

Johann Christian Schünmann's Printing House in Tartu in 1814-1840: Activities and Production

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This review discusses a quarter of a century in the history of Tartu printing shops in the first half of the 19th century, examining the activities of Johann Joachim Christian Schünmann (1780-1849) as the printer for the University of Tartu, as well as his work for other customers and his contribution to the increasing of the number of Estonian-language printed books.

The university printing shop that started to work in 1632 was the first printing shop in Estonia. When the Academia Dorpatensis was moved, expecting the threat of war, farther from the eastern border to the seaside town of Pärnu in 1699, the printing shop moved as well. Printing of books was resumed in Tartu only 90 years later, in 1789, when Johann Michael Gerhard Grenzius (1759-1822), who had moved to Tartu from Põltsamaa, started his own printing press. In 1800, Grenzius bought the privilege of printing Estonian-language church books and school textbooks from a Riga printer Julius Conrad Daniel Müller (1759-1830).

Grenzius's printing work got a boost with the opening of the imperial university in Tartu in 1802. However, in addition to initial hardships, the printing shop had to cope with more and more new troubles – hindrances in inviting skilled labourers from abroad, Napoleon's wars and the spreading of war activities to Russia, inflation, but perhaps also Grenzius's lack of good business sense in the conditions of budding capitalism. All this together brought his enterprise to a near bankruptcy in 1813. The printer, who at the beginning had not had enough work, was not able to fulfil as quickly as required the growing orders from the university and local literati. Many manuscripts, including dissertations, were queued up for printing. The same year, another large-scale customer for printing work appeared in Tartu – the Livonian Charitable and Economic Society (founded in 1792), aiming at furthering country life and spreading agricultural knowledge and practical skills in the form of publications, moved from Riga to Tartu.

Revision and re-cataloguing of collections of the UT Library in 2008

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The year 2007/2008 was a breakthrough for the UT Library in two senses – a large part of library collections was systematically revised and several catalogues were made electronically accessible. By the end of 2007, the collections of the UT Library amounted to 3 526 068 items, or 60 786 linear meters. During 2008, the revision involved ca 1 million items. The revision of collections meant content-based evaluation of older monographs and textbooks and discarding of out-dated publications. Electronic access to library catalogues was provided by including original records in the e-catalogue ESTER, buying bibliographical records and uploading them into ESTER and digitising sheet and card catalogues.

A notable change appeared in the habits of library users in the 2000s – card catalogues were no longer used, because it was taken as natural and for granted that all library materials can be found in the electronic catalogue. In reality, the electronic catalogue contained only 36% of all library collections. This prompted a decision to convert sheet and card catalogues into electronic format as soon as possible, aiming at having most of the card catalogues converted by the end of 2008.

At the beginning of 2008, the library had given a promise to the university administration to make 70% of all of its collections electronically accessible by the end of the year, but actually, the percentage rose to 89. Digital catalogues offer access to ca 773 000 titles and the electronic catalogue ESTER contains ca 950 000 titles. In the course of this work, 234 245 items were discarded from the collections, including 125 000 titles.

During the whole year, almost all library staff members participated in several labour-intensive activities. More than 1000 hours of additional labour were contributed in the revision of the catalogues and discarding unnecessary publications.

11% of items in the UT Library collections are still to be included in the electronic catalogue. Mostly, these materials include manuscripts and rare books, small prints and other special formats.