

## Foreword

Being accustomed to the chronology we learned in primary school, we quite naturally see Prehistory as a very distant horizon, going back at least five thousand years, i.e. before the great civilizations of the Near East. As far as Western Europe is concerned, it seems closer because we are used to prolonging this seemingly interminable period up until the arrival of the Celts, who sometimes transmitted their language in foreign scriptures, but this is still 2.5 millennia in the past. Moreover, it was long imagined that the Gauls, one of the peoples belonging to this vast group, still lived in makeshift shacks deep in the woods. Fortunately, this vision has been swept away by recent archaeological work. But this idea that societies without writing are somehow “uncivilised” remains quite prevalent in our collective imagination.

Many of our contemporaries would be surprised to learn that the Nordic peoples, especially those living along the shores of the eastern and north-eastern Baltic area, hardly used any writing until the classical Middle Ages, that is, the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This could give rise to the prejudice that they were decidedly backwards because they lived in “prehistory”, strictly speaking. It takes only a step to go from this view to thinking that the Crusades would have done them the greatest good. Especially since the fact that they often built in wood more than in stone means they left no monuments as spectacular as the Pont du Gard or the Colosseum in ancient times or even what we call the High Middle Ages.

Yet these societies which underwent Christianisation late, often in the 13<sup>th</sup> or even 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, were far more complex and robust than a cursory examination would suggest. The considerable work that archaeologists have been doing for nearly a century, particularly in recent decades thanks to increasingly powerful tools and exponentially developing knowledge, now makes it possible for us to understand and take into account this reality. The current issue is a testimony and a tribute to archeology as our sister discipline. Our readers should find here something to fuel their curiosity and overcome any lingering prejudices they may have. They will also be able to draw comparisons with what is known today about Scandinavian societies further to the west, as well as the Republic of Novgorod in the east, the powerful state with influence that extended from the Baltic to the Urals. In any case, they will

see that these Finno-Ugric and Baltic peoples could be formidable adversaries for their opponents, while at the same time shrewd traders who knew how to make the best use of their position as intermediaries, as the article by Jari-Matti Kuusela shows us. They will also observe that, far from having adopted the Christian religion directly after the Crusades, they long preserved their ancestral customs in unique syncretisms.

We are therefore very happy to contribute to this important deepening of knowledge which brings to European history an infinitely more subtle vision than one limiting it to a few common values and a conventional history of Christianisation and democracy.

In addition to this excellent collection presented by Lucie Malbos, our twenty-sixth issue also publishes two articles concerning the Baltic in modern times, in the “Mélanges” section. The first of these, written by one of the best specialists in the field, the Estonian historian Andres Adamson, studies the rise of the Gardie family in the service of the Kingdom of Sweden at a time when it was just becoming a great European power. The author takes the necessary distance to avoid hagiography and clearly shows that the fate of this famous lineage has often depended at least as much on luck as on talent. The second, written by Antti Kujala, author of a major work on the subject<sup>1</sup>, discusses the fate of the eastern provinces of Sweden (Finland in the geographical sense) between 1700 and 1714, during the Great Northern War between Sweden and a coalition with changing contours led by Russia.

It features a “Sources” section that is very substantial. Our colleague Dominique Gaurier, a specialist in the history of maritime law, presents us with a manuscript by Johan Gröning, unpublished in French before this translation, entitled *Navigatio libera* in Latin. The author, originally from the Swedish part of Mecklenburg (Wismar) and writing at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Nine Years' War (1688-1697) was in full swing, defended the freedom of navigation for neutral parties from a point of view apparently more pragmatic than that of Grotius, based on the rather vague notion of natural law. As this text is quite long, we have decided to begin with the introduction by Dominique Gaurier as well as Gröning's apologetics, the preface and the first three chapters of the work. The rest will appear in the next issue (27) of the journal.

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<sup>1</sup> Antti Kujala, *Miekka ei laske leikkiä. Suomi suuressa Pohjan sodassa (We don't play around with the sword. Finland in the Great Northern War 1700-1714)*, Helsinki, SKS, 2001.

Readers will also discover two recent book reviews, one about the astonishing life of a man who experienced slavery in a Danish colony, the island of St. Croix, and later settled in Iceland after defending his right to freedom, the other (collective) about the warriorlike figure of Charles XII of Sweden, a fine strategist but an unhappy king.

Finally, the issue ends with a well-deserved tribute to the great historian of the French Revolution, especially of the Directory, the late Kåre Tønnesson, a former student of Albert Soboul and professor of history at the University of Oslo from 1958 to 1991.

We hope that each of our readers will find something to their taste in this abundance of contributions, and we hope it will be exciting reading.

The Editors