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Статья

THE BORDER, THE FINNS AND RUSSIA IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE

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Abstract.

Key words:

The border between Finland and Russia, “the eastern border”, as we Finns call it, is in some respects among the oldest land borders in Europe. In the Early Modern Age, or from the first half of the 16th Century to the late 18th Century, Finland was only a group of the Swedish Realm’s eastern provinces. As we know, about Finland became a separate administrative entity only in 1809, when it formed the autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire.

In the 17th Century, near the Russian border, Sweden had the conquered territory, the province of Kexholm (Finn. Käkisalmen lääni, Russ. Korela uezd, Sw. Kexholms Län), which it gained from Russia in the Treaty of Stolbova signed on 27 February 1617. It was a province in the same manner as Estonia or Ingria. Inhabitants in the Swedish provinces did not have full political rights in the same way as people had at the core of the Swedish Realm, especially right to send its representatives to the Swedish Diet (Sw. riksdag). Rather soon, in the Peace Treaty of Uusikaupunki (Sw. Nystad) in 1721 Sweden lost its southern parts of the province of Kexholm back in Russia. The northern parts of it which Sweden kept, is nowadays Northern Karelia (Finn. Pohjois-Karjala).

What kind was the border against Russia (or the Grand Duchy of Muscovy) in the Early Modern period? The eastern border was mainly like as a “sieve-like frontier”, as we can describe it now, and it was not usually guarded. This was also the case on the borders in other parts of Europe. Only occasional stones and trees were used as markers of the eastern border. Land borders, including the eastern border, passed people and stuff quite freely from side to another.

The border made possible all kinds of movements. On the eastern border, border patrolling began only in the 18th Century, and then as customs control for preventing smuggling, and even then



quite locally. On the eastern border, the modern kind border was actually born until in the 1930s when the border between Finland and Soviet Union was closed. Only then the movements of people and stuffs across the border came almost completely under the control of the authorities. Still, in the Early Modern period the eastern border was the concrete barrier to authorities and soldiers. They could not cross the border as they were searching for all kinds of deserters and hiders. For that, as a result, would have been small scale diplomatic or even military conflict between Russia and Sweden.

Wars and the so-called border peace -institution

During the period from the 1490s to 1809, Sweden and Muscovite Russia were at war with each other nine times, who touched the eastern border and the current Finnish territory. In those wars, the Finns were targets of destruction and looting and many of them were taken as captives to Russia. This was especially the case of the population in the border regions. The Swedish Crown's ability to defend its eastern subjects was usually very poor and such a thing was not even expected. The control of the state power of its peripheral areas and frontiers was still extremely small. The defense of local residents was considered as their own obligation. The limited resources of the Crown were needed for the actual military operations.

The worst scenario in the border milieu, during the war, was being attacked. The most important solution to prevent it was the so-called border peace agreements during war or in the threat of war. Those local agreements were to maintain peace and help another, for example by warning about coming hostilities.

The second important aspect in these local agreements was shared measures against the common enemy, outlaws, robbers and bandits, who were hiding in the border forests and who were seeking opportunities for looting, murdering and arson, even if their native companions.

The third important point in those local peace agreements concerned the protection of border trade and trade routes. The intensive trade contacts occurred along established routes, mainly along natural routes, as waterways, in winter and summer in the vicinity of Swedish-Russian border area. Border traffic was especially lively between the White Sea region and the northern parts of Olonets and the eastern provinces of Sweden. As we all know, the significance of trade in these northern areas had been increased after 1553, when the English explorer, Richard Chancellor, found himself at the mouth of the Dvina River and so English-Russian trade contacts were opened via the Arctic Ocean and the White Sea. Between Russian and Swedish border inhabitants, cross-border trade contacts were an important factor in creating peace and harmony although from time to time in the mutual relations had even problems.

The first mention of border peace agreement comes from the end of the 15th Century. From the beginning of the 16th Century, state control over local peace agreements was increased, firstly especially on the Swedish side, as the state building process began towards a nation state, one ruler dynasty on its top. The last indication from this old practice is in the Finnish War of 1808–1809. After that the border peace institution became unnecessary, after centuries of use, as Finland became a part of the Russian Empire.

In the early modern period, these kinds of local peace agreements were concluded also in the British Isles, between England and Scotland, and in Scandinavia between Sweden and Denmark-Norway. In those areas, the case was the same as between Sweden and Russia in the eastern border: state control was very weak and the inhabitants sought their own protection by these local measures.



Emigration over the border

In the Early Modern Era, the Swedes, and the Finns in it, were ruled from the top of the hierarchical class society where each estate had its own given place according to that order which God had created. At least the leading layers of society thought so. In a word, the Swedes and the Finns were the subjects of the Crown. The subjection to the Ruler was determined by the birthplace: if you were born on the Russian side, you were automatically the subject of Grand Duke of Moscow/Russian Tsar and in the West in the same way to King of Sweden. Those ties were confirmed by a solemn act, an oath of allegiance. Peasants had their significance as soldiers, taxpayers and farmers. All living within the borders was like as the private property of the Ruler.

For that reason the Crown supervised its subjects carefully and regulated their right to change place, so within the kingdom and especially emigration. Any of the Swedish estates had no right to permanent emigration. In Early Modern Sweden, it was abolished in April 1620. It was allowed only a temporary travel, such as field trips to students, and only in certain social groups. From servants and workers going to abroad was forbidden. In Sweden, those, who were found guilty for such a crime, lost all their succession rights in their former home country. The Swedish Crown showed a particular attention to the unauthorized migration of the skilled population. At the same time in other parts of Europe, monarchs acted in the same way. Even in Russia the peasant's right to migrate was banned in the 17th Century and they were tied to a particular place as the property of the owner.

An illegal emigration across the borders was nevertheless happened because the open border without border guarding made possible these kinds of movements. Local people continued to move from one to other Realm, as in the past, regardless of the borders. Even though Sweden and Russia were foreign countries with each other, there was not a linguistic barrier between them. In the neighborhood on the Russian side was lived mainly by Finnic Karelians, whose language was close to Finnish. On both sides, communication ran smoothly. People, separated by the border, were accustomed to move in the West–East axis after their own desires and need, regardless of the fact that we were at war with each other many times. Some moved permanently away, some came back when conditions changed. As a rule, the emigration seems to be carried people from Sweden/Finland to Russia, and in general population from the border areas.

In the eyes of the Crown and its authorities, every illegal emigrant was a deserter. In the modern sense, however, in those people was often the matter of the refugees who had to move for political, economic or religious reasons. Extent how much they were on the whole, it is quite impossible to find out, because there is no certain source of them. It was, however, a question of large numbers of people, thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, when all people, who emigrated illegally, are summed.

It is possible to type the Finns, who moved to the East, to four major groups. (1) "Hunger refugees" during the crop failure, and other people who were seeking employment and livelihood. Particularly active in this kind of emigration seems to have been those who lived close to the border. This kind of matter continued, as a matter of fact, to the beginning of the 1930s. From Finland moved people, men and women, in their most productive years and especially from the landless people. The other three groups are displayed in the slide.

The border, in itself, made possible all these movements. The eastern border was mainly like as a "sieve-like frontier" and it was not usually guarded, as I already said. This was also the case on the borders in other parts of Europe. The eastern border was not any exception in the European



framework. Borders, including the eastern border, passed people and stuff quite freely from side to another.

People were an important economic resource in the Early Modern period and they were an essential part also in Swedish-Russian border relations in wartime and peacetime. So, Russia and Sweden tried to regulate an illegal emigration with their Peace Treaties. Often, in those agreements was the special section where both sides announced that they would not accept an illegal emigration and promised to return illegal emigrants and deserters, including all property and family members. Now and then, above all in the 18th Century, on the border was arranged the special occasions, where deserters were handed back their native countries. In the Peace Treaties, Sweden and Russia also promised that they would not persuade subjects from each other to deserting.

In practice, in the searching or returning of unauthorized immigrants was often delayed, or it was completely stopped, if it was concerned about hard-working and decent people. This conduct was on both sides. However, unskilled and lazy people and criminals were tended to deport back their native country. In a word, they were worthless population.

The Swedish Crown also tried to get its lost subjects back by declaring them an amnesty. Still, guilty for serious crimes were closed outside that right.

“Finland” at the end of the Swedish Era (1809) (lääni = province)



Korela uezd (Finn. *Käkisalmen lääni*, Sw. *Kexholms Län*, on the left) in the 17th Century



The border now and then

(on the left, the old border rock from the time after the Peace of Teusina 1595 on Ohtaansalmi, near Tuusniemi)



The wars between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Muscovy/
the tsardom of Russia/the Russian Empire
from the 1490s to 1809:

- 1495–1497
- 1555–1557
- 1570–1595 (includes several truce periods)
- 1610–1617
- 1656–1658
- 1700–1721
- 1741–1743
- 1788–1790
- 1808–1809

Warfare in the Early Modern age



The declaration of amnesty (Sw. *pardonsplakat*) from the time of king Gustavus III of Sweden



People of Petsamo (Russ. *Pechenga*) are swearing their oath of allegiance to the Republic of Finland after the Peace of Tartu (1920)



The deserters over the eastern border in the Early Modern Period

(Engl. *deserter*, Finn. *karkuri*, Russ. *begly* > Karelian *biegla*):

1. "Hunger refugees" (during the crop failure), and people seeking employment and livelihood
2. Criminals, vagabonds and vagrants from the landless population
3. Those who were fleeing from their obligations to the Realm (the payment of taxes and conscriptions, i.e. recruitment as an infantryman in army)
4. Those were fleeing from religious discrimination or persecution in their own country (orthodox peasants from the province of Kexholm, the Old Believers, Russian *raskolniki*)

**Arkhangelsk (founded 1584), the important spot in trade
contacts between Western Europe and Russia
in the 16th and 17th Century**



**Border peace agreement
(Finn. *rajarauha*, Sw. *gränsfred*) =**

a separate local agreement entered into by
population in a border area with the
corresponding population on the border in
order to prevent an outbreak of hostilities
between them in the event of war or the
threat of war between their two countries