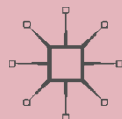




WORLD HISTORIES OF CRIME, CULTURE AND VIOLENCE

AGGRESSIVE AND
VIOLENT PEASANT
ELITES IN THE NORDIC
COUNTRIES, C. 1500-1700

Edited by Ulla Koskinen



World Histories of Crime, Culture and Violence

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Ulla Koskinen
Editor

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World Histories of Crime, Culture and Violence

ISBN 978-3-319-40687-9

ISBN 978-3-319-40688-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-40688-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016958288

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

PREFACE

This volume is the result of collaboration between historians from Norway, Sweden and Finland who share enthusiasm for shedding new light on the social dynamics of early modern peasantry. The idea began to develop in the conference ‘Agency and State Building in the 16th and 17th Centuries’ held at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, 13–15 November 2013. It took some time of considering and modelling, until finally the outlines of the volume were laid down in cooperation with all the contributors. We were able to present our studies at the ESSHC conference in València, Spain, 30 March–2 April 2016. At all stages, the process of writing and editing has been a smooth and efficient one and it has been my pleasure to cooperate with the authors, for which I want to express my warmest thanks. I also want to thank the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Jyväskylä and the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence ‘History of Society: Rethinking Finland 1400–2000’ for their financial support, as well as Alex Reed for English language proofreading and Kauko Kyöstiö for drawing the maps.

Ulla Koskinen
Tampere, Finland
27 April 2016

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kirjoja 1600-luvun alusta 1800-luvun alkuun (2012); 'Fordeliorum Familia'. Släkten Fordells genealogi och forskningshistoria i Finland och Sverige', *Sveriges släktforskarnas Årsbok* (2012); 'Kylistä kartanoiksi', *Suomen Museo* 2014/121 (2016).

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Nordic area in 1617. Drawing by Kauko Kyöstiö.

The Story of Aggressive and Violent Peasant Elites in the North

Ulla Koskinen

PEASANTS IN NORTHERN EUROPE

All over early modern Fennoscandia—in the areas of modern-day Norway, Sweden, and Finland—there were peasants who occupied wealthy farmsteads, held positions of trust, and had kinship networks with members of higher status groups such as local priests and state officials, burghers, and other gentry. Even though they served as a link between the rest of the peasantry and the state authorities, it is evident that early modern peasant resistance was also often led by the wealthy. There is abundant evidence in court records that these respected and leading members of the local community could practically terrorise their neighbourhood with violence and aggression. Why was there this seeming contradiction between respectability and confrontation, and how widespread a phenomenon was this in the North?

The chapter has been written with the funding of the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence ‘History of Society: Rethinking Finland 1400–2000’. I want to thank all the other authors of this book for their valuable comments and help.

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In the English language, the very concept ‘peasant elite’ sounds contradictory—‘peasant’ is often associated with lower status and seems to have nothing to do with elites. But in the Scandinavian languages and in Finnish, the contradiction disappears. In most contexts, *bonde* and *talonpoika* (for further terminology, see the glossary) do not have the same pejorative connotations as ‘peasant’ does in English. In fact, it is often the contrary; in the nationalistic histories and literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the terms were linked to contemporary, ideal images of a free, landowning peasantry. This peasantry, that had semi-autonomous administration over their local communities, was seen as the essence of the nation states of Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

The early modern reality was, of course, a lot more complicated though. Unlike most European regions, medieval feudalism had not gained ground in the kingdoms of Norway and Sweden (which included what is now Finland), and it was common that peasant farmers owned the land they cultivated; yet the early modern rural population was still divided into many sub-groups with regard to the ownership of land, taxation, and other duties.¹

In early modern sources from Scandinavia, the word *bonde* refers to a narrower group of people than the English translation. *Bonde* was a fiscal, social, and even political term. It referred to a farmer who occupied a taxable land unit called a *bruk*, *hemman*, or *talo*, meaning ‘farmstead’. It signifies a common person who occupied and cultivated a farm, in contrast to ‘lords’, meaning all the higher-ranking status groups, and landless rural groups, such as *torpare* and *bustumenn* (crofters) or *inhysningar* (cottagers).²

In the sixteenth century, the nobility did not dominate agricultural land in the North as in other parts of Europe. However, regional variations were great. Large areas in Fennoscandia—most parts of inland Norway, Northern Sweden and other forest regions, Central and Eastern Finland, Ostrobothnia (*Österbotten/Pohjanmaa*), and Lapland—had no noble dwellings at all, while in areas like Southern and Central Sweden as well as Southeastern Norway, there were a lot more. In addition, both population and production were more undifferentiated and rural than in many other European regions.³

Finland was the most extreme contrast to most of Europe in terms of landownership. Whereas elsewhere it was more of an exception that peasants owned their land, in Finland it was generally the rule; in 1560, for instance, 94 % of farms in the Finnish part of the Swedish realm were cultivated by freeholders.⁴ This contrasts sharply to the area of Denmark where,

in around 1700, the share of landowning peasants was less than 1 %.⁵ In what is now Sweden, about half of the land was *skatte* (tax), meaning that the peasant freeholders owned it and paid taxes directly to the Crown. After the Reformation in 1527, the Church lost its land to the Crown, who thereafter held 20–30 % of the land.⁶ Meanwhile in Norway, the pattern of landownership was more diverse. Farms were divided into separate holdings, some of which were owned by the farmer, some by others so that the percentage of land owned by peasants was about one third of the total, and only part of the land was actually owned directly by those who cultivated it.⁷ However, ownership, which often implied ideal shares of the land rent rather than ownership of land, laid the basis for a favourable system from a tenant perspective (life time tenancy, tenancy of inheritance and major rights of land disposal).

Altogether, the number of freeholders was substantial in the sixteenth-century Nordic area, but, excepting Finland, the share of tenants on Crown, noble, or other private land was equally or even more significant. Their number increased in the sixteenth and especially seventeenth centuries all over the Swedish realm as a growing number of farms were granted as fiefs and donations to the nobility. This did not automatically mean the transfer of ownership from freeholders to the new lords but the possible inability to pay taxes did. At the same time, Finland and Norway witnessed the novelty of large earldoms and baronies. In principle, the seigneurial rights were limited to collecting taxes, but there was also a strong tendency to extend them to cover administrative and judicial powers. Tenants on noble land also had to do day labour for their lords. In Finland, the position of the tenants did not in general differ dramatically from the freeholders in terms of the tenure of the land as the standard procedure was that the occupation of these farms was inherited in the family in the same way as the freeholders' farms. The situation in Norway was much the same, apart from a few fixed-term contracts issued by private owners.⁸

Having said this, the peasants of Norway, Sweden, and Finland generally had a fair degree of personal and political agency compared to most of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. They were socioeconomically the backbone of the economy as the towns were still modest in size, and even being a tenant did not necessarily mean worse conditions or being poorer than freeholders. In the Swedish realm, the freeholders and Crown's tenants were quite exceptionally represented by a fourth estate in the Diet (*Riksdag*), along with nobility, priests, and burghers in the other three estates.⁹

Some of these *bönder*, whether they were freeholders or tenants, amassed a fair amount of wealth and property, and they often had connections with the gentry, clergy, and burghers. These are the people—the elite among peasants—that this book is dealing with. It focuses on the connection between aggression and violence and this elite status in peasant communities. This has not been a visible theme in the abundant research on violence and revolts in early modern Nordic countries, although using physical force to exert social dominance has been recognised as an essential part of early modern Nordic society. The idea of this book is to look at the peasant elites from the perspective of aggressiveness and violence during a period when the intensification of state administration was reshaping local power structures. Local peasant elites occupied a specific status as a mediating group between peasants, Crown officials, gentry, and other literate groups in society. At the same time, historical evidence suggests that they were even more aggressive and violent than other peasants in their communities.

The authors of this volume share an open approach to the peasant community, seeing it more as a heterogeneous group than any kind of homogeneous entity. The principal idea is to consider them as active agents—people who were acting and interacting, not just reacting. The traditional view of peasantry as a solid community that had to face aggressive demands from the representatives of the expanding state administration and high-handed nobility is thus challenged by scrutinising the various regional peasant elites with their wider economic and political interests, abilities to resist, links to local administration, own inner power struggles, and readiness to use the local courts to voice their concerns.

PEASANT ELITES, ELITE PEASANTS

In contrast to the prevailing system in Eastern Europe—for instance, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, large parts of Germanophone Europe, Russia, and the Baltic area—where peasants were controlled by serfdom,¹⁰ to the west and north of the continent there were more opportunities for economic, social, and political agency available. Access to land was a vital question for all the rural population, and to have favourable terms that enabled this was the key to peasants' economic success. In most areas, it was not common that peasants owned the land they cultivated.¹¹ For instance, in Germany, the number of freeholders was relatively small at the turn of the seventeenth century. Rural areas were dominated by nobility who owned

virtually all the agricultural land. There was an almost chaotic variety of systems of tenure. In the sixteenth century, peasants' obligations had increased, and great noble latifundia were formed in the eastern parts of Germany, which meant the abolition of independent peasant farms there.¹²

Despite the lack of ownership rights, local communities all around Western Europe were clearly stratified and had their own elite groups, a phenomenon that has caught the attention of historians in the last decades. 'Peasant communities' that seem homogenous when viewed from above now appear to have been quite diverse on the micro-level, even in the Middle Ages. In the early modern period, the degree of differentiation only increased further as landownership became concentrated in the hands of a few. In general, by the end of the sixteenth century, the rural population of Western Europe was highly differentiated. Some of the winners were the better-off peasants, who could afford more land and then market the surplus.¹³

Terms of tenure and the size and quality of land were the decisive factors for determining the socioeconomic success of farmers. If the farm could be passed on intact to the next generation, peasant families could accumulate wealth.¹⁴ Trade offered additional possibilities if it was only allowed for farmers.¹⁵ In England especially, a group of commercial farmers had emerged already in the late Middle Ages who farmed for the market rather than to just feed their families. The wealthiest of the yeomen sometimes even surpassed the smaller gentry in terms of wealth.¹⁶

All this resulted in elite groups within the peasantry, whether they were 'Grossbauern', 'yeomen', or the 'coqs de village'. They had larger holdings, had a higher standard of living, and hired servants, and their status was that of a mediating group between the lords and people of the village community.¹⁷ They applied several processes of exclusion within the local communities. Participation in decision-making was often restricted to this group of wealthier peasants, as were community offices, which could be monopolised and kept within families for generations. This local hierarchy could also be consolidated by intermarriages within these families.¹⁸

In many early modern states, there were areas that were even dominated by landowning peasants as there were virtually no nobility or towns in the same area. One example is the Duchy of Schleswig, which was in late medieval and early modern times practically governed by strong groups of local peasants. These peasants held posts in

administration and allied themselves variously with the state and with other peasants.¹⁹

The prominent peasants that had wealth and power over others have been variously called ‘better-off peasants’, ‘large farmers’, ‘village patriariate’, ‘prosperous peasants’, ‘substantial peasants’, ‘peasant elite’, and ‘leading peasants’. In the use of any of these terms, there is always a danger of anachronisms and misunderstandings, as the terminology in English does not fit the Nordic context without a certain amount of flexibility. The recently coined term ‘rural elites’ as well as often used ‘local elites’ include groups outside the peasantry such as merchants, scribes, and officers, and this kind of elite groups existed in the Nordic context also.²⁰ However, this book’s target is better served by the term ‘peasant elite’ as this is what these substantial freeholders and well-off tenant farmers essentially were—peasants who cultivated their own land, even though they might have engaged in other activities and had other sources of income as well.²¹

As seen from above, defining ‘peasant elite’ is not without its problems. The historical contexts vary greatly, making a precise definition unreasonable. In social science, the concept ‘elite’ has been used in a *relative* sense, making it possible to define different elite groups in different contexts. Common to them all is that an elite is understood to be a small minority that has more political or economic clout than the majority.²² In pre-modern societies, the political and economic spheres were closely intertwined, although the correlation is not always self-evident.²³ Another possibility is to see the elite as a group that differentiated itself from other peasants socially and culturally through family, kin, and other networks among itself and with higher status groups. Social connections to higher status groups and outside the parish borders, for instance, have been found to correlate with greater wealth, and the same applies to higher standard of food, drink, housing, furniture, and even funeral arrangements.²⁴

In this book, the aim is not to get bogged down in the semantics of defining the term ‘peasant elites’ but to observe the behaviour of peasants that stand out from the majority in economic, political, and social terms. In Nordic peasant communities, these three-fold characteristics of an elite would refer in practice to holding offices in local administration (both civil and church), owning or occupying large farmsteads, owning other forms of wealth, engaging in other economic activity such as commerce, and being well-connected within one’s own group and higher status groups.

The boundaries of nobility and the wealthiest peasants remained fuzzy in the sixteenth century, and there were even marriages between the two groups.²⁵ As European examples verify, ownership of one's land was not a necessary prerequisite of wealth and power, and the elite thus also comprised of tenant families.²⁶

NORTHERN PEASANT ELITES IN THE ERA OF STATE-BUILDING

As we have seen, groupings within the peasantry that can be called 'elite' have existed in a wide variety of historical contexts. In Scandinavia, at the start of the early modern period, they were caught up in an era of state-building. In particular, the centuries spanning 1500–1700, which this book centres on, brought decisive changes to local communities and affected the position of the peasant elites within them in particular. Monarchs encouraged an ideology of subordination and loyalty among their subjects, whilst at the same time more severely punishing insubordination and crime. Widespread warfare meant that central governments started to intervene in local affairs more profoundly than ever before, which burdened the peasantry and altered the positions of the leading groups among them. The economic position of peasants declined in general in Europe, and even though small elites continued to exist, the proportion of smallholders, landless, and poor among the peasantry continued to rise.²⁷

Following attempts at tightening control over localities, many new economic and judicial records were created, providing source material that makes individuals within the peasantry more visible for historians than before. Consequently, some researchers have even placed the birth of peasant elites at the end of the sixteenth century. However, evidence shows that stratification of peasant communities has existed in the medieval period too.²⁸

The dissolution of the Kalmar Union in the 1520s and the emergence of Denmark-Norway and Sweden (including Finland) in its place mark the beginning of a long transition period from medieval dispersed kingdoms to modern centralised states. The two strong Lutheran princely states were to battle for power in Northern Europe throughout the next centuries.²⁹ The following chapters concentrate on this period and provide several interpretations of what these developments meant for the peasant elites.

In Norway, the beginning of the era was clearly marked by its annexation to Denmark in 1536. At this point, the Norwegian kingdom and its Council of the Realm were abolished, Lutheranism was introduced, and Danish officials were given direct control of the country. The majority of peasants were tenants under the Crown, Church, or private landowners. The rents were relatively low, but the tax burden increasingly grew—especially after 1620. The laws of 1557 and 1604 guaranteed lifetime tenure, but for privately owned lands, the tenure was often for fixed terms.³⁰

The Realm of Sweden, with its Finnish flank in the east, became the other strong state in the North. The era from 1550s onwards was a period of frequent warfare and economic trouble. The impact on local communities was quite heavy and created economic and social turbulence. For most peasants, it meant problems, even catastrophes, but for those who were better-off, it could also open up opportunities for gaining advantages. As seen elsewhere in pre-modern Europe, land was the main source of livelihood, and so those who could afford to, tried to get more of it.³¹ Tax-wreck farms were almost free prey. In Southern Finland, some economically successful freeholders managed to build up quite large estates.³²

This came to an end in the 1630s, however, when tax donations made to the nobility grew to unforeseen proportions, making Sweden the most aristocratic of Scandinavian countries by 1655. This almost feudal situation lasted only until 1680 when the ‘Great Reduction’ returned most of these lands to the Crown.³³ After this, tenants got opportunities to buy back their farms. This got especially large proportions in Finland after the Great Wrath (1713–21) but also in Norway where similar development took place as a result of extensive land sales by the Danish Crown.³⁴

Nordic peasant elites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have not yet been the target of a larger systematic study, even though their relative political, social, and economic influence has been widely recognised in much research. They have been treated in the contexts of state-building, political interaction and resistance, local administration, social stratification, agrarian economy, and local histories—in short, as a side issue in studies on early modern peasants as a whole—where they are referred to as the *bonde-elit*, *bondearistokrati*, *storbondeskikt*, *suurtalonpojat*, or *mahtitalonpojat*.

Peasant elites described in such terms have featured perhaps most explicitly in studies by Pentti Renvall, Eino Jutikkala, and Seppo Suvanto.

They all deem that wealth and posts in local administration are typical. Renvall has stressed the economic and social opportunities in the Swedish realm opened up by the cavalry service and the exemption from taxes that this entailed. He has also emphasised the importance of social connections and an eagerness to gain a higher social status, typical of what he perceives as the birth of a new individualistic mentality. Meanwhile, Jutikkala has observed that the elite was mobile and engaged in large-scale economic activity, often outside parish boundaries.³⁵ In the seventeenth century, the formation of cavalry estates became one of the clearest manifestations of this social differentiation.³⁶

In Sweden, the existence of a peasant elite—or a wealthier, influential, well-networked group within the peasantry—has been largely agreed upon, but interpretations of its size, structure, and position with regard to the rest of the peasantry vary. Whether stratification within peasant communities deepened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or was levelled remains an open question as there is evidence for both. Regional variations based on local conditions play a central role here.³⁷ There are also controversial findings concerning the correlation between wealth and office-holding.³⁸

In some cases, the ancestors of these early modern Nordic peasant elites can be traced back to family lines of lesser nobility in medieval times that could not maintain their tax-exempt status.³⁹ In Norway, because of various social and demographic factors, the relationship between the wealthy peasants and lesser nobility was especially close. There had been private military organisations, a system of retainers that created an elite group between the nobility and peasants in the fourteenth century.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Norwegian nobility was in steep decline after the Black Death and lost its position in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of its descendants in the sixteenth century could be found within the ranks of peasantry, having been pushed aside by the Danish nobility.⁴¹

Regional variations in peasant status were significant as different areas offered different possibilities. The ‘rural merchants’ (*landsköpmän/maakauppias*) in Lapland and other northern areas of Sweden and Finland that Tiina Miettinen studies in this book, for instance, combined large farms and livestock rearing with commerce. The Crown’s efforts to control economic resources more effectively from the mid-sixteenth century onwards had direct consequences on this fur-trading elite.⁴²

As Kimmo Katajala points out in this book, under special conditions, it was even possible to become a peasant leader without the typical economic, political, and social prerequisites. The authorities in the seventeenth century wanted to deal with individuals instead of the crowd. On the other hand, Mats Hallenberg argues in his chapter that in the sixteenth century, the king was still content to conduct political negotiations with an anonymous leading group of the local peasantry.

In Norway, Sweden, and Finland, local administration was based on what is often referred to as ‘local autonomy’. The leading group of peasants (*de beste menn*, as they were referred to in Norwegian) had a range of ways to exert influence within the system as there were many positions of trust that were open to farmers who had time to devote to collective matters. The district courts had a noble judge (or his substitute, the ‘law-reader’) and local peasants as lay jurors. The lay jurors were often chosen from among the most prominent peasants, although attention was also paid to geographical factors so that they could represent the whole parish. There were also various other temporary tasks that the court would give to trusted members of the peasantry, such as evaluating properties, examining borders, or settling debts. Even collecting the taxes themselves was originally in the hands of the local community. Meanwhile, the church administration had its own local agents, most notably church wardens and six-man vestries.⁴³

The gatherings of the court were not only judicial, however; decisions about community matters were also discussed and made there. This was also the arena where negotiations with the Crown’s representatives took place, most notably the district bailiff. The presence and control of the authorities at the court became more intense as the seventeenth century wore on. It has been a hotly debated topic within Nordic historiography whether this interaction between locals and the establishment was based on consensus or conflict.⁴⁴

In addition, each parish had a local constable whose position was central in mediating both ways between the Crown and the local community. As the constable needed to be both a leading authority in the parish and have the means to accommodate the court sessions, it was natural that they be usually chosen from among the local peasant elite, and their position often passed from generation to generation in the same family and/or farmstead.⁴⁵

Because of administrative reforms, local administration became more controlled and gradually even more professionalised in the seventeenth

century. Tasks that had been so far taken care of by prominent local figures became the responsibilities of formally trained servants of the Crown. They came from outside the peasant community and were parts of the hierarchic state machinery, which further undermined the 'local autonomy'. However, elite peasants continued to influence communal matters even in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶

AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE STATE

The early modern peasant elite provide an especially good context for studying aggression and violence not only because these were central elements of early modern social life but also because they were especially prominent in the social interactions of peasant elites. There is already ample historical research on pre-modern violence and peasant rebellions, both in Europe and Scandinavia. However, studies on rural elite have seldom touched upon these themes. This book adds to these discussions by emphasising the social stratification of peasant communities and highlighting social status as one of the key factors in defining a person's relationship to aggression and violence.

Aggression is commonly understood as a social behaviour that indicates the intention of causing harm to others; it means adopting an attitude of fierce confrontation. Violence, on the other hand, is a more concrete term, meaning the actual use of physical force against others in a damaging way. The concepts are not synonymous: aggression is not necessarily violent, and an act of violence can also be a reaction (like defending oneself), which might not be aggressive in itself. In this book, aggression and violence typically surface when there is reason to gain some advantage or relief for oneself or one's family, village community, or social group.⁴⁷

When it comes to violence, the state steps more clearly into the picture. One of the main characteristics of a state is its monopoly of violence. That is what the early modern Nordic states exercised when they waged war and carried out both corporal and capital punishments on their subjects.⁴⁸ Some forms of aggression and violence were sanctioned by the authorities and some were not, but often the early modern social reality was more complicated than that. The classification of pre-modern behaviour into criminal and non-criminal is usually based on the categorisations by state, not necessarily on the norms of the subjects themselves. Local morals

could vary between what was acceptable violence and what was not, and people had to walk the line between popular local norms and those of the state. Regional variations and local judicial practices could also differ significantly from what was said in the law. Not all behaviour that was legally sanctioned ended up in the court room but was, for instance, reconciled privately.⁴⁹

Aggression and violence were of course connected to crime, but it was clearly not the case that all aggression or even violence was illegal. In the eyes of a state trying to monopolise violence, the evaluation of its subjects' aggression and violence depended on whether it was about private or crown matters, or even about matters against the Crown. The chapters of this book present various perspectives on this 'grey zone' between legal and illegal aggression and violence and on the somewhat flexible interpretations of what was a crime and what was not, as we can see outlined in Fig. 1.1 below.⁵⁰

The figure shows that there were actually many forms of permissible aggression and even violence. Participating in an armed conflict on behalf of the Crown is the most obvious example, but aggressiveness was also needed of members of local peasant elites in some public duties and private contexts too.

A key idea of this book is that aggression and violence were an inherent part of the peasant elites' social reality, and it depended on the social context whether they remained private, turned against the state, or were channelled for the benefit of the state. Analysing violence and aggression in connection with the elite status allows also to examine the scope of peasant communalism: whether the elites were joined with the rest of the peasantry or whether they turned their aggressiveness against other peas-

	LEGAL AGGRESSION	ILLEGAL AGGRESSION	LEGAL VIOLENCE	ILLEGAL VIOLENCE
I. Confronting the Authorities	complaints and petitions	disobedience, verbal abuse	(feuds)	riots, revolts
II. Transactions with the Authorities	local office-holding	corruption	military service	conflicts with officials
III. Private context	active defense of ownership rights	high-handed action	disciplining wife, children and servants	assaults, hand fights

Fig. 1.1 Examples of legal and illegal aggression and violence

ants. Aggression and violence are approached on three contextual levels in the book: when used to (i) confront the state, (ii) transact with the state, and (iii) deal with private business in the peasant communities and networks. These levels are closely entwined with each other as the peasant elites tried to utilise the state in their private power struggles, and the state tried to utilise the peasant elites in their efforts to extend their grip to the local communities. Many phenomena also need tracing back to the fifteenth century or following through until the end of the seventeenth century.

Knut Dørum and Kimmo Katajala focus their chapters on peasant elites' resistance against state authorities or noble lords. They discuss the strategies and means of violent peasant resistance in a period when political power was being funnelled towards the centre. In the other section, Øystein Rian, Mats Hallenberg, and Johan Holm examine the transactions that took place between peasants and the state. The Crown's strengthening grip sometimes triggered joint opposition from the larger peasant community, while other times the rulers sought alliances with peasant elites to make them instruments of state authority on their local communities. Finally, Ulla Koskinen and Tiina Miettinen examine the elite's aggressive behaviour within their own communities. Focusing on the private use of violence on this micro-level reveals that well-off peasants and traders were trying to aggressively guard and expand their own wealth whilst facing threats from outside.

From the viewpoint of the new princely states, violence against the Crown was the most dangerous form of aggression. It was heavily sanctioned, as were many nonviolent forms of aggression against the authorities. Justified feuds could be condoned no longer.⁵¹ Despite this, ample historical research has shown that peasants adopted various forms of everyday resistance all over Europe.⁵² The extreme cases were violent riots and uprisings, which could even develop into large-scale revolts or wars. The peasant elites were a natural breeding ground for resistance leaders if they had joint interests with the rest of the community and if violent resistance was a relevant option for them.⁵³ As Knut Dørum points out in his chapter, even in periods that have been deemed peaceful by historians, there were a surprising number of conflicts between peasants and the Crown. Indeed, violence remained part of the peasant elite's political repertoire right up to the eighteenth century in various forms.

Nonviolent protest happened too in the form of active and passive resistance. Not only was aggression channelled into illegal demonstrations,

disobedience, or verbal protest but into legal channels as well. Peasants had the right to make petitions and voice complaints, and they readily exercised it, be it at the local courts or the king's residence in Stockholm.⁵⁴ However, as Kimmo Katajala's analysis of what eventually happened to persistent protestors from Eastern Finland demonstrates, aggression against the Crown easily bordered on the illegal.⁵⁵

Conflict and a power struggle has been one of the influential models for explaining the formation of the early modern states in Scandinavia; the other has stressed interaction and consensus between rulers and the ruled.⁵⁶ Peasant elites were certainly not always eager and obedient vehicles of the stately power; they were after all peasants who had to cope with increased taxation and conscription. In Norway, the formerly influential peasant elites faced a particularly challenging situation after the establishment of Danish rule. Øystein Rian's chapter offers an analysis of their relationship with the authorities and how they adjusted in their newly acquired subordinate roles.

In transactions between localities and the Crown, influential peasants had a special place. Similarly, in English communities, the 'middling sort' is argued to have been instrumental in allowing the state to intervene at the local level;⁵⁷ and in the Duchy of Schleswig, the state could only reach local communities with the help of its supporters in them as middlemen. Wealthy peasants built their position on close cooperation with the state authorities there, and growing social stratification went hand-in-hand with growing central power.⁵⁸ Regarding Sweden, Mats Hallenberg's chapter analyses what seems to have been one of the best options for the king: to ally himself with the peasant elites to channel their readiness for violence into military service for the state. Along the same lines, Johan Holm shows that violent protest remained the strategy of the poor in the seventeenth century, whereas the freeholders channelled their agency in legal forms of bargaining with the authorities.⁵⁹

Pre-modern violence, especially violent crime and homicide, has been a favourite subject of historical research. It was seemingly rather different from modern times: violence pervaded European societies and existed across the social spectrum, not just in the margins. It was not necessarily shameful; indeed, some violence was considered legitimate and obligatory to restore honour. It has even been stated that 'everybody was violent'.⁶⁰

Correspondingly, in the Nordic realms, there is evidence of violence having occurred at all social levels: the nobility, priests, office-holders, as well as peasants, men, and women were all capable. In Fig. 1.1, private

violence falls mostly into the state-defined category of crime, but domestic violence was an exception as the master had the right to physically discipline his wife, children, and servants in moderation when needed, and the mistress had the same rights over her children and servants.⁶¹ Aggressive measures were also a prerequisite for defending one's proprietary rights, but they could easily cross the boundaries defined in law. The judicial system underwent a profound change in this period so that private reconciliation in court gave way to state control with the aim to prosecute, judge, and punish crimes according to the law.⁶²

The socioeconomic profile of violence started to change with its overall decline in early modern Europe. Although the long-term and overall nature of this decline has been under discussion because of the problematic nature of early modern records, it is evident that there was a dramatic drop in the number of recorded homicides. This began in Northwestern Europe, especially England in the sixteenth century, and spread to the rest of Europe after, with Scandinavia generally following this overall pattern.⁶³

The most famous explanation of this has been the so-called civilisation process, meaning that hand-in-hand with the tightening grip of Crown and Church, people started to control their aggressive and violent tendencies. This model has, however, been criticised and remodelled in several ways.⁶⁴ The rational, ritualistic, and instrumental elements behind pre-modern violence have to be taken into account. In Scandinavia, it is not just the impact of a campaign of pacification and discipline and the promotion of a religious ideology undertaken by both state and Church that has been emphasised in research but also a changed mentality concerning honour and the use of violence, as well as demographic, socioeconomic, and other factors that played a role (e.g., in the form of a shortage of men through warfare).⁶⁵

As proof of regional variations, Ulla Koskinen's chapter shows that the overall decline in violence did not actually apply to the peasant elite in Western Finland, who resorted to all kinds of aggressive behaviour and violence throughout the seventeenth century. Most cases of violence that ended up in courts there were indicative of social and economic problems, and this is also dramatically shown in the case of the Fordell family in Tiina Miettinen's chapter. Members of this formerly influential family network lost their powerful position in Ostrobothnia after facing numerous charges of violence and other felonies that were finally used by the Crown against them.

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PART I

Confronting the Authorities with
Violence

Peasants and the Political Culture in Norway (c. 1400–1700)

Knut Dørum

This chapter looks at the major confrontations between the state and peasants in Norway during the period 1400–1700. These have variously been described as rebellions, riots and insurrections. Indeed, one could argue that none of these were full-scale revolts as such, if by that we mean a massive threat to the regime and social order. The peasants and their leaders would never declare that they were seeking to abolish the regime or attack the king nor that they intended to implement a new social or political order. In most cases, they would address oral or written protests or sabotage the collection of new taxes or other burdens that the state had imposed. Their protests would primarily be directed at royal officials on the local or, at best, regional level, who they felt had violated the law, abused their power, or were corrupt in some way. Their complaints might be combined with appeals to the king or the central administration in Copenhagen to intervene in order to restore law and justice, to protect their rights, and to fulfil the punishment of crimes. Furthermore, the interests and interaction involved were as a rule concentrated in a single community or a restricted region. Yet the peasants were seldom referring to interests and issues that

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spanned many localities or affected centres of power. On the other hand, the peasants all around Norway shared a common perspective or understanding of anchoring claims and complaints in legalism.

Rhetorically, these appeals to protect the “good old law” and traditional customs were the best way for the peasant to legitimise their political goals. Above all, this rhetoric was an attempt to halt the expansion of the state’s growing tax and military burdens. At the same time, violence continued to be a part of the political culture, even after the 1530s, with the gradual centralisation of power in the hands of the king and Council of the Realm (*Riksrådet*). In fact, the use of violence occurred often in political and social confrontations and conflicts and gained legitimacy to a certain extent. Violence was used by everyone and affected all social layers in Norway in 1400–1700 but often in a controlled and ritualised way.

This chapter aims to sort out the strategy, leadership, and the practical means of organised peasant resistance in order to widen our knowledge of this popular political culture in a period of transition from a loose, decentralised government to a growing monopoly of political power by the increasingly centralised state—the power state (*maktstat*)—in Denmark–Norway from the 1530s onwards. This was achieved through the development of a royally controlled administration and the gradual establishment of a system of state taxation with a variety of taxes and different rates that came to increase enormously.

In contrast to previous Norwegian research, my article argues that the controlled use of violence never stopped being an integral part of Norwegian political culture in the period 1400–1700, even though open uprisings almost vanished after the loss of national sovereignty to Denmark in 1536–1537. In other words, this perspective confronts, to a certain extent, the common view among historians that the Norwegian tradition of peaceful politics goes right back to the High Middle Ages, which would imply a low level of violence for the entire period. My investigations designate that the feud culture distinguished the period c. 1400–1530, involving not only the nobility but also the peasantry. This meant that violence could play a significant role in popular political culture. My findings also indicate that the 1530s and 1540s marked a turning point in the sense that the state chose to redefine “uprisings” to the far more condemning “rebellions”. The shift led to the deterioration of the conditions for popular resistance and political activism from below. However, the resistance became more sophisticated and adapted itself to more powerful and brutal kings and governments in the 1500s and 1600s as they began to exert

more authority than ever before over Norway. The feud thinking associated with medieval peasant risings altered after the 1530s into a gradually less challenging and aggressive approach but not without violence, insults and harsh complaints against the king's officials.

POPULAR POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In earlier research, popular uprisings have been considered a breach of law, a threat to political and social order, and as a way of resorting to illegal means—especially violence. In more recent research, there has been a tendency to emphasise that it was difficult to draw a clear distinction between legal and illegal political actions. Several international studies have shown that the authorities, to a certain degree, accepted elements of violence in peasant protests as long as they did not represent a threat to political and social order.¹ The British historian E.P. Thompson has underlined especially that the riots in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England were ritualised and predictable, with restricted goals and clear leaders.² According to several historians, protests and resistance from below were usually justified by either an appeal to religious ideas of divine justice and the words of the Gospel or more secular conceptions referring to laws and customs of the land or various social estates or groups, for example.³

It is commonly held by Nordic historians that the character of uprisings progressively changed from the 1400s to the 1600s. One explanation why open uprisings disappeared to be replaced by less confrontational methods is that the new “power state” came to abolish any kind of political or religious opposition during the seventeenth century.⁴ Another explanation is that it was in fact the new “negotiating state” that succeeded in ensuring a better level of justice, safety, and predictability to put in place a more advanced judicial apparatus to deal with complaints, conflicts, and interests from below, such as accusations against royal officials.⁵ A third perspective with particular reference to state formation in Sweden from about 1523–1680, launched by Mats Hallenberg, Johan Holm, and Dan Johansson, combines the two former models, though stressing strongly the interaction between rulers and subjects. They argue that the new state allowed more room for political action from below, which the state also benefited from and was in fact depending on. Legitimation of power exercised from above went hand in hand with participation from below, and especially, the farming elites and burghers saw opportunities to invest their social interest in the Vasa monarchy as a means to shape their own fortunes.⁶

However, there has also been a common agreement among Nordic historians about the strong continuity in which traditionalism and legalism dominated peasant resistance from the High Middle Ages until the 1800s. Another stable feature that Norwegian historians have linked to the Norwegian uprisings in the same long period is the decreasing use of violence, which resembles the pattern of what happened to Swedish popular opposition. As stated earlier, this article intends to display the breach and continuity in popular political culture in the period prior to and after the 1530s. In other words, the article's main topic is the transition from a feud culture, where magnates could take a leading part in the conflicts, to clear-cut peasant riots adapted to a harsher regime.

FEUDING AND RIOTS

It could be argued that the culture of feuding played a significant role in the 1400s and early 1500s among Norwegian aristocrats and that elements of this culture impinged upon the people too. Indeed, some major peasant uprisings seem to be intertwined with this feud mentality, not at least due to the fact that the nobles emerged as their leaders. Perhaps more importantly though is the fact that conflicts were usually resolved in rural communities via conciliation and compromise, after initial tension and insults, which often comprised violence, well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Consequently, feud-like thinking also featured the peasant society. However, feuding, in all its legal forms, did not come into existence in Norwegian political culture before the Late Middle Ages. The expectations the king had of the nobility were quite different from those he had of the peasantry. Formally or legally, feuding was an institution that belonged to the nobility as a prerogative. Nevertheless, the tradition of feud-like conflicts is obviously older.

The Norwegian historian Sverre Bagge has put forward a definition of feuding that distinguishes it clearly from legal proceedings as it includes violence, and yet compared to war, it is restricted to only some families or groups within a society.⁷ According to Bagge, feuding entails less overall use of violence than war and follows stricter rules, and the motives for it are usually revenge or recovering lost honour in retaliation to insults or assaults. In contrast, war would usually lead to the conquest of new land or the elimination of enemies. Finally, feuding is connected to the ideal that both sides in the conflict are throughout the process seeking for reconciliation and peace. Bagge has pointed out that, to a large extent,

the Norwegian kingdom had succeeded in stamping out feuds in the thirteenth century, and the efforts made from above were reflected in changes made to the legislation at this time. Indeed, the programme to eliminate internal struggle and blood revenge stands as one of the main themes in *Speculum Regale* (the king's mirror) and in the kings' sagas of the thirteenth century and also figuring as a central element in royal ideology.

Another Norwegian historian, Erik Opsahl, has focused on the prevailing feud mechanisms in political conflicts in the Late Middle Ages, which involved both kings and magnates. In 1326, a violent conflict ended with reconciliation between the two sides led by the regent and representative for the queen, Erling Vidkunsson, on one side and Baron Finn Ogmundsson and his allies on the other.⁸ On two other occasions in the 1330s, several major nobles engaged in a feud against Magnus VII Eriksson, the King of Sweden and Norway, and again it was resolved after negotiations resulted in terms that both parties found acceptable.⁹ Meanwhile, in the 1450s, the feuding between Hartvig Krummedike and Alv Knutsson flared up into a major political concern for the three kingdoms of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark; so in 1458, Christian I took it upon himself to lead a process of reconciliation between the two nobles, but Alv Knutsson refused to negotiate.¹⁰ For Opsahl, it is also interesting that archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson, in 1529, publicly announced his feud with the nobleman Vincens Lunge in a way similar to the one Vincens had used to announce his feud with the nobleman Henrik Krummedike earlier. Opsahl concludes from this that feuding among nobles appears to have been institutionalised in Norway in the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, although he sees no evidence of a feud culture among the peasantry from 1300 to 1600.

This is the opposite of what has been documented in Denmark and Sweden where one finds feuds between aristocrats that often involved the general populace in addition to feuding that is restricted to two groups or two individual peasants. Several court records in both countries bear witness to the fact that these peasants were even given the authorisation to resolve their feuds as part of a conflict. In fact, feuding terms and formalities occur often in Denmark and Sweden, with the aggressors formally dismissing the peace between themselves and their defined enemies, announcing why there is a feud, and accompanying this with a few specific threats. Another element in this feuding process is the reconciliation, which often led to the payment of compensation to restore honour and the balance of power.¹¹

The Swedish historian, Peter Reinholdsson, has argued that the term *uppror* or rebellion is not compatible with the special character of the political conflicts that occurred in fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth-century Sweden. There were no such things as peasant rebellions, he argues, since both peasants and noblemen often acted in close conjunction, and they shared several concerns and interests in opposing the king or another nobleman (with his respective loyal peasants). According to Reinholdsson, these conflicts or events are thus not to be conceived as rebellions as such but as feuds,¹² where the defining elements he finds to be are the close relations between peasants and their lords. “It was these bonds of mutual obligations”, as Reinholdsson puts it, “that gave the conflicts of the period their special character”.¹³

Opsahl is correct in pointing out how few documents there are to tell us more about feuding among the Norwegian peasantry after the 1200s. However, as Reinholdsson argues, the aristocratic feuds often involved the peasantry. In fact, the above mentioned peace treaty from 1458 refers back to “all the dispute and disagreement” (*all then trætta oc twedraght*) that had taken place between Henrik Krummedike and the “good men in Norway, clergy as well as laity”, which was clearly referring to many others in Norway, such as common people (i.e., peasants), who had fought alongside these nobles. The only exception to Henrik’s offer of reconciliation was Alv Knutsson since he apparently still had many accusations against Henrik (*vnden taghen then skylling her Alff Knwtsson sigher sigh at haffua til mik*). This aristocratic conflict thus contained many elements of feuding, and as a comprehensive conflict, it involved more than just the nobility in Norway.¹⁴

Steinar Imsen has studied all the episodes of major peasant unrest in Norway in the 1300–1700 period, and he has observed what he calls an extreme low level of violence.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Rolf Fladby and Jørn Sandnes have highlighted the moderate and often local restricted protests and resistance in Norway in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.¹⁶ Imsen deliberately omits the term *oprør* (“revolt”) to describe these outbreaks. Like Sandnes, he sticks to the more general term *bondemotstand* or “peasant resistance”. According to Imsen, the periods of greatest unrest and violence among the peasantry were 1420–1440, 1496–1508, 1519–1530, and 1570–1612. Imsen wishes to limit the examples of real rebellions (*oprør*) to relatively few events. His criteria in these cases are the use of weapons and comprehensive participation involving peasants from a wide area. Studying Imsen’s examples, one is not only struck by the nature of these uprisings but also by the components that are characteristic of

feuds—which Imsen does not focus on. Incidentally, the expression most often used in a Norwegian medieval context to describe organised peasant resistance is *oppreisning*, which resembles the Swedish word *upresning* and the English word *uprising*. As we shall see, *oppreisning* was a term used to describe less severe or challenging forms of unrest than the later *oprør*, which Reinholdsson has translated as rebellion.

THE UPRISINGS IN 1436–1438

The first of these uprisings occurred in Southeastern Norway in 1436–1438 and led to mobilisation across the region in the political vacuum that was left after King Eric III was deposed. A key motivation was the massive resentment of the brutal regime of bailiffs and sheriffs that had been run by Danes and other foreigners throughout Norway. Amund Sigurdsson was the noble who took the charge of the uprising, aided by peasants from across a large region and several of the lower nobility. In 1436–1438, the bishop’s residence was occupied by the rebels, and this was followed by claims that had proto-nationalistic features. They succeeded in obtaining concessions that would henceforth prohibit foreigners from enjoying positions in either the royal or the ecclesiastical administration and recognition for their general condemnation of all the injustice and sufferings that these “men of violence” from abroad had caused. The leader Amund Sigurdsson begged the king to forgive him and promised he never would act against the king again, assuring him that, together with his men, he wished to serve his king and obey his will, but the king had to guarantee security for his life and grant him mercy.¹⁷ Indeed, the later treaty document says that the king “declared that he mercifully in his love and friendship would forgive Amund Sigurdsson and all the people who had joined him in the riot” (*uplop*).¹⁸ At the same time, the king declared that the Norwegian Council of the Realm had “cancelled all feud and disagreement” (*afflyst all ffeigde oc vsemiia*) concerning all those involved; every man should henceforth enjoy “friendship and love” (*winskap oc kierlighet*). The resolution applied to not only rich and poor but also clergy and laity. All these terms are strongly attached to feuding, as Reinholdsson has described it, and it seems that there existed a flexible political culture that left space for conciliation, mercy, and pardon for nobles after warlike conflicts against the king and his bailiffs.

On the other hand, the king and his bailiffs could take an altogether different stance to more clear-cut peasant uprisings. In 1439, the bailiff in

Akershus, Olav the Stomach (*Olav Buk*), threatened to punish not just every man who had joined in the uprisings led by Hallvard Grey Hair (*Gratoppe løpp*) but also those who had stayed back at home in the region of Telemark and also if they were refusing to pay the fines they were liable for; in that case, he would spare neither women nor children.¹⁹ The rebels were accused of having plundered and ruined properties belonging not only to Olav but also his mother and sister.²⁰ In the same year, Olav had declared in another letter that Hallvard Grey Hair and his followers had plundered churches and people in his district, beaten and arrested his tenants, and threatened both clerks and laity.²¹ The bailiff then tried to talk the peasants into sending representatives to the court sessions organised by the Norwegian Council of the Realm. He addressed them as “dear friends” and was eager to persuade them that they would all benefit from the justice that would prevail and that he was merely seeking “peace and reconciliation” (*fred oc frielse*). At the same time, however, he described their “riot and disagreement” (*uplop oc missemia*) as having been against the will of the Virgin Mary, the king, and the Council of the Realm. So it seems that Olav the Stomach could oscillate between being harsh with the one hand and merciful and ready to find compromises that would suit the peasants with the other. Indeed, in 1438, the leader of the riots—Hallvard Grey Hair—was condemned as a traitor to the king by another peasant leader, who had been one of Hallvard’s conspirators, but now he was seeking to be pardoned by the king.²² Hallvard was actually called “the king’s enemy and traitor” (*konungsens owen oc fforædhare*).

What we find from sources in the 1430s is that the opportunity for political activism, from a peasant’s perspective, was far more limited than that for the nobility. Amund Sigurdsson was treated as an equal with legitimate interests, whereas Hallvard Grey Hair was clearly designated as a traitor by the authorities. Nevertheless, there was substantial flexibility in resolving many of the conflicts between state and peasantry, and the state usually strove to find the most peaceful solutions by using the same kind of conciliation tactics that were used to resolve feuding.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE NORWEGIAN THRONE (1448–1450)

In 1448–1450, the Swedish regent Charles (Karl Knutsson Bonde) managed to mobilise a large number of the Norwegian peasant elite together with the lower stratum of the lay aristocracy in his struggle for the Norwegian throne. This strategy paved the way for him to challenge the

rights and claims of the Danish king, Christian I. These supportive social groups all around Norway—at least as far as the signatories concern—seem to have been counted as clients of the more powerful aristocrats with heraldic signs and honourable and exclusive titles, as demonstrated in Erik Opsahl’s investigations of Norwegian political culture in the fifteenth century.²³ All the letters issued from the “common people” (*menige allmoghen*) in both the northern and southern parts of Norway concluded that Charles was the best candidate because of the alliance and good relations between Norway and Sweden. One of the letters also refers to the fact that some inhabitants had been forced and threatened with accusations of high treason if they did not seal letters in favour of Christian’s claim to the throne. Another letter raises the importance of Norway not being a part of the Danish Realm.²⁴ Moreover, according to the letter that was sealed in Trondheim by representatives from several parts of Norway, the common people of Norway, together with the clergy, knights, and squires, had elected and crowned Charles as long as they could not have a Norwegian-born man, or the former monarch, Eric III, as king. Under other circumstances, they would have wished Sigurd Jonsson to be the Norwegian king, and failing that Eric, if he had been peaceful-minded towards the Swedes. It was pointed out in the letter that God had linked Norway and Sweden with a common border of more than 400 or 500 Norwegian miles, and the destruction of this alliance would mean suffering for the people of both kingdoms, especially the poorer Norwegians. It seems the main reason for making these political declarations was to protect the Norwegian law and constitution.

For Opsahl, this massive mobilisation of the Norwegian gentry reflects political activism from below and reveals also the ability among the local elite to form strategies and promote claims serving their own political interests. Furthermore, Opsahl stresses the importance of strong personal patron–client bonds from bottom to top, that is, from the leaders of the peasants to the upper strata of the aristocrats. He asserts that it is too simplistic to interpret the letters from representatives of the common people as merely demands made by the elite. The contents of the letters, which express a preference for a native-born king, demonstrate the political will of the common people.²⁵ One objection that could be made, however, is regarding the propagandistic nature of the five letters and the somewhat standardised formula, which indicates the strong influence of an aristocratic leadership. Another objection is that, like other eminent men, the aristocrat and commander of Tunsberghus—Erik Sæmundsson—played a

significant role in making appeals, arranging propaganda, and taking letters round the country. Erik sent an open letter to the people of Agder in which he described the Norwegian supporters of Christian as traitors because they were trying to put a Danish and German king on the Norwegian throne.²⁶ On the other hand, Opsahl is correct in emphasising that there was resentment among Norwegian peasants in the 1430s that was indeed aimed at brutal and greedy foreigners in political and administrative positions or with fiefs, which corresponded with the repeated claim issued by the Norwegian nobility during the fifteenth century that royal officials should be Norwegian-born or naturalised as Norwegians. Thus we can see that this broad social participation in 1448–1450 was most likely due to shared political enemies and therefore shared interests.

THE UPRISINGS OF 1496–1508

In the period 1496–1508, the uprisings became more dangerous and threatening as they involved several great magnates, and a number of districts became engaged in violence or homicide. It was a time when the Swedish regent and politicians once more attempted to take advantage of an unstable situation and obtain Norwegian support against Denmark, just as the Danes were planning to permanently integrate Sweden into Denmark. In 1501, the aristocrat Knut Alvsson, in alliance with the Swedish regent and key members of the Swedish Council of the Realm, started the most comprehensive and challenging uprising in Norwegian history against the Danish King Hans, and a large portion of the peasants in various parts of Norway ended up supporting him.²⁷

The years 1496–1501 saw large groups of peasants becoming active in well-organised uprisings in Norway and officials of the king getting murdered. Arild Kane, a prominent member of the *Riksrådet*, together with several of his men, was the first to die in Sunnmøre in 1497,²⁸ and then in Romerike, a year later it was the turn of the unpopular sheriff Lasse Skjold. The authorities had to negotiate in the parishes where the uprisings had apparently occurred in reaction to brutal and greedy bailiffs and sheriffs—Lasse Skjold, for instance, was accused of violence, rape, and fining people for no due reason.²⁹ One could therefore argue that the Romerike peasants had acted in self-defence and had felt themselves be in a position where they had been forced to kill him. Indeed, this argument may have influenced the final decision that led to mercy and pardon of the crime for most of those involved. However, two or three

of the Romerike ringleaders were tried for high treason for having held an assembly in defiance of the king. All their property was confiscated, and they were executed after a trial in Konghelle, without any warning of what lay in store for them.³⁰ Similarly, the leaders of the uprising in the Sunnmøre were summarily executed as murderers who had committed *ubotamål* (a crime that could not be settled by fines), while the others who had joined in received the lesser sentence of having all their property confiscated.

Early in 1501, after an armed struggle of a few months, Knut Alvsson secured control over the major regions of Østlandet and parts of Vestlandet by seizing administratively and militarily important castles. Once he had seized Bergen Castle with the help of 300 peasants, for instance, it meant that the Danes had now lost military control over the entire Bergen fief—signifying conquest of the major parts of Western Norway (Vestlandet).³¹ At this point, although Knut lacked support from some prominent Norwegian nobles who remained loyal to King Hans, he decided to present his complaints about the king's men and Henrik Krummedike in particular at the Swedish *Herredagen* (meeting of the lords). In his speech there in the spring of 1501, Knut described the king and his men as “the malicious enemies of our realm [the Norwegian Realm] and of mine”, and used words from the Halmstad and the Kalmar decrees of 1483 to declare that these men had used “injustice and usurpation” (*oreth och ofverwold*) to exert their power. These decrees referred to the people's right to overthrow and dethrone a tyrannical king. Lars Hamre interprets Knut's reference to mean that by treating his subjects badly in this way, the king had released his subjects from oath and homage so that they could openly declare a feud against him.³² In August of the same year, Knut also joined the Swedish magnates in publicly breaking all bonds of fidelity to King Hans.³³ Nevertheless, some weeks later the Norwegian Council of the Realm declared that Knut had been “guilty of assembling people and initiating an uprising against the king and all of us” (“Her Knwth alffsons tianare wylie göræ naghén samningh och Wpp Reysningh j moth noriges throna war nadighe Herre och oss alle”).³⁴ Although in many people's eyes what Knut had arranged had a kind of legitimacy, the statement above indicates, at first sight, that what he had done was in fact totally illegal. According to the national code laid down in 1274 by King Magnus Håkonsson (the Law-mender), the uprising was “against the Norwegian throne, the king and all of us”. In effect, this meant he was being charged with the crime of “high treason” (*landrød*).

In 1502, Knut and King Hans eventually reconciled and Knut was admitted to have safe conduct by the king's representative, Henrik Krummedike. A sort of a peace treaty seemed to have been struck, and yet Knut was killed in dubious circumstances after entering the peace meeting onboard one of Henrik Krummedike's ships, which strongly indicated that Henrik had played a significant role in this misdeed. Interestingly, no murderer is mentioned in the verdicts produced by the tendentious one-off court that was set up by Henrik in Oslo to investigate what had happened. Instead, Henrik insisted in it that Knut had broken the terms of safe conduct after bringing too many soldiers on board, and then he and his men had verbally and unnecessarily insulted the king. In what effectively then turned into a posthumous trial, Knut was also accused of "the act of leading the country and the people away from their king", and he was summarily pronounced a traitor to his country (*landráðamaðr*) and his king (*drottinsvikari*). It was also established that Knut had violated the terms of safe conduct.³⁵ Hamre draws the conclusion that Knut Alvsson had, in fact, conducted an uprising (*reisning*), which was based on the legal theory and ideology contained in the Halmstad decree of 1483. The murder of Knut and the events immediately preceding it illustrate how strong feuding still was.³⁶ Indeed the feud was later exploited by the Swedes as propaganda when they encouraged the Norwegians to rebel against the Danish king. Again the Halmstad decrees were cited as well as the right of rebellion against "a tyrannical king".³⁷

While the acts of Knut Alvsson possessed a kind of legitimacy, the peasants in Romerike and Sunnmøre were both simply condemned and punished.³⁸ Both uprisings ended with executions, but the relatively soft treatment of the peasants in Romerike was the consequence of tactical considerations. The Danish king needed the support from the locals around Oslo and Båhus in the ongoing conflict with the Swedish magnates, and he was clearly aware of the strong connections between the Swedish and Norwegian nobles.³⁹ Indeed, one of the reasons there were more lenient sentences for the Romerike rebels was the fact that the uprising in Romerike was directed at one of Knut Alvsson's men.

It is important to mention that king's men or officials getting killed in connection with peasant uprisings were no novelty. We also hear of these in *thing* meetings from as far back as, for instance, 1445 in Gudbrandsdalen, where the bailiff was fatally assaulted; or in Ullensvang (1446), where a sheriff was grievously injured (though not killed); and Båhuslen (1494), where there was a double manslaughter of a sheriff and a judge (*lag-*

mann).⁴⁰ In 1494, there was also a riot (*upplöp*) in Tønsberg against the chancellor Jens Pålsson, which resulted in equal measures of mercy and punishment. Henrik Krummedike spared their lives but not without fining them heavily.⁴¹

The widespread unpopularity of the Danish regime persisted, and the Norwegian and Swedish magnates continued to collaborate in their opposition to it.⁴² In 1503, the Swedes had the military support of the peasants when attacking the important castle of Tønsberg.⁴³ Then, in 1507–1508, a massive mobilisation of peasants in the hinterlands of Eastern Norway arose against King Christian II who, having abolished the law of Saint Olaf, was accused in a letter of being the cause of the huge discontent “among the nobility, clergy and all free men” in the country. This time it was King Christian, instead of King Hans, who was guilty of “injustice and usurpation” (*then store oret och offuerwaldh*), again referring to the right of rebellion against a “tyrannical king”, as contained in the Halmstad decree. One of Christian’s misdeeds, which had terrified the common people, was to dismiss the incumbent bishop of Oslo in favour of a Danish candidate.⁴⁴

The author of the accusatory letter was the regent of Sweden, Svante Nilsson, who had his own reasons for wanting to see Christian’s downfall in Norway and gain his own foothold there, but other sources confirm also the dissatisfaction among the peasants and the severity of the uprising. Later on, King Christian took severe measures to crush the riot by summoning 500 soldiers to march on them. The leaders of the uprising in the hinterlands of Eastern Norway, including Herlog Hudfat, were then summarily executed.

It is clear that the events of 1496–1508 caused a major change in the regime’s approach to riots and rebellions. The opposition had been stronger and more dangerous than ever and now the state evidently felt the need for more brutal measures.

FROM FEUD TO TOTAL OBEDIENCE

Hans Jacob Orning has documented that both ecclesiastical and royal ideology in Norway in the thirteenth century emphasised profoundly the expectations of obedience, subordination, and loyalty among retainers, magnates, and peasants towards the king. However, what was true in theory was not necessarily the case in political practice. The strength of a monarchy depended on the ruler’s presence and how situations of conflict were responded to, especially since neither the monarch nor subjects

were bound by any strictly formalised laws.⁴⁵ It was clear, however, that the king could definitely tolerate more opposition from the aristocracy than from the peasants. Peasants were supposed to be more obedient and subservient than the king's retainers.

But Lars Hamre sees a change in Norway from the 1430s onwards, with regard to the kings' policy towards popular resistance. Royal sanctions became more severe for fear of what might happen otherwise. As mentioned above, during the uprisings in the 1430s, King Eric III was deposed and forced into exile, and the Norwegian peasants were involved in military actions in Sweden.⁴⁶ As Hamre notes, there were legal grounds for considering riots treasonable, according to the national code of 1274, and capital punishment could be the outcome.⁴⁷ However, execution came not to be the reaction from above until the 1490s when the Danish foothold in Norway was at stake. As Hamre also mentions, the King Magnus national code of 1274 strongly underlines the act of treason against the king as a severe threat and crime to society, and capital punishment was the outcome.⁴⁸ This provision could serve as legal ground for harsher punishment. It is clear that the state authorities perceived the uprisings in Sunnmøre and Romerike in the 1490s as serious threats, and they were eager to demonstrate punishments as warnings against new uprisings in the future. Perhaps the most threatening of all these uprisings though was the riot that Knut Alvsson initiated in 1501. In this case, the rioting was so widespread that it was some years before the Danish regime was in any position to intervene effectively, and so the main policy was to ensure the destruction of Knut Alvsson.

In the case of Sweden, Peter Reinholdsson points to the 1520s and 1530s as a watershed, after which, "uprising" (*resning/upresning*) was gradually superseded by the term "rebellion" (*upror*) to describe these political disturbances. This change of terminology also coincided with the process of state-building and the consequent requirement of greater subordination and loyalty from the king's subjects, according to Reinholdsson.⁴⁹

When summoning a peace meeting in 1532, King Frederick I wished to meet representatives from all social estates—nobility, clergy, burghers, and peasants—for the purposes of "peace and agreement" (*fredtt oc enighedtt*) and to "put an end to any objections and disagreements" (*att nidlegge all twesth oc twedracht*) that the previous king, Christian II, had maliciously caused. Note that Frederick is not condemning the fact that many Norwegians had given their support to Christian II and nor does the king stigmatise the Norwegians as rebellious and so forth. King Frederick

in fact uses the wording common to feuding, to resolve “disagreement and conflict” rather than disobedience and betrayal, and greets his subjects as “dear friends”. We also find a ritual reference to the patron saint of Norway—Olaf—and the wish that Denmark, Norway, and Sweden reached an agreement to secure a friendly union once more so that the poor people of Norway could live without fear of continuous war.⁵⁰ The same year, on behalf of the Norwegian Council of the Realm, the archbishop Olav Engelbrektsson promised to summon representatives from all over Norway to swear an oath of fidelity (*huldskap, mandskaff oc throtieniste*) to the king. In addition, the people should be prepared to deliver an extra tax linked to the coming of King Frederick I.⁵¹

In 1535, Christian III proclaimed that all his subjects in every social estate should “sit still” and not be tempted to join a rebellion (*oprør*). In return, the king promised to instruct his sheriffs and officials in general to act in accordance with law and justice and to do no unjust against the law of Saint Olaf.⁵² A new royal letter warning about *oprør* addressed to the people of Båhuslen from 1536 contains the same references and reflects the same line of argument as used in 1535.⁵³ It could also be argued that not even these letters reflect any real change in mentality and attitudes from late medieval political culture, although it is true that the new word *oprør* was being used instead of *opløp* or *opreising*, and that the king was being more systematic in putting down any sign of rebellion in Norway.

The loss of independence in 1536 and the integration of the Norwegian kingdom into the Danish Realm, together with the abolishment of the Norwegian Council of the Realm, marked a shift in the relationship between the state and subjects. The Reformation and Lutheranism ushered in a new and harder period of politics. The union between Denmark and Norway before 1536 had been looser with greater Norwegian participation in government and administration, but after years of huge resistance in Norway against the Danish regime, Christian intended to have a more centralised administration directed from Denmark.

In 1540, the peasants of Telemark took violent action against some workers from Germany who had been shipped in to a mine ore on behalf of the Danish king. After being repeatedly harassed, the Germans had to report back to the king that it would be impossible for them to accomplish their work there. The king was adamant that the mine should be operational, and he announced that those responsible for preventing this happening would be punished severely.⁵⁴ Christian III therefore ordered military units to intervene and crush the peasant uprising. Five leaders of

the peasants were executed by the sixth one, who was spared his life on the condition that he should kill the other five as a punishment. In addition, peasants all over Telemark had to pay heavy fines.⁵⁵ These traumatic events came to be remembered as part of the folk tradition.

In 1541, royal officials reported that a peasant army in Setesdal—a remote area inland consisting of deep forests and mountains—was marching south to the coast and towards the administrative centres in order to kill every official of the king. It is almost certain that these sources were exaggerating the events into an unlikely drama. On the other side, the rebellious peasants appeared to be frightening and threatening, which made brutal reactions from above necessary. Several peasant leaders seem to have been executed.⁵⁶

In 1549, the King of Denmark sent a letter to “the peasants in Marker”, an area in Southeastern Norway. He declared that those who held meetings or “rebelled against the bailiff” (*oprør mod kongens lensmand*) would be punished severely, and they were told to help the king in reporting those among them who they thought were guilty of this behaviour. Meanwhile, the bailiff in Oslo, Peder Hansen, received royal instructions to summon all those who were being disobedient or rebellious to appear in Oslo at the regional court (*lagtinget*).⁵⁷ The reason for the resistance lay in resentment of the *foring* tax, which had superseded the older obligation for farms to feed the king’s horses that rested upon the farms. It is interesting that the king simultaneously announced that he had examined the Norwegian Law and what the law from old times said about the taxes the peasant were obliged to pay. By doing this, the king sought legalism to calm down the protesting peasants.

These examples from the 1530s and 1540s perhaps show the clearest signs of a change in how the Danish Crown henceforth treated rebellious activity from below. King Christian III went much further than his predecessors, even though signs of a harsher policy were already developing in 1496–1508. The penalties were now generally more severe.

FROM ARISTOCRATIC REBELLIONS TO PEASANT RIOTS

It was not just the penalties imposed that were more severe after the 1540s, and which characterised the following period until about 1700. Aristocrats never became involved in upheavals after that. In 1436–1438 and 1448–1450, the main political actors appeared to be magnates, and in 1501, the peasant army was rallied together by Knut Alvsson, who was

a high nobleman. In the 1430s, the Norwegian aristocracy clearly saw an advantage in using peasants in their struggle against the Danish kingdom's policy of favouring Danish and German nobles over them in terms of fief donations and political-administrative positions in Norway. The anger and frustration among the peasants against these foreign bailiffs and sheriffs was easy to tap into and exploit for the Norwegian nobility in 1448–1450, just as it was in the conflicts around 1500.

Erik Opsahl has seen a political and social link between the Norwegian nobility and the upper strata of the peasantry in a military institution that came into being in the first two–three decades of the fourteenth century. Noblemen of various ranks began to take sworn retainers into their service, bound them to oath, and let them reside in their houses. This practice had grown out of the arrangement in the 1200s where the king's liegemen were entitled to have housecarls. However, according to the *Hirdskrá* (collection of laws regarding the king's liegemen and the corporation they constituted), in 1273, only the royal bailiffs and the barons, and men of even higher ranks, had the right to have housecarls or sworn retainers. Such an increased militarisation of the Norwegian nobility appeared to be threatening to the king as every noble man tended to possess his own contingent of soldiers. In an ordinance of 1332, King Magnus Erikson forbade everyone, except privileged high-ranked persons, to take into service sworn retainers, also called “lord's retainers”.⁵⁸ But later on, he had to accept this type of bastard feudalism or contingents of soldiers serving noble men, which not only strengthened the Norwegian nobility politically and militarily but also the military capacity of the kingdom. Through the sworn retainers, a peasant elite emerged as a social layer between nobility and peasantry. One major consequence was the increased possibility of a top-down mobilisation of ordinary peasants in military conflicts.

In my opinion, this institutional development paved the way for military political activism in the late medieval period—a time when the nobility and peasantry often combined forces. By the sixteenth century, however, the bonds tying these two gradually loosened until they finally slipped off, resulting in more clear-cut peasant political activism from then on. A major factor in this change was the gradual decline of the Norwegian nobility in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. From 1350 to 1520, the number of noble families in Norway decreased from about 600 to 200,⁵⁹ and during the seventeenth century, the nobility almost died out.⁶⁰ After 1536, the Norwegian nobility faced political annihilation as the Norwegian Council of the Realm was dissolved and the royal

policy of handing out fiefs strongly favoured the Danish aristocracy. It is interesting that Magne Njåstad, in his studies of peasant riots in Trøndelag (1550–1600), does not find any trace of the local aristocracy in charge of the peasant resistance.⁶¹ It is also interesting that some investigations tone down the features of peasant elites in the 1600s, such as for the region of Agder and the region of Ringerike,⁶² while several other studies tend to reveal elite structures in the peasantry.⁶³ Along with other studies of the sixteenth century, it confirms that uprisings were becoming more local in nature—sparked off by incidents and events taking place in just one or only a few communities, where there were only one or two–three royal officials involved.⁶⁴ Localism had, of course, always featured in the uprisings of the late medieval period too, but several of these also originated in transregional or national social networks and involved fighting a foreign government (as was obviously the case in 1448–1450).

THE SEVERE PENALTY REGIME AND VIOLENCE

As Øystein Rian has emphasised, the Danish Church Ordinance of 1537 (in Latin) and 1539 (in Danish) marked the beginning of a profoundly harsher censorship of the printed word; a stronger royal rhetoric, claiming obedience from subjects in general and from royal officials in particular; and the systematic indoctrination of the Norwegian population in Evangelical Lutheranism.⁶⁵ Hans Eyvind Næss has considered the Reformation in Norway to mark the start of an era in which punishments that were meted out were generally more severe. As far as violence was concerned, Næss sees one catalyst for this change, the adoption of Danish regulations that issued death sentences for those accused and tried for murder or manslaughter. As late as 1539, it was stated in a Norwegian decree that the punishment for killing was fines to both the family of the victim and the king. But by 1558, a Danish decree states that a murderer should pay with “his life” for the life he took, and so the severe penalty traditions of Denmark’s medieval manors and the Royal Danish Navy were thus transmitted to Norway. In 1570, Judge Nils Stub in Oslo chose to follow the earlier decree of 1539, but he was put under pressure to follow the Danish legislation and sentence the murderers to execution. Furthermore, by the 1560s and 1570s, several royal officials in Norway seem to have accepted the principles imported from Denmark, and several decrees were issued from 1558–1590 to make it easier to prosecute and sentence killers to death. However, as Næss points out, many manslaughter trials were still

being carried out at the beginning of the seventeenth century according to the old Norwegian law that required compensation be paid rather than capital punishment be carried out.⁶⁶

Robert Muchembled observes that the number of homicides fell sharply in Western Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century, while the number of death penalties for this crime greatly increased. He highlights the years between 1562 and 1648 as being a crucial period in which the absolute monarchs of that era were behind a massive theoretical and judicial effort to discipline populations. The principal targets for these governments were those people who had committed acts of lethal aggression or infanticide.⁶⁷ Both Heikki Ylikangas and Muchembled draw attention to the correlation between states strengthening the punishment for homicides and a general pacification of the inhabitants and a decrease in violence. A shift from the regulation of violence by families to a system under the control of the state (and the Church) happened in a context of growing “social discipline”, as Muchembled underlines. Several edicts were issued so that there were fewer opportunities for “sin” to occur (e.g., the abuse of alcohol and the carrying of weapons).

Jørn Sandnes has argued that, in Norway, violence and homicides reached their highest level in the remote areas or the periphery, where land self-ownership was more common, and that it was common all over Norway in both the late medieval period and the sixteenth century. He finds that in many regions, there was a clear reduction of violence towards the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Hans Eyvind Næss argues that violent behaviour had significantly dropped in Norway by about 1620.⁶⁹ For instance, in the fiefdom of Stavanger, there was a sharp decline in the number of homicides that resulted in capital punishment in the seventeenth century—particularly before 1660.⁷⁰ And in studies of the Agder region, Margit Løyland has similarly noted a steep drop in the number of cases of violent crime and homicide over the course of the seventeenth century,⁷¹ with a more drastic fall in the remote hinterland of the area than along the more densely populated coastal areas, which indicates that the change in state policy affected the areas where violent crime had been more common to begin with.

There is widespread agreement among Norwegian historians that once capital punishment (the focus of Næss’ attentions) became the expected legal outcome from around 1620, it had the immediate effect of reducing the amount of violence.⁷² This is similar to the situation in Finland, where Heikki Ylikangas has noted that the normal punishment for homicide was

death by the 1620s.⁷³ According to Ylikangas, the age of discipline in the seventeenth century is connected to a nascent power state that gained a monopoly over the use of violence that enabled it to pacify society. The medieval society, which to a certain extent still existed around 1600, had left people in a state where the rule of law was not sufficient enough to afford them protection; individuals turned to their families, and the families would strengthen and maintain their position by intimidating and terrorising those around them.⁷⁴

Erling Sandmo has gone further with this perspective and has asserted, without due controversy, that the Danish state of the seventeenth century succeeded in introducing a new understanding of violence among the Norwegian population so that homicide and violent behaviour were henceforth stigmatised.⁷⁵ Sandmo has been criticised for neglecting records proving that severe violence had in fact been condemned in Norway earlier.⁷⁶ However, it is apparent that Sandmo has revealed a society in the 1600s where the use of violence was more or less accepted and considered a crucial part of masculine honour. Furthermore, violent behaviour occurred often in conflicts between family members, neighbours, and friends who were strongly bound socially and emotionally. The common custom seems to have been that violence or even homicide should be resolved by reconciliation, peacemaking, and compensation and that the main goals for society and the individuals within it were friendship, agreement, and interaction between men—not conflict and antagonism. Sandmo has documented an interesting change that occurred from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Not only did homicides and brutal violence greatly decrease but there was also less tolerance of petty violence, so offenders could be sued for pushing, hitting someone over the ear, and pulling hair, for instance.

One could point out, however, that the old culture of there being a permissible level of violence to restore the honour of own self, other individuals, or a group did not suddenly disappear with the “judicial revolution” of the seventeenth century.⁷⁷ Although it was less frequent than before, throughout the seventeenth century, it was still sometimes allowed for killers to compensate a victim’s family by paying them a heavy fine. Terje Sødal has shown that as many as 148 of the 199 homicides that happened in Agder (over the period 1601–1663) resulted in fines and only 51 in capital punishment. But the number of death sentences issued did increase over this period, unlike in the sixteenth century when very few killers received capital punishment. All the same, it seems that some areas

that were more heavily influenced by the old culture remained relatively violent.

Frode Brenden Reime, for example, has found that in the remote Norwegian district of Hallingdal, there was still a relatively high frequency of homicides even in the eighteenth century. There were 15 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants annually, which approaches the level of violent crime in England in the High Middle Ages (20 homicides a year per 100,000 inhabitants).⁷⁸ The homicides in Hallingdal seem to be strongly connected to an ideal of manliness and the expectation that a man should use violence to maintain his honour and the honour of his family.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the main tendency is clear: the age of violence appeared to be in decline during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But what consequences did this judicial revolution have on the character of riots?

UPRISINGS BETWEEN 1570 AND 1611

Both Steinar Imsen and Jørn Sandnes conclude that armed rebellions in Norway belonged to the period prior to the 1530s.⁸⁰ It seems, however, that they have neglected the fact that there were massive protests against conscription and a considerable level of desertion among peasant soldiers in the periods 1563–1570 and 1611–1613. These events mirrored the reactions that were elicited among peasants against the state's militarisation of society; it meant a threat to stability and to the rights of the peasantry. The desertion had quite an effect on the conduct of war and points to a level of political organisation connected to peasant resistance. It is worth noting that, while King Frederick II pardoned the numerous deserters with a general amnesty in the 1570s, Christian IV chose a more brutal solution.⁸¹ However, in both cases, only one leader received the death penalty.⁸²

In 1574 and 1578, the peasants of Gauldal in Trøndelag organised a mass protest and tax strike. The bailiff, Ludvig Munk, informed the king and described it as “a rebellion” (*oprør*), while the peasants accused Munk of abusing his power, demanding payment of illegal taxes, and criminal confiscation of land and property. Munk's brutal and uncompromising behaviour led to a protracted conflict, in which he eventually received aid from the central government to defeat the peasants. After this, he had five peasant leaders beheaded and their bodies desecrated. Their royal arrest warrant had referred to them as “rebellious and disobedient subjects” (*opprørske og ulydige undersätter*). Here we encounter a termi-

nology that differed greatly from what had been common in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when all the peasants who had taken part simply ended up being fined heavily in accordance with the traditional reaction from above. In comparison, these executions shocked many communities and appeared as exceptionally harsh punishments.⁸³

The widows of the executed peasants tried to press charges against the executioner, and a new court came to the conclusion that the peasant leaders should be acquitted posthumously. Their bodies were then dug up and reburied in consecrated ground. Eventually, in 1597, Ludvig Munk was forced to take responsibility for all his misdeeds, and a verdict made it clear that he should pay heavy fines to the widows and other peasants he had wronged. The state authorities thus came to change their minds and ended up showing sympathy for the peasants. Nevertheless, this was a case of the state taking two steps forward and one step back: as overall, a new and harsher regime was established in Denmark–Norway after the Reformation in 1536 and 1537.

In the spring of 1611, the Danish king prepared for war by conscripting 2000 men from Båhuslen, 6000 men from Eastern and Western Norway, and 2000 men from Trøndelag. The mobilisation failed because after gathering for a while, the soldiers deserted in a more or less organised fashion. The punishment was in most cases fines; from the fiefs of Lista, Mandal, and Nedenes, for instance, the king's officials forced the peasants to pay as much as 4365 *daler* for desertion,⁸⁴ while in the scattered and thinly populated region of Jämtland, the fines came to 7740 *daler*.⁸⁵

But the massive extent of these desertions in the Kalmar War (1611–1613) did not seem to reverse the general trend in the relationship between state and peasantry as much as one might think. It is remarkable that just a year before the outbreak of the Kalmar War, the state authorities were able to quell uprisings and mutiny by simply declaring that the leader would be sentenced to death. However, capital punishment was far from regularly actually carried out, and the leaders would receive pardons and be forced to pay heavy fines instead. Ingemund Torsson was spared his life, but he was rendered bankrupt financially as well as socially by the heavy fine of 200 *daler*, and he was condemned to exile from the realm for the remainder of his life.⁸⁶ Lifetime exile was also the verdict pronounced in June 1610 on Olav Røssland (plus an extra-large fine of 500 *daler*) for leading an uprising in Numedal in the hinterland of Norway.⁸⁷ In 1604, Jon Jemt, meanwhile, was sentenced to lose his head for attacking a sheriff in the local court (*ting*) in Sunnmøre.⁸⁸ As Øystein Rian has pointed out,

death penalty, expatriation, and heavy fines tended to characterise Danish government policy during the reign of Christian IV (1588–1604).⁸⁹ It has been estimated that 20–25 peasant leaders were beheaded or executed in other ways in the period 1536–1613.⁹⁰

In the 1630s, the Danish kingdom put heavy restrictions on the use of petitions. This signalled that collective protests would no longer be tolerated and that if a petition needed to be made, then it should be directly addressed from a single named individual to the king, and each petition had to also first be approved by a royal judge (*sorenskriver*). In 1648, King Frederick III decreed strong prohibitions against popular gatherings and meetings without the approval and surveillance of the state authorities as they could lead to riots. This legislation reflects how the state was using its growing power to gradually encroach on its subjects but also fear for riots.⁹¹ This went along with another feature of state-building. A royal judge—*sorenskriver*—gradually superseded the peasants in the judicial apparatus in the period c. 1590–1632. However, the peasants did not cease to come together and conduct riots. The peasant resistance persisted also after the introduction of absolutism in Denmark and Norway in 1660 and 1661.

THE SURVIVAL OF RESISTANCE AND VIOLENCE

Organised and armed peasants' riots seemed to diminish after the 1530s, and Rolf Fladby has noted that, in fact, there were only few examples of organised peasant resistance after about 1610. Like Jørn Sandnes and Steinar Imsen, Fladby draws the conclusion that the judicial revolution in the higher courts and commissions, which now investigated the crimes and abuses of power by royal officials, halted the peasant's willingness and need to initiate further organised resistance.⁹² Another reason is of course the emergence of an increasingly centralised power state that demanded more obedience and subordination. In the 1530s and 1540s, King Christian III broke with his predecessors and declared war on any sign of rebellion in Denmark–Norway. In his reign, *oprør* figured as a relatively new term, and its meaning grew in the following years, coming to represent a severe crime and a threat to social order and the community.

On the other hand, peasant resistance did persist into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and violence against royal officials apparently did not die out. Court records bear witness to the fact that the judge and sheriff often found themselves being attacked by words and varying degrees of

violence. For example, in 1594 and 1599, peasants in Råbyggelaget and Sunnmøre, respectively, attacked royal officials with axes, as they also did in Nedenes in 1659—where death threats were made as well. In 1637, the peasants of Sogn tried to get rid of the sheriff on three occasions, and by the 1650s, it seems that the commoners in Sunnmøre actually planned to kill their sheriff. In the 1570s, a bridge in the region of Trøndelag was blown up after a conflict between the bailiff and local peasants got out of hand. On several occasions, weapons such as axes, guns, and bows and arrows are mentioned in reports of the conflicts between state representatives and the people.⁹³ Other investigations prove that violence was still a very important part of communicating with state representatives in the 1700s.⁹⁴ The *thing* meetings were characterised by peasants exerting “soft violent acts” against royal officials, such as the sheriff and the judge. Royal officials were exposed and vulnerable to being slapped, pushed, and dragged in encounters with the common people.

More importantly, by the eighteenth century, organised peasant resistance seems to have been on the increase again. This did not mean necessarily use of violence, but the acts of protests and resistance took physical forms. There were tax riots organised in several parts of Norway in 1712–1715, in 1762–1770, and together with food riots in 1790–1813. In one particularly large conflict in 1786–1787, peasants in Agder and Telemark armed themselves against the king’s soldiers. In Oppdal in 1752 and in Lærdal 1799–1802, entire communities under strong well-organised leadership refused military service, risking the death penalty according to military legislation.⁹⁵ However, the motivation for rioting was in almost every case to protect the “good old law” of Norway, and in remaining faithful to the king, this resort to legalism softened the reaction from above and paved the way for dialogue and reconciliation.

It is reasonable to assume that peasant elites also played an important role in the riots, but still no systematic investigations about the role of peasant elites in conflicts have been applied in Norway in early modern period. On the other hand, we do know that several of riots enjoyed massive endorsement in the local communities and that it was almost impossible for anyone to stay out of the conflict and those who did would be facing serious threats. This strict organisation would not have been possible without the involvement of the peasant elites. Indeed, as mentioned above, in accordance with several studies, many local communities in Norway in the seventeenth century were led politically and administratively by peasant elites.

The tradition of legalism can be traced back from the 1700s to the 1200s in Norway as well as in other European countries. Reform and revolution were never objectives in the people's demands. The background for the mutinous actions in Oppdal and Lærdal, for instance, was that the peasants had for a long period enjoyed the freedom of not being obliged to serve the king as soldiers because they had agreed to perform other tasks instead, such as repairing the roads and transporting travelers and royal officials. The loss of this privilege challenged the people's identity and pride in their community, which then sparked off resistance that the state was compelled to crush. We also find a strong continuity of political culture in other ways from the Late Middle Ages to the eighteenth century. The means of resistance, such as wooden stick related to delivery of messages, gatherings on special sites, and arranged rhetoric and oral argumentation in confrontations with the state authorities, were the same. But in the seventeenth century, harsh and cruel violence diminished in almost every community in Norway, and this had an effect on popular political culture. Indeed, by the eighteenth century, no state official was killed in connection with confrontations with the people, and homicide in general had fallen to a much lower rate.

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Did the Rich Lead the Poor to Rebel in the Finnish Peasant Revolts of the 15th–17th –Centuries?

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THE RICH AND THE POOR IN FINLAND

In his seminal work about the social background to the Finnish Civil War of 1918, Viljo Rasila has found that there were three factors behind the overall increase in political activity. First, it was a period when there were more opportunities to improve one's social status; second, people could migrate more easily; and third, there was a relatively high level of welfare. According to Rasila, political agitation was highest among those who enjoyed higher levels of economic and social welfare; and this applied equally to people on both the 'red' and 'white' sides of the Civil War.¹ In his opinion, those who were the most impoverished did not rise up in revolt.

In this important respect, the Finnish Civil War of 1918 was not a peasant revolt or even a revolt of crofters or agrarian workers against the

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establishment. Crofters certainly participated, but they did so on *both* sides. Nevertheless, these results are interesting if we bear them in mind when looking at the social context of the peasant revolts in the 15th–17th centuries. If the peasant revolts were mass movements, the participants must have chiefly come from the lower social strata of society; and yet if the poor did not rise in revolt of their own accord, then who was it who led them? The Finnish historian, Heikki Ylikangas, has suggested that in many of the European peasant uprisings, rebellious peasants tried to persuade nobles or knights to lead them because they needed their skills in warfare.² However, in the case of Finnish medieval and early modern peasant rebellions such as the Club War (*Nuijasota*), which was the largest, it was the peasants who led themselves; although in a biographical article about Jaakko Ilkka (the leader of that particular revolt), Armas Luukko (2004) concludes that he became so for ‘reasons unknown to historical research’.³

So the main questions of this chapter address how the leaders of these revolts were chosen, and who exactly they were. I will thus present six descriptions of Finnish peasant uprisings, with the first dating from the 1430s and the last from the 1690s. After describing each case, I will focus on the leaders of the revolts and try to fathom the logic behind how they got into that position. In conclusion, I will then try to answer the main questions as to whether we can say the rich led the poor to revolt in this period, and whether we can safely talk of there having been an ‘aggressive peasant elite’.

CRAZY DAVID OF UPPER SATAKUNTA (1438)

A document from 9 January 1439 states how the peasants of six parishes in Upper Satakunta, near the present-day town of Tampere, promised to never again rise up against the establishment and to remain loyal to the Swedish Council of the Realm and Lord of Turku Castle.⁴ The document is the ‘letter of pardon’ for the riot that had taken place in 1438, which became known as the ‘David Uprising’. The Realm of Sweden had just become part of the Kalmar Union (with Denmark and Norway) that was now ruled by a single monarch—King Eric of Pomerania. Only a few years previously, there had been a great peasant rebellion in the Swedish part of the realm called the Engelbrekt Rebellion (1434–1436) against the Union, and although King Eric was declared King of Sweden again in

1436, the situation remained unstable right up to 1439, when King Eric was finally dislodged from power.

Just over a 100 years later (in 1575), the minutes from the local parish court of Vesilahti tell of a peasant called David who was 'raised' (elected) to the position of 'King of the Peasants' (*bonde Konung*)⁵ and attacked the local manor with several neighbours 'like a bandit or robber'. We will return to the language used to describe David later. In the attack, four cavalrymen from the manor were killed and the peasants looted the property. Because of their misdeeds, it was later ruled that the peasants hand over some of their meadows to the manor; and the dispute over these meadows became an ongoing subject for debate in the Vesilahti local court, with the events repeating themselves in the sixteenth century.⁶ The other scant remaining sources give us reason to suppose that the same rebels also continued their looting of manors within the nearby parish of Pirkkala, and in Lammi within the Tavastia (*Häme*) region.⁷ The geographical spread of the revolt thus seems to have been quite wide. The armed troops of the bishopric of Turku and of Turku Castle eventually suppressed the revolt, however, and some kind of a meeting with the establishment and the representatives of those parishes who had joined the rebels took place in Lempäälä in January 1439. It was here that the abovementioned letter of pardon was drawn up.

The reasons for the riot, and the leader who was supposedly behind it called David, have puzzled historians for a long time. Traditionally, the revolt has been seen as a protest against heavy taxation,⁸ but there is also the possibility that the revolt was somehow connected with the political unrest further west in the kingdom. According to some researchers, the 'simple commoner' was incited to rise up in a tax revolt and to raid manors for the benefit of a pretender to the Swedish throne⁹; while Seppo Suvanto sees David's Uprising as being more against just the local manors, since the manors had enlarged their properties (meadows, fishing places, places for mills, etc.) at the cost of the local peasants. This had led to continual quarrels about natural resources between the local nobility, the crown bailiff, the local district judge, and the peasantry.¹⁰ Heikki Ylikangas has also stressed that the revolt of 1438 was a typical peasant rising against the local nobility and their manorial system.¹¹ His view can also be easily connected with the struggle for natural resources.

In the letter of pardon written in January 1439, the peasant leader was called 'Crazy David'.¹² It may well have been representatives of the establishment that added this epithet, as it seems hard to believe that

the peasants would have followed any madman to revolt. In the spirit of national romanticism, some mid-twentieth century researchers saw—in the 1575 Vesilahti minutes’ depiction of a king of peasants—a reminder of an ancient tradition of Finnish local kings.¹³ Present-day researchers are less inclined to romanticise David’s image though. Electing a peasant king to lead a riot in fifteenth century Satakunta has been compared to the ‘dragnet kings’—temporary leaders of groups of peasants who would go fishing with these nets.¹⁴ Whatever the actual state of affairs was, it is interesting for the purposes of this study that the peasants in Satakunta evidently had some kind of institution in place for electing leaders to carry out important occasional tasks.

But do we know anything more about this David though? Kaarlo Blomstedt has convincingly pictured him, albeit retrospectively, as a wealthy farm owner, and thus one of the mightiest peasants of the region. This may well have been the case, as many of his descendants acted as local constables—and this was an office that was most often given to the wealthiest families in the region. The position involved collecting taxes and helping the Crown’s bailiff keep order in the parish. Another clue that leads us to suppose he was a wealthy peasant is the constant quarrelling with the local nobility about the ownership of land and other natural resources.¹⁵ In a letter to Turku, Kristiern Nielsson (the Lord of Vyborg Castle) speculated as to whether or not David had escaped across the Gulf of Finland to Reval (present-day Tallinn). We will never know if he did or not, but from this speculation alone, we can at least deduce that he had not been caught by the men sent from Turku to catch him.¹⁶

DISOBEDIENCE IN LAPPEE (1551–1553)

As a result of the continuous wars with Denmark-Norway, Sweden withdrew from the Kalmar Union at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Under Gustav Eriksson Vasa, who later became King Gustav I and led the revolt against the Danes, the Swedish Realm began to take shape as an early modern centralised state with king at the helm of a growing administrative bureaucracy. The number of administrative districts gradually increased and picked up pace in the 1550s.¹⁷ The tendency was to create uniform taxation practices throughout the whole kingdom with the result that the overall tax burden on everybody in the realm increased, and the people who felt it the hardest were the peasants. Complaints multiplied and bailiffs and district judges were routinely abused.¹⁸ The first decades

of Gustav I's rule were thus filled with a variety of mutinies and rebellions. The most dangerous of these was perhaps the Dacke War in Småland in 1542¹⁹, but within the eastern half of the realm (present-day Finland), the uprising that happened in this period occurred in the parish of Lappee.

During the harvest of 1551, a delegation of three peasants from Lappee arrived in Stockholm to lodge a complaint with the king about their local district judge. The men claimed that the judge had increased taxes and enlarged his manorial estate by illegally evicting seven tenants of the Crown from their farms. In addition, he had taken a large number of fishing areas away from the peasants and claimed exclusive ownership of over 20 islands. To add insult to injury, the peasants complained that when the judge would come to Lappee to hold the local court sessions he would often delay proceedings for a couple of days, and in this time they would have to provide food and lodging for him and his entourage of men and horses. On hearing this, the king decided that these accusations should be examined in greater detail and so he ordered that both judge and peasants present themselves at his court the following summer, whereupon he would examine the case himself.²⁰

The next year, both parties duly arrived in Stockholm at the beginning of the summer. The peasants repeated their accusations about the judge and added some more, but the peasants also had complaints about the district bailiff as well because he had been collecting more tax than needed and keeping some of it for himself, they claimed. In addition, the bailiff had added four extra days to the number liable for labour tax in the year. But again, the thing that really upset them the most was having to pay for the upkeep of the bailiff and his retinue for the four times a year they came to collect the dues.²¹ They usually set aside a number of days before each district court session to do this, and it seems that this was the main bone of contention, as the bailiff and judge would invariably come to each of the four annual court sessions with an unnecessarily large number of mounted soldiers. Not only this, the process of collecting taxes and conducting court sessions seemed unnecessarily protracted (sometimes up to two weeks), when during all this time it was the parish's responsibility to provide them with food and lodgings.

But the judge was easily able to defend himself against these accusations and, according to him, everything had happened legally, and it was the peasants who had been obstinate and behaved badly. For instance, they had refused to organise more than two sessions of the local court per year. Most taxes for the Crown were thus unpaid, and for the judge and local

clergyman, whose salaries were dependent on these taxes, they had not paid even an ear of corn. One time, when the judge was visiting a village to hold the court session there, the peasants had beaten his horse with clubs and driven it out of the stable; and over the Christmas period the wife of the judge had been treated with disrespectful words, and her seat in church smashed.

By the autumn of 1552, it was the bailiff's turn to explain himself to the king. He also cleared his name and went on to accuse a peasant, Maunu Nyrhi and a companion of roaming round the parish on a sledge inciting others to go on a tax strike. Before one court session, when the bailiff was collecting poll tax, Nyrhi had taken an axe and threatened the other peasants: 'If you give him any money, you might be getting a taste of this'. After that, Nyrhi had pushed the bailiff out of his chair by the table and sat there instead.²²

Who was this Maunu Nyrhi exactly, who keeps cropping up from among the otherwise anonymous 'peasants'? According to the district judge, Nyrhi had travelled around the parish in the winter of 1551–1552 and encouraged the peasants to refuse paying taxes. At the same time, Nyrhi had collected supplies from them for his next trip to Stockholm. It seems he was the Måns Peersson (Maunu Pekanpoika), and one of the three peasants who first brought the complaints to the king back in the summer of 1551. During the following winter, in a meeting called to collect taxes, he had defied the bailiff and threatened other peasants with violence if they paid theirs. He also seems to have been present among the peasant delegation that went back to the king in the early summer of 1552. According to the bailiff, the reason the peasants refused to hold more than two court sessions per year was because of Nyrhi.²³

But what was Maunu Nyrhi really like as a peasant? Knowledge about his personality is scant and based only on the testimonies of his opponents. It seems, he was an active man, and ready to take the trouble to achieve his goals, as it cannot have been easy in the sixteenth century to travel around the parish in the winter, not to mention the long trips from Eastern Finland across land and sea to get to Stockholm. From the bailiff's statement about the poll tax incident, we can assume that Nyrhi was a quick-tongued and hot-tempered man, but this is just a guess. Kauko Pirinen has taken steps to sketch out the economic background of Maunu Nyrhi a bit further. Maunu was not the master of his farm; he was one of four adult brothers living under the roof of their father—Pekka Nyrhi. Some years before the riot, one of Maunu's brothers left his father's house

and set up a household in which there were two adult men. Because the source Pirinen used only mentioned menfolk, we can presume this brother was married and had at least one grown-up son. Pirinen also assumes that the other brothers were married as well and therefore the household was probably quite large; and that at the time of the riot Maunu was most likely a man in his best years.²⁴

It was usual to live together in extended families of this kind because of the slash-and-burn style of cultivation that was prevalent at the time needed a large workforce. The brothers and their families would have made a suitable sized group for doing this kind of hard work together. In the 1540s, before the one brother had left Pekka Nyrhi's house with his son, there had been seven men for slash-and-burn work in the forests. Basing his conclusions on the tax rolls, Pirinen suggests that the Nyrhi family's farm was thus one of the wealthiest households in the region.²⁵

Maunu Nyrhi was thus probably from a wealthy peasant background, and this seems to have given him some kind of authority in the local community so that he was able to become one of the leaders in this mutiny against the judge and bailiff. But we do not have much information about the other two peasants who were with Nyrhi in Stockholm in 1551. In his response to their complaints, the judge describes one Lauri Kiukas as his personal enemy. Was this because he had been one of the peasants who had accused the judge? The latter had certainly quarrelled with Lauri Kiukas about fishing rights, about a horse and about a farm,²⁶ and from his description of Kiukas, we can assume he was not a very wealthy man, thus perhaps the reasons for Kiukas joining the group were some kind of personal grudge with the judge. About the third complainant, Lars Jönsson, we know only the name, and nothing more about either his reasons for complaining, his background, or his wealth.

So it seems that it was Maunu Nyrhi who was complaining the most about the burden of having to stage four court sessions a year, as the wealthier households had more to lose when hosting the judge and bailiff than the poorer ones. The other complaints about the judge and the bailiff seem to have been to support this main aim by showing the arbitrariness of the judge and bailiff. But how and why was Nyrhi chosen to present Lappee's complaints in Stockholm? It seems that he had widespread support in the parish, but we do not have any further information on the decisions made by the parish before the trip to Stockholm. But because Nyrhi was the most vocal spokesman in the two court sessions, the judge, bailiff, and king saw him as the main leader of the uprising,

and the chief focus of accusations when the events were handled at the king's court.

The king made his decision and sent it in an open letter to the commons of Lappee parish; where a court session was called to discuss the matter in the spring of 1553. Gustaf Fincke, the chief regional judge (*lagman*) was chair, and there were 24 lay jurors present, together with many spectators—some of whom had come from quite far to 'see how the play would end'. The king's judgement, which was read out loud in court, dealt with the mutinous parishioners harshly; finding all of their complaints groundless, and condemning the tax strike as a crime against the king who needed this income to provide shelter for all his subjects. The peasants were advised to not intervene in the Crown's affairs, and it was ruled that four annual court sessions were necessary not only for tax collecting purposes, but for ensuring law and order among the peasants themselves.²⁷

After Gustaf Fincke had read and explained the king's letter to the crowd in court, Maunu Nyrhi stood up and said with a loud voice that the king had pardoned them from two court sessions and so two annual sessions were enough. The crowd in the courtroom followed Nyrhi's lead and one of the lay jurors, Inki Multiainen, even went so far as to stand up and voice his support for Nyrhi. The chief judge warned the crowd to obey the king's decision but the warnings had no effect—the parishioners insisted Fincke had written the letter himself. Nevertheless Nyrhi and Multiainen were apparently arrested and sentenced to death, on the grounds of inciting rebellion against the king and his will. The soldiers took them both out and executed them. After this, the crowd apparently acquiesced and agreed to obey king's letter, hold four court sessions per year, and pay their taxes.²⁸

THE CLUB WAR OF OSTROBOTHNIA (1595–1596)

The Club War at the end of the sixteenth century has traditionally been the focus of much heated discussion among Finnish historians, as it was the biggest popular uprising east of the Gulf of Bothnia during Swedish rule. Some of the peasant leaders in this war have thus become symbolic of the first stirrings of Finnish independence, and have almost developed the status of national hero. However, before launching any further into an analysis of the leaders in this war, we must first describe a bit more what happened in it.

By the end of the sixteenth century, Sweden had been at war for 25 years. This meant a long period of relatively high taxes, of men being conscripted, and of troops being accommodated during the months of winter and armistice. In the mid-1590s, Russian reprisals hit Finnish peasants hard on top of several years of crop failure; and the peasants soon saw the billeting of military in their villages as a very hard burden to bear. In fact, during the war with Russia some open protests occurred against this 'castle camp' duty (*borgläger*). In practice, *borgläger* was a tax taken from the peasants in the form of hay, fodder and foodstuffs as needed by the military detachments camped in the villages. In 1574, soldiers were given permission to collect these goods directly from peasants. Almost immediately, the peasants began to complain about soldiers abusing this right and visiting their granaries and stocks of hay too often.²⁹ Another factor in igniting the Club War was the death of King John III in 1592, who had been married to the sister of the King of Poland. As a consequence their son, Sigismund, had become King of Poland in 1587 (*Zygmunt III*); and now he became King of Sweden as well in 1593. His uncle Duke Charles, the youngest son of King Gustav I, saw things otherwise however, and with the Lutheran religion on his side, claimed the Swedish Crown for himself. Sigismund, after all, was Catholic in faith and had his court in Poland, so it was easy for Charles to paint him as an imposter. Thus, during the years 1595 and 1596, Charles rallied supporters to his course in Sweden. However, in the eastern, Finnish half of the realm, the real power laid in the hands of Marshall Klaus Fleming, the commander of the army and a faithful supporter of King Sigismund.

In 1592, King John III wrote a letter to the province of Ostrobothnia (*Österbotten / Pohjanmaa*) releasing the district from obligations to pay the *borgläger* tax. The reason for this was that the peasants had traditionally defended the county themselves. In spite of this, Klaus Fleming had stationed his military troops everywhere in Finland, including Ostrobothnia; and after the armistice with the Russians in 1593, the peasants began to protest against the continued presence of troops in their parishes. In some cases, soldiers' horses were mistreated, and in Ostrobothnia, groups of men armed themselves with clubs (or whatever makeshift weapon they could find) to resist paying any more *borgläger*. Soldiers were sent to the region and put down the uprising without any difficulty, however, and the two peasant leaders were captured—Pentti Pouttu was taken to Oulu Castle, and Pentti Piri was fined.³⁰

Even when a peace treaty with Russia was signed in 1595, Fleming did not demobilise the military troops that were being lodged in castles and villages throughout Finland. The official explanation given was fear of another Russian attack; but the real purpose was to ensure that Finland remained loyal to King Sigismund. So, although the war had ended, the soldiers continued to collect the unpopular *borgläger*, which resulted in outbreaks of violence in the regions of Savonia (*Savo*) and Southern Ostrobothnia. In Savonia, over the Christmas period of 1595, the peasants of Rautalampi raided a group of sleeping soldiers, killing some and capturing the others who were then taken to a frozen lake and pushed in through a hole in the ice; while in Southern Ostrobothnia, the soldiers were driven out of the county and the goods they had taken as *borgläger* payments were reclaimed by the angry peasants. In response, Klaus Fleming captured and executed five of the ringleaders from Rautalampi at Hämeenlinna Castle, while Jaakko Ilkka was the only one to be arrested from the Ostrobothnian uprising and imprisoned in Turku Castle—but this was just the beginning of his ordeal.³¹

That autumn (1595), Duke Charles had organised a kind of Diet, or meeting of the estates in the town of Söderköping. Representatives of the farmers and peasants in Finland, especially from Ostrobothnia, travelled there to make their voices heard. Hans Fordell, a merchant from Pedersöre (Pietarsaari), had written their various grievances down about Fleming and his soldiers, and these grievances were then taken to the meeting of the estates. Charles would later put these complaints to good use in his fight with Fleming.³² Indeed, the peasant representatives saw an ally in Duke Charles. When again the Ostrobothnians went to complain to Charles about the abuses of Fleming's soldiers in November 1596, the duke promised to 'guard the sea' if the peasants would 'seek rights for themselves', implying that they would have to fight with whatever clubs or weapons they could find.³³ It is also clear from these words that, although Charles was not the chief reason for the peasants fighting, they did share the same enemy in Klaus Fleming. The war-club was a kind of long mallet with a heavy pike-head, and was usually the only effective weapon peasants would have to fight soldiers on horseback; and it was this weapon that gave the uprising of 1596–1597 its name.

The Club War will be briefly summarised in the next paragraphs.³⁴ The first attacks against soldiers took place in the parish of Kyrö at the end of November 1596. One soldier was killed, and others were badly beaten. At the same time, Jaakko Ilkka managed to escape from Turku Castle. When

he arrived back in Southern Ostrobothnia, he became the leader of the revolt. How he was selected, we do not know, but over a thousand men were prepared to be led by him. By the beginning of December 1596, these split into three groups and they began to move southwards, with Turku Castle as their goal. While one group was led by Pentti Pouttu and marched down the western coast of Finland, the main body of men passed through the vast forest of Tavastia and picked up more recruits along the way. Meanwhile the third detachment headed eastwards first, to raise more recruits from the province of Savonia. The first group of rebels came across a detachment of 300 of Fleming's men in Ulvila parish and tried to persuade Axel Kurck, who was the noble in charge of this detachment to join their rebellion instead of fighting them.³⁵ Kurck refused and swiftly defeated the peasants, killing many of them, and capturing Pouttu, who was then imprisoned in Turku Castle. The main peasant army, which had probably swelled to about 2500 in number, arrived in Nokia village at the end of December. There they met Klaus Fleming and about 3000 trained soldiers. The peasants lost the short battle and a great number of them were killed. Jaakko Ilkka was able to flee to Ostrobothnia, but there he was captured and immediately executed. Meanwhile the eastbound group of 400 peasants met their fate in Padasjoki parish, where 'noble' commander Ivar Tavast lured them with false promises to lay down their weapons in peace, then gave the order for his soldiers to massacre them.

But word about the uprising nonetheless reached Savonia and numerous peasants joined the revolt from many parishes in the region. In January 1597, Gödick Fincke, who was the commander of St. Olof's Castle (present-day Savonlinna), received a request from the peasants of Savonia to join them as their leader.³⁶ Fincke's crude answer to the rebellious peasants was to order the hands of the messengers be chopped off before sending the men back to the peasant army. There followed several battles between the peasants and soldiers in Savonia, none of which the peasants won. However, the Club War was not quite over yet; as at this point between 3000 and 4000 peasants in Northern Ostrobothnia rose up in arms. The leaders of these rebels were the bailiff Israel Larsson and peasants Hans Kranck (*Krankka*) and Perttu Palo. The peasant army met Fleming's military detachment of about 1500 men in Kurikka parish. In the battle of Santavuori, most of the 'clubmen' got killed, and another 500 were arrested and taken to the churchyard of Kyrö parish. There they were whipped and forced to make an oath of alliance to King Sigismund.

After that they were set free. Altogether, about 2500–3000 peasants were killed in the Club War.

So now we come to our main topic: who were the leaders behind this revolt, and how did they come to be in this position? First, we have Hans Fordell, who was organising the resistance with complaints and petitions to Duke Charles. Second, we should look more closely at the peasant leaders in the Club War: Pentti Piri, Pentti Pouttu, Jaakko Ilkka, Hans Kranck, and Perttu Palo. Third, we have the bailiff Israel Larsson, who together with Kranck and Palo mobilised the peasant army in Northern Ostrobothnia. Fourth, there are those two strange events where the peasants asked the noblemen, Axel Kurck and Gödick Fincke, to lead them against Fleming. Why? We start with trying to answer this last question.

Heikki Ylikangas has noticed that in many European wars and revolts among rural labourers and farmers, the leader would be a nobleman. Ylikangas suggests that the nobility were generally, not so much supporting the peasants, but were using these troops to further their own private interests.³⁷ But Ylikangas does not delve any deeper into just what the motives of these aristocrats were, and nor does he ask why the rural working class wanted to be led by a nobleman—who could equally be their potential opponent. The fifteenth century was a very tumultuous time in Sweden as it was in the whole of Europe. In principle, the country was part of the Kalmar Union, which incorporated the Realm of Sweden with that of Denmark. However, after the 1420s, and the Engelbrekt Rebellion, Sweden was in many ways independent of the Union. Occasionally, they even elected their own kings in Sweden if the king in Copenhagen did not please the Swedes. This situation led to many disturbances and struggles for power not only with the Danes but also among the Swedish nobility, with the peasants also becoming deeply embroiled in the politics of that time. They wanted taxes to be lowered and for their trade in cattle and copper to increase.³⁸ In the Middle Ages, the various provinces held a strong position in a realm which was more loosely governed. Some provinces even had their own seal for confirming agreements—for instance, the letter of pardon after David's Uprising was sealed with the stamp of Satakunta Province in 1439.³⁹ Equally, the peasants of Ostrobothnia used this kind of stamp to seal the letters of complaint written by Hans Fordell before the Club War.⁴⁰

A Swedish historian, Dick Harrison, has interpreted several of Sweden's political struggles in the fifteenth century as being alliances between the nobility and peasants of a province, particularly when the former saw them-

selves as pretenders to the Crown. The nobility would promise tax exemptions to peasants if they would help them in their struggle. At this time, the peasant army of a province was a formidable weapon for any nobleman that wanted to win the Crown, and so it was natural that they might even become leaders of these peasant armies.⁴¹ In the Club War, especially when the peasants asked Axel Kurck and Gödick Fincke to become their leaders, there are echoes of the past. The fifteenth-century peasants had understood that if they were led by a noble knight trained in the art of warfare, there was a better chance of them winning than without, and generations later the ‘clubmen’ were still clearly aware of this tradition. This can also be seen in the promises of cooperation between the peasants of Ostrobothnia and Duke Charles.⁴² By the late sixteenth century, however, the political interests of Kurck and Fincke did not match those of the peasants.

As for the rebel bailiff, Israel Larsson, he was actually *not* the one who had been originally appointed by King Sigismund and his right-hand man Fleming. They had appointed Abraham Melkiorsson to the post in Ostrobothnia, and Melkiorsson had captured and executed those peasant leaders who escaped back to Ostrobothnia after the lost battles. Duke Charles thus nominated his own man Israel Larsson to the bailiff’s post, and immediately after arriving in Ostrobothnia, Larsson started to organise resistance against Fleming and the *borgläger* tax. Together with the peasant leaders, Hans Kranck and Perttu Palo he gathered a peasant army together and begun to march southwards. His intention was to promote the duke’s objectives, as these matched quite well with the aims of the peasant leaders.

Let us now turn to the leaders of farming or peasant origins. Pentti Pouttu, who was leading armed resistance in Kyrö, Ostrobothnia already in 1593, was most obviously a trader and one of those farmers in charge of collecting the taxes (*fjärdingsman*). Pentti Pouttu had a rather large farm but he was by no means among the wealthiest freeholders in Ostrobothnia or Kyrö. Armas Luukko suggests that Pouttu was chosen for leadership because he was a trader, and that he was one of the political leaders of the peasant movement, although leading the war effort was the job of other leaders.⁴³ Meanwhile, Pentti Piri who organised the peasant resistance to the *borgläger* tax in Lapua, Ostrobothnia was from the wealthiest farm in that parish, whose father had been a trader. In 1582, Pentti Piri began his own farm, and by 1590, he had 11 cows, which was a lot for that time.⁴⁴ Both these men thus had a background in trading, and although they

might not have owned the biggest or wealthiest farms in the local community, they were comfortably well off.

Hans Kranck (*Krankka*) was from one of the wealthiest farms in Liminka. His father had been a local constable and had even acted as vice-bailiff (*kronofogde*) for a while, which was quite a high position for someone of peasant origins. During the Russo-Swedish war, Hans Kranck's father had also been the leader of a detachment of home reserves, and he died on an expedition to the White Sea Karelia. Hans Kranck also took part in the war with Russia, and also had some kind of position as leader of the home reserve troops in Liminka.⁴⁵ This experience might explain why he eventually came to lead the 'clubmen' of Northern Ostrobothnia. After the battle in Ilmajoki, Hans Kranck was arrested and taken as a prison to Turku Castle, but was set free when Duke Charles took the castle in the autumn of 1597. The duke rewarded Kranck by relieving his farm from the obligation to pay taxes (as he had promised). Kranck also took part in the Linköping Diet (*riksdag*) of 1600, and later Hans Kranck served the Crown in Ostrobothnia and in the borderland area with Russia.⁴⁶

Perttu Palo, who had been in Jaakko Ilkka's army at the Battle of Nokia already, was able to flee to Northern Ostrobothnia. There, together with Hans Kranck and Israel Larsson, he organised the second rising of Ostrobothnians. The large peasant farm in the Isokyrö parish, which gave its name to the whole Palo village, was divided between three brothers in the 1540s, and Perttu Palo owned one of these farms. It was somewhat larger and wealthier than most other farms in the parish. In the 1580s and 1590s, Palo had to work as the *fjärdingsman* collecting the *borgläger* tax.⁴⁷ The men chosen for this position were often from the wealthiest homes, and it was not an easy one. Armas Luukko considers this troublesome position of brokerage between the parties might have been one of the reasons why several tax collectors ended up siding with the rebellious peasants. Palo was finally captured in the battle at Ilmajoki in February 1597, and he too was jailed in Turku Castle. However, he was set free in the autumn and lived in Ilmajoki as a wealthy peasant until at least 1608.⁴⁸

Finally let us turn to Jaakko Ilkka in the Club War. He was made into somewhat of a national romantic hero during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—leading the peasantry of Ostrobothnia against the injustice of Swedish rule. Poems, plays, and operas have been written about him and his name has adorned medals and monuments.⁴⁹ Jaakko Ilkka was also a very wealthy freeholder and owned one of the largest farms in Ostrobothnia. His father had been one of the 12 lay jurors at the district

court, which was a respected office for peasants to hold. Yet Jaakko managed to climb a rung higher than his father on the social ladder when he was nominated as the local constable in 1585, as in the sixteenth century they were usually recruited from among the wealthiest farming families. Jaakko Ilkka remained in this post for some years, and when an inventory was taken of his farm in 1591, it was noted that not only were his granaries filled with tar, butter and 44 barrels of grain; but that he also owned 4 horses, 30 cows, and 32 sheep.⁵⁰ Jaakko Ilkka did not earn all his wealth from farming though; he was also an active trader and even owned a ship that carried freight to, for example, Reval (Tallinn) and Stockholm.⁵¹

Perhaps the single most important reason Ilkka was selected to lead the peasant uprising was because he had some experience of warfare. Because providing a fully armed and equipped cavalryman and horse for the king's army would grant tax exemption to wealthy yeomen and the right to collect *borgläger*, Ilkka provided two fully equipped cavalymen with their respective horses. A hired hand rode one, while Ilkka himself rode the other, and once he had joined the cavalry, he participated in at least three military raids. This would give him some experience which thereafter would make him a suitable candidate to lead a peasant army. One of them was an attack on the River Volkhov near Novgorod. The aim of this manoeuvre, led by Marshall Klaus Fleming himself, was to devastate the territory on the enemy's side of the river so that the Russians would not be able to billet troops by the Swedish border. In effect, it meant burning houses, killing people, raping, and looting the land, and this must have hardened Jaakko Ilkka to warfare.⁵² In the autumn of 1596, before he returned from being imprisoned in Turku Castle, the peasants had asked Second Lieutenant Pehr Pettersson to lead the troops, but when he refused, Ilkka became their natural choice, but he did not last long. As already mentioned above, after the defeat at Nokia, he was arrested in Ostrobothnia and executed at the end of January 1597.⁵³

Meanwhile Hans Fordell, who was involved in Duke Charles' Diet at Söderköping also came from a wealthy and influential family. His forefathers had been merchants in Stockholm, and his father, uncle, and grandfather had all held both the positions of bailiff and local judge (*lagläsare*). The Fordell family owned the Pinnonäs manor in Pedersöre, and it was the largest one in Ostrobothnia. In fact, Hans Fordell was so wealthy that he even loaned money to Duke Charles. His motives for helping the peasants write their complaints down at the meeting in Söderköping were, according to Heikki Ylikangas, because Fleming had not only made it

more difficult for Fordell's businesses, but also denied him the offices of bailiff and local judge for Ostrobothnia that had previously been in the family.⁵⁴ This made him one of Duke Charles' men and yet helping the peasants write their complaints also served his own interests.

PROPRIETARY RIGHTS IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ELIMÄKI

In 1604, Duke Charles was eventually crowned King of Sweden and became Charles IX. In 1609, in a battle in Pomerania, an officer called Henrik Wrede saved the king's life by giving him his horse, and was killed. For this heroic sacrifice, King Charles donated a big fiefdom—the whole parish of Elimäki—to the bereaved widow and the Wrede family left behind. The widow was called Gertrud von Ungern, and she moved to Elimäki with her new husband Joachim Berendts. Immediately, she got on the wrong side of the local peasantry however, as she had to evict ten families from the manor grounds. Although they were given new places for their farms as compensation, many of them remained resentful and put up a lot of resistance.⁵⁵

To get the most out of their land, von Ungern and Berendts soon began to put up new manors in different parts of their fiefdom. Again, the result was continual disputes with the local peasantry about the use of fields, meadows, fishing places, and other natural resources that would be needed for these new manors. The peasants sometimes refused to do their days' labour and to pay taxes, and the local court became the scene of numerous disputes between the Elimäki people and their manorial lords.⁵⁶ In principle, the fiefdom was also a donation by the Crown, which meant the lords had the right to collect taxes according to the Crown's tax rolls and the freeholder peasants were thus obliged to do a number of days' labour for the manor. However, if the manorial lord subsequently managed to acquire the proprietary rights of a farm that had once belonged to freeholders, then they became tenants instead. The proprietor of the farm could then demand taxes and days' labour from the tenant whenever they wanted, and if the farmer objected in any way or made this difficult, then the lord could evict them. Many peasants in the Elimäki fiefdom claimed that their manorial lord was trying to lure them away from their proprietary right to their farms and to turn them into tenants. This became the root cause of the disputes at the Elimäki.

In 1628, Gertrud von Ungern decided that a quarter of the land in Anjala village by the River Kymi would provide a suitable site for one of

her new manors—near the site where the oldest part of the village was. During the 1630s and '40s, the peasants and farming families living in that particular area were thus offered new farms, and contracts were drawn up to put the exchange in writing. However, before long the farmers found that the contracts were not favourable for them and protests soon broke out. They took back their old meadows by continuing to use them and tried to annul the contracts at the local court. When this did not help get them back, they then took more extreme action—they no longer spread manure on Ungern's fields, refused to bring firewood and timber to her manor, salmon caught from the manor's fishery were stolen, and the fishing nets were cast adrift into the river. When Ungern and her sons arrived in the village of Anjala, the villagers also verbally insulted them; not that the nobles were any nicer—one son ordered the bailiffs to arrest four of the protesters and torture them.⁵⁷

By 1634, the inhabitants of Anjala decided to send two men to Stockholm to complain about what had been happening. Because it was the minority of Queen Christina at this time, Sweden was governed by a regency, and so by order of the regency, the complaints were investigated. Matti Sihvo and Olli Tuomaanpoika acted as spokesmen for the villagers in this, but the investigation found no grounds for any of the complaints. The nobility may have taken their land away but everything had happened legally. The fishing rights in the River Kymi were the only thing where the investigation found that an agreement had been broken by Gertrud von Ungern and her sons.⁵⁸ But the fishing rights were only a partial victory for the freeholders and peasants who had expected more. So, in the summer of 1636, Matti Sihvo and Olavi Matinpoika were sent on behalf of the village to Stockholm to complain once more that Gertrud von Ungern was depriving freeholders of the legal rights to their farms. This time the regency ordered a local investigation by the governor of the province to see if there was some truth in the complaints. However, there is no mention of the results of this investigation in the sources.⁵⁹

By 1637, the minutes of the local court record that, 'after an unnecessary quarrel', Gertrud von Ungern drew up a contract concerning the number of days' labour owed by those peasants in her fiefdom who still owned farms on her property,⁶⁰ but this was again ignored. In 1642, a delegation, with the Anjala peasants in the lead, were again in Stockholm complaining over their landlady, pointing out that the number of days' labour required by the tax hike had increased to such a point that they could not fulfil her demands. When they thus fell into arrears with their

taxes, Ungern could then claim the proprietary rights of their farms for herself which made them tenants, at the beck and call of their landlady thereafter. In response, the regency ordered the governor of the province to look into the matter and check that people were not being denied their legal rights by excessive taxation; and a letter prohibiting excessive taxation was sent to Gertrud von Ungern at the same time.⁶¹ But this was not enough, and the complaints continued. Letters were written to the High Court of Justice in Turku pointing out that by having to do their days' labour at the manor every day, they could no longer make their own living from their farms. Because the regency had already asked the governor of the province to look for evidence of any foul play in Elimäki, the High Court now ordered the governor to organise a thorough investigation of the fiefdom. This inspection took place in the autumn of 1643. Matti Sihvo was once more the spokesman, but this time not only for the villagers of Anjala, but also the whole of Elimäki. He also had some personal scores to settle with the manors too—he claimed that the bailiff working for the nobles had beaten his mother, argued with his wife about a horse at the churchyard, and broken his fishing nets. The inspection saw these accusations as the kind that needed to be settled in the local court. When Matti Sihvo then claimed that he was in possession of the proprietary rights of his farm, the representatives of the manor were able to show a document of the local court, which confirmed otherwise—these rights belonged to the manor. Gertrud von Ungern also accused Sihvo of persuading other villagers to not pay taxation or do a single day's labour for Anjala manor, upon his return from Stockholm. The consequences of this were now that the cattle of the manor were starving.

The outcome of the investigation did not favour the peasants: the inspectors decided to increase the number of days' labour that the Elimäki folk were liable for, but as there had already been quite a lot of aggression shown openly by them, it was decided that the decision would be sent to the queen for confirmation and the peasants were informed that she would decide the case according to the inspection—without mentioning that they had already made a decision ruling against the villagers for fear of serious unrest. The underage queen was still only 17 years old and still guided by the regency, and as the governor and inspectors thought would happen, the regency confirmed their decision in the name of the queen.

This decision did not go down well. The landlords of all the manors in Elimäki fief complained about the local peasants being obstructive about doing their days' labour in particular, and paying taxes in general. So in February

1644, the regency ordered the High Court of Turku to once more investigate the disputes in Elimäki, and this eventually took place in August of the same year. The minutes of the investigation have disappeared, but the decision has remained—most of the complaints were thought to be unfounded and three of the spokesmen were arrested and imprisoned in Vyborg Castle. It seems that Matti Sihvo was not among the arrested. The decision was sent again to the queen for confirmation, who had finally reached her majority. This time the queen decided to take the side of the Elimäki peasants and ordered yet another investigation. Once more, the High Court had to send their assessors to Elimäki, and the investigation took place in the summer of 1645 with the decision given in April 1646, but only three of the farmers got their proprietary rights back. The claims of many others were again found to be groundless. However, the landlords were severely fined for insulting the proprietary rights of the three that were found to be in the right. Meanwhile, the number of days' labour the peasants had to do for the manors confirmed the increases made in 1643; and the assessors of the High Court found Matti Sihvo to be the prime instigator of the uprising. He had urged the other peasants to take back their old meadows, even though they had exchanged them with the manor. He also advised other peasants to refuse carrying out any days' labour for the manor. For these things, the High Court thus banished Matti Sihvo from the Swedish Realm for a four-year period.

Immediately after this decision was given to the Elimäki peasants, they sent four men to Stockholm to complain to the queen that the verdict was wrong: the landlords were still demanding too many days' labour and the high taxes were forcing freeholders to give up their proprietary rights. The worst of it was, that if someone openly expressed their discontent at this, they were ordered to leave the farm like Matti Sihvo. But while these complaints were being lodged in Stockholm, the Elimäki manorial lords decided to enforce the last decision of the High Court, and in order to pay the fines they had been ordered to pay by the High Court, 700 cows were taken from the peasants. The lord of Hämeenkylä manor arrested 18 peasants and held them in chains in the manor's jail for months, and from the wife of Matti Sihvo, the lord took 40 *dalar* in copper. When the peasants complained about these misdeeds, the local court found the accusations were false.

Matti Sihvo, who was sentenced to exile, did not exactly follow the order of the High Court. According to his own explanation, he first travelled to Stockholm and stayed there for two years earning his living with work. When he was recognised, he was captured and jailed in a 'tower'. After he was released from jail, he travelled back to the Finnish side of

the realm and then on to Livonia, where he stayed six weeks. After this, he returned to his home district, but to the Mämmälä village just on the other side of the River Kymi from Anjala. From there he went to Turku to apply from the Governor General of Finland for permission to return to his home village. Then, he returned to Anjala.

In 1649, Matti Sihvo was accused, this time in the local court, of inciting the peasants to not do their days' labour for the manor. According to the minutes of this court session, the public in the gallery of the court was asked if Matti had indeed incited them to act in such a manner, and after a silent moment, the peasants answered that Matti had not. The representatives of the manor protested loudly and said that after his return to the village Sihvo had stopped other peasants from doing their days' labour for the manor. Sihvo himself said that he would not do his days' labour because the High Court decree said nothing about whether he should or not, and many peasants gave their support to him. In front of the court, Matti Sihvo and also Yrjö Matinpoika (from the village of Raussila) turned to the crowd and said out loud, 'anyone else who wants to, is welcome to do it [the days' labour]'.

During his exile, Matti Sihvo had lost the farm that he owned and tended with his brother. The brother had made an agreement with the manor and moved from the farm to another place, which was on the outskirts of the village. Matti tried to undo this agreement in court. First he claimed that the brother could not have made the contract because he was not in Anjala at the time. Matti argued that his signature had been copied to the contract from the bottom of his measure container or was written by his 'hag' (wife). But all resistance was in vain, as the agreement was found to be valid, and Matti was severely fined for inciting the crowd and disobeying the royal decree. However, by the spring of 1650, he was soon collecting money again from the peasants for a new trip to Stockholm and by the next summer he was there with two other peasants—with a new complaint for the queen.

The content of the complaint was the same as before: the peasants did not want to do as many days' labour at the manors as they were commanded to do in the decrees of the High Court and the queen. They also wanted to regain their proprietary rights for their farms and to get back the fields and meadows, which the manor had appropriated. At midsummer, Sihvo sent the other two peasants home from Stockholm to strengthen trust in a positive result for the complaint, and this 'news' from Stockholm led to a strengthening of resistance in Elimäki. There was even

a small outbreak of violence when the bailiff and farm-hands of the Anjala manor were harvesting in one of the disputed fields and about 40 peasants with their sons and wives gathered around the field armed with axes and spears. When the peasants began to climb over the fence into the field, the folk from the manor considered it wise to flee. The peasants could then go ahead and harvest the crop themselves and take it to their own granaries.

These events were eventually handled in the local court and those peasants who had surrounded the field and taken the harvest were heavily fined and had to compensate the manor for the grain it had lost as a consequence. However, according to the queen, because Matti had not followed his sentence, but instead travelled ‘around the country inciting others to impede, trouble and mutiny’ he had to be arrested and taken to the High Court of Turku. If his crimes were found to be serious enough, he was then to be tried and condemned to death as a warning to the others. In effect this was sealing his death warrant—the trial or ‘investigation’ would be a mere formality. But at this point Matti Sihvo disappeared into thin air, and had clearly realised it would be wise to flee Stockholm.

In February 1653, in the absence of Sihvo, the High Court found the peasants of Elimäki guilty of disobeying the decrees of the High Court, regency, and queen. Obviously, because there were too many to individually punish, so the Elimäki peasants were given a collective warning against any further obstinacy. However, Sihvo was outlawed from the realm and to be killed if met, and the four peasants who had accompanied Matti in the delegation to Stockholm were condemned to a three-year exile. Meanwhile, Markus Multanen, who had been a representative at the meeting and given advice to the other peasants, was condemned to pay 100 silver *dalar* and spend three years in exile, while another who had taken Multanen’s advice was fined 50 silver *dalar*. What actually happened to Matti Sihvo is not known exactly, but it seems he was captured and executed by the summer of 1654 at the latest. Soon Matti Sihvo became a martyr whose fate the peasants knew all over Finland. For example, the peasants of Nyslott, Vyborg, Tavastia, and Nyland Provinces (i.e., the whole of Southern Finland) were writing in their complaints in the mid-1650s, ‘our masters and lords are threatening us with the same punishment, which the late Carl Wrede⁶² let his peasant Matti of Elimäki suffer, who was executed and killed as an innocent man and against all justice, as all inhabitants of Finland witness to God and your Royal Highness’.⁶³

We know quite a lot about what Matti Sihvo said and did when he was leading the resistance of the peasants in Elimäki. Eeva-Liisa Oksanen, who

has written the local histories of Anjala and Elimäki parishes, depicts a hot-tempered, determined, and bullheaded man whose actions, at least after the lost court cases and exile are indicative of bitterness and desperation. During his last visit to Stockholm, Sihvo sent positive messages home, which were at best misleading if not pure lies.⁶⁴ However, we do not know much about his economic background. Sihvo was, most obviously, a freeholder who lost his proprietary rights to the nobility during the resistance, although the farm is not always marked in the tax rolls as belonging to Matti but to his brothers Esko and Simo, who lived in the same farm.⁶⁵ From the events, however, it seems clear that all three brothers together owned the farm. The third brother Simo was recruited to the Swedish army as an infantryman, but he hired another man to replace him in the regiment. However, the hired man soon escaped from his regiment and stayed and worked in Simo, Esko, and Matti's farm and Matti Sihvo was fined at the local court for lodging the escaped soldier.⁶⁶ Matti Sihvo had at least one son and was a married man; the court rolls mention his wife and mother—but not by name. In 1645, the sons of Matti Sihvo and Heikki Tilli stoned one of the Anjala manor's geese to death and they were taken to court for this deed. The same son of Matti Sihvo's (if his name was Mikko or Michel) may have made an agreement in 1663 concerning his taxes and number of days' labour owed, but there is no way of confirming this.⁶⁷

Although at least the three brothers worked on the farm, Matti Sihvo was clearly not one of the wealthiest peasants in Anjala. It seems his wealth was more likely to have been lower than average for Anjala. In the rolls of the assessment units of farmlands (*manthalslängd*) for the years 1648–1688, the number of farms of Sihvo brothers is 1/3. We can divide the farms into three groups by the assessment unit share.⁶⁸

<i>Group</i>	<i>Assessment unit</i>	<i>Number of farms</i>
1	1/1–3/4	4
2	2/3–1/2	6
3	1/3–1/4	5

We can see from this that the Sihvo brothers' farm, marked in the name of Simo, was among the smallest third of all farms in the village. Matti Sihvo's leadership was thus based not so much on wealth, but perhaps on his other qualities, whatever they were. We shall return to this in the conclusion.

Several other peasants went to Stockholm with Sihvo and, in later sessions of the local court, they were severely punished as well. However, the peasants did not describe these people as their leaders. Nevertheless, Markus Multanen (Multamies) was mentioned several times and the establishment did try to paint him as one of the peasant leaders, as Multanen had been one of the people who had provided the means for Sihvo and his companions to complete the trip to Stockholm in 1650. Also, in July 1650, Multanen had been the one to voice the decision of the peasants (at the local court) to not accept the decrees of the High Court and queen about the increased number of days' labour. However, when the bailiff of the manor tried to name Multanen as one of the ringleaders, the local peasant lay jurors said he was not, and that it was a common decision of the peasants to refuse to do the increased number of days' labour. In spite of this, Multanen and four other peasants were given a three-year exile.⁶⁹

TAX FARMERS AT THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

If the authorities thought that the unrest in Elimäki would die down after some harsh punishments, they were wrong. The resistance against doing days' labour for the nobility continued throughout the 1660s and '70s. The decisions made at the beginnings of the 1680s, often called the Great Reduction, where the largest fiefdoms were reduced and land was given back to the Crown, raised high hopes in Elimäki. However, because the Elimäki fief had been awarded for saving the King's life—an exceptional case—the reduction did not fully take effect there. This triggered a new wave of unrest among the local peasantry which remained latent throughout until the 1770s, when it flared up again in the peasant unrests that broke out all over the Swedish Realm—with Elimäki becoming the hotspot for these on the Finnish side.⁷⁰ In fact, all through the seventeenth century before this, there was unrest in many fiefdoms. For example, resistance against the manors was strong in Kexholm Province on the eastern borders with Russia. This had been annexed to the Swedish Realm in 1617, and in the 1640s and '50s, almost the whole province was parcelled out between large fiefdoms consisting of a whole parish or two. It resulted, at the end of the 1670s in a serious disturbance known as the Tohmajärvi revolt, and the peasant leader of that revolt, Tuomas Paakkunainen, was finally sentenced to death and executed.⁷¹

In 1650, Queen Christina gave a very large donation to Count Per Brahe which stretched from the town of Raahe by the Gulf of Bothnia to Kajaani near the eastern border of the realm. The large parish of Pielisjärvi, in the northernmost district of Kexholm, was included in this donation. Count Brahe was interested in developing trade in his jurisdiction, so in 1653 he founded the town of Brahea near Lieksa village in the Pielisjärvi parish. Over the next few decades, the town remained rather small with a population of only about 350. Nevertheless, it had the houses and shops of merchants, some streets, a council house, a church, and a school. In 1683, after the Great Reduction and the death of Count Brahe, the Governor of Kexholm decided this small town in the middle of nowhere was of no use to anyone so he ordered Brahea to be destroyed.⁷²

The Great Reduction in the 1680s was a kind of turning point in relations between the manors and peasants in Kexholm. Almost all the parishes in the province had been donated as fiefdoms in the 1640s and 1650s, and yet the nobles responsible for these remote borderlands did not choose to live there, preferring instead to stay in their residences in Stockholm, Riga or elsewhere more comfortable. The bailiffs were the ones taking care of cultivating their land and collecting the taxes from the peasants. In the Great Reduction, all these fiefdoms were returned to the Crown. However, in the Baltic Sea provinces (*Östersjöprovinser*) of Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, and Kexholm, the manors and fiefdoms were rented out to tax farmers, who tended the fields of the manor and paid the Crown a certain amount in return for the right to collect taxes from the peasants. Tax farmers also had the right to use the days' labour of tenants for other jobs around the manor as well. In many ways, the bailiffs, military officers, and others who became tax farmers assumed the position that had once been that of the manorial lord who had held the tax donations before the Great Reduction.⁷³ If anything, this tax farming system only intensified the pressure on peasants to work for the manorial estate and pay more taxes.

In 1685, the Pielisjärvi parish was rented out to Salomon Enberg as a tax farmer. Enberg decided to build a manor where Brahea had once been; or at least it was supposed to have been so, but several merchants had in fact stayed in the village and continued their trading, so Brahea was in fact still standing. Enberg therefore evicted them, tore down their houses, and ploughed up the streets⁷⁴; and this was to have drastic consequences for Enberg's popularity.⁷⁵ Not only did he have issues with the merchants for having done this, but he also got into quarrels with the

local clergy soon after arriving in the parish. Meanwhile, the peasants were complaining over the combined curse of crop failure and heavier taxes. Therefore, Enberg had almost the whole parish against him, and soon complaints about him were brought to the attention of the Governor General of Ingria and Kexholm in Narva⁷⁶ and King Charles XI and the Diet in Stockholm.⁷⁷ After the sermon at the church on the Boxing Day of 1686, the peasants of Pielisjärvi gathered in the churchyard. A peasant Matti Kotilainen shouted ‘come and see how Kotilainen has been raised to the position of *mieromies*’. In this context, *mieromies* could be translated as ‘man of the village’,⁷⁸ and in practice it meant the man entrusted with relaying complaints to the governor or monarch.

According to Pentti Renvall, meetings of peasants like this, in the churchyard or nearby on important church days after the sermon, was a practice that was happening already in the Middle Ages,⁷⁹ and it was widespread throughout the whole of Northern Europe, not just characteristic of this remote part of the Swedish Realm. Such local self-governing institutions have been particularly well researched in the German territory.⁸⁰ However, the name *mieromies* that the peasants continuously used for the representatives they sent on their behalf with complaints to meet the establishment, be it king, governor general or possessor of the fief, has led to an interesting discussion about the role of this ‘chosen man’ of the local community. Mauno Jokipii has proposed that selecting a *mieromies* was an institutionalised way to choose a temporary peasant leader of a village or a parish.⁸¹ Just as David was ‘raised’ to the position of ‘King of the Peasants’ in 1436 the sources describe Matti Kotilainen being ‘raised’ to the position of *mieromies*. We know ten cases of a *mieromies* being nominated between the years 1667–1782, with seven of them dating from the years 1686–1697.⁸² For example, Tuomas Paakkunainen of Tohmajärvi is given that title in the court minutes. Indeed, it seems that throughout Kexholm, *mieromies* was the name given to the representative of the village elected or nominated by this customary meeting of the parishioners (*mieron tuuma*). The meeting would only happen in times of crisis, and the opinions and advice of the elected *mieromies* were clearly important for many but the sources give no reason to believe that he would normally be seen as the leader of a local protest.

Thus in February 1687, Matti Kotilainen went, accompanied by Anders Hietanen and Matti Saastamoinen, to meet the Governor General Göran Sperling. Because he had been inundated with complaints, the governor organised a meeting between them and the tax farmers in Kexholm itself by

Lake Ladoga. There Kotilainen, Hietanen, and Saastamoinen complained over the harsh taxation laws and asked for nothing less than a renewal of the whole taxation system. They complained about how Enberg (the tax farmer) hindered their trade with the Russians and had evicted people from their houses when he wanted to build his manor in Lieksa village. With these complaints, the peasants were in fact referring to Enberg's destruction of Brahea.

It soon became clear that no help could be expected of the governor in Kexholm, as he assigned the accusations against Enberg to be judged in the local court. As for the suggestion of changing the tax laws, the tax farmers were of course heavily against it. In the Kexholm Province, there was a special system of taxation in place whereby every year the crops and properties of farmers were evaluated and taxes charged according to this evaluation. The problem was that the total amount of taxes collected from each fief still needed to stay the same, so if one person's taxes were moderated, the others had to pay more. The peasants who worked on the land felt that this system made it possible for the tax farmer to make more profit out of them than was due, as they could not keep track of what was being paid and why it would go up. Basically the system was too arbitrary, and they wanted a tax roll with a steady rate of taxation as elsewhere in the realm.

Immediately after the failed Kexholm meeting, Kotilainen and his companions decided to travel to Stockholm and make their case directly to the king. After spring intercession had been celebrated in church, the people of Pielisjärvi parish once more gathered in the churchyard for the *mieron tuuma*. A customs officer, who was married to the daughter of the local parson, wrote out the complaints on behalf the illiterate peasants gathered. The parson himself was against the tax farmer as well, so he wrote the passports to Stockholm for Kotilainen, Hietanen, Saastamoinen, and Hulkkonen. And when the spring thaw finally began, these representatives of Pielisjärvi travelled to Stockholm.

As already mentioned, Governor Sperling had been receiving letters about taxes in his district for some time; sometimes they were proposals for renewing the taxation system, but most of the time they were complaints about the tax being too high, and about troublesome tax farmers. The governor somehow felt that this reflected on him badly, or at least so it seems from his letters to the king. Sperling labelled the complainants as 'restless fellows' who were causing disorder in the province. According to the governor, their ideas were not their own but had clearly been put in

their minds by rabble-rousers from the more literate classes who wanted the king to think poorly of the governor. By this he was implying the local clergy who were in league with the peasants against the tax farmers. In July 1687, Sperling perhaps felt so threatened, that he sailed to Stockholm himself with these complaints to explain the situation in person to the king. This meant that the governor and representatives of Pielisjärvi parish were actually in Stockholm at the same time. In fear of the governor, the latter had to hide out in Stockholm the whole of that summer (1687) until Sperling had left again. Finally, on 14 September, they managed to leave their complaint at the king's chancellery. The contents of it were rather similar to the one they had given to the governor in February. All the same, the king passed on the complaint to the governor, with a note attached saying that perhaps an overhaul of the taxation system in Kexholm was a good idea. Sperling now found his situation quite uncomfortable and so, in response he proposed that this initiative to overhaul the taxation system be pondered first in the Chamber Collegium (similar to the present-day Ministry of Finance). The king agreed to this, not knowing that the governor had already informed his peers sitting in the Chamber Collegium about the proposed changes and how they would put him and his tax farmers in a difficult position; so the proposal came to nothing. However, the accusations regarding the tax farmers were taken up at Pielisjärvi local court in March 1688.

This local court took place at the Enbergs manor in Lieksa.⁸³ The peasants complained how, as a tax farmer, he had evicted many of them from their farms; but Enberg was able to show how the peasants had actually been given new places to live as a compensation and several years free of taxes. This was hard for the complainers to argue with, and the court swiftly denied them the right to complain any further about this matter. The other issue was about the use of what they believed were false measures to collect the taxes which led to them being eventually forced off their land; but when the lay jurors examined these measures, they were found to be correct. This meant that all the complaints were found to be groundless and were thus dismissed.

In the evening, when the judge pronounced the end of the day's court session—due to be continued the next morning—he decided that Matti Kotilainen and Anders Hietanen should be held overnight in court so they would not escape. Many peasants had arrived at the court to hear the outcome of the proceedings, in fact so many that they did all not fit inside the court house, and there were about 100 gathered outside. When

they heard that their representatives had been arrested, the crowd got angry and armed with spears and clubs, they tried to stop the soldiers from keeping Kotilainen and Hietanen in the courthouse, but after a struggle the soldiers managed to close the doors with their captives inside, and the peasants locked out. But as the crowd were worried their representatives might get imprisoned in Kexholm Citadel, they kept watch outside the courthouse all night, and messages were sent out to the villages for other peasants to join them. This meant the judge, crown bailiff, two soldiers, manor bailiff, the tax farmer, lay jurors, Kotilainen, and Hietanen all had to stay inside the courthouse the whole night. Because the soldiers and bailiffs were armed with guns, nobody wanted to actually force their way in. By the morning after everyone had calmed down, Kotilainen and Hietanen were set free, and soon they were on their way again to Stockholm with a new letter of complaints.

Complaints were flooding in from all over to the governor and king, as the situation was contentious between the peasants and tax farmers in many fiefs of the province—not just Pielisjärvi. At this point, the governor advised the king to have the High Court of Turku investigate them. But nothing changed, with the peasants' claims falling on deaf ears, and Hietanen and Kotilainen then going back every year to Stockholm with fresh complaints between 1688 and 1691. It seems that being a peasant representative had become some kind of 'career' for them, as there seemed to be no other option left open to them. Hietanen also tried to get people from other neighbouring parishes to join with them in the complaint. By the autumn of 1691, the authorities had had enough and they were arrested in Turku and thrown into jail, where they had to languish for about a year before the High Court sentenced Anders Hietanen, Matti Kotilainen, and Pekka Hulkkonen to pay large fines for resisting the governor's decisions, for groundless accusations against the tax farmer Enberg, and for insulting the honour of Judge Johan Ehrnroot and the assessors of the High Court. In addition, the High Court sentenced Hietanen and Kotilainen to be whipped and exiled for inciting others to go along with them; pronounced that every tenth man in Pielisjärvi parish would be whipped; and that they would have to collectively pay 1200 *dalar* for the costs they had caused the Crown. The decision was then passed to the king for his seal of approval. King Charles XI pardoned the peasants from whipping, but confirmed the rest of the sentence in November 1692. By this point, Anders Hietanen and Matti Kotilainen had already been taken in chains to Pomerania to do forced labour.

So who were these peasant representatives from Pielisjärvi really? Why were they chosen for the role of *mieromiehet*? Anders Hietanen and Pekka Hulkkonen were both merchants from the small town of Brahea. Before the founding of the manor in Lieksa, Hietanen and Hulkkonen had gained their livelihoods from trading across the Russian border. The decision of the governor to destroy Brahea and the way Enberg carried it out was a personal catastrophe for them and for their income, hence their resentment towards both the tax farmer and governor is understandable. As merchants, Hietanen and Hulkkonen were used to handling people and documents, and due to their profession, they had travelled a bit more than some of their farming-only neighbours. It was even mentioned in one court session that Anders Hietanen could read and write.⁸⁴ Moreover, we can find Hietanen's own handwritten signature under the complaint the peasants left at the king's chancellery in the autumn of 1687. In addition, Hietanen was the churchwarden (*kyrckiwärä*) of Brahea church at the start of the 1680s.⁸⁵

The merchants of Brahea were not only traders though; they also had farms. When Enberg was accused in court of destroying the houses and streets of the town, he said that the merchants of Brahea were not real burghers, but simply local peasants practicing illegal trade in the countryside. In the annual estimation of how much tax each farm should pay, they were each assigned a rating⁸⁶ which described how much of the total tax for the parish each farm had to pay. These are the ratings for Pielisjärvi parish⁸⁷:

Rating	Number of farms	%
0–1	500	82
2–3	92	15
4–	14	2

The farm of Anders Hietanen was not big, as its rating was 1½ in the year 1686. At that time, half of Hietanen's lands had already been swallowed up by the manor already. Therefore, we can suppose that the original farm would have once had a higher rating. Matti Saastamoinen and Pekka Hulkkonen's farms had a rating of four; so these farms were among the wealthiest 2 % of all farms in the parish. Actually, in 1688, when Hietanen and Kotilainen went with the first complaint to the governor, Matti Saastamoinen volunteered to pay for the journey himself.

The farm of Matti Kotilainen in the village of Vuonislahti was given a rating of only one; so the farm was not wealthy, but Matti had other

qualities that made him a suitable candidate for being a *micromies*. Matti was also the owner of one of the mills in the parish,⁸⁸ and as a miller, Matti was a key personality in the local community, coming into everyday contact with most people. Moreover, he was one of the trusted men of the local parson (vestryman) and the treasurer for the church's wine store. One of his tasks was to get the wine needed in the church services from Vyborg, which was the second largest town in the eastern half of the Swedish Realm at the time. Being the man entrusted with keeping the church's wine cellar properly stocked connects Kotilainen and churchwarden Anders Hietanen, and it also shows that they were on good terms with the parson and the parishioners. It is possible, that Matti was a trader as well, since we know that in 1688 he was in debt to some of the burghers of Vyborg.⁸⁹

THE GREAT FAMINE 1696–1697

Our last case study is the violent revolt that occurred in the northern part of Kexholm Province during the Great Famine of 1696–1697.⁹⁰ At this time, the slash-and-burn method in spruce forests was still widely used in cultivating rye and barley in Finland; particularly in the north of Kexholm, where the fields and cattle were otherwise small. Indeed, the (pine) forest was also relied upon for producing tar, which was another valuable source of income for the population. But if the summer was very wet, the peasants could not burn the forest, nor make tar from it. And if it was too hot and dry at the beginning of summer the germinating crops could be destroyed, just as they could be in the autumn, if the first frosts came too soon before the crops were ripe. During the last decades of the seventeenth century, the climate was very unstable and played havoc with the livelihoods of many. The years 1684–1687 were times of poor harvest and crop failures, and it reoccurred in 1690 and again from 1695–1697 when almost all the crops were lost.⁹¹ But because the harvests were poor all over Northern Europe, no grain could be bought from other more fertile Baltic areas to cover this lean period, and so by the last year of this period, Finland was in dire straits with all her grain stores used up and famine stalking the land. It became known as the Great Famine of 1696–1697.

Crop failure or not, people still had to pay their taxes, and throughout the seventeenth century, taxes had been usually paid in grain. The Crown or fief holders could moderate taxes in the years of crop failure, and generally they did not press peasants too much in the hope that next year, if

the harvest was good, the good folk would be paying their taxes again and perhaps even paying something towards the tax they had been unable to pay in previous years. However, the tax farmer's logic was different, as from the year 1690 onwards, tax farmers had to pay an annual sum of money and grain to the Crown without exception—as rent for the fief they were responsible for. These rental agreements between tax farmers and the Crown ranged from 3 to 12 years in length, and when their contract ended, tax farmers had no further right to demand back payment of taxes from anyone. This meant that tax farmers felt obliged to extract taxes from the peasants at any price, hence the heightened antipathy between these two parties. The famine and these desperate and ever-worsening relations between the authorities and taxpayers eventually conflated to produce an uprising.

The revolt first burst out in Pielisjärvi parish, where there was still smouldering resentment against the tax farmer, Enberg; and it soon spread to the neighbouring parishes. The bailiff of Enberg's manor in Lieksa, Simon Affleck, was known for his harsh manners when he was dealing with people, which had earned him the nickname of 'Simo Hurtta' (Simon the Hound). In December 1696, when he was collecting taxes at the northern part of Pielisjärvi parish, the peasants tried to kill him in an ambush but failed. Just after, however, a small crowd of 12 peasants armed themselves and attacked the small manor in Nurmes village. From the manor, they took some food, other necessities, and one cow. The cow they slaughtered, cooked, and ate.

Soon after this robbery, word got out to other villages and a large crowd of peasants soon gathered round the Lieksa manor. They then went into the granaries and cowsheds there and took whatever they were able to get their hands on. Some of them tried to burn the manor down, but for fear that the church nearby would also be destroyed, they did not dare to light the firewood that they had piled up round the manor. One peasant tried to break down the wall of the manor with an axe, but Affleck shot him in the back with a gun from a window. The man did not die from the gunshot wound but was laid up for several weeks. After this show of strength from the bailiff, the peasants concentrated on robbing grain from the granaries, horses from the stalls, and cows from the cowsheds instead. In a village nearby, the peasants again slaughtered two cows procured in this way and cooked them for food.

Two days after the attack on Lieksa manor about 30 peasants from the northern part of the parish visited the manor at Nurmes again. This time

they took food, six axes, and a pan for distilling spirits. One cow was again slaughtered for food. Soon after these events, Affleck left the area and travelled to the town of Sortavala by Lake Ladoga. The tax farmer Enberg had moved there and was now the mayor of the town. After Christmas, the word spread among the villages of Pielisjärvi parish about the great robbery at Lieksa manor. Eighty-one armed peasants, seven with their wives, gathered to the Lieksa manor on the night of Boxing Day, 1696. Because the bailiff had left the manor, the peasants could freely loot the place. The maid and farm-hands put up no resistance. Practically everything was taken; meat and fish from the granaries, cows and horses from the cowsheds and stalls, even the locks from the doors and the doors of the stall were taken. In a village nearby, the peasants divided a share of the plunder among each of them and either went home or, perhaps wisely, escaped over the border to Russia.

Robbing and looting continued for a while in Pielisjärvi. Those who had not participated in the main robbery of Lieksa manor now gathered what they could from its fields. Once the looting started, it was hard to stop it. Word about the success of the Pielisjärvi peasants had reached the neighbouring parish of Liperi, so by the end of January 1697, about 40 peasants armed with spears and axes attacked the local manor there. The tax farmer was at the time travelling elsewhere, but one of the manor's hired hands, Joseph Kaiponen, tried to defend it and he struck one of the attackers with an ice pick. The peasant died immediately and the other attackers beat Kaiponen badly. By this time, the other staff of the manor were already in full flight, and after this skirmish the peasants robbed the manor of everything. After this, all the windows, tiled stoves, and even the boats were smashed to pieces. Breaking the stoves was a strong message for the local tax farmer: if someone was evicted from a house, the establishment often broke their stove so the house could not be lived in anymore. This was a taste of the establishment's own medicine.

After Liperi, word was growing apace about the peasant uprising and it now spread to the village of Rasivaara in the neighbouring parish called Kitee. But the military commanders in Kexholm had also caught wind of it, and a detachment of soldiers was sent to quash it. In Sortavala, about 100 armed peasants had already gathered but when they saw the military arriving, they decided to withdraw. The military patrol eventually faced down the rebellious peasants at Rasivaara where, in a short gunfight, one soldier was killed and the peasants fled into the woods. In the

process, however, the soldiers killed an innocent cottager just because he happened to live in the farm where the clash had taken place. This continued throughout February and March of 1697—the soldiers tried to hunt down the peasants who had participated in the robberies in the woods and in various farms. Some of them were shot immediately when captured, along with some innocent people as well. Many were tortured and some died in custody. Those who were caught and survived were taken to the dungeon in Kexholm to await trial, and many died there from their wounds, or from disease and malnutrition through lack of treatment.

In March 1697, a special court session investigated what had happened during the Great Famine in more detail. Those few who were proven not guilty and were still alive were set free. The rest, about 40 in total, who had been captured and survived both the military and the dungeon were now sentenced to death. Some of the arbitrary behaviour of the military was also examined as well. Some of the soldiers had made themselves scarce, but those who were still present in the province and who had shot or tortured peasants without a trial were severely punished, and some were even sentenced to death too.

So who were the leaders of this last violent peasant revolt in the Finnish part of the Swedish Realm? In Pielisjärvi, the main figure behind robbing the manors at Nurmes and Lieksa was Antti Meriläinen from the village of Haapajärvi about 25 kilometres to the north-west of Nurmes. Although the distance from Haapajärvi to Lieksa manor was about 80 kilometres, travelling was quite fast in winter on a horse-drawn sledge across the frozen Lake Pielinen. The other leader of the movement in Pielisjärvi was Matti Eskelinen from the village of Höljällä, about 40 kilometres to the north of Lieksa manor.

The minutes of the court sessions give descriptive clues as to the wealth of the accused peasants. Comparing these descriptions with the ratings of the farms (see the section ‘[Tax farmers at the end of the seventeenth century](#)’ above) we find that farms rated under one (1) were ‘poor’, 1–2 ‘average’, 2–3 ‘rather wealthy’, and 4 and above ‘wealthy’. Meriläinen was almost 60 years old and Eskelinen about 40, so they were not exactly young ‘hotheads’ but more likely to have been stable middle-aged farmers. Indeed, Meriläinen owned a rather wealthy farm (rating 2½), although Matti Eskelinen’s was average, with a rating of one. Nevertheless, if we compare the names of the peasants accused of the Pielisjärvi robberies (in the court minutes) to information gathered from the tax rolls, we find that

the proportion of those from wealthy farms was slightly bigger than those from poorer ones among the attackers (perhaps because they had more to lose), which leads one to think that this was ostensibly an uprising of wealthy farmers.⁹²

In Liperi parish, the main people involved in the attack on the local manor were Lasse Karttunen and Antti Rouhiainen. Karttunen's farm was rated 3½ in 1682, and a year earlier it had been 4½; while Rouhiainen's was 1½ in 1682 and 2 the year before. This information about the wealth of the farms in Liperi is from 14 years before the revolt, however, so there is a good chance that a lot had changed in that time. Perhaps this wealth had vanished during the continuous crop failures of the mid-1690s, but then all the other peasants would have met these difficulties as well; so their position as the 'wealthy man' in the local community is likely to have remained, and it is most likely that the wealthier farmers were leading the revolt in Liperi as well as in Pielisjärvi. At the time of the revolt, Karttunen was 46 years old and Rouhiainen 56. Although Rouhiainen was not as wealthy as Karttunen, he enjoyed the trust of the local community and the local parson, as he was also Liperi's churchwarden.

Antti Meriläinen, the leader of the Pielisjärvi uprising, died in the dungeon of Kexholm Citadel on 22 March 1697. Meriläinen's companion, Matti Eskelinen managed to evade the soldiers in the spring 1697, but he was eventually captured in the village of Ylikylä in the parish of Pielisjärvi in November 1697 and sentenced to death in February 1698 at the local court. Meanwhile, Karttunen and Rouhiainen from Liperi were both sentenced to death at the court in Kexholm in March 1697. Between them all, the court in Kexholm (in March 1697) and the local courts (for some time later) issued 45 death sentences altogether. Nine of these were possibly mitigated to fines at the High Court; but the remaining 36 death sentences were most likely carried out,⁹³ even if the sources do not go so far as to note if each one was.

The food riots in Kexholm Province during the Great Famine constituted the last peasant uprising in Finland under Swedish rule where the peasants used open violence. Peasant resistance certainly continued well into the eighteenth century, but it took nonviolent forms such as going on strike and refusing to do the days' labour or pay taxes; or of complaining to the High Court and the king; and rather than fight, the peasants would for instance hide out in the forests. So having now covered the social context of the various peasant revolts that occurred in the 15th–17th centuries, we can now turn to the conclusions.

DID THE RICH LEAD THE POOR TO REVOLT?

The answer to the question set at the beginning of this article and in the title of this conclusive chapter is basically ‘yes’, but perhaps we need to qualify who ‘the rich’ were. As far as we know, only Matti Sihvo from Anjala and the disturbances in Elimäki was a peasant leader that was neither wealthy nor poor. David of Ania in the 1430s, Maunu Nyrhi in the 1550s, all the main leaders of the Club War in the 1590s, as well as the leaders of the resistance against the tax farmers and in the food riots at the end of the seventeenth century were all clearly richer than most other peasants. But perhaps there were other qualities that caused them to become leaders in these uprisings? These qualities may certainly have correlated with wealth, but might just as easily have been a *reason* for this wealth as much as the *result* of it. The ability to read and write clearly helped, as did the experience of handling people, the establishment, and documents, as well as being used to travelling to and from remote places. Therefore those who had experience of trading, of serving the Crown as tax collectors, or of serving the church as trusted men or churchwardens clearly demonstrated these very qualities. In the Club War, experience of warfare was clearly also an asset for a leader of peasants, and as we have seen it might explain why the nobles Axel Kurck and Gödick Fincke were asked if they would lead the peasants in revolt.

Jaakko Ilkka, the leader of the Club War, seemed to embody all these qualities: he was relatively wealthy, he had served the Crown as bailiff, he was a trader, and he had some war experience; and all other leaders in that uprising had at least one of these qualities. The *micromies* Antti Hietanen from Pielisjärvi was a trader; Matti Kotilainen was a miller and the vestryman of the local church, and treasurer of its wine cellar, so was no doubt able to count.

But why did David of Ania, Maunu Nyrhi, Matti Sihvo, and Antti Meriläinen become peasant leaders? As far as we know, they were not traders or literate and they did not have any war experience. It is clear, however, that all four men had their reasons to be bitter though. David of Ania campaigned for the meadows and mills, Matti Sihvo for his meadows and farm and Antti Meriläinen because of harsh taxation during the years of famine. The personal motives of Maunu Nyrhi remain unknown, however, due to the paucity of sources. What else played a role in making these people leaders? Describing the personality of people who lived several hundred years ago can only be speculative. Can we pay any attention

to the letter written in the Lempäälä meeting in 1439, where the penitent peasants said that they had followed ‘that Crazy David’. It may have been that the expression was chosen by one of the representatives of the establishment in the meeting, not by the peasants themselves, or if it did originate among the peasants, it may have simply been referring to David’s hot temper. As for Maunu Nyrhi we know that, according to his opponent the bailiff, he had gone round threatening the peasants with an axe if they agreed to pay taxes and that he pushed the bailiff off his chair and sat down in his place. Although this testimony is from the bailiff, it seems Nyrhi was a hot-tempered man from another source too. At the court, for example, he stood up and opposed the king’s letter claiming that it had been written by someone else.

Gertrud von Ungern, Baron Wrede, and Governor Brahe all called Matti Sihvo and the other protesters of Elimäki ‘bullies’ or troublemakers. Eeva-Liisa Oksanen has also described Sihvo as a ‘bullheaded’ man, but there is little written about the behaviour of Matti Sihvo in the local court minutes. In the session of November 1649, Matti Sihvo simply said that he had not agreed to exchange his farm with the one the manor had offered, and accused the landlord of having either copied Matti’s signature from elsewhere to put on the contract or else got ‘his hag’ to do it. Admittedly this last term used to describe Matti’s wife is perhaps not the nicest, but it might simply be the voice of man who has just lost his farm and, understandably, his temper. In 1686, in his complaint to the governor, the tax farmer Salomon Enberg wrote that the parson of Pielisjärvi did not keep order in church but instead protected those peasants who got involved in a drunken brawl during the service. Enberg names, for example, Antti Meriläinen, who was later to lead the revolt in Pielisjärvi during the Great Famine. What the brawl was about is not explained in any greater detail in the complaint,⁹⁴ but we have an idea of what kind of character Meriläinen was ten years before the revolt he was to eventually lead—though whether he was still as hot-tempered later on is hard to say.

There is thus one more possibility we should consider. In the seventeenth century, the peasants often made it clear that they did not have leaders. All decisions were made collectively and so they believed they were collectively responsible for their actions. It may be that this was tactical thinking as they thought the Crown would not be able to punish so many peasants at once, and they could shelter the individuals who had brought the complaints on their behalf to the High Court or king. The establishment, however, needed just one person who (perhaps whether

they liked it or not) became the spokesmen of the peasants and were thus named as leaders or the ‘principal authors’ of any insurrection. The establishment and the court did not process with a crowd, they needed a person to deal with. In this way, Matti Sihvo, Tuomas Paakkunainen, Antti Hietanen, and Matti Kotilainen were chosen instead *by the authorities* as being the leaders of the peasant movements, and this determined, in many ways, the future careers of these men, who it seems had little other choice than to continue complaining.

Finally, how were the peasant leaders chosen? More than 100 years after David’s Uprising, the local court of Vesilahti was told about a peasant called David, from the village of Ania who had raised himself to the position of ‘King of the Peasants’. But the modern way of interpreting this is that it just meant electing a temporary leader to carry out any kind of special deed, whether it was a revolt or simply a fishing expedition. Nevertheless, we know nothing of how this nomination process occurred. The expression used is ‘raised himself’, but whether there was some kind of meeting which elected him to the position of a ‘king’, or whether he decided to assume the position for himself is not known; and the same applies to Maunu Nyrhi and Jaakko Ilkka. We know that during the Club War the peasants asked several knights and officers to lead them, and so we can suppose that some kind of collective decision-making caused Jaakko Ilkka to be asked to lead the peasant army. The institution of *mieromies* in Kexholm Province gives us some hints about how these collective decisions were made. The meeting of the parishioners took place in the churchyard on important church days when lots of people had gathered anyway for the service. It seems that individuals like Matti Kotilainen certainly had a big influence on the decisions taken at such meetings; however, later events show that the parishioners stood as ‘one man’ behind the decisions made in these meetings. Because meetings of this kind were known throughout Northern Europe at this time, we can assume that this institution of *mieron tuuma* (parish meetings) in the churchyard may well have already been in use at the time of David’s Uprising in the fifteenth century.

NOTES

1. V. Rasila (1968) *Kansalaissodan sosiaalinen tausta* (Helsinki: Tammi), 147–153.
2. H. Ylikangas (1999) ‘Nuijasodan perusvoimat – ketkä kapinoivat ja ketä vastaan’, in H. Ylikangas, *Väkivallasta sanan valtaan*.

- Suomalaista menneisyyttä keskiajalta nykypäiviin* (Juva: WSOY), 120–122.
3. A. Luukko (2004) 'Ilkka, Jaakko, nuijamiesten päällikkö'. In M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 4. Studia biographica 3:4* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), 292. Transl. by the author.
 4. *Registratum Ecclesiae Oboensis eller Åbo Domkyrkans Svartbok. Turun tuomiokirkon mustakirja* (1996) (Jyväskylä: Art House), document 476.
 5. K. Blomsted (1937) 'Davidin kapina 1438', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* 35, 22.
 6. K. Blomsted, 'Davidin kapina 1438', 24; K. Blomstedt (1952) Anian David, in Aaltonen, Esko et al. (eds.) *Suomen talonpoikia Lallista Kyösti Kallioon* (Porvoo: WSOY), 16; S. Suvanto (1973) *Satakunnan historia III, Keskiaika* (Satakunnan maakuntaliitto) 361; S. Suvanto (1987) 'Keskiaika' in *Suomen historia 2*. (Espoo: Weilin & Göös) 145–146.
 7. J. Jaakkola (1950) 'Suomen myöhäiskeskiaika I. Unionin alkukausi', in *Suomen historia V*. (Porvoo: Werner Söderström Oy), 525–526; S. Suvanto (2001) 'Ylä-Satakunnan ja Hämeen talonpoikien kapinaherkkyys' in *Tampere. Tutkimuksia ja kuvauksia XI. Tampereen Historiallisen Seuran Julkaisuja XVI* (Tampere: Tampereen Historiallinen Seura) 175–176.
 8. Blomsted, 'Anian David', p. 13, p. 16; recent researchers who have adopted Blomsted's interpretation about taxation being the main cause of the mutiny are A-P Palola (1997) *Maunu Tavast ja Olavi Maununpoika – Turun piispat 1412–1460*. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia 178. (Saarijärvi: Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura) 298; M. Kallioinen (2001) *Kirkon ja kruunun välissä. Suomalaiset ja keskiaika*. Kleio. (Helsinki: Edita) 51–52.
 9. Kaarlo Blomsted presents the historiography of studies on David's Uprising up to the year 1937 in his article Blomsted, 'Davidin kapina 1438' 1–11.
 10. Suvanto, *Satakunnan historia* 360–361; S. Suvanto, 'Keskiaika' 146; see also P. Suvanto (2003) 'David, talonpoikaiskapinan johtaja' in M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 2, Studia Biographica 3:2* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 344–345.

11. H. Ylikangas (1990), *Mennyt meissä. Suomalaisen kansanvallan historiallinen analyysi*. (Porvoo: WSOY) 16.
12. *Registratum Ecclesiae Oboensis*, document 476.
13. Jaakkola, Suomen myöhäiskeskiaika I 522–523.
14. T. Salminen (1995) 'Davidin kapina ja Pirkanmaan kapinaherkkyys' in M. Kaarninen & M-R Saloniemi (eds), *Tampere, tutkimuksia ja kuvauksia X*. Tampereen Historiallisen Seuran julkaisuja XV. (Tampere: Tampereen Historiallinen Seura) 34–35; S. Suvanto, (2001) 'Ylä-Satakunnan ja Hämeen talonpoikien kapinaherkkyys', in T. Salminen (ed.), *Tampere, tutkimuksia ja kuvauksia XI*. Tampereen Historiallisen Seuran julkaisuja XVI. (Tampere: Tampereen Historiallinen Seura) 175.
15. Blomsted, 'Davidin kapina 1438' 23–33.
16. See Palola, 'Maunu Tavast ja Olavi Maununpoika' 304; P. Suvanto, *David* 344–345.
17. S. Seppälä (2009), *Viljana, nahkoina, kapakalana. Talonpoikien maksamat kruununverot Suomessa vuosina 1539–1609*. Bibliotheca Historica 125. (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 36–39.
18. Gustav I sent his trusted secretaries to the provinces to hear and write down the complaints his subjects had made about their manorial lords, bailiffs, and district judges. A report of this kind concerning the Finnish area was written by the secretary Jacob Teitt and was published. See (1894) *Jaakko Teitin valitusluettelo Suomen aatelistaa vastaan vv. 1555–1556 (Jacob Teits klagomålregister emot adeln i Finland år 1555–1556*. K. Grotenfelt (ed.) (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura).
19. See K. Johansson (2004), "The Lords from the Peasants or the Peasants from the Lords". The Dacke War and the Concept of Communalism', in K. Katajala (ed.) *Northern Revolts. Medieval and Early Modern Peasant Unrest in the Nordic Countries*. Studia Fennica Historica 8. (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society) 53–89.
20. Copies of the peasants' complaints and answers of the judge and bailiff have survived among the tax rolls, and some of these were published in (1849) *Handlingar till upplysning af Finlands häfder III*, A. I. Arwidsson (ed.) (Helsinki) documents 98, 99; (1856) *Handlingar till upplysning af Finlands häfder VIII*, A. I. Arwidsson (ed.) document 40. The course of events and a full description of the primary sources are available in K. Pirinen (1939) 'Lappeen talonpoikaikapina 1551–1553' in *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*

- 37, 38–52; K. Katajala (2002) *Suomalainen kapina. Talonpoikaislevottomuudet ja poliittinen kulttuuri Suomessa Ruotsin ajalla (n. 1150–1800)*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 212 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 168–179; K. Katajala (2004), 'The Changing Face of Peasant Unrest in Early Modern Finland' in K. Katajala (ed.) *Northern Revolts. Medieval and Early Modern Peasant Unrest in the Nordic Countries*. Studia Fennica Historica 8 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 149–153.
21. Pirinen, 'Lappeen talonpoikaiskapina' 41; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 170; Katajala, 'Changing face of Peasant Unrest' 150; In his biographical description about Maunu Nyrhi Veijo Saloheimo describes the events of the Lappee mutiny but does not, however, in any way enlighten the backgrounds of Nyrhi, see V. Saloheimo (2006) 'Nyrhi, Mauno Pekanpoika, kapinajohtaja, talonpoika' in M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 7, Biographica 3:7* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 272–273.
22. Arwidsson, III, document 99; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 173–174;
23. Arwidsson III, document 99.
24. K. Pirinen (1952) 'Maunu Nyrhi' in E. Aaltonen, E. Jutikkala, M. Haavio (eds.), *Suomen talonpoikia Lallista Kyösti Kallioon* (Porvoo-Helsinki: WSOY) 23–25.
25. Pirinen, 'Maunu Nyrhi' 25.
26. See Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 169–172.
27. Arwidsson III, document 99.
28. Arwidsson III, documents 99, 106.
29. R. Fagerlund (1991) 'Sotilasrasitus Varsinais-Suomessa 1523–1617'. In *Varsinais-Suomen historia V,7*. (Laitila) 69–71; H. Ylikangas (1996) *Nuijasota*, 3rd edn (Keuruu-Helsinki: Otava) 94.
30. A. Luukko (1950) *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia II. Keski-aika ja 1500-luku* (Helsinki: Etelä-Pohjanmaan historiatoimikunta) 528; Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 100–101; Katajala, 'The Changing Face of Peasant Revolts' 155.
31. Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 149–150; Katajala, 'The Changing Face of Peasant Revolts' 156.
32. Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 127–129; Katajala, 'The Changing Face of Peasant Revolts' 155.
33. Grönblad, Edvard (1843) *Handlingar rörande Klubbekriget I. Urkunder upplysande Finlands öden och tillstånd i slutet af 16de*

- och början af 17de århundradet* (Helsingfors: J. Simelius), 65; Y. Koskinen (1929) *Nuijasota, sen syyt ja tapaukset*, 3rd edn (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava) 202–203.
34. For more on the Club War see A. Luukko (1950) *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia II. Keskiaika ja 1500-luku* (Etelä-Pohjanmaan historiatointimikunta – Maalaiskuntien Liiton kirjapaino) 515–592; Koskinen, *Nuijasota*; Ylikangas, *Nuijasota*; E. Markkanen (1980) 'Nuijakapinan alku Rautalammilla – aika, paikka ja kapinoitsijat'. In *Scripta Historica IV*. (Tornio: Oulun historiaseura); in English see Katajala, 'Changing Face of Peasant Unrest' 157–158.
 35. Ylikangas 1999 'Nuijasodan perusvoimat' 122.
 36. Ylikangas, 'Nuijasodan perusvoimat' 122.
 37. H. Ylikangas (1991) 'The Historical Connections of European Peasant Revolts' in *Scandinavian Journal of History 1991, Vol 16, No 2* (Oslo-Stockholm: Scandinavian University Press) 94–95.
 38. P. Reinholdsson (1998) *Upprörelseresningar? Samhällsorganisation och konflikt i senmedeltidens Sverige*. *Studia Historica Upsalensia* 186 (Stockholm) 15–26; D. Harrison (1997), *Uppror och allianser. Politisk våld i 1400-talets svenska bondesamhälle*. Lagerbringbibliotek (Historiska Media: Malmö) 49–92; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 138
 39. *Registratum Ecclesiae Oboensis*, document 476; *Suomen historian dokumentteja I* (1968) (Helsinki: Otava), document 24, 43–45.
 40. Koskinen, *Nuijasota*, 281–282.
 41. Harrison, *Uppror eller resningar?*, 49–92.
 42. K. Katajala (2000) 'Uppror, resning och allians. Klubbekriget i senmedeltidens solnedgång' *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland, vol 91*, 61–66.
 43. Luukko, *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia II* 533–534.
 44. Ylikangas, *Nuijasota*, 101.
 45. Koskinen, *Nuijasota*, 350.
 46. A. Luukko (2005) 'Kranck, Hans, nuijamiesten päällikkö, Iin lohivouti, valtiopäiväedustaja, talollinen' in M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 5. Studia biographica 3:5*. (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 424–425.
 47. Luukko, *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia II* 536.
 48. A. Luukko (2006) 'Palo, Perttu, nuijamiesten päällikkö' in M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 7, Studia biographica 3:7* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 518.

49. Yrjö Koskinen suggests that there were two people with the same name Jaakko Ilkka, a wealthier one and the poor one who we know to have become the leader of the peasant uprising, Koskinen, *Nuijasota*, 303–304. For almost seven decades, Finnish historians wrote about two Jaakko Ilkkas until Pentti Renvall at the end of the 1940s showed that Koskinen had made a mistake in interpreting sources which were in fact only about one person with the name Jaakko Ilkka and he was the wealthy one, see P. Renvall (1949) *Kuninkaanmiehiä ja kapinoitsijoita Vaasa-kauden Suomessa*. (Turku: Tammi) 200–219; Luukko, 'Ilkka, Jaakko' 292.
50. Luukko, 'Ilkka, Jaakko' 292–293.
51. Luukko *Etelä-Pohjanmaan historia II* 534–535; Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 110–114.
52. Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 114–115; Luukko, 'Ilkka, Jaakko' 293.
53. Luukko, 'Ilkka, Jaakko' 294.
54. Ylikangas, *Nuijasota* 128–129; P. Virrankoski (2003) 'Fordell, Hans Hansinpoika, kartanonomistaja, kauppias, Pietarsaaren nimismies, valtiopäiväedustaja' in M. Klinge et al. (eds.) *Suomen kansallisbiografia 2. Studia biographica 3:2*. (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura) 849.
55. E. Oksanen (1981) *Anjalan historia* (Myllykoski) 99–104; E. Oksanen (1984) *Elimäen historia* (Anson oy) 69–78; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina*, 220–228; description of the events in English see Katajala, 'Changing Face of Peasant Unrest' 167–172.
56. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 99–104; Oksanen, *Elimäen historia* 69–78; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 220–228.
57. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 106; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 229–230.
58. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 106; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 231.
59. Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 231.
60. Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 231.
61. The events in Elimäki fief are explained in greater detail in my book Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 231–239. The version of events from 1642–1643 in this article is based on this book and on the large range of source material used there for the first time (Justitierrevisionen, utslagshandlingar oresolverade, Elimäki, Riksarkivet, Sweden).

62. Carl Wrede died 3 November 1654. John E. Roos (1934) ‘Wredesuku’, in K. Blomstedt G. Rein, M. Ruuth, G. Suolahti, V. Voionmaa, Y. Karilas (eds.) *Kansallinen elämäkerrasto V* 652–653. Therefore, the complaint must have been written after that date, although the execution of Matti Sihvo must have taken place before the death of Carl Wrede.
63. Quotation according to Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 125. Translated in English by author.
64. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 125.
65. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 275.
66. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 166.
67. Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 127, 163, 204.
68. The assessment unit numbers are from Oksanen, *Anjalan historia* 232. The composition by the author.
69. Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 252–253.
70. See Oksanen *Elimäen historia* 95–102; Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina* 318–322, 423–428; Katajala, ‘The Changing Face of Peasant Unrest’ 212–214.
71. About Tohmajärvi mutiny see K. Katajala (2005), ‘Yksi kaikkien ja kaikki yhden puolesta. Tohmajärven kapina’ in *Suurvallan rajalla. Ihmisiä Ruotsin ajan Karjalassa*, Historiallinen Arkisto 118 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) 76–120; K. Katajala (2009) ‘En för alla, alla för en. Tohmajärvi uppror 1679’ in *Karolinska förbundets årsbok 2009*, 163–191.
72. For more about the town of Brahea see V. Saloheimo et al. (1954) *Pielisjärven historia I* (Kuopio: Pielisjärven seurakunta/Pielisjärven kunta) 218–245.
73. About tax farming and tax farmers in the province of Kexholm see K. Katajala (1990) *Säätyläisiä ja nousukkaita. Veronvuokraus osana Käkisalmen läänin sääty-yhteisöä vuosina 1683–1700*. Karjalan tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja N:o 95. (Joensuu).
74. Saloheimo, *Pielisjärven historia I* 244.
75. A detailed description and analysis of the events in the Kexholm Province is presented in K. Katajala (1994) *Nälkäkapina. Veronvuokraus ja talonpoikainen vastarinta Karjalassa 1683–1697*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 185 (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura); short description in English Katajala ‘Changing Face of Peasant Unrest’ 178–181.
76. Today, this is in Estonia on the eastern border with Russia.

77. For more on the protests of the 1680s and 1690s in Kexholm, see K. Katajala (1994) *Nälkäkapina. Veronvuokraus ja talonpoikainen vastarinta Karjalassa 1683–1697* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura).
78. The old Finnish word ‘miero’ comes from the Russian word ‘mir’ which means both village and world (or peace). The original meaning of the word ‘miero’ is usually unknown to present-day Finns and in modern Finnish language it is only used in connection with the old fashioned word ‘mierontie’, which describes when someone has to leave his/her home without any funds and go begging, for example. Literally, ‘mierontie’ means ‘road of the village’ and the word ‘mieromies’ means ‘man of the village’.
79. P. Renvall (1939) ‘Pitäjäyhteisön kokoukset’ in *Yhteiskunnallisen järjestäytymisen historiaa*. Historian Aitta IX. (Jyväskylä: Historian Ystävien Liitto) 78–83.
80. This links to the discussion on ‘*gemeinde*’, see D. Sabeau ‘Die Dorfgemeinde als Basis der Bauernaufstände in Westeuropa bis zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts’ in W. Schulze (ed.) *Europäische Bauernrevolten der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp) 191–196; G. Lottes (1984) ‘Popular Culture and the Early Modern State in 16th Century Germany’ in S. I. Kaplan (ed.) *Understanding Popular Culture. Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Berlin: Mouton) 151–157; P. Blickle (1986) ‘Kommunalismus, Parlamentarismus, Republikanismus’ in *Historische Zeitschrift Bd. 242 H. 3. (Jun 1986)* (Oldenburg Wissenschaftsverlag GmbH) 529–556.
81. M. Jokipii (1959) ‘Mieromies – der Karelische Volksführer’ in *Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja 61* (Helsinki: Suomalais-Ugrilainen Seura) 1–65.
82. Katajala (1994) *Nälkäkapina* 237.
83. These events are described in detail in Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 209–216.
84. Pielisjärvi court session 5–10 March 1688, 79. Court minutes of the province of Kexholm. National Archives of Finland.
85. Letter of the King Charles XI to the Governor General Göran Sperling 14 September 1687. Copies or the register of King’s letters 1687. National Archives of Finland. 500–501.
86. This number was called the *arfrubel*, and literally meant the ‘estimation rouble’. This taxation system dates back to the 16th

century, when the province of Kexholm was under the rule of the Grand Duchy of Moscow. See K. Katajala and S. Hirvonen (1991) *Asiakirjoja Karjalan historiasta 1500- ja 1600-luvuilta II. Käkisalmen läänin maakirja vuodelta 1637*. (Joensuu – Petroskoi: Joensuun yliopisto) preface 7–16.

87. These figures are taken from Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 256, table 8.
88. Saloheimo, *Pielisjärven historia* 161.
89. Pielisjärvi court session 5–10 March 1688, Court minutes of the province of Kexholm. National Archives of Finland.
90. The events of this revolt are described in detail in my book Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 15–31.
91. Katajala, *Säätyläisiä ja nousukkaita* 61–66; S. Muroma (1991) *Suurten kuolovuosien (1606–1697) väestömenetyt Suomessa*. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 161 (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura); Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 292–307; M. Lappalainen (2012) *Jumalan vihan vuoska. Suuri nälänhätä Suomessa 1695–1697* (Helsinki: Siltala) esp. 29–32, 67–70, 87–102.
92. Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 348–352, esp. table 12 on page 349.
93. For more about the sentences that the peasants received see Katajala, *Nälkäkapina* 378–388.
94. Katajala, *Nälkäkapina*, 200, 283, 355.

PART II

Aggressive Transactions with the
Authorities

What Kind of Interaction Was There
Between Norwegian Peasants and Danish
Authorities in the Period Between
the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563–1570)
and the 1640s?

Øystein Rian

History gives us both the pleasure of having the freedom to choose our approach and the frustration of witnessing extreme differences in how we understand the past. But apart from concrete data, history is not science; we do not build an insight on top of foundations which all historians acknowledge as the absolute truth, and neither do we have the kind of scientific “progress” which renders historians who lived a 100 years ago obsolete and irrelevant. In fact, we can use practically anything that has been written over the last several 1000 years, as an observation made 500 years ago may well give us more insight than an interpretation formulated yesterday.

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FASHIONABLE IDEAS

This realisation gives historians a freedom of thought which ought to be more appreciated. The intellectual trends of the day seem too dominant and standardised—at least in my country—and they threaten to tyrannise the approaches historians choose to take. This is especially worrisome for young people who feel they must make a good impression on their seniors and research councils, and perhaps it is even more problematic if they feel the need to conform to their peers.

In most of western history, it was the theologians who decided what was acceptable—in terms of not only Christianity but also history. And then it was the kings, not least the Danish kings, who defined how a correct history should appear. The formula was simple and easy to understand. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, God ordained that the Danish king should see the light of true evangelical Christianity, and he became the divine instrument of God's will. Danes, Norwegians, North Germans, and others may well have been constantly sinful but, thanks to their pious king, the word of God was shedding its light on them and showing them the way to paradise. But this meant they had to be obedient to God and the king—only then could they perhaps be saved in spite of their wickedness.¹

This was a kind of structural history—all other distracting details had to fit around this main overwhelmingly important point. Perhaps modern structural history would have trouble pinning down its message any better than this explanation—stupid, short-sighted individuals have always needed the firm hand of help from above.

Since the seventeenth century, other compelling explanations have guided the way people understand history. For some, it has been the role of the nation or of classes and the class struggle; while for others, race has trumped all other historical causes. And then there have been, and still are, all those intellectual trends which conquer new generations of historians. In later years, they have often been derived from social anthropology, and quite often from a single guiding star—preferably a French philosopher—such as Foucault or Bourdieu, for example. A 100 years ago, German thinkers had greater prestige, and perhaps the greatest of them all had his Indian summer in my youth—Karl Marx. The heritage from theology has nevertheless remained present, and I have never liked it. I have always disliked catechistic knowledge—and what do these “gurus” mean exactly? But we are all prisoners of our own environments—and that, I admit, is a

structural thought. I for one, as a Norwegian historian, have had to struggle with my own cultural heritage, and I have thus come to the conclusion that interpretations of history are not pure fantasy; but simply elaborations on certain aspects of things which, in history, *are* a fact.

Since the late nineteenth century, the main trend in Norwegian historiography has been to adopt a materialistic interpretation of events.² It started when the old regime of royal civil servants came under increasing attacks from the liberal left in the 1860s. The conservative historians at the University of Oslo were accused of not being Norwegian enough, because their ancestors were Danish usurpers of Norway's sovereignty and now they were the servants of the Swedish-controlled king. The conservative historians answered that the 400 years of Danish rule were not so much to blame, as the Black Death—which left Norway fatally weakened and the Norwegian Crown and nobility impoverished. Marx could not have formulated a more consequent materialistic explanation. The only difference was that these historians did not consider the Danish rulers and officials as oppressors. In their view, the Danes introduced true Christianity (the Lutheran Reformation), and they governed fairly and justly. This was interesting when we consider that these men were the direct ancestors and forerunners of the elite officials who were governing Norway in the nineteenth century. The conservatives were persuaded that these men and their ancestors had brought the fruits of civilisation and good governance to rustic and stubborn Norwegian farmers.

The majority of Norwegians did not quite buy into this history, however, and the liberal left made a great impact on society over the two next generations. Their main adversaries soon became the socialists, and curiously the socialist historians almost adopted the conservative interpretation of why Norway had become Danish, but with a different twist: it was because the Norwegian nobility was poorer than the Danish and Swedish nobility, and since the strongest upper classes always won, that the Norwegians had lost. The socialists may not have liked the Danish elite in Norway quite as much as their conservative predecessors, but in their opinion the absolute state was still a progressive contribution to history, perhaps because socialism also advocated the necessity of a strong state.³

In no other western country did historical materialism gain such a dominant position as in Norway. In other countries, political history put up a strong resistance to historical materialism, but not in my country. One important reason for this is that anything on a larger scale than local politics practically disappeared from Norway in the sixteenth century,

and only reappeared again three centuries later—in 1814. Danish historians claimed a strong ownership over their shared political history with Norway, which meant the subject and its sources were almost completely situated in Denmark, leaving local history to the Norwegians. This was all the more tempting too, as what was left of Norwegian historical sources was local and little more.⁴

The abolishment of the Norwegian institutions of realm and church at the beginning of the sixteenth century led to the destruction of their archives, and with it went the memory of the Norwegian medieval elite. This dearth of historical sources continued well into the eighteenth century, and much of it was simply due to neglect. Officials had no system of preserving their archives; so until the middle of the seventeenth century almost, the only documents conserved were tax lists and land registers⁵—sources that, as luck would have it, are ideally suited for a materialistic interpretation of history. This even went as far as twentieth-century Norwegian historians almost exclusively writing about the Reformation in terms of agrarian history. After all, the few sources at their disposal from the land registry revealed little more than the fact that confiscated church properties now formed the bulk of the Crown's land.⁶ However, as already briefly mentioned, new winds have been blowing lately, but they too are mostly structural, with an emphasis on how different elements of society functioned. This means individuals are seen as typical examples of how that society was constructed, and with a clear tendency to imply that there was a general mentality which determined similarities between them, irrespective of their own life history, interests, and so on.

THE INTERACTIONIST INTERPRETATION

Norway is not exactly isolated from the rest of the world though, and modern intellectual trends tend to assimilate thinkers anyway—irrespective of national boundaries. One such trend that has flourished for many years in the Nordic countries is the “interactionist interpretation” of relations between the state and society (or the rulers and the ruled). The interactionist interpretation does not accept a clear distinction between rulers and ruled, since it sees society as an organic entity in which all individuals and all social strata coexist and function in such a way that they are dependent on each other. Eva Österberg is perhaps the most important proponent of this approach, and she has been able to combine an amazing number of opposing perspectives into a harmonious whole.⁷

In Norway, there have been many adherents to the functional and interactionist interpretations, as these were the natural successors to historical materialism—when it did eventually lose its sheen. In many ways, I admire the professionalism of the interactionists, as many of them are fine cultural historians and brilliant local historians. For example, they have used court registers extensively and intensively from the local governing assemblies (*things*). In doing so, they have gone a long way towards uncovering many so-called forgotten people in history.⁸ In fact, one cannot complain about anything they have done, except that perhaps they have made Nordic history too nice and tidy, and this can prove a problem in more than one way.

If it had been the case that Nordic history was really as harmonious as the interactionists would like us to think, I would be most happy, but I have the same feeling about this as a Danish cartoonist had in 2013 when he wryly commented, “[w]e Danes are the good ones, so if we want to bomb somebody, it must be the right thing to do”. He was commenting on the fact that, two years after bombing Libya, Danish politicians once again supported bombing another country (Syria).

I was rather startled some years ago when a highly respected colleague of mine wrote, in a manuscript, that the Norwegian homage of 1661 to the founder of absolutism in Denmark–Norway, Frederick III, was almost completely democratic because farmers from all over the country were represented at the ceremony. I think this illustrates that numbers do not explain everything. One ought to interest oneself more in power relations and remember that they often were placed behind the curtains. It is western arrogance to believe that it was only in Russia that Potemkin villages were erected to impress people. After all, the typical power relation is not a man pointing a gun at another man’s head, but in most cases is something which is wrapped up in nice words—in “spin”—as was the case with the Danish declaration of royal sovereignty in 1661.⁹

History is more untidy and messy than most of us care to acknowledge. There is a professional pitfall in our relation to history; we acquire a broad knowledge about relevant sources although each source is selective and narrow in its scope. It is also usually written by people wanting to give a good impression of themselves—mostly men in power—and the narratives are often spun afterwards. The history thus looks in order and the officials seem to have got it right, but every now and then things were clearly far less tidy.

Patronage was an important element in power politics. If you wanted to be an important man, you had to make sure that the king knew you, then

he must trust you or at least find you indispensable, and he must get used to using your services time and again. It was the same all the way down the ladder, between regional and local patrons and their clients.

If the 17-year-old Norwegian king, Olaf IV, had not died in 1387, things could have been quite different in Norwegian history. Instead, his mother Margaret and her Danish successors distanced themselves from the Norwegian aristocracy. They became strangers to each other, the trust was lost, and in the sixteenth century, there was not a single Norwegian nobleman or prelate whom the king trusted in the same way as he trusted his Danish clients. Then there was a sequence of events which worsened this distrust and resulted in perhaps the most far-reaching centralisation of any government in sixteenth-century Europe, with the abolishment of the Norwegian Council of the Realm and Norwegian Catholic Church in 1536–1537.¹⁰

The Norwegian state did not go under because of poverty, but because of personal distrust between the king and Norwegian nobility. The extreme nature of this centralisation was a singularly Norwegian development. It can only be understood when one remembers that it coincided with a royally dictated Reformation carried through in a totally Roman Catholic country—and that it was camouflaged so well that Potemkin himself could not have done it any better.¹¹

When Nils Erik Villstrand, Leon Jespersen, and I edited the contributions from the Nordic power state project in the 1990s, we called the book *A Revolution From Above*, with a question mark on the end as a concession to the interactionists.¹² I personally don't think that the question mark was necessary, hence its omission here. A few royals and noblemen certainly made their existence known and felt in the lives of ordinary people in those centuries. It is not only modern structuralism but also traditional Lutheran arrogance which has camouflaged the radical consequences of the church reforms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For hundreds of years, it was said to be a very good thing, partly because later theologians hated to admit that their divine Church was in fact ruled by a king who had been set up as a god-king, so that Lutheranism—at least in Denmark–Norway—could become a Christian version of *shintōism* in so far as it was an extreme adulation of the king. At the same time, the Vasa kings of Sweden carried through a similar transformation of the Swedish Catholic Church, much to the dismay of Swedish peasants, and then both Nordic kings proceeded to wage wars against each other and neighbouring princes and states. These perpetual wars which the Swedish

kings waged from 1560 to 1721 were not the result of free choices made by the peasants, they were the ultimate result of a revolution from above, not a Nordic democracy.

DANISH RULE IN NORWAY

From now on, I will write about Danish rule in Norway after 1537, in relation to the Norwegian population, of whom 95 % were peasants. Norway was a good country for fortune hunters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It turned out that Norway was not poor, as the Catholic Church had amassed some wealth, and all this now came into the hands of the king and his men. Much of it was sent to Copenhagen and used on Danish castles. But as is often the case, men on the spot were better placed to milk the local economy, and they were also there when Norwegian timber exports were growing. In fact, for 300 years, Norway was the greatest European timber exporter, with merchants in Amsterdam and London as their main customers. The export of fish was also an important source of income. On the other hand, it was necessary to import a large amount of grain. But that was not a negative element in the economy for those who controlled commerce, as it gave them enhanced opportunities to profit from the external trade by manipulating the prices of these products.¹³

The growth of external trade created golden opportunities for Danish nobles who got positions in Norway on favourable conditions,¹⁴ and for their clients who did the work for them, especially as tax collectors. These clients were usually young men with a mercantile training from estate management, and in a country where the control mechanisms were weak and inefficient they had a wonderful opportunity to enrich themselves quickly. The most profitable method was to make the farmers deliver the timber, to saw it in multiple sawmills and selling the boards on to the Dutch and the English.¹⁵

With the scant sources I mentioned, how can we know that these fortune seekers made their own luck in Norway? The answer is that during a surprisingly short time span, they became rich merchants with growing estates and means to establish their families as members of the new elite in their adopted country. This new elite was not entirely Danish. They often married women from the original Norwegian aristocracy, and these ladies had property and connections.¹⁶ In addition to the Danes, there were quite a lot of Germans and Dutchmen and some Scots, Englishmen, Swedes, and even some Norwegians who all took their share in the coun-

try's timber bonanza and the more traditional export of fish. Many of the successful men then went on to become clever entrepreneurs with the ability to develop the industry and establish new businesses in ironworks, copper mines, shipbuilding, and shipping.¹⁷

The Danish king did not decide that it should be like this—it was a development driven by these entrepreneurs who took the opportunities and saw to it that not only the king and the Danish nobility should prosper but also the new men in Norway. There was quite a lot of ruthlessness in these transactions. The farmers and other workers got their share, mainly in terms of expanded work opportunities, but the wealth itself eluded them, and their dependence on imported grain made them vulnerable to fluctuations in the grain trade.

PEASANTS?

Then there is another traditional interpretation which needs to be commented on, which concerns how the Norwegian peasants were referred to and talked about. In 500 years, there has been a tradition of painting these farmers with the same brush as “peasants”. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the elite mostly used this term to infer they were primitive and simple. But later, in the eighteenth century, they became almost noble in the idealised version of Norwegian identity—but it was still combined with much of the old arrogance in how they were perceived and treated in the real world.¹⁸

Nowadays, historians have finally broken with this simplistic tradition of viewing the rural population and try to give a more realistic picture of how farm ownership was organised. They have made statistics, for instance, about the distribution of land which show that some farmers owned their farms, while most of them did not. They have also analysed the way in which the land was owned in these cases—with usually more than one owner per farm. The one who owned the greater part had the right to decide who should live on the farm and use it.¹⁹ Yet for a long time, historians were reluctant to go any further in making nuances about the various kinds of farmer. In the sixteenth century, there was a nebulous zone between being noble and not noble. Many of those families who were simply “farmers” in fact owned a lot of land across a number of different farms. And they also married into the same sort of landowning families as their own. Before the Danish victory over Norway's separatists in the 1530s, the men in these families had positions as clients under both the

Crown and the Church—most frequently within the latter, where some relatives became priests, while others became local agents of the higher clergy and administered the Church's estates. In this respect, they were a form of Norwegian gentry.²⁰

After the abolishment of Norwegian secular and ecclesiastical independence, these families were still there. Some let their daughters marry the new men, many others continued their existence as a farmer elite. They played a dominant role in communications and confrontations with local and regional officials, and they still got some local positions, but it is not difficult to see that they mostly felt like outsiders and were quarrelsome in their attitude to the new rulers. They functioned as a kind of opposition, who answered defiantly when the officials imposed new duties on them, and they sometimes organised protests in the form of petitions to the king. From time to time, they were even successful in achieving concessions from the authorities, usually through a combination of refusing to obey orders and organising petitions which they led as members of the peasant elite. The greatest chances of success occurred when peasants in larger areas, like whole provinces (*len*), managed to stand together in protest.²¹

These activities have left a great impression on historians, especially those with political sympathies to the center-left.²² Nevertheless, even these commentators have tended to call all the protesters common people, just as the authorities did then, when in reality these farmers were giving their friends and neighbours a form of qualified leadership from the position of an old elite—one which was certainly weakened but not altogether extinguished. They were also rather entrepreneurial, taking part in the first phase of the timber bonanza, before eventually being squeezed out of it in the seventeenth century. Some of them thus moved to the towns and became successful merchants; leaving their farms to their children, so that as generations came and went, they became the backbone of the growing number of freeholding farmers in the eighteenth century.²³ But there was a great difference in social position between this farming elite and the majority of farmers. In the eighteenth century, it became fashionable to call the farmers free men, and the historians followed suite and confirmed that they were, but only by comparing them to the serfs in Eastern Europe, which illustrates the importance of historical criteria.²⁴ The farming elite may once have been in a position like the English gentry, but they lost much of their freedom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the other farmers got poorer still and more vulnerable. In fact, many of them ended up as cottagers and to call them free would almost be an insult.

Then there was all the power that the king and his men had amassed, especially in the seventeenth century. The farming population had to endure extensive military service on both land and sea, until by the Great Nordic War, one-third of all grown-up males were in military service.²⁵ Although they maintained a sort of mental freedom in the form of protesting and writing petitions, this was hardly freedom (along with all their other obligations). But it did get much better for farmers in the eighteenth century, and it was then that the rhetoric of farmers' freedom became fashionable. So, comparatively speaking, there is a grain of truth in such interpretations.

There were many stormy encounters between the general populace and the fortune seekers of the seventeenth century, some of whom occasionally lost their official position as bailiff.²⁶ But many wrongdoers triumphed, and the most corrupt period in Dano-Norwegian history was in the 1640s, when Corfitz Ulfeldt and Hannibal Sehested (the son-in-law of Christian IV), helped the old king to govern. Ulfeldt got hold of the royal treasury and, together with his clients in Copenhagen, he stole several million *riksdaler* from the king and taxpayers. Meanwhile, Sehested was governor-general of Norway and increased taxation to new heights, securing much of it for himself and his clients. The Crown finances were eventually saved when their brother-in-law, Frederick III, decided in 1651 that he had finally had enough of them and confiscated all their properties in Denmark and Norway.²⁷ But in the meantime, thanks to Sehested's bailiffs, the people had been paying higher taxes and sometimes in the form of a creative combination of farm products which ranged from animals to timber. In the weeks before Sehested was dismissed, the king sent two Danish councillors of the realm to Norway to look into just how he was enriching himself, and so farmers all over Østlandet (one-third of the country) were asked to produce lists of what they had been forced to pay Sehested's men.²⁸ This documentation from 1651 provides overwhelming evidence of how much the farmers lost, but it was all to no avail, as it was left to gather dust in the capital's archives. By the time that the documents arrived in Copenhagen, the king had already stripped Sehested of his titles and had become the ultimate beneficiary of his ill-won estates in Norway. These consisted of thousands of farms, a part of Kongsberg's silver mines, two copper mines, and four ironworks, and the king was reluctant to repay those who had been cheated, no matter what unlawful methods had been used against them.

To add insult to injury, Sehested's clients also went unpunished.²⁹ These men pursued their careers in other positions in Christiania (Oslo had been renamed after Christian IV),³⁰ where they formed the backbone of the new upper class in Norway, which I have called the "Dano-Norwegian elite". They were a Norwegian equivalent to the Anglo-Irish elite in Ireland, dominating the country economically and socially, and went on to become the Norwegian ruling elite in the nineteenth century.

I would thus concede that there certainly are structures in history, but I am against making these deterministic to the point which then makes it unnecessary to explore what men and women were actually doing—that is, the reasons behind these actions and the consequences that followed.

NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM AND NORWAY

Nordic exceptionalism usually refers to the notion that Nordic people are somehow unique in the way their society is successful. For instance, our society's present-day egalitarian values are thought to have deep roots in Northern history.³¹ However, the idea and practice of proud equality vis-à-vis the king was formulated more radically elsewhere in the Middle Ages than in the Nordic countries. In Aragon, for example, the oath of allegiance to the king ended with the succinct condition that without equal respect from the king, there would be none for him. "We, who are as good as you, swear to you, who are no better than us, to accept you as our king and sovereign, provided you observe all our liberties and laws, but if not, not".³²

In Denmark–Norway, the king was the supreme leader, initiating all the changes which strengthened the Crown and made it the dominant power in the land. The Danish Council of the Realm let these reforms happen, hoping to have more influence by adapting their content as administrative leaders and councillors rather than opposing them. Even if not all of them had administrative positions in central government, they were all governors in the provinces and influenced how laws were applied there, so they had shares in the rapidly growing royal state and profited from it.³³ In Norway, most of the regional governors were Danish noblemen, especially in the biggest and most important provinces—where they resided in royal castles and fortresses. Nevertheless, perhaps a quarter of them were Norwegian, or of mixed Danish–Norwegian ancestry.³⁴

Let us dive further into the politics of Norway at this point. The double revolution of 1536–1537 strengthened central power in Denmark–

Norway immensely. From a Danish perspective, it has been usual to stress the strong position of the nobility at this moment in history, and this was represented by the Danish Council of the Realm. Rarely were the estates consulted during meetings of the realm in either Denmark or Norway. It happened only a couple of times in Denmark and once in Norway during the 1570s, and then some short meetings were arranged in the period 1627–1648. But only the Danish nobility managed to make a difference in these meetings (and to a certain extent Danish town councillors representing the bourgeoisie). The Dano-Norwegian nobility in Norway secured themselves some rights too, but the overwhelming plurality of the population (commoners and bourgeoisie) had to accept greater responsibilities in both the Danish and Norwegian parts of the realm, even if Norwegian historians have found it significant that some Norwegian farmers were summoned to certain meetings, while Danish farmers were not.³⁵

These meetings were used as a means to have additional taxes accepted, although the larger Crown taxes were proposed by the king to the Danish Council of the Realm, which then passed them into law. The Council of the Realm thus had the same position as Parliament in England or the Diet (*riksdag*) in Sweden, and yet these noble councillors were also the king's closest clients, and some of them were heads of various departments of government. Normally they cooperated intimately, although the councillors did happen to disagree with the king's war policies and the continual tax increases which, in the long run, could threaten the income from their landed estates. With the exception of the Nordic Seven Years' War, the king and councillors cooperated closely throughout most of the sixteenth and well into the seventeenth centuries. Both parties were satisfied with the great victories of the 1530s which consolidated their position internally as a powerful state, and externally as one of the leading powers in Northern Europe.³⁶

So when the king wanted war, he got it, even if the council was deeply worried about the consequences. That was the case with the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563–1570), which Frederick II forced the councillors to accept, and even more so with Christian IV's wars in 1611–1613 and 1625–1629, as the councillors argued eloquently against starting both these wars, even though Christian disregarded their arguments anyway and went to war all the same. The war in 1643–1645, however, was forced upon Christian IV by Sweden who wanted to teach him a lesson.³⁷ All these wars were extremely expensive, and it was the Danish and Norwegian peasants who had to foot the bills, not only during but also long after they

had finished, and in preparation for new wars. The Danish king was so politically strong that there was no organised opposition against him, even when some of his wars were far from successful, and subsequently he used this strength to demand and get all the taxes he wanted.³⁸

Under Christian IV, the Danish nobility managed to reduce their share of the tax burden, by securing exemptions for their manors and for an increasing portion of their tenants. Those who had to pay in full were the direct tenants of the Danish Crown and the Norwegian peasantry. There were no decision makers who pleaded their case. The Danish Council of the Realm had the authority to approve any changes in Danish customs duties, and so it used this veto power to stop higher duties on the Danish export of grain and oxen. At this point, in the 1630s, Christian IV then turned to Norway to raise the customs duties on the Norwegian export of timber.³⁹

In so far as Norwegian peasants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were aggressive, it should not be difficult to understand why. They were nationally, politically, and religiously disenfranchised. Perhaps it is more interesting to ask why they were not more aggressive. Perhaps because royal power was now so consolidated, it was much wiser to appeal to the king than to rebel against him. But to fully examine the relationship between the people and authorities, I want to focus on three topics: religion, taxes, and military obligations.

CATHOLIC PEASANTS AGAINST LUTHERAN RULERS

The Lutheran Reformation was carried out in a Catholic country. This meant the king had to hold on to the old clergy and then recruit Lutheran vicars when the old ones died. From the 1550s, the Reformation gathered pace in parishes up and down the country, and the peasants did not seem to like either the removal of all the Catholic iconography or the new liturgy. In fact, we know that Norwegian peasants continued many Catholic customs for centuries, and from the 1550s to 1570s, we have scattered sources about peasants who continued to worship the saints and were either burned as heretics or flogged.⁴⁰ Most farmers were not forced to be martyrs though; their old Church was simply eradicated, and so they were forced to accept the sacraments only once a year and basic services of the community, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals in the new royal Church. It was only if one tried to evade these that one would be severely punished and exiled from the country.⁴¹

But the authorities could not enforce a positive attitude, and so negative ones persisted. Many people stopped going to church, almost all stopped giving gifts, and they tried to evade some of the traditional church tithes and offerings to the clergy. The clergy was deeply frustrated by this, and they told their superiors that the people hated the new Church and longed for the old Church. The paradox for the Lutheran clergy was that people were happier to make gifts to their old Church which was clearly more obscure and full of superstition than the one Martin Luther and the Danish king had given them, where God's pure word was spoken and there were no lavish icons.⁴² And nor was this exclusively a peasant resistance. Young men from richer families travelled to Jesuit colleges on the European continent and got their education there. Some remained in Catholic Europe while others succeeded in concealing their Catholicism and became vicars in Norway—we know this as five of them were exposed, punished, and exiled in 1613. Harsh penal codes were clearly publicised which prohibited studying in Catholic schools and universities and excluded Catholic priests and monks from the country under pain of death. Meanwhile, campaigns were launched to indoctrinate congregations in the correct practice of Lutheranism.⁴³

Under this new regime, most people's response was a sullen silence, but there were some who reacted more violently with spontaneous verbal outbursts against the local clergyman—some of these confrontations resulted in fights, and it soon became a valuable asset for a vicar to be a strong fighter. Combined with the severe sanctions imposed by the state, a combative temperament enabled such clergymen to command respect, and gradually, as more and more people knew this to be a fact, people grew more cautious.⁴⁴ Typically, the most difficult parishioners were the freeholders who had formerly been gentry—they knew their former worth and for a considerable time showed little respect for the clergy. But they had no constructive means to channel their religious frustration, and their brawls cost them dearly. We know of this because the fines they had to pay soon became yet another source of income for the king and his men—so the resistance of farmers to the new Church was tolerated by the Crown for as long as it went towards swelling the royal coffers.⁴⁵ Another more traditional way perhaps of protesting against the practical effects of the Reformation in Norway was to spread gossip and tales about bad deeds of the new clergy, and this seemed to be quite common, judging from the number of such stories written down in the nineteenth century. Many of these stories were told as if they actually had happened, and we know that

some of them do indeed have a core of historical truth. For example, a clergyman would be killed by a tough man in the parish, or have lost their position due to their recklessness. In a few stories, the king was even given a better role as he ended up sacking the detested vicar.⁴⁶

However, perhaps the most systematic struggle concerned the reorganisation of tithes. The Danish church ordinance of 1537 was formulated without a single Norwegian present but this did not stop the king from also making it a law for the Norwegians. In Catholic times, the tithe had been divided into four parts: one part went to the bishop, one to the vicar, one towards the upkeep of church buildings, and one to the poor of the parish (administered by the farmers). But now, according to the new ordinance, the last part was dropped and the tithe was now divided into only three parts: one went to the king, one to the vicar, and one to the upkeep of church buildings. This may have made the old clergy less negative to the change, as their share of the tithe increased from a quarter to a third, while the king's went from zero to the same amount.⁴⁷ Not only did the poorest in the community lose their part of the tithe but also the peasantry in general were nonetheless still being exhorted to fulfil their Christian duty and provide for the destitute. The distribution of roles was typical—the king and clergy produced the moralistic laws and sermons, while the people were supposed to actually carry out the good deeds. If they failed in this task, then they confirmed their inherent wickedness which the Reformation was supposed to have saved them from. A stubborn conflict about this three-part distribution of the tithe persisted for two generations or more. To begin with, the peasants refused to pay more than three-quarters of the tithe and they were prosecuted and sentenced repeatedly. In some districts, the authorities summoned representatives of the peasants to meetings where they put pressure on them to give in, but this was largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the new tithe distribution was being successfully carried out in the most central districts of Norway, while resistance continued in the more distant parts of the country. The scarcity of Norwegian sources makes it difficult to know exactly how this situation developed though.⁴⁸

In the meantime, the conditions for the poor grew worse—there was no longer any systematic cooperation between the authorities and peasantry in helping them. The most efficient remedy against poverty was the demographic solution—an early death. But when the plagues abated in the seventeenth century, the population increased and so did poverty, which was then worsened by famine and poor fishing, both consequences

of a colder climate. In fact, we have far more information about the eighteenth century than the seventeenth, telling us that there were scores of beggars of all ages up and down the country. Scarcity of grain was a problem right up to 1814, and approximately a third of the population had to worry about where their next meal was coming from—this was the reality overshadowing the struggle about tithes.⁴⁹

Another bone of contention was that the local farming elite had previously been the church wardens in charge of administering the income of the local church and, although in principle this system continued after the Reformation, in practice it was now the king who was in control and deemed the income necessary for other purposes: such as, for printing royally authorised bibles, building new churches in strategic towns in Denmark and Norway, and even paying ransoms to free Danes and Norwegians enslaved in North Africa.⁵⁰ This situation just added to the rampant decay of hundreds, and perhaps even thousands of churches all over the country, which did nothing to improve the standing of the new Church in the eyes of the people.⁵¹

CONFLICTS ABOUT TAXES

The conflict over tithes was very much like the conflict over taxes in general. It was a case of whether the authorities would succeed in introducing new taxes or whether the peasants would succeed in defending their traditional system inherited from the Middle Ages. Again, it was the king and his men who were the ones trying to change the state of affairs, not the people. And yet those in power tried to stigmatise the farmers by labelling them as aggressive. This was relatively easy, because peasants in confrontation with local officials were more likely to fly off the handle. Sometimes they might have had something to drink beforehand to get up the courage to confront the bailiff and his servants,⁵² and we must not forget that these were men and women who were defending their economy and way of life against intruders who clearly wanted their money, fish, cattle, or timber to simply take it all away with them to distant places. No taxpaying Norwegian farmer could see anything positive coming out of this forced contribution.

There was the traditional form of direct tax and the newer kind. The traditional tax consisted partly of regional taxes introduced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and partly of a tax introduced in the twelfth century and payable by all farmers in the Norwegian realm called *leidang*.

The newer taxes applied to farmers all over the country and were imposed by the Danish king, with the approval of the Danish Council of the Realm. But some of the new taxes were also regional, that is, to pay for a regional royal project, such as the fortress of Akershus, close to Oslo.⁵³ In internal official documents, it was euphemistically written that the fortresses were important for the Danish realm and its preservation (i.e., disciplining the Norwegians), while publicly it was declared that they served as a defence against foreign enemies (the Swedes).⁵⁴

The conflicts of interest between the Crown and its men on one side, and the populace on the other, differed from case to case—as we already have seen in the struggle about tithes.⁵⁵ And this was also the case when the governors and their bailiffs were given the go-ahead by central government to maximise regional taxes. The degree of success depended on the area, as one way to collect the tax was to present the taxpayers with a *fait accompli* in the form of a demand to fulfil a duty to work on building a fortress or other construction for the king, and then this was partly or wholly commuted to a tax which was normally a lighter burden than the work would have been.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, more conflicts arose from efforts to raise regional taxes, by claiming that they ought to be paid in greater amounts when they were in the form of agricultural, forest, or maritime products. It varied as to how the governors carried this out, as those who were most authoritarian often provoked the stiffest resistance, while others managed to evade an open and aggressive conflict by inviting representatives of the peasants to talks. If this smoother approach was completed with a compromise, social stability was strengthened. By several Norwegian historians, this has been interpreted as a victory for the peasants, and yes, it was far better than being crushed in a rebellion—they could then continue with their lives without dramatic ruptures—but the peasants were always on the defensive, they were certainly not bettering their position, only putting a brake on further “public obligations”.⁵⁷

Another way to put this brake on was when peasants tried to continue paying the traditional tax, that is, less than what was now being demanded of them. They could succeed only if they managed to conceal their evasions through some kind of pretext—for example, if their farm was too small to carry a greater burden, or they succeeded in concealing some of their property. But if they were not able to do this in a silent and discreet way—perhaps combined with bribes to the bailiff—they were of course punished with even more expensive fines than the original tax hikes.⁵⁸

In some instances, the conflicts therefore got more confrontational: the peasants completely refused to pay the additional regional taxes, governors reacted by using the courts of law against them, and exerted pressure to get the verdicts they wanted too. If the peasants then resisted paying what they were supposed to, as they did in the province of Trøndelag in 1573–1574, force was used against them, followed by another turn in the courts, where some resistance leaders were finally sentenced to death and executed.⁵⁹

This was a development which the king and the (Danish) Council of the Realm disliked, because it threatened stability in both Norway and Denmark, as peasant leaders could use this as an opportunity to directly appeal to the king to abolish what they saw as illegal taxes. This the king could only do in principle, however, as one problem was that people knew little about Norwegian geographical, social, or economic affairs in Copenhagen. This ignorance was remedied each time councillors of the realm were sent to Norway as commissars to deliver sentences about such conflicts though. As part of the process, they needed to be informed of the important details to get a more practical grasp of the train of events, and often the protesting peasants would thus have a chance to score some genuine successes.⁶⁰

As I have mentioned already though, it was the officials who were on the offensive on behalf of the Crown and they were also strengthening their own material position in doing so. From a wider perspective, it is perhaps possible to interpret the fact that fewer taxes were imposed on Norway than Denmark in the sixteenth century as a result of tax opposition in Norway.⁶¹ But when one considers all the other great Danish gains in Norway in the sixteenth century, and that most of the taxes were spent on Danish projects, it is somewhat absurd to talk about a victory for Norwegian taxpayers. They paid for the Danish to rule over Norway, and the fact that they were not at all happy about it is clear from the way they clashed with the authorities more often than the Danish did during the sixteenth century.⁶²

What happened on the fiscal front in the sixteenth century was only the first steps in the overall development towards a tax-funded state in Norway. The scholarly vicar Absalon Pederssøn Beyer (in Bergen) wrote in an unpublished manuscript from the 1560s that the Norwegians were not satisfied with being governed by a distant king they did not know. But he believed they would have had to pay more taxes had the king been in Norway itself and used a strong Norwegian nobility to govern them.

Indeed, the situation could one day change were a Danish king to discover the natural riches in the country and force through yet greater tax burdens on the people.⁶³ Beyer died in 1575, and in 1577 Christian IV was born, rising to the throne upon the death of his father in 1588, when he was still a boy. It was not until 1596 that he reached his majority and he proved to be the king who made Beyer's prophecy come true.

From 1596, all new taxes in Norway were promulgated by the king himself.⁶⁴ Regional obligations to be paid in work or goods were increased, but the burden was spread over a larger number of districts, so that the districts that would have originally borne the whole tax burden now had some relief. Another change was that the obligation to deliver goods was sometimes commuted into money, and again, this was at the king's discretion. In some of these cases though, the king left the governor vulnerable to accusations that it was he, and not the king, who had put a new tax on the people. For example, when the king issued a change in the general instructions (*lensbrev*) to the new governor of Telemark, it resulted in a conflict during the 1630s and 1640s about the obligation to deliver timber to the governor, which he was supposed to ship to Danish construction sites. The farmers were very reluctant to do this as the timber trade was their livelihood, and whereas their Dutch customers paid them for the trouble, the rich Danish King and his nobility were offering them nothing in return. So the farmers organised a boycott of this so-called timber tax. They were then prosecuted and convicted in court by the regional judge (*lagmann*), but they did not give up the fight, and eventually the conflict ended with the king deciding to scrap the timber tax in 1648. This was certainly a victory for the farmers in defence of their livelihood, but it was also a token of a fundamental change that was also occurring at this time in royal tax and trade policy.⁶⁵

The timber tax had been part of a traditional trade system in which the Crown itself tried to be an important producer and trader, but then the Norwegian timber trade increased dramatically from the 1530s onwards and well into the second half of the seventeenth century. This coincided with the time when the Crown had confiscated some vast church properties which contained extensive forests in the interior and excellent water falls on the coast—ideal for putting sawmills. The Crown thus built its own sawmills, and demanded the entitlement to buy this timber for their sawmills before anyone else could be sold it, that is, the Dutch, English, and Dano-Norwegian merchants. And this was all *in addition* to the

timber that was to be left unsawed and taken for tax!⁶⁶ We can thus see why the Crown could perhaps afford to scrap the timber tax.

But even this royal right of pre-emption was not popular with the peasants. They wanted to be free to sell timber to those who were willing to pay the most, or grant credit which many farmers were asking for—especially when the crops repeatedly failed and Norwegians were desperately seeking ways to avoid destitution and starvation.⁶⁷ These years were marked by cold summers, which created havoc in northern agriculture, and the peasants were clearly defending their fundamental interests against a royal power far more preoccupied by its own material needs than the well-being of its common subjects. Indeed, before long the royal sawmills gradually lost even their immunity to competition. The best weapon the farmers had was to silently sabotage that royal right of pre-emption. They simply sold to private merchants, knowing that it was too complicated and risky for governors to claim that the timber sold was illegal and should be confiscated, as confiscation would have risked a bitter conflict with those foreign countries that had paid for it, not to mention paralysing important external trade, which would have a further impact on the Crown's customs revenue.⁶⁸

In response, however, the Crown and its clients found a fiscal solution to this which, in the long run, was even more detrimental to the peasants. The king decided to give up being a direct participant in the timber industry. Instead, he turned the value of the properties and sawmills into a source of royal income paid in money. The governors leased out all the sawmills on royal lands for good money, and they used this policy as the means of patronage, because it became very profitable to operate the big sawmills. So the governors' clients, with the bailiffs on the front-line, secured themselves these leases, and in combination with their official power over the peasants these clients quickly became rich men. They collected taxes of a certain monetary value measured in goods, most commonly in timber, and sold these goods on with tidy profit for themselves, while the king got his tax money.⁶⁹

It was a constant factor in the relationship between the Crown and farmers that the former had the initiative. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Danish hegemony in Norway was now secure. King and council had started to consider it as right and normal that new laws should be common across both realms, with the same obligation to obey the king. Already there was a tradition that when the king needed additional money, he would ask the Council of the Realm to create new tax revenues, some

years only in Denmark, and other years in both kingdoms; but after 1596, all such revenues were imposed on both kingdoms, and they were far more difficult to avoid, because you could not simply claim that you had never paid this tax before; as the whole point with these centrally fixed taxes was that they were *not* old, they were new, and they had to be paid because of the obligation to obey the sovereign king.⁷⁰ If we regard the evolution of taxes in Norway in the seventeenth century, we can conclude that all new taxes were centrally imposed at the king's explicit command, at the same time as there was a corresponding growth in toll duties. These were also imposed by the king with frequent changes in the rates, especially the rates for timber export from Norway.⁷¹

METHODS OF TAX OPPOSITION

But even at this stage, farmers fought back and found ways to oppose a governmental system which was stronger than ever. As always, the confrontations between officials and peasants appeared at first to be a bewildering chaos of episodes, but I have found there were three main methods of opposition: (i) claim that your district had a special privilege; (ii) accuse the bailiffs of cheating (which required a high degree of solidarity between the peasants to defend themselves against revenging officials); and (iii) try and avoid the worst of taxation through concealing one's income, smuggling to avoid custom duties, and bribing officials to turn a blind eye. Method number three probably was the most common, but as it also was the most concealed, the sources are scattered and indirect. Method number one was the least common, simply because there only were a few districts which had tax relief privileges due to other burdens traditionally recognised by the king.⁷² It is also worth noting that the first two methods were typically only used by peasants, while the third was used by most people, though the most prominent actors were professional merchants and skippers.

Methods (i) and (iii) usually involved less aggressive confrontations than (ii), except if the king refused to acknowledge an old privilege, when things could get ugly, as they did in Jämtland when Christian IV refused to accept that Jämtland had a right to semi-autonomy dating from the Middle Ages. But this was the king who was constantly trying to strengthen his rule and increase centralisation.⁷³ And when bailiffs and customs officers caught tax avoiders and smugglers, there was sometimes physical violence too. Most conflicts occurred in cases where the officials

themselves were accused of cheating, and this happened especially during the reign of Christian IV when there were steep tax increases and the king's men would be continually asking for more goods and money from the taxpayers. This meant that the officials could always ask for more than the tax hike required, since the people were expecting it to go up every time anyway. Indeed, it was often the case that bailiffs demanded more than necessary as a fee for procuring the money the king had asked for (especially if it had to be delivered in kind). Another source of conflict was when demands were made to transport the goods long distances. And then there were all kinds of extortion that ranged from gifts and small bribes to heavy extra payments that needed to be made to officials, especially the bailiffs.⁷⁴

The reactions from the farmers varied with the circumstances. If the extortions were not bigger than taxpayers were used to, it did not generate much conflict. But if the farmers had brave leaders, they might take action, and the likelihood of this happening increased, the bigger the extortion got. Many reactions were spontaneous, such as verbal protests and abuse in the local courts (*things*) where their tax payments were registered. It is true that in some cases the peasants attacked the bailiffs, but very seldom with deadly weapons—Norwegian farmers were not exactly killing their oppressors in the seventeenth century.⁷⁵ Instead, what they did most was to protest orally and in written form, although it was not easy to get any positive results and the danger of reprisal was considerable. They could be convicted for false accusations, and given fines and imprisonment for their trouble. But it helped to organise a broad protest movement using the officially recognised method of petitioning the king or the highest authorities under him. The peasants were then represented by lay jurors who were farmers that the officials had appointed as members of the jury in the local and regional courts. These lay jurors sealed the petition which was written by a professional scrivener, and it was delivered either to the regional governor or directly to the king or his chancellery. The last option was often necessary because the governors tended to work against the petitioners. But the king was far away, and the farmers had to be patient when they were waiting for a definitive answer. Firstly, the authorities would examine the circumstances by asking the regional officials for their version of events, but there was always the risk that it could backfire and they be prosecuted for false accusations.⁷⁶

The central authorities were not interested in having conflicts of this kind all over the country, so their favoured method of dealing with them

was to appoint a commission to deal with it. Even if these commissions were staffed with noblemen who themselves were governors in other provinces, they often gave the petitioners something for their efforts. They would usually conclude that some of the accusations were true and decide that some of the demands from the officials were illegal and should be refunded.⁷⁷ But although they got a little something for their trouble, the king usually got more—in the form of fines from convicted officials and their removal. Not that they disappeared altogether, but they would be moved to other positions.⁷⁸ The main source of income for these officials was trade, and soon they had established themselves as members of the new Dano-Norwegian elite in Norway. As the seventeenth century progressed, farmers came under increasing economic pressure. What has become known as the “Little Ice Age” reduced their harvests and made them more dependent on trade with the merchants who then dictated the terms of trade in such a way that they quickly became wealthy, while most peasants had little more than enough for subsistence. Meanwhile the state steadily increased taxation. From the 1630s onwards, the Crown made customs services far more efficient, but in an economic situation where a depression provoked by war hit Europe, Norwegian export prices could not be raised. This meant that primary producers (farmers and fishermen) had to accept lower prices, with the effect that customs duties thus became concealed taxes on the farming and fishing population.⁷⁹

OPPOSITION TO CONSCRIPTION

The last field we are going to explore is the military. After 1537, Norway was a subjugated country after the military victory of the Danes. For a long time, the northern realm was thus secured with the help of fortresses and the Danish Royal Navy.⁸⁰ The king did not generally enlist his Norwegian subjects into the military in peace time, except for recruiting a number of Norwegian sailors into the Navy. They were stationed in the big naval base at Bremerholm in Copenhagen, surrounded by Danish seamen and commanded by officers loyal to the king (some of whom were Norwegian).⁸¹

But when the Nordic Seven Years’ War (1563–1570) broke out, there were two Swedish invasions in Trøndelag (1564) and Østlandet (1567) and the Danish King changed his mind. In both cases, the peasants did not resist the Swedes, and in Trøndelag they even welcomed the Swedes as liberators. But the Danes went on the counteroffensive led by two brilliant Danish officials in Bergen who managed to organise the reconquest

of both provinces. The people in the western provinces of Vestlandet had a vested interest in doing this because a partition of the country could have threatened their livelihoods, but most of the peasants did not want to fight for the Danish king any more than for the Swedish. All the same, they were forced to participate, and in 1567 some of the leaders were executed who had voiced their opposition to the war.⁸²

When the war ended in 1570, the system reverted to the way it had been in the period 1537–1563. Norway was subjugated by a combination of fortresses and Navy, and as we have seen, this seemed to work as the Norwegians did not present a military threat to the Danes in this time. Yet, even though the people knew the use of violence would not have helped their cause, there was no trust between the rulers and the ruled. This manifested itself in the fact that Norwegian farmers were not recruited into any land-based armed forces, in spite of the Swedish invasions during the Nordic Seven Years' War. In fact, the Norwegians did not get any military training at all. Admittedly this was at least partly because military activities were so universally unpopular though.⁸³

After 41 years of peace, the Kalmar War broke out (1611–1613). This was a war that, for several years, Christian IV had been asking the Danish Council of the Realm to let him have. His plan was to stop Swedish expansion in Northern Europe which had been progressing since 1560, and if possible to reconquer Sweden for the Oldenburg dynasty. The king waged the main campaign with mercenaries who invaded Southern Sweden from Denmark. As far as Norway was concerned, he planned the mobilisation of a Norwegian peasant army which was to invade Sweden from the south-eastern part of Norway. Thousands of farmers were ordered to march to the frontier, where they would be assembled in large camps before entering the Swedish border districts. The idea was that the Norwegian attacks should distract Swedish defence from the main Danish onslaught to the south.⁸⁴ This plan was less than successful though, as less than half of the 10,000 men that were expected actually turned up to the camps. The 5000 or so that did assemble were split into those that would defend, and those that would attack.

Peasants from Østlandet (the large south-eastern province of Norway) were mobilised in a general levy (*oppbud*) and ordered to take turns in defensive camps near the border. They were supposed to stop a Swedish invasion before it could reach the most populous and economically valuable districts. The peasants were less than enthusiastic. Far fewer than those who were ordered to go to the camps actually did so, and many

of these men went home before their commanders allowed them to. The farmers did not leave any evidence as to why they did this, but we can suppose that they believed their ancient rights would be violated if they obeyed such an order, since they were only obliged to defend their own parish (*bygder*).⁸⁵ This ancient right was demonstrated in August 1612 when peasants in the valley of Gudbrandsdalen massacred 300 Scottish mercenaries who tried to take a shortcut through Norway on their way to meet their Swedish employer—King Gustav II Adolf.⁸⁶ The governors thus had to find locations for the camps at a certain distance from the Swedish border which fitted with the farmers' idea of their ancient rights, but there was a continual problem with keeping them there for as long as required. This problem was aggravated by the fact that their commanding officer was an arrogant German-born nobleman, Lorens von Hadelen, who provoked even more resistance from the farmers. Hadelen himself was disloyal to the governor-general of Norway, as he ignored instructions and tried to force the local farmers to invade Sweden—which they flatly refused to do.⁸⁷

As for the troops that would attack, in 1611, Christian IV ordered Governor-General Enevold Kruse to assemble enlisted peasants from more than half of Norway (nearly 5000 men) in a camp near Svinesund in the south-eastern corner of Norway. The problem was that there was no established command structure in peace time which would have made this kind of mobilisation possible. Perhaps it is more surprising that nearly two-thirds of the men arrived at all in Svinesund, than the fact that the rest did not appear, but the men who camped that summer under the command of the assembled province governors and Kruse proved to be anything but subservient. They had not forgotten that, according to the old Norwegian law (*Landsloven*), the king did not have the right to order his subjects to fight an external war without the consent of the people. It is evident that the assembled farmers considered this to be the king's war and not theirs. So when the governors commanded them to march into Sweden, they flatly refused to do so. The governors tried to insist, but then the farmers threatened to use their weapons against them. Nevertheless, only one peasant soldier was killed and no official was physically hurt. The conscripted peasants then left the big camp in defiance of their officers and went home to their autumn harvest.⁸⁸

Above all, this was a fiasco for the king who had somehow thought that mobilising farmers in a subjugated country for a massive military campaign into a neighbouring country with which they were used to having

peaceful economic relations would work. But then the king resorted to something which he was much better at—he introduced a large war tax instead of military service, and this tax regime functioned much better. According to the tax registers, the farmers paid what they were demanded to do with only the occasional tax avoidance, even though the tax burden was quadrupled from the level it was at before the war, and ten times bigger than it had been in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. This shows how much more efficient the fiscal apparatus was: farmers who did not pay at once were forced to do it after the war, or they would not keep their farms. This financial coercion proved far more efficient than conscripting men.⁸⁹

After the war, the authorities built on this experience. They took their revenge on those peasants who had resisted military duties during the war. There was no question of widespread physical retributions, except for the two leaders of the war resistance in Jämtland, who were executed in Copenhagen in 1613. This was because the *Jämter* (the people in Jämtland) had not fought against an invading Swedish army, and when they protested against being punished with wholesale royal confiscations of their properties, the protest leaders were summarily arrested and executed. All over the country, economic sanctions was the method used against the war resisters. It meant that in Jämtland, nearly all of the farmers were thus turned from property owners into tenant farmers, while Christian IV acquired an estate valued at almost 100,000 *daler*. In other districts, many farms were confiscated too, but the farmers were then allowed to buy them back. In this way, the Crown secured itself another several thousand *daler*, while other farmers were punished with smaller, yet still quite substantial fines. For Christian IV, this was all on top of the war tax which the population was already paying. For the peasants, the taxes and the fines served as a financial reminder of who was their king and how economically defenceless they were against him in spite of the fact that they had thwarted his war efforts.⁹⁰

After the war, Christian IV started to plan a Norwegian army consisting of soldiers conscripted from the peasant population. The experience with Norwegian seamen in the Royal Navy had been reassuring—they had been placed under a strict naval command structure, and were in many ways better seamen than the Danes it seemed. So perhaps Norwegian peasant boys could also become good soldiers in the army, just like the Finns were proving for the Swedes? But the king's focus on Norway was not always that focused. By 1625, he was embroiled in the Thirty Years' War in Germany

with 25,000 mercenary soldiers. This expensive war effort was financed by taxes levied on his Danish and Norwegian subjects.⁹¹ Consequently, the plans for a permanent army in Norway were shelved, but in 1628 the Dano-Norwegian elite in Norway nevertheless made the king publish an ordinance for a new Norwegian army consisting of 6000 conscripted peasant soldiers. The king was not willing to take money from the royal coffers in Copenhagen and use it on an army in Norway, so elite representatives of the estates in Norway contributed some 1000 *daler* to begin with, and only a few officers were recruited and started to drill their companies.⁹²

When a new war broke out in 1643, there came a decisive phase in the realisation of the army in Norway. This was achieved by Governor-General Hannibal Sehested, who was married to one of Christian IV's daughters, Christiane. Sehested managed to realise two achievements simultaneously. He put the army in Norway on a war footing, and he financed this with increased taxes. He imported hundreds of officers from foreign countries, especially from Germany and the Low Countries and with their help he coerced the farmer soldiers into companies so drill-exercises could begin, but frictions multiplied.⁹³ The peasants in Østlandet did not want to provoke the Swedes, so they were against attacking them. Popular opinion was also against the extortions that accompanied Sehested's mobilisation. The farmers thus reacted with petitions where they made it clear that this was all too much.⁹⁴ The governor-general published that he was willing to consider all petitions, but his replies were non-committal words and he continued undeterred with his ambitious military and fiscal policies.⁹⁵

The aspect of resistance to this war which was most reminiscent of what had happened during the Kalmar War was the south-eastern peasants' refusal to camp near the Swedish border—they would go no further east than the River Glomma. But even then, they were not happy with their situation and many of them deserted. These were ordinary farmers without military training—they were commanded to be in the camps because of their duty as a male subject to meet the levy (*oppbud*). Their attitude eventually made it more difficult for Hannibal Sehested to wage an offensive war though, because he only had 6000 conscripted soldiers to do it with. These soldiers nevertheless stood under a far more efficient command structure than their forefathers had done in the two earlier wars which directly affected Norway in 1563–1570 and 1611–1613. Sehested had ambitious plans for using this new Norwegian army against Sweden, and he managed to carry out a couple of offensives into Sweden, strengthened by some companies of foreign mercenaries. But the results were mea-

gre, partly because the soldiers were insufficiently trained and equipped, and partly because both they and the Norwegian population regarded this as Sehested's war and hated him for it. Their lack of enthusiasm thus made it impossible to sustain the offensives.⁹⁶

Sehested himself is the main source of his own unpopularity. The political culture did not allow anybody to criticise official policy via petitions, so there is little talk of burdens, and mostly assurances of steadfast loyalty instead. And yet the situation in the field was quite different. Sehested told his correspondents in officialdom about all the ill-will he met. He interpreted it as being partly the peasant's fault, partly the Norwegians' in general. In late January 1645, he complained in a letter to Danish nobleman Ove Gedde that the peasants all over Norway were so repugnant that they swore loudly and shouted that they would never "set foot over the border"⁹⁷; while in another letter to nobleman Iver Krabbe, written in August of the same year, he complained that the peasants were totally rebellious and false.⁹⁸ Sehested summarised his own disappointment when he said "the Norwegian is not to be relied on when the going is rough".⁹⁹ When he and his family finally left Båhus fortress on 13 August 1645, he was jeered at by the people of Båhus *len* (from 1658 Bohuslän) who shouted curses and insults after them. They were angry that, at the moment, the war was drawing to a close, Sehested had started an unsuccessful offensive against Gothenburg and thus exposed them to Swedish reprisals.¹⁰⁰

POWERLESS PEASANTS IN HIGH POLITICS

The reason that resistance to the war did not become politically dangerous in Norway is perhaps because the peasant elite were no longer involved with how the military was organised, because they had been instrumental in the conflict between the people and the Crown. The conflict about war policy thus became a latent conflict in which the peasants had no voice. There was no doubt the 1643–1645 war was deeply unpopular. In Denmark, it was called the Torstensson War after the Swedish general who led the invasion into Jutland in the winter of 1643–1644; while in Norway it was called the Hannibal War after the governor-general there. Although his war efforts were hampered by the ill-will amongst almost all Norwegians, it is remarkable that this did not have greater political consequences. The war tax was reduced, but not abolished, and the tax burden in peacetime after 1645 was heavier than ever. Sehested was removed from his post in 1651, not because of his unpopularity in Norway but

because both the new king, Frederick III, and the Danish Council of the Realm wanted to strengthen direct Danish rule from Copenhagen over Norway.¹⁰¹

In high politics, Norwegian peasants were absolutely powerless, something which was definitely demonstrated when royal absolutism was introduced in 1660. This was to last for the next 154 years.

NOTES

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A State of Aggression? Swedish Peasant Elites and the Art of Bargaining During the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563–70)

Mats Hallenberg

INTRODUCTION: CONSCRIPTIONS, UPRISINGS AND THE EARLY MODERN STATE IN SWEDEN

The historiography of Sweden's so-called Age of Empire (c. 1560–1720) was for a long time dominated by two, seemingly diverging interpretations. Scholars like Sven A. Nilsson and Jan Lindegren have convinc-

The introduction is written by Mats Hallenberg and Johan Holm. It holds relevance both for Mats Hallenberg's chapter on the interaction between the peasantry and the state during the Nordic Seven Years' War and for Johan Holm's contribution on the political uprisings of seventeenth-century Sweden. Both chapters address political strategies amongst freeholding peasants and the rural poor. Mats Hallenberg deals with the peasant elites and their conflict with the Vasa regime during the Nordic Seven Years' War; while Johan Holm focuses on the diminishing legacy of the uprising as a political strategy during the early seventeenth century.

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ingly demonstrated how the Swedish military state of the mid-sixteenth century was based on a ruthless economic exploitation of the peasantry, through taxation and military conscription. They have also argued that the military power of the state made protest all but futile, as the peasantry had to face a superior adversary.¹ Meanwhile, Eva Österberg and others have instead stressed the considerable scope for adaptation and bargaining as a characteristic of the relationship between rulers and subjects in early modern Sweden. While the Swedish state metamorphosed into a major European power, the peasantry managed to retain a considerable part of their leverage, not only in the Swedish Diet (*riksdag*), but also perhaps even more so in the district courts and in parish meetings.² The current book project seeks to explain how these seemingly contradictory representations can be reconciled in a general interpretation of state formation and peasant protest in Sweden. The argument is that the relation between state and peasantry must be understood as a process, where the peasant elites retained their political and social position by participating in the exploitation of marginalised groups in the rural communities.³

There is also a third interpretation suggested by Börje Harnesk: the Swedish peasantry and other parts of the rural population were by no means pacified by the state or incapable of violent protest. On the contrary, from the mid-sixteenth century, there was a continuing series of riots, local disturbances and violent protests that had the potential of challenging the hegemony of the Swedish state.⁴ These occurrences have been largely neglected by modern Swedish scholars, although Finnish historians like Kimmo Katajala have thoroughly investigated the impact of social conflict in the eastern part of the Swedish realm.⁵ While Johan Holm's contribution to this volume seeks to explain the character of local protest in seventeenth century Sweden, Mats Hallenberg's mainly address the impact of war on the relationship between government and peasant farmer elites in the preceding century. Although Swedish historians have made a thorough inquiry into the origins of the Swedish "military state", there has been less investigation into the military conscriptions of the sixteenth century, and the conflicts that they caused in local communities.⁶

From a comparative perspective, the peasant elites in early modern Sweden are both different and similar to their European contemporaries in a number of ways. There is of course one obvious divergence: in a

period of absolutist monarchy, the peasant estate managed to defend their political autonomy as the fourth estate of the Swedish Diet. The peasant freeholders, who constituted the local elite in most rural communities, controlled up to a half of the arable land and fiercely defended their social position.⁷ On the other hand, Sweden might well be characterised as a typical European state according to the fiscal-military model suggested by Jan Glete. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Swedish Realm mainly followed the same social and political trajectory as most other European states (albeit with remarkably military success for a while).⁸ But when it comes to difference, we would argue that the essentially aggressive, expansionist character of the Swedish state must also be taken into account. The aggressive peasant farmer elites of Sweden gradually directed their violent actions away from the central government. Instead, they became successfully integrated into a military state organised for territorial expansion. In general, the violence of peasant elites was thus directed externally at the proclaimed enemies of the Swedish government and internally against the marginalised parts of local communities that often carried the main brunt of war.

Finally, we must also consider the case of Finland, the easternmost part of the Swedish Realm. There is a case to be made that the Finnish peasants were not as well integrated and might have carried less political and social leverage than their Swedish counterparts. In some ways, the Government in Stockholm treated Finland more as a conquered territory than a fully integrated part of the realm. The Finnish peasants were more often excluded from bargaining with government representatives. Coercion may thus have played a larger part in the eastern part of the realm, and that would also have meant an increased scope for violent aggression by the peasants themselves.⁹ On the other hand, the Finnish peasants may have been just as successful as their Swedish peers when it came to petitioning the King for tax exemptions or temporary reliefs. Geography, however, must have posed a problem. When summoned to the Diet in Stockholm, Finnish peasants faced a long journey. Consequently, they sent fewer representatives, and those they did sometimes arrived too late. Ultimately, the Finnish peasants did pay a larger price for the dynastic ambitions of their rulers, yet our contributions to this volume focus mainly on the western parts of the Realm of Sweden.

THE SWEDISH STATE AND THE PEASANT ELITES: EMPOWERING INTERACTIONS?

This chapter addresses the violent mentality of peasant elites in the Swedish Realm during the mid-sixteenth century. The purpose is to discuss how the belligerent politics of the Swedish kings was inflicted on peasant communities, and why this expansionist strategy came to foster a mentality of masculine honour and aggressive behaviour among the leading strata of peasant society. I will present a case study of the army campaigns against Norway in 1564–65 (which were ultimately futile) to demonstrate how the war policy came to rely on an extended bargaining process between royal officials and peasant elites, which in turn encouraged violent ideals of masculine honour as a means to achieve recognition.

The inspiration for this study comes from dominant trends in the historiography of state formation. In the late-twentieth century, Charles Tilly's broad survey of the history of European states had a great impact on this debate. He analysed this historical process as a struggle for resources: rulers had to bargain with local elites to secure the means for waging war. In rural areas princes bargained with noble landowners, who had the coercive means to extract the agricultural surplus produced by the peasantry; while in areas with larger urban settlements, they bargained with merchant elites who controlled the capital resources of the burgeoning financial centres.¹⁰ According to this model, the peasants thus had little or no impact on the state-building process and were primarily a target for coercive action by both the state and nobility.

Tilly's narrative, although well argued, seems to confirm the traditional notion of state-building being a top-down process, in which rulers gradually strengthened their capacity to impose their will on local societies. The political struggles of early modern Europe thus appear as a zero-sum game; that is, wherever central authorities gained influence, it was at the expense of local societies in that area. However, there are a number of rival interpretations to challenge this; Peter Blicke, for instance, in studying the political organisation of rural peasant communities, has argued that local, representative forms of government in many ways preceded the power structures of the state. State formation may thus be seen as the gradual incorporation of such institutions, rather than a simple series of top-down measures.¹¹

For early modern England, Michael Braddick has demonstrated how centralised state power was fundamentally limited. He argues that the

proponents of the English state were always deeply embedded in the social structures of local society. Office-holders had to adapt to local conditions, and local elites might equally use their office to forward their own agendas as well as the state's.¹² Steve Hindle has elaborated on the same theme, with evidence of how local agents used court proceedings and other state institutions to solve their own conflicts.¹³ Both Braddick and Hindle thus stress the participatory character of the early modern English state; how people in local societies—not only the elites—would make use of state structures to widen their scope for political action. Andy Wood, however, has presented a somewhat divergent interpretation, stressing that class conflict was omnipresent in sixteenth century England and that violent insurrection was often the only political means available to the majority of the rural population. In times of rebellion, there was constant tension between those who saw themselves as “honest men”, and the angry rank and file of protesters. The rulers thus had a keen interest in driving a wedge between these two groups to split them further and to encourage the former to think of themselves as a “peasant elite”.¹⁴

Inspired by Braddick and Hindle (among others), André Holenstein has suggested focusing on the “empowering interactions” between state representatives on the one hand, and local groups and individuals on the other. Holenstein argues that researchers must take account of how local agents responded to the opportunities offered to them by the expansion of state institutions.¹⁵ Following the above, I will study the interaction between the Swedish government and peasant communities during the Nordic Seven Years' war. The first problem will be to determine which groups in peasant society were engaged in bargaining with state representatives over the means of warfare. This then leads to the question of whether these groups actually got anything positive out of these negotiations. The problem of class must also be considered, more specifically the tension between peasant freeholders and their less fortunate neighbours. Last, and not least, I will demonstrate the role of political language in inviting the peasant elite to participate in the state-building project.

SWEDEN AND THE NORDIC SEVEN YEARS' WAR

The Nordic Seven Years' War was mainly a conflict between Sweden (which included present-day Finland) and Denmark (which included Norway), but it also involved the important Baltic sea power of Lübeck and the

Kingdom of Poland. It began in the summer of 1563, when there was an escalation of hostilities between the two young Nordic rulers, Frederick II of Denmark (r. 1559–88) and Eric XIV of Sweden (r. 1560–68). When the war started, Danish troops soon conquered the important fortress of Älvsborg which had served as Sweden's only access to the sea in the West. For the following seven years, Swedish and Danish troops would wage war by raiding the border provinces in order to deprive the other of logistical support. The war went on until the end of 1570 when a peace treaty was finally concluded in the Baltic port of Stettin.¹⁶

While the Danish monarch ultimately relied on mercenary troops raised from the recruiting markets of Germany and the Netherlands, the Swedish army relied mainly on conscripted or newly recruited peasant soldiers. Such army units, originally raised to supplement domestic or foreign elite troops, now had to lead expeditions into hostile territory in provinces like Scania (*Skåne*), Blekinge, Halland, Bohuslän, Jämtland and Trøndelag. Although King Eric of Sweden commanded a considerable force of regular troops, these had to be supplemented by locally raised peasant militias to wage war on a grander scale. While some of the peasants were forced to join army campaigns a long way from home, the others had to contribute in kind by supplying taxes and food for men and horses. The peasant elites of Sweden were therefore directly involved in the expansionist military plans of its rulers in a way that their Danish and Norwegian counterparts were not.¹⁷

The following analysis will focus on the conflicts that occurred when the Swedish state tried to mobilise peasant militias as well as newly recruited soldiers for army campaigns into foreign territory. I will also address how King Eric and his officers tried to solve the problems by bargaining with the peasant leaders, and the strategies used by the peasants to counter the demands of war. The main thrust of the argument is that large-scale war created both problems as well as opportunities for the Swedish government and its subjects. The Seven Years' war was only the first in a series of armed conflicts that would last for more than a century. The inevitable consequence of this would be an ongoing militarisation of Swedish society, and an increasing social divide between the established peasant freeholders who stayed at home and the conscripted soldiers. However, this Swedish military state was a long time in the making. The wars of the early Reformation period caused great havoc in the provinces targeted by army operations, but they were ultimately less devastating than the prolonged state of international warfare in the

seventeenth century. This makes it all the more interesting to study the relationship between the government and peasantry at the beginning of this “period of the great wars”.¹⁸

The Reformation saw major political upheavals in the Nordic countries. The Scandinavian Kalmar Union eventually disintegrated into two rival monarchies, Denmark–Norway and Sweden–Finland.¹⁹ With the advent of Protestantism, monarchs like Gustav I of Sweden (r. 1523–60) and Christian III of Denmark (r. 1534–59) gained the economic and ideological resources to strengthen their own position vis-à-vis domestic elite groups, and this meant profound changes in political culture and social relations. Ambitious aristocrats could no longer oppose the hegemony of the monarch in the same way as they had before, and in order to defend their noble lands and privileges they had to subscribe to the royal agenda. Swedish historian, Peter Reinholdsson has described this as a radical breach with medieval society, when noblemen had been able to form military alliances with peasant communities to boost their political leverage at the national level. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, the peasantry would stand alone in opposing the expanding power base of the fiscal-military state.²⁰

From this perspective, the Reformation saw the breakdown of three fundamental social institutions: the monarchy of the Kalmar Union, the medieval Catholic Church and the local dominance of the Swedish aristocracy. I have previously argued that this promoted a new social hegemony of royal officials expressing the ideals of an aggressive masculinity, as the national monarchy of the Vasa kings was dependent on a violent projection of power by noblemen, bailiffs and lansquenets.²¹ However, promoting legitimate rule eventually required new institutions to uphold the peace, and so the Swedish Diet was established as a national arena for the formation of political consensus, and a system for handling local grievances through central bureaucracy was created.²² The process of incorporating the previously independent peasant militias into the royal military structure was also part of this project. It meant that the national army also became a means of political integration as well as an instrument for projecting state violence.

In the late medieval struggle for power, the peasantry was included in the political discourse of the realm, and the peasants were occasionally recognised as being “Swedish men”.²³ But from the 1520s, Lutheran doctrine was employed by the monarchy to forge stronger bonds between rulers and subjects. On a general level, the patriarchal ideology of the

three estates created a norm for stable social organisation, while the focus on the individual subject and the quest for true knowledge of the scriptures created a new means for expressing community and fellowship. Kajsa Brilkman has demonstrated how this doctrine was transformed into a political discourse focusing on the integration of the subject into the community of the realm. It was no longer sufficient for subjects just to heed to the dictates of their ruler; they had to acquire the proper kind of knowledge to understand the correct way of action. The rhetoric of political integration was widely used by the Vasa monarchs to promote political cohesion. At the same time, this created an ideological platform for the peasant estate to act as fully recognised members of the political community of the realm.²⁴ As we shall see, this integrative aspect of the Reformation was combined with a belligerent discourse of war, violence and manliness.

In the following analysis, I have concentrated mainly on royal correspondence that has been preserved in the state archives (*riksregistraturet*). These letters from the king to rural communities provide a valid source of information concerning the concepts and ideals employed to mobilise the peasantry. These documents also include vital instructions to local officials which reveal the kinds of negotiation that went on to resolve local conflicts. Those conflicts which concerned military conscription are also treated in contemporary court records. When it comes to the Norwegian military campaigns, this will be studied through a close reading of both royal correspondence and the proceedings of King Eric's High Court (*Höga nämndens dombok*).

MOBILISATION AND MUTINY: THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1564

The Nordic Seven Years' War was waged through a series of expeditions into foreign territory where violence and plunder was the order of the day. The campaigns by the Swedish army across the Scandinavian mountains into Norway were no exception. In the autumn of 1563, a band of peasant militias had already invaded the Norwegian province of Jämtland to make the locals swear fealty to the Swedish King, but the first regular army expedition was launched in early 1564. While the main part of the Danish army was camped in the southern part of the Scandinavian peninsula, Commander Claudius Collart was ordered to assemble army troops from the northern provinces of Sweden to attack

the coastal city of Trondheim in Central Norway. The army units would be supported by peasant militiamen enlisted from the same area.²⁵ Swedish law and political tradition obliged the peasantry to defend their homeland, but fighting a war of aggression on foreign soil was not necessarily the same thing. Eric XIV therefore had to convince the peasants that this operation was part of a defensive strategy. In a letter addressed to the peasantry of Dalarna, King Eric thus explained that the attack on Norway would be of great benefit to the realm. Conquering the cathedral city of Trondheim would restore national pride that had been tarnished by the loss of Älvsborg. Moreover, Trondheim would provide an important sea port that might open up new trade routes to Western Europe. The King also tried to motivate the peasants by promising them that they could freely plunder all the goods they could carry after the town had been taken.²⁶

However, the mobilisation did not work out as planned. Eric XIV had wanted to rally all the peasants of Dalarna to the belligerent cause, but the peasantry only reluctantly conceded that every third man of the province would join the operation. The King eventually decided that this would have to do.²⁷ The mobilisation of peasant militias was a delicate matter, since the Vasa kings had already levied heavy taxes to support their regular army and Navy units. Gustav I Vasa had claimed that he would hire professional core of hired soldiers to protect the realm, so that the peasants could safely tend to their farms and animals without fear of being attacked by foreign invaders.²⁸ This same argument was taken up by King Eric during the opening phase of the conflict with Denmark.²⁹ But the sheer scale of the war soon compelled the Swedish King to call up the peasant militias to make up the numbers required for a prolonged military campaign.

In the beginning of 1564, Collart received his marching orders to enter Norway, ostensibly to meet the threat of Norwegian troops operating in the border province of Jämtland. Knut Håkansson, another army officer, was instructed to join the expedition with a number of horsemen and a full unit (*fänika*) of infantry—numbering approximately 500 men. However, antagonism between the officers and the conscripts plagued preparations. In January, Collart reported that the operation would have to be called off altogether, since the soldiers from Dalarna were refusing to obey their marching orders. The commander placed the blame on Dalarna's peasant leaders, as they had apparently told their men to disobey orders and were threatening to slay any officers who should try

to enforce the orders further. The militiamen from the neighbouring province of Hälsingland had also refused to obey orders, preferring to send their representatives to Stockholm to parlay directly with the king. Eric XIV later described how the peasant leaders of Hälsingland had presented themselves:

[They spoke] on behalf of all the peasantry, demanding that the peasants must retain their freedom so that they wouldn't have to leave their homesteads to fight the enemy in Jämtland and Härjedalen. And they promised Us [the king] that they would be obedient in the future, conscripting as many people as possible to serve ourselves and the realm, and to contribute whatever would be required in all matters.³⁰

The peasantry of Hälsingland and Dalarna chose widely diverging strategies for coping with the state's demand for army recruits. The leaders of the Hälsingland peasants did not want to leave their freehold homes and property for a winter expedition across the mountains. Instead, they offered to demonstrate their good will by assisting the royal officers in recruiting other people from the province. This, most likely, referred to farmhands and landless labourers from the rural outskirts. The Hälsingland men chose to bargain with the state, using their position as landed householders to provide service for the army from those less fortunate than themselves. The leaders of Dalarna, on the other hand, opted for a more confrontational strategy—they showed solidarity with the conscripted soldiers and refused mobilisation. The Dalarna leaders' projected their violence against state officials, whereas the Hälsinglanders preferred to wield it against their fellow countrymen. The latter solution obviously appealed more to Eric XIV, who accepted their suggestion providing that the Hälsinglanders kept their side of the bargain and produced a sufficient number of recruits.

Meanwhile, the king decided to punish the peasants from Dalarna severely. The noblemen Knut Haraldsson Soop and Nils Jespersion were commissioned to travel to the province, arrest the peasant leaders and put them all on trial. The king promised to pardon all the Dalarna peasants, however, if they would inform on the instigators. One suspected reason for the unrest was that malevolent rumours had been spread by Danish agents. As King Eric saw it, he was giving the peasant leaders a chance to further their own self-interest:

[...] therefore I will remind you of where your own benefit does lie, so that you may better comprehend, and then correct yourselves in this matter.³¹

According to the king, the peasantry needed to understand the meaning of their misdemeanour. To strengthen his argument, Eric XIV used his Vasa heritage, pointing out that the Danes were always inclined to oppress the Swedish, and that the people of Dalarna had always been loyal to his father Gustav I. Eric stated that it would be a great shame should they refuse to defend their fatherland in its hour of need. The peasants had contended that it was better for each man to fend for himself at his own front door. This was clearly referring to the peasants' traditional obligation to fend for their own province, rather than for the realm as a whole. But King Eric argued to the contrary:

It is a great folly if you do not understand, that it is much better to make war, plunder and scorch in enemy lands than to allow them [the enemy] to do the same in our own [land].³²

To convince the peasants to participate in military operations on foreign territory, Eric XIV claimed that the Norwegian expedition must be placed in a larger context. A Swedish attack upon central Norway would force the Danish army to spread itself across a larger territory, instead of concentrating its destructive power upon the border provinces of Western Gothia (*Västergötland*) and Småland. The invasion of Norway would be an act of solidarity, helping to relieve the harried peasantry of Southwestern Sweden. The province of Dalarna must therefore remain loyal to the other provinces of the realm. If they did not, they risked being left on their own, having to fend for themselves when enemy bands came to raid on their own province.

The king's letter to Dalarna is a fine example of an inclusive speech act, offering the peasants the necessary means to correct themselves by recognising the true purpose of war. The peasant elite of Dalarna had to comprehend how their own self-interest was intimately tied to the benefit of the realm and the Vasa dynasty. The king postulated that the peasants possessed the necessary knowledge of history and geography to understand—and contribute to—his belligerent strategy. Consequently, they should deem the violent aggression on the Norwegians as a noble act of solidarity; with free plunder as a fringe benefit. In this way, the king was offering a combination of a most honourable cause with brutal self-interest.

The peasants of Dalarna eventually yielded to the pressure and offered to provide the recruits needed for Collart's army, and by March 1564, the commander reported that he had defeated the Danish troops in the Norwegian province of Jämtland, and made the peasants there pledge loyalty to the King of Sweden. Claudius Collart immediately received his new orders to proceed over the mountain range into Norway and to offer the local people there the same choice as those in Jämtland had been given—to submit to the Swedish king or face the consequences.³³ The officer Tönnes Olsson was assigned the task of raising more soldiers from the northern provinces to support this expedition.³⁴ The peasant elite of Dalarna had sent their representatives to Stockholm to parlay, and the King now offered them a chance to redeem themselves. The conflict of the previous autumn would generously be laid aside, as long as the peasants promised to stay loyal “as honest and true men shall, and well ought to”.³⁵ Once again, the traditional strategy of solving conflicts was pursued: by consenting to single out the odd culprit, the peasant elite of the province could be restored and confirmed in their traditional position of authority, loyalty and manliness.³⁶

To spur the newly recruited soldiers on, the king told of the brilliant Swedish victories, and how Collart had succeeded in capturing both Trondheim and the fortress of Stenviksholm. Collart was now, however, in dire need of fresh troops. The king stressed that holding a port on the Atlantic coast was of great benefit to the Swedish realm. Trondheim was (fairly) close to the Swedish border and would therefore be capable of supplying all the northern provinces with requisite goods at much better prices. The peasants of Dalarna were urged to feel sympathy for the soldiers fighting on foreign territory—“because you have children, friends and relatives among them”. Refusing to aid their own kith and kin would cause irreparable damage to their manly honour. Finally, the king promised that the campaign would be swift. As soon as the Swedish were established in the province of Trøndelag, the fortress would be manned with “Germans and others”, so the men from Dalarna would be able to go home.³⁷

Eric XIV was thus appealing to an aggressive masculine ideal when trying to persuade the freeholders of Dalarna to support his campaign to devastate the provinces on the Norwegian side of the mountains. To Eric, the peasant elite represented local authority and loyalty to the king and these functions were intimately connected to their manly honour. In public discourse the authority of the peasant rested on his control of the local

means of violence. To be recognised as full partners in the community of the realm, the peasants thus needed to show they could provide and project aggressive violence against the enemies of the king. In this sense, mobilisation of the peasant elites was crucial for the imperial project envisioned by the Vasa monarchs.

The next call for a general mobilisation arrived in May 1564. Eric XIV anticipated a major Danish attack in the south and demanded that the peasantry of the northern provinces should conscript an additional number of army recruits to be sent to defend the border areas in the southwest. The king made it clear that he preferred to rely on “our native Swedes” to confront the enemy, instead of levying taxes to recruit mercenaries from foreign lands.³⁸ King Eric was referring here to a well-established trope—that peasants were loyal, whereas mercenary troops were unpredictable.³⁹ Meanwhile, the bailiff and the local army commander of Dalarna were commissioned to recruit two full units of infantry soldiers to join the main force in the south. The remaining peasants would support the campaign by leading a new army expedition against Norway. Nils Jespersion was assigned the task of raising a posse by mobilising every third or every fifth man of the province. The motivation was free plunder for the duration of the campaign, since Eric claimed that the Norwegians had failed in their pledge to support the Swedish cause.⁴⁰

Altogether, the bickering over army recruits demonstrates the tensions between conscripted infantry soldiers and the peasant freeholders. State representatives were compelled to bargain with both groups, but the landed peasant elite was always the preferred counterpart. They were the ones targeted by the king’s inclusive speech, being addressed as “manly and honourable” Swedes who must shoulder their responsibility for the wealth of the realm. In theory, the king presented the peasants with a choice: either consent to the subscription of servants and younger relatives, or else join the war campaign themselves. But there was no clear social divide between the two groups. The situation in Dalarna demonstrated that the landed elite might well decide they had a common cause with the conscripts: to stay out of the war operations for as long as their locality was not on the front line.

The war against Denmark gave the government a strong incentive to increase pressure on peasant society. Acting as supreme commander, Eric XIV could claim a larger part of the resources by stating that the monarch was personally responsible for the welfare of the realm.⁴¹ On the other hand, the war also created problems that might deteriorate

into a crisis of legitimacy. The burdens of war fell mainly on the peasantry who had to pay the price, not only in the form of taxes, but also in person—as conscripted peasant militias. This double exploitation was bound to produce local discontent, which might escalate into open insurrection.

A SUSPENDED WAR EXPEDITION IN THE SUMMER OF 1564

By May 1564, the nobleman Knut Haraldsson had been appointed as military governor of the conquered Norwegian provinces. His first assignment was to round up all the armed men he could muster in the northern provinces (*Norrland*), and lead them over the mountain range to relieve Claudius Collart's troubled band of soldiers. He was ordered to travel north along the Gulf of Bothnia, urging the peasants to rally every third or every fifth man of their province to join the campaign. Meanwhile, Nils Jespersson was instructed to do the same in Dalarna. Eric XIV originally planned to attack Norway on two fronts: the men from Dalarna would advance into Hedemarken while the main force would attack from Jämtland into Trøndelag further north.⁴² Once again, the mobilisation of the infantry troops turned out to be an extended procedure. By early June, the bailiff Mikkel Helsing received the order to decamp immediately and lead his contingent of militiamen north into Jämtland to join Knut Haraldsson's troops.⁴³ Meanwhile in Dalarna, Nils Jespersson was ordered to recruit additional soldiers, but this could only be done by offering the new recruits one month's salary in advance, so silver coin had to be transported from Stockholm.⁴⁴

As a consequence, it was not until the middle of July when the contingent from the coastal regions finally arrived at the mustering point in Oviken, Jämtland. But even then the reinforcement troops from Dalarna were nowhere to be seen, and the Norrland people flatly refused to proceed without them. So the army remained camped in Jämtland for the rest of the summer until the king decided to cancel the operation altogether. Eric XIV placed the blame on Knut Haraldsson and his officers. According to the king, the peasantry had loyally responded to the call, but the officers had lingered too long until the opportunity was lost. Knut Haraldsson was hastily summoned back to Stockholm to explain his actions. The Swedish historian Barkman has accepted the king's version, concluding that it was the officers' "pointless bargaining with the peasantry in Norrland", that had stalled King Eric's visionary plan.⁴⁵

This story seems neatly adjusted to confirm the king's conception of the world. While the peasants had remained loyal and true, the incompetence of the royal officers had hampered the success of the military campaign.⁴⁶ However, it seems necessary to consider Knut Haraldsson's version. By September, he was on trial before King Eric's High Court and his testimony provides us with better insight into the harsh reality of war. The commander described how, after receiving his orders, he had immediately set out for Gästrikland. The summoning of the peasants took several days, followed by prolonged negotiations at the district court meeting. After receiving a favourable answer, Knut Haraldsson travelled north to Hälsingland where the peasantry flatly refused to contribute any more soldiers. The peasants argued that there were no weapons, or provisions, let alone able men left in the province, since they had already provided quotas of conscripts on three separate occasions in the last year.⁴⁷ Knut Haraldsson suggested that the peasants could instead form a militia band, but the freehold farmers insisted that the king had promised that they would not have to go to war themselves; they had agreed to contribute by other means:

[...] so that they [the peasants] would benevolently agree to provide *their own people* and all the provisions whenever needed, which they claimed they had done in every matter as much as possible.⁴⁸

The peasant elite of Hälsingland thus managed to turn the king's propaganda against his own officers. Eric XIV had proclaimed that the realm would be defended by a trained army of Swedish soldiers, supported by the taxes and duties of the common man. The peasants insisted that they had kept their part of the agreement by allowing their servants and younger relatives to be conscripted. They had proved themselves loyal, but now they lacked the means to contribute any further. Knut Haraldsson tried to win the peasants over by appealing to their manliness and sense of solidarity. Their position as "honourable men" would be severely tarnished should they refuse to aid the troubled Swedish soldiers in Norway. Eventually, the peasants agreed to raise a posse of every third man from the province, on the absolute condition that this number would also include the conscripted soldiers still left in the province.

On June 16th, Knut Haraldsson bargained with the peasantry of Medelpad, and six days later he proceeded to meet the representatives of the province of Ångermanland further north. The peasants there were

equally reluctant to contribute further recruits. They claimed that they could not spare any more men until the harvest was safely gathered in from their fields. This time, Knut Haraldsson opted for a confrontational strategy. The peasants were rounded up in three groups and ordered to draw lots to decide who should be commissioned to join the army campaign:

The man who lost the lottery then had to get himself ready, or else there would have been great rioting among the common men, and one would have been struck dead by the other.⁴⁹

According to Knut Haraldsson, he succeeded in coercing the peasantry into an agreement by pitching each of them against the other. On top of raising this peasant militia, Knut demanded that the farmsteads which still held more than one able-bodied man would be subject for conscription. The peasants protested, like the people of Hälsingland, that they had already contributed several times over and that they could not spare any more men. In spite of this, Knut Haraldsson managed to round up his troops and get them on the move, but the march was slow, since the soldiers had to obtain provisions during their way. When they finally got to Jämtland, a month had passed since the mobilisation had started, but the troops from Dalarna had not arrived yet.

The people of Dalarna did actually set out on the expedition though, but when they reached Jämtland, they refused to go on and neither their officers nor the newly assigned commander Mats Törne could change this. They were out of provisions, and there were none to be found in Jämtland either, which had already been ravaged by armies several times. The parlay thus ended in bleak failure, and the soldiers from Dalarna decided to march home:

[...] they said that it was much better to die before one's own [door], than to die outside another man's door out of hunger and famine.⁵⁰

It seems the peasant militiamen had finally refuted the king's proposal to defend their homes by launching an aggressive attack on the Norwegian provinces west of the mountains. If they must fight, they preferred to fight on their home ground rather than perish in foreign lands. Of course the logistic problems may have influenced their decision, but the incident reveals that the peasants' traditional loyalty to their home province could still trump the prescribed loyalty to the realm.

The mutiny among the soldiers from Dalarna did not help raise morale among the troops from Norrland. Knut Haraldsson tried to parlay once more, but eventually gave up and stationed his troops in Jämtland to wait for provisions to arrive after the harvest. By this time, Eric XIV had seen enough though, and Knut was relieved of his command and summoned back to Stockholm. Meanwhile Mats Törne was appointed as his replacement. Törne had to start a new process of negotiation with the peasantry, but eventually succeeded in obtaining a sizeable force of soldiers that he led over the mountains to Trondheim. However, Claudius Collart had long since abandoned his position, so Mats Törne was forced to return to the Swedish side of the border without having achieved any military success at all.⁵¹

REPRESSION AND RECOGNITION

The examples above provide ample proof of the Swedish government's capacity to recruit and mobilise army troops and peasant militias. They also show that the cost of achieving this was often prolonged bargaining and local conflict, with the constant threat of mutiny. The government had to learn how to balance negotiation with coercion in order to get the job done. Knut Haraldsson was eventually transferred to the Navy, where he was killed in combat in 1566.⁵² Back in Dalarna, the local officer Nils Olsson arranged a provisional trial against the peasants who had refused to join the army campaign or had declined further conscriptions. Eric XIV stated that he did not wish to have the culprits executed, but they must be held responsible for their actions and stand trial. First the judgement must be passed, and then the king would graciously pardon them all since "the whole province has now agreed to march against the enemy".⁵³

Eric once again blamed his local representatives for the mutiny. The king stated that the officers should not have tried to recruit the peasants at harvest time, as the men were needed in the fields. Now that the corn was safely gathered it was time to recruit more men. By September, the peasantry of Dalarna was ordered to raise every fifth man to join Mats Törne's expedition against Norway. The king repeated similar arguments, saying that it was in their own best interests to attack the Norwegians now before the latter tried to do the same to them. The men from Dalarna were promised all the booty—cloth and salt—that they could plunder, and the king promised them free trade on the western sea when they had taken the port of Trondheim. Apart from these benefits, there was also a threat

of retaliation: Eric declared that if the men did not heed the call to join Mats Törne's campaign, the king would himself lead a punitive expedition to Dalarna.⁵⁴

Eric XIV also presented his own version of the summer episodes to the parishes of Mora and Orsa. The peasants were told that there were traitors among them, a bunch of "depraved rogues [...] who had no respect for either God or justice". The king claimed the instigators were a band of ex-soldiers, who had returned from Danish captivity to dissuade the peasant militiamen from enlisting. There were also a number of conscripted foot-soldiers in the province, who had taken their pay, only to hide themselves away rather than marching against the enemy. Because of this treason, many good Swedish men had lost their lives in enemy lands and the king's army had failed to capture Trondheim. Furthermore, the mutiny had caused extra trouble for the peasants at home, since the failure of the Norwegian invasion meant they now had to organise a special border patrol. The king therefore urged the peasants of Dalarna to hand over the troublemakers, and he would make sure that they were severely punished.⁵⁵

King Eric was apparently well aware of the risk of recruiting the sons of peasants and training them into professional soldiers. When they were discharged and returned to their home province, they could become a source of trouble if they banded together with the peasant freeholders. By the end of November nothing had happened, so the king had to repeat his order that "at least one from every parish must be rebuked". This was the moment to set an example, while many peasant militiamen were still away on military duty. King Eric proclaimed that he fully trusted the peasant elite of Dalarna, that there were enough honest men in the province to expose and arrest those who had tried to escape the king's justice.⁵⁶ In other words, the king was telling the peasant elite to direct their violence against the marginalised people in local society, the renegades that had failed to do their part in the war effort.

In spite of protests and widespread non-compliance, the Swedish government somehow managed to pressure the peasantry to provide new conscripts for the army, while at the same time ordering peasant militias to join army campaigns deep into foreign territory. The fact that the Swedish king could wage war against a Danish army of professional soldiers with troops composed largely of peasant recruits might well be held as evidence of how strong the Vasa monarchy was. On the other hand, state officials were compelled to bargain, negotiate, coerce and

make compromises with the peasants in order to achieve any result at all. This constant bargaining between government and peasantry should thus be considered a main characteristic of the political culture of the Vasa regime. The monarch needed the support of the peasant elite to maintain an aggressive foreign policy. Much has been said about the importance of the Swedish Diet and the formalised mediations of the local district courts. This study has demonstrated how the war effort brought about intensified political interaction outside the established arenas, as well as violent conflict within local communities. Most importantly, the peasant leaders were expected to control the unpropertied classes of local society, and to coerce them into joining the army. The early military state was thus a mediating institution that created room for peasant participation in national politics, but it was mainly the peasant elite that negotiated with crown officials on behalf of the rest of the local community.

VIOLENCE AND PEASANT POLITICS DURING THE NORDIC SEVEN YEARS' WAR

So what can we say of the relation between the Swedish state and peasantry during the first great war of the Vasas? Firstly, it is clear that the peasant elites were in control of means of violence. Not only did they have the weapons, resources and the manpower, but they were also the seniors of the "young and able men" that the Vasa monarchs wanted to turn into professional soldiers. Eric XIV did not have the power to coerce the peasantry into submission, he had to bargain and include them in the public discourse regarding the wealth of the realm. Secondly, intensive bargaining was needed at every stage of mobilising troops, and it was in no way restricted to the Diet or the district courts. The government had to bargain with a number of groups before, during and after the war campaigns: the peasant elite who remained at home, the militiamen who agreed to serve on a temporary basis and the conscripted soldiers who were supposed to form the backbone of the royal army.

Thirdly, we must recognise that this bargaining process evolved between very unequal parties. Eric XIV repeatedly threatened both the peasants and their male servants with repressive action. The Swedish king could definitely muster the power to physically attack his opponents in the provinces but there is no evidence to suggest that this was ever the preferred

strategy. Eric depended on the peasant elites to keep the unruly elements of the local community at bay. The peasants for their part were expected to arrest local troublemakers and make them stand trial at the district court. It seems that the peasant elite generally opted for a compromising attitude, bargaining with the king's representatives over local contributions. Non-compliance and obstruction certainly had their parts in this strategy, but there are few examples of direct confrontation. The violence of peasant elites was thus seldom projected at the state or its representatives.

Fourthly, the Vasa regime invested major ideological resources in integrating the Swedish peasantry within the political community of the realm. King Eric had to recognise the peasant elites as political subjects in order to mobilise physical and economic support for his war campaigns. He associated them with honour and manliness and the capacity to understand how their own best interests tied in with those of the realm. The bargaining over military dues thus entailed the construction of a stronger political identity which in turn strengthened the political weight of the peasant estate.

Fifthly, the military mobilisation of the 1560s involved a confusing mix of recruited infantrymen, conscripted peasants and farmhands as well as a considerable number of temporarily drafted peasant militias. The professional core of the Swedish army was based on the large infantry units that were manned by peasant soldiers, who had chosen—more or less voluntarily—to serve the king for monetary compensation. During the Nordic Seven Years' war, there seems to have been a considerable element of coercion in the recruiting of new troops. This violent coercion certainly emanated from the state, but it was mediated by the peasant elites, striving to shift the burdens of war onto other groups. The conscripted foot-soldiers were trained to fight alongside professional mercenaries as well as peasant militiamen. Military service promised opportunity as well as hardship for all groups. In this respect, there was no marked difference between the peasant leaders and their less fortunate neighbours. However, the government chose to bargain with the peasant elite rather than with the conscripts. Thus, the integration of the peasant elites into the political community of the Realm brought about consequences for social relations within local society; the aggressive peasant elites were frequently positioned alongside the state representatives against other groups in rural society.

Previous research has analysed the great wars of the early modern period as leading to oppression rather than working as an incentive for political

integration. This study argues that political integration was a necessary component of a political process which promoted the successive empowerment of the peasant elites at the cost of increasing tensions between different groups at the local community level. In the following centuries, there would be a major difference between those conscripted and those who stayed at home. There is also a case for emphasising the different trajectory of the eastern part of the Swedish Realm. The first great wars of the Vasa monarchs—the Nordic Seven Years’ war (1563–1570) and the Russo-Swedish war (1570–1595)—were fought mainly with troops recruited in the Swedish part of the realm who were supported by taxes and dues paid by Finnish peasants. Evidence suggests that the Finnish peasants were not subject to political integration in the same degree as their Swedish counterparts, and that coercion (rather than dialogue) may have played a larger part in the Swedish state’s dealing with the Finnish peasants.

This study confirms that the bargaining between the Vasa monarchs and the peasant elites must be understood as a form of empowering interactions. Eric XIV lacked the military means to coerce the peasantry into contributing the required resources, so he had to compromise and offer terms in order to obtain the soldiers, militiamen and provisions he needed for his war. For the peasant elites of the northern provinces in Sweden, the military aggression of the state could also be used to their advantage for asserting their own dominance over the rural poor.

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31. "[...] och minne eder uppå vad såsom edert eget gagn är, på det i eder dess bättre besinna, och eder själva i saken rätta kunna". Open letter to the parishes of Mora and Orsa, RR, 21/1 1564, RA.
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50. "[...] och sade att det var bättre att dö hem till sin, än dö för annan mans dörr utav hunger och svält". *Historiska handlingar 13:1*.

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The Lost Political Uprisings

Johan Holm

This chapter deals with civil unrest, uprisings, and revolts in Sweden—a country that has a long history of riots and uprisings. The fifteenth century was especially violent, as in many other European kingdoms, with rebellions and civil war being the order of the day, and this continued into the next century, particularly during the reign of Gustav I (1523–1560), when the kingdom was rocked by upheavals until the last great uprising in 1595 against the ruling nobility in Ostrobothnia (*Österbotten*), Finland. The aim during the sixteenth century was never to overthrow the king but to achieve local independence. After this, there were only small outbreaks of unrest and violence during the seventeenth century. So where did this political unrest go, and how should the smaller outbreaks of political violence that ensued be interpreted?

Mats Hallenberg has shown us how, why, and under which circumstances the Swedish kings had to negotiate with the rural peasants to acquire the manpower and resources necessary for the wars Sweden fought in the sixteenth century. The resources were not enough to cover both expansionist warfare and controlling of the rural society. Therefore, the

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kings had to make a choice; they chose war and thus they had to negotiate with the freeholders on the home front.

I will try to show you how this negotiating policy worked on a grander scale. I will also try to show you that the Swedish government during the next century chose to treat violent resistance from the freeholders (taxpaying farmers whose taxes were paid for the war) differently from marginalised groups of poorer farmhands and crofters (who formed the basis for the conscripted Swedish army—but did not pay for it). Finally, I will show that the Swedish peasant elites, freeholders, and poorer strata of the rural society, crofters, farmhands, and so on did not necessarily react in the same way towards the king's policies and that this, in turn, affected the Swedish state building process.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BARRINGTON MOORE JR

Barrington Moore Jr was first and foremost a sociologist studying the transformations from early modern civilisation to the world of the twentieth century. Historians, in particular, have questioned the validity of many of his thoughts, but I find what he has to say on just what makes the revolutionary process work quite useful. The first question we should be asking ourselves is when do people use rioting as a means to a political end?

Moore's answer is that riot and revolution are political strategies mostly used by those who cannot, or are not allowed to, express their political opinions in other ways. He goes on to propose that a revolutionary situation arises when the government or the rulers fail to provide law and order, food, and so on. But to make the revolution a success, Moore stresses that three conditions must be met. Firstly, the revolutionaries must have a strong sense of their identity and their rights, as this makes the difference between just another riot and a successful revolution. Secondly, the revolutionaries need a vision of what it is that they exactly want to change; and thirdly, they need to know how they want to organise society after the revolution.¹

I would argue that Moore's theory is borne out when we compare the Arab spring to the European autumn of 2011. In Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Egypt, the revolution was backed by the educated middle class. They had a sense of identity and had the same vision for after the revolution—some kind of democracy. In England, Spain, or Portugal the following autumn, however, the rioters were a mixture of ethnicities, often

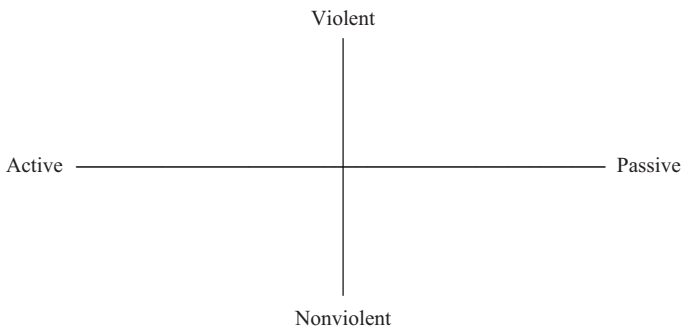
unemployed and less unified. Compared to the Arab middle class, they thus had a much weaker identity, and their political rights and place in society were perhaps not as clear. Furthermore, they had mostly not been thinking about what an alternative society should look like when they rioted.

The result of this was that the regimes in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt were overthrown, while the riots in Europe, where the working and middle class remained largely loyal to the state, were crushed. These types of civil unrest are common in Europe's big city suburbs. For example, about every three years, there are similar, though smaller, eruptions of violence in the suburbs of the Swedish capital—Stockholm.

A SWEDISH HISTORY OF RIOTS

When examining tax strikes, riots, and uprisings, there are a few things to keep in mind. An uprising is proactive and violent, as is the smaller riot, whereas simply refusing to pay taxes to the bailiff or pleading with the authorities is passive and nonviolent (a tax strike). If the bailiff and his men use force, however, the act becomes violent (though still passive). These acts could thus be presented in a simple diagram divided into four squares (see the figure below). Riot and uprising would be in the top left-hand square, while the tax strike would be anywhere on the right, with more violent behaviour being higher up.

From the government's point of view, everything in the upper left square is treason and punishable by death, while everything in the lower



right one is still considered a crime but not serious and certainly not punishable by death. The upper right square is a bit trickier, however, as the government might still consider this treason, depending upon how violent things get and whether they think a harsh punishment might upset the strikers. From the freeholders and peasants' point of view, an uprising was dangerous but righteous. In fact, refusing to pay unlawful taxes was probably considered fully justifiable.

In Sweden, uprisings (*resningen*) were the preferred political strategy during the fifteenth century as the Kalmar Union of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were headed by a king residing in Copenhagen. The king would be lawfully elected, but his interests would inevitably lie more in the Danish parts of the realm, not Swedish. Attempts to raise taxes and rule the Swedish part of the union with reliable Danish or German noblemen could thus spark an uprising; thus, time and again, parts of Sweden would break and often even engage in destructive civil warfare. The insurgents would generally be local clergy and self-conscious freeholder farmers who paid taxes, led by those noble families who felt they did not have sufficient influence over the king. These local alliances could be quite strong and had a clear vision of how they wanted Sweden to be organised. The nobility and clergy wanted a Sweden where their regional political influence was strong, and the freeholders wanted low taxes.

Gustav I Vasa put an end to all this when he seized the throne and dissolved the Kalmar Union in 1523. Nineteenth century historians hailed Gustav I as the father and saviour of Sweden and its people, but his contemporaries had a somewhat different view. The higher taxes that Swedish freeholders had been resisting for more than 100 years now became a reality, and being a true Renaissance prince, Gustav I strengthened royal power and crushed ecclesiastical power, two things that would make him, rich, powerful, and quite unpopular.

Swedish taxpaying freehold farmers were up in arms as they had been against the Danish kings, but because Sweden was a kingdom of strong regions (*landskap*), held together by the same law and king rather than a nation state, the rioters did not communicate. This in turn meant that the king only faced local uprisings and never several combined on a national scale—at one and the same time. Furthermore, the nobility (or what was left of it after the bloodbath in 1519) remained loyal to the king, so the freeholders stood alone.

Still, the uprisings that did happen were well organised; Nils Dacke managed to lead a rebellion in which the county of Småland, the island

of Öland, and parts of the county of Eastern Gothia (*Östergötland*) broke free of the king's jurisdiction in 1542, and the cost of reconquering these territories the following year proved staggering for King Gustav I. In the last major uprising of 1595, the freeholders and peasants of Finland who rose up against the nobility, loyal to king Sigismund. The uprising was known as the Club War (*Klubbekriget*) and goes some way to show that they had access to weaponry and some kind of military strategy. This military knowledge had clearly been passed down from generation to generation.² But when we enter the seventeenth century, mighty regional uprisings of this kind seem to have disappeared—so where did they go?

SOME EARLY EXPLANATIONS FOR WHY REGIONAL UPRISINGS STOPPED

Swedish researchers have come up with many answers to this question. One explanation points to the new found strength of the Swedish state, which by the seventeenth century had become a major player in the European theatre of war; thus, the argument is that any resistance would have been futile against what Sven A. Nilsson has called a powerful “top to bottom” form of military government. Nilsson goes on to draw attention to the fact that not only did Gustav II Adolf leave troops in the country to reduce the likelihood of “internal uprisings or unwillingness amongst the peasantry”³ but also that his new and heavy taxes and conscriptions were met with violent resistance—for instance in Småland (1624) and Dalarna (1627)—and that both uprisings were effectively crushed.⁴

Another claim is that the militarily stronger Swedish state crushed uprisings at an early stage before they could evolve into anything bigger. I have previously suggested that the parliamentary gatherings in the Diet (*riksdag*) held by King Gustav I were key to this, as he recognised that the freeholding farmers were a military force that needed to be reckoned with. He thus summoned them along with the nobility, clergy, and burghers and tried to tie them to his policies by getting them to share the responsibility for the decisions he made.⁵ The parliamentary gatherings with freeholders, as a fourth estate, did not keep them from rebelling, however, as regional leaders did not recognise the authority of the Diet initially. It did, however, play a vital part during the reign of the Vasa monarchs to

come. His youngest son Charles IX, especially, relied heavily on the support of the freeholders in his feud with the nobility, who mostly favoured his uncle, King Sigismund of Poland. Finally we have the explanation of “interdependence”. According to this explanation, the kings never aimed at total control, or some kind of “early modern dictatorship”; instead, they were just playing their role as ruler (but not ruler at all costs) in a coexistence with nobility and civil society. All actors were dependent on one another, and rather than seeking confrontation, they sought cooperation.⁶ The disappearance of the great uprisings could therefore be explained as being the result of a successful policy aimed at consensus.

When examining the historical evidence, it seems clear to me that the first two explanations hold little weight. However, my valued colleague Øystein Rian does not agree with me on this point; when it comes to the Danish realm, I am sure he is right, but when it comes to the Swedish state, its military muscles were of limited value when it came to controlling its subjects. Yes, the Swedish state controlled a mighty military machine, but this machine (the king’s army) was hardly ever on Swedish soil. It had been formed to fight international wars in Livonia, Poland, and the German states. True enough, Gustav I, in the aftermath of 1543, created an army to keep his subjects in check, but his sons and grandson clearly built theirs to conquer foreign land. And for this army to abandon its war objectives in Poland or Germany and march home to fight rebellious farmers and peasants instead did not seem a tempting prospect: it would have come at the expense of losing some recently hard-won parts of the growing Baltic empire and taken a very long time to march the army home. Although Nilsson somewhat labours the point that Gustav II Adolf left instructions in the late 1620s to leave some troops in the country to deal with “popular unrest”,⁷ these troops would never have stopped a man like Nils Dacke.

One might then reasonably question whether the freeholders could still fight like they had in the sixteenth century. The answer is yes. In return for drastic tax cuts, in 1612, the taxpayers of Möre in the region of Småland managed their own defence and fought off Danish mercenaries, and the king expressed his great admiration and gratitude for what they had done.⁸ So the lack of major uprisings in the seventeenth century was not due to any lack of military ability on the part of the freeholders.

How about greater interdependence as the reason for less conflict? At some level, I think it is relevant: John III, Charles IX, and Gustav II Adolf, amongst them, laid the foundation of the Swedish military state, and their

aim was clearly to expand the realm by conquering its neighbours, but this came at the cost of great suffering for the Swedish and Finnish people—to which the monarchs (and nobility for that matter) seemed totally indifferent. This leads me to think that the disappearance of the uprisings cannot be explained away by a consensus policy. I think that what we see here is a necessary bargain by the Swedish state, with recalcitrant peasants and freeholders.

The long wars, as Øystein Rian also points out in this volume, only led to suffering for freeholders, tax payers, crofters, and farmhands, and it was not a policy they wanted. But there is a clear difference between getting exactly the policy you want and being totally oppressed. Barrington Moore Jr claims that people can sustain almost any form of oppression and hardship, but what they cannot sustain is a rapid decrease in wealth and political rights. When this happens, there will be resistance.⁹ This would explain perfectly well what happened in the reign of Gustav I: as the king raised taxes and centralised power too fast, the taxpayers responded negatively. However, during the reign of Gustav II Adolf, there were no major uprisings, even though the new tax rises were much steeper than those during the reign of Gustav I and the demands of war on people and resources were as harsh as ever. To explain why, we perhaps need to investigate the nature of the riots that did occur in the seventeenth century, even though there were no uprisings as such. Our main quest will be to figure out who the rioters were and what their political ambitions were precisely.

WHAT THE SOURCES TELL US ABOUT THE UPRISINGS FROM 1600 TO 1653

By using a range of sources—the letters to and from Axel Oxenstierna, the state records (*riksregistratur*), the letters to and from the regional governors (*landshövdingar*), and the minutes from parliament sessions and cabinet meetings—I have identified more than ten outbreaks of violence or riots between 1600 and 1660.

There are almost no traces of major outbreaks of civil unrest at all during the reign of Charles IX (1600–1611). It seems that King Charles only fought the Swedish nobility, not his taxpayers. But by 1621, the wars of Gustav II Adolf were beginning to take a heavy toll on the country, and Gabriel Oxenstierna (brother to the chancellor and a member of the

Council of the Realm himself) voiced his concerns about how difficult it was becoming to find new conscripts.¹⁰ Finally, in 1623, riots broke out in Stockholm after the introduction of a tax on all goods sold inside the city walls. Four newly conscripted soldiers and one sailor were sentenced to “run the gauntlet” (*gatlopp*).¹¹ A little later, in 1624, violence broke out once more in Småland—the heartland of Nils Dacke. Some of the new conscripts deserted, while the freeholders refused to pay the new taxes. Five farming families actually took up arms, but the uprising never spread, and government officials from Stockholm eventually came to oversee the deportation of these families to Northern Finland. However, the freeholders persisted in refusing to pay taxes until the winter, whereupon it was finally proven that, in some cases, the taxes had indeed been unlawful.¹² Then in 1626, only two years later, many newly conscripted soldiers in Småland again deserted and made for the dense forests, where they lived for weeks as “outlaws”. Gabriel Oxenstierna reported that the freeholders were perhaps justifiably upset about the effects of inflation, and eventually, the deserters were finally given amnesty and persuaded to return to their regiments.¹³

In Dalarna, another region known for its rebellions in the previous century, an uprising began in 1627, led by a tailor’s apprentice. The poor in the village of Orsa armed themselves and began to march on Stockholm, but they did not get far. A priest gave them wine and shelter in his barn. The revolutionaries got drunk, fell asleep, and the priest locked the barn and called the authorities. Mattias Pfenning, the tailor’s apprentice, and five others were executed in Stockholm after a trial.¹⁴ In 1628, it was Småland’s turn to rise again, along with parts of neighbouring Western Gothia (*Västergötland*). The Diet had passed steep taxes, but the freeholders refused to pay, while yet more soldiers deserted. The government issued an order for local authorities to bargain with the freeholders and to use force to get the soldiers in line.¹⁵ In Western Gothia (Redvägs, Askims, and Orreholms districts [*häraden*]), things began to turn violent when the freeholders defended their property from bailiffs, using force. The king was informed of this while fighting in Germany, and on 24 July, he wrote two letters. One was sent to his government, blaming the bailiffs for the violence and instructing them to use other methods and treat freeholders respectfully—adding that anyone who did not comply would be hanged. The other letter he wrote to the violent freeholders, threatening to “abandon the enemy” and march his army home to deal with them in person.¹⁶ The final result was that parts of the tax were delayed until the following

year and the unrest subsided. From the king's letters, it seems clear that Gustav II Adolf viewed the freeholders' actions as passive up to that point, but in the light of this "gracious clemency", he was now issuing the warning that he would regard the freeholders' actions henceforth as active and unlawful treason if the riot did not abate.

In 1632, the king fell in battle and the government was taken over by the nobility, led by Chancellor Oxenstierna. This led to fierce battles within the Diet; to make taxpayers accept the legitimacy of the new government, the leading aristocrats had to lower the taxes they charged. They did so unwillingly, with the atmosphere in the Diet definitely more aggressive after the king's death than it had been. Towards the end of 1633s Diet, the government finally decided to cut taxes and scale down on the conscription policy; as Gabriel Oxenstierna put it, "[t]he people are unwilling [...and continued high taxes] might overturn the whole war effort". It is unclear whether by "overturn" he meant more tax strikes or a complete uprising, but it was clear that it was not simply a question of pleasing the freeholders. The Church was also petitioning the government to lower taxes or "the vengeance and wrath of God would be upon them!" Understandably, the government found this judgement "some-what harsh".¹⁷

In the years 1634 and 1635, the countryside was quiet, and there were no reports of tax strikes, riots, or deserting soldiers. But there are a few reports of tensions between freeholders and the nobility. With the help of priests and burghers in the Diet, the freeholders managed to keep taxes at a reasonable level and reduce conscriptions. They used a "carrot and stick" approach—threatening to leave the Diet, for example, if taxes were not reduced.¹⁸ At one point, fights broke out among the members of the fourth estate, and in an anonymous petition, the ruling nobility was threatened with a major uprising if they did not comply with the freeholders demands.¹⁹ The threat of revolution and violent resistance was thus being used as a political tool by the taxpaying estates. While the freeholders threatened a rural uprising, the clergy threatened the wrath of God.

In 1635, a number of the government and nobility held an inquiry into Mats Mickelsen of Dalarna, who had been accused of spreading accusations about some of the leading noblemen. He and his friends had also been talking in public about an illegitimate heir of King Charles IX—saying that being of royal blood, he was their rightful leader. The heir in question was Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm, who was actually a member of

the Council of the Realm. The interesting part, however, is the questions the nobles asked Mats, who was a servant and did not own any land. They were far more interested in the names of the people Mats had spoken with than in what he had actually said. Were the freeholders among them? Had any of the clergy been involved?²⁰

In 1638, the government changed its policies. Up to that point, all freeholders had been given the right to petition the king personally and ask for tax cuts and favours, but after the king's death, taxpaying farmers had flooded the government with these petitions in a seemingly orchestrated fashion throughout the country. Gustav II Adolf, in his time, had answered between 20 and 100 petitions of this kind every year, but in 1638, the government received over 600 petitions. Oxenstierna decided that henceforth this should be a matter for local authorities to deal with,²¹ but this decision did not sit well with the taxpayers. "Local authorities" meant basically the local nobility, and these were the people that the freeholders generally hated the most; in addition, the decision coincided disastrously with a decision to investigate those farmers who had avoided paying taxes. In Värmland, farmers tore down the customs booth and walls surrounding a marketplace, stating that no further domestic duties on goods would be paid. They also refused to have their taxes investigated and beat up the customs officials.

The government responded by secretly gathering troops and by dispatching the chancellor's brother, Gabriel Oxenstierna, to talk with the angry taxpayers.²² Once there, Gabriel learnt that the taxpayers' greatest grievance was that they wanted to be able to petition the government directly, not the local nobility, so he suggested that government officials should come and visit them and hear their complaints. With that suggestion, everyone was satisfied, but when Gabriel tried to press his advantage and find out more about who had been responsible for inciting the riot, the freeholders closed rank and claimed that all of them were equally responsible.²³ This response was accepted, and no one was eventually punished for the riot, but in return, the freeholders agreed to rebuild the customs booth. In other words, the peasant elite in Värmland made sure that their identities were not known to the government. The same year there was an attempt at another uprising when a few poor Finns and a soldier, Oluf Larsson, tried to incite a riot in the region Eastern Gothia. The attempt was short-lived, however, because Larsson was captured by a member of the clergy and was brought to justice.²⁴

Perhaps the biggest (and last) uprising of this period happened in Närke in 1653. This has become known as the “Morning Star” (*Morgonstjärneupproret*) uprising. Generations of historians have claimed it involved hundreds of peasants and freeholders, and government troops had to be brought in to quell the violence that ended up lasting for a number of weeks.²⁵ There are, however, a few weird things about this: hundreds of revolutionaries were apparently at war with the Swedish state and yet nobody died; in addition, according to the meagre records, the only leaders punished were four brothers by the name of Mårtensson—living as slash and burn farmers on the outskirts of the community. Noticing this discrepancy, a young historian, Håkan Strömberg, decided to compare these sources with the last 150 years of Swedish history writings. He noticed that the Morning Star uprising first appeared in Fryxell's *History of Sweden* from the late nineteenth century, and he suggests that Fryxell made a mountain out of a molehill, presuming the uprising to have been large based purely on the evidence of harsh death sentences and the fuss made about it in the government minutes. However, further scrutiny of the sources reveals that the government had simply got hold of a letter that merely *mentioned* an uprising. Since the political climate was tense, they feared the worst, and there was a great discussion of how to suppress the uprising and the penalties that would be meted out to those involved in the meetings (revealed in the minutes). But this was all before they got confirmation of what was really happening from a visitor's first-hand account in a letter.²⁶

Four poverty-stricken brothers, armed with one gun among them, decided to start an uprising. They went from house to house holding the men at gunpoint and asking them “Are you with us or against us?” Not surprisingly, these newly recruited “insurgents” proved to be less than loyal, and some managed to run away. Before long, the local freeholders gathered and put an end to the disturbance by delivering the brothers and their few remaining followers to the authorities. This version of the story is also confirmed in the Swedish state records. The government had written to the governor of the province, Christer Bonde, for two consecutive days asking to know what was happening in his region. After catching wind of this uprising, they didn't know if he was alive or dead, and they wanted him to find out whether clergy or prominent farmers were involved with the rebels.²⁷ From Bonde's replies to Stockholm, it seems clear that he had no idea of what the government was talking about. In the letters, he seems totally oblivious of any uprising, as during the days when Fryxell's would

have us believe he was fighting hundreds of rebels with his few troops, he was writing letters in which there is no mention of any fights. He is, however, deeply troubled over the matter of how he will get paid what the government owes him and writes to ask the Treasury (*Kammaren*) if he could perhaps take some of the Church's taxes to make up the difference.²⁸ In short, the big uprising of 1653 was little more than another short-lived attempt at insurrection by a group of alienated people without a fixed sense of identity or plan for the future.

A POLITICAL STRATEGY THAT WENT OUT OF FASHION

This takes us back to what Barrington Moore Jr suggests—about revolutions being the last political strategy for those who have no other possibilities. It seems clear that during the fifteenth century neither the nobility nor freeholders had any other political strategy, so the uprisings that happened often proved successful. In the sixteenth century, however, the nobility had better luck influencing their Swedish king via the Council of the Realm, whereas the freeholders “stuck to their guns”—since they had no other option. To get round this, when trying to legitimise policies that he knew were unpopular (regarding new taxes, Protestantism, etc.), Gustav I invited the freeholders as a fourth estate to the Diet. This strategy did not work, however, as the taxpayers still rebelled during his reign. Nevertheless, it seems to have worked for his sons as they summoned the Diet far more often than their father had done. That in turn turned the freeholders into a political class. Following Moore's reasoning, I would suggest that the tax raises and the expanding royal power during John III, Charles IX, and Gustav II Adolf kept a pace the freeholders would adapt to—thus they did not rise up. The political strategy for the taxpaying freeholders that we see emerging very early in the seventeenth century rested on three pillars, their voice in the Diet, their right to petition the king, and the passive tax strikes if the first two strategies failed. Besides, all the uprisings in the sixteenth century actually ended in defeat.

The poorer segments of society were not represented in the Diet, however, and the only political strategy available was thus rebellion. As Barrington Moore Jr has pointed out, to be a successful revolutionary, you have to have a strong identity, a vision of what you want to achieve, and a clear idea of what your rights should be. New conscripts, farmhands, crofters, and the poorer members of society had none of this. Like

the Mårtensson brothers, their uprisings were poorly organised and their goals (apart from killing the nobility) were not very clear. In fairness, we must add that the government of the militarily successful Swedish state was probably a lot better at putting down civil unrest than the Danish kings of the fifteenth century, but then again, they never had to face a full regional uprising planned and executed by freeholders who were better equipped for violent action.

The sources speak of two exceptions to the rule that no freeholders were involved in violent actions during the seventeenth century—1624 and 1638. Time and again freeholders refused to pay new taxes and even fought the bailiffs when they tried to use force, but this was not so much an uprising as a “tax strike”—passive and up to a point nonviolent. In 1624, five families in Møre tried to start a major uprising, but it did not spread. In 1638, the acts of violence were sparked by a change in government policy, where the right to petition the king (or the government in its place) was taken away. As soon as this right was reinstated, things calmed down; so what we see in 1638 is a case of taxpayers defending their new political strategy with an old one. In other words, the freeholders strived to stay in the lower part of our diagram, being active and nonviolent.

Sven A. Nilsson has written that it was the new taxes and conscriptions that provoked the uprisings, giving the reader the impression that it would have been the taxpaying freeholders who took up arms, only to be crushed by the state. However, only a handful of these families were involved in Småland (1624). And in 1627, no freeholders at all were involved; the rioters were all from among the poor and marginalised. Nilsson did not make the distinction between freeholding farmers (the fourth estate) and the crofters and farmhands (the poor and alienated).

This distinction is important because we also find that the authorities used very different strategies when it came to punishing rioters and rebels. Poor people, farmhands, and conscripts were punished severely and could expect torture and death sentences. Taxpaying freeholders, on the other hand, were reasoned with and never executed. The worst thing that would probably happen was to get deported...to Finland. We can also see that the government thought it very important to determine who precisely was involved. During interrogation, the suspects always had to reveal whether any freeholders or clergy were involved or had any knowledge about the riot. Our conclusion from this is that acts of rebellion were not considered a problem as long as neither the clergy nor freeholders were involved.

Perhaps this was simply a legacy of the great uprisings in the sixteenth century?

THE UPRISINGS OF THE POOR AND ALIENATED

Knut Dørum has pointed out above that the peasants of Norway kept violent protesting as a part of their political strategy but in more civilised forms than during the Middle Ages. The same is true for the Swedish freeholding elite, even if the reasons are not exactly the same. Swedish freeholders used the nobility's fear of a massive uprising in their bargaining with the state, especially during the years 1633–1644.

The conclusion must be that the large regional uprisings came to an end because the people protesting were different members of the local community. In the sixteenth century, the ringleaders had generally been the relatively wealthy freeholders. They were competent military men with a long tradition of voicing protests, a strong sense of identity, a clear view on which rights they had, and a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve.

After 1595, these freeholders used just the threat of starting a rebellion (more than actually starting one) as a political tool, as they could now petition the king and vote as the fourth estate. And if petitioning and arguing in the Diet did not help, there was always the nonviolent tax strike. As Moore points out, rebellion is, after all, the political strategy for he who has nothing else. The poor, the crofters, and the farmhands, for instance, had no other political strategy; hence, they continued to start an uprising time and time again. But they lacked a strong identity and vision and did not have the landowning farmers or clergy on their side; therefore, they did not come to much more than isolated attempts that could be easily crushed. For this purpose, the troops Gustav II Adolf left in the country were more than sufficient, and my belief is that the king had this in mind when he gave the order. He no longer expected a major uprising like the one Nils Dacke had orchestrated in 1542. To put down an uprising like that, he would have had to “abandon the enemy” (as he himself had said) and march home at a very great cost.

My colleague Mats Hallenberg points out in this volume that the government had to negotiate with both peasant elites and soldiers during

the second half of the sixteenth century. In some places, the rural society closed ranks, and the elite remained loyal to the poorer. So the government bargained with both parties. During the beginning of the next century, when the freeholders (peasant elites) had established themselves as a fourth estate in the Diet and as a negotiating partner to the government, they seem to a certain point to have abandoned the poor. The government therefore could use a tougher strategy with soldiers and farmhands. Thus, the Swedish state was built to bargain with the freeholders and keep the poorer in check with violence or the threat of violence.

What the government clearly feared the most then was an uprising among freeholders, as the few local troops left in the country would not be sufficient to squash a major rebellion by the well-organised freeholders. When it came to conflicts with them, the government's tactics were definitely *not* to use force—even when faced with an uprising (the upper left square in the diagram)—as now there was a forum for debate in the fourth estate of the Diet. The reason for this policy was not compassion or a will to govern justly; it was plain political necessity. Gustav I's heirs chose to use their military resources to conquer foreign lands rather than keep their taxpayers in check. This meant that when dissatisfaction grew among the freeholders, the leading nobility now sat down and negotiated. The government then went to great lengths not to upset the freeholders. At best, landowning farmers were not punished for their actions at all, and at the very worst, a rebel from this class would be deported. The sanctions were much harsher for the lower classes though; their “just desserts” were often a painful death and their head on a stake at the city gate.

Between 1560 and 1660, the major project for the monarchy and nobility was to build a small Swedish empire, and it was the main motor behind the state building process. This meant that the government could not afford any setbacks; the king's army had to be able to stay abroad and not have to worry about uprisings at home. If securing the loyalty of the freeholders meant that the government had to bargain with them, it was acceptable—as long as heavy taxes and conscriptions were maintained to finance and provide men for the war effort.

In many ways, the uprisings of the sixteenth century were like those of the Arab Spring as they were supported by taxpayers and some intellectuals (the clergy). The nobility, however, did not support the uprisings against Gustav I, and so after heavy fighting, the uprisings were crushed

(as in some Arab countries). In contrast, seventeenth century Sweden reminds us more of the European autumn: only the poorer and more alienated segments of society took part, and the majority of people did not sympathise with the rebels.

THE BARGAINING STATE

To summarise, the military competence of the freeholders and the Vasa kings' decision to build a military empire had a profound effect on the state building process. The military competence acquired by the freeholders during the fifteenth century used time and time again during the sixteenth century and still posing a threat to the government in the seventeenth century, forced the Swedish government to make a choice. Build an army to expand the realm and give the freeholding farmers the same political influence as the burghers and the clergy, or focus the king's military power on keeping the subjects in line. Eventually, the Swedish kings chose the first alternative.

This is how the Swedish bargaining state worked.

NOTES

1. Barrington Moore Jr, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, M.E. Sharpe, White Plains, NY, 1978.
2. See also Kimmo Katajala's chapter in this book.
3. Sven A. Nilsson, *De stora krigens tid*, Uppsala, 1990, see the essay "1634 års regeringsform i det svenska statssystemet", p. 203 and the description of the state's efficiency, pp. 156, 238. The Nordic Power state was a project in the 1990s that in many ways reached the same conclusion. The Swedish so far unpublished contribution by Jan Lindegren gives voice to the same opinion, as does his thesis published in 1980, *Utskrivning och utsugning: produktion och reproduktion i Bygdeå 1620-1640*, Uppsala universitet, 1980, p. 26.
4. Nilsson 1990, p. 238.
5. It is vital to understand that Gustav I had no intention whatsoever to create a parliament. He was a typical Renaissance prince in wanting legislative and executive power for himself. That he created a political institution that one day would be able to compete with the king was probably something he was not aware of at the

- time. What he wanted was to realise his political goals without a civil war.
6. The most prominent defender of this view is Eva Österberg, who formulated it in her doctoral thesis in 1971, *Gränsbygd under krig: ekonomiska, demografiska och administrativa förhållanden i sydvästra Sverige under och efter nordiska sjuårskriget*, p. 240, pp. 255 and returned to it time and time again, *Folk förr – historiska essäer*, Stockholm, 1996, p. 175 ff. Konflikt – kompromiss – politisk kultur, *Scandia*, *bd 55, häfte 1*, 73–95.
 7. Nilsson 1990, p. 238.
 8. Holm 2007, p. 159, RGR Svar till Allmogen I Södra Möre 22/7, 21/8 och 5/10.
 9. Barrington Moore Jr, *Injustice – The Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt*, New York 1978, pp. 18, 42, 49, 470.
 10. *Axel Oxenstiernas Skrifter och Brevväxling* (Stockholm 1897–1915) (AOSB) III, p. 34, Sturefors 10 Jan 1621.
 11. AOSB III, p. 44, Stockholms slot 8 mars 1623.
 12. Riksarkivet (RA, National Archives of Sweden), Riksregistratur (RR), 3 augusti 1624 – brev från regeringen till Jacob De la Gardie, Rgr, 2 augusti, 1624 – brev från regeringen till Bengt Kafle. RA, Kammarens protokoll 1624, “Extract utaff Bengt Kafles Bref till Wäb. Cammar Rådth Daterat Calmar den 5 Julij och den 20 inkommet”.
 13. AOSB III, p. 101, Stockholm den 29 sept 1626.
 14. AOSB III, p. 109, Dalarö 2 maj 1627.
 15. *Svenska Riksrådet Protokoll* (Stockholm 1878–1887) (SRP) II, 1628, p. 89; RR, Svar på Lars Sparres brev, Stockholm, 4 juli 1628.
 16. RR, Gustav II Adolf till rådet, 24 juli 1628.
 17. SRP, III 1633, p. 56 ff.
 18. SRP, IV 1634, p. 144 ff.
 19. SRP, IV 1634, p 152 f, 169, 186, AOSB III, p. 339, Nilsson 1990, p. 210.
 20. RA, Strödda Historiska handlingar, Vol 1, Rannsakan av Mats Mickelsen.
 21. Holm 2007, pp. 148, 254.
 22. SRP VII, 1638, 17 oktober, p. 329, AOSB III, Örebro 21 oktober 1638, p. 428.
 23. AOSB III, Örebro 21 oktober 1638, p. 428, Bro 15 November, p. 433.

24. RR, vol 3, 1635, Oluf Larsson rannsaking.
25. Peter Englund, *Ofredsår*, Atlantis, 1993, p. 517 f., Jonny Ambrius, *Att dömas till döden – Tortyr, kroppsstraff och avrättningar genom historien*, Strömbergs 1996, p. 123 f. Carl Grimberg, *Svenska folkens underbara öden*, Stockholm 1923, band III, p. 492.
26. Håkan Strömberg, “Femton Torpare blev en Bondearmé”, *Populär Historia* 2/2003.
27. RR 1653, 1112, 1 B vol 286 to Christer Bonde, 9:th and 10:th march.
28. RA, Kammarens Protokoll BIIa, vol 43, 21 December 1652.

PART III

Conflicts within the Communities

Violence and the Peasant Elite in Lower Satakunta (1550–1680)

Ulla Koskinen

FIERY FARMERS?

“The lengthy quarrels over inheritance hint that these people had fiery tempers”, wrote Mauno Jokipii in his pioneering article on the history of the Lavila family—one of the prominent families of freeholders in Lower Satakunta.¹ In our study on the women from that same family, Virpi Nissilä and I have encountered about 100 court cases from the 1620 to the 1650s, in which six women from two generations have been present. The most prominent of them is Anna Mårtensdotter who appeared in court 28 times in the four years for which we have the court minutes still intact. These records tell of her offensive behaviour: neighbours complaining about her physical violence, insults, appropriations, and even tearing roofs down. Against her brother Valentin, Anna engaged in an exceptional

The chapter has been written with the funding of the Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence “History of Society: Rethinking Finland 1400–2000”.

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dispute that lasted for decades and covered a variety of matters. The number of times and way she handled appearing in court reveals her active and aggressive agency.² The knowledge that there was a tradition in her family for its members to hold positions of trust in the local administration throws the contentious behaviour of her and her siblings into stark relief. Her grandfather had been a scribe and her father, uncle, and grandmother had held the post of local constable in Eurajoki parish for decades. So where did this fiery behaviour come from, and what might have caused it? What was its social context? And does the story of Anna Mårtensdotter tell us something more general about violence in Western Finland?

The home region of the Lavila family, Lower Satakunta, was one of the wealthiest agricultural provinces in Finland. Its economy rested solidly on arable farming and keeping livestock, while proximity to the sea offered farmers additional income in the form of fishing and the possibility of trading directly with Stockholm. The River Kokemäenjoki ran right through the province, and salmon would ascend the river every year, so there were several profitable fisheries, some of which became owned by the Crown, others of which belonged to local landowners.³

In Lower Satakunta, as elsewhere in Finland, most land was owned and cultivated by freeholder farmers in the late sixteenth century. The villages were typically built along the shore or on riverbanks and formed tightly built, relatively densely populated nexuses amidst the vast countryside. The Crown's policy of rewarding its aristocratic servants by granting them substantial fiefs and donations started to erode the freeholders' position at the turn of the seventeenth century and introduced feudal practices regarding the ownership of land. This was exacerbated by an economic decline that often resulted in unpaid taxes and indebtedness to the Crown or fief-owner, and if the debt carried on for a few years, the law required the freeholders to give up ownership of the farm.⁴

Arable farming was so good in the central parishes of Lower Satakunta that the farmers were among the wealthiest of Finland's rural population in 1571, and their farms had higher tax bands than those further inland. However, the wealth was not distributed evenly, and the rural population in Satakunta, as in other parts of Western Finland, had become heavily stratified as early as the late Middle Ages. Land and wealth accumulated in the hands of elite families, whose members also occupied traditional positions of trust in the local community and administration, for example, local constable, lay juror, or tax collector.⁵

In the decades either side of the year 1600, as the state-building process began to gather pace in Sweden, decisive changes to local communities affected the position of the peasant elite in particular. This was a period after Gustav I that was marked by warfare, economic trouble, and administrative experiments, which finally resulted in a strictly centralised state in the 1620s.

Lower Satakunta was never the scene of war, but from the 1550s, it had been providing military recruitments, the means to transport troops, and increasing financial support, which took the form of a growing tax burden. The pressing impact of warfare created economic and social turbulence locally. Moreover, the tax system became increasingly unevenly distributed. A concrete result was the growing number of farms that were not able to pay their taxes, left partly uncultivated or completely abandoned. The social and political unrest culminated in the Club War (see Chap. 3 by Katajala, for instance, in this volume), but this was an uprising in which the inhabitants of Lower Satakunta did not play a significant role.⁶

The situation provided opportunities for wealthier freeholders to benefit further by loans, pawns, and land purchase or by taking over tax-wreck farms, with the result that the stratification of rural society became more prominent in the late sixteenth century. As seen elsewhere in pre-modern Europe, land was the main source of livelihood, and those who could afford it, tried to get more.⁷ Especially in the provinces of Tavastia (*Häme*) and Satakunta, economically successful freeholders amassed their own “peasant estates” (*suurtila*) in the period 1570–1630.⁸ Some researchers have placed the birth of a socially and economically prominent farming elite in the late sixteenth century, whereas more recent results have shown that this social differentiation was already evident in the fifteenth century, and probably earlier. This peasant elite was not a consolidated group though; the farms and families within it varied over time.⁹

Prominent freeholders in Lower Satakunta shared a number of characteristics. These included being wealthy, occupying often more than one farm, having positions of trust in the local community, providing a man and a horse for the cavalry, and maintaining family connections with other wealthy farmers and literate groups (e.g., clergy, bailiffs, and burghers). The first two in this list were particularly important; Seppo Suvanto has discovered that having wealth and holding positions of responsibility in the local community were positively correlated in the period 1390–1571 and that if a family lost its wealth, those positions would also be lost. The

Satakunta parishes were the home of many such families in which these positions of trust passed from one generation to the next.¹⁰

Until the early seventeenth century, even the boundaries of nobility were blurred, with the top layer of farmers verging on gentry, known sometimes in Finnish as the *knaapit*. They were typically the wealthiest; they earned tax exemptions and acted as the local constables. Another factor leading to this was that Satakunta was an area with relatively few noble families, and this may have led to especially strong networks between the scarce nobility and the wealthiest peasants, which manifested itself in some marriages between the two groups.¹¹

Although the peasant elites may have thrived during the first wave of social and economic turbulence created by war, their continuation proved to be more problematic. The Crown started to reward the nobility for their participation in the war effort by granting them large tax donations. Substantial parts of Lower Satakunta were thus granted to noblemen as fiefs over subsequent decades, culminating in the large County of Pori granted to Gustaf Horn in 1651.¹² Ending up as a tenant on noble land did not necessarily mean worse economic conditions, but it did mean there was the threat of eventually losing ownership of the farm to noble overlords. The authorities encouraged building manors (*sätessgård/säterikartano*) on these new estates, which in most cases meant taking over neighbouring peasant farms. Even the peasant elite was not safe as the aristocracy seems to have targeted the larger farms as providing the most suitable estates for their manors. By the end of the 1630s, this meant that the formation of large peasant estates came to an end as the noble estates gradually took their place.¹³

These problems were further enhanced by the accelerated development of a centralised state in the 1620s, which defined the social hierarchy more clearly and directly affected the informal position of freeholders as the local elite. In effect, the gradual professionalisation of local administration eroded their traditional authority in the local community. The system of justice came under the increased influence of state officials at the expense of local laymen. It was especially significant that the formerly very prominent post of local constable became more narrowly defined and limited. By the eighteenth century, it had become a Crown's office that was taken over by non-noble but educated men of the administration.¹⁴

However, this process was neither swift nor total. In general, the Lower Satakunta peasant elite held on to their positions well into the

mid-seventeenth century, remaining economically active and participating regularly in the local court sessions (*ting/käräjät*). The court assembled usually two or three times a year in the house of the local constable, comprising of the district judge (*häradshövding/kihlakunnantuomari*), lay jurors, and commoners. They would gather to decide and stand as witnesses to any local matters, complaints, and demands for justice that needed discussing.¹⁵

Typical cases for this farming elite concerned the settling of economic disputes, including inheritance (whether real or imagined), which could be contested for decades—sometimes for as long as 70–80 years. They used the court as a social and local political arena to obtain official reinforcement for their claims and were particularly careful to obtain, keep, and use written documents to gain advantages. Many families held on to documents that were more than a century old and readily used them to prove their case. Some of them were also literate or at least had literate people in the family.¹⁶

Some of the most extreme examples of this are from the parish of Huittinen and the Takku family who provided the local constable for many generations. In 1653, Constable Matts Sigfridsson Takku presented three documents from 1552, 1591 and 1616 in court, all concerning a certain piece of land.¹⁷ The oldest paper had even survived a fire that had destroyed the Takku farmstead and half the village in the late 1580s. In addition, Takku's wife—Agnes Olofsdotter (also daughter of the local constable from a neighbouring parish)—referred to documents kept in a mansion in Tavastia province to further her case,¹⁸ while their son Thomas Mattsson had a document too (from 1549), which he presented in 1657.¹⁹ The purpose of presenting all these documents was to reinforce claims to certain pieces of land, or in the case of Agnes, her actual home.

Based on the current research situation, it is not possible to say exactly what percentage of court cases involved the peasant elite. A recent study on medieval England showed that wealthier members of communities dominated local court proceedings,²⁰ and we can ascertain that even in Lower Satakunta, the elite was very prominent in court, not just as active agents—presenting cases and demanding compensation—but also, as we saw in the case of Anna Mårtensdotter, as passive agents—standing accused for various reasons. Typical accusations included high-handedness, appropriation of land, insults, and violent assaults. This is interesting in terms of local social dynamics as some of the most respected families in the com-

munity had also some of the most aggressive and violent people in them. What was going on in the peasant communities?

As stated earlier, aggressive behaviour and violence has generally been recognised as being an integral part of pre-modern agency. In medieval times, and in the sixteenth century, dealing with violent crimes dominated the courts throughout the Nordic countries. The typical case was assault (in many areas, this was also the most common of crimes), and the fines were based on the number of bruises the victim sustained. Eva Österberg has called medieval and sixteenth century trials “the public face of society”, their purpose being to solve all kinds of minor conflicts between individuals, even though serious violence (such as homicide) was also far more common in this period than later.²¹

Violence and crime is a thoroughly researched topic in history. Heikki Ylikangas, especially, has shown that the overall trend of homicide and violent crime in Finland followed general European patterns, descending steeply from the mid-1500s onwards and stayed at a low level throughout the seventeenth century. Regional variations were great, but violent crime remained, at least in some areas, at a level of less than 10 % of all crimes. This has been explained by the enforced presence of the state at the local level, meaning that disputes were now more commonly solved with the help of the authorities rather than through resorting to physical force. It also seems that minor fights, which dominated earlier records of fines, were no longer brought to court.²²

In marked difference to more modern times, violence was less connected to any particular social group. On the contrary, it can be found throughout the social scale. However, the sources and methods available have proved restrictive when examining the social dimension of violence in this period, and there is relatively little research on the status of those who perpetrated violent crimes—especially regarding the role of the farming elite. This is most likely because it is generally accepted that identifying people from late sixteenth and early seventeenth century judicial documents is, at best, time consuming but more often downright infeasible. Typically, the sources provide names and the villages in which they live but rarely mention more details that would help us to connect the data with the individuals named in other records. Thus, research usually had to rely on exceptional cases, where there are for some reason more records than usual.²³

THE FARMING ELITE OF LOWER SATAKUNTA UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

This chapter tries to shed more light on the social context of violence by focusing on the aggressive behaviour of this socially most prominent group. Were the elite farmers of early modern Lower Satakunta actually violent and if so, why? The method will combine the quantitative analysis of various cases of violence with a micro-level analysis of the social backgrounds of those involved in each case (i.e., their status, family connections, and life stories).

There are two factors that enable us to overcome the methodological obstacles mentioned above. Firstly, the focus is on a strictly determined area of research, and secondly, I rely on a detailed research database that has already been put together in the form of 12 genealogical articles, coauthored by Virpi Nissilä and myself and published in the journal *Genos* in 2005–16.²⁴ The articles are genealogical surveys of farming elite families of sixteenth and seventeenth century Lower Satakunta, and the information was gathered using a meticulous genealogical method aimed at revealing hitherto unknown family ties. The difference in the information available for traditional historical research lies in the level of detail, and as the very point of these articles has been to produce what would otherwise be an excessive amount of information about local people, it has been possible to devote more time than would usually be available for undertaking genealogical work in historical research.

Lower Satakunta is among the foremost, if not the best, districts in Finland for finding source material from the early modern era. The data for the 12 articles came mainly from two sources: court records (preserved from some years from the 1550s, 1580s, and 1590s, and from 1620 onwards regularly until the 1650s), complemented with lists of fines, and accounts of the bailiffs (from the 1540s to the 1630s). The General Register of Settlement in Finland (*Suomen Asutuksen Yleisluettelo*) was also consulted in the process of identification.

As the purpose of gathering the data was originally to reconstruct family histories, examples that had sufficient amounts of material with genealogical value were chosen—the sample used was not originally selected to represent the farming elite of the region. In practice, this meant a lot of court cases, including inheritance matters, that provide a lot of information on family networks. Soon it became evident that most of the sample

families were related through marriage or otherwise, and they shared the unifying characteristics described above: wealth, positions of trust, and good social contacts. In short, what had been meant to represent a random selection of peasant genealogies turned out to be the elite peasants and their extended family networks in Lower Satakunta.

Based on the research, I have used the following criteria to determine elite status: evidence of owning a farm in the tax band (*öretal/veroluku*) of 8 *öre* or more, indications of other forms of substantial wealth or economic activity such as commercial shipping (*bondeseglation/talonpoikaispurjehdus*), office-holding in the local administration, and finally, taking up costly cavalry service or innkeeping to provide tax relief.²⁵ These characteristics are a mixture of economic, political, and social criteria. If there is data to grant that at least two of the criteria are fulfilled, I have deemed the family as belonging to the elite group. These understandably apply to Lower Satakunta, but with some modifications, they match peasant elites in other Nordic regions as well.²⁶

Other characteristics of the elite include having kin or network connections with other elite families, or even higher status groups; having networks beyond parish boundaries, and reasons to travel there; being literate (using writing skills, written documents, or having one's own seal); participating in negotiations with representatives of the Crown; and being actively involved in local economic matters, as well as sessions of the local district courts.

For the purposes of the present study, I have used this pool of information to create a database on the violent behaviour of some of the elite families in Lower Satakunta. The database contains 40 cases and covers the years 1555–1680. An overview of the data is presented in Table 7.1 below.

In most cases, it was possible to investigate the backgrounds of people who committed violent crimes using a genealogical method by comparing judicial sources with the tax records. Both the accused and victim's identity, status, and background were known in 58 % of the cases (23 of them). There are no statistics to indicate the exact proportion of total violent crimes that were committed by the freeholding elite, but the database indicates they certainly did. More precisely, they used violence in ways that led to court proceedings. It would perhaps be worth another study to examine which of all the fist fights and hair pulling that occurred actually ended up in court and were labelled a crime.²⁷ In any case, the sheer number of cases in the sample indicates that violence was considered a viable option every now and then in their social circle. I will try to draw some conclusions on the motivation behind some of these cases below.

Table 7.1 Violent crimes handled at court in the period 1555–1680—Lower Satakunta

<i>Period</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Nature of crime</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>
1555–1600	11	28	Serious crimes	11	27
1601–50	24	60	Hand-fights	21	53
1651–80	5	12	Others or not known	8	20
Total	40	100	Total	40	100

Sources: Kansallisarkisto (National Archives of Finland, KA), Ala-Satakunnan renovoidut tuomiokirjat (Renovated court records from Lower Satakunta district) 1620–80; KA Vanhempi tilikirjasarja (Old register of accounts), Ala-Satakunnan voutikunnan tilit: sakkoluettelot (Accounts of bailiffs from Lower Satakunta: registers of fines) 1550–1620; Riksarkivet (RA, National Archives of Sweden), Bielkesamlingen, Gustaf Horns och Sigrid Bielkes gods- och länshandlingar, vol. 25: Biörneborg grevskaps domböcker (Court records from the County of Pori) 1658–73; Roos, John E. (ed., 1964) *Ala-Satakunnan tuomiokirja 1550–1552/Dombok för nedre Satakunta 1550–1552. Suomen vanhimmat tuomiokirjat/Finlands äldsta domböcker 2* (Helsinki: Valtionarkisto)

VIOLENCE AND ECONOMIC MATTERS

Economic disputes, defending one's honour, and the use of alcohol have traditionally been recognised as the most important factors in explaining pre-modern violence. To tackle the last one first, there are only two cases in this database in which the use of alcohol is specifically mentioned. This does not mean that it is necessarily ruled out in the other cases, just that it was for some reason not worth mentioning in those cases. Either there was no alcohol involved, or its use was not considered to affect the verdict (i.e., as a mitigating circumstance). Honour and economic factors are likely to have been more important, even though this is not always easy to discern from isolated court cases. As Table 7.2 below shows, the motivation for violence is rarely mentioned in the court minutes. Honour is certainly never explicitly mentioned,²⁸ but it is evident in the cases where verbal abuse turned physical.²⁹ In seven of the cases, there was explicit evidence of either a direct economic motivation (2) or a history of previous economic disputes between the parties (5).

Maria Ågren has proposed that owning land in pre-modern society necessarily entailed aggressively defending one's rights. This practical and cultural norm only gradually began to die out as the Crown challenged it with the enforcement of law and regulations.³⁰ Along similar lines, Janne Haikari has described owning land in the seventeenth century as continu-

Table 7.2 Motivation and other factors related to violent crimes—Lower Satakunta

	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>
Economic motivation	2	5	Previous economic disputes	5	13
Other motivation	3	8	Abuse of alcohol	2	5
Not known	35	87			
Total	40	100			

Sources: See Table 7.1

ing to be an “aggressive” undertaking in which one had to actively use and defend it.³¹ This is clearly demonstrated by Jöran Thomasson from Kainuu village in the parish of Eurajoki, who tried to hold his own in 1620 when he physically assaulted Anna Mårtensdotter because she had taken his ox and cut his meadow without permission.³²

There are some cases in the database where violence is connected to the sudden economic success of one party at the expense of others, and when the wealth was associated with land, it was typically a complicated process in the Finnish area of the late medieval and sixteenth century Realm of Sweden. This was partly because of the realm’s laws that, for instance, allowed women to inherit and own land, thus adding to the number of possible economic actors in a family. Unlike in many other Western European societies, women had rights to inheritance even after their dowry.³³ A farmer called Matts Pasa, for instance, built a large farmstead in Eurakoski village in the parish of Eura in the 1560s by annexing two neighbouring farms. There seems to have been some disputes as the farms were later separated again and one was taken over by a man called Bengt Sigfridsson, who had been fined in 1569 for hitting Matts Pasa’s wife Karin. Two years later, Bengt assaulted Matts himself and was fined once more.³⁴

Äimälä village, in the parish of Kokemäki, has become known for the famous treasury overseer Anders Äimä (d. 1660). His father, uncle, and grandfather all lived as farmers in the village, and their farm suddenly got wealthier when Anders’ uncle, Mårten Johansson, was in charge in the late 1500s. Mårten Johansson took up cavalry service, became the local constable, and annexed a neighbouring farm, while his brother got an education and became a clergyman. All this might have caused some tension in the small village. Indeed, in 1587, their neighbour Sigfrid Staffansson

took grain and hay without permission from Mårten's mother and at the same time assaulted Mårten causing bruises.³⁵

Violence could also be triggered off by smaller-scale disputes over land, lots, and inheritance. In unfortunate cases, the aggressive defence of one's own could result in disastrous consequences. Valborg Andersdotter from Karhia village in Köyliö parish had recently given birth in early March 1658 and authorised her brother to accuse an innkeeper's son Sigfrid Eskilsson from Kankaanpää for having killed her husband Jacob Michelsson. The men had disagreed over a field that belonged to a tax-wreck farm that Sigfrid Eskilsson had taken over. The two men met in the middle of the field, one trying to plough it from one side, and the other trying to sow it from the opposite. A fight ensued, with Jacob hitting Sigfrid with staves and the latter defending himself with an axe. Unfortunately, the axe caused a fatal injury. The widow was prepared to reconcile with him, but the court pronounced a death sentence in accordance with the law. The verdict then went to the High Court in Turku, and apparently the sentence was carried out, as Sigfrid Eskilsson disappears from the sources after that.³⁶ We can suppose that the outburst of violence was the result of a drawn out economic rivalry between the two families, as Sigfrid Eskilsson's grandfather, a local constable, had also taken over a farm in Jacob Michelsson's village 50 years earlier.³⁷

SCUFFLES AMONG THE ELITE

The Lower Satakunta elite fought mostly with people with whom they already had close geographical and social ties. Almost all the cases of violence in the database were exclusively between elite peasants, meaning that both the accused and victim were members of this group. They were also often related to each other or lived in the same village. As Table 7.3 shows, in comparison, violence with other peasants were marginal in the database.

On the basis of this, we can conclude that in a typical case, both parties were elite and lived in the same village. This is in fact true: almost half of the violence (18 cases in total, or 45 %) actually took place between powerful local figures that lived next door to each other in a close-knit village community. This situation was opportune for a competitive atmosphere, as in Kepola village in Köyliö where Henrik Mattsson lived in the 1570s. Interestingly, he was the son of the abovementioned Matts Pasa (wealthiest farmer in Eura) and managed to get in a fight in Easter 1571 with another wealthy farmer in Kepola called Mårten Mattsson, whose farm

Table 7.3 Connections between the accused and the victims: social and spatial distance—Lower Satakunta

<i>Social distance</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Spatial distance (home)</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>
Both elite	23	58	Living in the same village	22	55
One party not elite	5	12	Living in different villages	15	38
Status of both unknown	12	30	Not known	3	7
Total	40	100	Total	40	100

Sources: See Table 7.1

had a tax band rating as big as 10 *öre*. The pair ended up with hefty fines for causing each other physical injuries.³⁸

This preponderance of internal conflict within the elite implies that violence was a customary way to assert and defend one's economic interests (among others) within the group. To a lesser extent, it also implies that violence was not something that the less wealthy peasants would use to try and control the dominant group. Violence concentrating on competitions within the elite is striking but matches evidence from elsewhere in early modern Europe. The ambitions of the elites often brought them into rivalry, forming factions and engaging in damaging conflicts.³⁹ A familiar example would be the practice of vendetta—violence within one's own group used by governing elites in early modern Italy as an essential part of their political culture.⁴⁰ Not so far away also, in the Duchy of Schleswig, there was evidently a power struggle going on among the local elite throughout much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries over the highest local office open to them—the *herredsfoged*.⁴¹

Since the elite tended to form endogamic family networks and most of the violence took place within local elite families, even in the same village, it is only logical that in many cases, the parties involved were related to one another. In the database, this holds true for almost one third of the cases (12 in total, or 30 %). It must be noted that it has not been possible to identify all possible family relations, so it is probable that the number was in fact much higher. Typically, these cases happened in the same village. For example, brothers Thomas and Henrik Klemetsson got fined for fighting with each other in 1555, after they had both recently started

cultivating their own halves of their father's farm in Kiukainen village, in Eura.⁴²

The most extreme showdown within an elite kin group took place in 1648 between six people on a field in the village of Ravanti in Ulvila. Cousins Susanna Mattsdotter and Anna Baltsarsdotter (the daughter of the abovementioned Anna Mårtensdotter) had lived with their families as neighbours in the village since the 1630s. The fight seems to have been the culmination of a long dispute that involved mutual accusations and verbal abuse. It began when Susanna's husband Arvid Persson attacked Anna's husband Måns Trometare, who was taking his cattle to pasture on the fields. Arvid Persson admitted this at the court, stating that Måns Trometare was a cottager with no right to forage the fields. This indicates that inflammatory questions of status and honour were quite possibly at stake as Måns Trometare did not carry on his wife's family traditions of owning a big estate but had taken up a small unoccupied farm in the village. In contrast, Arvid Persson's elite status was flawless as he owned a cavalry estate and was the local constable and innkeeper.⁴³

Arvid Persson's wife Susanna soon followed her husband's lead when she saw her cousin Anna also driving cattle to pasture and went to shove her off. Meanwhile, Arvid and Måns were fighting each other with axes, and then Måns' son joined the fray to help his father. The result was that Arvid was wounded and bruised and Måns' arm got broken. The women pulled each other's hair and bruised each other. Even Anna Baltsarsdotter's daughter got involved and got her hand cut. The court fined all the parties involved, but this did not stop their dispute. At the next court session, Susanna Mattsdotter presented a case concerning their latest insults as they had called each other whores and thieves.⁴⁴

Returning to the point illustrated at the very start of this chapter, women played a prominent role in these acts of violence. In fact, 12 of the accused in the database (30 %) were women. Many of the cases are related to the women of the Lavila family in particular, and some of the accusations were quite serious. Dordi Thomasdotter from Mullila in Eurajoki (Anna Mårtensdotter's sister-in-law) gave her husband's niece, Lucretia Mattsdotter, two big head wounds with a knife.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Anna Mårtensdotter herself was accused by her half-sister Margareta Fransdotter from the town of Pori for having caused her unborn child to die in the womb.⁴⁶

The Lavila women were often to be found in the courthouse. They often presented matters themselves without requiring the authority of their male

relatives. Historically, the active agency of women has often been associated with widowhood as the husband was usually a married woman's spokesman according to the law. However, this does not seem to explain what was happening here as none of these women were widows, except for when Anna Mårtensdotter was in court for the last of her violent outbursts.⁴⁷

This only further verifies the result of more recent historical research that early modern peasant women did have legitimate power and authority in their communities and could act personally in court.⁴⁸ Prominent figures like Anna Mårtensdotter pop up wherever the records allow it, for instance, Agata Persdotter in the nearby parish of Ulvila or Anna Meier in the village of Egg in Upper Swabia. However, it seems that the social and legal agency of women was greater in the Nordic area.⁴⁹

Even compared to evidence from other Nordic regions, it seems that the Lower Satakunta women from the peasant elite were particularly aggressive and violent, as violence crimes were typically the domain of men.⁵⁰ The active agency of the women in the current database in organising and aggressively defending their rights seems to be connected to the fact that their husbands were away from home for much of the time due to their administrative duties, war, or economic activities. This may have created the need for the wife to take matters in hand on the domestic front and present these issues at court when necessary, even when sometimes the husband was present. And assuming this role seems to also have meant that the women adopted the compatible norm of aggressive behaviour.⁵¹

Though fights within kin were common, there is only one family in the research group with three cases of suspected violence by children against their parents. This special branch of violence was the most strictly sanctioned. It was about family relations that were addressed in Luther's Catechism and considered inviolable. According to the Mosaic law introduced in 1608, even raising a hand against your parents was a capital crime punishable by death, not to mention killing your parents.⁵² That unspeakably horrendous crime was what local constable's son Per Mattsson from Uotila farm in Kokemäki was rumoured to have committed in 1639. He brought the accusation to the court himself, wanting to free himself of it. His siblings and neighbours testified that his father had died peacefully, and he had never been in discord with him.⁵³

However, in spite of his acquittal, it seems that Per Mattsson was not the most peaceful person. Four decades later, his son mentioned that Per (who was now over 80 years old) and his second wife used to beat the servants when they were drunk.⁵⁴ His new wife's relations were so bad

with her stepdaughter that the jurors testified that both were “very restless and quarrelsome people”. The stepdaughter ended up wounding her in the ear and was sentenced to death for this serious offence against parental authority. The case was nevertheless sent off to the Royal Court of Appeal in Turku, and it is not clear whether the sentence was actually carried out or not.⁵⁵

There are also some cases of elite violence against other peasants. Often these are somehow special cases, as when Olof Mattsson from Ylistaro, Kokemäki, was fined for wounding Grels Bengtsson, who was described as insane.⁵⁶ Widow Barbro, who owned a small farm in the village Irjanne in Eurajoki, is one of the few less wealthy farmers that engaged in violence with the elite. Her neighbour was the very same Anna Mårtensdotter mentioned already several times. The two women’s relationship had been worsening over the decades until finally they were facing each other in court in 1624. The quarrel concerned a wide variety of economic transactions and resulted in confiscation in Anna’s favour, even though Anna had also hit Barbro twice in a fight that had taken place 30 years ago. Two lay jurors were ordered to make an agreement between them.⁵⁷ It is worth noticing that this old fight had not arisen in court before but was taken up now as part of the bigger cumulative dispute.

AGGRESSIVENESS AS A RATIONAL CHOICE

Among others, Heikki Ylikangas has drawn attention to the fact that the lay jurors themselves in the sixteenth century were often more guilty of violence than many others. He points out that although violent crime was punishable, it did not automatically deprive a person of having a good reputation, so many jurors who had been convicted of violent crimes, even homicide, could remain in their posts. On the other hand, theft, adultery, and malevolent witchcraft were considered lacking in honour and used as common insults. It is worth noting that thefts were relatively uncommon in the Nordic area compared to most other European regions. “An honourable man in 16th century Finnish peasant society was violent and aggressive, but honest”, Ylikangas states. However, he sees sixteenth century peasant society as quite homogenous and does not go any further to say that the violence concentrated itself in the elite of this society.⁵⁸

Otherwise, Ylikangas’ conclusion is readily backed up with evidence from Lower Satakunta court records. The current database shows that violence was committed by prestigious members of the community: fathers

and mothers of families, who were no errant youngsters, but responsible adults with their own farms, wealth, and positions of trust. The high number of such cases shows that this was no isolated phenomenon either: it was somehow “socially purposive”, as Johan Söderborg has put it. This means that violence was used in a culturally rational way and to serve a cause.⁵⁹

Table 7.4 shows the number of office-holders in local administration that committed violent crimes. As office-holding is one of the characteristics that define our elite and so many members of the research group fall into that category, the figures do not show that the office-holders were necessarily especially violent, but they do show that office-holding did not *stop* them from being violent. Interestingly, the local constables and their wives are especially prominent in the table. It was their task to arrange the court sessions in their homes, but they were commonly seen as accused of violence themselves. For instance, the local constables from Kokemäki and Eura, Hans Johansson and Eskil Mattson, had a knife fight in 1653 on a public road and dealt with this in court several times over the next few years.⁶⁰

Accusations for the most serious crimes concern one family in particular in the research group, namely the Uotila family from Kokemäki. This family from a wealthy farm in the historically central village of Ylistaro had age-old traditions of holding posts in the local administration. Knowledge of the family tree starts with Thomas Knutsson, whose widow Brita Staffansdotter falsely accused another wealthy farmer for having killed her husband in the late 1580s. The accused was eventually declared inno-

Table 7.4 The accused and their administrative posts—Lower Satakunta

	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>
Posts in local administration	13	33
<i>Local constable</i>	8 ^a	20
<i>Lay juror</i>	1	2
<i>Other posts</i>	4	10
No posts in administration	14	35
Not known	13	33
Total	40	100

^aIncluding three local constables' wives

Sources: See Table 7.1

cent when he took an oath of 12 men.⁶¹ Later, Thomas' son, Henrik Thomasson, who also held positions of trust, was accused of manslaughter in 1601, but he too was declared innocent.⁶²

A generation later in 1622, Henrik's son, Matts Henriksson, the local constable, who was literate and owned his own seal, disturbed the peace in court. He prevented a person from pressing legal charges and, unveiling his knife, publicly chased the bailiff's representative out of court. Nevertheless, Matts did not lose his position as a constable.⁶³ Matts' son, Per Mattsson, who was also a lay juror, was accused in 1639 of murdering his father. As we have already seen above, he was eventually declared innocent but was violent well into his old age and also accused of heavy drinking.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Per's second wife, Agnes Mattsdotter, was accused by her stepson in 1678 of drinking, being a spendthrift, and constantly quarrelling with her stepchildren.⁶⁵ Constable Matts Henriksson's other son, Eskil Mattsson, was the local constable of Eura who was accused of trying to kill his opponent in the abovementioned knife fight.⁶⁶ Finally, Matts Henriksson's illegal son Olof Mattson was fined in 1632 for wounding a man.⁶⁷

In the family, violence surfaced in two ways: firstly, as rumours of homicide, which were taken to the court by the accused to clear their reputation. Malicious rumours about these prominent local figures seem to hint that there were some hidden inner disputes going on in the communities. The other way violence surfaced was more directly through violent and aggressive actions. Per, Eskil, and Olof Mattsson were particularly good examples of this second way. In this family, violence seemed to coexist with positions of trust as well as considerable wealth. Already in 1590, for example, Henrik Thomasson was being labelled as "very wealthy" (*wällförmögen*).⁶⁸

The fact that office-holders committed violent crimes and continued in their posts after this suggests that violence was culturally accepted or at least tolerated. Many historians do not approach pre-modern aggressive behaviour and violence as necessarily an irrational outburst or as a result of a lack of self-control.⁶⁹ Aggressiveness was written inside the culture itself. To describe the cultural necessity to stand up for oneself in the context of land-owning, Maria Ågren has coined the term "defence responsibility" (*försvarsplikten*). This required one to actively defend what was one's own, and to use aggressive behaviour to carry this out was not just a right but also a responsibility.⁷⁰ The other implication of this, however, was that it

was also possible to unlawfully acquire possessions if this was backed up by the threat of violence.⁷¹

Mats Hallenberg has examined the aggressive behaviour of Swedish office-holders and found the prevailing norm of the sixteenth century to have been what he calls aggressive masculinity. Vasa kings required aggressive men to enforce a state monopoly of violence. Due to the Reformation, these men acted free of many of the traditional religious constraints. Hallenberg also points out that whereas among the aristocracy in the central areas of the realm, a more calculating form of masculinity seemed to have supplanted aggressive behaviour in the early seventeenth century, in Finland, where control was weaker, aggressive masculinity had actually gained ground and prevailed at the local level throughout the Swedish imperial era.⁷²

According to Hallenberg, aggressive masculinity became the norm in the sixteenth century for new groups of men who wanted to assert themselves in state service.⁷³ I would like to expand this idea further to cover those members of the farming elite that wanted to achieve and maintain local authority, be it through holding posts in local administration or through acquiring more land and wealth. In the social turmoil of the late sixteenth century, it was aggressive behaviour that provided the little extra that was needed to thrive while others perished. And this did not just apply to men, as we have seen; women from the elite readily resorted to aggression and even violence. Aggressive female agency can also be found amongst the nobility. It seems to have been considered appropriate in certain roles, like being the master or mistress of a farmstead and having to defend the rights associated with that position. In this way, aggressive behaviour can be seen as one part of acting out complex social hierarchies in the form of standardised social roles.⁷⁴

It seems fair to conclude that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was a prerequisite of members of this elite to be able to resort to aggressive behaviour and violence to enhance their standing. Essentially, belonging to this particular elite was not institutionalised, so it was not defined by law, nor did it rest on any permanent conditions. This meant a constant struggle to assert one's position in it. This elasticity and blurry boundaries have been recently recognised as typical of European early modern rural elites in general. The elite was a purely social and economic construction that was volatile, and membership was not guaranteed. It was forged by personal agency and individual abilities, of which a readiness to aggressively defend one's rights was central.⁷⁵

Even if the elite's aggressive behaviour was a source of inner conflict on the local level, in some circumstances, it could also work for the peasant community as a whole, creating a certain degree of integrity. Prominent local figures capable of violence and ready for taking severe actions were able to defend local people's interests against demands from outside. Most peasants were thus eager to support their elite spokesmen even in extreme situations. Local constable Johan Jacobsson from Kokemäki nearly started a tax uprising in 1625 as he shouted out in the court room that the common people should not have to pay the cattle tax as they already had the customs tax, and if they were to be forced to pay it, then it would be a violation of his Royal Majesty's affirmation and will.⁷⁶ In Kokemäki, the situation eventually cooled down, but in the earlier chapters, we have seen the leading role that the elite could take in an uprising.

It was, after all, popular support that had given the elite their positions of local authority in the first place. Local constable Matts Takku and, more prominently, his wife Agnes Olofsdotter gathered a group of parishioners together in Huittinen to protest against their new vicar Timoteus Melkiorsson in the 1620s. It seems that the newcomer dared to confront the Takku family's important and long-standing position in the parish as being the local constables and, by far, the wealthiest landowners. Matts Takku had even declared to him upon his arrival that "you shall obey me and do as I will, otherwise you shall not thrive long in this parish". Takku's wife urged the people into violence against the cleric, who was eventually dragged out and ritualistically thrown over the church fence. This resulted in a prolonged judicial process, her imprisonment, and the execution of two of her followers. She was only able to release herself by paying a considerable sum of money.⁷⁷

The majority of parishioners seemed to have taken the side of their constable's family. Nevertheless, Takku was suspended from office temporarily, and the post was given to another member of the elite, Matts Kahari. The vicar seems to have hoped that this appointment would support him in his fight against the Takku family as he confidently stated at one point that "Kahari has started to diminish your power now". It seems tempting and plausible to deduce from this that there was a battle between members of the elite as other wealthy farmers saw a chance to usurp power from the traditional ruling family. However, the majority of farmers in Huittinen supported Matts Takku's efforts to regain his office by guaranteeing his reputation and acknowledging that the post of local constable had traditionally been held by Takku family. This eventually paid

off, and he continued as a constable for a further 20 years or more, and the bold clergyman was suspended.⁷⁸ However, during the judicial process, he came up with a nickname for Constable Takku, which sums up the prevailing local power structure quite well—“King of Huittinen”.⁷⁹

In this case, joint opposition from the vicar and a rival elite member was enough to escalate the situation and bring about an exceptional reaction of aggressive behaviour and violence, and most members of the community followed the family of their customary leader and helped him to regain his position.

VOLATILE PEASANT COMMUNITIES

Even if elite violence seems to fit well into the pre-modern requirement of aggressive behaviour to gain influence that is sketched above, there is something missing from the picture. The majority of these cases of violence in the database somehow relate to atypical members of the elite. The personal, social, and economic situation of each perpetrator must be examined in detail to uncover more clues on what connects them.

Based on his thorough micro-level research on medieval Satakunta, Seppo Suvanto has shown that even though peasant societies have traditionally been described as static, the social arena of Satakunta was in a state of constant flux in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The status, wealth, and administrative posts of families varied.⁸⁰ Similarly, the social structure has been found highly dynamic in several recent studies on European rural elites, showing a high degree of upward and downward mobility.⁸¹ Even according to my database, volatility was an essential factor in the social life of these peasant communities and especially the families which led them. The database shows great swings in fortune in the lives of many individuals.⁸²

The life of Matts Pasa, for instance, provides one of the most dramatic examples. In the late fifteenth century, there lived a farmer in Kiukainen in Eura who was later called “Stub Henrik”. The sale and inheritance of his properties caused complicated arrangements that were handled in court over many sessions that stretched for more than 100 years after. Henrik’s son Matts Pasa (also known under the name Bonde) seems to have been a speculator who created considerable property in the 1540–60s and lost it all in the 1580s. He also held positions of trust, as a lay juror for instance, and he created his wealth by annexing neighbouring farms, buying land, and being a pawnbroker. In 1571, he was the wealthiest farmer in Eura,

but his property vanished as quickly as it had come. In 1588, the already elderly man was in “great poverty” and in 1589 “completely poverty-stricken”. He had been forced to leave part of his farm tax wreck and pawn off most of his other land. The Crown pardoned him for his tax debts in 1591. The reasons for his economic downfall remain unknown, but it coincides with his ageing as well as the apparently early deaths of his eldest son and grandson.⁸³

The story of Matts Pasa is perhaps the most striking but by no means the only one. A significant number of others in the database shared this experience of some kind of a social or economic decline. As Table 7.5 shows, almost half of the acts of violence were connected to loss of wealth, property, and prestigious assignments; in fact, all the prerequisites of elite status that have been described above.

Thus, another (and perhaps the most significant) factor behind all these violent crimes was the loss of elite status. By this, I mean that the person in question lost the main criteria for being elite as defined above or did not meet them altogether even though his or her parents had belonged to the elite. Most typically, this meant loss of inheritance, indebtedness or poverty, and loss of office-holding.

In addition to the 17 cases where elite status was clearly lost, there were five cases in which perpetrators suffered another kind of personal setback—they were supplemented in the allotment of inheritance and had to move away from the home farmstead or divide it with coheirs. This meant losing the status as head of the family group (through loss of the original farm), and it meant that a lot of symbolic and social capital was now unreachable. If these cases are also counted as a loss of status, then there are only nine clear cases out of the total 40 (23 %) in which the perpetrators of a violent crime were secure members of the elite throughout their life.

Table 7.5 Perpetrators of violence and their loss of elite status—Lower Satakunta

	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>%</i>
Loss of status during lifetime	15	38
Loss of status in previous generation	2	5
No loss of elite status	14	35
Unknown	9	22
Total	40	100

Sources: See Table 7.1

The perpetrators of violence were typically in economic trouble or their families had lost the offices they had once held. As Seppo Suvanto has found, these two phenomena went hand in hand.⁸⁴ The standard case in the seventeenth century was to lose the homestead to noble magnates, either through being forced to sell or because of unpaid taxes. Rahvola cavalry estate in Eura parish was sold in 1651 or 1652 by Jöran Bertilsson and Agnes Tönnesdotter. The former owners were in great debt, moved to another parish, and ended up landless and poverty-stricken.⁸⁵ The Haistila family from Ulvila sold their farm to a nobleman in 1675 after having held the position of local constable for at least four generations, possibly longer.⁸⁶ In the same year, the formerly “very wealthy” Uotila farm in Ylistaro, Kokemäki, was lost to the noble lords of Kokemäki manor because of unpaid taxes.⁸⁷

After their loss of homestead and the status connected to it, these families were not able to form new high-ranking family connections either. Family lines continued via daughters and sons, but the offspring were no longer able to regain their ancestors’ central position in the local community. Their former wealth and prestige disappeared. Some family lines maintained their position among freeholders or tenants, but others became part of the landless population.⁸⁸

One of the most obvious cases is Thomas Sigfridsson Takku, brother to the aforementioned local constable and “King of Huittinen”, Matts Sigfridsson Takku. Thomas ended up landless in his home village. He was the younger son, so he did not inherit the home farm, but he may have owned another of the family’s farms for some years in the 1610s. For some reason, he left the farm and spent the rest of his life as a cottager.⁸⁹ Soon after that, he was charged at court for pulling a man’s hair (1620) and wounding another by hitting him in the face with a keyring (1621).⁹⁰ A few years later (1625), he was condemned for having broken a promise of marriage and commanded to sustain the child that was consequently born out of wedlock.⁹¹ Later he married another woman called Brita, who ended up in a fight with a neighbour (1638).⁹² Despite his landless position, Thomas Sigfridsson maintained an element of his family’s former elite status by temporarily holding an office, and he was even able to give loans to others. At the same time, it is clear that he was in a much weaker economic and social position than his powerful brother or sisters, who were married to the gentry.⁹³

Another example is Mårten Henriksson from Kiukainen village in Eura. Compared to his granduncle Matts Pasa, Mårten represented

an older but less wealthy line of the descendants of Stub Henrik. His father had cultivated half of the original farmstead, but Mårten was supplanted by other heirs and in 1589 took over an abandoned farm that was part of his mother's inheritance. Before that, he had lived in his home village. In 1585, he ended up going on a rampage at a feast in Simon Mattson's (son of Matts Pasa) house, where he violently assaulted a guest and tried to rape a maidservant. He and another guest were sentenced to death but then pardoned at the Royal Court of Appeal.⁹⁴

The correlation between social decline and violence is clear in the database, but it remains a bit of a chicken or the egg debate as to which came first. Was social decline a result of violent behaviour, possibly linked to other social and economic problems, or was it an attempt to put up one last fight in an escalating downward slide? In some cases, it is not clear if the two phenomena are connected at all. For instance, could Margeta Jacobsdotter (from Haistila in Ulvila), who wounded her maidservant badly in the hand with a sickle in 1639, have had the remotest idea that eventually her household would end up in debt, her husband would cease to be the local constable, and she would be forced to sell her family's age-old farmstead 36 years later?⁹⁵

However, as the overall trend is quite clear, it seems that it was generally difficult for the elite to keep their positions in the changing social situation. Other court cases show that they took part in substantial economic transactions, some of them included borrowing or lending large sums of money, and in a volatile economic situation, this speculation could easily lead to huge debts. In addition came the substantial fines for crimes committed (violent or otherwise).

AGGRESSIVENESS WITHIN CERTAIN BOUNDS

The Lower Satakunta database shows two seemingly contradictory results. Aggressiveness and violence was common among the elite and also seem to have been a prerequisite for acquiring and holding on to elite status in the community. On the other hand, a significant number of the cases of violence were very clearly related to losing one's position among the elite. So was violence an accepted part of the elite's life or was it the sign of a downhill slide?

There seem to have been two contexts for violence:

- 1) Violent crimes by members of the elite who maintained their position in it. There was no innate contradiction between aggressive behaviour and even violence and office-holding as long as this aggressiveness was kept within certain bounds.
- 2) Violent crimes by those that were losing their elite status. Excessive aggressive behaviour and violence was clearly connected to this group.

What then determined “the right amount” of or “excessive” aggressiveness? Here we can resort to the idea of a narrow middle way that Maria Ågren has proposed regarding the ownership of land. According to her, people had to try to keep to a relatively limited area between justified aggressive defence and illegal violence. If one was too aggressive, there was a risk of overstepping popular notions of justice and charges would be pressed, or perhaps even more serious crimes would be committed than just a hand-to-hand fight over a piece of land. Then again, if you were too passive, there was a risk of losing your rights and your respect in the community.⁹⁶

This elite therefore had to try and walk the line between the popular norm of aggressive defence and the regulations set down by the Crown precisely to hold uncontrolled aggression in check.⁹⁷ It seems clear that this was not restricted to economics but applied to all their interaction in the local arena. *Aggressiveness within certain bounds* was needed and expected of the elite. In some cases, it took the form of acts labelled as violent crimes. But most of those crimes were done by people that were for some reason dropping out of the elite. So we can conclude that *excessively aggressive behaviour and violence* was not essentially part of the elite’s conduct but rather a manifestation of the specific situation experienced by individuals that faced the threat of losing this status.

The difference between the two is apparent in the reaction of the local community. With aggressive behaviour, the biggest risk was not being charged for single acts of violence: they did not destroy one’s reputation in the society, and the elite could manage the usual fines. But there was a risk of overstepping the limits and acquiring the reputation of a restless and quarrelsome person, which might preclude them from social and economic networks of trust. These labels were given to Agnes Mattsdotter, the abovementioned mistress of a large cavalry estate in Huittinen, who was accused of misconduct and heavy

drinking.⁹⁸ This was even worse than losing respect as it meant ending up a social outcast.

This seems to be exactly what happened to Anna Mårtensdotter of the formerly respected Lavila family in the end of her life. Anna last showed up in court in 1624. It is also the year with the greatest number of cases against her. The community bombarded her with complaints, some of which concerned things that had happened decades ago. It seems that some personal factor triggered off these court proceedings on this occasion. Typically, the cases were about high-handedness and compensation for damage. At this point, Anna Mårtensdotter was as seasoned in court as any lay juror or local constable with more than 30 years of experience. Even years after her death, her name pops up in the minutes as she was found to have been the source of some evil rumours that were still spread about one of her antagonists. Anna's excessively aggressive behaviour, even maliciousness, seems to have had the cumulative effect that many wanted to attack her at the end of her life.⁹⁹

Why was Anna Mårtensdotter so especially confrontational? It is of course impossible to say exactly why, but there are some factors that must have played a part in this. In the 1620s, Anna's family lost all of what remained of their wealth and traditional leading position in Eurajoki since the early 1500s. Finally, the home farm, owned then by a relative through marriage, was given away as a fief in 1629, and the same year the ownership was sold to the new noble lords, who simply turned the estate into one of their manors. Anna Mårtensdotter was married twice, lastly to a German trumpeter, and she had at least two children. She is known to have suffered from economic problems, and later it was said that it was her son Måns Månsson who had got rid of all her belongings. Whatever the case, economic trouble may explain some of the prolonged and even tragicomic fights in which she embroiled herself, concerning the large inheritances of previous generations. At the time of her death, Anna's farm in the village of Irjanne in Eurajoki was in debt, and there was nothing to leave for her children. Soon after this, her son Måns abandoned the farm and moved with his wife to Prussia, and there is no more information about them after that.¹⁰⁰

Altogether, there was a decisive drop in both the fortunes of the Lavila family in general and Anna Mårtensdotter's personal life in particular. Perhaps part of her excessiveness can be explained as an attempt to struggle and hold on to what was left of her former special status in the community.

WHY WAS THE ELITE SO AGGRESSIVE?

It has been suggested that social isolation and tension stemming from the sporadic nature of Finnish settlements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was one of the key factors behind violent crime in the eastern half of the Swedish Realm.¹⁰¹ However, the research group examined in this chapter provides an example of quite the opposite. These people lived in a central rural area, in villages that were densely built, and they had ample experience of communal interaction. They were among the most prominent, well-known, and central figures of their communities. Their economic and social actions extended all over the local community and beyond, putting them in continuous contact with peasants, crown officials, burghers, clergymen, and the gentry.

The peasant elite was above of all aggressive and eager to take their disputes into public handling. Sometimes aggression led to violence, too. On the other hand, members of the elite who were losing their status stand out in the database as both aggressive and violent. On the basis of this sample, it seems that most of the peasant violence in seventeenth-century court records in Lower Satakunta was connected to members of the former peasant elite who had ended up in economic and social difficulties. In a way, this relates to the theory of a civilisation process according to which violence moved from its central place to the margins of the society.

Lower Satakunta was the home of an especially numerous and wealthy peasant elite, at least on the Finnish scale. There are no accurate statistics available, but based on archive work, it seems that the court records of Lower Satakunta are exceptionally abundant, full of detailed cases, whereas those from neighbouring districts are much more scarce. This could well be because the neighbouring areas lacked a prominent elite who in Lower Satakunta dominated the local court sessions and used them as arenas for their aspirations. Most of their violence stemmed from their inner scuffles, which could be the result of similar anti-communal processes of group formation, competition, and power struggles that were at work among many other early modern European elites. On the other hand, there is also clear evidence that at least on some occasions, the elite acted as spokesmen of the local community and defended their joint interests against outside threats.

The patterns of violence occurring in the Lower Satakunta database cannot be linked so easily to the overall trend of falling violence throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The peasant elite

persisted in their violent behaviour throughout the period. Consequently, even some of the key explanatory factors for falling crime rates, such as civilisation theory, the tightening of social controls, and a changed concept of honour, do not serve as explanations for this sample population on a micro-scale. Much of the elite's violence in Lower Satakunta stemmed from tensions in their personal socio-economic situation, hand in hand with centralisation, stratification, and tightening state control.

The farming families that form the current database from Lower Satakunta were situated in the borderlands between the gentry and peasantry. In the course of the seventeenth century, their status became increasingly unclear with regard to the emerging state institutions and ideologies that served to consolidate state-defined hierarchies based on regulated political estates. In local administration, the upper estates and people with a formal education took control, and they were granted a secure place in the social hierarchy. However, the peasant elite, no matter how wealthy and well connected, remained within the estate of peasants and outside the educated servants of the Crown.

The impacts on society of a centralised state led to extensive changes within the local elites in the Finnish part of the Swedish realm. This meant a loss of status for many families that had been among the elite for generations. Indeed, Chap. 8 by Tiina Miettinen in this book reveals how the wealthy and powerful family of Fordell lost its influential position in the north of Sweden as a result of centralising state politics. The same applies to those in Lower Satakunta studied in this chapter. They found it hard to find a foothold in the new structures and state-based hierarchies.

The space left for active, personal agency for those belonging to the estate of peasants narrowed. The new emphasis on official hierarchies is visible in Lower Satakunta tax records. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the entries often make no difference between the names of peasants, bailiffs, or army officials as land owners and occupiers. In fact, the titles are not usually mentioned at all, which makes it difficult to identify them; but in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the gentry and office-holders are clearly differentiated from the rest by the use of last names, titles, or a different style of handwriting (Latin instead of Old German).

Those freeholders that thrived in the end of the sixteenth century were those who were ready for bold action when the need or chance occurred. As the economic situation tightened, ongoing wars consumed men and resources, which tightened competition and created the right context

for aggressive agency, even making it a necessary survival strategy. In this sense, the crisis of the late sixteenth century enhanced the elite's aggressive and competitive mentality that aimed at perpetuating one's status at the cost of others if necessary. Aggressive competition manifested itself in economic action, office-holding duties, and social interaction.

In the centralised state of the late seventeenth century, however, the status of subjects was to a greater extent based on birth or education that gave a formal position within the system of estates. Personal wealth, local social respect, and family traditions of owning a large farmstead that had granted one an influential position in local communities of the sixteenth century were now only secondary factors. One's opportunities and position were more than ever defined by the Crown, not forged by local networks. In addition, many formerly well-positioned individuals found themselves in economic trouble and even became part of the landless population. In this situation, it is not surprising that the former elite tried to fight for its position. It had to compete with representatives of the Crown that began to intervene in local communities from outside as well as struggle for resources with other members of the community that were limited by the interventions of other social groups.

NOTES

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4. Jutikkala, Eino (1934) 'Kartanoyhteiskunta' in Gunnar Suolahti et al. (eds.) *Suomen kulttuurihistoria* (Helsinki: K. J. Gummerus Osakeyhtiö), pp. 478–498; Jutikkala, Eino (1958) *Suomen talonpojan historia*, 2nd edn (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), pp. 142–152; Jutikkala, Eino & Pirinen, Kauko (1996) *A History of Finland*, 5th edn (Helsinki: WSOY), pp. 174–176.
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The Fordell Family: A Struggle for Trade After Three Generations in Power

Tiina Miettinen

Ostrobothnia (*Österbotten/Pohjanmaa*) was a province on the Finnish side of the Realm of Sweden that stood out from other provinces in sixteenth-century Finland. Unlike the southern provinces, there was no nobility, and the social structure had developed in different ways.¹ But the lack of nobility did not mean that Bothnia (i.e., *Österbotten*, *Norrbottnen*, and *Västerbotten*) had an exactly democratic peasant freeholder society. It meant, however, that there was some room for agency, with the administration being located so far away in Stockholm. In the Swedish-speaking northern part of Ostrobothnia was an elite of wealthy peasant freeholders, called *birkarls* in Swedish, who dominated the fur trade and were in charge of taxation from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century.

In this article, I am going to explore how the northern peasant freeholder elite, in this case the old *birkarl* and merchant families in Ostrobothnia and the northern parts of the Swedish Realm, responded to the new situation, when they began to lose their old privileges and leading positions in north. What were the situations in which they turned to violence or

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used force, and who was it against? I also examine how accusations and complaints were made—when people ended up in court, on trial for a crime like witchcraft or incest, they could lose not only their position, but also their lives. Sometimes even the fine for a serious enough crime could easily destroy someone's whole financial livelihood and life, so somebody could also be destroyed without using actual physical violence.

People were either sentenced to pay a fine, convicted of death, or in some rare cases absolved. The violence among these northern actors, like clergymen, bailiffs, and merchants, was not always physical; often their reaction became more one of verbal violence: insults about witchcraft or incest in court, or complaints made to the king. It could be said that, in this time, the quill became a more important weapon than the sword. The background to a large number of these complaints to the king, and for many of the court sessions, was various different violent situations.

THE FORDELLS: BETWEEN SAVAGERY AND CIVILISATION

Economic integration in the period 1570–1621 was extremely complex for all the inhabitants in the north. War against Russia began in 1570 and continued right up until 1595. As a consequence, taxation grew year on year and furthermore, peasants and farmers were obliged to provide food and lodging for the king's army. Peasants in Finland expressed strong opposition to this, and this friction eventually erupted into sporadic acts of violence that later turned into a full-scale uprising, called the Club War (named after their choice of weapon).²

My case study applies to one merchant family in particular, called Fordell, who lived in Finnish Ostrobothnia, worked on the Swedish side in Westrobothnia (*Västerbotten*), and had family and trade connections to northern birkarl families. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Fordells had a prominent position in the Crown's fur trade. Members of the family had extremely close relationships to the royal court and they had even begun to lend money to the Vasa kings. One could almost say that they provided the royal family with leverage. Research has revealed that the men of the Fordell family were more like assimilated gentry than peasant freeholders and that their ethnic background was more Swedish than Finnish.³ But both conclusions can be challenged by asking how an ethnic background in the sixteenth-century coastal area of Finland can possibly be validated. For instance, we do not know when they arrived in the region or how long it would have taken to become assimilated when

a family is Finnish but has lived in the same area for over a hundred years. What we *do* know, however, is that the Fordells had lived in Ostrobothnia from at least 1499, when Jöns Fordell is mentioned for the first time in the sources. They were not “nobility” as such, but a wealthy merchant family with peasant freeholder status. Wealth, plus a close relationship to the burgesses of Stockholm on the one hand, and birkarl families in North Bothnia (*Norrbotnen*) and Westrobothnia, on the other, made them an unusually well-placed family in Finnish history.

We will be looking at just how the Fordells and their family networks used force and violence to build up their commercial power on the northern frontiers of the realm between the years 1553 and 1621. Through many generations of marrying into each other’s families, almost all birkarl, merchant, and bailiff clans in the North formed one large social network. By the sixteenth century, this network covered northern parts of Sweden and Finland and also Lapland. The Fordells found interesting ways to survive all the political struggles before and after King Gustav I’s sons. In particular, Hans Hansson Fordell was a key figure in the above-mentioned Club War (1596–1597), which started in Ostrobothnia. Even though Hans Hansson Fordell was on the winner’s side, the war put an end to both his own and his family’s leading position.

All the old northern birkarl families, like the Fordells, had difficulty settling into the new situation without their medieval trade or taxation privileges, which the Crown had started to take away in the sixteenth century. After that, rights to the fur and salmon trade became concentrated in the hands of just a few crown bailiffs and only some of the wealthiest merchants. Most of the birkarl families settled down without too much protest, however, and started to put their sons through the necessary schooling so they could get appointed to new offices and professions and a career with the Crown or Church. Others moved to towns to become burgesses, while some carried on with their lives as leading peasant freeholders with important posts in their own communities.

Peasant freeholders in Ostrobothnia and Westrobothnia lived near to the wilderness and the frontier, which both Church and the Crown in Sweden wanted to gain greater control over in the sixteenth century. Across the borders, in Russia and Norway, the authorities also wanted to tame their northern areas. Peasant freeholders, settlers from east and south, merchants and the local Sámi people alike were forced to accept a situation in which these three states divided the northern areas among themselves.⁴ In 1890, the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner

wrote his famous “Frontier Thesis” about the significance of the American frontier. In Turner’s opinion, each new frontier allowed Americans to again redefine themselves.⁵ According to him, the frontier created freedom, democracy, and a distinctly American culture that promoted individualism and an outlet for men, who rebelled against the civilisation they had left behind in the east.⁶

As Americans moved further west with each passing generation, the frontier was constantly reborn and each move west meant a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line. The main significance of this idea was that the American frontier lay at the edge of free land.⁷ In many ways, just as the nineteenth-century American frontier was expanding westwards, the sixteenth-century Swedish frontier was moving north. It too was a frontier of religion and trade, and these worked in tandem when the Crown started to take control of the whole area. The Crown and Church saw the north as a dark savage area, where there was violence, adultery, and witchcraft—and where there was also, a lot of free land and untapped resources like the fur trade. This idea of “free land” was a crucial factor because the Crown also began to systematically colonise northern parts of the country. First merchants and a few explorers, like Olaus Magnus, mapped the area, and then after this came settlers and teaching clergy. The frontier went gradually further north and the Sámi especially had to readjust in a similar way to the Native Americans in North America.

THE OLD NORDIC PEASANT FREEHOLDER ELITE: THE “BIRKARLS”

The “Birkarlar” (or Birka men) were an elite organisation of Nordic peasant freeholders set up in medieval times to confirm the king’s rights to the northern parts of the Swedish realm. The king started to grant privileges to the wealthy peasant freeholder elite who lived in northern areas, including the right to collect taxes. The legal term *birk* meant special status and privilege, and first appeared during the reign of Magnus Ladulås with the Ordinance of Alsnö in 1280, which marked the beginning of the rise of the nobility.⁸ Birkarls thus had the right to gather taxes for themselves but they also paid some of this to the Crown. The taxation applied to the Sámi and settlers alike.

According to Lars Ivar Hansen, the local elite started to trade with the Sámi and demand tribute-like payments from them. To begin with in the early medieval period, this went on in an area called Kvenland—the northern coastal area of the Gulf of Bothnia located between Hälsingland and Finland.⁹ At this time, it represented the northern “frontier”, if we are to use Jackson Turner’s terminology. Hansen has assumed that the Birkarls were the ones who eventually replaced the Kvens from this time and continued taxing the Sámi.¹⁰

During the sixteenth and start of the seventeenth centuries, birkarls and other merchants in Ostrobothnia and Westrobothnia formed a large, loosely organised corporation of merchants and elite family networks that farmed the coastal areas around the Gulf of Bothnia and specialised in trade with the Sámi.¹¹ The Ostrobothnian part was mainly inhabited by Swedish speakers, but the ethnic background of the birkarl families was mixed Finnish and Swedish, and elite peasant farmer families had kinship ties with each other across the Gulf of Bothnia.

The common background of these families on both sides of the Gulf, came up when the antiquarian and mystic, Johannes Thomae (later Bureus), travelled through Westrobothnia between 1599 and 1600 on a fact-finding mission about rune stones and other ancient monuments in the north. Knowledge about Sweden’s “great past” was seen as an important way to strengthen the Crown’s position in the north and to unify the whole realm. Johannes Bureus’ own relatives belonged to the peasant freeholder elite of Westrobothnia, and actually consisted of many old birkarl families, merchants and crown servants. In his attempts to find out more about possibly mythical ancestors from the rune stones, Bureus also started to write down the names and relationships of his own “kin” as one large family. His notes show the typical way seventeenth-century scholars traced their genealogy, but it also shows how the people in Westrobothnia were related, how they described their family ties, how they understood their descent, and how they distinguished themselves from other clans. They had not documented these things in writing previously, but their folk memory was extremely strong especially among the women, and they were able to tell Johannes Bureus whether individuals and whole families were related to one another. Though these may not have been exactly genealogically accurate, they were nonetheless valid depictions of a living clan.

As one old woman from Westrobothnia explained to Bureus, when he asked about families on the other side of the Gulf of Bothnia, “[a]ll the

best clergy, crown servants, bailiffs, merchants and peasant freeholders in Ostrobothnia are related to our [Bure] family". She probably said this without any actual proof, but it was not required as having a strong kinship feeling was enough. This feeling was what tied similar families to the same social grouping, and in many ways, kinship feeling was more important than awareness of the exact blood connections. But as a scholar, Johannes Bureus was more interested in blood connections and wanted to use surnames, which peasants often did not use. In this way, his genealogical notebook reveals the different ways in which peasants and scholars saw family and kin.¹²

According to Helle Vogt, kinship in the Middle Ages was more or less a matter of personal choice. In most cases, blood ties were certainly the key factor, but these were also supplemented with by ties of friendship.¹³ In some cases, belonging to an elite family like Bure or Fordell was the choice of an individual, and terms like brother, sister, or son could also be used for close friends.¹⁴ Differences between families or clans is thus nigh on impossible to find, because in real life there was no such thing as "legal patrilineal family"—a term constructed by noble scholars to protect the very family heritage which no doubt enabled them to be scholars. Peasant freeholder clans mainly gathered around some strong and wealthy male individual who had position, land, and a household. Around him lived his nearest family members, his blood and non-blood relatives, hired people, tenants, friends, allies, and supporters. Kith and kin together like this would thus form a clan.

ECONOMIC NETWORKS WITH VIOLENT CROSSINGS

Later in the fifteenth century, when state power became increasingly centralised, the wealthy and independent birkarls, with their concessionary privileges became a burden on the Crown. King John III started to reclaim all these privileges, yet he still gave the office of bailiff to men from birkarl or other wealthy merchant families in the north as compensation so that the transition would not be too abrupt. One good example of this was Olof Anundsson (Hans Knutsson Fordell's father-in-law) who was appointed as the first official crown bailiff in *Kemi Lappmark* in 1555.¹⁵

This was effectively a process of colonisation that went on peacefully for the most part. At the local level, however, conflicts between servants of the Crown and the peasants were often violent. There were also other crucial factors at play, like the war against Russia and the growing taxation that

came with it. The Crown needed money to finance the war, and so the fur, salmon, and tar trades were monopolised by the state and the heavy taxation which followed had repercussions on the colonisation process.¹⁶

Resistance against tax reforms and other new regulations was sporadic and mainly local. Nevertheless, we know that the outbreaks of violence in Ostrobothnia during the period 1570–1589 were often connected to the struggle of traders. For instance, from the register of fines one can sometimes find a reproachful mention of how people had quietly stood by while another used violence against tax collectors and other servants of the Crown. In 1588, Josef Henriksson, the bailiff in Torneå, complained about the difficulties of travelling round Lapland without a birkarl man to accompany him, and he complained that the birkarls were there trading all through the wintertime and interfering in the bailiff's duties.¹⁷

The Crown began to rigorously control salmon fishing in the sixteenth century, so that peasants no longer had the right to sell salmon directly to the merchants who offered the highest price. King Gustav I appointed special "salmon bailiffs", whose job was to keep track of all the fishing, and trade that went on (especially on the great northern rapids). These salmon bailiffs had storehouses (which were sometimes called the king's granaries) built on the waterfront, so that they could tax peasants directly in kind, every time they fished, and store it there, before selling it on to a select number of merchants. The same system was also applied to the valuable northern fur trade. The northerners resented this cut in their possible profit margins and so resisted the new regulations; especially as the salmon tax began to rise year on year.¹⁸

Maybe the best example of resistance happened in 1585, when Mickel Henriksson broke into the king's granary in Ii parish to take back the fish stored there, and when the salmon bailiff found him there, Mickel harassed him. In the court records, it was reported that this was with the "whole neighbourhood's silent consent", and that "nobody had stopped him". Mickel was ordered to pay a 40 mark fine. He had also hit a Sigfrid Larsson, who was probably the bailiff's servant.¹⁹ As early as 1571, Per Ragvaldsson had stolen two wolverine skins from the king's granaries in Kalajoki, and then sold them in secret. He was ordered to pay 70 marks to the king for this misdeed.²⁰ Both cases not only show how some peasants took their rights into their own hands, but also that there must have been a flourishing black market and lots of smuggling. This culminated in several cases of peasants stealing or selling grain, fish, or furs ending up in court by the end of the sixteenth century.

From the 1550s onwards, the problems for the birkarls really began, as the Crown wanted to concentrate all trading in only new established towns; at which point, the birkarls decided to fight to get their old rights back again. With the strengthening of the king's power came a realisation among ordinary peasant farmers and Sámi that they should take action against some of the very high-handed birkarl bailiffs and merchants. Indeed, the Crown often sided against the birkarls and merchants, especially in those cases concerning taxes or privileges. The final chapter in the era of birkarl power came in 1621, when Torneå, Luleå, and Piteå received their town charters, and laws were passed which ordered that all trading must be concentrated only in towns.

It has previously been suggested that the birkarl families had little chance of fighting back against the new trade laws, though there is evidence of violence or aggression throughout the northern area over trading issues between bailiffs and peasants at the end of the sixteenth century. The birkarls tried to compensate for their loss by developing their trade and extended their land owned in the north. Birkarl families gained the usufruct legal right to profit from hunting and fishing areas in the north on land that had once been free. As a consequence, conflicts between the people in Lapland and these bailiffs grew towards the end of sixteenth century. The high-handed and aggressive behaviour of some of the elite was often clearly connected to all kinds of disagreement about borders and usufruct areas.²¹

Clergy that were appointed to northern parishes from the south, aligned themselves more firmly with the Crown. In the first part of sixteenth century, some clergy behaved like ruthless wealthy landowners. They seemed to live any way they chose and many had gathered land and fortune in sometimes very suspicious ways. It was partly the government and parishioner's interpretation of the situation, but records show that clergymen were sentenced to pay fines for adultery, drunkenness, and violence. There was also a clear tension between the peasant freeholder elite and clergymen during the whole of the sixteenth century. Wealthy clergymen were the highest elite in Ostrobothnia, where there was no nobility. The vicar of Isokyrö, Jacobus Sigfridi Geet, was given the nickname "Grand Duke of Isokyrö" by Hans Knutsson Fordell, for example. These two men fought each other by writing various complaints to the king, but king avoided getting involved as they were both important allies to the Crown.²²

Violence against the clergy and other crown servants came to a head in the 1580s. Before that, there were only one or two court cases a year,

when somebody would be fined for either vandalism or violent behaviour towards them; but in 1581–1582, there were no less than 11. Nevertheless, most of the cases were not very serious, being either vandalism on fields, buildings, or other property, or a violent scuffle in which the clergy or crown servants had hit back. The most serious court cases (between 1570 and 1590), where heavy sentences were passed to pay a fine of 40 marks, were usually to do with the infringement of tax and trade regulations.²³

WINNERS OF THE FORDELL FAMILY

In 1553, the Crown established a chamber to control the export of fur to the wider European market. It also claimed to have first rights over purchasing fur before it could be sold on to others. Effectively, this meant that Karelian and Russian merchants had to pay higher prices than the Swedish. The peak years for the export of furs in the sixteenth century were the 1570s.²⁴ In the Realm of Sweden, the prosperous fur trade was being run at this time by both the *birkarls* (privately) and the crown bailiffs. The Swedish Crown decided to allow the North Bothnian fur trade to be run by the peasant freeholder elite there, and the Fordells were one such clan whose members lived in the Ostrobothnian coastal areas of Pedersöre and Salo, Westrobothnia, and Stockholm. Hans Knutsson Fordell was more of a burgess and trader than his *birkarl* predecessors, but he did have strong connections to many of the other old *birkarl* families like Tulkki, Oravainen, and Vojakkala in Torneå, who traded all over the Lapland and even as far afield as the Kola Peninsula and Lofoten Islands.

It is commonly accepted that rich families would develop in a similar way. Most of the wealth and land would be inherited by the eldest son's branch of the family (i.e., his sons or sons-in-law); while the families of younger sons would have to adjust to their destiny, which usually meant accepting a smaller amount of land, or living on his eldest brother's land. In the sixteenth century, Knut Jönsson Fordell and his three children after him inherited most of the land. As Fig. 8.1 shows, Knut Fordell was himself the eldest son of Jöns Fordell and is described in the sources as having been a merchant in Stockholm and Ostrobothnia at the end of the fifteenth century. In 1499, he bought Sten Sture's great manor in Ostrobothnia, which was later bequeathed to his daughter Brita and her husband Olof Tyrgilsson. Their two sons Olof and Josef Olofsson became local constables in the parish of Salo, and Olof was also made the Bailiff of Liminka and Oulu. It is clear from the sources that together with Knut

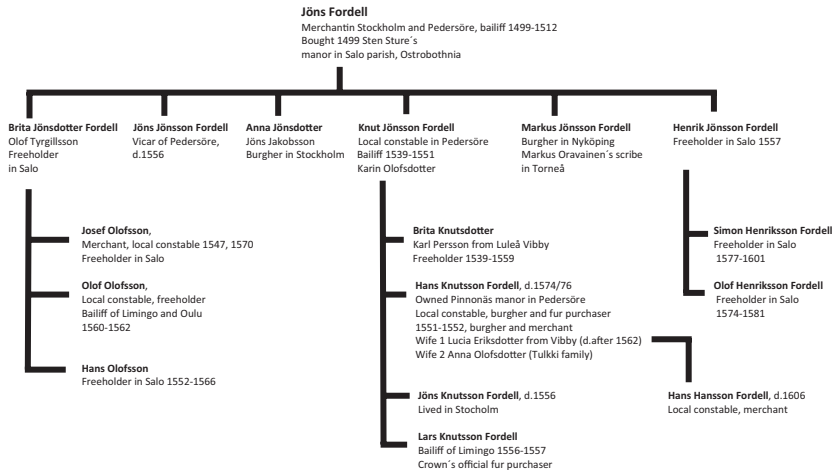


Fig. 8.1 Pedigree of Fordell family

Jönsson Fordell and his three sons they formed the hub of their family and allies. Olof and Josef Olofsson were also related in some way to an old birkarl family from Vojakkala in Övertorneå.²⁵

Knut Fordell's three sons were Hans, Jöns, and Lars. Jöns stayed mainly in his townhouse in Stockholm, while Lars was a bailiff and appointed the Crown's official fur purchaser for both Ostrobothnia and North Bothnia. Meanwhile Hans was also the Crown's official fur purchaser and merchant for Jämtland and North Bothnia. Their uncle, Knut's brother (and third son of their grandfather Jöns Fordell), was Markus Jönsson Fordell, who worked as a scribe to birkarl Nils Oravainen. He lived in Torneå and was made a burgher in Norrköping in 1548. He was probably also married to one of the Oravainen family, as he worked side by side with them.

The Fordells had a good relationship with merchants in Stockholm, and later with the royal court too. In the first part of the sixteenth century especially, some of the Fordells had married into the families of Stockholm burghesses and so they had lot of relatives there. In fact, the Fordells had owned a townhouse in Stockholm since the Middle Ages, but they did not want to become town burghesses, even though the king had urged them to settle down in Stockholm and concentrate all their trade there.²⁶ Hans Knutsson Fordell first appears in the sources in 1551, when it is noted

that he had been a bailiff for two years in Ångermanland and Medelpad (on the Swedish side of the realm). He also held some other offices in Ostrobothnia, nearer his home parish of Pedersöre. Hans Knutsson was also the local constable in Ostrobothnia jurisdictional district. This last office began to pass from generation to generation on his side of the family. It was quite remarkable that these cousins could both be local constables and bailiffs for such a large geographical area.

On King Gustav I's recommendation, Hans Knutsson Fordell with his brothers and their cousins Josef and Olof Olofsson started to reorganise how tax was collected, particularly with regard to the northern seal hunting. In the coastal areas, people had practised seal hunting and paid part of their catch to the Church. It is said, that the Fordell men themselves suggested to the king that "seal tax" should go directly to the king and not the Church. The consequence was that the Crown now took all the profit rather than most of it, as was previously the case. Hans Fordell benefited from the changes by gaining the right to gather some of the taxes by himself, Fordell also paid the king 15 ducats for this tax privilege, so it was less of a negotiation and more of a trade.²⁷ This trading with the Vasas seemed to put him on a good footing with the Court, but caused some envy and certainly made him a lot of enemies. King John III also took his son Hans Hansson into court service and made his daughter Elisabet his godchild, even though they were not nobles.

Previously, King Eric XIV had ordered Hans Knutsson Fordell to reorganise the Crown's wholesale business in North Bothnia. From doing this, he developed good relations with many of the wealthy birkarl families there. Hans Knutsson Fordell bought skins and furs from Sámi and other northern inhabitants, and then he resold them in Stockholm. Some complained at how cheaply he bought furs which he then sold on at such great profit, and this began to irritate the burgesses who were themselves forced to obey the royal orders to trade only within towns. In their eyes, it was not fair that the Fordells had the privilege to engage in the lucrative fur trade in the north (and not just in towns). At one point, the king commanded both brothers to move to Stockholm or Vyborg, but they refused. In fact, they did quite the opposite when, in 1564, Hans Knutsson sold his family's old townhouse in Stockholm.²⁸ It seems like he almost wanted to challenge both the king and the burgesses.

One of Hans Knutsson Fordell's worst enemies was Jacobus Sigfridi Geet, vicar of Kyrö parish, who wrote complaints about his bad behaviour and illegal actions to the king. And as mentioned earlier, Fordell

called him the “Grand Duke of Kyrö” in return (which was not meant as a compliment).

COUSINS WITHOUT POSITIONS

The difference between the wealth and status of these family branches is clearly visible. The losing side of the extended family, in this respect, was Olof Henriksson Fordell and his brother Simon Henriksson. They were the sons of Jöns Fordell’s youngest son Henrik, and they were peasant freeholders in the parish of Salo between the years 1574 and 1581. Unlike their other cousins, they did not hold any offices, and they had nothing to do with the family’s large trading business either. They seem to have lived like many other common peasant freeholders, in that they had trouble maintaining their households and keeping up with tax payments. Their violent behaviour in the 1570s may have been the result of the family’s failing financial situation. The only position of trust that this branch of the family held was church servant (bell-ringer). Meanwhile, their maternal cousins Josef, Olof, and Hans were bailiffs and local constables in the same parish (Salo), which may have caused tension between the two branches of the family.

One proof of this tension can be found in the record of fines for the year 1570. Simon Henriksson landed himself a huge 40 mark fine, because he had taken a load of hay without permission from his cousins Olof and Josef Olofssons’s meadow.²⁹ This may have hinted at some of the problems with the inheritance, which could not be solved in court. Both Olof Olofsson and Josef Olofsson had inherited a large portion of their grandfather Jöns Fordell’s manor in Salo, even though their father had only been Jöns’ son-in-law, whereas his actual younger son, Henrik Jönsson Fordell, seems to have inherited much less. The other sons of Knut Jönsson Fordell lived in Pedersöre and there is no information about whether they cooperated with Simon and Olof Henriksson Fordell.

In 1571, Olof Henriksson Fordell was again in court. He had been in a fight with his brother Simon and bruised him. His wife was also reported to have taken part in the fighting and she had got injured in the head.³⁰ In the record of fines, there are no explanations as to why these two Fordell brothers and their wives had started to fight each other. In 1574, Olof Henriksson Fordell was also reported to have forcibly taken down Henrik the vicar’s fishing tackle and vandalised his fishing areas. In court, it was stipulated that the fishing area under dispute belonged legally to

the clergyman. This trial may give some indication as to how fishing areas may have been free earlier on or had previously been part of the Fordells' manor in Salo.³¹

But troubles among the Fordells were far from over: Olof Henriksson Fordell and his son Jöran Olofsson had a fight in 1580. It was reported that Jöran pulled some of his father's hair out and the father had hit the son back, with the result that both got fines in court. One of the neighbours, or maybe a distant relative, had also hit Jöran Olofsson.³² While Hans Knutsson Fordell and his son were aggressively negotiating with clergymen, governors, and even the king (perhaps with the help of extortion and bribery), their cousins' violence manifested itself in physical form. But this borderline violence of wheeling and dealing with the authorities was in many ways more dangerous than actual violence, as Olof Olofsson eventually earned himself a death sentence in 1563. Somebody accused him of hiding money and furs that he had gathered in taxes, and he was only able to save his life by paying a very large fine of 120 marks.³³

If Hans Knutsson and his son did have to resort to actual violence, they used hired men. It is not always easy to tell if these men were actually carrying out their master's orders or going about their own business, but in 1571, one of Hans' men appeared in court because he had killed Per Andersson, a servant of the king. There was no explanation as to the reason, but it is reported that compensations were paid.³⁴ Hans Hansson Fordell himself is mentioned for the first time as having been in court in 1576. The tenant farmer Jören, from the parish of Skederid in Norrtälje, claimed how Fordell had forced him to travel by horse and cart much further than he had originally agreed to in the contract they had drawn up, so Jören had at this point refused, adding also that he was Anders Keith's tenant farmer. Fordell's response to this had been to say he did not care who his master was, and with that he hit Jören, who fell from the cart. Hans Fordell then took the reins himself and left the tenant farmer sitting on the ice by the side of the road. Other peasants who had born witness to the event backed up Jören's complaint.

To begin with, it seems Olof Henriksson Fordell and his brother Simon were trying to keep some semblance of dignity. After all, they used the same surname as their cousins Fordell. But it is impossible to find out precisely why they argued with their cousins or between themselves. We have only the record of fines, which details the most perfunctory description of what happened and the sentence meted out.

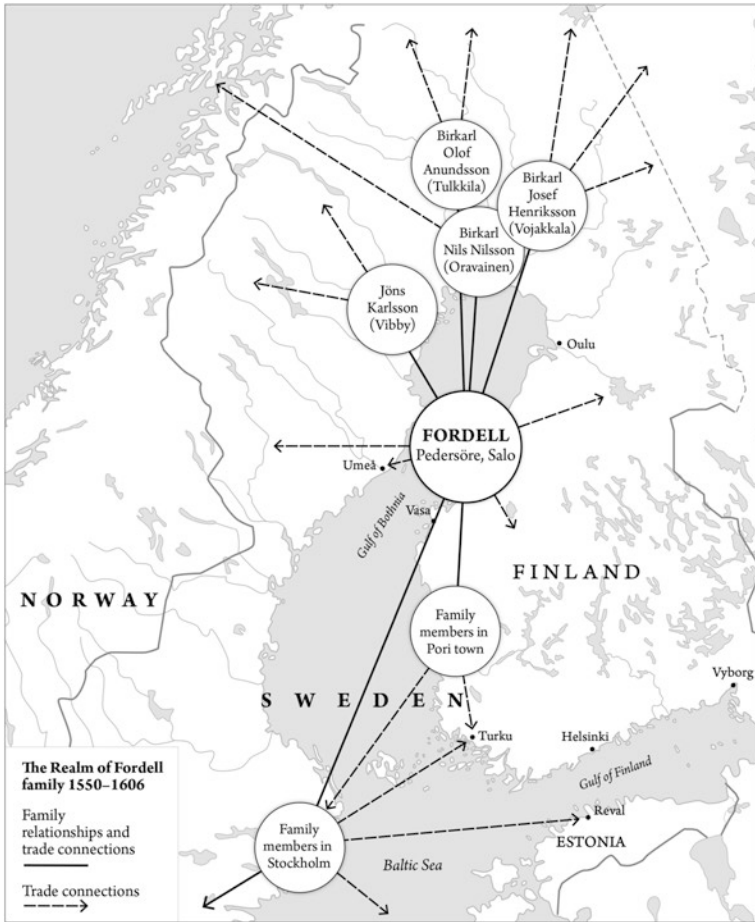
In fact, it is hard to say whether these poorer cousins even belonged to the family circle, even though they shared the same surname. In the sixteenth century, it was usually only those relatives or friends who were in the same social circle that used the more intimate form in letters, and this form was not used between the cousins. A similar state of affairs prevailed among the families of the peasant farmer elite in Satakunta during the seventeenth century.³⁵ The family branches of eldest sons were more likely to retain their leading positions and wealth than the younger sons, with the result that the latter would often resort to violence or argue the terms of inheritance in court. In Simon Henriksson Fordell's case, his family eventually lost their house soon after his father (Henrik Jönsson) died (Map 8.1).

ALLIES FROM THE WILD NORTHERN FRONTIER

One of the most important ways to get more allies, land, or property, was through mutually advantageous marriages. From the sources available, it is practically impossible to find any information about the wives and their backgrounds in earlier generations of the Fordells. Very often not even their names are mentioned, which makes it hard to find out how large their family network really was in the late sixteenth century.

Marriages between the wealthiest merchant families were an important factor in trade among others. Hans Knutsson Fordell's first wife in the mid-sixteenth century was Lucia Eriksdotter, daughter of a wealthy peasant freeholder and birkarl from Luleå in Westrobothnia. Lucia's uncle, Karl Persson also married Hans Knutson Fordell's sister Brita Knutsdotter.³⁶ This is an exceptional case, as usually with families other than nobility, it is difficult enough to get details about the names of the women involved, let alone their family relations.

Karl Persson and Brita Fordell had a son called Jöns Karlsson, who was later a bailiff in Lapland, as well as a trader and the local constable in Nynäs, Stråkanäs, and Kalix. He also became the wealthiest man in Neder-Kalix by the end of the sixteenth century. He and his two cousins were, in 1571, among the five richest men in Luleå, and they also played an important political role too. Jöns Karlsson also belonged to the delegation which settled the border and negotiated the peace with Russia in 1595 and was made a representative of the Diet of Sweden (*Riksdag*) like his cousin Hans Hansson Fordell.³⁷



Map 8.1 The realm of the Fordell family. Drawing by Kauko Kyöstiö

Probably, all of Hans Knutsson Fordell’s six children were a result of his first marriage with Lucia Eriksdotter. In 1562, however, Lucia died and so he decided to ally the Fordells to yet another wealthy northern birkarl family called “Tulkki”. He did this by marrying Anna Olofsdotter, who was the daughter of the somewhat notorious bailiff of Lapland, Olof Anundsson of Torneå. The birkarl families had three different trade areas in the north: Pite, Luleå, and Torneå (which also included Varanger and

Kemi).³⁸ In his lifetime, Hans Knutsson Fordell thus managed to ally his family with two other powerful birkarl families.

Birkarl and merchant families lived alongside the Sámi in the sixteenth century, which was an era of colonisation, a tightening of the Crown's economic networks, and the Lutheran Reformation. The Sámi had already experienced Catholic and Orthodox missionaries since the Early Middle Ages; and while some of them had converted to Christianity, many still practised a shamanistic form of religion or held more than one religion.³⁹

People in Kemi started to complain about how the birkarls there had been using violence to try and drive them from their homelands, so the king sent the bailiffs a stiff letter of reprimand in 1551.⁴⁰ These complaints carried on for some time, and the Swedish kings would vainly try to keep the balance. But perhaps also the gift that Olof Anundsson made to the king in 1553 of ten fine pine marten pelts had more of an effect on the king than ten letters of complaint and appears to have softened the nature of the king's reprimands.⁴¹

The Sámi had their own customs, even though they were now officially Christian, and in fact so did other inhabitants in the northern provinces of the realm. There was still a strong belief in sorcery and witchcraft in the seventeenth century, and it was usually those people who lived on the geographical and cultural periphery who were accused of this.⁴² Such accusations were often used as a kind of weapon by both the Crown and Church to hold sway over their more unruly subjects in the north.

The most intensive period of witchcraft persecution in (especially Northern) Europe is thought to have been from 1580–1630.⁴³ Ethnic background (even being a birkarl) would not protect anybody from accusations of witchcraft. When Lars Raumannus, from Southern Finland was appointed vicar of Ii parish in 1563, he immediately began a campaign to stamp out sorcery. Within a year, he was standing in court accusing the peasant freeholder, Olof Ruikka, and his wife of witchcraft, and both were summarily executed. Olof Ruikka was not a birkarl, but he was a wealthy merchant with substantial property and he had openly defied the Church and previous clergy in the parish.⁴⁴

Another tussle between the clergy and merchants occurred in Kalajoki parish, when Gregorius Henrici Palsa (Balls) was appointed vicar of Kalajoki in 1558. He was born close to Turku in the south, and so was a newcomer to this northern parish. According to local legend, when the new vicar travelled around his parish, he needed four hired men, four dogs, and some handcuffs with him because he was so scared of his parishioners. The

basis for this story seems to hold true, as in 1577, a man was sentenced to pay a fine for assaulting one of the clergyman's "hired men".⁴⁵

Gregorius Henrici's most influential adversary was the merchant and peasant freeholder Mårten Rautia, who in 1572 was condemned to death, because he had behaved in an "unchristian" manner towards the vicar and stopped other peasants from going to church. In the same trial, a former church servant also got fines, because he had shown violent behaviour towards the vicar.⁴⁶

The court absolved Mårten Rautia for all his crimes, but he was not deterred by his appearance in court and went on troubling the vicar. So in 1574, Gregorius Henrici made heavier accusations against Mårten in court—this time it was witchcraft. But again, the court absolved the defiant merchant and peasant freeholder. Mårten Rautia's life was spared in each case. Nonetheless, he was sentenced to pay a fine when he used violence against other peasants (also that same year in 1574).⁴⁷ This case illustrates quite well the balance that the Crown was trying to keep between the Church and traders towards the end of the sixteenth century. It wanted to bring the north more to heel by using the Church's authority, but at the same time it wanted to make best use of peasant freeholder merchants who were doing important work for them by organising economic matters, especially with regard to the fur trade.

Hans Knutsson Fordell's most formidable opponent was Governor Hans Larsson Björnram, who made it his business to replace both Hans Fordell and his ruthless father-in-law Olof Anundsson, the Bailiff of Lapland. Björnram was a noble, but at the same time he had a merchant and birkarl family background like Anundsson and Fordell.

The social mobility of the northern birkarl families in Westrobothnia has a number of interesting characteristics. One of these seems to have been to marry into an advantageous position. For instance, in 1526, King Gustav I gave the taxation rights for *Ume Lappmark* (the Ume river valley and its surrounding areas) to Anders Persson from Grubbe, who belonged to an old birkarl family. As the sixteenth century wore on, the family's oldest branches soon became assimilated with the clergy, burgesses, and even the nobility. Anders Persson's daughter, Anna, for instance was married off to Lasse Olofsson, the Bailiff of Westrobothnia in the 1550s. His background is unknown, but he had been one of the key figures who helped Gustav Vasa accede to the throne.⁴⁸

Descendants of Anders Persson, who later adopted the last name "Grubbe", lived and acted mostly in Westrobothnia, Luleå, and Pite,

where relationships between crown bailiffs and birkarl families were not so strained as they were becoming in the Torneå and Kemi areas, and social mobility was strong. Birkarl families, like the Grubbe family, had become assimilated with servants of the Crown and the clergy, while other branches of the family were members of the peasant freeholder elite, and held lower administrative positions, like local constable.

Anna Andersdotter's and Lasse Olofsson's eldest son, Hans Larsson, was eventually made a noble and took the last name Björnram. Their second son Anders ended up an archbishop; while Mårten, their third, became the deputy chief justice and bailiff of Hälsingland. Their eldest daughter Anna Larsdotter married Anders Sigfridsson Rålbamb, who was a colonel and chief justice of North Bothnia; their second daughter Sara married the king's secretary Per Eriksson Korp; and their third daughter Margareta Larsdotter married the vicar Jacobus Mathiae. All their children had thus married with servants of the Crown or Church, and not burghesses or old birkarl families.

Hans Larsson Björnram and his brother the Archbishop Andres Laurentii had now crossed over into a different social group from their peasant freeholder forbears. They represented not only the institutions of Crown and Church, but also the Reformation. Blood connections were still important, but they lost a great deal of their significance when a person became assimilated with the older nobility. Hans Larsson Björnram's first wife Anna Ållongren belonged to an old Finnish noble family as did his second wife Ingeborg Boije.

As a nobleman and governor, Hans Larsson Björnram thus began to fight against strong northern bailiffs such as Hans Knutsson Fordell and his father-in-law Olof Anundsson. In 1562, he wrote a letter in which he accused Fordell and Olof Anundsson of "gathering into the same sack", by which he meant they were in cahoots over some corrupt activity; and it seems that the object of this letter was, above all, to revoke Fordell's unusual trade privileges.⁴⁹

Governor Hans Larsson Björnram then went on to complain in his letter that Olof Anundsson and his sons behaved violently against people in the north, although he did not specify what these violent actions had been. Nevertheless, as we know from above, the Sámi had been repeatedly accusing Olof of being both violent and dishonest. King Eric XIV's response was to discharge Olof of his responsibilities as bailiff, but a year later in 1562 he was reappointed bailiff, but this time in Kemi. The feud between Björnram and Olof Anundsson thus continued unabated.

Björnram took up much stronger accusations, claiming that both the bailiff and his family indulged in incest and indecency. This was a heavy accusation, as after the Reformation, the punishment for sexual crimes had hardened significantly.⁵⁰

Björnram described in his missives to the king how most Sámi had moved away from Kemi to Norwegian and Russian areas, because Olof Anundsson and his sons had behaved too viciously towards them, and he added that the peasants and vicar (Eskil) of Kemi would stand by his letter of complaint.⁵¹ Apparently, Olof had also hit Knut Ingesson, the Bailiff of Torneå and Kalix. Finally, Björnram noted that all the peasant freeholders of Kiiminki also complained about Olof Anundsson. Whatever the whole truth was, after this onslaught, Olof lost his post as Bailiff of Kemi to Peder Svenske from Pedersöre, Ostrobothnia.

In 1566, Fordell wrote his own version of events to the king, in which he first explained the frequency of “robbery and adultery” in Ostrobothnia, to explain why it was sometimes necessary to use stronger punishments and sometimes even violence to do the job. He also called for official investigations into the new Bailiff of Kemi, Peder Svenske that had replaced his father-in-law.⁵² Hans Knutsson was hoping to show that this bailiff too was using violence sometimes in his everyday work, and thus legitimise it.

Fordell and his father-in-law, like other members of the peasant freeholder elite, used their hired hands to manage many varied and difficult assignments, like gathering taxes or guarding the king’s granaries, and just as for the nobility in the south of the realm, this was usually done with the help of violence. Fordell’s argument was that the northern peasant elite were trying to safeguard their interests with “legitimate violence” in the same way as the noble elite were trying to protect theirs. Rough justice or vigilantism was normal practice in some cases during the sixteenth century, but arbitrary violence was certainly not.⁵³

However, there was one heavy accusation that Hans Fordell could not help his father-in-law with. Incest was too much for either king or the law courts, which both took a strong attitude to sexual crimes. In his earlier letter to the king, Hans Björnram had described how Olof Anundsson had not only slept with his close kinswomen, but also how his son had had an illegal affair with his sister-in-law. He had also protested that nobody could do anything, not even the vicar Anders Nicolai, because everybody was too scared of the man. It’s hard to know how based in reality these

accusations actually were, but it was clear that Björnrams main motivation was to remove Olof Anundsson from office.

Polygamy or casual sex affairs seem to have been common to all social classes, and adulterous affairs and illegitimate children were nothing out of the ordinary. In northern parts of the realm birkarl and merchant men stayed a long time away on their annual travelling trips across Lapland. They had legal wives who took care of the household, children, farming, and possessions, while the husband was away gathering taxes and managing his fur trading business. It's difficult to say whether sexual affairs were also part of the violent behaviour and one way used to control people in north, but some of these men were certainly having sexual relationships with women in Lapland.

The attitude against incest and adultery had to tighten after the Reformation. According to law, a sexual relationship implied a blood relationship between man and woman, because the "liquids of their bodies" had been mixing. The idea that a sexual relationship was a blood relationship had been handed down from the Middle Ages.⁵⁴ If man and his brother slept with the same woman, it was therefore quite clearly incest. Polygamy, incest, and sexual offences irritated both the Church and higher civil servants. The theological aspect of this at the end of the sixteenth century was that sinful behaviour could bring down the wrath of God on the whole realm.

In the sixteenth century, there were indisputably sexual relationships going on between birkarl men and Sámi or "Lapp women" (*Lappekonor*). Olof Anundsson was condemned in court for having illicit relationships with women in Lapland, and he was not the only one. Other birkarls, like the Oravainen family, also got fined in court for adultery, extra-marital affairs, and illegitimate children.⁵⁵

"Lappekonor" and "extra-marital" were probably referring to Sámi women, but the ethnic background of the women involved is understandably difficult to prove. Just how equal these relationships were, too, is difficult to say without sources. Quite probably, these kinds of affairs were more like sexual abuse than any kind of equal relationship, though some too were no doubt based on love and old Sámi marriage traditions. Indeed, as we have seen, most legal Christian marriages between wealthy birkarl families were often marriages of convenience rather than love. But we should bear in mind that the Sámi had their own customs. In their eyes, a marriage between birkarl man and Sámi woman may have been quite legitimate, even if in the eyes of Lutheranism it was a sinful sexual

offence.⁵⁶ It cannot be ruled out either that northern birkarl families may well have also had their own traditional customs when it came to marriage, which may have been quite similar to the Sámi way.

There is evidence enough in the record of fines for the sixteenth century that the Lutheran Church at this time had a very narrow view of sexuality. Physical love was only allowed between a man and woman who had been married before God.⁵⁷ Olof Anundsson was in court in 1546, 1549, and 1553 for his adulterous affairs with Lappekonor.⁵⁸ It seems that he had a legal wife and an extra-marital relationship or even a Sámi wife in Lapland. He was also fined for not going to church. Meanwhile his son Nils was accused of incest, as mentioned briefly above. The actual charge was for having an illicit affair with a woman who was said to be his half-brother's *lappekona* (or Sámi wife) in 1559.⁵⁹ When Björnram wrote "kinwomen" in his letter of complaint, it could have been referring to those people (women in this case) in a large household born out of official wedlock.

Perhaps, the most interesting point about accusations of incest was that the process could destroy the status of these powerful northern merchant families much more completely than their violent behaviour. Olof Anundsson lost his position twice, but another birkarl man and local constable—Olof Andersson from Tåme in Skellefteå—was not so lucky. He was a distant relative to Hans Larsson Björnram, which shows just how spread out the family network was among birkarl families in Northern Sweden. Andersson was a merchant, a local constable, and one of the richest peasant freeholders in Skellefteå, and his nickname was the "Grand Duke of Tåme" (*Tåmefursten*).⁶⁰

All the same, in 1607, it only took one young servant maid, Karin Esbjörnsdotter, to not only destroy this powerful merchant's status and that of almost his whole family, but it also cost him his life. Karin Esbjörnsdotter first served in the house of Fällfors, where she slept with Olof Andersson's son Hans Olofsson, and then his brother Jacob. Before that, both sons had been convicted in court of having illicit relations with a Sara Larsdotter. This was construed as incest because Jacob Olofsson slept with Sara after she had first slept with his brother Hans. And the same applied with Karin; both brothers had a sexual relationship with her, and then to confound matters further and to drive home the incestuous nature of these events, Karin Esbjörnsdotter also slept with their father, Olof Andersson.

To further complicate matters for the Church, Karin had a sexual relationship with a peasant freeholder called Jon Ollsson from Byske, who

had also slept with her sister Lisbet. At this point, Karin admitted in court, “the evil of it dawned on me” and she went to church and confessed all her sins to the vicar.⁶¹ It’s difficult to say whether her action was an intentional form of revenge or really due to some inner religious contrition. Did she know, for instance, that if she was guilty of incest, then all those who had been involved with her would also be condemned to death.⁶² Only Hans Olofsson got off with his life, because he was the first man to have slept with Karin. There may also have been a background of resentment in the community towards Olof Andersson and his sons, and these people may have quietly supported the vicar and the crown servants ranged against this birkarl family. This case study shows how weak a man’s reputation could be, and perhaps the easiest way to lose it.

MISTRESSES OF THE MANOR AT PINNONÄS

The history of the frontier and the “Wild West” seems to more about the legends and views of white Anglo-American males.⁶³ In the same way, the story of the Scandinavian “North” can be seen as the views of Nordic white males. The Crown and Church made it their business to control and “civilise” these outer reaches of the realm. Violence and adultery were both as serious an issue for sixteenth-century Scandinavians as they were on the American frontier at the end of the nineteenth century.

In all the sixteenth-century sources, the actors described are mostly male. But what was the role of women in “taming” this northern frontier? This is a subject that has provoked plenty of discussion, especially among studies which have applied Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis. Were women merely passive sufferers at the mercy of strong frontiersmen, whose role was simply to marry and bear children (preferably boys)? And was the only option for active agency really to destroy the reputation of a powerful merchant and birkarl family via sex, revenge, and a kind of drawn out suicide like the ill-fated Karin Esbjörnsdotter?

Jackson Turner used masculine images and terms to describe the settlement of the frontier. On both the nineteenth-century American and sixteenth-century Swedish frontiers, this tendency can also be seen in the historiography and in the way source materials have been presented and in some cases picturised. Both colonisation and trade have been seen mostly from a male perspective. Clergy, crown servants and merchants were all men, as were the peasant freeholders in the north. Only a very few women can even be found in sixteenth-century sources, and if so, they are mostly

noblewomen or royalty; or, failing that, those who are accused of sexual offences or illicit affairs. The same situation has continued for decade after decade, and as Yvonne Johnson said, referring to the “picturized American West” of the late-nineteenth century, women undoubtedly had an impact on their communities, as all of them were community leaders.⁶⁴ The same could be said to apply in Ostrobothnia, Westrobothnia, and North Bothnia.

In official documents of the sixteenth century, and in much later times too, women have usually stayed in the background. The man was seen as the head of the sixteenth-century household, and women were seen to need a male guardian, in the form of husband, father, or brother. The master of the house paid taxes and represented the whole family; and so there was no need to write down all the household members. Wives, daughters, and any other women were thus practically invisible, because the sources only talk about landowning men. The names of ordinary women of the sixteenth century can practically only be found in the records of fines. As a consequence, the lives of women from this time often seem to have been short, hard, and brutal, but of course most women may well never have appeared in court. Through careful and thorough readings of the text, however, it is possible to find some hints in the sources about those women who owned land and were active agents like their husbands, even using violence if necessary to defend their husband’s efforts. One example of this is the barely mentioned wife of Olof Fordell who took part in the fight against her brother-in-law.

We know the names of Hans Knutsson Fordell’s two wives, but Hans Hansson Fordell’s wife is not named. This does not mean that she stayed in the background, however. In fact, in her time she seems to have played a much more visible role than her mother-in-law Lucia Eriksdotter. If we analyse her position from the ideological perspective, she was under her husband’s control. This was the situation in official documents, which were written from the patriarchal perspective of landowning men representing their households, without the need to write their respective wives’ names. It was just easier to write “Hans Fordells wife”, and the reader would immediately know who she was and what her social status and position was.

When Anna Olofsdotter married Hans Knutsson Fordell, she must have been much younger than her widower husband. They were already married in 1562, when Anna’s father was forced out of his office of bailiff. Young Anna consequently became a second wife to a much older hus-

band, and stepmother for six adult children who were probably almost the same age as herself. It might be easy to assume that Anna did not have any important significance in the Fordell family or at the Pinnonäs manor in Pedersöre. After all Finnish research, like that of Eric Anthoni or Yrjö Blomstedt, has concentrated only on the wealthiest male actors among the Fordells, and ignored the womenfolk of the family.

For example, it is interesting how late it is (1576) in the sources before Hans Hansson Fordell appears, as he was not only Hans Knutsson Fordell's son but also a famous participant in the Club War.⁶⁵ At this point, he must have been an adult married man. He is mentioned a few times in Stockholm's council books, but not in Ostrobothnia. Hans Hansson Fordell appears in the sources once more in 1578, when he argued on behalf of his late father's salt barrel and saltpeter business in the city court of Stockholm. In the court, it turned out that young Hans had trade contacts in North Bothnia like his father before him. After Hans Knutsson's death, we can therefore assume that the son had taken responsibility of the family business.⁶⁶

It's impossible to know how the adult children reacted when their new young stepmother came to their home. Young Anna Olofsdotter became the mistress of the whole estate at Pinnonäs when her husband (and their father) Hans Knutsson died somewhere between 1575 and 1576. After his death, the king granted the whole manor to the freshly widowed Anna Olofsdotter for the remainder of her lifetime.⁶⁷ The problem was that part of the estate included some meadows that Hans Knutsson had bought in 1570.⁶⁸ But these had now been inherited by Anna and in effect he had to wait until 1595 before he could inherit them.

Indeed, it was not until 1595, that Hans Hansson Fordell at last got his family manor to himself. It was only then that he began to get important offices and began his career of famous peasant leader, who started the fight against Klaus Fleming. So why was he invisible before that and what had he been doing? He may have been simply taking care of family business in Stockholm, or perhaps it was because of his stepmother who owned and lived at Pinnonäs Manor in Pedersöre.

It's impossible to say whether it was the stepmother or Hans Hansson Fordell who really ran the household before 1595. But one telltale sign can be found from the year 1584, when a neighbour was accused in court for taking chaff from Pinnonäs without asking Anna's permission first.⁶⁹ This short mention from the record of fines notes briefly that Anna Olofsdotter lived in Pinnonäs and her name is written in the record of fines, not her

stepson's. On some levels, it must have been a complicated situation for Hans Hansson; he may have been taking care his father's manor, but he was not the official owner of Pinnonäs.

Hans Hansson Fordell's nameless wife from Pori was also a strong independent actor in the Ostrobothnian community, although her name cannot be found in any documents. She may also have lived in Pinnonäs, because she apparently took care of family trade. In the year 1576, "Hans Fordells wife" sailed to Stockholm, where her cargo of tar was delivered for usage by the Crown.⁷⁰ This was the same year that Hans Hansson was first mentioned in the sources.

Later, Fordell's wife was also fighting alongside her husband against Klaus Fleming and his supporters in Ostrobothnia, while Hans Hansson Fordell was still on the Swedish side of the realm. She also worked with her husband in the Club War uprising between the years 1596 and 1597 to such an extent that there was a letter from Klaus Fleming to a servant, in which he declared "Fordell's wife is a much worse agitator than her husband Hans Fordell, and you should catch her immediately and send her back to Pori where her family lives".⁷¹ Klaus Fleming was thus quite worried and perhaps even frightened of this woman and her ability to agitate in Ostrobothnia. Both these cases tell us quite a lot about the social standing of this nameless wife and about the strong influence she had though she does not seem to be mentioned as one of the leaders in the uprising.

Karin Esbjörnsdotter in Tåme, Anna Olofsdotter in Pinnonäs, and the unknown "wife of Hans Hansson Fordell" from Pori were thus important actors who often used even very violent means to achieve their aims. Karin Esbjörnsdotter, who although she sacrificed her life and seemed penitent, brought a lot of people down with her, and might have been seeking revenge. Although, Anna Olofsdotter may have been a childless second wife, who gave all her power to her stepson, she still had all the rights to Pinnonäs manor, which the king made clear every year. And finally it seems Hans Hansson Fordell's unnamed wife had an important part to play in the Club War. However, in all three cases, the patriarchal perspective placed the women in the background.

The Fordell family's influence had been great in the sixteenth century, but their family saga would end soon after the Club War. Hans Hansson Fordell had no issue and the other family members could not save their leading positions in the seventeenth century, after Charles IX acceded to the throne. Some of them still kept their important local offices and were

vicars or wealthy peasant freeholders, but the time of large, powerful family networks or clans was now over. All the great northern birkarl families had become quite scattered and assimilated in widely differing social positions.

After the Club War, some people held the Fordells as being responsible for the whole peasant uprising. Although they may not have used direct violence to incite the rebellion, they had certainly agitated and caused trouble, and for some that was enough to hold them guilty. We should note, too, how these people talk not only of Hans Hansson Fordell, but also of the “Fordells” in plural. It implies that not only his wife was involved, but also perhaps the whole family, for instance, in this letter from royal secretary Olof Sverkersson to Duke Charles after the Club War.

“Everything has turned worse, much worse. God forgive the Fordells. They were guilty that so much innocent blood flowed here”.⁷²

CONCLUSION

The Fordell’s power in Ostrobothnia came to an end in the early seventeenth century. Their reign had really begun a century before this, and so for three generations this power had brought wealth and influence, particularly to the family branches of the eldest sons. Across the north, the lack of nobility facilitated the rise of merchant and birkarl families, as did being cut off from the administration to the south by large swathes of forest.

Wealthy peasant families like the Fordells had important local offices, but they commanded most of the trade across Ostrobothnia, North Bothnia, and Westrobothnia. This was important to the Crown and the whole realm’s economy, and so the Crown needed the Fordells as much as they needed the Crown’s support. King Eric XIV, John III, and even Duke Charles often borrowed money from the Fordells and other rich merchants, and this sometimes upset the balance between these wealthy merchants and the royal court. People in north would also send complaints about the violent and high-handed manners of the Fordells and their birkarl allies too.

The Fordells needed the support of others in the community, and it was clearly important to create a large network of ruling families through, for instance, marriage between the clans. All this, helped them to weather the storm of accusations and even to direct violence back against their enemies. We have evidence of wealthy Fordell men fighting for their rights

with the pen through letters that used compliments, insults, and accusations to get what they wanted. In the family branches of younger sons, this violence would however spill over, and the pen would be dropped by the younger cousins for more direct expressions of violence, either against each other or their wealthier cousins' property.

Before the sixteenth century, the Fordells married into families mainly from the western (Swedish) side of the realm—daughters married burghesses in Stockholm, for instance, and sons from wealthy merchant families in Westrobothnia. During the sixteenth century though, Hans Knutsson Fordell chose both his spouses from old northern birkarl families locally. His brothers may have done the same, but there are no sources to confirm this. Still, Hans Knutsson's uncle, Markus Fordell had strong links to the Oravainen family in Torneå and his aunt Brita's husband, Olof Tyrgilsson may also have had some contact with the birkarl families.

The birkarls did not have such a high social standing, but they wielded enormous power in the northern fur trade, so this could have been an attempt by Hans Knutsson to bolster the Fordells' position in it. Nevertheless, the Fordells began to lose their standing. One reason is that neither Hans Knutsson nor Hans Hansson Fordell was made nobles by the king, and the other was because the latter had no children.

Through aggressive behaviour, letters of complaints and well-planned marriages, northern merchant and birkarl families gathered a large network of loyal peasant freeholders, clergy, and servants about them who all supported their dominant position in the 1500s but by the end of the century, Hans Knutsson Fordell and later his son, Hans Hansson, had many struggles against the governor, vicars, local bailiffs, and other civil servants that increasingly started to fill what had formerly been the power vacuum filled by the birkarl and merchant families of the north. They started to run into more difficulties walking the line between bribery, which had been a necessity of northern trading up to this point, and extortion, which was now less acceptable as the state began to monopolise the use of violence. But the thing that really brought the families down were the accusations of incest and witchcraft. Hans Knutsson Fordell could not, for instance, intervene to stop his father-in-law from losing his office of bailiff once he was accused of incest. With the support of the nascent Lutheran Church, Governor Hans Björnram ensured that the Fordells and other strong birkarl families began to lose their positions by propagating such accusations which focused on witchcraft and incest, and the central government was able to tighten its grip on the realm's northern frontier.

NOTES

1. See for example Katajala, Kimmo (2003), Miksi nuijasota syttyi Pohjanmaalla? *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 3:2003, 12–17.
2. For more about the situation in 16th-century Finland and the Club War, see Kimmo Katajala's chapter (Chap. 3) in this volume as well as Katajala, Kimmo (2002), *Suomalainen kapina. Talonpoikaislevottomuudet ja poliittinen kulttuuri Suomessa Ruotsinajalla n.1050–1800* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), pp. 180–181. Ylikangas, Heikki (1997), *Nuijasota* (Keuruu: Otava); Lappalainen, Mirkka (2009), *Susimessu. 1590-luvun sisällissota Ruotsissa ja Suomessa* (Juva: Siltala).
3. About this case and the Fordells' situation in Finnish history writing, see Miettinen, Tiina (2012): Fordeliorum Familia. Släkten Fordells genealogi och forskningshistoria i Finland och Sverige. *Släktforskarnas Årsbok 2012* (Falköping: Sveriges släktforskarförbund), pp. 165–196.
4. Hansen, Lars Ivar & Olsen, Bjørnar (2013), *Northern World: Hunters in Transition*, Volume 63: An Outline of Early Sámi History (Leiden & Boston: Brill) p. 229.
5. Jackson Turner, Frederick (1893, 2014) *The Frontier in American History* (USA: Yale University Press), pp. 6–37.
6. Johnson, Yvonne (2010), *Feminist Frontiers: Women who Shaped the Midwest*. (USA: Truman State University Press) p. xi.
7. Lee Klein, Kerwin (1999) *Frontiers of Historical Imagination. Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990*. (USA: University of California Press), p. 13.
8. Vahtola, Jouko (1980), *Tornionjoki- ja Kemijokilaakson asutuksen synty. Nimistötieteellinen ja historiallinen tutkimus* (Kuusamo: Studia historica septentrionalia), pp. 510–511.
9. Germanic word *kven* was first borrowed into Finnish in its proto-Germanic form as *kainu*, meaning 'lowland field'. The same root is Norwegian, Swedish and Danish form *hvein* or *hvene*, which means 'low lying', marshy area with thin grass. See Hansen (2013), p. 152.
10. Hansen, Lars Ivar (2013), p. 154.
11. Hansen, Lars Ivar (2013), p. 232.
12. Kansallisarkisto (KA, National Archives of Finland), Archive of Armfelt family III: 14–15: Johannes Bureus släktbok över Bureätten.

13. Vogt, Helle (2010), *The Function of Kinship in Medieval Nordic Legislation*, (Leiden & Boston: Brill), pp. 11–12.
14. Koskinen, Ulla (2011), *Hyvien miesten valtakunta. Arvid Henrikinpoika Tawast ja aatelin toimintakulttuuri 1500-luvun lopun Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) pp. 130–136.
15. Enbuske, Matti (2008), *Vanhan Lapin valtamaille. Asutus ja maankäyttö Kemin Lapin ja Enontekiön alueella 1500-luvulta 1900-luvun alkuun* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), p. 252.
16. More about trade, see Hansen, Lars Ivar (1987) *Trade in Northern Fenno-Scandia. Nordkalotten I en skiftande värld—kulturer utan gränser och stater över gränser*. Ed. Kyösti Julku (Jyväskylä: Gummerus Oy), pp. 216–243.
17. Steckzen, Birger (1964) *Birkarlar och Lappar. En studie I, Birkarleväsendets, Lappbefolkningens och skinnhandels historia* (Stockholm: Carl Bloms boktrycker AB), p. 403.
18. Virkkunen, A.H (1919), *Oulun kaupungin historia I. Kaupungin alkuajoilta isonvihan loppuun* (Oulu: Oulun kaupunki), p. 27.
19. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine register 4777: 94v.
20. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine register 4719: 5.
21. Hansen, Lars Ivar (2013), pp. 242–243, 248–249. Fur, Gunlög Maria (2006) *Colonialism in the margins: cultural encounters in New Sweden and Lapland* (Leiden & Boston: Brill), pp. 52–56.
22. Mäntylä, Ilkka & Luukko, Armas (2000), *Jacobus Sigfridi Geet. Kansallisbiografia* (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura) <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/344/>, date accessed 16 February 2016.
23. KA. Ostrobothnia fine registers 1570–1590.
24. Hansen, Lars Ivar (2013), p. 230, pp. 238–239.
25. Snell, Per-Olof (2013) *Brottstycken från Torne och Kemi Lappmarker. Birkarlar, fogdar, Lappar, handel, gränsvister*. <http://web.comhem.se/historiaocharkeologi/samer/litteratur/>, p. 10. Date accessed 25 April 2016.
26. Anthoni, Eric (1963) *Släkten Fordell och dess släktförbindelser från slutet av medeltiden till omk. 1600. Historisk Tidskrift för Finland*, volym 48, 109–110.
27. Anthoni, Eric (1963), pp. 105–106.
28. Anthoni, Eric (1963), p. 110.

29. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine records 4719: 3v.
30. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine records 4727: 62.
31. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine records 4739: 99v.
32. KA Fogderäkenskaper, fine records 4761: 87v, 93.
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Conclusion: Resisting, Cooperating, and Fighting

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The three-fold division of this book—how these peasant elites and the peasantry in general confronted the authorities, how they dealt with them, and how they acted within their own local communities and networks—has aimed to place their aggressive and violent behaviour in the framework of Nordic state formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The focus has thus been on their relationship with the state and its representatives. This structure contained *per se* a conflict of interests between states that wanted to intervene and control local communities and the leading peasants in these communities who wanted to guard their favourable positions. At the same time, there were possibilities for cooperation and mutually benefiting from the arrangements.

Indeed, peasant elites could benefit from being integrated into the state government at local level, and simultaneously representing the local community. In this manner, the peasant elites gained enlarged prestige, status and power and took part in the statebuilding. On the other hand, the state both chose to discipline, exert power and punish, and interact, initiate dialogue, compromise and even reward the peasantry. Depending on the circumstances, this policy of Janus faces from above made the peasants either cooperating, being supportive and loyal or resisting, rebelling and complaining. This allows us to utilise both the perspective of *maktstaten* (the power state) and the perspective of interaction in our analyses.

It has been shown that aggressiveness and violence was a central part of the early modern peasant elites' way of socially interacting. In the Nordic context, it had an established basis in the peasants' medieval tradition of defending their own territory by force of arms. For the emerging princely states, controlling this readiness for aggression became a major concern, as they strived to monopolise the use of violence. As stated in the introduction of this book, it depended on the context whether the elite's aggression would remain private, be harnessed in the state's service, or alternatively turned against it.

In the time period 1500–1700, the overall trend was that the rulers successfully asserted control over their more belligerent subjects. Two major developments to this effect took place: (i) the states backed a Lutheran ideology stressing more than ever obedience and subordination towards the king and the regime and punished local violence more strictly than had previously been the case; and (ii) the states were swifter in stamping out rebellious outbursts, so they became more sporadic. In 1520s and 1530s, both the Swedish and the Danish king began to refer to the more con-

demning 'rebellion', replacing the older, less serious and challenging term 'uprising'. The introduction of a more harsh and severe punishment of crimes, for instance death penalty for homicide, contributed substantially to the pacification of the peasantry.

On the other hand, guiding the peasant elites' aggression so that it would serve the purposes of the state proved much more problematic. In the sixteenth century, leading peasants often held significant local posts so they might act, for instance, as constables or tax collectors in their region, which were positions or tasks that often required aggressive means. By the seventeenth century, however, the state increasingly took control over these kinds of posts, in the drive for a more centralised state that would reduce local autonomy. Educated outsiders were brought in and appointed as the new office-holders, often replacing members of the peasant elite, even though they might have had established networks and been quite competent.

In Sweden and Finland, military service remained the most obvious path for peasants to channel their aggressiveness in the service of the state and for the elite this usually took the form of cavalry service, as it not only granted economic tax advantages but also increased their social status. It is noteworthy that the peasant elites in the Swedish realm in the sixteenth century appeared to have been more integrated into the state government than was the case in Norway. Many peasants there were reluctant to become representatives for the state in fear of role-conflict and unpopularity in relation to their fellow village men. Finally, the peasant elites in Norway did not possess influence and special functions in the military system at local level, in contrast to the situation in Sweden and Finland.

The Nordic Seven Years' war (1563–1570) was the first large international conflict in early modern Sweden, and it is not surprising that the military contributions required caused local disturbances. The mobilisation of troops in the 1560s consisted of a confusing mix of recruited infantrymen, conscripted peasants and farmhands, as well as a considerable number of temporarily drafted peasant militias. During this war, there seems to have been a considerable element of violent coercion in recruiting the new troops. Much of it certainly emanated from the state, but it was mediated by the peasant elite, who strove to shift the burdens of war onto other groups than themselves. The conscripted footsoldiers were trained to fight alongside professional mercenaries, and yet the Crown

opted to bargain with this elite rather than directly with the soldiers. These aggressive elites thus became *ad hoc* representatives of the state, and they grasped the opportunity to benefit from war, at the cost of their less fortunate neighbours.

Previous research has mostly found the great wars of the early modern period to have worked against political integration rather than for it. However, we have seen examples in this book which show that political integration was an important part of a political process which successively helped to empower certain members of the peasant elite, at the cost of increasing tensions between rival groups in the local community. In the following centuries, a major difference would develop between the groups who had become marginalised and the target for military conscription and those who had stayed at home and flourished.

Even though generally the aggression and violence of the peasant elite became more strictly controlled by the state, it did not altogether disappear. There were some elements of it that remained socially purposive even with the changes in taxation and the local administration. This we have seen in the behaviour of the elite in Lower Satakunta, on the Finnish side of the Swedish Realm. The wealthiest farming families found themselves in the borderlands between the gentry and peasantry, and this was reflected in their roles in the local administration. The crisis of the late-sixteenth century served in many ways to actually enhance their aggressive and competitive mentality, and the following social and economic turbulence continued to sustain it, in some cases right through the seventeenth century. A certain level of aggressivity was expected if one wanted to defend one's honour and property. At the same time, the tightened economic situation provided opportunities for the wealthier ones to benefit at the expense of others by loans, pawns, land purchase or taking over tax-wreck farms.

It was not rare that local constables, lay jurors, and even their wives resorted to violence in seventeenth-century Satakunta, and they dominated the public court arena with their various cases. Within certain bounds, it was a prerequisite for those who wanted to become or remain in a better economic and social position than their neighbours. Belonging to the elite was not institutionalised, so it did not rest on any permanent conditions. The elite was a volatile social and economic construction, and membership was forged by often aggressive personal agency.

At the same time, actual violence was commonly an indicator of social decline, a phenomenon that was often part of the elite's life. In general,

their position was to change during the course of the seventeenth century. The Crown started to grant large fiefs to nobility, which had their own administrative organisation. At the same time, the local administration was partly and gradually taken to stricter control by professional Crown's servants. By the end of the seventeenth century, these developments left less room for the active involvement of those who did not have what had become the obligatory formal education; and they meant a loss of status for many of the formerly powerful peasant families that had been among the local elite for generations. They found it hard to find a foothold in these new societal structures.

The same applies to the Fordell family, whose power in Ostrobothnia (*Österbotten/Pohjanmaa*) had come to an end in the early-seventeenth century. Their reign had started a hundred years earlier, and for three generations their power had brought local wealth and influence to the oldest family branches. In Ostrobothnia, there was no nobility, which left a power vacuum that could be filled by the local *birkarlar* and merchants. The same situation prevailed in Westrobothnia (*Västerbotten*) across the Gulf of Bothnia where the Fordells had good contacts. A heavily forested area lay between Ostrobothnia and Southern Finland, and on the Swedish side of the Gulf a similar situation prevailed: both northern provinces were similarly cut off from the central administration. This meant the strong peasant freeholder elite of the old *birkarl* families were largely left to their own devices, and as a consequence they formed the local administration.

The Fordells were one such family who not only held important local offices in the administration, but also controlled the trade around North Bothnia (*Norrbotnen*). This position meant that the Crown needed the Fordells and the Fordells needed the Crown. King Eric XIV, John III, and even Duke Charles often borrowed money from the Fordells and other rich merchants, which sometimes troubled the balance between the merchants and Court. People in the north eventually sent complaints about the violent and high-handed manners of the Fordells and their *birkarl* allies.

Hans Knutsson Fordell and his son Hans Hansson had, each in their turn, many struggles against the governor, vicars, local bailiffs and other civil servants. They sometimes had difficulties treading the thin line between bribery (which was an accepted part of trading in the north) and extortion. For instance, when Hans Knutsson Fordell's father-in-law was accused of incest, Hans was not able to intervene and stop him losing

his office of bailiff. Other strong *birkarl* families also began to lose their offices as they began to be increasingly accused of witchcraft and incest.

Support from others in the community was crucial, if the Fordells wanted to keep their power. They also tried to keep their network of ruling families as large as possible via marriage, for instance. This allowed them to survive accusations and even use violence to intimidate their enemies. Wealthy Fordell men often fought for their rights and against their enemies via letters, in which they would either insult, compliment or accuse; while in younger branches of the family, the poorer cousins would sometimes fight one another.

The older generations of the Fordells married mainly families from Westrobothnia across the Gulf, but there were also daughters who married burgesses in Stockholm. This situation changed a little during the sixteenth century, however, when Hans Knutsson Fordell chose a wife (twice) from the old northern *birkarl* families. These families were not so high in their social standing, but they wielded great power in the northern fur trade; so one possible reason for this no doubt political move might have been an attempt to secure the Fordells' important position in the fur trade. Nevertheless, the family's standing weakened as the sixteenth century progressed, probably because Hans Hansson Fordell eventually had no children. Another reason may have been that the king did not make either him or his father a noble.

Through a combination of aggressive behaviour, letters of complaint and well-planned marriages, northern merchant families such as the Fordells had large networks of loyal peasant freeholders, clergy and servants who supported their powerful local status. Gradually, however, the Church and Crown encroached on the northern frontier part of the realm, and through a process of ennobling some and marginalising others, were able to bring the *birkarlar* into line with the central administration in Stockholm.

Another context that was especially ripe for friction between state authorities and leading peasants was Norway after 1536. Norwegian historians have traditionally put little emphasis on political relations as the main cause of fundamental changes in early modern times, although in recent years interactionist interpretations of the relations between peasants and the government have become more popular. But one could also emphasise the fact that high politics after 1536 became a royal, Danish prerogative and the Norwegian aristocracy lost its mediating role between the king and peasantry.

This was also a loss for the higher strata of the peasant elites who had held offices which made them a nascent local gentry in the late-medieval system, especially within the large organisation of the Norwegian Church. Now Danish noblemen and their clients took over as governors and bailiffs; and the same clients went on to gain other offices with the advent of the 'power state', combining these official roles with commercial activities as merchants. The former elite were thus now relegated to subordinate roles in commerce.

Although the peasant elites in Norway had previously owned much land and were active in the fishing and timber industries, they now functioned as a kind of opposition; they organised protests and formulated petitions. The authorities could not afford to completely ignore them, especially when these actions were accompanied by widespread refusals to obey orders. They scored some significant successes in obstructing and reducing new taxes and other demands from the king and his governors and bailiffs. Most of the protests were non-violent, the peasant elites had lost their power to resist militarily, and they knew it, although they showed many symptoms of frustration and anger over losing their former status.

All Norwegians were Catholics when the king abolished their church and made the Lutheran Church under his rule obligatory for all citizens. But the peasants were not made to be martyrs, instead they reacted with sullen silence and some outbursts against the new Lutheran clergy. For a long time, they stopped giving to the local churches and went to church less often in protest at the reorganisation of the tithes which took money away that had gone to the poor.

The most widespread resistance against official demands was related to new taxes. It was defensive behaviour characterised by small victories and big losses. The victories occurred mostly in the sixteenth century, when the authorities tried to introduce tax hikes regionally; and the losses occurred mostly in the seventeenth century when taxes were increased on the national level via royal decree. Simultaneously, custom services became far more efficient, and an indirect method of increasing taxes on the primary producers, that is, the peasants. In both centuries, peasant leaders had some success in exposing corrupt officials, but this was not enough to alter a system which continued to combine tax collection with extortion and unfavourable trading practices.

The Danish King was unconcerned with the loss of military capability in Norway in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but he wanted the peasants to fight for him in the wars with Sweden. They did not see any

difference between the Danish and the Swedish kings, however, and succeeded in avoiding the army to begin with. This was the most widespread defensive resistance against the king in the period. But after the Kalmar War (1611–1613), the peasants were heavily fined for resisting the call to arms, and from the 1620s, the authorities started to conscript an army in Norway. When the governor-general tried to use this new army to fight, however, it was to mixed success: the Torstenson War (1643–1645) was generally unpopular in Norway and the Danes did not win it, but it marked the start of a new period when military obligations were effectively imposed on the peasant population, although the conscription of Norwegians to the Royal Danish Navy in Copenhagen had already been going on for some time. Ultimately, the peasants lost out and fully complied with their military obligations, and the peasant elites became completely powerless in military affairs, just as they were in higher politics. They had to limit their activities more than ever to local questions and try to defend their best interests against the excesses of the power state.

It has been shown here that the controlled use of violence never stopped being an integral part of Norwegian political culture in the period 1400–1700 though, even though open uprisings almost vanished after the loss of national sovereignty to Denmark in 1536. In other words, the common view among historians that the Norwegian tradition of peaceful politics goes right back to the High Middle Ages seems misplaced, as this would imply a low level of violence for the entire period. However, the resilience and resistance of the peasant elites became more sophisticated, as they adapted themselves to kings and governments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which began to exert more authority than ever over Norway. In the 1530s and 1540s, the state started to crack down on all *oprør* or revolts, which marked a turning point in relation to the earlier pragmatism. The feuding context of medieval peasant risings transformed after the 1540s into a gradually less challenging and aggressive approach, yet there was still violence, insults and harsh complaints against the king's officials. Both in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, state officials happened to be killed, and there were well-organised and comprehensive peasant riots. Indeed, organised peasant riots grew in importance in the eighteenth century.

We also find a strong continuity of political culture from the Late Middle Ages into the eighteenth century. The peasants all over Norway shared a common perspective or understanding of anchoring their claims

and complaints in legalism. Rhetorically, the protection of the good old law and traditional customs was used as a way of legitimising political goals during the entire period.

The means of resistance were the same; the way messages were delivered; the way people gathered on special sites; and the rhetoric and oral argumentation in confrontations with the state authorities. But in the seventeenth century, harsh and cruel violence practically disappeared from almost every community in Norway, and this had an effect on popular political culture. By the eighteenth century, no state official was killed in connection with confrontations with the people, and homicides in general had fallen to a much lower rate.

Similarly in the Swedish realm, a plethora of local disturbances and riots appeared during the first part of the seventeenth century. During this period, there were no great provincial risings of the kind that had occurred during the previous two centuries. It has been argued here that the large regional uprisings came to an end because the social base of the protesters had changed. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, the ringleaders had been wealthy freeholders who were military competent men with a long tradition of voicing protest. They had a strong sense of identity, a clear view of their rights and a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve.

Yet after 1595, the main strategy of the peasant elites was to petition the king and vote as the fourth estate on the Swedish Diet (*Riksdag*), though they still used the threat of rebellion as a political instrument. When that did not work they reverted to non-violent tax strikes. The poor, the crofters and the farmhands had no alternative way of politically communicating their demands than violent insurrection; but they lacked a strong identity and political vision when they did not have the peasant elite or clergy on their side. Their attempts at violent insurrection could thus be brutally crushed by agents of the Crown. What the government feared the most was an uprising supported by the peasant elites, as they had a history of fighting for their rights—they also had weapons and the competence to use them. The Crown thus went to great lengths not to upset them. When there was widespread discontent supported by local peasant elites, the Crown's tactics was to not use too much force. However, the sanctions were much harsher for the lower classes; their 'just desserts' were often to suffer a painful death and to have their heads put on a stake at the city gates.

Combined with the knowledge of military mobilisations, this demonstrates that state formation in Sweden was a process that operated on several levels, integrating local communities in the project of monarchs creating a military state. The militarisation of the Swedish state led to intensified interaction between peasant elites and the king's representatives. The demand for men and resources compelled rulers to bargain with them. The Swedish kings did not have the coercive power to simply force peasant communities to contribute to their European wars. Negotiating over tax strikes and local conscriptions played a crucial role when it came to the peasant elite securing some political influence, with the threat of rebellion never far away.

The kings therefore had to bargain with them to legitimise their war policy. These negotiations ultimately resulted in an organisation and power structure where the king had the political initiative, but he also had to secure the support of all four estates in the Diet. The bargaining then continued at the regional and local levels.

The peasant elites had to pay the price for the royal war policy by contributing taxes as well as soldiers. But they usually retained the power to negotiate over the demands of the state, and to shift some (or most) of the burden onto the urban poor. The peasant elite may have lost the fight for low taxes, but they kept the right to voice their opinion.

The territory of Finland met with several violent peasant protests during the late-medieval and early-modern periods. Six of them were described above: David's uprising in the 1430s, Lappee in the 1550s, the Club War (*nuijasota*) in the 1590s, Elimäki in the 1640s and 1680s and the open revolt in Kexholm Province in the 1690s. The main question was whether the rich had led the poor to revolt, so the backgrounds and wealth of the leaders involved were examined more closely. It became evident, that the wealth did certainly correlate with being selected as a leader of the peasant uprisings. However, a correlation between the two phenomena does not necessarily mean that the latter was a result of the previous. It seems there were other qualities which were more important and that could have been a precondition of the wealth as much as the result of it.

These qualities were, firstly, to have the necessary skills for dealing with the establishment and travelling to far off places (Stockholm was a long way away). Those peasants, who also had trading experience, were often ideally suited. They had travelled and had experience with written documents in their trading activities, but only seldom can we discover

from the scant sources if these leaders could actually write or not. We can assume, however, that the traders must at least have been able to count and read. Experience of warfare was also a very important factor in selecting leaders in these peasant uprisings. In the period leading up to the largest in Finnish history—the Club War—there had been war for some time, so there were men with years of fighting experience behind them. It seems that the leaders for these movements were chosen, or ‘raised’ to their position, in the communal meetings organised usually in the churchyards after the Sunday sermon.

However, in the uprisings of the seventeenth century, we can find one more reason for why some people were the ‘peasant leaders’—because it suited the establishment that way. Although the rioters often claimed that the decisions about resistance were made collectively, and so they were all responsible for the deeds, this did not wash with the establishment. They preferred to deal with single persons rather than a crowd, as they were easier to punish and be made an example of, and they were to serve as a warning for the others. Sometimes therefore, men who were perhaps not the leaders of these movements originally, but got landed with the stigma of leader by the establishment, and it was thus their names that were put in the documents describing the events. Historians have thus adopted the view of the establishment and labelled, for example, Maunu Nyrhi, Matti Sihvo and perhaps Matti Kotilainen, as peasant leaders in their respective uprisings, though they might equally well not have been.

* * *

This volume has examined the agency of the early modern Nordic peasant elites, in terms of its aggressivity and violence. Elite groups within peasant communities existed all over Fennoscandia. They have seldom been the explicit target of historical research though, leaving us with the exaggerated impression that peasant communities were relatively egalitarian and united groups. There are several reasons for this, not least because of the scarcity of source material. This volume has problematised the harmony and solidarity of peasant communities by lifting up their inner divisions, contradictions and conflicts. As we have seen, these aggressive elite groups were also able to act as leaders and promoters of community interests, however. With the formation of more centralised states, their status and room for agency diminished, but the regional and temporal variations

were great in this relatively drawn-out process, and we have seen there still remained several favourable contexts for their agency. It must be borne in mind too, that the peasant elite was not a homogenous entity either. In this volume, we have seen one uniting feature—their tendency to assert themselves with an active and aggressive agency—even if this led to very different outcomes.

GLOSSARY

<i>English</i>	<i>Norwegian</i>	<i>Swedish</i>	<i>Finnish</i>
Peasant	Bonde	Bonde	Talonpoika
Freeholder	Selveier/selveiende bonde	Skattebonde	Verotalonpoika
Freeholder on donated land	–	Frälsekattebonde	Perintörälssitalonpoika
Tenant:	Leilending:	Landbonde:	Lampuoti:
(1) Tenant on Crown's land	(1) Leilending på krongods	(1) Kronolandbonde	(1) Kruununlampuoti
(2) Tenant on noble land	(2) Leilending på adelsgods	(2) Frälselandbonde	(2) Rälssilampuoti
Crofter	Husmann	Torpare	Torppari
Lodger, cottager	Husmann	Inhysing	Itsellinen
Farmstead	Bruk	Hemman	Talo, tila
Tax holding	Matrikkelgård	Skattehemman	Verotila
Crown holding	Krongods	Kronohemman	Kruununtila
Noble holding	Adelsgods	Frälsehemman	Rälssitila
Abandoned farm	Øde-gård	Ödeshemman	Autiotila
Local constable	Lensmann	Länsman	Nimismies
Lay juror	Lagrettemann	Nämndeman	Lautamies

(continued)

(continued)

<i>English</i>	<i>Norwegian</i>	<i>Swedish</i>	<i>Finnish</i>
Churchwarden	Kirkeverge	Kyrkovärde	Kirkonisäntä
Peasant uprising	Bondereising	Bonderesning	Talonpoikaisnousu
Peasant rebellion, revolt	Bondeopprør	Bondeuppror, bonderevolt	Talonpoikaiskapina
Peasant riot	Bondeoppløp, bondereising	Upplopp, tumult	Talonpoikaismellakka

Freeholders were those peasants who owned the farmstead they cultivated and paid taxes for it. They had hereditary rights to their land, but according to feudal ideology, the right was limited to possession. In Sweden and Finland, rights to their taxes could be granted to the nobility, but that did not directly affect the freeholders' ownership.

Peasants who occupied and cultivated a farmstead but did not own it were quite simply tenants. The farmstead could belong either to the Crown, nobility, or another private owner, and the peasants paid rent to them. The tenure of the farms varied from fixed-term to permanent. In contrast to tenants, however, crofters rented only part of a farmstead.

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