

Margot Damiens – PhD topic

Representations of Sweden and Denmark in the Holy Roman Empire during the 18th century (1721-1815)

My research project aims at better understanding the way both Sweden and Denmark were perceived, described and even appraised in German non-fiction texts over the 18th century and what implications these representations had about the way German countries perceived themselves. It follows two main aspects:

First, the work on representations. In 19th and 20th century Germany, representations of Sweden and Denmark were strongly called upon by romanticism then national-socialism; it is therefore interesting to go back to the roots of that phenomenon in the 18th century. At that time, a lot of knowledge was produced through exploration and description of the world, and both Sweden and Denmark were included in that process. For Germany, they were of a peculiar interest: they were both very close, given that they shared borders with the Holy Roman Empire, and distant (Lapland, Norway...); they were well-known (especially after Sweden's supremacy in the 17th century) and unknown; they were considered to be relatives (due to the first works in linguistics) but also still mysterious and barbaric. They posed the question of the border between what was close and distant, what was the same and different, *other*, even before the emergence of national identities. In that regard, it is also important to determine to what extent Sweden and Denmark were treated the same or differently, and according to which factors: political influence, exoticism, available sources, etc.

The question of sources brings us to the second aspect of my research, which is the role of historiography in the development of these representations. In the 18th century, historiography underwent an important change: it went from a cumulative type of writing, where the narrative centered on individual rulers and their actions, to a more scientific method of source criticism, where the narrative was that of a universal history, including social and cultural aspects. It was also influenced by several external phenomena: kings intervening as commissioners of histories; philosophical theories such as the climate theory, the teleological interpretation of history or the *Zivilisationskritik*; types of sources, their availability and their evolutions – like that of the travelogue, which went from an empiric description striving for objectivity and scientific value to the narration of a more subjective and emotional experience of travel.

The chronological borders chosen for my research go from the end of the Great Northern War (1721) to the Napoleonic Wars (1806-1815) : between these two points in time, both Sweden and Denmark remained relatively stable in regards to territory and politics, which only enhances the ways in which representations about them changed and the fact that those changes had little to do with the countries themselves and everything to do with the people writing about them.