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Introduction: Sweden, Russia and Finland 1808–1809

The break-up of the common realm two hundred years ago is now (2009) being commemorated in Finland and Sweden. Correspondingly, we could celebrate the birth of the autonomy of Finland or the joining of Finland to Russia, among other things.¹

In any case, the reason to celebrate was in all aforementioned cases practically clear more than 200 years ago, although the factual closing point was the Peace Treaty of Hamina (sw. Fredrikshamn), signed in September, 1809. On the Finnish side the matter proceeded remarkably swiftly, for in Southern Finland there were regions where it was known already in March 1808 that the co-existence between Sweden and Finland drew to its close for their part.

International background of the Finnish War

The Finnish War is bound to the chain of events of the French Revolution and the unrest and revolutionary wars that followed it European-wide. In the end of the 1790s the autocratic King of Sweden, Gustavus the IV Adolphus, cherished hopes of joining Norway which belonged to Denmark to Sweden. This goal was at first pursued in co-operation with Napoleon Bonaparte of France but by time the policy of the King, known to be unstable, turned against France. The relations of the two countries broke entirely in 1804 and next year Sweden was in the midst of a great European war. In the end of October, 1805, Sweden declared war to France.²

¹ See for instance Max Engman, Pitkät jäähyväiset. Suomi Ruotsin ja Venäjän välissä vuoden 1809 jälkeen. WS Bookwell oy: Juva 2009; Max Engman, Vad och hur skall vi fira 2008–2009? Historisk Tidskrift för Finland 2007: 1; Petri Karonen, Vad vet vi i dag om året 1809? Tidskriften Skärgård 3/2007 (See also www: http://www.1809info.net/pdfs/pdf_20_1; http://www.1809info.net/pdfs/pdf_20_2).

² On the foreign policy of the King Gustavus the IV Adolphus especially Sten Carlsson, Gustav IV Adolfs fall. krisen i riksstyrelsen, konspirationerna och statsvälvningen (1807–1809). Lund 1944; Sten Carlsson, 1792–1810. In Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia III: 1. Stockholm 1954; H. Arnold Barton, Scandinavia in the Revolutionary Era 1760–1815. The Nordic Series vol. 12. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1986; in generally also Petri Karonen, Pohjoinen suurvalta. Ruotsi ja Suomi 1521–1809. WS Bookwell OY: Juva 2008.

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries the relations of Sweden and Russia had been genuinely good and the two states had been in either alliance or in looser co-operation. A dramatic turn took place in 1807 when France in the Treaty of Tilsit proposed that Russia should give up its alliance with England while Sweden stayed with the British. The British in their dire straits needed urgently the iron and shipping equipment from Sweden to maintain its military might. Britain supported its allies with ample subsidies.

The common fate of Sweden and Finland was largely settled in Tilsit in July, 1807. It is common knowledge that Russia and France agreed, among other things, that Russia should force Denmark and Sweden join the enemies of England. Denmark did it by its own will after the British had made a surprise attack on Copenhagen. With regard to Sweden the situation was different since no agreement could be reached with Gustavus the IV who continued his self-made foreign policy. Russia was not very keen on waging war against its former ally either.

Picture 1. The meeting of Alexander I and Napoleon at Tilsit in June 1807.

The Finnish War 1808–1809

The Russian onslaught in February did not come as a surprise to the Swedes since the observers of the signs of the times had a hunch of what was coming already over half a year before. After the slowly Russian mobilization the attack at last started – without a declaration of war – in the end of February. At the same time Danish forces harassed Swedes in the south. Finland was, according to the prevalent defense strategy, largely left to its own. The call-up was carried out in the nick of time by the local, independent commanders. The warlords in Stockholm did not dare to command mobilization because they were scared that Russians would be provoked by the Swedish forces taking positions to defend!³

³ On the Finnish War, Martin Hårdstedt, *Om krigets förutsättningar, den militära underhållsproblematiken och det civila samhället i norra Sverige och Finland under Finska kriget 1808–09*. Umeå universitet: Umeå 2002; Martin Hårdstedt, *Finska kriget*. Prisma: Stockholm 2006; J.E.O. Screen, *The Army in Finland During the Last Decades of Swedish Rule (1770–1809)*. *Studia Historica* 75. SKS: Tampere 2007; Jussi T. Lappalainen, Lars Ericson Wolke, Ali Pylkkänen, *Sota Suomesta. Suomen sota 1808–1809. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia* 1148. Tammi: Hämeenlinna 2007; Erkki K. Osmonsalo, *Suomen valloitus 1808*. WSOY: Porvoo 1947; Päiviö Tommila, *Suomen autonomian syntyy*. Edita: Helsinki 2008.

The entire Swedish military force consisted of some 80 000 men in the beginning of the war. Out of them over 21 000 were defending Finland, and the number of the attacking Russian force was barely 10 per cent more at the outset. The Swedish army was far below its old striking ability and its efficiency was impaired by the comfort of the allotment system whereas the Russian army was rather well-disciplined and professional. With pessimistic war-plans the initial situation was rather grim for the defenders. The official plan of defense of Sweden was in the beginning of the 19th century based on the principle of saving. It had that the defense of the Finland part of the realm lay solely on the shoulders of the forces stationed there. All the officers and other experts of the era had pretty much come to realistic conclusion that successful encountering the enemy on the borders in the East was going to be quite difficult – it ran along the Kymi-river. As the enemy pushed forward the Swedish army would withdraw to Ostrobothnia to wait reinforcements from Sweden, with which the ceded lands would be re-conquered.

Map 1. The eastern border of Sweden in the beginning of the 19th century – The road map (*Wäg-karta*) from 1806.

So, a part of the army was stationed in the strongholds of Svartholm and Sveaborg and the rest of the forces withdrew to Ostrobothnia. This was done in an exemplary manner but the strongholds of Southern Finland destined to make up the backbone of the defense could not stand the rather mild offensive pressure of the Russians, nor the slightly more pressing psychological warfare. Svartholm collapsed already in March, Sveaborg during the first week of May.

The Russians reached Åbo in a month and after a week (26th of March, 1808) from that they were in Wasa. In five weeks they had reached Nykarleby area in Ostrobothnia. And by this time the invader pronounced its intentions to unite Finland to the Russian Empire. Also the convocation of the Diet was planned. All this happened rather swiftly so that the new masters became objects of wonder, for instance, in Central Ostrobothnia already in early April. Only after the middle of April the Swedish ground force launched its counter-attack in Northern Ostrobothnia and soon achieved victories in many battles. However, in the beginning of May, rumours soon corroborated as being true reached the Swedish ears: Sveaborg had surrendered.

Victories of the Swedish-Finnish army followed still in June, 1808. The Russians were ousted from Central Ostrobothnia and during the summer the Swedish army re-conquered large areas to the north of Björneborg-St. Michel line. Counter-attacks were supported by invasions to Southern Finland but without success since the Russians had firmly cut in the country by the summer 1808. The whole-scale attack the Russians launched with great force in the second half of August crushed the chances of Swedish-Finnish forces; Swedish army was defeated on the Finnish ground. The armistice of Olkijoki in the end of November 1808 at last sealed the cession of almost all of Finland to Russian forces.

The war continued in Västerbotten in summer 1809. Defense was not made any easier as the commanders of the main forces left their units to take part in the political game in Stockholm by which the King Adolphus was dethroned. Fighting continued in Norrland but without particular zeal, although the front reached Nordmaling. Sweden yielded to peace negotiations which started in Hamina in the middle of August. The separation of Sweden and Finland was sealed by the Peace Treaty on the 17th of September, 1809 although the matter had been closed already almost for a year.

Russian policy of pacification in Finland 1808–1809

In Finland practically all historians emphasize the significance of Russian policy of pacification around 1809. The central elements in this policy were, on one hand, the oath of allegiance sworn to the new Ruler, and on the other hand, the rapid convocation of the Diet.⁴

At first the invaders aimed at pacification of Finland by claiming an oath of allegiance to the Russian Emperor. The Russians started to take them already in April 1808. The usual procedure was that everyone swore the oath personally, not through mediators. This was for many particularly unpleasant since it made the change of rule tangible and concrete.⁵

⁴ Aimo Halila, *Porvoon valtiopäivät ja autonomian alkuaika*. In *Suomen kansanedustuslaitoksen historia*. Ensimmäinen osa. Helsinki 1962; Matti Klinge, *Keisarin Suomi*. Schildts: Helsinki 1997; Osmo Jussila, *Suomen suuriruhtinaskunta 1809–1917*. Porvoo 2004; Tommila (2008); Karonen (2008); Matti Klinge, *Napoleonin varjo. Euroopan ja Suomen murros 1795–1815*. Otava: Keuruu 2009.

⁵ Lars Gabriel von Bonsdorff, *Den ryska pacificeringen i Finland, 1808–09*. Söderström: Helsingfors 1929; Nils Erik Villstrand, *Från konungens undersåtar till kejsarens. den ryska tro- och huldhetseden i*

It was demanded from local population that they should abandon their old allegiance to the Swedish king, a demand which was, according to the measure of times serious – deadly serious – matter. It was all about changing the ruler from a King to an Emperor. For the peasants and the populace it was particularly hard to envisage becoming subjects of a Russian Emperor, whereas for the nobles and clergy it was not often that difficult. Giving up the King and swearing an oath to an Emperor was quite unpleasant for the bourgeoisie not only politically but also because the maintenance and preservation of their property rights was a matter of life and death for them. Bourgeoisie could exercise its rights of property and earn its living only with the permission granted by the state, i.e. the ruler. In a society of estates the stability of conditions and suppression of extra competition were things worth of having. Above all, it was all about bourgeois privileges and other prerogatives, the preservation, change and abolition of which was dependent on ruler's will. In this sense, the King of Sweden was a sure choice in comparison to the unknown Russian ruler who had lately incurred a lot of suffering and defeat. For this reason, as the saying has it, "money has its homeland" – even if only solely because of the common, own interest of the bourgeois.⁶

Picture 2. One important item in the Russians' policy of pacification was the demand that an oath of allegiance be sworn to the new ruler well before the war was actually over. These kinds of written pledges were demanded in Finland during spring and summer 1808.

The Russians ordered the oaths to be taken in all churches in Finland during two Sundays in May, 1808. The binding effect of allegiance was so strong in some regions that people systematically refused to swear the oath. The taking of oaths was especially hard in Ostrobothnia since the peasants were not willing to swear while the war was still going on. The Swedish spring attack was in full swing in May 1808 and the changing of troops from Russian to Swedish was really felt among the local society's everyday life.

Local differences were anyhow great. This was largely due to the fact that many areas in

Vasa län år 1808. In *Krig kring Kvarken. – Finska kriget 1808–09 och slaget vid Oravais i ny belysning*. Red. Martin Hårdstedt och Göran Backman. Oravais 1999; Nils Erik Villstrand, *Landet annorlunda. Uppsatser om Österbottens historia. Svensk-österbottniska samfundet: Vasa 2002*, cf. Klinge (2009).

⁶ Villstrand (1999); Villstrand (2002); Petri Karonen, *Patruunat ja poliitikot. Yritysjohtajien taloudellinen ja yhteiskunnallinen toiminta Suomessa 1600–1920. Historiallia Tutkimuksia 217*. Tampere: SKS 2004.

Finland faced a kind of state of flux in March 1808 as the troops of the old rule were leaving or had recently left and the Russian forces had not yet stepped in.

For instance, in Tavastland the Russians did not have difficulties in collecting oaths of allegiance. Lars G. von Bonsdorff who has studied the issue has found the Tavastians most obedient and flexible to accept a new master. In Tavastehus local vicar defended the chosen line during the occasion of oath swearing by referring to forefathers who had sworn to the Russians in the past. This had happened during the wars in the 18th century when Russians had forced the local people to do it. He hinted at the Swedish inability to defend its subjects although this sounded to some of parish people like an excuse. The vicar also ambiguously stated that *"we have to honour the ruler"*, and continued by straightforwardly asking whether *"it is in our power to refuse the allegiance due to the ruler?"* In Swedish this statement also sounded severe and revealing: *"Står det in vår makt att förneka övertinnaren lydnad?"*⁷

The grounds of the vicar are undeniable as such, for the earthly power, the Swedish crown, had not been able to defend its subjects in Finland. The vicar's speech has to be regarded as treason in May since the clergy in general and the Finnish clergy, which had been severely taught in Lutheran faith, in particular, were seen as the firmest mainstay of Swedish crown and earthly authority.

Put in other words, the transfer of government and ruler was not an easy or painless matter. The problems in oath-taking showed concretely to the Russians that a lot of attention had to be paid to planning of return to peace and that they had genuinely to try to negotiate with the new subjects of the Emperor. Particularly, obstinacy of the peasants in giving up the allegiance to the Swedish crown may have made a positive impact on the way Finland was pacified and on the birth of the autonomy of Finland. It forced the Russians to thinking of other means of pacification and to paying more attention to the existence and development of the asymmetric interaction between the ruler and his subjects. Old Swedish practices were good tools in easing the change from old order to the new.⁸

⁷ K. O. Lindeqvist, Hämeenlinnan oloista sotavuosina 1808–09. Hämeenlinnan lyseon vuosikertomus 1901–1902; K. O. Lindeqvist, Hämeenlinnan kaupungin historia Ruotsin vallan aikana. Hämeenlinna 1926; Bonsdorff (1929), 360; Klinge (2009), 109–110.

⁸ Bonsdorff (1929); Villstrand (1999); Maria Cavallin, I Kungens och folkets tjänst. Synen på den svenske ämbetsmannen 1750–1780. Avhandlingar från historiska institutionen i Göteborg 36. Göteborgs universitet: Göteborg 2003.

The Diet in Porvoo 1809

The Diet in Porvoo in spring and summer of 1809 followed down to the smallest detail of formalities the traditions of the Gustavian period. The Diet soothed the minds of the Finns because with it the instrument of Government along the lines of the old Swedish tradition was stabilized as the basis of Finnish social life.⁹

In Porvoo the Emperor of Russia, Alexander I, was ready to guarantee the Lutheran faith of Finland, the privileges of the estates and the constitutional laws, which had not been exactly defined, as well as to grant Finland an autonomous status. This was pacification policy at its best for the maintenance of the kind of privileges and prerogatives promised by the new ruler were widely used internationally and were for long considered good acts. As a consequence of the decisions made in Porvoo, the Finnish allotment army was practically demobilized. For its part, it also pacified the society, especially when the officers were given payment and other benefits for life. Instead, for the soldiers of the allotment army the situation was more complicated, for they had to give up their crofts and benefits therewith. Their fate after the war has not been carefully studied but they did not necessarily fare badly but many of them returned to their local communities and some of them became even landholders.

In general most of the Finns adapted to the situation swiftly. To the core of the Russian pacification policy belonged rewarding of good deeds with offices, money and medals.¹⁰ In this respect, it is easy to say that for the estates the result of the war brought remarkable opportunities with it. In practice many officials and their relatives found significant posts in Russian service. During this phase the Russians did not want to intervene in local administration or in organizing of the offices.

Epilogue

Finally I would like to compare the political development in different parts of the Swedish realm during the war and immediately after it. In Sweden the research

⁹ Villstrand (2002), Nils Erik Villstrand, Hyllningsakten i Borgå domkyrka den 29 mars 1809. några nya fakta och anmärkningar en gång till. *Finsk Tidskrift* 2008. See also Halila (1962); Karonen (2008); Henrika Tandefelt, Borgå 1809. Ceremoni och fest. SLS: Tavastehus 2009. Cf. e.g. Klinge (1997); Jussila (2004).

¹⁰ On this see e.g. Klinge (2009).

concerning the years 1808–1809 has concentrated mostly on analyzing the background of the 1809 form of government which was born as direct consequence of the war and on its content and implementation. It is known from the old that the highest officials and nobles above all were dissatisfied at the government of Gustavus the IV Adolphus since already in autumn 1808 the highest officials and soldiers pondered ideas of a coup. The most up-to-date research has highlighted the important role of the soldiers in bringing it about.¹¹

Interesting in this is above all that in Sweden the new form of government was dealt at the same time as Finland was transferred under the rule of the Russian Emperor. Although the then contemporaries did not know of it in real time, as a matter of fact on the same day (29th of March, 1809) as Alexander gave his sovereign pledge to the representatives of the Finnish estates and they swore allegiance to the new ruler, the last common king of Swedes and Finns reluctantly gave up his throne in Stockholm. Final separation from the old common order actually took place on the very same forum, the Diet, and the meeting of the estates. Notwithstanding, the atmosphere in Stockholm was different from the one prevalent in Porvoo. Already in 1808 people in Finland talked consistently of the coming Diet (*landtdag*), implying that it did not directly correspond to the Diet of realm in Stockholm (*riksdag*). In spite of that, the forms and practices of the Diet followed the Swedish traditions in full and thus the Porvoo Diet can be regarded to a large extent as an equivalent to Gustavian Diet.¹²

To make a slight overstatement, Stockholm argued in 1809 with full force for *the change* whereas in Porvoo the authorities tried to the last straw maintain *the old Gustavian order*. In Sweden the new authorities used the political concepts of the monarchs of the Gustavian era but gave them new meanings which legitimated the "new order" and the ambitions of power of its representatives. Especially interesting were the discourses during the enacting of the new form of government in the Diet in spring and early summer 1809: the term "subject" (*undersåtare*) was never used and its place was taken by "citizen" (*medborgare*) roughly in the same sense as it is understood today.

¹¹ Rolf Karlbom, *Frihetstidens författning och 1809 års regeringsform. En principutredning om empiri och teori i Sveriges nyare författningshistoria. Meddelanden från historiska institutionen i Göteborg*. Nr 7. Malmö 1973; Mats Hemström, *Marschen mot makten. Västra arméns revolt och väg till Stockholm 1809*. *Studia Historica Upsaliensia* 219. Uppsala universitet: Stockholm 2005; Anders Sundin, *1809: statskuppen och regeringsformens tillkomst som tolkningsprocess*. *Studia Historica Upsaliensia* 227. Uppsala universitet: Stockholm 2006; Hårdstedt (2006).

¹² The significance of the Swedish tradition is emphasized by Nils Eril Villstrand (2002, 2008). See also for instance, Halila (1962). Cf. Klinge (1997); Jussila (2004).

The difference to discussions in Borgå is huge; there the authorities strictly abstained from using the "citizen" in the present sense. The discourse of "subject" and its variations have certainly for long been known in the history of autonomous Finland. Nevertheless, comparison with the discussions in Sweden at the same time on the principally same forum of state creates an interesting contrast to the understanding of the phases of the crisis period.¹³

The reformulation of key-concepts of politics – or correspondingly the keeping of them exactly the same – is connected to the problem of legitimacy faced by the state and its ruler in general around the year 1809. This problem may have been even more serious on the Swedish side since the coup accomplished by home forces was altogether something else than being brought under occupation by an alien army which happened in Finland. A coup is always a sensitive issue, how "good" or "right" its causes ever were.¹⁴

"New" Finland and "new" Sweden were not born suddenly but by slowly edging. Without earlier traditions it is impossible to create new systems, and the central authority quickly built in autonomous Finland was not simply born in the brains of the 'founding fathers' whose powers had been exhausted but in the background there was long experience and tested practices from the times of common history of Sweden-Finland. As a matter of fact, the formation of the Finnish state took a long time, even decades.¹⁵

Old Gustavians rose to become political leaders of Finland quite easily in the end. They wanted to preserve old traditions and obey old codes and statutes. This was not only tactics with which they purported to keep Russians away from privileges of Finland but it was a well-tried tradition, for the changing of which the contemporaries did not see any reasons. This explains also the rather contrasting tactics which were applied at the same time by the mentally similarly armed leaders of the "new Sweden" and the "new" Finland in Stockholm and in Porvoo Diets in order to reinstate and maintain the

¹³ Mikael Alm, *Kungsord i elfte timmen. Språk och självbild i det gustavianska enväldets legitimitetskamp 1772–1809*. Stockholm 2002; Sundin (2006); Halila (1962); Jussila (2004).

¹⁴ Carlsson (1944); Alm (2002); Hemström (2005); Sundin (2006).

¹⁵ Suomen keskushallinnon historia 1809–1996. General editor: Raimo Savolainen. Helsinki 1996; Jussila (2004); Kati Katajisto, *Isänmaan ja yleisen hyvän vuoksi. Suomen autonomian ajan alun johtomiesten uhrautuminen*. Historiallinen Aikakauskirja 2007: 3; Kati Katajisto, *Isänmaamme keisari. Eliitin kansallisen identiteetin murros ja suomalaisen isänmaan rakentuminen autonomian ajan alussa*. Helsinki 2008. (<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-10-4593-6>); Karonen (2008).

legitimacy of the state authority: in that situation *change* was argued for in Sweden and *the old system* was guarded in Finland.

In any case, both Sweden and Finland survived with relatively small damages, or rather quite splendidly from the war which ended with severe defeat. This can be concretized by using Finland as an example, and one can ask: how many of the listeners here know of a region, country or state which suffered a crushing defeat in a war, the forces of which surrendered, which was separated from its old state, which was occupied and subdued under foreign rule but in which a functioning central administration was built almost from nothing by own hands in a couple of years and which could take care of almost all of its own business? While pondering the answer one should remember that the accomplishment of the Russian army deserves to be noted because it – contrary to, for example, other invaders and occupants in many other later wars – did not have to commit big forces to pacifying the country. It also showed the Russians' pragmatic attitude to organizing administration because in this way the huge state conglomeration was spared from such problems in Finland which haunted it in various other parts of the Empire.¹⁶

¹⁶ On the problematic of returning to peace in general and analogically considered in view of the 20th century situation, see *Kun sota on ohi. Sodista selviytymisen ongelmia ja niiden ratkaisumalleja 1900-luvulla*. Eds. Petri Karonen ja Kerttu Tarjamo. Historiallinen Arkisto 124. Helsinki 2006.