The concept of 'Finland as an Island': an external reappraisal*

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In Memory of John Armstrong († 12th February 2017)

For a considerable time, the concept of Finland as a peripheral 'island' in northern Europe dependent to a large extent on maritime trade and overseas commerce has dominated its historiography. Such an approach is understandable. A very high proportion of its foreign trade was seaborne; over one-third of its external borders were coastal; and urbanization was driven primarily by the growth of ports and maritime communities. A wide range of occupations and activities were directly related to the sea and long-term changes in the maritime economy had a direct effect on the structure of Finnish society and family life.

This article will re-examine the traditional concept by focusing on the 19th century when the Grand Duchy of Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. It will explore a number of themes in order to reassess the relative isolation of Finland between 1809 and 1917 and its alleged dependency on the maritime sector and foreign trade. The first section will analyse the origins and significance of the island concept and will be followed by a review of the role of overseas maritime trade in offering a solution to its geographical isolation while promoting market integration. This will be compared with Finland's non-maritime openness resulting from the rapid adoption of new technology, particularly in communications, and the gradual growth of a 'modern state'. The final section will focus on a topic which has seldom been accorded sufficient attention by maritime historians, namely the incorporation of Finland within the Tsarist Empire (1809–1917) and its significance for coastal and overland trade. Where relevant, the experience of Finland will be analysed in a comparative context, focusing on other Scandinavian states and European countries.

THE ISLAND CONCEPT

Finland has often been portrayed as a special case, as 'one of the world's most northern and geographically remote countries' with an island mentality moulded by trade and maritime culture. Because of its physical isolation, its long-run development was atypical, at least until the first half of the 20th century. The reports of European travellers to Finland in the late-18th century emphasised its physical isolation and relative poverty. The Gulf of Bothnia was 'surrounded by one contiguous

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unbroken forest', while the eastern district had 'numberless lakes', the most extensive forests and the severest winters.[1] Beggars were very common. The 'real Finlanders' were a 'genuine remnant of the original colony', but they were 'more barbarous than the Lapps' and the practice of cheating strangers was endemic.[2] Such characteristics led to Finland being assigned a very low rating in classifications of nationalities and races which became increasingly common during the Enlightenment.

Finland was the 'poorhouse of Europe', according to Zachris Topelius, and the inhabitants were pale shadows of the Swedes, who 'so strongly resemble Englishmen in all they do and say', although they were 'deficient in tact'. Travellers failed to recognise *Sisu,* a national symbol for Finns and a characteristic recently compared with the 'stiff upper lip' stereotype of an Englishman. But even if some of these opinions were questionable, the increasing popularity of Finnish peasant dress amongst members of the European upper-middle class suggests a real appreciation of the quality of rural craft designs. In March 1844, for example, Miss Elizabeth Thorneley wore a Finnish peasant dress at Liverpool's Grand Fancy Dress Ball in aid of the Public Charities.[3]

These highly subjective views of earlier travellers still resonate today. Indeed the concept of Finland as an island remains 'very true' because physical separateness was reinforced by linguistic isolation. In wintertime it was 'one of the most isolated and inaccessible regions in Europe'; the Baltic froze over for 80 to 100 days; and for a long time Hanko was the only port that stayed open the whole year round. As a result maritime historians have adopted the 'popular slogan' of Finland as an island as a conceptual framework for their research. The growth in Finnish maritime trade was a result of an opening to the western world via the Baltic. The sea, and the 'blue water' sailing ships that navigated the Atlantic as well as the Indian and Pacific oceans, played a critical role in promoting economic development and in facilitating the transmission of western ideas and contemporary cultural influences.[4]

After all, overseas trade was one of 'the most important impulses' for economic growth as income generated by exports led to an expansion of domestic purchasing power. In the late-18th century there was a 'rapid rise' in long-distance shipping; the combined merchant fleet in 1800 consisted of c. 500 ships; and by 1830 all coastal towns were able to trade abroad. Between 1813 and 1870 there was an annual increase of 2.2% in the value of foreign trade per capita (from 472 to 1318 silver kopecks). By the late-1860s the value of industrial exports was almost twice the figure for industrial imports, while trade deficits during this period were generally covered by shipping revenues.[5]

According to Ojala, the concept of Finland as an island, with its assumption that the expansion of international trade accelerated the Grand Duchy's economic development and its global market integration, remains the dominant research paradigm for many maritime historians. As a result, recent research has focused on different aspects of foreign trade, including the profitability of long-distance seafaring, the causes of improved productivity, the trend in the number of Finnish ships passing the Danish Sound ('the mother of all trades'), the increasing presence of Finnish vessels in the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Even if Finland was a 'rather peripheral shipping area', it had 'quite a large merchant marine' and in an international comparative context at the start of the 1870s it had the fifth largest tonnage per capita. Indeed, it has been claimed that the rise in timber exports and the large share of Finnish vessels involved in this trade, particularly between the 1830s and 1860s, 'witnessed the integration of the Finnish economy into the rest of Europe at the time'.[6]

Many aspects of the development of Finland's merchant shipping industry reflected wider, international trends. But some factors reflected the legacy of the long period of Swedish control or were specific to the Grand Duchy. As was the case in both Sweden and Finland, the administrative framework for the recruitment of sailors, the organization of pensions, and the provision of support for widows and orphans was created in 1748 and members of the Board of a Seamen's House (*sjömanshuset*) became the first statutory trustees for paid labour. By 1852 the Seamen's House in Pori had accepted that wives of seafarers should have broader welfare rights, while in 1858–9 the fund managed by Åbo's *sjömanshuset* supported 113 sailors. Finnish ship owners and merchants also benefited from attempts by the Swedish state to secure their property rights by creating a far-reaching consular network, but it was not until 1868 that rural ship-owners were finally granted unlimited rights to navigation when the 'staple system' (which divided ports into different trading categories) was finally abolished.[7]

The development of coastal fishing in Finland (as on the west coast of Sweden) was held back by the legal requirement that fisherman had to own land, in contrast to the situation in most other parts of Europe. This restriction was maintained even after the reform of the Finnish fishing laws in 1865, but the removal of regulations prohibiting the sub-division of peasant holdings as well as the introduction of new fishing techniques (hook-net fishing) which required little capital investment enabled a growing number of families to survive from fishing alone. By 1901 Åbo and Björneborg had 1,826 households where the main income came from fishing, 44 per cent of the total for the whole of Finland.[8]

As far as international trade was concerned, Finland 'adapted well to free-trading Europe' in the course of the 19th century and enjoyed 'lively international relations'. If a domestic bias affecting trade was an important constraint on integration, then the buoyancy of foreign trade and the positive response to rising external demand for Finnish exports, in particular wood and timber products, suggests that the 19th century witnessed a real improvement in Finland's international integration. By 1870 exports accounted for 25% of GDP, but a decade later this had risen to 30%.[9]

Centuries of incorporation within the Swedish Empire had already led to a high degree of economic integration, which was evident in the rank-size distribution of both Swedish and Finnish towns. Integration was supported after 1809 by the continuation of tariff-free trade between Finland and Sweden, as imports from both Sweden and Russia were either tariff free or subject to relatively low tariffs. Initially, incorporation within the Russian Empire had a negative impact on the process of international integration, as Russia maintained highly protectionist tariffs in line with its taxation policy. But from the late-1830s onward, particularly after 1841 when Finland became an autonomous customs area, tariff reductions reinforced the openness of its economy. Tariffs on both industrial and consumption goods were reduced by two-thirds; further significant reductions were implemented in the 1860s; and Finland's tariff policy was very much in line with the increasing adoption of free trade principles by many European countries. By 1900, according to Hjerppe, Finland was an 'open economy'.[10]

The degree to which Finland can be regarded as an increasingly 'open economy' was reinforced by rising rates of emigration. Emigration rates from Finland in the first half of the 19th century were never as significant as those in Sweden, Denmark and Norway, but Finns were amongst the first settlers in Alaska in the early 1800s and emigration from Ostrobothnia to northern Norway, in particular to the Troms province, developed real momentum from the 1830s onward. During the second

half of the 19th century there was a high rate of emigration to St. Petersburg, but Finnish workers also sought employment in the Swedish forestry industry, if only to avoid Russian conscription. The desertion rate of sailors from Finnish ships was no greater than that of other countries, but it contributed to emigration with the increase between the 1830s and 1850s a reaction to attractive settlement opportunities in the USA, specifically during the Californian Gold Rush of 1848 to 1850. By the late-19th century Finland had lost c. 10% of its total population as a result of emigration. High rates of emigration from the 1870s onward, largely in response to the increased demand for labour in North America, led to a greater degree of international convergence. They had a 'tremendous effect' on the Finnish homeland; stabilized wages during periods of depression; led to a long-run improvement in real wages in the domestic economy; and fostered wage convergence internationally.[11]

Moreover, Finland had a higher rate of return migration in comparison with the other Nordic countries which played an important role in the transfer of new technology. Already by the 1850s Finns recognised that 'North Americans and all Englishmen in general are amazingly ingenious and inventive men', but the spread of new machinery was supported by technical scholarships for study tours by Finnish engineers and by return migration from America. The disc harrows manufactured in Ylihärmä from the 1890s onward were based on an American prototype brought to Finland by a returned migrant, Jaakko Vassi; the thermal-mechanical process for the production of wood pulp was adopted in the late-1890s by another returning migrant, Georg Holm, while the Wickström brothers founded a boat engine factory in 1906 following their return from Chicago. It must be remembered, however, that high rates of emigration and return migration were phenomena of the two or three decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The former was largely a response to external demand, while the journey across the Atlantic was dependent on the existence of a well-developed maritime infrastructure.[12]

THE ROLE OF OVERSEAS MARITIME TRADE

Despite its importance as a research paradigm, the significance of the overseas maritime sector for the long-run development of Finland should not be overstated. Merchant tonnage per capita in 1870 was higher than that of France, Germany and the United States, but shipping remained 'an enclave economy' with limited backward linkages. At its peak in the mid-1860s, the shipping industry never contributed more than 3–4% of GDP. A number of points suggest that the overseas maritime sector was not as crucial as many historians have argued.[13]

First, despite, or perhaps because of, the 'Golden Age of Sail', the transition to steam in Finland was an unusually slow process. Although the first Finnish steamer, the *Fürst Menschikoff* had been built in 1834 by the Åboskeppswarfs Aktie Bolaget for the shipowner, Erik Julin, only 15% of the ships completed by the company between 1836 and 1879 were steam-powered (mostly naval frigates and corvettes). In 1875, steam ships accounted for approximately 3% of Finland's total tonnage, a figure that had only risen to 10.1% by 1892. By comparison, the whole of Bremen's merchant fleet in 1847 consisted of sailing ships, but 50 years later steamships accounted for 56% of the registered tonnage. In Hamburg steamships were already prominent by 1900, although some shipping companies remained committed to sail for a considerable period of time. In Sweden shortly before the outbreak of the First World War steamships accounted for almost 83% of the total merchant tonnage.[14]

Shipowners from Ostrobothnia purchased small coastal steamers and were often shareholders in steamship companies, but

S/v Sovinto (ex. County of Dumfries) in rough seas. Sovinto was a four-mast iron barque built in 1878 in Glasgow. Photo: The Maritime Museum of Finland.

they never acquired ocean-going steamers. There was still a strong tendency to purchase second or third-hand barques from foreign owners instead of investing in steam. The average age of vessels acquired by Finnish purchasers (admittedly from a small sample) was 21.4 years, largely from yards in Glasgow, Bristol and Southampton, which helps to explain the continued relative profitability of sailing vessels. For example, the 4-masted Barque *County of Dumfries* was built in 1878 as a full rigged ship by Barclay, Curle of Glasgow for R. & J. Craig, but it was changed into a barque before being sold in 1905 to Captain. J. Tork of Finland. Both Danish and Norwegian shipowners exploited the second-hand market for sailing ships, but to a far more limited extent. It was only after the First World War that Finns purchased second-hand steamships, including the *Garryvale* built in Glasgow in 1907 and acquired by a Finnish owner in 1923.[15]

Honorary Counsellor of Commerce Erik Julin, managing director of the old Turku shipyard. Photo: Picture Collections of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

The comparatively slow adoption of steam power cannot have been due to the significant fall in international freight rates in the late-19th century, as this affected shipowners irrespective of their nationality. Between the 1860s and the late-1880s, average profit levels in Finnish shipping fell from a peak of 20% to 7–10% primarily as a result of the general recession between the early-1870s and the mid-1880s, but they still represented a reasonable rate of return. The largest number of joint-stock companies established in Finland between 1865 and 1896 (174) were in the shipping industry, but the majority were steamship companies. A similar phenomenon could be found in other European ports as large liner companies found it necessary to raise external capital to finance new, faster and more luxurious vessels. But only two Finnish steamship companies (the Finska Ångslaps Depot AB, 1877 and the Finsk Ångfartygs AB, 1883) had a capitalization of 1m. Mark, while the average capitalization was only 115,000 Mark. There was also a high failure rate. For example, the Ostrobothnian Steamship Company, founded in Åbo in 1857, failed to pay a dividend until 1864 and was dissolved 11 years later.[16]

Honorary Counsellor of Commerce Carl Gustaf Wolff was a shipowner and also served as a member of the Diet of Finland. Photo: The Maritime Museum of Finland.

According to Ojala, prior to 1850 seafaring was a 'profitable business'. Considerable wealth was accumulated by successful merchants in costal ports, such as Commercial Councillors Carl Gustaf Wolff (1800–68) and Abraham Kingelin (1788–1849) from Vasa and Åbo respectively (the former reputedly the richest man in Finland). But lower rates of return in the late-19th century were accompanied by a transfer of resources to other sectors of the Finnish economy. Revenue from shipping had been used in the 18th century to establish proto-factories, but increasingly some shipowners and merchants, as was the case elsewhere in Europe, re-invested their wealth in manufacturing or other 'landward' activities to the extent that they were a 'crucial factor' in the country's development. Kingelin founded the Littoisten broadcloth factory in 1823 and the Åbo Steamship Company in 1835. Erik Julin (1796–1874) had a range of business interests as a shipowner, industrialist and apothecary. Konsul John Edvard Moé (1856–1931) started his business career as an importer of colonial goods, specifically tobacco, before moving into the wine trade, and by 1897 he was the owner of the Wasa Sockerfabrik AB, while the Trapp family in Åbo transferred its investments into industry as a direct response to the recession in shipping.[17]

By the late-19th century shipowners 'found themselves amongst the most important financers of Finland's industrialization'. This transfer of wealth out of the overseas maritime sector may well have been a rational choice in view of increased English and German competition for cargoes, the gradual erosion of the benefits that a low wage economy

provided, and the risk associated with joint-stock companies in the shipping industry. But it also represented a growing rejection of the island concept, as established interests gave way to a stronger focus on Finland's domestic economy.[18]

Secondly, despite the importance of overseas maritime trade, the overall contribution of seafaring to the dissemination of new ideas, as envisaged by proponents of the island concept, should not be exaggerated. In many respects Finnish seafarers shared the same characteristics as their counterparts from other European countries. There was a relatively low median age of entry, but a significant number were married (42% in Pori in the 1840s), as was the case in Britain (46% in 1891). As elsewhere, an occupation as a sailor was seldom a lifetime career and it was assumed that most seafarers retained close links with their port of origin. However, despite improvements in communication technology, faster turnaround times and other productivity gains which reduced the average duration of voyages, maintaining links with home continued to be problematic. Seafaring, particularly foreign trade, was still associated with high occupation-specific mortality rates, and, as in Sweden, a high proportion of seamen's widows were under 50.[19]

Despite their modest position in the seafaring hierarchy, defined by nationality, race, and by implication skill, in the early 1880s almost 50% of Finnish sailors (c. 6,000) were employed on foreign ships, primarily in the British and American merchant fleets. Although the total number of Finnish sailors on Russian ships was generally modest, some of them were attracted by better working opportunities created by the oil industry. For example, the Nobel Brothers Petroleum Company often made use of Finnish sailors, as well as technical experts from the Nordic countries, in their development of the oil industry in the Caspian Sea. Finnish ships carried a significant proportion of Russia's foreign trade, while Finnish steamer companies developed a prominent role in trade with St. Petersburg, including the Finska Ångslupsbolaget founded by Rafael von Hartman in 1872–73.[20]

Clearly, the extent of involvement in the international labour market for seafarers was substantial. Finnish seafarers were attracted by the large size of foreign shipping fleets and by higher wages, particularly at a time when British ships offered some of the best prospects for maritime employment. But it was unusual for such a high proportion of a country's sailors to be employed on foreign ships and it is often argued that it encouraged the assimilation of new cultural practices and their gradual dissemination in Finland.[21]

However, it is important to see this in perspective, as its contribution to the country's economic and social openness within the framework of the island paradigm remains debateable. In 1880, there were c. 506,000 men in the age-group 15 to 49. Many seafarers ceased to be employed in the maritime sector in their 30s, although a small number continued seafaring beyond that age. But the 6,000 sailors employed on foreign ships represented approximately 1.1% of Finnish men in that age-group. If all those men employed in the transport and communication sectors are combined, they still accounted for only 4.7% of the active male workforce. Moreover, the relative decline of the Finnish shipping industry from the 1870s onward and the slow transition to steam power led to a reduction in employment opportunities and the size of the maritime labour force.[22]

FINLAND'S NON-MARITIME OPENNESS

A general awareness of new ideas and inventions, as well as a willingness to adopt them, was reinforced by the implementation of developments in communication technology.

Russia had installed its first semaphore telegraph as early as 1824, but it was not until the Crimean War that the network was extended to the northern coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, including the port of Åbo. In the case of the electric telegraph there was no development gap. The first network in Finland was set up in 1855 only shortly after the invention of a viable commercial system and it was very much in line with similar developments in Sweden (1853) and Norway (1854). In 1860 a line was installed along the west coast all the way to Torneå, at the same time as the Swedish and Finnish/Russian networks were connected in Haparanda. Increased connectivity not only meant that news reached Finland at a faster speed, but the creation of telegram agencies (including the Great Northern Telegraph Company, 1869) reduced the dependence of regional newspapers on national dailies. The extension of the telegraph network was driven primarily by business interests, but it symbolised Finland's global interconnectivity.[23]

There was a similarly rapid response in Finland's adoption of the telephone. The first telephone line was installed in Helsinki in 1877 only 18 months after the telephone had been patented; in January 1882 the Helsinki Telephone Association was established by Daniel Wadén; and by 1884 it was dealing with over 1 million calls annually. A significant number of women were employed in long-distance telephone exchanges and by 1908 there was one telephone to 20 Finns. Finland can therefore be regarded as a 'forerunner' in the application of communication technology rather than an 'island' isolated from the wider world.[24]

As a result of improvements in communication, national and then international news was incorporated increasingly in the provincial press, not only in Finland but throughout the Nordic countries. A fairly standardized selection of foreign news was transmitted via the telegraph network and newspapers began to adopt a similar format. Indeed the *Wasabladet* in November 1906 reported a range of news and local activities that would have been recognised by readers in many parts of Europe. They included details of the AGM of the Constitutional Club, the competition to be held by the Wasa Amateur Photographic Club, and the programme of Världen Rundt, the city's largest and most prominent Biograftheater 'with living pictures for grown-ups and children'.[25]

Historically, the journey to the interior had been 'arduous' with its 'harsh and hostile environment' because nature had not been 'kind' to Finland. But this was gradually transformed by the development of a railway network. The first railway line was built in 1862 between Helsinki and Hämeenlinna (using locomotives imported from British manufacturers, including Beyer, Peacock and Co. from Gorton, Manchester). The opening of the line to St. Petersburg in 1870 (using the Russian 5 foot gauge) was followed by the transfer of most exports of manufactured goods destined for Russia from the maritime coastal trade to the new (and quicker) railway link. The new line proved to be 'a very potent competitor'. By 1900 every major seaport was served by a railway; the eastern interior had benefitted from the construction of new lines; and the whole Finnish system was integrated into the Russia network.[26]

Communication improvements were often dependent on maritime connections. After all, the benefits of the electric telegraph system were enhanced by the completion in 1866 of the first commercial telegraph cable across the Atlantic, while the development of the Finnish railway system was dependent initially on British-made components, including imported steam-engines and equipment. But the ability of Finland to exploit these opportunities increased significantly its international connectivity in a manner that was not dependent on the overseas maritime sector.

Indeed, there is an inherent risk of exaggerating Finland's under-development by

The Port of Helsinki in the 1880s. Photo: The Maritime Museum of Finland.

1900 and the role of overseas trade in breaking down its 'island' mentality. First, the claim that economic growth was held back by a shortage of capital is difficult to sustain. The Fiskars engineering workshop was established in 1837 by a firm that could trace its originals to 1649, while the development of the saw mill industry was financed by Finnish merchants and large-scale landowners. The level of demand for capital should not be overstated, as capital costs, as in other European countries, could be reduced by adopting a range of strategies. Although the Bank of Finland only offered loans against fixed securities (mainly agricultural property), capital could be obtained from family and friends, private loans (as advertised in the Helsinki press), and promissory notes (*skuldbrev*). Despite its relative under-development, between 1860 and 1913 the percentage GDP share of total public value added was consistently higher than in Sweden and by 1910 the percentage share of industrial value added was almost at the same level as Denmark.[27]

Second, with increasing industrialization and urbanization, the 19th century witnessed important developments in the creation of the 'modern' state. It would be overly simplistic to imagine that this was a unilinear path devoid of national differences, but it was a process that was certainly evident in Finland. For example, there were differences in how the women's movement progressed in the Nordic countries with class differences and tensions amongst suffragists most apparent in Finland and Norway. But the Finnish Women's Association was founded in 1884 and by 1906 general suffrage had been obtained for both women and men. In the elections to the new unicameral parliament (*Eduskunta*) in the following year, 19 women MPs were elected and Finland became the first country in the world where female representatives were returned in an election open to all adults, irrespective of gender. Finnish women were just as active as their sisters in Britain, Denmark and the USA in establishing city missions to fight against misery and sickness, in opening shelters for 'fallen women' (Helsinki, 1880), in affiliating with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (first Finnish branch in Åbo/Turku, 1896), and in supporting the Deaconess Movement. The first social work training course in 1906 was based on a British model created a few years earlier.[28]

Steamboat Murtaja was the largest of its kind in Finland upon its completion in 1840. This photo shows Murtaja in the port of Turku. Photo: Johan Jakob Reinberg / Picture Collections of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

But Finland's increasing openness to external influences, irrespective of contacts generated through the maritime sector, was not restricted to the women's movement. Whether in relation to its integration within the international book market, its susceptibility to new religious influences, the development and use of organised sport or the growth of the labour movement and waterfront unionism, Finland's trajectory was similar to that of many other European countries, in particular its Scandinavian neighbours, although sometimes with noticeable differences. The growth of associational culture, including the establishment of yacht clubs, was a phenomenon that was common to all Scandinavian countries. There were also similar policies in the treatment of the Sami and travelling families (*zigenare*) at the local level, but a growing divergence nationally. The design and development of Finnish towns and cities reflected general processes of change as a response to rising rates of in-migration and the health consequences of over-crowding. The development of Helsinki's 'new town' was greatly admired, even if it was accompanied by increased social differentiation, while the growth of municipal administration and fiscal revenues fuelled civic ambitions which led to the gradual provision of parks and open spaces in line with trends elsewhere in England, continental Europe and America. Far from being an 'island' dependent on connections generated by overseas maritime trade as a source of innovation, the framework of a modern Finnish state was clearly being constructed as a result of wider processes of economic, political and social change.[29]

THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

It is understandable that maritime historians have accepted the concept of Finland as an island dependent on shipping and trade for its long-run development. But such a perspective ignores its physical integration within the Swedish Empire and its status after 1809 as an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Rus-

The office (on the left) and port granaries of the Helsinki shipyard in South Harbour. Photo by: possibly Charles Riis / Picture Collections of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

sian Empire. Unfortunately, the role of Russia, together with the significance of coastal and overland trade, has been 'expunged' and has rarely been addressed in recent research, because of the legacy of the Winter War (1939–40) and the Continuation War (1941–4), as well as the years of Soviet influence in the post-war period.

It is difficult to evaluate the costs or benefits of the centuries of Swedish control of Finland in terms of long-run economic growth or the development of its maritime sector, but Finland certainly benefited from a 'relatively efficient' administrative and legal system, as well as from the geographical coverage of the Swedish postal system and consular service. Russia's acceptance of the basic laws in 1809 meant that the previous administrative framework remained in place, while the existing public banking institutions continued to operate as before, as did merchant houses and private individuals who lent and borrowed money.

After 1809 trade between Finland and Sweden continued in the same manner as both countries accepted each other's tariffs. Prior to the introduction in 1860 of Finland's own currency (markka), Swedish coin (*riksdaler*) and paper currency continued to be used until 1840. This was followed by two decades when the Russian Ruble was the primary means of payment and it was only in 1865 that the two currencies were formally separated when the Finnish Markka was tied to the value of silver. The traditional trading pattern between Stockholm and Finnish ports on the Gulf of Bothnia and the Åland Islands continued far into the 19th century, with exports of tar, timber and foodstuffs from the Grand Duchy exchanged for a varied assortment of goods. Over time, a growing independence from Stockholm led to an increase in direct trading contacts across the Gulf of Bothnia between Österbotten and the Swedish ports of Gävle, Härnösand and Luleå. But the drawing of a new Fenno-Swedish border along the Torneå River had no impact on the daily life of the Sami as no special restrictions were placed on border crossings. Semi-nomadic life continued even

after 1826 when more restrictive regulations were agreed between Norway and Russia, but increasingly the Sami were becoming a minority in the river valley as a result of in-migration and settlement from other parts of Finland.[30]

Between 1809 and 1917 close proximity to Russia began to influence tariff and monetary policy, as well as the structure and extent of trade between the Grand Duchy and other parts of the Russian Empire. Although it benefited from retaining many of the administrative and trading structures that had been imposed during Swedish rule, incorporation within the Tsarist Empire had a significant impact on Finland's subsequent development.

First, from 1835 onward exports to Russia became increasingly tariff free, specifically following the bilateral trade agreement of 1843 and the abolition of the tariff border in 1850. In the 1840s, Russia already accounted for 37% of Finland's foreign trade, but this had risen to 40–50% by the mid-19th century and to 52% by 1870. Finnish merchants could export to Russia duty free agricultural and forestry goods, as well as handicraft and cottage industry products, while industrial products enjoyed relatively high duty-free quotas. Exports of firewood, stone and other building materials rose 'almost continuously' and approximately 60% of cotton industry exports went to Russia.

In return, Russia was Finland's most important supplier of imports, including grain, raw sugar and tobacco. As a result, Finnish companies and private businessmen 'consistently had lively relations with the Russians'. Foreign investment in Finland's manufacturing capacity was motivated by the prospect of easy access to the Russian market, as was the case with Finlayson's cotton mill in Tampere, as well as German glass-makers and Swiss cheese-makers, and the manufacture of paper products before 1914 was primarily a response to Russian demand. In reality, Russia had become Finland's most important trading partner, a transformation that was facilitated by the modernization of coastal shipping and improved railway links.

Despite the growing trade with Britain and other western European countries from the 1870s and 1880s onward, primarily as a result of an increased demand for the products of Finland's forestry industries, Russia still accounted for just under 40% of all Finnish exports in 1890 and even prior to the outbreak of the First World War it just about retained the largest share, although the figure, according to Hjerppe, had fallen by then to only 28%. By the end of the 19th century over 50% of Finnish coastal trade was with Russian ports, specifically St. Petersburg, or ports under Russian control, such as Tallinn, Riga and Klaipéda, all of which could be accessed by local shipping. Steamship tonnage between Helsinki and St. Petersburg between 1883 and 1898 increased by 100% and although the loaded tonnage between Oulu and the Russian capital fell, it still represented 51.4% of its coastal trade.[31]

Second, as far as shipping and maritime employment was concerned, 1809 did not signify a major change, at least not initially, as Finnish ships were treated by the Russian authorities as 'foreign' until 1830. But increasingly Finnish ships accounted for a significant proportion of Russia's foreign trade, particularly grain exports from the Black Sea ports, although by the mid-1870s this trade was taken over by British and Greek steamers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century some Finnish steamers involved in the emigrant trade benefited directly from the rapid growth in Russian emigration, although they were prevented from taking passengers on board in St. Petersburg and were forced to use the home ports of Hanko and Turku. By the mid-1850s there is also evidence of Finnish sailors in Russian service and many of the sailors who took out a passport for less than a year were probably involved in the coastal trade to St. Petersburg or other ports in the Baltic.[32]

Third, the importance of the new links with Russia after 1809 was reflected in the rapid increase of Finnish migration to St. Petersburg. Already in the 1730s the Swedish-Finnish parish in St. Petersburg had c. 1,500 members (of whom barely 700 attended communion), but by 1880 only Helsinki (with a total population of 38,700) had a larger number of Finnish residents than the Russian capital with 24,400. Between 1826 and 1917 c. 60,000 Finns migrated to St. Petersburg, the majority of whom became members of the Finnish and Lutheran parishes of St. Maria (Finnish, 1803–5) and St. Katarina (Swedish, 1789, 1855). The Swedish-Finnish parish of St. Katarina, led by Pastor Herman Kajanus (born in Helsinki in 1852), had a membership of almost 7,000 at its peak in the 1880s. Finns were able to become members of Russian guilds without a new oath and therefore had unlimited rights to carry out trade, but Russia also became an attractive destination for Finnish engineers, technicians and mechanics, as well as graduates of the cadet corps. Finnish peasants in the 1820s and 1830s served in the Russian army, almost entirely in small Finnish units of 5,000 men, as replacements for indigenous conscripts; manual labourers were employed on major construction projects, including the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway; while at the other end of the social spectrum, Finnish politicians, administrators and businessmen were inevitably attracted to St. Petersburg as the seat of Tsarist power. As was the case in other metropolitan centres and port-cities with significant rates of overseas in-migration, the Finnish/Swedish community established ‘relatively many’ philanthropic associations,

The shipping company FÅA’s office building in Helsinki, on the corner of Eteläranta and Eteläinen Makasiinikatu, was used up until 1905. Photo: The Maritime Museum of Finland.

including an asylum for young girls (1847) and a Finnish *Damförening* (1884–5) that provided welfare support to fellow countrymen whose residence in the Russian capital had not been successful. Viewed from this perspective, the concept of Finland as a peripheral island dependent primarily on overseas commerce and maritime contacts is untenable.[33]

CONCLUSION

The origins of the concept of Finland as an island are easily established. Primarily as a result of travellers' accounts from the 18th century onward an image was embedded in European consciousness of part of the Swedish Empire that was isolated from wider trends. Finland was backward economically and trade was disrupted during the winter months by thick ice and inhospitable conditions. Within this context, it is understandable that many maritime historians have utilised this concept for much of their research. After all, overseas trade was monitored officially at a number of levels; data was more readily available than for coastal and inland trades; and the involvement in long-distance trading activities by 'blue-sea' sailing ships facilitated Finland's gradual integration into world markets, promoted economic integration, and led to the dissemination of new ideas by seafarers and return migrants.

However, the picture that emerges from this review is at variance with the traditional paradigm. Although long-distance overseas trade played an important role in fostering Finland's market integration and long-run development, it should not be exaggerated. The slow transition to steam, the continued dependency on the purchase of third-hand sailing ships, the low level of capitalization of steamship companies, and the increasing transfer of capital by ship owners and merchants to the domestic economy all suggest that the importance of overseas trade was more muted than expected.

By contrast, many maritime historians have tended to ignore two factors. First, Finland's opening to the wider world as a result of non-maritime links, including the rapid adoption of new communications technology (specifically the electric telegraph and the telephone), the development of a railway network that fostered inland trade, and progress in the creation of a 'modern state', in line with trends elsewhere in Europe. This was visible in a number of areas including the women's movement, the establishment of voluntary associations, and planning improvements to Helsinki and other urban communities. Indeed, by 1900 Finland was not as 'backward' as many historians have believed and higher rates of growth from the late 19th century onward occurred at a time when the maritime sector had ceased to be as buoyant or profitable as it had been in the 1850s and 1860s.[34]

Second, an over-reliance on the concept of Finland as an island has led to a failure to analyse the consequences of its incorporation between 1809 and 1917 in the Russian Empire. By 1900 over 50% of its trade was with Russia and St. Petersburg was a magnet for Finnish migration. But for non-academic reasons the role of Tsarist Russia in Finland's development has been largely ignored. Apart from Ojala's and Kaukiainen's brief surveys of coastal trade, this maritime sector has never been the focus of research and there is little evidence to suggest that archival material in St. Petersburg, Tallinn or ports in Lettland have ever been used to reconstruct Finland's coastal trade with Russia and its Baltic provinces. Indeed, there are other deficiencies that prevent a more objective analysis of the maritime sector's contribution to Finland's development. Many of the port-town histories that were meticulously compiled in the 1970s and 1980s are now rather dated and only in a few cases, including the ports of Kokkola (ship-

building and the tar trade) and Rauma (with the largest fleet in Finland of 57 sailing ships in 1897), have they been supplemented by more modern studies with a wider analytical agenda. They seldom focus on research issues of contemporary relevance, including port-hinterland relations, inter-port competition (or collaboration), and the spatial origins of seafarers. Only in a few cases, such as the ports of Kokkola (the tar-trade and ship-building) and Rauma (with the largest fleet in Finland of 57 sailing ships in 1897), have they been supplemented by more modern studies with a wider analytical agenda. There is no prosobiographical analysis of Finnish merchants and shipowners, nor any comprehensive assessment of the impact of capital transfer from the maritime sector to the domestic industry, while the extent of their collective involvement in Russian affairs is difficult to ascertain.[35]

Finally, although inland transport routes were particularly important in the pre-industrial period, their significance in the 19th-century deserves further attention. The expansion of the inland water transport system, including the construction of the Saimaa Canal (1845–6), meant that they continued to offer 'versatile communication' routes with foreign countries. By 1875, 45 steamers operated on the inland waterways. But to what extent were they integrated with overseas trade? Were men (and women) who worked on these inland routes invariably distinct from seafarers? And to what extent did they provide a mechanism for the dissemination of new products and ideas?

Within this context, the continued usefulness of the concept of Finland as an island for research in maritime history is questionable. As a commonly accepted axiom it has been poorly defined and reflects a long-running geo-political orientation towards the West. But there are other focal points that deserve more attention in the future, including the significance of trade between Finland and Tsarist Russia and its Baltic provinces, the role of coastal shipping and the increasing importance of inland water transport. These may be less attractive fields of research than the overseas maritime sector because of limited data availability and a need for additional language expertise, but they are central for a more balanced understanding of the role of commerce and trade in the Finnish economy.

ENDNOTES

1 Jones 1827, 1, 66.
2 Clarke 1823, 336, 354; Halmesvirta 1990, 93, 105; Lurcock 2010.
3 Rahikainen 1993, 24; Clarke 1823, 377; Hudson 1940, 4; Lurcock 2010; Tepora 2012; Liverpool Mercury 1844.
4 Myllyntaus 2013, 69; Grönfors 1993, 161; Moring 1993, 398; Mäenpää 2017.
5 Schybergson 1973, 41–5; Kaukiainen 1993, 66; Hjerppe 1989, 154.
6 Ojala 1999, 424; Ojala 2011, 187; Ojala and Räihä 2017, 26–43.
7 Frigren 2012, 13; Jutikkala 1985, 640; Ojala 1999, 437; Kaukiainen 1993, 60, 70.
8 Eklund 1994, 62, 84; Moring 1993, 409.
9 Hjerppe 1989, 164, 151; Arribas et al. 2006, 19.
10 Engman 2009, 148; Lilja 1994, 243; Schybergson 1973, 51; Hjerppe 1989, 151.
11 Engman 1995, 13; Møller 1983, 45; Ojala and Pehkonen 2005, 3; Ojala and Pehkonen 2006, 25–53.
12 Suometar 1854; Kero 1984; Heikkonen 1983.
13 Hjerppe 1989, 164; Kaukiainen 1993, 89, 92. According to Kaukiainen, a high proportion of operating costs of the shipping sector was paid abroad and only the ship owners' net income and crew wages were included in GDP calculations.

As a result, the sector's contribution to GDP was seldom very substantial.

14 Kaukiainen 1993, 86, 100; Jahrbuch für Bremische Statistik 1910, 136.
15 Ojala 1999, 412.
16 Kaukiainen 1993, 121; Schybergson 1964, 120–1. The Ångslaps Depot AB maintained small steamboat traffic on the River Neva (St. Petersburg).
17 Ojala 1997, 349–58; Ojala 1999, 427; Ojala 2009, 979–80; Rahikainen 1992, 49; Jern 1980, 158; Jutikkala 1985, 387; Rinne 1952; Schybergson 1964, 17. A long list of such cases can be found in Kaukiainen 1993, 309.
18 Ojala 2011, 178, 188; Kaukiainen 1993, 126.
19 Frigren 2012, 3–4; Burton 1987, 36–43; Kaukiainen 1993, 93; Kaukiainen 1996, 39–46; Kirby and Hinkkanen 2000, 247.
20 Kaukiainen 1993, 93; Engman 2000, 200.
21 Kaukiainen 2016, 20; Balachanran 2006, 97–8.
22 Mitchell 1975, 34, 155.
23 Westerland 2002, 197–8; Harvard 2013, 47–74; Harvard and Stadius 2013, 1–24.
24 Schantz 1929; Risberg 1955.
25 Harvard and Stadius 2013, 1–24; Wasabladet 1906.
26 Kirby 1979, 2; Kaukiainen 2002, 79.
27 Rinne 1952; Schybergson 1964, 17; Urbans 1954; Eloranta 1997, 131, 139.
28 Blom 2012; Sulkunen 2009, 10–11; Markkola 2000, 143–78; Brettschneider 1989, 20.
29 Hakopää 2012; Werner 2010, 65–85; Östman 2010; Keskinen 2012; Nielsen and Bale 2012, 69–86; Teräs and Bergholm 2000, 84–90; Thörnqvist, Bergholm and Mellberg 2016, 75–105; Alapuro 2010, 1–28; Stenius 2010, 29–88; Barek 2003, 83; Åström 1957, 117; Klinge 2012, 235; Schantz 2006; Lantto 2008, 26–51; Ericsson 2017, 94–121.
30 Simonson 2009, 384–424; Bagerstam 1989, 53; Engman 2009, 148; Møller 1983, 42–3; Lantto 2010, 543–6; Lähteenmäki 2006, 696–704.
31 Kaukiainen 1993, 62, 84; Kaukiainen 2002, 75–86; Hjerppe 1989, 158–9; Schybergson 1973, 387, 400; Hjerppe and Lamberg 2000, 387, 400; Ojala, Eloranta and Jalava 2006, 145 (Fig. 5a–b).
32 Kaukiainen 1993, 67; Engman 2000, 202.
33 Engman 1995, 14; Engman 2000, 325; Engman 2009, 164; Jangfeldt 2006, 74.
34 Sundmann 1991, 68–101.
35 Ojala 2002, 63–74; Kaukiainen 2002, 75–86.

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