CHAPTER TWO

SWEDEN BEFORE 1130

In order to consider the history of Sweden between the mid-twelfth and the end of the thirteenth century it is necessary first to look at the period before this. Until relatively recently views of administrative and military developments in the thirteenth century and earlier were viewed largely from the perspective of written sources. Unfortunately there are very few of them. Some political events were recorded in contemporary foreign sources, often suspect. The extant manuscripts of the landskapslagar date from the period after 1280. Although sometimes confused and apparently contradictory, they give a picture of administration and taxation at the time when they were written down (itself often a matter for dispute), and identifying the time at which given institutions were established is extremely difficult.

The advent of rule by the Folkung dynasty has been seen as a turning point for several reasons. The date, 1250, is a convenient starting point for many historians, but it is also marked in monastic annals, since the number of entries relating to the internal affairs of Sweden before this date is very limited: despite the establishment of many monastic foundations in the mid- to late twelfth century, records before this concern largely the affairs of their own Orders or of Denmark. The number of surviving diplomatic sources also increases markedly in the early Folkung period.

Although few would argue with the statement that Sweden already existed as a single kingdom before the mid-twelfth century, the extent to which its different regions were integrated is much less easy to determine. Within the last half-century, however, other disciplines have made an increasing contribution to the discussion of Sweden’s origin, particularly archaeology and the study of place-names and rune-stones. The early history of Sweden before 1130 is very obscure, details of names and events existing only in scattered foreign sources, but written evidence for the period 1130–1250 is also limited. This has left the field open for more or less informed speculation on the nature and degree of central administration and integration that existed prior to the accession of Sverker the Elder in c. 1132.
2.1. Peoples, Regions and Regional Identity

For most of the Middle Ages Skåne, Halland and Blekinge were parts of the kingdom of Denmark and Bohuslän belonged to the Norwegian crown. Before the twelfth century Sweden was recognised as being divided into two regions, Götaland and Svealand. The island of Gotland, although technically subject to the king of these two regions, was semi-independent. These were the heavily-settled regions of the Iron Age and Viking Period. Götaland itself was divided by Lake Vättern into western and eastern regions (Västergötland and Östergötland), sometimes distinguished in pre-twelfth-century written sources. In *Heimskringla*, most importantly *Ynglingasaga* and *Saga Ölafs konungs ens helga*, Snorri Sturluson uses *Svíþjóð* to refer to the region around Mälar, *Svíaveldi* to refer to the kingdom of Sweden, in which he includes Fjädrundaland, Tiundaland, Attundaland (the three *folkland* of the later Uppland), Västmanland, Södermanland, Västergötland, Östergötland and Värmland, as well as ‘marklands’. *Svíþjóð* itself includes Södermanland, Västmanland, Fjädrundaland, Tiundaland, Attundaland and ‘Sialand’. The last named exists in no other source, but is probably Roden, the coastal region north of the Mälar waterway that bordered Attundaland and Tiundaland. By and large other Icelandic writings agree with Snorri.

Although the antiquity of their sources is often disputed, the Svealand regions listed above correspond largely to those in the Florence document of c. 1120, which are listed in a corrupt Latin

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1 According to the thirteenth-century *Guta saga*, there was a voluntary agreement by Gotland to pay tribute and contribute to the Swedish *ledung* fleet. Earlier sources, such as the tale of Wulfstan in King Alfred’s version of Orosius and the runestone of Torsätra are not necessarily evidence of conquest. From at least as early as the reign of Calixtus II (Pope 1119–1124) the Church did nevertheless recognise *Guthlandia* as an ecclesiastical province linked to Sweden. See Yrving 1940 p. 47.

2 SSH 1, *Ynglinga saga* 36, pp. 37–39 and *Ólafs saga helga* 77, pp. 326–27. The marklands are included in the diocese of Skara, alongside Värmland and Västergötland, so Snorri probably refers to Dal and Nordmark. There are minor differences between Snorri’s description of the kingdoms in *Ynglingasaga* and the dioceses of *Ólafs saga*. All subsequent references to *Heimskringla* refer to the above edition.

3 Named as Tiundaland, Sudurmannaland, Vesturmannaland, Fjadrundaland, Attundaland, Sialand. This is the region referred to as ‘Svealand’ in this book, although Old Swedish sources usually used *Suecia/Scetthia*, derived from the oldest known Old Swedish form *Sceþjuþ*.

4 The north part, east of Tiundaland, constituted Tiundaland’s Rod, and the southern part Attundaland’s Rod.

5 Such as, for instance, Arngrimur Jónsson’s *Svecia chorographia*. 