

## Abstract

Lars Nyström, *Potatisriket. Stora Bjurum 1857–1917. Jorden, makten, samhället*. Avhandlingar från historiska institutionen i Göteborg 33 (Göteborg 2003). 432 pages. Written in Swedish with an English summary (*A Realm of Potatoes: The Stora Bjurum Estate 1857–1917. The Land, the Power, the Community*). ISBN 9188614-4333; ISSN 11000-6781.

To the people on Sweden's big landed estates, the period 1857–1917 was an epoch of changes. The first two decades were in many ways a golden age for the landlords. Agricultural prices were high, wages low, and formal and informal political power still directly related to the land ownership. After 1880 these conditions rapidly changed. Grain prices fell due to increased international competition. Wages rose due to emigration and industrialisation. The democratisation process soon threatened the landowners politically. After the turn of the century, the growing labour-movement questioned their legitimacy and called for expropriating the big estates and redistributing the land.

The present thesis deals with one Swedish estate-community during this period: Stora Bjurum in west-central Sweden. The goal is to offer an in-depth study over a limited area, covering a wide range of issues: geographic conditions, production, organisation of labour, social structure and local culture. The focus, however, is on political development. How does a community work where one person has virtually all means of power? How did the master use power and for what purposes? What could the apparently so powerless subjects do to assert themselves and their interests? How did all this change during the eventful period 1857–1917?

A key concept in the study on inegalitarian societies is *paternalism*. This thesis elaborates a model to analyze the political mechanism of paternalistic community from the tensions between *power* and *counter-power*, *solidarity* and *conflict*, and *omnipotence* and *righteousness*. It also shows how the masters' use of power changed over the time studied. Confronted with a harder competition of labour and the spread of ideas about democracy and social equality, the harsh and omnipotent rule of the early period no longer worked. The master now searched more to integrate the workers within the estate community. He also increasingly legitimized his own power through a paternalistic ideology stressing the good and mutual relationships between ruler and ruled. The subjects, however, also used this ideology, turning their masters' claims of righteousness into their own demands for better working conditions. This way, under the surface of a maintained monopoly of power, the subjects gradually strengthened their position.

*Key words:* landed estates, enclosure, agricultural crisis, farm mechanisation, organisation of labour, agricultural workers, peasants, paternalism, power, political culture, legal anthropology, everyday resistance, democratisation process, labour movement.