

Ships' names in Finland in historical perspective

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Summary

This article is a study of ships' names recorded in the towns of Finland over the period 1838–1938, sampled from five different years: 1838, 1863, 1887, 1912 and 1938. Its aim is to shed light on the types of names given to ships in Finland in earlier times, the way in which the stock of names developed, and the significance of naming patterns and analogy. The article also explores how social conditions and cultural and intellectual trends are reflected in the naming of vessels, and what the names tell us about their time, i.e. the period in which Finland as a nation was born.

Particularly common throughout the period studied were names from classical mythology, such as *Ceres*, *Neptunus* and *Juno*. In 1838, classical names made up over a quarter of the total. The fleets of western Europe may have provided a model, but an important reason for the use of these names was the strong position of neo-humanism in Finland and the fact that that movement, unlike National Romanticism, was perceived to be politically neutral. In Sweden, Romanticism arrived on the scene early on, giving rise to a renaissance for Scandinavian names, which made itself particularly clearly felt in the names of Swedish naval vessels. In Finland, by contrast, symbols of an emerging nationalism were sought in the *Kalevala*, and ships were christened *Aallotar*, *Aino*, *Ilmarinen* and *Vellamo*, all of them names of figures from that epic.

The majority of ships' names had a Swedish linguistic form, as their owners were for the most part Swedish-speaking persons of rank. In the middle of the 19th century, however, a dramatic change occurred: the proportion of Finnish names rose from around 6 per cent to some 30 per cent. Many traditional Swedish names, such as *Hoppet* 'Hope', *Lyckan* 'Fortune' and *Enigheten* 'Unity', made way for Finnish equivalents, which became more common than the Swedish forms. There is much to suggest that the choice of Finnish names was a patriotic gesture in honour of the new nation.

The hundred years which the article encompasses naturally saw major changes in society, a fact that is also reflected in the names given to ships. Shipping became safer in various respects, and steamships began to ply regular routes. Inspirational names like *Lyckan* and *Enigheten* became rare, while place-names came to be widely used in this context. The financial support of the family and the favour of those in positions of power declined in importance, with the result that names of members of the owner's family and of famous individuals became uncommon as ships' names. The emergence of larger companies gave rise to various forms of systematic naming. Many of the name types used in the past, however, survived into modern times and still form part of Finland's stock of ships' names.

In this article, the author focuses on some typical features of the nautical onomasticon: the wealth of names from ancient mythology, the limited occurrence of Old Norse names – so typical of Swedish ships during the same period – and the shift to the use of Finnish names and names from the *Kalevala*.

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