



Investigations in Helme: medieval chapel ruins, earlier timber shrine and churchyard

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2019 archaeological investigations were continued in Helme (Fig. 1). The main target of research were the ruins of the medieval stone chapel, located 500 m south of the ruins of the parish church. The aim of the excavations (Fig. 2) was to get more information about the remains of the mid-13th to the mid-14th century wooden shrine which were discovered under the ruins in 2018 (Valk & Kiudsoo 2019), especially concerning its chronology, size and shape. Limited trial investigations took place also in Helme churchyard.

Within the chapel,¹ its north-western corner was opened and thus the whole western end of the building was investigated. In addition, two trenches were made outside the ruins – south and west of the building – to find out the extent of the earlier shrine in these directions.

Since general stratigraphy inside the chapel was established in 2018, the demolition debris which contained almost no finds were removed by backhoe. The removal of 10 cm layers was preceded by metal detector investigations by Aleksandr Kotkin. In a similar way debris of the stone chapel were studied in the trenches outside the chapel walls. Deeper layers were sieved on 5 mm eye meshes.

THE SITE OF THE CHAPEL

The southern trench

South of the chapel an area of ca. 7.3 m² was opened near the western end of the building (Fig. 3). The top part of the ground consisted of a 60–75 cm thick layer of disturbed soil and demolition debris. From that layer four 17th century coins were found: a Swedish 1 öre minted

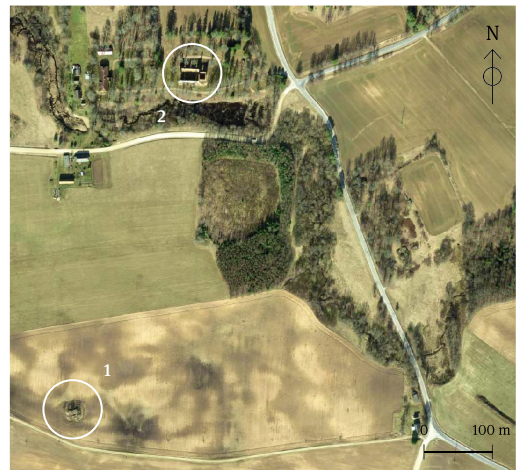


Fig. 1. Location of the medieval church and chapel site in Helme. 1 – chapel, 2 – church.

Jn 1. Helme keskaegse kabeli ja kiriku asukoht. 1 – kabel, 2 – kirik.

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet

¹ Finds: TÜ 2822: 1–166.

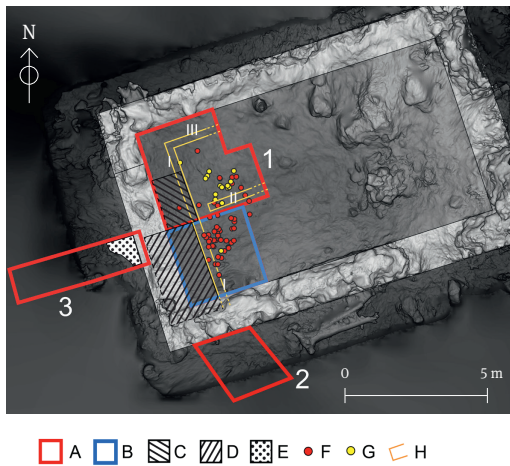


Fig. 2. Helme chapel ruins: trenches and main excavation results. A – trenches of 2019, B – trench of 2018, C – stone platform, D – cross-beam shrine: charcoal layer on sand, E – charcoal layer outside the shrine, F – mid-13th – mid-14th century offered coins, G – beads, H – log beds.

Jn 2. Helme kabelivaremed: kaevandid ja peamised kaevamistulemused. A – 2019. aasta kaevand, B – 2018. aasta kaevand, C – kiviplatvorm, D – ristpalkidest pühamu põlengukiht liival, E – väljapoole varisenud põlengukiht, F – 13. sajandi keskpaiga – 14. sajandi keskpaiga ohvrirüüdid, G – helmed, H – palgipesad. Map / Kaart: Ragnar Saage & Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet

in 1702. As no traces from this reconstruction work were found, levelling the surroundings was one of the last activities related to re-building the stone chapel.

After removing the debris and soil it became evident that the wall of the stone chapel had been built in two stages (Fig. 3), differing from each other by the size of the stones, as well as by the working experience of builders. The first stage of the wall stretched until ca. 1.05 m from the pre-construction ground level. This part of the wall was made of rather small granite stones (diam. ca. 20–40 cm), placed irregularly, sometimes carelessly and in upright position. The foundation ditch stretched only up to 2–3 cm from the wall. Approximately on the ground level of its construction time the wall had a 10–15 (mostly 12) cm wide socle. The second stage of the wall was made of big granite rocks. Two lower horizontal rows were made of stones 35–50 cm in diameter, but the rocks of the third row were very large – some of them even over a metre long. The wall had preserved until the height of 2.4 m from the top of the socle.

The western trench

The western trench (ca. 5 × 1.3 m) began ca. 1 m west of the inner side of the chapel – in the area where the outer side of the wall was expected to appear (Fig. 4). The trench ended where the hill of debris, rising for ca. 1.5 m above the level of the surrounding field, gradually merged with it.

in Tallinn in 1625, two Swedish schillings minted in Riga in 1663 and a Swedish 1 öre coin from 1695 (Table 1, nos 27–29, 36).²

Under the disturbed soil a compact layer of brick fragments similar to the one inside the chapel appeared, originating from the vaults which were demolished to get bricks for re-use – most likely, in the middle or second half of the 19th century. This layer was ca. 25–30 cm thick beside the wall and stretched, getting gradually thinner, until 2–3 metres from it.

Under the brick remains, ca. 20 cm of disturbed loam appeared, followed by a thin (up to 3–4 cm) grey layer with no finds – the bottom of intact virgin soil above natural yellowish loam. Most of the grey soil together with possible finds from the 13th and 14th centuries had been removed before constructing the stone chapel. Layers from Medieval and Early Modern times were also missing, being removed before demolishing the vaults. Most likely, this earthwork took place in the early 18th century, probably in the 1710s, when the medieval chapel was rebuilt to substitute the parish church, burnt by Russian troops in the Great Northern War

² All coins were identified by Mauri Kiudsoo (TLÜ AT).

The top layers consisted of brown soil mixed with granite and mortar rubble originating from the western gable. From this layer two coins – a penny of the Livonian Order minted in Tallinn between ca. 1426–1430 and Swedish *schilling* minted in Riga in 1665 (Table 1, nos 23, 34) were unearthed. As the layer of vault brick fragments was not found, the gable had still been standing when the vaults were demolished. The thickness of the layer of debris and soil gradually decreased from the east towards the west. It was followed by a layer of disturbed greyish soil and then by a layer of white lime mortar, 10–15 cm thick near the wall. Evidently, the mortar originates from the construction of the western wall and gable of the chapel. *In situ* stones of the western wall appeared in the trench under the debris ca. 60 cm higher than original, pre-construction ground level. Thus, the western wall of the chapel had almost fully been demolished.

The mortar was followed by disturbed loam from the foundation ditch of the stone chapel. The layer was 30–35 cm thick beside the wall and could be observed, getting gradually thinner and mixed with disturbed grey soil, in the whole trench. The ground contained irregular clusters of granite stones, 15–20/25 cm in diameter, in the central and western part of the trench.

Beside the chapel wall, under the disturbed pinkish loam there was a 2–3 cm thick compact layer of charcoal which stretched until 50–70 cm westward. As its surface appeared on the same level with the layer of charcoal inside the chapel in 2018, it originates from the wooden shrine which preceded the stone building and perished in fire. However, as there was no layer of clean yellow sand between the charcoal and intact grey virgin soil, as was detected inside the shrine last year, the investigated area remained outside the shrine, originating from its remains fallen to the west. Thus, considering the eastern edge of the timber shrine,



Fig. 3. Trench south of the Helme chapel ruins, with two construction stages of the stone chapel and remains of the grey intact soil in the foreground.

Jn 3. Kaevand Helme kabeli varemete lõunaküljel, sh kivi-kabeli müüri kaks ehitusjärku ja halli loodusliku mulda alaosa esiplaanil.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 4. Trench west of the Helme chapel ruins with remains of the fallen and burnt shrine near the wall of the chapel.

Jn 4. Kaevand Helme kabeli varemete lääneküljel puust pühamu põlengukihiga müüri ääres.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Table 1. Coins found in 2019 from the Helme chapel ruins. Trench: C – within the chapel, W – western, S – southern.**Tabel 1.** 2019. aasta mündileiud Helme kabeli varemetest. Kaevand: C – kabelis, W – läänes, S – lõunas.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Mauri Kiudsoo

No / nr	State/ruler and date / riik/valitseja ja aeg	Value / vääring	Find no / lei nr	Trench, context / kaevand, kontekst
1	Gotland, Visby, 1220–1280	penny	99	C, wooden shrine
2	Gotland, Visby, 1220–1280	penny	119	C, wooden shrine, under log II
3–5	Denmark, Tallinn, ca. 1265–1323	penny	100, 116, 108	C, wooden shrine
6–12	Tartu bishopric, 13th–14th cc.	penny	89, 94, 96, 101, 109, 114, 113	C, wooden shrine
13	Tartu bishopric, 13th–14th cc.	penny	131	C, wooden shrine, under log II
14–15	Tartu bishopric, 13th–14th cc.	penny	138, 139	C, wooden shrine
16	Tartu bishopric, 13th–14th cc.	penny (half)	140	C, wooden shrine
17	Livonian Order, Tallinn, ca. 1363/64–68(?)	seestling	157	W, stone chapel, construction stage 1 (?)
18	Tartu bishopric, Johann I Vyffhusen, ca. 1364/5–73	penny	65	C, stone chapel, construction stage 2
19	Tartu bishopric, s.d. (1397?–1420(15?))	lübische	156	W, stone chapel, construction stage 2 (?)
20	Tartu bishopric, s.d. (1397?–1420(15?))	lübische	160	W, stone chapel, construction stage 2 (?)
21	Tartu bishopric, s.d. (1410(09?)–1413)	lübische	62	C, stone chapel, construction stage 2
22	Tartu bishopric, s.d. (1413–1420(15?))	lübische	111	C, stone chapel, construction stage 2
23	Livonian Order, Tallinn, ca. 1426–30	penny	147	W, debris
24	Lithuania, Vilno, Sigismund II August, 1560	1/2 grosch	16	C, debris
25	Lithuania, Vilno, Sigismund II August, 1561	1/2 grosch	15	C, debris
26	Riga free town, 1572	schilling	21	C, debris
27	Sweden, Tallinn, Gustavus Adolphus, 1625	öre	144	S, debris
28	Sweden, Riga, Carolus XI, 1663	schilling	143	S, debris
29	Sweden, Riga, Carolus XI, 1663	schilling	145	S, debris
30	Sweden, Riga, Carolus XI, 1663	schilling	18	C, debris
31	Sweden, Riga, Carolus XI, 1663 or 1665	schilling	19	C, debris
32	Sweden, Livonia, Carolus XI, 1663	schilling	20	C, debris
33	Sweden, Livonia, Carolus XI, 1664	schilling	17	C, debris
34	Sweden, Livonia, Carolus XI, 1665	schilling	148	W, debris
35	Poland/Lithuania, John II Casimir, 166...	schilling (copper)	22	C, debris
36	Sweden, Stockholm, Carolus XI, 1695	öre	146	S, debris
37	Sweden, Stockholm, Carolus XII (1697–1718)	öre	20a	C, debris

discovered in 2018, the dimension of the structure in the east–west direction did not exceed 2.5 metres.

From the upper part of disturbed brown or grey soil above virgin loam two *lübische* pennies of Tartu prince-bishopric from between ca. 1397 and 1420, one of them probably fake, and a *seestling* of the Livonian Order, minted in Tallinn ca. between 1363/64 and 1368(?) (Table 1, nos 19, 20, 17) were found in the western part of the trench. As the coins are later than those offered to the timber shrine, they might be connected with the construction of the stone chapel.

Trench in the north-western corner of the chapel

North of the trench of 2018 an area of 14.1 m² was opened (Fig. 5). Firstly, it was dug until the bottom, then the profile from between the trenches of different years (1.5 m²) was removed.

Like in the south-western corner of the stone chapel opened in 2018, also in the north-west a filled test pit from earlier investigations appeared. The rectangular trench stretched to

the depth of 1.6–1.7 m from the ground level. As shown by some presumably 20th century finds, the trench of 2018 was supposed to relate to the archaeological trial digs of the church by Tartu University from the 1920s or 1930s (Valk & Kiudsoo 2019, 141). Within the similar trench of 2019, however, a fireplace with remains of burnt trash, including several sherds of late 18th or early 19th century basaltware teapot of English origin and pottery of grey clay, as well as two fragments of a sandstone disc (Fig. 6: 1) were found. Closest parallel to that object with irregular engraved crooked ‘spokes’ on its both sides around the central hole is a stone disc with magical signs, probably, from the 17th or 18th century (Jonuks *et al.* 2010).

Top layers

In the trench inside the chapel nine coins from the mid-16th to the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries were found from the upper layer of debris formed when demolishing the chapel walls. The coins (Table 1, nos 24–26, 30–33, 35, 37) include two Lithuanian ½ *grosch* items from 1560 and 1561, a schilling from the free town of Riga (1572), a Lithuanian copper schilling of John II Casimir from the 1660s, four Swedish schillings minted in Riga between 1663 and 1665 and a Swedish *öre* from between 1697–1718. A plaster fragment (Fig. 6: 2) from the same context indicates polychrome wall paintings in black, red and white. The layer of brick vault remains, ca. 40 cm thick, contained no finds.

Like in 2018, also now a thin and irregular layer of mortar covered by up to 1–2 cm thick uneven black cultural layer from Early Modern times appeared under the brick debris from the demolished vaults. The uneven surface and casual presence of mortar does not enable to regard it as a mortar floor, as previously suggested. Rather the mortar was laid here and there to avoid the beams bearing the wooden floor from direct contact with the underlying ground.

The dark cultural layer above the mortar contained several pottery fragments, a musket bullet, a 16th–17th cc. penannular brooch (Fig. 6: 3) and some food remains – 29 mammal bones, three fish bones (incl. perch and *cyprinides*) and a bird bone (Rannamäe 2020). The bones were very fragmented: only a representative of *cricetidae* family and two rodent bones could be identified. The finds confirmed the results of former excavations that the dark cultural layer dates from the second half of the 16th century and the 17th century when the chapel was ruined.



Fig. 5. Trench in the north-western corner of the Helme chapel and floor basement of the stone chapel.

Jn 5. Kaevand Helme kabeli loodenurgas ja kivikabeli maakividest aluspõrand.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 6. Finds from the chapel ruins: 1 – fragments of a sandstone disc, 2 – painted plaster fragment and 3 – penannular brooch.

Jn 6. Leide kabeli varemest. 1 – liivakivist ketta katked, 2 – maalingutega krohvitiikk ja 3 – hoburaudsõlg.

(TÜ 2822: 10, 159, 22a.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Layers related to the construction of the stone chapel

The 10–20 cm thick layer of clayish loam under the fragmentary mortar layer was followed, like in 2018, by a dense and compact floor basement made of 20/25–30/35 cm granite stones packed with greyish-brown clay (Fig. 5). Between the clay/stone basement and the walls there was a 20/30 to 50/60 cm wide stripe of mortar, fallen during masonry work. From the layers related to the construction of the stone chapel three coins of Tartu prince-bishopric were found – a penny of bishop Johann I Vyffhusen (ca. 1364/5–1373) from the clay between the floor basement stones, and two *lübische* pennies of Tartu prince-bishopric from 1410(09)–1413 and 1413–1420(15?) (Fig. 7: 1–3; Table 1, nos 18, 21, 22) – one from the basement clay, the other from the mortar beside the chapel wall. Since the circulation time of such *lübische* pennies ended with the monetary reform of the 1420s,³ losing two coins of such type in a later period seems unlikely. Loosing small change during chapel construction work might be a sign of buying/selling of food and/or drinks on the spot. The coin finds make it possible to date constructing the stone chapel with the time after 1413 and not later than in the 1420s. The excavation results may extend the circulation time of pennies of Vyffhusen – according to the former knowledge based on hoard finds, such coins were not in use in the 1380s any more.⁴ However, the fact that also two Tartu bishopric pennies (Table 1, nos 6 and 9) were found from the basement clay, also earlier origin and later disturbances cannot be excluded.

In addition, a fragment of a tiny round silver brooch (Fig. 7: 4), a cross pendant (Fig. 7: 5) and a belt mount of lead alloy (Fig. 7: 6) were found from the layers of chapel construction. The pendant is close in shape to cross pendants from the 11th–14th centuries (Mugurēvičs 1974, 229 and fig. 2: 30, 31); a similar item was found in Siksälä cemetery from a 15th century grave (Valk *et al.* 2014, 73, grave 50). The construction layers of the stone chapel also contained six animal bones (incl. one cattle and two sheep/goat bones) (Rannamäe 2020). Under the stone basement there was 20 cm of disturbed loam from the foundation ditches of the stone chapel.



Fig. 7. Finds related to the construction of the Helme stone chapel from the 1410s or 1420s: 1 – penny of Johann Vyffhusen, bishop of Tartu (1364/5–1373), 2–3 – *lübische* pennies of Tartu prince-bishopric from 1410(09)–1413 and 1413–1420(15?), 4 – fragment of a round silver brooch (?), 5 – cross pendant and 6 – lead alloy belt mount.

Jn 7. Helme kivikabeli ehitamisega seonduvad leiud 1410.–1420. aastatest. 1 – Tartu piiskop Johann Vyffhuseni penn (1364/5–1373), 2–3 – Tartu piiskopkonna *lübische* pennid 1410(09)–1413 ja 1413–1420(15?), 4 – hõbedast rõngassõle (?) katke, 5 – ristripats ja 6 – pliisulamist võõnaast.

(TÜ 2822: 65, 62, 111, 92, 83, 87.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

³ Pers. comm. Mauri Kiudsoo (19.09. 2019).

⁴ Pers. comm. Mauri Kiudsoo (26.08. 2019).

Layers related to the wooden shrine

Under the layer of disturbed loam, a dark, near its surface locally almost black cultural layer, gradually transforming into grey and yellowish grey soil and yellow loam, appeared in the whole trench (Fig. 8). To the assemblage of offered coins from the mid-13th – mid-14th century, gained from this layer in 2018, 16 new items – two Gotlandic pennies minted in Visby (1220–1280), three Danish pennies minted in Tallinn (ca. 1265–1332) and 11 pennies of Tartu prince-bishopric were added. 14 of them were gained from the dark cultural layer, two – when digging and sieving the disturbed loam above it. Since disturbed loam around them contained also patches of dark soil, the coins may originate from the area of the foundation ditch. The coins were more dispersed than those found in 2018 (Fig. 2: F). Similarly to those, they lay in the dark soil in different depths, possibly tramped into it. The top of the dark layer also appeared in different heights, showing traces of removal, including clear traces of spade tip.

From the dark soil also 14 tiny yellow seed beads with the diameter of 2.5–4.5 mm (Fig. 2: G; 9: 2) were found, in addition to the single item from 2018. The beads, dispersed in an area of ca. 1.4 × 2 metres, occurred likewise coins, in different depths. Since the beads were very small (going through sieve eyes), poorly preserved, soft and often getting disintegrated when touched, their actual number has probably been bigger. Similar character and the same distribution area indicate their origin from the same necklace. The dispersed location of beads and their main concentration outside the distribution area of coins does not enable to regard them as offered items, but rather as remains of a broken necklace. In addition, from the same context a pin of a tiny penannular brooch (Fig. 9: 1), as well as fragments of another similar pin and a spiral finger-ring came to light.

The dark layer with offered coins contained also 49 tiny dispersed bone fragments (46 of them grey and white burnt mammal bones), two unburnt mammal bones and an unburnt fish bone fragment (Rannamäe 2020). Since similar bone fragments were not found in the lowest layer of grey soil above intact mineral ground in the trenches south and west of the chapel walls, they might in some way relate to ritual activities performed at the wooden shrine.

The construction remains of the burnt shrine discovered in 2018 (Valk & Kiudsoo 2019, 146) – a layer of charcoal lying on a 3–4 cm thick layer of clean yellow sand above virgin grey soil – did not stretch into the trench of 2019, being discovered only within the profile between the two trenches.



Fig. 8. Dark 13th–14th cc. cultural layer under the floor of the Helme stone chapel.

Jn 8. 13.–14. sajandi tume kultuurkiht Helme kivikabeli põranda all.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 9. A pin of a penannular brooch and beads from the cultural layer of the wooden shrine under the Helme stone chapel.

Jn 9. Hoburaudsõle nõel ja helmed puust pühamu kultuurkihist Helme kivikabeli all.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

(TÜ 2822: 130, 121, 126, 136, 137.)

Immediately north of the north-eastern corner of the burnt structure an assemblage of granite stones – remains of some platform came to light. The structure could be observed in the area of ca. 1 × 1 m. The granite stones of 30–40/50 cm in diameter with surfaces ca. 25 cm higher than the dark cultural layer around them were laid upon virgin grey natural soil. Since the surfaces of outer stones were of similar height, the structure had probably served as base-ment for a wooden floor. The stones were covered by dark 1–2 cm thick cultural layer which contained tiny charcoal particles. This layer which probably originated from some wood-
 en structure covered the slanting slopes of the stones, merging with surrounding dark soil which contained coin offerings. If the dark layer on the stones was formed of decayed logs or half-logs which remained under the loam thrown out of the stone chapel foundation ditches, the platform cannot have been larger than found in the trench: the logs or beams would fully have been eliminated when digging the foundation ditch for the stone chapel.

Immediately east of the stone platform a trace of a log (log I, Fig. 2: H, width 17–18 cm) filled with brownish disturbed clayish loam came to light. The log, lying parallel to the west-ern wall of the chapel had partly been pressed into dark grey soil – the layer with coin offer-ings. The southern part of the same log had formed the eastern border of the burnt shrine studied in 2018. The log ended ca. 70 cm before the northern wall of the stone chapel. Its total length had been at least 6 metres – the southern end was cut by the foundation of the chapel wall. The log trace could not be followed in the southern trench, its end had been destroyed by digging the foundation ditch.

In addition, the traces of two other logs, II and III (Fig. 2: H) were unearthed in the dark grey soil in the bottom of the trench. They both were perpendicular to log I, following the direction of the northern and southern walls of the stone chapel. The bed of log II was sep-arated from that of log I by a ca. 60 cm wide gap, continuing into the eastern wall of the trench, but the trace of the western end of ca. 25 cm wide log III merged with that of log I. The function of logs II and III remained unclear, maybe they served as beams for a wooden floor east of the shrine. From the bottom of the trace of log II a Gotlandic penny from between 1220 and 1280 and an early penny of Tartu prince-bishopric (Table 1, nos 2 and 13) were found. The coin which dates the construction time of the timber shrine may have been deliberately placed under the log.

Most coin finds of 2019 were discovered east of log I. From the area of the stone platform north of the cross-beam structure only one coin was found.

The shrine

The excavations of 2018 and 2019 showed that the core of the shrine was a cross-beam build-
 ing with no entrance – a postament measuring ca. 2–2.5 m in the east–west and 3.5–4.5 m in the north–south direction (Fig. 10). The sacral centre to which offerings were made – proba-
 bly a wooden crucifix or cross⁵ –, stood on top of the structure. As no coins were found from the area of the building, the inside of which was covered by a 3–4 cm thick layer of clean yellow sand, the structure had to be too high for casting tiny bracteate pennies to its top. The low, ca. 25–30 cm high platform on stone basement might have been meant for the key person of rituals.

⁵ Since the earliest data about the dedication of the stone chapel are from the late 16th century (Valk & Kiudsoo 2019, 140), also some other dedi-
 cation and the presence of the image of a saint, an apostle or Virgin Mary cannot fully be excluded.

The wooden shrine which existed for about a century seems to have been re-constructed in the course of time. Since the ground east of the shrine must have been wet and muddy, as shown by coins and beads tramped into the ground, the presumed floor did not exist during the whole period of the shrine, but belongs to the final stage of its existence: logs II and III (likewise log I) lay in their beds until being removed when digging the foundation ditches for the stone chapel.

It seems that in its later phase the shrine was covered by a roof: the dark, partly black colour of the top part of the ground which contained coin offerings and small pieces of charcoal seems to originate not from the fire of the cross-beam structure, but from a light roof, maybe supported by posts. The post holes discovered in the trench of 2018 might have just such explanation. The presumed roof stretched, judging by the continuously

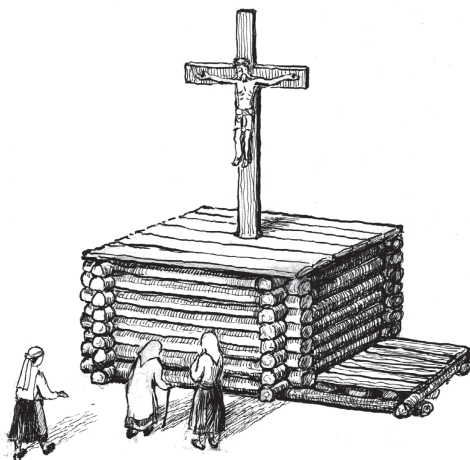


Fig. 10. *The first phase of the shrine in Helme around 1250 AD.*

Jn 10. *Helme pühamu algsel kujul, 1250. aasta paiku. Re-construction by the author, drawing by Mari-Ann Remmel / Autori rekonstruktsioon, joonis Mari-Ann Remmel*

black surface of the dark layer also east of the excavated area. The seemingly tramped status of coins and beads also refers to the lack of roof during a certain period. The roof indicates active participation in religious popular assemblies at the shrine on holidays – in case of individual devotion and offerings weather could probably be chosen for visiting the shrine and no roof was needed.

Since, likewise in 2018, no finds referring to pre-Christian roots of the sanctuary were found, and the shrine originates from the time after Christianization, its Christian character should not be questioned. Especially considering that after perishing in fire the original shrine was replaced by a stone chapel of Corpus Christi the orientation of which followed exactly that of its wooden predecessor.

It must especially be noted that while in medieval churches and chapels the main altar is always in the east with main access to it from the west, this rule common for medieval Christian culture was not followed in Helme. Rude deviation from it – judging by the location of coin finds (Fig. 2: F) people approached the sacral image from the east – can only be explained by unawareness of the builders how to set up a Christian sanctuary.⁶ This circumstance indicates that the shrine was not erected by the Church authorities, but by the locals – the Estonian neophytes.⁷ Moreover, the deviation from the elementary principle of orientation suggests that the clergy was not engaged in the construction process. Although facing the wrong direction, the sacral image remained in such position, as shown by lack of coins on its west side, during the whole existence of the wooden shrine – until its destruction in fire in the middle of the 14th century.

⁶ The same circumstance may also be the reason for the orientation of the shrine. The axis of the stone chapel does not follow the east-west line, but has a strong declination (65°–245°). Thereby, the axis of the parish church located 500 m away, almost exactly follows the east-west line (95°–275°). However, strong deviations from the east-west axis are common for medieval churches of Estonia (Pae 2019).

⁷ Thus, also the affiliation of the stone chapel to the Estonians, as noted in 1613 (Protocoll 1613, 37), may be based on tradition and historical roots.

The stone chapel

Excavations showed that the walls of the stone chapel were constructed in two stages. The work started soon after the fire – probably, the *seestling* of the Livonian Order, minted in Tallinn ca. between 1363/64 and 1368(?) from the west end of the western trench might relate to this stage of building activities –, but was stopped soon. A reason might be the lack of skills of the master and his teams to build stone walls,⁸ but we must also consider other possible reasons – e.g. social or economic disasters caused by epidemics or famines. As shown by coin finds, building the walls continued only in the second or third decade of the 15th century. It remains unclear how high the walls were when the first stage of construction was stopped: when the work was continued, the upper part of the poorly built walls may also have been demolished, until it was safe enough to go on with the work under the supervision of a skilled master.

The question on the width and character of the western portal did not get a definite answer during the excavations because of the demolition of the western wall. Considering that the preserved remains of the western wall stretched until 2.45 m from the north-western inner corner of the building, the doorway, together with framing profile bricks, could not be more than ca. 1.8 metres wide. This fact fully disproves the image of ca. 4 m wide stepped portal, as shown on the drawing from 1939 (Saadre 1939). Evidently, that drawing is based on the few wall remains visible above the ground at that time and phantasy of the author. The excavations of 2019 gave also no new information about the character of the roof and the floor, since no fragments of roof or floor tiles were found. However, the lack of floor tiles and the sporadic mortar layer under the 16th–17th century cultural layer formed in the ruins refer to a timber floor resting on beams. The presence of a plaster fragment with wall painting traces must also be noted.

INVESTIGATIONS IN THE PARISH CHURCHYARD

Parallel to excavations at the chapel ruins minor investigations were undertaken in the churchyard of the parish church in order to get information about the chronology of the parish centre.⁹ The ruins of the big stone church dedicated to Virgin Mary have been supposed to date, based on visual analysis, presumably from the 14th century (Altoa 1999, 123).

Metal detector investigations

Metal detector investigations in the churchyard, present-day park around the church ruins, yielded 14 coins from the 1530s to the 1730s (Table 2) and 26 other coloured metal objects – jewellery items and dress accessories. Round brooches with a flat arch and their fragments (13 items; Fig. 11: 2–7) cover the period from the 13th to the 17th century (Valk 2001, 45–46; Vaska 2017); six tiny round brooches (Fig. 12: 1–6) date from the 17th or 18th century (Valk 2001, 47; Kirme 1986, 144–148; Reidla 2012).

Finger-rings and ring fragments were represented with 10 items. From the spiral rings two (Fig. 13: 1, 2) originate from before the mid-15th century (Valk 1991, 184–185) whereby the first of them might date, judging by its thickness, rough design and enamel-like patina, from the 13th century. The third spiral ring with a twisted arch (Fig. 13: 3) is probably from the second half of the 15th or 16th century.

Mid-16th – early 17th century signet rings (6 items; Fig. 13: 4–9) are similar in their design with abstract, stylized ornamentation whereby the lack of lattice and bird images, most common on Estonian signet rings (Valk 1991, 190), must especially be noted. The signet rings of

⁸ According to renowned expert of medieval architecture Kaur Altoa, he had never come across such an unprofessionally constructed medieval stone wall before.

⁹ Finds TÜ 2722: 1–45.

Helme seem to represent the production of a local workshop or peculiarities of local demand.

Belt accessories were represented by a strap end with a leather fragment in it (Fig. 11: 1), a circular bronze mount (Fig. 12: 8) and a fragment of two-part strap ending (Fig. 12: 9). Since such flat, hook-based belt fasteners belong to the final stage of the Iron Age and do not occur in medieval cemeteries of southern Estonia, the churchyard seems to have existed before the mid-13th century already. A gilded button with a cross image (Fig. 12: 7) probably originates from Catholic period clergy garments.

The number of finds in most part of the former churchyard was considerably low. Exceptionally, three areas of high find concentration which yielded most of the finds appeared north of the church (Fig. 14). The uneven concentration of finds in the churchyard and big contrast with find density in the churchyard of Nõo (see Valk & Kiudsoo, this volume) must specially be outlined: it indicates thorough looting of the area by illegal treasure hunters, except for the three limited areas noted above.



Fig. 11. Finds from Helme churchyard: 1 – strap ending, 5–7 – round brooches, and 2–4 – their fragments.

Jn 11. Leiud Helme kirikaiast: 1 – rihmaotsik, 5–7 – rõngassõled ja 2–4 – nende katked.
(TÜ 2722: 34, 25, 26, 33, 22, 23, 37.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



Fig. 12. Finds from Helme churchyard. 1–6 – tiny round brooches, 7 – button, 8 – mount and 9 – fragment of belt ending.

Jn 12. Leiud Helme kirikaiast: 1–6 – vitssõled, 7 – nõop, 8 – naast ja 9 – vööotsiku katke.
(TÜ 2722: 31, 14, 27, 21, 17, 39, 19, 2, 38.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



Fig. 13. Finds from the Helme churchyard: 1–3 – spiral rings and 4–9 – signet rings.

Jn 13. Leide Helme kirikaaist: 1–3 – spiraalsõrmused ja 4–9 – pitsatsõrmused.

(TÜ 2722: 5, 13, 14, 9, 11, 18, 8, 10, 12.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

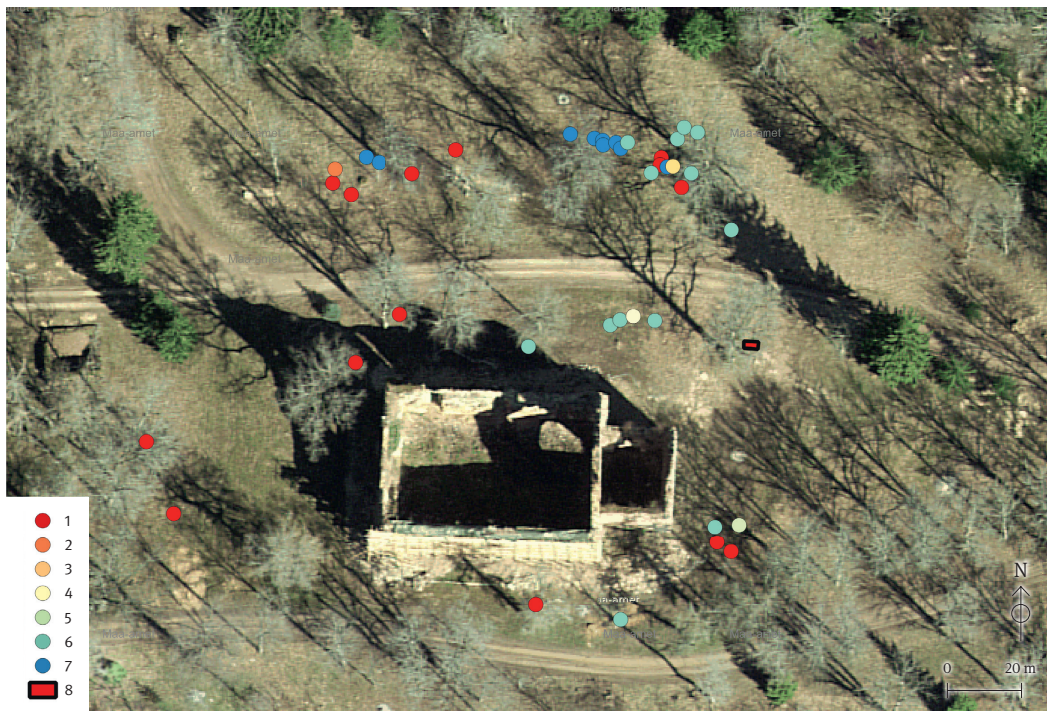


Fig. 14. Distribution of metal detector finds around the parish church of Helme. 1 – coin, 2 – mount, 3 – button, 4 – belt fastener, 5 – strap ending, 6 – brooch, 7 – ring, 8 – trench.

Jn 14. Detektorileidude levik Helme kirikaais. 1 – münt, 2 – naast, 3 – nööp, 4 – vöökinnis, 5 – rihmaotsik, 6 – sõlg, 7 – sõrmus, 8 – kaevand.

Map/ Kaart: Greta-Krislin Lutter & Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet

Table 2. Coins found in 2019 from the Helme churchyard.**Tabel 2.** 2019. aasta mündileiud Helme kirikaaist.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Mauri Kiudsoo

No / nr	State/ruler and date / riik/valitseja ja aeg	Value / vääring	Find number / lei number
1	Livonian Order, Riga, Wolter von Plettenberg, 1533	schilling	15
2	Riga Free town, 1569	schilling	1
3	Sweden, Tallinn, John III, 1571–85	schilling	20
4	Lithuania, Vilno, Sigismund III, 161...	schilling	6
5	Sweden, Riga, Christina (1632–54)	schilling	3
6	Poland/Lithuania, John Casimir (1649–68), 1660–66 (?)	schilling (boratinka)	7
7	Sweden, Livonia, Charles X Gustav, 1655	schilling	16
8, 9, 10	Sweden, Livonia, Charles XI, 1660–65	schilling	29, 35, 40
11	Sweden, Riga/Livonia, Charles XI (1660–97), 1660–65	schilling	41
12, 13	Sweden, Charles XI?, 17th century	schilling	30, 32
14, 15	Russia, Anna Ivanovna (1730–40), 1735	polushka	28, 36

Trench in the churchyard

Visual observation of the ground in the churchyard showed a concentration of cremated bone fragments ca. 15 m north-east of the church choir. Here a trench (2 × 1 m) was made to find possible traces of expected Late Iron Age cremations (Fig. 14: 8). Just after removing the turf a dense cluster of uncremated human bones appeared in most of the trench, except for one corner. From the trench which was dug until the depth of 20 cm, the total of over 40 kg highly fragmented bones was found. Since the trench had cut an assemblage of re-buried bones, further digging was stopped.

Sieving the soil above and around the bones yielded a 16th century coin, an amber bead, two bronze spiral tubes, a flint fragment and six sherds of pottery. The analysis of bones (Malve 2020) showed that 3252 fragments and 177 teeth originated from people of different ages – from infants to adults. Due to the very high stage of fragmentation, the number of individuals could not be identified. Osteological analyses revealed pathologies typical for medieval cemeteries: those caused by age (spondylosis and spondyloarthritis) and three fractures. Dental pathologies were represented by dental calculus, teeth loss during lifetime, hypoplasia, and periapical abscesses. The fact that most of the surfaces were eroded and bleached shows that the bones had been in the open air for a long time before being re-buried.

Explanation for the large assemblage of re-buried, formerly bleached bones can be found in the travelogues of C. H. J. Schlegel (born in 1757 in Jena, Germany) who was shocked by seeing huge amounts of unburied human bones, heaped up in pyramids in the churchyards of northern Estonia during his trip from St Petersburg to Tallinn in 1807 (Schlegel 1830, 293). Exposing found bones when digging graves has probably its roots in medieval times when such practice, a phenomenon of *memento mori*, was common in churchyards (Ariés 1976, 20, 68–70). Although abandoned in the core areas of Europe in the Enlightenment Period, the practice still survived in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire until it vanished in the first half of the 19th century when new ideas started to spread.

In the case of large quantities of unburied human bones in the churchyards it cannot be excluded that sometimes bones were cast into bonfires in the churchyards (e.g. in connection with re-construction works). This can give an alternative explanation to the finds of cremated

bone fragments from churchyards: they may not be regarded only as indications of pre-Christian burials in the places where churches were founded (Valk 2017), but might also reflect a way of disposal of unearthened bones from Christian graves.

CONCLUSIONS

Excavations at the ruins of Helme medieval stone chapel gave new information on the constructional details of the primary wooden shrine. It was established that the measures of the cross-beam postament with sacred image on its top could not exceed 2.5 × 4.5 metres and that there was a low stone platform on its north side, probably covered by a wooden floor. During its existence since the second quarter or middle of the century ca. 1350 the shrine was probably repaired and re-constructed, and finally furnished with a roof. The details of these structures remain, however, unknown – partly due to the limited size of the trench, partly because of the destruction of the remains of the burnt shrine for building the stone chapel – by digging the foundation ditches and partly removal of the former cultural layer.

The wrong facing of the sacral object which contrasts the elementary principles of the organization of medieval Christian sanctuaries gives evidence of the initiative and active role of Estonian neophytes in erecting the shrine soon after the Christianization of prehistoric Sakala (*Saccala*) province in 1215/1223. The active role of the natives at constructing the sanctuary might also be reflected in the unskilled masonry of the first stage of the stone chapel.

Investigations in Helme churchyard refer to the possible presence of the churchyard before the mid-13th century already, which makes it possible to suggest that the church preceded the wooden shrine. The reasons for making an alternative Christian sanctuary 500 m from the parish church, as well as for choosing the place, remain unclear.

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ARHEOLOOGILISED UURINGUD HELMES: KESKAEGSE KIVIKABELI VAREMED, VARASEM PUUST PÜHAMU JA KIRIKAED

Heiki Valk

Helmes jätkusid arheoloogilised uuringud kirikust 500 m lõuna pool asuva keskaegse kivikabeli (jn 1: 1) varemetes. Avati kabeli loodenurk ja tehti kaevandid hoone lääne- ja lõunaküljele (jn 2), et välja selgitada varasema, 2018. aastal avastatud puust pühamu mõõtmed.

Kabeli lõunaküljel (jn 3) leiti mullast ja müüride lammutusrusust koosneva segatud pinnase ülaosast neli 17. saj Rootsi münti. Järgnes kuni u 30 cm paksune võlvide lammutamisel tekkinud telliserusu kiht, mille all oli kivikabeli vundamendikraavist pärineva saviliiva lade ja leidudeta halli loodusliku alusmulla kuni 3–4 cm paksuselt säilinud alaosa. Enamik sellest pinnasest koos võimalike 13.–14. saj leidudega oli eemaldatud kivikabeli ehitusel, keskaegne ja varauusaegne kultuurikiht aga nähtavasti pärast Põhjasõda, kui kabel taastati asendamaks 1702. aastal põletatud kihelkonnakirikut.

Ilmnes, et kivikabelil on kaks ehitusjärku. Alumine, ehitusaegsest maapinnast kuni 1,05 m kõrgusele ulatuv seinosa oli tehtud väikestest maakividest ja väga oskamatult laotud. Hilisem müüri ladu oli suurtest raudkividest (jn 3). Vundamendil on olnud omaaegse maapinna tasandil keskmiselt 12 cm laiuse tagasiastega sokkel.

Kabelist lääne poole tehtud 5 × 1,3 m mõõtmetega tranšeos (jn 4) koosnes pinnase ülaosa mullasegusest rusust. Tellisvõlvide lammutusjäänuste puudumisest nähtub, et otsaviil oli võlvide lammutamise ajal veel püsti. Kabeli sein aäres järgnes kuni 15 cm paksune kivikabeli ehitusmördi lade, mis ulatus müürist kuni 1,5 m kaugusele ja mille all oli vundamendikraavist välja visatud, müüri aäres 30–35 cm paksune, kaugeal õhenev saviliiva kiht. Läänesein oli lammutatud ehitusaegsest maapinnast kuni u 60 cm kõrguseni. Vahetult sein aäres paljandus sellest kuni 50–70 cm kaugusele ulatuv 2–3 cm paksune kompakne söekiht, mis pärineb kivikabelile eelnenud puust pühamu põlenguvaringust. Kuna kaevamistel

ei leitud pühamu sisemuse põhja katnud kollast liiva, pole ehitus kivikabeli väliskülje joonele ulatunud ega olnud rohkem kui 2,5 m laiune. Tranšee lääneotsast leiti hallist segatud mullast Liivimaa ordu seestling (1363/64–1368(?)) ja kaks Tartu piiskopkonna *libische* penni (1397–1420), mis võiksid seostuda kivikabeli eri järkude ehitusaegadega.

Kabeli loodenurgas avatud ala (jn 5; 14,1 m²) külgenes 2018. aastal uurituga; kaevamiste lõpus eemaldati ka eri aastate kaevandite vaheprofiil. Hoone loodepoolseimast nurgast leiti mingitest varasematest uuringutest pärinev kinni aetud šurf. Pealmises, mullast ja müüride lammutusrusust koosnevast pinnasekihis oli 9 Leedu ja Rootsi münti 1560.–1660. aastatest. Sellele järgnenud 30–40 cm paksune tellisvõlvide lammutusrusu kiht leide ei sisaldanud. Telliserusu all oli ebahütlane ja katkendlik õhuke mördilade, mille peale oli 16.–17. sajandil, kabeli varemetes oleku ajal tekkinud kuni mõne sentimeetri paksune tume katkendlik kultuurikiht. Viimasest leiti savinõukilde, toidujäätmest pärit looma- ja kalaluid ning hoburaudsõlg (jn 6: 3). Ilmselt ei ole mördikihi puhul tegemist keskaegse mõrtpõrandaga, vaid puupõranda laake pinnasest eraldanud alusmördiga.

Nagu 2018. aastal, paljandus järgnenud u 10 cm paksuse saviliiva kihi all liivsavi või saviga pakitud, 20/25–35 cm suurustest raudkividest aluspõrand (jn 5). Kivikabeli ehitamise ajaga seostuvad oletatav hõbedast rõngassõle katke müüriäärse mördipuru seest ning ristripats ja pliisulamist võõnaast kivide vahelisest savist (jn 7: 4–6), samuti Tartu piiskopi Johann I Vyffhuseni (1364/5–1373) penn ja 2 Tartu piiskopkonna *libische* penni aastatest 1410(09)–1413 ja 1413–1420(15?) (jn 7: 1–3). Viimastest leiti üks aluspõranda kivide vahelt, teine müüri ladumisel sein aärde pudenenud mördikihist. Mündid võimaldavad dateerida Helme kivikabeli ehitamise 1410. või 1420. aastatesse.

Kaevamised ei toonud selgust kivikabeli lääneportaali kohta, kuid arvestades lääneseina väheseid säilinud jäänuseid, ei saanud see koos palestikuga olla enam kui 1,8 m laiune.

Kividest aluspõranda all oleva, vundamendikraavide kaevamiselt pärineva u 20 cm paksuse segatud saviliiva lademe all paiknes tume, puust pühamuga seonduv kultuurkiht (jn 8), millest leiti eri sügavustest kokku 16 münti (jn 2: F): 2 Visby penni (1220–1280), 3 Tallinnas vermitud Taani kroonbrakteaati (u 1265–1332) ja 11 Tartu penni (u 1260–1330), samuti 14 väikest kollast, nähtavasti ühte kaelakeesse kuulunud kudrust ja kolm hoburaudsõle nõela (jn 9). Nii müntid kui ka helmed leiti eri sügavustest ja olid ilmselt pinnasesse trambitud.

Puust pühamu jäänused – intensiivne põlengukiht ja selle all olev 3–4 cm paksune kollase liiva lade – kaevandisse ei ulatunud, neid leiti vaid eri aastate kaevandite vahele jäetud vaheprofiili alalt. Vahetult puust pühamu kõrvalt tuli kaevandi edelanurgas nähtavale kividest nelinurkne platvorm (u 1 × 1 m), mille peal võis kunagi olla puust põrand. Kive kattis 1–2 cm paksune tume kultuurkiht, mis “voolas” alla mööda kivide külgpindu, sulades kokku ümbritseva tumeda kultuurkihiga.

Platvormist vahetult lõuna pool oli kabeli lääneseinaga paralleelne 16–17 cm laiune palgijalg (jn 2: H: I), mis ulatus 2018. a kaevandisse: seal oli sama palk olnud puust pühamu idaseina aluspalgiks. Avatud ala servadest leiti kaks palgiga I ristuvat palgijäljendit (II ja III). Vundamendikraavist pärit pinnasega täidetud palgijäljendi põhjast leiti Gotlandi penn (1220–1280), võimalik ehitusohver. Enamik münte saadi palgist I ida poolt: kiviplatvormi piires oli vaid üks ohvriraha.

Nähtavasti kujutas kivikabelile eelnenud puust pühamu (jn 10) endast algselt 2–2,5 × 3,5–4,5 m mõõtmega ristpalkidest, ukseta postamenti, millel seisis tõenäoliselt kas rist või krutsifiks ja mille põhjaküljel oli u 1 × 1 m mõõtmega madal, maakividele tehtud platvorm – võimalik et riituste võtmeisiku jaoks.

Pühamust ida pool olevad palgijäljendid loodusliku aluspinna taustal võiksid viidata neile toetunud puitpõrandale. Selle rajamiseks võis põhjust anda rahvakogunemistel pehmeks ja poriseks muutuv pinnas, mida lubab arvata helmeste ja müntide leidmine eri sügavusest. Tõenäoliselt on pühamul selle hilisemas kasutusjärgus olnud postidele toetuv katus. Sellele viitavad kaude mitmed asjaolud: ohvrimüntidega kultuurkihi ülaosa tume värvus, selles olevad rohked söekübemed ja õhuke tume kultuurkiht platvormikividel. Oletatav katustatud ala on ulatunud ka kaevandist ida poole.

Erilist esiletoomist väärib Helme puust pühamu orientatsioon: kuigi keskaegsetes kirikutes ja kabelites on altar paiknenud idas ja sellele on lähenetud lääne suunast, on sealsele sakraalkeskmeele münte ohverdatud ida poolt (jn 2: F). Vastuolu üldlevinud printsiipidega saab seletada vaid sellega, et puust pühamu ehitajatel puudusid teadmised kristlike sakraalehitiste orientatsioonipõhimõtete kohta ja et ehitustöödel ei osalenud ka vaimulikke – st et tegemist on Sakala vastristitute omaloominguga.

Asjaolu, et keskaegse kivikabeli müüride suund järgib puust pühamu seinajooni, viitab ehitiste otsele seosele ja järjepidevusele. Kivikabeli ehitamist on alustatud varsti pärast puuehitise hävimist tules – tõenäoliselt 1360. aastate teisel poolel või pisut hiljem. Väga oskamatu müüri ladu võib viidata sellele, et siingi on tegemist olnud eestlaste omaalgatusliku ettevõtmisega. Seejärel on ehitus katkenud ja jätkunud kogunud meistri käe all alles 15. sajandi teisel või kolmandal kümnendil.

Helme kihelkonnakiriku ümbruses toimunud detektoriuuringutel saadi kokku 40 värvilisest metallist leidu, mis pärinevad 13.–18. sajandist (jn 11–13). Neist 14 on 16.–18. sajandi müntid (tabel 2), millele lisandub 13 sõlge või sõlekatket, 9 sõrmust, naast, rihmakatke ja nõõp. Hilisrauaajale omase haakvastusega vööotsiku katke (jn 12: 9) viitab kalmistu olemasolule juba enne 13. sajandi keskpaika. Leidude levik (jn 14) annab tunnistust ulatuslikust varasemast detektorirüütest kirikaia: enamik neist koondus kolme väikesse, ilmselt varem rüüstamata jäänud piirkonda.

Kooriruumist u 20 m kirde pool maapinnalt leitud põlenud luud, mis lubasid oletada muinasaegseid põletusmatuseid, andsid põhjust sinna 2 × 1 m proovikaevandi rajamiseks. Pinnase sõelumisel leiti kaevandi alalt merevaikhelmes, kaks spiraalorukest, münt ja kuus savinõukildu. Kohe kamara all algas peaaegu kogu kaevandit hõlmav tihe lasu tugevalt fragmenteerunud, enne tagasimatmist pikemalt õhu käes olnud inimluud. C. H. J. Schlegeli 1807. aasta reisikiri mainib Eestimaa kirikaedades leiduva õõvastava vaatepildina haudade kaevamisel leitud luudest tehtud riitasid või -püramiide. Inimluude eksponeerimine kirikaedades oli keskaegses Euroopas *memento mori* raamistuses laialt levinud komme. Võimalik, et Helme luulasu on tekkinud kirikaiaas olnud luude tagasimatmisest – arvatavasti millalgi 19. sajandi algupoolel, kui Liivimaalegi jõudsid uued ideed ja arusaamad.

Helme kirikaiaast saadud leidude põhjal otsustades on sinna hakatud matma 13. sajandil, tõenäoliselt selle algupoolel, seega nähtavasti enne puust pühamu rajamist kirikust 500 m lõuna poole nimetatud sajandi keskpaika.