

Continued. **September, 1808. A month that sealed Finland's fate**

the year 2009. While this is being written, Latvia is in political and economic turmoil. In the last quarter of 2008, the country's economy shrank by 10.5 percent. The government resigned in late February 2009. The president has called for more efficient governing of the country, and many blame the large Swedish banks for the economic crisis, as these, over the last years, have provided a major proportion of the loans. The de-regulation of the capital markets and the privatization of the banking system that took place as part of the adaptation to the EU's inner market are not features that guarantee the kind of "free" state that was dreamt of when the Soviet Union collapsed. Latvia is, in many respects, dependent on other, larger political and economic systems, and is subject to the vagaries of time.

**DO WE NOW DETECT** The signs of another up-coming collapse, that of modernism? Are these evaluating organizations trying to be modern and rational at the dawn of a postmodern era, in which we can no longer rely on an enduring pool of competence dwelling beneath the shiny surface of the financial world? This dissertation does not focus on, or question, the aspects that evaluating organizations choose to investigate, or on the values and economic and political theories that govern their actions. But in the time to come – which some already call the era of de-globalization, or the era of protectionism – we might soon see some exciting dissertations about the development of the Baltic states, dissertations that, conforming to the new spirit of the time, build on different ideas of how to develop the good state. Matilda Dahl gives a hint of this, in her conclusion, when she reflects on whether modern society exists here and now – or whether it exists at all.

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REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup> Marie-Louise von Bergmann-Winberg, *Wohlfahrt, Lebensniveau und Lebensweise im deutsch-deutschen Vergleich*, Helsinki 1987.

**Nils Erik Forsgård**  
**September 1808.**

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**F**INLAND'S FUTURE WAS settled in September 1808. Before the year was over, the eastern part of the Swedish kingdom would be occupied and controlled by Russian troops. The decisive military outcome had already arrived with the Battles at Ruona and Salmi on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of September. With the Battle of Oravais on September 14, the last Swedish attempt to reverse their fortunes in the war, Sweden's defeat was confirmed. Hopelessly unsuccessful landings in the Turku area during the second half of the month simply underlined the inevitable. Despite the often crisp, clear air of the Norrland autumn, the month of September 1808 carries with it a heavy sense of fate. It was in the increasingly chilly nights that the Swedish-Finnish army dragged itself out of Finland. Those who remained were Finnish civilians, who were left to the Russian authorities, with their demands for a pledge of allegiance to a new ruler. In addition, there was a Russian army with an inexhaustible need for food and shelter.

**IT IS THIS IMPORTANT MONTH** in the collective Swedish-Finnish past that is the starting point for historian of ideas Nils Erik Forsgård's book. The book gives a series of snapshots, or on-the-spot accounts, that capture the events from several perspectives. It is precisely in the different perspectives that the pre-sentation has its decisive strength. Classic historical events like the Finnish War often tend to be described on the basis of old, ingrained patterns of thought. Forsgård's book exemplifies the renaissance in research into the Finnish War that took place in the 1990s. The purely military-historical perspectives, which tended to focus on the actions of the most prominent historical actors, were increasingly joined by studies on the civilian population qua resource for the conduct of war, the consequences of the war for Finns from different social groups, and the reactions to the systematic Russian pacification policy. The explanations for why the war went the way it did multiplied, and were increasingly rooted in the preconditions of warfare – maintenance and transport – rather than being grounded simply in the decisions of highly placed commanders.

In Forsgård's well-written and illuminating book, the themes of the new research appear in many of the chapters, where we can meet people as they come to life from the source material: the plundered farmers, the refugees from Finland in Stockholm, the true Anna Bärlund and the made-up Amalia, Second Lieutenant Ljunggren, Battalion Pastor Holm, and many more. One theme that in many ways has the power to shake even a contemporary reader – even though today we are jaded because of all of the misery that we encounter daily in the media – is the ravages of disease. Illness was not only the cause of most of the losses among the soldiers, but also claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians. Forsgård brings the chilling diseases and their progression to life. The Finnish War, in the same way as almost all wars in pre-industrial Europe, quite simply was the history of the spread of illness and its lethal potential. The medical care available at the time was powerless in the face of the epidemics. The conse-

quence was population decreases and the impoverishment of settled areas. Forsgård's accounts provide support for the idea that the war hardly ended with a ceasefire, or when the peace treaty was signed on September 17, 1809. For the individual man or woman, the war continued as long as illness claimed victims and life in the material sense had not returned to normal. In many cases, it took several years before normalcy returned. The beginning and end of a war can thus in some respects be relative phenomena.

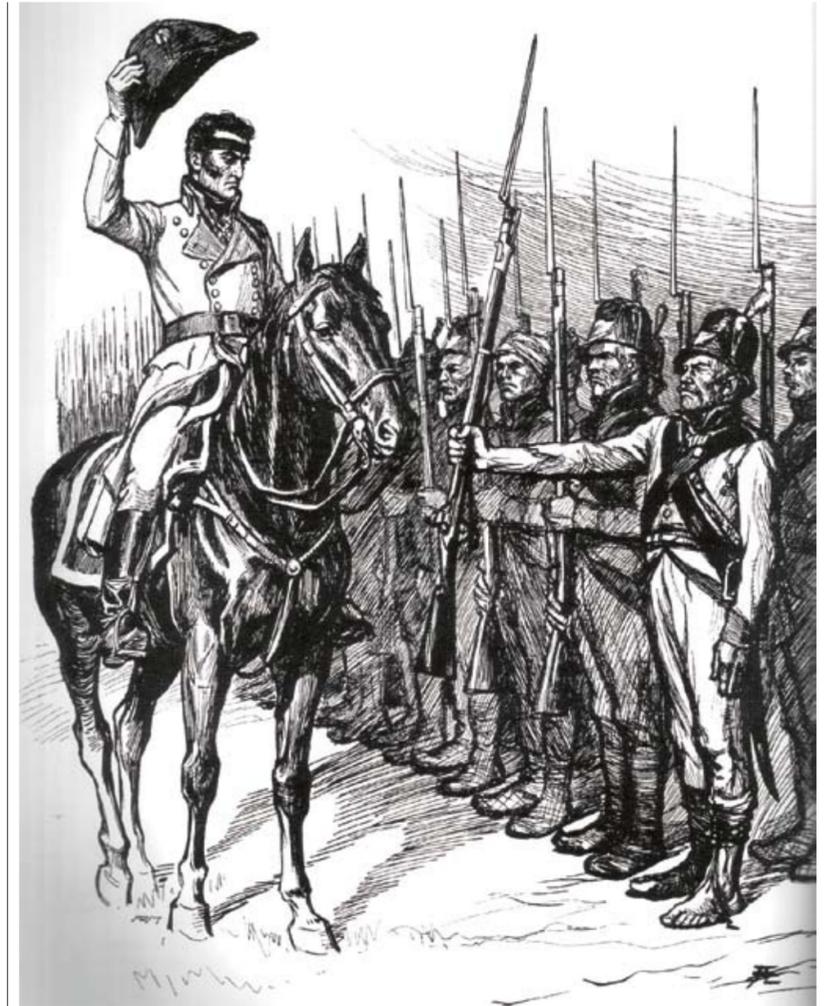
Perhaps it might have been possible to reflect even further on the women who baked the bread and the farmers who did the transporting. Here, the problem lies in the nature of the source material. The diseases have left traces, but bread-baking and troop and materiel transport have surely not done so. Nonetheless, it was likely bread-baking, transport, and the provision of accommodations that actually made the prosecution of the war possible.

Forsgård devotes considerable space to the Battle of Oravais. It was the bloodiest of all the battles. With a good eye for the overall course of events of the war, and with a sense of how it can be used for educational purposes, Forsgård sees the Battle of Oravais as illustrative of the entire war: the Russian attack on the north, the Swedish retreat, the Swedish counteroffensive, and the final Russian victory and the Swedes' desperate withdrawal. Döbeln's Battle of Jutas is of course also included in the historian of ideas' depiction of the war. This is partly because Döbeln is a compelling figure, but also because of Runeberg's poem "Döbeln vid Jutas" [Döbeln at Jutas], which surely should be numbered among the most famous of all the poems in the epic of Finnish national poetry, *Fänrik Ståls sägner* [The Tales of Ensign Stål].

**ONE CHARACTERISTIC OF FORSGÅRD'S** book still needs to be highlighted. The author himself says that he wants to open windows onto important people and events in Europe. Therefore, people such as Goethe, Beethoven, and Carl von Clausewitz figure prominently in the book. They are linked in an interesting way to events in Finland. The author has a desire here to show the reader that there is a concurrence of events in Finland and on the Continent. The war is placed in its European context. Here,

the author and I are in complete agreement. Even though the Finnish War was a "drama on the periphery of a world war" (see BW 1:1), as Max Engman puts it, it is all the same a part of the history of Europe. The Finnish War must be understood in the context of the larger developments in Europe. The suffering of individuals can perhaps be depicted without such parallels, but the suffering nonetheless acquires greater relevance with the insight that experiences in the Finnish War were shared by many other Europeans. Forsgård points out that the Finnish War can perhaps be said to have begun in 1804 – or at least 1805. Gustav IV Adolf had decided to take a stand against Napoleon in 1804, and, in 1805, broke the neutrality that had existed previously in an unmistakable way when Sweden joined the Third Coalition. That this, from a realpolitik standpoint, was disastrous, is known by all. The parallels to developments on the Continent are conveyed in Forsgård's book by, among other things, descriptions of the Congress of Erfurt in September-October 1808 – an event that took place as the Swedish army was slowly being forced out of Finland. Napoleon and Alexander I sat and discussed a continuation of the Treaty of Tilsit from the summer of 1807 – the agreement that made possible the Russian attack on Sweden in February of 1808. As far as we know, nothing was said explicitly about Finland during the Tilsit discussions. Nevertheless, top-level political matters proved decisive. No matter how one looks at the significance of the period of 1808-09, it was the caprice of the politics of Europe that led to the break-up of the Swedish Realm.

**THE TOPIC OF PEOPLE'S** war, or guerrilla war, is also addressed, where the Spanish rebellion against the French invaders has its obvious place. Perhaps it would be possible to see the uprising of the Finnish peasants as part of a European movement. One might have hoped that the discussion surrounding the Russian pacification of Finland had been given more space. While the Russians skillfully won the battle for the hearts and minds of the Finns, the French managed to completely alienate the Spanish population. The reactions and behavior of the various sections of the population regarding the new Russian regime is a delicate matter. A



Döbeln at Jutas. An illustration by Albert Edelfelt. From *The Tales of Ensign Stål*.

polarization arose between those who complied and those who resisted. In September 1808, those who had fought realized that it was over. Everything came to a head precisely during that month. Had the fight been in vain, were the sacrifices on the battlefield of Oravais simply a wasted effort? To survey such issues is perhaps not the primary task of the historian, but the issues are extremely relevant. September was the month when the outcome was decided. In retrospect, the Swedes and the Finns had a tendency, as Engman quite rightly points out, to see the historical developments as inevitable and beneficial for everyone involved. The question is: Is this really the case?

Finally, Forsgård's book can be recommended for an additional reason. The book gives a good feel for the moods that prevailed in 1808. The book should not be seen as an attempt at a complete reconstruction. Forsgård is very clear about this in his foreword. At the same time, because of the good references provided

in the book, the reader has the possibility of comparing the often problematic sources, in the form of diaries and memoirs, with today's research. This gives the author's work a certain solidity. Forsgård has helped to shed light on the chain of events and circumstances that became the dissolution of the Swedish-Finnish Kingdom.

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