



Skandinavian Suomalaiset ry

Fennoskandia | samverkan / Together in Fennoskandia

QUARTERLY



PIRKKALAISET: THE FORGOTTEN RULERS AND MERCHANT LORDS OF THE NORTH

When we speak of medieval Scandinavia, we often think of Vikings and the Hanseatic League. Yet a third significant force has remained in the shadows of history: the *pirkkalaiset* (*birckalar*). These Finnish merchants and tax collectors dominated the northern regions of Fennoscandia for centuries, forming a true trade monopoly.

The *pirkkalaiset* served as “Lapland bailiffs,” holding an exclusive right—granted by King Magnus Eriksson in the 1300s—to tax the inhabitants of Lapland and Peräpohjola. Their influence stretched from Tornio and Luleå all the way to the Arctic Ocean, into Finnmark. The name does not originate from the modern region of Pirkanmaa; rather, many Finnish place names beginning with “Pirka-” are remnants of the territories where these powerful men operated. Their roots reach far deeper than the Middle Ages. Archaeological findings from Tursiannotko suggest that their activities began already in the Iron Age, around the 400s.

The significance of the *pirkkalaiset* is further highlighted by mentions in distant Islamic sources. The geographer al-Idrisi described in the 1100s, in his *Tabula Rogeriana*, a northern land called “Fymark,” whose king owned territories by the Arctic Ocean. This is strong historical evidence of Kven and Finnish merchants whose networks extended as far as the Lyngen Fjord.



Trading near Pello. Detail from Carta Marina (1539).

Distortion and Censorship of History

Although King Gustav Vasa abolished the special privileges of the *pirkkalaiset* in the 1500s, their legacy lives on. Today, however, we encounter a worrying phenomenon: the deliberate obscuring of history. For example, in Norway there is often an attempt to deny the Finnish origin of the *pirkkalaiset* and to label them as “unknown.”

At the same time, the prehistoric presence of Kvens and Finns in Finnmark is frequently dismissed as immigration from the 1700s. It is essential that we recognize the *pirkkalaiset* as part of a genuine northern power structure that connected Finland to international fur trade and the networks of Novgorod long before the era of great powers.

KUULEMIIN! – DECADES OF FINNISH-LANGUAGE RADIO WORK IN SWEDEN BETWEEN TWO COVERS



The year 2027 is historically significant for radio, as one hundred years earlier information from the world began to arrive directly into people's homes. Finland is currently celebrating the YLE100 anniversary, but radio has also played an irreplaceable role in the lives of Finns abroad.

In Sweden, Finnish-language broadcasts began in 1957 as a response to a challenge from Radio Petrozavodsk. The programs produced by Ragnar Lassinantti, known as "Ragnarin Raatio," have been preserved as valuable snapshots of everyday life in the 1950s and the atmosphere of the Cold War. From this beginning grew the well-known North Calotte programs.

A particularly important era in Sweden-Finnish media was the Finnish-language programming of the local radio network (LRAB) from 1977 to 1997. This rich history is now documented in a new memoir and non-fiction book: *Kuulemiin! Local Radio in Finnish in Sweden 1977–1997*.



Ragnar Lassinantti.

The book was created through volunteer work by retirees and with Finnish perseverance. It brings together journalists' memories from two decades and gives a voice to the large generation of Sweden-Finns who moved to the country in the 1960s and 70s.

The book is a last-minute documentation of historical knowledge that might otherwise have been lost. Editors Eija Björstrand and Jaana Johansson, together with their team, have done extensive work with archives and personal stories.

Radio work has changed over the decades: when local radio and national radio merged in 1997, the digital SR Sisuradio was born. Today, the legacy continues online under the name Sveriges Radio Finska. Radio has served as a bridge between the homeland and the new country of residence, and the book *Kuulemiin!* is a well-deserved tribute to the generation that has maintained Sweden-Finnish identity and language on the airwaves.

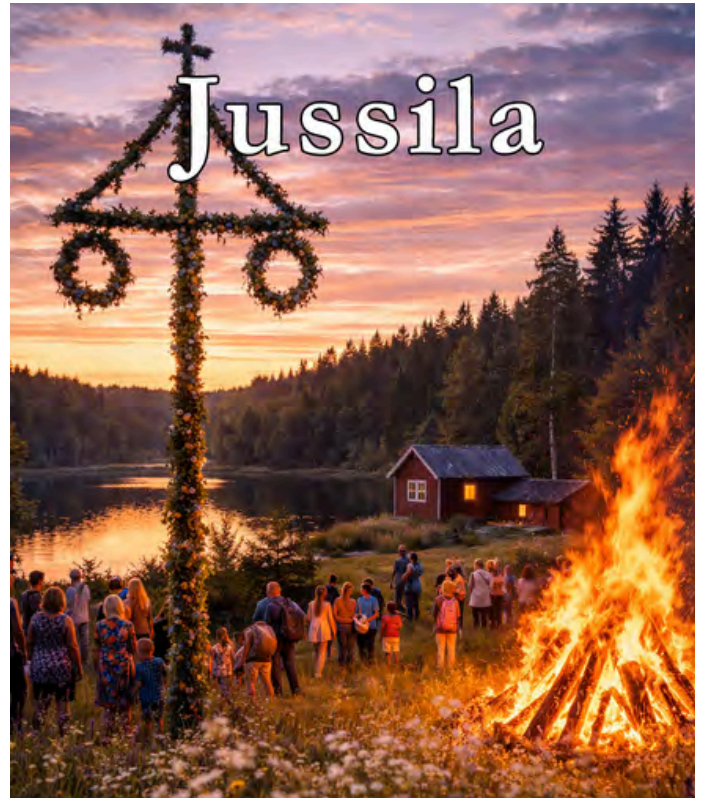
Urho Kekkonen and Ragnar Lassinantti

FINNISH SURNAMES IN FENNOSCANDIA



Throughout Fennoscandia, Finnish people have preserved their cultural and linguistic heritage by retaining their Finnish surnames. In both Scandinavian and Finnish traditions, people keep the surnames of their father or mother. The closeness to nature and agriculture is very often reflected in Finnish surnames. Niemi (peninsula), Kivi (stone), Järvi (lake), and Koski (rapids) are common elements in surnames.

As many as one third of Finnish surnames end in -nen. It typically signifies belonging to something, such as an ethnic origin or a geographical place. Ruotsalainen (swede) is one. Another commonly used suffix is -la or -lä. For example, the surname of Kari Jussila indicated that he came from Jussi's farm. Sometimes a surname reflects an occupation, such as Seppä / Seppälä (smith) and Nikkari (carpenter). Another type of Finnish surname is of Swedish origin. These names are usually connected to social status, such as the nobility, clergy, or the military.



An example of an image showing the meaning of the surname.

Swedish was the language of administration and power during the period when Sweden and Finland were united. In many parts of Fennoscandia, surnames indicated who a person's father or mother was until the late 19th century. For instance, Pekka Juhanpoika (Juha's son) and Liisa Juhantytär (Juha's daughter). In Norway and Sweden, different variants of surnames developed depending on phonetic changes. One example is the use of "jervi" instead of järvi, and "harjo" instead of harju.

Finnish surnames often offer fascinating glimpses into the background of a person or family—a descriptive addition to the society of Fennoscandia. Skandinavian Suomalaiset ry has created some images for Scandinavians that show the meaning of some surnames. They are posted on our Instagram account.

SIX KEYS TO SISU THROUGH THE FINNISH LANGUAGE



Language shapes how we think, act, and understand the world. The Finnish language carries a culture in which calm, perseverance, and action are central – the very core of sisu. Through its structure, expressions, and simplicity, Finnish conveys a way of meeting life.

1. Language as a Carrier of Mentality

The Finnish language expresses a mindset in which perseverance, quietness, and action are valued. While many languages use numerous words to describe emotions and relationships, Finnish often expresses strength and calm through simplicity and precision.

2. Grammar as a Mirror of Responsibility and Independence

In Finnish, the subject can often be omitted where other languages would use it. One may say, for example: Menen metsään – “(I) go to the forest.” The language reflects an attitude in which one simply does what must be done – without placing oneself at the center.

Suomalaiset kielet Sisu



3. Hän – Equality and Respect

The Finnish pronoun hän means both “he” and “she.” People are first and foremost ihminen – a human being. This creates a mental space for equality and respect.

4. Words and Expressions that Contain Action and Courage

The language itself encourages perseverance and action through grounded expressions that carry the spirit of sisu: Kestän tämän. – “I will endure this.” Mennään vaan. – “Let’s go.” Ei anneta periksi. – “We do not give up.”

5. Language as a Training Ground for Sisuu

Learning and using Finnish as an adult requires patience, precision, and endurance. One continues step by step until mastery comes. In this way, the language becomes a way to practice and express sisu.

6. Agglutination – Layers of Meaning in the Language

Finnish is an agglutinative language. Meaning is built by adding small elements to a word, layer by layer. A word such as talossanikinko is formed gradually: talo (house) → talossa (in the house) → talossani (in my house) → talossanikinko (also in my house?)

The Finnish language is a shared Nordic language in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. In these places, sisu is a well-known concept. To preserve the Finnish language is also to preserve the quiet strength of sisu.

THE PUBLICATION DATES OF OUR NEXT NEWSLETTERS

VERNAL EQUINOX

SUMMER SOLSTICE

AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

WINTER SOLSTICE