

Flashbacks of a foreigner studying archaeology in 1970s Helsinki, or a Caribbean Islander in C.F. Meinander's course

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Abstract

This is an essay about a foreign student, myself, learning archaeology at the University of Helsinki in the early 1970s. A venture that was successful thanks to the positive attitude of the university and, especially, my two mentors, Professor of Geology and Palaeontology Joakim Donner and Professor of Archaeology Carl Fredrik Meinander. I had the privilege to begin my Archaeology studies as a member of the first group to study under C.F. Meinander and to participate in his first archaeology field school in 1970. Through descriptions and anecdotes, I try to provide glimpses of how things were, or I perceived them, some 50 years ago.

Keywords: 1970s, archaeology, C.F. Meinander, foreign students, University of Helsinki

I could not resist paraphrasing Mark Twain's (1889) classic, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, to label my experiences while studying archaeology in Helsinki in the early 1970s. There were some parallels. The protagonist, Hank Morgan, was an engineer like me, and we both found ourselves in a world very different from the one we knew. Moreover, I saw something majestic in Carl Fredrik Meinander's manner and Finland as a sort of fantasyland. The Gallen-Kallela frescoes I passed when going to lectures seemed as out of Malory's (1894) *Le morte d'Arthur*, and I recall staring one dawn at the misty surface of a small forest lake and thinking the only thing missing is the Lady of the Lake with Excalibur.

Prelude

Among the reasons for leaving my good but boring job in the US was pursuing further university studies in Europe. My Sorbonne plans had been dashed since Paris was still reeling from the 1968 student revolt, so I turned to my Finnish friends in

Helsinki. I arrived in September 1968 and inquired about possible enrolment in the University of Helsinki soon after. To my surprise I was promptly accepted upon showing my academic records. Legitimized by my new *opintokirja* (study book) I began to attend courses that did not require knowledge of Finnish.

At the time there were not many foreigners, let alone foreign students, in Helsinki. We were exotic indeed. People would go silent when I walked in stores and, after visiting a friend's home, her older aunt had nostalgically said that I looked like an Arabian prince from the movies. Among the few foreign students were three Ecuadorians studying engineering, medicine and political sciences. I also remember a charming American girl from Sibelius Academy, a Korean doing linguistics and several scholarship students from Africa. They, as well as other foreigners and Finns, attended the Foreign Student Club meetings on Thursday evenings. A daily hangout was the Porthania cafeteria, where one could get the day's dish and a glass of milk for a *markka* (about a US quarter) and sit for hours between lectures. There I was to make many friends

among Finnish students. They were curious and it was easy to start conversation with those wishing to practice English or Spanish. I learned Finnish from them too, though I later found that most were *finlandssvenkar* (Swedish-speaking Finns). The university also offered three evening courses, Finnish for Foreigners I-III. Though I was learning faster outside, I simultaneously endured all three to get marks in my new opintokirja.

Spending summer 1969 in England led to fateful third-kind encounters with palaeontology and archaeology. By my return to Helsinki in September, I had decided to study both. Little did I know I had arrived at a crucial time for Finnish archaeology, one that involved generational and paradigmatic shifts as well as the advent of a new professorship at Turku and a radiocarbon dating lab in Helsinki (Meinander 1969, 1971; Jungner 1979; Edgren 2013).

One of my Porthania friends connected me with the Professor of Geology and Palaeontology, Joakim Donner, who welcomed me. There had been no applicants in 1969 and I received a very personal instruction from him and other researchers of the small department. Donner had suggested to wait with respect to archaeology because the new professor had not been named yet. Though the process would last two more years, he informed me in October that it would be OK for me to attend archaeology lectures in January 1970, but that the interim professor, Carl Fredrik Meinander, wanted to meet me before that.

First encounter

I went to the National Museum, where the Department of Archaeology was then, and was led through a cloakroom to the right of the main entrance to an empty classroom and a tiny office. Meinander shook my hand with *Bienvenue Monsieur Núñez*, and asked if he had pronounced my name right, which he had. He went on in French, which I more or less understood/guessed thanks to high adrenalin levels and the fact that I did know a little French. But it was difficult for me to respond. I finally managed to say *je suis désolé, mais j'ai oublié tout mon français*. We agreed that he would speak French and I English.

Meinander explained that since I had missed the basic courses in archaeology, I would have to take a written exam on Ella Kivikoski's (1967) book on Finnish prehistory. I was also welcome to attend the last weeks of his ongoing course on European prehistory but, being in Finnish, I should prep with Stuart Piggott's (1965) *Ancient Europe*, which I would have to read for the final exam anyway.

The real thing

My archaeology studies officially began in January 1970. It was quite different from what I was accustomed to at the Department of Geology. Instead of learning through dialogues, mainly in English, between the teacher and me, I found myself listening to lectures in Finnish together with two dozen or more students. Instead of the lofty room of Snellmaninkatu 3, Archaeology lectures were held in a cramped room, balmy from heat generated by 20+ students and the episcopes and slide projectors. My professorial mentors differed too. Mercurial Meinander clearly contrasted with calm, soft-spoken Donner.

Meinander's lectures were fairly easy to follow thanks to the numerous color slides and book prepping. Docent Ville Luho's were somewhat more difficult, partly due to the grainy black-and-white episcopes and the problem of prepping with German texts. I believe the reason for the assiduous student attendance was to avoid reading Ailio (1909) and Europaeus-Äyräpää (1930) in German for a written exam.

There was also a dreaded oral exam. Students had to demonstrate their knowledge of the Iron Age artefacts in the museum exhibit, where the exam was conducted by Meinander himself. Sometime in April he made a roster of the students taking the exam, booking all during the week, but leaving a Swedish-speaking student and me for Saturday. We were both at the museum at 11 AM as agreed, but Meinander was not. We finally phoned him after an hour's wait. He had completely forgotten and told us to wait. In less than 30 minutes he was racing up the National Museum steps. Addressing us very humbly and panting, he apologized. I had thought he would be lenient given his blunder, but I was not prepared for what I heard: he was sure that

we knew the material and we could go home with the highest grade.

Field school in Outokumpu, summer dig in Häme

Next was the archaeological field school, which took place at the Comb Ware site of Sätös, Outokumpu, during 20–29 May 1970. We were a group of about 25. Functioning as directors were C.F. Meinander and assistant (*assistentti*) Pekka Sarvas as well as two senior students who helped in the field. There were also three pre-1969 students doing the field school together with 16 freshmen, and two foreigners, a visiting Japanese researcher named Ushio Maeda and myself. We lived at the *Kyykeri* elementary school, girls in one classroom, boys in another, and Sarvas and helpers in a smaller room. Meinander stayed at a hotel in town.

After we had laid out the excavation plan and removed the top turf, Meinander opened two heavy wooden boxes and we began to assemble a three-legged steel monster under his direction. It was a later model of Erik Nylén's (1952) photographing tower. We managed to get it up at the second attempt, but not before the irritated Meinander was screaming his head off at the confused students holding desperately on to its legs. The excavations began afterwards, but the explosive incident had left all shaken, except me who was used to similar outbursts in my homeland. Even assistant Sarvas was keeping a safe distance from Meinander. I felt sorry for the silent solitary figure at the edge of the dig. To the extent that I dared to walk by and ask casually *ça va?* I startled him and was bracing myself for a second explosion, when he replied *ça va* and said he had a geologist's task for me. I was to trowel-dig a narrow 30-cm deep pit at the northeast corner of each square and take a 2-dl soil sample for phosphate analysis. While doing it I found big quartz chunk – the first find. When I returned with the soil sample bags proudly showing the quartz, Meinander said almost contemptuously something like *jespère que nous ne trouvons pas beaucoup de ceux*. I reasoned that he preferred pottery to quartz and thought that he was still upset from the tower-raising event.

Field school was a memorable experience where participating students learned field techniques and got to know each other. I was not the only one impressed. It inspired the late Mirja Kanerva enough to perpetuate the event with the painting now housed at the Department of Archaeology (Figure 1). Neither did we go unnoticed by the locals. Meinander was interviewed in town by the newspaper, which came to the dig for a second reportage upon learning about the two exotic outlanders (Figure 2).

Having tasted archaeology, I sought to join a summer dig. The State Archaeological Commission (now Finnish Heritage Agency) assigned me to Leena Söyrinki's excavations at the Iron Age cremation field of Kalomäki in Ilmoila, Hauho (Söyrinki-Harmo 1984), where I happily worked all summer with senior students and four fellow Sätös novices. Leena told me that she too had excavated with Meinander at Sätös in 1965 and confided that Luho had specifically insisted that she teach me everything about archaeological fieldwork, which I found touching.

Fall 1970

My ten weeks at Kalomäki had served as an immersion course in Finnish, and by fall it was fluent though far from perfect. Eager to ditch French I talked to Meinander, who told me I spoke like a horse (*kuin hevonen*). I was puzzled, but fellow students assured me it was a compliment. I continued to take courses in both palaeontology and archaeology, among them the undergraduate seminar (*proseminaari*). For this Meinander assigned each of us a Comb Ware site to study its finds for a seminar presentation. It was exciting – not only to be handling ancient artefacts but to do it in the legendary *Pälsin kuoppa* (Pälsi's pit) with its mellow olden smells. I stayed many times after dark, but never saw Appelgren-Kivalo's ghost. Then again, he was supposed to only show himself to good archaeologists and I was a palaeontologist.

Meinander had been satisfied with my seminar performance, but a comment I made in connection with another presentation led to a moment of tension between us. A student had described the finds of a site, mentioning the odd occurrence of a primitive axe. I asked why primitive,



Figure 1. Mirja Kanerva's vision of the 1970 Sätös archaeological field school. Although the unfinished painting lacks some details, it captures the spirit of the event. The monstrous three-legged steel tower is looming above the excavation area. Standing in the center are C.F. Meinander in a green coat and assistant Pekka Sarvas in black. To Meinander's left, in a pit, are Lena Wickström and Mirja Kanerva herself shoveling sand into the air. Further behind is one of the senior student helpers, Kari Saarovola, in camouflages marching some students to a test trench in the woods. To the right of Sarvas is Mirja Yli-Vakkuri with a camera. Further back, by the trees, are from the left Ushio Maeda in black sweater and jeans, probably Anne Wallin bending down, Aimo Kehusmaa, the other senior student helper, and Päivi Luppi at the painting edge. Also by the edge but at the front and partially hidden by the tower's right leg, is Lasse Ojonen. In the forefront, preparing the excavated surface for photography, are Sinimarja Ojonen and the author with beard and football shirt. All those mentioned have worked as archaeologists at least a few years.

and she explained that because it was polished only around the cutting edge. I said that did not make it primitive, the axe was just as effective without a polished butt. She countered that at least Äyräpää had written *primitiivinen kirves* in his report, to which I replied that Äyräpää was wrong too. The discussion ended there, or so I thought. After the seminar Meinander asked me to stay. Once we were alone, he said he did not blame me because I was not a Finn, but I should bear in mind that in Finland students do not criticize senior researchers. I was surprised to hear that from progressive unconventional Meinander and thought that that explained why Finnish students were always silent.

I had found out that one could complete courses at any time by taking book exams, a prerogative I fully exploited. In October it became clear that I would have fulfilled all the requirements for both my palaeontology and archaeology majors by spring 1971. I needed an additional major (*cum laude*) or two minors (*approbatus*) in other subjects for the LuK (BSc) diploma. Donner suggested chemistry and physics, so I turned first to Professor of Chemistry Reino Näsänen. After explaining the situation, I asked if I could do the whole Chemistry minor in a single written exam. It was a sincere and innocent request, but it must have sounded both cheeky and suspicious. Nevertheless, Näsänen said he



Tämäkesäsihtit löydöt eivät ehkä olleet määrällisesti sen suurempia kuin aikatemminkaan, mutta huomattavasti mielenkiintoisempia ne olivat. Nyt tehtyjä löydöt osoittavat, että tutkijoille on työtä. Sätönessä vielä muutama kesäkuu. Kaivauksista mielenkiintoisinta löydöt luonnista ja puumateriaalista löytyivät hautaa tarkastelevat Anne Wallin, Marjatta Pannonen ja Milton Nuñez.



Arkeologian opiskelijat saivat perintönsä kaivauksesta Sätönessä ja ovat lähtönnelmissä rostin opettajainkäsikirjoitusta. Kaivauksipaikalla merkitseivät maajapaikkaan Kyykerin kansiakouluille ja sieltä tilajuvalla kookki Heikin. Kaivauksissa paikka on ollut jlj. Jukka Ingatius, joka kertoi kaivauksen tuloksista.

Hautapaikka ja liuskekärki

Kansainvälistä väriä Sätöksen kivekaivauksilla

Liuskekärvä valmistettiin lähinnä suuren maaston liuskekärkeä, pansamaliikasta, tällaisia poljot sekä puoskelluista puoskella yhä kaivauksissa kutsuttaviksi löydöiksi, jotta arkeologien opiskelijat tekivät suuren kaivauksen kahden viikon aikana Laamankankaalla maanviljelijä Jaakko Voranaseen mailla.

Luettelo vaihtelee vielä jatkuvasti, mutta on silti mahdollista, että verkko paljastuu, josta monet näistä viimeksi mainituista löydöistä on löydetty jo vuosi sitten samalla paikalla tutkimuksena.

Perjantaina päätettiin kaivaukseen ottaa jo mainittuun maahan, muistotietä Saimaan rantatörmällä. Aikaisemmat tutkimukset on suoritettu paikallista työväenliikkeen kiertävien, nyt täällä tarkkuudella tehtävien työn suorittavien 20 koulunopettajaa työssäkäytössä Heitin ja yliopiston arkeologian laitoksen toimesta professori C. P. Mäkelä ja johtaja.

Kilmostarvin löydöksiä oli ollut kivaan kaivauksen noin kaksi vuotta vanha haata, johon oli ajan tavan mukaan ripoteltu sinne tänne joutamilla. Tällä on tutkijalle oma tärkeä merkitys. Lähes samalla alueella oli löydetty joukko luonnin, näiltään keuhkattomia ja vuoittamattomia mittaan joutamillaan syöpyä.

Löydetty liuskekärki ei ollut niin tavallinen tuolle ajalle, josta monet löydöt ovat peräisin. Liuskekärjen voinneen olemassa kuuluvan jollain muulla ajankautella kuin kampakeramiin, j.m. löydetty työt esineet. Vielä tutkijat eivät ole löytäneet sille mitään selittäviä aineita, koska löydetty esineet lähtivät vasta perustaan kaivauksistaan tutkittaviksi.

ASUNPAIKKA ASUNPAIKKA
ALOITE
TAAN - 28 VUODEN
TARKUUDELLA

Kivikauden ihmiset ovat asuneet eri vuodenaikoina eri paikoissa, riippuen metsästä ja kalapöytästä. Kaivauksissa on löytynyt kalapöytä, josta on selvitetty, miten ihmiset asustivat ja kalastivat. Kaivauksissa on löytynyt kalapöytä, josta on selvitetty, miten ihmiset asustivat ja kalastivat. Kaivauksissa on löytynyt kalapöytä, josta on selvitetty, miten ihmiset asustivat ja kalastivat.

löydösten avulla ja niiden mukaan asunpaikalla on ikää lähes 5000 vuotta.

LAUVU - TULEVIEN KAIVAUKSEN KOKIET

Myös muilla Voranaseen mailla on löydetty merkkejä melko läheltä esihistoriallisesta asutuksesta, samoin muualla Sätönessä on löydetty viittä vuotta täältä. Tähän saakka tutkimusten päähuomion on kiinnitetty Laamankankaan, josta parin sadan metrin pituisen kaistaleeseen, mutta eivät esityksistä silloin loppu. Parin kilometrin päällä Majonlammentie oli löydetty Jaakko Voranaseen löydyt uusia kivilaaksoja esineitä ja eräitä rasteja.



Kaivauksilla Suomeen saapuneet opiskelijat kumbalinen Milton Nuñez (oik.) ja japanilainen Ushio Maeda antoivat kokkirokkille kaivauksille oman pistäytän paronessa.

toyräältä oli havaittu kivilaaksoita, josta oli otettu otanta ja otanta, joka ei ole vielä tarkemmin tutkittu. Toistaiseksi on tavattu Laavun mailla paikkaa, joka tuntuu tutkijalle ja mielenkiintoisista löydöistään, kohteena ajatellen. Paikka sijaitsee noin metrin korkeudella nykyisestä meretasosta laskeutuen. Se on nimittäin ollut entisen Saimaan rantatörmän ja siinäkin on ollut asutusta kuituttavasti noin 2300 vuotta ennen Kristusta.

Muita tieteellisiä ehokkaita kaivauksia on ollut Tuusankangas ja Majaveli, jotka sijaitsevat myös Sätönessä.

KYLLÄ KIELLEN OPPI.
MITTA KIELLETTÄ - MITÄ

Kansainvälinen selvityksen tulle pariin viikon aikana suorittamille kaivauksille ovat antaneet japanilainen, Tokion kotoinen Ushio Maeda, joka opiskelee Heitin yliopistossa arkeologiaa. Toisen koulunopettajan, koulunopettajan kaverin on kumbalainen Milton Nuñez, joka on ollut jokuakin vuotta poissa kotoaan opiskellessaan mm. Amerikkaan. Jossa hän on suorittanut suunniteltaitaan ajatellen vähän enemmän kuin huomausten tieteiden kandidatin tutkinnon. Suomessa, jota hän pitää rauhallisena ja mukavana maana, hän valmistuu puolesta vuodesta vuodesta päästä geologian maisteriksi. Arkeologia on hänelle opiskelussa vain harrastus, josta on mielenkiintoa sellainen.

Pojat ovat olleet Suomessa opiskellessaan puolituntia vuorilla ja puhuvat Suomea sujuvasti. He eivät eroa kansa-erokkaita juuri muuten kuin ohuista tunteista silmälänsä. Molemmat myös viikkokielillä.

Mikä kanyyattensa maanalliset opiskelijat lähtivät Oulokammusta perjantaina illalla junaan Helsinkiin ja sieltä edelleen seuraavaan opiskelupaikkaan Helsinkiin, josta he lähtivät Suomeen.

Kaivauksilla on ollut jo parin vuoden kuluksena, opiskelijat eivät voi pitää kaivauksista on suositeltava juuri kesäkuu.

Hieman mallei vaikuttava japanilainen Ushio ei ollut kertonut mitään niistä lähtökärsä ensimmäisen koulunopettajan kumbalinen kumbalinen Milton Nuñez oli tänne koti-ikävänsä vaurit korvot olleensa mukana kesän aikana suorittamassa kaivauksissa. Hän on omia ja menee Kuuban vasta kaivauksissa, josta on suositeltava juuri kesäkuu.

ANNEI HAPPONEN

Figure 2. Anneli Happonen's newspaper article 'International colors in the Sätös Stone-Age dig' on the Sätös field school in Karjalana (31 May 1970). Though the photos include other participants, it is obvious that the reporter was targeting the two exotic ones. There are some inaccuracies about the excavations and people, which is not uncommon.

could give me a five-question exam to answer four and asked when I would like to take it. I replied: 'Anytime, right now if possible.' He wrote down the questions and I sat to answer them at a small table. They may have been difficult for first-year Chemistry students, but for a chemical engineer they were a piece of cake. It was not long before I handed back five answers, including correctly balanced chemical equations. He said that the exam deserved a 3 (excellent) mark but added apologetically that for the whole minor he could only give me a 2. Physics was next. Luckily, Näsänen had mentioned the strange incident to Professor of Physics Antti Siivola, who told me that he would give me a 2 for the physics minor without an exam. That clear, the next hurdle was writing the harjoitusaine, a short thesis, to obtain the BSc diploma.

It was around this time that I met 75-year-old emeritus Professor Väinö Auer. In addition to fascinating stories about Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (Auer 1956–1970) he had some interesting anecdotes about Finland's archaeology, including one especially suitable for this forum. Auer had witnessed the debate between the Helsinki archaeology professorship candidates, Julius Edward Ailio and Aarne Michaël Tallgren, in the early 1920s, and felt that Ailio's crude ungentlemanly treatment of Tallgren had cost him the post. Pointing at Tallgren, Ailio had loudly asked the audience: 'Do you want as professor a man that has no idea of what typology, chronology and stratigraphy are?' According to Auer, on the other side of the room sat poor Tallgren 'rachitic and red from coughing as tuberculous.' Everyone disliked Ailio's rant and felt sorry for Tallgren. There may be a grain of truth in this. Carl

Axel Nordman (1968, 53) writes that Ailio's significance 'was greater than the statements of the experts would lead one to suppose.' The Ailio–Tallgren feud can be traced back to 1910, when Tallgren's review of Ailio's (1909) dissertation led to a series of polemic essays (see Salminen, this volume). To some extent, Ailio's critique seems justified judging by Tallgren's (1911, 196) statement 'die Kammkeramik zum Teil bis an das Ende de Bronzezeit reicht.'

One foot in each discipline

Although Finland lacked the dinosaurs, Neanderthals and Romans that had attracted me to palaeontology and archaeology, it evidently offered enough incentive to keep me here. It may well have had to do with Donner and Meinander letting me follow my own interests and whims. In December 1970, Donner welcomed my suggestion for the subject of my harjoitusaine 'On the Deterioration of the Sub-Boreal,' on climatic/geological phenomena affecting ancient cultures. After getting my BSc, Donner arranged for me to do fieldwork in the Dordogne, where I was to spend the summer of 1971 learning about cave stratigraphy and sedimentology at the Middle Palaeolithic site of Pech de l'Azé with François Bordes (1972). The new skills were needed for analyzing the sediments of the Palaeolithic site of Abri Pataud that Donner (1975) had in mind for my MSc thesis: *A Paleoclimatic Interpretation from the Sediments of Abri Pataud, Dordogne* (1972). In addition to my professorial mentors, I stayed within the bi-disciplinary realm thanks to Björn Kurtén (when he was not abroad) and other researchers who were always there to answer questions, particularly Christian Carpelan, Högne Jungner and Irmeli Vuorela. My subsequent Finnish degrees were bi-disciplinary as well (Núñez 1977; 1978).

Though personally rewarding, bi-disciplinarity was a double-edged sword when seeking funds. My research proposals were generally rejected for being either too humanities- or sciences-oriented. Hindered by this barrier when seeking to do computer-assisted spatial analyses of Iron-Age sites, I ended up doing it with a research grant at the Department of Computer Science at the University of Calgary, Canada, in 1979–1980. While there, I was encouraged and applied for a PhD

grant in archaeology. It was not until the summer of 1981, while directing an archaeological field school in the Yukon, that I began to see myself as a *bona fide* archaeologist. The rest is history, but I have always followed a multidisciplinary approach in my research, for which I am much indebted to Donner and Meinander.

Epilogue

Only a few of the eager first-year students depicted by Kanerva (Figure 1) ended up as archaeologists. The rest justifiably took up more remunerative and secure jobs, some of them after years of excavating without permanent employment. The fact that none completed a PhD cannot be blamed on Meinander, however. His volatility may have given some students pause, but his office was always open to anyone with questions. The real culprit was the bottleneck of a limited number of positions already filled by relatively young people.

Back in the early 1970s I was the only foreign student listening to archaeology lectures in Finnish. There were only sporadic visits by foreign professors, like Barry Cunliffe, and graduate students, like Ushio Maeda and Marek Zvelebil (Núñez 2011). Now, in contrast, there are several foreign students, even professors, at the Department of Archaeology and it is not uncommon to hear English in lectures and seminars with actively participating Finnish students. Furthermore, students can now participate in major international research projects and grants which provide them with contacts and potential opportunities abroad. Today it is much easier to get funds for PhD research, and those who perform well have a good chance of obtaining postdocs. A bottleneck may nevertheless develop afterwards, but by then they have the advantage of owning both experience and international contacts. All is not a rose garden, though. Students may not need to worry about financing their PhD research, but there is the stress of completing it in three to four years.

Many things have improved since my 'good old days,' but even then it was possible for a foreigner to study Archaeology at the University of Helsinki thanks to the flexibility of the university and the help of inspiring mentors.

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