Swedish paper bindings, 1787-1846. A book history

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines in what material form books were consumed during the second half of
the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century. The study focuses on the
production, marketing and use of paper bindings in Sweden 1787-1846. The aim is to show
how the study of bindings can reveal changing attitudes towards the form of the book,
patterns of consumption and reading practises. The work is based on D. F. McKenzie’s
definition of bibliography as the sociology of text; it is also inspired by the ideas of R.
Chartier.1

From the middle of the 1800th century book production increased strikingly and books
spread to larger parts of the population. More books were produced than anyone could read.
We know that books took on a smaller format, and that typography and layout of the printed
page was adjusted to the text and to the consumers in mind.2 But in what way did the
binding of the book change? It is very likely that bookbinders and booksellers adjusted the
demands for quality through technical rationalisation and use of less expensive materials. In
Sweden publishers began marketing their books in edition paper bindings and booksellers
sold their books ready bound in half leather or paper retail bindings. At the same time
consumers changed their attitudes towards the form of the book, its binding and price.

The research is based on empirical and qualitative analyses of paper bindings; the binding
techniques and materials that were employed and the form of the binding is analysed. The
distribution and marketing of paper bindings are investigated through newspaper
advertisements, publishers and booksellers’ sale catalogues. The spread and holdings of
different types of bindings in private libraries at the time is examined. How the material and
formal changes in the binding of books, their production and marketing around 1800 can be
understood as new attitudes and practises in the consumption of books and the symbolic
meaning it entails is discussed in a concluding part of the thesis.