

## Introduction: Cultural Encounters

In the eighteenth century the world was expanding. Unknown geographies were explored, foreign cultures encountered, new trade routes consolidated. Alternative ways of living and understanding the world were noticed. New products were exchanged, unusual languages heard, different faces seen. The eighteenth-century world seems to show a greater mobility, a greater interest in the outer world, in landscapes and cultures beyond the horizon, on the other side of the mountains and the ocean. These encounters with foreign cultures challenged the everyday conceptions of what it meant to be human. This volume of *Sjuttonhundratal* is about cultural encounters, how people in a small corner of the northern hemisphere became aware of other cultures beyond their local community. Although this volume is a so-called open volume, having invited scholars to submit articles on any topic relating to the long eighteenth century, it sometimes happens that the realities of the present become so pressing that they influence the scholarly debate across disciplines. Thus, in our age of globalization in which every intellectual is forced to take a stand regarding ongoing encounters between cultures, ideologies, and economic systems, our approach to the sources of the past is likely to become affected. That may have been the case here. As editors of this volume, we have found that the theme of cultural encounter serves as a common link between the five articles.

The first article can be read as a comment on the concept of Orientalism. In the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries, Christian Europe consolidated itself vis-à-vis the Muslim World. The Ottoman Empire was pushed back from the doorstep of Vienna and gradually from the Balkans as well. In contrast to the Turks, the Persians, who had once posed such a great threat to the ancient Greeks, were now seen as an exotic, harmless, and philosophically inclined people. The 'orientalism' of the time was thus based less on fear than on curiosity. As KNUT OVE ELIASSEN (Trondheim) and ANNE FASTRUP (Copenhagen) argue,

Western intellectuals now turned to the East for the sake of satisfying their *curiosité*, not as preparation for hostilities. But perhaps there were other lessons to be learned from the remote Orient beyond satisfying the desire of readers for sensational stories? In their interpretation and contextualization of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721), Eliassen and Fastrup analyse how the French *philosophe* used the genre of the epistolary novel as a means to probe the inherent weaknesses and strengths of absolutism and despotism. By situating his main character, Usbek, in contemporary Paris, Montesquieu succeeds in conjuring a simultaneous intimacy and distance between the reader and the cultures described. The familiar Parisian culture is rendered less natural and logical when seen through the eyes of the Persian visitor, who in turn is forced to reflect on the society and domestic life he left behind in the East. In his juxtaposing of Paris and Persia, Montesquieu focuses on several aspects of the two cultures, among them sexuality. There was a widespread belief among Western intellectuals that the populations of the European countries were in decline. This was seen as a more pressing issue than any military threat (internal rivalry between European nations aside). Reflections on 'biopolitics', or how to stimulate growth in the number of citizens, permeate the *Lettres Persanes*, albeit on a philosophical rather than concrete level. On the one hand, the harem, which was so familiar to Usbek, was bound to produce fewer children than would be the case if every fertile woman had at least one man. On the other hand, the Christian (or rather Catholic) ban on divorce forced many unhappy couples to live together without affection and hence without children. Neither of the two 'family systems' was good for the state, nor did they necessarily produce happy subjects.

International trade was expanding during the eighteenth century. Merchant vessels from the Nordic countries made their way to the East Indies, Africa, and America. At the same time, neutral states had to navigate between the fighting states and alliances of Europe. During the turbulent years of the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence, some merchants and neutral states took advantage of the political situation in order to enrich themselves. LEOS MÜLLER (Stockholm) discusses in his article two perceptions of neutrality in the political discourse of the mid-eighteenth century. Neutrality could be perceived as a good and moral basis for peaceful inter-state relations, or as a shameless exploitation of warfare. Müller argues that the concept of neutrality changed during these years, and that the works of the Danish writer Martin Hübner played an important role in this development. His view on neutrality influenced the declaration of a league of three neutral countries, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, that aimed to stop British violence against neutral trade and shipping. Inter-state trade, armed

conflicts, and the expanding markets of the eighteenth century gave rise to a neutral discourse that has influenced the political debate and inter-state relations ever since.

In the Nordic countries, the age of colonialism was long perceived as a blemish on the history of the other European powers. School children used to learn about the Atlantic slave trade in which slaves were transported from Africa to plantations in the Caribbean, where cotton, sugar, and other products were dispatched back to Europe. How embedded the Danes and the Swedes, and as parts of the composite states, also the Finns and the Norwegians, were in this far from respectable activity was something one was generally kept ignorant of. In recent decades, however, historians in all the Nordic countries have tried to remedy this gap in our historical consciousness. The present contribution by HOLGER WEISS (Turku), which discusses the slave-based society that developed on Saint Bartholomew after Sweden had taken hold of this tiny West Indian island in 1784, is part of this process. Weiss demonstrates how little the civic and public spheres on Saint Bartholomew differed from the atrocious conditions found on other islands in the Caribbean. Encountering racist societies on all sides, the Swedish settlers soon adopted the local culture. Whites, blacks, and various degrees of *couleurs* were strictly differentiated. Ironically, although the abolitionist pamphlets of the late eighteenth century were translated and embraced by many Swedish intellectuals, it was rarely acknowledged that Sweden was involved in the same abominable business as the British and the French. The unawareness of the 'blood on our own hands' thus appears to have deep historical roots.

In the course of the eighteenth century, travel literature flourished as a literary genre, allowing writers to reflect on their impressions of the regions, manners, peoples, and civilizations they encountered while travelling. Moreover, travel accounts opened whole new worlds to those who had never had the possibility to travel themselves and experience foreign cultures in faraway lands. In his article on British images of the Finns in the late eighteenth century, ANSSI HALMESVIRTA (Jyväskylä) provides us with an analysis of the 'progressive' idea of history, stressing contemporary views on 'progress' that had not, according to eighteenth-century travellers, reached the same level in Russia as in western Europe. Halmesvirta analyses the travel accounts of William Coxe, William Tooke, Edward Daniel Clarke, and Giuseppe Acerbi, which were published in England shortly after the voyages of the authors to Russia and Finland. British travellers began to visit northern Europe, particularly Sweden, Finland, and Russia, in the second half of the century, when Italy and Greece had ceased to be their most alluring tourist destinations. On the northern fringes of Europe they encountered cultures and

manners very different from their own. Perhaps not surprisingly, the travellers wrote at length on the differences rather than the similarities between the countries. Halmesvirta stresses the importance of contemporary views on 'race' for our understanding of eighteenth-century British attitudes towards the Finns. For British travellers, the Finns represented an exotic mixture of Eastern and Western 'races' and cultures, allowing for an encounter between the familiar West and unfamiliar East, between Enlightenment and barbarism. At the same time, however, British travellers found that Finland in the late eighteenth century was developing into a civilized and industrious area as a result of the importation of western European political thought, economy, and culture.

Finally, encounters with cultures distant in time and space were also manifested in the local environment. In her article on a Greek temple built in Sweden in the 1780s, HEDVIG MÅRDH (Uppsala) studies Mälby estate in Gnesta, central Sweden, where the architect Carl August Ehrensvärd designed several buildings and a park for his friend Johan Gustaf von Carlson. Mårdh emphasizes the cultural connections between Sweden and Italy, notably visible at Mälby, where one of the first neoclassical buildings in Sweden was erected. Ehrensvärd travelled in Italy between 1780 and 1782, and was deeply inspired by Italian art, architecture, and literature. He was especially moved by the ancient Greek temples in southern Italy, and thus his interest in classical culture shifted from Roman to Greek architecture, whose pure columns and Doric temples made a strong impact on him. He applied Montesquieu's climate theory to people, art, and architecture, arguing that due to the cold climate in northern Europe the arts could not flourish there as they had done in the balmy south. For Ehrensvärd, cultural encounters between northern and southern Europe, between northern and classical cultures, were viewed as a challenge he tried to meet in his architectural designs and drawings. Italy, however, was not his only source of inspiration. Mårdh stresses the importance of English landscape architecture for Ehrensvärd's designs of parks in Sweden, which display the influences he had received from England through friends living there or through literature on architecture and landscape planning. Mårdh demonstrates that the design and erection of the temple in Mälby can be seen as a total work of art, combining influences from classical Greece and Rome, from Freemasonry, and from English and French ideals of garden architecture, all applied to the physical landscape of late eighteenth-century Sweden.

For a greater understanding of the developments and events that took place in the Nordic countries in the eighteenth century, it is very likely that a recognition of the global setting, the interaction with the world outside these countries, and the encounters with other European and non-European cultures, is indispensa-

ble. It is our hope that these articles have cast some light on the history of the Nordic countries and their role in the globalizing world. The next volume of *Sjuttonhundratal* is again planned as an open volume. Articles on any topic concerning the long eighteenth century are welcome. As before, we will accept articles and reviews written in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, English, German, or French. The whole range of eighteenth-century studies in the Nordic countries ought to be represented in our Nordic yearbook. A particularly promising development in this respect is the Danish Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies' decision to participate in the editorial team of *Sjuttonhundratal*. From its inception in 2004 as the annual journal of the Swedish Society, through the integration of the Finnish (2009), Norwegian (2010), and now (2013) Danish Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies in the enterprise, *Sjuttonhundratal* has continuously striven to contribute to a real 'cultural encounter' between scholars in all the Nordic countries and beyond.

David Dunér, Per Pippin Aspaas & Johanna Ilmakunnas