Honor thy father and thy mother- ambivalent emotions and conflicts between parent and child generations in early modern Sweden and Finland

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The aim of this project is to analyze conflicts and emotional tensions between generations within family and household in early modern Sweden and Finland, based on analyses of trial records from the 17th and 18th centuries. Early modern Sweden was a Lutheran patriarchal society where the fourth commandment – “honor thy father and thy mother” – was incorporated into secular law and “fatherhood” constituted the main social metaphor for authority. According to this ideology, a father’s rule over his household represented the most elementary and basic order of society. This was however not always a simple matter. While parents had the right (and duty) to chastise their minor children, they still had to pay the elder generation due respect. Thus, the emotional experiences of showing respect and reverence toward one’s parents was not just a question of minor age. The extensive trial records concerning conflicts and disrespectful behavior provide insights into just what exactly these experiences implied on different generational levels. Starting from the statistical patterns found in the material, key situations of conflict will be identified and analyzed by close reading. Focus will be on cultural meanings of abuse and violence, forms of social intervention and public attention. A central question is the role of paternal authority. To what extent did the upholding of paternal authority resolve or on the contrary contribute to the raise of conflicts and ambivalent emotions?