



## Finds from the churchyard and church of Karula

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The medieval parish church of Karula (Fig. 1) in the historical province of Võrumaa (presently Valgamaa County) in Lüllemäe village has stood in ruins since 20 August 1944 when the retreating German troops set fire on the building. Judging by architectural features, the stone church, dedicated to Virgin Mary, repeatedly damaged in the wars of the 16th – early 18th centuries and partially redesigned in 1835–1836, was probably built in the second half of the 15th century (Alttoa 1999). A specific feature of the monument is numerous cross graffiti on the outer surfaces of walls (Konsa & Jonuks 2010; Johanson & Jonuks 2016, 216–217).



**Fig. 1.** Ruins of Karula church from the west.

**Jn 1.** Karula kiriku varemed läänest.

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Standing without a roof had caused heavy damages to the church remains, and heaps of stones and brick debris with the height of up to 0.5–0.7 m had formed beside the walls, both on the inner and outer side.

To stop the consistent decay of the ruins, a joint initiative was taken by the Karula congregation and the reconstruction company Liivimaa Lossid (Castles of Livonia) to conserve the walls. First the heaps of debris had to be removed to set up scaffolding and to level the ground for that purpose. The work started in 2020 with the conservation of the chancel arch and was continued in 2021 with the removal of the heaps of debris inside the church and from the churchyard.

Since the ruins are listed as a national monument, archaeological monitoring of removing the debris was needed. The work was carried out by the Learned Estonian Society, being directed by the authors of the present paper. Most of the monitoring was supervised and the location of finds<sup>1</sup> was registered by Mait Raudsepp, archaeology student of the University of Tartu. In addition, to prevent possible looting after the removal of debris, systematic metal detecting was undertaken in the churchyard. Metal detecting was mainly performed by hobby detectorist Ott Papagoi, and partly also by Aleksandr Kotkin and Igor Tsakuhhin from history club Taaler. Due to dense ferrous signals only signals of coloured metal were checked.

## REMAINS OF PERISHED SACRISTY WALLS

The medieval sacristy of the church was located north of the choir. Before the monitoring its former presence was reflected only by a bricked up door on the north side of the choir, and by a vault remain in the south-western corner of the perished sacristy. Probably the old sacristy north of the choir was demolished during the reconstruction work of 1835–1836 when it was replaced by a new one in the eastern part of the choir.

During the removal of debris, the remains of the northern wall of the demolished medieval sacristy were unearthed in the depth of 10–20 cm from the ground level. The wall, 1.05 m wide and constructed of granite stones, followed the line of the northern wall of the nave. The floor of the demolished sacristy was made of 27–28 × 13–13.5 cm bricks.

A wall continued also north of the eastern wall of the choir, but it was only 67–68 cm thick and made of 31 × 15 × 7 cm bricks – evidently of post-medieval origin. In addition, the remains of a ca. 70 cm thick north–south directional wall, made of 28 × 13.5 × 6 cm bricks were discovered ca. 4.2–5.1 m east of the eastern wall of the longhouse. The bulkhead, possibly of 17th century origin, has been demolished and its remains were covered with floor sand. This reconstruction may have taken place after the Great Northern War (1700–1710) when the church, which burnt in 1702, was repaired again. The location of the eastern wall of the medieval sacristy remained unclear, but its remains are probably under one of the discovered north–south-directional walls.

## FINDS FROM THE CHURCH

After the removal of debris inside the church a ca. 1.5 m wide path paved with bricks leading from the western portal to the altar was discovered above the layer of charcoal and brands from 1944. Evidently, the path had been constructed after the fire. According to information of local pastor Enno Tanilas, confirmation of young congregation members had taken place in the church ruins during the first years after the war and this was probably the context for making the path.

<sup>1</sup> TÕ 2886: 1–58; TÕ 2969: 1–65.

The most considerable finds from the nave were the remains of a church bell and a chandelier. The church of Karula had two bells before the war.<sup>2</sup> The smaller bell is preserved, the bigger bell fell down during the fire in 1944. However, it appeared that several smaller fragments of it had remained *in situ*. When falling, the bell had decomposed into small pieces and in total over 60 fragments were collected from the area of ca. 4 × 2.5 metres in diameter, mostly west of the pillars of the organ balcony. The fragments, the location of which was documented as 28 assemblages of close location, were of different size and shape. The smaller pieces with the diameter of up to 5–7 cm were fully deformed in fire. The biggest fragment (ca. 15 kg) had the inscription ...*NO 1700*, and another large piece bore the inscription *GERHARD MF* or *ME* (Fig. 2a–b). In addition, a fragment of text with the letters *sch* was found. According to written data the original message on the bell, with preserved fragments of text was: *Nach dem die vor undenkliche Jahren her verwüstete Carolische<sup>3</sup> Kirche nun mero Gott loß wieder erbawet so haben einige Baur von Sagnitz Alt Antzen und Igast dehren Nahmen in Kirchen Bvch Ver **Sch**rieben sind diese Gloche zur Ehre Gottes freiwillig geschenkt. **Gerhard Meyer me fecit Rigæ anno 1700. Soli Deo goloria.**<sup>4</sup> (Merila-Lattik 2005, 74–75). Thus, the bell had been cast in Riga by Gerhard Meyer in 1700. Also traces of Bourbon's lily fragments could be traced on a fragment.*

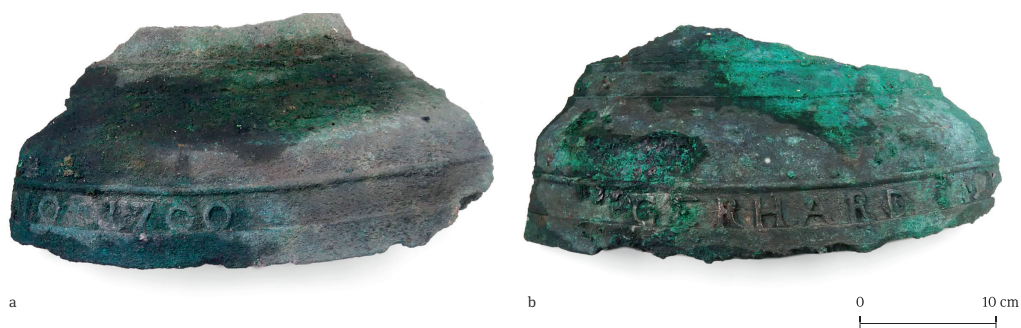


Fig. 2. Fragments of Karula church bell with inscriptions.

Jn 2. Karula kirikukella kirjadega tükid.

(TÜ 2969: 1/1, 1/2.)

Photo / Foto: Mait Raudsepp

The fragments of a burnt chandelier were found from an area of ca. 0.9 × 1 m. The chandelier from the late 19th or early 20th century – a factory work made of cast details<sup>5</sup> – had fully disintegrated in fire, being broken into pieces of up to 15–20 cm, mostly 4–10 cm in diameter. The fragments lay on the remains of charred 5 cm thick floor planks with the width of 24 and 28 cm. The beam which carried the floor was 20 cm wide.<sup>6</sup> Judging by the low number of candlesticks (3 in all), some of the chandelier remains had evidently been removed after the fire. The remains of the chandelier will be returned to the congregation.

<sup>2</sup> Oral information from local priest Enno Tanilas.

<sup>3</sup> The text in bold designates the preserved parts of the inscription. The text part *sch* may originate from different contexts. The spelling regarding the words visible on the photo published by Merila-Lattik has been corrected.

<sup>4</sup> Probably the word *goloria* is erratum: correct Latin were *gloria*.

<sup>5</sup> Estimation by Juhan Maiste, Professor of Art History (TÜ).

<sup>6</sup> It remains unclear whether just this chandelier is depicted on pre-war photos about the interior of Karula church (e.g. <https://www.muis.ee/museumview/1589241>): the chandelier on the photo seems to be located at the chancel arch, but the remains were found exactly from the centre of the nave.

Artefact finds were not numerous in the nave. Metal detecting inside the church yielded only one coin – a schilling of Gustavus Adolphus minted in Riga and a signet ring with dense lattice ornamentation (Fig. 6: 4). From the choir no finds were gained because the removal of debris revealed a concrete floor from the pre-war time that covered all earlier layers.

### FINDS FROM THE CHURCHYARD

Metal detecting in the churchyard provided, however, several archaeological finds, mainly coins and small jewellery items, predominantly from the Early Modern period (Fig. 3). Most of them concentrated in four assemblages: 1) at the north-western corner of the church, 2) near the prolongation of the southern wall of the church, 8–18 m west of the building, 3) area east of the choir and concrete stairs east of it, and 4) 12–20 metres south of the church – outside the present-day churchyard from former garden plots where human bones had been found when ploughing. Some other dispersed churchyard finds were collected also up to 4–5 metres south and north of the church.

Brooches were represented with 21 finds, all small items. The only penannular brooch (Fig. 4: 1) had degenerated knob-shaped endings and an arch with a rhomboid section. All the seven heart-shaped brooches (Fig. 4: 2–8) had a crown and a knob at the bottom – details typical to the 17th century. Heart-shaped brooches of such form do not appear in Estonia

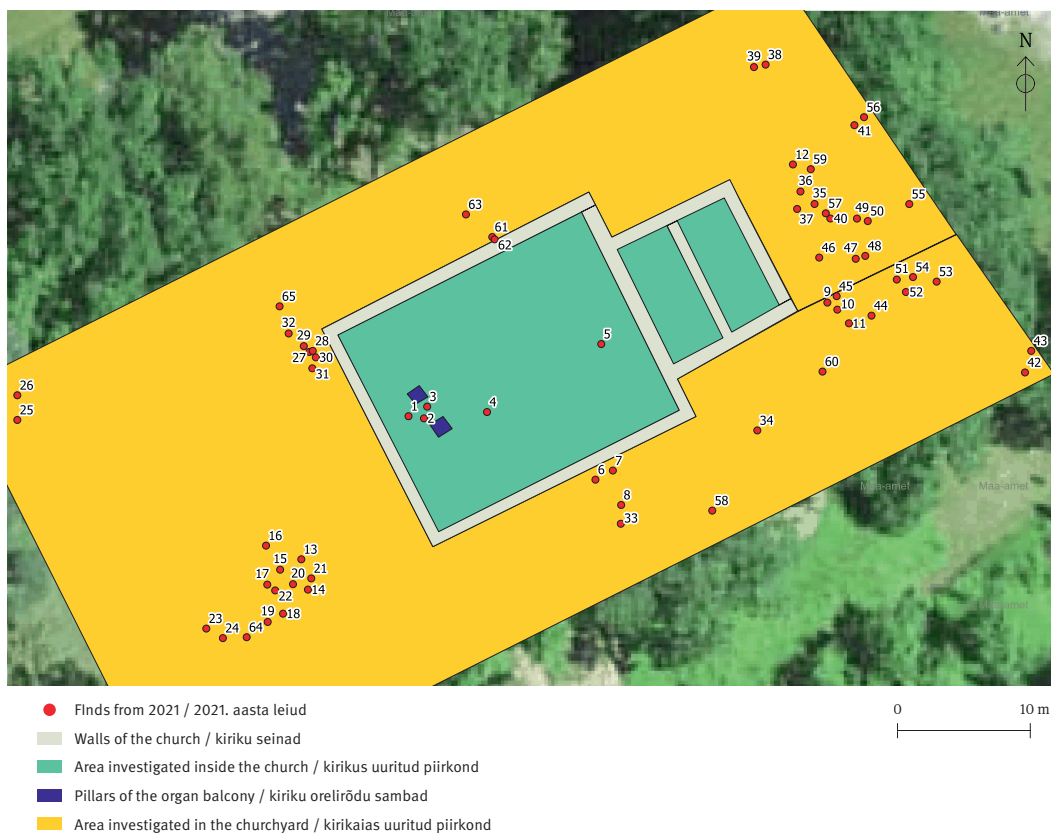


Fig. 3. Distribution of finds in Karula churchyard and church.

Jn 3. Leidude paiknemine Karula kirikaia ja kirikus.

Map / Kaart: Mait Raudsepp



before the 1630s (Valk 2001, 47, 48). From 12 little round brooches (Fig. 5) nine had no ornamentation. Their arch was mostly flat, in three cases with a triangular section. In two cases it was ribbed (Fig. 5: 4, 5), in one case decorated with oblong bumps (Fig. 5: 3). Two round brooches (Fig. 5: 9, 11) were very small (diameter 18 and 19 mm) that indicates their late, 18th century date – such finds are common for Kanepi and Rõngu cemeteries of mainly 18th century origin.<sup>7</sup> Small star-shaped brooches which appeared in southern Estonia since the 1630s were represented by a fragment of a lead alloy item (Fig. 6: 1). A common feature of some Swedish period 17th century brooches from Karula churchyard is the decoration of their flat arches with round dots that can be observed in the case of two heart-shaped brooches (Fig. 4: 6, 8) and a round brooch (Fig. 5: 8). This rare feature might indicate the products of some particular craftsman.

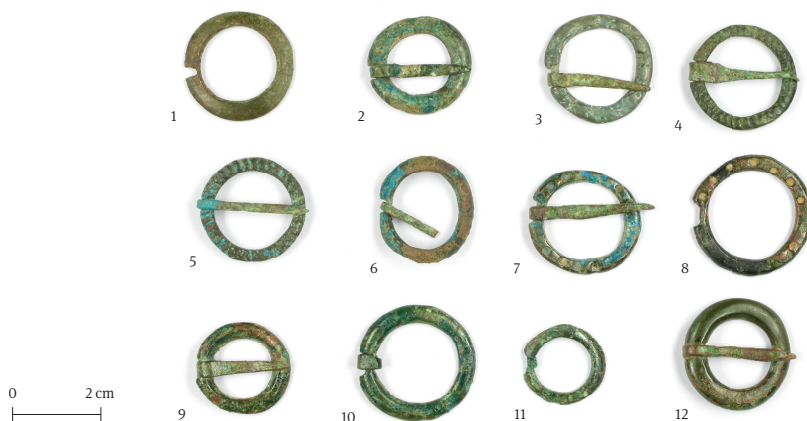


**Fig. 4.** Brooches from Karula churchyard.

**Jn 4.** Sõled Karula kirikaiaist.

(TÜ 2969: 60; TÜ 2886: 22, 23, 46; TÜ 2969: 50, 53, 54, 56.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk



**Fig. 5.** Brooches from Karula churchyard.

**Jn 5.** Sõled Karula kirikaiaist.

(TÜ 2886: 5, 12, 24, 45, 49, 56; TÜ 2969: 18, 23, 24, 38, 41, 52.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

<sup>7</sup> AI 4157; TÜ 1250.



**Fig. 6.** Finds from Karula churchyard (1–3, 5–9) and church (4).

**Jn 6.** Leide Karula kirikaiaast (1–3, 5–9) ja kirikust (4).

(TÜ 2969: 29, 42, 47, 5, 33; TÜ 2886: 1, 51, 64, 7.)

Photo / Foto: Heiki Valk

Jewellery was also represented by a simple closed ring and four signet rings. The shields of three signet rings were decorated with a lattice ornament. Two items with a round shield and a narrow arch, characteristic for the 17th century, had sparse lattice ornamentation ( $2 \times 2$  stripes) and hatches between the squares (Fig. 6: 6, 8), one shield had  $3 \times 3$  stripes (Fig. 6: 7). The signet rings with a bird image (Fig. 6: 5) are characteristic for the second half of the 16th century (Valk 1991, 190–191). The simple closed ring (Fig. 6: 3) dates from the 18th century. Such finds are not known from the mid-15th to 17th century contexts of southern Estonia. From jewellery also a pendant fragment (TÜ 2929: 63) was found. The artefact finds included, in addition, a small bronze ring, a possible belt ring (Fig. 6: 2), a tiny decorative nail with a gilded head (Fig. 6: 9) and some buttons from Early Modern or Modern times.

The most numerous find group were coins – in total 69 items (Table). The earliest of them are two *scherfs* of Tartu prince-bishops – of Bartholomaeus Savijerwe (1441–1459) and Andreas Peper (1468–1473), and two schillings of the Livonian Order – one minted in Tallinn between 1424 and 1470, and the other during the reign of Wolter von Plettenberg (1535).

The assemblage contained eight coins from the period of the Livonian War (1558–1582/83): a schilling of the free town of Riga (1567), two Dole schillings (1572), a Lithuanian *grosch* minted in Vilnius (1563), three Swedish schillings minted in Tallinn by John III (1568–1592) and a 2-öre coin minted in Stockholm (1573). The period of the Polish rule (1582–1625) was represented by a schilling (1621) and a *dreipölker* (1624) of Sigismund III Vasa, both minted in Riga.

Coins from the period of the Swedish power (1625–1704/10) included 27 Swedish items, the earliest being a Stockholm öre from 1621. From the rulers of Sweden, Gustavus II Adolphus (1611–1632) was represented with one, queen Christina (1632–54) with four, Charles X Gustavus (1654–1660) with three, Charles XI (1660–1697) with 17 coins, 16 of them schillings minted in Riga between 1660 and 1665, and the latest Swedish coin was a *dreipölker* of Charles XII (1697–1718), minted in 1701 also in Riga. One Swedish schilling struck in Riga could not be identified due to poor preservation. To the period of Swedish rule belong also four schillings of John II Casimir Vasa (1659–1668).

**Table.** Coins found from Karula churchyard.

**Tabel.** Karula kirikuaast leitud mündid.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Heiki Valk

No. / Nr	Issued by / Vermija	Denomination / Nominaal	Comments / Kommentaariid
<b>MEDIEVAL</b>			
1	Livonian Order, Tallinn, 1424–70	schilling	
2	Tartu BR, Bartholomaeus Savijerwe (1441–59)	scherf	
3	Tartu BR, Andreas Peper (1468–73)	scherf	
4	Livonian Order, Wolter von Plettenberg, 1535	schilling	
<b>EARLY MODERN TIMES, Livonian War and the time of Polish rule</b>			
5	Poland, Vilnius, Sigismund II Augustus, 1563	grosch	
6	Riga free town, 1567	schilling	
7, 8	Sweden, Tallinn, John III, 1568–92 (2)	schilling	
9	Sweden, Tallinn, John III, s.d., mintmaster Urban Dehn (1570–81)	schilling	
10, 11	Poland, Dole, Sigismund II Augustus, 1572 (2)	schilling	
12	Sweden, Stockholm, John III, 1573	2 öre	
13	Poland, Riga, Sigismund III, 1621	schilling	
14	Poland, Sigismund III, Bydgoszcz (Bromberg), 1624	dreipölker	pendant
<b>EARLY MODERN TIMES, period of Swedish rule</b>			
15	Sweden, Stockholm, Gustavus II Adolphus, 1621	öre	pendant
16	Sweden, Riga, Gustavus II Adolphus, 1611–32	schilling	from the church
17	Sweden, Riga, Gustavus II Adolphus (Christina), 1634	schilling	
18–20	Sweden, Riga, Christina, 1644 (2), 1653	schilling	
21–23	Sweden, Riga, Charles X Gustavus, 1654–60, 1655, 1657	schilling	1 pendant
24–27	Poland, John II Casimir, 1659–68 (3), 1665	schilling	
28–39	Sweden, Livonia, Charles XI, 1660–65 (3), 1661 (2), 1662 (2), 1663 (3), 1664, 1665	schilling	
40	Sweden, Stockholm, Charles XI, 1667	öre	
41–43	Sweden, Riga, Charles XI, 1661–65 (2), 1664	schilling	
44	Sweden, Riga, 17th c.	schilling	
45	Sweden, Riga, Charles XII, 1701	dreipölker	
<b>EARLY MODERN TIMES, Russian Empire</b>			
46	Russia, 1730s–50s	denga	
47	Russia, Peter II, 1730	5 kopeks	
48–51	Russia, Anna Ivanovna, 1731 (2), 1736, 1739	denga	
52	Russia, Anna Ivanovna, 1734	kopek	
53–55	Russia, Anna Ivanovna, 1735 (2), 1736	polushka	
56–58	Russia, Elizabeth Petrovna, 1743, 1744, 1753	denga	
59	Russia, Elizabeth Petrovna, 1759	kopek	
60–62	Russia, Nicholas I, 1842, 1852 (2)	kopek	
63–64	Russia, Alexander II, 1859, 1875	2 kopeks	
65	Russia, Alexander II, 1880	3 kopeks	
66	Russia, Nicholas II, 1912	10 kopeks	
<b>MODERN TIMES, Republic of Estonia</b>			
67	Estonia, 1928	25 cents	
68	Estonia, 1929	cent	
69	Estonia, 1931	5 cents	

Russian copper coins from the 18th century were represented by 14 dengas, kopeks and *polushkas* – nine from the 1730s, two from the 1740s, one from 1753 and 1759 and one from the 1730s–1750s. From the 19th century there were only six Russian kopeks – from 1842, 1852 (2 items), 1859, 1875, and 1889, from the 20th century – a Russian kopek (1912), and three coins of the Republic of Estonia (1928, 1929, 1931).

Burials in the churchyard were confirmed also by some stray finds of bones, both from north and south of the church. Although also a cremated, almost black bone fragment (TÜ 2886: 58), was found, burnt bones from churchyards cannot definitely testify cremation burials, as suggested before (Valk 2017) – they may also originate from bones exposed in the churchyards, accidentally or deliberately burnt in fire (Valk 2020, 121–122).

## DISCUSSION

The parish of Karula is first mentioned in 1392 when Fredericus Caghener was appointed priest of *Carwele* parish church in Tartu Prince-Bishopric after the recent death of the former priest Martinus Schaak (Kenkman 1932, 366). The fact that no coins or artefacts from before mid-15th century were found from the churchyard corresponds well with the architectural dating of Karula church. The find assemblage from the 15th and 16th centuries consists mainly of coins and the earliest artefact which might date from that period is a small degenerated penannular brooch. Considering that churchyards functioned as cemeteries in the Middle Ages and the fact that jewellery items of that time are common in the rural churchyards of southern Estonia, the reasons for the lack of medieval jewellery from Karula remain unclear. This circumstance gives grounds to ask if the stone church really was preceded by an earlier timber building in its present location.

Judging by coins and jewellery finds, the churchyard was intensively used during the 17th century, although the church stood at least partly in ruins for most of the period. The roof of the building was fully fallen in 1613 and the surroundings of the church had grown into bushes (Bunge 1857, 26). The choir had been restored by 1651, but most of the church stood in poor condition almost until the end of the 17th century (Kenkman 1932, 369). Repairing the church was finished only by 1700 (Merila-Lattik 2005, 80) when also the new bell was donated to the church by local peasants.

It remains unclear why most of the finds from Karula date from the Early Modern times – mainly from the 17th century. As a probable reason for disproportions in the temporal distribution of finds, earlier nonprofessional looting of the site can be suggested; brooches of earlier centuries were bigger in size and more easy to find. Previous looting is referred to also by most irregular and uneven distribution of finds in the churchyard (Fig. 3). Similar irregularity has formerly been observed in the churchyard of Helme (Valk 2020).

The jewellery items and coins may originate, however, from different sources: from disturbed burials and from activities and events in the churchyard. Finds outside the medieval churchyard of Nõo certify that intensive cultural deposits may also result from church fairs (Valk & Kiudsoo 2020). Written data confirm that ‘superstitious’ practices and offerings, also at churches and graves were a serious problem for Livonian church authorities until the end of the 17th century (LLO 1705, 8, 570–572; Köpp 1959, 217–240). Thus, coins and jewellery from the 17th century may have been lost during crowded popular festivities which included also selling food, drinks, and other goods.

Finds from the churchyard show that the character of ritual practices in the churchyard has been similar also during the first half of the 18th century. Evidently, the fall in the number



of coins since the mid-18th century reflects changes in popular activities and religious practices in the churchyard. The rapid decrease of finds since then may strongly be affected by the fact that burying in churches and churchyards was prohibited by central authorities of the Russian Empire in 1771–1773 (Hausmann 1903, 150–151). As a result, graves were not visited any more by later generations, and the number of activities in churchyards greatly decreased in southern Estonia.

## CONCLUSIONS

Metal detecting in and around the ruins of medieval Karula Church did not give new information about the location of the parish centre before the mid-15th century. The reasons for the low number of artefact finds from the 15th and 16th centuries remain unclear. They may refer to former looting of the site by using metal detectors, but may also be caused by the unrepresentative character of the find assemblage. The existing archaeological material is too scanty to make definite conclusions about the time when the parish centre of Karula was founded in Lüllemäe.

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## LEIUD KARULA KIRIKAIAST JA KIRIKUST

Heiki Valk ja Mait Raudsepp

Ehitusloolistel andmetel 15. sajandist pärinev Karula kirik on seisnud varemeis alates 1944. aastast (jn 1). Et ette valmistada müüride konserveerimist, eemaldati 2020. ja 2021. aastal nende ümbrusse sõjajärgsel ajal tekkinud varingurusu kiht. Rusueemalduse arheoloogilise järelevalve raames toimusid detektoriuuringud ka laiemalt kirikaia.

Koori põhjaküljel tulid nähtavale keskaegse, arvatavasti 1835.–1836. aasta ümberehituse ajal lammutatud käärkambri põhjaseina jäänused, mis paiknesid pikihoone põhjaseina joonel. Kuigi koori idaseina joonelt ja pikihoone põhjalöövi idaseinast u 4,2–5,1 m kauguselt leiti ligi 70 cm paksuse varauusaegse tellismüüri põhi, jäi keskaegse koori idaseina asukoht ebaselgeks. Käärkambri loodenurgas oli säilinud tellispõranda kive.

Kiriku pikiteljel tuli varingurusude alt nähtavale sõjaagese põlengukihi peale tellistest laotud ligi 1,5 m laiune tee, mis viis lääneportaali juurest altari poole. Tõenäoliselt oli see rajatud sõjajärgsetel aastatel varemetes peetud leeriteenistuste jaoks. Koori põrand oli betoneeritud.

Kiriku oreilirõdu postidest vahetult lääne poolt leiti detektoriuuringutel 1944. aasta põlengus hävinud kirikukella jäänuseid. Ühel suuremal tükil oli tekst ... *NO 1700*, teisel *GERHARD ME (või MF)* (jn 2). Kell oli põlengus purunenud väikesteks tükkideks, millest paljud olid väga tugevalt sulanud. Pikihoone keskelt leiti ka tulekahjus hävinud, tules väikesteks tükkideks lagunenuid kroonlühtri jäänused. Tegemist oli 19. sajandi lõpust või 20. sajandi algusest pärineva vabrikutoodanguga. Detektoriuuringutel avastati kirikust veel 16. sajandi pitsatsõrmus (jn 6: 4) ja rootsiaegne killing.

Enamik leide saadi kiriku ümbrusest, kus võis tõdeda tihedama leiukontsentratsiooniga alasid (jn 3). Võimalik, et leidude ebaühtlane levik on tingitud varasemast detektorirüütest kirikaia. Valdavalt

oli tegemist müntide ja 17.–18. sajandist pärit ehetega. Leitud 21 sõle seas oli vaid üks hoburaudsõlg, tõenäoliselt 15.–16. sajandist. Veel tulid nähtavale seitse rootsiaegset südasõlge (jn 4), 12 väikest vitssõlge (jn 5) ja ühe pliisulamist tähtsõle katke (jn 6: 1), varauusaegne lihtne vitssõrmus (jn 6: 3), neli pitsatsõrmust (jn 6: 5–8), oletatav vasesulamist vöörõngas (jn 6: 2) ja kullatud peaga ehisnael (jn 6: 9).

Kirikaia leiti kokku 69 münti (Tabel). Keskajast pärineb 4 raha – kaks Tartu piiskopkonna šerfi (1441–1459 ja 1468–1473), Liivimaa ordu Tallinna killing (1424–1470) ja 1535. aasta killing. Liivimaa sõja ajast (1558–1582) on kaheksa, Poola ajast (1582–1625) kaks ja Rootsi ajast 31 münti, sealhulgas 27 Rootsi ja neli Poola vermingut. Leitud müntidest hilisem oli Karl XII 1701. aasta Riia dreipõlker. Vene vaskmüntidest kuulub neliteist 18. sajandisse, kuus 19. sajandisse ja üks 20. sajandi algusesse. Leiti ka kolm raha esimesest Eesti iseseisvusaajast. Kirikaia leidis vähesel määral inimluid, sealhulgas üks põlenud luukild.

Kuigi Karula preestrit mainitakse esmakordselt aastal 1392, ei viinud uuringute tulemused praeguse kihelkonnakeskuse dateeringut varasemaks varemeis kiriku ehitusloolisest dateeringust. Samas ei pruugi võrdlemisi vähene leiumaterjal olla kirikaia kui ter-viku suhtes esinduslik ja Karula kiriku oma praegusesse asukohta rajamise aja küsimus jääb kindla vastuseteta. Samuti on selgusetu, miks on 15.–16. sajandi leide võrreldes 17.–18. sajandi omadega sedavõrd vähe. Varauusaegsed leiud kirikaiaist võivad pärineda nii matustest kui ka samas pühade, eriti kiriku nimepüha ajal toimunud kirikulaadadest. Uuringute tulemused viitavad sellele, et kirikaia toimunud tegevused olid 18. sajandi algupoolal samasugused nagu Rootsi ajal. Hilisemate müntide vähene hulk näitab, et inimtegevus kirikaia vähenes oluliselt alates kirikaedadesse matmise keelustamisest Liivimaal 1772.–1773. aastal.