



Book Review

Ola Winberg

*Den statskloka resan: Adelns
peregrinationer 1610–1680*

Uppsala University (PhD diss.)

2018, 414 pp.

During the last decades, the interest in transnational contacts and relations has escalated within a wide range of academic disciplines. This can probably be explained by an interest in the effects of globalisation on contemporary society, but also by the internationalisation of higher education and research, which has led scholars to raise their eyes beyond the national borders and to engage in international collaborations on transnational relations. This development can also be seen in studies of early modern Europe. To some extent, it has been promoted by EU funding, where the study of European integration is a recurring topic.

Ola Winberg's doctoral dissertation *Den statskloka resan: Adelns peregrinationer 1610–1680* can be read as a contribution to that broad field of academic inquiry into international and transnational phenomena, although it is not explicitly inscribing itself into that particular domain. Winberg studies the educational travels of a number of young members of the Swedish nobility during the seventeenth century, so-called *grand tours*, *Kavalierstouren*, or *peregrinatio academica*. The focus of Winberg's study is the educational aspects of these travels in a broad sense, including not just theoretical studies, but the integrated package of acquiring

theoretical knowledge, practical skills and courtly manners. The first chapter presents the three problems that the dissertation addresses: 1) contemporary opinions and discourses about the purpose and value of such travels; 2) how these journeys were realised, in a very practical sense, focussing on preparations, financing, itineraries and the actual activities carried out during the trip; and 3) the return to Sweden, and ways in which it was used to promote career opportunities.

Winberg relates these educational journeys to a wider framework of state-building, a concept that has been used with some success in Swedish research on the early modern period, to problematise processes and agencies during this expansionist era of the Swedish state. This is the closest we come to a theoretical framework for the study, which is otherwise motivated by references to previous research.

Winberg maintains that previous studies in this area has focussed primarily on the traveller's theoretical studies, and in particular their visits to European universities. An outspoken aim of this study is to apply a more holistic perspective, incorporating the practical and non-academic activities that the young noblemen were engaged in, including both the established *exercitia*, such as riding, fencing, dancing and learning an instrument, and participation in diplomatic missions, refined social interaction in courtly settings and the experience of the culture of the European elite at for example French and Italian theatres and opera houses.

The investigated period is based on the political development of the Swedish state. Its start in 1610/1611 is motivated by the establishment of the Swedish Kingdom as a European great power under Gustavus Adolphus. Its end in 1680 coincides with the political upheaval in connection with the Diet that year, when Sweden took the first steps towards royal absolutism, and the crown's demand for travelled noblemen diminished as a result.

The study makes use of a wide selection of source material. For the analysis of the debates on the usefulness and advisability of travelling, a number of printed dissertations and orations are consulted, in combination with seven hand-written instructions for travellers. In the study of the actual itineraries and activities on-route, Winberg uses mainly travel journals, letters and account books.

After the first introductory chapter, the second chapter of the study deals with travel as a form of knowledge, and investigates the justification and critique voiced in relation to the educational trips of the nobility in Swedish sources. Winberg demonstrates that a central concept in this discourse was *prudentia*, which can more generally be translated as "practical judgement," but in this particular context should be interpreted as "political wisdom:" "the ability to realise acquired knowledge into practical political measures and proceedings." An equivalent term in seventeenth-century Swedish is *statsklokhet*, which we find in the title of the dissertation. This concept is strongly related to a set of skills and a capacity for judgment, considered necessary for serving the state at the highest level, for example, as an officer or a top-level civil servant – hence the connection with state-building processes. Winberg

points out that this reveals a historical understanding of knowledge, which stresses the practical aspects and experience of a certain know-how and set of skills. These could only be acquired by practical training, interaction with others and re-enacted performances in different public social settings. The most important arena for acquiring such skill was the large, European metropolises. The framing of this particular notion of knowledge is the most important conclusion in the chapter, and also sets the prerequisite for the following empirical enquiry into the foreign travels of the Swedish nobility.

The third chapter investigates the preparations for educational journeys in the seventeenth century. Winberg shows the extent to which the government was involved in the planning and to some degree also the funding of the journeys, even though the noble families themselves took the main responsibility. The recruitment of a reliable preceptor was an important part of these preparations, as was some propaedeutic studies, usually at Uppsala University, and also to some extent preparatory journeys within Sweden. In Uppsala, focus was typically on practical exercises rather than theoretical studies. The formalised valedictions, that is, ceremonies where the travellers bid farewell to prominent state officials, demonstrated the state's investment in these journeys.

Chapter four presents a survey with examples of how the travellers disposed of their time abroad. Winberg shows that stays at university cities made up a comparatively small part of the time abroad. Focus was instead on the great capitals, especially Paris and Rome. The travelling routes were highly standardised, and so were the activities performed at different destinations. Winberg pays attention to social differences

among the noble travellers. He shows that the aristocratic families lead the way in establishing the routes and the forms of these travels, and that the destinations differed according to social differences. The longer stays in Italy were, for example, mainly reserved for the aristocracy, and served as a means of social demarcation. He also identifies some changes in itineraries and preferences during the period examined, such as the ever-increasing importance of Paris, and how London emerged as a more and more important destination during the latter part of the investigated period.

In chapter five, the author explores the economics of the educational journeys: both the costs of an entire journey and the distribution of expenses on different activities and destinations. Thanks to a number of preserved account books from journeys, Winberg is able to give very detailed reports of the expenditures. He demonstrates the astonishing costs of an educational journey, amounting to at least 1,000 to 2,000 Swedish *Riksdaler* annually per person, and for the aristocratic families even up to 5,000 per year. Since the noble families' fortunes mainly consisted in property and yields in kind from those properties, the travels often resulted in high debt. The stay in Paris was the most expensive one and could demand up to forty percent of the total expenses for a journey. A considerable part of those expenses was for clothing.

Chapter six provides a more in-depth analysis of what kind of activities the travellers devoted their time to, focusing on the most important destinations through a number of case studies. Winberg's case studies of a range of countries and cities provide very detailed accounts of how routes and activities were guided by local conditions and ideas about what kind of know-

ledge, skills and experiences different places could provide. They also reveal a high degree of standardisation, with travellers following similar trajectories according to already established patterns. Winberg argues that the combination of time and money devoted to different destinations and activities demonstrates the predominant importance of social interaction during an educational journey. This also explains the enormous expenses for dresses, not least in Paris, since they were a necessity for participating in court activities or attending ambassador's audiences.

In the seventh chapter, Winberg demonstrates the significance of a well-planned and grandiose return from the educational journey. This was very costly, again not least due to the expenses for clothes. It was important to use the momentum and exposition that the journey and the return offered to obtain a prestigious and lucrative position. The travellers' interest in attention was matched by the authorities' interest in debriefing the travellers about their journey and hearing a report about what they had learned and experienced.

The eighth and last chapter presents the conclusions of the entire study. First, Winberg refutes claims in previous studies that the journeys during the latter part of the investigated period could not be considered useful for the realm, arguing that this reflects a too narrow view on the purpose of activities such as for example dance and other *exercitia*. Still, Winberg can point to changes in the latter part of the investigated period, where the self-interest of the noble families seems to have become more prominent. This reflects changing attitudes to which kind of skills were considered useful. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, theoretical studies, moral stature and sober observations of political and

military circumstances were deemed more important. Towards the middle of the century more emphasis was put on courtly manners, rhetorical esprit, elegance and the ability to entertain the ladies. Consequently, the stay in Paris became increasingly important, as a result of the deliberate staging of Paris as a cultural and political centre during the regime of Louis XIV. According to Winberg, these developments can be explained by an escalating competition between noble families from the mid-seventeenth century and on, as a result of the large number of new families that were raised to nobility during and after the Thirty Years War. The author points out that this tension between theoretical studies and practical “learning-by-doing” (to use an anachronistic term that Winberg, perhaps wisely, avoids), reflects the contemporary notion of travelling as a specific kind of knowledge.

Ola Winberg has written a rich and extensive study, abundant in detail and intriguing empirical examples. The condensed summary above, outlining the main threads of argumentation, does not adequately represent the dissertation as a whole. It can actually be discussed whether it is really the condensed results and conclusions of this study that make up its main assets, or rather the path to those conclusions, the chain of intriguing, detailed case studies running through the chapters. That ambiguity can be traced in the study itself. A comparison of the short abstract, the summaries and conclusions presented in the Swedish main text, and the English summary at the end, reveals that they present slightly diverging accounts, or at least different emphasis, concerning what is the main focus and the main results of the study. This arguably indicates that this

is a study guided by the large source material that has been gathered, rather than by a selection of precise research problems.

That said, I want to stress that Winberg’s command over this vast and diverse source material is impressive. The author demonstrates remarkable language-skills, a keen eye for noteworthy details and a capacity to organise the large and complex material into a coherent and convincing narrative. It could be argued that this study could have been even more stringent. It could have been more rigidly regulated by a set of sharp, theoretically contextualised research questions, and a sterner selection from the empirical material, presenting only evidence needed to answer those questions. And, judged from a specific set of criteria, stressing logic consistency, organic form and avoidance of redundancy, it could also be argued that this would have resulted in a scientifically stronger study.

Still, such a study would also lose a lot in comparison with this one. Much of the attraction of this dissertation and, in fact, its usefulness for future scholars, lies in its wealth of detail and the large number of case studies – travellers and traveller’s activities – that are introduced and carefully described. This quality would have been lost in a more rigorous study. Winberg’s dissertation, in fact, offers the basis for such more focused investigations.

The overall framing of the study in relation to state-building processes and the transformation in attitudes and practices that Winberg points to, is mostly convincing. That said, those results are not surprising in relation to previous research. The reward from reading this study lies instead in the rich and elaborate accounts for the traveller’s activities and routes, presenting a narrative which

is not only illuminating for understanding important aspects of early modern society, but also quite entertaining. It is marked by convincing interpretations of the source material and an accurate attention to interesting particulars.

From an intersectional perspective, it could be remarked that for example women and members of the lower strata of society are mostly absent from this study (apart from as prostitutes and temptations, or servants). This is not unexpected considering the topic, but still could have deserved some reflection.

A study of the seventeenth-century Swedish nobility introduces a world which is on the one hand deceptively familiar, on the other perplexing and alien. This is a challenge that any historian has to face. It is not entirely clear how Winberg relates to that problem, partially because there is no explicit statement relating to the very principles of historiography guiding the project. His approach appears somewhat eclectic and *ad hoc*, sometimes using the trope of recognition, and sometimes rather pointing to the alterity of worldviews and actions. This is apparent also in the choice of terminology. In some contexts, Winberg is carefully choosing terms with a historical resonance – especially so, it seems, in connection with for example political or fiscal aspects. In others, the terminology appears more anachronistic, not least so within what could be described as the domain of cultural history. One example of the latter is the use of the term “aesthetic.” Introduced first by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century, it is an obvious anachronism in this study. This may seem as a purist objection. Of course, seventeenth century society dealt with artefacts, experiences and judgement practices with

close affinities with what is today in everyday discourse understood by “aesthetic” (which is, by the way, wildly different from what Baumgarten intended). However, in that period a much wider family of objects and practices were included in discourses on beauty and taste, and those discourses were guided by very different criteria. During the period examined in Winberg’s study, these discourses moreover went through an interesting renegotiation, in the tension between rule-based activities on the one hand, and aristocratic notions of taste and the elusive quality of *je ne sais quoi* on the other.

A more penetrating problematisation of these discourses and their conceptual history would not only have deepened the historical inquiry, it could also have supported and enriched one of Winberg’s main arguments, that of the close integration of theoretical and practical, socially based activities in contemporary views on knowledge and education.

Ola Winberg’s dissertation on educational travels in the seventeenth century is a good read for anyone interested in early modern society. As has already been stressed, its strong points lies in history as story-telling, in the very large empirical material the author has traced and made available, and in the solid and competent way in which this material is treated. He has offered us a treasure chest of interesting case studies, useful and enlightening for students and scholars interested in the period and in the wider field of cultural history.

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