



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS ON THE CEMETERY OF ARANKÜLA, RAPLAMAA

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INTRODUCTION

In autumn and winter 2009 archaeological salvage excavations were carried out in the Aranküla village (Rapla parish) in the County of Raplambia. A previously not known early modern pit-grave cemetery was discovered during the reconstruction work carried out at the crossing of the Tallinn–Rapla (road No. 15) and Aranküla–Juuru road (T-20123) (Figs 1–2).¹ Some human skeletons had been discovered by the road builders and the work was stopped for archaeological investigations. The site was known by local inhabitants as a place where some people had been buried during the World War II. Inspection by local police officials brought to light some Soviet Red Army equipment, but archaeologist Armin Rudi, Raplambia county inspector of the National Heritage Board, also found a glass bead which hinted at the existence of a village cemetery dating



Fig. 1. Aranküla burial site before the salvage excavations in October 2009 after the road works were stopped and police inspected the site. Discovered burials are marked by pegs. View from the north.

Jn 1. Aranküla kalmistu ala päästekaevamiste eel 2009. a oktoobris pärast teetööde katkestamist ja politseiuuringuid. Tikud tähistavad tuvastatud matuseid. Vaade põhjast.

Photo / Foto: Villu Kadakas

¹ Village cemeteries of North Estonia have been discussed in a diploma thesis compiled by Ain Lavi in 1974 (Lavi 1974).

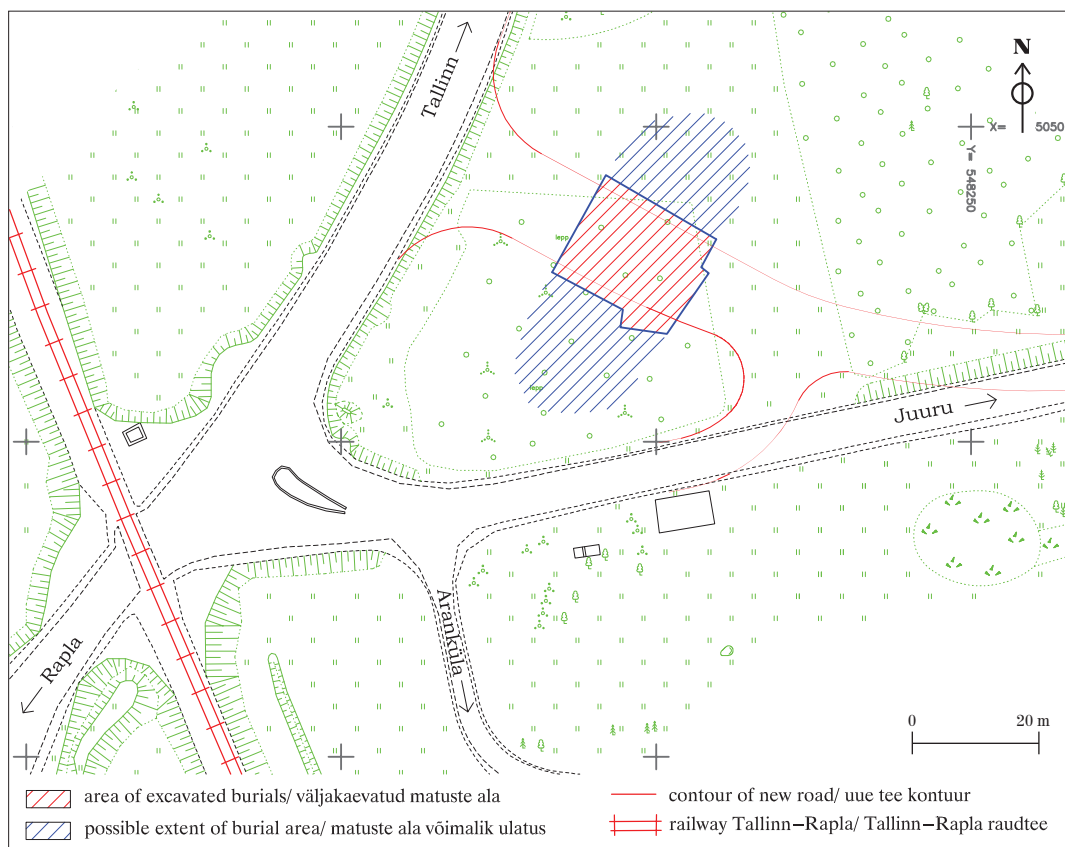


Fig. 2. Situation plan of Aranküla cemetery.

Jn 2. Aranküla kalmistu asendiplaan.

Drawing / Joonis: Villu Kadakas

from the 17th–18th centuries. During preliminary archaeological investigations in late October 2009 some more glass beads, 17th century Swedish copper coins and some silver brooches were found and at least 25 human burials in this early modern cemetery were identified.

As the suggestions to change the course of the road for saving the cemetery failed, and the burials would not have preserved beneath the new road, it was decided that all the burials in the new road area should be removed during extensive archaeological excavation. The cemetery has probably extended slightly northwards and southwards from the excavated area and those burials remained untouched by the works. The preliminary investigations were financed by the National Heritage Board, and the salvage excavations by Estonian Road Administration. The anthropological study of the skeletons was unfortunately not financed, but the skeletons from the early modern burials as well as the artefacts² will be preserved in the Institute of History of Tallinn University.

² AI 6942.

BURIALS FROM THE WORLD WAR II

Remains of at least three soldiers who had been fighting on the Soviet side were uncovered in a 50–60 cm deep pit dug in the south-western edge of the excavation area (Fig. 3). The items found with the buried included parts of a Russian M91/30 rifle cleaning kit, a Red Army personnel identification case with an unfilled label, single Russian rifle cartridges, a Red Army aluminium spoon, a pre-war Soviet 10 kopeck coin, an enamel covered British Army flask from World War II period etc. The soldiers had most probably fallen during clashes with German troops in late August 1941.

VILLAGE CEMETERY

The early modern cemetery of Aranküla has been situated on the crossings of the Tallinn–Rapla road and a smaller Aranküla–Juuru road (Fig. 2), to the east of the first and to the north from the latter. It has been a historical crossroads where roads from Tallinn and Juuru parish centre have met to continue south-west towards the Rapla parish centre. The place for burials had been chosen on the sloping south-western end of a low ridge oriented in the north-eastern – south-western direction, which forms the northernmost part of the arable lands of the Aranküla village. The burials had been made into a rather small sandy part of the ridge, otherwise consisting of hard to dig gravel, prescribing a natural border for the burial area. Originally the place rose slightly above the surrounding terrain, the difference of heights was most remarkable in the south and west directions where the land drops almost a meter from the level of the cemetery area.

The excavation area with burials measured ca. 400 m² (Figs 2–3). The upper layer measuring approximately one meter had already been removed by the road builders which lead to the discovery of skeletons, leaving thus the area altered from its original state (Fig. 1). Excavations revealed 107 burials or their parts. A large number of them were preserved poorly. Bones collected have not been determined, but deciding by the height of the skeletons, half of the intact burials belonged to children. The burials were made in the depth of 1–1.8 m beneath the original ground surface. Graves were situated more or less in rows stretching from south to north; in some places they formed small clusters. People were buried according to the Christian funerary tradition with their heads generally towards west, although it varied widely from north-east/south-west to north-west/south-east.

Most of the graves contained one single burial, but some exceptions existed. For example burials nos 7 and 8, most probably a mother and child, were put together into one

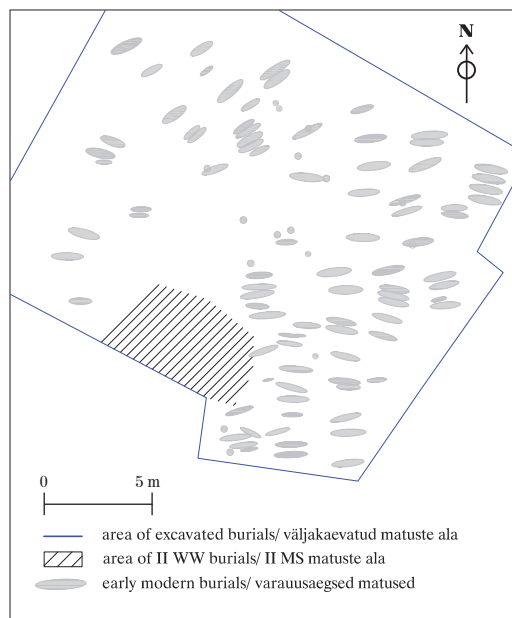


Fig. 3. Plan of burials in Aranküla.

Jn 3. Aranküla matuste plaan.

Drawing / Joonis: Villu Kadakas



Fig. 4. Finds from Aranküla cemetery. 1–4 silver brooches, 5 – bronze buckle, 6 – leather belt with bronze links, 7 – bronze link of a leather belt, 8 – studded bronze rim of leggings, 9–10 – glass beads.

Jn 4. Aranküla kalmistu leide. 1–4 – hõbesõled, 5 – pronkspannal, 6 – pronkslülidega nahkvöö, 7 – nahkvöö pronkslül, 8 – sääraste pronksnaastudega kaetud serv, 9–10 – klaashelmed.

(AI 6942: 5, 6, 30, 65, 17, 18, 18, 19, 57, 62.)

Photo / Foto: Villu Kadakas

single grave. The child was on the right side of the adult, its bones partially on top of the latter. Both skeletons were intact so it is not possible that the burial of the child was later. These burials were most probably interred without a coffin. Burials nos 2–4 belonged to children who were also buried side by side so close and on the same level that probably they were buried at the same time. Burials nos 13 and 14 were children who were also buried together. Remains of a wooden coffin and coffin nails were found near their bones. Nevertheless, as can be determined by the height of the skeletons, mostly children were buried together. The positions of hands could be observed in the case of 42 burials: they were mostly on the stomach or on the belt zone, in few cases hands were on the chest area.

Most of the finds were coffin nails. Fragments of wooden coffins were found near 15 burials, one child burial was in an almost intact coffin. Twelve skeletons had glass beads (Fig. 4) as accessories of their burial clothing; several had silver brooches (Fig. 4: 1–4) and Swedish copper coins, mostly 1/6 öres from the second half of the 17th century. Other items found were parts of a leather belt (Fig. 4: 5–7), clothing (e.g. Fig. 4: 8) and knives.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of coins found it can be supposed that the cemetery was used in the 17th century and probably in the beginning of the 18th century. The finds do not have a wide dating range and no burials disturbed by later burials were recorded. It seems that it has not been a regular village cemetery but rather a temporary burial place, perhaps only for the time of famine in 1695–1697 and the last plague in 1710–1712. The temporary character of the site can explain why the place has faded out of memories of the local people. The same place was used for burying soviet soldiers during the World War II.

REFERENCES

Lavi, A. 1974. Põhja-Eesti külakalmete uurimisest. Tartu. Diploma thesis. (*Manuscript in AI.*)

ARHEOLOOGILISED PÄÄSTEKAEVAMISED ARANKÜLA KALMISTUL RAPLA MAAKONNAS

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2009. a sügisel ja talvel toimusid arheoloogilised päästekaevamised Arankülas avastatud matmispaigal. Kalmistu leiti Tallinn–Rapla maantee ja Aranküla–Juuru ristmiku ümberehitustöödel (jn 1–2). Eeluuringutega selgitati, et kohta kasutati matmiseks tõenäoliselt 17.–18. sajandil. Samuti on sinna maetud mõned arvatavasti 1941. aastal langenud Nõukogude poolel võidelnud sõdurid. Päästekaevamistega kaevati läbi tee alla jääv kalmistu osa.

Kalmistu oli rajatud Aranküla põllumaade põhjaosas asuva madala kirde-edela-suunalise seljandiku edelaotsale, maetud oli selle liivase pinnasega osasse. Loode–kagu-suunalisest 400 m² suurusest kaevandist puhastati välja 107 matust (jn 3). Kogutud luud on määramata, kuid kasvu põhjal otsustades kuuluvad u pooled matustest lastele.

Matused olid 1–1,8 m sügavusel maapinnast. Hauad paiknesid ligilähedaselt põhja–lõuna-suunalistes ridades, mõnedes kohtades moodustasid need

väikeseid kogumeid. Maetud oli kristlike tavade kohaselt peaga lääne suunas. Harilikult oli ühte hauda maetud üks inimene, kuid olid ka mõned kaksik- ja kolmikmatused. Sellistel puhkudel olid koos maetud ilmselt ema ja laps või ainult lapsed. Maetute käte asendit oli võimalik kindlaks määrata 42 juhul. Enamasti olid käed kõhul või vööpiirkonnas, mõnel korral ka rinnal. Kirstude jäänuseid leiti viieteistkümne matuse juurest. Enamiku leidudest moodustasid kirstunaelad, kuid tähelepanu väärivad klaashelmed (jn 4: 9–10), pandlad (jn 4: 6–7), sõled (jn 4: 1–4), mitmesugused rõivastuse juurde kuuluvad esemed (nt pronksist vööosad (jn 4: 6–7)), noad, mündid (17. saj II poole 1/6 öörid) jm.

Leiumaterjal on dateeritav suhteliselt kitsasse ajavahemikku ning ühtki matust ei ole üle maetud, mistõttu on võimalik, et kalmistu oli kasutusel üsna lühikese aja vältel, nt 1695.–1697. a näljahäda ja 1710.–1712. a katku ajal.