

Medieval Pottery in the River Aura Valley in SW Finland

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Medieval Period; Pottery; River Aura Valley

The River Aura Valley, SW Finland, has been inhabited since the Stone Age. There were Iron Age settlements in two nearby river valleys, Aurajoki and Vähäjoki. These settlements were probably connected with the inland settlement area of southern Häme (Tavastland) by a permanent land route as early as the local Late Iron Age (ca 800–1150/1200 AD). The route was later called the Häme Oxen Road (Masonen 1989, 193–195). As a consequence of land uplift, these rivers got a common lower course in the medieval period. Turku, the first medieval town in Finland, was founded there on that river.

Most of the Iron Age material in the Turku district has been found in cemeteries. The Latest Iron Age cemeteries and silver treasures bear evidence of prosperity in the area. In that time, the cemeteries had a tendency to cluster where the two rivers met (Kivikoski 1971, 81–102; Salo 1982, 75–84; Pihlman 1986, map 14). The bishop's see was transferred to the same area in the beginning of the 13th century. The crown of Sweden started to build a stone castle at the new river mouth at the end of the 13th century and the town Turku was established three kilometres upstream, on the eastern side of the river (Fig. 1).

On the Medieval Archaeology in Finland

The archaeological research on medieval Finland for a long time focused on monumental buildings themselves, such as castles and churches. Before the 1980's proper urban excavations were not performed in other medieval towns than Ulvila (Ulfaby). The reasons



were e.g. financial or connected with land use and the research tradition. Turku is the place where most of the urban archaeological research in Finland has been carried out. The Turku Provincial Museum conducted the latest large excavations in the medieval town area of Turku: one on the site of the main building of Åbo Akademi in 1998, close to the cathedral and the medieval market place (Fig. 2; see the articles of Liisa Seppänen, Janne Harjula and Heini Kirjavainen in this volume), and another in Rettiginrinne in 2000–2001, in the area between the market place and the Dominican Convent, nearby the street leading to the convent.

Imported Medieval Ceramics in the River Aura Valley

According to general understanding, the Iron Age came to an end in western Finland in the

Fig. 1: Medieval ceramics has mostly been found in the Castle of Turku, in the town of Turku, in Koroinen and in Vanhalinna hillfort. The coast line and the river have been drawn according to the recent situation.

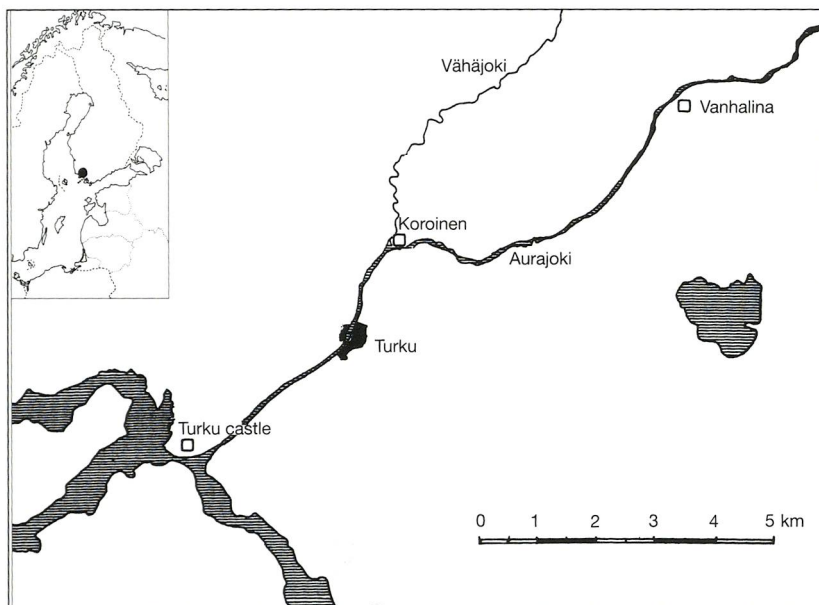


Fig. 2: Medieval Turku during the excavations carried out by the Turku Provincial Museum on the site of the main building of Åbo Akademi in 1998 (photo: Turku Provincial Museum/Janne Harjula).

1150's. The River Aura Valley had trading relations primarily with Gotland at the end of the Iron Age and during the entire 12th century (Kivikoski 1971, 89–90, 100; Salo 1982, 84). The local pottery was handmade and fired at a low temperature. It has been proposed that pots had not been made only for own usage but also for sale in workshops in certain centres (Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982, 70).

Imported ceramics from Continental Europe have been found in the lowest layers of the town Turku, from the end of the 13th century on. The imported pottery has since then been continually and abundantly in use (Pihlman 1995). Following questions are dealt with in the present essay:

Has pottery made in the north-western Continental Europe been used in remarkable quantities or only sporadically in the River Aura Valley before the time of the town, that is before the late 13th century? In which kinds of settlements has imported ceramics been used, and by whom?

Can some essential changes be seen in the ways of using imported pottery at the turn of the 14th century as the town was already established in the river valley?

What happened to the local pottery?

In the River Aura Valley, medieval imported ceramics has primarily been found on four sites: the bishop's residence in Turku Koroinen, Lieto Vanhalinna hillfort, the town of Turku and Turku Castle. Some pottery has been excavated in some other places as well, such as the Church Hill of Turku (Kaarina). There, a Final Iron Age

cemetery and a partly later settlement site have been found (Riikonen 1999). The imported ceramics on the Church Hill dates back to the 13th and 14th centuries: for example some sherds of the highly decorated redware (NM 27025:89). The Church Hill is situated opposite to the Koroinen bishop's residence on the other side of the river. The medieval imported ceramics seems to concentrate on special kinds of settlement sites in the River Aura Valley. Turku Castle, a castle of the crown, was originally situated on a small island at the river mouth. The oldest parts of the castle date back to the 1280's (Gardberg 1967, 55–57) or around the year 1300 (Drake 1993, 33–34). The medieval town of Turku was situated three kilometres upstream. It was founded at the end of the 13th century on the eastern side of the river (Hiekkanen, in print; Pihlman 1999b, 69–71). The town was the oldest and the most important of the medieval towns in the Finnish part of the Swedish kingdom. It was a centre of trade, an ecclesiastical centre and an important node of traffic routes. It has been estimated that the town had between two and three thousand inhabitants in the middle of the 16th century (Kaukiainen 1980, 105).

Koroinen developed to the first ecclesiastical centre in Finland (Fig. 3). The bishop's see was transferred in 1229 or very soon after that to Koroinen where it was situated until 1300 (Gardberg 1971, 158–166; Gallén 1978, 321; Koi-vunen 1979, 57). In that year, the see was moved to the new town and the new cathedral on the north-eastern border of the town was consecrated. Koroinen functioned as a residence of the bishop until 1429 (Palola 1998, 175–176). The hillfort of Vanhalinna ('the Old Castle') is situated five kilometres upstream from Koroinen, between the river and Häme Oxen Road (Fig. 4). According to Jukka Luoto, Vanhalinna was taken into use as a fortification in the 6th century. The hillfort was not in use in the Viking Age. The last period of usage of the fortification started, according to Luoto, in the 11th century. The intensity of use declined in the early 14th century and came to an end in the 1360's (Luoto 1984, 151–154). Jussi-Pekka Taavitsainen presumes that the first fortification phase started after the Viking Period and continued not later than the 1330's (Taavitsainen 1990, 140–141). The fortification apparently fell into the hands of the Swedish crown at nearly the same time as the

bishop's see was moved to Koroinen (Kivikoski 1971, 98, 102; Masonen 1989, 147).

Plenty of medieval imported pottery has been found in Turku Castle, in the town and in Koroinen. In the Vanhalinna hillfort the number is remarkably smaller. There has been found porous unglazed greyware, other unglazed pottery, redware glazed only on the outer surface (only few pieces are highly decorated), interior glazed redware, very hard fired porous ceramics, proto-stoneware, near-stoneware and stoneware was also found in the River Aura Valley. There are some pots belonging to other pottery groups, as well.

The datings of Vanhalinna and Koroinen cannot be based on stratigraphical observations or dendrochronology, but in the town of Turku that is possible. In the first mentioned places the datings are mostly comparative.

Continental Pottery from the 13th Century

Highly decorated leadglazed earthenware, especially redware, and proto-stoneware were distributed in the 13th century and in the beginning of the 14th century in the area of the Baltic Sea (Gaimster 2001, 54–55; Gaimster 1999a, 101–102; Gaimster 1999b, 62–63). Highly decorated redware has been found in Turku, in Koroinen and in Vanhalinna but only few sherds in the entire River Aura Valley.

Proto-stoneware, which was produced especially in the Rhine area and in Lower Saxony, is represented in the town of Turku, in Turku Castle, in Koroinen and in Vanhalinna. More vessels have been found in the town than in the castle but in both of them only in rather small quantities, and most of them yellow coloured with reddish wash on the surface (e.g. TMM 21074: 216). This kind of proto-stoneware belongs mostly to the end of the 13th century and to the first part of the 14th century (Stephan 1988, 85, 111; Lüdtke 1985, 68–70). In Koroinen and in Vanhalinna, most vessels of proto-stoneware are dark grey or reddish coloured. The fabric is more coarse-tempered and the surface is more rough than the previous one (e.g. NM 52100: 2334). This kind of proto-stoneware belongs mostly to the 13th century (Stephan 1988, 108–109; Lüdtke 1985, 66–67). In the town of Turku it has been used in small quantities till into the beginning of the 14th century.



Fig. 3: Koroinen at the confluence of two rivers in the year 1971. The most extensive excavation at Koroinen was carried out by Juhani Rinne in the beginning of the 20th century (photo: Turku Provincial Museum/C. J. Gardberg).

Some vessels of the Paffrath ware (Janssen 1983, 171–172) have also been found in Koroinen and in Vanhalinna (e. g. NM 52100: 2372). That sort of vessels has not been found in the town and in the castle. The production of the Paffrath ware started in the 11th century in the Rhine area and they were exported mainly in the 12th century, but to some extent in the following century as well (Janssen 1983, 171; Lüdtke 1985, 62–63; 123–125).

Fig. 4: The Vanhalinna hillfort. The photo is taken from the western side of the River Aura. The hillfort has been excavated at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries and in the 1950's–1970's (photo: Department of Archaeology at University of Turku).



Ceramics from the Beginning of the 14th Century

Stoneware production started in the Rhine area at the end of the 13th century and in Lower Saxony soon after that (Stephan 1983, 99–101; Stephan 1988, 91; Gaimster 1997, 35). Especially well known is the Siegburgian stoneware production from the Rhine area. Stoneware appeared in the town of Turku as early as in the first years of the 14th century and very soon, at the beginning of the century, it was the most common ceramic group and represented about 2/3 of all imported ceramics in the town. At the same time the amount of imported ceramics increased (Pihlman 1995. The datings of the layers have been based on dendrochronological datings by Pentti Zetterberg, University of Joensuu.) Usage and demand of ceramics seems to increase in the 14th century in Koroinen as well. The material of Koroinen includes plenty of stoneware produced in the areas of Rhine and Lower Saxony. No stoneware has been found in Vanhalinna. Thus, the development of ceramic consumption was clearly different in Vanhalinna, compared to the town and to Koroinen. The inhabitants or users of Vanhalinna either did not longer follow the same trend, or Vanhalinna hillfort was no more in use in the 14th century. The situation of Vanhalinna had changed again, as the town and the new castle had been built.

Church, Crown, Merchants and Ceramics

We can summarise that the consumption of western European imported ceramics started in the River Aura Valley not later than in the middle of the 13th century. That also happened simultaneously in Koroinen and Vanhalinna. The kinds of ceramics which can be dated back to the 13th century are similar in both places, the bishop's residence and the hillfort, but the amount of imported vessels is much greater in Koroinen. It seems to be that western European ceramics had at first been used only in special kinds of places in this area in the middle of the 13th century. That ceramics had apparently in the earliest phase been connected with the ecclesiastically most cen-

tral site and the military fortification taken over by the crown. The church and the crown had common interests in the region. Consumption of imported ceramics spread later from the ecclesiastical sphere to the local elite farms. The demand for western European ceramics started to grow. Maybe the church and its networks tempted a greater number of German merchants to the River Aura Valley.

The increasing consumption of imported ceramics in the beginning of the 14th century can be connected with the increasing commercial activities and the fact that the burghers of Turku were in most cases of German origin at that time. German merchants had relatives and partners in other towns (Kallioinen 2000, 104–109; 139–140). These relationships formed a network with shared cultural manners. The increasing consumption of western European imported ceramics is linked with the production of stoneware. The imported vessels were mostly tableware which could express social status, belonging to a social group, and wealth. The table manners of the elite and German burghers were in some extent adopted by other social groups as the production of stoneware increased and prices decreased (Gaimster 2001, 52, 56; 1999b, 63–64, 67).

Local Pottery

The use of local ceramics, which continued the tradition of Iron Age, remained in use until the 14th century in the River Aura Valley (Pihlman 1995). The local ceramics was formed by hand and fired at a relatively low temperature. It was probably produced by local peasant population, and the vessels occur in the town material as late as the latter part of the 14th century (Pihlman 1999a, 34). This kind of ceramics probably did not have very specialised functions. Local ceramic production and use had anyhow to react in some way in the new situation of increased amounts of imported ceramics. The imitations of forms of imported ware can be interpreted as an attempt to adapt the old pottery to the new demands (compare to Verhaeghe 1999, 159–160). Another reaction of the local craftsmen was maybe the increased production of small wooden stave-

built bowls, the proportion of which seems to increase in the vessel material in the town in the middle of the 14th century (Pihlman 1995). It seems to be that there was no more

demand for the local traditional ceramics in the town after the end of the 14th century. How long it stayed in use in the peasant households, is another question.

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Abbreviations

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TMM Turku Provincial Museum

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