

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-47300-2 - The Cambridge History of Scandinavia: Volume II: 1520–1870

Edited by E. I. Kouri and Jens E. Olesen

Excerpt

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## Introduction

E. I. KOURI AND JENS E. OLESEN

This volume presents the history of Scandinavia from about 1520 to 1870. There are chapters on individual countries and comparative studies on various aspects of political, social, cultural, religious and economical developments. The authors represent different Northern European countries and approaches to Scandinavian historiography. Until recently historical research in Scandinavia has mainly been published from the viewpoint of national history, and mostly in corresponding languages. The general international audience cannot be expected to be acquainted with the matter. Therefore, by way of introduction, we add a few words about historical research in the Nordic countries since the Second World War.

For a long time Scandinavian historical scholarship mainly followed the style of German traditions, but this trend was interrupted by the Second World War. Since then research on Northern Europe has followed international trends more closely. Nowadays Anglo-Saxon and French styles are favoured in all the Nordic countries, although some tendencies of German theory still prevail.

In the years after the Second World War two schools dominated Scandinavian historiography: historicism and source criticism. The one school preferred to stick to informative exploitation of sources, while the other used the sources in their capacity as proofs for a theory. Such antagonism produced bitter controversies between different schools in Denmark and Sweden. Finland and Norway remained almost untouched by similar quarrels. They were, as new independent states, more concerned with defining their own new identities. The years from the late 1940s until the mid 1960s formed a period of reconciliation. In Sweden, however, there was a struggle for mastery between those who accepted new impulses from abroad, mainly from the Anglo-Saxon world and France, and the stubborn traditionalists.

In many ways Scandinavian historical research has followed European trends, though it has diverged in some respects. Political and economic

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developments were of decisive importance. This applies in particular to the long-term waves of economic depression and social tension. Part of the German inheritance has survived: historicism and hermeneutics, down to Weber's ideal types. Also influences from French positivism remained. In addition, efforts were made to interpret economics through Marxist doctrine, which however faded away soon after it started during the 1970s.

Since the later 1960s, the foundation of new universities in all the Nordic countries has taken place, and this influenced historical research. New subject areas were taken up. Also new were extensive research projects – for example, on Scandinavia's move from domain state to military/tax state. In addition, administration became the subject of a large research project in which the differences between Sweden-Finland and Denmark-Norway were stressed.

Topically, new subject areas were taken up during the post-1960s expansion. Contemporary history became a field of activity in Denmark and in Sweden. According to a Swedish governmental decision, every second vacant chair should be allotted to a specialist of contemporary history. A further innovation was the study of overseas history. This brought new light to the former Danish and Swedish colonies abroad and to the non-European world in general. Economic history was much studied in all the Nordic countries, but it has often been incorporated into social history. Sub-disciplines like the history of mentalities – studies on criminality, healthcare and poor relief – have also been published. In demography historians have applied English and French methods, in works on agricultural and urban society. There are also studies of narrative history and biography. Along with these new approaches, new themes like the history of mentalities and women's history (or gender history) are now flourishing. There are also studies in other fields, such as, for example, the attempts at Counter-Reformation in Scandinavia or the role of the Northern powers in the diplomatic negotiations to create a pan-Protestant alliance.

In contrast to Sweden and Denmark, where local–regional history somehow remained weak, it has been eagerly studied in Finland, Norway and Iceland. This may be because these countries won their independence late and consequently have a need to find and define their national identities. Generally, in all the Nordic countries perennial controversies have continued to fascinate historians, although some older debates have lost much of their relevance.

Beside historical scholarship other sciences have been applied to explain the phenomena of Scandinavia. There are economic, social, religious, ethnic and linguistic borders – borders which are often crossed.

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In times of economic recession, Scandinavian historical scholarship – like the humanities in general – has managed to survive cuts, bureaucratisation and the onslaughts of the fashionable gospel of productivity and efficiency. Several factors may have contributed to this: the remarkable internationalisation, co-operation and evident pluralism of historical research and, perhaps most obviously, the level of quality attained since the Second World War.

Political changes in 1989, the European Union's expansion to the East and its Baltic strategy, made public in 2009, have rekindled interest in the history of the area, including Scandinavia. There were – and there are – several linguistic groups: Danes, Swedes, Finns, Germans, Poles, Balts and Slavs. In the course of history the nationality of the various littoral territories and the control of the Baltic have been subject to changes. At the same time the area has been the scene of intense exchanges on all levels of social and cultural life. The increase of communication, with the help of shipping, trade and the migration of groups of people accelerated the process of transformation. Thus supra-national cultures were formed. European influences followed various lines of communication and there is still much work to be done on the relations between Scandinavia and the major European powers in the diplomatic, political, economic, social and cultural areas.

In the early stages of the period discussed in this volume the Scandinavian powers started to play a greater role in international relations, diplomacy and commerce. Ideological and religious considerations can also be seen. In Counter-Reformation Europe as a whole *les deux protectorats* were widely recognised: that of England over Continental and Scandinavian Protestants and that of Spain over the Catholics. The role of the northern countries was largely determined by the balance of power in Europe.

At the beginning of the early modern period the northern kingdoms continued to function within their medieval framework. Political and religious institutions as well as social and financial arrangements were still what they had been during the late medieval period. The dissolution of the Teutonic Order, the disintegration of the Hanseatic League in the Baltic Sea region and the breakdown of the Nordic Kalmar Union were, however, symptoms of a new time approaching. The Stockholm massacre in 1520 put an end to the late medieval efforts to establish a union of the Scandinavian kingdoms. Starting the volume from the 1520s makes it also possible to address the Lutheran Reformation and the growth of the early modern Scandinavian kingdoms. The Reformation initiated by Martin Luther was, after 1517, brought to Northern Europe by trading contacts, students studying abroad and cultural transfer. The Danish King Christian II (1513–23) had

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ambitions to control the church politically and economically and was inspired by reformed Catholicism. In Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland the new reform ideas spread only slowly.

Chapter 1 deals with the Reformation. The concept of the Reformation as a significant period, with characteristics and central events, has had long life as such historical categories go. In the first place, the age marked the break-up of Western Christendom. In a short time it achieved an extraordinary spread, both rapid and wide. No part of Western Christendom remained unaffected by it. There existed widespread dislike of clergy and it often went with hostility to Rome and also with nationalism. But the reformers' message answered a spiritual thirst which the Catholic church was failing to satisfy. All this was true also in the Nordic countries. There it took place within the framework of political and social progress and depended on the complex political changes that have to be known as the emergence of the nation state. Also inner-state politics and the formation of nations were determined by the Reformation and by the Lutheran confessionality with its modernising tendencies towards state, society and nation.

The Lutheran Reformation reached Denmark in the mid 1520s. Under the reign of Frederik I (1523–33), Denmark remained officially Catholic. The king, however, soon adopted a policy of protecting Lutheran reformers like Hans Tausen and Peder Palladius. The new faith spread especially among the citizens of the provincial towns. Frederik's son Christian III (1534–59) was openly Lutheran and introduced the Reformation into his duchy in 1528. After the Count's War, which ended in 1536, Lutheranism became official in Denmark and Norway. The Catholic bishops were removed and the church was reorganised. Luther's friend Johannes Bugenhagen drew up the new church order in 1537. This order constitutes the common root of the churches in Norway, Iceland and the Føroyar.

The first decades of the sixteenth century were filled in Northern Europe with social, political and religious tensions. The Kalmar Union came to an end caused by the Bloodbath of Stockholm in 1520, where King Christian II tried once and for all to eliminate his Swedish opponents. With the help of an uprising in Dalarna the young nobleman Gustav Eriksson Vasa was elected regent of Sweden in August 1521. Two years later he became king (1523–60). His royal election represented a final victory of the policy against the Kalmar Union. Since Christian II had favoured Dutch interests the election was strongly supported by Lübeck. Moreover, it was not in Lübeck's interests that the Nordic countries formed a strong united political unit. The expulsion of King Christian II in 1523 led to an aristocratic renaissance in Denmark and

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also in Sweden. The aristocracy in Norway was, however, unable to unite the existing political factions and form a national programme. The formal transformation of Norway into a Danish province in 1537 has been highly debated, but stands out as a confirmation of a process which had been taking place over a long period.

As elsewhere in Europe it seems that the uprisings in Scandinavia during the sixteenth century were a reaction against the growth of monarchical power and the improved position enjoyed by noble landowners as a result of population growth and the increased supply of labour. It also seems that the greatest inclination towards rebellion was to be found among the peasantry in geographically peripheral provinces, who felt their modest prosperity and independence threatened. The social uprisings complicated the religious tensions in the Nordic countries.

Traditionally the picture of the Reformation in Denmark, Norway and Iceland has been solely that of a princely reformation. This view is, however, no longer valid. In Denmark the evangelical movement had taken roots in the major provincial towns and had created a solid ground for the introduction of a Lutheran church in 1536. The princely reformation of King Christian III (1534–59) in Denmark rested on a reformation in the towns. This was however not the case in Norway and in Iceland, where the introduction of the Reformation lasted longer. The last Catholic archbishop of Nidaros, Olav Engelbrektsson, fled to the Netherlands, where he died in 1537. The Danish government recognised the strength of Catholicism in Norway and avoided disturbances among the population in general. It was not until the second generation of superintendents was appointed in Norway that some form of Lutheranism was successfully promoted. In contrast, in Iceland the Reformation was promoted by force, after the last Catholic bishop had been executed with two of his sons in 1550. Real progress was, however, not achieved until the 1570s. The last Catholic bishops had been defenders of Icelandic national, cultural and political aspirations, and this might explain why Lutheranism generally proved slow in gaining support among the Icelanders.

In the fifteenth century the Catholic church in Sweden was in a powerful position, effectively independent of both the crown and *curia*. It held the balance between the Danish Union kings with their Swedish supporters and those who preferred an independent Swedish national policy. Finland came under Swedish rule from the mid-twelfth century and was an organic part of the Swedish realm. In the Middle Ages the Catholic church there had enjoyed the same privileged status in society as in Sweden. Its bishops were able men

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who had studied in foreign universities, mainly in Paris. As a Catholic bishopric, the Finnish church belonged to the archdiocese of Uppsala, but it also maintained direct contacts with the *curia*. It was only after the Reformation that it became fully incorporated into the Swedish church. Finland remained under control of Christian II's supporters when the evangelical reorientation of Swedish church policy began. When Gustav Vasa gained control over Finland in 1523 a new bishop, the king's former chancellor, was appointed to the vacant see of St Henry in Turku/Åbo (named after an Englishman, Henry, who was the first missionary bishop of Finland c. 1157).

The doctrinal reform in Sweden and Finland was carried out by young theologians who had been acquainted with the new religion during their studies abroad. Sweden's and Finland's reformers, Olaus Petri and Mikael Agricola, had studied in Wittenberg, where they personally experienced Luther's and Melancthon's evangelical teachings. Also the close connections between the German colonies in Stockholm and Turku and the Baltic cities, where the Reformation had taken hold in the mid 1520s, helped the new faith to spread in Scandinavia.

King Gustav Vasa was not a particularly religious man. In many respects he resembled Henry VIII of England. He cautiously encouraged the Reformation with the help of Olaus Petri and Laurentius Andreae. Historians of the Reformation have traditionally seen the parliament held at Västerås in 1527 as the birthplace of the reformation of evangelical Sweden-Finland. However, the actual doctrinal alterations were minimal. Of far greater significance were the decisions relating to the church's economic position: much church property was transferred to the crown and the jurisdiction of clergy was drastically curtailed. Thus, in contrast to what happened in Denmark, the Swedish church lost its economic, political and judicial immunity a decade earlier. But it was not until 1593 that a territorial Lutheran church with a written formula of faith was established in Sweden-Finland.

The new Lutheran church was led from the top and was based in the cities; in the countryside it only slowly gained ground. To a great extent the Reformation in Finland followed the same pattern as in Sweden, although it had its own character. In Finland – as in Norway – the Reformation stressed the national language and was very important for the formation of nationality and culture. Unfortunately, the consequent 'Swedishing' of Finland by the government in Stockholm soon caused a decline in the use of Finnish.

The Reformation in Scandinavia was, on the whole, a long process. It was in the first place the great revolution in religion and church. With its

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by-products in thought and learning, in constitutional changes, in national and international affairs and, of course, in economic, social and cultural factors in general, it changed history. To what degree the Lutheran church succeeded in introducing its new doctrine into people's minds has been debated. The church addressed itself to the matter with great vigour: towns and villages were visited every year by members of the clergy to test the people in the matters of faith. As well as struggling against the remnants of Roman Catholicism the church leaders had to fight against various kinds of magical belief and practice.

The Reformation also generally affected the intellectual life profoundly. The University of København was reopened in 1537. In Sweden the University of Uppsala was temporarily closed, and it was not until 1595 that it was refounded. In Iceland the introduction of the Reformation after 1550 was followed by the closing of the schools in the two bishoprics of Skalholt and Holar.

The influence of Lutheran Wittenberg was of great importance in Denmark during the reign of King Christian III. The economy improved at the end of his reign, and it was especially his son and successor King Frederik II (1559–88) who secured the economic base for the University of København. A number of students from the Nordic countries undertook a *peregrinatio academica* during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The break-up of the Kalmar Union in 1520 saw the rise of two Scandinavian monarchies. How the state-building processes took place and how the conglomerate states were formed constitutes an important research theme in Scandinavian history. The Nordic Kalmar Union had been beneficial for the leading noble families regardless of country, but it had negative consequences for other social groups. In Denmark the aristocracy was victorious and the power of the council increased as an institution keeping royal power under control. The year 1536 is regarded as that of the birth of the modern Danish state. Norway was almost completely incorporated with Denmark. It became one of the Danish provinces and could no longer formally be called a kingdom. Only a few remnants of Norway's former independence existed. Norway, including the Føroyar and Iceland, were governed from København, and Danish governors were responsible for the local administration. The monarchs, however, were not left completely without authority. The methods they used to reach these goals were dependent on the *Realpolitik* of the single monarchs.

In Sweden Gustav Vasa built up a stronger position than that of the Danish king. The crushing of the power of the bishops both weakened the council



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and improved the finances of the crown and of the king himself. Gustav Vasa managed to implement the hereditary monarchy in Sweden and revived the importance of the Swedish diet (*riksdag*). Administrative and fiscal modernisation took place in Sweden as well as in Denmark. Church property was confiscated in 1536 in Denmark, and in 1549 a new form of enfeoffment was introduced. The number of small fiefdoms was radically reduced. In Norway a great variety of administrative units existed side by side. The Danish chancery was strengthened, and a similar change accorded in Sweden. Danish fiscal administration lagged behind its Swedish counterpart in the sixteenth century, largely because the enfeoffed nobility had a more independent position vis-à-vis the crown. The development of the financial systems helps to explain the financial possibilities – and often severe problems – of the Scandinavian countries. Around 1600, they were able to modernise their finances, but not yet their administration. This was not completed until the eighteenth century.

As shown in Chapter 2, the population generally rose in number, but in the greater part of the Nordic region the positive trend ceased in the first half of the seventeenth century at the latest, resulting in a general period of stagnation. The development of settlements in Norway from 1520 up to 1720 was characterised by regional differences. In Denmark the greatest part of the population shifted from Jylland to the Danish islands. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, the growing population in Denmark produced an expansive phase in settlement. Thus the proportion of cottar households and landless cottars grew substantially. The increase of these groups caused a social stratification and differentiation within the Danish agrarian community. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Iceland experienced a population decline. In Sweden the population grew significantly during the sixteenth century and into the first decades of the following century. In Finland settlement growth continued until the latter half of the sixteenth century, when expansion was replaced by decline. Colonisation of the interior of Finland was above all promoted by the crown.

Scandinavia varied linguistically and ethnically. Denmark, Norway and Iceland were ethnically stable. It was otherwise in the Swedish kingdom. The Finnish-speaking population dominated in Finland, but this also accorded in parts of Sweden due to the emigration of Finnish settlers to the forested districts of Sweden from the end of the sixteenth century. The northernmost parts of the Scandinavia were inhabited by Sami. Their culture differed from the main stream of agrarian culture because of its nomadism or semi-nomadism.



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As elsewhere in Europe, mortality from plague and other epidemics tended to decrease in the Scandinavian countries from the second half of the fifteenth century. Other factors like hunger, war, migration, politics of taxation and privileges influenced trends in population – and settlement development too. The number and the size of Nordic households and family relationships deserves attention, since during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the ‘European family-model’ seems to have been dominant in Denmark as early as the second half of the seventeenth century.

Due to the economic boom experienced in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, the Scandinavian countries more or less acquired the position of providers of foodstuffs and raw materials for the maritime powers. In economic terms, they were in a way virtually reduced to the status of vassals in relation to the maritime powers of North-western Europe. Each country had its own profile: Denmark was based on an agrarian economy, Norway showed an expanding economy mainly due to timber trade, while Sweden and Finland experienced during the seventeenth century a development of proto-industrialisation caused by their large natural mineral and forest resources.

The rising prices and dynamic trends in the Scandinavian economy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries combined with new patterns of trade, created a hitherto unknown movement in the old society based on estates. The Nordic countries generally saw a breakdown of the old social structure and an adaptation to new economic realities. Thus the Reformation swept away the Catholic church, and the formerly powerful clergy now became a class of civil servants, sinking beneath the aristocracy in the social hierarchy to become the second estate. The second ‘revolution’ was the military one, where the nobility lost their military monopoly. The price revolution changed the former static economy based on natural resources into an unpredictable and dynamic money economy, though liased with economic fluctuations. All these factors resulted in a change of the medieval social structure, which had been based on class privileges. The old nobility was now confronted with new groups with capital – and this became an important component of eighteenth century society. In Norway a new power-elite developed, based on mining, timber and other wooden raw products. Sweden and Finland saw a remarkable growth in the number of the nobility due among other things to the ennoblement of members of the bourgeoisie. The nobility was to a large extent an open class, while its Danish counterpart was almost closed as a group.

As elsewhere in Europe, Denmark and Sweden developed from being conglomerate states into power states. The trade with Northern Europe was,

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up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, mainly dominated by Hanseatic traders and merchants. During the sixteenth century more and more English and Dutch merchants sailed to the Baltic and challenged the German supremacy. They were also active in the North Sea and in the Arctic. The development in the international market had consequences for everyday consumption in the Baltic Sea region and in the North Atlantic area.

As far as commerce is concerned, the Baltic area and Russia became more and more important for Scandinavia. Also the English founded the Eastland Company in 1579 and, as early as 1555, the Muscovy Company. The Dutch, for their part, founded in the early eighteenth century the *Directie van de Osstersche Handel en Rijderijen*. In 1557 Ivan IV concluded a commercial treaty with Sweden in which he embodied free passage to Western Europe. The passing of the market from Dutch to English hands during the seventeenth century meant a continuation on the road to a modern diversified economy. Scandinavian trade companies were founded according to the Dutch model. Traders from abroad settled in Scandinavian towns with the consent of the monarchs. The Danish cities in the Sound region and Göteborg in Sweden profited especially from international trade.

In Scandinavia confessional uniformity and a Lutheran identity had little effect on the relations between states. Here dominated competition and state-egoism just as they did between the two Catholic rivals, Spain and France. Fighting to control trade from Russia to Western Europe, for example, caused growing rivalry between Denmark and Sweden. From the middle of the sixteenth century until the end of the Great Nordic War (1720–1) the two Scandinavian powers were fighting each other to hold supremacy of the Baltic Sea and its coastlands. This struggle for *dominium maris Baltici* has attracted great attention among scholars, since this rivalry was linked to the politics of the Western European powers. The naval powers, England and the Netherlands, saw in the rise of Sweden a threat to their interests and followed a policy of balance in the Baltic. From the middle of the seventeenth century the Baltic Sea region became more and more an integrated part of the international European political and economic system. When Denmark and Sweden were reduced to middle-class states, Russia – and later Prussia – became the leading power in the Baltic region.

In order to rule over the Baltic territorial waters and to control the coastlands the Scandinavian powers not only built up armies for war, but they also strengthened their navies. Armies and navies became permanent state establishments thus leading to growing militarisation. This had