firm supporter until the end of his life (Danzig, 1598 or 1599).<sup>22</sup>

The next and most long-standing (c.1575–c.1584) preceptor was Arnold Grothusen, Nils Rask's brother-in-law who belonged to a Livonian (originally Westphalian) noble family and was educated in Rostock just as Rask was. In the German-language area, the network of Lutheran clergymen and scholars centred around the universities of Rostock, Jena, Königsberg (Russian Kaliningrad) and Helmstedt, which suggests that Grothusen was Lutheran rather than Catholic. Though there is no clear evidence on his religion in available sources at least officially he had to be a Lutheran. Possible sympathies are a question that comes to mind when investigating the central individuals involved. Firstly, John III is known to have tried to balance Catholics and Lutherans both religiously and politically. Secondly, it was none other than Pontus de la Gardie (1520–1585, Languedoc-born court master to Catherine Jagiellon and court envoy, later military commander) who was in charge of inviting Grothusen to the post and arranging his trip to Stockholm. Thirdly, Grothusen's daughter Lucia (1576–1647) was married to Swedish historian Johannes Messenius (1579–1636). Messenius, an alumnus of Braunsberg (Polish Braniewo) Jesuit College, and *imprisoned* for conspiring with Catholics (Sigismund and the Jesuits) against the Swedish crown. Or perhaps John III, with the help of Nils Rask and Pontus de la Gardie, succeeded in finding in Grothusen a preceptor who was a Lutheran but not a fervent anti-Catholic. The latter would have been an odd choice for a Catholic prince. In his 1574 letter to Sigismund, the Polish Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius (Polish Stanisław Hozjusz, 1504–1579) mentions sending religious books to Sigismund and Anna "to be often read with their preceptor" and to be explained to the children so that they would stay loyal to their mother's religion.<sup>23</sup> Hosius served as tutor to Sigismund II Augustus and his sisters during their childhood in Poland.

John worked on reforms within the Lutheran Church. These reform plans were also reported to the Pope, even though the king was the head of the

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*En liten catechismus eller kort summe på then rette christelighe och catholiske troo* known as *Katolikernas lilla katekes* in 1579. The translation was a part of the Counter-Reformation movement in Scandinavia; also see Possevino 1583.

<sup>22</sup> The last Catholic member of the Grothusen family was Johann Grothusen (d. 1527), Ohlson 1941, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Card. Hosius to Sigismund, 22 Jan 1574, Hosius 1584, 380.

Swedish Church. John asked the Pope to grant him some dispensations that would ease the emergence of an irenic Church in Sweden or permit him, according to certain interpretations, to pave the way for a re-introduction of Catholicism in his realm. The information travelled to the Papal Curia most often in Catherine’s letters. The three main requests to be found in the correspondence between the queen of Sweden and the Pope in the 1570s were to grant permission for Mass to be said in the vernacular, for the marriage rights of the clergy to be continued and for the practice of *communio sub utraque specie*, regarded as heretical by the Catholic Church, to be allowed. Initially, she denied having received communion *sub utraque*, but later admitted to it, asking for absolution. There were many other requests, but perhaps these three were deemed the most urgent, as they were repeated in several letters. The Pope was not responsive, although Catherine explained that these reforms were the best way to get the Swedes to be receptive to Catholicism.

Associated with this correspondence, a letter to the Pope (plate 1) from Catherine also includes Prince Sigismund’s salutation and signature.<sup>24</sup> “[...] obediens filius Sigimundus Dei Gratia Regnorum Sueciae Gothorum Wandalorumq(ue) Princeps haereditarius et Dux Finlandiae” ([...] obedient son Sigismund by the Grace of God hereditary Prince of the Kingdoms of Sweden, Goths and Wends and Duke of Finland.) The last digit of the year is not entirely visible, but the year is either 1575 or 1576, when Sigismund was nine or ten years old. However, for some reason, he was not able to show his writing skills to the Pope. The handwriting in the salutation part is different from the body of the letter, written in black ink by one of the court secretaries and signed by Catherine, “Catharina R(egina)”. Sigismund’s salutation and signature in brown ink represent not a child’s (however skilled he might be) handwriting but that of a professional’s sloping humanist cursive, with the Germanic habit of adding a short curvy line above the letter *u* (*U-Bogen* in German) to distinguish it from the letter *n*. Due to the intense intellectual and professional connections with German-language areas, the usage of *U-Bogen* was widespread in sixteenth-century Sweden. Sigismund, however, did not use it. I have not been able to trace any of Arnold Grothusen’s handwritten documents to compare it with, but it is possible that the salutation to the Pope is in Arnold’s hand. Apparently, the family, not relying on the excellence of the young prince’s own hand, wanted to ensure a good impression on the recipient. They had their reasons, not least Bona’s inheritance, the “Neapolitan sums”, which belonged partly to Catherine. Since the Duchy of

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Jagiellon to the Pope, 30 Apr 1575 or 1576, Vatican City, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, Nunz. Germania 95, f. 371.



Bari was incorporated into the Spanish Crown, the Jagiellons tried to recover the money through Philip II and the Pope.<sup>25</sup>

### Swedish letters on practical matters

At the Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet), there are two letters from the years 1579<sup>26</sup> and 1582.<sup>27</sup> Both were written in Swedish and signed by young Sigismund. They are categorized as “royal autographs” (“kungliga autografer”) in the catalogue. The first letter (plate 2) pertains to some utensils for Catherine Jagiellon’s (under) stable master, while the second one (plate 3) concerns an order of wine. Catherine was ill at the time and was to die the following year. While learning manifold practicalities and business affairs related to court life, Sigismund might have been helping her mother, with whom he had a close relationship. The first letter (1579) is written in a Gothic hand, whereas the second one (1582) shows a humanist cursive one. It is highly improbable that they should have been written by the same person. Moreover, the hand of the signature of either letter would not seem to be identical with the text hand. While it is possible that Sigismund had learned the Gothic script in addition to the humanist one, the Gothic text hand would seem very experienced indeed for a 13-year-old boy, and it clearly differs from that of the signature. His tendency to decorate the initial *S* of his name’s starting and ending points with serifs is already recognizable in this example. The use of serifs in the letter *s* occurs throughout his life, even at a later age, but is not a standard in his signature.<sup>28</sup>

Though the humanist hand of the second letter (plate 3) is more similar to Sigismund’s signature, it is not necessarily in his hand either. His minuscule *g* has a rather large, characteristic left-inclined lower loop.<sup>29</sup> It resembles the minuscule *g* in the main body of the epistle, e.g. in *förstlig*, *gunsteligen*,

<sup>25</sup> Biaudet 1900, iii-vi

<sup>26</sup> Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Stafsundsarkivet, Kungliga autografer SE/RA/720807/11/I/3, 183.

<sup>27</sup> Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Stafsundsarkivet, Kungliga autografer SE/RA/720807/11/I/3, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g. the signatures from the years 1597, Vilnius, Vilniaus Universiteto Biblioteka, Skaitmeninės kolekcijos, digitalised autograph collection

[https://kolekcijos.biblioteka.vu.lt/islandora/object/atmintis:VUB01\\_000367943#00001](https://kolekcijos.biblioteka.vu.lt/islandora/object/atmintis:VUB01_000367943#00001), 2 January 2022, and 1611, Buffalo, Buffalo University Library, Polish Documents, Polish Royal Documents, Sigismund III Vasa <https://library.buffalo.edu/polish-room/img/sokfront.gif>, 1 January 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Later on, it is often upright, e.g. in a letter from the year 1620, when Sigismund was 54, with all the other characteristics being identical to earlier instances, , Vilnius, Vilniaus Universiteto Biblioteka, VUB01\_368697; cf. the signed document from the year 1611, Polish Documents, Polish Royal Documents, Sigismund III Vasa <https://library.buffalo.edu/polish-room/img/sokfront.gif>, 1 January 2022.

*alwarligen, givit, begerendes and behagelig*. As for the other individual letters, *i*, *m* and *n* are virtually identical in the text and the signature. In *Sigismundus* the first *u* is more angular than the second one. In the text, the angular variant only occurs in *datum*. In the signature, Sigismund’s *d* has an open bowl and a high ascender. However, if we compare this signature with his other signatures, a *d* with an open bowl is not most frequent.<sup>30</sup> In the main body of the epistle, the form of letter *d* varies, ranging from one with an oblique, low ascender (like in the word *den*) to one with an upright, tallish ascender (*ted*, *ider*) and even to a variant resembling a *b* (*b/datum*). These characteristics may of course be due to his young age. It is also common knowledge that the handwriting of a person may vary. Rather, a signature which remains identical from document to document raises questions. Signatures change with time depending on the pen, position and speed of writing, routine, age as well as physical and mental states. Variation notwithstanding, certain characteristics are consistent throughout the long series of Sigismund’s signatures preserved in a significant number of documents at various archives.<sup>31</sup>

### Letter 1

1 Må du wetha Anders Larsson ath theth äfr<sup>32</sup> wår wilie och befallningh  
 2 att du skall lätha wår.<sup>33</sup> frumors wnderstalmester bekomma fjira alnar  
 3 dubelt stål till wår egen tienare och beridere Mårten tattars behoff hwil-  
 4 keth wij honom efftherlåthit haffwa.  
 Sigismundus Dux Finlandiae

1 May you know, Anders Larsson, that it is our will and command  
 2 that you will let our mother’s understablemaster have four alns of  
 3 double steal to our own servant and rider Mårten Tattars’ need, which  
 4 we have left to him.  
 Sigismund, Duke of Finland

### Letter 2

1 Må I wethe Hans klawijr att wij aff förstligis ynnest och Nåde  
 2 hafue skencht och giuit wor trokamertienere Oloff Ganimell

<sup>30</sup> See the signature from the year 1597, Vilnius, Vilniaus universiteto biblioteka, Skaitmeninės kolekcijos, digitalised autograph collection,

[https://kolekcijos.biblioteka.vu.lt/islandora/object/atmintis:VUB01\\_000367308#00001](https://kolekcijos.biblioteka.vu.lt/islandora/object/atmintis:VUB01_000367308#00001),

1 January 2022.

<sup>31</sup> On medieval and early modern signatures, see Fraenkel 1992 and Groebner 2004, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> *Äfr* or *äsr*.

<sup>33</sup> Maybe a full stop (unclear).

3 trij åmer renst wijn, och ectt oxehwud rött och blancht franst  
4 wijn,<sup>34</sup> befale Ider forthenskul gunsteligen och alwarligen att I låte  
5 förde vår tienere deth bekomme när han ted begerendes Warder.  
6 görendes här meds ted oss behageligt är, och skall samme wijn bliue  
7 askordett utj accisen der I wethe Ider efterrette datum Upsala den  
8 9 Septemb(er) Anno 82  
Sigismundus P(rinceps) P(oloniae) H(aereditarius) R(egni) S(ueciae)

1 /May you be informed, Hans Klawijr, that we of princely favour and grace  
2 have offered and given to our trusted valet Oloff Ganimell  
3 three awms of Rhenish wine and one hogshead of red and white French  
4 wine, we command for that reason graciously and seriously that you let  
5 our servant have it when he requests it,  
6 Doing so what we are comfortable with, and the same wine will be  
7 paid after the contract, as agreed. Given at Uppsala on  
8 9 September in the year 82  
Sigismundus Prince of Poland, Hereditary Prince of the Realm of  
Sweden

Although both letters can theoretically be writing exercises by the young prince, it is possible that they have been written by the Swedish-speaking court secretaries, who were numerous at the time, and Sigismund had only signed them. What is certain is that Sigismund's signature shows remarkably little variation over the years. In 1630, at the age of 64, the morphology of his signature is virtually identical to the signatures of his youth.<sup>35</sup> As a skilful amateur painter, goldsmith and cutter of precious stones, he was used to holding not only a pen but a paintbrush and other tools.

### Multicultural, humanist and steady-handed

As a member of a multicultural, cross-confessional royal family, Sigismund received an education with a strong international emphasis. When the heir apparent was seven, John III planned to marry him to a Habsburg princess, "to one of the emperor's daughters".<sup>36</sup> At the same time, John was a candidate for the Polish throne, representing underaged Sigismund.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it was quite natural that language skills and diplomatic relations to the Catholic Church

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<sup>34</sup> Maybe a comma (unclear).

<sup>35</sup> Buffalo, Buffalo University Library, Polish documents, Polish Royal Letters, Sigismund III Vasa [https://library.buffalo.edu/polish-room/img/zygmunt3\(1587-1632\).gif](https://library.buffalo.edu/polish-room/img/zygmunt3(1587-1632).gif), 1 January 2022.

<sup>36</sup> John III to Andreas Lorichs, Vadstena 1 Jan 1573, Biaudet 1900, 85.

<sup>37</sup> John to the Polish Senate 4 Aug 1572, Stegeborg, Biaudet 1900, 23; John III to a Polish ambassador, Visby 19 Apr 1573, Biaudet 1900, 40.

should figure in his education from early on. In 1587, Sigismund was a candidate for the Polish throne after the death of Stephen Báthory (1533–86), whose widow, Sigismund’s aunt Queen Dowager Anna, supported his candidacy together with several magnates. Swedish envoys were sent to Poland to support Sigismund. In one of their speeches, attention was drawn to his education and language skills. His Polish language was assured to be “exact”, both in written and oral form. He was able to communicate in Polish, Italian, Latin, German and Swedish. All in all, he was not only *linguae peritus* (skilled in languages) but also *litteratus* (learned) and *optime educatus* (very well educated).<sup>38</sup>

Biographer Östergren points out Sigismund’s increasing interest in history, especially in the Swedish history of the Catholic era.<sup>39</sup> Johannes Vastovius, a Swedish convert to Roman Catholicism, who became *protonotarius publicus* and canon in Warmia in Poland, served Sigismund as chaplain and librarian. Vastovius published *Vitis aquilonia* (1623), a work on Nordic – mainly Swedish – saints from about 850 until the early sixteenth century based on Vastovius’ studies at the Vatican archives.<sup>40</sup> In connection with this topic, Sigismund initiated the work on saints by adding Nordic – mostly Swedish – saints to the Roman breviary.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Gregorius Borastus, Sigismund’s secretary, chaplain and chancellor wrote not only panegyrics to the King, but also a series of Swedish historiographical works, including chronicles of Gothicism inspiration. Östergren interprets these literary activities as a proof of Sigismund’s nationalistic attitude to Sweden, where he was never to return after losing the power struggle with his Lutheran paternal uncle Charles IX. Sigismund was dethroned in Sweden in 1599 and forced to retreat to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. He never gave up his (legitimate) claim to the Swedish throne.

The Swedish-language letters provide a more practical angle to his education, which was comprehensive. In addition to Christian (Catholic) humanist learning and the art of diplomacy, he was taught very pragmatic skills, such as drafting business letters. Although most of them were probably written by secretaries, he was simultaneously trained to take responsibility for material, everyday matters, decision-making and dealing with subjects of various kinds, such as servants and merchants. All this proceeded in the language used by the majority of his Swedish subjects and the domestic administration, i.e. Swedish. There might be a link to Peter Brahe the Elder’s practical ideas on the education of nobility as transmitted by *Oeconomia*, but a sixteenth-century ruler could seldom concentrate on abstract state-level

<sup>38</sup> Mayer 1861, 359.

<sup>39</sup> Östergren 2005, 229.

<sup>40</sup> Vastovius 1623.

<sup>41</sup> Anonymi 1618; Bataille 2018, 3, 7 & 11.

issues; he was often concerned with a plethora of questions, topics and problems, which may appear even trivial to the modern scholar. From the book historical point of view, not only books and libraries, but also letters and notes on everyday matters or even formal salutations can offer a peek into the lives of Renaissance people and how they were educated. At least, a lot of wine was needed.

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## Illustrations

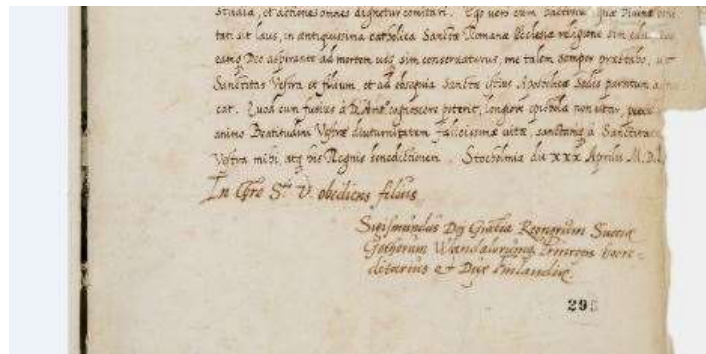


Plate 1. Sigismund's letter to the Pope (1575/76). Vatican City, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, Germania 95, f. 295r. By permission of the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, all rights reserved. © 2022 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano.

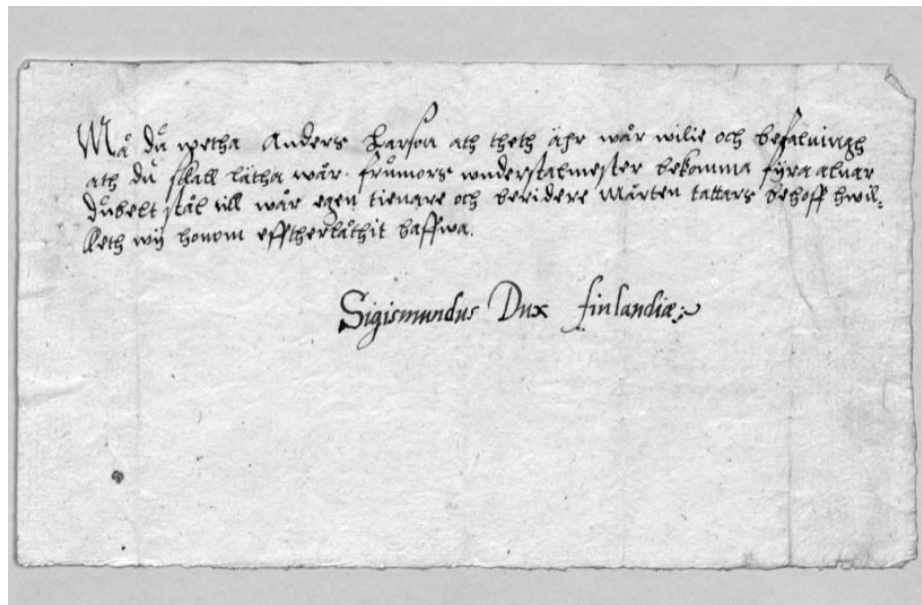


Plate 2. Sigismund's letter (1579), Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Stafsundsarkivet, Kungliga autografer SE/RA/720807/11/I/3, 183. By permission of the National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet).



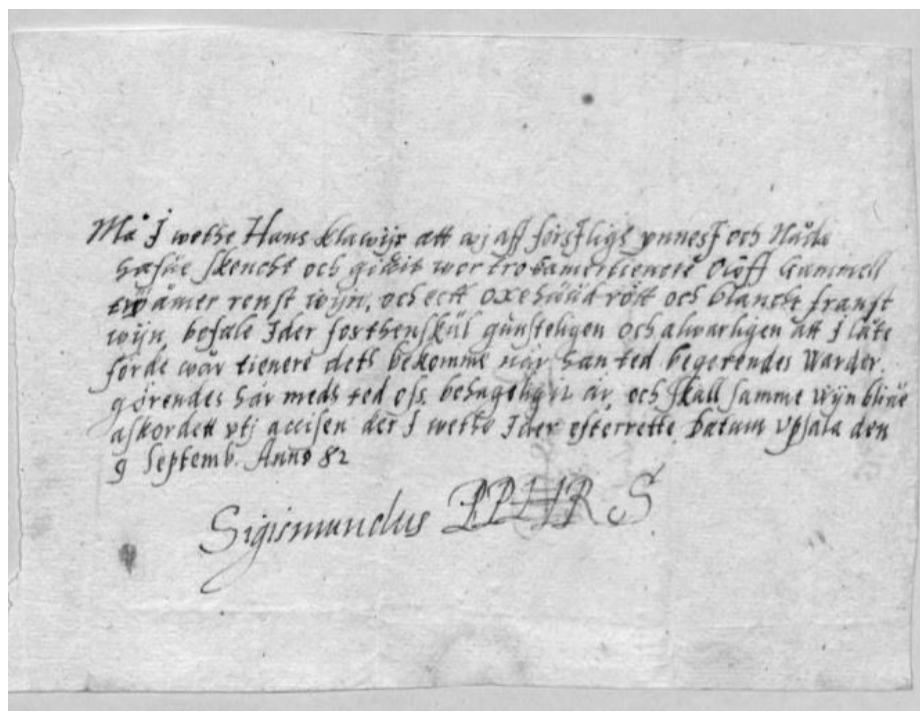


Plate 3. Sigismund's letter (1583), Stockholm, Riksarkivet, Stafsundsarkivet, Kungliga autografer SE/RA/720807/11/I/3, 184. By permission of the National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet).