

Swenska Psalm-Boken, Med the Stycker, som ther til höra & Evangelia och Epistlar På alla Söndagar, Högtider och Helgedagar (1778)



Although separate titles in their own right, these two books, *The Swedish Hymnbook* and a collection of Biblical passages for all Sundays and Holy Days, are seen so often together that they can rightfully be called the yin and yang of the early modern Swedish book market. Bestsellers in their time, with new editions coming every other year, they were a must-have for both wealthy and poor. These editions of *Swenska Psalm-Boken* and *Evangelia och Epistlar* were printed in Stockholm by the aging printer and woodcutter Carl Stolpe (1721–83).



The set, which is in private hands, is neatly bound in vellum, with gold-tooled covers and marbled flyleaves. One of the flyleaves bears an inscription by a woman who most likely was the first owner of the book. The short inscription is composed of parts written in the archaic gothic handwriting (kurrent) as well as modern script (antiqua), which by the late eighteenth century was gaining ground in Sweden among all sections of society.

*Anna. Erics. dotter
hörrer denna Boken
Till. d. 4: Sep=er
åhr.. 1779*

The passage translates to: “Anna Eric’s daughter does this book belong to. The 4th of September year 1779.” With a name as common as Anna Eric’s daughter and no geographical

location or further provenance, it is very hard to find out more about the owner of the books. Anna, the daughter of Eric. That is all.



It is not very surprising that these books belonged to a woman, since women were often gifted with a hymnbook when they were engaged or when they married. The hymnbook, or the combined hymnbook and *Evangelia och Epistlar*, was usually given to them by their husbands-to-be. Quite often, the covers were decorated in an archaic and characteristic style, with Biblical motives, but sometimes also with hearts and verses. They are so common that they have their own name in Swedish; *fästmansband* ('Fiancé binding' or 'Peasant binding').



Inscriptions made by the woman, often referring to her love for the future husband, is a common sight in these books. Since so many hymnbooks from the early modern period belonged to peasant women, they constitute a valuable resource when it comes to studying book culture and writing ability within this social group.