

## Chapter 68 : Victoria of Baden (I) – The Sources.

*”Flattery portrays princes as they should be.”*  
Queen Kristina (1626-1689)

To write about Gustaf V's consort Victoria av Baden (1862-1930) is because of the source situation a perilous undertaking. In connection with the wedding in 1881, her parents had some information published about her upbringing.<sup>1</sup> For a long time only official photographs, court bulletins, newspaper reports from the representation and some (English) criticisms of her German sympathies was published. The Swedish press corps appears to have been paralysed by the object. Even in 1888 it sounded like this:

To publish a detailed depiction of the three princesses' personalities [Oscar I's unmarried daughter Princess Eugenie of Sweden and Norway, Oscar II's consort Queen Sofia of Nassau and Gustav V's consort Crown Princess Victoria of Baden] is of course out of the question. It is not even necessary, as probably no one in our country is ignorant of who they are. However, as to Queen Sofia, Crown Princess Victoria and Princess Eugenie, we cannot fail to highlight their serious *godliness*, allowing them to ignore the superficial pleasures and vanity of the world; their vast *charity*, which finds the noblest pleasure in doing good, preferably in silence; and the warm and heartfelt *love* of family, which within our royal house has created the strongest bond; and finally, their superior *education*, which places them head and shoulder above their contemporary peers.<sup>2</sup>

If you lived in Stockholm, fraternized with some court official and read Post- och Inrikestidningar you could follow Victoria's life in outline but since she spent half the year abroad there were big gaps even so. In 1899, a longer article about her life in Rome<sup>3</sup> was published, but there was more information in it about her circle than about herself. Nor did one become wiser by the writings at her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1912, mostly praise from superficial acquaintances:

As Crown Princess, Queen Victoria did not appear much to the public. You can sometimes hear someone talk about how she drove her white team over Norrbro, a princely and fleeting sight, that disappeared the moment you spotted it. Only when you have met someone who has come into closer contact with her, do you get a more concrete picture, and it turns out that the judgments always match and complement each other. Those who, for example, have been able to show her something of their social activities, in which she is very interested, tell of a wise and gracious woman with simplicity and heart, who however, will never let you forget that you are talking to the Queen. Her interest is not mechanical and forced, if she wishes to hear you out, she will, and her questions show that she listens. In Tullgarn, the Queen is well known for her gracious nature and to her tactful, delicate charity, and the girls at her textile school there are extremely devoted to her.<sup>4</sup>

In 1920, so much information had accumulated that the author Cecilia Bååth-Holmberg dared to write a biography.<sup>5</sup> The information came from Swedish and German newspapers,

<sup>1</sup> Sjöberg red 1881: ss. 47-62; Trenkle 1881: ss. 11-20.

<sup>2</sup> ”Iduns qvinliga porträttgalleri.” Idun 1888:2, s. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Bildt, Carl. ”Kronprinsessan i Rom.” Idun 1899:20, ss. 1-6.

<sup>4</sup> ”På drottning Victorias 50-årsdag.” Idun 1912: s. 516.

<sup>5</sup> Bååth-Holmberg 1920: ss. 143-343.

Victoria's diary about the Egyptian trip<sup>6</sup>, and interviews with superficial acquaintances. It is not a good book. Maybe a quarter of the content is Victoria and half that part is flattery. The rest of the book is family, representation and the castles she had lived in. Gustav Åsbrink's semi-official homage to her 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1922 - a compilation of essays from the court and related parties - was more detailed but had the same format.<sup>7</sup> It had the character of curriculum vitae. Reading it is like studying Victoria through a telescope. The story behind it is unclear, but Victoria probably approved the text.

At her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary 1912 Aftonbladet had access to Tullgarn<sup>8</sup> and Victoria even uttered a few words, at her 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1927, Vecko Journalen was able to interview two employees about the daily life of their mistress<sup>9</sup>, and after Victoria's death in 1930, her circle of friends<sup>10</sup> and also her grandson Lennart spoke about her.<sup>11</sup> It became clear that Victoria had an upbeat sarcastic side difficult to reconcile with her dignified royalty.

Four books of tribute were published by Gustav Åsbrink (red. 1930), Lars Hökerberg (red. 1930), Hans Key-Åberg (red. 1930) and Hemmets Veckotidning (H-V 1930). One might also include Waldemar Swahn's family story the same year (1930: ss. 53-103). Åsbrink supplemented Victoria's CV and described the funeral, Hökerberg included a depiction based on interviews with unknown court officials that can be summarized: "Victoria wasn't just anybody. She was a Queen and it had been an honour to serve her!" Key-Åberg included an obituary of her son Prince Wilhelm - at the same time an elegy and a tribute to Victoria's Nietzschean credo: "He on whom God inflicts a torment, he also gives the power to bear it!" Hemmets Veckotidning wrote about her youth and the wedding. Her doctor, Axel Munthe, was supposed to write about her as well, but it never happened.

Then there was silence until the end of World War II when her maid of honour 1901-1907 published her memories.<sup>12</sup> Some years later, her son Prince Wilhelm and grandson Lennart Bernadotte also published their memories.<sup>13</sup> Additional memorial literature was Maud von Steyern's biography about her father Count Fredrik Wachtmeister (1855-1919) - chamberlain, monarchist politician and married to one of Victoria's ladies in waiting<sup>14</sup> - and the diary of Victoria's chauffeur Carl Stensons (1876-1949).<sup>15</sup>

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Victoria had an extensive correspondence - mostly with Gustaf & the parents - that she had burned. Judging from the remains, it was instructions about the household and children, civilities, gossip, political & religious outbursts and descriptions of her daily schedule, intercourse and ailments. The autodafé included her poetry. She also made the usher of Tullgarn Isak Blom promise to destroy her photographs. This, however, was delayed until the inventory after Gustaf's death. Blom and a colleague Helge Karlsson then loaded everything they found in a rowboat and threw it into the lake outside Tullgarn. It was both

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<sup>6</sup> kronprinsessan Victoria 1892.

<sup>7</sup> Åsbrink red. 1922.

<sup>8</sup> Jaya 1913: ss. 5-17.

<sup>9</sup> "Några smådrag ur Majestätets vardagsliv." Vecko Journalen 1927:32, ss. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> "Drottning Victorias gamla vänner ha ordet." Vecko Journalen 1939:15, ss. 26-29,35.

<sup>11</sup> Lennart Bernadotte. "Rackartyg och hovetikett." Vecko Journalen 1937:23, ss. 14-15,44,52.

<sup>12</sup> af Klercker 1944.

<sup>13</sup> prins Wilhelm 1938, 1951 & 1952; Bernadotte 1966 & 1995.

<sup>14</sup> von Steyern 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Stenson 1977.

family pictures and the original negatives of the Egyptian trip.<sup>16</sup> Also Gustaf had his private letters burned:

The location of the "execution" was the large boiler at Slottsbacken. The King [Gustaf VI] and Prince Wilhelm attended during the first few hours. The company as a whole consisted of the Marshal of the Realm, the guardian of the Bernadotte Family Archives Professor Torvald Höjer, Marshal of the Realm Birger Ekeberg, Governor Torsten Friis and Carl-Fredrik Palmstierna. Trunk after trunk was brought forward, emptied of letters that were burned... The king had looked very reticent. He, for one, realized how much of history, of cultural history, of living memories was lost. But Gustav V and his consort had so commanded. For two days they continued to burn. Then everything was ashes and gone with the wind...<sup>17</sup>

Posteriority wanted to explain the royal couples actions by saying that they took great offence at Princess Maria's memoirs & Gustaf later at the Haijby affair. The royal house's good name and reputation would be defended by a total cover-up. The consequence was a kind of "social suicide" so that no one - not even the immediate family - had any knowledge of their relationships and private interests. Maybe not what they had in mind.

Something similar happened in Germany. After the November Revolution of 1918, Victoria's mother burned the Karlsruhe Palace Archives - private letters and other sensitive documents. During World War II the castle was bombed and further parts of the archive were destroyed. Approximately 500 of Victoria's photographs 1901-1904 were later found in the attic of Mainau and 1966 donated by Lennart Bernadotte to the Stockholm Technical Museum.

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Here everything could have ended, but nature, especially human nature, hates a void. From 1963, further depictions of Gustaf & Victoria were published based on the almost total vacuum cleaning of the information that was left. The ambition was to portray Victoria's love life, art and politics. Further biographies were written by the priest Heribert Jansson (1963), the journalist Margit Fjellman (1980), the newspaper man Gustaf von Platen (2002), the historian & professor of journalism Stig Hadenius (2010) and the priest & professor of church history Anders Jarlert (2012). Shorter biographies were written by Lars O Lagerqvist (1979), Ann Grönhammar & Lena Nordström (1986), Agneta Ulfsäter-Troell (1996), Herman Lindqvist (2006 & 2010) and Kerstin Hagsgård (2010). Victoria also appeared as a supporting character in the Gustaf V & Axel Munthe biographies (Åsbrink 1918; Åhfeldt 1932; Swahn 1938; Lundebeck 1952; Cherneld, 1973; Jangfeldt 2003) and as the subject of a number of special studies (Hultman 1996; Grundberg 1999; Hedin 2001; Sundberg 2004: ss. 244-247; Dahlström 2006; Jarlert 2010; Alm & Johansson 2012; Fabiansson 2014: ss. 345-353).

The new information was diary fragments, forgotten letters, overlooked newspaper and archive data and a better understanding of the cultural climate and her life situation. That said, the updated interpretations did often not make much sense. The mantra was: "A perfect queen - for a different climate, a different country and a different time."<sup>18</sup> Victoria appears as a royalist weirdo - both outdated, over-intelligent, pitiful and misguided. My own approach is to

<sup>16</sup> Alm & Johansson 2012: s. 243.

<sup>17</sup> Fjellman 1980: s. 198.

<sup>18</sup> Ulfsäter-Troell 1996: s. 365.

supplement the court's information from the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1922 with additional data to better depict Victoria as a human being & "political person". It consists of three parts, each in its own chapter: Her person (until the wedding), how she was perceived (as Crown Princess) and how she acted (as Queen). Victoria is also supposed to have had two or three lovers. As with Gustaf this information is 100 percent rumours and therefore presented in a separate appendix 2.