The Swedish-led Gendarmerie in Persia 1911-1916
State Building and Internal Colonization

This talk will investigate the Swedish-led gendarmerie in Persia (Iran) as a case of state building through defensive modernisation (weaker state modernises its institutions to resist stronger states). The gendarmerie in Persia illustrates Swedish participation in this process and the personal records of the Swedish officers can help us map a wide spectrum of approaches, from (military) orientalism to empathy. The gendarmerie the Swedish officers helped build and lead (1911-1916) was meant to uphold law and order in the provinces. It became part of a long series of attempts to discipline the tribes - considered an anomaly in the modernisation of Persia. The projection of state power throughout the country through its representatives and their performative tasks is part of an internal colonisation of the country. The gendarmerie was to act as highway policemen, but got involved in other institutional/performative aspects of a modern state. The primary source material is the personal archives of the Swedish officers, the archives of the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the Iranian parliament. The former contain private correspondence, military communications, diaries, and a large number of photographs. The project will contribute to our knowledge of Iranian politics in early twentieth century and situate Sweden within a global history of colonialism.

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