

## Chapter 11 : Swedish legacy (III) – “A Dynasty Establishes Itself”.

Charles John's biography is usually written under the headings: The Man, the Warlord, The Head of State, The Economist & The Legacy. There is a development over time so that the legacy has increasingly come to focus on his efforts to legitimize his dynasty (below), to ignore his advisers (“his self rule”; next chapter 12) & the money (the appanage; the Guadeloupe money & the Galliera fund; below).

The standard description of how Charles John legitimized the Bernadotte dynasty is based on the election: Charles John's field record, administrative experience, knighthood & wealth offset his low birth, non-existent Swedish & Catholic religion. However, it did not end there. After the accession, Charles John had to continue legitimizing himself both at home and abroad: legally, politically, in public opinion and dynastically. It was a process that was not over until his son Oscar's marriage in 1823 to Josephine of Leuchtenberg (who was European nobility); according to some authors not until Gustaf V's marriage to Victoria of Baden (Gustaf IV was her father's maternal grandfather). But there are still a lot of people who consider the Bernadottes usurpers and parvenus, at least when they want to denigrate them:

\* \* \*

The haphazard outcome of the election and Swedes reputation for disposing their monarchs whenever it suited them, made Charles John worry about his position for the rest his life. The Liberals called this “shadow-fear” or worse, but it seems to have been highly justified. His whole generation was dead or in exile & he himself in a foreign country with his back against the wall. Research has not been able to verify any overt threats against himself, but against his dynasty. For example, during the Congress of Vienna 1814-15, Gustaf IV, through his envoy Admiral Sidney Smith, tried to have his son Gustav reinstated as successor to the throne, which did not succeed, but...

Ill planned and even worse executed, the various attempts to bring Prince Gustaf into the public's mind could appear harmless. But at a time when legitimacy was paramount they were not without prospects. When the bourbons were restored in France, in Spain, in Naples, the House of Orange in Holland, when every disposed royal house was reinstated, why should the House of Holstein-Gottorp in Sweden be rejected? Since the great powers did not want Napoleon on the throne of France or Murat on the throne of Naples, why did Bernadotte's position as a Swedish heir remain untouched? Such considerations were obvious. They were also much discussed in the French press, and could not escape Charles John's attention.<sup>1</sup>

The reason that Charles John was allowed to remain seems to have been that Sweden through Charles XIII was still governed by its old dynasty and that Charles John was appointed in accordance with law and had Alexander's support. “The Big Four” (Russia, Prussia, Austria & England) could not easily stab a legitimate heir in the back. However, the reluctance to allow the Bernadotte dynasty into the European salons was compact. The fact that Oscar (I) was allowed to marry into what was left of the Napoleonic clan seems like an emergency solution, which turned out well.

\*

---

<sup>1</sup> Carlsson 1883: ss. 112-114.

Charles John was an unusually stately & (when he wanted it) courteous man, which he initially - before his barrack manners, stinginess & suspicious nature made themselves felt - had great use of. He made a big deal out of his adoption & and treated everybody with the utmost courtesy: Charles XIII, Queen Charlotte, Dowager Queen Sophia Magdalena and her daughter Sofia Albertina. Charles XIII's health was shaky and after a few months Charles John was already given the regency. One of his actions was to create a special propaganda department - "The King's Public Bureau" - with the task of spreading a favourable image of himself and his field records. In 1812, he also succeeded in reducing the freedom of the press. Any criticism would be nipped in the bud by suspending publication, prohibiting critique of not only himself but his cabinet and even associates, prohibition to publish foreign newspaper articles and prohibition to publish articles about Gustaf IV & his family. The criticism that slipped between the cracks was attacked by friendly journalists & paid front men. It took until 1830 for a regular newspaper debate develop, which I suppose explains some of the rancour.<sup>2</sup>

In connection with the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election, an anthology was published: "Creating a dynasty: Media, myths and power surrounding Charles XIV John and the Bernadotte family". Editor Nils Ekedahl summarized the book as the unexpected outcome of the election giving rise to an extensive discussion of how to deal with the situation. There were three "camps": those who saw Charles John as a representative of the French Revolution - a citizen monarch; those who saw him as yet another great Swedish power-hungry Caesar; those who worried about how a person with his background & character would be able to cope with the office. In the homages, Charles John was described as field-marshal, citizen-monarch, father of the country and founder of a dynasty in the spirit of Gustav Vasa - he too elected by popular vote. In the pamphlets he was described as an intruder, despot & careerist. In contemporary memories, he appears as a confusing mix of Jacobin, royalist, Napoleon admirer, common sense, semi-understood readings, grandiose self-image, total uncertainty, self-love, persecution mania, good intentions, diva behaviour, flattery upwards, curses downwards & superior intelligence.

The 1818 coronation was full-on. Charles XIII's coronation had been a minor affair. Not so Charles John's, which was a two-day affair full of heraldic & ceremonial finesse. Ekedahl et al interpret the spectacle according to Jürgen Habermas' distinction between the old feudal & modern bourgeois public sphere.<sup>3</sup>

In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people.

In this case the struggle was between king, nobility & others. It concerned being seen. Those who appeared most frequently & in the right context had (or got) the most influence. The celebratory poems - just from Charles John's time as Crown Prince there are 206 of them<sup>4</sup> - are analysed in the same manner: The important thing is not what is published - the details, the veracity - but that it is published - the subject, the time, the scope.<sup>5</sup> I would still say that the effect of the state propaganda measured as litres of printers ink & square meters of canvas is exaggerated. Anything cannot be sold by cutthroat advertising. There must also be

---

<sup>2</sup> Boberg 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Habermas 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Almqvist 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Dayan & Katz 1992.

some substance. The substance in this case was the consent of the Estates & Charles John's oath of fealty.

\*

When Charles John arrived in Sweden, his title was Prince of Ponte Corvo. Upon Charles XIII's adoption, he received a Swedish title. Legally, the Bernadotte dynasty became a non-genealogical sideline of the Oldenburg house (the Holstein-Gottorp dynasty), but no one has bothered with this fact. The kinship through Oscar I's wife Josephine with the house of Vasa is considered much more important. Josephine's grandmother's grandmother's grandmother was the granddaughter of Gustav Vasa.<sup>6</sup> Easier put: Frederick VI of Baden-Durlach, part of Josephine's family, had married Charles X's sister Christina, granddaughter of Gustav Vasa. Josephine's mother was also related to King Gustaf IV's wife, which was however not advertised.

A digression about ancestry & money:

- Napoleon rewarded his family and marshals with titles & spoils of war. Charles John was 1806-1810 Prince of the Duchy of Ponte Corvo - created by an exclave to the Vatican State located in the Kingdom of Naples in southern Italy, which 1806-1815 was a client state of France. Napoleon's brother Joseph Bonaparte was king of the area (including Ponte Corvo) from 1806 to 1808. He was succeeded in 1808-1815 by Napoleon's brother-in-law Marshal Joachim Murat. In 1815, the Kingdom of Naples was reunited with the Kingdom of Sicily as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Ponte Corvo belonged 1806-1810 to Charles John, 1810-1812 to Joachim Murat and 1812-1815 to the son Lucien Murat. In 1815, it returned to the Vatican. In 1810, Napoleon promised Charles John a transfer sum, but he never received it. Charles John's notorious Guadeloupe fund is supposed to have been a belated compensation.
- Charles John's son Oscar I also took economic advantage of Napoleon's Italian conquests. In 1806 Napoleon was crowned King of (northern) Italy. His adoptive son, Eugène de Beauharnais, in 1804 Prince of France, became viceroy in 1806-1814. In 1808, he was granted the Duchies of Parma & Piacenza. His daughter Josephine, later married to Oscar, was from birth Princess of France, but Napoleon also awarded her the title of Princess of Bologna and in 1808 the Duchy of Galliera. The fief included a palace located in the city of Bologna not far away. In 1815 the fiefdoms reverted, but the Vienna Congress allowed the family to keep the profits. Josephine's so-called Galliera fund of inventories from the palace still exists & has increased considerably in value
- Eugène's wife was Princess of Bavaria, and Eugène was able (through her parents) to 1817 buy a small fiefdom in there. At the time of Oscar's marriage to his daughter, he was Duke of Leuchtenberg, Prince of Eichstädt and member of the Bavarian Privy Council. The problem was that Eugène was not prince because he belonged to a ruling dynasty, but as an honorary title. The same with Josephine's princess title. In 1810-1814 however, her father was recognized as heir of the short-lived Grand Duchy of Frankfurt. In October 1813, the Prince-Bishop von Dalberg abdicated in favour of Eugène, and until April 1814, when the duchy was abolished (=mediatized) he was de jure, although not de facto Grand Duke of the place. Josephine in this way became

---

<sup>6</sup> N.N. 1823.

princess of Bavaria for real. She also stood in line for the throne. The reason for this was that Bavaria 1713-1818 had a cognatic succession, the so-called "Pragmatische Sanktion". In the marriage contract, however, she renounced her rights.

\*

Charles John received propositions to divorce Desirée & remarry a princess, but declined. Neither Desirée was keen to deny her background, but made sure that she too was crowned. She reserved the dynasty for her son. Desirée thought he deserved someone from Almanach de Gotha, but for Charles John it had entered prestige into the choice of the daughter of someone with the same background as himself:

I repeat: Glory is the first of all awards. As long as it lasts, it forms the basis of all nobility in the world, and in that sense I am one of the greatest nobles in Europe. The Duke of Leuchtenberg is morally an equal to royalty. Although he is not included among those accepted by our order of succession, it is the relationship with him that I prefer.<sup>7</sup>

Another reason for Charles John to worry was that Tsar Alexander I was actually (as brother-in-law of his mother) Prince Gustaf's guardian. During the 1820s Gustaf's title was "Prince of Sweden, heir to Norway". In 1828, Charles John, through a diplomatic campaign, succeeded in preventing his marriage to a Dutch princess, by making the marriage appear to be a violation of the Vienna Convention. Prince Gustaf of Sweden changed his title to Prince Gustaf of Vasa (in civil contexts Gustav Gustavsson of Vasa), the Dutch marriage was cancelled and Prince Gustaf had to marry his cousin Lovisa of Baden. It was only with King Gustaf V's marriage to Princess Victoria of Baden 50 years later that the families were reconciled. There were a lot of rumours. As late as 1910, a trial took place that Alexander I, as guardian of King Gustaf IV's children, had left a fund to Charles John for their maintenance, which he had confiscated for himself.

\*

Another book from the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary was Per Sandin's doctoral thesis "A Royal house with the times" where he tried to prove that Charles John & son Oscar I were not as autocratic as previous research had claimed but also legitimized their dynasty in bourgeois circles by: (1) Allowing them to participate in court life. (2) Engaging in charity. (3) familiarizing their children with civil society; Sandin depicts a process in which Charles John until 1823 (when Desirée & Josephine arrived) abandons the traditional court life and dedicates himself to national government; encourages voluntary associations & non-profit social work; raises the son to be an economist like himself. He summarizes:

The overall purpose of this thesis has been to describe and analyse how the Bernadotte royal house maintained its legitimacy during the transition from an older social formation - the hierarchical society - to a new - egalitarian society.

...

Although earlier historians have emphasized Charles John's merits as Swedish and Norwegian regent, they have to a large degree depicted him as a conservative, even reactionary ruler with autocratic ambitions and ignored the rest. Over the past 10-15 years, a new, and I would argue, more nuanced research has emerged. Monarchy and

---

<sup>7</sup> Girod de l'Ain 1960: ss. 206-207. [Brev från Charles John till Desirée. Okänt datum.]

its societal role is treated as a subject in its own right. Protagonists of this approach are Peter Burke, Philip Mansel and others.<sup>8</sup>

Since Sandin's dissertation depicts "la longue durée", a process outside political fads, it is difficult to take a position on it. The royal house turns bourgeois, which may have been deliberate policy, or because of the impossibility of isolating itself from "the destructive forces of time". The question has little to do with the two researchers, Peter Burke & Philip Mansel, to which Sandin refers. They deal with the court life and "monarchist mystic" of yesteryear. If you follow that line of inquiry, Charles John becomes a compromise candidate - a bourgeois king from the French knighted bourgeoisie:

It should be pointed out that when Charles John arrived in Sweden in the autumn of 1810, he already had considerable experience of European court life. As the French ambassador to Vienna in 1798, he had, for example, been confronted with a court environment that Torvald Höjer has described as unsurpassed in "relentless spirituality and ceremonial life", and during the years 1804-1810 he had the opportunity to study the court life that developed around Napoleon I. Philip Mansel believes that Bernadotte's experience of moving in royal and socially sophisticated environments was in fact a prerequisite for his ascension to the Swedish throne. I fully share this view. There are also plenty of contemporary testimonies that show that Charles John indeed corresponded to very high expectations of a royal performance.<sup>9</sup>

\* \* \*

In 2010/11, three exhibitions were organized about how Charles John & son legitimized their dynasty through art. During his lifetime, Charles John had himself depicted in flattering portraits and erected statues in memory of his predecessors. The son also erected statues. The exhibitions were "The Art of Becoming King" (Helsingborg: Dunkers kulturhus), "Bernadottes in black and white" (Stockholm: National Museum) & "Emperor-Art" (Stockholm: National Museum).<sup>10</sup> The Dunkers exhibition pointed out the random nature of the choice of Charles John.<sup>11</sup> Charles John, who was a Freemason, even attributed occult powers to the outcome. The number 14 (XIV) has a numerological interpretation - that if you work hard for your dream it becomes true.

\*

It is difficult to distinguish between the legitimization of the Bernadotte dynasty and pure popularity hunting. Louis XVIII of France had similar difficulties in legitimizing his restored dynasty & employed similar methods.

Louis XVIII had in fact managed to gain significant popularity in France since 1814, no matter how turbulent some years of his reign might actually have been. Unlike his predecessors in the eighteenth century, Louis consciously adopted the role of the state's 'first servant': an enlightened, almost bourgeois monarch. This image is symbolically illustrated in a contemporary painting by François Gérard (1817), which shows the King in his study, dressed in a plain coat and sitting at an almost spartan

---

<sup>8</sup> Sandin 2011: ss. 269-279.

<sup>9</sup> Sandin 2011: ss. 87.

<sup>10</sup> Fagerström 2010; Olausson 2010; Olausson & Karlsson 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Ahnséhn 2010: s. 7; Forsberg 2010.

desk covered with documents and writing materials. The picture of a king working for the good of his people, who considered himself "head of the French nation", perceived as a "family", went down well with the expectations of the time. Louis was perceived as the guardian of prosperity, peace and stability, all of which contributed to the public esteem for the King.

Even though Louis XVIII did not initiate a personality cult, as Napoleon had done, the popularity of the monarchy was actively promoted in different ways. One tool was to heighten the "visibility" or "presence" of the Bourbons. Members of the royal family were regularly seen visiting provinces and thereby doing their part to strengthen loyalty towards the Crown out of town, while the King demonstrated public presence in the capital, for example at public events, such as the annual Saint-Louis festival, but also through regular court life. ... But the most important element of political symbolism was certainly the synthesis of King and Constitution. Given the popularity of the *Charte*, especially among the French middle classes, Louis wanted to be identified with the constitutional document, which was no difficult task, since he had not only defended the constitutional document on several occasions, but was actually its benefactor. The countless editions of the *Charte* in circulation in the country, including rhyming and illustrated versions, together with numerous pro-constitutional pieces of writing not only made the Constitution a public commodity, but also strengthened the image of the King as *Roi législateur*. With "constitutionalism" and "royalism" becoming identified with each other, [minister Élie] Decazes' ambitious strategy of *royaliser la nation, nationaliser la royauté* was after all far from preposterous, but actually within the realms of possibility — even after 1820.<sup>12</sup>

But now things, at least in France, have come to pass. What doesn't bend, cracks. Survival is conditional.

---

<sup>12</sup> Prutsch 2013: kapitel 5.