



The Story of War: Church and Propaganda in France and Sweden 1610–1710

by Anna Maria Forssberg.

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In her well researched, well argued, and well written new book, historian Anna Maria Forssberg (Stockholm Univ.) builds on her previous work concerning methods of information dissemination between the Swedish state and the commonality.¹ Specifically, she compares and analyzes how Swedish and French royal authorities used the *Te Deum laudamus*² service to legitimize foreign policy and royal authority in the eyes of their subjects. In the process, she clarifies various political, social, religious, and economic aspects of seventeenth-century Sweden and France.

The book's sixteen chapters (arranged in three parts: I, "Information"; II, "Celebration"; and III, "Narration") evaluate similarities and differences between Swedish and French *Te Deum* ceremonies particularly during the 1630s, 1670s, and 1709—a year of disaster for both Swedish and French militaries. She traces the changing messages of the ceremonies and the sacrifices they required of the peasantry as reflections of the nature of given conflicts and their outcomes.

Part I concerns how royal authorities (kings, a queen, and some regents) used the *Te Deum* to spread curated information. The author argues that Swedish monarchs used the ceremony mostly to disseminate news to the people and keep them informed of distant military operations. She argues that this emphasis stemmed from the Protestant country's greater reliance on verbal rather than purely ceremonial elements of religious services. Ministers, being state officials of the Swedish Church, were closely aligned with royal interests. The state required the Swedish peasants' consent to raise taxes and conscript soldiers due to the high rates of peasant land tenure and their representation in the four-estate Riksdag. Church pronouncements highlighted military victories, human sin, the mercy and providence of God, the many enemies surrounding the fatherland, and the need to pray for king, country, and the military.

By contrast, Forssberg argues, Absolutist France required no popular support for making war and thus emphasized the glory of God, the king, and royal ministers and generals. Even the issuance of the letters announcing victories followed a hierarchical pattern: "The king honoured his subordinates by sharing information that in fact was his prerogative.... The content of the letters gave a sample of the facts that it was acceptable to share" (84). Louis XIV, in dealing with the Fronde in his youth and peasant uprisings during his reign, stressed royal prerogative in the dissemination of knowledge.

Part II concentrates on ceremonies of thanksgiving in Catholic France, with their elaborate public spectacles accentuating local hierarchies and the supremacy of the king, who stage-

1. Viz. *Att hålla folket på gott humör: informationsspridning, krigspropaganda och mobilisering i Sverige 1655–1680* (Diss.: Stockholm Univ., 2005), available online with an English-language summary – www.miwsr.com/rd/1905.htm.

2. "The *Te Deum* (from its incipit, *Te deum laudamus* "Thee, O God, we praise") is a Latin Christian hymn composed in the 4th century ... which spread throughout the Latin Church with the Milanese Rite in the 6th to 8th centuries The term *Te Deum* can also refer to a short religious service, held to bless an event or give thanks, which is based upon the hymn"—*Wikipedia*, s.v. "Te Deum."

managed from Paris the entire *Te Deum* ceremony, from the guest list to the order of entrance and appropriate costumes. Forssberg describes in detail the grandeur, opulence, and royal power on display at two *Te Deum* celebrations: at Macon (1635) and Paris (1637), where Louis XIII took part.

In Protestant Sweden, on the other hand, there “was no procession—that tradition had been abandoned at the Reformation. In fact, very little is said in the sources about the celebration itself” (108). It featured heartfelt prayer and the treatment of rich and poor as one unified congregation. The *Te Deum* at Stockholm in 1701, after the Swedes’ victory at the Battle of Narva in the Great Northern War, exceptionally continued with music and “illuminations” even after the church service, when darkness fell on the February afternoon.

Part III scrutinizes texts of the ceremonies themselves, which often described the results of battles, without the gruesome details, evincing “an order and discipline that did not correspond to reality” (215). In Sweden, the rituals “inculcated a sense of unity and love for the fatherland” (216), while in those held in France “the message that the king was successful and God was giving him support, was sufficient” (216).

Forssberg also discusses how the *annus horribilis* of 1709 changed French and Swedish approaches to using the *Te Deum*. In France, Louis XIV wrote directly to the people and, sounding vaguely Swedish, informed them of the war’s calamities and the need for unity (203–4). In Sweden, royal communication simply ceased because Charles XII was stuck in Turkey after surviving the Battle of Poltava by fleeing across the Ukrainian Steppe. But, interestingly, nobles in the Council of State continued to communicate with the peasantry to bolster patriotism and unity, especially once the Danes declared war and invaded Skåne. Yet, in many ways, Charles XII “resembled his French counterparts far more than his forefathers” (201) by simply not discussing war with his subjects, as his indisputable royal prerogative. Disaster had, in fact, changed the methodology of both kingdoms’ propaganda systems.

The book is not a military history of Sweden or France in its target time period. A short section outlines the Thirty Years War, but in general the author assumes readers familiar with the major events and trends of the period under study.³ Her nearly complete neglect of the 1650s (Charles X’s wars against Poland, Russia, and Denmark) and 1660s (the disastrous regency) is unfortunate, since neither decade features prominently in English-language histories. I myself have found several references to Charles X Gustav’s use of the *Te Deum* to legitimize his foreign policy in Prussian towns in the 1650s. His entrances into Elbing, Marienburg, Thorn, and other cities were accompanied by *Te Deum* celebrations uniting the Swedish king with local elites and trumpeting Swedish martial prowess and the transfer of Prussian allegiance to himself. It would be interesting to know more about how Swedish and French kings used *Te Deum* ceremonies to further their foreign policies during the Thirty Years War.

These criticisms aside, Anna Maria Forssberg’s admirably concise, tightly focused, and engaging *Story of War* makes a significant and salutary contribution to the historiography of Sweden and France and a little-studied method of validating military policy and war-making in Early Modern Europe.

3. The volume lacks ancillaries like chronological charts and maps that would have made it more accessible to a non-specialist audience.