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Jewish Merchants and the Consumer Market in early 19th Century Sweden

On May 25, 1822 the following could be read in the 'For sale' section of the newspaper *Götheborgs Aftonblad*:

> For sale at a reduced price by merchant W. J. Wallentin: fine and regular coffee; yellow Havana sugar; Congo, Componar (compon) and Swatswon tea; ginger; Buenos Aires hides; large Brazilian ox horn; American soap; flax; authentic Turkish red, bleached and unbleached cotton yarns and our own manufactured striped and checked cotton fabrics; bleached, unbleached and coloured cotton fabrics; best quality soap and all types of marbled soap.[1]

This small advert shows some of the goods sold by one of Gothenburg's Jewish merchants, W. J. Valentin. The text gives an insight into the merchant's business and some examples of consumer goods that became increasingly common from the late 18th century. There was growing demand for goods such as coffee, sugar, tea and cotton fabrics. The historian Jan de Vries pointed out textiles, together with colonial products, as 'incentive goods', which means 'goods that responded persuasively to the wants of specific communities'.[2] The examples of goods mentioned in the advert above, refer to a new type of consumption, oriented to the commercial market. This was new to a wide range of consumers and it meant a transition from a society in which a self-subsistent household economy was predominantly a market economy. This 'consumer revolution' is now seen as an important condition of the continued industrial development in the 19th century and a key element of the growth of modern society.[3] The rural population constituted a large part of the 'new consumers' already before 1850. The reasons were a combination of increased access to goods, a general increase in prosperity and a proletarization process, which meant that more and more people had to go to the market to gain access to goods.[4] Lower relative prices of textiles and colonial goods helped to increase demand.[5] In parallel with the consumption changes, domestic production and imports increased. Sweden's commercial structure developed and the availability of goods rose markedly from the 1820s and 1830s. We have in our earlier research emphasized the cooperation between different types of commercial actors such as peddlers, village shops, urban wholesalers and retail traders.[6] Of these commercial actors, Jewish merchants like Valentin were an interesting and important group.

The impact of the Jewish group on the growth of the consumer goods market is consistent with international research, as well as the connection between Jewish commercial actors and the business and industry of textiles.[7] However, this has not been paid much attention to in the Swedish context, but we argue that the Jewish immigrants brought something new into the Swedish consumer market, not at least in production and trade with textiles.

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[1] Advertisement in *Götheborgs Aftonblad,* May 25, 1822, No 59. The same or similar adverts return in the following seven editions of the newspaper. The translation contains a few small changes due to the difficulties of translating some old linguistic expressions.
[2] de Vries 2008, p. 122.
[3] See Fridholm, Magnusson & Isacson; Schön 1976; Schön 1982 and Ahlberger 1996.
[4] Ahlberger (1996), pp. 158–159.
[5] Schön (1979), pp. 95–98, 175.
[6] Brismark 2008; Lundqvist 2008 and Brismark & Lundqvist 2010.
[7] *Jewish encyclopaedia*, vol. 15, 1971, pp. 1038–1042; Pollins 1982; Brenner et al 1997; Endelman 2002; Karády 2004.

In this paper we discuss the role of the Jewish entrepreneurs in the early 19th century Sweden.[8] *How did Jewish traders and industrialists contribute to the renewal of the consumer market in early 19th century Sweden? And what are the reasons for their influence and importance?* We will here discuss these questions from two empirical examples: The case of the early cotton industry in Gothenburg and the distribution networks of textiles. First we will give a short background of the city of Gothenburg and its character of a small, but still important, trading town.

Gothenburg – a trading town in western Sweden

Our study investigates the case of Gothenburg, Sweden's second town and major port city. In the first half of the 19th century it was still a small town. In 1820, the city had approximately 16,000 inhabitants, and by the middle of the century the population had grown to almost 26,000. Gothenburg was the leading port for imports of sugar, tobacco and cotton. These colonial goods were raw materials in the most important industries in the early part of industrialization, namely the food and textile industries. The production of goods like fabrics, sugar and tobacco increased rapidly in the early 19th century. Gothenburg was also the dominant commercial city on the Swedish West Coast. In 1840, it had about 150 wholesalers and 200 retailers. Together, they employed about 300 people.[9] Previous research has emphasized the importance of the importing firms in Gothenburg since imported goods were sold on to traders focused on the domestic market.[10]

Though a small proportion of the population, the Jewish merchants were important to the city's early industrialization and trade. Around 1820 about a tenth of all merchants were Jewish, although Jews represented only one per cent of the total population.[11] Half a century later, Jews ran about a third of the wholesale firms in Gothenburg.[12] Some of the Jewish traders dealt with a broad range of consumer products, but textiles were generally the most important goods. The Jewish retailers often had extensive trade relations. In fact, owners of small shops also had a range of goods that were imported directly from Germany, Denmark or England.[13] But Jewish entrepreneurs did not only deal with foreign trade and retailing, some of them established factories, especially in textile production.

Calico craze in Sweden?

Swedish consumption of finished fabrics rose sharply in the first half of the 19th century.[14] Studies of the economic value of the clothing of the Swedish rural population have shown that clothes amounted to about one-tenth of household assets. The general increase in wealth even led to a chance for maids and farmhands to buy new, modern fabrics and accessories.[15] Consumers generally had more choice. Those who could afford it were dressed in factory-made broadcloth

[8] This is a part of our research project, "A Jewish web of textiles and trade", financed by *The Swedish Research Council* and *The Swedish Retail and Wholesale Development Council*. The main purpose of the project is to increase our knowledge of how modern and attractive textiles and other consumer goods reached a growing range of Swedish customers.
[9] Fritz 1996, p. 150.
[10] Andersson 1996; Fritz 1996.
[11] Andersson 1996, p. 142. (The total number of Jews settled in Gothenburg was 230 in 1820.)
[12] Valentin 2004, p. 89.
[13] This shows our investigation of all petitions for bankruptcy by Jewish retailers in Gothenburg c. 1820–1850.
[14] Schön 1979, pp. 47–58.
[15] Lundqvist 2008, p. 212, 233, 242–243. See also Roche 2000, p. 213.

rather than coarse homespun cloth. Shawls, scarves and waistcoat fabrics in silk and half-silk were bought by a growing number of consumers.[16] From being an exclusive item used by a few, cotton fabrics became the most important fabric of mass consumption. With their low prices and improved colours they replaced linen fabrics, which were largely produced in the households. Printed cotton fabrics became an attractive fashion article.[17] The 1820s are considered 'one cotton printing heyday'.[18] In Britain, the expression 'calico craze' represented the great demand for printed cottons in the 18th century, but this fashion did not reach popularity among a broad range of customers in Sweden until the early 19th century.[19]

In Gothenburg, a large number of calico printing factories were established from the late 18th century. The firm Olbers & Schultz had been the most important calico printing workshop earlier in the 1700s, but it did not have any production by the turn of the century. In 1794, the Jew Aaron Moses began pressing coloured patterns onto fabrics, initially with oil paint on silk. Soon afterwards, other Jewish merchants like P. S. Fränkel, I. Davidson, G. Schlesinger and A. Barach started small printing workshops. The most significant was Reis & Magnusson, however, with the Aronsdal factory (1816–1833) and Isaac and Betty Pineus and their Ericsberg factory (1819–1858). A large number of calico cotton factories run by Jews were also established in Stockholm and Norrköping in the same period.

Reis & Magnusson's calico printing mill was established in 1816. It became one of the most important in Sweden and distributed the most printed fabrics to the provinces in the 1820s.[20] The founders, Aron von Reis (1777–1848) and Aron Magnusson (1774–1850), with origins in Mecklenburg in Germany bought an old calico printing shop in 1815. Four years later, they started a weaving mill to support them with fabrics for the printing. The imported fabrics used before were expensive and the factory owners quickly realized the advantage of producing the fabric themselves. This also meant that their calicos became cheaper, which in turn was a competitive advantage over the small printers. Coloured cotton fabrics, neckerchiefs, twill, cambric, satinett and muslin were produced at the weaving mill by the mid-1820s.[21] Weaving was done by hand like the printing, which was done using block printing, and required skilled workers. The business was very successful from the early 1820s, and it reached its highest point in 1825–1826. At this time, Magnusson & Reis produced the biggest amount of calicoes in the whole of Sweden.[22] The two industrialists attracted a great deal of attention from the authorities. In 1821, they were rewarded for their contribution to the Swedish cotton industry with a royal medal, and the following year they were among the first Jews to be awarded Swedish citizenships.[23] In 1820, the company had 62 workers in the printing workshop and 54 (female) weavers. Five years later, the weaving mill had 214 looms, 325 employees and 89 persons working on calico printing.[24] Early in 1827, there was a fire at the factory, and the printing workshop was completely destroyed. Even though they managed to rebuild it in three months, it

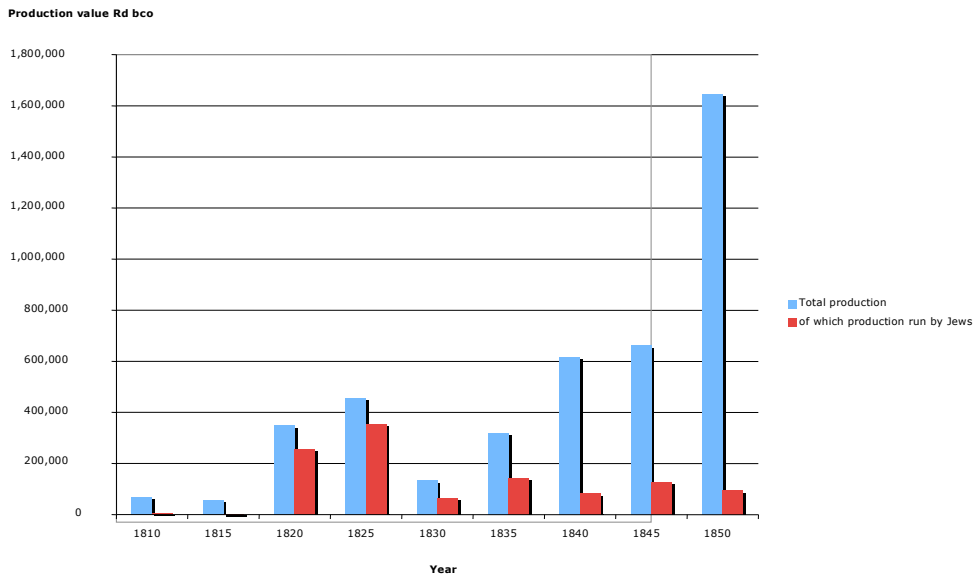
[16] Nyberg 2002, p. 68.
[17] Lemire 1991; Styles 2007 and Riello & Parthasarathi 2009.
[18] Bodman 1925, pp. 156–157.
[19] Tengroth Ulväng (forthcomming).
[20] Bodman 1925, pp. 156–157.
[21] RA [National Archives, Stockholm], Digital registers, Reports on factories.
[22] RA [National Archives, Stockholm], *Kommerskollegiums tryckta berättelse 1829*.
[23] Göteborgs landsarkiv (GLA) [Regional state archive, Göteborg], Göteborgs rådhusrätt och magistrat, handlingar till Hallrättens protokoll.
[24] RA [National Archives, Stockholm], Digital registers, Reports on factories.

was the beginning of the end of its successful days. The demand for printed calicoes declined due to changes in fashion. As printed calicoes had lost their great popularity, the calico printing shut down in 1829, but the weaving continued until the mid-1830s.[25] In the 1830s, the Jewish merchant Levi Fürstenberg established another important textile factory in Gothenburg, the weaving mill Oscarsdal.

In her study of the development of printed cottons in Sweden, textile historian Ingegerd Henschen pays great attention to Jewish calico printers and their impact on the renewal of the calico industry in Sweden.[26] The printed fabrics were colourfast, thanks to new colours and dyeing techniques. The reports from the local tax collecting department to the National Board of Trade said that the printed calicoes 'can compete with the English' in terms of quality.[27] Fabrics produced by Lamm in Stockholm and Pineus and Reis & Magnusson in Gothenburg are frequently mentioned in reviews from the first Swedish industrial expositions 1828–1829 and 1834. They are praised for their 'excellent quality and good prices'.[28] It was not only a question of quality however. When it comes to quantities, it is easy to draw the conclusion that a company like Reis & Magnusson was a really large-scale factory with extensive production. In 1825 in Gothenburg, there was no firm with more workers. Altogether, it had over 400 employees (weaving mill included), when, for example, the spinning mill Gamlebokullen, which was number two among the textile factories, had 107 workers.

If we study Gothenburg's major textile companies in the beginning of the 19th century, the dominance of the Jewish textile industries is evident in general and especially for calico printing. Jews dominated the calico printing industry almost completely in the twenties and also played an important role after this most prosperous decade. Their share of total production of calicoes in Gothenburg was 10 per cent in 1810, almost 100 per cent 1815–1830 and 72–94 per cent from 1835 to 1850. The diagram below shows the production value of *all* textile industries in Gothenburg from 1810 to 1850:

[25] GLA [Regional state archive, Göteborg], Göteborgs rådhusrätt och magistrat, E VI a, Petition in bankruptcy, Aron von Reis 1848: 33.
[26] Henschen 1992.
[27] RA [National Archives, Stockholm], Digital registers, Reports on factories: Göteborgs fögderi.
[28] See for example *Journal för manufakturer och hushållning*, no. 7, 1834 and *Journal för handel, slöjd och konst*, no. 54, 1834.



Textile production in Gothenburg 1810–1850
Source: RA [National Archives, Stockholm], Digital registers, Reports on factories.

In the diagram we can see that companies run by Jews represented most of the production in 1820 and 1825, about half of the textile production in 1830 and 1835, and later on a smaller part. The 1820s must be considered to be an extreme period of the Jewish group's importance in textile production.

Retailing goods

In addition to growing demand and greater supply, functional distribution of goods was essential to growing consumption. The prevailing trade legislation in Sweden limited opportunities to carry on the trade, however, particularly in the countryside where 90 per cent of the Swedish population lived. The government defended the urban monopoly, and urban merchants were in a privileged position. The legislation included a few exceptions, however, that increased the possibilities for the peasantry to engage in the trade. One such exception was the special legislation for peddling peasants from the province of Västergötland, about 80 kilometres from Gothenburg. The peddlers sold mainly textiles produced in the large-scale proto-industry, but a couple of decades into the 1800s, fabrics, especially from Gothenburg, increasingly became part of the range. These fabrics could also be imported.[29]

In 1846, a very important reform legalized the opening of retail shops in the countryside. A review of the legislation has also showed that the prerequisites of trade in the countryside were more inclusive and wide-ranging than the legislation prescribed. The conclusion is that peasants and other actors could compete with urban merchants when marketing various types of textiles and other goods even before the reform in 1846. Furthermore, the matter of the

[29] See Lundqvist 2008, in particular chapter 7.

establishment of different trade actors had a clear connection to the growing market for goods that evolved during the first half of the 19th century.[30]

Besides textile producers such as Reis & Magnusson, other Jewish merchants were very important to the distribution of textiles from Gothenburg in the first half of the 19th century. One of them was Moses Fränkel (dead in 1858). In his bankruptcy papers, dated 10 March 1843, Fränkel writes that he had been engaged in trade in Gothenburg for twenty years and that he had now become insolvent.[31] Fränkel's bankruptcy papers give a good idea of the products he distributed. There were extensive lists of goods provided as security for loans taken out in November 1842 and January 1843. In total, 59 different kinds of goods are specified. The range focuses almost exclusively on textile goods; one exception is silver knives and forks. The fabrics are printed cotton fabrics and Swiss chintz. The wool fabrics include blue calmink and worsted for trousers. The silk fabrics include orleans and silk velvet. The collection also included different kinds of white and coloured gaze and laces as well as rougher fabrics like hemp. The inventory includes no fewer than 17 different kinds of shawls, scarves and neckerchiefs of cotton, wool and silk. Here, we find bandanas, woollen muslin and pure cashmere shawls and black silk shawls. The finished garments included suspenders, gloves, socks and aprons. Finally, the range included curtain tassels, silk umbrellas and bags. Overall, it can be concluded that the range reflects the demand for finer, more or less prestigious textiles.

More information about the goods and their origin is obtained from the bills of goods from foreign and domestic trading houses, which are included in the bankruptcy act. Here, we can see where Fränkel bought his various kinds of goods. Some were bought from Swedish suppliers, among them two silk weaving mills in Stockholm (black silk scarves) and Sweden's first mechanized cotton mill (cambric and shirting). Most of the debts were from abroad, however, and the vast majority of the creditors were based in Hamburg. At that time, the town was one of the most important ports for trade with groceries and goods from Britain to the Continent. British goods to Scandinavia were largely transported through Hamburg. Most of Fränkel's business contacts in Hamburg were Jewish.

Through the list of Fränkel's outstanding debts, we can also gain an idea of whom he delivered goods to. More than a third, 72 debts, were to people who can be identified as peddlers. A quarter of the claims were to urban merchants mostly from small cities in western Sweden, but also from Stockholm, Sundsvall, Aalborg in Denmark and Stavanger in Norway. The remaining claims, about 40 per cent, belong to Gothenburg.

The business of Fränkel is an illustrative example of how the Jewish merchants contributed to the spread of imported textiles through the retail trade and peddling. Through the small town merchants, the goods reached consumers outside Gothenburg, and the peddlers spread the goods through most of the country and directly to the rural population. This is consistent with Lundqvist's previous research on peddlers. Her study has shown that peddlers frequently bought fabrics from Magnusson & Reis, Pineus, Fränkel and other Jewish merchants. In turn, the peddlers sold the goods in most of the country.[32] Modern textiles became thus available to the population living in the countryside in Sweden.

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[30] See Brismark 2008, pp. 16–19, chapter 4 & 5.
[31] GLA [Regional archives, Göteborg], Göteborgs rådhusrätt och magistrat, E VI a, Konkursakt [Petition in bankruptcy], Moses Fränkel 1843: 13.
[32] Lundqvist 2008, pp. 200–201.

Jewish merchants and their impact on the consumer market in Sweden

In the introduction, we asked how the Jewish merchants and industrialists contributed to the renewal of the consumer market in early 19th century Sweden. We have seen that when Jews were allowed to settle down in Sweden in the late 18th century, a great deal of them soon established themselves as wholesalers and retailers in textiles and colonial goods. In that sense, they took an active part in the integration of the Swedish domestic market with the European and global market. Representing only one per cent of the population, they constituted one tenth of all retailers. The examples above have shown that Jewish merchants sold attractive modern textiles both in Gothenburg and in the countryside. We have also drawn attention to the fact that peddlers from the Swedish countryside seamed to prefer to purchase their semi-luxury textile goods from Jewish merchants in Gothenburg. Maybe it was because they could offer more generous credit conditions than the other merchants. A more probable explanation could be that the Jews could offer the most attractive textile goods to a reasonable price.

We have also seen that the Jewish production of textiles, especially calicoes, became a starting point to the Swedish cotton industry. It is evident that the activities of the Jewish entrepreneurs in textile production meant a renewal of the Swedish textile supply through their production of printed calicoes and other fabrics. For a couple of decades after 1820, the Jewish merchants dominated the cotton-textile industry in Gothenburg. When it comes to calico printing, the Jewish immigrants, through their calico printing mills, doubtlessly brought new knowledge into the industry in Sweden.

How shall we then explain why Jewish immigrants became so influential in trade and production of textiles and other consumer goods in the early 19th century Sweden? Of course, there is not one single reason, but we will suggest some factors of importance: The role of the prevailing legislation, knowledge due to a long Jewish tradition in textile trade and industry, access to capital, international and family networks, ability to find efficient distribution and finally the fact that they succeeded in responding to the growing consumer demand at the time.

For many centuries, only Lutherans were allowed to settle in Sweden. At the request of the East India Company, foreigners, and thus Jews, were allowed to visit Gothenburg during auctions from 1733, but it was not until later they were permitted to settle down permanently in Sweden. It was mainly economic interests that were behind the decision to allow immigration from the 1770s. The National Board of Trade expressed that it was desirable to prevent other Jews from immigrating than those who could contribute to the country's development and prosperity through a useful trading business or considerable property.[33] These ideas were probably also the basis for the *'Jew Regulation Act'*, which was legislated from 1782 until 1838. To become a 'protected Jew', an immigrant Jew had to bring more than 2,000. 'riksdaler' for himself and his household.[34] The Jews were only allowed to live and own real estate property in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Norrköping and Karlskrona. Furthermore, Jews were not allowed to engage in crafts that fell under the Guild Charter and they were subject to various limitations on the right to carry on business. Still, the rules of Jewish engagement in trade and industry were not too dissimilar from those of Swedes and other foreigners. As a result of the limited rights to immigrate, many of the Jews who settled in Sweden were rather wealthy. Many of them had a

[33] Valentin 2004, pp. 179–181.
[34] 'Riksdaler' was the Swedish currency at the time. 2,000. riksdaler was a considerable amount of money, and can be compared with the value of a country farm, which could be around 200 riksdaler at this time.

background in business or as skilled craftsmen. In Sweden, the legislation set bounds to their possibilities, for instance they were forbidden to own land, which is one reason why the majority of Jews were dealing with different kinds of trade.

A second factor that may have had a favourable effect on the Jewish business was *tradition*. The connection between Jewish commercial actors of different kinds – peddlers, wholesalers and producers – and the business and industry of textiles have deep roots in the European tradition and history. The Jewish merchants came to form an essential part of the textile industry and trade in several central European countries. In the Jewish case, the profits resulting from the trade were often used to start a variety of industries.[35] Jewish calico printers led the renewal of the new dyeing and printing techniques in Germany.[36] Already in 1800, a senator in Hamburg stated that 'Certainly everyone knows [...] that our calico cotton factories to a large extent are owned by Jewish residents.'[37] Since most of the Jewish immigrants in Sweden came from Germany, they probably had access to knowledge and experience in the art of printing. In Gothenburg, the printing workshops could, with relatively little effort, process a semi-finished product into one of a high value.[38]

Another important factor is, of course, *access to capital*. The first Jewish community in Western Sweden was in the free port of Marstrand, north of Gothenburg, in the decade before the 'Jew Regulation Act' in 1982. The Jewish community in Marstrand consisted of mostly wealthy merchants engaged in wholesale distribution in connection with the East India Company shipping, and their families. They acted as commission agents for the company's export trade of imports from China and re-export, mainly to Holland. Some of them made good fortunes on the trade, which later could be invested in new businesses, when they later moved to Gothenburg. Generally speaking, foreign immigration to Gothenburg was sensitive to economic fluctuations, and this applied particularly to Jewish immigration. For example, many Jews settled down in Gothenburg during the Continental Blockade boom, between 1808 and 1815, during the Napoleonic wars. The period was a most important event in Gothenburg's economic development. Due to the French blockade of Great Britain, English merchants found new opportunities to transit their trade, particularly in Scandinavia. Gothenburg became an important international trading metropolis. The city's traditional merchant houses and immigrant foreign merchants were able to make big profits on the transit trade as commissioners.[39] Some of the most prosperous merchants during the blockade were Jews, who later developed their business in consumer goods in Gothenburg.

The Jewish merchants were also part of international ethnical communities and family *networks*. Their connections abroad were often also networks in trade. The connection to international trade contacts meant access to capital and transfer of commercial competence and industrial knowledge. It is interesting to note that Michael Simon Warburg, son of the Gothenburg merchant Simon Elias Warburg, seems to have served as commissioner for a major part of Fränkel's business with Hamburg. Furthermore, Michael Simon acted as a middleman for

[35] Meyer et al. 1997, p. 85.
[36] Brenner et al. 1997, pp. 86–87.
[37] Meyer et al. 1997, p. 76.
[38] Bodman 1926, pp. 66, 68.
[39] Tiselius 1935, p. 24.

several Gothenburg Jewish merchants.[40] The situation can be compared with the Jewish entrepreneurs in Great Britain, where Jews acted as commissioners and textile traders in England and, through their expertise and wide network, had advantages over traders on the Continent.[41] The importance of networks can be regarded on at least three levels: the international context, within the Jewish minority in Gothenburg and, finally, the contacts with other actors in the Swedish society. In Gothenburg, the Jewish community provided an arena for mutual relations on economic matters, which also functioned as a financial network. There are plenty of examples that show how Jews cooperated and supported each other financially.

An *effective distribution* to the ordinary consumer was crucial to the merchant's success. The Jewish textile entrepreneurs in Gothenburg soon built up new economic networks that focused on a broad domestic market. The goods were distributed in a geographically wide area, mainly in western Sweden, through retailers in Gothenburg and other towns, but especially through peddlers, who travelled around almost the whole country as well as in Norway. As already mentioned, inventories and bankruptcy papers from peddlers show that the Jewish merchants represent an important part of their urban creditors. In return, peddlers are frequently mentioned in the documents of several Jewish merchants. In this way, hundreds of peddlers helped to bring new modern textiles into a broad and growing customer base in the Swedish countryside. Through the business between the Jewish merchants and the peddlers, semi-luxury goods, like imported and domestic fabrics, were quickly available, even in remote rural areas.

Finally, we can draw the conclusion that textiles were found to be one of the most important consumer goods to the rapid growth of the domestic consumption market in early 19th-century Sweden. Gothenburg and its Jewish merchants and producers played a central role in this development. From the consumer's perspective, the printed textiles for example, are considered luxury goods, at least for the lower classes. Women, who constituted a great deal of the "new consumers", particularly requested calicoes and other modern textiles. The Jewish merchants and manufacturers settled in Sweden just when the domestic market really expanded. It seems like they also *succeeded to suit themselves to the consumer demand*, with fashionable goods that ordinary people could afford.

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Jewish merchants continued to have a great impact on the textile industry and trade, as well as on the market with colonial goods, in the 19th century. They did, however, never have so great influence as they had in the 1820s and 1830s. The reduced significance of the group later in the 19th century can be explained by the strong expansion of the textile industry, as well as in the market for colonial goods, in which the small group of Jewish entrepreneurs represented a relatively small portion. We also know that many Jews moved on to other activities in areas such as publishing and banking. It is still significant that the dominance of the Jewish group coincides well with its establishment in the Swedish business community and with the strong expansion of the Swedish consumer market.

[40] GLA, [Regional archives, Gotheburg], Göteborgs Rådhusrätt och magistrat, konkursakter [Petitions in bankruptcy].
[41] Pollins 1982, pp. 93–95.

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