

PART III

**Cities and the Provisioning
of Armies**

CHAPTER 8

Army Maintenance Shaping the Local Burgher Community in 18th-Century Helsinki¹

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The military town was a sub-species of European urban system fathered by the military revolution. Towns had, of course, been affected by the military since time immemorial, but, until the birth of premodern warfare, the peacetime interaction between

¹ The article is based on my doctoral thesis *Helsingin porvaristo Viaporin rakennuskaudella* (*The Helsinki Burgher Community during the Construction of Fortress Sveaborg*), published in 2016 by University of Helsinki. All the statistical information about the composition of Helsinki burgher community presented here is taken from the thesis. However, the concept of ‘military town bourgeoisie’, which is here used to analyse the material, is new and introduced to the theme in this article.

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the military and urban civilian populations was limited. The medieval castle functioned as much as a storage depot and an office building as it did as a military stronghold, and only had a handful of soldiers in permanent military service. Furthermore, the castle was separated from the town by gates, moats, ramparts and other physical barriers, and thus formed a separate entity.

When the European powers began to recruit standing armies, and warfare was revolutionised by the advancement of artillery, the medieval castle became obsolete and the military town was born. In such a town, the civilian settlement and the military stronghold coalesced, and the large numbers of permanent troops lived in constant interaction with the civilians. In the Vauban fortress town, perfected by French military engineer Marquise de Vauban (1633–1707) and held as the ideal all around the continent, the whole town was turned into a fortress by surrounding it with bastions. This kind of fusion of military base and civilian town eased the maintenance of armed forces: the townspeople could be obliged to lodge soldiers in their homes, which freed the army from expensive barrack-building, and the local burghers could sell their services to the army and food and drink to the soldiers.²

In the Swedish Realm, the military towns were a late phenomenon, as the predominantly rural kingdom manned its army first by conscriptions and then by the allotment farm system. However, little by little, militarised urban settlements started to appear. Gothenburg, founded in 1621 to be a commercial and military stronghold against the Danes, was designed and built as a fortified garrison town.³ Karlskrona, founded 60 years later, was first of all a base for the Swedish navy and only secondly a town, and the main function of its burghers was to cater to the maintenance needs of the navy.⁴

² See e.g. Parker 1988, pp. 10–24; Artéus 1988, pp. 25–26.

³ Andersson 1996, *passim*.

⁴ Bromé 1930, pp. 69–88.

The biggest and most expensive military town project in the early modern Swedish Realm began in 1747, when King Frederick I (Sw. Fredrik I) approved the plan to fortify the islands off the small Finnish town of Helsinki. The realm had lost its easternmost parts to Russia in two consecutive wars (the Great Northern War of 1700–1721 and the Russo-Swedish War of 1741–1743) and had to rebuild its eastern defence from scratch. The fortress of Helsinki – later named Sveaborg – was to be a large garrison and naval base functioning as the *place d'armes*, or the central fortress, of the whole of Finland. The gigantic project was funded mostly by financial subsidies from France, who pursued to curtail the growing power of Russia by bankrolling its enemies.

The construction of Fortress Sveaborg ended in 1791, after the French Revolution had cut off the vital French subsidies. The original plans had been so massive in scale that the fortress was left partly unfinished despite being under construction for over 40 years – apart from a few pauses, the longest in 1757–1763 due to the Seven Years War. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 19th century, Sveaborg was bar none the biggest military base in the Swedish Realm, with its standing troops – infantry, artillery, and army navy – and large civilian population adding up to some 5,000 persons.⁵

In this chapter, I analyse the development of early modern 'military town bourgeoisie', with Fortress Sveaborg as example. I trace the development of the Helsinki burgher community from 1747, the foundation year of the fortress construction, to 1808, when the Finnish War ended Sveaborg's history as a Swedish fortress, arguing that the co-existence with Fortress Sveaborg and its maintenance needs profoundly shaped the burgher community of

⁵ The history of Fortress Sveaborg has recently been researched by the Academy of Finland-funded project 'Connections, Associations, Innovations: The Case of Sea Fortress Sveaborg, its Founding, Socio-Economic Impact and Innovative Role ca. 1730–1808' (2010–2013), in which the author also took part. The publications of the project are extensively referenced in this chapter. For the population statistics of Sveaborg, see Hatakka 2012, pp. 103–120.

Helsinki. This shaping was not conscious, nor was it forced from outside. Instead, the natural law of supply and demand was at work. The fortress had specific needs, and the burghers had the opportunity to make money by answering to those needs. Slowly, unconsciously and often through trial and error, the burgher community started to form a shape that was ideal for the maintenance of the fortress.

The 18th century was an era of modest but intent urbanisation in the Swedish Realm: the urban population roughly doubled, with the percentage of town dwellers out of the national population rising from 4% to 7–8%.⁶ At the same time, the great legislative reforms and the rough-handed national economic policy, especially during the so-called Swedish Age of Liberty (1719–1772), reshaped the political and economic structure of urban communities. This resulted in certain broad national trends in the evolution of urban communities: the handcrafters were growing in numbers, the merchants increased their wealth and exclusiveness, and the petty-burghers lost their economic ground.⁷

All these variables were also present in Helsinki, but the effect of Fortress Sveaborg shaped them into something new. In some cases, the development of the Helsinki burgher community followed the general national trend; in others, it outdid it; and, in yet others, it completely subverted it. The key factor was whether the general trend was useful for the army maintenance. If it was, it was enhanced – if it was not, it was reversed.

The Difficult First Steps

When the construction work began in the spring of 1748, the army came to Helsinki with a firm intention to utilise the local civil society in its maintenance, as per the European models. The local burghers could, it was thought, deliver the brick, stone, timber, lime and other construction materials, as well as sell food and

⁶ Turpeinen 1977, *passim*.

⁷ Granqvist 2016, *passim*.

drink to the construction workers and soldiers. This would ease the logistical burden considerably, as the army would not have to engage in primary production. All it needed was money – money to buy materials from the burghers, and money to pay the wages and allowances so that workers and soldiers could purchase their own food.

This, however, was a miscalculation. Helsinki was a provincial hamlet with 1,500 inhabitants and some 80 burghers, barely recovered from the Russian occupation during the Russo-Swedish War of 1741–1743, and unable to cater to the needs of the soldiers and construction workers, whose number was at its highest some 5,000 men during the busiest years of the 1750s.⁸

During the summer of 1748, the right to retail beer, spirits and victuals at the construction site was leased out to two local merchants, brothers Georg Wilhelm Clayhills and Thomas Anton Clayhills. This arrangement did not last long, as officers soon started to complain that there was no food on sale in Sveaborg. The Clayhills brothers, brought before the town council for questioning, had to admit that they were unable to purchase enough victuals for the thousands of fortress builders.

The problem was not a lack of connections, as the brothers had probably the best business network in town: they belonged into an influential family that owned the biggest merchant house in Tallinn, Thomas Clayhills & Son, were sawmill owners and timber exporters, and operated on the credit markets of Amsterdam. Feeding Sveaborg was simply too gigantic and too sudden a task for any local merchant to handle.

The lack of bread proved to be another problem, as Helsinki had no professional bakers – the small-town people baked their own bread. The army demanded that the town council recruit master bakers, so that the soldiers could buy bread with their allowance, but the mayor and the councilmen flatly refused. They argued that the fortress construction was a ‘temporary phenomenon’ that should not affect the composition of the burgher community.

⁸ Granqvist 2016, pp. 40, 61; Nikula 2011, *passim*.

For the town council, the case was a matter of principle and self-rule: the burgher community did not take new members on the command of the army; it took them when it wanted.

After the contract with the Clayhills brothers was dissolved, the local crown warehouses began to hand out victuals to the soldiers, reducing the prize from their allowances. To solve the bread shortage, the crown built a bakery in Helsinki, and soldiers begin to receive bread as part of their allowance. Purchasing and transporting victuals to the warehouses, and buying and milling grain for the bakery, demanded the time and contribution of numerous military and civilian officials. Thus, the army had to do just what it had hoped to avoid: invest a significant amount of money, resources and working hours into making the food supply system work.⁹

The town council's unwillingness to cooperate caused problems also for the burgher community. When some master bakers eventually settled in Helsinki, lured in by the growing urban population, they had difficulties in earning their living, since the townspeople continued eating self-baked bread and the soldiers got their bread from the crown bakery. Master baker Carl Gustav Krook, who relocated from Norrtälje to Helsinki in 1751, left the town six years later in a state of bankruptcy.¹⁰ Johan Philipsson, who took Krook's place as the only baker in town, lasted about the same time. In 1766, a marginal note in a tax roll stated that Philipsson had 'disappeared from the town'.¹¹

These two cases illustrate the two types of problems the army encountered. In some cases, the burgher community was willing to cooperate, but was unable to do so due to the lack of resources. In other cases, it went into self-defence against a perceived threat

⁹ In his doctoral thesis, Sampsa Hatakka reconstructed the victual supply system of Fortress Sveaborg during the first construction years (1748–1756). See Hatakka 2019.

¹⁰ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:63, Helsinki Town Council protocol 17 and 19 December 1757; Granqvist 2016, p. 234.

¹¹ Granqvist 2016, p. 236.

to its political and economic autonomy. The law guaranteed the burghers the sole right to govern their own town and to do business inside its borders, and these rights were held sacred.

The purchase of construction material faced similar problems, as the quantities of stone, brick, timber and lime the fortress needed were larger than the local burghers could deliver. During the first construction years, the army had to resort to large-scale primary production. The soldiers were used for logging the timber, and the only brickworks in town was rented from its owner and expensively rebuilt to manufacture enough bricks. The situation eased after the first years, and the army was able to give up its own production bit by bit and outsource the purchases. When the lease period of the brickworks ended in 1753, the army decided not to extend the contract – despite all the money spent – and started to buy bricks purely from private entrepreneurs.¹²

All these entrepreneurs were not local burghers, however. In the old tradition of military entrepreneurship, several high officers of the army who had inherited financial capital and business sense had begun to sell materials and services to the fortress. Captain Carl Tersmeden, chief of the army dockyard in Sveaborg, is the most representative and most well-known case. After purchasing the Alberga manor near Sveaborg, he cut down its forests to sell timber and firewood – getting complaints from the local farmers, who accused him of desolating the whole area – and built a brickworks to its premises to manufacture and sell bricks. He also owned several vessels that transported soldiers and cargo to and from Sveaborg.¹³ In the 1750s, a larger amount of the materials and

¹² In her doctoral thesis, Sofia Gustafsson reconstructed the construction material supply system of Fortress Sveaborg during the first construction years (1748–1756). See Gustafsson 2015. See also Nikula 2011, pp. 115–117, 146–147.

¹³ Carl Tersmeden's private diary, kept from the 1730s to the 1780s and containing over 10,000 handwritten pages, is one of the most unique surviving sources of 18th-century Swedish history. Unfortunately, it has been published only as a greatly abbreviated version, which omits, among other things, nearly all entries considering his

services that the fortress needed was bought from Tersmeden and his officer colleagues than from the burghers of Helsinki.¹⁴

The main reason for the small share of the local burghers were their small resources. When the army made subcontracting deals with them, be it for delivering victuals for the crown warehouses, grain for the bakery or construction material for the fortress building site, it had to pay partly or totally in advance. A typical example was the contract the crown made with merchant Jacob Johan Tesche in October 1752. Tesche promised to deliver 3,000 barrels of grain for 19,000 silver dalers – a gigantic transaction by the standards of the Helsinki merchant community. Of this sum, 9,500 dalers were to be paid immediately, the other 9,500 when Tesche had purchased – but not necessarily yet delivered – half of the grain. In other words, he made the purchase solely on the crown's money, without investing a daler of his own.¹⁵

In 18th-century England, France or Germany, big merchants sold material to the army on long-term credit and thus were important financiers of the crown. In small Helsinki, the situation was the reverse – the merchants did not have enough capital to make the purchases unless the crown paid them in advance. This was a problem especially in the 1750s, as several burghers took advance payments for larger deliveries than they could manage, and the crown eventually had to collect its money back from their bankrupt estates.¹⁶

This was, among many others, the fate of the Clayhills brothers, the top merchants of their generation. After their unsuccessful attempt to keep the fortress construction site in food and drink, they made several large deals for delivering construction material. At first, they were the biggest local under-contractors, but it soon came clear that they had bitten off more than they could chew. In 1754, at the demand of the army, the town court of

business ventures. Tersmeden's role as under-contractor of Fortress Sveaborg is discussed in Granqvist & Gustafsson 2013, which uses the original manuscript of his diary as source material.

¹⁴ Gustafsson 2015, *passim*; Nikula 2011, pp. 115–117, 146–147.

¹⁵ About the Tesche case, see Hatakka 2019, pp. 132–133.

¹⁶ See Gustafsson 2015, *passim*; Hatakka 2019.

Helsinki declared Georg Wilhelm Clayhills bankrupt and confiscated his property to pay off his massive debts to the crown. Thomas Anton Clayhills avoided bankruptcy but spent the rest of his life as a small-time businessman.¹⁷

The Structure of the Burgher Community

The problems and conflicts that coloured the first fortress construction years were the result of high hopes colliding with harsh reality. The royal decision that turned Helsinki into the largest construction site in the Swedish Realm almost overnight caught the burghers off guard and unprepared. However, the burghers were able to adapt to the situation. Doing small business with the fortress gave them money, the money allowed them to invest, and the investments allowed them to do bigger business with the fortress. Step by step, the military town bourgeoisie began to emerge. To further analyse this development, we must take a closer look on the growth of both the general urban population and different burgher groups.

When the builders of Sveaborg came to town, Helsinki had some 1,500 inhabitants. Sixty years later, at the beginning of the 19th century, the town of Helsinki and the fortress Sveaborg had a combined population of almost 9,000 persons, one-third of whom were soldiers and the rest civilians. The fortress was officially a closed military base, but in practice it had grown together with the town, as large number of the fortress's garrison was lodging in the town and large number of civilian townspeople lived and worked on the fortress islands. Therefore, the 'twin town' of Helsinki–Sveaborg can be counted as one of the largest urban centres in the Swedish Realm.¹⁸

During the same period, the number of burghers in Helsinki grew from *c.* 70 to a little over 200. This growth, however, did

¹⁷ Aalto, Gustafsson & Granqvist 2020, p. 266.

¹⁸ Excluding the capital, Stockholm, and its more than 60,000 residents, the biggest urban centres in the Swedish Realm, such as Gothenburg, Karlskrona, and Turku, were in the range of 9,000–13,000 inhabitants.

not affect everybody in the same way, as different groups evolved along different patterns.

Out of the four groups in Figure 8.1, the sea captains are not discussed in this chapter. They were newcomers in burgher society, as only the Seaman Act of 1748 had required captains of merchant ships to acquire burgher rights. Almost all of them were employees of the shipowner-merchants and not independent businessmen, and thus they formed a group distinctively different from the three others.¹⁹

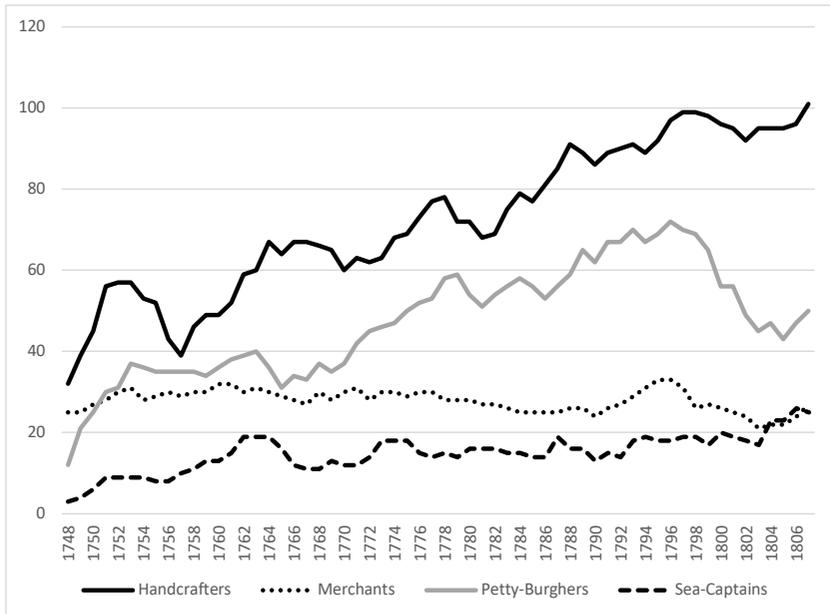


Figure 8.1: The Structure of the Helsinki Burgher Community 1748–1808.¹⁹

Source: Granqvist 2016. Figure by the author.

¹⁹ See e.g. Granqvist 2016, pp. 86–89.

²⁰ The figure is based on a database, into which I have compiled curricular information about the burghers of Helsinki from numerous sources (the most important being the Helsinki Town Council protocols and accounts, and the annual poll tax and concession tax rolls), and which is published, together with a complete list

The number of master handcrafters in Swedish and Finnish towns roughly doubled during the 18th century, as the general growth of urban population meant growing clientele. In Helsinki, the handcrafters roughly tripled their numbers during latter half of the 18th century, from *c.* 30 in 1748 to *c.* 100 in 1808. The main explaining factor was the pull of urban growth, with the above-average growth in the number of master handcrafters being the result of the above-average urban growth.

The local craftsmen complained early on that the military population did not benefit them. The soldiers, who got their clothes, accommodation and other necessities from the army, were only interested in buying food and drink, and thus carried all their allowance to taverns and grocery shops.²¹ The fortress construction site did not use the local handcrafters as subcontractors either. The army used soldiers for the menial work and employed trained army craftsmen for the more specialised tasks. Furthermore, a large number of enlisted soldiers were former apprentices and thus mastered different handcraft skills. Only a minority of master's apprentices had the opportunity to become masters themselves, and, for apprentices without career

of sources, as an annex to my doctoral thesis; see Granqvist 2016, pp. 227–256. In the database, I identified a total of seven different internal groups in the Helsinki burgher community: 1) handcrafters, 2) merchants, 3) sea captains, 4) petty-burghers, 5) grocers, 6) restaurateurs and 7) butchers. In this chapter, I have classified everyone who was not a handcrafter, merchant or sea captain as petty-burgher. Although the grocers, restaurateurs and butchers were distinguishable in the community as separate professional groups, they were small in number and their economic and social standing was identical to petty-burghers; therefore, to simplify the analysis, I have counted the practitioners of these professions as petty-burghers in this chapter.

²¹ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:52, Helsinki Town Council protocol 30 November 1748.

prospects, enlisting to the army was a popular way of making a living.²²

In the few cases where the army did use a civilian craftsman as subcontractor, it needed a special skill that none of its own soldiers could master and that was needed so rarely that hiring a full-time craftsman was not practical. It ordered windowpanes from the local glassblower, kettles and canteens from the local copper-smith, and stove tiles from the local potter. All these were makeshift solutions that were abandoned at the first opportunity; after a soldier who mastered the art of glasswork was found, the army stopped using the services of the town glassblower.²³

This is not to say the construction of Sveaborg did not affect the handcrafters at all, but rather to argue that the effect was indirect. The fortress lured more civilians to the town, which meant growing clientele to the masters. The high officers of the fortress, many of them wealthy cosmopolitans with refined tastes, also supported a small group of masters making luxury products – a goldsmith, a clockmaker, a pastry maker, a bookseller, a couple of fine tailors, eventually even a portrait painter. But the maintenance needs of the army, be them the soldiers' need for food and drink or the fortress's need for subcontractors, did not affect the craftsmen class as a whole and shape its structure in the same way it affected and shaped the merchantry and petty-bourgeoisie. Therefore, the craftsmen of Helsinki are not discussed further in this chapter.

The Enclosing Merchantry

In the Swedish Realm, the 18th century was a golden age for merchants. For the most part of the epoch, the official economic philosophy of the Swedish crown was strict mercantilism. To make the country more self-sufficient, the crown discouraged import

²² The soldier handicraft in Nordic military towns is a well-researched phenomenon; see e.g. Ramstad 1996. For soldier handicraft in late 18th-century Helsinki, see Granqvist 2019.

²³ Aalto, Gustafsson & Granqvist 2020, p. 164.

with bans and tariffs and supported domestic production by lavishly handing over economic privileges and subsidies. This benefited the Swedish and Finnish merchants, who were able to engage in new branches of trade and commerce with governmental backing, or monopolise lucrative businesses with the government's blessing.²⁴

At the same time, the legislation concerning municipal elections was revised and the traditional *per capita* voting was replaced by proportional elections, where each burgher's tax rate dictated his number of votes. This led to a situation where the merchants, when unanimous, were able to pick the mayor, the councilmen and the local member of parliament without consulting the rest of the burgher community. This allowed them to both run their towns according to their own interests and take part in formulating the national policies, as the Estate of Burghers at the Swedish Parliament openly campaigned for the benefit of big business.²⁵

In the Law Code of 1734, the merchants of the Swedish Realm were for the first time required to get formally organised by founding merchant societies. These societies became a tool for them to control their growing wealth and position. The Swedish and Finnish merchantry, which had during the previous centuries continuously got foreign reinforcements especially in the form of German and Baltic-German businessmen, started to turn inwards in the 18th century. The societies had an exclusive recruiting policy, and they openly favoured the sons and trustees of the old members. Total self-sufficiency was impossible with such small recruiting pools, but the effects were nevertheless prominent. The number of new merchants not related to the old plummeted during the 18th century, as did the number of burgher rights awarded to foreign businessmen.²⁶

Helsinki rode on the high tide of this phenomenon. In 1748, Helsinki was an economically menial small town with 1,500

²⁴ Ranta & Åström 1980, pp. 255–265; Heckscher 1985, pp. 217–219.

²⁵ Mäntylä 1977, pp. 11–17, 34–66; Mäntylä 1981, pp. 27–64.

²⁶ Karonen 2004, pp. 37–39.

inhabitants and 25 merchants. In 1808, the twin town of Helsinki–Sveaborg was a blooming centre of trade and commerce with 9,000 inhabitants – and 25 merchants. The local merchant society had kept its numbers down despite the urban population growing sixfold and all business activities multiplying.²⁷

The balance sheets of the Fortification Department reveal how the local merchants gradually took over the subcontracting deals. In the 1750s, only 40% of construction material was bought from the merchants of Helsinki. In addition to the purchases made from Carl Tersmeden and other army officers, the army bought material from other parts of the Swedish Realm. In the 1760s the share bought from local merchants had risen to 60%, with the share of officers and out-of-town businessmen dropping in proportion. In the 1770s, 80% was bought from local merchants, the remaining 20% containing mostly lime and limestone shipped from Gotland, the leading lime-production centre of the Baltic Sea area. The officers had practically disappeared from the balance sheets, as the old generation had died or moved elsewhere, and the burghers now left no room for new ones.²⁸

With the capital made by doing business with the fortress, the merchants were able to expand their trade and spread their networks wider. Helsinki had always exported timber, first in the form of raw timber and later in the form of sawn timber, but it had earlier been shipped abroad by Dutch intermediators, as the lack of capital had prevented Helsinkians to build large merchant ships. During the 1750s and 1760s, the local merchants built a fleet of ocean-worthy frigates and began to export their timber to the Mediterranean themselves. They were also able to invest in pre-industrialisation: in addition to the brickworks mentioned

²⁷ Granqvist 2016, pp. 48–50.

²⁸ The numbers considering the 1750s are taken from Sofia Gustafsson's doctoral thesis (Gustafsson 2015, *passim*). The numbers considering the 1760s and 1770s are based on the Fortification Department's balance sheets from the years 1766 and 1774: KrA, Fortifikations kassaräkenskaper GI F2: Finland, Sveaborg.

earlier, Helsinki got a sailcloth factory, a porcelain factory, a glass-works and several large breweries during the construction years of Sveaborg.

As Helsinki grew bigger and wealthier, there was no shortage of people seeking to become a merchant there. The local merchant society, however, had multiple means to block their way. It examined all applicants, and, if they were not members of the inner circle, usually found crucial flaws in their commercial expertise. The town council had, in theory, the power to hand out merchant rights against the society's will, but, since the merchants' favourites usually prevailed in councilmen elections, it rarely did so. Some rejected filed a complaint to the National Board of Trade and won their cases, but the majority did not challenge the decision of the merchant society and town council.²⁹

The exclusiveness also benefited the army. In the 1750s, its local subcontractors had been poor and untrustworthy. They had demanded payment in advance, and often failed to deliver, so that the crown had to litigate with their bankrupt estates to get its money back. The growing exclusiveness of the local merchant society eased this problem. The wealthier the merchants of Helsinki became and the wider their commercial network spread, the less they needed advance payments, and the more reliably they delivered on time. The situation had created a self-supporting spiral: the more business the merchants did with the fortress, the more capital they had to expand their other commercial ventures, and, consequently, the better under-contractors they were for the fortress.

This development allowed some of the merchants of Helsinki to grow into business tycoons of national class. The most illustrious example is Johan Sederholm, who began his career in the late 1740s by selling material to the fortress construction, cemented his position as the richest man in Helsinki in the 1760s, and kept it until his death in 1805. At the top of his game, Sederholm

²⁹ See Granqvist 2016, pp. 80–86 for more detailed description of the practice of taking new merchants in Helsinki.

dominated all branches of local big business: shipbuilding, seafaring, sawmills, industry and subcontracting for the fortress. After the fall of the Clayhills brothers in the mid-1750s, he was the biggest under-contractor of Sveaborg as long as the construction works continued.

As his career advanced, the Swedish crown granted Sederholm numerous special favours. The most important of them was the privilege to buy tax-exempt manors (Sw. *säteri*), the ownership of which was by law reserved to the members of nobility. This allowed him to become the largest landowner in the region. Sederholm had, stated the letter of privilege, served the crown so well that he was entitled to rewards. This was a diplomatic way of saying that the crown owed uncomfortably large sums of money to Sederholm after he had sold construction material to Sveaborg on credit. Granting him complimentary favours did not cost the crown anything but diminished the risk that he would demand his money back.³⁰

The letter of privilege perfectly illustrates the profound change in the merchantry of Helsinki. In the 1750s, Jacob Johan Tesche, one of the top merchants of the previous generation, had been able to sell grain to the fortress only with the help of 100% advance payments. In the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, Johan Sederholm and his colleagues had turned into important financiers of the army, as per as their British, French or Prussian counterparts.

The Thriving Petty-Bourgeoisie

Petty-burghers, or the 'third class' as they were commonly called, were the poorest and most heterogenous burgher group. They were small businessmen of all sorts – peddlers, vendors, grocers, fishmongers, butchers, innkeepers, drivers, barge skippers. They formed the grassroots level of the burgher community, modest financially but vital for the daily life of the town.

³⁰ Mäntylä & Mäkelä-Alitalo 1997, *passim*; Granqvist 2016, pp. 263–264.

In the 18th-century Swedish Realm, the petty-burghers were a species headed towards extinction. As the wealth and might of the merchants grew, they used both their grip over the local policymaking and their influence over the national policymaking to narrow the living space of the lesser burghers. Using privileges and subsidies as their tools, they were able to take over traditionally petty-bourgeoisie branches of business and drive smaller businessmen out of the market. In the local town councils, they lobbied for tighter criteria for accepting new petty-burghers, and even pushed whole trades and professions out of the burgher society, as fewer voters in local elections meant more political power to them.

In some towns, the petty-burghers as a class completely disappeared during the 18th century. In others, they stayed alive, but in smaller numbers and with smaller influence.³¹ The only significant exceptions seem to be the military towns. A large soldier population craved just for the kind of grassroots services – most notably, food and drink – the petty-burghers were specialised in.

Helsinki is a textbook example of this phenomenon. When the construction of Sveaborg began in 1748, the town had a dozen petty-burghers. Their number grew more or less steadily until the end of the 1790s, when it was 70 persons at most. The permanent ending of fortress construction works caused the number to drop, but just before the Finnish War there were still 50 petty-burghers in Helsinki. During a period when the class of lesser burghers diminished or disappeared from most towns, their numbers in Helsinki quadrupled.

The most singular branch of the petty-bourgeoisie business was producing and selling alcohol. Military towns were boozier towns everywhere in Europe, and Helsinki was no exception. The annual licence fees all innkeepers paid to the town council provide a fruitful source material to examine this phenomenon. When the

³¹ See e.g. Halila 1953, pp. 58–59; Mäntylä 1971, pp. 306–307, 364–368, 400–410; Nikula 1971, p. 287; Petersson 1972, p. 87; Keskinen 2012, pp. 52–53; Granqvist 2016, *passim*.

construction of Sveaborg started, the number of licence payers jumped almost overnight from 13 to 75. It decreased during the Seven Years War, but started to grow steadily after it, peaking at over 80 at the end of the 1780s. After the fortress construction ended in 1791, the number of taverns stabilised at around 30.³²

The structure of the alcohol trade is revealed in a town council report made in 1784. The 61 persons who paid the licence that year included 39 petty-burghers or their widows, five sea captains or their widows, three merchants or their widows, one master handcrafter, and five non-burghers keeping tavern with special permission (a broker, a bookkeeper, a fisherman, and two widows of civil servants).³³ In that year, there were 58 petty-burghers in Helsinki. These figures show two things: the class of petty-burghers dominated the alcohol business, and the alcohol business dominated the class of petty-burghers. Two-thirds of them lived on full-time or part-time innkeeping.

Out of all the forms of bourgeoisie enterprise vital for the army maintenance, the production and selling of alcohol was the only one that functioned satisfyingly from the first day onwards. Lack of beer and spirits was never a problem in Sveaborg. A small and short-lived crown brewery, co-managed by the ever-industrious Captain Carl Tersmeden, operated in the fortress from 1753 to 1756; however, it was not founded to fill a shortage of alcohol but rather to improve the quality of it.³⁴ Carl Fredrik Zandt, the army doctor of the construction site, complained that some of the alcohol the burghers sold was of such poor quality that it made the soldiers sick.³⁵

Thanks to the blooming alcohol business that supported the petty-burghers, Helsinki was one of the few towns where the

³² Granqvist 2016, p. 114.

³³ 'Förteckning Öfwer Wissa Ämbeten i Helsingfors Stad för Åhr 1784' HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:90, Helsinki Town Council protocol 12 January 1784.

³⁴ Granqvist 2012, *passim*.

³⁵ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:57, Helsinki Town Council protocol 27 January 1752.

lower strata of the burgher community unionised. The craftsmen had had their guilds since the Middle Ages, and the Law Code of 1734 required the merchants to found merchant societies, but neither the tradition nor the law required petty-burghers to do so. The only two known Finnish towns where this happened were Helsinki and its smaller neighbour, Loviisa, the site of the construction of frontier fortress Svartholma.³⁶

The unionisation happened in two steps. First, the grocers detached themselves from the rest of the 'third class' and started to appear in front of the town council as the Helsinki Grocer Society in 1774. Exactly a decade later, in 1784, the remaining petty-burghers officially founded the Helsinki Lesser Burgher Society.³⁷

Although these new societies closely mimicked the procedures of the merchant society, inspecting persons who pleaded for burgher rights as grocer or petty-burgher and giving statements to the town council, they did not have real opportunities to acquire similar clout or prestige than the merchants' union. In a burgher community, wealth and commercial success equalled political weight, and Johan Sederholm alone paid more taxes than the whole petty-bourgeoisie combined. The town council routinely overruled their statements and took new grocers or lesser burghers in Helsinki against their will.³⁸

Nevertheless, the societies proved to be useful tools for the lesser burghers. As they engaged in a war with merchants over the right to manufacture and sell alcohol, it was practical that they had a formal organisation that could prepare statements and hone strategies, and an official spokesman who could represent them in front of the town council. This war raged on for many decades and ultimately proved the power of the petty-burghers.

³⁶ Mäntylä 1977, p. 74.

³⁷ For the first recorded mentions of Grocer Society and Lesser Burgher Society, see Helsinki Town Council protocols 25 August 1774 (HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:80) and 18 October 1784 (HKA Maistraatin arkisto Ca:90).

³⁸ Granqvist 2016, pp. 90–98.

The Struggle over Alcohol

The rules of alcohol business favoured the petty-burgher. His tavern was a family business in the full sense of the word: it typically operated in his home, with his wife and children serving the drinks in the front room, and the stills and brewing barrels bubbling in the back room. When the clock in the church tower struck nine and the legal serving time ended, the tavern transformed into a private home and the burgher family made their beds in the room that had just a moment earlier been full of merry drinkers. This kind of tavern had no higher profit expectations than to bring food to the table for the burgher and his family.³⁹

If a wealthy merchant wanted to participate in the business, he had the opportunity to manufacture alcohol more efficiently than the petty-burgher. According to an investigation conducted by the town council in the 1750s, only a handful of the biggest merchants had ‘immured pans’ (*inmurade pannor*) – in other words, built-in distillation complexes instead of the freestanding stills.⁴⁰ But what the merchant won in manufacturing, he lost in the retail. He had to buy or rent a suitable locale for a tavern – opening a noisy boozier in his own house, next to his family home and business office, was out of the question – and hire external workforce to mind the pans and serve the drinks. Thus, the operational costs easily ate up the minuscule profits.

Since the rules favoured the petty-burghers, the merchants of Helsinki made two ambitious attempts to rewrite those rules. In the 1750s, a dozen of the leading merchants founded the Helsinki Brewing Company and built a stone brewery in the outskirts of the town. At the Diet of 1755–1756, the members of the company applied to the estates. They reported that they had ‘with high expense constructed a stone brewery to serve the garrison and the

³⁹ Of the structure of early modern alcohol retail business in Finnish towns, see e.g. Savolainen 2017, pp. 138–149.

⁴⁰ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:60, Helsinki Town Council protocol 28 September 1754.

construction workforce both here in town and in Sveaborg' and asked for a local monopoly for alcohol manufacturing in return.⁴¹

The plea was perfectly in line with the mercantilist, monopoly-favouring economic policy of the realm, and the Brewing Company was granted the privilege in 1756. But, when it tried to execute its monopoly, problems arose. Swedish Realm joined the Seven Years War in 1757, and the construction of Sveaborg was halted, as the soldiers were needed in the Prussian battlefields. This temporarily killed the alcohol business in Helsinki, the number of licence-paying taverns dropping from 72 to nine in a few years. Furthermore, the petty-burghers launched an official complaint and made it clear that they were ready to fight hard and long to keep what remained of the business in their own hands.⁴²

The merchants backed down. They announced that, regarding the circumstances, they were ready to allow the alcohol business to continue as usual 'for the time being'. The issue was never revisited.⁴³

Another attempt was made in 1787, when King Gustav III reformed the national alcohol policy. The right to manufacture alcohol was leased out to private entrepreneurs in each town and parish. In Helsinki, the Brewing Company and the Lesser Burgher Society competed harshly. The former wanted to concentrate all manufacturing of alcohol into the brewery, while the latter wanted to rent the manufacturing rights collectively in the name of all local petty-burghers.

The town council delegated the decision to the Town Elders. They were a representative body of members from different burgher groups, whose advice and opinion were asked in important political

⁴¹ '*... med nog dryg kåstnad nu låtit upbygga et brygghus af sten, till at therigenom fournera garnizon och arbets manskapet både i staden och på Sveaborg ...*' The pleas of the Town of Helsinki to the Diet of 1755, § 3. Published in Nordmann 1908, p. 149.

⁴² The complaint itself has not survived, but it is been referenced to in Helsinki Town Council protocol of 27 March 1759 (HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:65).

⁴³ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:66, Helsinki Town Council protocol 13 February 1760.

and economic matters – an ‘upper house’ of sorts. The lesser burghers were under-represented in the Elders, but the craftsmen and also couple of the poorer merchants took their side and chose the proposition of the Lesser Burgher Society. The Brewing Company was the project of the richest and mightiest merchants, and the majority of burghers preferred the old system.⁴⁴

Even though a well-functioning alcohol market was vital for the military maintenance, the army took no official stance in these fights. This was probably a wise choice, as the burghers traditionally had a knee-jerk negative reaction every time the army tried to involve into their business matters. However, it can be read between the lines that the army preferred the existing and time-honoured system over the new one the merchants tried to build. Notably, it was unwilling to cooperate with the Brewing Company in any way when it tried to create its monopoly in the 1750s. The company wanted to build its own taverns in Sveaborg – creating thus a total manufacture–retail monopoly over alcohol – but a representor of the army denied them the right, arguing that there were already enough taverns in the fortress.⁴⁵

The Entrepreneurs of Newtown

The local geography posed its own problems to the burghers selling their services to the army. Fortress Sveaborg was on islands, a quarter Swedish mile (2.5 kilometres) from the town harbour. For the merchants selling construction material, this was no obstacle, as large cargos were easier to transport by sea than on dry land, and the construction work took place in summertime, when the sea was open. For the supply of food and drink, the situation was more complex. As the soldiers were unable to freely visit the town and use its commercial services due to the water between, the grocers and innkeepers had to operate on the fortress islands.

⁴⁴ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:93, Helsinki Town Council protocol 8 and 9 November 1787.

⁴⁵ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Cb:40, Captain Jacob Gerdes to Helsinki Town Council 26 July 1756.

In the first construction summer 1748, as stated earlier, the army subleased the right to sell food and drink at the construction site to the Clayhills brothers. After it became clear the brothers were unable to fill the contract, the town council declared in the October of the same year that all burghers had the right to operate commercially in the fortress. In only a few years, a whole shanty town referred to commonly as 'Newtown' (Sw. Nystad), full of groceries, haberdasheries, taverns and restaurants, rose to the fortress islands to offer its services to the soldiers.⁴⁶

In the first years, Newtown caused heated exchanges of words and letters between the officials of the fortress and the town. The formers were annoyed that the burghers had settled in the fortress area without the army's consent and operated there without supervision or authorisation. However, they grudgingly tolerated the situation since the system worked. By the mid-1750s only the temporary workforce was still sustained through the crown warehouses, the soldiers of the permanent garrison troops already buying all their food and drink from Newtown.⁴⁷ As the manpower of the garrison increased and the number of seasonal workers dropped after the 1750s, Newtown became the main method of feeding the soldiers of Sveaborg.

The final peace treaty in the matter was composed in 1763, when the officers and the burghers made a detailed agreement concerning the business conditions in Sveaborg. The burghers promised officially to see that Newtown had enough grocers, butchers, innkeepers and restaurateurs to meet the needs of the army. Furthermore, every burgher needed the double authorisation of the Helsinki Town Council and the commandant of Sveaborg in order to operate in the fortress. This finely balanced resolution satisfied the army's need for larger control over Newtown without threatening the burghers' economic autonomy.⁴⁸

For several decades, Newtown functioned as intended, housing enough merchants and petty-burghers to keep the soldiers

⁴⁶ Granqvist 2015, pp. 79–81.

⁴⁷ Hatakka 2019.

⁴⁸ HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:69, Helsinki Town Council protocol 8 April 1763.

in fresh meat, groceries and alcoholic beverages, and a relative peace reigned in the relationship between the town and the army. But, after the Russo-Swedish War of 1788–1790, problems arose. As the generation of burghers that had got their authorisation in the 1760s died and retired, very few of their younger colleagues were ready to become their successors. As a result, the mayor and the councilmen began to receive complaints from the fortress commandant about the lack of commercial services.

The burghers' lack of interest in living and operating in Sveaborg rose from two things. The construction work was reduced in 1778 and altogether abandoned in 1791, meaning that the Newtown burghers lost the clientele of seasonal workers. Furthermore, the town of Helsinki had grown and provided more business opportunities for the burghers, making the keeping of a shop or a tavern in Newtown much less attractive in the 1790s than it had been in the 1750s.⁴⁹

The town council had a problem to solve. It was the keeper of the concord between the army and the burghers that was archived in the 1763 agreement. In that agreement, the burghers had committed to provide all the necessary commercial services in Sveaborg. Breaking the contract would have caused a serious riff to the local civil–military relationship. As a makeshift solution, the council started to bend rules and give burgher rights to members of the military who were willing to do business and keep taverns and shops in Sveaborg. Sergeant Carl Teckenberg of the army navy was appointed grocer in 1790, and baker Johan Österberg from the army bakery became merchant in 1792.

The appointment of two men perhaps does not seem a large issue, but the burghers of Helsinki did not think so. By taking in outsiders of the burgher community without any sort of formal qualifications, the town council crossed a line previously uncrossed. Both the merchant society and the grocer society flared up and protested with the strongest terms possible. The council, however, was unflappable in its decision. It stated that 'the Commandants

⁴⁹ Granqvist 2016, pp. 183–186.

of Sveaborg have repeatedly complained over the fact that the local burghers do not sell in the fortress enough food, drink and other necessities for the daily benefit of His Royal Majesty's officials and garrison soldiers as well as the other inhabitants of the fortress, and therefore, the appointments of Teckenberg and Österberg were a necessity.⁵⁰

The petty-bourgeoisie, on the other hand, saw no problem in collaborating with these two upstarts. By 1787, the Lesser Burgher Society had already subleased the right to manufacture and sell alcohol in Sveaborg to a company headed by Teckenberg and Österberg. The company built a large brewery in Sveaborg and ran the alcohol market of the fortress up until the breakout of Finnish War in 1808. After spending half a century fighting with the merchants over the control of alcohol market, the lesser burghers rather cooperated with total outsiders than with the richest members of their own community.

Grocer Carl Teckenberg filed bankruptcy in the turn of the century, but Johan Österberg grew to be the merchant-king of Sveaborg. He ran a haberdashery and grocery shop, a bakery and a tavern in Newtown and was the chief owner and operator of the fortress brewery. He sold gunpowder to the army, acting as official military purveyor, and had joint business with several high officers of the fortress, including the commandant of Sveaborg himself, General Nils Mannerskants. In the last years before his death in 1803 he was the second-richest merchant in all of Helsinki–Sveaborg, surpassed in the tax rolls only by the old Johan Sederholm.

Many of Österberg's actions veered on the illegal and generated complaints to the town council. To be able to continue his bakery

⁵⁰ '... och Klagomål, tid efter annan af wederbörande Befallningshafvare å Sweaborg blifwit theröf:r anförde, at Borgerskapet här i Staden urachlåtitt hålla på fästningen til försälgning, förfrisknings och mat-wahror, samt flera förnödenheter, som Kungl. Mai:ts thärwarande Ämbetsman och Garnizons Milice samt fästningens öfriga Innewånare dageligen betarfwa ...' HKA, Maistraatin arkisto Ca:96, Helsinki Town Council protocol 12 April 1790.

business even after becoming merchant – practising handcraft, including baking, was illegal for merchants – Johan Österberg used his younger brother Zacharias as front man. On paper, Zacharias Österberg was the owner and operator of Newtown bakery, even though he did not even live in Helsinki. The other local bakers tried on several occasions to shut down Österberg's bakery, but the town council protected him and systematically dismissed all complaints, even though it was well aware of the illegality of the situation.⁵¹

For the town council, Johan Österberg was too big to fail. At his peak, the 'King of Newtown' almost singlehandedly kept Sveaborg in groceries, bread, beer and booze. Both his indispensability for the fortress maintenance and his close connections with its highest officers made him untouchable, and the mayor and the councilmen considered it wiser to turn a blind eye to his endeavours.⁵²

Conclusions

The latter half of the 18th century saw the birth of a new Nordic military town, as the little town of Helsinki evolved into the blooming fortress town of Helsinki–Sveaborg. At the same time, the local burgher community evolved into a military town bourgeoisie – one fully equipped to serve all the major maintenance needs of the army.

⁵¹ Österberg's actions did not propel complaints to Helsinki Town Council only. Around the year 1800, an anonymous and undated letter sent to King Gustav IV Adolf described Sveaborg as a nest of corruption and pinpointed Johan Österberg as the most glaring example. According to the letter, Österberg's private vessels were repaired at the army navy dockyard at the crown's expense. When the king had visited Sveaborg, Österberg's barge, which was at the time under repairs, had been hidden by the dockyard workers in order to avoid awkward questions. The letter is referenced in Odelberg 1954, pp. 304–305.

⁵² Granqvist 2015, pp. 83–86; Granqvist 2016, pp. 187–189.

The start was rocky. In the 1750s, the actions and interest of the army collided frequently with those of the burghers. The army had come to the town with the intention of adopting the European models of military maintenance, only to discover that their functionality in Helsinki was questionable at best. The local burgher community was not the resourceful and obedient pool of helpers the army had hoped for. In many cases, they were too poor and too few to take care of the army's needs; in others, they bluntly refused to cooperate for fear of losing their autonomy.

Half a century of co-existence shaped both parties. On the one hand, the burgher community grew larger and wealthier, and thus was better equipped to fill the maintenance needs. The members of the exclusive Helsinki Merchant Society became more resourceful subcontractors, and the biggest of them even started to act as army financiers, European style. The local petty-bourgeoisie, in turn, grew and prospered, because the grassroots services they offered – most importantly, alcohol – were vital for the military community.

On the other hand, the army became more resilient and ready to accept ad hoc solutions for the maintenance problems, even though those broke official rules and established conventions. The most important of these was the spontaneous growth of Newtown in the fortress islands. After a period of protest on the army's part, commandants of Sveaborg became official patrons of Newtown and its burghers. Illegal as it might have been, the solution worked, as Newtown solved the problem of soldiers' food and drink, and acceptance was wisdom.

Also, the readiness of the town council to meet the army half-way improved. In the 1750s the councilmen reacted with almost knee-jerk opposition when the army suggested appointing more burghers in the town. In 1763, it was already willing to share its authority over Newtown with the commandant of the fortress. Finally, in the early 1790s, the council was ready to go so far as to appoint army employees as burghers in order to keep up the good relations, despite fiery protests from its own community. Defensive approach had mellowed into pragmatism.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the burgher community of Helsinki had acquired a shape ideal for army maintenance. It included a closed circle of wealthy merchants who acted as financiers and subcontractors, a large group of petty-burghers who took care of the grassroots services, and a handful of men specialised in catering to the needs of the fortress islands. What orders and ultimatums from the army had not managed to do, the simple law of supply and demand had.

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