

# Forms and Methods of the Book Trade in Finland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

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Traces the history of the first printing presses in Finland, and describes the method of publishing printed works through the subscription system. Examines the emergence of the publication of printed dissertations, as well as of convenient compendia and formats.

## Printing presses in Finland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

The role of publishing was very small in Finland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first Finnish printing press was only founded in 1642, in Turku, and before that all Finnish books had had to be printed either in Sweden or Germany. In the seventeenth century there were three printing presses in Finland. The main task of the first printing press was to print and publish all the academic literature, dissertations, orations, and lists of lecturers for the first university in the eastern part of the Swedish realm, the Academy of Turku, which had been founded two years earlier, in 1640.<sup>1</sup>

In 1666 the bishop of Turku, Johannes Gezelius the Elder, founded his own printing press in Turku (Figure 1). As a bishop he was involved in schooling, teaching of the catechism and raising the new generation of priests. Books had a remarkable role in all this work. According to Gezelius, the printing press of the Academy was not able to publish school books and devotional literature, catechisms, preliminary books, psalters, and sermons cheaply enough or in great enough quantities so that everyone could buy them. The great idea of Johannes Gezelius the Elder was that every Christian in his diocese should be able to buy inexpensive religious books and through them learn more about the Christian doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

The third printing press was founded in Viipuri, in the eastern diocese in 1690, but after only twenty years it was destroyed by the Russians in the Great Northern war. In the last decades of the eighteenth century the city of Vaasa in Ostrobothnia also acquired its own printing press. It was established for the regional needs of the area, for printing administrative publications, but it produced some devotional books as



FIGURE 1 The bishop of Turku, Johannes Gezelius the Elder (1615–1690).

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well. In any case, even after the first printing shops were founded, a large part of Finnish literature was still produced outside of Finland.<sup>3</sup>

### **The system of subscription**

Because printing was expensive and the demand for books was minimal, printers and publishers tried to publish books as cheaply as possible, producing books that could be used in many situations and by a large audience, and using many different

methods to market them. The most common method used everywhere in Europe was a traditional subscription for books.

In Finland the subscription of books in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was mostly used by authorities. The Crown and the Church gave orders for the parishes to buy useful books, even if they did not want them or could not afford them. These orders were enforced with penalties. The eastern diocese was especially very poor because it had been destroyed by the enemy many times. This affected the willingness to buy books in the area; it was often financially impossible.

The first person who used the subscription system for more personal or individual purposes was bishop of Turku, Johannes Gezelius the Elder. He and his son, Johannes Gezelius the Younger, the bishop of Turku after his father, wrote and published a large commentary on the Bible in the early 1710s. This was a very expensive work, and Gezelius received permission from His Majesty to collect money from the parishes for the publication of the commentary. The parishes were ordered to buy the work when it had been published.<sup>4</sup>

Quite soon the system of subscription became a common way to publish large and expensive works even more privately. The first known case in the Swedish realm is from the year 1708. The method was adopted from England, and it was used in the Netherlands even in the seventeenth century as well. In France it was used a little later than in Sweden, but in Germany the method of subscription was adopted only in 1773.<sup>5</sup>

Information about subscribed books was published in the newspapers. In particular, all kinds of theological and philosophical literature as well as textbooks were published and sold by Chapters, which were very active in this area. They sent lists of publications and information about subscribed books to other Chapters and parishes, even to some private persons. The notary of the Chapter usually took care of the practical things: letters between the Chapter and the subscribers, money and payments. The salaries of the notaries were very low, and this gave them the possibility to earn a little more because they took a small commission for this work.<sup>6</sup>

The system was very simple. People who wanted to subscribe to a book informed the notary, paying a small sum of money and receiving from him a receipt with the name of the book and the sum that they paid (Figure 2). These costs made it possible to publish a book, which was usually expensive. When the book was published, the Chapter informed the subscribers through a newspaper or through letters, and the subscribers came with their subscription notes, paid the rest of the sum and received the book. It was usually cheaper to buy a book by subscription before publication than afterwards. If someone bought many copies of the book, she/he received a discount: for example, every eleventh book might be offered free. Sometimes the subscribers had to wait for a long time for the book, and sometimes the book did not appear at all. Once in the eighteenth century all the subscription notes for a Bible were lost in a fire, and nobody knew who had subscribed to the Bible and given the advance payment. So, the method was not without risk.<sup>7</sup>

By the 1740s the subscription system worked freely without being overseen by the Crown, and, for example, the Chapters could use it freely. Especially after 1747, when the laws regarding the production of textbooks were changed, the subscription of

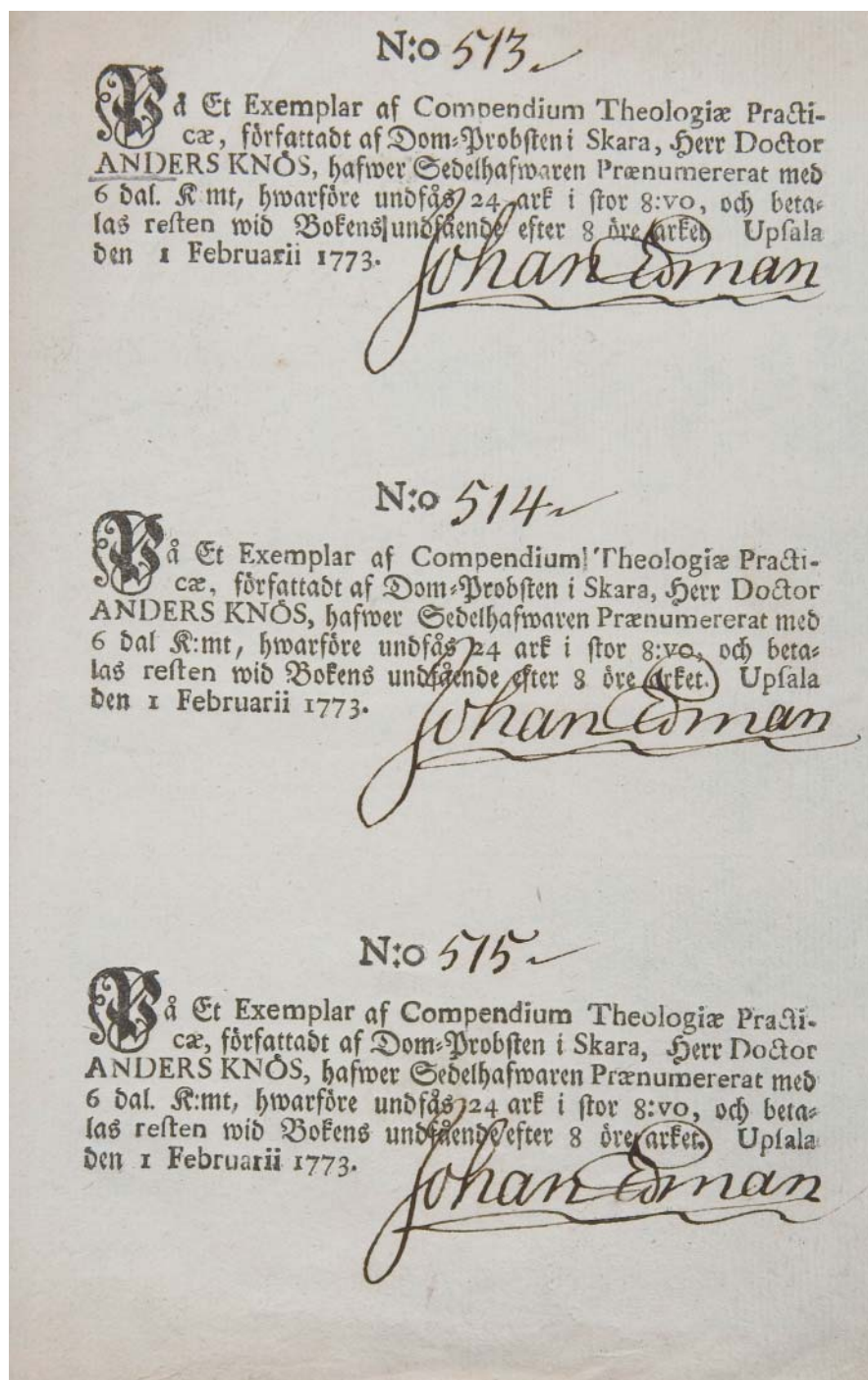


FIGURE 2 The Subscription notes from the year 1773. The subscribed book is Anders Knös' *Compendium theologiae practicae*

textbooks through the Chapters increased. All textbooks had to be produced and published in the country, and they were not allowed to be brought from outside the Swedish realm. The Chapters, especially in Sweden, started a large production of the textbooks used in schools and sold them to other Chapters through subscriptions. All educational work still belonged in the eighteenth century to the church, which made the role of the Chapters very extensive in this area.<sup>8</sup>

## The publication of dissertations

Before the printing press of the Academy (later University) of Turku was founded, all dissertations had to be copied as manuscripts by the students who had produced them. The possibility of printing made the publication and distribution of dissertations much easier. Despite this, publishing was still quite expensive, most students were poor, and there were not yet very many proper scientific books on the Finnish book market. Books were still needed in teaching and in exams. At the same time very many dissertations were published every year because students needed practice in the art of disputation, and professors wanted to publish books in their own special scientific areas cheaply. So the publishing of dissertations constituted a remarkable advance in widening the Finnish book market and the publication of scientific books for students.<sup>9</sup>

Dissertations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were very short, probably consisting of only a few pages. What was most important was not the text of the dissertation itself, but the theses, which were the aims of disputation. Usually students paid all the costs of the publication of their own dissertations. This was financially possible because in their dissertations they published dedications for their supporters: for example, local priests, bishops, and professors who paid a part of the costs.<sup>10</sup>

Professors wrote large scientific works on different themes and gave small parts of them to each student to dispute. When the disputations were over, the same works, without the dedications written by the students, were collected, and the large compendia were published as complete volumes. These could be used in lecturing as well as in studying and the costs of their publications stayed low because they were paid for by the students themselves or by their supporters. So publication cost almost nothing for the professors.<sup>11</sup> A large part of the major scientific works in Finland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were published with this system, including such natural sciences as theology and philosophy.

## Religious tracts and psalms as useful compendiums

As early as the Middle Ages priests had compendiums of the most important liturgical books with them when visiting parishioners. In the seventeenth century these compendiums developed into what were called *Manuale* books, which contained psalms, a handbook, the catechism, and a prayer book. When the people learned to read, the priests' book became a book for the common people.<sup>12</sup>

But books were still quite expensive, and not everybody could afford to buy them. It was not useful to buy books which one did not need. Therefore, the printers printed all the tracts and other religious books as little booklets. In addition, they

also printed common title pages for the compendiums of religious tracts and booklets. So everyone had the chance to buy the booklets they needed and have them bound himself/herself. If someone already had the catechism, but not the psalms and prayer book, he/she bought the latter books and common title page, went to the bookbinder and asked him to bind a compendium of psalms, the catechism, and the prayer book. In complete *Manuale* books (Figure 3) there were usually also a handbook and other liturgical books, but for the common people these were not needed; they were mostly useful for priests. So the peasants and bourgeois did not have to buy handbooks for their *Manuale* books, but priests and teachers could. This also made the planning of the publication process easier for the printers and publishers, and guaranteed that the publications would be bought.<sup>13</sup>

*Manuale* books were also commonly used for devotional purpose in Finland. People took the books with them to church, but they were used in private devotions and in family worship as well. For these purposes they were very useful, because they also contained also psalms and prayer books. In the eighteenth century the *Manuale* book developed into an 'old psalms book', which also contained the catechism, a prayer book, and a handbook besides the psalms. The catechism was still an important part of the psalm book because it contained the most crucial tenets of the Christian religion and was used in developing reading skills. During the eighteenth century most Finnish people, especially in the western part of Finland, could read, and not only by heart. Reading and knowing the Christian doctrines were made a condition of taking a part in the Eucharist and of marriage.<sup>14</sup>

## Format and its influence on publishing and selling books

Not only the extent, but also the format, of the book influenced the marketing and selling of books. In the Middle Ages, at the time of manuscripts and incunabula, Bibles and liturgical books were produced as folios. They were kept in the choir in the church, and the text had to be seen clearly because there was very little light in the churches. Even in the convents the books were secured to the tables; nobody carried them anywhere.

As the production of books expanded, the use of the book also changed. Bibles were still big and heavy with wooden and metal covers, and they were kept at the altar. But step by step the format of the book became smaller. In 1685 Bishop Johannes Gezelius the Elder published a Bible in quarto — it was the second Finnish Bible; the first had been printed in 1642. The reason for the smaller Bible was to make the book easier to carry in the war. But a smaller Bible had even more advantages. It was also easier for priests to carry and handle in times of peace, and useful at home when the priest had to write his sermon.<sup>15</sup>

When the production of Finnish New Testaments began in the early eighteenth century, they were published in octavo. Not only did the format of the Bible and the Bible text change, but the authority of Bible was also different — the New Testament in octavo was seen more as a devotional book than a Bible, and so the Bible became more familiar to the common people because they could afford to buy smaller books but not the big and expensive ones. Large folio Bibles from 1642 (the first Finnish Bible) were only owned by peasants in the eighteenth century when priests and other scholars sold their old Bibles and bought new ones.<sup>16</sup>

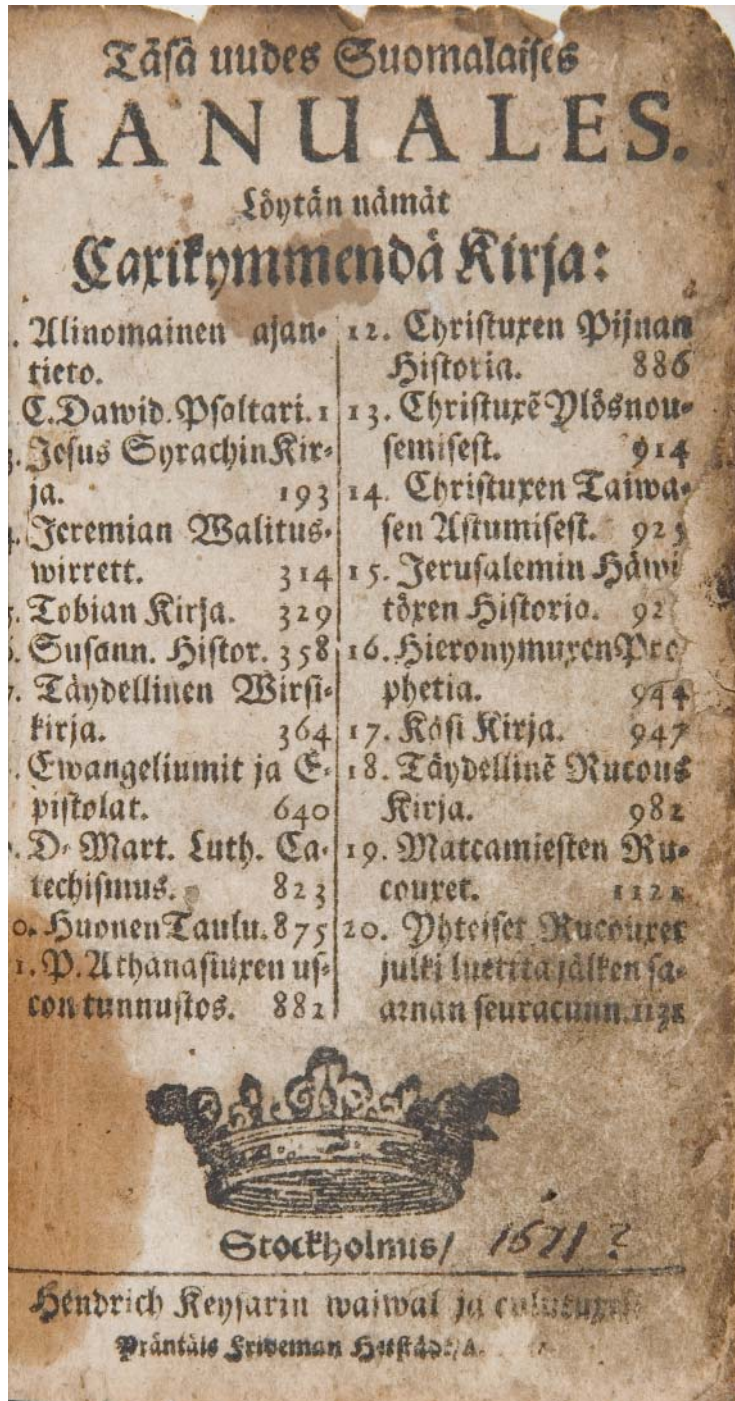


FIGURE 3 The *Manuale* book (1671) containing 20 other books, for example the psalmes, the catechism and a prayer book. This whole *Manuale* has been printed at the same time and not bound together from different parts

ABC books and catechisms could be printed in octavo or even in quarto in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century when they were used more by the priests who instructed the people than the people themselves. But when people learnt to read, they bought more and more books for themselves. Consequently, the printers started to produce catechisms in smaller formats, mostly in duodecimo, but also in octavo. In the seventeenth century duodecimo was the most used format in religious tracts; later on, in the eighteenth century it was octavo. One explanation for this is the fact that the peasants took catechisms and psalm books with them to church. Men's coat pockets increased in size during the eighteenth century. So, the larger format, the octavo, could also be carried in the pocket, in contrast to the seventeenth century when only the duodecimo could fit into a pocket. The smaller formats were usually in use because the production of smaller formats was cheaper than larger ones, quarto or folio. It was not rare to make the first edition in a bigger format from the standpoint of marketing, and the following editions smaller, when the book was already known and accepted by the audience.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Carl-Rudolf Gardberg, *Kirjapainotaito Suomessa Uudenkaupungin rauhaan asti* (Helsinki: Helsingin graafillinen klubi, 1949).
- <sup>2</sup> Gardberg, *Kirjapainotaito Suomessa Uudenkaupungin rauhaan asti*; Pentti Laasonen, *Johannes Gezelius vanhempi ja suomalainen täysortodoksia* (Helsinki: Suomen kirkkohistoriallinen seura, 1977).
- <sup>3</sup> Gardberg, *Kirjapainotaito Suomessa Uudenkaupungin rauhaan asti*.
- <sup>4</sup> Holger Nohrström, *Suomen kustannustoiminta I. Aika ennen Suomen kustannusyhdistyksen perustamista 1858* (Helsinki: Suomen kustannusyhdistys, 1933); Tuija Laine, *Kolportöörejä ja kirjakauppiaita. Kirjojen hankinta ja levitys Suomessa vuoteen 1800* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006).
- <sup>5</sup> Henrik Schück, *Den svenska förlagsbokhandels historia I-II* (Stockholm, 1923); Peter Burke, *A social history of knowledge. From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- <sup>6</sup> Laine, *Kolportöörejä ja kirjakauppiaita*.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Jorma Vallinkoski, *Turun akatemian väitöskirjat 1642–1828* (Helsinki: University Library at Helsinki, 1962); Tuija Laine, *Väittelykäytäntö ja väitöskirjojen julkaiseminen Turun akatemiassa 1600- ja 1700-luvuilla*, in Tuija Laine (ed), *Vanhimman suomalaisen kirjallisuuden käsikirja* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997).
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Nat. Fransen (ed), *Koralbok till then svenska Ubsala psalmboken 1645. Sveriges äldsta bevarade koralbok. Enligt Mönsteråhandskriften 1646 med understöd av allmänna medel Första delen* (Stockholm, 1940).
- <sup>13</sup> Tuija Laine, *Manuale Finnonicum -julkaisun synty ja kehitys, Opusculum 11* (1991) 177–206.
- <sup>14</sup> Laine, *Manuale Finnonicum -julkaisun synty ja kehitys*; Esko M. Laine, *Pelottava ja kauhistava lukeminen*, in *ABC — lukeminen esivallan palveluksessa* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, 2002).
- <sup>15</sup> Gardberg, *Kirjapainotaito Suomessa Uudenkaupungin rauhaan asti*.
- <sup>16</sup> Tuija Laine, *Kenen Raamattu? Raamatun levinneisyydestä Suomessa 1600- ja 1700-luvuilla*, in Lassi Larjo (ed), *Raamattu ja länsimainen kulttuuri* (Helsinki: Suomen teologinen kirjallisuusseura, 2003) 26–33; Tuija Laine, *Papiston kirjasta kansankirjaksi — suomalaisen uskonnollisen peruskirjallisuuden muoto ja merkitys*, in *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 6 (2007).
- <sup>17</sup> Laine, *Papiston kirjasta kansankirjaksi*.

## Notes on Contributor

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