RESCUE EXCAVATIONS IN RISTIPALO AND LOOSI BARROW CEMETERIES

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INTRODUCTION

In the summers of 2009 and 2010 small-scale rescue excavations took place on two barrow cemeteries in south-eastern Estonia (Fig. 1). These sites belong to the so-called Long Barrows Culture, which spread in the forest zone of Eastern Europe in the 6th–10th century AD. The round or rampart-like long sand barrows are usually situated in sandy pine forests near river valleys. The number of barrows in cemeteries is different. They may stretch from a single monument or a couple of them to several dozens.

Although excavations were small, it was important to resume the research of the barrow cemeteries after a decade long pause (Aun 2000). Both works were conducted by the Learned Estonian Society (*Õpetatud Eesti Selts*).

EXCAVATIONS AT RISTIPALO

In the summer of 2009 rescue excavations took place at the Ristipalo barrow cemetery (Fig. 1: 1) near Räpina in Põlva County, historical Räpina parish, where road construction work went through a state protected monument's protection zone. Excavations related to the reconstruction of the Räpina – Värska road were financed by AS Põlva Teed. The cemetery consisted of eight barrows, the largest of which (14 m in diameter and 22 m in height) was excavated in 1956 by Lembit Jaanits and Aita Kustin (Aun 1992, 94). No finds were discovered, except for one small fragment of bone, which got lost.

The purpose of the 2009 excavation was first of all to make sure, whether the barrow, overlapping with the area of the new planned road, though excavated in 1956, but not heaped up after the excavations, was thoroughly studied. The second aim of the work was to ensure that the new drainage ditch of the road that came dangerously

Fig. 1. Location of the barrow cemeteries mentioned in the text. 1 – Ristipalo, 2 – Loosi.
Jn 1. Tekstis mainitud kääbaskalmistute asukohad. 1 – Ristipalo, 2 – Loosi.
Drawing / Joonis: Maria Smirnova

close to one of the long barrows (reg. no. 11567) would not destroy any archaeological material, like possible pit-grave cremation burials or construction elements of the barrow.

There is no report from the investigations of Jaanits and Kustin, but the preserved excavation plans (AI 4-45) reveal that the trench, which usually is surrounding the barrows was not excavated. To find the presumed trench, two excavation plots of 1 × 8 and 3 × 0.5 m were laid out near and through the existing irregular mound, which was interpreted as a possible remain of a barrow. The investigations in 2009 confirmed the natural origin of the mound and no traces of the excavated barrow or its trench were found.

The third excavation plot (2 × 8 m) was laid out beside the long barrow closest to the road. The greyish cultural layer, at the bottom mixed with yellowish natural soil, was 50–90 cm thick. From the ditch around the barrow in the deeper part of the plot some charcoal was collected, which was dated 922 ± 50 BP (cal. 95.4% 1017–1220 AD).[1] It seems that this charcoal could not be used to date the construction or active use of the barrow; however, it may refer to some kind of later ritual activity near it. In the other part of the excavation plot, from the upper part of the cultural layer, two pieces of striated handmade pottery were found (Fig. 2: 1–2). This kind of pottery is not typical for the barrows, because the end of its use is usually dated to the 5th–6th century AD (Laul 2001, 174). No burials or other significant finds were found.

EXCAVATIONS AT LOOSI

In the summer of 2010 small excavations were conducted in the Loosi barrow cemetery (Fig. 1: 2) in Võrumaa County (Vastseliina parish). In the present time there are about 31 more or less preserved barrows in this group (Fig. 3). There is also a *tarand*-grave in the cemetery, which was fully excavated by Silvia Laul in 1965–1967 (Schmiedehelm & Laul 1970). A number of barrows in this group were studied in the past by several researchers: in 1839 by Guido von Liphart, in 1884 by Georg Loeschke and Johannes Klinge and in 1956–1966 by Marta Schmiedehelm (Aun 1992, 108). In the autumn of 2009 the slopes of several barrows were harmed by forestry machines. To prevent the slopes from eroding, the edges of the two most damaged barrows were studied. The work was financed by the State Forest Management Centre (*Riigimetsa Majandamise Keskus*).

The first of the two barrows (reg. no. 13741) was 10 m in diameter and 0.7 m in height (Fig. 3: 1). In the middle of it there was a 4 m wide pit and a 1 m wide trench

Fig. 2. 1–2 – pottery from Ristipalo, 3–5 – pottery from Loosi.
Jn 2. 1–2 – potikillud Ristipalost, 3–5 – potikillud Loosist.
(TÜ 1755: 1, 2; TÜ 1880: 2, 3, 4.)
Photo / Foto: Viire Pajuste

[1] Tln-3304.

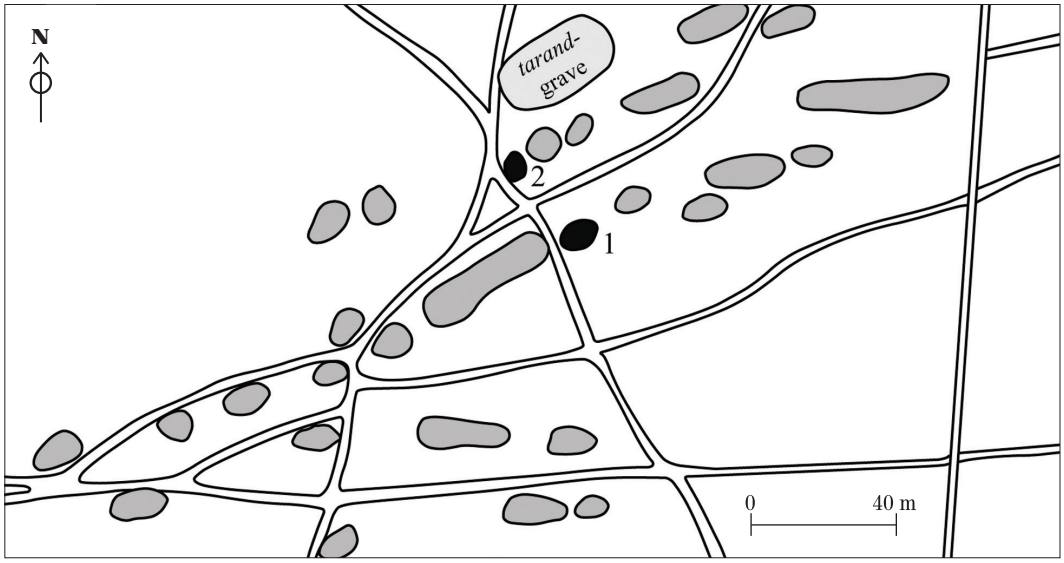

Fig. 3. Plan of the Loosi barrow cemetery (after Laul 1972, fig. 3).
Jn 3. Loosi kääbaskalmistu plaan (Laul 1972, jn 3 alusel).
Drawing / Joonis: Maria Smirnova

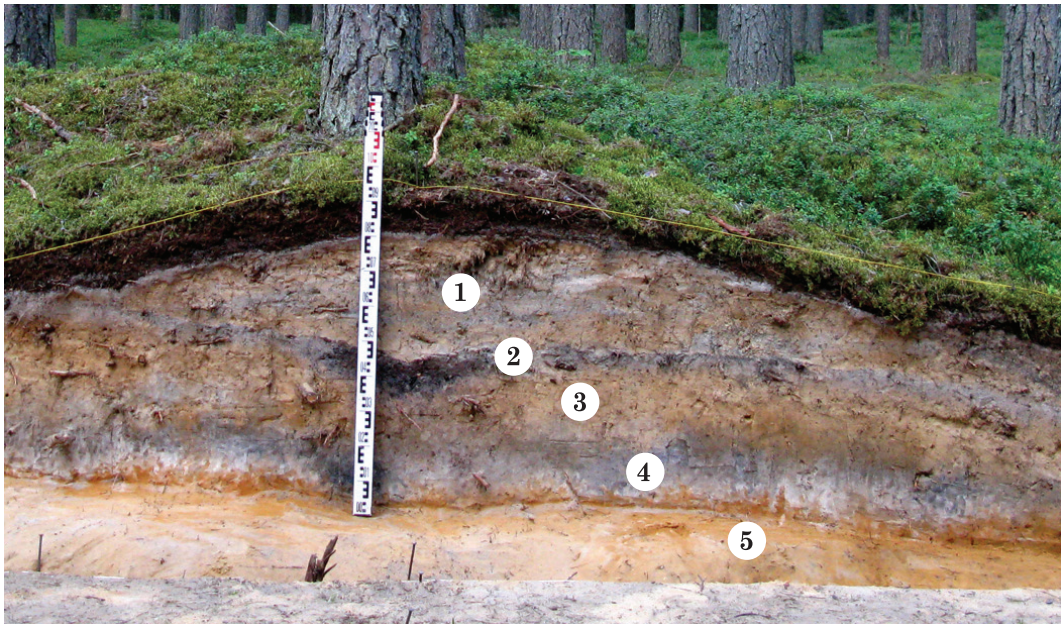

Fig. 4. Profile of the Loosi 1st barrow. 1 – grey and yellow mixed sand, 2 – original contour of the barrow, 3 – yellowish sand, 4 – greyish-whitish sand, 5 – natural soil.
Jn 4. Loosi I kääpa profiil. 1 – hall ja kollane segatud liiv, 2 – kääpa esialgne kontuur, 3 – kollakas liiv, 4 – hallikasvalge liiv, 5 – looduslik aluspõhi.
Photo / Foto: Maria Smirnova

crossing the barrow. These damages were old, fully covered by moss and thus probably made by the 19th century researchers. On the recently damaged western edge of the barrow a 6 × 1.5 m excavation plot was laid out. Since the sand from the upper part of the damaged area had eroded to the bottom, the excavated soil was very mixed and it was hard to understand the situation before clearing the whole profile. The profile (Fig. 4) revealed that the original contour of the barrow (Fig. 4: 2) lay below the layer of mixed soil (Fig. 4: 1), up to 35 cm thick, which consisted of grey and yellow sand with occasional small pieces of charcoal. This soil was probably excavated from the middle part of the barrow and then thrown on the slopes by the previous researchers. The upper part of the original barrow consisted of yellowish sand with some pieces of charcoal and some occasional patches of greyish sand in it (Fig. 4: 3). In the lower parts of the profile yellowish sand blended gradually with greyish and whitish sand (Fig. 4: 4), with some dark coaly spots in it, which lay on hard orange natural soil (Fig. 4: 5). In the middle part of the plot hard orange natural soil lay just about 15 cm below today's surface. The size of this 'platform' was approximately 3 × 0.3 m and the natural soil around it was deeper, about 30–40 cm below the present day ground surface. No finds, burials or a sufficient amount of charcoal for analysis was found in this barrow.

The second barrow (reg. no. 13726) studied in Loosi was approximately 7 m in diameter and 0.5 m in height. A plot of 2 × 6 m was laid out on the damaged area of the south-western part of the barrow. The barrow was situated right beside a small road (Fig. 3: 2) and excavations revealed that the barrow had been damaged severely already before 2009. The part closest to the road had several areas with mixed eroded soil that in some places went below the present ground level.

The barrow consisted of yellowish sand, with tiny pieces of charcoal and some areas of mixed greyish soil, which was the result of animal activity and vegetation. In the yellowish sand in the middle part of the plot from the depth of 20 cm beneath the turf layer there was a patch of charcoal. From there a sample for radiocarbon analysis was collected, which was dated 609 ± 60 BP (cal. 95.4% 1281–1422 AD).[2] In the middle part of the excavation plot an irregular stone cluster, which was about 1 m dense, consisting of stones with the diameter of 15 to 40 cm, was revealed (Fig. 5). The first stones came to light already under the turf. The cluster was most dense at about 20 cm below the surface of the barrow. In general, the use of the stones in the barrows is not typical for the Long Barrow Culture (Aun 1992, 112). But, the stone clusters have been also found in other barrows excavated in Loosi (Aun 1992, 108), as well as in Kõnnu cemetery, where the *tarand*-grave is also located near the barrows (Schmiedehelm & Laul 1970, 160–161).

Beneath the stones there was a layer of greyish-whitish sand with some coaly spots in it, which lay on a hard orange natural soil, the same as in the first barrow. In the north-western part of the plot a part of the trench surrounding the barrow was situated and the intact natural soil was significantly deeper there. From the lower part of the trench the second assemblage of charcoal, dated to 586 ± 60BP (cal. 95.4% 1288–1430 AD)[3], was collected.

[2] Tln-3303.
[3] Tln-3302.

Fig. 5. Stone cluster in Loosi 2nd barrow.
Jn 5. Kivilade Loosi II kääpas.
Photo / Foto: Maria Smirnova

The dates of both radiocarbon analyses are surprising and appear to be too late for barrows with cremation burials. So, it seems that the original barrow was already severely disturbed in the Middle Ages. Similarly, a radiocarbon sample taken from a barrow excavated by Mare Aun in Obinitsa in 1999 was dated to the 12th century, but since it was taken from the damaged part of the mound, the author concluded that it belonged to a later disturbance and did not date the use of the barrow accurately (Aun 2000, 67).

The remains of at least two cremations were found from the excavated part of the barrow. Most of the 45 bone fragments (Malve 2011) were parts of long bone diaphysis and epiphysis. The rate of burning was estimated according to Per Holck manual on cremation burials (1997, 90). Bones were burnt at quite low temperature. They were somewhat deformed by the heat, but still had preserved their natural hardness. There were few moderately burnt fragments, but most of them were slightly burnt. The bone colour was in some cases almost the same as of normal bones, but most of the fragments were paler.

The first cluster of burned bones came to light right under the turf layer. This burial was located in the area just beside the north-eastern profile of the plot. It is evident that some of the burial was left in the unexcavated part of the barrow. The area which contained bone fragments was about 10 cm thick and covered approximately 50 cm^2. Among the bones skull fragments, most of them small and fragmentary, were determined. Some parts of occipital bones and one fragment of lower jaw condoyle were discovered. Most of the skull fragments, like parts of occipital and lower jaw, were thin and small, and therefore belonged to at least one sub-adult. But among them a thicker fragment of a skull vault was found, which probably belongs to an adult. So, the burial contained at least two individuals, but due to the high fragmentation of bones, details about age, sex and exact number of buried people remains unknown. Occasions where remains of several individuals occur in the same burial are also known from other barrow cemeteries, for instance in Rõsna (Aun *et al.* 2008).

The second assemblage of bones, which may belong to different burials, was located in the south-western part of the plot in greyish mixed soil, probably the result of some previous damages to the barrow. About 10 small pieces of burned bones were found on an area of 1 m^2. Since the soil was mixed, the bone fragments were probably not in their original place. There was no determinable bone material in this assemblage.

In addition to cremated bones, seven pieces of handmade pottery were found in this barrow (Fig. 2: 3–5). Relatively small fragments were located close together in the turf layer. Similarly, stray pieces of pottery have been found also during earlier excavations on south-eastern Estonian barrows, including Loosi, and they might be connected to commemoration rites (Aun 2002, 87–81).

CONCLUSION

The excavations enabled to avoid further losses of archaeological information from the damaged parts of the barrows. Although small, they provided some new data, like surprisingly late ^{14}C dates. Both in Ristipalo and in Loosi they seem to indicate that these sites were somehow still used long after the tradition of burying cremated remains in sand barrows had ended. After excavations in Ristipalo a new bicycle road was constructed at the researched area. In Loosi profiles of both barrows were covered with plastic and the slopes were reconstructed with sand and turf.

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PÄÄSTEKAEVAMISED RISTIPALO JA LOOSI KÄÄBASKALMISTUTEL

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2009. ja 2010. a suvel viidi läbi väikesemahulised päästekaevamised kahel nn pikk-kääbaste kultuuri kuuluval kalmistul Kagu-Eestis (jn 1).

2009. a toimusid kaevamised Põlva maakonnas Räpina külje all **Ristipalo kääbastikul** (jn 1: 1), mille kaitsetsooni oli kavandatud kergliiklustee rajamine. Kääbaskalmistus oli varem olnud kaheksa kääbast, millest ühte kaevasid 1956. aastal Lembit Jaanits ja Aita Kustin. 2009. a töödel oli kaks eesmärki. Esiteks sooviti välja selgitada tee alla jääva künka iseloom, mis oli kaitse alla võetud kui varem uuritud kääpa asukoht, ning veenduda, et see kaevati 1956 lõpuni. Teiseks taheti uurida kultuurkihti teeäärse pikk-kääpa kõrval, kuhu oli plaanis kaevata kergliiklustee kraav. Läbikaevatud kääpaasemena kaitse alla võetud küngas osutus looduslikuks kuhjatiseks. Pikk-kääpa juures olevast kultuurkihist leiti kaks riibitud keraamika kildu (jn 2: 1–2). Lisaks saadi söeproov dateeringuga 1017–1220 pKr, mis näib olevat liiga hiline, et dateerida kääpa rajamist või aktiivset kasutust.

2010. a suvel toimusid päästekaevamised Võrumaal Vastseliina vallas **Loosi kääbaskalmistul** (jn 1: 2), mis koosneb 31 kääpast ja kivikalmest (jn 3). 2009. a sügisel metsatööde käigus said kahjustada mitme kääpa servad. Kahe enam kannatada saanud kuhjatise lõhutud osad puhastati ja kaevati, vältimaks nende edasist lagunemist.

Esimese kääpa profiil (jn 4) paljastas, et esialgse kuhjatise kontuur (jn 4: 2) oli mattunud kuni 35 cm paksuse kollaka ja hallika segatud liiva alla (jn 4: 1), mis tõenäoliselt pärines kääpa keskel olnud sissekaevest. Esialgne kääbas koosnes ülemises osas kollasest liivast (jn 4: 3), mis alumises osas läks järk-järgult üle hallikasvalgeks liivaks (jn 4: 4), mille all oli looduslik pind (jn 4: 5). Leide, matuseid ning dateerimiseks vajalikku söekogust uuritud kääpa osast leida ei õnnestunud.

Teise kääpa kamarakihist leiti seitse käsikeraamika kildu (jn 2: 3–5). Kääbas koosnes valdavas osas kollasest ning alumistes kihtides hallikasvalgest liivast. Kuhjatisest avastati ebakorrapärane, umbes ühe meetri laiune kivilade, mis koosnes 15–40 cm suurustest kividest (jn 5). Üldjuhul ei ole kivikonstruktsioonid pikk-kääbaste kultuuri kalmetele iseloomulikud, kuid neid on leitud ka üksikutest teistest selle kalmistu läbiuuritud kääbastest. Lisaks leiti kääpast kaks väikest luukogumit. Esimene tuli nähtavale otse kamarakihi alt ning arvatavasti jäi osaliselt kääpa läbikaevamata ossa. Põlenud luud kuulusid vähemalt kahele indiviidile, kellest üks oli nooruk ja teine täiskasvanu. Teine luukogum pärines kuhjatise lõhutud osast, mille pinnas oli väga segatud. Seetõttu ei ole päris kindel, kas tegu oli ühe või enama matusega. Leitud luukillud osutusid fragmentaarsuse tõttu osteoloogiliselt määramatuks. Kääpakuhjatisest saadi ka kaks söeproovi, dateeringuga 1281–1422 pKr ja 1288–1430 pKr, mis arvatavasti viitavad sellele, et kääbast on juba keskajal põhjalikult lõhutud ning seal on toimunud hilisem inimtegevus.

Ehkki kaevamised olid väikesemahulised, koguti nendega huvitavat lisainformatsiooni. Kuigi üllatavalt hilised proovid ei aita arvatavasti dateerida kääbaste rajamist ega sinna matmise perioodi, viitavad nad siiski teatavatele kääbastega seotud tegevustele, mis leidsid aset pärast nende aktiivse kasutuse lõppu. Kaevamiste lõppedes rajati Ristipalos läbiuuritud alale kergliiklustee. Loosis kaeti mõlema kääpa profiilid koormakilega ning rekonstrueeriti nõlvad liiva ja mätaste abil.