Trial excavations in Helme: medieval stone chapel and earlier wooden sanctuary with 13th–14th century coin offerings

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INTRODUCTION

The ruins of a medieval stone chapel or small church[1] in Helme, dedicated to Corpus Christi, are located on a field, 500 m south of the ruined Helme parish church, also of medieval origin, and ca. 150 m north-east of the site of Kantsu (Konsu) farmstead (presently Tiigi household; Figs 1, 2). The walls of the building have mostly been demolished, stretching still for ca. 1–2.5 m out of the surrounding hill of debris. The ruins with external measures of ca. 15.5 × 9.5 m (internal measures ca. 13.5 × 6.7 m, thickness of walls ca. 1.3–1.4 m) are located in a field. In the late 1930s the plan of the chapel ruins, preserved in Estonian Historical Archives (Saadre 1939, 4) was made. According to these measurements, the vaulted building consisted of two square-shaped bays of equal size, and it has been dated, judging by external features, to the 15th century (Alttoa 1995, 155–156). The eastern gable of the chapel existed until the 1950s when it was pulled down by a tractor to get material for road construction; at that time stones were also broken out of the walls.[2]

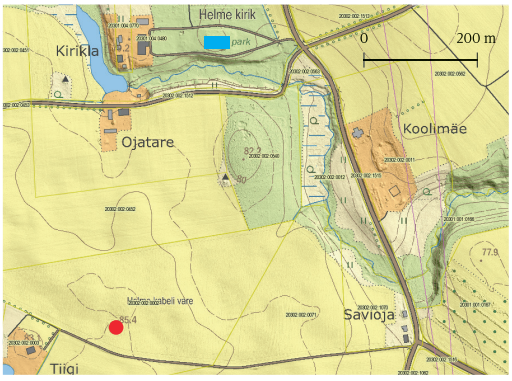

Fig. 1. *Location of Helme chapel ruins. Blue square – Helme parish church, red dot – chapel.*

Jn 1. *Helme kabeli asukohaskeem. Sinine ristkülik – Helme kihelkonnakirik, punane ring – kabel.*

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet; additions / täiendused: Heiki Valk

In 2018 the University of Tartu undertook investigation of the site because of its most unusual location: the presence of two medieval stone churches so close to each other is unique in Estonia. Evidently there must have been a definite reason for choosing the place. While

[1] The terms 'church' and 'chapel', are used as synonyms in connection with the building under discussion, as they both occur in the 16th–18th cc. written sources.

[2] Memories of Arno Anier (70), owner of neighbouring Savi farmstead.

Fig. 2. *Ruins of Helme chapel.*
Jn 2. *Helme kabeli varemed.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

the big church is situated in a somewhat extraordinary location – on the high bank of a stream valley –, the small church lies in a rather flat field with no definite landmarks in the surroundings. The landscape situation allows to suggest the temporal priority of the big parish church. Nevertheless, there must have been a definite reason for constructing the small stone church in its inconspicuous location. Presumably, it might have been preceded by some earlier sacral object. Finding of its remains and establishment of its date were the key tasks of the excavations. The article presents the survey of the excavation results, with special attention to the 13th–14th cc. coins related to the remains of a wooden sanctuary found under the ruins of the stone church. The numismatic aspects of the coin assemblage were discussed by Mauri Kiudsoo, the rest of the article was written by Heiki Valk.

EARLIER INFORMATION: WRITTEN AND FOLKLORIC DATA

The earliest written record about the chapel of Helme dates from the early 16th century: a preserved draft for the letter of the Master of the Livonian Order Wolter von Plettenberg mentions it as dedicated to Corpus Christi (*Hilligenn Lichnamen capelle; capelle des Hilligen Lichammen*) (Kreem 2017, 43–47). The Polish inventory of 1599, referring back to the inventory of 1590, notes two stone churches in Helme parish – one for the Germans (*niemiecki*), the second, small church, 'for the Latvians' (*drugi maly kościołek* łotewski).[3] During the Muscovite rule, i.e. during the Livonian War (1558–1582) both churches were deserted (*Te kościoły obadwa przez Moskwę spustoszone*) (Polska 1915, 243). Also the Catholic church visitation of 1613 notes two churches in the parish, both made of stone, without roof, ruined, one for the Germans, the other for the Estonians (Protocoll 1613, 37). There is no written data about using the small church during the 17th century. However, according to local lore, the small church was built after the big parish church had been burnt in the Great Northern War (1700–1710/21): the congregation, now small in number after the war, had no capacity to re-build the big one (Tamman 1927, 3–4). Evidently, this folklore note actually reflects not building, but re-building the ruined smaller sanctuary. The chapel perished in fire, struck by lightning in 1740 (Valgamaa 1932, 305) and has been ruined since that time.

Local lore knows the site mostly as ruins of a church (*kirik*), not of a chapel (*kabel*). Oral tradition about its age, collected in the 1940s and 1950s, and mediated by presently still living old people, is controversial. In one case, the small church is considered to be later than the big one; local people were told to have attended it on ordinary Sundays, but on big holidays, e.g. Easter, when there was not enough space, they visited the big church.[4] According to another version, the small church is older than the parish church, it was believed to be seven hundred years old.[5]

[3] Kaur Alttoa has interpreted the use of *łotewski* as a sign of author's unawareness and ignorance about the ethnic background of the local peasantry (1995, 155).
[4] Helga Pehme (born in 1926), inhabitant of Kantsu farm in the 1940s and 1950s, from local old farmers.
[5] Oral data from Arno Anier, from his father and grandfather.

INVESTIGATIONS OF 2018

Before the excavations preliminary investigations by using a metal detector were undertaken inside the chapel ruins and in the surrounding field in the spring of 2018 (Fig. 3).[6] The eastern part of the ruins was covered by fallen blocks of the demolished walls and was inaccessible for studies. In the western part of the building, just below the turf, a Livonian schilling of Carl XI (1664) (TÜ 2711: 3) was found. The only historical metal objects from the surrounding field area were two similar well-preserved silver örtugs of Gotland from between 1340 and 1380/90 (TÜ 2711: 1, 2). One of them was found ca. 11 m NNW, the other ca. 52 m NNE from the north-eastern corner of the building.

Fig. 3. *Coin finds (crosses) gained during spring inventory from the surroundings and inside of the chapel ruins, test pit (tiny rectangle) cutting a burial, and the trench.*
Jn 3. *Kevadised mündileiud kabelivaremete ümbrusest ja sisemusest (tähistatud ristidega), matusega proovišurfi (väike punane ristkülik) ja kaevandi asukoht.*
Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet; drawing / joonis: Heiki Valk

To establish if there was a cemetery around the chapel, a trial pit with the measures of ca. 40 × 40 cm) was made ca. 3 m south of the southern wall and ca. 3.7 m east of the west facade of the building. In the depth of 0.95 m from the present-day ground surface the pit cut a burial oriented with the head towards SW.

In the summer of 2018 a trial trench (3 × 3 m) was made in the south-western corner of the stone chapel (Fig. 4). All the soil was sieved through a 5 × 5 mm mesh.

Fig. 4. *Excavations in Helme chapel ruins.*
Jn 4. *Kaevamised Helme kabeli varemetes.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Already in the beginning of digging, a 2 × 1.5 m sized area filled with disturbed soil appeared in the south-western corner of the building. The pit was rectangular and with almost upright walls, it stretched until the depth of 1.4 m from the ground surface. Some fragments of faience tableware, as well as the fact that the pit appeared just under the turf, indicate its late origin. Most likely, the trench was dug in the 1920s or 1930s to study the construction history of the building.[7] From the upper part of the fill of the trench two medieval silver coins (Table: nos 48 and 55) and fragments of dark wheel-thrown pottery were found. These finds made it possible to suggest the presence of similar finds somewhere in the surrounding undisturbed layers nearby.

[6] The work was performed by Aleksandr Kotkin from the History Club 'Kamerad'.
[7] The trench may have been initiated by Olaf Sild who was Professor of Church history at the University of Tartu in 1921–1926 and 1928–1940, and head of the Cabinet and Museum of Christian Archaeology. Within that context he also conducted trial excavations on sites of deserted Christian sanctuaries. The materials of the cabinet have not preserved – they got lost when the Faculty of Theology together with the museum were closed at the University in August 1940 as a result of the Soviet occupation (Tammiste 2015).

Stone church in ruins – stratigraphy and finds

The upper strata inside the church ruins consisted of debris which had fallen down when the walls were demolished to get stones for re-use. The debris contained lime mortar and tiny brick fragments which had partly disintegrated into soil, as well as granite wedges from between larger stones. In addition, ca. 1.5 kg small burnt clay fragments with parallel imprints of hay or straw (Fig. 5) were collected by sieving.

Fig. 5. *Fragments of clay plaster with impressions of hay or straw.*
Jn 5. *Heina- või õlejäljenditega savikrohvitükid.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

The layer contained nine coins from the second half of the 16th century and the 17th century (Table, nos 49–54, 56–58) whereby four of them – three schillings of Riga (1572, 1575, 1575), and a Polish schilling minted in the castle of Dahlen (1572) – date from the period of the Livonian War. All others are Swedish coins from the 17th century, including a Livonian schilling of Christina (1644), a Rigan schilling of Carl X Gustav (1658), 2 schillings of Carl XI (both from 1662) and an öre of Carl XI (1682). The explanation for their presence in the layer of demolition debris can be that they were deposited in wall cracks as offered items during their time of circulation. To the 16th century belongs also a penny minted by Tartu bishop Johannes V Bey (1528–1543) (Table, no 48). As found from the fill of the 20th century trench, its original context remains unknown.

The debris upon the remains of fallen vaults contained also 17 strongly eroded human ribs or their fragments.[8] They all, possibly belonging to one adult person, were found close to each other. Here as a potential parallel the presence of commingled human bones upon the vaults of Mihkli (St Michael's) church in Pärnumaa district (Mäesalu & Malve 2012, 213–215) could be noted.

Window glass fragments from near the south-eastern corner of the trench, both of Early Modern times and medieval origin[9] indicate the presence of a window in that area or somewhat east of it. Probably, there were just two windows on the southern side of the church, the western beginning ca. 3 m from the line of the inner side of the west wall. A blue glass fragment, the triangular shape of the tip of another fragment and a piece of lead window frame indicate the presence of stained glass.

To late stratigraphic units, still covered by ruins from demolished walls, belong the remains of the western gable – a compact assemblage of 30–40 cm diameter granite stones with clean white lime mortar between them. The top of this assemblage appeared just under the turf east of the former western portal, and its bottom stretched until the depth of ca. 70 cm from the ground surface. The thickness of the deposit gradually decreased towards its edges. However, most of the gable had fallen out of the building and the lower part of the gable had dropped inside.

Remains from the gable and demolished walls were followed by a most compact and ca. 40 cm thick layer of lime mortar and brick rubble, originating from the vaults. The brick

[8] Identified by Martin Malve (TÜ).
[9] Identification of glass fragments and related comments by Monika Reppo (TÜ).

fragments were tiny (mostly less than 5 cm in diameter). Almost all pieces with at least one flat surface had been picked out for further reuse. Bigger fragments which enabled suggestions about the size and shape of bricks were rare. Some fragments originate from vault ribs or portal jambs, maybe of *Birnstab* character[10] (Fig. 6). Three fragments with a cut-off corner, probably, belonged to window reveals. Besides the brick fragments of thickness characteristic of the medieval period (ca. 9–9.5 cm) there were also three items 6–6.5 cm thick and of different composition which indicate repairing the church in Early Modern Times.

Fig. 6. *Profile brick fragments from the chapel demolition ruins.*
Jn 6. *Profiiltelliste tükke kabeli lammutusrusust. (TÜ 2723: 183, 181.)*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

The layer of debris contained bones of frogs, moles, rodents, perching birds and pigeons, evidently, not bound with human activities, as well as two bones of big cattle and four fish bones,[11] the latter, probably, food remains of people who demolished the ruins.

When bringing down the ruins, the western portal (or, at least, its southern side) had been destroyed. The part of the western wall beside it was made of bricks but further towards the south the wall was built of granite (Fig. 7). Excavations gave information also about the sequence of destruction – most likely, in the 19th century, when farm lands had been sold by landlords to the peasants. First, bricks from the western portal and its surroundings in the western wall were removed, and brick vaults were crushed for re-use of the material. Next the western gable was pulled (or had fallen) down, and then the upper parts of the standing walls were broken whereby the western wall was, maybe gradually, removed until the present-day ground level.

A thin (up to 2–3 cm) and dark occupation layer of uneven consistence and thickness, with vague patches of sooty soil and tiny charcoal fragments referring to fireplaces was discovered under the building waste (Fig. 8). The soil contained fragments of dark wheel-thrown pottery, some animal and fish bones (bream, cyprinids, perch)[12], as well as a Siegburg stoneware fragment which dates from between c. 1400 to 1550/1600 (SIEG3b, see: Russow 2006, 45, Table 6). The animal bones include 27 tiny fragments of mammal bones (mostly undetermined, but in one case sheep/goat and big cattle were identified), some of them with cut-marks referring to food. The pottery and food remains refer to meals in the ruins – probably, of people who worked in the surrounding fields and were looking for shelter from rain, wind or sun there in the second half of the 16th and in the 17th century, and maybe also after the fire of 1740.

Charcoal particles from the dark layer gave the radiocarbon date of 140±70BP (cal. after 1663 AD)[13] and might refer to the ruined status of the chapel in the era of Swedish rule – as noted above, the stone chapel was re-built after the Great Northern War again. Evidently, the dark layer was covered then by a new wooden floor which was evidently removed for re-use or as heating material when the ruins were demolished in the 19th century.

[10] Oral comment by Kaur Alttoa (TÜ). *Birnstab* – rib with a pear-shaped profile.
[11] Bones were identified as follows: mammals by Eve Rannamäe (TÜ), birds by Freydis Ehrlich (TÜ), fish by Lembi Lõugas (TLU AT).
[12] Perch bones might originate from a big (ca. 35–40 cm long) specimen. In addition, a herring or Baltic herring bone was discovered from the disturbed fill of the trench in the SW corner of the chapel, but it may also date from the 20th century.
[13] Ta-3169; all radiocarbon samples were calibrated with OxCal 4.3.2 programme (Bronk Ramsey 2009) and IntCal13 calibration curve.

Fig. 7. *Remains of the western stone wall of the chapel, from the east and general stratigraphy. 1 – western wall, 2 – late 16th – 17th/18th cc. cultural layer on the smoothed mortar surface ('mortar floor'), 3 – wall construction mortar (with its top on the level of 'mortar floor'), 4 – stone foundation of the mortar floor, packed with brown clay, 5 – disturbed loam with no finds (from the foundation ditches?), 6 – layer of charcoal – remains of the wooden sanctuary, 7 – clean yellow loam, 8 – intact grey soil – original pre-construction ground level (from that soil offered coins were found outside the area of the burnt sanctuary).*

Jn 7. *Kabeli lääneseina jäänused, vaade idast ja üldine stratigraafia. 1 – kabeli lääneseina telliseladu, 2 – 16. sajandi II poole – 17/18. sajandi kultuurkiht silutud mördipinnal („mörtpõrandal"), 3 – keskaegse kabeli seinte ehitusmört (ülaserv külgneb „mörtpõrandaga"), 4 – „mörtpõranda" aluspõrand, pruuni saviga pakitud maakividest, 5 – segatud leidudeta saviliiv (vundamendikraavidest pärinev pinnas?), 6 – põlengukiht – puust pühamu jäänused, 7 – kollane puhas saviliiv, 8 – hall looduslik muld – ehitustegevuse eelne maapind (selles pinnases olid väljastpoolt põlenud pühamu ala leitud ohvrimündid).*

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Stone church built and used – stratigraphy and finds

The dark thin cultural layer was followed by an up to 3–4 cm thick, uneven and fragmentary layer of lime mortar with a somewhat smoothed surface (Fig. 8). Probably, the mortar layer had served as basis for the medieval wooden floor above it. As the surface of the mortar layer was 6–12 cm lower than the lowest point of plaster remains inside the southern wall, the supposed floor may have been made of boards, resting on rather thin beams. Next to the western wall the mortar layer was much thicker, up to 15–20 cm (Fig. 7). Here it consisted of mortar which had fallen down when building the church wall. Next to the southern wall the mortar layer had been destroyed by a 20th century research pit and in the southern corner of the trench by some other later disturbance.

A thin fill layer of mixed soil and loam under the mortar contained a few mammal bones, incl. big and small cattle. Under the fill, a massive basement made of granite stones 25–35/40 cm in diameter (Fig. 9) appeared in the depth of 130–140 cm from the ground level. The basement stones, set densely next to each other, were packed with light brown sticky clay. The basement of uneven surface, slanting towards south-west, had preserved also in the south-western corner of the building – the trench from the 1920s or the 1930s had not stretched until that depth.

The clayish disturbed soil below the massive floor basement stones contained small pieces of mortar and tiny brick fragments, as well as 5–6 cm thick bigger flat mortar blocks with the diameter of ca. 20–30 cm. These flat blocks with impressions of 5–9 cm wide wood chips (Fig. 10) indicate a mortar box in the south-western corner of the building during the construction work. The careless waste of mortar is characteristic for the stone masonry of the Late Medieval period, although there are no comparative data from

rural regions of southern Estonia from the 14th century.[14]

The ca. 10 cm thick layer with mortar and tiny brick fragments was followed by ca. 20 cm of disturbed loam which contained only minimal particles of construction waste. Most likely, the soil originates from the ditches of wall foundations. From that layer a human tooth – right molar of a grown-up person[15], the only human bone fragment from layers below the stone church floor was found. Consequently, the tooth loss might be caused by some work accident or quarrel which happened during the church construction.

Under that fill the original ground level from the time before the stone church appeared in the eastern part of the trench. The grey, partly dark grey or even almost black soil had an uneven surface which seemed to have partly been removed by digging. Three post holes with the diameter of 17–18 cm, 23–25 cm and 27 cm appeared in it. As the holes did not stretch into intact virgin yellow mineral ground, they seem to be of late origin, maybe bound to early 18th century re-construction work – the stone basement and the 'mortar floor' had not preserved intact in that trench corner. The grey soil contained the total of 45 coins from the 13th and 14th centuries (Fig. 11; see below), as well as a small yellow seed bead (diameter 4 mm), and a tiny copper alloy ring, maybe for a pendant (Fig. 12). Such beads are common in the village cemeteries of south-eastern Estonia in the 13th and 14th centuries (Valk 2001, 49–50) whereby the light, lemon-yellow colour refers rather to the 13th century.[16] Also 13 tiny strongly burnt bone fragments, six of them from middle-sized or big mammals, and several bones from the head of a big (ca. 35–38/40 cm) perch were sieved from the soil.

[14] Oral comment by Kaur Alttoa.
[15] Identified by Martin Malve (TÜ).
[16] Oral comment by Priit Ligi in 1992, with reference to information from colleagues from St. Petersburg.

Fig. 8. *Dark cultural layer on the medieval mortar floor. On the left, in the south-western corner of the building, the trench of a former dig.*
Jn 8. *Must kultuurkiht keskaegsel mörtpõrandal. Vasakul, hoone edelanurgas varasemate kaevamiste sissekaeve.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Fig. 9. *Stone foundation of the floor of the medieval chapel.*
Jn 9. *Keskaegse kabeli maakividest aluspõrand.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Fig. 10. *Mortar pieces with impressions of timber chips from the layer of construction activities.*
Jn 10. *Laastujäljenditega kivistunud mördi tükid kivikabeli ehitustsoonist.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Fig 11. *Coin types found in Helme. 1, 2 – Danish coins struck in Tallinn, 3, 4 – bishopric of Tartu, 5, 6 – North German towns, 7, 8 – Gotland (no 7 – minted before 1220; no 8 – minted between 1220/25–1280/90).*

Jn 11. *Münditüüpe Helmest. 1, 2 – Tallinnas vermitud Taani mündid, 3, 4 – Tartu piiskopkond, 5, 6 – Põhja-Saksa linnad, 7, 8 – Ojamaa mündid (nr 7 – vermitud enne 1220. aastat, nr 8 – vermitud vahemikus 1220/25–1280/90).*

(TÜ 2723: 152, 64, 167, 144, 178, 122, 134, 177.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo

Fig. 12. *Yellow seed bead and copper alloy ring from the grey cultural layer.*

Jn 12. *Kollane kudrus ja vasesulamist rõngake ohvrirahadega hallist kultuurkihist.*

(TÜ 2723: 149, 171.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Construction remains of an earlier wooden sanctuary

When the soil from the ditch foundations had been removed, and grey soil appeared in most of the trench, an intensively black layer of charcoal particles came to light in its western edge, near the western wall. The layer which stretched into the trench until the distance of ca. 1.1 m from the western wall (Fig. 13) was even, ca. 2–3 cm thick and very compact, containing no mineral construction remains, finds or bones. A radiocarbon sample from the charcoal particles, gained by sieving, gave the result of 390±70BP, cal. 1421–1629 AD (95.4%)[17]. Although the charcoal layer was generally even, it included a ca. 10 cm long brand with the original thickness of at least 18 cm. The brand was radiocarbon dated to 300±70BP (cal. after 1444 AD)[18] (with 95.4% probability; 1490–1655 AD with 68.2% probability).

In the south and west the charcoal layer was cut by the walls of the stone church, in the north it continued into the profile of the trench. The eastern border of the layer located in the trench was, however, straight and most distinct. The charcoal layer was limited by a trace of a log which was set on intact original natural grey soil. As the log trace with the width of 18–20 cm stretched into intact grey soil for ca. 6 cm, the diameter of the log can be estimated as ca. 22–25 cm. Since no remains of charred wood had preserved, the unburnt (or semi-burnt) log seems to have been removed when the construction of the stone church began.

Under the charcoal layer indicating a timber construction before the stone chapel there was a 3–4 cm thick layer of clean yellow loam. Also this layer which covered intact grey original soil did not contain any finds. Although the compact layer of yellow loam was flat and even, in one place it formed a slightly irregular hump with the maximal diameter up to 40 cm and maximal height of ca. 12 cm, also covered by the black layer. On a construction site, such a heap of loam should inevitably have been disturbed or mixed with soil by stepping or walking. The cleanness and intact status of the loam heap, as well as of the layer of yellow loam as a whole, shows that the loam was added inside the structure from above, when the walls were high enough to hinder walking. Most likely, the heap of loam was poured or had accidentally fallen during the construction work.

[17] Ta-3167.
[18] Ta-3168.

Fig. 13. *Layer of charcoal from a wooden building destroyed in fire (on the right) and grey soil with offered coins (on the left). View from the north.*
Jn 13. *Põlenud puuehitisest pärinev söekiht (paremal) ja ohvrimünte sisaldav hall alusmuld (vasakul), vaade põhja poolt.*
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

13th–14th CC. COIN ASSEMBLAGE PRECEDING THE STONE CHURCH

The grey soil on top of intact natural loam contained the total of 45 coins from the 13th and 14th centuries. In addition, a Mecklenburg penny from that time was gained from the top layer of the vault debris (it may have originally been on the vaults), and a Danish penny minted in Tallinn between 1265 and 1332 was found from the fill of the research trench from the 1920s or 1930s. As the trench did not stretch until the depth where other coins of that period were found, this coin probably had been removed from its original location already before, by some earlier disturbances, e.g. when digging post holes.

The unearthed coins (see Table; Fig. 11) give evidence of their consistent deposition from the second quarter or middle of the 13th century until the mid-14th century. Besides local coins there are also bracteates from North Germany and Gotland.

Minting in Livonia which started in the first quarter of the 13th century, intensified in about 1265 both in Tallinn and Tartu (Leimus 2001). The early Livonian coins – pennies struck as bracteates, depicting a crown in Tallinn (Fig. 11: 1, 2) and a sword and key in Tartu (Fig. 11: 3, 4) – are characteristic in all Estonian coin hoards of the late 13th – early 14th centuries (*ibid.*, tab. 1). The total of 34 such local coins (25 Tartu and 9 Tallinn), minted before 1332, were found in Helme. Since 1265, minting in Tallinn and Tartu apparently met the requirements of local economy.

At the same time coins of Gotland (Visby) continually circulated alongside Livonian coins. This was rendered easy by the similar minting standard of the coins of Visby and Livonia (Leimus 2002, 1601). Six Gotlandic pennies were found during the archaeological fieldwork in Helme. The earliest of them was probably minted already in the beginning of the 13th century, before 1220 (Fig. 11: 7), but as no hoards from the second quarter and middle of the 13th century are known from Estonia, the circulation time of early 13th century Gotlandic coins remains unknown. The others (Fig. 11: 8) were struck in 1220/25–1280/90.[19] Although their

[19] While this coin type (XXII) was formerly dated to the years 1210/20–1260/70 (Lagerqvist 1970, 79), the coinage of this group is considered to have begun since 1220/25 and the chronological upper border is dated as about 1280/90 (Holmberg 1995, 78–79; Myrberg 2012, 182).

influx to Livonia ceased after the renewal of local minting in the 1260s, they still circulated alongside with Livonian coins also later (Leimus 2004a, 64; Kiudsoo & Tamla 2006, 278–279).

The percentage of Gotlandic 13th century coins found from Helme (13%) greatly corresponds to that from other chapel sites with rich coin material earlier than the mid-14th century in southern Estonia – Niklusmägi and Loosi. In Niklusmägi their proportion was 19% (three from 16), in Loosi – 10% (one from 10)[20] (Valk *et al.* 2013, 109–132; Valk *et al.* 2018, 145–182). In addition to Niklusmägi and Loosi, a presumable specimen was found near the chapel site of Siksälä (Kiudsoo 2014, 279). Gotlandic pennies have only a few parallels from rural cemeteries of southern Estonia: single items are known from Urvaste churchyard and Koikküla village cemetery only (Valk *et al.* 2018, 169).

Seven bracteate pennies of North German towns from the 13th–14th centuries (Fig. 11: 5, 6) were also found from the chapel site in Helme. Such coins played an important role in the 14th century currency of Livonia. North German bracteates prevailed in local circulation since 1332, when coining in the mint of Tallinn was interrupted (Leimus 1998, 83–89). The earliest coins of the type, however, reached Estonia probably already at the turn of the 13th and the 14th centuries, when the contacts of Livonian towns with Lübeck became denser (Leimus 2004b, 1100). North German coins still clearly prevailed in the composition of hoards deposited in the second half of the 1360s. But at the end of the 1370s the amount of such coins decreased considerably (Kiudsoo 2001, 70). The main reason for their disappearance from circulation lies in the decrees of the Livonian authorities prohibiting the import and circulation of such low-standard coins (Molvõgin 1969, 50–51, 58, 63). The necessity for foreign coins had ceased to exist already earlier. In the first half of the 1360s, after a break of more than 30 years, minting was restored both in Tallinn and in Tartu, and before the end of the 14th century a monetary system, one of the best developed in the region, with three different nominal values, had formed in Livonia (Leimus 2004b, 1101).

The small number of pennies of North German towns suggests that offering had ended around the middle of the 14th century already. As noted above, after 1332, when coining at the mint of Tallinn was interrupted, North German bracteate pennies clearly prevailed in local circulation. For example, there are even 2961 North German pennies in the earlier part (*tpq* 1356) of the big Olustvere hoard, which made 83% of the whole coin material (Leimus & Molvõgin 2001, 47–48). At the same time, Livonian coins from the 1360s – the minting of those started by the Livonian order and the Diocese of Tartu then – are fully absent among the assemblage from Helme. This makes it possible to suggest that the deposition of coins ended before that time, i.e. by the middle of the 14th century.

The unusually high number of 13th–14th century coins found in Helme – at that time coins only rarely functioned as grave goods in the region yet – is very remarkable. Analysing the known coin finds from churches of northern and western Estonia we can assert that consistent and frequent offering of coins started there only around the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries (Kiudsoo 2012, 79). The beginning of mass offerings in churches could be related with the so-called depression period that sorely distressed the local population at that time *(ibid.)*. However, as noted above, on two chapel sites from southern Estonia the earliest coins date from the 1230s–1250s (Valk *et al.* 2013, 120; Valk *et al.* 2018, 163).

[20] Niklusmägi TÜ 2171: 181, 214, 229; Loosi: TÜ 2680: 29. Since in case of Niklusmägi and Loosi also originating from the 13th–14th cc., but without more specific dating have been considered, and as in Helme offering seems to have ended in the mid-14th century, both in case of Niklusmägi and Loosi chapel sites the percentage of Gotlandic coins during the period in question may have been higher than shown.

INTERPRETATION: WOODEN SANCTUARY BEFORE THE STONE CHURCH

A most noteworthy circumstance is the extremely high concentration of 13th–14th century coins – 47 finds from the small trench (with the area of 9 m² on the ground surface and only of 6.25 m² in the bottom where coins appeared). Thereby, the coins were not distributed evenly, but most of them were found from only ca. 2.5 m² in the north-eastern part of its bottom. Within the area of the burnt timber structure not a single find occurred. Since the distribution area of coins continued into the northern profile of the trench, its real size remained, however, unclear.

Evidently, the deposition of coins is connected with some 13th–14th cc. offering activities performed at the structure which perished in fire. As the burnt structure was replaced by the stone church, there is no reason to doubt its sacral meaning: the medieval Corpus Christi Church was preceded by a local wooden sanctuary which was, judging by the dates of the coins, constructed already around the middle of the 13th century. As the earliest of the coins, a tiny penny minted in Visby, is from before 1220, the structure may even have been erected soon after the conquest and Christianisation of prehistoric Sakala province (1215/1223).

Since neither coins nor other finds were found inside the building, and as the layer of yellow loam inside was fully intact and undisturbed, the structure was of closed character and had no entrance. Presumably, it was a rectangular cross-beam postament with a sacral object on its flat top. As the eastern edge of the structure crossed the trench, its length in the north-south direction had been at least 3 metres.

The concentration of coins in the north-eastern corner of the trench, as well as their rare presence in the southern half – there only seven 13th–14th cc. coins were found in the grey soil – enables to suggest that offering took place in a limited area in front of a definite image. Probably, the brand with the thickness of 18 cm, found from the even layer of charcoal, originates from the cult cross or a statue which stood on top of the postament. Considering that the stone chapel was dedicated to Corpus Christi, the presence of a wooden Crucifix can be supposed. The location of coins east of the burnt structure suggests that the sacred image was facing east. Probably, the yellow seed bead and bronze loop relate to the context of offering and indicate the participation of local Estonian females.

Although the radiocarbon dates of the charcoal layer and brand from it are greatly overlapping, being (with 95.4% probability), respectively, from 1421–1646 and later than 1444 cal. AD, they cannot be regarded as reliable because the wooden building which perished in fire cannot stratigraphically be of younger origin than the offered coins: the grey natural soil under the remains of the building was fully virgin and contained absolutely no coin finds. Moreover, the stone pavement and remains of a mortar floor were intact above the burnt structure, excluding, thus, the possibility of Late Medieval or later disturbances. Evidently, the log wall of the timber building was a definite border which hindered the spread of coins. Since the wooden sanctuary existed on the site of the later stone chapel for a long time, possibly at least for about a century, its lowest logs, resting on the ground and not on stones, must have repeatedly been replaced by new ones.

The temporal relations between the stone chapel and its wooden predecessor are unclear. It seems likely that the stone church was constructed soon after the wooden building, since offering stopped abruptly in the mid-14th century. Even if the wooden sanctuary perished accidentally in fire, offering on its site could probably have continued, as known from popular practices of the 17th century (Kõpp 1959, 220–231). Most likely, it may have been the popularity of the wooden sanctuary which brought about the construction of a vaulted stone church

(or chapel) to an inconspicuous location on flat land in the distance of only ca. 500 m from the parish centre.

The origins of the two Gotlandic örtugs from the second half of the 14th century, found in the field north and north-east of the church remain unknown, but they indirectly also refer to the significance of the place at that time – probably, the presence of the stone chapel. They may relate to processions or popular assemblies near the church on holidays, e.g. the Feast of Corpus Christi.

CONCLUSIONS

Excavations at the ruins of the medieval stone chapel of Helme have shed new light upon its history. The chapel was preceded by a wooden sanctuary which was constructed there, judging by numerous offered coins, already soon after the crusades, around the middle of the 13th century. The sanctuary, probably, a cross-beam postament with a cross, crucifix or Golgotha group on its top, perished in fire in the mid-14th century and seems to have been replaced soon with the stone chapel dedicated to Corpus Christi, known from the 16th–18th century written data. The assemblage of offered coins gives unique and new information about coin circulation in south-eastern Estonia in the 13th and 14th centuries. Its composition is different from that of the medieval village cemeteries and chapel sites of southern Estonia, whereby especially the high number of 13th century Tallinn coins must be outlined. The time when the wooden sanctuary was founded remains unclear, mainly because of the wide chronological limits and only poorly known circulation time of the Gotlandic coins. The dating can only broadly be defined with the second or third quarter of the 13th century.

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Table. *Coins found from the Helme chapel site during the excavations of 2018 (TÜ 2723).*
Tabel. *Mündid Helme kabelikohast 2018. aasta kaevamistelt.*
Compiled by / Koostanud: Mauri Kiudsoo

	Issued by / Vermimiskoht ja -aeg	No / Nr	Value / Mündisort	Context / Leiukoht
1	Gotland, Visby, before 1220	: 134	penny	grey soil
2	Gotland, Visby, 1220/25–1280/90	: 124	penny	grey soil
3	Gotland, Visby, 1220/25–1280/90	: 158	penny	grey soil
4	Gotland, Visby, 1220/25–1280/90	: 177	penny	grey soil
5	Gotland, Visby, 1220/25–1280/90	: 151	penny	grey soil
6	Gotland, Visby, 1220/25–1280/90	: 172	penny	grey soil
7	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 130	penny	grey soil
8	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 64	penny	20th c. trench
9	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 131	penny	grey soil
10	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 157	penny	grey soil
11	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 139	penny	grey soil
12	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 164	penny	grey soil

	Issued by / Vermimiskoht ja -aeg	No / Nr	Value / Mündisort	Context / Leiukoht
13	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 150	penny	grey soil
14	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 128	penny	grey soil
15	Denmark, Tallinn, c. 1265–1332	: 152	penny	grey soil
16	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 147	penny	grey soil
17	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 120	penny	grey soil
18	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 174	penny	grey soil
19	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 143	penny	grey soil
20	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 144	penny	grey soil
21	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 151a	penny	grey soil
22	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 125	penny	grey soil
23	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 135	penny	grey soil
24	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 123	penny	grey soil
25	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 136	penny	grey soil
26	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 162	penny	grey soil
27	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 159	penny	grey soil
28	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 166	penny	grey soil
29	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 168	penny	grey soil
30	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 170	penny	grey soil
31	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 138	penny	grey soil
32	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 167	penny	grey soil
33	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 161a	penny	grey soil
34	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 145	penny	grey soil
35	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 163	penny	grey soil
36	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 129	penny	grey soil
37	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 140	penny	grey soil
38	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 126	penny	grey soil
39	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 142	penny	grey soil
40	Tartu bishopric, c. 1265–1332	: 141	penny	grey soil
41	North Germany, Hamburg, 13th/14th cc.	: 156	penny	grey soil
42	North Germany, Hamburg, 14th c.	: 178	penny	grey soil
43	North Germany, Hamburg, 14th c.	: 169	penny	grey soil
44	North Germany, Lübeck, 13th/14th cc.	: 122	penny	grey soil
45	North Germany, Mecklenburg, 13th/14th cc.	: 55	penny	debris
46	North Germany, Mecklenburg, 13th/14th cc.	: 155	penny	grey soil
47	North Germany, Mecklenburg, 13th/14th cc.	: 146	penny	grey soil
48	Tartu bishopric, Johannes VI Bey (1528–43)	: 72	penny	20th c. trench
49	Free town of Riga, 1569	: 45	schilling	debris
50	Poland, Dahlen, 1572	: 19	schilling	debris
51	Free town of Riga, 1575	: 20	schilling	debris
52	Free town of Riga, 1576	: 46	schilling	debris
53	Sweden, Livonia, Kristina, 1644	: 14	schilling	debris
54	Sweden, Riga, Karl X Gustav, 1658	: 9	schilling	debris
55	Sweden, Karl XI, 1662	: 82	schilling	20th c. trench
56	Sweden, Karl XI, 1662	: 3	schilling	under turf
57	Sweden, Karl XI, 1664	: 1	schilling	under turf
58	Sweden, Stockholm, Karl XI, 1682	: 8	öre	debris
59	coin fragment	: 153	?	grey soil

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PROOVIKAEVAMISED HELMES: KESKAEGNE KIVIKABEL JA VARASEM PUUST PÜHAMU 13.–14. SAJANDI OHVRIMÜNTIDEGA

Heiki Valk ja Mauri Kiudsoo

Helme keskaegse kivikabeli varemed, mis enne arheoloogilisi uuringuid olid välisilme põhjal dateeritud 15. sajandisse, asuvad kihelkonnakirikust 500 m lõuna pool tasasel põllul (jn 1–2). Kirjalike allikate põhjal oli tegemist Issanda Ihu kabeli või kirikuga, mis Poola ajal oli varemetes ja mida tollastes revisjonides (1590/1599, 1613) mainitakse eestlaste kasutuses olnud kirikuna. Suulise pärimuse järgi ehitati kabel varemeist üles pärast Põhjasõda, mil väikseks ja vaeseks jäänud kogudusel puudusid võimalused sõjas hävinud suure kiriku taastamiseks. Hoone süttis 1740. aastal pikselöögist ja seda enam pühakojana kasutusele ei võetud. Suulise traditsiooni kohaselt käidi kabelis tavalistel pühapäevadel, kuid rahvarohkete suurte pühade ajal mindi suurde kihelkonnakirikusse. Hoone müüre lõhuti ehitusmaterjaliks 1950. aastatel, mil ka seni püsti olnud kõrge idaviil traktoriga alla tõmmati.

2018. aastal toimunud arheoloogilisteks uuringuteks andis põhjust asjaolu, et hiliskeskaegne kivikabel paikneb kihelkonnakirikule väga lähedal. See lubas arvata, et kabelil on olnud mingi varasem eelkäija. Kevadistel eeluuringutel (jn 3) leiti kirikut ümbritsevalt põllult metallidetektoriga kaks 1340.–1380/90. aastate Ojamaa öörtugit – varemete kirdenurgast u 11 m põhjaloode ja 52 m põhjakirde pool, varemete lääneosast kamara alt aga 1664. aastast pärinev Liivimaa killing. Hoone lõunaseinast u 3 m kaugusele ja läänefassaadi joonest u 3,7 m ida poole künkanõlvale tehtud proovišurfis satuti maapinnast 95 cm sügavusel peaga edelasse suunatud luustikule.

Suvel tehti varemete edelanurka 3 × 3 m mõõtmetega kaevand (jn 4). Selle edelanurgas paljandus kohe maapinnalt algav u 2 × 1,5 m mõõtmetega sissekaeve, mis ulatus u 1,4 m sügavuseni. Täites olnud leidude põhjal pärineb kaeve 20. sajandist ja võiks ehk seostuda Tartu Ülikooli kirikuajaloo professori Olaf Silla 1920.–1930. aastate ehitusplaaniste väliuuringutega. Kirjalikke teateid nende tööde kohta säilinud ei ole.

Ülemise pinnasekihi moodustasid kirikumüüride lammutusrusud – suurte, ära veetud müürikivide vahel olnud väiksed vuugitäitekivid, mört ja tellisetükid. Lammutusrusust leiti üheksa münti – neli 1560.–1570. aastate ja viis 1640.–1680. aastate vahemikust. Nende olemasolu saab seletada ohvrimüntide pistmisega müüripragudesse, kust need seinte lõhkumisel lammutusprahi sisse pudenesid. Lammutusrusu sisaldas kokku 1,5 kg õle- või heinajäljenditega savikrohvi jäänuseid (jn 5). Lääneseina joonest ligi 3 m kaugusel leidus lõunamüüri ääres keskaegseid ja varauusaegseid aknaklaasikilde, sh vitraažikatkeid mis viitavad selles piirkonnas olnud aknale. Lammutusrusust leiti ka 17 täiskasvanu roidekatket (võivad pärineda võlvidepealsel olnud pinnasest), samuti kolm varauusaegsetele remonditöödele viitavat 6–6,5 cm paksust tellisetükki. Müüride lammutusrusu all algasid läänepoolse otsaviilu varingurusud – suured raudkivid ja neid sidunud valge lubimört.

Sügavamal paiknes u 40 cm paksune keskaegsete tellisvõlvide lammutusrusu kiht, kust peaaegu kõik tervemad kivid ja kivitükid, samuti vähemalt ühe sileda pinnaga väikesed kivikillud olid taaskasutuseks välja korjatud. Rusust leiti mõned profiiltelliste katked (jn 6), millest vähemalt üks võiks pärineda võlvi roidekivist, samuti kolm lõigatud nurgaga tükki portaali või akende palestikust. Tõenäoliselt alustati varemete lammutamist ehitusmaterjaliks 19. sajandil, seoses talude päriseksostmisega. Ehituskivide võtmisel oli välja lõhutud ka kabeli lääneportaal; läänеseinast oli säilinud sellega külgnenud tellislaotist (jn 7), mis lõuna pool läks üle maakiviseinaks.

Kaevandi üldine stratigraafia on hästi jälgitav lääneseina profiilis (jn 7). Võlvirusude all paljandus 2–3 cm paksune ebaühtlane tume, keskaegse kivikabeli hävinud puitpõranda all olnud silutud mördipinda kattev kultuurkiht (jn 8), mis sisaldas veidi looma- ja kalaluid ning tumedaid kedranõukilde. Leiti ka 15. sajandi või 16. sajandi algupoole kivikeraamikakild. Ilmselt pärineb kiht aegadest, kui varemeis olnud, kuid säilinud võlvidega hoone pakkus 16. sajandi II poolel – 19. sajandi algupoolel põllul töötavatele inimestele varju vihma, tuule ja päikese eest. Tumedast kihist võetud radiosüsinikuproovi dateering – pärast 1663. aastat – viitab samuti sellele, et kabel võis Rootsi võimu ajal olla varemetes.

Tumeda kultuurkihi all oli kuni 3–4 cm paksune ebaühtlane ja paiguti katkendlik silutud mördi lade, mis tõenäoliselt oli kandnud puupõranda laake ning toetus segatud pinnasest täite- ja tasanduskihile. Viimasel all tuli nähtavale tihe 25–35/40 cm läbimõõduga kividest laotud ja saviga pakitud aluspõrand (jn 9). Selle all algas mördi- ja tellisepuru, kuid laiguti ka suuremaid, kuni 30 cm läbimõõduga, kuni 5–6 cm paksuseid ja 5–9 cm laiuste laastujäljenditega kivistunud mördilatakaid (jn 10) sisaldav pinnasekiht. Kõnesoleva, kivikabeli ehitamise ajal tekkinud ladestuse all paiknes segatud, vaid üksikute tellise- ja mörditükikestega u 20 cm paksune leidudeta, nähta-

vasti vundamendikraavidest pärineva liivsavi lade, mille all tuli enamikus kaevandist nähtavale looduslik alusmuld.

Loodusliku halli, kohati mustja alusmulla ülaosa oli osalt maha kaevatud, kuid säilinud pinnasest leiti 45 13.–14. sajandi ohvrimünti (jn 11). Kuna varaseim Ojamaa brakteaat on vermitud enne 1220. aastat (jn 11: 7) ja veel viis Ojamaa penni pärinevad 1220/25–1280/90. aasta vahemikust (jn 11: 8), võiks ohverdamine olla alanud millalgi 13. sajandi teisel veerandil või keskpaiku. Umbkaudu 1260.–1330. aastatest pärinevad üheksa Tallinnas vermitud Taani nn kroonbrakteaati (jn 11: 1, 2) ja 25 Tartu piiskopkonna brakteaatpenni (jn 10: 3, 4). Seitse vendilinnade penni (jn 11: 5, 6) kuuluvad 13.–14. sajandisse. Et rahade seas polnud Liivimaa ordu Tallinna ega ka Tartu piiskopkonna münte, mida hakati arvukalt vermima 1360. aastatel, lõppes ohverdamine arvatavasti hiljemalt 14. sajandi keskel. Kuna münte sisaldava pinnase pealmine osa oli kivikiriku ehitustööde ajal osaliselt maha kaevatud, jääb ohvrimüntide kunagine tegelik arv ebaselgeks. Rahadega samast pinnasest leitud sidrunkollane kudrus ja vasesulamist, ehk ripatsehtest pärinev rõngake (jn 12) viitavad eesti naiste kohalolule.

Kaevandi läänepoolses osas paljandus vundamendikraavidest pärit täitepinnase all kiriku läänemüüri seinast kuni 1,1 m kaugusele ulatuv must 2–3 cm paksune ühtlane põlengukiht (jn 13), milles oli suurem, kuni 18 cm jämedune tukk. Sirge servaga põlenguala idakülge piiras looduslikku alusmulda ulatuv, u 22–25 cm läbimõõduga palgi jäljend. Söekihi all oli 3–4 cm paksune puhta kollase saviliiva lade, millest tõusis esile kuni 40 cm läbimõõduga ja 12 cm kõrgune kompaktne, samuti põlengujäänustega kaetud täiesti puhta saviliiva hunnik. Tõenäoliselt valati liiv ukseta ristpalkraketise sisse ülalt siis, kui ehitis oli saavutanud teatud kõrguse. Põlenud puuehitise alalt, ei põlengukihi seest, pealt ega alt ei leitud ühtegi ohvrimünti. Ilmselt pärineb söekiht puust väikepühamust, mille palkseina äärde ida poolt ohvrimünte visati. Kuna enamik ohvrimünte saadi väikeselt, vaid u 2,5 ruutmeetri suuruselt alalt ja kaevandi lõunapoolses osas leidus neid väga vähe, on rahasid ohverdatud väga selgepiirilisena tajutud sakraalobjekti ette. Et müntide leviala jätkus kaevandi põhjaseina sisse, jäi ohvrirahade leviala ulatus ebaselgeks.

Võib arvata, et ohverdamise lõppemine on seotud uue kivikabeli ehitamisega, mis toimus arvatavasti varsti pärast puust pühamu põlengut.

Tõenäoliselt eelnes kivikabelile ristpalkidest postament krutsifiksi või ristiga – seda lubab oletada asjaolu, et 16. sajandi alguses oli tegemist Issanda Ihu kabeliga.