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Turkansaari chapel and the material linkage of religious and socio-economic activities in the Oulu region in the 17th century

 Mirette Modarress Julin

Abstract

In Northern Finland, the middle and later part of the 17th century was an active time of building prayerhouses (Fi *saarnahuone*)¹, small chapels (Fi *kappelikirkko*), and churches. One of these small chapels was built in 1694 on the Turkansaari island in the Oulujoki river in the parish of Oulu (Uleåborg). In this chapter, I discuss connections between the religious and socio-economic practices on the island through the material remains excavated on Turkansaari. I also take a brief look at the building of other similar chapels or prayerhouses in Northern Ostrobothnia and chiefly the Oulu region. Since the borders and definition of the province of Northern Ostrobothnia have experienced changes throughout history, they are not defined exactly at this point. The main questions considered here are the following: What do the excavation finds indicate about the activities on Turkansaari? What was the existing social, economic, and religious framework and what motivated the building of Turkansaari and other chapels in the region?

Keywords: chapels, prayerhouses, religious buildings, religious practice, Northern Finland, 17th century, excavations, Turkansaari

5.1. Historical background

The island of Turkansaari² is one of a group of small³ islands in the Madekoski district on the Oulujoki river about 15 km upstream (to the south-east) of the river mouth. In the old written sources, the first references to Turkansaari are found in administrative documents of the Church from the 1340s, in which it is mentioned that the Oulujoki river was an official borderline between the Turku (Åbo) and Uppsala dioceses. Rivers and other waterways were also the main routes for the traders who came from the south and east to Northern Finland⁴ along the river to exchange commodities. According to A. H. Snellman (1887: 146, 150; 1905: 18–19), another early document is an edict from the bailiff of Ostrobothnia from 1489. It states that Karelian and Russian traders were allowed to come up the river only until Turkka⁵ to market their goods (also e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 18). This regulation had to be imposed because the traders had caused a lot of unrest and had sacked and ravaged the surrounding settlements.

1. A direct translation of *saarnahuone* is *saarna*=sermon, *huone*=room, but the word prayerhouse (Fi *rukoushuone*) is principally used here. Its meaning is the same as that of the Swedish term *bönehus*, a term used in the 18th-century map of the Turkka region (see p. 3 and Fig. 5.2). In 17th-century Finland, a *saarnahuone* was usually a small one-room wooden cottage or house. These small cottages were mainly built for giving weekly sermons in places that were located at some distance from the main parish church. In this respect, most of them are analogous with the English term 'chapel of ease' (see e.g. lexico.com).

2. Oulu Turkansaari (564010017)

3. Turkansaari is approximately 3 hectares in size.

At least since the 16th century, the area around Turkansaari has been important for fishing. Weirs for salmon were specifically mentioned. One of them was *Turkanpato*, which is known in the 1558 account books for fishing (Snellman 1905: 27–28; Virkkunen 1953: 27; Virrankoski 1973: 215; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 70). Salmon was a source of livelihood and an important product for the trading and economy of the region (see Vilkkuna 1949; Halila 1953: 277), also for the Church. The fishing rights were not self-evident, and they caused some disputes. The officials gave the town-dwellers of Oulu the right to fish on the weirs along the river, which the local fishers found hard to accept. The parties concerned engaged in lengthy disputes that often had to be solved in the local court. (Halila 1953: 451–464; Virkkunen 1953: 283.) Crop failures during several years in the 1630s, 1640s, and 1690s caused hunger among the population (e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 584–586; Vahtola 1986: 76–77; Talve 1997: 305–306), which might have made disputes over fishing even worse.

In the 17th century, trade in Northern Finland was strongly regulated by the Crown. Buying and selling should take place only at specific times in specific places, in the case of Oulu in the marketplace of the town. Nevertheless, rules were commonly broken. Traders and villagers bought, sold, and exchanged products in villages and small marketplaces. Salt was one of the most important imports, whereas sugar was rarely imported before the 18th century.⁶ Other articles included spices, tobacco, wines, luxury items, cloth, ceramics, and glassware. Local trade products included salmon, dried fish, butter, furs, and on a larger scale tar, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. (E.g. Halila 1953: 276–283; Virkkunen 1953: 228–229, 241, 250.) When travelling in Northern Finland at the end of the 18th century, the Italian explorer Giuseppe Acerbi (1802: 258) observed that at the markets of Stockholm, salmon from the Oulu region fetched higher prices than salmon from any other region.

Turkansaari was a part of the Oulu parish since 1610, and at the end of the 17th century, a wooden prayerhouse was built in the centre of the Turkansaari island.⁷ (Fig. 5.1.) The year 1694 is carved on the wall of the chapel, and this is considered to be the year the chapel was erected. The chapel was in use well into the 18th century. At that time, however, the activities on Turkansaari declined and concentrated on the growing and developing city of Oulu, which had been founded in 1605 at the mouth of the Oulujoki river. Already in the 1720s, the Turkansaari prayerhouse was in bad shape and in need of repair. According to Aimo Halila (1953: 550), the burghers of Oulu were not interested in repairing the chapel. Repairs were nevertheless carried out.⁸ Still, towards the end of the century, the heyday of the Turkansaari chapel was over. In 1814, the prayerhouse was taken down and moved to



Figure 5.1. Turkansaari chapel in the outdoor museum of Turkansaari in 2011. (Photograph: M. Modarress.)

4. At that time, Western Finland was considered to be under Swedish rule, and Sweden and Russia had disputes about the borders. In 1323 the borderline was defined by so called Treaty of Nöteborg (*Pähkinäsaaren rauha*) and in 1595 by the Treaty of Teusina (*Täyssinä rauha*). Researchers have not yet agreed upon the exact borderlines, and they are continuously under study (see e.g. Viinanen 2011).

5. Snellman (1887, 1905) calls the place *Turkan kylä*. The word *turkka* refers to market, like *turku* (see Itkonen et al. 1975: 1425), and *kylä* means village.

6. According to Virkkunen (1953: 229, footnote 1), the old trading documents from 1704 list sugar among the imported items. Sugar became more widely available in Oulu from the middle of the 18th century onwards (see also Vilkkama et al. 2016).

the river mouth to be used as a warehouse (Paulaharju 1968; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 70–71). Moreover, the salmon weir of Turkka was closed a few decades later, in 1871 (Vasala 1963: 46). Luckily, in the 1920s, Östen Elfving, who was fascinated by regional history, became interested in the forgotten and vanished chapel. He eventually found the rather broken-down warehouse, which he decided to transfer back to the Turkansaari island. The transfer was carried out and the chapel was repaired and re-erected in its original location in 1922 (Elfving 1933: 1716–1718; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 71). Since then it has been used as a small local chapel. Today, Turkansaari and the adjacent island of Siikasaari house an outdoor museum, and a collection of buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries have been brought there from various places in Northern Finland.

5.2. Material remains - what do they indicate?

In 2009 and 2010, three excavations were conducted on Turkansaari: inside the chapel, by the outer walls, and on the rise of the island about 20 to 30 metres north-west of the chapel (Modarress 2010, 2011a, 2011b). There are no written sources that mention any buildings on the island (other than the chapel) during the periods under discussion. The oldest map of the place known so far is from the 1740s. On this map, Turkansaari is called *kirkon saari* (the island of the church), and one building on the map has the word *Bönehus*⁹ (prayerhouse) beside it. (Fig. 5.2.) There is also a drawing from 1862 by the reverend and writer J. W. Calamnius. He has drawn one building on the map of the island (see Pääkkönen 2007: appendix VII; also Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 71). Since the prayerhouse had been removed already a few decades earlier, the building either marks the stone foundations of the removed chapel building or it could be a barn. A scythe blade (KM2010038:113) was found in the 2010 excavations (Modarress 2011a; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 71) in just about the same location,

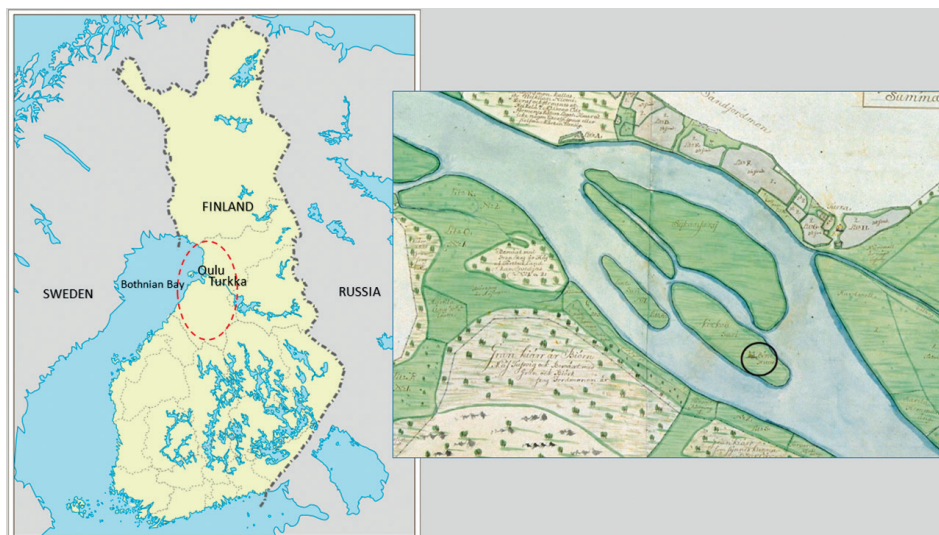


Figure 5.2. Map of the area under study (left) and a detail of the map of Turkansaari from 1737/1745 (right). The prayerhouse is marked with the word *Bönehus* (in the circle). (Map by E. Höjer. University of Jyväskylä/JYX Digital Repository. Adaptation by author. Available at <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/15137?locale-attribute=en> [Visited 22 Nov 2019].)

7. On the research of Turkansaari, see also the detailed article *Turkansaaren saarnahuone* (Modarress-Sadeghi 2011).

8. Various quantities of pieces of different glass for windows found around the foundations and under the church floor in the excavations in 2009 and 2010 are also attributed to repairs (see below; also Modarress 2011b; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011).

9. *Bönehus* is Swedish and means prayerhouse.

which indicates a possible barn at the site. In any case, there was a barn on the rise of the island during the rebuilding of the chapel in the 1920s (see Rinne 1921) (Fig. 5.3).

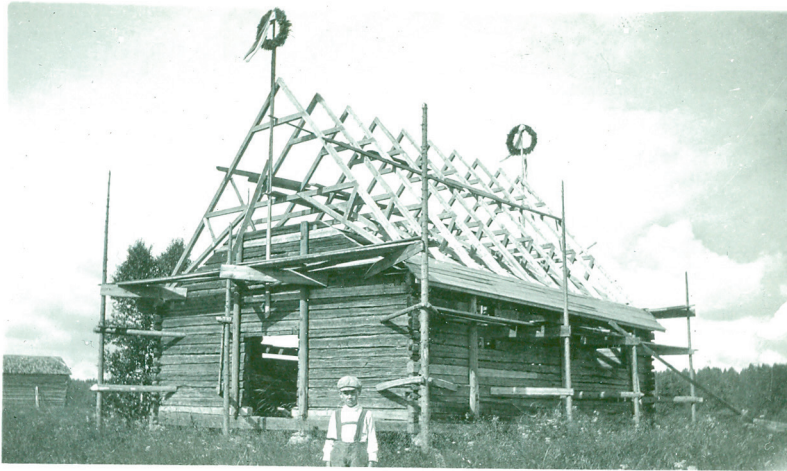


Figure 5.3. Re-erection of the Turkansaari chapel in its former location in 1922. A barn can be seen behind the building. (Photograph: Ö. Elfving/Museum and Science Centre Luuppi/Turkansaari archives.)

The excavations on the hillside in 2010 revealed signs of an earlier building, some burned layers, and the remains of an oven foundation (Fig. 5.4). Around the oven, a clear boundary of stained soil shows the foundation of a dwelling. The function of the construction(s) could not be defined. It could have been used by fishermen during active seasons of salmon fishing¹⁰ or traders during markets. In the marketplaces, there were usually some storage buildings and cottages for traders to use during the (autumn) markets (e.g. Luukko 1954: 489). Various activities of fishermen, farmers, and traders would have called for shelters and stores, as well as places for meeting and gathering socially. The excavations under the church floor also revealed a stone layer in the SE corner of the church, as well as some burned stones under and by the side of the southern church wall foundations. They are indicative of a building prior to the prayerhouse on the site. Also, sermons are known to have been conducted during the summertime already around the middle of the 17th century (e.g. Vasala 1963: 45; Palola 2000: 230). It seems possible that a small cottage could have stood at the site that was used for sermons before the actual prayerhouse was erected (Modarress 2011b; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 78–79).



Figure 5.4. Excavations 2010, trench B. Remains of an oven foundation. (Photograph: M. Modarress, Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu.)

10. Midsummer, June and July, was the best time for catching salmon (e.g. Vahtola 1991: 133).

Objects found in the excavations included pieces of clay pipes, glassware and ceramics, a few personal or clothing items, and numerous coins (Modarress 2010; Modarress 2011b; see also Hakonen 2012) a few of which were silver. All coins were Swedish, and those found under the chapel floor were from the period 1592–1766.¹¹ In the excavation trench on the hill, only one coin was found, dating from 1629 (KM 2010038: 32). The coins under the floor have mostly been considered as different kinds of offerings. Some coins might have fallen on the floor from people's pockets. (See e.g. Hiekkanen 1988: 48–52; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 76–77, 79.)

Furthermore, the coin finds in the chapel area and its surroundings are indicative of trade. As mentioned already, traders came to Turkka and markets were most likely conducted at times when people got together, on days when religious sermons were preached. The authorities assigned special market days. Although trading was forbidden at other times, it was nevertheless common (see e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 195–198, 201).

Other excavation finds revealing human activities were a few pieces of clay pipe handles and bowls (Modarress 2011b). Smoking tobacco was widespread in the Oulu region already at the beginning of the 17th century. The trade of tobacco was regulated, but illicit trade was quite common (e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 186–187.) In the Turkansaari material, the small and rounded forms of the bowls (e.g. KM2010082: 255, KM2010082: 270, Fig. 5.5.) clearly indicate early-17th-century origins (see Åkerhagen 1985: 59, 64–65; Duco 1987: 26 – 42; Hakonen 2012: 8–9; also Ainasoja 2003).



Figure 5.5. Excavation finds from 2010. Half of a clay pipe bowl (KM2010082: 270) and a bowl and handle (KM 2010082: 255). (Photograph: M. Modarress, Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu.)

11. Altogether 47 coins have been found at the Turkansaari excavations. Two coins could not be dated exactly, since part of the numbers had faded away. However, they were from the 18th century (Modarress 2011b). The total number includes five coins found by Rinne in 1921 and one coin found by Palmroos (2016) in a small-scale rescue excavation. Another rescue excavation was carried out in 2017 (Franzén & Viljanmaa 2018), and no remains earlier than the 20th century were found.

The excavation finds also included pieces of thin green object glass. One of the small pieces from the 2009 trench on the south-western side of the church has two decorative projecting lines that are typical of a so-called Passglas beaker (octagonal pole glass beaker) (KM2009050: 24, Fig. 5.6). Two pieces came from the 2010 excavations under the church floor. They are angular and parts of same object, a drinking vessel (KM2010082: 254) of seemingly low-quality glass. Passglas pieces are fairly common excavation finds in urban historical contexts of the 17th to 19th centuries in Finland, as well as Sweden. Passglas beakers were produced already at the end of the 15th century and through the 16th and 17th centuries in different parts of Europe. (Haggrén 1999: 35–36, 2005; Henricson 2003.) For this reason, it is impossible to give an accurate date for these small pieces. In the Turkansaari context, they indicate connections to the European trading network, as do the few pieces of stoneware ceramics found nearby. Some of them were decorated and unusual, certainly not local products (KM2010082: 145, Fig. 5.6). A comparison of the pieces with descriptions and illustrations of Raeren ceramics (see Hurst et al. 1986: 204–205, Fig. 99 and PL 37) shows clear similarities. Archaeologist Aki Hakonen (2012: 10–11) also found a similar ceramic flagon depicted on a European painting from the early 17th century. These kinds of flagons were produced in Raeren, today a part of Belgium, at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries (see Hurst et al. 1986: 194–208; also Pihlman 2018).

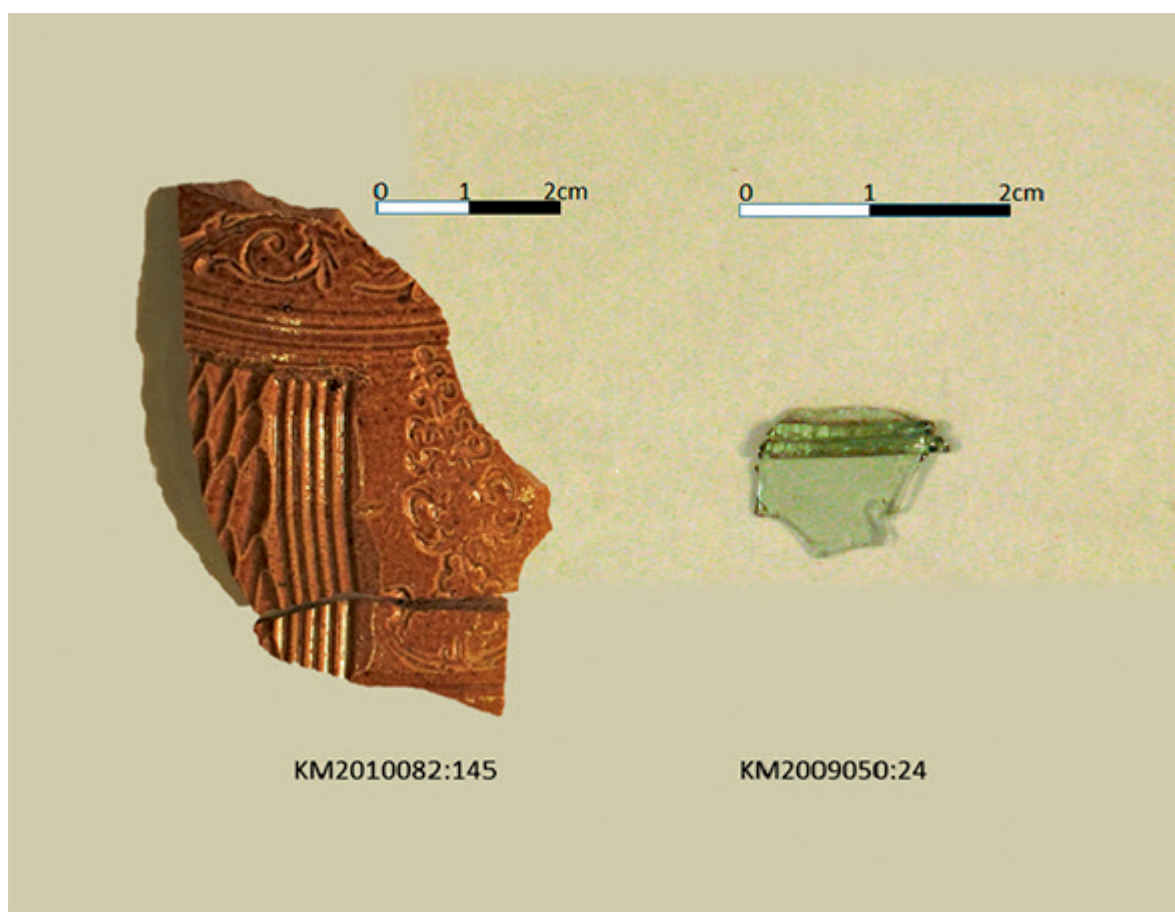


Figure 5.6. Excavation finds from 2009 and 2010. A small piece of a glass object (KM2009050:24) and two pieces of a decorated ceramic vessel (KM2010082:145). (Photograph: M. Modarress, Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu.)

All these excavation finds are indicative of trade conducted on the island. In the fishing and farming community, Passglas beakers would hardly have been used for drinking during daily working activities, nor would money be needed on such occasions. The patterned ceramics were clearly of Central European origin. Also, the pipes and a lead seal (KM2010082: 51, Fig. 5.7) found under the church floor are signs of trade. Lead seals have been found at several excavations and have been used in traded items of yard goods (e.g. Taavitsainen 1994, 2018). Although no writing or marks could be discerned on the seal surface, it was identified as a seal for a bolt of cloth and dated to the early 17th century (Ikonen & Hyttinen 2011: 182–183; Hakonen 2012: 12). Cloth of various materials was a popular item of merchandise. The tax book archives of the burghers of Oulu from the 17th century contain lists of imported cloth, among others silk, broadcloth, and fine linen. Some burghers of Oulu had complained that Russian and Karelian traders sold Persian silk cheaper than it was sold in Stockholm (Virkkunen 1953: 228–229, 250).



Figure 5.7. Excavation finds from 2010. A seal (KM2010082: 51), a ring (KM2010082: 85) Ø 1,2 cm; a buckle (KM2010082: 12) Ø 2,5 cm. (Photograph: M. Modarress, Laboratory of Archaeology, University of Oulu.)



Among the few personal items in the Turkansaari excavation material are a buckle (KM2010082: 12, Fig. 5.7), a pewter button (KM2010082: 11) connected to clothing, and a ring (KM2010082: 85, Fig. 5.7.). The buckle was gold-plated, so it was clearly not part of an everyday item. As for the button, no similarities to other buttons excavated in the Oulu region were found, and the ring was simple and narrow with no distinctive features.

The excavated materials do not date Turkansaari clearly either to the Middle Ages or the early 16th century. However, the material remains and excavation results show that at the end of the 16th century and during the 17th century the island was clearly an active social space used for various functions: activities connected to livelihood as well as economic, religious, and social gatherings. Religious activities were intimately connected to other goings-on, activities for means of livelihood and economics (see also Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 79).

5.3. The spiritual and mundane: The religious beliefs and practices of 17th-century Ostrobothnians

The basic activities in the daily life of the majority of common folk were carried out for livelihood and the practice of religious rituals. What, then, was the relationship between the means of acquiring the daily bread and the practice of religion, between the material world and the spiritual? How did they influence or affect the need to build chapels?

Early prayerhouses and churches especially in the Middle Ages were often located on islands. According to oral tradition, the first prayerhouses or chapels at the Ii trading centre by the mouth of the Ii river in the Bothnian Bay were built on the Illinsaari and Kirkkosaari islands already in the 14th century (Luukko 1954: 265), though this view has been challenged by recent archaeological studies.¹² Oulunsalo was an island in the 1660s when the first known chapel was built there, though a small chapel had probably stood at the site even earlier, in Catholic times (Hiltunen 1987: 17, 36–38). Likewise, in Muhos, a prayerhouse is said to have been located on an island hence called *Kirkkosaari* (Church Island), perhaps already in the beginning of the 16th century (Snellman 1887: 269; Vahtola 1986: 50, 78). Since chapels were plundered and burned repeatedly, it has also been mentioned that islands were safer places for chapels, as they were easier to defend in the case of enemy attacks (Luukko 1954: 263).¹³

Islands have often been regarded as special places. Surrounded by water, they have been given meanings as unusual or liminal and seclusive spaces (e.g. Herva 2009) not only in the material but also in the spiritual world. Spiritual or superstitious beliefs about material surroundings might have played a role in the use of islands as burial places, but the main reason seems to have been a question of practicality. Temporary burials were made if the deceased could not be buried in a cemetery, for instance because of weather conditions, long distances, war, or conflict situations. In different parts of Finland, there are numerous islands called *Hautasaari* (burial island), *Kalmosaari* (death island), and *Ruumissaari* (corpse island), names that might indicate possible burials on the islands.¹⁴ Indeed, some have been detected on the islands in excavations and surveys (see e.g. Jokipii 2001; also Koivunen 1990; Laitinen 2001). Actually, recent research has suggested that not all burials on islands were temporary: on the contrary, they were meant to be permanent from the outset (Ruohonen 2010). No burials have been found on Turkansaari (see Rinne 1921; Paavola 1998: 209; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011), and there is no known burial island nearby. Undoubtedly the various subsistence and economic activities carried out on the island, like fishing and trading, made the place unsuitable for burials

12. The claim that there has been an early chapel on Illinsaari cannot be verified by excavations carried out on the island (conversation with archaeologist Ville Hakamäki 23 March 2018). In the 2009 archaeological excavations, the remains of possible small chapels from the Middle Ages were found in Ii Hamina instead (see Kallio-Seppä 2011).

13. In the case of Turkansaari, this can hardly have been the motive for choosing the island, even though Turkansaari had also been plundered by Russian soldiers in 1714. They tried to burn the prayerhouse but did not succeed (e.g. Palola 2000: 73).

14. *Hautasaari* could also be connected to a means of livelihood (see e.g. *Hautasaari* 1000037956, *kyppi.fi*). Burning tar, which was an important activity in the region in the 17th century, was done in a tar-burning pit, which is called *tervahauta* in Finnish. Tar-burning pits were situated at some distance from living quarters, if possible, on the bank of a river or lake, for the easy transportation of tar with boats (see e.g. Turpeinen 2010: 26).

unlike other, more isolated islands. Besides, Turkansaari was, after all, a minor chapel in the parish of Oulu, a modest prayerhouse. Oulu was the central burial place in the parish also for rural people (see Paavola 1998: 209).

The change from various ancient folk beliefs and norms to Christianity was a slow process; it affected and changed the whole world view and culture (Talve 1997: 302). In the 17th century, old folk beliefs, superstitions, and even Catholic conventions were still common (see e.g. Hukantaival 2016; Lahti 2016; Koski 2018), although the Crown and the Church were trying to spread and strengthen the official Lutheran Christianity among the common folk. Firm control was exercised by the Church in the form of church discipline (Fi *kirkkokuri*). The 17th century has been considered a period of growing social control and discipline exercised by the authorities, the Church as well as the Crown (e.g. Juva 1956; Palola 2000: 231; Wunsch 2006: 72; also Kuha 2016: 11, 13; Koski 2018). Taking part in the Sunday prayers was, in a way, compulsory for everyone. It was important to make evident to the community that one was a pious Christian, a decent member of the community. Social control was strict; neighbours and other fellow citizens or villagers kept an eye on each other. If one did not attend church to take part in religious ceremonies, a neighbour could report this to the authorities. As a result, one could be brought to district court for failure to attend and be fined. One might also be considered a person out of one's society and in some instances even be accused of witchcraft. (See e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 509–512; Juva 1956: 37.) However, according to Miia Kuha (2016: 85), people were not necessarily as interested in their neighbours' behaviour as has been commonly believed. The judiciary and church exercised effective control over even one's personal religious behaviour (e.g. Wunsch 2006; Koski 2018). Nevertheless, as Kuha's (2015, 2016) studies of Eastern Finland show, many times common folk did not care to attend church and avoided attending if possible. On the other hand, on religious holidays, attendance at Lutheran chapels was overwhelming and churches were packed full of people. They wanted to partake in the Holy Communion and give offerings. Religious holidays were considered as something out of the ordinary, times when prayers and offerings were thought to be more advantageous than on common days. Clearly, the offerings sprang from people's religious needs, although Lutheran orthodoxy (Fi *puhdasoppisuus*) did not allow them. Offering was a relic of Catholic customs. Especially churches known as sacrificial churches (Fi *uhrirkirkko*), such as the church of Kuopio in Eastern Finland, were thus favoured (Kuha 2016: passim). In the Oulu region, the chapel of Oulunsalo was a famous sacrificial church¹⁵ where people gave offerings in the hope of fulfilling their personal wishes or easing their difficulties and fears; a traveller might ask for a safe journey and a fisherman for a good catch. The offerings were usually coins but could be also other things. Sacrificial churches were pilgrimage sites, and people came to these places even from long distances. (E.g. Merenheimo 1910; Hiltunen 1987; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 76; Toivo 2014.)

5.4. Motives for building chapels

There are a range of reasons for choosing the place for a chapel that are connected not only to religious notions but social realities as well (Turner 2011: 955). In the construction of the Turkansaari prayerhouse, we can perceive the connection between the spiritual and mundane worlds. It reflects the orientation of how people in the area brought together these two (spiritual and material) in everyday realities. Although old familiar beliefs and rituals had an influence on the mental and practical levels, religious practices were changing with the adoption of the Lutheran faith. As in other parts of Europe, they diverged from Catholic customs concerning ceremonies, practices, and saints. In Finland, this process was slow, whereas in some other places, like larger cities in Europe, the change was more aggressively pursued (see e.g. Juva 1956: 2–3; Isaiasz 2012; also Koski 2018).

15. Oulunsalon uhrirkirkko (567010045)

Apparently, the Lutheran faith caused some changes in the role of the church building *per se*. Preaching and prayers became central rather than the place where they were conducted (e.g. Heal 2005: 41; Isaiasz 2012; Koski 2018: 57–58). This seemingly also allowed the construction of a modest building that even a small community could accomplish. Collective services were seen as an important part of religious observances that influenced people's fortunes. Moreover, individual religious efforts could affect the collective fortune. (Talve 1997: 234–235; Kuha 2016: 101.) Building a proper prayerhouse nearby and within easy reach helped in both ways. One question to consider is also Luukko's suggestion (1954: 265; see also Herva 2009) that a church built on an island would be on no man's land and therefore more easily accepted by all. That is, at least partly, what the building of a prayerhouse indicates: the wish to perform religious duties as conveniently as possible, close to the working place and the site of daily activities. In the case of the prayerhouse of Turkansaari, this is evident: the needs of the fisher and farmer community were thus met, and the location had its advantages for traders too.

Another significant factor and motive in the construction and planning of prayerhouses was to make the community in question more independent (Hiltunen 1987: 89–92). Building a chapel for the community was a show of collective strength; it raised the status and self-esteem of the community. Such determined community involvement can be seen in the erecting of the Kempele and Oulunsalo chapels. The Kempele chapel, erected in 1691, was supposed to be a prayerhouse but became a towered church instead, as had happened with the Oulunsalo chapel built a few decades earlier (see e.g. Virkkunen 1953: 465–466; Hiltunen 1987: 91). On a more personal level, the pretensions of the region's wealthy families could be a reason for building a local prayerhouse. Sometimes disputes between groups led to the need to have separate places of worship (e.g. Snellman 1887: 258–259). Villages and neighbourhoods, especially wealthy farmers, had a kind of competition with their neighbouring villages, which might have been what led to building the prayerhouse in Ängeslevä, Tyrnävä. The locals wanted to show off, to assert that they could afford to build and maintain their own prayerhouse (see e.g. Modarress-Sadeghi 2018).

Building the chapel near the living and working areas is also understandable when the weather conditions of Northern Finland are considered. Travel was easiest by means of waterways, and otherwise it was difficult during a large part of the year: rainy or frosty weather conditions in the spring and autumn wrecked the paths and cart tracks.¹⁶ In the winter, sleighs could be used, but extreme snow or cold could still be an obstacle. As for the summer, it was the busy time of the working season; this is why it was good to have a chapel nearby. Before the prayerhouse was built on Turkansaari, the nearest churches for the local population were in Oulunsalo, circa 14 km to the west, in Oulu, 15 km to the north-west, and the Kempele chapel in the neighbouring Liminka parish, circa 14 km to the west.

5.5. Prayerhouses as markers of the formative phase of institutionalizing Lutheran religious practices

Erecting a prayerhouse on Turkansaari was not an isolated case; it was one of the many prayerhouses and chapels constructed in the villages of Northern Ostrobothnia during the latter half of the 17th century. Historian Pentti Virrankoski (1973) has mentioned c. 30 chapels or prayerhouses in the region.¹⁷ To display this wider context of activities, Table 5.1 provides a list of chapels and prayerhouses that were nearly contemporaneous to or a few decades earlier than Turkansaari. During the second half of the 17th century (from the 1640s to the 1690s) c. 23 of these small chapels were erected in the region (Fig. 5.8).¹⁸ Local traditions often mention the existence of an earlier (medieval) chapel in the same place or nearby. Information about the older chapels is usually controversial and their

16. Actual roads are a later invention. In rural areas, routes were rather more like cattle paths that were used when necessary. Waterways were by far the best way to travel, although rapids were possible obstacles to be overcome. (See also Mauranen 1999.)

17. The number depends on how the border of the Ostrobothnian province is defined. The borders are elusive and have changed a few times since the Middle Ages.

18. After these active building periods, times turned hard for the Ostrobothnian people. The turn of 17th and 18th centuries and the first decades of the 18th century saw first the famine years of 1695 and 1697 and later the Great Northern War (1700–1721) and the Russian invasion, 'the Great Wrath' (1713–1721) *isoviha*, as it is called in Finnish historiography.

exact location is known only by hearsay. However, it has been rather common to build a church over the foundations of an earlier prayerhouse (Paavola 1988: 11, 16), as has presumably been done in Haukipudas (Paavola 1998: 27) and Tyrnävä (Matinolli 1989: 28.) Even on Turkansaari, there has probably been an earlier building that might have been used for sermons (Modarress 2011b; Modarress-Sadeghi 2011).

Building a prayerhouse in the near vicinity of one's living and working place was rewarding and



Figure 5.8. An old map from the 19th century. The sites of the small chapels and prayerhouses (erected from the 1640s to the 1690s) are marked with dots (red dots are chapels/prayerhouses mentioned in the text, blue dots are other chapels in the region). (Original map: Hällström, C & Lundgren C. 1806. Available in the Doria Repository, National Library of Finland, adaptation by author.)

Table 5.1. Chapels and prayerhouses built in the Northern Ostrobothnia* and Oulu region in the 1640s–1690s.

Region/county	Year	Description
Tyrnävä/Ängeslevä	1640s	Prayerhouse
Tyrnävä	1644–1648 (1664)	Prayerhouse (church)
Haapavesi	1640s (1693)	Prayerhouse (chapel)
Pyhäjärvenkylä/Pyhäjoki	1647 (1626) **	Chapel
Haapajärvi	1649 (1653)	Prayerhouse
Alavieska	1651	Chapel
Sipola	c.1653	Prayerhouse
Ylivieska	1653	Chapel
Sievi	1654 (1690)	Chapel
Oulainen	1650s (1682)	Chapel
Rantsila	1658–63 (1640–45/1655–60)	Chapel
Oulunsalo	1665	Chapel
Pulkkila	1671	Chapel
Louhua	prior 1680s	Prayerhouse
Revonlahti	prior 1680s	Prayerhouse
Kalla/Kalajoki	1680	Prayerhouse
Nivala/Pidisjärvi	1682	Prayerhouse
Vihanti	1688 (1691)	Prayerhouse
Kempele	1688–1691	Chapel
Paavola	1691	Chapel
Ylikiiminki	1691–1693	Prayerhouse
Turkansaari	1694	Prayerhouse
Simo	1692–1695	Prayerhouse

*The table is based on Virrankoski 1973 and Petterson 1987. List is only indicative. Distinction between prayerhouse and chapel can be clear or subtle, they are defined according to the written sources or the small size of the building. Large churches are not included, but sometimes the definition is uncertain. Northern Ostrobothnia is considered as defined in the end of 17th century (excluding Eastern part), and attention is on Oulu region.

** When Virrankoski and Petterson give dissentient information for the date of the building, the latter is in parentheses. It's not clear from their text, but in some cases, it might be that the later one is a chapel and earlier in the same spot has been a modest smaller prayerhouse.

provided many benefits. It clearly simplified the practice of religious duties; it was so much easier to take part in the sermons. Accordingly, people wanted a chapel built near their daily activity centre. There would then be no need to travel to the nearest church in the heat of the harvesting season, in the middle of fishing on the river and farming on the surrounding fields. A practical way of carrying out one's religious duties was not the only motivation for chapel building. Other reasons to be considered were economy and trade: a chapel would draw traders to the site, since the arrangement enabled organizing a market where people gathered together (e.g. Manninen 1986: 3; also Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 70). Since the Middle Ages, marketplaces were often in the near vicinity of a church, for example, in the square in front of the church. This was a rather common feature in early Finnish towns, as well as in the wider European context (e.g. Ylimaunu 2007: 28; Burke 2009: 154–155).

Turkka is mentioned already in the 15th century as a place for Russian and Karelian traders to come exchange their goods. Nevertheless, it can be questioned whether, in this early phase, the market was on the island or on the banks of the river. In the old written sources, the market is mentioned to have been held in *Turkan kylä*, which means the village of Turkka (e.g. Snellman 1905:18–19;

Virkkunen 1953, 18–19), not necessarily the island. However, an island operating as a restricted area would have been a better choice in the case of the sometimes disturbing behaviour of traders and the market folk (Virkkunen 1953: 18–19; Ylimaunu 2007: 27–28). In any case, in the 17th century, the marketplace was on the island, as indicated by the excavation finds.

It seems that proposals for building prayer huts and chapels often came from the villagers themselves, but also the Church supported them. For the people, they strengthened a sense of communality and self-esteem. They were also places for discussing and making decisions related to various kinds of social and community concerns. In fact, the parishes were foundations for later municipalities and rural districts (Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ELY-keskus 2014; Asunmaa s.a.). The prayerhouses and chapels were a way of institutionalizing the Church and provided better opportunities to control people's religious practices. The 17th century was a time of growing Lutheran orthodoxy, which was vigorously carried out. The Lutheran church was changing the belief system, and at no other time was it as uniform as at the turn of the 18th century (Talve 1997: 306; see also Koski 2018). With the growing number of chapels with their own priests, new parishes were created. The people also had to provide economic support for the parish priest (Virkkunen 1953: 465; Virrankoski 1973: 678; Hiltunen 1987: 198). In the small chapels and prayerhouses, the sermons were preached periodically mostly by visiting curates (e.g. Hiltunen 1987:91). Turkansaari was a part of the Oulu parish, and sermons were probably preached mostly in the summer season.

5.6. A glance at the Ängeslevä prayerhouse

In general, written information on the old prayerhouses is rather scarce and confusing, and in many cases, their exact locations are not known. Often building a prayerhouse was a preliminary stage for a church to be built on the site later. Even the Turkansaari prayerhouse was re-erected as a chapel after a period of being used as a warehouse. There are sites where, according to local oral history, a prayerhouse has stood. However, the prayerhouse has been demolished later, and now there might be only a few stones of the foundation left to indicate its previous existence. This is the case in Tyrnävä some twenty kilometres south of Oulu. In the beginning of the 17th century, Tyrnävä, which was a part of the parish of Liminka, had two prayerhouses (see Table 5.1). One was located in the old churchyard by the bank of the Tyrnävänjoki river, approximately in the same place where the actual church was built in 1664 (Snellman 1887: 276; also Matinolli 1989: 27–28; Väre 2018). The other was in Ängeslevä, only about 3 km north-east of the old Tyrnävä churchyard (Fig. 5.9).¹⁹ The spot where the prayerhouse had been located is at present a field by the small *Kirkkokursu*²⁰ canal. Nothing is left to show the location of the vanished prayerhouse (Modarress-Sadeghi 2018; see also Snellman 1887: 276; Matinolli 1989: 27–29). The only present reminder is a memory stone erected on the bank of the canal by the field (Matinolli 1989: 29). The Ängeslevä prayerhouse seems to have been a modest hut. Still, having their own prayerhouse could be considered in the context of individual wealthy farmers' desire to show off, according to hearsay by earlier generations²¹ (see Modarress-Sadeghi 2018.) The existence of another prayerhouse at only a few kilometres' distance supports this idea.²²

19. The prayerhouse is mentioned in the register of the Finnish National Board of Antiquities as a "possible ancient remain" (Ängeslevä Toppinen 859500001), but the recent survey had not been able to verify or locate it more exactly (Itäpalo 2010: 16–18). However, in the summer of 2017, a local farmer, the owner of the Toppinen estate, escorted the author and a few members of the Tyrnävä old cemetery survey group to the presumed site of the 1640s prayerhouse.

20. The term *kirkkokursu* means a channel for the rivulet by a church. In this case, the name is also indicative of the site of prayerhouse.

21. Mentioned by the Toppinen estate farmer.

22. Nevertheless, archaeological studies of the site would be required to obtain more detailed information on the matter.



Figure 5.9. The site of former Ängeslevä prayerhouse (top right) and Tyrnävä prayerhouse (bottom left) on map, distance about 3.3 km. (Map: Google. com, 2019, adaptation by author.)

5.7. Concluding thoughts

Religious communities in Northern Ostrobothnia experienced what can be called a boom in the construction of chapels and churches in the middle and later parts of the 17th century (Virrankoski 1973: 663–668; also Modarress-Sadeghi 2011: 70). The local people had various motives for wanting to build the chapels and prayerhouses: practical aspects, religious needs and duties, economic concerns, spiritual pride, and a desire to show off. In the 17th century in Northern Ostrobothnia, the Lutheran religious convictions of rural people were not yet very deep, and old beliefs and customs still had a strong influence. Common people took part in church services usually weekly and on religious holidays. Communality was strengthened by increasing uniformity and the common concept of religion provided by collective services and prayers. Daily labour, farming, and fishing often required joint effort, people working together. This also helped people commit to collective sermons and to pray together, since it was thought to be advantageous for obtaining bountiful crops and catch.

For the Church, the prayerhouses and chapels supported its efforts to spread and control people and their religious practices on both the spiritual and the practical level. Furthermore, chapel building played a role in institutionalizing the Lutheran Church and in defining the borders of administrative areas. As can be perceived from the active chapel construction boom in the region (see Table 5.1), the locations of chapels were later used as a tool to define the borders of parishes, as well as community districts. Nevertheless, the lifespan of the early prayerhouses was often rather short, usually not due to demographic or organizational changes but simply because some just fell into decay and a number of them were torn down (e.g. Virrankoski 1973: 664–665) or burned. There was no desire or need to repair them, and many are remembered now only in local oral traditions or place names (e.g. *Ängeslevä*

kirkkokursu). In some cases, a church has been erected on the site and survives even today. A few have been reconstructed and enlarged, and they are operating as churches.

In the case of Turkansaari, the religious activities were closely connected to the means of livelihood, and practicality guided people in the construction of the prayerhouse. In Turkka, the most suitable place was on the island. The fact that the prayerhouse was within easy reach for fishers and farmers certainly influenced the decision. The idea of an island as a liminal or spiritual space might have strengthened the choice. However, in the case of Turkansaari, there are no signs of any strong feeling of sacredness, such as in Oulunsalo, where the chapel was famous for its sacredness and people came from long distances to visit the place. Instead, the main feature is the location's centrality to subsistence and economic activities. The excavation finds on the island indicate trading activities near the chapel at least since the turn of the 17th century. The island was a suitable central place for the market, but at a safe distance from settlements in the case of possible disturbances often caused by market activities.

For modern people, it is challenging to understand the mentality of the people living in 17th-century Northern Ostrobothnia, their decisions, and their possibilities to act accordingly. There was a close relationship between daily life and religious activities. More archaeological studies on the sites of marketplaces and chapels could shed essential light on the way people lived, acted, and built their social surroundings and environment and how they connected to the spiritual and material worlds, religion, and socioeconomics. Institutionalized religion gave the framework that people acted in, but the efforts and ideas came from the everyday needs of the people, and along with spiritual needs, practicality was a significant factor in how they lived their daily lives.

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Mirette Modarress Julin, PhD, is an archaeologist from the University of Oulu, Finland. Her research interests are in the areas of heritage studies, illicit antiquities trade, post-colonialism, Iranian archaeology, and the social and material aspects of the archaeology of religious sites.

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