

## GOLDEN KING OF THE FOREST

*In memoriam*  
*Åke Hultkrantz, 1920–2006*

# GOLDEN KING OF THE FOREST

The Lore of the Northern Bear



Juha Pentikäinen

*edited and translated by*

Clive Tolley

ETNIKA OY

© Juha Pentikäinen and contributors 2007

*All Rights Reserved.* Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

First published 2007

Etnika Oy, Helsinki

ISBN 978 951 97889 7 5

## Illustrations

Front cover: photograph by Lassi Rautiainen

Back cover: photograph by Aimo Kejonen.

Title page: a bear cub petroglyph from Flattruet, Sweden (Pekka Kivikäs)

Photographs are by the author unless indicated otherwise in parentheses in the caption. Copyright resides with the producer of each photograph, except as follows: Finnish Literature Society (Figs. 28, 35), Finnish National Board of Antiquities (Figs. 13, 14, 26, 29, 31, Plates I, VIII), Helsinki University Museum Arppeanum (Plates II, XLVIII), Maanmittauslaitos (basic maps upon which Map 3 and Plate XX are based), Satakunta Museum (Plates XXXVI–XLIV), Suomen posti (Fig. 3), University Library (Carolina Rediviva), Uppsala (Figs. 6, 7), Ursa (Fig. 15)

Cover design by Clive Tolley  
Typeset by Word and Page, Chester, UK

Printed in Finland by Saarijärven Offset Oy, Saarijärvi

# CONTENTS

List of maps	vi
List of figures	vi
List of plates	vii
Preface	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Translator's note	xiv
Introduction	1
1. The Natural History of the Bear	5
2. The Archaeology of the Bear	9
3. The Bear in Antiquity	16
4. The Bear in Scandinavia	24
5. The Bear among the Ob Ugrians	31
6. The Bear among the Sámi	43
7. The Bear among the Finns and Karelians	63
8. The Bear in Finnish, Karelian and Sámi Folklore	108
9. The Bear as National Symbol in Finland	130
Conclusion	146
Bibliography	149

## *Maps*

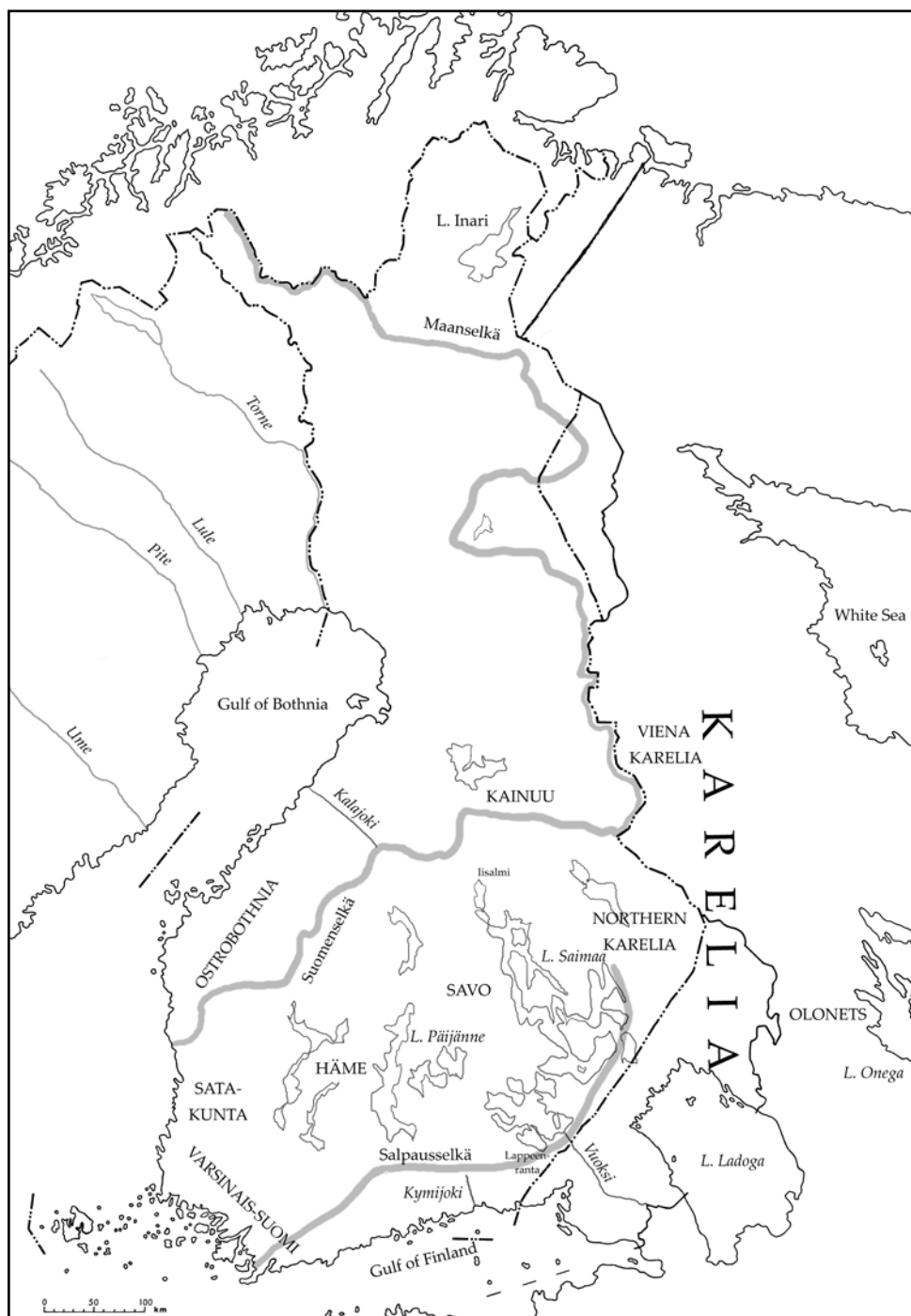
1. Finland: natural features and provinces	viii
2. Finland: townships	ix
3. The Rillankivi area	83
4. The distribution of <i>kontio</i> in place names	102
5. The distribution of <i>kouko</i> and <i>kouvo</i> in place names	103
6. The distribution of <i>oksi-</i> etc. in place names	105
7. Ritual bear-hunting in the Finnish-Karelian area	106

## *Figures*

1. Bear with torch by Hilda Flodin, 1899–1901	2
2. 'Bear' by Emil Wikström, 1910	3
3. Bear from a Finnish postage stamp, 1989	6
4. Petroglyph field in Slettnes, Norway	12
5. Brauron <i>arktoi</i> performing the initiatory bear dance	20
6. An excerpt from the <i>Carta Marina</i> by Olaus Magnus	27
7. Polar bears near Iceland, from the <i>Carta Marina</i>	28
8–12. Illustrations accompanying Olaus Magnus's <i>History of the Peoples of the North</i>	28–30
13. Ob Ugrian five-stringed zither	32
14. Khanty bear-festival dance	33
15. The constellation of the Great Bear	40
16. The Khanty celestial elk/reindeer	41
17. The shaman's elk figure imposed on the night sky	41
18. A Sámi on a broadsheet of 1631	44
19–24. Drawings by Ossian Elgström of the Sámi bear hunt	46
25. Diagram of a Sámi drum from Lycksele	51
26. Laestadius as a guide among the Sámi	52
27. The opening of the <i>Cantio Ursina</i>	70
28. A bear trap	88
29. Carrying the bear home after the hunt, Latvajärvi	89
30. A three-year-old bear's skull	90
31. A bear trap	91
32, 33. Names of the bear in Finnish	95–6
34. Some Finnish-Karelian bear names rendered into English	96
35. A bear's body parts: magical objects from Kuhmo	121
36. Marina Takalo beside her house	124
37. Tapio, master of the animals of the wild	131
38. A legendary bear hunt from Topelius's 'Our Land'	133
39. The Suomi Maiden, Esplanade, Helsinki	142
40. The Suomi Maiden, Senate Square, Helsinki	143

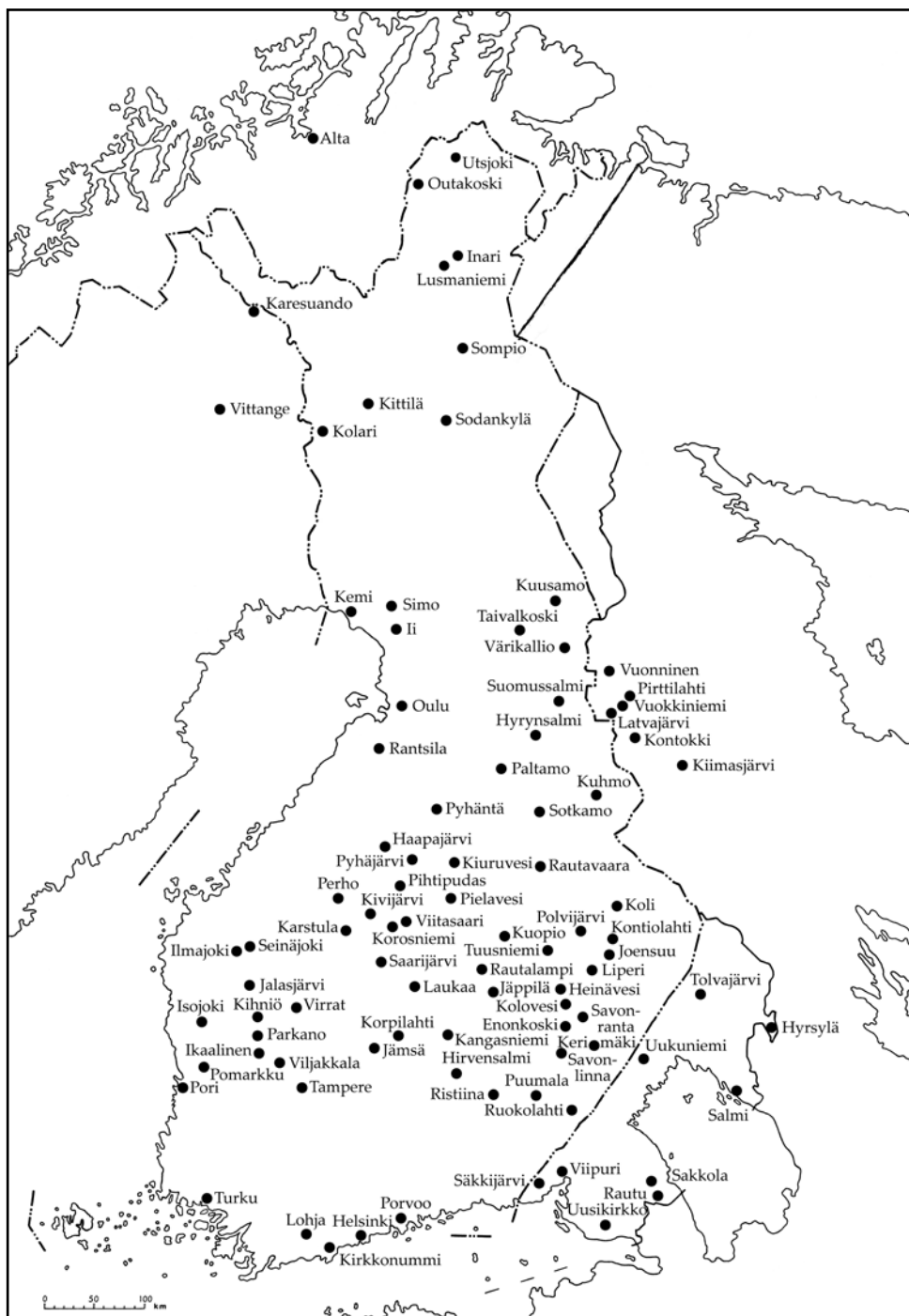
*Plates (in separate unnumbered section)*

- I. The Paltamo bear head
- II. Sacrificial stone from Kermajärvi
- III–IV. *Seita* stones from the Heinävesi area
- V. Ukonkivi, theriomorphic initiatory hunting site
- VI. Ukonvuori, anthropomorphic cliff face
- VII. Astuvansalmi, anthropomorphic cliff face
- VIII. Astuvansalmi, rock paintings
- IX. Petroglyph of bear, Valle, Norway
- X. Petroglyphs at Alta, Norway
- XI. Petroglyph of bear, Alta, Norway
- XII. The sacred Khanty sleigh
- XIII. A sacred sleigh in a Mansi graveyard
- XIV. The site of a Mansi goose sacrifice
- XV. Three Mansi relatives in a graveyard
- XVI. A Mansi lad leads his blind shaman uncle
- XVII. The Pigorini Museum Sámi drum
- XVIII. The Pigorini Museum Sámi drum (back)
- XIX. The opening of the Viitasaari bear text
- XX. Map of the Viitasaari area
- XXI. View of Pihtipudas
- XXII. View of Muurasjärvi
- XXIII. The Muurreppää sacred pine
- XXIV. Close-up of the Muurasjärvi pine
- XXV. The stone of Rillankivi
- XXVI. The stone of Kouvonkivi
- XXVII. Sacred pine near Rillankivi
- XXVIII. Carvings on the pine of Rillankivi
- XXIX. Carvings on a sacred pine of Tikkukangas
- XXX. ‘Matron of the forest’, a mighty sacred pine
- XXXI. Theriomorphic swellings on the ‘Matron of the forest’
- XXXII. Measuring the girth of the ‘Matron of the forest’
- XXXIII. ‘Holy tree’, Tikkukangas
- XXXIV. ‘Holy tree’, Tikkukangas
- XXXV. Bears’ penis bones
- XXXVI–
- XLIV Bears’ body parts used in ethnomedicine
- XLV. The armorial bearings of Satakunta province
- XLVI. The armorial bearings of the city of Pori
- XLVII. Marina Takalo, a Karelian folk-story teller
- XLVIII. The founding of Turku Academy, 1640,  
by Albert Edelfelt (1904)



Map 1. Finland, showing natural features and names of provinces.  
The pre-war borders of Finland are also shown. (Clive Tolley)





Map 2. Finland, showing places mentioned in the text, primarily by kunta (township). The pre-war borders of Finland are also shown. (Clive Tolley)



## PREFACE

*The beast of Oksava.* The bear has never been a predator to me. Since my childhood in the Ronkaala Vicarage in Haapajärvi the predator of Oksava – a village whose name intimates the presence of *oksi*, bear – has stuck in my mind; in the winters of the 1940s it roused fear in the district – a wolf, carrying out malicious deeds in the barns and sheepfolds of the village. I was around five years old, too young, in the mind of my brother Samuli, two years my senior, for the big boys' skiing tricks on the ice of the Kalajoki. The boys found out how to get rid of me: 'The beast of Oksava is coming!' The housekeeper Elsa Saarinen got me to calm down. My experience shifted from Elsa to the family's oral history, stretching back over generations. The local folklore was enriched, when later, after many an attempt, the wolf was finally shot. It cost 50 pennies to see its pelt at the winter fair; naturally, I went to see, and heard that this beast which had slaughtered dozens of sheep and calves was not really a wolf, but a man who had turned himself into a wolf – and his name was revealed, too. *It was a werewolf, from the world of the noita, the shaman.*

*Getting up speed from the bear-skull pine of Muurreppää.* I remember, as a five-year-old boy in 1945, going fishing at Muurreppää, as the village at the northern end of Lake Muurasjärvi near Pihtipudas was known in the local dialect, with my father Veikko Pentikäinen (1909–82) and brother Samuli (1938–2005). It abounded in fish, and we used to go there from Haapajärvi with a long rod in tow in the summer and in winter a net, by bicycle, by lorry or bus, once by skiing the journey of over six leagues. The village lane twisted between fields until it rose high up a hill, where the shops were. So that I could get up the hill on the bike, I had to get up speed right from the bear pine (*karhupettä*). We later heard memories from Matti and Martta Tiainen, and other locals at the Keitaanniemi angling spot, of the bear skulls still to be found on the branches of that pine tree between the world wars. As it stood there still, majestically surveying the bend in the road to the village, memories of childhood flooded back during the field trip to Pihtipudas in April 2006. I photographed the pine. In November 2006 the memories were discussed, as we sat next to the locals by the bonfire, along with Arto Tiainen's family, Aapeli Lappalainen and geologist Aimo Kejonen. What is *Muurreppää*, after which the whole village is named? Does its origin lie in some forgotten Sámi word, or in thefts of honey and raiding ants' nests, which belong to the bear's way of life. Someone beside the bonfire asks, could the honey-paw be the ant-swallower, *Muurreppää*?

*Bear dung in front of the tent at Angelinjoki.* In 1967 a quickwater boat grated up onto the village beach of Talvadas near Utsjoki. A collection programme

for Sámi folklore was beginning, a collaboration between Lauri Honko, Olavi Korhonen, Helvi Nuorgam-Poutasuo and others. The travellers decided to proceed from Inarinjoki to Angeli. We spent the night at Ranttila on a fine sandy ridge close to the seer Uula Ranttila's dwelling. We were ready for a proper interview, as we knew Uula had often refused the task of *noita* often offered him. I slept in a tent with Lauri Honko. In the night I awoke to the almighty shaking of the tent's supporting poles. 'Who's there, it's not He Himself, is it?' We didn't dare speak or go outside. In the morning things became clear: in front of the tent was a warm pile of bear dung. Uula Ranttila looked us in the eye: 'You know from that who walked there, and it was better that you didn't get up and speak anything. Hark to what the ancients said, that He can come at the call of his name.'

*A bear in rut on the way to Honkaniemi.* It happened at about 1 o'clock in the morning on 2 June 2005. I was returning from salmon fly-fishing at Kermankoski in the township of Heinävesi when I met a bear eye to eye. I turned into the road to Viitalahti (some 10 km to the north-west of Heinävesi), rejoicing in the peaceful calm of the summer night, and drove calmly through the hills along the road to Honkaniemi (on the way to Viitalahti), when before me rose a majestically lumbering bear about 30 metres in front. I stopped, and noticed the bear too was pausing. What next? I got out of the car, aiming to get my camera from the back, but decided to keep still. I guessed the moment would pass if I moved: I stood beside the car, the door open. The bear was clearly interested in me, and rose on both feet, looking me in the eye, and began to turn with his whole being, drawing attention with his penis bone to his being a male. Our experience together took about five minutes or so, after which the bear peacefully continued his journey towards the brow of the hill, disappearing into the depths of the forest. I told the locals about the event. Few have seen a great male bear, though they are known to den and overwinter in the area. 'He must have been looking for a mate.' An animal, estimated at 500 kg, made it into the Heinävesi paper the following August after emptying an 80 kg honey pot. One reason for the bear's behaviour, it occurred to me, relates to the bear's annual cycle: it was the 'running time', when the same bear was seen a 100 km apart in Enonkoski, Savonranta and Kerimäki. Why did his attention focus on me? Did it all stem from my anorak, under whose red hood I had fished all evening? Perhaps the bear had previously been near a woman, and apart from sniffing perfumes had learned to recognise a woman's endearing tones. Did the bear of Honkaniemi show his manhood because he thought he had met a woman? The bear must have been searching for a partner by night at that season, and apparently was doing so at that moment.

The presence of the bear is rooted deep in the Finnish psyche. This book brings out some of the ways that presence has been manifested in the country's myths, rituals and folklore, and in people's minds.

Juha Pentikäinen  
Heinävesi, Christmas 2006

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my students in the working group on Northern ethnography and Finnish folk belief who helped in the preparation of the Finnish volume lying behind this publication: Susanna Aarnio, Kaya Brandt, Janne Helin, Francis Joy, Miko Las-sander, Auli Oksanen, Anna Partanen, Vesa Matteo Piludu, Outi Pohjanheimo, Tanja Siitonen, Oili Ylikleemola. Docent Risto Pulkkinen was of enormous help in working on the manuscript and the bibliography, and has continued to do so for this more extensive English edition. Hannu Karttunen (University of Turku) prepared the astronomical texts and the diagrams upon which those in the book are based, and Ilkka Paatero has opened the treasures of his Lappish library in Heinävesi. I would also like to thank Stora Enso Wood Supply for their support of this publication, and the Niilo Helander Foundation and Nathorsts vetenskapliga stiftelse for their support for this publication and its translation.

I would like to express my appreciation for Ilkka Niiniluoto, *rector magnificus* of the University of Helsinki for his initiative in forming an exhibition based upon my field work; to the University visiting exhibition centre Arppeanum for the exhibit in 2004 'Karhun kannoilla, Amurin avannoilla' ('In the footsteps of the bear, at the ice holes of the Amur'). The exhibition has thereafter circulated around four museums in Finland (Koli in Northern Karelia, Satakunta Museum in Pori, the Museum of Central Finland in Jyväskylä and Haapajarvi Town Hall), and thereafter in Sweden in the Forest Museum, Lycksele, and the Ájtte Sámi museum in Jokkmokk; it is planned to take the exhibition to the Paolo Mantegazza Ethnographical Museum in Florence and the National Museum in Marseilles. I thank the museum directors for their cooperation: Kjell-Åke Aronsson, Erkki Fredriksson, Kati Heinämies, Maarit Kalela-Brundin, Lasse Lovén, Florence Piz-zorni, Maria Gloria Roselli, Juhani Ruohonen and Eila Telinkangas.

I am most thankful to Clive Tolley for his deep understanding of Northern mythology and innovative thoughts at the various stages of the book's production. Thanks to him, this book is quite different from the Finnish text upon which it is based. Translations of some of the treasures of ancient Finnish poetry, such as the Viitasaari and Rautalampi texts, Tuderus's *Metzän dyris voitettu* and others appear to our knowledge here in English for the first time. In a sense we have taken a step towards realising an epic, different from the *Kalevala*, based on the bear narrative and drama. I also thank Apostolos N. Athanassakis, Olavi Korhonen, Osmo Pekonen, Gabriel Rebourcet, Unto Salo, Senni Timonen, Börje Vähämäki and Urpo Vento, who have contributed their ideas on many issues related to bear epic.

The book has become linked with the field work carried out with archaeologist Timo Miettinen and geologist Aimo Kejonen on the cliffs and waterways of the Saimaa area, and with my wife Marja in Heinävesi.

This book and associated exhibition are based on field experiences and memories from the 1950s onwards. It is impossible to thank everyone who has contributed to this work over many years. *Ethnography is a Heavy Rite*.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Juha Pentikäinen's *Karhun kannoilla* (2005) was aimed at a domestic Finnish readership. Various challenges have arisen in undertaking its presentation in English to an international audience; the resulting volume is far more than a mere translation. The most obvious technical difficulty has been the rendering of ancient so-called rune poetry (from Finnish *runo*, 'poem'), and dialectal and archaic folklore texts, into another language; to mention but one aspect of this, the full Finnish dialect dictionary has so far only reached to the middle of K. Rune poetry is always problematic; those found in the present volume are among the most challenging of all such texts, a characteristic which can only be glimpsed in translation, as is the degree of uncertainty of interpretation in many cases. Without the use of the libraries of Helsinki and in particular the helpfulness of native Finnish specialists – first among whom must be mentioned (with great gratitude) Senni Timonen of the Finnish Literature Society, who spared a good deal of time in checking especially the poetic texts – the task of interpreting them would have been all but impossible.

The translator has also assumed the role of editor, typesetter and, to a certain extent, contributor, in consultation with the author. Such additions may be listed as follows. 1. The book has been reorganised, and extra material, for example from Juha Pentikäinen's other works, has been incorporated, giving a broader scope to the treatment; however, the central focus remains the ancient culture of Finland. 2. I have added some new sections of my own composition (based partly on discussions with Juha Pentikäinen, partly on my own research): much of the Introduction and Chapter 1, the section on the Norse *berserkir* in Chapter 4 (treated in more detail in Tolley 2007a and b), some of the discussion of Ob Ugric bear rituals (based on information to be found in *The Great Bear*), and shorter sections elsewhere (in particular in Chapter 9). The section on Greek sources in Chapter 3 is largely based with permission on the paper of Apostolos N. Athanassakis presented at the symposium *Karhun kannoilla*, Pori, 2005 (and published as Athanassakis 2007). The sections on the Sámi bear rites and bear names in Finland are by Risto Pulkkinen (and are dealt with more fully in Finnish in Pulkkinen and Salmenkivi 2007). 3. Explanations have been given of many matters which could be taken for granted when addressing a Finnish audience; these additions are at times of some length, and have also involved the preparation of the two maps of Finland. 4. On occasion, useful texts or points for consideration have been added from English-speaking cultures. 5. I have checked most original sources and revised the text accordingly when necessary.

I would like to thank Juha Pentikäinen for his friendly support, both by email and in person in Finland, and also Risto Pulkkinen for his continual help, in particular with smaller points of interpretation, as well as Maria Vasenkari of the Kalevala Institute. Great thanks go to Liisa Lehto and Juha Nirkko of the Folklore Archive in Helsinki, and Anna Partanen of Helsinki University, for checking archive references. We would also like to thank the Niilo Helander Foundation for funding the translation, editing and typesetting of the volume, as well as a most necessary trip to a very cold Helsinki in January 2006 to discuss work on the volume and to make use of the specialist libraries.

Clive Tolley

# Introduction

*Metzän kullainen kuningas, metzän ehtanen isändä*, ‘Golden king of the forest, bounteous master of the forest’: these are the opening words of the Finnish prayer or charm aimed at banishing the male bear from attacking livestock, recorded by the father of comparative mythology in Finland, Christfrid Ganander (1742–90, famous for his *Mythologia Fennica*, published in dictionary form in 1789, the first systematic publication of information about Finnish-Sámi myths, along with citations of ancient oral poems); a female was addressed as *Metzän kulda, metzän kaunis, metzän ehkiä emändä*, ‘Forest gold [or simply ‘darling’], forest beauty, graceful mistress of the forest’. With such apotropaic honorifics the bear was both revered and shunned: to have addressed him or her simply as *karhu*, ‘bear’, would have summoned the animal to the caller’s presence, to wreak ill to man and beast. The dual nature of the bear, its liminality – it is *metsän rajan eläin*, ‘beast of the forest border’, a creature living across the bounds of the taiga and tundra, half way between the utter wilderness and the world of men, crossing the dividing line between human and divine, and honoured as kin to man whilst also feared as man’s enemy – is a *leitmotiv* of the present book.

Yet the bear is not merely a denizen of the past. No visitor to the centre of Helsinki can fail to notice the dozens of bear images (Figs. 1, 2, 32, 38, 39, 40); anyone who ventures to the town of Pori on the west coast of Finland is likely to be overwhelmed by such images, in this the ‘Citadel of the Bear’ or Björneborg (the original Swedish form of the name). The bear, an animal central to the religious and cultic life of the country’s inhabitants from the most ancient times, is very much an image of modern-day Finland too. As the national animal of Finland, the bear is surely a fitting symbol of the liminality of Finland itself, a country which lies at the *metsän raja*, the border (including the lofty and less lofty fells of the north) of the great taiga stretching away eastwards into Siberia, and yet faces the West over the Baltic Sea. Historically, the border between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East has split the country, or the community of Finnish speakers, into two cultural areas, and this Christian border indeed has antecedents in prehistoric cultural boundaries in this region. The visitor to Helsinki’s Senate Square (Senaatintori) may behold a complex political manipulation of the image of the bear from the late nineteenth century, when Finland was struggling to achieve independence from Russia and establish itself for the first time as a modern nation. A statue was raised in 1894 to commemorate the Russian tsar Alexander II, but at his feet may be seen the image of the Suomi Maiden holding a book of law (a provocative image directly appealing to that found in other Scan-



Fig. 1. Bear with torch by Hilda Flodin, 1899–1901. Pohjolan talo, Helsinki. (Vesa Matteo Piludu)

dinavian capitals, for example in Copenhagen, where an inscription over the courthouse from 1815 proclaims 'With law shall a nation be built', *Med lov skal man land bygge*; she is clad in an outrageously wild-looking bear-skin, which is clearly intended to evoke the Old Norse *berserkir* warriors, and proclaims the new Finland's allegiance to the West. Ironically, the bear of ancient Finland links the culture more with the Finno-Ugric peoples such as the Sámi<sup>1</sup> and the Ob Ugrians found to the north and east, yet here an

ancient image is made to serve a new political purpose and direction. The statue is considered in more detail in Chapter 9, in the context of the growth of Finnish nationalism, where the symbol of the bear has come to stand for many different things, ranging from gentleness to strength, from welfare to Finnishness itself.

The liminality of Finland between East and West also finds a parallel expression in chronological terms, between Finland as an ancient oral culture and a modern civilised society following European norms. Even if the development took place in truth in a gradual fashion, one man is usually regarded as the lynch-pin: Mikael Agricola (1510–57), the first Lutheran bishop of Turku (from 1550, having been rector from 1539). In line with general Lutheran policy he preached, and wrote, in the vernacular, in this case Finnish; in Finland, this fact is of special significance, since Finnish records from before Agricola's time are practically non-existent. His writings therefore mark the beginning of the transition of Finnish literature from the oral form in which it had existed since time immemorial to a written form, and he is widely regarded as a founding father of modern Finnish culture and intellectual activity. The change was not just one of form, however: the very substance was affected, for written literature implied the adoption of standard European norms. Ironically, Agricola is valued now for the information he wrote down about the pagan gods and rites of the Finns (and hence is looked upon as father of Finnish folk-belief research), whom he divides into the people of Häme and of Karelia, underlining the cultural border between West and East yet again. However, these pagan cults were matters he was zealously trying to eradicate, not preserve; he would surely be appalled to discover that several hundred years after his death, his Psalter translation (1551) is still widely read, but only for the sake of what in his preface he had to say about pagan practices!

<sup>1</sup> *Sámi* is the form used to represent the native *Sabmelaš* (and variants), replacing the earlier term *Lapp(ish)*, used until recently, a term which originally, and in the present work, designated peoples within the ken of the Finns following a (semi-)nomadic lifestyle (without their necessarily being Sámi). For signs of ancient Lake Lapp culture, see Plates II–VIII.



It is in this preface that Agricola mentions the bear (1987: III.211):

Quin Carhu Sikiöns noleskele.  
Nins täte lue ia harioittele.  
Sijttes saat hengen wrhudhen/

piamb quin se Rwmins  
wäkewydhén

As the bear licks its offspring,  
read from this and practise it,  
for from this you will gain  
spiritual courage,  
just as it gains bodily strength.

This gentle characterisation reveals that in church circles in the sixteenth century the bear was not a rejected animal, but on the contrary was regarded as exemplary in its behaviour. Yet Agricola is alluding here to a long tradition, and it is one that looks West. It originated with Aristotle (*Historia Animalium* VI.30): ‘Of all animals the newly born cub of the she-bear is the smallest in proportion to the size of the mother; that is to say, it is larger than a mouse but smaller than a weasel. It is also smooth and blind, and its legs and most of its inner organs are not yet articulate.’ The idea was then expanded by Pliny the Elder (see Chapter 3), and entered the Latin tradition. As with the habits of so many animals, the Christian tradition could not resist making an *exemplum* out of this; it was used by St Ambrose in the fourth century (1961: 237), and from there entered the moralising tradition to which Agricola’s text belongs; the same idea is found in the writings of the last Catholic archbishop of Sweden-Finland, Olaus Magnus (29.7). Despite Albertus Magnus (1193–1280) demonstrating in his work *De Animalibus* the falseness of the notion in terms of natural history, the idea clearly persisted; Shakespeare in *Henry VI* (pt. 3, Act 3, Scene 2) calls Gloucester ‘an unlick’d bear-whelp’, and to this day we talk of licking unruly youngsters into shape.

Yet whilst Agricola was using the bear to attract Finns into a morally improving reading of the Psalms, a short distance from the metropolitan city in which he preached the backwoods inhabitants were engaging in rites involving the hunting of the bear, regarded as a god, and the ritual consumption of its flesh, accompanied by songs and dances. It was these pagan

Fig. 2. ‘Bear’ by Emil Wikström, 1910. National Museum, Helsinki. (Vesa Matteo Piludu)



customs that formed the focus of a scathing attack, delivered a century later in Agricola’s own city of Turku at what may be viewed as one of the pivotal moments in the establishment of Finland as a civilised nation, namely the founding in 1640 of the precursor of Helsinki University, the Academy of Turku, when Bishop Isak Rothovius, in his role as cleric and as vice-chancellor of the new Academy, preached long and pointedly against the dark practices of the Finns, mentioning in particular their worship of the bear and the rites of drinking from

its skull. Even at a much later date, while Walter Runeberg was producing the statue of the Suomi Maiden for Senate Square in Helsinki in the 1890s, bears' skulls were still being hung on the ritual pines of the more remote reaches of central Finland; the author heard accounts of this taking place between the World Wars at Muurreppää on Lake Muurasjärvi (in the township of Pihtipudas in central Finland), as recounted in the Preface and Chapter 7.

Modern civilisation may have brought a different approach to the ancient king of the forest, but the hunting of the bear, which on the evidence of abundant remains of burnt bones goes back many centuries, continued long after the ritual aspect was lost. Hunting was carried out so assiduously, indeed, that the bear was almost wiped out in Finland by the nineteenth century (numbers have now recovered to almost a thousand); over the years, the methods and purposes of the hunt may have varied, but the devotion to it never seems to have wavered, and Finland to this day has one of the highest per capita ratios of hunters.

The Finnish bear in a sense casts its gaze in two opposite directions: and the structure of the present book reflects this, looking first to the Classical and Nordic traditions, and then to the very different Finno-Ugric myths and cults. First of all, however, we look at the natural history of this Golden King of the Forest.