

The Swedish Empire and its impact on Finland and neighboring countries

The time between year 1000 to 1300 was quite restless in the Baltic Sea area. The catholic church wanted to convert people into Christianity. Sweden arranged two crusades to Finland and at the same time invaded areas to have more land to govern. At first, only the western part of Finland was part of Sweden, whereas the eastern part turned towards Novgorod. Eventually in the 15th century, Finland was considered part of Sweden.

The start of the Swedish Empire was gradual and Sweden expanded its borders through several wars. When Gustav Vasa was the ruler of Sweden, he started developing the country in many ways: he renewed the governmental system according to German model, he started religious reformation and, in many ways, created a modern state. He suffocated all rebellious movements with violence. This happened also in Finland, where the peasants suffered during the war between Sweden and Russia.

In 1560, Sweden started an era of many wars: it fought against Poland and Denmark to gain Baltia to itself. The sons of Gustav Vasa were rivals to get the crown and ended up ruling the country one after another. Johan III was married to a Polish princess, at later on their son became the king of both Sweden and Poland. Sweden ended up gaining land Baltia (areas from today's Estonia and Latvia).

In the beginning of 17th century, the ruler of Sweden was King Gustav Aadolf II. He entered the country into the Thirty Years' War, where especially Sweden and France tried to limit the power of the Habsburgs. The war was initially a religious civil war in Germany, but ended up involving the whole of Europe. When the peace treaty was signed in Westfalen in 1648, it was the beginning of the Swedish Empire. Sweden got big areas from Germany.

Sweden continued fighting wars with its neighboring countries between 1654-1660. It invaded areas such as Trondheim, Bornholm, Jämtland, Gotland and Skåne. Sweden lost most of the areas back very shortly, but Gotland and Skåne remained part of the Empire. The enemies of Sweden, namely Denmark, Poland, Lithuania and Russia, allied with each other which resulted in the Great Northern War (1700-1721). One by one, Sweden lost territories and the Swedish Empire came to an end.

Finnish War (1808-1809) between Sweden and Russia resulted in Sweden losing Finland to Russia as an autonomous Grand Duchy.

Map of the Swedish Empire



The Swedish heritage

In the beginning of the Swedish influence, Finland was very rural and distant. Ancient beliefs were common up until Sweden brought Christianity to Finland. The oldest bishopric in Finland was located in Turku.

Sweden gave Finland a model to a governmental system and legislation, and an idea of a market economy.

The Finns maintained their own language, but also learned Swedish. Nowadays, Swedish is Finland's second official language. Students start learning it on 6th grade. For certain positions, knowing Swedish is a requirement.

Finland has been influenced by Swedish food and cooking traditions. In the western areas of Finland, people were more likely to use Germanic outdoor ovens like in Sweden. Food was cooked in a three-legged cauldron that hang over open fire. Soups were typically western foods. People baked huge amounts of bread only twice a year. The bread was stored either inside the main cabin (near the roof in long skewers) or in a bread storehouse. Swedish influence is particularly big at Christmas. Nowadays, we share a lot of dishes, such as pea soup, meat balls, Shrove bun, etc.

Sources:

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