

Kirsi Laine, *Maatalous, isojako ja talonpoikainen päätöksenteko Lounais-Suomessa 1750–1850 [Agriculture, enclosure and the decision making of peasants in South-West Finland 1750–1850]* (Loimaa: Suomen maatalousmuseo Sarka, 2020). 394 pp.

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The dissolution of open fields in Europe is one of the great themes of agrarian history. Historians are relatively unanimous when it comes to the reasons why early modern states decided to abandon open field agriculture. The ultimate objectives were to accelerate population growth and to make countries self-sufficient in terms of their food production. There are also several studies devoted to the legislation and to the implementation of land reforms in different localities. As regards to implications, the research situation is much more complex. There are very little studies available seeking to measure the impact of enclosure movement and the interpretations are far from unanimous. In that respect, Kirsi Laine's doctoral dissertation *Maatalous, isojako ja talonpoikainen päätöksenteko Lounais-Suomessa 1750–1850* (Agriculture, enclosure and the decision making of peasants in South-West Finland 1750–1850) is a welcome contribution. This is particularly so, because dissertations dealing with early modern agrarian history have been relatively rare in the Finnish historiography, although the situation has changed somewhat in that respect during the past ten years or so.

The main objective of the dissertation is to analyze the implications of enclosure (Sw. *storskifte*, Fi. *isojako*) in four parishes – Huittinen, Marttila, Loimaa and Pöytyä – located in the South Western part of Finland where climatic conditions

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favoured arable farming. The *storskifte*-reform had two goals: to privatize commons and to get rid of *tegskifte* and other forms of medieval land divisions making the land holding system highly fragmented. With the reform, the legislators wanted to facilitate the introduction of new farming methods and to increase productivity. Laine's investigation focuses on the second component of the reform, i.e. on the dissolution of open fields. The choice is understandable considering that arable farming was by far the main source of livelihood in the four parishes under scrutiny. Commons were relatively small compared to other parts of Finland, and the role of commercial forestry was insignificant.

Laine's dissertation has two parts. At the beginning of the book, she concentrates on the implementation of the *storskifte*-reform and especially on the reactions of the local peasant population. Her main conclusions are that peasants applied the reform quite actively and that it was very uncommon to find someone who actually resisted the process. The results are not surprising bearing in mind that Birgitta Olai and Kalle Bäck drew similar conclusions already during the 1980s with regard to the province of Östergötland.

The latter part of the book is devoted to the consequence of *storskifte* for the local agriculture. There are several ways to approach the question. Most of the studies on enclosure movement concentrates on the relationship between land reform and productivity. Results are contradictory, but it seems that at least in some regions in Europe the dissolution of open fields had a positive effect on productivity levels. That was the case for instance in Scania according to studies carried out by Mats Olsson and Patrick Svensson.

In her dissertation, Laine has decided to go deep into the question of the actual outcome of the land division. She asks how many plots of arable and meadowland the farmers had before and after the land survey. One of the main results is that *storskifte* had a remarkable impact on the existing land holding pattern in South-West Finland. Local farmers were much more willing to reduce the scattering than previously thought in Finnish historiography. Whether or not this change had any impact on productivity, is an open question. According to Laine, the new land division was implemented within the framework of the medieval fallow system (two-course rotation), and there are no signs of new farming methods being adopted after the reform. Moreover, most of the farmers wanted to continue the common of pasture in forests. The farmers' 'radicalism' clearly had its limits.

Although Laine does not tackle the question of productivity, she argues that the new land division made it easier for the farmers to clear new land. The evidence is fragmentary but it seems as if several farms in her study region began to increase their production immediately after the land reform. Laine points to the fact that

it was the crofters (*torppare*) and not the farmers themselves who did the hard job implying that the whole process was closely related to settlement expansion.

Overall, Laine's dissertation is a well-written, thorough and carefully structured piece of scholarly work. The biggest challenge of the dissertation is that it is highly empirical and source oriented. The study would definitely have benefited from a more theoretical and methodologically innovative approach enabling the author to bring fresh insights to the discussions. The author takes some preliminary steps in that direction by combining an eighteenth century *storskifte*-map to a modern soil map. This experiment includes only one village and the analysis is restricted to a few pages. This is an interesting method, however, and the researcher should have followed the path more systematically in her dissertation.