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ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE DESTROYED PART OF THE VÕMMORSKI SETTLEMENT SITE

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The Võmmorski village (formerly also known as *Tsüdsinä*) is located in South-East Estonia, Võru County, Meremäe municipality in the ethnic Seto region, traditionally belonging to the so-called Üle-Pelska area or *nulk* (*nulk* or *kolk* is an informal administrative unit used by the Seto people). The settlement site lies in the central part of the Võmmorski village, north of Obinitsa – Pechory (Petseri) road, occasionally reaching the old river bed of Piusa in the north. The settlement has been previously excavated by Heiki Valk (Valk 1995).

In spring 2009 Aare Hõrn, the cultural councillor of The Union of Rural Municipalities of Setomaa, discovered that relatively large-scale earthwork had been carried out in the protected settlement site in the village of Võmmorski.¹ He informed a hobby archaeologist Arvis Kiristaja about the situation who visited the site in late spring and noticed that the part of the settlement site was destroyed in a relatively large scale by a bulldozer – the cultural layer containing numerous sherds of pottery was heaped up in a pile. The cultural layer had been disturbed south-east of the buildings of Suvijõe cadastral unit (Fig. 1). Ceramics were also found in an area of the disturbed settlement site.



Fig. 1. The disturbed part of the settlement site of Võmmorski. View from the south-east.

Jn 1. Võmmorski asulakoha lõhutud osa. Vaade kagust.

Photo / Foto: Anti Lillak

¹ No. 13604 in the National Registry of Monuments.

In August 2009, the University of Tartu carried out archaeological research, financed by the National Heritage Board. On the surface of the area, where the part of the cultural layer had been removed, several darker spots were distinguished. The disturbed area was cleaned out and the darker areas were drafted on the site plan (Fig. 2). The main aim of the investigations was to determine the extent of the destruction and the character of the preserved part of the cultural layer, and also to date the settlement site.

The area of the destroyed cultural layer was about 450 m². Possibly an up to 62 cm thick layer of soil had been removed in the area and only an about up to 30 cm thick lower part of the cultural layer had been preserved. The soil was dark grey or dark brown in colour. Several darker spots were distinguished, forming two major concentration areas – one in the central part of the destroyed area, another in the southern part of it. The cultural layer had been entirely removed in the northern part of the investigated area, revealing only light yellow sand (virgin layer). The landowner did not intend to do any further earthwork, thus the archaeological research was limited to a trial pit measuring of 3 × 1 m in the southern part of the destroyed area and several small-scale trial pits with diameters of ca. 30 cm. In addition remains of a brick oven were unearthed.

TRIAL PIT

The trial pit was 3 m in length (from north-northeast to south-southwest; the axis of the pit were in fact 15 degrees in azimuth) and 1 m in width. The location of the trial pit was determined by a fragmented sherd of hand-made pottery (Fig. 5: 2) found in the area of dark grey soil, which was interpreted in the course of the excavation as remains of a hearth. In the area of the trial pit a 15–20 cm thick cultural layer covered natural dark yellow sand. In the northern part of the trial pit a single layer of sparsely clustered stones ca. 50 cm in diameter contained a skeleton of a young, about 2–6 months old pig (*Sus scrofa domesticus*).² Another stone cluster (up to 80 cm in diameter) was revealed in the eastern part of the pit. Assumingly half of the cluster outreached the area of the trial pit. The third stone cluster was found in the southern part of the pit. It marked a shallow (up to 10 cm deep

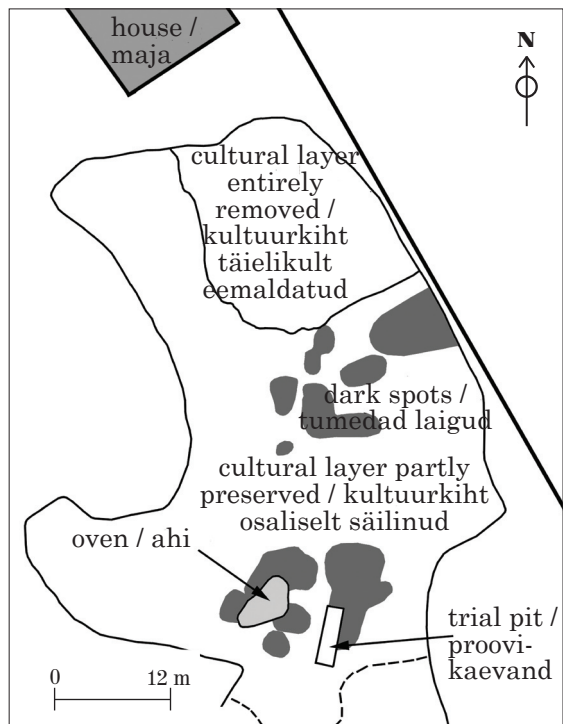


Fig. 2. Site plan of the disturbed part of the site.
Jn 2. Asula lõhutud osa üldpilaan.

Drawing / Joonis: Anti Lillak

² The species and the age of the animal bones were identified by Eve Rannamäe (TÜ).

and about 20–25 cm wide) artificial groove stretching from north-west to south-east with remains of unburnt wood. A preserved detail of a wooden post rammed into the ground was revealed (Fig. 3). The stones were scotched in the groove, probably to underprop the posts. The groove also contained several animal bones and charcoal. The construction presumably represented remains of a fence. The stones in the trial pit were mostly quite small; only few of them reached about 20 cm in diameter. However, the function of the cluster remains unclear, because none of the stone clusters can be definitely interpreted as a hearth or a fire-place.

2 m west-northwest from the trial pit a dense cluster of stones and bricks – evidently remains of a Modern Era oven – was revealed (Fig. 4). It measured about 3 × 1.8 m. A Russian 1 kopek³ dating from 1798 was found from the thin layer covering the remains of the oven in addition to several sherds of pottery, including a fragment of hand-made Rõuge-type pottery (see Fig. 5: 1).



Fig. 3. The trial pit. An artificial groove with stones and remains of wooden posts. View from the south-southwest.

Jn 3. Proovikaevand. Kunstlik kraav kivide ja puupostide jäänustega. Vaade lõunaedelast. Photo / Foto: Anti Lillak



Fig. 4. The remains of an oven. View from the north-west.

Jn 4. Ahju jäänused. Vaade loodest. Photo / Foto: Anti Lillak

³ TÜ 1752: 225.

FINDS

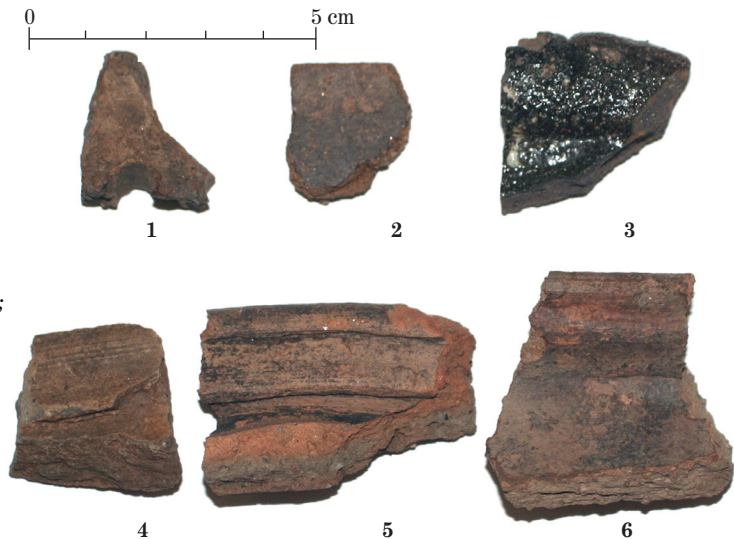
The find material of the settlement mainly consisted of ceramics. A few pottery sherds most likely belong to hand-made vessels – for example, a fragment of fine ceramics (Fig. 5: 2) and pieces of Rõuge-type pottery with holes in the rim (Fig. 5: 1). The holes are a bit larger than those of a typical Rõuge-type vessel. The hand-made pottery suggested that the settlement site was formed in the Viking Age (9th–10th century). In the 11th century hand-made pottery was used in the region of Setomaa mostly in the context of burial traditions (see for example Aun 2009, 79; Laul & Valk 2007, 32, fig. 25), while in everyday use wheel-thrown pottery already prevailed. A line-ornamented sherd of a wheel-thrown ceramics⁴ can be dated to the Latest Iron Age. One cannot exclude that a couple of sherds with wave ornament may also date from that period. Finds that may originate from the Medieval Period are represented by a single rim of a vessel⁵ resembling the form present in the 15th – the beginning of the 16th century.⁶ The scarceness of the medieval find material at the site indicates that the main core of the Võmmorski settlement had previously been somewhere else in the vicinity, because the village is first mentioned in the Pskov census books (*писцовые книги*) from 1585–1587 (Kiristaja 2009, 217).

The majority of the fragments of wheel-thrown vessels (Fig. 5: 4–6) could be dated to the 17th–19th century and a single heavily burnt fragment of a vessel (Fig. 5: 3) might indicate, that the clay vessels had been made at the site (pers. comm. Andres Tvauri (TÜ)). The tradition of making archaic pottery was common in the vicinity of Pechory even in the 19th century and it ceased to exist only in the 1940s (Niidu 1978, 88).

Fig. 5. Ceramics from the settlement site.
1 – fragment of hand-made Rõuge-type pottery;
2 – fragment of hand-made fine ceramics;
3 – fragment of a heavily burnt clay vessel;
4–6 – fragments of wheel-thrown ceramics.

Jn 5. Asulakoha keraamika.
1 – Rõuge tüüpi nõu katke;
2 – käsitsivalmistatud peenkeraamika katke;
3 – suures kuumuses porsunud nõu katke;
4–6 – kedrakeraamika katked.

Photo / Foto: Anti Lillak
(TÜ 1752: 227; 79; 238; 226; 39; 237.)



⁴ TÜ 1752: 96.

⁵ TÜ 1752: 123.

⁶ Ceramics of the Latest Iron Age and the Middle Ages were dated by Arvi Haak (TM).

The 20th century was also represented in the find material. The finds from different periods were mixed up and no separate layers could be distinguished in the settlement site.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, on the base of the find material the oldest settlement phase likely dates from the Viking Age. The fragments of pottery dating precisely from the Latest Iron Age and the Middle Ages are very rare in the find material, but most of the cultural layer of these periods may exist in the undisturbed, yet unexamined part of the site. It is likely that the settlement site was most intensively used during the Modern Era.

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ARHEOLOOGILISED JÄRELUURINGUD VÕMMORSKI ASULAKOHA LÕHUTUD ALAL

Anti Lillak

Võmmorski asulakoht paikneb Piusa jõest vahetult lõunas, jäädes Obinita – Petseri maanteest põhja poole. 2009. a kevadel avastas Setomaa Valdade Liidu kultuurinõunik Aare Hörn, et Võmmorski külas (Meremäe vald, Võru maakond) on arheoloogilise asulakoha alal, Suvijõe katastriüksuse hoonetest kagus, tehtud suuri pinnasetöid. Kevad-suvel kohta inspekteerinud harrastusarheoloog Arvis Kiristaja tuvastas, et märkimisväärne osa asulakoha kultuurkihist on buldooseriga kokku lükatud. Sama aasta augustis tegid Tartu Ülikooli arheoloogid asulakoha lõhutud osal arheoloogilisi uuringuid, mida rahastas Muinsuskaitseamet.

Asulakoha lõhutud ala suurus oli umbes 450 m² (jn 1) ning sellelt oli kultuurkihti eemaldatud nähtavasti kuni 62 cm paksuselt. Avariiala põhjaosas oli kultuurkiht täielikult eemaldatud ja seal paljandus kollane alusliiv. Mujal oli kultuurkihti säilinud kuni 30 cm paksuselt, kusjuures võis valdavalt tumehallis või tumepruunis pinnases eristada mitmeid tumedamaid laike (jn 2).

Lõhutud alale tehti 3 × 1 m suurune proovikaevand, milles paljandus kolm suhteliselt väikestest kividest ladet. Neist põhjapoolseimas hõredas ühekihilises kihivunnikus leiti noore, 2–6 kuu vanuse sea luustik. Proovikaevandi lõunaosas tuli välja

umbes kuni 10 cm sügavune ja 20–25 cm laiune loode – kagu-suunaline kraav, kust leiti põlemata puidu jäänused. Neist üks oli otsapidi maasse surutud puupost (jn 3). Kraavi servi katsid kivid, mis pidid tõenäoliselt poste toetama. Ehituskonstruksiooni puhul võib tegemist olla kunagise tara jäänustega.

Proovikaevandist 2 m lääneloodes puhastati välja kividest ja tellistest ahju vare, mille mõõtmed olid ligikaudu 3 × 1,8 m (jn 4). Puhastamisel leiti muuhulgas üks 1798. a Vene kopikas, samuti käsitsivormitud nõu katke, mis kuulub nn Rõuge tüüpi keraamikale (jn 5: 1). Leiumaterjali seas leidis veel üksikuid käsikeraamika katkeid (nt jn 5: 2), mis viitavad, et siin on elatud juba viikingiajal. Hilisrauaaega võib kuuluda üks tihedate joontega kaunistatud kedranõukild ja paar laineornamendiga kedrakeraamikakatket. Ka keskaega võib dateerida vaid ühe servakillu, mis meenutab 15. sajandist 16. sajandi alguseni levinud nõutuüpe. Valdav enamik keraamikast kuulub 17.–19. sajandisse (jn 5: 4–6) ning ka 20. sajandisse. Üks tugevas kuumuses porsunud savinõukild (jn 5: 3) võib viidata kohalikule pottsepatööle, millega tegeleti mõnes Petseri ümbruse külas teadaolevalt veel kuni 1940. aastateni.