

Joonas Ahola and Frog with Clive Tolley (eds.) 2014. *Fibula, fabula, fact. The Viking Age in Finland*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society. 519 pp.

Joonas Ahola, Frog, and Jenni Lucenius (eds.) 2014. *The Viking Age in Åland. Insights into identity and remnants of culture*. Sastamala: Finnish Academy of Arts and Letters. 427 pp.

Modern Finnish national identities often involve an ambivalent relationship to Scandinavia and its "Viking" heritage, and Ålandic identities show additional ambivalence, "caught between" Finland and Sweden. These two article collections approach the Viking Age in Finland and Åland from an interdisciplinary perspective, involving archaeology, linguistics and onomastics, folklore and mythology, paleobotany, paleoclimatology and population genetics. The contributors also emphasize that the modern reception of the Viking Age, in which nationalism is central, is intertwined with the history of scholarship.

*Fibula, Fabula, Fact: The Viking Age in Finland* (henceforth FFF) and *The Viking Age in Åland: Insights into identity and remnants of culture* (VAA) both stem from the project "Viikinkiaika Suomessa - The Viking Age in Finland" (2011-2014) (FFF 13-14). It emerged that the case of Åland warranted special study. A few contributions to FFF contain sections on Åland (Talvio, 135-136, Raninen and Wessman, 329-330, Schalin on the name *Åland*, 425-427), but Åland is largely "outsourced" to VAA. Conversely, some chapters in VAA cover broader scope in order to interpolate Åland's situation from thin evidence (e.g. Aalto, 199-226, Ahola, 55-82, Heikkilä, 303-322).

The contributions to FFF divide into five main areas: language and onomastics, archaeology, natural sciences, history, and folklore and mythology. The book is organized into broad themes of "Time," "Space," and "People." All the contributors stress the uncertainties of their findings and the limits of their methods. Many provide concise introductions to their respective fields for a non-specialist audience.

The Viking Age in Finland was a period of gradual warming with greater short-term fluctuation (Helama, 117-130). Rye cultivation begins near Ladoga around

600 AD, and land use intensifies around 1200 AD (Alenius, 242-252). Some Germanic loanwords in Finnish are connected to changes in cultivation (Häkkinen, 387-398), such as *humala* 'hops', which increases in the pollen record during the Viking Age (Alenius, 249). It is difficult to identify genetic input from closely related human populations over a short period like the Viking Age, but there may be signs of migration from the west to Satakunta (Salmela, 347-360, here 357).

Most likely Finnic languages were spoken on the Finnish coasts and Sámi further inland, with paleo-European languages possibly persisting in the north (Tolley, 91-103). Sámi place names are the oldest layer preserved in the Siikajoki valley in Ostrobothnia (Leiviskä, 253-268) and there is evidence of a Sámi substrate over the whole area of Karelia (Kuzmin, 269-295). The divergence of the Finnic languages began with the separation of what became South Estonian early in the Common Era (Kallio, 155-168). Some place names from southern Finland appear to have been borrowed back and forth between Germanic and Finnic, including the first element of *Åland* (Schalin, 399-436). It is uncertain whether Scandinavian languages were spoken anywhere on the Finnish mainland in the Viking Age (Raninen and Wessman, 328; cf. Schalin, 408).

In the archaeological record, the Viking Age is a time of gradual change. A shift from level cremation fields (*polttokenttäkalmisto*) to inhumation graves at its end reflects Christian influence (Laakso, 104-116). The Finnish mainland has many fewer Viking Age coins than neighboring areas, and most of these are from the very end of the period (Talvio, 131-138). (In Åland, by contrast, coin finds are plentiful in the early Viking Age but abruptly disappear around 1000 AD (Talvio, 135).) Activity zones in Northern Finland gradually shift inland from the coasts (Kuusela, 219-241). Archaeologists use the term *Viking Age* more than historians, but despite political connotations it did not lose popularity after the Second World War (Aalto, 139-154).

Contacts between Finnic and Germanic are reflected in folklore and mythology. The antisocial hero type found in the *kolbítr* 'coal-biter' of Norse sagas and

Kaukomieli themes in Kalevala-meter poetry represents an areal phenomenon also seen in Russian *bylina* (Ahola, 361-386). The *tietäjä* type of magic practitioner and incantational magic spread in Finnic at the expense of shamanic practices during the Viking Age (Frog, 437-482). While Bjarmaland appears in Norse sagas as a fantastic place, it was likely a real area on the White Sea inhabited by Finnic-speaking peoples (Koskela Vasaru, 195-218).

Ahola, Frog and Tolley (485-501) propose a broad definition of the Finnish Viking Age, from the foundation of Staraya Ladoga in 753 to the Second Swedish Crusade in 1248 (489). Finland remained marginal to the Viking world (Raninen and Wessman, 327-346) but was affected by increasing connectivity across Northern Europe (Heininen, Ahola and Frog, 296-320). Christianity brought a shared sense of identity and supra-regional consciousness (Korpela, 175-194).

Many of the same themes are discussed in VAÅ, often by the same contributors - e.g. Alenius on pollen (187-197), Ahola on Kalevalaic epic (55-82), Frog on mythology (349-414), Heininen, Ahola and Frog (with the addition of Storå for VAÅ) on geopolitics (323-348). VAÅ contains fewer natural science contributions. VAÅ is similarly divided into sections with broad themes, in this case more epistemological: "Interpreting evidence of the past" (37-152), "Between sources and their lack" (153-265) and "Contexts, contacts, and perceptions" (267-414).

Although the books reflect the same project and there is overlap in authors and editors, they come from different publishers. The Åland volume is tighter, and more of the contributions seem overtly interdisciplinary. Place name evidence is used in several contributions. Some articles are cowritten by authors with complementary specialties (as described by Heininen et al., VAÅ 324-325) and in both books some authors appear on more than one paper.

The introduction by Tomtland (21-36) outlines the basics of Ålandic society during the Viking Age, providing context for the rest of the book. Lucenius (41-54) traces modern constructions of Ålandic history in relation to 20th century politics.

Åland has been "a contact zone between Finnic and Scandinavian linguistic and cultural groups for at least two thousand years" (Ahola, Frog and Lucenius, 7). Recurrent themes in VAA include some "mysteries." Åland is conspicuously absent from Old Norse sources, mentioned only once, in *Fundinn Noregr* [The discovery of Norway]; but there it appears in an accurate itinerary, indicating familiarity (Schalin with Frog, 277-278). The lack of place names in Åland older than the late Viking Age and the dearth of artefacts from the late 10th and 11th centuries have been taken as evidence of a possible discontinuity in settlement near the end of the Viking Age. Another mystery is the clay paw amulet, a grave practice mainly restricted to Åland, from which it spread to Timerëvo in central Russia (Tomtland, VAA 35-36). Frog (349-414) focuses on this rite in relation to bear ceremonialism generally (arguing convincingly that the paws are more likely to represent bear than beaver), situating Åland between Finnic and Scandinavian mythological traditions.

Many contributions adopt indirect approaches to problems for which the evidence is minimal. Ahola, Frog and Schalin (227-265) explain the methodological problems involved in trying to ascertain the language(s) spoken in Åland during the Viking Age. Aalto (199-226) explores the meaning of the Norse ethnonym *Finnr*, which in addition to Sámi and (occasionally) the residents of present-day Finnish territory may have included Ålanders, even if they were Scandinavian speakers. Heikkilä (303-322) argues that Scandinavian place-names in Finland indicate that continuous Swedish-speaking settlement in Southwest Finland dates to around 1100 AD and that Finnish persisted in Åland to some extent for two centuries longer (317). Complementarily, Schalin with Frog (273-302) argue for Germanic etymologies for most of the older place names in Åland. Jomala, a Finnic name for 'god', is likely an old name for the largest island, and may reflect a Viking Age borrowing of the word into Scandinavian as an appellative for Finnic sacred places (286-289).

Ahola (55-82) discusses traditions in Kalevala-meter poetry associated with Saari 'Island', which has sometimes been identified with Åland. Rather than indicating that these epic stories are based on historical events in Åland, as Kaarle Krohn thought, Ahola suggests that mainland Finns may have come to

view Åland as a mystical place because of the valence of islands in epic tradition (cf. Bjarmaland in the Norse imagination, Koskela Vasaru in FFF).

The Viking Age in Åland emerges as a time of more dramatic change than on the Finnish mainland. From a central position on trade routes in the early Viking Age, Åland suffered an economic collapse in the 10th century due to changes in trade routes, increased piracy, power struggles on the Swedish mainland and the receding coastline (Sjöstrand, 143). Although the islands never became completely depopulated (as pollen records indicate continuous habitation (Alenius, cf. Schalin with Frog, 229)), likely there were waves of depopulation and repopulation (Sjöstrand (81) makes a comparison to the 18th c.) and sufficient disruption to create discontinuity in e.g. place names and cemeteries. Scandinavian languages were established in Åland by the end of the Viking Age (Ahola, Frog, and Schalin, 259), while place names indicate several ethnic identities (Heikkilä, 316). Differences between northeastern and southwestern Åland suggest that it may have constituted two polities (as seen in differences in funerary practices, Gustavsson, Tomtland, Kennebjörk and Storå, 159-186). However, shared elements such as the clay paw rite speak for a united Ålandic identity.

These ambitious collections assemble for the first time a wide range of data about and approaches to the Viking Age in Finland and Åland. They form a strong platform for continued research and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Note: My more detailed review of FFF will appear in the *Journal of Finnish Studies*.