
REVIEWS

Estonian Journal of Archaeology, 2007, 11, 1, 155–157

ASPECTS ON THE FENNOMAN PARADIGM IN FINNISH ARCHAEOLOGY

Eva Ahl

Department of History, University of Helsinki, Vironkatu 8 B 34, 00170 Helsinki, Finland;
Eva.Ahl@helsinki.fi

Derek Fewster. Visions of Past Glory. Nationalism and the Construction of Early Finnish History. (Studia Fennica Historica, 11.) Helsinki, 2006. 555 pp. ISBN 951-746-787-7

It is a known fact that the science of archaeology was born in the 19th century. Bruce G. Trigger's opus on the worldwide history of archaeology is nowadays part of every curriculum in the subject's studies. Yet there is still a lot to add to the discussion on the role of history and archaeology in building an image of the past. In many countries it seems to be closely linked with the process of "nation building" in the 19th century. It has been stated that the boundaries between the disciplines (the study of ethnology, literature, archaeology, history, etc.) in the 19th century were not as harsh as today. At present there is a great trend in research on nationalism and its various roles, forms and functions in recent centuries. The "rearrangement" of the late 20th and early 21st century Europe and its countries has inspired many studies on questions concerning the influence of images of the past in science, popular culture, as well as on politics. The rise of a vivid interest in a medieval past has also launched issues on the continuity or discontinuity of trends and traditions.

In Finland both archaeologists and historians have taken an interest in the question of nationalism and the birth of cultural studies. In recent years Timo Salminen has discussed the 19th and early 20th century Finnish archaeologists' work and interest in the Finno-Ugric peoples in Russia as a part of Finnish past (2003). Derek Fewster's doctoral thesis *Visions of Past Glory* is arguing for the role of nationalist views of historians and archaeologists as image-makers in the creation of the Finnish nation.

The study at hand belongs to the history of ideas with an emphasis on three phases in the history of historical and archaeological research: "romantic national antiquarianism", "high national medievalism" and "militant medievalism", stretching chronologically from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. In Fewster's vast study he theoretically relies on ideas launched by authorities in the field like e.g. Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson. Smith has argued that if a national identity is to be built, the use of myths of ethnic decent, both genealogical and ideological, is needed. Hobsbawm has launched ideas on "invented traditions" as important pieces in constructing a national identity. Similar work that has inspired Fewster is also found in

Swedish research, e.g. recent works by Bodil Pettersson (2003) and Ulf Zander (2001). Fewster's study is part of a larger trend in present research: a popular book on the subject of the questions on creating images of ethnical descent in Sweden in the 19th century (the so-called "Göthicism" and the following movements) has been presented by Maja Hagerman (2006).

Very rarely nowadays scholars tend to display their "building site" of the study, but Fewster is making a courageous stand in the debate: in four "theses" Fewster draws the aim of his study. First he claims that previous research has somewhat neglected the importance of prehistoric and medieval interpretations of Finnish history in the creation of national, Finnish consciousness. Secondly he argues that several theories based on ethnical and archaeological material have been used to benefit in contemporary political discourse. The third "thesis" concerns the fact that the popularization of the Finnish Antiquity was a part of the nationalist movement in constructing a "great myth of ethnic decent" (compare with Smith's term). In the fourth "thesis" Fewster claims that archaeological images were used in popular images and thus utilized to serve a cultural, political and ethnical aim. This is also displayed in the debate between the Finnish (Fennoman) and Swedish-minded (Swecomman) in the mid-nineteenth century.

Along with using the debate of scholars, Fewster also uses educational images (e.g. primary school books, wall pictures and calendars of enlightenment), aesthetic images (e.g. drama, literature), apparent political images (satirical pictures) and commercial images (price catalogues for educational aids) as his vast collection of sources, thus making a thesis on how prehistory and early medieval history were put to national use or invented to benefit the "imagined community" of the idea of the Finnish nation in the 19th and 20th centuries. The material is thoroughly presented in six appendixes for further study in the future, at the end of the book.

From an introduction of the history of the concept "Early Finland" Fewster moves on into the debate on the First Crusade in the mid-nineteenth century. An interest in Finnish folk poetry was introduced by Professor Henrik Gabriel Porthan in the late 18th, early 19th century, and he was the first to "divide" the area into two "nations" consisting of coastal inhabitants and the people living inland. This division remained in the views of the 19th century scholars and perhaps we can see the remains of these views still today. According to Fewster, the nationalist images thus developed into concepts of "three nations": semi-foreign Swedes, semi-decadent lowland dwellers and near-original highlanders. As an example of the debate Fewster takes the case of the so called Finnish "scull-cap" (*patalakki*) and the hunter holding his cross-bow. Painters and travellers like Pehr Hilleström and Giuseppe Acerbi chose to depict Finnish life as ancient and created artistic images that started to have a "life of their own" copied by several artists and recorders of ethnology, later even used in the semi-militaristic scout-movement and in politic propaganda.

Illustrating the past became relevant with the popularity of the heroic romanticism introduced in the *Kalevala*, the epic songs published by Elias Lönnrot (in 1835, second edition in 1849). The songs and their historical role provided motifs both in visual art, drama and literature. In the 1850s the national ideology shifted into radical ethnic nationalism producing more and more images of ancient Finnish "greatness". Due to the jubilee of the commemoration of the so-called First Crusade to Finland (ca 1155/1157), as well as the commemoration of the baptism of the Finns in 1857 the images gained publicity and popularity. The jubilee enhanced the need to defend ancient "Finnishness" (the term originating from this debate) by Professor J. V. Snellman, taken up by Yrjö Koskinen (orig. G. Z. Forsman). Inspired by J. G. von Herder, Professor Z. Topelius introduced his ideas on a specific Finnish "national character" and its importance in national history: the Finns became one of the chosen peoples with a mission. The Topelian medievalizations came to be as long-lived as Snellman's images on a glorious past. Similar ideas were of course common in the 19th century Europe.

Alongside the development of historical images of the past, the antiquarian research underwent a period of professionalization ca 1850–1890. As Salminen (2003) has argued earlier, Fewster underlines that the Finnish past was considered as "eastern" and thus research was concentrated on hunting for the origins of the Finnish "tribe". Archaeological finds were to be collected and activities

in forming a national museum began: a search for the “people” – thus defined. In the heyday of Karelianism these collections and activities around them led to the “invention” of a national heritage. Via education the ideas were spread to the public: “The ideology of nationalism was slowly ‘uniting’ the Finns, seeping down the social ladder, through the work of the Student Nations of the university, the teacher training facilities, newspapers, journals, societies, and associations”, Fewster points out (p. 163).

Presenting the high national medievalism (the politicized view on Finnish antiquity in ca 1890–1918) Fewster takes up other examples on “invented traditions” such as the “discovery” of “ancient costumes” thus “dressing up the Finn”, resulting in e.g. the “Aino-costume” and other popular reconstructions based on the archaeological grave finds from Tuukkala in Häme. Louis Sparre’s pictures of “ancient Finns” based on these reconstructions were manifested and spread in the Kaleva-revival at the turn of the century, in visual arts (e.g. widely known Akseli Gallen-Kallela’s frescoes), in wall charts for public schools, in calendars and price lists for material for schools and so on. In satirical, political images the “Finnish Maiden” was dressed in the “ancient” Aino-costume. Alongside with the “patalakki” and the cross-bow also the “invented tradition” of the Aino-costume had a “typology” of its own, which could seemingly be followed for about 150 years, resulting in popular reconstructions of finds in jewellery launched by the *Kalevala Koru* in the inter-war period. The images had been commonly accepted in the process of forming a national identity.

From the Civil War (1918) to the outbreak of the Second World War, the “invented” past of “Finnish greatness” became militarized. In the independence in 1917 the “myth of regeneration” came true – a teleological view on how a return to a Finnish “tribal” past finally became realized. During the inter-war period right-winged popular fiction on medieval themes, inspired by antiquarian research and interpretations, flourished. Fewster describes how the medieval period was militarized and masculinized during these decades. The examples of the use of the “national” images in the scout-movement, the *suojeluskunta*-movement (the whites) and in the political movement *Akateeminen Karjala-Seura*’s anti-Russian agenda and racial issues, as well as in Arne Karimo’s vastly popular book on early Finnish history, *Kumpujen yöstä*, published in 1929–1932. The title (and expression) derived from a Karelian poem: “*Ja urhoot astuvat kumpuin yöstä / Ja kertovat muinainkansan työstä, / Ja neuvovat polvea nousevaa – / Oi Karjala muistojen maa!*” by ”Arvi Jännes” (senator Arvid Genetz) in 1889 (p. 346f).

Yet there remains much to study. The view on gender in these “national images” could have been another interesting viewpoint to study, but this may have exceeded the limits of the already vast study at hand. The ethnical nationalism of the Swecomans has not been much examined in Fewster’s present study. The heroic romanticism of the “Viking” theme as images used in nation building in Scandinavia was based on the uniqueness of these societies in the north, the ancient greatness of the true “Germanic” forefathers of contemporary Swedes (the term “Viking Age” invented by Oscar Montelius, see e.g. Hagerman 2006, 275f). Thus the invented “Viking” tradition flourishing in the 19th and 20th centuries among the Swedish speaking people in Finland is yet to be discussed in comparison to the Fennoman paradigm. We will probably hear more on this theme from Fewster in the future.

References

- Hagerman, M.** 2006. Det rena landet. Om konsten att uppfinna sina förfäder. Prisma, Stockholm.
Pettersson, B. 2003. Föreställningar om det förflutna. Arkeologi och rekonstruktion. Nordic Academic Press, Lund.
Salminen, T. 2003. Suomen tieteelliset voittomaat. (SMYA, 110.)
Zander, U. 2001. Fornstora dagar, moderna tider. Bruk av och debater om svensk historia från sekelskifte till sekelskifte. Nordic Academic Press, Lund.