

**Abstract of *History in Magazine. A Study of the History Writing of the Magazine Populär Historia and of Commercial Use of History.* (Lund, 2011)**

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The thesis has two aims: to define and explain the history writing, namely content and form, of the Swedish history magazine *Populär Historia*, and to investigate the concept “commercial use of history”. The background to the choice of subject and aims is based on a curiosity about the constantly growing public interest in history. This magazine, *Populär Historia*, had 2010, 200 000 readers per month which is an enormous amount if you compare to the readership figures of other kinds of historical productions, such as academic journals or popular science books.

The research material consists of magazine articles, editorial texts and reader’s letters which are published during the period of 1991-2010. From this period I have selected one issue per year for close reading, but the entire production is also investigated by categorizing every article by different kinds of themes to find out which are the most and least common ones. The theoretical framework consists mainly of history culture and use of history. From those perspectives I have also developed tools for close reading of the annual selected texts. It’s also worth mentioning that the framework provided opportunities to put the magazine in a wider context and thereby explain shifts in content and form and also the popularity of the magazine.

The study shows that the uses of history are very shifting, but a common feature is that different aspects of an academic use of history are widespread among readers and writers. By this kind of academic use of history I mean a slightly dated one with a main purpose to reconstruct, to explain the past and to use history as a background to current events.<sup>2</sup> Chronological perspective, distinct actors and aims to convey truths (often just the one and only truth) about the past are typical traits in this, what I call, modified academic use of history. In modern academic history writing it is clear to discuss different kinds of interpretations and also the relevance of the present in history writing. It is also a claim that the historian explains in what grounds she or he interprets material and sources. None of these structures are

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish title is: *Historia i magasin. En studie av tidskriften Populär Historias historieskrivning och av kommersiellt historiebruk.*

<sup>2</sup> Concerning current events, the content of the magazine is quite resistant to ongoing events that are associated with political sensitivity, for example the Middle East conflict or the debate on the Armenian genocide. These parts of history are very seldom subjects of articles. On the other hand there are other examples on “current event” which really made its marks on *Populär Historia*, like the fall of the Eastern Bloc around 1990 when the magazine was quite new on the market. During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the magazine was more academic and adapted to current events and even debates, than it is today.

visible in the articles of *Populär Historia* which I believe depends on the reader's preunderstanding of what history really is about and the expectations on the genre.

The most common subjects and themes of the magazine are wars and conflicts, biographies and cultural history (art, architecture, travelling), but it also consists of a broad repertoire of various themes, which I think is one of its main attractions; *Populär Historia* has something for almost everyone. However, for those readers who are interested in living history, social- and labour history have nothing to gain from *Populär Historia*.

Concerning the concept "commercial use of history" I define it as a phenomenon that is built upon on a consensus between producers of popular history and the consumers of the same, but the borders between those parts can be very diffuse. That depends on the consumer's important role as co-producers of, in this case, the magazine. If the readers do not agree to the magazine's content or form, as evidenced in some of the letters to the editor, the editors have to consider the criticism, and balance it to their own needs and ideas of what kind of history they want to publish. In other aspects commercial use of history is characterized by a history writing that is quite concrete and recognizable for the readers, but it is made new by "unknown" details, fascinating individuals and commemorative articles about different types of anniversaries. Of great significance is also the rich imagery.

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