# ARHEOLOOGILISED VÄLITÖÖD EESTIS

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN ESTONIA

2004

Koostanud ja toimetanud
*Ülle Tamla*

Muinsuskaitseamet
Tallinn 2005

*Esikaas: ehtenaast Viskla II asulast.*
*Tagakaas: rihmajagaja Kämbla II asulast.*
*Cover: decorative mount from Viskla II settlement site.*
*Back cover: strap-divider from Kämbla II settlement site.*



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# RESCUE EXCAVATION IN THE CHURCHYARD OF VIRU-NIGULA

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## PROLOGUE

In 2004, at the end of August and the beginning of September, a rescue excavation was completed in Lääne-Virumaa, in the churchyard of Viru-Nigula. The salvage object was a crypt with a partly caved-in vault which was situated on the ninth block of the cemetry and belonged to the owners of the Varudi manor, von Adlerbergs. At first, the alternative to excavation, filling the chamber with sand without investigating it archaeologically, seemed more ethical. But since in Estonia a site of this kind has never been excavated before and so we cannot regard our knowledge of the burial custom of the gentry in the 19th century to be adequate, filling the chamber without scientific research would have meant a loss of valuable information. Therefore it was decided to remove the collapsed part of the vault, clean the chamber of the debris and document the possible inhumations from the 19th century.

According to the faded text on the cross, with its left arm broken off and lost, two main burials were expected in the chamber: Friedrich Johann Theodor von Adlerberg (born 1767, died 16.05.1841[1]), a major serving in the Russian army, and his wife Christina Juliana, born de Colongue (born 10.03.1771, died of tuberculosis 09.02.1821[2] in Uue-Varudi). Friedrich von Adlerberg was the owner of the manor of Vana-Varudi (*Alt-Wartz*, *Wardes* since 1841). He was related closely to captain Hans de Colongue, who was the owner of the Uue-Varudi (*Neu-Wartz*) manor and Friedrich's father-in-law. In his will from the year 1812 (signed in 1819), Hans de Colongue names his daughter Christina as one of his heirs who

[1] The text on the cross has the year 1841 for the death of Friedrich Johann. However, the metrics books of the Viru-Nigula parish in Estonian Historical Archives do not mention his death, neither in this year nor in the beginning of 1842 nor the last months of 1840. To rule out possible spelling mistakes also the year 1847 was checked over, but without any results. Thus it is possible that Adlerberg lived somewhere else during the last years of his life, but the fact that he has been buried in the churchyard of Viru-Nigula makes this unlikely.

[2] The date of death of Christina Juliana is February 9, 1821 according to the Historical Archives, but February 2nd according to the text on the cross.

thus became the owner of the manor of Uue-Varudi. Both Friedrich and Christina von Adlerberg were intimately connected with the church, as Friedrich belonged to the vestry of the church as the representative of the Varudi (only Vana-Varudi at the beginning, later Uue-Varudi as well) manor(s) at least until 1820. According to the archives, the Adlerbergs had five grown children.[3]

## EARLIER ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE CHURCHYARD OF VIRU-NIGULA

The excavations of 2004 in the churchyard of Viru-Nigula were not the first archaeological investigation there. The plans of conservation and restauration in the dado of the church brought about architectural-archaeological investigations in 1988 conducted by Toivo Aus and Toomas Tamla (Аус & Тамла 1989). Five test excavations were made around the church, whereas the one dug on the northern side revealed a skeleton of a young, 18–20 years old woman, whose position indicated that she had been inhumed only after the establishing of the basement of the church. This information together with the dating of the grave goods accompanying the dead woman set the founding of the church of Viru-Nigula earlier than it was thought, namely to the 13th century (Tamla 1993). The hypothesis found more support during the continued research in 1990 when another burial with grave goods from the 13th century was unearthed, the armbone of which was placed on the foundation stones, thus indicating again that the burial could have been inhumed only after the construction work on the church was started. This makes the church of Viru-Nigula one of the oldest in Estonia and the earliest in the context of Virumaa. In addition, the fact that it was founded so to speak "in the centre of the village", directly in the middle of a Late Iron Age settlement, is also intriguing.

## RESCUE EXCAVATION IN THE CHURCHYARD IN 2004

The excavation of 2004 started with documenting the collapsed part of the vault and cleaning the chamber of the soil that had been initially mounded on its crumbled part. The chamber had its long axis aligned from west to east, measured 225 x 204 cm and was covered with an underground low-arched cylinder-vault. The eastern part of the vault had collapsed and the border of the collapse ran almost diagonally through the chamber. By the walls of the chamber, the vault extended to a depth of 50 cm from the ground level in the case of both the southern and the northern wall and to a depth of 35 cm from the ground above the

[3] Materials EHA, 860-1-446.

ridge of the vault. The soil that had been heaped on the vault and had fallen into the chamber after the collapse included numerous human bones (including skulls and big tubular bones which, as seen from the profile of the collapse, could be found directly under the topsoil), a few sherds of prehistoric handmade and wheelthrown pottery supposedly from the Middle Ages,[4] a single bead of calcedony or strongly patinated glass,[5] six coins,[6] a piece of slag, numerous iron coffin nails, many of which had wood remains on them, a few horseshoe nails, some fragments of roof tiles of monk-nun and S-type and a fragment of a wheel-cross hewed of limestone. Two whole skulls and one that was crushed during the collapse but which was probably originally also deposited in one piece were situated right on the vault. A hypothesis that was raised during the cleaning of the ruins from the chamber, namely that the skulls and long tubular bones could refer to independent burials on the vault and not to accidentally gathered bones, does not hold true, however, since the two skulls were located directly one after the other separated by a distance of 50 cm, both heads were turned to the east and both skulls were completely without any other bones associated with them.[7]

## MAIN BURIALS

The two main burials were placed on the floor of the chamber (Fig 1). At first, the skeletons were cleaned together with the remains of the coffins. The coffin of the 2nd burial had been decayed to a large extent and it was possible to clean the skeleton at once. Also the coffin handles of nickel (possibly nickel covered with amalgamated silver) were unearthed, which were constructed of two parts - the handle and a plate attached to it. The handles associated with the two burials differed in form as well as elaboration - the plates that belonged to the handles of the 1st burial were relatively more elaborately crafted, decorated with flags and probably originally covered with coloured enamel. There were three handles by the long sides of both coffins, altogether eleven since one of the handles belonging to the 2nd burial was not located.

The **1st burial** (male, possibly Friedrich Johann von Adlerberg) had been located in the southern half of the chamber. Many remnants of wood were preserved

[4] If it is supposed that the soil mounded on the vault is taken from the churchyard, as indicated by the numerous human bones, then it should not contain any Middle Age pottery, because "after the construction of the church the households had to disappear from its close neighbourhood" (Tamla 1993, 21). By the way, in his article from 1993 Tamla mentions the lack of Middle Age pottery from the churchyard.

[5] In the former case we would be dealing with a prehistoric, in the latter with a bead from the Middle Ages.

[6] The coins were identified by numismatist Mauri Kiudsoo (Institute of History): five Swedish (three from the 17th century, two from the 16th century) and one Russian (18th century).

[7] Although we are not dealing with burials in their original position, the regular arrangement of the skulls points to a possibility that they may not have reached the vault quite accidentally, but rather they were placed there deliberately (to be discussed below).

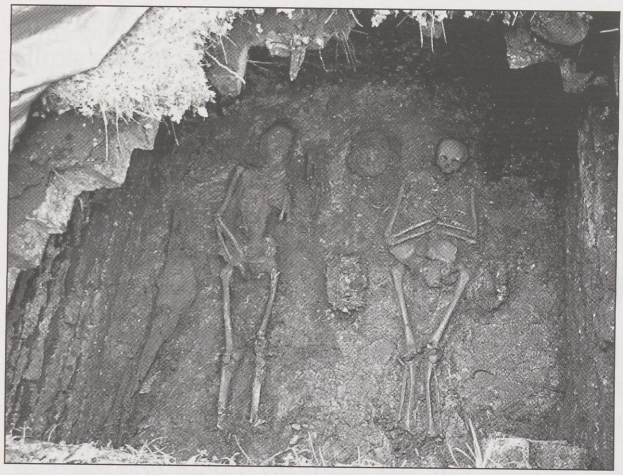


*Fig 1. Burial chamber in Viru-Nigula churchyard with main burials. Female burial on right and male on left side. Remains of coffins have been removed but handles mark the coffins.*

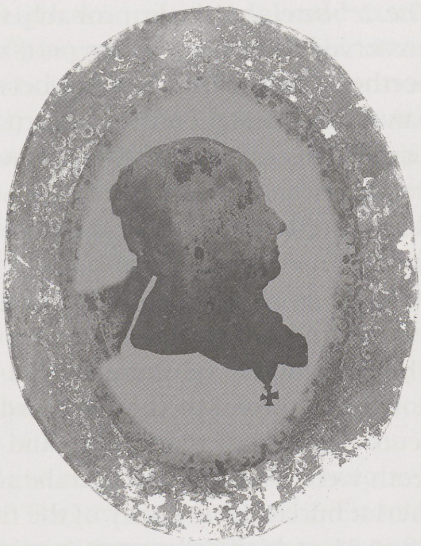
*Joon 1. Hauakamber kahe põhimatusega Viru-Nigula kirikaias. Naisematus asub paremal, mehematus vasakul pool. Kirstujäänused on eemaldatud, kirste markeerivad kandesangad.*

around the burial. It was possible to document both long sides of the coffin, the headboard and the remains of the cover of the coffin on the skeleton's skull, rib cage and the left side of the body. The coffin was richly decorated: its sides were outlined with a double ornamentation band of brocade. The upper one of these probably framed the outer edge of the coffin, whereas the lower one was used to decorate the coffin inside. The upper ornamentation band had been preserved as fragments almost everywhere around the body, but the lower one was observed only in places. Decoration knobs of carved wood covered with brocade were found in each corner of the coffin. Smaller amounts of brocade thread could also be found elsewhere inside the coffin. In addition to that, bone buttons were gathered from the decaying wood (probably initially they were inside, not upon the coffin) which, as suggested by their considerably dispersed arrangement, could be connected with either the fastening of the cloth that covered the body or a coat of the deceased.

The skeleton lay in an extended supine position oriented from west to east, the head directed towards the east. The right arm was slightly bent at the elbow, the wrist part was placed on the pelvis, the lower part of the left arm from the elbow had not been preserved, but the arrangement similar to the right hand is indicated by the similar position of the humerus. Both tibias from the middle of the shinbones were totally decayed, also the rest of the tibias to the knee-caps were poorly preserved and friable. However, a part of the leg of a leather boot had been preserved in the place of the left leg. The skull had been wholly preserved, but similarly to the rest of the bones, it was also relatively friable and crumbled into pieces when taken up. In addition to the missing feet bones, the tibia and the left wrist bone, the finger bones and most of the ribs could not be found as well.

Very little had been preserved of the clothing of the buried. A piece of textile had been maintained under the spine; remains of thread were gathered from the area of the neck directly under the mandible, which seem to suggest a high-collared garment (a uniform or a greatcoat?). Four bone buttons probably relate to the clothing of the dead as well. Two of these were located in the pelvic area, possibly on both hips (pockets?), the third one between the knees.

In addition to the brocade bands framing the coffin and decoration knobs, surprising and unique findings were obtained inside the coffin as well. Four glass plates were found around the skull of the buried, two of which were oval, one round and one square-shaped. The northern- and southernmost glass ovals had a plaster frame around them, which fell apart when lifted up. Considering the arrangement of the glass plates, their frames and elevation in relation to the burial, it is likely that we are dealing with ornamentation on the cover of the coffin.



Conservation Centre Kanut / Ennistuskoda Kanut.

*Fig 2.* *Glass oval with painting found beside the head of male burial. Most likely the painting depicts F.J.T. v Adlerberg. Note the cross at the neck.*

*Joon. 2.* *Mehematuse peatsist leitud maalinguga klaasovaal. Ilmselt kujutab maaling maetut – F.J.T. v Adlerbergi. Omapärane on kaelas kujutatud rist.*

After removal of the northernmost oval, another glass plate of the same shape was revealed underneath it, whereas unlike the others this one had a painting with black paint preserved on it that depicted the profile of a man (Fig 2). Considering the lower position of the painted glass it is likely that it had been placed inside the coffin, next to the head of the buried man, left of it. Most likely this is the profile of the buried man, Friedrich, J.T. von Adlerberg. The painting was preserved in a very bad condition and dissapeared during conservation. Still it was possible to restore it. An interesting detail is the cross attached to the man's neck. Could this be a personal order, indicating his position as a major of the Russian Army? It is possible that the four upper glass plates were originally also with paintings which are not preserved, however. This is also suggested by an incised pattern on the rim of one oval plate. It will be possible to be more conclusive about the glass plates only after their conservation has been completed.

The 2nd **burial** (female, probably Christina Juliana von Adlerberg). Very little was preserved from the wooden parts of her coffin. Two long boards ran alongside the northern wall of the chamber between the skeleton and the wall, and an upright panel was leaning on the western wall of the chamber by the head of the burial. Textile decorations of the coffin were either absent or were not preserved. Probably the only ornamentation related to the burial was a cluster of brocade thread on the right hip of the deceased. However, the coffin handles were present and in their proper position. Thus the dead had been placed in the chamber in a coffin and not wrapped in a shroud *etc.*

The skeleton lay on the northern side of the chamber in extended supine position, head turned to the west and face to the east. Both hands were bent at an acute angle from the elbows and placed in a crossed position on the chest. All teeth were missing, although the rest of the skull was well preserved. Similarly to the 1st burial, the majority of the finger bones and parts of the feet were not identified. Most of the ribs were missing as well.

Due to the poor preservation of the coffins, the collapsed vault and the soil heaped on the vault that was packed with bones, it was not always possible to determine whether the bones belonged to the main burials or were in the soil that covered the vault. Therefore, some of the higher parts of the skeletons could have been removed before the burials were reached. That would explain the missing finger and toe bones (the latter of the 1st burial most likely decayed), and most of the ribs of the 2nd burial.

In addition to the two main burials, another skull was unearthed in the southwestern corner of the chamber, directly on the floor of the chamber, which did not relate to either of the burials. A sacrum lay right next to the skull. Both bones belonged to a man aged 45±5 years and were situated partly under the edge of the coffin of the 1st burial, the skull on its occiput, chin turned upwards.

The bones investigated by the anthropologist Jana Limbo offer interesting additional information about the buried (Limbo 2004). In the case of the male burial, judging from his bones, the height of Friedrich von Adlerberg is probably 170 – 173 cm. In comparison, the average height of the Estonian men aged 19 – 39, who were serving in the Russian army as draftees in the years 1818–1827, was only 164.3 cm in Järva- and Virumaa. The stature has been determined from the skeletons of the Modern Age graveyards as well, with the average height of the men of Kohtla-Järve in the 17th – 18th century being 168.8 cm. Accordingly, in the case of von Adlerberg we are dealing with a relatively tall man for his time, which could

relate to better living conditions; hence the height was possibly to some extent greater than the average of the time (in case of better food conditions the actual potential of height is revealed). Most of the pathologies of the buried were associated with his age - for example osteoporosis, rheumatism, hyperostosis. It was difficult to draw any conclusions from the presence of the teeth, since the buried man was old and many teeth had fallen out, possibly because of a trauma a long time before the death. At the same time caries is missing, which shows diverse eating habits as well as small amounts of refined sugar in the food. The strongly developed ligament sockets on the bones reveal that the man had been physically active during his lifetime and engaged in activities requiring strong muscles, physical work or perhaps riding. Especially unique were the artificial oblique traces of wear on the right teeth of the lower jaw.

The average height of the female, possibly Christina Juliana von Adlerberg, was 158.9 cm based on different measurements. The average height of Estonian women was measured only in the beginning of the 20th century; the data is known from Tartumaa (1900-1902) where the average height of women was 154.2 cm. Measurements have been made from a series of skeletons by both L. Heapost and R. Allmäe: for example the average stature of the women of Kohtla-Järve in 17th-18th century was 152.84 cm, the village graveyard of Tääksi in 14th-18th century 157.6 cm, Tallinn St. Barbara's cemetery from the 14th-17th century 157.67 cm. Thus, Christina von Adlerberg can be considered a relatively tall woman for her time. Osteoporosis was identified on all bones and to a relatively more developed extent than that with the man 24 years older. Also today the frequency of osteoporosis in women increases after menopause and is usually accompanied by bone fractures. In this case there were no traces of fractures on the preserved skeletal material, which could refer to good living conditions that allowed the developing of osteoporosis to such an extent without any bone fractures. As to other pathologies, rheumatism and chronic arthritis were present. The growing over of the tooth sockets indicates that most of the teeth had been lost a long time before death and the woman lived completely toothless during the last years of her life. Similarly to the man, the strong fixing points of the muscles on long bones are indicative of her having been physically active.

In the soil on the vault of the chamber, the bones of at least 32 individuals were distinguished, half of which (16) were children. The two skulls that had been placed in an orderly manner one after the other on the vault both belonged to males, one of these to a man 30-35-years old and the other to an 18-20-year old juvenile. For the latter individual, the growing over of the tooth sockets indicates tooth loss already some time before the death. For other adults it was possible to

determine the sex only in the case of 7 individuals. Five of them were male and 2 female. The age was even more rarely ascertained. Only in two cases it was determined that the buried were definitely older than 40 years. All the others were younger. On the basis of numerous loose teeth gathered from the soil it is possible to say that most of the remains of the skeletons belong to young individuals. Among others, a unique human molar covered with a bronze plate was uncovered. The root of the tooth had been sawed off straight and a bronze sheet had been used to replace the tooth. The original assumption that we might be dealing with a denture apparently does not hold, since bronze would have caused blood poisoning when in contact with blood. It is possible, instead, that it was a denture specifically made for the dead, in order to leave a better impression of the individual; him or her during the funeral.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHAMBER

The southern, northern and eastern walls of the chamber have been evenly laid from limestone and properly jointed. Another lay could be seen in the western wall, that has been separated from the northern and southern walls by a joint (Fig. 3). The gap between the stones here is imperfectly jointed and in places mortar covers the stones. In addition, soil has fallen into the chamber from both of the corner joints. The walls of chamber have been preserved to the height of 170 cm, thus extending to the ground. The floor of the chamber had been laid from limestones and covered with mortar. Greyish-yellow clay appeared immediately under the floor plates and the walls of the chamber ended at the same height.

*Fig. 3. Northwest corner of the chamber. Note the shallow arch of the brick vault, groove on the northern wall and gap in the corner.*

*Joon. 3. Hauakambri loodenurk. Näha on madala kaarega tellisvõlv, kambri põhjaseina raiutud soon ning vuuk müüride ühinemiskohas.*

The vault has been laid of bricks, with limestones stuck between the bricks to lock them in place. Especially noteworthy is the extremely shallow arch of the vault. It seems as if during the construction of the vault an attempt was made to lay it as flat as possi-

ble, which resulted in an almost horizontal "ceiling". Under the vault stones, in the mortar, it is possible to see traces of timber shoring boards. The vault is supported at a 30 cm wide and 5–10 cm deep groove, incised into the northern and southern wall, which begins 60 cm from the ground bottom edge of the walls. The vault did not rest on the eastern wall, since there is no trace of it in the wall. The connection of the western wall with the vault remained unclear, however, although in places it seemed possible that the vault actually was leaning on the western wall.

## DISCUSSION

It should be mentioned that from an architectural point of view the vault left an impression of amateur work, which was probably the main reason for its collapse. Another reason was apparently the shallowness of its arch, which is almost absent. The present (pre-collapse) appearance of the chamber is presumably the result of reconstructions of different periods. During the first stage a hole of suitable size was dug into the churchyard and a chamber with limestone walls was laid on the ground. The chamber was probably covered with an above ground vault (these kinds of vaults are preserved, for example, in the churchyards of Väike-Maarja, Lüganuse *etc.*) (Fig 4). Any preserved signs of such an above ground vault are totally absent. It is hardly plausible that the brick vault was laid as the original vault in the middle of the limestone chamber and not above it. Thus, most likely there has been an above ground vault of some kind which at some point collapsed or was dismantled. After that a secondary vault was laid of bricks and mortar, not above the chamber but in the middle of it, and grooves were incised in the northern and southern walls of the chamber to support the vault. The vault was covered with soil that was probably obtained from the same churchyard since it contains numerous human bones. The fill was deposited above the vault apparently immediately after the vault was fin-

*Fig. 4. Burial chambers with above ground vault at Lüganuse churchyard.*
*Joon. 4. Maapealse võlviga hauakambrid Lüganuse kirikaias.*

ished. This is indicated by some human bones in the fill with fossilized mortar on them. As a result of the new vault, the burial chamber was no longer discernable as a mound, and only the upper parts of the walls were barely noticeable on the ground. It is most likely that one of the reasons for the construction of the vault in the middle of the chamber was the expected disappearance of an outer, above ground vault. This is indicated by a few other presumed locations of burial chambers in the Viru-Nigula churchyard that also lack an above ground vault and by the fact that such chambers are totally missing in Viru-Nigula. Thus it seems to be a certain general local development.

The time of the costruction of the brick vault is not known but it was probably built in some connection with the main burials. This would mean that the chamber with limestone walls, together with an original vault above it, was constructed before it and used for burying already earlier. The chamber was cleared for the Adlerberg from the older burials in the 19th century.

The time lapse between the main burials is 20 years. Thus a possibility still exists that the chamber was founded only in 1821 for the burial of the woman together with the initial (limestone?) vault which collapsed before the secondary brick vault was laid after the man had been placed in the chamber. However, it is not likely that the female burial would have been preserved as intact and in its right position during the incising of the groove for the construction and the laying of the vault. So is it possible that she was exhumed and re-interred afterwards together with her husband? This would explain the scarcity of coffin remains and their irregular position (a board leaning upright on the chamber wall). But still we would not be able to explain the anatomically correct position of the bones of the female burial and the proper arrangement of the coffin handles.

Thus it is more likely that the chamber existed and was used for burying already before the death of the Adlerbergs and the collapse of the initial vault disrupted the burials. Thereafter, the chamber was cleared of the disarranged bones which were later probably heaped on the vault for fill. Some evidence for this could be found in the correct positioning of the skulls on the vault (in addition to the two whole skulls recovered), it is possible that the number of whole skulls placed on the vault in this manner was larger which seems to indicate a certain sense of ethics according to which the bones removed from the chamber were supposed to be buried at the same location. However, it is unlikely that 32 individuals, and possibly even more, were buried under the initial vault. Thus the soil heaped above the vault had to, in addition to the chamber's original burials, consist of bones from the area of the surrounding churchyard as well.

Thus, the most plausible alternative is that the chamber was taken into re-use in 1821 when Christina von Adlerberg was buried there, and at the same time a brick vault was erected in the middle of the chamber. This, however, means that an entrance was needed to place the body of Friedrich von Adlerberg into the crypt 20 years later, but the vault in the middle of the chamber does not leave any opening. The only way to get in would have been the western wall which is detached from the northern and southern walls by joints. Also, the brick vault was only partly supported on this wall, thus leaving a possibility that the wall was laid only after the construction of the vault and a few stones were wedged under the vault. This points to the fact that there should be either another chamber or an extension of the same crypt behind the wall, to the west.[8]

As another alternative it should be mentioned that the entrance to the chamber after constructing the secondary vault might have been in the collapsed part of the vault. The latter still remains hypothetical as no stone construction relating to it could be observed.

It is difficult to explain the skull and sacrum of the 45±5 year old male in the southwestern corner of the chamber, situated directly on the floor and under the edge of the coffin of the 1st burial. Since the bones lay in the corner that was not affected by the collapse, they could not have gotten there after the collapse of the vault. Their age is indicated by their position under the coffin which dates them earlier than the main male burial in the chamber. It can be suggested that these bones also belong to the earlier inhumations in the chamber and were left in the crypt, either by accident or intentionally, after taking it into use again.

The prehistoric finds in the soil covering the vault are explained by the fact that the church is erected in the middle of a prehistoric settlement site. Namely, the earliest finds from the churchyard (striated pottery sherds) relate to habitation in the neighbourhood already in the beginning of the 1st millennium at the latest. The place was occupied also during the Viking Age which is indicated by burnished ware sherds with line-ornamentation (Tamla 1991; 1993, 21). The Swedish and Russian coins are connected to the Modern Age burials in the churchyard, supposedly the initial burials in the chamber that were disrupted by the collapse of the original vault, taken out in the 19th century and placed above the new vault.

To sum up, the development of the chamber is seen as follows: in the first stage, a burial chamber with an above ground vault was built and used for burying. In the second stage, the vault collapsed or was dismantled and a new vault of brick

[8] Above the presumed extension of the chamber there is a wheel cross on the ground, the text on which refers to burials from the 17th cen.

was established. Together with it all signs of the chamber on the ground level disappeared, which brought about the need for a stone cross as the chambers with an above ground vault do not require a cross. The following text is hewed on the cross (the beginnings of the first three lines are missing as the left arm of the cross has been broken off and lost):

... herr Mayor und Ritter
... ich Theodor Adlerberg
... 1767 gest. d. 16. Mai 1841
und dessen Gemahlin Christiane
J. Adlerberg geb. Colonge geb. d.
10. März 1771 gest. d. 2. Febr. 1821

According to the text it can be assumed that the cross was erected after the burial of the man. It is intruiging that there is another text on the opposite side of the cross which is so faint that it cannot be deciphered. Maybe this text would explain the development of the chamber?

After establishing the new vault, a female burial in 1821 and a male burial in 1841 were placed into the northern and southern parts of the chamber, respectively. In what way the coffins were taken into the crypt is not clear. Was there an opening in the eastern part of the vault, collapsed by now, or was it the western wall that was opened and closed after burying the man? These questions remain unanswered but these two alternatives are the most likely ones, as a vault could not have been laid after burial had taken place (neither because of the small size of the chamber nor because the bricklayers would not have been able to get out of the chamber later).

## EPILOGUE

Immediately after the cleaning and documenting of the chamber, the rest of the vault was supported and the chamber was filled with sand. After completing the bone analysis, all the bones taken out of the chamber were re-buried at the same place, whereas the main burials having separate coffins and the bones from the soil above the vault were buried together.

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## PÄÄSTEKAEVAMISED VIRU-NIGULA KIRIKAIAS

*Kristiina JOHANSON ja Tõnno JONUKS*

2004. aasta augusti lõpus ja septembri alguses viidi läbi arheoloogilised päästekaevamised Viru-Nigula kirikaias. Avariiobjektiks oli kirikaia I kvartali 9. platsil osaliselt sissekukkunud võlviga Varudi mõisnikele, von Adlerbegidele kuuluv hauakamber. Kuna varem ei ole Eestis 19. sajandi maa-aadlike matuseid kaevatud, siis otsustati kamber läbi uurida enne selle liivaga täitmist.

Hauakambri servale asetatud ristil (selle vasak haar oli murdunud ja kaduma läinud) oleva kulunud teksti järgi oli oodatavaid matuseid kaks: Friedrich Johann Theodor von Adlerberg (sünd 1767, surn. 16.05.1841), major Vene teenistuses, ja tema abikaasa Christina Juliana, sündinud de Colongue (sünd. 10.03.1771, surn. 09.02.1821 Uue-Varudis tiisikusse). Friedrich von Adlerberg oli Vana-Varudi mõisa omanik. Ta suhtles tihedalt kapten Hans de Colongue'ga, kes oli Uue-Varudi mõisnik ja ühtlasi Friedrichi äi. Oma testamendis aastast 1812 (allkirjastatud 1819) nimetab Hans oma pärijana ka tütar Christinat, kellest sai seega Uue-Varudi mõisa omanik. Nii Friedrich kui ka Christina olid kirikuga lähedalt seotud: Friedrich oli kiriku eestseisuses Varudi (algul ainult Vana-Varudi, hiljem ka Uue-Varudi) mõisa esindajana vähemalt aastani 1820. Arhiivi andmetel oli Adlerbergidel viis täiskasvanuks saanud last.

Kaevamistöid alustati varisenud võlviosa fikseerimisest ning hauakambri puhastamisest võlvile kuhjatud ja kambrisse varisenud pinnasest. Pikiküljega lääne-ida suunas paikneva hauakambri suurus oli 225 x 204 cm ning see oli kaetud maa sees paikneva ida-lääne-suunalise madalakaarelise silindervõlviga.

Kambri kaks põhimatust asetsesid kambri põrandal (joon. 1). Esialgu puhastati luustikud välja koos kirstujäänustega. II matuse kirst oli suures ulatuses kõdunenud ning luustiku sai välja puhastada kohe peaaegu terves ulatuses. Välja puhastati ka kirstude niklist (võimalik, et amalgaamhõbedaga ülehõbetatud niklist) kandesangad, mis koosnesid kahest osast – sangast ja selle külge kinnitatud plaadist.

I matus (mees, kõigi eelduste kohaselt Friedrich Johann von Adlerberg) oli maetud hauakambri lõunapoolsesse ossa. Matuse ümber oli säilinud arvukalt puidujäänuseid; võimalik oli fikseerida kirstu mõlemad pikilauad, samuti peatsipoolne laud ning jäänuseid kirstu kaanest luustiku koljul, rinnakorvil ning keha vasakul poolel. Kirst oli ohtralt kaunistatud: selle servad olid ääristatud kahekordse brokaadist ehispaelaga, millest ülemine oli ääristanud ilmselt kirstu pealmist serva, alumisega oli ääristatud kirst seestpoolt. Kirstu kaanel, ümber maetu pea oli asetatud neli klaasplaati, kaks neist ovaaljat, üks ringi- ning üks ruudukujuline. Põhja- ja lõunapoolsete klaasovaalide ümber oli kohapeal säilinud, ent üles tõstes lagunev kipsist raam. Arvestades klaaside paiknemist, raami ning nende kõrgust matuse suhtes, on tõenäoline, et tegemist oli kirstukaane kaunistustega.

Kõige põhjapoolsema ovaali eemaldamisel tuli aga selle alt nähtavale veel üks samakujuline klaasovaal, ent erinevalt pealmistest oli sellel säilinud maaling, mis kujutas musta värviga klaasile jäädvustatud mehe profiili (joon. 2). Arvestades selle klaasi sügavamat paiknemist, on tõenäoline, et see klaas oli asetatud kirstu, mehe pea kõrvale, vasakule poole.

II matuse (naine, tõenäoliselt Christina Juliana von Adlerberg) kirstu puitosad ei olnud pea üldse säilinud. Küll aga olid olemas kirstu kandesangad, mis asetsesid oma õigetes kohtades.

Antropoloog Jana Limbo poolt uuritud luud pakuvad maetute kohta huvitavat lisainformatsiooni. Nii on luude põhjal võimalik mehematuse, tõenäoliselt Friedrich von Adlerbergi pikkuseks oletada 170,29 - 173,04 cm. Võrdluseks võiks siinkohal tuua aastatel 1818 - 1827 Vene armee nekrutite hulgas teeninud 19-39 aastaste Eesti meeste keskmise pikkuse, mis Järva- ja Virumaal oli vaid 164,3 cm. Enamik maetu patoloogiatest olid seotud vanusega, sh. osteoporoos, reuma, hüperostoos. Hammaste kulumise põhjal oli toitumise kohta järeldusi raske teha, sest maetu oli vana ning palju hambaid oli ilmselt trauma tagajärjel ammu enne surma ära tulnud. Samas puudub kaaries, mis näitab nii mitmekülgset toitu kui ka rafineeritud suhkrute väikest osatähtsust toidus. Tugevalt arenenud lihasekinnitumiskohad luudel näitavad, et mees oli elu jooksul füüsiliselt aktiivne ja tegeles tugevaid lihaseid nõudvate toimingutega, füüsilise töö või näit. ratsutamisega. Eripärased olid alumise lõualuu parempoolsete hammaste kunstlikud poolviltused kulumisjäljed.

Naisematuse, tõenäoliselt Christina Juliana von Adlerbergi keskmiseks pikkuseks erinevate mõõtude põhjal saadi 158,90 cm ning sedagi võib oma aja kontekstis pidada küllalt pikaks kasvuks. Osteoporoos oli täheldatav kõikidel luudel, kusjuures ilma luumurdudeta, mis võiks viidata headele elutingimustele, mis võimaldasid sellise kaugelearenenud osteporoosi kujunemist, sealjuures ilma suuremate traumadeta. Teistest olulisematest patoloogiatest peaks ära märkima reuma ning kroonilise põskkoopapõletiku. Hambasompude kinnikasvamine viitab sellele, et enamik hambaid on ära tulnud pikka aega enne surma. Sarnaselt mehele, osutavad pikkade luude tugevad lihaste kinnitumisekohad ka naise füüsilisele aktiivsusele.

Hauakambri võlvi peale kuhjatud pinnases eristati vähemalt 32 indiviidi luud, neist pooled (16) olid lapsed. Kaks võlvi peale korrektselt üksteise järele asetatud koljut kuulusid mõlemad mehele, üks neist 30-35-aastasele täiskasvanule, teine 18-20-aastasele noorukile, kelle kinnikasvanud hambasombud näitasid hammaste äratulemist juba mõnda aega enne surma. Teiste täiskasvanutele kuulunud luude põhjal oli vaid 7 indiviidi puhul võimalik kindlaks teha nende sugu: 5 olid mehed ning 2 naised. Vanuselist koosseisu oli võimalik määrata veelgi harvem. Eristati vaid kaks juhtu, kus maetu oli vanem kui 40 aastat. Teiste puhul oli tegemist noorematega. Ka arvukate kokkukogutud hammaste põhjal võib öelda, et võlvi peale kuhjatud mullas olevad luudejäänused kuulusid enamuses noortele indiviididele. Kõik need luud olid aga pärit hauakambri peale kuhjatud mullast ning pärinesid segatud matustest.

Hauakambri (joon. 3) lõuna-, põhja- ja idaseinad olid laotud ühtlaselt paest ja korralikult vuugitud. Teistsuguse laoga oli läänesein, mis oli põhja- ja lõunamüürist vuugiga eraldatud. Kivide vahe oli siin halvasti vuugitud ja mört kattis kohati ka kivide pinda. Lisaks oli müüri mõlemast nurgavuugist sisse varisenud mulda. Hauakambri müürid olid säilinud 170 cm kõrgusena, ulatudes maapinnani välja. Kambri põhi oli laotud paeplaatidest ja mördiga üle valatud; kohe põrandaplaatide all tuli vastu hallikas-kollane savi ning samal kõrgusel lõppesid ka müürid.

Võlv oli laotud tellistest (müürikivide hulgas ei esinenud tellist kusagil), lukuks oli telliste vahele torgatud paekive. Tähelepanuväärne oli võlvi väga madal kaar. Tundus, et võlvi rajamisel on püütud

laduda seda nii sirgelt kui võimalik, mistõttu tulemuseks oligi peaaegu sirge "lagi". Võlvikivide all, mördis oli näha saalungilaudade jälgi. Võlv toetus põhja- ja lõunamüüri sisse süvendatud 30 cm laiale ja 5–10 cm sügavusele soonele, mis sai alguse 60 cm sügavusel maapinnast (mõõdetud müüride ülaservast). Idamüürile võlv ilmselt ei toetunud. Ka läänemüüri seos võlviga jäi ebaselgeks, ehkki kohati tundus võimalik, et võlv just läänemüürile toetubki.

Arhitektuuriliselt on kambri- ja võlviehitus küllaltki ebaharilik, jättes mulje amatöörlusest, mis oli tõenäoliselt ka võlvi sissevarisemise peamine põhjus. Üks varingu põhjuseid oli nähtavasti ka pea olematu kaarega võlv ise. Kambri praegune (enne sissevarisemist) ilme on ilmselt tekkinud mitme eriaegse ümberehituse tagajärjel. Ehkki päris selgeks kambri kujunemiskäik ei saanudki, võis eristada teatavad põhietapid. Esimeses etapis on kirikaeda kaevatud hauakambriks sobiva suurusega auk ja laotud maa sisse paekividest seintega kamber, mis kaeti tõenäoliselt maapealse võlviga (selliseid on säilinud nii Väike-Maarja, Lüganuse jt. kirikaedades), millest puuduvad aga säilinud märgid (joon. 4). Teises etapis on võlv ilmselt sisse varisenud (või varistatud) ning laotud uus tellistest võlv. Võlv on toetatud pikiseinte keskele raiutud soontesse ning on selgelt kambri seintest hilisem. Uue võlviga on kaotatud ära ka märgid hauakambrist maa peal ning see tingis ilmselt ka vajaduse paigaldada kivirist, sest maapealse võlviga kambritel risti pole vaja. Seejärel on hauakambri põhjaossa asetatud 1821. aastal naisematus ja 1841. aasta paiku mehematus kambri lõunaossa. Mil moel kirstud kambrisse saadi, ei ole selge. Küsimus, kas oli selleks avaus võlvi praeguseks sissevarisenud idaosas või oli avatud kambri läänesein, mis võidi sulgeda pärast mehe matust, jääb vastuseta. Need kaks võimalust on aga kõige tõenäolisemad, kuna pärast matuseid ei ole võimalik kambris enam võlvi laduda (ei kambri väikeste mõõtmete ega ka seetõttu, et võlviladujatel puudub pärast võimalus kambrist välja pääseda).