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Those mysterious words, Part 4

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Those mysterious words – what do they mean? Part 4.

Husaga

means “household punishment,” which means that the master of the household had the right to “correct” his servants if they had done anything wrong.

The wife and children were also subordinated to the master. He could just box the culprit’s ears or bring out the cane.

This right was mentioned in some of the medieval laws. The 1734 law only mentioned this in connection with servants. In 1858 the law was changed and only applied to hired boys under the age of 18 and hired girls under 16. It was totally abolished in 1920.



Husaga. Sketch by Fritz von Dardel, 1850s.

Legostadga

In the old days you had to have steady work, otherwise you were considered a burden on your parish. If you did not have a master, you were in danger of being apprehended by the authorities as you lacked *laga försvar* (see SAG 2009/2, p.8).

The relationship between master and servant was regulated in a law, *Legostadgan* (Law on employment) which was decreed in 1664, and was

replaced and modernised several times before it was abolished in 1926.

It stated that this law should be read in church twice a year. From 1856 it was forbidden to read publications in the church that had to do with emigration or recruitment from abroad of Swedish servants. This was probably because the government was apprehensive that emigration would cause a lack of servants needed in Sweden.

In this law it was stated that the servant (*tjänstehjon*) should be obedient, sober, God-fearing, and do all his or her duties in an orderly fashion. If the servant did not obey orders or was insubordinate, then the master had the right to apply “*husaga*.” If a maid, for instance, broke some household vessels, then she had to pay for replacement. Or if a *dräng* answered his master back in uncivil words he could lose his job and all the salary for that year.

If a servant ran away from his job, the bailiff could be asked to bring him/her back, and he/she had to stay until the year was up, and also lose half his/her wages. It was also a felony to try to entice a servant from his/her present master. These matters usually ended up in the local court, and the perpetrator was fined.

When were servants hired?

According to the 1734 law it was only allowed to recruit new servants in the time between *Larsmäss* (Aug. 10) and *Mickelsmäss* (Sep. 29). The new master then paid a part of the salary (*städja* or *städjepenning*) and the servant had to show testimony from his/her former master (*orlofssedel*), that gave that person’s opinion on the servant’s conduct. The servant also should hand in their notice during

Olofsmäss (Jul.18) and *Larsmäss* (Aug. 10), if they wanted to leave their job.

During the 1800s servants had to move to their new post on Oct. 24 (in Stockholm also April 24). Often they were free the week after, which was the only vacation they had during the year. This was called *slankveckan*, which means that they had to pay for their own food during this week, as they had not officially started their new job.

An example of a maid’s wages in 1817

In February 1817 there was a court meeting in Filipstad, and Mrs. Eva Helena Brattström complained to the court that her husband Nils Wessman had incurred a lot of debts, and she wanted no share of them, as she had inherited a good-sized property from her late husband mining farmer (*bergsman*) Anders Swensson.

As a widow she was in charge of her property, but when she remarried, her new husband became her guardian, and he did some unwise business deals, so she wanted a division of her chattel and monies.

During this case one of her maids, Lisa Nilsson, complained that she had not received what she had been promised in wages. She listed the following items:

Cash	5 daler
1 fine woolen dress	
3 ells of linen (1 ell = 45”)	
9 ells of coarse linen	
3 pairs of Swedish shoes	
(with birch bark bottoms)	
1 pair of German shoes	
(with leather bottoms)	
3 pounds of wool	
1 everyday dress	
1 everyday apron	
1 knitted hat	

(*Parnebo häradsrätt A1a:55*)