

# Between the Darkness of Barbarism and the Light of Civilization: British Images of the Finn in the Late Eighteenth Century

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## *Introduction*

During the second half of the eighteenth century, in the Enlightenment travel literature which described the peculiar customs, manners, and the level of civilization of peoples, there emerged an indisputable fact of European history: the 'progress' of society. This article argues that as books of travel became 'tremendously' fashionable the 'Finnish race' was discovered (cf. the concomitant discoveries of Dalmatia and Norway), and it was rated according to the image of a gradual development from 'barbary' towards a civilized way of life.<sup>1</sup> The first few British travellers who visited Finland in the period between approximately 1760 and 1800 placed the Finns on the ladder of semi-civilization, denoting their settled but uncertain 'middle position' between the Russians and the Swedes. They jettisoned old mythical notions, for example of Finnish seamen capable of raising winds against the British seafarers in the Baltic or the Arctic Sea, and realized that they were different from the still nomadic, uncivilized Lapps. This new image of the Finn did not change much with the onset of Romanticism, although it brought to the fore scepticism concerning human unity and wonderment at the originality of the human 'races' in the Nordic sphere.<sup>2</sup> In this way, as scientific observation was complemented by more refined human understanding, the world view of the Enlightenment was opened towards the still unknown North.

My task in this article is to offer an intellectual historical analysis of the British images of the Finns in the late eighteenth century in the light of the 'progressive' idea of history. I try not only to see into their logical structure and eavesdrop on their hidden messages, but also to recover them in their complexity and variety, an attempt left rather unsatisfactory and incomplete in previous studies.<sup>3</sup> The sources consist of scholarly and philosophical studies as well as four prominent

books of travel, three of them by British authors (William Coxe, William Tooke, and Edward Daniel Clarke) and one by an Italian (Giuseppe Acerbi), whose work was first published in English and widely read and acclaimed in England. It provides a kind of mirror reflecting contemporary critical attitudes towards 'progressivism'.

Before analysing the primary sources, it would be appropriate to give a synopsis of Finnish political and cultural developments from the mid-eighteenth century to 1809, when Finland was conquered by Russia from the weakened northern power Sweden.<sup>4</sup> Sweden had declined since the Peace of Nystad (1721) when it had had to cede south-eastern Finland along with Ingria, Livonia, and Estonia to Russia. With access to the Baltic and the establishment of Saint Petersburg, Russia gradually strengthened its power in the Baltic sphere. Even the internal affairs of Sweden, which came to be ruled by the Estates (1720–1771), were influenced by Russian intrigue. After further territorial losses in the Peace of Turku (1743), the leading nobles in Finland realized that it was no longer sheltered from Russian invasion, and they tried to assume a conciliatory policy towards their eastern neighbour.

As early as the 1720s and 1730s, the Finnish peasant representatives in the Riksdag in Stockholm reacted against the dominance of Swedish policy and culture among the Finnish upper classes. The Finns and the Swedish-speaking administrators in Finland became alienated from each other, culturally and linguistically, a fact observed by British travellers. This showed itself in the coup of Gustav III in 1772; some officers from Finland helped Gustav to reinstate monarchical power. The new Constitution of 1772 and the later Act of Union and Security (1792) gave the monarch full executive powers, the four Estates convening only when new taxes were planned.

Soon after Gustav III's coup, it became clear that the Swedish government had neglected the defence of Finland. In the 1780s Finnish discontent developed into a separatist movement that reached its culmination just before Gustav III's war against Russia. Finnish officers were disinclined to wage yet another war; they rebelled, but were suppressed. It was during the tumultuous years preceding and during the French Revolution that the foundations for the coming cultural and national awakening were laid in Finland. The interest in the Finnish race, language, and history grew particularly at the University of Turku (Åbo), which was also visited by the British travellers, where more systematic research in these fields was kindled in the spirit of Herderian Romanticism. The Finns began to cherish strong local patriotic sentiments specifically associated with Finland as distinct from Sweden, while still remaining loyal to the Swedish throne.



Typical interior of a Finnish peasant house. Two men are singing the runes (cf. Kalevala) and pulling arms to the rhythm of the kantele. Joseph Acerbi, *The Travels through Sweden, Finland and Lapland to the North Cape in the years 1798 and 1799* (London, 1802), vol. I.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, power politics were to decide the status of Finland. Napoleon urged Tsar Alexander I to force Sweden to abandon its relations with Britain and to join the Continental Blockade. After a short war in 1808–1809, Russia conquered Finland. As relations between Alexander and

Napoleon cooled, Alexander decided to keep Finland and annex it to Russia as an autonomous Grand Duchy. The British observers in Saint Petersburg and some of the travellers who crossed Finland understood that the balance of power in Northern Europe had decidedly tilted in Russia's favour.

When studying late-eighteenth-century visitors to Finland, it may be surprising to note how many Brits were among the more familiar French<sup>5</sup> and Germans. During their Grand Tour they usually headed to Central Europe and continued to Italy and Greece, the lands of classical cultural heritage that they admired and cherished. However, while the French Revolution shook Continental Europe, British travellers would turn away from the conventional routes and visit the margins of the continent, the northern countries and the Russian Empire, which contained still uncharted regions inhabited by lesser-known peoples.<sup>6</sup> The old great power and ally in the North, Sweden, attracted them, and in Lapland and Finland – which were geographically and mentally positioned along the border between Western civilization and 'barbaric' Russia – one could encounter unspoiled and unique nature as well as peculiar 'races' of man. One incentive for this orientation may well have been that the works of French scientists were translated into English and cited in British journals. One such scientist was Maupertuis, who had corroborated the Newtonian theory of the Earth's flattening towards the poles with his measurements in Lapland. In addition, letters to *The Gentleman's Magazine* and British poetry (e.g. Richard Steele, James Thomson, and Robert Southey) describing untainted Lapps stirred interest among the educated public.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the British who visited Saint Petersburg were interested in discovering if Russia, despite the reforms introduced by Peter the Great and Catherine II, was still as barbaric as typically depicted. From the Russian capital there was a direct route through Finland to Stockholm, and along the way the British traveller could glimpse Finns or take a longer tour through the country. Among them were scientists, historians, and other educated men whose knowledge of Finland was meagre and restricted to fragmentary ancient literary sources, dubious histories,<sup>8</sup> and fantastic narrations of sailors to the North. They had the opportunity to establish whom Tacitus had denoted by his 'fenni', Finns or Lapps, and see whether they still lived in holes in the ground and left their elderly to the mercy of nature.<sup>9</sup> If Francis Bacon had exhorted the traveller to merely 'prick in some flowers of that he had learned abroad into the customs of his own country',<sup>10</sup> the enlightened traveller wanted to learn more: he was not only deeply interested in the variety of human nature but in the manners and dispositions of the foreign 'races' as such. As one widely read compendium put it:

they [travellers] have explored with a philosophic attention; and by laying open the internal springs of action by which the inhabitants of different nations are actuated, exhibit to us a natural and striking picture of human manners, under the various stages of barbarity and refinement.<sup>11</sup>

Here we come across the expression of the travellers' main tenet of culture: according to the progressive idea of history formulated by the Scottish Enlightenment, civilization had developed through gradations – from savagery, barbarism, nomadism, and feudalism to modern commercial capitalism – reaching its apogee in the British Isles. These gradations were preceded by the original climax of classical culture, which served as an exemplar of the best of human nature.<sup>12</sup> Civilization signified refinement in manners and freedom in security under just authority. No wonder travellers were often taken aback by the barren conditions of the land and the brutish manners of the Finns and Lapps. Yet there were those who saw in them features of the noble but ignorant savage whose mind had not yet been spoilt by the Western morality of harsh utility, which was poised to replace the traditional code of knighthood and courts.<sup>13</sup> Travellers felt free to combine historical reflections with utilitarian lessons; while they made enlightened guesses as to the origins of the Finns and Lapps, they usually paid more attention to their present state and possibilities for development. It turned out that the Lapps remained at a lower level of the civilization process than the Finns, who had enjoyed contacts with the commercial and civilized West and climbed to the level of semi-civilization. This was confirmed by the travellers who realized how many products were already exported from Finland to England: including pitch, tar, planks, and rope for the shipping industry. Although there was disagreement among the Romantics over whether civilization really was better than innocent savagery, they agreed that ignorance and superstition were objectionable. The lesson was that these obstacles would be removed if the resources of Finland could be fully exploited. This was also the opinion of Daniel Defoe, who floated the remarkable but infeasible idea of digging a canal from the Gulf of Bothnia to the White Sea in order to shorten the route of British ships to the Russian Archangel.<sup>14</sup>

### *Earlier Views*

Before analysing some of the most representative travel accounts of Finland, it is necessary to take into account the prevalent racial classifications which accorded

with the grand idea of God's creation, the Great Chain of Being.<sup>15</sup> According to this static scale, in the hierarchy of humans the Lapps were superior to the Australian Aborigines and other 'black races', resembling the 'yellow' Mongoloids. However, the varieties of the Finnic 'race' – which included the Savo, the Tavast, and the Karelian sub-races – were superior to them thanks to their agricultural, settled lifestyle, and were positioned between the whites (Caucasians) and the Mongoloids.<sup>16</sup> Their status implied a distinct potential for cultural development according to commentators such as Count Buffon and the naturalist Linnaeus in particular. In the early 1730s Linnaeus carefully studied the Lapps and Finns ('I would tie them up against a wall and flog them till they promised to build chimneys'<sup>17</sup>) and identified them as part of the white race. For one British zoologist well acquainted with the Nordic climate, Europe provided a mild zone that was most suited to the 'White Race'; the physical features of the tall Finns and the dwarfish Lapps of the North were products of the environments in which they lived.<sup>18</sup> In Oliver Goldsmith's popularized history of nature, the Finns featured as a more civilized 'race' than the Lapps, whom they, along with the Norwegians, were still trying to convert to Christianity. The fairer complexion of the Finns indicated that they inhabited a milder zone than the Lapps. It was their queer and difficult language (Finno-Ugrian) that bespoke their Eastern origins, the whereabouts of which remained obscure until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

One prominent scholar who attempted to study the matter more closely was Edward Gibbon, the historian of the Roman Empire who rejected Olaus Magnus's fantastic notion of the Northerners (Goths) as the main occupiers of Scandinavia and the leading tribes of Europe (the so-called Gothic myth). Drawing on second-hand German sources in Saint Petersburg, he concluded that the Finns had remained outside the orbit of civilization until the Swedes forcefully baptized them in the twelfth century. Gibbon was sceptical of the supposed linguistic relation between the Finns and other Finno-Ugrian tribes of north-east Russia and Siberia, but agreed that Finns and Hungarians were racially related. He claimed that the Hungarians were more fortunate, however, as they had wandered from Russia to the south, to the banks of Danube, where they learned to cultivate wine.<sup>20</sup> This contradicted the view adopted by most of the proto-anthropologists who were convinced of the unity of creation (monogenism) and explained the dark complexion of the Lapps and some Finns by referring to their proximity to the Arctic zone: the cold and dirt engendered their dark hue. It was also evident to them that the cold winters of the North made blood run slowly, thus lowering vitality and stunting the reasoning abilities of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and Georges

Cuvier, for example, regarded the deviation of the Finns from the white ideal as a degeneration towards the Mongoloid type – after all, had not God created the white man in his own image?<sup>21</sup> The Northern environs were no longer something romantically idealized, as they dulled the passions and the character of the Northerners, which according to David Hume could only be aroused by liquor. And too much drinking would lead to complete ‘darkness’, as was the case with the Negroes.<sup>22</sup> So, even if there was ample evidence to the contrary – for example, in Linnaeus’s *A Tour in Lapland* and Schefferus’s *Lapponia* (1673), which showed how peaceful, simple, and swiftly-moving Lapps and Finns were – many an armchair scholar thought Finns hostile to foreigners and even more superstitious and ignorant of civilized comfort than the Lapps.<sup>23</sup>

Setting aside these ambiguous and partly antiquated notions, we come across some quite reliable sources of information on the Finns available to British readers. With the Peace Treaty of Nystad (Uusikaupunki) in 1721, after the Great Northern War, the maritime trading routes to the Baltic were open again, and soon one guide for seafarers and traders described Finland as not ‘totally useless’ to the outer world:

It is remarkable that in the summer the People are, like Prisoners, confined at home, or near home, there being no travelling for the Rivers and Lakes, which are innumerable, and some very large and unpassable for want of Bridges and Boats, besides, the soil is soft and miry, and the roads unpassable, the Heat not being sufficient to dry up Sloughs and low wet Grounds; so that the People keep at home, and tend to Plow and Harvest, but in the winter, which begins about October, the Frost first hardening the Surface moderately, and then the Snows falling for several weeks with little or no Intermission. Nature put on a new Face, is dressed all in White, and then the inhabitants look abroad, begin to travel, and carry on their needful Affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Mentioning only the best-known ports for the British in Finland, Tornio (‘Torne’) and Viborg (‘Wiborg’), the writer concluded that the greatest obstacles to furthering the economic progress of the country were, as Adam Smith had also noticed, the lack of transportation and population and the so-far modest exchange of goods.<sup>25</sup>

### *‘Progress’ in Finland*

The travellers’ reception of the scholarly images of the Finn was mostly rejecting, and some learned men, such as William Coxe, William Tooke, and Edward Daniel



Clarke, refuted antiquated ideas and speculations with their first-hand experiences. In Finland they found new sources of information which proved that the Finns were not as backward as typically depicted. They also contested far-fetched historical analogies and racial typologies and were able to draw quite realistic images of the Finns, thus disseminating relatively reliable knowledge about them. The fourth traveller, Giuseppe Acerbi (introduced in the Epilogue) comes into the picture as a foreign commentator on their views, and personifies the relativity of cultural imagery during the time.

One traveller well acquainted with the conditions in the Russian Empire, particularly the Baltic provinces and Viborg county where Karelian Finns lived, was the travelling antiquarian and tutor of the Earl of Pembroke, William Coxe (1747–1828). He realized how little social progress had been achieved in Russia, where serfdom prevailed and despotism reigned. He could not agree with Voltaire's positive portrait of the Russian emperors, and his account confirmed the view that Russia had not changed much since the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> However, being a Tory, Coxe did not support radical changes in society and had no faith in enlightenment by coercion; in order to develop Russia, he argued, the Tsars should free the initiative of the individual, a goal that seemed very far from realization in the Empire, in which the majority of the Orthodox population lived in a state of indifference. In comparison to this stagnation, the government of Viborg, annexed by Russia from Sweden in 1721, showed a very different state of affairs. Travelling through the area by stagecoach, he observed on 2 March 1779:

This province retains most of its ancient privileges with occasional modifications. The country produces, besides pastures, rye, oats and barley, but not sufficiently for the population [...] The villagers possessed many conveniences of life which we did not meet in Russia, particularly beds, and great variety of household furniture.<sup>27</sup>

Crossing over the border to Finland enhanced the impression that the Finns had also progressed morally, since Russian dishonesty and stealth instantly disappeared. This seemed to have resulted from the freer atmosphere of Lutheranism and from the freedom of the peasant, who was traditionally held in high esteem in Sweden. The fair-haired Finns were also a lot cleaner, tidier, 'more civilized', and happier than the dark-complexioned, dirty, and lazy Russians. Even the landscape in Finland was not as monotonous and bleak as in Russia. Inns there were better kept than hotels in Russia, and in western Finland there were very neat peasant houses not found in Russia, their chimneys comprising an important sign of civilization. The dwellers made their tools themselves and seemed quite self-suf-



ficient, and their work ethic, fortified with Lutheran piety, was good. These Finns, unlike the Russians and Lapps, had given up most of the pagan and Catholic 'superstitions' so much despised by the enlightened. It may be noted here in passing that one Lapp family had been transported from Lapland to a menagerie in London and exhibited to the public. The Lapp woman was found ugly, but it was conceded that perhaps the Lapps would not like the look of alabaster white people either.<sup>28</sup>

Another educated traveller, William Tooke (1744–1820), author of a history of the reign of Catherine the Great, had travelled widely in Russia and become a respected expert in Russian affairs whose works were cited in British encyclopedias in the early nineteenth century. Since 1772 he had been the vicar of the parish of British tradesmen and entrepreneurs in Saint Petersburg, and claimed that he had access to scientific circles and the library of the Imperial Academy. He classified Russian culture according to the scale of progressive gradation: it was a wonderful collection of hunter-gatherers (Samoyeds), nomadic people, peasants, and a few entrepreneurs and industrialists. He wondered how great a cultural distance it was from 'the earth-holes of the Samoyeds to the palaces of the residence, from the needle-work of fish-bones and sinews to the weaving of tapestry, from the sling and the arrow to the fire-arms of the modern art of war in Europe!'.<sup>29</sup> He considered the Finns to be one of the two indigenous races of the Empire, the Slavs representing the other, and using information compiled from Russian chronicles, he classified them into thirteen sub-races: Lapps, Finns (of Finland), Estonians, Livians, Tseremiss, Tsvash, Mordvians, Votyaks, Permians, Voguls, Ostyaks, Samoyeds, and Hungarians. He firmly refuted the theory by August Ludwig von Schlözer, a German historian of the Russian Empire, that the Finns had originally been European and leaned towards the ancient idea that Asiatic Scythia had been their cradle. The step from nomadism to agriculture by the Finns and Estonians, after they had wandered from the steppe beyond the Ural Mountains to the West, had been decisive in their rise to the top of the Finno-Ugrian family of races. It signalled the transformation from a crude and hard lifestyle to a more comfortable one.<sup>30</sup> Within the Finno-Ugrian family, the Finns living in the Viborg province were the most progressed of all, and a fairer race than the 'dwarfish, dirty and pale-hued Lapp'. Evidently this was partly due to their mixture with the Germanic Swedes, given that they were 'fair, tall and sturdy', but the main cause for their improvement was moral rather than physical. Their greater happiness compared to other Finnic tribes was chiefly due to the freedom they enjoyed, and accordingly they fared a lot better than any Russian tribe. Their successful adaptation to their rugged environment had released their initiative:

the Russian serfs usually toiled on their old lands year after year, whereas the life of the Finnish peasant was eased by his access to forest products, which he sold to the international market. Tooke believed that the impact of the environment on men was visible, as he thought that if the Finns moved to Lapland they would soon begin to resemble the Lapps.<sup>31</sup>

Tooke carefully recorded the peculiarities of the Finnish way of living. He criticized the slash and burn agricultural method for being deleterious to the forests and British trading interests and barbaric as such, but he nonetheless regarded the culture of the Finns as semi-civilized, no longer nomadic in the proper sense of the term but semi-settled, which was reflected in their agricultural tools such as the harrow (*risukarbi*) and special plough (*banka-aura*). Certainly the Finns were less developed on the whole than the British, but in one area they were more advanced: they had invented an ingenious method of drying corn, the drying barn (*riibi*).<sup>32</sup> In general terms, Tooke's approach was dualistic; on one hand, he appreciated the way the Finns had escaped the barbarism of Russia, but on the other, he hoped that their economy would reconcile with the British trading interests in the Viborg province, a major centre for the export of wooden products to England – sixty-six out of ninety-nine ships in Viborg harbour were British owned in 1772. It is also as if Tooke had defended the Physiocrats' maxim that all progress was dependent on the development of the basic mode of production, agriculture, without which trade could not flourish.

The traveller-historians or scholars used the analogy of natural gradation to describe the rise of civilization. Progress from an earlier and lower stage to a higher one appeared to be as law-like as gradual evolution in nature – though not in a Darwinian sense. The Enlightenment model of explanation for the rise of natural phenomena could be applied to 'moral sciences', the history of civilization included. The mineralogist, geographer, and traveller Edward Daniel Clarke (1769–1822) was attracted by the Newtonian system, which he applied in his empirical studies in natural history and racial-historical disquisitions.<sup>33</sup> He travelled in the North in 1799–1800 with John Marten Cripps, whom he tutored. In addition to minerals he collected cultural artefacts from the Finno-Ugrian people, musical instruments such as the *kantele* and a shaman drum, and bought books, such as Daniel Juusten's chronicle of Finnish bishops of Turku. He also lectured at Turku University on the growth of plants, which he explained as resulting from the light lit by God at the beginning of time. He was appointed as the first Professor of Mineralogy at Cambridge University in 1808.

Clarke, a deist, wanted to study the laws of nature put into motion by God. They determined the order of species and assigned the human races to the cli-

matic zones to which they naturally belonged: Negroes to the tropics, Lapps and Finns to the north, near the Arctic. In the North, Clarke could ponder the moment of creation and expound his scientific motivation to travel there:

That of beholding the face of Nature undisguised; of traversing a strange and almost untrodden territory; of pursuing inquiries which relate to the connexion and the origins of nations; of viewing man as he existed in his primeval date; of gratifying taste for Natural History, by the sight of rare animals, plants and minerals; of contemplating the various phenomena caused by the difference of climate and latitude; and to sum up all, the delight which travelling itself affords [...].<sup>34</sup>

Like many other British scholars, Clarke viewed the Lapps as providing a point of comparison with the Finns. Unlike some Romantics,<sup>35</sup> he did not perceive any 'noble savages' in Lapland. The rugged and barren environment had not allowed the Lapps to rise from their lowly status. Although he paid respects to Linnaeus's studies of the Lapps, he could not agree with his predecessor's positive image of them. At first he considered himself an intruder and did not find Lapland a peaceful haven, but rather became restless when remembering the gardens of Surrey, his home. And the Lapps did not fit in with his ideal of human beauty; their skin was covered with bear grease – a useful method to defend against the attacks of mosquitoes – and they resembled a human being as much as any Negro from Africa. They had 'high cheek-bones, little, sore eyes, widely separated from each other, a wide mouth and a flat nose', and if placed in a menagerie, they would be considered the long-lost link between man and ape.<sup>36</sup> Having looked at them more closely, he finally became inclined to identify them with the Mongolians, because the manners of both Lapps and Finns surely hinted to eastern rather than southern origins. The Lapps drank sour milk as did the Kalmyks; they entertained such eastern vices as heavy drinking – Lapp bearers and guides were detestable when they overindulged in spirits. When sober they were as meek as their reindeer.<sup>37</sup>

Already in Lapland Clarke stumbled on Finnish settlements and felt some relief and joy. In Enontekiö he stayed at one cabin where glue was made from reindeer intestines, and noted that it was an example of manufacture at the lowest level of production. In the village of Kolari he entered the first white-painted house with glass windows. The furniture was nice and the tables were well set. He slept well between clean white sheets.<sup>38</sup> The port of Tornio was a busy town centred on wood export, but it was only in Oulu that Clarke could find a degree of civilization matching his own standards and expectations. The upper-class bourgeois enriched by the tar trade appeared to be living in a state of plenty which was quite familiar to Clarke:

We had exchanged the wilderness of Lapland for the luxuries of polished society; brilliant lustres, supporting English patent-lamps, being substituted for burning splinters; a magnificent saloon for a narrow, contracted and smoky cabin; French confectionery for bread made of birch-bark and chipped straw; the most costly dainties for raw or dried fish and flesh, beauty and wit and wine for ugliness and stupidity and pima [Finnish: *piimä*, i.e. sour-milk].<sup>39</sup>

The difference between British and Finnish culture seemed to have disappeared for a moment, but the abyss between the lowest Lapp and the highest Finnish urban culture remained in place as a mirror to enhance one's own identity.

In Finnish-Swedish Ostrobothnia, Clarke recognized the basic working virtues of the Finns. They had the Arcadian ability to stand against nature with firm character; they were 'a healthy and athletic race of men, inured to labour, and by nature active and fitted to undergo the severest trials of bodily strength'.<sup>40</sup> For Clarke, this was not the result of the innate vitality of the race, but of their partial descent from a higher race, the Swedes. Armed with the infusion of Swedish blood they had rid themselves of their Asiatic elasticity, yellowish hue, and roundish face. It was again only the Lapps who still resembled the aboriginal Japanese. And the beneficial impact of Swedish culture was to be seen in other things, too: the potatoes brought to Finland during the Pomeranian war had made them healthy.<sup>41</sup>

Clarke's racialism was at its strongest when he visited central Finland, the refuge of the 'pure' Finnish race, and became more closely acquainted with it. In his view, the inhabitants were the progeny of the Finns who had arrived from their unknown Asiatic cradle in times immemorial.<sup>42</sup> In contrast with the Finns living on the coastline who had been in contact with Swedish culture, their way of life had barely been touched by civilized ideas or customs. They were the crudest and most robust of all the races in the North; they were even 'more barbarous than the Laplanders' because they 'held in sovereign contempt all the comforts and luxuries of the more refined nations'.<sup>43</sup> Clarke rejected the myth of the hibernating Finns and drew a more naturalistic image of them than Tooke and Coxe had done.<sup>44</sup>

It seems as if the natives of the dreary district between Åbo and Petersburg had exerted their utmost ingenuity, and with fatal success, to banish from their dwellings everything that bore any relationship to comfort and cleanliness. They lie down themselves upon dirty boards, filthy with grease and smoke; in dark hovels, stinking of putrid fish.

Their smoke-cabin life was repellent; they spat on the floor, lived with animals, drank from dirty cups, and seemed to live in promiscuity (the sauna). The view made Clarke sigh with longing for home: 'Oh England! decent abode of comfort

and cleanliness and decorum! Oh blessed asylum of Religion, and of Liberty for the whole world [...] the cradle of Heroes, the school of Sages, the temple of Law, altar of Faith, asylum of innocence, bulwark of private security and public honour.<sup>45</sup> On his return to England, Clarke's belief in the superiority of Western civilization was strengthened, a natural conclusion of the times in which enlightenment and discovery were combined to open the world for the British Empire.

### *Epilogue*

In the summer of 1799, the travellers Clarke and Giuseppe Acerbi from Italy met in Oulu. Acerbi had escaped the turmoil of revolution and went to the North for relief and entertainment. He played the violin and sang with the British residents, local authorities, and bourgeois elite. The occasion was quite extraordinary in the northern town in those times. While it was a success for the travellers, Acerbi himself was not enthusiastic about it. Unlike the optimistic Clarke, who saw how progress and wealth had reached the tar-trading town, he felt pangs of conscience about the showy mentality and luxury which were the products of the new commercial spirit. It obviously threatened the simple minds of the Northern Finns. Acerbi lamented:

Our narrow minds, that are filled with notions of what is called refinement, are at loss to conceive how these people, who appear so poor and low in our eyes, merely because they have not a coat cut after the model of ours, should refuse money, and submit to so much toil only for the pleasure of being useful to others or for the insipid satisfaction of doing good. Such examples, but too rare and too little known in the polished circles of great towns, are not so in those places which are far removed from a metropolis, where morals have become the victim of selfish and corrupt passions.<sup>46</sup>

As an Italian nobleman who had had to flee the political unrest in his country, Acerbi realized what the utilitarian commercial culture had brought with it to the North. Its rise would break the harmony met with in peripheries where nomadism and basic agriculture provided livelihood for the great majority of people. The message of Acerbi's itinerary – first published in English – to the British was that a nobleman should not leave the simple but happy countryside lifestyle. He should shy away from the bustle of commerce, which undermined the finer virtues of knighthood.

For the British, hospitality and simple earnestness as expressions of untainted morality represented ignorance and backwardness. As traditional feudal relations

had been relaxed and commercial classes were experiencing a boom before and during the Continental upheaval, their evaluations of Finnish affairs coincided with progressive value-judgments. Acerbi's romantic and nostalgic musings were cast aside, and a cautiously optimistic picture of Finland could emerge. The British progressives – who urged the agricultural reforms to keep pace with commercial progress – demanded a new, more forward-looking entrepreneurship and governmental culture to take the lead. The signs of progress in Finland were interpreted as the dawn after a long night of barbarism, and it may be that the knowledge the travel books disseminated enticed enterprising British investors to try their luck in the North. An adventurous pioneer morality coupled with the 'liberal' tsarism of Alexander I played their remarkable roles in the motivation of the British, who arrived in Finland in the early nineteenth century to establish textile factories and other businesses. It is difficult to weigh what incentive travel accounts from Finland may have given to early industrialists (e.g. Finlayson, Montgomery, and the Salvesens) who were heading North in hopes of lucrative investments. They were nevertheless persistent in disseminating to the West the image of the formerly backward and now civilized Finns, at least those in coastal towns such as Viborg, Turku, and Oulu, ports for maritime trade in forest products to Britain – thanks to the infiltration of Western political economy and culture. Moreover, they called into question contemporary scholarly notions of the Finnish people, remoulding them into a curious mixture of Eastern and Western 'races' that was congenial to the British.

### Notes

1. Pat Rogers, 'Introduction: The Writer and Society', *The Context English Literature: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Pat Rogers (Methuen, 1978), p. 63 f.
2. For this shift, see Robert Holmes, *The Age of Wonder* (London, 2008), esp. prologue and ch. 5.
3. See Stefan Collini, 'General Introduction', *History, Religion and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750–1950*, eds. Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore & Brian Young (Cambridge, 2000), p. 3. Although Tony Lurcock's anthology *Not So Barren or Uncultivated* (London, 2010) deals with some of the same travellers as this article, it fails to put the travel accounts in the general frame of mind of the age and does not provide scholarly annotation. For its part, the present author's study (Anssi Halmesvirta, *The British Conception of the Finnish 'Race', Nation and Culture, 1760–1918*, Helsinki, 1990) left many relevant sources untouched. Brian Dolan's study, despite showing that travel literature created

- new 'racial types' and thus contributed to the new constitution of Europeaness, does not pay due attention to the position of the Finns in this process. See Brian Dolan, *Exploring European Frontiers: British Travellers in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 2000), esp. p. 185, 188.
4. A handy guide to Finnish history for British readers is George Maude, *Historical Dictionary of Finland* (London, 1995).
5. See Osmo Pekonen, *La rencontre des religions autour du voyage de l'abbé Réginald Outbier en Suède en 1736–1737* (Rovaniemi, 2010).
6. Certainly it had been more popular to study the Eskimos and the Indians or to sail to the Pacific to encounter the Polynesians or the Aborigines of Australia or the Maori of New Zealand. See, Iain McCalman, 'Introduction', *The Enlightenment World*, eds. Martin Fitzpatrick et al. (London & New York, 2007), p. 518 f.
7. See, *Henceforth the Anglo-Saxon is the Brother of the Finn! Poems about Finland 1634–2000*, eds. Anssi Halmesvirta & David Wilson, *Studies in General History*, vol. 11 (Jyväskylä, 2003).
8. The idea of the greatness and valour of the Northern peoples was widely disseminated by Olaus Magnus in his *A Compendious History of the Goths, Swedes & Vandals and Northern Nations* (London, 1658) but featured already in George North's *Description of Swedland, Gotland and Finland* (London, 1561).
9. Tacitus' description was cited among many others by Gilbert Stuart in his *A View of Society in Europe* (Edinburgh, 1778), p. 10.
10. Francis Bacon, 'Of travel' (1612), *Essays* (London, 1965), p. 56.
11. *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar and the Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World*, ed. William Guthrie, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, 1795), p. ix.
12. Thomas H. Peardon, *Transition in English Historical Writing 1760–1830* (New York, 1966), *passim*.
13. John W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (London, 1985), p. 82.
14. Daniel Defoe, *An Impartial History of the Life and Actions of Peter Alexowitz, the Present Tsar of Muscovy* (London, 1723), p. 118, appendix I. He emphasized that the collapse of Sweden in 1721 in the Great Northern War made Russia one of the great powers to be taken into serious account in the calculations of the balance of power in Europe.
15. See for this Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic *The Great Chain of Being* (New York, 1936).
16. *Readings of Early Anthropology*, ed. J. S. Slotkin (Chicago IL, 1965), p. 177–180, 182–186.
17. Linnaeus's description quoted in Wilfrid Blunt, *Linnaeus: The Compleat Naturalist* (London, 2004), p. 65.
18. Thomas Pennant, *Arctic Zoology* (London, 1784), vol. I, introduction.
19. For the British controversy over the Finnish origins, see Halmesvirta, *The British Conception of the Finnish 'Race', Nation and Culture, 1760–1918*, esp. ch. 3.



20. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, new ed. (London, 1838), vol. I, p. 277, 280 f., 286. He did not see, e.g., the connection between *vogul* and *ugur* in Finno-Ugric languages
21. E.g. Georges Cuvier, *Animal Kingdom*, vol. I, p. 94; Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (Madison, 1964), p. 231.
22. David Hume, 'Of National Characters' (1742), *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Thomas H. Green & T. H. Grose (London, 1875), p. 244, 252, note 1; Cf. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on History of Civil Society* (London, 1765), p. 17.
23. See, e.g. Moses Pitt, *English Atlas* (1680).
24. *Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis*, ed. Edmund Halley (London, 1728), p. 41.
25. Cf. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. A Skinner (London, 1983), p. 125, 220.
26. Cf. M. S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia, 1553–1815* (London, 1953), p. 80–89.
27. William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (London, 1784), vol. II, p. 308, 319.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 309–311; Cf. Matthew Consett, *A Tour through Swedish-Lapland, Finland and Denmark* (London, 1789), p. 94.
29. William Tooke, *View of the Russian Empire* (London, 1800), vol. I, p. 511; Cf. *Rees' Cyclopaedia*, vol. 14 (1819), 'Finland', 'Finns'.
30. Tooke, *View of the Russian Empire*, p. 85, 326 f.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 322 f.; vol. II, p. 132, 154 f.
32. *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 139 f.; vol. II, p. 156 f., 220.
33. See, William Otter, *The Life and Remains of the Rev. Edward Daniel Clarke, LL.D.* (London, 1824), vol. I, p. 49.
34. Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa* (London, 1810), part. III, sec. I, p. 561.
35. See e.g. John Ledyard, *Journey Through Russia and Siberia 1787–1788: The Journal with Selected Letters*, ed. Stephen D. Watrous (Madison, Milwaukee & London, 1966).
36. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, part, III, sec. I, p. 486 f.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 400 f., 540 f., 486; 1824 edition, p. 24 f. Clarke rejected both the biblical and Gothic myths of the origins of races and gathered his information from Finnish sources (the historians Franzén and Porthan) and rejected Voltaire's views by claiming that the latter knew as much of Finns as of the inhabitants of the moon.
38. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, part III, sec I, p. 418.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 64 f.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 47 f.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 72, 75–77, 80 f.; vol. II, p. 206 f.
42. Clarke relied only on his 'racial' reasoning and did not trust any authority (Tacitus, Paulus Diaconus, et al.), concluding: 'For all that concerns their early history, and the origin of the Finns, we may in vain ransack the libraries of the world.' *Ibid.*, p. 233.

43. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 232.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

46. Joseph Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden, Finland and Lapland to the North Cape in the years 1798 and 1799* (London, 1802), vol. I, p. 235 f.

### Summary:

#### *Between the Darkness of Barbarism and the Light of Civilization: British Images of the Finn in the Late Eighteenth Century*

This article aims to show that it was the British travellers (Coxe, Tooke, Clarke, et al.) to Finland in the late eighteenth century who discovered Finland for the British reading public. As they distinguished the Finns as a separate ‘race’ from the Russians, the Swedes, and the Lapps, they contributed to the proto-racialist image of them that would become popular in the nineteenth century. Because Sweden had become an important maritime trading partner (in iron ore, tar, and timber) to the British, its eastern part, Finland, also became an interesting country to visit en route from Stockholm to Saint Petersburg (or from Saint Petersburg to Stockholm). The travellers were astonished to realize that the Finnish peasants had attained a higher degree of civilization than their Russian counterparts, who were still serfs, and additionally that there were in Finland bourgeois and noble people who had acquired culture and wealth. This image of the Finn as living between the civilized Swedes and ‘backward’ Russians was inherited by the Romantics from the enlightened travellers, and it penetrated later anthropological studies on the ‘races of man’.

*Keywords:* history of ideas, travel books, proto-racialism, Finns, Enlightenment, Romanticism.