

Finnish Magic and the Old Gods

by

Terri Simon

for

The Nomadic Chantry of the Gramarye

Converted to Adobe portable document format
by www.sacred-magick.com

History

The Finnish people are, in many ways, an enigma. Despite Finland's location amidst the Scandinavian countries, the Finns are not Scandinavian. They came out of Asia thousands of years ago and settled in Finland at least 4,000 years ago. Their language is closer to Ugrian, Samoyed or Korean than the nearby German, Russian or Swedish. According to Finnish Magic by Robert Nelson, "There is evidence that the Finno-Ugrians anciently occupied a major part of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and possibly part of the British isles. J. F. Campbell and others have taught that the aboriginal inhabitants of the British Isles were Finns displaced by the conquering Celts and Germans, who seemed to associate the Finns with magic. The old Norse word for sorcery, *finngerd*, literally meant 'a Finn's work.'" It is also thought that the Finns conquered and absorbed the Lapps as they traveled through the north and their are similarities between languages to support this.

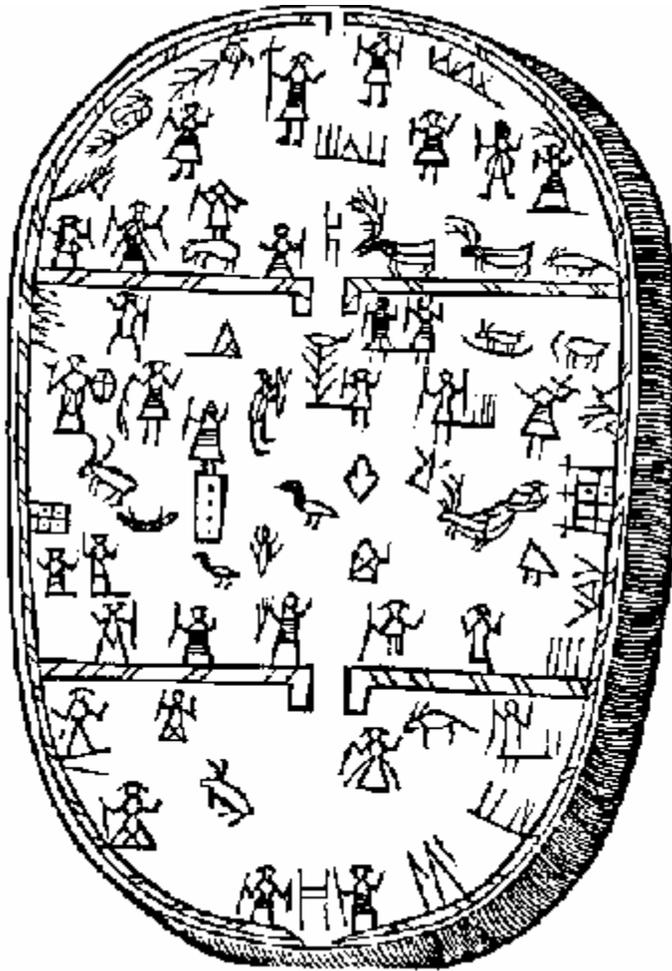
The Finns were seen as warriors, but in some ways this is a role that was thrust upon them. Finns served the Byzantine emperors as bodyguards, palace police and soldiers. They served the Uppsala kings of ancient Sweden in Viking conquests throughout the Baltic and North Sea areas. After Finland was made a province of Sweden by Swedish King Eric the Good and Bishop Henry of Uppsala, the Finns often found themselves in wars that were more like fights for survival than matters of territoriality.

Finnish warrior spirit is more a sign of indomitable will than one of blood-thirstiness. They survived forty-two wars with Russia, having lost all of them. They paid their war debts when richer countries didn't. These are examples of what the Finns would call *sisu*. *Sisu* doesn't have a translation but it represents the philosophy that what needs to be done, will be

done, no matter the cost. “Strong will takes a person even through stone.” The Kalevala, the Finnish national epic, is probably the only such epic which is not about war. Considering that for most of Finland’s history it didn’t have it’s own government, this makes a point about the temperament of the Finns.

Magic

The Finns have long been associated with magic. Sailors considered it bad luck to kill a Finn. The Norwegian kings forbade their citizens to travel to Finland to consult magicians. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Swedish government searched for and confiscated *goudbas*, the magic drums of the Lapp and Finn shamans. There have been many stories of Finns controlling the wind, something very useful for Vikings and sailors of all sorts.



A shaman drum (*goudbas*)

While Finnish magic includes ways to capture wind into knots for use later, the magic is based in shamanism, which Nelson describes as “the practice of using altered states of consciousness to influence the world and acquire power.” Finnish shaman made particular use of songs and chants and the phrase “to sing” someone meant to perform magic on them. For example, the contest between Väinämöinen and Joukahainen starts with Joukahainen’s challenge:

“If you’re old Väinämöinen
the everlasting singer
let us start singing
begin reciting

with man testing man
one defeating the other!”

Great importance was placed on knowing the right words for the songs and knowing the origin of a thing gave you power over it. Spirits were everywhere in nature and a shaman could gain knowledge by observation or by being taught, but the most useful method was by going into a trance. Shaman and magi are called “word-masters,” but knowing the words is not enough. The knowledge must be used by an act of will. To make this act of will take place, the mage must develop the disciplines of focus, practice, purification and trance work.

The trance work was often preceded by a sauna (an invention of the Finns) which was perhaps a ritual cleansing and could also be used as part of the trance itself. Trance work was usually done in groups with loud and energetic chanting, but it could be done alone and quietly. Dancing could be used to enter a trance state.

One of the things which could be accomplished in a trance state was to communicate with *haltija*. The *haltija* is the spirit of a thing, whether it be a tree, a place, an object, etc. The *haltija* is not a spirit which can be separated from a host object, the *haltija* is more the spiritual essence of the object.

Nelson points out that magic, while being based in the spiritual, was used for practical purposes as well. In the Kalevala, Väinämöinen uses his magic to build a ship and to aid agriculture. Ilmarinen uses his magical ability, combined with his expertise as a smith, to create the Sampo, an artifact that creates corn, salt and money.

Then the smith Ilmarinen
put this into words: “I’ll be
able to forge the Sampo
beat out the bright-lid
from a swan’s quill tip

a barren cow's milk
a small barley grain
a summer ewe's down
because I have forged the sky
beaten out the lid of heaven
with nothing to start off from
with not a shred ready made."

According to Nelson, there is evidence that the Finns also knew and used the futhark and were familiar with the Norse pantheon. In the Kalevala, one of the places a runaway fire passes through is "Thor's field edge" and, when Väinämöinen needs to determine what happened to the sun and moon, which are missing, he apparently uses runes.

He, the old Väinämöinen
the everlasting wise man
from an alder cut slivers
laid the slivers out
set about turning the lots
his fingers arranging them

Festivals

The Finns divided the year into four quarters. The dates for these holidays are approximate since there was a lot of individual adaptation involved in everything they did. The Finns were also aware of the cultures of those around them and adapted and adopted as necessary. For instance, when Christian influence increased, St. Anthony's Day (January 17th) was melded into a continuation of the house spirit cult. A rag doll or candle would be made to represent the spirit of the house or farm. The doll or candle would be kept somewhere appropriate (like a grain bin) and later in the year would be offered food and prayer. The dates for the quarters and some other holidays are:

- Plough Day - April 14
- Bear's Day - July 13

- Withering Day - October 14
- Collection Day - January 14
- Summer festival, or *kesäjuhlat* would begin on St. John's Eve (or *Juhunnas*) and the longest day of the year would be celebrated.

- Midwinter or Yuletide would be celebrated around December 21-23.

- The National Winter Festival or *Laskaiainen* is celebrated around February 7. This festival honored woman and their handiwork. It marked the beginning of weaving for the year and it was bad luck if the spinning wasn't done by then.

- Spring Equinox was celebrated, marking the time when animals were first freed from the barn for grazing.

- Autumn Equinox was celebrated around September 21-23. It was a harvest celebration marked with feasts, sacrifices, story telling music and the sauna. At the harvest, the first or last sheaf cut would be saved and offered beer and food on Christmas eve to ensure that the grain would grow the next year.

- August Eve or August 1st was the festival of first fruits.

- November Eve is the feast of remembrance. The shamans believed the doorway between the seen/material world and the unseen/immaterial/spiritual world was open. It was celebrated with sacrifices and ancestral remembrances.

Ancestor Worship

The Finns have strong ties to their ancestors. Although the ancestors have gone on to the spirit world, they maintain an interest in their descendants. The ancestral spirits gain and keep power through the attention of the living, earthly spirits. It is believed that our attention

gives the spirits focus, purpose and motivation. Without it the spirits lose touch with the earth and lapse into sleep. The spirits powers vary, some being very strong and others on a par with mortals. The spirits can intervene on their descendants behalf, be benevolent or manipulative, much like when they were alive.

Finnish Gods and Goddesses

In this section, I provide a list of every Finnish deity I could find listed on the Internet and in the books listed in the bibliography. The major deities are marked with asterisks.

Ahti *

Other Names: Atho

Description: Chief god of waters and seas. Husband of Vellamo. Rules over water and the sea. He is the god prayed to by fishermen looking for a good catch and for blessing their equipment. Even Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen need his help to catch a particular magical fish. Ahti could be placed in the West when casting a circle.

Egres

Other Names: Akras

Description: Fertility god, responsible for the turnip crop.

Haltia

Description: House goddess. She was said to live in each room's roof beams, bringing good luck and health to the residents if they greeted her upon entering.

Hiisi

Description: Tree god, said to reside in pine forests. After Christianization, he was reduced to a troll. Also described as a group of evil spirit that worked with Lempo and Paha and ruled over evil, skilled sorcerers, necromancers, spells, sacred drums, trance, chanting.

Hittavainen

Description: Hunting god, guardian deity of hare hunters.

Ilma

Description: God of air. Father of Ilmatar. Rules over air.

Ilmarinen *

Description: Sky god. Weather god who places the stars in the sky. He may be a successor to Ilma. Guardian of travelers. Smith-god who educated man in the use of iron and forging. He forged the mysterious, powerful talisman Sampo. He rules over smiths, magick, talismans, prosperity. Ilmarinen could be placed in the East when casting a circle, but could actually fit in any of the four quarters, since his skills as a smith and magician indicate his ability to use all elements. A smith uses fire in his forge, air in the bellows, earth in the form of the metal he works and water to cool the finished project.

Inmar

Other Names: Votyak

Description: Sky goddess. The name became incorporated into Christian tradition and interpreted as “the mother of God”.

Jumala

Other Names: Mader-Atcha.

Description: First sky god, creator. No shape or identity, creative impulse only.
Rules over sky, thunder, weather, twilight, dusk.

Kalma

Description: Goddess of death and decay, haunted graveyards, snatching the flesh of the dead. In Tuonela, she lived in an invisible country guarded by the flesh eating monster, Surma. Daughter of Tuoni and Tuonetar.

Kaltesh

Description: Fertility goddess. Concerned with childbirth and the future destiny of the infant. Consort of the sky god Num. Her sacred animals include the hare and the goose.

Symbol: Birch tree

Kipu-Tytto

Description: Goddess of Illness. Daughter of Tuoni.

Kondos

Description: God of cereal crops, particularly identified with the sowing of wheat. After Christianization, he was absorbed by the figure of St. Urban.

Kuu

Description: Moon Goddess.

Leib-Olmai

Description: Bear God. Rules over luck in hunting, protection from injuries.

Louhi *

Description: Magic working ice giantess. Princess of Pohjala, far to the north. Goddess of sorcery, evil, dark magick. Rules over sorcery, evil, dark magick.

Loviatar

Description: Goddess of plagues, daughter of Tuoni and Tuonetar, mated with the wind. She had 9 children which gusted out across the universe carrying diseases.

Lounnotar *

Other Names: Ilmatar.

Description: Virgin daughter of Air, Sky Mother, Water Mother, Creatress Goddess, Daughter of Nature, Mother of the Waters. Rules over immense powers. “Daughter of nature.” One day a duck nested on her knee while she was resting. When she moved the three eggs fell into the primeval slime. There the eggs were transformed into the universe. The bird’s eggs hatch and are used to form the sky and the earth, the yolk forms the sun, the white forms the moon. After this she formed the islands and peninsulas on earth. Lounnotar also gives birth to Väinämöinen. She was pregnant for 700 years. In casting a circle, Lounnotar could represent the West, since she is known as Water Mother and is the creator of the world. She is also known as Air-Daughter and could represent the East.

Mere-Ama

Other Names: Vete-Ema, Mier-Iema

Description: “Sea mother”. She was the spirit of water. Her most powerful manifestation was in the ocean, but she also resided in the streams and brooks. She was the queen of aquatic life.

Mielikki *

Description: Goddess of the forests, protector of animals, and also goddess of the hunt. Her favorite animal was the bear-cub. When she found orphaned cubs, she would nurture them herself into adulthood. Consort of Tapio and mother of Tuulikki and Nyyrikki.

Protectress of woodland animals. Goddess of the Hunt. Rules over bears, hunting, animals, archery, abundant grain. In casting a circle, Mielikki could represent the North.

Num

Description: Samoyed sky god.

Numitore

Description: Vogul sky god who created all animals.

Paiva

Description: Sun God.

Pajainen

Description: God. The deity who kills the great bull.

Paivatar *

Description: She was called “competent maid” or “resplendent of the shaft-bow of the sky”. The spinning sun virgin who wove daylight from a rainbow arch. In one myth, Paivatar is the sun and her son is the moon. They are captured by Louhi, the Maid of the Northland, and are rescued by Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen. I wonder if Paivatar and Paiva are really the same, since the names are similar and both are sun deities. Paivatar may be associated with the South when calling quarters.

Pellervoinen

Description: God of fields, trees and plants. Rules over fields, trees, plants, harvest, fertility.

Pellon Pekko

Description: Vegetation god. The deity responsible for the germination and harvesting of barley used to make beer. The first brewing is dedicated to Pellen Pekko. Melded with St. Peter under Christian influence.

Rana Neida

Description: Goddess of spinning

Rauni

Other Names: Akka, Maan-Eno, Ravdna, Roonikka

Description: Forest Mother, storm and thunder goddess. Consort of the thunder god Ukko and responsible for rainbows after storms. She was incarnated in the rowan tree or mountain ash. Associated with air, clouds, thunder, rain, plant life. She oversaw the harvest. Rules over childbirth, ease from pain.

Sampsa

Description: Vegetation god. He is perceived as a giver of life to seed that lies dormant through the winter months. His unnamed consort, to whom he is wed in a form of sacred marriage that takes place at sowing time, is also his stepmother.

Tapio *

Description: Hunting god. God of water and woods. Husband of Mielikki, father of Nyyrikki and Tuulikki. Wore a fir hat and moss cloak. Rules over abundance of game. Believed to inhabit forests and invoked before a hunt. In casting a circle, Tapio would be placed at the North.

Tuonetar

Description: The queen of death. Lived in a jungle of darkness somewhere on earth, divided from the land of the living by a black-water river.

Tuoni

Description: Lord of Tuonela/Manala (underworld). Rules over death.

Tursas

Other Names: Iki-Turso, Turisas, Turras

Description: Possibly related to the Scandinavian word *thurs* meaning giant. He's described as malevolent. Connected to water and the beach. War god. Father of demons. His symbol was an image of four arrows known as the Heart of Tursas.

Ukko *

Description: Thunder god. King of the gods, successor to Jumala. He was an elder of the universe and his existence guaranteed its survival. He remained aloof – mortals only saw rain clouds. Drives a cart which generates flashes of lightning as the horses hoofs hit stones along the way. The noise of thunder comes from the wheels or from Ukko grinding grain with a big stone. Rules over clouds, rains, thunder, help with the impossible.

Attributes: Ax, blue robe, hammer, and sword. Ukko could be called in the East when casting a circle.

Väinämöinen *

Description: Cultural hero/god. According to the Kalevala, he is the son of Luonnotar. He took 700 years to be born. In some stories, it was he who sat in the sea and had the bird nest on his knee. Väinämöinen is referred to throughout the Kalevala as “steady” and “old man”. It appears that he is the foremost magician/singer

Vellamo

Description: The sea goddess lived underwater with her daughters, the waves, who tended cattle and raised mysterious crops on the ocean floor.

Venden Emo

Description: The “mother of water” was responsible for guiding fish into the nets of the hungry. She is a very ancient goddess; her worship was recorded almost 2000 years ago by Agricola.

Yambe-Akka

Description: "Old woman of the dead." Has charge of the underworld. Rules over underworld.

Bibliography

Ancient Religion of the Finns

Written for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs by Professor Juha Pentikäinen, University of Helsinki

<http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/muinueng.html>

Ancient Finnish Myths

<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/4640/indexbase.html>

Finnish Folklore

Written for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs by Juhani U. Lehtonen Professor of Ethnology, University of Helsinki, May 1993

<http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/folkleng.html>

Finnish Magic - A Nation of Wizards, A World of Spirits, by Robert Nelson, Ph.D., published by Llewellyn Publications, 1999

Finnish Pagan Pages

<http://members.nbc.com/karjala/ENGLISH.HTM>

The Kalevala, by Elias Lonnrot, translated by Keith Bosley, published by Oxford University Press, 1989

Kalevala Tarot, by Kalervo Aaltonen, published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1996