

# **Old Finnish: historical and sociolinguistic background**

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# Take a look at the texts...

- Who are the Finns in Agricola's preface?
- What do you think Finland is in Ljungo's law translation?
- Who are the Finns and Finland in Lizelius' 1775 text?

# In the beginning

Finns are one Finnic tribe among others (e.g. Tavastians, Karelians), probably each with their own mythological origins (traces in folk-poetry, e.g. the fight between Kalervo and Untamo in the Kullervo cycle).

Finnish language: not a discrete branch of Finnic, but rather a literary language (with a composite dialectal background) governing an area with various closely related Finnic languages (difference between Turku dialect and Savo bigger than between e.g. Ingrian and Viena Karelian).

This reflects Agricola's perspective (who has an inside view of Finland).

# Then

Finland as Sweden's "eastern half": everything east of the Bothnic sea that was under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Turku (fluid borders).

Finns as any Christian inhabitant under that jurisdiction (number could suddenly rise with e.g. the conversion of inland Sámi in 17<sup>th</sup> century Savo).

This is an outsider view (the Swedish King and government bureaucracy).

# And then

Swedish power waning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Finns start to think of themselves as a nation with scientifically debatable (not mythological) origins (early Romanticism).

The outsider view becomes the insider view.

*Svenskar äro vi icke längre, ryssar vilja vi icke bli, låt oss alltså vara finnar*  
(Adolf Ivar Arwidsson 1791-1858).

# What happened inbetween?

A lot, but primarily:

- **Christianization:** Finland becomes part of a common cultural-religious sphere, enabling the transfer of ideas and written texts and creating a need for a written religious domain of language that was not there before.
- **Finland became a part of Sweden (and was then lost to it):** part of a state with a very uniform religious policy (first Catholic, then Lutheran), a specific legislation (medieval county laws – late-medieval Land and City laws – 1734 Swedish law), a highly stratified society with possibilities for upward mobility, and an educational system (first monasteries, then schools and universities).

# Christianization

Originally likely from the east (Novgorod):

- Much Christian vocabulary common to Finnic (*risti*, *pappi*, *raamattu*) and of Slavic origin, suggesting Finnic (dialectal) unity during christianization efforts from Novgorod (not earlier than approx. 900)
- Slavic origins for toponyms of important ecclesiastical centres (*Turku*, possibly *Koroinen*), suggesting the Novgorod mission reached the west coast of Finland.

(image: Koroinen, Wikimedia Commons)



# War and peace across the Bothnian

Movement of peoples:

- Swedish immigration to coastal areas beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, possibly originating initially from Hälsingland.
- Finnish presence in medieval Swedish towns (e.g. Arboga).

War:

- Finnic raids into Mälardalan area, destruction of Sigtuna in 1187. Response: foundation of Stockholm.
- Swedish "crusades" into Finland, culminating into Birger Jarl's conquest of Tavastia after 1238.

Mythological justification: the murder of bishop Henrik by the Finnish pagan(?) Lalli in 1156.



# Peace of Nöteborg 1323

Treaty between Sweden and the Republic of Novgorod, division of Finland. Finland west of the Karelian Isthmus and south of approx. Lake Kajaani now a recognized part of the Swedish kingdom. Northeast Finland a grey zone.

Finland now a Swedish county (*landskap*) on the same level as e.g. Närke or Hälsingland: no autonomy, no discrimination.



(Image: Peace of Nöteborg, Velivieras, Wikimedia Commons)

# Late medieval Finland

**Cities:** Turku (1280s), Ulvila (1365), Porvoo (1380), Viborg (1403), Rauma (1442), Naantali (1443).

**Monasteries:** Turku, Viborg, Rauma, Naantali.

**Religious orders:** Franciscans and Dominicans (convent in Turku 1249), emphasis on preaching in the vernacular.

**Clergy:** mostly Swedish background, but command of Finnish was mandatory (also in order to preserve clerical positions for local families).

**Local aristocracy:** some local families (e.g. Kurki), may have been Finnish-speaking.

**Significant minorities:** Low German burghers in the coastal cities.

**Finnish as a lingua franca?** Finnish may have served as an interlanguage in the communication between Finnish artisans, Swedish noblemen and Low German burghers and traders in early Finnish cities.

# Medieval Finnish?

What do we have of medieval Finnish?

- Names, toponyms and short phrases in medieval documents (e.g. *Registrum ecclesiae Aboensis* and others).
- Sebastian Münster in his 1544 *Cosmographia* prints a Finnish paternoster, which may represent a pre-Reformation version of the prayer.
- Other occasional material, e.g. the phrase *tärffwa höffwe mees* in Peter Månssons poem *Bondakunst* (early 16<sup>th</sup> century), which encourages the King to support Finnish immigration into deserted areas of Sweden.

# Münsters Paternoster

**East Finnish features:** personal pronouns *möe* (*myö*), *siun*, translative *-kse* in *anteikse*, and others.

**West Finnish:** retention of  $\delta$  in *meidhen*

**Combination of these:** can be found in southeastern Häme dialects (Uusitalo).

**Ortography:** retention of *k* has been interpreted as signifying medieval origin, but may also be explained by German – note also *ü* in *pühittü* and *y* for *ii* (Kallio).

**Note** *-nd-* in *syndiä* (but *waltakuntasi*, *anteiksi*). The use of 'sin' rather than 'debt' may be explained by the Protestant reliance on the Matthew version of the prayer (rather than Luke's). Speculatively, the exceptional ortography may represent a 'Protestant' correction in an originally 'Catholic' prayer (Kallio).

# Medieval Finnish?

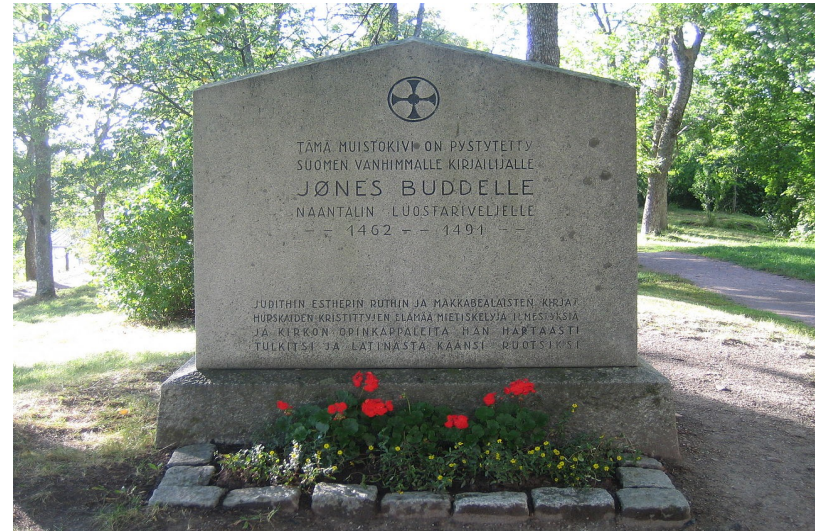
Very likely, Finnish was used in religious and legal contexts and probably written down to some extent:

- Various papal and clerical decrees demand the use of the "local language" in Confession, prayers and key liturgical moments. Probably some of this was written down! Dominicans and Franciscans made a big point of preaching in the local vernacular.
- There are arguments that some orthographic features of early Finnish legal texts point to legal translations made during medieval times.
- Some syntactic features of Old Finnish seem to be archaisms surviving from an earlier tradition of translated language with Latin as a basis (I will elaborate later on).
- Gustaf Vasa's reforms in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century led to widespread re-use of medieval parchment in tax administration (and the destruction of many surviving medieval manuscripts).

# Other medieval Finnish literature

- **Jöns Budde:** Birgittine monk at the Naantali monastery, late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Translated a number of works (incl. Sections of the Old Testament) to Swedish. Among his works are a biography of St. Catherine (daughter of St. Birgitta), a translation of the encyclopedic *Lucidarius* of Honorius of Autun (12<sup>th</sup> century) and various theological and mystical treatises. Budde is thought to have been born in Ostrobothnia.

(Image: Jöns Budde memorial, Wikimedia Commons)



# The birth of literary Finnish

Three main factors:

- **Book-printing** in late 15<sup>th</sup> century (milestone: *Missale Aboense* in 1488). Medieval Catholic authorities not as hostile to literature in vernacular as sometimes thought, but book production in Middle Ages incredibly expensive and laborious.
- **Renaissance humanism**: suspicion towards Bible translations in medieval tradition (Clementine Vulgate), striving towards "pure" original texts (Erasmus of Rotterdam).
- **Reformation**: salvation by faith (as opposed to participating in communal religious tradition), faith is mediated through Scripture (word of God), Scripture must thus be available (vernacular) and correct (correct translation, suspicion towards religious texts from medieval Catholic tradition).

# The 16<sup>th</sup> century

**Gustav Vasa** (1523-1560), carried out Lutheran Reformation from 1527 (Gustav Vasa Bible 1526-1541). Reformation "complete" in Sweden: remaining Catholic priests exiled (e.g. Olaus Magnus), no Catholic minority remained.

**Erik XIV** (1560-1568) and his brother **John III** (1568-1592). John was initially Duke of Finland, and his powerbase lay in the east. He married the Polish princess Katarina Jagellonica (who remained Catholic) and carried out a moderate "catholicizing" Lutheran religious policy. There were dreams of reconciling the various Christian traditions (notably Lutheran and Orthodox).

- Relatively strong position of Finnish nobility
- Religious moderation, retention of many Catholic features except the Pope. Hostility to radical Protestantism.



# Sigismund and Charles IX

**Sigismund (1592-1599):**  
king of Sweden and  
Poland, remained Catholic,  
troubled relation with  
nobility in Sweden  
(particularly duke Charles  
IX, a convinced Protestant)  
but support from Finland  
(steward Klas Fleming).

**War between Charles IX  
and Sigismund 1598-  
1599:** Sweden and Finland  
on different sides.

(Image: Sigismund by Rubens)



# The Club War and aftermath

Steward Klas Fleming (and nobility) had a troubled relation with Finnish peasants. Charles IX instigated a peasant rebellion ("club war", *nuijasota*) which was repressed at great cost.

War between Charles IX and Sigismund: Klas Fleming dies 1599 at Turku castle (under siege by Charles). Many Finnish noblemen subsequently executed (Turku and Viborg bloodbaths).

Result: centralization of power, Finnish nobility marginalized. Strong religious repression under Charles IX and successors (e.g. bishop of Turku Eric Sorolainen imprisoned because of "Catholic sympathies").



(Image: Duke Charles by Edelfeldt)

# The 17<sup>th</sup> century

Sweden expands into Germany after 30 years' war (1618-1648) and is a great power – with an enormously effective government bureaucracy (and Church record-keeping) and occasionally very repressive atmosphere (execution of suspected Catholics and Jews). Witch-trials 1676-1688.

- Great expansion of religious literature in Finnish (notably, 1642 complete Bible translation, *Biblia*), but little other literature.
- Notably: translations of Swedish land and city law remained manuscripts, never printed. Some subsidiary law texts (Church Law, military law) did appear in print.
- Some Finnish grammatical literature did appear in print (e.g. Eskil Petraeus 1649 *Linguae Finnicae Brevis Institutio*).

# Turning-point: the great Northern war

Great Northern War between (among others) Sweden (Charles XII) and Russia (Peter I): decisive Swedish defeat at Poltava 1709). Afterwards: Russian occupation of Finland 1714-1721 (Great Wrath, *Isoviha*). Peace of Nystad 1721: Viborg lost to Russia.

Subsequent Russian occupation of Finland during war 1741-1743: Hamina and Lappeenranta lost to Russia.

Most of Finland remains with Sweden in 18<sup>th</sup> century – but Swedish rule in Finland is no longer self-evident.



(Image: Karl XII by David von Krafft)



# The 18<sup>th</sup> century

**Rising Finnish national consciousness:** increasing interest in (and publication of) Finnish folklore, mythology, folk poetry (Porthan, Ganander).

**Enlightenment:** increasing publication of secular and popular-scientific texts (farmers's almanacs, Frosterius' *Hyödyllinen huwitus luomisen töistä*).

**Political troubles:** *frihetstiden* 1719-1772 with much power in the hands of the Swedish parliament, murder of the more authoritarian king Gustav III 1792 by Jacob Johan Anckarström (apparently inspired by the French revolution).

**Religious dissidence:** dissatisfaction with religious authorities, revivalist and pietist movements (Achrenius, *Zionin Juhla-Wirret* 1769, Johannes Wegelius' *Postilla* 1747-1749), Petter Schäfer's (1660-1729) prison diary.

# Contact languages: Old German

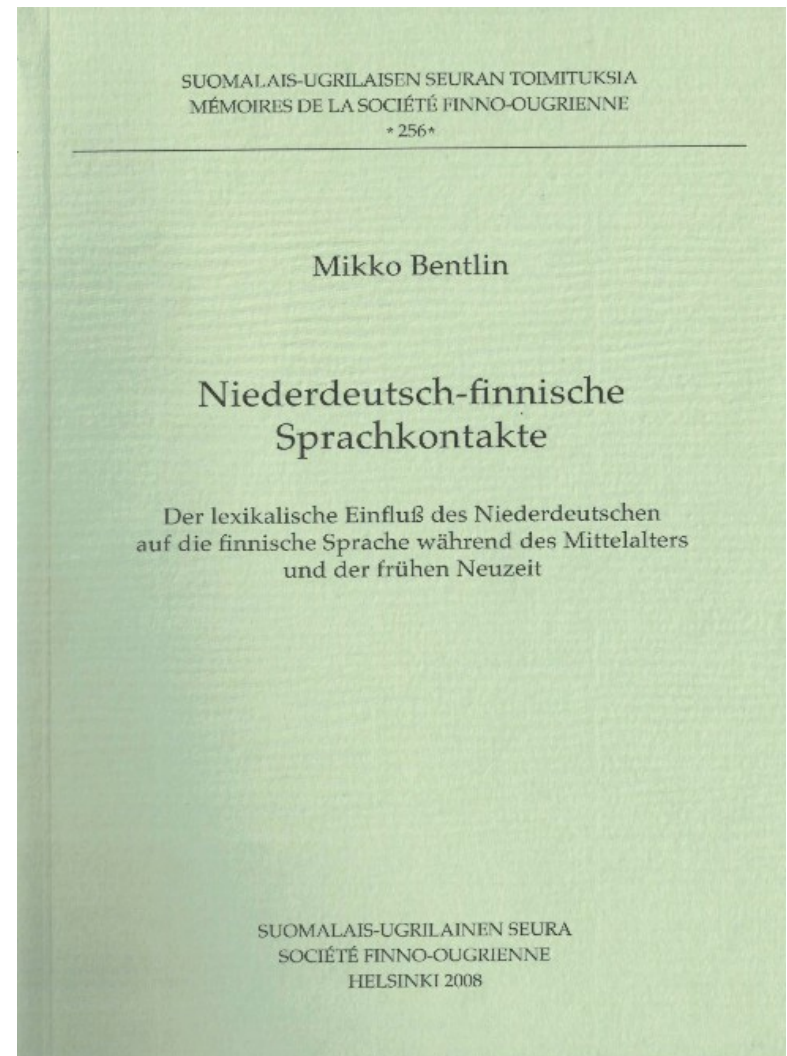
From Magnus Eriksson's 1350s City Law:

*Borghamestara sculu vara alz siæx, thre swenske oc thre thyzske, oc twe skulu vara hvart arith. Radhmen sculu wara thretighi altz, halft aff hvario. Then scal wara swensker borghamestare ellær radhman, sum war födder aff swenskum fadher, ææ hwat modher var swensk eller thyzsk. Thydzsker borghamestare scal vara thæn, sum var födder aff thyzskum fadher, ee hwat modherin war thyzsk eller swensk*

In Ljungo's 1609 translation, this section has disappeared: *[B]ormestarita pitä ainoastans Neliä olemän miestä, ia Raadhi miehiä 24 Ruodzalaisia, ia eij vlkomaisia. Eij mahdha eikä pidhä iocu muukalainen Bormestari eli raadhi mies olemän ikänäns, eijkä mös wirka Caupungisa pitämän, quin on, Tullin kirioitaia, Caupungin kirioitaia eli Wahtin kirioittaian virka pitämän, eli ionguista muuta virka pitämän, ionga päälle suuri waara maka*

# Old German in Finland

- Strong presence in medieval Swedish cities, including (at least) Viborg.
- Anecdotal evidence: surviving letter of a German trader sending his son to Turku to learn Swedish, Latin and Finnish.
- Loanwords: *kirkko*, *kilta*, *amatti*, southeastern spread (e.g. *katve*).



# Contact languages: Swedish

- Indo-European – Germanic – Scandinavian presence in Finland (e.g. toponym *Harjavalta*) but not necessarily continuous.
- (Pre-)Swedish in Åland from 7<sup>th</sup> century, mainland Finland (Ostrobothnia, Nyland, Egentliga Finland) from 12<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Ostrobothnia**: stable, but expansion of Savo dialects in the north (Evijärvi, Veteli) during 17<sup>th</sup> century: same planned settling as in mainland Sweden (Finnmark in Dalecarlia, Värmland etc.).
- **Egentliga Finland**: Fennicization of mainland areas 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, Swedish holds on mostly in isolated island communities.
- **Nyland**: Swedish expansion eastward into Kymenlaakso province from late medieval times, as well as west (Lohja) and northeast (Orimattila, Elimäki) in 18<sup>th</sup> century.



# Swedish influence on Finnish

- **Loanwords:** massive, also in Old Finnish
- **Phonology and grammar:** total loss of word-final \*-k in some previously Swedish-speaking areas, lack of agreement with negative auxiliary (and agreement markers on main verb: *he ei luevvat*) in SE Häme, agreement of neccessive verbs close to Swedish-speaking areas.
- **Difficulties:** Swedish influence in Old Finnish not easy to distinguish from influence from Latin, German learned language/literary texts. Covert interference: sometimes influence manifests itself as the absence of a construction, not its presence (e.g. rarity of "agent participle" *antama-ni lahja* in Old Finnish).

## Language contact and structural change

An Old Finnish case study

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# Finnish in Sweden

- **Tornedalen:** movement of initially Häme, later Karelian population starting in 11<sup>th</sup> century (*birkarla – pirkkalaiset*).
- **Central Sweden:** medieval presence in rural Mälardalen and Östergötland as well as cities (Arboga, Stockholm).
- **17<sup>th</sup> century:** officially encouraged settlement of mainly Savo farmers in the wildlands of Dalecarlia, Närke, Värmland (Värmland Finnish until 1950s).
- A number of Old Finnish writers worked in Sweden, Old Finnish was really "Sweden Finnish".

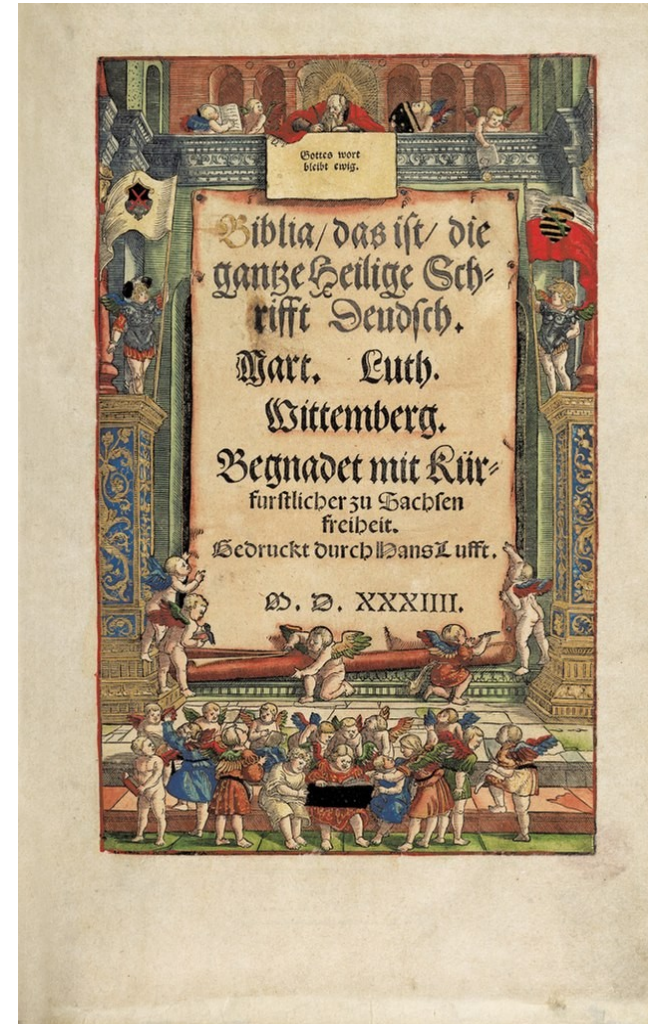
(Image: personal collection)



# German

- Import of German-speaking nobility during king Albert of Mecklenburg (1364-1389), no known influence on language contact.
- High German source texts in Old Finnish: Luther's Bible (1522-1534), German sermon literature.
- Probable influence on Old Finnish grammar (e.g. certain future-tense constructions).

(Image: Luther's Bible 1534)



# Latin

- Direct language influence probably mostly on hypothetical medieval Finnish: later overshadowed by other source languages.
- Latin remains the language of science until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Castrén still wrote his dissertation in Latin).
- *Formulae Puerilium Colloquiorum* (1644): a Latin textbook for schoolboys with Swedish and Finnish translations.