The purpose of this project has been to assess how the natural sciences related to religion in early modern Scandinavia. Traditionally, the 17th century has often been described as a period of scientific secularization, when the influence of religion on scientific thought diminished. As a consequence, the 17th century has been attributed a central role in modern historiography as the period when “modern science” was born. This conventional view has been criticized in recent years, however, as based on an anachronistic use of the concept of “science”. In reality, the natural sciences of the 17th century were part of a discipline known as “natural philosophy”, in which the knowledge of nature always included a religious dimension. As a scholarly discipline, early modern natural philosophy encompassed a wide field of knowledge, from cosmology and physics to biology and medicine. The central concept holding this disparate field together was the concept of “God’s two books” – the Bible and nature – as equally valid expressions of God’s wisdom. As a consequence, the discipline was to a large extent shaped by the ambition to harmonize “faith” with “science”, the knowledge of nature with the biblical text. However, this relation of mutual dependency also meant that the religious changes of the period had a dramatic impact on how natural philosophy was perceived and practiced.

Originally, the intention was to problematize Scandinavian natural philosophy through two separate but complementary studies; the first focusing on the religious dimensions of early modern medicine, the second on the emergence of the so-called “mosaic philosophy”, a discipline based on the idea that natural science itself had its foundation in the Bible and in the wisdom of the biblical patriarchs. The former theme was treated from a general perspective in “Människan är född till olycka, såsom fågeln till att flyga: medicin och religion i reformations- och stormaktstidens Skandinavien” (2008). However, it soon became clear that the two themes were better handled as a unity, partly because medicine constituted a prominent theme within the mosaic philosophy, and partly because both fields were intimately connected to the early modern biblical view of history. As a consequence, the enquiry shifted its focus, turning into a synthetic and contextual study of the relation between natural philosophy and the biblical view of history and its impact on early modern culture. More specifically, a large part of the project came to focus on the antiquarian Johannes Bureus (1568-1652), one of the foremost advocates of a mosaic natural philosophy, but also active as a linguist, gothicist historian and apocalyptic propagandist.

Bureus’ work on natural philosophy and its connection to biblical historiography is discussed in “Alchemy of the Ancient Goths: Johannes Bureus’ Search for the Lost Wisdom of Scandinavia” (2012). In a number of works, Bureus argued that a consummate form of natural philosophy had been known in biblical times, but that this knowledge had later been lost. However, Bureus was also a keen advocate of the gothicist historiography in vogue in early modern Scandinavia, arguing that the knowledge of the biblical patriarchs had been kept intact by the Goths of ancient Sweden. Claiming
that the Gothic form of writing – the runes – constituted an ancient symbolic language in which a true knowledge of nature had been hidden, he viewed the study of biblical and Gothic history, as well as the study of language, as a means to restore natural philosophy to its former perfection.

The book-length study *Vid tidens ände* (2014) broadens this perspective by situating Bureus’ ideas in their wider political and Lutheran context. The book focuses on the apocalyptic notions fostered by the Protestant Reformation and how these came to shape Bureus’ philosophical ideas, as well as the religio-political climate of the 17th century generally. During the 1610s, Bureus’ work became increasingly influenced by apocalyptic notions, as he began to view the restoration of the ancient wisdom of the biblical patriarchs as a predestined event, anticipating the end of the world. In effect, he treated natural philosophy as intimately tied to biblical historiography and the Christian eschatological drama. The book highlights how Bureus tried to fuse historiography, linguistics and natural philosophy within an apocalyptic framework, but also the fact that these ideas and ambitions were quite often shared by his contemporaries. Even if Bureus’ conclusions were unique in many respects, the methods he employed and the notions he based his conclusions on were widely accepted during the period 1550-1650. An illuminating example of this is the astronomer Tycho Brahe, whose apocalyptic notions are discussed in the essay “Tycho the Prophet: History, Astrology and the Apocalypse in Early Modern Science” (2007). Though Brahe might be characterized as a typical empiricist, his interpretation of astronomical data was clearly influenced by an apocalyptic view of the world, and he too regarded the scientific progress of the 16th century as anticipating the end of the world.

The main results of the project can be summarized as follows:

1. A deeper understanding of the close relations between the natural sciences and the religious view of history prevalent in the early modern era. In the works of Bureus, natural philosophy was both methodologically and theoretically dependent on biblical historiography. Like many contemporaries, he viewed natural philosophy as a scientific field founded and brought to perfection by the biblical patriarchs, but now in need of a complete “restoration” (*instauratio* or *restauratio*). Thus, he explicitly adhered to the Renaissance notion of a *prisca sapientia* – an “ancient wisdom” – having its roots in the biblical Adam. Like many contemporaries he also viewed the 17th century restoration of natural philosophy as an important element in the ongoing apocalyptic drama: it was by restoring natural philosophy to its former glory that man could pave the way for the “golden age” prophesied in the Bible, an age ultimately leading to the end of the world.

2. A deeper knowledge of how the political use of history shaped and informed other fields of knowledge, including natural philosophy. The natural philosophical and linguistic work of Bureus was intimately dependent on the gothicist historiography invoked to legitimize Sweden’s political position in the 17th century. By attributing the ancient Goths a central position in history as the communicators of biblical wisdom, Bureus’ works formed the starting point for the gothicist ideology of the later 17th century, developed by, for instance, Georg Stiernhielm, Olof Verelius and Olof Rudbeck.

3. A better understanding of how Lutheran faith affected natural philosophy during the first half of the 17th century. The apocalyptic notions and sentiments influencing natural
philosophy were primarily a product of the Protestant Reformation. Contrary to traditional opinion, Lutheran faith did not lead to a gradual “entzauberung” or disenchantment of nature, but to an even stronger emphasis of the religious dimensions of nature; firstly, by attributing an apocalyptic significance to natural phenomena, and secondly, by treating natural philosophy as a subdiscipline of theology. From a Lutheran perspective, natural philosophy was not merely concordant with theology, but sharing its vary aim and purpose: that is, to lead man towards salvation. However, this view also had controversial implications, and when Lutheran orthodoxy hardened in the 1620s, this view was forcefully criticized. In this respect, Bureus serves as an illuminating example, since he was vehemently criticized by the Lutheran Church in the 1620s, a controversy that gradually estranged him from the scholarly world and marked a turning point in how natural philosophy was practiced and debated in early modern Sweden.

One of the questions raised by this project is why the apocalyptic world view seems to have lost its significance relatively suddenly by the mid-1630s. It has long been known that the death of Gustavus Adolphus marked the end of the millenarian expectations attributed to the “Lion of the North” during the early stages of the Thirty Years’ War. Yet, the apocalyptic world view had a huge impact on areas far outside the political rhetoric of the Thirty Years’ War, and its diminished significance during the 1630s cannot be explained solely as a consequence of the changing political situation.

Apart from a number of publications in English and Swedish, the results of the project has been presented at a number of international conferences and work-shops, including Nordic Network for Renaissance Studies in Copenhagen 2012; “Religion, Natural Philosophy, and Medicine in post-Reformation Scandinavia”, Copenhagen 2013, and at ESSWE in Gothenburg 2013.

The project itself cannot be claimed to have contributed to a better cooperation between the University and the library. However, free access to the library collections has profoundly benefited the research process, whereas having a research office at the library has created new opportunities for constructive cooperation between the library and academic researchers. For instance, I have established close ties between the University Library and Lund University department of ALM, Library and Informations Studies, including joint courses and collaborative exhibition projects; I have worked on user-driven digitizing strategies and participated in evaluation projects concerning the libraries’ research support, resulting in the report “Tillgänglighet, närhet och synlighet – gemensamma utmaningar för LUB-näverket för att möta forskares behov av stöd vid Lunds universitet” (2012). Since April 2013 I am permanently employed by the University Library as Manager of the Manuscripts and Special Collections Department.
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