



THE HAAPSALU GALLOWS HILL

MARTIN MALVE, LIIVI VARUL and RAIDO ROOG

Tartu Ülikool, Ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, Arheoloogia osakond (University of Tartu, Institute of History and Archaeology, Department of Archaeology), Jakobi 2, 51014 Tartu, Estonia; martinmalve@gmail.com

MADIS MAASING

Tartu Ülikool, Ajaloo ja arheoloogia instituut, Üldajaloo osakond (University of Tartu, Institute of History and Archaeology, Department of General History), Lossi 3, 51003 Tartu, Estonia

SEBASTIAN K. T. S. WÄRMLÄNDER

Stockholm University, Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Arrhenius Laboratories, Svante Arrhenius väg 16C, 10691 Stockholm, Sweden

KALEV JAAGO

Rahvusarhiiv, Ajalooarhiiv (The National Archives of Estonia, Historical Archives), J. Liivi 4, 50409 Tartu, Estonia

INTRODUCTION

The excavations in the Haapsalu Gallows Hill were held as part of the study of the Estonian execution sites (Malve *et al.* 2013). Little was previously known about the gallows – it was opened more than 80 years ago (Lääne Elu 1932a; 1932b; Postimees 1932) and only some of the material has been published so far (Jaago 2011, 31). The purpose of the current excavations was to determine if the cultural layer had been preserved (e. g. human remains, structures) and when the gallows was erected.

The Haapsalu Gallows Hill is situated *ca* 1.2 km south-east from the medieval and early modern town, between the roads to Lihula and Tallinn. The execution site was in the middle of the town's meadows and pastures and could be seen from far away. Thus, the gallows with the executed people served as a warning to everyone. Today, only a 2 m high and 16 m wide mound overgrown with grass has remained.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The legal system of Haapsalu in Medieval and Early Modern Times

The Haapsalu Gallows Hill presumably existed already during Medieval Times, although so far no documents can confirm this. In Germany, fixed execution sites developed in the 13th – 15th centuries, and along with them the profession of the executioner. In Medieval Livonia (comprising modern Estonia and Latvia), a similar development took place (Jeziorski 2007).

Compared to the legal systems in large Livonian towns such as Tallinn, the jurisdiction in Haapsalu was tightly under the control of its lord, the Bishop of Ösel-Wiek (Kala 1998a). The autonomy of Haapsalu increased during and after the 14th century (LUB 3, No. MCCCXCVIII), but the lord still had authority through the participation of the Drost (administrator of the castle) in the legal decisions of the town council (Kala 1998b; Põltsam 1998). In Haapsalu, the Gallows Hill was situated inside the borders of the town jurisdiction (Germ. *Stadtmark*), on the pasture that was in joint possession of the citizens of Haapsalu, the bishop, and the canons (LUB 1, No. CDLXI).

It is unclear if there was a professional executioner in Medieval Haapsalu. Smaller towns often obtained professional hangmen only in the Early Modern Times (Schubert 2007, 68–69). In Haapsalu, the first documentation of an executioner dates from 1566 (SRA, Balt. Fögderäk. 376-1566-67).

Haapsalu managed to retain its town rights during the 17th and 18th centuries, when many Estonian towns lost that status (Küng *et al.* 2013, 344; Laur *et al.* 2003, 78). However, Haapsalu lacked independent decision-making capacity in criminal matters (including executions), especially in the middle of the 17th century when Haapsalu belonged to De la Gardie family (Soom 1995, 143–145; Jaago 2004).

The Gallows Hill of Haapsalu

The Haapsalu gallows may be compared to the ones in Tallinn and Tartu which are both known to have stone foundations (Lavi 1995, fig. 2; Renner 1953, 17). It is however unknown when these Estonian execution sites were erected. In the Holy Roman Empire, gallows hills with stone foundations appeared in the beginning of the 14th century (Schubert 2007, 68). According to the latest archaeological finds, the Haapsalu gallows was in use at least from the 16th century. It is first mentioned in written records in 1648, when the citizens complained that in 1642 the gallows was moved from its original location to *Lustimägi* (Germ. *Freudenberg*), where the citizens used to feast. After this complaint, the gallows was returned to its original location (Jaago 1997, 93; EAA 1239-1-8, page 272p, No. 38).

The site of execution is depicted on several town plans, starting from 1798¹ (Fig. 1). In the same year, the site was probably used for the last time: according to the church

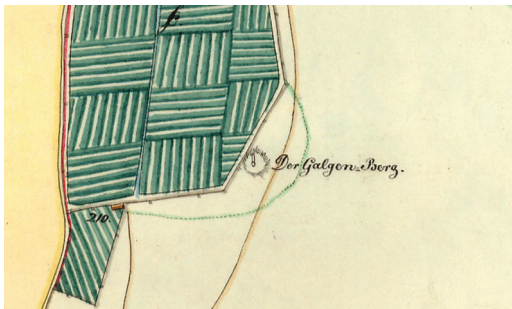


Fig. 1. The location of Haapsalu Gallows Hill on a map dating from 1848.

Jn 1. Haapsalu Võllamäe asupaik 1848. a kaardil. (EAA 854-4-105.)

metrics, on the 19th of November 1798, a suicide, a freed peasant Rein of Buxhöveden (1749–1798), was buried there (EAA 1239-2-4, page 95). In 1801, the Governing Senate of Russia demanded to liquidate all public execution sites (EAA 30-1-16309), and according to the protocol of the town council, the gallows of Haapsalu were torn down in the same year (EAA 992-1-132, page 51p).

During the 19th century, a suburb of Haapsalu formed around the former gibbet that was called *Võllaste*, or the Gallows Hill (Germ. *Galgenberg*) (Jaago

¹ EAA 854-4-109 (1798); EAA 854-4-105 (1848); EAA 854-4-106 (1859).

1997, 96). For a long time, the suburb had only one street, *Võllaste* (later renamed *Mäe* and *Niine*); only in the 1950s the contemporary street network was formed (*ibid.*). Allegedly, even in the beginning of the 20th century, the remains of the gallows were detectable (Lääne Elu 1932a). According to folk tales, there was also a torture chamber around the 17th century, where both criminals and the leaders of the Estonian rebels were tortured and executed (*ibid.*).

FIELDWORK IN 1932 AND 2013

Excavations in 1932

In 1932 two skeletons, a round wall, and some early modern items were found. Local 'gold diggers' opened the mound, but after discovering the first skeleton the Society of Haapsalu Museum took over the excavations. They were conducted by artist Roman Gottfried Haavamägi (until 1937 Espenberg; 1891–1964). The remains of two males in supine-prone position were unearthed on the east side of the hill (Fig. 2). The first skeleton was found in a 1 m deep grave. His cranium, midshafts of the left femur, right tibia, and fibula had been sawn through. The second skeleton was unearthed 1 m deeper from the first and was aged 40 to 50 years. Only the vault of the cranium was cut off. A knife was found on the right part of the chest, together with pieces of a greatcoat, three buttons, and fragments of hobnailed boots. Several cut-marks were noticed and interpreted as execution injuries (Lääne Elu 1932a; 1932; Postimees 1932).

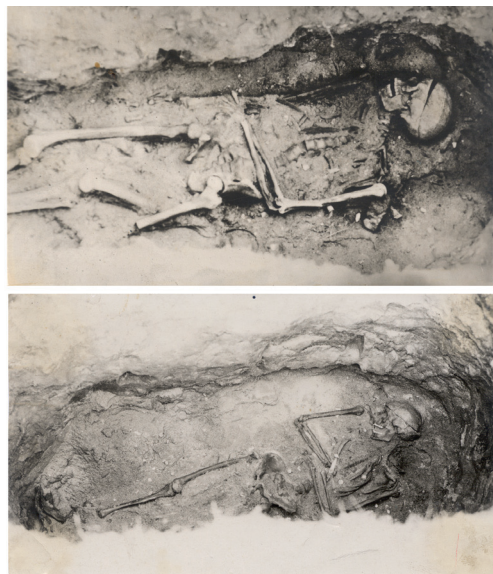


Fig. 2. First (above) and second (below) skeleton unearthed in 1932.

Jn 2. 1932. aastal välja puhastatud esimene (ülal) ja teine luustik (all).
(HM 2019; HM 2018.)

Fieldwork in 2013

Two trenches and the round wall with a probable entrance were opened (Fig. 3). Additionally, test-pits were made around the mound to find the place where the executed were buried. It appears that the cemetery was probably not located nearby.

The polygon-shaped round wall, 10 metres in diameter, was well preserved (0.5–1 m high, 1 m thick). It was laid of limestone and fastened with mortar (Fig. 4); also boulders, bricks and roof tiles were used. The gallows was probably surrounded from every side by a ditch, dug approximately 2 m from the round wall. The gravel from the ditch was used to fill the centre of the gibbet. In the north-western section of the round wall a structure of two parallel walls laid from boulders was unearthed (Fig. 3). It could be a foundation of a 3 m wide entrance. In 1932 and 2013 numerous boulders and limestones were found, which could have been wedge stones to a gallows constructions. Interestingly, 0.9 m inside from the round wall a row of posts wedged

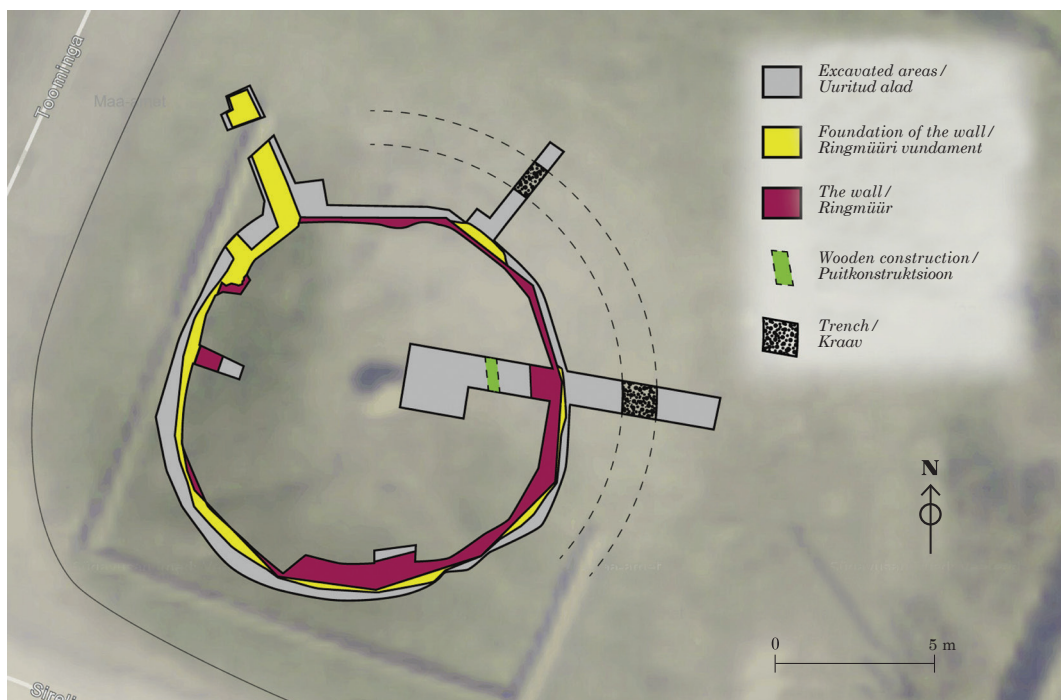


Fig. 3. Location plan of the excavated areas of the Haapsalu Gallows Hill in 2013.

Jn 3. 2013. aasta välitööde käigus avatud alade asendiplaan Haapsalu völlumäel.

Drawing / Joonis: Raido Roog



Fig. 4. Opened section from the round wall.

Jn 4. Avatud lõik ringmüürist.

Photo / Foto: Raido Roog

with limestone was encountered (Figs 3; 5). This construction could be part of the previous wooden gibbet² or belong to another structure (e.g. a gallows tree).

Excavation in the 1930s disturbed the central part of the mound – coins and trash from the beginning of the 20th century were found even from the bottom. The excavated soil was sieved and seven coins³ from the 16th century (the oldest minted in 1536) and the first quarter of the 17th century were found.⁴ One of them (HM 9188: 24) had a hole, suggesting it had been used as a pendant. All coins were most likely deposited when the gallows was still in use.

Only mixed human bones were uncovered from the site. Two of the bones – a parietal bone (Fig. 6) and a fibula – had saw marks on them. The fibula probably

² Samples of the wood were collected for radiocarbon dating.

³ HM 9188: 1, 4, 14, 17, 22–24.

196 ⁴ Coins identified by Mauri Kiudsoo (AI).

belonged to the first skeleton uncovered in the 1930s. Osteological analysis of the bone material preserved from 1932 and found in 2013 revealed no injuries related to execution. The removal of the cranial vault of the men indicates autopsy. Both crania had been opened in a similar manner, which could be the handwork of the same surgeon. At that time there were no standards for craniotomy and every practitioner developed his own method (Connell & Miles 2010, 48). The surgeon who conducted the procedure was skilled, as the crania had been opened with single cuts and the sizes of the removed vaults were the same. It is unknown why the autopsy was held – whether to determine the cause of death or out of anatomical interest.

One of the two skeletons discovered in 1932 could have belonged to Rein of Buxhöveden, as according to a remark in the church metrics he was buried there after autopsy (Germ. *obduction*) (EAA 1239-2-4, page 95). Since autopsies were usually performed by physicians and surgeons in the 18th century, the performer of this procedure was probably Andreas Friedrich Schütz who was both doctor of the county (Germ. *Kreisarzt*) and staff surgeon from 1797 (Brennsohn 1922, 328). Thus, the men found at the Haapsalu gallows hill probably belong to the period when performing autopsies became popular in Europe, i.e. from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Cadavers were mostly opened to establish the cause of death during the Early Modern Times (Waldron 2009, 163). The criminals and suicides were dissected frequently, and it was often seen as an additional punishment (Burton 2005, 280). Burying suicides in execution sites is not unusual in Estonia, e.g., one was placed in Tartu Gallows Hill in 1649 (Hermann 1977, 488). There are



Fig. 5. Wooden structure with wedged limestones inside the round wall.

Jn 5. Ringmüüri seest leitud paekividega kiilutud puitkonstruktsioon.

Photo / Foto: Raido Roog



Fig. 6. Fragment of a parietal bone with saw cut marks.

Jn 6. Sae lõikejälgedega kiiruluu fragment. (HM 9188: 44.)

Photo / Foto: Raido Roog

only a few known cases of autopsies found in Estonian archaeological material. In addition to the skeletons of Haapsalu, there is a female cranium from the choir of the Koeru St Mary Magdalene Church (Roog & Malve 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

During the fieldwork in 2013 the polygon-shaped limestone round wall and a wooden construction with unknown purpose were unearthed. Additionally, a probable entrance and a ditch surrounding the wall were found. Mixed human remains and five coins from the Early Modern Times were collected from the mound. The bones belong to the two men found in 1932 and the coins were from the 16th – 17th centuries, possibly deposited when the site was in use.

The male skeletons, excavated in the 1930s, probably originate from a period when the gibbet was not in use as an execution site, during the turn of the 18th century. The skeletons displayed traces of autopsy, including sawn cranial vaults. Unlike in Tallinn Gallows Hill, the dead and their body parts have not been buried in the execution site of Haapsalu.

On the basis of the archaeological material found in the gallows, it can be concluded that the site was used already during the 16th century. In the light of current results it remains unclear whether the gibbet was used in Medieval Times. The Haapsalu Gallows Hill is currently the only known well-preserved execution site in Estonia.

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- EAA 854-4-106.** Karte von Hapsal. 1859. (*Map in EAA.*)
- EAA 854-4-109.** План о принадлежащих уездному городу Гапсалью также о прожектированных в 1788 году для отдачи в городское ведомство близ лежащих помещичьих землях. Compiled by C. F. Guthardt, 1798. (*Map in EAA.*)
- EAA 992-1-132, page 51p.** Rae protokoll. 31.05.1801. (EAA.)
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HAAPSALU VÖLLAMÄGI*Martin Malve, Liivi Varul, Raido Roog, Madis Maasing, Sebastian K. T. S. Wärmländer ja Kalev Jaago*

Haapsalu völlumäe uuringute eesmärk oli välja selgitada, kas mäel on säilinud hukkamisega seostatavat kultuurkihti – inimluid ja rajatise – ning mis ajast need võiksid pärineda. Völlumägi asus kesk- ja varauusaegsest Haapsalu linnast linnulennult 1,2 km kaugusel, Tallinna ja Lihula maantee vahel. Praeguseks on paigast säilinud u 2 m kõrgune ja u 16 m läbimõõduga kungas.

Kuigi võib eeldada, et völlumägi eksisteeris Haapsalus juba keskajal, pole selle kohta kindlat teavet. Vastavalt viimaste kaevamiste leidudele kasutati hukkamiskohta hiljemalt 16. sajandi I poolest. Endist timukat on Haapsalus mainitud 1566. aastal, ent völlast on esimest korda kirjalikult nimetatud alles 1648. aastal ning see likvideeriti 1801. aastal. Völlumäge kujutatakse 18.–19. sajandi linnaplaanidel (jn 1).

1932. aasta väljakaevamistel puhastati välja kaks mehematust (jn 2). Mõlema luustiku koljud olid läbi saetud, esimesel ka vasaku reieluu keskosa ja parem sääre- ja pindluu. 2013. aasta uuringutel rajati künkale kaks kaevandit ja avati ringmüür (jn 3). Völla hulknurkne kümnemeetrine ringmüür oli säilinud kogu pikkuses 0,5–1 m kõrgusena ja 1 m paksuselt. Müür oli laotud mõrdiga seotud paekividest, lisaks oli kasutatud maa-, tellis- ja katusekive. Ringmüüri ümber, u 2 m kaugusel, paiknes kraav, millest võetud kruusa oli kasutatud völlakoha südamikute täitmiseks. Ringmüüri loodeosas leiti kaks paralleelset müüri, mis olid laotud maakividest (jn 4). Tegemist võis olla völlale viiva tee alusega, mille laius oli u 3 m. Huvitav leid oli ringmüürist 0,9 m seepool asunud kividega kiilutud püstiste postide rida (jn 3; 5), mis võis olla osa kivivöllale eelnenud puust hukkamispaigast või mõnest teisest konstruktsioonist.

Kaevamiste käigus leiti seitse 16. sajandil ja 17. sajandi I veerandil vermitud münti, mis pärinevad tõenäoliselt hukkamispaiga kasutamisaajast. Koguti ka segatud inimluid, mille analüüsi käigus tuvastati kahel luul sae lõikejäljed – oimuluul (jn 6) ja pindluul, viimane pärineb tõenäoliselt juba 1930ndatel välja kaevatud esimeselt luustikult. 1932. ja 2013. aastal leitud luudel hukkamisele viitavaid vigastusi ei esine: neil olid lahkamise tunnused. Üks leitud luustikest võis kuuluda 1798. aastal enesetapu sooritanud Buxhövedeni Reinule, keda lahati enne völlumäele matmist. Haapsalu völlumägi on seni Eestis ainuke kindlalt teadaolev kesk- ja varauusaegne hukkamispaik, mis on ka praeguseni säilinud.