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The inventory of Michael Meyer's property (1758) as a reflection of a Tallinn (Reval) merchant's material world during the Age of the Enlightenment

Abstract: The inventory of Tallinn merchant Michael Meyer's (1704–1758) property is one of the largest inventories of an 18th century citizen of Tallinn. Almost the entire world of his possessions is reflected in this unique source. The inventory provides a comprehensive picture of his success, lifestyle, and hobbies, and the diverse list of household items provides a good idea of a prosperous merchant's home in northeast Europe in the 18th century. The unique body of sources (Michael Meyer's will, property inventory, and auction reports) provides comprehensive insight into the development of Tallinn's material culture, *i.e.*, the material culture history of Northern Europe, during the century of Enlightenment.

Abstrakt: Inwentarz pośmiertny rewalskiego kupca Michaela Meyera jest jednym z najobszerniejszych rejestrów dóbr osiemnastowiecznych obywateli tegoż miasta. W tym unikatowym źródle znalazł odbicie niemal kompletny świat rzeczy mieszczanina. Rejestr przedstawia szczegółowy obraz jego sukcesu zawodowego, stylu życia i zainteresowań, a lista różnorodnego wyposażenia gospodarstwa domowego daje wyobrażenie o domostwie zamożnego kupca z północnego wschodu osiemnastowiecznej Europy. Unikatowy materiał źródłowy — testament, inwentarz pośmiertny oraz rejestry aukcyjne majątku Michaela Meyera — zapewnia szczegółowy wgląd w rozwój kultury materialnej Rewala, a tym samym w historię kultury materialnej Europy Północnej doby oświecenia.

Key words: probate inventories, Enlightenment, Tallinn (Reval), merchants, Michael Meyer, luxury

Słowa kluczowe: inwentarze mienia, oświecenie, Tallin (Rewal), kupcy, Michael Meyer, luksus

I. Introduction. II. Michael Meyer — life and background. III. Michael Meyer's property and wealth. IV. Conclusions

1. Introduction

The rich collections of the Tallinn City Archives include the will and inventory of local merchant Michael Meyer's property. He died in early 1758. The will was written on 26 January 1758¹ and the inventory was compiled on February 19th.² The auction protocol and settlement of accounts for the auction of his possessions have also survived.³

The inventory of Meyer's property is one of the largest inventories of an 18th century citizen of Tallinn, and provides a detailed overview of the deceased's diverse possessions. The

¹ Testament des Kaufhändlers Aeltesten Michael Meyer, TLA.230.1.Ae10, 1–6 Seeberg-Elverfeldt Roland. 1975, 327–328.

² Nachlass-Inventarien des Kaufhändlers Aeltesten Michael Meyer, TLA.230.1.Ae10, 6r–95.

³ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 99r–267.

detailed description of his real estate is followed by a list of Meyer's working capital and gold and silver objects. Thereafter, the list continues with jewellery and silverware (*an Bauer-Pfand-Silber*) pawned by the peasants from the Tallinn area, various tin, copper, brass and steel objects, bed and table linens, men's and women's clothing, porcelain, stoneware and glass objects, and household items (*an allerhand Hausgeräthe*), including furniture. Also listed are wagons, sleighs, and other means of transport, as well as horses and other domestic animals. As well as weapons, animal skins, and pleasurable substances, such as tobacco, alcohol, sugar, and spices. The list continues with flax, yarn and wool, cotton fabric, broadcloth, and homespun wool fabric, as well as foods such as butter, fruit, hops, salt, honey, meat, and lard. Separately listed categories include axes, candles, soap, counters and tables, goods for sale (*an Krahm-Waaren*), small debts, printed books, inventory books, manuscripts, and serfs (*an Erbleute*). More detailed descriptions are provided for houses inside and outside the town walls, pastures, jewellery and tableware, pictures, mirrors, chandeliers, chairs and books, lighting fixtures, and clothing and accessories, including both old and new, everyday wear and formal wear. Thus, almost the entire world of Meyer's possessions is reflected in this inventory. To date, Meyer's voluminous inventory has not been edited or examined in detail (Fig. 1).

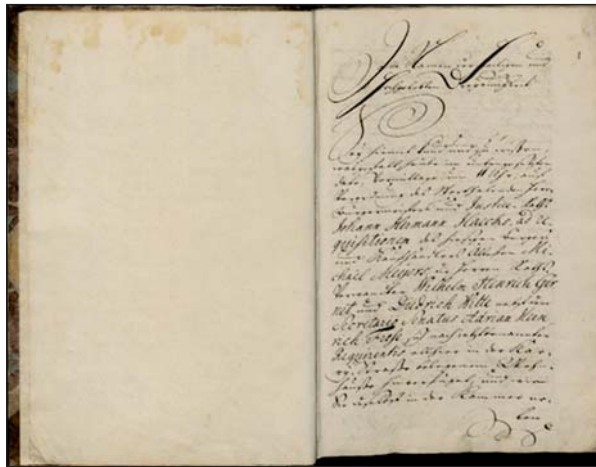


Fig. 1. Michael Meyer's will and the inventory of his property, 1758
(source: TLA.230.1.Ae10)

Ryc. 1. Testament i inwentarz pośmiertny Michaela Meyera, 1758 r.
(źródło: TLA.230.1.Ae10)

A comparative assessment of Michael Meyer's assets and legacy can be made based on a number of studies on the material culture of Tallinners that have been published to date. The most important of these is Raimo Pullat's *Tallinlase asjademaailm valgustussajandil* (A Tallinner's material world during the Age of Enlightenment), which provides a thorough survey of the living conditions and material culture of eighteenth-century Tallinners.⁴ In addition, seven volumes containing the property inventories of eighteenth-century Tallinn and Pärnu merchants, craftsmen and intelligentsia, edited by Raimo Pullat between 1997 and 2009, provide rich comparative material.⁵

⁴ Pullat R. 2016.

⁵ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. 1997; Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2002; Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2004; Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2005; Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2006; Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2007; Privatbibliotheken. 2009.

Numerous source publications, articles and studies on eighteenth-century property inventories and material culture have been published in all the Baltic Sea countries and countries in the European cultural space, which enable the material heritage of Tallinn's merchants to be viewed in the broader context of Western culture.⁶

II. *Michael Meyer — life and background*

Michael's father was Johann Gotthelf Meyer, a pewterer and merchant, who was born in the small town of Marienberg, near Chemnitz in Saxony. He moved to Tallinn (then Reval), a provincial town in the Kingdom of Sweden, around 1680.⁷ In September 1686, he married Catharina, the nineteen-year-old daughter of beltmaker Andreas Schilly⁸ and was granted town citizenship.

Johann Gotthelf had four sons and three daughters. The oldest, Andreas Meyer, born in the summer of 1687, chose a religious path and became the pastor of Simuna parish in Viru County.⁹ The second, a son also named Johann Gotthelf (1691–1722), was a Tallinn merchant until his early death at age 31.¹⁰ Maria Magdalena, the family's oldest daughter, died of the plague in 1710 at the age of 21, as did the youngest son, two-year-old Samuel. The surviving daughters Catharina Elisabeth and Anna Dorothea married in keeping with their station in life.

Michael Meyer was born as the sixth child of the merchant's family and was baptised on 26 August 1704.¹¹ However, this was not a very friendly time to start a young life. The devastating Great Northern War had begun in 1700, during which the Russian tsarist state sought to conquer the possessions of the Kingdom of Sweden in the Estonian and Livonian provinces. Just a few years before that, a great famine had raged in the provinces, killing about one-fifth of the population (1695–1697).¹² (Fig. 2).

In 1710, when Michael was six years old, Russian troops began a siege of Tallinn, which lasted from mid-August to the end of September. At the same time, a plague raged in the city, as a result of which only a tenth of the Swedish garrison survived.¹³ In the autumn of 1710, the plague also killed Michael's father Johann Gotthelf, his older sister and little brother.¹⁴ If before the war more than 12,000 people had lived in Tallinn, fewer than 2,000 people remained after that terrible year, according to a list submitted to the Russian military authorities by the defeated town council in December 1710.¹⁵

However, the difficulties he faced early in life did not prevent Michael Meyer from rapidly becoming one of the most successful merchants in Tallinn. Despite famine, war, plague,

⁶ See, e.g.: Główka D., Klonder A. 2003; Mannheims H., Roth K. 1984. Among the Polish source editions, one may highlight the Poznań inventories, published already in the 1960s: Inwentarze. 1961; Inwentarze. 1962–1965.

⁷ Meyer J.G. 1922, p. 3. Marienberg was a well-known copper and tin mining town in the 17th century.

⁸ Catharina's father was beltmaker Andreas Schilly, who had been born in Austria and was the elder of the Tallinn belt masters' guild and the Canute Guild, Stammfolge. 1948, p. 65.

⁹ Andreas died on 29 May 1739, at the age of 52. He had a large family — three daughters and four sons, Stammfolge. 1948, p. 66f.

¹⁰ His inventory of property compiled on 28 April 1722 has also been preserved, TLA.230.1.Bt17 VI, 444r–448r; see also: Nachlaßverzeichnisse. 1997, pp. 224–230.

¹¹ Stammfolge. 1948, p. 67; see also: Meyer W. 1915; Etzold G. 1975, p. 194ff.

¹² Seppel M. 2020.

¹³ Capitulation. 1865; Belagerung. 1910; Hartmann S. 1975, p. 80; Loit A. 2010; Pullat R. 2016, p. 54; Tallinna ajalugu. 2019.

¹⁴ Stammfolge. 1948, p. 65f.

¹⁵ In the mid-18th century, the population of the town grew to about 7,600, Kenéz C.J. 1978, p. 14; Pullat R. 2016, p. 54; see also: Pullat R. 1992; Pullat R. 1997.



Fig. 2. View of Tallinn in 1796. Detail from Count Ludwig August Mellin's map "Der Revalsche Kreis" (source: Mellin L.A. 1798; in the collection of Estonian National Library)

Ryc. 2. Widok Rewala (Talinna) w 1796 r. Szczegół z mapy hr. Ludwiga Augusta Mellina „Der Revalsche Kreis” (źródło: Mellin L.A. 1798; w zbiorach Estońskiej Biblioteki Narodowej)

and the upheavals associated with the Swedish-Russian transition, Michael Meyer was able to amass a proper fortune by the middle of the century. Since he was born as the sixth child of his family, it can be assumed that he did not inherit very much from his father.

By the age of 23, Michael Meyer was an active member of the Brotherhood of Black Heads (*erkorener Älteste des Schwarzenhäuptercorps*) and by the age of 26 at the latest, was already a merchant and following in his father's footsteps. He took his oath as a citizen of Tallinn on 5 September 1740 at the age of 36. Michael married Catharina Elisabeth Brockhausen, a merchant's daughter, on 6 March 1744, at the respectable age of 40.¹⁶ Unfortunately Catharina died in Tallinn on 20 January 1745, at the age of 28, only a week after the birth of their first and only son. Michael did not remarry, and for the next 14 years devoted himself to raising his son and his work as a merchant. In 1744, he was accepted as a member of the Great Guild, and was also elected to be Elder of the Guild (*Ältester der Grossen Gilde*).¹⁷ (Fig. 3).

The last years of Michael's life were also spent during difficult times. In 1755, an unusually severe winter was followed by famine and starvation, and the situation in Tallinn, where mortality rose sharply, was particularly difficult.¹⁸

Michael Meyer died in 1758 at the age of 54, and was buried on February 5th at St. Nicholas Church.¹⁹ When his will was drawn up in January, his physical weakness was noted, but his mental clarity was also remarked upon.²⁰ In February, an inventory was made of his estate.

Michael Meyer's only son Bernhard (Berend) Johann Meyer was born on 12 January 1745.²¹ As mentioned above, he lost his mother immediately after his birth and his father died when Bernhard was 13 years old. Since he was a minor, his maternal uncle Adam Hinrich Brockhausen

¹⁶ Catharina was born in Tallinn on 6 December 1717. Her father was merchant Berend Brockhausen, a member of the Great Guild, *Stammfolge*. 1948, p. 67.

¹⁷ Leimus I. et al. 2011.

¹⁸ Mäeorg K., Maiste M. 2019, p. 50.

¹⁹ *Stammfolge*. 1948, p. 67.

²⁰ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 1r.

²¹ *Stammfolge*. 1948, p. 69.

²² TLA.230.1.Ae10, 7.



Fig. 3. Family coat of arms of Michael Meyer and his descendants (drawn by Johannes Britze, *Stammfolge*. 1948, p. 2)

Ryc. 3. Herb rodzinny Michaela Meyera i jego potomków (rys. Johannes Britze; *Stammfolge*. 1948, s. 2)

was named as his guardian.²² In 1763, at the age of 18, Bernhard left Tallinn and went to study law in Jena and Leipzig.²³ During his studies, he joined the Freemasons.²⁴

After returning to his hometown, Bernhard Meyer worked as a lawyer in the city's upper and lower courts and as head of the local police (civil service).²⁵ He also belonged to the Great Guild and was elected as an alderman of Tallinn. On 18 September 1768, at the age of 23, Bernhard married Natalia Catharina Sendenhorst. Six children — three sons and three daughters — were born into the family, which founded an influential Tallinn merchant dynasty that operated in Tallinn until World War II.²⁶ Bernhard died in Tallinn on 28 March 1805 at the age of 60.

III. Michael Meyer's property and wealth

The inventory of rural merchant Michael Meyer's assets provides a comprehensive picture of his success, lifestyle, and hobbies. A year after his death, public auctions of his property were held on 32 days from April to November.²⁷ Michael Meyer had taken into account that his property would be publicly auctioned, and only bequeathed two taverns outside the city walls to his son.²⁸ The sale price of the remaining real estate was 2,635 roubles, and a total of 7,680 roubles was obtained at auctions from the sale of his other goods and furniture, jewellery, silver, etc.²⁹ Thus, Michael Meyer's total real estate and movable property was valued at nearly 11,000 roubles.

Therefore, according to Gottfried Etzold, he belonged to the middle class of Tallinn's merchants,³⁰ being a very active and successful rural merchant. He annually imported goods worth 100 to 1,000 roubles, while his exports were usually modest. According to Ants Viires, about a hundred rural merchants were active in Tallinn during the 18th century³¹ and Michael Meyer was one of the wealthiest.

We shall try to assess how wealthy Michael Meyer actually was. For comparison, some statistics: in 1750, Ernst Jacob Tewes, who had risen to the position of chief musician of Tallinn, received an annual salary of 100 *courant*-state thalers or 65 roubles; in 1740, the annual salary of Johann David Elster, the cantor of Tallinn Cathedral was 165 state thalers or 128 roubles; and in 1746, Heinrich Christoph Callenberg, the organist at St Nicholas Church, was annually paid 125 *courant*-state thalers or slightly more than 81 roubles.³² Thus, the average salary of a musician in Tallinn during the middle of the Enlightenment was around 100 silver roubles. In

²³ Eckardt J. 1876, p. 578.

²⁴ *Nachrichtenblatt*. 1924, p. 1ff.

²⁵ Elias O.H. 1978, p. 75.

²⁶ *Stammfolge*. 1948, p. 69.

²⁷ Etzold G. 1975, p. 195.

²⁸ Etzold G. 1975, p. 195.

²⁹ Etzold G. 1975, p. 195.

³⁰ Etzold G. 1975, p. 195.

³¹ Viires A. 2006, p. 214; see also: Laur M. 2003, p. 184f.

³² Heinmaa H. 2017, p. 50ff.

Tallinn during the 1770s, a professor at a secondary school earned about 250 roubles annually and a secondary school teacher earned about 150 roubles.³³ So, it can be concluded that if Michael Meyer had had to earn a living as a musician and not spent a single kopeck to live on, it would have taken him more than a hundred years to accumulate his fortune. Of course, there were even wealthier merchants and nobles in Tallinn, but compared to the intelligentsia and artisans, Meyer was undeniably a wealthy citizen. To put things in context, we should note that a bottle of beer cost 1 kopeck in the 1770s.³⁴

Michael Meyer's property is very diverse considering his wealth and occupation and the list of the included items alone would require a separate publication. Therefore, the following is limited to a few examples and a general survey. An interesting aspect is how much the inventory of Michael Meyer's property reflects the love of luxury which his wealth afforded him. Meyer's legacy includes luxurious and fashionable goods and valuables, which various state and city authorities consistently sought to regulate more or less successfully with various rules, prohibitions, and orders. He also owned modern furniture, precious stones and jewellery, mirrors, paintings, books, silverware, porcelain dishes, fine fabrics, pleasure substances, and the like.

As for the various currencies in circulation (*an contantem Gelde*), Michael Meyer did not pay much attention to the collection of coins and banknotes. There were many different currencies in Meyer's legacy, but not conspicuously many. Thus, 19 ducats, 937 roubles, 18 Albertus thalers, 371 local copper roubles, and several other smaller currencies are listed.³⁵ The international currencies of the time are represented, including the Albertus thaler, which was the most widely used in foreign trade, and gold Dutch ducats. It is noteworthy that valuables and other items in the inventory were valued in Dutch ducats, while the assets sold at auction were settled in silver roubles, thus testifying to the fact that Tallinners habitually made use of various currencies in an amicable way.³⁶

As a rural merchant, the inventory of Michael Meyer's wealth provides an excellent overview of the items that were sold primarily to peasants. However, his clients almost certainly included wealthy citizens and nobles for whom more luxurious goods were intended. Thus, it can be assumed that the 15 wide gold rings, the value of which varied between 1 and 21 ducats, were not intended for trading with the peasantry. Even more valuable were two gold necklaces, one worth 51 ducats and the other 31 ducats. According to regulations enacted in 1631, only merchants were allowed to wear gold necklaces.³⁷

He also owned a gold brooch with nine unspecified gemstones, a gold ring with a diamond and two rubies, a gold ring with three diamonds, and two strings of genuine pearls. No attempt was made to estimate their monetary value during the inventory. Meyer's inventory also includes a pair of gold buttons and a pair of enamelled earrings listed under the category of *an Juwelen, Perlen und Gold*. It should be noted that, in the 1780 regulations regarding the luxury items that the nobles of the Estonian knighthood could wear, even silver and gold buttons were forbidden.³⁸

As a dignified citizen, Meyer also had a silver watch with a minute display on a silver chain.³⁹ For wealthier Tallinners, wearing an expensive gold or silver pocket watch was a ques-

³³ Elias O. H. 1978, p. 209.

³⁴ Hupel A. W. 1777, p. 316.

³⁵ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 8p–9.

³⁶ See also: Tender E. 1937, p. 531; Verdenhalven F. 1968; Leimus I. 2014, p. 115–128.

³⁷ Tallinna ajalugu. 1976, p. 281; TLA.190.1.2; Pajur A. 2020; see also: Pallasma P. 1994; Pullat R., Suurmaa L. 2008; Ilmakunnas J. 2009.

³⁸ Pallasma P. 1994, p. 6, 46, 70.

³⁹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 9–10r.

tion of prestige,⁴⁰ and by the 1750s a pocket watch had already become the norm for the wealthier members of the urban population. The inventory of alderman Johann Christoph von Husen, compiled in Tallinn on 20 May 1758 (the same year as Meyer's inventory), includes the following: *1 Silberne Taschen Uhre, welche bey dem Uhrmacher Pechelin zu beßern seyn soll.*⁴¹ We find a similar entry in merchant Martin Heinrich Bogemell's inventory, which was compiled on 22 December 1758.⁴²

When trying to estimate the value of a pocket watch, it should be noted that a used silver watch cost around 13 roubles in Tallinn in the 1770s.⁴³ Based on the example of Finland, it can be said that, during the Enlightenment, a silver pocket watch was just as expensive as a work-horse and a Holstein cow could be bought for a gold pocket watch.⁴⁴ The value of a pocket watch in Tallinn was similar.

In the case of all the valuables mentioned above, it is not known whether they were Meyer's own possessions, items that his deceased spouse has inherited, investments for his old age, or trading items. In any case, luxury items provided social protections and served as capital investments for their owners, by strengthening their economic position in the event of possible devaluation, illnesses or old age.

In total, Meyer owned gold objects and precious stones worth at least 40 ducats. However, since the monetary value of many items was not recorded, their value could have totalled as much as 100–150 Dutch ducats.

The silver items listed together with their weight also provide an idea of Meyer's wealth.⁴⁵ Silver weighing 1,224.98 *loths* (approx. 20 kg) is listed.⁴⁶ Among the heaviest, and thus most valuable, silverware is a gilded silver pitcher weighing 123.5 *loths* (approx. 2 kg)⁴⁷, a three-tap coffee pot (*Coffe-Kanne mit 3 Hahn*) weighing 128.5 *loths*, and old peasant silver, weighing 123 *loths*. Also listed are: three lighter weight gilded silver pitchers, three ordinary and eight large silver spoons, three salt cellars, a milk pitcher, two teapots and a teaspoon, a candy tray, two potash containers, one plate, bowls, a sugar bowl, three beakers, two sugar tongs, five tobacco canisters (one of which had an ivory bottom), as well as one medicine container, one silver sword, a silver brooch with a large Bohemian stone, 19 ordinary silver brooches, a heart-shaped balsam container (*Balsam-Dose en form eines Hertzens*), etc. Thus, Meyer's inventory also reflects the fact that during the Enlightenment, the importance of personal silverware among merchants increased significantly.

Although the monetary value of the silver items is not indicated, their market price can be found in the sales records from the auction of Meyer's property. For example, the average price of a silver tobacco canister was three roubles.⁴⁸

It should be noted that the earliest record of a coffee pot (*Caffe-Kanne*) in the property inventory of a Tallinn resident is dated 1722, and is that of Michael Meyer's older brother, Johann

⁴⁰ In Sweden and Finland pocketwatches became popular in the second half of the 18th century, the same time as in Estonia, see: Lehto M.-L. 1981; Herranen M. 1995.

⁴¹ Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2002, p. 79.

⁴² Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2002, p. 94.

⁴³ Heinrich Ernst Giese vara oksjonimüügi protokoll 1777. aastast (Auction sale record of Heinrich Ernst Giese's property from 1777), TLA.230.2.106, 21–26.

⁴⁴ Herranen M. 1995, p. 237.

⁴⁵ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 10r–12r.

⁴⁶ Lexikon. 1979; Kirme. K. 2000.

⁴⁷ This silver pitcher was one of the few items that, for unknown reasons, was not sold at the auction of Meyer's property, TLA.230.1.Ae10, 266.

⁴⁸ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 121.

Gotthilff Meyer, a merchant who died at the age of 31.⁴⁹ However, coffee drinking had been widespread since at least the 1690s, and based on current information, the first café was opened in Tallinn in 1702.⁵⁰ It was owned by Alphonso Tellado Carvallido, who came from Zaragoza in Spain.⁵¹ Coffee evenings started taking place at the Tallinn Great Guild in 1744 at the latest. In the second half of the 18th century, Tallinners already widely preferred coffee to tea.⁵²

Michael Meyer's silver coffee pot weighed almost 2 kg and had three taps. The impressive legacy of Hermann Clayhills, one of the great merchants of Tallinn (died 24 May 1764), also included *Eine silberne Coffee-Kanne mit 3 Hahnen*⁵³ and the inventory compiled for Peter Kliesendorff on 24 July 1762 also tells us that he had a brass coffee pot with three taps.⁵⁴ *1 Coffe Kanne mit 3 Hahnen* is also listed in the inventory (compiled on 18 December 1783) of Gottfried Michaloffsky, a glassmaker who was the elder of his guild.⁵⁵ Of these four coffee pots, each with three taps, Michael Meyer's pot is dated the earliest, and somewhat specifies the time of arrival of this type of coffee pot in Tallinn.

From the middle of the 18th century, sugar was widely used and loved in Tallinn. This is evidenced by the numerous sugar canisters, bowls, shakers, and tongs included in the inventories of Michael Meyer, as well as other merchants and craftsmen in Tallinn. Previously, sugar had been a luxury item.⁵⁶

Numerous jewelry and other silver items pawned by peasants also added a unique addition to Michael Meyer's valuables.⁵⁷ The peasants had mainly pawned necklaces (*Corallen*), brooches, and rings, as well as a breast ornament, a gilded cross, a headdress, and perforated state thalers. In total, an impressive number of peasants, in addition to some townspeople, had pledged their property to Meyer.

Although items made of various other metals cannot be considered luxurious, it is worth noting a few. Michael Meyer had a total of 136 pewter items.⁵⁸ Based on the quantities, it can be concluded that some of them were intended for sale. Thus, the following are listed: 46 pewter bowls with a total weight of 169.5 lb., 14 deep plates (13 lb.), 9 shallow plates (8 lb.), 4 dozen plates (56 lb.), 15 plates (16 lb.), 7 bowls (38 lb.), 2 barrels (20 lb.), in addition to a pewter soup bowl, a butter dish, 9 table decorations, 6 dishes, a chamber pot and a night lamp, a teapot, an inkpot, etc. The total weight of the new and used copper vessels was 1,094.5 lb. These included ten kettles with taps, a malt frying pan, 37 malt cooking pots, and 35 other items.⁵⁹

The list also included 33 kettles (total weight of 91 lb.) and 79 various household items (287.75 lb.) made of brass,⁶⁰ 14 steel items, and numerous iron and tin products.⁶¹

The list of animal skins (*an Futterwerck*) owned by Michael Meyer is remarkable. It includes a marten-skin lining for a man's coat, 21 tanned marten skins, 13 marten tails, two tanned fox

⁴⁹ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. 1997, p. 225.

⁵⁰ Coffee services first appeared in Europe in the late 17th century in England, Suurmaa L. 2004, p. 67.

⁵¹ See also: Vende V. 1996, p. 3.

⁵² In the early 18th century, tea was still a luxury drink or a medicine in the towns on the Baltic Sea, Formey J.L. 1796, p. 74.

⁵³ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. 1997, p. 201.

⁵⁴ Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2006, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Nachlassverzeichnisse. 2006, p. 302; see also: Wiegelmann G. 2006, p. 172.

⁵⁶ Suurmaa L. 2004, p. 64.

⁵⁷ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 12r–21r.

⁵⁸ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 21r–23r.

⁵⁹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 23r–26.

⁶⁰ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 26r–28r.

⁶¹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 28r–30.

skins, five precious tanned ermine skins, two untanned otter skins and four swan skins.⁶² Only wealthy people could afford the exclusive furs from Russia, such as sable, mink, and ermine, and they were only found in the inventories of rich merchants.

Some of the weapons (*an Gewehr*) that were part of Meyer's legacy can also be classified as luxury items — in particular, a brass sword with silver decoration and six rifles that are included in the inventory. It is not known how, whether through inheritance or by some other means, or why Meyer acquired an old sword, 18 old rifle locks, two old pistols, two old sword blades, and three old leather gun bags.⁶³ Of spices and exotic foodstuffs, Meyer owned large amounts of pepper, cocoa, laurel, almonds, sugar, coffee beans, plums, and raisins.⁶⁴

Meyer's legacy also includes a number of valuable porcelain items — eleven decorated brown teacups and saucers, six small teacups and saucers, two dozen grooved teacups, and 18 smooth teacups, making a total of 76 porcelain teacups.⁶⁵ Based on the inventories of 47 Tallinn merchants, those who departed this world owned more porcelain cups and plates than anything else made of porcelain. Thus, the inventory of Meyer's possessions reflects a significant change in the dining culture of the 18th century, as faience and porcelain tableware became popular. In the 18th century, the demand for fine tableware increased among the wealthier citizens. Pure porcelain was an obvious sign of fine taste and wealth.⁶⁶ Porcelain plates, bowls, pitchers, and cups are rarely found in artisan inventories. During the first three decades of the 18th century, few pieces of porcelain tableware can be found in property inventories, but the number increases sharply in the 1740s.

The merchants of Tallinn had as many as seven times fewer faience cups than porcelain ones. Starting in the 1730s, the famous Delft faience ware was often listed as a separate asset group on property lists. Faience ware became less popular toward the end of the 18th century, as it was unable to compete with finer porcelain or cheaper stoneware. Half of Tallinn's merchants, including Michael Meyer, did not have any faience dishes in their cupboards at home. Only ten merchants had more than ten faience cups.

However, Meyer had several stoneware (*Steingut*) dishes that imitated faience,⁶⁷ including six dozen blue-and-white teacups, three dozen Delft-style plates and eleven blue-and-white plates.⁶⁸ Hot punch was also a favourite among wealthier Tallinners, as evidenced by the five blue-and-white and two white ceramic punch bowls (*Punsch-Schaalen*) owned by Meyer.

Meyer also owned numerous glassware, including a box of window glass, a multicoloured butter dish, two cupboard mirrors, 33 glasses, eight beer glasses, eleven vodka glasses, a salt container, ten decanters, and 672 glass bottles (*Bouteiller in einem Fass*).⁶⁹ The bottles were used primarily for beer and wine, and were widely produced by Estonian glassworks.⁷⁰

⁶² TLA.230.1.Ae10, 38.

⁶³ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 39–39r.

⁶⁴ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 53–54.

⁶⁵ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 39r–40.

⁶⁶ See: Raik A. 1973; Chrościcki L. 1989; Heimvell E. 2000.

⁶⁷ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 40–40r.

⁶⁸ Unlike his father, alderman Bernhard Johann Meyer, who died in 1805, also owned crystal and faience ware. It is also noticeable that there were significantly more mirrors among the son's household items as well as technological innovations including a barometer (invented in 1643 by the Italian physicist and mathematician Evangelista Torricelli), a thermometer (a mercury thermometer invented in 1714 by the German physicist Daniel Gabriel Fahrenheit) and a camera obscura. Also, there was significantly more art pieces including busts, copper engravings and paintings, as well as globes, board games and musical instruments, among his son's legacy. Fifty paintings were registered as part of Bernhard Meyer's legacy, along with another 14 copper engravings that hung on the walls of his residence, which is significantly more than the art resources of any other member of Tallinn's town council and the central government, TLA.230.1.437, 31–43; Pullat R. 2008.

⁶⁹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 40r–41r.

⁷⁰ Mankin U. 1995, p. 64; Suurmaa L. 2004, p. 45.

The ratio of liquor and beer glasses in this inventory vividly illustrates the situation in the 18th century during which Estonia was becoming a vodka-drinking rather than a beer-drinking country.

Meyer's diverse list of household items provides a good idea of a prosperous merchant's home. The list of furniture and other household items includes the following: eleven cabinets (including two that have two doors and a long drawer and are made of walnut; a black lacquered and lockable double-door cabinet with a drawer, and a large six-doored *Krahm-Schrancke*), 19 tables, eight benches, 32 chairs, three armchairs, four mirrors, two 24-hour grandfather clocks, a wall clock, a bed, and a sundial. Seventeen paintings decorated his residence.⁷¹ All these objects undoubtedly increased the comfort of the living space and raised the self-esteem of the Tallinners during the Age of Enlightenment. The different forms and types of furniture, their decor and colour, helped to increase the aesthetic level of the homes and to demonstrate the wealth of the owners. Thus, there was a direct correlation between wealth and the display of furniture.

Meyer also had an abundance of linen fabric, fine fabrics, bedding, and bedlinen (*an leinen Zeug, an feiner Leinwand und Wäsche, an Bettzeug*). He had 3,563 Tallinn ells (*Ellen*)⁷² of linen fabric, as well as fine linen canvas. There was an impressive number of tablecloths, napkins and towels — 66 tablecloths, 100 napkins, 45 towels, and a couple of Russian sauna towels. The articles of clothing included the following: a Dutch dress shirt with lace and cuffs, 21 men's undershirts, 18 women's undershirts, 14 collars, four neckerchiefs, five pairs of boots and cuffs, as well as three children's towels. The following bedding and bed linen is listed: 16 mattresses, 25 pairs of small pillows (one from Canton, China), 80 bed sheets, 34 pillowcases, 19 sets of bed linens, three sets of linens with Warendorf corners, two blankets, nine Russian-linen sheets, etc.⁷³ In addition, the list includes 21 bundles of linens, four linen curtains, green taffeta curtains, yarn, and wool.

It isn't possible to deal in detail with the various men's and women's clothing listed in this inventory, but we should mention some examples. The men's clothing includes six coats, three vests, three pairs of trousers, two coats, two nightshirts, a breast covering, nine hats, six caps, five pairs of gloves, 32 pairs of silk socks, seven old wigs, and three poor-quality Spanish canes.⁷⁴ The women's clothing includes five dresses, a coat, two skirts, a corset, a breast covering, nine neckerchiefs, four aprons, a hat, a hanger (*Bügel*), and silk.⁷⁵ The women's clothing probably belonged to Meyer's wife, who had died 14 years earlier. In his will, Meyer bequeathed these clothes to his sister Anna Dorothea Meyer.⁷⁶

Twenty-two book lists are included in the asset lists of 33 Tallinn merchants, so the share of merchants who owned books is quite large (66.7%). There are a total of 611 books on these lists, which is not many, considering the wealth of Tallinn's merchants. Michael Meyer's legacy also included only a few books.⁷⁷

However, the number of vehicles in Meyer's legacy is impressive. Understandably, most of them were intended for sale. Thus, he owned 281 peasant sleds, eleven sleighs, nine peasant wagons, five Russian sleighs, and four small sleighs, as well as horse tacks. He also owned one old *Chaise*, a Riga sleigh, and a large wagon (*Fuhrwagen*).⁷⁸ The latter vehicles may have been

⁷¹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 41r–50.

⁷² 1 ell = 1.25 yards in length.

⁷³ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 30–34.

⁷⁴ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 34r–36.

⁷⁵ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 36–38.

⁷⁶ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 2r.

⁷⁷ Compared to the merchants, Michael's son Bernhard Johann Meyer, with his 258 books, was one of the most educated townspeople, see also: Reimo T. 2001.

⁷⁸ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 69r.

personally used by Meyer. In the 18th century, the *chaise*, a light, two- or four-wheeled vehicle with a French name, became very popular.⁷⁹ (Fig. 4).

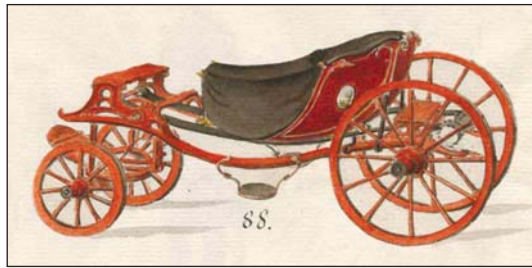


Fig. 4. Chaise, drawing from Johann Christoph Brotze Collection (source: University of Latvia Academic Library, Inv. No BM03072A)

Ryc. 4. Bryczka (landolet/kariolka), rys. z kolekcji Johanna Christopha Brotze (źródło: Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Łotewskiego, nr inw. BM03072A)

In any case, on the basis of Meyer's inventory, it appears that the residents of Tallinn had sufficient means of transport and haulage to perform their daily tasks, as well as the necessary horse tack, i.e., saddles, collars, yoke harnesses, etc.

The following domestic animals are included in Meyer's property inventory: two brown horses, two cows, and two pigs. Traditionally, merchants had fewer domestic animals than Meyer did.

Michael Meyer's voluminous and rich inventory also gives a detailed overview of his housing and real estate (*an liegenden Gründen*). Wealthy merchants owned a lot of real estate, including meadows. For example, Michael Meyer owned a large and a small house on Karja Street (*Karri Strasse*), a stone house on Brookusmägi (*Brocks-Berge*), the main building of a summer manor in Kristiine (*Christinen-Thäler*) with outbuildings (incl. a sauna, cellar, stable, barn and a tavern with a bowling alley⁸⁰) and meadow. He also owned a tavern in front of the Great Coastal Gate (*Strand-Pforte*) and a tavern in the suburb of Kivisilla (*bey der Stein-Brücke*), as well as a tavern in Kalamaja (*Fischer-Moggi*), a garden plot and part of a meadow in Tonismäe (*St. Anthoni-Berge*), along with outbuildings,⁸¹ and a house that was rented out in Paldiski (*Roggerwieck*).⁸² After his death, everything was sold except for one tavern, the summer manor in Kristiine, and the house in Paldiski.

The fact that Meyer owned serfs (*Erbleute*), which was not very common for merchants, provides an indication of his wealth. In his will, he granted complete freedom to all his serfs after his death.

As was the custom, in his will, Michael Meyer makes donations to a poorhouse and an orphanage and either waives the claims against his debtors, or asks for them to be treated with leniency.⁸³ He also bequeaths his deceased wife's clothes to his sister, some silver items to his merchant's journeyman (*zwei silberne Löffel und ein paar silberne Schue-Schnallen*), a *grüne Pfand Cofte* to his nurse, and a gold ring to a servant.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ See also: Hein A. et al. 2006; Viires A. 2006, p. 209.

⁸⁰ In the legacy of Michael's son Bernhard Meyer, instead of a bowling alley, a mahogany pool table is listed, Pullat R. 2008, pp. 163-177.

⁸¹ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 7-8r.

⁸² TLA.230.1.Ae10, 8r.

⁸³ TLA.230.1.Ae10, 3r.

⁸⁴ TLA.230.1.Ae10.

In regard to the rest of his legacy, his sole heir was his minor son, Bernhard Meyer, for whom he named his brother-in-law Adam Hinrich Brockhausen as guardian.⁸⁵ As compensation, he gave Brockhausen the use of a tavern in Kristiine until his son reached the age of majority. He assigned the guardianship of the tavern in front of the Great Coastal Gate to the Town Orphan's Court (*Stadt-Waisen-Gerichte*).

Fortunately, the 1806 inventory of the legacy of Bernhard Johann Meyer, Michael Meyer's only son, has also survived.⁸⁶ Nearly half a century separates the inventories of father and son, making it possible to compare the genesis of the material culture of a merchant family through two generations. Since Bernhard Meyer was a minor when his father died and his father's assets were sold at auction instead of being bequeathed, it is impossible in this case to see to what extent the composition and nature of the assets changed or remained the same through two generations,⁸⁷ or what material continuity existed and how much the assets increased or decreased, and how they were preserved and bequeathed. On the other hand, a comparison of these inventories could make it possible to see how different or similar the fortunes of two dignified Tallinn citizens — a father and a son — were, half a century apart, when both had good start-up capital but essentially had to start from scratch. One represented the merchant class and the other the literati and town authorities.⁸⁸

IV. Conclusions

This article only provides a brief survey of Michael Meyer's material world and the reports on the auctions of his assets certainly deserve further analysis. This would make it possible to determine the price that was actually paid for various new or used items and which items were valued higher than others. In some cases, the auction reports leave the impression that Meyer's legacy was sold below market price, but this assertion requires the exclusion of possible objective reasons and a thorough comparative analysis. In any case, the unique body of sources, *i.e.* Michael Meyer's will, property inventory, and auction reports, provides comprehensive insight into the development of Tallinn's material culture, *i.e.* the material culture history of Northern Europe, during the century of Enlightenment.

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Inwentarz dóbr Michaela Meyera (1758) jako odbicie świata rzeczy rewalskiego kupca doby oświecenia

Inwentarz pośmiertny rewalskiego kupca Michaela Meyera jest jednym z najobszerniejszych rejestrów dóbr osiemnastowiecznych obywateli tegoż miasta. W tym unikatowym źródle znalazł odbicie niemal kompletny świat rzeczy mieszczanina.

Michael Meyer przyszedł na świat w 1704 r., jako szóste dziecko w kupieckiej rodzinie. Nie był to spokojny czas. Od 1700 r. trwała wyniszczająca trzecia wojna północna, a nieco wcześniej region dotknęła klęska wielkiego głodu. W 1710 r., gdy Meyer miał 6 lat, wojska rosyjskie obległy Rewal, pustoszony w tym czasie też przez zarazę. Jesienią tegoż roku plaga zabrała ojca, starszą siostrę i młodszego brata Michaela. Z przedwojennej, ponad dwunastotysięcznej populacji miasta, przeżyło mniej niż dwa tysiące osób. Pomimo dzieciństwa i młodości przepełnionych trudami i przeciwnościami, Meyer szybko został jednym z najlepiej prosperujących kupców rewalskich. W 1740 r., w wieku 36 lat złożył przysięgę, stając się pełnoprawnym obywatelem Rewala, zaś 4 lata później ożenił się. Niestety życiem małżeńskim cieszył się tylko przez dziesięć miesięcy; jego żona zmarła w połogu w tydzień po urodzeniu ich pierwszego i jedyne go syna. Michael nie ożenił się ponownie, kolejne 14 lat życia poświęcając wychowaniu syna i swej pracy. Zmarł w 1758 r., zostawiając nieletniego Bernharda jako jedyne go spadkobiercę.

Inwentarz dóbr Meyera w sposób szczegółowy obrazuje jego sukces zawodowy, styl życia i zainteresowania. Rejestr różnorodnego wyposażenia gospodarstwa domowego daje wyobrażenie o standardzie życia zamożnego kupca z północnego wschodu osiemnastowiecznej Europy. Dodatkowych danych na ten temat dostarczają informacje o publicznych licytacjach rzeczy należących do Michaela, które przeprowadzono rok po jego śmierci. Całość jego nieruchomości i dóbr ruchomych wyceniono na 11 tysięcy rubli, co pozwala go zaliczyć do przedstawicieli klasy średniej miejscowego kupiectwa. Gdyby zarabiał jako muzyk, nie wydając na utrzymanie nawet kopiejki, musiałby pracować przez ponad 100 lat, by dorobić się takiego majątku. O jego bogactwie świadczy też, rzadkie wśród kupców, posiadanie chłopów pańszczyźnianych, których, co ciekawe, wyzwolił zapisem w swoim testamencie.

Zachował się również inwentarz pośmiertny jedynego spadkobiercy kupca — Bernharda Johanna Meyera. Sporządzony w 1806 r., niemal pół wieku po rejestrze dóbr Michaela, pozwala prześledzić materialne aspekty codzienności dwóch pokoleń kupieckiej rodziny, ukazując podobieństwa i różnice w majątku szacownych obywateli tego ośrodka, ojca i syna.

Analizowany, unikatowy materiał źródłowy — testament, inwentarz pośmiertny oraz rejestry aukcyjne majątku Michaela Meyera — umożliwia wgląd w rozwój kultury materialnej Rewala, a tym samym w historię kultury materialnej Europy Północnej doby oświecenia.

Tłumaczenie
Maciej Radomski