

Johan Stén, *Kulta-aika. Valistus ja luonnontieteet Turun Akatemiassa [The Golden Age. Enlightenment and science at the Academy of Turku]* (Helsinki: Art House, 2021).
517 pp.

Ella Viitaniemi, Tampere University

Johan Stén has authored an impressive – and quite voluminous – book about the Royal Academy of Turku (Åbo) in the eighteenth century. It deals with what often has been referred to as “the golden age of the Academy of Turku” (1721–1809), when rationalism, the Enlightenment, and utilitarian thinking captured universities and scholarly discussions and works. In his book, Stén succeeds in combining two levels of observation: the general history of science and the focus on what happened at a particular institution. He takes a close look at the European development of philosophy and science, and he also shows in detail how new ideas were received (or rejected) and implemented at the Royal Academy of Turku. Therefore, the main issues of the book are the formation of scientific and social networks and the flow of academic knowledge between scholars during the eighteenth century.

Stén offers an extensive survey of the main scientists and students, and their academic works on economics and the natural sciences (physics, mathematics, meteorology, chemistry, and medical science). The book also includes other Finnish-born scholars who made their career outside the Academy of Turku, such as the explorer Peter Forskål and the economist Anders Chydenius. In addition, Finnish-born scholars working at the Academy of Saint Petersburg have been included in the survey. The book is highly interesting, but also an encyclopaedic and detailed study. Therefore, some readers might wonder why one would write a book that

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consists of short biographies of well-known scholars. After all, there are already some databases covering these persons (e.g. *Ylioppilasmatrikkeli*, the student roll of the Academy of Turku) as well as biographical articles and sites (e.g. *Biografia-sampo*) easily available online. However, Stén's survey not only gives an overall picture of the history of science, but it also presents the important relations and close connections between science, politics, and economics in eighteenth-century society.

During the period covered by the book, the Academy of Turku figured in the shadow of Uppsala University and its famous natural scientists Anders Celsius and Carl von Linné. On the other hand, the relatively short distance to Uppsala University and the Royal Science Academy of Stockholm also benefitted the scholars in Turku. Students and academics made visits and wrote letters across the Gulf of Bothnia. Remarkable examples include two close friends of Carl von Linné, namely Johan Browallius (1681–1759) and Carl Fredrik Mennander (1712–1786), who became professors of physics at the Academy of Turku and later were elected bishops of Turku. Mennander even became the Archbishop of Uppsala in 1775. They both keenly promoted the teaching and research of the natural sciences and brought Enlightenment and utilitarian thinking to the Academy of Turku.

Stén's book shows well how the hunger for rationalistic knowledge and investigations was great, even though resources and appropriations for wide scholarly activities were limited at the provincial university. The Royal Academy of Turku focused closely on utilitarian thinking and providing practical solutions and inventions in the interests of the fatherland. The scholars in Turku focused on solving the problems and issues arising particularly in Finland. Most of the students and teachers were from the middle class (sons of the clergy and officers), and after graduation they returned to serve in various positions around Finland. Therefore, pragmatism and the utilitarian viewpoint were closely connected to teaching and research in science. Turku scholars aimed to renew society's economic situation, for example, with new practical solutions for agriculture, mechanics, and engineering that could be implemented at the local level.

Therefore, Stén's book not only presents the history of science and the history of the Royal Academy of Turku; it is also an important survey that shows how the scientific community worked together and shared ideas (and disputes) in order to advance science for the common good and in the spirit of utilitarianism and Enlightenment thought.