

## ***Poor Nobles and Rich in Denmark, 1500-1700***

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On the threshold of the seventeenth century the notion of a petty nobility (or gentry, here used for convenience) defies a clear-cut definition. Lines had become far more complicated than they been a century earlier. At the end of the middle ages crises had decimated to a great extent the lesser nobility; several sank back into the peasantry, others had to earn their living as clients, retainers or bailiffs on greater nobles' or ecclesiastical estates - not unlike English bastard feudalism.<sup>1</sup>

The reformation (1536), the secularisation of church property and the subsequent reforms of the system of *len* (administrative districts without feudal elements) further reduced the prospects of petty nobles. Even the - poorly paid - posts as provincial judges, who had, formerly, been recruited from the gentry, became the preserve of aristocrats, not least due to the numerous disputes over noble property, which made these posts attractive in the eyes of the higher nobility.<sup>2</sup> The petty nobility simply had no function any longer. And even if all nobles shared privileges on an equal footing, small landowners probably were in no position to 'utilise their property most profitably' (ordinance 1547) as could those with large estates. They disappeared or barely survived, though this process remains obscure up till now.

<sup>1</sup> E. Ulsig, *Danske adelsgodser i middelalderen*, (Copenhagen [henceforth Cph] 1968), pp. 251-88, 384-89 (summary); T. Dahlerup, Lavadelens krise i senmiddelalderen, *Historisk tidsskrift* (henceforth: *HT*) 12.ser. IV, (Cph. 1969), pp. 1-43; *idem* in: *Den nordiske adel i senmiddelalder. Struktur, funktioner og internordiske relationeren*, (Cph. 1971), pp. 49-52, 70-78; K. Prange, Lavadelsskæbner i senmiddelalder og renaissance. *Profiler i nordisk senmiddelalder og renaissance. Festskrift til Poul Enemark*, (Århus 1983), pp. 219-32.

And prospects became still more and more ominous by inflation, which of course again favoured the aristocracy. Prices of grain and livestock rose rapidly from c. 1560 - occasioned by frequent crises - but the value of property rose even more steeply, a fact that indicates solid optimism. Early investment, therefore, could yield handsome profits, while late investment would become expensive. Finally, one must suppose the many - unpaid - commissions (wardships, settlement of disputes etc.), ordered by the chancery, must have been a burden, just as much as knights' service (*rostjeneste*).<sup>3</sup>

1. Economic prosperity stimulated fierce competition and speculation amongst the higher nobility over property, financed to a great extent by loans at the Kieler moneymarket (*der Kieler Umschlag*) from c. 1570. Success or failure depended upon manipulation, often of a dubious nature. In the early 1620s the situation approached chaos, demanding government interference in 1623, 1632 and 1641. But the result of this uncompromising (and unhealthy) struggle over property had then become evident: heavy concentration in the hands of a narrow stratum of élite nobility - individuals rather than families - holding privileged land; unsuccessful noble gamblers foundered and sank down into the lesser nobility.<sup>4</sup>

At this juncture these processes also meant that the concept of gentry changed: in addition to the remnants of the former petty nobility came those who had reduced themselves to beggary during the struggle. Three qualifications will be necessary however. First, that families with a narrow basis of property seem, normally, to have steered clear of speculation and to have safeguarded their modest holdings carefully (by family arrangements, ownership in common or some sort of entail).<sup>5</sup> This holds good for the Walckendorffs (Funen)

<sup>2</sup> HT93, (Cph. 1993), pp. 279-94 (with summary).

<sup>3</sup> V. Dybdahl et al. (eds.), *Dansk socialhistorie* 3, (Cph. 1980), pp. 261-77.

<sup>4</sup> *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 98, (Köln-Wien 1980), pp. 61-75.

<sup>5</sup> S.E. Green-Pedersen, Christoffer Walckendorff som godspolitiker. *Festkrift til Poul Enemark*, pp. 277-97; J.E. Maarbjeerg, *Scandinavia in the European World-Economy, c. 1570-1625*, (New York 1995), pp. 141-60.

in the sixteenth century and the then declining Seefelds (Jutland) a century and a half later.

Second, some families rose to prominence, e.g. Juel, Krag, Seefeld, Sehested and Vind (all of them of Jutland stock). And, third, a few rose to riches in the seventeenth century in their capacity as military entrepreneurs such as Henrik Holck of Egholm (d.1633) and Anders Bille (d. 1657), belonging to an impoverished branch of this otherwise prominent family (cf. below). In general lesser nobles had to content themselves with an education abroad in 'fear of god and cavalry', though some obtained an academic *peregrinatio*, enabling them to climb the social ladder, in chancery service, as *lensholders* etc.

A statute of 1625 fixed the limit of one knight's service at 312 *tønder hartkorn* (henceforth td.htk.); 'barrels of hard grain (rye and barley), the unit of the tenant's rent and the yield of the home farm). We can use 300 td.htk. as an upper limit for an esquire's property, especially because several petty nobles 'served the king' at sea or in court, probably a survival of medieval personal service. Provided this working hypothesis be valid, we can take as our point of departure the register of the knights' service from Zealand 1638.<sup>6</sup>

Again, a qualification will be necessary. Normally nobles were registered only in one province, even if they listed themselves as having an estate in another, probably because they held a *len* on Zealand. Unfortunately, the editor specified the distribution of estates (and several had more than one) only in this case, clearly singling out those who owned only one; this implies, that we have to extrapolate from this, admittedly, narrow basis.

In table 1 a total of 58 estate owners have been classified in three categories: those who owned less than 300 td.htk., then 301-500 and, finally, those who had more than 501 td.htk., the largest being Hans Lindenow of Gavnbø (8,426 td.htk.) and the smallest Lisbeth Daae, the widow of the *justitiarius* Jacob Ulfeld of Bavelse (520 td.htk.). In the first category Lisbet Bille held 43 td.htk and Jørgen

<sup>6</sup> *Danske Magazin* 5.ser.I, (Cph. 1887-89), pp. 179-82.

Grubbe of Vedby 292 td.htk., the minimum and maximum respectively. 21, 21 and 45 are found in each of the main groups, respectively; there would, in this case, be no need for further specification, seeing that the pattern appears absolutely unequivocal and further details would be beyond our scope. Table 1 also includes the distribution of property in all provinces.

<b>TABLE 1 - The distribution of noble property 1638</b>					
<b>td. htk.</b>	<b>Scania</b>	<b>Zealand</b>	<b>Funen</b>	<b>Jutland</b>	<b>totals</b>
- 300	17.5	2,343.0	-	15.0	2,375.5
- 500	186.0	2,873.5	169.0	65.0	3,293.5
501 -	4,174.0	33,191.5	5,184.0	5,092.0	47,642.5
- 300	0.7%	98.6%	-	0.6%	99.9%
- 500	5.6	87.6	2.0%	5.1	99.9
501 -	8.8	69.7	10.9	10.7	100.1

The inequality of distribution is obvious: 64% of the owners held 88% of all property, while the remaining, lesser, nobles had no more than 12%; the gentry seem - *grosso modo* - to have been purely local. The disproportionality held good for the whole country, but poor nobles were much more numerous in Scania and Jutland than on Zealand, and were entirely absent on Funen.

With this distribution in mind, we can proceed to the knights' service-registers of 1587/88, 1617 and 1638/52, which have been selected in order to make sense of the mass of data in the records at suitable intervals.<sup>7</sup> The register of 1587/88 - probably occasioned by the current European crisis - may still be incomplete, though not to the extent of distorting the situation. Table 2 summarizes the calculations in percentages<sup>8</sup> (cf. also the diagrams 1-2).

<sup>7</sup> RA. Danske kancelli B. 96: *Rostjenestekaksationer på adelen 1574-1652*; B.115: *Jordebøger afleveret til kommissarierne for rostjenestens taksering...1647*; cf. K.J.V. Jespersen, *rostjenestetaksation og adelsgods*. (Odense 1977), pp. 256-64 (summary), 272-97; H. Chr. Johansen in *HT78*, (Cph. 1978), pp. 536-41.

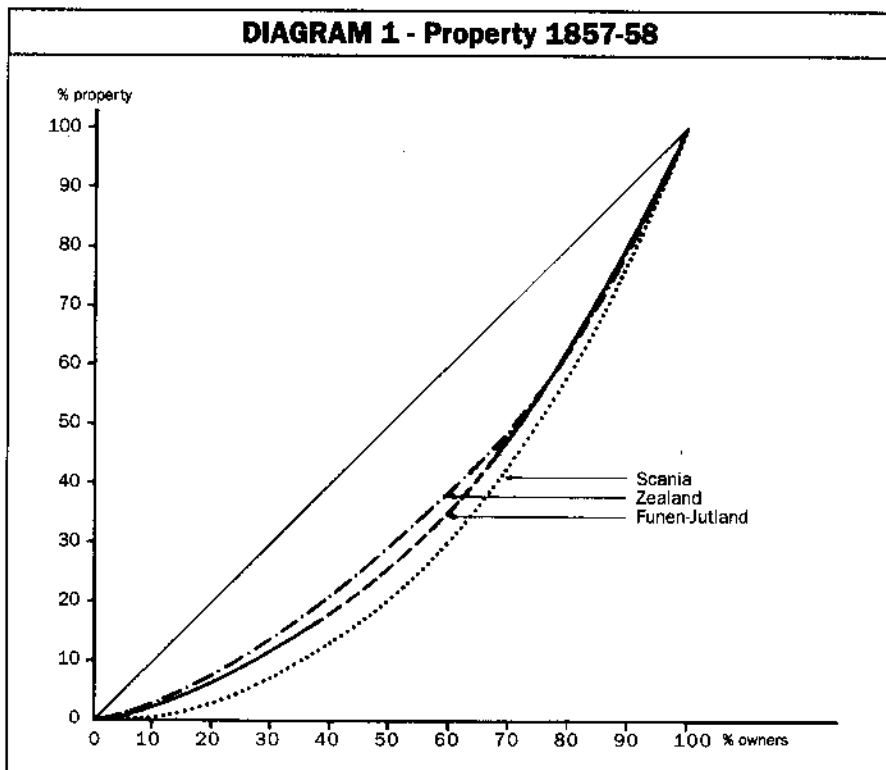
<sup>8</sup> The scale has been so arranged that one horse equals, approximately, 300 td. htk. and 1.5, corresponds to 450 td.htk.; cf. also the graphs.

<b>TABLE 2 - The percentage distribution of property 1587-1652</b>							
	horse(s)	Zealand		Funen		Jutland	
		own	prop	own	prop	own	prop
1587/88	-1.0	45.8	21.9	65.9	38.8	58.3	31.8
	-1.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2.0-	54.2	78.1	31.4	61.8	42.7	68.7
1617	-1.0	11.1	2.1	11.9	2.1	35.8	6.5
	-1.5	27.5	14.4	42.4	23.0	23.9	14.8
	2.0-	58.0	83.5	45.8	74.9	40.3	78.7
<b>1638/52</b>		<b>1647</b>		<b>1638</b>		<b>1652</b>	
	-1.0	10.8	1.8	54.2	8.6	41.5	5.5
	-1.5	29.7	12.3	14.6	28.5	27.0	19.8
	2.0-	59.5	85.8	31.2	62.9	31.5	74.7
own = owners prop = property							

The table needs a few comments. First, in the minor category a man did not, on average, muster more than 0.2-0.5 horses, corresponding to the 1625 rate, at about 60-150 td.htk. In such cases 2-5 individuals combined to form a recruiting group to contribute one horse, jointly to present one horse; and the same applied to the next category. In both cases the obligation must have been a serious burden. A horseman would demand 80-120 rd. annually;<sup>9</sup> but provided that the owner held 100 td.htk., he might have had an income of about 250 rd., in which case the service would swallow 30-45% of total income.

Not all regional differences are readily explicable on such general lines, though. Incidental factors might have played a role: change of generation, inheritance and marriage, the activity of particularly ruthless tax- collectors or *vice versa* the failures of gamblers. The latter seems to explain the sudden rise of the number of petty owners on Funen 1617-38; a number of shipwrecks occurred, like those of Claus Brockenhuus of Broholm, the Quitzow brothers, Eiler of Lykkesholm and Frederik of

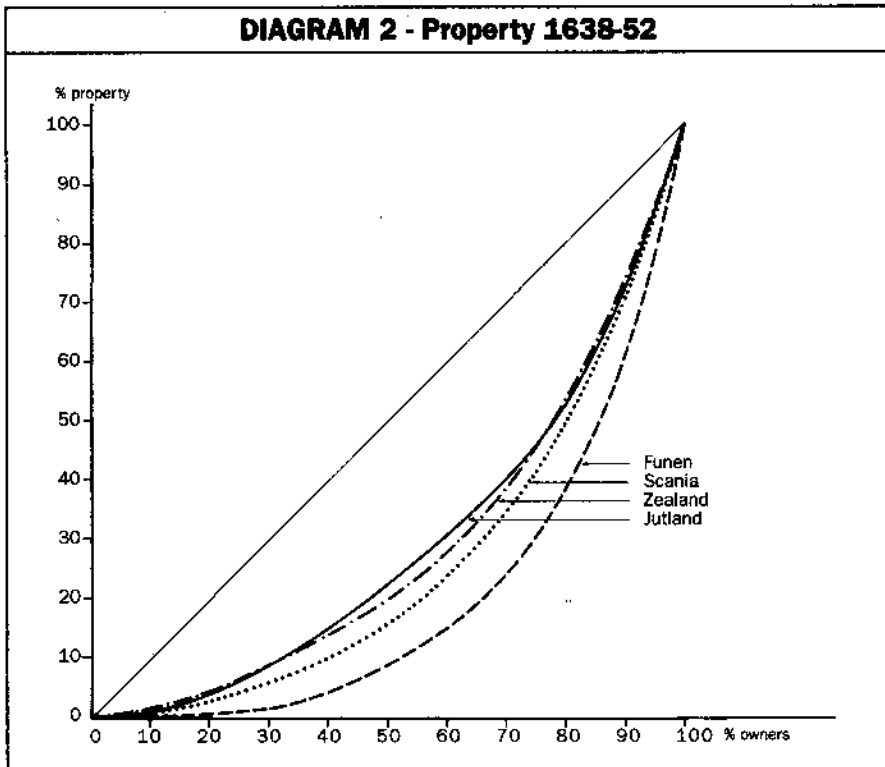
<sup>9</sup> *Hilsen til Hæstrup 9.aug.1969*, (Odense 1969), pp. 91 sq.; RA. *Diverse lens- og godsregnskaber for 1660* (Skinnerup); RA. *Privatarkiver* no. 5955: Frederick Markdanner: skiftesager (Rønningsøgård).



Quitowsholm. The position of large landowners remained stable (as it did in Scania), while their counterparts in Jutland and on Zealand expanded.

The table and the graphs demonstrate, however, beyond any doubt the increasing concentration of landed property in the hands of the highest strata of society, to the detriment of the smallest, as well as a high degree of polarisation. Next, it becomes evident that landless families abounded in Scania and Jutland (18 and 10%, respectively); later the percentages fell to a more moderate level. Finally, we can observe regional differences. The process of impoverishment started in Scania and Jutland, and to a certain degree on Zealand, too, but gained momentum on Funen only after about 1617.

2. The answer to the question which we should like to know most of all – the economic and material conditions of the gentry – cannot be



solved. Only very few of all the ledgers that must have existed have survived, the majority of which, moreover, come from bigger estates or institutional ones (the academies of Herlufsholm and Sorø, Zealand), which can certainly have only limited value as evidence. Only two have come down to us from smaller estates: Skinnerup (now Ulriksholm, belonging to a natural son of Christian IV) and Rønningsøgård (originally a considerable estate, but divided twice in 1640-48 between five heirs), both on eastern Funen.

The methodological and technical problems involved have been discussed elsewhere and need no repetition here.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand it will be necessary to point out that the Danish estate-structure did not fit the German categories, the western *Grundbesirrechaft* or the East German and Baltic *Gutswirtschaft* (often huge *latifundia*), not

<sup>10</sup> *Hilsen til Hæstrup*, pp. 92-99.

to mention the English *manor* or the French *seigneurie*, preserving feudal elements. In general, Danish homefarms were of modest size, serving as administrative centres of the estates, as well as for the collection of rents and the sale of surplus production. Thus, they might most appropriately be labelled *rentier-estates*.<sup>11</sup>

In 1627/28, during the 'imperial war', the noble order voted a contribution of 1.5 rd. per td.htk. fixed rent.<sup>12</sup> At a price of 50-55 rd. per td.htk. this would imply a profit of 2.7-3.0%, to which should be added non-fixed income, entry fines, ordinary fines, the use of woods, meadows and fishing rights etc., all in all supposed to yield a further 2.5-3.0%. Profits varied, of course annually, often drastically and could change from affluence to penury suddenly. This happened in the years after 1618, when the harvests were good - and prices fell - but in the period 1621-93 the situation changed with crop failure and dearth. Between the peace settlement at Lübeck 1629 and the outbreak of a new war, the Swedish stranglehold upon the Vistula until 1635 (afterwards the Polish crown learned its lesson), as well as the continental demand for provisions during the war, created a profit inflation, ending about 1645. From then and down to the 1730s depression set the scene.

In the period 1616-20 Skinnerup had been farmed out to a local nobleman (Hans Oldeland) at a price presupposing a yield of nearly 5%, but eventually it was sold to the king on the same conditions.<sup>13</sup> Hans Oldeland had abandoned his farm - at that date the estate had some 290 td.htk. - probably because it had yielded, during the depression, no more than 2-3%, i.e. almost half the level agreed upon in 1616. During the 1620s and 1630s profits increased to 4-5%, but even that was less than the 5-7% obtained by three big estates, Kærstrupgård (Funen, Selsø and Vallø-Lellinge in Zealand), due, probably, to the advantages of large-scale farming. By the late 1630s

<sup>11</sup> Godsdriften i Norden under 1600-talet. *Från medeltid till välfärdssambälle*, (Uppsala 1975), p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Kr. Erslev, ed., *Aktstykker og Oplysninger til Rigsraadet og Stændermødernes Historie i Kristian IV.s Tid*, II, (Cph. 1887-88), pp. 3, 8-11, 125, 134-36.

<sup>13</sup> B. Fritzboeger, *Hovedgårdsdrift og godsøkonomi: Sinnrup 1616-60. Bol og By: Landbobohistorisk tidsskrift* 2.ser. VI, (Cph. 1984), pp. 166-68.

Skinnerup, however, had expanded so much that it becomes unrepresentative from our point of view.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunate though it is, we have to turn to nearby Rønningsøgård. The accounts for 1642-52 record an executor's administration of three deceased persons' estates, a mixture of real as well as cameral calculations, including payments towards a monumental debt (15,-20,000 rd.). This procedure does not, however, distort the main picture, since this, as well as other contributions, can be eliminated in order to isolate the running of the estate.<sup>15</sup> Rønningsøgård belonged to Frederik Markdanner (d.1639); we have no record of the executor's - his brother Hans' - administration; but on his and their mother's deaths in 1642 a new executor had to take over until a division of the estate could take place in 1648, when the youngest daughter of Frederik Markdanner came of age. Then it became divided according to the legal ratio of 2:1 between two sons and three daughters, respectively. For the period 1648-52 only the account for the elder daughter - Birthe Markdanner - has survived.

By 1642<sup>16</sup> Rønningsøgård owned about 620 td.htk. on Funen and 125 in Scania; upon the division in 1648 each brother got 235 td.htk., the three daughters half of that. With the exception of the two years 1645-47 - when profits fell to less than 1% - the estate yielded 3% until 1648. From then Birthe Markdanner obtained 0.6-2.4%, but in 1651/52 a deficit occurred of no less than 6%. In this case the small size of the estate, harvest failures and dearth in the period 1647-51 might explain the poor results. Economic conditions had definitely changed, and the two disastrous wars with Sweden in 1657-60 only added to the losses. At Rønningsøgård the owner, Henrik Markdanner reported that 32% of the copyholds were deserted and 29% impoverished; in 1662 26% still remained abandoned and 6% of the cottages.<sup>17</sup> Having served during the wars at court and as an officer, the crown owed him

<sup>14</sup> RA. Rtk. 311 *Jordebøger indsendt i henhold til kgl. missiver 1660 28/9, 1661 10/1 og 1622/7 (1661-65)*, no.s 26 and 3.

<sup>15</sup> For detail, see: *Festskrift til Troels Dablerup*, (Århus 1985), pp. 231-42.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 238-40

<sup>17</sup> RA.Rtk. 311. *Jordebøger* no. 30.

a considerable amount, but he, too, had incurred debt (liquidated only in 1668). In 1660 he applied for a military sinecure; he died in 1674 with the rank of major.

On nearby Kappendrup Birthe Markdanner reported in 1661 that 46% of the tenancies were in ruin. Incidentally, Margrethe Straale of Neldemose - his sister in law and the widow of one of the gamblers of the preceding generation, Niels Gyldenstjerne - wrote in 1661: "I have absolutely no landed property of my own, while the following has been presented to my daughter, Helvig Gyldenstjerne... by our friends. We live at Neldemose, and the tenant rented 16 barrels as long as he had it". In 1662 they moved to a house, which "I had built in the grounds of the Manor". The son, Henrik Gyldenstjerne, acquired Boltinggård in the neighbourhood, and owned in 1662 nearly 500 td.htk.<sup>18</sup> *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

3. On the advent of absolutism in 1660 things changed rapidly. In June 1661 all three orders - nobles, clerics and burghers alike - were deprived of every political right and influence, but they were allowed to preserve several material privileges "in so far as they do not harm his majesty's royal prerogative". Two became of paramount importance; nobles lost their monopoly of higher administrative posts, and non-nobles - hitherto labelled as 'not wellborn' - got the right to own 'free property', often with noble privileges, and several became subsequently ennobled, thus opening a path to upward social mobility.

Taking into consideration the weak position of the lesser nobility, and noble indebtedness, one could have expected the property loss to have been rapidly eradicated. In the long run this was true, but during the first generations of absolutism the statement needs qualification, to which we shall return presently, since the effects of the new situation must be taken into account in order to arrive at a balance.

First, we need to remember that from 1660 the crown had to sell

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* no.s 23 and 28; *Stamtavler over danske Adelslægter* (henceforth: *SDA*) XI:1, (Cph. 1928), pp. 140 sq., 144; Aa. F. Blomberg, *Fyns vilkår under svenskekrigene 1657-60*, (Odense 1973), pp. 522-26, 532.

parts of its domains in an attempt to liquidate its debts (5 million rd.), later even more to finance its wars; and to impose taxation upon property, including the property of nobles. While the crown owned about 40-45% of all property, by the mid-XVIIth century this percentage had decreased; in the 1680s to 25%, and in 1730 to a mere 17%. This process demonstrated the final effects of the tax-state, but, also, the advent of new social groups.

Second - and of no less importance from a social and economic point of view - it would no longer make any sense to distinguish between old and new nobility or to isolate immigrant nobility, most often of German stock, as previous historians had done. In the present context, categorisation according to noble status, professional points of departure and social mobility ought to lay claim to our attention; and the thesis will be that the gentry did not disappear rapidly after 1660, as has frequently been assumed, but only during the first generations of the eighteenth century.

Already in 1625 more than half of the gentry (54%) lived in Jutland, representing 52% of this group's property. The sources seem to suggest that this disproportion continued until 1660 and later, a conclusion, that will be borne out by the preparatory analysis of Christian V's land-register in 1688.<sup>19</sup> In table 2 the situation in 1680 has been compared with that of 1625, and female owners - unmarried and widows alike - have been specified, since one can assume these to have been the most identifiable group. This assumption can, however, only partly be sustained as can the supposition of an overall impoverishment. By 1625 poor nobles made up 42% of the total, by 1680 only 16%, and females 12% and 6%, respectively.

On the other hand, estates had, on average, generally increased in size, while those of women even more so, with the exception of Jutland. Unfortunately, no ledgers have survived; but the general impression remains that the liquidation of debts,<sup>20</sup> as well as the division of deceased

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Dr John E. Falsig, for having made available to me his data, taken from the preparatory analysis of the cadaster of 1688.

<sup>20</sup> Thus the owner of Stenshede (Jutland) owed debts amounting to 109% of the value of the estate. RA.Rtk. 311 *Jordebøger* no. 59.

husbands' estates, did not impoverish women. From many sources we have plenty of evidence that ruined nobles had to earn their living in other ways.<sup>21</sup> Hans Urne, a patrician, became a cottager, and Anne Krabbe served as a housekeeper in a neighbouring manor house. It should be added that commodity prices fell, and even more so property prices.

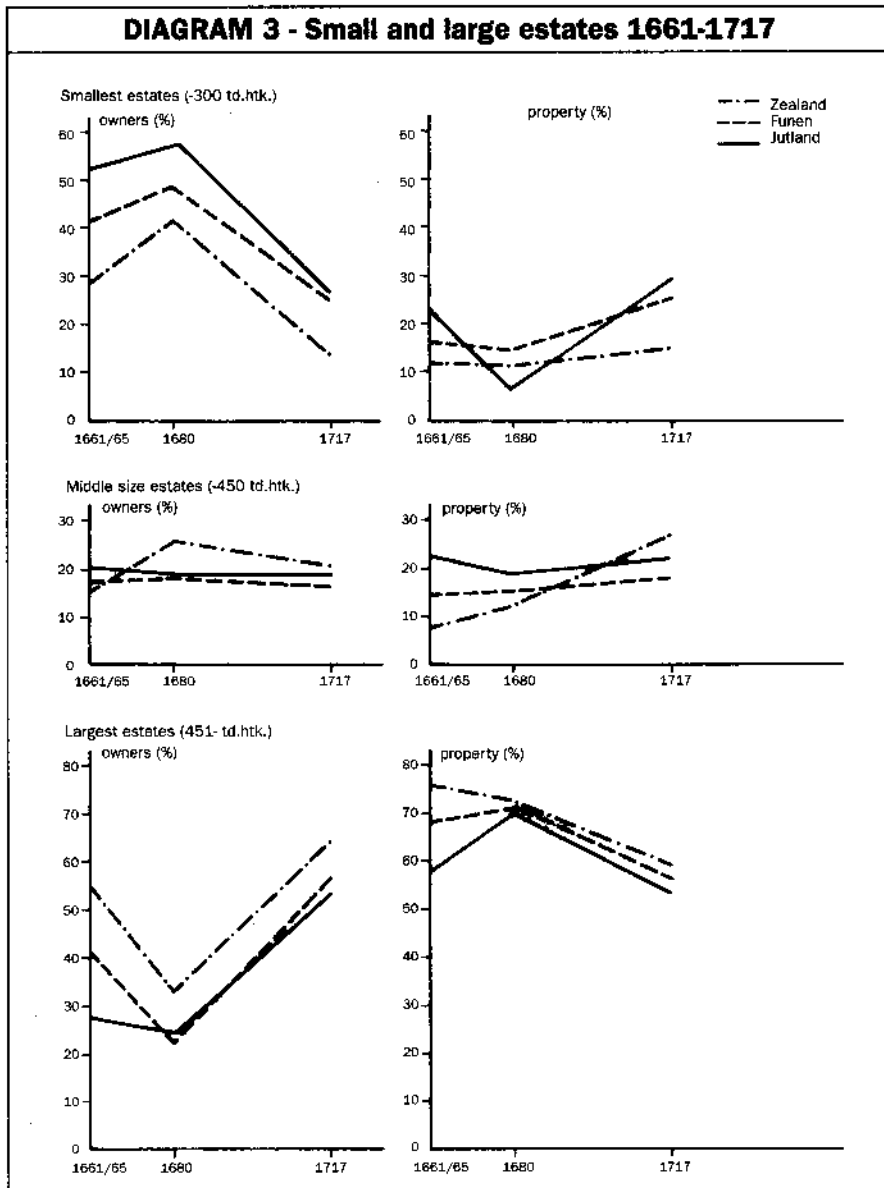
The introduction of absolutism brought two changes of great importance in the distribution of property. First, noble indebtedness now demanded liquidation, especially because the fall in land values after 1664 made the burden of debts even heavier. The nobles' loss of property has often been overestimated; probably it amounted to some 20%. Second the crown had to liquidate its wartime debts by selling its domains, as has been mentioned above. Consequently the land market became highly turbulent; prices fell from 50-55 rd. a td.htk. by 1670 to 20 rd. or even less at the turn of the century, and the government had to issue an ordinance, prescribing minimum prices. The situation changed only around 1740.

The reference points selected here are 1661/65, 1680 and 1717. As to the years 1661-65 the early sales of royal domains have been deducted, as the purpose has been to map the situation on the threshold of absolutism. The effects of both these and noble sales can be assumed to be measurable by 1680. Furthermore, an ordinance of 1682 stated that home farms could obtain tax-exemption, if comprising 200 td.htk. or more inside a radius of two miles (about 3.2 kilometres). One may suspect this measure - unintended though it was - to have created a standard estate of 2-300 td. htk.; we can, thus, suppose that wartime taxation in the period 1714-19 (here mainly 1717) reflected this process.

Diagram 3 clearly demonstrates that the effects can be identified, primarily, at the lowest level and at the top. In the first case the smallest landowners gained relatively until 1680, but the tide turned drastically later, while the shares of the largest moved in exactly the opposite direction, and with no less force. If measured by the relative size of estates, we are again presented with a mirror-image; and these

<sup>21</sup> Sv.Aa.Hansen, *Adelsvældens grundlag*, (Cph. 1964), pp. 148 sq. Of the Alchemist Valdemar Daae of Borreby (Zealand) we hear, that he 'distilled away his property'.

**DIAGRAM 3 - Small and large estates 1661-1717**



statements hold up remarkably well for all provinces. Turning from relative to absolute figures the same trends remain unchanged.

The effect of the 1682 ordinance varied highly. On Zealand no more than 13% of the estates could muster 201-325 td.htk. in 1717.

On Funen and in Jutland, on the other hand, the distribution was 37% and 28%, respectively. The establishment of 'complete estates' according to the ordinance of 1682 had been a long process, and several failed utterly, in spite of governmental postponement until 1691. The diagrams clearly reflect these regional differences: on Funen and in Jutland this process is clearly discernible, far less so on Zealand (tables 3-4).

<b>TABLE 3 - Average holdings of the smallest landowners 1625 and 1680 (td.htk.)</b>			
	<b>Zealand</b>	<b>Funen</b>	<b>Jutland</b>
1625 total	135.2	94.1	101.6
females	153.3	151.2	125.3
1680 total	162.1	141.2	114.5
females	200.1	132.7	93.9

<b>TABLE 4 - Relative distribution of estates 1661-1717 (p.ct.)</b>							
		<b>Zealand</b>		<b>Funen</b>		<b>Jutland</b>	
<b>1661/65</b>		<b>owners</b>	<b>property</b>	<b>owners</b>	<b>property</b>	<b>owners</b>	<b>property</b>
td. htk.	-300	29.1	12.2	41.3	17.3	52.4	22.5
	-400	16.5	12.7	17.4	14.3	20.1	19.0
	451-	54.4	75.1	41.3	68.4	27.5	58.5
1680	-300	41.4	14.0	48.8	14.6	58.5	8.0
	-450	25.3	20.0	18.6	14.6	17.6	22.0
	451-	33.3	66.0	32.6	70.8	24.1	70.1
1717	-300	14.9	14.6	25.2	25.9	26.4	29.3
	-450	21.1	25.8	17.7	17.3	18.8	16.8
	451-	64.6	59.6	57.1	56.8	54.6	53.3

We need not embark here upon any closer inspection of social or national change during early absolutism; a few figures must suffice, including here, too, the island of Lolland (table 5). Whether or not - or rather to what extent - this development influenced the situation we cannot yet ascertain. At least Lolland quickly became Germanized, and only one landless female had survived by 1680, but none at all in 1717 and 1743/44. On the other hand no overall impoverishment seems to have taken place; average possessions

rose by 19%, while those of women fell by 24%. Finally table 6 shows the general profiles of the social composition of landowners in the period 1680-1717 and 1743/44.<sup>22</sup>

During the first half of the seventeenth century impoverished

	<b>Zealand</b>	<b>Lolland</b>	<b>Funen</b>	<b>Jutland</b>	<b>Total</b>
Old nobility	24.5	24.3	52.8	51.2	32.3
New nobility	38.1	69.9	31.8	27.2	26.6
of which German	19.7	69.9	27.4	16.7	15.8
Non-nobles	25.5	11.7	15.4	34.0	20.6
of which German	14.5	5.2	9.6	2.3	4.7

	<b>Zealand</b>		<b>Lolland</b>			<b>Funen</b>			<b>Jutland</b>	
	<b>1680</b>	<b>1717</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1717</b>	<b>1743/44</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1717</b>	<b>1743/44</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>1717</b>
old nobility	37.6	23.9	45.5	10.9	38.2	58.8	-	25.5	48.0	32.5
new nobility	20.2	17.9	34.5	59.2	51.1	4.0	38.8	17.3	10.8	25.1
peers	9.6	19.5	11.7	7.0	-	17.1	51.0	22.4	13.8	18.1
non-nobles	32.5	38.8	8.3	22.8	10.8	20.3	10.8	33.8	27.4	24.2

members of the aristocracy occasionally succeeded in returning to a higher station, as mentioned above. This applies in the case of Anders Bille of Damsbo (Funen, d.1657), who made his fortune as a *condottiere* in Germany during the Thirty Years' War, as well as by a rich marriage; in 1625 he owned no more than 80 td.htk., but by his death no fewer than 8 estates with 2.842 td.htk.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, his cousin Henrik Holck of Egholm (Zealand; d.1633), who likewise made a career in Germany as a *condottiere* and imperial general, had by 1629 earned enough to buy Ravnholt (Funen) with 976 td.htk. at a price of

<sup>22</sup> H. Pedersen, *De danske Landbrug, fremstillet paa Grundlag af Forarbejderne til Christian V.s Matrikel 1688*, (Cph. 1928/1975), pp. 356 et seq. and John E. Falsig's excerpts (note 19); RA. Rtk. 313: 5-6: *Hartkornsekstrakter for proprietærgodset og tiender ... 1714-19*; RA. Rtk. 313.27-28 *Diverse hartkornstabeller 1690-1832 (1743/44)*.

<sup>23</sup> *Danske Magazin* 5.ser.I, p. 170. RA. Rtk. 311 *Jordebøger* no. 24.

50.000 rd. But in the end he ruined himself (through debts for weapons, wages etc.), and his widow had to sell Ravnbolt.<sup>24</sup>

A second way of survival consisted, as mentioned above, in staying away from the élite's speculation in property, to take care of small possessions in a form similar to entail, and to marry equals. This applies to families like the Kaas, Markdanner, Norby, Oldeland and Walckendorff. As a third possibility: some families - the Akeleye, Grubbe, Kaas, Steensen and Urne - formed virtual dynasties of provincial judges (some of them even closely bound together by marriage); this had been the case already in the sixteenth century with the Urne and Grubbe families, but by the late seventeenth century these families had obviously declined. The 'dynasties' could, however, continue in alliance by intermarriage with other families: the Kaas and the Steensen mainly had their property on Funen and the island of Langeland, Akeleye in Scania and Halland. Most members had, in addition, an academic or military training, and served as civil servants or officers, although several petty nobles emigrated to Norway like the Akeleye, Due, Skinkel, Venstermand etc.<sup>25</sup>

Absolutism certainly did not halt this process, but even created new opportunities for nobles of lower status, due to the monarch's suspicion of the intentions of the old aristocracy when pursuing a civil or military career - the latter in the case of Henrik Markdanner - and upward social mobility. Salaries, particularly in the case of officers, were not high, but office paved the way for marriages into respectable families. Officers had to find comfortably better-off partners, and daughters to marry rich non-noble landowners. In the case of officers the only disadvantage was that they were not allowed to marry until they reached the rank of major, unless they obtained royal permission. This led, of course, to late marriages, which reduced in turn the frequency of births and put the survival of the family at risk.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> K.C. Rockstroh in *Dansk biografisk Leksikon*, (2nd ed.X. Cph. 1936), p. 393.

<sup>25</sup> (Norwegian) *HT* 1998, pp. 91-98.

<sup>26</sup> Sv. Aa. Hansen, *Adelsvældens grundlag*, (Cph. 1964), pp. 211-16, 219-22, 269-72.

As a paradigm we could choose the Markdanner and Rodsten families. Henrik Markdanner's only brother had been 'killed rogue-like', but two of his sisters married into the Kaas and Due families, while Birthe Markdanner remained a spinster. Henrik Markdanner's only surviving son died in 1677; thus the family died out. The Rodsten family - from northern Jutland and known only since the late middle ages - had lived in modest obscurity until the mid-seventeenth century, but then climbed upward, strengthening its reputation by forging its pedigree and, probably, by mere luck.<sup>27</sup> By 1661/65 three members held 2,300 td.htk., by 1680 two members owned 1,085 td.htk., and in 1717 three persons had 3,200 td.htk. One, Marquard Rodsten (d.1670), rose to lieutenant-colonel; another, Jens Rodsten, advanced to the rank of vice-admiral; a third, Marquard Rodsten (d.1681), rose to admiral; a fourth, Christian Rodsten, became a lieutenant general, and his brother Peder Rodsten became Chief of the Admiralty in 1704, a couple of years later 'knight of the white ribbon', and acquired the title of baron, according to a statute of 1671, shortly before his death in 1714.

Jens Rodsten had been able to marry Sofie Amalie Gersdorff, daughter of the late Lord-Seneschal. Peder Rodsten married Sofie Elisabeth Charisius, lady in waiting, and his sister, Margrethe Rodsten, married the élite nobleman Holger Rosenkrans of Lungholm. But with the death of the elder brother, Christian Rodsten, who had remained a bachelor, the family became genealogically extinct in 1728. This example demonstrates the trend<sup>28</sup>.

5. As an epilogue a brief comparison with neighbouring countries is illuminating. Remote nobilities such as the Polish can be omitted, since in spite of great diversification they were incomparably more numerous (5%) than the Scandinavians - (0.5% in Sweden in the sixteenth century, 0.25% in seventeenth-century Denmark and 0.02%

<sup>27</sup> T. Dahlerup, *Slægten Rodsten oprindelse. Danmarks adels årbog 79*, (Cph. 1963), pp. 73-80.

<sup>28</sup> *SDA VIII*, (Cph. 1914), pp. 28 *et seq.*

in Norway). Even the Holstein *Ritterschaft* can be dismissed, since it was an élite on the basis of *Gutswirtschaft*.<sup>29</sup> What remain as comparable units are the lesser nobilities of the Duchy of Schleswig, Sweden and Norway.

In the case of Schleswig the invasion of Holstein nobles had started in the fourteenth century, but continued until 1600, when the Danish nobility of northern Schleswig had been all but swept away. A tax list of 1507 still registers a numerous nobility, but later lists in 1543, 1546 and 1588 reveal its rapid retreat, until by 1600 it had been almost totally eliminated and replaced by the Holstein dukes and magnates, families like Rantzau, Ahlefeld, Blome, v.d. Wisch etc.<sup>30</sup> Some of the former Schleswig noble families simply died out (e.g. Sture); others, like Andersen, v. Deden, Hartvigsen, Holck and Lindenow, moved to the kingdom. The latter two joined the aristocracy, while the former three could claim no more than local importance in western Jutland.<sup>31</sup>

The sixteenth-century Swedish nobility consisted, like its Danish counterpart, of 'aristocrats and enhanced peasants' (J. Samuelson), but was even less abundant, due to the blood bath of Stockholm in 1520. This implied a heavy concentration of property in a few hands, and a surplus of women. Humble nobles were crowded in southwestern Finland and the western and southwestern regions of Sweden and often married, in spite of governmental interference, into local non-noble circles (peasants, bailiffs, priests) and served as judicial officers and, in contrast to Denmark, as *len* holders.<sup>32</sup>

As to Norway, its nobility had been seriously decimated during the late middle ages, and the state council became completely

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M.L. Bush, *Rich noble, poor noble*, (Manchester 1988), *passim*; H.M. Scott, (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries II*, (London 1995), *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> J. Skovgaard i *Sønderjyllands Historie II*, eds. V. laCour *et al*, (Cph. 1942), pp. 399 *et seq.*, 500.

<sup>31</sup> *SDAI*, (Cph. 1887), pp. 18-20; IV, (1897), pp. 265-67; VI, (1905), pp. 38-51; X, (1923), pp. 156-60; XI: 1, (1928), pp. 37-47.

<sup>32</sup> For Sweden and Noeway: J. Samuelson, *Aristokrat eller förädlad bonde? Det svenska frälsets ekonomi, politik och sociala förbindelser under tiden 1523-1611*, (Lund 1993), pp. 52-86, 167-221, 258-60, 268 *et seq.* (summary); T. Weidling, *Den norske adelen fra reformasjonen til eneveldet*, (Oslo 1997); (Norwegian) *HT*98, pp. 91-98 (review).

dominated by the bishops in the turbulent decades before the Reformation. The country had, since 1380, formed an unofficial union with Denmark, and its nobility shared - at least after 1483 - the privileges of its Danish equals. This opened the door to Norway - 'the garden of the Danish nobility', in the words of one immigrant (Vincens Lunge, d. 1536) - and more often than not it was to the detriment of the Norwegians, at least in the eyes of Norwegians. This was not only, to magnates like Hartvig Krummedige and his son Henrik and the latter's enemy Vincens Lunge, but to large numbers of nobles of the most modest lineage, often client nobles. On top of this, the situation became further embroiled by the Norwegian church's stubborn resistance to the Lutheran movement.

Immediately following the civil war of 1534-36 Norway became formally incorporated into the Danish crown, a blatant violation of its sovereignty. This did not, however, halt the influx of Danish nobles, whatever their status; the Norwegian nobility (abolished in 1821) has not been investigated after 1661, but nothing would suggest that the gentry disappeared immediately. On the other hand the aristocratic line of Bielke emigrated to Denmark and became wholly assimilated.

This brief comparison must suffice to demonstrate similarities as well as dissimilarities. Conditions in Denmark and Norway, of course, had much in common; and absolutism seems - at least for a while - to have improved the possibilities of the gentry for admission to officialdom, since the gentry were far less suspicious in the eyes of narrow-minded monarchs. A final assessment must, however, await detailed investigation. On the other hand the Norwegian nobility, small by numbers, had recruited new members of high and low status from Denmark since the late middle ages, a trend which far surpassed in this respect the immigration of Schleswig gentry, to Denmark.

As to Sweden, its independence in 1523 created the strong Vasa monarchy, but the country soon became involved in war (in 1558) lasting almost continuously until 1720. The military *perpetuum mobile* therefore made necessary closer control of the nobility and, in particular, meticulous inspection of knights' service and later the standing army, a fact that kept the nobility, great and small constantly

occupied. In fact, after 1600 this inevitably led to an enormous expansion, not only of indigenous, but also of Baltic, German or English-Scottish stock. These few facts undoubtedly explain why Sweden's path differed from the Danish-Norwegian pattern. In partial contrast to Sweden Danish absolutism offered an obsolete gentry an Indian summer, however short-lived.

Abbreviations:

HT = Historisk tidsskrift I-. Copenhagen 1839-.

RA = Rigsarkivet (The public record office, Copenhagen).

Rtk. = Rentekammeret (The accounting chamber).

SDA = Stamtavler over danske Adelslægter, eds. A. Thiset *et al.* I-XV, (Cph. 1887-1945) (Pedigrees of Danish noble families).

Td.htk. = Barrels of hard grain (rye and barley); for a definition cf. above.