THE MAKING OF A EUROPEAN SOCIETY.
THE EXAMPLE OF SWEDEN

THOMAS LINDKVIST

ABSTRACT

In this article the transformations in Sweden during the period 1000-1300 are discussed as forms of Europeanization. The transformation was carried out and promoted by indigenous elites and entailed the establishment of a Christian monarchy. Christianization meant gradual assimilation to the wider cultural context. The clergy and the ecclesiastical organizations introduced new economic and cultural institutions as well as new concepts. All this took place in tandem with a transition from an economy based partly on plunder and external appropriation to a feudal economy. The changes to social and economic structures, such as the establishment of a manorial economy and the disappearance of slavery, were Swedish variants of a general European change. The particular role of the Cistercians in Sweden is noted. Due to the later development of Church and Christian monarchy, in comparison with the other two Scandinavian monarchies, administrative and cultural literacy was mainly introduced by this order.

The making of a European society in Sweden is certainly, as elsewhere, a matter of definition. The label “Europeanization” has been attributed to several historical phenomena and transformations. During the period 1000-1300 CE, Sweden emerged as a political unit, with economic, social, and cultural structures similar to those of Western Europe. The formation of a Christian kingdom, and the introduction of other European-style institutions, however, occurred later in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway. Europe itself emerged and was defined during this period, with the first European revolution, as defined and delineated by R. I. Moore, occurring during the first centuries of the second millennium. The period has also been characterised, from a slightly different perspective, by Robert Bartlett as the making of Europe. The Western form of Christendom became the common denominator, with more or less homogeneous classes of knighthood and clergy emerging throughout this nascent European community. The development of the aristocracy and the Christian monarchies played an integrative role in this culture, alongside the Church, the clergy and especially the monastic orders. The formation
of this European elite, which was relatively homogeneous across the community, was part of a new political and intellectual culture, which was itself increasingly homogenized. The geographical boundaries of this new world were also being defined; as one European unity was formulated, it excluded the Eastern Church, Russia, the remains of the Byzantine Empire and other kingdoms. The relatively late integration of Sweden and the Baltic Sea area in this new culturally defined Europe entailed a redefinition of the frontiers.\footnote{Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350*, London: Allan Lane 1993; R. I. Moore, *The First European Revolution c. 970–1215*, Oxford: Blackwell 2000. Concerning the frontier perspective, see also Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier 1100–1525*, London: Macmillan 1980.}

These historical transformations were social and economic, as well as cultural and political. These processes are often referred to as “Christianization”, the unification of a kingdom, or the “making of” a Sweden, Norway or Denmark. The change in religion and the emergence of a Christian, if fragile, monarchy has been generally understood as a crucial turning point in history. Especially as concerns the later Scandinavian kingdoms, this turn has been commonly identified as the origin of the modern nation state.\footnote{Cf. Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton University Press 2002.} But it must also be recognized that this transformation cannot be adequately understood through a perspective that reduces it to a nodal point in the later development of the nation state. It must be understood as part of a more general restructuring process with many regional and local variations.

The transformation has, from another perspective, been described as a “feudal revolution”. Georges Duby formulated this idea to explain the changes that occurred around the year 1000 in Western Europe, or more particularly, in Northern France. This transition has also been discussed by Guy Bois, who focused especially on transformations in the relations of production. Social and economic relationships were totally restructured, and new forms of lordship arose. The new “feudal” and “European” lords formed a new social elite whose positions were based upon their systematic appropriation of agrarian production. The age of plunder and predation was gradually replaced by a system in which lordship was based upon control over people and, eventually, land. Slavery was replaced by a manorial and feudal system, based on a dependent peasantry. Countless variants of the manorial and seignorial...