

Time and Exemplarity

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Abstract

The idea of history as *magistra vitae* – a collection of good and bad examples – was a central *topos* of historical writing in the West from antiquity till the late eighteenth century. The idea has served a number of different ends, motivating advanced political theory as well as functioning as a mere saying. The article investigates two books of historical examples, written for pedagogical purposes addressing young boys, both explicitly produced with this aim in mind: Johannes Schefferus' *Memorabilium Sueticae gentis exemplorum liber singularis* (1671) and Ove Mallings' *Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere* (1777). They differ considerably from modern history books in not being structured chronologically but according to the virtues the histories are meant to illustrate. The article compares the books' structure, tables of content, choice of virtues and introductory texts. The aim is to explore the tension between exemplarity and temporality in the two collections.

Keywords: Civic Virtue, Exempla, *Historia magistra vitae*, Mallings, Schefferus

1. *Introduction*

One eye of history is time; the other geography. These were staple phrases in early modern history textbooks, intended to teach schoolboys and students how to study history. Historical knowledge was important because history was understood as the relation of great and memorable deeds, passed on to us to be remembered and honoured, and to teach us by example how to be virtuous, good and happy. History was simply a large collection of memorable narratives able to work as *magistra vitae*, the teacher of life – as Cicero once had termed it (*De Oratore* II, 9). Reinhart Koselleck has pointed out that this remained the dominant *topos* of Western historical thought from antiquity to the late eighteenth century, though in reality embracing a large variety of ideas and notions, and could occur in advanced political theory as well as in simple textbooks of the kind to be investigated here (1985, 22). The reason why history could provide behavioural models was the belief that human nature was not subject to change. And the same was



true of virtue and vice, as well as the main challenges, problems and issues that humans were expected to confront. They remained largely unchanged, while political systems and dynasties correspondingly shifted and alternated, though never bringing with them anything fundamentally new. As pointed out by Koselleck, this was also the reason why history was usually designated in the plural, as *histories*. Without the idea of a 'linear, historical time [that] promised to reveal higher meaning' (Appleby, Hunt and Jacob 1994, 55), early modern historical understanding did not include an overarching, uniform and unifying temporal dimension that defined both historiography and the meaning of history. If the individual histories were parts of a larger pattern, it was that of a divine plan, not of sequential time (Schiffman 2011, 5-13).

Historical narratives could concern events and persons from the past. It was, however, not the past as such, or time and temporal processes of change, as in the modern understanding of history, that really mattered (Eriksen 2014). Describing this notion of history, J.D. Lyons has pointed out that 'the past per se is not the primary value. Rather the authority of the past becomes the raw material for the corrective genius of the writer in his quest to influence the future conduct of the reader or audience' (1989, 14). As the two eyes of history, time and space were necessary tools for a proper understanding of it, but they were not themselves integral parts of history. Together they rather made up the specific location where history took place. Chronology, defined as the calculation of the exact time of important events like the Creation or the Flood, even became an independent science in the early modern period. Another of its aims was to synchronize the bewildering inconsistencies between Christian and Egyptian or Chinese histories: the latter two claimed to date back to before Creation! Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609) and Isaac Newton (1643-1727) were among the leading agents of this once so ground-breaking science (Grafton 1983). More commonly, time or chronology was said to give history its shape and fixity (e.g. Holberg 1733, 45). Bossuet, in his well-known *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681), originally written for the education of the French *Dauphin*, declared knowledge of chronology to be indispensable to avoid major historical errors like representing 'men under the law of Nature or under written law as they are under the law of the Gospel' or speaking of the vanquished 'Persians under Alexander as of the victorious Persians under Cyrus'. Students who do not know when the historical events had taken place 'will make the Greeks as free at the time of Philip as at the time of Themistocles or Miltiades' (1961, 666).¹ In short, chronological confusion created the worst kind of historical errors, for it prevented students from understanding the true meaning of what they learned.

This leaves a paradox. On the one hand, history illustrated never-changing virtues and vices. It told stories about great and good deeds which

¹ All translations are mine.

should be admired and emulated independent of time, and about values and principles which were more fundamental than any shifting modes of human life and not determined by any princely whim. On the other hand, histories got their form, their fixity and their true meaning from their location in time. Without knowledge about this, they could not be properly understood, not 'seen' as they really were. In actual history writing, both these dimensions would have to be handled. For how could history be fixed in time and circumstance and at the same time be exemplary, which meant reaching beyond its own immediate context? The present article will explore how this tension between exemplarity and temporality was handled in two specific cases. It will investigate two historical textbooks, written for boys and young men, published in the Nordic countries and quite widely read there. Textbooks of this kind do not represent 'cutting edge' historical research or philosophy. They are sources for cultural rather than intellectual history. What makes them interesting is that they provide excellent access to the simple truths, commonplaces and general ideas in early modern historical thinking and writing. They spell out basic premises and explain things that would be taken for granted in works addressing more advanced readers. They can be taken to present basic historical knowledge, truths that are held to be beyond dispute, and ideas that basically go unchallenged. In this way, the textbooks do not merely represent a didactic tradition, but are also valuable sources to an understanding of how the *magistra vitae topos* was set to work culturally.

The books were published hundred years apart, but share a number of common features. The aim of comparing them is to investigate how two works that belong to the same tradition, inspired by very similar ideas about history and employing the same generic conventions, nonetheless can also differ from each other in the way they engage with the relation between temporality and exemplarity. Despite their shared ideas about the use and usefulness of history as *magistra vitae*, their conceptualizations of the conditioning frames of human existence appear to be different.

2. Two Nordic Textbooks

Johannes Schefferus composed his *Memorabilium Sueticae gentis exemplorum liber singularis* at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, in 1671. It was translated into Swedish in 1733, with the title *En bok om det svenska folkets minnesvärda exempel* (*A Book about the Memorable Examples of the Swedish People*).² The Dane Ove Malling published his collection *Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenere* (*Great and Good Deeds by Danes, Norwegians and Holsteinians*) in Copenhagen in 1777.³ Both books were produced with

² A modern edition appeared in 2005. All references are to this edition (Schefferus 2005).

³ The most recent edition dates from 1992. All references are to this edition (Malling 1992).

explicitly educational aims. Schefferus, *professor skytteanus* in rhetoric, law and political thought, used the work very actively in his own teaching. His Chair had been established in 1622 as a direct response to the king's desire for competent government officers. The university had traditionally educated the clergy, but a growing state administration now created the need for young aristocrats to be trained in the arts of law, rhetoric and administration (Landgren 2008, 287 ff; Savin 2008).

The ambitious young author Ove Malling was given the task of producing a historical textbook by Ove Høegh-Guldberg, perhaps the country's most powerful man during the reign of the insane king Christian VII. He had initiated a reform of the Latin-school system in 1775, as well as a new law of 1776 which demanded that all civil servants be born within the realm. Together these novelties created the need for an education that fostered patriotism and knowledge of the history of the fatherland, and at the same time gave the pupils – as future civil servants – a good command of their mother tongue (Eriksen 1999). Malling's book was commissioned to answer these educational needs. The book met with huge success far beyond the educational system, and saw a number of new editions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was also translated into German (1779), French (1794) and English (1807 and 1822).

The fact that both books are composed with educational aims does not only imply that they are written for young boys rather than learned men, and thus expected to contain less complicated arguments and discuss less specialized issues in a less complex language. It also means that both books are explicitly oriented towards the future. History is intended to be the teacher of life in a very direct and even instrumental way, not only shaping the young boys as persons, but also supplying them with the tools they would need to enter government, state administration or, more generally, take part in civil life as truly patriotic citizens. The two books are both organized as collections of short narratives. They do not seek to explain the processes of change over time, or show the development of society or any of its institutions, for instance. Chronology is mainly an ordering principle and has little explanatory value of its own. The books present histories rather than history, examples intended to teach young people how to master future challenges aided by past experience.

Koselleck describes the relation between past experience and future challenges, which according to him stood at the core of the *magistra vitae* notion of history, by the two terms *space of experience* and *horizon of expectation*. His point is that in traditional and early modern society, these two spheres or dimensions were largely identical – there were few ideas that the future would bring situations or phenomena that the past had not already experienced. Hence, this experience, collective and accumulated, would be adequate to handle even future situations. Moreover, expectations towards the future would not exceed the limits set by past experience. This high degree of identity between the already experienced and the not yet lived was what made it sensible to think

of history as *magistra vitae* – the histories represented accumulated experience of past generations living in the same social and mental universe as the present or future ones. When the *magistra vitae topos* started to dissolve during the latter part of the eighteenth century, this was due to the fact that rapid social and cultural change, together with a new and genuinely historical notion of temporality, created a gap between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation (Koselleck 1985, 267 ff). This makes it probable that the differences between the two books are due to the nearly one hundred years that separate them, rather than the fact that they present two different – and antagonistic – ‘fatherlands’. Though both build on the overall idea of history as a collection of useful and exemplary histories, they also represent two historically different ways of putting this idea into pedagogical practice. As we shall see, the frames of exemplarity as well of those of human existence are presented in different ways in Sweden in 1671 and in Denmark in 1777 respectively.

3. *A Tradition of Exemplary Narrative*

The two collections are thematically, not chronologically, organized, which makes them differ considerably from modern history books. To this impression of strangeness is added the authors’ insistence that historical knowledge is relevant for the present and the future: the narratives are being presented because of their usefulness as models rather than as explanation of how past events or developments shape present situations. The location of the narratives – the past – is not described as something preceding the present, but rather as a close parallel to it.

The stories of each book are taken from the author’s (and potential readers’) own country, defined by the borders of each kingdom at the time of the books’ publication. The two authors both present this as a significant feature of their respective work. Patriotic education was an integral part of the task Malling had taken on when writing his book, and part of the commission he received from Høegh-Guldberg. He also chose to emphasize the patriotic dimension in his introduction, saying that examples taken from other nations would be ‘less important and less inviting for Danes and Norwegians’. The important advantage of domestic examples is that ‘we experience more by reading and thinking about them because they are our own’.⁴ Schefferus, for his part, is emphatic that ‘for it is certainly so that we are more deeply impressed by examples from our own fatherland, examples that we so to speak have received as inheritance’.⁵

⁴ In Danish, ‘Vi føle endnu meere ved at læse og tænke om den, fordi de ere vore egne’ (1992, 21).

⁵ In Swedish, ‘Vi påverkas nämligen starkare och mer på djupet av exempel från vårt fädernesland, sådana som vi så att säga erhållit i arv’ (2005, 35).

In both cases these declarations are the result of an explicit break with established tradition. Through the centuries European schoolboys and students had read and learnt from the histories and exemplary rhetoric of Valerius Maximus' *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, a collection of nine 'books' containing about one thousand histories and anecdotes taken from Cicero, Livy, Varro and other classical writers. The book occupied a central position in Schefferus' own teaching in Uppsala. He dealt with it during his lectures, and his students were given the task of defending or attacking its various examples and points, learning to know both the historical *exempla* and the rhetoric employed in historical argumentation (Johannesson 2005, xv; see also Savin 2008, 244). His own book thus represented a direct continuation of this tradition – by introducing Swedish examples and arguing for their greater efficacy and value – as well as a contrast to it.

Malling's approach to the same tradition is more nonchalant. In his introduction he says that 'there are certainly some who have collected this kind of deeds before. Valerius Maximus made a draft'.⁶ Considering both the size and very durable influence of Valerius Maximus' work, these words seem somewhat condescending. They probably reflect Malling's ambitions as a writer as well as his position as a young man without teaching experience comparable to that of Schefferus. In spite of these differences between the two authors, their references to Valerius Maximus and the tradition of classical *exempla* in the teaching of history serves as an important framework to their own collections. Both authors acknowledge their place in this ancient tradition. By situating themselves in it, they both build on the authority that it represents while at the same time declaring that they present something that is new, different and better – though not too dissimilar.

The actual differences between the two books and that of Valerius Maximus are small, and certainly smaller than the two authors first indicate. Neither Schefferus nor Malling argued against the value of classical history as 'teacher of life'. Their expressed reason for wanting to substitute classical examples with Nordic ones was not that the former were too old or came from a historical context that was strange to the Nordic world. Nor did they claim the need for more recent examples. Temporal distance was not seen as a problem. They simply pointed out that examples from 'our own' people worked better when patriotism was the issue, because they encouraged identification and made a deeper emotional impression. However, even Valerius Maximus had given the most attention to examples from his own domestic Roman context. Narratives concerning for instance Athens or Sparta were singled out as 'external' in his work. It can thus be argued that the argument presented in

⁶ In Danish, 'Vel er der nogle, som før mig have samlet saadanne Handlinger. Valerius Maximus har gjort et Udkast dertil' (1992, 20).

the two books – the efficacy of domestic examples – had already been claimed by Valerius Maximus. The difference rather consisted in where and what the ‘local’ or domestic actually was: the Northern world of Schefferus and Malling versus the Roman world of Valerius Maximus. The relation between these two locations, as seen in the period, was not merely a matter of geography, nor one of historical time. The Nordic and classical worlds simply occupied very different positions on what can be imagined as a ‘ladder of exemplarity’. The latter reigned at the top. In early modern European culture the classical world constituted far more than a specific time and place; it represented the very embodiment of exemplarity. The Nordic world was close to the bottom end of the ladder. Situated beyond even the farthest reach of Greek culture and the Roman empire, the cold and wild Northern countries were little more than the dark contrast to classical exemplarity. What Schefferus and Malling had to address when presenting their books was thus not the temporal or geographical distance between classical examples and the life-world of their students, but the lack of recognized exemplarity of the Nordic world.

Faithful to the tradition of Valerius Maximus, both Schefferus and Malling arranged their collections according to the virtues or moral qualities that the narratives are meant to illustrate. Seen in isolation the tables of contents in both books look like lists of desirable qualities attached to ways of acting. Closer investigation will nonetheless show that these lists are composed according to somewhat different principles. Even if (some of) the same virtues occur in both books and thus on both lists, they also represent different ways of thinking about the meaning of the virtues and the overall network of configuration that they are part of. Of particular interest in the present context is that none of these networks are defined through time or temporality. Taken as a whole, Malling’s choice of chapters and way of structuring them seems to aim at constructing an autonomous system of mutually constitutive ‘human and civic virtues’ – a kind of Linnaean taxonomy of virtues. Schefferus, for his part, instead, presents a universe filled with signs and references, in which ‘deeds’, events and phenomena in the secular world are related to cosmic powers and a divine will.

4. Structure and Overall Content in the Two Books

Commenting on the chapters in his own book, Malling points to a methodological challenge that he encountered during his work: ‘The categorization of the deeds into their classes has been difficult. Several deeds can be considered under more than one aspect, and several virtues are so closely related that it at times remains ambiguous where it belongs’.⁷

⁷ In Danish, ‘Handlingernes Inddeling under visse Classer har havt sine Vanskeligheder. Mange Handlinger kan betragtes fra forskellige Sider, og mange Dyder grændse saa tæt sammen, at det undertiden bliver tvetydigt at bestemme en dydig Handling sit Sted’ (1992, 21).

He has nonetheless stuck to a method of categorization that is determined by the order of the book itself. Each and every 'human and civic virtue' will be better understood when they are illuminated through a selection of examples, he claims. The musings over 'order' and the division into 'classes' reflect typical Enlightenment systems. Malling appears as a veritable Linnaeus of virtues when he presents his 'deeds' as specimens of this or that class, and introduces each class with short descriptions of its main features. This approach creates a neat order, but it is also what makes the overlap between the 'classes' problematic. The species of a well-ordered system should be clearly distinguished from each other by mutually exclusive properties.

Malling also explained why his presentation of the narratives (or specimens) within each class was not chronological. His main aim, he declared, had been to make the book enjoyable to the reader and to secure variation. A chronological arrangement would inevitably let all the 'best' examples come first, and the 'weakest' towards the end – which was not to be recommended (1992, 23). The explanation makes it very clear that time and chronology had no independent value in this kind of historical narrative. Compared with the argument over the problem of classes, it also becomes clear that chronology is not part of the intrinsic 'order' of histories in the same way as the classes of deeds and virtues are. Chronology – or lack of it – had to do with the presentation of histories, with the question of how the examples were to be organized to make the most durable impression on readers and best keep their attention. In addition to this, Malling's worries about the effects of a strictly chronological order of narratives illustrates that to him it was an obvious fact that the 'best' examples and greatest deeds belonged in the most remote past. The greatest authority and highest value resides in the past.

Schefferus presented no corresponding introductory reflections concerning his own chapters and used no particular terminology to describe them. And even if his table of contents looks like a list of virtues, his way of arranging them was different. The chapters in Schefferus' book refer instead to a more ancient mental universe. What defines the virtues in this case is not their respective places in a system of contrasting identities, but rather their relations to powers beyond human existence and outside the secular world. In Schefferus the virtues refer to eternity. Moreover, the narratives about virtues and great deeds are framed by stories that describe events and phenomena rather than human action, and which present powers and forces outside the human sphere of influence.

In his introduction to the modern edition of Schefferus, the literary critic Kurt Johannesson points out that most of the book is centred upon the four cardinal or 'natural' virtues: *prudentia*, *justitia*, *fortitudo* and *temperantia*, each of them presented over a number of chapters. He also underscores the significance of the first chapters, which are about religion, signs, omens,

and dreams. These stories are important because they speak about the signs by which the will of God can be known. Johannesson describes the final chapters as representing a 'variety of themes', like friendship, matrimonial love, the people's loyalty to their kings and the kings' love for their people. There are also chapters about patriotism, eloquence, physical force, luck, and persons who have been saved from great dangers and strange events, who have had an extraordinarily long life, or have died in unusual ways (2003, xviii). The echo of Valerius Maximus is easily heard here. Even his work has an introductory part about signs and omens, which indicates that such stories not only have their base in Christian seventeenth-century Sweden, but also reflect far more ancient ideas and mentalities. Stories about friendship, love, eloquence, and so on are likewise found in his collection. I would however argue that the arrangement of these narratives in Schefferus' work is less random than indicated by Johannesson. The chapters that present what he refers to as a 'variety' of themes, and which might look like a catalogue of strange episodes, do likewise show more of a pattern.

In the five chapters that follow the ones about cardinal virtues, different aspects of love and friendship are presented: love between spouses, loyalty to the king, friendship among equals, and the allegiance of soldiers. Setting aside modern ideas about love and friendship as belonging to the sphere of romantic emotion and sentiment makes it easier to see the qualities described in the stories as important parts of social structure. They regulate relations between individuals not only ethically but also structurally. Friendship and love represent social bonds that carry with them specific rights and obligations. Only rarely does this concern relations between social equals, most often it is a question of rights and duties within a hierarchy. Qualities like friendship, fidelity, loyalty and allegiance thus have no stable meanings, but depend on perspective and position within the hierarchy: a king's love for his subjects differs from that of his subjects for him. The exemplary narratives describe how friendship, fidelity, and love are practised in a number of different contexts, working as a performance of social roles and social structure. They also make it clear that virtue is not only about morals or personal obligation, but is also a matter of social competence.

After these stories follow two chapters on eloquence and physical strength respectively. The combination is less random than might appear at first sight. Eloquence is about the capacity of expressing one's ideas with force and persuasion, in such a way that they impress and move an audience. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *eloquence* as 'The action, practice, or art of expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness, so as to appeal to the reason or move the feelings' (*OED*, s.v. *eloquence*). The definition makes it clear that both chapters are about aspects of human force and capability of winning one's way. Schefferus himself presents the two chapters and the relation between them as follows:

So far we have presented virtues. We will now proceed to describe some tools by which the virtues may conquer. If any such tool is to be mentioned, it must be eloquence. For what tenable results can wisdom accomplish without its aid? ... To achieve something one also has no little help even from one's physical strength. For even if those who aim at accomplishing something admirable and great have a particular need for the faculties of their soul, they will reach no longer than half the way towards the goal without the assistance of physical force.⁸

While the virtues work as a normative framework of human activity, linguistic and physical power are decisive for individual agency and success.

The final part of the book has five chapters that each present stories about changing luck, and two about unusual deaths and extraordinarily long lives. Taken as a whole, the structure of the book provides an image of the human condition. In our modern – and thus anachronistic – terms, it can be said to present an understanding of the relationship between social structure and the individual. The book discusses issues like the limitation of individual agency, gives advice for human behaviour and presents the cosmic powers that fix the conditions of human life on earth. Schefferus' table of contents makes it clear that human life unfolds in the span between virtue and fate, between virtue and fortune or luck. The human task is to strive towards a virtuous life, the human vocation is to fulfil the ideals set by the virtues by means of the physical strength and mental faculties which one has been given. However, life is also governed by other conditions, over which humans have no power and can do nothing to change, but which may easily turn their existence upside down. Signs, omens, and dreams are thus highly important and may refer both to the will of God and to a predestined fate. In any case, they give glimpses into the realm of powers and cosmic connections that humans are subjected to, but over which they have no influence. The same applies to the changes of fortune – even they are excluded from human manipulations. The last chapters in the book describe individuals who have miraculously escaped great dangers, and tell stories about others who have won great fame in spite of a modest origin. In this way, even the individual's most earnest attempts of living a life in accordance with the virtues and with one's place in society are quite literally framed by determining forces and conditions. The message that can be read out of the book's structure seems to be that no matter how much one strives towards a deserving and virtuous life, and no matter what mental

⁸ In Swedish, 'Vi har hittills behandlat dygder och skall nu övergå till att berätta om några redskap, med vars hjälp dygderna kan vinna sina syften. Om något av dessa redskap här skall nämnas, så är det värtaligheten. Ty hvilka hållbara resultat kan väl klokheden nå utan dess hjälp? ... För att utföra något har man ofta en icke ringa hjälp också av sina kroppskrafter. Ty även om de som försöker åstadkomma något berömvärdt och lysande har en särskild användning för sin själsstyrka, kan denna likväl ofta inte komma längre än halvvägs, när den verkar utan bistånd av kroppskrafterna' (2005, 221, 227).

and physical gifts one has been given, a human being can never conquer fate, escape chance, or defeat the will of God.

The ideas about this tension or span between virtue and fate reach back to Antiquity, and can be followed in European culture through the centuries. The Roman goddess of fortune and fate, above all known for her changing nature, was traditionally depicted with a wheel or standing on a ball. In *Il principe* (1532), Machiavelli writes that fortune determines half of what happens in the world, while human will answers for the rest (2007, 141). Art historian Rudolf Wittkower has traced the iconographical tradition of representing virtue and fate from antiquity to the seventeenth century, while philologist Marianne Pade has investigated the relation between virtue and fate in early modern translations of Plutarch (Wittkower 1938; Pade 2007). Kristiina Savin has investigated early modern notions of fortune, risk, and luck in a more specific Swedish context, regarding them as elements in a cultural repertoire. She points out that in this period luck – or happiness – was not considered to represent an emotional state, but refer to ‘the sum of several social and economic factors which in the Latin literature were called the gifts of fortune (*bona fortunae*). From this perspective, fortune is not merely a subjective apprehension, but represents an objectively given external reality’ (2011, 64). She consequently points out that even if fortune was an individual experience, it could be observed and evaluated from an external standpoint. The criteria for lucky events, a fortunate career, or a good life could be determined independently of the individual’s emotional experience. Shifts between good luck and bad luck were likewise understood in terms of changes in an external world (67).

The pattern that can be read out of Schefferus’ book is inscribed in a tradition which is just as ancient as the idea of history as the teacher of life. In Schefferus the signs and omens point towards the will of an all-powerful Christian God, in the same way as the ‘natural virtues’ are supplemented by His grace, but the principles and the structure from the classical tradition are nonetheless still intact. The individual stories – the examples – in Schefferus also carry a message that reaches beyond the stories themselves and the qualities that each of them is meant to illustrate. The stories make up a large and comprehensive image that not only presents the right ways to conduct oneself in order to live a good and deserving life, but which also serves as a kind of cosmic map of the forces that actually govern human life and to which humans are subjected. What defines and delimits qualities and virtues and what determines human agency is above all their relative positions within this larger image of cosmic forces and conditions. The lack of definitions and ‘classes’ in Schefferus compared with Malling is therefore not due to a lack of system or clear thought, but caused by the fact that the order of virtue in Schefferus is different. In his book, human life is presented as part of an eternal cosmic drama where virtues never change, but fortunes always do. In this universe the hand of God can be detected everywhere.

The 'structural conditions' of human life are not human-made, and their stability is not of this world. In such a context, histories are also examples of how eternity makes itself present in the secular world. The histories that take place in the secular world, defined by all its particularities of time and place, are merely superficial or accidental manifestations of these stable, cosmic and unchanging forces. Histories need time and location to take place, but not to acquire their deeper meaning.

5. *Defining the Virtues*

The introductory texts in both books serve to describe the virtues or events that will be presented and to relate the various stories to each other. Schefferus' texts are generally very short and work to entangle the virtues and qualities in a kind of network or complex pattern. In his description of eloquence (quoted above) Schefferus underscores that wisdom cannot do without it, and goes on to say that even courage needs the encouragement of eloquence. It also supplies justice, goodness, and temperance with beauty and pleasure (2005, 221). Wisdom, for its part, is said to have its source in piety, while justice stops it from becoming sly. Strength supports justice, while mildness prevents it from becoming hard. Courage in war has its parallels in mental strength and a strong character in civil contexts. In opposition to Malling, Schefferus does not regard it as a problem that the virtues overlap. He underscores connections, mutual references, shades and gradual change. The overall image that he presents demonstrates how all human existence and all secular life have one common source: the will and plan of God.

To the general description of each virtue, Schefferus often adds how the Swedes excel in it, either above other nations or on a par with them. About political cunning, defined as a subtype of wisdom, he says that:

Wisdom moves along different paths, some of which deviate from the common lane and may be used in an emergency, so that a goal may be reached more swiftly and easily, which only with great risk could be achieved if following the beaten track. For it does happen that the masses are so ignorant or so stubbornly indifferent to their own best that one has to dupe them to reach a good outcome. To plan this kind of cunning and employ it with success has therefore been an important concern for men who are experienced in public affairs and love the common good. Not even Sweden has been lacking in men who are well skilled in this art.⁹

⁹ In Swedish, 'Klokheten rör sig ibland på vägar, som något avviker från den allmänt upptrampade och som den utnyttjar i nödlägen för att snabbare och lättare uppnå syften, som den endast under stor risk skulle kunna uppnå, om den höll sig till den vanliga vägen. Ty allt emellanåt är massan så farligt ovetande och envist likgiltig till och med för sitt eget bästa, att man måste överlista den för att föra den till det målet. Att uttänka detta slags list och tillämpa den med framgång har därför alltid varit en viktig angelägenhet för män med

Only a minor part of the introduction (quoted in its entirety here) really seeks to define this particular type of wisdom. The main concern of the text is to explain how it works and in what situations it is necessary. It is also important to spell out who the agents are that possess this kind of skill and have the responsibility and right to make use of cunning. The Swedish nation has fostered many men with these capabilities, but Schefferus also underscores that the right to use cunning is far from general or common. It belongs exclusively to men in certain positions and with public responsibilities. In this way Schefferus presents an understanding of the Swedish nation or people that is different from the modern one. The Swedish nation is not the population at large, but neither is it an ethnic and cultural group, as in the typical nineteenth- and twentieth-century understanding of nations and nationalism. To Schefferus, the Swedish ‘people’, to whom his book title also refers, are the persons about whom and for whom he writes: the nobility and the sons of nobility, those who govern the country or are learning to govern it. The histories – the examples – are *about* them, and *for* them. They are the ones who are supposed to learn from history, and they are also the ones concerned by it. History is not about the common people. This does not mean that they are absolutely excluded from it. Schefferus presents narratives about a peasant so strong that he could lift a horse, and about a man who was trapped in a deep mine at Falun but succeeded in cutting his way through the obstructing rock by means of a small knife. It is nonetheless obvious that such episodes belong to history merely because of their extraordinary content. Events and episodes that belong to history proper only very rarely concern common people. Their lives are mostly spent outside history.

Malling’s introductions are more extensive than those of Schefferus. They all share a common structure and start with an explanation or definition. ‘Brave courage’ may serve as an example. Malling explains that:

There are situations in life when great difficulties present themselves to us; there are others when we will meet unsought dangers, at times unavoidable ones, which defy us so that we will be forced to counter them. The weak man will fear, the timid will yield, give in, submit, or fly. The brave man however remains determined, and dares in such moments both to think and speak, dares to ask for remedies against danger, dares to grab for it even if it is the only possible way, dares to execute it, everything with the hope of success and without fear for himself.¹⁰

erfarenhet av offentliga värv och med kärlek till det allmännas bästa. Inte heller i Sveriges folk har det saknats män som behärskat denna konst’ (2005, 70).

¹⁰ In Danish, ‘Der ere Tilfælde i livet, hvor store Vanskeligheder lægges os i Veien: der ere andre, hvor Farer, undertiden uundgaaelige Farer, møde os, uden at vi søge dem, eller trodse os der, hvor vi ere forbundne til at gaae dem i Møde. Her frygter den svage, den forsagte: han bøier sig, giver efter, ligger under, eller flyer. Den kiekke derimod staaer fast, tør i disse Øieblikke baade tænke og tale, tør spørge om middel mod Faren, tør gribe det, om der endog kun er et eeneste mueligt, tør sætte det i verk; alt i Haab om godt Udfald og uden Skræk for sig selv’ (1992, 174).

The virtue or quality is thus explained by the means of action carried out in a specific context. Malling describes to his reader what the brave person *does*. In the quote above we are first told what the weak and timid person would do, then follows the direct contrast: the actions of the brave individual. After this, the text follows the same patterns of contrast in explaining the difference between the virtue in question and the other ways of acting that only apparently are good or virtuous. In this way, and unlike Schefferus, Malling does not describe shades and gradual difference, but simply contrasts. The text about courage goes on thus:

Some believe themselves to be brave just because they have hardened themselves to defy danger, to run blindly against it, without any other intention than running, and without considering whether it will bring them honour or shame or whether they were called upon to act. This is not true courage. This is only wantonness, forwardness, or rage.¹¹

In similar ways the smart is distinguished from the forward, the just from the unrelenting, and the wise from the cunning. The explanations are constructed over such oppositions, making each good quality stand out through the contrast with the bad. The same method is employed to distinguish between different good qualities, even if this is more problematic. In his efforts to draw the line between perseverance and courage, Malling returns to the problem of overlap, and concludes that these two qualities have some common features. He still insists on relevant differences:

Courage alone is a glow that flares up when it is nourished, but at times will fade away when nourishment is lacking or decreasing. Perseverance is a steadily burning fire which is continually nourished and which spreads an evenly maintained warmth in the breast.¹²

The selection of virtues and deeds is also different in Malling. His choice does not reflect the traditional cardinal virtues. Neither does he present the tension between virtue and fortune. His 'great and good deeds' can be divided into four main categories. The first section of his book is about man's relation to God. Then follow two chapters about the king and the fatherland. After

¹¹ In Danish, 'Nogle have troet sig modige, fordi de have hærdet sig til at trodse, til at løbe blindt mod Farer, uden anden Hensigt, end at løbe mod dem, og uden at see paa, om der var ære eller Skam ved at vove, om de havde Kald dertil eller ei. Dette er ei det sande. Det er kun kaadhed, eller Fremfusenhed, eller Raserie' (1992, 174).

¹² In Danish, 'Mod aleene er en Lue, der blusser saa tit den oppustes og faaer Næring; men falder undertiden, fordi Næringen dæmpes, eller tager af. Standhaftighed er en jevntbrændende Ild, der næres stedse og udbreder en stadig vedligeholdtd Varme i Bryster' (1992, 205).

this a number of chapters present virtues and qualities which above all are relevant when at war. Courage, bravery, perseverance, cunning, and justice are among them. The final section presents civic virtues like zeal, diligence, industry, and charity. Even this can be read as an image or map. However, this map does not present the conditions of human existence in a universe of divine power, strong forces and enigmatic signs. What Malling's choice of virtues serves to portray is rather the life of a good subject in an absolute monarchy. His table of contents informs the reader about the qualities of a good citizen, in prioritized order. Readers are instructed to love their king and their fatherland. By means of a virtuous life and diligent action, citizens are expected to work for the common good as well as for their own salvation. Religion is the frame: personal piety is not only praised, but also given pride of place as the first chapter of the book. Loyalty to the king – chapter two – has its basis in the fact that the king has his power from God. Secular civil society is nonetheless the main issue throughout the book. The greatest emphasis – in a number of chapters and stories – is put on good patriotic deeds, serving the state and the community of citizens. Even kings are presented as good citizens or as private individuals. They are wise, noble, and mild. The king is portrayed as the father of his house, be it in his affairs with his subjects or within his own family.

Human beings in Malling do not spend their lives in the unpredictable and at the same time constant span between virtue and fortune. They live in quite another world, safely situated in civil society which on the one hand is given by God – represented by solid Lutheranism – and on the other hand is defined by the absolute state. The agents are also different in Malling. To fulfil the promise made in the title, the collection had to include citizens from all parts of the realm of the composite Danish-Norwegian monarchy. The reader will thus meet persons from Denmark, Iceland, Norway as well as the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. Equally important is the fact that both the bourgeois and peasants are represented in addition to the king and nobility. There are stories about brave soldiers, heroic clergy, and even the courageous Anna Colbjørnsen, wife of the vicar at Norderhov in southern Norway, who tricked the Swedes into an ambush during their campaign in 1716. In some cases the non-noble agents are anonymous or even represented as groups – like 'a Norwegian' or 'the Norwegians' – but just as often are given individual names. Not least does this apply to the chapter about industriousness which presents a large number of peasants. Malling got much of his material for this chapter from the patriotic societies that flourished in the period. These societies awarded prizes for different types of improvements, diligence, and useful projects, and supplied him with numerous stories about digging of ditches, cultivation of new fields or construction of manure cellars. One such story tells about the Norwegian peasant Gunder Haresaas from the Trondheim region who 'built a road that goes over steep hills and deep bogs up to a wide mountain valley, Giedaalen; by means of which he has gained access for

himself and his neighbours to an excellent summer pasture for more than 70 cattle'.¹³ The peasants Osmund Hustø, Ole Torvig and Jens Gundersen Kulaas from the Stavanger region all showed 'courage and swiftness' in hunting down wolves and bears. A truly magnificent example is the peasant Lars Huusbye, also from the Trondheim region. Even though he was a poor man, he established and cultivated a large orchard at his farm. He is also reported to have carried out other agricultural improvements. This peasant – all by himself – studied magazines and literature concerning agriculture, he added to them with notes and comments based on his own experience, and offered copies of and excerpts from this edifying material to others (1992, 408 ff).

There can be no doubt, then, that in Malling's view even ordinary citizens can be historical agents, in the sense that their deeds have exemplary value. Malling is nonetheless explicit that exemplarity is a feature of the deed, not of the person who carries it out. He also points out that in order to judge a deed, it is the deed that must be examined, not its executor:

one may see Bishops and clergy drawing the sword to defend their country, one may see heroes laying down their weapons to live a life in quiet virtue. What is important to observe is the deed itself. It shall not be mentioned because of the person behind it, but the person because of the deed. This is the reason why one sometimes will find the peasant equal to the king, his deeds earn him the place.¹⁴

The argument makes it clear that the choice of persons presented in the book is not based on democratic ideas about representation. The image presented is not one of an egalitarian society. Malling's intention is to praise those who deserve it due to their deeds rather than their position, but in no way to suggest that this implies an adjustment or change of positions. The point is to underscore that peasants and citizens may 'equal the king' because they are ennobled by their actions. For this to happen it is fundamental that their actions be truly exemplary. When Malling argues that even civic virtue – like diligence, industriousness, and zeal – may hold an exemplary quality, he is also giving access to the scene of history to persons outside the governing elite.

¹³ In Danish, 'opbrudt en Vei igiennem bradt Berg og bløde myrer til en stor Field-Dal, Giedaadalen; hvorved han har tilveiebragt sig og sine Naboer en ypperlig Sommer-Drift for over 70 Storfæe' (Malling 1992, 408).

¹⁴ In Danish, 'thi man vil finde Bisper og Præster drage Sværdet og fegte for Fædrelandet, og man vil see Helte nedlægge det og udøve de stille Dyder i roligt Liv. Men her agte man, at det er Handlingen, der egentlig sees paa, og at den ikke nævnes for Personens, men Personen for Handlingens Skyld. Dette er Aarsagen hvorfor man vil finde Bonden undertiden ved siden af Kongen; thi hans Handlinger fortjene at staae der' (1992, 22).

6. *On Courage*

Schefferus and Malling both made structural choices that clearly subordinated temporality to exemplarity in their books. Schefferus' presentation of signs, references, and cosmic powers and Malling's construction of a taxonomy of virtues differ considerably from each other. Both do nonetheless create frameworks that enhanced the intrinsically atemporal dimension of the virtues and deeds that were to be presented. Both embraced the set of virtues in a way that gave them the appearance of a stable existence, indisputably independent of the more superficial shifts of temporal circumstance. It remains to be explored if this atemporal quality of histories is also maintained in the actual episodes that are narrated in the two books. To facilitate the examination and make comparisons possible, the following discussion will focus on a virtue that is given a prominent place in both books: courage.

Malling's definition of courage is without any temporal dimension and without historical specificity. He introduces the virtue in his usual systematic way, contrasting true courage with duels and other pretentious fights, which do not produce true heroes. Courage, on the other hand, has to do with the battles that honour and obligation demand: defending the king and the fatherland, doing one's duty. As duties will vary according to one's position in life, Malling also draws a distinction between courage in common men, seen largely as a matter of physical strength, and in leaders, which includes strategic capacity (1992, 224). Schefferus for his part introduces the chapter on courage with the claim that the Swedes have 'always' excelled in this virtue. He also says that this virtue is recognized by everybody, quite independently of their social standing. The references that follow are not very specific, but an informed reader will recognize a compact version of Swedish history in the introductory text. The non-temporal 'always' is thus made specific by means of a roughly chronological presentation, rather than a definition of courage as such.

Schefferus' narratives – or examples, as he calls them – about courage are all rather short. They are not presented in chronological order and not clearly related to period or circumstance. In some stories, the name of a king is mentioned, which indirectly situates the story historically. The same goes for the wars that in some cases are given as frames for the reported act of courage: the event can be said to have taken place during the war against the Danish king Kristian, or during a war in Russia or in Livonia. Readers well versed in the events of Swedish history, and particularly that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will understand which campaigns and thus which period this refers to. It is nonetheless obvious that such discernment has not been regarded as a prerequisite to enjoy – and learn from – the examples. The only temporal distinction that is given some relevance can be found in a remark that the most ancient narratives (from heathen times) may seem like fairy tales and thus be less trustworthy than the more recent ones (Schefferus

2005, 128). What gives Schefferus' chapter on courage its structure is thus not time and chronology, but rather the thematic connections that are made. Stories about brave kings make one such thematic cluster, stories about courageous women who fight like men, and at times even dress like them, is another. Not the least important are the stories about brave soldiers and common men who possess great physical strength and ability to fight.

All the narratives are short, most of them fill less than a page each. They are usually one-episodic and contain little circumstantial information. Schefferus' book presents, as Kristiina Savin has described, 'dramatic moments, colourful details, directly reported speeches and dialogues and emphatic partiality' (2008, 235). When it comes to courage, it is the action itself – the fight – that is presented, rather than its circumstances. In this way, Schefferus' narratives are even less historically specific than his introduction. The temporal dimension is at best a part of the 'stage' where heroic action takes place, and courage appears as a quality that is independent of time, agent, and circumstance, but fundamentally tied to battle and physical strength.

The narratives about courage in Malling are considerably longer and have a more complex structure with many episodes linked together. Some of them amount to compact biographies about men known for their courage and bravery, for instance about the sixteenth-century naval hero Cort Adeler (1992, 247-253). Unlike Schefferus, Malling does not present any stories about brave commoners. The protagonists of all his stories are kings, noblemen, or at least military officers. There are no women in the chapter on bravery. As was the case with Schefferus, all events and episodes are related to war and warlike struggle. It is nonetheless by means of setting up contrasts and emphasizing differences that Malling, in accordance with his definition of courage, includes strategic cunning in this virtue. Some of his stories consequently present military leadership and successful strategies rather than the fight itself.

Malling's stories also contain far more specific details about time, place, and circumstance. For some events the exact year is given. There is also information, for instance, about the number of ships involved in a battle, or the number of men in an army. Moreover, despite Malling's general remark that he will not present his stories in a chronological order (cf. above, p. 190), he does so in the chapter on courage. The first story is about the Cimbrians – a people held to be ancestors of the modern Danes – and their struggle against the Romans in Gaul and northern Italy. After this follow stories taken from saga literature, and then from more recent times. The last part of the chapter presents episodes about Danes involved in the war of Spanish succession. It concludes with some comments that link these persons to the ancient Cimbrians, and with the claim that other European peoples have 'always' recognized and admired the bravery of the Danes (1992, 274).

Despite the chronological order and greater specific historical detail, even Malling thus ends with a patriotic 'always' that very much resembles

that of Schefferus. Historical period also becomes more significant in Malling than in Schefferus. On the other hand, the choice of a chronological order is what excludes Malling from making distinctions between legendary, ancient times and a historical 'presence' including all of Christian time in the way Schefferus does. Most important in the present context is nonetheless that, despite the variation in composition, complexity, and historical detail, there seems to be little significant difference in the role of time and temporality in the two books' understanding and presentation of courage.

7. *Time and Exemplarity*

There is no doubt that the narratives in both Schefferus and Malling are presented as examples, and history as *magistra vitae*. How does exemplarity negotiate time in these stories? It has been pointed out throughout this article that the temporal dimension does not play an important role in the shaping of the stories and that time and period are ascribed comparatively little explanatory value. Even chronological order is sometimes explicitly set aside to further enhance the exemplary value of the collected stories. Nonetheless, not even examples can escape temporality, at least not as long as they are part of a narrative. Narrating events cannot do without temporality. For a better understanding of what is at stake here, a closer look at the nature of examples might prove useful. What are they, and how are they made? J.D. Lyons will be our guide here. In his study of the rhetoric of example in early modern France and Italy, Lyons defined examples as a 'connection of a general statement or maxim and a local or specific actualization of that maxim' (1989, 5; see also Eriksen *et al.* 2012). The example is thus:

a dependent statement qualifying a more general and independent statement by naming a member of the class established by the general statement. An example cannot exist without a) a general statement and b) an indication of its subordinate status. Moreover, examples are most frequently used to c) provide clarification of the general statement and d) demonstrate the truth of the general statement. (Lyons 1989, x)

This structure can easily be identified in the two books studied here. In both cases, the narratives contained in the books are emphatically presented as relating to the general statement or class – the respective virtues. The relationship is clearly of a hierarchical kind, making the stories depend on the general statement for their full meaning and message. It may also be argued that Malling tends to use his examples mainly to clarify the general statements. His stories serve to illuminate the systematic definitions that are presented in the introductions. His narratives flesh out the definitions and make them more easily comprehensible. Schefferus, for his part, tends to use the narratives more to demonstrate the truth of his general statement, as when he starts by saying that the Swedes have always excelled in this or that virtue and then presents stories to prove it.

An implication of the description given by Lyons is that examples are defined by the structural relation between the statement and the instantiation or case. This relation itself has a temporal dimension. One of the conventions for giving examples is the explicit combination of a general rule, usually given in the present tense, and a specific historical event, which usually is presented in the past tense (1989, 26). This pattern is followed by both the authors investigated here, in the sense that their introductions to each chapter, presenting the virtue to be exemplified, is written in the present tense, and the following stories in the past.

Lyons also points out that ‘when used in an example, an entity loses its autonomy and unicity’, because ‘occurrences and events in examples not only can but must be both themselves and representative of something else – of the subordinating concept – and must be replaceable in that function with other events or entities’ (28). An example, then, is not just any narrative, but one ‘with a claim to particular form of truth’ – that which is given by the relationship of a general class to a particular instance (12).

At the same time, the instantiation, when it is narrative, will also have a temporal structure of its own. This creates the ambivalence that has been observed in the histories presented by Schefferus and Malling. As narrative units each of them presents the reported events in the temporal order required by the plot of the story. To some degree, as we have seen, this even involves a more extensive historical chronology represented by the names and reigns of kings, the duration of wars and military campaigns and so on. If this historical temporality should come to dominate, however, the stories would no longer be replaceable and work as examples or instantiations of a general statement or value. Their relation to the overall statement would be broken and their exemplarity dissolve.

The replaceability of examples reveals – or claims to reveal – an identity of events, figures, and even plots across chronological borders. In this way, replaceability not only relates the single example to the general statement by placing it in a subordinate position. It also relates the example directly to other examples of the same general truth, claiming them all to be ‘of the same kind’ and equal to each other. They are linked in a way that cuts across time and specific circumstance, that cuts across history in its modern sense. According to Lyons,

the importance accorded the temporal orders is paradoxically linked to the way example allows an act or object to reappear at different periods and thus to defeat change. If an *exemplum* / copy can allow the past not only to be alluded to or reflected upon, but actually resuscitated, then time itself can be subordinated to a higher, more powerful order. (1989, 11-12)

In Schefferus and Malling it is obvious that the system of virtues itself represents a higher order than that of historical chronology. The historical

time of the actual narratives, both as single units and as a collection, is subordinated by this order. This is nonetheless done in different ways in the two books, and the order in question appears to be of two different kinds. Schefferus presents his collection in the guise of a 'grand narrative' about the will of God and the strength of powers like fate, chance, and luck. This is what frames his stories about virtue and human achievement, gives them their ultimate meaning and serves to position them within a higher order. It is from this order that the individual stories get their true meaning, and it is also this order that eclipses historical time. In Malling, the individual stories are written into a higher order of a different kind. It does not produce a grand narrative and it is not in itself temporal. The order presented by Malling is simply systematic. This can be seen in the Linnaean introductions to each chapter. The nature of each virtue is suspended in a network of identities and differences: Malling explains what the virtue is and what it is not. It can also be discerned in the overall structure of his book, which does not present a cosmic drama in the way Schefferus does, but rather appears as a systematic table – again comparable to those of Linnaeus – in which all items get their true meaning from the relations they are part of.

The two books that have been examined here were written largely for the same purpose. Both are textbooks intended for young people, and based on the general idea of history as the teacher of life, as a collection of useful examples to learn from. They do not claim to be works of great historical erudition, and do not enter into any of the debates current among the learned history-writers of their times. Despite their unpretentiousness and the relative simplicity implied by their genre, this investigation has shown them to differ quite significantly from each other in the ways they make use of the *topos* of history as *magistra vitae*. It has also proved the fruitfulness of using this kind of material to gain a more advanced understanding of the cultural implications of the *topos*, and the ways in which it could be made to work.

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