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The Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg as a Centre of Finno-Ugrian Studies, 1725-1860

Much is already known about the role of members of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg in gathering material about the languages, ethnography, history and social conditions of the peoples of northern Russia who spoke Finno-Ugrian languages. In his *Finnisch-Ugrische Sprachforschung von der Renaissance bis zum Neupositivismus* (1990), Günter Stipa has provided us with both a detailed record of materials that emanated from the activities of the Academy and their cultural-historical context.[1] Mikko Korhonen has analysed these materials, and many more besides, in his valuable synthesis of the evolution of a concept of Finno-Ugrian linguistic affinity in the period with which this paper is concerned.[2]

The intention here is to build on the work of Stipa and Korhonen and to argue, first, that it was no coincidence that the St Petersburg Academy acquired a role as a centre for Finno-Ugrian studies in the eighteenth century and, second, that it retained such a role until the second half of the nineteenth century when the centres of gravity shifted to Helsinki and Budapest. For almost 150 years, the Academy of Sciences together with bodies working under its aegis provided a scientific apparatus for the planning and execution of fieldwork. Over the same period, it assembled a library and an archive of Finno-Ugrian materials that was unsurpassed in Europe. For much of that time, it housed the world's largest single group of scholars with some professional interest in Finno-Ugrian matters. The Academy's terms of reference ensured that it had a monopoly of information about matters Finno-Ugrian since its *imprimatur* was required for almost any work published in Russia on scientific subjects. The Academy's regular review and discussion sessions provided a forum for systematic interdisciplinary debate of research in hand. Above all, the Academy supported publication of research in international languages — Latin, German and French — through grants or through inclusion in its various bulletins, acts and proceedings and ensured international circulation through exchange with other learned societies around the world.

This analysis is based on two factors. One, the driving force, was the exploration of Russia and Russia's development as a great power. This generated various dynamics. The most important of these concerned economic growth, security questions, political developments — especially with respect to nationalism — and education and science. The second factor was the particular individuals who adapted the dynamics of their day to their own purposes. The periodisation of the analysis falls into four phases: up to 1770; 1770-1800; 1800-1835; 1835-1860.

Up to 1770

The dominant dynamic during the first phase was, quite literally, the discovering of Russia. With the collapse of Swedish power in the North, Peter the Great had to consolidate his empire. For this he needed Western skills and had to develop an economy which would allow him to guarantee the well-being of his empire. But before any of this could be achieved, he had to know the extent of his empire and the variety of human and physical resources that it possessed. Liselotte Richter and Alexander Vucinich have demonstrated that the individual who had more influence than anyone else in shaping this process was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz. In a correspondence that lasted almost two decades, Leibnitz provided Peter the Great with a blueprint for westernising education in Russia.

A central pillar of this blueprint was scientific research. Leibnitz emphasized the importance of such work in improving the national economy. In a submission of 1716, he elaborated in much greater detail the nature of the scientific research that should be undertaken and thereby laid the intellectual foundations of the Academy which Peter was to found nine years later. To cite from Vucinich's summary of his recommendations, Leibnitz urged: 'the systematic collection of "linguistic" material necessary for the advancement of ancient history and ethnography; the study of earth magnetism and the incline of the compass, as an important step towards the improvement of navigation; the organization of astronomical observations; the advancement of geographical knowledge; systematic survey of the plants, animals, and ores of Russia and her southern neighboring areas; and (7) the translation into Russian of Western scientific and technical books that were known to be useful in the study of modern industrial technology.'

In addition to providing a blueprint for the work of the Academy of Sciences, Leibnitz also helped to shape the intellectual ethos in which such research was undertaken. Following the pattern of the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin,

Leibnitz emphasized the importance of an academy being at the apex of a hierarchy of educational systems. Secondly, Leibnitz's recommendations supported Peter's own view that an academy's first duty was to respond to the state's educational and scientific needs and that the academy should therefore be an agency of the state. This principle, which Vucinich calls 'scientific nationalism', is of great importance in understanding the final phase in the periodisation I have outlined — i.e. 1835-1860 — since it conflicts with the idea in many parts of the West that science should serve the whole of humanity rather one national group. But Peter, like Leibnitz, saw the Academy's role as 'improving the welfare of the /.../ people and earning them an honorable place in the family of nations.'[3]

The phase from 1725 to 1770 saw, either in the commission of the Academy or under its auspices, several journeys of exploration including the Great Northern Expedition of 1733-1743 to prepare detailed reports of the terrain and economic and human resources. The inclusion in the terms of reference of these expeditions of history, demography, languages and customs led to the gradual accumulation of data about peoples who spoke Finno-Ugrian languages. The authors are in most cases well known — Gottlieb Bayer, Samuel Gmelin, Daniel Messerschmidt, Vasilii Tatiščev, Gerhard Müller, Johann Eberhard Fischer — and their research was published either as individual volumes or in the Academy's various bulletins and proceedings. The research of this first phase of my suggested periodisation were synthesized by the German scholar August Ludwig Schlözer. After studying under Johan Ihre in Upsala, who had written on the history of the Finns and the Sami, Schlözer travelled to St Petersburg where he became Professor of Russian history before returning to the University of Göttingen in 1768 to take up the chair in the History of Eastern Europe. His *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte*, published in 1771, was to serve for many years as the most authoritative source of information about the history and distribution of the Finno-Ugrian peoples known to scholars of his day. Acknowledging Müller and Fischer as his most important sources, Schlözer classified the Finno-Ugrian peoples into fourteen groups: Sami, Finns, Karelians, Estonians, Ingrians, Livonians, Komi, Permyaks, Udmurt, Mari, Mordvins, Khanti, Mansi and Hungarians; Schlözer also included the Chuvash whom he linked to the Volga group.[4]

1770-1800

The dynamics which shaped developments in the next phase of my periodisation — 1770-1800 — continue in Russia to be the need to modernise and to gain what was

seen as its proper place among nations as the most populous country of Europe. Modernisation was given a new impetus by Western developments in technology and the beginnings of industrialisation. A second dynamic which at this time touched Russia less than the countries around it was the emergence of national identity as a means of political mobilisation. Though commonly associated with the work of Herder, identity linked to region, local language and culture had been evolving both in Europe and North America for much of the eighteenth century. The importance of Herder was as a catalyst. The effects of this rising force were to be of particular importance for three peoples — the Finns, Estonians and Hungarians — who were soon to look to Russia as the terrain on which they should seek fact to transform a regional consciousness into a national identity.

The demands put on the Academy of Sciences by modernisation are evident from scrutiny of the new publication series for the Academy's proceedings: *Acta Academiæ Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitanæ*. From the very first issue in 1778, a new and much more rigorous scientific approach is obvious. Increased attention is given in the first of two bulletins published in 1780 to the planning of large-scale projects and the methods by which they should be carried out. The Director of the Academy, S.G. Domashnev, presented a plan to compile a description of the whole of the empire, concentrating on state boundaries, history, governance and administration, physical geography, and economy (which includes zoology and botany). The plan makes it clear that part of the description should be prescriptive, that is to say, the authors should take into account what needs to be done to allow the state to exploit its resources. A committee consisting of several academicians, including Simon Peter Pallas, the Finn Erik Laxmann, Ivan Lepekhin, Johann Güldenstädt and Johann Georgi, was formed to work out these ideas in greater detail.[5]

The proposal drawn up by the committee can best be characterised as a 37-page expedition protocol. Although the Finno-Ugrian inhabitants of the empire are covered implicitly in each part of the protocol, they are the subject of specific reference in the historical section dealing with 'nations'. Under the heading 'Nations finlandoises', the authors identify three groups: the Finns of the Governments of Viipuri and St Petersburg; the Estonians of the Government of Tallinn and part of Livonia; and the Livonians of the Riga district. The section continues with five groups which are designated 'Nations qui descendent, à juger par la langue qu'elles parlent, des Finlandois': these so-called descendants of the Finns are listed as Sami, Komi, Udmurt, Mari, Chuvash, Tepters, Morvdvins, Khanti and Mansi.[6] A contribution to the Academy proceedings of the same year develops the link between the Ob Ugrian peoples and concludes with a reference to 'la grande tige Hongroise et Finnoise'.[7]

Developments of this kind owed much to the men on the drafting committee. Pallas had already travelled widely in Russia and his extensive writings in the 1770s include information about the Khanti, Mansi and Mordvins.[8] The hand of another member of the drafting committee, Georgi, is also apparent in the section on the Finno-Ugrian peoples. His *Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reichs, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten* (1776) contains an 83-page chapter, 'Finnische Nationen', about the peoples listed in the research protocol.[9] Lepekhin, too, had already undertaken major expeditions extending deep into Russia, visiting the Volga and Caspian basins, the Urals and the Archangel region.

The impact of the research protocol produced by this new generation of experienced scholar-explorers was to be far-reaching. First, it set out a structured approach to the exploration of Russia which was to serve as a model for successive generations of scholars from both within and outside the Academy of Sciences. In so far as the approach changed, it was in the division of activities with a concentration on a particular region or on a particular theme, leading to the major composite expeditions of the later nineteenth century such as Alexander Middendorff's expedition to Siberia which comprised several teams and lasted more than twenty years. As will be argued later, this model explains the form of many of Anders Johan Sjögren's writings. The collection of material on this basis also ensured that information relevant to the Finno-Ugrian peoples began to accumulate in St Petersburg, both in libraries and archives, and on a scale that was to be found nowhere else in Europe. Within only a few years of the preparation of the research protocol such information began to be published. Information about the Mansi, Komi and Permyaks, for example, is to be found in Lepekhin's writings of 1783.[10] Benedikt Franz Johann Hermann discusses the peoples 'von finnischer Herkunft' in his statistical description of Russia of 1790.[11] The greatest contribution of this kind and the clearest move towards specialisation in a single theme was made at this stage by Pallas himself with his announcement in 1785 of the project to publish a comparative vocabulary of all the languages of the world.[12] The second part, which appeared in 1789, contained information about the Finno-Ugrian languages.[13]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the duty of the Academy of Sciences to describe the empire in ever more scientific ways coincides with growing interests in Finland and Hungary to study the Finno-Ugrian languages and the people who speak them, but for quite different purposes — namely as part of the process of national identification. In both Finland and Hungary, during the 1770-1800 phase, scholars had started the process of creating a national history on the eighteenth-

century assumption that the so-called 'Finnish nations' shared a common origin. In his early writings, Henrik Gabriel Porthan had followed Schlözer's work but presenting new details drawn partly from research subsequent to Schlözer's and partly from his own observations. In his *Chronicon episcoporum* of 1787 and 1788, Porthan had extended Schlözer's pattern of relationship to include the Votes. He also wrote about the Sami in the first of what was intended to be a series of studies on the 'The Finnic Peoples of the North'. Apart from illuminating the early history of the Sami in Finland, the essay provides a more concise idea of what Porthan understood by 'Finnic', defining it as Sami, Bjarmians, Estonians, Kurlanders, Finns, Karelians, Ingrians and Votes.

In Hungary, Sámuel Gyarmathi, who like Porthan had also studied in Göttingen under Schlözer, built on the work of Joannis Sajnovics. While Porthan extended the pattern of Finno-Ugrian relationship from a historical point of view, Gyarmathi concentrated wholly on the nature of the linguistic relationship between these languages. For this task Gyarmathi not only made good use of Sajnovics's comparison of Hungarian and Lapp (1770), but also had at his disposal several new sources of material. These included the grammars of Mari and Udmurt produced by the Russian Church (1775) and access to Pallas's unpublished notes on the languages of Siberia. Gyarmathi described in detail the relationship between Hungarian, Sami, Finnish and Estonian. Although he had also advanced the wider Finno-Ugrian theory, it was with the reservation that more reliable and exhaustive descriptions of the grammar and syntax of these languages were required before the real nature of their affinity could be worked out. In Gyarmathi's view this could only be achieved by visiting the speakers of each of the Finno-Ugrian languages and studying them on the spot. Porthan had come to the same conclusion some years earlier in the section of his *Chronicon* dealing with the Mari.[14]

It is here that the Academy's interests in seeking a deeper understanding of Russia began to converge with the interests of a handful of Finnish scholars who wished to discover their historical origins. By 1795, Pallas was strongly of the view that the Academy needed to employ Finnish scholars to assist with its work of exploring Russia on the grounds that only Finns had the necessary linguistic skills to study people whose native languages belonged to the Finno-Ugrian group. Erik Laxman and others persuaded Pallas that Porthan was the person to undertake such work. Although Pallas secured the funding for an expedition, the invitation came too late. Both for personal reasons and because of the risk to his health — he was fifty-six — Porthan did not want to set out on so arduous a journey. Nevertheless, in declining the invitation he emphasized how important such an expedition was and expressed the

hope that 'an intelligent young man might undertake such a journey before the various peoples were completely assimilated by the Russians.'[15]

1800-1835

The idea of a Finn undertaking research in northern Russia in the service of the Academy of Sciences marks a convergence of Finnish and Russian priorities which was to grow and increasingly to flourish for most of the third period of my periodisation, 1800-1835. On the Russian side, the interest remained for most of this period the gathering of knowledge about Russia. With the implementation of Nicholas I's policy of official Russian nationalism towards the end of that phase, however, the interest would begin to change and the happy coincidence of interests would begin to diverge. For the Finns, the desire to learn more about their origins was evolving into a movement intent on the shaping of a Finnish national identity through the construction of a national history and a national culture. Whatever the turn of political events, this dynamic would certainly have continued to grow. However, the annexation of Finland as a Grand Duchy of Russia in 1809 and the liberal attitude of Alexander I to the Finn's cultivation of a national identity gave it powerful impetus.

The first stage in the process of constructing a Finnish national identity — what I have called elsewhere the Herderian phrase — occurs at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and culminates in 1835 in the inter-linked literary and scholarly output of three men: Anders Johan Sjögren, Elias Lönnrot and Johan Ludwig Runeberg. Sjögren's role in this tripartite process was to work out a national history of the Finns.[16] Educated by men who had absorbed Porthan's ideas, an active member himself of the Turku Romantic movement and a remarkably gifted linguist, Sjögren obtained firsthand experience of other speakers of Finno-Ugrian languages when he visited Ingria as a student in 1816 He returned to Åbo Akademi imbued with the Romantic ambition to devote himself to the study of the history of the Finns.

Sjögren's determination coincided with a renewal of interest in Russia to employ Finnish scholars to collect materials relevant to Russian history. In this particular instance, the idea came not from the Academy but from a wealthy aristocrat, Count Nikolai Rumiantsev, who had set up a special commission in 1811 under the auspices of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to collect documents relating to Russian legal matters, and to edit and publish them.[17] In 1816, like Pallas some twenty years before, Rumiantsev had concluded that the archival work in northern Russia could best be accomplished by Finns. On the suggestion of Bishop Jakob Tengström, he

agreed to engage Gustav Renvall and E.G. Ehrström. Although circumstances forced Renvall and Ehrström to withdraw from the expedition, Rumiantsev did not give up the idea. In order to encourage other Finns to think of this possibility, he undertook to donate to the library of Åbo Akademi copies of all the works published in Russia about the country's Finno-Ugrian inhabitants. Bishop Tengström shared Rumiantsev's determination that the expedition should take place and wrote to a leading member of the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, Friedrich von Adelung, that he thought there would be an opportunity of finding a Finn ready to travel within two or three years.[18]

Sjögren, who was well informed of such developments, made it his ambition to undertake such a journey. After graduating in 1819, he moved to St Petersburg and before long had obtained employment as Rumiantsev's librarian. He went about achieving his aim single-mindedly and quickly worked his way into the confidence of two influential members of the Academy: the linguist, Friedrich von Adelung, and Philip Krug, a specialist in Russian history. By the early 1820s, a close link also appears to have been taking shape between the historical commission set up by Rumiantsev and the Academy of Sciences, since in 1828 the Academy drew up a plan which would continue the commission's work with a five-year programme of more intensive searches for documents in provincial archives and monasteries.[19]

In 1823, with the help of the Minister for Finnish Affairs in St Petersburg, Count Robert Rehbinder, Sjögren succeeded in obtaining a grant from the special fund of the Finnish Treasury set aside for the Tsar's private disposition to travel and undertake research in northern Russia.[20] The journey started in 1824 and lasted five years. As a venture it was a skilful marriage of Finnish and Russian interests. The ideas in the journey application are a programme for answering questions posed by Porthan about the origins of the Finns and their route into Finland. The methods by which Sjögren intended to find answers are an exposition of Herder's thinking on the need to use language, folk song and folk culture as auxiliaries to documentary materials. Yet the ideas are presented in such a way that they also satisfy Russian requirements. Moreover, the diligence with which Sjögren searched the most remote monastery archives for documents and the form of the reports he published during and after his journey focus on questions of direct interest to the Academy of Sciences. Correspondence with several members of the Academy throughout the duration of the journey also demonstrate Sjögren's keen awareness that on completion of his journey, he would only be able to continue his research and to publish with the support of the Academy.

Travelling by carriage, cart, horseback, boat, sledge and on foot, Sjögren covered twelve thousand kilometres. His route took him from Novgorod north through Karelia and Finland into Lapland, south-east across the Kola Peninsula to White Sea Kem' and thence around the White Sea to Archangel; north to Mezen'; south-east to Ust'Syssolsk and Perm before returning to St Petersburg by a southern route via Kazan' and Vologda. Shortly after his return, he achieved his ambition of being appointed to the staff of the Academy of Sciences, first as adjunct in Russian history and from 1832 as extraordinary academician in the same subject. Of all his countrymen, he was now uniquely placed to write about their history. Of all the Russians of his generation, he was best qualified and uniquely experienced to handle the historical documentation project taken on by the Academy the previous year, 1828, and placed in the charge of Sjögren's most powerful patron and the head of the section in the Academy responsible for the documentation project — Philip Krug. The convergence of Finnish and Russian interests had reached its apogee.

Sjögren's first five years in the service of the Academy of Sciences were spent in writing up the results of his travels in the North. In this work, both his approach and his achievement epitomised the convergence of Finnish and Russian interests. Using the Academy's research protocols, Sjögren was able to combine earlier theories about the history of the Scandinavian and Russian North with new information about constitutional and social history, language, culture and economy to produce a many-sided portrait of a whole region. The first of such works, *Anteckningar om församlingarne i Kemi-Lappmark*, which had appeared in 1828 while he was still travelling and his long study of the Komi, *Die Syrjänen*, provide further examples of the Academy's regional reports, covering matters such as meteorology, construction of transport systems, agricultural development and popular entertainment in addition to historical documentation and analysis and the first scientific description of the Komi language.

While Russian priorities were satisfied in respect of documentation, analysis and presentation of economically and politically significant material, the exponents of the Finnish national cause could extract, and did extract, from his writings of the years 1828-1834 a history of the Finnic peoples. Against the background of a more sophisticated pattern of Finno-Ugrian affinity, to which he had added the Vepsians, Sjögren elaborated Porthan's thinking, following the same directions and developing the idea of a once powerful and wealthy Finnish people inhabiting the shores of the Dvina River near Archangel. In various works he shows how this 'golden age' was brought to an end by Slavic peoples coming from the south and forcing the Finnic peoples from their homes, killing or assimilating them. In other works, he