

SUMMARY: BOOKS' PATHS TO READERS
HOW BOOK STORES BECAME THE NORM FOR
BOOK DISTRIBUTION IN FINLAND 1740–1860

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STUDYING HISTORY OF THE BOOK TRADE

Books' Paths to Readers describes the history of the origins and consolidation of modern and open book stores in Finland. The thesis approaches the book trade as a part of a print culture. It aims to describe the history of an institution that in many ways seems self evident nowadays, although the position of book stores as the main channel for book distribution networks is first only 250 years old in Finland and secondly has recently been heavily contested. As a result the study reveals the ways selling and distributing books have influenced the printed works and the literary and print culture.

Instead of literary studies' focus on texts and writers, book history seeks to describe the print culture of a society and how the literary activities and societies interconnect. For book historians, printed works are creations of various individuals and groups: writers, printers, editors, book sellers, censors, critics and finally, readers. They all take part in the creation, delivery and interpretation of printed works. Robert Darnton has famously described such literary activities' connections, togetherness and nature in his model *communication circuit of the book* (kirjan kiertokulku). However, I prefer to see the literary activities and actors as a *community of the book* (bokens samhälle – kirjan yhteisö), to use a term from a Swedish book historian, Johan Svedjedal. When replacing the circuit with a community, Svedjedal first emphasises the literary activities' random order and actors' mul-

tiple tasks. Secondly, he emphasises that European societies have in large measure been communities of books. Printed works have significantly shaped them and the societies have created printed works according to their own opportunities and limitations. Printed works are not an external high-cultural factor, but an integral part of the European societies.

The research period covers the so-called *second revolution of the book* (see Frédéric Barbier's studies), or the *modernisation of the print culture* (see Reinhard Wittmann's studies). Although the notion of a revolution emphasises a sudden and overall change of the print culture, in this case the change happened slowly, during 100 years or even more. Nevertheless, the modernised print culture created and carried phenomena and effects unheard before the 2nd half of the 18th century. This study seeks to describe the slow, complex but still revolutionising period of the print culture.

In the Finnish case, literary researchers have emphasised the establishment of modern publishing houses and the rise of literacy during the last decades of the 19th century as the most significant signs of the literary life's modernisation. However, they have neglected many of the print culture's development on the economic, cultural and business levels, especially what comes to the history of the printed works' distribution networks. The modernised community of book's nature and methods were created during the latter part of the 18th century and adopted during the first part of the 19th century. Therefore, the modernisation of book trade – as well as publishing, reading, paper making etc. – took place and had become a regular part of the local community of the book before today's most visible results of the modernisation of print culture – Finland's largest publishing houses such as WSOY and Weilin & Göös and widespread literacy – became the norm at the end of the 19th century.

The thesis concentrates on three themes: first, how the particular book trade network became a central institution for printed works' distribution, secondly what the relations were between cosmopolitan European book distribution and the national cultural sphere, and thirdly how book stores functioned as cultural institutions and busi-

ness enterprises. The thesis describes the history of 60 book stores and their 96 owners that were active in Finland during 1740–1860.

Because of the national culture's aim and tradition to view the written and printed products in Finnish as the key arena for creating and preserving national Finnish culture, literary and print culture studies have concentrated on 19th century national culture's literary life. These studies have mainly focused on writers and their texts. Other spheres of the community of the book have been largely overlooked. Nevertheless, the research questions and methods that have been offered by modern book history research approaches have been noticed also in Finland since the 1990s. Recently the history of reading has earned a place in Finnish cultural and literary histories.

However, there are only a few books and articles that concentrate on the publishing and the distribution of printed works. Even the available ones usually concentrate on describing the published works' values. Most of the available studies on the book trade history have been written by book trade and publishing professionals as a pastime or retirement activity. The most notable exception is culture historian Yrjö Hirn's title on the history of the *Akateeminen kirjakauppa* (Academic bookstore in Helsinki), which has been the centre of the Finnish book trade since the early 20th century. Internationally book historians have covered book trade activities as a part of print cultures' transnational activities, which is an important element in this study too. Although the most well-known recent international book history concentrates on the French and Anglophone world, it is the German and Swedish research tradition, for example the results of Johan Svedjedal and Reinhard Wittmann, that have provided interesting points of view to this study.

The thesis uses available book store and publisher's archives from Finland, Sweden and Germany (most notably from Wasenius bookstore's archives, which hold over 10 000 letters and receipts from 1823–1860), newspapers (articles and advertisements), private persons' archives (for example J. V. Snellman's numerous and lengthy private and public commentaries on local print culture) and the printed works themselves.

Book stores that have a varied assortment and are targeted to all readers became the main institution for the book trade in Finland during 1740–1860. They became the norm of the trade because of three features: first, the book binders' monopoly on selling bound copies in Sweden was abolished in the 1740s. For the first time in Sweden – Finland was part of the Swedish realm up to 1809 –, this decision permitted commissioners to collect printed works from various printers and publishers and offer them to local literary markets. This did not mean an automatic beginning of book store activities in the Finnish territory. Up to the early 19th century Stockholm based publishers used private commissioners, who delivered and sold books as part-time employees. Only after 1809 did book stores begin to develop as the norm of the book business in Finland.

Secondly, the common business model of bartering was replaced by selling copies for cash, first in the German book trade centre Leipzig in the 1770s. In the Finnish case, this method was rapidly adopted, as most of the book business was done with foreign colleagues and Finnish book sellers, printers and publishers rarely had anything that would have been accepted in large quantities in French, German or even Swedish book markets.

Thirdly, after Finland was annexed to the Russian empire in 1809, the Grand Duchy administration steered and supported the economic life and activities. Throughout the period the Senate granted privileges for opening and operating book stores. The censorship administration gave its opinions on the privilege applications since 1829, but the Senate followed rarely censors' denials. However, because of censorship demands, administration centralised foreign book trade to book stores. Only from 1858 onwards did booksellers and publishers themselves have a chance to give their opinion on new entrepreneurs' applications.

Lastly, it is quite difficult to say what the role of the reading audience was in the development of the book stores. The reading audience was not the same as the book stores' clientele: not everyone who could

read would also buy printed works. Furthermore, the clientele was not one unified group, but consisted of several distinct groups. Lastly, each book store had its own local clientele. Although there were certain common traits, essentially all book sellers had to adjust to local circumstances. For example, the first book stores of the late 18th century were created for academic purposes and served the learned clientele of the Academy of Turku. From the late 18th century onwards the Swedish-speaking gentry was growing used to reading both for education and leisure. During the next century it proved to be the main clientele of the book stores. However, still in 1850s this group consisted of only 30 000 readers. In smaller towns it did not have a presence large enough to comprise a sufficient clientele. The Finnish-speaking peasantry had elementary reading skills, as by 1855 at least 90 % of the population could read at least basic religious texts. But this did not create a meaningful literate clientele, because only almanacs and the most popular religious sermon and hymn books could be sold each year in thousands to the populace.

BOOK STORES AND BOOK SELLERS

During the second half of the 17th century the academy of Turku, church and local printing house had created and supported permanent book trade in the urban centre of Finland, Turku. However, at the time of the abolition of the book binders' monopoly, this tradition had become marginalised. The first efforts to open a modern and open book store at Turku occurred after the mid-18th century. However, these stores were not successful and the first open book store to run consistently and continuously (printer Johan Christopher Frenckell II's book store) opened only in the early 1780s. By the time Finland became a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, there was only one book store in Turku. Up to the 1830s book stores were still available only in Turku and Helsinki, the new capital since 1812. In Finnish settings, both were exceptional urban centres; they had fairly large population numbers of about 12 000 inhabitants by the early 1830s and Swedish was the main language of all inhabitants from gentry to servants. The

two towns were also the administrative, religious, educational and merchant centres of Finland, and they received a large number of visitors from all over the Grand Duchy. They were natural centres for a book seller looking for a large local readership and best available connections to other towns in Finland and the countryside.

The earliest entrepreneurs had various backgrounds. The Frenckell family had owned the Grand Duchy's main printing house since mid-18th century. Aside from the printing activities they also started publishing and selling books as well as ran paper-mills. By the mid-19th century they had moved onto the paper industry. Nevertheless, Fredrik Wilhelm Frenckell, representing the five generations of the Frenckell family's print culture tradition, became the first chairman of the *The Finnish Book Publishers' Association* in 1858. The most important book seller of the 1820s and 1830s, Gustaf Otto Wasenius, had a merchant background and used his entrepreneur skills in other cultural activities, such as printing and publishing, and promoting theatre groups' and singers' performances in Helsinki. The successful early book stores were all vertical business enterprises which included various tasks related to making and distributing printed works. The versatility diminished expenses and gave control over the book markets. The book store's task was to ease the delivery of printed works and to help create an open centre for all books and people to meet.

During the late 1830s and early 1840s, the regional centres of Viipuri, Porvoo, Vaasa, Hämeenlinna and Kuopio all got their own permanent book stores. By mid-1840s there were 10 book stores in 8 towns. The one common reason for establishing book stores in these towns was their educational institutions: all of them had an upper-secondary school or at least otherwise active schools. Some other towns, namely Pori, were also important merchant towns and had similarly fairly large populations of 2000–4000 inhabitants each. However, they lacked education institutions or these institutions were used to order books from Helsinki or Turku. Therefore, book stores were established there slightly later and these book business activities did not reach a higher level. In most of the cases the new entrepreneurs had a background as book store or printing house assistants. Following

their predecessors' lead, their business activities were versatile: they too opened printing houses and published newspapers and printed works.

In between the year of madness of 1848 and the beginning of the Crimean War (1853–1856), book stores were opened in almost all Finnish towns. At the beginning of the war 36 book stores operated in 21 towns. During the late 1840s various opinion leaders had called for the development of a national Finnish print culture, and also book stores. A large number of young teachers and civil servants, fresh out of university, heard this call. They not only keenly supported the national culture but they also sought extra revenues to their meagre incomes. At this point book sellers were divided in two categories: older stores continued their multitasking tradition and became the main clusters of the local print culture, while newcomers settled for the distribution of printed works and became commissioners.

However, the majority of the newcomers were not educated for the book trade. Furthermore, they settled their businesses in small towns without a sufficient clientele or faced an insuperable competition in larger towns. The lack of entrepreneurship, experience and customers meant that half of the book stores that opened between 1845–1860 were closed or changed owners in less than five years. By the end 1850s many small towns were again without a book store.

GATHERING, DELIVERING AND OFFERING BOOK STORES' SELECTIONS

To collect a respectful assortment of titles available at the book stores, book sellers had to make large investments (costs of premises, hiring an assistant, transport costs of book consignments, in many cases purchase of copies, advertising etc.) before any copy was sold. Contemporaries estimated in late 1840s, that a new book seller in Helsinki should invest 25 000 silver roubles in his enterprise, but could only get a few hundred roubles profits annually. The needed investments were huge, as a young teacher's or priest's annual salary would not rise much over 500 roubles. In smaller towns and book stores costs naturally diminished, but so did the revenues, too.

In addition to the financial costs, a beginner book seller had to win publishers', book sellers' and customers' trust. Without personal connections to colleagues, copies were not sent to a new entrepreneur. The clientele demanded an educated storekeeper as well as a wide selection of books. If books were not available at the moment when a passing customer asked for them, the reputation of the book store declined. However, the book stores' selection consisted not only of the copies present at the store, but also on the book sellers' abilities to order titles from their publishers. Therefore the book stores also offered a wide variety of publishers' catalogues and subscription lists.

The book stores' financial potential was tight. Their selling commission was rarely more than 10–20 % of the copy's selling price. The commissions became even smaller because of various but usual misunderstandings in consignments and accounts or plain accidents that destroyed shipments and warehouses. According to some contemporary estimates and a few available statistics as many as one third of copies could be damaged or destroyed. Furthermore, even one quarter of the copies that came to book stores could be left unsold. In addition to losing the potential profits, the real financial losses were also immense.

On the other side, book stores had some advantages: they quickly became natural centres for the urban population, where aside the book purchases, they could pick up their newspapers (they were not yet delivered to home during this period) and lost and found articles were left there. In contrast to other businessmen of the time, book sellers also advertised their assortments in large amounts. The book stores' spaces were dedicated to the business activity. They did not become meeting places for cultural or political discussions.

Most of the sales were made immediately after the copies had arrived to the book stores. Especially fiction became old already in a few months. Only religious titles and school books were produced and offered in quantities that protected their availability for longer periods. Already during the early 19th century most of the book sales concentrated on Christmas markets as well as the annual markets, when the rural population flooded to towns.

Despite the publishers' and book sellers' efforts to sell all copies, both began to gather large quantities of unsold copies. These stocks became a burden. Book sellers could have the right to return unsold copies to their publisher, but long distances and transportation costs reduced such activity. The Finnish publishers preferred to keep the price level high, which meant that book sellers rarely could offer the copies at the discount. On the other hand, Swedish publishers tended to support quite large reductions. Usually book sellers opened libraries besides their book stores. Unsold copies played a heavy role in these libraries, but they rarely offered any further profits.

INTERNATIONAL BOOK TRADE

The early book stores received most if not all of their revenues from selling foreign titles. Swedish, German, French and Belgian (pirated editions of popular French novels) books were widely available for the multilingual gentry. Finland and Sweden formed a mutual marketing area. From the early 19th century, Finnish book stores declared that they brought all new Swedish books to their book shelves. Although the clientele in Finland was quite small, Swedish publishers had to take it in account. In 1845 the Russian administration declared a customs tariff of 20 % on all Swedish printed works' imported to Finland. The book sellers in Finland could not pay these sums. Furthermore, forcing customers to pay this extra sum was generally not accepted, as principally books were supposed to be offered at the price the publisher had given to them. In many cases Swedish publishers were forced to pay the extra bill. They conceded, as they were afraid of losing altogether the needed extra market in Finland. However, book sellers that had only recently started their business in the regional centres were unable to receive the advantage. Because of this, the community of the book that had just tended to become multipolar began to concentrate in the hands of the Helsinki's and Turku's entrepreneurs.

Finnish booksellers were present at the Leipzig book fairs from 1813 onwards. Leading book sellers visited the fairs and had lively connections to the German book trade throughout the period. Book sell-

ers imported especially school books, atlases and academic literature from the German book markets. In the 1840s and 1850s, book sellers from Vaasa, Viipuri and Hämeenlinna made efforts to increase their selection and sales by importing books from Leipzig. They managed to open business contacts to Leipzig, but practical trading remained minor. The French trade networks were available since 1820s to the main book sellers in Helsinki and Turku, but because of the distance to Paris and the difficulty of making business contacts, the French trade was problematic. Once the Finnish book sellers made contact with the Parisian publishers and book sellers who had German background, the import of French titles tended to become easier. The French imports were usually scientific luxury products. Literature in French was imported mainly from Brussels. Brussels was well-known as a centre of French pirate publishing up to early 1850s: the Brussels editions would appear rapidly and they were cheaper than the original editions.

Although St. Petersburg was the closest metropolis to Finland, it did not become an important book trade centre for the Grand Duchy. Very few people read Russian in Finland, and those who did could easily order books from St. Petersburg themselves. Russian titles tended also to be expensive. Although St. Petersburg had international book store connections, they did not offer their European selections to Finland: book stores in Turku and Helsinki were able to offer similar and acceptable connections and selections and did not want to pay any middleman's fees. Also English was not a well-known language in 19th century Finland, and therefore books from the British Isles were rare. Furthermore, German publishers published cheap editions of the most famous English novels and fulfilled the European book markets' needs.

Censorship offices examined all foreign titles. Up to the early 1820s the inspections were almost nonexistent, but especially after the new censorship decree was proclaimed in 1829, the inspections became regular. Local censorship in Finland relied on the Russian censors' decisions, which prohibited almost 50 000 titles' entrance to the Empire during the first half of the 19th century. In addition, local

Finnish civil servants prohibited few thousands of Swedish, German and French titles themselves. All censored books were nevertheless principally available, as book store keepers in Helsinki and Turku were capable of smuggling copies into Finland. However, the censorship did diminish book sellers' chances to advertise forbidden titles, and the clientele would sometimes share censors' opinions on certain titles. Nevertheless, if a forbidden title was particularly interesting, it could find a large clientele in Finland. For example Friedrich Rüh's title *Finland och dess invånare* (Finland and its inhabitants, forbidden 2nd edition in 1827 printed by Z. Haeggström in Stockholm) found over 500 subscribers in Finland before it was censored. The Wasenius book store in Helsinki alone smuggled more than 100 Rüh's copies for its customers.

LOCAL BOOK PRODUCTION'S DISTRIBUTION

Even if the local Finnish print production steadily rose (annually 100 new titles for the first time at the end of 1830s, and 200 titles at the end of 1840s), many of those copies, even titles, were never delivered via book stores. Up to the 1840s professional printer-publishers settled on well-known titles – mostly religious and educational – which would result in certain revenues. These titles were in large quantities targeted to the common people and sold on markets and villages by book binders and other petty commissioners. Almost all innovative publications – i.e. not official religious prints or published for administrative or academic needs – were published by writers themselves or cultural societies. They sold most of their copies via friends, colleagues, and society members. Only a limited amount was left available via book stores.

As printer-publishers began to diversify their publishing programme, they first clashed with Swedish publishers. Book markets' main clientele both in Finland and Sweden was rather similar culturally and linguistically. Therefore, it was quite difficult to find successful titles which had not already been printed in Sweden. The common opinion and financial conditions did not support printing pirate editions of literature, which meant that Finnish printing houses did

not became a Nordic equivalent to Brussels. However, school books were regarded as essential to Finnish society. As book sellers had problems to import enough large quantities of these titles from Sweden, the Finnish cultural elite and community of the book allowed local reprints of foreign school books. They became the first type of printed works which would diversify the professional printer-publishers' inventories in Finland during the 1830s and 1840s.

From the 1840s onwards publishers, printers, book sellers and writers began to experiment with literature and show some trust to the book store network. Alexander Constantin Öhman (publisher and book seller in Porvoo 1839–1848) and Johan Wilhelm Lillja (publisher and book seller in Turku 1844–1860) were the main innovators, the Grand Duchy's first professional publishers, as they began to create diversified literature publishing programmes both in Swedish and Finnish. They also managed to remove the part-time commissioners from the core of the book trade. Book stores could offer more reliable business networks, which could reach a wider audience than private, sporadic and ever-changing commissioner networks.

However, large portions of common people's literary markets were still out of the book stores' reach. Popular broadsheets and simple prayer books were sold on markets by book binders and street singers. Educated book sellers had no part in these literary markets. Furthermore, still at the end of the 1850s, the Finnish production numbers were too small to support the book trade network financially.

THE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF BOOK STORES

Although the book store institution was stable in Turku and Helsinki since 1820s and in all regional centres from 1840s onwards, very few book stores survived a long time. Financial troubles were usual, stores changed owners constantly and even in Helsinki and Turku it was possible to fall into bankruptcy. Nevertheless, some book stores managed to maintain their status as excellent firms through decades. The Frenckell family's book stores in Helsinki and Turku remained in the family's possession up to the 1850s, and even after that they were seen

as the centre of local literary life. Wasenius' book store in Helsinki and Öhman's book store first in Porvoo and from the late 1840s in Helsinki were the best known enterprises up to the beginning of the Crimean War. After that, their fame and economic profit ability degenerated. As pointed out earlier, in smaller towns the change of owners and financial troubles were more frequent. Especially in late 1850s it was noticed that many small town entrepreneurs had been forced to shut their doors during or right after the Crimean War. Usually this was unannounced, which left publishers and other book sellers demanding their payments and copies without any response. Unprofitable local conditions or young book sellers' scanty work experiences were not the only reasons for the decline. The book stores' warehouses that burned in the fires of Vaasa and Pori in 1852 and the breakdown of the international book market connections during the Crimean War diminished all book sellers' chances to succeed.

As more book stores were founded in Finland, competition between entrepreneurs tightened. This was the case already in the 1820s as Friedrich Anton Meyer's academic book store in Turku could not compete with Frenckell's and Wasenius' more entrepreneurial businesses. During the next decade the new book sellers in more remote towns estimated that the leading colleagues in Turku and Helsinki would not cause trouble in the hinterland book markets. However, the potential book markets were small and the established book sellers saw that new book sellers' example could inspire further competitors. The book sellers of Turku and Helsinki were victorious, as they had more means and capacity to compete: they cut prices strategically and advertised their assortments heavily.

As the poor condition of small town markets and the book trade network overall was revealed right after the Crimean War, the few leading publishers began to discuss the need to develop business rules and manners. *The Finnish Book Publishers' Association* was established in 1858. During the early years of activity, its main task was to create new rules and methods for the book trade. The association's commissioners were forced to pay guarantees and tender yearly accounts. The association could offer wide selection to its commissioners, but at the

same time the earlier independence of publishing and book selling enterprises in Finnish regional centres diminished greatly.

SUMMARY

The consolidation of modern and open book store network in Finland is a history of a slow and complex development without clear signs of a beginning or an end. The ideal book store model was rarely accomplished in its all features. Nevertheless, book stores became the norm of the book trade. They managed to offer larger selections, reached larger clienteles and maintained constant activity better than any other book distribution model. In essential, the book stores' methods have not changed up to present times.

Before 1860s, book stores could function only if they offered a large international selection to their main clientele, the gentry. Domestic production played a minor role, although its importance – first as cultural events and only secondly as a meaningful business – was rising. No book seller could function without keeping a keen eye on his enterprise's business side. Although book stores carried and created important cultural values, the institution was dependent on book sellers' ability to make business.

Although book sellers' competition could sometimes be fierce, in essence the whole community of the book sought to work in unison. Book sellers' mistakes and bad luck would cause losses to publishers and mistrust towards the whole trade network, which meant that colleagues had an interest to support each other. Furthermore, it wasn't wise to exaggerate your fee demands. They diminished colleagues' chances to keep their businesses profitable or the clientele became resentful about the rising book prices. Both endangered the future of the book trade activities. As a result, book trade maintained their position as essentially a cultural institution.