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THE BUILDING OF CASTLES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF SWEDEN

Throughout Sweden the King began to build castles on the basis of foreign models in the middle of the 13th century. It is about the new art of castle building under Anglo-Norman and German influence¹.

You find a square or rectangular plan, massive stone walls, flanking towers and an outer and inner bailey. Prior to the castle there was often an old tower, a keep. The houses, now connected with the walls, were dwelling-houses for the garrison and its commander and lodgings, for the king, queen and other residents. Within the walls there were also half-timbered houses and wooden huts etc. The castle was a fortificatory unit, always strategically placed and often surrounded with water or, if not, with ditches or moats and wooden palisades; the bridge could be drawn up.

To this type of castle belong some fortresses in the Novgorod area in Northern Russia, such as Oreshek at Neva (Nöteborg/Schlüsselborg) and Koporje (Käksisalmi/Keksholm)².

The possession of these citadel-type fortresses became imperative for the control of the Swedish country. The royal castles guarded danger points and thus protected against all sorts of enemies, Slavonic invaders as well as Danes. There was also the possibility of danger from within the state and the fortresses protected the growing trade, especially the export of copper and iron from Central Sweden, and the many towns, founded in the same period.

Instead of naval warfare and an army raised as an obligation of land tenure in different districts all over the country, as earlier, there were now the heavily-armed warriors on horse-back. The new castles served both as garrisons for such an armoured cavalry and as residence for the ambulatory court. As a consequence the castles replaced the royal manors as the most important centers of local administration.

It should be mentioned that the late 13th century was a time that saw not only the costly castle-building but also the building of cathedrals and city-walls. At this period you find the introduction of the king's council, the high offices of the Crown, the Chancellor for example, the new nobility and the chivalry, a more important royal legislation and jurisdiction, all institutions and ideas of foreign origin. In the 12th century the use of royal

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¹ For the abundant international literature see e.g.: *Castella Maris Baltici* I / Ed. K. Drake, *Archaeologica Medii Aevi Finlandiae*. 1993. I. P. 253–275.

² *Kirpichnikov A. Steinfestunen Nordrusslans. Untersuchungsresultate und einige Bewertungen* // *Castella Maris Baltici*. I. P. 101–107.

writs and charters with seals for authentication had been introduced by the church, but not until now, when the new castles were built, the King could back up his written words by force. It all resulted in a stronger royal power³.

In my book ("Hus, land och län, Förvaltningen i Sycrige 1250–1434⁴. Stockholm 1972–1973. 1–2; repr. 1992") I have studied the building of castles from the middle of the 13th century and the rise, development and function of this new administrative organization up to the year 1434, when many of the castles were destroyed in connection with an armed revolt. The study is concerned with the Swedish realm of that time, including Finland⁵.

In comparison with that of the late 15th and 16th centuries, the administration of this period has not been subject to many studies by historians⁶. That can to some extent can be explained by the lack of sources and scarcity of evidence.

The direct remnants of the administration itself, such as accounts and other documents used by the bailiffs, are few. Therefore to an inquiry of this kind must be added a variety of scattered notices gathered from sources of different types, mainly writs or charters, which either directly or indirectly bear witness to the administrative conditions. Indeed, it was a hard and very timeconsuming part of the work.

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First the castles and the requirements for their upkeep and that of the garrisons were studied. For many castles excavations and other investigations have revealed a complicated building history with many building periods. Twenty years ago some good studies by antiquarians and experts of the history of art could be used, but on the whole there was little interest in the medieval castle. Today fortresses of all sorts are studied, especially by the archeologists. It can be mentioned that earlier this year (1993) scholars from Scandinavia, the Baltic states, Poland and Russia met at Nyköping in Central Sweden (where there is a castle of medieval origin) to study the old castles of Northern Europe⁷.

A further study for my thesis involved the measures adopted in allocating to the new establishments different types of income, which the

³ For a general survey see for example: *Carlsson S., Rosén J. Svensk historia. I: Tiden före 1718* (2nd ed. 1964, several editions); *Den svenska historien. Stokholm 1966–1968* (repr. several times); *Lindkvist Th., Agren K. Sveriges medeltid*. 1985.

⁴ I.e. The castles, their bailiwicks and the administration of Sweden 1250–1434.

⁵ Skåne and other provinces in Southern Sweden of today belonged to Denmark during the Middle Ages. However the province of Skåne was acquired by the Swedish king in 1332, but lost again in 1360.

⁶ E.g.: *Hammarström I. Finansförvaltning och varuhandel 1504–1540. Studier i de yngre Sturarnas och Gustav Vasas Statshushalling*. Uppsala, 1956.

⁷ Concerning the first meeting at Turku in 1991 see: *Castella Maris Baltici I*.

king had of old or had acquired at the time. For the castles were not only built, they should also be kept in repair, the men be provided with food, clothes, arms and wages and the horses with fodder/forage; etc.etc. To build and keep the strong castles, good enough to stand a siege, and to entertain the garrisons was very costly.

The financial resources of the 13th century were not sufficient for the new demands. There was a set of old taxes and charges of various kinds. The names and character of them varied from one province to another and they also changed over time. There were taxes of known and unknown origin; annual land-taxes, taxes from the cities/towns, rent from land ploughed up, rent from mines and minting and charges derived from *iura regni*. Additional taxes – aids – could be demanded when war and other urgent circumstances made it necessary. Rent from the royal demesnes, penalties/fines and customs can also be mentioned⁸.

In addition, all noblemen were exempt from annual taxes, because of their war-service. That is, any man, who could afford to provide himself with suitable weapons and a good charger, a horse trained for fighting, had his land exempt from taxes in exchange for his military service for the King.

As a consequence of the reorganization of the defence system new taxes had to be imposed and old ones altered; the taxes and other fees, paid in kind and money, were from now levied at the castles, either brought there by the taxpayers themselves or by tax-collectors. All this gave the commandant administrative (civil) duties in addition to his military ones in the management of the premises (the castle) and thus turned the maintenance area of the castle into an administrative unit.

Of course the principal task for the commander/commandant was of military nature, but he also became an agent of government, a civil servant responsible for the administration of the adjoining territory. He had to send out tax-collectors, keep a close watch on them, exercise extensive police and administrative functions, thus supervising the administration of the bailiwick.

Since the supply district, the maintenance area of a castle became an administrative unit in the local government of the kingdom, the building of the new castles from the middle of the 13th century not only meant that an old pattern of duties but also that of administration was altered.

These bailiwicks are described in contemporary documents – on the same lines as those without castles – with the latin terms *advocatia* and *prefectura*, later on with the Swedish and German equivalents *foghati* and *Vogtei* (*fögderi* in modern Swedish). The concept *fief* (*län* in Swedish) was first used in this (territorial) sense of the word towards the end of the fourteenth century.

⁸ See: Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid. 1970. 15. P. 417–424; Medeltidens ABC. 1985. P. 340–341.

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Of fundamental importance for the investigation is a reconstruction of all of the administrative districts of the period, which is based on a meticulous analysis of the source material.

The documents treating the administration as such are few. For the most part they have got lost already in the Middle Ages, having no lasting value. Luckily we know how the realm was divided up between the King and his brothers, the dukes, in 1310 and between the King and his son in 1357. In connection with that the different administrative units were mentioned. Of all account-books that have existed only one is left, and a list of the lawful rights of the King from the early 15th century is only known through later extracts, not covering all Sweden.

Thus the knowledge about the division of the country for military and administrative purposes had to be searched for in all sorts of writs and charters. After they had been collected it was necessary to try to combine all those scattered facts and to find a pattern. Luckily the undertaking turned out to be successful at the end, but it was a hard job indeed.

The descriptions of the individual units – with or without a castle or royal manor at the center – took up a great deal of room and had to be printed separately. In volume 2 territory after territory is treated, starting with Stockholm. Even if Stockholm was not a capital in the modern sense of the word, the castle of Stockholm was always the most important one.

From what was shown about the territorial composition and the varying fates of the bailiwicks, it was then possible to map out the administrative districts in the different parts of the country and for the realm as a whole during the various stages of this period.

On the whole there was a rather high degree of continuity concerning the territorial pattern. Of course, it happened that a castle disappeared and then the bailiwick was either kept without a castle as administrative center or connected with another castle in the neighbourhood. From time to time parts of a bailiwick was removed, because the income was needed somewhere else, etc.

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After that part of the investigation was finished there was a good foundation for the rest. The next step in the investigation was to see how the castles and bailiwicks were utilized at different times by the King and Crown. That is, to what extent were they administered directly for the King by royal bailiffs, who were required to give account to him. That meant – at least in theory – that the revenues more or less reduced went into the Exchequer. I say more or less, for the keeping of the castle and its garrison costed a lot as mentioned, so mostly there was not surplus from such a

territory. In consequence a territory without a castle to maintain was much more profitable for the Crown.

If not administered directly for the King, the castles and bailiwicks were leased out under varying conditions – under which the holder (more or less) took over the obligations and privileges of the King in the fief in question. There were different sorts of enfeoffments, fiefs: *duchies* given to male members of the royal family; *fiefs of maintenance* for the queens, *fiefs for official duties*, especially military ones, and at last, but not least, *for debt*, a fief which served as a pledge and in that case sub-enfeoffment was possible and common. In all cases the oath of fidelity to the King was very important. Infidelity and claims for heritability always ment a risk of the realm falling apart.

These different forms of administration have been given a systematic study in volume 1. To summarize, it can be said that the first type – namely that of administration by royal officials – was the normal one. Enfeoffments – although they existed to a limited extent during the whole period – can be shown to have been exceptions, mainly concerning the districts, which did not have castles, during the first century of the new administrative system.

It should be mentioned that there also were money-fiefs, consisting of a fixed revenue to be paid from a definite source, for example from the markets at Skanör and Falsterbo in Skåne with the important revenues from the fishing of herring.

But as a result of financial difficulties, a number of bailiwicks – even some of those with castles at this time – were pledged during the middle of the fourteenth century and thus were completely removed from the influence of the central power. Among other things Sweden had acquired the province of Skåne in 1332 and had to pay a lot for that.

And after the German invasion in the 1360's, the duke of Mecklenburg, the father of king Albrecht, and other German magnates were amply rewarded with profitable fiefs. During the German regime of the 1360's to 80's the dominating form of administration was the pledged-fief. The new rulers had raised troops by contract in Northern Germany and then they had to be paid for that and for all the costs of conquering the land for the young prince of Mecklenburg, who had been elected King in 1364.

That means that the castles with their territories and income of just the territories were given to the German lords as a pawn. In fact the King now kept very few castles: Stockholm and Turku (later also Axvall and Örebro). Those enfeoffments differed in many ways from those of the former reigns. As just mentioned the cause and purpose was another and the yield was now kept by the lord as pure profit, that is, if there was a surplus; there was no talk of amortization, part payment, in spite of the fact that christians were forbidden by the church to engage in usury.

To this time belong some administrative accounts (in Latin), which are the only ones preserved from the period. (A complete, modern edition of

these accounts is missing but is in the course of publication by me and a colleague of mine at the Swedish State Archive in Stockholm⁹.)

After the change of rule in 1389, when the Germans were defeated and thrown out of Sweden, the Crown tried to regain royal administration and upheld an older principle, implying that only the districts which did not have castles could be leased out. Thus, in the year 1400 the new regime was in possession of all the royal castles. Sweden was now united with Denmark and Norway.

However, towards the end of the period (from 1412), during the reign of king Erich of Pommerania, the heir (but not son) of queen Margareta I, a slight tendency towards increasingly important enfeoffments could be discerned, a fact which can be seen as a prelude to a later decentralized county administration. More important for the following development was that the king preferred commanders of foreign origin in the castles, which was against the Common law. It is not surprising with regard to the fact that the three Scandinavian countries, Sweden including Finland, Denmark and Norway since 1397 were united in a political union. Nor did the king change commanders and officials as often as his predecessors on the throne had done. Thus the bailiffs grew strong and could more easily abuse their power, which led to the rebellion in 1434.

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The sources do not permit a systematic study of how the administration functioned within the individual bailiwicks. And other than as an exception, it does not reflect the view of the arrangement for defence and administration on which the system was based. But indirectly it is possible to deduce at least something from the summary of the different parts of the investigation.

As to the question of administrative divisions, there was from the middle of the fourteenth century, at any rate, a development from large bailiwicks under comparatively strong castles – or other centers of administration – towards more numerous and, at the same time, simpler castle establishments and administrative units.

As we have seen several castles were built by the King in the 13th century and they needed rather big bailiwicks, because the sources of income were limited. Some of those fortresses were destroyed during the civil war in the beginning of the 14th century. Then there was a period without castle-building until the middle of the century, when there was civil war again. The bailiwicks of those castles and of the castles from the late 14th century were smaller. At the end of the century smaller fortresses of private origin, either sold to the Crown or confiscated by the King, meet

⁹ Accounts for the bailiwick of Nyköping (including Dalarna and Norrland) 1365–1367 by the German knight Raven van Barnekow. They are kept in Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv in Schwerin, Germany.

in the contemporary sources. Some were located in the borderland in the provinces of Småland and Västergötland. Judging from certain statements of a more principle character, this should be understood as an expression of a conscious policy of the part of the sovereigns about 1400.

As has been mentioned, administration by royal officials was evidently the "normal" form, and a few decades with enfeoffments of the majority of the castles and bailiwicks stand out as a parenthesis in the history of administration during the period of investigation.

But what is important is, that it is not the relationship royal administration/enfeoffment *per se*, but the conditions of the commission in each special case, that reveal something of the policy behind the choice of administrative organization and the King's ability to realize this policy. Thus, it is not possible – as has been suggested in previous literature on the subject – to draw a simple parallel between on the one hand royal administration/strong royal power, and on the other hand enfeoffment/strong magnate opposition, and to interpret the changes in the system of administration in accordance with this scheme.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Swedish monarchy first had caused to build up its administration at a time when central powers in different parts of Europe had begun more and more to use officials, who were directly dependant upon their sovereign. By means of an increased access to funds, to money, these sovereigns were enabled eventually to cut free from the (feudal) administrative organisation of an older period. Some observations concerning the conditions in Sweden 1250–1434 can be added. Heritability was not common. Nor did the grant of a fief normally meant that the King tranfered the exercercise of the royal jurisdiction or the profits of it to someone else.