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## THE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF FINNISH IMMIGRATION TO FINNSKOGEN

### **The focuses of research**

Research concerning the Forest Finns has been conducted for a long while, and the scholarly literature on the subject is extensive. Swedish and Norwegian researchers have naturally been primarily interested in these foreign immigrants within their own borders, with their considerable impact on the regional history of settlement. From the outset, studies have also noted the exceptional cultural features distinguishing the immigrants from the original local population.

In Finnish studies, the Forest Finns have represented a very old migrant group, with research seeking to investigate their areas of origin, reasons for migrating and typical features. The isolated nature of the Forest Finns has also been an impetus for research since its beginning. In this respect, they are in a special situation in comparison with, for example the Finnmark Finns on the shore of Arctic sea. With regard to work in linguistic and folk culture studies, a kind of parallel can be seen in the interest of German research in eastern German "linguistic lacunae" in the Ukraine, the former Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary and the former Yugoslavia.

The long isolation of the Forest Finns from their mother country has emphasized the significance of linguistic and folk culture materials collected among them. Since the main period of migration (ca. 1580 –1630) is known and the areas of origin could be established already at an early stage in the regions of the Savo Finns in North Häme (the greater parish of Rautalampi), it was natural for the materials of the Forest Finns to gain considerable importance with regard to the age and dating of various cultural phenomena. Where a phenomenon was known from Värmland (the area of most of the Forest Finn material), it was also known in Central Finland in the late 16th or early 17th century. If, on the other hand, a phenomenon was not known at all from Värmland, it was concluded that it had been forgotten, if already old in the area of origin, or then it was not yet known even in that area at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, and was thus younger. The approach was mostly quite straightforward and there were no considerations of the local Swedish-Norwegian cultural background or of broader connections.

With the exception of a few more thorough monographs, the study of the folk culture of the Forest Finns has suffered from the fact that Swedish-Norwegian researchers have not known the Finnish material or taken it into account, and accordingly Finnish scholars have addressed the Forest Finn material as separate from the local Swedish-Norwegian cultural heritage. Research has not considered the socioeconomic development of the Forest Finn region, such as Värmland from the 17th to the 20th century, or the impact of these developments on folk culture, and therefore the problematic of acculturation has remained for the time undiscussed, except for changes in the vernacular Finnish language.

### **Old migration**

Finns have moved to Sweden in varying numbers ever since the Early Middle Ages. There are written sources already from the 1330s and by the end of the Middle Ages (i.e. the beginning of the 16th century) at least 600 Finnish migrants were recorded. Most of them settled in Central Sweden, in Uppland and the Lake Mälaren region. Of the migrants, 85% moved to the towns, mainly Stockholm, and to the countryside north of Lake Mälaren to work as labourers on large holdings, and some 60 went to work in the mines of the Bergslagen region.

During the reigns of King Gustavus Vasa and his son Eric, especially in the 1540s and 1550s, there appears to have been a marked expansion of settlement in Central Sweden. This was based, on the one hand, on the idea, dating from the Middle Ages, that all land in the realm that was not in active use belonged to the crown. Gustavus Vasa underlined this point in numerous administrative decisions and royal letters in the 1540s and 1550s. This allowed pioneer settlers to enter, on the one hand, completely uninhabited regions, and on the other hand areas that were under long-distance utilization from older regions of settlement. They were locations for wilderness livelihoods, hunting and fishing, only on a seasonal basis. Some of the farms and homesteads sent members of their younger generation to settle their former wilderness tracts, while others relinquished these areas either voluntarily or through judicial process. It was the aim of the king to obtain assured tax revenue from the new permanent settlers. This concerned the whole realm, both present-day Sweden, and its previously eastern province, Finland.

On the other hand, also Swedes settled permanently above all in their outlying tracts serving animal husbandry, at cattle sheds and distant meadows, which became arable fields and permanent meadows. In this way, permanent settlement also spread in the central areas. Colonization was caused by the pressures of population growth, increased economic demand for the produce of colonized areas, and the implementation of the crown's plans.

Thousands of Finns moved mainly to the areas of the towns of Uppsala, Enköping and Sigtuna. From the perspective of Finns, a natural gateway was Stockholm, the capital of the realm. Travel was facilitated by active peasant seafaring practised by inhabitants of the archipelago in both directions. The peasant seafarers had the right since time immemorial also the sail beyond Stockholm. This halved the time required for the journey from Finland to Värmland, as shown by documents. The migrants included individuals seeking work, people who had set out to become farmhands and maids, and whole families with children seeking a new permanent abode. Slowly they settled also in Södermanland and Västmanland up to lake Vänern.

Those who were intent on settling in the forests of Gästrikland, Hälsingland or Medelpad followed a route further to the north, facilitated by peasant vessels sailing to Gävle. Thus, the migrants hardly walked from their original regions to Central Scandinavia with birch knapsacks on their backs, as mentioned in heroic tales. According to stories, the immigrants when arriving had hardly anything else

with them than the clothes on their backs, sheath knife on their belts, an axe in their birch-bark knapsack and special seeds of rye and turnip in a box or bag. Not many seeds were needed to get started, for they were sowed sparsely: only seven grains in an area the size of a calf's hide.

Instead, as pointed out by Richard Broberg, they in fact made use of all means of aided transport available at the time. We should also be note that the westward migration took place gradually in stages, using earlier immigrant settlements as stepping-stones.

From where did the early immigrants come? They were West Finns who found it easy to settle in the new area because of the similarities of culture. They were driven by excess supply of labour in their own regions, and the demand for labour in the central areas of the Swedish realm. There were thus factors of both push and pull. Some of the immigrants moved upon the urging of King Gustavus Vasa, while others came of their own accord. This earlier West-Finnish migration has been regarded as a separate phenomenon in comparison with the later wave of East Finnish immigrants.

### **The new migration**

Duke of Södermanland Karl addressed the problem of colonization in the 1570s and 1580s by issuing several open letters ordering croft sites to be given to settlers. As a result, over a thousand crofts were established. Documents clearly show that the duke sought to increase the grain crop of his territory; he even imported wheat seed from Germany to be cultivated at the so-called crown manors or model farms. He also worked to promote the growing of slash-and-burn or swidden rye at all new farms, not only the ones cleared by Finns.

The Finnish settlers that come to Sweden via Stockholm and Gävle presumably halted their advance around 1600 at the latitude of Medelpad Province where they came across Finns who had crossed the Gulf of Bothnia further north at its narrow part known as Kvarken or via Sundsvall. Also in regional terms, the migration of Finns concerned all the provinces of Central and North Sweden, from Södermanland and the border forests (Tiveden) of West Götaland and Närke in the south to Västerbotten and as far as Lapland in the north.

In Värmland to the west, settlement by the migrants connected directly with Finnish settlement on the Norwegian side of the border. The border with Norway did not pose any kind of obstacle, being crossed by Finnish settlers before the 1630s. From the centres of settlement in the forests of Grue and Brandsval, Finnish settlement spread rapidly throughout the forest regions of East Norway to Trysil in the north and in the west across the river Glommen to the forests of Bårum and Modum in the vicinity of Oslo and Drammen, after which it extended in the west to the fell zone. Finnish settlement thus reached the type of terrain that could no longer be utilized by its cultivation techniques.

Owing to natural reasons, material is not available in any even manner to later research from this large Swedish-Norwegian area, since the small and dispersed Finnish population assimilated at an early stage into the mainstream population in

many of the regions. They are attested in often sparse mentions in series of historical sources and in some place-names. This is one of the reasons why researchers disagree considerably over the actual contribution of Finns to the colonization of Central Scandinavia. Some scholars (Nordmann, Broberg, Brunius) calculate their proportion of inhabitants to as much as one-third, while others (Wetling, Österberg) maintain that there was practically no Finnish colonization in the forest regions before the year 1600.

The fact that Savo Finns remained strictly within the boundaries of the duchy during the first two decades of colonisations proves that immigration was controlled by crown bailiffs. Immigration gained new impetus when Duke Karl became king at the turn of the century.

Some 5,000 Forest Finns are estimated to have lived in Värmland in the 17th century.

### **The areas of origin of the Forest Finns**

Oral tradition has preserved very little information on the places of origin of the Forest Finns and the routes by which they came to their new areas of settlement. In some cases, it was told that one's ancestors had come from Rautalampi or Häme, which in fact meant the same region. Rautalampi had been a utilized wilderness region or *erämark* of the Häme Finns, or Tavastians, to which they came over long distances in the spring and autumn to fish and hunt. Around the middle of the 16th century, Savo Finns began to come to the area from the southeast. They did not restrict themselves to hunting and fishing but also began to practise primitive cultivation. This clash of different types of livelihoods led to trials and appeals all the way to king, with the result was that the crown systematically took the side of the newcomers, i.e. the Savo Finns, because it felt that farming would lead to permanent settlement and regular tax revenue in the long run. Judicial rulings and cadastres drawn up for purposes of taxation give a good idea of the advance of settlement. This is largely based on the fact that family names were in use in East Finland and by observing them we can follow the geographical spread and consolidation of settlement. The family names also followed the migrants from Finland to Sweden, remaining known among the inhabitants there from one generation to another. The Western name custom, which was followed in Sweden and West Finland, was based on the patronym, e.g. Matts Mattson, and possibly on the name of the farmstead derived from its geographical location (e.g. Mäki = Hill, Harju = Ridge, Järvi = Lake) or relation to other home or farmsteads (e.g. Alitalo = Lower Farm, Keskinen = Middle Farm, Laitala = location at the side)

Although a dozen or so parishes as far as Jämsä, Kuopio, Mikkeli and Sääminki can be identified in sources as the areas of origin of the Forest Finns, Rautalampi was nonetheless the most common one. It is to be noted that Rautalampi Parish, established upon the orders of King Gustavus Vasa to improve local administration, was later known as Greater Rautalampi (Fi. Suur-Rautalampi), as it was later divided into as many as six separate parishes. In some

documents the name is even translated into Swedish when entering a colonist's place of origin in records as "Finnelandh i *Järnkärna* (literally Iron Pond) Parish".

The origin of the Finns of Central Scandinavia in the Rautalampi region is thus verified by both oral tradition passed down in families and documents. It is, however, also supported by features of folk culture.

For a long while there prevailed in the outlying regions of Central Scandinavia colonized by Finns a distinct sphere of beliefs differing from the traditions of the original population, different customs and, above all, a completely different language, which left its mark on the surrounding natural environment and its place-names. These enclaves could withstand assimilation and disintegration for a relatively long while. Locations of this kind were, for example, regions near the Norwegian border in Fryksdalen and Klaraälv dalen, with an undivided area of Finnish settlement extending over a distance about one hundred and a half kilometres.

### **Taking possession of land**

An integral part of the East Finnish non-material heritage was the culture of customs that were followed when settling in a new location. The homestead had to fulfil certain rational conditions, but also, in our opinion, some functions mainly related to the sphere of beliefs.

Rational features included, for example, a location on high ground, such as the slopes or crests of hills. This was partly due to necessity, since the valleys were already settled by Swedes.

The suitability of a site could be tested in various ways. In the autumn a wooden or birch-bark vessel was filled with water and left to stand in place. If the surface of the water froze very early, the site was susceptible to night frosts and thus unsuitable for cultivation, and a new location had to be sought.

The quality of the soil was also important. Forest Finns are said to have tested the soil by smelling it and sometimes by tasting it with the tongue. The soil had to be of fine granularity and it had retain water. The latter meant that water should not flow too quickly through the soil, whereby it would dry too quickly.

The site also had to have water veins ensuring a permanent supply of spring water or a good location for a well. A good nearby river or lake for fishing was also a requirement, and enough land for slash-and-burn clearing and hunting. (Broberg 1981)

When a suitable location with regard to climate and soil was found, the actual site of the farmstead had to be purchased or redeemed. Beliefs now became involved. A farmstead could not be built where the "underground folk" (*Fi. maahiset*) did not allow it. This would lead to illness, setbacks, accidents, and general discomfort for both people and domestic animals. A site was tested by lying down on the ground and listening. If sounds were heard, the underground folk were active and the place was reserved. Another test was to let a rooster walk around the site. If it crowed, it was good for building and settlement. Newcomers could also camp for the night at a site to see what kinds of dreams would follow. If

there were fields of grain, game animals or people nodding in approval in the dreams, the site was suitable. Flowing water in a dream was a bad omen, pointing to floods or too much rain.

There are also stories of having to redeem a site from its previous owners, i.e. the underground folk, who could be given offerings of food or coins.

Stories have survived regarding the size of the area that could be claimed, with old Pan-European traditions discernible in the background. The farmyard extended as far as the master of the household could throw a bladed tool (an axe or knife). This is a northern tradition. From the south came stories of cutting the hide of a domestic animal into a long band marking the perimeter of the site. The boundary of the nearby fields was the perimeter of the area that the farmer could plough in a day or sow from a single bushel of seed. Even the burn-cleared plots could not extend further than a man could ski in a day, or walk all around them. According to some storey, new settlers were not allowed closer than twenty or thirty kilometres from the previous ones. Beliefs of this kind were also common in the areas of origin of the colonists in East and Central Finland.

### **Slash-and-burn agriculture**

The importance of slash-and-burn practices has particularly been underlined in connection with the Finnish settlers of Sweden and Norway. The concept of the *Svedjefinnar* (Swidden Finns) is known from scholarly texts and literature alike. A great deal has been written about these practices by the Forest Finns, and various authors have actively quoted each other, often leaving the details of the period, locality and specific slash-and-burn practices unclear.

Details familiar from East Finnish conditions have also been transferred uncritically to the immigrants, and there has been a great deal of generalization based on a relatively small and dispersed material. There is no doubt that slash-and-burn agriculture was of significance to the Forest Finn economy, but its proportionate role has varied considerably over the centuries.

According to the traditional view, the Finnish settlers moved into uninhabited areas of moraine soils. Denser or sparser settlement formed in these hitherto uninhabited locations and came to be known with terms such as *finskog*, *finmark*, *finbygd*, referring to the forests, lands or localities of the Finns. As opposed to the dense village settlements of the valleys, the Finnish areas consisted of individual farmsteads or isolated villages in deep forests. In most cases, the farmsteads were on high hills to avoid night frosts, often on the southern slopes in fine-grained moraine soil that retained water.

Arvo Soininen made a detailed study of the slash-and-burn practices of the Savo Finns, to which Juhani Kortessalmi provided additional material. According to the latter, the Forest Finns were familiar with the *huuhta* type of swidden, which was burned over once or twice and was not tilled with either an ard plough or a branch harrow, i.e. neither ploughed nor harrowed. The fact that this technique practised by the Forest Finns was considerably more primitive than those known from the Savo region has been known for a long while. Slash-and-burn cultivation

can be regarded as having been considerably more important in the early stages of settlement and still in the 18th century (Nilsson). However, it decreased considerably by the middle of the 19th century, after which it became temporary, though still practised in places at the beginning of the 20th century.

Ilmar Talve questioned whether slash-and-burn cultivation was ever a livelihood of such extent in the Forest Finn context that it could be compared to the practices followed in East Finland. It was already prevented by limited local conditions (including the Swedish-Norwegian system of outlying cattle sheds and the large numbers of ironworks in many provinces) and especially from the 18th century onwards by rapid population growth and the increase of settlement also in the Värmland-Solör forest regions. Under certain conditions and especially in the early stages of settlement slash-and-burn agriculture could even have been the main means of livelihood, but by the 18th century it had become one livelihood alongside others. Animal husbandry, arable farming, fishing and to some degree even hunting were no less important. Henrik G. Porthan, known as the "father of Finnish history" already gave precedence to animal husbandry among the Forest Finns. It is to be noted that the Finnish researcher Eero Sappinen will publish next autumn a study on the traditional livelihoods of the Forest Finns as based on research carried out by Professor Ilmar Talve. Talve was a student of the famous Swedish ethnologist Sigurd Erixon, who also conducted fieldwork in Värmland.

Collections of vocabulary recorded among the Forest Finns features the words *kaski*, *huhuhta*, *halme*, *aho*, *palo* and *rovio* relating to swiddens and the practices of burn clearing. In his studies of place-names, Julius Mägiste has shown how the West Finnish word *kaski* meaning a swidden cleared in deciduous or mixed forest is considerably more common as a place-name than *huhuhta*. The grain that is obtained was mostly rye (Fi. *ruis*) known as *halmeruis* (literally 'rye from a swidden'). This point alone suggests caution, if the spread of Forest Finn settlement is to be associated with some kind of large-scale slash-and-burn cultivation in coniferous forests. Moreover, the word *huhuhta* cannot be directly linked to any particular technique of slash-and-burn agriculture, because its meaning has varied. The word has an old Baltic-Finnic background (cf. *uht* in Estonian). In addition there is no unequivocal information on the practice of ring-barking (Fi. *pyältäminen*), which is understandable if the oldest reliable data on it in Savo and Karelia is from the second half of the 17th century, as noted by Kortessalmi. As a mark of claiming an area, it is of course older. The only implement that is mentioned is the swidden harrow (Fi. *kaskihara*), more widely known in Scandinavia as *fälle-kratta*. The slash-and-burn practices of the Forest Finns can be described as representing a more primitive and older form of this technique, which could no longer be influenced by developments that took place in Savo and Karelia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Swiddens are a labour-intensive form of cultivation. It was calculated in the 16th century that a swidden half a hectare in area required two weeks of labour by one man.

After the rye crop, oats were usually sown, but they, too, thrived only as a first-year crop in swiddens.

### **Arable farming and animal husbandry**

In research, arable farming among the Forest Finns has unnecessarily been almost completely overshadowed by slash-and-burn practices. However, the related terminology and techniques can also shed light on practices followed in Savo at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, of which we have otherwise very limited information.

The fields of the Forest Finns were small and dispersed, mainly growing barley, and to a lesser degree (from the 18th century) oats and mixed grain, but rye only from the early 19th century and wheat from the late 19th century (Nilsson). Turnips and, from the 1780s –1790s, potatoes were also cultivated in fields. The main implement was the ard plough or *oatra*, the plough term *sahra* is not known.

The system of cultivation was a kind of rotation of field and fallow that could be called, with reservation, single rotation farming. According to Y. Nilsson regular fallows were not practised in North Värmland even in the early 19th century. A report from 1848 –1850 by the governor of the province notes that the Finns of North Värmland do not allow their fields to lie fallow, but plant oats or barley from one year to another, while fertilizing the fields well in the autumn. The fertilized field was known in Finnish as *sonnikko* (from *sonta* meaning 'dung') on which the dung was spread and ploughed into the ground with an ard plough. In addition to this, fields were fertilized with the so-called enclosure method. During the early summer, livestock was kept at night in the fields in moveable enclosures (Fi. *tarha*, Sw. *qvi, que*), which were relocated until the whole field was fertilized.

In the 19th century, the ard plough was replaced by Swedish mouldboard ploughs, often as local variants (e.g. Fryksdalsplogen, Sunneplogen etc.). The ard plough receded in functional terms, and came to be used for planting and harvesting potatoes. Apparently the short-shafted Bergslagen variant of the ard plough (Lingis 1952) belongs to this last stage. Other agricultural implements were common items and naturally Swedish cultural loans for the most part. The branch harrow (*finnharv*) appears in a few indistinct items of information, most important variants being frame and jointed harrows which were replaced in the late 19th century by spiral and spring harrows of iron. Other implements included drawn grooved sledges (*lata*) and rollers (*jyrä*) for crushing clods of soil, and shovels and hoes especially for digging ditches. Plaited birch-bark seed baskets were used for sowing as in the inland and eastern regions of Finland, but there were also oval or round seed containers, sometimes with leather bottoms. The sickle was of East and North Finnish type and was a common cutting tool; scythes were adopted for harvesting oats at a relatively late stage. After first drying outdoors, the grain was dried in threshing sheds and threshed with flails of various types (hole flail, West Swedish grooved flail, and further to the south in Värmland the so-called loop



flail). There are a few rare references to primitive branch or knot flails, while the East Finnish peg flail (*riusa*) is unknown.

As mentioned above, animal husbandry no doubt became one of the main means of livelihood of the Forest Finns in the second half of the 18th century in Värmland, other northern provinces of Sweden, and Norway. It has been presented to an unfortunately small degree in research and descriptions, being overshadowed by slash-and-burn agriculture in this respect.

Random samples of estate inventories of the Forest Finns of Värmland show that Finnish names for cows remained in use for long, although Swedish *gäs*-suffixed names predominated in some parishes (Gräsmark, Lekvattnet) in the late 18th century. The Finnish word *navetta* for cowshelter is associated with the care of livestock during the winter. The grazing season usually began on the Feast of Cross (3 May, Sw. *Korsmässan*) and shepherds worked in the forest pastures until the 1870s. However, in all the provinces inhabited by the Forest Finns, the Swedish inhabitants of the main villages used outlying cattle sheds in the summer months. With the exception of the southernmost provinces (Södermanland, Närke, northern parts of West Götaland) the area of Forest Finn settlement in Sweden lies north of the southern boundary of the cattle shed system. The system permitted the more efficient use of forest pastures and it appears that the Forest Finns adopted it in places already at an early stage. There is information from Dalecarlia on the outlying cattle sheds of the Finns from as early as the 1660s–1670s). Though not commonly used, the summer cowshelters (*sommarfähus*) were also adopted from the Swedes. It was also quite common for Finnish crofts to take on livestock from the Swedish villages to be fed over the summer.

### **The relationship with the original population**

It is often mentioned in the older literature that the Finnish immigrants came into conflict with the original population. This is incorrect. Later studies have shown that a niche was found for the Finns for a long while with regard to both farm sites and means of livelihood. It was only in the regions where forests were needed in large amounts for mining in the form of lumber and coal that slash-and-burn clearance began to be truly restricted already in the 17th century.

Bans on slash-and-burn clearance were already declared in the mining region in the 1630s, and a Forest Statute issued in 1647 gave permission to burn or tear down the farmhouses of those who engaged in this practice. These orders led to a great deal of unrest, and large numbers of Forest Finns moved from Central Scandinavia to America to the Swedish colony of Delaware, which had been founded in 1638. Finns also migrated directly to Delaware from Finland, mainly from the region of Ostrobothnia. They became assimilated with the Swedes as early as the beginning of the 18th century.

Stories of oppression did not come about until the 19th century when difficult socioeconomic conditions prevailed around the middle of the century in Värmland. The forests began to gain value as felled timber, and slash-and-burn

cultivation, being a labour-intensive livelihood, produced a great deal of surplus population.

In other respects, mutual understanding emerged at an early stage. After the decreed years of tax exemption, the Finnish settlements became normal tax-paying farms and crofts. The less-affluent Finns were seasonal labourers. Originally the Finns had their own representatives, i.e. Finnish-speakers, in local administration. Acculturation and assimilation, however, soon came under way. Part of the population first became bilingual, and gradually those who spoke only Finnish became a minority, and finally knowledge of Finnish became rare. It was to be found only in the most outlying parts and people were ashamed to speak the language. Although the language disappeared, knowledge of Finnish roots and some practices remained known long enough for them to be recorded by historians, linguists, and ethnologists.

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