

Emma Hagström Molin,  
History of Science and Ideas  
Uppsala

### **Plundered Knowledge in Swedish Collections: A Biography**

During the many wars of the seventeenth century, Swedish regents and field marshals took the opportunity to plunder rich continental collections. In my book *Spoils of Knowledge* (forthcoming 2021), I set out to give novel perspectives on this controversial yet well-known heritage, focusing mainly on plundered archival documents, manuscripts, and printed books. In recent years, Anja-Silvia Goeing, Anthony T. Grafton, and Paul Michel have underlined the juxtaposition of warfare in relation to collecting: on the one hand, it has destroyed and scattered collections throughout history, on the other, it has contributed to spreading knowledge. Drawing on this, together with a rich field of international scholarship focused on early modern collecting and knowledge circulation, I analyse what roles the abducted collections and objects played when they reached their new place of abode in the Kingdom of Sweden. Consequently, I focus on the meanings and effects of spoils beyond their immediate connotations as signs of triumph for the victor. This entails taking the practices of plundering and exact descriptions of spoils in certain spaces and in a variety of sources, as well as the early modern usage of certain words, into careful consideration.

Methodologically speaking, I approach the plundered knowledge by creating object biographies, which enables me to question material fixity and circle change. In my talk, I will demonstrate this by presenting one case: the Mitau documents in Vasa genealogy. Created by the Livonian Knights – an autonomous branch of the Teutonic Order – in the Middle Ages, the Mitau records were confiscated by Gustavus Adolphus during his campaign in Livonia in 1621, and came to Sweden as spoils of war in 1622. In the King's archive, which later became the Swedish National Archives, the files were classified and, at first, kept together. Within a couple of years, however, the records spread out; some parts assimilated, others were alienated, documents disappeared, and then resurfaced again during the centuries that followed. Being visible as well as invisible in inventories and catalogues then, the transformations of the Mitau files can be used to de-stabilise the studied booty-object itself, as this biography ultimately sheds light on object instability and change.