

The Concept of the Finnic Peoples and the early Stages of Archaeology in Finland

The history of Finnish archaeology provides interesting examples of the relationship between society, its needs and ideas and the scientific community. The problem of the origin of the Finns and related peoples as examined by archaeology in the 19th century is a case in point. Finnish archaeology became an independent discipline as part of the so-called »national sciences», which were concerned with defining the national character of the Finnish people in its various aspects. The Finns were seen as part of a larger entity formed by the peoples speaking the Finno-Ugrian languages. This entity was assumed to have descended from a single ethnic community as witnessed by the assumed genetic pattern of the Finno-Ugrian languages. Language was the main source for investigating the early history of one's people and the national sciences evolved at first around a linguistic model of national origin.

Certain features of a linguistic model of ethnic genesis were already present in patriotic-romanticist historical studies in Sweden-Finland in the 17th and 18th centuries. This trend used freely chosen comparisons of vocabulary, place-names, mythical heroes etc. to prove that one's own people had descended from the tribes of Israel or in some cases the ancient Greeks. Although the comparisons between e.g. Finnish or Swedish and the Biblical languages were far-fetched and highly unscientific they did contain some elements pointing to the Finno-Ugrian community of languages and peoples. These zealously patriotic views of national origin were conditioned by the political climate of the period; Sweden's status as a leading European power required a corresponding role in prehistory. This aim was also reflected in Finland, while still a part of Sweden. The more ambitious explanations of the »fennophiles», who were active at the Academy of Turku in the 17th and 18th centuries strove to prove the descent of the Finns from Noah's grandsons and the existence of prehistoric Finnish influence in places as far removed as the Iberian peninsula. (cf. Juslenius 1700, II, § 18: 57–61).

The main elements of the subsequently accepted linguistic model of the Finno-Ugrian peoples' origin was presented in Finland by Henrik Gabriel Porthan in the 1770s and 80s. Porthan, the leading scholar of his day in Finland, developed contacts with German scholars actively involved in studying the Finno-Ugrian languages. During a visit to Göttingen in 1779 he met A. L. Schlözer, a central authority on the question of the Finnic peoples. Schlözer had assumed that the ancestors of the Finno-Ugrians had lived as a single ethnic unit in an area bordering on the Caspian Sea at some time in prehistory (Schlözer 1771, 295–308). Porthan also took this view including it in his work on the Finno-Ugrians. He assumed that the original ethnic group constituting the ancestors of the Finno-Ugrians had been dispersed from its homeland in the fourth and fifth centuries AD as a result of the migrations of the Huns (Porthan 1859–1873, I: 46). Porthan defined the »Finnish tribe of nations» as including the Hungarians, Lapps, »Bjarmians», Estonians, Curonians, the Finns or Finns Proper, Karelians, Ingrians and Votyaks. He stressed the importance of using

linguistic history to elucidate their common past and genesis (op.cit. V: 29–42). Porthan also believed in the possibilities of using other sources for this purpose and also expressed interest in investigating the then-known burial cairns along the coasts of Finland. (Schybergson 1911, 25, 92). At the same time an interest in archaeology arose among the clergy of Southern Ostrobothnia, although this did not lead to systematic scientific research at the time.

Porthan's legacy was passed on to the following generations of scholars in a changed political situation. At his death in 1804, Sweden could not any more lay claims to present much less prehistoric glory among nations. Finland became incorporated into the Russian empire in 1809 as an autonomous grand duchy, which immediately placed new needs for nationalistically oriented research as well as opening new possibilities for scientists and scholars. Furthermore, the general influence of European romanticism was felt in the relatively small Finnish academic community. A. I. Arwidsson, a leading figure in the early national romanticist movement, translated into Swedish in 1827 Friedrich Rüh's history and geography of Finland. Rüh was a linguist and historian of the Göttingen school and his original history of Finland, published in 1809, restated Schlözer's and Porthan's position on the origin and migration of the Finnic peoples. Arwidsson's translation contained many revisions and additions especially regarding the protohistorical development of ethnic relations among the Finnic peoples of Northern Russia. Arwidsson wished to prove that the ancestors of the Finns and related peoples had already achieved a high level of cultural development before coming into contact with either the Swedes or the Russians. The example cited was »Bjarmia», mentioned in the Nordic sagas, where a Finnic »proto-state» had existed with trade relations and a developed religion. This assumption can be seen as a Finnish counterpart to the romanticist views then in fashion in Europe regarding the Middle Ages. Arwidsson also tried to set out a chronology of the descent and dispersal of the Finnic peoples and he assumed that the direct ancestors of the present-day Finns had come to Finland from the east in the 6th century AD. (Rüh (Arwidsson) 1827, 186, 196–199).

A. J. Sjögren, a contemporary of Arwidsson's, emigrated to Russia as a young man and followed an esteemed career as a scholar of Finno-Ugrian languages and peoples. Sjögren's main interests lay in outlining the ethnic history of Northern Russia. Sjögren interpreted the references to the Jem' (Gam) in the Chronicle of Nestor as referring to the Häme or Tavastian Finns, later called čud by their Russian neighbours. Sjögren's model, based on linguistic history and onomastics, assumed that the Jem' had originally come to an area known as Zavoloče along with their northern neighbours, the Zavoločeskaja čud' (or the ancestors of the Karelians). Part of the Jem' moved to Finland in the by the 11th century AD pushing the Lapps out of their way, while part moved to the areas southwest and southeast of Lake Ladoga. This population in turn came into conflict with Russians and Karelians in the area and finally continued on to Finland. Sjögren's model was very popular and it remained widely accepted up to the 1870s. (Sjögren 1861, 483–497, 538–593; Branch 1973, 222).

The study of folk-poetry also added elements to the linguistically defined scheme of national prehistory. Elias Lönnrot's preface to his Kalevala of 1835 contains a brief sketch of the assumed migrations of the Finnic peoples from an original homeland beyond the Urals first to the Volga, from where the ancestors of the Karelians went north and the fore-fathers of the Finns and Estonians west. Lönnrot also mentions the Karelians on the shores of the White Sea as »Bjarmians» (»Permiän suomalaiset»). The preface to the first edition of the Kalevala does not

contain any detailed references to linguistic studies and in some instances the arguments are supported by references to the actual poems. (Lönnrot 1835, vi–viii; Kaukonen 1979, 92–98).

By the mid-19th century Matias Aleksanteri Castrén had become the leading personage of the national sciences in Finland. He has been referred to i.a. as one of the founders of Finnish archaeology and he can be seen to have laid down many of the central themes of research for the young discipline of archaeology (cf. Aspelin 1882, 1896; Tallgren 1936; Nordman 1968). Castrén continued Sjögren's studies on the Zavoloče problem arriving at partly the same conclusions. Castrén stressed that the ancestors of the Finnic peoples had come from an original homeland in the Altai mountains where they had lived as single people. He also believed that the mountains had served as refuge at the time of the Great Flood. (Castrén 1852–1858, V: 40–62, 126–143). Castrén was cautious in his views on the actual chronology of the Finnic migrations and, in many connections, he called for the need to combine the results of different disciplines in investigating national origins. He maintained that the areas previously inhabited by the Finno-Ugrians would contain not only linguistic remains but archaeologically observable material witnessing the development of the Finnic peoples. Pursuing this view, Castrén himself excavated about 40 kurgans in the Minussinsk area reaching the conclusion that the graves of the prehistoric Finnic population could be grouped apart. He also underlined the importance of studying the prehistoric cairns of Finland. (Castrén 1852–1858, VI: 129–137, 145–147).

The national sciences were not only interested in satisfying the curiosity of the academic community. By the 1850s the various fields of research had begun to constitute something of an ideological movement. The need of the day was a clear definition of the Finnish people and its ancestry as part of the struggle to establish a national culture based on the Finnish language. The opponents of these aims strove to prove that the Finnish people as well as related peoples had never achieved any higher level of culture on their own but had always been the receivers of cultural influences. Especially Gobineau's racial theories were popular in proving the passivity of the Finns. Yrjö-Sakari Yrjö-Koskinen set out in a true »fennophile» spirit to vindicate his people claiming in his doctoral dissertation that the Aryan races had actually received their original cultural influences from the ancestors of the Finnic peoples (Yrjö-Koskinen 1862, 1–9).

However, the main task of defining national prehistory and ethnic origin came lie with archaeology. The »metaphysical» assumptions of linguistic historians required »physical» proof in the form of archaeological material. The startingpoint, methods, and aims of this task were clearly defined beforehand – theory had preceded empirical investigation.

Johannes Reinhold Aspelin, the founder and organizer of systematic archaeological research in Finland, took up this task. He claimed that the aims of archaeology were basically »ethnographic», i.e. research had to cover »all areas previously inhabited by our family of peoples» in order to illustrate its development from a single people to its present state. (Aspelin 1874; 9–10). The key to the problem was the archaeological method. It could show »how the specific character of a people is reflected not only in its language and customs but also in the forms of its equipment when studied in full.» (Aspelin 1874, 10). Accordingly, the original ethnic community would be represented by an archaeological culture.

Aspelin's studies took him to Russia in the 1870's where he collected material for his main work »Muinaisjäännöksiä Suomen Suvun asumusaloilta – Antiquités du

Nord Finno-Ougrien» (1877–1884). This compendium contained over 2100 illustrations of Stone, Bronze and Iron Age finds from Finland, the East Baltic region and Northern Russia. The material was divided according to the territories assumed to have been inhabited by the Finnic tribes and peoples. The original population and its culture was represented by the »Ural-Altai Bronze Age«, with its main finds in the Minussinsk area. Aspelin also sketched out a model of ethnic descent and migration placing the arrival of the Finns to Finland in the 8th century AD. In later studies Aspelin combined previous interpretations with the results of the Danish linguist Thomsen claiming that the immediate ancestors of the Baltic Finns had prior to settling in their present areas inhabited an area roughly bordered by Lakes Belozero, Ladoga and Peipus where they had been subjected to strong cultural influences from Germanic peoples living in the East Baltic region. The movements of the Slavs broke up this ethnic community in the 4th century AD sending the ancestors of the Finns and Estonians west to the eastern reaches of the Gulf of Finland where they further divided with the ancestors of the Finns Proper of southwest Finland migrating first to Northern Estonia along with the Estonians before crossing the Gulf of Finland. Aspelin did not give any detailed chronology for these developments and was inclined to believe that the above Germanic culture had also extended to Finland before the arrival of the Finns in the 8th century from the east and southwest. The archaeological material cited by Aspelin for the arrival of the Finns from their respective directions is very scanty when compared with the far-reaching implications of his theory. In his doctoral dissertation from 1875 Aspelin supports his theory by referring to 14 closed finds of the 8th century, of which five had been excavated with some degree of accuracy. The material did not however contain any artefact forms that could have been interpreted as evidence of eastern origin at the time of the study, viz. indicating the direction from where the Finns had come. The finds could just as well have been interpreted as indicating western origin or a continuation of the assumed Germanic Iron Age culture.

Furthermore, the material presented in Aspelin's dissertation is a nearly complete sample of the museum collections of the day. Aspelin took up the question of the original home of the Finnic peoples again in the late 1880s, when he led three expeditions to Minussinsk to excavate kurgans and to copy certain inscriptions then believed to have been in a Finno-Ugrian language. The Yenisei inscriptions were later identified as Proto-Turkish and soon after these expeditions Aspelin lost interest in active archaeological research and returned to the study of medieval history, the main interest of his earlier years.

At the end of the 19th century the nationally oriented disciplines began to differentiate in aims and basic assumptions. Finno-Ugrian linguistics had abandoned the idea of a Central-Asian homeland of the Finnic peoples' ancestors. Paleolinguistic results suggested an original territory in the Volga-Kama region. The overall scheme of the prehistory of the Finnic peoples had been provided by linguistics and had been the starting-point and theoretical basis for Finnish archaeology in its first years – Archaeologists however did not aim at a closed model of explanation; Aspelin was cautious in separating assumptions from definite results and stated clearly where he felt that further studies were required.

Aspelin's model kept its status for several years and partly was not revised until in the early 20th century. The most obvious revisions to his theories came from Alfred Hackman's investigations regarding the Early Iron Age in Finland. Although Hackman was no longer a pioneer of archaeology his work has certain methodological standpoints that are in many respects the same as those of his predecessors. The

linguistic model of national descent and the ethnic developments of the East Baltic area were still in the background and were not doubted. Hackman also relied on Thomsen although he changed some aspects of the original interpretation.

The question of the origin of the Finns as part of the family of Finnic peoples was one of the main problems of early Finnish archaeology. It can be seen that this question and the tentative explanations offered for it was deeply rooted in the traditions of the nationally oriented scientific community of the day as well as the ideological requirements of the early and mid-19th century in Finland.

REFERENCES

- Aspelin, J. R., Muinaistieteellisiä tutkimuksia Suomen suvun asutusaloilta. *Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistyksen Aikakauskirja I*. Helsinki 1874.
- Aspelin, J. R. *Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Muinaistutkinnon Alkeita*. Helsinki 1875.
- Aspelin, J. R., M. A. Castrén muinaistutkijana. *Valvoja 1882*. Helsinki 1882.
- Aspelin, J. R., *Muinaisjäännöksiä Suomen suvun asumusaloilta*. Antiquités du Nord Finno-Ougrien. I–V. Helsinki 1877–1884.
- Branch, Michael, A. J. Sjögren. Studies of the North. *Suomalais-ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia 152*. Helsinki 1973.
- Castrén, M. A., *Nordiska Resor och Forskningar*. Helsingfors 1852–1858.
- Juslenius, Daniel, *Aboa vetus et nova*. Aboae 1700.
- Kaukonen, Väinö, Lönnrot ja Kalevala. *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 349*. Helsinki 1979.
- Lönnrot, Elias, *Kalevala*. Helsinki 1835.
- Nordman, Carl Axel, Archaeology in Finland before 1920. *The History of Learning and Science in Finland 1828–1918*. Helsinki 1968.
- Porthan, Henrik Gabriel, Opera Selecta. Henrik Gabr. Porthans skrifter i urval. *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 21: I–V*. Helsingfors 1859–1873.
- Rühs, Friedrich (Arwidsson, A. I.), *Finland och dess invånare. Andra upplagan, tillökt och omarbetad af Adolf Ivar Arwidsson*. Stockholm 1827.
- Schlözer, A. J., *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte*. Halle 1771.
- Schybergson, M. G., Henrik Gabriel Porthan. Lefnadsteckning I–II. *Svenska Litteratursällskapets Skrifter*. 83.98. Helsingfors 1908, 1911.
- Sjögren, Joh. Andreas, *Gesammelte Schriften*. I–II. St. Petersburg 1861.
- Tallgren, A. M., Geschichte der antiquarischen Forschung in Finnland. *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua X*. Helsinki 1936.
- Yrjö-Koskinen, Y. S., *Tiedot Suomen-suvun muinaisuudesta*. Helsinki 1862.