# Streets, seals or seeds as early manifestations of urban life in Turku, Finland

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In the 2000s, the studies concerning the early phases of urbanization in Finland have re-actualized after many decades. The studies have focused on Turku, which is the oldest town of the present-day Finland and has been a target for many excavations. The focus of this paper is in the beginnings of the urbanization of Turku with the questions when and why the town was founded. The questions are old and discussed in many studies since the early 20th century. In this article, these questions are reflected on the basis recent archaeological findings and the circumstantial evidence from historical sources. I am presenting my interpretation about the course of events, which led to the establishment of Turku. The town was not founded on a virgin land, but it was preceded by human activities like farming and possibly gatherings of religious or commercial nature. The political circumstances activated the planning of the town in the late 13th century, which were realized in the turn of the 13th and 14th century. It seems, that the urbanization process took several decades and probably it was not until the mid 14th century when Turku met all the benchmarks set for the medieval town.

## Tracing the earliest evidence

The origins of Turku (fig. 1) have fascinated Finnish historians and archaeologists for more than a century. In a key role in this discussion has been a document, which has been connected with the foundation of Turku. In this document Pope Gregorius IX suggests to the bishop of Linköping, the abbot of Cistercians in Gotland and the vicar of Visby that the bishop's seat of Finland has to be transferred to a more appropriate place. The document is dated in Perugia on the 29th of January in 1229, but it does not, however, reveal the location of the bishop's seat at that moment or contain any information on the favourable destination where it should be transferred (REA 1).

At the first phase, the bishop's seat of Finland situated in Nousiainen from where it was first transferred to Koroinen and thereafter to Turku (fig. 2). In the 20th century,



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*Figure 1. In the Middle-Ages, the southwest part of the present-day Finland belonged to Sweden. The map presents the location of the oldest town of Finland, Turku, and the site of the first bishop's seat in Nousiainen. The distance between Nousiainen and Turku is c. 20 km. In the Middle-Ages, only six towns were established in the area of Finland. Today the easternmost town, Vyborg, belongs to Russia.*

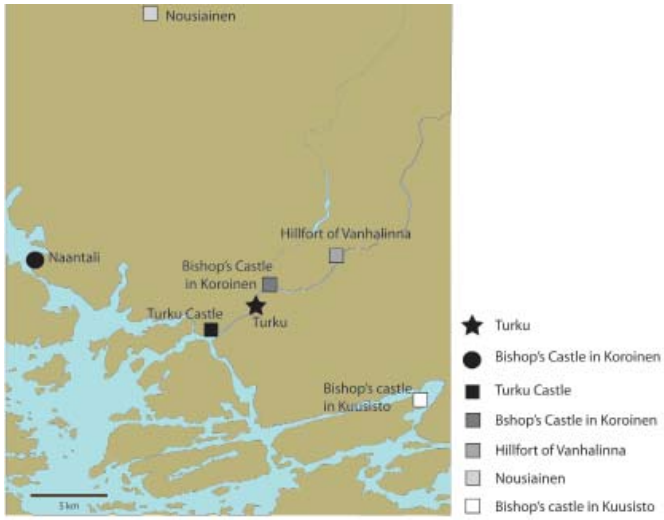


*Figure 2. The map presents the locations of the following sites mentioned in the text:*
*1) Turku*
*2) Bishop's seat in Koroinen*
*3) Bishop's seat in Nousiainen*
*4) Turku Castle*
*5) Bishop's Castle in Kuusisto*
*6) Hillfort in Vanhalinna*
*7) Naantali*



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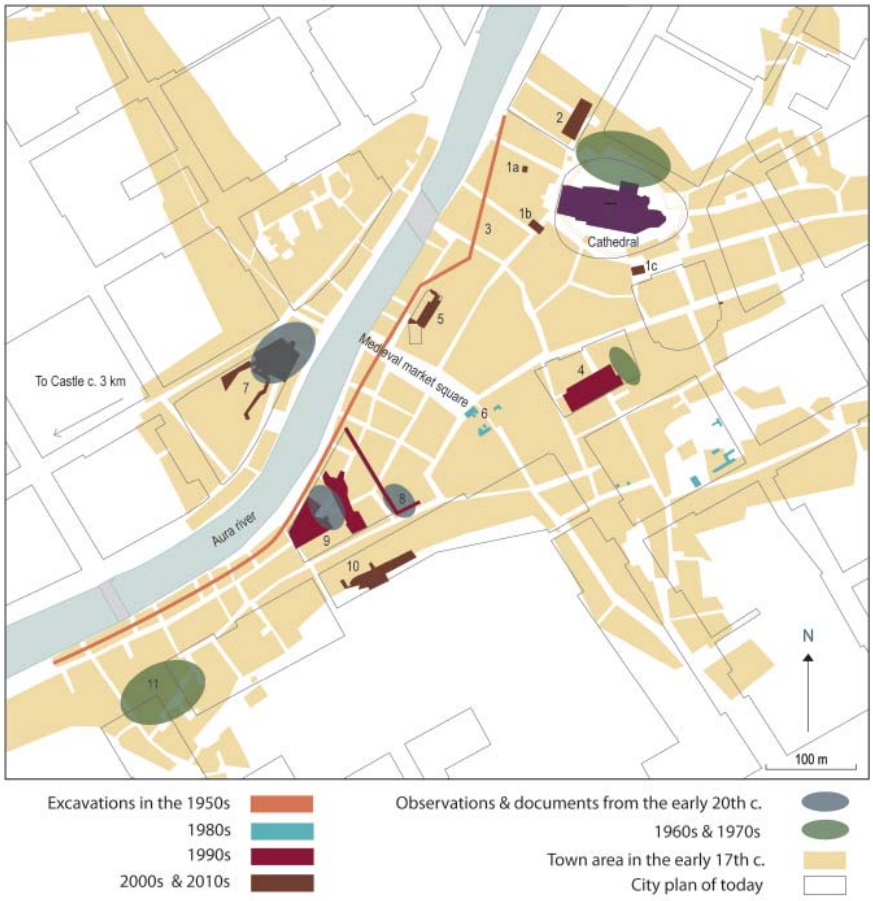


*Figure 3. Map presenting the most important archaeological excavations and observations revealed information about the foundation and early development of the medieval town of Turku by now.*

there were two different opinions about the course of events. According to the other interpretation, the pope's letter would have catalyzed the transfer of the bishop's seat from Nousiainen to Koroinen to the riverside of Aura River in the turn of the 1220s and 1230s. The bishop's seat would have remained in Koroinen until the end of the 13th century, when it would have been retransferred only c 1.6 km downstream the Aura River in the area where the town of Turku would have been established at the same time. This theory was first presented by "the father of Finnish history" Henrik Gabriel Porthan (1859, p. 58–65) in the late 18th century, but was abandoned in the early 20th century when historian J.W.Ruuth (1909, p. 1–5) suggested another idea. According



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to this idea, the bishop's seat would have situated in Koroinen already at the beginning of the 13th century and consequently, the pope's request in 1229 would have catalyzed the transfer to Turku at this phase. This idea had its roots in the atmosphere of National Romanticism, and gained strong support among the contemporary historians leading to the result that the year 1229 was pronounced as an official birthday for the town of Turku. (E.g. Dahlström 1930, p. 159; 1937, p. 171; Rinne 1941, p. 80–81; 1948, p. 44; 1952, p. 179–180).

However, the earlier view presented by H.G. Porthan gained strong support already from the 1940s onwards and by the 21st century it reached unanimous acceptance of all scholars acquainted with the question. (E.g. Cardberg 1971, p. 149–152; Gallén 1978, p. 314; Hiekkanen 2002; 2003a; Oja 1944, p. 373–374; Pirinen 1956, p. 76–77). Despite the academic discussion about the matter, the general and public standpoint was still fixed with the idea that Turku was founded in 1229. In 2004, Turku commemorated the founding date of Turku with many festivities. A group of archaeologists wanted to contribute to the 775th anniversary of the town and gave a present including a variety of articles about the archaeological research of the town. (Seppänen 2003.) Among the articles was the article written by Markus Hiekkanen (2003a), which was concerned with the question of the founding date of Turku and aroused the interest related to this topic.

The book catalyzed an idea among the policy-makers of Turku that it is time to get some certainty to this matter and resolve the real foundation time of the town. As the result, the town decided to finance a research project in 2005–2007. According to the general assumption, the oldest nucleus of the town located near the cathedral, and consequently, three small excavation areas were opened in the vicinity of the cathedral with the total area of 126 $m^2$. (fig. 3, 1a–1c) The aim of the excavations was to find out answers to the following questions: When were the surroundings of the cathedral inhabited? When was the oldest street of the town (Church Street) leading from Cathedral to Main Square constructed? Is the square in the vicinity of the Cathedral the oldest square of the town and when was it made? Although the excavated areas were small in size the results were interesting. Probably, the most interesting discovery was that the surroundings of the cathedral were cultivated until the end of the 13th century (fig. 4).

The first buildings of the area were dated to the turn of the 13th and 14th century at the earliest, which supported the later founding date of the town. Furthermore, the first phase of Church Street could be dated to the beginning of the 14th century. (fig. 5) The earliest phase of the excavated square next to the ca-



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*Figure 4. Ploughing marks near Turku Cathedral. Photo: Päivi Repo.*



*Figure 5. The first phase of Church Street is dated to the early 14th century. Probably, the street was unpaved until the end of the 14th or early 15th century when it was paved with logs. Photo: Päivi Repo.*



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thedral was dated to the mid of the 15th century and thus it turned out to be younger than the Old Market Square next to the medieval town hall. Consequently, there were no traces of the town in the vicinity of the cathedral before the beginning of the 14th century. (Ainasoja et al. 2008; Pihlman 2007; 2010; Seppänen 2011, p. 477).

However, the excavations carried out at the end of the 1980s in the area of the medieval town hall (fig. 3, 6) revealed few remains of wooden constructions and ceramics from the end of the 13th century. (Pihlman 1995, p. 62, p. 78, p. 276–278, p. 300, p. 307, p. 310; 2003, p. 202). In the 1990s, in the excavations carried out in the Aboa Vetus -museum area more evidence from the end of the 13th and early 14th century was unearthed. (fig. 3, 9) The material includes figs, ceramics from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea and glass vessels, which originate from the Mediterranean region and South Germany or further south. In 2009–2010, a small excavation area of only 4 $m^2$ was excavated in the museum area with the utmost specificity, and the layers revealed four pieces of window glass, which were dated to the 1290s or to the very beginning of the 1300s. One of the fragments contained some remains of poorly preserved painting. (Bläuer & Lempiäinen–Avci 2011, p. 34; Haggrén 2011; Pihlman 2011). The finds of this kind refer to the existence of some sort of a religious building in this precinct at the end of the 13th century. On the other hand, in 2010 and 2015, further evidence for the cultivation activities was found in excavations carried out near the river and the Old Market Square. (fig. 3, 5; Pihlman et al. 2011; Saloranta 2015[1]).

Consequently, on the basis of the archaeological material, we can separate an area, which was cultivated until the beginning of the 14th century and an area with traces of habitation and religious activities in the end of the 13th and at the beginning of the 14th century. (fig. 6.) It is possible, however, that the cultivated area has been much larger, but the evidence of cultivation has not been detected in earlier excavations.

## The emergence of Turku

The obscurity and scarcity of the earliest historical sources have left much space for speculations concerning the establishment of Turku. The first mentions referring to the Turku cathedral dedicated to St. Mary (*vt cathedralis ecclesia beate Marie Aboensis*) are dated to the 1290s. (FMU p. 135, 16; Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 19; REA p. 13, 16, 18). In these documents, we can detect reference to Turku (Aboa in Latin) but did it really mean that the existence of the town? (Virrankoski 2001, p. 64–65).

Abo is mentioned for the first time in a copy relating to a land donation. The copy is provided with the date 1234, but the original do-



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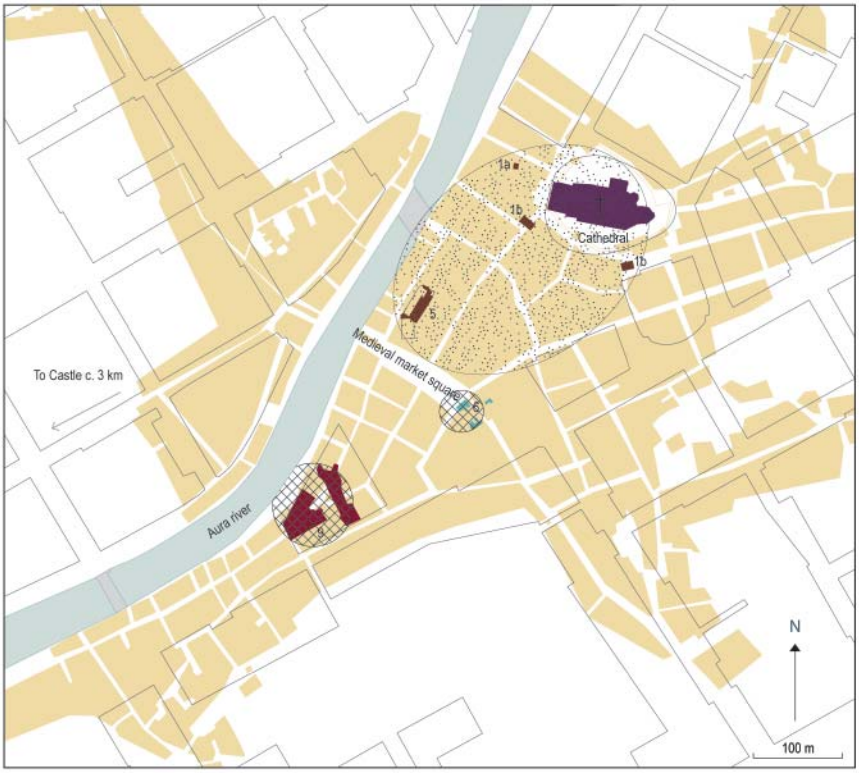


**Fig 6.**
Archaeological evidence of cultivation from the late 13th c.
Archaeological evidence of constructions and artefacts from the late 13th c.
Town area in the early 17th c.
City plan of today

*Figure 6. Traces of cultivation from the late 13th century have been discovered near the cathedral and the medieval market square. The earliest remains of constructions and artefacts have been found in the area of the medieval town hall and the present-day Aboa Vetus -museum.*

cument does not, however, reveal the name of the town. Consequently, it is possible that the year as well as the name of the town were added when the copy was made. (Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 18; REA p. 10).

The bishop of Turku and Cathedral Chapter are mentioned for the first time in the letter sent by Pope Alexander IV in 1259. Also this document is a copy made at the end of the 15th century. (Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 18; REA p. 13). Until the end of the 1260s the bishops of Finland were provided with the epithet "*Finlandenses*", after which it was replaced permanently by "*aboensis*". (fig. 7) Possibly the name "*abo*" with its different derivatives was introduced along with a new church and cathedral chapter, which were located and operated still in Koroinen. Consequently, the name "*abo*" cannot be connected



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*Figure 7. The epithet abonensis appeares on the seal of Bishop Catillus from 1270. Photo: Gardberg 1971, p. 155.*

with the emergence of the town of Turku. There is a document from 1308, which supports this idea. According to the document, the cathedral has been transferred to its "present place" in 1300 by bishop Magnus. (FMU 257). The time of the transfer matches well with the latest archaeological evidence of the early urban phases of Turku.

Consequently, the introduction of the name *Abo* alone does not witness for the existence of the town of Turku (Sw. *Åbo*) in the same sense we understand the medieval town with urban activities. The Finnish name for the town, Turku, has been interpreted as a proof for the significance of trade and especially for eastern contacts, because in Old Russian a word "*torgu*" was used as a denotation for a marketplace. The word originates from Central Asia and it was adopted in Scandinavia already during the Viking Age. (Gardberg 1971, p. 139). Consequently, the word "Turku" as a modification from *torgu* could have been adopted from our western neighbours as well.

When we try to understand the early process of urbanism, we need to find out how and why the towns were established, how they formed and what were the reasons behind the development. One of the key issues in the North European discussion of urbanisim has been whether the medieval town was founded on a virginal place without preceding activities or whether it was a topographical and functional successor of the older rural centre in that area. (E.g. Clarke & Simms 1985, p. 676–687). This kind of discussion has also been active in Finland among the researchers interested in the early phases of Turku. At the end of the 1960s, historian C. J. Gardberg published his ideas based on the continuum theory in which he suggested that the German merchants established a trading post in the vicinity of the cathedral already in the mid of the 13th century. This would have formed a nucleus for the town of Turku established at the end of the 13th century. Gardberg based his ideas on previous interpretations, historical sources and on the earliest map of Turku from the early 17th century. The most concrete evidence, however, he got from archaeology.

His idea was thoroughly scrutinized in the early 2000s by



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Markus Hiekkanen, who shot down the evidence for this interpretation one by one. First evidence presented by Gardberg was the remains of a large wooden building in the vicinity of the cathedral, which were unearthed already in the early 1950s. (fig. 3, no 3). Niilo Valonen, who was responsible for the excavations, estimated that the remains could originate from the late 13th or early 14th century. Gardberg did not try to re-date the remains, but presented a hypothesis that they might belong to preurban German settlement. In the 1990s, the remains were dated with the help of dendrochronology and the analysis revealed that the logs were felled between the 1290s and 1320s. The second evidence was the hoard of coins, which was found in the same area in 1851. In 1900, the coins were dated between 1250 and 1275, but they were reanalyzed in 1979 by numismatist Pekka Sarvas, who claimed the coins to be from the mid 14th century. The third evidence is the most disputable one. According to Gardberg, the cathedral of Turku would have had a wooden predecessor based on stone foundations. He suggested that the first cathedral made of wood would have been built in the mid 13th century. Unfortunately, the remains of the stone construction found in the excavations in the early 20th century cannot be dated or re-evaluated. (Gardberg 1969, p. 35-36; 1971, p. 171-174, p. 204, p. 218; Hiekkanen 2002, p. 160–162; 2003a, p. 43–44).

Hiekkanen did not only confine himself to review the ideas of Gardberg but presented a hypothesis that the town of Turku was founded on a virgin uninhabited land in the 1280s and 1290s. The initiators behind the plan would have been the King, the Catholic Church and the Dominican Order, to whom the founding of the town in the eastern part of Sweden would have been imperative and advantageous at that moment. The presentation of circumstantial evidence is logical: the King needed a town to consolidate his power in this district. The Dominicans needed the town in order to be able to operate in the country. Furthermore, an urban environment provided better operational preconditions also to the Church with the bishop's seat and the Chapter, founded probably in 1276. (Hiekkanen 2003a, p. 46–49). However, we do not have any archaeological or historical evidence to support this hypothesis and consequently, the role of each party in this event remains unsolved.

As stated above, the excavations in the town area in 2005–2006 exposed some evidence related to this matter. The cultivation marks from the earliest layer revealed that the town was not founded on a virgin land, but was preceded by rural activities until the turn of the 13th and 14th century. The question, however, is how to distinguish an urban-like settlement from a rural settlement when we have only a handful of finds and poorly preserved woo-



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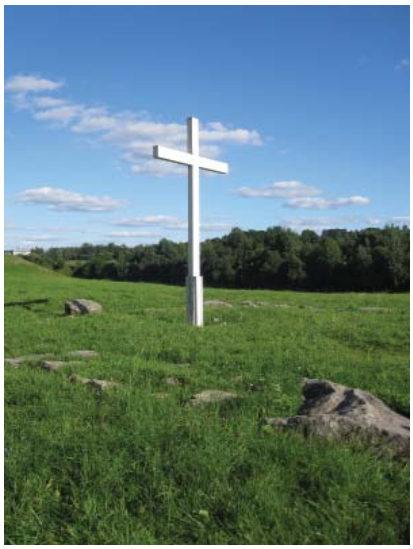

*Figure 8. Today Koroinen is an uninhabited cape by the Aura River with only a cross reminding of the location of the Bishop's seat in the 13th century. Photo: Satu Mikkonen-Hirvonen, National Board of Antiquities.*

den remains from a few excavations to help us to solve this conundrum.

## Urban features and Turku

Towns have several distinctive features, which separate them from central places, trade centres and villages. The characteristics and criteria for the town have been scrutinized and discussed in many studies in urban archaeology. (E.g. Andersson 1990, p. 26–27). The whole topic seemed so self-evident, than when I started working on the material and constructions from Turku excavations in the early 2000, I was even advised not to ponder on the old, well covered topic on the criterion of a town. However, the criteria for a town vary depending on time and place in question. It is not easy to define the early medieval town unambiguously, and it is even more difficult when we have limited information about the factors which are to be included among the criterion. In the following, I am presenting a collection of requisites and reflecting when Turku meets these criteria.

First we can estimate the status of the place. Generally, a town forms a religious, cultural and commercial centre for a larger area. Already at the end of the Iron Age, the valley of the Aura River formed the most densely populated area of the present-day Finland. Interpretations about the late Iron Age society and inhabitation of the area have mainly been made on the basis of the burials and graveyards, because the evidence of the settlements of this time is scant and poorly preserved. The Aura river valley formed a central¬-place in every meaning of a word: it was a centre for trade and economy, culture and communication. (E.g. Kivikoski 1971, p. 81–102).

Koroinen formed a religious centre of Finland in the mid 13th century with its bishopric and Dominican convent, but it cannot be designated as a town. The distance from Koroinen to Turku Cathedral is only 1.6 km. However, there is no evidence of the concentration of the activities mentioned above in the area of medieval Turku before the transfer of the cathedral, which probably took place in 1300 (fig. 8). Consequently, Turku does not meet this criterion before the turn of the



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century. One of the most significant factors, which affected the choosing of the place, was the geographical location of this area, which offered favourable circumstances for agriculture, fishing, traffic and trade. Locating on the coastline, the area formed a geographical border zone, the gate through which the contacts and innovations as well as goods were transferred between West and East. This location made this place strategically very important. The place was sheltered by an extensive archipelago, which also offered resources for the people living onshore. This area was also a border zone in mental, social and cultural context with a strong local symbolic meaning. (Pihlman S. 2003, p. 27–38).

Generally, the town covers a relatively wide inhabited area, which differs notably from its surroundings e.g. with its land-use and legal status. According to archaeological evidence, the surroundings of the cathedral in Turku were cultivated until the turn of the 13th and 14th century. Accordingly, the area of Turku did not differ from the surrounding countryside. It has been presented, that judicially the towns with an idea of urbanity did not appear to Eastern Europe before the Germans settled down the area. (Gläser 2007, p. 43). It is unknown, when the first Germans settled down at the shores of Aura River, but according to archaeological material described above this could have happened in the latter



*Figure 9. The oldest seal of the town of Turku from 1309. Photo: Gardberg 1971, 221.*

part of the 13th century. The medieval town privileges of Turku are not preserved, but the first mention of Turku with an epithet *civitas*, which has been interpreted as a characterization for the town, comes from 1309. Furthermore, the document carries a seal with a text *sigillum Borgensium in Abo,* which refers to urban citizens at the beginning of the 14th century. (fig. 9., Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 19).

The town is comprised of private and public buildings forming dense inhabitation. The oldest building remains of Turku are poorly preserved and often only partially exposed and do not reveal whether the house was used for private or public purposes. The oldest remains of the late 13th century might belong to houses as well as outbuildings or other constructions. The excavated areas, which have revealed layers and building remains from the early 14th century, are not very large and thus it is difficult to evaluate the density of the earliest inhabitation (fig. 6).



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In the first decade of the 14th century, at least one large building was erected in the vicinity of the cathedral. The size of the building was c. 100 $m^2$ and it comprised at least two rooms. It is possible, that the building – or at least a part of it – could have been some sort of an assembly room or a storehouse. However, the size of the building does not necessarily refer to public use. Since all other buildings from the early 14th century are only partially excavated or preserved, we do not actually know the size of these early houses or the number of functions they sustained. (Seppänen 2012, p. 816–817).

The town hall offered a central forum for public functions including decision-making and meetings, jurisdiction, public communication and control of public property. The construction date of the first town hall of Turku is still unsure, but the ceramic finds indicate that the first phase of the building can be dated to the early 14th century. The second construction phase of the town hall is dated to 1350–1430. (Uotila 2003a, p. 124-125). The medieval town is characterized also by an organized administration with a town council and a mayor. The first reference to the town council and the mayor of Turku comes from 1324. (Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 19, p. 53; REA p. 36, p. 449, p. 607). Consequently, Turku meets the criteria of dense habitation with private and public buildings and organized administration at the beginning of the 14th century at the earliest.

The town is normally characterized also with many institutions. The archaeological evidence of the schools, hospitals and guildhalls of Turku is very limited. The first reference to the school comes from 1355 (”*antiquus scholastiqus Aboensis*”). Gardberg (1971, p. 251) has presented that the Cathedral school of Turku could have been established already in 1276 together with the chapter. However, the idea of organized education in Turku is not supported by the evidence we have from Turku area from that time. We also need to take into consideration, that the organisation of the diocese of Turku was still transforming at the end of the 13th century. The Dominican convent probably housed a school too, but there is no evidence of educational activities in the convent of St. Olav in Turku before 1418. (Hiekkanen 2003b, p. 92).

The archaeological evidence of the first hospitals is still waiting for future excavations in Turku. The leprosorium of St. George hospital is mentioned for the first time in connection with a donation in 1355. (REA p. 160). The site of the hospital is known, but no archaeological excavations have been conducted in the area. It is quite likely, that the establishment of the hospital could have happened in the mid of the 14th century. In this case, it would match well with the discovery, which proves that the establishment of leprosoriums generally preceded the significant growth of the town



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and the phase of intensive construction activities signifying the growth and prosperity of the town. (Rawcliffe 2005, p. 252). According to the documents, the number of hospitals increased in Turku in the late 14th and 15th century. The first mention of the hospital in the vicinity of the Dominican convent comes from 1396, but it is quite possible that the hospital was already established when the convent was founded in Turku. However, the date of this event is still unknown. (Kuujo 1981, p. 60–61, p. 188; Pihlman & Kostet 1986, p. 39–41; Ruuth 1909, p. 56–57).

Medieval institutions included guilds, which were not only urban phenomenon but can be found in rural surroundings too. According to historical sources, there were six guilds in Turku in the Middle-Ages. The first mention of the guild of St. Nicolaus comes from 1355, and there is no archaeological evidence for guilds from any earlier date. (Gardberg 1971, p. 294–295; Kuujo 1981, p. 194). Consequently, tracing for institutions like schools, guilds and schools in the town area of Turku gives us no results before the mid of the 14th century.

Furthermore, the town is characterized by several streets, plots and quarters. The first evidence of the formation of plots in Turku is from the early 14th century. The oldest street of Turku, Church Street, leading from the cathedral to the Old Market Square has been dated to the early 14th century. The other medieval streets exposed in Church and Convent quarters are still waiting for more exact dating. In the Mätäjärvi quarter, the oldest streets have been dated to the 1360s and 1370s coinciding the time when this area was inhabited. According to the archaeological material and the spread of inhabitation, it is very likely that the four quarters of the medieval Turku were established in the mid 14th century after the enactment of the Swedish town law. (Seppänen, 2009; 2012, p. 888, p. 908, p. 912).

One of the differences between the town and other sites is made by people. Typically, the town is inhabited by people with differentiated occupations and social status, with urban identity and way of life. Although the archaeological finds from the Aboa Vetus -excavations indicate the presence of people with wealth and quite high status, there is no evidence of other occupations but farming from the 13th century Turku. The first evidence of different occupations comes from the first part of the 14th century, but the differences in material and occupational traces are more visible from the mid 14th century onwards. (Seppänen 2011, p. 482–483).

As a result of this inspection, we can say that probably there was a sort of a central place in the area of present-day Aboa Vetus -museum near the Aura River in the late 13th century, but the criteria for a town were not met until the first part of the 14th century. I still have not



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given the answer to the question, why Turku was founded in the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. This is leading to another question: Why Koroinen, at the distance of only 1.6 km with the bishop's seat and probably with the Dominican convent as well, was not considered as a suitable place for a town?

## Why Turku was founded?

### *Missionaries, crusaders and colonists of the 12th century*

The formation and foundation of Turku is intimately related to the societal development and change that took place in southwest Finland during the Late Iron Age and in the Early Middle Ages. Unfortunately, this period provides us with very few sources. One of the most significant changes was the population growth, mainly caused by immigration from Sweden and in lesser extent also from Germany. New-arrivals brought along new ideas, which affected and changed the whole society. According to the estimations, the population of Finland would have been doubled from the 12th century to the mid-13th century when the number of inhabitants would have broken the limit of 100 000 (Virrankoski 2001, p. 84).

It is very likely, that southwest Finland had received arrivals from Scandinavia also during the Iron Age but researchers have talked about a real migration in the 13th century. One catalyst for the migration could have been the economic and demographical growth of the 13th century. The population had increased considerably especially in the counties around the lake Mälare in the middle of Sweden. However, the output of agriculture in this area was unable to correspond to the population growth. This decreased the standard of living, which at the same time was affected negatively by the new taxation policy of the Crown. Probably, these factors gave rise to the migration to Finland, Norland as well as to the backwoods of Svealand.

Without question, the Swedish Crown benefited from the migration. Was this migration or colonization somehow organized or systematically encouraged by the state? Possibly, colonists were even supported by allotting exemptions from taxation during the very first years after immigration. However, this is a question that could not have been answered in default of reliable and undisputable evidence, but the course of events can be reasoned from the facts although they are open to various interpretations.

Political events and military actions affected at least implicitly to immigration to Finland. It is very likely that it would not have been safe for the newcomers to settle down by the fishing waters in southern Finland and Häme (Tavastland), unless these areas of enjoyment would not have been under the protection and



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dominion of the Swedish Crown. It is very likely that the migration was not only favoured, but at least in some extent also caused by political factors related to mutual competition between Sweden and Novgorod about the authority in Finland. This competition was closely intertwined with the missionary work of the Catholic as well as the Orthodox Church (Virrankoski 2001, p. 73, p. 84).

Traditionally, the first crusade for Finland in the mid-12th century has been considered as the first clear landmark in clerical and societal changes in this area. The information about this crusade is based only on a legend about King St. Erik and Bishop Henrik (*Henry*) from Uppsala. This legend has recently been thoroughly studied by Tuomas Heikkilä (2005), who has pointed out that it is very typical for the format of medieval legends that the historical facts were of secondary importance when a saint legend was created to glorify his/her good deeds and miracles. It was important to give the King a role as a crusader, thus raising him among the saints. As far as Henrik is concerned, reliable documents do not mention any bishop of Uppsala having this name at this time. It is very likely that he was some sort of a missionary priest working in subordination to the bishop of Uppsala, who was sent to organize the Catholic Church in Finland, with Nousiainen in southwest Finland as his posting (See also Gardberg 1971, p. 132; Pirinen 1991, p. 41–46; Virrankoski 2001, p. 65–66).

Documents reveal, however, that Erik's son Knut, who succeeded to the throne after his father, campaigned against the non-Christians in the 1170s. Most probably, these battles took place in the Baltic sphere. (Virrankoski 2001, p. 66). It is very likely, that also the residence and hillfort of Vanhalinna in Lieto (situating c. 8 km southeast from the present-day Turku, fig. 2) was subjected to the crown of Sweden or the men of Church during his reign. (Pirinen 1991, p. 48). Considering the supremacy over the Gulf of Finland, the strongest enemy of Sweden was the principality of Novgorod with their Finnic allies. They raided Häme (Tavastland) in 1186 and 1191 with the effort to debilitate Swedish supremacy. At this time also the Danish were excited about Finland and at least in 1191 they made a military expedition to some part of southwest Finland. Probably this competition over Finland pandered the interest and motivation of Knut Eriksson. Consequently, it was during his reign when Finland – including also the eastern parts of the country – was bonded more closely to Sweden (Lind 2007, p. 40–44; Suvanto 1985, p. 33–35; Virrankoski 2001, p. 67).

Pope Innocentius III supported the interests of the Swedish Crown and he took Knut Eriksson under his special patronage in 1216. In the bull (Ex tuarum) addressed to the King, the pope mentions the



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country his forefathers had conquered from heathens, referring most likely to Finland. (Pirinen 1991, p. 56.) As an indication of the pope's patronage the bishopric of Finland was subordinated to the archbishop of Uppsala from the subordination of Lund, which at that time belonged to Denmark (Gardberg 1971, p. 152).

### *Establishment of new bishopric and Dominican order*

In the 1220s, the missionary work practiced in Finland entered a new phase. The bishopric of Finland had remained without an incumbent leader since 1209 and a new era began probably in the early 1220s with the nomination of Bishop Thomas, who is the first identifiable bishop of Finland. He was probably Anglo-Saxon and engaged as a canon of the archbishopric of Uppsala before his assignment in Finland. Possibly, the bishopric in Nousiainen was relocated closer to the estuary of the Aura River to Räntämäki, Koroinen in 1229 on his initiative (Gardberg 1971, p. 149–152, p. 157–159). The new site situated in the confluence of the Aura and Vähäjoki Rivers, about 1.6 km upstream from the place where the Cathedral and the town of Turku were established seven decades later (fig 2). The first excavations in Koroinen were carried out in 1898–1902 and the most recent fieldwork has taken place in 1977. Material includes also finds from the Iron Age, which indicates that the site was probably settled before Bishop Thomas and the Church adopted the place as a new site for the bishopric of Finland (Koivunen 2003, p. 47, p. 74–75).

Probably, the focus of activities such as trade and communication had shifted to the Aura river valley and the relocation of the bishopric became justified and topical in the 1220s since Nousiainen no longer offered a suitable place for the operations of the Church. The cape of Koroinen is surrounded by waters from three sides and was thus easily restricted from the surroundings. Possibly, the centrality of the place in the early 13$^{th}$ century as well as its distinguishable topography favoured the cape of Koroinen as a new place for the bishopric. Furthermore, the re-establishment of the bishopric to a new place symbolized a new era for the Church and the bishopric thus emphasizing the significance of the new Bishop (Gardberg 1971, p. 151, p. 157, p. 167).

Although, the missionary work in the southwest Finland had bound the area close to Sweden, the battle for the souls of the people in Häme (Tavastland) was not over. In 1237, Pope Gregorius IX sent a bull to Sweden urging the bishops of Sweden to fight against the apostates of Häme (Tavastland), who had forsaken the Christianity incited by the enemies of Christ living nearby. Probably, the meaning of this bull was to encourage Swedish Christians to a military expedition against Novgorod, which was launched in 1240. The expedition did not forge



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beyond the Neva River, but it joined western Finland and Häme closely to Sweden. One proof for this relation and for the Swedish authority was that the Swedish troops included also men from southwestern Finland and Häme (Tavastland) (Suvanto 1985, 42; Virrankoski 2001, p. 70).

It is very likely that this bull stimulated for a raid to Häme (Tavastland) even before this expedition, probably in 1237 or 1238. The raid was organized and conducted by the statesman and military commander Birger Magnusson of Bjälbo (Birger Jarl). There seems to be some sort of culmination in the Swedish migration right after the expedition, which can be interpreted as some sort of indication of the interaction between the migration to Finland and the actions of sovereignty and the Church. These expeditions to Häme related implicitly with the formation of Turku, because the Swedish troops must have arrived via the Aura River and the disembarkation probably took place in Koroinen, which would have been an intermediate stopping point providing the protection of the bishopric and supplies of men, food and other essentials (Pirinen 1991, 60–64; Virrankoski 2001, p. 69–73).

In 1249, the Dominican Order strengthened the status of Koroinen as a religious centre of Finland with the foundation of their religious house in this area. The traditional explanation for this event at this particular time has stressed the expansionary policy of the Swedish crown and the assertion of his authority into Finland as well as the support, which the supreme authority and ecclesiastical leaders of Sweden gave to Dominicans. (Krötzl 2003, p. 15, p. 19).

This explanation can be accepted, but what was the course of events, which culminated in the foundation of the Convent in Koroinen? Dominican order was confirmed in 1216 and 1217 by Pope Honorius III who authorized Dominican monks to do missionary work all over the Christendom. Very soon, in the early 1220s, the Dominicans settled down in northern Europe: in 1221, they founded their convent in Köln and in 1223 the first Scandinavian convent of the order was founded in Lund. The appointment of Wilhelm of Modena as a papal legate of the Baltic region accelerated the establishment Dominican houses. During his time, convents were founded in Danzig (1227), Ribe (1228), Visby (c. 1228–1230), Lübeck (1229), Kammin (1230), Roskilde (1231/1234), Kulm (1233), Riga (1234), Sigtuna (1237), Skänninnge (1237 and Elbing (1238). The first Dominican convent in Tallinn was founded in 1229, but it survived only a few years until its destruction in 1233. This could have been favourable time for the Dominicans to establish themselves also to Finland, especially because Bishop Thomas was favourable toward Dominicans and would most likely have welco-



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*Figure 10. Turku Castle has guarded the estuary of Aura River for more than seven centuries. Photo: Liisa Seppänen*

med their house in his diocese. Why did the Dominicans not establish themselves to Finland when he was in the office, but waited until 1249? (E.g. Gardberg 1971, p. 152, p. 154; Krötzl 2003, p. 18, p. 22; Salminen 2003, p. 37–38, p. 47–48).

Christian Krötzl has provided this question with the following explanations: Firstly, Finland did not belong to the legateship of Wilhelm of Modena but remained outside the active sphere of operations. The main reason, however, lies in the unstable political situation of the country caused by the military expeditions and uprisings in Häme (Tavastland). The circumstances on the south side of the Baltic Sea (in the present-day northern Estonia) were not that favourable either for the re-establishment of the Dominican Convent in Tallinn, which did not happen until in 1246 (Krötzl 2003, p. 15–22). Three years later, the Convent was founded to Koroinen, where a new era began with the nomination of Swedish-born Bero as a bishop of Finland. This office had been unoccupied since the divorce of Bishop Thomas in 1245 and the bishopric of Finland had suffered from severe crisis for four years (Gardberg 1971, p. 154). It is understandable that this region without religious stability and clerical authority did not attract Dominicans before the situation was stabilized.

### *Beginning of the new era in the mid 13th century*

Although Koroinen formed a religious centre of Finland in the mid 13th century with its bishopric and Dominican convent, it cannot be designated as a town. Markus Hiekkanen has pointed out that in Europe it was a common practise since the early Christian era to place the bishopric and Dominican convent in urban environment. Consequently, these two reasons together with the royal power politics would have resulted in the foundation of Turku in the end of the century. (Hiekkanen 2002, p. 165–169; 2003a, p. 46–48). These reasons, however, were valid already by the mid-13th century, but why neither the time nor the place, were not suitable for the foundation of the town?

As mentioned above, Finland entered a new era in the mid 13th century with closer ecclesiastical contacts with Sweden. Since then, three bishops of Finland, Bero



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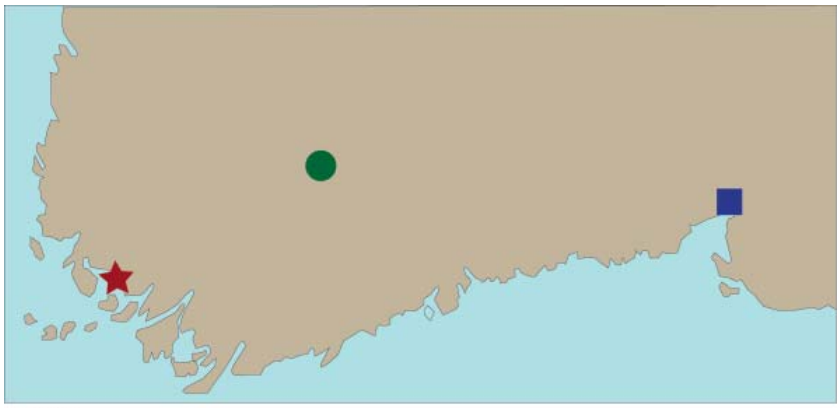


*Figure 11. At the end of the 13th century Turku Castle, Häme Castle and Vyborg Castle were all under consideration. The castles situated strategically on the frontier of the eastern part of Sweden. Drawing: Liisa Seppänen.*

1249–1258, Ragvald 1258–1266 and Catillus 1266–1286, were all of Swedish origin, the chancellors of the Swedish Court and nominated for their office by the Swedish King. During their time the interests of the Crown and the Church were closely connected and the Swedish must have had a strong impact and dominion in southwest Finland. (Gardberg 1971, p. 154–155).

It is quite easy to understand the close relation and strong support of the Crown to the Catholic Church. In Sweden, the Church had adopted the Roman Law according to which the succession was hereditary. This was in contrast with the local tradition where the people, represented by patricians, were in the position of choosing and divorcing the King. This practise had lead to corruption, where patricians extorted privileges for their favour from the competing princes striving for the crown. Especially, Birger Jarl and his son Magnus Ladulås (King Magnus Birgersson 1275–1290) were ardent supporters of the Church because they both aspired after hereditary kingship and tried to reassert the sovereignty of the King. (Virrankoski 2001, p. 82.) Under the rule of Magnus Ladulås, Sweden did two campaigns against Novgorod in the Neva River, but both attacks were fended off easily. The rivalries led to the acts of war in the early 1290s (1292 /3) when the Russians raided Häme (Tavastland) and the Swedish besieged Karelia and Ingria. During the spring in 1292, Swedish armada sailed to Finland under the rule of Torkel Knutsson. He was a marshal and a virtual ruler of Sweden during the early reign of King Birger Magnusson (1280–1321), the son of Magnus Ladulås (Virrankoski 2001, p. 82). Possibly this was the time when the Swedish were



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looking for a strategic location for their base and an idea for founding the town was conceived.

### *The interconnection between the construction of castles and the town*

The end of the 13th century and the turn of the 14th century witnessed the construction work of three castles on the frontiers of the Swedish dominion. One of them was Turku Castle, which was built on a small island in the estuary of the Aura River (fig. 10). The others were Häme Castle and Vyborg Castle, which situated along the eastern frontier of the Swedish realm and Catholic diocese facing the Orthodox precinct and the border district of the taxation area, which belonged to Novgorod (fig. 11). Construction of these castles proves for calculated strengthening of the Swedish authority in these strategic areas. The Turku region was also protected by another castle, Bishop's castle of Kuusisto, which situated about 12 km southeast from Turku Cathedral. It guarded the eastern sea routes to Aura River and the main road leading from Vyborg to Turku (fig. 2).

In Northern Europe it was quite common that the town was founded in the vicinity of the castle, which was built and owned either by the Crown, bishop or noble family. Many times it is impossible to say which one became first: the town or the castle, because their development and construction histories were so closely and firmly connected and intertwined with each other. It is very likely, that the construction of Turku Castle as well as the Bishop's castle of Kuusisto was catalysed by the plans for the establishment of the town, and they were both built simultaneously for its protection fending off the raids from the sea (Drake 1996, p. 29; Niukkanen et al. 2014, p. 30; Mogren 1995, p. 173–176; Uotila 1994; 2003b; Verhulst 1999, p. 116–117).

In Finland, we can name only one place where a construction of a castle indubitably predated the emergence of a town: this is Vyborg where the castle was built by the Swedish in 1293. However, there is no of evidence of a town or even traces of the plans for establishing a town in this area from this time (FMU I 214, 217; Lovén 1996, p. 97–99; Suhonen 2004). It is very likely that the construction work of Turku Castle and Vyborg Castle were begun at the same time and they both emerged as symbols for power and as the strongholds of protection. Like the castles, the towns acted as symbolic expressions of power and ownership of that particular area.

In Turku, the earliest construction phases of the castle and the town were probably carried out quite simultaneously. This idea is supported by a discovery in the constructions of the castle. Kari Uotila has detected in his studies that the direction of the castle was slightly altered towards the riverside after



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the very first construction phase, which included the west tower and a part of the northern ring-wall. The possible reason for the modification of the direction concerning the rest of the castle could have been the activities, which were taken place three kilometres upstream the river, where the Cathedral and the town were also under construction. The adjustment in the direction of the castle resulted in a better view between the castle and the town facilitating the guarding function of the castle (Uotila 2003b, p. 154–157).

### *The displacement of Koroinen*

The traditional explanation for the displacement of Koroinen, which is based on the glaciostatic land uplift and the diminished depth of the Aura River, supports the idea that the town of Turku was preceded by an earlier trading place with the need for a new harbour more suitable for German trading ships, the cogs (Gardberg 1971, p. 174–175). According to some studies, the draught of these ships varied from less than two meters up to three meters depending on the cargo and the size of the ship (Kallioinen 2000, p. 40, ref. 40). There are no estimations or studies concerning the depth of the waterway near Koroinen at the end of the 13th century, but it is very likely that this could not have constituted an absolute hindrance to trade in Koroinen. We also need to remember that the foundation of Turku happened only six–seven decades later when the



*Figure 12. The cathedral is dominating the landscape of the medieval town area in the present-day Turku. The appearance of the cathedral was quite the same in the late middle ages as it is today. Photo: Lasse Andersson.*

bishopric was transferred to Koroinen. Within this time, the natural upheaval in this area would have been about 25 cm. Had this caused any problems, there could have been also other solutions instead of changing the place: most of the towns and harbours of Europe and around the Baltic Sea situated by relatively shallow rivers, the banks of which continuously silted up. It was not at all unusual practice to unload the cargo first to smaller ships, which forwarded the goods to the harbour (Kallioinen 2000, p. 40).

Consequently, what was the reason why Koroinen with the location favourable for trade and services in the 13th century was not good



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enough for the place of a town? Many earlier studies have emphasized the role of trade as a reason for the foundation of the town and some researchers have considered the site of Turku as a market place for Koroinen (Suvanto 1985, 85). At the time, when the town was about to be founded the following, far-reaching aspects needed to be taken into consideration besides the trade: What kind of environment the topography and the soil conditions offered for the construction and extension of the town? How could the town be defended and protected? Was the location favourable for existing as well as prospecting activities? Probably all these things together contributed to the decision that the town of Turku was founded 1.6 km downstream from Koroinen. It was founded in the confluence of the Aura River and Hämeen Härkätie, which was an important land route leading to East and inland. Furthermore, the choice of the place possibly entailed a better harbour and visual communication between the town and Turku Castle (E.g. Uotila 2003b, p. 156–158).

Also the price of the land and its availability could have favoured the new area, which was previously used only for agriculture. Koroinen was officially, as well as symbolically, devoted to the Church and bishopric. Probably the status of this land, loaded with many implications was not neutral enough for the establishment of a town, which was meant to serve the men of Crown and Church equally, as well as traders and craftsmen. On the other hand, the hill of Unikankare provided the Cathedral with solid land and visible place, which the flat and clayey Koroinen was unable to do (fig. 12). The advantages the new place, Turku, superseded the qualities of Koroinen in many respect and thus the plans for the first town of Finland were realized in this area which offered better protection and prospects for growth and prosperity.

## Summary

In the article, manifestations of urbanism are examined with the focus on the foundation of Turku, which became the most significant town of Finland and one of the most important towns of the medieval Sweden forming a gate to East and a Finnish window to the Hanseatic world. According to the present knowledge, Turku was founded in the early 14th century in an area, which was previously used for cultivation and probably hosted religious and commercial activities of some kind. On the basis of archaeological evidence and historical circumstantial evidence, I suggest that Turku was founded as a result of active power politics of the Swedish realm, which was initially intertwined with the missionary work of the Roman Catholic Church. Trade and its organization, especially practised by Germans, affected the functionality, viability, growth and development of the town, but it cannot be consi-



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dered as the prime reason or catalyst for its founding. Koroinen, with the Bishop's seat from the 13th century, was not considered as a suitable place for a town because of its main status as a religious centre of the area. The crown needed a new area to establish itself with a better location for the defence and better availability of land. Therefore the town was founded c. 1.6. km downstream the river were the heart of the medieval town of Turku is situated today.

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## Notes

*1. Saloranta Elina. The presentation about the excavations of Cathedral School 2014–2015 (Turku) in the National Museum on the 5th of February, 2016 in the seminar Presentations of excavations in 2015, organized by the National Board of Antiquities in Helsinki, the 4th and 5th of February.*



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