



THE IRON AGE AND 13TH–18TH CENTURY CEMETERY AND CHAPEL SITE OF NIKLUSMÄGI: GRAVE LOOTING AND ARCHAEOLOGY

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SITE, LOOTING AND INVESTIGATION

The cemetery and chapel site of Niklasmägi (Reg. No. 13086) is located in Valga County, Karula local authority, Kaagjärve village, according to the historical administrative division in the County of Võrumaa, Karula parish, Rautina village. The site lies 10 km east-south-east of the Valga town centre and ca. 3.5 km north of the Estonian – Latvian border. The hill called Niklasmägi, the highest hill in the surroundings, is situated ca. 100–150 m north of Valga–Lüllemäe–Antsla road and Kalda (Järvekalda) household, ca. 250–300 m north-east of Ala-Rautina farmstead (Fig. 1). The foot of the hill begins ca. 120 m north of Lake Rautina (Kaagjärv). The eastern part of the hill top and the cemetery has been destroyed already in the Czar time, when a large gravel pit was dug there.

The name Niklasmägi ('Hill of Niklus') arises from the popular derivate form of the name of St Nicolaus. The hill is considered to be a church site in numerous folklore texts, stored in the Estonian Folklore Archives and in archaeological archives.² Legends tell about the church that once stood on the hill, although different people indicate different places. The bell of the church is believed to have been sunk or hidden into the lake. Some old locals also have heard about an old cemetery on the hill. Although the legends have greatly disappeared, digging pits for treasure hunting is still practiced by the locals.

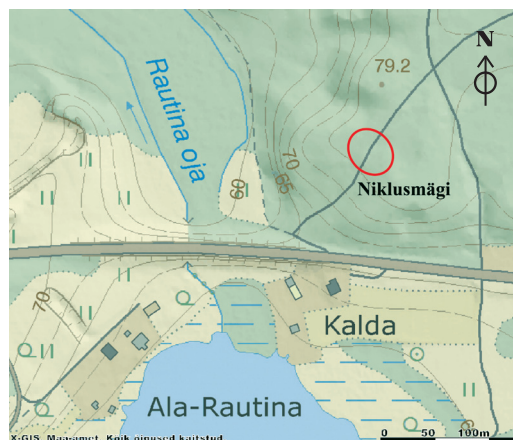


Fig. 1. Location of Niklasmägi.

Jn 1. Niklasmäe asukoht.

Drawing / Joonis: Maria Smirnova

¹ The parts written by the authors divide as follows: H. Valk – the site, its excavation and context, P. Kama and H. Valk – artefacts, R. Rammo – textiles, M. Malve – human bones, M. Kiudsoo and H. Valk – coins.

² E.g. EKM, Estonian Folklore Archives: E 59505/6 – August Vallner < Karula khk (1927); ERA II 247, 109 694/5 (12) – Evald Tauk < Selma Pettai (58), Karula khk, Karula v, Ujumetsa t (1939); RKM II 49, 470/1 (5) – Jaak Sarapuu < Sinaida Pettai, 76 a, Karula khk. (1956), etc.



Fig. 2. Traces of looting on Niklasmägi in 2011.

Jn 2. Rüüstamisjäljed Niklasmäel 2011.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

In the spring of 2011 anonymous e-mails hinted to extensive plundering of the site during the last years. The letters spoke about digging until the depth of 2 metres with the aim to find coins, and about removing the soil by a lorry, to study it undisturbed. It was also mentioned that numerous coins from the 12th to the 18th century, sold with the total price over one million Estonian kroons (over 63 900 EUR) were found from the hill.

Visiting the site in May 2011 proved information about looting to be true (Fig. 2). Irregular fallen, mostly 1.5–2 m wide ditches with the total length of ca. 40 m had been dug on the hill by a

backhoe and some of the soil from the trenches seemed to have been removed. Judging by poor vegetation on the loose sand, the latest large-scale plundering of the site had taken place in 2010. Big coniferous trees, fallen because trenches had cut their roots, had been removed from the area in winter. The loose sand contained numerous fragments of decayed human bones and in the higher part of the hill also some cremated bones were found. An assemblage of pottery fragments and iron artefacts (nails, knives) gathered by the looters was discovered under a big tree; it had been left there as having no commercial value.³ These finds, and the lack of bronze items and coins also indicated the use of metal detectors. The National Heritage Board reported this serious damaging of the site to the police, but as the constable got no information from local inhabitants, criminal investigation was not initiated.

In 2012, archaeological investigation was launched on Niklasmägi in the framework of the international project 'Archaeology, Authority and Community: Cooperation to Protect Archaeological Heritage' (see also Kama 2013). The aim of the work was to avoid further damage to the site caused by continuously falling profiles of the open trenches, to get more information about the monument, and to determine the extent of damages, caused by looting. Most intriguing from the archaeological perspective were the cremated bones, not so typical for medieval village cemeteries, and hints about finding a very large number of coins.

Rescue work started with making a plan of the plundered area (Fig. 3), as well as by sieving the heaps of sand from the trenches. Main attention was concentrated upon the top part of the hill, the area with cremated bones, where also the disturbed sand was darker and somewhat sooty.

By coring the ground, the size of the area where the grey top soil had been removed in the course of digging and disturbances was determined. It appeared that ca. 350 m², including the core of the cemetery with its immediate surroundings, had almost totally been destroyed (Fig. 3). Only a narrow strip of the hill top between the plundered area and the old gravel pit had remained intact, being protected by the roots of big, 150–200-year-old trees. When the heaps of sand around the plunderers' trenches in the

³ TÜ 1906.

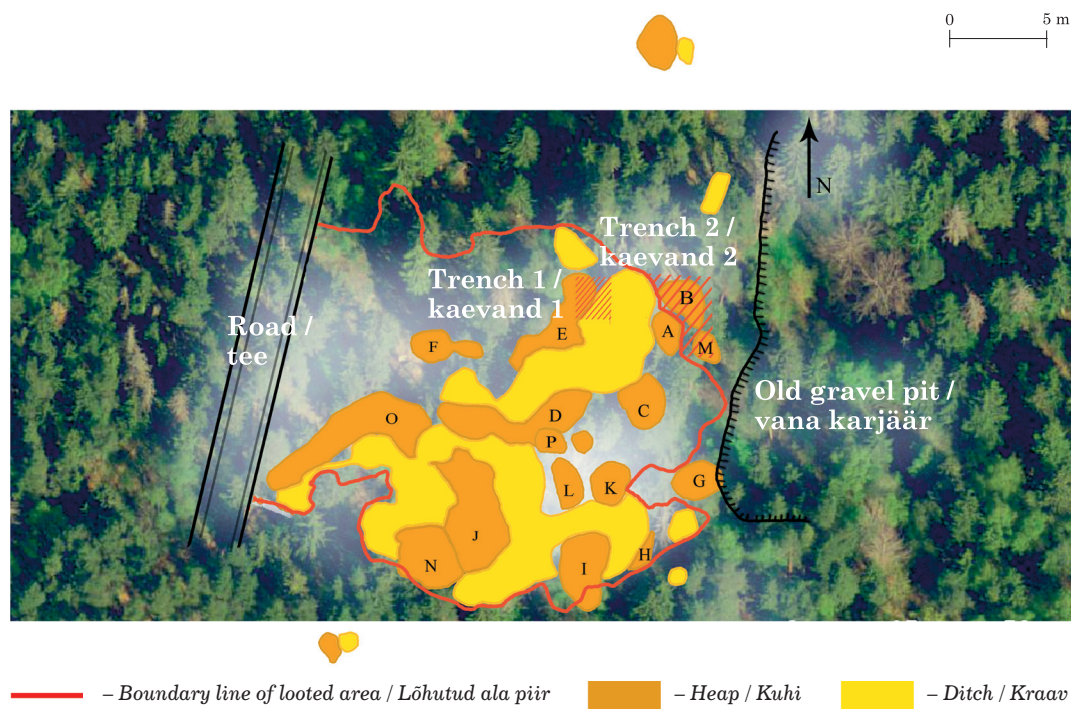


Fig. 3. Plan of the looted central part of Niklusemägi.

Jn 3. Niklusemäe lõhutud keskse osa plaan.

Composed by / Koostaja: Pikne Kama

core area of the cemetery and partly the loose sand, fallen into the trench had been sieved, two trial trenches were opened on the hill top, next to the end of the main trench excavated with a backhoe, on both sides of the trench (Fig. 3). During and after the work at trial trenches, the damaged area with no grey top soil was reviewed with metal detectors. Great assistance was provided by the Jõgevamaa Detectorists' Club. When surveying the top layers, a large number of artefacts, mostly iron items, but also 38 coins⁴ were collected. After the study of top soil, the heaps of sand and trenches dug by plunderers were levelled with a bulldozer, to bring the monument into better condition and to prevent further damage.

Sieving the sand revealed finds indicating to the chapel mentioned in oral lore – fragments of window glass, lime mortar, and some fragments of weakly burnt bricks. From the hill top also a large amount of cremated bones and remains of poorly preserved uncremated bones were found. The disturbed sand contained numerous iron nails, knife fragments, glass beads and cowry shells, as well as tiny bronze spirals and fragments of textile decorated with bronze.⁵

In the course of the rescue detecting work two assemblages of items, found and collected by the looters were discovered. The first assemblage included six coins (five 17th century schillings and a Russian copper denga), a spiral ring, an iron needle and some other artefact fragments. The artefacts had fallen back into the trench, probab-

⁴ A Russian *denga* was also found from the area damaged by a bulldozer in the 1980s when the forest road was made.

⁵ TÕ 2171: 1–725.

ly accidentally. The second assemblage, maybe belonging together with the group of artefacts found in 2010, contained, in addition to some iron objects, also two pseudo-ethnographic brooches from the late 20th or early 21st century. Presumably, these items were left by a looter, instead of removed artefacts of archaeological value, as a 'compensation' for grave robbery. Plundering any graves, including old deserted cemeteries, is still regarded as sacrilege by the local people of Võrumaa.

In a briefing, organized for the local community in the end of the excavations, more information was gained about plundering the site. The systematic digging that ended in 2010 had started 4–5 years earlier and the top of the hill was characterized by the locals as 'totally disturbed'. The first stage of plundering was done using metal detectors – then only small pits as a result of metal detecting appeared. Some areas of the hill were characterized as, judging by the number and density of small plundering pits, 'a fishing net'. Later on, extensive digging, both by spades and backhoe continued. The deep trenches and pits dug on the hill were said to continuously have changed their location. A large amount of soil has been removed from the hill also using a lorry or a tractor. The work of the plunderers was secured by guards at the ends of a small forest trail that passed by the old cemetery: the looters were warned, evidently, by phone. Although local people claim they had informed the police, the inspector of the National Heritage Board of Valga County and the local authorities about the plundering, no measures were taken and looting continued.

TRIAL TRENCHES

The aim of the two trial trenches (Fig. 3) was different. Trench 1 (3 m²) was made to get information about the extent of damages caused by the plunderers. It was made in the area with removed turf west of the looters' trench, in the core area of the cemetery where the somewhat darker sand contained cremated bones and fragments of window glass. Trench 2 was made to study also the character of the cemetery and its cultural layers. As less cremated bones were found from the trench, it was located in the vicinity of the cemetery's core area. Here a 7 m² territory with preserved turf and top soil, intact because protected from looting by roots, was studied.

In trench 1 the ground was almost totally disturbed until intact natural yellow sand that appeared in the depth of 0.7–0.8 m, i.e. mostly about 1–1.2 m from the supposed original ground surface before looting. In one pit the disturbed soil stretched down until the depth of ca. 1.5 m from the original ground level. A compact assemblage of dark soil – almost black sand with cremated bones and small fragments of fire-cracked granite in it also appeared in the trench. This soil seemed first to have remained intact from disturbances, and to form a pit grave cremation, but as under the dark sand semi-rotten spruce cones were discovered, the ground turned out to be not in the original position. As the dark soil was anyhow expected to originate from the cremation cemetery a radiocarbon analysis was made from charcoal pieces in it. The result of 108±50 BP (cal. 95.4% 1674–1778 or 1799–1942 AD)⁶, however, probably indicates recent bonfires. In the bottom of trench 1 an *in situ* skull of a WSW-oriented old man (Table 1: 1) was discovered in the estimated original depth of ca. 1.1 m. North-east of the plunderers' trench, under the roots of a big spruce tree bones of poorly preserved undisturbed skeletons were revealed in the profile in the depth of 1.2 m.

⁶ Tln-3473. Radiocarbon dates, processed at the radiocarbon laboratory of Tallinn University of Technology, are calibrated into calendar years, using OxCal 4.2 program and IntCal09 calibration curve (Bronk Ramsey 2009).

Table 1. Burials from the cemetery of Niklasmägi.

Tabel 1. Niklasmäe kalmistu matused.

Determined by / Määranud: Martin Malve

Burial number/ Matuse number	Sex/ Sugu	Age/ Vanus	Pathologies/ Patoloogiad
1	male	50+ years	tooth stone; tooth hypoplasia
2	male	21–25 years	tooth stone; tooth hypoplasia
3	?	2 years ± 8 months	
4	male	40–50 years	tooth stone; ante mortem tooth losses; tooth abscesses; healed fractures on the distal 1/3 ends of the right ulna and both radii; Schmorl's nodes, osteoarthritis
5	?	9 months ± 3 months	
6	male	40+ years	Schmorl's nodes, spondylosis, osteoarthritis
7	female	40+ years	osteoarthritis
8	?	infant, newborn*	
9	female	50+ years	osteoarthritis, button osteoma
10	?	12 years ± 30 months	tooth hypoplasia
11	?	5 years ± 16 months	
12	male	50+ years	caries, spondyloarthritis of cervical vertebrae
13	?	40+ years	
14	female	18–25 years	

* Bones not preserved, age estimation based on coffin (inner width 11 cm).

In trench 2 the grey 15–20 cm thick top soil had remained intact. From this layer two rock crystal beads of the 13th – 14th century origin (Fig. 4: 2, 4), lying *ca.* 50 cm from each other, and a faceted amber bead (Fig. 4: 1) from the lower part of the layer were found. The grey top soil also contained two schillings of Tallinn (1430–1449?), both used as pendants, maybe offered items – one from the depth of until 10 cm, the other from the depth of 10–20 cm. A Swedish schilling from 1660 came to light just below the grey top soil. From the bottom of a pit where grey disturbed top soil, mixed



Fig. 4. Finds from Niklasmägi. 1, 3 – amber beads, 2, 4 – rock crystal beads, 5 – biser beads, 6 – double curved bead, 7, 9, 12 – ring-shaped beads, 8 – cowry shells, 10, 11 – curved beads, 13, 14 – lead scettas, 15, 16 – flower-shaped mounts. (5–8 probably one complex; 15 – iron, 16 – bronze).

Jn 4. Leide Niklasmäelt. 1, 3 – merevaikhelmed, 2, 4 – mäekristallhelmed, 5 – kudrushelmed, 6 – vinthelmes, 7, 9, 12 – rõngashelmed, 8 – kaurikarbid, 10, 11 – vinthelmed, 13, 14 – tinakettakesed, 15, 16 – õiekujulised naastud. (5–8 – tõenäoliselt üks kompleks, 15 – raud, 16 – pronks).

(TÜ 1271: 600, 602, 551, 608, 449–452, 71, 359, 581, 127, 77a, 77b, 703, 34.)

Photo / Foto: Kristel Külljastinen



Fig. 5. Burials in trench 2.

Jn 5. Matused II kaevandis.

Photo / Foto: Anna Hints

with sand, stretched until the depth of 50 cm, a Russian kopeck from 1799 was found. The disturbed light sand under the grey top soil contained some tiny charcoal particles, some rare cremated bone fragments referring to the Iron Age cemetery and some coins from the fill of the graves, located deeper.

The first bones from inhumation graves appeared in the depth of 70–80 cm, but most of them lay 1–1.3 m below the ground surface. From the twelve burials from trench 2 (Table 1: 2–13) seven (nos. 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13) belong to adults (incl. four male and two female) and five (nos. 3, 5, 8, 10, 11) to children. The graves were, with the exceptions of two infants, oriented with the heads towards the west (mostly 270°) (Fig. 5). Burial no. 3, with a penny of Tartu bishop Johann I Vyffhusen (1343–1373) in the fill of the grave, was directed with the head to the south-east, and burial no. 5, coin-dated to the mid-15th century – to the east. Remains of coffins were found in three infant graves (nos. 3, 5, 8). In two cases the rectangular coffin was made of boards, in grave 8 there was a trunk coffin of a newborn baby (inner width 11 cm; length unknown) where no bones had been preserved inside. The board coffin of grave no. 5 (90 × 27 × 14 cm) was rather well preserved. Only one coffin nail was found from trench 2 (grave 10). At least in one case (grave no. 12), the body had not been buried in a coffin, judging by the position of the skeleton.

From the infants, grave no. 8 contained no grave goods; no. 3 had, as mentioned above, a 14th century coin in the grave fill. From the breast region of grave no. 5 a bracteate (1441–1459; Table 2, no. 30) was found; another coin (1459–1468; Table 2, no. 31) was on the coffin cover. Infant burial no. 10 had an iron knife (Fig. 6: 5) beside the upper edge of the right thigh, and in the fill of the grave there was a penny from 1441–1459. Infant burial no. 11 was furnished with a penannular brooch (Fig. 6: 1) with round ends and with a *scherf* of Tartu bishop Dietrich IV Resler (1422–1441), both located on the breast under the chin. A *scherf* of Tartu bishop Bartholomäus Savijerwe (1441–1459) was found from the grave fill above the bones.

From adults, two males (4, 12) and one female (7) were furnished with an iron needle close to the neck, no. 7 also had a coin from 1430–1465 (?) in the fill of the grave. A schilling of Johan III, minted in Tallinn (1571–1585) was found in the fill of grave no. 2. Burial no. 6, later than burial no. 2, had a simple, primitively made penannular brooch (Fig. 6: 2) on the backbone. Female burial no. 9 had a simple penannular brooch with rolled ends on its neck bones, a bronze needle (Fig. 6: 6) on the breast and a knife (Fig. 6: 4) under the pelvis, with the sharp end towards the feet. From the fill of the grave, a penny of Tartu bishop Johannes VI Bey (1528–1543) was found. Burial no. 13, earlier than infant burial no. 11, had a penannular brooch (Fig. 6: 3) close to the chin. From trench 2 also two round brooches, probably from the 16th century, were gained as stray finds from disturbed graves (Fig. 6: 7, 8).

Concerning the burial customs, the high number of grave coins must especially be outlined: from the 7 m² area of trench 2, in all 15 coins were found, four of them from the top layers (until -20 cm). 11 coins (among them one from the 13th, one from the 14th, seven from the 15th and two from the 16th century) were collected from bigger depths. This is, considering that 13th – 15th century coins that are quite rare in the village cemeteries of the region, an extraordinary frequency. The original number of coins may have been even higher, because also in the area of trench 2 the top layers may have been looted using metal detectors. Evidently, the high frequency of grave coins is the reason why the looters did not limit their



Fig. 6. Finds from trench 2. 1–3 – penannular brooches, 4, 5 – knives, 6 – fragment of a bronze needle, 7, 8 – round brooches.
Jn 6. Leide II kaevandist. 1–3 – hoburaudsõled, 4, 5 – noad, 6 – pronksnõela katke, 7, 8 – rõngassõled.

(TÜ 1271: 699, 691, 701, 696, 697, 695, 669, 670.)
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

activities with the top soil with numerous votive coins, but the cemetery was plundered in full depth of the graves. Among coins from the fill of the graves the ratio of grave goods and votive gifts bound with the chapel remains, however, unclear.

HUMAN BONES

During and after the rescue work 13 burials (incl. 12 *in situ* skeletons) (Table 1: 1–13) and one assemblage of disturbed bones (Table 1: 14), partly picked up as two blocks, were investigated. The bones were heavily decayed, due to acidic soils characteristic for the area, and their surface was eroded. Only skull fragments, central parts of long bones and fragments of bigger bones (e.g. pelvic) had been preserved. Of similarly poor preservation stage were also the skeletons unearthed at the rescue work of Hargla old parish cemetery, also Valga County (Malve *et al.* 2012, 189–200). Due to the poor preservation of osteological material, determining the sex, age and pathologies was complicated. Most of the adults had died at the age of over 40; only two skeletons belonged to younger adults. Children were aged between 1.5 and 15 years.

On teeth several pathologies – tooth stone, enamel hypoplasia, tooth abscesses and ante mortem tooth losses could be observed (Table 1). Three individuals had horizontal lines of enamel hypoplasia that designate anomalies of tooth tissue (Larsen 1997, 44). Tooth enamel is most sensitive to metabolic disorders that may be caused by lack of nutrition in the organism, or by diseases or by both. One of the main reasons for other dental pathologies – caries, tartar and ante mortem loss of teeth – is food that contains carbohydrates (e.g. made of grain).

As aged adults predominated in the osteological data, also most of the pathologies – wearing of joints, alteration of vertebral bodies and vertebral joint surfaces – were those accompanied by old age. Intervertebral disc herniations (Schmorl's nodes) that existed on skeletons of two men indicate hard and constant physical work.

Injuries were recorded on the skeleton of an elderly man (no. 4) who had three healed fractions: in the distal third of right ulna and both radii. Such injuries to forearm bones are caused by direct damages of the impact place by external force (e.g. by pressure or compression) (Petlem 1974, 119–120). However, no evident signs of violence were discovered on the bones.



Fig. 7. Osteoma on the right parietal bone of a skull.

Jn 7. Osteoom kolju paremal kiiruluul.

Photo / Foto: Martin Malve

Most interesting were three cases of benign osteoma. Osteoma is extra formation of bone tissue in bone periosteum. On the left parietal bone of a woman, aged over 50 (no. 9), there was a button osteoma of some millimetres. Such osteomas exist mainly among people aged over 40 (Waldron 2009, 172). Among disturbed bones⁷ two cases were noted:⁸ one skull had a large (2.6 × 3 × 0.7 cm) circular osteoma on the left parietal bone of the cranium (Fig. 7) and there was an osteoid osteoma in the central part of the left femur. This tumour occurs mainly in the

⁷ Due to the large number of disturbed bones, their precise analysis is still forthcoming.

⁸ The osteoma cases are discussed here because of the small number of documented osteomas in

lower part of femur and tibia, and mostly among younger individuals (Roberts & Manchester 2012, 256).

The discovered pathologies and injuries show that the cemetery was used probably by local peasants.

FINDS

In addition to finds from trench 2, a large number of artefacts were collected from the disturbed cemetery area.⁹ The low number of objects of non-ferrous metal – brooches, rings and pendants – items most frequent in Estonian medieval and post-medieval rural cemeteries must specially be outlined. This is also evidence of the systematic and deliberate character of looting.

Jewellery

Jewellery occurred in small amount. The most numerous find group is beads – items that could not be discovered by looting with metal detectors. The 168 beads gained from loose sand mostly as single items or small assemblages, varied in colour, material and size. The most numerous were ring-shaped beads of somewhat irregular shape – usually covered with grey, brown or white oxide (Fig. 4: 7, 9), sometimes identifiable as yellow (Fig. 4: 12). 61 tiny yellow *biser*-type beads (Fig. 4: 5) were found from loose soil and about 280 from the blocks and their surroundings. The tiny *biser* beads come mostly from a headband around the skull of burial no. 14 (see below). To the same burial belongs also an assemblage of black, green and grey curved beads (Fig. 8), not represented in the village cemeteries of southern Estonia. As loose finds, another amber bead (Fig. 4: 3), a black bead curved at openings (Fig. 4: 11), a



Fig. 8. Beads from block 2.
Jn 8. Helmeid monoliidist 2.
(TÜ 2171: 487: 11–15.)
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

⁹ TÜ 2171: 1–725.

fragment of such bead and eight light blue curved beads (Fig. 4: 6, 10) dating, judging by their cobalt contents, from the 10th or 11th centuries,¹⁰ were found. Also 59 cowry shells (Fig. 4: 8) were collected by sieving and 33 from the area of blocks. In one case eight round yellow glass beads and eleven cowry shells were found close to each other. One round greyish glass bead was still joint with a cowry shell. A large number of beads came also from the two blocks. A large assemblage of curved ring-shaped glass beads (black, green, grey) were found dispersedly in the sand around the skull fragments. The two small bronze bells from the 13th – 14th centuries (Fig. 9: 1, 2) probably also originate from the necklaces. One trapezoid flat anthropomorphic pendant (Fig. 9: 5) and seven small single trapezoid pendants (Fig. 9: 6, 7) were found together with textile fragments. The finds included also a bundle of partly melt trapezoid pendants (Fig. 9: 8) and a small flower-shaped bronze mount (Fig. 4: 16).

In addition to six brooches from trench 2, two more fragments – of a round brooch and of a penannular brooch with rolled ends were found.

Rings were represented by a bronze spiral ring made of wire of round section, by pieces of a 13th – 14th century ring with a flat shield and spiral ends (Fig. 9: 9) and by some tiny pieces of medieval spiral rings. Also some tiny fragments of wide shield-shaped bracelets were unearthed.



Fig. 9. Ornaments from Niklasmägi. 1, 2 – bells, 3, 4 – fragments of minuscule letters (?) of lead, 5 – antropomorphic pendant, 6–8 – trapezoid pendants, 9 – ring.

Jn 9. Ehteid Niklasmäelt. 1, 2 – kuljused, 3, 4 – plüisulamist minuskeltähtede (?) katked, 5 – antropomorfne ripats, 6–8 – trapetsripatsid, 9 – sõrmus.

(TÜ 1271: 286, 51, 167, 282, 263b, 263a, 287, 161, 107+56.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

¹⁰ Estimation by Yakov Frenkel, State Hermitage (Russia).

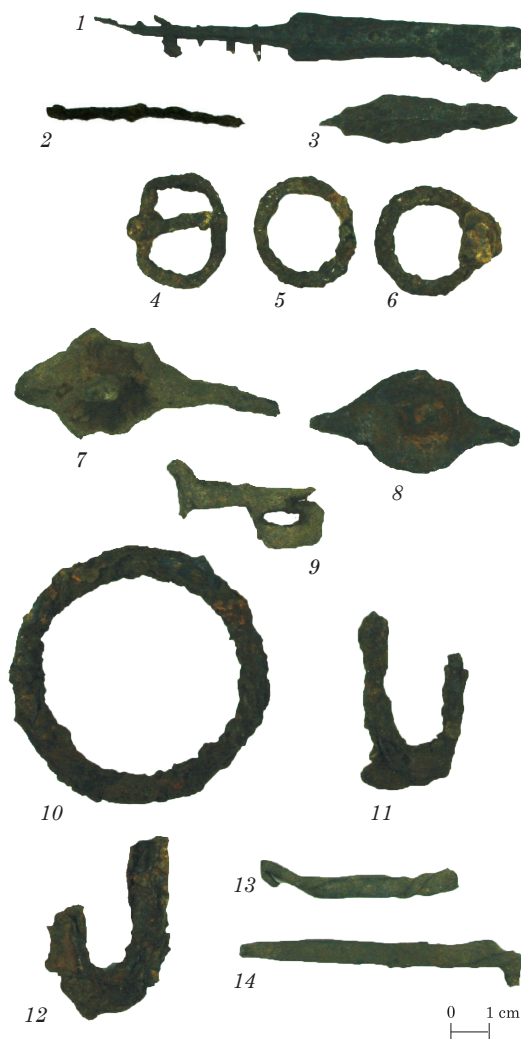


Fig. 10. Iron artefacts from the cemetery of Niklusemägi. 1 – knife fragment, 2 – needle, 3 – arrowhead, 4, 6 – belt buckles, 5 – belt ring, 7, 8 – ice spikes, 9 – key, 10 – twisted ring, 11, 12 – fire steel fragments, 13, 14 – twisted shafts of broken and burnt iron objects.

Jn 10. Raudesemäe Niklusemäe kalmel. 1 – noakatke, 2 – nõel, 3 – nooleots, 4, 6 – pandlad, 5 – vöörõngas, 7, 8 – jäänaelad, 9 – võti, 10 – tordeeritud rõngas, 11, 12 – tuleraudade katked, 13, 14 – põlenud ja katkimurtud raudesemete väänatud rootsud.
(TÜ 1271: 136, 389, 706, 335a, 335b, 335c, 1b, 7, 396, 431, 12, 549, 584, 572.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Iron and lead objects

Iron artefacts (Fig. 10), most of them just fragments, were poorly preserved in the sandy soil. It seems that also well preserved and unbroken iron objects (except for coffin nails) were picked up by the looters. The most common finds were nails (*ca.* 90 items) and knives from the 13th – 17th centuries (*ca.* 60 items).¹¹ Wood, leather or textile impressions in rust, and in seven cases also fragments of long leather knife sheaths had occasionally preserved on iron.

The stray finds also include numerous iron needles (Fig. 10: 2) or their fragments (at least from 23 items), five iron belt rings or their fragments (Fig. 10: 5), 14 iron belt buckles or their fragments (Fig. 10: 4, 6), a large twisted iron ring (Fig. 10: 10) and a flower-shaped iron mount (Fig. 4: 15). Three horseshoe ice spikes from the 13th century of similar type (Fig. 10: 7, 8) and fragments of two oval fire-steels (Fig. 10: 11, 12) are rare finds in the cemetery context. The ice spikes could also originate from the context of a supposed crusaders' assembly site (see below) or visitors of the chapel, located at the big road. The finds included also a small Late Medieval or Early Modern Times key (Fig. 10: 9) from some casket, and a Russian arrowhead¹² (Fig. 10: 3), probably, from the Livonian War period (1558–1583). A special group of finds of unknown purpose are 16 tiny lead scettas with the diameter of 7–10 mm (Fig. 4: 13, 14). These may have been used as substitutes for coins in the context of votive offering.

Pottery and animal bones

From disturbed soil 145 pottery sherds, mostly of wheel-thrown vessels were collected. Some of them were of coarse surface and contained coarse stone rubble.

¹¹ The number of artefacts presented below includes those found at burials in trench 2. The exact number of iron artefacts may be different, as it is hard to determine if fragments originate from one object. Also, fragmentation and corrosion made it hard to identify some objects.

¹² Determination by Jekaterina Štšogoleva (TÜ). The find belongs to type 6 д, according to the typology of O. Dvurechenskij (2007).

Table 2. Coins from the cemetery and chapel site of Niklasmäe.

Tabel 2. Niklasmäe kalmistu ja kabeliaseme mündid.

Determined by / Määranud: Mauri Kiudsoo

No / Nr	Find No. / Leiunr.	Issued by / Vermija	Value / Nominaal	Date / Dateering	Context / Leiuandmed
1	181	Gotland, Visby	penny	ca. 1210/20–1260/70	
2	214	Gotland, Visby	penny	ca. 1210/20–1260/70	heap D
3	229	Gotland, Visby	penny	ca. 1210/20–1260/70	heap E
4	120	Riga, archbishop Nicolaus	penny	1231–1254	
5	30	Riga, archbishop Nicolaus	penny	1231–1254	
6	618	Riga, archbishop Nicolaus	penny	1231–1254	trench 2
7	387	Denmark, Tallinn	penny	2nd–3rd quarter of 13th c. (?)	
8	126	Livonia	penny	13th–14th cc.	
9	182	Denmark, Tallinn	penny	ca. 1265–1332	
10	180	Tartu bishopric	penny	13th–14th cc.	
11	284	Tartu bishopric	penny	13th–14th cc.	
12	153	Tartu bishopric	penny	13th–14th cc.	heap O
13	125	Tartu bishopric	penny	13th–14th cc.	
14	567	Tartu, bishop, Johann I Vyffhusen	penny	1343–1373	trench 1
15	634	Tartu, bishop, Johann I Vyffhusen	penny	1343–1373	fill of grave 3
16	294	Western Europe	penny	14th c.?	
17	324	Livonian Order, Tallinn	lübische penny	ca. 1406/7–1415	heap E
18	75	Tartu, bishop Dietrich IV Resler	lübische penny	ca. 1413–1420 (15?)	
19	47	Tartu, bishop Dietrich IV Resler	lübische penny	ca. 1413–1420 (15?)	heap O
20	45	Tartu, bishop Dietrich IV Resler	penny	1422–1441	
21	109	Tartu, bishop Dietrich III Damerow (?)	penny	late 14th (early 15th?) c.	
22	325	Tartu, bishop Dietrich IV Resler	scherv	1422–1441	
23	681	Tartu, bishop Dietrich IV Resler	scherv	1422–1441	grave 11
24	652	Livonian Order, Tallinn	scherv	ca. 1426–1430s	trench 2
25	596	Livonian Order, Tallinn	schilling	ca. 1430–49 (?)	trench 2, top layer
26	603	Livonian Order, Tallinn	schilling	ca. 1430–49 (?)	trench 2, top layer
27	655	Livonian Order, Tallinn	penny	ca. 1430–65	grave 7
28	636	Tartu, bishop Bartholomäus Sawijerwe	scherv	1441–1459	fill of grave 11
29	198	Tartu, bishop Bartholomäus Sawijerwe	scherv	1441–1459	
30	624	Tartu, bishop Bartholomäus Sawijerwe	scherv	1441–1459	fill of grave 10
31	690	Tartu, bishop Bartholomäus Sawijerwe	scherv	1441–1459	grave 5
32	689	Tartu, bishop Helmich von Mallinkrodt	scherv	1459–1468	grave 5
33	210	Tartu, bishop Andreas Peper	scherv	1468–1473	heap D
34	322	Livonian Order, Tallinn, Wolter von Plettenberg	penny	ca. 1515–1522	
35	17	Tartu, bishop Johannes VI Bey	penny	1528–1543	
36	612	Tartu, bishop Johannes VI Bey	penny	1528–1543	fill of grave 9
37	227	Riga Free Town	schilling	1561–1581	
38	627	Sweden, Tallinn, Johan III	schilling	1571–1585	fill of grave 2
39	86	Poland, Dahlen	schilling	1572	
40	146	Livonia	schilling	16th. c. (?)	
41	101	Sweden, Riga, Kristina	schilling	1632–1654	looter's assemblage
42	105	Poland, Johann Kasimir	schilling	1649–1668	looter's assemblage
43	101	Sweden, Livonia, Kristina	schilling	1650	heap C
44	102	Sweden, Riga, Kristina	schilling	1650	looter's assemblage
45	606	Sweden, Livonia, Karl XI	schilling	1660	trench 2, top layer
46	118	Sweden, Riga, Karl XI	schilling	1661	
47	119	Sweden, Riga, Karl XI	schilling	1663	
48	104	Poland / Sweden	schilling	17th century	looter's assemblage
49	103	Poland, Johann Kasimir	schilling	1665	looter's assemblage
50	106	Russia, Anna Ivanovna	denga	1740	looter's assemblage
51	718	Russia, Jelizaveta Petrovna	denga	1750	
52	85	Russia, Jelizaveta Petrovna	denga	1751	
53	143	Russia, Jelizaveta Petrovna	denga	1751	
54	113	Russia, Jelizaveta Petrovna	denga	1754	
55	623	Russia, Paul I	kopeck	1799	trench 2, pit

A few sherds may come from the Late Iron Age, but most are, probably, of medieval origin. Some pottery fragments had charred organics on their outer surface (nos. 314, 315). Likewise on other medieval rural cemeteries of southern Estonia, animal bones were rare: only two cattle teeth¹³ were found.

Coins

During the rescue work in all 55 coins, partly from the chapel site, and partly from the graves were found (Table 2).

The earliest coins from Niklasmägi were from the 13th century. The most interesting of them are three bracteates depicting a bishop's head with a mitre of a crescent shape, minted in Riga during the rule of bishop Nicolaus (1231–1253). Up to 2004, the majority of the 33 previously known such coins had been found in Latvia: 21 items from eleven find spots, including three hoards. In 2004, the unique hoard, with about 300 such kind of pennies, was discovered on Peldu street in Riga (Berga 2007, 3). Altogether, 12 coins showing a half-moon-shaped mitre have been found outside Latvia: eight in Estonia, two in Finland and two in Sweden (Berga 2007, 11–13). In Estonia they come from Kadrina churchyard (1), Viljandi castle (1) and some hoards: from the surroundings of Tartu (1), Koksi (1), Otepää (1), Vaivara (1) and Utike (2) (Leimus 2001, table 1; Kiudsoo 2004, 202; Kiudsoo & Tamla 2006, 276).

Among the 13th-century coins there are also three bracteates from Gotland, minted in 1210/20–1260/70. Although Gotlandic coins' influx to Livonia ceased after the renewal of local minting in 1260s (Leimus 2004, 64; Kiudsoo & Tamla 2006, 278–279), they still circulated here during the first quarter of the 14th century.

Coins that may be struck in the 13th century are also represented by four bracteate pennies of Tartu bishopric from the 13th – 14th cc, two Danish pennies, minted in Tallinn (second or third quarter of the 13th century and *ca.* 1265–1332), and a Livonian penny from the 13th – 14th cc. There were also a West European penny from the 14th (?) century, a Tartu penny from the late 14th or early 15th century, 16 coins from the 15th, seven from the 16th, nine from the 17th and six from the 18th century.

From the perspective of coin history in Livonia the most unique find is a two-sided penny of Tartu bishop Johann I Vyffhusen (1343–1373) (Fig. 11) (Sarkkinen 2001, Abb. 4; Haljak 2010, no. 482) – the first of such coins that has reached Estonian museum collections. Beside this item also a Vyffhusen's one-sided penny, represented by 17 documented items from Estonia (see Leimus 2002, 128–129), was found.

The discovered coins form, however, only a small minority of what existed on Niklasmägi before looting. The disproportional ratio of bigger and smaller coins found during the detecting works from the plundered area is noteworthy. The profound looting of the site is shown by the fact that among 33 coins found from the loose sand 24 were tiny pennies and *schers* of the 13th – 15th centuries. When disregarding the six coins from assemblage no. 1, found but lost again by the looters, the share of small-sized, not so easily detectable



Fig. 11. Two-sided penny of Johann I Vyffhusen, bishop of Tartu (1343–1373).
Jn 11. Tartu piiskop Johann I Vyffhuseni (1343–1373) kahepoolne penn.

(TÜ 2171: 634.)

Photo / Foto: Kristel Külljastinen

¹³ Determined by Eve Rannamäe (TÜ).

13th – 15th cc. coins was unusually high: 73%. Coins of a bigger size, more easy to find when using metal detectors, were disproportionally rare. The schillings of the 16th and 17th centuries, clearly predominant both at Estonian medieval village cemeteries (Valk 2001, 57–58, fig. 45), and chapel sites, were represented only with 11 items and big Russian copper coins with four finds. Evidently, the looters had found and picked up most of the bigger, 16th – 18th century coins, but several tiny coins had remained unnoticed.

In general, the continuity and temporally homogeneous distribution of coin finds must be noted. Analysis of the coins from Niklasmägi, considering also the losses caused by looting, shows that consistent and frequent deposition of coins started in the second quarter of the 13th century and continued until the 18th century. The extremely high frequency of coin finds, when compared to their usual occurrence on the village cemeteries of southern Estonia, leaves no doubt that most of the coins were deposited as a result of long-term offering practices. Apparently, the main reason for robbery was small medieval coins, rare in hoards and because of that highly demanded and of high price among the collectors and on auctions.

Textile finds

During the field work also remains of textile items, preserved thanks to the connections with bronze artefacts and to the soil (moist and slightly acidic sand) of Niklasmägi, were found. The textile remains are mainly from a fabric of sheep wool, as linen has preserved poorly. Several textile remains come from the blocks (designated with numbers TÕ 2171: 486 and 487), that were found during the metal detector studies close to the artefact assemblage no. 2 and opened later in laboratory conditions.¹⁴ Soil around these blocks contained disturbed bones of a 18–25-year-old woman (Table 1: 14). From the vicinity of these two blocks smaller pieces of textiles and their bronze decorations (nos. 488–496) were collected. The second assemblage of textile finds (nos. 211–217; 312) was discovered from the heap D and the third from the heap P (nos. 263–267) (see Fig. 3). In general, the fabric types and remains of clothing items are similar to the medieval textile finds from Siksälä cemetery and north-eastern Latvia (Laul & Valk 2007, 49–68; Zariņa 1970).

A most noteworthy find among clothing items is the headband (Fig. 12) from block no. 486. The skull of burial no. 14, found from this block, was removed from its original location by backhoe and re-laid, turned around, into a formerly existing pit or trench. The skull with hair and remains of a headband had remained in one piece. The headband consisted of four separately made narrow bands decorated with tin plaques, glass beads and bronze spirals. These four ribbons were fixed to each other by seams and metal ringlets to achieve a broader band (the width of the whole headband was *ca.* 7 cm). Some fragments of well-preserved tablet-woven bands discovered from the same assemblage belonged probably to the ribbons and tassels, usually hanging down on the back from these headbands (e.g. Laul & Valk 2007, 65). Remains of rhomb-shaped woollen tassels, possibly from the same headband, were in the second block (no. 487). The shape and technique of braiding are common to finds of a similar type (Laul & Valk 2007, fig. 68). Unique is the plant fibre braiding (Fig. 13) used instead of bronze spirals. Judging by the width and parallels from Siksälä, the headband might probably date from the

¹⁴ In the course of opening, sub-numbers were added to single items found from the blocks.



Fig. 12. Headband from block 486.

Jn 12. Peapärj monoliidist 486.
(TÜ 2171: 486: 1.)

Photo / Foto: Kristel Külljastinen

14th century. There were some smaller fragments of headbands (bands, rhomb-shaped tassels, horse hair braiding, spirals, beads, tin remains) (nos. 488–495) also in the vicinity of both blocks, and in the third concentration area of textile fragments in the heap P (nos. 263–267).

Fragments of two different types of semi-woollen textiles were found from the blocks and their surroundings. First, the remains of fabric, initially a linen tabby textile decorated with a woollen weft-pattern, a technique represented in Siksälä and north-eastern Latvia (Laul 2006; Laul & Valk 2007, 51; Zariņa 1970, 106), can be named. From these textiles only blue and red weft threads of sheep wool had been preserved. The bundle of this fabric near the skull in block no. 486 comes evidently from a fabric folded together, as the weft threads lay in several regular layers. It should be noted



Fig. 13. Plant fibre braiding of a headband's rhomb-shaped tassel made of wool (from block 487).

Jn 13. Taimsest kiust punutis peapärja rombilisest villasest otsatutist (monoliit 487).

(TÜ 2171: 487: 20.)

Photo / Foto: Kristel Külljastinen

that between these textile layers remains of branches and fern leaves were found. This bundle may originate from a shawl placed separately to the grave together with branches. Secondly, altogether 16 fragments of blue and white squared textiles (nos. 487/24, 488j, 491b, 495d, 496d), initially made of linen and wool (cf. Laul & Valk 2007, 50) were collected from block no. 487 and the area close to the two blocks.

From the heap D and nearby, seven textile fragments (nos. 202, 203, 211a–213), eight loose bronze spirals (nos. 211b, 217, 218) and one bronze clasp (no. 211c) from the edge of a blue woollen shawl (Fig. 14; cf. Laul & Valk 2007, 50) decorated with spirals and a row of triangles of bronze clasps were discovered. In addition, a piece of woollen twill (no. 445), a band with spirals (no. 169) and single spirals were found as stray finds from different places.

The finds of plant-fibre textiles preserved in contact with the brooches (nos. 669, 670, 691, 694, 699, 701) all come from excavation trench 2 and date from the 15th – early 17th century. These tabbies with repp character originate from shirts, but maybe also from shrouds or linen scarfs. Two latter suggestions are supported by the fact that in some cases the layer of the fabric is clearly on top of the ornaments (Rammo 2014). Six fragments of tabby plant-fibre textiles preserved due to contact with iron (e.g. knife, buckle) were also found (nos. 187, 474, 676, 696b, 697c, 697d).



Fig. 14. Fragments of blue shawl made of wool and decorated with bronze clasps and spirals.

Jn 14. Sinise villase, pronksklambrite ja -spiraalidega kaunistatud sõba katke.

(TÜ 2171: 202, 211.)

Photo / Foto: Kristel Külljastinen

IRON AGE CEMETERY

The large number of cremated bones from the top of the cemetery hill – of different cremation stages, but predominantly white, calcinated – refer to the Iron Age roots of the cemetery. Although the practice of cremation somewhat continued in southern Estonia also during the medieval period (Valk 2001, 63–65), cremating corpses on Niklusmägi can be excluded in that time – both for practical (fire danger) and ideological reasons (a chapel of central meaning). As different circumstances give evidence of the former presence of a wooden chapel on the hill top (see below), judging by the coins,

probably already in the second quarter of the 13th century, simultaneous cremation practices in the same area seem impossible.

The number of finds from the Iron Age cemetery is limited. The earliest of them are a few fragments of textile-impressed pottery, dating earlier than the middle of the first millennium AD (nos. 651, 667). However, as the Roman Iron Age graves of south-eastern Estonia are rich in ornament finds and pottery (Laul 2001, 90–105), but as no other finds characteristic for that period were found from Niklasmägi, there was probably no grave of that time on the hill.

Also some small fragments of strongly melt bronze objects, twisted shafts of two deliberately broken and burnt iron objects (Fig. 10: 13, 14), a burnt fragment of a needle from a penannular brooch, a cluster of burnt trapezoid pendants (Fig. 9: 8), eight blue curved beads from the 10th or 11th century (Fig. 4: 6, 10), and maybe also the necklace of black, brownish grey, green and blue twisted beads from block 2 (Fig. 8) belong to the Iron Age. Such beads have not been found from the post-conquest (since 1225 AD) graves of the village cemeteries of south-eastern Estonia before and they may indicate also Late Iron Age inhumations.

The disturbed ground contained also some granite stones, partly cracked in fire (original size between 15–35 cm). Most of the stones, removed from their original location when looting the site with metal detectors lay dispersedly on the ground beside the disturbed area close to the forest road.

According to memories from the time of looting,¹⁵ there was a small hill of dark sooty soil (height *ca.* 0.8 m, width 3–4 m) close to the forest road; the ground contained cremated bones and fire-cracked granite stones there. One rock was large – *ca.* 0.8 m high and of *ca.* 1 m diameter. Also documented memories of a local inhabitant exist about looking for coins from a ‘heap of mixed sand and soil’ from between the stones on Niklasmägi.¹⁶ Evidently, before the chapel a stone grave existed on the hill. The character of this stone grave remains, however, unclear. As stones with the diameter of 0.7–0.9 m are most typical for the Roman Iron Age *tarand* graves of South-East Estonia, but as no stones of such size had remained on the hill after plundering (all stones removed from the disturbed area were small-sized), the presence of a stone grave of that time on Niklasmägi seems unlikely. This suggestion is supported by the lack of definitely Roman Iron Age jewellery finds. As the area with cremation graves was totally disturbed, a charcoal piece was taken for radiocarbon analysis also from disturbed sand from the heap E to get possible hints about the dates of cremation practices. It gave the result 750±70 BP (cal 95.4% 1052–1080 (2.0%), 1129–1132 (0.2%), 1153–1328 (84.2%), 1341–1395 AD (10.8%))¹⁷, referring either to Final Iron Age (*ca.* 1050–1225/50) cremations or to burning timber, cut in the 13th or 14th century, maybe originating from the chapel.

THE CHAPEL, ITS ORIGINS AND CONTEXT

The results of performed investigations confirm the folkloric data about a chapel on Niklasmägi. The presence of the chapel is clearly shown by numerous sherds of window glass of different thickness, colour and composition. Some fragments come from pieces of circular shape, some have straight edges. As some of the fragments are strongly melt, the chapel was destroyed in fire. Probably, several pieces of melt lead originate

¹⁵ Data from Arnold Kuld, Kaagjärve village.

¹⁶ The letter by Peeter Puudersell to Kalju Leht from 13.08.1985. (TÜ)

¹⁷ Tln-3475.

from the frames of the glass windows. Also finds of lime mortar, a few tiny fragments of weakly burnt bricks, burnt clay and fire traces on some of the nails refer to the chapel. The large size and shape of two nails enables us to interpret them as belonging to the decoration elements of the chapel, originating, e.g., from its door. Some lead objects (Fig. 9: 3, 4) that resemble fragments of minuscule letters might also refer to ecclesiastical activities. These letters may have been originally attached to some flag or liturgical textile.

It remains unknown when the chapel perished. Probably, it happened during the Livonian War (1558–1583) already – to that time belongs a Russian arrowhead. In the context of ‘superstition’ (*Abgötterey*) only a high hill grown into bushes in the lands of Kaagvere manor at *Rautits* farmstead¹⁸ is noted in the church visitation protocol of Valga and Luke parishes from 1689 (Westrén-Doll 1926, 13). Evidently, the chapel, as not mentioned, did not exist then any more. As the latest coin is from 1799, the tradition of offering lasted, however, from the second quarter of the 13th century up to the late 18th century or even longer.

The reasons for constructing a chapel on Niklasmägi can be found when reading the chronicle of Henry of Livonia. Henry mentions Lake *Rastigerwe*¹⁹ (järv means ‘lake’ in Estonian) as the assembly site of the crusaders in 1224, before the big military campaign against Tartu (HCL XXVIII: 3). The identity of this lake with Lake Rautina (Kaagjärv) is reflected in its German name *Röstjerw* (HCL, 177, comment 15), but also in the names of Rästina farmsteads located close to it. Lake Rautina with its high shores close to Niklasmägi hill is really a suitable camping place for the army.

Henry mentions Lake *Rastegerwe* also in 1217. Then the crusaders’ army, having arrived at the lake, met a boy coming from the hill fort of Otepää and used him as a guide to the fort (HCL XX: 7). This note also indirectly refers to the lake as the assembly place or camping site before the raid to Ugandi district. Naming such a small lake is most rare in the context of the chronicle: the lake and its meaning had to be well known to Henry and the Germans. Thus, the main road from Latvia to Otepää, the centre of Ugandi (Ugaunia) district, must have passed Lake *Rastigerwe*/*Rastegerwe*. Here it must be noted that until the large changes in the road system in the Soviet time, the historical way from Valga to Kaagjärve manor passed Niklasmägi ca. 50 m west of the chapel site. Also oral tradition mentions an old war road, coming from Latvia and leading through Niklasmäe forest towards Sangaste and Otepää.²⁰

If used by the crusaders’ armies, this road was probably used also by merchants. From Henry’s chronicle we know that the German merchants’ way from the lower course of the Daugava River to Pskov passed through Ugandi: people of this district had once before Riga was founded robbed their goods in the value of over 900 silver marks (HCL XI: 7, XII: 6, XIII: 5). The suggestion that the road passing Niklasmägi was intensely used by the Germans is supported by the fact that the chapel on the hill was dedicated to St Nicholas, the protector of seafarers and merchants in the Catholic tradition (e.g. Melchers & Melchers 1991, 788; Bentley 1997, 235; Farmer 1997, 46; Lexikon 1990, 365). Although the cult of St Nicholas was most widespread in medieval

¹⁸ *Unter Kagershof bey Rautits-Gesinde gleichfalls ein bewachener hoher Berg seye.*

¹⁹ The spelling of Estonian words, as written down by medieval authors, does not correspond to the way of present-day spelling and pronunciation. The word *gerwe* as equivalent corresponding to the word *järv* (i.e.) ‘lake’ occurs also concerning other lake names, as well as in the district name *Gerwe(n)* / *Järvamaa*.

²⁰ Oral data by local inhabitant Arnold Kuld, Kaagjärve village. The road was told to have come from Suldina to Venda farmstead; having passed through the Meeluti hills, Rästina and Niklasmäe forest, it lead to Parandu and Surdi, and, further on, after crossing the Väike-Emajõgi River at Vilaski, to Laatre and Sangaste.

Europe and churches dedicated to him existed also in Estonian towns (Tallinn, Pärnu) and parish centres (Viru-Nigula, Lääne-Nigula, Kirbla, Kose), rural chapels dedicated to him are extremely rare in Estonia (Vahtre 1989, 42–43). The dedication of the chapel to St Nicholas is also an argument for its location at a big way, intensely used by the German merchants.

Not only the name distinguishes the chapel of St Nicholas from other medieval rural chapels of Estonia, but also its very early origin must be noted. Coins from the second quarter of the 13th century show that the chapel on Niklasmägi hill existed at that time already. Here it must be noted that so early coins have not been found from the village cemeteries and rural chapel sites of southern Estonia before: the lower border of the earlier known ones is in the 1260s only.

Why was the chapel erected namely on this hill? Also here we can find an answer from Henry's chronicle. Henry writes about the crusaders' practice to have sermons at military assembly sites before the raids. The place of praying and negotiations of the army (*locus orationis et colloquiorum exercitus*) is mentioned in the context of the big raids of 1217 (HCL XXI: 2), 1218 (HCL XXII: 2) and 1220 (HCL XXIII: 9). In 1223, before the raid against Viljandi, 'the festivities of praying and negotiations' were celebrated (*celebratis orationum et colloquiorum solempniis*) (HCL XXVII: 2). Henry also mentions the crusaders' large army to direct against Saaremaa in 1227 after celebrating the festive ceremonies of Masses (*celebratis missarum solempniis*) (HCL XXX: 3). The same practice is noted also concerning the assembly site at Rastigerwe. Henry tells about performing negotiations and sermons or 'mysteries of praying' (*peractisque colloquiorum et orationum ... mysteriis*) there before the big campaign against Tartu in 1224 (HCL XXVIII: 5). As Niklasmägi Hill is the main landscape dominant in the surroundings of Lake Rautina (*Rastigerwe*), it seems most likely that just the top of this hill, well visible from the camping area at the lake, was the place at the military assembly and camping site where Masses before the raids were celebrated – the festive events of communal purpose and character had to be well visible to the army. Probably just this tradition of pre-raid Mass celebrations was, in addition to the landscape situation and location at the trading road, the reason why the chapel was built on Niklasmägi as early as in the second quarter of the 13th century already.

Thus, soon after the crusades a wooden chapel was constructed close to Lake *Rastigerwe*, at the trade route from Riga to Otepää, and from there further onwards to Pskov and Tartu. It was built on the same hill with an Iron Age stone grave, maybe on its top. The chapel became the centre for a large medieval village cemetery that functioned continuously up to the 18th century. Judging by the glassed windows and remains of lime mortar, referring at least to a stone foundation, the chapel was outstanding, different from ordinary rural local chapels. Also the legends of a church bell in the lake may refer to the special status of the sanctuary and be based on real recollections of a chapel bell.

THE CEMETERY IN A BROADER CONTEXT

The existing data indicate that the medieval chapel was preceded by an Iron Age stone grave that was, probably, in use also in the end of the Iron Age. However, the presence of flat cremation graves, with bones either dispersed or buried in pits, as characteristic

for rare cremations at medieval village cemeteries of the region (Valk 2001, 63–65) cannot be excluded either in its surroundings – this can be suggested by the broad distribution of dispersed cremated bones. Although data referring to the use of Final Iron Age stone graves in Ugandi district are most scanty, information from Niklasmägi has raised the question of stone graves again, at least in the southern periphery of the region. It remains unclear if the cemetery was continuously used during transition from prehistory to the Christian period, but the coin finds reflect intensive use of the site already since the second quarter of the 13th century.

It is difficult to estimate the place of Niklasmägi among the village cemeteries of southern Estonia, as most of the ornaments of non-ferrous metal were robbed. However, against the background of the few remains, ferrous finds and excavation results from trench 2 some specific peculiarities can be noted. Concerning the burial rites, first, the high number of iron sewing needles among grave goods is significant. From the twelve graves in trench 2 in all four needles were found; in addition there were over ten fragments from the trench and at least ten finds from the plundered area. Such frequency is unique in all southern Estonia, giving evidence of the peculiarities of burial customs, for needle finds are quite rare in the cemeteries of the region (Valk 2001, 55). Second, the area of trench 2 stands out by the high number of coins, especially of the 15th century. Such frequency of coins from that period has never been recorded on medieval cemeteries of southern Estonia: coins from the 15th century are rare in the graves yet (Valk 2001, fig. 45). Although the coins from the fill of the graves may partly be votive gifts brought to the chapel, their large number can also be caused by a higher than ordinary use of coins in burial practices at the chapel site with vivid coin offering traditions.

The cemetery of Niklasmägi stands out among ordinary South Estonian village cemeteries also in ethno-cultural terms. Textile items decorated with bronze are not so typical for southern Estonia and refer to other cultural traditions. Up to now, from Estonia there exist numerous data of bronze-ornamented shawls and headbands only from the cemetery of Siksälä in the south-easternmost corner of the country (Laul & Valk 2007, 64–65). Also the few remains of medieval jewellery indicate to close contacts with the territory of Latvia during the first half of the second millennium AD. Spiral rings made of wire of round section are an artefact type widespread in eastern Latvia in the 11th – 13th centuries (LA 1974, 232, table 62: 14).

The 13th – 15th century ornaments, especially shield-shaped bracelets (Vaska 2006) and trapezoid and anthropomorphic pendants are typical finds for that time in north-eastern Latvia, likewise on Siksälä Cemetery (Laul & Valk 2007, 73, fig. 105: 10), but alien for medieval graves of southern Estonia.

The numerous Iron Age cremations, probably, bound to the tradition of stone graves, as well as the fact that Lake Rautina was called *Rastigerwe* in Henry's chronicle (see footnote no. 19) indicate, however, the Finnic background of the area. Considering the 'Latvian' character of finds from the 13th – 15th centuries, the ethno-cultural affinity of the area in the period of crusades remains unclear. These finds show that the local population differed in ethno-cultural terms from that of Ugandi district. It remains unclear, however, whether the surroundings were populated by the Latgallians, by some micro-ethnos, i.e. an intermediate group between the Estonians and the Latgallians or by mixed population.

The medieval grave finds enable us to raise the question, if the region belonged to Ugandi at all in the Final Iron Age. Against such affinity speaks also the assemblage of hostile troops at Lake *Rastigerwe* before raids into that district. As unexpectedness was a precondition for successful attacks, it seems unlikely that the army gathered in the territory of the district that was going to be plundered. Rather we can suggest that Lake *Rastigerwe* was located in the attackers' or, at least, neutral territory. Also, in case of the military assembly site at Lake *Astigerwe* on the way to *Saccala*, Henry clearly mentions its location in the land of the Latgallians (HCL XIV: 12; XIX: 11; XXIII: 9). An anonymous military assembly site that has been suggested to be located at Evele (because of its German toponym *Wohlfahrt*) is also said to have been 'close to *Saccala*' (HCL XXI: 2). Considering this, it seems likely that the surroundings of Lake *Rastigerwe* rather were not, than were a part of Ugandi district.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavation results show that an Iron Age stone grave, a site of a Catholic chapel and a 13th – 18th centuries' village cemetery, belonging to the local population had existed on Niklasmägi before looting. From this complex only the peripheral areas of the Christian period cemetery have partly been preserved. The results of recent rescue work on Niklasmägi – although the gained information forms only scanty remains of what existed there before looting – give evidence of the former richness of the archaeological material. Judging by the finds, the site outstands among Late Iron Age cemeteries and chapel sites of southern Estonia, as unique and special. Having its roots in an Iron Age stone grave already, the village burial ground existed on the hill since the time of crusades up to the 18th century. The special position of the chapel was probably caused by its location on a central route from Latvia to Ugandi, passing Otepää and Tartu, and by the meaning of Niklasmägi hill in the period of crusades: most likely Masses were celebrated there by the crusaders before their raids to Ugandi while camping at the adjacent Lake *Rautina* / *Rastigerwe*.

Although the long-term and systematic looting has destroyed most of the information about the chapel site and the core area of the Iron Age, medieval and post-medieval cemetery, the investigated remains of the monument have anyway provided new information and raised new questions about prehistoric and medieval burial traditions, medieval offering practices and the ethno-cultural situation on the borderlands of the Finnic and Latgalian population.

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RAUAAEGNE KALME NING 13.–18. SAJANDI KALMISTU JA KABELIASE NIKLUSMÄEL: KALMERÜÜSTE JA ARHEOLOOGIA

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Niklusmäe kalme asub Valgamaal, Karula vallas, Kaagjärve külas, ajaloolise Võrumaa Karula kihelkonna läänepiiril, Valgast 10 km idakagus (jn 1). Mäe jalam algab Rautina ehk Kaagjärve järvest u 120 m kaugusel, Valga–Antsla tee põhjaküljel. Pärimuse järgi on Niklusmäel olnud Nikluse, s.t Püha Nikolause kirik.

2011. a anti arheoloogidele anonüümne vihje muistise lõhkumisest. Kontrollimisel ilmnis, et mäelaale oli kopaga kaevatud ligi 40 m 1–1,2 m laiust kraavi (jn 2). Lahtine liiv sisaldas põlenud ja põlemata inimluid ning üksikuid kalmeleide.

Kalme iseloomu ja kahju ulatuse kindlakstegemiseks ning selleks, et ära hoida muistise edasist kahjustumist, tehti kalmel 2012. a suvel projekti “Arheoloogia, võim ja ühiskond” raames arheoloogilised päästeuurinud. Ilmnis, et kogu kalmesüdamik u 350 m² ulatuses on täiesti lõhutud (jn 3) ning pinnasest on metallleid ja mündid välja korjatud. Põhjalikust detektorirüüstest andis tunnistust värvilisest metallist esemete ja tervemate raudsajade peaaegu täielik puudumine. Rüüstajatest oli maha jäänud kaks kokku korjatud leidude kogumit. Segatud kalmepinnasest leidude otsimisel oli arheoloogidele abiks Jõgevamaa Detektoristide Klubi. Korraldatud teabepäeval ilmnis, et kalmet on süstemaatiliselt rüüstatud 4–5 aasta vältel.

Uuringute käigus sõeluti läbi liivahunnikud, mis olid kopaga kraavist välja tõstetud, ning tehti kalmesüdamikku läbiva kaeve kõrvale kaks proovikaevandit. Neist esimeses (3 m²) oli pinnas puutumatu liivani läbi segatud. Algses asendis oli vaid ühe peaga lääneedelassee maetud mehe kolju. Teisest kaevandist (7 m²) leiti pealmisest hallist mullakihist kaks 13.–14. saj mäe-kristallhelmest (jn 4: 2, 4), merevaikhelmes (jn 4: 1) ja 3 münti. Üks 1799. aastal vermitud ohvrimünt oli ligi 50 cm sügavusele ulatuvas kaeves. Maapinnast 1–1,3 m sügavusel oli kaksteist 14.–16. (17.) saj matust, osalt pealematmisega lõhutud (jn 5). Luustike juures oli kirstujäänuseid, sh hästisäilinud 15. saj laudkirstust ja vastsündinu pakk-kirstust. Surnud olid suunatud valdavalt peaga läände, kuid üks laps oli maetud peaga ida ja teine kagu poole. Luustike juurest leiti münte, hoburaudsõlgi, nuge ja nõelu (jn 6: 1–6). Kaks rõngassõlge (jn 6: 7, 8) ja üks sellise katke pärinevad lõhutud matustest. Müntide suur hulk – ülakehtides tõenäoliselt osaliselt rüüstatud pinnasega kaevandist leiti neid kokku 15, sh 9 matuste juurest või hauatäitest, on ilmselt põhjuseks, miks kalme rüüstamisel ei piirdutud ohvrirahade otsimisega maapinna lähedusest, vaid kaevati läbi kogu puujuurtest kaitsmata kalmesüdamik.

Põletamata luud olid happelises pinnases halvasti säilinud. Luustike seas (tabel 1) domineerisid täiskasvanud, kellest enamik oli surnud vanemas eas. Maetute hammastel esines hambakivi, stressijooni, abstsessijälgi ja kaariest; esines ka hammaste väljalangemist. Kahe viimase patoloogia üheks peamiseks põhjustajaks on süsivesikuid sisaldavad toidud. Vananemisega kaasnevatest patoloogiatest täheldati liigeste, selgrootülikehade ja liigespindade kulumist. Pidevale raskele füüsilisele tööle osundasid selgrootülide vahekettasongad (Schmorli sõlmed) kahe mehe luudel. Tuvastati kolm paranenud luumurdu ühe vanema mehe luustikul, samuti kolm healoomulist osteoomi ehk luukasvajad, neist kaks segatud luudel (jn 7). Luuleiud, sh patoloogiad ja vigastused viitavad sellele, et kalmistule maeti talupoegi.

Segatud pinnasest saadud leidudest moodustavad enamiku kaelakeedest pärit helmed ja kaurikarbid (jn 4: 5–12), savinõukillud, nugade, naelte ja nõelte katked ning tekstiilide pronkskaunistused (klambrid, spiraalid). Pronksehetest leiti spiraalsõrmus, katkine laiakilbiline sõrmus (jn 9: 9), keskaegsete spiraalsõrmuste ja käevõrude katkeid, mõned väikesed trapetsripatsid (jn 9: 6–8) ja antropomorfne ripats (jn 9: 5). Juhuleiuna saadud helmestest moodustavad enamiku rõngashelmed (jn 4: 6) ja väiksed kollased kudrused (jn 4: 5); lisaks leiti mõned sinised vintjad helmed (jn 4: 6, 10) ja must vinthelmes (jn 4: 11). Keedest või peapärgadest võisid pärineda kaks kuljust (jn 9: 1, 2). Enamik raudesemetest (jn 10) on naelte, nugade ja õmblusnõelte (jn 10: 2) katked (vastavalt u 90, u 60 ja 23 leidu); seitsme noa juures oli säilinud nahktupe jäänuseid. Leiti ka 5 vöörõngast (jn 10: 5) või rõngakatket, tordeeritud raudrõngas (jn 10: 10), 14 pannalt või pandlakatket (jn 10: 4, 6), kaks ovaalse tuleraua katket (jn 10: 11, 12), kolm jäänaela (jn 10: 7, 8), 16.–17. saj laekavõti (jn 10: 9), õiekujuline raudkettake (jn 4: 15) ja 16 väikest pliiikettakest (jn 4: 13, 14). 145 savinõukillu seas domineerib kedrakeraamika (valdavalt keskaegne, osalt hilisrauaaegne). Leiti ka 2 veisehammast.

Leitud 55 (tabel 2) mündist pärineb seitsmeteist 13.–14. sajandist. Märkimisväärsimad on kolm Riia peapiiskop Nikolause (1231–1253) penni – esimesed sellised leiud Lõuna-Eesti külakalmistutelt ja kabeliasemetelt – ning Tartu piiskop Vyffhuseni (1343–1373) kahepoolne penn – esimene omalaadne Eesti teaduskogudes (jn 11). Leiti ka kolm 13. sajandi Visby brakteaati, neli 1260.–1330. aastate vahemikust pärit Tartu ja kaks Tallinnas löödud Taani brakteaatpenni ning kuusteist 15. sajandi väikenominaali. Suuremaid, 16.–18. sajandi

münthe oli varasematega võrreldes vähe – ilmselt olid need kui kergemini leitavad rüüste käigus välja korjatud. Müntide jaotumus alates 13. sajandist kuni 18. sajandi lõpuni, arvestades ka suuremate müntide suuremaid rüüstekadusid, on silmapaistvalt ühtlane.

Leitud tekstiilijäänused on valdavalt villased, linast oli vaid II kaevandist leitud sõlgede küljes. Erilist märkimist väärivad peapärja jäänused. 18–25 aasta vanuse naise kolju ümber olnud peapärg (jn 12) koosnes neljast omavahel ühendatud peapärjast, mis olid kaunistatud tinuliste, klaashelmeste ja pronksispiraalidega ning otsatuttidega (jn 13). Samast kogumist leiti tõenäoliselt pärja otsatuttide paeltest pärit kõlapaelte katkeid ja ruudulise sõba jäänuseid, eraldi aga sinise villase, pronksiga ilustatud sõba katke (jn 14).

Keskaegsele külakalmistule eelnenud rauaaegne kivil kalme oli rüüstega hävitatud. Mälestuste kohaselt oli nõgise, põlenud kive ja põlenud luid sisaldava pinnasega muinaskalme ligi 80 cm kõrgune ja 3–4 m laiune ning paiknes tee ääres, sellega risti. Järeleuuringutel leiti segatud pinnasest rohkelt eri põletusastmega, kuid valdavalt kaltsineerunud luukilde, samuti üksikuid põlemisjälgedega või lõhki põlenud, algselt 15–35 cm läbimõõduga kalmekive. Kalmekihis olevat olnud ka üks suur, ligi 1 m läbimõõduga ja u 0,8 m kõrgune kivi. Leidudest kuuluvad rauaaega kaks arvatavasti I aastatuhande algupoole tekstiilkeraamikatükki ja osa kedranõukilde, samuti vähesed põlenud metallesemed, sh trapetsripatsite kogum (jn 8: 8), kaks põlenud raudeseme katket (jn 10: 13, 14) ja mitmed üksikud väikesed sulanud pronksitükid. Mõned põlemata sinised 10.–11. sajandi vinthelmed näivad viitavat hilisrauaaja laibamatusele.

Muinaskalmel või selle läheduses olnud kabelist annavad tunnistust segatud pinnases olnud vähesed mõrditükid, rohked, osalt põlenud ja kokku sulanud aknaklaasikillud ning arvatavasti ka kaks ehisnaela. Niklasmäele kabeli rajamist põhjuseks oli tõenäoliselt asjaolu, et Henriku kroonika kohaselt asus Rastijärve (*Rastigerwe*), s.t Rautina järve ääres Ugandisse suunduvate vaenuvägede kogunemispai. Kroonika toponüümid aitavad lokaliseerida Rautina järve saksakeelne nimi *Röstgerw*, samuti lähedal olnud Rästina talude nimi. Henrik mainib ka ristsõdijate sõjaretkede-eelseid palvusi ja läbirääkimisi – nii üldiselt kui ka seoses Rastijärvega. Et sõjaretke eelsed missatalitused pidid olema sõdalastele nähtavad, toimusid need ilmselt Niklasmäel, mis on ümbruskonna maastikudominant ning järveäärsest laagripaigalt hästi näha. Kuna Niklasmäelt on leitud kolm Riia peapiiskop Nicolause (1235–1253) münti, ehitati kabel mäele ilmselt juba 13. sajandi teisel veerandil. Ilmselt just ristsõdade aegsete jumalateenistuste traditsioon andis põhjust teeäärsele Niklasmäele kabeli ehitamiseks. Meritsi saabunud võõraste rolli kabeli rajamisel näitab asjaolu, et see oli pühendatud pühale Nikolausele – meresõitjate kaitsepühakule. Klaasakende, aga ka mõrdiga seotud vundamendi põhjal otsustades oli Niklasmäe kabel tavalistest külakabelitest esinduslikum. Hoone hävimisele Liivi sõjas viitab kaude selleaegne Vene nooleots (jn 10: 3) – 1689. aasta kirikuvisitatsioonil mainitakse küll ebausukombeid kõrgel võsasel mäel, kuid kabelit enam mitte. Münthe ohverdati kabeliasemele 18. sajandi lõpuni.

Henriku teated Rautina järvest möödunud sõjaretkedest ning arheoloogilised märgid tähtsast ja erilistest kabelist toetavad vastastikkui üksteist, viidates nii tee kui ka kabeli keskele tähendusele. Tõenäoliselt kujutab Niklasmäest möödunud sõja- ja kaubatee endast sama teed, mille ääres ugaldas kunagi enne Riia linna rajamist Väina alamjooksult Pihkvasse suundunud saksa kaupmeeste vara röövisid. Lätist tulnud, Niklasmäe metsa läbivast ja Sangaste poole suundunud sõjateest räägib pärimus tänini.

Et muistis on rüüstatud ja lõhutud, jääb rauaaegse kalme ja matmiskombestiku lähem iseloom selguseks: pole teada, kuivõrd oli tegemist kivil kalmega ja kuivõrd maa-aluste põletusmatustega. Selge pole ka see, kas rauaaegne kalme kasvas vahetult üle keskaegseks külakalmistuks. Samas ulatub müntide põhjal paiga järjepidev kasutus 13. sajandi teisest veerandist 18. sajandini.

Matmiskombestiku osas eristavad Niklasmäe kalmet tavalistest lõunaeeesti külakalmistutest arvukad nõelaleiud ja müntide rohkus 15. sajandil. Paik on eriline ka etnokultuurilises võtmes. Pronksilustustega tekstiilijäänused, peapärjad, laiad õhukesed käevõrud ja trapetsripatsid on võõrad lõunaeeesti külakalmistutele, kuid väga tavalised Ida-Läti 13.–15. sajandi matustes, samuti Siksälä kalmes Eesti kagunurgas. Rastijärve (*Rastigerwe*) nimetus, samuti arvukad põletusmatused ja põlenud kalmekivid viitavad rauaaegsele läänemeresoome asustusele. Siiski jääb küsitavaks, kas ümbruskonnas elasid pärast ristsõdade lõppu ugallased, latgalid, läänemeresoome-latgali segarahvastik või mõne nüüdseks kadunud lõunaeeestilise väikeetnose esindajad. Vaatamata läänemeresoome kultuuritaustale ei ole tõenäoline, et 13. sajandi algusveerandil kuulus ümbruskond Ugandi maakonda.

Niklasmäel olnud ainulaadset muistist eristavad tavalistest lõunaeeesti külakalmistutest rohked rauaegsed põletusmatused, keskele kabelikohale viitavad leiud, sh müntide ja eriti 13.–15. sajandi väikeminaalide rohkus, ning etnokultuurilised erijooned. Sealsed leiud on tõstatanud uusi küsimusi Eesti lõunaserva muinasaegsete matmiskommete, keskaegsete maakabelite ja etnokultuuriliste olude kohta. Kuna kalmesüdamik on täielikult rüüstatud, jäävad paljud küsimused paraku vastuseta.