Introduction: Finland in Imperial Context

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Abstract
"Imperial Era," this special issue of the *Journal of Finnish Studies*, presents a selection of articles that describe Finland in the context of the Russian Empire. In this introductory article, "Finland in Imperial Context," the authors sketch the historical background for the specialized articles. They present key features in the history of the Grand Duchy of Finland during its period of Russian rule (1809–1917), that is, after the Napoleonic Wars and before the Russian Revolution, after Swedish rule and before independence. The importance of understanding Finland in imperial context—as a part of the wider context of the Russian Empire—is highlighted. It is contrasted with a narrower national context. The complexities of studying this era and other aspects of Finnish-Russian history include the need for scholars to be multilingual and grapple with the legacy of Russian imperialism—which still burdens the world today. Multi- and translingual considerations are described, orienting the reader to standardizations employed by the authors for maximum accessibility and comprehensibility of the issue's articles, which are each introduced in summary.

Keywords: Finland, Russia, Finnish history, long nineteenth century, nationalism, imperialism, historiography

The imperial era was a period of Finnish history from 1809 to 1917. It began in connection with the Napoleonic Wars as the Russian Empire conquered the Finnish territory from the Kingdom of Sweden. The imperial era lasted until the collapse of the Russian

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Empire during the First World War. In Eastern Finland, the imperial era began earlier, as the province of Viipuri was already annexed by imperial Russia in two stages during the eighteenth century. The province and the newly conquered Finnish territory were united in 1812.

The foundations of modern Finland were laid during this period. The Finnish territory was granted self-rule by the Russian emperor as a separate Grand Duchy of Finland within the Russian Empire; the territory was not incorporated into the empire proper. This new administrative unit had clearly demarcated borders: in the west, there was an international border between the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Sweden, in the east, there was an internal customs border. However, in the north, the demarcation was not completed until 1889. Already during the Swedish era, Finland had been a titular grand duchy, but it had lacked a central administration and even an official capital. Turku was the administrative center and most important city, where a university, an episcopal seat, and a Court of Appeal resided. Like other parts of the unitary Swedish realm, Finland was ruled from Stockholm.

In 1809, the Russian emperor established a central administration for Finland in the form of a governing council located in Turku. It was renamed the Imperial Senate of Finland in 1816 and moved to the newly chosen (1812) capital of the grand duchy, Helsinki, in 1819. The elevated name of the body was a visible sign that Finland was not subordinate to the Imperial Governing Senate of Russia. The Russian bureaucracy had no say in Finnish affairs as they were prepared by Finnish officials and presented to the emperor in Saint Petersburg by a Finnish state secretary, who was granted the more prestigious title *minister* state secretary in 1834. Only the emperor's representative, the governor general, was a distinctly non-Finnish official (see the organizational chart, Figure 1). Still, most governors general tended to defend the grand duchy from the incursions of the Russian bureaucracy, as Finland was their own administrative sphere and the weakening of Finland's position would have simultaneously meant the weakening of their own position.

Most Finns became loyal imperial subjects because of the favorable conditions assured by the Russian emperors. During the imperial era, they were ruled by five emperors: Alexander I (ruled in the grand duchy 1809–1825), Nicholas I (1825–1855), Alexander

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II (1855–1881), Alexander III (1881–1894), and Nicholas II (1894–1917). Finns also gradually became Finnish citizens in a specific sense, as the administrative unit evolved into a full-blown bilingual Finnish nation, rapidly developing culturally and economically, though more slowly politically, during the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, a conflict developed between the emerging Finnish nation and the empire proper. The administrative system of the empire was reformed toward unitary rule—at the same time as the Finns became increasingly more confident of their separate statehood, constitution, and nation. Both parties were affected by the rise of nationalism. The collapse of the earlier understanding and loyalism became suddenly evident to all in 1899, when the infamous February Manifesto was received with horror in Finland. In fact, it only demarcated an alternative route of imperial legislation for Finnish affairs. However, as it was only decreed by the emperor and not enacted by the Diet, most Finns considered the manifesto an unconstitutional coup. Unlike his predecessors, the recently appointed governor general, Nikolay Bobrikov, aimed to integrate the grand duchy into the empire forcefully—instead of defending his own administrative sphere.

The historical period here in question is often traditionally named "the period of autonomy." The designation emphasizes the newly received self-rule that separated the period from the earlier unitary kingdom and the later independence. This label comes from the figurative "road to independence" narrative, whereby Finnish history is presented as progressing teleologically toward sovereignty. From this point of view, the nineteenth century tends to be a sort of "pre-independence" and not interesting on its own terms. But if we take an overall view, even autonomy was possible only because it was supported by an autocratic emperor and because Finland had been annexed by a non-unitary empire. It is this imperial context that is fundamental to this period. That is why we call it *the imperial era*.

With this issue we present Finland in imperial context. "Imperial" here has two meanings: relating to an empire and relating to an emperor.[1] These two meanings are usually expressed with two separate terms in Finnish, Swedish, and Russian. Relating to

[1] Dictionary.com, s.v. "imperial," accessed October 25, 2022, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/imperial.

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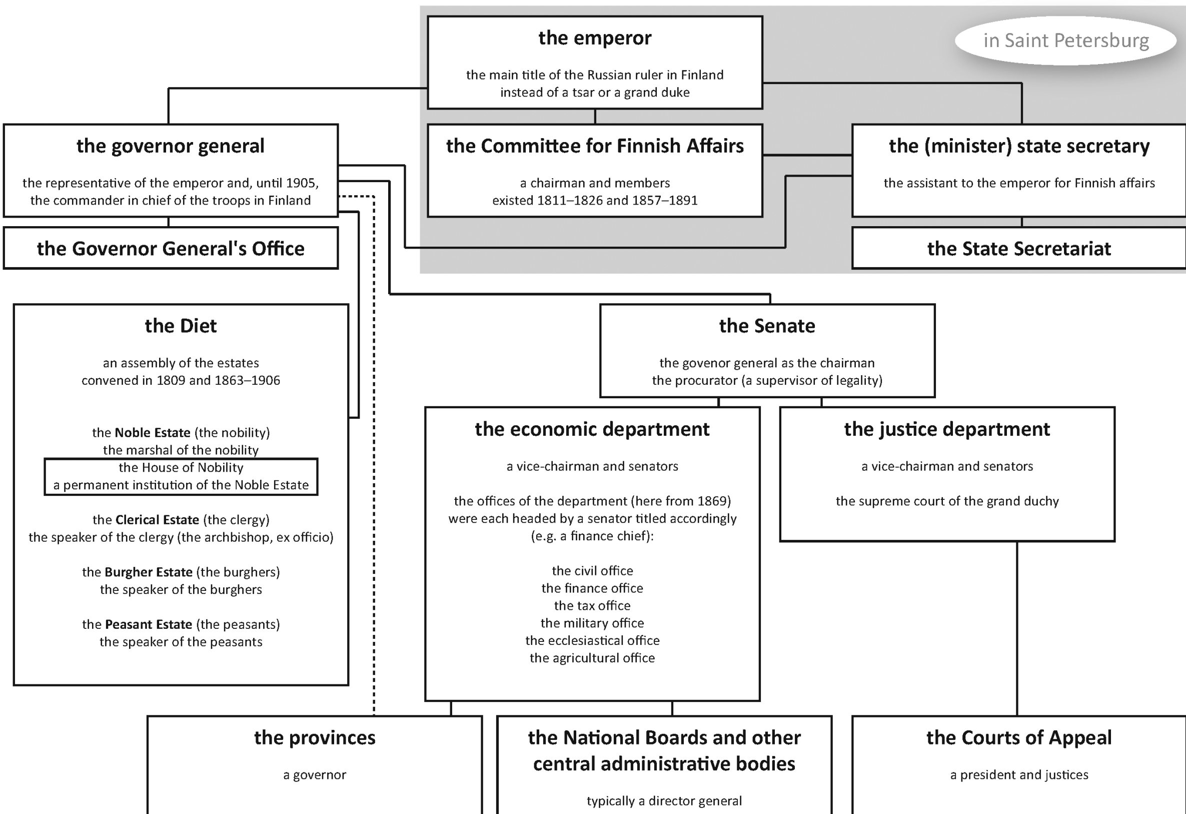
Figure 1. The Higher Administration of the Grand Duchy of Finland.



This organizational chart is an effort to standardize the English terminology of the higher Finnish administration that has varied widely. We have preferred concise terms that usually correspond closely to the original terms in Swedish—the main language of the nineteenth-century Finnish administration. We have applied minimal capitalization and hyphenation in accordance with the current American and British practice (*Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. [2017]; *New Oxford Style Manual* [2016]; and several dictionaries). Titles, such as “emperor” or “finance chief,” are capitalized only when they immediately precede a personal name. When they follow a name or are used alone, they are lowercase. We have consulted most general histories of Finland in English and several special studies of nineteenth-century history and administration. The terminology presented here is a synthesis of this review and, as such, not to be found in any single study previously published.

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an empire: *imperiumin*, *imperiell*, and *imperskiy*. Relating to an emperor: *keisarillinen*, *kejserlig,* and *imperatorskiy*.

While some Finnish historians—notably Matti Klinge (1997)—have emphasized the latter meaning, that is, the personal role of the Russian emperor in nineteenth-century Finnish history, for this issue the primary meaning is the former: imperial context means that we place Finland in the wider context of the Russian Empire. It means that we are interested in transnational phenomena that crossed the internal Finnish-Russian customs border and that we are interested in other regions and populations of the empire and their influence in Finland as well as the influence of Finland's inhabitants elsewhere.

The imperial context can be contrasted with a narrower national context that examines nineteenth-century Finnish history within the confines of the Finnish Grand Duchy. As historians wrote history for the developing Finnish nation, they often minimized the role of "outside" influences. This methodological nationalism was reinforced by the political conflict with the Russian government at the end of the imperial era. The so-called periods of oppression (from 1899 onward) buried under them the memory of an earlier period of relative loyalism and amicable relations.

Osmo Jussila (2004, 2007) has argued that it was only in the 1860s that the Finnish population (or at least its educated classes) suddenly discovered—after a learned debate—that Finland was a nation-state guarded by its own constitution. The evidence for this reasoning was mostly found in the documents of the Porvoo Diet of 1809. They contain many eloquent and noble words, but their legal and political significance is all but clear; it is still debated by historians (Soikkanen 2005; Engman 2009; Katajala 2017). The nineteenth-century Finnish interpretation even proposed that Finns had concluded a Finnish-Russian union treaty with the emperor in Porvoo. The exact characteristics of the duly created Finnish state and its alleged union with the Russian state were unclear, but essentially the emperor was often considered to be the only uniting factor. This view of the Finnish contemporaries was vehemently opposed by numerous Russian debaters but later, at least partly, shared by many twentieth-century Finnish historians. It was assumed that Finland was already in the nineteenth century a semi-independent nation-state sharing the same monarch but struggling under Russian rule and heading for independence. This assumed progress toward

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sovereignty—that was almost seen as preordained—as well as the struggle against the empire during the periods of oppression were sublimated into a narrow national history where the empire did not exist.

In addition to professors Osmo Jussila and Matti Klinge, Tuomo Polvinen, who wrote a biography of Governor General Bobrikov (1995), and Max Engman, an expert on the Finnish features of Saint Petersburg (his synthesis in Finnish, Engman 2004) are also key contributors to the study of Finland's imperial context. At the moment, there are no history professors in this field in Finland. If there were, they undoubtedly would be editing this issue.

As in the nineteenth century, there remains both a language and a political barrier between Finland and Russia that hinders research on Finnish history in an imperial context. Despite many efforts during the imperial era—and ever since—few Finns have studied the Russian language and even fewer have used their language skills to study the history of the imperial era. Those fluent in Russian are mostly employed by commercial firms or as civil servants. Those studying history might find nineteenth-century handwriting and newspaper typefaces daunting compared to the typed documents of the twentieth century.

Nineteenth-century Finland was also a remarkably multilingual society. For example, in an ideal case, an imperial-era historian of the upper classes would be able to read sources and research literature in six languages:

- in French (a language of the upper classes and bureaucratic correspondence at the beginning of the nineteenth century);
- in German (a language of commerce, science, some imperial officials, and some Finnish inhabitants of the city of Viipuri/Viborg/Vyborg);
- in Swedish (the main language of the Finnish upper classes and administration, and a very important language of research literature);
- in Finnish (not found in upper-class sources before the end of the period, but the main language of research literature);
- in Russian (found in some administrative, military, and commercial sources, and an important language of research literature);
- and in English (found in some commercial sources, and the main language of international research literature).

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On the other hand, a researcher of minorities of the period would additionally benefit from the knowledge of the Sámi languages, Karelian, Romani, Tatar, and Yiddish. A researcher of the Imperial Alexander University would benefit from the knowledge of Latin, and of its theological faculty, Greek and Hebrew as well. It is relieving to know that even if no one comes close to mastering this complete set of languages, research is still being carried out successfully.

There is no doubt that the language barrier has been—and still is—connected to a political barrier: Russia has not always been an easy neighbor for Finland. The motivation required for years-long language studies is not easily kept up in politically troubled times. The foreign aggression and internal repression carried out by the Russian government deeply distress the Finns, who nonetheless sympathize with the plight of ordinary Russians.

This special issue is a collaboration by several members of the Imperial Era Network that was established in 2016. The network is intended for those Finnish researchers who are interested in the Finnish-Russian interaction of the long nineteenth century. The Kone Foundation has supported our activities financially.

The articles in this issue are in chronological order. First, we meet the most important Finnish aristocratic lady of the century. Tryggve Gestrin and Märtha Norrback point out that Aurora Karamzin was born in Finland in the same year (1808) that the Russian army crossed the border and initiated the Finnish War. The following year, Sweden accepted its defeat in the Treaty of Hamina (Fredrikshamn) and the imperial era began. The new situation gave Aurora Karamzin tremendous opportunities: eventually she received a position at the Russian imperial court and, soon thereafter, married one of the richest men in the empire. As a widow, she became the owner and leader of one of the largest industrial conglomerates of Russia. She also devoted herself to charitable work and is still remembered in Finland because of that role. Karamzin was an influential cultural mediator who was familiar with European high-society salons and a rare intermediary between the aristocratic court circles of Saint Petersburg and the Finnish Grand Duchy.

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Next, we meet a Russian learned gentleman who moved to Helsinki and worked as a professor of Russian literature and history at the local university from the 1840s to 1852. Liisa Byckling describes how Yakov Grot, born in Saint Petersburg, established himself as an intermediary between the academic and cultural spheres of Russia and Finland. His published correspondence with the rector of the Saint Petersburg University gives valuable insight into this field. Grot had to give lectures in Swedish because students in Finland could not understand Russian well enough. He was also a theater enthusiast and gave lively descriptions of the local theater performances. Aurora Karamzin also belonged to his circle of acquaintances, and Grot had the honor to be invited to her supper parties, which were rather stiff, although theatricals in her house proved more interesting. Professor Grot wrote extensively about literature, translated Swedish poetry into Russian, and in later life would become a renowned linguist in Russia.

Another Russian had arrived in the Finnish Grand Duchy for a completely different mission. Marina Zagora examines how August Tobiesen, the gendarme field officer in Finland from 1854 to 1885, analyzed the local situation for his superiors. His reports were received by the famous (or infamous) Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery, the supreme body of the secret police, in Saint Petersburg. Tobiesen was worried about Swedish influences in Finland and noted with concern the prevalence of the idea, mentioned above by Osmo Jussila, that Finland was a separate nation-state in union with Russia. While Grot had enjoyed the theater as an entertainment, for Tobiesen it was work: he regularly informed the Third Section about politically problematic performances. He also monitored university students and local newspapers. Tobiesen even recommended that the Russian government should establish its own newspaper in Finland. The idea was not ripe at the time, but one of his motivations for the newspaper was interesting: to explain the terms and conditions under which the Grand Duchy of Finland became a part of the Russian Empire.

In fact, some Finns shared the common Russian interpretation of those terms and conditions. Sami Suodenjoki draws attention to Juho Koskela, Johannes Karhapää, and others who collaborated with the imperial authorities, especially with the Governor General's Office and Gendarme Administration. They were examples of a new

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culture of political informing that took shape and aroused public attention during the last two decades of the imperial era in Finland. The activity was fiercely condemned by many Finns, and newspapers tried to expose informers and stigmatize them as traitors or henchmen of tyranny. In the case of Johannes Karhapää, his Orthodox faith was an important factor: he opposed the Lutheranization of the Karelians. Karhapää's religious activism apparently pleased the imperial government and led him to correspond with Governor General Franz Albert Seyn, who even visited Karhapää's home. During the Finnish Civil War in 1918, Karhapää was executed by the Whites. The Finnish Orthodox Church ranked him among saints as the Holy Martyr and Confessor John of Sonkajanranta in 2018.

While some Finns collaborated with imperial authorities during so-called periods of oppression, a group of traders from the empire proper became a political bone of contention. Johanna Wassholm explains how in the spring and early summer of 1899, Governor General Nikolay Bobrikov received reports claiming that itinerant peddlers and other mobile workmen from Russia were being maltreated in the Finnish Grand Duchy. A group of peddlers from White Karelia complained that their traditional livelihood had become threatened and petitioned the Russian administration to strengthen the legal status of their trade in Finland. Around the same time, the administration also received a petition from representatives of Russian industrialists, who urged it to defend Russian economic interests in the grand duchy by revoking the laws that forbade Russians as "foreigners" to trade in Finland. These petitions followed a campaign in the Finnish press that had depicted the Russian peddlers as politically motivated agents.

A key person behind the underground newspaper that warned about the peddlers was the famous Finnish political adventurer and journalist Konni Zilliacus. Ira Jänis-Isokangas relates how Zilliacus, who had an affluent background, became an unlikely revolutionary. Following a bankruptcy and a divorce (from a countess), his social position collapsed in 1889. As a consequence, he moved abroad and traveled in North America, South America, Japan, and France as a journalist and an author. During the same period, several political refugees from Russia were active in the United States, and it is possible that Zilliacus met some of his revolutionary friends there. He returned to Finland in 1898. During the next year, the February

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Manifesto was published and Zilliacus began to smuggle publications into Finland in cooperation with Russian revolutionaries. In 1902, he wrote a book about the revolutionary movement that he had come to know; the *New York Times* reviewed it favorably. Many leading Finnish politicians were wary of Zilliacus's revolutionary friends, but he managed to convince the Finns that it was at least necessary to learn more about the political situation in Russia. In 1917, the revolution—which Zilliacus had sought—came to pass. Overcome by war and upheaval, the imperial era ceased to exist.

Name Usage across Languages

Many places in Finland have names both in Finnish and in Swedish. In the nineteenth century, the upper classes used Swedish names and often the Russian language loaned these forms. For example, the capital Helsinki, in Swedish Helsingfors, was then called *Gel'singfors* in Russian. In this issue we use the current Finnish-language place names and occasionally give the Swedish forms in parentheses. The corresponding Finnish and Swedish place names are available online.[2]

Many Russian family names have a feminine form. These forms are not used in Finland when the woman in question is considered a Finnish person (Aurora Karamzin, not Karamzina). Some Russian names have an established form in Finnish history that is used instead of a direct transliteration (Governor General Seyn, not Zeyn).

The Russian transliteration in this issue is the system of the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) recommended by the *Chicago Manual of Style* (17th ed., 2017, 11.98).[3]

[2] Mattfolk, Leila and Maria Vidberg, "Svenska ortnamn i Finland—en förteckning över svenska namn på orter av allmänt intresse i Finland," Institutet för de inhemska språken, October 25, 2012, https://kaino.kotus.fi/svenskaortnamn/.

[3] "Romanization Systems," National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, last modified March 19, 2021, https://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/romanization.html. Russian = English:

А = A, Б = B, В = V, Г = G, Д = D, Е = YE/E, Ё = YË/Ë, Ж = ZH, З = Z, И = I, Й = Y, К = K, Л = L, М = M, Н = N, О = O, П = P, Р = R, С = S, Т = T, У = U, Ф = F, Х = KH, Ц = TS, Ч = CH, Ш = SH, Щ = SHCH, Ъ = ", Ы = Y, Ь = ', Э = E, Ю = YU, Я = YA.

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