

The Missing Books of Magic from Sandvik

In search for hidden books and secret knowledge

This article aims at defining a privately-owned manuscript from the end of the eighteenth century; a notebook of charms, recipes and ritual prescriptions, presumed to be connected with known manuscripts of magic, that were kept secret and hidden away.

The study attempts to reconstruct the context of 'The Sandvik Notebook', in order to find out who penned it, when, and why. What kind of knowledge was sought: was it collected for antiquarian reasons, for esoteric interest, or for practical use – such as curing livestock and human beings? Was it copied from books or collected from peasant informants, and could it be related to the extant manuscripts 'The Black Book' and 'The Red Book', objects of the same line of enquiry?

The three manuscripts are from Sandvik Manor, of the joint parish Burseryd-Sandvik, Sweden.

Introduction

In 1895 a former warrant officer by the name of Lundeberg, at one time the proprietor of the Sandvik estate, in the county of Småland, Sweden, received a letter from a Professor Lundell in Uppsala – an extraordinary event. The professor wanted to borrow a book-length manuscript on magic, originally authored by one of the eighteenth-century Reverends Gasslander (letter from J. A. Lundell to P. W. Lundeberg, 22.11.1895). This letter prompted the family – the successors of the Gasslander clerics – to engage in some frustrating explanations of the family history, as the book¹ was found to have already gone missing in 1895.

1 A bound manuscript with a cover is called a book in Swedish.

In that very same year the professor re-published a description of vernacular customs and mentalities, penned by Petrus and/or Johannes Gasslander and entitled *Beskrifning, om allmogens sinnelag, seder... vid de årliga högtider, frierier, bröllop...* ('A Description of the Peasant Mentality, Customs...'), first published in 1774. This work is known as an original source for the history of the discipline of folklore studies in Sweden. In his preface the professor writes about the two men of the cloth, a father and son, indicating that they also left a book on magic, a *svartkonstbok* (literally, a 'book of black magic') that was still extant (Gasslander 1895: 4, 248; Bringéus 1967: 20). He most likely received this information orally from his colleague, the layman scholar Nils Gabriel Djurklou (1829–1904), though never in writing. The identity of the owner was kept secret. In the 1870s Djurklou had in fact no less than two manuscripts on magic placed at his disposal, on loan from the estate of Sandvik – situated on the shores of lake Fegen in Västbo district, where the three counties of Småland, Västergötland and Halland meet, in southwest Sweden. Djurklou copied the charms, the ritual prescriptions and recipes they contained and named the copy *Salomoniska magiska konster. Utdrag ur en Westboprests svartkonstböcker* (1918, 'Solomonic Black Magic: Excerpts from the Manuscripts of Black Magic by a Clergyman in Westbo'). When his colleague Lundell later wrote to Warrant Officer Lundeberg, we may assume that he wanted to confirm that the clergymen really had owned – even written – a 'book' on black magic.

But in the meantime the book asked for by Lundell had gone missing. At least it could not be located in the house of Warrant Officer Lundeberg. The estate had already been sold, and Lundeberg died in 1906. His grandchild Margareta (1905–99) spent her



Reverend Petrus Gasslander (1680–1758), Burseryd-Sandvik parish, Westbo district, Småland County, south-western Sweden. Collections of Claes Ljungström, Örebro.

childhood listening to intermittent talk of the missing book. She became my mother-in-law, and key informant. From her dining room wall the portraits of the Reverend Petrus Gasslander, and his wife, surveyed the family. My husband was raised under the watchful eyes of the son, the Reverend Johannes Gasslander, hanging on the wall of the boys' room.

The two manuscripts originally studied by Djurklou, enjoyed a continued existence in academic circles. In 1918, excerpts from both were published by Paul Heurgren. On the one hand, the original manuscript of the, from then on, so-called '*Svarta boken*' ('The Black Book', from here onwards BB), so-called because of its black cover, appeared in 1924 at a book auction of the clergyman Ludvig Palmgren (1844–1915), and was bought for the library of Lund University. On the other hand, the original for the so-called '*Röda boken*' ('The Red Book', from here onwards RB), so-called due to its red cover, was identified in 1991 by Nils Arvid Bringéus. This book was stored as a museum artefact rather than as a literary item. When in 2009 I wished to see RB at the Museum of Cultural History in Lund, on mentioning 'Palmgren' quite another manuscript was produced, one never heard of before in academic circles. This was a modernised copy, dating from the end of the

nineteenth century, purchased at the Palmgren book auction in 1924.

By 1967 Bringéus had already clarified the connections between the two manuscripts (RB still missing), the Sandvik estate, the Gasslander family, and – a further complication to the tale – the role of the clergyman Palmgren, who turned out to be the one who had brokered the loan to Djurklou. Palmgren however had kept the exact conditions of ownership from Djurklou (at least indirectly insinuating that the ownership was his). Thus Bringéus had no knowledge of the letter sent by Professor Lundell to Lundeberg. That letter was preserved by Lundeberg's son Ernst (uncle to my mother-in-law), together with various annotations, books, letters, newspaper clippings, and such like, useful in my ongoing study of the back-story of the version called '*Salomoniska magiska konst*' ('Solomonic Black Magic').

However, while the original black book had already gone missing by 1895, there was still a notebook, which was overlooked by the family. In order to further unfold the story of the Gasslander bound manuscripts of magic, there is a need for added context, which I strive to provide for this '*Sandvikshäftet*' ('The Sandvik Notebook', referred to hereafter as SN). As it is privately owned, this notebook has never been known in academic circles. Today I work with photocopies, as the original was itself subsequently stolen. Margareta inherited SN from Ernst Lundeberg (1879–1967), who was born at Sandvik Manor.

SN is composed of handwritten recipes, and a few charms, set down on old handmade sheets of quarto format paper (from the eighteenth century), folded and sewn together, possibly rearranged at a date later than their collation. Six of the prescriptions coincide with those copied by Djurklou. There are formulas, recipes and ritual prescriptions for curing livestock as well as human beings. To my mother-in-law however, interesting as these aspects of popular spells and charms might have been, they paled in significance in relation to the narrative of the missing book of magic she had heard as a child, the one that went missing long before she was born. When I suggested that this might after all be the missing book, she brushed it aside: 'Oh no', she said, 'the book of magic should have a cover with a mark on'. Narrative expectations notwithstanding, this still leaves a set of intriguing questions to ponder regarding SN; how it emerged, and how it is connected to the Sandvik estate, and the roles played in its production by the Reverends Gasslander residing in the Burseryd vicarage.

Three eighteenth-century manuscripts from Sandvik Manor

To consider the motivation of the clergymen Gasslander for their writing I will return to the privately owned eighteenth-century notebook (SN) of magical and rational prescriptions from Sandvik Manor, inherited by my mother-in-law. Her mother was born at Sandvik in 1877. The estate was bought in 1812 by Sven Peter Gasslander, son and grandson of the two clergymen Gasslander, known among scholars for the early folklife description, mentioned above, for a glossary of the old dialect and for the excerpts of the BB and RB of magic, jointly published under the title *Salomoniska magiska konster* (1918).

I compare the SN of magical and rational prescriptions to two bound manuscripts from Sandvik Manor; RB and BB. These are in turn related to handwritten notations bound into the family Bible, and a series of 25 small diaries kept by Johannes Gasslander, covering the years 1756–91. My questions are whether SN was copied from a book or collected from peasant informants, and if it was, how is it related to BB and RB? SN clearly comes from Sandvik Manor, but who held the pen and why? What kind of knowledge was sought – was it collected for antiquarian reasons, esoteric interests, or for practical use, such as curing livestock and human beings?

In 1967 Nils-Arvid Bringéus established the connection between *Salomoniska magiska konster* and the Sandvik estate when he identified the until then anonymous clergyman of Westbo as the vicar Johannes Gasslander, and his broker as another clergyman, Ludvig Palmgren. The editor of *Salomoniska magiska konster*, Paul Heurgren, believed that the peasants used the charms and ritual prescriptions. In 1924 BB was found again. Bringéus (1967) explains that most of the magic formulas of BB were copied from a learned seventeenth-century book, *Wolfgang Hildebrandi Magia Naturalis* (first published in 1610, in Sweden in 1650). RB was missing until 1991 (Bringéus 1991). The bound manuscripts contain magic cures for human and animal diseases. Towards the end of the assumed RB – in 1967 accessible only as a copy with BB – Bringéus found prescriptions of local origin with four named informants, probably added by Sven Peter, son of Johannes.

I find that the RB also contains charms on how to gain wealth, and virgins, and how to win a dispute or a lawsuit. Acquiring spirits of assistance will enable the owner of the book to become invisible, to walk on water, or instantly to be carried home from any distant place. Many of the formulas are morally un-

acceptable. Perhaps this was the reason why RB was allowed to ‘disappear’. Nor did Palmgren make use of the copy he modernised.

To sum up so far, the manuscripts around the SN manuscript range from notes to a few neatly copied manuscripts, among them *Försök til en ordabok på the uti Jönkjöpings Lähn Wässbo Härad brukelige Ord och Talesätt, som mer eller mindre gå ifrån then wedertagna Swenskan, Upsändt 1766. J.G.* (‘An Attempt at a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Common Use in Jönköping Province, Westbo District that More or Less Diverge from the Ordinary Swedish Language. Sent 1766. J.G.’ [Johannes Gasslander]; Ekenvall 1943/4: 104 ff.), the two aforementioned bound manuscripts, the BB and RB of magic, and the folklife publication of 1774, *Beskrifning, om allmogens sinnelag, seder...*, attributed to Petrus Gasslander (1680–1758), and/or his son, Johannes Gasslander (1718–93).

The glossary met no opposition, but the folklife description was suppressed. When published in 1774, the bishop reproached Johannes Gasslander in public, thus causing him to burn every copy he could find. The publication was intended as a model for a broad inventory of vernacular customs and beliefs, perhaps meant to render visible, and thereby obliterate, what were presumed to be pre-Christian beliefs (Bringéus 1967). During the eighteenth century, the official line in public discourse was rationality, in the modern spirit of the Enlightenment, but there was also a strand of interest in occultism alongside the quest for rationality (Oja 2005).

Could the mere description of beliefs and customs inspire reproach from the bishop? There are a few pre-Christian customs described. The district of Burseryd-Sandvik was considered old-fashioned in the first half of the eighteenth century (Bringéus 1967). The preceding seventeenth century was characterised by strict Lutheran Orthodoxy, but this district resisted the persecutions of witches. Only once, in the 1670s, an embarrassing church trial had taken place concerning a race by certain naked young maidens across a bog, which was taken to be about fertility (Lindstén 1969: 154–6). Still the bishop condemned the book (Virdestam 1931: 138). Maybe the bishop just preferred the rationality and wholesome lifestyle of the Linnéan era in the eighteenth century. Or did he expect more manuscripts were to come from the vicarage?

Already the senior Gasslander, Petrus, was known for several manuscripts he intended to publish, according to his funeral sermon, copied into an old

manuscript ('Likpredikan' 264 ff.). What if the bishop had reason to fear more collections penned by Johannes? The vicarage must have been known for its library and the clergymen's habit of writing. Another concern of the bishop might have been the legend included in the West Nordic folklore tradition that the clerics who had studied in Wittenberg were also educated at the 'Black School', run by the Devil – where each one of them received a book of black magic (Edsman 1962, Gunnell 1998). The bishop would not accept the addition of any fuel to such a rumour. Petrus and Johannes Gasslander's parish, Burseryd-Sandvik, some 100 kilometres from Gothenburg, fell within the area where these legends were known. There are some sixty reports of the Black School of Wittenberg, the black books and their clerical owners. Some are mentioned by name and year of life, written down as late as in the 1920s in the Department of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research in Gothenburg. It is also mentioned that clergymen became Freemasons.

One of the legends, told in 1928 by a woman born 1861 in Burseryd, maintains that all clergymen who had studied at the Wittenberg School in Germany were extraordinarily wise; they could 'do more than other people', provided they wanted to. According to the elders, such a clergyman had resided in Sandvik; he was said to be especially skilled at restoring stolen goods (VFA 1801: 14–16).² According to this woman, the priest had caused a thief to walk down the aisle of the church, believing he was walking in the woods (VFA 1801: 16).³

There is no mention of the name of the clergyman. Petrus Gasslander (d. 1758) had studied in Turku, Johannes (d. 1793) in Lund. The grandson Sven Peter (d. 1833) had studied in Lund, but was not a clergyman. Still, he was said to have a black book, as he had been to Wittenberg (interview with Anna Lorentz, 22.9.1984). In 1984, the vicars seemed to have become too distant, the local tradition now pivoting around 'the doctor'.

Another implication is that Petrus Gasslander responded to the Royal Edict of 1666 which created an

embryonic form of the Royal Academy of Antiquities, History and Literature. This edict ordered every clergyman to document vernacular memories of old age, both physical and mental. Long before Herder's idea of a 'national spirit' (*Geist des Volkes*) the government acknowledged the peasants as carriers of the oral tradition. Only some sixty years before Petrus Gasslander (in 1712) took up his post in Burseryd-Sandvik his predecessor had reported a thirteenth-century wooden baptismal font, carved with a runic inscription (Tuneld 1960).

The question of authorship

Ludvig Palmgren was a great collector of old books and manuscripts and was highly respected by the scholars but not by the local people (Pleijel 1968). He corresponded with Nils Gabriel Djurklou (1829–1904). In 1874 he brokered a loan to Djurklou of two 'manuscripts' of magic from Sandvik: BB and RB. Luckily Djurklou copied the manuscripts as Palmgren never returned them to Sandvik (Ljungström forthcoming a).

The letter from the professor prompted some talk of the missing book. The family knew nothing either of '*Beskrifning, om allmogens sinnelag, seder...*', or that their missing manuscripts from Sandvik, BB and RB, were known to the research community, published from the copy made by Djurklou in 1918. In 1895 Lundeberg replied to the professor: 'I also have other manuscripts by the aforesaid vicars, although most unfortunately, I myself cannot read their handwriting' (letter from P. W. Lundeberg to J. A. Lundell, 2.12.1895). He might refer to the SN manuscript.

The 73 prescriptions of the SN seem to have been added as field notes over time. Following the handwriting of Johannes in his diaries (1756–91) I believe he may have been the sole writer. Manuscripts like SN were circulated in copy-chains among certain families, a combination of books on good house-keeping (*hushållsbok*) and books of magic prescriptions (Vistrand 1897, 1906). Sometimes a named informant is quoted for a cure. There are headlines for procedures against malaria, dysentery, snake-bite, and so forth. Its content is clearly of male interest with entries on hunting, shooting and the wellbeing of horses and cattle – but no fishing. Only one, on how to get the dough to rise, seems traditionally female. There are remedies for illness among human beings and animals and tricks to get rich – but no love-tricks. These are in RB.

Nils-Arvid Bringéus considers BB to have been

2 'Alla präster som hade studerat vid Wittenbergska skolan i Tyskland, voro "kloka" och kunde mer än andra, om de bara ville. Det fanns en sån präst i Sandvik, talte de gamle om. Han skall särskilt ha varit svår till att ställa tillrätta stulet gods.'

3 'Så pass kunde prästen, så han hade tvingat tjuven att gå genom kyrkan, fast han trodde att han gick genom skogen.'

written by Johannes Gasslander, 'the anonymous clergyman from Westbo'. Palmgren writes that the two books were used by Sven Peter Gasslander, 'a great sorcerer' and a Freemason (letter from Palmgren to Djurklou 16.4.1874, quoted in Bringéus 1967). He was a clerk at the court of assizes who studied medicine at Lund University towards the end of the eighteenth century. Being addressed 'Herr Controlleur', he was the given spokesman of the parish, working as a local doctor and growing a pharmaceutical garden (Bringéus 1967).

Bringéus identifies an informant of RB by name, age, and residence, who tells a charm against the *wetta*, a supranormal collective being living underground, and believed to cause various diseases. The charm aims at casting out gout, caused by the *wetta*, according to Måns of Lida. When no one could fight 'the little ones' underground one could use the trick of cutting a grass turf and placing it on top of one's head. That would help. This charm appears twice in SN. I am inclined to think that the writer is Johannes Gasslander on both occasions. So too with RB, with few additions by his son.

SN is not identical with RB, but there are similarities. Six prescriptions are identical. In four cases, the name of an author is given as a reference. Not all four of them are the same in SN as in RB, but 'Måns of Lida' appears in both (1769–1834). Måns moved in from the neighbouring parish in 1796 when Johannes was already dead (Bringéus 1967). In the bookkeeping section of Johannes Gasslander's diary, however, Måns Månsson is mentioned in 1788, before the farmhands and maids of the vicarage, receiving a sum in cash ('Dagböcker' 1788: last page). The grammar of one of the prescriptions gives the impression that it was noted on paper while listening to the talk. The handwriting of SN looks to be in the style of Johannes, some of it was written with an aged hand. The collection implies that the prescriptions were to be practised, but I would not discount an antiquarian interest, even a medical-historical motivation. Måns Månsson of Lida explained that the disease referred to was the gout. The *wetta* ritual and charms of this kind were used for other problems as well, for instance for curing rickets (Ljungström forthcoming b).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries magic and wisdom were conceived of as one and the same thing. This simplifies the question as to how the clerics were able to copy and translate books of magic. Science would be the key to the acquisition of knowledge of the secret agency of nature – *Magia Naturalis*



Salomoniska magiska konster, title page of RB, Museum of Cultural History, Lund.

– that would unveil the wisdom of God according to the apocryphal sixth and seventh books of Moses, which were believed to have been lost (Bringéus 1967: 26; Edsman 1962: 88). The clerics were the ones who knew Latin and Greek and were able to translate books of wisdom.

The Gasslander clergymen might have taken over a work from elsewhere, but it is possible that they copied Hildebrand's book of wisdom, *Wolfgang Hildebrandi Magia Naturalis* (1610, in Swedish 1650). The vicars were learned men with a substantial library.⁴ In the diary Johannes made notes of which books to order from the booksellers in Gothenburg and Stockholm. He made a small drawing of the freemasonic pair of compasses and setsquare and a note about the distance of the sun from the earth in the year 9520, the diameters of the earth from every corner, 1200 Swedish miles ('Dagböcker' 1756: last page).

I believe Johannes Gasslander wrote most of SN and his son Sven Peter followed up his work, or they worked together. It is a mere guess that Petrus Gasslander was already in the habit of copying learned books, spending his time writing and reading, and that his son Johannes joined in, while his grandson kept up the custom of the family. According to Bringéus, Johannes Gasslander may have written most parts of BB. I suggest Petrus' handwriting for certain parts. Also, I regard part of RB to have been produced by Johannes Gasslander, partly out of

4 A list of some 237 books in Swedish is preserved as well as a few actual books bearing their signatures; a hymnbook, a book of the law and a book in German on exotic travel, all of them privately owned.

interest in esotericism, a strand of the Enlightenment. Interest in the esoteric reached its peak at around 1800 with the Freemasons. The grandson Sven Peter may have been a Freemason, according to Palmgren and local historians. I have found neither Sven Peter, nor his father Johannes registered, but the influence is obvious, especially in RB. I suggest that the latter part of RB was penned by Johannes Gasslander, due to the handwriting, as compared to his notations in the Family Bible. Sven Peter added a few remarks. Again, it is possible that Johannes in part copied RB from an older version.

The century of the three generations of the Gasslander family coincides with the period of the continental Enlightenment. In the family Bible there is also a note about Petrus Gasslander's interest in the pietistic thought of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The manuscript glossary and the '*Beskrifning, om allmogens sinnelag, seder...*' (1774) call for a different motivation as to whether both father and son worked on them. They are too early to be the fruits of Romanticism. Rather, both Ludvig Palmgren and Nils Gabriel Djurklou were exponents of the romantic nationalist movement at a time when folklore was taken to be a manifestation of a type of national community with a popular base (Palmenfelt 2010: 8 f.). Still, it is not sufficient to explain the interest of the clergymen one hundred years earlier in copying learned books and/or collecting knowledge from their parish inhabitants.

SN may have been collected over time from local informants by Johannes Gasslander for practical use as well as for antiquarian reasons. His work seems to have been continued by Sven Peter Gasslander with various prescriptions copied from books and prints, intended for practical use in curing human beings and livestock. With today's access to RB, I find that it contains charms on how to gain wealth and virgins and how to win a dispute or a lawsuit – beside the more common bits of advice for curing diseases in cattle, keeping bees and protecting guns.

Conclusions

The three manuscripts, 'The Sandvik Notebook', 'The Black Book' and 'The Red Book', from Sandvik Manor, were owned by Sven Peter Gasslander, the son and grandson of the Gasslander clergymen of the Burseryd-Sandvik parish. They were learned men with a private library, running several farms. Among scholars they are known for a folk life description which was condemned by the bishop when

it was published in 1774 and consequently burnt. A glossary manuscript of local dialect words, dated 1766 by Johannes Gasslander met with no obstacles.

Two identified informants appear in SN and were copied into RB. Sven Peter added certain pharmaceutical recipes to SN. Most of the notebook might have been intended to cure human beings and livestock – collected by Johannes over time. The practical interest goes together well with the antiquarian motivation.

What if RB is an educated man's literary creation of a book of magic, based on rumours and legends extant in the area concerning the Black School of Wittenberg? It is hardly of vernacular origin though some rituals for clearing the rifle to get good shooting are common. The mere fact that in the vernacular imagination the black books of Wittenberg did exist, and were being used by clergymen, might have led someone, somewhere to create a book that verifies the imagination. In order to be accepted as authentic reality, though ostensive, it would have to be diabolic, turning the moral standards of human beings upside down. It can hardly be proven but perhaps explicated through a close reading of the covetousness of RB as the only paratext is the titles of the paragraphs (cf. Ohrvik 2012).

Most of BB, dating probably from the end of the eighteenth century, is considered to have been written by Johannes Gasslander. It is a copy of a continental publication, hardly meant to be used in practice. It seems that Johannes Gasslander did most of the work of copying BB from *Wolfgang Hildebrandi Magia Naturalis*, but his father Petrus may well have started the intellectual work at the vicarage, thus founding the family tradition. There is also handwriting of other persons besides Johannes's in the book, and I would thus not exclude the Petrus from the authorship either.

RB is of later origin, a copy of an unknown version, by Johannes Gasslander who wrote up most of the manuscript. Parts have been added from identified local informants for practical use. Prescriptions and practical advice were circulated among certain families in the area. The practical and antiquarian motivations seem to be connected with an esoteric interest – not necessarily credulous interest. Wisdom and magic were, however, regarded as inseparable concepts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, enabling men of the cloth to tread paths of the divine nature that would lead unto God anyhow. Part of RB could have been written in answer to the belief that clergymen who had studied in Wittenberg were

in possession of the Devil's black book of magic, and thus verifying the West-Nordic legend. I suggest, that Johannes's son Sven Peter added a few remarks to RB, too. Did they copy the previous text or create it? – The answer is out of our reach. ■



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