



# Archaeological investigations on Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery in Urvaste parish centre in Võrumaa

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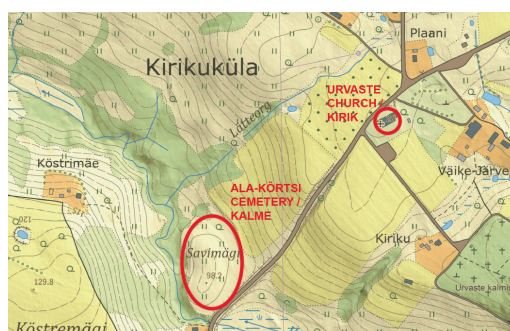
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## INTRODUCTION

In summer 2017 the National Heritage Board was informed about detector finds in Kirikuküla village, ca. 400–500 m south-west of Urvaste medieval parish church, Võru County, south-eastern Estonia. The Savimägi (Eng. ‘Clay hill’) hill lies 50–200 m north of Ala-Kõrtsi farm (former inn site), on church land (Fig. 1). The site is located in hummocky landscape up to ca. 150 metres north-west of the historical road connecting Kanepi via Kärghula and Urvaste with the big Võru–Kuigatsi–Viljandi road. The cemetery lies on the slope of a deep valley with the small Visela River in its bottom. The river links Lake Punde with Lake Uhtjärv. The site is presently used as grassland.

First finds from the cemetery, unearthed as the result of ploughing, were collected already in the 1930s. These finds include three flat bracelets and a spiral finger-ring with a broad



**Fig. 1.** Location of Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery.

**Jn 1.** Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalme asukoht.

Map / Kaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet

middle part, probably most of them from a single burial, and a circular flat amber bead. Most of these finds, which were delivered to Valga Museum in 1956 (VaM A 5: 2–6), perished in the fire of its exposition in 1988. The cemetery was not widely known and until recently not listed as a national monument.

In 2017, metal detector enthusiasts Jaanus Naaber and Kaido Keske decided to check a small hill where the locals had previously seen several people<sup>1</sup> detecting. Thanks to them, information about metal detecting finds at the site reached the National Heritage Board. While the National Heritage Board with the help of Mauri Kiudsoo (TLÜ AT) documented the finds, an assemblage of spiral tube embellishments, a bracelet, and forearm bones was found indicating an inhumation burial at a low depth. The grave was located on a sloping area where the top layers of soil had been removed by erosion caused by ploughing. Soil in this area differed from the rest of the cemetery by high contents of sand and fine gravel. To document the burial and prevent damage from further looting as well as ploughing, the National Heritage Board carried out rescue excavations of the burial.

While archaeologists were excavating, a big assemblage of metal finds was found from the area by the reporters of the site who worked to find out its borders. The locations of the detector and excavation finds<sup>2</sup> were recorded by GPS to give an overview of their distribution and the cemetery area.



**Fig. 2.** Metal detector investigations on *Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi* cemetery in September 2017.

**Jn 2.** Detektoriuuringud *Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi* kalmel septembris 2017.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

As the cemetery was looted again shortly after the excavations, Heiki Valk from the University of Tartu continued investigations at the site in the autumn of 2017 with complementary metal detector searches in co-operation with Aleksandr Kotkin and Igor Tsakuhhin from history club 'Kamerad'.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this study was to collect metal finds from the detectable layer making the site less appealing for the 'gold-diggers' and therefore minimize further looting damages. During the post-excavation detector studies the cemetery area and its surroundings, factually most of the grassland, were systematically divided into ca. 2 m wide parallel zones, designated by cords. These zones were carefully reviewed by using metal detectors (Fig. 2); the locations of finds from soil disturbed by ploughing were recorded in 3D space with

the exactness of  $\pm 1$  cm by using GNSS-instrument. During the complementary investigations, additional 65 stray finds, mainly minor objects, were gained from the cemetery area.

Ploughing had probably shifted some of the finds from their original location, especially down the slopes. Since from the peripheries of the investigation area no finds were gained, it seems likely that the borders of the cemetery area were determined.

<sup>1</sup> Possibly foreign looters, as the number plates of the vehicles were allegedly not Estonian. Oral information from local inhabitants during the fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> These finds, together with those from the excavations, are stored in a single collection (TÜ 2690: 1–101).

<sup>3</sup> The finds of this fieldwork are stored under the number TÜ 2702: 1–65. A small area where detector studies were hindered by high grass in September, was reviewed in April 2018. The finds were added to the assemblage collected in autumn.

### FEMALE GRAVE FROM URVASTE

The burial, directed with the head towards east (E) was unearthed on the north-eastern slope of the hill with the grave bottom in the depth of maximum 30 cm (Fig. 3), but some of the soil had been removed from the bones due to erosion. The head and upper torso as well as the right side upper extremities of the skeleton had been destroyed by ploughing. Nevertheless, the rest of the skeleton had preserved rather well, only with slight taphonomic erosion on the bone surface as well as a few new breakages. Timber fragments preserved with copper alloy spiral tubes indicate a coffin burial.

Based on the pelvic bones (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1989), it is rather possible that the excavated individual was female. The finds that accompanied the burial also hint that the individual was possibly female as previous research has found similar garments and personal adornments with female burials (Laul 1981; Valk & Laul 2014, 107, fig. 81). The preserved pubic symphysis and auricular surfaces of the pelvis suggested that the individual died most probably after the age of 40 years (Lovejoy *et al.* 1985; Brooks & Suchey 1990).

The body was buried in an extended supine position with the left forearm lying straight next to its left side; the bones of the right hand were not preserved. The preliminary osteological analysis did not reveal many pathological signs. The spinal column showed some signs of physiological stress as most of the preserved thoracic vertebrae had shallow depressions on the articular surfaces. This suggests the presence of Schmorl's nodes (hernia of the vertebral discs), which is a very common joint damage, usually caused by stress on the spine as well as osteoporosis (Roberts & Manchester 2010, 141; Waldron 2009, 45).

The skeleton had a 6 cm wide bracelet around the left forearm (Fig. 4: 1), a fire steel (Fig. 4: 2) was found near the left hip, on top



Fig. 3. The female grave investigated in July 2017.

Jn 3. 2017. aasta juulis uuritud naisematus.

Photo / Foto: Eliise Lind



**Fig. 4.** Finds from the Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery female burial. 1 – bracelet, 2 – fire steel, 3, 4 – rings, 5 – cowry shells, 6 – seed beads.

**Jn 4.** Leide Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalme naisematuses. 1 – käevõru, 2 – tuleraud, 3, 4 – sõrmused, 5 – kaurikarbid, 6 – kudrushelmed.

(TÜ 2690: 45, 49, 47, 63, 67, 72.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



**Fig. 5.** Spiral tube decorations around the leg bones of the skeleton. Below – drawing of the pattern.

**Jn 5.** Spiraaltorudest kaunistused luustiku jalaluude ümber. Foto all on joonis mustriks.

Photo / Foto: Eliise Lind

Drawing / Joonis: Jaana Ratas

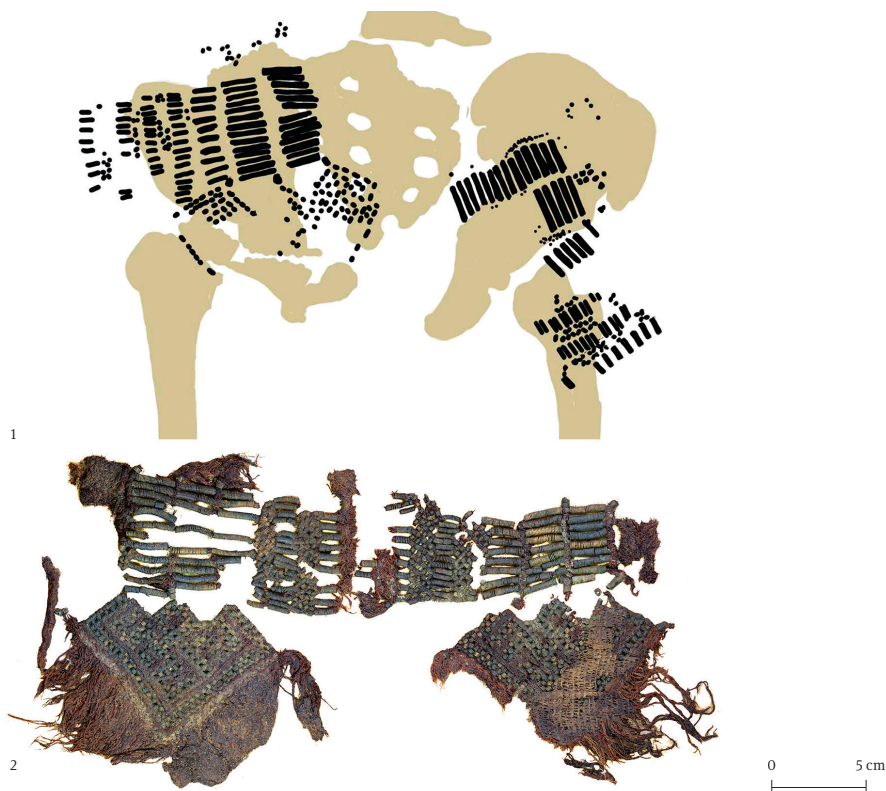
of the bones of the left hand, an iron spiral ring (Fig. 4: 3) in the fourth (or last) finger of the left hand, and a finger-ring with 'moustache' around the middle finger of the left hand (Fig. 4: 4). There were several patterned spiral tube embellishments on garments, from which textiles had not preserved, and 13 cowry shells with 9 small yellow seed beads (Rus. *буцеп*) (Fig. 4: 5, 6) – remains of a larger necklace in the area where the neck once was. Tiny pieces of thin leather with sewing holes (yarn has been decomposed; TÜ 2690: 83, 93, 96, 97, 100), which were found near both ankle bones, were from shoes she was wearing.

The funeral dress of the woman was adorned with decorations made of small spiral tubes, wound of copper alloy wire. The yarn holding spiral tubes together, was disintegrated and the patterns could not be preserved during the conservation process, only some small fragments have been glued together (Kajak 2018). On the basis of spiral tubes and *in situ* photos, at least two types of clothing items or accessories can be distinguished. First, ribbons ran around both shin bones from the ankle until the knee indicating that strips of cloth adorned with spiral tube braidings on the long edges had been wound around the legs (Fig. 5). Such find is unique and no parallels have been found so far. It seems that these ribbons were not wrapped sufficiently tightly to cover up the legs properly. Thus, they were not leg wrappings of several meters length tightly wound around legs; such wrappings were used in the Late Iron Age and medieval period in the Eastern Baltic (e.g. Zariņa 1988, pl. V–VI; Žeiere 2008, 76–82; Riikonen 2006, 208, fig. 6; Rammo 2017). The items found in Urvaste are more likely additional adorning layers around the already wrapped legs. Similar wrappings consisting of several layers on top of each other, so that the most beautiful is the uppermost, have been noted by ethnographic descriptions (e.g. Öpik 1970, 95) and it seems to be common, for example, in

12th–13th northern Estonian fashion (Rammo & Ratas 2016). A rectangular pattern patch of spiral tubes (ca. 78 × 83 mm) found between the knees may also have been a part of the leg wrappings, although it can also be a trace of some other item not recognizable anymore.

Another item was found on the top of the pelvis, it means that it was initially placed on the lower part of the belly. The spiral tube patterns clearly resemble those characteristic for a clothing item called ‘back apron’ (Fig. 6). On the basis of the archaeological finds it has been reconstructed as an accessory made of spiral tubes by means of horse hair and woollen yarns and adorned with tassels hanging from the waist on the bottom (Laul 1981; Rammo 2005, pl. III). Altogether ten similar items dated mainly to the 13th–14th cc. have been discovered in cemeteries of southern and south-eastern Estonia (Laul 1981, 76–77; Rammo 2005, 63). Seven of them have been found from Otepää village cemeteries (six from Piiri St. and one from a site near the hill fort). All these graves are similar: the women wore necklaces of glass beads and cowry shells; in rare cases also other items (e.g. knife, coins) were found in the grave. In one case an iron spiral finger ring was discovered as well (Otepää, AI 4127: 56).

Only four ‘back aprons’ have been found under the pelvis and spine, i.e. the correct position according to the reconstruction of wearing it (Laul 1981, 76–77; AI 2652: 15, 14; AI 4127: 58;



**Fig. 6.** Spiral tube decorations. 1 – the pelvis of Urveste skeleton with spiral tube decorations, 2 – the ‘back apron’ found in Virunuka.

**Jn 6.** Spiraaltorudest kaunistused. 1 – Urveste luustiku vaagnaluu koos spiraaltorudest kaunistustega, 2 – Virunukast leitud “tagapõll”.

(AI 4342: V: 9.)

Drawing / Joonis: Jaana Ratas

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

AI 4342 V 9). In other cases, the remains of the item have been discovered, for example, placed along the body near the pelvis and the thigh (AI 3680: 10, 12, 20), near the knees (e.g. AI 2676: 22, 23) or near the shins (e.g. AI 2677: 27). The latter examples might indicate, as well as in the Urvaste case, the habit to put clothing accessories into the coffin as grave goods and not as a part of the funeral dress. Nevertheless, the possibility that the reconstruction is not correct or similar items were worn in a different way cannot be excluded either. Most of these clothing items have been found at young female skeletons (Laul 1981, 83). In addition to being part of the festive attire, it could have designated a special period in a woman's life cycle related with fertility and protective beliefs (Riikonen 2005, 66). Nevertheless, one item belonged to a young girl (Ervu, TÕ 2: 124) and Urvaste skeleton was attributed to a woman over 40 years old.

The best preserved part of the Urvaste 'back apron' is the broad 'band' that unites two rhomboid patches (Fig. 6). The latter were not well preserved, but disturbed tiny spiral tubes, in sufficient amount to make such patches, close to the 'band' indicate their former presence. The 'band' consists of rows of various longer tubes and patterns of tiny spiral tubes in-between. However, Urvaste item is peculiar; its 'band' seems to consist clearly of two separate halves and if these remains are compared with the better preserved finds from Otepää (AI 4127: 58) and Virunuka (AI 4342: V: 9), the positions of these two halves are just the opposite (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 7.** Roman Iron Age beads from Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery.

**Jn 7.** Rooma rauaaja helmeid Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt. (TÕ 2690: 74; TÕ 2702: 49, 39, 47; TÕ 2690: 64, 77; TÕ 2702: 32.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

## THE FINDS

The find assemblage from Urvaste cemetery, gained mainly by detector studies, includes artefacts from two main periods 1) the Roman Iron Age (2nd/3rd – 4th/5th cc.) and 2) transition from the Final Iron Age to the Middle Ages (mainly the 13th cc.).

The Roman Iron Age finds, most of which were spread within the area of 33–36 m diameter, are represented mainly by copper alloy beads. There are two simple single beads on iron wire (Fig. 7: 1, 2), two simple beads without wire (Fig. 7: 3; TÕ 2702: 48), a single bead of double conical shape (Fig. 7: 4), a double bead (Fig. 7: 5) and two triple beads (Fig. 7:

6, 7). The finds, except for the double-conical item, are typical for the 3rd and 4th centuries (Laul 2001, 135–137).

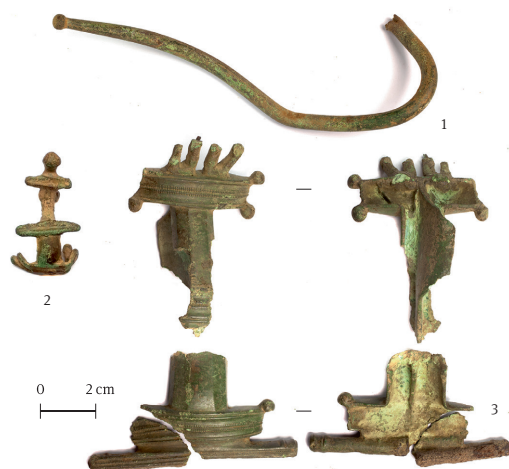
A fragment of a neck ring with knob ends (Fig. 8: 1) has no known earlier parallels in Estonia. Similar end knobs occur, however, on bracelets from the 2nd century AD which are numerous in north-eastern Estonia (Schmiedehelm 1955, 65–67) and are represented with two finds also at Vybuty cemetery at the Velikaya River, 13 km south of Pskov (Yakovlev 1997, 401). A rather similar neck ring with date from around 125–200 AD has, however, been found from Lithuania (Michelbertas 1997, 92, fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> A small cross-ribbed brooch (Fig. 8: 2) represents a type most common in southern Estonia in the 4th century (Laul 2001, 106–107). Most prominent finds from the earlier phase are, however, fragments of a large, knob-decorated

<sup>4</sup> Information about this find was kindly provided by Maarja Olli (TÕ).

unique cross-ribbed brooch (Fig. 8: 3) found at the distance of 1.4 m from each other. This find which combines traits characteristic for southern and northern Estonia might date from the 4th century, but also the 5th century cannot be excluded.<sup>5</sup> A fragment from a cremated bracelet with a rim on its back (TÜ 2702: 43) might belong to the Migration Period. Such finds date from the Roman Iron Age to the 8th century (Mikhailova 2014, 87–90), but as there are no parallels from among the numerous finds from the Roman period cemeteries in Estonia,<sup>6</sup> the time since the 6th century is more likely. The assemblage includes also some fragments of fully melted copper alloy items which evidently relate with Iron Age cremation graves. It remains, however, unclear, if they date from the first phase of the cemetery or from a later time.

The later phase of the cemetery is mainly represented with finds from inhumation burials. The most numerous and specific find group among this find assemblage are bracelets and their fragments. Bracelets are represented mainly with flat thin items with narrowing ends – 19 whole specimens<sup>7</sup> (although often distorted by ploughing) and the total of 40 fragments which probably originate from a smaller number of finds. The ornamentation of bracelets includes ‘wolf teeth’ and rows of notches; the latter being organised in rhombs or triangles in the bracelet end parts. Ornamentation based on triple dot motif can also be met in some cases. Among such bracelets two major groups can be distinguished.

The first group (Fig. 9) of ‘middle’ width (18–26 mm; distribution of different widths within this range is quite even) includes 17 whole items and three fragments. The second group (two whole or fragmented items and 28 fragments) includes wide shield-shaped bracelets with the width between



**Fig. 8.** Roman Iron Age jewellery from Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery. 1 – neck ring fragment, 2 – cross-ribbed brooch, 3 – fragments of a big cross-ribbed brooch.

**Jn 8.** Rooma rauaaja ehteid Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt. 1 – kaelavõru katke, 2 – kärbissõlg, 3 – suure kärbis-sõle tüükid.

(TÜ 2702: 51; TÜ 2690: 62; TÜ 2690: 61 + TÜ 2702: 47.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



**Fig. 9.** Flat bracelets of middle width from Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery.

**Jn 9.** Keskmise laiusega lamedaid käevõrusid Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt.

(TÜ 2690: 38 a, b; TÜ 2702: 24a, b; TÜ 2690: 8, 1, 2, 10, 28; TÜ 2702: 58.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

<sup>5</sup> Estimation by Maarja Olli.

<sup>6</sup> Information from Maarja Olli.

<sup>7</sup> The number includes also three earlier finds from the collections of Valga Museum (VaM A 5: 2–4).



**Fig. 10.** Shield-shaped bracelets (1, 2) and a bracelet with a flat-convex section (3) from Urvaste cemetery.

**Jn 10.** Õhukesed laiad kilpkäevõrud (1, 2) ja lamekumera lõikega käevõru (3) Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt.

(TÜ 2690: 29+45, 14, 57.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



**Fig. 11.** Finds from Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery. 1–6 – rings, 7 – bell, 8 – pendant, 9 – strap end, 10 – coin.

**Jn 11.** Leide Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt. 1–6 – sõrmused, 7 – kuljus, 8 – ripats, 9 – rihmaots, 10 – münt.

(TÜ 2690: 7, 24; 2702: 63, 65, 27; TÜ 2690: 6; TÜ 2702: 64; TÜ 2690: 19, 31; TÜ 2702: 5.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

44 and 60 mm, in most cases *ca.* 50 mm (Figs 4: 1; 10: 1, 2). In some cases, there is also a pressed horizontal ridge along the middle of the bracelet (Figs 4: 1; 10: 1; TÜ 2690: 17, 39; TÜ 2702: 4). These bracelets were made of very thin (less than 1 mm) copper alloy sheet, which also is the reason for their frequent fragmentation. Such bracelets do not represent the Final Iron Age bracelet traditions of Estonia (compare with Selirand 1974, pl. XXXVIII–XL), but are most common at Siksälä cemetery in the south-easternmost corner of the country (Valk & Laul 2014, 115–116) where bracelets are, however, somewhat broader – mostly 6–7 cm wide. The distribution area of wide thin bracelets includes also the northern part of eastern Latvia (Vaska 2017, 33–45, fig. 21).

Four fragments (TÜ 2690: 25, 39, 59; TÜ 2702: 11), all from wide bracelets, are from silver alloy items whereby they might originate from two different objects. The alloy used for making these objects does not contain more silver than 82% and its main additive is copper (up to 33%), whereas a small percentage of lead is also present (Saage 2018).

The find assemblage includes also a Final Iron Age bracelet type – a narrow, 10 mm wide bracelet of a flat-convex section, with ornamentation based on interlaced bands (Fig. 10: 3). Appearing in the 11th century (Mägi-Lõugas 1995, 308–309), such jewellery was in use until the end of prehistory (Selirand 1974, 167, pl. XXXIX: 8), occurring rarely also in the 13th-century village cemeteries.

Almost all bracelets and their fragments bear no traces of fire and come from inhumation graves. Probably burnt finds are represented by three ‘middle-width’ items (Fig. 9: 1, 3), the last two set into each other to form a closed ring. A pair of similar bracelets

in such position, but without traces of fire came to light also during metal detector studies (Fig. 9: 2), reflecting some specific feature of burial rites on the cemetery.

Among nine rings there are six items with a ‘moustache’ – these spiral rings have a broad middle coil and long open ends (Figs 4: 4; 11: 1–4; VaM A 5: 5). This is the largest assemblage of such ring from all Estonia – there are two finds from Siksälä cemetery (Valk & Laul 2014,

120–121) and the total of six finds from other sites, all from southern regions (Valk 1991, 188). The two simple spiral rings, one made of iron and the other of copper alloy wire (Figs 4: 3; 11: 5) represent a find group common for Estonia in the 11th–13th cc. (Selirand 1974, 173), but the wire of copper alloy item is not of round, as usual, but of rectangular section. One simple closed ring with a grooved arch (Fig. 11: 6) has no known parallels and may be of a later origin.

Brooches from inhumation graves are represented by five items. Four of them are penannular brooches with knob ends. One of them has an arch of a rhombus-shaped section, decorated with ‘wolf-tooth’ ornamentation, and with cross images on its knobs (Fig. 12: 1). The second and third brooch have knob-shaped ends and, respectively, a twisted and a grooved arch (Fig. 12: 2, 3). Typologically such brooches belong to the 12th–13th centuries. The fourth brooch has a gnarl on the arch (Fig. 12: 4), which is an indication of 13th-century origin (Pauts 1997, 197) and is strongly worn out. The fifth brooch, a small octagonal object made of thin metal sheet (Fig. 12: 5) is decorated with medieval Gothic plant ornamentation and has no parallels from Estonia. Plausibly, it can be of later origin when compared to other finds from the inhumation cemetery.

As finds were collected by using metal detectors, information about necklaces is mainly limited to that from the investigated burial. As noted above, the unearthed skeleton had a necklace of cowry shells and yellow seed beads. In addition, a flat circular amber bead (VaM A 5: 6) has been found from the cemetery before. A bell with four sheets (Fig. 11: 7) from among stray finds represents a type common for the cemeteries of the 13th – mid-15th century. A rare find for south-eastern Estonia is a ‘headed’ trapezoid pendant with additional small tinkling trapezoid pendants hanging from it (Fig. 11: 8). Such finds are typical for north-eastern Latvia, being present also in Siksälä cemetery (Valk & Laul 2014, 110–112). Other costume remains are represented only by a strap end (Fig. 11: 9). The lack of belt buckles and belt rings, common in medieval cemeteries of southern Estonia should also be noted.

Iron objects are represented by four oval or rectangular fire steels (Figs 4: 2; 13: 1–3), and three knives or knife fragments (Fig. 13: 4, 5; TÕ 2690: 16) the small size of which refers to Final Iron Age traditions. Stray finds include also an iron axe characteristic for the final stage of prehistory (Fig. 13: 6), a

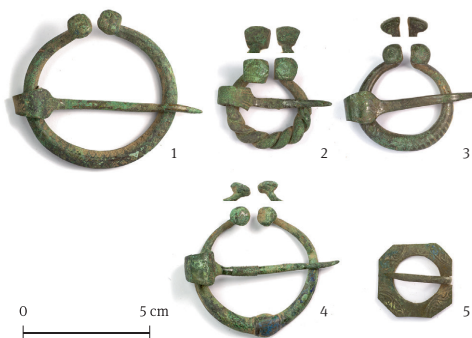


Fig. 12. Brooches from Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery.

Jn 12. Sõled Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt.

(TÕ 2690: 9, 18, 22; 2702: 16; 2690: 13.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



Fig. 13. Iron items from Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery.

1–3 fire steels, 4, 5 – knives, 6 – axe.

Jn 13. Raudesemeid Urveste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmelt.

1–3 – tulerauad, 4, 5 – noad, 6 – kirves.

(TÕ 2690: 5, 11; 2702: 22, 9, 18, 29.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

supposed fragment of axe blade (TÜ 2690: 42), and an iron nail (TÜ 2702: 62), maybe from a coffin.

From the seven coin finds only one – a tiny silver penny of Riga archbishop Nicholas (1231–1254) (Fig. 11: 10) – has temporal correspondence with the inhumation cemetery. As the find of 11 mm diameter, penetrated by an oblong triangular notch seems too small for a coin pendant,<sup>8</sup> it may have been fastened to the clothes or belonged to a necklace. Three coins – a schilling from Riga free town from 1577 (TÜ 2702: 30), and two schillings of Johan III minted in Tallinn (1571–1585) (TÜ 2702: 2, 38) originate from the time of the Livonian War. The time of Swedish rule is represented by a Livonian schilling minted in Riga (1660–1665) (TÜ 2702: 37), that of the Russian Empire – with a *denga* from the 1740s (TÜ 2702: 60) and a mid-19th century half *kopeck* (TÜ 2702: 14). Evidently, the coin finds from the 16th and 17th century, as well as other finds from Early Modern times, and a pipe cap (TÜ 2702: 42) are probably not connected with the cemetery any more. This can be suggested by the lack of other artefacts, typical of medieval and post-medieval village cemeteries. Most likely, they were either occasionally lost on a roadside field or can be explained with the vicinity of Ala-Kõrtsi inn, the genesis time of which is unknown. The three lead bullets (TÜ 2702: 17, 46, 61) are connected, evidently, with the historical church road and war activities related to it.

## CHRONOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

The earlier phase of Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery belongs to the Roman Iron Age, as shown by several beads, the neck ring and the cross-ribbed brooches. The character of the Roman Iron Age cemetery remains unknown. Although a *tarand*-cemetery of that time, fully destroyed for construction material (e.g. of the stone church), cannot be excluded, no smaller stones which might have been preserved from it were discovered on the grassland. Thus, also the presence of a flat cremation cemetery of that time might be possible.

The later phase of the cemetery – that with inhumation graves – includes finds referring to transition from the final stage of the Iron Age to the medieval period. It should be pointed out that the concentration areas of Roman Iron Age and Final Iron Age finds were almost not overlapping, but were located beside each other. It is difficult to position the cremation phase of Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery on a precise chronological time scale, because of yet unclear artefact chronology and the fragmentary character of the find material.

The presence of some artefacts typical for the Final Iron Age (bracelet of convex section, penannular brooches, axe) which are missing in the ordinary medieval village cemeteries of southern Estonia indicates the beginning of inhumation practises in the time when Iron Age traditions were still alive – probably, in the early 13th century. The flat thin bracelets with traces of fire (Fig. 9: 1, 3) also relate to the final stage of the cremation traditions which might have continued at a limited extent also parallel to inhumation burials. The lower chronological limit of the inhumation graves could hypothetically be bound with the baptism of Ugandi (Ugaunia) province in 1215 which brought along general transition to inhumation practices, but a somewhat earlier genesis cannot also be excluded.

Chronological indications are also provided by the numerous bracelet finds. The 18–26 mm wide bracelets from Urvaste, but, probably, also the shield-shaped bracelets – seem to be typologically earlier than classical shield-shaped bracelets which exist in their ‘ripe’ form since the late 13th or early 14th century, representing the genesis phase of the latter (Vaska 2017, 33–45). Likewise, the rings with a ‘moustache’ represent typologically the transition phase

<sup>8</sup> Coins were identified by Mauri Kiudsoo (TLÜ AT).

between Final Iron Age spiral rings with a less than 1 cm wide middle coil (Selirand 1974, 173–174; Laul & Valk 2014, 69) to medieval shield-shaped rings with open ends, common in the mid-13th–14th century south Estonia and north Latvia (Valk & Laul 2014, 118–119). Rings with a ‘moustache’ occur in Siksälä cemetery in the post-conquest context (Valk & Laul 2014, 120–121, fig. 98: 7, 8), but they have not been found from Estonian Final Iron Age cremation cemeteries. Since wide thin bracelets and such rings are most rare in typical medieval village cemeteries of the region, there seems to be a chronological gap between the desertion of Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery and the beginning of typical village cemeteries, or only a short-time overlapping. However, most of the find assemblage seems to be of post-conquest origin. Medieval use of the cemetery is indicated by the strongly worn-out stage of penannular brooches of the Final Iron Age or transitional period. The uniform find assemblage from the inhumation graves greatly differs from that of the medieval village cemeteries of Võrumaa which is of rather homogeneous character since the mid-13th century (Valk 2001) and gives evidence of its origin from a limited time span.

The upper chronological limit of the cemetery can be judged by the lack of some ornaments most typical for medieval village cemeteries, e.g. different types of spiral rings made of copper alloy ribbon – this refers to the ending of burial before the end of the 13th century. The lack of bracteates of Tartu bishopric which date from the 1260s to the 1330s and which are quite numerous in the village cemeteries of south-eastern Estonia might also be an indication of the end of its use. Most likely, the inhumation phase of the cemetery dates mainly from the first decades of the 13th century to its middle or the third quarter, with the coin from 1231–1254 representing the period of its most intensive use. The character of the find assemblage – a high number of bracelets, textiles decorated with copper alloy spiral tubes and the presence of silver bracelet fragments – indicate that the cemetery belonged to a well-doing community, representing local social nobility.

As Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery lies close to the medieval parish centre of Urvaste (Fig. 1; 14), the question of its co-existence with the parish cemetery in the churchyard emerges. Evidently, the church was deliberately founded on a higher, more prominent place. The origins of Urvaste church are unknown. The architectural features of the stone church suggest that it was built not before the 14th century (Alttoa 2013), but a Visby bracteate, minted between 1225 and 1288 from a test pit west of the tower (TÜ 708: 2) refers to the presence of an earlier, possibly wooden church already in the 13th century. Although it cannot be excluded that Urvaste church and churchyard were founded already soon after the baptism of Ugandi in 1215 (HCL XIX: 7), they might probably be of later origin. This is suggested by the fact that the church is located on the border of two manors – Antsla (Germ. *Anzen*) and Vaabina (Germ. *Uelzen*) which probably belonged to the Üxkülli (Uexkülli) and Tiesenhausen families in medieval times and that these manors/families had a common patronage over the church (Alttoa 2013, 42–43). As primary enfeoffment of the provinces of Ugandi to German landlords took place only after 1224 (HCL XXVIII: 8), the church and churchyard are probably not earlier. It remains unclear in the



**Fig. 14.** Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery (marked with a circle) and Urvaste church 2018.

**Jn 14.** Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalme (märgitud ringiga) ja Urvaste kirik 2018. aastal.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

present state of research whether the Ala-Kõrtsi cemetery has co-existed with the churchyard for some time or was the cemetery deserted when the new churchyard was founded nearby.

## CONCLUSIONS

Information about the cemeteries from the final stage of prehistory and the first half of the 13th century has hitherto been scantiest from southern Estonia, including the Final Iron Age Ugandi province. As Otepää, the central hill fort of Ugandi lies only *ca.* 20 km north-west from Urvaste, the core areas of later Urvaste parish, evidently, belonged to that province.

The cemetery of Ala-Kõrtsi is one of the most important archaeological discoveries of 2017, since it shed new light upon cemeteries in Ugandi at transition from the Final Iron Age to the Middle Ages. In spite of considerable losses caused by looting, the find assemblage is large enough to draw conclusions about the chronology of the cemetery and the general trends in the development of personal adornments in the core areas of Ugandi province during the transition period. Although information about burial rites is most limited, the find assemblage helps to fill the gap between the Final Iron Age (ending with the crusades of 1208–1224) and the era of typical medieval village cemeteries which begins approximately in the mid-13th century. Artefacts from the inhumation graves, belonging to a limited time span, form a unique assemblage for the whole region and give important information about traditional attire and technologies. Although we cannot exclude neither the pre-crusade origin of the inhumation cemetery, nor its genesis after 1215 only in the current state of research, its abandonment in connection with making the present-day parish church and churchyard of Urvaste seems highly likely.

It remains unclear, if the cemetery was in continuous use since the Roman Iron Age until the early 13th century, but even in case of discontinuity the re-use of the site may indicate awareness of the site and its meaning in popular knowledge, i.e. continuity of population and tradition.

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## ARHEOLOOGILISED KAEVAMISED ALA-KÕRTSI KALMEL URVASTE KIHELKONNAKESKUSES VÕRUMAAL

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2017. aastal teatasid hobidetektoristid Jaanus Naaber ja Kaido Keske detektorileidudest Urvastes, kirikust 400–500 m edelas ja Ala-Kõrtsi talust 50–200 m kaugusel olevalt künkalt (jn 1). Kalmeleide on sealt saadud juba 1930. aastatel ning tundmatuid detektoriste on paigas varem korduvalt otsimas nähtud.

2017. aasta suvel toimusid künkalt väikesed arheoloogilised uuringud, mille käigus avati üks kändmisega osaliselt lõhutud luustik. Nii suvel kui ka sügisel tehti mäel põhjalikku süstemaatilist detektoriseiret. Kännikihi olevad leiud korjati sealt välja ja dokumenteeriti nende asukohad (jn 2).

Uuritud naisematus (jn 3) oli suunatud peaga ida poole; kolju ja rindkere ülaosa ning parema käe luud olid kändmisega hävitatud, vasak käsi oli sirgelt piki keha. Luustiku juurest leiti lai käevõru, rauast spiraalsõrmus, „vuntsidega“, s.t pikkade spiraalselt keerduvate otstega laiakilbiline sõrmus ja tuleraud, kaela piirkonnas oli kaurikarpe ja klaashelmeid (jn 4). Pahklude juures olid säilinud väikesed õmblusjälgedega nahakatked, mis pärinevad jalatsitest.

Luustiku juurest leiti mitmelt poolt spiraaltrükkedest mustreid. Ümber mõlema sääre luude kulgesid mustriiribad, mis olid ilmselt kinnitatud minevikus jal-

gade mähkimiseks kasutatud kangaribade servadesse (jn 5). Vaagnaluude pealt leitud spiraalitorude kogum (jn 6) pärineb riideesemest, mida on arheoloogiaalases kirjanduses nimetatud tagapõlleks. Urvaste leiu puhul jääb lahtiseks, kas tegemist on nn tagapõllega, mis on asetatud surnukehale või on seda tüüpi aksessuaare kantud kuidagi teistmoodi.

Detektorileiud pärinevad kahest ajaperioodist – rooma rauaajast ning muinas- ja keskaja piirimaadelt. Rooma rauaaja leide esindavad peamiselt mitmesugused 3.–4. sajandi vasesulamist helmed, osa neist raudtraadil (jn 7), samuti 4. sajandile iseloomulik kärbissõlg (jn 8: 2). Haruldasteks ja Eestis seni vasteteta leidudeks on nuppotstega kaelavõru katke (jn 8: 1) ning kaks suure 4.–5. sajandi kärbissõle tükki (jn 8: 3). Üks lameda, kolmnurkse ristlõike ja harjaga käevõrukatke võib pärineda ka rahvasterännuajast või I aastatuhande II poolest. Kalmest leiti veel täiesti sulanud vasesulamist esemete tükke, mille algupära ja vanust pole võimalik määrata. Rooma rauaaja leidude leviala ei kattu hilisrauaaegsete omaga, vaid paikneb selle kõrval.

Matusepaiga hilisem kasutusjärg seostub peamiselt laibamatustega. Kõige arvukamad leiud on käevõrud, mida leiti kokku 19 terviklikult säilinud eksemplari ja 40 katket. Võrud on kaunistatud hundihammasornamendiga ja täkete ridadega, mis moodustavad võruotstes rombi- või kolmnurgakujutisi; leidub ka kolmiksõõre. Käevõrude esimese alarühma moodustavad keskmise laiusega (1,8–2,6 cm) võrud (17 terviklikku leidu ja 3 katket) (jn 9), teise aga väga õhukesed (paksus alla 1 mm) ja laiad, 4,4–6 cm, enamasti 5 cm laiused kilpkäevõrud (2 tervet ja 28 katket), mille seljal on vahel kummitud riba (jn 10: 1–2). Sellised võrud on väga tavalised Ida-Läti kirdeosas, samuti Eesti kagunurgas asuval Siksälä kalmel. Neli väikest katket pärineb hõbekäevõrudest (hõbedasisaldus 67–82%). Kahel juhul oli kaks keskmise laiusega võru asetatud üksteise sisse, nii et need moodustasid suletud ringi, ühel sellisel võrudepaaril, samuti ühel üksikul võrul oli oletatavaid põlemisjälgi, mis viitavad võimalikule põletusmatustele. Leiti ka lamekumera lõikega hilisrauaaegne käevõru (jn 10: 3).

Üheksast sõrmusest on kuus laia kilbi ja selle ümber spiraalselt keerduvate otstega (jn 4: 4; 11: 1–4), kaks spiraalsõrmust oli ümaralõikelisest traadist (jn 4: 3; 11: 5). Veel leiti neli 13. sajandile iseloomulikku nuppotstega hoburaudsõlge (jn 12: 1–4) ja väike gooti ornamendiga sõlg (12: 5), kuljus (jn 11: 7), “peaga” trapetsripats (jn 11: 8), rihmaotsik (jn 11: 9), neli tulerauda (jn 4: 2; 13: 1–3), kolm nuga või noakatket (jn 13: 4, 5), kirves (jn 13: 6), oletatav kirvetera tükk ja raudnael.

Seitsmest mündist vanim on Riia peapiiskop Nicolause (1231–1254) penn (jn 11: 10), mida on kasutatud ripats- või ehismündina. Kolm münti pärinevad Liivi sõja ajast, üks Riia killing 1660. aastate algupoollest; kahest Vene mündist on üks 1740. aastatest ja teine 19. sajandi keskelt. Kuna 13. sajandist hilisemad kalmeleiud puuduvad, pole mündidki tõenäoliselt kalmistuga seotud.

Kalmistu varaseim järk võib seostuda rooma rauaaja tarandkalmega, kuid kalmekivide täielik puudumine ei välista ka maa-aluseid põletusmatuseid. Kalmistu hilisema järgu leiuväine viitab matusepaiga kasutamisele 13. sajandil, tõenäoliselt vallutusjärgsel ajal. Võimalik, et põletamata surnuid on kalmele hakatud matma alles pärast Ugandi ristimist (1215). Mitmete lõunaeesti külakalmistutele iseloomulike esemetüüpide, samuti alates 1260. aastatel ilmuvate väikeste Tartu brakteaatide puudumine viitab asjaolule, et kalmistule matmine on tõenäoliselt lõppenud varakult, juba 13. sajandi keskpaiku või kolmandal veerandil.

Kuna Ala-Kõrtsi kalmistu asub Urvaste kiriku läheduses (jn 1; 14), võib selle mahajätmise olla seotud uue, praeguses kirikaia oleva surnuaia rajamisega. Urvaste kirikaia pärinev vanim leid on aastate 1225 ja 1288 vahel vermitud Visby brakteaat. Kuigi see leid viitab kiriku olemasolule juba enne praegust, ehitusloolistel andmetel mitte enne 14. sajandi algust rajatud kirkurik, ei pruugi Urvaste kirik ja kihelkonnasurnuaed olla rajatud mitte kohe pärast Ugandi ristimist, vaid mõnevõrra hiljem. Asjaolu, et kirik paikneb Antsla ja Vaabina mõisate piiril ning et patronaadiõigus kuulus ühiselt neid valdavatele Üksküllide ja Tiesenhausenite suguvõsadele, lubab arvata, et kiriku on rajanud nimetatud suurvasallid millalgi pärast Ugandi maade esmast läänistamist, s.t pärast 1224. aastat. Küsimus, kas uuritud kalmistu ja kirikaed olid mõnda aega samaaegselt kasutusel või jäeti kalmistu maha seoses kiriku rajamisega, jääb praeguse uurimiseisuga siiski lõpliku vastuseeta.

Kuigi andmestik matmiskombestiku kohta Urvaste Ala-Kõrtsi kalmistul on vähene ja fragmentaarne, on tegemist esimese uuritud kalmega, mis võimaldab saada teatavat ettekujutust rõivastusest ja ehtekultuurist Süda-Ugandis 13. sajandi esimesel poolel. Vähemasti ehete osas võiks arvukas leiuväine olla piisav esialgsete üldistuste tegemiseks. Praeguses uurimiseisus jääb ebaselgeks, kas kalmistu oli pärast rooma rauaaja lõppu järjepidevalt kasutusel või mitte. Ka viimasel juhul võiks sama matusepaiga taas kasutusele võtmine 13. sajandil olla märgiks rahvastiku ja traditsiooni järjepidevusest.