

Simona Sofija Valke

Dr. philol., literary scholar;

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

Dr. philol., literatūrzinātniece;

Latvijas Universitātes Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts

E-mail / e-pasts: simona.valke@lulfmi.lv

ORCID: [0000-0003-2910-5984](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2910-5984)

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Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan's Book Catalog: Historical Context and Values of Enlightenment

Sagānas hercogienes Vilhelmīnes grāmatu katalogs: vēsturiskais konteksts un apgaismības vērtības

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Summary

The catalog of the library owned by Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan (1781–1839), compiled in the early years of the 19th century, is one of the few surviving registers of books that belonged to the last ruling family of the Duchy of Courland (now Kurzeme). Its oldest editions are published in the mid-17th century and, by the predominance of French books, the catalog shows that the owner's interests were leaning towards the French cultural space. The present study, which is at the intersection of the history of ideas and micro-history, looks at the historical events affecting the Duchy of Courland and also seeks to shed light on the presence and role of Enlightenment ideas in the said library.

Kopsavilkums

Sagānas hercogienes Vilhelmīnes (1781–1839) 19. gadsimta sākumā sastādītais bibliotēkas katalogs ir viens no retajiem šodien pieejamajiem grāmatu uzskaites dokumentiem, kas piederējuši pēdējai Kurzemes hercogu dzimtai. Tā senākās grāmatas ir izdotas 17. gadsimta vidū, un franču literatūras pārsvars iezīmē īpašnieces interesi par franču kultūrtelpu. Rakstā tiek pētīta apgaismības literatūras loma šai bibliotēkā, kā arī iztīrāts Kurzemes hercogistes vēsturiskais konteksts, izmantojot ideju vēstures un mikrovēstures pieejas.

Introduction

In the catalog of books owned by Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan, born Princess of Courland (1781–1839), the numbers from 84 to 93 denote the volumes of *Histoire de l'esprit humain ou mémoires secrets et universels de la République des Lettres* (History of the Human Spirit, or Secret and Universal Memories of the Republic of Letters), written by one of the most famous intellectuals of his time, Marquis d'Argens (1703–1771). The author had claimed that this publication, as he had intended it, could itself hold the status of a "library": "My intention was that my work could serve as a local library to those who own a very ample [library], and as a universal library to those whose situation or mediocre resources do not allow them to have a large number of books"¹ (Argens 1765).

These 14 volumes by d'Argens (although only 10 are mentioned in the catalog of the Duchess of Sagan) themselves functioned like a library inventory or catalog, as they facilitated navigation in an array of books – but going even beyond this function and also offering evaluations of the best contributions of the "Republic of Letters", namely of the works by well-known authors (about whom the majority of readers used to hold an opinion formed by authorities). However, this intellectually fixed attitude did not contribute to autonomous reflection and to the concept of *Sapere aude!* (Dare to know!) advocated a few decades later (1784) by Immanuel Kant. No doubt, the project of Marquis d'Argens expressed his convictions and his personal vision – which was not always progressive and sometimes was oriented towards the past. As Pierre Mannoni has put it: "The formation of an individual library follows, in a certain sense, the same process, as one chooses from the accessible sources those volumes which represent a personal interest. And again, the past mixes with the present not only to form a repertoire of personal values, but also, as it is with mental representations, to bring out a fraction of the external universe in the individual's mind" (Mannoni 2016: 3).

This external universe was an epoch where a new system of ideas and values was being established. During the Age of Enlightenment, the values of this intellectual movement – freedom, equality and tolerance – were present throughout Europe both in philosophical thought and in the literature of ideas. The movement of Enlightenment relied on reason – which was essential to combat obscurantism and intolerance and to achieve happiness, knowledge and freedom. The situation in Germany, compared to the Enlightenment of France and England, was different – its philosophical thought

1 Here and henceforth my translations – SSV.

was not separated from religion and therefore, to a large extent, the ideas and values of the Enlightenment developed within the Church and in theological discussions. With the ascension of Frederick the Great (Friedrich II) to the throne of the King of Prussia, the Age of Enlightenment gained a new momentum, as this Francophile sovereign encouraged the influx of ideas from France. In the Baltics, the Age of Enlightenment began around the middle of the 18th century, and its end was marked by December 1825 and the Decembrist uprising in Russia (Straube 2018: 29).

The catalog of the library owned by Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan and mostly containing volumes that were presumably inherited from her ancestors Ernst and Peter Biron, the Dukes of Courland, will be the subject of this detailed study. Taking into consideration the chronological extent of the publications of these books, we will look not only at the traditional values of the Enlightenment but also at the ideas of the period defined by Paul Hazard (1994) as the crisis of European consciousness (1680–1715), and also the period characterized by Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel as Radical Enlightenment (1650–1750). Thus the diversity of historiographical views of the Enlightenment, as well as its chronological framework, goes beyond the limits of one century and also makes it possible to include a wider geographical area.

Regarding the high number of French books in the library of Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan, it is essential to note that the French language was the means of communication of the intellectual elites of the time, and this prevalence in her library reveals her desire to go beyond the national limits in favor of integration into the international society.

We will adapt an approach based on the principles of intellectual history (which developed from the concept of “history of ideas”, treating ideas in their context) in order to grasp the diversity of the library in question and to examine it in the historical, political and social contexts of Courland of the 18th century. We will also view the diversity of this book collection as the result of personal choice, trying to detect points of interest that relate to the values of the Enlightenment.

The “indiciary paradigm” defined by Carlo Ginzburg postulates that history can reach the singular through conjectural quest and interpretation (Ginzburg 1980: 3–44). Microhistory refers to individuals as well as their groups, to the details of their experiences, and this pursuit of seemingly insignificant clues is as experimental as the research approaches leading to it: “On the reverse of systemic regularity [...] is inscribed the requirement to express the singularity of the social event, so that sociology or history has a mission to make it intelligible” (Vidal 2002: 297). Like the singularity of the social event, the singularity of the cultural fact is interpreted and reconstructed on the basis of imprints and indices. The present research does not claim to be a generalization, but aims to study one of the rare catalogs currently

known to have belonged to the family of the Dukes of Courland at the end of the 18th century.

Given that this catalog constitutes one of the few documented witnesses to a private aristocratic collection owned by the family of the Dukes of Courland, it offers a privileged field of study for a cross-disciplinary approach combining intellectual history and microhistory. Through this handwritten document, one can observe the concrete modalities of appropriation of philosophical, literary, and scientific ideas of the 18th century within a private library. Notably, around 80% of the books are in French, underscoring the cultural and intellectual orientation of the collection. From this perspective, Wilhelmine of Sagan's library can be viewed not only as a place of preservation, but also as a tangible manifestation of a mental universe and an intellectual identity shaped by both family heritage and personal choices.

Thus, this study uses a hybrid approach and employs various methodologies from the fields of history of ideas and microhistory to trace certain events in the historical context of the research object. A territorially marked historical context constitutes the first part of the study. This is followed by an analysis of the ducal libraries, with a particular emphasis on the library of the Duchess of Sagan whose books mostly come from her ancestors' collections and whose book catalog is the subject of our study.

Historical context of the Duchy of Courland

The Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, mostly referred to simply as the Duchy of Courland (for the sake of linguistic economy and convenience), was founded *de jure* in 1561 when the Treaty of Vilnius was signed between Sigismund II Augustus, King of Poland and Lithuania, and Gotthard Kettler (1517–1587), the last master of the Order of Livonia. This establishment *de facto* took place in 1562 when the treaty was ratified in Riga, after the solemn resignation of the master and other members of the Order of Livonia. Gotthard Kettler as the Duke then took an oath of allegiance to the King's Ambassador Nicolas Radziwiłł, the Grand Chancellor of Lithuania, and the Order's former brothers subsequently swore allegiance to Kettler, recognizing him as their new Duke. At the same time, the Duchy of Livonia or Polish Livonia (Latin: *Ducatus Livoniae Ultradunensis*) was formed as a vassal territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

After the Polish-Swedish War (1600–1629), Livonia and a part of Estonia were incorporated into the Swedish Empire. Thus the ethnic territory of the future Latvia was divided into two state entities. The Great Northern War (1700–1721) brought about new territorial changes. The part that had been under the influence of Sweden now came under the control of the Russian Empire. During the military conflict, the

Duchy of Courland was also not spared from war. In 1701, King Charles XII of Sweden occupied Mitau (now Jelgava), the capital of the Duchy of Courland. However, after 1710 the power shifted to the Russian side, making Livonia an administrative unit of the Russian Empire.

Nevertheless, Peter I allowed the Baltic German nobility and the bourgeoisie of the cities to retain their privileges (Bérard 2010: 214). Thus the Baltic Germans continued to enjoy a fairly high degree of freedom and autonomy, including the right to keep their religious denomination. The official language of the Duchy of Courland, as well as of the Riga Governorate, remained German. This was probably due to the Europeanization reforms launched by Peter I, which allowed the Baltic Germans to integrate into the Russian society and ensured them a special status, with a possibility to take part in the administration of the state or cities. They also contributed to the development of science and medicine.

Even though the Duchy of Courland continued to be a vassal state of Poland, Peter I wanted to strengthen his political influence and therefore made Friedrich Wilhelm Kettler (1692–1711), the young Duke of Courland, marry his niece Anna Ivanovna (1693–1740). After the untimely death of the young duke and the regency of his widow Anna, the last period in the history of the Kettler dynasty ended with the short reign (1730–1737) of his childless uncle Ferdinand (1655–1737).

The death of Ferdinand Kettler left the ducal throne vacant, and Ernst Biron, a favorite of the young widow Anna who had by then become the Empress of Russia, claimed the title of the Duke of Courland. It was decided at the court of Saint Petersburg to send armed troops under the command of General Bismarck to Mitau to ensure the desired result in the duke's elections. This military presence was convincing, and the nobility of Courland gathered in the cathedral of Mitau where, after having sung *Veni creator*, they elected Ernst Biron as the new Duke of Courland, who was then certified by King Augustus III of Poland (Manstein 1771: 254).

The fall and exile of Biron after the death of Empress Anna brought the country into a "non-ducal" phase, during which Charles of Saxony temporarily ascended to the throne, but failed to reinforce his political power and to achieve economic growth. Biron returned to the throne of the Duchy of Courland in 1763, and in 1770 ceded the reins to his son Peter. The politically unstable situation in the Duchy of Courland, already impoverished after the Great Northern War, was followed by an epidemic of plague that caused severe depopulation. This led to a significant immigration from Germany, and people from various walks of life, including intellectuals, came to Courland to fill the gaps created by war and plague. It was only in the 1770s that the demographic level of the duchy reached the pre-war level (Sommerlat 2010: 154). During these years, informative and intellectual activities also developed. For

instance, in 1766 the local newspaper *Mitauische Nachrichten* first came out, and *Academia Petrina*, an institution of higher education which housed a rich library (Zaļuma 2019: 20–31), was founded in 1775. and. Moreover, after the newspaper's initial phase of development the ducal court conferred its printing privileges upon the *Academia Petrina*. Thus the publication obtained a significant degree of autonomy from political authority (Šemeta 2011: 368). In 1777 a reading library (*Lesebibliothek*) was established in the city of Libau (now Liepāja), and in 1785 – in Mitau. These activities, stimulating the intellectual life, gave rise to a specific Baltic phenomenon – the fact that the literati or *die Gelehrten* ('the learned'), i.e. people who had academic education, had the status of a separate social class: "The Courland literati class evolved into a kind of 'bourgeois aristocracy' which interposed itself between the rest of the bourgeoisie and the nobility, often in stark contrast to the latter, and sometimes opposing to 'the arrogance of the nobles' with 'the intellectual arrogance of the literati'" (Wachtsmuth 1928: 107). In addition, during the time of the Birones the literati were an essential pillar of the ducal power against the local nobles (Lenz 1953: 9). In the Duchy of Courland, due to the strong influence of the local aristocracy, the ducal political power was weak, but the duke was able to express himself through economic activities and the development of court culture (Lancmanis 2004). Thus the income from economics, especially during the time of Peter Biron, was used to build castles in Courland, to acquire new properties outside Courland, and to satisfy cultural interests such as collecting art objects and buying books. This cultural interest, which was directed towards Western Europe, as well as the already mentioned complicated political situation, also inspired Duke Peter's journey through Europe in the 1780s.

Duke Peter Biron with his family (including his three-year-old daughter Wilhelmine, the future Duchess of Sagan) travelled abroad from 1784 to 1787, visiting Germany, Austria, and Italy. Micheline Dupuy in her biography of the Duchess of Dino, Wilhelmine's younger sister, describes the Biron family's ample possibilities: "Peter's immense fortune allowed him to travel like a ruler of a country much larger than the one he had" (Dupuy 2002: 30). His financial prosperity, the political situation of the Duchy in relation to Poland and Russia, as well as his personal relations shaped the reputation of Peter Biron and his family in Europe.

Their trip abroad was immediately reported by *La Gazette de France*, one of the oldest newspapers published in France (established in 1631). On September 10, 1784, this periodical published a short story received from Königsberg: "The Duke & Duchess of Courland are accompanied by a brilliant suite & arrived in this town last night; tomorrow they will continue their journey & they will stop for a while in Berlin" (Nr. 73, 300). The events of their trip were covered in detail in this French newspaper, even mentioning road accidents: "The Duke & Duchess of Courland arrived here [in Rome]

from Naples last Sunday. Their carriage had overturned on the way, but luckily they were not injured" (*La Gazette de France* Nr. 31, 04.19.1785, 132). The purchase of the subsequent residence of Duke Peter was also mentioned: "It is increasingly believed that the Prince of Hohenlohe has bought the Principality of Sagan for the Duke of Courland" (*Journal de Bruxelles* Nr. 19, 13.05.1786, 57).

Travelling undoubtedly was an integral part of Enlightenment practices, helping to get acquainted with different cultures, to obtain new knowledge and objects, and to attend artistic events. Meanwhile, to travel also meant to distrust the existing travel literature and to critically appraise the described facts and societies (as well as their structures, institutions and traditions), acquiring one's own experience and opinion about them. Besides gaining individual experience, for a person in power travelling also had a political dimension, as it was often accompanied by personal visits whose objectives ranged from courtesy and maintaining contacts to carrying out diplomatic missions and even achieving political goals. This could also work in the opposite direction, namely by receiving and hosting visitors. Driven by political objectives, the Duke invited to the Duchy of Courland various cultured and artistic people – artists and art lovers, philosophers and scientists –, thus participating in the development of what has been often called "the road network of the European mind/spirit" (*Wegenetz europäischen Geistes*). It should be noted that the Courland palaces of Würzau (now Vircava) and Ruhental (now Rundāle) were located on the way from Western Europe to Saint Petersburg (Mesenhöller 2009: 166). It was thus possible for the Birones to receive foreign guests and to show them the great architecture of their castles, their collections of paintings and other works of art, and also the library about which little information has survived, but which most probably later formed the basis of the library owned by the Duchess of Sagan, born Princess of Courland. In order to contextualize this collection, we have to study the available information about the ducal libraries of the 18th century in Courland.

Ducal libraries prior to Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan

One of the trophies of the Great Northern War – the library of the Dukes of Courland, which the King of Sweden had hoped to acquire in 1701 – was moved from Mitau Palace to Riga Castle in order to be later transported to Sweden. However, when Russia began to gain ground in the war and Riga fell to the Russian army, the library was taken to Saint Petersburg and became the foundation for the library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Valke 2020: 61). Thus, when Ernst Biron was elected duke, he had to create a new ducal library of his own dynasty.

Thus not only a new dynasty, but also a new ducal library begins with Biron. We should recall that a library then was not only a tool for acquiring knowledge, but also had a prestigious role – it proved that its owner not only had a great financial capacity, but also was well-informed about literature and the most recent discoveries, ideas, social movements and developments. Therefore, as the Biron family came to power, the compilation of a library was one of the indicators of the quality of their power – not only showing the level of ambition and legitimacy of the new ducal family in the face of the old aristocracy, but also functioning as a visual sign of the Biron family's knowledge, education and skills.

As a favorite of Anna Ivanovna, Empress of Russia, Ernst Biron was the *de facto* ruler of Russia, but after the coup d'état his property was confiscated, and he was deported and spent 22 years in exile: first in Siberia and then in Yaroslavl (Dunsdorfs 1973: 25). During his short reign as the Duke of Courland from 1737 to 1740 (and probably already before that), he had established his own library. Little information on the content and number of his books has been preserved in the available confiscation deeds: it was only noted that books with religious content, including an explanation of the gospels, were moved to Dinamenskaya Church (presumably, Daugavgrīva) in 1741. The list was drawn up in Russian, and the years of publication and language of the books are not indicated (Vedomostj 1741).

The repressions against Ernst Biron affected not only his own family, but also those close to him – including the family of his wife's sister, born Benigna Gottliebe von Trotta-Treyden (1703–1782). The property belonging to her husband Ludolf August von Bismarck (1683–1750), who with his military support had helped Biron to be elected the Duke of Courland, was confiscated along with Biron's private property and described in detailed confiscation lists. There is also a scant information on von Bismarck's books: "140 German and French books, large and small" (Opisj 1740). The short entry is between "Earthenware teapots" and "Crystal dishes", and the books do not seem to have more importance than an array of dishes. The listed objects were handed over to Captain von Erzdorf in Petersburg. Unfortunately, no other information about this officer could be found.

The Duchess of Dino, the youngest daughter of Duke Peter, in her memoirs also reflects on the life of Ernst Biron in exile. She mentions that he was exiled to the town of Pelym and later moved to Yaroslavl. The ascension of Elizabeth to the throne of Russia had given some hope to the Duke of Courland. At the beginning of 1742 he received, in fact, a letter from the Senate announcing that he was liberated. He immediately left Pelym and was preparing to go to Courland, but was stopped en route by a new message ordering him to stay at Yaroslavl. The ex-regent settled there in a relatively spacious house with a beautiful garden on the banks of the Volga.

He was sent his library, furniture, crockery, and even horses and guns, with a permission to hunt in an area of 20 versts around. His brothers and Bismarck were allowed to visit him (Dino 1908: 102).

Unfortunately, there is no more detailed information on the mentioned library, as well as on its future fate. After returning from his exile, Ernst Biron took over the construction of the palaces of Mitau and Ruhental in Courland. Latvian cultural historian Andrejs Johansons attributes the construction and furnishing of these two palaces to the Late Baroque and Rococo period in the territory of Latvia, pointing out that the cultural splendor of Courland at the end of the Duchy period, during the reign of the two Birones from 1763 to 1795, was undeniably centered around the ducal court (Johansons 1975: 45).

Regarding the availability of literature at that time in Courland (and thus also books that could have been found in the Biron library), Latvian researcher Pauls Daija notes that “thanks to the bookstore of Johann Friedrich Hartknoch (1740–1789), which was founded in 1767, books published in Europe in various languages were also read in the Baltics. Reading in French was common among the Baltic aristocracy and accompanied their imitation of court culture” (Daija 2020: 69).

When the Duchy of Courland was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1795, Duke Peter after his abdication went to Sagan in Silesia, and all his possessions were also transported there (Wulffius 1973: 43). He moved to the Sagan estate together with his three eldest daughters, while the duchess lived in Löbichau with her youngest daughter Dorothy and visited the duke from time to time. The aforementioned diary by Duchess of Dino, who spent winters at the Sagan property, describes the layout of the palace and its library as follows:

Sagan offered a precious collection of paintings and superb marbles brought from Italy. The library was extensive. The numerous apartments of this vast house were almost all furnished with the finest fabrics from Persia and China, and contained all the curiosities of Asia which had been presented to my grandfather during his regency. I still have in front of me, in the very room where I write, some remains of these magnificent trinkets. (Dino 1908: 109–110)

As mentioned above, little information has been preserved on the Biron libraries and their catalogs. The situation is similar regarding the art objects belonging to the Birones. Latvian art historian Imants Lancmanis admits that “the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia, although it shaped the structure and cultural area of much of Latvia, left little material evidence about its time, and even less about the dukes themselves” (Lancmanis 2004).

The transportation of the collection of paintings to Sagan began in the summer of 1793. Two years later, after the abdication, all the belongings of the Birones' Courland estates were brought there. The palace of Sagan was rebuilt and furnished

with a theater and also supported a theater troupe (Wulffius 1973: 43), and hosted countless masquerades, festivals and hunting parties for the local nobility. Peter Biron wrote bitterly from Sagan to his administrator von Buttlar that all these frequent entertainments were received and acknowledged there with more gratitude than in Courland (Sitzungsberichte 1900: 58).

A small number of books have been preserved in one of Duke Peter's foreign properties in Bohemia – Nachod Castle, which he bought in 1792. Along with the castle he also bought the books that it housed, mostly German and French fiction. Over the time, the collections mixed and the books originally owned by Biron can now only be distinguished by the supralibros on their covers (Fabian 1997: 145). The State Digital Archive in Zielona Gora (*Archiwum Państwowe w Zielonej Górze*) contains the catalog of a small theater library owned by Duke Peter, included in the inventory of the Nachod estate and mainly consisting of German translations of French plays written in the 17th and 18th centuries (General-Inventarium 1800).

Books owned by Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan

Clemens Brühl, the German biographer of Wilhelmine of Sagan, in his account of her adolescence and the evolution of her personality underlines the important role played by her governess Antonie Forster who served the Biron family since 1792. It is from her that Wilhelmine drew the current Western European intellectual ideas of her time: the concepts of human dignity and human rights (Brühl 1941: 34). After two years, Forster left the service and Wilhelmine's biographer assumes that she was suspected of expressing liberal ideas, because her brother was Georg Forster (1754–1794), the famous Jacobin of Mainz.

One of the most interesting documents offered by digital archives regarding the books owned by Peter Biron's daughter Wilhelmine is the catalog titled *Catalogue de différents Livres extraits de la Bibliothèque de Son Altesse Madame la Princesse de Rohan Duchesse de Sagan née Princesse de Courlande* (Catalog of Various Books Extracted from the Library of Her Highness Madame the Princess of Rochan, Duchesse of Sagan, born Princess of Courland)². The title of this manuscript document shows

2 A list of the French books in the catalog is available on the ILFA digital website *garamantas.lv* in the section *Sagānas hercogienes bibliotēka / Bibliothèque de la duchesse de Sagan*. While the original books have not survived, their existence is documented. The digital catalog has been supplemented with visual representations of the works, identified through cross-referencing with Wilhelmine of Sagan's catalog. <https://garamantas.lv/by/collection/1587265/Saganas-hercogienes-biblioteka-Bibliotheque-de-la-duchesse-de-Sagan>

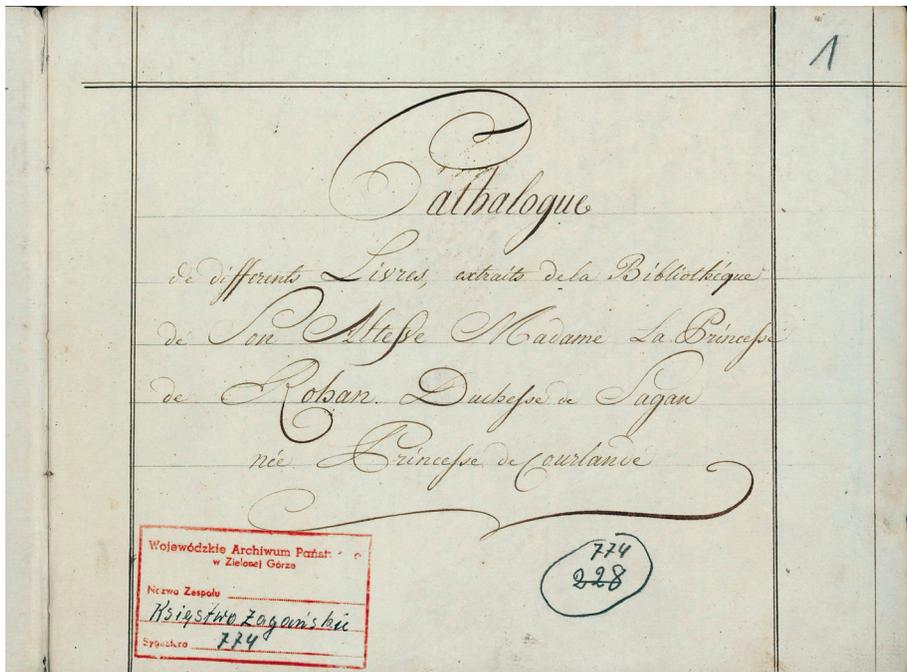


Figure 1. Title page of Duchess Wilhelmine's catalog (State Digital Archive in Zielona Gora)

that the catalog does not include all books, but the ones included are mostly in French (Figure 1). This is hardly surprising, because – as pointed out by Marc Fumaroli (1932–2020), a French academician and eminent historian of literature – the 18th century conversed and corresponded in French even when one was not a Francophile. At that time, French was a language “inseparable [...] from the *bon ton* in manners, from one’s “presentation” in the society, and from the quality of a literature–nourished spirit in conversation” (Fumaroli 2014: 16).

It is very possible that after the death of Duke Peter on January 13, 1800 some of his books found their way onto the shelves of his daughter Wilhelmine, who was then on the threshold of her 19th birthday. The age of some of the books supports this conjecture. The catalog actually contains two books from the mid-17th century, if we include the 1660s in the “mid-century” concept. The first is the 10-volume pastoral novel *Cassandre* (Cassandra) by La Calprenède, a French author popular in the 17th century. The second is a book by Gabriel Guéret, entitled *Le Caractère de la sagesse payenne, dans la vie des sept sages Grecs* (The Character of Pagan Wisdom in the Life of Seven Greek Sages) (1662), which in the catalog is recorded in the section of “Philosophical Writings”.

A question may arise: why was this almost 150 years old book also included in the catalog of the young duchess? The legend of the seven wise men of the ancient world, or the *syllogè* ('assembly') of the Seven Sages "linked together not only by anecdotes, but also [...] by a common wisdom" (Haziza 2018), was very much present in 17th-century culture, and in the elite culture in particular. (For instance, the novel *Le Grand Cyrus* (The Great Cyrus) (1649) by Madeleine and Georges de Scudéry, a bestseller of its time, narrates in its own way the Banquet of the Seven Sages.) Meanwhile, Guéret presents Greece through the great men who made it famous and with customs that easily fit into the customs of his own time: "Whether we are dealing with considerations of the double face of nobility (either inherited or conquered by one's own genius) or with performances of political heroism, or with the attention devoted to the legislative apparatus ensuring social cohesion – all the comments evoked by these exemplary lives can be integrated into polite conversation" (*Le Caractère de la Sagesse Payenne* (synopsis)). The misogynistic philosophy that permeates the book can be read with an ironic eye, as evidenced by this clarification of the author's point of view:

As Heaven (says a great man) gives women all the graces of the body, it seems that for this reason it ordinarily refuses them the gifts of the spirit, and the Phoenix is no rarer in the world than a beautiful woman which is at the same time enlightened and judicious. But this Author was undoubtedly an enemy of the fair sex, and without looking in our century which provides us with [examples of] women who are learned and political, whereby to prove the error of this ancient, the antiquity itself shows us Cleobulina, Zenobia, Diotima, Aspasia & many others who adorn our stories (Guéret 1662: 129–130).

This small volume (160 pages) highlights the general trends of the Duchess's library and her aim to acquire a broad cultural horizon, necessary for active participation in social life. This knowledge was very beneficial for her future career as a socialite, the evidence of which guides the present research.

It should be noted that ten years later, being in close contact with the Austrian diplomat and statesman Klemens Wenzel von Metternich (1773–1859), an important figure in the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), Wilhelmine played a considerable role in Europe's diplomatic processes. Around the time of the creation of the catalog (1802), on June 23, 1800 she married the first of her three husbands – Jules Armand Louis de Rohan-Guéméné (1768–1836). He was the son of the Prince of Guéméné, a French aristocrat from an old Breton noble family whose origins dated back to the Middle Ages (Brühl 1941: 61–62). American historian Dorothy McGuigan, who has studied the correspondence between the Duchess of Sagan and von Meternich, describes the Duchess as quick-witted, and also politically interested and capable:

She had a thorough understanding of the complex history and political machinery of Central and Eastern Europe. Multilingual, with a network of relatives and acquaintances in England, France, Prussia and Russia, she kept in close touch with the latest news, nuances, and gossips. (McGuigan 1975: 27)

Wilhelmine's books, as we have already mentioned, are mostly in French. This fact is not only a confirmation of her belonging to the European elite, but is also rooted in her life experience. Wilhelmine's planned marriage to Friedrich Ludwig Christian of Prussia, the nephew of Friedrich II of Prussia, did not materialize because the Prussian royal family, namely the then king Friedrich Wilhelm III, opposed it. This refusal to recognize the family of the Duke of Courland as equals to the Prussian nobility was a harsh insult to Wilhelmine, who promised never to set foot in Berlin again and kept her promise (Brühl 1941: 60). The marriage with Rohan-Guéméné helped the Duchess of Sagan to prove to the Prussians that she could very well do without them and was not affected by the humiliation which she called "*les torts de la cour de Berlin*" (the wrongs [done] by the court of Berlin). Thus, the French orientation of Wilhelmine's book catalog shows a counterpoint to the Prussian cultural space. Furthermore, her French husband was a master of the art of *causerie* ('conversation') and was convinced that those who were not good at it were boring, unsociable and hopelessly talentless (Brühl 1941: 65). And, no doubt, the art of conversation and the diversity of its subjects is best stimulated by reading (and a library as a source of knowledge).

Wilhelmine's catalog is handwritten and consists of 21 pages, including the title page. It contains books published from 1660 to 1799. The books are grouped in two lists – thematically and by their place of storage. The size of the books is also noted – for the majority of works it is the *octavo* format, while eight books are in *duodecimo* format. However, the distribution by size is uncertain, because a large number of the books, listed in her catalog, have another format in the catalogs of their publishing houses.

Each page of the catalog is divided into four columns. The first column indicates the sequential number of the work. The authors and titles are given in the second column, which also specifies the binding type of the books. The third column contains the place and year of publication. If a single work consists of several volumes, they are all counted in the first column, so this numbering does not indicate the number of books, but the number of volumes. For example, the complete works of Voltaire, released in Amsterdam in 1738, are noted as 295–300 in the first column, while in the fourth column the number of volumes is specified – 6. Each thematic section of the catalogue has its own numbering.

The books were kept in twelve bookcases, but the sixth bookcase is not mentioned in the catalog. In total, there were 356 books in these bookcases, among

7		Catalogue		Voyage de M. de Sagan, Journal, M. de Sagan, L'Esprit de M. de Sagan.		L'Esprit de M. de Sagan.	
314.	15.	Dictionnaire historique	in 8°	Paris 1786.	2.	1.	356
316.		Curiosités de l'histoire naturelle de la France.		Paris 1737.	1.		
317.		Lettres de M. de Sagan à M. de Sagan.		Genève 1786.	1.	11.	
		in Duodecimo.				15.	
340.	17.	Amusement des Dames, ou Recueil d'histoires galantes.	in 8°	Paris 1763.	3.	17.	
350.	31.	Conte du Monde de M. de Sagan.	in 8°	Amsterdam 1739.	2.	18.	
352.		Fenelon, de l'Education des filles.	in 8°	—	1749.	1.	
356.	60.	Bibliotique de Jean de Sagan.		—	1746.	3.	
361.	70.	Essai de Montaigne.		London 1771.	10.		
371.	83.	Bibliotique anglaise, ou histoire littéraire de la Grande-Bretagne.	in 8°	Amsterdam 1717.	15.	25.	
390.		Lettres à Emilie sur la mythologie, par M. de Sagan.		Brunswick 1796.	1.	30.	
392.	300.	Mémoires secrets de la République des Lettres.		Paris 1743.	6.		
		L'Esprit in 8°				33.	
501.	2.	Dictionnaire comique, satyrique, critique, pour faciliter l'intelligence des livres.	in 8°	London 1752.	2.	40.	
510.	18.	Histoire amoureuse des Gaules.	in 8°	Paris 1720.	6.	41.	
						74.	
						88.	

Figure 2. Page 7 from Duchess Wilhelmine's catalog (State Digital Archive in Zielona Gora)

which 284 were in French (80% of the total). The number of volumes is 1248, thus there are about 3.5 times more volumes than book titles. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned volume numbering confirms that the books came from a larger library, as there are regular breaks in this numeration. For example, eight volumes are missing between Philibert-Joseph Le Roux's *Dictionnaire comique, satyrique, critique [...] pour faciliter l'intelligence des livres* (Comic, Satyric, Critical Dictionary [...] to Facilitate the Understanding of Books) and Roger de Rabutin's *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* (Romantic History of Gaul), which are listed in the "Arts and humanities, journals, dictionaries" section under the numbers 501–502 and 510–515 (Figure 2).

The title itself "Catalog of Various Books Extracted from the Library [...]" supports this hypothesis. However, the question remains: why were the other books removed from the young duchess's library? We can consider two different possibilities. Either these books were deleted from the catalog because they were no longer relevant, or maybe this separate collection was being created specifically with books which, given the young age of the duchess, were interesting and beneficial for her social life. The second possibility is more credible, noting that the catalog includes books

published in the last decades of the 18th century, descriptions pertaining to Silesia (the residence of Wilhelmine at that time), as well as the current reference literature. In total, the catalog contains eight sections with the following titles in German (Figure 3).

Topic titles in German (the original orthography has been preserved)	Translations of topic titles	Bookcase number
<i>Rechts Gelahrtheit, Stats, Arzeney und Landwirtschaft Wißenschaft</i>	Jurisprudence, political science, medicine and agriculture	I, X
<i>Philosophische Schriften</i>	Philosophical writings	II, XII
<i>Schöne Wißenschaften, Journale, Wörterbücher</i>	Arts and humanities, journals, dictionaries	III, XI
<i>Geschichte, Erd- und Lebens Beschreibungen, Reisen</i>	History, country descriptions and life stories, travels	IV, V, IX, X
<i>Gedichte</i>	Poems	VII
<i>Matematique, Astronomie, Baukunst, Kriegs Wissenssch.</i>	Mathematics, astronomy, architecture, military science	VIII
<i>Romane und Theater</i>	Novels and theater	IX
<i>Gottes Gelahrtheit</i>	Theology	X

Figure 3. Classification of Duchess Wilhelmine's library

This catalog is typical of the private libraries of that time, where diverse interests characteristic of the Enlightenment are often found (Zanders 2003: 142). Wilhelmine's library could be described as focused on education and knowledge, which was one of the main guidelines of the Enlightenment. Literature with religious content was hardly represented there: only four works are listed in the "Theology" section, three of which are devoted to the history of Christianity. Although one cannot draw any conclusions about the presence of Enlightenment characteristics in the small theological segment of Wilhelmine's library, it is worth noting that it fits with the trend highlighted by American historian John Greville Agard Pocock – the modernity of Enlightenment consists of the ability to transform theology into the

history of Christianity (Pocock 2008: 83–96). It is to be noted that Wilhelmine's choice of reading does not focus on recreation, and novels which were enjoying great popularity at the end of the 18th century are not much represented in her library.

One of the most famous French works of the 18th century and a precursor of romanticism literature, the epistolary novel *Lettres de deux amants, habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes* (Letters of Two Lovers, Living in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Wilhelmine's library is not placed with other novels, but in the "Arts and humanities, journals, dictionaries" section. The author's assertion in the preface to this work that "a young girl who dares to read even one page of this correspondence is lost" (Rousseau 1761: 5) – namely, risking the loss of her moral uprightness, – obviously did not discourage Wilhelmine de Sagan from reading it, as well as the novels *Le Libertin de qualité* (The Quality Libertine) by Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti Mirabeau (1749–1791) and *Zéphirine ou l'époux libertin* (Zéphirine or the Libertine Husband) by Charles-Georges-Thomas Garnier (1746–1795), which are also present in her library. The catalog also includes works that have stood the test of time and become literary and cultural classics, such as the comedies by the Ancient Roman author Terence (c.190 BC – c. 159 BC), *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (The Thousand and One Nights) stories in the French translation by Antoine Galland (1646–1715), the Renaissance monument *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (Gargantua and Pantagruel) by François Rabelais (c. 1494?–1553), and the short stories by his contemporary Margueritte de Navarre (1492–1549).

As regards English literature, the catalog contains novels by Henry Fielding (1704–1754) and Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) in French translation, as well as the works by the famous 17th century playwright John Dryden (1631–1700) and his successor William Congreve (1670–1729) in the English original.

Wilhelmine's father Peter Biron was a theater enthusiast and, as mentioned above, had built a theater stage in his castle at Nachod in order to enjoy performances at home, and the inventory of his possessions compiled after his death included a library of dramatic literature. In the library catalog of the Duchess of Sagan, the French theater classics Pierre Corneille (1606–1684) and Molière (1622–1673) rub shoulders with Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1674–1762). The latter had been moving away from the strict rules of classicism that advocated decency (*la bienséance*) and the aesthetic and moral conventions of the time, and showed on stage hatred and violence. The dramatic works written by Denis Diderot (1713–1784), the prominent personality of the Enlightenment and the father of bourgeois drama, appear in the catalog in their Berlin edition of 1763. A similar scene can be seen in the poetry section which includes works by 17th-century French and English authors, such as Jean LaFontaine (1621–1695), Paul Scarron (1610–1660), Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux

(1636–1711) and John Milton (1608–1674), as well as 18th-century authors Voltaire (1694–1778), James Thomson (1700–1748), and Alexander Pope (1688–1744).

The period of crisis in the European consciousness, as defined by Hazard, chronologically spans from 1680 to 1715. During this period there was a shift from an absolutist thought based on undoubted faith to a rationally founded and explained worldview that could be questioned. The immobility and isolation of the French classical tradition – which is perfectly characterized by the maxim of Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), the 17th century French moralist and Jansenist: “All human miseries come from one single thing: inability to remain at rest in a room” (Pascal 1887: 74) – was replaced by a new worldview which, by crossing and transcending borders, marked the beginning of modernity.

The most voluminous section of Wilhelmine’s library – “History, country descriptions and life stories, travels” – occupied four bookcases with the numbers 4, 5, 9 and 10. The majority of these books correspond to the topic of “history” which comes first in the title of the section. They mostly describe the history of European countries: France, England, the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland and others. One of the authors is François Eudes de Mézeray (1610–1683), whose works saw many reprints until the first half of the 19th century – for instance, *Abrégé chronologique de l’histoire de France* (Chronological Summary of the History of France) of 1755. There were also French translations of the works by David Hume (1711–1776), a famous representative of the Scottish Enlightenment, among which we can mention *History of England*, translated into French by Madame Belot and published in 1765. The historical accounts of distant lands such as India and Suriname functioned similarly to travel literature, as they provided a metaphorical crossing of borders not only to the past but also to an exotic place with a different scenery and culture. Going beyond borders and transcending the traditional space helps one to take another, more tolerant look at the world and also to consider different perspectives on various social questions – as it is done in the famous *Histoire des deux Indes* (History of Two Indies) by Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal (1713–1796), which criticizes colonialism and is a typical representative of the Enlightenment. A total of seven French and seven German titles in Wilhelmine’s catalog mention the words *voyages* and *Reise* (both meaning “travel” in French and German respectively).

The polysemy of the German word *Geschichte* (‘history; story’) itself goes beyond its traditional meaning which implies describing the past of a territory. The same term was also used to denote the life stories of eminent personalities, in this sense encompassing the concepts of evolution and passage through different phases – for instance, *Histoire de la Vie de Louis de Bourbon* (History of the Life of Louis de Bourbon) by Pierre Coste (1668–1747), the famous translator of John Locke (1632–1704) into French.

The life stories in Wilhelmine's library catalog exceed 20 books and describe politically important personalities of different eras and countries. For the sake of illustration, we will mention some of them: Cicero, Diodorus, Tamerlane, Louis XI, Henry IV and many others. It might be that Wilhelmine's aunt Elisa von der Recke's book *Nachricht von des berühmten Cagliostro Aufenthalt in Mitau im Jahre 1779 und dessen magischen Operationen* (Report on the Stay of the Infamous Cagliostro at Mitau in 1779 and on His Magical Operations; 1787) prompted her to add to her library another insight into the life of the fraudster – namely, *Mémoires authentiques pour servir à l'histoire du comte de Cagliostro* (Authentic Memoirs to Serve the History of the Count Cagliostro; 1785) by Jean-Pierre-Louis de Luchet (1740–1792).

As regards the histories of countries and geographical entities, they are fewer in number and mostly devoted to France, England, Portugal, etc. Among them we also find *Geschichte des Herzogthums Sagan* (History of the Duchy of Sagan; 1795) written by the Lutheran theologian and historian Johann Gottlob Worbs (1760–1833).

There are also seven books devoted to "histories" of revolutions in different times and countries – the Roman Republic, England, Spain, Portugal, Poland, the Netherlands, and France (including the uprising in Cévennes or the War of the Camisards). One can assume that they owe their presence in Wilhelmine's library to the recent revolutionary events in France. This context is also manifested in works which condemn the monarchy – such as *Les crimes des rois de France* (The Crimes of the Kings of France) by Louis-Charles de Lavicomterie (1746–1809) and *Les crimes des reines de France* (The Crimes of the Queens of France) by Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830). (The aforementioned work on the uprising in Cévennes, however, presents the royalist position.) By the way, the aforementioned newspaper of the Duchy of Courland reported on the availability of Lavicomterie's book in Paris bookstores in 1791 (Valke 2024: 331). All these publications dealing with history and the lives of notable figures (even though expressing diametrically opposite views) testify to Wilhelmine's interest in social and political processes, which continued throughout her life.

In the section "Jurisprudence, political science, medicine and agriculture", which was kept in the first and tenth bookcases, 12 book titles were listed. Most of the first bookcase was occupied by Johann Georg Krünitz's (1728–1796) famous *Oeconomische Encyclopädie* (Encyclopedia of Economics; 1773–1858) – or, more precisely, by the first 74 out of its 242 volumes. Other German editions include *Botanik für Frauenzimmer und Pflanzenliebhaber* (Botany for Women and Plant Lovers) in 4 volumes by August Batsch (1761–1802), published in Berlin in 1775 (most likely, this is an error, because the first edition of this work was published in 1795 in Weimar). This section of the library catalog also includes *Beytrag zur Naturgeschichte der Vögel Kurlands*

(A Contribution to the Natural History of the Birds of Courland), published in 1792 in Mitau and Leipzig by the respected professor, scholar and *litteratus* Johann Melchior Gottlieb Beseke (1746–1802).

In the section “Mathematics, astronomy, architecture, military science”, 20 book titles in French were recorded, among them 12 devoted to the art of war and the construction of fortifications. The chronological framework of their publication spans from 1692 to 1755, suggesting that military history and the corresponding terminology were also among Wilhelmine’s circle of interests – possibly motivated by her husband’s military career.

The catalog of books owned by the Duchess of Sagan contains the works by authors who are considered key figures in the Enlightenment movement and in the reception of its ideas. Most of them are listed in the sections “Philosophical writings” and “Arts and humanities, journals, dictionaries”. The German expression *Schöne Wissenschaften*, literally meaning “beautiful sciences” but approximately corresponding to “arts and humanities”, was very frequently used around the middle of the 18th century and up until the 1880s. It designated, as the adjective *schön* indicates, knowledge that was nice and pleasant to acquire, and implied good taste. However, in the late 18th century *Schöne Wissenschaften* were considered vague and superficial, and experienced a certain decline – until they were revalued by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) who reactivated their humanist and philological essence (Strube 1990: 181, 196). In Wilhelmine’s catalog, they are represented by works centered on education which later contributed to the emergence of child psychology: *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (Emile, or On Education; 1762) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Traité de l'éducation des filles* (Treatise on the Education of Girls; 1749) by François Fenelon, and *On the Education of Children* (1760) by John Locke. Meanwhile, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds) by Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, written in the form of a dialogue with a marquise, presents discoveries in astronomy, alternating them with metaphysical musings and gallantries. This work, based on observation and rationalism, is “a preface, coquettish and profound, to a new interpretation of the universe” (Hazard, 214). A similar technique of popularizing scientific ideas is used in *Le Newtonianisme pour les dames* (Newtonism for Ladies; 1741) by Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764), describing discoveries about light, color, and gravity.

Before the advent of the Enlightenment, deconstruction of traditional ideas was carried out by means of disbelief and doubt. Thus Pierre Bayle, with his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary), questions the veracity of the traditional principles of morality and religion, while Charles de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703) indulges in libertine skepticism. Another libertine and epicurean, William Temple (1628–1699), found earthly happiness in his gardens.

If we stick to Margaret Jacob's classification – according to which there was the moderate or Newtonian Enlightenment, which presupposed the presence of a providence in the world and supported the usefulness of monarchy ("With Newton's agreement, his science fulfilled a precise ideological function [...] to strengthen the newly restored monarchy and the established Church as pillars of order and stability" (Jacob 1981: 91)) and the Radical Enlightenment, which advocated a morality based on reason and on respect towards others, their freedom and rights –, the library owned by the Duchess of Sagan can be considered to be representing the moderate Enlightenment.

Conclusion The fact that the library belonging to Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan contains books expressing ideas and values of Enlightenment proves her personal interest in them and thus her desire to be a part of the European intellectual space.

It must be admitted that the publication years of these books reveal a late reception of these ideas. Books that first came out at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries are listed in Wilhelmine's catalog with later years of publication. (Of course, this refers to the reception by the previous owners of the library – Wilhelmine's ancestors.) However, the very fact that these books had repeated editions during the 18th century indicates their relevance to the French and Francophone reader of that period. As for the catalog analyzed in this paper, it contains several authors and works that are known still today and who, in their time, marked an important turning point in the history of ideas. These timeless publications are located in those sections of Wilhelmine's catalog that are devoted to philosophy, fiction and reference literature.

The most significant section, titled "History, country descriptions and life stories, travels", shows the owner's aspiration to grasp the historical processes – which is a characteristic feature of the Enlightenment and has been described as the historicization of knowledge. The Enlightenment was based on encyclopedic and critical knowledge, defining the boundaries of concepts and thus allowing to arrange knowledge on a chronological axis, which supports the idea of progress and development. The inclusion of geographical spatiality makes it possible to demonstrate the diversity and circulation of knowledge.

The smallest section in the analyzed catalog is that of "Theology", which is reduced to the history of Christianity. The two sections which each include a wide diversity of fields – "Jurisprudence, political science, medicine and agriculture" and "Mathematics, astronomy, architecture, military science" – do not have many books. The first contains only 12 titles, among which the most important work is Krünitz's

Encyclopedia of Economics in German, of which 74 volumes are noted. The last section, entirely in French and mainly consisting of works dealing with fortifications and other aspects of the military art, seems to be inspired by the military career of the library owner's husband.

The predominance of French-language books in the library of Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan, whose first language was German, shows a transcendence of the national cultural space and a universalist tendency. We can agree with the eminent French historian Jean-Marie Goulemot that the so-called universality of the French language came at the right time when the Babelic disarray was incapable of distributing knowledge across Europe (Goulemot 1996: 296).

Wilhelmine's choice in favor of books in French was also determined by reasons linked to personal experience: her resentment at the refusal by the Prussian royal family to accept her planned marriage with Friedrich Ludwig Christian of Prussia. This fact caused Wilhelmine's aversion to the Prussian cultural space and led to the search for a replacement. Her marriage with the French aristocrat Jules Armand Louis de Rohan-Guéméné, as well as his views on the great value of the art of *causerie*, contributed to the enrichment of her linguistic space.

The fact that the library of Duchess Wilhelmine of Sagan was dominated by the ideas of Enlightenment, in any case, proves her desire to be informed and to be a part of the elite of international society.

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