



Imperial Sweden (1611-1721)

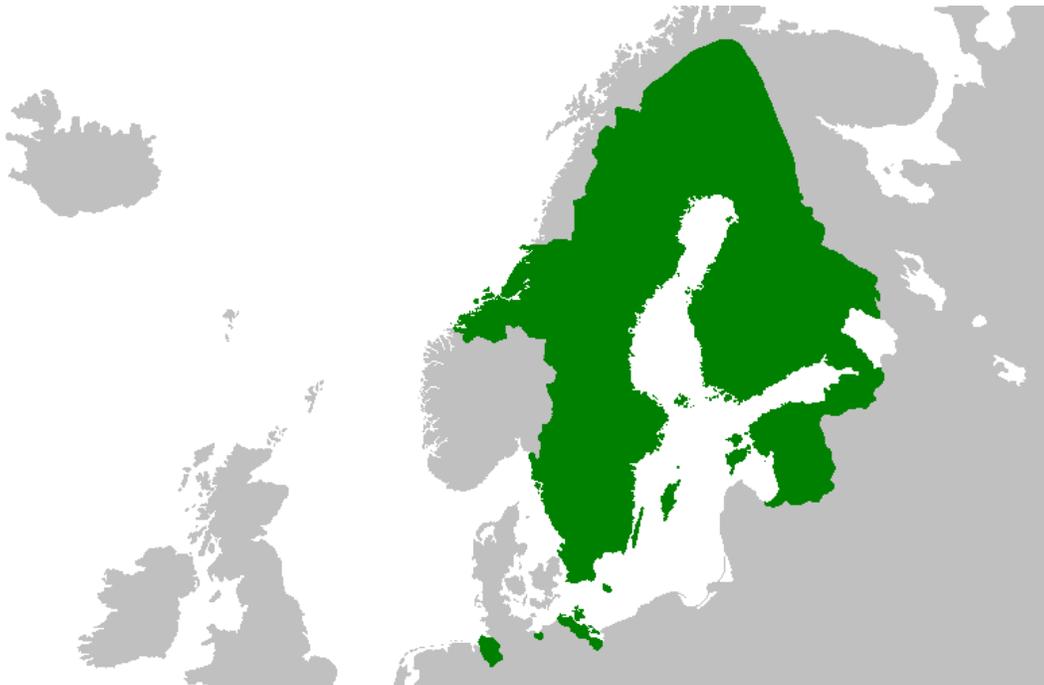
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This essay focuses on the political, economic, and cultural history of imperial Sweden during the 17th and early 18th centuries, when Sweden was the leading expansionary power in the Baltic region. It is based on lectures that were written for two expeditionary cruises in the Baltic Sea during the year 2000.

Sweden was an unlikely imperialist in the 17th century. I begin by looking at how Sweden created its Baltic empire – the leadership roles played by Gustavus Adolphus, the empire’s founder, Axel Oxenstierna, his public administrator, Charles XI, the empire’s consolidator, and Charles XII, the expansionist whose recklessness led to the empire’s fall. I turn next to an analysis of 17th-century Sweden’s sources of wealth and power – foreign conquest of Baltic ports to control natural resources and trade (amid rivalries with Denmark and Poland), productive domestic agriculture, mining, forestry and fishing, and extensive taxes on foreign trade. I close by examining why Sweden’s empire collapsed by 1721 – Charles XII’s military errors, the lack of defensible natural borders, ethnic heterogeneity, and the rise of Russia. I append a time line, a bibliography, and a description of sites visited in Sweden and the Baltic.

Sweden – Imperial Ruler of the Baltic (1611-1718)

Introduction to the Rise and Fall of Imperial Sweden. The seventeenth century was Sweden’s “moment in history.” Sweden rose from being a minor Scandinavian kingdom to become the ruler of the Baltic region. How did this sudden rise to power occur, and why did Sweden’s Baltic empire collapse in the early eighteenth century?



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*Sweden’s Baltic Empire At Its Peak –
At the End of the Reign of Charles XI, 1697*

To build and maintain their empire, Swedish rulers tapped three sources of wealth and power. First, they successfully invigorated and

then effectively taxed domestic economic activities – agriculture, mining (iron and copper), forestry (lumber and naval stores), fishing, and artisanal crafts. Second, they expanded Swedish foreign trade, gained control over the lucrative east-west Baltic trade route (the former basis of Hansa wealth), and imposed customs duties on foreign trade to transfer wealth to the Swedish state. Third, they utilized adroit military leadership and tactics to conquer key areas in the Baltic – southern Sweden, parts of northern Germany, and the eastern Baltic north and south of the Gulf of Finland – and then took control of those regions’ economic resources and foreign trade.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
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*Stockholm Old Town, Founded by German Hansa Merchants –
25,000 Residents in the Early 17th century*

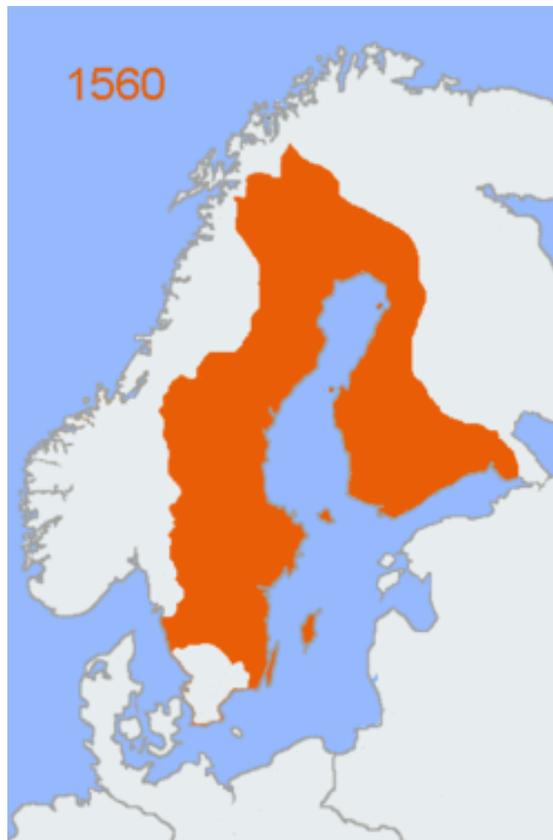
To create its Baltic empire, Sweden required extraordinary leadership and good fortune (distraction of or alliances with Europe's principal powers). Swedish rulers taxed their peasantry to provide resources – tax revenues and manpower – for the army and navy and then used its military might to conquer foreign territories and to control foreign trade routes. For a century – following the Viking traders and the Hansa merchants and preceding the rise of Russian power – Sweden was the preeminent power in northern Europe and the Baltic.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Haupthandelsroute_Hanse.png>

*The Hanseatic Trade Route (12th-17th centuries) –
German Cities and Kontore (London, Bruges, Bergen, and Novgorod)*

Sweden's Economy and Society (early 17th century). At the turn of the seventeenth century, Sweden was a small and relatively poor country. Its land area consisted of much of modern Sweden – less parts of the southwestern peninsula that were then part of Denmark and of the central area that were part of Norway – plus much of modern Finland. Sweden's total population was probably no more than 1.5 million people, and about ninety-five percent were peasant farmers.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sweden2.gif>>

Sweden c. 1600 – About 1.5 Million Residents

Swedish agriculture was made up of large estates, owned by the crown, the nobility, and the Lutheran church, and small farms, owned and worked by small-scale farmers. On both the estates and the private farms, the farmers practiced mixed agriculture (producing a wide variety of grains, vegetables, and animal products) and supplemented their incomes by engaging in forestry (producing lumber and naval stores – tar and resin) and fishing.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fegen_Schwedenhaus.JPG>

Traditional Swedish Rural Home, Fegen, Sweden – 17th century-style

Sweden's exports in the seventeenth century came primarily from mining and metallurgy and secondarily from forest products. By the

mid-seventeenth century, Sweden was the European leader in production and exports of iron (17,000 tons) and copper (3,000 tons), and it exported both ore and finished products, including brass (a blend of copper and zinc). Copper production was concentrated in Falun, where 1,000 people worked in the mine, whereas iron mining was carried out in various parts of central and southern Sweden and later in the north (Sapmi, formerly Lappland). Stockholm was Sweden's only sizeable town, with about 25,000 residents. Artisanal and craft activities were practiced in the towns. Among Sweden's four Estates – the Nobility, Clergy, Burghers, and Peasantry – the peasants paid most of the taxes.



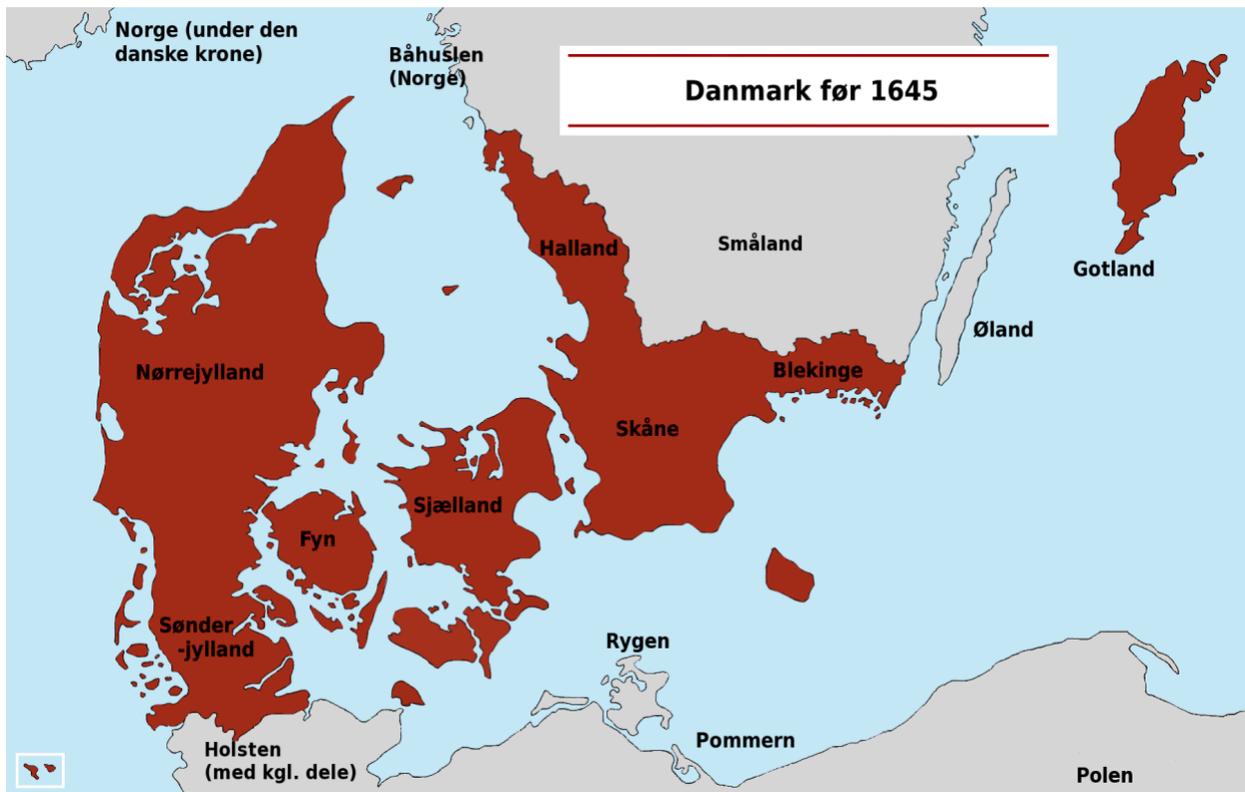
Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Falu_gruva_\(by_Pudelek\)_2.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Falu_gruva_(by_Pudelek)_2.JPG)>

Copper Mine, Falun, Sweden – Opened in the 14th century

Sweden’s Foreign Rivalries and Trade Strategy (early 17th c.).

Lacking a strong domestic economy in the early seventeenth century, Swedish rulers were forced to look abroad for new sources of wealth and power. The prospects for foreign expansion in the Baltic region did not appear promising. Sweden faced three principal rivals – Denmark, Poland, and Russia. Denmark was Sweden’s principal antagonist. Between 1397 and 1523, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had been united under the “Union of Three Crowns,” and Denmark had been the

central power in that Scandinavian union. Great hostility persisted after Gustav Vasa took Sweden out of the union and became king of independent Sweden in 1523.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Danmark_f%C3%B8r_1645.png>

Denmark in the mid-17th century – Sweden's Arch-rival

Because Denmark retained Skane and Halland in modern southwestern Sweden, the Danes controlled both sides of the Oresund Sound and thus the western outlet from the Baltic Sea into the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Sweden thus was boxed in in the western

Baltic, and Denmark charged sizeable customs fees on merchandise passing through the Sound. Sweden naturally turned its energies to the east and south in the Baltic region.

Fortunately for Sweden, the power of Poland-Lithuania was declining, and Poland was vulnerable in the eastern Baltic – where Russia and Poland vied over control of Livonia (modern Latvia). Sweden took advantage of Russia’s internal weakness during its Time of Troubles in the late sixteenth century and used its superior navy to take control of Estonia in 1595 at the Peace of Teusina.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Town_of_Tallinn,_Tallinn,_Estonia - panoramio \(58\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Town_of_Tallinn,_Tallinn,_Estonia_-_panoramio_(58).jpg)>

Reval (Tallinn), Estonia – Part of Sweden after 1595

The Swedish strategy was to try to gain control of ports and territories in the eastern Baltic and of ports in the southern Baltic. The eastern Baltic, especially Livonia and Estonia, would serve as Sweden's granary, whereas control of the ports would allow Sweden to charge customs duties on the export trade of timber, naval stores, furs, and grain from the eastern territories and of salt, cloth, wine, and other manufactured goods imported into the eastern and southern Baltic ports.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swedish_Empire_\(1560-1815\)_en2.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swedish_Empire_(1560-1815)_en2.png)

Expansion of Sweden – 1560 (Very Dark Green), 1611 (Dark Green), 1654 (Lighter Green), 1660 (Light Green)

Gustavus Adolphus and Axel Oxenstierna (1611-1648) –

Domestic Reform. Gustavus Adolphus became king of Sweden in 1611 at the age of 16 and ruled until his death in battle in 1632. He was one of the most fascinating characters in European history and arguably was Sweden's greatest king. Gustavus Adolphus was a charismatic leader who spoke nine languages with fluency. He is best known as a military genius – Napoleon counted him as one of the five best military leaders in world history – and as the savior of Protestant northern Europe from Austria (and Catholicism) in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). He also was the architect of Sweden's expansionism in the Baltic region.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Attributed_to_Jacob_Hoefnagel - Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden 1611-1632 - Google Art Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Attributed_to_Jacob_Hoefnagel_-_Gustavus_Adolphus,_King_of_Sweden_1611-1632_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)>

*King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden (ruled 1611-1632) –
The Lion of the North, Military Genius, and Public Administrator*

Gustavus Adolphus could not have accomplished his military objectives without the unusually able collaboration of Axel Oxenstierna.

Oxenstierna was a Swedish noble and civil servant who ran the public administration of Sweden while the king was overseas in battle.

Gustavus Adolphus and Oxenstierna were close friends and loyal allies, and Oxenstierna continued to administer the Swedish government for

more than a decade after the king's early death. Together they realized that military success could be built only on the foundations of a strong domestic economy and a peaceful society.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Unknown_painter_after M. van Mierevelt -
Portrait of Axel Oxenstierna.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Unknown_painter_after_M._van_Mierevelt_-_Portrait_of_Axel_Oxenstierna.jpg)>

*Axel Oxenstierna – Right-hand Man to King Gustavus Adolphus,
Lord High Chancellor (1612-1654), and Regent (1632-1644)*

Gustavus Adolphus and Oxenstierna carried out a series of domestic reforms – to develop the economy, improve taxation, and reign in the power of the nobles. They invested government funds in new and improved roads, ports, and waterways, they created new towns to serve as trade and ship-building centers, and they attracted foreign investment

(especially in mining) and foreign immigrants (mainly Germans, Belgians, and Dutch). Their strategy was to exert Swedish power in the Baltic through military conquest and to finance those conquests with taxes collected initially from an improved Swedish economy.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Visby_ringmur_%C3%B6stra_delen_norrut.jpg>

*Sweden Re-built the Walls of Visby, Gotland –
After Re-gaining Gotland from Denmark in 1645*

Gustavus Adolphus and Axel Oxenstierna (1611-1648) –

Foreign Expansion. In 1611, Sweden faced a difficult dilemma. It had an inexperienced, new 16-year-old king, Gustavus Adolphus, the country was at war with both Denmark in the west and Russia in the east, and the treasury was empty. Gustavus Adolphus and his

chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, soon solved both the foreign and domestic problems. In 1613, they made peace with Denmark and agreed to pay a very large indemnity to the Danes in return for Swedish ships' use of the Oresund Sound in their international trade.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_%C3%98resund_new_version.JPG>

*The Oresund Sound Today –
The Only Entry from the Atlantic Ocean to the Baltic Sea in 1613*

Sweden had better success in resolving its conflict with Russia, which was suffering through its Time of Troubles prior to the installation of the first Romanov tsar. Through the Treaty of Stolbova in 1617, Russia ceded Ingria and adjoining areas bordering the Gulf of Finland to Sweden, cutting off Russian access to the Baltic Sea and giving Sweden an unbroken coastline around the Gulf of Finland.

During the second decade of the young king's reign (the 1620s), Sweden accelerated the pace of its Baltic expansionism. From Poland, Sweden took Livonia (modern Latvia), featuring the port of Riga (soon to become Sweden's largest town and most important port) and rich grain fields (soon to become Sweden's bread basket).



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sw_BalticProv_en.png

*Sweden in the Eastern Baltic, 1617 to 1721 –
 Swedish Ingria, Swedish Estonia, and Swedish Livonia*

Sweden then invaded and took over the German/Slav areas of Pomerania and West Prussia on the south coast of the Baltic Sea, gaining several ports including Stettin. Gustavus Adolphus next decided to enter

the Thirty Years War. He hoped to defeat Austria and Poland and check the power of Denmark by forming a North German alliance led by Sweden. The young king had impressive military successes in northern Europe but was killed in the battle of Lutzen in 1632.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Battle_of_Lutzen.jpg>*

*Battle of Lutzen (1632), Death of Gustavus Adolphus –
Painting by Carl Wahlbom, 1855*

Oxenstierna then assumed effective leadership of Sweden until Queen Christina came of age in 1644, through most of the remainder of the Thirty Years War (which ended in 1648). Sweden thus became the leading power in the Baltic region as a result of the strong leadership of

Gustavus Adolphus and Axel Oxenstierna who saw that effective domestic reforms could finance a strong military and lead to successful foreign expansion.

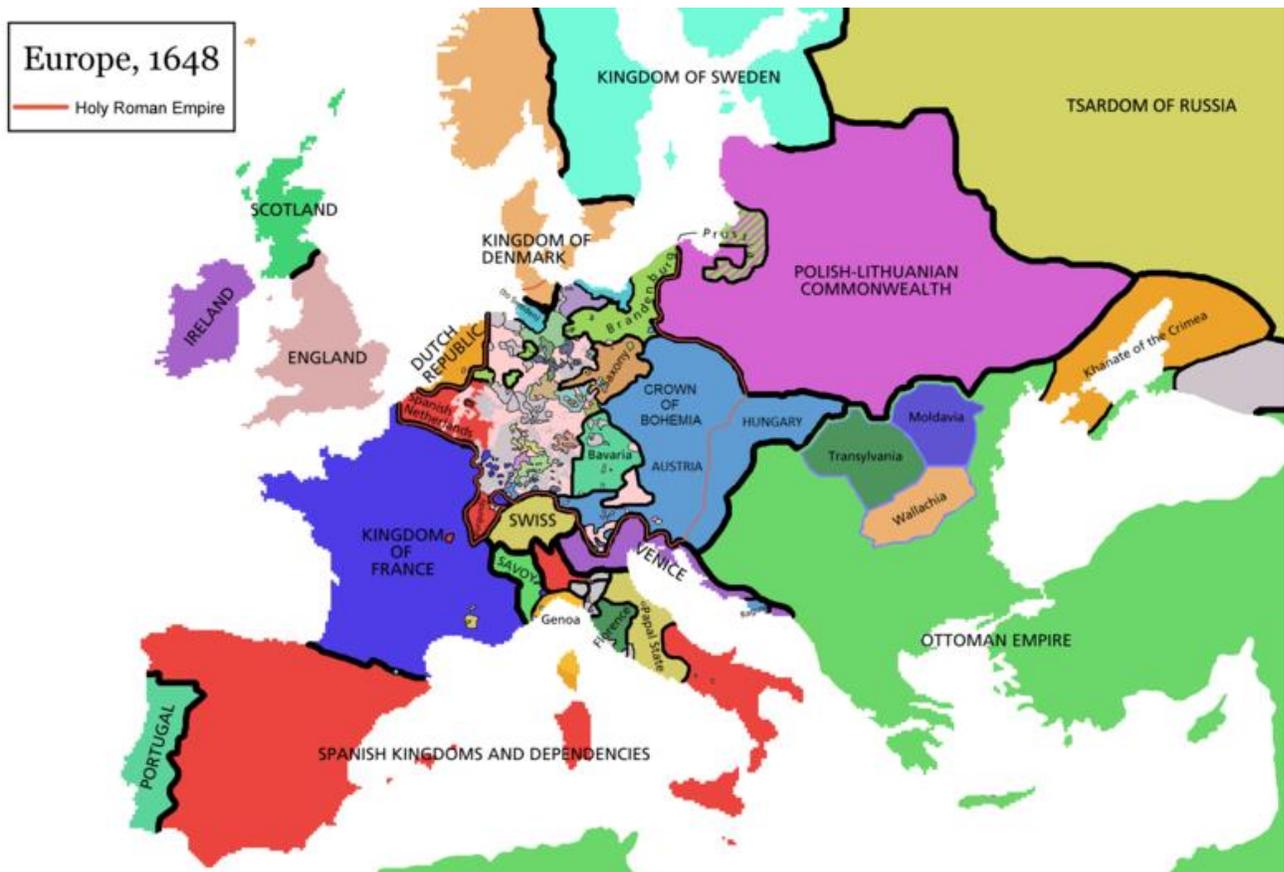


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacob_Ferdinand_Voet_-_Queen_Christina_of_Sweden.jpg

*Queen Christina (Ruled 1632-1654) –
Portrait by Jacob Ferdinand Voet, c. 1670-1675*

The Height of Sweden’s Baltic Empire (1648-1660). The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) was the European settlement that ended the Thirty Years War. Sweden gained much – but not all – of what it desired in that settlement. Sweden assumed control of Western Pomerania,

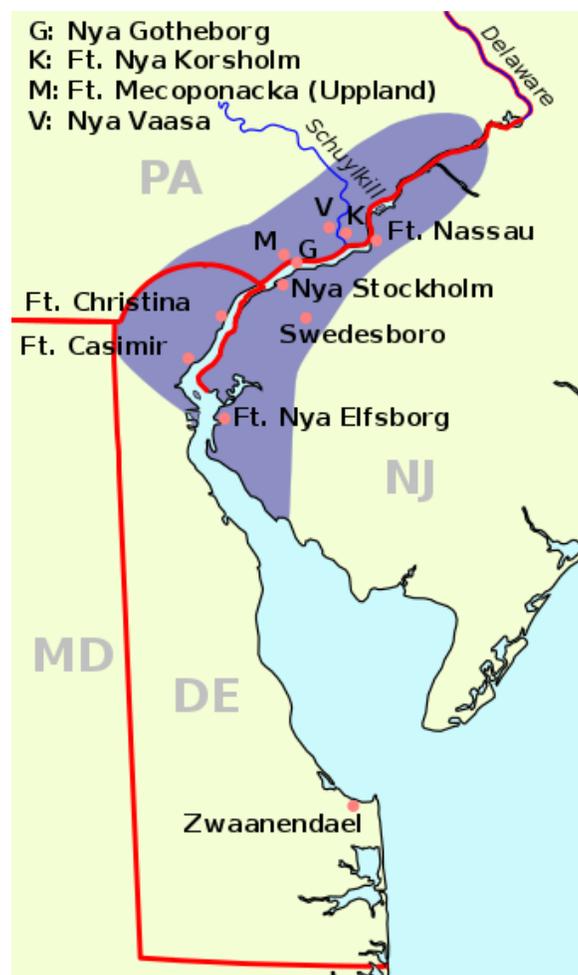
including the port of Stettin and the mouth of the Oder River, of Mecklenburg, including the ports of Wismar and Warnemunde, and of the ports of Bremen and Verden, controlling the mouths of the Elbe and Weser Rivers. However, Sweden was forced to cede one-half of Pomerania to Brandenburg, and it had to settle for war reparations of only one-fourth of the amount it had requested.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_map_1648.PNG>

Europe in 1648, After the Treaty of Westphalia

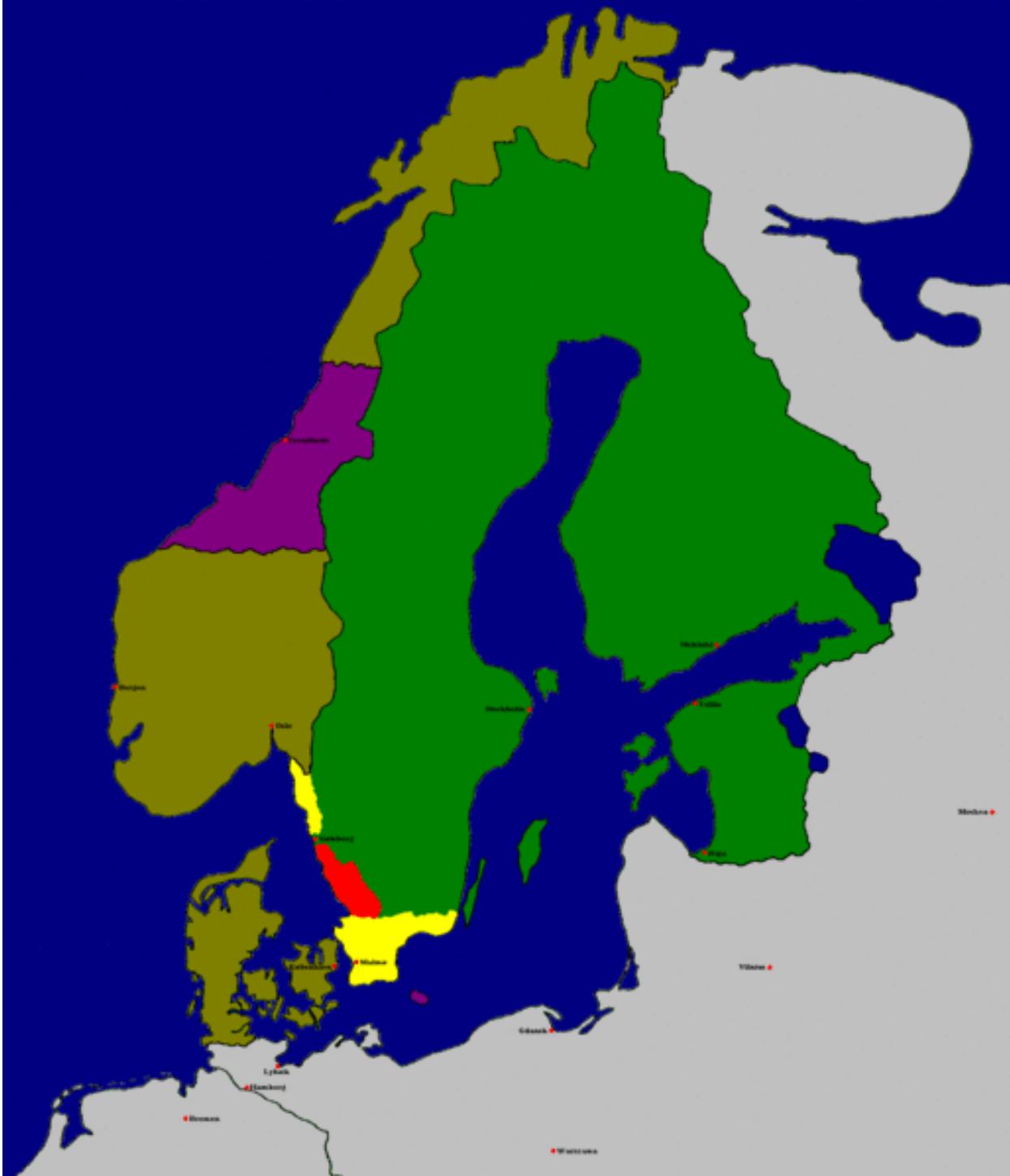
Sweden also suffered a setback in 1655 when the Dutch took over the Swedish settlement of Fort Christina on the Delaware River in North America, which Sweden had founded in 1638. Holland took advantage of the fact that Sweden had gone back to war with Denmark in 1654 and was occupied elsewhere.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nya_Sverige.svg>

*New Sweden Colony in Delaware and New Jersey, North America –
Founded in 1638, Lost to the Netherlands in 1655*

Sweden won the war with the joint kingdom of Denmark and Norway. In the Treaty of Roskilde (1658), Denmark ceded the provinces of Skane, Blekinge, and Halland to Sweden, and Norway ceded the province of Bohuslen to Sweden. Those territorial acquisitions gave Sweden the remainder of its mainland peninsula and deprived Denmark of control over both sides of the Oresund Sound. Sweden also tried to force Denmark to close the Sound to ships of Sweden's enemies in battle, but that controversial clause was overturned in a subsequent treaty two years later. By 1660, Sweden had reached the pinnacle of its Baltic empire. Its military successes had given it control of all of the northern and eastern Baltic and of key ports and river mouths in the southern Baltic. Sweden thus was able to charge hefty customs duties on shipments along the lucrative Baltic trade route.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scandinavia_1658.gif>

Sweden After the Treaty of Roskilde (1658) – Winning Sweden (Green, Lavender, Yellow, and Red Areas), Losing Denmark (Tan Areas)

Swedish Power in the Baltic under Charles XI (1660-1697).

Charles XI was the second of Sweden's three impressive rulers during the seventeenth century. He officially took the throne in 1660 at the height of Sweden's imperial rule in the Baltic region. But because he was still a child, a regency government ruled in his stead. That government suffered from weak leadership and temporarily drove Sweden into decline during its twelve years of rule. The regency government was led by nobles, gave excessive power to the nobility, and created a fiscal crisis by reducing the tax base. Charles XI took control in 1672 and gradually restored the power of his government and the credibility of his country.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_XI_of_Sweden.jpg>

King Charles XI (1672-1697), Effective Administrator of Sweden's Baltic Empire – Painting by David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, 1676

To rein in the power of the nobles, Charles XI established an absolute monarchy in Sweden. He and his advisors also carried out a series of extensive reforms of the country's public administration, tax system, and military. Although the king was not a charismatic leader and did not achieve any notable military successes, he was an unusually effective manager of Sweden's economy and government. His sound

management set the stage for the later military exploits of his son, Charles XII.

Under the leadership of Charles XI, Sweden followed mercantilist economic policies. The government tried to promote exports, especially of iron and copper ores and products, and to develop domestic industry to substitute for imports of manufactured goods. The aim was to have the country's export earnings exceed its import expenditures so that the government could realize an inflow of gold or silver that could then be spent on military expansion.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swedish_plate_money_in_the_British_Museum.jpg>

*Eight-Daler Swedish Copper Plate Money from 1658 –
British Museum, London*

The Swedish government earned more than one-third of its total revenue from taxing transit trade through the eastern Baltic provinces or northern Germany. Earning that revenue was a central part of the country's rationale for expanding its Baltic territory through military conquests. The other Baltic countries that had lost territory, power, and wealth during the first two-thirds of the seventeenth century resented Sweden's successful strategy. Denmark in the west, Brandenburg-Prussia in the south, Poland in the south and east, and Russia in the east were all thirsting for a chance to reverse Sweden's new-found imperial successes in the Baltic.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slottet_Tre_Kronor_1661.jpg>

*Kronor Castle, Stockholm, Seat of Power of Sweden's Baltic Empire –
Painting by Govert Dircksz Camphuysen, 1661*

The Great Northern War (1700-1708) – Charles XII's

Successes. Charles XII assumed the throne of Sweden in 1697 at the age of 15. Within three years, his military aggressiveness had precipitated The Great Northern War. In that 21-year war, Sweden's Baltic enemies – Denmark, Poland/Saxony, and Russia – were allied against the young warrior king. But Charles XII was a brilliant military strategist and leader, and the Swedish army was the best trained and disciplined in all of Europe. Sweden's young king personally and

courageously led his troops in battle, and he lived an incredibly spartan life, often eating meals in the saddle.

During the first seven years of the war, between 1700 and 1707, Charles XII and his army seemed invincible. They first knocked Denmark (temporarily) out of the war. Then they inflicted defeats on the Russian army of Tsar Peter in battles in the eastern Baltic region.



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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Copy_Charles_XII_-_Nationalmuseum_-_17886.png>

King Charles XII of Sweden (1697-1718), Brilliant and Eccentric Leader – Portrait by Hyacinthe Rigaud, 1715

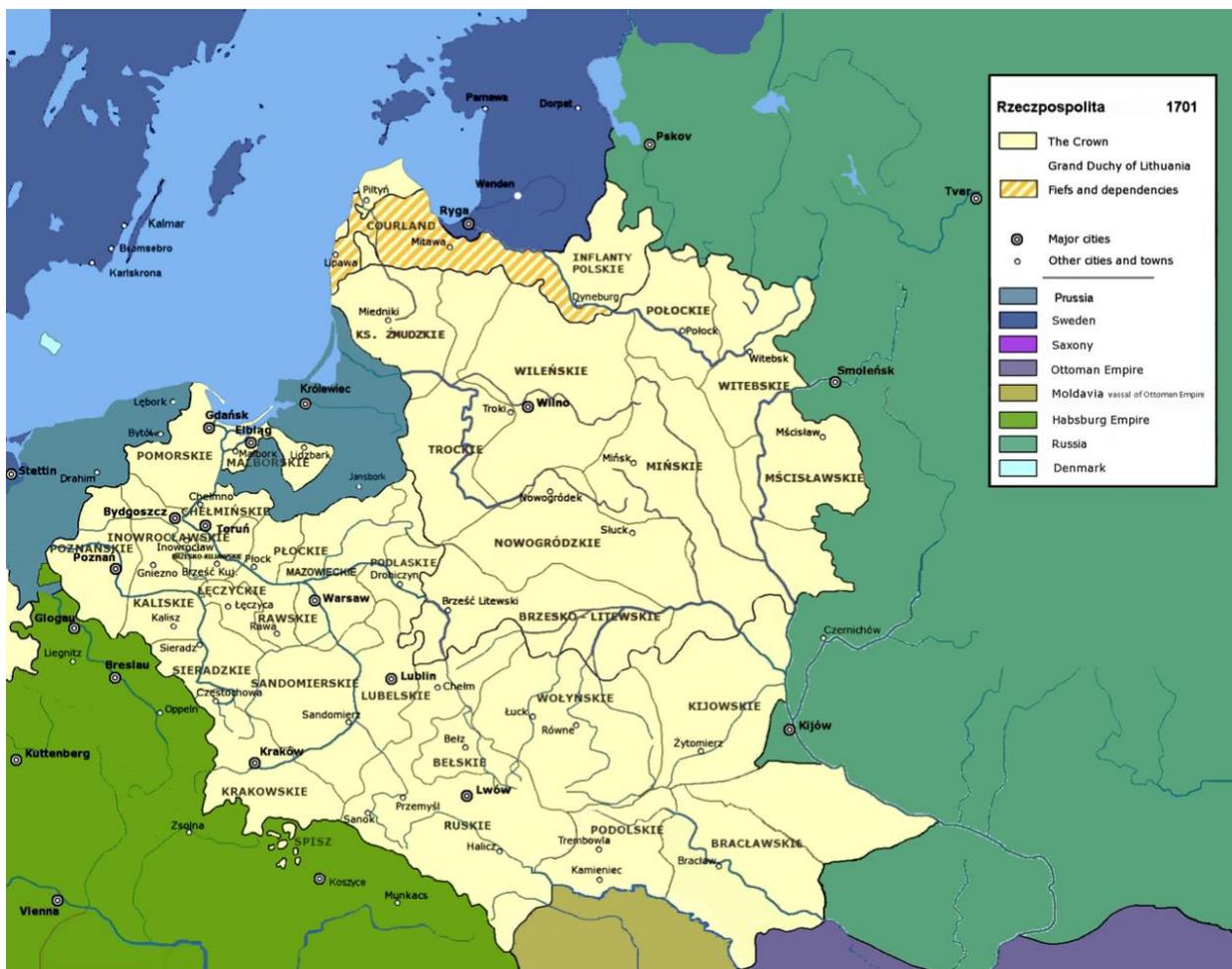
Charles XII next pursued and defeated his major nemesis, King Augustus II of Poland and Saxony. In Poland, however, Sweden could win the battles but not the war. It defeated the Polish army but could not take control over the vast country until it forced Augustus to abdicate. In 1701, therefore, Charles XII made a critical – and, in retrospect, faulty – decision. Instead of pursuing the disheveled Russian army and solidifying Swedish control over the rich eastern Baltic provinces, Charles XII decided to go after Augustus and his army in Polish territories and to force Augustus from the Polish throne.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:August_II_of_Poland_and_Friedrich_Wilhelm_I_of_Prussia.PNG

King Augustus II of Poland (Left) with King Frederick William of Prussia –Sweden’s Adversaries in the Great Northern War

Charles XII eventually achieved that result, but it took six years to do so. During that time, Peter rebuilt the Russian army and recaptured much of the Baltic provinces from remnant Swedish forces. Charles XII was determined to fight only one enemy at a time, and he felt that he needed to defeat Poland before he could risk marching into Russia.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IRP.PNG>

The Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, 1701 – Charles XII's Key Adversary

Peter was so fearful of Sweden's military might that in 1706 he sought peace with Sweden under terms by which he would yield all of the Baltic to Sweden except for the region immediately around his new capital of St. Petersburg, then under construction. Charles XII, who had formed a very low opinion of the fighting abilities of the Russian army, rejected any compromise and was determined to defeat Peter. In 1707, Charles XII worked out a new military strategy. He would ensure the final defeat of Peter by marching across Russia and conquering Moscow.



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<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J.-M. Nattier \(d%27apr%C3%A8s\) -
Portrait de Pierre Ier \(mus%C3%A9 de l%27Ermitage\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:J.-M._Nattier_(d%27apr%C3%A8s)_-Portrait_de_Pierre_Ier_(mus%C3%A9_de_l%27Ermitage).jpg)>

*Tsar Peter the Great of Russia (1689-1725) in 1717 –
Reformer and Expansionist*

The Great Northern War (1709-1721) – Sweden’s Defeat. The rest of Europe breathed a huge sigh of relief in 1708 when Charles XII decided to invade Russia rather than seek conquests elsewhere in northern Europe. But Charles XII’s invasion of Russia faced many of the same obstacles that later confronted Napoleon and Hitler when they sent armies into that vast country. Although the Swedish army was able to advance slowly across Poland, western Russia, and Ukraine and defeated the Russian army in occasional confrontations, Peter carried out a scorched-earth retreat.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RussianEmpire1700.png>>

*Romanov Russia Under Tsar Peter the Great (1689-1725) –
No Access to the Baltic Sea or the Black Sea*

Charles XII thus was forced to move south into Ukraine in search of supplies and an alliance with Mazepa, the leader of a large force of

Cossacks. After failing to gain the supplies, the Swedish army found itself in southern Russia, far from any supply lines and means of auxiliary support. Peter and his Russian army then inflicted a severe defeat on Charles XII in 1709 at the Battle of Poltava. Much of the Swedish army was killed or captured in that fateful battle, but Charles XII and a small remnant force escaped into Turkey. There they remained for more than four years while Charles XII encouraged the Ottoman leaders to declare war on their Russian enemy.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mazepa2.JPG>>

*Charles XII and Mazepa, After Losing the Battle of Poltava (1709) –
Painting by Gustaf Cederström, 19th century*

In 1711, at the Battle of Pruth, the Turks routed the Russians and nearly captured Peter. In the peace settlement, however, the Ottoman Turks did not insist that Russia give back to Sweden the Baltic provinces that Russia had retaken during campaigns in 1710-1711 (although Peter apparently was prepared to do so to protect other Russian territories). In 1713, Charles XII made a remarkable return to Swedish territory when he rode 1,400 miles in 13 days from Turkey to Mecklenburg. He then returned to Sweden proper, after fifteen years abroad, and immediately began to raise a new army to continue the war.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prut_pohod_in_1711-en.png>

*Battle of Pruth (1711) –
Ottoman Empire Defeated Russia and Nearly Captured Peter the Great*

Charles XII became obsessed with the idea that he could lead a new Swedish army to victory over its enemies and thus reclaim Sweden's Baltic empire. His new strategy was to invade Norway (still part of Denmark) and then defeat Denmark first. From there he would reconquer northern Germany, and then he would move on to the Baltic provinces, completing the Baltic circle in a counterclockwise movement. But the brilliant and brash warrior king was killed in Norway at the beginning of the campaign, and Sweden quickly gave up on his plan.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gustaf_Cederstr%C3%B6m_-_Bringing_Home_the_Body_of_King_Karl_XII_of_Sweden_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg>

*Bringing Home the Body of King Charles XII –
Painting by Gustaf Cederström, 1884*

Sweden struggled on with the war, hoping to gain better terms in the eventual peace settlement. King George I of England (and of Hanover) brokered the settlement in 1721.

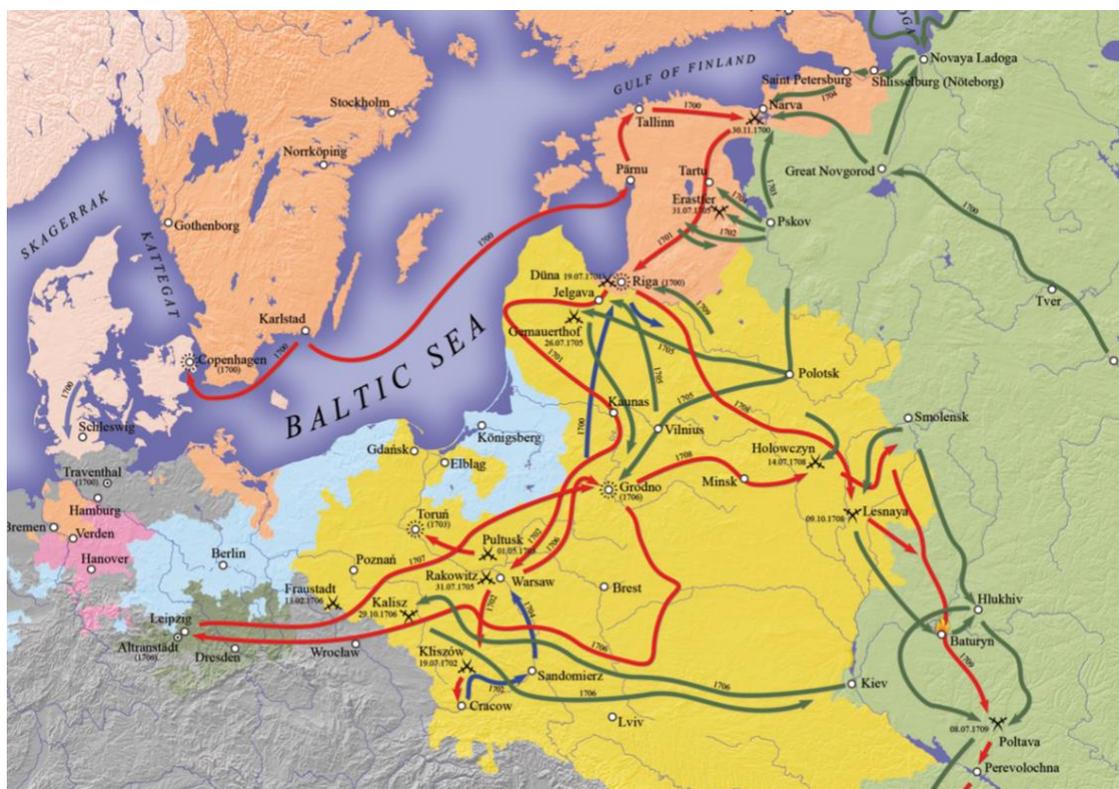


Source: Wikimedia Commons available at <
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_George_I_by_Sir_Godfrey_Kneller,_Bt_\(3\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:King_George_I_by_Sir_Godfrey_Kneller,_Bt_(3).jpg)>

King George I of England – Intervened to Limit Sweden’s Losses (and Russia’s Gains) after the Great Northern War (1700-1721)

Sweden was forced to cede its Baltic provinces – Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, and part of Karelia – to Russia, but it was permitted to keep most of Finland (even though Russia had overrun much of Finland). Sweden also lost nearly all of its territory in northern Germany. It ceded Bremen

and Verden to Hanover and much of Pomerania to Prussia; it was allowed to keep some of Pomerania and the port of Stralsund. Significantly, Sweden retained the territories that it had taken from Denmark/Norway in the mid-17th century – the Skanian provinces in the southern Swedish peninsula and the province of Bohuslen (formerly in southeastern Norway). At the end of The Great Northern War in 1721, Sweden had lost its Baltic empire.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Northern_War_Part1.png>

*Sweden Was Defeated in The Great Northern War (1700-1721) –
Lost Its Baltic Empire*

The Collapse of Sweden's Baltic Empire (1721). With the death of Charles XII in 1718 and the final defeat of Sweden in the Great Northern War in 1721, Sweden's "moment in history" was over. The reasons for the sudden collapse of Sweden's Baltic empire are clear. The empire had no natural borders and no ethnic or religious homogeneity. Most of the people in the eastern Baltic and in north Germany had no desire to be ruled by Sweden, although they did not rise in revolt against Sweden. The empire existed for the convenience and glory of Sweden alone. Because it provided Sweden with lucrative taxes on trade in the eastern and southern Baltic as well as control over valuable grain and timber from those areas, the other Baltic powers resented Sweden's imperial arrangement. Hence, the Swedish empire required considerable maintenance at great cost to the Swedish treasury.



*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl_XII_1706.jpg>*

*King Charles XII (Ruled 1697-1718) –
Obsessed With Expanding the Swedish Empire at Any Cost*

The empire could be held together only by constant supervision and show of force by the Swedish navy. It is not known whether those costs exceeded the economic benefits of the empire to Sweden. After the Great Northern War, both Sweden/Finland and Denmark/Norway reverted to the status of secondary powers in Europe. Sweden, though the loser of the war, fared somewhat better than Denmark. The intervention of King George I of Great Britain had limited the gains of

Russia in the eastern Baltic and thus had restored much of Finland to Sweden. The settlement also resulted in Sweden retaining the Skanian provinces and Bohuslen that it had taken from Denmark at mid-century.

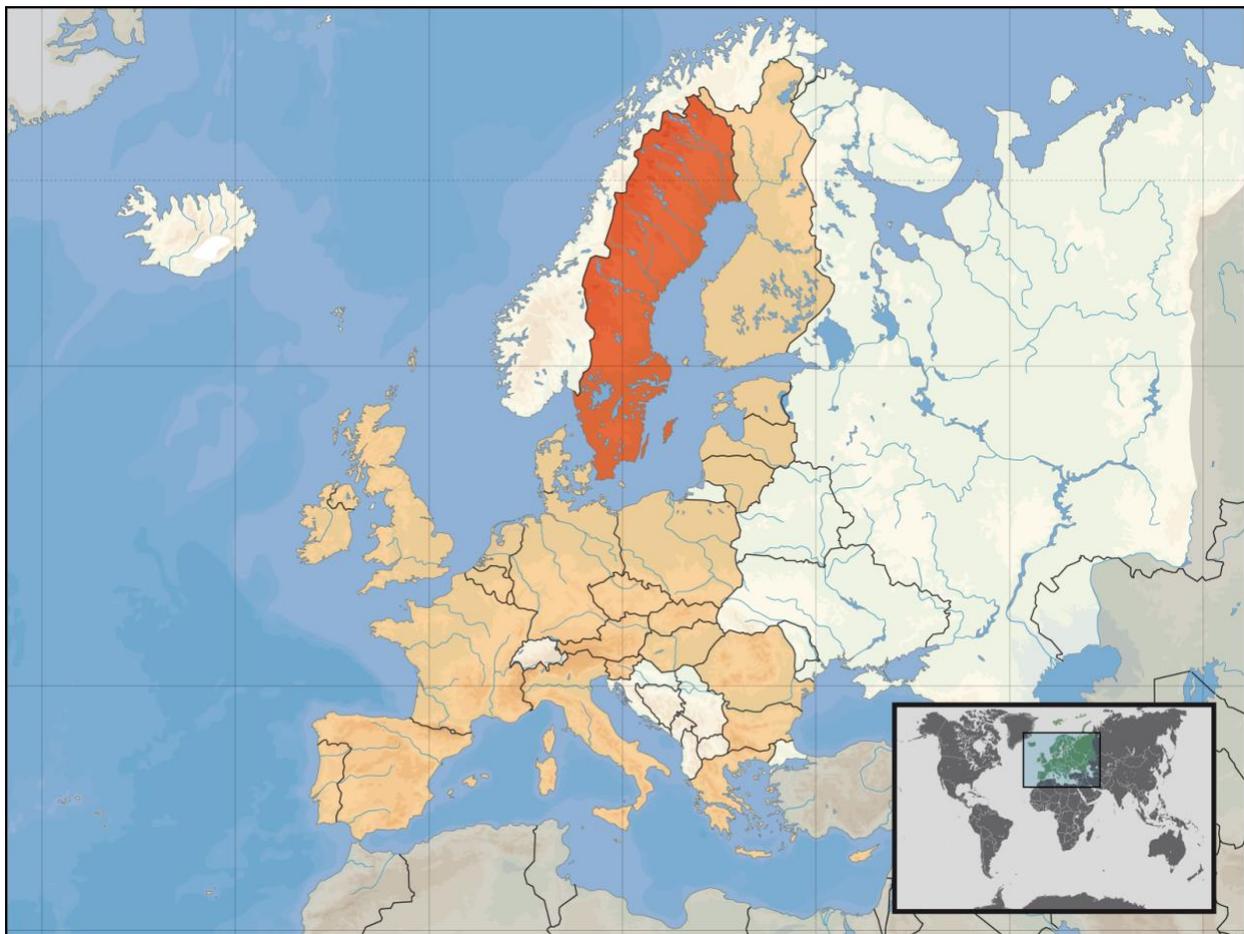


*Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%98resund Bridge from the air in September 2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%98resund_Bridge_from_the_air_in_September_2015.jpg)>*

Øresund Bridge Connecting Sweden and Denmark, Allies in the European Union – Five Miles Long, Opened in 1999

Thereafter, in the eighteenth century the Baltic region became the scene of European great power politics. The line-up of alliances typically pitted Sweden with France against Denmark with Russia. Great Britain was an active player, usually against France, but saw its

main role as promoting British trading opportunities in the Baltic region. Sweden and Denmark were forced to take a back seat in the Baltic as Russia rose in the east and Prussia in the south. For the next three centuries, the Scandinavian countries shifted alliances and used their status as neutral countries to advantage.



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EU_location_SWE.png>

*Contemporary Sweden, Bordered by Norway and Finland –
Not a European Power After 1721*

Time Line for Sweden

c. 8000 BCE	glaciers retreated in Fennoscandia (Scandinavia, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia)
c. 7000 BCE	ancestors of Sámi and Finnish peoples settled Fennoscandia – hunted reindeer and moose, fished
2 nd millennium BCE- 1 st millennium CE	Sámi people were majority in Fennoscandia
8 th -12 th century CE	era of Viking Scandinavia – Sweden, Norway, and Denmark
860s-880s	Swedish Vikings (called Rus) established states in Novgorod and on the Dnieper River around Kiev
912-1054	Kievan Rus (contemporary Ukraine) – Swedish Viking elite, mostly Slav population
12 th -17 th centuries	era of the German Hansa – trade monopoly – 200 cities in the Baltic region plus <i>kantors</i> in Bergen, Novgorod, London, and Bruges
13 th century	Hansa and Catholic Church established new towns for trade – Riga (1201), Dorpat (1224), Reval (1230), and Stockholm (1252)
mid-13 th -mid-17 th centuries	Hansa merchants monopolized the principal trade route in the North and Baltic Seas – from London to Novgorod via Lübeck
1300-1923	Ottoman Empire in Anatolia, Balkans, Middle East, North Africa

- 1397-1523 Union of Three Crowns – Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – Denmark dominant
- 1523 Sweden became independent – King Gustav Vasa took Sweden out of the Union of Three Crowns
- 1522 Protestant Reformation began in northern Germany – led to instability in Hansa towns – friction with Catholic trading partners
- 1595 Peace of Teusina – Sweden gained control of Estonia from Russia
- c. 1600 Sweden’s population was about 1.5 million – 95 percent peasant farmers – 25,000 in Stockholm, only sizeable town
- 1611-1632 Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden – charismatic leader – spoke 9 languages – military genius – initiated Swedish Empire
- 1612-1654 Axel Oxenstierna – Lord High Chancellor – Regent (1632-1644) – right-hand man to King Gustavus Adolphus (1612-1632)
- 1613-1918 Romanov tsars ruled Russia – first Romanov was Michael (ruled 1613-1645)
- 1613 Sweden made peace with Denmark – agreed to pay a large indemnity to the Danes in return for Swedish use of Oresund Sound
- 1617 Treaty of Stolbova – Russia ceded Ingria to Sweden – cut off Russian access to the Baltic Sea

- 1632 Battle of Lutzen – death of Gustavus Adolphus
- 1632-1654 Queen Christina ruled Sweden – Axel Oxenstierna, Regent (1632-1644) – continued Sweden’s expansionism
- 1638-1655 New Sweden Colony – Delaware and New Jersey, North America – Fort Christina on Delaware River – lost to Netherlands, 1655
- 1648 Treaty of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War – Sweden became leading power in the Baltic region – ran Hansa trading network
- 1648 Treaty of Westphalia – Sweden gained Western Pomerania (Stettin), Mecklenburg (Wismar, Warnemunde), Bremen, Verden
- 1658 Treaty of Roskilde – Sweden gained Skane, Blekinge, and Halland from Denmark – Sweden gained Bohuslen from Norway
- 1660-1697 King Charles XI ruled Sweden – weak regency government led by nobles (1660-1672) – absolute monarchy – mercantilism
- 1660 pinnacle of Sweden’s Baltic Empire – controlled all of the northern and eastern Baltic and key ports in the southern Baltic
- 1669 *Hansetag* (assembly of the Hanseatic League) – met for final time, disbanded

- 1689-1725 Tsar Peter the Great ruled Russia – built new capital at St. Petersburg, reorganized army and navy, encouraged industrialization
- 1697-1618 King Charles XII ruled Sweden – brilliant, military strategist – subdued Denmark, crushed Poland, allowed Russia to recover
- 1700-1721 Great Northern War – Russia, Prussia, Denmark, Hanover, and Poland defeated the Swedish Empire
- 1709 Battle of Poltova – Russia (led by Peter the Great) severely defeated Sweden (led by Charles XII) – Charles XII fled to Istanbul
- 1709-1713 Charles XII lived in exile in Istanbul, under the protection of the Ottoman Empire
- 1710-1711 Ottoman Empire defeated Russia – Russia failed to gain access to the Black Sea
- 1711 Battle of Pruth – Ottoman Empire routed Russia – nearly captured Peter the Great
- 1713 Charles XII made a remarkable return – rode 1,400 miles in 13 days from Turkey to Mecklenburg – then returned to Sweden
- 1718 Battle of Fredrikshald, Norway – Charles XII was killed – his body was taken to Sweden
- 1721 Treaty of Nystad – Sweden ceded Livonia, Estonia, Ingria, Karelia to Russia, Bremen, Verden to Hanover, Pomerania to Prussia

- 1721 Treaty of Nystad – Sweden was allowed to keep most of Finland, Skane, Blekinge, Halland, and Bohuslen – King George I of England intervened to limit Russia's gains
- 2020 Sweden ranked 7th of 189 countries in the UNDP's Human Development Index (including income, health, education)

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Sites Visited in Sweden and the Baltic

A Cruise to the Hanseatic Cities of the Baltic Sea

Clipper Cruise Line

June 15-July 5, 2000

Ship-based, Aboard the *Clipper Adventurer*

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Sandra and I had not visited Amsterdam since 1963, the summer after we concluded our Peace Corps assignments in Nigeria. The city has changed greatly in the interim, mostly for the better. During the one and one-half days that we had for sightseeing, we took the obligatory boat trip around Amsterdam's canals, walked around the city for miles, worked our way carefully through the museum on the city's history, and spent a half-day sampling the marvelous exhibition on art in Amsterdam's Golden Age (the 17th century, when Amsterdam was the leading entrepot in the world). The special exhibit had assembled 200 major works of art, so many that Rembrandts became almost commonplace after a few hours.

Lübeck, Germany

The theme of the excursion was a visit to the major cities of the German Hanseatic League, an organization of merchant associations and towns that governed or influenced international trading relationships in northern Europe for nearly four centuries – from the late 12th century through the 16th century. Our first port of call was Lübeck, Germany. Lübeck was founded in 1159 and soon became the head of the Hanseatic League. The League was an unusual organization. It was a group of mostly German towns, run by merchants' associations, that organized and regulated international trade in northern Europe. The Hansa, in effect, substituted for the absence of strong national governments. For nearly three centuries, the Hanseatic League promoted trade, advanced

the establishments of German cities in the Baltic region, and allowed the Hansa merchants to earn excess profits in their highly lucrative trade. The main trade route for the League stretched from Novgorod (now in Russia) to Tallinn (Estonia) to Lübeck (Germany) to Hamburg (Germany) to Bruges (Belgium) and, finally, to London (England). The League declined in the 16th century and died out in the 17th century when strong kingdoms began to exert their power in the Baltic.

Copenhagen, Denmark

Our second stop was Copenhagen, Denmark, which was not a Hanseatic port. Throughout most of the Hanseatic period, Denmark was the League's principal rival. Copenhagen was founded just after Lübeck, and it soon became Denmark's major port, city, and, eventually, administrative center. Sandra and I greatly enjoyed our time in Copenhagen and Denmark (we visited all cities on the itinerary twice, once on the cruise from west to east and once on the return trip). We spent time in the national museum, tracing Danish history and marveling at the collection of Viking relics, notably the hoards of Viking silver that have been dug up by archeologists. We also took a scenic tour of the Danish countryside, visiting the famous castles at Elsinore ("Hamlet's castle") and at Fredericksborg.

Gdansk, Poland

Gdansk, Poland was the third stop on our first cruise. Gdansk, the former German city of Danzig, has been impressively restored by its current Polish residents following the destruction of the city by Russian troops at the end of World War II. Danzig in the 16th century was a leading Hanseatic port city, exporting grain, timber, and beer. Gdansk is also well known as the site of Lech Walesa's Solidarity Party and the beginning of the downfall of Communism in Poland. Sandra and I enjoyed the carefully restored Hansa sites, and she spent our second visit to Gdansk shopping extensively for amber jewelry.

Visby, Sweden

Our fourth stop was Visby, Sweden, located in the middle of the Baltic Sea on the island of Gotland. Visby was by far the oldest place that we visited. It was a prospering port well before the Viking era, perhaps as early as the 6th century. The Vikings then took over Visby and Gotland, and the town was the most important Viking trading center in the Baltic region. About three-fourths of all Viking silver hoards found in the world have been from the island of Gotland. Visby continued to be a key trading city during the early part of the Hanseatic period. The forerunner to the Hanseatic League was known as the Gotland Community because the German merchants centered their activity on Visby. Following the formation of the Hanseatic League in the mid-14th century, Visby began a long and gradual decline. Today, it is a beautiful tourist center of 24,000 residents, and there are only 59,000 permanent residents on Gotland. Visby features the best preserved Medieval city wall (2 miles long with 36 towers) in northern Europe and the most pleasant climate in Sweden.

Stockholm, Sweden

Sweden ruled much of the Baltic region during the 17th century. Sweden benefited from having three extraordinary kings during that century – Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XI, and Charles XII. The first was a genius at both military strategy and public administration, the second reformed the Swedish economy, and the third was a brilliant, if eccentric, soldier whose stubbornness caused the demise of the Swedish empire in the Baltic region. Stockholm was a wonderful experience for Sandra and me. We had last visited Sweden's capital during the summer of 1963, and we had forgotten how strikingly beautiful the city is. In addition to participating in two well-conceived tours, we spent hours walking around the city's many parks, soaking in its 750-year history, and probing its excellent museums. Stockholm is booming, beautiful, and bustling, and there is no end of things to do there.

Tallinn, Estonia

From Stockholm, we sailed eastward across the Baltic Sea to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Tallinn (Reval to the Germans and Swedes in earlier times) was our most pleasant surprise. We had anticipated seeing marvelous Hanseatic architecture (Gothic cathedrals and gabled merchant houses/storehouses) from the times when Reval was a key Hanseatic trading port on the major Baltic trading route connecting Novgorod to London. The old part of Tallinn has been preserved remarkably well and nicely features its Hanseatic influences. But we had also expected to observe a dreary city struggling to overcome 50 years of wasteful and exploitative Soviet domination. Estonia and Tallinn (like Poland and Gdansk) are poor – their income levels are only about one-fifth those in the United States. But the Estonian spirit is strong and optimistic, and the country, like Poland, is on the fast track to join the European Union in 2003. The Estonian language and culture are closely linked with those of Finland, and Estonia is receiving much Finnish support and investment.

Helsinki, Finland

We then crossed the Gulf of Finland to visit Helsinki, Finland. Helsinki was not a Hanseatic port. It was created in the mid-18th century when Finland was part of Sweden to counter the rising power of the Russian navy in the eastern Baltic Sea. Subsequently, Helsinki became the capital of Finland when that country finally became independent after World War I. Helsinki and the Finnish people are amazing. Since the end of World War II, Finland has rushed out from under the influence of the Russian bear to become one of Europe's richest and most entrepreneurial countries. Finland leads the world in ship-building technology (and thus builds many of the new large cruise ships and icebreakers) and is at the forefront of communications technology and development (featuring Nokia cellular phones). Although Helsinki was

not one of the more beautiful Baltic cities that we visited, it certainly was the most bustling and booming.

St. Petersburg, Russia

The final stop on our first cruise (and the first one on our second cruise) was St. Petersburg, Russia (formerly Leningrad, USSR). We had spent four days in St. Petersburg on another trip three years ago and had enjoyed the city very much. This time, we had only one day there, since the ship was turning around to begin a new trip. Visiting St. Petersburg was a poignant experience. The city was once one of the most magnificent places in the world, but now it suffers from the downturn of the Russian economy and the continuing preponderance of Moscow. The Hermitage is still one of the half dozen best art museums in the world, and we were fortunate to be able to join our passengers on a guided tour there. We also had time in the afternoon to visit a beautiful Orthodox church and to see some of the city. Fortunately, we had been able to visit the numerous points of historical interest during our prior visit. The city had been built by Tsar Peter the Great during the early 18th century and reached its peak under Empress Catherine the Great in the latter half of that century.

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