Självvägarområdenas egenart
Jämtland och andra områden i Skandinavien med småskaligt jordägande 900–1500

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Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i historia vid Stockholms universitet som offentligen kommer att försvaras onsdagen den 19 december 2012 kl. 10.00 i De Geersalen, Geovetenskapens hus, Svante Arrhenius väg 14.

Abstract
The special character of freeholders’ regions. Jämtland and other regions in Scandinavia with small-scale landownership AD 900–1500

This thesis takes its departure from the fact that in the 16th century there were some regions in Scandinavia where almost all land was held by freeholders, while in other regions large areas of land were held by landlords. The aim of the study is to determine which factors had been decisive in the development of this regional variation. One factor is known from earlier research: the conditions for farming, dependent on climate and natural features. In this thesis the author points out another important factor, namely the conditions for people in the countryside to acquire surplus from trade. This is done through an in-depth investigation of the society of Jämtland in the period AD 900–1500, which is then compared with other freeholders’ regions, treated briefly.

It is observed that the landownership had been small-scale or mostly small-scale in all these regions for many centuries before the 16th century, and that there are strong indications of the wealthiest farmers being traders and having their surplus mostly drawn from trade activities. It is reasonable to believe that the lack of willingness to invest in estates in these regions was due to the fact that those who had resources gave priority to investments in interregional and regional trade instead. They probably saw better chances of gaining more surplus from trade activities than from the agrarian economy, given the conditions for trading and crop cultivation, respectively, that were prevailing there. In such a region, hence, an important economic force for estate-formation was missing. This will explain why certain regions, like Jämtland or Gotland, developed into and remained as freeholders’ regions.

Another observation concerns the social structure of freeholders’ regions. It is observed that the societies in these regions seem to have been less hierarchical on the local level than societies in regions dominated by landlords – even though the differences in fortunes could be great.

Keywords: landownership, freeholders, trade, social structure, Scandinavia, Jämtland, Viking Age, Middle Ages.

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