

Gunilla Tegengren: *Sverige och Nordlanden. Förvaltning och nordlig expansion 1250–1550*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, 2015. Kungl. Skytteanska Samfundets handlingar, vol. 72. xiv, 354 pp.

REVIEWED BY STEFAN FIGENSCHOW

For any scholar studying the expansion of Scandinavian central authority into what is often regarded as peripheral areas of medieval Fennoscandia, the publication of Gunilla Tegengren's doctoral dissertation *Sverige och Nordlanden. Förvaltning och nordlig expansion 1250-1550* is a welcome addition. The book should be of interest to anyone with a predilection for Swedish medieval history in general, a desire to explore the process of integrating the northern part of present day Sweden in the medieval Swedish kingdom, or those focusing on similar processes elsewhere in Northern Europe. Whilst the Swedish medieval expansion to the southern parts of present day Finland, including the clashes with the Russian city-state of Novgorod that relate to this process, is quite well covered, works on the scale of *Sverige och Nordlanden* regarding the northward expansion of Swedish central authority are not as manifold.

The book consists of an introduction, five main chapters, a conclusion, an excursus as well as a summary in English. The five main chapters are predominantly chronologically organized, and take us from the thirteenth century to the age of Gustav Vasa. As can be inferred from the title, the focus is firmly on the administrative and judicial aspects of the northward expansion of the medieval Swedish state. Max Weber's definition of the territorial state and its legal, fiscal, administrative and territorial characteristics is taken as a point of departure, and the theoretical development and practical application of legislation, administrative organisation and taxation systems central to the incorporation of the north into the medieval Swedish realm are studied conceptually and through a wide array of available sources.

The introductory chapter works well in presenting the what, why and how of Tegengren's project, but the survey of previous research is perhaps too tilted towards older works. This can give the impression that seeing the development of the Swedish kingdom during the Middle Ages as more isolated from the common European trends than it really was is more prevalent in current research than, at least, is apparent to the present reviewer. For instance, thirteenth and fourteenth century legal developments in Scandinavia could be misconstrued as being seen by most scholars as *either*

a continuance of ancient unwritten Germanic traditions *or* totally dependent on the reception of European clerical legislation, when the present debate on this subject arguably focuses more on its complexities and the influence of several legal traditions and groups of society in these processes. Adapting older legal concepts to fit a new situation by giving them new meaning is not necessarily the same as severing all ties with the past. In addition, it was often the newly introduced regulations that required the most explanation, and therefore took up most room, in new laws. It should be mentioned that Tegengren clearly acknowledges the combined influence of customary law and more contemporary European legal development when discussing the creation and application of the Law of Hälsingland, and the above-mentioned impression refers mostly to the review of previous research.

The first main chapter takes us through the legal developments of the late thirteenth century, ending up with the promulgation of the Law of Uppland in 1296/7, modelled on European examples. The wide-ranging consequences of introducing a taxation system based on the landed wealth of the individual and regulations for a territorially based administrative system are presented. Tegengren reinterprets the Law of Uppland as not “just” a provincial law for Uppland and model for the later Law of Hälsingland, but as a semi-revolutionary regulatory blueprint for the future regulation of the Swedish kingdom. This reinterpretation of the role of the Law of Uppland is seen in line with Weber’s theories through the introduction of coordinated administrative systems that included new organisational legal regulations and the *markland* system’s basic administrative division of territory and taxation of land.

In the second chapter, the introduction of the *markland* system to the north in the first half of the fourteenth century and the *markland* as the fundamental unit of the taxation system takes centre stage. Although debated, the *markland* is seen as the most important basic measurement of land in Svealand at least by the end of the thirteenth century. Tegengren thoroughly discusses several aspects of the *markland* system and the historiographical debates concerning it, but it is beyond the scope of this review to go into detail regarding them. Whilst the characteristics of the *markland* system is discussed proficiently and in great detail, the characteristics of the *tolft* system as the ancient precursor to the *markland* system seem more mysterious. Often considered in previous research as a predecessor to later administrative systems, such as the *markland* system, a system based on the *tolft* as an administrative district has often been presented as a basic division for raising the *ledning*, and/or the basis for the formation of parishes. Although Tegengren mentions that the *tolft* system is a controversial term, it is not made sufficiently clear to the reader why. This is compounded by the fact that other current scholars question or even reject the possibility

of proving that such a *system* existed by pointing, for example, to the difference of opinion regarding the exact nature of the *tolft* as a unit in an administrative framework and the scant evidence that places the *tolft* as the precursor to the medieval *sokn* (parish). Whilst this does little to the rest of the argumentation regarding the introduction of the *markland* system, it does potentially raise the question of how other debates, terms and sources are handled throughout the book.

The expansion of central authority to the Hälsinge provinces and the area of Norrbotten is the subject of the third and fourth chapters, the very core of *Sverige och Nordlanden*. With the re-interpreted role and thus historical presence of the Law of Uppland, Tegengren argues that through this law the Crown was given the necessary rights according to Canon law to expand northward, and that this coordination with similar legal systems in other territorial states in Europe permitted both Sweden's development as a territorial state in general as well as the expansion to the north. Securing the Hälsinge provinces as *skattlands* was attained by introducing the Law of Hälsingland – partly based of the Law of Uppland – and the introduction of the *markland* system in the second decade of the fourteenth century. Further, the colonisation of the areas around the Bay of Bothnia, also integrated as *skattlands* in the Swedish realm with the help of the Law of Hälsingland and the introduction of the *markland* system, is considered complete by 1340, even though the author underlines that the *full* incorporation of the area around the Bay of Bothnia in the Swedish realm was not accomplished until the Treaty of Teusina in 1595. The final main chapter follows the administrative system of the Law of Uppland based on the *markland* system and its application in the north through to the tax reforms of Gustav Vasa mid-sixteenth century. The chapter documents the flexibility of the late medieval taxation system, and how it could be adapted to the local conditions in the north.

The theoretical point of departure, that of Weber's territorial state, is stated clearly at the outset and consistently followed throughout. Still, when reading *Sverige och Nordlanden* it is difficult not to wish for a more in-depth treatment of how and to what degree the practical application of the administrative territorial, fiscal and legal systems worked in the initial phase of expansion. The possible perceived gap between Weber's theories of the territorial state and their resonance in Tegengren's reinterpretation of the Law of Uppland and the reality of fourteenth century northern Sweden cannot be disregarded without comment, even if Tegengren's main focus is on the introduction and development of the administrative systems as part of the expansion. Tegengren likens the Swedish authorities' execution of their plans to Robert Bartlett's description of the methods used during the Germanic expansion into Slavic areas. But to what degree did the carefully planned and regulated territorial divisions,

establishment of new and relocation of old settlements and division of parishes follow these plans and ideas in practice, especially early on? As the administrative systems developed further, and the Swedish influence in the north strengthened towards the end of the Middle Ages, it is more conceivable that these systems worked as well in practice as Tegengren seems to suggest, but surely the northward expansion must have been more of a slow process of adaption and not the direct application of a ready-made system to the new *skattlands* that the book occasionally is in danger of giving an impression of. Given the relative remoteness of some of the areas in question and, especially, the rapid expansion process in the first half of the fourteenth century, a more thorough discussion of the central authorities' early practical application of the legal and territorial blueprint in the local communities would have been very interesting, if at all possible.

In conclusion, *Sverige och Nordlanden. Förvaltning och nordlig expansion 1250–1550* is a valuable contribution to scholarship on the expansion of central authority in the Nordic region in general, and in northern Sweden in particular. The quite strong emphasis on past research as seeing the development of the Swedish kingdom based mostly on interior circumstances and in near-isolation from the social, political and territorial processes large parts of northern Europe had in common at this time is not, however, as easily agreed upon. Nor is the occasional impression of a strong dichotomy between Scandinavian legal systems being based solely on old customary law *or* entirely new laws modelled after European examples. This sometimes seemingly – at least to the present reviewer – dated view of the status of current research, combined with occasionally too categorical statements not clearly fortified in the sources (for instance regarding the *tolft* system) makes some of the results of the book seem both *more* innovative and *less* dependable than they perhaps are. This is a pity, as some of the approaches Tegengren utilises, and the results they yield, are both original and interesting to explore.

Finally, as a note to the publisher, it is worth mentioning that with the use of so many names, place names and terms, a list of the most important ones or, even better, an index, would have made this publication a lot easier to navigate and thus use effectively.

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