

TYGE KROGH: *A Lutheran Plague. Murdering to Die in the Eighteenth Century*. Leiden 2012, Brill. ix + 226 s. 109 EUR.

The wish to be executed is an intriguing phenomenon. I first came across it during my research in the Amsterdam judicial archive, where I found two cases in which the convict confessed to an invented homicide (*Spectacle of Suffering*: 95-6). In both instances the magistrates refused to believe the self-accusation and a deputy minister (a term that I have for long preferred now over the literal translation of »comforter of the sick«) flatly equated the false confession with a suicide attempt. During my research on imprisonment, I hadn't even thought of considering the cases of inmates who committed serious offenses out of a desire to obtain the death penalty and thereby end their misery of forced labor under the rubric of indirect suicide, although they count as such by Krogh's criteria. Subsequently, books by Arne Jansson (1998) and Vera Lind (1999) paid ample attention to the phenomenon of committing a murder, often on a young child, out of a desire to be executed. They pointed out that religious scruples against direct suicide constituted the main reason for this desire and that the act was especially frequent in Scandinavia and Northern Germany, hence in Lutheran areas.

To my knowledge, Tyge Krogh has written the first book devoted exclusively to killing in order to be executed. Instead of indirect suicide, he prefers the term suicide murder, to which I will keep in this review. Krogh has performed archival research for Copenhagen and the Danish province of Zealand. In addition he makes use of the studies by Jansson and Lind and many other publications, including a set of early modern treatises, which turns his book into the first European-wide assessment of the phenomenon (much more comprehensive than I could be in my *History of Murder*, 158-9). Krogh confirms that suicide murder was mainly confined to Lutheran parts of Europe, including cities in Southern Germany where this confession prevailed. The phenomenon was infrequent in Anglican, Reformed and Catholic places, with the notable exception of Vienna. It should be added that historians of France and other non-Lutheran countries have not systematically looked for suicide murders, but the assumption of their relative infrequency there is a plausible conjecture from the available literature. Copenhagen, on the other hand, appears to have been the European capital of suicide murder, with an annual rate of 1.5 per 100,000 for only this type of killing during the eighteenth century. Krogh identifies three types of perpetrators in particular: female domestic servants,

prisoners, also mostly female, and soldiers. Maids typically wanted to die due to ill treatment or beatings by their employers or because of a broken promise of marriage, whereas prisoners were tired of the hard work they had to perform.

Soldiers are a bit of a surprise category, as the literature that until now I had been familiar with suggests that suicide murder was committed almost exclusively by women. Soldiers often committed the act with the aim of avoiding severe but non-capital physical punishment. As their victims they preferred, rather than young children, a fellow-soldier or an adult male civilian. Since this category of murderers was armed, more than once they simply killed by shooting the other in the back. Krogh rightly calls this a severe breach of the military code of honor, but we may suppose that the perpetrators would have found it even more dishonorable to shoot a child. One motive, appearing in the earlier literature, for suicidal murderers' preference for a child as victim is the little resistance expected. Of course this equally applies to shooting someone in the back by surprise. The other motive mentioned in the literature for the choice of a child is the belief that it is free from sin and hence destined to go to heaven. This does obviously not apply to the adult victims, certainly not when they were incidental passers-by unknown to the perpetrator. Thus, Krogh shows that consideration with the victim's fate in the hereafter was not a universal concern for suicidal murderers.

Krogh organizes his book in three parts, together comprising no less than 16 chapters (including introduction and conclusion). It looks like a scheme that the author laid out in advance, from which he did not want to deviate. Some of the chapters are only a few pages long and the distinction between the first part, »morphology«, and the second, »origins«, is not entirely clear to me. Yet, the reader gets the definite impression that all possible aspects of the subject have been treated. The third part, »demise«, is more straightforward. It deals with legal changes from the second half of the eighteenth century onward and the gradual decline in the frequency of suicide murder following these changes. Until the mid-eighteenth century at least, the authorities found it self-evident that intentional murderers, even if they admitted their suicidal motive, received the death penalty, whether or not with aggravated torments. Krogh even suggests that the judges happily complied with the murderers' death wish. A new mentality broke through from the second half of the eighteenth century onward, in some countries earlier than in others. A Danish decree of 1767 made murder with

a suicidal motive punishable with, among other things, life imprisonment and recurrent whippings on the anniversary of the crime. Krogh attributes the new mentality to the growth to prominence of a secular discourse that considered prevention of the crime more important than saving the perpetrator's soul, as well as new ideas on punishment generally as exemplified by Cesare Beccaria's treatise. The frequency of suicide murders declined with a delay, but even today they are not completely absent from countries that apply the death penalty.

As we would expect, Krogh deals at length with the question why suicide murders occurred mainly in the Lutheran parts of Europe. Earlier authors attributed this, not so much to Lutheranism *per se*, but to the Pietist strands within it. Pietism tended to infuse its adherents with introspection that could lead to depression, but it stuck to the condemnation of actual suicide. Krogh seems to waver between Lutheranism and Pietism (esp. pp. 130-4), but in the end he considers the second as merely a variant of the first. The popularity of suicide murder, he argues, had to do with the typically Lutheran soteriology. To those about to die, Lutheran pastors could offer more than those of other confessions could. Under Lutheranism, anyone who repented and turned to God would surely go to heaven. Ordinary people in Scandinavia and Northern Germany even believed that execution earned one a free ticket to heaven. The Calvinist doctrine of predestination, on the other hand, implied that it was very unlikely that a criminal would be among the elect. Catholics could obtain absolution of their sins, but they would always go to Purgatory first. For Anglicans, too, the road to heaven was not as free from obstacles as for Lutherans. Thus, Krogh adds a positive motivation to the negative one of religious scruples against direct suicide. Lutherans with a death wish turned to murder, because they longed to be happy in the hereafter and thought that execution was a sure way to this end.

In connection with this argument, Krogh states that the religious tenor of early modern executions, for all crimes, was especially pronounced in Lutheran countries and towns. It may be true that Lutheran ministers got the opportunity to prepare the convict for death during a longer period than was common elsewhere in Europe, but ordinary people would first of all think of the execution ceremony itself and the religious ritual played out there. Krogh takes his argument even further, claiming that religious ritual was nearly absent from executions in other parts of Europe – a claim that I cannot accept. I have called the process by which capital punishment became religiously tinged the

sacralization of executions (in a contribution to a 2011 collection, reprinted in my *Violence and Punishment*, 2012). The evidence for it comes from the work of several scholars, in particular Peter Schuster (to whom Krogh refers) and Mitchell Merback. They both show that the process in question already set in during the fifteenth century, even though Schuster attributes its breakthrough to the Reformation. However, during the sixteenth century all of Europe witnessed the sacralization of executions, regardless of the prevalent confession. The available literature amply confirms this. How could Beccaria have objected against the religious ritual surrounding the death penalty, if it hadn't been common in the Italy of his time? Religiously tinged executions were common in Colonial America too, as shown by Stuart Banner. In conclusion, I accept that Lutheranism facilitated the option of suicide murder, but I reject the claim that the execution ceremony as such had a lesser religious flavor in non-Lutheran places.

These reservations do not diminish my appreciation of Krogh's accomplishment. He has written a valuable study that will remain the standard work on suicide murder for years to come.

*Pieter Spierenburg*

PASI IHALAINEN, MICHAEL BREGNSBO, KARIN SENNEFELT & PATRIK WINTON (red.): *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution: Nordic Political Cultures, 1740-1820*. Farnham 2011, Ashgate. 404 s. 75 GBP.

Denne antologi er udsprunget af to workshops i 2008 og 2009, arrangeret af de nordiske selskaber for 1700-talsstudier. Disse selskaber er tværfaglige og har et stærkt islæt af litteratur- og idehistorikere. I dette bind er det dog kun faghistorikere, der har ordet.

Titlen skal tages meget alvorligt. Emnet er den politiske kultur, ikke politiske forløb eller politikens socialhistorie. De 21 bidrag er fordelt på fire sektioner med titlerne »The crisis and renewal of monarchy«, »The transformation of political debate«, »Commercial interests and politics in Scandinavia« og endelig »The shifting boundaries of political participation«. Inddelingen fungerer ikke i den grad systematisk, at der i de respektive sektioner kun fokuseres på henholdsvis et objekt, en arena, en aktørgruppe og en proces, men det er en realistisk måde at udpege nogle af de punkter, der har været i fokus i den nyere forskning. Bogen kunne nemlig have heddet *ny forskning* i nordisk politisk kultur.