

LIFE IN SAVO REGION from 9th to 13th CENTURY

DEFINITION OF THE PERIOD

In Finland the period is divided according to the European tradition of history even though we lived still the Iron age while Central Europe already lived the Middle Ages. So the period between 800-1050 is called Viking age and 1050-1150 Crusades' Age. The Middle ages and historical age began in Finland in the 1150's. Historical age means that we have written sources from that period of time. Swedish rule and Christianity started to spread in Finland at the same time as the historical age began. Christian faith came to Finland from two directions. Catholic faith from the West mostly by the Swedish and Orthodox faith from the East by the Carelians and the Russians.

WHAT DID THEY EAT?

It is estimated that approximately 1000-3000 people lived in Savo region in the beginning of the period , and perhaps 7000-10 000 at the end of the period, most of them in southern parts of the region. They got their food by hunting, fishing, agriculture, animal husbandry and gathering berries, mushrooms and plants from the nature.

The most popular game was elk but also rabbits and birds were hunted. Hunters used cross-bows, spears and traps to catch their prey. Fish like pike, perch and vendace were an important part of the nourishment. Different kinds of nets were mostly used to catch fish.

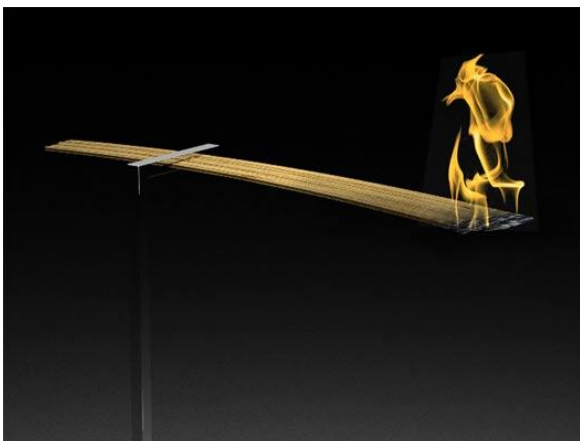
Agriculture was mainly slash and burn type cultivation which means that after 3-4 years the field was abandoned because the fertility of the land had diminished. It took over a year to work and to till a certain area of a forest into a new slash and burn field ready for sowing. The first year the trees are slashed so that they dry up, the second year the trees are cut and burnt and then land is ready to be sown. Usually barley and rye were cultivated during the first two years, after that oat or turnip for one or two years. Other plants were flax, hop, onion and horse bean. Hop was used to flavour beer which was made of barley.

Cows and horses were kept, they could pasture on the clearings abandoned by slash and burn cultivators. Cows could be milked in summer and autumn because only

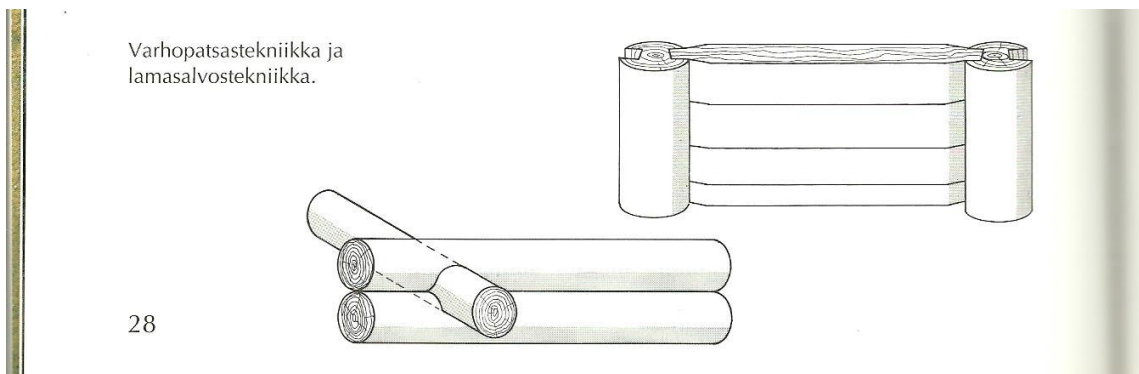
then there was enough fodder to feed them properly. Milk was not drunk but processed into butter, cheese and sour milk, that's because raw milk goes bad fast. Other domestic animals were dogs, pigs, sheep and hens. People gathered blueberries, lingonberries, cloudberries, raspberries etc. The only fruit that could be grown in Finland was apple. It was brought here in 13th century, probably by Swedish crusaders. Forests provided also plants that were eaten or were used as seasoning for example chive and pigweed.

HOW DID THEY LIVE?

People lived in small cottages. The walls were constructed of logs, roof usually was made of birch bark. There were no windows, the light came in through a small hole or holes in the wall. The smoke coming from the stove also went out from those holes because there was no chimney in the cottage. Big stove was used to heat the cottage and to cook. People burnt wooden shingles inside the cottage to get more light. One wooden shingle burnt for about 15 minutes.



a wooden shingle burning



two techniques to build a log cottage

Heating and burning shingles needed plenty of wood. Every summer it was necessary cut and chop lots of firewood. People slept a lot during wintertime because it was dark most of the time, and worked a lot during summertime when it was light almost 24 hours a day.



from the left: the head of an axe, a sword, a spear head

CULTURE, SPIRITUAL LIFE AND CONNECTIONS TO OTHER CULTURES

The dead were usually cremated in a graveyard until 11th century. People thought that the graveyard was the home of a dead person. That's why a person was buried with objects and food that he or she would need in the afterlife for example tools, weapons and jewellery. The graveyards were near the houses so that people could go there and ask the dead for help or advice. After the 11th century it became more common not to burn the dead. It is a sign that people started to convert to Christian faith.

The chief was the head of a community. The climate was warmer than today and favourable to agriculture. A village started to arise around a farm when the number of population started to increase and more space was needed to feed and house all the people.

Long distance trade started to increase in Northern Europe from the 8th century. The Viking Age began. More products were transported and much further than before. So called “ Eastern route “ of the Vikings started from Birka in Sweden and went via Gulf of Finland to Novgorod, through Ukrainian rivers to the Black Sea and finally to Bagdad and Constantinople(today Istanbul, Vikings called it Miklagardr, Russians Tsargrad)

For Finns Vikings were usually trading partners and sometimes a threat. Probably some Finns took part in Viking voyages and travelled to Novgorod and Constantinople to trade. The most important Finnish export were furs. The imports consisted of salt, weapons, jewellery. Like always, when goods were traded, also ideas were shared and spread.

FORT HILLS AND CASTLES

Over 90 fort hills are dated to the Viking and Crusades’ age in Finland . It tells that the times were troubled. People needed a refuge, a place to escape and defend themselves if necessary. Fort hills were high hills which were fortified with stone and/or wooden walls. One of the greatest fort hills, Pisamalahti, is situated in Sulkava, not far away from Savonlinna.

The construction of the first stone castle in Finland , Castle of Turku, started around 1220-1230 by the Swedes. The nearest stone castle to Kuopio is Olavinlinna , the castle of Olavi(Olafsborg in Swedish), the construction of it began in 1475 under Swedish rule.

Answer the following questions using the information that you have read, heard, seen so far. These questions help you to create your part of collaborative writing on Monday

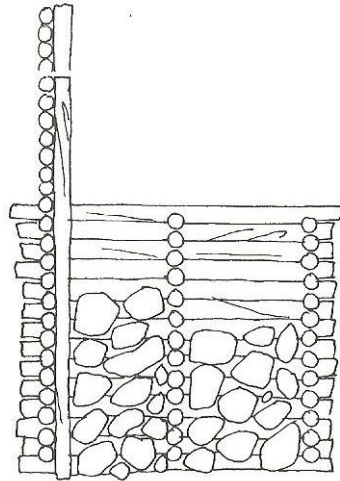
1. What age did people live here in Finland 1000 years ago?
2. Why did they usually live near water?
3. What kind of clothes did they wear, who made those clothes?
4. If you were a cook 1000 years, what would you prepare for dinner tonight?
5. What do graveyards tell us about the people who lived here?
6. What did people do during long, dark and cold winter nights in Savo 1000 years ago? Use your imagination!



A view from the fort hill Pisamalahti near Sulkava



Remains of the stone wall of the fort hill Pisamalahti



Reconstruction of the wall

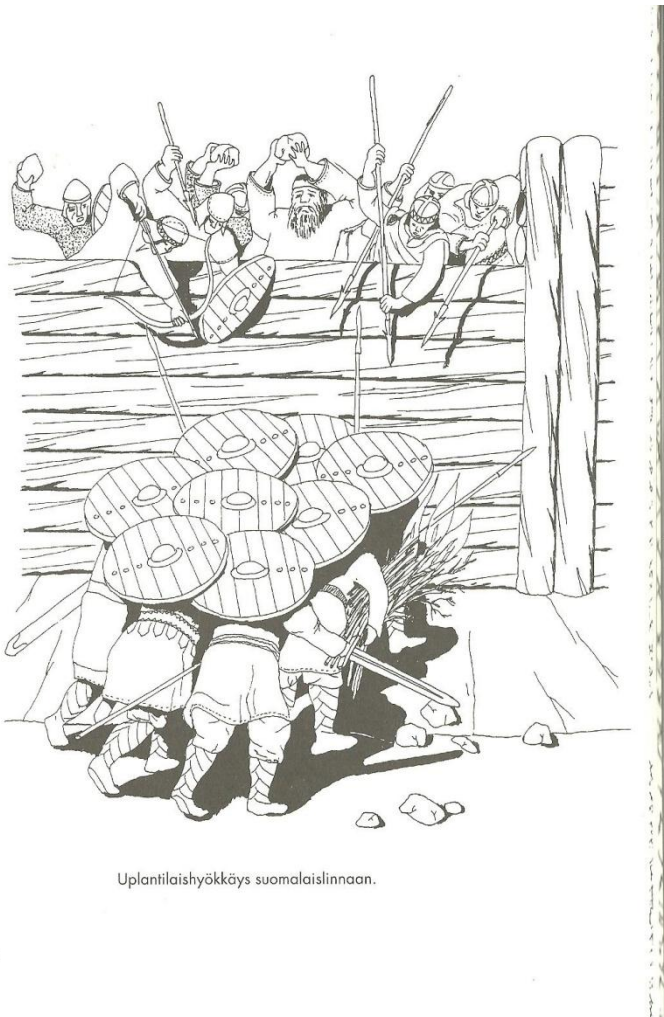
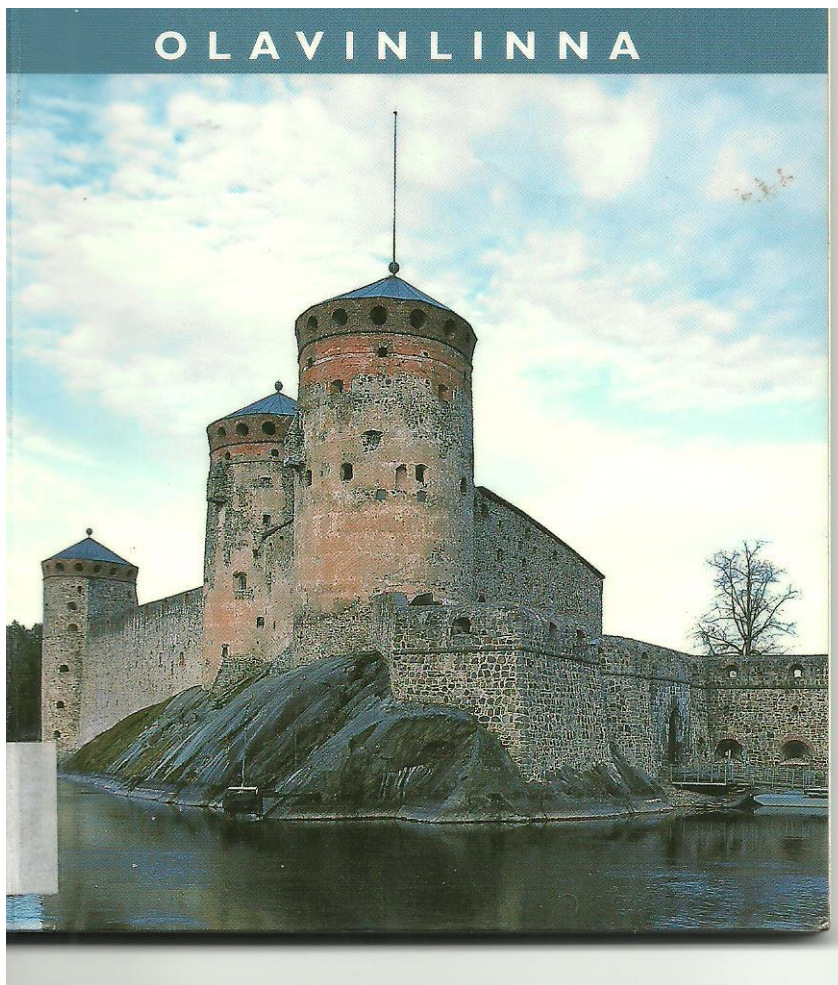


Illustration of Finns defending against Vikings



7. Why were fort hills and castles usually build near water?