

Managing legal pluralism: the negotiations on the re-acquisition of crown land in the Livonian Diet (1681) as a matter of securitisation and imperial integration

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Abstract: The emergence of empires during the early modern period led to a shift of territorial borders and social as well as economic and political boundaries. This is also true for early modern Sweden and especially for Livonia, being one of the eastern border provinces of the Swedish empire. The plans for withdrawing alienated possessions of the Swedish Crown there, i.e. a *reduktion*, make this particularly clear. This article examines the discussion of the year 1681 between the Swedish Crown and the Livonian knighthood and nobility in the Livonian Diet on the retake of crown lands as an example of how early modern empires dealt with legal pluralism. Combining the concepts of securitisation and integration will show that these deliberations should be understood less as a struggle for or against re-acquisitions of crown lands than as negotiations about Swedish rule in Livonia, and its normative foundations and functions, and thus about the Swedish empire.

Keywords: border, boundary, early modern period, empire, integration, Livonia, *reduktion*, securitisation, Sweden.

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Introduction

The emergence of the Swedish empire in the Baltic Sea region in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries was not only characterised by its territorial expansion, but also by extensive awarding of the newly acquired lands to deserving officials and military officers. As the result of this practice the resource base of the Swedish Crown decreased, while simultaneously its financial needs increased. In the second half of the 17th century, Swedish kings attempted to consolidate the crown's finances through *reduktion*, i.e. the re-acquisition of alienated crown possessions. Taking as an example the discussions on the retake of crown properties in the Livonian Diet (*Landtag*) in 1681, I will argue, using securitisation as an analytical concept, that these deliberations should be understood less as a struggle for or against withdrawals of land as in previous research, but rather as negotiations about Swedish rule in the borderland of Livonia, and about its normative foundations and functions, as the differing security concepts used by Swedish king Charles XI (1655–97) and his representative respectively on the one hand and the Livonian knighthood and the nobility on the other reveal. Thus tracing security discourses provides deeper insights into how the Swedish king and the Livonian nobility perceived rule and its foundation. What is more, through the comparison to the negotiations with the Swedish Diet, this case provides an excellent example of imperial practice and of how empires managed legal difference.¹ Thus the study ties in with recent research on early modern empires and, using Sweden as a case study, adds an example that has been largely overlooked in the history of empire, which with regard to Europe mostly focuses on Spain, France, Great Britain and Russia.²

The concept of securitisation has been developed since the 1980s by three schools (Copenhagen, Paris and Aberystwyth) as a 'critical interventio[n] into realist and neo-realist theories of international relations' and is well-established in research, especially in political science.³ Historians also deal with questions of security and, in recent years, have been increasingly interested in securitisation. The Collaborative Research Centre SFB/Transregio 138 *Dynamics of security: Forms of securitization from a historical perspective* at the universities of Marburg and Gießen, funded by

¹ See Kumar (2017: xii).

² See selected Dandeleit (2014), Wendehorst (2015); Kumar (2017). For a concise overview over recent research on early modern empires see Tölle (2018). Recently, Ricarda Vulpius published her seminal study on the emergence of the Russian empire. See Vulpius (2020). Burbank & Cooper (2012: 253) at least acknowledge Sweden's imperial ambitions. In his still seminal study, Michael Roberts speaks of Sweden's imperial experience. See Roberts (reprint 1992). On the discussion of the imperial character of early modern Sweden see Olesen (2014), Eng (2015).

³ Langenohl (2019: 26).

the German Research Foundation (DFG) since 2014, provides a prominent example of this.⁴

From a historical perspective, security is of special interest not only because it is a central value concept, but also because of its connection to power and rule.⁵ Although security is a social key concept, it is never a given, but is ‘the outcome of processes termed securitization’. Hence security and its perception are ‘politically, socially and culturally constituted’⁶, thus also varying in history between different societies or various groups within a society.⁷ The term *security* therefore always brings with it socio-cultural, i.e. moral, ideological and normative ideas of value and order.⁸ That is why the perception and the discussion of security or insecurity are always interpretations of the respective reality.⁹ Studies on security can thus provide information on the thinking about values and order specific to the period under scrutiny.

This is also the connection to power and rule. ‘Security not only establishes state sovereignty and security or a promise of security not only legitimises the state, but security is ultimately the reason and goal of state and statehood’, according to Eckart Conze.¹⁰ This finding does not limit the validity of the argument to modernity, as it does not presuppose a centralised state. In the early modern period, in which rule was not organised in the form of nation states, sovereigns or political decision makers took the place of the state and carried out its task of ensuring the security of their subjects. Therefore, security not only determines the relationship between ruler and individual,¹¹ but ‘as a resource of legitimacy for political actors, the promise of future security and the corresponding action with regard to security policy aim at creating or stabilising binding structures and normative concepts of order’.¹² Besides legitimacy, security is about power: Whoever declares something to be a security issue, creates it by successfully doing so.¹³ Securitisation can then be described as a communicative process for interpreting reality. Thus, analysing securitisation processes can reveal the attempts of various actors to assert their goals through security-related arguments.¹⁴ This is evident in Charles XI’s proposition to the Swedish Diet in 1680

⁴ See <https://www.sfb138.de/en/> (accessed on 25 September 2020, 15:23). For an overview over historical security studies see Zwierlein (2012).

⁵ See Daase (2012: 389).

⁶ Langenohl (2019: 27).

⁷ Conze (2012: 456).

⁸ See Conze (2012: 456).

⁹ See Conze (2012: 456).

¹⁰ Conze (2012: 460)—from German by the author.

¹¹ See Conze (2012: 455).

¹² Henne *et al.* (2018: 10)—from German by the author.

¹³ See Henne *et al.* (2018: 11).

¹⁴ See Conze (2012: 457, 459).

and the Livonian estates in 1681, in which, by the means of a re-acquisition of alienated crown lands, he linked the restoration of the Swedish Crown's finances to the security of the realm and the province of Livonia respectively.

The Swedish retakes of crown lands of 1655 and 1680

The term *reduktion* addresses the resumption of alienated land by the Swedish Crown. These alienations were connected with intensive shifts of borders and boundaries that accompanied the formation of the Swedish empire, which followed when medieval orders ceased to function in the Baltic Sea region at the beginning of the early modern period: the decline of the Hanseatic League, the break-up of the Kalmar Union, the dissolution of the states of the Teutonic and Livonian Orders as well as the process of the Reformation were symptoms for changing orders in that area.¹⁵

This is especially true from the perspective of territorial borders as seen in the expansion of the Swedish empire to the north of the Scandinavian peninsula, but above all to the east into the Baltic (Estonia 1560, Livonia 1628, the islands of Gotland and Saaremaa 1645) and to the south of the Scandinavian peninsula (Scania, Halland and Blekinge 1658) as well as to the opposite side of the Baltic Sea and into the Holy Roman Empire (West Pomerania, Bremen and Verden 1648). This gave the Baltic more and more the character of a Swedish inland sea over a period of no more than 100 years.¹⁶ Historiography describes this process as the attempt to establish a so-called *dominium maris baltici*.¹⁷ These shifts challenged existing borders and boundaries, not only on a territorial but also on a normative or social level, all of which are closely intertwined. For instance, as deserving officers, civil servants, diplomats and political decision makers were rewarded with gifts or fiefs in the newly acquired territories due to the lack of economic resources of the Swedish Crown, especially under Queen Christina's rule from 1644 to 1654. Thus, the territorial expansion of the Swedish dominion was accompanied by social shifts.¹⁸

With the inclusion of the newly acquired provinces into the Swedish domains, the social elites in the Baltic states as well as in the provinces of the Swedish Crown, which the crown gained through the Peace of Westphalia (1648) expanded. Although it has to be mentioned that the latter remained legally part of the Holy Roman Empire. The practice by which the Swedish Crown awarded grants of land led to the social elites

¹⁵ On the history of the Baltic Sea region in general see most recently [North \(2015\)](#); [Boggis-Rolfe \(2019\)](#).

¹⁶ Selected on the expansion of the Swedish dominion: [Roberts \(reprint 1992: 1–42\)](#); [Rystad \(2003: 61–68\)](#); [Olesen \(2016\)](#).

¹⁷ See still [Ahnlund \(1956\)](#).

¹⁸ On the awarding policy of the Swedish Crown see for example [Gjerstad \(1995\)](#).

becoming more permeable and diverse in the new provinces. Before this point, the social elites in these territories consisted of German noble families, who were also the largest land and property owners in the regions and who organised themselves in the so-called knightships (*Ritterschaften*). Due to their social and economic capital, these groups formed the political leadership in the respective region and enjoyed numerous privileges and freedoms. In addition to the German-Baltic and the Bremen and the Pomeranian aristocracy, the Swedish high nobility and so-called *homines novi*, were now also included. On the one hand, established members of the Swedish high nobility were able to expand their property and thus their economic capital, such as the Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna (1583–1654), who became the largest landowner in Estonia and Livonia alongside Jakob De la Gardie (1583–1652), but on the other hand also military careerists like the latter's father, Pontus De la Gardie (1520–85), and Hans Christoph von Königsmarck (1600–63), the first Swedish governor in the duchy of Bremen, were able to consolidate the economic and social rise of their families in this way.¹⁹ From the 1630s onwards, the Swedish high nobility owned about 45 per cent of the estates in the Baltic provinces.

In the second half of the 17th century, the Swedish monarchs made several efforts to consolidate the crown's finances through withdrawals of alienated crown properties. This phenomenon is well known in Swedish historiography on the early modern period, although only a few works have focused exclusively on it.²⁰ The re-acquisition of crown land of 1655 has received even less attention than that of 1680.²¹ In the Swedish Diet of 1655 King Charles X Gustav (1622–60) succeeded in his plans to retake alienated crown lands. Referring to the work of Arne Munthe, Mats Höglund summarises the king's programme, which consisted of a total of four issues: a reform of the granting of fiefs; verification of ownership of all former crown estates; restitution of alienated crown possessions in so-called forbidden places which were once reserved to support the crown; and the resumption of a quarter of all property donated by the crown after King Gustavus Adolphus's death in 1632. Scholars still disagree on whether the decision on the retake of crown land also applied to the provinces of the Swedish Crown within the Holy Roman Empire or the Baltic provinces.²² However, the implementation of the re-acquisition proceeded hesitantly and slowly. Only three years after Charles X Gustav's death in 1660, the regency council acting on behalf of his successor, Charles XI, who was still under age, decided to moderate the resolution on the retake of crown land.²³

¹⁹ See selected Fiedler (2017); Seppel (2017); Dunsdorfs (1981).

²⁰ Selected: Vasar (1931); Isberg (1953); Dahlgren (1964), Ågren (1973); Loit (1975); Rystad (2001: 165–177 and 181–203), more recently Jonsson (2013) and Kepsu (2014).

²¹ See Höglund (2017: 32).

²² See Kepsu (2009: 390–1).

²³ See Höglund (2017: 63).

The resumption of alienated crown possessions, which was agreed upon at the Swedish Diet of 1680, has received more attention from scholars. By playing off different groups among the estates against each other, Charles XI succeeded in getting his wish for a further re-acquisition of land accepted. The estates assembled at the Swedish Diet agreed to retake all donated crown property, which had an annual income of more than 600 silver thalers. According to Martin Gjerstad, this amount corresponded to the revenues of 25 farms.²⁴ Moreover, all earldoms and baronies were to be returned to the crown, regardless of when they had been alienated. With regard to properties which the crown had sold, leased or exchanged, the Diet decided to audit all private owners to see whether they had acquired that land in accordance with the regulations for the resumption of 1655. The resolution of 1680 did not only apply to the Swedish realm, but also to the goods of Swedish aristocrats in the provinces ruled by the Swedish Crown in the Baltic and the Holy Roman Empire.²⁵ In 1682, the regulations were sharpened. Regardless of the way in which crown possessions were acquired, the decision to withdraw them was henceforth the sole responsibility of the sovereign. In addition, the limit of 600 silver thalers for the resumptions of land was abolished.²⁶

Charles XI's proposal for land withdrawals: a matter of security

The debates that preceded the re-acquisition of crown land framed it from the very beginning as a security matter, both in the Swedish Diet of 1680 and the Livonian assembly of estates the following year.

The Swedish Diet was opened by the king's proposition. After extensively describing the threats and burdens of the past war (1675–9) and the fortunate peace achieved in Nijmegen in 1679, Charles XI presented four issues on which the estates were to decide: they were called on to consider 'how the king's and the realm's security and peace could be sufficiently observed and all future risks could be met in the best possible way'. The estates were also required to deliberate on appropriate equipment of the fleet as well as maintenance and supply of the fortresses. Reminding them that 'all attempts for the realm's security and prosperity would be in vain, if sufficient resources were lacking', the king linked those issues with the demand to the estates to grant new financial resources.²⁷ By directly connecting questions of defence and its financing with the threats of the immediate past war, which, contrary to its course,

²⁴ See Gjerstad (1998).

²⁵ See Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll (1896: 305–6).

²⁶ See Gjerstad (1998: 9–10); Rystad (2001: 187–8).

²⁷ See Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll (1896: 256–7)—from Swedish by the author.

ended very mildly for Sweden,²⁸ Charles XI exerted strong moral pressure on the estates. He further emphasised this moral component by postulating it as crucial for the security and thus the continued existence of the Swedish realm.

That this was not only a well-founded concern of the monarch, but a political communication and legitimisation strategy is clearly evident, when comparing the monarch's address to the Swedish estates with his proposition to the Livonian estates, whose deliberations preceded the retake of crown land in Livonia.

After the conclusion of the Swedish Diet in December 1680, Charles XI appointed Robert Lichton (1631–92) on 4 January 1681 as head of the newly established commission to organise and guarantee the withdrawal of the properties of the Swedish nobility in Livonia. The question of the re-acquisition of alienated land from the Livonian nobility was to be discussed at a Diet, in which every estate owner listed in the Livonian register of nobility had the right to participate.²⁹ There, the members of the knighthood and the representatives of the city of Riga debated all issues concerning the welfare of the province. On 12 July 1681, Robert Lichton opened such a Diet in Riga.³⁰

As in the case of the Swedish Diet, at the opening of the assembly of the Livonian estates a proposition by the sovereign presenting the planned points for consultation were read out. Charles XI's proposition was introduced by recapitulating how the retake of crown land was decided upon at the Swedish Diet in 1680. Moreover, it was emphasised, as was already the case in the king's proposition to the Diet, that it was in particular the king's responsibility and concern for the security and protection of his dominion that had led him to call on the Swedish estates to decide on appropriate measures. The argument of security, here in connection with the sovereign's duty to protect his subjects, is clearly at the centre of the reasoning. On the one hand, it is stated as the sole motivation for the actions of Charles XI, on the other hand, this motivation is placed at the beginning of the text and thus takes precedence over the outcome of the Swedish estates' deliberations. This gives the security argument particular weight. At the same time, this aspect is given a defining character when Charles XI declares that the Swedish estates put the fundamental interests of the crown and the realm above their private concerns and thus unanimously agreed to return properties owned by them in the Swedish realm or in the provinces to the crown, properties which were indispensable for the public welfare. Due to the composition of the

²⁸ On the so-called Scanian War and the parallel Swedish-Brandenburgian War (both 1675–9), which were part of Franco-Dutch War (1674–9), and its outcomes see [Frost \(2000: 208–16\)](#); [Mittenzwei & Herzfeld \(1988: 112–14\)](#); [Rystad \(2001: 40–119\)](#), [Köhler \(2011: 94–158\)](#), and most recently [Van Gelder \(2021\)](#).

²⁹ All dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

³⁰ See [Vasar \(1931: 126–7\)](#).

argument, the expression ‘fundamental interests’ could mean nothing other than security. In order to implement this decision of the Swedish Diet with regard to the properties of Swedish nobles in Livonia, the king had set up a commission.³¹ It appears from this proposition that the monarch continued with his strategy of securitisation, already chosen in 1680, in the context of the Livonian nobility.

The introductory passage of Charles XI’s proposition to the Livonian estates, which summarised the decision of the Swedish Diet of 1680 and its background, was followed by the issues on which he wished the Livonian knighthood to make a decision: the withdrawal of property owned by the Livonian nobility, land mapping and the production of a cadastral land register of Livonia as well as the abolition of serfdom.³² These were highly sensitive subjects which, if approved, would result in a fundamental change in social, economic and political orders.

To legitimise his request for a retake of properties owned by the Livonian nobility Charles XI once again used the security argument. He began by emphasising that the security of a state could not be guaranteed without sufficient financial resources. Immediately thereafter, he pointed out that patrimonial and private property in Livonia had always been kept separate for security reasons. In so doing, he implicitly declared the landownership structure to be relevant to the province’s security. This was all the more important, according to him, for Livonia, as a border region, was more exposed to external threats than the internal regions of the Swedish empire. Its defence required more resources, which should be covered by the crown’s possessions. Therefore, he formulated the expectation that the Livonian knighthood would follow the example of the Swedish estates and also decide on a resumption of alienated properties, which should include the former clerical possessions from the time of the rule of the Livonian Order.³³

The sovereign’s strategy and argumentation followed the same line as towards the Swedish estates the year before, when linking financial issues to defence and thus security matters and asking them to decide on such a highly important subject as the security and welfare of the realm and the province respectively. But in contrast to the Swedish Diet of 1680, Charles XI prescribed for the Livonian estates the solution to the security problem right from the start: a re-acquisition of property. The decision of the Swedish Diet of 1680 served him as a reference, defining the scope of what was reasonable and acceptable. In addition, he was able to use the example of the Swedish estates to increase the moral pressure on the Livonian knighthood in not only referring to the knighthood’s sense of duty and loyalty, but also to express his expectation that the knighthood and the aristocracy would be no less willing

³¹ See [Schirren \(1865: 16–17\)](#).

³² See [Schirren \(1865: 18–19\)](#).

³³ See [Schirren \(1865: 18\)](#).

than the Swedish nobility to agree to resumptions of possessions for the welfare of their own fatherland.³⁴

The Livonian nobility's rejection of land withdrawals: also a matter of security

On 26 July 1681, the knighthood responded to Charles XI in a declaration in which it commented on each point of his proposition. This reply opened with an expression of gratitude for Charles XI's efforts for the welfare and security of his dominion and his subjects. In so doing, the Livonian estates accepted both the security argument and the strategy of securitisation. Nevertheless, they rejected land withdrawals. Like the sovereign, the estates turned to a strategy of securitisation themselves to justify their opposition to Charles XI's plans. Their argumentation reveals a completely different understanding of security than that of the ruler. The estates articulated their concept of security implicitly and *ex negativo* by depicting the threats that would arise from a resumption of crown property: according to them, the nobility was in danger of impoverishment in the event of a retake of crown possessions, as a result of which they would no longer be able to fulfil their duties to the sovereign, especially since the knighthood was already heavily burdened by past threats. By listing concrete events such as the defence against the Russian attack during the Livonian War (1558–62), the contributions to the Swedish Crown in 1643, which were considered to be very high, or the fires in Riga (1547/1677), these burdens were not only exemplified, but the commitment of the members of the knighthood to the province was historicised. Their anticipated future incapacity to fulfil their obligations was the nobility's main argument against withdrawals of land and framed the further reasoning for the rejection of the retake of crown property by being placed at the beginning and end of the argumentation.

This argument aimed precisely at the core of early modern rule. The fulfilment of the subject's obligations, e.g. the raising of taxes, the observance of the legal and the ecclesiastic orders and the maintenance of public order determined by (ecclesiastical) law, as well as participation in the defence of the country, were crucial for the implementation of the rule of a sovereign. In this context, the property acquired by the nobility was partly classified as recognition of their performance of their duties and their commitment to the preservation, and thus the security, of the country and implicitly of Swedish rule. Both the nobility and their possessions were thus given a particularly high level of moral integrity.

³⁴ See [Schirren \(1865: 18\)](#).

The estates linked their support for the Swedish Crown with the demand for the continued security of their privileges and property, which had been confirmed and thus guaranteed by every ruler since Sigismund II Augustus of Poland (1520–72), including Charles XI himself.³⁵ This interpretation also left room for the suspicion that Charles XI was endangering the legal security of his subjects by the retake of crown possessions. Such a suggestion not only contradicted the self-image expressed in the proposition, but also insinuated that he was violating his sovereign obligation to protect his subjects.³⁶

The planned abolition of serfdom was also linked to security aspects and considered a particular risk. The knighthood expected that the liberated peasants would drown the province in ‘murder and bloodshed’ and seek to eliminate their former employers or at least that they would not respect the constitution and therefore would always live in conflict with their lords, causing only quarrelling, unrest and unhappiness. The nobility moreover assumed that the liberated peasants would even leave the country and make it desolate. In the opinion of the Livonian estates, the abolition of serfdom would not bring any advantages for the province, but would only pose an ‘extreme and irreversible danger to the lives’ of the members of the nobility—and, the thought can be continued, endanger their security and thus that of the province.³⁷

These statements reveal a broader and less clearly defined understanding of security than is evident in the propositions of Charles XI. The Livonian estates did not relate security exclusively to defence measures and their financing and thus to physical aspects, but above all to (constitutional) legal and economic questions. Moreover, in contrast to Charles XI’s proposition, the response of the estates described the consequences of a resumption of land: the shifting of social, economic and legal boundaries, and thus the social, economic and legal orders, which was perceived as a security problem. This enormous impact of the re-acquisition of crown property has been highlighted by Aleksander Loit, who discussed the Baltic land withdrawals in the context of the abolition of serfdom and the liberation of peasants in the Baltic region which accompanied these measures.³⁸ Loit notes that the retake of possessions meant nothing less than a change in the system of basic social relations.³⁹ According to him it was the most important and extraordinary event during the Swedish rule in the Baltic. Loit concludes that the resumption of crown land received its importance not least because it affected all spheres of society: the political and the public financial,

³⁵ For the privileges of the Livonian nobility and their confirmations see [Müller \(1841\)](#).

³⁶ See [Schirren \(1865: 25–9\)](#).

³⁷ See [Schirren \(1865: 30–1\)](#)—from German by the author.

³⁸ On the perception of serfdom in the Swedish composite state see [Seppel \(2019\)](#); for further information on agricultural structures in the Baltic Sea region see [Schmidt \(1997\)](#).

³⁹ See [Loit \(2000: 176\)](#).

as well as the private economic and the social realm.⁴⁰ This judgement confirmed that the re-acquisition of crown property shifted existing political, economic and social boundaries—an aspect which has been largely overlooked by scholars. Loit mentions this desideratum explicitly.⁴¹ In doing so, however, he missed the fact that Baltic German historiography derives its negative perception of Swedish rule, and especially of Charles XI, from precisely this experience of changing economic, social and political boundaries caused by the extensive loss of the nobility's property.⁴²

Retake of crown lands, security and imperial (dis-)integration

An agreement between the nobility and the sovereign in the question of land withdrawals could not be reached. On 15 August 1681, the knighthood decided to send a deputation to Charles XI.⁴³ In the end, the Livonian estates could not avert the re-acquisition of crown property. As a result, five-sixths of the total possessions of the nobility in Livonia were taken back by the crown. In total, the income from these measures in the Swedish provinces in the Baltic region accounted for about one-third of all income generated by the resumption of alienated crown possessions in the Swedish dominion.⁴⁴ The discussion of the Livonian estates reveals not only Charles XI's and the Livonian nobility's attempts to enforce or prevent a withdrawal of property, but something else: the disintegration of Livonia.

The connection between integration issues and the retake of crown land has already been discussed by scholars. While Baltic German historiography sees the re-acquisition of crown possessions of 1681 as the main reason for the failure to integrate Livonia into the Swedish empire,⁴⁵ Swedish research links it with the debate

⁴⁰ Loit (1985: 42).

⁴¹ Loit (2013: 36).

⁴² Schoultz von Aschenraden (1843: 83), for example, explains the re-acquisition of crown land with Charles XI's 'inherited greed for conquests' and judges that these withdrawals ruined and almost annihilated the Swedish and Livonian nobility; for further examples see Bunge (1849: 51) and Körber (reprint 1977: 295). Buxhöwden (1838: 111) describes the retake of crown land as a predatory system ('*Raub-System*') and in claiming that only the Russian rule following the Swedish government in 1721 could 'guarantee the security of the [Livonian] constitution permanently', he traditionalised the understanding of security of the Livonian knighthood. He contrasts Charles XI, whom he calls a 'poisonous plant', with Peter I, 'the medical plant' (Buxhöwden 1838: 81). Shortly after the conquest of Livonia in 1710 Peter I of Russia confirmed the privileges of the knighthood and the nobility (Brüggemann *et al.* 2014). All quotes from German by the author.

⁴³ See Schirren (1865: 51). On the history and the effect of that deputation see Vasar (1931: 252–85).

⁴⁴ See Loit (2013: 36).

⁴⁵ See for example Arbusov (1890: 169–70).

about Swedish absolutism (*envälde*) that was introduced by Charles XI since the 1680s and accompanied by a restructuring of the administration, especially in the provinces of the Swedish Crown.⁴⁶ Sven Lundkvist argues that ‘uniformity in administration was going to make the *reduktion* easier to carry out’.⁴⁷ Interestingly, the majority of researchers take exactly the opposite view: from this perspective the withdrawal of land is understood as an instrument that created the economic and social preconditions for Swedish absolutism by reducing the power of the nobility, which was based on its landownership, as the most influential political group and strengthening the peasants as a counterweight to the aristocracy and allies to the Swedish Crown.

According to Stellan Dahlgren, Swedish absolutism resulted in a higher degree of political integration as it reduced the power of such traditional political institutions as the Diet, the Council of the Realm or the estates.⁴⁸ With regard to Sweden’s provinces in the Baltic, Dahlgren emphasises the economic integration deriving from Swedish absolutism and sees the resumption of crown property of 1680 as a measure to promote it.⁴⁹ Other researchers understood these measures as the first step of an extensive programme of the Swedish Crown with respect to its peripheral provinces, which aimed at (legal) unification or even integration, thus, reducing the composite character of the Swedish dominion.⁵⁰

The understanding of integration inherent in such interpretations implicitly refers to the idea of a uniform and centralised nation state as it has developed since the 19th century. Since a concept of integration that equates it with administrative unification or greater participation in public finances and ignores the character of early modern states and empires is unsuitable for drawing conclusions about the integrative character of the withdrawal of alienated crown land in Livonia, I will introduce an alternative concept of integration: in general, integration is defined as ‘certain qualitatively determinable forms of order and structuredness’.⁵¹ In so doing, integration is described more precisely on a very general level as relations, on the one hand. On the other hand, the order or structuredness resulting from these relations is of a certain and determinable quality. Thus, integration as an analytical term makes it possible to describe order, both the process and the state of order.⁵²

⁴⁶ Tuchtenhagen (2014: 54–5) denies that the land withdrawals were a centralist measure in the sense of absolutism. On Charles XI’s absolutism see selected Dahlgren (1993a; 1993b); Upton (1998). On Swedish administration in the Baltics see Tuchtenhagen (2008).

⁴⁷ Lundkvist (1973: 44).

⁴⁸ See Dahlgren (1993b: 17).

⁴⁹ See Dahlgren (1993b: 19–20).

⁵⁰ See for example Loit (1993: 67); Kepsu (2014: 92–102).

⁵¹ Peters (1993: 7)—from German by the author.

⁵² This indicates a terminological as well as a methodological problem of integration research. The term ‘integration’ refers to both the process of integration and its outcome.

Integration ‘contains a psychological component, since it is ultimately carried out by social subjects through their actions and is lived by people’.⁵³ Integration therefore means qualitatively determinable forms of order and structuredness as interactions and relations of historical actors. These can be either individuals or collectives. Moreover, integration is not an objective in itself, but fulfils certain functions for the parties involved. Since human action is value- and norm-based, this also applies to the order resulting from interactions and relations between actors. From this concept of integration, I argue that the differing understanding of security, as revealed in the discussions between the king and the Livonian estates in 1681, can be seen as a symptom of a disintegration of the Livonian knighthood and the Swedish Crown.

As Kumar points out, ‘empires provided stability, security, and legal order for their subjects’.⁵⁴ Since the sovereign and his subjects shared no common understanding of security, a core element of early modern rule, the existing (ruling) order could no longer fulfil this function. The existing (ruling) order became dysfunctional in this respect. Thus, a central characteristic of an integrative order was no longer met and, therefore, the deliberations of the Livonian Diet are, in my view, less to be interpreted as an actual decision on a withdrawal of land. Rather, the relationship between sovereign and subjects and thus the ruling order was renegotiated. Jürgen Heyde hints at this in his study on the policies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Sweden towards the nobility in Livonia, but without elaborating on the idea.⁵⁵

This becomes evident in the further course of the negotiations of the Livonian Diet in 1681. After the proposition of Charles XI and the response of the nobility had revealed a state of disintegration, the ruling order had to be renegotiated and thus the foundations of Swedish rule in Livonia had to be discussed. This is what the Livonian Diet began in its response to the governor, in which its members explained their understanding of the constitutional basis of Swedish rule in Livonia in detail. The key argument of their argumentation was the composite character of the Swedish empire.

Although it is necessary to be cautious about regarding early modern empires and composite states as identical, since not every composite state was an empire and not every empire had a composite character. However, despite all attempts by scholars, a binding definition of what constitutes an empire is still lacking. So that it must be stated as a kind of truism that ‘empires have come in many shapes and forms, at many places and in many times’.⁵⁶ But the Swedish empire in particular shares numerous

⁵³ Köppel (1987: 248–9)—from German by the author.

⁵⁴ Kumar (2017: 4).

⁵⁵ See Heyde (1998: 566).

⁵⁶ Kumar (2017: 7). Summarising the state of research, Tölle (2018: 16) lists nine characteristics of early modern empires, which, however, are not fulfilled by all empires or at least the same extent: (1) expansion and the idea of a large population and/or territory, (2) distinction between centre and periphery,

similarities with early modern composite states, as Dorothee Goetze and Michael Rohrschneider show in their attempt to bring together research on early modern composite states and empires by comparing early modern Spain and early modern Sweden in terms of their imperial and composite characteristics.⁵⁷

Through its expansion in the Baltic Sea region, early modern Sweden was increasingly transformed into an empire and a composite state in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. The concept of composite state was developed by Helmut G. Koenigsberger and John H. Elliot.⁵⁸ Building on their influential studies early modern historians have over the last decades analysed this specific form of rule and its defining characteristics.⁵⁹ Composite states are composed of at least two territories which were united under a single sovereign, but very heterogeneous when it came to politics, law, economics and culture, despite the fact that their ruler was one and the same person. Moreover, ‘each territory—or rather the social élite of each territory—had its distinctive relation to the ruler, its privileges, its own law code, its administrative system staffed by that same local élite, and often its own estate assembly. In questions like taxation or conscription, the ruler had to negotiate with each territory separately’.⁶⁰ It becomes evident that composite states as well as early modern empires had to manage difference and legal pluralism.

This becomes obvious, when Charles XI separately convoked the Swedish and the Livonian Diets to decide on the approval of a withdrawal of land in the Swedish realm and the province of Livonia respectively. Contrary to what Juhan Vasar suggests in his monograph on the retake of crown property in Livonia in the years 1678 to 1684, which still provides the most detailed information on the course of the resumption of crown possessions during this period, the convocation of the Livonian Diet was not only a tactical move by Charles XI to ease the implementation of the planned measures,⁶¹ but it reflects the political reality of the composite empire and its political order as well as forming part of the constitutional basis of Swedish rule in Livonia. Therefore, it should be seen as an example of imperial practice, because ‘empires were made and unmade by words as well as deeds’.⁶²

Already in his seminal study on governance and provincial politics during the so-called Swedish Age of Greatness (1560–1721), Jerker Rosén outlined the composite

(3) highly selective, vertical integration of certain groups, (4) strong loyalties between elites and marginalised groups, (5) integration through charismatic persons, (6) lack of participation, (7) confessional unification, (8) imperial mission and tradition, (9) diversity.

⁵⁷ Goetze & Rohrschneider (forthcoming).

⁵⁸ See Koenigsberger (1991); Elliot (1992).

⁵⁹ See selected: Gustafsson (1998); Bosbach (2005).

⁶⁰ Gustafsson (1994: 47).

⁶¹ See Vasar (1931: 128, 143 and 148).

⁶² Tölle (2018: 30).

character of the Swedish empire, although the research concept of the composite state had not yet been developed, when he wrote that ‘the different degree of uniformity with Sweden in law and privileges, which during that period separated the newly conquered territories not only from the old part of the Swedish dominion but also from each other, had its origins in the differing structures, when they came under Swedish rule’.⁶³ Over the last 20 years early modern Sweden’s composite character has been intensively analysed.⁶⁴ The territories which Sweden acquired in the Baltic Sea region ‘were provinces of the Swedish Crown, but not part of the kingdom proper. To a large extent they retained their old administration, laws and courts’.⁶⁵ The crown’s power was restricted by the privileges of the estates and their self-government, which was the exclusive domain of the nobility in the rural areas of Livonia. This applies also to absolutist sovereigns. They too depended on consensus, commitment and cooperation with their subjects or at least with the elites.⁶⁶ In Livonia, for instance, the crown used the self-government of the nobility to implement its rule down to the local level.⁶⁷ In that way, composite states and early modern empires were fundamentally different from the modern nation state, which is described by the triad of the people of the nation, its territory and its sovereignty. The composite state formed the prerequisite for enabling the ruler to confirm the privileges and constitution of each part of the dominion, or as the Livonian knighthood put it with regard to the status of Livonia: ‘as long as it had been under Swedish rule, it had never been bound in its homeland by the statutes of the Swedish realm, but had had its own laws and statutes’.⁶⁸ Accordingly, they argued that the Swedish Diet’s decision was not valid for Livonia, as it contradicted not only the Livonian privileges but also the sovereign’s assurances of 1678 and 1681, which ‘protected [the knighthood] against all land withdrawals’. In concluding their argument, the nobility linked the future fulfilment of their obligation as subjects, i.e. ‘loyalty to the king and to the country’s welfare’, which they had shown in the past, to ‘an assurance from the ruler affirmed by hand and seal and his vested promise that its privileges would not be violated in any way’, and thus to a confirmation of the composite ruling order which had been in effect until then.⁶⁹

It becomes obvious, that the retake of crown property and its implementation following the example of the Swedish realm was perceived by the Livonian nobility

⁶³ Rosén (1946: 228)—from Swedish by the author.

⁶⁴ See selected Gustafsson (1994); Nordin (2000: 42–143); Eng (2001); Tuchtenhagen (2008: especially 440–2); Eng (2015); Goetze & Rohrschneider (forthcoming).

⁶⁵ Gustafsson (1994: 50). On Livonia see Tuchtenhagen (2008: 48–54).

⁶⁶ See Lindström (2013: 245). For the discussion on the controversial concept of absolutism see selected Duchhardt (1989); Asch & Duchhardt (1996); Freist (2008); Schilling (2008); Faber (2017).

⁶⁷ See Tuchtenhagen (2008: 42–9).

⁶⁸ Schirren (1865: 34)—from German by the author.

⁶⁹ Schirren (1865: 35)—from German by the author.

as a violation of Livonia's constitutional status and thus of the composite character of Sweden. In their presentation, the nobility not only described the normative basis of Swedish rule, the composite state as manifested, specifically, in the privileges of the Livonia nobility, but continued with the securitisation strategy of Charles XI's proposition and their rejection of it. They did so by repeating the knighthood's need for legal security, thus, defining the function of the order they were renegotiating.

In his reply of 5 August 1681, the governor commented in detail on the declaration of the Livonian estates. First he assured the nobility that 'the re-acquisition of crown possessions was not intended to restrict privileges'.⁷⁰ In support of his argument, he referred to the legal security enjoyed by the knighthood under Swedish rule until now, since the privileges dating from Polish times had been confirmed. The governor also emphasised that by convening the Livonian Diet to discuss the withdrawal of land with the nobility, the constitution of Livonia as documented in the privileges was respected.⁷¹ However, it was a prerogative of the sovereign to revoke voluntary acts of favour, such as donations and enfeoffments, if it was 'indispensable for the security and the welfare of the dominion'.⁷² Consequently, the withdrawals concerned only those possessions, donated out of an act of favour.⁷³ In this case, too, Livonian privileges were preserved, the governor continued, since the donations to the Livonian nobility had been made under Swedish law.⁷⁴

Since the governor was the representative of the Swedish Crown, his explanation can be read as an official interpretation of the Livonian constitution. The special characteristics of the composite state are clearly evident in this interpretation: unlike the Livonian knighthood, the crown apparently not only distinguished between different legal and constitutional spaces in the various parts of the empire, but also differentiated legal systems with varying scope within particular territories. With regard to the resumption of alienated crown land in Livonia, a legal system protected by the privileges of the knighthood and a legal sphere defined by personal bestowal of sovereign favours thus becomes apparent. The way in which the landowners had acquired their possessions defined their membership of the respective system. It was quite possible for a landowner to belong to both of these areas, which led to a competition of norms as regards of ownership.⁷⁵ These remarks show the insufficiency of traditional views, such as that of Vasar, that governor Lichten's argumentation only

⁷⁰ Schirren (1865: 36)—from German by the author.

⁷¹ See Schirren (1865: 37).

⁷² Schirren (1865: 36)—from German by the author.

⁷³ See Schirren (1865: 36).

⁷⁴ See Schirren (1865: 37).

⁷⁵ On the concept of competing norms see Karsten & Thiessen (2015).

served to enable a withdrawal of land in Livonia at the ruler's disposal and without the consent of the estates.⁷⁶ It was rather a question of explaining the foundations of the political order, as understood by the Swedish rule and made them the basis of its actions. Moreover, this example shows that the security argument had its limits: it was not possible to disregard legal orders that existed under the pretence of security needs, such as the privileges of the Livonian nobility. Here it becomes evident what Gehler and Rollinger stress, namely that, due to their size and diversity, empires required more effort and energy to fulfil their obligations with regard to integration.⁷⁷ Lichten's argumentation did not have the desired effect on the members of the Livonian Diet. In their response of 11 August 1681, the nobility refused to recognise two separate legal areas, as described by the governor, by emphasising, the privileges they had enjoyed under Polish rule and which had been confirmed by Swedish sovereigns since the reign of Charles IX.⁷⁸ Consequently, they argued, the Swedish rulers had succeeded the Polish sovereigns and had thus taken over the law applicable to them in Livonia. Additionally, the donations the nobles had received from the crown were not exclusively acts of favour, but compensation for the fulfilment of their duties as subjects, for which their privileges had also been confirmed. Therefore the decision of the Swedish Diet did not apply to them.⁷⁹ By emphasising the central importance of knighthood and nobility for Livonia's security and the nobles' will to contribute with their blood to the province's welfare and safety, the estates derived the expectation that Charles XI would refrain from withdrawing property (even if Livonia should be more exposed to risks due to its status as a border region) in order not to endanger Livonia's security by weakening its most important pillars.⁸⁰ That would inevitably 'lead to the downfall, if not the ruin of the province', according to them.⁸¹

Once again, security becomes the leitmotif of the argumentation. This is evident from the fact that the members of the Livonian Diet introduce and conclude their declaration by referring to their willingness to contribute to the security of Livonia. Thus, the knighthood and nobility presented themselves as the guarantors of the province's security and underlined the dependence of the ruler on them for the safety of Livonia. Consequently, as the sovereign could not ensure security on his own, his rule could not function in a one-sided way, but only in cooperation and agreement with his subjects.

⁷⁶ See Vasar (1931: 170–1).

⁷⁷ Gehler & Rollinger (2014: 10).

⁷⁸ See Schirren (1865: 40–1).

⁷⁹ See Schirren (1865:40–2).

⁸⁰ See Schirren (1865: 39–40).

⁸¹ Schirren (1865: 39)—from German by the author.

Conclusion

The expansion of the Swedish empire and the maintenance of Swedish rule in the territories the crown acquired were accompanied by shifting borders and boundaries. Livonia as a border region and the re-acquisitions of alienated crown lands of 1655 and 1680, which resulted from the policy of the Swedish Crown of awarding land, provide excellent examples of this. Since research on these events focuses on its course and outcomes, it discusses mainly economic aspects as well as constitutional aspects by linking it with the introduction of Swedish absolutism and the crown's attempts to abolish serfdom in the Baltic provinces. With regard to the retake of land of the 1680s in Livonia, the resulting conflict between the Swedish Crown, in the person of Charles XI, and the local nobility is emphasised. However, more in-depth analyses of this particular conflict, which take into account the findings of research on state-building and rule over the past 20 years and thus allow a more accurate understanding of the developments under scrutiny, are still lacking. The study presented here addresses this issue using the example of the discussions in the Livonian Diet of 1681.

The Livonian Diet served not only to make political decisions such as approving taxes, but also to establish a relationship between the ruler and his subjects.⁸² This is obvious in the debates of the estates about the withdrawal of property. Both Charles XI and the Livonian knighthood and nobility adopted strategies of securitisation to justify their respective positions, a need for taking back crown possessions and its rejection. An examination of their particular understanding of security reveals a state of disintegration: the actors involved in the political order could not agree on its function. Thus, from a perspective of securitisation, the deliberations of the Livonian Diet were a discussion of the normative foundations of Swedish rule in Livonia. Juhan Vasar's judgement that this was not a struggle for a fundamental interpretation of the constitution must therefore be strongly contradicted.⁸³ Hence, the approach to securitisation not only enables an extension of the research horizon to the withdrawal of land in Livonia, but, in combination with the concept of integration, also contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the integration of the early modern Swedish empire.

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⁸²On the necessity of legitimising and strengthening *Herrschaft* in the provinces of the Swedish Crown by building diverse relationships between sovereign and subjects, see [Stadin \(2007\)](#).

⁸³See [Vasar \(1931: 178\)](#).

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