



Revising Swedish Christianisation: History Mediation in Research and School, 1915–1996

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Abstract • This article examines history mediation and the relationship between education and academia. The aim is to investigate historical representations of the Christianisation in Sweden from 1915 to 1996, by doing a comparative analysis of the content in research publications and history textbooks for upper secondary school (or the equivalent). The research field and the textbooks are perceived as two different knowledge arenas. The analysis shows how the two arenas are more harmonious and consistent in their representations of Christianisation during the early twentieth century. In the mid-twentieth century, the arenas deviated from each other for an extended period, before finally becoming more unitary again by the end of the century. The impact of the schools' steering documents, as well as the distinctiveness of the two arenas, seems to constitute the conditions for inconsistencies between them at different times. The analysis also suggests that the educational applicability of the knowledge content in contemporary research, likewise impacts the relationship between the two arenas.

Keywords • history of knowledge, history teaching, history textbooks, upper secondary school, historical research, Christianisation in Sweden, historiography

Introduction

Divergent or harmonious knowledge arenas?

Knowledge about historical periods has gradually changed over the last century and this transformation of knowledge has continuously been mediated in society. Historical knowledge is circulated in different mediating arenas that shape politics and cultural life.¹ One portion of this mediation takes place among scholars, who mediate their historiography in research forums, books, and journals. But how does historiographical change correspond to the knowledge content that is being mediated in the schooling of pupils? This question is particularly intriguing when it comes to representations of historical periods of which our understanding has changed greatly. Moreover, history teaching often includes national identity building, which can make teaching hard to adapt to current research findings.² The shift in religious denomination – from paganism to Christianity – that took place at the end of the Viking Age has been referred to as the *Christianisation* in Swedish historiography.³ In the field of inquiry into this Christianisation process, key aspects of the representations have initially been

- 1 Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad, "Introduction: histories of knowledge in postwar Scandinavia," in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations*, ed. Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 1–3.
- 2 David Cannadine, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 220.
- 3 Bertil Nilsson, "Avslutande reflexioner," in *Kristnandet i Sverige: gamla källor och nya perspektiv*, ed. Bertil Nilsson (Uppsala: Lunne böcker, 1996), 419.

centred around missionaries, early bishops, and kings. This has changed over time and new factors such as political motives and cultural mentalities have become more crucial for the representations.⁴ But what has happened to the educational mediation of knowledge when the scientific knowledge has changed? This article explores the relationship between mediation of knowledge in schooling and in academia.

Academic research findings and theses tend to be ever-changing, which leaves textbook authors with the difficult task of having to select representable content and, at the same time, write in accordance with syllabus, curriculum and textbook writing traditions. This leads to the question of how the circulation of academic knowledge is impacted by changing conditions for schooling. Furthermore, it has been suggested that textbook authors, just like other mediators of historical knowledge, continually let their own historical understanding and values impact the content in textbooks.⁵ Narratives about the Christianisation in Sweden have been taught as part of the history subject in Swedish schools as far back as the mid-nineteenth century.⁶ At the same time, we know that the history of education and the history of culture were strongly conjoined in western society during this time.⁷ Over the course of the twentieth century, much has happened in Swedish culture, religion, and, not least, politics, and all of these changes have thus affected how history has been taught in school.⁸ In this complex intersection of influencing factors, one of the most influential genres of history books has been written: textbooks.

Aim and research questions

This article will highlight the mediation of knowledge in the history of education and the connection between history teaching and academic research. The aim of this article is to investigate historical representations of the Christianisation in Sweden between 1915 and 1996, with the main focus on the relationship between historical knowledge presented in historical research and in history textbooks. The year 1915 was chosen as a suitable starting point based on the fact that the Swedish state church started to lose its grip on Swedish education around this time.⁹ The year 1996 was

4 Bertil Nilsson, "Inledning," in *Kristnandet i Sverige: gamla källor och nya perspektiv*, ed. Bertil Nilsson (Uppsala: Lunne böcker, 1996), 11–12.

5 Hans Almgren, "I huvudet på en läromedelsförfattare," in *Att spegla världen. Läromedelsstudier i teori och praktik*, ed. Niklas Ammert (Lund, 2011), 352–55.

6 The first Swedish history textbook to present the Viking age and the shift in religious denomination around the year 1000 was published in 1845, see Göran Andolf, *Historien på gymnasiet: undervisning och läroböcker 1820–1965* (Stockholm: Esselte Studium, 1972), 185–86.

7 Cannadine (2011), 219–221.

8 Herbert Tingsten, *Gud och fosterlandet: studier i hundra års skolpropaganda* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1969), 277–281; Ulf Zander, *Fornstora dagar, moderna tider: bruk av och debatter om svensk historia från sekelskifte till sekelskifte* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2001), 460–472; Hans Albin Larsson, *Barnet kastades ut med badvattnet: historien om hur skolans historieundervisning närmast blev historia* (Bromma: Historielärarnas förening, 2001), 88–91; Janne Holmén, "Historia," in *Utbildningshistoria: en introduktion*, ed. Esbjörn Larsson and Johannes Westberg (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2011), 290–293.

9 Esbjörn Larsson and Johan Prytz, "Läroverk och gymnasieskola," in *Utbildningshistoria: en introduktion*, ed. Esbjörn Larsson and Johannes Westberg, third edition (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2019), 157. Another relevant factor is that this article builds on a previous work with similar source material, see Daniel Andersson, "Bruket av kristnandet: Relationen mellan framställningar av kristnandet i Sverige i forskning kontra gymnasiets läroböcker under 1900-talet" (Umeå universitet,

chosen as the endpoint for the study due to the selection of sources, where the latest publications in both categories of sources were published this year.

The textbooks will not be studied through the abstract lens of “progression”, nor will I do an analysis of the overall societal setting that might have influenced the textbooks. Instead, the ambition is to try to isolate the specific relation between research publications and textbooks in connection to a specific historical period in order to enhance the understanding of how knowledge in the textbooks corresponds with historical research and how this has changed over time. The study will therefore focus on when and how history textbooks have coincided with or deviated from the contemporary findings and themes that are presented by prominent historical scholars. Through this approach, the study will establish new knowledge on the development of history teaching by focusing on the history of textbooks and temporal shifts in the depictions of a specific period. By highlighting the intersection between historiographical and educational mediation of knowledge in the public sphere, the study will bring new perspectives to the traditional subjects of the history of education. The article also brings the history of science into dialogue with the institutional history of schooling, which results in an analysis of how this reframes our understanding of schooling as an institution and its relationship to scientific development.

This article will first focus on the question of how historical knowledge about the Christianisation process in Sweden has changed over time in various research publications. It then addresses the question of how the same type of knowledge has changed in history textbooks. The study will then dive into the comparative analysis and focus on the question of the nature of the relationship between the knowledge content in textbooks and in historical research, and how this relationship has changed over time. Furthermore, the article focuses on historical knowledge as it – in the form of textual information – unmasks what the relationship between these two categories of texts says about the circulation of knowledge between historical studies and history education. This will then deepen the understanding of how the circulation of knowledge between science and education was impacted by the changing conditions of Swedish schooling during the twentieth century.

Previous research

Previous research into historical representations has shown how nineteenth-century Swedish textbooks depicted the Viking heritage as primitive, with a distinct feature of clerical-ideological use of history. The historian of religion Johan Wickström has shown how the Lutheran understanding of humans and the potency of the state-church framed the representations in textbooks, especially during the late 1800s. Furthermore, depictions of the Christianisation of pagans had imprints of nationalism and evolutionism, usually angled towards cultural evolution or even Social-Darwinism.¹⁰ History textbooks around 1900 were often characterised by a conservative theological view of history in which God was presented as a sort

Humanistiska fakulteten, Institutionen för idé- och samhällsstudier, 2017), <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1094109/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (Retrieved May 20, 2022).

¹⁰ Johan Wickström, *Våra förfäder var hedningar: nordisk forntid som myt i den svenska folkskolans pedagogiska texter fram till år 1919* (Uppsala: Department of Theology, Uppsala University, 2008), 2, 4–8, 13, 45–59, 355–61.

of intervening historical director, directing the fate of the nation. The Vikings appeared as God's tools for spreading Christianity to the Nordic countries.¹¹ Readers were expected to identify with the Christian legacy that was introduced during Christianisation, and not with the pagan heritage that preceded it.¹²

The limited amount of previous research into the relationship between history textbooks and historical research shows how political forces, rather than current research trends, have been allowed to control representations in history textbooks. Textbooks published during the first half of the twentieth century are often described as static and tradition-laden, and therefore lacking proper correspondence to contemporary research findings. The representations in these textbooks were often considered to be rooted in "eternal values", which in turn represented a kind of timeless identity. This meant that the content in these textbooks could not be changed, even though there was new research that disputed it. The immutability of history textbooks was also largely due to the fact that there were divergences and inconsistencies within the research fields, which in turn led to passivity among the textbook authors. This resulted in a "lag" in relation to the content in current research during most of the twentieth century.¹³

Another prominent factor that influenced history textbooks and their relationship to scientific development was the Swedish State Approval Scheme for Textbooks (Sv: *Statens läroboksnämnd*). The appointed experts in the State Approval Scheme took the position that textbook authors should be conservative in matters where one or several aspects were disputed within the research field. This further contributed to static tendencies in the history textbook genre.¹⁴ It is also evident that historical scholarship and history teaching have been dichotomised in a split between scientific motives versus pedagogical or ideological conceptions. But previous research still shows how both arenas are parts of the same negotiation-processes that intertwines actors and knowledge in both arenas.¹⁵

Theoretical framework

History mediation and knowledge arenas

Representations of different periods or events in the past, are here understood through the concept of *history mediation*. This refers to any communicative act in which a person, group, or institution, which possesses certain historical knowledge, in some way communicates this knowledge in order for the recipient to absorb it and

11 Tingsten (1969), 125–26, 145, Wickström (2008), 355–61.

12 Jörgen Gustafsson, *Historielärobokens föreställningar: påbjuden identifikation och genreförändring i den obligatoriska skolan 1870–2000* (Uppsala: Department of History, Uppsala University, 2017), 180, 187–88.

13 Andolf (1972), 256–57, 292–94; Ingmarie Danielsson Malmros, *Det var en gång ett land: berättelser om svenskhet i historieläroböcker och elevers föreställningsvärldar* (Höör: Agering, 2012), 252–79.

14 Henrik Åström Elmersjö, *En av staten godkänd historia: förhandsgranskning av svenska läromedel och omförhandlingen av historieämnet 1938–1991* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2017), 124. 274, Henrik Åström Elmersjö, "Negotiating the Nation in History: The Swedish State Approval Scheme for Textbooks and Teaching Aids from 1945 to 1983," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* 8, no. 2 (2016), 16–35.

15 Henrik Åström Elmersjö, "Historievetenskap och historieundervisning: Sven Ulric Palme och 1950-talets läroböcker i historia för folkskolan," *Scandia* 83, no. 1 (2017), 10–42.

learn from history.¹⁶ Mediation of historical knowledge takes place within different mediating forums where mediators reconceptualise the past to make it serve a communicative purpose. It is within this context that there is a meeting between humans and history, and a production of historical knowledge and meaning.¹⁷ This article will, in this sense, combine history didactics with history of knowledge perspectives. The analysis will focus on changes in the mediation of historical memories and how this knowledge content reflects the messages conveyed by the mediators. Historical knowledge is put into motion through several mediation processes that lead to what here will be referred to as a *circulation of historical knowledge*. This is likewise a communicative process that is imbedded in the social and cultural structures of a society and usually rests on an essential material basis, in this case textual communication. This concept illustrates how materiality and mediality are intertwined in the process where knowledge is produced and distributed.¹⁸ The concept of circulation will be used to explain how a certain form of knowledge appears in, and moves through, different mediating forums in society (academy and school) at different times.

In this article, the 1) history textbooks and 2) the research publications within the overall field of history (which here includes the academic fields of history, archaeology, church history and history of religion) are perceived as two *knowledge arenas* where historical knowledge is mediated. These two genres are understood as textual arenas based on their ability to function as forums for mediation of knowledge. The textbooks and the research publications are textual vessels for mediation and the genres as a whole can be seen as textual locations for this mediation. The two arenas are thus a part of the cultural communication chain and are elements in a larger infrastructure for knowledge.¹⁹ The understanding of the two history-mediating sections as arenas also illustrates the interplay between the mediator of history as an actor and the circulation of knowledge in society.²⁰ It is important to note that these arenas are connected to two different knowledge institutions, one academic and one educational, with different actors, audiences, and contexts. In this study, the key feature that characterises and unifies the arenas is their role in the mediation process and not necessarily the public nature of the forums, which in these cases is arguable.²¹ The emphasis is on mediation in itself rather than mutual

16 Cecilia Axelsson, *En meningsfull historia?: didaktiska perspektiv på historieförmedlande museiutställningar om migration och kulturmöten* (Växjö University Press, Växjö 2009), 47.

17 Here, mediation of historical knowledge can be related to the concept of *historical culture*, which refers to the socio-cultural area of communication where history is depicted, used and understood. See: Klas-Göran Karlsson, *Europeiska möten med historien: historiekulturella perspektiv på andra världskriget, förintelsen och den kommunistiska terrorn* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2010), 76–77.

18 Johan Östling et al., “An introduction,” in Johan Östling, et al. eds, *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018), 18.

19 Östling et al., (2020), 7–8; John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 18–19.

20 Östling et al., (2020), 7–8; Johannes Glückler, Roy Suddaby, and Regina Lenz, eds., *Knowledge and Institutions* (Springer International Publishing, Cham, 2018), 1–9.

21 Johan Östling, “Offentlighetens kunskapsarenor. Historiska reflexioner över samtiden,” in *Oumbärliga samtal*, ed. Johannes Heuman, Jenni Sandström, and Sten Widmalm (Daidalos, Göteborg, 2020a), 123.

interaction between mediators and their audiences.²² An arena for mediation of knowledge is a forum that, through its given (academic or pedagogical) framework, offers opportunities and sets limits for the circulation of knowledge.²³ In order for an arena to be a forum for mediation or promotion of knowledge in society, it needs a clearly defined audience and a measure of stability and persistence over time.²⁴ I would argue that both the textbook genre and the academic research field meet these criteria. They are understood as two knowledge arenas whose dissemination is connected to two major knowledge institutions in society: Swedish academia and the Swedish school.

This article only examines the two arenas side by side in relation to their respective influencing factors and the external forces influencing them mutually. The theoretical stand is not that there is a production of two separate forms of knowledge: scientific knowledge and educational knowledge. Rather, the theoretical perspective is characterised by a more general approach to the circulation of the knowledge with a focus on temporality in mediated knowledge content.

Materials and method

The source material consists of 22 publications, including 11 academic texts and 11 educational texts. The research publications were published in the following years: 1915 (two publications), 1934, 1938, 1945, 1959, 1962, 1971, 1980, 1990, and 1996, whereas the history textbooks were published in 1919, 1923, 1942, 1955, 1962, 1966, 1970, 1973, 1982, 1985, and 1996.²⁵ The two categories of sources were selected with two different methods. The research publications were selected through a study of bibliographies and the number of references that can be attributed to specific studies. By looking at citation patterns in publications concerning the Christianisation at different times, a bibliometric selection of research was made.²⁶ References that have been frequently used at different times by scholars are here viewed as signifiers of prominence. It is important to note that both contemporary references and later references were taken into account. A study can be prominent in its time, only to lose relevance, but also be highly relevant for a later generation of scholars. In this study, it was more important to read research publications that made an early impact in their field. In order to grasp what kind of representations characterised the publications at a specific time, the temporal aspect must be paramount. The sample of publications is, however, not an attempt to capture the entire research field and its development over an 80-year span, but rather to give examples of how prominent representations have shifted over time.

History textbooks for upper secondary school were selected based on sales figures, and from the 1970s onward, based on the number of editions. Textbooks printed in

22 Östling et al. (2020), 7.

23 Johan Östling, "En kunskapsarena och dess aktörer: Under strecket och kunskaps-cirkulation i 1960-talets offentlighet," *Historisk tidskrift* 140, no. 1 (2020b), 119.

24 Johan Östling, "Circulation, Arenas, and the Quest for Public Knowledge: Historiographical Currents and Analytical Frameworks," *History and Theory* 59, no. 4, (2020c), 122. See also: Östling (2020b), 119.

25 The titles are presented under *References*.

26 Olle Persson, *Forskning i bibliometrisk belysning* (Umeå: Inum 1991), 2–3, 51.

several editions are more likely to have been frequently used, which makes them relevant for this study.²⁷ Just as the case with the historical research, the textbooks might not be completely “temporally representable”, because there might have been a delay between publication and market penetration. In addition, both the selection of academic and educational texts was chronologically steered to create a better distribution of sources throughout the research period. Both selection processes were also aimed at creating an endpoint for the study sometime during the 1990s.

The comparative aspects of the analytical method are centred around a textual comparative analysis of the content in the historical research publications and the history textbooks for upper secondary schools (or the equivalent) in Sweden. The comparative analysis will highlight the differences and similarities in the representations of the Christianisation process at different times in order to enhance the understanding of how the relationship between this specific research field and the textbooks has changed over time. Through this, the historical scholarship and upper secondary history teaching (or the equivalent) will be better understood in terms of what separates and unifies them as two different, yet both influential history-mediating forums. It is also important to note the constructive aspect of the period that is being depicted. Sweden did not exist as a state during the time of the Christianisation, which means that a *Swedish* Christianisation never actually took place.²⁸ For this reason, the descriptive refuge in this article is Christianisation *in* Sweden, that is, a geographical area that later became Sweden. The authors have, however, solved this issue in different ways, which in itself is an interesting facet of the findings.

Analysis

The historical research publications

Research publications concerning the Christianisation process in what later became Sweden have largely been confined to a specific Swedish historiography. This can be attributed to the phenomenon of methodological nationalism, which is an influencing factor through the nationalistic premises in the earlier studies.²⁹ There is also the fact that modern Swedish areas such as the southern peninsula of Skåne often were included in the medieval or iron-age geography of “Sweden”.

In the earlier publications from the 1910s, the Christianisation process was largely presented as a form of “struggle” between paganism and Christianity. Paganism was represented by its old, dark forces and “piracy morals”, and Christianity was

27 From the 1970s onward, there are no more public sales figures, and therefore a different method of selection had to be used. The quantitative study conducted by Andolf in 1972 shows that textbook authors used for “general history” (which excluded Swedish history) were also frequently used in books on Swedish history, see Andolf (1972), 117–135, 271–282. See also Niklas Ammert, *Det osamtidigas samtidighet: historiemedvetande i svenska historieläroböcker under hundra år* (Uppsala: Sisyfos, 2008), 74–75.

28 Thomas Lindqvist, “Kungamakt, kristnande, statsbildning,” in *Kristnandet i Sverige: gamla källor och nya perspektiv*, ed. Bertil Nilsson (Uppsala: Lunne böcker, 1996), 222; Jan Arvid Hellström, *Vägar till Sveriges kristnande* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1996), 241.

29 For a definition on methodological nationalism see further Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-state Building, Migration, and the Social Sciences,” *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002), 301–34.

essentially represented by its missionaries.³⁰ The missionaries thus played a key role in the representations, which were often centred around different missionary legends, such as the legend of Ansgar from Hamburg, or the legends of Saint Eskil or Saint Sigfrid from England. The archaeologist Sune Lindqvist wrote: “The foundation for this mission was probably laid by Eskil’s and Sigfrid’s diligent work and then followed up by their companions, and with which it maintained lively contact in the future [...]”³¹ There was a moral dimension in the historical knowledge that was framed by an emphasis on righteous missionaries who established Christian churches and overcame pagan forces. Christian and national values were clearly paramount, alongside the notion of the eternal legitimacy of the Swedish state church that was established. The authors often referred to the areas that were being Christianised as “Sweden” or even “the country of Sweden.”³² The treatment of the sources and the arrangement of the presentations further show how the Christian foundation was both compatible and merged with the historical methodology and the design of the publications, especially concerning framing and fact selection. In the early missionary-centred research publications, the finalisation of the Christianisation was placed around the year 1100.

The studies of the 1930s focused more on mission tactics than on individual missionaries, as the missionary legends were toned down. The description of the “struggle” between paganism and Christianity also changed gradually. Helge Ljungberg’s study from 1938 was one of the first that emphasised the relevance of the early Swedish monarchy.³³ The final phase of the Christianisation started to be placed around the latter half of the 12th century, which illustrates that the certainty in the narratives about successful missionaries started to fade. This further shows a shift towards a more critical stance concerning the sources, where the old missionary legends started to be subjected to more critical scrutiny.³⁴ This is likely connected to the development of the source-critical historical methodology.³⁵ In Birger Nerman’s archaeological study from 1945, more emphasis was placed on the role of the monarchy as a supporter of Christianity and its stakeholders. Now the more critical analysis of the sources clearly started to change the representation of the Christianisation process. Here we see an example of how Nerman questions the legitimacy of the missionary legends:

30 Knut B. Westman, *Den svenska kyrkans utveckling: från S:t Bernhards tidevarv till Innocentius III:s* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1915), 16–20; Sune Lindqvist, *Den helige Eskils biskopsdöme: några arkeologiska vittnesbörd om den kristna kyrkans första organisation inom mellersta Sverige* (Stockholm, 1915), 3.

31 Lindqvist (1915), 169; *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, s.v. “Sune Lindqvist,” ed. Birgitta Lager-Kromnow, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/Presentation.aspx?id=10643>.

32 See for example: Westman (1915), 16, 18; Lindqvist (1915), 8–12, 63, 99–113.

33 Helge Ljungberg, *Den nordiska religionen och kristendomen: studier över det nordiska religionsskiftet under vikingatiden* (Stockholm, Uppsala Univ., 1938), 166–167, 213, 308–9.

34 See for example: Ljungberg (1938), 188; Toni Schmid, *Sveriges kristnande: från verklighet till dikt*, (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag 1934), 22–23, 27.

35 Birgitta Odén, “Det moderna historiskt-kritiska genombrottet i svensk historieforskning,” in *Teori och metodproblem i modern svensk historieforskning: en antologi*, ed. Klas Åmark (Stockholm: Liber, 1981), 37–67.

It is the biography of a saint and thus arranged according to a scale where the intention was to glorify and where the hero's fate, insofar as it is not connected with his Christian deed, does not interest to a greater degree [...].³⁶

The findings in the research field from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (and also partly the 1980s) increasingly depicted the Christianisation as a state-forming process in which the monarchy played a key role. The chieftains and missionaries came and went, but the statehood surrounding the early Swedish kingship became a stable factor in the area that could be relied on. The function of Christianity as a means of power was likewise developed into one of the most important theses of the studies. Members of the social elite in the form of chieftains and prominent peasants were the main adherents of the new religion. At the same time, Christianity became the main tool of the monarchy in the struggle for the centralisation of power by using the church organisation and the ecclesiastical institutions. The historian Sven Ulric Palme was one of the first to present this depiction in 1959. He did not have a background as a church historian or as a religious scholar like some of the earlier scholars. Palme was instead associated with the history-critical school of "Weibull" that emerged in Sweden during this time, and this historiographical positioning clearly shapes the content in his representations.³⁷ Palme wrote:

The following question must be posed: which social groups, which forces in society, supported the mission? [...] The runestones testify to the early conversion of rich peasants and local elites to Christianity. And this connection, between the grouping of rune stones and the internal differentiation of agricultural areas, one cannot escape. [...] Christianity has first been accepted by the local elites, and the elite class has been its main supporters [...] they knew the richness and power of the Christian principals, sought to learn for their part from the administrative technology that seemed to follow Christianity [...].³⁸

His emphasis on the critical analysis of the limited sources (like the runestones) and the social hierarchy manifests a distinct shift from the earlier knowledge content. This further shows how knowledge about the Christianisation in Sweden was now angled towards social, economic and political change rather than a missionary-driven struggle against paganism. This shift displays many of the typical traits of the history-critical school, not least the critical stance towards ideological and moral interpretations, and an emphasis on strict empirical scientific ideals. The history-critical school may therefore have had a substantial impact on the historiography of Christianisation at this time, due to its major impact on the historical research arena as a whole. The key role of kingship, the state-forming force of Christianity, and its function for power and control thus became the core ingredients in the representations of the Christianisation process from the 1950s onward.³⁹

36 Birger Nerman, *När Sverige kristnades* (Stockholm: Skoglund, 1945), 16.

37 Alf W. Johansson, "Sven Ulric Palme (1912–1977)," in *Svenska historiker: från medeltid till våra dagar*, ed. Ragnar Björk and Alf W. Johansson (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2009), 596–597.

38 Sven Ulric Palme, *Kristendomens genombrott i Sverige* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1959), 144, 149.

39 Palme (1959), 129, 143–44, 149; Kjell Kumlien, "Sveriges kristnande i slutskedet: spörsmål om vittnesbörd och verklighet," *Historisk tidskrift* 82, (1962), 255–56, 260; Jan Arvid Hellström, *Biskop och landskapssamhälle i tidig svensk medeltid* (Stockholm: Nord. bokh. distr., 1971), 20, 165–66; Stefan

Palme also described the archaeological evidence for an early eastern mission to “Sweden”. Palme claimed, just as the scholar Toni Schmid had briefly done in her study from 1934,⁴⁰ that Byzantine or early Russian orthodox missionaries were directed towards Scandinavia. How substantial the impact of this mission had been was, however, described as unclear at this time. After all, it was the German central European mission that ultimately became victorious.⁴¹ The study of the conservative historian Kjell Kumlien from 1962 also expands on the notion of an early eastern orthodox mission to “Sweden” that acted as a complement to the German and English missionary work. Kumlien stressed that this had little impact on a finalised Christianisation, which he claimed was not completed until the early 13th century.⁴² Most of the chronological dating of a finalised Christianisation was increasingly postponed and placed between the second half of the 12th century and sometime during the 13th century.⁴³ The study of Stefan Brink from 1990 concerning the formation of early parishes followed this line of development in the research field, but added to the relevance of the tolerance towards other denominations that characterised the Old Norse religion.⁴⁴

A massive research project called *The Christianisation in Sweden* was launched in the 1990s. The publications from this project continued this line of development by emphasising the social elite who first converted to and supported the new religion, the use of Christianity as a means of power and as a tool for state formation. In this project, we see several religious scholars and historians of religion, alongside regular historians. Here, the description of a “struggle” between the two religions was completely rejected, and the representations included a humanistic feature where the two groups were depicted as having lived side by side under peaceful conditions for a long time. Traces of Christianity already existed in the 9th century and its final establishment did not take place until the 13th century. In the main anthology of the project, the historian Thomas Lindqvist wrote:

The Christianisation was a change in societal views and legitimisation of power [...]. The importance and influence of Christianity in the state formation process lay partly on an administrative and organisational level [...]. The higher clergy, the bishops, gained significant political influence. The significance of the Church was perhaps primarily in the ideological area.⁴⁵

Knowledge was now centred around political influence, power and the early symbiosis between Christians and pagans. Most important is perhaps that scholars who in some cases were educated as theologians now took a critical stance in the depiction of the establishment of the early Swedish church and present it as an ideological

Brink, *Sockenbildning och sockennamn: studier i äldre territoriell indelning i Norden* (Uppsala: Gustav Adolfs Akad.; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 52–53, 63, 67; Lindqvist (1996), 239–40.

40 Schmid (1934), 65.

41 Palme (1959), 125–27.

42 Kumlien (1962), 256–57, 275–81.

43 Hellström (1971), 262–63.

44 Brink (1990), 52–53.

45 Lindqvist (1996), 239–40.

and economical project, rather than a heroic stance for the “right faith”.⁴⁶ During the late twentieth century, most of the prominent texts in the historical research arena presented the Christianisation as a part of the formation of the Swedish state, exclusively in a political respect.

The history textbooks

The representations in history textbooks from the early twentieth century mirrored contemporary research publications to a great extent. The author Erik Falk wrote in a textbook from 1923:

[...] The monk Ansgar, who first preached Christianity at Hedeby (Schleswig), then journeyed to Birka (c. 830) where he founded a Christian congregation. When it was disturbed by the pagans, Ansgar came once more to Birka (853) and was then allowed to preach Christianity [...] In 1008, King Olov Skötkonung was baptised by Bishop Sigfrid at Husaby in Västergötland, and the subsequent Swedish kings were also Christians. By the end of the old age, however, paganism was still strong, and the struggle between the old and the new religion continued.⁴⁷

The emphasis on the fate of the nation-state, its early Christian kings and missionaries and not least their struggle against paganism, characterised most of the sections about the Christianisation. The authors of the early textbooks highlighted the same forms of religious and political knowledge as the early scholars, with an equally strong emphasis on nationalism and clerical values. The representations evoked the idea of the relevance of the church, by stressing the importance of the Christianisation.⁴⁸ This knowledge corresponded well with the confessional agenda that was stipulated in earlier Swedish schooling, but also in the overall societal setting. The church influence over upper secondary school was formally lifted in 1905, but the ecclesiastic institutional imprint on all school forms remained strong.⁴⁹ Confessional stakeholders thus had a strong impact on the historical knowledge mediated in both knowledge arenas during this time. One can say that the pedagogical framework that conditioned the mediation in the textbook arena allowed for a harmonious relationship with the research arena. The confessional influences in the textbook arena therefore promoted the circulation of contemporary academic knowledge. Falk wrote the following in a textbook from 1942:

Many Swedish runestones also preserve the memory of Christian men [...]. When Christianity became dominant in the Nordic countries, the Nordic peoples came under the influence of the Christian Church and gained a greater share of the general European culture than ever before.⁵⁰

46 Nilsson (1996), 419–29.

47 Erik Falk, *Lärobok i svensk historia för gymnasiet. 1, Forntiden och medeltiden* (Stockholm, 1923), 26–27.

48 Falk (1923), 28; Clas Theodor Odhner, *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia samt grunddragen av Danmarks och Norges historia för gymnasiet. [1], Forntiden och medeltiden*, Third edition (Norstedt, Stockholm, 1919), 14–15, 18; Erik Falk, *Lärobok i svensk historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm, 1942), 22–24.

49 Larsson and Prytz (2019), 157.

50 Falk (1942), 22–24.

Note the methodological nationalistic premises surrounding the notion of *Swedish* runestones and different Nordic *countries* during the late Iron Age. Falk mediated a notion of “lineage” that contemporary Swedish people had to these early Christians. Falk used the terms “Swedish” or “Sweden” frequently in these representations and sometimes when he explicitly referred to geographical aspects.⁵¹ The differences in the presentation of facts are overall small between textbooks and research publications in the early twentieth century, which illustrates that history-mediating texts were more similar to each other on a general level during this time. This in turn shows that the historical knowledge mediated about the Swedish Christianisation was quite unitary in the early twentieth century. The understanding of the Christianisation was framed by nationalism and moral-clerical values in both arenas during this time.

However, this starts to change when a divergence appears between textbooks and research publications from the mid-twentieth century onwards. This divergence coincided with the development of historical scholarship into new scientific standards and away from the traditional narrative form.⁵² The process was likewise connected to the development of the textbook into its own pedagogical genre.⁵³ History mediation in the two arenas thus seems to have grown apart during the mid-twentieth century. The knowledge content in the textbooks was generally static and mostly unchanging up until the 1960s. The explanation for this is the diverging conditions for mediation within the two arenas, where the academic and pedagogical characteristics of the two knowledge institutions no longer were aligned. This process gradually started to inhibit the circulation of newer academic findings in contemporary history education. This was illustrated in a textbook by the historian and author Kjell Kumlien from 1955. He described the Christianisation in Sweden largely as a struggle between potent missionaries and pagans. He writes:

The missionaries Christianises the north: [...] paganism flourished in Uppland as late as the end of the 11th century [...] the Viking age thus became long and filled with longer fruitless attempts to Christianise our nation [...] Eventually, the new faith also won in Uppland. Uppsala Temple was destroyed, probably around 1090, and a church was erected on its old site.⁵⁴

This quote is in many ways representative of the textbooks during this time. Kumlien’s text is especially interesting considering that he also contributed to the historical research field around the same time, where he made a much more critical depiction of missionary work, which was in line with contemporary trends in the research arena.⁵⁵ Moreover, this representation does not include a description of the early eastern orthodox mission in the Scandinavian areas that Kumlien expanded on in his research publication. This further illustrates the great divide between the two

51 See for example: Falk (1923), 27–28.

52 Odén (1981), 37–67; Klas Åmark, “Historiografi 2: svensk historieskrivning,” in Knut Kjeldstadli, *Det förflutna är inte vad det en gång var* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1998), 56–66.

53 Sture Långström, *Författarröst och lärobokstradition. En historiedidaktisk studie* (Umeå: Univ., 1997), 165–67, 185–90; Ammert (2008), 23–24.

54 Kjell Kumlien, *Sveriges historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1955), 38–40.

55 Kumlien (1962), 255–56, 260.

knowledge arenas, as we see how the same mediator makes two different depictions based on the text genre and the intended target group. Kumlien as a mediator was here subordinated to the contextual influence of the arena. Observe how this not only included pedagogical considerations in the framing of the content, but also actual facts about the Christianisation process. Such a distinct divide between the two knowledge arenas did not exist 30 years earlier.

The first tendencies for a shift became visible in the textbooks published during the 1960s. It was here that the first passages with problematising depictions of the missionary legends began to appear.⁵⁶ In connection to this, it is important to remember that the Christian values expressed in the curricula had changed significantly during the mid-twentieth century. A modernisation in the understanding of the “nurturing” duties of the Swedish school led to a decline for Christian values. The new elementary school curriculum of 1965 could be viewed as a milestone in this development, with several signifiers of a shift towards a neutral religious position.⁵⁷ This is a contextual factor for the textbook arena that made contemporary research trends more favourable and usable for textbook authors. The mid-twentieth century was also a time when the textbook market opened up the authorship for teachers without academic backgrounds.⁵⁸ Thus, the character and background of the mediators themselves changed, which can also be connected to an incipient shift in the textbooks.

However, the 1960s was also a time when the content of older history was severely reduced in the textbooks due to changes in the curriculum towards an emphasis on more recent history. Between 1965 and 1981, the curriculum excluded all historical content before the year 1000.⁵⁹ This was an additional influencing factor that seems to have made a major impact. This change seems to reinforce a “lag” in textbooks in relation to contemporary historical research, due to the limited space that the Viking age and the mediaeval age were now given in the textbooks. This further strengthened the static mode and textbook representations of the Christianisation once again became almost unchanging.⁶⁰

When we reach the 1980s, the textbooks suddenly appeared to adhere to the line of development that had characterised historical research publications from at least the 1950s onward. Knowledge about the political and state-forming force of the Christianisation seemed to be circulated within the textbook arena around this time. This coincided with the expansion of older historical content through changes in the curriculum in 1981,⁶¹ which indicates that the change in the schools’ steering

56 Martin Bäcklin et al., *Historia för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 47–48; Wilhelm Tham, Kjell Kumlien and Folke Lindberg, *Folkens historia 1: Lärobok för gymnasiet* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget 1966), 29–31; Ivan Borg and Erik Nordell *Historia för gymnasiet. Årskurs 3, 1, Hum-Sh* (Stockholm: Läromedelsförlagen: Svenska bokförlaget, 1970), 53.

57 Daniel Lindmark and Niclas Lindström, “Religionskunskap,” in *Utbildningshistoria: en introduktion*, ed. Esbjörn Larsson and Johannes Westberg (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2019), 270–71.

58 Långström (1997), 165–67.

59 Lgy 65, *Läroplan för gymnasiet* (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1965), 177, 182, Lgy 70, *Läroplan för gymnasiet II: Supplement 71 Historia* (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget/Skolöverstyrelsen, 1981), 17–18.

60 See for example Göran Graninger and Sven Tägil, eds., *Historia i centrum och periferi: Del 1 Högmedeltiden till Franska revolutionen* (Stockholm: Esselte Studium, 1973), 40.

61 Lgy 70, *Läroplan för gymnasiet II: Supplement 71 Historia*, Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget/Skolöverstyrelsen 1981, 17–18.

documents had opened the door for the authors to align with “newer” research findings. There is, however, a significant possibility that some of the textbook authors already knew about these research findings earlier but the educational conditions did not allow for the mediation of them until now. There is no mediation of these research findings within the textbooks arena until after 1981, regardless of the possible circulation of them among textbooks authors at an earlier stage.

Now the representations were more humanistically oriented and depicted how the two colliding cultures during the late Viking age did not engage in a struggle but lived in harmony. The ones causing distress between the groups were the political actors, like the societal elite or the chieftains, striving to be kings and seeking legitimacy from the Christian kingdoms on the continent. The date for the finalised Christianisation was now placed during the second half of the 12th century or even the 13th century, which is another important marker that signifies a shift in the textbooks towards the trends in the research arena from the 1950s onward.⁶² Another example that illustrates this shift becomes visible when the 1985 textbook *Alla Tiders Historia* becomes the first textbook to include a passage concerning early eastern orthodox missionary attempts to Christianise “Sweden”.⁶³ In the 1996 textbook *Epos historia*, the depiction was finally in line with the themes that had been dominating the research arena for almost 40 years. The authors wrote:

The unification of the kingdom and the increase of power for the kings went hand in hand with the introduction of Christianity. The two phenomena are intimately connected with each other. The church enlisted the help of the kings to spread its message, and the kings received support from the church as they sought to increase their power at the expense of the clans [...] The monk Ansgar was sent on several journeys up to both the Danes and the Swedes [...] But when Ansgar left Birka, Christianity was soon forgotten [...] It is doubtful whether Sweden can be called Christian until the 13th century [...].⁶⁴

Here, the research findings had gained even more weight in the depictions and seemed to be perceived as completely consolidated truths by the authors. The key role of the kingship, the state-forming force of Christianity, and its function for power and control were now the three major facts constituting the framework for the understanding of the Christianisation process. The textual comparison makes it evident that a “lag” exists in relation to the historical knowledge mediated in the research arena. The themes that had been primary in the research field since at least the 1950s finally emerged in the textbooks. It is important to emphasise that this shift started to occur in close connection to curriculum changes, especially after the expansion of older history within the history subject in 1981. The school steering documents obviously had a substantial impact on the mediation of knowledge in the

62 Göran Graninger and Sven Tägil, eds., *Vägar till nuet: historia för gymnasieskolan. Antiken - 1800* (Solna: Esselte studium, 1982), 57, 59; Börje Bergström, Arne Löwgren and Hans Almqvist, *Alla tiders historia*, Third edition (Stockholm: Liber, 1985), 90–91.

63 Bergström et al. (1985), 90–91.

64 Robert Sandberg et al., *Epos historia: för gymnasieskolans kurs A och B* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996), 119.

history textbooks and acted as one of the defining aspects both in creating a divide between the two arenas and in steering the textbook arena back in line with the historical research arena. Thus, the actors within the National Board of Education (Sv: *Skolöverstyrelsen*) had been highly influential in regulating the possibilities for correspondence between the two arenas due to their formulated changes in the curriculum.⁶⁵

However, there remain aesthetic differences between the two knowledge arenas in relation to the presentation of knowledge. This mostly concerns the way the texts are written and how the knowledge is framed in terms of pedagogical simplifications, parables, or metaphors in the textbooks, versus empirical presentation and analytical reasoning in the research publications. The general trend of writing “grand narratives” in history textbooks and the usage of such metanarratives in the overall history subject is another trait that distinguishes the textbook arena from the research arena.⁶⁶ These differences can largely be explained by examining the now very different contexts in which the textbooks are influenced by the pedagogical motives of the authors, alongside the impact of the curricula. The intended recipient becomes increasingly decisive for how the texts are written, which then impacts the consistency of knowledge between the two arenas. The Swedish school still has to live up to certain values and nurture children into a particular citizenship and a certain value system that in turn implies certain connections to the past. New democratic values in history teaching become more prominent during the second half of the twentieth century. These are in turn the creations of the new political actors connected to the Swedish government and the Ministry of Education and Research (Sv: *Utbildningsdepartementet*), who now partake in defining the historical content. But at the same time, it is important to note that democratic values are usually connected to younger history and do not relate to much of the earlier historical content in the history subject, such as the Christianisation.⁶⁷ This might leave the floor open for depictions that correspond with older narratives and older forms of expression connected to textbook traditions.

It is important, however, to observe that the divide between the two arenas in fact shrinks after 1981 and is not particularly notable during the 1990s. During this period, the content in the textbooks is more up-to-date and consistent with contemporary research findings. In relation to this, it is also important to note the steering towards secular values in Swedish schooling, especially in connection to the issuing of new curricula during the late twentieth century.⁶⁸ There is an example of this in the curriculum from 1994, which states that even though the schooling shall rest on values that derive from a Christian past, it must be completely secular.⁶⁹

65 Lgy 70, *Läroplan för gymnasiet II: Supplement 71 Historia* (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget/Skolöverstyrelsen, 1981).

66 See for example Heidi Knudsen Eskelund, “Historiefagets forhold til redegørelse,” *Norddidactica* 1 (2015), 56, 58, 61; Danielsson Malmros (2012), 253ff.

67 Larsson (2001), 68, 89–91; Holmén (2011), 292.

68 Lgy 70, *Läroplan för gymnasieskolan*, revised 1992 (Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 1992); Lpf 94, *Läroplanen för de frivilliga skolformerna* (Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). The Swedish School Board, *Skolöverstyrelsen* became *Skolverket* in 1991 and remains a state-controlled institution that influences the nature of the curriculums and syllabus.

69 Lpf 94, *Läroplanen för de frivilliga skolformerna* (1994), 3.

Some of the textbook authors may have interpreted this as a somewhat dualistic imperative, but they seem to have taken the secular rule seriously during the late twentieth century.

On a general level, the circulation of knowledge seems to be conditioned by a correspondence between the nature of new research trends and values that frame Swedish education. When these two factors are compatible, academic knowledge is circulated in the contemporary pedagogical arena. When they are not, the circulation seems to be halted and the knowledge arenas become out of sync. If new research publications had suggested that heroic missionaries in fact played a crucial role in the Christianisation of the country, it is unlikely that this would have been deemed as acceptable content to mediate in upper secondary history teaching during the 1990s. Nevertheless, such representations were applicable in history education during the 1920s, when the contexts surrounding the two arenas were more unitary. The *applicability* of historical research in contemporary history education therefore conditions the relationship between the two knowledge arenas.

The changing conditions for schooling, particularly in relation to the syllabus, curriculum, and educational values seem to have obstructed the circulation of academic knowledge on several occasions. The possibilities for the circulation of academic knowledge in history education was in fact impacted by its changing conditions during all phases of the twentieth century. Common views and values in the two arenas were continuously a constitutive for a unitary and harmonious temporal relationship between them. These results are somewhat consistent with previous research suggesting a lag between historical research and history textbooks due to either static textbook traditions and values or to passivity among influential experts and authors because of the divergence and disputes within the research fields.⁷⁰ However, this article nuances the relationship further by revealing the influencing factors of applicability, correspondence in mediation and temporality in the conditions and contexts that frame both academia and education.

Concluding remarks

This article set out to analyse the mediation of historical knowledge in connection to representations of the Christianisation in Sweden. The analysis shows that history textbooks for upper secondary school from the early twentieth century are in line with the overall knowledge content presented in contemporary historical research. A divergence occurred somewhere around the mid-twentieth century when representations in the research publications became more critical towards the missionary legends and started to emphasise the role of the kingship and political factors concerning power, control, and early state formation. This shift coincided with the introduction of new scientific standards within academia, as well as a higher number of regular historians contributing to the research field.

The textbooks, however, continued in a static way to mediate similar historical knowledge until the 1970s and partially into the 1980s. This resulted in a gradually increasing “lag” or “knowledge gap” between the textbooks and contemporary

⁷⁰ Andolf (1972), 256–257, 292–294; Danielsson Malmros (2012), 252–279; Åström Elmersjö (2017), 124, 274; Åström Elmersjö (2016), 16–35.

scholarly representations. The changes in the school steering documents seem to be one of the major factors causing this lag in the textbooks, even during the period when the lag was reduced. Steering documents can in this way be a factor that steer the didactical tools in history education away from scientific development. The fact that the textbooks started to include segments from newer knowledge content within the research arena during the 1980s shows how the two arenas started to drift towards each other again in terms of history mediation. This illustrates fluctuations in correspondence between the knowledge mediation in the two arenas: There is high correspondence between them in the beginning of the century, low correspondence in the middle, and then higher correspondence again at the end of the century. However, the external aspects concerning values and motives behind the texts that are specific for each arena seem to make this divide continuous. But this mostly impacts the aesthetic considerations in connection to the pedagogical objectives in schooling versus scientific display in academia. It is also important to stress the conclusion that even the aesthetic aspects connected to the framing of the content were much more unitary in the early twentieth century. Historical knowledge mediated in academia and in schooling regarding Swedish Christianisation did not deviate from each other to any large extent until the 1940s.

So, what do these conclusions mean for the history of education and the understanding of the circulation of knowledge between science and education? This article has examined how historical knowledge about the Christianisation in Sweden has changed and what roles these two arenas have played in the mediation of that change. It is important to note that the conclusions imply a transition of knowledge in the way that this change took place during the twentieth century and how the two arenas interplayed in this transition. One also needs to observe that knowledge is never detached from power. The investigation into the relationship between the historiographical and educational mediation of knowledge is therefore also an inquiry into the power and control over the memory of the Christianisation in Sweden. Political documents such as the school steering documents have been one of the ways that power over historical knowledge has been exercised. It is, however, likely that few actors in the Swedish School Board or the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research were aware of the extent of their impact on representations of a specific period such as the Christianisation.

The distinctiveness in the nature of schooling and textbooks, and the impact this has had on textbook authors, remains one of the core explanations for the divide between the two arenas. The text genre and the target group remain important for how knowledge is conveyed for the duration of the century. The intended recipient becomes more and more crucial for how the texts are written, which is an important analytical result in relation to the question of the consistency of knowledge between the two arenas. However, the study also shows that the twentieth century consisted of periods when the divide both expanded and was reduced, which shows that the distinctiveness between the two knowledge arenas is not a constant in itself. In the early twentieth century, there was no such divide between these arenas. The analysis instead suggests that the applicability of historical research in contemporary history education can be an additional factor that conditions the relationship between historiographical development and history teaching.

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