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The reading public outside Sweden knows little of that country's history, beyond the dramatic and short-lived era in the seventeenth century when Sweden under Gustavus Adolphus became a major European power by her intervention in the Thirty Years War. It is also known how Sweden lost her status after the dramatic confrontation between the warrior king Charles XII and Peter the Great of Russia.

In the last decades of the seventeenth century another Swedish king, Charles XI, launched a less dramatic but remarkable bid to stabilize and secure Sweden's position as a major power in northern Europe and as master of the Baltic Sea. This project, which is almost unknown to students of history outside Sweden, involved a comprehensive overhaul of the government and institutions of the kingdom, on the basis of establishing Sweden as a model of absolute monarchy. This book gives an account of what was achieved under the direction of a distinctly unglamorous, but pious and conscientious ruler who was convinced of his Christian duty to secure the welfare of his kingdom and the subjects God had placed in his care. It also shows why a seventeenth-century European might well see royal absolutism as an acceptable way to govern a society, and why Charles XI enjoyed the support of most of his subjects.

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Charles XI on his horse 'Brilliant' at the battle of Lund, 4 December 1676,  
by D. K. Ehrenstrahl, 1682.

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A. F. UPTON

*University of St Andrews*



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico CityCambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UKPublished in the United States of America by  
Cambridge University Press, New York[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521573900](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521573900)

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First published 1998

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library**Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Upton, Anthony F.

Charles XI and Swedish absolutism / A. F. Upton.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in early modern history)

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0 521 57390 4

1. Sweden – Politics and government – 1660-1697. 2. Charles XI,  
King of Sweden, 1655-1697. I. Title. II. Series.

DL727.U67 1998

948.5'03-dc21 97-25197 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-57390-0 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-02448-8 Paperback

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## Swedish words used in the text

**indelningsverk** This was a system long practised in Sweden, whereby an institution or an individual public servant drew income from a revenue source, usually land rent or taxes, which had been permanently assigned for that purpose in the state budget. The recipient would collect the income directly at source. Part of the reform plan under Charles XI, in the first place for financing the armed forces, was to universalize this method of payment for public services.

**knektehåll** A system used in Sweden for maintaining infantry soldiers. The king entered into a contract with the peasantry of a province, whereby they undertook to maintain a specified number of soldiers in constant readiness for service, in return for the crown giving up its traditional right to call for conscription. Peasant farms grouped into *rotas*, and recruited the soldier, provided a cottage with an allotment, or alternatively board and lodging, basic clothing and a wage. These contracts were regarded as legally binding and irrevocable.

**reduktion** This is a legal process, based on the principle of the inalienability of the crown's lands and revenues. The principle meant that even if a ruler made a grant to a subject in perpetuity from these lands and revenues, he, or his successors, could recall the grant at any time on grounds of public necessity. It was the principal means used in the reign of Charles XI to fund his reform programme.

**Riddarhus** This is strictly the building, first used in the Diet of 1680, as the permanent meeting place for the Estate of the Nobility – *ridderskap och adeln* – and to house the archives of the Estate, including the Matriculation Register of its members. The term is also commonly used, as in this text, to denote the Estate of the Nobility in the Diet.

## Currencies in use in Sweden

In the seventeenth century there were three main types of currency in use.

- 1 The *rixdaler*, denominated in the text as rd. This was the silver thaler of the Holy Roman Empire being used as an international currency.

*Swedish words used in the text*

- 2 The *daler silvermynt*, the Swedish silver daler, denominated in the text as dsm. This was the internal money of account, and there was a silver currency in use, though there was no actual coin of that denomination, and the copper coinage was used in most contemporary cash transactions.
- 3 The *daler kopparmynt*, the Swedish copper daler, denominated in the text as dkm. It was an intrinsic value copper coinage that circulated in the kingdom. This meant that high denominations were minted slabs of solid copper – *plåter* – too heavy for an individual to carry. It had been intended that the silver and copper coinage should be of equivalent value, but in reality silver coins enjoyed a substantial premium over copper of the same face value.

## Dates

Seventeenth-century Sweden used the Julian calendar, like the rest of Protestant Europe, and in consequence the dates in the text are Old Style, unless otherwise indicated.

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## Comparative chronology

### EUROPE

1609 Truce between Spain and the United Provinces.

1618 Bohemian revolt begins the Thirty Years War.

1620 Battle of the White Mountain; Bohemian revolt crushed.

1622 Olivares made First Minister in Spain.

1624 Richelieu comes to power in France.

1625 Wallenstein employed by the emperor, war moves into north Germany. Denmark enters the war in the Protestant interest.

1629 Edict of Restitution; Denmark leaves the war, defeated.

### SWEDEN

1611 Accession of Gustav II Adolf; Axel Oxenstierna appointed Chancellor. Sweden at war with Denmark, Russia, Poland.

1613 Peace of Knäröd with Denmark, status quo maintained, but Sweden pays a large indemnity.

1617 Peace of Stolbova with Russia. Russia cedes Kexholm and Ingermanland to Sweden.

1618 Sweden renews the offensive against Poland.

1621 Sweden captures Riga and control of Livland.

1629 Sweden concludes a truce with Poland; left in possession of Livland provisionally.

1630 Sweden decides to enter the war in Germany in the Protestant interest and sends an army into Pomerania.

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- 1631 Sweden makes subsidy treaty with France. Sweden wins major victory over the Imperialists at Breitenfeld.
- 1632 Gustav II Adolf killed at the battle of Lützen. Accession of Christina; regency government led by Axel Oxenstierna and the Council of State.
- 1634 Murder of Wallenstein.
- 1634 Swedish army defeated by the Imperialists at Nördlingen; Sweden concludes new treaty with France as junior partner in the Thirty Years War. Swedish Diet accepts Oxenstierna's draft for a Form of Government for the kingdom.
- 1635 France officially enters the war against the Imperialists and Spain.
- 1643 Death of Louis XIII; accession of Louis XIV and a regency.
- 1643 Sweden launches preventive war on Denmark.
- 1645 Denmark defeated; concludes Peace of Brömsebro; cedes provinces of Jämtland, Härjedalen, Halland and the islands of Gotland and Ösel.
- 1648 Peace of Westphalia; year of widespread revolts through Europe.
- 1648 By the Peace of Westphalia Sweden acquires the German provinces of Pomerania, Bremen Verden and Wismar from the Empire. King of Sweden made a guarantor of the treaty and Sweden gets the status of a major international power. The king of Sweden becomes a prince of the Empire, represented in the Imperial Diet.
- 1650 Post-war financial crisis in Sweden results in confrontation between the commoner Estates and the Riddarhus and Council of State in the Diet. The commoners put forward a request to Christina for a general reduktion of crown donations to the nobles.
- 1653 End of the *frondes* in France. Mazarin becomes First Minister.
- 1654 Abdication of Christina; accession of Charles X Gustav, father of Charles XI.
- 1655 Swedish Diet agrees a scheme of partial reduktion; king and Council agree to

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- embark on a war of conquest against Poland. Birth of future Charles XI.
- 1656 Sweden attacks Poland; Russia attacks Sweden.
- 1657 Sweden launches preemptive attack on Denmark; causes the defeat of Denmark and the Peace of Roskilde; Denmark cedes the provinces of Skåne, Bohuslän and Blekinge.
- 1658 Sweden renews the attack on Denmark with a view to achieving total annexation; United Provinces and the emperor intervene to save Denmark, and the attack is repulsed.
- 1659 Peace of the Pyrenees ends the French–Spanish war.
- 1660 Restoration in Britain; Louis XIV begins his personal rule; Denmark becomes an absolute monarchy.
- 1660 Charles X Gustav dies; regency for Charles XI led by the queen–mother and the magnate Magnus de la Gardie as Chancellor; the Form of Government reinstated as the basis of the regency regime. Peace of Copenhagen with Denmark, Sweden retains the three ceded provinces. Peace of Oliva with Poland; Livland formally ceded to Sweden; end of the dynastic feud between the Swedish and Polish Vasas.
- 1661 Peace of Kardis between Sweden and Russia on the basis of the status quo. End of Sweden’s imperial expansion. Regency adopts a policy of defensive consolidation. Gustav Bonde draws up a balanced national budget.
- 1665 Anglo–Dutch War begins.
- 1667 Louis XIV launches his first war of conquest geared to the Spanish succession.
- 1668 The ‘Blue Book’, a report commissioned by the Council, reveals the failure to observe the budget guidelines, and exposes a structural deficit in the public revenues.
- 1672 Louis XIV’s Dutch War begins.
- 1672 In response to the international crisis, de la Gardie persuades the regency to

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pursue a balancing position for Sweden, and to ease the budget problem by concluding a subsidy treaty with Louis XIV; Sweden committed to station troops in Pomerania. Diet of 1672 declares Charles XI of age and he assumes the government. Attempts in the Diet by a magnate faction to impose a restrictive accession Charter rebuffed by all four Estates. Charles XI retains de la Gardie as Chancellor.

1674 Preliminary negotiations for Charles XI to marry the Danish princess Ulrika Eleonora. Pressure from Louis XIV forces Sweden to mobilize an army in Pomerania.

1675 Swedish army moved into Brandenburg; defeated at Fehrbellin; defeat triggers a general attack by Sweden's neighbours, except Russia. Denmark, United Provinces, the emperor and Brunswick-Lüneburg join Brandenburg. Denmark invades Skåne.

1676 Peace negotiation begins at Nijmegen.

1676 Swedish navy overwhelmed by Danish and Dutch fleets; Sweden's German provinces overrun. In Skåne, Charles XI leads his army to a decisive victory over the Danish invaders at Lund. Charles XI blames de la Gardie and the regency for the disasters; takes Johan Gyllenstierna as his chief adviser.

1678 Peace of Nijmegen.

1678 Swedish Diet meets and sets up a Commission to investigate the conduct of the regency government, with the approval of Charles XI.

1679 Following the Nijmegen settlement, Sweden makes peace with the emperor and the United Provinces. Louis XIV pressures Brandenburg, Brunswick-Lüneburg and Denmark to make peace on the basis of the restitution of conquered territory. Planning conferences at Ljungby on post-war reconstruction; Gyllenstierna negotiates a political and marriage alliance with Denmark as the basis for a new foreign policy.

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1680 Louis XIV embarks on policy of *réunions* at the expense of the Empire.

1680 Charles XI marries Ulrika Eleanora. Gyllenstierna dies, no new chief minister appointed. Bengt Oxenstierna, as Chancery President, assumes direction of foreign policy. Diet of 1680; driven by joint pressure from royalist nobles and the commoner Estates on the regency magnate families. On the basis of the report from the Commission on the regency sets up a Tribunal to assess the alleged illegal gains of the regency government and force repayment. Diet authorizes a broad reduction of crown donations since 1632. Issues a formal declaration that Charles XI as an adult, Christian king has absolute power to rule his kingdom at his discretion, according to law and custom. Budget Office established. Military reforms begin on the basis of the *indelningsverk*, funded by the proceeds of the reduction.

1681 Charles XI and Bengt Oxenstierna begin the change of foreign policy from a French alliance to alliance with the emperor and the United Provinces to constrain Louis XIV.

1682 Council of State purged and downgraded to King's Council. Tribunal on the regency assesses heavy financial penalties on the regency government. Diet of 1682 again sees pressures from the commoner Estates on the Riddarhus. Diet approves change from conscriptions to the *knektehåll* system for raising infantry for the new model standing army. Diet issues a formal recognition that the king has unlimited powers to legislate without the confirmation of the Estates.

1683 Turkish siege of Vienna.

1683 Sweden, now in the anti-French camp, threatened with attack from Denmark, supported by a French fleet; Sweden's German neighbours discuss joint war of conquest while Sweden is weak. Their mutual rivalry and distrust obstruct the design.

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1684 The Truce of Ratisbon.

1684 Denmark challenges Sweden by the seizure of the lands of the duke of Holstein-Gottorp. Charles XI backs off from confrontation, looks for allies in the Empire.

1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

1686 The League of Augsburg against Louis XIV.

1686 Sweden joins the League of Augsburg; in return emperor sets up the conference of Altona for the restitution of Holstein-Gottorp. Diet of 1686 accepts king's new Church Law without debate; pressed by the king to relieve the public debt; in spite of stubborn opposition agrees to an extensive repudiation, which concludes the legislation of the *reduktion*. Diet authorizes the king to undertake a general revision of Swedish law.

1688 Louis XIV begins the Nine Years War in the Palatinate; the Glorious Revolution in Britain.

1689 Because of deadlock at the Altona conference, Charles XI prepares to use force against Denmark. Diet of 1689 agrees to grant supply; gives the king an open authorization to raise funds in case of war with Denmark. Diet issues a public repudiation of the offensive protocols in the minutes of earlier Diets and Council debates, which implied the powers of the king were subject to limitation. Sweden mobilizes against Denmark. Denmark gives way and agrees to full restitution of the duke of Holstein-Gottorp. Sweden's international position strong as the only major power uncommitted to the general war; solicited by all the belligerents. Charles XI resolved to keep his involvement to the minimum consistent with his existing engagements.

1692 Peak of success for Louis XIV, war begins to turn against him.

1692 Abortive attempt by pro-French faction in Sweden to change Sweden's alignment; Charles XI continues his support of Bengt Oxenstierna's policies.

1693 Death of the queen. Funeral Diet



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used to publicize the achievements of the reign. King declares the budget in surplus, extraordinary taxation no longer needed in peace time; promises early completion of the *reduktion*. Diet empowers the king to raise whatever funding may be needed in the event of war, without the consent of the Diet. The Diet Resolution incorporates a 'Declaration of Sovereignty'. This confirms that kings of Sweden are absolute, Christian rulers, answerable for their actions to God alone. Subjects have an unlimited duty to yield full compliance with the king's commands. The Diet affirms that the king's achievements are to be regarded as permanent and inviolable. Any public criticism of the king's actions by a subject is sedition.

1693–7 In the last years of his reign Charles XI continues to exploit the full legal possibilities of the *reduktion*, despite the undertaking to the Diet of 1693 to bring the process to a conclusion. The *indelningsverk* and the *knektehåll* substantially completed. Charles XI declines wider involvement in the war; protests vigorously effects of Anglo-Dutch blockades on Swedish commerce.

1693 Belligerents accept Charles XI as mediator for a general peace.

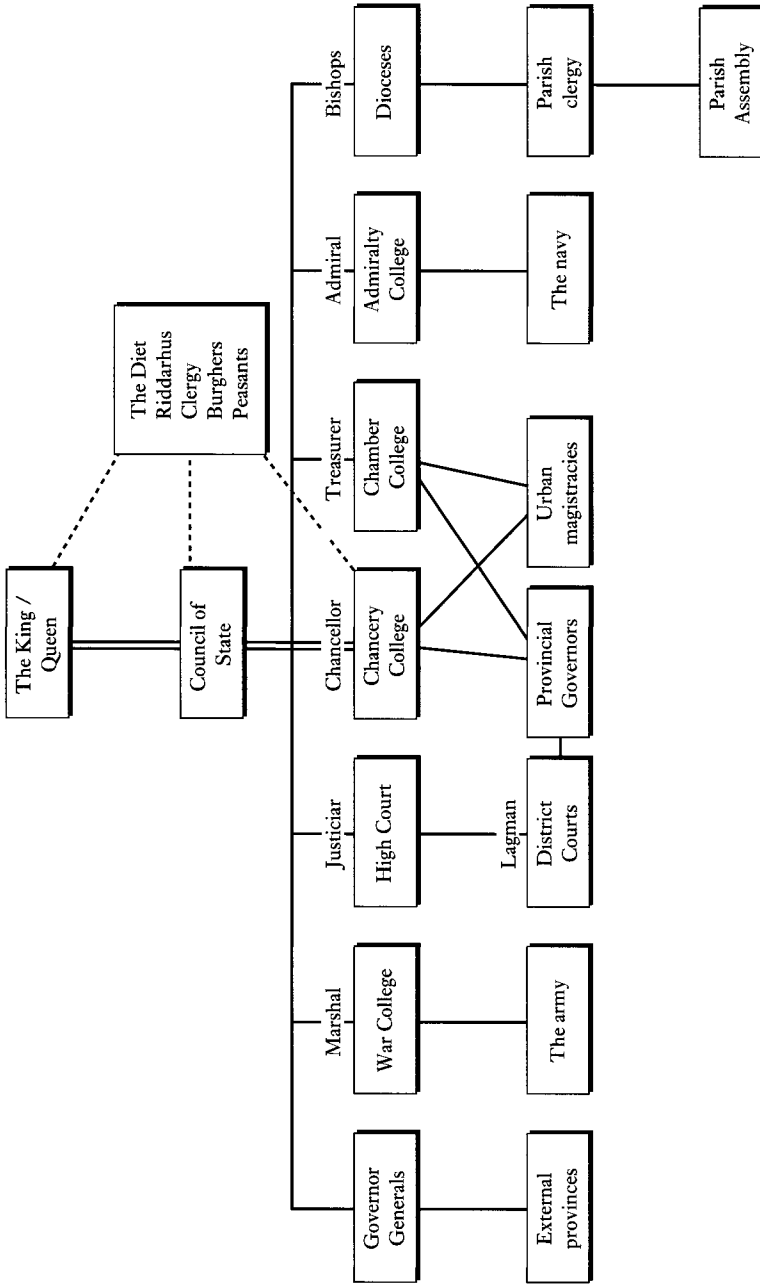
1695 Peace negotiations begin at Rijswick.

1696 Charles XI instructs the Law Commission to prepare a new draft royal law, based on the absolute sovereignty of the king. Draft near completion at the king's death.

1697 Peace concluded at Rijswick, nominally under mediation of Sweden.

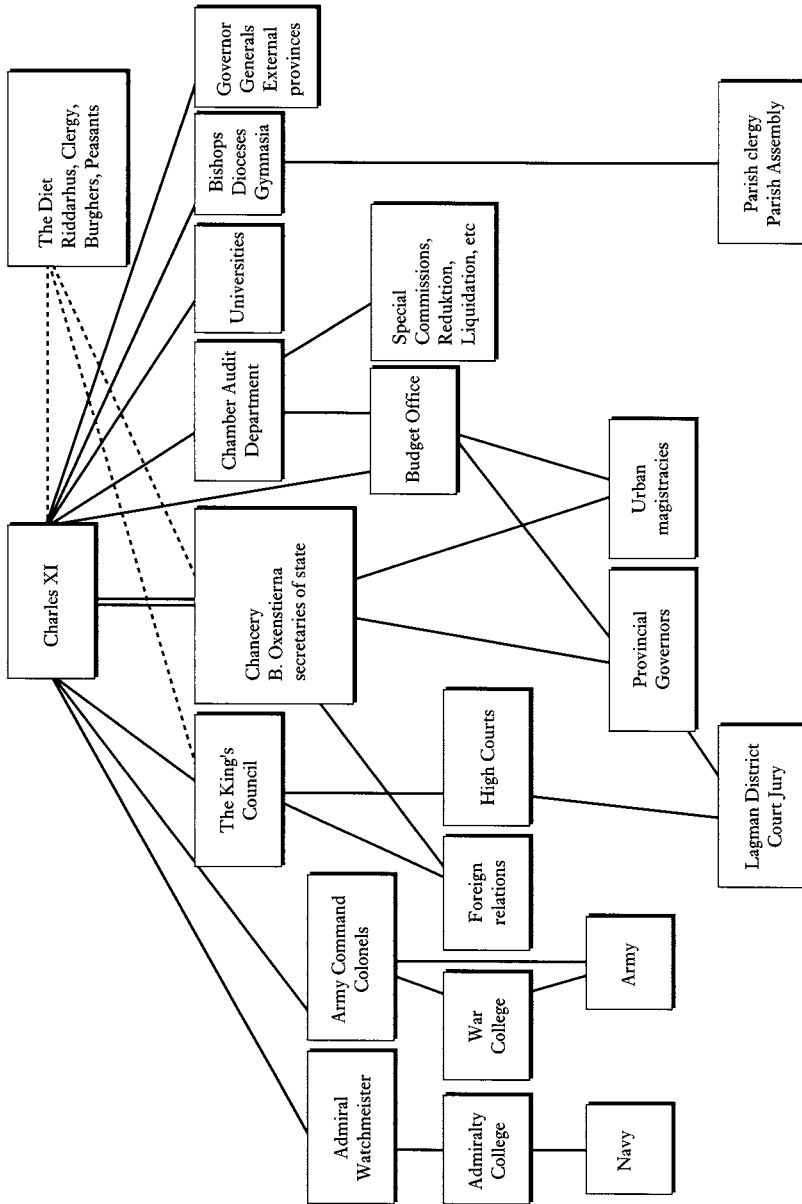
1697 Death of Charles XI at age forty-two from cancer. Accession of Charles XII at age fifteen, regency appointed under terms set out in Charles XI's Testament.

The structure of government before and after 1680



Axel Oxenstierna's 'Form of Government', 1634

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Government after 1680

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## Foreword

The research from which this book has developed was begun with the intention of writing a definitive account of the construction of a royal absolutism in Sweden during the reign of Charles XI. But I soon discovered that someone like myself, who was a full-time university teacher throughout the period when the book was being researched, and who was based in Scotland, could not realize the original intention. There is a belief among many historians that the records of the reign of Charles XI were substantially destroyed in the great fire of Stockholm Castle in 1697. This was not the case, and the sheer volume of the surviving primary materials conserved in Swedish archives is such that a single researcher, working from a foreign base, could not hope to master them; they could only be sampled. The problem is then compounded by what may appear to an outside observer to be a neglect of this reign by Swedish historians. The historiographical situation resembles that which once applied to the history of the early Stuart period in England. There the historians, even after nearly a century have to start from the monumental multi-volume narrative of S. R. Gardiner, which has never been bettered or displaced. In the case of Charles XI, there is a similar narrative, written at almost the same time as Gardiner and which is a monument to the achievements of that generation of archive-based historians working in the late nineteenth century. This is F. F. Carlson's, *Sveriges historia under konungarna af Pfalziska huset*, which has never been replaced as the basic scholarly narrative. However, the notes and bibliography in this book show how much excellent work has been done, since Carlson wrote, mainly by Swedish and Finnish historians. But this seems to have left wide gaps where not much systematic research has been undertaken. The obvious example is the history of the reduktion, the radical repossession of crown land revenues, which provided most of the resourcing for all Charles XI's projects. There are several good studies of what the royal policies were and how they were applied by the administration. But there is little detailed overview of what the actual impact of the policy was on Swedish society, although the whole economic position and lifestyle of the Swedish nobility were radically affected by it. This constitutes an historical black hole. We can affirm that despite the eloquent lamentations of contemporary observers and of the victims, the nobility survived the experience and continued to be the hegemonic ruling elite in Swedish society and we can note that when, after 1718, they had the possibility of reversing the

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reduktion, they chose not to do so. But there are only a few scattered studies of what the actual experience of affected individuals was.

This book is not therefore the definitive history but a survey which has been written in the first instance for students of early modern European history who cannot read the Swedish language, but who share my own view that this unusual political experience has a significance that extends beyond the limits of Swedish domestic history. Since the publisher has wisely set a firm word limit for the book I have been obliged to leave out some aspects of the story which I would have been glad to include. Finland was legally and constitutionally part of the kingdom and fully integrated into it, but it has distinct experiences of its own and unfortunately there was not the space to do them justice here. Two other features of the book require a brief justification. I have deliberately inserted a considerable number of quotations from contemporary sources into the text, as a means of illustrating the thought processes of these early modern Europeans in the most direct way possible. Most of these quotations were originally in Swedish and the translations are my own and I take full responsibility for the results. I have never enjoyed any academic training in the Swedish language and realize that an amateur linguist may not achieve a high standard of elegance in making translations and will certainly make a few errors. I also considered how far it was useful to employ Swedish words and expressions in the text. The decision was to keep these to a minimum and use them only where there is no acceptable English equivalent. Thus the word *Diet* is well understood and can be used instead of *riksdag* to describe meetings of the Swedish Estates. But there is really no suitable English word to convey the meaning of *reduktion*, or *indelningsverk*. I have therefore provided a list of the very restricted number of Swedish words or phrases which appear frequently in the text.

It is not possible to mention by name all those who have given help and encouragement over the years, without which nothing could have been accomplished. It would include many academic colleagues in the United Kingdom and in Sweden, who showed interest and gave advice. But I would like to give particular thanks to Professor Göran Rystad, Professor Herman Schück and Dr Alf Johansson for their assistance. I would then like to thank the numerous members of staff in libraries and archives, but especially those in the Riksarkivet and the Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm, and the University Library at Uppsala, who were very patient in assisting a foreigner to find his way through their collections. In France I am indebted to the Ministère des Relations Extérieures for the permission to consult the official archives at the Quai d'Orsay. My research has been supported financially by grants from the British Academy and by the Court of the University of St Andrews, which granted research leave and gave financial assistance through its travel and research funds. My wife has been supportive throughout, and gave assistance with the preparation of the text. Finally I must give a special mention of our friends Lea and Sven-Erik Leffler, whose open-ended hospitality made it possible for me to stay in their home in Sweden during extended periods of research.

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## Abbreviations

- KB** Kungliga Biblioteket (the Royal Library), Stockholm
- RA** Riksarkivet (the State Archive), Stockholm
- UUB** Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, (the University Library), Uppsala
- PR** L. Thanner, ed., *Prästeståndets riksdagsprotokoll*, iv: 1680–1714 (Norrköping, 1962) (Minutes of the Estate of the Clergy)
- SRARP** *Sveriges riddarskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll*, xiii: 1680 (Stockholm, 1896); xiv: 1682–3 (Stockholm, 1898); xv: 1686, 1689 (Stockholm, 1899); xvi: 1693, 1697 (Stockholm, 1900) (Minutes of the Estate of the Nobility)
- HT** *Historisk tidskrift* (Historical Journal)
- KFÅ** *Karolinska Förbundets Årsbok* (Caroline Society's Yearbook)

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Map of Sweden in the reign of Charles XI