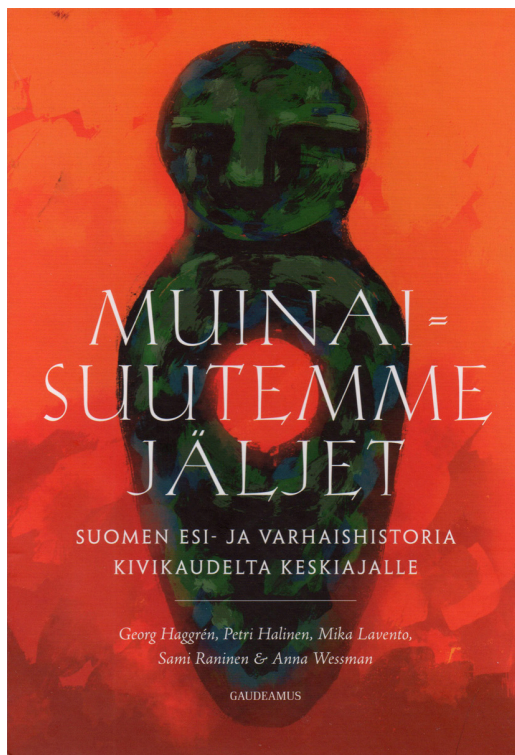


Georg Haggrén, Petri Halinen, Mika Lavento, Sami Raninen & Anna Wessman: *Muinaisuutemme jäljet: Suomen esi- ja varhaishistoria kivikaudelta keskiajalle*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki 2015. ISBN 978-952-495-363-4. 619 pp.

Since the first work on general prehistory of Finland by J.R. Aspelin (1885), the book *Muinaisuutemme jäljet* is approximately the tenth volume on the topic. Within the past 30-odd years, two general presentations of the Finnish archaeological past have been published (Edgren et al. 1984; Edgren 1992). Compared with the previous ones concentrating on prehistory only, the new book covers the whole period from the first postglacial settlement up to the 16th century AD, i.e. the period without comprehensive written records and widely explored by contemporary archaeologists.

The book consists of four main sections: Stone Age (8850–1900/1700 BC; PhD Petri Halinen, 163 pp.), Bronze Age/Early Metal Period (1900/1800 BC – AD 300; Prof Mika Lavento, 87 pp.), Iron Age (500 BC – AD 1200/1300; MA Sami Raninen & PhD Anna Wessman, 150 pp.), and medieval/early modern period (AD 1150/1200 – c 1600; PhD Georg Haggrén, 167 pp.). The authors have their background in the Universities of Helsinki (Haggrén, Halinen, Lavento, Wessman) and Turku (Raninen).

The table of contents is breathtaking: the six pages with three levels of headings printed in small font are precise but somewhat difficult to follow, and do not give a clear idea of book's structure. The layout is not as well-thought-out as one could wish for. Body text, information boxes and illustrations are not always combined in an ideal way, and the empty spaces left on several pages do not express an ambition for polished appearance. The illustrations are numerous, even if of varying quality. More importantly, the text should have been subjected to a much more intense editing process: there is a disturbing amount of repetition and variation in the narration and expressions, which should have been corrected and unified. This lack of



editing and proofreading is most obvious in the Stone Age section. Also, the crosschecking of citations has not been careful enough – all cited references are not included in the bibliography.

In the preface, it is maintained that the neighbouring areas on the other side of the present-day Finno-Russian border are included in the book, as they are an integral part of particular prehistoric phenomena observed in Finland. However, this approach is applied highly selectively and only the most well-established examples are included and illustrated. Mostly, the phenomena are discussed largely detached from their overall spatio-temporal contexts and presented as if their focal point was in the current Finnish territory only.

The first section, Stone Age, is divided in two parts, covering the Mesolithic (8850–5200 BC) and Neolithic (5200–1900/1700 BC) periods respectively. These parts are further divided thematically, although the subchapters include

very heterogeneous and overlapping material, which do not correspond with the headings. In general, the interpretative approach used in the Stone Age section allocates people and (material) culture merely a passive role. It promotes the view of climate change and the related environmental alterations as the main drivers of cultural change. The external impulses and stimuli, mediated by particular migrations, are seen as the sole exceptions to this rule. In this respect, the section continues to employ the interpretative frame traditionally used in Finnish Stone Age archaeology.

The part about Mesolithic is more versatile than the previous general presentations on the topic: it outlines the advances and results of recent research, which during the last couple of decades has significantly changed our understanding of this period. One significant element in this development has been the progress in scientific dating methods, especially the introduction of AMS dating of small samples. This has affected not just the Mesolithic chronology, but also other temporal frames of prehistory.

The new or updated ¹⁴C-based chronology obtained for Neolithic pottery types is also employed, and the periodization of the Neolithic used in the book differs from the conventional one in placing the Middle–Late Neolithic boundary to 3200 BC rather than 2300 BC. The underlying idea is obviously – and reasonably – to define the transition according to the appearance of the Corded Ware culture in Finland, but for some reason the author has applied the old, erroneous date given for the beginning of this cultural phase instead of the currently established date of 2800 BC (see Mökkönen 2011; Nordqvist & Mökkönen 2016).

The Stone Age section includes a fair number of arguments and generalizations, which cannot be seen as being based on any actual research. The use of research literature is selective and essential works are missing from the bibliography, in addition to which references related to Finland's neighbouring regions, especially north-western Russia and the Baltic States, are practically absent. Even if archaeological reasoning always includes some room for speculation, interpretations should be based on concrete research (which cannot be said, e.g., about the ideas of exploitation or 'cultivation' of water

chestnut during the Stone Age, cf. pp. 36, 54, 69). A fundamental problem with this section is that the scientifically demonstrated facts can be distinguished from common sense -based reasoning only by a professional deeply familiar with the topic. What we have, then, is not a research-based general presentation of the past.

The Neolithic forms the main paradox of Stone Age section. In short, the Neolithic and the Neolithization process are reduced to their narrowest sense. The term *Neolithic* is used over *Sub-Neolithic* – as stated in the work – just to make things simple, and a marked contrast between Finland and the 'real' Neolithic societies of more southerly regions is constantly present. The latter are, first and foremost, defined by the presence of agriculture, whereas the former are said to exhibit just some 'secondary elements' of the Neolithic, most characteristically pottery. Yet at the same time numerous cultural features, like burial customs of the Typical Comb Ware phase (3900–3400 BC), are suggested to derive from 'cultural contacts' with 'truly Neolithic societies', apparently taking place over 500 km south of the present-day Finland. However, what these contacts were, and how and why the influences were transmitted, is never specified. Regardless of this flirt with agricultural societies, it is expressly emphasised how only the abrupt arrival of the agrarian Corded Ware culture changed everything – while simultaneously, the author notes that the mental and practical change towards an agricultural mode of life was a gradual process. Thus, there are internal conflicts in argumentation and a disharmony in the narrative, a feature that spans through the entire Stone Age section.

The double standards in using evidence are well evident in the discussion concerning the beginning of cultivation. The oldest cereal macrofossils, dating to the end of the Neolithic, and the first occurrence of dairy lipids on Corded Ware pottery are seen to give credence also the results of pollen analyses that show evidence of cultivation during this period. However, similar pollen evidence – but predating Corded Ware – are viewed as flawed. By contrast, Estonian pre-Corded Ware pollen evidence of cultivation is accepted, even though no macrofossil remains are known there either. This does not reflect the different quantitative or qualitative properties of

the available evidence, but rather the selection of elements that are in accordance with the desired outcome. A similar, eclectic use of natural scientific results is visible in other instances, too, such as the dating of the Jettböle burial (p. 102).

The chapter on the Neolithic also includes themes previously not really touched upon in popular works on Finnish prehistory. Of these, housepits or archaeological remains of semi-subterranean dwelling structures, which have been studied especially from the 1990s onwards, are discussed to a significant extent. The present book introduces the main spatio-temporal changes in housepit building tradition, although, again, not all interpretations are based on generally acknowledged results. The widening focus of the discussion is here evident also in that the author now includes much more material than previously from eastern and interior parts of Finland, as well as northern Finland and Lapland. Also, recent advances in various types of analytical research, such as archaeogenetics, are briefly touched upon.

The following section, which deals with the Bronze Age/Early Metal Period, similarly considers the results of new research, for example when it comes to chronology and pottery typology, but in general the discussion faithfully follows traditional paths of interpretation. The section is divided thematically into relatively coherent subchapters and ends with summarizing regional overviews. The adopted approach and the generally small amount of find material (vs the number of pages allocated to the section) have resulted at places in report-like descriptive presentations at the site-level, an approach not feasible in the case of the other periods. Although the focus is on regional level, the wider contexts of discussed phenomena are introduced in this section, including the eastern reaches of Seyma-Turbino phenomenon and Textile Ware.

The chapter is better-edited than the previous section but, unfortunately, includes a few careless mistakes. For example, while discussing archaeological and palynological studies done at the Lake Huhdasjärvi area, the datings are given as 'BP', whereas they should read 'BC' (p. 154). In another case, 'clearing phases' (Fi. raivausvaiheet) observed in pollen analysis have been transformed in the text into 'building phases' (Fi. rakennusvaiheet), which gives a new fla-

avour to the interpretation of Kastelli, a 'Giant's Church' or a large-sized stone enclosure located in Ostrobothnia (p. 144).

In terms of illustrations, one could question the relevance of reproducing A.M. Tallgren's (1931) map of coastal and inland cultural areas of Bronze Age Finland in large size (p. 128) or the representativity of the example given of inland 'Lapp cairn' (Nastola Kilpisaari, p. 169), as the excavations of this monument actually demonstrated that it is the remains of a Late Iron Age or early historical period oven structure (see Saipio 2015). In general, certain topics and illustrations should have been synchronized and moved to their correct chronological positions within and between the Stone Age and Bronze Age sections.

The section discussing Iron Age is organized at first periodically, then thematically. In the beginning of each period, a North European background of developments is presented – a well-chosen starting point. Developments in language history are described together with the archaeological record, but changes in population history are largely bypassed. Quite a lot of attention is paid to the means of livelihood.

In general, the idea of Iron Age settlement continuity is maintained in the book. The traditional and very dualistic view of well-known, permanently settled *areas with cemeteries* vs vast inland areas with just hunter-gatherer populations is still the starting point, despite the fact that numerous artefact finds, palaeoecological evidence of permanent agriculture, and several graves are today known in the latter areas as well. Would not the simplest explanation for all these observations be that the *area with cemeteries* was just larger than previously thought?

Only about 70 Crusade Period (AD 1025/1100–1150/1300) cemeteries are known in the western part of country, versus some 200 from the Viking Age (AD 800/825–1025/1100), and the authors suggest that this is caused by the diminishing amount of artefacts placed in the graves. A more plausible explanation, however, would be the emergence of village cemeteries, which replaced the previous burial sites used by smaller settlement units. Another major factor is that typical inhumations dug deep into the ground are much harder to detect than typical

cremation cemeteries of the level ground. This applies both to archaeological field surveys and the work of metal detectorists.

Some geographical concepts used in the Iron Age section are vague. For example, sometimes ‘south-western Finland’ is extended to the Lake Päijänne (p. 364). In many cases, materials from parts of Finland ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944 are included – in others, they have been left out. This inconsistency is present also in some of the maps (e.g. p. 286, 344).

Especially the chapter about Crusade Period – and to some extent the Middle Ages as well – has surprisingly few references. In numerous instances even a professional reader is left wondering where some particular pieces of information come from, as they clearly are not original interpretations of the book’s authors.

The quality of photographs and maps in the Iron Age section is mainly good, and many previously unpublished images have been used. However, captions in this section are mostly very concise. For example, in pictures of artefacts, no measurements or find locations are usually given. These would have been valuable especially for the non-professional readers: in some cases it is even difficult to comprehend, what kind of archaeological information some generic-looking pieces of iron really might offer. Many of the pictures serve more as decoration than as sources of information.

Overall, the Iron Age section is well written and perfectly up-to-date, but it leaves a bit conservative and cautious aftertaste. The writers obviously are experts on the subject, but for some reason they present few bold new interpretations, and mainly just refer to previous research. This raises the question whether the two-writer system has resulted in compromises and toned down some fresh opinions. A minor example of this is the periodization. All possible years suggested by different scholars as the starting or ending points of different Iron Age periods are presented, when only the most plausible ones should have been chosen.

The section about the Middle Ages has been long-awaited for, since no wrap-up on the topic from an archaeological point of view has been published earlier. The text even deals with some phenomena of the early modern period, which is also very welcome.

The section about Iron Age concentrates on the southern and western parts of the country – the chapter about Middle Ages even more so. With a few exceptions, mainly the areas that belonged to the Swedish realm and Roman Catholic Church are dealt with. This is evident, for example, in the description of Christianization and the development of Church organization. But churches and monasteries existed to the east of the medieval borders of Sweden, too – even within Finland’s present borders. From the text, a reader can now get the impression that these areas were mere wilderness. Once again, the concept of a totally unpopulated North Karelia is presented on a map (p. 422), even though the evidence for numerous medieval villages in the area was first published more than a century ago (Ronimus 1906; Könönen & Kirkinen 1975).

On a positive note, the section on Middle Ages is more lavishly illustrated than the one concerning Iron Age. However, some of the pictures are not of perfect quality and could have been left out.

The incorporation of medieval and even early modern periods into a general presentation of the prehistory of Finland is refreshing. As a concept, however, writing a prehistory of a single nation state is outdated. Prehistoric phenomena are not confined by modern borders and such an approach inevitably detaches the studied phenomena from their wider contexts. Further, in a country geographically as large as Finland, the variation even within particular periods is so great that it cannot be covered without gross generalizations. At the same time, research is increasingly producing more specific and fragmented data. Contrary to the view given in the book, there is not one generally accepted (or canonized) prehistory of Finland anymore, but different approaches and researchers holding much-differing views of the past.

Despite the many critical comments made above, *Muinaisuutemme jäljet* provides a more wide-ranging view of the past within the current borders of Finland than the previous popular publications on the subject. The incorporation of new periods and new data into a book addressed to the general public is a significant act on its own right. Such large-scale popularization of archaeology provides a good opportunity for the layman to acquire information about the past,

and consequently, to understand better what archaeological research is all about, and why it is worth doing also in the future.

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