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AARNE MICHAËL TALLGREN AND EURASIA SEPTENTRIONALIS ANTIQUA

Abstract

A brief review of Aarne Michaël Tallgren's (1885–1945) involvement with the journal *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua* and the background of this work is presented. Tallgren's interest in North Eurasian prehistory is seen from the perspective of an earlier research tradition in Finnish archaeology which strove to define the ethnic origin of the Finns through the prehistoric material of North Eurasia. The journal expressed not only Tallgren's personal scientific interests but also a concern for free enquiry and the exchange of ideas in the darkening intellectual climate of pre-war Europe.

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Aarni Erä-Esko, the internationally esteemed Finnish antiquarian, has aptly remarked (Erä-Esko 1973,53) that much of the international reputation of Finnish archaeology, especially in Central and Eastern Europe is due to the achievements of A.M. Tallgren and his extensive work in founding and publishing the journal *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*. The year 1985 marks the centennial of Tallgren's birth and the fortieth anniversary of his death.¹ By the mid-1980s it may be felt that new claims should finally be made to this fame, but whatever form or orientation new achievements will take, they will ultimately be connected to the legacy of this central figure in Finnish archaeology.

This paper briefly examines some aspects of the background and nature of Tallgren's involvement with *Eurasia*, a main part of his life's work and without doubt the cornerstone of his international repute. It is not possible to present any detailed analysis of the numerous themes and problems discussed on the pages of the journal and many of them have inevitably become outdated and obsolete in the course of time. Never-

theless, *Eurasia* is still a major source of information on East European and North Asian prehistory and a review, however brief, of its background and historical context may be of interest.

Twelve volumes of *Eurasia* were published from 1926 to 1936 under the aegis of the Finnish Archaeological Society (from 1985 the Finnish Antiquarian Society). A final supplementary volume with a biography of Tallgren and his bibliography as well as a bibliography of all previous issues of *Eurasia* was published in 1954. The series was originally intended as a joint forum for archaeologists and ethnographers specializing in the study of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. It was at first co-edited by Tallgren and U.T. Sirelius, professor of ethnography at the University of Helsinki, the latter being followed by Ilmari Manninen. After Manninen's death in 1935, Tallgren remained the sole editor. Despite its original purpose the journal was primarily devoted to archaeological subjects from its very beginning. Tallgren himself supplied some 25 research papers, two detailed bibliographies of Russian and East European archaeological literature in addition to numerous essays, commentaries, surveys and reviews. He carried out the editorial work alongside his duties as professor of archaeology at the University of Helsinki. In its later stages the journal

¹) For biographical details see Kivikoski (1945a; 1945b; 1946; 1954; 1960), Nordman (1946; 1968, 60–66). See also Anonymous (1946a; 1946b), Äyräpää (1945; 1946; 1947), Vilkuna (1960), Selirand & Tönissón (1974), Selirand (1985) and Pöllä (1985).



Fig. 1. Johan Reinhold Aspelin (1842–1915) Tallgren's mentor and the founder of scientific archaeology in Finland. Photo: courtesy of the National Board of Antiquities.

was run by Tallgren alone and, as observed by Ella Kivikoski (1954, 107) it was in many ways "his", reflecting and disseminating his own opinions, views and ideals. It brought Tallgren into contact with the leading European scholars of his field and gained him recognition as an authority in his own right, especially with respect to his phenomenally extensive grasp of the immense material of his area of study. Tallgren was awarded honorary membership in some 32 learned societies in Europe and Scandinavia and in 1940 he received the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

Eurasian prehistory was not only a personal scholarly interest for Tallgren. It was part of an earlier tradition in the study of the humanities in Finland. This applied especially to the disciplines concerned with the recovery, description and explanation of what were seen to be the elements of national culture. A leading intellectual movement in 19th century Finland with its relatively young academic traditions was the founding of the so-called "national sciences" (*Fi. kansalliset tieteet*) as part of an overall process of national revival. The "national sciences"

consisted of Finno-Ugrian philology, folk poetry studies, ethnography, history and by the last decades of the century, archaeology. These disciplines found common ground in an implicit paradigm which saw the culture of the present-day Finns and that of their linguistic relatives in the broad perspective of an assumed Finno-Ugrian past. Philology had outlined a model of the development of the Finno-Ugrian languages from an original proto-Finnic tongue and this process was readily seen in ethnic terms as implying the actual origin and dispersal of the peoples now speaking these languages. The origins of this idea go back to the writings of M.A. Castrén in the 1840s and the much earlier theories of the 18th century scholar Henrik Gabriel Porthan (see Nordman 1968; Kokkonen 1977, 1985; Meinander 1977).

For the founders of Finnish archaeology, led by Johan Reinhold Aspelin, the above model was obviously much more than a vague theoretical hypothesis. It offered a definite goal and programme for research. Consequently, archaeology could not limit itself to the territory of Finland alone. It had to take into its scope the vast areas settled by the Finno-Ugrian peoples, viz. most of Northern Eurasia. We may also sense a certain political element in this orientation: a fledgling field of study in a small country on the outer fringe of Europe could now lay claim to geographical areas and materials so vast and rich as to establish for itself a recognized position.

Finland's political status as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire permitted Finns to travel and study throughout Russia. Continued access to this area and regular contacts with learned circles in Russia lead gradually to the formation of a definite tradition of North Eurasian studies in various fields. This trend was paralleled by the career opportunities available to Finns in Imperial Russia in many non-scientific fields. In the study of national culture eastern orientations remained long after the original models and hypotheses had been rejected and ties with Russia had been severed.

Thus, Finnish archaeology was concerned not only with its own territory but also with the past material culture of the areas of Finno-Ugrian settlement and especially with how this record could be accommodated to the philological-ethnic model of national origin. These aims were explicitly pursued in the work of J.R. Aspelin as witnessed by his doctoral dissertation (Aspelin 1875) and his compendium of "Finno-Ugrian" archaeology, *Muinaisjännöksiä Suomen Suvun*

Asumusaloilta – Antiquités du Nord Finno-Ougrien. This work was published in five volumes from 1877 to 1884 and presented over 2100 pre-historic artefacts grouped according to assumed chronology and ethnic provenance. Although Aspelin was cautious in his ethnic conclusions, the preconceived philological model and especially Castrén's theories on the original home of the Finnic tribes are implicit (Aspelin 1877–1884; Castrén 1852–1858, V:40–62, 126–143).

A main theme of Aspelin's studies which was to be of importance for Tallgren was the problem of the so-called Ural-Altai Bronze Age. Aspelin saw the original ethnic community of the Finno-Ugrians in the Bronze Age culture of the Altai, in agreement with Castrén (1852–1858, V). Aspelin linked the Altai Bronze Age with the later Bronze Age phenomena of the Urals to form a combined Ural-Altai Bronze Age culture, representing the assumed original culture of the Finno-Ugrians and their westward dispersal. Around the turn of the century philologists had already begun to reject the idea of a Central-Asian *Urheimat* of the Finno-Ugrians and although archaeology had begun to concentrate more on Finland and its immediately neighbouring areas, no final assessment of Aspelin's theories was made. When A.M. Tallgren began his studies in archaeology in 1903 only 19 years had passed since the publication of the last volume of *Antiquités* and Aspelin's theories, though no longer the sole programme of research, were still an integral part of the archaeological paradigm of the time.

Tallgren began his studies in archaeology under the supervision of Hjalmar Appelgren-Kivalo, at the time Curator of the Finnish Archaeological Commission. There was no official academic teaching in the subject. Tallgren graduated as *can. phil.* in 1905 and continued his studies in Stockholm and Uppsala under Montelius and Almgren. His interest in the problems outlined by Aspelin regarding the Ural-Altai Bronze Age is witnessed for the first time in an article in the journal *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* in 1908. Here he pointed out that Aspelin's combined Ural-Altai Bronze Age lacked sufficient proof and the two geographical entities had to be kept separate in future research. Also, the ethnic interpretation had to be reconsidered (Tallgren 1908, 148–165).

In his memorial address to the Finnish Archaeological Society after Tallgren's death, Aarne Äyräpää pointed out that already this

very early paper bore the mark of the future scholar. First and foremost, it outlined a definite problem, assessed the available evidence and the accepted theories and outlined the requirements and course of future studies (Äyräpää 1945). The article contained the elements of Tallgren's future conclusions on the East Russian Bronze Age, argued at length and in detail in his 1911 thesis.

In 1908 Tallgren undertook his first journey to Russia. Before the October Revolution he visited the country in 1909, 1915 and 1917. Later journeys were made in 1924, 1925, 1928 and 1935. The first journeys were for the express purpose of gathering materials on the East Russian Bronze Age and led to his thesis (Tallgren 1911). The early journeys were supported by grants from the Finnish Archaeological Society and Aspelin's personal support was evident in correspondence. A letter from Aspelin to Tallgren, then residing in Kazan, dated November 16, 1908, contains detailed suggestions on collections and scholarly contacts as well as philological details of interest for Bronze Age problems. Aspelin's open encouragement for his younger successor was obviously instrumental in deciding the course of the latter's scientific career. Writing to Tallgren in 1912 in connection with a planned journey to Russia, Aspelin said that he eagerly awaited "the roof-timbers of your building", a reference to the problems and perspectives broached in Tallgren's 1911 thesis and also to the criticism it had received for insufficient accuracy of detail and material documentation (see Ailio 1912; Nordman 1968, 67).

Plans for a publication along the lines of *Eurasia* can be assumed to have begun to form after Tallgren's 1915 journey to Russia. By this time Tallgren had gained extensive knowledge of Russian archaeological collections and had obtained wide contacts with Russian scholars in his field. In July 1916 Tallgren and U.T. Sirelius presented a written proposal to the Board of the Finnish Archaeological Society asking that it take steps to secure a yearly grant of 5000 marks from the Finnish Senate for the founding and continued publishing of a journal devoted to the archaeology and ethnography of Eastern Russia and Western Siberia. The proposed name was *Eurasia Septentrionalis* and the original proposal went as far as to list potential and willing contributors to the first volume. These included most of the leading Finnish archaeologists and ethnographers of the day as well as several Russian scholars. It was planned that the journal would be evenly divided between archaeological



Fig. 2. Tallgren in Siberia during his 1915 Russian journey. Photo: courtesy of the National Board of Antiquities.

and ethnographic contributions. With reference to the research tradition referred to above, the wording of the proposal is of interest. It expressed the wish that the series would make Finland an international centre for *Uralic* archaeology and ethnography. The proposal was dated July 4, 1916 and was discussed and approved by the Board of the Society in October the same year. However, at this stage no further steps were taken and all possible plans were interrupted by the Russian Revolution the following year.

Although the original plans did not come to fruition the idea was not entirely forgotten. In 1920 Tallgren accepted the Chair of Archaeology in Tartu, Estonia, which naturally led him on to new challenges (see Selirand & Tõnisson 1974; Selirand 1985). Tallgren was instrumental in organizing archaeological research in newly-independent Estonia and his studies revised previously-held concepts of Estonian and East Baltic prehistory (Tallgren 1922–1925). Writing to Aarne Äyräpää in 1921 in a somewhat depressed mood, Tallgren mentions briefly his earlier plans for *Eurasia*, which at that time were for him "a dead idea". However, the original proposal was taken up again in March 1924 when the Finnish

Archaeological Society appealed to the Finnish Ministry of Education for a yearly grant of over 50,000 marks to support the publishing of an archaeological and ethnographic journal for *Ural-Altai* studies. The 1916 decision is referred to in this context and the proposal is presented in much the same vein as eight years earlier. Here again, the aim is to make Finland a leading country in this field of study and to promote the status of Helsinki as an international centre in this respect. Among other grounds for the proposal the Society referred to economic crisis elsewhere in Europe making a publication of this kind economically unfeasible. The proposed name was *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*. It is interesting to note that the sphere of interest is defined as Ural-Altai archaeology and ethnography – in accordance with the earlier terminology of Aspelin.

Tallgren set about to obtain articles and materials from Russian colleagues along with canvassing interest and support for the journal among other foreign scholars. In a letter to Tallgren on this subject in September 1925, V. Gordon Childe also expressed his wish "that the Bolsheviks will adopt your suggestion."

In 1925 a yearly grant of 35,000 marks was finally obtained to cover publishing costs. From its very beginning the journal seems to have been an economic liability. Costs regularly exceeded available funds and further financial support had to be obtained from the Archaeological Society, State lottery proceeds and private donations. On the other hand, the printing work was of extremely high quality comparing favourably with modern publications in this respect. The editorial work was carried out voluntarily and the only times Tallgren asked the Archaeological Society for remuneration were when the publishing of an issue of *Eurasia* had required him to resort to his own savings.

Despite economic difficulties the series was launched. The first volume, numbered II, contained Tallgren's extensive "La Pontide pré-scythique après l'introduction des métaux". The following number (volume I) clearly displayed the intended international spirit with a range of contributions from Finnish, Baltic and Soviet scholars. In later numbers contributors included Scandinavians, Germans, Poles, Rumanians, Englishmen and several other nationalities. The first numbers of the series contained mainly presentations of new materials in the form of shorter articles. Broader theoretical issues and questions of synthesis were mainly discussed by Tallgren.

The years involved with *Eurasia* have been described as the peak period of Tallgren's career (Kivikoski 1954, 107; Äyräpää 1945). His main works were published in the journal and they witness the fulfilment of many of his original plans in Bronze Age research. In the 1920s Tallgren became interested in the prehistory of the Caucasus but this promising area of research was unfortunately closed to him through his disputes with the scientific authorities of Soviet Russia. In 1928 Tallgren published an open letter to the Russian scientific authorities in one of Finland's leading dailies protesting the treatment of certain scientists in the post-Revolutionary upheavals. Tallgren was especially concerned over the banishing of the academician Zhebelev from his post (Tallgren 1928). The dispute made it impossible for him to visit the Soviet Union until 1935 and he had to abandon many of his previous interests.

Apart from purely scientific contributions *Eurasia* served also as a forum for discussion and polemic. This side of the journal was naturally dominated by Tallgren's role of editor. It is in his numerous essays, review and comments that later readers can form some idea of his per-



Fig. 3. A.M. Tallgren shortly before his death. Photo: courtesy of the National Board of Antiquities.

sonal convictions and how these were reflected in his views regarding science in general. Tallgren has often been seen as the historian of culture concerned with broad issues of synthesis and explanation (cf. Nordman 1968, 60–66). He did not have the patience or love of detail of the typologist or the meticulous museum worker and was, indeed, frustrated over the more tedious details of museum work (e.g. letter to Aarne Äyräpää, August 25, 1923). His main interests in scientific discussion were accordingly the defining of guiding concepts and the overall tasks of present and future study.

To this orientation we must add Tallgren's personal liberal views and his strong requirements for intellectual honesty. As a young man he contributed regularly to the radical paper *Päivä* and Äyräpää mentions that at some stage Tallgren was even sympathetic to socialism (Äyräpää 1945). During the First World War he was a rare advocate of a pro-Entente position in Finland. Later, he spoke out strongly in favour of a liberal position in the language strifes of the 1930s concerning the relative positions of Finnish and Swedish in Finnish academic and public life. These liberal views ran alongside a concern

for free enquiry and discussion in scientific matters.

In a review of Russian archaeological literature published in volume VII of *Eurasia* Tallgren strongly criticized the tendential use of Marxist doctrine in forming a preconceived image of prehistory to which the archaeological materials could then be accommodated. He called for the rejection of ideological programmes in research in quite strong terms (Tallgren 1932, 200–202). Despite his strong rejection of the ideological tone of Soviet archaeology and his previous criticism of scientific administration in the country, Tallgren took distance from the nationalistic anti-Russian fervour that was widespread in Finland in the 1930s (see Vilkuna 1960, 34–35). He even stated that he had followed with some interest the current social experiments launched in that country and that he was quite aware that our West European world order was in no way an ideal (Tallgren 1932, 202).

These views on doctrinaire archaeology were reiterated in an article by Tallgren in volume X of *Eurasia* in 1936 (Tallgren 1936a). Here he presented a comprehensive survey of the current state of archaeological research in the Soviet union mainly based on his 1935 journey. Also in this connection he called attention to the fates of archaeologists who had been purged in the early years of the Stalin era. The review of Soviet archaeology also provides a glimpse of the darker and more depressive side of Tallgren's nature. In more or less categorical terms he stated that he would no longer continue his East European studies addressing a poignant salute to future workers in this field (Tallgren 1936a, 152).

Tallgren's most consistent statement of his own position and in some respects his testament to future generations was his article "Sur la méthode de l'archéologie préhistorique" (Tallgren 1936b). The article, based on an earlier version in Finnish (Tallgren 1934), touched off something of a dispute between Tallgren and the German readership of the series. Translated later into English (Tallgren 1937) and other languages (e.g. Tallgren 1941), stressed a strong disappointment with the prevailing formalistic typological method of archaeology and its inadequacy to account for the underlying historical and cultural phenomena in any but the most stereotypic terms. Tallgren underlined the need for prehistoric studies that would concentrate on elucidating the cultural-historical, social, and intellectual phenomena of the past in all their variety. The English version came to be quoted

many years later by the first advocates of the so-called New Archaeology (see e.g. Binford 1972, 79). In keeping with his previously stated anti-ideological position Tallgren also warned against making archaeology the servant of political ideology and sacrificing its independent and neutral nature. To his earlier critique of Marxist archaeology he added his expression of distaste for the course archaeology had begun to take in Nazi Germany.

As expected, the article caused a stir among German colleagues. In the following number of *Eurasia* Tallgren modified some of his comments though not actually retracting any of them. A private reaction to Tallgren's views was expressed by Joachim Werner in a letter to Tallgren dated August 9th, 1936. Commenting first upon Tallgren's review of Soviet archaeology and urging him not to give up his East European work, Werner went on to voice his regret at Tallgren's allegations that German archaeology was in the service of ideology. He felt that these accusations were aimed at all German archaeologists regardless of ideological persuasion. In view of Tallgren's position, Werner felt that he could no longer contribute to the series because in doing so he would open himself to the attacks of his colleagues. The letter ends with a request that Tallgren take back his generalizing attack on German archaeology.

A further reply to Tallgren's method article was published in the last volume of *Eurasia* (von Richthofen 1938, 242–246). Von Richthofen, an East Prussian archaeologist, strongly rejected Tallgren's comparison of German and Soviet archaeology as ideologically committed, supporting his argument with statistics on quotations from Marx and Lenin on the one hand and Hitler on the other, in the archaeological literature of these respective countries. Quoting Alfred Rosenberg, von Richthofen emphasized that current German archaeology was in no way bound to ideology and that the German regime expressly called for the freedom and critical nature of scientific enquiry. There was no reply to von Richthofen's vehement defence of German archaeology other than a somewhat laconic preface by Tallgren where he referred the reader of von Richthofen's article to an article by V. Gordon Childe (1937) where a definite distance is taken from the German school of archaeological research.

The publication of *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua* came to an end in 1938. The economy of the journal posed problems and Tallgren could no longer carry out the editorial work on

his own. *Eurasia* was a period of intensive activity for Tallgren but it obviously took its toll in undermining his health and sapping his energy (see Äyräpää 1945).

For the present-day reader the series is an intriguing collection of published materials, often inevitably outdated conclusions and a wide range of essays, surveys and reviews expressing

the strong convictions of its central figure. It can be seen as a monument to a single person but also as an image of an archaeology that is paradoxically close to us but also remote, a product of a time when single specialists could lay claim to whole areas of knowledge and where much of the original idealism and innocence of the study of prehistory still remained.

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