

## Introduction 1 : The Monarchy

*The magnificence and shimmer of the royal throne, which still dazzle the faithful people, originate from magic sources and have arisen from the religious rites and religious cults of wild racial groups. Monarchy was created from magic and superstition. According to our Swedish constitution, the Majesty of the King shall be held in sanctity and veneration; that chapter originated from the concept of the king as a holy, super-human being.*

*The monarchic constitution is thus an expression of an ancient superstition which is still kept alive with a few western peoples, including the Swedish people.*

Vilhelm Moberg (1955) Why I am a Republican<sup>1</sup>

### Origin

In his pamphlet “Why I am a Republican“, William Moberg derives the monarchy from a human need to subordinate himself (see above). However, it seems far more reasonable to assume that the monarchy was primarily the solution to an administrative problem - which is the modern functionalist interpretation of the monarchy's *raison d'être*. The monarchic system was a way to hold together a kingdom despite the poor communications and regional conflicts. When the kingdom grew, the monarch (=a recognized regent; The Supreme Official of the Realm) was the difference between order and anarchy:

“We argue that a monarchical system of rule is best equipped to solve this coordination dilemma in disconnected societies, where obstacles to coordination are greatest. This explains its appeal in the pre-modern world, where most citizens were illiterate, spoke a babble of tongues, rarely encountered those outside their locality, and consequently had little sense of belonging to a larger community (Crone 1989).

...

To recapitulate, monarchy offers an efficient solution to the primordial problem of order where societies are large – requiring a state-like form of organization – and citizens isolated from each other. Its efficiency is challenged by other methods of leadership selection when barriers to communication are removed.”<sup>2</sup>

The larger the kingdom & poorer the communication (=land-based kingdoms like China & Russia) the stronger monarchies (=bureaucracy + military + priests) were necessary to keep them together. Smaller kingdoms and kingdoms with better communications (=coastal kingdoms like the Nordic countries & England) did not need the same apparatus. According to this reasoning, the monarchy was a suitable form of government for a poor medium-sized conglomerate state of the Swedish model with large regional differences. I quote the political scientist etc. Charles de Montesquieu (1689-1755):

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<sup>1</sup> Moberg 1955, 1966, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Crone 1991; Gerring m fl. 2020.

“It is natural for a republic to have only a small territory; otherwise it cannot long subsist. ... A monarchical state ought to be of moderate extent. Were it small, it would form itself into a republic; were it very large, the nobility, possessed of great estates, far from the eye of the prince, with a private court of their own, and secure, moreover, from sudden executions by the laws and manners of the country--such a nobility, I say, might throw off their allegiance, having nothing to fear from too slow and too distant a punishment. (Book VIII: chapter 16 & 17.) A large empire [therefore] supposes a despotic authority in the person who governs. (Book VIII: Chapter 19.)”<sup>3</sup>

The dangers of regional autonomy had last shown itself in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dalecarlian rebellion of 1743, the so called “Great Dance“, Sweden's last armed peasant rebellion. Earlier monarchs had listened to their Dalecarlians, but not now. In 1743, they were expected to fall in line.

As the empire dwindled and communications improved (railways, newspapers, telegraph), the monarchic system reached its limits. The Swedish end point is considered to have been the construction of the railway trunk lines in 1856-1892, which both meant that Sweden became a homogeneous nation state and dramatically increased the economic and political activity. The activity proved impossible to accommodate within the monarchic system which required a passive population. Telephones, radio, TV & internet have further activated the grass roots which now seem difficult to accommodate even within parliamentary democracy, but that is not included in the book.

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## Definitions

Since monarchy has existed since prehistoric times & on every continent there are a large number of variations. The book uses four different definitions based on power-influence-legitimacy: (1) Proto monarchy. (2) Absolute monarchy. (3) Constitutional monarchy. (4) Symbolic Monarchy.

### *Proto Monarchy*

The origin of the Proto monarchy is often explained as a system of war and legislation. In order to avoid succession battles, there were from the outset comprehensive rules on how these tribal chiefs, clan leaders, petty kings, etc. would be appointed. Their power was due either to the weakness of the environment or to the isolated position of their empire. The first monarchs were thus (relatively) powerful despite their weak kingdoms. Moberg's proto-monarchies are now known as “kinglets“, but often served only a religious function.<sup>4</sup>

### *Absolute Monarchy*

Absolute or “classical“ monarchy is defined as a hereditary life long office held by one person at a time & involves a non-trivial power position (Gerring et al. 2020). The need seems to have been dictated by the increasing population. The large, previously sparsely populated areas became increasingly difficult to govern & demanded a large bureaucracy + military power + preferably a common state religion, but above all money. It was also the rule that the

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<sup>3</sup> Montesquieu 1748-1757: Bok VIII, kap. 16 & 19.

<sup>4</sup> Riccardo 2005.

monarch (with reference to the need for stability) strengthened his personal position through splendour, ruthlessness & family policy.

### *Constitutional monarchy*

Constitutional or limited monarchy is defined as an intermediate form of absolute monarchy & full democracy and is based on the degree of “democraticness“ (≈degree of competition for political office, participation & restrictions in the exercise of power). The forms of this are the subject of intense discussion.<sup>5</sup> The coding used in the Polity IV estimate (Marshall et al. 2017) varies between -10 (=absolute monarchy or dictatorship) and +10 (=full parliamentary democracy). Alternative coding systems such as Varieties of Democracy and other democracy indices are too detailed for this book's purpose.

### *Symbolic Monarchy*

In the humanities<sup>6</sup> symbolic monarchy (English: limited monarchy) is defined as a cultural heritage based on three elements:

- Power, law, religion [=tradition, “soft power“, “leading by example“]
- Ceremonial, representation, spectacle
- Dynasty, court, kingdom

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The transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy is usually dated to the death of Charles XII in 1718. It was shaky, however. During the “Liberty“ period 1718-1772 the Parliament had the advantage. 1772-1789 was a period of equilibrium. 1789-1809 was a period of royal absolute monarchy. 1809 was a return to the equilibrium of 1772. this time with safe guards in the form of a written constitution. The next transition to an intermediate system of democracy + symbolic monarchy is usually dated to the period between the 1865-66 form of government & the 1917-21 suffrage reform. The exact year is hard to pin down, to many things happened, but: Charles XIV John, Oscar I & Charles XV are best described in political terms. Oscar II & Gustaf V are best described as transitional regents with both a political & a symbolic role. Gustaf VI and Carl XVI Gustaf are best described in symbolic terms only.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, republican circles feared “backsliding“ (=a monarchic counter coup) or a despot under the cloak of monarchy (=an Italian or Hungarian fascism). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are corresponding fears that the Swedish-democrats' supposed “Fascist-Monarchic“ ideology is of the same ilk.

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### “The monarchic heritage“

With the nation state, the need for bureaucracy + military + priests to hold the kingdom together diminished. The bureaucracy was replaced with national, county, church, regional and municipal politicians who would defend the interests of the citizens rather than the interests of the state; the military lost its police function and religion was privatized. That

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<sup>5</sup> Knutsen et al. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Quigley red. 2005; Deploige & Denecker red. 2006; Woodacre m fl. red. 2019.

said, the entire 18- & 1900s was characterized by “the monarchic heritage“, a mixture of old & new (see Part 1: Chapters 1 to 7):

- Feudal State (=mutual duties & obligations, oath of loyalty)
- Bureaucracy (=passivity of citizens; an instrument for the exercise of power)
- Democracy (=activation of citizens; a side effect of the nation state)
- Folkhemmet (=Society as a family; a continuation of the paternalistic role of the Royal Family, but now with the social democrats.)
- Tradition (=the Swedish identity where WKP-history = war, kings & parliaments was an important element.)

Since the transition between monarchy and democracy was so long, it is unclear what should be included in what. I have not tried to take stock. The monarchic heritage consists of the national state + democracy, where democracy presupposes the nation state but also “a democratic heritage“ of unclear origin.

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Modern monarchy research follows three tracks: (1) The monarchy as a form of government, its special features, advantages and disadvantages. (2) The transition between monarchy & democracy (this book). (3) Monarchies as avatars of modern dictatorships. Below are some results with bearing on Swedish conditions (Huntington 1966; Kokkonen 2014; Anchar 2020; Gerring m fl. 2020):

Until 1789, monarchies were both larger and politically more stable than republics. However, anything that increased political activity was to the detriment of the monarchy, as politics often consisted of asserting old regional differences using national sentiment as arguments, which led to division.

The monarchies had difficulty modernizing. The background to this was that they were based on the old elites who would lose out from a social transformation. Nevertheless, there were monarchs willing to try. Modernization from above, however, was both risky & ineffective. The monarchs did indeed have the autocracy, the bureaucracy and the coercive laws on their side, but modernization must be implemented by the same people who would lose from it. The reforms were therefore often stalled. The centralization also made the monarchy vulnerable, as experienced by France (1789), China (1911), Russia (1917) and the Ottoman Empire (1908-1923). If you decapitated the royal family, the bureaucracy due to a lack of management had difficulty acting on its own. Democracy with its separation of powers was not as fragile.

The fact that monarchs in small countries during a transition to democracy often retained their powers, while monarchs in the large countries were dethroned or executed, indicates that a personal relationship of king-citizens was an important factor in the survival of the monarchy. Personal journalism made the monarchy more democratic in the sense that they were presented as human beings of flesh, blood & (well) opinions, for which it was possible to empathize.

Virtually all the references I have found regret the lack or rather the bias in monarchy research. There is an enormous amount of biographies and histories, but few unprejudiced studies of the monarchy as a form of government or depictions from within. The lack of facts fuels the imagination. You can imagine anything.

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