

When Finland was lost

Background, Course of Events and Reactions

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Summary

Since 1809 the loss of Finland has been discussed in different ways in Swedish history research. In the early 20th century the burst of the state was seen in a nationalistic perspective. It was said that the people in Sweden, or the “public opinion”, with despair and in a “nationalistic trauma” received the news bulletins from the peace agreement in Fredrikshamn 1809, which was interpreted the worst defeat ever in Swedish history. Nowadays researchers argue whether the loss of Finland really was seen as a nationalistic trauma in the early 19th century. The article first summarises the background of the war and the most important war episodes and then discusses the apprehension of a Sweden in national chock after the burst of the state.

Zusammenfassung

Der Verlust Finnlands 1809 wurde in der schwedischen Historiographie unter unterschiedlichen Vorzeichen diskutiert. Während des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts wurde das Aufbrechen des Staates aus einer nationalistischen Perspektive betrachtet. Man argumentierte, dass die Menschen in Schweden, oder die „öffentliche Meinung“, die Nachricht vom Friedensschluss in Fredrikshamn 1809 mit Verzweiflung und unter der Prämisse eines „nationalen Traumas“ entgegengenommen hätten, so dass dieser als schlimmste Niederlage in der schwedischen Geschichte interpretiert wurde. Zeitgenössische Forscher hinterfragen, ob der Verlust Finnlands im frühen 19. Jahrhundert tatsächlich als nationales Trauma empfunden wurde. Dieser Artikel fasst zunächst den Hintergrund des Krieges und seine wichtigsten Ereignissen zusammen, um im Anschluss das Verständnis von Schweden im Zustand eines nationalen Schocks nach der Abtrennung Finnlands zu problematisieren.

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Introduction

The most important political consequence of the Finnish War, fought between Sweden and Russia from 1808 to 1809, was the ensuing annexation of Finland as an autonomous part of Russia. The peace treaty, signed in the Finnish city of Fredrikshamn in September 1809, cost Sweden one third of its territory and one fourth of its population. Since the 14th century Finland had been politically, culturally and economically integrated in the Swedish realm, but from the 17th of September 1809 onwards, it was consequently separated from “the motherland.”¹

Swedish historical research often describes the loss of Finland, or the partitioning of the Swedish state, as the most painful peace treaty in Swedish history. Some scholars have even portrayed the Treaty of Fredrikshamn as a national trauma or even as a national catastrophe. But even though the loss of Finland can be seen as a disaster, one can also assert that both Finland and Sweden benefited greatly due to this treaty. For

¹ In recent years, due to the 200-year remembrance of the cession of Finland, a great deal of attention has been paid in Sweden and Finland to the war of 1808–1809 and its consequences. For example, there have been conferences and exhibitions on the topic. Additionally, a great number of books and articles have been written. See for example: Linder, Jan: *Riket sprängs 1809, Sverige och Finland under Napoleonkrigen*. Stockholm 2008; Forsgård, Nils Erik: *September 1808*. Stockholm 2009; Lundin, Lars: *Kriget som bär Napoleons skugga: Finska kriget 1808-1809*. Helsingfors 2008; Gullberg, Tom et al: *Finskt krig – svenskt arv: Finlands historia genom nyckelhålet 1808-1809*. Helsingfors 2008; Malmberg, Ingvar von (ed.): *Stormvindar: En bok om ödesåret 1809*. Stockholm 2009; Engman, Max (ed.): *Fänrikens marknadsminne: Finska kriget 1808-1809 och dess följder i eftervärldens ögon*. Helsingfors 2009; Jansson, Torkel: *Rikssprängningen som kom av sig*. Stockholm 2009; Gussarsson Wijk, Maria: “Kartan och kriget: finska kriget 1808-1809 i Krigsarkivets samlingar”. In: *Biblis* 12 (2009:1), 112–120; Kuvaja, Christer et al: *Det åländska folkets historia, 4, från finska kriget till Ålandsrörelsen, 1808-1920*. Mariehamn 2008; Sandin, Per (ed.): *Rikssprängning och begynnelse: 200-årsminnet av finska kriget*. Helsingfors 2009; Jarolf, Tage: “Med kriget i biblioteket: inredningsarkitekt Kaj Johansson och hans samling skrifter om Finska kriget 1808-1809”. In: Tage Jarolf (ed.): *När jag får lite pengar så köper jag böcker*. Helsingfors 2008, 65–109; Mickwitz, Joachim (ed.): *Havet, minnet, slaget: kriget 1808–1809*. Stockholm 2009; Bergquist, Mats: “Var kriget 1808-1809 oundvikligt? Legitimitet och svenska optioner”. In: *Kungliga krigsvetenskapssakademiens handlingar och tidskrifter* 213 (2009:3), 85–98; Asplund Ingemark, Camilla and Wassholm, Johanna: *Historiska sägner om 1808–1809 års krig*. Helsingfors 2009; Klinge, Matti: *Napoleons skugga: baler, bataljer och Finlands tillkomst*. Helsingfors 2009.

example, there were no wars in the 19th century between Sweden and Russia, whereas in the 18th century there were three. Sweden has in fact not been involved in any major wars since the Finnish War of 1808–1809. Peace and the absence of costly wars were important prerequisites for the economic growth that Sweden experienced during the 19th century. In Finland, the new political position as a relatively autonomous grand duchy of the Russian Empire had arguably positive results. Finland gained the opportunity to slowly develop its own political and economical institutions. Formally, Finland was a part of Russia, but in practice Finland resembled an independent state with its own legislature, which in fact followed Swedish law (*Sveriges Rikes Lag*) from 1734. This practical self-rule lasted until the so-called 'Russification' of Finland at the end of the 19th century. Finland would probably not have had the same level of autonomy had it remained part of Sweden. Additionally, had Sweden won the Finnish War of 1808–1809, there would likely have been several more devastating wars fought on Finnish territory.

The Napoleonic Wars and the Treaty of Tilsit

The war between Sweden and Russia in 1808–1809 must be discussed in the broader context of the Napoleonic Wars (1800–1815), which influenced all states in Europe in one way or another.² In the beginning, Sweden adopted a neutral stance and did not take part in any coalition activities against France. However, Sweden's relations with France were successively strained; after 1804 it was palpable that Sweden was hostile to France and above all to Napoleon Bonaparte. The Swedish king Gustav IV Adolf was an outspoken enemy of Napoleon, whom he saw as an illegitimate ruler. Thereafter, diplomatic relations between Sweden and France were cancelled and French newspapers and books were rigorously censored. In 1805, Sweden declared war on France in the Pomeranian war of 1805–1807. The result was a humiliating defeat for Sweden: many Swedish soldiers and officers were captured by the French. The commander of the French forces was

² For surveys about Sweden in the Napoleonic wars and the war against Russia, see Carlsson, Sten and Rosén, Jerker: *Svensk historia II – Tiden efter 1718*. Stockholm 1961; Sandström, Allan: *Sveriges sista krig*. Örebro 1994; Hårdstedt, Martin: *Finska kriget 1808–1809*. Stockholm 2006.

a marshal named Jean Baptiste Bernadotte. In the summer of 1810, he was elected as the new heir to the Swedish throne after the dethroning of Gustav IV Adolf.

As an antagonist to France, Sweden benefited from British economic and political assistance. Great Britain was France's strongest enemy during the Napoleonic Wars. The diplomatic relationship with Great Britain was a very important element in Swedish foreign policy during the Napoleonic Wars. Temporarily, British maritime military forces were even stationed in the Baltic Sea and Gulf of Bothnia as a protection against Russian, French and Danish forces.

From the Nordic and Swedish-Finnish perspectives, the peace treaty of Tilsit in July 1807 is a very important explanation of the Russian attack on Finland in February 1808. At that time, Napoleon Bonaparte and France were at the height of their power and nothing seemed to be able to end French successes on the battlefields of Europe. The coalition powers Austria, Prussia and Russia were defeated at the significant battles of Austerlitz (1805), Jena (1806), Auerstädt (1806) and Friedland (1807). Great Britain had not yet been beaten, but at this time the Britons were defensive and mainly focused on securing their maritime dominions. In Tilsit, the Russian emperor Alexander I accepted, at least temporarily, French hegemony in Central Europe. In exchange, Napoleon gave Alexander I the right to act freely in Northern Europe, preferably against Sweden and Finland. Another important French aim of the Tilsit treaty was to forge an economic blockade directed against Great Britain. Therefore all European states, including Sweden, were forced not to take part in any commerce with British interests. This blockade, which was called "the continental system", was in fact very ineffective. Smuggling flourished, above all in Swedish cities such as Karlshamn and Gothenburg.

Sweden maintained, not formally but in practice, its political and economical ties to Great Britain. This was not the case for Denmark, which resulted in a brutal British bombardment of Copenhagen in the beginning of September 1807. Thereafter, Denmark was an outspoken enemy of Great Britain and thus a loyal ally to France, a development which was very ominous for Sweden. Now it was surrounded by enemies: Russia in the East, France to the South West and the Denmark-Norway to the West. The political situation in Sweden was consequently very precarious in the autumn of 1807. Soon Russia, Sweden's arch-enemy since the 18th century, launched an attack on Finland.

When Finland was lost, the king dethroned and a new constitution inaugurated

The Russians had probably planned an attack on Finland for a long time. For them, it was important to gain control over the Baltic Sea for military and economic reasons. Therefore, Alexander I was eager to conquer Finland, especially the southern parts of the country. In fact, this had been a Russian aim since Saint Petersburg had become the capital of Russia in 1712. In the 18th century, Sweden and Russia had fought wars over Finland three times. During the Great Northern War of 1700–1721 and during the war of the 1740s, Finland even was periodically occupied by Russia.

Consequently, the attack on the 22nd of February, 1808, when Russian forces crossed the Kymmene river in southeastern Finland, should not have been the shock for the Swedish military that it was. Only a few days prior to the attack the Swedish envoy to Saint Petersburg, Curt von Stedingk, was assured that the Russian emperor did not plan an assault. However, there were many signs, such as large troop movements, that indicated an upcoming Russian invasion. Maybe the Swedish military leadership, including the king and the commander of the Finnish army Wilhelm Mauritz von Klingspor (who was in Sweden when the attack was launched!) thought that the winter was too cold for military activities. On the night of the 21st of February, the temperature was 30 degrees below zero (Celsius), and there was heavy snowfall. Perhaps the Swedish leadership expected Alexander I to focus on strategic interests in Central and Eastern Europe, above all in the regions belonging to the Ottoman Empire, instead of attacking Finland. As a result of this, the Russians encountered hardly any resistance at all in the beginning of the war. The Swedish forces even neglected the destroying of some important bridges, and as a result of this, Russian troops could easily reach the southern parts of Finland.

The Swedish military plan presupposed that the Finnish Army would retreat to central and northern Finland to wait for reinforcements during spring and summer of 1808. Fortresses such as Svartholm and Sveaborg, situated at the coast of the Baltic Sea, were expected to resist Russian attacks and become important centres for possible future counterattacks.

On the 22nd of March, the conquerors won an important victory when the main city in Finland at that time, Åbo, was conquered. Symbolically, the Russian takeover of Åbo was very important, since the Russians henceforward controlled the centres of the church and

the university as well as important administrative organs.³ It was even more crucial that the dignitaries of Åbo – university teachers, priests and merchants – voluntarily accepted the Russian invasion. In general, the occupation of southern Finland proceeded quite calmly. The people in Finland were tired of devastating wars in which they always lost people and economic assets. The Russians also promised that Finland would not be forced into serfdom or Russian-Orthodox Christianity. It was important for the Russians that the locals cooperated, since the Russian army, as well as the Swedish one, needed supplies of food, shelter and horses for the army. Generally, the Russians solved logistic problems better than the Swedes did.⁴

Resistance against the Russian invasion was more common among Finland's lower social classes, such as peasants, burghers and craftsmen. There were even some brutal peasant rebellions on the Åland Islands and in Österbotten, which the Russians feared very much. However, the Swedish king and military leadership were disappointed with the fact that so few Finnish peasants revolted against the conquerors. In fact, the absence of peasant rebellions was one important reason why the Swedish counter offensive failed in the summer of 1808.⁵

As I mentioned earlier, the fortress of Sveaborg was essential for the Swedish war plan. The Russians realised that with the taking of Sveaborg, they would undisputedly control the southern coast of Finland. In March 1808 they besieged the fortress, which had approximately 6 800 soldiers, 2 000 artillery pieces and a great number of war vessels. In spite of his orders to defend Sveaborg, the commander – Admiral Carl Olof Cronstedt – surrendered quite easily on the 6th of May, 1808. Even if the loss of Sveaborg did not determine the outcome of the war, it had a great negative symbolic impact on the army and

³ The university, which was founded by the Swedish queen Christina in 1640, was moved to Helsinki in 1827 and renamed “The Imperial Alexander University” (“Kejsrerliga Alexander-universitetet”). Before, it was called “The Royal Academy of Åbo” (“Kungliga Akademien i Åbo”).

⁴ Martin Hårdstedt has convincingly argued that logistical dilemmas caused a large number of problems for Swedish warfare. In fact, Hårdstedt's point is that Swedish logistical failures are one important explanation of why Sweden lost the war. See: Hårdstedt, Martin: *Om krigets förutsättningar – Den militära underhållsproblematiken och det civila samhället i norra Sverige och Finland under finska kriget 1808–1809*. Umeå 2002.

⁵ About the peasant resistance, see Persson, Anders: *1808: Gerillakriget i Finland*. Stockholm 1986.

on the military leadership, since the fortress of Sveaborg was perceived to be impenetrable. It also remains unknown why Cronstedt surrendered. Until today, scholars have not been able to give a satisfying answer to the question why Sveaborg was abandoned. Perhaps the admiral was convinced that the war would be lost anyway, irrespective of the possession of Sveaborg. It is obvious that many of the soldiers at the fortress did not share the opinions of their commander. Some of them were very disappointed and some wanted to kill the admiral on the spot. In the historiography of the Finnish war, Cronstedt has ever since been portrayed as one of the worst traitors in Swedish history.

From the spring of 1808 onwards, the battles of the Finnish War were mainly fought in the regions of Savolax, the Åland Islands and Österbotten. During this phase, the Finnish Army won some prestigious victories. In April, Russian forces were defeated in the battles of Siikajoki and Revolax. In the middle of July, the Russians were beaten in the famous battle of Lappo. At this time, the Finnish army doubtlessly was quite successful and some of its leaders – for example Georg Carl von Döbeln, Johan August Sandels and Carl Johan Adlercreutz – were looked upon as war heroes.

However, Swedish and Finnish victories were only occasional. A major Swedish counter-offensive, orchestrated by the Swedish king from the Åland Islands in the summer of 1808, was a total failure. Soon, the Russians came back with more soldiers and forced the Finnish army to withdraw to the northern parts of Finland. After the decisive battle of Oravais, on the 14th of September 1808, the Finnish army had to retreat constantly until it crossed the border into Sweden in December of 1808.⁶ Finland was lost and would never again be a part of Sweden. At the time of the battle of Oravais, which was one of the bloodiest clashes in the war, there were around 18 000 soldiers in the Finnish Army.⁷ Due to illnesses (mostly typhoid fever and dysentery), deaths in battles and desertions, the army was reduced to around 8 000 men when it came to Sweden a couple of months later.

⁶ At the time of the war, the Swedish army was organized into three parts: The southern army (stationed in the south of Sweden), the western army (stationed in the west of Sweden against an attack from Denmark–Norway) and the Finnish army. In the Finnish army there were officers and soldiers from both Sweden and Finland.

⁷ In Oravais, 740 Swedish and 900 Russian soldiers died in the battle field. Many soldiers on both sides later died from injuries received during the fighting. For more information about the battle of Oravais, see Backman, Göran (ed.): *Slaget vid Oravais 1808–2008: 200-årsminnet av "två ödesdagar" i Nykarleby och Oravais 13-14 september*. Oravais 2008.

In March 1809 the political situation in Sweden was very serious. Finland was definitely lost and there were Russian troops on the Åland Islands as well as in the northern parts of Sweden (around the cities of Umeå and Skellefteå). For some days in March 1809, there had also been a Russian contingent, under the leadership of the legendary commander Jakov Kulnev, in Grisslehamn, just 60 kilometres from Stockholm. At the same time there was a concrete military threat from the west, where the Danes, supported by the French, were ready to attack Sweden. Consequently, the existence of an independent Sweden was at stake; there were even plans for Russia and Denmark to conquer and divide Sweden amongst them.

At the same time, dissatisfaction with the Swedish king Gustav IV Adolf was widespread, especially among high-ranking military officials who blamed the king for the failure of the war in Finland. Many politicians and public officials were also discontented with Sweden's opposition to Napoleon and France. They blamed Gustav IV Adolf for repudiating Bonaparte, which they believed had caused Sweden's loss of Finland. The financial advisors in the government also disagreed constantly with the king. The main dispute was about the king's plans to recapture Finland in the spring of 1809. On the 13th of March Gustav IV Adolf was dethroned in a bloodless coup d'état. It was in fact a general from the Finnish army, Carl Johan Adlercreutz, who arrested the king at the castle in Stockholm. It is remarkable that a Swedish army contingent (the Western army), under the command of Georg Adlersparre, marched from the Western parts of Sweden (Karlstad) to Stockholm in support of the coup d'état.⁸ One very significant result of dethroning Gustav IV Adolf was that a new constitution was legislated on the 6th of June in 1809.⁹ The main aim of that constitution was to avoid an autocratic ruler as well as an overly powerful parliament. Sweden had experienced deterrent examples of autocratic rulers during the reign of Gustav the III (1771–1792) and his son Gustav IV Adolf (1796–1809).¹⁰ The negative

⁸ About the march of the western army from Karlstad to Stockholm, see Hemström, Mats: *Marschen mot makten: västra arméns revolt och väg till Stockholm 1809*. Uppsala 2005.

⁹ Sweden celebrates its national day on the 6th of June as a remembrance of the creation of the constitution. Accordingly, in 2009 several books have been published which have focused on the constitution of 1809 and its consequences, see for example Brundin, Margareta and Isberg, Magnus (eds.): *Maktbalans och kontrollmakt – 1809 års händelser, idéer och författningsverk i ett tvåhundraårigt perspektiv*. Stockholm 2009.

¹⁰ Since Gustav IV Adolf was too young to be a king when his father died, Sweden was ruled by a regency from 1792–1796.

experiences of a strong and self ruling parliament during the era of 1718–1772 (“the age of liberty”) were also important when the new constitution was forged. Now it was decided that the political institutions of Sweden would rest upon three pillars: the king, the parliament and the Supreme Court. In reality, the Supreme Court had limited powers. It was mainly the power balance between the king/government and the parliament that was elaborated. To control the government and the parliament, freedom of the press was legislated in March 1810. In fact, it was already introduced directly after the coup d’état. The constitution of 1809 was legally valid until 1974; of course, there were many amendments and supplements, but its long duration demonstrates how important it has been. It is obvious that it would not have been implemented in 1809 if the king had not been dethroned and the coup d’état would not have occurred if Sweden had won the war.

The immediate threat from Denmark disappeared when French troops, under the leadership of Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, left Denmark in the spring of 1809. There were still Russian troops in the north of Sweden but after two major battles at Sävar and Ratan in August 1809, the war between Sweden and Russia ended. The peace agreement in Fredrikshamn was settled, after some disputes, on the 17th of September 1809. It was decided that Finland, as a Grand Duchy, should be a part of the Russian Empire, that the Åland Islands would belong to Russia, that the northern border between Sweden and Russia would be placed at the Torneå and Muonio rivers and that Sweden would join the continental blockade against Great Britain. The partitioning of the Swedish state was now a reality. How have Swedish historical scholars dealt with this fact?

Swedish historical research about the partitioning of the Swedish state in 1809

Most Swedish historical surveys of the loss of Finland and its consequences are written by historians who lived at the end of the 19th or at the beginning of the 20th centuries. This was an era when the academic discipline of history was rather young and chiefly influenced by nationalistic ideas.¹¹ Towards the end of the 19th century, mass nationalism fo-

¹¹ For more information about the nationalistic and state-centric historical paradigm in Sweden in the end of the 19th century, see Zander, Ulf: *Fornstora dagar, moderna tider – Bruk av debater om svensk historia från sekelskifte till sekelskifte*. Lund 2001, 75f; Torstendahl, Rolf: *Källkritik och vetenskapssyn i svensk historisk forskning 1820–1920*. Uppsala 1964, 181.

cussing on the state's unique ethnicity, language, culture and history had a breakthrough all over Europe – Sweden and Finland were no exceptions. The British historian Eric Hobsbawm has discussed this era of European history as a period when the state consciously invented or strengthened national myths and traditions. National anthems were introduced; the state sponsored and built national museums and national parks; people started to wave flags; states competed with each other at events such as world exhibitions or Olympic Games.¹²

Seen through this nationalistic lens, history became very important to prove how the dominant nation of the state had a glorious past. In the case of Sweden, scholars focused on the honourable past of the 17th and early 18th centuries when Sweden had been a European power. The founding father of Sweden, Gustav Vasa, and the kings Gustav II Adolf, Karl IX, Karl X, Karl XI and Karl XII got a lot of attention, since they had made Sweden famous throughout Europe. In this context, the loss of Finland in 1809 was also important, as it was seen as a final blow to a Swedish supremacy of Northern Europe. After the partitioning of the state, Sweden gradually became an insignificant power in the outskirts of Europe.

For the nationalist historians of the early 20th century, it was obvious that the humiliating loss of Finland was a traumatic national catastrophe. They took it for granted that the people in the early 19th century had shared similar feelings. For example, the very well known Swedish historian Carl Grimberg, in 1923, stated:

With despair in their hearts, the Swedish representatives in Fredrikshamn on the 17th of September 1809 had to sign the saddest peace agreement ever in Swedish history, a peace that tore Finland, the Åland islands and Swedish Lappland in Västerbotten, near the rivers of Torneå and Muonio, from the Swedish motherland: a country that had given the people of Finland its free society, its religion and its culture.¹³

¹² Hobsbawm Eric: *Nationer och nationalism* [Nations and nationalism]. Stockholm 1990, 106.

¹³ ”Med förtvivlan i hjärtat måste de svenska ombuden i Fredrikshamn den 17 september 1809 underteckna den sorgligaste fred vårt land någonsin slutit, en fred som lösryckte hela Finland jämte Åland samt svenska Lappmarken med Västerbotten intill Muonio och Torneå älvar från det svenska moderlandet, från det land, som givit Finlands folk dess fria samhällsordning, dess religion och kultur.” Grimberg, Carl: *Svenska folkets underbara öden VIII. 1809 års män, Karl Johans och Oskar I:s tid samt vårt näringsliv och kommunikationsväsen under teknikens tidevarv*. Stockholm 1923, 46.

Grimberg was not alone in his grieving for Finland.¹⁴ In fact, until very recently this interpretation of the annexation of Finland has dominated Swedish historical surveys, not only in textbooks, of how people in Sweden perceived the situation. From the 1960s the nationalist paradigm in Swedish academic history writing has been weakening. The nationalistic apprehension of 1809 has slowly been questioned and criticized. Scholars have become less focused on what happened in the war and why it was lost. They are more interested in long-term political, cultural, economical and social consequences for people in Sweden as well as in Finland.¹⁵ When such new historical questions are posed, it becomes evident that the notion of a country in national shock or despair after 1809 is far from an obvious reality.

¹⁴ See for example: Boëthius, Simon Johannes: *Sveriges historia från äldsta tid till våra dagar*. Stockholm 1879; Odhner, Clas Theodor: *Lärobok i fäderneslandets historia samt grunddragen af Norges och Danmarks historia – För skolans lägre klasser*. Stockholm 1902; Clason, Sam and Hildebrand, Emil: *Sveriges historia*. Stockholm 1910; Andersson, Ingvar: *Sveriges historia*. Stockholm 1938; Höjer, Torvald T:son: *Karl XIV Johan – Kronprinstiden*. Stockholm 1954; Carlsson and Rosén 1961, as footnote 2; Elenius, Lars: “Förlusten av Finland – ett svenskt trauma”. In: Raoul Granqvist (ed.): *Svenska överord*. Eslöv 1999, 75–92.

¹⁵ See for example: Klinge, Matti: *Runebergs två fosterland*. Helsingfors 1983; Karvonen, Lauri: “Likadan på ett annat sätt. Sverige som motpol och model”. In: *Historisk tidskrift för Finland*, 77 (1992), 529–547; Tarkiainen, Kari: *Finnarnas historia i Sverige 2*. Helsingfors 1993; Tarkiainen, Kari: “Svenska finlandsuppfattningar under 200 år”. In: Anders Björnsson and Tapani Suominen (eds.): *Det hotade landet och det skyddade*. Stockholm 1999, 67–86; Sjöstrand, Per Olof: *Hur Finland vanns för Sverige – En historia för nationalstater*. Uppsala 1996; Elenius 1999, as footnote 14 (though Elenius says that the loss of Finland in 1809 was a national trauma, he has a long term perspective on how the cession of Finland was perceived in Sweden during the 19th and 20th centuries); Sandström, Åke: “Den svenska identiteten och synen på Finland 1808–1860”. In: Tapani Suominen (ed.): *Statsmannakonst eller opportunism. En antologi om 1812 års politik*. Stockholm 2002, 191–205; Idem: “Sverige 1809–1864”. In: Max Engman and Åke Sandström (eds): *Det nya Norden efter Napoleon*. Stockholm 2004, 262–263; Idem: “Sökandet efter en ny svensk identitet – Om svensk självsyn och synen på Finland 1808–1860”. In: Max Engman and Nils Erik Villstrand (eds): *Maktens mosaik – Enhet, särart och självbild i det svenska riket*. Helsingfors 2008, 381–402; Jansson, Torkel: “Två stater – en kultur”. In: Tapani Suominen (ed.): *Sverige i fred, statsmannakonst eller opportunism: en antologi om 1812 års politik*. Stockholm 2002, 151–176; Idem 2009, as footnote 1; Samuelsson, Jan: *Eliten, riket och riksdelen: sociala nätverk och geografisk mobilitet mellan Sverige och Finland 1720–1820*. Helsingfors 2008; Edgren, Henrik: *Publicitet för medborgsmannavett – Det nationellt svenska i Stockholmstidningar 1810–1831*. Uppsala 2005; Idem: “Nationell katastrof, bortglömmade eller ointresse? Finland i Sverige från rikssprängningen fram till 1830-talet”. In: Malmberg 2009, as footnote 1, 299–318.

Was the loss of Finland a Swedish national trauma?

The loss of Finland was certainly a disaster for the king, Gustav IV Adolf, and his leading officials in the government and military as well as for the participating soldiers and their families, who had lost their loved ones. But was it really a trauma or crisis for the national Swedish identity? Did a large number of people mourn the loss of Finland? Is it appropriate at all to talk about a widespread common national identity in the beginning of the 19th century, when mass nationalism was a phenomenon that did not occur until the second half of the 19th century?

It is difficult to estimate the attitudes of a large population or of a public opinion. However, there are some institutions in a society that can be regarded as indicators of views among a greater number of people. One such institution is the political press, which is a kind of representative or a mouthpiece of a public opinion. If the loss of Finland was apprehended as a national catastrophe, there should plausibly have been some screaming about it in contemporary newspapers and lampoons.

This was not the case, however. It is really remarkable that the cession of Finland was very seldom discussed at all in Swedish newspapers and lampoons during and after the war. The results of the major battles were only reported (for example the surrender of Sveaborg in May 1808), and there were no longer articles contemplating how disastrous it was that Sweden was losing the war and how precarious the political situation was when Russian troops were controlling the northern parts of Sweden proper.¹⁶ Not even after the coup d'état in March 1809, when there suddenly were opportunities for a free press to prosper, were there such articles in the newspapers. Instead of an atmosphere of national trauma, there were celebrations and festivities in Stockholm during the spring and early summer of 1809, especially around the 6th of June, when the new constitution was legislated. In spite of the debacle in Finland, the leading commanders of the Finnish army – Wilhelm Mauritz Klingspor and Carl Johan Adlercreutz – were honoured with medals and poems for their war efforts.¹⁷

The mourning of the partition of the state seems to have been overshadowed by the celebration of the dethroning of the king Gustav IV Adolf and the forging of a new

¹⁶ Sandström 2008, as footnote 15, 387.

¹⁷ Sandström 2002, as footnote 15, 195.

power balancing constitution. Maybe the loss of Finland did not matter to public opinion or perhaps the people counted on recapturing Finland in a near future. It is however evident that there was no loud voice crying in the newspapers and lampoons about how the Swedish national pride had been mutilated when Finland was lost.¹⁸

In January 1810 there was nevertheless an exception to the silence about Finland in the political press. In the paper *Journal för Litteraturen och Theatern* one writer expressed gratitude to all men who had fought bravely on the battlefields of Revolax, Lappo and Alavo. It was important that these “Finns” (*finnar*) were not forgotten, even if the situation in Sweden was precarious and turbulent at the moment.¹⁹ It is not obvious what the writer really referred to when the concept of *finnar* (Finns) was used. Today it is quite undisputable that a “Finn” (*en finne*) is a person with ethnic Finnish origin who speaks Finnish and is accustomed to a typical Finnish culture, etc. In the context of 1809 however, a “Finn” could also be just a person who fought in the war against Russia.²⁰ It did not matter if he was born in Sweden or in any other country. It was also irrelevant if he lacked Finnish ethnic origin or had no knowledge of the Finnish language; he was still considered a “Finn.” In the same way, the definition of a “Swede”, or a person of any other nationality, was not necessarily characterized solely by ethnicity and language as it was later in the 19th century.²¹ Accordingly, since people did not identify themselves primarily by national origin, it is quite confusing and even perhaps anachronistic to presuppose that the nationalistic feelings were the same in the early 19th as in the late 19th century. Probably, people thought that they belonged to a family, guild, village, region, state, king and a religion, rather than being a part of a unique ethnic and cultural nation. Even if it is deceptive to describe the reactions among the Swedish populace as a national trauma, people must of course have been upset when Finland was lost since it doubtlessly was a harsh military defeat. This was also a fact in some circles.

¹⁸ Torvald T:son Höjer, a prestigious historian in Sweden during the first half of the 20th century, argued that the peace treaty in Fredrikshamn in fact was a “mutilation” of the Swedish “state body” and that it resulted in wounds that, 150 years later, had not yet healed. See Höjer 1954, as footnote 14, 134.

¹⁹ *Journal för Litteraturen och Theatern*, No. 7, 10th Jan 1810.

²⁰ Sandström 2008, as footnote 15, 486.

²¹ Edgren 2005, as footnote 15, 307ff.

In some contexts there were outspoken manifestos of revenge and a recapture of Finland. In 1811, for example, the “Gothic Association” (*Götiska Förbundet*) was founded. Here some of the most prominent Swedish authors, officials, university teachers, politicians and priests participated, such as Gudmund Göran Adlerbeth, Esaias Tegnér and Erik Gustaf Geijer. The purpose was to rebuild the Swedish national identity and to revive older Swedish values from ancient times. Early on, for example in Tegnér’s famous poem *Svea*, there were ideas of recapturing Finland.²² There were also similar thoughts among some former participants in the war, especially among those who were born in Finland.²³ There were some signs of national shame or a trauma among a very limited number of Swedish people, but still, they were surprisingly few.

The period of 1811–1812 was the first and only time during the 1810s and 1820s when some newspapers solidly discussed the result of the war and if Sweden should recapture its former eastern half. Three newspapers were involved: *Allmän Politisk Journal*, *Nya Posten* and *Skandinaven*. The editor of *Allmän Politisk Journal*, Adolf Regnér, published an article about a possible reunion of Sweden and Finland. Regnér asserted that this was a likely scenario, but Sweden could not realize it on its own or just with the assistance of the inhabitants of Finland. Regnér’s solution was that Napoleon and France had to assist Sweden. To get the support from Napoleon, Sweden needed to regain her confidence by severing all economic and political ties to Great Britain. Regnér also thought that the Russians would voluntarily agree to let Finland go, if French troops supported the Russians in their war against the Ottoman Empire. He also foresaw a future conflict between Russia and France, which actually occurred in the summer of 1812 when French troops invaded Russia.²⁴

Regnér was not alone in Sweden hoping for French assistance in a recapture of Finland. Indeed, one of the main reasons for electing the French marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte as the new Swedish successor to the throne in the summer of 1810 was the expectation of support from France (Napoleon) in a new war against Russia. However,

²² In the lampoon of Per Elgström from 1810, *Om ett patriotiskt tänkesätt* (“About patriotism”), there were similar addresses.

²³ Gustaf Adolf Montgomery, who participated in the war, wrote in 1812 a proclamation to the Finnish people where he encouraged them to revolt against the Russian emperor. See Tarkiainen 1993, as footnote 15, 77.

²⁴ *Allmän Politisk Journal*, No. 3, 14th Sep 1811.

it was soon obvious that Bernadotte and Napoleon were far from good friends. Instead, Bernadotte realised that the most strategic action was to become an ally with Alexander I of Russia and consequently cancel any plans for recapturing Finland. With help from Russia and her allies, Sweden could instead ‚diplomatically conquer‘ Norway. This is in fact what happened when Bernadotte, in the autumn of 1812, promised Swedish support to Russia and its allies in the battles against France. In exchange Alexander guaranteed that Russia would help Sweden gain Norway, which was realized in the autumn of 1814.²⁵ This shift in Swedish foreign policy, when Bernadotte strived to stay on good terms with the great powers of both Russia and Great Britain, is called “the policy of 1812” and is sometimes interpreted as a first step towards the well-known neutrality policy that characterized Swedish foreign relations during the 20th century.²⁶

“The policy of 1812” was evident when Swedish officials reacted to Regnér’s article. Since Bernadotte and Sweden now planned to build an alliance with Russia, it was not considered appropriate for the Swedish public to discuss a recapture of Finland. Therefore, *Allmän Politisk Jurnal* was withdrawn and Regnér was prosecuted. He was sentenced to three years in prison. Concerning sensitive foreign policy matters, there was apparently no freedom of the press.

Karl XIV Johan did not only act repressively against bold and outspoken publicists, he also actively supported publicists to write articles in accordance with “the policy of 1812”. For example, the publicist Carl Axel Grevesmöhlen was paid to compose texts which supported the opinions of Karl XIV Johan. In a newspaper – *Skandinaven* (“The Scandinave”) – he promulgated that Finland had been a very expensive province, which had not benefited Sweden at all. Further, Sweden was at the moment not able to defend Finland with its own forces; it needed alliances to achieve the necessary military power against a Russian aggressor. The only alternative at the time was a very hazardous alliance with France, which would most likely result in a conflict with Rus-

²⁵ There were some minor battles between Swedish and Norwegian forces during a couple of weeks the summer of 1814. However, the Swedish military was superior and the fighting soon ended.

²⁶ For a discussion on the historical roots of Swedish neutrality policy in the early 19th century, see Wahlbäck, Krister: *The roots of Swedish neutrality*. Stockholm 1986; Talvitie, Heikki: “Sverige och 1812 års politik”. In: Suominen 2002, as footnote 15, 15–74.

sia and Great Britain. After the partitioning of Sweden, Grevesmöhlen stipulated that Sweden dared not risk another devastating attack; instead the time had come to improve relations with Russia. Grevesmöhlen's solution to better relations was to develop commerce between the two former arch rivals.²⁷ "The policy of 1812" could not have been mediated in a more proper way. The newspaper's name *Skandinaven* also clearly indicated that Sweden now should turn westwards towards the Scandinavian peninsula, and accordingly abandon Finland. The publicist Bengt Johan Törnebladh strongly opposed the opinions of Grevesmöhlen in the newspaper *Nya Posten*. Törnebladh believed that the economic assets of Finland had been very poorly utilized. Quite contrary to Grevesmöhlen, Törnebladh argued that Sweden was still able to defend Finland militarily, without any support from foreign powers. The loss of Finland was not, he emphasized, a guarantee to hinder future Russian assaults on Sweden.²⁸

During the following years, there were conspicuously few newspaper articles and lampoons written about the partition of the state. On a few occasions there were some paragraphs dealing with the commerce between Finland and Sweden and how Swedish agricultural production was affected by competition from Finnish agricultural articles.²⁹ Of course, judging from the fate of Adolf Regnér, it could be fatal to put forward a literal recapture of Finland. There were still many other subjects to write about where Finland could get attention. Nothing at all was written about the fact that Finland had belonged to Sweden for 600 years, whether Sweden had benefited from Finland or about how the Finnish army and lower classes of the society in Finland had bravely fought against the Russians.

However, the new political situation in Finland was at least discussed in a couple of articles in the newspaper *Nya Extra Posten* in 1821. Critical views about the situation in Finland were very rare due to "the policy of 1812." That is why these articles in *Nya Extra Posten* deserve attention. The publicist, who was the early Finnish nationalist Adolf Iwar Arwidsson, criticized how the Finns had become too dependent and subordinate to the Russians. He did not like the mix of love and fear the Finnish people held

²⁷ *Skandinaven*, No. 3, 25th Apr 1812; *Skandinaven*, No. 4, 27th Apr 1812; *Skandinaven*, No. 6, 2nd May 1812.

²⁸ *Nya Posten*, No. 36, 8th May 1812; *Nya Posten*, No. 38, 14th May 1812.

²⁹ *Allmänna Journalen*, No 108, 12th May 1820; *Journalen*, No. 91, 22nd Apr 1825; *Granskaren*, No. 60, 26th Jul 1822; *Argus den IV*, No. 33, 15th Oct 1823.

for Alexander I. Most of all, Arwidsson pointed out that the national army, founded on the allotment system, was abolished in the Borgå agreement of 1809.³⁰ For him such an army was the prerequisite for a national spirit. The main problem for Arwidsson was that Finland, under Russian rule, jeopardized its unique national spirit and awareness. Arwidsson was undoubtedly inspired by the romantic views of a nation and a “Volksgeist” promoted by German philosophers like Herder, Fichte and Hegel. Arwidsson was also critical of the way Finland had been governed while it still belonged to Sweden. He meant that Finland was often looked upon as inferior; too often officials in the military and public administration saw a mission in Finland as a degradation. Further, Arwidsson asserted that Sweden had “drained” Finland of talented and competent politicians, scientists, militaries and authors.³¹

Arwidsson’s article was the starting point for a rather intensive debate in Sweden at the end of the 1830s when some prominent scholars and debaters, like Erik Gustaf Geijer and Israel Hwasser, argued that the agreement of Borgå in March 1809 guaranteed Finland extensive autonomy.³² Others, like Arwidsson, emphatically asserted that Finland suffered harsh conditions under Russian rule.³³

³⁰ The allotment system was a way to organize the military forces of Sweden. It was founded around 1680 and lasted until 1901. Each province had its own regiment. It included a system with permanently recruited “career” soldiers. To avoid the risk of being involuntarily recruited, the farmers and country people accepted a system which guaranteed that they would not be required to perform military service. The condition was that they provide the army with soldiers. Farmers in a “rote” (ward) provided one soldier to the regiment of that province. The size of a “rote” depended on how much it could harvest. For more information about the allotment system, see Thisner, Fredrik: “Manning the armed forces: the Swedish solution”. In: Frederick Schneid and Harold Blanton (eds.): *Conscription in the Napoleonic Era: a revolution in military affairs*. London / New York 2008, 162–174.

³¹ *Nya Extra Posten*, No. 76, 21st September 1820; *Nya Extra Posten*, No. 78, 28th September 1820.

³² Borgå lantdag, which ended the 18th of July 1809, was a kind of agreement between Alexander I and the Finnish people. In a way, Finland was organized as a state with limited autonomy. It could decide what to do with taxes from Finnish territories; Finland got its own state budget; a Finnish government was formed which governed two different departments: one for economy and one for the judicature. Many people in Finland, especially among higher social groups, saw the conditions of Borgå lantdag as a considerable improvement compared with the system under Swedish rule. About Borgå lantdag, see, e.g. Hårdstedt as footnote 2, 288.

³³ See Jansson 2009, as footnote 1, 57ff.

One way to handle the partition of the state seems to have been to promulgate or invent national differences between the Swedish and the Finnish people. As I mentioned before, when Finland and Sweden were parts of the same realm, national identification was not particularly common. The meanings of the concepts “Swedish” and “Finnish” were not obvious. The newspaper *Granskaren*, which was supported financially by king Karl XIV Johan, asserted that nowhere else in the world two nations living next to each other, like the Swedes and the Finns, gave witness to such explicit differences.

The publicist Hans Axel Lindgren meant that it was surprising that the realm of Sweden and Finland had lasted for so long. Like Arwidsson, Lindgren was convinced that a state could only consist of one unique ethnic nationality.³⁴ In spite of the fact that Finland had been an integrated part of Sweden for hundreds of years – just as integrated as, and sometimes even more incorporated, than provinces like Dalecarlia, Scania or Småland – the relationship between Sweden and Finland was now described as artificial and impossible to have been sustained in the long run.³⁵ Lindgren’s opinions are quite remarkable since Finland before 1809 was hardly perceived as unique state or nation in an alliance with Sweden.³⁶ Lindgren did not discuss the fact that many “Finns” spoke the Swedish language as a mother tongue and that they were, from a cultural point of view, just as Swedish as the people who lived on the other side of the Gulf of Bothnia. It is obvious that the official policy of Sweden, in accordance with the “policy of 1812”, was to forget the fact that Finland had been a part of Sweden for 600 years.

The erasing of Finland from the Swedish consciousness was also evident in historical surveys of Sweden-Finland before 1809. By the 1820s, historians like Erik Gustaf Geijer were already writing the history of Sweden from the territorial perspective of post-

³⁴ *Granskaren*, No. 96, 8th Dec 1826.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For more information about different interpretations on Finland’s position within the Swedish realm before 1809, see Nordin, Jonas: *Ett fattigt men fritt folk: nationell och politisk självbild i Sverige från sen stormaktstid till slutet av frihetstiden*. Stockholm 2000; Eng, Torbjörn: *Det svenska väldet: ett konglomerat av uttrycksformer och begrepp från Vasa till Bernadotte*. Uppsala 2001.

1809 Sweden. Accordingly, Finland was seldom mentioned at all or it was asserted that Finland and Sweden were separate units in a realm predestined to fall apart.³⁷

At the end of the 1820s Finland became more visible in newspaper articles. Still, the “policy of 1812” had a lot of influence. One example is when *Journalen* in 1826 wrote about the death of Alexander I. It was promulgated that all Finns were very sad when they received news of the death of the noble and generous emperor. According to *Granskaren*, and of course Karl XIV Johan, Alexander I had made Finland prosperous in many ways.³⁸

One year later *Granskaren* described the devastating fire in Åbo, which had ravaged the city. Here, quite unexpectedly, it was remarked that Sweden always had been a protector of Finland’s freedom and rights.³⁹ Probably, centuries would pass before the ancient brotherhood of Swedes and Finns disappeared. The publicist also declared that Sweden always felt a great deal of pain when provinces were lost. It is quite remarkable that the loss of Finland was interpreted as equal to the loss of Scania in the 14th century and the loss of Swedish Pomerania in 1814.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the partition of the state in 1809 was not asserted as a uniquely painful moment in Swedish history.

In 1830, when the Poles revolted against the Russians, some Swedish publicists took the opportunity to write about Finland as well. Especially liberal and radical newspapers like *Aftonbladet* and *Den Svenske Medborgaren* dared to assert that, in opposition to the “policy of 1812,” there was some discontent among the Finnish country people against the Russian rule. Further, *Aftonbladet* and *Den Svenske Medborgaren* promulgated that the Finnish soldiers who participated on the Russian side in fighting down the Polish rebellion did so involuntarily and without enthusiasm.⁴¹

³⁷ See for example Geijer, Erik Gustaf: ”Svenska folkets historia. Första delen till Gustav Vasa”. In: *Erik Gustav Geijers samlade skrifter, Sednare afdelningen*. Vol. 2, Stockholm 1832. About the erasing of Finland in Swedish history writing after 1809, see Klinge 1983, as footnote 15; Sjöstrand 1996, as footnote 15; Elenius 1999, as footnote 14.

³⁸ *Journalen*, No. 40, 17th Feb 1826.

³⁹ It is remarkable is that this was in a way still the case, since the Swedish law of 1734, 1772 and 1779 remained valid in Finland.

⁴⁰ *Granskaren*, No. 74, 21st Sep 1827.

⁴¹ *Aftonbladet*, No. 143, 25th Jun 1831; *Aftonbladet*, No. 144, 27th Jun 1831; *Den Svenske Medborgaren*, No. 43, 28th Jun 1831; *Den Svenske Medborgaren*, No. 44, 1st Jul 1831.

Even if there were some articles about Finland in Swedish newspapers in the 1810s and 1820s, they were surprisingly few considering how long Finland had been a part of Sweden, and considering how many Swedish historians have taken it for granted that the partitioning of the state in 1809 was a contemporary national trauma. The subjects of the articles mostly focused on the situation in Finland after 1809, and not on how it was a disaster for Sweden that Finland was lost. Of course it was very risky to propose a recapture of Finland, but there were many other Swedish-Finnish perspectives possible to deal with. In earlier times of press repression in Sweden, writers were very innovative in using metaphors and allegories when they wanted to expose forbidden or delicate subjects. If the loss of Finland had been looked upon as a real contemporary national trauma, there should have been more newspaper articles about Finland.

A national trauma for migration, education and the economy?

The newspapers quite often emphasized that Sweden and Finland still had strong mutual economical connections.⁴² Concerning the economy, the partition of the state definitely did not result in a national trauma. During the 1810s there was more commerce between Sweden and Finland than ever before. For example, Sweden imported cattle, fish, timber and corn from Finland and exported iron ore, lime stone and construction stones to Finland. In fact, Sweden imported more goods from Finland than it exported.⁴³ People, as well as goods, continued to travel across the Gulf of Bothnia after 1809. People moved to Sweden or Finland permanently or temporarily due to work, marriage, studies or economic reasons. In the 1810s there were approximately 1000 travels each year crossing the Gulf of Bothnia. One important change after the partition of the state was the prohibition of ownership of land or other properties in both Sweden and Finland. Wealthy people consequently had to decide which state, Sweden or Russia, they wanted to live in. Some important state officials moved from Sweden

⁴² See for example, *Allmänna Journalen*, No. 108, 12th May 1820; *Journalen*, No. 91, 22nd Apr 1825; *Granskaren*, No. 60, 26th Jul 1822; *Argus den IV*, No. 33, 15th Oct 1823; *Den Svenske Medborgaren*, No. 59, 23rd Aug 1831; *Den Svenske Medborgaren*, No. 88, 6th Dec 1831.

⁴³ Samuelsson, Kurt: "Den ekonomiska betydelsen för Stockholm av Finlands förlust". In: *Skrifter utgifna av Sjöhistoriska samfundet*. Vol. 5, Uppsala 1945, 24–54, here 32.

to Finland, since the Russian authorities gave priority to well educated immigrants and therefore offered good conditions when they moved to Finland. Others moved in the opposite direction. So did the famous professor and writer Frans Michael Franzén. He emigrated from Åbo to the Swedish parish of Kumla.⁴⁴

At Uppsala University, there was a Finnish student corporation (*Finska nationen*). In spite of the partition of the state in 1809, students kept on coming to Uppsala from Finland. During the years of 1808–1835 around 70 Finnish students were members of *Finska nationen*. It prospered during the 1810s and had a lot of activities. Adolf Iwar Arwidsson was one of its active members and leaders. One problem was that the Russian government in Finland actively tried to prevent Finnish youngsters from going to Sweden for university studies. Therefore it was decided that officials in the Russian state administration needed university exams from Russian universities only. Consequently, Finnish students chose to attend the universities of Helsinki (transferred there from Åbo in 1827) or Saint Petersburg instead of Uppsala University.⁴⁵

In Stockholm, the Finnish church congregation was a place for social and cultural activities between Swedes and Finns. During the 18th century the Finnish congregation was an important meeting place for people from the Finnish provinces living in Stockholm. In this congregation, members came from different regions in Sweden. After 1809 the activities of the Finnish congregation continued pretty much in the same way as before, even if it was not possible to be a member of the congregation if one were a citizen of the Russian Empire.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Apart from the undisputable political fact that Sweden and Finland were separate political entities after 1809 there were obviously many cultural, economical, social and even political examples of how the connections and relationship between Sweden and Finland did not change after the partitioning of the Swedish state. In some cases, both Finland and Sweden even prospered. The fact that the Swedish political press was not

⁴⁴ Tarkiainen 1993, as footnote 15, 98.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30ff.

particularly bothered by the loss of Finland also demonstrates that the “business as usual” attitude was prevalent. Consequently, the nationalist description of a country drowned in national despair after 1809 must be questioned. It is doubtlessly a historical interpretation chiefly influenced by the nationalist paradigm which dominated Swedish historical research and writing at the end of the 19th century. The most important message in this article has accordingly been to emphasize the need to look beyond such starting points. Doubtlessly, more research must be performed on how common people – from different social groups and geographical regions – in Sweden as well as in Finland experienced the partitioning of the state.