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Bookbinding and reading practises : technical and material changes in Swedish bookbinding culture around 1800

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2007

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Strömquist, H. (2007). *Bookbinding and reading practises : technical and material changes in Swedish bookbinding culture around 1800*. 1. Abstract from Possession and Distribution of Books : Doctoral workshop, The Nordic-Baltic-Russian Network on the History of Books, Libraries and Reading, Helsinki, Finland.

Total number of authors:

1

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Possession and Distribution of Books

Doctoral workshop and conference in Book History arranged by HIBOLIRE, Helsinki, October 31st 2007.

Abstract

Bookbinding and reading practises – technical and material changes in Swedish bookbinding culture around 1800
by Helena Strömquist Dal

How were books bound in Swedish private libraries at the turn of the 18th century? In this paper¹ I would like to discuss in what material form books were consumed during the second half of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century and how a study of bindings reveal changing attitudes towards the form of the book, patterns of consumption and reading practises. From the middle of the 1800th century book production increased strikingly and books spread to larger parts of the population. More books were produced than anyone could read. We know that books took on a smaller format, and that typography and layout of the printed page was adjusted to the text and to the consumers in mind.² But in what way did the binding of the book change? It is very likely that bookbinders and booksellers adjusted the demands for quality through technical rationalisation and use of less expensive materials. Books were sold as half leather trade bindings, and edition paper bindings became more common. At the same time consumers changed their attitudes towards the form of the book, its binding and price.

To get a general idea of how books were bound during this period a statistic investigation of thirty book-auction catalogues from private libraries (in all 65 758 entries) printed 1792-1846 was undertaken which is presented here. The survey gives a general view and some knowledge about types of bindings and covering materials used. It shows how common paper bindings, half leather bindings and deluxe bindings were in Swedish private libraries around 1800 and thus how the material culture of the book shaped the printed word at that moment.

¹ The study presented here is part of a doctoral thesis: *Swedish paper bindings 1787-1846. A book history*. Department of Cultural Sciences, Institute for Book and Library History, Lund University, Sweden.

² See for example Roger Chartier's studies of the "Bibliothèques bleues" or *L'ordre des livres*, Aix en Provence, Alinéa 1992. D. F. McKenzie "Typography and the meaning: the case of William Congreve" in Giles Barber & Bernhard Fabian (ed.) *Buch und buchhandel in Europa im achtzehnten jahrhundert*. Hamburg 1982, pp. 81-126. D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of text*. London 1986. Swedish book production and the form of books is discussed by Rosvall 1975, pp. 131-133. Arne Jarrick, Stockholm 1992, pp. 87-95 and pp. 146-177. Per S. Ridderstad, *Textens ansikte i seklernas spegel*. Stockholm 1999.