

HISTORISK TIDSKRIFT
(Sweden)

127:4• 2007

Beyond national history:

Introduction to the special issue on internationalization

During the summer of 2007, Anders Flodström, the new chancellor of higher education, asserted that all research in Sweden must orient itself to the international research front. He was certain that such a research front exists in the humanities as well.

The articles in this special issue of *Historisk tidskrift* deal with world history, global history, transnational history, *histoire croisée* and comparative history.

Perhaps this is where historical research is headed today. Those who have not yet learned about these different methods of writing history will find these articles most interesting.

This issue's theme is internationalization. Through contacts, not least *Historisk tidskrift's* international committee, the undersigned, who was honored to be asked to serve as guest editor, contacted a number of colleagues in Western Europe and the United States to see if they would be willing to analyze the attitudes in their research environments and fields of research to the internationalization of the writing of history.

Accordingly, this issue clearly reflects a Eurocentric view, which can only be defended by the premise that it is important to know what our colleagues are doing and thinking – those colleagues with whom we will likely collaborate to an ever greater extent. Thus, it is my hope that in the near future *Historisk tidskrift* will dedicate a special issue to historical writing – historiography from colleagues who work in parts of the world where we do not have the same institutional and historic ties.

Those colleagues who agreed to write for this issue of *Historisk tidskrift* have done more than simply describe new directions within historical topics. They analyze, take stands, discuss previous research and juxtapose the different ways of writing history in relation to their own research. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all of them. At my request, David L. Ransel, Mafalda Cunha and Pedro Cardim expanded their articles to include information on their professional milieus and how they are organized in the United States and Portugal. Thanks to their efforts, we are able to gain perspective on how we function in Sweden.

In addition to historiography, theory and methods, the articles cover many other fields, including welfare state history, worker history, Russian history, early modern history and political history. They take us on an odyssey during which we go on shore now and then to gain new insights. David L. Ransel introduces us to the North American historians who, for over two decades, have flown above the clouds to recount the history of the flow of ideas, commerce and politics. Mafalda Cunha and Pedro Cardim provide insights into how the Portuguese historian's milieu, which has a structure similar to ours, reacts to the challenges of internationalization. Cardim and Cunha ask important questions such as: Who sets the standard for historical writing? Is it still the big powers of old Europe? Why do interesting historical works remain on the domestic market? Can countries on the periphery only take part when they can confirm the predominant perception of their role? Sweden faces the same kinds of questions: Should we learn to adapt and package Swedish history in a way that will interest people outside of Sweden? Or should we leave behind thoughts about the nation as a frame of reference, a legitimate object for study and an obvious consumer of our studies and instead begin to interest ourselves in the flow, systems, models and meetings, and their manifestation in local and time-bound situations? Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, who considers the issue of internationalization trends from the perspective of an early modern historian, recommends the latter, even if, in his article, he humbly notes that much of what is described as "new" in today's historical writing is not. Yun's most important point is that history is localized knowledge and therefore, the great, overarching advances must always be rooted in local studies. Dirk Jan Wolffram's article on welfare state research, a field that is growing, thanks to comprehensive international studies, does this by delving deeply into both large comprehensive works and matters at the local level. Wolffram elucidates the power of inspiration of overarching studies but also their risks. They must be proven empirically against those standards from which decisions, processes and politics actually arose. However, this local reality is not limited to the local; rather Wolffram emphasizes the international exchange of ideas and contacts among local officials and experts involved with city planning, for example. Local studies complement and amend the comprehensive studies.

In his article, which is an analytical exposition of comparative history and classical and current works that successfully used this method, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt argues that comparative history still constitutes an excellent

method for writing history without using national history as a point of departure. Comparative history is problem-solving history, which cannot be replaced by studies of how societies and groups became integrated and influenced one another in the course of history. The advantages of the comparative method, not the least of which is its ability to call into question national historical writing's specific explanations of general phenomena, is illustrated in the article written by Katarina Friberg, Mary Hilson and Natasha Vall. The authors, who take us back and forth between Karlskrona, Plymouth, Malmö and Newcastle, believe that the intellectual journey among different historical traditions, among national and local, among Swedish and English and among different local source materials are just a few of the pay-offs of comparative history. This is what makes comparative history such a demanding and, at the same time, stimulating method. Haupt shares their conclusion.

Many of the articles take up the question of what language internationalization should use. The same question came to the fore in connection with this issue of *Historisk tidskrift*. The most natural course would have been to translate all of the articles into Swedish. However, we will never be able to achieve an acceptable level of international exchange if we do not avail ourselves of translations and, at some conferences, of interpreting. Few of us are so gifted linguistically that we can express complicated arguments both verbally and in writing in the world's major languages. Further, many of us in Sweden understand and read Swedish texts more quickly and therefore, would have been delighted to see this issue of *Historisk tidskrift* in Swedish. However, to ask a number of colleagues in other countries to contribute articles to an ongoing discussion and then exclude them from the opportunity to study the results did not seem the right thing to do either. Therefore, we elected to use English, our new, much loved and much despised lingua franca.

The linguists among you will notice that the articles are either in American or British English, depending on the author and translator. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mireille L. Key and Lucy Cathcart Frödén for their translations!

The articles are accompanied by Swedish summaries written by the undersigned. Thus, the responsibility is entirely mine if the readers and authors do not recognize the articles from the summaries.

Bon voyage, dear readers!

Elisabeth Elgán