



The chapel site and stone cross of Viro

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INTRODUCTION

The historical region of Setomaa in the south-easternmost corner of Estonia belongs to the area of Orthodox Christianity. Although archaeological record gives evidence of profound changes in burial rites of the region since the 11th century (Valk 2009, 164–167), the Christianization of the ancestors of the Seto people advanced greatly as a result of missionary activities performed during the Livonian War (1558–1582/83) by Kornelius, igumen of Petchory monastery (Piho 2017, 526).¹ His missionary activities focused probably mainly on the western areas of Setomaa. For the surroundings of Izborsk – an important power centre with a stone church from the 1330s –, and maybe also for the coastal areas of Lake Pskov earlier Christianization can be suggested. Because of attachment to the world of Orthodox Christianity, differently from the Lutheran areas of Estonia, the tradition of local village chapels (*Seto tsässon* < Rus. *часовня*) (Piho 2011) has survived in Setomaa since the Middle Ages until the present time.

The chapel site and stone cross of Viro (ST 2011, 556–560) are located in Setomaa, at the distance of 4.5 km from its western border, ca. 1 km north of Meremäe village, ca. 20 m west of Obinitsa–Meremäe road. Judging by stray finds of pottery, the former sanctuary lies in the periphery of a Medieval and Early Modern Times settlement – the predecessor of present-day Viro and Palandõ villages – with its core on the other side of the road. Main information about the village sanctuary dedicated to the Feast of Transfiguration (celebrated on August 19, according to Julian’s calendar) originates from the inventory of village chapels of Võrumaa County in 1974 (Kupp 1974). It was a 3.6 × 3.4 m and 2.85 m high log building with an open lobby which had been demolished by that time (Fig. 1). The big stone cross with Orthodox inscriptions in Cyrillic stood in the eastern end of the chapel. According to the memories of the landowner it was



Fig. 1. Viro chapel in 1974.

Jn 1. Viro tsässon 1974. aastal.
Photo / Foto: Mati Tammisaar

¹ Mare Piho (2011, 17–23; 2017) has suggested, indicating features of Catholic origin in Seto religious culture, that the western part of Setomaa was involved in the sphere of Catholicism in medieval times and that the missionary activities of Kornelius were factually directed to re-converting the ancestors of the Setos from Latin to Orthodox Christianity.

hidden behind a wooden wall. The chapel was used by the inhabitants of Viro and Palandõ villages.

Unskilled repairing of the building and the weight of wet snow in around 1990 caused its roof to fall in. The walls were still standing in the 1990s, but the ruins were demolished in 2000 with the aim of reconditioning the site. By 2020 the chapel site could be recognized only by the stone cross and a few rotten timber remains.

INVESTIGATIONS ON THE CHAPEL SITE

Archaeological excavations supported by Setomaa Culture Programme² were undertaken by the University of Tartu with two purposes: 1) to get information about the age of the chapel and the stone cross, and 2) to make preparations for constructing a new roof for the cross which had greatly suffered from weather damages. Being located in the immediate vicinity of the road, the cross, generally unknown until the excavations, had potential to become a sightseeing object.

In the spring of 2020 metal detector investigations were undertaken on the chapel site to find out whether the site would be informative enough for archeological excavations.³ During this preparatory work 17 coins from Early Modern Times, an Orthodox cross and some fragments of pottery were found.

In the summer of 2020 a trench of 6 × 4 metres was laid in the area of the chapel site and just next to it (Figs 2–3). All the soil from the trench was sieved on 5 mm eye meshes.

The upper 20–25 cm of soil was of dark colour in the peripheries of the trench, deeper down getting lighter and more loamy, gradually transferring into intact mineral ground in the depth of 30–35 cm. Under the central part of the chapel, in the area where there was an oblong irregular (ca. 2.5 × 1.5 m) and ca. 10–15 cm deep depression before the excavations, disturbed ground stretched, however, deeper – until the depth of 45–50 cm from the ground surface. Here the dark brown top soil was followed by disturbed pink clayish loam, the transition of which to intact clay was clear. The depression and disturbed loam under the chapel can be explained by Seto traditional practices of constructing wooden buildings – firstly soil with humus contents was removed from the area of the future building, being replaced with mineral ground to avoid moisture damages from below. From that area of disturbed soil, however, a fragment of sheet iron and coins from different time periods (including those minted in the 1660s, 1738, 1769, 1797, 1859, 1898 and 1922) were found. The presence of late coins in great depths indicates late, 19th–20th century disturbances of soil in front of the cross. The reasons for these disturbances remain unclear. Probably, they can be explained by reparation work of the floor, possibly related with attempts to straighten the slanted cross. In the bottom of the trench also some post holes of 30–40 to 50 cm diameter and of irregular location, dug into intact loam, were discovered in the area of the depression.

In the depth of 15–20 cm an irregular stone setting appeared in the area of the chapel (Fig. 3). The amount of stones with the diameter of 10/15–30/40 cm was the biggest below and around its walls. Evidently, most of these stones had functioned as basis for the lowest logs, but a lot had moved away from their original position – probably, due to frost shifts. The corners of the southern side rested on bigger granite stones with the diameter of 35–40 cm, on top of which there were fragments of horizontally split limestone slabs, set to regulate the height of the corners.

² Originally the project was planned to study the stone graves of Izborsk/Irboska (presently Russian Federation), but because of several reasons (incl. the restrictions caused by the pandemic of COVID-19 virus) the expedition could not take place and the budget was transferred to study archaeological sites of Setomaa within the territory of the Republic of Estonia.

³ Investigations were performed by Aleksandr Kotkin and Igor Tsakuhhin from the history club Taaler.

In the lobby area there were two very big (diameter 50/55–70 cm) granite rocks the location of which was not symmetrical in relation to the axis of the building (Fig. 3). The connection of these stones with the building remains unclear. It cannot be excluded that they are in some way connected with the stones under the central part of the chapel, belonging to some structure which preceded the demolished chapel.

The finds

Finds from the chapel site (TÜ 2865) were not numerous. The total of 48 coin finds (including those found in spring; Table 1) originate from Early Modern and Modern Times. The earliest of them include two poorly preserved Swedish schillings minted in Riga (1621–1665), and six Russian silver wire kopecks – one of Mikhail Fyodorovich (1613–1645), four of Peter I (1696–1717), and one strongly worn item (probably also Peter I).⁴ To the 18th century belong three dengas from the 1730s or 1740s, a denga from 1769 and a kopeck and polushka from 1797. Nine coins date from the first half of the 19th century (four of them from 1811 or 1812) and seven from its second half. The first period of the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) was represented by three coins from 1922, 1930 and 1931, the German occupation (1941–1944) by two coins (1943), and the Soviet occupation (1940/41, 1944–1991) by ten finds. Three of the Soviet coins (1945, 1946 and 1949) were in circulation before the monetary reform of 1961, seven from the 1960s (in circulation until 1992). One Estonian kroon (2000) and two Russian 50-kopeck coins, evidently, tourist gifts to the cross (2008, 2009), belong to the time when the chapel did not exist anymore.

Finds from the chapel site also include two Orthodox crosses (Fig. 4: 1, 2), a book clasp (Fig. 4: 3), a lead alloy button (Fig. 4: 4), seven hand-made iron nails, a tiny bronze mount (:98), a piece of flint (:143), an iron



Fig. 2. Excavations at the Viro chapel site.

Jn 2. Kaevamised Viro tsässonnaasemel.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 3. General view of the chapel site and stone cross of Viro.

Jn 3. Viro tsässonakoha ja kiviristi üldvaade.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 4. Finds from the Viro chapel site. 1, 2 – Orthodox crosses, 3 – book clasp, 4 – button.

Jn 4. Leide Viro tsässonakohast. 1, 2 – õigeusu kaelaristid, 3 – raamatulukkum, 4 – nõõp.

(TÜ 2865: 16, 216, 4, 190.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

⁴ The Russian wire kopecks were identified by Ivar Leimus (AM).

Table 1. Coins found in 2020 from the Viro chapel site.**Tabel 1.** 2020. a mündileiud Viro tsässonaasemelt.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Heiki Valk

No / Nr	Find No / Leiunr	Issued by / Vermija	Value / Nominaal	Date / Dateering
1	196	Russia, Mihkhail Fyororovich	Moscovian kopeck	1613–1645
2	68	Sweden/Riga	schilling	1621–1665
3	186	Sweden/Riga	schilling	1621–1665
4	67	Russia, Peter I	wire kopeck	1696–1717
5	152	Russia, Peter I	wire kopeck	1702
6	217	Russia, Peter I	wire kopeck	1696–1717
7	13	Russia, Peter I	wire kopeck	1696–1717
8	197	Russia, Peter (?)	wire kopeck	1696–1717 (?)
9	163	Russia, Elizaveta Petrovna	denga	1738
10	103	Russia, Elizaveta Petrovna	denga	1741
11	15	Russia, Elizaveta Petrovna	denga	1744
12	170	Russia, Catherine II	denga	1769
13	164	Russia, Paul I	1 kopeck	1797
14	22	Russia, Paul I	polushka	1797
15	1	Russia, Alexander I	2 kopecks	1811
16	12	Russia, Alexander I	2 kopecks	1811
17	8	Russia, Alexander I	2 kopecks	1812
18	95	Russia, Alexander I	2 kopecks	1812
19	220	Russia, Alexander I	2 kopecks	1812
20	2	Russia/Poland, Alexander I	5 grosz	1825
21	10	Russia, Nicholas I	1 kopeck	1840
22	204	Russia, Nicholas I	1 kopeck	1840
23	99	Russia, Nicholas I	1/2 kopecks	1841
24	11	Russia, Nicholas I	denezhka	1850
25	224	Russia, Nicholas I	1 kopeck	1851
26	92	Russia, Nicholas I	1 kopeck	1852
27	169	Russia, Alexander II	1 kopeck	1859
28	17	Russia, Alexander II	1 kopeck	1874
29	227	Russia, Alexander II	1 kopeck	1878
30	166	Russia, Nicholas II	1 kopeck	1898
31	168	Republic of Estonia	1 mark	1922
32	151	Republic of Estonia	1 cent	1930
33	14	Republic of Estonia	5 cents	1931
34	212	Germany	5 pennies	1943
35	9	Germany	1 penny	1943
36	247	USSR	2 kopecks	1945
37	6	USSR	3 kopecks	1946
38	3	USSR	2 kopecks	1949
39	24	USSR	1 kopeck	1961
40	50	USSR	2 kopecks	1961
41	53	USSR	10 kopecks	1961
42	7	USSR	2 kopecks	1961
43	5	USSR	3 kopecks	1962
44	20	USSR	3 kopecks	1963
45	43	USSR	1 kopeck	1969
46	155	Republic of Estonia	1 kroon	2000
47	26	Russian Federation	50 kopecks	2008
48	27	Russian Federation	50 kopecks	2009

and a bronze ring from some timber artefact (:21, 113), a lead bullet and pellet (:100, 132), a slate pencil fragment (:141), a faceted blue piece of glass from a glass stone ring (:112), some iron details from the chapel door, and a fragment of a simple iron candlestick.⁵

From the trench also numerous pottery sherds (Fig. 5) were found. The fragments originate exclusively from wheel-thrown vessels, and are predominantly of dark grey or black colour. Also brownish-pinkish, brownish-greyish or dark grey/black sherds were found, some of them with a brownish inner side, whereby in the case of bigger sherds the inside colour could variate, being dark near the edge and brown in the lower part. The dark vessels originate, judging by profile fragments, from the 15th/16th to the 18th century. Glazed redware of 18th/19th century origin was almost missing under the chapel floor.

THE STONE CROSS

The stone cross on the chapel site of Viro (Fig. 6) was 114 to 120 cm high when measured from the ground surface. The width of the 27–31 cm thick cross was 92 cm on the top and 97 cm at the lower part of its ‘hands’. When opening the foot of the cross, a dense cluster of granite stones of 15–25 cm diameter was discovered. The heap of stones stretched from the straight bottom of the cross foot almost until the ground level. After opening its foot, the cross appeared to be 1.87 m high.

Within the typology of medieval crosses of the Pskov and Novgorod Lands, the Viro cross represents the so-called Izborsk type which has been dated to the 14th–16th centuries (Sedov 1976). This cross type, most common in Setomaa district, is characterized by upwards extending ‘hands’. The Viro cross was made of local Devonian limestone, probably originating from the lower deposits of Marinova quarry, located ca. 4 km south-east of the site.⁶ The stone was of uneven consistence and the surface of the cross, except for the foot buried in the ground, had strongly suffered from long-term weather damages.

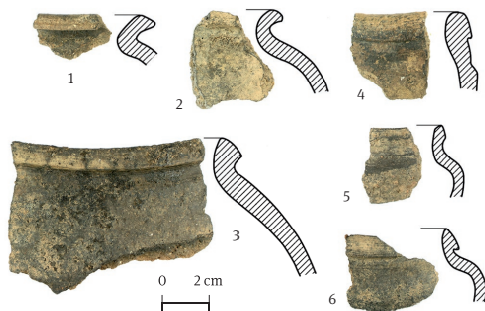


Fig. 5. Pottery from the Viro chapel site.
Jn 5. Savinõukilde Viro tsässonakoha kaevamistelt.
(TÜ 2865: 79, 161, 81, 91, 172, 117.)
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



Fig. 6. The stone cross of Viro after opening its foot.
Jn 6. Viro kivirist pärast ristijala avamist.
Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

⁵ Metal details of the chapel will be delivered to Obinitsa Seto Museum.

⁶ The cross was visited and estimations about the origin of the rock were kindly provided by Prof. Leho Ainsaar (Institute of Geology, TÜ).



Fig. 7. Inscriptions on the Viro stone cross.

Jn 7. Kirjad Viro kiviristil.

Photo / Foto: M. Tammisaar (1974); outlined letters and cross image / esile toodud kirjad ja ristikuju:

Heiki Valk

The variable consistence of sediments had caused deep pits and even penetrating holes on the cross. The upper part of the cross was loose, separated from its body by a penetrating crack, probably caused by freezing water.

Because of weather damages, the inscriptions on the cross (Fig. 7) were heavily worn and hard to distinguish. As typical for medieval stone crosses of Novgorod and Pskov Land, there is the image of Orthodox cross, standing on the barrow on Calvary Hill in the middle of the cross. The design and position of the textual inscriptions differ, however from the standard of ordinary grave crosses of Setomaa. Traditionally, the word 'НИКА' ('Victory' [over Death]) is engraved to the upper part of the cross, and there are usually the letters ИС ХС – abbreviations from *Jesus Christ* (Иисус Христос) – left of the axis (with view to the cross), and the letters ЦР СЛ – abbreviations from 'the Lord of Glory' (Царь Славы) right of it. On Viro cross text on the left 'hand' had fully perished due to weather damages. On the right side, under ligature symbols the abbreviations СЛ and ХЪ, probably, the latter designating 'Christ', could be observed. Just under them the letters КА, plausibly remains from НИКА, also under a ligature symbol, had preserved.

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DISCUSSION: ORIGINS OF THE CHAPEL AND THE STONE CROSS

Although stone crosses with similar inscriptions have been dated from the 14th to the 16th centuries in north-western Russia, neither medieval coins nor medieval artefacts were found from the chapel site of Viro. The earliest coins, although two of them date from the period between 1621 and 1665, and one from between 1613 and 1645, cannot be regarded as solid proof for the origin of the chapel before the Great Northern War (activities in Estonia from 1700 to 1710; in south-eastern Estonia until 1704), because such coins remained in circulation in Livonia also during the first decades of the 18th century.⁷ The presence of Livonian coins in the Russian territory shows that state border was not a border for coin circulation. Swedish 17th-century coins were also common at the chapel site of Härma (Valk 2013) and Russian coins occurred at the 17th-century market site in the outer bailey of Vastseliina Castle (Valk 2006, 135).

The coins from 1613–1645 and 1696–1717 found from pits filled with disturbed mineral ground west of the cross can hardly be explained as items offered or lost in the chapel during its use. Instead, they could rather relate to the time of building of the chapel or, likewise the discovered post holes, to some activities in the periphery of the settlement site before constructing the village sanctuary.

Judging by coin finds, the chapel was probably built after the end of the Great Northern war. Dendrochronological data indicates such date also for three other village chapels in the Estonian part of Setomaa: the chapels of Säpinä and Rokina were probably constructed in 1711, and that of Võõpsu in 1710 (Läanelaid *et al.* 2005, 40–41). The making of new chapels

⁷ Pers. comm. Ivar Leimus (AM), 10 June 2021.

might be caused by war damages – their predecessors may have been destroyed during war activities –, but as an important factor also the Great Plague of 1710–1711 may be considered: this catastrophe may have provided an impetus for the growth of popular religiosity. However, also the 17th century origin of the sanctuary cannot fully be excluded. Since the early 18th century up to the end of the Soviet period the distribution of coins indicates continuous use of the village chapel.

The stone cross of Viro is considerably bigger than ordinary medieval Orthodox grave crosses which commonly stretch for 40–60 cm out of ground surface. In the Estonian part of Setomaa the only cross of similar size is located at the village cemetery of Podmotsa (6 km north of Värskä). That cross, 210 cm high and stretching for 1.3 m out of ground, probably designates the whole cemetery and was plausibly set in its central part when the burial ground was re-consecrated. Observations made when straightening the slanted cross in 2003 (Valk 2003, 229–231; Valk 2004, 127–129) show that the cross was erected in the time when a ca. 50 cm thick layer of fill sand was added on top of the earlier burial ground. Probably, these reconstructions were undertaken due to the ascending water level in Lake Pskov, to prevent water from rising into the graves. It must be noted that at the foot of Podmotsa cross a coin from 1533⁸ was found (Valk 2003, 231).

The function of the stone cross of Viro is unclear, but it is definitely not a cemetery or grave cross – during the excavations not a single human bone was found from the chapel site and in the bottom of the trench no grave pits appeared. Although stone crosses from medieval cemeteries have been brought into village chapels of Setomaa in several cases – in the Estonian territory in Suure-Rõsna, Väike-Rõsna and Küllätüva –, the presence of a big stone cross within a chapel is not typical for Setomaa. A similar case is known from Sokolova (ca. 15 km east of Pechory) where, according to oral lore, the cross was once found in the field and brought into the chapel. A big stone cross is located in Vastsy chapel (2 km north of Izborsk), as well. Bringing loose stone crosses into chapels has been common practice both in the northern and central part of Pskov Land⁹ and in the north-western part of Novgorod Land (Panchenko & Fyodorov 2019, 354). On the Izhorian plateau medieval stone crosses have also been removed from their original location into local village sanctuaries of complex character, consisting of sacred natural sites (springs, trees, stone or timber crosses and village chapels) (Panchenko & Fyodorov 2019). According to the present state of research, these sanctuaries have yielded archaeological finds from the 18th to the mid-20th century (Panchenko & Fyodorov 2017; Panchenko & Fyodorov 2019; Panchenko *et al.* 2000) which fits well with the chronology of finds from the chapel site of Viro, reflecting similar cultural processes within popular Orthodox Christianity.

Heavy weather damages indicate that the Viro cross is considerably older than the time when it was covered by the chapel roof (probably, in first quarter of the 18th century) and that it had been without a roof for a long period already earlier. Although the cross had stood in the open for about 30 years and, according to the words of the landowner, weather damages on its inscriptions had increased during that time, they were still greatly similar to those depicted on a photo from the inventory of 1974.

It remains unclear if the cross stands on its original site, and was later surrounded by the chapel, as known from Vastsõ (Vastsy) and Halahalnja (Chalachalnia) in the eastern part

⁸ In former publications (Valk 2003, 231; Valk 2004, 129) erroneously dated as 1535.

⁹ Information from Aleksandr Mihkailov (Archaeological Centre of Pskov Oblast). According to his letter (25.09.2021), stone crosses may be removed from their original location to village chapels even as far as a hundred kilometres in Pskov Land.

of Setomaa, or was brought to its present location from another place when the chapel was constructed. The last version seems more likely, since no coins or artefacts of medieval origin were found in its surroundings.

Numerous dispersed pottery sherds in the chapel site, dating mainly from the period before the Great Northern War make it possible to suggest that the area functioned as the periphery of the common predecessor of present-day Viro and Palandõ villages at that time and had no sacral meaning before constructing the chapel in the early 18th century. The lack of burnt stone fragments in the cultural layer confirms, however, that the area was not involved in active occupation activities. Parallels to the topographic situation can be found from the Izhorian plateau in the western part of Novgorod Land where Orthodox village sanctuaries of complex character from the Early Modern or Modern Time have also emerged on the cultural layers of medieval settlements (Panchenko & Fyodorov 2017, 118–120).

CONCLUSIONS

Judging by coin finds, the village chapel of Viro was probably built in the first quarter of the 18th century. The big medieval stone cross has stood in the open for a long time, maybe in another location, before the chapel was constructed. It may originally be erected in connection with the missionary activities of igumen Korelius during the time of the Livonian War and re-allocated to its present site when the chapel was constructed. The coins found at the chapel site form a continuous row from its beginning to the final stage of using of the sanctuary until the end of the Soviet period. Pottery gained during the excavations seems not to relate to the chapel, but it probably represents the periphery of the medieval settlement site.

After the excavations, the strongly slanted stone cross was re-erected. The cross got a wooden roof, the borders of the chapel became designated with joint logs on the ground in 2021, and the site was furnished with an information board (Fig. 8). As a result of the excavations the formerly almost forgotten and unknown historical monument with a high potential to attract wider interest became better known both for the local people and visitors.



Fig. 8. Viro stone cross and chapel site after the excavations.

Jn 8. Viro kivirist ja tsässonakoht pärast kaevamisi.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

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VIRO TSÄSSONAASE JA KIVIRIST

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Viro ja Palandõ küla tsässon asus Setomaa vallas, Meremäelt u 1 km põhja pool Viro küla maal, Meremäe–Obinitsa maantee lääneküljel, keskaegse ja varauusaegse asulakoha äärealal. 1974. a inventeerimisandmetel olid hoone mõõtmed ilma hävinud eeskajata 3,6 × 3,4 m (jn 1). Tsässona katus langes oskamatu remondi tulemusena sisse 1990. a paiku ja varemed lammutati 2000. a. Tsässonakohta jäid tähistama vaid hooned olnud suur kivirist ja aluspalkide vähesed kõdunenud jäänused.

2020. a suvel korraldas Tartu Ülikool Setomaa kultuuriprogrammi toetusel Viro tsässonakohas arheoloogilised kaevamised (jn 2–3), et välja selgitada tsässona vanus ja valmistada ette ilmastiku

toimel tugevasti kahjustatud kiviristi katustamist. Eelnevalt toimusid risti ümbruses detektoriuuringud, et teha kindlaks, kas pinnas sisaldab arheoloogilisi leide. Avastatud mündid andsid põhjust edasisteks kaevamisteks.

Tsässona alale ja ümbrusse tehtud 4 × 6 m suuruses kaevandis ulatus tumepruun muld maapinnast 25–30/35 cm allapoole, asendudes helepruuni üleminekupinnase ja kollase saviliivaga. Tsässona idaosa ja keskkoha piirkonnas, kus enne kaevamisi asus 10–15 cm sügavune u 2–2,5 × 1–1,5 m mõõtmetega lohk, ulatus segatud pinnas maapinnast kuni 45–50 cm madalamale, kusjuures alumise 15–20 cm ulatuses oli tegemist segatud savika mineraalpinnasega. Samas

piirkonnas leitud ka puutumata liivsavisse kaevatud ja segatud pinnasega täidetud, 30–40/50 cm läbimõõduga postiauke.

Maapinnast u 15–20 cm sügavusel paljandus tsässona piires ebakorrapärane raudkividest kivistik. 10/15–30/35 cm läbimõõduga kivide hulk oli suurem hoone seinajoonte kohal. Ilmselt on need kivid kandnud tsässona aluspalke, kuid paljud neist olid oma algsest asukohast, arvatavasti külmakergete tõttu, nihkunud. Tsässona lõunakülje nurgakohtades olid suuremad, 35–45 cm läbimõõduga raudkivid, mille peale olid lapiti pandud lamedad lubjakivid. Ilmselt on vajumisel tsässona nurkade kõrgust nende lisamisega reguleeritud. Eeskoja alal oli samal joonel kaks väga suurt (lm 55/50–70 cm) maakivi, mis ei asunud tsässona telje ja uksekoha suhtes sümmeetriliselt, vaid olid hoone pikitelje suhtes nihutatud (jn 3). Nende kivide seos hoonega jääb ebaselgeks.

Kaevandist, valdavalt tsässona piirist leiti kokku 48 münti, mis pärinevad 17. sajandist 2009. aastani ulatuvast ajavahemikust. Vanimateks leidudeks on kuus Vene hõbedast traatkopikat – Mihhail Fjodorovitši Moskva kopikas (1613–1645), neli Peeter I kopikat (1698–1717) ja üks väga kulunud määramatu eksemplar, samuti kaks õigeusu kaelaristi, raamatu-lukkum, pliinööp (jn 4) ja musketikuul. Hilisemate müntide aegrida ulatub ühtlaselt 1730. aastatest kuni 1960. aastateni, andes tunnistust külapühamu järjepidevast kasutusest. Valdava enamiku leidudest moodustavad savinõukillud (jn 5), mis üldilme ja servaprofilide põhjal võiksid enamasti pärineda 15.–18. sajandist.

Suur Devoni lubjakivist välja raiutud kivirist (jn 6) asus varem tsässona tagaseina ääres. Tegemist on nn Irboska tüüpi ristiga, mille tunnusjooneks on ülespoole laienevad ristilabad. Sellised ristid on dateeritud 14.–16. sajandisse. Enne kaevamisi ulatus

rist maapinnast välja 114–120 cm võrra, kuid pärast jala lahtikaevamist selgus, et rist on 1,87 m kõrgune. Risti laius labade ülaotste joonel oli 97 cm ja paksus 27–31 cm. Ristil olevad kirjad (jn 7) olid ilmastiku mõjul tugevasti kannatanud. Risti keskele on raiutud Pihkvamaa õigeusuala keskaegsetele kiviristidele iseloomulik Kolgata risti kujutis. Paremal labal ligatuurimärkide all säilinud tähed СЛ kujutavad endast lühendit sõnaühendist Царь Славы (kuulsuse tsaar/valitseja), ХЪ võiks olla lühend sõnast Христос. Analooogide põhjal võib arvata, et neist madalamal säilinud tähed КА pärinevad sõnast НИКА, mis tähendab võitu – Kristuse võitu surma üle. Kirjad risti vasakul labal olid täielikult hävinud. Kuna kivirist oli 1974. a foto põhjal ilmastiku toimel tugevasti kahjustatud juba tsässonas katuse all viibides, peab see varem olema olnud kaua seisnud ilma katusega.

Kuigi vanimad mündileiud pärinevad 17. sajandist, ulatub kõigi nende kasutusaeg 18. sajandi alguskümnenditesse. Tõenäoliselt ehitati tsässon pärast Põhjasõja sündmuste lõppu Ida-Eestis – sel ajal, 1710. ja 1711. aastal, on varasemate dendrokronoloogiliste uuringute põhjal rajatud ka Rokina, Säpina ja Võõpsu tsässon –, kuid täiesti ei saa välistada ka 17. sajandi algupära. Savinõukillud ja tsässona all olnud postiaugud võiksid seostuda varasema asulakoha äärealaga. Võimalik, et kivirist ei paikne oma esialgses asukohas, vaid on tsässonakohta toodud kusagilt mujalt pühakoja ehitamise ajal. Võib oletada, et suur rist pärineb ajast, mil Petseri kloostrülem Kornelius tegeles Liivi sõja ajal Setomaa lääneosas setode esivanemate õigeusustamisega.

Kaevamiste lõppedes aeti viltu vajunud risti püsti ja Setomaa vald tellis sellele ühe sarikatepaari laiuse varikatuse (jn 8). Kaevandi ala täideti 2021. aasta kevadel liivaga, tsässona ase markeeriti maapinnal palkraamistusega ja paigaldati infotahvel.