



PHOTO: BENGT OLOF OLSSON/SCANPIX

Ale's stones in Österlen on the southern coast of Sweden. The monument was most likely erected around 600 AD.

HISTORY OF SWEDEN:

WAR, PEACE AND PROGRESS

Fourteen thousand years ago, present-day Sweden was covered by a thick ice cap. As the ice retreated, humans came to Sweden. The first known dwelling place, found in southern Sweden, dates from around 12,000 BC.

From 8,000 BC to 6,000 BC, the country as a whole became populated by people who lived by hunting, gathering and fishing, and who used simple stone tools. Dwelling places and graves dating from the Stone Age, lasting until about 1,800 BC, are found today in increasing numbers. The Bronze Age was marked in the Nordic region – especially in Denmark but also in Sweden – by a high level of culture, shown by the artefacts found in graves. After 500 BC, such artefacts become increasingly rare as iron came into more general use. During the early Iron Age, the population of Sweden became settled, and agriculture came to form the basis of the economy and society.

Vikings and early Christians

The Viking Age (800–1050 AD) was characterized by a significant expansion of activity, in Sweden's case largely toward the east. Many Viking expeditions set off from Sweden to both plunder and trade along the Baltic coast and the

rivers that stretched deep into present-day Russia. The Vikings travelled as far as the Black and Caspian Seas, where they developed trading links with the Byzantine Empire and the Arab kingdoms. Christianity first reached Sweden with a mission led by Ansgar, who visited in the 9th century, but the country was not converted to Christianity until the 11th century.

Founding of the kingdom

The various provinces of Sweden were absorbed around 1000 into a single unit, but the crown began to gain significant influence only during the late 13th century. In 1280 King Magnus Ladulås (1275–90) issued a statute authorizing the establishment of a nobility and the organization of society on the feudal model.

The Hanseatic period

Trade grew during the 14th century, especially with the German towns grouped under the leadership of Lübeck. By the

mid-16th century, this group, known as the Hanseatic League, dominated Swedish trade, and many towns were founded as a result of lively commercial activity. However, the Black Death, which reached Sweden in 1350, led to a long period of economic and population decline.

The Kalmar Union

In 1389, the crowns of Denmark, Norway and Sweden were united under the rule of the Danish Queen Margareta. In 1397, the Kalmar Union was formed, with the three Scandinavian countries under a single monarch. However, the union (1397–1523) was scarred by internal conflicts that culminated in the 'Stockholm Bloodbath' in 1520, when 80 Swedish nobles were executed at the instigation of the Danish union king, Kristian II. The act provoked a rebellion, which in 1521 led to the deposition of Kristian II and the seizure of power by a Swedish nobleman, Gustav Vasa, who was elected king of Sweden in 1523. ►

FAMOUS SWEDISH MONARCHS

GUSTAV II ADOLF (1611–1632)

By intervening in the Thirty Years' War, Gustav II Adolf came to assume great political importance, and internationally is the best known of Sweden's kings. Under his rule, Sweden became a leading military power. Gustav II Adolf was killed in 1632 at the Battle of Lützen.



PHOTO: AKG-IMAGES/SCANPIX



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

On the church green in Mora in 1520, Gustav Vasa urged residents of the town to take up arms and help free Sweden from Danish occupation.

KRISTINA (1632–1654)

Excepting the short caretaker government of Queen Ulrika Eleonora 1719–20, Kristina is the only female monarch of the modern Swedish kingdom. She succeeded Gustav II Adolf in 1632, just before her sixth birthday, and ruled for 22 years. Kristina abdicated in 1654, converting to Catholicism and settling in Rome, and was succeeded by her cousin, Karl Gustav. When he died in 1660, she travelled to Sweden in the hope of reclaiming the throne. Her claim was rejected by parliament, however, and Kristina returned to Rome.



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

► The Vasa period

The foundations of the Swedish state were laid during the reign of Gustav Vasa (1523–60). The church was nationalized, its estates confiscated by the crown, and the Protestant Reformation was introduced. Power was concentrated in the hands of the king and hereditary monarchy came into force in 1544.

The Swedish empire

Since the dissolution of the Kalmar Union, Swedish foreign policy had been aimed at gaining dominion over the Baltic Sea, leading to repeated wars with Denmark from the 1560s onward. After Sweden intervened in 1630 with great success in the Thirty Years' War on the side of the German Protestants, and Gustav II Adolf became one of Europe's most powerful monarchs, Sweden defeated Denmark in the two wars of 1643–45 and 1657–58. Finland, provinces in northern Germany and the present-day Baltic republics also belonged to Sweden, and after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the Peace of Roskilde with Denmark in 1658, Sweden was a great power in northern Europe. The country even founded a short-lived colony in what is now Delaware in North America. However, Sweden had a largely agrarian economy and lacked the resources to maintain its position as a great power in the long run.

After its defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–21) against the combined forces of Denmark, Poland and Russia, Sweden lost most of its provinces on the other side of the Baltic Sea and was reduced essentially to the same frontiers

as present-day Sweden and Finland. During the Napoleonic Wars, Sweden surrendered Finland to Russia. As compensation, the French marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, who had been elected heir to the Swedish throne in 1810, succeeded in obtaining Norway, which was forced into a union with Sweden in 1814. This union was peacefully dissolved in 1905 after many internal disputes.

18th/19th century Sweden

After the death of the warrior king Karl XII in 1718 and Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War, the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) and council were strong enough to introduce a new constitution that abolished royal absolutism and put power in the hands of parliament.

Eighteenth-century Sweden was characterized by rapid cultural development, partly through close contact with France. Overseas trade was hard hit by the Napoleonic Wars, which led to general stagnation and economic crisis in Sweden during the early 19th century. In the late 19th century, 90 per cent of the people still earned their livelihoods from agriculture.

One consequence was emigration, mainly to North America. From the mid-19th century to 1930, about 1.5 million Swedes emigrated, out of a population of 3.5 million in 1850 and slightly more than 6 million in 1930.

Industry did not begin to grow until the 1890s, although it then developed rapidly between 1900 and 1930 and transformed Sweden into one of Europe's leading industrial nations after World War II. ■

GUSTAV III (1771–1792)

Usually called the Theatre King, Gustav III was a keen patron of the arts, and founded the first opera in Stockholm in 1782, the Swedish Academy and the Royal Academy of Music. His reign was not popular with the high nobility, however, and opposition culminated in a conspiracy in 1792, when he was shot at a masked ball held at the opera. He died shortly after.



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

WELL-KNOWN FIGURES IN HISTORY

SAINT BRIDGET (1303–73)

After being widowed, Bridget (Birgitta in Swedish) made her way to Rome, where she was to live the rest of her life. She undertook several pilgrimages, including to Jerusalem. Bridget was known for her 'heavenly revelations', visions and prophetic messages, which she relayed to popes and princes. Bridget was canonized in 1491 and since 2000 has been considered one of Europe's patron saints.



PHOTO: HISTORISKA MUSEET

ALFRED NOBEL (1833–96)

The inventor, chemist and benefactor received his first patent in 1863 for a method for handling nitro-glycerine by mixing it with black powder and lighting the mixture with a fuse. Nobel went on to produce dynamite and other explosives. The Nobel Prizes were a bequest from Nobel for achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace.



PHOTO: NOBELMUSEET

DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD (1905–61)

An economist and government official, Hammarskjöld was appointed UN secretary-general in 1953. He quickly became associated with the strategy of 'quiet diplomacy', which in 1955 resulted in the release of American prisoners of war in China. En route to a meeting during the Congo crisis, Hammarskjöld died in a plane crash in northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The same year, he was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



PHOTO: UN



PHOTO: LEIF ENGBERG/SCANPIX

On September 3, 1967, Sweden switched from driving on the left-hand side of the road to the right. The result was chaos in the streets.

THE 20TH CENTURY – A CENTURY OF REFORMS

Late 19th-century Sweden was marked by the emergence of strong popular movements that included the free churches, the temperance and women's movements, and above all the labour movement.

The labour movement, whose growth kept pace with industrialization in the late 19th century, was reformist in outlook after the turn of the 20th century.

The first Social Democrats entered government in 1917. Universal suffrage was introduced for men in 1909 and for women in 1921. Plans for a welfare state were drawn up during the 1930s after the Social Democrats rose to power, and put into effect after World War II.

The post-war era

During World War II, a coalition of Sweden's four 'democratic' parties (excluding the Communists) formed the government. After the war ended, a purely Social Democratic government resumed office under Per Albin Hansson. Under Social Democratic leadership, but in close cooperation with the other democratic parties, a series of reforms were carried out in the 1940s and 1950s that together laid the foundations of the

Swedish welfare state. At the same time, there were calls for a modernization of the 1809 constitution. A new Instrument of Government was adopted in 1974, stating that all public power is derived from the people, who are to select the members of parliament in free elections. The monarch is still the head of state, but in name only. In 1979, an amendment to the order of succession gave male and female heirs an equal claim to the throne. Accordingly, Crown Princess Victoria is next in line to the throne, not her younger brother, Carl Philip.

Foreign policy

Since a short war against Norway in 1814 in conjunction with the creation of the union, Sweden has not been involved in any war. Since World War I, Sweden has pursued a policy of non-alignment in peacetime and neutrality in wartime, basing its security on a strong national defence. Nonetheless, Sweden

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THE SHIP THAT SURFACED AFTER 300 YEARS

The battleship *Vasa* was commissioned by King Gustav II Adolf in 1625. On August 10, 1628, the *Vasa* weighed anchor in Stockholm, but its maiden voyage ended in disaster. The *Vasa* sank after only 20 minutes. After a lengthy search, the ship was rediscovered in 1956 and salvaged in 1961. Today the *Vasa*, by far the best preserved example of ship construction and naval warfare of that era, can be seen at the *Vasa* Museum in Stockholm.

MENTOS IN STONE

There are more than 2,500 rune stones in Sweden, with messages dating from the 5th century to the mid-12th century, making them the oldest preserved Swedish documents. Relatives often had stones erected in memory of a dead family member, many of them alongside roads, bridges or meeting places where they could be seen and read by many.

THE SÁMI IN SWEDEN

The first document to mention the Sámi was written almost 2,000 years ago. Inland parts of upper Norrland are known to have been inhabited even longer, however – for close to 10,000 years. The Sámi have had to fight for their rights, and were recognized by the Riksdag as an indigenous people first in 1977. In 1993 the Sámi Parliament was established as both a democratically elected body and a national administrative authority. There are an estimated 20,000 Sámi in Sweden, about 2,500 of whom earn their living from reindeer husbandry.

► joined the League of Nations in 1920 and the United Nations in 1946. The first UN operation involving Swedish troops took place in Suez in 1956. Since 1994, Sweden has also cooperated with Nato under the Partnership for Peace. Through these organizations, Sweden has been involved in numerous international peacekeeping missions.

New governments

The economic crisis of the early 1970s broke the long hegemony of the Social Democrats. Since 1976, power has changed hands more often.

- **1976** Non-socialist coalition government under the leadership of Centre Party chairman Thorbjörn Fälldin.
- **1982** Social Democratic Party, with Olof Palme as prime minister.
The murder of Olof Palme on 28 February 1986, came as a shock to the Swedish people, who had been spared such political violence for almost 200 years. Palme's successor as prime minister was Ingvar Carlsson.
- **1991** Non-socialist coalition government, with Moderate Party leader Carl Bildt as prime minister.

- **1994** A minority government led by Social Democrat Ingvar Carlsson. In 1996, Carlsson stepped down and was replaced by his finance minister, Göran Persson, who remained prime minister for 10 years.
- **2006** The Moderate Party emerged as the main victor. Together with the Centre Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats, it formed a coalition government headed by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt.
- **2010** Although the Moderate Party achieved its best election result yet, Reinfeldt had to retain his coalition partners to stay in office. For the first time in history, there were eight parties in the Riksdag, including an extreme right-wing party for the first time.

Sweden and the EU presidency

Sweden joined the EU on 1 January 1995. In a national referendum in 2003, a majority of the country's voters voted not to join the euro.

The government sees Sweden's role in the EU as important for the country's future. Sweden has held the EU presidency twice: 1 January–30 June 2001, and 30 June–31 December 2009. ■

USEFUL LINKS

- www.center.kva.se Centre for History of Science
- www.ekohist.su.se Department of Economic History, Stockholm University
- www.hist.lu.se Department of History, Lund University
- www.historicalstatistics.org Portal for Historical Statistics
- www.historiska.se The National Historical Museum
- www.hist.uu.se Department of History, Uppsala University
- www.levandehistoria.se The Living History Forum
- www.raa.se The Swedish National Heritage Board
- www.riksbank.se Sweden's central bank
- www.royalcourt.se The Swedish Royal Court
- www.samer.se Sami information centre
- www.skansen.se Skansen open-air museum
- www.statsvet.su.se Department of Political Science, Stockholm University
- www.tacitus.nu Historical atlas

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