ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN ESTONIA

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ARHEOLOOGILISED VÄLITÖÖD EESTIS

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON THE HILL OF SALUMÄGI AT SALEVERE

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INTRODUCTION

The Salumägi hill at Salevere village, Hanila parish in Läänemaa, is well known as an attractive natural place in the territory of Matsalu National Park. The place has also an interesting archaeological component, which attained an addition in 2001 when a long rampart was discovered on the top of Salumägi hill (Fig. 1). The interesting combination of a rampart, fossil field systems, possible graves and settlement sites attracted the in-

Fig. 1. The rampart and field remains. View from south-west.

Jn 1. Linnuse vall ja muistsete põldude jäänused. Vaade edelast.

Photo / Foto: Helena Kaldre

terest of archaeologists more and more. Therefore, in 2008, archaeological investigations were started there. The main target of the investigations was the fossil field system. The mapping of the fields and the rampart with total station was started in April 2008. During the first week of August, excavations were carried out. Two trenches through baulks were made, one of them was situated in the area enclosed within the rampart, the other was outside it.

Salevere is situated in the West-Estonian lowland, in the northwestern part of the area between Matsalu Bay, Virtsu Peninsula and the Risti–Virtsu road. The landscape is rather flat and low-lying and Salumägi with the height of 24 m over the sea level rises clearly and visibly from the surrounding landscape. The hill is by nature a glint island, formed in Silurian times (Padu 2008, 152). Nowadays the area is covered with rather thin rendzina-soils on limestone bedrock, where the thickness of the humus horizon is on average 15–20 cm (Estonian Soil Map).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The historical Hanila parish is considered as one of the densest settlement areas in the County of Läänemaa in the (Late) Pre-Roman Iron Age (Jaanits *et al.* 1982, 198; Mandel 2003a, 170). In contrary to that, the cultural layers of the villages from the Late Iron Age are situated rather sparsely. Also, the central settlement area and hill fort are absent. It seems that there were no such big and large-scale villages as we know from north Estonia from that period (Mandel 2003a, 170). Northwest from the hill of Salumägi is a cultural layer of a prehistoric settlement site (no. 9906[1]) and in the centre of Salevere village a prehistoric cultural layer was also found (Mandel 2008, 254). None of these sites have been archaeologically investigated.

The most intriguing archaeological object in Salevere is without doubt the rampart of a hill fort in Salumägi that was discovered by Mati Mandel in 2001 (for further reading see Karnau 2001; Mandel 2003b, 25). It is interesting that the existence of the rampart was not known, although the place has raised the attention of archaeologists already from the end of 19th century and is also a popular nature-tourism site.

Jaan Jung (1910, 193) names a cemetery in Tõugumägi near Salevere manor, where bones, rings, bracelets, coins, knives and coffin banks of oak where found in the course of gravel-digging. Harri Moora refers to Salumägi as a sacred place with unknown date (1942, 15). In the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s bones and artefacts were found from the gravel-pit near a *kolkhoz* barn (it might be the same place Jung mentioned). Trial excavations revealed several funerals from the 17th century (Lõugas & Selirand 1989, 119–120).

[1] National Register of Monuments, National Heritage Board (http://register.muinas.ee/).

Another cemetery, probably a *tarand*-grave (no. 9908) is registered about 100 m from the south-eastern slope of Salumägi, in a high pasture-land. It was probably established in the first half of the first millennium and unburned bones and potsherds have been found there (Lõugas & Selirand 1989, 119). A few hundred metres from it, on the other side of the Kõmsi–Mõisaküla–Salevere road there is a graveyard (no. 9907). On the top and eastern slopes of Salumägi there are a lot of cairns. Most of them are clearance heaps, but some might also be graves.

The east–west oriented rampart discovered in 2001 in the northern part of Salumägi, separates the 270 × 100 m wide yard from the rest of the hill. The 5–5.7 m wide, approximately 0.5–1 m high rampart of stones and soil separates the fortified area from the rest of the hill from the southern, south-western and south-eastern sides, whereas the 15 m high steep slope of the limestone bank forms the northern edge. Since both ends of the rampart have been destroyed, it has given the opportunity to investigate the profile of the rampart. It showed that it was made of smaller irregularly put limestones, with black soil in between of them. Since soil was missing under the wall, it means that it was built straight on the limestone bedrock. No datable finds were discovered during the examining of the wall (Mandel 2008, 254). The construction of the wall has been compared with a settlement site with circular rampart nearby, in Massu, which has been dated to the first millennium BC (Mandel 2003a, 167). Early promontory forts enclosed by semi-circular ramparts like in Salevere have been also discovered in Lihunetsi in western Estonia, Jägala and Muuksi in northern Estonia and Võnnumägi in Raplamaa (Lang 2007, 81). By those analogies it has been suggested that the Salevere complex dates back to the Early Iron Age (Lang 2007, 81–82). It has also been suggested that the enclosed settlements like Massu and Salevere among others can be more or less associated with cult activities, since the cultural layer is rather thin in the places that have been investigated (Lang 2007, 246).

On both sides of the Salumägi rampart, there are numerous fossil field remains – baulks surrounding block-shaped fields and clearance cairns. Their investigation was the main goal of the work in 2008.

THE RESULTS OF THE FIELDWORK

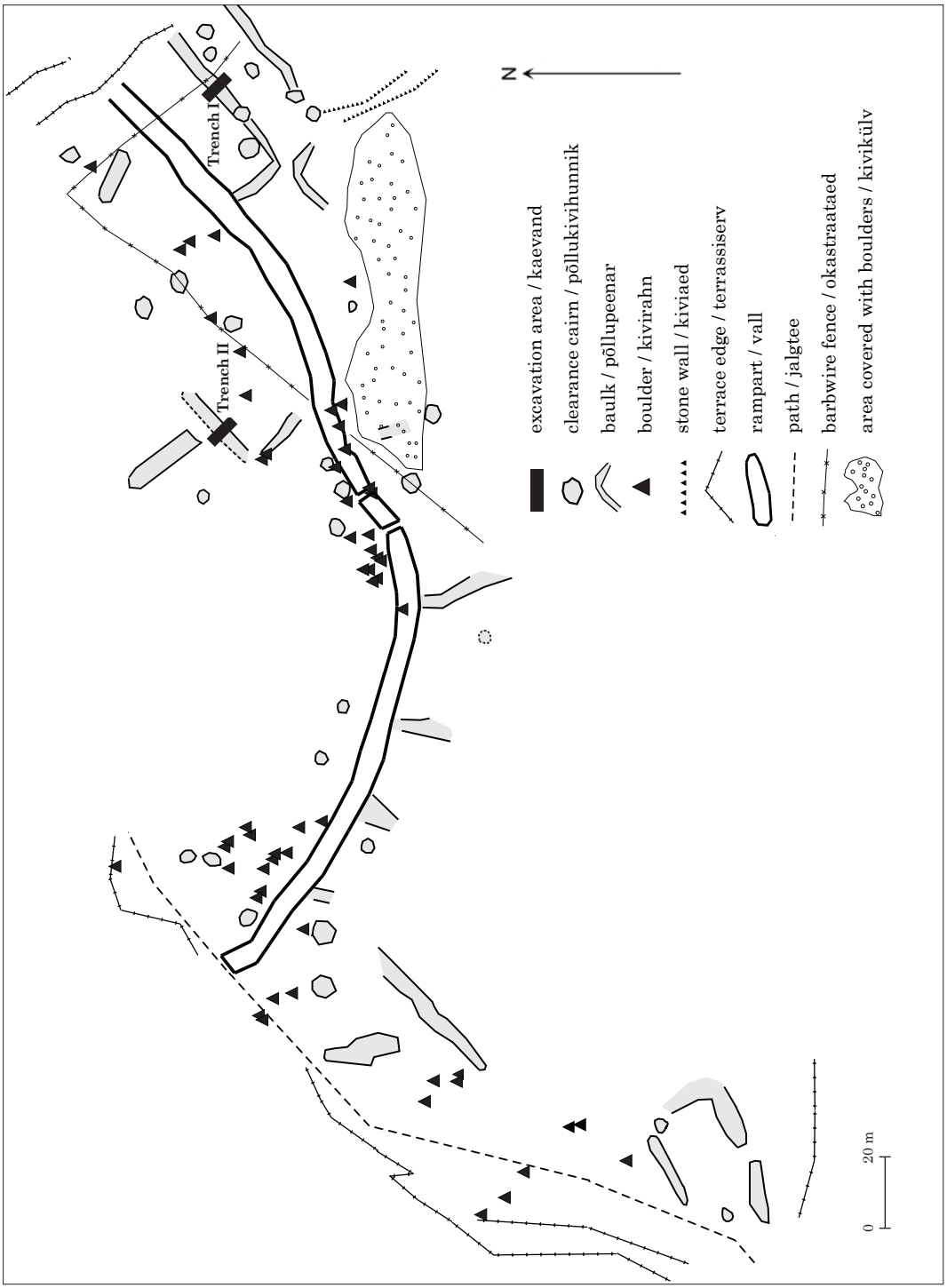
Mapping

The mapping in spring incorporated the rampart and fossil field remains on the plateau of Salumägi (Fig. 2). Because trees and bushes blocked the visibility, it was impossible to map all the field remains on the top of the hill. Also cairns and baulks in the eastern and south-eastern slope of the hill remained outside of the mapped area.

Altogether 26 clearance cairns were mapped, the height being at the average of 0.5–0.7 m from the surrounding ground, the diameter ranging from 3.5–5 m, but some heaps were even larger, with the diameter of 7 m.

►►

Fig. 2. Area mapped on the hill of Salumägi in 2008.
Jn 2. 2008. aastal Salumäel plaanistatud ala.
Drawing / Joonis: Helena Kaldre


Trench I
Trench II
N
excavation area / kaevand
clearance cairn / põllukivihunnik
baulk / põllupeenar
boulder / kivirahn
stone wall / kiviaed
terrace edge / terrassiserv
rampart / vall
path / jalgtee
barbwire fence / okastraataed
area covered with boulders / kivikülv
0
20 m

Altogether 18 baulks of different size and shape were counted. The baulks were long and wide, clearly marked and visible. Massive boulders, probably in their initial natural location, which were used for bordering the fields, were also mapped.

It was possible to distinguish 14 parcels in the map-ped area. One approximately 413 m² large field-plot can be seen in the south-western part of the hill, straight to the east from the path that leads to the hill. In the north-eastern part of the area enclosed with the rampart there are at least 3 field-plots, two of them measuring 625 m² and 430 m², but the borders of the third one were not fully visible with the total station. Outside the rampart, in the south-western part, there are two parcels approximately measuring 400 m². In the south-eastern part there are at least 3 plots with the size of 570–675 m².

The field system here, according to the existence and placement of clearly defined field-plots refers to the block-shaped fields. The plots are slightly irregular and surrounded with baulks, clearance cairns and boulders. The average size of the field-plots is 400 or 600 m². In the case of field systems and their size in Gotland for example, it has been suggested that the plots were made according to a certain measure which was 195 m² (see Lang 1995, 158) and the same might be true for fields in north and west Estonia. In the current state of investigation, it is too early to say if this was the case in Salevere fields.

TRENCH I

The 1.5 × 6 m trench was made crosswise through the baulk orientated from north-east to south-west outside the area enclosed with the rampart.

Fig. 3. The uppermost stone layer in trench I. View from south-west.
Jn 3. Pealmine kivikiht I kaevandis. Vaade edelast.
Photo / Foto: Helena Kaldre

The baulk ran parallel to the rampart and was 45 m long and 2–4.5 m wide. It separated two field plots, the south-eastern one sized 675 m² and the north-western one 594 m².

The baulk was mostly thrown of limestone slabs (20 cm in diameter), but there were also granite stones. Most of them were visible in the uppermost stone layer and they were more numerous on the side areas of the baulk (Fig. 3). It seemed that the big granite stones were thrown to the baulk before the smaller limestone slabs. Maybe the baulk was even marked with bigger stones before the start of farming. The upper stone layer was covered with 15 cm of soil. Three stone layers were cleared out, in between of which there was quite a large amount of soil. For example, in between the first and the second stone layer there was 10–25 cm of dark soil. The width of the stone cover of the baulk was 375 cm. Under the lowermost stones and natural gray-yellowish soil there was a very thin, barely distinguishable soil layer. It did not constitute a clear layer, but was more or less blend into the natural soil. The thickness of the stone cover of the baulk in the central part was approximately 47 cm.

The second and third stone layers revealed altogether 36 potsherds[2], 14 pieces of animal bones, some of which were burned, and nutshells. Starting from the third layer, there were small pieces of charcoal in the soil, distributed sparsely in the soil between the stones. Most of the charcoal pieces and also burned nutshells were found under the third stone layer, in the intersection of lighter, probably natural gravel soil and the dark soil on top of it. The sample of charcoal taken from here was radiocarbon dated to the 1315±35 BP (cal. 650–780 AD).[3] In addition to the charcoal beneath the third stone layer, there was also a thin stripe of charcoal in the south-western side of the trench.

TRENCH II

The second trench, measuring 1.4 × 6 m, was made crosswise through the baulk that was situated in the area enclosed with the rampart. The 25 m long and 3.5 m wide baulk ran parallel to the rampart and was oriented from north-east to south-west. It bordered from the north-western side with a 625 m² field plot. To the north-west of the baulk a clearance cairn and another baulk were visible, but a clear fence of the field was not observable.

The baulk consisted mostly of limestone slabs with a diameter of 20 cm, but there were also bigger granite and limestones, with the diameter of 30–40 cm. The uppermost stone layer was covered with 10 cm of soil. The breadth of the baulk was 300–380 cm and the thickness of the stone cover was 40 cm.

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[2] TÜ 1692: 1–33.

[3] Hela-1861.

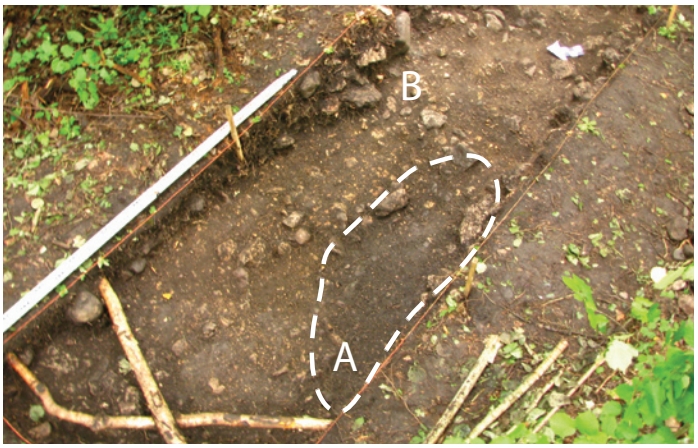

Fig. 4. Trench II. Area of dark soil (A) and burned stones and soil (B) under the baulk. View from west.
Jn 4. II kaevand. Tumeda pinnasega täidetud sissekaeve (A) ning põlenud kivide ja pinnasega ala (B) põllupeenra all. Vaade läänest.
Photo / Foto: Helena Kaldre

Four stone layers with dark soil in between were distinguished during the excavation. Under the stones, the dark soil was gradually mixed with the natural gravel clay or gravel; it was impossible to see a clear dark layer, to which the baulk had been thrown. Under the stones, in the centre of the baulk, there was a 30 cm wide layer of sparsely situated but strongly burnt stones (Fig. 4: B). The soil between them was orange and there were small pieces of charcoal. The charcoal was radiocarbon dated to the 3130±40 BP (cal. 1500–1310 BC).[4] In the north-western part of the south-western side of the excavation plot, there was an area with extremely dark soil that was visible from the third layer (Fig. 4: A). It was measured by 1 × 0.5 m and it revealed many potsherds (also one decorated with horizontal lines) and bones. There were also burned stones, but similar to the other parts of the trench, there were only a few charcoal pieces in the dark soil. The size of this area diminished in the lower layers. Its bottom, which was paved with limestone, was *ca*. 20 cm below the natural ground surface. There were some small, 5–7 cm stones on the edge of this area, but they were not forming a clear structure. Although it remained unclear, why this hole was made, it seems that it was contemporary to the baulk, since the finds from it and from other parts of the baulk were similar. In between the stones of the baulk, altogether 59 potsherds[5] and 36 pieces of animal bones were found. The majority of the finds came from the third and fourth layer and they were distributed quite evenly all over the area of the baulk (except for the darker area described before that contained more finds than the soil inside the baulk). Likewise in trench I, nutshells were also found. All over the excavation area, there were numerous burned stones, but charcoal pieces were rare. They were nevertheless evenly distributed all over the excavation area.

[4] Hela-1862.
[5] TÜ 1693: 1–59.

DISCUSSION

The date of the potsherds found from the trenches, especially the one with the line-ornament from trench II, refers to the third quarter of the first millennium (pers. comm. Valter Lang (TÜ)). The block-shaped fields were used for farming all through the prehistoric times, starting from the Bronze Age onwards. The size and shape of the field plots has differed – the earlier plots were usually smaller. One of the best preserved block-shaped field system has been discovered in group I of Ilmandu, north-west Estonia, where the size and appearance of field plots in the south-eastern part resemble the plots in Salumägi. Unfortunately there are no radiocarbon dates from this part of the field. The much larger block-shaped fields in the central part of group I of Ilmandu, were used in modern times (Lang *et al.* 2004, 72–74). In Salevere, it is impossible to make any final conclusions about the field system in general, before the mapping of the entire area covered with fossil fields has been completed. The relative regularity and size of the field plots ranging from 400 to 600 m² seems nevertheless one of the characteristic features of the Salevere fields. Another characteristic is the small amount of charcoal pieces on one side and the relatively high number of potsherds and animal bones on the other. The lack of charcoal may indicate that the area was quite open before turned into fields and there was no spectacular tree-cover that would have left more charcoal to the soil when burned. The radiocarbon date from trench I coincides well with the date of the potsherds, suggesting that the field system here might belong to the 7th – 8th centuries. In that case the potsherds and animal bones may refer to household waste brought to the field to maintain soil fertility. On the other hand, it is also possible that the potsherds and bones were in the soil before the land was used as a field. They might refer to a cultural layer from an earlier settlement site area. The surprisingly old radiocarbon date from trench II (16th – 14th centuries BC) is more clearly connected with earlier human activity. It is possible that the features under the baulk, i.e. strongly burned stones and the lower area of dark soil, belong to the period of the enclosed settlement.

In order to draw final conclusions about the date of the fields and their connection with the rampart it is vital to proceed with the investigations in Salevere archaeological complex.

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ARHEOLOOGILISED VÄLITÖÖD SALEVERE SALUMÄEL

Läänemaal, Hanila vallas, Salevere Salumäel asuv arheoloogiline kompleks koosneb Salumäel ja selle nõlvadel paiknevatest muistsete põldude jäänustest, 2001. aastal avastatud linnusevallist Salumäe põhjapoolses osas (jn 1), paarist registreeritud kalmest ja asulakohast mäe lähiümbruskonnas. 2008. a uuringute eesmärk oli muistsete põldude uurimine. Aprillis alustati põllujäänustega kaetud ala ja linnusevalli plaanistamist ning augustis viidi läbi põllujäänuste arheoloogilised kaevamised.

Plaanistatud ala hõlmas linnusevalli ning sellest mõlemale poole jäävaid põllupeenraid ja põllukivihunnikud (jn 2). Kokku loendati plaanistatud alal 26 põllukivihunnikut, mille kõrgus maapinnast oli 0,5–0,7 m ning läbimõõt 3,5–5 m. Erineva pikkuse ja ebakorrapärase kujuga, keskmiselt 3 m laiuseid peenraid või peenrajuppe oli kokku lugeda 18. Plaanile kanti ka massiivsed, ilmselt oma algses looduslikus asendis paiknevad kivid, mida oli kasutatud põllupiirete tegemisel. Selgelt pikkade ja kõrgete peenardega markeeritud põllulappide suhteliselt korrapärase paiknemise alusel liigituvad Salevere Salumäe põllud kamberpõldude hulka. Kokku võib lugeda 14 partselli, mille suurused varieeruvad 400 ja 600 m² piires.

Põldude üksikasjalikumaks uurimiseks ja vanuse väljaselgitamiseks rajati kaks kaevandit. Kaevand I (jn 3) oli 1,5 × 6 m suurune läbilõige linnusevalliga piiratud alast väljaspool asuvast 45 meetri pikkusest põllupeenrast. Kaevand II (jn 4) kujutas endast 1,4 × 6 m suurust tranšeed valliga piiratud ala sees olevast 25 meetri pikkusest peenrast. Mõlemad peenrad olid kokku visatud peamiselt paekividest, kusjuures kivilademe paksus peenraalusest looduslikust pinnasest pealmiste kivideni oli keskmiselt 40 cm. Sütt leidus kividevahelises ja -aluses mullas äärmiselt vähe, kuid mõlemast kaevandist leiti palju savinõukilde ja loomaluid, millest mõned olid põlenud. I kaevandist korjati kokku 36 savinõukildu, II kaevandist leiti neid 59 (sh üks joonornamendiga). Leitud keraamika võib kuuluda keskmisesse rauaaega ning sarnase tulemuse (7.–8. sajand) andis ka I kaevandi peenrakivide alt võetud söeproov. Siiski pole selge, kas see tulemus näitab põldude rajamise algust ja kasutusaega või on seotud varasema asustusega. II kaevandi põllupeenra alusest tugevalt põlenud pinnase ja kividega alast võetud söeproov andis aga tulemuseks 16.–14. sajand eKr, mis näib olevat seotud põldude-eelse asustusega, võib-olla isegi linnusega. Et selgitada välja põldude, linnusevalli, kalmete ja asulate täpsem seos, tuleb arheoloogilisi uuringuid Salevere muinaskompleksil kindlasti jätkata.