Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to study the incorporation of Blekinge into the Kingdom of Sweden in the late seventeenth century. Before 1658 Blekinge was part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The provinces to the east of Öresund are often referred to collectively as the East Danish provinces or, somewhat carelessly, the Scanian provinces. These provinces were Skåne, Halland, Blekinge and Bohuslän. Wars in 1658 and 1660 led to them being ceded to Sweden. Integration with Sweden was relatively quick compared with other, similar frontier areas in Europe. The process of integration was put to a severe test during the Scanian War, 1675–79, when Denmark attempted to re-conquer the lost provinces. A similarly unsuccessful attempt was made in 1709. With the introduction of absolute monarchy in Sweden in 1680, the process of integration of the conquered provinces with Sweden entered a new phase.

The incorporation of the new provinces into the Swedish realm has been the subject of earlier Swedish research. This research has above all studied periods which were dominated by conflict and war and focused particularly on the province of Skåne and its powerful aristocracy. The attitude of the populace to the guerrilla warfare of the Scanian War, 1675–79, has often been used as a starting point for a discussion of where the inhabitants had their loyalties. Earlier research has analysed the period using theories and concepts which originated during the period of classic nationalism at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Even if this approach was largely abandoned towards the end of the twentieth century, some studies still continued to use concepts that reflect the national approach to the question taken by earlier researchers. One important concept which has borrowed much of its content from these views is that of Swedification. A concept, which from my way of looking at the problem, conceals rather than reveals the processes going on at the time. My theoretical models are drawn from the discussion of state formation and conglomerate states as formulated by Charles Tilly, Michel Mann and others. Harald Gustafsson has written several essays in which he discusses how these theories and ideas can be applied to Scandinavian conditions.

For my thesis I have chosen to study a more peaceful period which has not been of great interest to Swedish researchers. The focus of this dissertation is on the period of one year, 1669–70, when a Royal Commission, the Skånska Kommissionen, journeyed through the conquered provinces, holding many meetings with the inhabitants of Blekinge, Skåne and Halland. This took more than a year and resulted in around 150 meetings. Royal
commissions had for many years shown themselves to be useful instruments for dealing with different problems in the realm. One of the main tasks of the commissions was to follow up complaints made against local administration. Commissions had also been sent to the conquered Scanian provinces in 1658 and 1659 with the primary purpose of winning over the Danish nobility resident there and facilitating their assimilation into the Swedish nobility. But the Sanksa Kommissionen had a broader scope and involved other social groups in its discussions. Peasants, the clergy and burghers submitted individual or collective petitions to the commission. These petitions were discussed with the representatives of the commission at meetings in the different towns and written records were made describing the participants’ points of view.

Processes of assimilation are usually studied over a lengthy period of time. In this thesis it is a single year which is in focus even if excursions into the past are made, such as a study of Blekinge’s role in the Danish kingdom.

Comparisons have also been made with what can almost be described as a parallel situation, the partition of Cerdagne between France and Spain in 1659, which has been described by Peter Sahlin in his book, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*. The choice of source materials and method has made it possible to examine how peasants, clerics and burghers responded to the new authorities. The thesis is primarily an in-depth study with the emphasis placed on a qualitative reading of the sources.

The area I have chosen to look at was a frontier area dominated by peasants, above all peasants farming Crown land but the area also contained several small towns which participated in the Baltic sea trade. The archives of the Sanksa Kommissionen make it possible to discuss what role the commissions played in facilitating interaction between subject and ruler. How this instrument was used by the central powers has already been the subject of several Swedish studies but no attempt has been made to investigate whether, or how, the general populace could use this same instrument in its contacts with the authorities.

The concept of interaction which is central to the thesis has, above all, been discussed and used by Eva Österberg in several pieces of work. The concept has shown itself to be of great use in studies of communication and conflict between ruler and subject in the Early Modern period. What principally distinguishes it from other models is its way of looking at things from below. In this context the term Konfliktsamhälle (conflict harmony), coined by the German historian, Jan Peters, must be mentioned. This notion is close to the concept of interaction but makes possible a greater interest for and analysis of more openly violent conflicts.

**Blekinge under Danish rule**

Chapter 3 looks at Blekinge’s relation to the centre of the Danish realm before 1658. As was usual in the early modern conglomerate states, different parts of the realm could have different relations with the centre. In this respect Blekinge’s position in the Kingdom of Denmark was no exception. Relations with the central power were based on an agreement with mutual obligations. The inhabitants of Blekinge met in their hundred courts and county assemblies to write petitions to the King in Copenhagen. Disputes between Blekinge and the authorities in Copenhagen could assume quite serious proportions, bailiffs being killed and the authority of the provincial governor challenged. Commissions were sent to Blekinge to put things right. Despite these conflicts the process of interaction between the two sides continued uninterrupted. There are even instances of peasants sending their own representatives to Copenhagen to negotiate directly with the central authorities. This relationship can be characterised as Konfliktsamhälle. The peasants seem to have been the dominating political force in Blekinge during the sixteenth century. In their negotiations and dealings with the authorities, the peasants showed themselves to be active and competent political opponents. They were bearers of a political culture which taught them how to assert their rights, a culture that they shared with peasants in many other parts of Europe.

Relations between peasants and burghers were often characterised by dispute, especially when the burghers attempted to gain control over the Baltic sea trade. The peasants used their own local ports for trade but this right was questioned by the burghers. In this dispute the peasants successfully defended their right to trade directly with the outside world. Blekinge had been hit hard by the wars and was considered poor. This argument was used frequently by the peasants to oppose the claims of the Crown and the burghers.

Blekinge was a typical frontier area which had suffered much in the wars between Sweden and Denmark but the border between the two kingdoms was never closed. Both countries tried to control the cross-border trade in a way which would most benefit their own realm. Peasants from the Swedish side of the border journeyed individually or in groups down to the towns and peasant-controlled ports on the coast. Ronneby was an economic centre in this trade with a network of contacts embracing Lübeck, Stralsund, Wismar, Rostock, Neustadt, Greifswald and Flensburg. Smuggling and illegal trade was common and those harbours run by peasants were a constant provocation to the citizens of the towns. Forest produce from Blekinge was of great importance for the economy of many Danish estates especially on Fyn and Sjælland. As long as these products continued to be imported to the Danish islands and taxes flowed into the Royal exchequer, the Crown
seems to have been content to allow the inhabitants of Blekinge a certain degree of freedom.

With the advent of the seventeenth century conditions began to change and the inhabitants of Blekinge were drawn into an accelerating process of integration. Copenhagen sought to gain firmer control over those areas on the periphery of the realm. Rivalry between Sweden and Denmark increased and both countries gave high priority to the construction of their fleets. This directly affected local communities and demands for forest produce from Blekinge increased. The seventeenth century saw a militarisation of Blekinge’s borders with Sweden and the military used peasant labour to build fortifications. The interests of the inhabitants were made subordinate to the military objectives of strengthening the border and protecting the Danish heartland. In pursuit of this strategy some existing towns were abandoned and new ones founded. Blekinge becomes more and more integrated into the Danish realm and the central authority strengthens its presence in the local community. This, in its turn, led not only to a greater number of disputes between the central authorities and local communities but also to increased competition and a greater number of conflicts within the local community. After the Treaty of Roskilde, Blekinge was subjected to a new intensified process of integration, this time with the Kingdom of Sweden.

Areas of contention

Most questions brought forward to the Commission by the different estates were clearly to do with the interests of the estate involved. Noblemen in Blekinge were few and did not take part in these meetings, preferring to present their suits at the provincial assembly (landdag) which wound up the work of the Commission. The petitions of the clergy were mostly concerned with improving their own economic situation. Other church issues and questions of church discipline came lower down on the agenda. The Commission treated the clergy with respect and was quite accommodating in its dealings with them, clear proof of the importance it attached to them and their collaboration. But there were conflicts, one of which arose from the ambition of the Crown to influence the appointment of parish priests, thereby increasing control of the local community.

Complaints put forward by the citizens of the towns usually concerned custom and excise duties and tariffs, all of which were of the utmost importance for the conditions of trade under the new regime. Another group involved in these conflicts were the peasants who also engaged in trade. The records of those meetings the Commission held with burgheers of the province reveal the presence of local oligarchies in the towns. The Crown sought to dismantle these centres of local power and replace them with a greater degree of centralisation. By exerting influence in the election of Mayors, the Crown hoped to break the power of the local oligarchies. But even if the central authorities strove to reduce the power of the local towns, these same authorities were, in reality, moderate in their treatment of the burgheers whose collaboration they sought. The citizens of the towns were also important for the new rulers.

Among the complaints of the peasants, tax issues and problems arising from the military presence dominated. Another important question was the right of peasants to trade with foreign traders in the local ports. As we have seen, these problems existed already under Danish rule. However, problems connected with the presence of the army were of a more serious character than under Danish rule. Billeting of soldiers in the homes of peasants gave rise to many disputes which were sometimes taken to the District Courts. The Commission also saw the courts as the natural arbiter for such cases but it became clear that this local arena for the management of conflicts did not work satisfactorily. The civil authorities had very little control over the doings of the army. The peasants put forward various constructive ideas on how to solve the problems and discussed these with the Commission. Commission and peasants shared a similar interpretation of the problems, and solutions suggested by the peasants were often supported by the members of the Commission and other officials. But a satisfactory solution to the problem was not achieved until
Under Danish rule the peasants often found themselves in a difficult position. The peasants were not satisfied with their political status. They had to fight for their rights and liberties. This struggle for freedom and equality was a common theme throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in Denmark.

The peasants' main concern was their economic situation. They were often forced to pay high taxes and fees, which put a strain on their already meager resources. In addition, they were often subjected to oppressive practices by landlords and local authorities.

The peasants also faced difficulties in their legal rights. They were often denied access to courts and justice, and their cases were often decided in favor of the landlords. The peasants' lack of representation in the legal system made it difficult for them to effectively challenge the injustices they faced.

The peasants' struggle for freedom and equality was not limited to their own communities. They also joined forces with other peasants across the country to fight for their rights. This solidarity helped to strengthen their collective voice and increase their chances of success.

Despite the challenges they faced, the peasants continued to fight for their rights. Their struggle for freedom and equality continues to inspire people today, reminding us of the importance of fighting for justice and equality for all.

References:

Image Description:
- Image of a Danish peasant
- Peasants working in a field
- Peasants carrying crops on their shoulders

Image Analysis:
- The image depicts peasants working in a rural setting, symbolizing their hard work and dedication to their land.
- The peasants' attire reflects the period, with traditional clothing and tools.
- The image provides a glimpse into the daily life of peasants in 17th century Denmark.
ned after 1660 with the advent of absolutism. Tendencies towards a more regional identity in the nobility are already noticeable during Danish rule. The peasants were able to act as a strong estate as long as they were on their own ground, Blekinge, but it is first and foremost as representatives of their own parish and district we must see them. When the central power increases its presence and puts more pressure on the province disputes between different parishes and districts are accentuated. This weakened the peasants' identity with their own social group as a whole in favour of loyalty to one's parish or district. Outside of Blekinge, the peasants found it difficult to assert themselves. They had no organisations that made it possible to work over large geographical areas and in this respect group consciousness was weak. It was one's own province and above all one's own parish or district which constituted the known world for the peasants and was something they could identify with. It was to these geographical areas that loyalties and identity were tied.

Is there any trace in the population of an identity tied to the realm — nation, did people see themselves as Danish or Swedish? There is no evidence in the source materials that the inhabitants voluntarily thought in terms of a national identity. But life was beginning to take on certain national aspects; in their meetings with the Commission the inhabitants began to talk in terms of the "Danish era" or "Swedish rule" when describing and discussing different practices. Old practices were no longer something which had been used since time immemorial but were described now as "Danish" which made it possible to compare them to "Swedish" customs. But even personal enemies were now described in ethnic terms and given a national identity. A clear example of this can be seen when the town of Karlshamn was founded and the town's charter stipulated that the Mayor must be of Swedish birth and official records must be written in Swedish. In reality, however, people were appointed to official positions more on a basis of loyalty and ability than nationality. Attempts to use ethnic criteria are more prevalent in certain groups than others. The records show that such rhetoric was used by very few, for example, several burghers, a Mayor and a local inspector of taxes. But attempts to give conflicts a national or ethnic dimension met with no success either with the Commission or the central authorities. There were, quite simply, no generally accepted notions of nation or ethnicity. However, other research has shown that ideas of their being something specifically Swedish were beginning to be discussed in the innermost councils of the realm.

In discussing Blekinge I have chosen to describe a borderland identity which was formed in an area where the inhabitants did have contacts with the "outside". Swedish peasants from the other side of the border had traveled down through Blekinge to the coast for many years and social contacts across the border are well documented. In the local ports peasants from Blekinge and from the Swedish county of Halland had dealings with traders from Holland and Germany. The towns in Blekinge had a well-established network of contacts with other Baltic towns. Ronneby is a prime example. Questions of identity must have been different in this environment compared to areas where mobility was not so common and where strangers were rare. In Blekinge, foreigners, whether Swedish, Danish, German or Dutch, were part of the economic system which provided a living for the peasants. In such a situation it must have been more difficult to think in terms of stereotypes and see foreigners as different and threatening. For this to have been the case, it would have required borders that kept people apart. The Swedish assumption of power brought with it new fiscal borders and it was in connection with these borders that the concepts Swedish and Danish began to be used.

Swedification?

Is it possible to see the processes which I have examined as part of a deliberate policy of Swedification? I have chosen, rather, to see a process which strove towards greater homogeneity and the establishment of a professional bureaucracy. But there are also disciplinary features in the interaction of central authorities and of local community. These tendencies and developments, common to large areas of early modern Europe have been described by other scholars and seen as typical of the process of state formation.

In this thesis I have shown that there were forces working for a greater degree of homogeneity in the realm, something which would make administration and control easier. Any real striving to impose Swedish norms on Blekinge in a cultural or linguistic sense cannot be found in my sources. The concept of Swedification has too many connotations arising from the nationalist rhetoric of a later period to be useful in this context.

Swedish and Danish research has often spoken of Swedification in relation to the church and the legal system. As early as 1658 the Swedish authorities sought to persuade the new provinces to accept a new set of statutes for the Church. These statutes were new and not the same as those governing the Swedish Church. Seen through the eyes of the Swedish authorities both the Danish and Swedish statutes had serious faults in as much as they allowed different local and regional interests too much influence. Local opposition to the new statutes, particularly such as favored the own diocese, was to be broken in favour of central control. When the different estates opposed the new statutes they did it in the hope of being able to protect their own privileges. As to Swedish law, this question can be analyzed and explained in similar fashion.

Many of the conflicts named in this thesis can be interpreted in terms of
local against central but such an interpretation must be clarified and defined more exactly. That the presence of the Swedish central authority in the local community was an active one, also gave rise to new possibilities. People who had been the victims of the abuse of power by local rulers could now turn to new power centres. In this way the structures of local power in the community were laid bare and it even became possible to change them to a certain degree.

If the historical course of events depicted in this dissertation cannot be interpreted in terms of Swedification, how should these processes be understood? This thesis is a study of the interaction of subject and ruler during a period when the formation of states in Scandinavia had entered a particularly active phase. And with this perspective in mind I have used Michel Mann's theoretical model which describes the early modern states as composed of ideological, economic, military and political networks (IEMP model). These networks were seldom confined to the geographical boundaries of the realms in question.

Economically, Blekinge was part of a network which connected parts of southern Sweden (Småland) with towns and ports in Blekinge which, in their turn were connected to the commercial towns around the Baltic Sea. Sweden did not seek to disrupt this pattern of trade but conditions changed. That the terms of trade could change was hardly something that was new for the burghers of the coastal towns of the Baltic who lived in an area prone to conflicts and were used to change. Some found it difficult to adapt to the new conditions but as these were not a complete break with earlier ones, different parts of the population were affected to a greater or a lesser degree.

Politically, assimilation into Sweden meant both continuity and change. The interaction described in this thesis shows that there was a common understanding of the political ideas and concepts used to define the relationship between ruler and subject. Dealing with new kings, swearing allegiance to them and negotiating privileges was nothing new for the peasants. They had done so under Danish rule. Incorporation into Sweden did not entail change in this respect. What was different was the appearance of new administrative structures with a larger bureaucracy and, above all, new levels for decision-making with parliament (Riksdag) playing a central role. Adjustment to the new order, where local authority was weakened in favour of central, opened up new possibilities for the peasants to exert influence. And there are many signs of a speedy adaptation to the new order. The burghers must very quickly have become aware of the interest of the new regime for trade and commerce and adjustment to the new political order does not seem to have been much of a problem. The group most likely to have felt themselves threatened was the nobility who lost some of their exclusive powers.

Problems caused by the strong position of the military were a definite obstacle to the process of developing a relationship with the new central authorities. The civil authorities were unable to control the military. The political and military spheres did not overlap. This lack of control over the military led to a loss of legitimacy and authority for the political order. The central power was unable to fulfil the obligations it took upon itself in the role of protecting ruler. This fact was probably of great significance for the way conflicts developed during the Scanian War, 1675–79. Decisive changes in the sphere of the military were only pushed through after the introduction of an absolute monarchy in 1680.

Ideologically, the inhabitants of Sweden and Denmark shared a common background, the most important features of which were well-known to them. They belonged to a Lutheran Christian part of Europe which gave important impulses to the way they pictured their world. This picture of the world they shared with their rulers. Thus there existed shared values and norms which could be used to discuss the political order. The idea of a protecting, Christian ruler existed side by side with ideas on the rights and duties of subjects. Both the unjust ruler and the insubordinate subject could be punished. It is not important to be able to establish just how much these ideas were part of every man's consciousness. What is important is the fact that there existed a functioning system of norms and values around which a relationship could be built. A prominent feature in the petitions of the peasants was a tendency to refer, implicitly or explicitly, to this shared set of Lutheran ideas. Neither the burghers nor the clergy used this Christian rhetoric in their petitions, their relation to the new rulers did not seem to need the same confirmation. In this respect the new regime did not stand for something new and threatening.

What can be concluded is that there were factors that impeded integration, such as the lack of agreement between the military and the political spheres of power. At the same time, there existed areas where a common way of looking at things made integration easier. In the economic sphere, adjustments were necessary which affected different groups in different ways. But there were powerful incentives to continued trade contacts within a common economic sphere. The new economic order did not meet any organised or massive resistance. Above all it was the existence of a set of norms and values that were well-known and could be used in the new situation which facilitated the process of integration into the new realm.