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THE NOBILITY AND THE STATE IN THE 16th–18th CENTURIES. THE SWEDISH MODEL

(in connection with Jan Samuelson's book *Aristokrat eller förädlad bonde? Det svenska frälsets ekonomi, politik och sociala förbindelser under tiden 1523–1611*, Lund University Press 1993, 361 pp. Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis 77)

What characterized the early modern social structures in the Scandinavian countries was a low percentage of nobility. In 17th century Denmark the nobility accounted for about 0,5 per cent of the population, in Sweden it did not exceed 1 per cent. This, as well as the early development of the state fiscal and control apparatus in Sweden, the fact that sources have survived in a perfect state and that Swedish genealogical studies have a long-standing tradition, makes it possible to reconstruct the effective force, financial status and family connections not only of the aristocracy but also of the petty nobility. Many studies have appeared in Sweden on the genesis of the nobility, its transformations in the 17th century and the change in its social and political functions in the 17th–19th centuries¹. The 16th century has been a blank space. Detailed studies have dealt with the noblemen's privileges, the endowment of estates by the Crown, and the nobility's political

¹ See I. M. Munktel, *Gods, godsägare och landbor 1450–1520. Studier i de senmedeltida frälsegodsens funktion*, Göteborg 1982; I. Elmroth, *För kung och fosterland. Studier i den svenska adelns demografi och offentliga funktioner 1600–1900*, Lund 1981; P. E. Fahlbeck, *Sveriges adel. Statistik undersökning öfver de ä riddarhuset introducerade ätterna*, Göteborg 1898; K. Ågren, *Breadwinners and Dependants. An Economic Crisis during the 1600s?*, in: *Aristocrats, Farmers, Proletarians*, ed. K. Ågren et al., Uppsala 1973; S. Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndspersoner 1700–1865. Studier rörande det svenska ståndssamhällets upplösning*, Lund 1973. For Denmark see the fundamental work by S. A. Hansén, *Adelsvaeldens grundlag*, København 1964.

stance². Monographs characterizing the Finnish nobility as a social group have also been published as well as studies on the economic status of the nobility in some Swedish provinces³. What was missing was a comprehensive characterization of the nobility's financial base, its internal fragmentation, and the influence exerted by the state in this respect. Partial studies on individual professional groups (e.g. the military) could not fill the gap⁴.

Jan Samuelson wanted to present a comprehensive picture of the noble estate in his work. The book consists of three parts. In the first, which deals with the elite, the author examines financial differences within the noble estate and singles out the political and the social elite. In the second part he discusses the petty nobility, analyzing the cases of noblemen losing their rank and the ways of joining the estate. The third part concerns the hardly perceptible clientage ties, which have practically not yet been researched. The publication of this valuable book makes it possible to present the anatomy of the Swedish noble estate in the modern era more fully.

As has been said above, the Swedish nobility was not a numerous group. In the 16th century it consisted of some 500–550 adult men. It can be presumed that together with women and children it consisted of no more than 3,000–4,000 persons, that is, 0,4–0,6 per cent of the total population, which amounted to about 750,000 at that time. Its distribution was not even. Military registers show that in Sweden proper there were some 280–300 landowners whose land was exempt from taxation (*frälsejord*); they lived in the southern and west–central parts of the country. Another 200–240 lived in Finland; these were mostly poor noblemen living in the south–western part of the country. There was no nobility in the other regions. Incidentally, the author has established that during the period he investigated out of about 2,000 men who reached maturity 170 died a sudden death (executions, wars and tragic accidents). The Finnish nobility was painfully hit by the conflict over the crown between Sigismund and Charles, duke of Södermanland, over 50 persons, that is, 20 per cent of the Finnish nobility, being put to death during the conflict in 1590–1611 (mainly in executions).

² S. Jägerskiöld, *Adelsprivilegier i Sverige och Danmark*, "Historisk Tidskrift" 1934; S. A. Nilsson, *Kampen om de adliga privilegierna 1526–1594*, Lund 1952; *idem*, *Krona och frälse i Sverige 1523–1594*, Lund 1947; K. Strömberg–Bäck, *Lagen, rätten, läran*, Lund 1963; also *Kalmare standgor 1587*, Umeå 1989.

³ E. Anthoni, *Finlands medeltida frälse och 1500–tals adel*, Helsingfors 1970; O. Ferm, *De högadliga godsens i Sverige vid 1500–talets mitt: geografisk uppbyggnad, råntestruktur, godsdrift och hushållning*, Stockholm 1990; J. A. Almqvist, *Frälsegodsens i Sverige under storhetstiden*, vols. I–IV, Stockholm 1931–1976.

⁴ Officers were a subject discussed by, among others: G. Artéus, *Till militärstatens förhistoria. Krig, professionallisering och social förändring under Vasakonungarnas regering*, Stockholm 1986; S. A. Nilsson, *På väg mot militärstaten. Krigsbefällets etablering i den äldre Vasatidens Sverige*, Uppsala 1989.

The 17th century, the period of Sweden's greatness, brought far-reaching changes in the numerical strength of the noble estate, owing mainly to mass ennoblements (see *Table 1*).

Table 1. Numerical Strength of the Swedish Nobility 1600–1895 (adult men)

Year	Number of persons	Old Nobility	New Nobility*
1600	450	450	—
1650	1000	500	500
1700	2500	550	1950
1750	3000	550	2450
1800	3600	700	2900
1850	3600	700	2900
1895	4000	800	3200

*New nobility: families ennobled after 1600.

Source: I. Elmroth, *Förkult och fosterland*, p. 42.

As a result of mass ennoblements, the old nobility accounted for only 50 per cent of the noble estate in the middle of the 17th century, that is, during the domination of oligarchic trends in Sweden's political system, and for a mere 20 per cent at the beginning of Charles XII's reign. Ennoblements reached the largest proportions when Sweden became involved in the Thirty Years' War. In 1630–1639 they increased twenty-fold compared with the 1600–1619 decade, from 11 to 243, to stabilize at about 170 per decade in the years 1660–1679. The introduction of absolutism in 1680 increased the number of ennoblements to over 200 per decade, and in 1700–1790 another 559 families joined the noble estate. In the 18th century, as a result of countless discussions on new ennoblements, the average number of families raised to the rank of nobility oscillated between 20 and 140 per decade⁵. This large inflow of new people was due to the expansion of the army and the state administration. The heavy losses suffered by the officers' corps were not insignificant either. This group suffered the greatest hecatombe during the Great Northern War, when more than 1,000 noble officers met their deaths⁶. Another reason for the mass ennoblements was that by virtue of the privileges which Johan III was forced to grant to the nobility in 1569, the noble estate gained monopoly in appointments to most offices. This monopoly lasted throughout the era of Sweden's greatness and was confirmed in the new privileges granted in 1719. Following a discussion in the Riksdag, this principle was modified in 1723. The highest offices (members of the Council of State, presidents of collegia, and palatines — *landshövdingar*) remained

⁵ I. Elmroth, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶ S. Carlsson, "Många tappra drängar ha fått sitt banesår." *Den svenska adelns personella förluster under stora nordiska kriget*, in: *Bland böcker och människor*, Uddevalla 1983.

the nobility's monopoly while other nominations were to be made irrespective of parentage⁷.

In the 17th century, a young man aspiring to the noble rank usually started his career in the army or the civil service. When he obtained the rank of major or lieutenant colonel or became secretary in a central office, ennoblement was automatic. In the second generation 70–80 per cent of the new nobility followed in the footsteps of the old families and chose a military career. This enormous disproportion was the result of the conviction that service in the army was the nobleman's principal function. The Oxenstiernas' Cassandran forecasts that unless young noblemen chose civil service as a career the likes of those who ruled under Charles IX would return to power, were of no avail; the poems of Georg Stiernhielm, who put learning and proficiency in clerical work on a par with other virtues characteristic of the nobility, did not help either⁸. The second and successive generations of the new nobility imitated also the old families' procreative behaviour and avoided early marriages, which resulted in a lower fertility⁹. In this way the chain was closed and new ennoblements were therefore necessary. Let us point out that the military career retained its popularity among the nobility despite the rule introduced by Charles XI that service in the army should always start with the rank of private. Aristocrats would sometimes get round this regulation by starting their career abroad; only when they were promoted to the rank of colonel did they return to Sweden to take up an officer's duties¹⁰. The situation was more difficult in the administration, for service as an unpaid clerk lasted 8–10 years in the 18th century; the young man had then to pass through all the successive grades of civil service.

The model of a successful career in the civil service or the army, crowned with ennoblement, began to grow out of fashion in the second half of the 18th century. Whereas in 1720 noblemen accounted for 79 per cent of all senior officials in the central civil service (88 per cent of them were first generation noblemen), in 1809 their proportion amounted to 28 per cent

⁷ I. Elmroth, *Nyrekryteringen till de högre ämbeterna 1720–1809*, Lund 1962.

⁸ Gabriel Gustafson Oxenstierna to Axel Oxenstierna, Stockholm January 1, 1636, *Axel Oxenstiernas Skrifter och Brefväxling*, vol. II: 3, p. 398, reply Wismar 29 March 1636, *ibidem*, vol. I: 15, p. 331.

⁹ I. Elmroth, *Family Planning as a Diffusion Phenomenon during l'ancien régime, in: Europe and Scandinavia: Aspects of the process of integration in the 17th century*, ed. G. Rystad, Lund 1983.

¹⁰ C. G. Andrae, *Karl XI's exercis reglemente. Om lydhet, likformighet och envælde*, "Saga och Sed" 1981. Nils Bielke served in the imperial army and Karl Gustaf Rehnskiöld in the Dutch army, both with the consent of Charles XI; their task was to watch all novelties, see also P. Englund, *Det hotade huset. Adliga föreställningar om samhället under stormaktstiden*, Stockholm 1989, pp. 168 ff.

(of whom 81 per cent were first generation noblemen)¹¹. The reduction in the number of ennoblements in the second half of the 18th century did not close the plebeians' access to offices. At the same time, more and more noblemen chose another career than the military and administrative ones and engaged in large-scale trade or management of a landed estate. Thus the nobility ceased to perform its original social functions.

The fact that the numerical strength of the nobility at the beginning of the 17th century was similar to that in the 16th century cannot be regarded as evidence of the permanence of noble families. A closer analysis shows that many persons were ennobled or lost their noble rank also in the 16th century. The barrier separating the noblemen from the plebeians was not clearly defined and the poorest families did not retain their status for a long time. Of the 102 noble families who owned a peasant farm in 1562/1563 only 21 can be identified in the next generations. Eleven families died out, the other simply disappeared, probably melting into plebeian ranks. It is characteristic that among the new noblemen who pursued an administrative career in the 17th century there were few representatives of the old petty nobility, which accounted for about 90 per cent of the noble estate in the 16th century. According to U. Sjö d e l l, of the 1028 senior civil servants appointed in 1611–1718 only 53 (5 per cent) were members of this group. 33 of them had been senior officers and were appointed civil servants for services rendered during the Thirty Years' War¹².

The sinking of the petty nobility to plebeian ranks was not a new phenomenon in the 16th century. This process was the most intense at the end of the 15th century. It occurred in the whole of Scandinavia and was linked as much to the change in the nobility's function in society as to the strong agrarian crisis in the north of Europe and a drop in incomes from rent¹³. More detailed data for Sweden are not available, but regional research has shown that the membership of the nobility decreased considerably at the end of the Middle Ages, for noblemen's estates were bought by rich men. In the part of Småland researched by L. O. L a r s s o n the number of noblemen's landed estates decreased by 75 per cent between the beginning of the 15th century and 1520. The drop in the numerical strength of the nobility also occurred in Finland, where some noblemen sank to peasant

¹¹ I. E l m r o t h, *Nyrekryteringen*, p. 67; M. R o b e r t s, *The Age of Liberty. Sweden 1719–1772*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 190 ff.

¹² They were ministers, members of the Council of State, *landshövdingar* and senior officials in collegia. U. Sjö d e l l, *Det gamla lågfrälset och 1600-talsbyråkratien*, "Historisk Tidskrift" 1974; i d e m, "Infödda svenska män av ridderskapet och adeln". *Kring ett tema i Sveriges inre historia under 1500- och 1600-talen*, Lund 1976.

¹³ *Desertion and Land Colonisation in the Nordic Countries c. 1300–1600*, Stockholm 1981.

ranks and some joined the burghers' estate¹⁴. The situation was similar in Denmark, where the number of noble families fell from 416 to 251 (by 40 per cent).

At the same time, however, ennoblements, which were in the competence of the Council, not of the king, were few, only 16 being granted in 1510–1570. The result was that the number of Danish noble families kept decreasing until the end of the noblemen's rule in 1660 (*adelsvaelde*). It was only the introduction of absolutism that removed the barriers: 108 families were ennobled in 1650–1699 and another 233 in the 18th century¹⁵. However, fewer persons were ennobled in Denmark than in Sweden, even in the times when oligarchic trends prevailed.

At the beginning of the 16th century the noble estate in Sweden consisted of men who owned land exempt from taxation. But at the king's demand the noble landowners had to raise a horsemen's detachment (*rustjånst*) of a size proportional to their income. The duty began to be strictly exacted from the beginning of the Vasa period. According to the 1562/1563 military register, of the 477 noble landowners as many as 403 put only one horseman at the king's disposal. According to Samuelson's calculations, if a landowner earned less than 300 marks, which corresponded to an annual income from 30–40 peasant farms, he had to provide only one horseman. But more than 300 noble landowners had fewer than 10 peasant holdings. The duty of providing horseman was becoming increasingly difficult for this group. Particularly difficult for the noblemen were the changes made during the times of Gustavus Vasa (1526 and 1540) and Erik XIV (1562). Hence many of them lost or renounced land owned by right of being noblemen, which was tantamount to losing the noble rank. As late as 1526 and in 1538, Gustavus Vasa warned noblemen that those who failed to appear at inspections would be regarded as plebeians and their estates would be subject to taxation. This soon became clear to the nobility of Oland, where after a royal inspection (*råfst*) the number of noble landowners dropped from 36 to 13. A similar fate awaited 60 Finnish noblemen. A further 25 persons were deprived of noble rank following a control ordered by Erik XIV in 1562. But in the latter case only four verdicts were carried out; the other defendants were gracefully allowed to retain their status and sometimes even their

¹⁴ L. O. Larsson, *Det medeltida Värend. Studier i det smålanska gränsländets historia framtill 1500-talets mitt*, Lund 1964; I. M. Munktel, *op. cit.*; E. Anthoni, *Flöteskatsmännen på 1500-talet*, "Historisk Tidskrift för Finland" 1960; J. Gallén, *Spårar och Silfverspårar*, "Genealogiska Samfundets i Finland Årsskrift", 1957–1959.

¹⁵ S. A. Hansen, *Adelsvaeldens grundlag*; E. Ladewig Petersen, *Fra standssamfund til rangssamfund 1500–1700*, København 1980, p. 193; T. Dahlerup, *Lavadelus krise i dansk senmiddelalder*, "Historisk Tidskrift" (Danish) 1969–1970.

estates. Later controls were qually effective. However, let us stress that regardless of how many persons were affected, the loss of noble rank was a realistic threat for 40 per cent of the Finnish nobility and 25 per cent of the Swedish noblemen.

It was only the noblemen's privileges of 1569 that put the poorest noblemen under protection. Persons who were unable to comply with *rusttjänst* had to sell their land to another nobleman but they were not deprived of their noble rank. This marked the beginning of hereditary nobility. The process ended when the House of Noblemen was established and the system of noblemen's registration was started (1626). Paradoxically, the next decade witnessed mass ennoblements which burst the noble estate from within.

Ennoblements were not rare in the 16th century, but they were not so frequent as in the 17th century. The author has ascertained that 192 persons were ennobled in 1523–1610 (1567 in the 17th century). These were mainly regional officials. Only 32 officers were ennobled, while in the 17th century the military accounted for 47 per cent of all ennoblements.

It is worth mentioning that of the 192 men ennobled in the 16th century 126 were married to noblewomen or had noble relatives. It was of vital importance in both military and civilian careers to have noble relatives or be married to a noblewoman.

This is why marriages between nobility and plebeians, especially provincial officials in the service of the Crown, were frequent. Marriages between members of different estates were also frequent in the 15th century and probably even earlier¹⁶. The author has succeeded in finding references to about 700 marriages between representatives of different estates in 1523–1611. It was especially noblewomen (624 cases) who married outside their estate. Their partners were usually regional officials (94 cases), military men (79), peasants (52), clergymen (46) and burghers (43). Assuming that a generation lasted about 30 years, this means that noble landed estates were in the hands of some 2,000 persons, 600 of whom joined the noble estate through marriage; another 100 were married to women from outside the nobility and 63 had no noble relatives when they were ennobled. This means that nearly 800 persons, that is, 40 per cent of the nobility, were linked to plebeians in one way or another.

As a result of close contacts between different estates, tax-free land was passing into the hands of plebeians. This was strongly opposed by both the Crown and the nobility, each for different reasons. In the middle of the 14th century King Magnus Erikson warned noble widows that their estates

¹⁶ E. Anthoni, *Finlands medeltida frälse*, pp. 197 ff.

would be confiscated and they would be deprived of their noble status if they married plebeians. At the same time, however, the National Law laid down by the same ruler envisaged that a plebeian who fulfilled the *rustijänst* duty on assuming possession of a noble landed estate would enjoy a nobleman's status. However, Gustavus Vasa stressed that the title of nobleman could be acquired only through ennoblement by the ruler and that inter-estate marriages contracted without the consent of the monarch would entail loss of the noble rank and transfer of the landed estate to the group of taxed estates. Similar injunctions were passed by the Riksdag during Gustavus Vasa's reign. In practice, however, the Crown adopted a liberal attitude. Under Erik XIV, controllers (in 1562) shut their eyes to an illegal sneaking into the ranks of nobility, as long as the *rustijänst* duty was fulfilled. The situation changed under Johan III. In a letter announcing a control of noblemen's estates in 1573, the king complained about frequent marriages between representatives of different estates, pointing out that the Crown was the loser, for the military service of plebeians was inferior to that done by the nobility. Control was then targeted mainly against inter-estate marriages. However, many a plebeian escaped consequences, for the Crown was venal, even if it used a stern rhetoric. An accused man who gave up a part of his estate to the king was left in peace and sometimes was even ennobled.

The nobility, especially the Council of State, demanded stricter measures. The noblemen feared that they would lose control over ennoblements and that tax-free land would pass into the taxed category (*skattejord*) or become crownland (*kronojord*). They demanded that the estates of persons who married plebeians should be sold to the nearest relative. At the same time, some members of the political elite knew how to take advantage of inter-estate marriages to expand their own possessions. This was done, for instance, by Erik Joakimson Fleming (1487–1548), who married noble girls under his care to plebeians and then asked the king to allow him to take over their hereditary estates. In 1622, after a vehement discussion, the nobility softened its stand, making inter-estate marriages dependent on relatives' consent. There were fewer inter-estate marriages in the 17th century. In 1680–1689 they were contracted by about 20 per cent of the nobility. They became popular in the 18th century, but were no longer such a problem as they were in the 17th century¹⁷.

As has been frequently mentioned above, there were great financial differences between the individual members of the nobility, most of the estates and incomes being in the hands of 10 per cent of the noble families.

¹⁷ S. Carlsson, *Ståndssamhälle och ståndpersoner 1700–1865*, pp. 182 ff.

Research into the situation in the 17th century has shown that even the richest noblemen were greatly dependent on the state financially¹⁸. It was practically the same in the 16th century.

A list of the ten richest noblemen shows that their income from state land held on various terms (*förlänningar* and hereditary counties and baronies) greatly exceeded that from hereditary estates. For instance, Per Brahe, leader in the classification (third as regards incomes from hereditary estates) earned 28,600 marks a year from endowed estates and 3,771 marks from the hereditary ones. Gabriel Christiernsson Oxenstierna, the richest of all owners of hereditary estates, was fifth on the list of the richest noblemen with 5,470 marks from his hereditary estates and a mere 6,100 from the land bestowed on him by the Crown. Pontus de la Gardie was the most dependent. He entered service for Sweden in 1565 (he served the Danish king before was taken prisoner by the Swedes); in 1571 he received the title of baron, in 1580 he became Johan III's son-in-law (after marrying the king's illegitimate daughter, Sophie) and in 1581 he became a member of the Council. In 1569 he did not yet have a hereditary estate, but earned 5,200 marks from the land bestowed on him by the Crown. Another example is Charles de Mornay from France, who joined Swedish service in 1557; in 1571 he earned 31,711 marks from the endowed estates. However, his brilliant career came to a tragic end when he was beheaded for taking part in a plot aimed at rescuing Erik XIV from prison.

Only a small group of the nobility benefited from these generous endowments, and this led to an even greater polarization of the noble estate. In 1571 only 17 per cent of the nobility held endowed estates. By 1607 this figure had increased to 40 per cent, but this was due to the generosity of Charles of Södermanland, who wanted to win over the nobility¹⁹. In 1569 the ten richest owners of hereditary estates held in their hands 64 per cent of the incomes from lands bestowed by the Crown. The other noblemen, in particular poor ones, were cut off from incomes from the public sector. This group could find a certain, though small, consolation in remunerations for functions performed in royal service (*beställningar*), but these were much smaller than incomes from endowed estates and were received mainly by non-nobles. The great dependence of the nobility, in any case its upper

¹⁸ See K. Ågren, *Gods och ämbete. Sten Bielkes inkomster inför riksdagen 1680*, "Scandia" 1965.

¹⁹ S. A. Nilsson, *Förvaltning och länen i striden mellan Sigismund och hertig Karl*, in: *Vetenskap och omvärdering*, Göteborg 1986. These endowments were of a political character, as is proved by the confiscations carried out in the first years of Gustavus Adolphus's reign, S. A. Nilsson, *Reaktionen mot systemskiftet 1611. En linje i Gustav II Adolfs politik*, in: *På väg mot reduktionen*, Stockholm 1964.

stratum, on the state was also due to the fact that if a nobleman died, all his children as well as relatives on the paternal and the maternal side had the right of inheritance; the patrilineal system began to be applied only in the 16th century. As a result every generational change led to a break-up of hereditary estates; this is why noblemen sought to make endowments indivisible for in practice it was endowments that defined their financial situation.

It is significant that the intensive colonization which was taking place in the 16th century was the work of the Crown, not the nobility, for the latter owed the increase in the number of peasant holdings it controlled not to its own economic activity but to endowments²⁰. This does not mean, of course, that this was a group of spendthrifts living on endowments and salaries. Research into the economics of Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, Per Brahe and other aristocrats has shown that they knew how to maximize their incomes, but they did this mainly in the estates they were given by the Crown. They showed great energy in tax evasion, not in the intensification of agricultural production, and from the middle of the 17th century, being faced with the threat of land confiscation, they tried to acquire the largest possible part of the land which had traditionally belonged to the nobility (*gamla frälsejord*) through purchase or exchange. Contrary to the propaganda spread in the 17th century and the opinions formed by historians under its influence, the nobility did not seek refeudalization and did not try to impose corvée on the peasants living in newly established manors (*säteri*). The establishment of many manorial farms in the 17th century was due to the fact that the nobility tried to avoid taxation and meet the models of consumption established by the old nobility²¹.

In addition to endowments and salaries (notoriously unpaid) introduced in the 17th century, the noblemen also derived income from war booties, usury and some of them, in particular the recently ennobled nobility, from large-scale trade (copper, iron, tar). The ideal of a noble landowner propa-

²⁰ L. O. Larsson, *Kolonisation och bebyggelseutveckling i det svenska agrarsamhället 1500–1640*, Lund 1972, p. 173.

²¹ The situation in Denmark has been described by E. Ladewig Petersen, *Conspicuous Consumption: the Danish Nobility of the 17th Century*, in: *Eighth International Economic History Congress, Budapest 1982*, vol. 2, Budapest 1982.

gated by Per Brahe the Elder at the end of the 16th century did not take root in Sweden²².

The aristocracy's incomes, meticulously recorded in the double sided bookkeeping, were sunk in elitist consumption which was to distinguish old families from the increasingly numerous new nobility and, on the other hand, enable the latter to be included in the privileged class. This peculiar race which encumbered the nobility with debts was praised by the Crown and the ruling aristocrats, for Europeanized the country and increased respect for it in the international forum²³. The introduction of the fork by Prince Johan (the latter King Johan III) in 16th century Finland was regarded as a manifestation of extreme refinement (not to say profligacy) and of submission to fashion. A hundred years later Swedish aristocrats and rich noblemen tried to come up to European standards as collectors of works of art and bibliophiles; they enlarged their collections not only by robbery in foreign countries²⁴. In the hundred years between the middle of the 16th century and the middle of the 17th, the Swedish nobility went at accelerated speed through a civilization process led by the royal court and aristocratic families, a process which was closely linked with social discipline²⁵.

In view of the nobility's great polarization, it is not surprising that the Swedish aristocratic elite was an extremely stable group despite historical storms, such as the Stockholm blood-bath of 1520, Erik XIV's tyrannical rule, the cruel showdown with the pro-Sigismundian Council in the times of Charles IX, and the rule of secretaries during the German period of Gustavus Vasa and under Johan III.

²² See E. Dunsdorfs, *The Livonian Estates of Axel Oxenstierna*, Stockholm 1981; for the nobility's endeavours to evade taxation and protect themselves from the confiscation of their land see M. Revera, *Gods och gård 1654–1680. Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies godsbildning och godsdrift i Västergötland*, Uppsala 1975; for discussion on the nobility's economics see M. Kopczyński, *Państwo militarne. Z badań nad dziejami Szwecji okresu mocarstwowości (The Military State. Research into the History of Sweden When It Was a Great Power)*, "Zeszyty Historyczne", vol. LVI 1991, № 1, pp. 132 ff. The role of usury in the structure of an aristocrat's incomes has been discussed by A. Kulberg, *Johan Gabriel Stenbock och reduktionen. Godspolitik och ekonomiförvaltning 1675–1705*, Uppsala 1973, in particular pp. 22 and 133 ff.; P. Brahe, *Oeconomia eller Huusholdzbook för ungt adelsfolck*, written in 1581–1585, published in 1677, and also in 1920.

²³ P. Englund, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 ff. and 205 ff.; M. Revera, *The Making of a Civilized Nation. Nation-Building. Aristocratic Culture and Social Change*, in: *The Age of New Sweden*, Stockholm 1988.

²⁴ A. Losman, *Carl Gustaf Wrangel och Europa. Studier i kulturförbindelser kring en 1600-talsmagnat*, Stockholm 1980; A. Eilenius, *Konst och miljö*, in: *Kultur och samhälle i stormaktstidens Sverige*, Stockholm 1967, cites many other statements which emphasise that art, architecture in particular, arises *in honorem status nobilitatis* (Axel Oxenstierna, p. 63). The burghers did not try to imitate the nobility.

²⁵ See M. Kopczyński, *Prawo czy obowiązek? Funkcje urzędów w Rzeczypospolitej i Szwecji XVII wieku (A Right or a Duty. The Function of Offices in the Polish Commonwealth and Sweden in the 17th Century)*, "Przegląd Historyczny", vol. LXXXII, 1991, № 3–4.

It is members of the Council of State whom the author regards as the political elite; this is a traditional approach in Swedish research²⁶. Marriages within the group of the richest and most influential families and a residence built of bricks or stone are for him the criteria of membership of the social elite²⁷. On this basis he discerns 17 families who met these criteria in 1530–1570. In the next period, 1570–1611, this elite consisted of 18 families and changed only insignificantly. As regards completely new members, only the de la Gardie family was added, for the other six new families had already previously belonged to the political, social or financial elite. What is more, changes in the narrow elite (in the strict sense of the word) were small in the next century up to 1680, for of the eight families who joined it only the Wrangels were completely new. The close elite knew how to defend themselves not only against the inflow of ennobled plebeians but also against the many foreigners arriving in Sweden (mainly to join the army). In the second half of the 17th century foreigners predominated among senior officers, but few of them became members of the Council of State and those who did served on it only for one generation²⁸.

Changes in the incomes hierarchy were greater. In 1655 the De Geers and Leijonskiölds were listed for the first time in the group of the first ten families in the register of the levy in mass (*rustjänstränta*); another ten new noble families occupied further places. The confiscation of endowed estates (reduction) in 1680 and the trial of the regents who wielded power during Charles XI's minority led to changes of an almost revolutionary character. The consequences were particularly painful to such families as the Wrangels and, first and foremost, to the de la Gardies, whose financial position depended on endowments. New families, the de Geers, Falkenbergs and Wredes, found themselves in the group of the first ten families in the military list of 1697; they were followed by a further dozen new families. But after a few years the Wrangels and de la Gardies, who were the most affected,

²⁶ The activity of the Council in the 17th century has been discussed, among others, by: U. Sjödel, *Riksråd och kungliga råd. Rådskarriären 1602–1718*, Lund 1975, and K. Ågren, *The Rise and Decline of an Aristocracy*, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 1976; A. Maćszak, *Rządcy i rządzeni (The Rulers and the Ruled)*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 178 ff.

²⁷ The latter criterion cannot be used to distinguish the social elite in the 17th century for brick residences were already a rule. Schering Rosenhane wrote: "A brick house is more elegant, warmer, more comfortable; it offers more comfort and room than a wooden house which falls into decay quickly and may even collapse one day". He was echoed by Claes Fleming: "our residences must be so huge to make us glorious", quoted after A. Ellenius, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 and 63.

²⁸ J. Cavallie, *De höga officerarna. Studier i den svenska militära hierarkien under 1600-talets senare del*, Lund 1981. For the careers of immigrants see also S. Carlsson, *Niemiecka emigracja w Szwecji, XIII–XX w. (The German Immigrants in Sweden, 13th–20th Centuries)*, "Zeszyty Historyczne", vol. LIV, 1989, № 2–3, in particular pp. 16 ff.

managed to rejoin the social elite from which, after all, they were not excluded for a single moment after 1680²⁹.

The stability of the elite which ruled Sweden in the 16th and 17th centuries was due to the fact that the social, political and financial elites stemmed from the same narrow circle of families. In the 16th as well as in the 17th centuries, up to 1680, within one or at most two generations the families of the Council of State members were linked by marriage, turning the Council into a group rallied round one, at most two or three families. The aristocratic titles introduced by Erik XIV in 1561 only sanctioned the long-existing division into a narrow elite and a poor majority. This division existed in the 17th century, despite many ennoblements and the granting of titles (e.g. by Christina), because aristocrats predominated in the nominations to the Council of State and ministerial offices and because the most powerful families were closely related.

In describing the two worlds in which the Swedish nobility lived in the 16th century, the author advances the theory that in view of the enormous disparity in prestige and financial status, it was informal ties that united the noble estate. Factional divisions played an important political role in at least one case, during the fight between Charles of Södermanland and Sigismund³⁰. Two distinct parties could be noticed among the Finnish nobility: one was grouped round Claes Fleming and the other round Karl Henriksson Horn. The death of the former in 1597 led to the decomposition of his party and to a relatively unhampered subordination of Finland by Charles. As duke of Södermanland, Charles, had been for many years consistently building his own party of noblemen, which fully supported him during the crisis, as did the radical Lutheran clergy whom Charles protected in his duchy from the anger of Johan III. When building his own party Charles strove to make noblemen independent of the Crown by granting them land on hereditary terms without Johan III's consent and by harassing those noblemen who remained loyal to the monarch³¹.

The aristocrats also built their own parties and they could hardly refuse to fulfil the requests directed to them for this would have been a confession of weakness. As is often the case, the services were mutual. Johan Sparre, brother of Erik Sparre who was Vice-Chancellor and member of the Council, begot an illegitimate child in a short-lived love affair with a certain

²⁹ These lists are quoted by B. Åsker, *Officerarna och det svenska samhället 1650–1700*, Uppsala 1983, pp. 23 ff.

³⁰ In my opinion, clientage ties also lay at the root of the revolts which broke out in the first half of Gustavus Vasa's reign.

³¹ For relations within the dynasty and the warfare between the sons of Gustavus Vasa see M. K o p c z y Ń s k i, *Wazowie (The Vasas)*, in: *Dynastie Europy*, ed. A. M a c z a k (forthcoming).

Poletta von Zijlen during his stay in Poland in 1585. The trouble was that he was engaged to Per Brahe's daughter at that time. To save the situation, Poletta von Zijlen was quickly married to Erik Bagge, a nobleman from Småland, who was connected with the Sparre family. "Three or four peasant hearths or 600 talar", this is how Erik Sparre evaluated the cost of the transaction in a letter to his brother. Moreover, three years later Bagge, "thanks to the support of a prominent person", regained the family estate which had been confiscated when his father was accused of treason. Johan Sparre could marry his fiancée and a guarantee issued by the king in 1586 protected him from the claims of Poletta's relatives³².

The importance of cliental ties did not diminish in the 17th century. Informal ties with the most important dignitaries facilitated career in the state administration and, to some extent, also in the army. The clients were civil servants, some of them ennobled, who not having landed estates, waited hopefully to receive their pay, which was sometimes overdue for years³³. The difference between a secretary in the Swedish chancellery and a petty Lithuanian nobleman was that the former lived in the capital and could try to get a hearing from the monarch or come to see, during a session of the Riksdag, that many other members of the House of Noblemen were in an identical situation. This was one of the main reasons why in a vote in 1680 the Riksdag overthrew the aristocrats' rule and introduced absolutism. The noble estate was burst from within. Clientage did not, of course, disappear in the new circumstances under absolute rulers and even less so in the era of freedom³⁴. Research into the careers of civil servants in the first half of

³² Examples of similar services, e.g. the case of a certain Dębski, are cited by W. N e k a n d a – T r e p k a, *Liber generationis plebeatorum*, ed. W. D w o r z a c z e k et al., Wrocław 1963, Part I, p. 113.

³³ F. P e r s s o n, *Att leva på hoppet — om den misslyckande klienten*, "Historisk Tidskrift" 1992; i d e m, *En hjälpande hand. Principiella aspekter på patronage i förhållande till nepotism och meritokrati under stormaktstiden*, "Scandia" 1993; see also M. K o p c z y Ń s k i, *Max Weber, Axel Oxenstierna i szwedzcy urzędnicy XVII stulecia (Max Weber, Axel Oxenstierna and Swedish Officials in the 17th Century)*, "Studia Waweliana" (forthcoming); i d e m, *Patroni i klienci w dziejach Szwecji nowożytnej (Patrons and Clients in the History of Modern Sweden)*, "Przegład Historyczny", vol. LXXXI, 1990, № 1–2; S. N o r r h e m, *Uppkomlingarna. Kansliutrustemännen i 1600-talets Sverige och Europa*, Stockholm 1993.

³⁴ Let us remember that all adult noblemen were to participate in the debates of the House of Noblemen of the Riksdag. In practice each family sent one representative. B. B o e t h i u s, *Svenska riddarhuset förutsättningar och tillkomst*, in: *Sveriges riddarhus*, Stockholm 1926, p. 76. During the era of freedom (1719–1772) this was a great strain on the finances of political parties, which made large-scale use of corruption, M. M e t c a l f, *Frihetstidens riksdag (1719–1772)*, in: *Riksdagen genom tiderna*, Stockholm 1985, p. 124. Potential clients were lured by promises of support in promotion. It was difficult (though not impossible) to speed up a man's advancement in the central administration which had its own formal criteria of promotion, but this was common practice among the clergy, B. R y m a n, *Eric Benzelius d.y. En frihetstida politiker*, Motala 1979, pp. 122 ff.

the 18th century shows that despite examinations and formal criteria of promotion, it was the descendants of officials who progressed by leaps and bounds. Know-how and above all familiarity with important persons turned out to be a better guarantee of a career than parentage³⁵.

In summing up these remarks on the Swedish nobility in the 16th–18th centuries let us stress that it included large numbers of plebeians already in the 16th century. The process of the nobility becoming a closed group from the legal point of view was not concluded until the first decade of the 17th century, but at the same time mass ennoblements made the nobleman's title accessible to talented men seeking a career in the army and administration. Let us also stress that in fact the Swedish nobility was never an estate of civil servants. As befitted a military state, preference was given to the military career. It is not surprising therefore that the officers' separate representation in the Riksdag soon disappeared. But the narrow elite consisting of ministers and members of the Council were civil servants, and it was this group that monopolized political decisions. Let us point out that there were practically no officers in the senior civil service (apart from the places reserved for them in military collegia). The situation was very similar in local administration, the competence of the civil and the military administration being clearly distinguished in instructions. The fact that from the middle of the 17th century officers frequently held the post of palatine (*landshövdingar*) does not alter this picture, for their competence in military matters expired when they took over the post of palatine. This fact distinguishes the Swedish model from the Prussian one and is the reason why despite the popularity of the military career, Sweden, a military state, never militarized its society³⁶.

Generally speaking, the Swedish model is a typical example of a feed back between the nobility and the modern state. According to this theory, the political system of a state is a resultant of the nobility's social structure and this structure could be effectively shaped by the state, especially from the 17th century³⁷. The rulers' anti-aristocratic excesses in the 16th century — the blood-bath of 1520, Erik XIV's crimes and Charles IX's reprisals — did not prevent the elite from becoming oligarchic; this was a process which went on irrespective of how many new people were introduced into the Council of State. It was only the monarchy's reconciliation with the aristocracy in 1611 that made it possible to effectively modernize and Europeanize

³⁵ I. Elmroth, *Nyrekryteringen*, p. 259.

³⁶ For a discussion on this question see M. Kopczyński, *Panstwo militarne*, pp. 127 ff.

³⁷ See A. Mączak, 'The Nobility-State Relationship. Natural but Complex', in: *The Origins of the modern State in Europe* (forthcoming).

the country on a scale required by its great-power status³⁸. This in turn made it necessary to admit plebeian officers to offices and important posts. In consequence, in its struggle against the elite at the end of the 17th century, the Crown gained the support not only of the traditionally pro-monarchic three lower estates, but also of the majority of the nobility. The year 1680 marked a turning-point. The elite was first ruined through confiscations and afterwards access to it was opened to new families tried out in royal service. The nobility's social exclusiveness was finally broken in the 18th century as a result of the noblemen's privilege losing its significance, a process which lasted several decades.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

³⁸ See C. A. Hessler's classic text, *Gustav II Adolfs konungaförsäkran*, praised by traditional historians as well as confirmed Marxists, "Scandia" 1932–1934.