JOURNAL OF NORTHERN STUDIES 1 • 2009, PP. 69–89

MAGNUS RODELL

Fortifications in the Wilderness

The Making of Swedish-Russian Borderlands around 1900

ABSTRACT In the decades around 1900 the northern territories between Sweden-Norway and Finland-Russia were created and enforced as significant borderlands. In the article I situate the making of these borderlands in what was known as "the Defence Question." Taking my point of departure in this heated political debate, I discuss the various cultural meanings that were ascribed to the Swedish-Russian borderlands. I argue that at the time the discourse about the Swedish-Russian relationships stretched out and made the northern parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia into a vast frontier between the west and the east, the occident and the orient and civilisation versus barbarism. In making borders culturally significant, material culture plays a vital role. In the article I analyze flags, border stones and the fortifications in Boden, Sweden. Through the discourse about the fortifications, the borderlands between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Finland took on a new strategic meaning. In the political and public debate they served as a means to bring together trade, industry, communication and defence politics into one overarching narrative. The general argument of my article is that the historical study of borderlands can benefit from analyzing significant political debates, and from exploring the material culture of past borderlands.

KEYWORDS borderlands, anthropology of borders, material culture, fortifications, the defence question, Norrland, Boden

Haparanda, the Summer of 1900. An Introduction

A sense of anticipation spread as the company of travellers approached the border.[1] The municipality of Haparanda and its surrounding areas on the Swedish side of the river were filled with flags. One traveller

stated that he had never seen so many flags concentrated in one place before (Centerwall 1901: 130 f.). This account is found in an article published in the Swedish yearbook *Svea* in 1901, written by Julius Centerwall, a member of the Swedish Parliament.

In the summer of 1900 one hundred and fifty Swedish politicians, officers and administrative staff went to the northern parts of Norrland. Since 1809 they constituted the border to the Grand Duchy of Finland, a part of Imperial Russia. One reason for making this trip was the costly decisions that the Parliament recently had made concerning the province (Centerwall 1901: 103 f.). In the late 1800s Norrland became envisioned as the land of a prosperous future (Sörlin 1988). But Norrbotten and Lappland were also border provinces, and from the 1880s onward several politicians, journalists and the military argued that Sweden could be facing an assault in these parts of the country.

The travellers made their first stop in the village of Boden (ca 1,100 kilometres north of Stockholm), where the Parliament one year earlier had finally decided to construct a huge fortification. The mountain hills surrounding Boden were going to be transformed into "a Nordic inland Gibraltar" (Centerwall 1901: 109). In the discussions, before and during the construction of the fortification, the borderlands between Sweden-Norway and Finland-Russia were ascribed meaning and reinforced as strategically important. The making of these borderlands will be discussed and analyzed in this article.

*

Since the end of the 1980s the world has changed dramatically and in the context of these transformations research about borders has increased significantly (see for example François, Seifarth & Struck 2006: 7 f.). The trend is perhaps most visible within anthropology. In two books—*Border Identities. Nation and State at International Frontiers* (1998) and *Borders. Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (1999)—the anthropologists Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson present a new approach to borderlands which can be summed up in three points.

Firstly, they state that borderlands are both sites and symbols of power. This is materially manifested through watchtowers, border stones, barbed wire fences and other material artefacts. *Secondly*, borders are meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities. They are parts of cultural landscapes that make various meanings. And *thirdly*, borders and borderlands are markers of national, regional and local identities. Sometimes these levels of identities coincide and sometimes they diverge. This depends on geographical

location as well as historical context (Wilson & Donnan 1998; Donnan & Wilson 1999).

In addition to the concept of identity, Donnan and Wilson also stress that one of the least understood and least studied aspects of international borders is culture. They use the concept of culture as a means to look not only on the formal arrangements between states but also on the "desires and other realities of the people who live at those borders, as well as the cultural significance of the borders to people in more distant metropolises" (Donnan & Wilson 1999: 11).

Inspired by these trends within anthropology, I will explore how the northern borderlands between Sweden-Norway and Finland-Russia were created and enforced as significant in Sweden around 1900. I will examine how various cultural meanings were expressed in the borderlands and show that formal border arrangements do not necessarily coincide with the cultural processes that are involved in the making of borders. In analyzing borderlands as cultural entities, various aspects can be taken into consideration. One that I will discuss, and which can be related to a widely defined cultural approach, is the importance of *material culture* in the making of borders.

I will situate the making of the Swedish-Norwegian and Finnish-Russian borderlands in what was known as "the Defence Question." During the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a growing awareness among certain groups that the state of the Swedish military defence was critical. Urgent measures concerning everything from the introduction of a conscript army to equipment, technical training and the construction of fortifications was discussed. Different interest groups were created; these held meetings, raised funds, published brochures, and tried to influence the parliamentary process.

The fortification in Boden became a focal point that served as a resource to structure the arguments that depicted the threat from Russia that Sweden faced, according to the defence activists. Through this practice the northern frontier was enforced as something of great importance. The construction of the fortification is one way to analyze the meanings of material culture. Even if the fortification had not physically come into being in the 1890s, it nevertheless occupied a space created in brochures, the press, magazines and so forth. I will also analyze how temporal forms of material culture became another part of the making of borderlands.

I focus on brochures and articles that made up a crucial part of the defence question and that were widely circulated in the contemporary public sphere. This material has been discussed within Swedish historiography before, but not from these perspectives (Danius 1956; Nevéus 1965; Holmén 1985; Åselius 1994b). Previous research dealt with the defence question,

sometimes in a very detailed manner. But if we take it one step further, the brochures and the articles also became an active part of the production of borders in a symbolic as well as a real sense.[2]

Norrland as the Land of the Future

In order to understand why Norrland and the northern border became important, both as symbol and geopolitical issue, comprehending historical as well as contemporary processes is crucial. After the defeat in the war with Russia in 1809, Sweden lost Finland, and the northern border was drawn along the rivers of Torne and Muonio (see for example Lähteenmäki 2006). For much of the nineteenth century Norrbotten was not considered very important. It was seen as a remote wilderness, and due to its inaccessibility the military elites feared no attack. Economically the province was under-developed; farming methods were primitive and infrastructure insufficient (Björklund 1990: 21 f.).[3] At the end of the century, however, these conditions would change drastically, and this was clearly articulated in the debate about the defence.

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a great economic boom in Norrland.[4] At the same time, with the northward expansion of the Swedish railway system, Norrland became more accessible. The board and wood pulp industry also developed, as did farming. In the context of this progress Norrland came to be considered as "the land of the future," as an America within the internal borders where national welfare could be accomplished.[5]

Concurrently with these developments, shifts within foreign policy led to further changes in the way Norrbotten was considered. In 1886 the railway lines in Finland reached the coastal city of Uleåborg. This meant that the Russians could move troops easily, and in 1903 the railway to the actual border was completed (Åselius 1994b: 70; Åselius 1994a: 199). During the 1880s and 1890s the Russian rule in Finland hardened. The relative independence that Finland had enjoyed within the empire, for more than half a century, was to a large extent abolished. Customs, currency and the post system were reformed according to imperial standards (Lindberg 1958: 113).[6] In the Swedish public debate and the security debate and within the security establishment, Russian policy in Finland was situated in a broader geopolitical frame of interpretation. The Russian will to expand westwards was considered a self-evident, almost natural, process (Lindberg 1950: 201).

Fennomanian nationalism became considered yet another problem. In the northern parts of Sweden-Norway a Finnish minority lived. During the course of the nineteenth century these groups grew bigger and in the latter half of the century they became objects of assimilation policy.[7] In this context, Fennomanism and the expansionist aspirations of the Russian empire

were seen as different sides of the same coin (Åselius 1994b: 199; Oredsson 2001: 25; Eriksen & Niemi 1981: 26–92).

To these factors we must add the state of the Swedish armed forces. During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a growing awareness that the army and the navy needed to be radically reformed and adapted to contemporary standards. But within the Parliament nothing happened. Some saw a solution as essential and initiated different organisations. One of the most important was Allmänna försvarsföreningen ['The Public Defence League']. These mostly conservative organisations played an important role in putting questions about the defence, but also about foreign policy in general and other contemporary issues, on the agenda (Cronenberg 1969; Björck 1946: 132).

All these factors were articulated and discussed simultaneously within the framework of the defence question, in various books, brochures and articles and through visual representations such as maps, drawings and photographs. These depictions should not be seen merely as a passive, reflective background, but as active, formative elements in the public debate. In understanding how the Swedish-Norwegian and Finnish-Russian borderlands were ascribed meaning and made more significant in the decades around 1900, the first step in the analysis is to discuss a geographical space, which was made into a vast borderland between Western civilisation and Eastern backwardness.

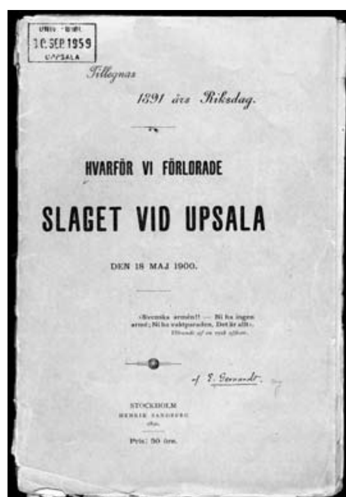
Mapping Boundaries

One of the best-known defence activists was the officer and publicist Gustaf Björlin (1845–1922).[8] In one of his brochures—*Vårt försvar mot norr* ['Our Defence in the North'] (1886)—he discussed Russian expansionism and orthodox religion, and argued that up north two different societies were confronted. The territory he referred to what we today call the North Calotte, made up of the northern parts of Sweden-Norway and Finland-Russia.

From the Middle Ages up until the present day the driving force of Russian nationhood, the unifying idea of being Russian, was, according to Björlin, a never-ending desire to expand. A desire we, the "children of the Occident," usually do not understand, since we tend to see the world "through the lens of modern civilisation" (Björlin 1886: 14). This way of describing Russia became more common in Sweden from the middle of the nineteenth century and onward (Eriksson 1939: 1–21).

In a brochure anonymously published in 1890, the Russian will to expand and the characteristics of the Russian people were brought forward. The brochure was organized as a conversation between an officer and a member of the Parliament. In the dialogue the officer represented the defence movement and the Member of Parliament the idea that the Swedish armed forces

were in good condition. The officer inculcates that Russia aspires power and greatness, and that the Slavic people would actively participate and collectively sacrifice themselves in any kind of enterprise that would serve to expand the empire ([Gernandt] 1890: 18 f.).[9] In this discourse the Russians were generally depicted as collectivist in contrast to the individualism of Occidental civilisation (Fig. 1).


10 SEP 1959
UPPSALA
Tillegnas
1891 års Riksdag.

HVARFÖR VI FÖRLORADE
SLAGET VID UPSALA
DEN 18 MAJ 1900.

STOCKHOLM

Fig. 1. Brochures was one media form where the defence question was discussed and the Russian threat depicted.

Russian expansionism was also visually depicted. In 1902 the magazine *Vårt försvar* ['Our Defence'] published a map that showed the extension of the empire from 1533 to 1894. The gradual territorial expansion was illustrated by different graphic patterns, and in the north-western corner of the map there was a white field—the still unconquered nation of Sweden. The visual drama of the map stated that it was likely that the white area would be the next object. In addition to the texts, the map became a visual depiction of the threat Sweden was facing. As the expansionist agenda of the Russians was discussed, the importance of the border was enforced. In this context, defending the border became crucial. It altered the meanings of the borderlands, made them more visible, and ascribed them vital strategic meaning (Fig. 2).

The uncertainty and the dangers of the contemporary situation can be situated in a wider international context. In the book *Der Krieg in seiner wahren Bedeutung für Staat und Volk* (1892), the German general Albert von Boguslawski (1834–1905) stated that never before in world history had the balance between war and peace been as insecure as during the decades following the great Franco-Prussian war. The urgent desire of the French to win back the provinces Germany had "reconquered" during the war, the

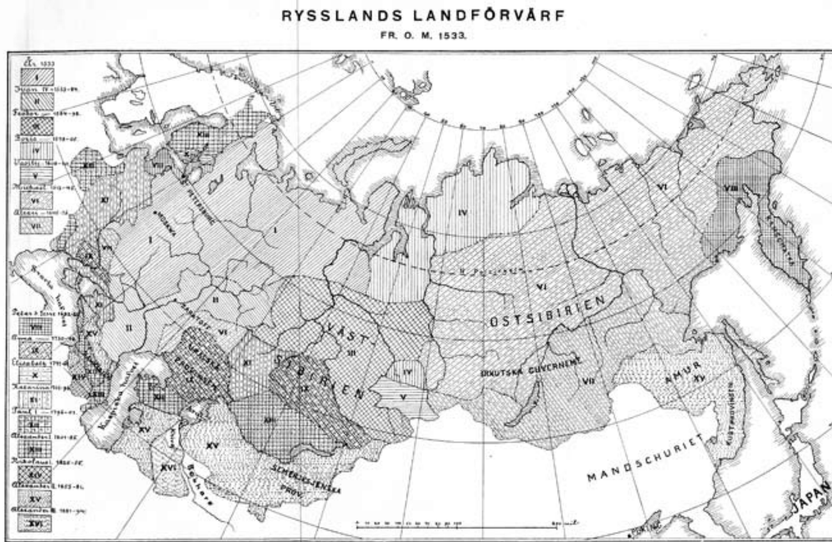


Fig. 2. This map enables the observer to follow Russian expansion ever since the sixteenth century. The implicit message was that Sweden would be the next object.

development in the Orient, the political attitude of the Russians, and the passions found among most Slavic people resulted in continuous armament. The argument of Boguslawski is found in the introduction of a book on war and war institutions, by the Swedish officer Carl Otto Nordensvan (1851–1924), published in 1893 (Nordensvan 1893: 1). By relating the Russian threat not only to the situation in Northern Scandinavia but also to Europe and Asia, the outbreak of war was made more likely, which thus made improvements and reforms within the Swedish defence even more urgent.

In addition to the aspirations to expand, Björlin argued that in order to convert the nomadic "Lapp" population during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Russians established orthodox monasteries and churches. One of the most important was the monastery in Petchenga (today Petsamo), constructed during the first decades of the 1500s. After flourishing, the monastery was plundered in 1589. The decision to reconstruct it in the 1870s and the 1880s was considered as part of the strategy to secure the Russian Arctic Sea coast (Björlin 1886: 7–9, 27). It was also located close to the Norwegian-Swedish border. Orthodox religion was thus seen as a vehicle to forge a unified imperialist culture.[10]

In a brochure published in 1890, Björlin further discussed what was happening within the Russian empire.[11] In the spring of 1886 a burial took place in Reval (today Tallinn) in Estonia. As everywhere else in "the civilised world" the coffin was decorated with flowers and wreaths. After the priest had conducted his prayer the coffin was lowered into the ground. All

of a sudden a police officer appeared and ordered the mourners to raise the coffin and remove the decorations. A recent *ukas* (a decree or a regulation) from the Russian Minister of the Interior stated that Protestants were forbidden to use flowers and decorations in burying their dead. Björlin saw this event as an example on “the ruthless persecution” that affects our “former compatriots” across the Baltic Sea. The persecutions were not restricted to religious customs only; everything that was “marked by western culture” served as a target. The university in Dorpat (Tartu), the “proud memory” from the times when Sweden was a great power in the Baltic Sea region, was “already totally Russified” (Björlin 1890: 59 f.).

In the 1880s and 1890s, institutions in Finland became, as mentioned above, the object of Russification. This tendency is emphasized by Björlin in his 1890 speech where he describes “the process of assimilation” that threatens people which are subject to Russian rule. The cultures, religions and traditions of these people are in the long run bound to be destroyed. Barbarism threatens “civilisation,” in this case Sweden and Norway, according to Björlin (60 f.).

In the 1886 brochure, Björlin compared the contemporary situation in the Norwegian Finnmark with the situation along the Russian Arctic Sea coast. Although the Russian government in 1868 decided to support the colonization of the Murmansk coast, it remained deserted eighteen years later. The only permanent town was Kola, with around 700 inhabitants. In the Norwegian Finnmark there were four towns with a total of more than 10,000 inhabitants. How does Björlin explain this huge difference? The most obvious explanation was the differences within the societies on each side of the border. Citing a Finnish newspaper, Björlin wrote that while the Norwegian Finnmark was a civilised area with “trade, magazines, doctors, clergy, nobility, post offices, telegraphs and steam ships,” the Russian side of the border was “lawless” and “one vast desert” dominated by old socio-economical structures (Björlin 1886: 19 ff.).

Through these words Björlin created a geography that was physical as well as mental. Larry Wolff states that the “operations of mental mapping were above all association and comparison” (Wolff 1994: 6). During the Enlightenment, philosophers and other writers used this logic and created the notion of civilisation. Civilisation discovered its defining contrasts in “shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarity” (Wolff 1994: 3). The observation in the Finnish paper must be situated in this context. In comparison, the two sides on the northernmost parts of the Kola Peninsula represent two radically different forms of societies. Sweden-Norway represented civilisation; Finland-Russia manifested the opposite.[12] In the context of borderlands, differences between societies and cultures were made visible.

This mental mapping related to the different sides of the border, made it a boundary not only between nations, but also between different levels of societal progress.

Demarcating Objects. The Material Culture of Borderlands

Mental mapping was one of the ways in which Swedish-Norwegian and Finnish-Russian borderlands were ascribed meaning. This mapping was interwoven with accounts describing the border in physical terms. In this section I will discuss how flags, border stones and portraits were important elements in the making of the border.

During the course of the twentieth century, flags as symbolic objects became an almost natural fact. In *Banal Nationalism* (1996), Michael Billig argues that we tend to associate the concept of nationalism with flags and banners used by right-wing extremists. Rarely do we reflect on what flags on government buildings mean and the role they play. Billig states that the idea of the nation is being continuously created in a banal way and on an everyday basis (Billig 1995: 5 f.). The use of flags as a national symbol is one of the traditions invented during the second half of the nineteenth century (Hobsbawm 1983). From then on, they have been a vital part of the symbolic and material repertoire of every nation-state.

Flags are also a decisive way of demarcating the border of the nation-state, which was exactly what the members of the Parliament saw in the summer of 1900. One obvious remark is that the flags in Haparanda and its surroundings had been put on display due to the official situation. In the mid-nineteenth century the use of flags in Sweden was related to military practice, official buildings and public events. The use of flags in Haparanda can be related to these older practises. But around 1900 a wider use became more common. In 1893 the ethnographer and museum founder Arthur Hazelius (1833–1901) initiated a national feast at Skansen—one of the oldest open-air museums in the world, inaugurated in 1891—on 6 June, and from 1916 to 1983 this day was celebrated as the day of the Swedish flag (Biörstrand 1967; Jonsson 1993).

It is impossible to visualise international borders during the past fifty years without flags. The Swedish flags in Haparanda expressed where one territorial entity ended and another one started. They also connected the centre of the nation with its periphery. In the context of the Torne Valley, one must also keep in mind that in 1888 four elementary state schools were founded, with the chief purpose of teaching the Finnish minority Swedish. These schools served as a means of Swedish assimilation policy (Elenius 2001). The flags became another way of expressing the linguistic national

homogeneity that the schools served to create. In this light, the flags in Haparanda in June 1900 became a decisive and multilayered way of enforcing belonging at the end frontier of the Swedish nation.

Another way of marking the border is border stones. In an article, published in 1904 in the Swedish Tourist Association Yearbook, Hugo Samzelius described the Finnish population living on the Swedish side of the Torne River (Samzelius 1904: 138–161). Even if the overarching purpose of the article was to describe the beauty and the richness of the area to potential tourists, Samzelius started his article by discussing the consequences of the treaty of Fredrikshamn in the autumn of 1809. In the treaty Sweden lost one third of its territory, and the Finnish communities, located on both sides of the Torne River, were shattered and divided by the state boundary.

The discussion of the border situation after 1809 was stressed by a photograph of one of the border stones along the Torne River (Samzelius 1904: 139). This border stone and others were put there after 1809 (Gustafsson 1995: 78). In the summer of 1888, the Finnish-Swedish border was overhauled, and the border stones were improved (Elenius 2001: 133). The anthropologists Samuel Truett and Elliott Young state: "National borders are where territorialization becomes real, where physical markers and barriers are erected, and agents of the state regulate the movement of people, goods and information" (Truett & Young 2004: 2). Border stones manifest, in a materially more permanent way than flags, where one territory ends and another one begins.

In Samzelius' article, the photograph sets the scene. Even if he does not explicitly discuss the border situation after the introduction, it nevertheless serves as a condition for the present. Border stones become a materially persistent way for the state to manifest its presence. They also serve as a means to physically inscribe the abstract border on the map and show that it is "real." The geographer James D. Sidway argues "that the representation on the map *coincides* with other systems of representation in which the border is narrated, cited and reiterated." Often borders are marked by rivers, and if not, they can be designated by border stones (Sidaway 2005: 192). In the case discussed here, the Torne River marked the border, and the border stones further inscribed the boundary.

Björlin argued that a conflict could have erupted between Russia and Sweden in the 1850s (Björlin 1886: 16 ff.; see also Björlin 1890: 68 f.). But the outbreak of the Crimean War drew the attention of the Russians elsewhere. In the 1870s and the 1880s, Finnish migration to Northern Norway resulted in the so-called *Finnish-Russian question*. In the Russian press headlines like "Oppressed Finns in Norway" were recurrent. Björlin presumed that the Russian plan was to let the Finnish language eventually expand west and

south and let the Fennomans follow with their agitation. And when the time had come the Russians would attack (Björlin 1890: 69).[13]

In Sweden, the political boundary did not correspond to the language border after 1809, and some saw the expansion of the Finnish language and population in the Norwegian Finnmark and the Torne Valley as a threat (Lundholm, Groth & Pettersson 1996: 80). The state schools in the Torne Valley served to control this development. By referring to a speech held by the official Simon Nordström (1831–1906) at the Geographical Anthropological Association, Björlin created a link between the Finns and the Russian desire to expand.

In his speech, Nordström stated that the closeness of "the Russian eagle" was getting more and more obvious. In the Finnish cottages, portraits of the Czar family were found, and there was also a wide use of Russian porcelain (Björlin 1890: 70). These artefacts served as an indication of the Russian expansionist agenda and were seen as a part of a Fennomanian project. They also made the Finns into a hostile other, living in the borderlands. Using the portraits and the porcelain as physical testimonies of contemporary political processes became another way of envisioning the threat Sweden was facing in its north-eastern borderlands.

The Gibraltar of the North

One powerful artefact that has been used for centuries in defending, enforcing and physically marking state borders is military fortifications. In the 1800s and up until the interwar period in the 1920s and 1930s, the art of fortification improved, and huge fortifications were constructed throughout Europe. The fortifications in Boden are among the most expensive military projects in Swedish history, and parts of them were taken into use in 1907. At that point the fortifications had been on the political agenda for almost three decades.

In his 1886 brochure *Vårt försvar mot norr* Gustaf Björlin discussed the necessary measures that were needed to reinforce Sweden's abilities to defend Norrland. Strategically, he stated, one must always remember that "Norrbotten is a *border county*." One fact illustrating this was a mixed population (Björlin 1886: 46 ff.). Three years later a short book was anonymously published. The book dealt with the defence question and showed how Sweden lost Norrland after being attacked by Russians ([Douglas] 1889).

Even though Norrbotten had constituted the only Swedish land border since the 1809 peace agreement, it had not been distinguished as significant. This vast territory was considered a wilderness where no major military operations could be launched (Cronenberg 1890: 36 ff.). The explicit discourse about Norrbotten as an important border area altered from the 1880s. So

did the criticism of the negligence in the past. According to the historian Sverker Oredsson the interest in defending Norrland was something new in the 1880s (Oredsson 1968: 292). The political and cultural processes that make borders and borderlands into meaning-carrying entities should not at first hand be related to the border agreement in 1809, but more to the developments and the public debate at the end of the century. One public arena where this can be observed was the defence question. Among other topics, the strategic importance of Norrbotten was discussed by agents like Björlin and Melander. They stated that different measures were required to strengthen the border defence, and one of the most crucial was the construction of permanent fortifications.

In the 1890s, political discussions on the fortification of Boden broadened; several expert inquiries were presented, and in articles and brochures defence activists argued that fortifications were a necessity (Cronenberg 1990). At a public lecture held in 1890, Björlin emphasized that a fortified Boden would mean that the enemy would have to increase its resources substantially (Björlin 1890: 76). In 1895 an anonymous author published a brochure entitled *Öfre Norrlands fasta försvar* ['The permanent defence of Upper Norrland']. Several of the arguments and outlooks embraced by the defence activists were formulated in this text. Since the reign of Peter the Great, Russia had pushed Sweden back step by step, as Björlin stated in one article: Russia has for a long time been "striving to the ocean" (Björlin 1888: 105). In relation to this expansionist agenda the Swedish defence needed to be reinforced. In case of war, the anonymous author argued that the country was facing its greatest threat along its north-eastern border. The main road across the Torne river was available during all seasons. In the event of an attack, a border fortification would radically improve the defence abilities. The anonymous brochure also brought forward the expansion of the railway network in Sweden, and in Finland, and stated that soon they would merge at the northern border ([S] 1895: 7–10).

This was also considered by Emil Svensén in his book *Sverige och dess grannar* ['Sweden and its neighbours'] (1901). In discussing Norrland, he brought forward the rich mineral assets and the electricity that the great waterfalls could supply. Eventually resulting in a prosperous industry and the growth of the population, both would serve to strengthen and secure the continuity of the Swedish national spirit. He stated that politicians and the military were very much aware that the railway transformed the geopolitical outlook. The railways did not only result in commercial opportunities (Svensén 1901: 124, 126). They also posed a threat. They enforced the significance of the north-eastern border and ascribed it strategic meaning. Or in the words of Emil Melander: the state border was not only a "geographical

concept" but had through the railway also "become a politically strategic" concept (Melander 1898b: 39).

The anonymous author continued to discuss how the railways in Finland made mobilization and movement of Russian troops a lot easier. In a future war, fortifications would therefore become necessary, and a fortification in Boden would have a crucial function. There was no other place in Sweden where natural conditions were more favourable. In the end of the brochure he brought arguments about economy and defence together. Whatever the outcome of a future war "against our fatherland, a fortified and unconquered Boden" would be "the key to the inexhaustible ore fields of Gellivara and Luosavaara" ([S] 1895: 22). A fortified Boden would guarantee the future visions that were linked to Norrbotten. The links among trade, industry and defence politics were brought together in the discourse on the fortification.[14] In addition, trade, industry and other forms of developments can also be related to the mental map of civilisation that was ascribed to the Swedish-Norwegian side of the border. National progress needed to be protected against Russian imperialist aspirations.

One well-known defence activist was Emil Melander, mentioned above. In several texts published in various contexts, he strongly argued that Boden needed a fortification. In the article "Framtidslandet" ['Land of the Future'] he described Norrbotten as the place of possibilities, and he also brought this together with the need to improve the defence. The place to do this ought to be where most roads intersected and the enemy thus had to pass. In Boden seven higways meet, the railway connected the village with the rest of Sweden, and in the future it would be linked with the railway in Finland and with the Atlantic Ocean at Ofoten (Melander 1898a: 7). If an enemy passed the border along the river of Torne, it was in a fortified Boden he could be stopped.[15]

In the geopolitical narrative that made the fortifications politically possible, the Russian expansionist desires were linked to the altered situation of the railways and the growing economy of Norrbotten. This narrative was produced in the defence question and through the activities that different organisations arranged, and it enforced the meanings and the significance of the north-eastern border. The fortifications in Boden thus became one of the focal points through which the central arguments in the debate could be formulated.

In the travel account by Julius Centerwall that was published in the yearbook *Svea*, Boden was situated in the broader economic expansion of the area. Members of the Swedish Parliament made a journey to Norrland in June 1900, and in Boden they were guided by an officer who showed them the hills where the fortifications would be constructed. Centerwall stated that once one had seen the future location of the fortification, one could

not doubt the immense meaning it would have for Sweden's defence capacities. The mountains surrounding Boden would be turned into "a Nordic inland Gibraltar" (Centerwall 1901: 109–113).

Alongside text descriptions, maps served to visualize the geographical situation of Norrbotten and the importance of permanent fortifications. In Björlin's brochure *Vårt försvar mot norr*, a map was included after the text. On the Finnish side, the newly opened railway between Vasa and Uleåborg was clearly marked. Observing a map like this meant something else in the 1880s and 1890s than it does today. As mentioned above, the expansion of the railway in the border areas held promises as well as threats. It served the visions of economic and societal progress, but also made northern parts of Sweden and Norway strategically more accessible. The textual descriptions of the railway were visually expressed through this map. Maps, illustrations and other visual sources were given meaning in specific historical contexts and should not be interpreted through the lens of the present.

In Centerwall's travel account, there was a map covering the vicinity of Boden. It underlined the strategic importance of Boden, and visually depicted what the author of *Öfre Norrlands fasta försvar* and Melander had discussed. In the year-book *Vårt försvar*, a map expressed the expansion of the Russian empire since the sixteenth century. At the same time it also implicitly underlined the importance of defending the border, and it is no coincidence that the year-book included articles about the strategic importance of Norrland ([A.S.] 1902: 19–28). In addition to the maps, pictures displayed the village of Boden and the mountain hills where the fortification would be constructed (*Hvar 8 dag* 1900: 553 f.; Melander 1898a or 1898b; Centerwall 1901).

Even if the details concerning the fortification were secret, it nevertheless worked as a resource in the arguments produced by the defence activists. Arguing about the need to construct this fortification, they also depicted the menace Sweden was facing. In addition, through the discourse about the fortification, the borderlands between Sweden and the Grand Duchy of Finland took on a new strategic meaning.

Through various accounts, the fortification was inscribed in the landscape. Ultimately it served as a state vehicle to physically manifest its presence, power and will to control and defend the borderland and the territory of the state. As the flags and the border stones, it marked national homogeneity at the peripheries of state territory.

Conclusion

Summing up the discussion, it becomes clear that if we situate the making of Swedish-Russian borderlands in the defence question around 1900, three

intersecting levels jointly made the border and the borderlands between Sweden-Norway and Finland-Russia culturally and politically significant.

Firstly historical and cultural accounts created a mental map where cultural differences between Sweden and Russia became separating factors. The Russian settlements along the Murmansk coast, on the eastern side of the Norwegian-Swedish Border, were compared to the way the Norwegians organized their society. The prosperity of the Norwegian Finnmark and the county of Norrbotten were contrasted to the vastness and backwardness that characterized the non-Swedish-Norwegian terrain; a backwardness that was often related to orthodox religion. Generally it is important to keep in mind that religion continued to play a crucial role in the forging of national identities throughout the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, something that research about nation-building has not focused very much upon.

Making the Russians, and to some extent the Finns, into the other, was very common in Sweden and in several other European countries during the second half of the nineteenth century. At the time of the Crimean War, the discourse about Russian otherness, and the cruelty of the Russian regime, was a dominant trope in the West-European press. However, the otherization of the Russians was not a simple dichotomy. Some argued that Russia could become a European civilization; that the Russians were positioned in between the Asian and the European cultures, but that the development of the Russian society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was Asian.

Secondly I explore these northern borderlands by analyzing material artefacts mentioned by contemporaries. Taking material culture into consideration is a fruitful way to understand how the territorial space of the state is created. I analyze artefacts that gained and gave a specific meaning in the context of borderlands. They served as a means to symbolically connect peripheral parts of the nation with the centre. Appearing in peripheral borderlands they also expressed the power of the centre. The flags that the members of the Parliament saw when they came to Haparanda expressed the reciprocal relationship between the centre and periphery. The border stones, some of them located along the Torne River, inscribed and manifested the boundary in a materially more persistent way. The portraits of the Czar family and the Russian porcelain served as indications of both Russian expansionism and Fennomanian aspirations.

Thirdly I discuss the meanings that were ascribed to the construction of the fortifications in Boden. During the 1890s several defence activists argued that Sweden needed to construct permanent fortifications. The purpose of those was of course to defend the nation against a hostile assault. The arguments draw on the expansion of the railway in both Sweden and

Finland, and the expanding industry in Norrbotten. The railway network resulted in better communications that served the Swedish economy, but at the same time the Russians could use them to move troops to the border. Defence activists like Gustaf Björlin and Emil Melander and organizations like Allmänna försvarsföreningen and Fosterländska studentförbundet used textual accounts, visual accounts—such as maps and photographs—and organized lectures to depict the menace Sweden was facing. In this discourse the fortification of Boden served as a means to bring together trade, industry, communications and defence politics into one overarching narrative.

The historical study of borderlands can benefit from analyzing significant political debates and all the layers of meaning that they express, such as the defence question, but also from looking at the material culture of past borderlands. Quite often materialities are left as traces of long gone geopolitical narratives. In 1900 the Swedish parliament decided to construct fortifications in Boden, and the first parts were taken into use in 1907. Throughout the twentieth century the fortress was continuously developed, and Boden became one of the biggest garrison towns in Sweden during the Cold War. In January 1998, the fortress was closed, and today the fortifications stand as a monumental manifestation of the meanings the Swedish north-eastern borderlands once had.

NOTES

1. This article has been published in a longer version—"Das Gibraltar des Nordens. Die Herstellung des schwedisch-russischen Grenzgebietes um 1900"—in the anthology *Grenzregionen. Ein europäischer Vergleich vom 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. C. Duhamelle, A. Kossert & B. Struck (Campus Verlag, 2007), pp. 123–152.
2. There are also different possibilities to study the perception of the northern borderlands by those who lived there. In the area we can find Sami/Lapp and Finnish minorities. In the late nineteenth century both groups became the objects of state policy in several ways (see for example Eriksen & Niemi 1981; Elenius 2001; Lähteenmäki 2006).
3. Carl af Forsell stated in the 1820s that most of the inner parts of Norrland were unknown (Höjer 2007: 82).
4. At the beginning of the 1880s Swedish exports of iron ore were almost non-existent. The introduction of new methods, however, led to a dramatic increase in the following decades and in 1913 iron ore made up 8.5 percent of the Swedish export industry (Salmon 1997: 39 f.; Sörlin 1988: 56).
5. The great expansion of the population also served as a sign. In an article on the defence of Norrland, Emil Melander (1856–1930) claimed that the population of Norrland in the beginning of the seventeenth century was 125,000. In the end of the 1890s it was 800,000. Even if these figures are not entirely correct they still depicted a crucial change (Melander 1898b: 37). Sörlin (1988: 58) writes that between 1870 and 1900 the population increased by 300,000 people.

[6] In 1898 Nikolaj Bobrikov (1839–1904) was appointed general governor, and in the following year the constitution was abolished. In the summer of 1899, thousands of intellectuals all around Europe signed a plea to the Russian Czar on behalf of the Finnish people (Oredsson 2001: 28; Polvinen 1995).

[7] In 1821 the Finns on the Swedish side of the Torne River numbered about 7,000. By 1860 their numbers had nearly doubled. In the Norwegian Finnmark the Kvens (the Norwegian name of the Finnish minority) made up 13 percent of the population in 1845 and in 1875 the figure was 24, 2 percent (Niemi 1995: 152, 154).

[8] Björlin's writings where widely circulated, printed in several editions, and some served as lectures in different public appearances (Ribbing 1930: 22). Björlin was the editor of various journals containing topics related to the defence question which were discussed (for information about his public activities see Jacobson 1924: 612–620). Ideologically he was conservative which generally characterized the men taking part in the defence movement (Cronenberg 1969).

[9] The Russian will to expand was also expressed by for example [S.] (1895: 6 f.), [A. S.] (1902: 23) and Hedin (1905: 79). In the brochure *Vår mest hotade provins* ['Our most exposed province'] Gustaf Björlin discussed the strategic importance of the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea and wrote that the commander of the Russian troops, just before they left the island in 1808, promised that sooner or later they would come back (Björlin: 1890: 4).

[10] Scholars often argue that the symbolic universe of nationalism replaced religion during the course of the nineteenth century. Describing the historical background to the genocide in Bosnia during the 1990s, Michael A. Sells (1996: 176) argues that "the religious element in nineteenth-century Serbian nationalism is far more important than works like Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* might lead us to expect."

[11] Björlin performed parts of this brochure as speech held in Uppsala in March 1890. The organizing body was Fosterländska studentförbundet ['The National Student League'], founded the previous year. It became a part of the defence movement and served to make students an active part of the defence efforts (Cronenberg 1969: 67, *Det flydda decenniet* 1899: 8–9).

[12] A similar mental mapping can be found in various travel accounts that compared the situation in the Swedish border town of Haparanda with the ones in the Finnish border town of Torneå. The Dane Ludvig Daa visited Torneå in 1867 and stated that the towns differed in many ways. Haparanda was modern with painted buildings. In Torneå the houses were run down and business activities had steadily been declining since 1809 (Lähteenmäki 2006: 31 f.).

[13] This is thoroughly covered by Eriksen & Niemi (1981).

[14] See also for example [v. Hbg.] (1898: 30).

[15] In the book *Fästningar och fästningskrig* (1907) B. A. Tarras-Wahlberg, captain in the general staff, generally discussed the purposes of border fortifications (Tarras-Wahlberg 1907: 13–19).

REFERENCES

[A. S.] (1902). "Luleå-Ofoten banans betydelse för Norrbottens försvar" ['The importance of the Luleå-Ofoten railway in defending Norrland'], *Vårt försvar*, 1, pp. 19–28.

Åselius, G. (1994a). "Hotbilden. Svenska militära bedömningar av Ryssland 1880–1914" ['The menace. Russia in Swedish military assessments 1880–1914'], in *Mellan björ-*

nen och örnen. Sverige och Östersjöområdet under det första världskriget, 1914–1918, eds. J. Engström & L. Ericson, Visby: Gotlands fornsal, pp. 197–207.

— (1994b). *The Russian "Menace" to Sweden. The Belief of a Small Security Elite in the Age of Imperialism*, Stockholm.

Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, London: Allen & Unwin.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage.

Biörstrand, A. (1967). "Svenska flaggans bruk" ['The use of the Swedish flag'], *Fataburen*, pp. 43–56.

Björck, S. (1946). *Heidenstam och sekelskiftets Sverige. Studier i hans nationella och sociala författarskap* ['Heidenstam and turn of century Sweden. Studies in his national and social authorship'], Stockholm: Natur och kultur.

Björklund, J. (1990). "Den samhällsekonomiska bakgrunden till Bodens fästning" ['The socio-economical background of Bodens fortification'], in *Boden. Fästningen, garnisonen, samhället*, eds. B. O. Nyström & S. Skeppstedt, Boden: Kungl. Bodens artilleriregementes historiekommitté, pp. 21–27.

Björlin, G. (1886). *Vårt försvar mot norr* ['Our defence towards the north'], Stockholm.

— (1888). "Vårt krigspolitiska läge och dess väsendtligaste kraf" ['Our war-political situation and it's most crucial demands'], *Fosterlandets försvar. Tidskrift för alla*, pp. 91–139.

— (1890). "Några ord i vår försvarsfråga. Föredrag hållet i Uppsala den 20 mars" ['A few words on our defence question. Lecture held in Uppsala the 20th of March'], *Fosterlandets försvar. Tidskrift för alla*, 3–4, pp. 59–78.

[Björlin, G.] (1890). *Vår mest hotade provins. En maning till Gotlands invånare af en försvarsvän* ['Our most exposed province. A call to the inhabitants of Gotland signed by a friend of the defence'], Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & S:r.

Centerwall, J. (1901). "Från riksdagsmännens färd till Höga norden sommaren 1900" ['From the journey made by Members of Parliament to the High North in the summer of 1900'], *Svea*, pp. 103–139.

Cronenberg, A. (1969). "Gustaf Björlin och Allmänna försvarsföreningen" ['Gustaf Björlin and the Public Defence League'], *Aktuellt och historiskt. Meddelanden från försvarsstabens krigshistoriska avdelning*, pp. 53–93.

— (1990). "Från Karlsborg till Boden. Tillkomsten av Bodens fästning mot bakgrund av tidens operativa teori" ['From Karlsborg to Boden. Constructing the fortification in Boden in context of reigning military theory'], in *Boden. Fästningen, garnisonen, samhället*, eds. B. O. Nyström & S. Skeppstedt, Boden: Kungl. Bodens artilleriregementes historiekommitté, pp. 29–81.

Danius, L. (1956). *Samhället och försvaret. Återblick på svensk försvarspolitik 1809–1955* ['Society and defence. Swedish defence politics in retrospect 1809–1955'], Uppsala: Medborgarskolan.

Det flydda decenniet. Minnesskrift utgiven med anledning af Fosterländska studentförbundets 10-årstillvaro (1899) ['The gone decade. A commemoration published at the tenth anniversary of the Patriotic Student League'], Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.

Donnan, H. & Wilson, T. M. (1999). *Borders. Frontiers of Identity, Nation and the State*, Oxford: Berg.

[Douglas, L.] (1889). *Hur vi förlorade Norrland* ['How we lost Norrland'], Stockholm: Nordin & Josephson.

Elenius, L. (2001). *Både finsk och svensk. Modernisering, nationalism och språkförändringar i Tornedalen 1850–1939* ['Both Finnish and Swedish. Modernisation, nationalism and language change in the Torne Valley, 1850–1939'] (Kulturens frontlinjer 34), Umeå: Kulturgräns i norr.

Eriksen, K. E. & Niemi, E. (1981). *Den finske fare. Sikkerhetsproblemer og minoritetspolitik i nord 1860–1940* ['The Finnish menace. Security problems and minority policy in the north 1860–1940'], Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Eriksson, S. (1939). *Svensk diplomati och tidningspress under Krimkriget* ['Swedish diplomacy and newspapers during the Crimean War'], Stockholm: Norstedt.

François, E., Seifarth, J. & Struck, B. (2006). "Einleitung. Grenzen und Grenzräume. Erfahrungen und Konstruktionen," in *Die Grenze als Raum, Erfahrung und Konstruktion. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen vom 17. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. E. François, J. Seifarth & B. Struck, Frankfurt: Campus verlag, pp. 7–29.

[Gernandt, E.] (1890). *Hvarför vi förlorade slaget vid Upsala den 18 maj 1900* ['Why we lost the battle at Uppsala 18 May 1900'], Stockholm: H. Sandberg.

Gustafsson, Å. (1995). *Riksgränshistoria & gränsöversyner. Från Svinesund till Haparanda* ['Frontier history and border revisions. From Svinesund to Haparanda'], Gävle: Lantmäteriet/Kartförlaget.

Hedin, S. (1905). *Sverige och den stora östern* ['Sweden and East'], Stockholm: Lantmäteriet/Kartförlaget.

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1983). "Introduction. Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. J. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–14.

Höjer, H. (2007). *Sveriges argaste liberal. Carl af Forsell. Officer, statistiker och filantrop* ['The angriest liberal in Sweden. Carl af Forsell. Officer, statistician, and philanthropist'], Stockholm: Norstedts.

Holmén, H. (1985). *Försvar och samhällsförändring. Avvägningsfrågor i svensk försvarsdebatt 1880–1925* ['Defence policy in an age of political change. Issues of adjustment and balance in Swedish defence debate from 1880 to 1925'], Göteborg.

Jacobson, G. (1924). "Björlin, Johan Gustaf", in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, 4, ed. B. Boëthius, Stockholm, pp. 612–620.

Jonsson, L. (ed.) (1993). *Flaggor. Från fälttåg till folkfest* ['Flags. From military campaigns to feasts'], Linköping: Läckö institutet.

Lähteenmäki, M. (2006). *The Peoples of Lapland. Boundary Demarcations and Interaction in the North Calotte from 1809 to 1889*, Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters.

Lindberg, F. (1950). *Kunglig utrikespolitik. Studier i svensk utrikespolitik under Oskar II och fram till borggårdskrisen* ['Royal foreign policy. Studies in Swedish foreign politics from the reign of Oskar II to the castle court yard crisis'], Stockholm.

— (1958). *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia* 3:4, *1872–1914* ['History of Swedish foreign policy, vol. 3:4, 1872–1914'], Stockholm: Norstedt.

Lundholm, K. O., Groth, Ö. J. & Peterson, R. Y. (1996). *North Scandinavian History*, Luleå.

Mazower, M. (2000). *The Balkans. A Short History*, New York: Modern Library.

Melander, E. (1898a). "Framtidslandet" ['Land of the future'], *Allmänna försvarsföreningens årsskrift*, 1, pp. 4–7.

— (1898b). "Öfre Norrlands försvar" ['The defence of Upper Norrland'], *Allmänna försvarsföreningens årsskrift*, 2, pp. 36–62.

"Några bilder från Boden" (1900). ['Some pictures from Boden'], *Hvar 8 dag*, 35, pp. 553–554.

Nevéus, T. (1965). *Ett betryggande försvar. Värnplikten och arméorganisationen i svensk politik 1880–1885* ['An adequate defence. The conscript army and military organisation in Swedish politics 1880–1945'], Stockholm.

Niemi, E. (1995). "The Finns in Northern Scandinavia and Minority Policy," in *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World*, ed. S. Tägil, London: Hurst, cop., pp. 145–178.

Nordensvan, C. O. (1893). *Kriget och krigsinrättningarna. En bok för alla* ['The war and the war institutions. A book for everyone'], Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & S:r.

Oredsson, S. (1968). "Försvarsintresset omkring 1890, järnvägsbyggandet och Sveriges strategiska läge" ['The defence interest around 1890, railway construction and the strategic position of Sweden'], *Scandia*, pp. 287–310.

— (2001). *Svensk rädsla. Offentlig fruktan i Sverige under 1900-talets första hälft* ['Swedish dread. Public fear in Sweden during the first half of the nineteenth century'], Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Polvinen, T. (1995). *Imperial Borderland. Bobrikov and the Attempted Russification of Finland, 1898–1904*, transl. by S. Huxley, London: Hurst.

Ribbing, O. (1930). "Allmänna försvarsföreningen 1890–1930" ['The Public Defence League 1890–1930'], in *Vårt försvar. Jubileumshäfte*, 4, pp. 9–52.

Rodell, M. (2002). *Att gjuta en nation. Statyinvigningar och nationsformering i Sverige vid 1800-talets mitt* ['Shaping a nation. Statues and nation-building in nineteenth century Sweden'], Stockholm: Natur och kultur.

[S.] (1895). *Öfre Norrlands fasta försvar* ['The permanent defence of Upper Norrland'], Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & S:r.

Salmon, P. (1997). *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890–1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Samzelius, H. (1904). "I nordsvenska finnmarken" ['In the North-Swedish Finnmark'], *Svenska Turistföreningens Årsbok*, Stockholm, pp. 138–161.

Sells, M. A. (1996). *The Bridge Betrayed. Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sidaway, J. D. (2005). "The Poetry of Boundaries. Reflections from the Portuguese-Spanish Borderlands," in *B/ordering Space*, eds. H. van Houtum, O. Kramsch & W. Zierhofer, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 189–206.

Sörlin, S. (1988). *Framtidslandet. Debatten om Norrland och naturresurserna under det industriella genombrottet* ['Land of the future. The debate on Norrland and its natural resources at the time of the industrial breakthrough'], Stockholm: Carlsson.

Struck, B. (2006). *Nicht West – nicht Ost. Frankreich und Polen in der Wahrnehmung deutscher Reisender zwischen 1750 und 1850*, Göttingen: Wallstein.

Svensén, E. (1901). *Sverige och dess grannar* ['Sweden and its neighbours'], Stockholm: Geber.

Tarras-Wahlberg, B. A. (1907). *Fästningar och fästningskrig. En orienterande framställning för officerare af alla truppslag* ['Fortifications and war. An introductory account for army officers'], Stockholm.

Truett, S. & Young, E. (eds.) (2004). *Continental Crossroads. Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*, London.

[v. Hbg.] (1898). "Främsta stridslinien vid fosterlandets försvar" ['The first line of combat in defending the father land'], *Allmänna försvarsföreningens årsskrift*, Stockholm, pp. 8–34.

Wilson, T. M. & Donnan, H. (1998). *Border Identities. Nation and State at International*

Frontiers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Wolff, L. (1994). *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilisation on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.