

## Rejection and acceptance : Exchange of architectural ideas between the Finns and the Norwegians?

#2

### Finnish store house

During a registration of Finnish farms in Finnskogen last year I stayed in Norway all the time but regarding to the building tradition I had crossed a border to a new and fascinating country. I am still a freshman in that field and you may find it arrogant of me to say anything about the relations between the traditional Finnish and Norwegian architecture. On the other hand it is also a situation that makes it possible to ask questions of the “what if?-type” and to see the material with a kind of fresh approach.

#3

### Burning of land

Most of you are probably familiar with the Finnish migration that advanced from Sweden into Norway about 1600. Also here the situation was a meeting between two rural cultures. A main difference was the way the grain was sowed. While the Norwegians harvested the fields within the farm the technique of the Finns was based on burning the land before sowing rye in the ashes. The crop could be immense but it did also require a considerable area. When the fertility of the soil was reduced it was necessary to move the activity to a new field.<sup>1</sup>

#4

### Map

Already in the 1630s the first immigrants had reached the area north of Oslo.<sup>2</sup> After what is known from historical information they reached as far west as Buskerud.<sup>3</sup> The clashes between the two civilisations occurred in the areas where the Norwegians would use the territory for various activities. In 1673 an official decree made it more or less legal to hunt Finns living in the woods - “Skouvfinde”.<sup>4</sup> In other cases both sides seem to have profited on the situation. One example is when the Finns moved to Vollsætra near Svulrya in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> While the summer farm on the same spot was declining the Finns seemingly had earned enough money to buy the land. In fact it was a win-win situation. The burning of land also increased the available grazing area.

#5

### Road sign

The Finnish population in the western areas was rather quickly assimilated into the Norwegian culture. After three or four generations the Finnish farms were often taken over by the Norwegians.<sup>6</sup> In the eastern areas the Finnish population was big enough to create a cultural area of its own in Finnskog. After some time the Finns also here abandoned the burning technique and adopted the Norwegian way of farming, as a kind of acceptance of the Norwegian culture. A more long-lasting part of the Finnish culture was the language. In the

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<sup>1</sup> P.M.Tvengsberg, ”Et lom-skinn med rug”, D.Raaberg (red.), *Livet på Finnskogen*, Flisa boktrykkeri 1992, s. 101

<sup>2</sup> R.Holtvedt m.fl., *Krokskogen*, Gyldedal Norsk Forlag 1977, s. 67

<sup>3</sup> P.M.Tvengsberg, ”Finsk byggeskikk i Grue”, *Fortidsminneforeningens årbok 1961*, Oslo 1962, s. 121

<sup>4</sup> Holtvedt 1977, s. 67 f.

<sup>5</sup> H.Johnsson, *De skogfinske bebyggelsen : En studie av skogfinske byggnadstraditioner i gränstrakterna mellan Sverige och Norge*, Göteborgs Universitet 2008, s. 34

<sup>6</sup> P.O.Borgen, *Lier bygdeleksikon*, Drammen 1997, s. 46

1950s it was still possible to hear Finnish spoken in the shop in Svulrya.<sup>7</sup> To day only the name of the place remains.

#6

#### The lay out of local farms

Another cultural meeting point between the Finns and the Norwegians was the design of the farms and the houses. As a result of the natural conditions much was similar. The eastern part of South Norway is a part of the conifer belt that starts in Russia. In both Finland and Norway the traditional buildings were log built. The design of the farms seems to reflect a greater cultural difference.

When the first wave of Finnish settlers arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the lay out of the local Norwegian farms can have been like Husan in Østerdalen.<sup>8</sup> The many houses are gathered in two groups with the dwelling house and some store houses in the one end of the farm and houses for grain and animals in the other end. Later several farms were often built together and looked more or less like a village. One example from the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the same area is the farm Rø in Vingelen.<sup>9</sup> In the outskirts are smithies and other buildings that were dangerous because of the risk for fire.

#7

#### The lay out of the Finnish farm.

It is uncertain how the first Finnish farms in Norway were designed. The stable Finnish farms were often situated on a hill with the various houses are scattered out with some distance between the various houses.<sup>10</sup> A kind of order would still be achieved by orientating the different buildings in the same direction.<sup>11</sup>

One of the first buildings to be raised was the bathing house, *sauna*. Other important buildings were the living house with the smoke stove, *pørtet*, and the drying house for the grain which also was heated by a stove, *rie*. Among the obligatory buildings would also be stables for the animals and storehouses for the various crops.

There are probably several reasons why the lay out of the Finnish farms differed from the Norwegian. One obvious reason is an even greater fear of fire as also the *sauna* and the *rie* had a fire place. Later the Finnish farms could be extensive. An example is Tvangsberget which in 1846 consisted of 21 buildings but it was still rather loosely organized.<sup>12</sup>

#8

#### The Finnish living house

As on the Swedish side of the border the lay out of the living houses used by the Finns was often very much like the traditional Norwegian "three room plan" but apparently not as a result of any cultural influence. The length and width of the buildings is bounded by the usable dimension of the trunks - that is up to 7-8 meter.

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<sup>7</sup> O.Øgar Svendsen, "Tvangsberget i Grue", *Fortidsminneforeningens årbok 1959*, Oslo 1960, s. 82

<sup>8</sup> Berg 1968, s. 34

<sup>9</sup> Berg 1968, s. 31 f.

<sup>10</sup> B.Nesholen, "Byggeskikken på Finnskogen", D.Raaberg (red.), *Livet på Finnskogen*, Flisa Boktrykkeri, 1992, s. 166

<sup>11</sup> Tvangsberget 1962, s. 126 f.

<sup>12</sup> Tvangsberget 1962, s. 127

The stove was built in a corner in the main room. The smaller room could be heated from the stove. There could also be an open fire in the adjoining room that gave light to various activities. Most of the smoke from the stove was led through an opening in the ceiling while fresh air was taken in by an opening in the wall. The walls were high and the shape of the ceiling makes the room even higher. The meaning of the ceiling was to keep the smoke above the living area. In addition it was isolated by a layer of earth.

#9

#### Finnish smoke stove

When the stove was heated the openings would be closed. For cooking purposes glows from the stove could be taken out in front of the opening but in most cases there would be a separate cooking house.<sup>13</sup> Even in the winter it was heated only once a day. The great heap of stones connected with clay would store the heat from the fire and gain a maximum temperature 6 hours after the wood was burned.<sup>14</sup>

#10

#### The Norwegian living house

The living houses in the valley of Østerdalen had often a similar plan as the Finnish houses. The open fireplace was placed in a corner where it could give heat to the adjoining room as well. Another part of the traditional living room in Østerdalen is a characteristic ceiling that is more or less like the one in the Finnish houses. The similarity may be functional. Though the houses had chimney smoke from the fire place would still gather below the ceiling. A so far not investigated possibility is that the shape of the ceiling in the Norwegian houses is a loan from the Finnish culture.

A special feature known from some living houses in Østerdalen is the curious annex that in some cases was placed over the entrance – *barfrø*. Seemingly the name is a loan from the French word *befroi* meaning a sort of tower. To day it stands like a sign for the willingness to accept almost anything if it is found smart enough. Functionally it was complicated to integrate the *barfrø* in the building and technically it was a disaster. It is a credit to the Finns that it is not known from their houses.

#11

#### Living room in Østerdalen/open fireplace

The main room in the traditional Norwegian living houses in Østerdalen is often surprisingly large compared to the harsh winter climate in this part of the country. This winter temperatures 30 degrees below zero were reported from many places. In The little ice age it was even colder.

In this situation one might wonder why the Finnish smoke stove was not adopted by the Norwegians. When the first Finns arrived most of the local farmers houses had an open fire placed on the floor. Later the fire-place was introduced and was soon accepted by the Norwegians but the technique is not without difficulties. The fire-place is a fuel consuming method and the heat effect is not very good. But the open fire gave also an excellent light for the people sitting and working in the main room. For the Norwegians the Finnish smoke stove does not seem to have been any option at all.

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson 2008, s. 60

<sup>14</sup> Nesholen 1992, s. 171

#12

Living room in Østerdalen with fireplace and iron stove

A central question is what would have happened if the Norwegian fire place and the Finnish smoke stove had a parallel existence for a longer period. An important paradigmatic shift was the introduction of the iron stove. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it came in general use among all people in this part of Norway. Often the iron stove was installed side by side with the fire-place.

#13

A new building type

Also the Finnish smoke stove was deeply connected to other parts of the culture. The stove was not only used for heating the house. It was also used for activities like making bread, cleaning skins and drying grains. When light was needed one would use a burning stick.

What seems to be a new type of building was a cooking house which also contains a smoke stove.<sup>15</sup> The house could even be used as *sauna* and *rie* as well. The result was a combination of the Finnish and the Norwegian culture that is only known from the Norwegian area.<sup>16</sup>

A Finnish living house which contains both a smoke stove and a fire-place was moved from Ampiansbråten to the open air museum near Oslo in 1925. From the outside the open fire place is marked by a chimney. The characteristic ceiling in the living room is visible in the facade.

#14

Smoke stove/fire-place.

The building from Ampiansbråten is dated to 1800-1850 and is of the usual three room type. From an entrance room there are doors to the living room with a smoke stove and to a smaller room that is a kitchen with a fire-place.

In some cases Norwegian way of heating the living houses was adopted at an even earlier stage. In 1821 a Swedish traveller complained that some of the Finns had abandoned their traditional houses with a smoke stove and built new houses with a fire-place after Swedish and Norwegian models.<sup>17</sup>

#15

Norwegian smoke stove

Bit also in Norway the smoke stove was a part of the traditional culture. If the Finns had continued 150 kilometre further west they would have come to an area where the smoke stove was introduced already in medieval time. Because wood for burning was a scarce resource a stove was placed in one corner of the living room. The stove was heated with bushes twice a day. When the fire went out the room was closed to keep the warmth inside the room.

Again one might wonder about the result if this confrontation had taken place. Leprosy was an illness with great progress on the western coast of Norway in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century because of the closed living houses. In addition it was a general lack of cleanness. Among the Finns in the eastern part of South Norway leprosy seems to have been a seldom disease.<sup>18</sup> It may have been due to their traditional bath culture.

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<sup>15</sup> Nesholen 1992, s. 176 f.

<sup>16</sup> Nesholen 1992, s. 177

<sup>17</sup> Nesholen 1992, s. 171

<sup>18</sup> Information by The Norwegian national museum for health, 2010

#16

Painted decor from Hedmark, “Stai” Stor-Elvdal B-114 1870

The living houses with a smoke stove on the western coast of Norway had only decorations scratched out in the soot on the walls - *kroting*. Living houses in the same area with light stoves had richly painted decorations on the walls. Something similar may be the reason why the Finns did not adopt the glowing colours that can be seen in some of the farms houses in Hedmark from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Also among the Finns *kroting* existed.<sup>19</sup> And also in this case painted decorations on the walls in a living room with a smoke stove would soon be destroyed. The paintings were restricted to parts of the furniture.

#17

Painted door from Ampiansbråten

The living house from Ampiansbråten has a decorated interior door. The painting is of a 18<sup>th</sup> century type.<sup>20</sup> The door may be a loan from a Norwegian house. Another possibility is that it is a retarded decoration intended for the Finnish house. In any case it is an example on Finnish acceptance of this part of Norwegian culture.

#18

Norwegian turf roof

The traditional Norwegian log built house is often shown with a turf roof with waving grass and flowers. The sight look picturesque but it is also a construction with many problems.

The task of the turf is mainly to keep down the birch bark that is laid on the roof boards to prevent water from getting into the room below. The water will penetrate the turf and follow the bark to the end of the sloping roof. In theory the sun will make the turf dry but on the north side the turf will remain humid. The result is rot in the adjoining wooden parts.

#19

Finnish roofs

The traditional Finnish roof was covered with slender poles made from young threes. Like the turf on the Norwegian roofs the task of the poles was to keep the layer of birch bark in position.<sup>21</sup> In other cases one would use halved trunks. In contrast to the Norwegian roofs with turf the Finnish roofs did not maintain the humidity. Where isolation was needed it was made by the layer of earth on the ceiling.

#20

Norwegian wooden roofs

Also in Norway halved trunks to keep the bark down is known – *gvåvtak*.<sup>22</sup> When the saw was introduced about 1600 regular planks were easy to produce. As a result wooden planks were used on many roofs. Where isolation was needed the planks could be laid upon the turf.

The geographical extension of the early use of wooden roofs in Norway is not exactly known.<sup>23</sup> One area is Telemark another is Hedmark. It the last case is tempting to see an

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<sup>19</sup> Information by B.Nesholen, Norsk skogfinsk museum, 2010

<sup>20</sup> Information by J.Brønne, NIKU, 2010

<sup>21</sup> A.Lie Christensen, *Den norske byggeskikken*, Oslo 1995, s. 66

<sup>22</sup> Godal 2009, s. 54

influence from the Finnish culture, but more likely the tradition was established before the Finns arrived.

#21

#### Norwegian lofts

In medieval time the Norwegian houses for storing food and clothes, *bur* and *loft*, were placed directly on a ground.<sup>24</sup> One example is Staveloftet that is dated to 1324. Later the storing houses were placed on a wooden sub construction to lift them above the ground.

Dendrochronological tests even show that the medieval store houses in some cases were dismantled and rebuilt with a new wooden sub construction. The Norwegian sub constructions seem to have been introduced about 1600. A hypothesis is that The little ice age resulted in snow that was laying later in the spring. In this situation the crust must have been a kind of high-way for mice and rats.

#22

#### Finnish store houses with and without sub construction, Finnetunet

The existing Finnish storing houses in and from Finnskogen are in most cases placed directly on the ground. One example is the storing house from Kalneset from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Finnetunet.

But also storing houses with a wooden sub constructions are known from Finnish farms. An example is the adjoining store house with an inscription from 1805. Like in Norway the sub constructions were used for houses where food was stored.<sup>25</sup> An immediate thought is the sub construction is a loan from Norwegian culture but even in Finland these structures are well known. The constructive similarity might be homologous with the same off spring.

#23

#### Potatoes

The potatoes came early to the eastern part of South Norway. The first time they are known in Solør was about 1765.<sup>26</sup> Already in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the potatoes came in general use. In Solør and Brandval it was sowed 3130 barrels of potatoes and 4025 barrels of grain in 1835.<sup>27</sup>

Also the Finns started early to sow potatoes. An example is the farm of Lebiko where the land was cleared about 1860. Already in 1865 it was sowed two barrels of potatoes.<sup>28</sup> Another example is the farm Kvåho that was cleared in 1857. In 1865 also they sowed two barrels of potatoes.<sup>29</sup>

#24

#### Norwegian storing of potatoes

To keep the potatoes from freezing in the winter time it was necessary to store them in a room dug into the ground. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Norwegians would use a separate building – *utkjeller* – where products like dairy and beer was stored.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> J.Bojer Godal o.a., *Beresystem i eldre norske hus*, Akademisk forlag 2009, s. 55

<sup>24</sup> A.Berg, *Norske tømmerhus frå mellomalderen*, bd. 1, Oslo 1989, s. ??

<sup>25</sup> Information by B.Nesholen 2010

<sup>26</sup> H.Hveberg, *Grueboka*, bd. I, Flisa 1948, s. 256

<sup>27</sup> Hveberg 1948, s. 286

<sup>28</sup> Notice on the farm by Austmarka Historielag 2007

<sup>29</sup> Notice on the farm by Austmarka Historielag, 2005

<sup>30</sup> Lie Christensen 1995, s. 101

In Hedmark the potato houses originally seem to have been dug into the ground and covered with a stone vault. The buildings required a technique unknown to the Norwegian farmers and were often built by Swedish workers.<sup>31</sup> Later the storing room for the potatoes in most cases was placed in one of the other houses. In a collection of reconstructed Norwegian farms from about 1900 none of the examples from Hedmark have separate storing houses for potatoes.<sup>32</sup>

#25

#### Finnish storing houses for potatoes

In the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Finns had in many ways adopted the Norwegian culture. Also the storing houses for the potatoes seem to have been made more or less the same way, but in most cases not with a roof of vaulted stones. But in contrast to the Norwegians the Finns stayed with the use of a separate building to store the potatoes. It is tempting to see it as a part of the old farm system with many separate buildings.

#26

#### Cultural heritage

Another kind of cultural acceptance was when the Norwegians began to realise that the Finnish culture also was a part of their past. Not surprisingly it happened at relatively late stage.

The use of open air museums started early in Norway. In 1881 the museum outside Christiania (Oslo) was opened as the first of its kind in Europe. The first local open air museum was started in 1901.<sup>33</sup> Still the Finnish culture in the eastern part of South Norway had no cultural signification. When a guide from 1903 mentions that Finnish customs and buildings are found in a small part of Solør it is a kind of curiosity.<sup>34</sup> When the ethnologist Kristoffer Visted published his book about Norwegian folk culture in 1923 he gave great attention both to the smoke stove in western Norway but the Finnish smoke stove and their bathing culture is not mentioned.<sup>35</sup>

In 1925 the first Finnish building was moved to Norsk Folkemuseum. It was the previous mentioned living house from Ampiansbråten.<sup>36</sup> The Norwegian Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments was established already in 1844 but it lasted until 1935 before the first article about Finnish architecture was published in the annual report from the society.<sup>37</sup> When Finnetunet opened in 1942 it was mainly a local initiative.<sup>38</sup>

But also among Norwegian scholars the Finnish culture was gradually accepted as a part of the Norwegian past. When an extended version of Visted's book from 1923 was published in 1971 the Finnish culture was given several pages.<sup>39</sup> Later a lot of work has been done in the same field, by both Swedish and Norwegian scholars. Important contributions from the

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<sup>31</sup> Information by G.T.Risåsen 2010

<sup>32</sup> A.Berg, *Norske gardstun*, Universitetsforlaget 1968, s. 310 f.

<sup>33</sup> K.Sommerseth Jacobsen, "Finnetunets plass i norsk museumsverden", D.Raaberg (red.), *Livet på Finnskogen*, Grue 1992, s. 197

<sup>34</sup> Y.Nielsen, *Reisehaandbog over Norge*, Chria. 1903, s. 242

<sup>35</sup> K.Visted, *Vor gamle bondekultur*, Kria. 1923

<sup>36</sup> Sommerseth Jacobsen 1992, s. 198

<sup>37</sup> "Museenes gamle bygninger", *Fortidsminneforeningens årbok for 1935*, Oslo 1937, s. 84

<sup>38</sup> Raaberg 1992, s. 12

<sup>39</sup> K.Visted og H.Stigum, *Vår gamle bondekultur*, bd. 1, Oslo 1975, s. 89 f.

Norwegian side are made by Per Martin Tvengsborg and Birger Nesholen. To day Finnetunet is visited by several thousand tourists every year.

#27

#### Decorative birch braiding

This symposium reflects a general acceptance of the Norwegian-Finnish culture. The dangerous part of this situation is that one easily can believe that all important issues already are discussed. My paper has been a modest try to lead the interest towards the meeting between the Finnish and the Norwegian culture. We still need a lot of information to fully understand the interchange of architectural ideas in the wake of that incident. The final picture is an interior with painted birch braiding as a decoration from the living house on Kvester in Hedmark, dated to about 1900.

Ola Storsletten

6.4.10