

Probate Inventories as Sources for the Study of the History of Luxury in Estonian Towns in the Early Modern Period (18th Century)

Prof. dr. hab. Raimo Pullat and Lauri Suurmaa, MA (Tallinn)

One of the manifestations of socio-economic conflict between wealth and poverty is attitude towards luxury.¹ According to Voltaire people have declaimed against luxury for at least two thousand years, both in verse and in prose, but they have always delighted in it.

It can be maintained that the main reason why the issues connected with luxury have been raised is subjectivity. Nothing in itself is luxurious. People assign value to an object or a way of life depending on their world views, opinions, property status, etc.

According to a traditional definition luxury is that part of consumption which can be avoided as it does not affect the satisfaction of basic human needs. Luxury is certainly related to the person's position in the social hierarchy, to gender, wealth and even climate. It has been claimed that as long as one's place of living is warm and rainproof, one's food is healthy and one's drink is only for quenching thirst, everything else beyond it can be considered needless luxury.² Other problems connected with luxury have to do with social prestige, studied in great detail by Gerhard Jaritz, who looks at different strata in society and analyses social differentiation.³ Yet another important problem is associated

¹ **Henri Baudrillart**. *Histoire du luxe privé et public, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*. Paris 1880, vol. 1–4; **Cathleen S. Hoeniger**. *Cloth and Gold and Silver: Simone Martini's Techniques for Representing Luxury Textiles*. – *Gesta* 30.2. New York 1991, 154–162.

² See **Janusz Tazbir**. *La consommation et la Reforme. Les dissidents polonais et le probleme du luxe*. – *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*. 30.1.1982, 5–20; **Gunnar Mickwitz**. *Luxus- oder Massenware im späten Tuchfernhandel? – Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 32/ 1939, 245–250; more recent on the topic see **Gerhard Jaritz**. *Leggi suntuarie nelle aru di lingua tedesca*. – Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli und Antonella Campanini (Ed.). *Disciplinaire il lusso. La legeslazione suntuaria in Italia e in Europa tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*. Roma 2003, 137–143; **Andrzej Klonder**. *Mieszczanski luksus w szlacheckiej Rzeczypospolitej w XVI–XVIII wieku*. – *Documenta Pragensia XXII* (2004), 275–293; *Historia Gdańska*. Tom III/1: 1655–1793. Pod redakcją Edmunda Cieślaka. Gdańsk 1993, 644 etc.

³ **Gerhard Jaritz**. *Kleidung und Prestige-Konkurrenz. Unterschiedliche Identitäten in der stätischen Gesellschaft unter Normierungszwängen*. – Jan Assman, et al., and (ed.), *Sonderdruck: Saeculum* 44. München 1993, 8–31.

with luxury and this is consumption, central to the social theoretical discussion of "consumer society";⁴ it is a little-studied area in the historiography on the history of Estonia, Latvia and Finland.

A very important aspect is fashion; starting from the 17th century fashion was followed by the wealthy in most spheres of life. Fashion became an inseparable part of life. The domination of fashion was even denounced as tyrannical.⁵

Throughout time there have been attempts to limit and regulate luxury spending. Sumptuary laws were passed in antiquity, especially during the period of the disintegration of the Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church saw luxury as a threat to Christian morality and mentality. It was not only considered a sin but a possible damage to economy. The moralists and the writers were mostly concerned about clothing and hair styles. According to Janusz Tazbir, the festivities that lasted too long were a concern to the Polish dissidents.⁶

The Enlightenment thinkers August Wilhelm Hupel and Johann Christoph Petri, who were active in Estonia, approved of luxury.⁷ Hupel emphasised the geographical dimension. Luxury in this part of the world was supposed to secure people against caprices of weather – cold, dampness and darkness. Yet he also thought that there should be a limit.⁸

The first ordinances against luxury in Tallinn date from the first half of the 16th century. Most of them were drafts of laws.⁹ It was the magistracy that passed statutes regulating the citizens' entertainment, clothing, seating arrangement at the table, etc. Being a member of a guild or corporation was of utmost importance. According to an ordinance of 1631 only merchants were allowed to wear gold chains, velvet, taffeta and expensive

⁴ **Reinhold Reith.** Einleitung. „Luxus und Konsum“ – eine historische Annäherung; **Reinhold Reith, Torsten Meyer.** „Luxus und Konsum“ – eine historische Annäherung. Münster, New York, München, Berlin 2003, 9–27.

⁵ **G. J. Zollkofer.** Predigten über die Würde des Menschen, und den Werth der vornehmsten Dinge, die zur menschlichen Glückseligkeit gehören, oder dazu gerecht werden. Th. II. Leipzig 1784, 147.

⁶ Tazbir 1982, 8.

⁷ **Raimo Pullat.** Die Stadtbevölkerung Estlands im 18. Jahrhundert. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung Universalgeschichte. Hrsg. von Heinz Duchhardt. Beiheft 38. Mainz 1997, 158, 246–247.

⁸ **August Wilhelm Hupel.** Nordische Miscellaneen. Riga 1781. St. 3, 114.

⁹ **Tiina Kala** (Tallinn City Archives). Oral report 17.03.2006, see also Tallinn City Archives, B. s. 7: Kleider-, Hochzeits-, Begräbnis- u.s.w. Ordnungen 1497–1596.

furs.¹⁰ The Erneuerte Landordnung¹¹ enacted in Tallinn in 1665 laid down a principle that each person's expenditure should correspond to his/her social status. This was to draw strict distinctions between the estates and to fight the craving of lower classes (for ex. townspeople) for luxury, in particular, for wearing clothing that was considered the privilege of the nobility.¹² This ordinance was re-enacted in 1747 with a justification that made customary references to excessive spending and a luxurious way of life.¹³

In the period under discussion several sumptuary ordinances were issued about clothing and luxury in the towns of neighbouring countries, for example, in Riga¹⁴. In 1960 Meta Taube published an article on the 16th and 17th century statutes in Riga.¹⁵

In the 18th century society life was more active. If a person belonged to a decent society it meant that he/she had reached a certain level of affluence, even perhaps, a certain level of consumption of luxury goods. The rapidly changing way of life, the increasing demands and wishes coincided with an economic depression in the last quarter of the 18th century, for which luxury was believed to be responsible. As a result, a sumptuary ordinance of the Estonian Nobility regulating the dress of noblemen was passed in 1780. There is no

¹⁰ Tallinna ajalugu 1860-ndate aastateni. Chief editor **Raimo Pullat**. Tallinn 1976, 281.

¹¹ Erneuerte Land-Ordnung, wie es mit den Kleidung, Hochzeiten, Kindertauffen, Begräbnissen ind andern im Lande eingerissenene Unordnungen und deren Abschaffung hinführo sol gehalten werden. Reval 1665.

¹² As early as in the 17th century the wealthy citizens of Estonian towns, mostly the merchants, became owners of manorial estates, although they had no proper right to it. The manorial estates might have been acquired by the citizens because these estates had been pledged; the noblemen were very often in debt to the merchants. The ownership of manorial estates was a matter of social prestige for the burghers. Despite the protests from the nobility some merchants were knighted. The owners of the manorial estates, who were not members of the matriculated nobility, were called *landsassen*, whether they were noblemen or merchants, that is, the burghers. In the 17th and 18th century some of the citizens of Reval (Tallinn) who were called *landsassen* were: the Buchaus, Dehn, Dellingshausen, Gemet, Hahn, Hueck, etc.; starting from the end of the 18th century also the family of zur Mühlens. Not a single Tallinn burgher in the 18th century had been admitted to the Estonian Nobility, although some families or members of some families had been ennobled for their services to the Russian Empire. (Pullat 1997. Die Stadtbevölkerung Estlands, 158–159.)

¹³ **Estonian Historical Archives, f. 854, nim. 2, s. 2650.**

¹⁴ **E. E. Rahts**. Der Königl. Stadt Riga Wieder Den Kleiderpracht und andere Verschwendung und Uppigkeiten Erneuerte Gesetze und Kleider-Ordnungen. Riga 1677; **G. C. Andrea**. Ihre Rußisch-Kayserslichen Majest. publicirte Rang-Ordnung. Riga 1722; Gedanken über die Kleider-Ordnung. Bey **Johann Friedrich Hartnoch**. Riga und Mitau 1767; Von Einrichtung und Zweck der Gesetze wider den Luxus. Riga, 11. Jul. 1780.

¹⁵ **Meta Taube**. Greznibas nolegiums Rīga XVI un XVII gadsimta. Fundamentālās Bibliotekas Raksti I. Rīga 1960, 287–309.

evidence whether it was implemented or not. Rather, there was an increase in the import of luxury goods through the Tallinn harbour in the 1780s.¹⁶

By the end of the 18th century it was clear that the laws intended to limit consumption were ineffective, and that this was not a solution. For example, while in the previous centuries a number of Estonian towns had regulated the matters of clothing and food and drink repeatedly, Tartu was the only town in the 18th century where clothing was regulated.¹⁷

The history of luxury associated with urban way of life has been little studied on both sides of the Gulf of Finland. Scholarship in Finnish historiography of the field is also quite sparse.¹⁸ At present there are no scholars in Finland or in Latvia who are devoted to studying inventories or luxury, in particular. The precondition for research in Estonia has been the publication of 18th century probate inventories of Tallinn merchants (total 94) and artisans (47) as well as of Pärnu inhabitants (53) over the past few years.¹⁹ On the basis of these source publications articles and lengthy papers have been written (Raimo

¹⁶ **Peep Pallasma.** 1780. aasta Eestimaa rüütelkonna luksuskorraldus uusaja alguse luksuse käsitluse valguses. Thesis. Tartu 1994, 23–49.

¹⁷ **Vilja Turba.** Rõivastus Eesti linnades 18. sajandil. Thesis. Tartu 1989, 10.

¹⁸ **Eino Tamelander.** Tornion kaupungin pesäluetteoloja 1666–1800. Forssa 1942; Boupptecknigar i Jakobstad 1706–1800. Utg. av. **M. Björkman.** Helsingfors 1930. Genealogiska samfundets i Finlands Årskrift 13; Boupptecknigar Borgåstad 1740–1800. Utg. av. **Birger Åkerman.** Genealogiska samfundets i Finland skrifter 10. Helsingfors 1934; Bouppteckningar i Gamlakarleby stad 1697–1800. Utg. av **Birger Åkerman.** Genealogiska Samfundets i Finland skrifter XI. Helsingfors 1935; Bouppteckningar i Helsingfors stad 1679–1808. Utg. av **Birger Åkerman.** Genealogiska samfundets i Finland skrifter XIII. Helsingfors 1937; **Alf Brenner.** Oulun kaupungin perunkirjoituksia 1653–1800. Suomen Sukututkimusseuran julkaisuja XXV:1–3. Tampere 1963–1965; **Eva-Christina Mäkeläinen.** Säätyläisten seuraelämä ja tapakulttuuri 1700-luvun jälkipuoliskolla Turussa, Viaporissa ja Savon kartanoalueilla. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 86. Suomen Historiallinen Seura. Helsinki 1972; **Riitta Pykkänen.** Säätyläisnaisten pukeutuminen Suomessa 1700-luvulla. Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen aikakauskirja 84. Helsinki 1982; **Erkki Markkanen.** Perukirja tutkimuslähteenä. Studia Historica Jyväskyläänsä 37. Jyväskylä 1988, 22; Kustaa III:n aikaan. Heinolan Kaupunginmuseon julkaisuja no 1. Lahti 1992; **Kirsi Vainio-Korhonen.** Kultaa ja hopeaa mestarien työkirjoissa. Suomen kultasepäntö Ruotsin ajan lopulla valtakunnallista taustaa vasten. Historiallisia Tutkimuksia 182. Suomen Historiallinen Seura. Helsinki 1994; Hilka Saari gives a good overview about the domestic luxury of the mayor of Helsinki Abraham Vetter on the basis of his probate inventory from 1737: **Hilka Saari.** Eräs varakas helsinkkiläiskoti vapaudenajalta. Kotiseutu 1950, 77–91.

¹⁹ Die Nachlaßverzeichnisse der deutschen Kaufleute in Tallinn 1702–1750. [Bd. I] Bearbeitet von **Raimo Pullat.** Tallinn 1997 (= Nachlaßverzeichnisse. Bd. I); Bd. II: 1752–1775. Tallinn 2002 (= Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. II); Bd. III: 1777–1800. Tallinn 2004 (= Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. III); Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der Einwohner der Stadt Pernau 1702–1800. Bearbeitet von **Raimo Pullat.** Tallinn 2005 (= Nachlassverzeichnisse Pernau); Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der Handwerker in Tallinn 1706–1803. Bearbeitet von **Raimo Pullat.** Tallinn 2006.

Pullat, Lauri Suurmaa, Helve Russak, Ants Viires, etc.).²⁰ In the current article the focus is on the information gleaned from the probate inventories of merchants. The merchants had an influential position in the socio-economic and political life of towns, they were open-minded and progressive. They had notably more economic possibilities than other citizens to renovate the interiors, to commission art, to gain possession of luxury goods and to travel. They strove to improve the material environment in which they lived and to keep up with fashion.

For example Martin Heinrich Gebauer (who died in 1797), unmarried merchant, head of the Tallinn Brotherhood of the Blackheads, freemason and a rich money-lender, lived with Estonian woman.

We can read from his probate inventory that his domestic library was impressively big, where together with pietistic books and the textbooks of trade and geography you could also find the works of Spinoza, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Gellert, Sterne, Rabener, Goethe, Justus Möser. He drank coffee and tea in porcelain cups, which were made in Saxony. He used mahogany furniture and had also a mirror with golden frame. He had oil paintings and 83 copper engravings by William Hogarth and others. He was an unwonted Tallinn merchant, who beloved and collected art. For example, he had even the catalogue of the

²⁰ **Raimo Pullat.** Buch und Leser im Reval des 18. Jahrhunderts. – Aufklärung in den Baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Ideologie und soziale Wirklichkeit, hrsg. von Otto-Heinrich Elias in Verbindung mit Indrek Jürjo, Sirje Kivimäe und Gert von Pistohlkors. (Quellen und Studien zur Baltischen Geschichte, Bd. 15) Köln, Weimar, Wien 1996, S. 229–253; **Lauri Suurmaa.** Tallinna saksa kaupmeeste varaloendites inventeeritud laua- ja kööginõud kultuuriajaloo allikana 18. sajandil. [Table- and Kitchenware in the Probate Inventories of Tallinn German Merchants as the Source of the History of Culture in the 18th Century.] – Vana Tallinn XV (XIX). Tallinn 2004, 9–157; **Lauri Suurmaa.** Pärnu elu- ja majandushoonete kirjeldusest 18. sajandi varaloendites. [On the Description of Pärnu Residential and Non-Residential Buildings in 18th Century Probate Inventories.] – Vana Tallinn XVI (XX) *Modus vivendi II*. Tallinn 2005, 291–319; **Helve Russak.** Tallinna kaupmehe garderoob 18. sajandi I poolel. [The Wardrobe of Tallinn Merchants in the First Half of the 18th Century.] Ms. Tallinn 2003; **Helve Russak.** Tallinna kaupmeeste peakatted 18. sajandi I poole varaloendites. [The Headwear of Tallinn Merchants in the First Half of the 18th Century: A Study Based on Probate Inventories.] – Vana Tallinn XVI (XX) *Modus vivendi II*. Tallinn 2005, 320–341; **Ants Viires.** Tallinna kaupmeeste ja talurahva vahelised sidemed 18. sajandil. [The Links Between Tallinn Merchants and Rural People in the 18th Century.] – Vana Tallinn XVII (XXI). Tallinn 2006, 191–216; see also **Heinz von zur Mühlen.** Besitz und Bildung im Spiegel Revaler Testamente und Nachlässe aus der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts. – Reval und die Baltischen Länder. Festschrift für Hellmuth Weiss zum 80. Geburtstag, herausgegeben von Jürgen von Hehn und Csaba János Kenéz. Marburg/Lahn 1980, 263–280; **Krista Kodres.** Innenraumgestaltung von Tallinner Bürgerhäusern des 17.–18. Jahrhunderts. – Homburger Gespräch 11. und 12.. Heft 13, 1990/1991, 167–186. **Krista Kodres.** Elamuinterjööri ja selle sisustusest Tallinnas 17.–18. sajandil. [The Interiors of Residential Buildings in Tallinn in the 17th and 18th Centuries] – Vana Tallinn II (VI). Tallinn 1992, 51–70; **Marge Rennit.** Tartu magistraadi varaloendite kasutamine linna olme ja materiaalse kultuuri ajaloo uurimisel (19. sajandi 1. pool). [The Probate Inventories of Tartu Magistracy as a Source of the History of Culture of Tartu in the First Half of the 19th Century.] – Tartu Linnamuuseumi aastaraamat VII. Tartu 2001.

sculpture collections of Frederick II of Prussia, published by Matthias Oesterreich in Berlin in 1775.²¹

The Probate Inventory as a Source

The probate inventory is a list of possessions of a deceased person in which real estate, goods and chattel, stocks and cash are recorded. This document was drawn when the person had made no last will or testament. The inventory was made in the course of insuring the estate of the deceased person under the court supervision. The authorised persons (representatives of the local government, court or church) conducted the inventory and the sealing of the property and its further management.

Approximately 500 probate inventories of 18th century Tallinn have survived.²² If we compare these inventories from Tallinn with those of German towns, that is, with 65 lists from Lübeck and 70 from Münster (16–19th cent.), the number of Tallinn probate inventories is extremely high. The probate inventories enable us to have a look at the life and interests of the deceased as most of his/her property has been listed (probably not always all of it) – houses in the town, gardens, pastures, finances, jewellery of precious materials and tableware, pictures, books, furniture, lights, clothes and textiles, bed linen, food stocks – everything that the deceased had collected during his/her lifetime. These sources contain a highly informative and diverse material and provide answers to questions concerning everyday life (crafts, trade, finances, standard of living) and give us a glimpse of cultural history (books, paintings, musical instruments).

The inventories of Tallinn and the rest of Europe differ mainly in that that, as a rule, the inventories of Tallinn did not add up the value of the items. Even with money and precious metals it is not always possible to reach the total sum and it is virtually impossible to give an estimate of the value of the possessions. The Tallinn inventories did

²¹ Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. III, 179 ff.; see also **Otto-Heinrich Elias**. Die Nachlassverzeichnisse der deutschen Kaufleute in Tallinn, Band 3: 1777–1800, bearb. von Raimo Pullat. (Tallinn 2004, Estopol, 294 S.), – Hansische Geschichtsblätter 123, 2005, 283–284; **Otto-Heinrich Elias**. Reval in der Reformpolitik Katharinas II. Die Statthalterschaftszeit 1783–1796. (Quellen und Studien zur Baltischen Geschichte. Bd. 3.) Bonn–Bad Godesberg 1978, 32.

²² Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. I, 17.

not list the items according to their location, as was the custom in Germany and in some other countries, although there were exceptions.²³

We will take a closer look at luxury in Estonian towns on the basis of probate inventories.

Gold and Silver²⁴

Historical precious metal jewellery in the Baltics and in Estonia has been thoroughly studied and several major works have been published.²⁵

In the probate inventories of Tallinn merchants and artisans as well as the inhabitants of Pärnu we can find reliable information about the objects made of precious metals that the wealthiest people of the day possessed. We can calculate the frequency of the listed objects, the proportion of gold and silver objects, which are no longer available in their original form. We can also estimate the time when new items (for example, coffee and tea pots) came into use.

The first thing that catches the eye is the relatively high frequency of gold objects in the homes of Tallinn merchants and artisans, as well as in those of wealthier Pärnu citizens. In the Estonian museums and private collections these items are rare. In the probate inventories the number of gold chains is most impressive. Their number in the probate inventories of Tallinn merchants is 24, of the artisans 11, and of Pärnu citizens it is 30. One bookkeeper had a chain of Indian origin, so we can assume that this might have been unique jewellery of ancient American origin. Not only rich merchants had gold chains, but also other administrators.

Gold rings were widespread. In the Tallinn probate inventories 354 gold rings were listed, in those of Pärnu 247. Many of the gold rings were decorated with jewels. Diamonds, rubies, agates, turquoises as well as corals and pearls ornamented the rings. There were a large number of gold bracelets and ear rings, gold buttons, gold brooches, and even gold buckles, etc. In addition, there were a dozen platinum buckles, which the Tallinn merchant Constans Friedrich Höppener offered for sale among other wares in

²³ Ebenda.

²⁴ See **Kaalu Kirme**. Kasutades uusi allikaid. Mns. Tallinn 2006 and Suurmaa 2004, 83–94.

²⁵ **Annelore Leistikow**. Baltisches Silber. Lüneburg 1996; **Kaalu Kirme**. Eesti hõbe: 800 aasta hõbe- ja kullasepakunsti Eestis. Estnisches Silber: 800 Jahre Silber- und Goldschmiedekunst in Estland. Tallinn 2000; **Anu Mänd**. Hõbedakamber Niguliste kirikus. The Silver Chamber. Die Silberkammer. Tallinn 2002.

1777.²⁶ We can conclude that gold was quite popular with the more affluent citizens of Tallinn and provincial towns.

The inventories prove that in the prosperous circles of Estonia larger gold objects than jewellery were in use in the 18th century – although they were not a big quantity. A gold chest, gold cases, and balsam boxes can be mentioned.

Silver items made up about 25 percent of all metal tableware listed in the inventories of Tallinn merchants in the 18th century.²⁷ Silver pots and jugs were recorded in large numbers. The introduction of new luxury beverages – tea, coffee and chocolate – into the diet of the wealthy was accompanied by a demand for suitable tableware and cutlery. A silver teapot was mentioned for the first time in the inventory of merchant Dietrich Vermeer, who died in Tallinn in 1731.²⁸ Ceramic and pewter teasetts and coffee tins were listed in Tallinn inventories as early as 1711.²⁹ In the 1740s silver coffee pots and milk jugs, sugar bowls and sugar tongs appeared in the inventories. These pleasurable drinks reached the province later: in an inventory of a Pärnu notary³⁰ a silver teaspoon and sugar tongs were first mentioned in 1759, and a silver coffee pot was first mentioned in an inventory of a merchant's widow in 1782.³¹ There were also silver tankards for beer and wine.

The fine silver tankards used by wealthier classes did not go unnoticed by the rural folk, and it is quite probable that Estonian wooden beer tankards were modelled on the silver drinking vessels of the townspeople.

The silver plates were not in use, even the wealthiest peoples used pewter dishes. Large serving dishes were of brass.

As silver was precious and beautiful, the dishes of this material were often engraved with the person's initials or a full name and coats of arms. These were usually commissioned by the owner. The engravings were very often on the cups, which were more frequently mentioned in the probate inventories starting from the mid-18th century.

²⁶ Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. III, 27.

²⁷ Suurmaa 2004, 85.

²⁸ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. Bd. I, 275.

²⁹ Ebenda, 111, 113.

³⁰ Nachlassverzeichnisse Pernau, 286–299.

³¹ Nachlassverzeichnisse Pernau, 379.

Of silver items we can mention buckles, tobacco boxes, cases and frames for spectacles, buttons, children's toys; even one dog-collar with silver bells has been listed.

One part of the items was definitely of foreign origin (for example, gold and silver pocket watches, silver water-bottles from Hungary, etc.), but a considerable part of the precious metal objects listed were made by the local goldsmiths and silversmiths.

Porcelain and Faience

The tableware used by the wealthier citizens in the 18th century included, among other ceramic items, faience and porcelain dishes. This is well reflected in the collections of the Tallinn City Museum and other Estonian museums. Beginning in the 1730s the famous Delft faience dishes formed a separately listed group in the probate inventories. Single items of porcelain were listed in the first three decades of the 18th century, their number increased suddenly in the 1740s. The most popular was Saxony porcelain, but porcelain from England, France, Russia, Sweden, China and Japan was also recorded. In a few cases porcelain lights were listed. Quite a large number of porcelain figures and dolls were mentioned.³²

Glass

In the probate inventories under discussion glass objects make up about 10–20% of the described items. The majority of glass objects that the Estonian citizens in the 18th century possessed had come from outside Estonia, mostly from Germany, Bohemia and Sweden. Luxurious crystal objects were rarely mentioned. Most of the crystal objects were bottles, carafes and spirit glasses. Crystal chandeliers were practically absent from the inventories. Among more luxurious glass objects carafes, rummers, and perhaps even wine and beer and spirit glasses can be mentioned. One of the most unique were English beer glasses, out of 91 glasses listed in the last two decades of the 18th century 19 were English beer glasses.³³

³² Suurmaa 2004, 107–110.

³³ Ebenda, 110–115.

Wardrobe

Probate inventories give a splendid survey of citizens' clothing. On the basis of 44 probate inventories of Tallinn merchant wardrobes in the first half of the 18th century, Helve Russak wrote her master's thesis under the supervision of prof. Raimo Pullat.³⁴ The major items of a merchant's wardrobe were linen shirts, sleeves, collars, neckties and neckerchiefs. Men's clothing was made up from a coat, a waistcoat and breeches. Women's wardrobe consisted of more items: a skirt, a mantua, a contouche, an andrienne, a caftan, an apron, a sash, a stomacher and stays (corset). The accessories included handkerchiefs, pockets and bags, swords, canes, masks and fans.

The highest level of luxury was displayed by a Spanish walking stick with silver ornaments and a silver knob described among the silver items in 1750. There were gold and leather belts, collars of sable and fur. The stomachers were made of costly material. As to caftans, the choice of a range of fabrics was extremely wide, shown by the spread of Indian cotton (peeling), French linen, expensive silks, glossy kalmuck, floral-patterned damask, red Russian damask, Sicilian silk and, starting from 1734, striped (semi) silks, striped wool and striped taffeta. The women's costume worn on formal occasions – a mantua, a contouche and an andrienne – was characterised by the choice of a wide and expensive range of materials and was in a good state of repair. The most expensive materials were used for women's jackets, or caftans that came in various lengths. Their fabrics included multi-coloured silks and moirés, expensive cottons and linens, chintz, glossy kalmuck, brocade, striped silks and wools. Dutch, German (*Warendorf*) and French linens were classified as having "fine" quality. Other materials mentioned were silks from Venice, Sicily and Tours, East-Indian cotton or calico and Danzig cloth.

In the 16th century clothing regulations of Tallinn expensive silks for women's gowns were forbidden.³⁵ There were attempts to restrain the craving for luxury in the 18th century as in 1780 a luxury ordinance to Estonian Nobility forbade the noblemen to wear clothes made of velvet, silk or tricot, as well as all kinds of embroidery and borders,

³⁴ Russak 2003 (Ms.).

³⁵ **Inna Põltsam.** Eesti ala linnaelanike rõivastus 14. sajandi teisest poolest 16. sajandi keskpaigani – Tuna 2/2002, 39.

silver and gold buttons. Silk was only allowed for linings. The fabrics allowed were broadcloth, and one-coloured taffeta and satin for noblewomen.³⁶

On the basis of probate inventories it is possible to observe the rapid development of men's and women's clothing in the first half of the 18th century because of a variety of items in use and the choice of a wider range of materials. Decoration reflecting the general fashion trends remained relatively modest in the citizens' wardrobe.

The probate inventories confirm that there was a great variety of headwear as well. The most usual headwear worn in the Tallinn merchant families was the cap or the bonnet, half of the citizens wore hats or wigs. Most of the caps were made of silk or velvet and winter headwear partly of fur. Winter caps were made of velvet or plush and were lined with fur on the inside and on the outside. Wigs and various hats were influenced by the aristocratic fashion of France. Spanish influence was notable in felt hats.³⁷

Residential buildings and furniture³⁸

The residential buildings of Tallinn citizens in the 17th–18th century were not unlike the medieval buildings in their appearance. This type of a building consisted of the ground floor, which was mainly used for living space, and the upper floors, which were used for storing goods. Not until the end of the 17th century and the 18th century were the upper floors taken into use as living space. Wealthy merchants built large halls or parlours on the first floor. On one occasion the walls of the parlour were covered with luxurious gold-leather wallpaper, the upper part of which formed a frieze with a painted landscape. The beamed ceilings were covered with acanthus-leaf paintings. The *diele* or the entrance hall on the ground floor was an impressive room in the 17th and 18th centuries: its walls were hung with portraits of ancestors and dignitaries, a large chandelier was fixed onto the ceiling. From this entrance hall a staircase with a banister led to the first floor on which there was a living room (*Stube*) or a large parlour and several smaller rooms. Many examples of 18th century interiors in Tallinn survive. They all have wonderful ceiling paintings, sometimes even the window jambs and doors have been painted. There are also examples of decorated walls.

³⁶ Pallasma 1994, 6, 46, 70.

³⁷ Russak 2005, 332–333.

³⁸ See Kodres 1992, 51–70.

In other Estonian cities – in Tartu, Pärnu and Viljandi, etc. – medieval buildings had mostly been destroyed in the previous wars and new buildings were erected in Baroque style; as a rule, these were one-storeyed and of wood, although bigger dwelling houses were built of stone. Unlike the probate inventories of Tallinn the inventories of Pärnu described the exteriors and interiors of residential buildings in much detail, which allows us to reconstruct the minutest details of a citizen's house in Pärnu.

The wealthy citizens in Estonia had rather luxurious furniture. The materials used were mahogany, oak, walnut, and wood was often lacquered or stained. French furniture became increasingly widespread. Showcases with glazed doors appeared in the rooms, which means that the owner had something to display. The inventories show that in the 18th century the number of expensive bric-a-brac and gimcracks grew in the families – objects of porcelain, statuettes, dolls of plaster of Paris, chests, tobacco boxes and cosmetic boxes, wig stands, bird cages and flowerpots were listed. The beds were mostly canopied. The bed curtains were mostly red- or green-coloured, but there were also blue- and multi-coloured curtains. The upholstery of chairs was often luxurious – leather, woollen velvet, plush, damask and other materials were used. In the second half of the 18th century other types of soft furniture were added – canapes and sofas; they and the chairs usually made a set.

The range of tables in the 18th century was wide. Quite popular were tea tables, toilet tables, night tables, folding tables, and the so-called ombre tables. As a rule, these tables were supported on one central base, which was sometimes sculpted.

One of the most luxurious objects in the 18th century interiors was undoubtedly the mirror. In the 17th century the rooms usually had one mirror. Mirrors were rare items even later, presumably, the reason was the cost of plate glass. The focus was on the frames of the Baroque mirrors, which were mostly gilded and with abundant decoration.

The mirrors and pictures listed in the Tallinn probate inventories were studied by Jörg Driesner and Robert Riemer, who published their results in an article in 2004,³⁹ in which they divided the mirrors in the merchant homes of Tallinn into 91 categories,

³⁹ **Jörg Driesner, Robert Riemer.** Spiegel und Bilder in den Nachlassinventaren deutscher Kaufleute in Reval im 18. Jahrhundert. – Land und Meer. Kultureller Austausch zwischen Westeuropa und dem Ostseeraum in der Frühen Neuzeit. Hrsg. von Martin Krieger und Michael North. Köln, Weimar, Wien 2004, 165–198.

distinguishing them by size, form, the material of the frame, function and origin. In the second half of the 18th century the number of mirrors increased considerably.

Driesner and Riemer counted 471 mirrors and 755 pictures and copper engravings in 71 inventories of Tallinn merchants between 1702 and 1775, which have been published by Raimo Pullat.⁴⁰ The pictures were divided into 68 categories (*Schildereien, Nürnberger Schildereien, Portraits auf Pergament, Gipsbilder, Kontrefeit, "nach Rembrandt", "holländischer Stil"*, etc.).⁴¹

The frames were often considered even to be more important than the pictures themselves. Some gilded frames were mentioned. There were quite a large number of pictures in the rooms, regrettably, it is mostly the frames that were described and the artist's name was never mentioned. The number of pictures reflected the owner's financial situation as well as the owner's appreciation of culture. The favourite pictures of a Tallinn citizen were portraits of high dignitaries and family members. The former included mostly the portraits of Swedish monarchs and, beginning in the second half of the 18th century, Russian emperors and princes.

We should also note the clocks, which were quite frequently listed items in the inventories of Tallinn and Pärnu. The most frequently listed is the so-called English clock, sometimes Dutch and Spanish clocks. The most usual was a wall clock, less frequent were table clocks and grandfather clocks.

Table Manners, Food and Drink⁴²

When we talk about luxury in 18th century Estonian towns, we should also talk about new table manners and some more expensive and exotic foods and drinks that were also reflected in the probate inventories.

Sumptuous meals on festive occasions have been indicators of luxury throughout time. Naturally, these meals were only arranged on special occasions, during festivals and anniversaries.

In the 18th century, especially in the second half of the 18th century, table manners of high society in Europe became more refined than in earlier times. Fashion was strictly

⁴⁰ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. Bd. I; Nachlassverzeichnisse. Bd. II.

⁴¹ Nachlaßverzeichnisse. Bd. I, tab. 3, 178–179.

⁴² See Suurmaa 2004, 52–82.

followed. The lower classes adopted elements of the aristocratic way of life.⁴³ While the *bon vivants* in the age of Renaissance devoured limitless amounts of food, the focus in the 18th century was on luxurious foods and their enjoyment.⁴⁴ Meals always lasted for a long time in high society. Feasts and banquets lasted for hours.⁴⁵ At ceremonial meals a large number of servants were busy in the kitchen and around the table. The feast was also a display of costumes as it was possible to show off sumptuous clothes.⁴⁶ In addition to dishes, tables were decorated by vases for flowers, silver tablemats (*plat de ménage*), tin dish rings (*Tafelkranz*, *Schüsselring*), candlesticks, etc. Tableware was an important part of the interiors. The people in the room were treated to the delightful sight of the items displayed in the showcases, on the shelves and the walls. The fork, which in the 16th and 17th centuries was an item of luxury in Europe, was quite usual on the citizen's table in Estonia in the 18th century.

During the 18th century the demand for finer tableware grew among the wealthy people. This is well reflected in the inventories of Estonian towns. Besides silver and porcelain other materials came into use, such as mother-of-pearl, agate, lacquer, glass, rock crystal, etc. New types of tableware were introduced, such as coffee, tea and chocolate cups, punch bowls, sugar tongs, sugar sprinklers, tee urns, fruit and salad plates, tureens of silver, pewter, faience and porcelain; in an inventory of a Tallinn merchant from 1788 a pan for frying oysters was listed. The higher classes, especially the nobility, enjoyed different food at lunch and at dinner depending on the time of the day and the season. The choice of the range of dishes was very wide. What food citizens ate is clear from the tableware listed in the inventories as well as the foodstuffs recorded in the lists. The person's daily menu was not luxurious, but more affluent citizens could afford oysters, spices, sugar, fruit, almond cakes, waffles, ice cream, and such drinks as coffee, tea and chocolate and French or German wines on festive occasions.

⁴³ **Norbert Elias.** Über die Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen. Frankfurt 1987 (Basel 1939), 227.

⁴⁴ **Gertrud Benker.** Alte Bestecke. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Tischkultur. München 1978, 21.

⁴⁵ **Richard van Dülmen.** Kultur und Alltag in der Frühen Neuzeit. Bd. I. München 1987, 73.

⁴⁶ **Fernand Braudel.** Capitalism and material life, 1400–1800. London 1979, 139.

Books

Libraries containing expensive or valuable books, which demonstrated the quality of intellectual life of Tallinn merchants can also be termed as luxury.⁴⁷

The inventories of Estonian towns confirm the contemporary claim that citizens were educated, broad-minded and progressive.⁴⁸ This was especially true of literati and merchants.

Books were important for disseminating knowledge and for developing intellectual life. Home library was usual for Estonian townspeople in the 18th century, its acquisition was promoted by social customs and fashion. The number of books increased rapidly in the mid-18th century. Besides „compulsory” religious literature we can find historical chronicles, novels, language textbooks, books on mathematics, geography and commerce, as well as books on housekeeping, cooking, reference books, etc. in the libraries. The majority of the books were in German, but there were also quite a large number of Latin, French, English and Swedish books. Most of the libraries were relatively modest, but some merchants, teachers or bookbinders had a substantial number of books. As books have been very expensive throughout time, we can regard large libraries as luxury, although they also had an enlightening and educational purpose and were generally useful.

The social status of a wealthy citizen was shown by a coat of arms or a garden in which it was possible to indulge in luxury and take pride in the ownership of lands and houses in the town and in the countryside. We cannot forget that many merchants had gained the title 'von' before the surname, which showed the high position of the family in the society.

Conclusion

Probate inventories as historical sources prove that civilisation and the way of life in Estonian towns in the 18th century was similar to that of Central and Western Europe. The more progressively-minded Estonian citizens kept apace with the latest developments in European fashion. This concerned table manners, tableware, clothing,

⁴⁷ Pullat 1996. Buch und Leser..., 229.

⁴⁸ **Johann Christoph Petri.** Ehistland und die Ehsten, oder historisch-geographisch-statistisches Gemälde von Ehistland. Ein Seitenstück zu Merkel über die Letten. Bd. II. Gotha 1802, 178.

furniture, book reading, etc. On the basis of the inventories it is therefore possible to observe the different symptoms and levels of luxury in the urban world both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The proportion of wealthy people in the population might have been less than in other parts of Europe, but they had undoubtedly adopted a European way of life and mentality. For example, in furnishing their homes Estonian citizens followed the trends in interior design fashionable in Europe, which was connected with the general development of urban culture in the 17th and 18th centuries.

In the mid-18th century (1740–1760) citizens in towns got richer and the growth of affluence continued for the next couple of decades when it stabilised. The corresponding changes were reflected in the probate inventories. When compared to the rest of material culture luxury items were not frequent; only in some inventories expensive and valuable objects and materials were listed in large quantities, in most of the 18th century inventories stored in our archives more expensive items were lacking or there were very few of them.

Similarly to other socio-economic phenomena, luxury is not easy to measure and compare. What was luxury in East or North-East Europe could have been usual in Central Europe. However, this comparison is necessary in order to discover and record the luxurious components of material and intellectual culture and the extent of their dissemination as well as their genesis. The final goal would be to assess quantitatively and qualitatively the level of luxury of the populations of European countries and make a socio-topographical map which would enable us to determine the quality of life and the level of civilisation in early modern age.