

## Koknese Hansa story

A small place by Daugava, which grew and developed during medieval times. This short story will be about Koknese, which was given town rights by the archbishop of Rīga rather early – in 1277. Most likely, the archbishop of Rīga recognized the potential of this place, and he was certainly not wrong, because at the end of the 13th century, this place attracted foreign traders from far away German lands. This small town, which only covered 3.6 ha, was added to Hanseatic League.



Imagine traders who travel upstream or downstream Daugava and in the distance see a castle on a hilltop. Coming closer, it is clear that the place is located on cape, surrounded by two rivers Daugava and Pērse. Stepping off the boat, the place seems even more unreachable – it is surrounded by walls with towers and gates. Through the gates, traders entered the town, which seemed familiar as it was similar to German towns with narrow, cobblestone streets and mixed stone-wooden buildings. These buildings were inhabited by craftsmen, who worked with bone and clay, and traders who sold and purchased goods. Sales and purchasing made up the main income of the town. The income was used for different needs. One part was used for envoys, who went to shared meetings in Valmiera or Valka. Another part was used as payments for various tasks that were carried out by Hansa traders. Foreigners like Russians and Lithuanians also did business in this town.

The traders did not only see the narrow streets and buildings, but also the monastery which was used by the Franciscan Order. Not far away from the walls was the central church of the town, the custodian of which was Saint Paul. A cemetery was right next to it, where due to lack of space, Christians were buried on top of one another. The traders noticed the stone castle close to the church. It was separated from the town with a ditch and a wall. Regardless of this, the town was connected to it in a joint protection system. The archbishop of Rīga used this castle as his abode quite frequently. This was the same person who at some point granted the town its rights. The rights included both inhabitant obligations to the archbishop, and trading rules. Traders knew these rules well because it concerned their income. The traders returned to the town hall, which was located near the

church, to execute trades. Through traders eyes, a small place next to Daugava was seen, where people were living their everyday lives in a calm and safe manner, because they were guarded by the castle and town walls. And the events could continue to run their course.

Even though development is not usually associated with Middle ages, Koknese gained its significance in the Livonian administrative system and recognition on a wider scale exactly during this period. Traders attached this place to Hansa region and the town benefited from this.

Author: Mg.hist., Historical Sciences PhD candidate Edgars Pletiens

Photo author: Ainars Briedis

