CHAPTER NINE
ROYAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE EARLY FOLKUNG PERIOD

9.1. The extension of royal administration

During the period 1250–1320 a number of substantial fortifications were built at royal instigation. They undoubtedly had a defensive function, both against external enemies and possible rebellions, but incidents recounted in Erikskrönikan and other sources, in which castles appear as kings’ residences or prisons during the disputes within the Folkung family, provide evidence of another function, their use in the exercise of royal power. Whoever controlled the new fortifications could dominate surrounding regions, and for this reason castles functioned as royal administrative centres for the collection of taxes. It was not only the building of the new fortifications that entailed expense and effort, but the upkeep of both structures and men and animals. For this reason those who administered them had to be chosen with care. The construction of castles accompanied a change in the nature of administration, with the advent of a new administrative district, later called the län but referred to as land in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In Erikskrönikan and diplomatic sources administrative districts are frequently named fogderier, the fogde their administrator.¹ These terms derive from Middle Low German vogedie and voget, and were latinised as advocatia and advocatus by the beginning of the fourteenth century, and prefectura and prefectus by the mid-fourteenth century.² Their early development must be reconstructed from assorted references in letters and chronicles, since late thirteenth-century sources do not include detailed accounts or land registers.³

¹ The term slottslän is also anachronistic. Castles were usually referred to as hus or borg in the thirteenth century. To avoid confusion, I have followed Birgitta Fritz’s example in referring to all the castle administrative districts as fogderier.
² For example, DS 1379 (1303), DS 1434 (1304), ST 1, 144 (1288) and 185 (1315).
³ Those medieval sources which detail län divisions are both fifteenth-century,
The terminology used for *fogderier* and their administrators is not consistent. In 1281 Magnus Ladulås referred to Borgholm as ‘our *slott*’.\(^4\) When in 1288 he mentioned St Klara monastery as being in ‘our *slott* Stockholm’ he was clearly referring to an administrative region.\(^5\) In other cases there appear to be references to the king’s agents (*slottsfolk*). In 1303 Birger Magnusson referred to ‘our *fogde*’ in Tavastland.\(^6\) There are references from the late thirteenth century to the *fogde* and *underfogde* in Stockholm and Kalmar collecting dues, giving rights to trade or fish in nearby areas, and even preventing the sale of a house in the town at the king’s request. There is no clear statement that the *fogdar* of *Erikskrönikan* were identical to any of the king’s men listed in the *landskapslagar*, but this must have been the case. These included *herrar*, *länssherar*, *länsmän* or *länsinnehavare*. The *länsmän*, often referred to as *kungens länsmän*,\(^7\) were installed in every *hundare*, each of which was supervised by a *länssherre* or *länsinnehavare*, the two terms seemingly being interchangeable.\(^8\) That the *länssherre* was a senior official is clear, since only he and the king could summon an extra *ting*.\(^9\) The income from *ting* fines was divided among the king, the *hundare* and others concerned in Södermanland, but disposed of among those ‘who hold the *län* above the *bönder*’ by the *folkland herre* in Uppland.\(^10\) Elsewhere in the same law code and in other circumstances, concerning failures to fulfil *ledung* obligations, fines were divided among those ‘who hold the *län*’, alongside those who administered the *hundare* and the *uppbordsman*.\(^11\) In this case the first must be the *länssherar*. Holmbäck and Wessén argued that the *herre*, clearly referred to in the *Manhelgdsbalk* as ‘the one who rules

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Erik of Pomerania’s *skattebok* (tax register, sometimes called *jordebok*), originally produced after Margrete’s death in 1412, and reconstructed from seventeenth-century work on a sixteenth-century copy, and the 1497 *länsregister* made for King Hans. No accounts of the type kept during Gustav Vasa’s reign exist for the Middle Ages, but there are surviving ones from 1360 for Nyköpings *län* and Dalarna, from Gotland in the 1480s, and two from the early sixteenth century. The most important single work on Swedish royal administration after 1250 is unarguably Birgitta Fritz’s *Hus, län och land*.

\(^4\) DS 736.
\(^5\) DS 975.
\(^6\) DS 1828.
\(^7\) Andrae 1960 pp. 73–81.
\(^8\) UL Kg 10:2, R 1.
\(^9\) UL R 1, SdmL R 1.
\(^10\) UL M 14.
\(^11\) UL Kg 10:2.