

## TRANSPORT IN FINNISH HISTORY

### A SHORT SURVEY OF RESEARCH LITERATURE

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Moving people and goods from one place to another has caused problems everywhere. Nevertheless, in Finland these problems have been historically extraordinary. Finland is one of the world's most northern and geographically remote countries and is subject to a severe climate. In a sparsely populated country, the road network was built nationwide only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The terrain was difficult because thick woodlands covered nearly three quarters of the landed area, making it the most densely forested country in Europe. Deep forests, 188,000 lakes and even more numerous marshes hindered moving with vehicles. As if that was not enough, the Baltic Sea froze for about four months each year, and for that time the country was cut off from Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> Before the eighteenth century land-borne traffic to neighbouring Russia was poor and the major Russian cities were situated very far. As a result, one could claim that in wintertime Finland was one of the most isolated and inaccessible regions in Europe, and thus Finns have learned to value the means of transport highly.

Water is generally considered a separating element; however, in the preindustrial world water connected regions, whereas vast landed areas without roads, divided them. In pre-modern Finland, waterways were the main transport routes in inland regions, while the Baltic Sea provided routes for versatile communication with foreign

countries. Transport has been in the focus of Finnish historical research in many ways. Maritime history has been one of the major branches in Finnish economic and social history. Despite ice problems, Finland has been a shipbuilding and seafaring country for centuries and its sailing ships have sailed all the major seas around the world. Consequently, the technology,<sup>2</sup> the commercial and military uses and the seafarers of the sailing era have fascinated Finnish historians for decades.<sup>3</sup> Yrjö Kaukiainen has been one of the most productive Finnish maritime historians and his book *A History of Finnish Shipping* provides a good introduction to this field.<sup>4</sup> Numerous niches of maritime history have been studied, from smuggling in the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia<sup>5</sup> to the breakers of dockworkers' strikes.<sup>6</sup> Maritime history has yielded a large number of Master's theses and doctoral dissertations; some of the most recent Ph.D. theses were completed by Jari Lybeck in 2012 and by Tytti Steel in 2013.<sup>7</sup>

Several publications exist on the history of Finnish railways, the first line of which was opened between Helsinki and Hämeenlinna in 1862. The State Railways, *Valtion rautatiet*, has published thick volumes on its history nearly every 25-year period since 1912.<sup>8</sup> There is even a special magazine on railway history, *Resiina*, and a couple of railway museums keep attracting the public. Unfortunately, publications in foreign languages are scarce on this topic, although source materials as well as research literature are plentiful and diverse in Finnish and Swedish.<sup>9</sup> For example, the State Railways has published a detailed report on the construction of each major railway line. Besides research literature, the experiences of Finns on travelling by train have been addressed in both fiction and cinema. A case in point is a novel *Railway* (1884) by Juhani Aho, who also wrote other pieces of fiction dealing with how new technology, such as



A skirmish with smugglers from Finland at the Russian border, 1853, by Vasily Hudyakov (1826–1871). Source: Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hudiakov\\_Smugglers.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hudiakov_Smugglers.jpg)).

oil lamps and automobiles, impacted on the everyday life of ordinary citizens at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>10</sup>

As Tapio Bergholm mentions in his article in this issue, numerous studies have been published on the Finnish history of road transport from different aspects in national languages. The field is therefore quite well covered although the broader outlines have not been published. The history of the car industry has not been intensively examined by Finnish historians because this branch only started in 1968 when a Swedish-Finnish joint venture factory was founded to assemble the model 95 of Saab cars in Uusikaupunki.<sup>11</sup> The history of the truck, bus and tram industry is not in a much better position although it started production in the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, publications on Finnish road transport history in English and other world languages are rare. Nevertheless, some articles on certain special viewpoints are available. In this century, the social and gender history of automobiles have been examined in a few articles.<sup>13</sup> The history of alternative fuels in the road transport has also been the subject of some studies.<sup>14</sup>

If military airplanes are included in the Finnish history of transport, then its most extensively examined field is the history of aviation, where publications in English probably outnumber those in national languages. The history of the Finnish Air Force (FAF) has been studied meticulously; there are several books on single models of airplanes,<sup>15</sup> as well as several outlines of the FAF's development.<sup>16</sup> Kalevi Keskinen and Kari Stenman have written a substantial book series on these topics, and most of its volumes are available also in English.<sup>17</sup> The Aviation Museum of Central Finland has been compiling its own book series.<sup>18</sup> The civil airborne transport has been commercially operated for 90 years. Most of that time Finnair, a largely state-owned company, has dominated this branch. Finnair has published several company histories, some of them also in English.<sup>19</sup>

Other fields of transport history have been under study in Finland as well. The floating of timber through lakes and rivers to the wood processing factories was significant from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s and some studies have been published on its history.<sup>20</sup> Another rising field



An advertisement of the Finnish State Railways on travel options for skiing holidays during the winter 1936–1937. Source: Matti Bergström and Seppo Ahonen, *Rautahevon kydyssä, Junamatka Matin ja Liisan päivistä Pendoliinon, Jyväskylä, Gummerus 1996, 136.*

has been the history of cycling.<sup>21</sup> On that field Finnish history writing has gained international recognition: in 2012 a contribution by Tiina Männistö-Funk was awarded the Abbott Payson Usher Prize on the best article published in SHOT's journal *Technology and Culture* in the preceding year.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Activity in the Finnish history of transport is increasing and the focus is on several different fields and subfields. Education at university level is currently available only in maritime history; the University of Helsinki, Åbo Akademi University and Turku Adult Education Centre (Turun suomen-

kielinen työväenopisto) provide some introductory courses in that field.<sup>23</sup> There are also several museums of transport history in Finland; their number is the highest in the aviation sector.

Research in transport history is varied in many ways; professional historians are a minority among researchers, and the field is dominated by amateurs. In addition, some subfields and researchers specialise on writing for the domestic audience in the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, while others are more orientated towards the international community and keen to communicate in English. Researchers in the Finnish transport history do not form a common school or share a similar educational background. The energetic drive of subfields like the history of the Finnish Air Force, as well as its popularity abroad, is surprising. In some British and American bookshops I have been astonished to notice that the only books available on Finnish history are about airplanes of the FAF during the Second World War. Furthermore, books on the history of the military airplanes are among the best selling Finnish history books in major

American online bookshops. Consequently, Finnish transport history has gained a great popularity at home and abroad – this notable take-off has happened almost without the notice of professional historians.

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<sup>1</sup> Steam-powered icebreakers began to keep shipping lanes open in wintertime along the Finnish coasts only in 1890 – that is more than 50 years later than on the East coast of the USA and 40 years later than in the ports of Central Europe. Rasila 1982; Valanto 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Toivanen 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Bibliographies and source materials are available online. Maritime literature, <http://sydaby.eget.net/fi/refi.htm>; Database of ships' diaries in the collection of the Maritime Institute, Turku: <http://web.abo.fi/institut/sjohistoriska/sjo/skeppsdagbok.php>; Alphabetic register of 1106 sailing vessels, <http://sailing-ships.oktett.net/register-alphabetic.html>

<sup>4</sup> Kaukiainen 1993; see also Kaukiainen 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Filpus 2001. <http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514259734/isbn9514259734.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Bergholm 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Lybeck 2012; Steel 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Gripenberg and Munck 1912–1916; Zetterberg 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Some publications are, nevertheless, available, for example: Alameri 1979 (also in Finnish); Päivärinne 2008 ([http://www.reilia.fi/seminar/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Paivarinne\\_txtarticle\\_REILIA\\_2009.pdf](http://www.reilia.fi/seminar/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Paivarinne_txtarticle_REILIA_2009.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> Aho 1988; available also in Swedish under the title *Järnvägen*, Stockholm 1920; in Estonian *Raudtee*, Tallinn 1957, in German *Die Eisenbahn* / [aus dem Finnischen übers. von Gustav Schmidt], Rostock: Hinstorff 1986, in Slovakian *Zeleznica*, Bratislava 1988 and in three other languages.

<sup>11</sup> Nowadays Valmet Automotive Oy is a subsidiary of the Metso concern and produces primarily A-models of Mercedes-Benz.

<sup>12</sup> History of Sisu Auto: <http://www.sisauto.com/node/122>

<sup>13</sup> Wessberg 2001; Jalonen 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Myllyntaus 2010.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Keskinen and Stenman 2004; Stenman 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Shores 1969; Tiainen, Nikunen, and Vainio (eds.) 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Keskinen 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Valtonen 1996; Valtonen 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Wegg 1983

<sup>20</sup> Peltonen 1991; Muranen 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Antila 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Männistö-Funk 2011; The Abbot Payson Usher Prize: <http://www.historyoftechnology.org/awards/usher.html>

<sup>23</sup> Maritime history studies at Helsinki University: <http://www.helsinki.fi/merihistoria/english/index.html>

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