

THE SCIENTIST AND AUTHORITY IN THE HISTORY OF FINNO-UGRIC RESEARCH IN RUSSIA

DR. ALEXEY ZAGREBIN

Head of the Historical Research Department
Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature
Ural branch of the RAS.

426004, Russia, Udmurt Republic, Izhevsk, Lomonosova ul. 4.

E-mail: zagreb72@izh.com

ABSTRACT

The history of Finno-Ugric Ethnology has already come a considerable way. There have been periods of brilliant discovery as well as periods of stagnation; or, what was worse, periods when what was said depended on what the prevailing conditions demanded. Looking back, we are to some degree able to reconstruct the facts and to follow the development of the ideas that contributed to contemporary studies. The main subject of this paper is the interpretation of mutual understanding between the ethnologist and government in the history of Finno-Ugric studies in Russia between the 18th and 20th centuries.

KEYWORDS: Finno-Ugric ethnology • historiography • fieldwork.

Ethnographic science at all stages of development felt an acute need for qualitative evidence from informants within ethnic traditions. Nevertheless, the observation of different cultural events and collection of artefacts had not developed into ethnography before scientists began to think about the ideological and theoretical side of their activity. A historiographic view – tracing and evaluating the accumulation of information – reveals the main achievements made in this area, and outlines the “apical points”. In our case, through a periodisation, it allows us to come closer to the origin of Finno-Ugric ethnology and to address its history and the history of its relationship with authority in particular.

THE CENTURY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

In scientific reference literature there are different explanations of the age of Enlightenment, more often linked to a rejection of prevailing scientific opinion and the favouring of more rationalistic learning. Also, many academics were discouraged from being too daring in order not to lose favour with the state, while at the same time placing their academic hopes in an educated sovereign-reformer.

Pre-Petrine ethnical research in Russia was predominantly of an applied non-interdisciplinary nature and was poorly known in Europe. This situation began to change with the advent of Peter I and his heirs, who patronised the sciences and were concerned with quickly moving expedition materials to the East of the empire. These materials contained valuable historic and ethnographic information on Finno-Ugric peoples. The rationalisation of different branches of knowledge demanded that science accept new organisational forms capable of uniting and directing the scientific community's crea-

tive potential towards a course of national research. Most productive in this respect was the idea of the Academy of Sciences. In this context Finno-Ugric research gained both the disciplined character of the exploratory projects and the benefit of state funding (Branch 1995: 69–73). At the same time, the academician's ability to pick up experimental material independently directly resulted in the possibility of subsequent far-reaching scientific innovation. In short, the concept of the expedition as special "scientific travel" enabling direct observation was part of the spirit of the Enlightenment.

But first it was necessary to part from established scientific research methods and set out on an uncertain road. Perhaps A. L. von Schläzer was one of the first to come up with this idea. He noted that "the steps of history should be traced not so much by the military roads of the conquerors but by the swath which the merchants, missionaries and travellers inconspicuously plow" (*August Ludwig von Schläzer...* 1961: 10). Expeditionary activity created a new type of exploratory procedure nowadays known as fieldwork. It also resulted in the appearance of networks of relations, which can be defined as the "field community". Although at first the University, and then the academic body in general, were connected to this hierarchy, the expedition implied a gap with any conventional association scheme. Expeditionary equality, at the same time, did not hinder the development of leadership. However this leadership was not based on the scramble for authority or property, rather it was founded on a readiness to accept another's authority regardless of whether this was reinforced by grades and ranks. The leadership needed to be capable of supplying effective habitation for the scientific collective in field conditions that were quite often located in aggressive social and ecological environments. A leader, or leaders, of field research in time can turn into mythical subjects themselves, and their lives personify a history of science and inspire new generations of researchers.

In the history of Finno-Ugric research of the period in question there are many examples illustrating the activity of "field communities" (Lehtinen 1992: 41–49). Perhaps one of the earliest experiences of this kind was the journey of D. G. Messerschmidt around Siberia between 1720 and 1728. At that time Swedish and German prisoners of war readily accepted the call of their civil comrades to travel with them into uncertainty (Hämäläinen 1937–1938: 29–30). The scientists in turn shared with them not only the hardships of the Siberian journey, but also their own knowledge. This knowledge made one such man, Ph. J. (Tabbert-) von Stralenberg, a researcher and enabled him to make his own assessments of collected material.

A slightly different example of field community comes from the history of a trip along the eastern domains of Russia, made by the participants of the Overland Squad of the Great Northern Expedition (1733–1743). Having arrived in the realms of the Kazan government in autumn 1733, G. F. Müller and J. G. Gmelin began their analysis of the Volga region peoples and ancient monuments with an urgent request to the governor's office "... to find two aged and dignified persons from each nation who can be asked about their faiths, life, bargains, fields, morals, customs and history, and also to give skilful metaphrasts to interpret for them" (Kharlampovich 1903: 253). Being little experienced at the beginning, and to some extent light-minded young people whose world outlook successfully combined personal adventure with working capacity, they did great work and managed to overcome the dispassionateness of the ethno-cultural background.

The generation which came to Russian academic science in the second half of XVIII century was as enthusiastic as their predecessors about the idea of expeditions where educational purpose was combined with state necessity. The analysis of Finnish peoples and the research into comparative character in order to detect the connections between the Ugric and Finnish peoples was selected as a perspective direction. Activities organised by squads of the Academic Expedition (1768–1774) gave rich empirical material which was reflected in “The Day Time Notes” by I. I. Lepekhin, “Travel Around the Miscellaneous Provinces of the Russian Empire” by P. S. Pallas, “Orenburg Topography” by P. I. Rychkov, and notes by J. P. Falk and J. G. Georgi, etc.

Then, the thoughts about the transition from incidental travels to specialised regional expeditions were expressed by the special commission of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. In this way further aspects could be incorporated into the field of Finno-Ugric research, which was in need of the support of experts and enthusiasts. At the same time an idea was born, and later developed into a concrete proposal, that Finnish academic interest should be matched, as well as the tendency of Finnish scientists to explain the historical and cultural origin of their people more deeply. In 1795 the Academy of Sciences addressed H. G. Porthan, a professor from Turku and a successor in Schlözer’s scientific tradition, and famous for his Finnophile views. He was invited to Russia to make a direct analysis of the empire’s Finno-Ugric peoples. However, political tension between countries, along with the professor’s respectable age and uncertain health, prevented him from accepting the invitation (Setälä 1904: 5–6). It has become clear that the future of Finno-Ugric research depends not only on the continuing search for and processing of field materials, but also on the well-timed appearance of a new generation of researchers.

In XVIII century after having become the sponsor of fieldwork, and, in our case, Finno-Ugric research, the Russian officials demanded that scientists abide by certain conditions: the politically correct textual interpretation of the collected facts, the practical applicability of scientific projects, and the development of a favourable image. The latter, originally connected with the formation of a favourable image of the monarchy in the eyes of European intellectuals, was gradually transformed into one of the empire’s important arguments in its claim to the role of collector of “the Finnish territories and nations”. In this connection, the beginning of the following century can be characterised by the attempt to combine the Romantic world outlook of the scientists with the Constructivist enthusiasm of the government. Through gradual scientific influence the government came to the comprehension that Russia was a polyethnic empire and, hence, there were specific goals to be achieved by government and state.

THE CENTURY OF ROMANTICISM

The ideological situation in Europe changed at the beginning of XIX century. The rationalism of the age of Enlightenment was replaced by Romanticism, fated to play the greatest role in the formation of Finno-Ugric study as an independent field of research. Having become a powerful pan-European movement for the promotion of culture as intrinsically valuable, Romanticism, first of all, raised the authority of humanitarian knowledge, so that “...everybody wanted to be poets, wanted to think as poets and to

write as poets" (Berkovskij 1973: 19). Following the call-up of J. G. Herder, the romantically-minded scientists, anxious to combine science, philosophy and poetry in their search for the best samples, addressed the products of folk literature. In this period many scientists, as well as politicians, began to seriously consider the complexities of constructing national states and national cultures. The attitude of the Romantics to 'nation' as a related syngenetic collective even gained a certain mysticism.

European political change at the time of Napoleon I allowed the Romantics to overcome their individualism and to feel they belonged to the life of the people and their history, and to gain a powerful incentive from this feeling of patriotism. This general trend can be described as a return from idealism and speculative construction to an objective world. This return was considered by the Romantics as an ethical necessity – a moral obligation. Access to "the national idea" of folk creativity, the traditions of vivid bygone days, and, eventually, to nation building, resided in the Romantic consciousness of Finno-Ugric study specialists.

A. J. Sjögren, the founder of the field of Finno-Ugristics, was the first to adopt the Romantic path of scientific research. In his studentship the young Sjögren decided to devote himself to one problem and "with all his might to search for and collect the spiritual monuments of the forefathers, whether it concerns national poetry, fairy tales or anything else that can be of great help in making an analysis of our past". In other words, to the history of the Finns, related peoples and nations (Haltsonen 1956: 207–208). But after his first independent trip to the Ingermanland Finns, he understood that without the support of the financial hierarchy it was too early to speak about the prolongation of field activity in Russia. Taking into account the specific character of the Russian empire, either the state or the "patronising" party could become such a hierarchy. And then the Romantically minded young scientist had to search for cooperation with this authority. Fortunately, in this period those more liberally minded in the highest imperial ranks looked to themselves to make connections with the intelligentsia of regained territories.

A. J. Sjögren found his patron in the person of the State Chancellor of Empire Count N. P. Rumyantsev, who collected together an informal group of scientists: historians, linguists, economists, and others known as "Rumyantsev's coterie". Having become the Count's librarian Sjögren presented him with a schedule of expedition to the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia. After he had received the approval of the chancellor, Academy of sciences and Finnish Senate, Sjögren set out in 1824 – a journey that took him about five years. He visited different Karelian, Vepsian, Sámi, Komi, Komi-Permyak, Udmurt, Mari and Mansi groups and collected unique and important authentic field material. Thus, Sjögren managed to combine a government order with Finnish national aspirations of self identification. A. J. Sjögren authored the famous theory about the existence of the Finno-Perm population in the basin of the North Dvina and Onega region, which he realised was the territory of legendary Bjarmaland (*Бьярмия*) (Branch 1973: 195–196). It inspired further Romantic searches in the area of the Finno-Ugric (Ural) native land.

Tight contact with the government undoubtedly appeared useful for the scientific activity of A. J. Sjögren, but had a negative effect on his personal fame. His moving to St Petersburg and the obtaining an established post in the imperial Academy were seen in his motherland as an unpatriotic act. Having become a civil servant Sjögren, taking into account a prevailing Russian-German component in the Academy, could not act as

an open Finnophile any more and he became less prominent against a background of a new more independent generation of the scientist-Romantics. But it shouldn't be forgotten that the primary and hardest part of organising the exploratory process in Russia, was undertaken by the son of a shoemaker from Iitti. It was he who discovered the scientific talent of M. A. Castrén, perhaps the best known Finno-Ugric specialist, and he who organised Castrén's Siberian expedition and recruited F. J. Wiedemann from Estonia to work in St Petersburg Academy of Science (Setälä 1905: 1–5).

Biographies of M. A. Castrén and Hungarian pioneer of Finno-Ugric researches A. Reguly illustrated their double attitude to state institutes: as inevitable and sometimes useful realities, and as monsters ruthlessly destroying the peaceful idyll of national life (Setälä 1901: 1–3; Karjalainen 1909: 2). The merit of the scientist-Romantics was that by being fieldwork enthusiasts and laborious collectors, they began to popularise their discoveries. Often having a literary gift they started talking to society in the language of the people, the language which had been scorned by the noble estates before. Imperial authority was then challenged to decide a preference, either to become more popular or to continue to preserve estate and caste anachronisms. Research made in the Romantic spirit, and which took place during this period among the Finno-Ugric peoples of Russia, was first apparent in the Finnish national awakening, and to a lesser degree in that of the Hungarians where the process of nation building was already out of the imperial authorities' control. The approaching new century gave hope to others...

THE CENTURY OF EVOLUTIONISM

The second half of XIX century became a time of parting with the past for many countries of the Old World. Mechanical mass production and urbanisation ran hand in hand with increasing bourgeois individualism. But it is well known that any action is impossible without overcoming a definite reaction; and besides there can be the "boomerang effect" on the way to the intended purpose. Europe especially had already experienced the confrontation with Rationalism. The main methodological difficulty was to match the ideal of an anticipated Romantic idyll, with the pragmatic aims of field research. In the opinion of many scientists the theory of evolution, then gaining popularity, could become a universal solution to this problem (Zagrebin 2003: 164). Taking into account the non-uniformity of Finno-Ugric peoples' social and economic development, it was possible to attempt to renovate the milestones of their histories with help from the analysis of modern household activities, using related peoples in the Ural and Volga regions of Siberia.

This was the approximate way U. T. Sirelius, the first professor of Finno-Ugric ethnography from the University of Helsinki, thought in 1923. He noted that: "the analysis of Finno-Ugric ethnography has large perspectives, as the peoples considered to be its subjects are at different stages of development. Thus, the household activities of the peoples who are on lower levels can shed light on the early stages of household activities of more developed peoples" (Sirelius 1919: 16). In due time J. Jankó, the Hungarian ethnographer and mentor of Sirelius, offered a three-level development scheme for Finno-Ugric culture. On the upper level were the ethnic cultures of the Hungarians, the Finns and the Estonians; in the middle the cultures of the East-Finnish agricultural

peoples; and on the lower tier the trade cultures of the Ob-Ugrian region (Kodolányi J. (jr.) 1985: 103). Becoming part of this scheme didn't restrict individual cultures from sharing the basic "one nation – one culture" formula of the Romantics. The effectiveness of this approach wasn't questioned until the ideas of geographical determinism and noefunctionalism appeared in science.

At the first sight it might seem that the creative enthusiasm of the pioneers of Finno-Ugric ethnography led them to be psychologically predisposed for absorption into the world of conventional Finno-Ugric culture. It's quite another matter whether the world they idealised was ready to perceive the personality of the researcher in an adequate way. Probably, any ethnographer who has ever undertaken fieldwork knows that sometimes it's not easy to overcome a wall of imaginary indifference demonstrated by those included in fieldwork studies. The future informants who are part of the rhythmic flow of daily life. At the beginning of his scientific career U. T. Sirelius suggested that the scientist in the field should take up a position as "a person from the people". The difficulty implementing this wish was soon apparent. In most cases an ethnographer differs from the population he studies not only in professional education, but also by a set of other socially significant factors best illustrated in the concept "habitus". This factor apparently influences the scientist's behaviour and state of mind in the field, and in turn cannot but influence the technology used for research and subsequently the way in which collected empirical material is interpreted. It is remarkable that having acquired some field experience Sirelius rejected his original idea and, within ethnography, kept a role of interested spectator and occasional producer for the researcher.

Sometimes it seemed to young ethnographers that the unsociable demeanour and secrecy they came across almost everywhere in the field, was the only possible means of protection from the influence of external obscurity and a consequently hostile environment. But understanding this situation did not make the work easier. In some remote villages traditionally favoured by scientists, the people believed in the supernatural abilities of strangers and tried never to catch the strangers' eye. Another side of this unsociable demeanour was that here and there scientists were met with excessive curiosity or obtrusiveness from the natives. Having been convinced of the newcomer's harmlessness, they pestered him with different requests. Quite often field reports include descriptions of tragicomic situations in which scientists became victims of their own profession and had to escape from rural activists urging villagers "to beat anti-Christians" (Hämäläinen 1930: 5).

The responsibility of the field researcher in relation to the people under study was sooner or later felt by everyone. Quite often in the past, but also in the present, the scientist became a peculiar intermediary between his informants and the local authorities. So it was at the end of the XIX century when ethnographers opposed the authorities in passing a verdict of guilty, using their reviews to defend Udmurts from the village of Old Multan who were accused of human sacrifices. M. Mikkor notes that, perhaps, the ethnographer often feels guilty because of all the requests for help to which he couldn't respond (Mikkor 2001: 60). A recent case comes to mind on this matter, in which our research group, working with a portable video camera on a tripod, was mistaken by the inhabitants of one of the Udmurt villages for long-expected surveying engineers laying a gas pipeline. When, at last, the situation cleared up, we were nevertheless asked whenever possible to speed up the process of gasification of the village.

Historically the researcher's stay in "the Russian field" depended not only on his contacts with the ethnic group under study, but also on his relationship with authority of different degrees and ranks. So, A. O. Heikel was sensible enough to go on his first trip around Eastern Russia in 1883 after receiving the personal blessing of the Minister of Affairs of the Great Dukes of Finland. Thirty years later U. (Holmberg-) Harva apparently neglected this formality and as a result spent one of the summer nights in a police watch house in the village Old Kanisar, in the Kazan administrative region, for the verification of his identity. Certainly he tried to explain to the watchful rural policemen that he was an ethnographer from Finland, and that his companion, a local Udmurt teacher, was only his guide and translator (Kelmakov 1990: 111). I suppose that the guards took a dim view of his reasons, local territory map, notepads, drafts and drawings. The Finnish folklorist Y. Wichmann appeared to be more provident and before going into the field equipped himself with numerous credentials along with instructions for all grades of district police to render him full assistance (*Matkamuistiinpanoja* 1987). The list of "the persons for contacts", mainly including agricultural teachers, local officers and clergymen, played another role: using the help of these people Wichmann began to comprehend the key technical point of fieldwork among related peoples.

At the beginning of XIX century the scientist-Romantics felt an impelling need for the natives' help. The search for smart guides was not arbitrary nor made according to the landlord's fancy. Many researchers had problems with colloquial Russian, without mentioning the local Finno-Ugric languages which were difficult for researchers to learn during expeditions. As a rule, the natives in their turn were not good at Russian or other foreign languages. The situation was a little improved when educational reference and other specialist literature permitted the ethnographer to make preliminary linguistic preparation for fieldwork research.

In the second half of the XIX century the problem of local helpers gained further urgency when Finno-Ugric specialists began to move from long-term exploratory expeditions, to research of a localised character among specific ethnic groups. Ideally local helpers would have made that earlier missing link which would bridge relations between the scientist and the population under study. Theoretically they should be of the people, should have a thorough command of the local language (or dialect) and have an idea about the value systems of the subjects. At the same time, they should feel at home in Russian as well as one of the European languages in order to pass information from its origin to the collector. But where was it possible to find such helpers in the majority of the illiterate non-Russian population of eastern Russia? The Kazan Teachers' Seminary, which prepared Christian missionaries and teachers for national schools in the area, was the real salvation for Finno-Ugric specialists (Lallukka 1987). The organiser and permanent seminary director N. I. Ilminsky, known as a scientist-teacher, enjoyed successful long-time co-operation with the Finno-Ugric Community and even became an honorary member. His active concern enabled Mordvin seminary pupils of Mari and Udmurt origin to participate in Finno-Ugric research as field guides and translators.

This innovation began shortly before the beginning of World War I, when the administration of the Finno-Ugric Community offered to organise special training courses to teach local helpers independent research skills. But the outbreak of war allowed only a few scholars to pass the scientific training. Among them was a Komi ethnographer V. Nalimov, and a Mari ethnographer T. Yevseyev (*Zyrjanskij...* 2004: 15, Sanukov 2002:

5). And even during the war research did not stop. In due course Ö. Beke described in detail the methods used by Hungarian scientists who were among Finno-Ugric prisoners of war (Beke: 1937–1938: 1–16). The effects were really productive, but as for me, the moral and ethical side is still ambiguous. Nevertheless, the opportunities for fieldwork that followed the revolutions and civil wars of this period were on the decrease, and even legal correspondence was put under close control; it couldn't but have an effect on the social prestige of Finno-Ugric ethnography. In Soviet Russia the science was swiftly becoming "Bolshevist"; equally in Finland, Hungary and Estonia ethnographers were unable to avoid being held hostage by a definite politicisation.

THE SOVIET TIME

As a rule, in each country problems of "the national" are taken up by experts from different disciplines. According to the Soviet division of scientific labour, ethnographers were responsible for both empirical research and its theoretical justification. Soviet ethnology was considered by the government to be one of the sciences with special political problems (within the context of Marxist-Leninist ideology). In 1920–1930 Soviet ethnology was participating in social experiments and the National Cultural Revolution for the so-called backward peoples (Slezkine 1991: 476–478). Finno-Ugric ethnographic research in Soviet Russia had to maintain a balance between these two poles through unambiguous co-operation between science and policy. In addition, it was a fact that during the period in question the Russian province forming the focus of study experienced a dramatic period of forced modernisation. It changed from an agrarian community into an urbanised and industrial society in which it was more effective to affirm communism using native language. Besides, authority came from the "Kulturträger", the leader of backward peoples' cultural development, and by the opportunity to work with "entirely pure" material unaffected by the modest charm of the bourgeoisie. The authorities wanted to supervise the modernisation process of the 'backward peoples' and, in these conditions, ethnographers had to accept the revolutionary rates of cultural changes taking place in the communities they studied. In short, they had to switch their attention from national traditions, to class (even where there was no class structure). They were made to search for features of backwardness and to uncover class antagonisms within ethnic groups, with the authorities playing the role of prosecutor.

This short wave of glory also touched the burgeoning national Finno-Ugric intellectual world, totally absorbed as it was with revolutionary study and construction. But all attempts to forge a national culture were soon suppressed by the government, which organised "Delo SOFIN" (The Union for Liberation of Finno-Ugric Peoples) and used other methods of suppression which, although they were not much publicised, were rather effective (Kulikov 1997). The government made it clear that it was only in its power to model and to construct. In the magazine «Советская этнография» No. 2–3, 1937 the article "Socialist construction among the Volga region peoples" was published and its author noted: "The policy of imperial government, which was focused on suppressing small nationalities, had an especially bright manifestation towards the multinational Volga region" (Lekomcev 1937: 3). Many facts presented in the first part of the article can be agreed with. But in the

second and the main part of the opus, apart from the inexhaustible images of adulation for “the top echelons of the Lenin-Stalin political party of the Bolsheviks”, there is a conceptual phrase: “For the people of multinational Russia previous history is over and the history of liberated people begins” (Lekomcev 1937: 7).

World War II divided the Finno-Ugric peoples yet further and hindered the exploratory schedules of the scientists. When A. Hämäläinen, professor of Finno-Ugric ethnography, being at the same time a major in the Finnish army, was engaged in the evacuation of the Finnish speaking population of Ingermanland it seemed that science appeared to be directly connected to the solution of political problems (Räsänen 1992: 104). A few Finno-Ugric study specialists who survived Stalin’s purges tried to forget their longstanding contacts with foreign colleagues, who had now been declared fascists. Relevant to this concern is the Estonian ethnographic expedition of 1942–1943 which worked with the Votes and the Izhorians in the Leningrad area. Practically all its leading participants later became famous scientists, for example G. Ränk in Sweden, and I. Talve in Finland.

In 1950 J. V. Stalin scarified academic N. Ya. Marr’s previously accepted theory about the language and proclaimed that classes leave and come but nations remain (Meurs 1997). After that, Soviet ethnographers then had a little breathing space. They hoped to make ethnography a legitimate science again, unfortunately the problem was that the price for making it legitimate was the same as before – support for the ideological and political aims of the government. By the way, dependence of this kind characterised the whole of post-war ethnology and was closely connected in Western countries with the colonial system, in the Soviet Union with “the guiding role of the CPSU”, and with similar factors in non-aligned countries. But this fragile balance between the power of ethnographic fact and the authority of the state provided the conditions for a post-war Renaissance in the field of Finno-Ugric ethnography. And what is more important, for the formation of steady scientific interest in Finno-Ugric problems. As a result of this renewal process the organisation of a regular International Congress of Finno-Ugric study specialists started in 1965.

In this period the role of those scientists who were not afraid, and who in the number of cases didn’t shirk the difficult role of being both a researcher and a public person working with the government, was especially important. As I have previously mentioned, examples of this were the academic K. Vilkuna, who remained adviser to president U. K. Kekkonen for many years, the leader of Soviet ethnography Y. V. Bromley, and also many regional science centre chiefs in Finno-Ugric areas of the USSR (Lehtonen 2004; Vainshtein 2004). It was a delicate game based on mutual concessions, compromises, offences and embraces. But this game made it possible to issue the magazine *«Советское финно-угроведение»*; for the academic P. Ariste to start a post graduate course; and for the Estonian National Museum to undertake numerous expeditions to the eastern and western Finno-Ugric peoples (Vilkuna 1965: 132). In considering the period covered in this paper it is possible to propose that the independent exploratory collectives of Finno-Ugric specialists in Siberia, in the Ural and in the Volga regions, as being the greatest success. A fact made more telling because this was, probably, exactly what the pioneers of Finno-Ugric research dreamt about.

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