

NB: This is the author's original version. For quotes, please refer to the version of record published in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 125, issue 4, October 2020, p. 1511–1512, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz1346>, <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-abstract/125/4/1511/5933430>.

Svante Norrhem, *Mercenary Swedes. French subsidies to Sweden 1631–1796*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2019. Translated by Charlotte Merton. 292 p.

During the early modern period, subsidies were a central means to France's foreign policy and its efforts to support its allies and keep them loyal to French interests. In his new book, Svante Norrhem explores the French subsidies to Sweden from the Thirty Years' War to the Gustavian and revolutionary era. The central questions of the investigations are why Sweden needed subsidies and accepted them from France.

The intriguing "mercenary Swedes" of the title is an expression by the seventeenth-century Austrian diplomat Isaac Wolmar, quoted by Jean Bérenger. The subject being rather narrow, the reader would expect some more explanations as to why Norrhem has decided to explore this subject, but these are left at an implicit level. Instead of positioning the study with regard to previous scholarship on Franco-Swedish relations or early-modern diplomacy, Norrhem builds his argument on an empirical basis of primary sources. Although this is obviously an academic book rather than a presentation for a broader audience, the level of analysis remains fairly general and descriptive, and previous research and theories are referred to by namedropping rather than through debate.

The text contains a large proportion of paraphrase, particularly of the minutes of the Swedish royal council. This is the case especially in chapter 8, but lengthy summarizing characterizes the whole book. It is perhaps symptomatic of this approach that in the section titled "method" of the introduction, we find a critical description of the sources, and under "argument" essentially a summary of the themes of the book.

The period covered is 1631–1796, over a century and a half. Focus is on continuity rather than on change, but there is a certain imbalance as the seventeenth century is dealt with more extensively than the eighteenth. As the outline is thematic, some arguments are repeated several times, such as the contradictions of the alliance between Lutheran Sweden and Catholic France. The thematic approach also results in a slightly jumpy chronology, with frequent returns to the 1670s.

To judge by the subject, the reader might expect a book on early-modern diplomacy, but this is not so much about foreign policy as about its means, resources and narratives. A consequence of this economic and cultural approach is that the political context is only little explained. This may be a challenge for the non-Swedish reader (after all, the book is in English).

As Norrhem points out, Swedish politics and political parties were much defined by foreign policy and the attitudes taken towards the possible alliance with France. Particularly for the Age of Liberty (1718–1772), when Sweden was governed by the Diet and the Council, the study could have explored the divergences between various political groups to explain particularly the anti-French texts but also the texts in favor of the alliance. Obliterating the differences between "Caps", "Hats" and others produces an impression that the political discussion was consensual, which it was in many other respects but not when it came to foreign policy.

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Despite the heavy dependence on primary sources, Norrhem generally succeeds in giving a balanced account. On some occasions, however, the reader may suspect some bias, as on page 125, where Sweden's form of government in the Age of Liberty is referred to as "abominable". This is probably a paraphrase of Breteuil's thoughts on the matter, but the quotation marks are missing.

The most rewarding section of the book is chapter 9, which reflects on the links between subsidies and other historical processes. Here, we eventually get the bigger picture, with a presentation of the agents, infrastructure and consequences of the subsidies: bankers, financiers, diplomats and officials handling the payments as well as the institutions forwarding them, but also the consumption of goods, social mobility, and wartime mortality. Luxury consumption and mortality, however, are a little far-fetched, since they were not direct consequences of the subsidies, but aspects of economy and war in general, as Norrhem also admits. The link between the subsidies and broader issues is interesting, but it seems a little cheap or naïve to argue that the French king's ambitions made peasants from a village in northern Sweden suffer because they had to go to war. Norrhem himself, on page 245, does acknowledge that in a study like his, the subsidies "eventually [...] become the answer to everything".

The book is mainly well written but with some problems of terminology, part of which are due to the fact that it is a translation. Examples of this are some Swedish titles and functions translated with British terminology (e.g. Lord High Constable for *riksmarskalk*). Another issue is the use of the term "ambassador" as a synonym for diplomatic representative, while only a minority of these representatives actually had the rank of ambassador. For the seventeenth century, terminology might be indifferent, but in the eighteenth century, contemporaries were very sensitive to the difference between ambassadors (e.g. Tessin) and envoys (e.g. Ekeblad). There are also some minor issues in the rendering of Latin quotes (e.g. p. 101) and the translation of French quotes (e.g. p. 105).

A reader familiar with geography will also object that Sveaborg (now Helsinki) is not on the south-western but the southern coast of Finland (p. 212). On the same page, the reader wonders where the shipbuilders from "northern Finland" actually came from (Ostrobothnia?). There are also inconsistencies between references in the text and notes and the bibliography (Gustafsson/Gustavsson, p. 212, and Bély 1996, n. 595).

In spite of slight imperfections, this is an informative research report, but it leaves the reader slightly puzzled as to its further aims. It is useful, though, to scholars of early-modern Scandinavian and French diplomacy, who will appreciate its thorough critical apparatus and extensive use of primary sources.

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