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PRO-REFORMATION PRINT
ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE EUROPEAN BOOK WORLD
'BRAND OLAUS PETRI' AND PUBLISHING STRATEGIES
IN A SWEDISH PRINT FROM 1527

Abstract

This article examines the adoption and adaptation of pro-Reformation publishing strategies on the periphery of the European book world. Existing scholarship highlights that competitive print markets were necessary for the creative and innovative printing and publishing that characterised the early Reformation. However, our understanding of the close nexus between print and the Reformation is largely based on the 'German paradigm', where pro-Reformation print thrived through competitive printing, strong vernacular readerships, and weak centralised censorship within the Holy Roman Empire. Recent research has shown that in this specific environment, reformers developed creative publishing strategies to maximise their output in the print market. By focusing on Sweden – which saw a flourishing of pro-Reformation printing but lacked vernacular inter-printer competition due to a printing monopoly – this article challenges the assumption that innovative pro-Reformation publishing strategies depended on competitive print markets. Through an investigation of the pamphlet *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* (1527), this study shows that publishing strategies – such as timely publication, the polemical pamphlet form, and a visually striking title page emphasising authorship – were deliberately employed. In conclusion, the article argues that strategic publishing was valuable not only within book markets shaped by inter-printer competition but also emerged in peripheral and monopolistic regions like Sweden, suggesting that strategic publishing was integral to the Reformation movement itself.

Keywords: Reformation, Sweden, Olaus Petri, periphery, title page, publishing strategies, book history, media history, Melchior Hofmann, Brand Luther

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This contribution explores the development of new publishing strategies during the early Reformation on the periphery of the European book world – regions where competitive book production was underdeveloped, yet where pro-Reformation print nevertheless flourished. Existing scholarship highlights that competitive print markets were necessary for the creative and innovative printing and publishing that characterised the early Reformation¹. Sweden, with only one operating printing press during the Reformation, challenges this assumption. Focusing on the Swedish pro-Reformation pamphlet *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*² (Ill. 1), published in March 1527 by the Swedish reformer Olaus Petri, this article investigates whether and how new publishing strategies were utilised in pro-Reformation printing on the periphery of the European book world. To contextualise the transformations that the Reformation brought to publishing and printing, the analysis incorporates books intended for the vernacular Swedish book market from the pre-Reformation era until 1527³.

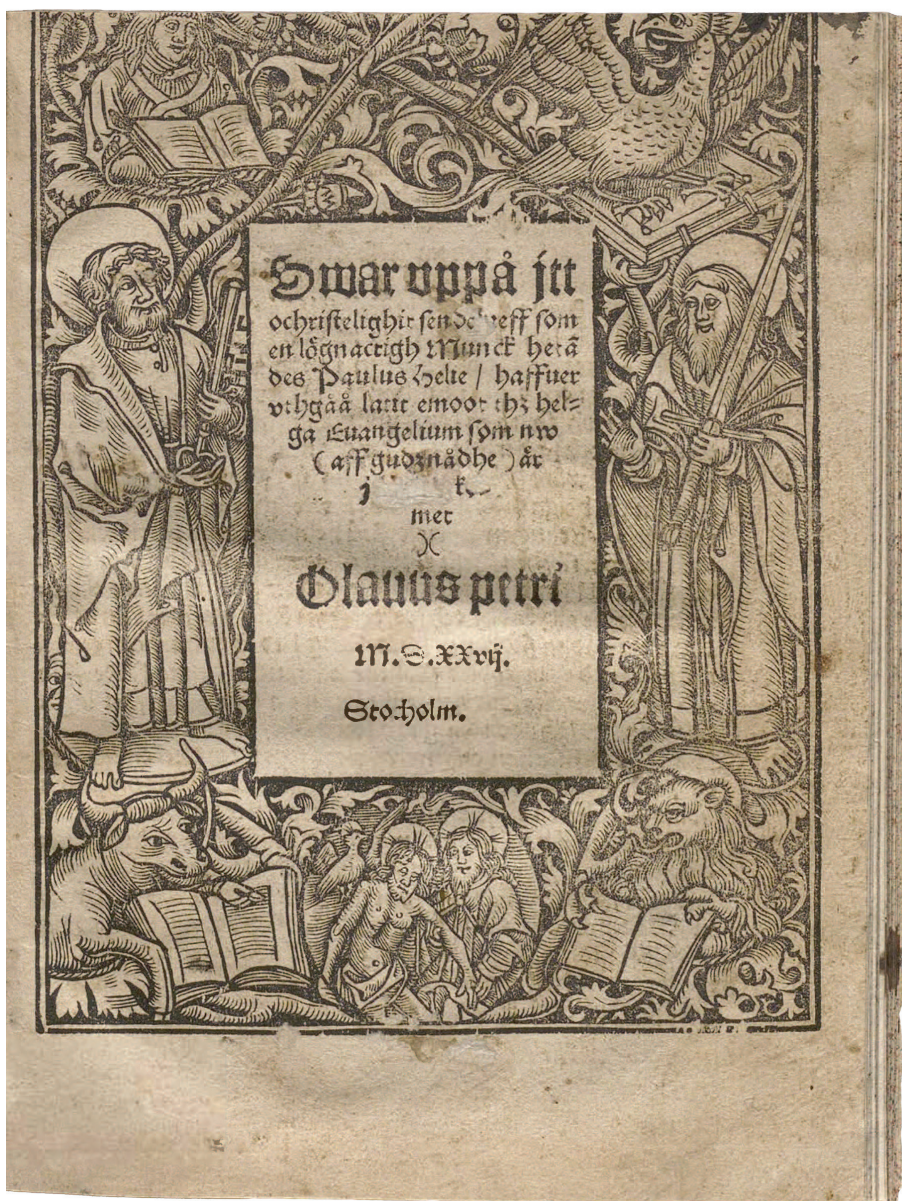
The close connection between print and the Reformation has long fascinated scholars⁴. However, our knowledge regarding the nexus of print and the Reformation in the 1520s is largely built upon what Andrew Pettegree terms the ‘German paradigm’; the exceptional success of pro-Reformation print in the Holy Roman Empire – at the very centre of the European book world – where the book market was literally flooded with pro-Reformation print. This success was predicated on a commercially mature book industry featuring multiple printing centres, competitive book production, strong vernacular reading communities, and significant obstacles for authorities attempting to suppress

¹ Thomas KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation. Eine Studie zu Buchdruck und Publizistik im deutschen Sprachgebiet, zu ihren Akteuren und deren Strategien, Inszenierungs- und Ausdrucksformen* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Bd. 187), Tübingen 2019; Andrew PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation*, New York 2015; Drew B. THOMAS, *The Industry of Evangelism: Printing for the Reformation in Martin Luther's Wittenberg* (Library of the Written Word, vol. 96; The Handpress World, vol. 77), Leiden–Boston 2022.

² Complete title: Olaus PETRI, *Svar vppå jtt ochristelighit sendebreff som en lögnactigh muncck hetādes Paulus Helie, haffuer vthgåå låtit emoot thz helga euangelium som nw (aff Gudznādhe) är j liwset kōmet*, Stockholm 1527. The text is edited in *Samlade skrifter af Olavus Petri*, Bd. 1, red. Bengt HESSELGREN, Uppsala 1914, pp. 151–222 (hereinafter cited as OPSS:1).

³ For the retrospective Swedish bibliography, see Isak COLLIJN, *Sveriges bibliografi intill år 1600*, Bd. 1–3, Uppsala 1927–1938. The first volume covers the period discussed in this article, see Isak COLLIJN, *Sveriges bibliografi intill år 1600*, Bd. 1: 1478–1530, Uppsala 1934–1938 (hereinafter cited as COLLIJN, vol. 1). *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* is listed in *ibid.*, pp. 340–341.

⁴ See, for instance, Elizabeth L. EISENSTEIN, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, vol. 1–2, Cambridge 1979; Bernd MOELLER, *Stadt und Buch. Bemerkungen zur Struktur der reformatorischen Bewegung in Deutschland*, [in:] idem, *Die Reformation und das Mittelalter. Kirchenhistorische Aufsätze*, hrsg. v. Johannes SCHILLING, Göttingen 1991, pp. 111–124.



Ill. 1. Olaus PETRI, Swar vppå jtt ochristelighit sendebreff som en lögnactigh munck hetades Paulus Helie / haffuer vthgåå lätit emoot thz helga euangelium som nw (aff Gudznådhe) är j liwset kömet, Stockholm 1527 (original at Uppsala University Library, Sv. Rar. 10:62; title page cropped)

dissident print due to the federal structure of the Empire⁵. Consequently, a consistent implementation of the imperial anti-Reformation censorship regulations was not carried out across large parts of the Empire during the 1520s, enabling print agents to effectively evade censorship controls⁶. In this environment, reformers and printers developed innovative publishing strategies to maximise their market success and attract new adherents⁷.

This, however, was not the norm in Europe⁸. Outside the Empire, structural restrictions and various forms of censorship legislation heavily restricted the publication of pro-Reformation texts in the 1520s⁹. A brief overview of Europe's countries confirms the immense difficulties to print pro-Reformation material outside the Empire during this decade. The writings of Luther and other reformers were translated into Dutch and printed early on, and those texts seem to have gained wide recognition. Between 1519 and 1525, at least 49 of Luther's texts were printed in the Spanish Netherlands (in Dutch and Latin), but after the mid-1520s fewer texts appeared, and Luther's name vanished from title pages¹⁰. Printers began using false places of printing on the title page, and after 1523, they became exceedingly cautious about explicitly mentioning Luther as an author¹¹. Similarly, in Paris, there was notable interest in Luther's ideas; however, the widespread dissemination of evangelical texts was effectively precluded, as the publication of Scripture in the vernacular was

⁵ Andrew PETTEGREE, Matthew HALL, *The Reformation and the Book: A Reconsideration*, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47: 2004, no. 4, pp. 785–808; Johannes BURKHARDT, *Das Reformationsjahrhundert. Deutsche Geschichte zwischen Medienrevolution und Institutionenbildung 1517–1617*, Stuttgart 2002.

⁶ Thomas KAUFMANN, *Zensur in der frühen Reformationszeit*, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Jg. 123: 2026, H. 1, pp. 28–79.

⁷ T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, passim; A. PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther*, passim; D. B. THOMAS, op.cit., passim.

⁸ Andrew PETTEGREE, *Printing and the Reformation: The English Exception*, [in:] idem, *The French Book and the European Book World* (Library of the Written Word, vol. 1; The Handpress World, vol. 1), Leiden–Boston 2007, pp. 299–322, here p. 300; idem, *The Early Reformation in Europe: A German Affair or an International Movement?*, [in:] *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. idem, Cambridge 1992, pp. 1–22.

⁹ *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François GILMONT, trans. Karin MAAG (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot 1998; Bernd MOELLER, *Luther in Europe: His Works in Translation, 1517–46*, [in:] *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Erkki I. KOURI, Tom SCOTT, Basingstoke 1987, pp. 235–251.

¹⁰ Casper Ch. G. VISSER, *Luther's geschriften in de Nederlanden tot 1546* (Van Gorcum's theologische bibliotheek, Nr. 43), Amsterdam 1969, pp. 28–103.

¹¹ Andrew G. JOHNSTON, *Printing and the Reformation in the Low Countries, 1520 – c. 1555*, [in:] *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François GILMONT, trans. Karin MAAG (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot 1998, pp. 154–183.

prohibited from 1525 onward¹². Consequently, Reformation literature in the French-speaking area remained clandestine and marginal during the 1520s¹³. Across the Channel, the orthodox English establishment faced the early stirrings of evangelical heresy in the 1520s, a movement deeply influenced by Luther's writings¹⁴. Because publishing these texts in London was far too risky a venture for the small community of English printers, evangelical books for the English audience were printed in exile in Antwerp¹⁵. It was only during the reign of Edward VI in mid-sixteenth century that these printing restrictions were lifted, and the publication of works on Protestant theology was actively promoted¹⁶. In Bohemia, several of Luther's texts were translated into Czech between 1519 and 1523, but a distinct gap followed, lasting until the mid-1530s before new translations emerged¹⁷. Poland also witnessed early and considerable interest in Luther's writings, though it was primarily preachers who spread his ideas. The local printing presses were instead employed to counter these ideas and circulate various forms of prohibitions¹⁸. Meanwhile, in other parts of Europe, such as Riga, the evangelic movement was highly successful in the 1520s, but it lacked a working local printing press to serve the reformers¹⁹. Hence, while Luther's texts were immensely successful on the German book

¹² Andrew PETTEGREE, *Centre and Periphery in the European Book World*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, vol. 18: 2008, p. 111.

¹³ Francis M. HIGMAN, *French-Speaking Regions, 1520–62*, [in:] *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François GILMONT, trans. Karin MAAG (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot 1998, p. 110.

¹⁴ Alec RYRIE, *The Strange Death of Lutheran England*, The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, vol. 53: 2002, no. 1, pp. 64–92.

¹⁵ Andrew PETTEGREE, *Printing and the Reformation: The German Paradigm – and the English Exception*, [in:] *Reformation und Buch. Akteure und Strategien frühreformatorischer Druckerzeugnisse / The Reformation and the Book: Protagonists and Strategies of Early Reformation Printing*, hrsg. v. Thomas KAUFMANN, Elmar MITTLER (Bibliothek und Wissenschaft, Bd. 49), Wiesbaden 2016, p. 140.

¹⁶ Celyn D. RICHARDS, *The English Print Trade in the Reign of Edward VI, 1547–1553* (Library of the Written Word, vol. 115; The Handpress World, vol. 93), Leiden–Boston 2023.

¹⁷ Lubomír BATKA, *Martin Luther in Central Europe: Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia*, [in:] *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.311> [accessed online 29 May 2026]; Rudolf ŘIČAN, *Tschechische Übersetzungen von Luthers Schriften bis zum Schmalkaldischen Krieg*, [in:] *Vierhundertfünfzig Jahre lutherische Reformation 1517–1967. Festschrift für Franz Lau zum 60. Geburtstag*, hrsg. v. Helmar JUNGHANS, Ingetraut LUDOLPHY, Kurt MEIER, Berlin 1967, pp. 282–301.

¹⁸ Maciej PTASZYŃSKI, *Wie politisch war die Reformation in Polen?*, Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte / Archive for Reformation History, vol. 112: 2021, p. 72; Natalia NOWAKOWSKA, *King Sigismund of Poland and Martin Luther: The Reformation before Confessionalization*, Oxford 2018.

¹⁹ Guntis KALME, *Luther in Latvian*, Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 32: 2018, no. 4, pp. 435–445.

market, they faced severe obstacles in reaching audiences outside the Empire, particularly in the wake of the Edict of Worms.

Flourishing pro-Reformation printing, entirely free from anti-Reformation censorship regulation, was highly unusual outside the Empire in the 1520s, but exceptions did exist. The Kingdom of Sweden is a case in point, alongside Denmark²⁰ and the Duchy of Prussia²¹. In Sweden, the entire domestic print production was devoted to the Reformation between 1526 and 1530²² – a period that Otfried Czaika has characterised as ‘a general reckoning with everything that had previously come off the press’²³. The texts were straightforwardly pro-Reformation and pro-Luther. This was politically authorised printing, protected from anti-Reformation censorship and executed by the only operational print shop in the kingdom, which held a strict monopoly²⁴. This created a situation completely inverted from the European norm: within the Swedish Kingdom, there was, in effect, a ban on printing anti-Reformation texts.

Despite the notable success of pro-Reformation publishing in Sweden, printing on the remote periphery of the European book world looked nothing like it did in the Empire²⁵. After 1526, a single royal-controlled printing house held a monopoly on printing, meaning there was no competition among printers

²⁰ In Denmark, printing activity paused between 1522 and 1527, followed by a flourishing of pro-Reformation printing from 1528 to 1537, with presses operating in Malmö, Viborg, and Copenhagen, see Anne RIISING, *The Book and the Reformation in Denmark and Norway, 1523–40*, [in:] *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François GILMONT, trans. Karin MAAG (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot 1998, pp. 432–448; Henrik HORSTBØLL, *Menigmands medie. Det folkelige bogtryk i Danmark, 1500–1840. En kulturhistorisk undersøgelse* (Danish Humanist Texts and Studies, vol. 19), København 1999, pp. 116–117, 263–266, 662.

²¹ A print shop dedicated to Lutheran publications was established in Königsberg in 1524, see Vanessa BOCK, *Die Anfänge des polnischen Buchdrucks in Königsberg. Mit einem Verzeichnis der polnischen Drucke von Hans Weinreich und Alexander Augezdecki*, [in:] *Königsberger Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte*, hrsg. v. Axel E. WALTER (Aus Archiven, Bibliotheken und Museen Mittel- und Osteuropas, Bd. 1), Köln 2004, pp. 127–155; Joanna MILEWSKA-KOZŁOWSKA, *Reformation und Volkssprache. Polnischer Buchdruck in Königsberg*, [in:] *Reformation und Freiheit. Luther und die Folgen für Preußen und Brandenburg*, hrsg. v. Ruth SLENCZKA, Petersberg 2017, pp. 245–256.

²² Otfried CZAIKA, *Buchdruck und Reformation in Schweden und Finnland. Einheimische Drucke, Transfer und Importe, Sammlungen*, [in:] *Reformation und Buch. Akteure und Strategien frühreformatorischer Druckerzeugnisse / The Reformation and the Book: Protagonists and Strategies of Early Reformation Printing*, hrsg. v. Thomas KAUFMANN, Elmar MITTLER (Bibliothek und Wissenschaft, Bd. 49), Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 281–301.

²³ ‘eine Generalabrechnung mit dem, was zuvor die Presse verließ’; *ibid.*, p. 300.

²⁴ Henrik SCHÜCK, *Den svenska förlagsbokhandels historia*, D. 1, Stockholm 1923; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 316–319.

²⁵ Arthur DER WEDUWEN, Barnaby CULLEN, *A Nordic Press: The Development of Printing in Scandinavia and the Baltic States before 1700 from a European Perspective*, *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, vol. 13: 2022, no. 1, pp. 1–30.

for the Swedish-language book market. Furthermore, books in Swedish were not printed abroad until the second half of the sixteenth century²⁶. This northern kingdom has been described by Pettegree as part of a third, outer circle of book production during the first decades of the sixteenth century. The first circle, or the inner core, consisted of the Holy Roman Empire, France and northern Italian cities, alongside the Netherlands and the Swiss Confederation. The second circle comprised Spain, Portugal, England and southern Italy. Territories in the third, outer circle, which included Sweden as well as other northern and eastern European countries, encountered obstacles in creating a stable print infrastructure. They had small vernacular reading communities, and their printing initiatives depended on foreign investment and expertise, as well as local political elites²⁷.

Consequently, the conditions under which pro-Reformation printing developed in Sweden differed significantly from the commercial and competitive book market within the Holy Roman Empire, which constituted the very precondition for the Reformation as a media event²⁸. Existing research on print and Reformation has seldom investigated such environments of flourishing pro-Reformation print operating in the complete absence of inter-printer competition from a comparative perspective, even though several attempts have been made to analyse the Swedish Reformation within a broader Nordic or European context²⁹.

In this article, I use this context of flourishing pro-Reformation publishing in an vernacular book market with no inter-printer competition to examine how media practices from the mature book market of the Empire were adopted or adapted in the periphery of the book world during the early Reformation.

PUBLISHING STRATEGIES AND PRO-REFORMATION PRINT

Recent research has shown that innovative publishing strategies were crucial to the success of pro-Reformation print in the German-speaking book market. It was not merely the content itself that persuaded and engaged readers;

²⁶ Isak COLLIJN, *Sveriges bibliografi intill år 1600*, Bd. 3: 1583–1599, Uppsala 1932–1933.

²⁷ A. PETTEGREE, *Centre and Periphery*, pp. 105–106.

²⁸ Berndt HAMM, *Die Reformation als Medienereignis*, *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie*, Bd. 11: 1996, pp. 137–166.

²⁹ Erkki I. KOURI, *The Early Reformation in Sweden and Finland, c. 1520–1560*, [in:] *The Scandinavian Reformation: From Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform*, ed. Ole P. GRELL, Cambridge 1994, pp. 42–69; Remi KICK, *The Book and the Reformation in the Kingdom of Sweden, 1526–71*, [in:] *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-François GILMONT, trans. Karin MAAG (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot 1998, pp. 449–468. Andrew Pettegree acknowledges the significantly different situation in Sweden, see Andrew PETTEGREE, *The Book in the Renaissance*, New Haven–London 2010, pp. 110–111.

rather, the specific ways in which new religious norms were mediated contributed significantly to their dissemination. In this study, the analytical concept of publishing strategies is defined as the methods used by publishers to 'find and keep customers willing to buy and read the publisher's books'³⁰. Although this is a modern concept typically utilised in social science publishing studies, it is applied here as a historical concept, meaning it has an evolution that varies over time and thereby reflects and shapes the context where it takes place. In this analysis, this translates to viewing pro-Reformation publishing as a series of strategic choices made by print agents, including decisions regarding typography, title-page design, publication timing, author visibility, market adaptation, audience addressing and distribution. As printing and publishing from the very start was a capital-intensive business with high risks, this is not anachronistic but well established in research³¹.

Prominent German church historian Thomas Kaufmann and British historian Andrew Pettegree have examined publishing strategies on the book market during the Reformation in the Empire. They view printing not merely as a means to disseminate content, but as a medium that is modulated to drive religious change. In this sense Kaufmann and Pettegree build on media theory and the notion that the printed page 'hosts a changing interplay of form and content, of message and medium' and that this interplay affects how the page is interpreted³². They also integrate the commercial realities of book printing into their analyses, and emphasise that book printing was a hazardous business requiring specialised know-how and financial capital. Discovering the right mechanism to persuade someone to purchase a book or a pamphlet was therefore key for survival in a competitive market.

In *Die Mitte der Reformation*, Thomas Kaufmann argues that previous research has assumed it was the plausibility of textual content that led to its dissemination and success on the book market. Instead, Kaufmann focusses on the design and typographical staging of pro-Reformation print products, the strategies authors used to reach a large audience, the methods print shops employed to maximise profits, and the development of new publication forms. In his analysis, the early 1520s emerge as a creative laboratory where printing natives created new ways of communicating via the printed word or reshaped existing ones. The Reformation thus appears not only as a new theology, but as a new way of mediating theology³³.

³⁰ Albert N. GRECO, *The Strategy of Publishing*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Publishing*, ed. Angus PHILLIPS, Michael BHASKAR, Oxford 2019, p. 189.

³¹ Shanti GRAHELI, *Buying and Selling: The Business of Books in Early Modern Europe* (Library of the Written Word, vol. 72; The Handpress World, vol. 55), Leiden–Boston 2019.

³² Bonnie MAK, *How the Page Matters*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2011, p. 3.

³³ T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, pp. 1–14, 698–699.

Similarly, Andrew Pettegree argues in *Brand Luther* that the ‘revelation of style, purpose and form’ of print ‘was at the heart of the Reformation’³⁴. He explores the cooperation between Luther and Wittenberg printers, demonstrating how they mutually benefited from developing a new and distinct design of their work. Dissatisfied with the outdated design of Wittenberg’s Rau-Grünenberg press, Luther and his fellow reformers collaborated with Leipzig printer Melchior Lotter and artist Lucas Cranach to create the visually distinctive ‘Brand Luther’, using title-page design, Luther’s name, and Wittenberg itself as marketing tools. Hence, Pettegree argues that the importance of print for the Reformation lies not only in the rapid transmission of a message but rather in how it enabled the reformers to modulate the medium to suit their purpose and reach the widest possible audience.

What Kaufmann and Pettegree have demonstrated regarding the relationship between Luther, print, and the Reformation appears, at first glance, to be inoperative in the Swedish case, as the vernacular book market was characterised by no inter-printer competition. The deliberate application of such strategies in Swedish pro-Reformation print – and especially in the publication of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* – presents a paradox in relation to our current understanding of printing, publishing and the Reformation.

The field still lacks comprehensive analysis of pro-Reformation publishing strategies outside of the Empire during the first decade of the Reformation. In *Printing, Power, and Piety*, Brad C. Pardue argues that the early English Reformation was shaped by the emergence of a new public sphere created through print. Focusing particularly on William Tyndale, Pardue shows how Tyndale challenged traditional ecclesiastical hierarchy and encouraged lay engagement with theology through translating Scripture and polemical works into English³⁵. For the Swedish case, Hannah Kress’s study of Olaus Petri’s publishing remains an exception. Kress emphasises Petri’s role as an independent publicist, arguing that he deliberately utilised the printing press to advocate for the Reformation in Sweden³⁶. While this article shares much with Kress’s study, I place a greater emphasis on comparing Reformation-era print with the output from the pre-Reformation era in order to assess what difference the Reformation actually made. I also draw comparisons with pro-Reformation print in the Holy Roman Empire to understand how the Swedish market shaped

³⁴ A. PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther*, p. 5.

³⁵ Brad C. PARDUE, *Printing, Power, and Piety: Appeals to the Public during the Early Years of the English Reformation* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, vol. 162), Leiden–Boston 2012.

³⁶ Hannah M. KRESS, *Reformation und kalkulierte Medialität. Olaus Petri als Publizist der Reformation im schwedischen Reich* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Bd. 200), Tübingen 2021.

publishing strategy. As Sweden represents a peripheral region within the European book world – with printing conditions that differed markedly from those in Central Europe – it may help clarify whether Central European developments were exceptional or whether broader conclusions about the relationship between print and the Reformation can be drawn by studying the periphery.

This contribution is intended as a starting point for a broader discussion of pro-Reformation printing in the periphery. It asks: What strategies were employed on the periphery of the European book market? How did reformers, who had only a significantly less developed book industry and vernacular book market at their disposal, utilise the communicative forms used to convey pro-Reformation arguments that had been, and remained, so effective in the Holy Roman Empire? Did they employ publishing strategies developed for a commercial book market characterised by inter-printer competition, and if so, how did these strategies play out when adopted to the new context of a non-competitive book market utilising a minor European vernacular? Was there even something akin to 'Brand Olaus Petri' in Sweden – a distinct graphical design that helped marketing the printed texts of the Swedish reformer to his Swedish audience?

These questions can contribute to our understanding of how the nexus of Reformation and print functioned in Europe in the early sixteenth century. The dual character that Sweden displays – pro-Reformation content within a market formed by no inter-printer competition – allows us to examine how pro-Reformation publishing functioned under different market conditions. Was branding the Reformation – as for instance the 'Brand Luther' – a unique phenomenon restricted only to Luther's cooperation with his Wittenberg printers, or is it the blueprint for how typography and graphical design was used to serve the Reformation?

THE SWEDISH REFORMATION AND BOOK PRINT IN CONTEXT

Before turning to the investigation of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* and exploring the four ways in which it represented a novelty on the Swedish book market, some contextual background is necessary for readers unfamiliar with the situation in Sweden in the 1520s.

Since the late fourteenth century, the Kalmar Union had united Denmark, Sweden, and Norway under a single monarch. In the decades leading up to the Reformation, the Swedish Council of the Realm repeatedly resisted Danish rule and opposed electing the Danish king as ruler of Sweden. In 1520, Christian II of Denmark invaded Sweden to suppress this resistance and secure his claim to the throne. After Stockholm Castle surrendered in September under promises of amnesty, Christian was crowned in November. The coronation celebrations soon turned into trials and executions in which around one hundred

individuals, including two bishops, were killed in the event that became known as the Stockholm Bloodbath. Although Christian subsequently left Sweden, resistance endured, and in 1523 the Swedish nobleman Gustav Vasa (1496–1560) was elected king of Sweden³⁷.

Gustav Vasa soon began cooperating with reform-minded individuals, most notably Olaus Petri. Petri had matriculated at the University of Wittenberg in the summer of 1516, graduated as a magister in February 1518, and came back to Sweden in 1519 to serve as deacon in the diocese of Strängnäs. From 1524 onward, he served as the secretary of the Stockholm town council. Olaus Petri utilised his position to advocate for shifting religious norms and from 1526 he began publishing pro-Reformation books and pamphlets in Stockholm³⁸. The burghers of Stockholm were pro-Reformation minded and supported changes in religious norms. By the mid-1520s, the king also backed these changes, and at the Diet of Västerås in 1527, formal decisions were enacted to support pro-Reformation preaching. Simultaneously, the Church lost much of its economic and political power³⁹.

Prior to the Reformation, printing in Sweden had been characterised by a lack of continuity in print shops. While several print shops had been established in the realm, they were tied to specific publication ventures and could not sustain long-term operations. They printed letters of indulgence, missals, breviaries, and devotional works⁴⁰. Probably at the beginning of 1526, the printing press was relocated from Uppsala to Stockholm, and Jürgen Richoff, a skilled printer from Lübeck, was engaged to manage it⁴¹. His main assignment was to print the New Testament in Swedish, but he also produced several

³⁷ Harald GUSTAFSSON, *Gamla riken, nya stater. Statsbildning, politisk kultur och identiteter under Kalmarunionens upplösningsskede 1512–1541*, Stockholm 2000; Lars-Olof LARSSON, *Gustav Vasa – landsfader eller tyrann?*, Stockholm 2005; *The Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520: Context and Commemoration*, ed. Heiko DROSTE, Kurt V. JENSEN (Crossing Boundaries: Turku Medieval and Early Modern Studies, vol. 15), Amsterdam 2025.

³⁸ H. M. KRESS, *Reformation und kalkulierte Medialität*, passim; Christian CALLMER, *Svenska studenter i Wittenberg* (Skrifter utgivna av Personhistoriska samfundet, vol. 17), Stockholm 1976, p. 14.

³⁹ For an overview of the Swedish Reformation, see Martin BERNTSON, *Kättarland. En bok om reformationen i Sverige*, Skellefteå 2017; idem, *Mässan och armborstet. Uppror och reformation i Sverige 1525–1544*, Skellefteå 2010. The classic study of the Swedish Reformation is Knut B. WESTMAN, *Reformationens genombrottsår i Sverige*, Stockholm 1918.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang UNDORE, *From Gutenberg to Luther: Transnational Print Cultures in Scandinavia 1450–1525* (Library of the Written Word, vol. 37; The Handpress World, vol. 28), Leiden–Boston 2014, pp. 47–61.

⁴¹ Dieter LOHMEIER, *Richoff, Jürgen d.J.*, [in:] *BioLex Digital. Biographisches Lexikon für Schleswig-Holstein und Lübeck*, Kiel 2020, pp. 2265–2266; idem, *Jürgen Richoff d.J.*, [in:] *Die Lübecker Buchdrucker im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Buchdruck für den Ostseeraum*, hrsg. v. Alken BRUNS, Dieter LOHMEIER, Heide in Holstein 1994, pp. 80–82.

other prints before departing the kingdom. Sometime during 1526 or 1527, Swedish printers took over the operation, including the typefaces and the equipment. Around the same time, Gustav Vasa prohibited the activities of the other functioning print shop in the kingdom.

The relocation of the printing press to Stockholm and the establishment of its monopoly were arranged by Gustav Vasa. While the exact economic conditions of the print shop have been difficult for historians to reconstruct, it appears that the Swedish Crown owned the premises where the press operated, as well as the typefaces and the press itself. The head of the printing house was compensated through land grants. In return, he was required to pay his own staff and execute the printing commissions requested by the Crown. In addition to that, the printer was permitted to take on outside commercial work for payment⁴². Notably, there was no employed censor or censorship legislation in place during the 1520s. Hence, publishing and printing was a collaborative venture between the Crown, the printer and the author⁴³. While the Crown assumed an active responsibility in providing the requirements for domestic printing – by owning the press, shutting down competition, and supporting pro-Reformation texts – it did not act as a publisher that curated specific titles. Gustav Vasa seems to have been fairly uninformed about the day-to-day operations of the print shop and the specifics of what was published.

Even though the market for books in the Swedish vernacular was not competitive, a commercial trade in foreign-language books naturally persisted and Swedish books were sold within this broader marketplace. Books were imported along established European trading routes and sold in Stockholm⁴⁴, where the German-speaking population in particular likely constituted a lucrative market for pro-Reformation German texts. Nevertheless, the key point remains: books printed in Swedish originated from a single press, and therefore did not have to compete with other printers for potential buyers of Swedish-language works.

THE PAMPHLET

We will now turn to the analysis of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* (1527) within the broader context of earlier Swedish print production. *Svar på ett*

⁴² H. SCHÜCK, *Den svenska förlagsbokhandelns historia*, pp. 53–80.

⁴³ For this situation, see Arthur DER WEDUWEN, Barnaby CULLEN, *King, Bishop, Professor and Postmaster: The Early Modern Swedish Publisher*, [in:] *Early Modern Publishers: Identities and Strategies in the Book Trade*, ed. Barnaby CULLEN, Ian MACLEAN, Arthur DER WEDUWEN (Library of the Written Word, vol. 138; The Handpress World, vol. 113), Leiden–Boston 2025, p. 14.

⁴⁴ O. CZAİKA, *Buchdruck und Reformation in Schweden und Finnland*, pp. 281–301; W. UNDORF, op.cit., pp. 63–121; Arvid HEDBERG, *Stockholms bokbindare 1460–1880. Anteckningar*, Bd. 1: *Tiden från 1460 till omkring 1700*, Stockholm 1949.

okristligt sändebrev introduced novelties to the Swedish book market in four distinct ways: it was a pamphlet, it was topical, it had an elaborated title border, and it prominently displayed the author's name on the title page. The following analysis is structured around these four aspects.

Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev is the first pro-Reformation pamphlet printed in Swedish. While previous research has primarily focused on the textual content and highlighted its polemical character⁴⁵, this study approaches the work from a media-historical perspective, focusing on the author's choice of medium – the Reformation pamphlet. This new medium had already exerted a considerable influence on the course of the Reformation in the Holy Roman Empire, where such pamphlets were known as *Flugschriften*⁴⁶. They were small publications, often in quarto format, consisting of eight or sixteen pages (equivalent to one or two sheets of print). They were cheap and quick to produce, allowing them to be sold at a very low price. In terms of content, they addressed religious or social themes and were explicitly intended to influence the reader in a particular direction through argument and agitation⁴⁷.

Since its establishment in 1526, the Stockholm print shop had produced the New Testament in Swedish⁴⁸ alongside two catechetical works inspired by the evangelical movement: *En nyttig undervisning* and *En skön nyttig undervisning*, both published in 1526⁴⁹. The publications are generally attributed to Olaus Petri, although his name does not appear in the publications.

⁴⁵ Anders KRAAL, *The Swedish Reformation Debates of 1527–28*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 24: 2010, no. 4, pp. 373–392; Sven INGEBRAND, *Olavus Petris reformatöriska åskådning* (*Studia doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia*, vol. 1), Uppsala 1964; Henrik SCHÜCK, *Striden mellan Olavus Petri samt Peder Galle och Paulus Heliæ*, *Samlaren*, årg. 7: 1886, pp. 49–70. Kress offers the most recent analysis of content, possible originals, and print materiality, see H. M. KRESS, *Reformation und kalkulierte Medialität*, pp. 87–95.

⁴⁶ Robert W. SCRIBNER, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation*, Oxford 1994; *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit. Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium 1980*, hrsg. v. Hans-Joachim KÖHLER (Spätmittelalter und frühe Neuzeit, Bd. 13), Stuttgart 1981.

⁴⁷ A. PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther*, p. 147. See also T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, pp. 4–5, note 21: 'Eine reformatorische Flugschrift ist ein ein- oder mehrblättriges, zumeist im Quartformat gesetztes, selbständig erscheinendes, ungebunden vertriebenes Druckerzeugnis, das in der Regel mit bescheidenen ikonographischen Elementen (insbes. Titleinfassungen) ausgestattet ist, in unterschiedlichsten Textgattungen abgefasst, zumeist auf aktuelle religiöse und gesellschaftliche Themen bezogen ist und auf die Beeinflussung einer möglichst breiten Öffentlichkeit abzielt'.

⁴⁸ Lars WOLLIN, *Det humanistiska bibelverket. Kring den nordiska reformationens bibelöversättning* (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskriftsällskapet. Serie 1: Svenska skrifter, vol. 105), Uppsala 2024.

⁴⁹ COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 319–328.

Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev, published in 1527, marked a significant departure. It was a compact booklet or pamphlet in quarto format of 36 pages and it advocated for changing religious norms by examining such topics as Lent, human free will, the papal Church and ecclesiastical authority. The title itself left no doubt regarding Olaus Petri's intent: *Answer to an unchristian letter which a lying monk called Paulus Helie has published against the Holy Gospel, which now (by God's grace) has come to light*⁵⁰. Its aggressive purpose was unmistakable; it positioned itself as a direct rebuttal to an 'unchristian letter' and cast its author as a 'lying monk' opposing the Holy Gospel at the precise historical moment when Christians were being enlightened by true evangelical Scripture. The pamphlet format enabled Olaus Petri to stage a conflict with representatives of the established Church and to put forward his arguments. In this way, it serves as a strategy to make various positions publicly known⁵¹.

Olaus Petri deployed another publishing strategy previously unseen on the Swedish book market: he published his opponent's arguments in order to systematically refute them. His target was the anti-Luther treatise originally published by Paul Helie (c. 1485 – c. 1534), a Carmelite friar and lecturer at University of Copenhagen⁵². Giving space to the opponent's arguments in order to demonstrate their flaws more effectively was a polemical strategy employed by Luther and other reformers against the representatives of the Church⁵³. This method demonstrated considerable intellectual confidence, given that repeating an opponent's argument inherently risks reinforcing it. The reformers must therefore have been convinced that exposing their opponents' arguments would not propagate them, but that their own counterarguments were robust enough to sway the reader. Moreover, publishing the opponents' arguments invites further debate, thereby creating a forum in which pro- and anti-Reformation positions could confront one another. The examples from the Empire demonstrated that the pro-Reformation side could indeed benefit from these strategies.

A polemical, agitating, and argumentative text of this nature had not previously been published in the Swedish language. The only older Swedish pamphlet is *Von den grausamen tyrannischen Misshandlungen*, which was printed

⁵⁰ Original Swedish title: *Svar vppå jtt ochristelighit sendebreff som en lögnactigh munk hetådes Paulus Helie, haffuer vthgåå låtit emoot thz helga euangelium som nw (aff Gudznådhe) är j liwset komet.*

⁵¹ Kress also emphasises that the publication of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was a way for Olaus Petri to position himself as an opponent of the established Church, see H. M. KRESS, *Reformation und kalkulierte Medialität*, p. 131.

⁵² *Skrifter af Paulus Helie*, vol. 1, udg. Peder SEVERINSEN, København 1932, pp. 259–281. This text is now lost.

⁵³ T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, pp. 171–173.

in 1523 and 1524 in Rostock, Lübeck, Worms, and Speyer across at least seven different editions in Low and High German⁵⁴. The pamphlet detailed King Christian's responsibility for the Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520. Its purpose was to sway public opinion within the Empire and to demonstrate the legitimacy of driving Christian out of the kingdom, despite his status as the elected, rightful monarch. The pamphlet was issued by the Swedish Council of the Realm and Gustav Vasa, who had led the uprising. They were clearly aware of the great importance the print medium had acquired in the Empire and sought to leverage it to influence opinions to their advantage⁵⁵. There was, therefore, some experience of publishing pamphlets, but *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was the first pamphlet intended for a Swedish-speaking audience.

The critical importance of this domestic audience is visible in another publishing strategy deployed at the very beginning of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*. On the very first page, Olaus Petri addresses his reader directly. This was a technique also employed by the Wittenberg reformers to reach laypeople and draw them into the controversy⁵⁶. *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* begins: 'To all and to anyone in particular who may read or hear this my writing, I, Olaus Petri, secretary of the Stockholm council, wish grace and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ'⁵⁷.

The reader constructed by Olaus Petri through this mode of address is not a learned theologian, but a layperson. Speaking in his capacity as secretary of the Stockholm town council, he directs his words to all who read or hear his text. In doing so, he invokes a mode of reception and dissemination characteristic of the sixteenth century: printed texts were not solely consumed through silent reading, but were frequently read aloud, thereby reaching an audience broader than the literate public. By explicitly addressing those 'who may read or hear this my writing', the author further reinforces the notion that this manner of disseminating the text is both legitimate and desirable. Such a mode of address thus serves to strengthen the oral circulation of the written word and to encourage its public reading. A standard print run at the Stockholm

⁵⁴ COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 286–291, 367–368; Laura-Marie MORK, *Kommunikation über Herrschaft im schwedischen Reich. Die erste Regierungsphase Gustav Vasas im Spannungsfeld von Religion und Politik* (Schriften zur politischen Kommunikation, Bd. 27), Göttingen 2026.

⁵⁵ Laura-Marie Mork has published the most in-depth analysis of the pamphlet, see L.-M. MORK, op.cit., pp. 64–91. Mork concludes that the pamphlet was a highly political text and, as such, was deliberately composed and circulated.

⁵⁶ T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, p. 156.

⁵⁷ 'Allom och huar och en besynnerligha som thenne min scriffuelse läsande eller hörandes warda, wunskar jach Olaus Petri Stocholms Råadz Secretarius, Nådh och fridh aff gudhi wårö fadher och herranom Jesu Christo'; OPSS:1, p. 153.

press has been estimated at around 500 copies, although the figures remain uncertain⁵⁸.

Moreover, this opened up opportunities for listeners and readers to engage in discussion of the content and to transmit it further through word of mouth. By identifying himself as the town council secretary, Olaus Petri also presents himself as a civic rather than an ecclesiastical figure – someone infinitely familiar with the living conditions of the town's inhabitants. At this time, Stockholm was a relatively small town of about 5,000 inhabitants⁵⁹, and Olaus Petri was undoubtedly a well-known figure among its burghers due to his regular service at the town hall. In this way, he forged a bond and a sense of community with his audience.

Hence, several key features of the pro-Reformation pamphlet format developed in the Empire were adopted by Olaus Petri in his *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*. However, one element considered as crucial for the rapid spread of pro-Reformation ideas to the illiterate is noticeably absent in the Swedish case: visual print communication that used images and symbols in combination with text to stage a message. In the Empire, the publication of pamphlets was accompanied by *Flugblätter* – that is single-sheet prints that conveyed a polemical and agitational message through text, but above all, through images. Swedish pro-Reformation print is entirely devoid of this type of medium.

TIMING AS A STRATEGY

The deliberate publishing strategies employed by Olaus Petri to advance pro-Reformation arguments were unprecedented in Swedish publishing. Though *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was likely not his first publication. Why, then, did he employ these strategies at this precise juncture? To fully comprehend the use of publishing strategies in pro-Reformation print, we need to understand what motivated him and other print agents to utilise these strategies at this specific point in time.

To advocate for change and to maximise their reach, print agents had to carefully calculate the perfect timing of publication in correspondence to the political and social context. This implies that, in early 1527, Olaus Petri must have judged that a publication in March would be highly advantageous.

⁵⁸ *Några wijsor om Antichristum [1536] samt handskrivna tillägg*, utg. Otfried CZAIKA (Skara stiftshistoriska sällsksaps skriftserie, vol. 98; Finska kyrkohistoriska samfundets handlingar, vol. 235), Skara–Helsingfors 2019, pp. 29–38.

⁵⁹ Otfried CZAIKA, *Metropolen als Vermittler, Förderer und Akteure von Reformation und Konfessionalisierung in Skandinavien und insbesondere im schwedischen Reich*, [in:] *Reformatio Baltica. Kulturwirkungen der Reformation in den Metropolen des Ostseeraums*, hrsg. v. Heinrich ASSEL, Johann A. STEIGER, Axel E. WALTER (Metropolis, Bd. 2), Berlin 2018, p. 725.

The pamphlet's emphasis on agitation and on inciting its audience to action presupposes a certain public receptivity to its arguments – otherwise, its somewhat confrontational content risked backfiring on its author. The publication of such a pamphlet therefore needed to be opportunely timed and to strike the appropriate tone in order to engage its audience effectively. We shall, therefore, examine the circumstances surrounding pro-Reformation argumentation during the final months of 1526 and the first months of 1527.

In 1526, the congregation in Stockholm was confronted with a man preaching in the streets. His name was Melchior Hofmann (c. 1495–1543)⁶⁰, and he belonged to a group of preachers who claimed to represent Martin Luther's ideas. Like several other preachers of this kind, Hofmann lacked formal theological education and travelled throughout northern Europe to advocate for new religious norms. In Stockholm, Hofmann most likely preached in German and enjoyed the support of German merchants.

Gustav Vasa was informed about Hofmann's activities in January 1527, and he wrote 'we have also learned from others who have heard his preaching that he indulges in many fantasies and is somewhat reckless in his words'⁶¹. The letter confirms that Hofmann preached to the town's inhabitants and that his sermon did not go down well with Gustav Vasa and the churchmen. Gustav Vasa continued in his letter to his chancellor, Laurentius Andrea, that Hofmann should therefore no longer be permitted to preach in the town and that the mayor should keep him informed of developments. Shortly thereafter, Hofmann appears to have left Stockholm for Lübeck, and later Kiel⁶².

Hofmann's preaching in Stockholm is just one of several indicators of a heightened conflict over the Reformation during the autumn of 1526 and the spring of 1527. Around this time, the congregation in Stockholm likely began singing in Swedish, which was a major innovation, as congregational singing had not been part of the traditional mass prior to the Reformation. With the dawn of the Reformation, the vernacular sacred song developed as a way to involve the congregation in worship. Singing in Swedish during the

⁶⁰ For Hofmann, see Klaus DEPPERMAN, *Melchior Hoffman. Soziale Unruhen und apokalyptische Visionen im Zeitalter der Reformation*, Göttingen 1979; idem, *Melchior Hoffman. Widersprüche zwischen lutherischer Obrigkeitstreue und apokalyptischem Traum*, [in:] *Radikale Reformatoren. 21 biographische Skizzen von Thomas Müntzer bis Paracelsus*, hrsg. v. Hans-Jürgen GOERTZ (Beck'sche Schwarze Reihe, Bd. 183), München 1978, pp. 155–166. On Hofmann in Stockholm, see L.-M. MORK, op.cit., passim.

⁶¹ 'wij haffwe nogoth forfarit vtaff andre som hans predican hörth haffwa ath han phantese-rar stor hoopp och ær noghot owarligh j sin ordh'; *Konung Gustaf den förstes registratur*, vol. 4: 1527 (Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia. Serie 1), Stockholm 1868, pp. 24–25.

⁶² Kajsa WEBER, *Empiri och historikerns sökverktyg. Kataloger, bibliografier, databaser och Melchior Hofmanns böcker som aldrig togs upp i den svenska nationalbibliografen*, *Historisk tidskrift*, vol. 142: 2022, nr 3, pp. 353–379.

service was thus a clear sign of pro-Reformation sentiment⁶³. Furthermore, in December 1526, the king issued a letter of protection for a monk who had fled his monastery, and he intervened to prevent the spread of anti-Luther writings in the kingdom. It was the bishop of Linköping who had issued translations of German anti-Luther pamphlets⁶⁴. The king also ordered the closure of the printing press in Söderköping, which was under the bishop's control. From that point onwards, it became impossible to print anti-Reformation texts within the kingdom. By late 1526 and early 1527, rumours circulated that the king and the town of Stockholm were attempting to introduce a new faith in the kingdom. The king denied this and affirmed that he sought to strengthen the true and proper faith as taught by the Apostles⁶⁵. To avoid division over matters of doctrine, the king intended to convene a national assembly where the issue could be discussed.

Hence, the climate for arguing to the advantage of change of religious norms had altered between autumn of 1526 – when the first two pro-Reformation catechetical works were published – and March 1527⁶⁶. The catechetical texts printed in Swedish in 1526 were indeed also Reformation-oriented, but they had not staged a transformation of the Church or religious practices, nor had they sought open conflict with the established Church. By early 1527, this had changed, and an open conflict emerged over which religious norms should prevail. When *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was printed in March 1527, it appeared against the backdrop of ongoing congregational singing in the vernacular in Stockholm, previous pro-Reformation preaching in the streets of Stockholm, monks leaving the monasteries, royal suppression of anti-Luther writings and widespread rumours that the king sought to impose a new faith. In other words, March 1527 presented a favourable climate for publishing a polemical text that both presented and refuted the opponent's anti-Reformation arguments, contested the established Church and its religious practices, and addressed an audience accustomed to reading, hearing, and discussing pro-Reformation material. Petri had good reason to expect that such polemics would find a receptive audience in the town and that the text could further intensify the ongoing Reformation conflict.

⁶³ For a discussion of Swedish hymnals and the possibility that a hymnal was printed in 1526, see *Then svenska psalmeboken 1582*, utg. Otfried CZAIKA (Skara stiftshistoriska sälls-kaps skriftserie, vol. 87; Finska kyrkohistoriska samfundets handlingar, vol. 227), Skara–Helsingfors 2016, pp. 20–26.

⁶⁴ Per STOBÆUS, *Hans Brask. En senmedeltida biskop och hans tankevärld*, Skellefteå 2008.

⁶⁵ M. BERNTSON, *Mässan och armborstet*, pp. 90–119.

⁶⁶ Kress argues that the 'Reformation's ideas were about to become public within the years 1526 and 1527', see Hannah M. KRESS, *Olaus Petri, the Reformation's introduction and the media*, Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift, årg. 121: 2021, p. 30.

THE TITLE PAGE DESIGN
AND TITLE BORDER

It was not only the fact that *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was a highly topical pamphlet that made it a remarkable product on the Swedish book market, but also its title page. The title page was visually striking, and nothing quite like it had ever been printed in Swedish before. It was decorated with an elaborated title border, representing the Apostles Peter and Paul in full figure to the left and right of the text respectively. The title border also included a representation of the Trinity at the bottom, alongside the four Evangelists depicted as an angel, a lion, a bull, and an eagle in the corners⁶⁷. This wooden border was likely crafted by a Swedish woodcarver⁶⁸.

To understand why the title page of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was unique within the Swedish vernacular book market, we will take a closer look at the title pages of books produced for the Swedish audience prior to 1527, contextualising them within broader European developments.

The title page as a medium is closely linked to the emergence of printing in the fifteenth century. The mass production of books forced printers and booksellers to store large portions of print runs while awaiting sales. Unlike manuscripts, which were custom-produced for specific buyers and thus changed owners immediately upon completion, printed books could remain in the printer's workshop for long periods before being sold. To protect the printed pages, they were provided with a blank first page or a blank cover. Shortly thereafter, simple titles were added so that they could be easily identified. These so-called label titles came into use during the 1480s, coinciding with the boom in European print production as the craft transformed into a mass-market industry. Label titles were essential for the production and distribution of books⁶⁹. Printers and publishers quickly realised the potential of marketing their books using title pages and simple label titles were soon transformed into more sophisticated titles. By providing a text with an attractive and informative title page, printers were able to increase sales. To respond to this new opportunity, various elements of graphic communication on the title page

⁶⁷ Printed in COLLIJN, vol. 1, p. 342.

⁶⁸ See Artur SAHLÉN, *Om träsnitt och träsnidare i Sverige. Några data ur vårt lands träsnittshistoria*, Stockholm 1914, pp. 15–16, who likewise assumes that there were Swedish woodcarvers at this time.

⁶⁹ Bettina WAGNER, *An der Wiege des Paratexts. Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Druckern, Herausgebern und Lesern im 15. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Die Pluralisierung des Paratextes in der Frühen Neuzeit. Theorie, Formen, Funktionen*, hrsg. v. Frieder VON AMMON, Herfried VÖGEL (Pluralisierung & Autorität, Bd. 15), Münster 2008, p. 142.

were developed, including the title border, typography and colour⁷⁰. Hence, the evolution of the title page was driven by the need to bring the book to the right buyer and to secure profit.

TITLE PAGES BEFORE THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE STOCKHOLM PRINT SHOP

Most books printed for the Swedish market during the fifteenth century were breviaries and missals produced on commission⁷¹, such as the *Missale Upsalense vetus* (1484)⁷². These projects were commissioned by bishops or cathedral chapters and were lucrative printing ventures. Beside printing liturgic books, printers produced commercial editions. Printing a missal was a prestigious project for any diocese and historical evidence suggests competition among them to produce the most lavish and successful print products⁷³.

The first known title page in a Swedish book is found in *Breviarium Strengnense* (Ill. 2), printed in Stockholm in 1495⁷⁴. This title page had a label title⁷⁵. Several products have no title page at all but begin with an incipit⁷⁶, and in several other cases the first page has been lost over time, so it is uncertain whether the work originally included a title page⁷⁷.

Around the year 1500, title pages had become an established feature of printed books on the European book market⁷⁸, but this shift did not truly manifest in the Swedish book market until the 1510s and early 1520s. For example,

⁷⁰ Margaret M. SMITH, *The Title-Page: Its Early Development, 1460–1510*, London–New Castle 2000, pp. 15–23; Philip GASKELL, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, Winchester–New Castle 1995, p. 52.

⁷¹ Mattias LUNDBERG, *The Printing of Missals and Breviaries as Ecclesiastical Authority in the Late-Medieval Baltic Region: A Battle between Printers or between Bishops?*, [in:] *The Baltic Battle of Books: Formation and Relocation of European Libraries in the Confessional Age (c. 1500 – c. 1650) and Their Afterlife*, ed. Jonas NORDIN, Gustavs STRENGA, Peter SJÖKVIST (Library of the Written Word, vol. 116; The Handpress World, vol. 94), Leiden–Boston 2023, pp. 62–77.

⁷² *Missale Upsalense vetus*, Stockholm 1484; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 29–38; *Universal Short Title Catalogue*, <https://www.ustc.ac.uk> [accessed online 29 May 2026] (hereinafter cited as USTC), no. 741319.

⁷³ M. LUNDBERG, op.cit., pp. 62–77.

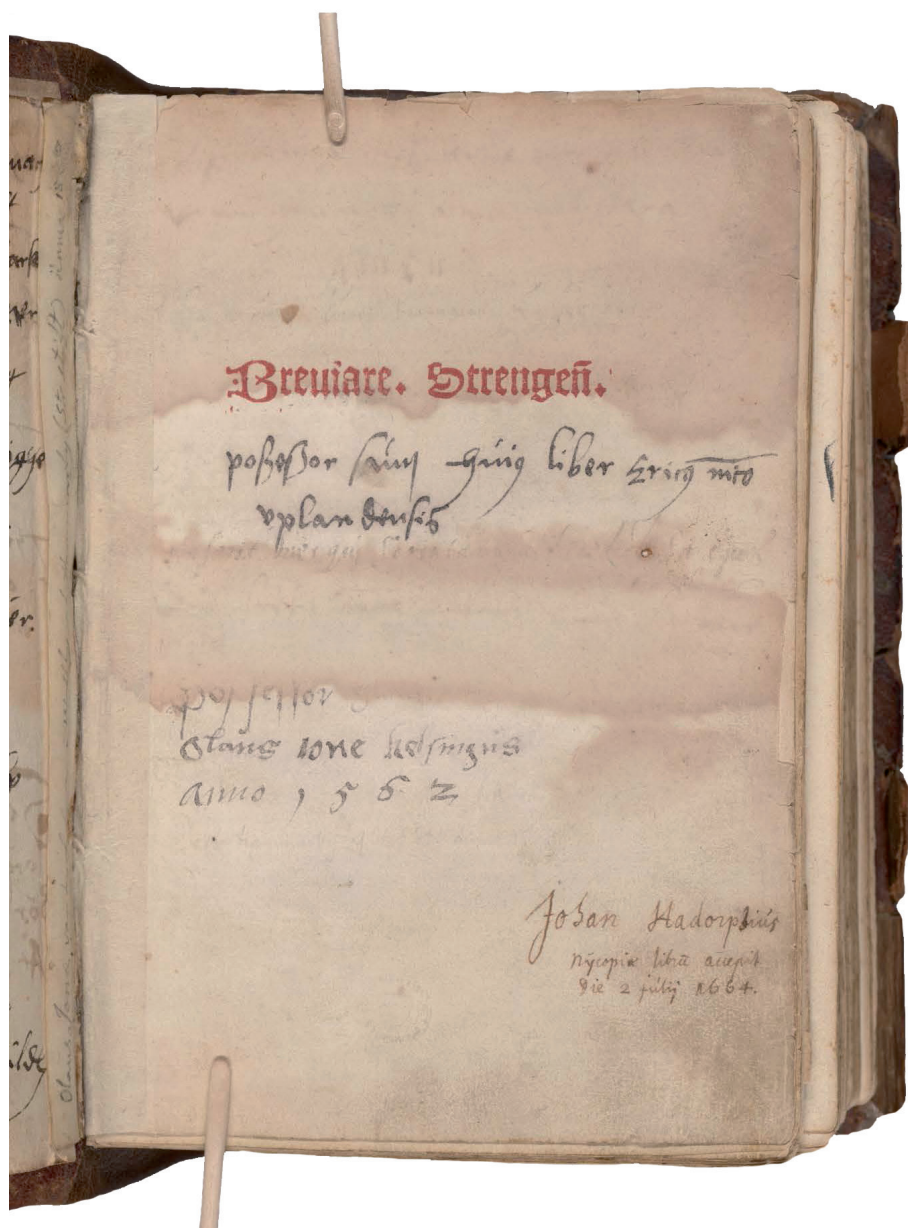
⁷⁴ *Breviarium Strengnense*, Stockholm 1495; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 138–144; USTC, no. 766713.

⁷⁵ Another example from the Swedish book market is Alanus DE RUPE, *De dignitate et utilitate psalterii b. Mariae virginis*, Mariefred 1498; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 160–169; USTC, no. 767320.

⁷⁶ For example, *Horae de domina secundum ecclesias diocesum Lincopensis et Scarensis*, Vadstena 1495; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 132–138; USTC, no. 766799; and *Vita cum miraculis b. Katherine*, Stockholm 1487; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 53–69; USTC, no. 765734.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, *Missale Strengnense*, Stockholm 1487; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 69–75; USTC, no. 741308.

⁷⁸ M. M. SMITH, op.cit., p. 12; Alfred F. JOHNSON, *German Renaissance Title-Borders* (Bibliographical Society. Facsimiles and Illustrations, no. 1), Oxford 1929.



Ill. 2. *Breviarium Strengnense*, Stockholm 1495
(original at the National Library of Sweden)

the *Psalterium Upsalense*, printed in Uppsala in 1510⁷⁹, featured a full title printed on the title page alongside a colophon. This was the second edition of the *Psalterium Upsalense*; the first edition, printed around 1487, had featured no title page whatsoever⁸⁰. Shortly before the establishment of the Stockholm print shop in 1526, the print shop of Hans Brask, Bishop of Linköping, in Söderköping produced two books with title pages that can be seen as forerunners to later developments: the *Historia s. Nicolai Lincopensis* (1523)⁸¹, which featured a title border consisting of four block prints and woodcut depicting a bishop, and the *Manuale Lincopense* (1525)⁸², which displayed a title and a woodcut depicting a Madonna and Child.

The first two publications of the Stockholm print shop – the aforementioned *En nyttig undervisning* and *En skön nyttig undervisning*, both published during 1526 – had identical title borders with vase-shaped objects and large leaves. The border was coarser in its execution and lacked the intricate craftsmanship found in the title border used for *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*. Hence, while title borders did exist in books produced for the Swedish book market prior to the establishment of the Stockholm print shop, the title border of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* represented a major stylistic leap forward, looking entirely unlike anything that had previously been published in the realm.

THE NEW TITLE BORDER
WITH THE APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

The title page with its elegant title border has long been recognised in research as a characteristic feature of Olaus Petri's writings. Isak Collijn, the Swedish bibliographer, argued that it was used for the first time in 1527 in the printing of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*, designating it as 'Border C' in his review of the typographic materials available to the Stockholm print shop⁸³. Gunnar T. Westin, meanwhile, argues that the title border not only distinguishes the writings authored by Olaus Petri from other works, but also that its design reflects Olaus Petri's self-understanding as a 'preacher, a successor of the Apostles, a proclaimer of the true Gospel'⁸⁴. Hannah Kress agrees with the interpretation that Olaus Petri selected the title border because it reflects his self-understanding, but she contends that the title border was not used exclusively

⁷⁹ *Psalterium Upsalense*, Uppsala 1510; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 202–209; USTC, no. 300191.

⁸⁰ *Psalterium Upsalense*, Stockholm [c. 1487]; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 75–80; USTC, no. 741695.

⁸¹ *Historia s. Nicolai Lincopensis*, Söderköping 1523; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 279–284; USTC, no. 300184.

⁸² *Manuale Lincopense*, Söderköping 1525; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 291–295; USTC, no. 300172.

⁸³ I. COLLIJN, *Sveriges bibliografi*, Bd. 3, p. XV.

⁸⁴ 'predikare, en apostlarnas efterträdare, det sanna evangeliets förkunnare'; Gunnar T. WESTIN, *Träsnitt och författarmarkering*, Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift, årg. 99: 1999, p. 20.

to mark his authorship. Instead, she identifies three distinct series across his production and suggests that Border C was reserved for publications of fundamental importance to the Reformation and would remain relevant well beyond the time they were written⁸⁵.

Hence, existing research suggests that the title page with the title border design functioned essentially as a 'Brand Olaus Petri', but things are not always what they appear to be. The printer Richolff had arrived in Sweden with the obligation to print the New Testament in Swedish in 1526. While awaiting proofreading and typesetting for the project, he had the opportunity to take on other commissions as well, such as the two catechisms printed in 1526. Yet, these were not the only works to emerge from the Stockholm press that year.

Melchior Hofmann – the preacher who visited Stockholm during the autumn of 1526 – also published two texts in German in Stockholm in that same year: *Formaninghe an die gelöfigen vorsambling in Livlandt*⁸⁶ and *Das XII. Capitel des propheten Danielis*⁸⁷. It is on the title pages of these two publications from 1526 that the Border C – featuring the Apostles Peter and Paul, and the four Evangelists – appears for the first time⁸⁸. Hofmann's name appears on the title page of *Formaninghe an die gelöfigen vorsambling in Livlandt*.

Despite this, the title border was probably not developed specifically for Hofmann's writings, and as earlier research has shown, the connection between a title border and the content of a book was often weak. Title borders were expensive objects that a printer needed to reuse in multiple runs, and a new title border could not be produced for every new print product. Frequent reuse was simply a standard commercial reality of early modern printing⁸⁹. Instead, inspiration for the title border seems to have stemmed from the ongoing work of printing the New Testament in Swedish.

⁸⁵ H. M. KRESS, *Reformation und kalkulierte Medialität*, pp. 405–406. This interpretation of the different series seems beside the point, since polemical, agitational, and argumentative texts were published with different title borders.

⁸⁶ Melchior HOFMANN, *An de gelöfigen vorsambling inn Liflant ein korte formaninge, van Melcher Hoffman sich tho wachen vor falscher lere de sich nu ertzeighen unde inrithen, under der Sthemme götliker worde*, Stockholm 1526; *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts*, <https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/sammlungen/historische-drucke/recherche/vd-16> [accessed online 29 May 2026] (hereinafter cited as VD16), XL 75; USTC, no. 2212599.

⁸⁷ Melchior HOFMANN, *Das XII. Capitel des propheten Danielis ausgeleget, und des evangelion des andern sondages, gefallenndt inn Advent, vnd von den zeychen des jüngsten gerichtes [...]* MDXXVI, Stockholm 1526; VD16, XL 165; USTC, no. 2213479. Possibly one more text was printed, but it is known only from its title, *Das Büchlein vom Jüngsten Tage*, see Josef BENZING, *Melchior Hoffmanns Auslegung des Propheten Daniels 1526. Der erste schwedischer Druck in deutscher Sprache*, *Nordisk tidskrift för bok- och biblioteksväsen*, årg. 45: 1958, p. 75.

⁸⁸ K. WEBER, *Empiri och historikerns sökverktyg*, pp. 353–379.

⁸⁹ A. PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther*, p. 160.

Luther's 1522 translation of the New Testament (the September Testament) was first printed in Wittenberg by Melchior Lotter⁹⁰. Luther's translation was soon published in new editions by other printers, all with different title page design. The edition printed in Basel by Adam Petri⁹¹ in 1522⁹² bears striking similarities to the Swedish title border (Ill. 3). It shows the Apostles Peter and Paul on the side and the symbols of the four Evangelists in the corners. This was designed by Hans Holbein the Younger, and cut by Hans Lützelburger⁹³. Petri used the same title page design in his following editions, printed in 1523 and 1525⁹⁴. An investigation of other title borders to Luther's New Testament at the time reveals that Petri in Basel was the only printer to use this idea for his title page⁹⁵. The idea to use representation of the four Evangelists in the corner was a common motif circulating among workshops at the time⁹⁶, as were visual representations of the Apostles Peter and Paul at the side of a title border⁹⁷. However, uniting them into a single, cohesive title border was a graphic innovation developed specifically by Adam Petri in Basel for his 1522 New Testament.

Since the title borders of the New Testament editions printed in Basel so closely resemble the design of the Swedish title border, it may be assumed that Jürgen Richolff – or another agent involved in the production of the 1526 Swedish New Testament – owned a copy of one of these Basel editions and drew inspiration from it. A title border featuring Peter and Paul together with

⁹⁰ VD16, B 4318; USTC, no. 627911.

⁹¹ Adam Petri was a supporter of Luther and printed many of his works; for further information, see T. KAUFMANN, *Die Mitte der Reformation*, pp. 232–243; see also Philipp SCHMIDT, *Die Illustration der Lutherbibel 1522–1700. Ein Stück abendländische Kultur- und Kirchengeschichte*, Basel 1962, pp. 117–121.

⁹² *Das new Testament*, Basel 1522; VD16, B 4317; USTC, no. 625474.

⁹³ *Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years, 1515–1532*, ed. Christian MÜLLER, Munich–London 2006, pp. 443–445.

⁹⁴ VD16, B 4325; and VD16, B 4357.

⁹⁵ The following sources have been consulted: *Jesus. Das New Testament*, Augsburg 1524; VD16, ZV 1839; *Das neü Testament*, Augsburg 1523; VD16, B 4321; *Das neue Testament*, Basel 1523; VD16, B 4330; *Das gantz neuw Testament*, Basel 1523; VD16, ZV 1841; *Das neue testament*, Wittenberg 1524; VD16, B 4351; *Das neuw Testament recht grüntlich teutsch*, Straßburg 1524; VD16, B 4346; *Das gantz Nüw Testament recht grüntlich vertütscht*, Zürich 1524; VD16, B 4352; *Das gantz Nüw Testamēt recht grüntlich vertütscht*, Zürich 1524; VD16, B 4354; *Das gantz Nüw Testament recht grüntlich vertütscht*, Zürich 1524; VD16, B 4353.

⁹⁶ Johannes LUTHER, *Die Titeinfassungen der Reformationszeit*, Bd. 1, Leipzig 1909, Table 9. The title border was used by Johannes Rau-Grunenberg in Wittenberg in 1522, see Christian RÜMELIN, *Hans Holbein und die Druckgraphik*, [in:] *Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years, 1515–1532*, ed. Christian MÜLLER, Munich–London 2006, pp. 124–131. See, for instance, Martin LUTHER, *Von der beicht ob die der Bapst macht hab zugepieten*, Augsburg 1521; VD16, L 7180; USTC, no. 700014.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, Martin LUTHER, *Auslegung der Episteln und Evangelien*, Wittenberg 1522; VD16, L 3936.



Ill. 3. *Das new Testament: yetzund recht grüntlich teutsch. Welchs allein Christum unser seligkeit, recht und klärlich leret; Mit gantz gelerten und richtigen vorreden, und der schweristen örteren kurtz, aber gut, außlegung.* Basel 1522; VD16, B 4317 (original at the Augsburg State and City Library)

the four Evangelists also fits the New Testament iconographically. The design may well have been one of several options discussed for the Swedish edition. However, the Swedish New Testament was never printed with this title border. Instead, a design was chosen featuring a large woodcut depicting Christ on the Cross⁹⁸.

That Jürgen Richolff was involved in the design of the new title page, perhaps by bringing a copy of the Basel edition of the New Testament, is further supported by his subsequent reuse of the idea of Peter and Paul on the sides and the four Evangelists. When he departed Sweden sometime during 1527, he left behind the woodcut used for the printing of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*, along with the rest of the royal printing office equipment. However, he reused the idea of the Apostles and Evangelists in new woodcuts, which he used, among other works, on the title page of *Pinacidion de Romanae ecclesiae imposturis et papisticis sutelis*, published in Hamburg in 1530⁹⁹, and *Uan Christliker Fryheyt vnde mynschen gebaden*, published in Lübeck in 1533¹⁰⁰.

Hence, the title border with the Apostles and the Evangelists was actually first used in Sweden to print the two texts by Melchior Hofmann. It is highly probable that someone had brought an edition of Adam Petri's Basel New Testament to Sweden to use it as a template to develop a new domestic design. Though another design was chosen for printing the Swedish New Testament, the woodblock with the Apostles Peter and Paul would be used in the Stockholm print shop for years to come.

Thus, contrary to the assumptions of previous scholarship, the publishing of *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* did not mark the debut of the title border on the Swedish book market; Hofmann had already claimed that distinction. The title border cannot be seen as an expression of Olaus Petri's self-understanding, nor did he help to create it. However, it does appear on several well-known pro-Reformation publications between 1527 and 1539¹⁰¹. The title border signals pro-Reformation sentiment to its purchaser but as Hofmann used it before Olaus Petri, it cannot in itself be seen as the 'Brand Olaus Petri'. Though, there is something that Olaus Petri does with the title page that transforms it into something that is uniquely associated with him: the combination of the title border and his name.

⁹⁸ The model for the Swedish title page is thought to be the 1523 Strasbourg edition of the New Testament printed by Johann Schott, see COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 331–339; *Ihesus. Das New Testament teütsch*, Straßburg 1523; VD16, B 4334.

⁹⁹ Johann AEPINUS, *Pinacidion de Romanae ecclesiae imposturis et papisticis sutelis*, Hamburg 1530; VD16, A 380.

¹⁰⁰ *Uan Christliker Fryheyt vnde mynschen gebaden*, Lübeck 1533; VD16, T 1314.

¹⁰¹ See COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 12, 17, 26, 31, 33, 49, 50, 66, 340, 341, 343, 347, 358.

THE AUTHOR'S NAME
ON THE TITLE PAGE

In March 1527, Olaus Petri must have thought that the time was right to publish a polemical pro-Reformation pamphlet. By this point, he was a well-known figure in the town, having served as secretary to the town council since 1524. In February 1525, he had also married in the parish Church of St Nicholas, thereby breaking the vow he had taken as a deacon – an act that attracted the attention of both Bishop Hans Brask, the leading defender of the established Church in the realm, and King Gustav Vasa. Brask wrote that the marriage had taken place *in facie ecclesiae* – suggesting that it was a public event noted by the town's inhabitants. During the 1520s, marrying and breaking vows of celibacy had become a common and powerful way of signalling one's support for the Reformation in the German-speaking lands, and Olaus Petri clearly mirrored this strategy¹⁰².

In early 1527, Olaus Petri was therefore known to the people of Stockholm as a man who advocated pro-Reformation changes of religious norms and practices, but he had not yet established himself as an author. The two pro-Reformation texts that had been published in 1526 were anonymous, and in addition there were Hofmann's two German works – featuring the striking title border with Peter and Paul – which must have been associated specifically with Hofmann. As noted, Hofmann had incurred the king's disapproval, suggesting that he was regarded in Stockholm as a radical preacher. To avoid producing a work that looked exactly like Hofmann's, Olaus Petri therefore needed to make a change and clearly signal that he stood behind the content of the printed book. The solution was to place his name on the title page.

In *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*, Olaus Petri clearly demonstrates that he was inspired by the reformers' creative use of print as a medium to promote their cause in the book market. For a book printed in Swedish, it was a remarkable event that the author's name appeared on the title page. In the empty space at the centre, the title is printed together with the words 'Olaus petri M.D.XXvij Stocholm'.

This is the first time that Olaus Petri's name appeared on the title page and it is clearly styled to capture reader's attention. While authors' names had appeared on title pages before, these were instances of foreign and dead authors, such as the French Dominican mystic Alanus de Rupe on the title page of

¹⁰² Kajsa BRILKMAN, *När och hur inleddes reformationen i det svenska riket? Ett kulturhistoriskt perspektiv på ett gammalt problem*, Scandia. Tidskrift för historisk forskning, Bd. 82: 2016, H. 2, pp. 49–56.

De dignitate et utilitate psalterii b. Mariae virginis (1498)¹⁰³. Prior to Olaus Petri, the only contemporary Swedish author identified on a domestic title page appears to have been Magnus Ingemari on the *Composita verborum* (1519)¹⁰⁴. There are a few other cases where an author's name was printed on the second page, for instance the translator Ericus Nicolai from Uppsala appears in *Aff dyäffwlsens frästilse* (1495) – the first book printed in Swedish¹⁰⁵.

These examples, however, bear no stylistic resemblance to Olaus Petri's layout. He placed his name in the centre of the page, clearly separated from the text that marks the pamphlet's title. He also employed another means to graphically distinguish his product – his name was printed in a larger font than the rest of the text and in the same font as the first three words of the title. The result is that the title page immediately, and in a way that was new to Swedish book production, communicated that this was a text by Olaus Petri¹⁰⁶.

Olaus Petri never communicated why he chose to use these features, and the idea may well have originated with the printer rather than the author. It is clear, though, that these innovative ways of designing the title page look very similar to the strategies employed in Wittenberg to promote Luther's text on the book market. A few years prior, the printers of Luther's work had realised that the name Martin Luther was their best and unique selling point. The first works buried Luther's name in a dense text or used clumsy word division that split his name in two parts. In subsequent editions, printers and typesetters set the name in bold type, larger than the rest of the text. The obvious goal was to make Luther's name spring off the page, instantly catching the eye of the purchasers¹⁰⁷.

Raising awareness of new religious norms and arguing for their implementation also required someone to step forward as a reformer and advocate for change. To achieve success, a certain amount of attention had to be drawn to the new norms and their implementation. By printing his name on the text, Olaus Petri not only appeared as the author, but he also certainly stepped onto the stage as the creator of these texts for his contemporaries, and more specifically for the people of Stockholm. The first two pro-Reformation writings in Swedish that left the printing press – and where research strongly suggests

¹⁰³ Alanus DE RUPE, *De dignitate et utilitate psalterii b. Mariae virginis*, Mariefred 1498; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 160–169.

¹⁰⁴ Magnus INGEMARI, *Composita verborum*, Uppsala 1519; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 266–268.

¹⁰⁵ *Dialogus creaturarum optime moralizatus*, Stockholm 1483; COLLIJN, vol. 1, pp. 16–29; USTC, no. 765488.

¹⁰⁶ See I. COLLIJN, *Sveriges bibliografi*, Bd. 3, pp. I–III, for an analysis of the types used at the royal printing house; and COLLIJN, vol. 1, p. 340, for the types used in *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev*.

¹⁰⁷ A. PETTEGREE, *Brand Luther*, p. 162.

Olaus Petri as the author – do not have his name on the title page. To further stress that *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was his text, the very last page contained more information for the reader. It says that the text ‘shall be attributed to me alone and to no one else’¹⁰⁸.

We can only speculate as to why it became important for Olaus Petri to step forward as an author in 1527. Presumably, the name Olaus Petri was intended to convey some kind of information that was not necessary or desirable before. It is possible that Hofmann’s street-preaching in Stockholm, the printing of his texts and his disapproval by Gustav Vasa prompted Olaus Petri – who used the same title border as Hofmann – to put his name on the published text. This also points to a process of learning and adaptation in which Olaus Petri adjusted his choices in response to the actions of other actors. This, in turn, means that Hofmann – who is often seen as a secondary figure in the Swedish Reformation – should be credited with a more active role, as his presence prompted other actors to make new decisions regarding how the pro-Reformation message should be conveyed. It became important to show that *Svar på ett okristligt sändebrev* was Olaus Petri’s text. In the years that followed, the name ‘Olaus Petri’ was clearly printed on nine of the pro-Reformation publications of the coming years, with the initials O.P. used on one other occasion instead. This represents the closest approximation to a ‘Brand Olaus Petri’.

It is also noteworthy that the name is printed as Olaus Petri – as he is known today. The name is, of course, a Latinised form of Olof Petersson. However, apart from printed works, the Latinised form is used sparingly in other material from the period. In the preserved letters he sometimes appears as ‘Master Olof’, sometimes as ‘master Olof Petri’¹⁰⁹. In Wittenberg he matriculated as ‘Olaus Phase ex. Suecia Sweignen’¹¹⁰, in the notes of the Stockholm town council he wrote his name as ‘Olauus Petri’ or ‘Secretari Mgr Olau phase’¹¹¹. The decision to print the author’s name in its Latin form was by no means unusual at the time, but reflects his scholarly persona.

Because he did not operate within a highly competitive commercial book market in the vernacular, Olaus Petri had little reason to place his name on the title pages of his publications for commercial reasons. The fact that he nevertheless chose to implement some of the publishing strategies that had been

¹⁰⁸ ‘Såå biwdher jach mich och (Christelighe läsare) her medh til swars, ath thenne min scriffuelse skole mich aleena wara förekastat och inghen annan’; OPSS:1, p. 222.

¹⁰⁹ In Swedish, ‘Mäster Olof’ or ‘mäster Olof Petri’, see *Konung Gustaf den förstes registratur*, vol. 4, p. 276; *Konung Gustaf den förstes registratur*, vol. 6: 1529 (Handlingar rörande Sveriges historia. Serie 1), Stockholm 1875, p. 367.

¹¹⁰ Ch. CALLMER, op.cit., p. 14.

¹¹¹ *Stockholms stads tänkebok under vasatiden*, vol. 1: 1524–1529, utg. Nils SjöBERG, Stockholm 1915, p. 3.

developed by the theologians in Wittenberg as tools for the Reformation suggests that ideas and media practices were closely intertwined for him. Olaus Petri was well acquainted with the publishing strategies and typographic design choices employed by other reformers. His writings show that he had access to works by Luther and other reformers through the Baltic book trade and, even after leaving Wittenberg in 1518/1519, he remained well positioned to follow developments in the book market¹¹². Unfortunately, Gustav Vasa ordered the destruction of Petri's library after his death, leaving the full extent of his book collection unknown.

CONCLUSION

Scholarship on print and the Reformation has largely been shaped by the commercially dynamic conditions of the Holy Roman Empire. The Swedish case shows that many of the publishing strategies associated with early pro-Reformation printing also emerged in peripheral regions with monopolistic printing, suggesting that the relationship between print and the Reformation cannot be explained through market competition. Even where competitive incentives were weak, reformers still adapted publishing strategically because evangelical communication itself encouraged experimentation with genre, title pages, authorship, and timing. Consequently – as the article shows – innovative publishing strategies were not a merely German phenomenon but could be employed elsewhere as well.

At the same time, certain strategies were notably absent. In Sweden, there was no aggressive or inventive anti-Reformation publishing, owing to the fact that only a single press was in operation. Likewise, printed visual communication was largely absent. Consequently, the situation differed markedly from that of many continental European contexts, where competing presses generated a more diverse and contested public discourse around the Reformation.

That many publishing strategies associated with the German Reformation could emerge even in a monopolistic and peripheral print environment has implications for how we can perceive the nexus of print and Reformation. It is very likely that publishing strategies in Sweden were inspired by and modelled on the Wittenberg print – or publications from other well-known pro-Reformation print centres – as blueprints. Strategies that had been developed in a book market characterised by profit requirements and competition were adapted and used in a context characterised by a fundamentally different print environment.

However, I propose that this tells us more than just about dissemination of pro-Reformation publishing strategies from the Empire to the periphery.

¹¹² Kajsa WEBER, *Translating Luther into Swedish in the Sixteenth Century*, *Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 34: 2021, no. 3, pp. 301–324.

As publishing strategies were refined and further developed in peripheral regions – and thereby proved effective in markedly different contexts – they became partially detached from the economic context in which they initially took shape, and which often is treated as their structural precondition.

Olaus Petri and the other Swedish print agents employed these strategies without the same competitive commercial pressures that characterised the Empire. For the print agents it was crucial to persuade readers to engage with, circulate, and participate in the renegotiation of religious norms. To do so, they needed to establish the printed book within a media system in which the spoken word – especially through preaching and song – retained considerable importance. They also had to produce publications capable of competing with books printed beyond Sweden's borders and sold in Stockholm during the 1520s, while simultaneously establishing the legitimacy of their own role and position in the conflict with the Church. In all these respects, publishing strategies proved to be a powerful and effective instrument.

Hence, the findings of this article suggest that the connection between print and the Reformation was less the result of a competitive book market than an expression of a transformed understanding of publishing and mediation, in which pro-Reformation print agents came to view strategic publishing as integral to their cause. The adoption and adaptation of these publishing strategies outside the Empire implies that they were integral to the Reformation itself. This suggests that prevailing explanations of how printing and publishing became powerful tools for the Reformation can draw more general conclusions by combining our knowledge of the centre of the book world with studies of its periphery. More research is therefore needed to explore the diversity of pro-Reformation publishing strategies in sixteenth-century Europe and what they can tell us about the nexus of printing, publishing, and the Reformation.

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