

Summaries

Christer Winberg

**Why don't we write historical novels instead?
A contribution to the debate on the historian's
relationship to reality**

After 1965 Swedish historical research experienced strong currents in a positivistic direction: an interest in social theories, closer relations with the social sciences, model building, etc. The striving after "scientificness" was uncontroversial and unproblematic. During the 1980s, however, two other tendencies have worked in an opposite direction. The one has involved different relativistic scientific theories, the best known of which has Thomas Kuhn as its originator. These bring out the importance of the researcher's own theories and biases and deny the existence of theory neutral data. The other direction is "neo-historicism," the interest in hermeneutics, which, in the discipline of history, expressed itself partly in an interest in historical anthropology and mentality studies. Both these tendencies operated in the same relativistic, subjectivistic direction, and their diffusion within the Swedish scholarly community has produced uncertainty about the historical discipline's philosophical status, about criteria for good science and scientific progress, as well as an unwillingness to talk about historical reality, which justifies the question posed in the article's heading.

This debate article would like to draw attention to a direction which avoids both the positivistic and historicistic extremes — theoretical realism. This has two central components. For the first, it is knowledge realistic, that is, it maintains the existence of an independent reality about which we can obtain increased knowledge. The decisive proof of this is the most fundamental development in mankind's entire history: the fact that mankind to an increasing extent has learned to master nature, understood more and more how it functions, achieved scientific and technical progress. Theoretical realism concedes that empirical data are not theory neutral, but claims that, nevertheless, they can be used in order to choose between two or several competing theories. For the other, and in contrast primarily to positivism, theoretical realism argues that it is not just observable phenomena that can be the object of scientific knowledge. It distinguishes between depths and surfaces and claims the existence of non-observable ("theoretical") forces and structures which yield definite patterns of events. The researcher's task is not, as the positivists state, to make empirical generalizations from observable surface phenomena and construct laws from them, but to establish causal links between observable surface phenomena and underlying structures and forces. Transferred to the area of social theory, this leads to some form of theory of structuration.

Translated by Joseph Zitomersky

Erik Gamby

Olof Skötkonung, Sven Forkbeard, and Ethelred the Unready

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains information for the years 991 and 994 of the ravages of England by Scandinavian Vikings under the leadership of Viking chieftains named Olof and Swein. Until now it has been assumed that the latter were identical with the Norwegian Olof Tryggvason and the Danish king Svend Forkbeard. According to Norwegian saga traditions Olav Tryggvason, before he became king in Norway, is supposed to have undertaken a Viking voyage to England, but no information on this can be found in the contemporary source material. The author attempts to show that the Olof named in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* must have been identical with the Swedish king Olof Skötkonung (reigned c. 995—1022). According to Thietmar von Merseburg and Adam of Bremen a Danish-Swedish Viking fleet could be found off the north German coast in June 994 and it plundered extensively Hadeln, Friesland and Saxony. Much argues for the fact that this was the very same Viking force which attacked London in September 994, ravaged the south coast of England and forced Ethelred II to pay a tribute of 16,000 pounds. On that occasion Olof (he is called "king" in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) was confirmed, with Ethelred acting as godfather. The Vikings wintered in Southampton and must have returned to Scandinavia in the spring of 995 at the earliest. The return journey can be set in relation to "the battle of the Svolder" in Danish waters between Olof Tryggvason on the one side and Sven Forkbeard and Olof Skötkonung on the other, as well as to the mint coinage of the Anglo-Saxon type and to the aid of English mint masters which was begun at that time by Sven Forkbeard and Olof Skötkonung.

Inge Skovgaard-Petersen

Saxo as a contemporary historian The uprising in Scania

Did medieval historians look upon contemporary history in the same way as modern historians do? An answer can be found by studying Saxo's tale of the Scanian revolt which took place some twenty years before *Gesta Danorum* were written down.

A full English translation of books IX—XVI of Saxo's work has been made by Eric Christiansen in *Saxo Grammaticus* I—III, BAR, 1980—81. The Scanian revolt is described in Saxo's book XV and the beginning of book XVI. The main points of the tale are that Absalon, archbishop between 1178—1202, himself tried to negotiate with the seditious population. At first he seemed to succeed, but afterward met with strong opposition and had to leave his diocese in order to sail to his native island, Zealand.

Absalon then turned to King Valdemar (1157—1182), who went to Scania and heard people complain of the taxes and especially the new bishop tithes. They even indicated their desire to get rid of the archbishop. Absalon threatened to lay Scania under an interdiction but deferred doing so after a discussion between the clergy and the farmers. At this point the king took up arms and defeated the rebels in two battles.

King Valdemar died shortly afterwards and a new rebellion occurred in Scania. This time the Scanian nobles were able to cope with the situation themselves. When the new king and Absalon arrived, order and justice were reestablished.

Only two other sources mention the Scanian revolt. The oldest, the annals of Lund, written at about 1206, confirms Saxo's narrative, the other, *Vetus chronica Sialandiae* from about the year 1300, is dependent on *Gesta Danorum*, but adds a new motive to the rebellion; the farmers were humiliated by the king's agents because they were ordered to drag heavy trunks without using horses. Both sources emphasize Absalon's importance but they are not in contradiction with Saxo.

Modern historians have found different answers to the most important questions: who were the rebels? What were their motives? and who was the target? The discrepancy stems from Saxo's text. In order to understand it the whole of book XV of *Gesta Danorum* must be reconsidered. This book consists of a number of episodes without apparent coherence. But all of them tell about more or less complete defeats leading up to the last: the death of King Valdemar. This sad atmosphere is the key to the book, the inner reality of the events.

Going through those parts of Saxo's text which could be considered as superfluous, it is clear that many of them defend Absalon's deeds. But if Saxo only wanted to praise Absalon, he could simply have avoided these embarrassing details. In fact he tells a good deal about the humiliations of the archbishop. This seems to be the explanation for Saxo's extended account of the Scanian rebellion: he wants not only to write about the revolt itself but to give moral instructions on how to bear troubles and injustices.

To be able to understand this a knowledge of medieval rhetorics and historiography is required. Kurt Johannesson and Eric Christiansen are both aware of the theme but as for the Scanian revolt the full implications have not been noticed.

Rolf Adamson

State sponsored grain exports in the early 1820's

During the seventeenth century the first real civil service departments were founded in Sweden. According to mercantilistic ideas prevalent then, they were used in those sectors of the economy which could give export revenues, i.e. metallurgical industries, foreign trade and shipping.

Deeper interest in agriculture was not observed until the latter part of the eighteenth century. Some older restrictions, i.e. on domestic corn trade, were now considered awkward and were abolished. Some government authorities, partly of a new kind, were built up to direct important economic activities. "Allmänna magasinrättningen" (AMI) which means "The Institution for grain storage and distribution" with its Board (AMD) were among the important new organizations.

One of its principal missions was to collect taxes in kind. After 1809 two other tasks were still more central. To regions affected by bad harvests, relief actions through shipments of corn were carried out. On the other side, to support prices regions with bumper crops might instead be assisted through public buying of part of the abundance. Sometimes it happened that both these kinds of measures were used at the same time in regions situated near each other. That was demanding for AMD.

From the latter part of the eighteenth century Sweden was on its way from a strong dependence on imported corn towards self-sufficiency. Relief actions which had dominated earlier grew less important and instead price support became more common.

From August 1819 — on the eve of a good crop — to April 1820 Swedish import tariffs were raised four times to protect against cheap foreign corn. During this period AMD bought much corn within the country to support prices. Its stocks increased and its funds decreased. From earlier relief actions the organization had very large outstanding claims. The likelihood that they all could be collected soon was small, indeed. This was the more dangerous as AMD financed most of its operations by means borrowed through the assistance of the Swedish Parliament.

Very eagerly pressed on by King Charles John AMD tried hard in the course of the spring and summer of 1820 to find ways out of its financial dilemma. Markets for corn in many European countries were studied, although Sweden totally lacked traditions from and thus knowledge about exportation of such goods and although competition from foreign sellers was intense already on the highly tariff protected Swedish territory.

The excellent harvest in the autumn of 1820 convinced the King that fundamental measures must be tried. He persuaded his cabinet about a corn export adventure to England, open for such business up to the 15th of November. In a hurry two decisions were taken on the 11th of September: the prohibition on exporting Swedish corn was removed and details were fixed about an expedition which according to Swedish circumstances was very large. Under serious strain for AMI the whole shipping for London was effected in due time.

The net proceeds from the sales did not yield enough for sheer profit on the adventure, as the exported corn was bought some years ago at prices that were much higher than those prevailing in 1820. Nevertheless the result was much better than if the same lots of corn had been sold at the very low prices in Sweden. Thus the king and AMD had some reason for their assessment that the whole business was more of a success than of a failure. Therefore they wished to try again.

In 1821 the English corn market was no longer open to foreigners. During an urgent search for other possible buyers the Swedes met a number of disappointments. At the beginning of June, however, Italy was pointed out as an acceptable alternative. The basis for the decision had not been very satisfactory. The person to be responsible for carrying through the sales in Italy, J C Askelöf, obviously suspected an unfavourable outcome and in these circumstances great care was devoted to preparing the cargoes for their long voyage.

The Swedish corn reached a country already well provided for. Whereas oats sold fairly easily, the set-backs were very marked for the much larger quantities of barley. The first cargoes arrived in August 1821 but most of them were not sold until in 1823, and at horribly low prices. Only small fractions of the outlays for the expedition were met. The bad result was one of the important factors behind Parliament's decision to cease financing AMI's operations. The whole organization was winded up.

It would be unfair to see the corn adventure to Italy as an example of incompetence in a bureaucratic body. On the decisive point, that the expedition was at all brought about, AMD was strongly pressed by the King and the organization was sooner not enough bureaucratic, had too few rules valid in all situations, to be able to withstand. In other respects the preparations were mostly handled satisfactorily by AMI. Once the shipments had begun the possibility to make them profitable was small in a country which like many other parts of Europe in the beginning of the 1820's abounded in corn. The failure grew quite accidentally worse than necessary and gave good reasons for abandoning public corn regulations. In this field liberal ideas won a victory over mercantilistic ones.

Uffe Østergård

Justification of Nationality. Two definitions of nation in 19th century European political thought

"Nation" is a concept of which no generally accepted definition exist. This essay traces two conflicting definitions that were important in the 19th century and still influence debates on nationalism.

The objective-cultural definition has its roots in Johann Gottfried Herder's ideas. He saw national differences as the leading principle of historical development. The different nations had both a right and a duty to realize their destiny. Both among reactionaries (e.g. Joseph de Maistre) and radicals (e.g. Giuseppe Mazzini) such an objective definition was accepted during the 19th century. In this understanding people belonged to a nation irrespective of their own will or consciousness.

Since it has been very difficult in practice to agree on which nations had the right to exist, there have been attempts to fall back on a subjective definition of a nation. Joseph Ernest Renan argued for such an understanding when he after 1870 tried to explain why the people of Alsace and Lorraine actually had the right to belong to France after the German conquest. While German nationalists argued that the inhabitants were objectively German and should be given back their true identity, Renan claimed that they, in spite of their German language and race, were French because they identified themselves with France. The nation was a political community, and people should belong to it by their own choice.

Attempts to unite the subjective and objective definitions and translate them into practical politics were made by the Austrian socialists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer. They both stressed cultural autonomy for nations, while holding that territorial units should not be based on national allegiance. The Bolsheviks criticized the Austro-Marxists in two conflicting ways: they limited the right of nations to self-determination but at the same time encouraged unwished for national feelings.

The conflicting definitions of nation have placed a heavy burden on political thought in the 20th century and result in vague and conflicting ways of justifying nationality, with which we still have to struggle in the future.

Kristian Gerner

'Volk und Reich'. The German Question in the Interwar Period

The German question quite unexpectedly became highly topical in 1989. The cause was the rapid breakdown of the Soviet empire. Europe was on the threshold of political changes as profound as in 1918 or 1945. Again the fate of the German nation — Volk — and state — Reich — was placed on the European political agenda. History and myths were brought to life.

The article examines the discussion on the German question in the interwar period. The point of departure for the analysis is a scrutiny of Ingemar Karlsson's doctoral dissertation 'History as Biological Fate', which demonstrates the ideological affinity between core concepts in German conservative historiography in the interwar period and in Nazi ideology. It is argued in the article that the specific German discourse in the interwar years, using concepts such as 'nation', 'state' and 'leader', was not confined to conservative historians and Nazi ideologists only, but was central also in the leftist radical opposition to the Weimar republic. It is suggested that this German discourse may be regarded as representative of German historical thinking across the ideological spectrum but in some respects, especially as regards the fusion of the concepts 'nation' and 'state', also may be viewed as a local variety of an European ideological stream, whose other major manifestations were Leninism-Stalinism and Fascism.

It is concluded in the article that the analysis of the semantics of the concepts 'state', 'nation' and 'leader' in the German intellectual tradition, carried out by Karlsson, is of special value for a proper understanding of the German discussion of the German question in the 1990s and its eventual fateful aspects.

