Eighteenth-century visions of the Stone Age: Stone artefacts and the concept of the furthest past in theses published at the Academy of Turku in 1700–1828

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Abstract: Archaeological concepts of prehistory and the Stone Age are rooted in nineteenth-century scientific discoveries, which extended the human past much further back in time than was previously thought. Without this deep past, the disciplines of archaeology and history would not be what they are today. However, when the division of prehistory into the ages of stone, bronze, and iron was introduced in 1836, it was already an old idea. Stone Age artefacts and the initial phase of human history were discussed in the eighteenth-century academic world, even though the periodisation of history was constructed differently. In the philosophy of the Enlightenment several ideas surfaced which were essential to the formation of archaeology as a scientific practice, and which still affect the way the prehistoric past is imagined. This article examines the concept of a prehistoric, furthest past in Finnish scientific texts, within the framework of eighteenth-century Swedish traditions of science and historiography. How did the scholars in the Academy of Turku view Stone Age artefacts that had a multi-faceted nature in the antiquarian tradition? In what way did their visions of the earliest phase of the Nordic past set up later nationalistic narratives about prehistory?

Keywords: Historiography; History of archaeology; Stone Age; Enlightenment; History of science; Finnish history; Conceptual history.


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Introduction

Archaeological concepts, like the Stone Age or prehistory, were coined in the nineteenth century. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the vast scope of the past unreachable through textual sources was uncovered, attributing to the concept of prehistory its chronological depth.¹ Earlier concepts for the furthest past existed, but the temporal scope of human history was perceived as significantly shorter than in our current understanding. The three-age system dividing the prehistoric past into successive periods of stone, bronze, and iron was presented in 1836 by C. J. Thomsen. Before this, similar division of the past already existed in Classical Greek and Roman texts as a philosophical concept, illustrating mankind’s progress from primitivity towards civilization.² However, the discovery of the geological “deep time” was essential in transforming the foggy and vague concept of the furthest past into defined successive periods of human history set on a chronological timeline.

Reinhart Koselleck’s conceptual history employs the classic key concept of Sattelzeit: a conceptual threshold spanning the years 1750–1850. Before the notion of Sattelzeit, the conceptual meanings of terminology used to describe historical and social phenomena differed from contemporary meanings so much that we cannot fully understand or compare them to their present counterparts.³ The Sattelzeit-


type threshold for archaeological concepts could be located during the latter half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{4}

According to archaeologist Peter Rowley-Conwy, there is an imminent danger in researching the history of archaeology beyond its nineteenth-century scientific beginnings. Our present-day concept of prehistory is so entwined with the deep past that we cannot fully grasp a concept of the past predating the discovery of geological time. Therefore, any attempt to interpret earlier concepts of the furthest past as being similar to the concept of prehistory is anachronistic.\textsuperscript{5}

I do not intend to treat the eighteenth-century view on prehistory as a direct precursor to the present concepts, or to consider them equivalent. While being aware of the variation in temporal scope, I suggest that tracing the conceptual change and continuity beyond the mid-nineteenth-century threshold could bring forth something new about implications still attached to the concepts of Stone Age and prehistory.\textsuperscript{6}

My first research question is related to the use of prehistory in the narratives of the national past, from which the Stone Age has often been omitted.\textsuperscript{7} Is this tendency already visible in the eighteenth-century discussion about the early history of the Nordic peoples? My other question considers Stone Age artefacts and their appearances in the sources: there was a lot of scientific discussion about their origin and classification during the eighteenth century. To what extent were these artefacts associated with prehistoric past in the Academy of Turku?


\textsuperscript{5} Rowley-Conwy, \textit{From Genesis to Prehistory}, pp. 3–4.

\textsuperscript{6} Prehistory is obviously more than just the Stone Age. Encompassing all human history before written sources, it lasted in Northern Europe until the first centuries of the second millennium. However, the early concept of prehistory, still during the nineteenth century, was more interchangeable with the Stone Age. Without a clear understanding of the chronology of the human past, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age were thought to have lasted for only a short time before the advent of writing. Still, for example in English the term ‘prehistory’ is more affiliated to the Stone Age, since historical sources reach much further back than in Northern Europe. According to the current view, the Stone Age in Finland and Sweden began with the first human settlements after the last glaciation period, c. 11 000 years ago, and ended in c. 1700 BC.

The source material for this article includes academic theses published at the Academy of Turku (Kungliga Akademien i Åbo, Turun kuninkaallinen akatemia), founded in 1640, and articles in Finnish newspapers during the years 1700–1828. When Finland became a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809, the academy was renamed the Imperial Academy and then moved from Turku to Helsinki in 1828 (Fig. 1).^8

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^8 In 1712–21, the Academy was evacuated to Stockholm and essentially shut down because of the Russian occupation of Finland during the Great Northern War. A similar break occurred in 1742–3, also due to Russian occupation. For more on the Academy, see e.g. Matti Klinge, Rainer Knapas, Anto Leikola & John Strömberg, *Kuninkaallinen Turun Akatemia 1640–1808: Helsingin yliopisto 1640–1990*, 3 vols. (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 1987–90), I–II; Jussi
The surviving corpus of the Academy’s theses is available in digital form in a database managed by the National Library of Finland. I used a bibliography of the theses for shortlisting my source material, and then supplemented that list using the results of a query performed in the Doria database by searching for theses from the years 1700 to 1828 with key words that could indicate any texts mentioning stone artefacts or prehistoric structures, for example historia (history), kivilajit (types of rock), and mineralogia (mineralogy). After excluding the ones that were irrelevant based on their title or topic, approximately 200 theses comprise my source material. On these, additional searches were performed using search words related to stone artefacts, for example ceraunia and lapid* or sten. Similar searches were performed on the newspaper material (sten, kivi, åsk(e)wig*, etc.) using the tools available in the digital archive database of the National Library of Finland.

Archaeology in the Age of Enlightenment

Archaeology in Finland and Sweden during the long eighteenth century has been touched upon in some presentations of the history of archaeology in the Nordic countries as well as outlined by Ola W. Jensen in his essay. Jensen has also examined the history of the concept of prehistory and the reactions towards archaeological finds in Sweden from the Medieval Period to the Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century interest in prehistoric structures has been featured in several...
publications. For example, Joakim Goldhahn has studied how eighteenth-century historians interpreted a Bronze Age cairn and accompanying rock art in Scania, Sweden.\textsuperscript{15} Jari Okkonen has utilized also eighteenth-century sources about the prehistoric stone structures of northern Finland.\textsuperscript{16}

According to historian of archaeology Bruce Trigger, the Enlightenment provided several philosophical concepts that were extremely important for the development of archaeology as a scientific practice, like the ideas of a ‘psychic unity’ of mankind and cultural progress as the essential force in history.\textsuperscript{17} The former idea implied that the differences between nations mainly result from their natural environment, while the latter encompassed the belief that progressive change stemmed from humans striving to improve their condition and acquire greater control over nature. Such continuous cultural change included technological, social, intellectual, and moral progress.

The idea of progress was related to universal stages of human development, from the primitive original state of mankind to the technologically and culturally developed world of eighteenth-century Europe. These ideas affected how prehistoric societies, contemporary indigenous peoples, and their subsistence strategies were perceived. Economists, like Adam Smith (1723–90) and Turgot (1727–81), catalogued all past and present human societies into four stages: hunting, pasturage, farming, and commerce. While hunting and pasturage were present throughout the world, farming had only occurred a few times during human history and the stage of commerce had only been reached in European society.\textsuperscript{18}

Swedish historiographical tradition at the beginning of the eighteenth century was based on an established canon of written sources that included sagas, historical works written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Bible, and the works of Classical Greek and Roman writers. This textual tradition was thought to encompass all human history, spanning approximately 6 000 years. The Gothicist


\textsuperscript{17} Trigger, pp. 100–1.

tradition of history became especially important during the seventeenth century, when Sweden needed to prove itself among the great powers of Europe. The Swedish past beyond the time of actual written sources was anchored to events described in the Bible. The Swedes were thought to descend from Noah’s grandson through Gothic tribes known from historical sources. In Olof Rudbeck’s *Atlantica* (published in four volumes in 1679–1702), he divided the earliest history into six periods: the ages of gold, silver, stone, copper or ash tree, Giödingz, and iron. In this chronology, a version of Stone Age existed as the lowest point in human history, when the Deluge had resulted in the collapse of civilization and people had been reduced to using stone tools.

In the eighteenth century, the receding political pressure to represent the Swedish past as glorious as possible made way for a more critical examination of sources. Some traditions of Gothicist historiography persisted, though: the sources depicting Sweden’s remote past were perhaps patchy and unreliable, but this did not change the fact that a glorious past existed somewhere just beyond the reach of source material. The tradition of Gothicist history was also essential in creating institutionalized antiquarianism in Sweden, with the Collegium Antiquitatum being founded in the 1660s to gather and preserve information about objects from antiquity. As a result, archaeological finds from Finland were also sent to Stockholm until the end of Swedish reign in 1809.

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20 ‘Giödingz-Ålderen’ refers to Odin and the *asir* (asar) arriving in Scandinavia from Central Asia, which was considered a real, historical event. See Evert Baudou, ‘Drivkrafter och tolkningar i arkeologisk forskning’, in *Från Worm till Welinder: Åtta essäer om arkeologins disciplinhistoriska praxis*, ed. by Goldhahn, pp. 1–32 (p. 19).

21 Urpilainen, pp. 159–60.

22 Urpilainen, pp. 199–201.

Researching the ‘Finnish prehistory’ at the Academy of Turku

Daniel Juslenius’s (1676–1752, Professor of Greek and Hebrew 1712–27 and Theology 1727–34) work Aboa vetus et nova, published in 1700, introduced many claims about the Finnish past that were later to become lasting tropes of Fennomanian historiography, for example blaming the Swedes for destroying the evidence of a Finnish glorious past. Even though Juslenius does not explicitly consider archaeological research as a method for studying the past, his expression ‘monuments’ (monumenti) refers to all remains of the past, written sources as well as material remains, and the remark that some ancient objects could only be retrieved by ‘leaving no stone unturned’ (omnis esset movendus lapis), can be interpreted as an allusion to archaeology.24 Both Aboa vetus et nova and its follow-up study Vindiciae Fennorum25 were attempts to apply the Gothicist tradition to Finnish history and prove Finland a nation in its own right.26 Historian Derek Fewster has called this initial phase of a ‘national antiquarian consciousness’, beginning in the seventeenth century and lasting until the early nineteenth century, a ‘patriotic or proto-nationalistic antiquarianism’.27 Besides the works of Juslenius and, to a lesser extent, Torsten Rudeen’s studies on the Hyperboreans,28 researchers of history at the Academy during the first two decades of the eighteenth century focused on Classical antiquity, literature, or mythology instead of Finnish or Scandinavian history.

When the Academy resumed its operations in 1722, after the Russian occupation during the Great Northern War (1700–21), Algot Scarin (1684–1771) was appointed Professor of History and the focus shifted more to Nordic past.29 Scarin thought that the measurements of soil thickness on top of old structures performed by Olof Rudbeck clearly showed that the Nordic countries had already been inhabited a long time ago. He assumed that arriving in a few centuries after the Deluge to a newly dried land, the first inhabitants had subsisted on hunting and fishing.30

28 Torsten Rudeen/Johan Tälpo, Monomakhian veterum Hyperboreorum (Åbo: Wallius, 1703); Torsten Rudeen/Nikolaus Hahn, De sacris, antiquorum Hyperboreorum (Åbo: Winter, 1703), see also Anttila.
29 Scarin as a historian has been studied by Erkki Urpilainen (1993), who focuses especially on Scarin’s detachment from the Gothicist tradition.
30 Urpilainen, pp. 168–71; Algot Scarin/Jacob Starckou, Aboriginum Scandianorum praecipui vitae sustinendae modi, I (Åbo: Kämpe, 1740); Algot Scarin/Asmund Carlander, De gentis Vano- rum priscis et hodiernis in Westrogothia sedibus, I (Åbo: Kämpe, 1747); Algot Scarin/Samuel Chydenius, De Askmannis, ultima, in exteros, Scandianorum colonia, I (Åbo: Kämpe, 1747).
According to Trigger, even though the use of stone tools at some point in human history was already quite universally accepted as a fact among eighteenth-century scholars, the idea of technological epochs was not connected to the theory of stages of economic development, causing it to remain just a philosophical idea.\(^{31}\) However, in Scarin’s vision of Nordic prehistory this idea is touched upon.

In a thesis from 1740, Scarin postulated that the first people to have arrived in the Nordic countries were ‘ikhtyophagi’, fish eaters, who had lived much as the ‘samojeds of Novaja Zemlja’ or ‘the fishermen in America’. They were also associated with Tacitus’s description of the poor and animal-skin-clad ‘Fenni’, who made arrowheads out of bone. The text described the ancestors of the Scandinavian people as seafaring people, or pirates (Vikings), who later arrived in the lands of these more primitive people.\(^{32}\) Thus, it assigned the earliest time period, one resembling the Stone Age, to the Finns and Sámi. In the eighteenth century, the origin of the Finns was commonly explained as not being of the same Gothic or Scythian origin as Swedes but having arrived in the north earlier, and then pushed into the forests and mountainous regions by subsequent Germanic colonization. Scarin compared the ancient Finns to Native Americans since both had receded in the face of colonization.\(^{33}\)

The works of Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1739–1804)\(^{34}\) further discussed the origin of the Finnish people and their relationship to the Swedes and the Sámi. Porthan sought to prove that Tacitus’s Fenni were a reference to the Sámi instead of the ancestors of the Finns and that the Finns’ reputation as witches was also related to the Sámi. While Swedish historians thought that the ancestors of both the Finns and Sámi had formed the primitive, aboriginal population of the Nordic countries, Porthan wanted to present the Finns as a distinct group of people who gradually expelled the Sámi further north.\(^{35}\) Despite a common origin evidenced


\(^{32}\) Scarin/Starckou, pp. 8–14, 20, 23.

\(^{33}\) Urpilainen, pp. 178–84; Henrik Hassel/Matthias Hallenius, *De Borea-Fennica* (Åbo: Kämpe, 1732); Algot Scarin/Israel Escholin, *Positiones historico-politicae e Chronico episcoporum m.scr. Pauli Justen excerptae* (Åbo: Kämpe, 1726). In the Gothicist tradition, the ancestors of the Finns were also sometimes depicted as having arrived after the Swedes; see Sarviaho, p. 4.

\(^{34}\) Several studies have been published on Porthan in his many roles as historian, researcher, newspaper publisher, librarian, and antiquarian: e.g. *Porthanin monet kasvot: Kirjoitoksia humanistisen tieteen monitaiturista*, ed. by Juha Manninen (Helsinki: SKS, 2000); Inkeri Kinnari, *Hyödyllisiä ja miekkäitä oppeja kotiin viettäväksi. H. G. Porthanin väitösteesi ja akateeminen kasvatus* (Turku: Turun yliopisto, 2012).

by language, these two groups were often set apart due to contemporary differences and habits.36

This effort to separate the ancestors of the Finns and Sámi into two distinct groups continued in the works of the historians Johan Bilmark (1728–1801) and Gabriel Rein (1800–67). In their work, the nomadic lifestyle, reindeer herding, and hunting were attributes more associated with the Sámi, while the ancient Finns had lived more like the ancestors of the Swedes in villages practicing agriculture.37

Stone artefacts

The folklore related to Stone Age stone artefacts, in addition to their alleged nature as natural curiosities, is a well-known aspect of the history of archaeology. For centuries, people were bewildered by stones with smooth polished surfaces and sharp edges resembling tools and weapons. Ancient, near universal beliefs, probably dating back to the time when the use of stone as a raw material had first faded from collective memory, connected these objects with thunder and especially with lightning. Believed to be so-called thunderbolts arriving with lightning, their supposed origin endowed them with various magical, protective, and healing properties, and therefore, they were often collected and preserved by people.38

Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have researched the concept of wonder in the history of science and pointed out how objects and events considered wonders faded from scientific thinking during the Enlightenment. This process, shifting the focus of natural science from curiosities and contingencies to recognizing systems and patterns, began in the seventeenth century. Wondrous or supernatural explanations for phenomena gradually changed into explanations based on empiricism.39

36  E.g. Anders Wetterblad/Israel Aiemelaeus, Theses miscellanea (Åbo: Köpm, 1745).
37  Johan Bilmark/Fredrik Collin, De origine Fennorum (Åbo: Frenckell, 1764); Johan Bilmark/Christiern Björkgren, An Sveathia plures olim habuerit incolas, quam nostro aevo, II (Åbo: Frenckell, 1769); Gabriel Rein/Johan Norring, De vetere Carelia ante occupationem Svecanam, I (Åbo: Frenckell, 1825); Gabriel Rein/Fredrik Cygnæus, De gente Sumorum (Åbo: Frenckell, 1827).
During the eighteenth century, two main scientific explanations existed for the thunderbolts: either they were the results of meteorological or geological phenomena, related to meteorites or volcanic pyroclasts, or they were analogous to the stone artefacts used by Native Americans or Polynesians, and therefore ancient tools. The latter opinion was backed up not just by ethnographic analogies, but also the descriptions of ‘barbarians’ in Classical sources. Eighteenth-century sources refer to these objects with many different terms, the most common being related to thunder (ceraunia, pierres de foudre, and thorswiggar or åsk(e)wiggar), but also pierres de circoncision (connecting the use of stone tools to passages in the Bible) or casse-têtes.

The terminology is often confusing and overlapping: ceraunia can mean actual stones falling from the sky or stones deliberately modified as tools by humans, and it can also be both. Kristiina Johanson, for example, has noted that objects catalogued as thunderbolts in museum collections are not just Stone Age artefacts found in later contexts, but are also natural stones, fossils, and even stones of actual meteoritic origin. In folklore, all of these had similar beliefs and ritual re-use attached to them.

The attempt to explain the terminology in a French dictionary from 1730 included several entangled meanings: ceraunia, or pierres de foudre, is a term erroneously used for ancient stones shaped like tools or weapons often kept in cabinets


42 For the history of the recognition of stone tools through analogies, see Kunnas-Pusa, ‘Function Follows Form’

43 ‘Pierre de circoncision’ refers to passages in Exodus and the Book of Joshua depicting stone knives used for circumcision. It was used as a synonym for ‘pierres de foudre’ (thunderstones) during the eighteenth century, especially in French auction catalogues (but also in scientific texts) to refer to stone artefacts: e.g. Catalogue raisonné des Antiquités & autres Curiosités du Cabinet de feu M. Picard (Paris, 1779). The term is also used as a synonym for ‘åskewigga’ in Per Gadd/Alexander Ramstadius, Om finska jaspis-arter och agater (Åbo: Freneckell, 1776). ‘Casse-tête’ often refers to stone artefacts from America or the Pacific: e.g. Pierre Remy, Catalogue des Curiosités qui composent le Cabinet de m. Le Duc de Caylus (Paris, 1773). Still in modern French, ‘casse-tête’ means a puzzle, a challenge for one’s brain, but also tomahawk-like weapons. This is further discussed in Liisa Kunnas-Pusa, ‘Kieli ja käsitteet tieteen ja tiedon historian peilinä: Esimerkkiniä kivikautisten esiaineiden nimitykset 1700–1800-luvuilla’, in Tiede ja tieto historiantutkimuksen kohteena, ed. by Mikko Myllykangas, Annastiina Mäkilä, Johanna Skurnik & Veli Virmajoki (forthcoming).

of curiosities. The dictionary clarified that real pierres de foudre exist, too. While they are stones that fall from the sky, they are not formed by thunderstorms, but instead the result of mountain erosion spread by wind.44

Stone artefacts were discussed as a thunder-related phenomenon in a thesis published in 1744 under the supervision of Johan Browallius (1707–55). Browallius accepted that these objects had been used as tools, calling them ‘stridshamrar’ (stridsyxa, a battle-axe) and noting that stone tools were still being used in the Americas among indigenous people. Nevertheless, he still assigned the origin of these stones to thunderstorms and likened them to meteorites.45 Instead of being deliberately formed by humans, they were natural stones once utilized as tools.

Eight years later, in 1752, the use of stone in history was discussed in a thesis by Gustav Allenius (1730–1808), with the Professor of Physics Carl Fredrik Mennander (1712–86) serving as the præses. This text clearly distinguishes between ancient stone artefacts and stones created by thunder, ceraunia: ‘These stones, considered by common people to be ceraunia, are not that, but weapons and tools, used by ancient people for many purposes before the discovery of metallurgy, as for example Mahudel has tried to prove.’ (Fig. 2)46 Nicolas Mahudel had presented his theories about the relationship between thunderbolts and ancient tools in France in 1734.47 In the theses used as source material for this article, this was the only explicit reference found to Stone Age artefacts as distinct from other thunderstones.

The ethnographic analogies between European thunderbolts and stone artefacts used by indigenous populations were known to Finnish and Swedish scholars. Nevertheless, in Pehr Kalm’s (1716–79) travelogue of his North American journey, he does not connect American stone tools to European finds, even though he had collected the former and wrote about them.48 Native American cultures were also examined in Kalm’s study on the Inuit, published in 1756, with Andreas Indrenius


46 ‘Lapides quoque, quos pro Cerauniis vel fulminaribus vulgus vendidat, non esse, nisi instrumenta vel bellica vel oeconomica, quae ante metallorum usum cognitum variis negotiis adhibant prisci, post alios Mahudel prolixe evincere conatus est.’ Carl Mennander/Gustav Allenius, *De usu lapidum in historia* (Åbo: Merckell, 1752), p. 18.


as the respondent. It included depictions of Inuit leather clothes, kayak making, and how they made stone and bone tools.\footnote{Pehr Kalm/Andreas Indrenius, *De esquimaux, gente Americana* (Åbo: Merckell, 1756). Kalm discusses many of the same things as Henry Ellis, *A voyage to Hudson’s-Bay by the ’Dobbs Galley’ and ’California’ in the years 1746 and 1747, for discovering a North West Passage* (London: H. Whitridge, 1749). Kalm disapproved of the Native Americans’ ‘ignorance and contempt for science’ in his travelogue (Kalm, *Matka Pohjois-Amerikkaan*, p. 92), while Ellis, in contrast, admired the ingenuity and skills of the Inuit.}

A mineralogical thesis written under the supervision of Professor of Chemistry Pehr Gadd (1727–97) in 1767 stated that, like all people, the ancient Finns also once made weapons out of stone. This was evidenced by a folk poem in which Väinämöinen is asked to produce a ‘sword made of stone’. The study also referred to excavating Bronze Age burial cairns in Reuharinniemi, Tampere.\footnote{Pehr Gadd/Carl Giers, *Indicia mineralogiae in Fennia sub gentilismo* (Åbo: Frenckell, 1767), pp. 3–5, 13–14.} Gadd discussed stone tools in other texts as well. He dismissed the belief that thunderbolts caused trees to splinter, attributing the phenomenon instead to electricity,\footnote{Pehr Gadd, *Satakunnan kihlakuntain pohjoisosan taloudellisen kuvaamisen yritys* (Tampere: Tampereen Historiallinen Seura, 1946 [1751]), p. 54.} and referred to them as ancient weapons that had also been sacrificed to Thor.\footnote{Gadd/Ramstadius.}

The contested nature of thunderbolts as a natural phenomenon continued to co-exist with explaining them as historical objects until the nineteenth century. In 1803, a three-part article published in *Åbo Tidningar* stated that ‘åskwiggar’ or ‘celestes carreaux’ (stones from the sky) are either pyroclastic matter from volcanoes, eroded material from mountains, stones from the Moon, or stones formed...
by electricity during thunderstorms, but the article did not mention their use as possible ancient tools. By and large, stories about stones falling from the skies often featured in early nineteenth-century newspapers.

However, by the early nineteenth century the existence of the Stone Age was already fairly common knowledge. An 1821 article published in the newspaper Turun Wiikko-Sanomat, presumably written by Reinhold von Becker (1788–1858), educated the Finnish people on the subject:

Before people learned how to use metals, they only had sharp stones instead of knives, the tips of arrows and spears were made of flint and some other weapons were hammered out of stone with great effort. These kinds of stone weapons have up until now been found in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Fig. 3 Illustration from Pehr Kalm / Anders Chydenius, Americanska näfverbåtar (Åbo: Merckell, 1753). Digitised by the National Library of Finland. Public Domain.

53 Åbo Tidningar, 10 Dec 1803, 14 Dec 1803, 17 Dec 1803.
54 E.g. Åbo Tidningar, 16 July 1808; Åbo Allmänna Tidning 12 Jan 1811, 30 June 1812.
Conclusions

Stone Age artefacts appeared in the source material only rarely, but when they did, they were discussed in the framework of the transnational scientific discourse of the time. For example, the contemporary French sources were familiar to scholars at the Academy of Turku. The artefacts begin to be more frequently mentioned from the 1740s onwards. The attitudes towards accepting the stone tools as man-made objects, diverting from the Biblical depiction of world history, or connecting ethnographic analogies to European stone tools, seemed to vary according to scholars’ personal preferences. Since the source material regarding the artefacts was scarce, and the artefacts themselves a marginal topic of interest, these personal opinions were probably more visible than they would if there was more source material. Therefore, conclusions should be drawn carefully.

However, it can generally be observed in the source material that scientific explanations gained momentum during the eighteenth century and became mainstream by the end of it. An example of this is the debate on the ‘theory of diminishing water’ (vattumniskingsteorin, Fi. vedenvähemisteoria). Resulting from the last glaciation period, the topography of Sweden and Finland suggested much higher water levels during some point in history, and the coastal waters were continuously receding. The Deluge was considered a valid explanation in the early eighteenth century, but not anymore by the end of it.\(^{56}\)

Regarding the stone tools, this process of moving towards empiricism and scientific explanation is evident, for example, in Pehr Gadd’s disbelief that striking lightning created them. Still, even when recognized as ancient artefacts, stone tools are associated with specimens of natural history. The historical background of entanglement between stone tools, fossils and meteorites was simply too strong and the division between artificial and natural was fluid in the antiquarian tradition.\(^{57}\) Stones resembling tools were only one subcategory of strange stones. The connection between Stone Age and natural history has lasted until today, with the Stone Age later also being affiliated to indigenous peoples. For example, The American Museum of Natural History in New York also displays the ‘evolution-
ary story of the human family’ and ‘the cultures of Asia, Africa, North and South America, and the Pacific’. 58

On the other hand, prehistoric cairns and other interesting structures were considered historical objects in the source material. 59 Structures were perhaps more easily recognized as manmade. Also, the newspaper material contained several stories about stone cairns and other structures labelled as ancient tombs, but none about stone artefacts until the nineteenth century. 60

What then can be said about the eighteenth-century vision of the Stone Age? A period resembling the concept of prehistory could be detected in some sources, like Algot Scarin’s vision of the ‘ikhtyophagi’. Even when differences in the overall timeline of history are considered, there are some interfaces with the Stone Age as it is understood today. It is unreachable through written sources but can be approached using ethnographic analogies; tools and weapons were made of stone and bone, and the lifestyle was nomadic with hunting and fishing as the prevalent subsistence strategies.

In the nineteenth century, the narrative about the ancestors of the Finns having arrived in Finland during the Iron Age, forcing the Sámi, the remnants of a Stone Age population, off their lands, became an important building block of Finnish national history. This idea was already clearly visible, for example, in Henrik Gabriel Porthan’s work. When the Scandinavian historiography portrayed the first inhabitants of the North as Finns and Sámi together as a Proto-Finnic tribe, it led to a pressure to prove the Finns equally civilized to the Scandinavians. Eighteenth-century ideas of proto-nationalism, natural determinism, the theory of ‘nation character’, cultural evolution, and the model of universal development became even more important in the formation of the concept of the Stone Age, when these notions were later combined with ideas of Darwinism and biological evolution.

List of primary sources

Newspapers

Tidningar Utgifne af et Sällskap i Åbo


59 E.g. Gadd, Satakunnan kihlakuntain pohjoisosa; Pehr Kalm/Eric Castrén, Historisk och oeconomic beskrifning öfwer Cajanaborgslän (Åbo: Merckell, 1754); Sigfrid Henrik Porthan, Descrip
tio paroeciae Cuopio – Kuvaus Kuopion pitäjästä (Kuopio: Kuopion 200-vuotisjuhlien valmiste
lustoimikunta, 1982 [1775]).

60 Stone structures, ‘Lapp cairns’, are at least mentioned in Tidningar Utgifne af et Sällskap i Åbo, 15 Feb 1777, 15 May 1777, 30 Sep 1778, 13 July 1782, 28 Oct 1784.

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Turun Viikko-Sanomat
Åbo Allmänna Tidning
Åbo Tidningar

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