

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FIELDWORK  
IN ESTONIA**

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**ARHEOLOOGILISED  
VÄLITÖÖD EESTIS**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT PIKASILLA VOOREMÄGI HILL FORT AND SETTLEMENT SITE

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### INTRODUCTION

In 2004 Puka local municipality launched a spatial planning project on the area involving Pikasilla Vooremägi hill fort and its closest surroundings (Fig. 1). The planning included several alterations in the landscape that needed archaeological investigations in order to determine the extent and character of the cultural layer, both on the plateau and the foot of the hill fort. Excavations at the hill fort were also part of a research project with the aim to establish the chronology of hill forts in South Estonia.



*Fig. 1. Location of Pikasilla Vooremägi.*

*Jn 1. Pikasilla Vooremäe asendiskeem.*

*Drawing / Joonis: Martti Veldi*

Archaeological excavations at Pikasilla hill fort and settlement site were carried out at the second half of July in 2009 in co-operation between the University of Tartu and National Heritage Board. The excavations of 2009 had two main aims: firstly, to study the cross section of the hill fort's plateau in order to date different activity layers as precisely as possible; and secondly, to determine the area and the dating of the settlement site surrounding the hill fort. The latter was also vital for the planning in progress.

### **LOCATION OF THE SITES AND PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS**

Pikasilla Vooremägi hill fort is situated in South Estonia, close to the very southern tip of Lake Võrtsjärv, on the eastern shore of the lake, next to the outlet of River Väike-Emajõgi. According to current administration the site is located in Purtsi village, Puka municipality, Valga County, but historically the village belonged to Aakre manor in Rõngu parish.

Vooremägi is a natural moraine hillock formed by melting ice at the end of the last Ice Age (about 12 000 BP). The hillock that has been artificially steepened and heaped higher is surrounded by marsh areas (Väike-Emajõgi water meadow and Võrtsjärve Lowlands), so that during high water in spring and autumn the region is over-flooded. Only a small area around the fort, partly covered with the settlement cultural layers is not endangered by high water floods. The high area around the fort was evidently insufficient for granting agrarian subsistence for the inhabitants of the settlement. With the top elevation of 49 m a.s.l. Vooremägi is the highest point in the landscape in the neighboring areas. At the foot of the hill fort high ground meets the lake without extensive wetlands, and this situation is quite uncommon in the surroundings. There is a small local harbour site at the foot of the hill fort also in the present time.

The plateau of the Vooremägi hill is flat with no visible rampart remaining on its rim. The oval plateau measures only 1200 m<sup>2</sup>, and because of various earthworks is relatively uneven. The foot of the hill fort is encircled by a flat terrace boarded by four 1–2 m high ridges, which are probably not man-made, but remains of the hillocks natural slopes. It seems that they have been separated from the main part of the hill by extensive soil removal and have also been dug steeper (Tõnisson 2008, 304).

For the first time Pikasilla Vooremägi was archaeologically investigated in 1952, when Harri Moora excavated several trial pits on its plateau (Moora 1952). He discovered the top of the hillock unevenly covered with a 25–40 cm thick cultural layer containing different traces of human activity. According to the finds – wheel-thrown pottery and pieces of clay bricks<sup>1</sup> Moora dated the fort to the Late Iron Age (11th–13th century). He even speculated that the building tradition of the hill fort's defense constructions might be comparable to that of the Lõhavere stronghold (Moora 1955, 81) that probably belonged to the Estonian senior Lembitu, but further investigations proved him wrong.

During a field survey in 2007 (see Konsa & Ots 2008, 235) a fistful of presumably Viking Age and wheel-thrown, presumably Latest Iron Age pottery shards<sup>2</sup> were discovered on the south-western foot of the hill fort, suggesting that the area was used as an open settlement, probably simultaneously with the hill fort. The new finds gave ground to an assumption that the hill fort might have been established already during the Viking Age (800–1050). Amongst other finds a Stone Age flint chip was found, pointing to the traces of Mesolithic or Neolithic hunter-gatherers in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> AI 4058.

<sup>2</sup> TÕ 1612.

**WRITTEN SOURCES AND ORAL TRADITION**

Pikasilla hill fort is located close to the place where the historical land route between Latest Iron Age Sakala and Ugandi districts crossed the River Väike-Emajõgi. Throughout the Middle Ages and up to the late 19th century the main route of communication between Tartu and Viljandi was via Pikasilla ('of the Long Bridge'). Pikasilla (Germ. *Langebrücke*) is first recorded in written sources in 1398, when the Teutonic Order and the Bishop of Tartu signed a peace treaty after a military conflict that lasted from 1396 to 1398 (Baltisches historisches Ortslexikon 1985, 288). Most probably the treaty was signed next to the crossing of the River Väike-Emajõgi, which also served as a historic border line.

The toponym Vooremägi can be found in various written forms on several historical maps. The earliest of the maps dates from 1684, there Vooremägi is depicted as a square-shaped hillock (Fig. 2) named *Woremeggi ell*, *Wore backe*. Vooremägi hillock as a special landscape mark is also drawn in the atlas of Mellin in 1793 as *Woramäggi* (EAA 854-4-470-7), and on the special map of Livonia compiled by cartographer Rücker in 1839 as *Wohro mäggi* (EAA 1809-2-293). In all of these maps also Pikasilla tavern (Germ. *Lange Brügg*, *Lange Brücke*) as a focal point for travelers using the historic war and trading route is marked.

The toponym 'Vooremägi' is probably not connected with the geographic term 'voor' used to signify in Estonian oblong oval large moraine hillocks, but might be related to the term 'vooris käima', which means transporting market or military goods from one location to another. Even today the locals tell stories that still at the beginning of the 20th century the surroundings of Vooremägi was used as a storage place while transporting goods over long distances, especially in winter time when special



Fig. 2. Pikasilla Vooremägi on a Swedish map from 1684.  
 Jn 2. Pikasilla Vooremägi 1684. a katastrikaardil.  
 (EAA 308-2-98.)

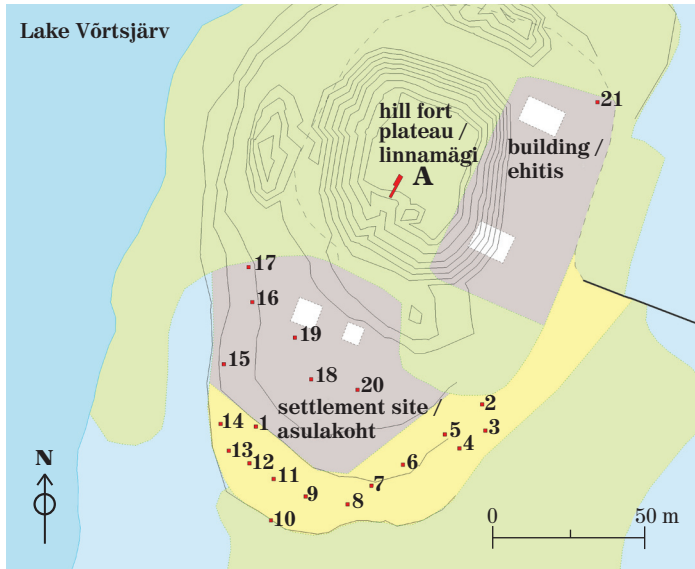


Fig. 3. Location of the excavation trench (A) and trial pits (1–21).

Jn 3. Kaevandi (A) ja prooviaukude (1–21) asupaigad.

Drawing / Joonis: Martti Veldi

snow routs across Lake Võrtsjärv could be used.<sup>3</sup> The local lore tells also much about the cellars in the hill. In 2009, one depression on the plateau was said to have been formed on a formerly flat area, only before World War II – probably as a result of the collapse of some hidden cellar.

According to local oral folk tradition (Reinman 1928, 1–2) Vooremägi was owned by a rich and powerful merchant known as Vooru Andres. Andres had built a fortification on the top of the hill, and used it to look for cargo ships sailing on Lake Võrtsjärv in order to pirate them. The local lore recorded in the late 19th century (Eisen 2002) also tells us that Vooru Andres had a spectacular merchant fleet, which he used to trade with Hansaetic towns like Tartu, Viljandi and Pärnu, making a lot of profit. Finally Vooru Andres ended up in a conflict with traders from Tartu, who besieged his fort. When the tradesman tried to escape by a small boat, he was forced to seek refuge on a near-by lake called Andresjärv, where he starved to death (Kirschbaum 1921, 54–56). *Andretzen Lacus* is already depicted on the map of 1684.

Besides archaeological relevance, Vooremägi, situated on the borders of four historic church parishes, has been a traditional get together location over the centuries. The site has hosted several singing stages, both on the top plateau and on the terrace enclosing the hillock.

### **EXCAVATIONS AT THE HILL FORT IN 2009**

One of the main aims of the excavations in 2009 was to obtain some information about the character of the cultural layer and chronology of the hill fort's possible fortifications. Methodologically the most efficient way to accomplish that was by studying the stratigraphy of the cross section of their presumable location.

<sup>3</sup> Oral comment by Aksel Tiideberg (owner of Voore farmstead).

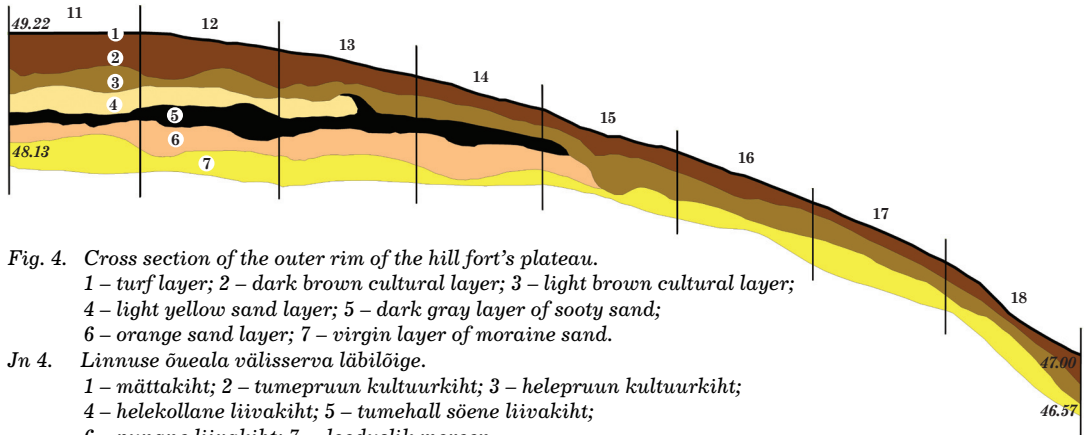


Fig. 4. Cross section of the outer rim of the hill fort's plateau.

1 – turf layer; 2 – dark brown cultural layer; 3 – light brown cultural layer;  
 4 – light yellow sand layer; 5 – dark gray layer of sooty sand;  
 6 – orange sand layer; 7 – virgin layer of moraine sand.

Jn 4. Linnuse õueala välisserva läbilõige.

1 – mättakiht; 2 – tumepruun kultuurkiht; 3 – helepruun kultuurkiht;  
 4 – helekollane liivakiht; 5 – tumehall sõene liivakiht;  
 6 – punane liivakiht; 7 – looduslik moreen.

Drawing / Joonis: Martti Veldi

As Pikasilla Vooremägi hill fort does not have a visible rampart, the excavation trench of 8 m in length and 1.5 m in width was established on the southern perimeter of the hill fort's plateau (Fig. 3). Based on preliminary observations, the trench was made close to the potential gateway to the hill fort, which today is marked by a path leading from the hill's foot to the plateau. On the way to the hill, just below the trench, there is a lower plateau that was at first interpreted as an inner courtyard of the fort, meant to serve as a tiny 'outer bailey' of the main plateau. The character of landscape features also allowed hypothesizing that the location could give some information on the possible fortifications on the edge of the main plateau.

### ***Stratigraphy of the cross section***

The cross section of the hill fort's outer rim of the plateau (Fig. 4) revealed six different layers, containing remains of human activity at least from two completely different time periods – the Mesolithic and the Medieval Period (13th–14th century). The overall thickness of the cultural layer was approximately 0.9–1 m.

Under the turf layer a 20–25 cm thick dark brown cultural layer was revealed. It contained different finds including mostly pottery shards (both, imported stoneware and local wheel-thrown pottery), pieces of bricks, but also two silver coins and enameled pieces of imported glass. Amongst other finds the upper horizons of the layer revealed many pieces of bomb shells, referring to intense military activity during the battles of the World War II. The dark brown layer was followed by a 10–15 cm thick light brown cultural layer which was almost identical to the previous dark brown one, but somewhat less intensive both in color and finds. The general dating of the layers 2 and 3, based on artefacts is the second half of the 13th and the first half of the 14th century.

After the brown layers a light yellow sand layer (thickness 10–15 cm) was unearthed. The sand layer was probably carried to the top of the hill fort and spread over its plateau in order to even out the ground for building. It contained no finds and it probably dates from the beginning of the medieval period on the hill fort.

A dark gray layer of sooty sand (10–15 cm in thickness) containing chips and shards of flint stone, mainly process residue was reached after removing the yellow sand. While no pottery shards were found from this layer, it is highly likely that the layer might date from the Mesolithic, though  $^{14}\text{C}$ -analyses are still to be done. As the layer was extremely dark for a normal Stone Age cultural layer, it could represent the area of some building (pers. comm. Mari Lõhmus (TÜ)). Under this, an orange sand layer (10–15 cm thick) containing only pieces of flint stone was revealed. The upper horizons of the layer had also traces of soot in it. The sand layers most likely represent two different stages of a Mesolithic settlement, when Pikasilla hillock was a small island in Lake Võrtsjärv, and probably served as a seasonal stopping place for Stone Age hunter-gatherers. These Stone Age layers were followed by the virgin layer of moraine sand. At the top of the plateau moraine sand was revealed at an average height of 48.1 m a.s.l.

Surprisingly the cross section of the hill fort revealed no evidence of burning or military activity, suggesting that the fort was not conquered but abandoned. Also no signs of any fortifications, neither earthen ramparts nor wooden or stone constructions, could be detected. Only traces of a possible clay floor were discovered in the northern part of the trench that was part of the light brown cultural layer.

### **Finds**

The finds<sup>4</sup> from the 10 m<sup>2</sup> trench are abundant – more than 300 artifact finds were discovered, the number of bone finds also exceeded 300.

The finds consisted mostly of small pieces of pottery, only wheel-thrown pottery was found from the hill fort plateau. Amongst regular local pottery, 16 shards of stoneware were also discovered (Fig. 5).<sup>5</sup> The earliest pieces of stoneware originate from Siegburg (group Sieg2: Russow 2006), and are generally dated to the middle of the 13th – second half of the 14th century, but also shards from southern Lower Saxony representing the



Fig. 5. Shards of Siegburg and Southern-Lower-Saxony near-stoneware jugs, 13th–14th century.

Jn 5. Siegburgi ja Lõuna-Alam-Saksi varakivikeraamiliste kannude katked 13.–14. sajandist.

(TÜ 1772: 41, 60, 73, 98, 131, 153.)

Photo / Foto: Martti Veldi

<sup>4</sup> TÜ 1772.

<sup>5</sup> Identified by Arvi Haak (TM).

<sup>6</sup> Identified by Mauri Kiudsoo (AI).



Fig. 6. Riga dreipölder 1623 (1) and Tartu Bishop's bracteate (2) from the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century.

Jn 6. Riia dreipölder 1623 (1) ja Tartu piiskopi brakteaat (2) 13. sajandi lõpust või 14. sajandi algusest.

(TÜ 1772: 25, 144.)

Photo / Foto: Martti Veldi

groups Lasx2 and Lasx3 (Russow 2006) dating from 1275–1350 AD were found. All the pieces of imported pottery were unearthed from the upper horizons of the cultural layer. In South Estonia stoneware is very rarely found from rural regions, while it is more common for medieval towns that had overseas connections through the Hanseatic League.

Besides imported and local pottery, two silver coins (Fig. 6) were also discovered from the same horizons of the cultural layer. The first coin (Fig. 6: 1) was discovered directly beneath the turf layer, and is a *dreipölder* minted in 1623 in Riga.<sup>6</sup> The holes in both edges of the coin suggest that it belonged to a necklace or was fixed to some textile item. The dating of the coin does not correlate with other finds, so the coin was probably accidentally lost long after the site had been abandoned. Probably, it might refer to the use of the hillock as a popular gathering site. The other coin (Fig. 6: 2) is a bracteate minted by the Bishop of Tartu during the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century, and very effectively dates the hill fort's early medieval period.

Exceptional finds are also two pieces of enameled glass that probably originate from Italy, and are remains of a beaker (pers. comm. Ain Mäesalu (TÜ)). Although, the glass pieces are extremely miniature, they constitute that the hill fort was a place of power and wealth.

More than 1/3 (altogether 123) of the finds consisted of pieces of flint stone, which were found from all parts of the cultural layer, though the dark gray and the orange sand layer contained exclusively only flint stone. The flint stone finds are relatively small, mostly pieces of process residue, although several nice flakes and chips are also included (Fig. 7). As no Stone Age pottery was found with the flint stone, it can be assumed that the layers originate from the Mesolithic.



Fig. 7. Flint stone finds from the lower horizons of the hill fort's cultural layer.

Jn 7. Tulekivileiud linnuse kultuurkihi alumistest horisontidest.

(TÜ 1772: 253, 292, 299, 301, 311, 319.)

Photo / Foto: Martti Veldi

### INVESTIGATIONS AT THE SETTLEMENT SITE

On the settlement site at the foot of the hill fort 21 trial pits (Fig. 3) were dug, mostly south west from it. There the cultural layer could be observed on an area of ca. 0.9 ha.





Fig. 8. Wheel-thrown vessel from the trial pit no. 1.

Jn 8. Prooviaugust nr 1 leititud kedrakeraamiline nõu.

(TÜ 1773: 1.)

Photo / Foto: Martti Veldi

On the lake side, the settlement area had a steep slope, falling sharply down to the marshy meadow, overgrown with bushes. The core area of the settlement has not long ago been an orchard of a small farm, which today is replaced by a summer cottage. The investigations showed that during the construction of the new cottage a substantial part of the cultural layer had been removed.

All of the trial pits established on the small peninsula south west from the hill fort gave evidence of a thick intensive cultural layer rich in finds from different periods. The thickness and richness of the cultural layer was best characterized by the trial pit no. 1, which revealed a whole wheel-thrown pot (Fig. 8). The trial pits also showed that the cultural layer was relatively similar all over the investigated area. In most cases it was about 50–60 cm of dark brown soil

without any specific stratigraphy. As the surrounding areas are wet and marshy, several pits were over-flooded by ground water before reaching the virgin soil.

While the hill fort's cultural layer contained only traces of Medieval and probably Mesolithic activities, the trial pits also gave evidence from the Neolithic, and also Pre-Viking or Viking Age. In several trial pits beneath the medieval layer shards of Neolithic Comb Ware (both Typical and Late) pottery (Fig. 9), and also pieces of flint were found. There were also a couple of pottery shards with line and wave ornament, that might date from the Latest Iron Age, but in the light of hill fort's finds these pieces are most likely of medieval origin.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the archaeological data gathered in 2009, the dates and stratigraphy of the cultural layer both on the Vooremägi hill fort and on the settlement site were considerably specified. The excavations carried out on the hill fort showed that the main using period of the hill was the 13th century and the 14th century. There was no definite evidence that the hill fort had been inhabited during the Viking Age or the Latest Iron Age, which are the main periods for fortifying hills as power centres, military or trading sites.

The excavations also pointed out that the edge of the hill plateau close to the supposed entrance had not been thoroughly fortified, neither with earthen ramparts nor with wooden or stone constructions. Another vital aspect was that the hill fort's cross section gave no evidence of any burning or destruction, suggesting that the fort was abandoned, but not conquered or destroyed. The finds also contain no evidence of military action what so ever.

All the above mentioned refers to a possibility that Pikasilla Vooremägi has not acted as a 'hill fort' in the traditional meaning of the word. The finds and character of the

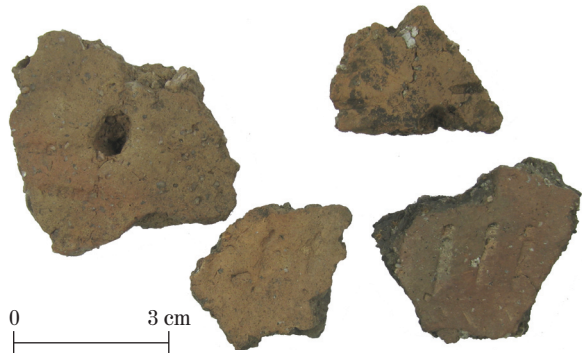
cultural layer enable us to suggest that the hill and its closest surroundings were rather used as a trading place or a toll station, or both at the same time, but the hill may have also been the dwelling site of some local magnate. Intensive life activities on the hill are shown also by the thickness of the cultural layer. The sites' natural and political location on the border line between Tartu Bishopric and Teutonic Order, and on the crossing of important water and land routes was an excellent place to establish a toll station or a market place. The prestigious or even snobbish finds from the hill point out that trading had to be profitable, at least for a while. The finds from the hill also show that the site was in active practice for only a short time, may be just for a century or even one generation – in this case the folk stories about Vooru Andres might have some truth in them.

Very strangely, before the medieval period Vooremägi had been uninhabited for thousands of years. The next traces of human activity are assumedly from the Mesolithic, when the hill was probably used as a seasonal camping site. One interpretation for such a long settlement gap could be that the surrounding areas covered with marshes and forests were unsuitable for cultivation, and the economy of the settlement could only be based on fishing and gathering or later on trading and marketing.

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**Fig. 9.** Neolithic Comb Ware from the settlement site.  
**Jn 9.** Asulakohalt leitud neoliitiline kammkeraamika.  
 (TÜ 1773: 43, 44, 66.)  
 Photo / Foto: Martti Veldi

## ARHEOLOOGILISED UURINGUD PIKASILLA VOOREMÄE LINNUSEL JA ASULAKOHAL

*Martti Veldi ja Heiki Valk*

2004. a algatas Puka vallavalitsus detailplaneeringu Pikasilla Vooremäe linnust ja asulakohta puudutataval kinnistutel (jn 1–2). Planeering nägi ette ka mitmeid pinnasetöid, mille tarbeks oli vaja täpsustada nii linnuse kui ka asulakoha kultuurikihi iseloomu. Samuti olid linnuse uuringud üks osa suuremast uurimisprojektist, mille üheks eesmärgiks on luua Lõuna-Eesti linnuste kronoloogia.

2009. a kaevamiste peamisteks eesmärkideks oli uurida linnuse õueala läbilõiget, dateerimaks kultuurikihi erinevaid ladestusi ning teha kindlaks linnuse jalamit ümbritseva asulakoha ulatus ja vanus.

Varem on Pikasilla Vooremäe linnust arheoloogiliselt uurinud vaid Harri Moora 1952. aastal, kes avastas, et linnuse õueala on kaetud 25–40 cm paksuse kultuurkihiga, mis sisaldas erinevaid inimtegevuse jälgi. Prooviaukudest saadud ketrakeraamika ja tellisetükkide põhjal dateeris Moora linnuse peamiseks kasutusajaks 11.–13. sajandi. 2007. a maastikuinspektsiooniga avastati linnuse jalamilt arvatavasti viikingiaegset käsikeraamikat ja hilisrauaaegset joon- ja lainornamendiga ketrakeraamikat, mille põhjal oletati, et ka linnus võis alguse saada juba viikingiajal. Samuti leiti jälgi kiviaegset kultuurikihist.

Kuna Pikasilla Vooremäe linnusel ei ole silmaga eristatavat valli, siis rajati 8 m pikkune ja 1,5 m laiune tranšee linnuse platoo lõunapoolsele äärealale (jn 3). Esialgsete vaatluste kohaselt võis seal pinnavormide alusel paikneda linnuse eesõu. Linnuse õueala läbilõikes oli võimalik eristada kuute kihistust (jn 4), mis sisaldasid inimtegevuse märke kahest täiesti erinevast perioodist: mesoliitikumist ja keskajast (13.–14. sajand). Üllatavalt ei olnud linnuse õueala profiili läbilõikes võimalik tuvastada ühtegi põlengukihti ega jälge sõjalisest tegevusest, mis annab mõista, et linnus jäeti maha, mitte ei vallutatud ega põletatud.

Linnuse õuelt saadud leiumaterjal oli rikkalik, koosnedes peaaesjalikult savinõukildudest ja tulekivist. Linnuse õueala kultuurikihi ülemised horisondid sisaldasid peamiselt 13. ja 14. sajandi leide. Muuhulgas leiti Lõuna-Eesti maapiirkondades võrdlemisi harva esinevat kivikeraamikat (jn 5), kaks hõbemünti (jn 6) ning kaks arvatavasti Itaalast pärit emailmaalingutega klaaspeekri kildu.

Varakeskaegset ladestust iseloomustavad leiud on omased keskaegsele hansalinnale, mitte maapiirkonnale, ning annavad tunnistust, et 13.–14. sajandil oli Pikasilla Vooremägi oluline jõukuse ja võimu koondumise koht. Enam kui 1/3 leidudest moodustas tulekivi, mida võis leida kõikidest kultuurikihi osadest. Kultuurikihi kaks alumist kihistust sisaldasid ainult tulekivi. Kuna neist kihtidest keraamikat ei leitud, võib suure tõenäosusega tegemist olla mesoliitikumi ulatuvate elutegevusjälgedega. Tulekivileiud on võrdlemisi väikesed, peamiselt töötusjääd, kuid leiti ka paar tulekivi laustu (jn 7).

Asulakoha kultuurikihi määramiseks rajati linnuse jalamist edelasse jäävale poolsaarele 21 prooviauku (jn 3), kus kõigis oli näha leirikast kultuurikihti. Kultuurikihi intensiivsust iseloomustas kõige paremini prooviauk nr 1, millest leiti arvukalt ketrakeraamilise nõu kilde (jn 8). Prooviaukudes paljandunud kultuurikiht oli kogu uuritaval alal võrdlemisi sarnane – ilma erilise stratigraafiata 50–60 cm paksune tumepruun pinnas. Kui linnuse kultuurikiht sisaldas elutegevuse märke ainult varakeskajast ja arvatavasti mesoliitikumist, siis asulakohalt saadi leide neoliitikumist (nii tüüpiline kui hiline kammkeraamika; jn 9), arvatavasti eelviikingi või viikingiajast ning keskajast. Samuti leiti mõned joon- ja lainornamendiga kaunistatud savinõukillud, mis võivad dateeruda ka hilisrauaaega, kuid linnusest saadud leiumaterjali taustal võiksid need olla pigem keskaegsed.

2009. a andmed lubavad arvata, et Pikasilla Vooremägi ei pruukinud olla kasutuses linnusena selle militaarses tähenduses. Linnuse ja asulakoha kultuurikiht näitavad, et pigem võis olla tegemist kaubavahetuskoha või tollipunktiga. Prestiizsed leiud linnusest vihjavad, et mäel võis mõnda aega elada ka kohalik rikas kaupmees. Jõukast kaupmehest Vooru Andresest pajatab ka rahvaluule.

Üllatavalt seisis linnus enne keskaegset asustusperioodi mitu tuhat aastat tühjana – peale 13.–14. sajandi kultuurikihi leiti märke inimtegevusest vaid kiviajast, mil Vooremägi oli ilmselt kütakorilaste hooajaline peatuspaik. Pika asustuslõnga üheks põhjenduseks võib olla vähene põllumajanduslikult haritav maa Vooremäe lähiümbruses, mistõttu asustuse majandus sai põhineda vaid kalapüügil ja korilusel, hiljem aga kaubandusel ja turupidamisel.