

# Material Religion

The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfmr20>

## The Materiality of Turku Cathedral's Spiritual Treasury: Indulgences

Reima Välimäki & Kirsi Salonen

To cite this article: Reima Välimäki & Kirsi Salonen (2022) The Materiality of Turku Cathedral's Spiritual Treasury: Indulgences, *Material Religion*, 18:5, 532-547, DOI: [10.1080/17432200.2022.2132071](https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2022.2132071)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2022.2132071>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 17 Nov 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)




Article views: 239



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

**the materiality of turku  
cathedral's spiritual  
treasury: indulgences  
reima välimäki<sup>a</sup>  and  
kirsi salonen<sup>b</sup> **

<sup>a</sup>university of turku, finland; <sup>b</sup>university of bergen, norway

Reima Välimäki is medieval historian at the University of Turku. He has studied late medieval heresy and inquisition and the Great Western Schism. He is the co-editor of *Tangible religion: materiality of domestic cult practices from antiquity to early modern era* (Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2021).  
[rsmval@utu.fi](mailto:rsmval@utu.fi)

Kirsi Salonen is professor of medieval history at the University of Bergen. She has been working with the papal source material and is specialist of late medieval European ecclesiastical history and papal administration.  
[Kirsi.Salonen@uib.no](mailto:Kirsi.Salonen@uib.no)

## ABSTRACT

The article discusses indulgences as an instrument that provided the spiritual treasury of the Church with a material manifestation. We propose that indulgences reflected the Divine within the material world in four different ways: 1) by promoting particular locations as sources of divine grace; 2) by promoting the cult of saints and their relics; 3) by generating donations for the construction and renovation of churches, and 4) by being in themselves – as indulgence letters and their copies preserved in chartularies – material evidence of the Church's spiritual treasury. Therefore, indulgences must be taken into account in scholarly discussion of Christian materiality. We explore the four material aspects of indulgences through the evidence from Turku Cathedral from the mid-thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century.

**Keywords:** Indulgence, Turku, Cathedral, Papacy, Middle Ages

Material Religion volume 18, issue 5, pp. 532–547  
DOI: [10.1080/17432200.2022.2132071](https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2022.2132071)



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

### ***“Omnibus vere penitentibus et confessis...”: Letters of Indulgence as Spiritual Treasure***

For over a decade, scholars of medieval religion, as well as historians, have paid increasing attention to the concept of material culture. In Jennifer K. Deane’s words: “stuff’ and what it means to people” (Deane 2013). Material and sensorial aspects of religion are deeply rooted in the study of medieval cultural history, and especially within the history of everyday life and material culture that has been a focus area since the 1970s (Jaritz 1990; Jaritz and Schuh 1992). More recently, Caroline W. Bynum’s book *Christian Materiality* (Bynum 2011) has served as a facilitator for the “material turn” within medieval studies. Since then, devotion to material objects and religious experience triggered by sensorial engagement have been objects of myriad articles, books and edited volumes (for references, see Berg et al. 2021, 9–33, esp. 18–20).

Bynum and other scholars have studied such specimens of late medieval material religion as the Eucharist, relics, blessed water and salt, church space and its adornments, candles, images, pilgrimage badges and devotional books. In this article, we argue that indulgences, thus far neglected in the discussion of medieval Christian materiality, represent in fact an essential form of late medieval material devotion. Through indulgences, the fear of Purgatory, the guilt of sin and the treasury of merit, generated by the passions of Christ and his martyrs, all found material manifestations, with the Divine being “reflected in the cosmos” (Bynum 2013).

There were four ways in which the indulgences manifested divine grace in the material world:

- 1) The indulgences that were granted to a particular church or altar presupposed the presence of the faithful in a specific place at a specific time in order to benefit from the indulgence. The most famous examples are the plenary indulgences that required a visit to the most important basilicas in Rome during jubilee years. However, even less spectacular indulgences promoted particular churches as foci of penance and grace.
- 2) Some indulgences promoted the cult of a saint or their relics. Scholarship on the material devotion surrounding relics has been focused on healing and related touching and even consumption of relics. When popes, cardinals or bishops granted indulgences to pilgrimage sites and shrines in order to support a saint’s cult, their relics started to channel divinity in two senses: as holy matter related to a particular saint and through indulgences from the universal spiritual treasury of the Church.
- 3) One way to gain indulgences was to partake in the construction or restoration of a church or one of its altars. Sometimes indulgences were granted to a church that had suffered destruction in order to aid in its reconstruction. Through such indulgences, the desire of medieval Christians to avoid suffering in Purgatory resulted in lasting material monuments.
- 4) Finally, letters of indulgence were material manifestations of the spiritual benefits they conferred. Precious to the churches who

received them, indulgence letters were copied in chartularies in order to preserve their memory. To make a banal comparison: one might understand the indulgence letters of an institution serving as stock certificates, listing their holder's share in the Church's inexhaustible treasury of merit. Of course, through donations, letters of indulgence also guaranteed monetary benefits to their holders.

To analyze these four material aspects of late medieval indulgences, we have chosen to focus on one specific church: the medieval Cathedral of Turku, the diocesan see of the bishop of Turku, a suffragan of the archbishop of Uppsala in the Kingdom of Sweden (Pirinen 1956). We begin by briefly outlining the theology that supported medieval indulgences, since this is sometimes misunderstood even by scholars of history and religion. We then move on to consider specific examples from indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral.

### ***Indulgence in the Catholic Church***

According to Catholic theology, Christians who had committed a sin had turned their back on God and could not enter Paradise. To return to the Christian fold, sinners had to repent and confess their evil deeds to a priest. The priest heard their confession, imposed a penance and granted an absolution, which became valid when the confessant had fulfilled their penance. This did not yet, however, guarantee sinners untrammelled access to Heaven upon their death. Instead, their souls would reside in an intermediate state, known as Purgatory, where an eternal fire would purify their souls until they were cleansed (Le Goff 1986). The length of time that a sinner's soul had to spend in Purgatory would depend on the gravity and number of sins committed (Palmer 1967; Paulus 2000a; Paulus 2000b; Doublier 2017).

The concept of indulgence developed alongside that of Purgatory during the twelfth century. According to the theology of the Catholic Church, the suffering of Christ and other saintly martyrs, as well as all prayers for the dead formed a treasury of merit that could be used for the benefit of Christian souls that had ended up in Purgatory. This heavenly treasure could be used to shorten the time spent in Purgatory, and indulgences offered one means for effecting this. It was possible to collect indulgences by saying certain prayers, by fasting, by giving alms, by donating to ecclesiastical institutions, by visiting holy places, by participating religious celebrations or by participating in a crusade (Palmer 1967). Through these different activities, Christians could accumulate a large store of indulgences during their lifetime. This store shortened their time in Purgatory by a corresponding amount of time. For example, an indulgence of a year shortened the time in Purgatory by a year and an indulgence of forty days shortened the time by forty days. And by combining these two, one's time in Purgatory was shortened by

one year and forty days. From the fourteenth century onwards, it became particularly common to collect indulgences by visiting holy places that had received a special privilege to grant indulgences to their visitors. Churches or ecclesiastical institutions could not grant indulgences to their visitors in their own right, but had to obtain such privileges from bishops, cardinals or the pope.

There was a clear hierarchy concerning the power to grant such privileges. A bishop could grant an indulgence of up to forty days, while a cardinal had the powers to grant an indulgence of up to one hundred days. Only the pope could confer larger indulgences. Until about 1400, a typical papal indulgence would be for one year, but popes could grant extended indulgences of up to seven years if they wished. Bishops and cardinals could compete with papal indulgences by joining forces. For example, two cardinals or five bishops could grant an indulgence of two hundred days (Palmer 1967).

In addition to the usual papal indulgences, popes had the powers to grant more substantial indulgences in special situations. The most powerful indulgence that popes could grant were plenary indulgences (Lat. *indulgentia plenaria*). These remitted all temporal punishment, that is, decreased time spent in Purgatory to zero. These were typically reserved for very special events, such as for those pilgrims who visited Rome and its most important churches during Holy Years. Although plenary indulgences offered a very powerful route to salvation, it removed temporal punishment only for sins committed before receipt of the indulgence – not those committed afterwards (Jenks 2018, 21–28).

The granting of indulgences was particularly common during the Great Western Schism (1378–1417), and the Roman papacy in particular conferred indulgences in large numbers. During this period, the use of indulgences was revised radically by Pope Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404). He not only began to grant larger indulgences than his predecessors, but also introduced a new kind of indulgence practice, the so-called *ad instar* ('in the style of') indulgence. The *ad instar* indulgences made it possible to gain the benefit of a powerful indulgence given for visitors of a certain site by visiting another location. For example, those who could not travel to Rome during Holy Years could obtain a jubilee indulgence closer to home because popes granted numerous *ad instar* jubilee indulgences for many local churches. Other common *ad instar* indulgences were those imitating the very generous indulgence granted in favor of the chapel of S. Maria degli Angeli in the Portiuncula in Assisi. During the 15th century, other *ad instar* indulgences were also granted with increasing frequency (Jenks 2018, 25–28; Palmer 1967; Frankl 1977).

A papal letter of indulgence was always the result of a petition to the pope, and it had originally the form of a supplication. In the papal curia, the contents of approved petitions were copied into the registers of supplications, after which the

original petitions were normally thrown away. Thus the only material remnants of petitions for indulgences can be found in registers that nowadays are kept in the collections of the Vatican Apostolic Archives (AAV, *Registra Supplicationum*). After the pope gave his consent, a papal letter confirming the decision would be composed and expedited to the institution that had requested the indulgence. These papal letters would be kept in the archives of the recipient institutions and sometimes copied to their chartularies. Today, many of these original letters can still be found in local archives, museums and libraries. In Turku, indulgence letters were copied into the chartulary of Turku Cathedral, nowadays known as the *Black Book of Turku Cathedral*, which is preserved at the Swedish National Archives in Stockholm (ms. A 10). The fact that letters of indulgence were copied into the Turku chartulary underlines their institutional relevance, since only important documents were recorded there. These chartulary copies served as the 'spiritual stock certificates' referred to in the introduction. It is notable that the chartularies preserved the indulgences long after they had become invalid: in theory, an indulgence was only valid as long as its grantor remained in office, although it is difficult to tell whether, in practice, this rule was rigorously adhered to. Additionally, the contents of letters of indulgence were usually copied into registers of outgoing papal letters, preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Archives (AAV, *Registra Vaticanense*; AAV, *Registra Avenionense*; AAV, *Registra Lateranensia*). In these collections, there is still numerous material testimonies concerning indulgences granted to various ecclesiastical institutions.

### ***Indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral***

The surviving documentation of the letters of indulgence granted to Turku Cathedral during the Middle Ages is extremely lacunar. This is generally the case with medieval source material in Finland, and is due to a number of factors, such as the late arrival of literary culture to Finland, as well as post-medieval losses suffered as a result of fires and other calamities (Harjula, Immonen, and Salonen 2021). The existing knowledge of medieval documents in Finland is result of the activity of the Finnish State Archivist Reinhold Hausen, who in the early twentieth century collated all known information about Finns and Finland in the medieval sources preserved in numerous archives across Europe, including the Vatican Archives (Salonen 2012).<sup>1</sup>

The surviving sources contain a number of documents testifying about indulgences in favor of Turku Cathedral (Rinne 1948, 309–317; also Pirinen 1956).<sup>2</sup> Altogether, the sources attest that Turku Cathedral received indulgences on almost twenty occasions. From these, we possess the testimony of twenty-seven documents, including three copies of petitions approved by the pope from papal registers of supplications (DF 636, 517, 2615), seven copies of papal bulls from papal registers

of outgoing letters (DF 477, 478, 637, 755, 855, 999; One such document [AAV, Reg. Vat 222, fol. 402v-403r and an identical copy of it in AAV, Reg. Aven. 125, fol. 487v-488r] has not been edited nor included in DF but the content is the same as in DF 635) and 17 copies of papal bulls in the chartulary of Turku Cathedral (edited version of these documents: DF 118, 206, 635). It is probable that other indulgences were granted in favor of the cathedral, but it is not possible to estimate their number. All the information we possess survives as entries copied into medieval registers, with none of the original indulgence letters surviving. Meanwhile, copies of some letters have survived in more than one location.

The earliest surviving indulgence granted to Turku Cathedral is dated February 24, 1259 (DF 118), while the last is dated August 20, 1465 (DF 3266). Nine of these indulgence letters were issued by a pope, seven by cardinals and one by the Council of Basel. In four cases, an indulgence was granted by the bishop of Turku or jointly by a group of Swedish bishops.

### ***Papal indulgences***

Nine indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral during the Middle Ages were papal indulgences. The oldest papal indulgence letters granted to a cathedral in Turku were conferred in favor of a different church than that referred to in later letters. The episcopal church of the diocese of Finland was situated at another location until the end of the thirteenth century, in Koroinen c. 3 km from the present location of the cathedral. Finland was, until the mid-thirteenth century, a missionary diocese, called the “diocese of Finland,” with its episcopal church, dedicated to Saint Mary the Virgin, located at Koroinen, until it was transferred in c. 1300 to its present location (Harjula et al. 2018, esp. 300–301). The new church was dedicated to Saint Mary and to Saints Erik and Henry (Hiekkänen 2003, 200–207). Since the first two indulgence letters – the first granted by Pope Alexander IV on February 24, 1259 and the second by Pope Nicholas IV on February 5, 1292 – were issued for the benefit of the church of Saint Mary, it is likely that both letters refer to the older church, although the new church might already have been under construction during the 1290s. Both indulgence letters survive as copies within the chartulary of Turku Cathedral (DF 118, 206). The first letter granted visitors an indulgence of 40 days, while the later one was more generous, offering them instead one year and 40 days. At the time when they were copied into the cathedral’s late medieval chartulary, these thirteenth-century indulgences no longer had any practical relevance, but nevertheless carried the memory of papal favors from the early decades of Finland’s missionary diocese.

One year and forty days was the standard duration of a papal indulgence until the pontificate of Boniface IX (r. 1389–1404) (Paulus 2000b, 132–133), and all four fourteenth-century



indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral by popes Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V and Gregory XI follow this model. All letters promise the remission of temporal punishment for one year and forty days for all those who visit Turku Cathedral on certain listed days and donate money for the building and maintenance of the cathedral. These fourteenth-century papal indulgences thus relate to aspects one and three outlined above: they encouraged the presence of the faithful in the cathedral on its most solemn feast days and their contribution to its expansion and renovation. Neither of these benefits would have been guaranteed in the medieval diocese of Turku, where distances were long and resources meagre. Unlike the two earliest indulgences that survive only as copies in a chartulary, the fourteenth-century indulgences have all survived as petitions (DF 636 [11.11.1353]) or papal letters (DF 477 and 478 [24.11.1342], 637 [11.11.1353], 755 [22.10.1366], 855 [28.3.1377]); the unedited version in AAV, Reg. Vat 222, fol. 402v-403r and AAV, Reg. Aven. 125, fol. 487v-488r [11.11.1353]) being recorded in papal registers. A copy of only one of these can be found in the Turku chartulary (DF 635 [11.11.1353]).

The three later papal indulgences are all of more substantial in their duration. Pope Boniface IX granted to Turku Cathedral an indulgence of 3 years on April 22, 1391, while Pope Martin V generously granted the cathedral an indulgence of ten years on January 18, 1418 and Pope Eugene IV granted an indulgence of seven years on May 26, 1445. The generosity of Pope Martin is explained by the unfortunate fact, mentioned in the document itself, that the cathedral had burned down twice in recent years and was in desperate need of income for its reconstruction. This makes explicit the third material aspect listed above, which concerns construction and restoration. Boniface IX's indulgence is preserved both in the papal register of outgoing letters and in the Turku chartulary, while that of Martin V is recorded only in the register of petitions. The indulgence of Eugene VI is preserved in the papal register of incoming petitions, with a copy of the bull surviving in the Turku chartulary (DF 221 from the chartulary [wrongly dated to 1295/6 in the edition instead of the correct 22.4.1391], 999 from the papal registers [22.4.1391], 1517 from the registers of petitions [18.1.1418], 2615 from the registers of petitions [26.5.1445], 2616 from the chartulary [dated due to a possible mistake of the copyist to 1.6.1445, but it should bear the same date as 2615 because of its identical content]).

It is possible to conclude that the papal indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral followed the same pattern as papal indulgences in general: these became progressively longer by the late Middle Ages. The surviving letters record indulgences granted by several popes over three different centuries. They show that the Finnish cathedral received papal favors during the whole medieval period, and that it was the Avignon-based popes who were most active in granting such privileges, while

the late fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century popes of Rome did not confer any indulgences upon the cathedral – or at least there are no surviving records of any being granted.

### ***Indulgences granted by cardinals and councils***

Since the papacy did not record within its registers documents composed in the name of cardinals, there are no traces of such indulgences within the papal archives. In fact, all the information we have about the seven indulgence letters granted by cardinals survives through documents copied into the chartulary of Turku Cathedral (DF 1386 [9.11.1412], 1387 [9.11.1412], 2515 [11.4.1443], 2516 [11.4.1443], 2619 [2.6.1449], 2626 [2.6.1445], 3266 [20.8.1465]). The same applies to indulgences granted by the authority of church councils, specifically, in the case of Turku Cathedral, by the Council of Basel (DF 2506 [8.3.1443]).

The indulgences granted by cardinals to Turku Cathedral were in fact granted by groups of cardinals, which means that the indulgences in question were rather substantial. These indulgences also share a specific peculiarity: on multiple occasions, different groups of cardinals granted indulgences to Turku Cathedral on the very same day. Indeed, the first two were granted in November 1412 and the next two in April 1443 and in June 1445 respectively.

One of the indulgences from November 1412 was granted by five cardinals, while the other was issued by four cardinals on the same day. These two letters were especially significant for Turku Cathedral because together the nine cardinals had the power to grant an indulgence of nine hundred days. The two letters are identical, apart for the names of the cardinals who issued them. The letters give no explanation for why these specific graces were granted but it can be assumed that they were related to the visit of the newly-appointed bishop of Turku, Magnus Tavast, to the papal curia in October of the same year (DF 1384 [21.10.1412 – papal letter of appointment for Magnus], 1385 [26.10.1412 – receipt of payments made by Magnus to the Holy See on the occasion of his appointment]).

The second pair of indulgences dates from April 1443. This time, the indulgences were granted by Alexander, cardinal priest of San Lorenzo in Damaso in Rome, who also served as papal legate in Germany. Both indulgences are dated at the Council of Basel and make reference to the papacy of Antipope Felix V. Alexander granted two generous indulgences on April 11: seven years for the cathedral of Turku and five years for the altar of the Holy Body of Christ. The letter of indulgence in favor of the cathedral makes special mention of the fact that the cathedral was in a bad state after it had been twice destroyed by fire during Russian attacks – here, again, we encounter the use of indulgences as an instrument for restoration. The letter in favor of the altar does not mention any reason to explain why an indulgence was needed. These two letters can be connected

to the participation of Finnish ecclesiastics at the Council of Basel, which granted a generous indulgence of up to twenty years to the ruined church of Turku.

Since the Swedish Church mainly supported the Roman papacy (Losman 1970), the grant of an indulgence letter to Turku Cathedral by a cardinal supporting the church council that elected Felix V is quite curious. But it seems that the Finnish ecclesiastic authorities were hedging their bets, since the cathedral obtained, two years later, an indulgence letter from the Roman Pontiff, Eugene IV (DF 2615 and 2616 [26.5.1445]). On June 2, 1445, six cardinals granted again letters of indulgence in favor of two altars in Turku Cathedral: the altar of Saint Mary and the altar of All Souls. Both received indulgences of six hundred days. These grants can be connected to the visit of the provost of Turku, Olavus Magni, to the papal curia in May and June 1445.

The last letter of indulgence granted to Turku Cathedral is dated August 20, 1465, and signed by five cardinals who jointly granted an indulgence of five hundred days to the altar of Saint Catherine in the cathedral. That letter is dated in Rome, where the later bishop of Turku, Magnus Särkilahti, was at that time residing.

Unlike the letters of indulgence issued by popes, which were issued over a longer period, all the letters issued to Turku Cathedral by cardinals were issued in the fifteenth century. It is evident that these letters must have been important to the cathedral since, unlike some papal letters, which survive only as copies in Vatican archives, they were all copied to the cathedral's chartulary, which dates to the 1460s at the earliest.

### **Episcopal indulgences**

Episcopal indulgence letters issued to the benefit of Turku Cathedral are much rarer. The cathedral's chartulary contains copies of four such letters, two from the year 1396 and two from 1441. The first two were made in connection to a new ecclesiastical feast, the feast of relics, *festum reliquie*, promoted by the bishop of Turku. For this occasion, the archbishop of Uppsala granted an indulgence of forty days in September 1396 for those who visited certain churches in Turku – including the cathedral – on the occasion of the new feast. This was celebrated in January on the day after the feast of Saint Henry – the semi-legendary twelfth-century missionary bishop of Finland and martyr. A couple of months later, on November 23, Bishop Bero Balk of Turku granted a similar forty-day-indulgence for the same purpose. Both letters have been copied into the chartulary of Turku Cathedral (DF 1061 [27.9.1396], 1062 [23.11.1396]). Among the indulgences granted to Turku Cathedral, these are the most obvious examples of the second material aspect of indulgences that we noted above: their

purpose was to boost a new relic cult and encourage the faithful to attend a new feast day.

The second pair of episcopal indulgences granted for the benefit of Turku Cathedral date from June 13, 1441. One of them is signed by all seven Swedish bishops, who together granted an indulgence of two hundred and eighty days to those who visited Turku Cathedral or any other church within the diocese of Turku. On the same occasion, the same bishops, with the exception of Bishop Laurentius of Växjö, granted an indulgence of two hundred and forty days for the altar of Saint Erik in Turku Cathedral. The latter is not dated but it is assumed that it was composed at the same time as the other, in June 1441, when the Swedish bishops were convening in Söderköping. Both letters survive as copies in the chartulary of Turku Cathedral (DF 496 [13.6.1441], 497 [s.d. but apparently from around the same date]).

Although episcopal indulgences were quite common in the Middle Ages, relatively few indulgence letters issued by bishops are preserved. This could mean that more such letters probably existed but that these were not been considered to be important enough to be recorded into the chartulary of the cathedral.

### ***Why were the indulgences granted?***

Indulgences were typically meant to invite pilgrims to visit a church and to make donations to its *fabrica*, the fabric fund. Sometimes the letters were intended to increase the number of pilgrims on specific occasions, such as at the consecration of a new ecclesiastical building. Sometimes the intention was to gather funds for repairing a destroyed church following a fire or other unfortunate event. Regrettably, not all the letters of indulgence that survive provide much explicit information about the purposes for which they were intended. Therefore, we have chosen to analyze these indulgences with the help of the four material aspects outlined in the introduction: 1) Attracting pilgrims to the cathedral on particular feast days; 2) Promotion of the cult of saints and relics; 3) Supporting the construction or renovation of the church; 4) Institutional preservation of indulgences.

The two thirteenth-century indulgence letters are very formulaic and do not offer any extra information apart from that they granted an indulgence to those pilgrims visiting the cathedral. A monetary donation to the cathedral is mentioned for the first time in the papal indulgence letter from November 1342. On the same occasion, however, Pope Clement VI also granted a separate indulgence to those who merely visited the church. His successor, Pope Innocent VI, did the same. On the very same day, he granted two different but equally generous letters of indulgence to the cathedral: one for those who visited the cathedral and the other for those who gave financial aid to

its *fabrica*. Unlike Pope Clement's very formulaic letter, which records no motivation for the granting of the indulgence, Pope Innocent's letter specifically mentions that the Russians had recently burned the cathedral and that it therefore needed to be rebuilt. The poor condition of the cathedral is mentioned again in 1418 in the petition to Pope Martin V, and the indulgence granted by the Council of Basel in 1443 also mentions that the church had been ravaged by fire on two occasions. Pope Eugene's indulgence letter from 1445 mentions a destruction by fire. In other letters such motivations or explanations are not described, but one can assume the motive for rebuilding the cathedral also lay behind the pair of episcopal indulgences from 1441.

The only other kind of reasons behind the granting of indulgences to Turku Cathedral was the *festum reliquie* established by the bishop of Turku in 1396. Both episcopal indulgence letters are made for the promotion of this feast. These indulgences – along with the other episcopal indulgences – were granted as part of the attempts made to strengthen the Nordic (Kalmar) Union policy through support for the cults of local saints (Brilioth 1948, 178–181).

Although the source material is scant, it shows, however, that the granting of a letter of indulgence did not require a specific motivation but that these were conferred generally for the benefit of churches and pilgrims. Yet, even such 'routine' indulgences demonstrate that Turku's clergy found them to be useful and necessary for the local cathedral – otherwise they would not have petitioned for them.

### ***The significance of indulgences to Turku Cathedral***

The cathedral of Turku received its indulgence letters over a period of three centuries, and copies of almost all of these exist in its chartulary. Only the indulgences granted by popes Clement VI in 1342, Urban V in 1366, Gregory XI in 1377 and Martin V in 1418 are missing. The copying of the indulgence letters into the cathedral's chartulary, which is dated to the 1460s at the earliest, demonstrates that these letters were considered so important that the diocesan authorities wanted them to be remembered and conserved for posterity. The use of chartularies and registers was very common in the Middle Ages and the documents copied into them were considered to be as official as the original documents, and sometimes even more important than these, as scholars working on the material culture of cartularies have shown (Kallio-Hirvonen 2021, esp. 25–28, 153–155, 169–176). It is curious that the Turku chartulary does not include any indulgence letters from the period after the point at which it came into service. Were such privileges not requested or received, or were they simply no longer recorded?

The surviving indulgence letters do not, however, provide concrete evidence about the pilgrims who visited the church and donated property to its *fabrica*. Nor do the letters say

anything about the motivation of such pilgrims. Moreover, due to the total lack of sources concerning the economic history of Turku Cathedral it is impossible to estimate how much the building and rebuilding of Turku Cathedral cost in its different phases of construction or how much income the indulgence letters might have generated for the cathedral. Yet, according to Paulus (2000b, 379–394), the granting of indulgence letters was extremely beneficial for the papal administration due to the high price of such letters, and also, because churches were willing to apply for such letters despite their cost, it must have been beneficial for them also. The history of Turku Cathedral's construction shows that it was rebuilt and enlarged several times during the Middle Ages (Hiekkanen 2003, 200–207), which is a clear testament to the fact that the indulgence letters must have generated sufficient wealth for the church to maintain, embellish, and enlarge the building.

Here we have an excellent example of how the spiritual benefits of indulgences were transformed into income, and income into masonry. In the fifteenth century, Turku Cathedral became a ninety-meter-long monument, somewhat out of place in a small town of c. 2,000 inhabitants. Although the evidence relating to the history of the construction of various altars within the cathedral is too scarce to permit any concrete connections to be made between indulgences and building activities, it is plausible that the indulgences also served to raise funds for altar construction. Indirectly, the indulgences are informative with regard to lived religion within the medieval diocese of Turku, for which there exist very few direct sources. The fear of Purgatory and the promise of reward from the church's spiritual treasury of merit motivated medieval Finns to make pilgrimages and donations to their cathedral. However, it is necessary to stress that the cathedral derived its income from multiple sources, including various types of donations and ecclesiastical taxes, and did not depend exclusively upon donations from pilgrims who visited the church to gain an indulgence.

In his short analysis of the letters of indulgence granted to Turku Cathedral, Rinne concludes that the lack of indulgences from the last decades of the fifteenth century onwards is probably connected to the fact that the largest construction works in Turku Cathedral were finished by the 1470s and that therefore there might not have been any further need for such letters. Rinne's interpretation is interesting and logical: the letters served an important purpose when the cathedral was attempting to attract funds for its building activities, and when the building activities were complete indulgences were therefore no longer needed. We do not want to dismiss Rinne's interpretation, but it is necessary to point out that from the second half of the fifteenth century, papal sellers of indulgences became increasingly active in Christendom's northern regions, and their activities and other means of obtaining indulgences competed with – and replaced – traditional indulgence letters

(Rinne 1948, 316–317; Andrén 1975; Stobaeus 2010, 136–150; Jenks 2018).

### Conclusions

During the Middle Ages, Turku Cathedral received numerous letters of indulgence, which brought pilgrims and property to the church. The tradition of requesting indulgences for the cathedral began in the thirteenth century when Finnish lands had only recently been Christianized and fallen under the spiritual authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Most of the Cathedral's papal indulgences date from the fourteenth century, with two papal indulgences from the fifteenth century also being documented. By the fifteenth century, indulgences were being obtained from other sources instead, such as from groupings of cardinals and Swedish bishops. Papal indulgences were relatively modest until the late fourteenth century, when popes systematically began to grant more generous indulgences. While the earlier papal indulgences diminished the temporal punishments of those who visited or made donations to Turku Cathedral by either forty days or one year, fifteenth-century popes would grant indulgences of seven or even ten years. Such practice must have made Turku Cathedral much more attractive as a place of pilgrimage.

If we now return to the four points mentioned in the introduction to this article, it is possible to draw conclusions about the ways in which indulgences manifested divine grace in the material world:

- 1) During the Middle Ages, the diocese of Turku was situated at the north-eastern end of western (Latin) Christendom. Large but sparsely populated, the diocese was able to support only a handful of religious institutions. Nevertheless, Turku developed into a significant cult site, boasting a cathedral of a size comparable to those of far more populous towns and possessing dozens of altars. This development was supported by papal indulgences from a very early stage (mid-thirteenth century). The supplication and granting of these indulgences attest both the local prelates' need to promote their cathedral and the popes' and cardinals' will to support one of the furthestmost cathedral churches in Christendom.
- 2) Some of the surviving episcopal indulgences, in particular, were granted to promote local saints and their cult and had a political purpose – to support the unity of the Kalmar union. The indulgences granted in 1396 by the archbishop of Uppsala and bishop of Turku were aimed to support the *festum reliquie* of Finland's martyr-bishop, Saint Henry. This episode also demonstrates that there was a local demand for indulgences, as the two prelates saw them as suitable tools to promote this new feast.
- 3) From the fourteenth century onwards, it was possible to gain an indulgence by donating funds for the construction and restoration of Turku Cathedral. While we have no way of estimating how much money these indulgence letters generated for construction work at the cathedral, the indirect evidence of several

late medieval expansions records an influx of resources at that time for this purpose.

- 4) Since most of the indulgence letters are preserved as copies in the chartulary of Turku Cathedral, the indulgence letters must have been considered important and worth preserving. These spiritual privileges attracted a substantial monetary income to the cathedral. It was therefore necessary to keep a track of them by recording them.

## ORCID

Reima Välimäki  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8301-6563>

Kirsi Salonen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3877-2228>

# notes and references

<sup>1</sup> Hausen published several source editions, including Hausen (ed.) 1910–1935 and Hausen (ed.) 1996<sup>2</sup>. The contents of both editions are later included in the database of medieval Finnish sources, known as the *Diplomatarium Fennicum* (DF), which is available online (<http://df.narc.fi/>).

<sup>2</sup> Juhani Rinne has listed all indulgence letter in favour of the cathedral in the second volume of his seminal work about the history of Turku Cathedral, published in three volumes. In his listing, Rinne also provides a short comment on each letter of indulgence. Rinne based his list and comments upon Hausen's edition and repeats some of Hausen's errors. Also, Rinne did not have access to material not included in Hausen's edition. This article therefore corrects and expands Rinne's list and interpretations.

## Unedited sources

Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), the Vatican City

Registra Avenionense (Reg. Aven.)

Registra Lateranensia (Reg. Lat.)

Registra Supplicationum (Reg. Suppl.)

Registra Vaticana (Reg. Vat.)

## Edited sources

Hausen, Reinhold, ed. 1910–1935. *Finlands Medeltidsurkunder I–VIII*. Helsingfors: Statrådets tryckeri.

Hausen, Reinhold, ed. 1996. *Registrum Ecclesie Aboensis eller Åbo domkyrkas svartbok*. Helsinki: Archivum Finlandiae publicum.

## Digital sources

Diplomatarium Fennicum (<http://df.narc.fi/>), accessed 4 February 2022.

## Literature

Andrén, Carl-Gustav. 1975. "De medeltida avlatsbrevens – instrument för kyrkans verksamhet." In *Investigatio memoriae partum. Libellus in honorem Kauko Pirinen*, 201–221. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia 93. Helsinki: Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura.

Berg, Ria, Reima Välimäki, Anu Kaisa Koponen, and Antonella Coralini. 2021. "Introduction: Tangible Religion from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period." In *Tangible Religion: Materiality of Domestic Cult Practices from Antiquity to Early Modern Era*, edited by Ria Berg, Antonella Coralini, Anu Kaisa Koponen, and Reima Välimäki, 9–33. Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 49. Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae.

Brilioth, Yngve. 1948. *Handbok i svensk kyrkohistoria 1: Medeltiden*. Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelse.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 2011. *Christian Materiality: an Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: Zone Books.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. 2013. "The Sacrality of Things: An Inquiry into Divine Materiality in the Christian Middle Ages." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78 (1): 3–18. doi:[10.1177/0021140012465035](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140012465035)

Deane, Jennifer Kolpacoff. 2013. "Medieval Domestic Devotion." *History Compass* 11 (1): 65–76. doi:[10.1111/hic3.12026](https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12026)



- Doublier, Étienne. 2017. *Abläss, Papsttum und Bettelorden im 13. Jahrhundert*. Köln; Weimar; Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Frankl, Karlheinz. 1977. "Papstschisma und Frömmigkeit. Die „Ad instar-Ablässe.“ *Römische Quartalschrift* 72: 184–247.
- Harjula, Janne, Sonja Hukantaival, Visa Immonen, Tanja Ratilainen, and Kirsi Salonen, eds. 2018. *Koroinen. Suomen ensimmäinen kirkollinen keskus*. Turku: Turun historiallinen yhdistys.
- Harjula, Janne, Visa Immonen, and Kirsi Salonen. 2021. "Medieval Literacy in Turku: Material and Linguistic Remains from a Multilingual Townscape." In *Urban Literacy in the Nordic Middle Ages*, edited by Kasper H. Andersen, Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm, Lisbeth M. Imer, Bjørn Poulsen, Rikke Steenholt Olesen, 197–227. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Hiekkänen, Markus. 2003. *Suomen kivikirkot keskiajalla*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Jaritz, Gerhard, ed. 1990. *Materielle Kultur und religiöse Stiftung im Spätmittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs 12. Wien: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Jaritz, Gerhard, and Barbara Schuh, eds. 1992. *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs 14. Wien: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Jenks, Stuart, ed. 2018. *Documents on the Papal Plenary Indulgences 1300–1517 Preached in the Regnum Teutonicum*. Later Medieval Europe 16. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Kallio-Hirvonen, Maria. 2021. *Käsikirjoitustutkimus, kopiokirjat ja kopiokirjojen tehtävä Turun keskiaikaisessa tuomiokapitulissa*. Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, ser. B, 547. Turku: Turun yliopisto.
- Le Goff, Jacques. 1986. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Losman, Beata. 1970. *Norden och reformkonsilierna 1408–1449*. Göteborg: Elanders.
- Palmer, P. F. 1967. "Indulgences." In *New Catholic Encyclopedia VII*, 482–484. San Francisco: Catholic University of America Press.
- Paulus, Nikolaus. 2000a. *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter. Vom Ursprunge bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts I–II*. Darmstadt: Primus Verlag.
- Paulus, Nikolaus. 2000b. *Geschichte des Ablasses am Ausgang des Mittelalters*. Darmstadt: Primus Verlag.
- Pirinen, Kauko. 1956. *Turun tuomiokirkko keskiajan lopulla*. Suomen Kirkkohistoriallisen Seuran Toimituksia 58. Helsinki: Suomen Kirkkohistoriallinen Seura.
- Rinne, Juhani. 1948. *Turun tuomiokirkko keskiaikana II. Altarit ja kirkolliset toimitukset*. Turku: Turun tuomiokirkon isännistö.
- Salonen, Kirsi. 2012. "The Vatican Archives and the Nordic Countries." In *Friedensnobelpreis und historische Grundlagenforschung. Ludwig Quidde und die Erschliessung der kurialen Registerüberlieferung*, edited by Michael Matheus, 551–561. Bibliothek des Deutschen Historischen Instituts in Rom 124. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.
- Stobaeus, Per. 2010. *Från Biskop Brasks tid*. Skellefteå: Artos.