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## Modified History and Genetics for Visitors: Turku and Russian Tourists

My hometown of Turku is the oldest city in Finland. It was also the administrative centre or “capital” of Finland during the more than 600 years of Swedish rule, and the sea channel between Turku and Stockholm was the most important channels controlled by the Swedish kingdom. All of this changed in 1808–1809, when the Russians conquered Finland and it was incorporated into the Russian Empire as an autonomous grand duchy. The Russians soon realised that Turku was no longer suitable as the administrative centre of Finland because it was too far from St Petersburg, the capital of the empire. So the Russians built Helsinki to serve as the new administrative centre of Finland. Helsinki was in the beginning just a small town, but grew quickly during the period of Russian rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So, in terms of their background, Turku began as a Swedish town and Helsinki as a Russian town.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian tourists were allowed to travel to the West, to Finland and elsewhere. Soon they also had money to use there. This was a problem for Turku. The Russians were interested in Helsinki because of its Russian background, but not in Turku because of its Swedish background. The Russians also liked to sail to Stockholm, and the sea channel between Turku and Stockholm was still important and the fastest route between Finland and Sweden. But how to tempt the Russians to stop in Turku and not only to drive straight through it on their way to the harbour and ferries to Stockholm? Turku Touring is an organisation for marketing Turku to tourists. Its management team soon realised that a good story was needed for marketing Turku to Russian tourists. Well, they found it and I am going to talk about it now. But for me, it was rather more of a detective story.

The main local newspaper *Turun Sanomat* ran a whole-page article on 14 January 2004 with the title “Russian tourists fill the national cathedral – A long way from the Ural Mountains to the Cathedral”. The article included a half-page colour picture of Turku Cathedral with nine young Russian tourists standing in front of it. At the beginning of the article, Pirjo Saari, a guide with Turku Touring tells that in the year 2003, nearly 33000 Russian tourists had visited Turku Cathedral. Then, the dean of the cathedral, Rauno Heikola, went on to talk about how the cathedral of Turku is for Russian tourists both a place to practise religion and a building of

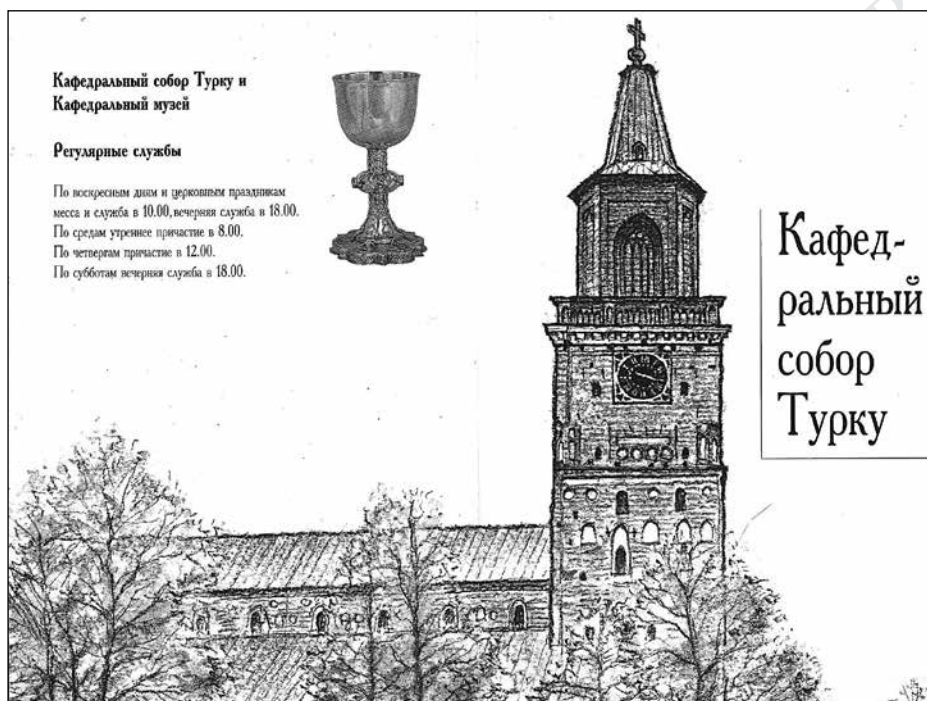
historical significance. In saying this, he was referring to the period of Russian rule in Finland. He continued as follows:

“The Russians are well aware of their roots. These roots could also be found from the Grand Duchy period [of Finland]. There are still old connections.

When the Russian military forces left Turku in the second decade of the last century, they left behind the heritage blood type known as the B blood group.”

Pirjo Saari from Turku Touring continues:

“The Russian travel agencies still use in their marketing these old connections with Russia. One of their brochures asks whether people know why the blood group B is more common in Turku than elsewhere in Finland. The answer is that it is due to the former Russian garrison in Turku.” (Kärkkäinen 2004.)



1. The brochure for Turku Cathedral marketed to Russian tourists (Turku Touring)

On the same day that this article was published in *Turun Sanomat*, I happened to meet an old friend of mine for lunch at a restaurant near our university. His name was Petter Portin, a professor of genetics at Turku University. Still thinking about the article, I asked him for his opinion about this theory of the frequency of blood group B in Turku and the connection with the former Russian garrisons here. He promised to consider the question; he then published his opinion on the matter in a

letters to the editor of the newspaper on 21 January (Portin 2004a). He wrote that the argumentation about the deviating frequency of blood group B in Turku was just not true. He had gotten figures of the different blood groups in Turku and the whole country from the Finnish Red Cross Blood Service. The figures were for those persons who had recently donated blood in 2001. They were as follows:

	Turku	Finland
Blood group A	40,27%	41,51%
Blood group O	34,36%	32,97%
Blood group B	16,82%	16,69%
Blood group AB	8,55%	8,83%

Source: Portin 2004a.

On the same day as this article was published, I received an e-mail message from Petter Portin in which he told me that a colleague of his had stated that this theory about the frequency of blood group B in Turku as a consequence of former Russian garrisons had once been presented by the then-professor of serology and bacteriology at our university, Eero Mustakallio, who had died a couple of years back.

Two days later, on 23 January, I received another e-mail message from Petter Portin in which he told me of having received a postcard from a Turku tourist guide who had read his article in *Turun Sanomat*; she wrote in the card that the story of the frequency of blood group B in Turku as a consequence of the former Russian garrisons had been taught to them as fact during the educational training offered by Turku Touring. So no wonder that the Russian tourists knew of this claim about blood type.

But the discussion in *Turun Sanomat* continued. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, the successor to Eero Mustakallio, Professor Paavo Toivanen, wrote his opinion on the matter in a letters to the editor in response to Petter Portin's claim that the theory was incorrect. According to Toivanen, blood group B had previously been more common in the province of Finland Proper than it is now and clearly more common than elsewhere in Finland (Toivanen 2004). He told that this research result had been published by Eero Mustakallio in 1989 (Mustakallio 1989). He had collected material about Finnish-speaking people between the years 1935 and 1972. According to his findings, the frequency of blood group B in Finland Proper was 19,4%, whereas in western Finland when not including Finland Proper it was 17%, in northern Finland 16,7% and in eastern Finland 17,5%. Paavo Toivanen continued: "In his research report, professor Mustakallio does not take any stand on what would be the reason for this greater frequency of blood group B in Finland Proper.

We should, however, remember that that after the end of the War of Finland in 1809, there arrived in Turku between 1000 and 2000 Russian soldiers, the greatest part of whom were left here as a permanent garrison. The total population of Turku was then 9000, so the Russian garrison made up a remarkable part of the overall population.” (Toivanen 2004, Mustakallio 1989.)

Now that we knew the author and the year, 1989, it was easy for Petter Portin and me to find the original research rapport by Eero Mustakallio. When we did, we both found that there were nothing about Russian soldiers or garrisons in Turku during the period when Finland was a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire. So it seemed we had reached a dead end at the moment. Petter Portin, however, sent his reply to Paavo Toivanen to *Turun Sanomat* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, and it was published on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March (Portin 2004b). In it, he referred the results provided by Mustakallio and admitted that they were relevant. During the years 1935–72, the frequencies were as follows:

	Finland Proper	Western Finland	Finland as a whole
Blood group A	40,84%	41,46%	42,61%
Blood group B	19,40%	17,53%	17,52%
Blood group AB	7,71%	7,08%	7,48%
Blood group O	32,05%	33,93%	32,39%

Petter Portin stated here that the difference between Finland Proper and Western Finland and Finland Proper and the whole of Finland was in both cases significant. Then, he asked what would be the reason for the differences in the material presented by himself, which were based on statistics of blood donors in 2001 from the Finnish Red Cross, and the material presented by Eero Mustakallio. His answer was that migration had levelled out the differences in the frequency of occurrences of blood group B. He continued his article as follows: “The [presence of the] Russian garrison in Turku after the War of Finland in 1808–09 had nothing to do with the matter. For a long time, it has been a well-known fact that the frequency of blood group B increases when moving east of Finland. [...] If the reason for the former clearly higher frequency of blood group B in the district of Turku would have been caused by the Russian garrison in Turku, then every soldier of the garrison would have had to procreate, according to a rough estimation, on average enough for at least ten children [to be born].” (Portin 2004b, Mustakallio 1989.)

What was at this stage of the matter still unclear to me was the question of where Turku Touring had gotten the idea of these blood ties between the Russians and

citizens of Turku that it used when educating the local tourist guides. It seemed quite possible that *Turun Sanomat* had written something about it in 1989, when Eero Mustakallio had first published his research report. So I thought that I should next go to the university library and read through articles from the year 1989. Fortunately, there was an easier way to find what I was looking for, and when I found it, the former way proved to have been invalid.

At this stage of the matter, an old friend of mine and a fellow ethnologist, Risto Laine, happened to phone me. He had already retired from working life and was continuing as a contributor to *Turun Sanomat*. So without going into much detail here, with his help I was able to find the necessary articles about Eero Mustakallio's research from the newspaper's archives, which would have been impossible without his help. Besides, I did not have to read all the volumes of the newspaper from the year 1989. Anyway, I found two copies of newspaper articles about Mustakallio's research on blood groups in Turku. But to my great surprise, the two articles were from the years 1946 and 1992. So reading back copies of *Turun Sanomat* from the year 1989 would have been useless to me anyway; at any rate, now I had gotten what I needed.

The first of the two articles, the one from the year 1946, was an article on the inauguration speech given by Mustakallio when receiving his professorship at the University of Turku. Here, the question was about research on blood groups in general and especially about the blood groups of the Finns, but even still he also mentioned the frequency of blood group B in the Turku region. However, according to him the reason for the phenomenon had nothing to do with the former Russian garrison, but instead with earlier contacts of both citizens of Turku citizens and people living around Turku with Estonians (Veriryhmien puolesta 1946). Later, I found that Mustakallio had even written his doctoral thesis on the same topic in 1937.

The second newspaper article had been published in *Turun Sanomat* in July 1992. It was not only about Mustakallio's research, but also about another study on a quite similar topic by another researcher. According to the article, both researchers had recently given lectures on the topic as part of a series of lectures organised by the Turku Regional History Society. The theme of the series had been "Of what are the Turku people made?" The second article, in contrast to the evidence Mustakallio had presented in his inauguration speech in 1946 and in his article from 1989, the reasons for the frequency of blood group B around Turku was now for the first time – as I had then believed – posited as the result of contacts between both the people of Turku and neighbouring Russians. The figures themselves were the same as those provided in the latter publication (Pohjola 1992).

But when reading this article, I realised that there had to also be something on the topic in the periodical put out by the Turku Regional History Society. The title of the periodical is *Suomen Turku – Åbo vår stad*, because it is bilingual. We have copies of the periodical in the departmental library, and so it was not difficult for me to get a hold of it. And – bingo! There it was, an article about the Russian-influenced blood group B in Turku in number 2/1992 of the journal (Haapakoski 1992). This

indeed must be the starting point for the story about the connection between the frequency of blood group B in Turku and the Russian garrison told by the tourist industry. The author of the article must have been the journal's editorial secretary, Eeva Haapakoski, because the article gave no name for the author. She had died in 1994. Again, the figures presented in the article were exactly the same as those from Mustakallio's article from year 1989, but the reasons for their existence were quite different.

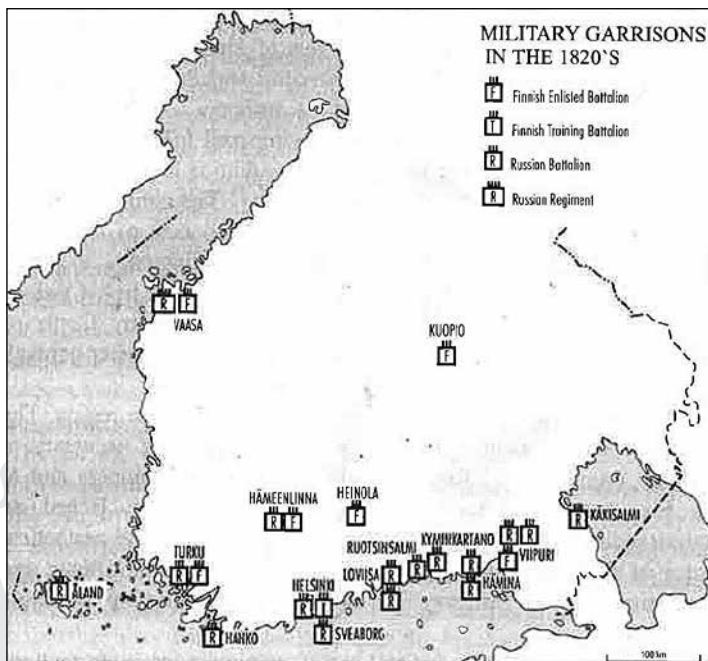
“Professor Mustakallio had also considered reasons for the high rates of [blood group] B [in Turku] and had come to the conclusion, that one big factor here was military quartering. Romantic relationships between Russian merchants or members of their security forces and girls from Turku had been possible at least since the early Middle Ages, maybe much earlier in the market places along the River Aura. [...] With independence [of Finland], the Russian soldiers finally returned to their own country. The men left, but the strength of their “actions in darkness” can be seen mirrored in the genotype of the citizens of Turku.” (Haapakoski 1992.)

So, as we saw in 1946, in 1989 and again in 1992, Eero Mustakallio each time gave a different explanation for the high frequency of blood group B in Turku and its surroundings. Or did he?

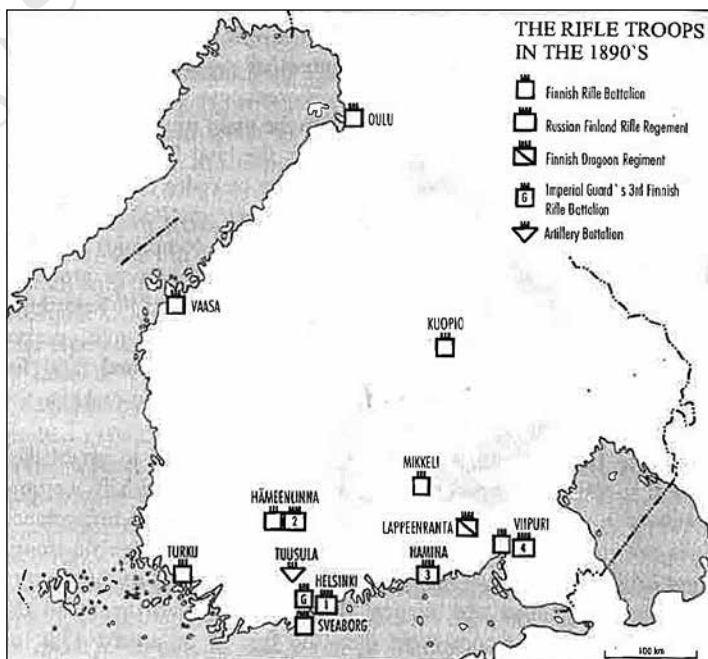
Eero Mustakallio himself never published the lecture he gave in 1992, but the author of the journal article was Eeva Haapakoski. When rethinking the quotation from above, it seems obvious that the editor had first referred Mustakallio's lecture in her article, and after that she had asked him about the reasons for the high frequency of blood group B in Turku. This is just the way editors used to do it. But what Eero Mustakallio really said in the interview remains a mystery. It was evidently Eeva Haapakoski's idea and not Eero Mustakallio's that the Russian garrison in Turku had something to do with the phenomenon in question. The more I think about this possibility, the more convinced I become that it is true.

Although the problem addressed here has already been solved to a satisfactory degree and the main question has been answered, just for curiosity's sake it might be interesting to examine the figures and locations of Russian garrisons in Finland in the past. As it happens, Pentti Luntinen's work on the topic, *The Imperial Russian Army and Navy in Finland 1808–1918*, published in 1997, provides a comprehensive discussion on the topic for the periods in question (Luntinen 1997: 49). The book includes two maps showing Russian garrisons in Finland during peacetime, the first in 1820 and the second in the 1890s. According to the first map, one Russian battalion was located in Turku, while others were stationed in Åland, Hanko, Hämeenlinna, Ruotsinsalmi, Kyminkaartano and Käkisalmi. But two Russian battalions could be found in Helsinki, Loviisa, Hamina and Viipuri as well as an entire Russian regiment in Vaasa. In all of these towns or villages, the population of the garrisons was at the time remarkably smaller than in Turku.

Luntinen's map of the situation in the 1890s is quite different. Russian rifle regiments were stationed in Hämeenlinna, Helsinki, Hamina and Viipuri, and an artillery battalion was stationed in Tuusula, near Helsinki. But in Turku there were no



2. Russian Garrisons in Finland in the 1820s (Luntinen 1997: 49)



3. Russian Garrisons in Finland the in 1890s (Luntinen 1997: 150)

Russian troops at all, just a Finnish rifle battalion, which was also the case in seven other Finnish towns. So it is worth considering that during the period of Russian rule, the military garrison in Turku could not be the reason of the formerly high frequency of blood group B in the town itself and in the surrounding countryside.

But what about the Greater Wrath (1713–1721) and the Lesser Wrath (1742–1743), which were also mentioned as possibilities here? During both these wars, all of Finland and not just Turku was occupied by the Russians. Turku and the countryside around it were the densest populated parts of Finland at the time, so any changes in blood groups should have been relatively larger percentagewise elsewhere. We should also take into consideration the fact that only Russians used to penetrate into the interior of Finland in contrast to other enemies who had mainly attacked the Finnish coastal areas: the Swedes, the Danes, the Englishmen, the French and even the Germans. They always came from the sea – and they also left via the sea. Whoever is responsible for an increase in blood group B in Turku and its surroundings obviously came only from the sea then – and left by the sea, too. Otherwise, higher frequency rates of blood group B would also be found elsewhere in Finland.

What can we learn from all this? First, Eero Mustakallio made a big mistake when he presented only percentage for the small population living in Turku in past centuries. He should have used absolute numbers instead. Probably the frequency of blood group B in Turku was just a coincidence. Second, if you publish faulty research results but the story is good, you can never quite recant the story. It is repeated over and over again forever. I believe that there are still people at Turku Touring who believe in the story about the relations between Russian soldiers and girls from Turku. They just don't want to believe me.

*Translated by the author and language proofed by Erik Hieta  
Associated by Petter Portin*

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*Veriryhmien puolesta*

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**Módosított történelem és genetika a látogatók számára: Turku és az orosz turisták**

Amikor Finnország svéd fennhatóság alatt állt (1155–1809) Turku volt az ország fővárosa, mivel közel volt Stockholmhoz. Az orosz uralom alatt (1809–1917) ez már nem volt megfelelő, mivel Turku túl messze volt Szentpétervártól és túl közel volt Stockholmhoz. Ezért megépült Helsinki, mint az ország új fővárosa. A finn függetlenség után is megőrizte ezt a státuszt. A Szovjetunió 1991-es összeomlása után az orosz turisták szabadon utazhattak nyugatra, Finnországba és máshová is. Később nem csak lehetőségük, de pénzük is lett erre. Ez problémát okozott Turku városának: az oroszokat Helsinki érdekelte, annak orosz vonatkozásai miatt, Turku nem volt érdekes számukra a maga svéd hátterével. A Turku Touring cég feladata Turku városának népszerűsítése a turisták körében. A vezetőség arra a következtetésre jutott, hogy egy jó történet szükséges ahhoz, hogy az orosz turisták a városba látogassanak. Találtak egy ilyet: a történet szerint az orosz uralom elején Turkuban elhelyezett orosz katonák nyomot hagytak a város lakosai körében: a keletiekre jellemző B vércsoport nekik köszönhető. Ez a történet azonban nonszensz, a tanulmány ezt be is bizonyítja, illetve a történet eredeti forrását is bemutatja.

### **Istorie și genetică modificată pentru vizitatori: Turku și turiștii ruși**

În timpul dominației suedeze al Finlandei (1155–1809) Turku fusese capitala țării, căci se situează aproape de Stockholm. Iar în timpul administrației rusești (1809–1917) lucrurile s-au schimbat, căci era prea departe de Sanct Petersburg și prea aproape de Stockholm. Astfel că a fost construită orașul Helsinki ca și noua capitală a țării. Și în perioada independenței finlandeze și-a păstrat acest statut. După destrămarea Uniunii Sovietice în 1991 turiștii ruși au avut posibilitatea de a trece granița spre vest, în Finlanda sau în alte părți. Mai apoi aceștia au avut și bani ca să facă acest lucru. Turismul a devenit un aspect problematic pentru Turku, căci rușii erau interesați de Helsinki, datorită trecutului rusesc, și nu de orașul Turku, care avea mai degrabă un fundal suedez. Turku Touring este o organizație cu scopul de a realiza activități de marketing pentru turism. Managementul acestei organizații și-a dat seama repede de faptul că are nevoie de o poveste bună pentru a atrage turiștii ruși. Astfel că au și găsit una. Conform acesteia soldații ruși așezați la Turku la începuturile dominației rusești au lăsat în urma lor ceva în rândul locuitorilor: cică lor se datorează grupa de sânge B, caracteristic esticilor. Această poveste nu are nici un sens, iar studiul de față dovedește acest lucru. Ba chiar mai mult, ne dezvăluie sursa originală a acestei povești.

### **Modified History and Genetics for Visitors: Turku and Russian Tourists**

During Swedish rule of Finland (1155–1809) Turku was the capital of the country, because of its close location to Stockholm. During Russian rule (1809–1917) it was no longer suitable for that, because it was too far from Saint Petersburg and too close to Stockholm. So Helsinki was built for the new capital of the country. During Finnish independence it sustained its position as the capital of the country. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian tourists were allowed to travel freely to the west, to Finland and elsewhere. Later they also had money to do this. This was a problem for Turku. The Russians were interested in Helsinki, because of its Russian background, but not in Turku, because of its Swedish background. Turku Touring is an organization for marketing Turku to tourists. The management of it soon realized that a good story was needed for marketing the town to Russian tourists. Well, they found such. According to the story the Russian soldiers, who had been accommodated in Turku in the beginning of Russian rule of Finland, have left behind the eastern blood group B among the inhabitants of the town. This story is just nonsense and the author aims to prove this. He has also found the original source of the story.