



The Battle that Shook Europe: Poltava and the Birth of the Russian Empire

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The Battle of Poltava, 1709, marks the birth of Peter the Great's vast Russian Empire. In 1700, the Tsar combined with Denmark, Saxony, and Poland to attack Swedish hegemony in the North. When the forces finally defeated King Charles XII of Sweden in 1708 at Poltava, in the Ukraine, it proved the turning-point of the Great Northern War, heralding the collapse of the Swedish Empire and the rise of Russia, the effects of which would be felt for almost three hundred years. Swedish historian Peter Englund's vivid account of the three violent days of battle is an internationally acclaimed classic of military history.

The Battle that Shook Europe: Poltava and the Birth of the Russian Empire Details

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From Reader Review The Battle that Shook Europe: Poltava and the Birth of the Russian Empire for online ebook

Margaret Sankey says

A bestseller in Sweden, and told from a largely Swedish perspective, this used the 1709 battle to frame the development of the Swedish and Russian armies up to that point, and then (despite most of the official Swedish campaign documents being destroyed on the field), Englund reconstructs the actions from memoirs of a variety of participants. Notable for following the aftermath into ten years of captivity for some officers, and the experiences of a number of camp followers as prisoners/slaves of the Kalmyks. Includes a biographical section so you can follow the subsequent or truncated lives of everyone mentioned, including J.S. Bach's older brother John Jacob.

Michael Bully says

The author examines the Swedish attitude towards war at the end of 17th century /18th century, offers biographical details of those who fought in Charles XII invasion of Russia, drawing on contemporary accounts to depict how the Swedish forces progressed through Poland then got deeper into Russia. Their treatment of civilians was particularly brutal.

The standard problems of over-extended supply lines, harangued by Russian fighters who then melted away, a particularly fierce winter, a Russian scorched earth policy, were destined to be repeated in future centuries. The campaign culminated with the Swedes having to pitch themselves against Peter the Great's army who had constructed a series of redoubts at Poltava in The Ukraine. The Swedes desperately lacked shot for their cannon, and were short of ammunition generally.

The author gives a detailed and quite impressive account of the Swedish defeat, their retreat, and desperate predicament where they were faced with either having to cross the ferocious river Dnieper or give themselves up to the pursuing Russians. Charles XII and some of this entourage managed to cross but huge numbers of Swedes surrendered -the worst event in their military history. So ended Sweden's status as a great power.

Extremely well written and got totally drawn in.

The book is from the Swedish perspective, and there is little about their allies such as the Saxons, and the Ukrainian Cossacks under Mazeppa, Though Poltava was a triumph for Russia, and for Peter the Great's policy of 'Europeanisation' it was by no means certain that Russia would develop into a major power. The Pruth campaign of 1711, against the Ottoman empire was a major Russian defeat.

Magnus Stenqvist says

A very realistic depiction of the battle that would ultimately end the great Swedish empire. It shows all the gruesomeness of war and also the absurdities where the battles are compared to sport games with its sacrifices, glory and the acting by the army officers. Reading this makes you get a glimpse how it really was fighting a war in the sixteenth century.

Matti Karjalainen says

Peter Englundin "Poltava" (Art House, 2010 - 6. painos) ilmestyi alun perin 1980-luvun loppupuolella, ja oli samalla suosikkihistorioitsijoiden joukkoon kuuluvan kirjailijan läpimurtoteos. Se on kiehtova ja kattava kokonaisuus kesäkuussa 1709 käydystä Pultavan taistelusta, jossa aikaisemmasta haavoittumisesta kärsineen Kaarle XII:n johtama armeija otti nekkuunsa venäläisiltä. Taistelussa kärsitty tappio merkitsi myös Ruotsin suurvalta-ajan päättymistä.

Sodan kauheus käy värikkäästi kirjoitetusta kirjasta hyvin ilmi. Lukija saa kohtalaisen hyvän kuvan siitä, millaista oli taistella ruotsalaisten ohuessa sinisessä riveissä Ukrainan auringon alla. Ei kovin hääviä, kuten seuraava sitaatti osoittaa:

[Tykinkuulat] aiheuttivat hirvittävää tuhoa. Rautanyrkki iski joka ainoan miesrivin läpi, koska muodostelmat olivat tiiviitä ja miehet seisoivat pystyssä. Yksi ainoa kuula saattoi tappaa tai silpoa yli 20 miestä. Kuulien teho ihmiskehoon oli kammottava: käsivarret, jalat ja kämmenet saattoivat repeytyä kerralla irti ja päät räjähtivät helposti hiutaleiksi. Pehmeä ihmisruumis on hauras yhdistelmä luita, jänteitä, rustoa ja lihaksia; osuma saattoi halkaista sen kahtia tai pirstoa sen palasiksi jättäen jäljelle vain kokoelman lihaisia luita. (s. 93)

Venäläisten hirmuteot Isonvihan ajalta Suomessa ovat tulleet meillä hyvin dokumentoiduiksi, vaan osasivatpa meikäläiset tappaa, teurastaa, kiduttaa ja polttaa matkalla Pultavaan. Sotavankeja ei myöskään kohdeltu erityisen hyvin kummallakaan puolella, mikäli nämä nyt yleensä vaivauduttiin jättämään henkiin.

Englund tarjoilee myös kiinnostavia pikkuanekdootteja. Soturikuningas Kaarle XII pelkäsi pimeää ja nukkui mielellään soturiensa seurassa pää jonkun polville painettuna. Lisäksi kuningas onnistui saamaan osuman kuolleesta kissasta, joita venäläiset heittelivät piirittävien ruotsalaisten niskaan. Majesteettirikos kostettiin kiiivaalla käsikranaattitulella.

Englund ei siis pettänyt tälläkään kertaa. Erinomainen kirja kaikille sotahistoriasta kiinnostuneille.

Liam says

About five years ago I was putting together my Hordes figurines (don't ask), and I was trawling the forums for some music to listen to while I did so - someone posted Swedish Pagans by Sabaton, and I fell in love.

I quickly acquired the rest of their CDs, and landed on Carolus Rex - an album almost entirely based on Sweden's rise and fall as a great power. I hadn't even known Sweden was *ever* a great power before that. This had a cascading effect of getting me into historical strategy games (Europa Universalis, Crusader Kings, etc), and, importantly, sparked my interest in Swedish history.

Poltava, or The Battle that Shook Europe, is one of the only books I could find on the Great Northern War - Sweden's last hurrah, being attacked by a coalition of Denmark, Poland-Lithuania and Russia. It speaks to Swedish military dominance at the time that despite being outnumbered almost 3-to-1 at the opening of the war, Sweden quickly decimated Denmark and Poland-Lithuania, knocking them out of the war.

At this stage, Russia began having serious doubts, and tentatively suggested peace to Sweden several times over - high on the rapid victories thus far, Charles XII - Carolus Rex - the King of Sweden denied, and pressed his army further and further into hostile territory, as Russia practiced scorched earth for their future usage against Napoleon and Germany.

The campaign culminated at Poltava, the focus of the book - a weary, hungry, demoralised Swedish force attacking an entrenched Russian army twice its size.

The book is written in an informal, prose-like style which I very much enjoyed - I found it very easy to read, and Englund chucks in a lot of small anecdotes from soldiers in the battle - their origin, their service, their fate - which kept it from slipping into simple numbers of soldiers and casualties. It humanises the Swedish army hugely.

As for the battle, Sweden came so close to an incredible and total victory that it's painful - if one or two small things had just gone their way rather than falling somewhere in the middle, then Sweden could easily have become the dominant power in north-eastern Europe rather than Russia. What a world that would be.

Sean C.W. Korsgaard says

One of the most immersive, complete looks at one of the most overlooked battles of European history, one where the impact is still felt today.

Safir says

I find myself being much more intrigued by Englund's descriptions of life in an 18th century army than of the descriptions of the battle itself.

Åsmund Ådnøy says

Sverige var faktisk en europeisk stormakt ved inngangen til slaget ved Poltava i 1709. Etter det var de det ikke. Fantastisk skildring av krigens galskap for 300 år siden. Mye av det Englund beskriver ligner på dagens krigføring, andre sider virker veldig fremmed. Englund har et skarpt blikk for klasseskillene som rådde enda sterkere da enn nå, ikke minst på slagmarken (og i gravleggingen). Tusenvis av svensker ble drept, mange tusen måtte i fangenskap, men kong Karl XII kom seg unna. Hans liv har jeg lyst å lese en bok om.

Martinxo says

An outstanding work of history telling. Englund's writing is clear, concise and always interesting, highly recommended.

Ryan Campbell says

After looking for a long time for a book on the epic battle of Poltava I found this gem. This book explains the events leading up to and the actual battle itself. It is told from the Swedish perspective. Great read.

Tiina Susanna says

varsin mainio opus
kerronnallisesti mukava lukea,
historiasta nostettiin yksilöitä ja kerrottiin kuinka heille kävi taisteluiden lomassa

kuvaukset toimivat hyvin ja kartat selvensivät asiaa erinomaisesti.

Hans Ostrom says

I was teaching at Uppsala University when this book came out, and it was enormously popular. To some extent, it concerns the end of Sweden's imperial aspirations (and of course the country has been all the better for it).

Johan says

I can't vouch for this book in english..but the original in Swedish was a fantastic read. Incredibly detailed and well researched and able to bring history to life.

The subject is almost irrelevant because it's such a masterful historical work but it's all about the demise of the Swedish empire and the rise of Russia in 18th century, centered around the battle of Poltava...a military game-changer akin to Napoleon's failed russian invasion.

Petri Volanen says

En ole ollut liiemmäli innostunut tämän aikakauden sotatouhuista, pitänyt järjenvastaiselta tuntuvaan ihmislahtia tiukoissa muodostelmissa jotenkin omituisena ja kenties jopa... no, tylsänä. Tämä kirja todellakin osoittaa ennako-oletukseni vääräksi. Kirja kuvaa aivan käsittämättömän hienosti, tarkasti ja mukaansatempaavasti taistelua joka käytännöllisesti katsoen lopetti Ruotsin suurvaltavaiheen ja avaa siinä sivussa ymmärryksen monille seikoille joita ei ollut ennen tämän lukemista tullut edes ajatelleeksi. Siksi hyvä kirja, että tämä oli jo toinen läpilukukerta. Suosittelen.

Pål-otto Mikkelsen says

Fantastic vivid and informative about a watershed in Europe, when Sweden lost power to Russia in an epic battle.
