

# Introduction to the English edition

**E**VERY HUMAN BEING grows up and lives in a local context, an environment with characteristic features and values which becomes the filter through which the rest of the world is interpreted. This also applies to an author of a book about Europe. The author of this book has very extensive in-depth experience from many parts of Europe. The reader will find an impressive number of examples from many countries, including Spain, Romania and Montenegro in particular. Nonetheless, the reader will soon realise that the author comes from Sweden. Many of the examples of European and regional environments, features and phenomena are Swedish. It was therefore decided that this English edition of the book should include a brief introduction outlining a few features of the visible and hidden landscape of the author's region of Europe. It is hoped that this background information will give readers from other parts of Europe a better understanding of the Swedish and north European examples given in the book.

The most recent Ice Age eradicated virtually all traces of earlier parts of the Quaternary south to northern Germany and Poland. Thus, we know very little about the flora and fauna of the Pleistocene in this part of Europe. Biologists in northern Europe tend to consider the end of the Ice Age 15,000 – 10,000 years ago as the start of history and may be lost when scientists from southern Europe discuss earlier periods with various geological names.

On the other hand, the post-glacial period is known in considerable detail. It must be remembered that written records in northern Europe only exist for the last one thousand years. Except for scattered notes in Roman literature, all earlier information we have has been collected using archaeological and palaeobiological methods. Pollen analysis, first presented by the Swedish quaternary geologist Lennart von Post in 1916, has been of great help. The North European environment is well suited for this method, since there are plentiful organic deposits.

The most recent glacial period created a landscape that is still very young and the subsequent land upheaval an even younger one, because low-lying areas were left under water when the ice had receded. Hardly any soil has been formed through weathering processes. Most of the land is covered by till soil formed by the ice during the glaciation.

The post-glacial history of the Baltic Sea is complicated. It can be studied in detail in the geology volume of the National Atlas of Sweden. Periods of freshwater conditions have alternated with salt or brackish water, resulting in the present brackish environment. One peculiar feature is the salt gradient; salinity decreases northwards until it falls to nearly freshwater levels in the northern Bay of Bothnia. Obviously this has a profound impact on the biota.

The basic cause of the changes over time in the Baltic basin, i.e., land upheaval, has proceeded at a varying pace in different parts of the region and has therefore caused tilting. When new land rose from the sea, hills and small elevations appeared first and lost all their sediment, which was deposited in the depressions between them. The typical young landscape below the highest water level therefore consists of soil-less rocky outcrops sharply delimited from surrounding clay plains.

The agrarian history of Europe is extremely diverse. "Independent" farmers not living in villages or towns of any size have been a characteristic feature of Norway, Sweden and Finland. In most places they managed to remain outside the influence of feudal landowners, and established a culture of free peasants. This remains part of the national identity. The original solitary farms developed into hamlets, still under family control, but seldom growing into villages. In continental Europe, modern analogues can mainly be found in the major mountain ranges (the Alps, Carpathians and Pyrenees), where the altitude provided similar ecosystems, similar colonisation processes and a comparatively weak urban lowland influence. Elsewhere in Europe, the antiquity of agrarian colonisation and the density of urban settlements eradicated this social structure early on. This process must be extremely ancient in the Mediterranean region; agrarian villages were documented in the pre-classical era, developing an early, pre-feudal, social structure of ownership (Ackerbürger).

The importance of winter fodder collection is extensively discussed in the book. We would like to emphasise the author's standpoint that cold climate per se may not be reason enough for stabling animals in winter. In fact, experience has shown that domestic animals prefer to be outdoors in winter too. During the Neolithic and the Bronze Age, when the climate was warm,

cattle were not normally housed, and it is true that the practice began during a period of climate deterioration about 2,500 years ago. But, as discussed in the book, this probably also coincided with a period when animals became more valuable, and this may be the most important reason for housing them.

Whatever the case, housing animals in winter necessitates collection of winter fodder, which was done in semi-natural meadows. The importance of these meadows in northern Europe can hardly be overemphasised. Both non-fertilised mesic land and wetlands were used. Some of the latter, when seasonally flooded by surface water from streams, were by far the most productive. In northern Scandinavia, with its scattered habitations in a sea of forest, the existence of these wetlands was often a key factor when choosing a place to settle.

Thus, people had a positive relationship to wetlands. This was not broken until the 19th century, when artificial fertilisers became available and fodder production could therefore be transferred to seeded grasslands. Nearly all wetlands were abandoned during the first half of the 20th century, and many of them were drained and converted into arable fields.

The chapter on pastoralism is the longest in the book and it is also a subject about which the author is particularly knowledgeable. The difference between long-distance seasonal migrations in Southern Europe (the Spanish *cañada*, the Italian *transumanza*, etc.) and the network of Scandinavian *fåbodars*, scattered on the periphery of the agrarian landscape, may appear large. The transhumance in Southern Europe, necessitated by seasonal drought, may entail an annual migration of herds (mainly sheep) and humans over hundreds of kilometres between summer pastures in the mountains and winter pastures in the lowlands. The location of Scandinavian seasonal settlements was based on a wish to reach unexploited grazing areas for cattle in the nearby forest. They are not based on seasonal variations in climate. Only in some districts do cattle (and goats) follow a sort of seasonal migration to the uninhabited upper part of the forest region, resembling the practice of vertical short-distance seasonal migration in the Alps to the *Almen* and *Matten* (German) or *alpi* and *malghe* (Latin).

Closer analogues with Southern Europe may be found in the seasonal migration of the Sami people from the mountains

to the coast, especially on the eastern side of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The author, comparing the different systems, stresses the general importance of the availability of fodder during the harsh seasons (winter in the north, summer in the south), thus providing a consistent functional interpretation of the genesis of nomadic pastoralism throughout Europe.

The depression of the 1930s caused the Swedish government to adopt a protectionist agricultural policy involving heavy subsidies. This policy continued until 1990 and kept the landscape open. Abandoned land was mainly peripheral or isolated fields, except in northern Sweden, where farms were abandoned on a larger scale. However, the number of people employed in agriculture fell dramatically during this period. The new generation often did not take over the small farms they inherited from their parents; instead these were sold to neighbouring farmers, who thereby increased their farm size. This trend was certainly not unique to Sweden, but the result we now see is that Sweden is the European country with the highest proportion of its population living in towns. Sweden is also a country where large-scale and centralised solutions are generally favoured, both in the public and private sector. Development has favoured large supermarkets, while people in villages and small towns see their shops, railway stations and post offices being closed down. It is a paradox that a people whose ideal is a rural cottage, preferably red with white edging and surrounded by forest and lakes, live in towns to such a large extent.

The Swedish parliament adopted a new policy for the agricultural sector in 1990. It was decided to gradually abandon subsidies so as to eliminate overproduction. It was estimated that 500,000 hectares of land used for cereal production needed to be used for something else, and that the number of dairy cows needed to be reduced by up to 100,000 animals. However, a few years later, in 1994, Sweden joined the European Union, and has since received agricultural subsidies just like other EU member states. Although there is almost a political consensus in Sweden that EU subsidies in this sector should be reduced, Sweden has so far had little success in arguing this position. The book concludes with a plea for a shift in EU agricultural policy away from support for production towards support for conservation of rural cultural landscapes and their biodiversity.

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