

*Daniel Riches*

*Protestant Cosmopolitanism and Diplomatic  
Culture: Brandenburg-Swedish Relations  
in the Seventeenth Century*

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TO historians of the Thirty Years' War, understanding the relationship between Sweden and its erstwhile ally Brandenburg is absolutely essential, and, to date, the war period pre-1635 has received the most attention from scholars. This is unsurprising given that competition for Pomerania placed the two states on a collision course and would to a large extent define their relationship throughout the conflict. However, what most historians do not acknowledge, and what Riches demonstrates most capably in this account, is that the relationship lasted the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and that actions during the Thirty Years' War – although a particularly strained episode – were in fact just the continuation of policy that had been active for a number of years prior (p.121).

Riches does this through the lens of 'new diplomatic history', that is to say, 'the investigation of foreign relations and diplomatic practice via the insights of social, intellectual and cultural history, as well as engagement with social scientific and literary theory' (p.4). This incorporates individuals and their social and belief systems into diplomatic activity, and therefore analyses this activity on a more nuanced level than that achieved by previous studies, which focus on official state activities. Indeed, whilst Riches still recognises the importance of the more 'traditional issues of how and why countries related to one another as they did', and this takes its place in the study, the core of his argument is that an individualistic element worked alongside, and often in spite of, the officially sanctioned diplomatic line (p.6). As such, he argues that diplomatic activity was conducted by a number of 'protestant cosmopolitans' (defined as individuals with a world-view simultaneously

political, intellectual, and religious [p.9]), who conducted foreign relations on both an official and unofficial level between Brandenburg and Sweden for more than one hundred years. This is done through five chapters which for the most part proceed chronologically to keep in line with the advance of historical events, with the exception of chapter three, which takes a more detailed look at the diplomatic activity behind the wedding of Gustav II Adolf to Maria Eleonora and the proposed wedding between Queen Kristina and Elector Wilhelm Friedrich. In these chapters he carefully highlights the main players on both sides who conducted diplomatic activity, such as Samuel von Winterfeld and Christoph von Götze on behalf of Brandenburg, and Johan Adler Salvius and Gustav Horn for the Swedes.

Such an analysis, of course, enlightens the processes behind diplomatic actions and that diplomatic actors often had their own personal agenda that did not always represent the view of the state. One example of this was the meeting between Kurt von Pfuel and Gustav Adolf in the winter of 1631 (p.134-35). Brandenburg's official line was primarily that it did not want to turn Pomerania into a battleground. Sweden, meanwhile, wanted Brandenburg to cast aside its neutrality in favour of declaring war against Emperor Ferdinand II and to enter into a Protestant alliance with the Swedes. Von Pfuel, although officially supporting the Brandenburgian line, wished that Brandenburg would take a more active role in the war and expressed his regrets to this effect to the king, but was still nonetheless forced to take the official passive line. Indeed, as Riches also demonstrates, Brandenburg's more active participation on Sweden's behalf in the war can be linked with the rise of the 'Swedish' party (von Pfuel, von Götze, Samuel von Winterfeld, and Sebastian Stripe [p.117]) in Brandenburg), and their subsequent fall (and the equivalent rise of Catholic advisor Count Adam von Schwarzenburg) can be linked to Brandenburg's entrance into the Peace of Prague (1635) and the issue of the Advocatorial Edict in 1636 (p.126). When negotiations for peace between the two re-initiated in the 1640s, it was these individuals who would help to restore the relationship to what it once was, and who were a known quantity to State Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna and the Swedish government (p.127). What Riches shows quite capably is the ability of Brandenburg/Swedish relations to survive such points of obvious crisis, and it was not until the very nature of diplomatic dealings themselves changed that relations deteriorated completely (p.287).

Whilst there is little doubt that this book provides an exciting and important insight into a diplomatic world that was controlled both by individuals and the state, he is not the first person to encompass this dual-sided angle into new diplomatic history as he states (p.6), and indeed earlier

studies have been done in this field in the same 'Northern World' series in which the present volume is published. Alexia Grosjean's *An Unofficial Alliance: Scotland and Sweden, 1569-1654* (NW6, Leiden, Brill, 2003) investigates the Scotto-Swedish relationship during the same period that Riches covers and is of particular value to readers of Northern Studies. Sweden and Scotland did not have an official alliance per se (nor did Brandenburg and Sweden until the 1650s), and yet the Swedish Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna expressed the importance of the Scottish relationship in the Swedish riksråd in 1640 (Grosjean, p.177). Indeed, the relationship Grosjean discovered is somewhat mirrored by the Brandenburg-Swedish one in that it was conducted by a number of individuals who often furthered the interest of both countries. Alexander Leslie, Earl of Leven, was of course a prime example. Leslie was an army officer who eventually reached the rank of Field Marshal in January 1636 and was one of a number of Scots to enjoy successful careers in the Swedish ranks. Whilst it is worth remembering that Grosjean's study was primarily a military and naval one, diplomatic activity was of course conducted by military officers as well. Riches does not acknowledge the full potential of this military dimension even though the rather encompassing spectre of the Thirty Years' War looms large for a significant part of the period under investigation. This became especially significant when the interests of Brandenburg soldiers and Swedish authorities diverged after the death of Field Marshal Johan Banér, and the foreign soldiery in the Swedish army rose up against their senior officers. Major General Adam Pfuel, brother to Kurt von Pfuel and half-brother to Gustav II Adolf, was one of the protagonists in this drama, and the relationship between Pfuel and Oxenstierna would remain strained. The fact that a senior officer in the Swedish army was of Brandenburgian descent, at a point in time where Brandenburg was officially allied to the Emperor and was actually attempting to undermine the Swedish war effort, is more than a little fascinating and it is important to incorporate this into our understanding of the 'personal' diplomatic relationship between the two states.

Thus, Riches' tome is an incredibly significant addition to the 'new diplomatic history' and even diplomatic history as a whole. Surprisingly few books acknowledge the highly personalised nature of 17<sup>th</sup>-century diplomacy, and in doing so this book shows how these personal relationships could not only have an effect but also be successful in spite of official diplomacy. Without understanding this dimension, a key part of how the process works is lost, and thus Riches enhances our knowledge of a relationship that was to some extent defined by such activity. Indeed it was not until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that, as the nature of diplomacy became more constricted, the relationship finally broke down. It is this reviewer's hope that more

17<sup>th</sup>-century relationships will now be reassessed in the same fashion to enlighten our knowledge of how diplomacy functioned during this period.

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