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FIELDWORK  
IN ESTONIA

2004

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Ülle Tamla

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*Tagakaas: ribmajagaja Kämbla II asulast.*

*Cover: decorative mount from Viskla II settlement site.*

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## VIKING AGE HARBOUR SITE AT TORNIMÄE, EASTERN SAAREMAA

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During the summer of 2004, a series of excavations aimed at investigating prehistoric harbour sites was carried out on the island of Saaremaa. These investigations formed a part of the research project *Coastal settlements on Prehistoric and Medieval Saaremaa* (Grant No 5432 of the Estonian Science Foundation). In addition, the excavations were financed by the target-financed project *Land, Sea and People: Estonia on its way from the Iron Age to the Medieval Period* of the Institute of History in Tallinn, and the University of Tallinn. The field work was conducted as seminar excavations for history students of the University of Tallinn.

Prehistoric harbour sites in Estonia have so far been excavated only randomly, and the excavations have been carried out without proper prior knowledge of the probable character of such sites (e. g. Aita Kustin 1963; Gurly Vedru 2000). Since the archaeological evidence of prehistoric harbour sites is normally reported to have been rather similar to that of “normal” dwelling places, such places are first and foremost defined as harbour sites due to their location and coastal proximity at the time of their use (criteria for locating harbour sites in Estonia and neighbouring countries see e. g. Mägi 2004).

The experience of Estonian archaeologists in recognizing and excavating harbour sites is consequently quite limited. The series of excavations at different sites of the same type on Saaremaa was arranged in order to compare the culture layers, finds and methods during the process of the excavations. The project was supervised by Marika Mägi, other participants were Tyge Andersen, Kristin Ilves (carried out trial excavations at Sutu) and Villu Kadakas (supervised excavations at Viltina), all working for the Institute of History in Tallinn.

The largest plot was opened at Tornimäe, and a somewhat smaller one at Viltina. Trial excavations were carried out at Sutu and at Pällamõis on the southern bank of the Ristioja brook, both in the vicinity of the Püha church. At all sites except Tornimäe, the excavations will be continued in 2005.



## THE VIKING AGE HARBOUR SITE AT TORNIMÄE LOCATION AND RESEARCH HISTORY

The Viking Age harbour site at Tornimäe is located on an elevation now nearly 2 km from the coast line, where a Russian orthodox church was erected in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stretch of land between Tornimäe and the present coast line is flat and submerged occasionally. 1200 years ago, the hill with the present church was situated right next to the sea, and it must have provided an excellent view over the main part of the Little Strait (Fig. 1). To the east of Tornimäe Hill, the island of Saaremaa was separated from the present peninsula of Kõrkvere by a strait extending from north to south. The site is likely to have been very suitable for controlling navigation through the Little Strait which, judging from several archaeological on both sides of it, might have been an intensively used water route. The slopes of the hill are well-suited for beaching boats and ships on dry land, which might otherwise have been somewhat problematic due to the flat and wide-stretching foreland in the vicinity. At Tornimäe during the Viking Age, the sea next to the coast was deep enough to be navigable for sea vessels, while along most of the coastline the water level might have been too shallow for sailing. All these topographic features pointed to Tornimäe as the most suitable site for a Viking Age harbour in this part of Saaremaa.

West of Tornimäe lay some of the most fertile arable lands of the whole island, in the middle of which the manor of Uuemõisa was founded in the Middle Ages. Several prehistoric stone graves, however, indicate that settlement of this area reaches further back in history. 6.3 km west from Tornimäe is the site of the Põide Hillfort, which was used at the same time as the harbour site – that is, in the first half and the middle of the Viking Age (Lõugas & Mägi-Lõugas 1994). In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the parish church of Põide was built right between the harbour site and the hillfort, at a distance of 4.2 km from Tornimäe. The catchment area of the harbour site may, accordingly, be considered as central for the local community, and the site of Tornimäe most likely functioned as the main harbour of a whole district.

Brick fragments found close to the Tornimäe orthodox church suggest that some brick buildings were situated there during the medieval period. Considering that the manor of Uuemõisa became the collecting point of tax, paid and gathered in kind for the Livonian Order, Tornimäe most likely continued to be the main harbour of the district. Taxes were transported away from the islands(?) by sea, and all tax-collecting centers were bound to have been connected with suitable harbour sites. Because of the land mass transformations, the medieval harbour of Tornimäe could hardly have been situated at exactly the same place as in the



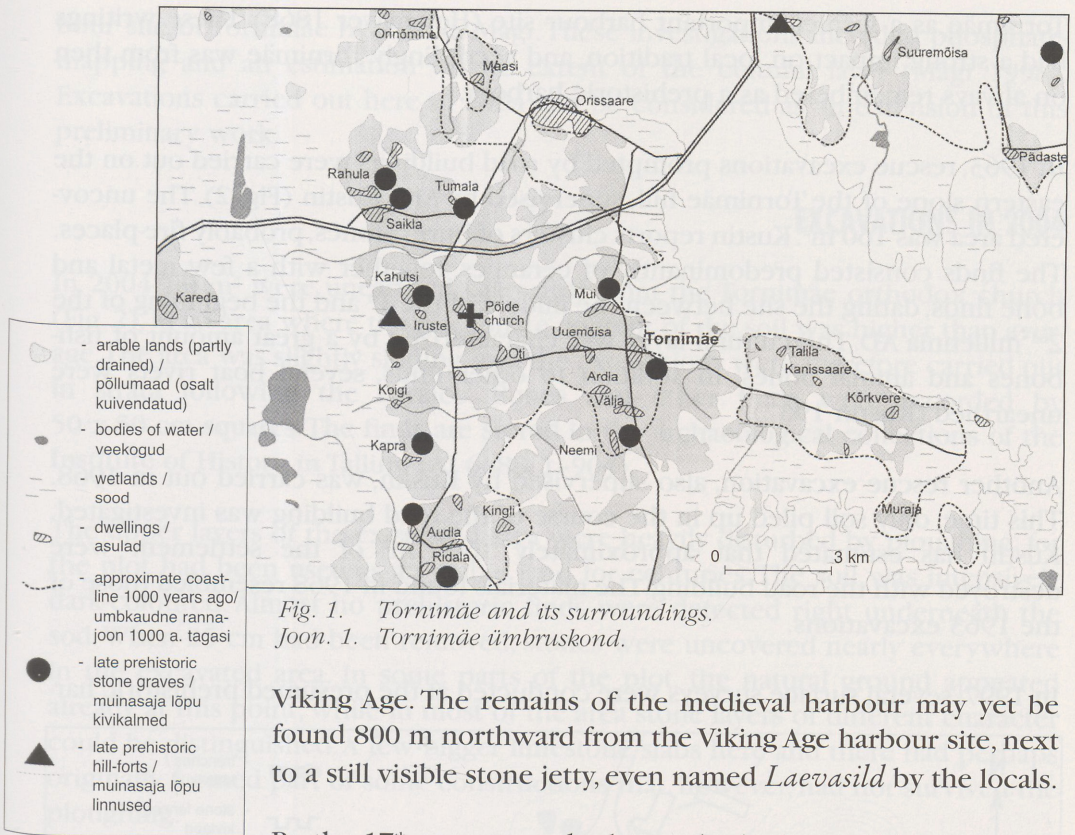


Fig. 1. Tornimäe and its surroundings.  
Joon. 1. Tornimäe ümbruskond.

Viking Age. The remains of the medieval harbour may yet be found 800 m northward from the Viking Age harbour site, next to a still visible stone jetty, even named *Laevasild* by the locals.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, the harbour of Tornimäe was abandoned – the sea around it was by then too shallow, and the Little Strait no longer navigable for bigger vessels. On surveyor maps from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the area of the former harbour site is indicated only by bare fields (EA, 308-2-66). Neither were there any farms visible on the 18<sup>th</sup>-century maps. On these maps, it is of interest that the hill below the later church was then called *Linnamägi* (Hill-Fort Hill or Town Hill) (EA, 2072-3-419). While ploughing on the slope of the hill, local peasants found the remains of a “wooden palisade” (Luce 1811). Although the exact location and character of these finds remain obscure, it is likely to suggest that the “palisade” originally formed a part of the harbour construction, or perhaps indicated a wooden jetty.

The site of Tornimäe was brought to the attention of the public by Johann Wilhelm Ludwig von Luce, who in 1811 published an article in which he suggested that *Castrum Mone*, mentioned by the 13<sup>th</sup> century chronist Henry the Latvian, might have been situated at Tornimäe (Luce 1811). His theory was questioned by Jean Baptiste Holzmayer in 1868, who, however, supported the idea of



Tornimäe as a former important harbour site (Holzmayer 1868). These writings had a strong impact on local tradition, and accordingly Tornimäe was from then on always remembered as a prehistoric harbour.

In 1963, rescue excavations prompted by road buildings were carried out on the eastern slope of the Tornimäe hill, supervised by Aita Kustin (Fig. 2). The uncovered area was 160 m<sup>2</sup>. Kustin reports clusters of burnt stones, probably fire-places. The finds consisted predominantly of ceramics, together with a few metal and bone finds, dating the site between the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia AD. The cultural layer was characterized by a great amount of fish-bones and animal bones. In addition to other finds, several boat rivets were unearthed (Kustin 1967).

Another rescue excavation, also supervised by Kustin, was carried out in 1968. This time, only soil piled up in the course of the road building was investigated. Kustin has estimated that approximately 1600 m<sup>2</sup> of the settlement were destroyed with the road building. The materials found in 1968 resembled those of the 1963 excavations.

In 1997, several surface surveys were conducted at the presumed prehistoric har-

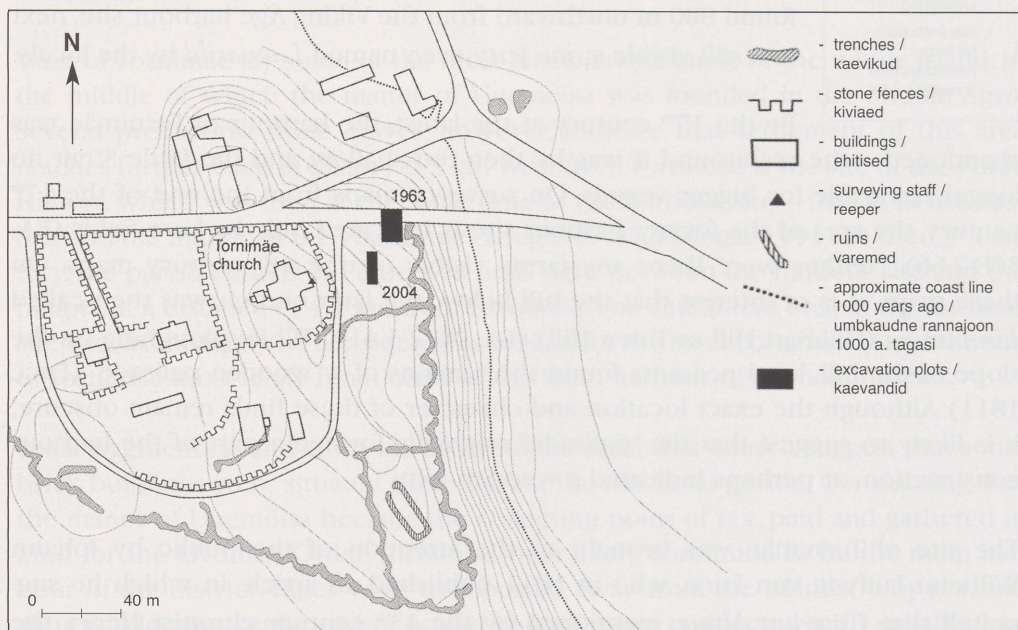


Fig. 2. Tornimäe harbour site with the excavation plots of 1963 and 2004. From Kustin 1967.  
Joon. 2. Tornimäe sadamakohht 1963. ja 2004. aasta kaevanditega.



bour site of Tornimäe by Marika Mägi. These investigations included phosphate-mapping and an estimation of the extent of the cultural layer (Mägi 1998). Excavations carried out here in 2004 can be considered as an extension of this preliminary work.

## EXCAVATIONS IN 2004

In 2004, 80 m<sup>2</sup> were unearthed eastwards from the Tornimäe orthodox church (Fig. 2), in an area where the phosphate content of the soil was higher than average. The area was slightly sloping, and the excavations were therefore carried out in strata following the surface. Bones and other finds were recorded by 50 x 50 cm squares. The finds are stored in the archaeological collections of the Institute of History in Tallinn (AI 6688: 1-904).

The upper layers of the excavated area were heavily disturbed by ploughing, for the plot had been used as an arable land for centuries. The soil was intensively dark-coloured. Almost no prehistoric finds were detected right underneath the sod. When 25 cm had been removed, stones were uncovered nearly everywhere in the excavated area. In some parts of the plot, the natural ground appeared already at this point, while in most of the area stone layers of different character could be distinguished. A few bigger limestone slabs here and there had perhaps originally formed part of some constructions that, however, had not survived the ploughing.

The central part of the excavated area was characterized by a layer of fist-size, mainly granite stones; the soil among them was darker than usual (Figs. 3, 4). In places, the stones had clearly been in fire – perhaps they were from ovens. Still, such sporadic groups of cracked stones could hardly be interpreted as remains of hearths. The majority of prehistoric finds and

animal bones were gathered from the layer described above. The layer extended over approximately 40 m<sup>2</sup>; the area seemed to have been rectangular, but was diagonally intercepted by the edge of the excavations.

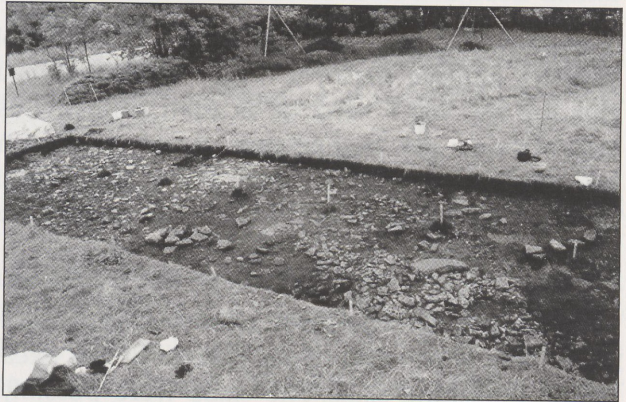


Fig. 3. The excavated area at Tornimäe. Taken from SW.  
Joon. 3. Vaade Tornimäe kaevandile edelast.



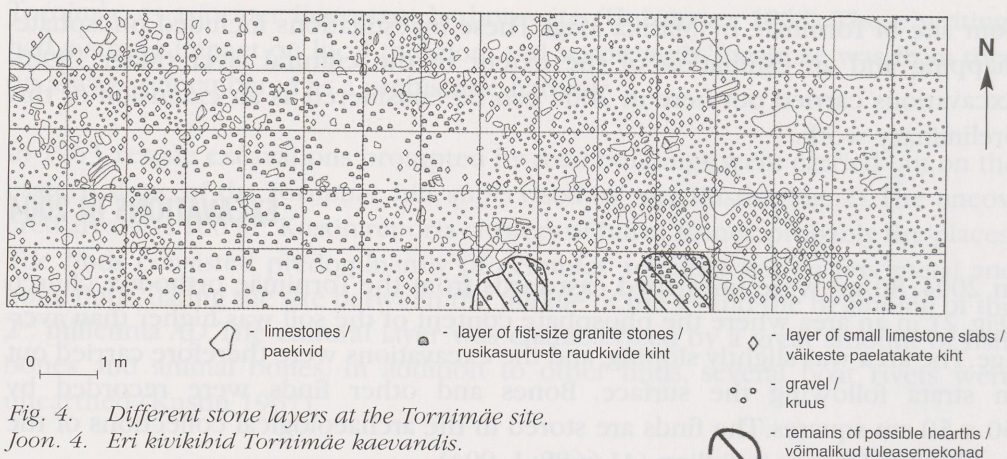


Fig. 4. Different stone layers at the Tornimäe site.

Joon. 4. Eri kivikibid Tornimäe kaevandis.

The layer of small partly cracked stones had a counterpart at the contemporary Põide hill-fort, excavated 1990–1994. The similar layer at the Põide hill-fort surrounded oven remains and was therefore interpreted as indicating the site of houses (Lõugas & Mägi-Lõugas 1994). Several excavations in mainland Estonia have demonstrated that prehistoric houses can be indicated only by certain concentration of finds, intensively dark soil, and sometimes a similar layer of partly burnt stones (Лави *et al.* 1983; Lavi 1997).

The absence of oven remains in the excavation plots both in 2004 and 1963 may perhaps indicate seasonal use of the buildings at the Tornimäe site. Presuming that the site was a harbour location, primarily used during summer months, the lack of ovens may be explained by no need for heating. However, the area so far excavated at Tornimäe is clearly not sufficient in size for drawing far-reaching conclusions. Dwelling houses situated in other parts of the site may possibly have contained ovens.

The only collection of burnt stones which should perhaps be interpreted as a fireplace was uncovered in the middle of the excavated area next to several horizontal limestone slabs. The slabs were possibly remnants of a pavement, preserved in an area of about 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>. A parallel to it can be found at the Põide hill-fort where the floor next to one of the Viking Age ovens had been paved with similar looking limestone slabs. The possible construction at Tornimäe was, however, strongly disturbed by ploughing.



The layer of small granite stones was in the northern and south-eastern end, surrounded by a 2.5 m wide zone of small limestone slabs. Although some bones and even pieces of artefacts were uncovered in the latter zone as well, they occurred much less frequently than in the layer of small granite stones. Outside the zone of small limestone slabs, in the northern and southern end of the excavation plot, the natural ground had been partly uncovered already underneath the sod. Only a few finds and bones were recorded there.



Fig. 5. Semicircular construction formed of limestone slabs.

Joon. 5. Paeplaatidest poolkaar.

Upon removing the layers of small granite stones and limestone slabs, the natural ground was laid bare in most of the excavated area. Underneath the zone of small limestone slabs reaching diagonally over the southern half of the excavation, slightly bigger limestone slabs formed a clear semicircle (Fig. 5). The inner side of the construction indicated that the slabs had originally surrounded some, probably wooden construction with a diameter of 2–2.75 m. What kind of a building this had been remained unclear. In any case, the construction had been demolished and covered by the layer of small limestone slabs already during the use of the Tornimäe site. Similar (semi-) circles of stones have been observed previously at the Proosa dwelling site, where they were interpreted as some kind of a storage building (Deemant 1986).

## FINDS

The finds of the Tornimäe site consisted predominantly of ceramics (Fig. 6). Most of them were potsherds of quite simple cooking vessels but remains of more fine-grained, often carinated Viking Age bowls were also found. Some potsherds were decorated with line and/or zigzag ornament (Fig. 6: 2, 4), resembling similar ceramics from the Pöide hill-fort.

The rest of the prehistoric finds consisted of a fragment of a bronze decorative pin (Fig. 6: 5), a piece of silver plating, half of a glass bead and another, probably burnt bead, as well as some possible iron awls and some fragments of bone arti-





Fig. 6. Finds from Tornimäe.

Joon. 6. Leide Tornimäelt.

facts. Close to the excavated area of 2004, a local landowner had earlier found an iron axe of the C-type. All the finds that can be dated more exactly than to the Iron Age belong to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, which is consistent with the finds from Kustin's excavations. The cultural layer of Tornimäe also contained a considerable number of bones, among which domesticated animals as well as seals and different kinds of fish were represented.

## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The excavations at Tornimäe uncovered a part of a Viking Age construction, indicated by the layer of small and partly burnt granite stones. In the uncovered area, the measurements of the construction were 8.5 m (NE-SW) and 5.5 m (SE-NW). Whether the layer indicated one or more buildings remains unclear. Possibly we may have here a situation with overlapping house structures, considering the continuum of at least two centuries of activity at the same location. The house or houses had probably been built in log technique as has been the custom in pre-historic, medieval and even later Estonia. Neither post-holes nor, for instance, burnt clay was found.

The materials found may not provide a final proof of the Tornimäe site having been the location of a harbour. Archaeological material similar to that of dwelling places has, however, been also reported at harbour sites from neighbouring countries. By the bone material excavated at the Tornimäe site, such maritime activities as fishing and seal hunting were repeatedly undertaken from here. Some bones with cutting marks also indicate handicraft. The ceramics used by the peo-



ple at Tornimäe were generally similar to those from the Pöide hill-fort; some unusual potsherds found both in 2004 and 1963 may reflect overseas connections. The finds suggest that the harbour site was abandoned around the year 1000, perhaps because of land transformation processes, which might have made it too difficult to approach the site by ship.

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## VIIKINGIAEGNE SADAMAKOHT IDA-SAAREMAAL TORNIMÄEL

Marika MÄGI

2004. aasta suvel korraldati Saaremaa muistsetel sadamakohtadel kompleksekspeditsioon, kus arheoloogilised kaevamised toimusid üheaegselt Tornimäel ja Viltinas ning proovikaevamised Püha lähedal Sutus ja Pällas. Projekti juhatas Marika Mägi, lisaks osalesid AI arheoloogia sektori töötajad Tyge Andersen, Kristin Ilves (juhatas kaevamisi Sutus) ja Villu Kadakas (juhatas kaevamisi Viltinas). Kõigis nimetatud kohtades, välja arvatud Tornimäe, jätkuvad kaevamised järgmisel suvel.

Tornimäe viikingiaegne sadamakoht paikneb rannalähedasel kõrgemal künnal, kuhu 19. sajandi keskel püstitati vene õigeusu kirik. 1200 aastat tagasi jäi küngas otse mererannale ning sealt avanes vaade üle suurema osa tollasest Väikesest väinast (joon. 1). Koht oli strateegiliselt sobiv kontrolli kehtestamiseks Väikese väina liikluse üle ning topograafiliselt ümbruskonna soodsaim sadam.

Sadamakohast 6,3 km lääne suunas jääb Põide maalinn, mille varaseim järk oli kasutuses sadamaga üheaegselt, s.o. viikingiaja esimesel poolel ja keskel. 4,2 km kaugusele Tornimäest püstitati 13. sajandil Põide kirik. Tegemist oli seega piirkonnas keske alaga, mille tagasadamaks Tornimäe tõenäoliselt oligi.

Arvestades, et Uuemõisa mõis Tornimäe läheduses oli keskajal Ordu maksukogumiskeskus, võib oletada, et Tornimäe püsis sel ajal jätkuvalt piirkonna tähtsaima sadamakohana. Konkreetne sadamakoht pidi aga keskajal olema seoses maatõusuga nihkunud ning ilmselt pärineb sellest ajast viikingiaegsest asulakohast u 800 m põhja poole jääv kividest Laevasild.

Hiljemalt 17. sajandi lõpuks oli Tornimäe sadamakohana maha jätetud – meri sadama ümber oli selleks ajaks jäänud madalaks ning Väike väin veeteena suurematele veesõidukitele läbimatu. 17. sajandi lõpu kadastriplaanidel on kunagise sadama kohal vaid põllud. Talud puuduvad siin ka 18. sajandi kaartidel, millelt võib aga teada saada, et kirikualust küngast nimetati siis Linnamäeks. Künga veerel kündes olevat kohalikud talupojad leidnud puidust palissaadi jäänuseid.

1963. aastal toimusid Tornimäe künga idanõlval seoses tee õgvendamisega avariikaevamised Aita Kustini juhtimisel (joon. 2). Kaevandis paljandusid kohati põlenud kivikobarad, arvatavalt leesemed. Leiumaterjal (koosnes valdavalt keraamikast, sekka ka mõningaid metall- ja luuesemeid) dateeriti I at. teisest poolest kuni II at. alguseni. Teised avariikaevamised toimusid samuti A. Kustini juhtimisel Tornimäel 1968. a. Seekord kaevasid arheoloogid läbi vaid tee ehitusel hunnikusse lükatud mulla. Leiumaterjal sarnanes 1963. a. saadule.

1997. aastal toimus Marika Mägi juhtimisel mitmeid inspeksioone Tornimäe oletatavasse sadamakohta. Nende käigus määrati kindlaks asula kultuurikihi ulatus ning fosfaadisaldus. Nende tööde otseseks jätkuks olid siin 2004. aastal läbi viidud kaevamised.

2004. aastal avati 80 m<sup>2</sup> suurune kaevand Tornimäe õigeusu kirikust ida poole jääval lagendikul (joon. 3, 4). Leiud ja luud registreeriti 50 x 50 cm täpsusega kihtide kaupa. Kuna kaevendi kohal oli sadu aastaid küntud põldu, oli kultuurikiht eriti ülemistes kihtides tugevasti segatud. Mättaalusest kihist ei saadud peaaegu üldse muinasaegseid leide.

Umbes 25 cm sügavusel paljandus kaevandi keskosas rusikasuurustest, põhiliselt raudkividest kiht, mida ümbritsev muld oli eriti intensiivselt must. Laiguti leidis kihis põlenud (kerise?)kive, mis aga



ei moodustanud kusagil selgeid tuleasemeid. Sellest kihist saadi valdav enamik luid ja leide. Väikeste raudkivide kiht kattis umbes ristkülikukujulise, u. 40 m<sup>2</sup> suuruse ala, mille kaevand diagonaalselt läbi lõikas.

Nimetatud kihi näol võib tõmmata paralleeli Põide maalinna hoonejäänustega, mis kuuluvad samasse esiajaloolisesse perioodi. Põide maalinna kaevati aastatel 1990–1994. Eelpoolkirjeldatud kiht ümbritses seal kerisahjude jäänuseid ning tähistas seega kunagisi hooneid. Ahjude puudumine nii varasemas A. Kustini kaevandis kui ka 2004. aasta kaevandis Tornimäel võiks osutada siinsete hoonete sessoonsusele. Eeldades, et tegemist oli sadamakohaga, pidi see olema kasutusel eelkõige suvekuudel, mil ahjude järele puudus vajadus. Samas on läbi kaevatud osa Tornimäe kultuurkihist siiski veel liialt väike, et teha kaugemaleulatuvaid järeldusi.

Kaevandi põhja- ja kaguküljel ääristas eelpoolkirjeldatud, väikeste raudkividega kihti 2,5 m laiune väikeste paeplaatide vöönd. Kuigi ka selles leidis mõningal määral leide ja luid, oli neid siin hoopis hõredamalt, kui raudkivide kihis. Nimetatud vööndist veelgi väljapoole, kaevandi põhja- ja lõunaotsa jäi looduslik pinnas, mis paljandus osalt juba mäntaaluses kihis. Luid ja leide saadi siit hõredalt.

Kaevandi lõunapoolsest osast, väikeste paekivide alt tuli välja üksikute suurematest paeplaatidest konstruktsioonijäänus. Kivid moodustasid selgepiirilise kaare (joon. 5). Tundub, et need olid ümbritsenud mingit varasemat, võib-olla puidust konstruktsiooni läbimõõduga 2–2,75 m. Mida see enesest võis kujutada, jäi selgusetuks. Igal juhul oli konstruktsioon lõhutud juba sadamakoha kasutusajal ning kaetud paeklibukihiga.

Valdava osa Tornimäe leiumaterjalist moodustas keraamika (joon. 6: 1–4). Kuigi suurem osa kilde pärines majapidamismõõdudest, leidis ka viikingiaegseid joon- ja siksakornamendiga anumate kilde. Muust leiuainesest võiks mainida ehtenõela katket (joon. 6: 5), hõbeplateeringu fragmenti, poolikut helmest ja mõningaid raudteravikke, võib-olla naaskleid. Leidus ka löikejälgedega luutükke ning üks luueseme fragment. Luumaterjali hulgas oli rohkesti kalaluid, aga ka hülgeluid. Dateeritav muinas-egne leiumaterjal kuulub 8.–10. sajandisse.

Tornimäe kaevand lõikas ilmselt mingit eri kivikihina eristatavat konstruktsiooni, tõenäoliselt hoone alust, mida ümbritses u 2,5 m laiune paelatakatest vöönd. NO–SW-suunas oli konstruktsiooni pikkus avatud osas 8,5 m, SO–NW-suunas 5,5 m. Pole kindel, kas tegemist oli ühe hoone jäänustega või mitme eriaegse hoonepõhjaga. Hoone või hooned on olnud tõenäoliselt ristpalkehitud, mingeid jälgi postiaukudest või ka näiteks saviga üle mätsitud seintest ei leitud.

Tornimäe leiuaines ei paku kindlat tõestust, et koht oli kasutusel sadamakohana. Sadamakohtade leiuainese sarnasus tavaliste asulakohtade omaga on siiski laialt levinud nähtus ning koht määratletakse kunagiseks sadamaks pigem topograafiliste näitajate põhjal. Võimalik, et Tornimäe mahajätmene u. 1000. aasta paiku oli tingitud maakerkest põhjustatud muutustest, mis tegid veesõidukite ligipääsu konkreetsele kohale keeruliseks.