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Rescue excavations at the pit grave cemetery of Järveküla

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INTRODUCTION

The pit grave cemetery at Järveküla was discovered by the workers of OÜ Tammepärja Maja, while building an edifice in Kaare Road 3b in March 2014. The work was halted when a pin with a double-spiral plate head with a chain arrangement was found hanging from the bucket of the excavator and representatives of the National Heritage Board were informed. Since the burial site was discovered only in the course of earthworks, a part of it was dug off. As a result of preliminary studies the exact location of burials and the extent of the cemetery was determined. In order to carry on with the building activities the part of the cemetery that remained under the future houses had to be excavated. Those rescue excavations were carried out in April and November–December 2014.

The fieldwork revealed that the site was used in different periods: in the Roman Iron Age, the Migration Period and in the Final Iron Age in Estonia (*ca*. 1050–1225/50). *In situ* preserved burials originated from the last centuries of prehistory, some burials without grave goods may also be of a later date. The present paper gives an overview of the preliminary investigation results, a more comprehensive analysis of the material is yet to be finished.

LOCATION AND FIELDWORK

The cemetery is located in Järveküla village, Harju County, *ca*. 0.5 km east of Lake Ülemiste and *ca*. 45 m southwest of the Old Tartu Road. The settlement site of Peetriküla (no. 18821 in National Register of Monuments) is situated 250 m to the east-northeast and the settlement site of Järveküla (no. 18735) *ca*. 425 m to the west-southwest of it. The *tarand* grave of Mõigu-Peetri, excavated in 1975 was located *ca*. 100 m west from it (Fig. 1; Tamla 1977; 1978). At present the burial place is in the courtyard of an apartment building, a large modern warehouse; an industrial building is located east, southeast and south of it. Possibly a part of the cemetery was destroyed during the construction of the industrial building.

The cemetery in Järveküla was established on a flat ground where differences in height with the surrounding area are almost lacking. There used to be an open landscape with a

field twenty years ago. The same area was already used as a field at least since the 1680s (EAA 1-2-C-II-1; EAA 1-2-C-I-14). A heap of stones is located in the area of the cemetery. Its diameter is 10–12 m and height *ca*. 1.7 m. Most probably the stones were piled up during the Soviet period, but the possibility that stones were piled upon an earlier stone grave cannot be excluded.

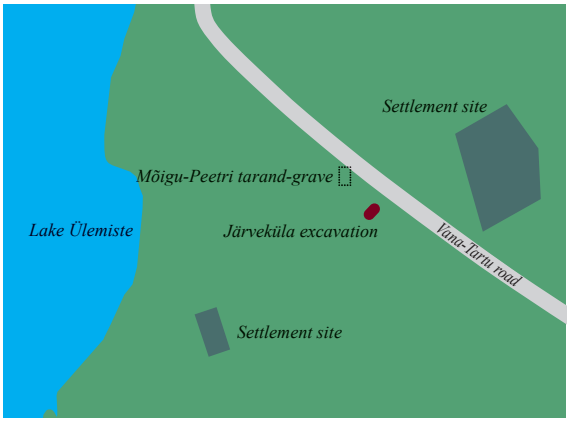

Fig. 1. *Distribution map of archaeological objects at Järveküla and neighbouring areas.*
Jn 1. *Järveküla ja naaberalade arheoloogiliste objektide levikukaart.*
Drawing / Joonis: Reet Maldre

BURIAL PLACE AND HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS

The rescue excavations took place in two stages, during which two excavation plots were opened (Fig. 2; 3). Eight partial or full skeletons *in situ* were recovered from the site. The results of anthropological analyses of these skeletons are given below and in Table 1. The age at death and biological sex of buried individuals were estimated according to common standard methods (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994; WEA 1980; Mays 2006; Bass 2006). The bones were measured according to Martin & Saller (1957); the body stature and weight were assessed according to the methods based on regression equations (Ruff 2007; Ruff *et al*. 2012).

The first excavation plot measured 80 m² and it was located in the north-eastern part of the cemetery. Three burials were unearthed in sandy soil. Burial no. 1 belonged to a child aged 11–14 years, whose head was directed towards south-west. The skeletal elements from cranial and post-cranial skeletons were recovered, unfortunately mostly in fragments. Only the bones of upper extremities and left tibia were measurable; the body height of the child was estimated to be 140–155 cm. Both hands were slightly bent at the elbow and placed on the pelvic area. A coiled fragment of a finger-ring with double-spiral ends was placed close to the fingers of left hand.

Burial no. 2 was situated 80 cm south-east from the above described burial and its head had originally been directed towards south-west. The bones of that burial were heavily disturbed and extremely broken. That burial was surrounded by limestones and granite stones that were probably pulled together with a stone-clearing machine. The burial was destroyed in the course of pushing stones towards the edge of the stone heap, which is why the bones were located between, under and on top of stones. Although the majority of bones were found in their anatomic locations, they were located in different heights amongst stones, occasionally broken around stones. The skeletal remains belonged to a 40–55 year old woman. The body height was 150–152 cm and body weight 64–65 kg. The skeleton indicated

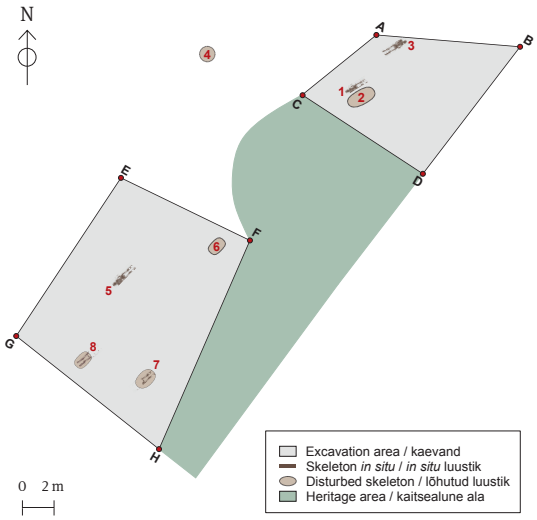

Fig. 2. *Burials in Järveküla.*
Jn 2. *Järveküla matused.*
Drawing / Joonis: Reet Maldre

Fig. 3. *View to the northern part of Järveküla cemetery from north-east.*
Jn 3. *Vaade Järveküla kalmistu põhjapoolsele osale kirde poolt.*
Photo / Foto: Gurly Vedru

Table 1. *Results of anthropological analyses of eight human skeletons from Järveküla burial site.*
Tabel 1. *Järveküla kalmistu kaheksa inimluustiku antropoloogilise analüüsi tulemused.*
Table / Tabel: Raili Allmäe

Number of burial / Matuse nr	Sex / Sugu	Age (yrs) / Vanus	Body weight / kehakaal (kg)*	Body height / kehapikkus (cm)*
1	-	11–14	-	139.4–154.2
2	Female	40–55	64.5	150.4–151.6
3	Female	18–25	55.8	153.9–157.1
4	Female	25–35	55.8	-
5	Female	40–60	57.9	156.7–160.6
6	-	10	-	119.6
7	Male	35–45	-	162.5
8	Female	40–50	60.1	-

* Ruff 2007; Ruff *et al.* 2012

pathological changes caused by a trauma. The distal ends of right ulna and radius were deformed, probably a complication of bone fractures. The right humeral bone showed also pathological changes on the anterior side of *caput humeri*. The jaw bones showed pathological changes characteristic to periodontal disease. A fragment of a rumbler bell and glass beads were unearthed in the neck area of the burial (Fig. 4). Additionally, bronze tweezers (Fig. 5: 8), a boat rivet and a fragment of a strike-a-light were found amongst the stones, but their connectedness with the burial remained unclear.

Burial no. 3 was located 2.4 m north-east from burial no. 1. That person was interred with its head towards north-east. The skeletal remains belonged to a 18–25 year old woman. The skeletal elements of cranial and post-cranial skeletons were recovered, but often in fragments. The estimated body stature was 154–157 cm and weight approximately 60 kg. Her right hand was stretched out beside her body, left hand was placed in the lower abdominal area. An assemblage of

Fig. 4. *Late Iron Age glass beads from Järveküla, burial no. 2.*
Jn 4. *Noorema rauaaja klaashelmeid Järvekülast, matusest 2.*
(AI 7278: 3.)
Photo / Foto: Heidi Luik

Fig. 5. *Late Roman Iron Age and Migration Period artefacts from Järveküla.*
Jn 5. *Noorema rooma rauaaja ja rahvasterännuaja esemeid Järvekülast.*
(AI 7278: 76, 64, 59, 75, 31, 35 (2), 45, 74, 29, 28, 5, 32.)
Photo / Foto: Heidi Luik

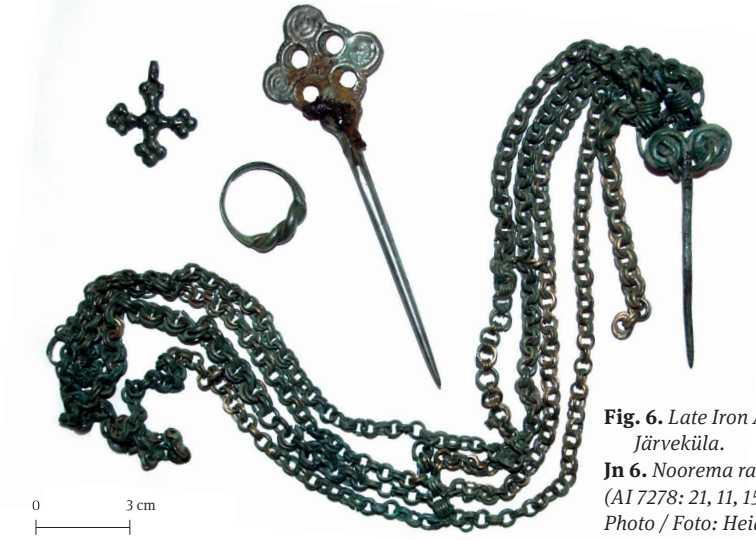

Fig. 6. *Late Iron Age bronze ornaments from Järveküla.*
Jn 6. *Noorema rauaaja pronksehteid Järvekülast.*
(AI 7278: 21, 11, 15, 85.)
Photo / Foto: Heidi Luik

disorderly positioned small bronze spirals was found above her knees, a larger bronze spiral and a number of small bronze spirals were also found between her thigh bones. Probably all of them originated from the ornamented lower part of an apron. Additionally, a knife and a sherd of a clay vessel were found near the head of the burial. It is possible that they were originally not connected with the burial, but got into that place in the course of earthworks. A bronze ring (Fig. 6) was found from the abdominal area while removing the bones. Originally it had been in the left hand of the deceased. Another knife was found *ca*. 25 cm west of the burial. It was placed on the same depth with the bottom of the grave, on the waist line, its blade towards the head of the burial.

Burial no. 4 was only partially preserved and it was located outside the excavation plot. These bones were found from the area where the soil was peeled off to the natural bedrock. Whether it was the original location of the burial is not known, nevertheless, it was an extremely fragmentary skeleton damaged by construction activities on site. The morphological and osteometric features of bones refer to a female who died at the age of 25–35 years. The body weight was approximately 56 kg; it was not possible to estimate the body height. A decorative pin (Fig. 6) and bronze spirals were found with the bones.

Additionally some fragments of other skeletons were found: the right side of maxilla, right zygomatic bone and a fragment of the mandibula of an adult individual and a fragment from the left temporal bone (*pars petrosa*) of an infant.

Excavation plot II measured *ca*. 65 m² and it was opened in the western part of the cemetery. Burial no. 5 belonged to a 40–60 year old woman, who was interred with her head towards west-south-west. The skeleton was well-preserved and complete. The estimated body height of the woman was 156–160 cm and weight 58 kg. Her left arm was slightly bent from the elbow and the palm of the hand placed on the right side of the pelvis. Her right palm was placed on top of the left one. A nail was found in a distance of 15 cm from her left knee.

Burial no. 6 belonged to a 9–10 year old child, whose skeleton was completely disturbed. The body was probably interred with its head towards north-east. The bones were mostly fragmentary, a measurable bone was the right humeral bone, according to which the body height of the child was 120 cm.

Burial no. 7 was only partially preserved. Articulated bones of lower extremities and fragments of innominate bones were found *in situ*. The few observable morphological and osteometric features of these bones refer to an adult male skeleton, who was probably buried face down, in prone position. The estimated body height was 162.5 cm. Burial no. 8 was oriented towards south-west. Only articulated bones of lower extremities and innominate bones were found. All bones were highly eroded and fragmentary, thus only some measurements are available, suggesting that it was a female with an estimated body weight of 60 kg.

In relation to skeletons nos. 7 and 8, fragments of two skulls were found. The morphological features of the first skull were characteristic to a male skull in most cases. The age at death of the man was 35–45 years. The second skull indicated morphological traits characteristic to a female skull in most cases. The age at death of the woman was between 40–50 years.

Also a number of mixed bones were found at the excavation area, which is natural for a burial area. The analyses of these bones show that in addition to eight estimated burials there could have been at least one burial of a 4–6 year old child and at least four burials of adults (based on finds of mandibular bones). Counting the distal ends of right radial bones confirms the find – three adults and one child. Occasional single bones of newborns and infants were also found.

FINDS

More than 100 artefacts were gathered during the archaeological excavations and supervision. Most of the finds are related to burials of different periods. Some wide bronze finger-rings with a hollow-convex cross-section, a spiral finger-ring with obliquely grooved ends and two fragmentary crossbow fibulae (Fig. 5: 1, 3–4) belong to the Late Roman Iron Age. Both fragments come from the crossbow fibulae with a ring decoration which were mostly spread in the northern part of Estonia, and could be dated to the 3rd–5th centuries (Lang 1996, 150–153, fig. 55; Rohtla 2005, 125–126, fig. 3: 3–4; 5). Most of the wide finger-rings – four specimens – are closed, but one has open ends. A fragment of such finger-ring has been made into a bead (Fig. 5: 2). Both finger-rings with a hollow-convex cross-section and spiral finger-rings were common finds in northern and central Estonian *tarand*-graves (Lang 2007, 214, figs. 136–137). A deformed fragmentary bronze ornament decorated with dots-and-circles (Fig. 5: 5) is probably a spiral finger-ring with longitudinally ridged end-plates also belonging to the Late Roman Iron Age (Schmiedehelm 1955, fig. 14: 9; Quast 2005, 256–258, fig. 10; Lang 2007, 214). One more presumable spiral finger-ring with tapering ends and a small bracelet which probably belonged to a child also could be dated to the Late Roman Iron Age (Fig. 5: 6–7; cf. Schmiedehelm 1955, fig. 23: 14).

Find material of the Roman Iron Age containing finds typical to *tarand*-graves, was gathered in the course of supervision carried out while sieving the peeled soil, and when the soil was tested with metal detectors. Most probably, they originate from a possible stone grave, remains of which form the previously mentioned stone heap.

Bronze tweezers decorated with dots-and-circles (Fig. 5: 8; e.g. Tvauri 2012, 92, fig. 54: 1) and a gilded bronze item (Fig. 5: 9) may belong to the Migration Period. The gilded object is presumably an agraffe button with the domed face divided into three segments (Hines 1993, 28–30, figs. 59–61). The majority of gilded agraffe buttons in Estonia have been previously found from the stone grave-field at Proosa (Tvauri 2012, 174, fig. 146). A fragmentary finger-ring with double spiral ends, found with burial no. 1, is folded so that it could have been used as a bead. Finger-rings with double-spiral ends were used from the 4th century until the end of the Viking Age and even later in all Estonia (Tvauri 2012, 165, fig. 131; Selirand 1974). Quite numerous finds – more than 50 specimens – are iron rivets and nails. Boat rivets have been found from several Pre-Viking and Viking Age graves in North Estonia and Saaremaa. The rivets and nails may originate from boat burials, but several other interpretations are also possible (Mägi 2002, 114–115; Tvauri 2012, 277). The majority of finds, part of which were found as grave goods of excavated burials, could be related to the burials of the Late Iron Age: a pin with a double-spiral plate head, a small cross-headed pin with completely connected terminals, a fragment of a pin, bronze chain fragments, a cross pendant, bronze rumbler bells, a finger-ring with twisted middle section and overlapping ends, a connecting link of chain, glass beads, bronze spirals of different sizes, an iron chain rod and knives, etc. (Figs. 4; 6). All these items were typical grave goods in Estonia in the Late Iron Age (e.g. Selirand 1974; Mägi 2002). Both find material as well as the long use of the burial place resembles the grave at Mõigu-Peetri, located in the vicinity (Tamla 1977), thus indicating similar pattern of use. Several artefacts, presumably not related to the burials and belonging to the Middle Ages and the Modern Period were also found: Swedish 2 öre, Stockholm, Johan III, 1573(?)[1], a brass button, a fragment of a horse figurine, etc.

[1] Identified by Mauri Kiudsoo (AI).

ANIMAL BONES FROM JÄRVEKÜLA

In addition to human bones, the osteological material of Järveküla also contained a small number of animal bones. The origin of animal bones remained uncertain: they are not associated with the burials of the Late Iron Age or later periods; some of them could theoretically be associated with the burials of the Roman Iron Age. Most likely they are material from a settlement site that has landed up on a former field.

54 bone fragments could be determined, additionally three bird bones were found, two of which belonged to hen. In order to determine the age of animals at slaughter, the replacement of milk teeth and the eruption of permanent teeth (Schmid 1972) and ossification of epiphyses (Silver 1969) were used; bones of sheep and goat were differentiated on the basis of the identification guide compiled by Boessneck *et al.* (1964).

The majority of animal bones was gathered from the peeled soil during sieving. Archaeozoological material consisted of the bones of domestic animals (Fig. 7). Almost half of the material was the bones of sheep/goat (*Ovis aries/Capra hircus*). Yet the existence of goat bones remains uncertain, all bones identified to the species level belonged to sheep. Cattle bones were the second numerous, pig bones occurred in lower number. All body regions were represented, with slaughter remains clearly dominating. As the amount of material is very small, the results may be occasional.

The sheep/goat bones belonged to at least three animals, one of them was slaughtered at an age before 28 months; one was somewhat older and the age of one remained uncertain, it certainly was not a lamb. As the preservation of bone fragments was poor, their modern origin can be excluded. Cattle are represented by at least three or four specimens – a calf, a heifer and an older adult specimen. Two bone fragments seem to be modern. Pig bones belong to at least one young animal before the age of one year, one specimen older than two years; the third specimen was obviously modern.

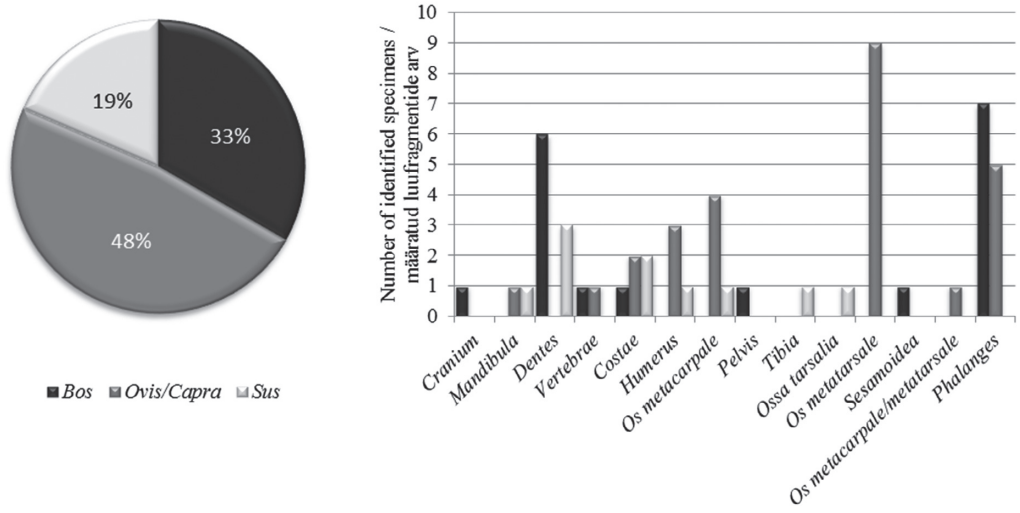

Fig. 7. *Species and anatomical composition of bone fragments.*
Jn 7. *Loomaluude liigiline ja anatoomiline koostis.*
Figure / Joonis: Liina Maldre

CONCLUSION

On the basis of finds it can be supposed that the cemetery at Järveküla was first used in the Late Roman Iron Age. The finds of that period probably indicate the existence of a *tarand*-grave. Those finds were gathered during supervision in the process of sieving the peeled soil; the soil was investigated with metal detectors. The same area was used for burying also in the Viking Age. Those finds were mostly also gathered later from the peeled soil. Eight burials were preserved in their original locations, although some of them were disturbed in the course of agricultural activities of later centuries. A part of the cemetery will be preserved intact in the courtyard of the building complex at Kaare Road 5.

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PÄÄSTEKAEVAMISED JÄRVEKÜLA MAA-ALUSEL KALMISTUL

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2014. aasta aprillis ning novembris–detsembris toimusid arheoloogilised päästekaevamised Järveküla maa-alusel kalmistul. Matmispaiga avastasid sama aasta märtsis Kaare tee 3 kinnistul hoonet ehitanud firma OÜ Tammepärja Maja töötajad. Kuna muistis avastati mullatöid tehes, oli osa sellest hävitatud. Ehitustegevuse jätkamiseks tuli läbi kaevata hoonete alla jäävad kalmistuosad. 2014. aasta välitöödega selgitati välja Järveküla kalmistu säilinud ulatus. Arheoloogiliste kaevamistega, eemaldatud pinnase sõelumisega ja selle kontrollimisel metallidetektoritega selgus, et kohta oli matmiseks kasutatud erinevatel aegadel: rooma rauaajal, rahvasterännuajal ning muinasaja lõpusajanditel. *In situ* säilinud matused pärinesid kõik muinasaja lõpusajanditest, võimalik, et osa leidudeta matuseid ka hilisemast ajast.

Kalmistu asub tasasel maal Järveküla külas, Ülemiste järvest u 0,5 km ida pool ja Vana-Tartu maanteest u 45 m edela pool. Matmispaik on praegu korterelamute hoovialal, matustega alast ida, kagu ja lõuna poole jääb kaasaegne suur lao- ja tööstushoone. Võimalik, et viimase ehitusega hävitati osa kalmest juba varem.

Päästekaevamised toimusid kahes etapis, mille käigus avati kaks kaevandit. Esimene kaevand asus kalmistu kirdepoolses osas ning sellesse jäi neli matust. Matus 1 kuulus 11–14-aastasele lapsele, kelle pikkus oli 140–155 cm. Matus 2 luulised säilmed kuuluvad 40–55-aastasele naisele, kelle kehapikkus oli 150–152 cm ja kehakaal 64–65 kg. Leiti ka traumale viitavaid muutusi: parema kodar- ja küünarluu distaalne ots oli deformeerunud, arvatavasti halvasti paranenud luumurru tüsistus. Parema õlavarreluu pea eesmisel pinnal esinesid samuti patoloogilised muutused. Matus 3 kuulus 18–25-aastasele naisele, kelle kehapikkus oli 154–157 cm ja kehakaal u 60 kg. Matus 4 oli säilinud väga fragmentaarselt. Enamik luulisi säilmeid kuulus 25–35-aastasele hapra kehaehitusega naisele, kelle kehakaal oli u 56 kg. Lisaks nimetatud leidudele oli luude hulgas teise indiviidi ülalõualuu parem pool, parem sarnaluu ja alalõualuu põnt; leiti ka imiku vasaku oimuluu koljuosa.

Teine kaevand avati kalmistu läänepoolses osas. Sellesse jäi samuti neli matust. Matus 5 kuulus 40–60-aastasele naisele. Tema kehapikkus oli 156–160 cm ja kehakaal 58 kg. Matus 6 luulised säilmed kuuluvad 9–10-aastasele lapsele, kelle kehapikkus oli u 120 cm. Matused 7 ja 8 olid tugevasti lõhutud ning vaid osaliselt oma algsetes asukohtades. Neist matus 7 kuulus arvatavasti mehele ja matus 8 35–40 aastasele naisele. Lisaks leiti osaliste luustike lähedalt fragmentidena veel kaks koljut. Esimese kolju jälgitavate morfoloogiliste tunnuste osas esineb mehelikke tunnuseid rohkem kui naiselikke, oletatavasti on tegemist mehe säilmetega, kelle vanus surmahetkel 35–45 aasta vahel. Teise kolju morfoloogiliste tunnuste osas on ülekaalus naiselikud tunnused, naise vanus surmahetkel 40–50 aastat. Eelkirjeldatutele lisaks leiti 2014. aasta arheoloogiliste uuringutega kaevandi alalt hulgaliselt lahtisi ja omavahel segunenud luid, mis on lõhutud kalmistualale omane. Materjali analüüs näitas, et lisaks kaheksale esialgses kohas säilinud luustikule võis matusealal olla veel vähemalt ühe 4–6-aastase lapse matus ning vähemalt nelja täiskasvanu matused (põhineb alalõualuu fragmentide arvul). Parempoolsete kodarluude distaalsete osade loendamine andis sarnase tulemuse – 3 täiskasvanut ja 1 laps. Üksikleidudena ilmnesid ka vastsündinute või imikute luud.

Arheoloogiliste kaevamiste ja järelevalvetööde käigus saadi enam kui 100 esemeleidu, millest suurem osa on seotud eriaegsete matustega. Nooremasse rooma rauaaega kuuluvad esemed on laiad õõneskumera läbilõikega pronkssõrmused, spiraalsõrmused ja ambsõlgede katkendid (jn 5: 1–7). Rahvasterännuaega võivad kuuluda silmakestega kaunistatud pronkspintsetid ja kullatud pronksese, mille puhul on tõenäoliselt tegemist agraffnööbiga (jn 5: 8–9). Üsna arvukalt leidus rauast paadineete ja naelu – umbes poolsada eksemplari. Kõige enam leide on seostatavad muinasaja lõpu matustega: ehtenõelad, keede katked, ristripats, kuljused, sõrmus, klaashelmed, erineva suurusega pronksspiraalid, rauast varrasaheliku lüli, noad jms (jn 4; 6). Lisaks saadi läbiuuritud alalt ka kesk- ja uusaegseid leide ning loomaluid (jn 7), mis tõenäoliselt matustega ei seostu.