VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Article | Mattias Lundberg

‘Singing out of the dead’ in Ramsjö and Färila, Sweden: Historical aspects and recent ethnography

Laypeople’s custom of having hymns and other songs sung beside the body of a deceased family member or villager has its roots in at least the sixteenth century in Sweden and Finland. The practice reflects a quasi-liturgical lay singing ritual that typically occurred in the house of the deceased before a priest or another church official arrived and before the body could be brought to a church or a burial site. It was generally referred to as ‘singing out of the dead person’ (‘*utsjungning av den döde*’) and may historically be interpreted as a lay variant of the last rites, sanctification of the corpse and the first section of the sung burial rites, all otherwise traditionally performed by the clergy.

Despite the Swedish Church’s many attempts to centrally curtail or outright abolish the practice from the seventeenth century onwards, it lived on in some regions well into the twentieth century. A pattern may be discerned, which clearly shows that singing out of the dead in later times has remained evident in locations far from their parish churches, and with only the sporadic presence of the clergy. Some remnants of such traditions had been documented and studied by folklorists and ethnographers around 1900–1920.[1]

In 2023, it was brought to my attention that singing out of the dead had been practised even more recently in the parishes of Ramsjö and Färila, northern Hälsingland (circa 360 and 390 km north of Stockholm, respectively, in the northernmost parts of the archdiocese of Uppsala). For this reason, I conducted ethnographic field work during six visits to Ramsjö, Färila, Kårböle and surrounding villages between April and September 2024. Eight persons born between 1927 and 1955 have so far been interviewed regarding their memories of the

[1] Hagberg 1937: 310–318. The tradition of holding a *vigilia* (wake) for the deceased also has medieval origins. In early modern times, it developed into an occasion of lavish receptions, with food, drinks and sometimes games and dancing. The vernacular term *gravöl* (burial beer) reflects the social function of this practice. It was also regarded as problematic by church and state authorities and predominantly criticised concerning order, conduct and parochial economy, rather than with theological arguments. It seems rather loosely attached to the practice of singing out of the dead. See Hagberg 1937: 239–246. When the *vigilia* was forbidden in the Church Law of 1686, it was still stipulated that some laypersons should remain in the presence of the corpse. Ch. 18, §. III

prevailing practice of singing out of the dead. In the present study, their reports, memories and, in some instances, physical artefacts relating to the practice are analysed in the light of archival records and older written evidence of the same traditions. In the first half of this article, I analyse this custom's historical background; in the second half, I examine the recent ethnographic evidence.

Observed through both archival and ethnographic evidence, singing out of the dead may be said to manifest a performed ritual:

> Ritual is a stereotyped, symbolically concentrated expression of beliefs and sentiments regarding ultimate things. It is a way of renewing contact with ultimate things, of bringing more vividly to the mind through symbolic performances certain centrally important processes and norms. […] Those events which are closest to the generation, reproduction, and cessation of the vitality of individuals and collectives are among the most likely to arouse the need for connection with sacred things.[2]

This is not a definition of ritual in a broader sense but an angle from which the longevity of ritual performance may be perceived as permeating porous borders of culture, society and religion over longer periods. In the hands of laypeople, the ritual of singing out has survived centuries of attempts to get rid of it. The practice is linked to the 'cessation of the vitality of individuals', as Shils puts it, and may be viewed as an attempt at 'renewing contact with ultimate things' by means of some practical and performative customs. The sung contents of melodies and texts may thereby change considerably over generations, as I shall show in the second half of the article, without losing the notion of continuity by those keeping the custom alive. The tradition ultimately waned, not because of a successful central prohibition, but by unforeseeable and radically changing lifestyles and conditions of rural Hälsingland after around 1950.[3] The results of the case studies in Ramsjö, Färila and their surrounding villages and hamlets make possible a fuller understanding of the tradition's origins, developments and longevity. Moreover, the case studies document personal reflections concerning the meaning, significance and purpose of the practice, expressed by those who have participated in or witnessed singing out of the dead.

---

[2] Shils 1975: 154.

[3] In some Swedish-speaking parts of Finland, the term *utsjungning* and some form of practice related to it is still observed under the aegis of the clergy. In 2025, *Pedersörenejdens kyrkliga samfällighet* in Ostrobothnia advertises that *utsjungning* can be arranged by the parish priest. https://www.pedersorenejdensforsamlingar.fi/hautausmaat/begravningsinformation/utsjungning-och-sjalaringning.
In 2025, the Church of Sweden states that a priest or a deacon may assist with *utsjungning*. Based on the context, it seems to point to the burial service itself, which marks a shift in terminology. https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/begravning/att-planera-en-begravning/vem-ansvarar-for-vad.

Alexander's notion of the three levels of tradition – *continuity*, *canon* and *core* – has great potential to illuminate the present topic and is founded on Shils's work.[4] The tradition of singing out of the dead presupposes a continuity for its survival. Such continuity may be highly flexible regarding *what* is sung and *how* it is performed. However, what Alexander calls the canon of a tradition has long been missing. Since church authorities were intent on eradicating the custom, it may be found to have been criticised for centuries since the Reformation. The reason for church leaders' antipathy lies in the difference in the *core* of the singing custom, namely the notion of what and whom the tradition is for. Is the singing performed for the mourners (condoned by Swedish church authorities) or for the deceased (a notion seemingly continuous in the Hälsingland laity's beliefs but zealously suppressed by the clergy)? The practice may be fruitfully assessed alongside similar customs in other parts of Europe and the Near East, often likewise dominated by female agents.[5] However, in this study, I focus exclusively on Swedish practices.

Historical background of sanctification of the corpse (*likvigning*) and the sung burial procession

Two interrelated late-medieval liturgical practices have been merged in the later tradition of singing out of the dead, namely the sanctification of the corpse (*likvigning*) and the sung burial procession from the home of the deceased to the church (*liksången*). The former, a type of liturgical blessing, has deep medieval roots. A dead body was regarded as 'impure' until it had been blessed by a priest and should not be transported physically or prepared for burial until it had been 'sanctified' or 'ordained' (Swedish: *vigd*).[6] It was illegal to remove a dead body from its location until this rite had been performed. The medieval laws (valid for different regions, the so-called landscapes, equivalent to counties) prescribed how the priest should procure the sanctification. The Dalecarlian and Södermanland laws both stated that if the priest had been informed about a corpse and if it had then been laid without sanctification for one night, the priest should pay a fee of three marks (Swedish medieval currency) and double that amount for two nights.[7] If the household had not informed the

[4] Alexander 2016.
[5] The so-called keening at Irish wakes and the singing by mourners in Karelia in Eastern Finland display a number of similarities to singing out of the dead (Collins, 2014 and Silvonen 2022, respectively). The comparison of the cultural and confessional differences among the Lutheran Swedish singing out, the Catholic Irish keening and the orthodox Karelian tradition of *Itkuvirsi* is especially interesting. Both the Irish and the Karelian traditions have undergone extensive revival and rediscovery in terms of identity and views on death and mourning.
[6] Brilioth 1946: 264.
[7] *Svenska landskapslagar* 1936–40: 4. III: 18–19.

priest, the same fee should be paid by the master of that house. This requirement reflects a strong shared responsibility for performing the rite of sanctification before the corpse may be moved from the house to the burial ceremony.

The practice of *likvigning* survived through the early stages of the Swedish Reformation, at least by name. In the Church manual issued by Olaus Petri in 1529, the medieval practice was taken as a commonsense liturgical practice and introduced as such: 'Since it has now been customary that the body should be sanctified [literally, ordained] before it is carried out of the house, then let it be done in this manner, or in another, so that it can be done in a Christian way.'[8]

The practice of sanctification of the corpse is linked to the idea that it may not be physically moved from the house of the deceased before the rite has taken place. This notion acquired special significance in the piety of the broader strata of the population, in rural areas where the church and the priest were far away. It also took on the meaning of 'safeguarding' or 'binding' the soul for a short period before it leaves the body to guarantee the soul's rest and proper salvation in eternity.[9] *Likvigning* was the first ritual performed when a person died, before the priestly blessing and the burial rite could even start. Several scholars have observed that singing out is related in function and public perception much more to this liturgical tradition than to the priestly blessing and the burial rite itself, which took place in the church or on a burial site.[10] The Church Order of 1571 refers to the sanctification of the corpse as a 'vain belief ' ('*vantro*') and purports to abolish the custom.[11] However, here the practical matter of singing out fares better, with a typically suspicious Reformation-era admonition that the practice is intended only for the living, not for the deceased:

> When then the body is carried out, one may well ring bells, sing and make use of other things that are not unchristian, if the people first are taught about such matters, so that it happens more for their sake, who live – as St. Augustine also confesses – than for the sake of those who are dead, which now have no need for such matters.[12]

[8] 'Epter thet så upkommet är at lijket skal wiyas förra än thet bäärs aff huset / må thet thå skee widh thetta settet eller annat sådana / at thet kan Christeliga tillgåå.' Olaus Petri 1529.
[9] Fallberg Sundmark, 2020.
[10] See e.g. *Svensk uppslagsbok*, 2nd edition, vol. 15: 52, under *Jordfästning*: 'The sanctification of the corpse was later prohibited, but lives on in the custom of "singing out" corpses.' ('*Likvigningen förbjöds senare men lever kvar i seden att "sjunga ut" lik*.'). See also Hagberg, 1937.
[11] Chapter 61.
[12] 'När tå lijket vthbärs, må man wel lata ringia, siunga, och annor stycker, som icke äro ochristeligh, effter sedwenion bruka, först at folket är vnderwijst om slijk tingest, så at the skee meer för theras skul som leffua, effter som ock S. Augustinus bekenner, än för theras skul som döde äro, hwilke slijkt nu intet haffua behoff.'

Olaus and Laurentius Petri thus tried in different stages and ways to abolish the sanctification of the corpse and, while retaining the name of the ceremony, replace it by a sermon for the living, while the continuation of singing out of the dead was tolerated and reinterpreted as a gathering merely for the mourners in the presence of the corpse.[13] Prohibitions against the combined customs of sanctification and singing out are found in many synodal records, such as those from the Uppsala synod of 1593.[14] The general tendency is an effort to transfer as much as possible the ritual aspects – and the corpse itself – from the home to the grave or to the church for the actual burial rite. This also constituted a shift from lay activities to clerical liturgy.

The second tradition on which singing out of the dead appears to be founded is the so-called *liksång* (literally 'corpse singing'). This typically commenced with an intonation outside the home of the deceased and continued without interruption in a singing procession (by foot or by horse) to the place of burial. It was perfectly allowed by the Church Order of 1571. In cities and smaller parishes, this transportation spanned a hundred metres or up to a few kilometres, but in large swathes of rural Sweden and Finland, the corpse had to be moved (while singing or not) over considerable distances, impossible to transverse even in a week's time. For example, in the northernmost parts of the parish of Ljusdal, to which Ramsjö belonged in early modern times, the transportation of the mortal remains to the church covered a distance of up to 75 km, across lakes, steep hills and dense forests. An interesting high-profile case was the *liksång* of King Gustav I (Vasa) in December 1560, which took place with many boy choristers and professional singers incessantly singing between Stockholm and Uppsala Cathedral (ca. 73 km) over a three-day period. In early modern times, parishioners were expected to pay the city and cathedral schools for such services, depending on how lavish they wished the singing to be performed from the home of the deceased to the place of the burial rite. However, there is also evidence of parishioners and family members singing without any involvement of the school or clergy. The latter is the direct forerunner of the laity singing out of the dead, as known from later times.

If the sixteenth-century reformers had tried to strategically assimilate the popular traditions from the Middle Ages into liturgical customs, the seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodox Church went to considerable lengths to abolish all such traditions once and for

[13] For an analysis of the blessing of the corpse and intercessory prayers in sixteenth-century Sweden, see Fallberg Sundmark, 2020.
[14] *Svenska riksdagsakter jämte andra handlingar*, 3:1: 62.

all.[15] The sanctification of the corpse was gradually replaced by '*utfärdspredikan*' ('sermon as the journey commences'). A number of such sermons have survived, some delivered by priests, others as speeches by laypeople.[16] In some cases, a handwritten 'sermon of the journey' was preserved on paper and read aloud beside the corpse by designated laypersons in each village. A difference in power and representation between the Swedish estates (nobility, clergy, burghers and peasants) is noticeable. The clerical estate proclaimed in 1648 that the nobility alone were granted the privilege of a sermon at their wake before being carried away to their funerals, but priests should not do the same for peasants: 'for no sermon should take place among peasants and common people at home [...], when their body is carried to the grave. *But if the vicar with chaplain and churchwarden wishes to go to that house and only sing, it should be free for him to do so* [emphasis mine].'[17]

Again, the singing survived and was tolerated, even when the Swedish peasants were denied other ritual aspects of death and bereavement. The proposed Church Order by Emporagrius (ca. 1652) stipulated that the cantor or sexton could travel to sing the peasants out of their houses so that the clergy would not have to do so – seemingly primarily a practical suggestion but which again opened up for lay participation.[18]

Nonetheless, the Church Law of 1686 formally forbade priests to partake in the sanctification of the corpse and in singing out of the dead in parishioners' homes. The law also stipulated that the deceased must be brought to church within two days.

> The priests shall also here be forbidden by serious penalty to travel to the farmsteads, from which the bodies are carried, in order to 'sing them out' or to hold any last sermon there or in other places. For this reason, those who wish to have their dead buried must bring the bodies to church either on the same day, or – if the road is very long and hard – on the following day.[19]

Readers may note the completely reverse situation from medieval law – priests would now be punished for *doing* what they were penalised for *not doing* in the late Middle Ages. A synod of 1693 stated that the archbishop had interpreted the 1686 law, with royal assent,

---

[15] Terese Zachrisson has outlined different strategies of early modern Swedish Church authorities in relation to objects and places held to be sacred and holy by the laity. (2017: 293–295).
[16] Pleijel, 1956
[17] *Svenska synodalakter efter 1500-talets ingång* I, ed. Herman Lundström (Uppsala: Wretman, 1903): 81: '…ty skall ingen predikan skee hoos bönder och gemeent folk hemma i husett, när deres lijk uthbäras till grafwa. Men om pastor medh caplanen och klockaren will gå till dett husett och allenast siunga, thett ståår honom fritt.'
[18] Emporagrius, c.1652 II: 2: 172.
[19] Chapter 18, paragraph 5: 'Prästerna skal och här med alfwarligen och wid Straff tilgiörandes wara förbudit, at resa hem til Gårdarna, hwadan Lijken utbäras, them at utsiunga, eller och någorstädes någon utfärdz Predikning at giöra. Förthenskull måste the som sine Döde wilia låta begrafwa, antingen så tijdeligen samma Dag, eller ther wägen är lång och swår, Dagen näst förr, hafwa Lijken til Kyrckian…'

as King Karl XI's approval of singing out of the dead on week days (not on Sundays) but that the king now wished for its abolition altogether, a rather conspicuous intervention in matters otherwise to be decided by the clerical estate.[20] A practical rationale behind such an interpretation was that if priests had to travel around distant parts of their parishes to sing out the dead, they could not make it back to church on Sundays (as previously discussed by Emporagrius ca. 1652). The 1686 regulation of promptly (within two days) transporting the mortal remains to church and the graveyard possibly reflects a realistic practice in cities, towns and smaller parishes of southern Sweden. However, in situations such as that in Ramsjö, with homes located up to 75 km from the parish church in Ljusdal, it would have been hardly possible to bring the deceased to church within that time. Yet the Church Law completely banned the clergy's participation in the rituals in parishioners' homes. In effect, this legislation left singing out, if it had to continue, entirely in the hands of the local laity. In fact, it constituted not just an *opportunity* but – if desired by the families and neighbours of the deceased – a ritual as understood by Shils and Alexander, an *obligation* of the local community to procure the core of religious tradition.

The Church Law of 1686 also prohibited the use of temporary graves and reburial.[21] Again, this seems to reflect a lack of awareness of the situation in remote villages without passable roads. There is evidence that the so-called winter graves were used for those who died in Ramsjö and its surrounding farmsteads well into the nineteenth century. Such graves were dug out in the autumn and then gradually filled with water and layers of spruce branches so that the frozen ice blocks were kept in underground grave pits in the winter until early summer, when the mortal remains could be transported to the gravesite. Several bodies could thus be temporarily buried (or stored) in the same winter graves and preserved from decay until a priest arrived or the villagers could transport the bodies to the church in Ljusdal in the spring or summer. In Valsjön, a hamlet in the town of Naggen, ca. 30 km northeast of Ramsjö, the corpses were buried by laypeople in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, but a little passage or canal was left open for a priest to fill with the three spadefuls of dust from the burial rite when he visited the site a few times a year.[22] Eventually, special timbred log houses were used for storing the remains, the so-called corpse sheds (*likbodar*); a number of these buildings still exist today. Since the physical placement of corpses in winter graves, other temporary graves and storage in corpse sheds resembled a kind of interim burial and exceeded the limit of transporting a dead body to

[20] *Svenska synodalakter* I (1903): 182.
[21] Chapter 18 paragraph 4.
[22] Berglund 2013: 242.

church within two days (as stipulated by Church law), the need for some type of ritual seems to have been made manifest.

Not only in rural parishes but also in cities, singing out of the dead from their homes appeared to have been highly valued. A royal decree on 17 April 1688 addressed this practice, making it evident that not only the laity but also some of the clergy wished to maintain the tradition.[23] The decree reiterated that it was indeed forbidden but that the cathedral school was allowed, as previously, to sing at the grave. This decree seemed to have totally ignored the pastorally felt need for 'ordination' or 'sanctification' of the corpse, intended to occur before it could be moved from the house or village. Moreover, it would be completely out of touch with reality to expect boy choristers from Uppsala, Gävle or Bollnäs to travel to Ramsjö, Färila or even Ljusdal for the purpose of singing out of the corpse. These historical factors all play their part in making the practice a tradition for laypeople rather than for priests or trained choristers. In the dioceses of cities, scholars also seemed to have been aware of the antiquity of the custom. A 1688 consistory record in Växjö connected the procession of boy choristers to the concept of singing out, calling both 'common from the most ancient of times' and claiming that it had 'always been the custom in the realm of the Swedes'.[24]

The spiritual distress caused by the abolition of the long tradition is exemplified by a Dalecarlian priest's testimony before the clerical estate in 1690: 'how many now are tormented in their final hour, that he shall not be allowed to be sung out as was formerly the custom'.[25] The same concern was raised at the Uppsala diocese synod in 1691, when Archbishop Olof Svebilius (1624–1700) appeared to back down from what he previously interpreted as Karl XI's express command. The synodal records provide evidence that Svebilius claimed to go against his will in these matters:

> At this occasion the provost [praepositus] in Odensala related how the lay people moan over [the fact] that such matters are cut off from them and ask why and how they should give what belongs to the priest, if their corpses should be brought into the ground as if they were soulless animals. It was answered [by the archbishop] that one could not wish more for

[23] See also Berg 1882: 221.
[24] I am grateful to Alexandra Hibolin, who works at the excerpt archives of *Svenska akademiens ordbok* in Lund, for pointing this out to me.
[25] 'Hurusom mången kväljer sig på sitt yttersta, att han intet får efter sin död utsjungas, som förr varit vant.' Enochsson 1949: 92.

> something than for the singing out of the corpses to be allowed, but who dares dispense with the law of the King?[26]

What may be called a 'spiritual contract' that was breached between the clergy and laity can be gleaned from the Odensala complaint. In hindsight, the new regulations caused considerable spiritual suffering and remorse for both the dying and those by their side at the moment of death. This is especially evident in rural parishes and remote locations in those parishes. Theologian and gentleman-scholar Sven Baelter offered a perspective on how the regulation of singing out of the dead in the 1680s was viewed in his own day (1762), when the prohibitions against the custom were clearly less zealous than in the past century, but still had not resolved the problematic aspect of the rural versus the urban situations. Swedes residing far from their parish church experienced the unfair disadvantage of lacking a choir school for burial processions, combined with the practical problems associated with bringing the deceased to church fast enough to meet the demands of the Church law. Baelter interpreted the law and the royal decrees as follows:

> From this, some tended to draw the logical conclusion that in cities it would be allowed, after the old custom, to sing the corpses out of the houses, across the street with procession with the [choir] school to the churchyard. In relation to this the King [Karl XI] himself declared in 1688 that the corpses should be dealt with as then happened for the most part in Stockholm, that is: that they are not to be sung out from their houses, but to be placed immediately either in the church or in the churchyard, depending on where the grave was located, and there the [choir] school could be waiting in place.[27]

Given that the Swedish peasantry evidently believed that singing out of the dead was not just intended for the living but also a performative act with consequences for the deceased, no Lutheran doctrine or proposition appeared to have diminished the popularity of the practice. In Alexander's words, continuation was procured due to the total lack of canon, seemingly out of the common people's beliefs concerning the core of tradition.[28] In retrospect, the bishops, the cathedral chapters and the clerical estate handled the situation rather poorly – it may be argued, not just from the ethical and communal perspectives of

---

[26] *Svenska synodalakter* I (1903): 182: 'Wid detta tillfället berättade præpositus i Ohnsala, huru folket qwider der öfwer, att dhem sådant blifwer afskuret och frågar hwar till de skola gifwa prästen sin rättighet, när deras lijk skohle föras till jorden såsom oskählige diur. Swarades, att man inthet hällre skulle önska än att lijkens uthsiungande wore tillåteligit, men hoo understår sig att dispensera i konungens lagh?'

[27] Bælter 1762: 803: 'Här af wille somlige draga den följgd, at i städerna skulle wara tillåtit, efter den gamla plägseden, utsiunga liken utur husen öfwer gatan med process och Schola til kyrkogården. Der öfwer förklarade sig konungen 1688, at med liken skulle öfwer alt så förehollas, som då i Stockholm merendels skiedde, nemligen, at de icke borde siungas utur husen, utan sättias strax antingen i Kyrkan, eller på kyrkogården, efter som grafwen war belägen, hwarest Scholan kunde wara tillstädes.'

[28] Alexander 2016.

pastoral care, but also in the very methods and arguments by which they tried to eradicate this deep-rooted tradition. Church historian Hilding Pleijel states, 'it is self-evident that this ceremony in the popular reception came to play a very big role and was understood to free the dead from everything impure and transmit divine power as a help beyond the grave'.[29]

Ironically, it seemed that in the places that suffered most from the late seventeenth-century zeal to abolish singing out of the dead, the practice was kept for the longest period, long after citizens of towns and cities had lost interest in (or even conceptual awareness of) being sung out of their houses.

Archival sources and ethnography relating to singing out of the dead after 1850

The recurrent prohibitions against the practice of singing out of the dead between ca. 1700 and ca. 1900 testified to its continued widespread use and popularity among the lay population for hundreds of years. Brilioth had witnessed the inclusion of a brief form for a service – with a hymn being sung – at the transport of the mortal remains for the 'journey' ('*utfärd*') in the Evangeliary of 1921 as a concession to popular piety: 'Finally, the old wish for a solemn form for the carrying out of the corpse [from the house] in a certain way again had been given ecclesiastical consideration'.[30] In archival sources, the tradition can otherwise mainly be found as negative and reactive evidence since singing out of the dead was perceived as a problem, a remnant of medieval superstition that ought to be discontinued and forgotten.

A more positive view of the practice can be traced in the important documentation by folklorists and ethnologists in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Louise Hagberg and others collected materials concerning this practice and beliefs about it.[31] Hagberg also covered parts of the singing out tradition in a magisterial monograph on Swedish practices and beliefs related to death and the dead.[32]

As expected – given the historical background that I have presented – readers may notice a much clearer distinction between the rural and the urban understanding of funerary

[29] Pleijel 1956: 'Det säger sig självt att denna ceremoni i den folkliga uppfattningen kom att spela en mycket stor roll och ansågs befria den döde från allt orent och förmedla gudomlig kraft såsom hjälp bortom graven.'
[30] 'Slutligen har det gamla önskemålet om en högtidlig form för likets utbärande på visst sätt åter vunnit kyrkligt beaktande, då evangelieboken intagit ett kort formulär för dylik utfärdsandakt.' Brilioth 1946: 265.
[31] These records are presently kept in the archives of Nordiska muséet, Stockholm.
[32] Hagberg 1937.

practice by the late nineteenth century. An example of these opposing views is this excerpt from a reader's letter published in the newspaper *Tidning för Wenersborgs Stad och Län* on 29 March 1886:

> For a funeral in the countryside the gathering of people mostly happens very early in the morning since the graveyard is located so far away. To this may be added that in most places several customs which are now generally little known to the urban citizen occur before the journey can even commence. So, for example, 'singing out of the corpse' always takes place, which happens in the following way: that all guests together with the people of the house [of the deceased person] are seated in the room of the dead [literally, the corpse room] and intone a hymn, after which some older, dignified person loudly reads out a prayer.[33]

With broad generalisations, the letter writer claims that in 1886, singing out of the dead 'always' takes place 'in most places' in rural Sweden. This notion may sound like an exaggeration but is corroborated by both the ethnographic materials collected by Hagberg and the LUKA archives (more information is provided later in this section).[34] The forms of the practice described here are typical: the locals from the entire village, or as many persons as can fit into the largest room of the residence of the deceased, gather to sing before and/or during the transfer of the corpse from the house to its final resting place. Ritual aspects are occasionally demonstrated, such as placing coins on the eyelids of the dead person and the family hymnal under his/her chin. The latter seemingly served the double purpose of propping up the head and the chin to prevent an open mouth and sanctifying the situation since the hymnal was by far the most important book of piety for Swedish peasants.

In memoirs and autobiographical literature from the twentieth century, the singing out tradition crops up. Later in her life, Sami author Sara Ranta-Rönnlund (1903–1979) reflected on several Lutheran practices among Sami, Finnish and Swedish villages in the far north of Sweden. She recalled how she and an older cousin in Piilijärvi, Norrbotten, had to deal with a number of practicalities at the death of an older acquaintance (Lena, nicknamed *Aftonsstjärnan* [The evening star], signifying the youngest born in a family), when all adults in the village were temporarily absent.

---

[33] 'Till en begrafning på landsbygden sker samlingen merendels bittida på morgonen allteftersom kyrkogården är långt aflägsen och vägarne ärp svåra att färdas. Dertill kommer att å de flesta platser åtskilliga för stadsbon mindre bekanta ceremonier skola föregå affärden. Så t.ex. förekommer alltid att "sjunga ut liket", hvilket tillgår på så sätt att samtlige gäster tillsammans med husets folk taga plats i likrummet och uppstämma en psalm, hvarefter någon äldre allvarlig person högt läser en bön.'

[34] See also Herman Hofberg 1880–1881: 30.

> My cousin was older than me, but we were both inexperienced when it came to dealing with the dead. I thought about it intensely and recollected what I had heard that they usually did:
>
> – I think we shall put the hymnal under her chin, and straighten her hands out, and close her eyes.
>
> […]
>
> The mistress (village school teacher) then came to the house to sing the corpse out of the house. She had brought coffee and baked goods, so that all who wished to follow the dead out of the house could be nourished. In this manner, 'The evening star' [nickname] was led out to the notes of the burial hymn 'To eternity the righteous are carried, although themselves unworthy' [Swedish hymn *In i saligheten bäres de rättfärdiga, fast i sig själv ovärdiga*], sung in Finnish, and yet another human fate could be left to the archive of oblivion.[35]

Just like in Hälsingland, which is discussed more extensively in the next paragraphs many regions in the far north of Sweden seem to have had a ready team of specialists who prepared the corpse for burial (washed it, wrapped it in a shroud and dressed it in Sunday clothes) and took charge of singing out. The same women also served as midwives in the parishes.

The LUKA ethnographic collections at Lund University contain questionnaire responses from parishes all over Sweden during the twentieth century, relating to 'ecclesiastical customs' ('*kyrklig sed*'). Unfortunately for the purposes of the present study, there is little documentation from the archdiocese of Uppsala since the project director, Hilding Pleijel (1893–1988), tasked theology students at Lund University with gathering the information in their parishes of origin during semester breaks. Students from the diocese of Uppsala rarely enrolled at Lund University (studying instead in Uppsala, where no similar research was conducted at that time). That tendency is reinforced by the societal fact that few university students came from parishes such as Ramsjö or Ljusdal. For the present study, below is the most interesting question in Pleijel's form, shown here in the printed questionnaire of 1944:

> 4. Was the so-called going out sermon held before the funeral? Who delivered the sermon (the priest? the churchwarden or some other lay person?). Which hymns were sung then?[36]

[35] Ranta-Rönnlund 1973: 17–18.
[36] '4. Höllos s.k. utfärdstal före begravningen? Vem höll talet? (prästen? Klockaren eller någon annan lekman?). Vilka psalmer sjöng man då?'.

No reply survives from Ramsjö, but from Ljusdal (original mother parish of Ramsjö), below is an excerpt from a report dated 1958, quoting the informant Millan Borgström (born in 1890):

> One 'sang the corpse out' and there were a couple of girls in the village where I lived, who were particularly skilled in song and they always led the singing on such occasions. If it was privileged, then the priest participated and read out a prayer. When somebody stood as a corpse [the traditional expression for being on display], then all mirrors in that room were covered with sheets of cloth or something else.[37]

It is unclear if the passage concerning the sermon demonstrates a difference of social class, with priests participating 'if it was privileged' ('*förnämligt*') or deemed 'privileged'. The detail about covering mirrors is common in central Sweden. The leading and intonation of the hymn sung by young girls and women with good voices constitute a recurring pattern, also attested by the informants in 2024.

The informants in Ramsjö and Färila, interviewed in 2024 and whose reports are analysed in the next subsection, were not the first witnesses recently heard concerning singing out of the dead in the twentieth century. In a socio-ethnographic study on the opinions and experiences of life, aging and death among elderly people, an informant (born in 1934) reflected on her early memory of singing out of the dead in Hälsingland in the 1940s. The author, social work researcher Magnus Broström, relates:

> Nora, 76 years of age, was around ten years old when her maternal grandmother died and she had to go and take a last farewell. She found that her grandmother was lying in an open casket in her home with relatives and friends gathered around the casket, singing songs and hymns. It was an old Hälsingland tradition to sing the departed person out in this manner.[38]

A more systematic study on 'ecclesiastical custom' from LUKA, with questionnaire answers collected at frequent intervals from 1962 to 1995, reveals some interesting tendencies.

---

[37] 'Man "sjöng ut liket" och det var ett par flickor i byn där jag bodde, som var speciellt duktiga i sång och dom ledde alltid sången vid sådana tillfällen. Om det var förnämligt så var prästen med och läste en bön. När någon stod lik, så var alltid speglarna i det rummet förhängda med lakan eller något annat.' Gratitude is here expressed to David Gudmundsson at the LUKA archive in Lund for pointing to this questionnaire answer from Ljusdal.
[38] Broström 2014: 63: 'Nora, 76 år, var i tioårsåldern när hennes mormor dog och hon fick åka och ta ett sista farväl. Det visade sig att mormodern låg i en öppen kista i sitt hem med släktingar och vänner samlade runt kistan sjungandes sånger och psalmer. Det var en gammal hälsingetradition att sjunga ut den avlidne på detta vis.'

	1962	1968	1974	1980	1986	1995
Devotional gathering with 'going out' sermon when the deceased leave home	47	46	-	-	-	-
Devotional gathering with 'going out' sermon, speaker	-	47	-	-	-	-
Devotional gathering when the deceased leave home	46	45	63	62	63	84
Other older or newer funerary customs in the parish	-	-	-	-	95	106

Some type of gathering connected to the mortal remains being transported from the house seemed stable over time, while the 'going out' sermon waned after 1970. The category 'Other older and newer funerary customs' may reflect a personification and diversification of arrangements. This tendency ought to be followed up in future research based on the LUKA archives. The questionnaires do not specifically mention singing, but the records may contain leads for further investigation into these matters.

The local funerary situation in Ramsjö and Färila in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries

Before considering the ethnographic evidence of singing out of the dead in Ramsjö and Färila from 2024, the cultural, ecclesiastical and geographical particulars of this region must be briefly addressed. Ramsjö is situated near the northern end of Hennan Lake in the extreme north of Hälsingland and the extreme north of the archdiocese of Uppsala. It is thus a typical example of regional and ecclesiastical borderlands. Until 1845, it constituted the farthermost areas of the parish of Ljusdal. That year, it became a *kapellförsamling* (an annexed parish), allowed to maintain a chapel in the village of Ramsjö. The present church had been erected in 1844. In 1865, Ramsjö became an independent parish. Since 1974, it has once more become part of a conjoined parish with Ljusdal. The population in Ramsjö village and its immediate surroundings totalled over a thousand in the early twentieth

century, but in 2024, the number dropped to 134 – a drastic depopulation even by Swedish rural standards.

Färila lies 14 km west of Ljusdal, while Kårböle is 54 km northwest of Ljusdal. Many of the reported events of singing out have occurred in the area between the Färila–Kårböle roads and Ramsjö, with an epicentre straddling the three villages. Both Ramsjö and Färila have had a marked Finnish presence since the first more systematic census in the sixteenth century onwards. Several waves of relocation from Savolax and Karelia helped populate Northern Hälsingland in the seventeenth century. This migration is evident from genealogical records of families hailing from Ramsjö, as well as from place names (e.g., Finneby and Pilkalamm).

In 1835, the first deceased person was buried in Ramsjö (a crofter named Olof Jonsson) rather than in Ljusdal. Previously, there was by necessity a considerable delay between a death in the Ramsjö region and the funeral in Ljusdal. Nonetheless, even when the church had been built and Ramsjö had its own vicar, an observer may note a longer delay between the death and the funeral, especially from the outer parts of the parish. As I have shown, this phenomenon is relevant to the custom of singing out of the dead since the tradition was rooted in the medieval sanctification rite for the corpse, which ought to happen before the body could be moved. The lack of roads and slow communication made it impossible to move as quickly as desired in most other areas and as stipulated by Church law. This deficiency naturally slowed down the necessary semi-ritual transportation of the mortal remains to Ljusdal.

In 1872, Carl Oscar Roos (1819–1882), vicar of Ljusdal, described the possibilities of travel to Ramsjö as follows:

> The parish of Ramsjö had hitherto been called roadless, since Hennan Lake, dangerous in all seasons, had been the only way to connect Ramsjö to the more remote villages in Ljusdal, until 1865, when a new road was built by state subsidies covering around 35 km between the church of Ramsjö and the village of Letsbo in the parish of Ljusdal. But this road only leads from the church of Ramsjö to the villages of Sund, Tallnäs, Gåda and Huskanäs. To the others, scattered over around 60 or 70 sq km, no roads lead other than walking paths or perilous riding routes. […] Out of the population of 792 persons, 350 live by a road, while 442 are without such infrastructure.[39]

[39] Quoted in Höijertz 2019: 149: 'Ramsjö församling har tillförene warit kallad wäglös, enär den under alla årstider farliga sjön Hännan warit den enda wäg som ställt Ramsjö i förbindelse med de aflägsnare byarne inom Ljusdal, intill dess år 1865 genom statsbidrag omkring 3 ½ mil ny wäg blef anlagd mellan Ramsjö Kyrka och

The situation described is unusual even by Swedish rural standards. Even after 1872, the majority of the population lived with no roads that could be travelled by horse carts leading to their farmsteads and houses. It may be noted that most interviewees in 2024 came from villages *not* mentioned here as connected by the new road, and some did not have roads until 1950. This lack of infrastructure would naturally lead to parishioners' difficulties in reaching the church and, conversely, those of the clergy in going to the parishioners' houses. Consequently, it apparently led to a religious practice peculiar to each village.

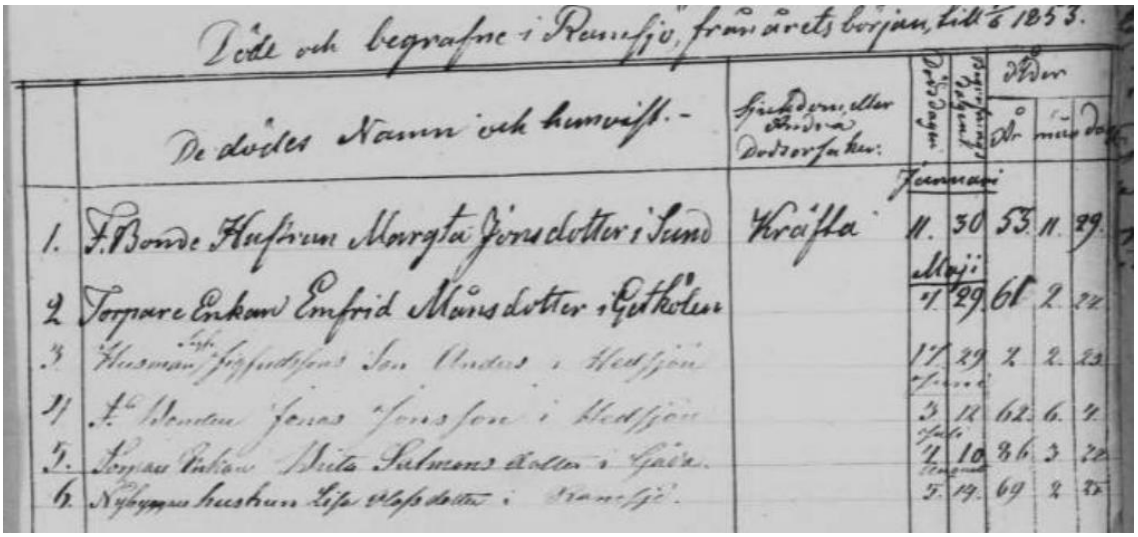


Figure 1. List of the six parishioners who died in Ramsjö in 1853. The interval between death and funeral in some cases ranged from around one to three weeks, even when the farms were as close to the church as the village of Sund (see line 1: Margareta Jonsdotter), only 5 km away (Ramsjö kyrkoarkiv, F. Död- och begravningsböcker. Landsarkivet Härnösand).

Letsbo by i Ljusdals socken. Men denna wäg leder från Ramsjö kyrka endast till byarne Sund, Tallnäs, Gåda och Huskanäs. Till de öfriga ungefär 6 à 7 qvadratmil spridda byarne finnes inga andra vägar än gångstigar eller farliga ridvägar. […] Af folkmängden, 792 personer, bo 350 vid wäg, men 442 sakna sådan beqwämlighet.'

Figure 2. Section of the 54-km road between Ramsjö and Ljusdal on the west side of Hennan Lake, broken in 1865 and photographed here in 1937 or 1938. Before the 1960s, there was no road on the east side of Hennan Lake. Photo: Länsmuséet Gävleborg.

Informants in 2024: identification and methodology

Between April and September 2024, I interviewed four persons with experiences and memories relating to funerals in Ramsjö and its surroundings. In September, I interviewed two more informants raised in Ramsjö and Stocksbo, Färila in their present common home in Gävle, as well as one informant in Los, west of Färila. In October, I interviewed a previous resident of Färila in her current home in Uppsala. All informants were prepared beforehand for what to expect and informed of my particular interest in customs relating to people

dying in their homes and what happened afterwards.[40] They were initially asked a number of open and semi-structured questions about what they had experienced in relation to people dying at home in northern Hälsingland.[41] Only after all they could relate from more general inquiries had been recorded did I introduce questions concerning what they had perhaps learned or heard from older Ramsjö inhabitants. This methodological choice was intended to separate, if possible, first-hand experiences from the narrated traditions that constitute common features of rural Sweden. The interviews also touched on many other local traditions relating to church life and singing, which may form the basis for future musicological research, but in the present study, I focus only on those relevant to singing out of the dead. The questions did not initially bring up details from historical records to avoid contaminating the memories of informants with specific details previously known to me from historical sources. Interestingly, many such particulars came up naturally, without the need for more concrete follow-up questions. However, at the end of the interviews, some historically attested specifics were addressed in the form of questions of this type: 'Do you have any recollections of …' or 'have you heard anything relating to…?'

The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the informants and the interview situation in each case. All interviews were recorded digitally, and the passages deemed interesting for this study have been transcribed. Some interviewees spoke in a strong Ramsjö or Färila dialect. In the Swedish transcripts of statements from the informants, conjugations, declension and pronunciation have been adapted to present Swedish orthographic standards, while word order and phraseology have been retained. The informants have consented to being quoted in the transcripts and have read and approved the present text in its entirety.

Sonja Persson (born in 1937) grew up at a smallholding farmstead in Gåssjö, worked in a seniors' home in Ramsjö and has lived in the villages of Gåssjö, Tevansjö and Finneby her entire life. On 15 August 2024, she was interviewed in her house in Finneby, situated ca. 25 km southwest of Ramsjö. She participated in and witnessed singing out of the dead many

[40] The procedure used in the interviews, documentation, storage, transcriptions and citations has complied with the code of conduct of the Swedish Research Council of 2024 https://www.vr.se/download/18.4c9f221a191e4edf9053a474/1727853946433/God%20forskningssed%20VR%202024.pdf and with the principles and practices outlined in the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*, revised edition 2023: 5–6. https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf.

[41] '1. Have you witnessed somebody died at home? 2. What happened when this was the case? 3. Who was responsible for the arrangements for the burial rite? 4. How old were you at the time? 5. Have you spoken to anyone about these memories and experiences? 6. Have you pondered the significance or meaning of these customs? 7. How were the arrangements referred to? 8. How common was this in your childhood?'

times in her youth and has continued to be a singer in the church of Ramsjö and elsewhere. She remembers many particulars concerning how deceased persons in Gåssjö, Finneby and Tevansjö were handled and transported to Ramsjö.

Figure 3. Funeral sweets from northern Hälsingland, in the possession of Anders Sandqvist, a resident of Ramsjö. Photo: Mattias Lundberg.

Anders Sandqvist (born in 1955) has spent most of his life in Ramsjö. He was interviewed on three occasions: 25 April, 22 July and 9 September 2024. Sandqvist is a rich source of information about traditional church and village customs, as well as long family traditions. He can narrate both his own memories and historical events in Ramsjö, as passed on by his parents and others, in considerable detail. He is an unusual informant, being a trained singer and performer as a narrator and artist in relation to older singing traditions, including those emanating from their roots in Karelia, Finland. Sandqvist possesses a considerable material heritage in the form of family bibles and hymnals from the eighteenth century onwards, as well as other artefacts he has collected in the region over the years. Several of these relate

to funeral customs (including clothing and funeral sweets) from the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. He had previously displayed some of these collections at Anders Gammelgård in Sandbacken, Ramsjö. Sandqvist has been very helpful in introducing me to three other informants (Persson, Lundin and Söderberg).

Elisabet Söderberg (born in 1949) has lived in Vås (ca. 10 km southwest of Ramsjö) and in Ramsjö. Söderberg was interviewed in Ramsjö on 9 September 2024. She grew up at a smallholding farmstead and worked for the Ramsjö ambulance service, at the hospital in Ljusdal and at the seniors' home in Ramsjö. She is a musically active person who sings, plays several instruments and has written for local theatre and music groups. Her memories and experiences span the entire region, with her earliest recollections in Vås and later ones in Ramsjö.

Figure 4: Locations of the villages where the informants attested to singing out of the dead, as shared in interviews held in 2024. 1. Ramsjö, 2. Vås, 3. Gåssjö, 4. Finneby, 5. Hedsta, 6. Stocksbo, 7. Södra Veckebo.

Mary Lundin (1927–2025) lived in Hedsta (ca. 40 km south of Ramsjö) and Ramsjö and was interviewed in Ramsjö on 9 September 2024. Lundin worked in the forestry sector and as a telephone operator in Hedsta and in the seniors' home in Ramsjö. At the time of the

interview, she lived in the same seniors' home. With great accuracy and in detail, she shared her memories from the late 1930s onwards. Lundin passed away on 16 January 2025.

Lennart and Eva Thunvall (born in 1940 and 1943, respectively) were married in 1965, and both worked as teachers. They have lived together in Färila, Malmberget, Gävle and other places. Lennart's family tree shows multigenerational school teachers and grew up in Ramsjö. Eva was born and raised in Stocksbo, 4 km south of Färila, where she witnessed singing out in the 1950s. The couple also possess material remnants from Hälsingland funeral customs, such as funerary sweets and handwoven ribbons used to adorn the casket of the deceased.

Gun-Britt Nylund (born in 1943) was born and raised in Ådalen, Ångermanland, and worked as a district nurse in Färila and the surrounding region for over 20 years. She was interviewed on 7 October 2024, in her present home in Uppsala, concerning her memories of singing out of the dead in Södra Veckebo, where it was performed until the early 1990s.

Gunnar Högberg (born in 1946) was interviewed in his home in Los on 9 October 2024. He is the son of Astrid Högberg (1909–1995), one of the most frequent 'singers-out' in twentieth-century Färila and Kårböle. He has many memories of his mother's singing and performed many of the hymns himself as a soloist and a choir member. Astrid and her husband Alfred Högberg (1900–1973) started a family funeral direction firm. She prepared the corpses for burial and made all practical arrangements, in which she integrated the traditional singing out of the dead. Alfred drove the hearse.

Living memories of singing out of the dead in 2024 and understanding of its meaning and significance

The procedure described by those alive today with memories of singing out from ca. 1940 to ca. 1965 was that when somebody died in the village, an older woman washed and dressed (*svepning*) the corpse while a male relative of the deceased produced the casket in which the body would be placed. The corpse could lie for several days or a week thereafter, but on the day when it would be taken to the church in Ramsjö or Färila, singing out was normally performed. All who knew the deceased gathered in the chamber (the largest central room in the traditional Hälsingland house). Someone, typically a woman and often the same person who had prepared the corpse for burial, commenced the singing of hymns, in which everyone sometimes joined. On other occasions, she remained a solo singer.

Early memories of singing out

Sonja Persson's earliest memories of singing out are from Gåssjö, situated 28 km from Ramsjö, of which approximately 10 km had no roads that could be travelled by car or bus before 1950 (the passage from Tevansjö to Gåssjö). The first occasion of singing out that she recalls occurred when she was around seven years old and her older sister was 17. It was her paternal grandfather, born in 1854, who died in Gåssjö in 1945.

> Lundberg: Is this your first or earliest memory of singing out?
>
> Persson: It is [my] earliest memory, with Grandpa.
>
> Lundberg: And then it has taken place also later?
>
> Persson: Oh, yes! It has taken place in the neighbouring farmsteads; it has taken place almost everywhere!
>
> Lundberg: So you have been at how many of these singing-out occasions, would you say?
>
> Persson: Yes … [thinking] … almost in all of the neighbouring farmsteads. I participated in them about eight or ten times.[42]

Eva Thunvall also has her first remembrance of singing out when she was a child in 1956. When her paternal grandfather (born in 1872) died, all mourners were gathered when the lady who would sing out arrived, but Eva had to leave the room because of her overwhelming sense of solemnity and emotion.

> Thunvall: I was barely 12 years old then. And it was seventy years ago. […] Oh, it was as if I did not know what happened! I heard and I saw and … I lie down upstairs and listen to this lady singing grandpa out, down there in the chamber. I could not stay there since it was so vast and so overwhelming […]. It was so immense, and I heard her sing, you know, and it was so powerful and fantastically big.[43]

This type of early reminiscences of emotive impressions of singing-out occasions seems to have made a strong impression on the informants. It is significant that their memories date

[42] Sonja Persson, Finneby, 25 August 2024:
'– Är det ditt första, tidigaste minne av utsjungning? – Det är det tidigaste minnet, med farfar. – Och sedan har det förekommit även senare? – O, ja! Det har förekommit i granngårdarna, det har förekommit lite överallt! – Så du har varit på, hur många sådana här utsjungningar, skulle du säga? – Ja … nästan alla gårdarna, åtta-tio gånger hann jag nog vara med på det.'

[43] 'Då var jag tolv år, knappt. Och det är sjuttio år sedan. […] Åh, det var som – jag vet inte vad som hände! Jag hör och ser och … en ligger uppe på övervåningen och lyssnar på när den här tanten sjunger ut farfar där nere, i kammaren. Jag kunde inte vara med för det var så stort och så mycket […] Det var så stort och jag hör ju henne sjunga vet du, och det var så mäktigt och fantastiskt stort.'

back from childhood and adolescence. Therefore, their recollections most likely predate the full linguistic and conceptual framework of an adult in that generation.

Practical arrangements for singing out of the dead

Persson relates that when the road from Tevansjö to Gåssjö was built in 1950, it became easier to transport the dead to Ramsjö, which seemed to have gradually made singing out of the dead a rarer occasion.[44] The geographic distance carried a clear social and civic distinction between singing out in the village and the funeral in Ramsjö.

> Persson: Then [at the funeral] it was the vicar who held forth. But at home, we decided for ourselves […].
>
> Lundberg: Were you aware that the vicar or cantor had any views on this thing of singing out?
>
> Persson: Not views, exactly…
>
> Lundberg: Was it known that it took place?
>
> Persson: It was like natural […] so natural that one should do that thing. One wished to sing a song before departing from home.[45]

The distance to the church that seemed to have upheld the tradition, when Ramsjö belonged to the Ljusdal parish, apparently remained long after Ramsjö became a separate parish. The understanding that the church, community council and trade in Ljusdal favoured the southern part of the region seemed widespread, similar to the singing-out and burial traditions in earlier centuries. Elisabet Söderberg comments on the situation thus:

> Ljusdal, it is the mother. Then she has two daughters, Los and Ramsjö, whom she does not care about. But Färila and Järvsö [...] are the beloved and favoured daughters of Ljusdal.[46]

The same tension between the main parish churches and annex churches and chapels that was instrumental in the transition from a clerical to a lay rite was thus also explicitly expressed in 2024.

---

[44] Sonja Persson, Finneby, 25 August 2024.
[45] '– Då var det kyrkoherden som höll låda. Men hemma var det vi som bestämde själv … hemma.
– Hade ni någon uppfattning om att kyrkoherden eller kantorn hade synpunkter på det här med utsjungning? - Nej, inte synpunkter precis. - Det var känt att det förekom? - Det var som naturligt … det var så naturligt att man skulle göra det där. Man ville sjunga en sång innan de for hemifrån.'
[46] 'Ljusdal, det är modern. Sen har hon två döttrar, det är Los och Ramsjö och de bryr hon sig inte i. Utan det är Färila och Järvsö – det är älsklingsdöttrarna till Ljusdal.'

Conceptions of meaning and purpose of singing out

Persson spontaneously ponders the concept of singing out, without me asking specifically about it. She reflects on the practice and how natural it was to her in her youth, now half a century later in hindsight.

> Persson: Isn't it strange? What is meant by singing out?
>
> Lundberg: … yes, that is interesting …
>
> Persson: … what does it mean … *actually*?[47]

Later in the interview, she returns to her own unanswered question and comments on the practice:

> Persson: But so honourable and so beautiful! One had a value as a human, even if one was dead.[48]

Comments about song as a 'gift' or 'service' to the deceased display a strikingly different view than that of the early modern Swedish theologians, who stressed that the singing was solely for those alive, not for the deceased. The notion that the custom was intended for the departed person links to Alexander's idea of 'core' beliefs, regardless of how the tradition was maintained.[49] Singing out took place in the room of the house where everyone had gathered, as well as at the moment when the casket was brought to the church, seemingly a direct trace of the early modern *liksång* tradition, as outlined above.

> Persson: In the chamber.
>
> Lundberg: And there everyone could enter?
>
> Persson: There you could go in. […] and when they left … for church. When the journey commenced, then we always sang.[50]

The latter custom of singing when the horse cart left a village such as Gåssjö (before 1950, when cars could not reach the village) is linked to the term *utfärdspsalm* or *färdepsalm* (hymn when faring out and wayfarer hymn, respectively).

The house of the deceased was the focal point of the ritual. If a handmaid or a farmhand, who did not own a house, were sung out, it happened in the house where they had resided,

---

[47] '– Visst är det konstigt? Vad menas med "sjunga ut"? – Ja det är intressant … – Vad betyder det – egentligen?'
[48] 'Men vad hederligt och vad fint! Man hade ju ett människovärde, även fast man var död.'
[49] Alexander, 2016.
[50] '– I kammaren. – Och dit fick alla komma in? – Dit fick man gå in. […] och när dom for … till kyrkan. När färden gick, då sjöng man alltid.'

in the farmstead of their master (*husbonde*) and mistress (*husfru*). When a relative who owned a house died in someone else's house, that person was sung out in the latter location. When Persson's maternal grandmother died in 1956, while visiting the latter's aunt in Bollnäs, 126 km south of Gåssjö, the family and friends had to go there to sing out.

> Lundberg: What were the proceedings then? Did you still sing in the home there and then?
>
> Persson: We sang in the home before [letting the body leave the house] – always! That was mandatory [...]! Absolutely, every time![51]

This is an interesting possible link to the strand of the tradition constituted by the sanctification of the body (*likvigning*), as practised until the sixteenth century. Singing out was performed where a person died – it would be against the tradition to transfer the corpse to Ramsjö, since the whole idea was that it must occur before the body could even be moved.

When asked about how the older generation viewed the practice of singing out, Persson could not recall ever discussing the motivation or rationale behind the tradition.

> Lundberg: Did you ever ask when you were young, why you did it in the way you did – how people in the older generation viewed this?
>
> Persson: No, it was so natural that one should …. No, I didn't ask that. No, it was an incentive that existed in everyone. One should sing. One wished to offer something more. And then it became a song. Probably.[52]

Here I can draw the preliminary conclusion that the 'core', in Alexander's sense, had also been waning in the twentieth century. However, the continuation of the practice had been obligatory, regardless of its meaning and significance.

Repertoire

Singing out of the dead was not a carrier of a unique repertoire of songs, at least not as far as has been discerned from archival evidence and ethnography from the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Instead, the official hymnal at a specific time was used (the so-called Wallin hymnal in 1819 and the hymnal of the Church and State of Sweden in 1937), in what may be described as a loyal common practice of church music. This is strikingly different from many other orally transmitted traditions of religious singing in

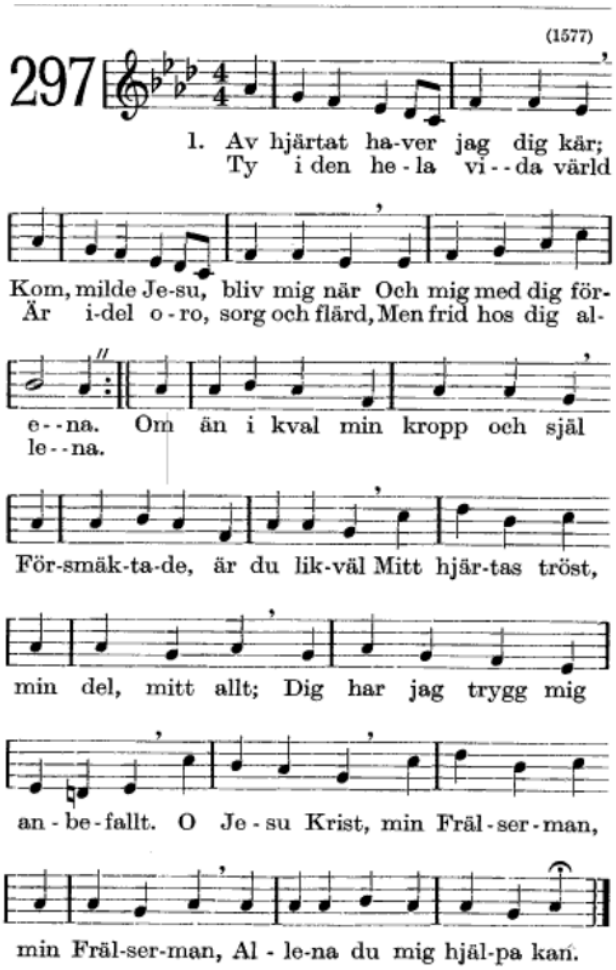
[51] '– Då dog hon hos sin moster som vi hade i Bollnäs – Hur gick det till då? Man sjöng fortfarande i hemmet där då? – Man sjöng i hemmet innan – alltid! Det var obligatoriskt det! Absolut, varje gång!'
[52] '– Frågade du någonsin när du var ung, varför man gjorde så här – hur de äldre såg på det här?
– Nej, det var så naturligt att man skulle …. Nej, jag frågade inte det. Utan det var en inlevelse som fanns hos alla. Man skulle sjunga. Man ville tillge något mer. Och då vart det sång. Antagligen.'

Sweden, which often reach back to older hymnals, manuals and prayer books than those presently used or which make use of improvised or locally based singing repertoires. As a contrasting example, the so-called Bodellists of the valley of Pite Älv in northern Sweden (documented by Märta Ramsten in 1974 and by myself in 2021) only acknowledged the 1695 hymnal, songs from *Sions sånger* (1743–1754) and the forbidden eighteenth-century publications of Anders Carl Rutström (1721–1772).[53] In Hälsingland, singing out seemed to have floated above all central developments of the Swedish Church. The singing tradition was not anti-clerical, anti-ecclesiastical, nonconformist or in any other way critical of the central church of bishops, consistories and local priests. Again, this links to a continuity in a loose sense by drawing on the present hymnal, without the 'canon' (the practice in fact being formally forbidden) and with the 'core' hinging on the belief that singing out was performed on account of the deceased. Apparently, the proneness to change and adaptation of the current hymnody in the Swedish Church was somewhat of a prerequisite for the continuation of the tradition. In Alexander's words, the tradition survived by virtue of its breach of the canon that tried to forbid the custom, in a way that preserved the core belief that singing also meant something for the deceased.[54]

The Ramsjö and Kårböle traditions seem not to have maintained any personal songs biographising the deceased, as of 2024. This peculiar personal lamentation is otherwise often declared in some singing-out traditions, for example, in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland in the early twentieth century.[55] In Ramsjö and Färila, the lay singers-out appertained to the hymnals of 1819. The most often reported hymn verse at singing out of the dead in Hälsingland around 1900 was '*Sänd, Herre dina änglar ut*'. This is the last stanza of *Av hjärtat haver jag dig kär*, written by Johan Olof Wallin, and rendered here in a literal, unrhymed translation:

> Send, O Lord, your angels out / that the soul may by the end of life / be taken by them to heaven. / And let my tired body in peace / rest in its silent home [the dead body] / until your voice shall be heard. / Then I, clad in holy shroud / with my eyes behold God / and by his grace and splendour / shall rejoice in all eternity. / O, Jesus Christ, alas hear my prayer! / In life and death, I belong to you.[56]

[53] Ramsten, 2024. The publication *Sions nya sånger* (Copenhagen: Hallager, 1778) contained many of the songs that were frequently used by the Bodellists.
[54] Alexander 2016: 10–11.
[55] Lönnqvist 2013: 77–78.
[56] 'Sänd Herre, dina änglar ut / att själen må vid livets slut / av dem till himlen föras. / Och låt min trötta kropp i ro / Sig vila i sitt tysta bo / tills där din röst skall höras. / Då skall jag, klädd i helig skrud / med mina ögon skåda Gud / och av hans nåd och härlighet / mig fröjda i all evighet. / O Jesu Krist, ack bönhör mig! / I liv och död jag tillhör dig.'



Example 1. *Av hjärtat håller jag dig kär*. Its final verse (‘*Sänd, Herre dina änglar ut’*) was commonly used to sing out of the dead. Photo of the Swedish hymnal, 1937.

This stanza appeared as number 221 in the hymnal of 1819 and as number 297 in the hymnal of 1937 (see Ill. 5). However, its popularity as a hymn for singing out of the dead is rooted further back in history, through the version codified in the 1695 hymnal, which is rather different from the 1819 hymnal:

> Alas, Lord! Your angels send / who *my* soul in its final end / to the bosom of Abraham will draw / *My* body that is lowered into earth / let it rest in peace and calm / until the final day. / And from death awaken *me* / let *my* eyes behold you / in all its joy, O you son of God / *my* human saviour and throne of grace / Lord Jesus Christ, hear *my* prayer! / *I* wish to praise you in eternity,[57]

[57] ‘Ach Herre! Tina änglar sänd / som siälen i *min* sidsta änd / I Abrahams sköte draga. / *Min* kropp som läggz i jorden nidh / låt hwilas uthi roo och frijd / in til then sidsta dagen: / och ifrå döden upwäck *migh* / låt *mina* ögon skåda tigh / uthi all frögd o tu Gudz Son / *min* frälserman och nåde-thron! / Herre Jesu Christ bönhör du *mig* / *Jag* wil tigh prisa ewiglig.’ (First-person pronouns: emphasis mine).

This hymn stanza contains seven first-person pronouns, italicised for emphasis in the preceding quotation. The 1695 version, which was continually sung also long after the 1819 hymnal had been made official, has a much more direct reference to what happens in the funeral rite. Moreover, the souls' fear of not resting in peace but remaining 'lost' in this world was very real in early modern times, and typical of Lutheran orthodoxy, the 1695 version promises a direct awakening from death, unlike the Wallin (1819) version. Mary Lundin remembers learning and singing the Wallin version of the verse in question in Hedsta. Many ethnographic records and local newspapers' funeral notices mention it as the most popular hymn for singing out of the dead in the first half of the twentieth century, now available in microfilm and on a database from Kungliga biblioteket in Stockholm, where it ranks among the most commonly cited.[58]

As concluded above, singing out of the dead in the Ramsjö region did not seem to have preserved unique and older repertoires associated solely with the tradition. Conversely, newer repertoires appeared to have been assimilated naturally and cumulatively. For example, the songs of Carolina 'Lina' Sandell Berg (1832–1903) and the melodies of Oscar Ahnfeldt (1813–1882) were reported as common in the first half of the twentieth century, before their inclusion in the Swedish Church's official hymnal (which happened first in 1937). This also showed that the tradition aligned with the general tendencies of hymns and songs disseminated also in pietist factions of the Lutheran Church and among revivalist movements. Again, the continuity surpassed the canon and core (in Alexander's sense). Söderberg reports having sung Sandell Berg's *Bred dina vida vingar* in Vås. Persson remembers *Blott en dag* being common in singing out of the dead in Gåssjö and performing it herself for several deceased persons in the village.[59] Both hymns have a strong first-person perspective. Eva Thunvall also mentions *läsarsånger* (nineteenth-century revivalist and pietist hymns) as typical in singing out of the dead.

The first-person perspective grants the ritual a proxy viewpoint since the person (or persons) who sings (or sing) out represents (represent) the deceased in linguistic terms. It also provides a link to the *liksång* tradition, where one of the most popular processional hymns was *'I stoft och sand den svarta mull min lekamen är införd och slagen omkull'* ('In

[58] https://tidningar.kb.se/.
[59] Interview with Sonja Persson, Finneby, 25 August 2024: 'Då var det "Blott en dag" – den fick då jag sjunga för flera i byn som gått bort.'

dust and sand, to the black soil, my body is turned and knocked down') with the refrain '*Mitt hus är mörkt, min säng är trång*' ('My house is dark, my bed [the coffin] is narrow').[61]

Who sang? Singing out as a female practice

Evidently, singing out of the dead in Hälsingland was often intoned and led by the women in the villages, sometimes singing as soloists or as a group.[62] This also links to preparing the corpse for burial (washing it, shaving the facial hair of a male, tying the hair of a female and dressing the body in its finest clothes) as an exclusive female practice. For example, 'Mickels-Karin' (Karolina Olsson, 1862–?) shrouded the dead (*liksvepning*) in Tallnäs and Sund, west of Hennan Lake, and sang out the bodies.[63] The LUKA report from Ljusdal mentions 'a couple of young girls with good voices', and Anders Sandqvist discusses the singing out as an almost exclusive female practice. These aspects of who was suitable for singing out may be compared with the lyrics of a song attested in Swedish-speaking Finland. Maria Fredrika Bengts (1820–1887) performed the following suitor's song, as testified by her granddaughter:

> Dear mother of the house, take me as a son-in-law. I can do many things. New buckets I can make, the old ones I can mend. I can sweep the floor; I can carry out the garbage. I can gnaw the bones. I can dig the ditches*; I can sing out the corpses*.[64]

Persson remembers that both her maternal grandmother and mother had been leaders of singing out. Women were expected to have strong and beautiful voices and be of 'good character'. She describes the performance as a type of proxy singing for the closest family members of the deceased:

> It was the same way with my grandmother. If they [parents, spouse or children of the person who was sung out] could not sing themselves because of sorrow, then she sang. And with a soprano voice so high![65]

Persson also comments on her grandmother's singing in the church in Ramsjö, which she could rarely attend, due to the lack of roads between Gåssjö and Tevansjö:

---

[61] This funeral song, seemingly peculiar to Swedish diocesan schools, is found in many school song books and was included (number 402) in the 1695 hymnal.
[62] Hjelmström says that the singers were 'led by someone who had the reputation of being a good singer', (*Svenska Landsmål* XI 1896: 23), while Erik Modin notes that in Tåsjö, Ångermanland, the singer should be someone 'renowned for a spiritual sense'. 1916: 268.
[63] Berglund 2009: 8
[64] Emphasis mine. Quoted in Lönnqvist 2013: 76.
[65] 'Det var lika med min mormor. Kunde de inte sjunga själv för att de inte orkade av sorg, så sjöng hon. Och då med en sopranstämma så hög!'

> I was with her to church once and *jädrar anacka* [darn me!], what a soprano voice! She was allowed to sing out her heart [...] in church.[66]

Elisabet Söderberg also mentions her female ancestors, as well as her mother, as accomplished singers, who always sang and had such roles in the village. In many cases, the singers tended to be matrilineal, especially in the villages of Vås, Finneby and Gåssjö – but less so in Ramsjö, where a priest, a school and a cantor were present. This trend somewhat differed from the evidence in southern Sweden, where men have also been reported as leaders or soloists in singing out, sometimes called *vedkastarpräster* (wood-chucking priests), since they took on a role associated with the clergy on the site of the wood-chopping storehouses, where the dead were kept before taken into the house or to the church.[67]

I have shown that the early modern practice in cities and church villages was to have the diocese and city schools sing in the burial procession and/or by the graveside, whereas no such singing institutions could be counted on in places like Ramsjö. After the introduction of a general elementary school in Sweden (1842), the school classes – then consisting of boys and girls of different ages – were occasionally employed to sing out of the dead. Persson recalls:

> Persson: Yes, indeed, in '52, we had an old lady [who had died] in Gåssjö, Lina Nylin, and we school children went there to sing for her. Wasn't it a fine thing for the mistress [schoolteacher Birgit Ekegren] to think about that?
>
> Lundberg: So you were gathering – the entire class?
>
> Persson: Yes, and then we sang there by her casket, in the little room where she lay.
>
> […] It was peculiar that the mistress wished for us to do that thing. Because otherwise, we would have done it anyway.[68]

Using the local *Folkskola* (primary school) similar to how elite diocesan schools trained choristers in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries testified to the continuing tradition of institutional anchoring of singing out, at least until the mid-twentieth century.

---

[66] 'Jag var med 'na till kyrkan en gång och jädrar anacka vilken sopranröst hon hade! Då hon fick sjunga ut där i kyrkan.'
[67] Hagberg 1937: 314.
[68] '– Jo då, -52, då hade vi en tant i Gåssjö, Lina Nylin, och vi skolbarn fick gå dit och sjunga för henne. Det var väl fint att fröken tänkte på det. Fint gjort! – Så ni fick samlas ihop i skolklassen? - Ja, och så sjöng vi där kring hennes kista, i den där kammaren där hon låg. […] Det var ju egendomligt att lärarinnan ville att vi skulle göra det där. För annars gjorde vi ju det ändå.'

As mentioned, Astrid Högberg was a renowned singer-out who integrated this tradition into her activities as an undertaker. The fact that an originally liturgical singing tradition from the late Middle Ages can be subsumed into the entrepreneurial spirit driving the rise of modern undertaker firms is a great testament to the longevity of rituals. Her son Gunnar provides many details concerning her style of singing, the places where she sang out and the remaining legacy and repute of her name and practice.

By mid-twentieth century, singing out seemingly became a peculiarity for the villages west of Hennan Lake, not practised in Ramsjö itself. Söderberg, who worked for many years at Nyhem (the Ramsjö home for seniors), cannot recall singing out of the dead taking place when residents passed away there, possibly because their mortal remains could quickly and easily be transferred to the morgue by the church. Nonetheless, the tradition of gathering all employees in the room of the deceased may be a remnant of the practice in more recent times:

> Söderberg: We gathered the entire staff then and bid [the residents] farewell, so to speak, when they passed away [...].
>
> Lundberg: Was this spontaneous or something for which there was a procedure?
>
> Söderberg: Yes … we just always did it that way there.[69]

The staff paid their last respects to the deceased after the relatives had left and before the deceased was transported from the seniors' home to the morgue or the church vault. Even if this may happen in other homes for the elderly, and for different practical and counselling reasons, the way that it is described here apparently reflects the pattern of the singing tradition when the corpse is taken out of the house and the journey to church starts.

Gun-Britt Nylund recalls that in the early 1990s, when working as a district nurse in Färila, she was summoned to an occasion of singing out in Södra Veckebo, ca. 7 km west of Färila. She was called on due to her reputation of having a good voice and being accustomed to church traditions. When she arrived at the house, the old man had already passed away. Although not clearly knowing what to do, she 'found something little in the hymnal', remembering that 'in the past, it was done in this way, when they finished everything off in the home'.[70] Dating from sometime soon after 1990, this is the latest recorded testified instance of the practice, to the best of my knowledge.

---

[69] '– Vi samlades ju hela personalen då och tog avsked av dem, liksom när de gick bort då. – Var det spontant eller något det fanns en procedur för? – Ja … vi bara gjorde alltid så där.'
[70] 'Jag hittade någon liten grej i psalmboken…' '… förr gjorde man väl så att man avslutade så här i hemmet.'

Other customs and ritualistic aspects

I have already discussed the often-reported non-musical customs of singing out of the dead. These include stopping the pendulums of all clocks at the point of death, putting coins on the eyelids of the deceased and propping up the chin with a hymnal. It was also common to arrange two equal-sized spruce branches that formed a 'portal' at the entrance through which the deceased was carried out of the house and sung out in a procession from the village to the church. These customs have traditionally been interpreted as strong ritualistic remnants from an uncertain and distant past and can still be found in many locations across Europe and Asia. The coins can be traced back to ideas from antiquity (e.g., leaving a coin in the mouth of the deceased as a 'fee' for Charon, the ferrymen who rowed the dead over Styx River). The practical customs are widespread yet perceived as 'local' and 'ancient'. However, Eva Thunvall interprets the practices of placing coins on the eyelids and a hymnal under the chin as purely practical. She testifies that the hymnal could be removed once the body had become stiff and, similarly, the coins only served the purpose of keeping the eyes closed immediately after death and were removed once rigor mortis had set in. In her grandfather's case, a hymnal was not even used.[71]

Conclusion

As discussed, the tradition of singing out of the dead had survived in practice until at least the 1990s and retained its peculiar terminology. Apparently, one explanation for its longevity is that the ritual gave rise to a term. That term – singing out (*utsjungning*) elevates the practice to a solemn event that should be remembered and observed. At the same time, the rite had changed beyond all recognition regarding the concrete matters of who sang, what was sung and how it was sung. This transformation again highlights the distinction among 'continuity', 'canon' and 'core'.[73] While beyond all doubt, there was continuity in the process outlined in this study, how can the gradual differences in its concrete manifestations be accounted for? It is elucidating to consider these half-millennial developments as the phenomena of the separate levels of 'continuity', 'canon' and 'core', as proposed by Alexander (drawing on Shils's analysis).[74] While Shils has demonstrated the

[71] 'Många gånger så lade de ju en psalmbok under hakan, men I det här fallet var det mera praktiskt, och mera riktigt, att knyta upp med en gasbinda. – För att han … för att han inte var så kyrklig? – Ja, det var inte så där då. Nej. Men jag vet inte om han fick en psalmbok med sig sedan i kyrkan då. […] Men i det här fallet så ödslades det inte iväg någon psalmbok.'
[73] Alexander 2016.
[74] Alexander 2016.

mechanisms through which a custom or practice that in historical hindsight may be perceived as drastically changed over time, in each generation, it may conversely be logically and empirically experienced as 'unaltered and ancient'.[75] Alexander's tripartite definition of tradition shows that at the 'canon' level (liturgical orders, etc.), singing out was outright forbidden for 400 years. The 'core' level (ideas concerning the meaning and significance of singing out) indicates remarkable continuity, with the laity persisting in their notion that singing out was a performative act for the deceased, not just something for the mourners present (the very reason behind the prohibitions against it). The 'continuity' level seemed to have been projected in a gradual process, whereby the persons singing out believed that they perpetuated a custom inherited from their forefathers.

Actually *performing* singing out has been of primary importance, not the external musical forms or customs of the performance (even if these have occasionally survived). Shils hits the mark when proposing that '[t]raditions possess authority by virtue of the quality which they acquire in the minds of the persons of one generation when they believe these traditions were accepted by a succession of ancestors coming up to the immediate past.'[76] The resulting perspective is the opposite of an established notion of the history behind theology and ecclesiastical regulation, according to Alexander's distinctions: 'Cores and canons change traditions, but the only thing necessary is continuity.'[77] A history written from printed church orders and laws would conclude that singing out of the dead did not exist more than as an outlier in Swedish society after 1686. By presenting archival and ethnographical evidence to the contrary, hopefully, I have demonstrated that it was absolutely central in matters of life and death for many people until the mid-twentieth century. In some respects, it may even be claimed that the women who sang out corpses in early modern Sweden constituted the first female clergy since they performed the central rites of medieval priests once the clergy had abandoned the same.

Several informants report their overwhelming sense of solemnity, beauty and grandeur associated with the experience of witnessing the dead being sung out. While this event compelled a few interviewees (such as Thunvall) to leave the room due to their fear or strong emotion, others contrast it to their perceived modern ways of 'taking death lighly'. It is indeed problematic for the current Swedish Church to communicate, in a highly secularised society, the meaning of death and resurrection, as traditionally taught. Many

[75] Shils 1981: 14.
[76] Shils 1958: 154.
[77] Alexander, 2016: 25.

may neither share nor even ponder the fate of their departed loved ones, while others may find it difficult to know how to act according to such beliefs, even if held at some level of cultural or religious consciousness. The practical problems of funerals being 'too dark', 'too heavy' or 'miserable', as reported by secularised Swedes, arise partly from the rites formulated when a very specific and detailed Lutheran doctrine was taken for granted. Jarlert has addressed this clash between the traditional rite and an unwillingness to encounter the practicalities of death and bereavement:

> It is a big difficulty for the church that many people in our time do not want to face death in its 'simple and heavy severity', but rather wish to lighten up that which in itself is not light – or not be reminded of death at all. To bury a dead next of kin without being reminded of death transforms also life into something deceptive or unreal.[78]

With the greater mobility of the Hälsingland population, the infrastructure of roads, hospitals and palliative care seems to have brought about the end of a long tradition of lay religious singing. Apparently, it occurred rather abruptly after the 1940s and the 1950s since only a few examples of singing out can be attested thereafter. Thus, modern societal living patterns seem to have achieved in a few decades the Swedish bishops' fervent but unsuccessful attempts for over 400 years to eradicate singing out of the dead.

Literature

Alexander, James (2016) 'A Systematic Theory of Tradition'. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 10: 1–28.

Bælter, Sven (1762) Historiska anmärkningar om kyrckoceremonierna. Stockholm: Hesselberg.

Berg, Wilhelm (1882) Samlingar till Göteborgs historia. I. Kulturhistoriska skildringar. Stockholm. Beijer.

Berglund, Laila (2013) Byar i Norra Ramsjö: Hedsjö, Stugutjärn, Mellansjö, Stagelåsem, Betlehem, Norrberg, Valsjön och Sörnaggen. Bollnäs.

[78] Anders Jarlert: 'Kyrkans budskap – människans behov', *Dödens riter* ed. Kristina Söderpalm (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1994): 189–194, at 191: '[f]ör kyrkan är det en stor svårighet att många människor i vår tid inte vill möta döden i dess "enkla och tunga allvar" utan vill lätta upp det som i sig själv inte är lätt – eller inte alls påminnas om döden. Att begrava en död närstående utan att påminnas om döden gör också själva livet till något skenbart eller overkligt.'

Brilioth, Yngve (1946) *Svensk kyrkokunskap* 2nd edn. Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens förlag.

Broström, Magnus (2014) Äldre människors föreställningar om den egna framtiden, döendet och döden. Diss. University of Linköping.

Collins, Michelle: Caoine: Spaces for vocalizing grief. The De-ritualisation and Re-ritualisation of Keening in Contemporary Ireland. Masters' thesis, Høgskolen i Telemark, Rauland, 2014.

Emporagrius, Erik Gabrielsson (c.1652): Kyrkoordningsförslag.

Enochsson, Ernst (1949) *Den kyrkliga seden med särskild hänsyn till Västerås stift*. Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens förlag.

Fallberg Sundmark, Stina (2020): 'Remembering the Dead and Reminding the Living: Blessing of the Corpse and Burial in Sixteenth-Century Sweden'. *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 7/1: 43–59.

Hagberg, Louise Hagberg (1937) När döden gästar: Svenska folkseder och svensk folktro i samband med död och begravning. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.

Hilding Pleijel (1956). *Gamla utfärdstal från svenska bygder*. Lund: Gleerup.

Hjelmström, Anna (1896) 'Från Delsbo'. *Svenska Landsmål* XI.

Hofberg, Herman (1880–1881) Några drag ur det forna Skogsbyggarlifvet i Halland. Stockholm: Norstedt.

Höijertz, Lars: *Wås i tid och rum* (2019) Gävle.

Jarlert, Anders (1994) 'Kyrkans budskap – människans behov'. *Dödens riter.* Ed. Kristina Söderpalm. Stockholm: Carlsson, 1994, 189–194.

Lönnqvist, Bo: Dödens ansikte: Tro och sed bland herre och folk. Vasa: Scriptum, 2013.

Modin, Erik (1916) *Gamla Tåsjö: Anteckningar om hembygden*. Sollefteå: Dahlberg.

Olaus Petri (ed. 1529) Een handbock påå swensko ther doopet och annat mera vthi ståår. Stockholm.

Ramsten, Märta (2014) 'En muntlig sångkultur kopplad till skrift: 1700-talssamlingarna Sions sånger och Sions nya sånger i musiketnologisk och kulturhistorisk belysning med utgångspunkt i traditionsinspelningar'. *Puls* IV, 10–26.

Ranta-Rönnlund, Sara (1973) *Njoalpas söner: Berättelser om dagligt liv i norr*. Stockholm: Askild & Kärekull.

Shils, Edward (1958) 'Tradition and Liberty: Antinomy and Interdependence'. *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political and Legal Philosophy* LXVIII.

Shils, Edward (1975) *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Silvonen, Viliina (2022) Apeus arkistoäänitteellä: Äänellä itkeminen performanssina ja affektiivisena käytäntönä Aunuksen Karjalassa. Ph.D. thesis, University of Helsinki.

Svenska riksdagsakter jämte andra handlingar som höra till statsförfattningens historia. Under tidehvarfvet 1521–1718 (1894–1910). Ed. Emil Hildebrand. Stockholm: Norstedt.

Svenska synodalakter efter 1500-talets ingång (1903). Ed. Herman Lundström. Uppsala: Wretman.

Svensk uppslagsbok (1947–55). 2nd edition. Malmö: Norden.

Svenska landskapslagar […] Dalalagen och Västmannalagen II (1936–40) Stockholm: Gebers.

Svenska synodalakter efter 1500-talets ingång (1903–08). Ed. Herman Lundström. Uppsala: Svenska kyrkohistoriska föreningen.

Zachrisson, Terese (2017) Mellan fromhet och vidskepelse: Materialitet och religiositet i det efterreformatoriska Sverige. Diss. Göteborgs universitet.