

Charlotta Wolff, *Johan Fredrik Aminoff: kustaviaani kahdessa valtakunnassa* [Gustavian i två rikén] (Helsinki: Otava, 2022). xx + 352 s.

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*Johan Fredrik Aminoff: Kustaviaani kahdessa valtakunnassa* [Gustavian i två rikén] examines the life of a Swedish nobleman from Finland whose political career spanned from the reign of Gustav III of Sweden to that of Alexander I of Russia (after Finland became a part of Russia in 1809). In addition to following the life of Aminoff and his immediate circle, the book sheds light on the thinking and position of the nobility of his generation balancing through the unsettled decades of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Wolff succeeds in linking to three research traditions – biographical, cultural historical, and history of ideas.

The structure is chronological, anchoring on the focal moments and roles in Aminoff's life as part of Swedish, Russian, and European history. Aminoff is presented as a nobleman, husband, friend, political agent, and most consistently as a Gustavian whose relationship with the realm was inseparably intertwined with the personal relationship with the ruler and central officials.

Wolff's research completes Aminoff's character especially from the earlier parts of his life and explains the continuities from the Gustavian era to the Russian era. Aminoff was born in Sweden in the Age of Liberty, introduced to Gustav III as a youngster and became his trusted subject, lived through two Russo-Swedish wars, and rebuilt his career in Finland under the Russian throne. He was a spirited character, sentimental with a tendency towards melancholy, and sometimes grumpy especially towards the end of his life. He was raised to respect religion and responsibilities. Wolff studies his family affairs to paint a multifaceted picture of financial, political, and emotional entanglements. Marriages during this period

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are frequently depicted as rational contracts that bound families and assets together, but Wolff skilfully demonstrates that emotions from despair to utter happiness played a great role in the success or failure of a union.

The great turning points for Aminoff personally seem to have been the assassination of Gustav III, Aminoff's time in prison, and the death of his third wife Eva Mathilda Bruncrona. Aminoff was deeply affected by the assassination of Gustav III and he saw his devotion to the memory of the slain king as a representation of his loyalty as a subject. The inability to move forward from these feelings also explains Aminoff's involvement in the movement against the regency. When detained and imprisoned for conspiracy, Aminoff's life fell into crisis and his health began to decline. With his third marriage came a family and expectations of companionship for the rest of his life, but Bruncrona died more than 20 years before Aminoff, leaving him bereft. Sweden's loss of Finland in 1809 was arguably the most significant episode of Finnish history in Aminoff's eventful lifetime, but for him personally it became about seeking continuity in a new and delicate situation.

Wolff's vast expertise of the eighteenth century supports her analysis throughout. The values of Aminoff's upbringing remained with him throughout his life. Characteristics that in earlier research have been seen through the lens of nationalism are here put in the context of Aminoff's life course and the ideals of the nobility in pre-revolutionary Europe. His actions become more understandable when investigated from his viewpoint and not merely as a backdrop to the life of his better-known friend Gustav Mauritz Armfelt. Still, the life-long companionship and the intertwined life stories of the three Gustavians – Armfelt, Aminoff, and Johan Albert Ehrenström – serve as a natural storyline. Despite their differences, the men shared a loving friendship that is presented beautifully in the book. They were not afraid to disagree nor to offer mutual support.

The book is published both in Swedish and in Finnish. The translation to Finnish by Jouko Nurmiainen was a pleasure to read. Not only does it contribute to academic discourse, but it also captivates a broader audience with its engaging narrative and accessibility.