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## Forest Policy and Economics

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### Book review

**Golden King of the Forest. The Lore of the Northern Bear, By Juha Pentikäinen, 2007, Etnika Oy, Finland, 154 p. 30 USD, [www.etnika.fi](http://www.etnika.fi)**

Dr Juha Pentikäinen, Professor of Comparative Religions, University of Helsinki, published in 2005 an original Finnish version of this book. It was a surprise for me and for numerous other Finns. The mythology of bear worshipping by our ancestors had been well covered by the Christian churches in the past. Even Kalevala, the national epos of Finland, had only an abbreviated story of this once so strong tradition among the hunting Finns. The worshipping of the bear is still actual among our remote linguistic relatives Mansi-people, east of the Ural mountains in Russia.

This English version is 26 pages longer than the Finnish one. Dr Clive Tolley has edited and translated the book into English. The author acknowledges Dr Tolley by writing "Thanks to him, this book is quite different from the Finnish book upon which it is based." The book has six maps and numerous illustrations and photos about the various aspects of the bear worshipping. The bibliography is unexpectedly wide. Unfortunately, the index is missing.

The author describes after the introduction the natural history of the bear. Then he goes on to the archeology of bear and describes the bear myths of the antiquity. Thereafter Dr Pentikäinen traces the bear myths in Norway and Sweden, among the Ob Ugrians of Siberia and among the Sami people of the North. Ultimately he arrives to Finland and Karelia, just east of the Finnish border. The last chapter concerns the bear as a national symbol of Finland. A number of interesting points are introduced in it. However, the rationale for the lion becoming into the coats of arms of Finland and not the bear is missing.

Especially during the 19th century "the most visible expression of Finnish paganism was being chased down, the bear was hunted almost to extinction in the country". Simultaneously, the hunting

culture gave way to agriculture and animal husbandry with their new values.

Unfortunately, the author does not place the bear mythology into any international comparative setting of similar myths, such as the Mountain Spirit San-Shin of Korea (Mason, 2001) or the tree spirits of the rain forests of Peruvian Amazonia (Luna and Amaringo, 1991). The divine San-Shin has remained vital in Korea due to the adoption of him by Buddhism as one of the Buddhist gods.

Due to the recent effective conservation the bear population in Finland has grown to almost one thousand individuals. Also restricted hunting is still allowed. The book by Pentikäinen does not include interviews of the contemporary bear hunters in Finland.

We may ask how spiritual sustainability of forest management according to Rio UNCED definition should be supported? No professional or scientific analysis or discussion has so far been visible to me.

Thanks to Juha Pentikäinen the history of the bear mythology has been conserved for the future generations in Finland and worldwide.

### References

- Luna, L.E., Amaringo, P., 1991. *Ayahuasca Visions. The Religious Iconography of a Peruvian Shaman*. North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California. 160 pp.  
 Mason, J.A., 2001. *Spirit of the mountains. Korea's San-Shin and the Traditions of the Mountain Worship*. Seoul.

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