

H-Net Reviews

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Jesper Thomassen, ed. *Danmarks Adels Aarbog*. Odense: Odense University Press, 1997. 753 pp.

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The Danish Nobility's Yearbook has been issued since 1884, and –to the best of the reviewer's knowledge–was preceded, only, by the German *Gotha-kalender*. To the present day ninety-four volumes have been published and 735 noble pedigrees have been registered; some of them (Bille and Rosenkrans) have recently been re-issued in modernised shape and updated, particularly because medieval and early-modern evidence has turned up, but also because new interpretations have been much in need. The present volume deals with five families, two of which–Halvbjørn and Kotte–are of late medieval stock, while three–Castenschiold, Linde and Undall–belong to the eighteenth century. Only one–Castenschiold–has been treated in an earlier pedigree (1945), but curiously enough the early 1940s remain a lacuna.

The two pre-absolutist families both belong to the urban nobility, peculiar to Funen (here Odense and Børgense). Others (Akeleye and Marsvin) did escape the urban milieu before the reformation. The latter family even climbed up to the highest nobility and one member, Ellen Marsvin, became the mother-in-law and creditor of Christian IV. Still another family, the Mule lineage, attempt to flee Odense but do not succeed, even though one member–Hans Mule (d. 1602)–was able to buy an estate at Funen. His descendents had to content themselves with the status of merchants at Odense. After the reformation the nobility became an almost closed group, and excluded attempts at reaching a higher station.

The Kotte family remained in Odense, and became merchants–trading mainly in oxen until the late sixteenth century. One ancestor, Niels Kotte (d. 1518), moved from his estate to the city, where he served in the

court of the queen-widower, Christine. The widow of a later family member, Karen Kotte (d.ca. 1590) became ruined circa 1580, due to a slump in the exportation of oxen, that was caused by the Duke of Parma's offensive politics towards the northern Netherlands. Genealogically, the family became extinct in 1591, but her daughter, Mette Kotte (d. 1613) married no less than Hans Mule.

By contrast, social advancement became perfectly possible after absolutism in 1660, when all noble political privilege was abolished. Henceforth, non-nobles (and subsequently ennobled persons) were allowed to buy noble states and enjoy noble economic and social privilege. The Linde family, later de Linde, provides an example of this. Christen Christensen Linde, a merchant from Holstebro in Jutland (d. 1706), bought his patent in 1704, which made him the owner of eleven estates in western Jutland (including Volstrup to which he ascribed himself).

In all events, it became the hallmark of the new situation, that merchants, clergymen, bailiffs and occasionally even free peasants, became landowners in Jutland; while civil and military officials became prominent on Zealand (close to Copenhagen), and German nobles took over Lolland and part of Funen (though the old nobility maintained its positions as well). *Mutantur tempora, mutantur conditiones*, a history-writer once noted. In all circumstances the early members of the Linde-family as well as other *homines novi* deserve closer inspection.

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