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Metsiku collection in the National Library of Estonia

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METSIKU COLLECTION IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ESTONIA

The National Library of Estonia was established on 21 December 1918, ten months after the birth of the Republic of Estonia. Between the two world wars the library was called the State Library and operated in the Toompea Castle, the residence of the Estonian Government.

The State Library did not build up from scratch – it inherited about 2 000 volumes which had previously belonged to the Guberniya Government library located in the same building. The library initially served the parliament and governmental institutions, and supplemented its collections with literature on law, economics and history, as well as major periodicals and educating books.

By 1940 the State Library's collection amounted to ca 6 0000 volumes and the decade that followed marked a big boost in its growth – the library was given the collections of different authorities and organisations which were discontinued due to the change of power, as well as private collections of people who had been imprisoned or left Estonia. The State Library also acquired a number of family libraries of Baltic Germans who fled Estonia in 1939–1940. During the Soviet period the library, then named the Fr. R. Kreutzwald State Library of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, started to receive legal deposit publications from all over the Soviet Union, which notably increased its collections. Today the stacks of the library – which was given the status of the National Library of Estonia in 1988 – hold over 3 million items. 1993 saw the opening of a new large library building in the centre of Tallinn.

From its very first days the State Library undertook to collect Estonian printed matter, *estonica* and *baltica* as comprehensively as possible. In 1919 the library started to receive legal deposit copies of all Estonian printed matter, and in 1935 it established the archival collection which

stored one copy of all Estonian print publications. During the Soviet era the collecting of Estonian national imprint was not discontinued although the ruling ideology demands were to re-interpret and forget the past, and the bulk of print production published during 1918–1940 was locked into a special collection with restricted access. In order to supplement the national imprint collection, the library staff travelled all over the Estonian countryside, hoping to find books missing in the library.

Metsiku collection



Fig. 1. The bindings from Metsiku collection. Phot. by Teet Malsroom

In 1966, while searching for antiquarian books in Lääne-Viru County, the acquisition librarians of the F.R. Kreutzwald State Library of the Estonian SSR came upon a large library in a farm in Villandi village, acquired during several generations. The owners agreed to sell the whole collection (Pärloja, 1969). In addition to books, the purchased collection contained photo albums, documents, and manuscripts by the family members – diaries, literary experiments, folk stories, and handwritten speeches, etc. In total, 2365 items of publications and manuscripts were registered as a memorial collection, conventionally named the Metsiku collection, within the Archival Collection in the year of 1971 (Tamme, 1973).

The acquired collection had belonged to **the Pruul family** and consists of several elements. Approximately one third of it comprises the **Library of the Metsiku Study Society** which was active in 1872–1889. It was one of the first lending libraries for Estonian peasants, established on 2 February 1872. A group of active peasants and educated men from the villages of Metsiku, Vihula, Aaspere, Sagadi and Karula convened in the schoolhouse of Metsiku. Together they established the Metsiku Study Society whose primary task was to maintain a lending library (defined as “pibliotek” in the log book). There were twelve founding members, six or seven of them more active. **Danel Pruul** was

elected the President of the Society, and his home also began to accommodate the library. About 650 books were bought for the library during eighteen years of its existence¹. Their ownership was marked by the stamp “Eestikeele Raamatukogu Metsikus” (“The Estonian-language library at Metsiku”).

The library founders had certain goals that were written down in the minutes of the foundation meeting: “... first of all it has to buy story-books and books on the events that have happened. And if the Society is vital enough, then also textbooks and all religious books...” (ArM 1.324). Based on these guidelines, mostly belles-lettres – in particular by Estonian authors – were collected and added to the Metsiku collection. For this reason a bunch of first editions from the 1860s–1880s can be found in the collection; some authors are represented with almost complete works. The favourite authors of the people of Metsiku were Lydia Koidula, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, Carl Robert Jakobson, Lilli Suburg and Jakob Pärn and from the later period – Eduard Vilde and Eduard Bornhöhe.

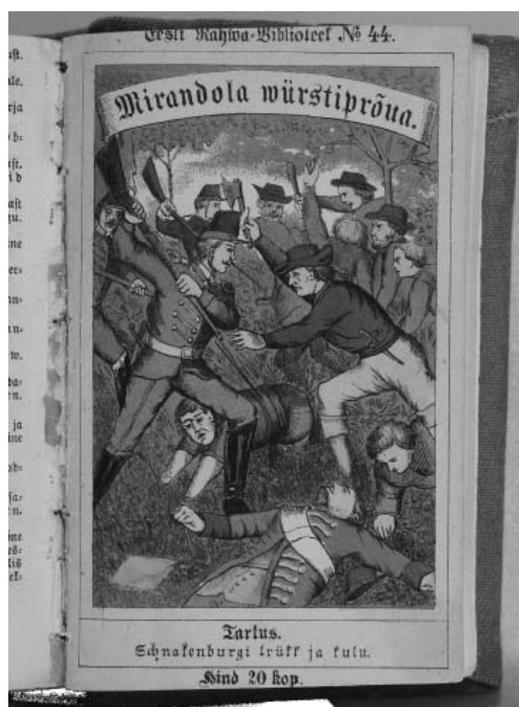


Fig. 2. Mirandola vürstiproua. Tartu, 1886 (Eesti Rahva-Biblioteek; nr. 44). Phot. by Teet Malsroom

¹ Mitme sugused wanad ametlikud protokollid ja kirjad. ArM 1.324

Besides Estonian classical literature, the collection offered a large amount of translated recreational literature, for instance the instalments of a book series “Eesti rahwa-biblioteek” (“The Library of the Estonian People”) (Tartu, Schnakenburg, 1880–1891). The series included pocket format editions of approximately a hundred pages with colourful cover illustrations and predominantly historical content – *Joosep Haideni elulugu* (“Franz Joseph Haydn’s Biography”), *Wallensteini surm* (“The Death of Wallenstein”), *Masepa ehk sõit surma riiki* (“Masepa or the Ride to the Kingdom of Death”), *Raudse näukattega mees* (“The Man in the Iron Mask”) and others. Plenty of adventure stories with action in faraway lands were also acquired to the library’s collection. These included *Tumm tütarlaps ehk Lapse-röövel Hiinamees: Üpris ilus ja liigutav jutustus Ameerika maal* (“The Mute Girl or the Child Abductor Chinaman: Quite a Lovely and Moving Story in America”), published in 1882, *Bulgaria neiu ja Wene pealik: Jutustus Wene-Türgi sõjaplatsilt 1,877* (“The Bulgarian Maiden and the Russian Chief: A Story from the War Site of Russo-Turkish War in 1877”), published in 1880, *Neegri kuningas Kambuda* (“Kambuda, the Negro King”), published in 1876, etc. There is scanty information about the foreign authors of these books. Most these works were produced in Germany; however, Russian, English, American, and French authors had been translated, too. The Metsiku collection also includes the works by literature classics, e.g. *Pealiku tütar* (“The Daughter of the Commandant”) by Alexander Pushkin, published in 1879, *Kasaka-hetman Taras Bulba* (“Taras Bulba”) by Nikolai Gogol, published in 1880, *Kaukasuse wang* (“Prisoner in the Caucasus”) by Leo Tolstoy, and *Notre-Daame kellalööja, ehk ilus mustlasetüdruk* (“The Hunchback of Notre-Dame”) by Victor Hugo, published in 1875, etc.

Religious literature also played a role in the spiritual quests of readers during the Estonian Awakening Period. Awakening and meditative literature, books on church history and missionary work were acquired for the library’s collection. Danel Pruul shared the subscription of the *Mission-Leht* (“The Missionary Newspaper”) with his neighbour.

School literature and the so-called “instructive books”, as the popular science literature was then called, also held an important place in the Metsiku collection. School literature books have been preserved since the middle of the 19th century, including the books in the series of “Koli-ramat” (Schoolbook), edited by Põlva pastor Johann Georg Schwartz and published between 1852–1861. The Metsiku collection included textbooks on mathematics, history and geography, and the songs of the Old Testament. The second half of the century is represented by richly illustrated school literature books, *Weikene Geograafia ehk Maateaduse käsiraamat* (“A Brief Handbook of Geography”) (the 2nd edition from 1875) and a chrestomathy for girls, *Helmed. 1. jagu* (“Beads. Part I”), compiled by Carl Robert Jakobson, etc.

Among the textbooks for the learners of the Russian language, *Riigi-keele õpiramat Eestlastele. 1. jagu* ("The Textbook for Estonians for Learning the Official Language. Part I" by Ado Grenzstein), published in 1888, should be mentioned. The first atlas in the Estonian language, *Maa kaardi-ramat kus sees 16 Maa Kaarti* ("Atlas that Contains 16 Maps") with hand coloured maps, published in 1859 and compiled by the pastor of St. Elizabeth's Church in Pärnu, Ernst Wilhelm Woldemar Schultz, is a remarkable printed work of its time.

The oldest manuals in the collection, *Ramma Josepi Hädda- ja Abbi-Ramat. Ehk maggused ja tullusad juttud ja õppetussed, kuidas ma-rahwas woib rõõmsaste ellada, ausal wisil rikkaks sada, ja isse ennesele... abbi teha* ("Ramma Josep's Book on Distress and Help. Or Sweet and Useful Stories and Instructions How Peasants Can Lead a Happy Life, Get Rich in an Honest Way, and Help Themselves"), published in 1790, might as well have belonged to the Pruul family before the foundation of the lending library. *Terwisse Katekismuse Ramat...* ("The Catechism of Health"), published in 1816 and written by Johann Wilhelm Ludwig von Luce, a doctor and man of letters from Saaremaa, is the oldest among healthcare manuals. Metsiku people were also keen on history books. The collection includes publications about the history of Estonia, Russia, Germany, France and other countries.

Newspapers and calendars evidently belonged to the Pruul family. Already since the middle of the 19th century, the Pruul family subscribed to periodicals, usually jointly with neighbours, as then several newspapers could be read like *Tallorahwa Postimees*, *Eesti Postimees*, *Mission-Leht*, *Sakala* and *Valgus*. All the newspaper issues were preserved and bound into annual sets; however, at the 1930s the family had to donate broadsheets to the museum due to the lack of space. Yearbook-calendars that the landlord often used as notebooks were acquired annually. Initially, *Maa-rahwa kasuline kalender* ("Useful Calendar for Peasants"), later *Talurahwa Kasuline kalender* ("Useful Calendar for Farmers"), *Isamaa kalender* ("The Calendar of Fatherland"), and/or *Eesti Postimehe kalender* ("The Calendar of *Eesti Postimees*") were acquired.

Peasant family and books

The lending library petered out in 1889. Since then the Pruul family kept the books, and continued their acquisition as diligently as it was done before. The books belonging to the family and to the Society got mixed up and, particularly in the case of older books, it is hard to distinguish whether they originally belonged to the Pruul family or to the lending library.

The Pruul family's fondness of books continued over several generations. The brewer of Palmse Manor, **Hans Pruul** (Pruhl, Bruhl, 1796–1864),



Fig. 3. The Pruul family

the first bearer of the Pruul family name, started to collect books in the first half of the 19th century. According to his grandson Hans, he left behind a library of one hundred volumes (Kultuurne talu Vihulas, 1939). However, only several religious and commodity books have been identified as once definitely belonging to Hans Pruul, Sr. The son of the brewer Hans, **Danel Pruul** (1840–1912), continued his father's work for ten years but in 1866 he bought the Aaviku and Marjametsa farms in the neighbourhood. In his memoirs, Danel Pruul writes that he was able to go to school only for four weeks²; nevertheless, his way of expression and handwriting reveal that he was an educated man in the context of his time. He was a famous orator and an ardent supporter of the Estonian politician Carl Robert Jakobson. Danel Pruul participated in a number of vital events of the Estonian Awakening Period – he supported the Estonian Alexander School movement and was a member of the Society of Estonian Literati. The neighbourhood parties were held at Aaviku farm, with songs and games and fiddle music to accompany dancing, and the landlord delivered a speech. He also collected folklore and was a diligent correspondent to pastor and folklorist Matthias Johann Eisen. Numerous folktales and myths collected by him were published in several of Eisen's folktales collections.

² Awiko koha arwo pidamisse raamat. ArM 1.772.

The two sons of Danel, Gustav and Hans, also had a passion for books.

Gustav Pruul (1880–1905) who died from tuberculosis in his early age, was an amateur actor and bookbinder. He prepared albums and verse books for sale, and tried to engage himself in different businesses, for instance in selling stamps, as his surviving business records reveal³. That is why he had also made for himself several stamp bookplates, e.g. “Gustav Pruul Metzikus” (“Gustav Pruul at Metziku”) and “Gustav Pruul'i Raamatu-kogu raamat” (“Gustav Pruul's library book”). He was involved in acting at the Salatse “Kalevipoeg” Society. It was a kind of charity undertaking, which provided the source of income for supporting the school of the society. Approximately ten drama books with Gustav's ownership marks have been preserved. In some of these, the share of roles and a brief overview of the play's performance have been given at the beginning or end of the book.

Hans Pruul (1875–1948), the elder brother, was mostly involved in farming, though from 1919 up to 1924 he also held the position of the rural municipality mayor of Vihula. Hans Pruul was married twice and had two children, Helmi and Gustav Adolf. Most of his leisure time he dedicated to the library – ordering books from the publishers, binding the old ones, and cataloguing. The daughter of Hans's second wife, Elisabeth (Betti), Agnes Solmann, was blessed with artistic talent and decorated with colourful ornaments the edges of the blocks of books bound by her stepfather. Hans was interested in literature and history, and had a certain taste for literature; however, his attitude towards literature was rather that of a bibliophile than of a lover of literature who is thirsty for knowledge. He was pleased to acquire antiquarian books, as can be seen from the notes on the title pages. Hans Pruul also compiled two catalogues of his family library, the bulk of its content was catalogued retrospectively. The last owner of the Metsiku library was Hans Pruul's daughter Helmi Lensküll who lived in his father's house in 1966.

From the aspect of Estonian book history, the biggest contribution of Hans Pruul, Jr. is that he preserved the lending library from the Estonian Awakening Period in the same location and refused to scatter it. So it has been preserved almost as a whole to our days (from the other peasant libraries of that period we have only archival documents, or some dispersed information). During the years in the National Library the Metsiku collection has been investigated in different aspects, for example, beside book historians the diaries of Hans Pruul have been used by climate history researches. In 2013, a solid Metsiku library exhibition took place in the National Library. In addition, a stand exhibition was compiled with extensive illustrative material which was ordered by several schools and public libraries and is travelling now around Estonia.

³ Gustav Pruulile Wälja-läinud kirjade ära kirjad (Copiad) 1899 kuni 1905 aastani. ArM 1.378.

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Sirje Lusmägi***Metsiku collection in the National Library of Estonia*****Summary**

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