

THE TIMES BEFORE WRITTEN DOCUMENTS: ROVANIEMI'S FIRST 7000 YEARS

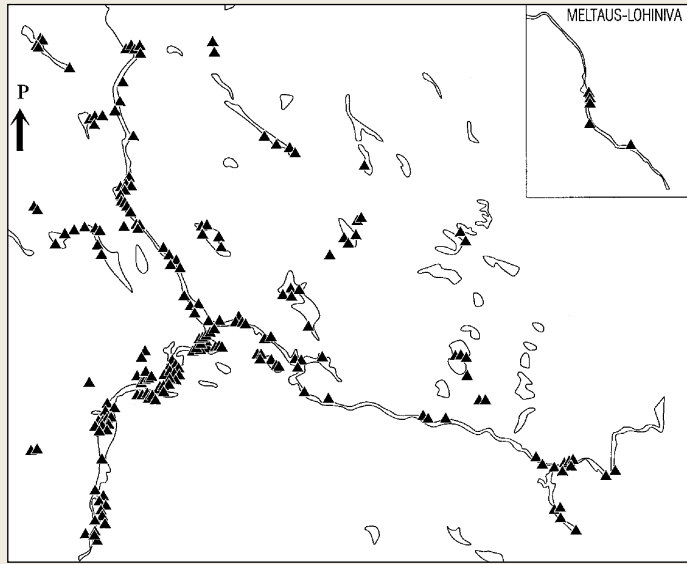
The historical era in Rovaniemi, i.e. the period of history for which written sources are available, goes back only about 600 years, while the prehistory of the area can be traced for as long as 7000–8000 years.

Human settlement from the east

It has been deduced that human beings came to the Rovaniemi area soon after the retreat of the ice sheet, around 7000–5800 B.C. Their main sources of livelihood were elk and deer, while fish were available in the freshwater Ancylus Lake and other lakes and rivers. The first settlers would seem to have entered the current area of Northern Finland from the east, through Eastern Karelia in particular.

One of the oldest signs of settlement in Rovaniemi can be found on the hill of Matkavaara, where an ancient hunter once had a camp on the slope. At that time, the water level in the Ancylus Lake was some 20 m above the current centre of Rovaniemi. A carved wooden elk head found at Lehtojärvi and a number of other local finds have been dated to that period. The oldest of these were encountered on the banks of Valajaskoski and in the Sinettä-Lehtojärvi area.

When the Ancylus Lake reverted to the salty Litorina Sea around 5500 B.C., seals and salmon appeared close to the coast, adding to the available sources of livelihood and providing a means of survival through the late winter months for as many as 4000 years. Settlement consequently became concentrated in areas close to



There are about 250 known Stone Age dwelling sites in the Rovaniemi area, the majority beside the Rivers Kemijoki and Ounasjoki.

the sea, which at that time covered the slopes of Jokkavaara and extended to the banks of Valajaskoski when the channel was formed later. Inhabitants of the settlements in the Sinettä area, for example, are thought to have encamped on these shores during their hunting trips.

The inhabitants during the first 3000 years or so mainly left behind artefacts of stone, bone and wood. Finds comprise a wealth of stone objects, including primitive axes, curved-backed chisels, spear and arrow heads, knives and large ice picks, which are recognized as representing a particular Rovaniemi style. The material for most of these consisted of quartz and schists found in the nearby area.

Moving between coast and hinterland

The inhabitants of those days subsisted on what nature could

offer, and were highly dependent on a knowledge of land and water resources and the skills required for utilising these. Stone Age man was above all a careful observer, user and communicator of information on natural phenomena.

The remains of dwelling sites suggest that the people of that time lived in 'villages' of 40–50 persons, at least in spring time, when they spent their time close to the sea, the villages being composed of 8–10 dwelling units. Their winter dwellings were peat huts partly dug into the ground, whereas lightweight shelters covered with animal hides were also used in summer time. It is likely that each dwelling housed a core family together with grandparents or other relatives. The village as a whole constituted a hunting group comprising 10–15 able-bodied men. For



An elk's head carved in pine is one of the area's oldest archaeological finds. It has been shown by ¹⁴C dating to be over 8000 years old. The most characteristic stone artefacts of the lower reaches of the River Kemijoki, the "Rovaniemi picks", have been dated by reference to other finds to the period 5500–2000 B.C.

centuries the banks of the River Kemijoki were inhabited by a community of no more than 200–300 people.

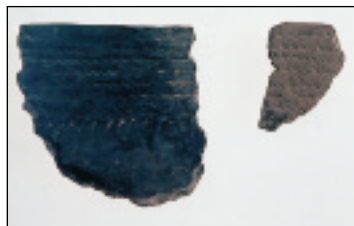
Most of the hunting of seals on the coast took place in the late winter, while people spent the summer and autumn living beside the lakes, hunting other types of game and fishing for pike in particular. Apart from

The salient features of Combed Ware ceramics are bands of pits and comb impressions (below). The Corded Ware belonging to the Boat-Axe culture (right) was quite different. The discovery of these fragments at the head of Valajaskoski shows that connections with distant peoples already existed around 1600–1200 B.C.



deer and elk, the most important game species, they would also hunt smaller animals such as beavers, martens, otters, hares, squirrels, grouse and ducks. The basic weapons at that time were spears and bows and arrows.

There seems to have been a wealth of game available at that time, and it was naturally possible to subsist not only on meat but probably also on berries, roots, seeds and mushrooms. The people moved about on skis, sledges, boats made of hides and punts carved out of a single tree trunk using stone tools.



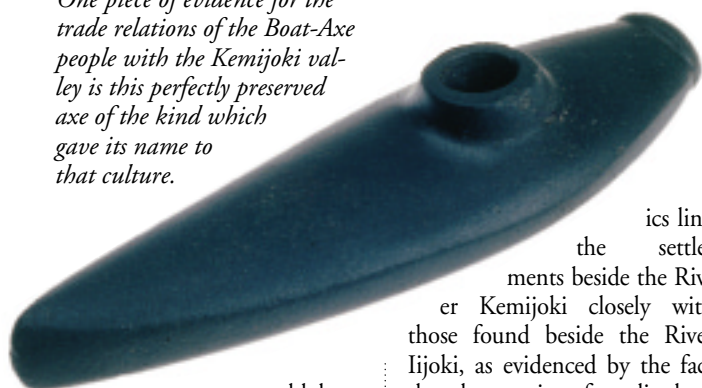
Life in the Stone Age has been regarded as mainly involving unhurried handwork, which obviously meant that the people who formed the community were already using technical tools, thinking, speaking, expanding their range of experience and communicating among themselves. Environmental influences gave rise to a hunting culture characterised by the use of distinctive Bothnian schist tools, i.e. axes, chisels and ice picks. Objects shaped to resemble elk and bear heads may also have been used as tribal symbols.

The art of ceramics, learned from the south-east

The Pre-Ceramic Era was followed in Rovaniemi by another period of about 3000 years represented by stone artefacts and clay potsherds. Ceramic skills were adopted around 4200 B.C., apparently not accompanied by any major influx of population but rather as a result of interaction with people living in the south-east. The vessels varied in size, the largest ones being almost a half a metre in height and holding over 70 litres. Their purpose is unclear, however, for being of the shape of a halved egg and lacking handles, they cannot have been used for carrying water nor perhaps for heating food, either, though they



One piece of evidence for the trade relations of the Boat-Axe people with the Kemijoki valley is this perfectly preserved axe of the kind which gave its name to that culture.



would have been suitable enough for storing domestic water, food-stuffs and fat.

As the sea continued to retreat, the seal hunters were forced to move their late winter dwellings from below Valajaskoski to Muurola and from there to Tervola. The dwelling sites beside the Ancient Lake Kolpene were mainly used in summertime. Interaction with more distant peoples became livelier in this period, as indicated by the presence of high-quality flint imported from areas up to a thousand kilometres away beyond the White Sea and Lake Onega or around the Straits of Denmark for use in making arrow heads, while poor quality flint was obtained from the Varangar fjord in the north.

A new style of ceramics, known to us as Combed Ware, was adopted from the south-east around 3500 B.C., and is thought to have been accompanied by the spread of a Finno-Ugric population as far north as the River Kemijoki. The Boat-Axe culture which entered southern Finland from the eastern Baltic did not proceed to the north, however, but only extended its trade relations as far as the Rovaniemi area.

New ceramic influences were adopted around 2800 B.C., the most important being the use of asbestos as a binding agent in clay. The resulting Päljä ceram-

ics link the settlements beside the River Kemijoki closely with those found beside the River Iijoki, as evidenced by the fact that the remains of a palisade at Kärrniemi beside the River Kemijoki resemble those encountered at Kierikki close to the River Iijoki.

Bronze working skills from east and west

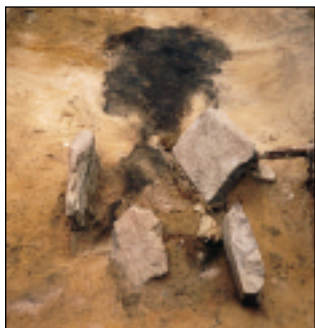
The first bronze objects entered the Rovaniemi area from the east around 1300–1000 B.C., while some of the slightly younger casting moulds to be found have been of western types. Only a very small number of bronze items have been found, however, for the raw material was typically recycled. Stone, wood or bone artefacts

still predominated even during the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age.

A new way of producing ceramics had spread to Rovaniemi from the east before the beginning of the Iron Age which enabled the vessels to be made with thinner sides and flat bottoms. At the same time they became smaller, more of the size that would be used for cooking. Most of them had a capacity of 10–12 litres, though smaller ones of 1,5 litres and even ones the size of a drinking mug have been recovered. In the first centuries of the modern era the clay vessels may have been

The first objects fashioned in bronze entered the Rovaniemi area from the east, but these soapstone casting moulds of the Mälär type from around 1000–500 B.C. are of Norwegian origin.





Kilns used about 2000 years ago for the smelting of iron have been discovered at Sierijärvi, east of the town. The one pictured here still retains its cover stone and the pit in which the molten iron was collected.

replaced by metal ones, introduced as a consequence of the fur trade with the Roman Empire. These had the advantage that they did not break so easily when moved around.

The iron foundries of Lake Sierijärvi

Excavations performed by the Provincial Museum of Lapland in 1989–1991 at Riitakanranta and Kotijänkä beside Lake Sierijärvi, east of the hill of Ounasvaara, brought to light iron foundry kilns of a kind that have also been unearthed close to Kajaani and in Eastern Karelia. These are a find of some significance in the context of Northern Europe as a whole. Iron-making skills are assumed to have been brought to the Rovaniemi area from the east.

Iron was typically extracted from local bog or lake ore, which was mixed with charcoal in kilns constructed of stone slabs sunk into the ground or in the form of a dome above ground. The former had a base of width approximately 50 x 25 cm and were some 25 cm in height. The smelting of iron requires a temperature of 1100–1300°C, and extensive



A sword, two spearheads and an axe blade have been found at Marikkovaara, west of the River Ounasjoki. The sword carries the inscriptions "GICELIN ME FECIT" ("Gicelin made me") and "IN NOMINE DOMINI" ("In the name of the Lord"). The smith Gicelin is thought to have worked somewhere in Central Europe around the year 1200.

finds of slag indicate that the kilns were in frequent use around the beginning of the modern era. The first iron tools were knives and tubular axes.

Iron founding skills also opened the way for making better

use of the natural resources. The need for moving about in search of game decreased in time as cattle-rearing and primitive forms of agriculture gained a foothold, and this enabled the formation of permanent settlements.

THE LONG PREHISTORIC PERIOD

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| T h e P r e h i s t o r y o f R o v a n i e m i a n d t h e E a s t e r n F i n n o - U g r i c C u l t u r e | Appearance of pine | 6000 B.C. | Human beings reach the Rovaniemi area Carved elk head from Lehtojärvi Hunting settlement at Valajainen |
| | Formation of Pirttikoski | | |
| | Rise of Korkaloniemi from the Litorina Sea Formation of Vanttauskoski | 5000 B.C. | Mesolithic settlement at Lamminvaara |
| | Formation of the Ancient Lake Kolpene | 4000 B.C. | Early Combed Ware settlement at Tapulinpelto |
| | Formation of Valajaskoski | | Barter trading with east and west |
| | | 3000 B.C. | Typical Combed Ware settlement at Kolpene Finno-Ugric population enters the area |
| | Formation of Petäjaskoski | | |
| | Seals retreating Climate cooling More reindeer Arrival of spruce | 2000 B.C. | Käröniemi palisade: "Blockade of the River Kemijoki" Artefacts from the Boat Axe culture beside the river |
| | Formation of Ossauskoski | 1000 B.C. | Adoption of bronze working skills from the east and west |
| | | | Thin-sided Asbestos Pottery at Sierijärvi |
| | Birth of Christ | | |
| Highly favourable climate | | Iron founding at Sierijärvi Ceramic replaced by metal vessels The Saami: a hunting people | |
| Cool climate Viking Age Climatic optimum | 1000 A.D. | | |
| Favourable conditions | | Finns: grain cultivation, domestic animals Settlements destroyed by invasions from the White Sea area Rovaniemi gains its own chapel Rovaniemi becomes a parish Period of active development | |
| Little Ice Age | | | |
| | 2000 A.D. | Rovaniemi becomes a town | |

**Hist-
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