

- 1 Castrén 1843; 1858c.
- 2 Castrén 1844; 1858a.
- 3 Castrén 1849; 1858b.
- 4 Castrén 1870a; 1870b.

M.A. Castrén's Archaeological and Historical Studies: An Introduction

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Castrén's archaeological and historical publications

Matthias Alexander Castrén's body of work includes three articles published during his lifetime that are considerably historical and archaeological in character. In addition to these, there are two texts that were published posthumously. The article *Utdrag ur Solovetska kloster-krönikan* [Extract of the Solovetsky Monastery Chronicle] was originally published in the journal *Suomi* in 1843 and was later published again in the fifth volume of *Nordiska resor och forskningar*.¹ *Anmärkningar om Savolotscheskaja Tschud* [Notes on Zavoločeskaja čud'] was published both in *Suomi* and *NRF V* in 1844.² *Hvar låg det Finska folkets vagga?* [Where was the Finnish people's cradle?] appeared in *Litterära soiréer i Helsingfors under hösten 1849* and in *NRF V*.³ *Förslag till en undersökning af de in Finland befintlige grafkumlen* [A proposal for an investigation of the grave-mounds in Finland] and *Om kurganer eller s. k. Tschud-kummel i den Minusinska kretsen* [On kurgans or so-called Chud mounds in Minusinsk district] were not published until after Castrén's death in *NRF VI*.⁴ No other unpublished manuscripts of this type have been found in Castrén's archives.

Because these texts present quite different types of scholarly problems, they do not form a coherent whole and can be compared with each other only to a limited extent. In this introduction, a short summary of their aim is sketched, along with a brief analysis of their context in scholarly and ideological history.

Castrén lived during a period when the differentiation and specialization of different disciplines was going on. This is reflected in his writings, wherein elements of history, archaeology, ethnology, geography, and linguistics are in constant dialogue with each other and synergistically interact to form the final conclusions. Castrén approached history and archaeology, as well as linguistics, from ethnological point of view. He used the historical and comparative method that had become established in German and Scandinavian research by early 19th century. He followed international models,

like that of August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735–1809), and domestic ones, like Anders Johan Sjögren's (1794–1855), that continued the *Völkerkunde/Ethnologie* tradition of searching for the origins of different peoples through a comparative methodology. However, Castrén seems to have assumed, like Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), that peoples are primordial entities, whereas Schlözer considered them merely as taxonomic units. Especially fundamental for Castrén was the idea of a “national spirit” reflected in language and all aspects of culture. More specifically, Castrén was committed to the tradition of Finno-Ugrian research initiated during the previous century.⁵

Although Castrén's archaeological activities were launched primarily under the auspices of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, he also had a personal interest in researching prehistoric archaeological remains. The latter can be seen in his travel reports from Lapland and Karelia in the 1830s (see the first volume of travels in this series). On the institutional level, his work belonged to the Russian tradition of collecting information about the remote parts of the empire. This institutional framework was based, in fact, on a German ethnological tradition that was introduced into Russia by several German-born scholars who were hired by the Academy of Sciences to travel in Siberia. The idea of an academy of sciences was also adopted from the German world by Emperor Peter I. Castrén's own contribution was to add a Finnish national(ist) layer on this German/Russian foundation. In all respects, he was continuing the European tradition of exploration.⁶ It was merely his emphasis that varied according to this theme.

Castrén and the prehistory of Siberia

Castrén's archaeological writings are mainly based on the fieldwork that he carried out during his last expedition in Siberia. All his other excavations and surveys of archaeological sites were marginal and did not result in significant publications, although some were mentioned in his travel descriptions. *Om kurganer eller s. k. Tschud-kummel* deals with the *kurgans* (burial mounds) that Castrén excavated mostly in the upper course of the Yenisei River⁷ between 1847 and 1848.⁸ He also draws on information he had collected from administrative officials in Siberia. Castrén wrote this work after returning home from his expedition but it was not published during his lifetime. The *kurgans* had already been excavated from the 1710s by several travellers and scholars including Philipp Johann Tabbert (von

- 5 Vermeulen 2015: 1, 5, 306–310, 316, 321–323; Korhonen 1986: 64–66; Branch 1973: 23–32; Nisbet 1999; Ahola – Lukin 2016: 43–46.
- 6 Vermeulen 2015: 28–29, 47–58; Korhonen 1986: 64–66; Salmi-nen 2003b: 38–40.
- 7 The Russian (Cyrillic script) names are transliterated according to the scientific transliteration standard of Cyrillic transliteration except for such place-names that already have an established spelling in English like Yenisei or Solovetsky.
- 8 These excavations are published and analysed in greater detail as a part of Castrén's travel diaries in a later volume of this series.

- 9 Белокобыльский 1986: 7–54; see also Ahola – Lukin 2016: 36–37.
- 10 Above all these include Strahlenberg 1730: 312–317, 336–337, 356–358, 362–371, 410–412; Gmelin 1999 [1752]: 286–291; Pallas 1773: 608–610; 1776: 357–362, 384–387; Степановъ 1835; Спасский. 1818.
In Miller 1999: 503–539 two of G.F. Müller’s archaeological writings from Siberia have been published, but they did not appear in print during his lifetime and Castrén was probably not familiar with them.
- 11 Trigger 2006: 121–138.
- 12 Nilsson 1838–1843: 85–93.

Strahlenberg, 1676–1747), Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685–1735), Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755), Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), and Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811).⁹ Castrén’s archaeological work would have hardly been possible without the work of his predecessors, although the literature containing earlier archaeological observations is sparse.¹⁰ Gmelin, Müller, and a little later Pallas, gave this work a more scholarly tone that its early pioneers were lacking. Castrén challenges the typologies made by Gmelin, Müller, and Pallas and his conclusion is that the relationship between the burial mounds and the sought-after Finnic ancestors is uncertain, and even improbable. Instead, he connects them with the Kyrgyz people of the region. Compared with the fact that he eagerly lists Finnish-sounding place-names from the upper course of the Yenisei in his article *Hvar låg...*, he was somewhat unsure of the potential to use the archaeological remains as source material. This uncertainty can be traced to the fact that archaeology itself was only just emerging as an independent discipline and did not yet have an established theoretical and methodological basis.¹¹

The questions that Castrén posed were completely new in the Siberian context. Gmelin and Pallas had attempted to divide the burial mounds into groups by constructing a typology of them on the basis of their location in the topography of the steppe and mountains. Pallas also claimed that kurgans reflected the relative wealth of the population that constructed them as well as the social status of the individuals who were buried therein. This would not have been the case had he assumed that all kurgans from Siberia and European Russia belonged to the same people.

Castrén supplemented his own archaeological field observations with folklore he had collected among locals or read in literature. There was no real means to establish a relative, not to speak of absolute, chronology for archaeological remains before the 1860s, which led Castrén to experiment with different methods of dating the graves according to their appearance and other superficial characteristics. In this respect, he followed the general trend of his time such as the Swedish zoologist and ethnologist Sven Nilsson (1787–1883) who attempted to date archaeological remains and finds through a systematic comparison of them, in addition to making stratigraphic and other geological observations. With them he could reach relatively accurate conclusions, e.g., concerning the end of Stone Age in Scandinavia.¹² Castrén cites Nilsson, which proves that he was familiar with his work and used it as a model. Castrén’s archaeological fieldwork will be analysed in greater detail in connection with his travel diaries in a future volume of this series, which also contains the archaeological notes he made during his voyages.

The excavations that Castrén made in Siberia also brought about a research agenda that Castrén submitted to the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1851 in order to investigate the grave mounds or, rather, cairns that he knew about in Finland. *Förslag till en undersökning af de i Finland befintlige grafkumlen* applies the experience that Castrén had gained both in Finland in the late 1830s and Russia and Siberia in the next decade. His assumption was that through comparative study it could be discovered whether the graves in both regions are the remains of the same people (in his interpretations, the Finns). This type of synthetic question would not have been possible without the fieldwork that Castrén had conducted in Siberia. In Finland's case, there was earlier research about the cairns that has been carried out in the 17th century and collected for the Antiquities Collegium of Sweden. In his travel description of Lapland from 1838, Castrén cites Christfrid Ganander's (1741–1790) observations from Ostrobothnia, published in 1782 (see later in the volume of Castrén's travels in this series).¹³

The research plan was never realized in the form that Castrén had outlined, due to the fact that the development of archaeological methodology made it outdated within a couple of decades. Ethnic questions in themselves remained central to archaeological research until around 1900. A substantive analytical criticism of this methodology arose during the first decades of the 20th century and, finally, it fell out of fashion entirely after the Second World War. Furthermore, because Castrén did not have a means to date the graves, he lacked the necessary chronological basis to realize his own research plan.¹⁴

Hvar låg det Finska folkets vagga? is a synthesis of Castrén's studies in Siberia. It is a lecture in which Castrén continues to explore the question of the whereabouts of the original homeland of the Finnish people. No actual archaeological material evidence is cited, but the lecture is an essential source to understand the conclusions that Castrén makes on the basis of linguistic and folkloric observations. Castrén's most important predecessors are Julius von Klaproth (1783–1835) and Carl Ritter (1779–1859), whose works on the topic Castrén cites. He mentions, above all, their interpretation of the ancient Turks' wandering to their present-day areas of habitation after the Great Flood.¹⁵ Considering the Finns' relationship with Turks, Castrén concludes that the origins of the Finns should also be sought in the Altai and Sayan Mountains of southern Siberia. The main message of the lecture can be found on the ideological level: according to Castrén, Finns must achieve a respected name in history for themselves through their own work instead of chasing unrealistic aspirations to find exalted roots or ethnic relatives

- 13 Nordman 1968: 11–14.
- 14 Cf. Aspelin 1875: esp. 57–62; Trigger 2006: 211–216, 235–241, 248–261.
- 15 On the deluge myths, see Dundes 1988.

- 16 On the ideological problems connected to Mongol relatives, see Kilpeläinen 1985: 169, 189; Kemiläinen 1993: 107–110; Sommer 2016: 155.
- 17 See Korhonen 1986: 60–61.
- 18 Korhonen 1986: 60; Salminen 2003a; 2003b; 2009.
- 19 Aspelin 1875; Aspelin 1877.

to help them.¹⁶ From today's point of view, the whole lecture can be characterized as a fantasy rather than as a scholarly synthesis¹⁷, and Castrén even exceeded the bounds of empirical research in his own time.

Building on this synthesis, several later attempts were made to reconstruct a more detailed and analytical picture of the ancient past and original homeland of the Finns, based on linguistics, ethnology, and archaeology. Finnish researchers in the second half of the 19th century were inspired to go to Siberia to search for the assumed prehistoric ancestors of the Finns. Although its basic premises turned out to be false, it had an immense influence in launching a research agenda that had international importance, particularly in research about the Turkic inscriptions of southern Siberia.¹⁸

Castrén had not consciously adopted the idea that clues about “national spirit” could be found in artefact material, similar to how he sought them in language and poetry. In Finnish archaeology, this idea was introduced by Johan Reinhold Aspelin (1842–1915) in the 1870s, who built on Scandinavian comparative methods in archaeology.¹⁹ Castrén actually formulated it, however, in his proposal of 1851, in which he laid ground for Aspelin's work to seek by means of archaeology the Finnish wandering from their original home to the west.

Early history of Finns in European Russia

Another area of interest expressed in Castrén's archaeological and historical writings is the early history of the Finns in European Russia. Here he directly built upon the work done by A.J. Sjögren in the 1820s and 1830s and also was in dialogue with some other earlier researchers.

Anteckningar om Savolotscheskaja Tschud is a synthetic overview, dealing with the early history of a people that Castrén interpreted to be Finnic. Castrén wrote the article after his 1842 travels in the Arxangel'sk Governorate and it was published in 1844. The concept of *zavoloč'e*, referred to in the title, means behind the *volok*, or portage – a path across which boats had to be transported while travelling from one river system to another. The *Zavoločeskaja Čud'* people are originally mentioned in the Russian Primary Chronicle, or so-called Nestor's Chronicle. Here Castrén analyses the area of northern European Russia, especially focusing on Karelia and the surroundings of Arxangel'sk. In this research, as in his Siberian research, Castrén combines historical and linguistic material, as well

as some archaeological observations of his own, to gain an image of what kind of people the *Zavoločeskaja Čud'* were and where they lived.

Castrén's work is linked to a long tradition in both Russian and western research. The Italian author Julius Pomponius Sabinus (Pomponius Laetus, 1428–1498) had discussed the question of the *Zavoločeskaja Čud'* in his commentary on Virgil's (70–19 BCE) work in the late 15th century, and the mystery of their origins had been discussed by several other scholars too: most notably by Vasilij Nikitič Tatiščev (1686–1750), A.L. von Schlözer in his commentary on the Primary Chronicle, and Aron Christian Lehrberg (1770–1813).²⁰ Later, A.J. Sjögren expressed his thoughts on the issue²¹ and Castrén concluded that Sjögren's material allowed him to define the borders of the ancient areas of habitation of the Finnic peoples in northern Russia. If Sjögren's research had been the most prominent on this topic since the 1820s, Castrén's research took the leading role after it had been published.²² Today, the *Zavoločeskaja Čud'* are assumed to have been a Baltic-Finnic tribe or group of tribes in the Dvina River basin. Thus, today's understanding of them is still quite close to the one proposed by the early 19th century scholars.²³

In the Russian tradition, the Chuds – both the Finnic and the mythical ones – represented an Otherness that Sjögren and Castrén borrowed to construct a narrative of an assumed Finnic past. Simultaneously they were a rhetorical device for Russians to look at the history of Russia through the eyes of the Other, while for Finns they represented an Other due to their distinctness from today's Finns, in a way that could be considered a third Otherness.²⁴

Castrén's essay *Utdrag ur Solovetska kloster-krönikan* is completely different from the rest. It is not an analysis but rather an overview of material for subsequent, more analytical approaches to 16th and 17th-century history. Published in 1843, the text was written immediately after Castrén's visit to Solovetsky Monastery in 1842 (see the 1841–1844 journey in a volume of travels in this series). In the 18th century, critical source analysis had gained a considerable international significance in historical research, an approach used by A.L. von Schlözer, Castrén's model in several respects.²⁵ The main representative of historical studies in Finland in Castrén's time was Gabriel Rein (1800–1867), who had published a chronology of the history of Finland up to 1523 as two academic dissertations in 1831²⁶, and Castrén's Solovetsky Chronicle forms, to some extent, a regional continuation of it. Castrén's survey is not, however, a real critical source analysis but occupies a place between source analysis and more explanatory accounts of historical material. Most importantly, Castrén did not use primary archival materials from the

- 20 Schlözer 1802b: 39–44; Lehrberg 1816: 29, 32–34.
- 21 Sjögren 1832a: esp. 268–276; Sjögren 1832b: esp. 493–496.
- 22 Branch 1973: 190–196, 263; Korhonen 1986: 46.
- 23 Рябинин 1997: 113–148; Saarikivi 2006: 29.
- 24 On construing Otherness in ethnography and its roots in evolutionism and colonialism, see Fabian 2014: 12–20.
- 25 Kemiläinen 1983: 50–52; Rytönen 1983.
- 26 Rein 1831.

- 27 Jussila 1983: 128–129.
 28 Klinge 2012: 118, 146, 217.

monastery but only the most recent publication of the history of the monastery, based on its chronicle.

Despite Castrén's shift in source material and methodology, in this essay he was continuing his earlier search for a demarcation line between Finns and Russians. The scope of his research was the areas where the Swedish-Russian border remained vaguely defined in the 16th century. Thus, the article can, in a broad sense, be seen as another part of the construction of the same narrative that had been built around the prehistory of Siberia and northern Russia. Its scope is the 16th and 17th century history of Finnish-Russian relations in the north according to the notes in a published version of the Solovetsky Monastery Chronicle.

Castrén as a historical thinker

Castrén's historical thinking was fundamentally based on the Romantic ideology of nations as main actors of history. On a practical level, Castrén was neither a historian nor an archaeologist in the present-day specialized understanding of these words, but he composed his interpretations by drawing from many different fields of study. Such polymathy is reflected especially in his articles on the *Zavoločeskaja čud'* and the original homeland of the Finnic peoples. This tradition had preceded Castrén, especially by such scholars as Schlözer, Ritter, and Sjögren, who, of course, each had their own emphases.

Castrén's relationship to contemporary and earlier Russian historiography was pragmatic. He cited Afanasij Mixajlovič Ščeka-tov (1753–1814), Nikolaj Mixajlovič Karamzin (1766–1826), and others when necessary, although he himself belonged to another tradition of research. According to Osmo Jussila, Karamzin wrote specifically about the state and Emperor, but not social history, also representing the Russian official nationalist view of history.²⁷ In these respects, Castrén differs radically from him.

In Castrén's scholarly career, historical and archaeological writings belong to the years 1843–1851, i.e. practically the final phase of his career, during which he was attempting to build a coherent synthesis of the Finno-Ugrian past. This synthesis was never completed, however, due to Castrén's early death in 1852. In a more general sense, constructing a new national(ist) view of the history of Finland and the Finns was fashionable only in the mid to late 19th century.²⁸ Castrén supplied society's demand, although he did not accept the most radical views of the younger Fennoman circles (see his university texts in this volume). Following the nationalist tradition, Castrén interpreted the past through a dichotomy of "us" and "the Others", which, along with the idea of progress and the

idea of a “national spirit”, were the main elements that Castrén’s interpretations of history and prehistory consisted of. The latter two appear above all in his *longue durée* syntheses of prehistory; in his shorter-term histories they remain marginal. One could assume his understanding of internal cultural development was a natural outgrowth of the concept of “national spirit”. Nevertheless, Castrén also acknowledged diffusion and external contacts as sources of development. In this way, he applied an international model to a specific object of study. However, this is only a superficial layer on his fundamentally nationalist way of thinking which appears in his understanding of grave types and his interpretation of the poetry of the peoples he is dealing with in his essay on the original homeland of the Finns.

Castrén’s aim in all of his work was to define the Finns through their history and areas of habitation. His ideological roots in this respect lay in the Romantic philosophy of Johann Gottfried von Herder.²⁹ Thus, his research questions were of an ethnic character. For Castrén, ethnic identity and language formed an inseparable pair, although in several of his writings he acknowledged the possibility that language could change without losing the essence of the original ethnic identity. Searching for a people’s origins meant, above all, seeking its original homeland and tracing its wanderings to the habitation areas where it is located in historical sources. The idea that material culture, language, and genetics are independent of each other and a change in one of them does not necessarily mean a change in another had gradually been established during the 20th century. Thus, no such original homelands can be discovered, as was believed during Castrén’s lifetime.³⁰

Castrén did not found an actual tradition or school of history or archaeology. In the field of archaeology, theoretical and methodological development occurred so rapidly that the approaches of the 1840s became completely outdated within 20 years. Moreover, the theoretical departure points for research on Siberia were redefined by the 1890s.³¹ On the other hand, Castrén’s, as well as Gabriel Rein’s, attention to eastern sources of the history of Finland endured by showing the way to later researchers, the first of whom was Aspelin, who began his career as a medievalist before turning to prehistoric archaeology.³² Castrén’s significance for historical research and archaeology lies above all in the ideological model he set for later scholars and the questions he raised. This formed the basis of a tradition that continued until the 20th century. Even if the theoretical and methodological approaches and conclusions changed and the question of an original homeland lost its significance, the field research tradition launched by Castrén was carried forward. To some extent it has been even been revived in our own times.³³

- 29 Nisbet 1999.
- 30 See, e.g., Carpelan 2002: 202–207.
- 31 Salminen 2003c.
- 32 Salminen 2003a.
- 33 Salminen 2003b; 2003c; 2006; 2007; 2009.