

Summary

The boats of Lake Ladoga

THE PEACE TREATY after World War II meant that Finland's area diminished by over ten per cent. The cession of Karelian territory to the Soviet Union included Lake Ladoga, half of which had belonged to Finland before the war. The evacuation of population from the ceded areas meant a discontinuation of traditional culture at its original location, boatbuilding being one manifestation of traditional local culture. Lake Ladoga, a body of water with a vast open part roughly the size of Kattegat, boasted some distinctive features in the wooden boats built on her shores. The article deals with boat types built by traditional boatbuilders in the Finnish part of Lake Ladoga until its cession in 1944.

The archive of the National Board of Antiquities contains an interesting unpublished study on Lake Ladoga boats written in 1908. It distinguishes three areas of the lake according to boat types: the southwest, the northwest and the northeast. Common for most types were almost symmetrically lean stem and stern, curving gently at their lower part and more pronouncedly higher up. The highest part of both stem and sternposts curved sharply inwards. The smallest boats measured about five metres in length and had a beam of about 140 centimetres with a three-metre keelson about five centimetres thick. A distinctive feature were the uppermost side planks, which were not fastened to stem and stern but to the upper part of the lower plank. The boats carried usually a three to four square metre spritsail without boom. Larger boats were built for various fishing purposes, the biggest ones two-masted and over ten metres long. Best sailors were line-fishing boats built in the southwestern area (in the villages of Taipale and Saaronen in Metsäpirtti, Sortanlahti in Pyhäjärvi and Vuohensalo in Käkisalme). These were in certain areas called *saima*, which causes some confusion, as heavy cargo sailing ships were known by the same name. These boats had a forward centre of gravity for the sail plan, as well as for the keel. Traditionally boats on Lake Ladoga were forward burdened; an idea justified in many cultures by comparison to a fish with its heavy head and lean tail. At the end of the 19th century, a contrary model starting spreading from the southwestern area. In the 1880's, Colin Archer had started building his aft burdened boats in Norway. The profiles of the large and smaller boats were somewhat different, but the shapes of their hulls were quite similar. Compared to most other boats, the shape of Lake Ladoga boats, seen from above, curved sharply at the midship with a very lean stem and stern, causing a concave water line forward and aft. Similar features can be seen on boats built on the shores of Lake Onega in Karelia on one hand and on the Faeroe Islands on the other. The first engines appeared in the Lake Ladoga boats in the 1920's, and a decade later all larger boats had had their masts replaced by engines.

Earlier opinion placed a great influence by the Vikings on the boat traditions of Lake Ladoga, as their *Austerveg* went by way of Lake Ladoga. Still, the most marked feature of these boats is their stem and stern profile, which points to Dutch influence. Peter the Great's interest in Dutch shipbuilding is well documented, but already his father Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich invited Dutch shipbuilders, besides Britons and South Europeans, to the Russian part of Karelia. This gave Karelian shipbuilders and boatbuilders a good chance to familiarise themselves with Dutch building traditions.

The angular shape of the stem of the fast-sailing line-fishing boats on Lake Ladoga, and some smaller boats on Lake Onega, are similar to the Dutch *snik*, a fast-sailing boat used for carrying live fish. In the etching of J. Atkinson of London a vessel very much reminding a *snik* on Lake Onega in 1804. On the other hand, the stem's gracefully curving profile of the smaller boats on Lake Ladoga is very similar to the Dutch *aaks* of the North Sea. The Dutch influence on the Lake Ladoga freight carriers has been taken for granted for generations, so why should we exclude boats from this influence?

Karelians are known as skilful carpenters and boatbuilders. The Lake Ladoga boats combine an old local building tradition, the 18th century Dutch influence and the later boatbuilders' aim to improve the performance of the traditional models. In recent years, interest has awoken to revive the traditions of Ladoga boatbuilding, thus saving this beautiful product of Karelian folk culture for future generations.