

I kungens frånvaro

Formeringen av en isländsk aristokrati 1271–1387

With an English summary

Fil. mag. Sigríður Beck
Institutionen för historiska studier



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i historia vid Göteborgs universitet som med tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetsnämnden kommer att offentligens försvaras fredagen den 13 maj 2011, kl. 10.00 i Lilla hörsalen, Humanisten, Renströmsgatan 6, Göteborg

Abstract

Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2011

TITLE I kungens frånvaro. Formeringen av en isländsk aristokrati 1271–1387

ENGLISH TITLE In royal absence. The making of an Icelandic aristocracy, 1271–1387

AUTHOR Sigríður Beck

LANGUAGE Swedish, with an English summary

DEPARTMENT Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 200,
SE-405 30 Göteborg

ISBN 978-91-88614-74-2

Icelandic society was transformed during the 13th century. There was no kingdom in Iceland until 1262/1264, when the Norwegian kingship annexed the country. Along with the kingship a new political system, with new rules and ways to acquire power, emerged. The purpose of this dissertation is to study how an Icelandic aristocracy developed in 1271–1387. This process is examined through four empirically generated themes: the new administration; the social structure of the aristocracy; the political culture; and the economic base. Mainly, the source material consists of Icelandic annals, diplomas and the Sagas of bishops: *Árna saga Þorlákssonar* and *Lárentíus saga*.

The Icelandic elite achieved a new power structure that derived from the kingship. The forming and consolidation of an aristocracy took place during the 14th century. Three phases have been identified. The first was a contingency phase, when the old elite adapted to the new system while new men were starting to enter. The second phase was a forming phase. This lasted the entire century. The closure of the Icelandic aristocracy became more evident during the last decades of the 14th century. This closure was similar to what happened in the rest of Europe, where the aristocracy also was a mixture of an old elite and newcomers. Thus, the third phase was a stabilizing phase.

With a new way of legitimizing power society became more differentiated and hierarchical. With *staðamál* the aristocracys traditional incomes ended since control over the local church institutions was partially lost to the diocese. Acquiring wealth through property and/or fishing replaced earlier systems. During the 13th century the tenant system (*leiglingssystem*) developed and fish became increasingly important as a product for export. Even though the sources are scarce, it is obvious that the aristocracy acquired more properties. The consequence was a larger differentiation in society, where wealth accumulated in the hands of a few.

KEYWORDS Aristocracy, Iceland, Middle Ages, friendship, political culture, elite, aristocratic identity, state formation, kingship