The Story of War
Church and Propaganda
in France and Sweden 1610–1710

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There was never anything so gallant, so spruce, so brilliant, and so well disposed as the two armies. Trumpets, fifes, hautboys, drums, and cannon made music such as Hell itself had never heard. The cannons first of all laid flat about six thousand men on each side; the muskets swept away from this best of worlds nine or ten thousand ruffians who infested its surface. The bayonet was also a *sufficient reason* for the death of several thousands. The whole might amount to thirty thousand souls. Candide, who trembled like a philosopher, hid himself as well as he could during this heroic butchery.

At length, while the two kings were causing *Te Deum* to be sung each in his own camp, Candide resolved to go and reason elsewhere on effects and causes. He passed over heaps of dead and dying, and first reached a neighbouring village; it was in cinders, it was an Abare village which the Bulgarians had burnt according to the laws of war. Here, old men covered with wounds, beheld their wives, hugging their children to their bloody breasts, massacred before their faces; there, their daughters, disembowelled and breathing their last after having satisfied the natural wants of Bulgarian heroes; while others, half burnt in the flames, begged to be despatched. The earth was strewed with brains, arms, and legs.

Rien n’était si beau, si leste, si brillant, si bien ordonné que les deux armées. Les trompettes, les fifres, les hautbois, les tambours, les canons, formaient une harmonie telle qu’il n’y en eut jamais en enfer. Les canons renversèrent d’abord à peu près six mille hommes de chaque côté ; ensuite la mousqueterie ôta du meilleur des mondes environ neuf à dix mille coquins qui en infectaient la surface. La baïonnette fut aussi la raison suffisante de la mort de quelques milliers d’hommes. Le tout pouvait bien se monter à une trentaine de mille âmes. Candide, qui tremblait comme un philosophe, se cacha du mieux qu’il put pendant cette boucherie héroïque.

Enfin, tandis que les deux rois faisaient chanter des *Te Deum* chacun dans son camp, il prit le parti d’aller raisonner ailleurs des effets et des causes. Il passa par-dessus des tas de morts et de mourants, et gagna d’abord un village voisin ; il était en cendres ; c'était un village *abare* que les Bulgares avaient brûlé, selon les lois du droit public. Ici des vieillards criblés de coups regardaient mourir leurs femmes égorgées, qui tenaient leurs enfants à leurs mamelles sanglantes ; là des filles éventrées après avoir assouvi les besoins naturels de quelques héros vendaient les derniers soupirs ; d’autres, à demi brûlées, criaient qu’on achevât de leur donner la mort. Des cervelles étaient répandues sur la terre à côté de bras et de jambes coupées.

*Candide ou l’optimisme*, Voltaire, 1759 (ch. 3).
Anonymous translation into English from 1918.
As I write this, bombs are falling on Aleppo. The civilian population is trapped in the ruined city and has nowhere to go. The death toll is rising. There is nothing glorious about war, and there never was.

There have been times when my investigation of seventeenth-century war narratives from France and Sweden has seemed meaningless compared to the horrors of war and human suffering around the world today. And yet there is a point to it, however banal: the way war stories are formulated matters. Those narratives affect not only our understanding of war as a phenomenon, but also future generations’ understanding.

Researching this project over the past few years, I have been surrounded by helpful people. At the Swedish Army Museum in Stockholm, where I work, I have received many useful comments on the book from my colleagues in the museum seminar (Anna Fredholm, Anders Åborg, Andreas Ohlsson, Aron Erstorp, Emelie Deinoff, Johanna Larsell, Martin Markelius, and Thomas Roth). I particularly want to thank Karin Tetteris, who read the manuscript in its entity and made many valuable suggestions, and Klas Kronberg, who provided me with countless books, and who together stood for many thought-provoking discussions over the years. Eva-Sofi Ernstell, the director of the museum, and Per Sandin, head of the museum collections, have both been very supportive. Rauno Vaara kindly went out of his way to help me search for images.

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Stockholm, September 2016
CHAPTER 1

The story of war

What is war? In the scene from Candide, Voltaire describes it with unmistakable sarcasm as ‘this heroic butchery’. Borrowing the language of contemporary war propaganda, he depicts the gallant, brilliant, and carefully arrayed armies with their musical instruments and cannons, but recoils from the fact that they ‘made music such as Hell itself had never heard’. He then gives an account of the battle in which 30,000 men were killed by cannons, muskets, and bayonets. After the battle both kings arrange for a Te Deum to be sung in their camp to celebrate the victory, but the philosopher leaves the scene of dead and dying soldiers. He finds himself in a nearby village, burnt to the ground, filled with wounded men and women, raped girls and people who beg to be put out of their misery having been burnt in the flames. The scene ends: ‘The earth was strewed with brains, arms, and legs.’

The description is so gory, so full of sickening details, that it is usually taken as an unpleasant parody. Yet even though it was unusual for battles that large and numbers of dead that high, the picture it paints of dead and wounded soldiers and civilians is realistic. We are just not used to war being described this way. Voltaire also makes fun of the fact that both sides immediately celebrated the battle as if it were a victory, with a Te Deum to thank God for their success. Te Deum, however, was not only a psalm sung on the battlefield: it was also a propaganda ritual, telling the story of their success to the people back home. In churches throughout France and Sweden, people gathered to give thanks after such victories. Together with other forms of war propaganda purveyed by the Church, they were in fact crucial for the perception of war during the early modern period.

This book is about war and legitimacy in the seventeenth century. It rests on the assumption that wars were deadly, expensive, and often unpopular, and that rulers therefore needed to legitimise them. From there, I argue that war propaganda affected not only the immediate reception of war at the time, but also the way war was perceived. Many of the rhetorical figures and war descriptions presented in the book are probably representative
of much of Western Europe during this era. This study, however, makes a specific comparison between France and Sweden—two states that were very much involved in warfare during this time, which often fought on the same side, but differed greatly when it came to size, wealth, and social and political structure.

France and Sweden both lived through more years of war than of peace in the century from 1610 to 1710. War conspired to shape each country and move frontiers. But despite the fact that war was often (and still is) depicted as a royal affair, it was not. It was paid for by the lives of millions of soldiers, by never-ending increases in taxes, the selling of offices, and loans, loans, endless loans. War marked everyday life not only for soldiers in the field, but also at home, where people were asked to lodge passing soldiers or to build defences to ward off a potential invasion. The war effort thus required legitimation and explanation in order to mobilise people and prevent civil unrest. In the end, the ability to muster soldiers and gather resources could be decisive for the outcome of the war. In this book, I investigate tacksägelsedagar, or days of thanksgiving (as they were called in Sweden) and Te Deum (as they were called in France)—celebrations that were held in church in order to celebrate victories and peace treaties. They were part of the war propaganda, but they also entailed a war narrative. What did these ceremonies tell people about what was going on at the front, or why the war was being fought? And what did they say about society and the role that subjects were expected to play?

**France and Sweden, 1610–1710**

Sweden and France both stand out as special cases in European history. War was inseparable from France’s grand siècle and Sweden’s Age of Greatness, or stormaktstid. Even though the cultural influences from France were considerable towards the end of the period, this was due to the military and economic strength of the country, and its huge population. In Sweden’s case it was success in war that temporarily made this small realm in the north an important player on the European scene. The two countries participated in the same wars, often on the same side. Yet they were polar opposites: the one, a densely populated, Catholic realm at the heart of Europe; the other, a sparsely populated Lutheran realm out on the periphery.

Even though Te Deum and days of thanksgiving had been held before,
they gained a new importance in both countries during the period studied in his book. This can be connected to an intense phase of state formation in 1610–1710, which in both cases was intimately linked to war. In France, 1610 saw the assassination of Henry IV and the political unrest that followed. In Sweden the young king Gustav II Adolf (Gustavus Adolphus) inherited the throne in 1611 and immediately continued the wars against Russia, Poland, and Denmark that his father had been so embroiled in. Both Sweden and France underwent significant changes during the fifty years that followed, with the consolidation of the monarchy, and the bureaucracy, tax collection, and the organisation of the army put on a far steadier footing.\(^2\) France’s rulers, meanwhile, had to fight rebellion and civil war. Uniting the splintered realm and gaining its loyalty proved a difficult task. After what could be regarded as the peak of conflict, the Fronde (1648–1653), the Crown was able to assert its authority. After the death of Mazarin in 1661, Louis XIV decided not to appoint a new chief minister, but to govern by himself. In Sweden, Charles XI instated absolute rule in 1680.

I have chosen to conclude in 1710 not because royal power was at its zenith then, but rather the opposite. Over the course of a century endless wars had been fought, and they were now being taken to their extreme. Absolutism was firmly established in both countries, but despite the fact that they were ruled by Charles XII and Louis XIV, war kings of the most bellicose kind, the wars were not going well. In 1710 chaos reigned in the Swedish army overseas after the defeat at the Battle of Poltava the previous year, and pestilence and famine were cutting a devastating swathe at home. Faced with similar problems in France, Louis XIV took the extraordinary step of issuing an open letter to his subjects to explain the situation. The state of affairs in both countries, and the new modes of communication required to deal with it, ultimately changed the way war was narrated.

As this book will show, there was a common story of war that was told in both countries, but there were important differences when it came to the intended audience and how the celebrations of their various successes were carried out. In Sweden, detailed accounts of battles and sieges were read to all inhabitants from church pulpits, whereas in France, where such letters were reserved for the political elite, everyone was instead invited to attend Te Deum, where the focus was on celebration rather than information—even though the ritual contained both. These departures are intimately linked to a number of fundamental differences between the two countries, which can be summarised under three main headings.
First of all, the social structure of the two societies differed substantially. In France, peasants were politically and economically marginalised, yet very involved in the wars since they contributed to the state with high taxes. The wars, and the economic burden they brought, also sparked several peasant uprisings. The high aristocracy were so strong that they too could occasionally defy the king, and there were a large number of fairly autonomous cities with a rich and powerful bourgeoisie. The situation in Sweden was quite the opposite: cities were small and depended upon the state. Despite the fact that the nobility in Sweden became increasingly wealthy and powerful thanks to the wars of the seventeenth century, they were still few in number and nothing like as rich as their French counterparts. In Sweden, a large part of the peasantry (sometimes called freeholders) owned their own land and were represented at the Riksdag (Diet). Despite its geographical divisions, Sweden was the more homogenous realm when it came to laws and taxes: they were generally the same, and the central government’s control of the realm was firm. During the period in question, however, new provinces were being added. The Baltic and German territories were seen as separate entities and maintained their languages and to some extent their own laws and regulations, and were not represented at the Diet, whereas the province of Skåne (which is part of Sweden to this day) was integrated into the realm quite fast. In France, despite the efforts to unite the different parts of the realm, taxation and legislation remained disparate.

This brings me to the second point regarding the organisation and administration of the two realms. Even though defence and waging war was a royal prerogative in both countries, the authority of the Crown differed. According to the ideology of the day, the French king was under no obligation to justify his actions to his subjects. Unlike his Swedish counterpart, he was regarded sacred—even though, according to Paul Kléber Monod, the religious features of the monarchy lost some of their importance towards the end of the seventeenth century. France was not a constitutional regime and the king did not need to ask permission to go to war, to treat for peace, or to write laws. He could do ‘as he desired’, as the expression had it: ‘car tel est nostre plaisir’. He answered only to God. Yet the idea of society as a body with the king as its head also meant that the king had obligations towards his subjects—he had to act in accordance with the common good. During the seventeenth century, the kings gradually strengthened their political position. However, as the heated debate about absolutism revealed, the kings did not have the plenary powers which they coveted. As the numerous peasant
revolts and clashes with the most powerful noblemen (often members of the royal family) showed, royal authority could be questioned. Furthermore, the sheer cost of war often triggered opposition. There was thus a need for war propaganda and the legitimisation of royal power. In Sweden, meanwhile, the power of the monarchy was more limited. In his kungaförsäkran (royal pledge) of 1611, Gustav II Adolf promised not to start a war, or to conclude any peace, truce, or alliance, without the prior knowledge and consent of the Diet.11 It was the Diet—comprising the Estates of the Nobility, Clergy, Burghers, and Peasants—which decided on war, taxes, and the number of conscripted soldiers (something that changed with the introduction in the 1680s of indelningsverket, or the allotment system, an administrative system based on territorial divisions that existed to finance the military). Even though this formulation was watered down when Charles X Gustav came to the throne, the Diet remained an extremely important institution as the guarantor of public interest up until 1680.12 The fact that the Estates were involved in decisions about wars and taxes gave these enterprises a legitimacy they could hardly have obtained otherwise. It is also important to underline that in contrast to France, with its reliance on mercenaries, a substantial part of the Swedish army consisted of conscripted soldiers. Until the 1680s, the Diet decided the number of men who were to be conscripted as soldiers—often every tenth man between the ages of 15 and 60. The allotment system that developed thereafter meant that specially assigned men would serve as soldiers in wartime, but would return home to tend their allotted farms in peacetime. The Diet also served as an important forum for information: since Sweden’s rulers had to make a real argument for war, this also meant explaining their foreign policy. Summonses to the Diet were read from church pulpits, and its decisions were published and read out at the ting (district courts).13 Yet, these meetings should not be confused with modern democracy. The point of them from the rulers’ perspective was to persuade the Estates to do as king and council wanted, not to really hear their opinions. The Estates, on the other hand, fought to retain their privileges and to cut their contributions in men and means. The Diet resembled a barometer: it was a way of gauging how far the population was prepared to go, what the maximum taxes and number of soldiers might be before they revolted. When Charles XII was crowned, he decided not to take the royal pledge and he swore no oath before his people—he was an absolute king. Yet the idea that the king had an obligation to defend his subjects from foreign threats remained.14
In France, the Estates General were not summoned between 1614 and 1789. There were regional Estates that negotiated taxes with the king’s representatives—the états provinciaux—but not in all provinces. In the provinces that were *pays d’élection*, taxes were set by the king, whereas the *pays d’états* gathered to agree taxes when the king summoned them. Their actual political influence, however, was limited, and the representation of the third Estate was often weak (although it varied from province to province.) There were around 15 *parlements* in France—the most important being the Parlement of Paris. The *parlements* were both judicial and legislative institutions, but they could not create new laws. Their role was to register royal ordinances. However, they could postpone the registration of ordinances they did not like by presenting *remontrances*, thus manifesting their discontent. The king then had the power to issue a *lettre de jussion* to force them to comply, or as a last resort he could show up in person to force them by a so-called *lit de justice*. The *parlements* consisted of nobles—so-called *noblesse de robe*—whose offices were obtained by purchase or inheritance. Thus, creating new offices was an important source of income for the state. During the Fronde, the Parlement of Paris sought to increase its power, but in the end it failed. In 1673, Louis XIV forbade the *parlements* to present remarks on the ordinances, which severely restricted their power.

Partly as a reaction to the administrative system where offices were bought or inherited, the institution of the *intendants* was created by Richelieu. The idea was for them to be temporary and to monitor law, order, and finances, but towards the end of the century the positions had become permanent. Even so, the intendants played quite a different role than the Swedish *landshövdingar* (county governors). The office of the county governor was created in the 1630s to act as the king’s representative in the county, responsible for tax collection and law and order. He also had the explicit task of both monitoring and spreading information to the king’s subjects—for example, about the wars.

Thirdly, both religion and the organisation of the Church differed. France was a Catholic country with a Calvinist minority (the Huguenots). The French state had asserted its independence from Rome back in the Middle Ages—an approach normally referred to as Gallicanism—and this was strengthened during the reign of Louis XIV. When the leaders of the Catholic world had gathered several times to do the great work of the Counter-Reformation—the Council of Trent—the French Church
had participated, but the decree was never officially recognised in France. Still, Tridentine thought had a great influence on French religious life. Religion was important and Christian devotion was a vital part of the royal image. The fact that the chief ministers of state, Richelieu and Mazarin, were both cardinals also says something about the close ties between the Church and the political leadership. Yet the clergy were not servants of the state in the same sense as they were in Sweden, and they could oppose the king’s plans. French priests, for instance, had no interest in reading out secular proclamations in church. They successfully fought to get rid of the duty to read out decrees from the pulpit, even though until the end of the seventeenth century they were obliged to read out royal letters and the like. There are examples of other texts being read out as well, and it seems that bailiffs could read at the church gate after service. There does not seem to have been any resistance when it came to the Te Deum. In wartime there were also special prayers for the king and his soldiers, and in times of crisis a sort of prayer marathon was organised—the Quarant’ Ore (prières des Quarante-Heures). By praying night and day, the people would appease God, who would lessen their burdens.

In post-Reformation Sweden, the Lutheran faith was fundamental to society. The Church was both a religious and a social meeting point. Aside from sermons, the pulpits were used for readings of the law and for public announcements of all kinds, including declarations of war. Churches also housed two kinds of ceremonies, in which the state and the Church took a shared interest: days of intercession and days of thanksgiving. The days of intercession took place three or four times a year, and were held with the idea that prayers could prevent the Lord from sending divine punishment: war, plague, and famine. At the beginning of each year, an explanatory proclamation was read out to all subjects, describing the political situation. Often this meant giving an account of any of Sweden’s enemies that were threatening the country, and the congregations were urged to pray for peace. Praying for the royal family and for success in war was part of everyday church life. Church pulpits were also used to spread the news about the outbreak of war or the course of events. Furthermore, it was through the pulpits that information about enlistment and demands for information about deserters were broadcast. The priests were expected to lecture their flock about their duties to the state, and this was also mentioned in their oath. Even though there was a newspaper in print in Sweden from the 1640s and a steady flow of published accounts
of battles and other news from the war, they had a limited circulation. The church remained the most important medium in Sweden.\textsuperscript{22}

In France the situation was different. The country's rulers were quick to recognise the importance of the printing press, and they engaged in pamphlet wars and used state organs such as \textit{La Gazette de France} (1631) and \textit{Le Mercure François} (1611) (the latter, while not set up by state officials, gradually came under state control).\textsuperscript{23} They also supervised other forms of printed propaganda and promoted the royal image in various ways.\textsuperscript{24} However, these media did not reach all of the French king's subjects, and the Church therefore still had an important role to play.

**Praising God for victory**

For the vast majority in both France and Sweden, the role of the Church, and especially of \textit{Te Deum} and days of thanksgiving, was crucial when it came to obtaining information about the country's wars. The information disseminated by the Church is all the more interesting since war and religion were so intimately connected in the seventeenth century. Days of thanksgiving were celebrated in both Sweden and France to thank God for their success in war (or to pray for peace). The Church was a place of comfort in times of war, but also the mouthpiece for the country's rulers and their policies. Giving thanks in organised forms is a Catholic tradition with medieval roots that survived in Protestant countries too.\textsuperscript{25} It was the hymn \textit{Te Deum laudamus}, sung on the battlefield after victory and in celebrations in the churches across the country, which gave the ritual its name in France. In Sweden it was sung in Swedish as ‘O Gud vi love dig’ (lit. ‘O God we praise you’).\textsuperscript{26} The singing of \textit{Te Deum laudamus} was closely linked to the monarchy in Europe. The hymn was sung at coronations and other occasions of royal celebration such as childbirth or recovery from disease. The celebrations to mark peace and military victory that are the focus of this book were also profoundly political. First of all, the selection of which battles should be celebrated and which not was essential for the reception of the war and its reality. Secondly, the texts themselves—a form of battle résumé—clearly gave a partial account of events. Thirdly, the ceremony in itself was a form of political manifestation, especially when it came to who was invited, their place in the procession and in church, and the order of service.

It was widely believed that God was the originator of war and peace, and that the outcome of all battles was in his hands. A day of thanksgiving
was the confirmation of the covenant between God and man: God heard the prayers of the people and the people owed him praise. Or, as it is formulated in the Psalter, ‘call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.’ Still, there was a certain ambiguity when it came to war. Even though war was a divine enterprise, human beings were clearly involved, and factors such as equipment, numbers of men, and good leadership seemed to affect the outcome. It is essential to remember that *Te Deum* were religious ceremonies in a religious world. Thanking God for victory and praying for further assistance would have made perfect sense to the congregations. In post-Reformation Sweden, where the position of the Old Testament was strong, the analogy to Israel was evident: Sweden was the new Israel, God’s chosen people. God, who used to test or punish Israel by sending enemies, was now doing the same thing to Sweden.

In both Sweden and France it was the government that took the initiative for days of thanksgiving, but they were held in the churches across the realm. A text was written about the background to the military success or the peace treaty that was the focus. It often included a fairly detailed account of the battle or siege. In Sweden, the king or council sent letters to all the bishops (and later the county governors too) ordering the celebration and attaching the thanksgiving text that was to be read out from the pulpits. The French royal letters had an even greater number of recipients: towns, bishops, governors, other dignitaries, and *parlements*. In contrast to the Swedish letters, which were sent out to organise the celebration, the French ones also served as invitations (or orders) to the people who were expected to participate.

Even though the thanksgiving texts in Sweden and France bore great similarities, the ceremonies themselves did not. In Sweden, the most important aspect was that thanks were to be given by praying and singing in all churches throughout the realm. Thus the reading of the thanksgiving text and the sermon were vital elements. Every one of the king’s subjects was supposed to attend. No special invitations were sent out and the sources very rarely specify who had been present—not even members of the royal family. Even though there were examples of gun salutes for Swedish days of thanksgiving, they were not commonplace. The ceremony took place in church and resembled a Lutheran service. Sometimes they gave thanks during the ordinary Sunday service; sometimes it was celebrated on a special day. Gradually over the course of the seventeenth century the days of thanksgiving came to resemble *böndagar* (days of intercession),
which meant that no fewer than three services in a row were held and that special biblical texts were chosen for the sermons.29

The sources on French *Te Deum* are less clear when it comes to the scope of the ritual. Sometimes it was explicitly stated that it was to be celebrated across the entire nation, but at other times it was limited to the cathedrals. Much of the source material I have studied deals exclusively with the ceremonies held in Notre-Dame, which was the cathedral of the archdiocese of Paris. There was a special bond between the royal family and Notre-Dame, one which represented the bond between the monarchy and the Church. The presence of a wide range of government officials during ceremonies in the cathedral was designed to give the impression that the whole kingdom had been summoned and was represented, even though the guests in fact belonged to a small elite.30 This seemed to change over time, as general celebrations throughout France became more common towards the end of the seventeenth century. Still, it is important to note that, in contrast to Sweden, it was not the public who were the centre of interest here, but the socio-political elite, whether it was the mayor and the magistracy of Paris or the Parlement in Aix-en-Provence.31 The *Te Deum* itself started with a procession to the cathedral or church, and once there the ceremony seems to have been shorter than the Swedish one, as it consisted of singing the *Te Deum* and other hymns and some prayers, but not necessarily a reading of the thanksgiving text. The congregation then processed out, again in hierarchical order. The *Te Deum* were associated with gun salutes—sometimes before the ceremony, during the singing of *Te Deum*, and in the evening. In the evening there were street festivities such as bonfires, illuminations, and fireworks.32

### War propaganda

During the period studied in this book, war was an almost constant feature of life. Martin Luther himself had said that war was ‘as useful and necessary as eating and drinking or any other work’, and many of his contemporaries used similar turns of phrase.33 The historian Michael Howard has claimed that war has been seen as natural throughout history and that peace is a modern invention. Or rather, he admits that the idea of peace has long existed, but according to him it was turned into a political goal only after the Enlightenment.34 Yet war was never unproblematic or uncontroversial, whether for theologians, rulers, or the people who paid for
them in money and blood. The seventeenth century saw a long and heated debate about the definition of just war. The scholastics had believed that war was justified when it came to defending oneself, retaking conquered territories, or punishing the enemy. However, a wise ruler would always consider the consequences before starting a war. Were the sufferings of war proportionate to the wrongdoings of the adversary? Starting a war as a quest for glory or to spread religious ideas was not acceptable. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, new, more pragmatic ideas were launched. The humanists argued that a preventive war could be just, and so too a war against barbarians—thus legitimising the colonial conquests.\(^{35}\) Even though these ideas normally featured in the international propaganda rather than the kind for domestic audiences, the notion of formally giving thanks for military victories should be understood in this context, as a way of legitimising the authorities’ war policy.

The French historian Michèle Fogel has written the pioneering work on French *Te Deum*, investigating their history from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century and presenting several case studies.\(^{36}\) She calls them ‘ceremonies of information’, but actually focuses on their ritual aspects. She
acknowledges the occasional political and tactical use of ritual, but refrains from using the word propaganda (which to her implies deceit). She argues that the French Te Deum were not about ‘make-believe’ (faire croire) but rather ‘make known’ (faire savoir). It is tempting, she admits, to dwell on the question of truth and lies, but she finds it too simplistic: the practice of information is more complex, since in the end it is a cultural practice, a ritual in which the form often matters more than the content. She also stresses that the state was not as absolute as it may seem—rulers are not in perfect control of events and are often surprised by the outcome of things. They do not have the capacity to draw a clear distinction between what they believe and what they want to make believed.37 Inspired by Jürgen Habermas, Fogel regards the Te Deum as representation, rather than communication. They permitted France’s rulers to manifest their power and thereby strengthen their legitimacy. The ceremonies did not communicate directly with the spectators, yet the spectators were vital for the ceremony to be complete. The role of the audience was to admire the rulers in their splendour: the ceremony ultimately served to display the unbridgeable differences between ruler and subject (dominants–dominés).38

The differences, then, between France and Sweden were not limited to the form and content of the Te Deum and days of thanksgiving, but also extend to Fogel’s perspective and mine. In my interpretation, these ceremonies were clearly both propaganda and communication—even though communicating the differences between ruler and subject was a vital part of that. In the definition I use, in which I follow Jowett and O’Donnell, propaganda is not necessarily deceitful, but it certainly sets out to influence its audience: ‘Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.’39 The stress here is on the purpose of the propaganda. The important thing is not whether the information is correct or not, but the propagandist’s intention. Propaganda is a means to affect people and to influence their behaviour. In the Swedish case, it is clear that the powers-that-be used days of thanksgiving as a way of both informing the king’s subjects and mobilising them for war. Even though France’s rulers were not as interested in communicating detailed facts to the lower strata of society, the main message of the Te Deum still reached a large proportion of the population. And their purpose was clear: to legitimise war. For many people—those who were not literate, newspaper-reading city dwellers—acts of public thanksgiving provided the most
important source of information about the wars. That said, it is important to underline that they were not merely propaganda. They also served as religious ceremonies, news media, and social rituals. They contributed to a war narrative—to an understanding of what war really was.

**Information, celebration, narration**

How then, did the days of thanksgiving and *Te Deum* legitimise the wars? These rituals worked on several different levels, and the book is divided into three thematic sections to reflect this. First of all, there was information about the course of the war—about victorious battles and captured cities. The days of thanksgiving worked as news media in this respect, even if the information was highly selective. Rulers of the early modern period were well aware that wars were controversial. In order to get people to do the two things essential for war, to fight and to pay taxes, they could use violence, money, or words. Even though they usually had recourse to all three at different stages, they vastly preferred the latter. Normative resources were both the least expensive and the most efficient method, and were used wherever possible. They certainly meant that the state could use the diffusion of information as a political tool. In the Swedish case, it is also clear that the country’s rulers were aware of this possibility. The king and council explicitly discussed celebrations of thanksgiving as a way of keeping the populace onside and avoiding the worst discontent and defeatism. In France, with its recurrent peasant uprisings and harsh government responses, it is plain that the state did not limit itself to normative resources, yet information still had a crucial part to play. There is, however, also another side to this issue. Having accurate and up-to-date information is a power resource for the audience too. In order for subjects to be able to protest against the king’s war policy, they need to know what that policy is. Did the days of thanksgiving in any way contribute to such knowledge?

Even though for many people days of thanksgiving were important for spreading news of the wars, they were not people’s sole source of information. None of these thanksgiving texts should be read in isolation. Context, after all, is everything. Whatever the country, the solemn celebration of military victories was thus strongly linked to questions of power and information: who should be informed, and of what?

The *celebration of Te Deum* was ritualised, and the ritual in itself conveyed ideas about both the war and the order of society. This means