

Everything is well in the Kingdom – may about a hundred towns speak for themselves! Poetical Images of the Time of Grandeur in the Kingdom of Sweden at the End of the 17th Century

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By now we have poetry in Latin from a period of more than 2200 years, beginning with Ennius and Plautus and continuing still, thanks to the Neo-Latin poets of today.

Olof Hermelin, one of the most talented Latin poets in Sweden during its time of grandeur, composed in 1684-85 his collection of poems called *Hecatompolis Suionum* ('Some Hundred Towns of the Swedes'). It is a description, in a poetical form, of 102 towns in the Kingdom of Sweden. Ninety-one of these elegies, 1082 verses in all, have been preserved till today.

The literary genre of urban elegies in Latin dates back to the 4th century, beginning with Ausonius' *Ordo nobilium urbium* ('A Set of Noble Cities'). In the early 16th century, at the latest, this genre was revived and brought into full flourish by Renaissance humanists, such as *Julius Caesar Scaliger* among others. *Scaliger's Urbes* ('Cities') can be regarded as a direct model for Hermelin's *Hecatompolis*.

Many of Hermelin's town elegies praise the physical and metaphysical environment of a town, as well as its immediate surroundings. Often the first few verses seem to have a pessimistic tone, but towards the end the poems rise into a victory of optimism, expressing strong belief in the economic resources of many areas in the Kingdom of Sweden. There are, though, some particularly negative tones, concerning the past and the invasions of the neighbouring nations.

Eleven of the towns described in the poems are situated within the borders of today's Finland, no less than 77 in modern Sweden and three in the Russia of today.