

Crown's Intervention in the Self-Government of a Small Town. Choosing Burgomasters and Councillors in Sortavala in the Swedish Borderlands in the Late 17th and Early 18th Century

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Abstract: This chapter examines the selection of burgomasters and councillors in the small town of Sortavala. The purpose of investigating these processes is to use the typology in this volume to find out who had decisive control over the town.

Sortavala had been donated in the 1650s to Count Gustaf Adam Banér, who also appointed the town's burgomasters. Count Banér never visited the town, but his affairs and manor were managed by a bailiff. Although not nominated as the burgomaster, these duties were carried out by the bailiff of the Count's estate in the 1670s. There is no record of how the councillors were elected during that period. However, almost all of the councillors were local eastern Finns or of Karelian peasant origin. In this era, Sortavala can be characterised as having resembled, at least in part, the category of a noble town.

The largest fiefdoms were reduced in 1680. Between 1681 and 1685, the Sortavala burghers paid their taxes to the Crown. During this period, they were actively involved in the selection of councillors. Johan Mether, who had managed the manor and estate, first for the Count and then for the Crown, and from 1685 as a tax-farmer, held the position of burgomaster. In the early 1690s, when Mether's son-in-law, Carl Ottoson, was appointed vice burgomaster, the Mether family ruled the town so that it assumed the features of a privatised monopoly town. The influence of the manor increased even further when Salomon Enberg, who was also appointed burgomaster by the governor general, became the new tax-farmer of the manor.

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Under Enberg, the role of the town's burghers in the election of the burgomaster and the councillors seems to have completely vanished.

After Enberg, the governor general appointed Benjamin Krook as burgomaster. There is no information on how new councillors were selected during his time. However, the names and backgrounds of the new councillors suggest that education or social status was now an important selection criterion. Under Benjamin Krook, the link between the manor and the burgomaster's post seems to have been broken, so that in the last decade before being destroyed in the war in 1710, Sortavala ranks quite clearly in the state-led town category in urban typology.

Keywords: Swedish realm, 17th century, urban history, history of administration, Sortavala

A state-ruled town or self-government?

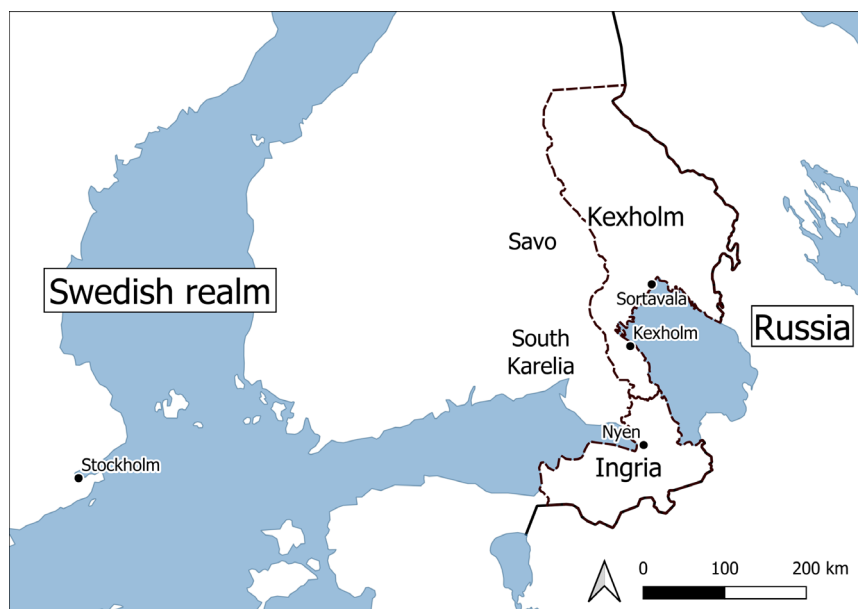
In April 1691, a letter from the governor general was read out in a meeting of the town council of Sortavala, a small town in the eastern borderlands of the Swedish realm. The burgomaster of the town, Johan Mether, had been nominated for the post of border inspector on the border with Russia. Because of these new duties, it was necessary to take a vice burgomaster to chair the meetings of the town council. To this post, the governor had nominated Notary Carl Ottoson, a son-in-law of Burgomaster Mether. During the spring of 1691, Ottoson had already participated in the council meetings and had even chaired some sessions himself. In this way, Ottoson had proved his skills for the vice burgomaster's post, and Burgomaster Mether justified the governor general's decision to the councillors and burghers. Although it is not openly mentioned in the council's protocol, it is evident that Mether himself was behind the reorganisation of the town council's work. After reading the instrument of appointment of Ottoson to the post of vice burgomaster, Mether urged the councillors and burghers to be humble and obedient to him. Ottoson gave the oath and, according to the protocol, 'the burghers accepted and welcomed him with good will'.¹

However, the following questions arise: what if the burghers or the councillors had not 'accepted and welcomed' the new vice burgomaster with good will? Would the governor general have changed his mind if

¹ NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 8 April 1691.

the townsmen had protested? One doubts that. What was the role of burghers in this process anyway? Did they have any other option than to accept the governor general's decision, which was practically dictated by Burgomaster Methers? Why weren't any of the local burghers selected for the post of vice burgomaster? Is the autonomy of early modern towns, often repeated in historical writings, just an empty cliché?

The main aim of this study is to describe the patterns of choosing burgomasters and councillors at the end of the 17th century. The burgomaster and some of the civil servants and councillors comprised the narrow elite of small towns. This 'triangular drama' is examined using the following questions: Did the burghers or councillors have any say in the nomination processes of the burgomasters or councillors, or was this just the business of the Crown? On what grounds were the burgomasters and councillors chosen for their posts? Following the breakdown of the



Sortavala is located in a traffic-advantaged site on the northern shore of Lake Ladoga. From there you could sail along River Neva to Nyen, located on the site of the present-day city of St Petersburg, and then along the Baltic Sea to Stockholm, which was an important trading post for Sortavala burghers. However, the administrative town of Kexholm province was a somewhat larger Kexholm, which housed the castle, the residence of the Governor and the garrison.

Illustration: Antti Härkönen.

introduction to this work, one wonders whether Sortavala was a state-ruled town guided by the governor general, a privatised monopoly town led by the Burgomaster Mether and his family, or an autonomous network town ruled jointly by the wealthy burgher families. Although the case examined in this study is Sortavala, a small town located near the 17th century Swedish–Russian border, the results can be generalised to some degree when describing the relations inside the elites of the small towns in the early modern North.

Sortavala – a borderland town in the east

In the Treaty of 1617 between Sweden and Russia, the provinces of Ingria and Kexholm were annexed to the Swedish Realm. During the first half of the 17th century, new towns – among them Sortavala in 1643 – were founded in the new eastern provinces to promote trade. The town of Sortavala is situated on the northern shore of Lake Ladoga. Although this location by the biggest lake in Europe was favourable for shipping and commercial activities, the town never grew to become a significant trading centre. However, it had local importance in the trade in products made by the peasants, which were shipped via Lake Ladoga to the town of Nyen, on the easternmost shore of the Gulf of Finland on the Baltic Sea.² Nyen and Stockholm were the most important trading towns for the burghers of Sortavala. The most common export ware from Sortavala was tar, bought from the peasants in the surrounding parishes.

In the 17th century, the town occupied a rather small area: the area enclosed within the town's customs fence was 280 metres long by 300 metres wide, covering an area of about 5–6 hectares.³ The number of inhabitants is usually estimated to have been about 600 in the latter half

2 The town of Nyen was founded in 1642 on the delta of the River Neva. The town and its citadel were destroyed in the War of 1700–1721, and St. Petersburg was founded on the same site in 1703.

3 Meurman 1972, p. 64, and Jaatinen 1995, p. 55, both estimate that the area of the town was about 11 hectares. Even a short visit to the town makes it clear that this must be a mistake. Antti Härkönen has estimated the town's width, length and size of the town area from the 17th century and from present cartographic material.

of the 17th century. This estimation is based on the number of plots (102) within the town fences and on the estimation that the average number of people living in each house (plot) was about six. The tax roll of Sortavala from 1685 lists 103 burghers, as well as 17 landless inhabitants (*bobuler*) living in the town, who earned their living through different kinds of work. The gentry, i.e., the civil servants, school masters and the clergy, are missing from the tax rolls. The list of plot owners (*Notorium explicatio*⁴) in the town plan of Sortavala drawn by Erik Beling in 1697 names nine members of the gentry. In addition to these, the town council protocols mention several artisans and their families, who lived with the burghers in their houses but are not accounted for in the cameral sources or listed as plot owners. With this additional information in mind, it can be assumed that the number of households in the town of Sortavala was at least about 140. Using the same size of household, it can be estimated that the number of inhabitants in the town was about 840 at the end of the 17th century. Regardless, one can quite safely say that the number of inhabitants in the town was more than 600 and less than 1,000.

Sven Lilja has classified early modern Swedish towns in six categories according to their population. According to his classification, Sortavala falls into the category of 'small towns' (500–1,000 inhabitants), in-between the categories of 'micro towns' (less than 500 inhabitants) and 'small medium towns' (1,000–2,000 inhabitants). According to Lilja, the 'micro towns' were the most common in number in Sweden throughout the entire 17th century. Almost all towns in this period fell into these three previously-mentioned categories, and only eleven out of the total number of 101 towns had more than 2,000 inhabitants.⁵ Therefore, one can say that although Sortavala was a tiny town on the periphery, it was a typical early modern town in the 17th century Swedish realm.

In 1706, Sortavala was badly burned and pillaged in the Great Northern War (1700–1721), and practically destroyed in 1710. The Treaty of 1721

4 See Kostet 1995, p. 145.

5 Lilja 1995, p. 54.

between Russia and Sweden left the town on the eastern side of the new border. The town shrunk to become a small village-like merchant centre in the Russian western borderlands until it gained town privileges again in 1783. Sortavala became a Finnish town when Finland was annexed to the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy in 1809, and the territories annexed to Russia in the Treaties of 1721 and 1743 were united with the Grand Duchy of Finland. However, as a result of the Second World War, Sortavala was annexed with the Karelian territories to the Soviet Union in 1944. Today, it is a small border town with less than 20,000 inhabitants in the western borderlands of Russia.

Tracing the burgomasters and councillors from the sources

The main primary source for this study is the collection of town council (*stadsråd, rådstugurätt*) protocols of Sortavala. These protocols have survived as almost a continuous series from 1673–1706 (the missing years are 1677, 1698, 1699, 1701 and 1705). The approach to this primary source is micro-historical; the method can be described, according to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, as ‘thick description’.⁶ All available data is collected, read carefully, described, and interpretations attempt to identify the stable and the changing patterns of ideas and the world view behind the described acts.

The information about the burgomasters (*borgmästare*) and councillors (*rådmän*) is contextualised with literature on the administration of early modern Swedish towns, especially concerning the town of Sortavala. The history of the town of Sortavala in the 17th century has not been given much attention. There are descriptions of the outline of its development and some very detailed information on the topic of this study in two relatively dated town histories published in 1932 and 1970.⁷

6 Geertz 1973, pp. 3–30; Geertz 1983, p. 5.

7 Karttunen 1932; Kuujo et al. 1970.

In the 17th century, towns were led by the town council, which acted as both town court and administrative council at the same time. These two tasks were not separated from each other with the town court handling crimes and disputes and the magistrate handling administrative civil cases. Therefore, this study prefers to refer to this organ as a town council rather than as a town court. The council was led by the burgomaster and the councillors, usually between four and six in number. Up until the 17th century, burgomasters were often selected from the wealthiest burghers, but during the 17th century, increasingly more burgomasters were selected from outside the local community,⁸ while councillors were chosen from among the inhabitants of the town.

The grounds for electing councillors can be surmised by tracing their social background, prospective education and wealth, which all affected their social status in the local community. Comparing the wealth of councillors with all other burghers is possible by examining lists showing the amount of contribution tax paid annually by the burghers. These lists of taxes paid in Sortavala have survived in the Crown's provincial account records for 1681, 1682, 1683 and 1685, although the entire volume of accounts for 1684 is missing. After 1685, the lists of the taxes paid by the burghers are not included in the Crown's provincial accounts, although we know from the protocols of the town council that the tax was still collected by the possessor of the manor.

The minority elite – referred to as 'gentry' in this study – are not mentioned in the tax lists. The contribution tax that the burghers paid was based on income from trading. The burgomaster, civil servants, school masters and clergy did not pay this tax. For example, Councillor Martinus Canuti, an old school master and civil official, is always mentioned in the tax lists by name but without any tax rate assigned to him. In 1681, he is mentioned under the comment 'does not trade' (*brukar ingen handell*).⁹ Although there is no information about the exact wealth of the 'gentry', one can refer to such qualifications as education, social background and

8 See Karonen 1995, pp. 40–53; Karonen 2001, pp. 122–123.

9 NA (Finland). Accounts of Kexholm Province, 1682, VA 9741, pp. 688–691.

profession when pondering the question of why someone in particular was chosen for the post of councillor.

Nominating the burgomasters of Sortavala

In 1651, the Sortavala parish and newly founded town were donated to Gustaf Adam Banér. A manor was built on the bank of the strait of Ladoga opposite to where the town lay. Count Banér never visited this remote property. A bailiff, often referred to as an inspector, took care of the manor and the fief. The Count nominated the burgomaster for the town. After the war that raged on the eastern border and severely damaged the town in the 1650s, the first known burgomaster of Sortavala was Hans Rijk. However, not much is known about him or his period as burgomaster because no council protocols or formal correspondence have survived. According to U. Karttunen's history of Sortavala (1932), Rijk held the post of burgomaster during the period 1656–1663, possibly longer.¹⁰

The earliest surviving protocol of the town council meeting is an interesting document. On 15 November 1673, the inspector of the Sortavala Fief, Johan Tistell, called all of the burghers and councillors to the manor's house in the town. The meetings of the council were held in the manor house, which functioned in practice as the town hall. The fief holder, Count Banér, had ordered the inspector to list the names of all the burghers of the town. The Burgomaster Johan Berends, whom the Count had nominated to the post of burgomaster, had not sent any information about the town, taxes or any protocols of the council meetings to the Count during his seven-year term of service. From this, one can calculate that the Count nominated Johan Berends for the post of burgomaster in 1665.¹¹

Two councillors, Pål Varonen and Ivan Puukello, were sent from the meeting to Burgomaster Berends to ask if he would hand over the

¹⁰ Karttunen 1932, p. 44.

¹¹ NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 15 November 1673. The protocols for several years are bound together in the same volume. Neither the volumes nor the protocols have continuous page numbering.

protocols, the lists of burghers and the town seal. Berends answered arrogantly that he would not give up any protocols, documents or seals. If someone wanted a list of burghers and to know what had happened during his period as burgomaster, he would have to walk up and down the streets, collect the names himself and ask the burghers how things had been settled. Only then would he take the protocols to the Court of Appeal in Turku and give all of the necessary documents to the Count.¹²

Perhaps this was to happen sooner than Burgomaster Berends intended; Count Banér summonsed him to appear before the Court of Appeal in Turku to give an account of how he had taken care of his duties as burgomaster. Major Didrich von Zimmerman was to represent the Count at the Court. According to the Count's orders, during the absence of the burgomaster, Councillor Jöran Pesu was to chair the council sessions in handling minor quarrels and debts. If there were serious criminal cases to be handled, the councillor was to write to the hired judge, Zachris Daalman, at the Sortavala Fief and ask him to chair the sessions.¹³ However, Inspector Tistell (later to bear the title of *hopman* or *hauptman*) continued to chair the council. During his travels, some people from the estate stood in for him as chair of the town council.

It seems that Berends did not have any written protocols of the court sessions to present at the Court of Appeal. A note made at the Court on the cover page of the earliest surviving volume verifies that protocols had been sent from Vyborg in January and had arrived and been inspected at the Court in March 1675.¹⁴ The authors of the local history of Sortavala town (Kuujo et al., 1970) write that Berends travelled with all his papers and documents to Stockholm, where he died in 1674.¹⁵ In May 1675, Berends is mentioned in a protocol as the 'late burgomaster of the town'.¹⁶

12 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 15 November 1673.

13 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 28 January 1674.

14 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council, years 1673, 1674, 1675 and partly 1694.

15 Kuujo et al. 1970, p. 53.

16 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 8 May 1675.



A map drawn up by land surveyor Erik Beling in 1697 shows the town plan (A), marketplace (B), church and bell tower (C), and Sortavala manor (D) across the strait. Sortavala, like early modern towns in general, was surrounded by fields. The largest owners of arable land were Staffan Klimpo (fields 1-5) and Tarasia Pukari (fields 10-17), representing the Karelian Orthodox minority. The widow of the late Vicar Mårthen Thoranius also had arable land (fields 6-9), of which number 6 was, however, the cemetery of the Orthodox church, “Calmo”.

Illustration: Lantmät. lev. 1892, nr. 14, bl. 2. Swedish National Archives. This illustration cannot be reused without permission.

After Berends’ death, the inspector of the fief, Johan Tistell, most often led the town council sessions. However, it seems that he did not serve as the nominated burgomaster, although he took care of many of the burgomaster’s responsibilities.¹⁷ Sortavala received a new burgomaster at the beginning of 1675. The new inspector of the Sortavala Fief, Johan Methers, is mentioned for the first time as burgomaster in a court case in April 1675.¹⁸

17 Kuujo et al. (1970, p. 53) state that Tistell was acting burgomaster, but he was never referred to as a burgomaster in the documents. His given title was always Inspector and *Hopman* (*Hauptman*) of the Manor.

18 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 24 April 1675.

In the protocols of the town council, there is no mention of his nomination for the post and it seems that he did not participate much in the work of the town council before the 1680s. Most often, Hauptman Tistell, now working under Inspector Mether, is mentioned as chairing the council sessions.

The largest fiefs in the Swedish realm were recaptured to the Crown by the decision of the Diet in 1680. This project is called in history books as the Great Reduction of 1680. For a short period, from 1680 to 1685, Sortavala Parish and Town were taxed by the Crown. However, in the Baltic provinces (*Östersjöprovinser*) the reduced fiefs were given for rent to the tax-farmers. This was done in the province of Kexholm as well. In 1685, Inspector of Sortavala Fief and Burgomaster Johan Mether rented the parish and the town as a tax-farmer.¹⁹

During the latter half of the 17th century, it became the custom that the post of burgomaster was no longer filled by burghers from the town. Some academic education, or at least experience in jurisprudence, was a required qualification for overseeing council sessions.²⁰ The bailiffs who had managed the larger fiefs often fulfilled this requirement. When the town had been a part of the fief, the fief-holder – in Sortavala, Count Banér – nominated the burgomaster. From the 1630s and 1640s, the Crown had brought so-called King's burgomasters to the towns. The aim was to intensify the Crown's control of the towns. The King's burgomasters received at least part of their salary from the Crown, and their task was to chair the town council meetings and to act as judges in court cases. Some training in jurisprudence was therefore required.²¹ The instrument of appointment to the post of burgomaster was received from the king, governor general or governor.

The first contract on tax-farming between Johan Mether and the Crown regarding the Sortavala Fief was made in 1685. Before that, acting as the Count's and the Crown's bailiff in the fief, it can be assumed that he was the first King's Burgomaster in Sortavala, although the instrument of appointment for the posting is not known to have survived. However, Mether was not very keen on his place in-between the burghers, the town

19 Kuujo et al. 1970, p. 53.

20 Karonen 1995, p. 59.

21 Halila 1942, pp. 92–97.

council and the Crown, and he applied for leave from the position of burgomaster already in 1686. His interests lay elsewhere: he had built his future in tax-farming and had rented several fiefs from the Crown from the province of Kexholm in 1685 and 1686.²²

However, Methers had to wait until 1687 to be relieved of his duties as burgomaster, when the governor general nominated Sven Hielmberg as Vice Burgomaster of Sortavala. Therefore, Methers had to retain the title of burgomaster and was not fully relieved of his obligations as burgomaster. At a council session, the instrument of appointment for Hielmberg was read out. Burgomaster Methers delivered a short speech and thanked the burghers and the council for the obedience they had shown him. Hielmberg gave his Vice Burgomaster Oath and, as the protocol states, the burghers accepted him as vice burgomaster of the town.²³

Hielmberg came from outside town society. He had not been chosen by the burghers but had received his post by order of the governor general. It is not even known if he had lived in Sortavala previously. Hielmberg's father was a vicar in Hjälmteryd in Småland, and he himself had graduated from the Royal Academy of Turku. Therefore, he had an education and background suitable for the post of vice burgomaster. In the 1680s, before his nomination to the post of vice burgomaster, Hielmberg is mentioned in several court cases in the provinces of Kexholm and Vyborg as an advocate or representative for some members of the gentry. So, one can assume that Sven Hielmberg had already lived in these eastern borderlands for a while. He was available for the post, but for some reason the governor general considered it necessary that Johan Methers should continue as burgomaster. Hielmberg died, however, in 1689 and Methers had to take over all of the burgomaster duties once again.²⁴

As described in the introductory chapter, it took two years until Burgomaster Methers found a new candidate for his replacement. In 1691, the governor general nominated Notary Carl Ottoson as vice burgomaster, and, finally, in 1693 as the fully fledged burgomaster of Sortavala.

22 See Katajala 1990, p. 91.

23 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 25 May 1687.

24 Kuujo et al. 1970, pp. 53–54; *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852* (2005): Sven Hielmberg. Web publication <<https://ylioppilasmatrikkeli.helsinki.fi/henkilö.php?id=2411>>. Retrieved 26 August 2020.

If the burghers and councillors accepted the new vice burgomaster 'with good will',²⁵ as described in chapter 1, nothing is said about their participation in the nomination process of Ottoson to burgomaster. Their part was simply to promise to honour and obey and be true to the new burgomaster.²⁶

Ottoson's background lay in the town of Vyborg by the Gulf of Finland, where his father worked as a customs officer. Carl Ottoson graduated from the Royal Academy of Turku in 1679,²⁷ and in the protocols of the town council he is called a 'notary.' His background and education made him a possible candidate for the post of burgomaster, but the pivotal factor was that he was a son-in-law of Johan Mether. As far as it is known, Hielsing had been a vice burgomaster without any connections to the manor or Mether's family, but Carl Ottoson's marriage to Sara Mether renewed this connection. Ottoson moved to the town and resided by the market square, near the house of his father-in-law that served at the same time as the town hall.²⁸

So, it would seem that when the burgomaster was elected by the owner of the fief in the 1670s, Sortavala was a town led by a nobleman. After the reduction of the fiefs in the 1680s and early 1690s, the Crown's hold on appointments of burgomasters was strong, and Sortavala could then be considered a state-ruled town. However, in the early 1690s, although the governor general appointed Carl Ottoson to the post of vice burgomaster, it was his close relationship with the family of Burgomaster Mether that was crucial. When members of the same family held both the burgomaster's and the vice burgomaster's office, the family's influence in the town must have been significant on a political level. However, Johan Mether and his family had no control over the business of Sortavala; instead, their finances depended on the manor, its crops and the rights it gave to taxes paid in the town and parish of Sortavala. Thus, although the role of the Mether family was very central to the town for a period of time,

25 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 8 April 1691.

26 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 15 July 1693.

27 *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852* (2005): Karl Fabricius. Web publication <<https://ylioppilasmatrikkeli.helsinki.fi/henkilo.php?id=2701>>. Retrieved 26 August 2020.

28 NA (Sweden). Beling 1697.

Sortavala was not a privatised monopoly town according to the classification presented in the introductory chapter to this book.

Johan Mether and Carl Ottoson both died during the Great Famine of 1697. Fatal contagious diseases followed the wandering beggars who had spread around the country. It is estimated that about one third of the population of Finland's territory died during 1696 and 1697. The Sortavala Fief, however, had changed its tax-farmer already in 1693. After Ottoson's death, the new tax-farmer of the manor, Salomon Enberg, acted in the position of burgomaster in town council meetings. Soon the governor gave him the instrument of appointment as burgomaster.²⁹ In this way, the connection between the manor and the post of burgomaster was continued. When the tax-farmer who controlled the estate with the most exclusive ownership was always appointed burgomaster of the town, albeit by a representative of the Crown, it is then quite close to belonging to the category of noble's town as described in the classification.

From 1685, Enberg rented Pielisjärvi, the large northernmost parish in the province of Kexholm, as a tax-farmer. Before his career as a tax-farmer, he had held the post of Crown Bailiff. As a tax-farmer, his officer rank was quartermaster and, later, captain of the infantry. It is not known whether Enberg had any academic education. However, his experience as a bailiff may have given the governor general the impression that he had the qualifications required for the post of burgomaster. Enberg appears to have lived in Sortavala Manor, outside the town limits.

Enberg's rental period as the tax-farmer of Sortavala Fief and Manor lasted until 1704.³⁰ However, in May 1700, Benjamin Krook was nominated by the governor general as Burgomaster of Sortavala Town. When the instrument of appointment was read out at the council session, the burghers and the councillors were given no more influence in the process

29 Carl Ottoson held his last town council meeting on 7 May 1697. In the council meeting of 12 July 1697, the instrument of appointment for the post of burgomaster for Salomon Enberg, signed by governor general on 18 June 1697, was read out. NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 7 May 1697 and 12 July 1697; see also Kuujo et al. 1970, p. 54.

30 For more information about Enberg, see Katajala 1990, p. 86.

other than being urged to accept the nomination.³¹ Krook's education and background is not known.³² In 1717, after Krook had left Sortavala because the raging war had destroyed the town, he was nominated as a district judge in the county of Northern Savonia.³³ Therefore, one may assume that he already had an education in jurisprudence when he lived in Sortavala, as the Crown burgomasters often had. Krook was the last Burgomaster of Sortavala before the town was destroyed in the war, first in 1706 and finally in 1710.

In conclusion, nominating the burgomaster of the town of Sortavala was primarily in the hands of the fief holder, Count Adam Banér. After the time of Burgomaster Johan Berends, the inspector of the fief acted in the place of burgomaster of the town. At the beginning of the 1680s, after the Great Reduction, the task of nominating a new burgomaster fell to the governor general. The noble's town was turned into a state-ruled town. The burghers and members of the town council were practically excluded from the nomination process. When nominating Sven Hielmberg and Carl Ottoson as vice burgomasters in 1687 and 1690, the council protocols state that the burghers and the councillors gave their acceptance, which gives the impression that they were in a position to influence the choice. During the period 1691–1697, the family of Johan Mether held both the burgomaster's and the vice burgomaster's posts, which made them very influential in the town. However, they did not rule the business but rather the politics in the town. In his instruments of appointment to the burgomaster posts in 1697 and 1700, the governor general simply ordered the burghers to show allegiance and obedience (*lydno och hörsamheet*) to the burgomaster. The burgomaster of the late 17th century small town was not a representative of the town's burghers but rather a tool of the Crown, used to rule and control the town.

31 For Krook's nomination as the Burgomaster of Sortavala, see NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 16 May 1700.

32 Burgomaster of Sortavala Benjamin Krook should not be confused with the quite well-known Vicar of Nyen, also named Benjamin Krook (d. 1675). As far as we know, these two individuals were not closely related. Paaskoski 1997, <<http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:sks-kbg-002389>>. Retrieved 26 August 2020.

33 Saloheimo 1990. p. 574.

A colourful representative of the 'gentry'

The membership of the council was a mark of respected status in the local town community. A small number of Sortavala Town's inhabitants can be labelled as belonging to the 'gentry'; i.e. people who had a special social status in the local community. They were not burghers but civil officials serving the Crown or the manor, school masters or members of families who otherwise held significant positions in the local community. In Sortavala, members of this group included the son of District Judge Carl Frese, District Clerk (*häradskrivare*) Lorentz Frese, Foremen (*amptman*) of the Manor Johan Isaksson Looman (or Loom, as he is called in the council's protocols³⁴) and Carl Affleck, and school masters Petter Pomelius and Martinus Canuti. The vicar and the chaplain lived outside the town limits. Martinus Canuti was the only one from this group who was elected to the town council.

In principle, the post of councillor was a life-long duty. Only rarely was a councillor relieved of his duties, but it did happen occasionally. In November 1674, Count Banér ordered wealthy Karelian burgher Jören Klimpo to be removed from the post of councillor for 'special reasons' (*serdeles orsaker*). The reasons for this are not explained further. Klimpo was replaced by the previously mentioned Martinus Canuti, 'who has for a while been teaching children in the town, is a skilled person and has a good testimony from the burghers,' as written in the protocol.³⁵ In 1675, Burgomaster Johan Methers and the other councillors expelled Ivan Puukello from membership of the town council. The exact reason for this is unclear, but it was connected in some way to quarrels between Puukello and Heinrich Blankenhagen, a trader from Nyen. At Burgomaster Methers's house, Blankenhagen had uttered to Puukello that such a traitor and a rogue should not sit on the council. Burgomaster Methers agreed with his opinion and thus Puukello was expelled from the post.³⁶ In this

34 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 7 April 1688. "*Sedan kom och H Methers Uthskickade Amptman Johan Isaksson Loom*"

35 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 2 November 1674. "...*hwilken sigh här i staden een rundh tijdh låtit för barna praceptor bruka efter han een skickeligh person ähr och aff Borgerskapet gådt låfordh hafwer ...*"

36 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 24 April 1675.

way, in two years, both councillors representing the minority of Karelian Orthodox traders in Sortavala were expelled from the council.

In fact, the 'skilled person' with a 'good testimony', Martinus Canuti, seems to have been quite a colourful person. At the beginning of the 1680s, he acted as the 'bridge bailiff', a civil official responsible for commanding the burghers and peasants to keep the bridges in good condition.³⁷ In May 1681, some peasants from the Sortavala Parish complained that Martinus Canuti had collected their payments but had not accounted for the sum correctly to the *hauptman* of the manor, Johan Tistell, and had kept some of the money for himself.³⁸ The case was not inquired into further at the town council, so Canuti was able to continue as councillor. However, in November 1681 he was again accused of theft, this time in the countryside in the nearby parish of Tohmajärvi. After this, Burgomaster Methers suspended Canuti from the post of councillor, but in April 1682, he was permitted to resume his post on the town council again, because accounts of the events surrounding this theft were contradictory and Canuti was found innocent.³⁹

In July 1682, Martinus Canuti was accused once more at the town council: this time for inflicting an axe wound to the face of Mats Natri. On this occasion, Natri had gone to Canuti's house with two friends to obtain some beer because Canuti owed them some money. There they found Canuti reading a book. However, because Canuti was very drunk and quarrelsome, Natri decided to withdraw quickly from the room, but at the door he appeared to collide with Canuti's grown-up daughter who was entering. The daughter fell and cried out in fright. Thinking her daughter was hurt, Canuti rushed out and took an axe. The blow split Natri's hat and nose, causing a deep wound. Canuti explained in court that he was so drunk that he could not remember what had happened. Subsequently, he was fined for the offence at the council meeting, though there was no discussion about whether he was still suitable to continue as councillor.⁴⁰

37 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 30. October 1680.

38 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 11 May 1681.

39 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 13 November 1681 and 10 April 1682.

40 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 3 July 1682.

In the town council meeting on 7 December 1687, Burgomaster Mether openly expressed his irritation over the fact that some councillors and burghers had sent a supplication to the Swedish Diet without his knowledge. Burgomaster Mether was keen to find out what this was about. Quite embarrassed, Councillors Martinus Canuti and Isak Makkonen explained that the inhabitants of the surrounding parish of Sortavala had sent a peasant, Erik Ijäs, with a complaint to Stockholm to the King and Diet. On his way to Stockholm, Ijäs stayed overnight in Makkonen's house in the town, where he had proposed that if the burghers had any complaints, he could take their supplication with him to the King in the same way. A year before, the burghers, the councillors and the burgomaster had sent a supplication to the governor general in Narva about trading in the countryside and the lack of compensation for their deeds as councillors. However, they had not received any decision or reply. Thus, it sounded like a good idea to send the same letter to the Diet and King with Ijäs. Canuti and Makkonen underlined that they had not added a word to the original supplication. If something had been added to the letter, Ijäs must have done it himself, without their permission.⁴¹

Johan Mether was not only the burgomaster of the town of Sortavala but was also, as previously mentioned, the tax-farmer of the entire Sortavala Fief. As a tax-farmer and possessor of the manor, it was he who the peasants of Sortavala Parish were complaining about to the King. Now the councillors seemed to be involved in the same plot against him as the peasants. Perhaps Mether was not completely wrong in his suspicions. The following April, Councillor Martinus Canuti quarrelled with Johan Mether about fishing waters and rights regarding the use of certain meadows. *Amptman* Johan Looman had witnessed at the council session that Canuti had berated Burgomaster Mether with improper words, saying that the burgomaster would bring the town to ruin.⁴² However, reading the protocols gives the impression that these conflicts did not affect work at the council in any way; the councillors and Burgomaster Mether continued working at the council sessions just as before.

41 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 7 December 1687.

42 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 7 April 1688.

Voting for the councillors

It seems that an individual's education played a part in being elected to the post of councillor. In Sortavala, some of the councillors had some degree of education. Councillor Martinus Canuti taught children before Peter Pomelius founded a school in the town at the beginning of the 1680s.⁴³ His Latinised name is referred to in academic studies, although we cannot find his name in the registers of the Royal Academy of Turku.⁴⁴ Martinus Canuti died in late 1692 or early 1693, and his seat on the council was filled by Burgher Brun Olofsson, a son of Bailiff Olof Brunsson. The protocol mentions that the burghers of the town who were gathered discussed and voted for a skilled person and chose Brun Olofsson for his irreproachable life and because he was a 'scholar' (*Literatus*).⁴⁵

Another councillor of the 1680s and 1690s who may have had some scholarly education is Jören Wallius. 'An honest son of the Vicar of Kitee Parish,' Jören Wallius, and Jacob Thomasson, 'an old and honest man who has lived a long time in this town,' were selected as councillors in 1680. Adding two more councillors to the town council was necessary because many councillors were often away travelling on business to other towns and were unable to participate in council sessions.⁴⁶ A good reputation, a long career and a stable position as a burgher are the most frequently mentioned qualifications for becoming a councillor.⁴⁷ In 1685, the burghers of Sortavala replaced the deceased Jacob Thomasson with two new members on the town council: 'respectable and steady old burghers Isak

43 Kuujo et al. 1970, p. 56.

44 Kuujo et al. (p. 56) mentions that Martinus Canuti was the son of a vicar in the parish of Kitee in the province of Kexholm. However, if Canuti (Latinised form of Knutsson) is a patronym, he cannot be a son of Jören Petri Wallenius (vicar in Kitee 1630–1669) or Michael Aeschellii Hyvetius (vicar 1669–1684). If Martinus Canuti used his last name as a family name, it is possible that he was a son of the vicar in the parish of Pälkjärvi, Matthias Canuti (vicar 1659–1674). Both parishes are situated near the town of Sortavala. Cf. Kauppinen 1994, pp. 184–185; Saloheimo 1976, pp. 261–263.

45 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 30 January 1693. "... *han icke allenast ett gott lofordh om sitt ehrbara lefwerne bäär, utan och Literatus ähr*". See also Halila 1942, p. 77; Ilmoniemi 1934, pp. 88–93.

46 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 27 March 1680.

47 Cf. Halila 1942, p. 75.

Makkonen and Anders Tuhkunen, who were stable and humble men.⁴⁸ Brun Olofsson, previously mentioned, had been a burgher in the town for only six years, but that was already a reference for the post.



The map shows the residential plots of Sortavala burgomasters and councillors for which this information is available. Both burgomasters, Johan Methier and Carl Ottoson, lived on the side of the marketplace. Most of the councillors, who were usually wealthy burghers, lived along or in the immediate vicinity of the main street.

Illustration: Antti Härkönen.

In August 1694, the election of two new councillors was once more on the agenda. Pål Waronen, who is mentioned as a councillor in the earliest surviving protocol of the town council from 1673, had become too old and weak to continue to sit on the council. Johan Mutka, a wealthy burgher mentioned as a councillor in 1675, was now found to be incompetent and unsuitable to continue in his post as well. Therefore, according to the protocol, the burghers were asked ‘according to the adopted manner’ who they would choose to replace these two old councillors. The

48 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 14 November 1685. “... Ehrliche och behålnne gamla Bårgaren, Isack Mackoin och Anders Tuhkoin till Rådmän, och efter de waker och beskedelige Män åhre...”

burghers announced that they considered Burghers Thomas Immonen and Thomas Hulkkonen as the most appropriate candidates because they were perceived as skilful men. The members of the council warmly supported this proposal. However, Hulkkonen had travelled to Stockholm to trade and therefore the election had to be deferred until the autumn.⁴⁹

In October 1694, Burgher Thomas Hulkkonen returned home from his journey to Stockholm and was asked if he would accept nomination for a seat on the town council. Hulkkonen thanked the council politely and was very pleased with the honour. Then he and Thomas Immonen were nominated to the post of councillor.⁵⁰ This is the last time an election of the members of Sortavala Town Council is described in the protocols and, at the same time, that burghers with family names common to the east of Finland are chosen as councillors in Sortavala. The burghers with Finnish names had peasant origins from the surrounding countryside or from the county of Savonia (Savo), west of the province of Kexholm. Later, all burghers selected for the council had Swedish or 'Swedified' family names. Only Petter Mutka, son of the expelled councillor Johan Mutka, was selected for the post of councillor in the late 1690s.

Changing their name to a Latinised form or adopting a Swedish family name was the custom for people who had undertaken academic studies, been selected for clerical posts in parishes or served as civil officials or as military officers. Often, the burghers of Sortavala who had Latinised or Swedish family names were the sons of vicars, officers or civil officials, laying claim to a higher social status than those burghers who had Finnish names.

Councillors were not chosen from among the wealthiest burghers, but they could often be described as belonging to the category 'well-to-do'. For example, in 1688, the council voted for Mårten Taskinen to replace the deceased Anders Tuhkunen.⁵¹ In 1685, Anders Tuhkunen was taxed 35 copper thalers and Mårten Taskinen 20 copper thalers when the average tax paid by the burghers of Sortavala was ten copper thalers. In 1681,

49 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 25 August 1694.

50 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 22 October 1694.

51 NA (Finland). Protocols of Sortavala Town Council 21 April 1688.

Jören Wallius paid a tax contribution of 30 copper thalers.⁵² The councillors whose wealth can be verified by data belonged to the wealthier half of the burghers in Sortavala (i.e., they paid a tax contribution of more than ten copper thalers). However, none of them belonged to the richest group of burghers. The richest burgher in the town, Anders Taskinen, who was taxed 120 copper thalers in 1681, was never elected to the town council.⁵³ According to Petri Karonen, the Crown favoured the practice of not electing the wealthiest traders to town councils. It was more profitable for them to concentrate on trading, rather than on solving petty theft and summary offences at the town court.⁵⁴

The principles for electing members of the town council seem to have changed at the end of the 1690s. During the terms served by Salomon Enberg and Benjamin Krook as burgomasters, new councillors were selected but no description of how they were elected was recorded in the protocols. In addition, Enberg was careless in regard to the other councillors. In the protocols from the 1670s, the burgomaster or whoever chaired the council meetings is not always mentioned, but the councillors are always carefully listed. In the 1690s, Burgomaster Salomon Enberg always mentioned himself but sometimes forgot to write down the names of the councillors who were present. The protocols of his final years as burgomaster, 1698 and 1699, are missing, and perhaps they were never even written.

The series of protocols of the council sessions during the period of Burgomaster Benjamin Krook are not complete either: the years 1701 and 1705 are missing, and new names appear in the lists of councillors following those years. Therefore, nothing is known about their election processes. Burgher Petter Polack was the son of an officer in the border guard in Salmi. We know that Councillor Daniel Kilckman was selected as a market inspector of Sortavala in 1697, and had ended up in disagreements regarding impounding the trading wares of the surrounding parish peasantry at the country fair. Although the peasants were able to prove that they had permission to sell wares from the governor general

52 NA (Finland). Accounts of Kexholm Province, 1681. VA 9739, pp. 470–471.

53 For list of councillors see Karttunen 1932, p. 44.

54 Karonen 1995, p. 39.

and Kilckman was fined for his deed,⁵⁵ this was not an obstacle to being selected for the post of councillor. There is no information available concerning Councillor Johan Wenander's background, but he was married to Councillor Brun Olofsson's daughter, Sidonia, in 1700.⁵⁶ Perhaps Wenander was able to climb to the elite of the Sortavala Town burghers that way.

Conclusions

In the typology adopted in this volume,⁵⁷ Sortavala falls in-between the 'noble's town' and 'state-ruled town.' First, during the period of 'feudal' rule under Count Banér, the burgomasters were nominated by the possessor of the fief. It seems that the burghers did not have any say in the nomination process. From the mid-1670s, the inspector of the fief was the acting burgomaster. However, electing councillors appears to have been in the hands of the local burghers. It seems that, to some degree, the councillors at least represented the main religious or ethnic groups in the town: two councillors representing the original inhabitants of the territory, the Orthodox Karelian people, clearly had a significant role in the town council in the early 1670s. However, in the mid-1670s, both Karelian councillors were expelled from the town council and replaced by Lutheran Finns. The expulsion of the first Orthodox councillor was carried out by the will of the fief holder Count Banér. Perhaps it is worthy of note that in the first protocol, the mention of the inspector as a burgomaster was connected to the other Orthodox councillor's expulsion from the post.

After the Great Reduction of 1680, the fief was ruled for five years by the Crown. The former inspector of the fief continued to manage the fief and acted as the burgomaster. However, during this period, the burghers and councillors seem to have had the most say in the nomination processes of vice burgomasters and in electing new councillors. When the

55 Katajala 1994. p. 273.

56 *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1640–1852* (2005). Petter Wenander. Web-publication. <<https://ylioppilasmatrikkeli.helsinki.fi/henkilo.php?id=6636>> Retrieved 15 October 2020.

57 State-ruled town, noble's town, privatised monopoly town, network town, and open competitive town. See Chapter 1.

governor general nominated new vice burgomasters in 1687 and 1691, the protocols state that the burghers and councillors 'accepted' and 'welcomed' the new burgomaster, as if there had been a tradition that they were responsible for selecting the burgomaster for the town. In practice, without any doubt, this 'power' was no longer real in the 1680s.

According to the protocols, after the fief and town of Sortavala were offered for rent to the tax-farmer Burgomaster Methers in 1685, and especially from the period of the new tax-farmer and Burgomaster Enberg onwards, the burghers and councillors had less influence in all elections. Perhaps the rising influence of the manor can also be seen as a reference to the return of noble's town features in Sortavala. On the other hand, the influence of Johan Methers's family in Sortavala was so strong for some years that it also displayed the features of a privatised monopoly town. It should be noted, however, that Burgomaster Methers and his family did not play a significant role in the town's trade; their wealth was based on cultivating the estate's land and tax-farming. Their power was political, not commercial in its nature.

The protocols of the 1680s describe how the councillors discussed nominations and how the burghers voted when electing new councillors. These descriptions are absent from the protocols of the mid-1690s. When the governor general appointed the tax-farmer Salomon Enberg and Benjamin Krook to the post of burgomaster in Sortavala, the burghers and councillors were simply advised to be humble and obedient to their new leaders on the town council.

The absence of protocols for several years at the turn of the century makes this reasoning difficult and uncertain, but it seems that the free election of councillors was also limited to some degree at the end of the 1690s and the beginning of the 1700s. New councillors' names appear in the protocols but there are no indications as to how these new men came to be elected to their posts. However, another 'intervention' seems to have taken place in the composition of the councillors. The names of new councillors at the beginning of the 1700s are no longer Finnish, like 'Hulkkonen' or 'Makkonen' in the 1670s and 1680s. These men had their background in the local peasantry and, at least some of them, were clearly illiterate. The argument for choosing

these burghers with local backgrounds for the council was that they were 'skilful' and 'stable' and were known to be reliable burghers in the town over a number of years.

Choosing Martinus Canuti as a councillor was a first sign of change. He had some form of education: he was literate, read books and had taught children. When Brun Olofsson was selected as a councillor, the burghers openly expressed one argument in his favour – that he was 'literated.' Names like 'Polack,' 'Kilckman' and 'Wenander' are typical in the Swedish-speaking regions in the south and west of Finland, but not in the east. Often, such names were used by families who had climbed at least some steps up the social ladder, having served as military officers or civil officials, with some education or the acquisition of wealth through trade. Perhaps those councillors with a higher social status and some formal education were, firstly, better qualified for the tasks of councillors, but also secondly, better integrated into the bureaucracy and goals of the Crown.

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