



**The Henrik Database:  
reconstruction of lost collections in 18th century  
Finland**

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**Abstract**

*The Henrik database is a result of the cooperation of Finnish book historians. It contains information about books and their owners in Helsinki and Oulu up to and including 1809. This information has been retrieved from estate inventory deeds and auction protocols. When conducting searches, information about books and their owners can be combined. Henrik represents a multifaceted resource and yields new opportunities for research in cultural history. The group of researchers behind the database has published a book on book culture in Helsinki. New knowledge has been gained already about the history of book ownership and dissemination of literature in a historical context.*

*Material collected by the legendary Finnish librarian and book historian Henrik Grönroos over several decades has been at the centre of our work in creating this database. The Grönroos Collection is preserved by Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland [the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland]. Additional information has been assembled from various sources in the City Archives of Helsinki. The database is published on the web site of Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura [the Society of Finnish Literature].*

*To date, the database covers all estate inventory deeds and auction protocols in the small towns Helsinki and Oulu up to 1809. The books have been indexed and linked to registries of persons and of documents. Historians have completed biographical and bibliographical information when possible. Thus it is possible to recreate information about book collections and trace books through the lively second hand book market in a town without bookshops and open libraries. Unfortunately no books have yet been identified physically, most likely due to the destruction of Helsinki in a fire 1808 and because these books have to a large extent never ended up in library collections. None the less the database gives us important knowledge about book culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.*

*In my paper I will explain how the database is structured and present some of the results of our research.*

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A collection of books, a library, an old catalogue or a list of book titles contain much more information than a title of a single book. Not because of the fact that the amount of text and signs is larger, but because the selection and combination of books adds so much value and meaning to the entity. The multitude brings additional layers of time, space and even psychology – or cultural anthropology, what ever you want to call it, into the picture. A question that sometimes arises is whether a collection is "typical", for its time, the creators background and so on. To be answered with some credibility one of course has to define the exact reference group and then hope to find enough collections to be able to make such an assessment. The relevance of this kind of work could be discussed at length, since the reference group often can be defined so that either of the answers, yes or no, can be the result of the inquiry. It is often more interesting to investigate a book collection by looking at which trends and ideas are represented in it and how they perhaps develop over time – if such a temporal perspective is possible to reconstruct – or how these ideologies stand in relation to each others or have afflicted one and other, or for instance, how different periods in the collector's life or lives correlate with the books.

Now, many things that can be studied with existing physical book collections can be likewise studied in "lost collections". They can be virtually "reconstructed" from historical sources, like old catalogues, book lists, estate inventories or documents stemming from auctions. Often the information is defective. Even if we know the exact edition of a title, we probably can never find out what kind of binding was used, or if annotations or signs of provenance existed in the specific book. Usually the information is even much more insufficient than that. Often only the author and the title are known, sometimes only one of them. The most frustrating cases are of course the annoying expressions like "a pile of books". I often have had the intuition that these piles contain the most interesting literature. Of course one has to proceed with great consciousness with these kinds of book lists or lost collections. Firstly, normal source criticism has to be applied. Which were the specific circumstances in which this "collection" of books was documented? Estate inventories often were done in critical moments and very special occasions: a death in the family, a marriage or divorce or perhaps a bankruptcy. In these cases there are usually two important motives or values that mattered ... or could interfere with the documentation of books: economic and moral issues. On the one hand it was, always, a question of money. Books are expensive, to those poor people that owned one or two books, as well to those rich people who owned great libraries, sometimes with rarities in them. Books could be hidden or intentionally forgotten during inventory, to avoid taxes or simply to be kept or stolen.

When concerning morals, of course, the opposite was often true, showing was more motivated than hiding. By adding titles, people might have tried to attain supplementary value. Religious reading was for instance always good, it was a testimony for high moral standards, honesty and other eligible virtues. Professional literature usually seems to have been documented with great piety, naturally it was besides highly ranked, a clear signal about social status and a serious and ambitious character and manner of life.

Other things apply to book lists from auctions. These are very interesting indeed, as you sometimes also can find references to buyers. Buying is always an active choice that has one or more incentives. That is what makes this kind of source material so valuable to research, because studying it can bring you to the front lines of literacy in a society. People who have not left any written statements about their attitudes towards books and literature are sometimes mentioned as buying books. This is definitely different from a mentioning of a book in an estate inventory, too, as those documents might well list books that were absolutely irrelevant to their owner. But when buying a book, you probably want to read it or at least want people to think you'll read it. You want to own it, which means it carries some kind of meaning and has some relevance to you. Few things are as loaded with collective meanings as books.

In the Henrik-database a group of Finnish book historians has collected information about books and book ownership in two towns, Helsingfors and Uleåborg up to and including the year 1809. The information has been gathered from the city archives, from estate inventories and auction minutes. This material has made it possible to reconstruct book collections, even their development over time.

Because of the extent of the material some things can be assumed about the book culture in these small towns, though there are some difficulties caused by the sources, work processes and technical solutions. I will come to those soon, and also to what I actually think can or could be concluded with some certainty. But first some words about the context, the towns themselves and the state of book history in Finland today.

Firstly we have to discuss the year 1809 as temporal delimitation. Why that specific year? Two centuries have today passed since Finland was separated from the rest of the Swedish realm during the Napoleonic wars. The split was administrative and political, but not cultural. Finland kept its laws and religion, and Swedish remained for many decades the common language for extensive reading, though now under Russian rule. Finland was in many ways still a part of the Swedish book market during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Drawing a dividing line in cultural history this year is not well motivated. But here the group behind the database project has chosen to follow the sources, which are saturated by a traditional, nationalistic understanding of history, but which is a later construction. It would be very interesting to go further on in time recording book ownership and analysing more exactly how the structures of it changed, but there is one major practical problem: during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the number of books explodes. Staying in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Finnish book history keeps the amount of sources more easy to grasp and handle.

Another aspect is that a considerable part of Helsingfors, which was our starting point, burnt down in 1808 and in a few decades Helsingfors became a modern capital. The small wooden town vanished, as did many of the sources and books. Actually we have not yet identified a single copy. Helsingfors, originally founded in 1550 and Uleåborg founded in 1605, were really small towns, with only one or a few thousands inhabitants. Sweden, as the Scandinavian countries in general, were very rural and urbanisation really tardy until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> It is good to remember that printing did not arrive in Finland until during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and that the books shops were very few even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and none of them were in Helsingfors or Uleåborg where books were sold by bookbinders or agents.

In Finland today book history grows its popularity. It is not very focused on bibliographical research, though this kind of activity also exists. In the library at the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland we have ongoing research in book bindings and book collections. Book culture, markets and publishing have been objects to some close studies in the recent years, unfortunately published almost only in Finnish, a language in general impossible to understand even for our colleagues in Sweden. However, it is worth underlining in this context, that the cultural and social aspects of book history are those that are found especially interesting today. The dissemination and use of books are considered relevant and interesting in our situation, when textualities and reading cultures are in extensive transformation.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Jyrki Hakapää: *Kirjan tie lukijalle*. Diss. (SKS, 2008).

2 Sven Lilja: *Tjuvehål och stolta städer. Urbaniseringens kronologi och geografi i Sverige (med Finland) ca 1570-tal till 1810-tal*. (Stockholms universitet, 2000).

3 Luke Tredinnick: *Digital Information Culture* (2006, 2008).

*The Henrik database*

The Henrik database contains information about books and their owners in the mentioned two small towns up to and including 1809. When conducting searches in the database, information about books and their owners can be combined. The records of books are the primary and central component. It could be said that Henrik represents a multifaceted resource and will yield new opportunities for research in cultural history, because of the possibilities to add temporal aspects and aspects of provenance to the searches. But as the case usually is, researcher's needs are complicated, which unfortunately has its consequences for usability. Using the database for more extensive research takes some exercise and knowledge of the material.

This database was named after Henrik Grönroos Ph. D. [honorary doctorate] and a legendary librarian at the University library in Helsingfors, and a passionate and innovative book historian who died about a year ago at the venerable age of 99 and a half. He had during his life time collected considerable amounts of information about book ownership in Finnish towns in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The material collected by Grönroos over several decades has been at the centre of our work in creating this database. By us here referring to a group of Finnish book historians at this time based in Helsingfors. The Grönroos Collection is today preserved by the Archive of Literature and History attached to the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. Additional information has been assembled from various sources in the City Archives of Helsinki. The database itself is maintained by the Society of Finnish literature and a company called Tietokannat, specialised in technical solutions for research in history.

In reality the database has two versions, one for development maintained by Tietokannat, and the other, public version, which is updated from the researcher's database. The researchers can work over internet, too, and by logging on edit and complete the data. Development has been iterative and the financing has been collected from different resources as smaller projects taking one portion of material at a time. At first one group of sources has been inserted by hand, because the sources are handwritten. Then the information has been completed with keywords and additional data about the book titles. Then the next portion of sources has been added. The researchers have a e-mail list, which is used for internal discussion and planning. Seminars and meetings are naturally also a part of the activity of the so called "Henrik-group", some of them internal and some open for the public.

To date, the database covers all estate inventory deeds and auction protocols in Helsingfors and Uleåborg. We hope to include similar material from other towns in the future. Today the content is as follows:

	Helsingfors	Helsingfors	Uleåborg	Uleåborg	Total	Total
	records	books (est.)	records	books (est.)	records	books (est.)
Estate inventories	5952	8247	3629	12623	9609	20898
Auctions	5782	7849	1319	2665	7107	10520
Total	11734	16096	4948	15288	16716	31418

The database is a relational sql-database consisting of eleven different tables. Books notated in estate inventory deeds and auction protocols are given in separate tables, as is data about auctions, estate inventories and persons. Main information about books and persons are given in the search result. Additional information can be retrieved using the links presented in the search result. When a

book has been identified with some probability information has been entered to the fields for author and title. Still searches by title and author also always include the field for the source text, to give all users the possibility to find books we have not been able to identify. For the same reason information about uncertain suggestions done by the Henrik-group is inserted in the same field as the source text, but this data is marked by brackets.

We have added keywords to the books to facilitate research. Keywords are either general (like religion or textbook) or specific words (like horses). Some uniform titles are also given to psalm books, bibles etc. It is also possible to use the operators AND, OR and NOT for advanced searches.

Some personal names have several entries due to use of several different forms of names in the source text. However, some normalisation has been attempted concerning the spelling of names and titles of the persons. We have also inserted available information about professions according to a normalised vocabulary. Professions are only in Finnish and Swedish in the database, but we have provided a list with English terms. This makes searches about the social profiles possible to some extent. On the other hand, you have to know the material quite well to be able to draw the right conclusions. For instance, this kind of numbers can be drawn from the database about the number of mentioned books in the sources, which gives a high ownership ratio for women:

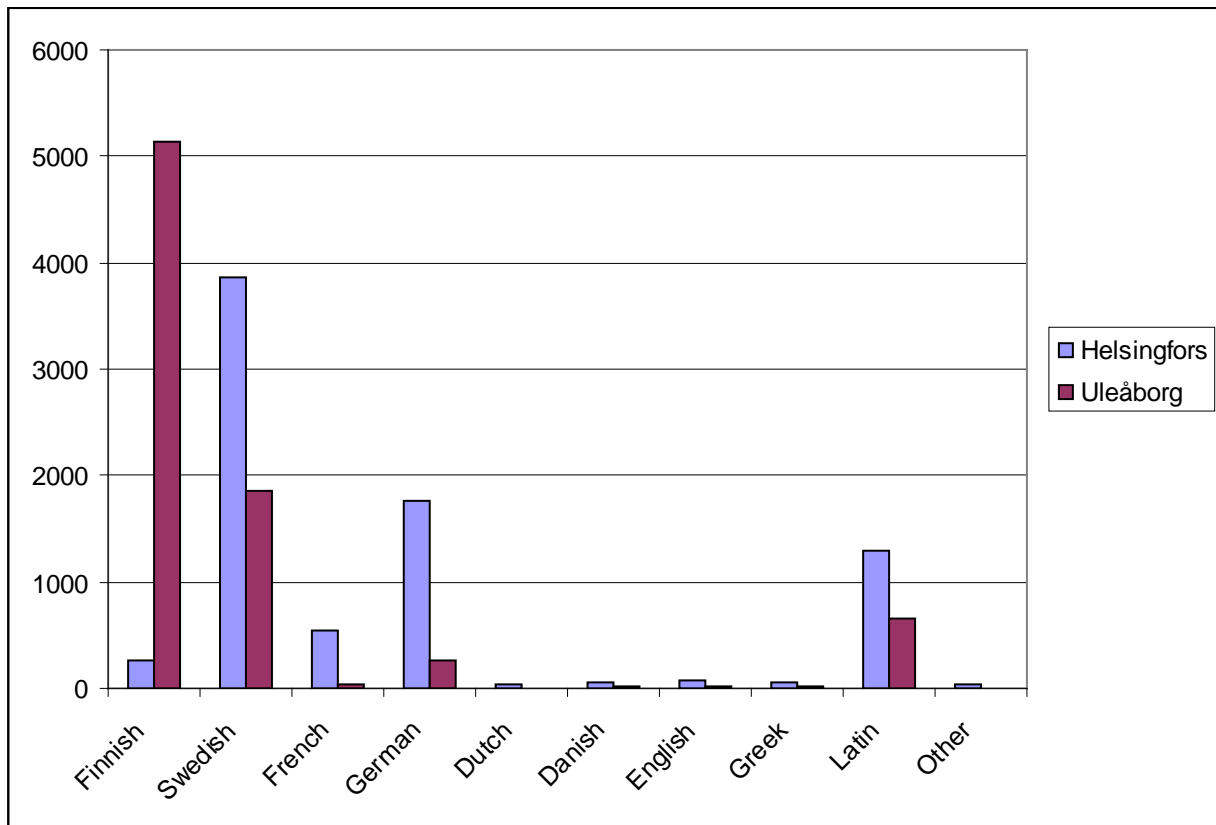
Merchant	5475
City court	
judge	2541
Wife, widow	3222
Officer	818
Burgher	563
Suregon	
barber	324
Vicar	184
Assistant vicar	106
Shoemaker	84
Tailor	62
Midwife	61

But, here you need to know that there is one very large collection in Helsingfors, left by a vicar, which is presented under the name of his wife, so the correct numbers would be somewhat different, presenting more expected numbers for the clergy:

Merchant	5475
City court	
judge	2541
Wife, widow	2366
Vicar	1049
Officer	818
Burgher	563
Suregon	
barber	324
Assistant vicar	106
Shoemaker	84
Tailor	62
Midwife	61

With some searches and use of ordinary calculation software it is easy to create graphic representations of the books in the towns. Despite the usually quite rudimentary information about

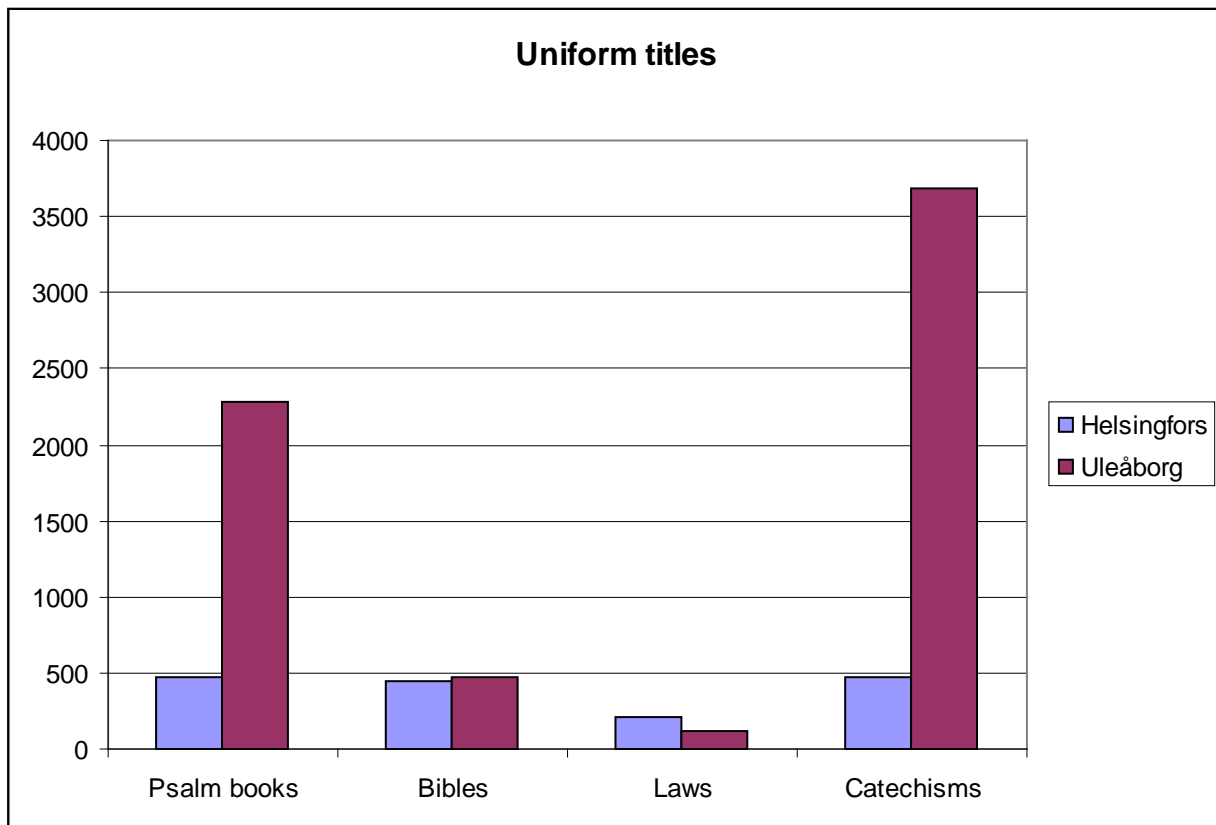
the books, it has been possible to record the language of the majority of the books. This has been possible either because the language is mentioned in the source or because it has been established, that the text has been published only in one language at the time. Of the records of books of the estate inventories about 21% are without information about language, and in the case of auctions protocols the percentage is around 28.



Source: The Henrik Database, April 2009.

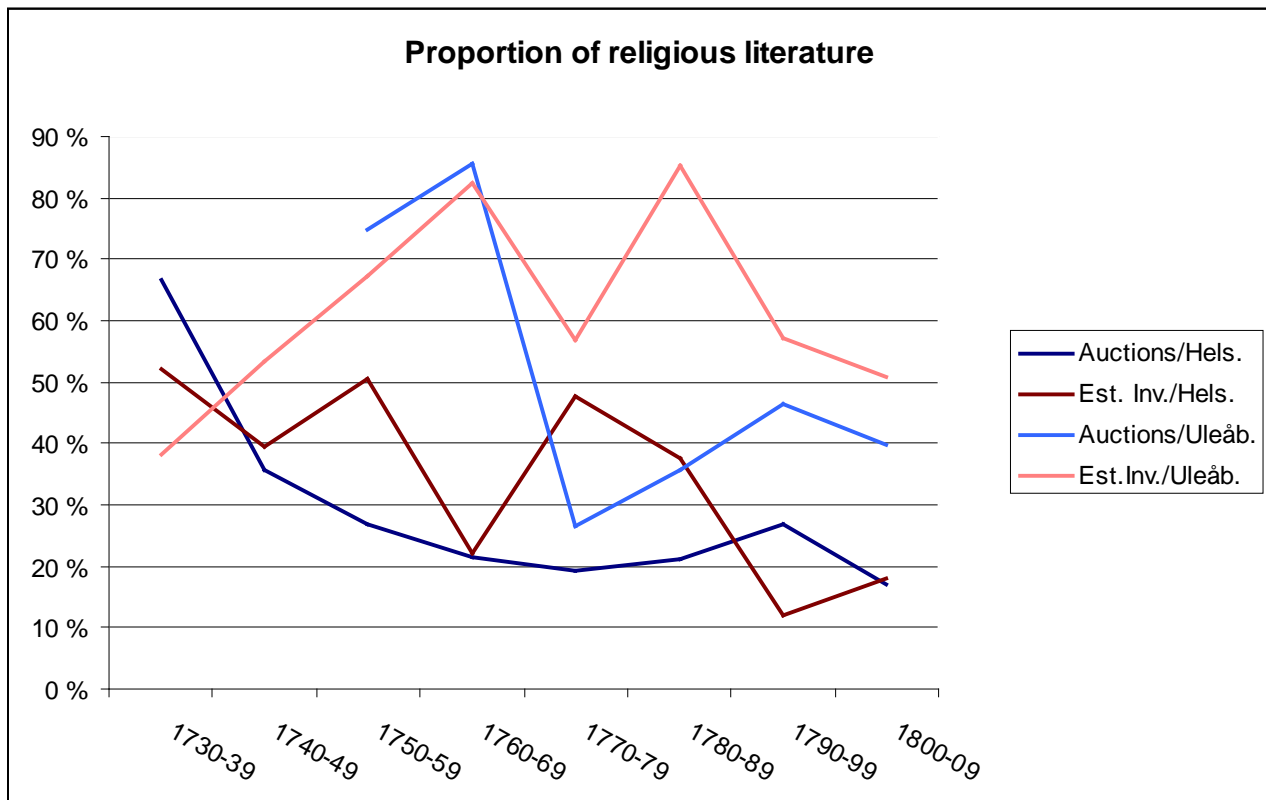
It turns out that all of the literature in Finnish in Uleåborg was elementary school books or religious literature. It is worth reminding that book production in Finland was very modest at this time, and it seems evident that a lot of Finnish books were distributed to the hinterland of Uleåborg, since great consignments are recorded, but Finnish is still the most common language of the books in Uleåborg even if one excludes the most obvious and largest lots. We can also see that Helsingfors was a much more cosmopolitan town. This was partly due to the fact that during most of this period the towns in Ostrobothnia were not allowed so practice commerce abroad, while Helsingfors always was encouraged by the crown to do so.

Of course the information in the source book lists is very incomplete, often only a few words. With the help of several OPACs on the internet, we have managed to identify most of the books to a satisfying degree. Still the text in the source is also always recorded, to make source criticism possible for the user, since our interpretations can never be more than qualified guesses. That is, we have been able to classify books and to most titles we have added suggestions about which book it could be. Also the sellers and buyer have often been identified.



Source: The Henrik Database, April 2009.

By using keywords in combination with source type and temporal and spatial criteria, it is possible to create time lines and analyse trends. Below an example of the proportion of religious books in different sources counted per decade. It is worth while noticing, that the same books might be mentioned twice, first in an estate inventory and then again in an auction protocol. This is a good reason to diversify the searches and results like this.



Source: The Henrik Database, April 2009.

There are special features to the books sold in auctions in Helsingfors compared to the estate inventories. For instance there are more textbooks and fiction among these books, than those mentioned in estate inventories. The same feature has been noticed in Stockholm.<sup>4</sup> Religious books on the other hand were not sold as often, their owners were more attached to them. This points to different types of book ownership.

### *The dispersed collections*

With the help of the Henrik database it is also possible to reconstruct individual book collections, and maybe even more interesting, book collecting itself over a period of time. One limitation though is, that there are not very many other informative sources about the social and cultural life in Helsingfors, which I will be focusing on in this part of my paper. We know quite little about the social structures and networks in the town. There are not many biographical data to be added to these stories of book collecting.

There was for instance a merchant Myhr (dead in 1774), who was a quite active buyer of books at the auctions. He bought almost 80 books on 17 different occasions during the period 1751-1774. Many of these books were laws or related literature. This was quite common among merchants. Knowing the law was a necessity at a time when law suits were common and lawyers were rare. In the estate inventory made after Myhr's death we can find 139 catechisms, presumably meant for retail and 136 other books. At least 15 of the books can be identified as bought at auctions. Still,

<sup>4</sup> Anita Ankarcróna: *Bud på böcker*. Diss.(Stockholms universitet, 1989)

one would expect this number to be much higher, but again this outcome is most likely due to a lively second hand market and not unusual.

Another later example is the towns physician Rosenström's book collecting. He came to town in 1791 as a young doctor and soon married the daughter of the recently died mayor. He bought many kinds of things at the towns auctions during his life, before he died in 1819. Up until 1810 he bought more than one hundred books. Some of them were in French, probably meant for his daughters to study. When compared to his estate inventory, again, the difference is almost astonishing. Here we find mostly professional literature in Swedish and German. But we also have records of him selling some books to the uncle of his wife privately. It shows how books really were sales goods like other things.

The town was to a very large extent influenced by the fact that it was of great military interest to Sweden, an importance that grew as S:t Petersburg grew and Russia strengthened its influence and power in the Baltic region. Around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Helsingfors and the islands just outside were chosen to be the site of the big sea fortress of Sveaborg. This brought a lot of money and activities to the area. Soon the number of military personnel competed with the number of city dwellers. The military officers brought with them French literature to Helsingfors. An example that also shows that auction sources can compensate lost or undone estate inventories is the case of major Fredrik Granatenhjelm. This lonely and later legendary benefactor of the poor died in 1784. His belongings along with his library can be found listed in an auction protocol stemming from the sales of the property left some months after his death.

Granatenhjelm's collection of books in actual fact also contained almost 20 manuscripts. Many of the books in his library concern his profession, it is military literature, for instance literature on fortification and gunnery. Almost all of the relevant literature of the period is included in Swedish, French and German. This category of books covers subjects like drawing and mathematics as well. The most important book on fortification, written by Vauban, that was essential when building Sveaborg is listed here, too.

His father and brother had been interested in modern economy, an interest that can be traced in Fredrik Granatenhjelm's collection of books likewise. Examples of this are Andreas Gries' popular book on fishing, a book on dyeing and some issues of the series of the Swedish Academy of Science. Economic theory of famous contemporaries can be found. Albeit Granatenhjelm was considered a deeply faithful and practising Christian, only few religious books are included. This literature was old fashioned, purely Lutheran and very popular among common people. He also owned some books that were used in schools. This corresponds well to sources that mention him founding schools for poor children.

What is interesting about Granatenhjelm's collection, is its linguistic and geographical features. As opposed to other known libraries of Swedish officers in Sveaborg, his collection of Swedish fiction is very small and old. But on the other hand, he owned Don Quixote in German and Giovanni Battista Marini's epic poem L'Adone in French and five books in Italian, seemingly making him the owner of the largest collection of Italian books at the time. There is also a mentioning about a book called "Methode pour apprendre la langue italienne". This interest in Italian culture seems a bit odd. It might be possible that Granatenhjelm at some point had planned to grand tour to Italy, or maybe he even had done it in his youth, despite his later ascetic lifestyle.

Of Granatenhjelm we even have some more knowledge, due to his position. He played an interesting part in the coup of king Gustavus III in 1772 in Sveaborg. At that time Granatenhjelm was the only officer who was excused from giving his vows to the king without consequences. His

character was considered to be so honest and decent, that he was given excuse, when he claimed that he could not break his previous vow that was conflicting with the one he was ordered to give. So the coup maker Sprengtporten immediately gave in saying, that he could only wish all of the royal subjects had the same moral stamina as Granatenhjelm.<sup>5</sup> I think this historical anecdote supports later legends about Granatenhjelm's Christian high morals. Today he is a symbolic figure for the Finnish Swedish free masons, a movement with very Christian convictions and teachings. This is a bit interesting, because everybody agrees Granatenhjelm never was a member of this brotherhood.

The dissemination of Pietistic and Moravian literature can also be traced to some extent in Helsingfors. Literature by or on count Zinzendorf can be found for the first time in Helsingfors in the property left by a merchant in 1746. The preachings of Zinzendorf, leader of the Moravian movement, was bought by a clergyman. This is a behaviour we often can notice; the educated class quickly buying off “dangerous” books in auctions, the military officers bought French philosophic literature and priests purchased theological perilous literature. However, it is of course not excluded, that the buyers themselves read this literature with great interest and warm feelings.<sup>6</sup> The later on very popular Moravian psalm book, *Sions sånger*, was during many decades owned only by merchants and members of the clergy. This according to the Henrik database. It is of course not a complete source to book ownership during the period, but might well be considered to correspond with reality at least to some extent, seeing that the first time a craftsman is mentioned as an owner of this book, is exactly the same year as a case was raised against illegal private hours of devotion in the town court. The meetings had been led by an educated member of the town council, but attained by people of all kinds. After this year, 1775, Moravian songbooks can be found with artesans and alike in Helsingfors.<sup>7</sup>

This might attract some interest to the private preacher in question, David Bergenfelt, about whom we know little from elsewhere, at least about his personal interests. Bergenfelt was a lawyer and involved in towns politics. He probably came to Helsingfors in the 1750ies and he also died there in 1779 at the age of 50. In 1758 he bought Ovid and a work on Swedish history, and ten years later he bought books on cooking, trade and history. After his death 60 books he left were auctioned. His collection included professional literature that did not interest the audience, but also many books on religion, for instance several books by the founder of the pietist movement Philip Jacob Spener. These books were immediately bought by a priest, as could be expected. It can also be noticed that the Ovid Bergenfelt had bought as a young man from a reverend Barfooth, probably was the same book that in 1779 was sold to a private tutor Aronson. It is thus possible to follow a book being transferred from one owner to another in several steps, again pointing to the fact that the second hand market of books really was important in a small town like Helsingfors.

Women as book owners are difficult to trace. Often the books of widows seem to actually be the libraries of their husbands. But when women bought books at the auctions, it can perhaps be assumed that they have had some interest in the literature they were buying. Women generally seem to have bought literature they needed for their religious activities. The only exception is the tailor's wife Madame Boström, who purchased scientific and other books on several occasions. She might have been just planning to sell them again to someone else, because she bought different kinds of goods at the auctions. Generally it appears that female reading was considered most appropriate

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5 Jessica Parland-von Essen: *Fredrik Granatenhjelm. En man och hans minne*. (Föreningen Granatenhjelm, 2008)

6 Ilkka Mäkinen: ”Romaanien ja näytelmien läpimurto Helsingissä ja Suomessa kustavilaisena aikana.” in af Forselles & Laine (SKS, 2008).

7 Helsinki City Archive, MA, Ca:81, 4.4.1775,

when restricted to traditional religious intensive reading. This does of course not mean that all women adjusted to this idea when in private.

However, there was one exceptional group of women, who were formally educated and book owners. Those were the midwives, who were respected and of the middling sort. The midwife Anna Kock left more than thirty books, unfortunately their titles are unlisted. But the books of her colleague Hedvig Hedman are known. She owned a bible, several psalm books, one of them Moravian, a prayer book, two cookery books, and a work on Swedish history and of course some professional literature. Helsingfors had several midwives during the century, but these women of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century are to only that can be found in the database.

It can be stated that the second hand book market was lively and of great importance for book supply in towns without booksellers.<sup>8</sup> This concerns especially fiction and school books. We can see how new groups of people find the auctions, the books there and buy them – perhaps to read them, or may be sell them again to someone else. But they stand up and state their interest in specific titles in front of the public, they pay the money required and they carry the books home with them. This is valuable information, if we want to understand a society from the past, a society that has left very little sources that reflect the daily life and mentalities of its members.

As a matter of fact, the work with this database already produced a book about book culture in the town. And we hope to continue the work with creating information that can help us reconstruct "virtual" book collections, long ago vanished, but giving us an insight into how people thought and acted about books more than two centuries ago. For books are really not only full of thoughts and ideas inside, meaning is also added to them socially. And a selection of books tells more than the books separately, evidently.

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8 Jessica Parland-von Essen: "Kirjanomistus kulttuurihistoriallisen tutkimuksen kohteena. Helsinkiläiset ja heidän kirjansa 1700-luvulla." in *Kirjakulttuuri kaupungissa 1700-luvulla* ed. By af Forselles & Laine (SKS, 2008)