

The Relation between the Local and the International Context. Reading Behaviour of Men of Letters in 18th-century Tallinn¹

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Abstract: A study of readers is one way to examine the relationship between the local and broader literary contexts. In this respect, the lists of private library collections from the 18th century (that have survived in the catalogues of probate inventories) serve as a good source for analyzing the reading behaviour of the owners of the books during this period. Even if the conclusions drawn from the analysis may not give a fully truthful picture – books were also read in public libraries, reading societies and were exchanged between individuals – these lists still offer us some insight into the intertextuality of the period. The number of texts related to the region or the Estonian language was relatively small in the 18th century libraries of Tallinn. This paper will analyse these texts in the context of world literature.

Keywords: library catalogue, private libraries, reading behaviour, book ownership, cultural contact, Tallinn, 18th century

My research paper will focus on the relationship between the local and broader literary or cultural contexts on the basis of a study of readers. My analysis is based on the lists of the 18th-century private library collections and will examine the possession of books among the educated members of the Tallinn society. Interest in this subject area has increased in Estonia, particularly over the last decades (Pullat 2009, Reimo 2010). After a short introduction I will provide an overview of the research sources. Then I will raise some issues concerning the subject matter of books in private libraries in Tallinn and will discuss the dating of books in the collections under review. Since it is a broad area, I will begin with giving some general information about the topic.

First it is necessary to consider the general atmosphere of the epoch: the 18th century is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. In the history of

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reading, it is regarded as the onset of an important change called *Leserevolution* or the reading revolution (cf. Blaak 2009). During this time, a language shift from Latin to other languages took place, in the case of Tallinn a shift to German; whereas the shift to Estonian started later. The 18th century was also characterized by a transition from intensive to extensive reading, as well by a change in the nature of texts: fiction became an important subject of reading (Martino, Jäger 1990: 15ff).

In order to investigate and assess the reading habits in Tallinn (Reval) in that period, I have analyzed the catalogues of the private libraries of educated people in Tallinn in the 18th century on the basis of probate inventory lists. The study of private book ownership is an essential historical source, because there were no relevant developments in terms of municipal or institutional libraries (Garber 2007: 119), and it was only in the last decades of the century that reading societies were established (Jürjo 1990: 550).

Generally, there was a clear dominance of German influence in Tallinn at that time. Most of the intellectuals whose libraries were listed in inventories had come from Germany and they maintained close relationships with their cultural motherland over their lifetime in Tallinn. At this point it is difficult to determine which was the “own” and which was the “other” for these individuals. In a broad sense, German traditions and language were their “own”, whereas the local Estonian traditions and language belonged to their new homes. About one third of the library owners were born in Tallinn but had still retained close ties to Germany; some persons born in Tallinn had for instance studied in Germany. Thus it can be inferred that personal contacts with Germany of this social group were rather intensive. The stocks of their libraries provide evidence for an active cultural transfer from Central and Western Europe to Tallinn.

Most of the probate inventory lists that were analyzed in the course of this research have been archived in the collections of the Tallinn City Council Archives (Fund 230), some have been preserved in the collections of the Court of Orphans (Fund 166) of the Tallinn City Archives, and occasionally there are two versions of the same document in both repositories. Part of the probate inventories from Tallinn have been edited earlier: in 2007 Raimo Pullat edited 23 inventories of the personal property owned by men of letters; in 2009 he published another collection which focused on the book catalogues in these inventories, but also dealt with the libraries of craftsmen and merchants (Pullat 1997, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009). To date, further 28 library lists have been edited in the monograph *Bibliothekskataloge der Tallinner Literaten des 18. Jahrhunderts. Quellenedition aufgrund überlieferter Nachlassverzeichnisse* (Tarvas 2014).

The books listed in the inventories that have been edited by Pullat and myself amount to about 8000 titles, pamphlet volumes as well as multi-volume works have mainly been regarded as one title. According to the probate inventories, the amount of books in private libraries substantially exceeded the amount of books in public libraries in Tallinn. There is no record of the exact number of books in public or institutional libraries, but judging by the data from the early 19th century (Robert 1991: 57) we may claim that private libraries were of high significance among the overall existing reading material in Tallinn.

Most of the probate inventories that have been included in this research were drawn up by town secretaries or other public scribes of the city and had a relatively rigid structure. Inventoried items were defined by category and material. The lists started with cash (column “An Contantem”) and real estate, then followed the precious metals (gold, silver etc.) and various general or specific household items. The reason for such costly valuation of an estate was legal interest, mainly inheritance issues, and inventories were taken with care and along the rules. Hence, the deceased person’s property was recorded with a view to secure its preservation for underage children, or more seldom with a view to protect the rights of potential creditors. In other words, the information was delivered for practical purposes, and it is exactly because of this that the probate records allow an insight into the everyday culture of the time. Books, as a rule, have been recorded at the end of the lists, often arranged by the author or the title. Even if the unambiguous identification of the books is not possible – sometimes the lists just give descriptions like “Ein Italienisches Buch mit Kupffern” (an Italian book with engravings), or only the name of the author “Justinus” or a general description like “Ein Kräuter Buch” (a herbal book), they nevertheless draw a diverse picture of what was read in Tallinn at that time. Reinhard Wittmann has called the catalogues of public and private collections even a “*via regia* to the investigation of the social history of reading, the reading habits in temporal, social and regional diversification” (Wittmann 1985: 13). The lists enable us to understand the conditions in the literary field of the region; they document the texts that were accessible to private individuals in addition to books in public libraries, lending or subscription libraries and that were a prerequisite for creating the intertextuality and culture of the period.²

The investigation of book consumption on the basis of probate inventory lists is by no means easy. On the contrary, this approach is very labour-intensive since there are plenty of such documents in the archives and one has to pay great attention to details. However, this method is an opportunity to collect

² For further details see Tarvas 2014: 10ff.

data which are unobtainable from other sources. In this respect it is also a way to reconstruct the destroyed or dispersed book heritage (Weyrauch 1985). This applies also to the book collections recorded in the probate inventories from Tallinn in the 18th century. Recent search efforts in Estonian libraries for specific copies of books with owners' notations have proved unsuccessful in most cases. The real books from that period simply do not exist anymore, or it is impossible to identify them. But we still know that they have been there.

The analysis of the book selection available in Tallinn demonstrates that most of the books listed in the probate records relate to the occupation of their owners. In most catalogues nonfictional literature dominates. Only a small amount of these texts were printed or written in the Baltic region, most of the texts were brought to Tallinn from Europe, predominantly from Northern Germany (Reimo 2001). Besides professional texts, e.g. surgery books in the library of a doctor, volumes of laws and treaties in the library of a lawyer, or geography or mathematics textbooks in the library of a teacher, there was a large variety of religious texts (Bibles, biblical exegeses and hymnbooks) as well as of Christian devotional literature. In small libraries religious reading matter was by far the most dominant, for example in the collection of Anna Elisabeth Wartmann, the widow of Superintendent Magister Arnold von Husen (1738):

In Fol.

Die ganze heil. Schrift Altes und Neues Testaments Nürnberg 1652.

In 4to.

Die gantze Heil. Schrift. Lüneburg 1642.

M. Christian Scriver's Seelen=Schatz Leipzig 1691.

EjUSD. Seelen Schatzes und zwar des funften Teils letztes Stuck Leipzig 1696. der Stern oder verneuerte und vermehrte Anweisung, wie Crist: Scriver in den Sonn= und Festtäglichen Episteln und Evangelien Texten wohl zu gebrauchen.

In 8vo.

Erasmi Francisci Wol der Ewigkeit, für die Verächter der Eitelkeit. Nürnberg 1683.

EjUSD: Wol der Ewigkeit für die Verächter der gnaden Zeit Nürnberg 1682.

Thom. Honsteden Palaestra veri Cristiana oder christliche Burg=Pre-digten Lübeck 1675.

Ein alt Gebeth und Gesang-Buch ohne Titel=Blat. (Pullat 2009: 16)

None of these books bore relation to Tallinn; they were all printed in Germany. Most books in this small collection were probably sold soon after the death of the husband and just a few remained in the household of the widow, apparently to satisfy her religious needs.

All in all, the number of books originating from the 17th century is high; the proportion of belletrist books, on the other hand, is very low, especially with regard to contemporary literature. The preponderance of nonfictional and scientific literature can be explained by the *zeitgeist* that favoured these kinds of texts. Furthermore, the high cost of books compelled the intellectuals to make pragmatic choices, often resulting in the acquisition of works connected with their professions.

We must concede that not all book lists are complete. According to the purpose of an inventory, the least valuable or unusable items were probably disregarded. It is possible that books were evaluated and selected before listing, and this is one of the reasons why nonfictional and scientific literature dominates. However, the assortment of books printed in the 18th century also reflects a preference for certain book types. It is peculiar that there were no ABC books in the collection of an elementary school teacher (altogether there are very few primers in my corpus), and catechisms and calendars were also rare. Sometimes such books were recorded en bloc. They could be associated with a region: many calendars were printed on site. These texts were used during a short period of time and therefore had little market value. This explains why they were not included in the inventories.

The book catalogues also provide information about the level and type of multilingualism existing in the region at that time. The first catalogues from the 18th century contained mainly books in Latin whereas towards the end of the century German books began to dominate. Besides the works in German and Latin, there were also many French titles, some works in Swedish and Finnish and very few in English. The strong representation of French literature in some catalogues, e.g. in the collection of teacher Greve (1782), refers to the importance of French in cultural life. While at the beginning of the 18th century mainly French grammar books and dictionaries were recorded in inventories, then towards the end of the century the number of philosophical texts in French increased. This proves that the ideas of the Enlightenment also reached the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire and that cultural transfer from the Francophone area was taking place. By the end of the century there existed several libraries with a high proportion of French-language texts. For instance August Ludwig Carl Schwarz (1785) had a wide selection of works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and by Nicolas Boileau Despréaux (1636–1711). Indeed, the book catalogues confirm a close connection between local and European discourses.

With regard to the Estonian language, there are many references to Estonian texts in the lists, such as grammars (cf. Bartholomäi (1739) Gutzleff's *Ehstnische Grammatique*, Tarvas 2014: 70), dictionaries, but also Estonian (i.e. *undeutsch*

as it was called at the time) catechisms and house books. However, the number of texts in Estonian is small, and the types of books indicate an intention of carrying out missionary and religious work. Likewise, there are examples of such texts in Latvian. It is remarkable that the proportion of literature from Sweden is so low in the lists: the few texts in Swedish are mostly of legal, in a few cases also of theological content (senior pastor Roos, Pullat 2007: 212–214). Russian texts are even scarcer, which proves that the intellectuals living in the region were orientated above all towards Central Europe, in particular to the German language area.

Another conclusion to be drawn from the analysis of the lists is the strong footing of Pietism, the religious renewal movement (cf also Pullat 1997: 160). The copies of the works of the most important theorist of Pietism, Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1705) as well as of his predecessor Johann Arndt (1555–1621), whose *Wahres Christentum (True Christianity)* was undoubtedly the most popular text in Tallinn in the first half of the century, spread all over the town. Some libraries contained dozens of texts by these authors. Another strong movement, which was represented by fewer books, was the tradition of the Moravian Church (Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine). The works of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorff were found mainly in the libraries of priests.

Other important trends in the libraries bore close relation to education. School textbooks were well represented in most libraries, predominantly among teachers, but also in the libraries of other members of the educated classes. Many private collections contained books that according to the research of Kaja Tiisel (2001: 55) could be found in the Tallinn Cathedral School. In addition to the school textbooks by Joachim Lange (his Latin grammar, for instance, was frequently present), these included the historical works and orthographies by Hieronymos Freyer³, the legal manuals by Samuel Pufendorf, the theoretical religious writings of Johann Anastasius Freytingshausen, or the works on geography, history and Latin by Christoph Cellarius. These works were highly common in the schools of Northern Germany (Tiisel 2001: 55) at that time – yet another indication of the cultural relationship with that region. In this way, the framework within which the intellectuals identified themselves and literary communication occurred helped to connect local readers with major parts of Europe.

³ According to Arvo Tering, these books were of essential importance all over Europe: “Die benutzten Lehrbücher [in der Halleschen Anstalt] (die hauptsächlich vom Inspektor des Pädagogiums H. Freyer verfaßt waren), wurden in vielen europäischen Schulen zum Vorbild genommen.” (Terling 1994: 25)

There is no clear answer as to what extent the texts from the Age of Enlightenment appear in the edited book lists. For example, there are many texts by Christian Thomasius, whereas other important authors of the Enlightenment are considerably less represented. Only one text has been recorded by an author of the early Enlightenment as important as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and there is only one more text from René Descartes (2 copies). Christian Wolff, the “popularizer of the rationalistic line of thought” (Alt 2007: 8) boasted of many works. Some renowned authors of the later Enlightenment are completely absent, e.g. David Hume, Johann Jacob Breitinger, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten; there is only one book by Johann Jacob Bodmer (in the collection of Greve jun.), and Immanuel Kant has been found only in the collection of August Ludwig Carl Schwarz (1785). There are no books by Johann Gottlieb Herder, who was important not only for the 18th century as a whole, but who also worked in the Baltic region for a while. Other authors, for example the early Enlightenment writers Barthold Heinrich Brockes and Karl Wilhelm Ramler, but also the anacreontic poets Friedrich von Hagedorn and Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim are well-represented.

The texts under study demonstrate that the role of belles-lettres in the lists is rather complex. The Age of Enlightenment is often associated with the so-called reading revolution (*Leserevolution*) in German cultural history. It is a period when new social classes started to read more and more, and when a shift in the nature of books took place. The proportion of devotional literature decreased, and in particular in the second half of the century fictional texts (novels, plays, secular poems) became ever more popular. Indrek Jürjo has spoken of the reading revolution also in the Baltic States: he found that the book production as well as the number of readers grew considerably in this region. He also pointed out the transfer from intensive to extensive reading in the region, but he dated this development to the period after 1770. However, the proportion of belletrist texts in the modern sense as recorded in the probate inventories began to grow only towards the end of the 18th century.

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Many of the findings in this paper are based on earlier developments, mostly from the 17th century: a substantial part of the texts in the library catalogues originate from the 17th century. Most texts in the oldest library of 18th-century Tallinn – *Catalogus Librorum Dⁱ Pastoris Joachimi Salemanni* – date back even to the 16th century. As concerns belles-lettres, there was a surprisingly strong acceptance of poetry of the Baroque era (Fleming, Opitz, Gryphius etc.) even in the second half of the 18th century.

All in all, there are about 2000 authors whose books could be found in the private libraries of the men of letters of Tallinn. Among the authors who appeared most frequently were Cicero as the most important ancient master of style, and a natural law philosopher and historian Samuel von Pufendorf. The number of books originating from the 17th century is remarkable.

Other authors whose works appeared more frequently in the library collections fall into the following groups⁴. Quite expectedly, there were many texts from the ancient authors like Caesar, Cicero and others, constituting an important part of education in the gymnasium. Further, there were plenty of texts connected with the Protestant Reformation (Luther, Melanchthon) of the 16th century, and texts from the pietists and the writers of the Moravian Church like Spener (17th–18th centuries) or Zinzendorf (18th century). Earlier important authors included Thomas a Kempis (15th century) and Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (16th century). Among the most widely read books there were many texts from the 17th century authors, including Johann Arndt, Johann Brunnemann, Anton Friedrich Büsching, Johann Amos Comenius, Conrad Dieterich, Hugo Grotius, Daniel Georg Morhof, August Pfeiffer, Samuel Freiherr von Pufendorff, Johann Rhenius, Johannes Scheffer, Cornelis Schrevel, and Christian Scriver.

Even a higher number of authors from the 18th century were strongly represented in the private libraries of 18th-century Tallinn. We should point out the numerous copies of works by Gottfried Arnold, Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten, August Bohse (= Talander), Joachim Just Breithaupt, Barthold Heinrich Brockes, Franz Johann Buddeus, Anton Friedrich Büsching, Christophorus Cellarius, Jean Robert des Pepliers, Johann Konrad Dippel (= Christianus Democritus), August Hermann Francke, Hieronymus Freyer, Johann Anastasius Freyling(s)hausen, Johann Christoph Gottsched, Johann Gottlieb Heineccius, Ludvig Baron Holberg, Johann Hübner, Johann Daniel Intelmann, Johann Gottlob Krüger, Joachim Lange, Johann Friedrich Mayer, Georg Friedrich Meier, Johann Jakob Rambach, François Roux, Benjamin Schmolck, Jakob Philipp Spener, Christian Thomasius, Voltaire, Christian Wolff, and Nicolaus Zinzendorf.

Based on our data, we may conclude that the reception of literature from the 17th century concentrated on a few selected authors, whereas the works of 18th-century authors met with growing acceptance. This corresponds with the general shift from intensive to extensive reading as mentioned above.

In addition to authors from different fields of life who were well known also in Germany at that time, we should mention Johann Daniel Intelmann, the

⁴ For further details see Tarvas 2014: 26ff.

author of an arithmetic textbook from Tallinn. His *Revalsches Rechenbuch* (Reval Arithmetic Book) was present in many libraries in Tallinn, and in the collection of the arithmetic teacher Greve there was even a class set of that book. It seems that this local achievement was held in esteem in the town. There were also other texts written by the locals, including texts about the history of the region, but their number was small. Additionally, there were a number of partly handwritten compendia of laws relating to the region, for instance in the collection of Johann David Bagge (1784):

- 33) Liefländische Land Rolle
- 34.) Estländische Land-Rolle nach der Revision vom 1765.
- 35.) dieselbe nach der Revision von 1774. (Tarvas 2014: 214)

Many copies of the local song book have also been listed, because *Das Revalsche Gesangsbuch* (Reval's hymnbook, 1666, 1676, 1706 etc.) was used in local churches. With regard to its content, this German-language songbook often contained songs which were also sung in Germany.

In the collection of the arithmetic teacher Greve, there were texts relating to the region, for instance books on agriculture from the 17th century:

- 59. [Gubert, Salomo] Lifländischee Oeconomie oder das Ackerstudent de A. 1645.
- 60. [Hermann, Johann] von Neidenburg Liefländisches Landmann d. A. 1662.
(Tarvas 2014: 181)

Some other texts printed in Reval were also present in his collection, like a book on fortification *Florilegium Fortificatorium tripartitum Revaliae 1647* by Gebhard Himself (1603–1676), a local professor of mathematics and a medical practitioner (Tarvas 2014: 178).

Although the majority of the book collections in the libraries of Reval were pragmatic and indicated, above all, an interest in European cultural developments of the time, there were also examples that reflected an interest in far-away places. There was a small number of travel accounts of exotic countries and landscapes, for example Dapper's *Beschreibung von Africa* (*Description of Africa*) (Tarvas 2014: 79) or Cardonne's *Geschichte von Africa und Spanien unter der Herrschaft der Araber 1^{ster} Theil* (*History of Africa and Spain under the Dominion of the Arabs*) (Tarvas 2014: 188), George Marie Butel-Dumont's *Histoire et Commerce des Colonies Angloise dans Amerique Septentrionale* (*History and Commerce of English Colonies in Northern America*) (Tarvas 2014: 166),

Beschreibung von China (*Description of China*) (Tarvas 2014: 69), Scheffer's *Beschreibung von Lappland* (*Description of Lapland*) (Tarvas 2014: 92) or Verkens *Eilfte Schiffart oder Beschreibung einer Reise nach Ostindien* (*Description of a Trip to the East Indies*) (Tarvas 2014: 86). These examples, along with a number of maps recorded in probate inventories, prove that intellectuals were interested in the geography, civilization and culture of the other parts of the world. Educated people in the 18th century Tallinn exhibited curiosity for a wide range of different issues, proved by an extensive collection of texts about astronomy or various other fields of science. For instance, the collection of Andreas Bartholomäi (Tarvas 2014: 65–72), a professor of mathematics and law, contained many copies of books about applied mathematics and astronomy.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the collections of the private libraries in Tallinn reflected the developments and tendencies in European literary and scientific circles rather than the local life and traditions. The local men of letters considered themselves to be readers, not provincial patriots, and even if they took some interest in the welfare of their home town or the local way of life, their reading habits sought to reinforce the connections with the outer world.

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