

Thomas Ewen Daltveit Slettebø, *In Memory of Divine Providence: a Study of Centennial Commemoration in Eighteenth-Century Denmark-Norway (1717–1760)* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2016). 545 pp.

In his dissertation from the University of Bergen Thomas Slettebø explores the development of jubilees, or centennial commemorations, in the twin kingdoms of Denmark and Norway in the eighteenth century. The focus of attention is on the four national jubilees to celebrate the Luther Reformation (1717), the Danish Reformation (1736), the Oldenburg dynasty's accession (1749), and the introduction of absolutism (1760). In addition Slettebø discusses lesser commemorations, such as the annual thanksgiving and prayer days, and the local centenaries in the towns of Kongsberg (1723) and Røros (1744).

The official and public commemorations that are studied thus fall into a religious and a secular group: two Reformation jubilees, two dynastic celebrations, and two local festivities commemorating town foundations. The annual thanksgiving and prayer days are of an intermediate character: their setting was religious and they were celebrated in the churches, but the objects of the prayers were the royal family and the prosperity of the state. In other words, religion was used as a means of rallying the people around the absolute monarchy. Then again, Slettebø would not fully agree on a division along those lines. One of his main points is that Lutheran religion cannot be separated from other cultural expressions. It was an inherent component of a Danish and Norwegian ethos and one which, if anything, grew even stronger as politics in general was separated from a religious foundation.

The first jubilees were decidedly religious, but according to Slettebø Denmark was uncommonly early in adapting this means of popular communication to celebrate events of a political nature. Over time the celebrations

also left the churches and moved out into public places (through, e.g., festive decorations, theatre plays and fireworks) and into taverns and private homes (through, e.g., toasts and banquets). It is common to trace a general development from religious, through representational and to national public ceremonies between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Following Slettebø it seems that the Danish state made an early and extensive use of jubilees as a way of addressing the public in an inclusive manner, resembling the popular approach of the nationalist era. Bearing in mind the constitutionally rigid character of Danish absolutism, celebrations of a more representational character would rather have been expected. The main explanation for this Danish *Sonderweg* seems to be the influence of the Lutheran state church with its strong emphasis on participation. It was not enough that the congregation performed, it had to feel and understand.

The religious aspects play a vital role in Slettebø's analysis for several reasons. Religious belief was still widespread and church attendance compulsory, the clergymen were state servants dispersed throughout both realms, and churches were often the only large assembly rooms available outside the major cities. Above all, Slettebø claims that state and religious functions were intertwined to a higher degree and for a much a longer time than has been generally acknowledged in previous research, but he does not reduce this observation to a simple dichotomy between Lutheran orthodoxy and secularization. As mentioned, he rather sees Lutheranism as an inseparable element of Danish and Norwegian culture as a whole. From this follows an interesting conclusion, viz. that the clerics, although being state servants, were not simple government henchmen. The sermons they delivered could vary substantially in their interpretations of a particular jubilee. How these sermons were received and understood

by the congregations has not been studied by Slettebø, however.

That Slettebø has made no effort to investigate how the celebrations and stories of the past were interpreted by the common people may be perceived as a major weakness of the thesis. On the other hand it would be impertinent to discuss what is missing rather than what Slettebø has actually accomplished. There are certainly enough perspectives to discuss as it is. Having said this, there is nevertheless one matter that Slettebø should have considered further, viz. the varying legal status of Danish and Norwegian peasants. Such a discussion would have fallen well within the scope of the thesis in its present shape and it would have added substantially to the analysis.

Slettebø discusses how the first hundred years of absolutism affected the legal status of Danish peasants (pp. 436 ff.).

In total, it is therefore not altogether unfair to claim that the first hundred years of absolute monarchy had seen a steady increase in the estate owner's legal rights and authority over the peasants, rather than any form of liberation of the Danish peasantry. [p. 439.]

The situation for the Norwegian peasantry was quite different, but a fundamental assumption in the thesis is that a declared purpose of the jubilees was to create a common Danish-Norwegian narrative. Supposing that this is correct, it seems likely that the legal differences between various groups of subjects posed a major complication in the storyline. Civic freedom, e.g., could be heralded in some instances, but not in others, but this topic is hardly addressed by Slettebø. He informs us that a sort of diversion was exercised when addressing the subservient peasantry of Zealand: they were told of the blessings of the long peace that royal absolutism had brought with it (pp. 440 f.). This implies that the message

of the sermons was adapted to local circumstances.

Slettebø's thesis is impressive in its thoroughness and precision, but at times he is almost too exhaustive. And whereas his general conclusions are clear and convincing, many of his more limited inferences are of a more irresolute character. It is sometimes hard to perceive his actual standpoint in certain issues. Seen from the positive side, this might very well demonstrate a scholarly ideal: human experiences and emotions are rarely unambiguous and this must be reflected in investigations of the past.

The thesis transcends many fields of historical research: political history, cultural history, history of religion and of ideas, to name but a few. Although the study has a broad embrace both topically and methodologically, it can be noted that Slettebø only to a small degree makes use of conceptual and visual analysis. Both areas could have added further to the investigation. The celebrations were public ceremonies with the purpose of persuading and uniting the population, not least through visual effects aimed at making an intuitive impression on non-literate spectators. This omission in no way diminishes the effort, however. What he actually has accomplished is more than enough and impressive in many ways.

The style is clear and lucid while Slettebø's thoroughness also makes the thesis verbose, substantially longer and less readable than necessary. Given that the investigation moves forward continuously this may, after all, be justifiable. Even so, there are several passages that digress quite far from the subject at hand, and other passages of textbook character without much original research. Chapter seven, e.g., treats the 1760 centenary of the introduction of absolutism. The chapter opens with a general introduction, a discussion of the historical significance of absolutism, a thorough survey of two contemporary

authors' views on autocracy, a presentation of period depictions of the royal revolution in 1660 as well as several other, if not unrelated, at least peripheral topics. A total 25 of the chapter's 90 pages are devoted to what must be described as background information. Such deviations may sometimes be useful when writing for a general audience, but they could have been excluded without loss in an already extensive scholarly treatise that primarily aims to further our knowledge. The body text runs to a total of 487 pages, and no harm would have been done if a hundred pages or so had been edited out.

The theoretical concepts presented in the introduction (cultural vs. functional memory; memory sites) are only rather sparingly used in the investigation, which relies mainly on a well-performed close reading and thematic analysis of key documents (including 200 sermons). Considering the fact that so much of the dissertation revolves around things said or done in the public sphere it is surprising that Slettebø does not discuss any of the relevant theories within this field. Fundamental changes in the public sphere are without doubt among the key factors explaining the difference between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century jubilees.

Slettebø's thesis is dominated by a top-down perspective. This is partly due to the sources and to the character of the public sphere in absolutist Denmark-Norway, but it also represents a simplification that may be unnecessary, and even undesirable. The analysis of the many sermons is the most significant exception, but if other types of occasional literature had been included the picture would probably have become more nuanced and thus more interesting. Parts of this occasional literature are excluded for understandable linguistic reasons (e.g. academic speeches in Latin). However, other parts, such as occasional poems and broadsheets, could have been included without too much effort. The source material

used for studying the dysfunctional 1760 celebration is somewhat more extensive, but this owes more to the nature of existing scholarship and the lack of material illuminating the plans and decisions of the government.

These remarks should not hide the fact that, all in all, Thomas Slettebø's thesis is a solid and in many ways impressive historical investigation in which the strengths by far outweigh the weaknesses.

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Ella Viitaniemi, *Yksimielisyydestä yhteiseen sopimiseen: paikallisyhteisön poliittinen kulttuuri ja Kokemäen kivikirkon rakennusprosessi 1730–1786* [Från enighet till gemensamt beslutsfattande: uppförandet av Kumo stenkyrka 1730–1786: byggnadsprocessen och lokalsamfundets politiska kultur], Acta Universitatis Tamperensis, 2158, (Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto 2016). 443 s.

I takt med att befolkningen på 1700-talet växte och kapellförsamlingarna blev allt fler ökade behovet av tillräckligt många och tillräckligt rymliga kyrkor i Sverige. I den östra riksdelen byggdes från 1760 till den svenska tidens slut 131 nya kyrkor. De flesta byggdes i trä men en mindre del, närmare bestämt elva av dem, var stenkyrkor. År 1776 reglerades uppförandet av byggnader och andra konstruktioner som genomfördes med allmänna medel. Ritningarna och kostnadskalkylerna skulle inte bara granskas och godkännas av staten, utan det påbjudna materialet blev i fortsättningen sten och tegel. Riket skulle prydas av offentliga byggnader som var lika vackra som de var hållbara. Sten var också att föredra eftersom brandrisken var lägre och skogstillgångarna kunde sparas till annat. Byggnader i trä tilläts som undantag från regeln, och i Norrland och Finland fortsatte byggandet av kyrkor i