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# GENDER ASPECTS OF INHERITANCE STRATEGIES AND LAND TRANSMISSION IN RURAL SCANIA, SWEDEN, 1720-1840

Martin DRIBE and Christer LUNDH

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper deals with gender aspects of land transmissions in preindustrial Sweden. Although not supported by law, there was a clear "mentality" of male primogeniture among peasants in the Swedish countryside in the eighteenth century. However, in many cases this ideal could never be realized, making the idea of the "family farm," handed down from father to son for generations, more of a myth than a reality. In this paper, using postmortem inventories linked to tax registers and family reconstitutions for a sample of parishes in western Scania in southern Sweden, we show that various strategies were chosen when transferring the farm after the death of the husband or the wife. Although sons were more likely to take over the farms, daughters (or more correctly sons-in-law) also frequently did so, as did, sometimes, more distant kin and non-kin. Moreover, it was not the case, as has sometimes been maintained, that daughters took over the farm only when there were no able bodied sons available. On the contrary, this study shows that daughters (sons-in-law) quite frequently took over the farm even in cases where there were sons available. The decision on land transmission was a part of a more general family strategy concerning reproduction (access to marriage and household formation) as well as old-age security.*

## INTRODUCTION

The practice of land transmission was a crucial component of the system of social reproduction in pre-industrial society. In the West European family system access to property was often a necessary prerequisite for peasant children to get married (Hajnal 1983), especially in the period before agricultural transformation and rural industrialization opened up new economic opportunities at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Berkner and Mendels 1978). Previous research on European inheritance practices has also tried to show a connection between inheritance practices and family systems and its impact on marriage, fertility and population growth. Areas characterized by impartible inheritance, often together with a son preference in selecting the heir, frequently also had a stem-family household system, where the selected heir coresided with the parents. In contrast, areas characterized by partible inheritance practices displayed a higher frequency of nuclear family households, greater parceling of land, higher frequency of marriage and household formation leading to faster population

growth (e.g. Habakkuk 1955; Berkner 1976).

However, despite this apparent relationship between family system and inheritance system, the great variety in the implementation of these inheritance systems in practice has been stressed in previous research. The inheritance practice was only one part of a family strategy of social reproduction that also included marriage and household formation, family system, retirement arrangements, etc., which led to a complex pattern of regional variation in these strategies depending on, for instance, economic conditions and land tenure (e.g. Berkner 1976; Goody 1973; Le Roy Ladurie 1976; Sabeau 1976, 1990; Fauve-Chamoux 1998). In particular, partible inheritance has been shown to have been highly flexible, harboring a wide variety of practices, from transferring all land to a single person to completely egalitarian land transmission, where all heirs received equal parts of the land (Berkner 1976; Sabeau 1990; Arrizabalaga 1997).

In this paper we will discuss the practices of land transmission in rural southern Sweden during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with special focus on gender differences. Earlier studies on land transmissions in pre-industrial rural Sweden give a quite mixed picture as far as the gender aspects are concerned. On the one hand, inheritance legislation in Sweden was rather equal, especially after 1845 when children of both sexes inherited equal amounts of both fixed and movable property. But even before this date, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Swedish legislation has to be considered rather equal, compared with the impartible inheritance systems which often favored a son as the one to take over. Up to 1845, all children inherited their parents and sons inherited twice the amount of daughters. Furthermore, by law there were no rules favoring older or younger siblings. Thus, it seems as if the Swedish legislation promoted partible inheritance.

On the other hand, in ethnological and to some extent in historical literature, a claim is commonly made that despite the rather equal inheritance legislation, in practice, peasants tended to favor handing over the family farm to one of the sons, often the eldest one. Ethnological reports from the late nineteenth century strongly support the fact that this was the ideal among the peasant population in the countryside (Wohlin 1910; Erixon 1921; Hellspång and Löfgren 1976). Thus, peasant mentality seems more to have been rooted in an idea of impartible inheritance, where the eldest son took over the property (male primogeniture).

As a result of the conflict between the equal inheritance legislation and peasant's norms of family farm maintenance, strategies were developed in order to sidestep and counteract the legislation. Depending on economic or demographic circumstances the inheritance practice varied a lot between regions and among individual households within regions. In the province of Dalarna, for instance, the estate was distributed among all heirs and heiresses, while in the province of Gotland the land was usually transmitted to one heir, most often the eldest son (e.g. Hellspång and Löfgren

1976). Even though there are many accounts in the literature of peasant families letting the family farm over from father to the eldest son, local studies - few though they are - show that it was not always so. Sometimes the family farm was taken over by a widow, a younger brother or a daughter, and sometimes it was split or sold (Österberg 1980; Winberg 1981; Hedberg 1985; Zernell-Durhan 1990; Perlestam 1998). It seems probable that not all of these cases were "failures" compared to the ideal of impartibility and male primogeniture.

Even when transfer of the family farm to the eldest son was not always the preference of the old peasant couple, it is likely that in many cases they were still not satisfied with an equal division of the land between all the children. Therefore, peasants developed strategies to counteract the "equality" of the inheritance legislation in one way or the other. In the literature on Sweden we find four such strategies. First, strategic marriages were used to bind properties together to avoid the land division among heirs and heiresses that made the farms too small to be economically sound. Secondly, systems were developed for compensating those who did not inherit land and sales and purchases of inherited plots between the heirs/heiresses. Often, other assets were transferred to non-inheriting children, for instance as dowries. It was also common that the property was devalued in order to facilitate the buying out of siblings. Thirdly, the peasant couple could, while they were still alive, influence the land transmission by closing a retirement contract with one of the children in exchange for pension privileges. Fourthly, the peasant couple could also write wills, either in favor of the surviving spouse so that he or she would be able to continue to manage the farm, or to one preferred child (e.g. Hellspong and Löfgren 1976; Hedberg 1985; Persson 1992; Rosén 1994; Sjöberg 2001).

In this paper we study the strategies for land transmission and the determinants behind them. Special attention is devoted to transmission of the family farm on the female side, to widows or daughters. Did these transmissions differ in any systematic way from transfers to widowers or sons? We use data for two parishes in western Scania, Sweden from 1720 to 1840. The data is based on a sample of postmortem inventories linked to family reconstitutions and poll-tax registers, which makes it possible to follow families and farms between generations.

## **THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF LAND TRANSMISSION IN SWEDEN**

In pre-industrial times, when transferring land as an exchange, a gift, an inheritance or a sale, there were several institutional arrangements that confined the owner's right to deciding to whom the transition should be or in what way the land was going to be distributed. To begin with we discuss some general preconditions for land transmissions



in Sweden in 1750-1850 and thereafter the gender aspects of land holding and land transmission.

The most common way to transfer land was through inheritance. Unlike some parts of continental Europe with impartible inheritance favoring the eldest son, Swedish inheritance legislation gave all children the right to inherit real estate when the inheritance after the parents was to be divided.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there was no ranking within the sexes depending on birth parity - all sons inherited the same amount and so did all daughters.

Within marriage, inherited land or land that was acquired prior to the wedding was the husband's or wife's individual property. Land that was acquired after the wedding was matrimonial property and owned by the husband to two thirds and by the wife to one third. To some extent, this imbalance was compensated for by the "morning gift," given to the wife by her husband at marriage, which remained the individual property of the wife and her guarantee for old age security in case she became a widow (e.g. Ågren 1999).

Until 1845 sons inherited twice the amount of daughters. As far as inherited land was concerned, this rule was unconditional and could not be evaded by a will. However, all siblings were not guaranteed to inherit *land*. According to the legislation, an heir or heiress with a larger share could buy out the others if the farm was too small to divide. In most cases, this must have favored sons at the expense of daughters. When it came to non-inherited land, there were no rules of lawful portions at all, but the parents could bequeath it to anyone, for instance to the surviving spouse or to one of the children.

Despite restrictions on parceling of land and sales of inherited land, trading in land increased from the middle of the eighteenth century. Thereby the ratio of acquired land to inherited land increased, which should have increased the scope of parents to influence the way that land was transmitted. In a peasant household where all land was acquired, none of the children could be sure to inherit their parents. Thus, together with topographic differences, the scope of the land market might have contributed to the regional differences in inheritance practice. (Rosén 1994; Ågren 1999)

While the inheritance legislation in principal was in favor of a rather uniform division of property among the heirs and heiresses, there were some institutions in early-modern Sweden that aimed at maintaining family farms undivided or limiting the extent of division. One was the lineage right, which gave relatives precedence over anyone else when buying inherited land that was offered for sale. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this right meant that sales of inherited land to non-relatives could

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<sup>1</sup> The formal inheritance rules in the period 1740-1840 come from the inheritance code in the legislation of 1734 (*Svea Rikes Lag*). A summary of the legislation is given in Winberg 1981 and 1985 and Ågren 1999.

be declared invalid within a specified amount of time. Another was the legislation against parceling of land. In order to prevent farms from being split up into units that were too small to be able to pay taxes, rules on the minimum size of a farm were set up. A third institution was a rule in the inheritance legislation itself, stating that, for farms that were too small to divide, an heir or heiress with a larger share could buy out the others. Thereby the land could be assembled again, after the division of the inheritance (Winberg 1981; Ågren 1999).

While these institutions concerned freeholders, a fourth institution was intended for farms on crown land. The socioeconomic situation of crown tenants was similar to freeholders. They enjoyed a rather secure tenancy and could not be evicted as long as they paid rents and taxes to the crown. They could also sell their tenure or close retirement contracts, implying a transfer of the tenure to a new tenant, in many cases to one of the children. However, since they did not own the land, only movable property could be inherited. The farm itself was no object of inheritance, and the crown tenant was not allowed to split the farm and parcel the land (Jutikkala 1963; "Kungl. Förordning d. 22 febr. 1749 om kronorusthåll").

Complementary to the restrictions that aimed at maintaining the family farms, the peasant family itself could try to arrange the division of the inheritance in such a way that the property was held intact or even increased. Local studies indicate that peasant families sometimes tried to compensate for land divisions by arranging strategic marriages (Sporrong and Wennersten 1995). In other cases the family tried to prevent the splitting up of the family farm by setting up agreements between the heirs and heiresses on who was going to take over (including drawing of lots). After the land was split up in the division of inheritance it was brought together again through sales and purchases among the heirs and heiresses (Winberg 1981; Hedberg 1985; Zernell-Durhan 1990). Sometimes the peasant couple made a will that enabled the surviving party to continue to head the farm (Andersson and Ågren 1997). Another strategy was that the parents passed the farm to one of the children in exchange for board and lodging for the rest of their lives, thereby anticipating the division of the inheritance (Winberg 1981; Gaunt 1983; Zernell-Durhan 1990). Whatever the arrangement might have been, it included a compensation for those heirs and heiresses who did not take over the family farm (split or undivided). One precondition for such compensatory strategies was that land prices were rather low, so that the value of the movable property seemed reasonable. Another precondition was the existence of a local land market, so that sales or exchange of land could take place, which made it possible for the chosen heir or heiress to buy out the others. The existence of such a land market has been established at least back to the sixteenth century (Sjöberg 2001). As land prices increased during the nineteenth century, the difficulties for an heir or heiress that wanted to buy out the others also increased.

In legal terms, closing a retirement contract<sup>2</sup> with one of the children, and at the same time transferring the farm, was considered a gift under certain terms. The contract was registered by the district court as a mortgage on the property. If the agreement terms were not fulfilled, the old couple could complain to the district court and the agreement could be declared invalid, with the consequence that the land transmission was revoked. If both parties were satisfied with the way the retirement arrangement worked, at the time when the parents died, and the inheritance was to be divided, the land transfer was considered an inheritance in advance. When a retirement contract was closed, the value of the calculated costs of pension privileges was subtracted from the value of the farm, which was regarded a gain to the person running the farm. If the farm was worth more than the costs of maintaining the farmer couple (or widow/-er) in their old age, a paragraph was sometimes added to the contract stipulating that the siblings should be compensated. Even in cases when no such paragraphs were put into the contracts, children who did not take over the farm were often compensated.

Even though the legislation in principle did prescribe quite equal inheritance, the peasant household could choose between different inheritance strategies depending on the topographic preconditions, demographic conditions and the development of the land market. In regions where mixed farming was combined with lumbering or other subsidiary occupations, land was divided between the heirs and heiresses with smaller farm units as the result. In regions where farm work was concentrated to cereal production and all plots possible to clear were already cultivated, farms were more often left undivided, since one heir or heiress usually bought out the others after the inheritance was distributed (see e.g. Hellspång and Löfgren 1976). This clearly illustrates the often highly flexible implementation of partible inheritance legislation found in different parts of Europe (e.g. Berkner 1976; Sabeau 1976, 1990).

## GENDER ASPECTS OF LAND TRANSMISSION

Let us now turn to the gender aspects of land transmissions. So far, only the *owning* of land has been discussed. Although the legislation favored sons to daughters until 1845, the Swedish inheritance system seems to have been less discriminating to women than many other systems with son-preference, where most, or all, property was transferred to a son. Local studies of inheritance practice have revealed that it was not only in theory that a woman was able to inherit land, it happened quite frequently (Österberg 1980; Winberg 1981; Hedberg 1985; Zernell-Durhån 1990).

From a gender point of view, it is not only important who owned land, but also

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<sup>2</sup> The legal aspects of the institution of retirement contracts are analyzed in Charpentier 1896, and its practice in Högnäs 1938; Cederlund 1965; Zernell-Durhån 1990; Åberg and Öster 1995 and Lundh and Olsson 2002.

who disposed of land. In preindustrial Sweden, an unmarried woman was not legally competent, but was under the supervision of a guardian, usually the father, or, if the father was dead, another male person. The same went for a married woman, with the difference that the guardian was her husband. An unmarried woman owned inherited land as her personal property, and a married woman owned inherited land and the morning gift as personal property and one third of the acquired land as matrimonial property, but such land was always at the disposal of the guardian. The married woman could transfer her part of the matrimonial property by writing a will, but in that case the approval of her husband, the guardian, was needed.<sup>3</sup>

Only as a widow did a woman become legally competent. A widow owned the land she had once inherited, the morning gift and one third of the matrimonial property, and all this land was at her disposal. If her husband had written a will handing over his part of the matrimonial property to her, which was a quite common arrangement, this part, too, was at the widow's disposal. If the widow decided to remarry, the inheritance after the father had to be divided among the children.

It is only in a household context that such gender relations can be understood. While we tend today to focus on individuals, in pre-industrial times the focus was on the household. The household was the basic unit for both production and consumption, and it was also the most important welfare institution. The basis of the household was the married couple, the property they brought with them into the marriage and the wealth they produced during their marriage. The husband was the head of household and represented it in dealings with other households and societal institutions and organizations. Within the household, work tasks were distributed according to sex and age, and all individuals were under the supervision of the head of household.

Since it was the head of household who was registered to pay tax or who took part in the village community, the farm was usually registered in his name in official registers, for instance in the land registers and the poll-tax registers. However, there were also separate documents that kept track of who actually owned the different plots in a farm and the acquisition history of those plots: certificates of registration of titles, deeds of gifts, purchase deeds, etc. (e.g. Winberg 1981).

The household institution and its specific gender-relations influenced the way that land transitions to women could be made in pre-industrial Sweden. If land were transmitted to an unmarried woman, she would be the landowner, but the land would

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<sup>3</sup> Sjöberg (1996) put this pattern of ownership and disposition of land into the framework of gender theory, arguing that the pre-industrial Swedish land system could be seen as a manifestation of the Laqueurian "one-sex model," where the difference between the sexes is viewed as differences in degree of perfection rather than of two different species. Thus, landowning women could "become men" - i.e. get full right of disposition to the land - if, and only if, their guardian male (husband) died. Similarly, Österberg (1980) found that widows in sixteenth century Sweden often took on male roles and, for instance, took responsibility for the farm after the death of their husbands.

be at the disposal of some guardian who would cultivate it himself or lease it out on the behalf of the heiress. Later on, if the heiress married, her husband would be her guardian and her land would be at his disposal and form a part of the real estate of the household.

If land was transmitted to a woman who was already married, it would become her private property, but it would be at the disposal of her husband, the guardian. If land were transmitted by will from the dead husband to the widow, or, if the widow decided to continue to run her part of the farm herself, she would be the landowner and also the one who had control over the land. If she decided to remarry, the inheritance after her husband had to be divided, and the land she owned would be at the disposal of her new husband.

Since it is not the land owning itself but the transmission of farms that is the focus of this study, we will concentrate on the gender aspects of two issues. First, to what extent did widows take over the responsibility for the farm when their husbands died, and under what circumstances did this occur? Second, how common was it that land was transmitted to daughters, in practice to sons-in-law, and did this happen only when no sons or older sisters were alive?

## DATA AND AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The area under study is two neighboring parishes in western Scania in southern Sweden (Hög and Kävlinge), situated on the agricultural plains, where the peasants were either freeholders or tenants on crown land; two rather similar groups of peasants. The two parishes had 401 inhabitants in 1750, which increased to 1,041 in 1840 (see Bengtsson and Dribe 1997). Since we are dealing with land transmission the analysis is limited to landowners, i.e. freeholders and tenants on crown land, leaving aside all landless and semi-landless people.

We use two different sources to clarify who took over the land and when. Postmortem inventories (*bouppteckningar*) give not only a list of possessions of the deceased person but also a list of the heirs and heiresses and other related persons, and often also an indication of marital status, age and occupation of these persons. Thus, what we get from an inventory is a list of all children alive at the time of the postmortem inventory, and other persons, kin or non-kin, who were affected by the inventory in one way or the other, either as heirs or as guardians. What we do not get, however, is information about what happened to the property after the death of the person. In order to get this we have linked inventories to data on land ownership from the poll-tax registers, which provide detailed information on who took over the property.

From the inventories we get information on children who were alive at time of the postmortem inventory and their age and marital status, and from the poll-tax

registers we get information on who took over the farm. We have coded all transmissions according to the relation of the new owner to the old (i.e. son, daughter/son-in-law, widow/er, other kin, non-kin).

Quite frequently the actual transmission of land did not take place immediately after the death of the husband or wife, and therefore we have kept track of the farm in the sources for five years after the death of the person in the inventory. If the widower or widow was still the head after five years, we have judged him or her to be the new manager even if the farm was transferred at a later stage, i.e. more than five years after the death of the husband or wife. Thus, in this study we investigate who was running the farm five years after the death of one of the peasant couple. Since the final division of the inheritance in some cases may have occurred later than that, it is not only the final results of inheritance that we are studying, but also some intermediate solutions.

From 1734 onwards the law required an inventory to be drawn up after the death of an adult person (Bringéus 1977), but it was used before this time as well. However, the inventories preserved in the archives are not a complete collection for all landowners in the parishes under study. Between 1720 and 1840, the period for which we have inventories for the two parishes, there were 536 deaths of ever-married adults in all social groups, while only 315 inventories, of which a few were for never-married. Thus, no more than 58 percent of the deaths were matched by an inventory. Between 1725 and 1740 we have no inventories at all for landed peasants, while we have only one between 1746 and 1774, which clearly shows that a fair amount of inventories have been lost. Nonetheless, these inventories are crucial in this kind of study since, without the inventories, we would not have the necessary information on potential take-overs.

As was mentioned above, the land in the parishes were either farmed by freeholders or by tenants on crown land. These groups were rather similar in their socio-economic characteristics; the main difference being the stronger property right of freeholders. The period witnessed substantial changes in land structure. In Kävlinge parish, for example, there were 19 farmsteads farming 9.2 *mantal* (a tax unit measuring the productive-potential /size/ of the farms) in 1720. In 1840 there were 48 farmsteads farming the same 9.2 *mantal*, which implies that the number of peasant holdings increased 2.5 times over this 120-year period. The increase in the number of farmsteads was due to the parceling of land in combination with cultivation of new land. Very few of these subdivisions, however, took place in the five-year period following the death of the previous head, or his wife, that we focus in this study, and not in a single case was the farm split between two children.



**LAND TRANSMISSION IN SOUTHERN SWEDEN: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

In this investigation, 129 inventories were studied with the focus on transfer of farms (see table 1). At the point in time when the inventory was done, someone had died and the surviving spouse (if any) and children were gathered to make a list of the inheritance. From local studies we know that sometimes the inheritance was divided immediately and in other cases a union was formed to keep the inheritance intact, so that the division was not made until several years later, when the surviving spouse died or when the children were ready to marry. In the years following an inventory a new farmer sometimes took over the farm. In other cases, the transmission had already been done at the time of the death, which preceded the inventory. If the deceased person were a married man, the widow often administered the farm for a year or two, while the discussion on who was going to take over was going on, and thereafter passed the responsibility to somebody else, for instance one of the children. An alternative was that the widow decided to keep on running the farm on her own, with the help of minor children and servants, as she was now the new head of household. She could also choose to remarry and hand over her part of the farm to her new husband. If it was the wife who died, the husband, in principle, had the same alternatives: to continue to run the farm as a widower or after remarrying, or to make it over to one of the children or anyone else in exchange for a retirement contract.

Table 1. Number of deceased persons by sex and marital status in the inventories.

	Number	Percent
Married men	59	46
Married women	47	36
Widowers	12	9
Widows	11	9
N	129	100

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

As was discussed in the previous section, the inheritance legislation favored sons who inherited twice the amount of daughters and husbands who owned twice as much of the matrimonial property as wives. If such inequalities were not counteracted by the peasant families in practice, one would expect sons to have been more likely to take over the farms than daughters, and widowers more likely to have continued to run the farm than widows.

Let us start with the different patterns of widowers and widows. From table 2 it seems as if there was little difference between the sexes in the proportion of



surviving spouse taking over the farm (21 percent of the widows and 24 percent of the widowers). However, the number of deaths of married men was about one third more than for married women (see table 1). This implies that it was more likely for a widower to continue to run the farm after the death of his wife than for a widow following the death of her husband. The probability of keeping the responsibility for the farm was 66 percent for widowers, while the corresponding probability for widows (including those who remarried) was 48 percent (see table 3). This means that a widower was more likely to continue running the farm after the death of the spouse than a widow. However, it is also true that the likelihood of taking over the farm for a widow was as high as 70 percent of the probability of a widower.

Thus, it was quite common also for widows to continue to head the farm for at least five years after the death of her husband, which contrasts with some other findings for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Perlestam, for instance, when analyzing a parish in the province of Småland (some 200 kilometers north of the parishes under consideration here) for the period between 1720 and 1820, found widows to have farmed independently for rather short periods of time (mean of three years) (Perlestam 1998, p.169). Similar findings have also been made by Hanssen (1976) and Svensson (2001) for different parts of Scania. Perlestam finds that it was in periods of war and societal crisis that the gender system was put out of order and widows became farmers more frequently, for instance during the 1630s (the Thirty Year's War) and the 1710s (the Great Nordic War). (Perlestam 1998, pp.175, 232)

Table 2. Relationship of new farmer to previous farmer.

	Number	Percent
Son	39	30
Daughter/Son-in-law	17	13
Widow	21	16
Widow/remarried	7	5
Widower	31	24
Kin	7	5
Non-kin	7	5
N	129	100

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

From table 2 it is also clear that a son was more likely to take over a farm than a daughter. In 30 percent of the cases a son took over, and in 13 percent it was a daughter (in practice the son-in-law) who took over the responsibility for the family farm. Since there is no *a priori* reason to believe that there were more sons than daughters in the concerned families, these proportions indicate that a son was about twice as

likely to take over the farm as a daughter (see also table 6). Since sons inherited twice the amount of daughters, it was cheaper for a son to buy out his sister(s) than for a daughter to buy out her brothers(s), which may account for at least some of the difference between sons and daughters in the likelihood of taking over the farm.

However, although sons were twice as likely to take over the farm than were daughters, it was by no means unusual for (married) daughters, or more correctly their husbands, to take over the farm. This result stands in sharp contrast to, for instance, Zernell-Durhån's findings from Kubbe hamlet in the province of Ångermanland in northern Sweden. In the period 1751-1850, male dominance in takeovers was almost complete. Sons were nine times more likely than daughters to take over responsibility for the family farm. In most cases when the farm was made over to a daughter, there was no son in the family. In short, it was a makeshift solution to transfer the farm to a daughter (Zernell-Durhån 1990, p. 34). This seems not to have been the case in Hög and Kävlinge parishes in Scania. Similarly, when investigating intergenerational land transmission in Locknevi parish in Småland, Persson found that in almost all cases the farm was transferred to one of the children, most often the eldest son (Persson 1992, pp. 271-272).

Table 3 suggests that the death of the husband rather than the wife increased the likelihood of a son taking over the farm. It is possible that there was great pressure on the widow to hand over the farm to a son, since that was customary and what was favored by the law. Another possible reason is that the widow might have preferred to let a son take over the duties after his father, since she herself could not manage customary male work-tasks. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in cases when the wife died, the proportion of daughters taking over the farm is larger than in cases when the husband died.

Table 3. New farmer's relationship to previous by deceased person (%).

	Husband dies, wife alive	Wife dies, husband alive	Widower dies	Widow dies
Son	31	19	58	45
Daughter/Son-in-law	8	11	25	36
Widow	36	0	0	0
Widow/remarried	12	0	0	0
Widower	0	66	0	0
Kin	7	2	17	0
Non-kin	7	2	0	18
Total	100	100	100	100
N	59	47	11	12

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

In 10 percent of the cases, the farm was transferred to a more distant relative or non-related person (see table 2). Most of these cases occurred when the husband died, which probably meant that the widow needed someone to run the farm while waiting for the children to grow up and the inheritance to be divided (see table 3). In some cases a distant relative or non-kin person took over the farm after the death of a widow or widower, which might indicate that the children were too young to marry and take over the responsibility for the farm.

It was previously stated that sometimes the transfer of a farm occurred prior to the death of the person in the inventory. In some cases this happened while both parents were alive and a retirement agreement was made with one of the children, including the transmission of the farm to the chosen child. A retirement contract could also have been closed between a widow or a widower and one of the children. There were a few cases when land was transmitted to a distant kin or non-kin person. In such cases, there were no, or only minor, children who could take over the farm (see below).

Table 4. Land transmissions between generations by parental live status.

	Both parents alive		Father dead, mother alive		Mother dead, father alive		Both parents dead	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Son	11	100	17	68	6	43	5	83
Daughter/Son-in-law	0	0	8	32	8	57	1	17
N/Total	11	100	25	100	14	100	6	100

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

Table 4 shows the land transmission between generations in the peasant households. One fifth of the transmissions from parent to child took place while both parents were still alive. The bulk of the transmissions occurred after the death of either the head of the household or the wife, but before both were dead (about 70 percent). Only in about 10 percent of the cases did the transmission of land between generations take place after the deaths of both parents. This means that the retirement contract was the main strategy for the arrangement of the future of the family farm, the division of family property between future heirs and heiresses and old age security for the old peasant couple. This great importance of retirement arrangements is in agreement with what has been found in other parts of the country. In both Dala parish in the province Västergötland in western Sweden and in Kubbe hamlet in Ångermanland in northern Sweden, as much as 85 percent of the land transmissions occurred while the parents (or at least one of them) were alive (Winberg 1981, pp. 288-289; Zernell-Durhan 1990,

p. 22).

The gender aspect of table 4 is striking. In *all* cases when both parents were alive they decided to hand over the farm to a son. It is probable that such cases left room for parental preferences and were quite free from constraints: the parents planned for their own old age and tried to anticipate a future inheritance. If so, the result could be derived from the peasant norm of impartibility and male primogeniture. In cases when one of the spouses had died, the situation was probably different. The need for replacement labor probably made it more urgent to go into a retirement arrangement, especially for widows and old widowers. Even if a son was preferable as the person to take over, this was not always possible. As can be seen from table 4, the difference in the proportions of sons and daughters (sons-in-law) taking over the family farm is not very large: 59 percent and 41 percent respectively. Daughters were also relatively more likely to take over the farm following the death of the mother, which seems to imply that they substituted for the mothers in the household to a certain extent. Previous findings on the pattern of leaving home have indicated a similar situation for unmarried daughters. Following the death of the mother, unmarried daughters with younger siblings present in the household were more likely to remain longer at home, most likely substituting for their deceased mother in the household (Dribe 2000, pp. 195-197).

Since the inventories in most cases include information on sex, civil status, age and occupation of the living children of the deceased person, it is possible to say something about how differences in the family composition influenced the choice of transmission strategy. Table 5 shows that the family life cycle had a great impact on the strategy of land transmission. If most of the children were minor, few were adult and hardly any were married, then the surviving spouse was likely to take over responsibility for the farm. In cases when the farm was transferred to distant relatives or non-kin persons, the family composition was about the same. In such cases, either both parents were dead, or the widow or widower was incapable of managing the farm. If, on the other hand, the land transmission took place rather late in the family life cycle, and a large proportion of the children were already married or in marriable ages, then it was more likely for a son or daughter (son-in-law) to take over the farm. This is also corroborated by the migration pattern of different family types in the same area of southern Sweden. Female-headed families where the head was over 40 years old - i.e. in most cases families headed by widows - were considerably more likely to move within parish borders compared to male-headed families in the same age group, which indicates that older widows were more likely to transfer the farm after the death of the husband and move to another place in the parish (Dribe forthcoming).

Table 5. Mean number of different kin in different take-over groups.

	Unmarried sons			Unmarried daughters			Married sons	Married daughters	Other kin	N
	0-19	20+	age n.a.	0-19	20+	age n.a.				
Son	0.3	1.4	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.8	0.9	1.3	39
Daughter/ Son-in-law	0.5	0.8	0	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.5	0.8	1.1	17
Widow	1.6	0.3	0	1.9	0.4	0	0	0	1.6	21
Widow/ Remarried	1.4	0	0	1.9	0.3	0.3	0	0	3.4	7
Widower	1.4	0.5	0	1	0.1	0.2	0	0.1	1.4	31
Kin	0	0.3	0	0.3	0.3	0.1	0	0.3	3.7	7
Non-kin	1.4	0.3	0	1.7	0	0	0	0	1.3	7

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

As is clear from table 5, in cases when a son was favored to take over, the number of unmarried adult sons in the family exceeded the number of married sons. No such difference could be discerned in cases when the farm was transferred to a daughter (son-in-law). One interpretation of this is that the land transmission made it possible for unmarried adult sons to get married, often in exchange for a retirement contract. Land transmission on the female side more often was made to a married daughter and took place after the death of one or both parents.

The legal inheritance framework made no difference between sons or daughters of different birth order. However, ethnological and historical literature frequently gives the picture that it was common for farmers to favor the eldest son in the decision on land transmission.

In the sample of this study, 57 percent of the land transmission between generations was to the eldest son (see table 6), which gives some support to the idea that peasants preferred the eldest son to take over. But in 45 percent of the cases it was not the eldest son that was chosen to take over the farm. In 27 percent of the cases it was the eldest daughter, which indicates that birth order did matter, not only for sons but also for daughters. In the remaining 18 percent of the cases the farm was passed on to a child of less birth rank, mostly to younger sons. Other studies, too, have shown that birth order influenced the transmission of land, but that, in practice, it was not always the eldest one that was the chosen one (Winberg 1981, pp. 295-298; Zernell-Durhàn 1990, p.38.)

Table 6. Children taking over by sex and parity.

	Number	%
Sons	39	70
thereof		
-eldest child	14	25
-eldest son	32	57
-other sons	7	13
Daughters/Sons-in-law	17	30
thereof		
-eldest child	11	20
-eldest daughter	15	27
-other daughters	2	6
N/Total	56	100

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scania Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

The overall importance of birth order, both for males and females, is clearly pictured in table 6. About 80 percent of the sons and 90 percent of the daughters taking over the family farm were the oldest of their sex among the siblings. However, it seems as if gender was superior to birth order. First, sons were more likely to take over the family farm, as was established above. Second, in two thirds of the cases when the farm was transferred to a daughter (son-in-law), she was the eldest child alive when the inventory was made. The corresponding proportion for sons was about one third. This might be interpreted as a parental preference to transmit land to a son rather than to a daughter. In cases when the daughter was the eldest child, this parental discrimination to some extent was overcome.

It is also interesting to note that in those cases where the farm was transferred to a daughter, this need not imply that it was “a second best” choice, i.e. that there were no adult sons alive. Table 7 shows that in 24 percent of the cases, when the one taking over was a daughter, she had an older brother, in 35 percent of the cases she had a younger brother, and in 18 percent she had a brother whose age could not be established. If we exclude cases of double counting (a daughter could have both an older and a younger brother), a son was alive in 64 percent of the families when the farm was transferred to a married daughter (see table 8).

Table 7. Proportions of sons and daughters taking over by presence of siblings.

	Older brother	Younger brother	Brother age unknown	Older sister	Younger sister	Sister age unknown	N
Son	18	62	0	23	54	28	39
Daughter/Son-in-law	24	35	18	18	41	0	17

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

Table 8. Sons and daughters/sons-in-law taking over by presence of siblings

	Sons		Daughters/Sons-in-law	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Only child	2	5	3	18
Brothers, no sisters	5	13	4	23
Sisters, no brothers	9	23	3	18
Both brothers and sisters	23	59	7	41
N/Total	39	100	17	100

*Source:* Inventories in Hög and Kävlinge parishes, The Provincial Archives in Lund; The Scanian Demographic Database, Department of Economic History, Lund University.

To conclude, even if there seems to have been a clear preference for males to take over, it was not only in rare cases that land was transmitted to a woman. If the husband in a peasant family died, and the children were minor, the widow often kept on managing the farm until one of the children married and took over responsibility for the farm. Land was also frequently transmitted to married daughters, or more correctly to their husbands, and in most of these cases the female succession was not made necessary by the lack of sons.

## CONCLUSION

Although it was not supported by law, there was a clear “mentality” of male primogeniture among peasants in the Swedish countryside in the eighteenth century. To a very large extent the portrayed ideal of the time was to transfer the “family farm”



from father to son, preferably the eldest son, generation after generation. However, in reality this ideal could not always be maintained, implying that other people took over the farm, and the idea of the “family farm” owned by the same lineage for generations seems to have been more of a myth than a reality (Rosén 1994; Winberg 1981). In this paper we have also been able to show that various strategies were chosen when transferring the farm after the death of the husband or the wife. Although sons were more likely to take over the farms, daughters also frequently did so, as did, sometimes, more distant kin and non-kin. Moreover, it was not the case, as has sometimes been maintained, that daughters only took over the farm when there were no able bodied sons around to do so. Instead it seems that the daughters, or more correctly sons-in-law, could take over the farm even in cases where there were sons available. Instead, the decisions on land transmission were parts of a more general family strategy concerning reproduction (access to marriage and household formation) as well as old-age security.

When they had no adult children, the widow or widower most often chose to continue running the farm, while when there were married, or marriageable children, they transferred the farm to them. In some cases, however, the widow did not continue to run the farm, or get remarried after the death of the spouse, but chose to transfer the farm to other people; most often to non-kin.

Daughters were more often chosen as heirs when one of the parents, especially the mother, died, while sons were clearly given an advantage when transmission was planned and implemented during the lifetime of both parents. To a higher degree than sons, daughters who took over the land were already married at transmission. For sons, it was, instead, in many cases the inheritance that gave the opportunity for marriage. Finally, female heiresses also appear to have been more likely to be an eldest child, than male heirs.

Taken together, this study has shown that there were many different strategies that could be chosen when transferring land to a new generation. These strategies were also intimately connected to other crucial goals of pre-industrial society, such as old-age security, opportunity for marriage and household formation. Only by combining analyses of these economic-demographic interactions can we get a better understanding of the role of property and inheritance in peasant society.

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