

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT STUDIES FROM TURKU

Markus Hiekkanen

Academy of Finland. Koskelantie 46 A 2, 00610 Helsinki, Finland; markus.hiekkanen@pp.inet.fi

Sites and Settlements, Publications of the project "Changing Environment – Changing Society", University of Turku, Turku, 2000 (276 p.).

In the early 1990s an extensive project in environment studies was launched at the University of Turku. Keeping up with the spirit of the times, it was named "Changing Environment – Changing Society". The scope and depth of the project are given in its subheading: a cultural-ecological study on the interaction of a land-uplift coastline, settlement and economy in Finland Proper from the Iron Age to the present day. Over the years, it developed into a kind of umbrella project in which many researchers of the University of Turku, the Åbo Akademi University and the University of Joensuu found (temporary) positions and which received funding from the Academy of Finland, among other sources.

The project achieved impressive results in the areas of prehistory and history, and in a particularly interesting way in their borderline zone from the end of the Iron Age to the Middle Ages. In terms of published material and text, the project was particularly successful for Finnish conditions. Two books (Nissinaho 1994, 1995) have already been published, in addition to the present work *Sites and Settlements*, which contains seven articles, with archaeological finds and observations as the main source material, but also articles in the fields of geology and historical research.

The archaeological section begins with two studies on the valley and catchment of the Aurajoki River, the core of Iron Age culture in the province of Finland Proper and in Finland in general. It was on the lower reaches of this river that Finland's first medieval town, Turku, was established either at the end of the 1280s or in the 1290s at a completely new site which, according to archaeological sources was uninhabited at that time (on this subject, see Hiekkanen 2002). This fact alone attests to the considerable importance of the river and its environs, which continued to grow during the 12th century. The first base of Christian missionary activity in Finland in the mid-12th century was by no means founded here but at Nousiainen, some 20 km to the north. It was from there that the centre of missionary activity was moved, upon conditional authority issued by the Pope in 1229, to Koroinen which had been founded at the confluence of the Aurajoki River and its tributary the Vähäjoki River.

Of the archaeological articles, *Kaisa Lehtonen's* contribution is on the structure of the Iron Age settlement in the Aurajoki River valley and its relation to settlement in historically documented times. As is common in Iron Age archaeology in Finland, Lehtonen, too, has to rely primarily on the material provided by cemeteries, as very little material from settlements is available. Therefore,

the ordinary traces and signs of the life of the farmer population who established and used the cemeteries are lacking in most cases. Nor did Finland have any early towns like Birka in Sweden, Hedeby in Denmark or Wollin in Germany.¹

Lehtonen presents the related archaeological material of the Aurajoki River valley and its research history in a concise, factual manner. The settlement was still limited in the Early Iron Age, but Lehtonen nonetheless concludes that it was located on the lower reaches of the river. This statement clearly requires the support of new finds, for it now remains without sufficient grounds.

It was not until the Migration Period that the form and scope of later settlement in the river valley emerged. This was a roughly 10 km long zone, beginning approximately at Koroinen and extending to Lieto on the upper reaches of the river. Settlement expansion mainly took place within this area. A choice of soil type appears to have been at issue here. As interpreted by *Eljas Orrman* in several connections, the clayey soils of the upper reaches of the river valley were too hard to be worked with the Iron Age ploughs, and consequently these areas were not cleared for cultivation until the Middle Ages.

For some reason a regression in demographic developments took place in the early Merovingian Period, as Lehtonen argues with well-founded claims. It truly appears to have been the case that as many as eight cemeteries ceased to be used at the end of the Migration Period, while nine new ones were established in the latter half of the Merovingian Period. It is difficult to give any precise reasons for this change, but it was hardly a question of a reorganization of settlement, for this alternative is not supported by later finds. The brief, yet highly marked, regression of population and settlement in the Aurajoki River valley may have been the joint result of years of crop failure and an epidemic.

The second half of the Merovingian Period appears to have been a time of marked growth of settlement, and in the Viking Age the number of cemeteries doubled, but diminished again in the Crusade Period. This change hardly reflects actual demographic conditions, but rather the fact that with the influence of Christianity the cremation of the dead begins to wane and new cemeteries solely intended for inhumation burial are being established. As is well known, the latter are more difficult to find than cremation cemeteries.

Lehtonen discusses in great detail the effects of topography and soils on the selection of settlement sites, with estimates of the possible locations of yet undiscovered sites in relation to known cemeteries. Settlement is not spread out evenly along the river but clustered in groups mainly at mouths of its tributaries. Obviously this settlement laid the basis for later medieval settlement, although the sites are not the same: the medieval villages were mostly located in slightly different places than the Iron Age cemeteries and the farms assumed on the basis of the latter.

Elina Saloranta's study shows that development of settlement at the Vähäjoki River, a tributary of the Aurajoki River, followed largely the same course as along the latter river. An interesting feature, however, is the notable emergence of settlement already in the Early Roman Iron Age in this area. It was here that Finland's classical and most important finds of the Early Iron Age were discovered. Intensive settlement and occupation, however, do not appear to have continued into the Late Roman Iron Age.

Saloranta also demonstrates the clustering of settlement into a few larger entities. There would have been cause for both Saloranta and Lehtonen to combine their information, for example, in an article presenting a synthesis of results, in addition to their separate contributions. Now, the reader has to go through both articles separately to find the features that these river valleys have in common and those that separate them. In any case, Saloranta's article is solidly based on the material, and its only flaw is its limited presentation of ecclesiastical factors of change in early medieval Finland.

¹ The much-vaunted Varikkoniemi or Varikonniemi site at Hämeenlinna (former Vanaja) is an Iron Age dwelling site, with none of the traits (urban or trading-site character, town plan, port, defence walls, etc.) that some researchers have wished to ascribe to it.

In a series of three articles, *Juha-Matti Vuorinen* expands the results of Saloranta and Lehtonen to the whole northern part of the province of Finland Proper. His research concerns the quantitative variation of Early Metal Period and Iron Age archaeological sites and remains in chronological and spatial terms, local relations between cemeteries and dwelling sites, and the chronological division of archaeological research concerning Iron Age antiquities.

Vuorinen's studies are representative of the comprehensive approach to research that is characteristic of the Chair of Archaeology at the University of Turku: a thorough and wide-ranging collection and analysis of material. Unfortunately, all three articles are incomplete in the sense that they remain at the level of statistics without any further use of material. The short passages of text mostly repeat points that can be read directly from the tables. Here, too, it is evident that the contributors did not enter into a discussion with each other; or at any rate, the discussions did not result in any kind of synthesis.

The location of Finland's first diocesan church is a problem that has repeatedly attracted archaeologists, not only for purely scholarly reasons but also because it is a site laden with importance for the creation of national identity. *Unto Salo* takes up this question from the perspective of the cemetery of Nousiainen, near present-day Nousiainen Church, and its assumedly related estate of a local chieftain. Salo provides food for thought in his analyses of the suggestions of earlier researchers, and interprets the 11th–12th century cemetery of Moisio at Nousiainen to have been the burial site of a chieftain property. He goes on to suggest that the leaders of this "Moisio family" reverted to paganism after their Christian conversion, as shown by a return to cremation from Christian inhumation in the material of the cemetery. This is not a new suggestion, but Salo presents it in more forceful terms than has been done previously.

There is a great deal of value in Salo's arguments, but when, like many other Finnish scholars, he underlines the importance of the building that stood at the cemetery site, one must ask for further grounds. This structure has namely been interpreted as a belfry situated in the middle of the cemetery and built as the first marker of Christianity before the church. This is not necessarily credible, because a belfry, in my opinion, cannot be regarded as a primary Christian building in the missionary period, or even later. A church where Mass could be said was such a building. The belfry is a secondary structure, whose bell signals the approaching hour of the Mass, or other ceremonies.

The suggestion of a belfry at Moisio (and at Ristipelto in Lieto) has lived on in Finnish archaeology ever since a classic article on the subject published by Cleve (1952), but it may now be time to take a close look at the grounds for this idea. Could they have been later structures unrelated to the period of the cemetery? A similar reappraisal could also be extended to the headstone found in the ruins of Moisio Church in the 1920s. I would claim that the shape of the engraved heraldic device on the stone clearly points to a later date than the assumed 12th century. It may also be necessary to question the construction of stone fences around cemeteries in Finland in the 11th–13th centuries. Probably here, too, ditches served as boundary markers as has been noted elsewhere, particularly in South Scandinavian archaeology during the past two decades.² The alleged stone fences can, in my opinion, belong to later periods when the use of the cemeteries had ceased and the lands were divided into field lots.

Especially in a discipline that is often termed *landscape archaeology*, it is necessary to discuss what is actually meant by *archaeological site*. In his article, *Paul Barford* addresses this question in many inventive ways, focusing on a variety of points, including the ways in which the boundaries of a "site" are defined. Is a church building, for example, a single site and the churchyard around it another one? How to define the boundaries of a site consisting of objects and their fragments found in ploughed soil? Basing on his experiences from Great Britain, Poland and elsewhere, Barford introduces a number of new dimensions into Finnish discussion on this problem.

² Such a fence surrounded at least the Kauskila cemetery/churchyard at Lappee in Karelia, but it is of unknown date. It is difficult to image that it had still been in use towards the end of the Middle Ages. The line of the ditch can still be easily observed in the terrain.

The archaeological analyses of the volume find support in two other articles. The first of these, by *Lassi Hatakka* and *Gunnar Glückert* discusses the land-uplift chronology of Southwest Finland. This contribution presents the most recent calibrated curves for land uplift in certain parts of Finland Proper. The new information calls for considerable revision of earlier concepts. In the Turku region, for example, land-uplift has been estimated at slightly over 5 mm (± 0.5 mm) per year over the past century. The new data, however, show it has been only 4.14 ± 0.4 mm per year. This information will be of particular use in research concerning the Iron Age and Middle Ages in the archipelago.

The other article is *Kari Alifrosti's* long contribution on medieval and Early Modern Period settlement in the light of environmental factors. The author particularly discusses the role of different environments (archipelago, coastal, inland) in the spread of settlement. He also seeks to demonstrate differences emerging over time and their underlying reasons.

Sites and Settlements is an important contribution to new approaches in Finnish archaeology and the project responsible for it has provided significant advances in research. As is well known, it is difficult to come forth from behind the Fenno-Ugrian language barrier. The articles in English clearly show how much archaeology can offer historical research. Even today there are outmoded views according to which the role of archaeologists is to furnish, with photographs and drawings, suitable illustrations for the conception of the past that historians have created from their own sources. The editor of the book, *Aino Nissinaho*, has succeeded in an excellent manner in her task.

References

- Cleve, N.** 1952. En kyrkogård från korstågstiden. – *Corolla archaeologica in honorem C. A. Nordman*. Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys – Finska Fornminnesförening, Helsinki, 157–167.
- Hiekkänen, M.** 2002. Die Gründung der Stadt Turku. – *Civitas et castrum ad Mare Balticum*. Baltijas arheoloģijas un vēstures problēmas dzelzs laikmetā un viduslaikos. Rakstu krājums – veltījums LZA īstenajam loceklim prof. Dr. habil. hist. Andrim Caunem 65 gadu dzīves jubilejā. Rīga, 156–177.
- Nissinaho, A.** (ed.). 1994. *Cultural Ecology: One Theory?* Publications of the project Changing Environment – Changing Society. University of Turku, Turku.
- Nissinaho, A.** (ed.). 1995. *Ihmisen maisema. Kirjoituksia yhteisön ja ympäristön muutoksesta Lounais-Suomen rannikolla. Projektin Muuttuva miljöö – muuttuva yhteisö julkaisuja.* University of Turku, Turku.