monier och andra iscensättningar var för legitimeringen av den nya politiska ordningen som etablerades 1772 och hur mycket tid och resurser som lades på dessa arrangerang. Hon visar också hur mycket av denna politik som präglades av ett behov av att markera gentemot den gamla frihetstidens regimen. Flerta av komponenterna i kungens politiska budskap har visserligen framhållits av tidigare forskning, men bekräftas här genom analyser av andra företeelser och annat källmaterial. En av framställningens styrkor är de komparationer som görs med andra regenter, vilka tydliggör att kungens age-rande styrdes av en rationalitet som var etablerad bland de flesta av Europas förstehus i slutet av 1700-talet. Författaren hade kunnit bredda en del av undersökningarna för att på så sätt få en bättre förståelse av den logik som styrde maktutövningen och de begränsningar som existerade, men det förtar inte intyget av att detta är en intressant och läsvärd bok som bevisar att det kulturhistoriska perspektivet kan generera ny kunskap om den politiska historien.


Fredrik Thisner’s dissertation is an interesting contribution to the field of Nordic research on the eighteenth century, in which the officer corps and holders of military posts have been the focus of particular interest. Thisner has based his research mainly on some earlier Swedish, Finnish and Danish studies on the subject – in particular those of Björn Asker, Gunner Lind, Gunnar Artéus and Kaarlo Wirilander – with which he demonstrates his familiarity with his subject, as he does with his research on the broader field of office holding and social mobility. In addition to his knowledge of his subject, Thisner demonstrates both a command of, and competence in, the field of historical research as well as an awareness of the complex reality of the eighteenth century in which the officers lived their lives.

Thisner’s main question (p. 31) concerns how seeking a military post and the position of an officer functioned as a means for ensuring a position among the social and power-holding elite in Sweden and Denmark during the period between 1720 and 1800. This strategy of upward mobility was also used by other groups in eighteenth-century society, but evidence to support this is often very hard to find because phenomena like upward social mobility are not obviously visible. As Thisner’s study shows, it is most easily identifiable in the military sphere.

Military officers were the most organized group in eighteenth-century Nordic society. The system of allocating military posts as an economic solution was highly organized and the members of the officer corps in the regiments were socially and culturally controlled by a strict code of honour and masculine values. This situation made them into a group that has proven to be a very fruitful subject for a wide variety of historical research.

Thisner’s dissertation is well structured and proceeds fluently with the use of metatext. The work is divided into two main sections. The first describes the economic role of military posts, and the second the social dimension attached to them. Thisner’s approach to the subject is to make a comparative study between the two Nordic military states, Denmark-Norway and Sweden, but as he points out (p. 43, 62), the main focus is on the Swedish officer corps. The principle objects of his study are three infantry regiments: the Swedish Upplands regemente, the Norwegian La trondeligma regemente and the Danish Kronprinsens regemente. The primary sources consist of various kinds of documents from Sweden and Denmark such as military registers, officers’ pension-fund records and private letters from officers.

Thisner locates his research in a socio-economic structural context, in which he defines the state and its military structures as a ‘late feudal state’ (senfeodal stat). He also emphasizes the fact that the Nordic countries were ‘military states’ (militärstater). Thisner places his study in a broader theoretical context using Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of social reproduction and social capital.

Thisner’s study opens up a view into a more complex world where things are not always that apparent and often not exactly what they may seem to be at first sight. Consequently, the research results often become a subject of debate. For example, the post of captain was not just a position that secured its incumbent an income, but also one that permitted him to recognize his place – and to be recognized by others as having such a place – in a regiment, in the army or in society more generally. However, as Thisner shows,
research methods using a culturally broader approach produce more interesting results when the focus is not strictly limited to the economic base.

The author succeeds especially well in his research when he points out the practical functions of the field armies. The roles of different troops such as cavalry, infantry, artillery and sappers are clearly presented. Also the roles that were attached to different military posts are clearly elucidated. Such matters are important, although the research focuses on a period (1720–1800) when Sweden and Denmark did not take part in any long or major wars of the kind that had occurred during the previous century. Military customs continued to hold a central place in the minds of the people in the upper strata of society, a fact which should be better appreciated in other areas of historical research. Thisner clearly points this out when he emphasizes the need for a man to perform the role of ‘an officer and a gentleman’ among the elite.

Thisner notes that the benefits which officers gained from their posts were primarily social rather than directly economic. The problem is that this is not easily measured if the research, however comprehensive, is mainly located in a structural socio-economic context and shaped by the questions this poses. Thisner also notes that military posts and the processes by which they were obtained were essentially the same in Sweden and Denmark, although the political and economic bases of these states were very different. This points to a slight shortcoming in the presentation of the broader theoretical context. That context, with the use of theories about social reproduction and social capital, could have helped the author to draw even more profound conclusions than he has. In this respect, the reader can look forward to Thisner extending his research on the subject.

The discussion of the problems of using the term ‘class’ (klass) is also a bit unnecessary (p. 35). If they did not belong to the Noble Estate (ofrälse), officers simply regarded themselves members of a new estate: the ‘soldierly estate’ (soldattstånd), ‘military estate’ (militärstånd), ‘fifth estate’ (femte stånd), or ‘gentlefolk’ (ståndspersoner, Adelens wederlikar), as the author of course knows.

All in all, Thisner’s dissertation is an explicit, well thought-out and constructed, broad presentation of officers’ lives in the Nordic countries in the eighteenth century and of the many factors that influenced them. It also serves as a very useful resource for research into such aspects of the officers’ lives as loan-taking, marriage bartering and many other matters that went into making up the rich and colourful life of officers at that time.

Ville Sarkamo