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Articles

The Development of Peasants' Reading Habits in Courland and Livonia in the 18th Century*

Valstiečių skaitymo įpročių raida Kurše ir Livonijoje XVIII a.

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Beneficiario: Article The Development of Peasants' Reading Habits in Courland and Livonia in the 18th Century*

Abstract: The article explores the development of peasants' reading habits over the 18th century in the Latvian-inhabited Lutheran regions of Russia's Baltic provinces Courland/Kurzeme and Latvian Livonia/Vidzeme. By analysing the transition from intensive to extensive reading patterns, as well as from loud and ceremonial to silent and private reading, insight into the available statistical sources and information from subscription lists is provided and the observations of contemporaries are scrutinized. The views on Latvian peasants' reading habits expressed by Baltic-German Lutheran parsons Friedrich Bernhard Blaufuß, Joachim Baumann, Christian David Lenz, Johann Friedrich Casimir Rosenberger, Alexander Johann Stender, as well as those published by Johann Friedrich Steffenhagen, are discussed within the context of urban and middle-class reading patterns. While the number of literate peasants in the 18th century was high, reaching one third in Courland and two thirds in Livonia by the turn of the 19th century, the motivation for reading and everyday habits differed, and while extensive reading increased, before the 1840s, the Baltic rural society did not see a phenomenon similar to the European middle-class reading revolution. The article focuses on differentiating among various types of readers, divided according to their confessional lines (Herrnhutian Brethren or Lutheran Orthodox Church), social standing (reading patterns were different depending on rural professions) or generation (the older generation tended to prefer loud and ceremonial religious reading while the younger generation more often adopted silent, private and secular reading). The collective reading of books has been explored by demonstrating how it allowed combining the reading of books with other activities and also performed a socializing function. The available sources demonstrate that quiet reading did not replace reading aloud, in the same way that extensive reading did not replace intensive, but all reading practices continued to co-exist alongside each other, creating an increasingly diverse and saturated reading experience.

Keywords: history of reading, history of reading, enlightenment, reading revolution, Latvian literary culture, Baltic Germans.

Summary: Straipsnyje nagrinėjama valstiečių skaitymo įpročių raida XVIII a. latvių apgyvendintuose Rusijos Baltijos provincijų Kuršo / Kuržemės ir Latvijos Livonijos / Vidžemės liuteronų regionuose. Analizuojant perėjimą nuo intensyvaus prie ekstensyvaus skaitymo būdo, taip pat nuo garsinio ir apeiginio prie tylaus ir privataus skaitymo, pateikiama įžvalga apie turimus statistikos šaltinius ir informaciją prenumeratos gavėjų sąrašuose bei nagrinėjami amžininkų pastebėjimai. Miesto ir vidurinės klasės atstovų skaitymo būdų kontekste aptariamos Baltijos vokiečių liuteronų dvasininkų Friedricho Bernhardo Blaufußo, Joachimo Baumanno, Christiano Davido Lenzo, Johanno Friedricho Casimiro Rosenbergerio, Alexanderio Johanno Stenderio išreikštos, taip pat Johanno Friedricho Steffenhageno publikuotos nuomonės apie latvių valstiečių skaitymo įpročius. Nors XVIII a. raštingų valstiečių skaičius buvo didelis – iki XIX a. pradžios Kuržemėje jis siekė trečdalį, o Livonijoje – du trečdalius, skaitymo motyvacija ir kasdieniai įpročiai skyrėsi, ir, nors ekstensyvus skaitymas populiarėjo, Baltijos jūros regiono kaimo visuomenė iki XIX a. 5-ojo dešimtmečio

nebuvo patyrusi reiškinio, panašaus į Europos vidurinės klasės skaitymo revoliuciją. Straipsnyje pagrindinis dėmesys skiriamas įvairių tipų skaitytojams, suskirstytiems pagal jų religinę grupę (hernhutiečiai ar Liuteronų Ortodoksų Bažnyčia), socialinę padėtį (skaitymo būdai skyrėsi atsižvelgiant į užsiėmimus kaimo vietovėse) arba kartą (vyresnioji karta buvo linkusi teikti pirmenybę garsiniam ir apeiginiam religiniam skaitymui, o jaunoji dažniau rinkosi tylų, privatų ir pasaulietišką skaitymą). Kolektyvinis knygų skaitymas buvo ištirtas atskleidžiant, kaip jis leido derinti knygų skaitymą su kita veikla bei atliko socializacijos funkciją. Turimi šaltiniai rodo, kad tylus skaitymas nepakeitė garsinio skaitymo, kaip ir ekstensyvus skaitymas nepakeitė intensyvaus, tačiau visi skaitymo būdai ir toliau egzistavo drauge kurdami vis įvairesnę ir turtingesnę skaitymo patirtį.

Keywords: skaitymo istorija, Apšvieta, skaitymo revoliucija, latvių , literatūros kultūra, Baltijos vokiečiai.

Introduction

The article focuses on 18th century peasants' reading in the Latvian-inhabited Lutheran regions of duchy of Courland/Kurzeme (by the end of the 18th century governorate of Russian Empire) and Russian province Livonia/Vidzeme. By exploring the development of Latvian Lutheran peasants' reading habits [1] in the 18th century and the early 19th century, it is possible to contribute to the wider debates on peasant literacy in early modern Central and Eastern Europe, especially the German-speaking world. The transformations in reading habits that took place over the course of the 18th century in all social classes of the Russian Empire's Baltic provinces – faster in cities and slower in rural areas – can be described as the spreading of extensive reading habits.. They also mark a decline in the proportion of religious books in favour of periodicals and secular belletristic fiction. Although in the 18th century reading became common in all social classes, reading habits remained attached to a particular class: the aristocracy read differently from the middle class or peasants. In addition, social borders in the Baltic provinces often converged with ethnic ones, and relations between the social classes in the 18th century continued to develop as relations between "Germans" and "non-Germans" (i.e., ethnic Latvians and Estonians)[2] Therefore, it is both necessary and fruitful to identify diverse reading experiences – between those of the common people and the educated elite, Latvians and Germans, as well as readers among the Pietists, Herrnhutian Brethren and Rationalists. In this article, these issues will be approached by analyzing opinions and reflections upon attitudes towards reading in Latvian and Baltic German published and unpublished sources of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Context:

Upper and middle class reading patterns

Before turning our attention to peasants, it must be noted that urban and middle-class reading habits in the Baltic provinces were rapidly expanding and cosmopolitan; thanks to Johann Friedrich Hartknoch's (1740–1789) bookshop (founded in 1767) in Riga, books published elsewhere in Europe were more easily available in the Baltics. Among the Baltic aristocracy, reading in French was common. It was part of the attempts to copy court culture. It is even considered that French authors were more popular than German authors among the aristocracy.. Reading in foreign languages was common not only among landowners, the middle classes' personal book collections included travel descriptions, books on the natural sciences, geography, biographies of historical persons and descriptions of life in European courts, as well as (and mostly) fiction – especially novels and plays. Along with the trivial literature of the time and the books by the most popular writer of the mid-18th century, Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, the citizens of Riga and other towns also read, for instance, the works of La Fontaine, Corneille, Molière, Voltaire, Lessing, Goethe and Shakespeare [4] . In the second half of the 18th century, contemporaries claim that reading in the Baltics became the "most favoured" pastime of the middle class [5] . It was a trend and similarly to elsewhere in Europe, it spread extremely rapidly in the Baltics. There are even sources stating that, by reason of reading, one could meet people in rural areas who were as knowledgeable as Berliners [6] .. Books were still expensive in the 18th century, therefore reading communities were established in Baltic urban and rural areas following the model of German-speaking countries. Beginning with the simplest form – collective subscriptions to newspapers, which was considered almost self-explanatory at the time – to lending libraries, reading societies, cafes and clubs, where members of the aristocracy and the middle class mingled..

Nevertheless, reading in one's spare time, in the opinion of concerned 18th-century contemporaries, could also become destructive; the joy of reading could turn into a reading mania, referred to as the reading fever, epidemic or disease in German-speaking countries. In German-speaking countries, discussions emerged about readers led astray, who enjoyed easy and trivial reading material, but who felt bored reading more serious texts.. These concepts travelled quickly to the Baltics. The risks were mostly mentioned in relation to the middle class, not peasants. In 1781, a Livonian enlightener and parson Heinrich Johann von Jannau (1753–1821) noticed that the elite of society read for entertainment purposes, as opposed to education. The upper classes preferred novels, poetry and comedies. However, he warned, "novels and poetry alone do not educate a person; they are more harmful than useful, if read very carelessly. And does one always read to become educated? To my mind, love of reading is rather pretence than sophistication. Some ladies, who

live in the countryside and are brought up to be householders, also read because it is fashionable.". In 1801, the rector of the Riga Dome School, Johann August Albanus (1765–1839), pointed out: "The more young people, especially women, love reading, the less they should read without supervision; and an enormous joy of reading in children aged ten to twelve often attests to bodily imperfection, as opposed to them having great spiritual energy." [10] These and other ideas were integral to 18th-century discussions on correct and incorrect reading. [11] While we can witness the patterns similar to the "reading revolution" in the Baltic middle-class, the developments in peasants' reading habits were more complicated and considerably slower, however demonstrated progression in the same direction.

Religious reading:

Views of Blaufuß, Baumann and Lenz

The Baltic case was peculiar because in the 18th century, the vast majority of ethnic Latvians belonged to the peasant class, then subject to serfdom. Latvian literary culture was developed by Baltic-German Lutheran parsons initially with religious aims (the first Latvian-language religious books were published starting from the 16th century, the Bible was translated in Latvian at the end of the 17th century) and, from the mid-18th century, secular reading matter appeared with Enlightenment ambitions. It was connected to the import of ideas of Popular Enlightenment (*Volksaufklärung*), a reform movement in German-speaking countries, that attempted to improve the peasant living conditions and educate them through the printed media. [12] Although schools were few and domestic learning dominated in 18th-century Latvian education, the proportion of literate peasants was high. By the end of the 18th century, it had reached two thirds of Livonian residents, and one third in Courland. [13]

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Latvian-language religious books – sermons and hymns – were intended primarily, with few exceptions, for Baltic-German parsons,[14] although, they did not exclude ethnic Latvian peasant readership. The formation of active reading habits during the end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th century was often observed among Latvians in towns, especially Riga and Jelgava/Mitau as well as in areas close to towns. [15] At the end of the 17th century, the contemporaries witnessed the habit of urban Latvians to imitate Germans in clothing and everyday habits, including reading. [16] Gradually, these trends influenced rural Latvians as well. In 1735, for instance, following state of reading was reported from Skulte/ Adiamünde: "There will not be more than two houses, where all [Latvian] peasants would not be able to read and all by themselves get devotion from God's words. Many have their own Bible, and they study hard when they are unable to understand some

part of it."[17] In the 18th century, Latvian readers not only from urban, but also from rural areas began to play an increasingly prominent role in the Latvian-language book market and also in the new development directions of religious and secular literary culture. This is evident in three essays published in the mid-18th century by Baltic-German Lutheran parsons and addressing the proper reading of religious texts. Although these essays were written in order to instruct rather than characterize Latvian readers, they reveal glimpses of Latvian reading habits.

In an essay *Viena pamācīšana, kādā vīzē tie svēti Dieva raksti jālasa, ka tas var cilvēkam izdoties uz savu dvēseles labumu un mūžīgu dzīvošanu* [An Instruction on How to Read the Sacred Lord's Book in Order to Gain Blessing of the Soul and Eternal Life], published as a foreword to the second edition of the Latvian Bible (1739), Friedrich Bernhard Blaufuß (1697–1756), a Lutheran parson in Riga, outlined six rules for reasonable reading of the Bible: first, one must read the Bible regularly; second, one must avoid useless and vain reading; third, one must keep in mind eternal life when reading; fourth, one must pray before, after and during reading; fifth, one must think over what one has read and reflect upon it; sixth, one must keep what one has read in one's heart and follow it in everyday life.[18] Three features attract attention in Blaufuß's instruction. First, he provided a detailed description of incorrect reading, which he characterized as futile: "Some read only to pass the time; or read with a proud heart only in order to show off and boast to other people what a great reader and expert in the Lord's book they are. Similarly, it is not good when some people read only the stories [in the Bible] wishing to find out about people in ancient times, the places they lived in, their lifestyle, their ages, the kings who ruled, the wars and victors and similar historical facts in the Sacred Book."[19] This observation allows us to presume that, at the time, reading the Bible performed the functions of secular and entertaining reading for some readers. In other words, modern reading habits developed even before first secular books appeared. Second, Blaufuß stressed rational reflection emphasizing that "understanding the Lord's words is impossible without praying just as praying without reflection does not help at all. These two things, namely, prayer and reflection should be kept together when reading the Lord's book just as two poles are put together in a ladder because prayer and reflection on the Lord's words are like the ladder through which we reach God in our hearts."[20]

Third, Blaufuß argued that everybody must read the Bible: "What is the use of a possession or expensive property if it is hidden or locked in a chest? So it is with the Lord's book. How can they help if they are locked or hidden away and come neither to light, nor to people's hands and hearts? [...] What will be the good of the Bible if it remains lying on a granary bench or shelf? [...] But some say: why should I read the Bible if I don't need it? If we, peasants, are able to recite our poor prayers, more or less understand God's words and know our catechism, we have enough of God's words and we do not have to read the large book that is the

Bible. Oh people! Be ashamed, be ashamed when you speak like this. [...] Somebody else says: I would like to read the Lord's book but why should I read it if I do not understand it? The parsons and other smart people know how to read the Lord's book, but we, poor peasants, what do we know? Oh people! How can you talk like this? Did God order the writing of the Lord's book only for parsons? Not for all the people?" [21] This part of the instruction is laid out as a discussion with peasants, but can be also read between the lines as a discussion with members of the Catholic church who opposed the necessity for every churchgoer to read the Bible.

Yet another objection by peasants was mentioned in the essay *Viena pamācīšana, kā šī grāmata sataisīta in kā to ir jāvalko* [An Instruction on How This Book Is Composed and How It Must Be Used], written by Joachim Baumann (1712–1759), a Lutheran parson in Jelgava/Mitau and later a superintendent of Courland, as a foreword to the fourth edition of Georg Manzel's *Jauna latviešu sprediģu grāmata* [New Book of Latvian Sermons] (1746). It was the high price of the book. "Do not spare the money, my friend, that you will spend on this book," Baumann wrote. "Some spend more money than this book costs when they trade horses and in addition are sometimes deceived." [22] Baumann expanded on the idea of rational reading: "Think over thoroughly what you read and check your heart. When you are reading a fine edification, bear in mind the wisdom that God has given you, accept and keep it in your heart and become wiser for it. When you are reading some condemnation in which sins, such as idolatry, blasphemy, sorcery, rebellion, quarrelling, adultery or stealing are denounced, consider whether you are also entangled in such sins. If so, then confess your sins." [23]

Baumann also deplored the small number of literate peasants in Courland at the time and expressed the wish that a network of schools be set up soon. He also emphasized the great role women could play in the development of reading skills: "Some fathers and mothers teach their children to read, but only the sons, they pay no attention to their daughters. This is not right. Why should girls not learn to read? Girls sometimes have lighter hearts [i.e., better learning skills] than boys, they can learn how to knit colourful clothes, weave bright garments and sew ornaments on fabrics, why should they also not learn how to read? Girls sometimes have better voices than boys. When tending cattle, milling or doing other work, they sing different foolish songs about dear mothers or little foals [i.e., Latvian folksongs], but it would be better and more appropriate for them if God's hymns resounded from their mouths. Women also have more free time than men, and when a farmer who knows how to read is working for himself or for the master, women at home can teach their children to read while weaving or knitting, if they were themselves taught in their youth. Therefore, dear fathers and mothers, teach your children, gifted to you by God, to read. [...] When this happens, light will come to our Courland." [24]

In a similar vein, Christian David Lenz (1720–1798), a Lutheran parson in Tartu/Dorpat and later a superintendent of Livonia, in the essay *Priekšēja uzrunāšana uz tiem latviešiem* [Foreword to Latvians],

published in his *Spredi̧ku grāmata* [Book of Sermons] (1764), explicitly addressed not only male, but also female readers, at the same time regretting the small number of literate peasants: "If you, farmers and wives, do not know how to read, there is sure to be a *grahmatneeks* [literate person, bookworm] in your household who knows how to read. You have to ask them to read the sermons aloud on Sundays, holidays and working days. [...] If there is not a single literate person in the whole household, then ask some of your closest neighbours to read aloud an extract from this book, or visit, together with your family and servants, those neighbours who read this book aloud. And, although you ignoramus can neither with your eyes see God's teaching, nor read it, you can listen with your ears to the words of this book that shows you the way to heaven from the Lord's Sacred Book." [25] Lenz intended his sermons predominantly for loud reading and envisioned silent reading only when preparing for a ceremony: "In order to do it clearly and well, read to yourself the extract that you are going to read aloud beforehand." [26] Interestingly, Lenz allowed for the reading of extracts and encouraged his readers not to read the whole sermon at once, but to read only parts. Perhaps this corresponds to the impact of Pietists by focusing on different needs and perception patterns of readers. Lenz provided detailed instructions, especially to the listeners to sermons and recommended praying before a sermon and listening with close attention: "It is true that your attention can wander when an entire sermon is being read on Sunday in a church. But you should pray sincerely and ask God to protect you from the wandering of your thoughts. [...] In the beginning, it will be quite difficult, but when you get used to it, it will be easy to listen with close attention for an hour or an hour and a half. You will get a twofold gain from it. First, your mind will become enlightened and you will receive from God's teachings strong, clear and coherent knowledge. Second, your heart will gain a strong emotional experience through such quiet and uninterrupted listening." [27]

Emergence of peasants' secular reading:

Rosenberger's observations

In these essays, the significance of rational reading is noticeable; even when coupled with prayer and emotional religious experience, it remained at the centre of authors' attention over the whole of the 18th century. The essays limited reading experience to religious books because secular fiction in Latvian appeared only later, in the 1760s. This branch of Latvian secular literary culture was pioneered by a Sēlpils/Selburg and Sunākste/Sonnaxt parson Gotthard Friedrich Stender (1714–1796). His secular songs and fables, inspired by the works of Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, Johann Ludwig Gleim and others, as well as the German Anacreontic poetry of such literary circles as Hainbund in Göttingen, gained popularity among peasant readers, as attested by the repeated

editions of these books in the 18th and also early 19th century.[28] They also helped changing reading patterns gradually and expanded reading functions. Religious and secular reading co-existed and shared the nature of reading as a serious pastime connected with learning.

In 1773, a Jelgava/Mitau parson, Johann Friedrich Casimir Rosenberger (1731–1776) portrayed a scene he had witnessed in a Courland household revealing the diverse reading functions in a peasant's life: "First of all, when prayers have been held in a group, he [grandfather] through particularly passionate and secret praying to God and through quiet reading of the Bible, attends to his own soul. Having done this, he invites the oldest children to come closer and asks them to carefully read an extract from [Gotthard Friedrich] Stender's stories several times and ponder upon it. While they are learning this way, he writes something. Sometimes he spends more than an hour writing. Then he asks the younger children to come, with their own books. [...] If a child has been a thoughtful role model to others and diligent in learning, the grandfather gives him something to write as a reward, and by showing how it must be done, he teaches the child, and later in the evening he allows those peculiar fairy tales and stories that the honourable educated man Stender has published to be read aloud. In this manner, they all look for books one after the other and always treat [this activity] as entertainment."[29] Here Rosenberger demonstrated both the ceremonial reading of prayers and quiet reading of the Bible, as well as reading as part of children's educational process, when they learn what they have read by heart. Furthermore, reading is seen as entertainment – reading aloud sections from Gotthard Friedrich Stender's *Jaukas pasakas in stāsti* [Nice Fairy Tales and Stories] (1766), which at the time that Rosenberger wrote these lines, was the only Latvian book of secular *belles-lettres* alongside Rosenberger's own work.

Rosenberger also discussed entertainment and leisure time, mostly expressing his concern about the popularity of taverns that could cast a shadow over other alternatives. He recommended a number of options, including reading books, which in their usefulness were compared with conversations of religious content: "Be thoughtful about your pastimes, what you can improve through learning and wisdom and good thoughts, so that your soul would be elevated and you would notice the rise of devoutness. The Bible and other good things and books serve as devout conversations at home with your closest ones, praising God and his deeds and words."[30] Similar ideas were expressed by Jelgava/Mitau publisher Johann Friedrich Steffenhagen (1774–1812): "When all tasks are completed in the evening and everybody is napping in one corner or another, would not it be better, if the master or anybody else who can read, were to read aloud educative lessons, stories or songs in front of the others?"[31]

Such descriptions of reading in 18th century books were reproduced repeatedly. For instance, in the 1794 calendar, when a peasant was described, the following observation was included among others:

"Dahwis was also a well-read person, and he had gradually bought various Latvian books; he used the books not only as sources of good advice and morals, but also read aloud nice stories and useful lessons in front of his children and household members."[32] The collective reading of books became typical not only of urban, but also rural societies, allowing illiterate persons to be reached. Collective reading in rural areas also allowed combining the reading books with daily chores during winter evenings, yet it had one more function – reading in the 18th century had become a form of socializing, an opportunity to get closer and to spend time together. Therefore, when silent reading had established itself, reading aloud did not disappear. Numerous narrative features of 18th-century texts (in dialogues or monologues, which provided an opportunity to show one's oratorical talent in front of listeners) were closely connected with the authors being aware that their works would be read aloud. Collective reading was related to the reading of extracts characteristic of the late 18th century, not necessarily trying to read books from beginning to end, but selecting certain parts. Collective and "fragmentary" reading influenced a new book trend in the very late 18th century – almanacs, namely, mixed content publications, which included short texts of various content, referred to as "encyclopaedic entertainment."[33]

Herrnhutian readers

One type of reading that deserves to be treated separately was Herrnutian reading – because their reading matter circulated not only in printed media, but also in manuscripts in handwritten form. Among readers who preferred religious texts, Herrnhutians occupied an unusual position. There were markedly more literate persons in regions where Herrnhutian Brethren were active. The number of readers in such regions reached as high as 90%, since the rules of the Brethren demanded mandatory literacy, and writing skills were desirable.[34] In the 18th century, Pietism and the Herrnhutian Brethren had major roles in promoting literacy among large masses, and it was not coincidence that previously quoted parsons Blaufuß and Lenz were connected to the Pietist movement, but unlike secular readers, the followers of the Herrnhutian Brethren associated *Leselust* with a religious experience – it was viewed as a latent force that could be awakened in oneself.[35] Along with the foundation of the Herrnhutian Brethren's mission to Livland in the 1730s–1740s, the distribution of manuscripts with translated or self-written texts was started. Initially, the texts were written with the aim of their being read during the congregation meetings. Preaching, congregation transcripts were read in front of audiences and hymns were sung together. Intimate reading, however, spread eventually as well. Over the course of the 18th century, historical descriptions, biographies and autobiographies of Herrnhutian Brethren members were also written alongside sacred literary genres. In addition, epic compositions emerged, including original works and translations, which echoed the global

character of the Herrnhutian Brethren and eventually covered an even wider range of texts.

The handwritten life stories of the Herrnhutians followers often drew attention to reading and, at times, the almost supernatural force that reading possessed. The Latvian Herrnhutian Podiņa Mārtiņš (1728–1797) wrote in his autobiography that he had seen everything that was read from the New Testament before his eyes. As soon as he was able to read, he tried to read all the books he could get hold of, to continue his education in conversations with the German brother at the Liepa School. [36] As regards Herrnhutian attitudes to reading, the 18th-century Latvian translation of the Czech Herrnhutian Michael Jeschke's (1701–1772) autobiography was also quite telling. He remembered himself reading secretly in his youth, until he was caught: "I secretly read sacred books. Often it was touching, and I feared that my soul was not sacred. Once I thought I was alone in the fields and I was reading and praying." He was seen and caught. However, the stranger seemed to be sharing the same secret, as he stated: "Dear brother! Don't be scared; I also read such books, and I'm also grieving for my soul." [37]

Herrnhutian Skangaļa Jēkabs (1722–1801) wrote in his autobiography: "My mother herself taught me how to spell and read, and I learned it very quickly. Afterwards, I had to teach my younger brothers and sisters, and I found it very hard because I reluctantly wasted time which I could use for learning myself. In my eighth and tenth year I learned by heart Luther's small catechism with all questions, answers and explanations, all hymns in Latvian hymnbook, especially those which treated the word of Jesus, His sufferings and death. [...] [Brother of my father] appointed me as a reader on Sundays (because he as an elder of the house always led the prayers and his vision did not allow him to read the sermons any more), and it made me very delighted. I had to read aloud the chapters from New Testament and also to sing in the mornings of workdays, too, to all women during the spinning and especially to my grandmother. [...] And during all those times of reading aloud and singing, I began reflecting upon and making comparisons about all I had sung and read, especially in the epistles in New Testament. [...] I acquired a small Courland prayer book, and also another Latvian book, 'The Book of Pearls'. I found there very beautiful prayers for all groups of people, especially for young men and boys. I often walked alone with these books. And especially in one prayer for young men and boys about obedience to parents and love and surrender to Saviour, I felt extremely good and I burst into tears." [38] Here we see how loud reading led to silent reading, and how gradually reading became accompanied not only by emotional appeal, but also by rational reflections.

This suggests that the religious practices of the Herrnhutian Brethren made writing and reading more consolidated in the daily lives of parishioners than it was in the official Lutheran church. [39]

Diversifying the reading habits of peasants: Steffenhagen's typology

The diversifying of peasants' reading choices were represented in an advertisement published by Johann Friedrich Steffenhagen in 1793. [40] In it, he classified his own production of Latvian books in three sections – the books "for blessing", "for wisdom" and "for wholesome entertainment".

The books "for blessing" – mostly sermons and hymns as well as religious tracts – continuing the earlier tradition, were at their zenith in the 18th century. Their circulation regularly reached several thousand copies, and there were so many religious books printed that virtually no one had any difficulties accessing them. Religious reading had gained a stable place in Latvian readership. [41] The most common books among Latvian peasants, judging by circulation and surveys of peasant homes, were hymnbooks, biblical stories, compilations of sermons and the Bible (or the New Testament). For instance, in the 1770s and 1780s in the Āraiši/Arrasch parish, there were 163 Bibles, 436 hymnbooks and one book of sermons within 161 households; whereas in the Mazsalaca/Salisburg parish, there were 655 hymnbooks, 98 Bibles and two biblical stories within 350 households. This and the similar content of the books attest that reading was mostly loud and ceremonial. [42]

The books "for wisdom" offered by Steffenhagen was the most rapidly growing group and included such works as Gotthard Friedrich Stender's scientific encyclopaedia for peasants *Augstas gudribas grahmata* [The Book of High Wisdom] (1774), as well as Rūjiena/Ruien parson Gustav Bergmann's (1749–1814) *Labbu siņņu un padohmu grahmata* [The Book of Good News and Advice] (1791), which contained recommendations in agriculture and medicine and was an adapted and shortened translation of German Enlightener Rudolf Zacharias Becker's (1752–1822) bestseller *Noth- und Hülfsbüchlein für Bauersleute* (1788). Various other books on different aspects of agriculture, cattle breeding, beekeeping, potato and clover cultivation, and popular medicine were published over the 18th century. [43] Popular science works such as *Augstas gudribas grahmata* was also read by Baltic-German middle-class readers, [44] and this was a rather characteristic tendency witnessed also by subscription lists or, for instance, German-language comments in Latvian books. [45]

The third group with books "for wholesome entertainment" was the closest to the modern extensive reading for pleasure and *Leselust*. The first Latvian secular works of prose fiction, poetry, and drama, all published during the 18th century, were mostly adapted translations from German, created with enlightening and entertaining aims. Entertainment was combined with useful lessons. Readers still expected moral guidance from the material they read and were often disappointed, having found out that the texts were only entertaining, failing to provide any moralising generalisations. An advertisement for one 18th century book claimed:

"Each story has a certain moral. And where there is no moral written down, which is rare, every deliberately thinking reader will discover it themselves." [46] In the 18th century, practical instructions, along with belletristic fiction and popular science articles, formed supplements to calendars, turning these into the most purchased publications – their annual circulation reached 3000 copies at the end of the century. [47]

The three reading functions, outlined by Steffenhagen, developed unevenly. Therefore, it is productive to differentiate Latvian readers, as proposed by scholar Aleksejs Apīnis, in two groups – "old" and "new" reading communities. Apīnis points out that the old reading community in the course of the entire 18th century continued to read intensively and ceremonially mostly religious texts and it was wide-spread in the countryside; whereas the new reading community, which read extensively and looked for ever-new books of secular content, was more likely to be sought first among urban Latvians, then in the social class of householders and finally – in those professions that were unrelated to land cultivation works (see below more detailed analysis of this group). [48] Generation gap here was also a social gap. It corresponds to similar observations of German peasants' reading developments by Reinhart Siegert: "For a large mass, reading still meant a loud and common reading from a static, overaged possession of books, almost completely limited to religious reading matter. No innovative or emancipatory quality was to be exptected from this reading. [...] In addition, an increasing minority among the people, too, was made of readers who read a lot. Only under these conditions, an emacipatory effect of reading (desired or not) was to be expected." [49]

Transition from intensive to extensive reading: Stender's comments

As a new reading community, which had read extensively and always sought out new books of secular content, was more likely to be found first among urban Latvians, then in the social class of householders, and finally in those rural professions that were unrelated to agriculture, [50] to an extent it might be argued that extensive reading was an elitist practice at its initial stage.

This was observed by Lutheran parson in Sēlpils/Selburg and Sunākste/Sonnaxt Alexander Johann Stender (1744–1819) in an essay published as an afterword to his book in Latvian entitled *Dziesmas, pasakas, stāstu dziesmas* [Songs, Fairy Tales and Stories] (1805). The book comprised moral instructions in the spirit of popular enlightenment, told through secular prose fiction and poems, including a Latvian translation of Friedrich Schiller's ode *An die Freude*. However, Stender was not optimistic about his book's success with the Latvian reading public, which was predominantly religiously oriented and in which the new extensive reading habits were spreading slowly. Stender wrote: "When I finished working on this book and reflected on the good things in it, through

which some readers will become more clever, I suddenly asked myself if there will be many who will buy and read it? What is the use of all the shops of knowledge when nobody seeks it? What is the use of the most refined words for those who are deaf, or pretend to be deaf, wishing neither to hear nor accept? What is the use of the best books when there is no desire to read and reflect upon them? It is a great disaster – and indeed the single reason for the decline and serfdom of Latvians: although here and there, readers appear and seem to grow in number, and one can see many of them in church where they show off with their books – I see, however, few benefits from this. [...] What can you do with people who have disfigured minds, who turn down wisdom and do not love reasonable reading? What is the use of writing and printing books for them – it would be just the same as adorning a swine with pearls – a pig remains a pig, and though washed and adorned, he immediately returns to his filth. [...] [Latvians] do not wish to be parted from their dearly beloved stupidity, just as the dung-beetle from his dung." [51]

This quote corresponds to the prevailing atmosphere during the late 18th century, both in the Baltic Provinces and in Germany, and can be summed up as the "pessimism" of the Enlighteners in regard to their readership among peasants. While on many occasions we might suspect that such statements were exaggerated, they nevertheless illuminate the way in which authors saw their readers. [52] Stender's observations mirror the sceptical comments made by other contemporaries, such as Garlieb Merkel, who compared Latvian secular books to a lamp that has been lit for a blind person: "For many years, a number of honourable parsons have worked hard to dispel the darkness through which the people wander, partly by translating sections of books into Latvian for them and partly by writing new books. They have lit a lamp for the blind." [53] To a certain extent, it was connected to popular enlighteners' attempts to create a new reading public simultaneously with new books; it has been noted that during the initial stages, popular enlightenment books were addressed to non-existent readers. [54] There were, nevertheless, significant signs that pointed towards changes in terms of the perception of books, as outlined by Stender in his essay.

First, he emphasized that some Latvians tended to show off with books: "Occasionally, people read voluntarily but with no other reason than to boast about it. [...] If only he has a book in his hands, – the thicker, the better, – then he thinks he owns something valuable. [...] A lot of book owners, just a few readers and more superficial readers. [...] In [Southern] Livonia and Courland today there are many readers, but it is hard to find out if they are wiser than non-readers, since on many occasions they [the readers] are also the greatest masters in delinquency, misconduct, drinking and all the vices." [55] This quote also corresponds to other observations by the contemporaries, according to whom the prestige of books was increasing, similarly as in other peasants' reading communities throughout Europe, where one observed "the respect attached to the book

as a rare and precious object that is always to some degree considered as sacred." [56]

Stender's second observation was connected to the primarily religious understanding of books: "Others expect to become more blessed before God through it [reading books] and better in the eyes of those who cannot read. Therefore, they do not approve of books without religious teachings, hymns or prayers, and the unreasonable ones say: those are jokes – nonsense – and turn down what they do not understand [...] thinking that a peasant does not need to elevate his mind and strive for great wisdom, but only to remain loyal to his plough and scythe – and that it is a good thing to drink liquor and deceive one's masters." [57] Here we witness that ideas outlined by Blaufuß, Lenz and Baumann continued to live until the end of the 18th century, despite changes in the book market.

It explains why the discourse of dangerous reading among peasants (that can lead to revolts), or what Ilkka Mäkinen has called "thinking obscurantism," [58] was very rare in Courland and Livonia. As an interesting exception, a claim by some Lutheran parson should be highlighted, who noted that in those regions where the number of readers was higher, there was consequently a higher risk of social unrest. [59] Consequently, two opposing views on books and reading practices were connected to the use of books for religious and pedagogical purposes. In the comments by Stender and other similar accounts, one witnesses tension between peasants' views on the usefulness of reading (that are based in religious assumptions), the parsons' views on the educational benefits of reading, and the new perception of reading as a pastime.

Concluding remarks

During the 18th century, Latvian reading habits expanded, and rural Latvians became as active readers as their urban counterparts. From individual "book lovers" and "Bible lovers", over the course of the 18th century a wider range of active readers was established. In their daily lives, reading became an increasingly more regular activity, the range of books expanded, reading habits became ever more diverse. While the transition from mechanical reading to active, personally motivated reading took place and was observed here and there, the majority of Latvian readers remained devoted to intensive reading, which was also closely connected to ceremonial book use. At the same time, quiet reading did not replace reading aloud, similarly as extensive reading did not replace intensive reading, but all reading practices continued to co-exist alongside each other. The first modern readers – in terms of reading habits themselves rather than secular content of reading matter – were observed among Herrnhutian peasants.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Latvian reading habits were discussed on several occasions, and these debates were contradictory – some authors continued to reproduce the stereotype of non-reading Latvians, which, to a great extent, was based on ideas about peasants'

reading habits in German-speaking countries; others regretted the slow spread of extensive reading habits among Latvian readers; and there was also even a strong opinion that reading was very popular in rural areas. [60] The main goal and achievement of the Baltic Enlightenment, however, was not a mass reading, but a change of reading motivation. Therefore, one can hardly witness processes similar to a "reading revolution" during the 18th century in Latvian-inhabited Baltic provinces; however, the development of Latvian reading patterns suggests that the last part of the 18th century was a time when significant preconditions for it were established. It led to the democratisation of reading, which reached a massive scale in the 19th century. [61] Following the complicated developments of reading habits in the 18th century, in the 19th century reading finally became extensive, creating ground for what can be described as a "reading revolution" in Courland in Livonia in the 1840s. [62]

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Notas

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11 Cf. also: DAIJA, Pauls. Lasīšanas pieredzes 18. gadsimtā. In TREILE, Maija (sast.) *Lasīšanas pandēmija: Esejas par lasīšanas vēsturi Latvijā*. Rīga: LNB, 2020, pp. 66–79. Parts of this publication have been elaborated in more detail in the present article – P. D.

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