Finland

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Finland is the most easterly of the Nordic countries—a land of woods and women if we are to believe Adam of Bremen and some of his commentators. Finland was unknown to most Europeans during the Viking Age and, to those who did know about it, it was a land of mists and monsters. Swedes and Gotlanders were the only people who were more knowledgeable about the inhabitants of Finland. They were probably the only ones who realized that the Finns were not Saami, but people very similar to Scandinavians. Their language was different, but there were certainly some people along the coast of Finland who understood Swedish and traded with the Scandinavians.

Written records tell us very little about the Finns. If Scandinavian sagas and other written records were the only sources for Viking Age and medieval Finland, we would believe that there was a land called Finland, that it was periodically conquered by the Swedes, and that its kings had eligible daughters who could be married to Swedish kings—unhappily for them—and whose sons could become kings. We should also know that there were powerful witches and wizards, and also independent women who apparently liked men but who did not wish to marry (the dream, perhaps, of sailors and merchants!). When these women had children their daughters were very beautiful but their sons were monsters, with heads in the middle of their bodies.

In the far north, Finnish chieftains competed with Scandinavians for the furs of Lappland. Sometimes they were rivals, at other times they formed alliances against the Karelians. When a Norwegian king, St Olaf, tried to exact tribute, the Finns fled to the forests where they could defend themselves. Their witches and shamans conjured up a great storm and only the royal luck of St Olaf saved his ships from disaster. Later, the same Finns antagonized the Pope because they did not want to maintain the Christian faith once there were no armed bands to remind them of it.

Histories relate that St Erik, a Swedish king, conquered Finland in the middle of the twelfth century (cat. no. 536), and that his bishop, St Henry, baptized the Finns; but this is probably a much later story created to enhance the dignity of St Erik and his royal line. The Danes are also said to have conquered 'Finland' at the end of the twelfth century, but their dominance must have been short-lived.

The picture given by archaeology is different, and more diversified. It does not show us kings, shamans and witches, but a virtually egalitarian society with farmers and soldiers, hunters and traders, potters and weavers. Nor does it show signs of Swedish conquest—central-Swedish culture of a true Viking Age type only became dominant on the Åland islands.

Finns and Saami—permanent settlements and the wilderness

The Finns lived mainly in the southern part of the Finnish mainland, along the sea coast and on the shores of inland lakes. To the east and north lived hunters and fishers who may either have been ancestors of the Saami (Lapps) or of some other branch of the widespread Finno-Ugrians. Before the Slavs migrated to the north, vast areas of northern Europe formed the hunting and fishing territories of Finnish tribes, many of which, in contrast to the Finns in Finland, became extinct through assimilation with other peoples.

The Finns in Finland had begun to cultivate cereals long before the beginning of our era, and wheat, barley, rye and oats were grown during the Viking Age. Although they mainly practised slash-and-burn cultivation, there must also by then have been permanent fields. One of the areas with such fields was Eura, where most of the richest Viking-age remains are to be found.

Animals played a prominant part in burial ceremonies. From the material found in burial contexts we know that all the most important domestic animals were kept—cattle, horses, sheep/goats and pigs. Dogs were also buried with many of the men and some women, but no traces of cats have been found.

One animal, not domesticated but apparently very important to the Finns, was the bear. There are bears' teeth and claws among the bones from cremation cemeteries, and bears' teeth and bronze pendants modelled on them were attached to the breast-chains and clothes of the women. Strange clay artifacts, some of them resembling bears' paws, have been found on the Åland islands (cat. no. 234–7). Similar objects, rather more like beavers' paws, have been found frequently in cemeteries of the Finnic tribes of central Russia (cat. no. 298).

Finnish folklore and ethnology record that the killing of a bear was accompanied by special rites, including great feasts. The bear had many pet names, and it was believed that its paws, teeth and grease had healing properties. Such

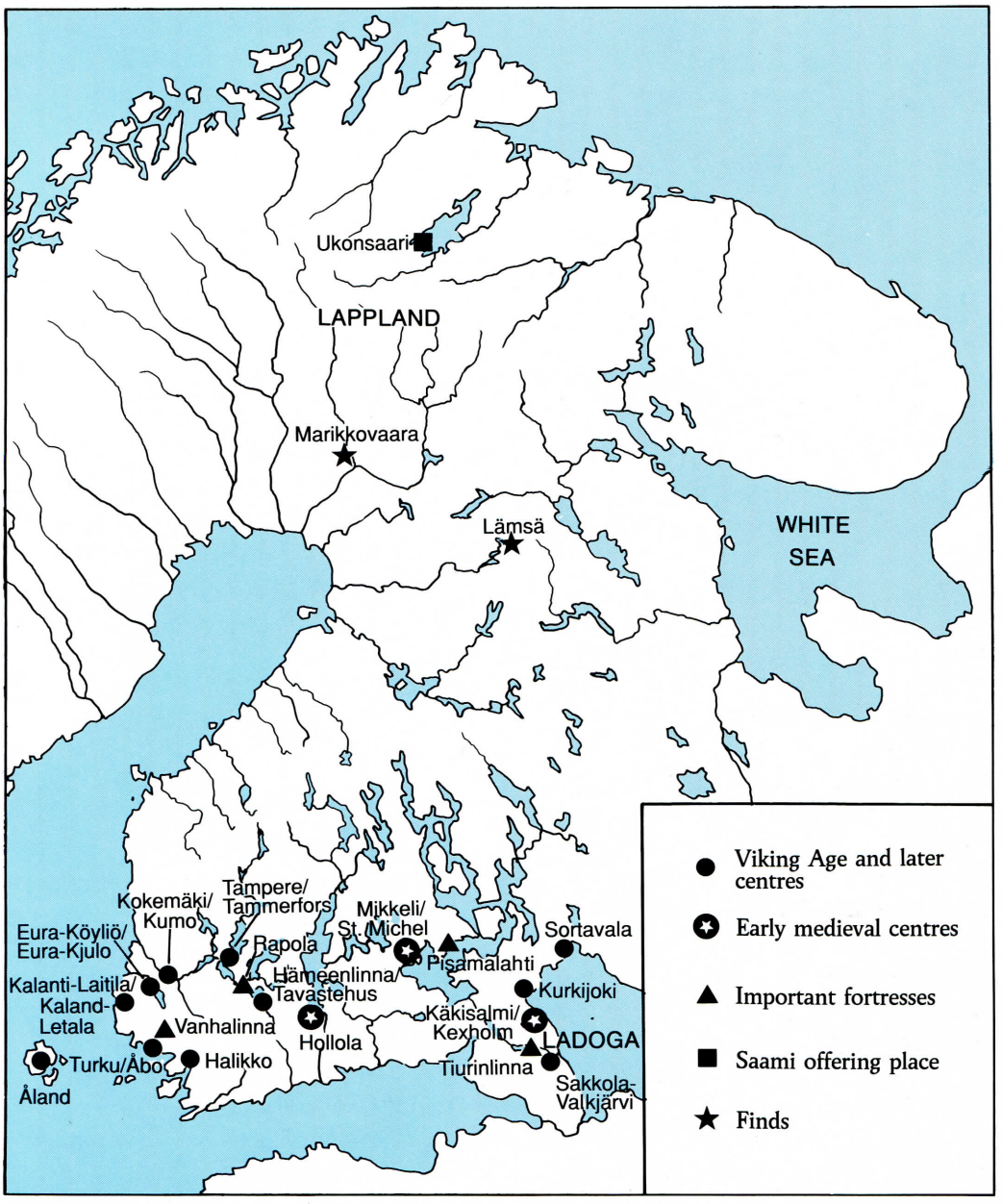

Fig. 1. Finland.

beliefs are probably reflected in the burial customs.

The Finns also hunted elk—the hides of which were often used to line the bottoms of graves—and other fur-bearing animals such as squirrel, sable, marten and fox. Their furs probably produced the surplus which enabled the Finns to acquire the fine west-European weapons which are found in their later Iron Age cemeteries (cat. no. 214, 220, 558).

Most of the Viking Age and early medieval objects discovered in Finland have been excavated in cemeteries. There are almost no hoards with Arabic coins, and, although there are several eleventh-century silver hoards containing western coins and jewellery, these are small compared with those of Scandinavia.

Only a few Iron Age settlements are known; most of them are probably still occupied by modern dwellings. There are many hill-forts on steep, rocky hills beside bays and lakes, but few can have been permanently occupied and they were only resorted to in times of danger. Their most easily accessible slopes were protected by stone ramparts surmounted by timber walls and on their crests warning fires could be lit in times of danger.

Most of the hill-forts are unexcavated, and settlement sites also have mainly been dug on a small scale. Somewhat larger excavations, however, have recently been carried out on two settlements, both in the lake district of Tavastia. Varikkoniemi, in the present town of Hämeenlinna, has been equated with the town of Vanai mentioned in the Early Russian chronicles.

The settlement at Rapola in Valkeakoski (near to the largest hill-fort in Finland the ramparts of which are more than 1000 m long) must have been very large and had a long history. The earliest finds are from the fourth century, but its *floruit* must have been in the Viking Age and later. The hill-fort itself was probably the central fortress of the province of Tavastia.

The most important market centres must, however, have lain near the coast. A concentration of finds suggests that one of them was on the River Aura, in the present town of Turku (Åbo). Nearby is one of the most important hill-forts, known as the Old Castle of Lieto, which seems to have been permanently occupied at least for some time.

Another centre was near the small town of Uusikaupunki, in the Kalanti-Laitila area. This part of Finland seems to have had the closest contacts with the Swedes during the pre-Viking and Viking Ages, and many types of brooch and other ornaments originated there. New weapon types spread to the interior of Finland by way of the parishes of Kalanti, Laitila and Eura, and thence along the river Kokemäenjoki.

The importance of the Turku and Halikko regions increased in the eleventh century, when new centres also began to appear in the interior. One of these was on the site of the present town of Tampere; another lay at the southern end of Lake Päijänne near the town of Lahti; and a third on the north-west shore of Lake Saimaa where the town of Mikkeli now stands.

From the beginning of the Viking Age, permanent settlements were established on the north-west shore of Lake Ladoga, but they did not develop into really important centres until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A few very rich finds discovered at the end of the nineteenth century have enabled the Karelian culture of the Crusading period to be distinguished from that of western Finland. It has since been realized that many of the so-called Karelian forms had earlier prototypes in the Tavastian area, and that the contacts between the different centres of Finland were of a more permanent and peaceful nature than suggested by the scanty references in the Old Russian chronicles.

Fig. 2. The fortress at Pisamalahti, Sulkava, Savolax. In Finland fortresses usually lie beside waterways and on high outcrops with steep sides. The most exposed slopes were defended with stone walls and probably also with wooden palisades.

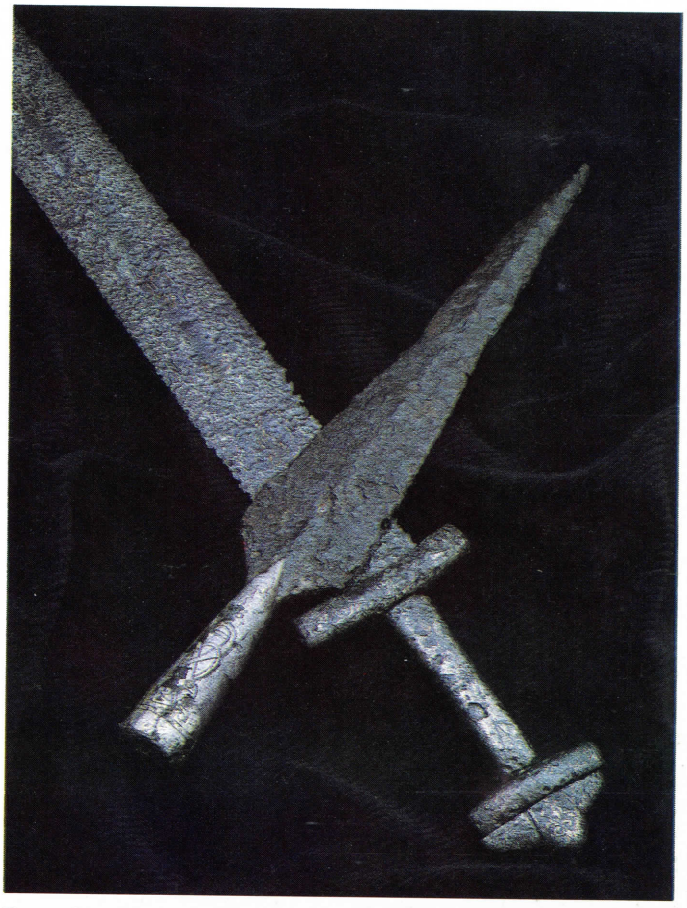

Fig. 3. Sword and spearhead with silver encrustation. 11th cent. Cat. no. 228, 229a.

Burial rites and personal property

Burial customs can be used to illustrate the close contacts between Karelia and western Finland. From the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia to the shores of Lake Ladoga the dead were buried in cairns, in cemeteries on level ground, or in flat graves. Both cremation and inhumation were practised, although cremation was predominant at first.

Cremation cemeteries on level ground were commonest; the remains of the pyre were covered either with thick layers of stone or with thinly scattered stones. Sometimes there are no stones and the cemeteries consist of large areas of ash and charcoal with broken and fire-damaged artifacts. The remains of a single burial pyre were generally scattered over the cemetery, but occasionally they were deposited in a specific grave.

In the coastal zone of south-west Finland, some people were cremated in boats—their remains being scattered over the cemeteries, a custom that was practised in Finland from

at least the end of the sixth century. No inhumation burials in boats, nor boats under mounds (as found in Sweden and Norway) are known from Finland. In the interior of Finland, the custom of burying the dead in cairns of stone and earth continued until the twelfth century. Some of the cairns contain a single burial, others contain more burials, and both cremation and inhumation are known. In the Åland archipelago, cremations were covered by mounds; in this, as in other matters, the Åland islanders followed the customs of the Swedes.

Cremation cemeteries with their scattered remains are of little use for dating purposes but, fortunately, there is one part of Finland where inhumation was almost the sole rite. In the parishes of Eura and Köyliö, at the north end of Lake Pyhäjärvi in south-west Finland, the dead began to be inhumed from the end of the sixth century. An early Viking Age inhumation cemetery is also known from the south end of Lake Pyhäjärvi. Many of the most spectacular finds from the Finnish late Iron Age come from these cemeteries (cat. no. 200–3).

The appearance of inhumation graves in the middle of a country which originally had an almost exclusive custom of cremation has been the cause of much speculation. The similarity of the inhumations to the *Reihengräber* (literally: graves set in rows) of western Europe, and the new types of weapon which they contain, have been taken to indicate an influx of foreign soldiers with innovative customs and weapons. Nevertheless, Finland's culture soon became uniform and independent, and in the Viking Age similar artifacts were buried in both inhumation and cremation cemeteries.

From the beginning of the eleventh century inhumations were deposited in earlier cremation cemeteries; and some decades later the people of western Finland began to bury their dead in separate inhumation cemeteries. Belfries were erected in some of these, indicating the change to Christian practices. In some parts of Finland, however, the dead still continued to be buried clothed in their gala clothes, whilst in Karelia they were still provided with weapons and tools.

The long-lasting tradition of inhumation burial with grave-goods, and the fashion of decorating garments with small bronze spirals, has meant that we now know a good deal about Viking Age and early medieval dress. Although no complete garments are known, many early Finnish female dresses have been reconstructed (fig. 5).

A man may have been clothed in two smocks, with a belt and garters of colourful wool, decorated with spirals. His most handsome garment was his cloak: dyed blue, bordered with brighly-coloured braids, and decorated with small ornamental bronze spirals. It was fastened with a large

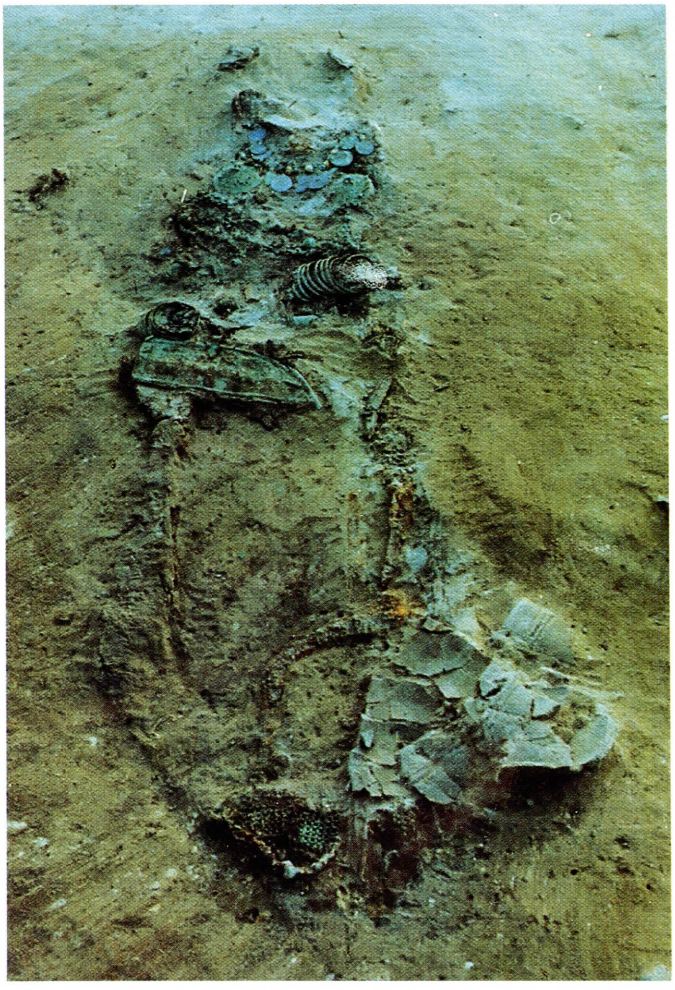

Fig. 4. Female grave from Luistari, Eura. Cat. no. 200. Excavation photo, cf. fig. 5.

penannular brooch, usually of bronze but sometimes plated with silver.

Some male cloaks were fastened with ringed pins decorated with Scandinavian type animal ornament (cat. no. 201). These pins were popular among the men who travelled to the East, and a fragment of a Finnish penannular brooch found on the island of Berezan in the Black Sea (cat. no. 312) suggests that there were Finns among the men who sailed along the great rivers of Russia. Finns had eastern contacts long before the Swedes appeared on the shores of Lake Ladoga.

Even before silver became popular in the eleventh century, the brooches used by men to fasten their cloaks had long been made of silver. But the fashion for cloaks was soon replaced by that for coats, open at the front and fastened by small buttons, often in the form of tinkling bells.

Male dress-fashion seems mostly to have reflected that

current around the Baltic Sea, but female fashion was more conservative. Throughout the Viking Age and later, women continued to wear the traditional mantle-dress resembling the Greek *peplos*, and only their jewellery and the amount of spiral decoration changed throughout that period (cat. no. 200, 220).

As in Scandinavia, Finnish women wore three brooches as dress fasteners, but they never adopted the Scandinavian oval brooches. Round brooches came into fashion in Finland at the end of the eighth century, and this continued to be the dominant shape throughout the Viking Age. The most popular purely ornamental objects were bead necklaces and finger-rings. The abundant use of ring ornaments and spiral decoration on clothing was a feature which the Finns had in common with their southern neighbours (cat. no. 249–50), and is a fashion which distinguishes them from the Scandinavians. Small bronze wire spirals were sewn onto garments almost everywhere where Finno-Ugrians lived, including Latvia.

This fashion came to Finland at the beginning of the Viking Age. At first the ornaments were small and rather simple, but in the tenth century men's cloaks, waistbands and garters were decorated with complicated interlaced ornaments, and at the beginning of the eleventh century the hems of women's aprons were decorated with large spiral appliqués. But it was not until the late eleventh century that women's cloaks with rich spiral decorations came into fashion in western Finland. These cloaks, with their spiral borders and applied roundels, stars, and crosses, seem to have been copied from the cloaks worn by the Madonna in Byzantine art. Perhaps some of the icons of the Eastern Church had fascinated Finnish travellers who then described them at home, their verbal images being skilfully transformed into ornament.

Traits indicative of contacts with continental fashion can also be seen. In the twelfth century the women wore a circular silver brooch, at the neck of their tunic, as depicted in contemporary manuscript illumination. The circular silver brooch became an essential part of female costume in eastern Finland, but it was often imported from Gotland or the Swedish mainland.

The abundant grave-goods also include many Iron Age tools (cat. no. 204–11). Knives and agricultural implements such as sickles, scythes and shears, are the commonest; but carpenters' and smiths' tools are also found, although not as frequently as in Norway.

Finns were not buried with their horses, but some graves contain bridle-bits, which might reflect a belief that there would be horses in the next world, and that they could then be mounted. Many men were buried with their dogs.

Fig. 5. Female clothing reconstructed on the basis of the finds from a grave in Luistari, Eura, Finland (cat. no. 200). It represents Finnish fashion at the beginning of the 11th cent. All the articles of clothing are of wool and the details are copied from the finds in one grave. The reconstructed dress is as similar as possible to the original; for example, the yarn was spun as the original and dyed with vegetable dyes. The basic design of the garment was the same throughout the Finnish area. The archaic dress, known as the Greek peplos, *was used in both west and east Finland. The chain-decorations with round brooches and spiral-ornamented apron are also important elements which distinguish the Viking Age Finnish female dress from the Scandinavian.*

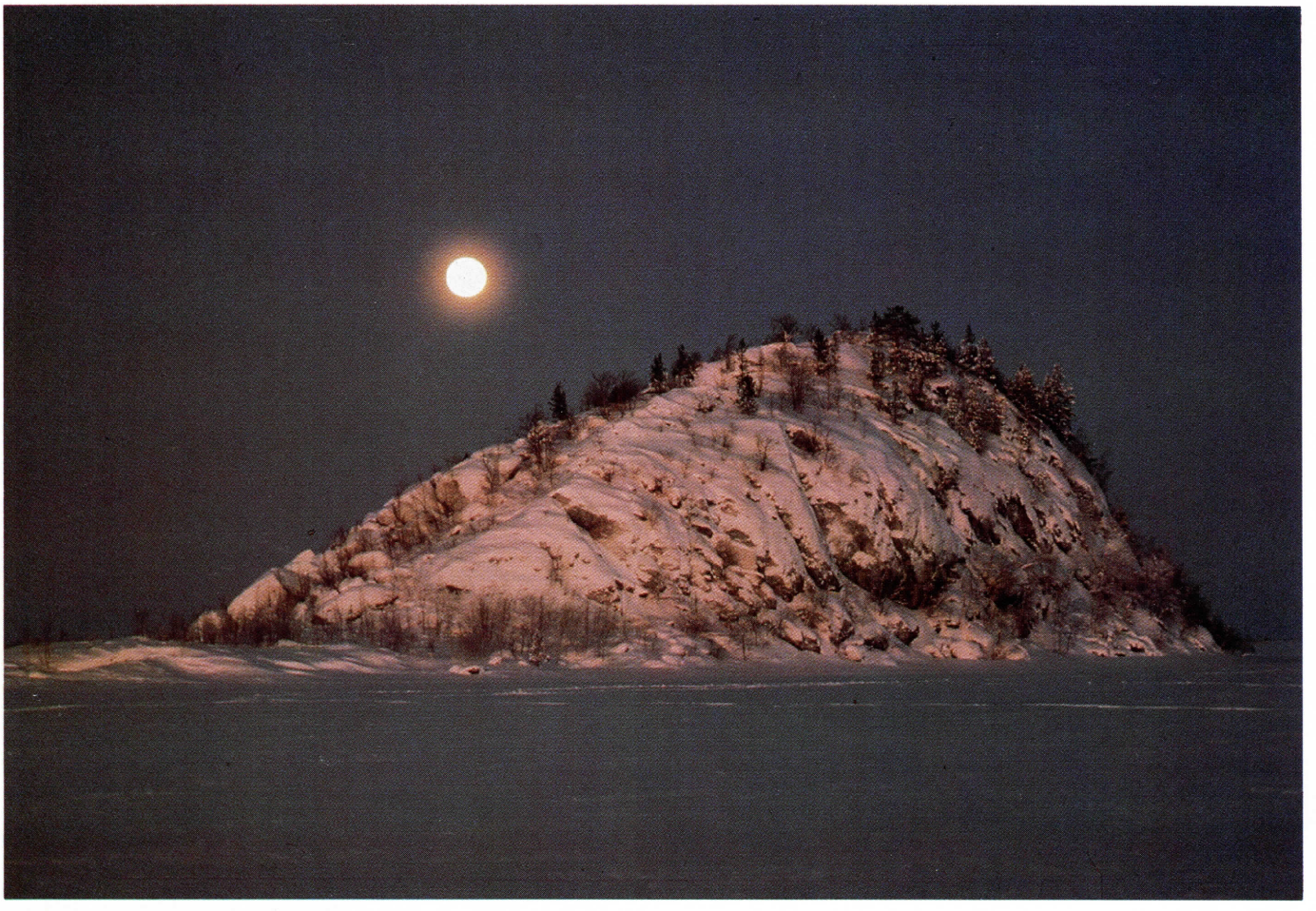

Fig. 6. The island of Ukonsaari in Lake Enare, Lappland, Finland. On the island was a Saami cult-site in a cave containing antler, animal bones and animal teeth. A semi-circle of reindeer antlers was found outside the cave.

The other bones in graves do not represent complete animals, often just the skull is found, perhaps symbolic of a complete animal. Some bones may be the remains of food provided for the dead.

The containers found in graves were probably for food and drink. The carbonized remains found in some of them include crushed barley, hops, and raspberries; perhaps the components for a type of beer.

Fishermen, swordsmen, wealthy women

The Finnish table was apparently provided with many types of fish, not necessarily of types available locally. When salmon teemed in the rivers, men travelled miles to catch them. These men covered even greater distances on skis when they went out hunting, or they travelled by boat on the lakes and rivers of the Finnish wilderness (cat. no. 7, 21–2).

Some graves have been found in the vast wildernesses of the Finnish interior, and indicate that there must have been settlements there in the Viking Age. They probably represent buildings in which the hunters from southern Finland sheltered, either when hunting in the interior or when travelling to the more northerly regions in Lappland to collect furs which would be transported to the coast in favourable weather.

Many axes have been found far from permanent settlements. They indicate the routes followed by hunters and slash-and-burn cultivators. These finds are concentrated along the important waterways as far as northern Finland,

where silver hoards and cemeteries of western Finnish type have also been found in Kuusamo, for instance (cat. no. 240), and Suomussalmi. An important meeting place for hunters and traders probably existed in this area.

The Finns' activities in Lappland may date from long before the Viking Age, but it was only then that the Finns began to exploit their wilderness to the full. About the beginning of the ninth century the trade routes to European markets opened up and the Finns could then exchange their furs for desirable commodities, especially swords. From the last decades of the eighth century Frankish pattern-welded swords had begun to arrive in Finland; and, later, swords inlaid with names such as *Ulfberht*, *Ingelrii*, *Inno*, *Beno*, and *Gicelin*, and also with Latin inscriptions, show their origins (cat. no. 214, 558). Some may have been provided with hilts in Scandinavia, others were hilted in Finland. Contrary to what has been claimed, the manufacture of weapons in Finland did not end at this time, but most spearheads and axes continued to be made in Finnish workshops following models current throughout Scandinavia (cat. no. 212–3).

The prevalence of these weapons in Finland has led to speculations about a foreign, probably Scandinavian, military caste living in Finland during the Viking Age. But, Scandinavian burial mounds are unknown in Finland, apart from on the Åland islands, and very few Scandinavian female ornaments have been found. Weapon graves were not new in the Viking Age; Finnish men had been buried with weapons from the beginning of the Iron Age.

It is true, however, that the genes of the western Finns are nearly (up to 75%) the same as the Swedes', the result of many various and close contacts. These contacts, however, have lasted for many thousands of years, and as Finns still speak Finnish today the Scandinavian influence must be seen as the result of a continuous infiltration of Scandinavian genes into Finnish blood rather than an overwhelming dominance of Scandinavian language and culture. Perhaps the sagas are correct in speaking of Finnish mothers and Swedish fathers. The language is the mother tongue, even though the fathers supply half the genes!

There is also archaeological support for the sagas when they describe the independent character of the Finnish women who were fatal to Swedish kings. Each of two women's graves found in the interior of Finland contained two swords. The swords are not commonplace ones, but richly ornamented and worthy of a chief (cat. no. 220, 230). All the other artifacts in these graves were normal Finnish female ornaments—but one contained a knife and a sickle, and the other a knife and shears. Both graves date from the second half of the eleventh century when there is also a female grave containing scales, weights, and a purse.

Fig. 7. Jewellery from a female grave in Tuukkala, St Michel, Finland. C. 1200. The jewellery is characteristic of the dress of the Crusade period in east Finland. Cat. no. 221. Pointed-oval shoulder-brooches are typical in this region; in west Finland small penannular brooches were used.

Women's graves became richer and richer during the Viking Age, not only in jewellery but also in tools and other furnishings. In the early Viking Age, for example, dogs, cattle and bridle-bits occur only in male graves; by the eleventh century a woman could be accompanied by a dog, her funeral could have been celebrated with roast beef, and she could have a bridle for her mount in the future world.

There were obviously wealthy and esteemed women in Finland at that time; but what of those men called 'kings' in the sagas? Were there really Finnish kings, or were the beautiful women whom the Swedish kings married simply the daughters of yeomen to whom the title of king was given as a status symbol? There are, as we have seen, no princely graves in Finland, but many weapon-graves contain fine swords. These are so common in Lower Satakunta, the

Fig. 8. Silver-inlaid weapons from 11th–12th cent. The sword was found in Eura and the axe in Masku, Finland. Cat. no. 231, 233.

Eura-Köyliö area, that it has been suggested that a royal *hird* (bodyguard) lived there.

There is further evidence for a concentration of power. When the Swedes consolidated their rule over Finland in the thirteenth century, an ancient system of taxation of Finnish, not Scandinavian, origin already existed. As we know from modern society, taxes will not be paid unless there is a strong central power to collect them.

The numerous hill forts also imply co-operation, and thus there must have been some centralized power; but we do not know whether this power was wielded by a king, as in other Northern countries, or by a council of elders. Archaeology suggests the latter.

Ancient magic and Christianity

According to folklore the most important people in Finland were magicians who could foretell the future, heal the sick, and announce the propitious times for the start of important enterprises. But they were not the only ones who could act as mediators between the people of this world and the spirits. Every tree, every bush, every beast, had its own spirit; and every person could, and had to, propitiate them with sacrifices and magical verses.

With all this magic and all these spirits, the Finns lived more or less happily with their neighbours. We do not know when they first heard of Christ; but Christian symbols began to spread in Finland much earlier than did the Christ-

Fig. 9. Reliquary containing St Erik's lower jaw, from Åbo (Turku) Cathedral, Finland. Cat. no. 536. St Erik was slain in Uppsala in 1160; according to legend he and Bishop Henrik together converted the Finns.

ian Eucharist. Cruciform decorations on brooches appear as early as about 800, and the earliest cruciform pendants have been found in eleventh-century graves (cat. no. 222, 224). These graves, however, are amply furnished with grave-goods, and both pagans and Christians probably existed alongside each other in Finland for a long time.

Archaeology shows that the people of northern Finland proper (Varsinais Suomi), the Kalanti-Laitila area, ceased to bury the dead with grave-goods as early as the eleventh century, and few furnished burials are known from the beginning of the twelfth century in Eura-Köyliö-Kokemäki. This part of Finland may have had such close connections with the Swedes that Christianity was adopted here earlier than anywhere else.

The southern part of Finland proper, around Turku, has been described as the centre of pagan belief, but crosses and pendant crucifixes have been found in graves there, and an early twelfth-century cemetery in Lieto is thought to be Christian. Christians and pagans probably lived side by side at first, but when the Church began to demand not only burial without grave-goods but also the payment of tithes, the Finns were not so accommodating. In both the Legend of St Erik and the old folk poem on the murder of St Henry, the murderer Lalli is said to have been Christian. Lalli murdered the bishop because he had demanded board and lodging, by force, in Lalli's own house. This happened in Köyliö. In the neighbouring parish of Eura, people continued to be buried in the pagan cemetery of Luistari for at least two centuries after the transition to Christian burial customs. They wanted to rest alongside their ancestors, even if they had to relinquish the deposition of grave-goods.

In southern Finland proper and in Tavastia, furnished burials continued until the end of the twelfth century; and in eastern Finland and Karelia some graves contained grave-goods as late as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Finns were set in their ways, and it took a couple of centuries and many battles before the Christian Church and Swedish rule were established. For many hundreds of years after that, the growing of crops, the hunting of game, and the catching of fish still demanded the help of the old gods. In eastern Finland, the Eastern and Western Church fought over the souls of the people; in this region, in particular, the old beliefs and traditions maintained their power.