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Clas Frietzcky's Library at Säbylund

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Clas Frietzcky's Library at Säbylund

Jonas Nordin

In 2017, Kungl. biblioteket/The National Library of Sweden, received a donation from the well-preserved late eighteenth century country-house library of Clas Frietzcky and Säbylund manor. Clas Frietzcky was an ironworks proprietor and politician, active in the Cap party during the Age of Liberty who, in his later years, became a leading voice in the opposition to King Gustav III. He was born in 1727 and died in 1803. At the time of his death, he had collected over 4,000 volumes in his library at Säbylund. Since the transformation of Säbylund into an entailed estate (*fideikommiss*) in 1786, Frietzcky's library has been passed down through the generations, and the library remains virtually untouched to this day.

Säbylund manor is located in Närke, some 15 kilometres south of Örebro, and about 170 kilometres from Stockholm. The main building is a neat, but fairly simple, wooden house, and the library's original setting was in a corner room on the bottom floor facing westward (Fig. 1). Apart from the 4,000 plus volumes, the library also contains paraphernalia that might be expected in such an environment, e.g. two globes made by the famous Swedish globemaker Anders Åkerman, a carved sixteenth century coffin, a series of engraved portraits of Swedish monarchs, and a relief portrait of the owner Clas Frietzcky sculpted by Johan Tobias Sergel.

The book collection reflects Clas Frietzcky's interest in politics and history, and it is evident that he tried to follow the dramatic



Figure 1. Clas Friezky's Library at Säbylund in its original setting, November 2015.
Photo: Jonas Nordin.

events occurring in the European politics of his age, not least in revolutionary France. What makes the library especially interesting, however, are the contemporary catalogues and other records that show how the library was used both by Friezky himself, and by his friends and neighbours. In this essay I will point to the importance and possibilities of some of these sources.

Catalogues and Arrangement of the Library

The primary access to the Säbylund library is via Friezky's two catalogues – the first is marked 1777 on the cover but was begun only in 1779, the year after he moved in with his sister at Säbylund, and the second was begun in 1798. In addition to the catalogues there is also a borrowers' register, with the first entries from 1791, and the last from the 1840s, long after Friezky's passing.

The majority of Frietzky's books are in French, with Swedish coming in as a close second. There is also a substantial number of German books, a couple of dozen books in Danish, and the occasional book in Latin. Most of the books fall into the category of non-fiction, but there are also novels such as *Tom Jones* and *Don Quixote*, always in French or Swedish translation.

Frietzky was clearly a man who took an active interest in maintaining and curating his collection of books. On the first page of his 1779 catalogue, he gave clear and useful instructions on how the library should be used. Beside the titles of the books there are three columns with meta-information. The first column contains a running number, the only use of which is to indicate how many entries there are under the different initial letters in the catalogue. The second column indicates on what shelf a book can be found. Many of these numbers have been altered by Frietzky at a later stage, as his library grew from 19 to 97 shelves; each shelf was individually marked with a painted number on the front. The library measured a total of 146 shelf-metres, but many of the shelves held books stacked in double rows allowing Frietzky to compress his collection-space by placing several of the books in multi-volume works behind the others, keeping only the first and last volume visible. The third column gives the total price for each book including binding. These column-entries provide us with an accessible overview of the whole collection (Fig. 2).

At the end of the catalogues, Frietzky summarised his expenditure on books and bindings. If we combine the figures from the two catalogues, we can see how the collection more than quadrupled in little more than two decades, from 304 works embodied in 920 volumes in 1779, to 1,644 works in 4,049 volumes, by the end of 1802. (The probate record drawn up after his death counts a total of 4,116 volumes.) The black bars in Figure 3 show the number of works, and the grey bars show the total number of volumes. Together they indicate that there were on average three volumes to each work.

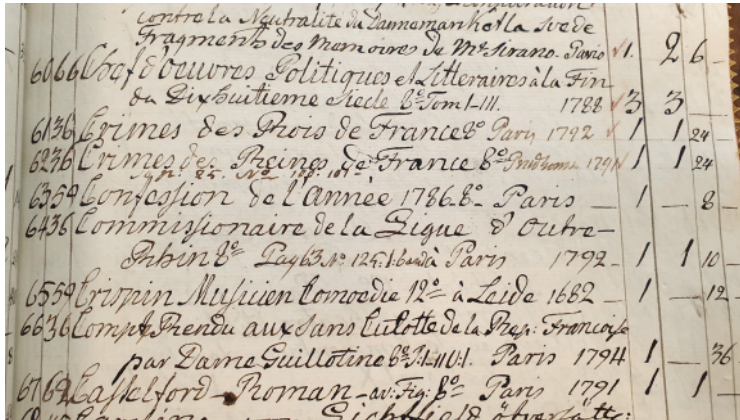


Figure 2. Sample from Clas Frietzky's 1798 catalogue. The second record from the top lists Louis Lavicomterie de Saint-Samson's *Crimes des Rois de France, depuis Clovis jusqu'à Louis XVI*, in octavo, printed in Paris 1792. Lavicomterie was obviously not one of the "renowned" authors who was registered under his name in the catalogue. The first column records a running catalogue number (61); these were not registered in the volumes. The second column records the shelf number (36). Following the title is the number of volumes for this work (1), whereas the last two columns give the price: 1 riksdaler, 24 skilling. Photo: Jonas Nordin.

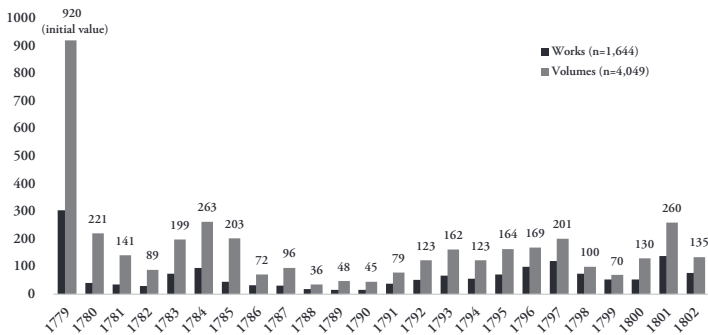


Figure 3. Acquisitions to the Säbylund Library 1779–1802. Source: Säbylund catalogues, 1779–1797, 1798–, Kungl. biblioteket/The National Library of Sweden.

CLAS FRIETZCKY'S LIBRARY AT SÄBYLUND

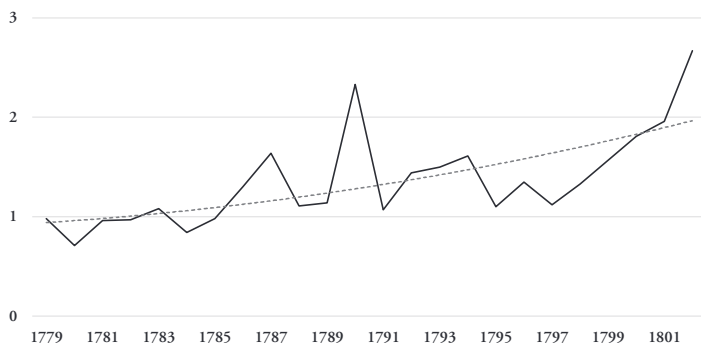


Figure 4. Development of Book Prices in Säbylund's library. Average Price per Volume in *Riksdaler*. Source: Säbylund catalogues, 1779–1797, 1798–, Kungl. biblioteket/The National Library of Sweden.

Note: One *rikdaler specie* was divided into 48 *skilling*. In the diagram, 1.5 on the scale equals 1 *rikdaler*, 24 *skilling*. The total average price per volume, including binding, was 1 *rikdaler*, 17 *skilling*.

The 920 volumes acquired up until 1779 had cost a total of 903 *rikdaler*, which gives an average price of just below one *rikdaler* per volume. In 1802 the average price had risen somewhat, to 1 *rikdaler* 17 *skilling* per volume, and Frietzcky had spent a total of 5,071 *rikdaler* on his book collection. As a point of comparison, this was three times the cost of Carl Linnaeus' epitaph in Uppsala Cathedral or equal to 1,000 barrels of rye.

To the total expenditure on books, Clas Frietzcky added the cost of a bookplate impressed with the family's coat of arms (Fig. 5). The bookplate was commissioned from the engraver Fredrik Akrel, who worked with the well-known globemaker Samuel Åkerman, from whom Frietzcky had bought the two globes to his library for eleven *rikdaler*. The plate together with 3,600 impressions was ordered in 1778 for a total amount of twenty *rikdaler*. In 1799 Frietzcky had no bookplates left and had to order another 600 impressions, of which less than a hundred were left at the time of his death.



Figure 5. Clas Frietzky's bookplate engraved by Samuel Åkerman and delivered in a total of 4,200 impressions in two instalments.

An inventory list drawn up by Frietzky in 1786 (printed in *Svenska slott och herresäten*, 1911, pp. 24–27) situates the following items in the library (with price in *riksdaler*):

1 mahogany desk with cabinet and drawers	22,–
1 mirror with gilded frame and [candle] carriers	20,–
1 red dresser with fittings	6.32
1 red table with compartment inside	3,–
2 green roller blinds	–,32
4 chairs	5,–
King Gustav III's and his Queen's portraits	4,–
Emperor Joseph on horse	2,–
King Frederick of Prussia d:o	2,–
Voltaire's arrival in the realm of the dead	2,–
Rousseau's d:o	2,–
Everything else in the same chamber, both portraits and paintings, belongs to the library, of which there is a separate description	4,–

I have not been able to investigate the order of the books for this essay, and I cannot say how systematically they were arranged. The placing of books may be deduced from the information contained in the catalogues where the shelf numbers are recorded. I notice, for instance, that many descriptions of Swedish geography are placed on shelf 26, and books about the French Revolution on shelf 36 (cf. Fig 2), but a more thorough analysis will have to wait until another time.

At any rate, Frietzcky's catalogue principles were not fully developed, and the catalogues were very much tools designed for an owner who was already familiar with the content of the collection. For example, he explained that only books by "prominent authors and great men" were placed under their proper names, and he had a narrow definition of prominence. Consequently, most of the books were arranged by their titles, and there are, for example, nine catalogue pages with titles beginning with *Oeuvres de*, and sixteen pages with *Histoire de*, which limits its usefulness for any outsider who wants to find a specific volume. I perceive the catalogue more as a tool for documenting and mapping the collection's growth than as a guide for finding particular books.

Private Lending Library

What makes Clas Frietzcky's book collection particularly interesting is that it was used as a private lending library by his friends and neighbours. Their borrowings were recorded in a register, which gives us an insight into the literary tastes of local polite society of the time. The information is difficult to extract, however, firstly because of the scribbled handwriting, secondly, because the notices have been crossed out once the loans have been returned, and thirdly because neither the borrowers' names nor the title of the books are given in full. It is therefore a time-consuming task to decipher the information, and in the following I will only discuss information from the first page of the register in order to make some suggestions of what can be deduced from this information (Fig. 6).

The register seems to have been begun by Friezcký some years into the 1790s, but it opens with a registration of older loans. The first notice registers the fact that Count Frölich borrowed six volumes of *Les contemporaines* in 1791. From his title, “Stable master”, we can deduce that the borrower was David Gustaf Frölich, born in 1757, equerry in 1792. A contemporary diarist, Berndt von Schinkel, characterised Frölich as “one of the least talented in the whole royal entourage”. The volumes in question, *Les Contemporaines, ou Aventures des plus jolies femmes de l'Âge présent*, comprised a collection of short stories by Restif de La Bretonne (1734–1806). From the catalogue entry we can confirm that Friezcký had all forty-two volumes of the Leipzig edition.

The next entry concerns Count Claes Axel Lewenhaupt (1757–1808). Like Friezcký, Lewenhaupt was one of the leading opponents of King Gustav III at the Diet in 1789 and he left his military service in protest soon after. Lewenhaupt, who was a generation younger than Friezcký, borrowed a volume with pamphlets on constitutional matters published during the dynamic and dramatic last years of the Age of Liberty, but I have not been able to identify the volume by only using the catalogue. Lewenhaupt was the proprietor of Claestorp manor in Östra Vingåker, some 60 kilometres from Säbylund.

The next note is about a woman, the Baroness Gustava von Essen, née Rudbeck (1767–1828), who borrowed four volumes of French moral anecdotes and epigrams in prose and verse. Gustava von Essen resided at Kavlås manor in Västergötland, 130 kilometres from Säbylund. Her father, Ture Gustaf Rudbeck (1714–1786), was one of Friezcký's former political allies. He had been speaker of the nobility during the important session of the Diet in 1765–1766, which, among other things, adopted the Freedom of the Press Ordinance. As county-governor of Stockholm he was one of the few who, in vain, tried to take military action during Gustav III's royal coup d'état in 1772. Gustava's sister-in-law, Charlotta Elisabet von Essen (1758–1822), daughter of another of Friezcký's political associates, Fredrik Ulrik von Essen, had been

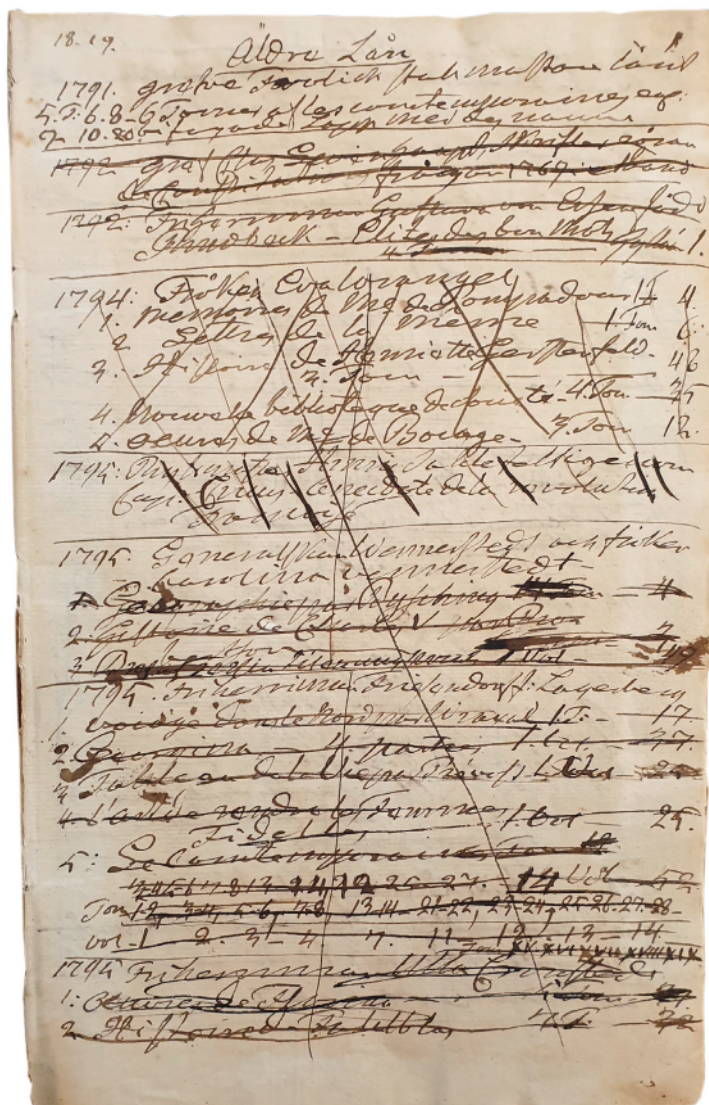


Figure 6. The first page of Clas Frieztczky's borrowers' register. The page is headlined "Older loans", which probably refers to the first few records starting with 1791. There are a total of eight loans recorded between 1791 and 1795 on this first page. When the loans were returned, Frieztczky crossed out the note. Photo: Jonas Nordin.

made heiress to Säbylund in 1786 by Friezcky and his widowed and equally childless sister.

The next person of interest is Eva Margareta Wrangel (1766–1839), the unmarried daughter of General Fredrik Ulrik Wrangel of Sauss, owner of Åkerby manor some 15 kilometres away. She was born in 1766 and was married only in 1795 to a man nineteen years her senior (Elgenstierna: Wrangel af Sauss, nr 279, tab. 1). She was obviously interested in reading stories by or about contemporary or near contemporary women. The memoirs and letters of Madame de Pompadour do not need any presentation, but the trials of Henriette de Gerstenfeld are not widely known today. The work is a fictional series of sentimental letters from the War of Bavarian Succession 1778–1779, attributed in the preface to Christopher Martin Wieland, but in reality written by Adam Beuvius. The German original was entitled *Henriette oder der Husarenraub*, but Friezcky owned a French translation in three volumes: *Henriette de Gerstenfeld, ou Lettres écrites pendant la dernière guerre de 1779 pour la succession de la Bavière* (Genève 1782).

Next, we meet a cavalry captain “Hinric”, whose last name I have not been able to decipher, but he borrowed some books on the French Revolution. In the following record, however, we encounter a known mother and daughter. Madame Wennerstedt, or Brita Elisabet Tersmeden (1758–1810), was the wife of Major General Gustaf Philip Wennerstedt, and the mother of Brita Carolina Wennerstedt, born in 1776. The Wennerstedt family resided at Skogaholm manor, which today has been moved to the outdoor museum of Skansen located in Stockholm, where the couple’s portraits can be seen. The manor was originally located some 15 kilometres from Säbylund. The Wennerstedts only borrowed instructive books: William Robertson’s *L’histoire du règne de l’empereur Charles-Quint*, Carl-Gustaf Tessin’s *En gammal mans bref, til en ung prints* (An old man’s letters to a young prince), and all fourteen volumes of Anton Friedrich Büsching’s universal geography. There is reason to believe that these books were intended for the education of their young daughter. A few years later,



Figure 7. Skogaholm manor, painted by Brita Carolina Wennerstedt-Armfelt. Photo: Nina Heins, Nordiska museet.

in 1798, the daughter married another general, Carl Armfelt, but even though she was married and came under the guardianship of her husband, she pursued a career as a painter and engraver in the early 1800s. Among her works is a painting of her childhood home Skogaholm (Fig. 7).

Baroness Beata Sofia Lagerberg (1759–1841) was married to lieutenant colonel Gustaf Didrik von Friesendorff. The couple were also Frietzcky's neighbours and lived only eighteen kilometres away at Hjälmarsnäs manor. The baroness borrowed *L'art de rendre les femmes fidelles*, a contemporary title known in three eighteenth-century editions, containing marital and cohabitation advice. The baroness was also a consumer of Restif de La Bretonne's moral stories, which we have already encountered.

The last entry of the first page names Baron and Baroness Ulrika Eleonora (1768–1829) and Jakob Otto Cronstedt (1766–1828). She was sister of the aforementioned Eva Wrangel while Jakob Otto, was nephew to Beata Sofia Lagerberg, the ardent reader domiciled at Hjälmarsnäs.

From this short sample we can deduce some general observations. We encounter both male and female readers, and as far as we can tell they were all members of the nobility. All of them were a generation younger than Friezky, but approximately the same age as his heir-ess, Charlotta Elisabet von Essen, who lived under the same roof from the late 1780s.

There also seems to be a pattern of gender specificity insofar as reading habits were concerned, but in general the books were also of an edifying nature, which of course depended on the content of the volumes that could be found in Clas Friezky's library.

The borrowers were mainly local residents and neighbours, but not exclusively. Of the five individuals or families I have been able to locate, three lived within 20 kilometres of Säbylund, whilst one family lived more than 130 kilometres away. Nearly all borrowers were related to one another through friendship or family ties. It is easy to picture a regular intercourse within local polite society, but also one where more remote visitors stopped by on their way to and from Stockholm and their country homes.

These general observations from the first page of the borrowers' register seem to be corroborated by a quick look at the following pages. Beside the predominantly noble borrowers we also find the local vicar, the dean (Carl von Rosenstein, admittedly a nobleman too), and a university professor, among others. One notice stands out for its detail: "the soldier Mossberg receives these books – he lives in Mosås by the road". It is obvious that private Mossberg was no regular guest at Säbylund, but in May 1803 he borrowed no less than twenty-one volumes in both French and Swedish, mostly on travels to various parts of the world. These volumes were returned on 12 February 1804, four months after Friezky's death.



Figure 8. Map over Säbylund and the neighbouring estates found in the borrowers' register's first page.

The first page of the register contains records from 1791 to 1795, and appears to be an attempt to bring the list of borrowers up to date at one point, whereas the following pages record further loans. There are several instances where the loans are registered in another handwriting and confirmed with a signature, suggesting that trusted borrowers could visit the library even when its master was not present.

After Clas Frietzcky's death there was an advertisement in the local newspaper, *Örebro Weckoblad*, requesting the return to Säbylund of all books that the borrowers had already read. Borrowers were also invited to give the title and number of volumes for all works anyone wanted to keep a while longer. The books could either be returned directly to Säbylund or to Frietzcky's former caretaker in Örebro. It is possible that this routine existed already when Frietzcky was alive.

Clas Frietzcky's library at Säbylund was substantially smaller than Charles De Geer's at Leufsta: some 4,000 volumes compared with over 10,000. The collections differed not only in scope, but also in content and use. Whereas the books at Leufsta to some extent formed the working library of an amateur and practitioner within the natural sciences, the collection of Säbylund was assembled only to satisfy the desire for reading and to inform its owner of the great events of the outside world. Frietzcky lived a life as a reclusive landowner with an apparently large circle of friends whom he supplied with reading material. In a word, De Geer seems to have had a more both professional and private relationship to his library than Frietzcky did, but both seem to have taken an equal amount of pride and joy in their books.

Through the research of, among others, Alex Alsemgeest, we have a fairly good knowledge of how and through which channels De Geer acquired his books. Our picture of Frietzcky's book acquisition is sketchier so far, but the preserved documentation promises to provide a rich return for those who want to delve into the material. Many more such detailed studies are needed to give a more comprehensive picture of the collecting of books, of the transmission of information, of the acquisition of knowledge, as well as of social life and representative culture in the Swedish gentry of the eighteenth century.

References

Clas Frietzcky's books from Säbylund together with catalogues, furniture and other inventories are kept at Kungl. biblioteket/The National Library of Sweden. The books are not recorded in the National Library's ordinary catalogues. According to the donation agreement (3.3-2017-387), Kungl. biblioteket commits itself "to recreate and maintain de Frietzcky's library on KB's premises in Humlegården and to keep the library's stock of books as a unified unit for the future". This agreement is still waiting to be realised.

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