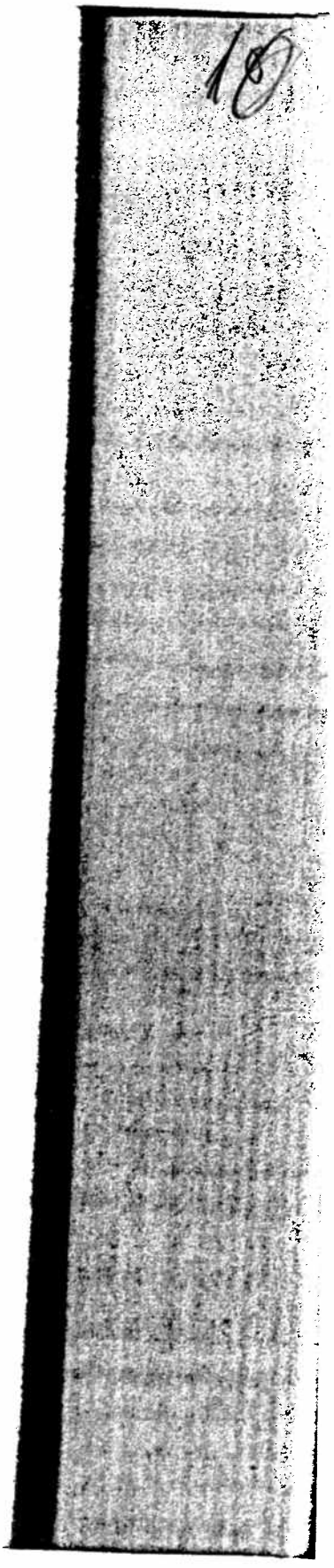
Das Bild und die Wahrnehmung der Stadt und der städtischen Gesellschaft im Hanseraum im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit

herausgegeben von Roman Czaja

Toruń 2004



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A Quest for New Charters: Argumentation and Justification in Swedish and Finnish Town Histories from the Eighteenth Century[1]

Introduction

In the eighteenth century, travellers journeying through Sweden were critical of what they saw. Especially smaller towns caught their eye. Travellers through the native country like Carl Linneaus described towns as pastoral idylls whose burghers were mostly occupied with farming, fishing and keeping livestock. During his journey through southern Sweden in 1749, he described the small town of Falsterbo: in his diary he wrote that it „looks like an open peasants' village" but also „a beautiful meadow", images which hardly relates to the town as a place of commerce and industry[2]. According to this image, sectors like trading and manufacturing were not taken care of as they should. In eighteenth century Sweden provincial towns were frequently portrayed in this way, i. e. as sleepy villages where life did not differ from the rest of the countryside. This is a well known image of the early modern Swedish town, and in modern times it has been carried on by historians who have wanted to assess the economic importance of the towns[3].

In this paper I would like to present an alternative way of perceiving towns in the eighteenth century. The material which will be used here are descriptions of towns written by university students from 1700 to 1799. Nearly all of

[1]This paper is a part of my ongoing thesis on the production of geographical knowledge about the native country in eighteenth-century Sweden. The thesis is to be published in 2004 and will include a summary in English.

[2]C. Linneaus, *Carl Linneaus skånska resa år 1749*, Stockholm 1959, p. 261.

[3]See for example E. F. Hecksher, *Sveriges ekonomiska historia från Gustav Vasa*, II, Stockholm 1949.

the authors wrote about their home town, thus giving an insider's opinion on a place. This genre of topographical dissertations existed from the late years of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, and their production peaked between the years 1730 and 1770 (roughly seen), a period in Swedish history which is known as the Age of Liberty. During this epoch, lasting from the fall of absolutism in 1721 to the coupe detat's of Gustavus III in 1772, political power was in the hands of the four estates (nobility, clergy, burghers and peasantry). It was marked by a will to make social and economic reforms; moral and economic improvement for the common good became an important political goal. The topographical dissertations produced around mid-century can be seen as an expression of this will to get to know the state of the country and to lay a foundation for the improvement of society.

Topographical dissertations

In the course of the eighteenth century, nearly 70 academic dissertations describing the history and topography of towns were produced at the universities in the kingdom of Sweden with Finland[4]. These dissertations consisted of almost 100 volumes with 85 different authors (co-authors excluded), which was quite a large quantity considering the highly limited resources available for this kind of work in eighteenth-century Sweden. Given a closer look, these dissertations were the lion's share of the production of Swedish (and Finnish) town histories during the eigheteenth century. True, a number of voluminous monographies, periodical articles and county histories describing towns were also published, but the quantity of these publications amounted to no more than about half of the academic ones[5]. Because the dissertations were part of a different context (i. e. the university) than the non-academic literature, I here deal exclusively with these odd 70 academic town histories.

In the time period considered here, Sweden had three universities: Uppsala, located north of Stockholm and being the largest university, Lund in the south of Sweden and Turku in Finland. As is shown in Table 1, a majority of dissertations describing towns were produced in Uppsala. Even when taken together, Lund and Turku represents only a smaller portion (or 39 per cent)

[4]These town histories comprised the larger part of all topographical dissertations published at the Swedish universities in the eighteenth century. M. Jokipii, *Nuläget inom den lokalhistoriska forskningen*, in: *Lokalhistoriska studier*, J. Kuusanmäki & S. Lindgren (eds.), Helsinki 1979, p. 25.

[5]18 monographies, 22 periodical articles and 12 county histories (with separate articles on the towns) were also published.

of the total production. Furthermore, it becomes evident that the Age of Liberty (1721 - 1772) was a period when the production of such descriptions culminated. What the table does not show, however, is that the universities had somewhat different view on topographical knowledge. Uppsala generally had a more antiquarian approach, while Turku in the 1740's became something of a centre for economic or 'useful' knowledge.

Beginning around mid-century, it became possible to write dissertations in Swedish and not just in Latin, as had been the rule earlier. Turku was the first (in 1752) university granted this right, and economics was for a long time the only subject in which Swedish was allowed. The immediate reason was that the main purpose of economics was to spread useful knowledge, and from that point of view Latin was obsolete, representing arcaic and erudite learning[6]. To a large extent, Turku produced topographical descriptions with an economic perspective, and a majority of them were printed in Swedish. Lund had a persistently small production and no distinctive perspective.

Table 1. Number of town descriptions produced at the universities in Uppsala, Lund and Turku respectively in 1700 - 1799.

	1700 - 1719	1720 - 1739	1740 - 1759	1760 - 1779	1780 - 1799	Total
Uppsala	6	16	8	8	5	43
Lund	1	-	5	1	5	12
Turku	1	2	6	5	1	15
Total	8	18	19	14	11	-

Sources: Carl Gustaf Warmholtz, *Bibliotheca Historica Sveo-Gothica*, Stockholm 1782; Kristian Setterwall, *Svensk Historisk Bibliografi 1771 - 1874*, Uppsala 1937.

In this paper I want to direct attention to two circumstances. First I will show how the authors of town histories were closely connnected to the towns they set out to describe. Secondly I will argue that the way a town and its history was depicted by an author was strongly influenced by his connection to (or dependence on) local society. Earlier research[7] on Swedish topographi-

[6] B. Lindberg, *De lärdes modersmal*, Göteborg 1985.

[7] To mention only the most important works: C. Annerstedt, *Upsala universitets historia 1719 - 1792*, Uppsala 1914, pp. 359 - 362; B. Olsson, *Svenska ämbetsmäns insatser i svenskt hembygdsarbete*, in: *Svensk bygd och folkkultur i samling, forskning och vård*, S. Erixon & Å. Campbell (eds.), P. II, Stockholm 1947; H. Richter, *Geografiens historia i Sverige intill år 1800*, Uppsala 1959, ch. 10; S. Lindroth, *Svensk lärdomshistoria. Frihetstiden*, Stockholm 1978, pp. 125 - 133; M. Adolfsson, *Fäderneslandets kännedom. Om svenska ortsbeskrivningsprojekt och ämbetsmäns folklivsskildringar under 1700- och 1800-talet*, Stockholm 2000, pp. 267 - 277.

cal literature has exclusively focused on the intellectual and scientific value of the genre, generally interpreting it as the result of a wish to assess the state of the kingdom after the end of the Great Nordic War in 1718. Therefore, topographical literature has been interpreted solely within the context of a national and academic discourse. The local context, which primarily serves to problematize the relationship between the author and his town, has largely been neglected by earlier scholars.

The purpose of writing about the home town was not just to make a humble contribution to the knowledge about the native country, as often was stated in the prefaces of these descriptions. By adding the local aspect to the study of town histories, I hope it will become evident that one of the main purposes with writing the history of a town was in fact to manifest civic pride and to reproduce the social order[8].

Authors and patrons of town histories

Most university students in eighteenth-century Sweden lived under poor circumstances[9]. Many of them were the sons of common parish priests, peasants and burghers. In order to graduate, the student had to publish and publicly defend a dissertation. The printing cost of this dissertation was a heavy burden for the student (the dissertation was often printed in 600 copies)[10], and for this reason the student generally had to seek support from patrons of art[11]. In return, these patrons received dedications in the final work. In some cases, they were even mentioned in the description itself[12].

Dedications generally served the purpose of confirming the social status of the patron:[13] they showed his or her title(s), name and relationship to the

[8] See also an earlier essay in which I compare Swedish and Finnish town descriptions from the eighteenth century: *1700-talets ortsbeskrivningar: nationellt projekt eller lokalt identitetsskapande? En undersökning av svenska och finska stadsbeskrivningar* [Eighteenth-century topographies: a national project or the shaping of local identity? A study of Swedish and Finnish town descriptions], SHT 120, 2000, pp. 527–552.

[9] M. Klinge, *Kungliga Akademien i Åbo 1640–1808*, Helsinki 1988, ch. D; S.-E. Åström, *Studentekonomi på 1700-talet*, HTF, 1981 no. 1; J. Strömberg, *Den lärde studenten i stormaktstidens Åbo*, HTF, 1999 no. 1.

[10] This information is taken from Annerstedt, *Upsala* (as note 7), p. 183. He also writes that the costs involved „surely were a rather great burden" for the student.

[11] Klinge, *Kungliga* (as note 9), p. 448.

[12] See e. g. A. P. Tidström, *De Mariaestadio vestrogothiae urbe cum vicina Mariaeholmia dynastica sede provinciae Skaraborgensis*, Stockholm 1748–1752.

[13] G. Sahlin, *Författarrollens förändring och det litterära systemet 1770–1795*, Stockholm 1989, pp. 64–65.

author, and sometimes they even contained elaborate poems written by the author for the patron[14]. No less than 57 of the 64 authors studied dedicated their work to one or more patrons. It is striking that all but two of them stated either the town or the county as their *patria* or native place, and every one of these authors directed dedications to persons or institutions operating in the town described or in its vicinity. Furthermore, nine out of ten (88 per cent) dissertations had dedications to leading civic offices in the town, like mayors and magistrate or a corporation of some sort (merchants, artisans, fishermen etc.). Often each and every member of the magistrate's court was mentioned with his name[15].

Somewhat fewer (58 per cent) dissertations contained dedications to some local church official. Less than half (42 per cent) of them were dedicated to the local governor, and the bishop of the diocese received a dedication in one out of three (33 per cent) dissertations. Roughly the same (37 per cent) can be said for other civic offices – like local customs officials or county clerks – or local inhabitants without an office. The latter ones could, however, still be characters carrying a prominent standing in local society, such as squires and nobles. Relatives were not uncommon in dedications, and the parents of the author were often included, especially in cases where the father was a mayor, a member of the town council or, most frequently, a local cleric. These offices constituted roughly half of all persons receiveing dedications.

This far, my observations indicate an intimate relationship between the topographer and the object of his description. In almost all cases, students writing the history of a town came from the very same town or its vicinity. Most of them seem to have received financial support of some sort from offices and institutions which were prominent in local society, such as the magistrates, some corporation or the parish. In order to graduate, these students generally depended upon local society. Obviously, this dependency must have given the student a substantial motive – beyond plain love for his *patria* – to describe the town in a favourable light. Dedications were not always just signs of gratitude, but could also function as declarations of loyalty and obedience. I will now move on to study how local interests were presented in town histories.

[14]See e.g. dedication to magistrate and burghers in S. Linnaeus, *De Wexionia urbe Smolandorum*, Lund 1743–1744, in which the author declares his deepest respect for the burghers of Växjö.

[15]See e.g. dedication to magistrate and burghers in M. F Hammar, *De Carlshamnia, urbe Blekingiae*, Lund 1749.

Local interests and the town history

Like other literature on topography, town histories were limited by genre conventions, and these tended to give the histories a rather homogenous disposition. These conventions, however, do not seem to have put any constraints on the way the interests of the town were presented. The rules of the topographical genre seem only to have regulated the order in which the different characteristics of a place were to be described, and not what the descriptions of these characteristics and topics should observe and deal with. The ordinary town history started with a brief chapter on the name, age and the foundation of the town, then it would move on to a closer description of the town's topography and economy (giving the church buildings and institutions a generous amount of space), ending with a short historical account of its vicissitudes of fortune, frequently in the form of a chronicle[16].

Motives for writing the town history were often stated in a foreword, in which the author had the opportunity to proclaim the love he felt for his native place. In many cases the need for increased knowledge about the state of the country was also stated[17]. Love for the *patria* was a fully legitimate motive for writing a town history, and as a consequence, readers should also have been expecting an account which portrayed the town positively. The pride of the town was its charters (letters of privilege), granted and confirmed by the king. Charters gave the town the right to exist, and the town was also depending on them for its survival. Therefore, the charters were often cited literally and accounted for in one or more lengthy chapters.

Swedish towns still dependend on charters granted by the king. The oldest charters, first granted in medieval times, had in many cases been renewed and confirmed several times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time, many new towns had been founded and granted often generous charters. Especially the first half of the seventeenth century stands out as a period when new towns were founded and set up in Sweden[18]. Simultaneously, the Crown established itself as an absolute state with an efficient administration. In many aspects towns became important local or regional centres for this growing administration. Their main task was to collect duties from traded merchandise, since commerce – at least in principle –was to be intermediated

[16]See e. g. P. Kastman, *De Wimmerbya, oppido Smolandiae*, Lund 1747, § IX. Kastman briefly describes how his town Vimmerby has been ravaged by fire, plague and war.

[17]See e. g. the preface in C. Bergman, *Historisk och oeconomisk beskrifning öfwer siö-staden Ekenæs*, Turku 1760.

[18]L. Nilsson, *Privilegiesystem under upplösning*, Stockholm 1989, p. 7.

by a town. Yet, beginning in the late seventeenth century the number of markets allowed increased remarkably, making it harder for towns to profit on trade[19]. At the same time all towns north of Stockholm and Turku were prohibited from trading with foreign ports, so even with extensive charters it could prove very hard for a small town to grow. This was a concern especially for newly founded towns, often located in parts of the country where no urban settlements had existed before and where the peasantry was used to trade more freely[20].

The towns of Kokkola and Pietarsaari

Looking more closely at how two neighbouring towns on the west coast of Finland depicted their social and economic situation in dissertations published around mid eighteenth-century, I shall give an example of how town histories could channel local interests. The histories considered in the following investigation were all written within the subject of economics and printed in Swedish. The two towns are the ports of Kokkola and Pietarsaari, founded in 1620 and 1653 respectively. From a national point of view they were around the 1750s regarded as a couple of conveniently located but rather small towns, lacking the right to trade with foreign ports[21]. Still, both towns grew substantially between the 1730s and the 1770s: in fourty years Kokkola almost doubled its population to 1300 inhabitants, and the population of Pietarsaari – being a considerably smaller settlement – grew from barely 400 to more than 650[22].

Kokkola was described in a two-piece dissertation[23] (the first part concerning the town and the second one dealing with the surrounding parish) defended in 1754 by the 22-year-old Jacob Chydenius. Jacob was the younger brother of Anders Chydenius, who later became a famous reformer in Swedish politics. While Anders succeeded his father as the vicar of Kokkola, Jacob became the vicar of the town of Vaasa not far south of Kokkola[24].

[19] N. Staf, *Marknadsreformen 1788*, Stockholm 1940, pp. 7–8.

[20] A. Sandström, *Plöjande borgare och handlande bönder*, Stockholm 1996. N.-E. Villstrand, *Stormaktstiden 1617–1721* (Finlands historia; 2), Helsingfors 1993, pp. 142–143.

[21] E. Tuneld, *Inledning til geographien öfwer Swerige*, Stockholm 1741, pp. 365–366.

[22] S. Lilja, *Historisk tätortsstatistik. D. 2, Städernas folkmängd och tillväxt: Sverige (med Finland) ca 1570-tal till 1810-tal*, Stockholm 1996, p. 30.

[23] J. Chydenius Jacobson, *Om Gamle Carleby*, Turku 1754.

[24] See the article *Chydenius* in *Svenskt Bibliografiskt Lexikon* [Swedish Bibliographical Dictionary]; O. E. A. Hjelt & A. Hästsko, *Pehr Kalms brev till samtida*, I, Helsinki 1914, p. 355.

What does Chydenius' dissertation tell us then? Like many other Finnish town histories it is a story of suffering but also of loyalty towards God and King, of the strains and satisfaction of building and rebuilding the town. Basically, a substantial portion (pp. 8–14; see also the second part's lengthy account of the civil war in the late 1500s) of the first part was an account of the harsh fates the town had faced since its foundation: the fire of 1664 which completely destroyed the newly built town, the famine at the turn of the century which forced everyone who survived to abandon the town, followed by the plague some ten years later, not to mention the ruthless Cossack raids of 1714/15. In 1721, after the end of the Great Nordic War, Kokkola was a deserted place without any commerce, Chydenius tells us. Those who had not starved to death, died from the plague or been slain had vanished from the parish, though not because of disloyalty or cowardice towards the King. According to Chydenius, no Finn had ever let his King down: the responsibility for the poor situation of today's Kokkola rested solely on the shoulders of a cruel and fierce enemy (pp. 8–9). Because of these misfortunes, Kokkola could in its present state not be more than „just a sapling" (p. 14), but the town was expected to thrive soon enough if only better fortunes awaited.

Chydenius' historical account mainly functioned as a background for the subsequent report on the economic condition of the town (pp. 25–36). First he described the economic structure of Kokkola, stating that it was becoming harder to earn a living because of the constantly growing population. Poor burghers were abundant due to the lack of trades, and the incomes from commerce could not possibly support all merchants with their households.

After having reported on the town's precarious economy, our topographer made some remarks on how it could be improved. Here he expressed conflicts within local society and between the town and its surroundings. These conflicts were caused by internal as well as external circumstances. Internally, members of the magistrate should be forced to take tests in economics in order for their suitability to be assessed, and there was also a problem with merchants who also jobbed on the side as lesser burghers (artisans), thus preventing the trades of the town from developing. Externally, the peasants of the interior had exploited the forests too heavily, raising the prices on timber and rendering shipbuilding in Kokkola nearly impossible. Interestingly enough, Chydenius did not accuse the closest living peasantry of doing so. His critique was solely directed against the peasants of neighbouring parishes.

What about Pietarsaari then? In fact, the only time Pietarsaari was mentioned by Chydenius was when he initially described the location of Kokkola (p. 4). Despite being its closest urban neighbour, the author hardly related

to Pietarsaari at all. The author of a dissertation[25] on this town, Hans Henric Aspegren, was the son of the rural dean. In his dissertation, Aspegren stated that the only reason the inhabitants of his native town were able to keep a living standard as high as the neighbouring towns was their moderate and industrious customs. Chydenius had represented Kokkola as an isolated community, seemingly independent of its closest surroundings. Pietarsaari, he complained, only had the right to trade within its parish, while both Uusikarlepyy (another coastal town somewhat south of Pietarsaari) and Kokkola were said to able to trade with as many as ten parishes each (pp. 27–28).

Access to the interior was not by far as important as the privilege to sail to foreign ports. According to Aspegren, Pietarsaari was for this purpose the best suited town in the whole county of Ostrobothnia because of its healthy climate, its location in the middle of the province (at this point he emphasized the proximity of the neighbouring towns) and its well adapted harbour (pp. 29–30). He acknowledged that Kokkola also had a central location, but its harbour was better suited for barges than for foreign merchant vessels. In similar ways, other towns of the province were rendered less suitable as staple ports. Then followed a detailed description of the fairways to and from Pietarsaari and a suggestion on how to improve access to the lakes in the interior of the province. In short, Aspegren's dissertation can be said to have been an obvious pleading for granting the town more generous charters.

Fourteen years later, in 1777, Aspegren (now addressed as „schoolmaster and engineer" and working as a surveyor) published an economic description[26] of the parish of Pietarsaari (the town being a part of it), apparently encouraged by his father, the old dean which Hans Henric's younger brother was appointed to succeed[27]. Kokkola had received staple privileges in 1765, but Pietarsaari would have to wait until the year 1793[28]. Apparently, Uusikarlepyy and Kokkola still traded with many more parishes than Pietarsaari did. Consequently, they were able to send off numerous vessels to Stockholm where they traded the tar and timber produced by the region's peasantry. Pietarsaari had but one individual market every year, and only cattle to be slaughtered for domestic

[25]H. H. Aspegren, *Försök til en historisk, geometrisk och physico-oeconomisk beskrifning öfwer Pedersöre sokn i Österbotn: Första delen, öfwer sjö-staden Jacobstad*, Turku 1763.

[26]H. H. Aspegren, *Pedersöre landtman eller tankar om landtbrukets hinder och hjelp i Pedersöre sokn af Österbotn och Wasa län*, Turku 1777.

[27]V. Lagus, *Åbo akademis studentmatrikel. Senare afdelningen 1740–1827*, Helsinki 1895, p. 129, 149.

[28]O. Nikula, *Stadsväsendet i Finland 1721–1875*, in: *Stadsväsendets historia i Finland*, Päiviö Tommila (ed.), Helsinki 1987, p. 138.

needs could be bought there. But as long as the trade with timber and tar – which threatened to lay the forests waste and force the peasants to break new but weaker soil – was restricted Pietarsaari would continue to grow, Aspegren assured the reader (pp. 10–12). In the description he presented quite a few suggestions on the improvement of the local economy, some of which had appeared already in his dissertation. In the final paragraph he proposed the founding of a market town some miles inland and the construction of a depot in the outskirts of the archipelago. Aspegren meant that all towns in northern Finland would benefit from such an improvement, but it is not hard to see which town they would hade benefitted the most: Pietarsaari would of course be the winner.

Conclusions

In short, I have shown that the authors of academic town histories in nearly all cases had strong connections to the described towns. Many of them were sons of local officials, burghers or clergy with a prominent standing in local society. The authors generally seem to have depended upon local resources for financing their graduation. In return, the author dedicated his dissertation to these individuals and institutions, thus confirming their standing in society and the hierarchical relationship between patron and client.

By giving an example of how neighbouring towns were described and related to each other, I have tried to show the topographer's partiality towards his native place despite his emphasis on the common good[29]. Earlier research has not, the topographer was not only involved in a national, academic discourse. He could also engage and take a stand in local politics and sensitive issues. Both Chydenius and Aspegren strongly defended their respective town, demonstrating civic pride but also a sense of being exposed of competition and danger. Chydenius was not afraid of criticizing those he thought did harm to his town, were they local inhabitants like merchants or council members, or outsiders (the peasantry). As a son of the vicar he had a solid position in the town and could hardly be accused of taking sides in local conflicts.

Much like Chydenius, Aspegren also enjoyed high standing in his own town, but he was evidently not interested in relating to internal conflicts.

[29]For more examples regarding the question of partiality and patriotism, see my recently published essay on economic topographies in Sweden 1740–1790: *Geografin i fosterlandets tjänst. De ekonomiska ortsbeskrivningarna i Sverige 1740–1790* [Geography in the Service of Native Country: the economic topographies of Sweden c. 1740–1790], Historiska och litteraturhistoriska studier 77, 2002, pp. 37–70.

Instead, he focused completely on presenting a vision or an idea, i.e. the making of Pietarsaari into a prospering place. In his description Pietarsaari stood out as a community enjoying undisputed unity and solidarity, a place where everyone strove toward a common goal. Its enemies, those who did not wish the dwellers of Pietarsaari the happiness they deserved, were to be found exclusively outside the community.

Pietarsaari was squeezed between the towns of Uusikarlepyy and Kokkola: anyone describing the situation of Pietarsaari simply had to relate to these towns, whereas Kokkola was considerably larger and better off. This is probably the reason why Aspegren actively related to Kokkola and why Chydenius almost ignored Pietarsaari.

To summarize, I have tried to show that earlier research on eighteenth-century Swedish topographical literature has excluded an important aspect, i.e. the relationship between the authors and the places they described. Most of the patrons financing the printing cost of a local history were to be found in the town described, and often patrons were directly related to the author. The author seems in many cases to have had the prospect of receiving a prominent office in the town, not seldom by succeeding his father as dean, vicar or perhaps mayor. He had often appearant reasons to write favourably about the town. By studying the local context in which most town histories were produced, it has become evident that an author often was dependant upon the town and that the history he wrote was shaped by this will to serve local interests.