

## **Astronomy Library in a Small Country - a Rare Species**

Eva Isaksson

*University of Helsinki Observatory Library, PO Box 14, 00014*  
*University of Helsinki, Finland*  
*Eva.Isaksson@Helsinki.fi*

**Abstract.** Finnish astronomy libraries are small and few, but one of them is representative of hundreds of years worth of astronomy literature.

### **1. In the Beginning: The Fire that did not Burn Astronomy Literature**

Astronomy was first practised in Finland in the Academy of Turku (founded in 1640). A great fire of 1827 destroyed most of the Academy of Turku library. However, astronomy books had been stored in the newly built observatory (1817) located on the Vartiovuorenmäki hill, and were not destroyed in the fire.



Figure 1. Helsinki University Observatory, built in 1834, designed by C. L. Engel (Photo: Suomen Ilmakuva)

After the great fire in Turku, the university was moved to the new capital, Helsinki, and the library collections were transferred to the new observatory, which was opened in 1834. The oldest astronomical books are thus located in Helsinki and date back to the 1600s-1700s.



Figure 2. Oldest collections at the Helsinki observatory museum  
(Photo: Jere Kahanpää)

## 2. Early 1900s: International Sharing of Resources

After Helsinki observatory joined the Carte du Ciel effort in the late 1800s, its international ties were strengthened. As a result, there are publications series from tens of other observatories and institutes that have been received on an exchange basis during several decades, particularly in the first half of the 20th century.



Figure 3. Astronomers and Computers Processing Carte du Ciel data, Early 1900s

Until the end of 1960s, a major part of the habitable space in the observatory building was used as the residence for the professor of astronomy. After the building was retrieved for institutional use, the library gained more room. During that period, the once separate Astrophysics Laboratory moved to the Observatory hill, thus enlarging the printed collections.



Figure 4. First half of 20th century: The free exchange of observatory publications can be seen from the 176 shelf metres of those stored at the library. (Photo: Jere Kahanpää)



Figure 5. Latter half of 20th century: books and periodicals dominate. A View of the main library room. (Photo: Jere Kahanpää)

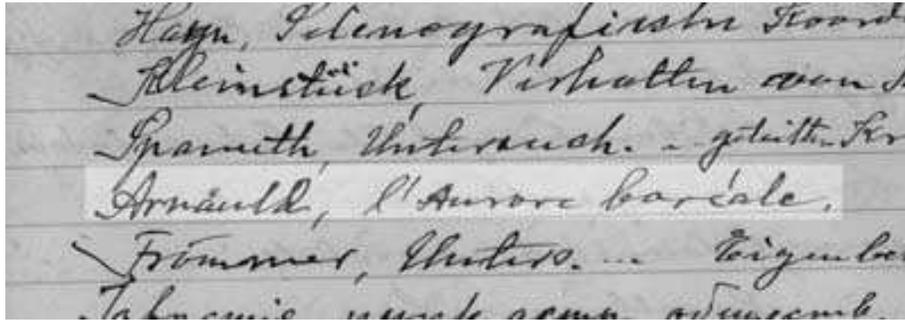


Figure 6. Handwritten note in the librarian's notebook, early 1910s.

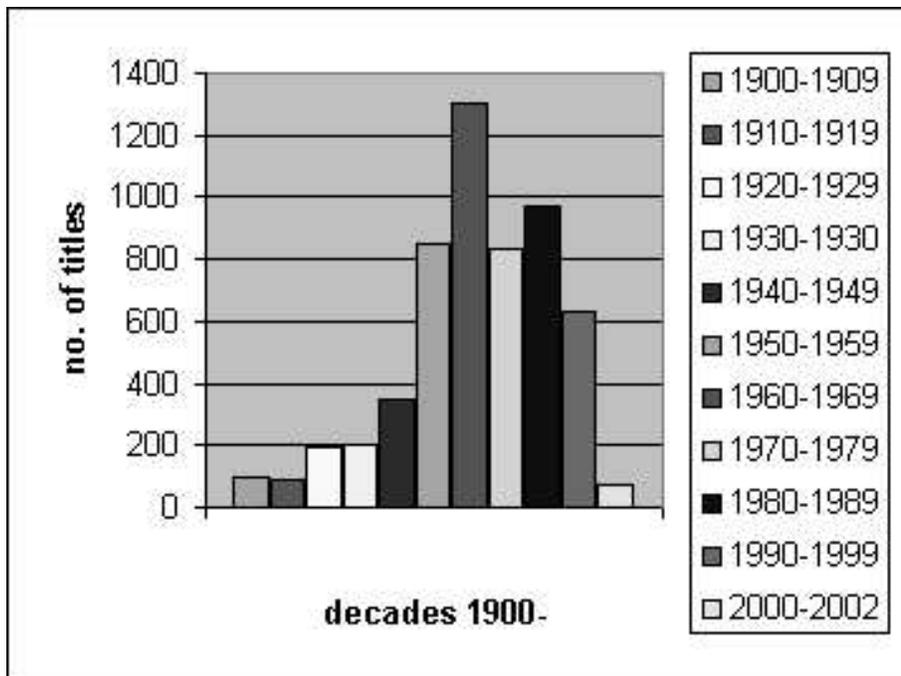


Figure 7. A large part of the books at the library were printed in the 1960s

### 3. Late 1900s: Era of Accumulation of Books and Periodicals

In the latter half of the 20th century, the exchange was replaced by acquisition of astronomy books and periodicals. These gradually used all of the available shelf space, and an increasing amount of financial resources.

Like so many libraries at astronomical observatories elsewhere, the Helsinki observatory library grew into a relatively self-contained unit, its services being mainly directed to assisting astronomers. The holdings of the observatory library today are representative of several centuries of resources that have been available

for Finnish astronomers. It is a living monument of both what has been present, and also for what has been lacking.

#### 4. Future Challenges

In the early 2000s, the trend is clear: less books, less printed periodical titles; instead, a strong emphasis on electronic resources. The latter are usually acquired for campuswide use, which implies ever closer cooperation with other libraries at the University of Helsinki.

Until recently, the Helsinki university library services was comprised of a patchwork of individual libraries, usually located at the respective institutes, with a few separate central libraries. These small libraries are now disappearing and merging with the larger campus libraries.

The observatory library will remain separate for the time being; however, with increasing emphasis on shared electronic resources and larger campus units, will astronomers at Helsinki be able to keep their unique library?

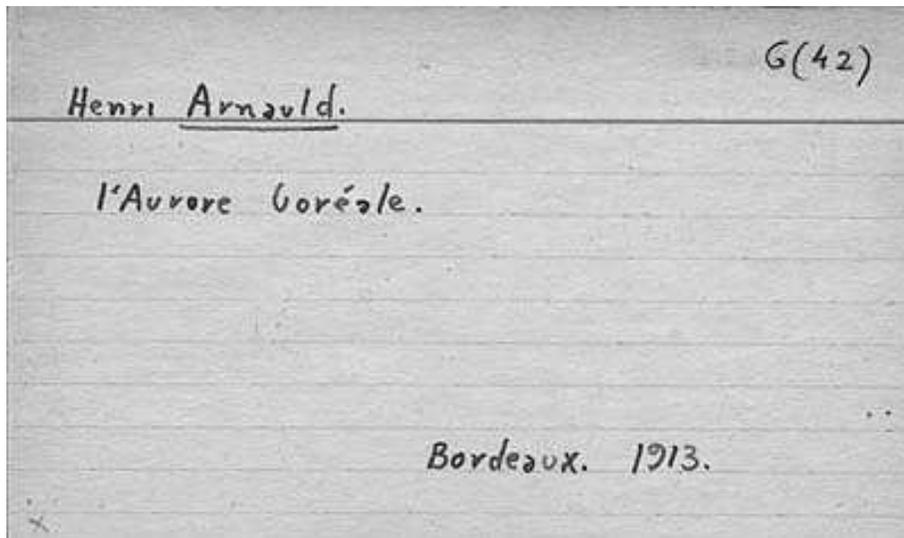


Figure 8. Card, mid-1900s

#### 5. Astronomy libraries and literature in Finland

##### **Helsinki Observatory library:**

Founded in Turku in 1817, relocated in Helsinki 1834  
ca. 800 shelf metres, 6 000 books

##### **Tuorla Observatory library:**

ca. 350 shelf metres, 2 700 books



HELKA

data-bases search headings titles history patron login request help exit

---

Database Name: HELKA - Helsingin yliopiston kirjastot  
 Search Request: Author Browse = Arnauld, Henri  
 Search Results: Displaying 1 of 1 entries

---

Holdings	Whole record	MARC view
000	00350 am 220015773 450	
001	75901	
005	20010523150007.0	
008	890613s1913 fr fre	
035	__  9 kr009037	
035	__  9 0076-47760	
041	0_  a fre	
100	0_  a Arnauld, Henri	
245	12  a L'aurore boréale  d Henri Arnauld	
260	__  a Bordeaux  c 1913	
300	__  c 8:o	
998	__  a H Hmtäh	

Figure 9. HELKA database entry, 2002, <http://helka.csc.fi>

#### Other libraries:

Elsewhere in Finland, astronomy collections are a part of larger academic libraries, for example the Oulu University library and the Helsinki University of Technology library. Also worth mentioning is the Library of the URSA astronomical association.