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Historians on Finland's Status in the Russian Empire

The Historian and Time, Politics and Political History

History in itself is important for researchers and citizens of a nation. Some problems, events and phenomena of history, however, tend to catch the attention of the public more often than others. When referring to them, the motto of the historian of today telling that the human being is important to history although he/she does not belong to any party, ideology or strand of development has always been forgotten (Rahikainen 1996, 20, 22, 24). The abstract state risen above the individual has acquired a personal character and has operated as a subject in historians' minds and texts. Its interest has become the contents of politics and the standard object of study (Kettunen 1990, 167, 169). Sweden has its period of greatness, Norway has its Diet of Eidsvold, the Germans have their Bismarck, the French have their Revolution and the Russians have the Peter the Great.

The landmarks of national history of Finland have traditionally been the annexation of the country to Russian Empire (1809), the years of oppression ('russification') 1899–1905, and of course, the period of 1917–1918, when Finland waged a Civil War and became independent. Becoming a part of Russia, the development of Finland's status in the 19th century, and the fear of losing it at the turn of the century have all created a most complicated problematic in the history of Finns and of Finland. In a certain sense, the teaching and the study of Finnish political history has been regarded as based on the learning, interpretation and its changes of this particular period. Finnish political history as discipline has largely been the product of the 19th century idea of the state and the defence of Finnish autonomy during the years of oppression (Jussila 1983, 13-16). These phenomena have affected the character and urge to change within the discipline. Even today political history of Finland does not acquiesce to the view that it would be high time to give up linear understanding of history (Kettunen 1990, 163). The political 'fate' of Finland is understood and narrated as a continuum, the highlights of which are those dramatically paramount events listed above.

The years of the turn of the last century in Finnish history explains also the popularity of political history, in spite of its methodological conservatism. The greatest problem in the essence of Finland has been political. The political history's solutions are always an answer to the very same question: how is it possible that Finland is an independent state. And this is connected to another question: how is it possible that Finland has become an independent nation. The latter question has dominated the problematic of Finnish political history for decades. The approach has been rather tendentious and almost always also pragmatic.

History impregnated by a particular conviction has easily become a weapon in grounding important political arguments. The particularity of Finnish past, the separation from Sweden, for instance, the annexation of Finland to Russia and the preservation of the Swedish language, has made language, class and politics identical and concerned the historians (Engman 1990, 39-41). In spite of political change, the basic setting has stayed the same: a small nation, later a state, lived in the shadow of a bigger and more powerful state or as its neighbour being afraid of – generally justifiably, sometimes not – losing its own existence and identity.

The critical periods in Finnish-Russian relations have been the crux of the argument also in research until today. Quite recently this has been brought again forward in debates concerning what would have been the line of development of Finland if Finland had stayed with Sweden. Or, to put it more simply and unscientifically: has the time when Finland was annexed to Russia (1809-1917) been a period of 'progress' or 'regress'?

The line of political development that has been the moot question was, in general terms, largely as follows. According to the agreement of Tilsit (1807) the Tsar of Russia, Alexander I, had to persuade Sweden to join the continental economic blockade against Great Britain. Because Sweden was one of Britain's most important trading partners, it did not agree to it. Alexander took to force and launched a military campaign against Sweden. Russia was to occupy Finland until Sweden would accede to Alexander's demand. As the occupation proceeded smoothly, and as the expansion at the expense of Turkey – the main foreign political goal of Russia – seemed improbable, Alexander changed his mind and transformed occupation to invasion. On August 23rd, 1808, Finland was declared a permanent part of Russia and an oath of allegiance was

taken from the Finns in the name of the new ruler. The war ended with the peace treaty of Hamina on September 17th, 1809. According to it, Sweden had to secede Finland to Russia along the line of the rivers of Tornio and Muonio. The peace treaty was indisputable and Finland hardly featured in Russian-Swedish relations ever since. Objectively gauged, the constitutional status of Finland was clear. Formerly Finland had been a part of the Swedish state, after the peace treaty of Hamina it did not share the sovereignty of the Russian Empire.

The contention over the status of Finland and its foundations at the end of the 19th century was caused by another event that took place already before Hamina treaty. Due to its ambiguous nature, it provided avenues for later, contestatory interpretations. It so happened that while the Russian invasion was still going on, the Emperor, urged by his advisors, convened the Estates of Finland to a Diet in late winter to Porvoo (a little town of Finland), 1809. In this meeting of Estates Finland gained the administrative and constitutional structure connected to its autonomous position. In his pledge the Emperor announced that he would guarantee the religion of Finland, the constitutional laws and the privileges of the Estates of the times of the Swedish rule (1155–1809) (Nygård 1996, 107–108; Jussila 1987, *passim*). The other part of the act was the oath of allegiance given by the Estates, i.e. by the nation, to the ruler.

The new constitutional status was not actually questioned before the end of the century, when the peculiar characteristics of the nation, representative system, offices and state's bureaus, money, territory, language, the system of higher education, religion, even the customs barrier against the Empire had developed quite far and had become peculiar to Finland. However, they were largely based on modern Swedish system of the state dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. This fact brought

to the discussion on the status of Finland a particular inherent dimension which created a language divide among the participants.

The Language Question and National Indebtedness

Basically, the contention was also about history and the way Fennomen (Finnish nationalistic) used history as a powerful weapon in it. This was the case especially since the 1860s as the Professor of history Georg Zachris Forsman (Yrjö Sakari Yrjö Koskinen) became the leader the Fennomane movement (Tommila 1989, 94-95). His ideological background and view of history were largely based on the philosophy of J.V. Snellman, although it shows distinct traces of von Herder's and Geijer's, too. Mediated by Snellman Yrjö Koskinen's ideas are connected to Hegel's views on historical process and on the part nations (states) play in the progressive development of world history (Nygård 1968, 145-152, esp. 47-54). However, Yrjö Koskinen was an empiricist, not a theoretician, so that the roots of his ideas and reasoning have to be traced back to Leopold von Ranke's inductive-empiricist method (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 41, 45). In Finland, the thinking and attitudes of the historians were complicated in that as the Fennomane movement called forth the Svecomane (Swedish nationalistic) movement, also the historians became divided notwithstanding their basic views of history and readiness to study were almost totally the same (Engman 1990, 41, 49, 51). This relates also to the question of the debts of gratitude to Sweden which has been the basis also for later speculations.

Without doubt Finnish historians were at the end and partly also during the latter half of the 19th century in trouble. The current view of history emphasised the mean-

ing of the state as a factor creating history, as its acting subject (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 45). Also Snellman could not accept any other history than political history, a part of the history of the whole humankind. A nation had the right to exist only when performing its world-historical mission. Snellman's emphasis on the nation offered salvation because according to the current view the Finns had not formed a state so that they could not have their own history (Nygård 1968, 53-55).

The concept of history meant other things for the 19th century historians than it means now; it was narrowly defined as political history. And to that definition appealed also the Swedish-speaking historians in Finland, or, it provided a starting-point for them. The contribution of Fennoman movement to historical studies was that – if we may say so – it, starting from purely national-political objectives, successfully demanded the enlargening the contents of history (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 53-55), although different spheres of history remained very vaguely interpreted and encompassed. For instance, depending on the author, the history of learning and ideas, description of the life of the common people or the development of various institutions of society were understood as cultural history.

The time-perspective of the Fennomen was limited, for e.g. Yrjö Koskinen was searching for “political” greatness for the Finns from the period earlier than the Swedish rule. The impact of Z. Topelius, paradoxically the Professor of Finnish History since 1854, as a writer, lecturer and author of historical novels was enormously bigger than as methodologist in history. As a Romantic he saw history as a dialectic of thesis/antithesis – as a battle which, according to the Hegelian formula, ended with a synthesis guided by the principle of Providence (Noro 1968, 207; Nygård 1968, 124 ff.). In his paper called “Äger Finska folket historia” (Do Finnish people have a history)

read at the anniversary meeting of the Ostrobothnian Student "Nation" he had answered the question in the negative (Topelius 1949, 489-516): the Finns had not formed a state before joining the Russian Empire. Because of this handicap, their history was provincial, at the most.

Although Topelius later smoothed his stance, he did not adopt Yrjö Koskinen's view. But as Snellman and Yrjö Koskinen and all other Finnish historians irrespective of language, Topelius recognized the unique meaning of 1809 and the Porvoo act to the Finnish history. It was a landmark that initiated the real history of the Finnish state. Perhaps the uniqueness and esteem of political history is best depicted by the characterization which the Swedish-speaking historians gave of Yrjö Koskinen's work called *Oppikirja Suomen kansan historiasta* (Textbook in Finnish history). Of the work, empirical in detail but national in interpretative framework, it was said that it was like a game of chess in which the pawns tried to mate the king and the queen (Engman 1990, 50; Tommila 1989, 92).

This was the way in which the message of Yrjö Koskinen's work was being employed by his cousin, fervent Svecomane, the Professor of Literature, C. G. Estlander. This criticism may describe the intention of the work, and of Yrjö Koskinen's view of national history and of its premises most accurately. It put in a nutshell the power of Koskinen's conviction. It was Yrjö Koskinen himself who had stated that a nation had history if it wanted to own it. Namely 'will' proved that a specific nation-subject was in existence (Yrjö Koskinen 1876, 1-9; Tommila 1994, 232-233).

The Fennomane movement was split by different evaluations of the solution of the year 1809. Amazingly enough, the dividing factor was a trivial one, namely age. The so called older, respectable Fennomen agreed with the Swedish-speakers that the Swedish rule had lifted the Finns from the shade to the light. Sweden had given the

institutions of cultural and social life and in connection with Sweden the Finns had become accustomed to political activity, and risen to the leading ranks of the Western civilization to perform its mission to guard against the Eastern barbarity in the fringes of Europe (Topelius 1931, 467-468; Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 34, 35, 39-40). Although the idea was not expressed in these words, it was cherished by both the Swedish-speaking and the older Finnish-speaking cultural elites. In their opinion, it was not at all certain whether the period following the year 1809 would fit in with the period of the Swedish rule to form a positive continuity in Finnish history.

Also the younger generation of the Fennomen, led by Yrjö Koskinen and those intellectuals who had adopted Snellman's nationalist philosophy and drawn practical conclusions from it, watched the march of history from the loophole of the Diet of Porvoo. However, it was not the starting-point of Finnish history and a deviation from the positive development for them. On the contrary, for instance, Yrjö Koskinen put it bluntly that the Swedish period was one of exploitation, utilization, burdens and the building of the greatness of the mother country. He also distinguished independent Finnish development in various fields, and evaluated events, and especially the workings of the Swedish government from the angle of how they had hindered or encouraged the rise of Finnish national consciousness and the strengthening of their self-consciousness. Telling signs he found from eras and areas which were being regarded or are regarded as the worst of swedification or institutions of 'Great Sweden', e.g. the 17th century or army. In his studies also Sprengtporten, the leader of the opposition against the King Gustavus III, and the "Finnish separatism" of the 18th century acquired the Finnish-nationalistic interpretation which prevailed among the Finnish-speaking historians until the end of the 1940s. Sprengtporten was not a traitor or an insig-

nificant daydreamer but a national fighter and great man. On the other hand, the Swedish kings had rarely understood Finnish interests. Also Gustavus Vasa received negative marks from Koskinen (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 27, 32-33; Yrjö Koskinen 1870; Tommila 1989, 92). The upshot was that at the end of the Swedish rule the Finns had risen onto the level of the rest of the world culturally and in civilization. The mature national spirit had started to demand a special constitutional status.

Yrjö Koskinen declared also openly that the historians' task was to awaken national consciousness. Since language was the main instrument of national life, practical work had to be concentrated on furthering Finnish in order to make it the leading language in the country. Also the Swedish-speakers were looking for the clue to the past of the nation, but they proceeded rather in liberalistic, not in the Hegelian mood. Typically, C. G. Estlander, the aforementioned critic of Yrjö Koskinen's work and M. G. Schybergson, who wrote the so called official Swedish rejoinder to it, found the leading motif of Finnish development in the developing freedom of the citizenry. The Swedish-speakers highlighted the loyalty of the Finns towards Sweden and argued that Yrjö Koskinen's tendency to find some peculiar Finnish national feeling in Finnish history was erroneous (Tommila 1989, 95-96; Tommila 1994, 233).

The interpretations of the Finnish- and Swedish-speakers differed greatly from each other in spite of the fact that both based their work on the tradition of idealistic philosophy of history. The Swedish-speakers leaned on Swedish-Swedish idealistic philosophy of the state, the Finnish-speakers on the German philosophy of history moulded by Snellman. Since Finland became independent (1917), Finnish-nationalistic history continued on the same line stressing that the study of history of independent Finland was unthinkable without present-

ing the achievement as the goal of all previous development (Danielson-Kalmari 1919, 63-91; Tommila 1989, 92-95; Engman 1990, 52). The Swedish-speakers could not accept this view.

The views referred to above were not only the property of a few historians or intellectuals at the time but they were quickly disseminated through school history books of the basic schools and gymnasias, and in this way they made a lasting impact on wider readership. Since the independence the schools books depicted the annexation to Russia as a turning-point. Before 1809 Finland had been only an easterly province but the Porvoo Diet had made the Finns almost independent as they had been “lifted among the nations” (Nummila 1997, esp. 37).

Defending the Autonomy

Finnish historians’ view of what was the status of Finland in the 19th century and what it meant for national development, was dependent on their image of Russia. In this, the experiences of the years of the constitutional contention, the first (1899–1905) and second (1908–1914) periods of oppression, proved decisive. In contrast, Finland did not arouse attention before the end of the 19th century in Russia.

The pressure that was put on Finland from the end of the 19th century was from the Empire’s point of view actually strengthening the internal integration by means of making the administration more effective and in that way seeking a better strategic position (Paasivirta 1978, 298-299). For Finland the new policy meant destruction of national institutions and assimilation of the country into the Empire. By actively defending those institutions Finnish historians at the same time took a stand towards the events in the beginning of the 19th century. The reali-

ties of the times and national interest provided the background for their interpretations. The foremost of the historians were also politicians; in this sense scholars performed an important national task, namely defended the status of the country as a state by pleading history. It is against this background that we have to study the ideas of the historians of the turn of the century. Although J.R. Danielson (Danielson-Kalmari), for example, held to his views ever since so that his interpretations cannot be regarded merely as political and tactical instrument but they reflect, at least in part, his scholarly convictions (Jutikkala 1983, 83-84).

The starting point was that the Finns did not recognize that the problem concerned the Empire and autonomous Finland. Russia had been pushed aside in Finnish thoughts. They considered the issue of what the words and actions of the Emperor did mean for Finland. The view was correct in the sense that the part the Emperor had played in the change of the status of Finland had been dominant (Ylikangas 1995, 22-24).

Defending the constitutional status of Finland was in itself a sufficient factor for a very tendentious interpretation of history. Historians were bound to scholarly traditions and schools of historical research of their times. Political history was popular in many European countries, and it was customary to seek support to state's policy from the past. Tendentious conclusions followed which was also the result of the one-sidedness of the evidence. The Russian onslaught which provoked Finnish defense emanated from the interest Russian liberals and reactionaries had in Finnish matters. Finnish historians held that the reforms carried through in the second half of the nineteenth century could be a model for the whole of the Empire. The nationalist Russians considered Finland a conquered land which had, for some peculiar reason, been able to develop to a direction which ran against Russian

interests. This negative view was to be brought forward in historical studies.

The forum for the literary onslaught on Finland was the paper called *Moskovskaja Vedomosti*, but the main reason for the Finnish counter offensive was the book *Pakornie Finlandij* (1889) by the Counsellor of the Court, K. F. Ordin. Its title “The Conquering of Finland” already suggested that it argued that Finland had been annexed to Russia on the basis of the Hamina peace treaty without any conditions referring to autonomy, i.e. Finland was a land that had been conquered in a war. At the turn of the century there was a group Russian historians (S. Petrovkij, E. N. Berents, M. M. Borodkin) who specialized in Finnish history. That they published their work in the years of the debate was an accident because the political situation blinded the Finnish historians who overlooked the merits – e.g. the perusal of Russian documents – of their work.

The defense of the Finnish historians was led by the Professor of General History, J. R. Danielson. He held also a central position in the Old-Finns’ party. Aroused by Ordin’s argument, his main goal was to unravel how the autonomy of Finland was born and what form it took at the moment of its birth. Answer to this question would have solved the problem concerning the political status of Finland, too. The problem overshadowed all other themes. J. R. Danielson’s counter-attack consisted of four books written in an incredibly short time: *The Incorporation of Finland to the Russian Empire* (1891), *The Internal Independence of Finland* (1892), *The Restoration of the County of Viborg to Finland* (1894) and *The Finnish War and Its Soldiers in 1808 and 1809* (1896). He also published quite a few articles on the issue. He was supported heavily by Kustavi Grotenfelt, E. G. Palmén and Torsten Hartman, among others. In addition to books, the debate was carried on on the pages of the two most important reviews in Finland, *Valvoja* and *Finsk Tidskrift*. Support and acknowledgement to the his-

torians' interpretations was given also by high-rank officials and politicians (Tommila 1989, 91).

Ordin, however, had taken the lead and defined what was it all about and how to conduct the debate. Was the constitutional status of Finland decided in Porvoo or Hamina? In his view, the former did not mean a thing. Instead, in the peace treaty of Hamina, Finland had been severed from Sweden and the Swedish king had given up his rights to the conquered counties (Finland) which had then been annexed to Russia by full possession. There was no autonomy because there was not a single word about it in the peace treaty. Autonomy was supported by Finns only, not by the documents. Danielson, on his part, set out from the view that all had been decided on already in Porvoo. In the Diet a dual act was performed; the Finns and the Emperor made a contract. The Emperor could not rule autocratically but according to the old 'constitutions' of Finland. He had conceded to keeping them in force. What was emphasized was that Finland was not annexed to Russia as a province – a view actively spread also in schools (Nummila 1997, 37). As the Tsar and Finnish Estates made an agreement on the fate of Finland in Porvoo, Russia as a state had nothing to do with it. Only the Tsar meant something.

This idea included also the answer to the question whether Finland was a "state" or merely a "province". The negative answer of the Russians made the Finns to take stand also to the problem whether Finland had a constitution which the Emperor could have confirmed. In these questions the Finns agreed but in considering what was the nature of the relation between Finland and Russia, all did not accept Danielson's view. For instance, one of his party fellows and leader of the Finnish party, the Professor of Finnish, Nordic and Russian history, E. G. Palmén, remarked to his colleague, Danielson, that in the book *The Internal Independence of Finland*, he had strayed

too far away from history and theorized too much. In Palmén's thought, the existence of Finland was hanging on a too thin rope if its tenability was weighed with such a subjective and arbitrary arguments (Palmén 1892, 233-235). The Finns rather had to defend themselves "on a firm historical ground". A theory of law and state could always be disproved with another, but unambiguous historical acts could not be questioned and annulled by jurisprudence.

The interpretations of birth and essence of the autonomy worked out by Danielson and his colleagues were sanctified and were mediated to later research almost intact. The image they had provided was easily inscribed in the minds of historians and the reading public. It flourished and lived long, and this was not so only because of day-to-day problems caused by the Russian oppression. The answer lies in a wider ideological setting and atmosphere. During the late years of the autonomy a picture of persevering, law-abiding and -loving Finns was painted, and they were compared to unreliable Russians who had internalized Oriental values and concept of law (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 29-30; Torvinen 1965, 201-202). As much as the Finnish interpretations concerning the birth of the autonomy written during the period of oppression contained tendentiousness, some sort of judicial pettyfogging and, above all, seeking of political justification, they quite pointedly reflect the frame of mind which the people of the times shared, and the way how they experienced the Russian oppression.

In recent discussions concerning the period of oppression, one essential point has been missed. The Finns, historians and the reading public, living during the oppression were convinced that autonomous Finland was born in Porvoo Diet as a result of the mutual act of the Emperor and the Finnish Estates. In their view, the Russians appeared to want to turn the wheel of history back-

wards. They wanted to abolish the institutions, e.g. national army and the Diet which were regarded as making Finland an autonomous state (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 30). In doing this, the Russians took on themselves, or at least strengthened, the image of reactionary chauvinists who were hostile towards Western culture. This image has left its mark in how the Finns had evaluated the meaning and nature of the period of autonomy in Finnish history.

The students and friends of Danielson continued the work of their master and idol. Some of them took a critical stance towards the reorganization of the status of Finland (1809) as a part of general European politics. These studies, e.g. by U. L. Lehtonen, were written from the standpoint of general history (Poland in Russian politics) but were connected to the problematic of which the 'Porvoo solution' was a part. The most important of them was perhaps Lehtonen's *From Tilsit to Hamina: A Study of the Policy of Alexander the First in Regard whether It Caused the Conquering of Finland* (1908). The title reveals the main subject of the study, and the interpretation of Lehtonen became the standard one in Finnish historical writing and view of history. Alexander had, against his will, had to conquer Finland. Alexander's foreign policy had not been expansive, as it had been suggested in former studies.

Lehtonen's line of study was continued by Erkki J. Osmonsalo whose doctoral thesis (1932) dealt with border politics of Finland. His contribution is contained in his work called *Suomen valloitus* ("The Conquering of Finland"), the results of which corroborated Lehtonen's interpretations. Osmonsalo emphasized that Finland was given its own General Gouverneur already on the first of December, 1808, which virtually meant autonomy.

Osmonsalo's later work is connected to the third phase in debates concerning the birth of autonomy of Finland and Finland's status in the Russian Empire. His synthesis came out in *Suomen historian käsikirja* (1949, "The Hand-

book of Finnish History”) which was – also meant to be such (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 25-26; Kettunen 1990, 178-179) – the symbol of the new direction in Finnish historiography after the World War II. He wrote extensive articles for it which dealt with the foundation of the Finnish state and the period of autonomy until the years of oppression. According to him, the times of Nicholas I were not only of the “black reactionary” kind, as the earlier liberalistic interpretation of Finnish history had had it, but a period of positive developments in many areas. Osmonsalo was the harbinger of the reevaluation of the period of autonomy.

Osmonsalo analyzed also the history of national institutions, a theme picked up by K.W. Rauhala, who specialized in these studies. His starting point and goal were national. One had to study the history of the institutions which were the most important in the formation of the autonomy and to show to Finns and others the state-like nature of Finland and its organized political power.

The generation of the Swedish-speaking historians who studied 19th century history was somewhat younger than the Finnish-speaking one. The work of Carl von Bonsdorff proved fundamental. He took up the history of autonomy slightly later than J. R. Danielson. Most probably he was egged on by his cousin E. G. Palmén in his studies on the history of administration and economy. Because of the Russian pressure university teaching in history orientated towards emphasizing the constitution handed down from the period of Swedish rule. During the years of debate this proved advantageous also tactically. As straightforward criticism of the Empire was impossible in public, comparison between the Swedish and Russian systems made the same impact, even more clearly. Bonsdorff expanded his studies from the history of the university of Turku to cover the history of public opinion and politics. He stressed the importance of biography. In this he was

followed by B. Lesch, whose leaning to biography took him to studying Sprengtporten and Finnish separatists, so called the men of Anjala¹ and their objectives. He could not find common ground with the national Finnish interpretations (Engman 1990, 44, 52-53; Jutikkala 1983, 85). In the works of the historians who studied the Gustavian period (1772-1809), the birth of autonomy and its early decades, the impact of great men in reorganizing the status of Finland was prominent.

“The Realists” and The National Interest

After the World War II Finland had to arrange its relations with Russia on a new, “firm” basis. The transition was reflected also in historical writing. It has been highlighted (Kettunen 1994, 81; Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 21) that history joined the ranks of cultural conservatism and mental reconstruction. The goal was to ensure national continuity. The objective was to maintain room for life for history by cutting those visions that allowed too much room for various interpretations and did not fit the mood and the “realities” of the times from it. It was they that had presented Russia, the predecessor of the Soviet Union, as a natural arch-enemy of Finland. History also wanted to react to the challenge coming from the social sciences which became influential after the war. Positivism and its presupposed ‘exactitude’ of social sciences was countered by emphasizing the centrality of historical sources (Kettunen 1990, 183-184, 191-193).

The “Handbook” was, according to its editor, Arvi Korhonen, a crutch for historians in a threatening situation. It offered for all the people “an essentially more realistic” image of history. However, the yardstick for its main contributors were national values which were now threatened not by officials of the Tsar but by the Soviet

Union and communism. The endurance of the Finnish backbone presupposed revision of the old visions that had lost credibility and cool understanding of the images of threat. Historians also had to impress the readers' minds the new political and geo-strategic realities, a phrasing that became highly valued in Finnish politics for a few decades to come (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 25-26).

In the circumstances prevailing the memory of the people had to be cultivated and its inner strength and cohesion had to be enhanced. Because of these new goals and necessity the studies and their themes which had been fashionable before the war, e.g. Finnish middle-ages, the Finnish separatism of the Anjala men and – most important in this connection – the years of oppression, had to be abandoned or they were reinterpreted. The years of oppression (1899–1905) became the years of 'frost' and the chauvinist, expansive regime of the Tsar an ordinary great power with its wide "legitimate interests of security" and "justified" geostrategic goals.

The contributors of the "Handbook" were chosen according to the main goals. Those left outside, foremost of them Professor Jalmari Jaakkola, the "visionary" of Finnish national history, did not abstain from making their stand towards the value and historical sense of the new line of studies clear (Ahtiainen & Tervonen 1996, 27). Jaakkola was right in pointing out that a positivist view of history without firm convictions could be appropriate in studying so called intimate problems of political history but it changed with the inspiration aroused by the "Handbook" into an internal norm or a self-supporting value in history. In 1964 Professor Kauko Pirinen wrote that the politics of Russia had become more pivotal as a problem concerning Finnish national existence. According to him, this field of studies had experienced a remarkable reorientation. In studies dealing with the years of oppression – or if this denomination was to be avoided – of the

Russian policy of integration, only the tip of the iceberg was to be seen so far (Pirinen 1964, 125-128).

The question remains: what had happened that made this argument – justified as it, by all means, was – possible? The articles of the “Handbook”, also those which had been left unfinished, did not, also in Pirinen’s own opinion, justify this conclusion. ‘The years of oppression’ were simply shown by means of juridical and political research and their evidence to be a misleading concept. It was being replaced by a neutral, so called impartial expression ‘politics of integration’ or ‘Russian-Finnish conflict’.

Here we come across a quite significant revision which was not the result of only political change, although Paasikivi and Kekkonen quite powerfully pointed to some boundaries of research for the historians (Kettunen 1990, 176-178, 184-185). The image of the period of autonomy was redrawn because of new research material which became available as the Finnish historians started to consult archives abroad. The framework for the studies of the period of autonomy remained, however, as it had been. Finland still was a “question” to its eastern neighbour. The initial results of the scholarly revision were presented to the reading public at the beginning of the 1960s. The formation of the Grand Duchy of Finland was dealt with Päiviö Tommila (1962) and Keijo Korhonen (1963) in their doctoral theses. Korhonen’s work divided opinions sharply. The opponent of his thesis, prof. Vilho Niitemaa, for instance, referred to works of Russian emigrant historians used by Korhonen, and concluded that Ordin’s and Borodkin’s views were returning to Finland by a roundabout route (Niitemaa 1963, 312-321; Kettunen 1990, 187-188).

Was the trace of Ordin’s argument so prominent in Korhonen’s work that it was worth special emphasis? Korhonen had argued that the atmosphere of the years of oppression and constitutional contention had affected the

interpretations of period of autonomy. In his view, Alexander I and Speranski had surely had such a quite clear idea of the status of the privileged border-lands under separate administration within the Russian Empire that they could have applied it also to Finland. However, only the rise of liberalism as the leading ideology in the 1860s and the years of oppression made the question whether Finland was created a state or not in 1808-1809 a dominant one (Korhonen 1963, 19). Even less of 'ordinianism' would have caused a row. As a matter of fact, the debate returned to its starting-point. Essential was, however, also that Korhonen's study provided ground for the "realistic", timely and opportunist line of Finnish policy towards Russia, the origin of which could appropriately be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen-line of foreign policy was later officially marketed as traditional as this.

Korhonen's, and partly also Tommila's interpretation, which was widened by Aira Kemiläinen's study on the concept of nation, paved the way to Osmo Jussila's studies on scientific but above all on attitudinal level. Jussila purported in his doctoral thesis (1969) and also in many other contexts (Jussila 1979, 1987; Tommila 1962) to show the interpretations of previous historiography false, or at least suspect by arguing that the Finnish state had been born in 1809. In his opinion, the tendency in previous studies was to interpret important documents the stability and continuity of the autonomy of Finland since the Porvoo Diet in view.

Revision seems to have been amenable to creating or at least to supporting the view that the period of autonomy was favourable to the general development in Finland. It showed, as the title of one of Jussila's works hinted at, that Finland had developed from being a province to being a state. In other words, the period of Russian rule was no interval or a period of stagnation, but it was during

that very period that foundations for independence (1917) were laid. It was then that the institutions which suited well a sovereign Finland were organized. Seen from the point of view of demand of the revision it was very logical that the period of oppression and the personalities involved in it became the subjects of study. Besides, the so called Old-Finn policy of concessions, to the leadership of which also Paasikivi himself had belonged, was bound to be restored to its value. From the angle of the so called history of independence this line of thought was not popular (Kettunen 1990, 188).

The years of 'frost' and their background was clarified by Lauri Hyvämäki (1964), Pirkko Rommi (Yrjö Koskinen's Policy, 1964), Eino Murtorinne (The Clergy and Regime during the years of 'Frost', 1964) and Taimi Torvinen (J.R. Danielson-Kalmari as a Defender of the Finnish Autonomy, 1965). These studies helped to reconcile the legalist and concessionary lines of policy to form an up-to-date model of national integration.

A Wider Perspective

Arguably, the great changes in politics at the beginning of the 1990s have motivated the Finns into a reevaluation of the permanent problems of the history of the period of autonomy. Also many practical factors of research started to exert influence on the interpretations and generalizations only in the 1990s. Studies into the structures of the history of administration in Finland demanded comparison with the administrative system in Russia in the 19th century. The reading public began piecemeally to get used to the idea that autonomy was not conceded to Finland because of Alexander's liberal policy, gallantry of the Finns themselves, the pacifying of the north-eastern corner of Europe or because of the security needs of St. Petersburg.

Explanatory factors were sought also in the power- and administrative structures of the Russian Empire. Subjugation of Finland to a Russian province would not simply have succeeded because the Empire of the early 19th century lacked empire-wide, modern bureaucracy, the administrative organ to accomplish it. Russia was an autocratic state with a chaotic central government. The best and at the same time the only possible procedure was to allow the conquered countries to retain their former governmental systems, and to annex them with all their administrative machinery via the only integrating power in Russia, the Tsar, to the Empire (Ylikangas 1995, 23; Nygård 1996, 109-110).

In the light of the abovementioned view, the dawn of Finnish politics in the 1860s can be seen as a result of changes in the regime. Alexander II sought support in the bourgeoisie, and the Diet, for instance, was a concession to the middle-classes. There remains the paradox that it was the very development in the efficiency of the administration of the imperial system and the acquiring of the nature of *Rechtsstaat* that led Finland and Russia on the road to conflict since the end of the 19th century. Both Russia and Finland were quite different at the end of the century from what they had been in the days of the Porvoo Diet. Russia was now able to rule the countries it had conquered, a condition not fulfilled at the beginning of the century.

Unscientific Evaluation

In the end of the 1990s, a debate was started whether the period of autonomy had been a 'bad' or a 'good' development. It was not, however, based on new research. On the background of the debate one can discern the development of European integration and the "whims" of the Åland Islands. Bringing forward the problem has, on the

one hand, led to subjective outbursts and many historical 'ifs and if not's'. On the other hand, it has tried to restore the reevaluation of the status of Finland to the starting-point at the middle of the nineteenth century. The task is not very difficult, if personal feelings, predilections and the national prejudices suffice. It does good for research to break up myths and revise old interpretations critically. The dark side of autonomy has to be reconsidered, too, because it was that very task which was forgotten during the debates of the Finnish historians after the World War II (Vihavainen 1997; Salminen 1997b; Nortamo 1997; Salminen 1997a).

The largely unscientific debate carried on in *Helsingin Sanomat*, a Finnish newspaper with the widest circulation in Finland, was ignited by a book which is scientifically reliable and interesting, namely *Finlands Historia, vol. 3, Kejsartiden* ("Finnish History, vol. 3. The Imperial Time"), written by the expert of the period of autonomy, Professor Matti Klinge. The book was reviewed in *Helsingin Sanomat* in the end of December, 1996, by the former Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Jaakko Numminen. He described the book as "the Rehabilitation of the Imperial Era", and it was this very label which motivated the ensuing debate, although Kerstin Smeds had earlier reviewed Klinge's work under the title "Imperial Age – Finnish Golden Years?" in *Hufvudstadsbladet*. Despite the fact that Smeds had lifted one of main topics of the later debate in view, the review itself did not cause wider discussion. The reviews of Numminen and Smeds had been very laudatory. Instead, the review "The Imperial Age was not only a success story" by Dr Martti Häikiö in *Helsingin Sanomat* (2nd of February, 1997) contained the sharp opinion that the period of autonomy had been one of reaction and stagnation.

Klinge's book is largely a superb synthesis of the insights of his previous work, and it utilizes the most

recent research. It does not bring into light much new data, but the interpretations are personally clear-cut. In view of the topics discussed here, it is central that the Klinge's book successfully combines the history of Finland with both general European and Russian developments. The cornerstone of Russian-Finnish relations was the trust Russians had in Finns as good and loyal subjects. The basis for this, in turn, had been laid by organizing and developing the autonomous status of Finland. The Tsar Alexander the First had to pacify the Finnish front for the troops were needed elsewhere. It was best to leave the Finns to organize their government within the provided framework (Klinge 1997, *passim*). This view does not contain much new in comparison to what has been earlier put forward. The gist of the matter was the way Klinge emphasized the importance of Tsardom, and perhaps the way the meaning of the so called loyalty was expressed. It is very likely that all of the reviewers had not even read the book through (cf. Päiviö Tommila's review of Klinge's book in *Kanava* 1997, 449-454, esp. 450).

Those reviewers for the *Helsingin Sanomat* who had evaluated the period of autonomy in a positive way, focused their attention to the practical matters concerning the particular status of Finland. For instance, the Russians living in Finland did not have citizens' rights in Finland, the Finns, on the contrary, had their own laws, own language, own system of taxation and their revenue was to be allocated and spent in the Grand Duchy. The autonomous status Finland had was a rarity in Europe though not totally exceptional in the Russian Empire. In the nineteenth century there were six so called quasi-independent territories (counties) in Russia which enjoyed, for historical reasons, separate national status. They were not integrated into the Russian administrative system (Manninen 1997, 129).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century Finland developed into being more of a civil society, and in the beginning of the twentieth century the most democratic representative system (the Eduskunta) of the times and in the world was implemented. It has also been reminded that it is impossible to draw a parallel between the conditions and the way of life in Finland and Russia in the period of autonomy. Furthermore, it has been argued that it would have been impossible for Finland to enter into such dualistic and equal, federal relations with Sweden as were in place in Austria-Hungary or in Sweden-Norway. If connected to Sweden, Finland would have been a precarious borderland with its suspect and separatist, dangerous population. In exchanges of views, the starting-point has usually been that the objectives of the measures of oppression at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were to "normalize" the relations between Finland and Russia and to give the citizens of the Empire an equal status with the Finns in Finland (Vihavainen 1997).

In future reconsiderations concerning the development of Finland during the period of autonomy, the focus of interest may be directed to the fact that the Finland which separated from Russia in 1917 was, taken the circumstances of the time into account, constitutionally and socially a rather highly developed Finnish Finland (Nygård 1996, 114). It was a state in which things Russian were pretty marginal and in which 'Swedishness' was settling to its "relative" position in respect to Finns it deserved. The odds for the secession – no matter what its reasons actually were – would have been a lot meager if Finland had belonged to Sweden. Projection into history or not, Finland gained "fitness" for independence during the period of autonomy.

Notes

- ¹ Anjala was the manor in the eastern part of Finland, where the supporter of Sprengetporten 1788 decided to stop the war, which King Gustavus III had begun against Russia.

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