

TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg



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EDITED BY

SYLVIA AKAR, JAAKKO HÄMEEN-ANTTILA
& INKA NOKSO-KOIVISTO



Helsinki 2013

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Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
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JOHAN DAVID ÅKERBLAD: ORIENTALIST, TRAVELLER, AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTOR

Fredrik Thomasson
Uppsala University

Johan David Åkerblad (Stockholm 1763 – Rome 1819) was legation secretary at the Swedish mission in Constantinople in 1792–1793. Arriving at his first diplomatic posting in the Ottoman capital in 1784, he had already spent a great part of the 1780s travelling in the Eastern Mediterranean. During the Christmas of 1792, Åkerblad wrote to a botanist friend in Stockholm:

I have wasted more money than I should on manuscripts of all kinds, and the worst of it all is that I sense the complete futility of it. A flash of lightning strikes from France that makes a connoisseur of herbs look up from his magnifying glass and his cap, and the orientalist from his manuscript.....¹

That collecting manuscripts felt futile is easy to understand. Europe was in turmoil and the political situation in Constantinople was complicated. Åkerblad had been critical of increased despotism in Sweden during Gustav III's reign and welcomed the French Revolution. Some of his diplomat colleagues even considered him “a dangerous man of Enlightenment”.² Nevertheless, for the first time, we can now judge whether (according to our perspective) he wasted his money. Although we do not know what he paid, Åkerblad's *Shahnama* was certainly a judicious acquisition on the Constantinople book market in 1792 (Figures 1, 2, 3).³

This and the following article will briefly trace the history of Åkerblad's collecting and the vicissitudes of his Oriental manuscripts. My article introduces Åkerblad, while the following contribution by Olga Vasilyeva treats the history

1 Johan David Åkerblad [JDÅ] to Olof Swartz, 24 Dec. 1792, Constantinople, Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien [The Royal Academy of Science], Stockholm. Åkerblad himself wrote the finishing five periods.

2 JDÅ to Schering Rosenhane, 25 Feb. 1797, Constantinople, G 231 h, Uppsala University Library [UUL].

3 Please note that all figures for this and the next contribution are to be found in the plates insert between the two articles.

of these manuscripts after Åkerblad's sale of his collection in 1815 and presents an inventory of Åkerblad's manuscripts that now are housed in Russian institutions.

Kaj Öhrnberg was instrumental to these articles being written. While Olga Vasilyeva was researching the Russian General Jan Pieter van Suchtelen's collection of Oriental manuscripts, she found an inscription on the *Shahnama* that read "Åkerblad Constple 1792". She asked Kaj whether he had any idea of who this Åkerblad might be. Kaj Öhrnberg was aware of my work on Åkerblad and he put us in contact. This subject is a fitting tribute to his wide interests in Arabic and Oriental history, and it is also relevant to another of his areas of interest: European travellers to the Middle East and Arabia. We express our sincere thanks to Kaj Öhrnberg, who by putting us in contact made it possible to add another piece of research on the history of Northern European Oriental scholarship and collecting.

When I first began researching Åkerblad's life, one of the main starting points was to look at his two notebooks conserved in the Vatican Library. The larger one of these, the *Vaticani Latini 9785*, has on its last pages (fols 73r–75r) a list of *Libri manuscripta* (Figure 4).⁴ The list (see Appendix 2 in the following article) comprises four vellum manuscripts, as well as six Coptic, five Ethiopian, 23 Arabic, 17 Persian, 27 Turkish, and three Tatar manuscripts. Printed books are listed at the end, such as Golius's and Castell's dictionaries, various grammars, and parts of the Bible in several languages. When I first read the list, I had problems understanding that it actually referred to Åkerblad's own collection of Oriental manuscripts.

The received knowledge on Åkerblad was that he never had any money, so it struck me as unlikely that he could have acquired so many manuscripts (even considering the low prices on the book markets in Constantinople and the Middle East in the 1780–1790s). Like many others before me, I had taken too seriously his and his scholarly colleagues' laments about economical hardships. His petitions and correspondence are full of requests for money from his employers, but while it is certainly true that he did live for long periods with very little money, he sometimes did have enough money to acquire precious manuscripts and objects. While Åkerblad may not have been an obsessive collector (that is, someone who lets the quest for objects take over their lives), the 1792 letter indicates that he sometimes made acquisitions with money that he might have needed for other purposes.

4 For a full treatment of Åkerblad and his accomplishments, see Thomasson 2013; 2011.

After having found other small pieces of information on certain of the manuscripts listed in the inventory (the Samaritan Bible fragment mentioned below is such an example), I realised that the pages in *Vaticani Latini* 9785 indeed described his own collection. The list of the manuscripts was tantalising, and I tried to trace them in both Sweden and Italy. I assumed that Åkerblad might have sold the manuscripts during his time in Italy (1805–1819), but my attempts to find them in Italian collections proved unsuccessful. As his contacts with French Oriental scholars were frequent, I also checked the catalogues of the main French repositories to make sure that they had not been sold to France. The other hypothesis was that they had been sold after his death in Stockholm, but there was no track of them in the records of the sale organised by Åkerblad's sister after his death in 1819. Neither could I find any of the manuscripts in Sweden. It was only when Olga Vasilyeva contacted me that the idea that he himself sold his collection during his lifetime and that they had ended up in a third country, so to speak, dawned on me. While this was one of those late realisations that of course should have come earlier, it was nevertheless a welcome breakthrough that added important information about Åkerblad's scientific interests and new keys to understanding his rather exceptional life. I would also like to take the opportunity here to thank Olga Vasilyeva for her extraordinary investigative work in several Russian institutions that made it possible to reconstruct Åkerblad's manuscript collection almost in its entirety.

Åkerblad's collection should be understood as formed by opportunity. He acquired the most interesting manuscripts that came his way and that he could afford. The collection is also testimony to his broad scholarly interests. Åkerblad was not a believer, and though he was well versed in both Christian history and pagan mythology, his interests were predominantly secular. His collection represents an interesting example of what a single European scholar with limited economical means could buy while travelling and working in the Ottoman Empire in the late eighteenth century.

TRAVELLER IN THE EAST

During Åkerblad's first posting to Constantinople in the 1780s, he came to know most of the foreign scholars in the city. Two of Åkerblad's close friends from Constantinople, the ex-Jesuit Giambattista Toderini and the Tuscan scholar Domenico Sestini, ran into problems when they tried to acquire manuscripts. Toderini explained the subterfuge involved in book-buying:

I went with abbe Sestini to Sarcì, the book market which is a long street with shops full of codices on both sides, to buy something. The Turks are very

restive in communicating their writings and mysteries to the Infidels (that is how they call us), and when they saw us browsing through the books, they shouted in our faces. To avoid being insulted, and to make sure that the seller would not have problems, we left but made him a sign that he should follow us. We escaped to a different street and made our deal with the bookseller in an Armenian workshop.⁵

Toderini's broad interests and scientific curiosity are mirrored in the depth of enquiry and the organisation of the material found in his three-volume study of Ottoman learning, *Letteratura Turchesca*. It starts with a passionate defence of Ottoman and Muslim attitudes towards learning and science:

Before commencing the study of Turkish Literature, I must correct a great popular error, still rooted in the soul of many learned Europeans, who are firm in the belief, writing on Muhammad, that while the sciences were cultivated before, he felt that the threat against his doctrine was such that he with severe rules closed any admittance to the study, making ignorance the base upon which the bizarre Moslem religion was founded.⁶

The purpose of Toderini's book was to relegate this error to history, a goal that Åkerblad sympathised with. Åkerblad had profound knowledge of, and respect for, both Ottoman and Arab learning. He studied Arabic and Turkish at Uppsala University with Carl Aurivillius, probably the foremost Orientalist in Sweden at the time. Aurivillius had studied with Christian Benedikt Michaelis in Halle, Étienne Fourmont in Paris, and Albert Schultens in Leiden. Åkerblad was already at the age of twenty when he left Uppsala, knowledgeable about the new directions in Oriental scholarship, and he would visit several universities and libraries on his way to Turkey. At the risk of simplifying the history of Orientalism, Åkerblad was part of a growing secular strand of Oriental studies that saw the study of Oriental literature as an object that was worthy in and of itself, without being explicitly related to Christian and theological issues. The abundance of religious texts tired Åkerblad, as shown by his comment – in this case, on Coptic manuscripts – about their boring nature: “this literature offers few attractions, and [...] such studies require a lot of courage”.⁷

When he arrived as *jeune de langue* in Constantinople in 1784, he was well prepared. And in contrast to most of his foreign colleagues – including Toderini and Sestini – he soon spoke the local languages, to the extent that he was able to

5 Toderini 1787, II: 35.

6 Toderini 1787, I: 1.

7 Åkerblad 1834: 340.

travel in disguise. We have many testimonies to Åkerblad's exceptional fluency in Arabic, Turkish, and Modern Greek.

Kaj Öhrnberg has extensively studied and written about another Scandinavian famed for having travelled in disguise, Georg August Wallin (1811–1852). Wallin spent years under his Arabic alter-ego, while Åkerblad only seemed to have used his when it was expedient during his travels. For example, he entered Jerusalem on horseback in 1788 at a time when all Christians were forced to dismount: "But as no one considered me Christian I rode all the way to the monastery of the Saviour, to which I was directed."⁸ While travelling in the Nile Delta, he dressed up as a Janissary, in this case with security being the main reason: "I did this trip disguised as a Turkish soldier and I am in despair because neither my purse nor my time permitted me to see the entire Delta that is to us so unknown and that my disguise made it possible to do in safe conditions."⁹ There is a certain mystique around these travellers who knew languages and customs so well. This aura is not unlike the fame of travellers that reputedly visited Mecca, Medina, and other holy sites. It would possibly be more interesting to shift the debate from who could travel in disguise, and where they happened to go, to a discussion on how this knowledge changed the travellers' perceptions and ideas about the cultures and places that they visited.

COLLECTING MANUSCRIPTS AND LANGUAGES

An important part of extending Oriental knowledge during this period was the search for new texts. As interest in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian literature grew during the eighteenth century, many travellers did their utmost to find works unknown in the West. Printing arrived relatively late in the Ottoman empire, and thus the quest was mainly directed towards manuscripts, although printed books – for instance, in Modern Greek – also attracted the attention of Åkerblad and his scholarly friends. One of Åkerblad's travelling companions, the French scholar Jean-Baptiste-Gaspard D'Ansse de Villoison, was luckier in his quest for manuscripts than Åkerblad. He had more money and, importantly, he had backing by the French ambassador in Constantinople. Nevertheless, Villoison complained that it was very difficult to buy manuscripts from unwilling priests: "it required a great deal of labour and sweat to get the manuscript book from

8 Fol. 42r, Vat. lat. 9785, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [BAV], Città del Vaticano.

9 JDÅ to Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, 28 Dec. 1787, Constantinople, no. 105, Ep G 7:17, National library of Sweden [KB], Stockholm.

Father Sloutziari”.¹⁰ The verb used by Villoison, *extorqueo*, implies that a certain amount of force was needed.

The search for manuscripts was actually also a part of Swedish government policy. Åkerblad’s immediate travelling predecessor, the learned Jacob Jonas Björnståhl, died while surveying monastery libraries in Northern Greece in 1779. He had been instructed by the government to search for texts of religious and linguistic interest on behalf of a Swedish commission set up to deliver a new translation of the Bible. Åkerblad’s official brief, on the other hand, was to gain insights into both the spoken and written languages of the Mediterranean in order to be able to serve the government as interpreter and translator. Nevertheless, he often had difficulties convincing his superiors in the diplomatic service that all of his travels were really necessary. When it came to finding new texts, his results were meager, as Åkerblad explained to a benefactor in Stockholm:

Around Tripoli are several Greek and Maronite monasteries, some of which I visited in the hope of finding manuscripts. This was the foremost reason for my trip to the Lebanon. I can now explain to Sir that the learned have little new to expect of that kind from there. I have minutely surveyed almost all of the book collections on the Lebanon; they only contain Syriac and Arabic breviaries and a few Arabian poets long known in Europe. A single historical work, which I believe is not known, have I had copied. It is a kind of chronicle about Lebanon and other places in Syria from the beginning of the Mohammedan epoch until 1730, written by a Maronite Patriarch Stephan. It is written in Arabic but with Syriac letters (this manner of writing is called *Karschuni*).¹¹

However, according to his notebook he also found other things that were yet not widely known or published. Two such examples were extracts from a historical work by Ibn Asbāt, Ḥamzah ibn Aḥmad (d. 1520) and a medical tract by Anṭākī, Dā’ūd ibn ‘Umar (d. 1599).¹² Other things caught his attention as well, often because of the linguistic challenges posed by the texts. He describes buying a manuscript in Jaffa (the only item in his collection about which we have precise information on its acquisition): “During my stay in Jaffa I got acquainted with some Samaritans. I bought from one of them a fragment of the Samaritan Bible that contains some chapters of the Deuteronomy” (Figure 5). In his notebook, he also wrote down the Samaritan alphabet with the help of one of the local Samaritans.¹³

¹⁰ Homer: xlvi.

¹¹ JDÅ to Carl Christoffer Gjörwell, 28 Dec. 1787, Constantinople, no. 105, Ep G 7:17, KB.

¹² Fol. 24r, Vat. lat. 9785. For Ibn Asbāt, see Brockelmann 1938: 42, no. 15. For Anṭākī, see Brockelmann 1902: 364, no. 3, 2nd title.

¹³ JDÅ to Gjörwell, 1 March 1789, Marseille, no. 5, Ep G 7:13, KB; fol. 12r, Vat. lat. 9785.

Åkerblad's travels in the Mediterranean during the 1780–1790s also left other types of paper trails. We can follow some of his peregrinations through a few of his passports, which came into Suchtelen's possession. An Ottoman passport from 1784 named the cities of Brussa, Salonica, Jerusalem, Baghdad, and the province of Egypt. The destination of Baghdad is especially intriguing. We have no sources that mention Åkerblad's intentions to travel there, but it might have been part of his programme. He did, for instance, want to visit Palmyra (although he never succeeded in doing so). Another Ottoman passport from 1796 (during his final posting to Constantinople) granted travel to Salonica and the islands of the archipelago (Figure 6).

Åkerblad's main interest was languages. He wrote in a large number of languages and scripts. A tentative count exceeds twenty: Albanian, Aramaic, Arabic (various dialects), Coptic, Dutch, English, Ethiopic (Ge'ez and Amharic), Etruscan, French, German, Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, Phoenician, Portuguese, Spanish, Syriac, Swedish, Samaritan, Tatar, Turkish, and so on. While living in Rome in the 1810s, anyone interested in Oriental languages would visit him: "I also became acquainted with Signior Akerblad at Rome, who is another of these extraordinary linguists – his knowledge [of languages] is *confined to twenty-three*."¹⁴ Åkerblad approached new languages with an initial period of intense studies; he wrote to a female friend about his newly found obsession with Aramaic: "since a month, goodbye Greek, antiquities, Coptic, society, amusements, I am not occupied with anything but Chaldean [Aramaic]. I well know it is a great folly, but what do you want, I have been carried away, and one does not become wise when one wants."¹⁵ A year later it was Ethiopic's turn, including both the ancient Ge'ez – still used in liturgy – and the living Amharic: "I have for the past few months plunged myself into certain barbarous investigations; an Ethiopian priest comes home to me every day to teach me the *cursed cries* of his language."¹⁶ He also taught several languages throughout his life and his methods appear quite modern. A 1790s visitor to Constantinople asked for his advice:

When I after some time requested Åkerblad to find me a good language teacher for the common Turkish and New Greek I might need, he answered that no language master was necessary. I only needed a good memory and

¹⁴ Henry Salt to William R. Hamilton, 28 Jan. 1816, Malta, in Halls 1834, 1:441.

¹⁵ JDÅ to Friederike Brun, 7 Feb. 1810, Rome, fol. 147, NKS 1992, Danish National Library, Copenhagen.

¹⁶ JDÅ to Sebastiano Ciampi, 16 April 1811, Rome, Raccolta Sebastiano Ciampi, Cassetta E. 368, Forteguerriana library, Pistoia.

to follow his instructions, after that he taught me to conjugate and decline, I should learn at least 10 words every day, and when I had mastered the most indispensable [words] I should immediately start talking as well as I could.¹⁷

Åkerblad made contributions to several scholarly areas and his investigations were most often triggered by linguistic difficulties. His work on Phoenician inscriptions and his early and exceptional interest in Greek ancient magic, for instance, are closely related to language issues. Another example of his intensive language learning is when Åkerblad studied Coptic with the Danish scholar Georg Zoëga, who after six months described Åkerblad's progress: "Åkerblad studies the Coptic language with fervour, and he knows more of it than me at this point."¹⁸ His knowledge of Coptic was the key to his work on the Demotic part of the Rosetta inscription. In 1802, Åkerblad published the treatise on the Rosetta Stone that would bring his fame as an Orientalist.¹⁹ He was one of Jean-François Champollion's predecessors in the process that led to the deciphering of the hieroglyphs in 1822. Several Coptic manuscripts in his collection (Figure 7) serve as testimony to his interest in this area. Intriguingly, they are inscribed as having belonged to the Ethiopian-Coptic church in Rome, Santo Stefano degli Abissini (situated within the walls of Vatican City) (Figure 10). Åkerblad was in Rome during the French occupation of the city in 1798–1799 and the manuscripts might have been acquired during this turbulent year, marked by both individual looting and the French occupiers' removal of more than 500 manuscripts from the Vatican Library to Paris.

It appears likely that almost all of Åkerblad's Oriental manuscripts (with the exception of the Coptic manuscripts) were acquired during his postings and travels in the Ottoman Empire in the 1780–1790s. Except for a few sparse notes, there is very little information about what happened to Åkerblad's collection after he left Constantinople for the last time in 1797. In 1798, he tried to have his collection sent to Stockholm on one of the frigates that usually visited Livorno in the fall, as Swedish warships were regularly patrolling the Mediterranean to protect Swedish merchant shipping. He justified the demand for military assistance by invoking the constant fear of piracy: "to let me embark on the frigate some chests containing books, manuscripts, antiquities, etc. that I have collected during my travels in Greece and Italy, which would be exposed to the risk of being abducted by privateers and pirates, that are more than ever plying the Mediterranean."²⁰

17 Löwenhielm 1923: 75.

18 Georg Zoëga to Stefano Borgia, 17 Oct. 1798, Rome (Andreasen † & Ascani (eds) forthcoming: letter 769a).

19 Åkerblad 1802.

20 JDÅ to Shering Rosenhane, 5 Aug. 1798, Rome, G 231 h, UUL.

He was not successful, however, and when he left Italy for Sweden in 1799 he left at least the main parts of his collection in Livorno. A few years later, he wrote to a friend in Stockholm about it being stuck there: “Since almost three years all of my collections that I own in Italy are united in Livorno with [the Sw. consul] Mr Grabien [...] these collections that now amount to 9 heavy chests are according to what Grabien writes much damaged by moths and maybe not worth the cost of such a long transport.”²¹

Åkerblad left Rome in the spring of 1799. There is no known image of Åkerblad, and a passport issued to him by the *Repubblica Romana* (the regime installed in Rome during the French occupation 1798–1799) in Suchtelen’s collection is interesting as it describes him as a blond man of ordinary stature, with a round face, wide nose, regular mouth, and dark eyes (Figure 8). On his way to Sweden, he spent several months in northern Italy, as well as almost four months in Göttingen. Once back in Sweden, he stayed only one year and left for Paris in 1801 in order to be able to continue his work with Oriental languages. After repeated requests for employment in the Foreign Service, he was first posted at the mission in The Hague and later appointed as secretary at the mission in Paris. In 1804, he worked as *chargé d’affaires* in Paris. When Sweden broke diplomatic relations with France and he was ordered back to Sweden, he disobeyed and went instead to Italy, thus falling out of favour with the foreign administration in Stockholm. He claimed that he sold off parts of his collection when he tried to finance his return to Sweden from Italy in 1805, but maintained that Sweden’s participation in the Napoleonic Wars made it impossible for him to leave Italy. In 1809, he mentioned to his friend Paul-Louis Courier that he had been reunited with his books and manuscripts which had been left in Italy in 1799, and in a letter to Jean-François Champollion in 1812 he remarked that some of his Arabic dictionaries were still in Florence.²²

TWO SALES TO SUCHTELEN

While living in Rome during the Napoleonic Wars, Åkerblad was cut off from Sweden and came into serious economical difficulties. This time we can trust his lamenting, especially as we have several testimonies that confirm the dire nature of his situation. As soon as the European borders opened up after Napoleon’s defeat in 1814, Åkerblad needed to sell anything that could provide him with

²¹ JDÅ to Erik Bergstedt, 13 Aug. 1804, Paris, F 651 b, UUL.

²² JDÅ to Paul Louis Courier, 21 June 1809, Rome (Viолет-le-Duc (ed.) 1976–1985, 2:94); JDÅ to Jean-François Champollion, 26 Feb. 1812, Rome, NAF 20357, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

money. By some manner, Åkerblad found a prospective buyer in Stockholm: Pieter Suchtelen (introduced by Olga Vasilyeva in the following article), the Russian minister in Stockholm in 1812–1836. Suchtelen was a well-known buyer of books, coins, and other artefacts in Stockholm, and the transaction was probably mediated by a friend or Åkerblad's sister. The sale is corroborated in 1815 by one of Åkerblad's friends in Rome: "Åkerblad is selling all his books to survive."²³ Regrettably no information has yet been found on when and how the manuscripts were transported to Sweden, or on the price paid for the collection. However, Åkerblad did write a note concerning the sale that resembles an advertisement for the collection (Figure 9):

Notice des manuscrits de M.A.***

1. Fragment fort ancien du deutéronome en lettres Samaritaines. Ce manuscrit sur parchemin fut acheté par moi-même à Jaffa en Palestine.
2. Le nouveaux Testament en grec ; manuscrit en parchemin du 13. siècle
3. deux Ms. Latins. parchemin
4. 6. manuscrits coptes. papier
5. 5. manuscrits Ethiopiens, tous en parchemin.
6. 23 ms. Arabes. La bibliothèque orientale de haggi Chalfa qui est du nombre m'a coutée 50. ducats à Constple.
7. 17. manuscrits Persans, dans quelques uns de la plus grande beauté, écrits sur papier de Samarcand. Le chah-namé contient plus de 70. miniatures.
8. 29. manuscrits Turcs.
9. 3. manuscrits Tartars, parmi lesquels un dictionnaire fort rare Tartar et Turc.²⁴

This note is in Suchtelen's papers, who himself added: "Note, de la main de M. Åkerblad, des Manuscrits que je lui ai achetés en Janv. 1815."

Åkerblad died in Rome in February 1819. Though his economical situation had improved somewhat after the sale and the granting of a small Swedish pension, he left very few possessions. The estate inventory is extremely short and does not mention books or manuscripts. The Swedish consul in Rome, Ulisse Pentini, advised the Foreign Service on what to do with his papers:

It is however quite singular that among the papers of the said deceased [Åkerblad], except for a small part, everything else only regards correspondence with women. My opinion is that it should all be set aflame to avoid compromising *peace within various families*, and even *the honour of the persons*

²³ Francesco Cancellieri to Aubin-Louis Millin, 28 Oct. 1815, Rome, fol. 317, MS FR 24680, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

²⁴ N. 2878, box 93, Suchtelen's collection of autographs, National Library of Russia, St Petersburg.

that have been imprudent enough to write, and to conserve documents of what should have been consecrated to the most rigorous silence.²⁵

The correspondence was probably destroyed, but some other papers were taken by the consul. Pentini died the following year and his son inherited two notebooks, which were sold to the Vatican library in the 1870s. These were consequently catalogued as *Vaticani Latini 9784–5*, the second one containing the list of Åkerblad's manuscripts. Some other papers were bought in Rome by the Swedish Egyptologist Karl Piehl in the 1880s. It is a fair supposition that these papers also were taken by Pentini and, like the notebooks, subsequently turned up on the market in Rome.

Åkerblad's sister Johanna Christina was the sole inheritor in Stockholm. In the fall of 1819, she put her brother's collection of "antiquities and curiosities" up for sale. These were objects and papers that Åkerblad had brought to Stockholm before he left Sweden in 1801. She first approached the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien), of which Åkerblad had been a member. The academy was willing to pay 200 rix-dollars, adding that the offer should be made promptly so that Demoiselle Åkerblad would not sell to anyone else.

But Åkerblad's sister had also received an offer from "Mr General Baron van Suchtelen". After the earlier sale of Åkerblad's manuscripts, it was a natural strategy to also offer the collection to Suchtelen. Suchtelen's bid was higher, yet she nevertheless reserved the option to sell to the academy for the same amount if they were disposed to raise their offer. The academy did not raise its bid and Suchtelen bought the collection.²⁶ As Suchtelen had already acquired Åkerblad's Oriental manuscripts in 1815, he now bought Åkerblad's remaining objects. These probably included (no inventory has been found) inscribed stones, some small statuettes, and a number of coins.²⁷ A Greek inscription that Åkerblad acquired at the island of Imbros in the 1780s was acquired by Percy Smythe, the British ambassador in Stockholm in 1817–1819, either directly from Åkerblad's sister or from Suchtelen.²⁸ The collection also included a range of Åkerblad's personal papers, which all appear to predate the year 1800. Examples of these papers are his Ottoman and *Repubblica Romana* passports (Figures 6 & 8). This would

25 Pentini to Chancery Board, 15 May 1819, Rome, no. 973, vol. 66, Skrivelser från konsuler, Huvudarkivet, UD, Kabinettet, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

26 20 April, 18 Aug., 13 Oct., 11 Nov. 1819, Vitterhetsakademiens protokoll 1816–20, Ämbetsarkivet 2, The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm.

27 For a discussion on Åkerblad and some of his acquaintances' collecting of ancient artefacts in the Ottoman Empire, see Thomasson 2010.

28 Currently in the British Museum, Greek inscription LVIII.

suggest that Åkerblad had left them with his sister when leaving for France in 1801 (see the following article for details on these papers).

The acquisition by the Russian ambassador in two separate sales not only illustrates Suchtelen's wide interests, but also reveals something about how learned circles and the academy in Stockholm regarded Åkerblad and his collection.

ÅKERBLAD AND RUSSIA

Åkerblad surely never met Suchtelen, but geographically they had been close to each other when they served on opposite sides in the Russo-Swedish war of 1788–1790. Åkerblad's attitudes toward Russia were mixed; two concrete examples from his correspondence and diaries are particularly illustrative. When Åkerblad travelled from Palestine to Egypt in 1787, he explained why he could not find a ship: "Having returned to Jaffa I was forced to wait there 14 days before I could find a small boat to Damietta. Russian cruisers have made these waters so dangerous that the Arabs do not dare to go out."²⁹ Åkerblad had observed the diplomatic machinations in Constantinople, where European powers fought for influence at the Porte, and it was not surprising that war was the result, considering that Sweden itself had kindled Turkish animosity toward Russia. Now he witnessed the effects of the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792. A couple of years later, while in Tunis, Åkerblad received the news about the Russo-Swedish War of 1788–1790. He wrote to Stockholm, making his sympathies clear:

A word from king Gustaf and I will fly with the sabre in one hand and the
Alcoran in the other to preach a crusade in — — — — against the barbarians
that provoked discord in the North and who threaten to crush my best friends
— — — the Turks.³⁰

These "barbarians" were, of course, the Russians. It is entertaining to imagine Åkerblad — later caricatured by Caroline von Humboldt as the "grosse, dicke Akerblad" — flying like Mohammed with a sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, fighting the Russians together with the Turks.³¹ Once back in Sweden in the summer of 1789, he was sent to the front in Finland. He served as interpreter in the war and personally experienced the consequences of the ill-advised Swedish attack on Russia. One of his duties was to interrogate Turkic-speaking prisoners of war. These included both Russian officers and Turkish prisoners

29 JDÅ to Gjørwell, Marseille 1 March 1789, Ep G 7:13, no. 5, KB.

30 JDÅ to Gjørwell, Marseille 1 March 1789, Ep G 7:13, no. 5, KB. Åkerblad himself used the dashes to indicate words not written out.

31 Sander-Rindtorff (ed.) 1936: 290.

of war that had been taken by Russian forces in the Black Sea and moved to the Baltic to fight against Sweden. There was, for instance, a Tatar captain – “a good Muslim”, as Åkerblad put it – who had been captured by the Swedish forces. Åkerblad had been instructed by the king to keep the Russian officers’ company and report what they might know. He forwarded information from “his Turks” about a new Ottoman ambassador who had just arrived in Moscow, as well as the consequences of his arrival on Russian politics. Åkerblad was possibly the only Swede who spoke Turkish at this time and his services were needed throughout the war, both in Stockholm and in Finland. During the winter, the war was put on hold. But in the spring of 1790, his services were again in demand: “when the sea campaign starts one foresees that Turkish prisoners of war in the Russian navy must be dealt with, and then the Royal Secretary Åkerblad can probably not avoid being commanded here to Finland as Turkish interpreter”.³²

But politics were one thing and personal relations another. While living in Rome in 1809–1819, for instance, Åkerblad was a close friend to Andrey Yakovlevich Italinsky (1743–1827), the Russian minister in Rome. Italinsky had been the Russian representative in Constantinople in 1803–1806 and 1812–1816, where he became interested in Oriental languages and history and learned Arabic. In a dissertation dedicated to Italinsky, Åkerblad wrote that they had met before Italinsky was posted as Russian representative in Constantinople, probably already in Italy or France in the 1790s. Åkerblad refers to Italinsky as his “respectable Plato”, and the treatise that Åkerblad dedicated to him was on a Phoenician inscription, befitting Italinsky’s longstanding interest in Oriental literature. Italinsky had also managed to acquire an important collection of Oriental manuscripts, as Olga Vasilyeva mentions, and Åkerblad worked with these. He also gained the confidence of Grand Duke Michael Pavlovich, probably through Italinsky’s intermediation. Åkerblad had promised to be the grand duke’s guide in Rome, but died before the Russian party arrived in Rome in 1819.³³

32 JDÅ to Ulric Franc Gustaf, Kymmenegård 21 Aug. 1789, Kabinettet, UD, Huvudarkivet, E 1 A, Inkomna skrivelser (Skr till Franc), vol. 26, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm; Åkerblad to Johan Albrekt Ehrenström, Finland 10 Sept. 1789, X 241 UUL; Ehrenström to Franc, Borgå [Finland] 20 April 1790, vol. 24, Inkomna skrivelser (Skr till Franc), Kabinettet, UD, Huvudarkivet, E 1 A, Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

33 Åkerblad 1817; JDÅ to Gustaf Löwenhielm, 15 Aug. 1817, Rome, Ep L 24, KB; Åkerblad’s annotations in Italinsky’s papers (Buonocore 1988: 66); *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, suppl. t. 56, 1834: 118.

In 1819, Sweden's former place on the European stage was diminished. It lost Finland to Russia in 1809 and its remaining German provinces at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Russia fought several wars against the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century and continued its expansion southwards. It might appear as an ironic twist that Åkerblad's collection of Oriental manuscripts, as well as parts of his personal papers, ended up in Russia after Suchtelen's death. As the Russian Empire grew, new scholarly areas were institutionalised, and as Olga Vasilyeva outlines, Åkerblad's manuscripts became sought after by several of the newly founded institutions dedicated to Oriental studies. This new Russian scholarship also greatly influenced the Orientalist tradition in Finland, as Kaj Öhrnberg has evocatively pointed out in the introductory volume of Georg August Wallin's works.

The purchase by Suchtelen of Åkerblad's collection and its transfer to Russia represents an interesting moment in the creation of Orientalist traditions in Northern Europe. It is also a striking metaphor for some of the most important political developments during Åkerblad's life: the waning of Swedish power and rising Russian expansionism.

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