



Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen

* 4.6.1933 † 13.1.2024

Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen, Professor Emeritus of General History, died in Tampere on 13 January 2024. He was 90 years old, born in Helsinki on 4 June 1933.

He graduated from Munkkiniemi Co-educational School in 1951 and began studying history at the University of Helsinki in the same year. Vehviläinen's interest in history was sparked by reading historical novels and being inspired by relatives such as Professor Eino E. Suolahti.

Vehviläinen's studies progressed rapidly. He graduated with a Master of Arts in 1956 and a Licentiate in 1962 and, in 1966, defended his doctoral thesis entitled *Kansallissosialistinen Saksa ja Neuvostoliitto 1933–1934: Hitlerin valtaantulosta Baltian pöytäkirjaa koskevien neuvottelujen raukeamiseen*. The topic of National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union was inspired by the legendary history professor Arvi Korhonen. Vehviläinen's doctoral thesis was supervised by Professor Jaakko Suolahti, an important teacher and role model for Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen.

Vehviläinen began his university career as Assistant of General History in 1964 at the Helsinki university, was appointed Associate Professor in 1967, and was acting Assistant Professor from 1969 to 1971, and

later Acting Professor from 1971 to 1973. In 1972–1974 he held a professorship at the University of Joensuu. He was appointed Associate Professor at the University of Joensuu in 1975.

Vehviläinen was appointed Professor of General History at the University of Tampere in 1973. He retired from this post in 1996. He served as the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Tampere 1977–1978.

Vehviläinen was elected a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1994. He was invited to become a research member of the Finnish Historical Society in 1967. He was a member of the Board of the Finnish Historical Society from 1983 to 1986 and was Chairperson in 1986. He was elected a foreign member of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1997. He was involved in various influential roles throughout his career including Vice-Chairman of the University council 1987–1989 and Chairperson of the Humanities Section of the University Council 1984–1989 under the Ministry of Education. Vehviläinen was also Chairperson of the Finnish Society for Labour History 1983–1993, member of the Board of Directors of the Lenin Museum 1984–1988, and Chairperson 1988–2005.

At its meeting on 31 January 1972, the Finnish Historical Society established a working group, chaired by professor L. A. Puntila, to draw up a proposal on how to improve the conditions for research on the history of the Second World War and how best to organise research.

The study was associated with the International Committee for the History of the Second World War operating under the auspices of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH/ICHS). This was linked to the Committee for the History of the Second World War set up within the Finnish Historical Society.

Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen was appointed director of the research project “Finland in the Second World War” (Suomi toisessa maailmansodassa, SUOMA). The project was conducted under the auspices and supervision of the Ministry of Education. It was launched in the beginning of 1975 with funding from the Research Council for the Humanities of the Finlands Academy. Four assistants were assigned to the project. The aim was to broaden the picture of the war by bringing together aspects of diplomatic history, military history, social history, and cultural history. A new feature of the project was the broad perspective on Finnish society.

The main work of the project “Finland in the Second World War” was a three-volume series entitled *Kansakunta sodassa* (“A Nation at War”). The first volume was published in 1989, the second in 1990 and the third in 1992. In all three volumes, Vehviläinen wrote about the attitude of “foreign powers” towards Finland’s Winter and Continuation Wars. Vehviläinen collected source material from archives in Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

Olli Vehviläinen and Oleg A. Ržeshevski

edited the book *Yksin suurvaltaa vastaan. Talvisodan poliittinen historia*, which was published in 1997. Vehviläinen’s book *Jatkosodan kujanjuoksu* was published in 1982.

The project also resulted in doctoral theses by Britta Hiedanniemi, Silvo Hietanen, Ilkka Seppinen and Martti Turtola. Britta Hiedanniemi’s thesis explored the cultural propaganda of National Socialist Germany in Finland from 1933 to 1940, Silvo Hietanen’s thesis was on the settlement of evacuees after the Winter War, Ilkka Seppinen explored wartime foreign trade and Martti Turtola’s topic was the development of defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden. The SUOMA seminars were attended by researchers working on similar research projects in Sweden, the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the GDR.

Vehviläinen’s most notable study internationally is *Finland in the Second World War*, published in 2002 by Palgrave and translated into several languages, most recently Ukrainian.

Vehviläinen was also interested in Hungarian history and labour history. In the 1980s, he also co-edited two publications of the Finnish Society for Labour History entitled *Työväen historiaa ja perinnettä* and *Näkökulmia työväen ammatilliseen ja paikalliseen historiaan*.

Vehviläinen initiated cooperation between Finland and Hungary, while György Ranki, Deputy Director of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, represented Hungary in this cooperation. A Hungarian section was established at the Historical Society, joining the sections for France, Italy, Spain, and Poland. Olli Vehviläinen co-edited three works on Hungary, the first of which was published

already in 1995 entitled *Hungary 1956*. The second was *Hungary and Finland in the 20th century*, published in 2002 with Hungarian historian Attila Pok, followed two years later by *Unkari: maa, kansa, historia*, co-edited with Juhani Huotari.

Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen promoted the international relations of students and teachers at the University of Tampere. He opened doors and study opportunities to Hungary, Germany, and the United States. Long-term contacts with universities in Bremen and Darmstadt brought international lecturers to Tampere. Vehviläinen organised Erasmus intensive courses in Joensuu and Bremen. He also had very close ties with the Goethe Institute when the institute was still in Tampere.

In the academic year 1984–1985, the multidisciplinary American Studies programme was added to the history curriculum on the initiative of Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen. It was the first of its kind in Finland. In 1994, it was extended from 20 to 40 credit units. It would later become the discipline of North American Studies and include Canadian Studies and later Mexican Studies. Many Fulbright professors,

including Keith Olsson and Robert Bieder, were also active in Tampere. Together with Associate Professor Markku Henriksson, Vehviläinen led the Academy of Finland-funded Graduate School of North American Studies in the 1990s, which later continued as the Graduate School of American Studies. Students were required to spend a period studying in the United States. The practice of studying abroad later spread to other graduate schools.

Vehviläinen's interest in local history is demonstrated by a history of the city of Savonlinna that he wrote. The subject was close to Vehviläinen's heart. Family roots and a summer house brought the family – wife and lecturer Irma Vehviläinen (née Merikoski) and daughters Maria Karoliina (Leskinen) and Eeva Hentriikka (Kontio) and their families – to Savonlinna and its surroundings.

Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen was a well-liked, friendly, and encouraging teacher. With just a stern look, he could make a student and a doctoral thesis writer talk about how their work was progressing. Olli-Pekka Vehviläinen's legacy is far-reaching.

Obituary by Marjatta Hietala

Image: Tampere University archive