

## RESCUE EXCAVATIONS AT THE OBINITSA BARROW CEMETERY

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After a longer interval the investigation of the barrows of Setumaa was resumed in 1999. The Institute of History carried out rescue excavations on an endangered round barrow at the southern side of the Obinitsa barrow cemetery (see Fig. 1: 2; Aun 1999) with the support from the Meremäe parish administration and the Setu Development Foundation. The Obinitsa barrow cemetery, one of the largest cemeteries of the Culture of Long Barrows in Estonia, is situated on the western bank of the Tuhkavitsa valley (Aun 1992, 108–110, Fig. 47). The original number of the barrows in the cemetery is not known, but according to the available information it was at least 50. The Obinitsa barrows lie in several groups (Fig. 1). In the largest, the main group, 36 barrows are preserved. Three of the eight long barrows are so-called combined ones, consisting of the round and the long part. The smaller group, about 100 m northeast of the main one, is comprised of four round barrows. Some barrows lie in the Obinitsa churchyard: at least one long barrow is recognisable. According to O. Parmas (1922, 13) there were three round barrows with a stone circle but now there are two round *zhalniks* preserved with the diameter of about 3 m in the northern part of the churchyard. About 80 m ENE from the Obinitsa churchyard, a smaller stone cross was still preserved in 1920s, which is now destroyed. By oral tradition the round barrows of Obinitsa are called war barrows, and the long barrows are considered to be trenches dating from the time of the Lithuanian war (*op. cit.*)

In preparation for the XVI Archaeological Congress, which was to take place in 1916 in Pskov but was postponed because of the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian amateur archaeologist V. N. Kreiton investigated the Obinitsa barrows. In 1913 he excavated seven barrows, one long and six round barrows (Kreiton 1913, 10 ff.). Kreiton discovered cremated bones, charred remains of wooden constructions and big granite stones in the barrows. He also found potsherds and a bronze spiral ring. In one of the barrows, a clay vessel covered a cluster of cremated bones (Sedov 1974, Pl. 19: 6).

The southern part of the barrow investigated in 1999 (Fig. 1: 2) was damaged (see Photo) by the clearance work carried out the previous year. The same barrow was used as a sandpit in the spring of 1999. In doing so, a few big stones came to light in the central part of the barrow. The diameter of the round barrow had been 10–11 m and the height 1.1–1.2 m. The ditch surrounding the barrow could be traced only at the northern foot. The mound consisted of yellow sand containing



Fig. 1. The barrow cemetery of Obinitsa. Location plan. 1 barrows, 2 the round barrow no 7, excavated in 1999.

Joon. 1. Obinitsa kääbaskalmistu asendiskeem. 1 kääpad, 2 1999. aastal läbikaevatud ümar-kääbas nr. 7.

small pieces of charcoal, as well as patches and veins of greyish and whitish sand. In the western part of the barrow there was a large entrenchment (Fig. 2: 2), the bottom of which extended into the original soil. Small fragments of charcoal and burnt sand were discovered in the entrenchment.

Under the mound of the barrow there was an area of sub-barrow soil, oblong in the N-S direction, measuring 5.7 x 7.5 m (Fig. 2: 5), which contained dark coaly sand, mainly in the central part. In the upper part of the mound, at a depth of only 5-7 cm from the present-day surface, cremated bones came to light (Fig. 2: 9). The

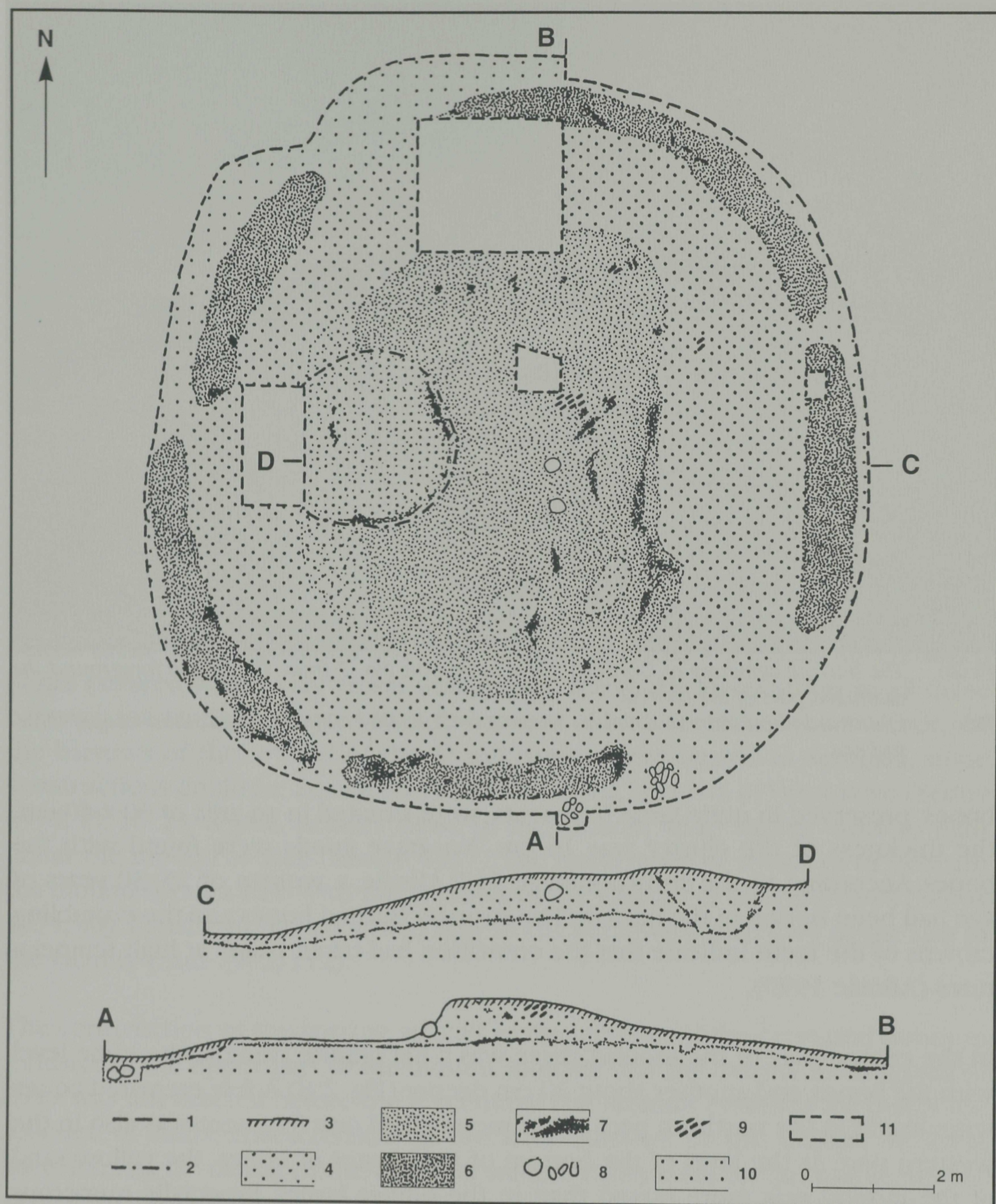


Fig. 2. The barrow cemetery of Obinitsa. General plan of the barrow no 7. 1 contour of the excavation, 2 contour of the entrenchment, 3 sod layer (in the cross-sections), 4 the mixed yellow sand of the mound, 5 the sub-barrow ground, 6 grey sand, 7 charcoal and coaly sand, 8 stones, 9 cremated bones, 10 yellow natural sand, 11 the area not excavated.

Joon. 2. Obinitsa kääbaskalmistu. Üldplaan kääpast nr. 7. 1 kaevandi piirjoon, 2 sissekaeve piirjoon, 3 kamarakiht (läbilõigetel), 4 kääpakuhjatise segatud kollane liiv, 5 kääpa-alune maapind, 6 hall liiv, 7 süsi ja söesegune liiv, 8 kivid, 9 põlenud luud, 10 kollane looduslik liiv, 11 kaevamata ala.



*Photo. The barrow cemetery of Obinitsa. View of barrow No. 7 from SW; in the foreground the damaged part of the barrow.*

*Foto. Obinitsa kääbaskalmistu. Vaade kääpale nr. 7 edelast. Esiplaanil on näha kääpa lõhutud osa.*

bones, preserved in quite large fragments, were situated in an area of 30 x 40 cm, the thickness of the cluster was 16 cm. No grave goods were found with the bones. According to the anthropologist Raili Allmäe, a woman of 25–30 years of age had been buried in the barrow. The strongly burned bones and the crumbling crowns of the teeth indicate that the cremation had taken place at high temperatures (Allmäe 1999).

In the central part of the mound, there was a big granite stone at the same level with the bones, and another about 20 cm deeper (Fig. 2: 8). A few cremated bones were found in the northern part of the mound, and one fragment was also in the western part. At the level of the bottom of the cluster of bones, the yellow sand of the mound was more mixed than in the higher layers. Especially numerous were the patches of greyish and white sand to the east and southeast of the bones. Such patches of different colour in the yellow sand indicate that the cremated bones could have been deposited on the surface of an already existing mound.

At the barrow, investigated in 1999, an exceptional trait was observed: the ditch surrounding the mound had been dug in five separate segments (Fig. 2), not as a whole, as is typical of the SE Estonian barrows belonging to the Culture of Long Barrows in the East-European forest zone in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. Unfortunately we have no information about the ditches that surrounded the barrows excavated by Kreiton. At the foot of some of the barrows on the northern bank of the Piusa River, I have observed 3–4 holes, where probably sand was dug to pile up the mound (Aun 1992, 105). Since these barrows have not been excavated, we are not able to determine the nature of their surrounding ditches.

From the barrows of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, I have discovered stones in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> barrows of the Rõsna-Saare II barrow cemetery. As in the Obinita barrow excavated in 1999, the stones in those barrows were also situated near the bone clusters and almost at the same level. I presume that the stones were used in the barrows to mark the nearby burials (Aun 1992, 111). Kreiton (*op. cit.*) discovered stones in three of the Obinita barrows. In one of them, the stones were associated with a later burial. The second barrow with stones contained neither bones nor other finds. In the third barrow, three big stones and a fourth one below them were associated with the cremation burial – a cluster of cremated bones covered with a clay vessel was located above the lower stone. In all these barrows, the stones occurred in isolation and did not form any construction. Of the barrows of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium investigated in Setumaa, stone constructions could be assumed in one of the long barrows of Verepkovo (Sedov 1974, Pl. 16: 2), where, besides those in the mound, more stones came to light under the mound as well (Saadre 1937). The occurrence of stones in or beneath the mound is not a rule with the barrows of the Culture of Long Barrows (Sedov 1974, 40). Usually stones are found only in the barrows where they occur also in the vicinity (Aun 1992, 112).

The construction of the barrow, as well as the location of the cremated bones in a cluster in the upper part of the mound, indicate that the barrow investigated in 1999 was not erected before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The indirect evidence for this is the absence of finds, characteristic of the later barrows of the Culture of Long Barrows. The C<sup>14</sup> dating of the charcoal sample taken from the pit under the SW part of the mound produced 850±40 for the age of the sample, 835±50 with dendro-correction (Ta-2715). The result (12<sup>th</sup> century) seems to be too late, and apparently does not date the mound with the cremation burial. Since the charcoal sample was taken from the pit in the damaged part of the barrow where the mound had been destroyed, it is likely that the pit was an entrenchment of a later date.

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## PÄÄSTEKAEVAMISED OBINITSA KÄÄBASKALMISTUL

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Ajaloo Instituut kaevas 1999. aastal Meremäe Vallavalitsuse ning Setu Arendusseltsi kaasabil Obinita kääbaskalmistu lõunaservas läbi ühe hävimisohtu sattunud ümarkääpa (joon. 1: 2). Obinita kääbaskalmistu (joon. 1) paikneb Tuhkavitsa oru läänekaldal ja on Eestis üks suuremaid pikk-kääbaste kultuuri kääbastikke. Kääbaste esialgset arvu selles kalmistus pole teada, kuid olemasolevad teated lubavad arvata, et neid võis olla vähemalt poolesaja ringis. Rahvasuus on Obinita ümarkääpaid peetud sõjakääbasteks ning pikk-kääpaid Leedu sõja ajast pärit laskevallideks.

Seoses ettevalmistustöödega XVI arheoloogiakongressiks, uuris Obinita kääpaid Vene asjaarmastaja-arheoloog V.N. Kreiton. 1913. a. kaevas ta läbi seitse kääbast, millest kuus olid ümarad ja üks pikk. Kääbastest leidis Kreiton põlenud luid, söestunud puitehitiste jäänuseid ja suuremaid raudkive. Leidudena sai ta savinõukilde ja pronksist spiraalsõrmuse. Ühes kääpas kattis põlenud luudepesa suurem savinõu.

1999. aastal uuritud kääpa nr. 7 lõunapoolne osa (vt. foto) oli lõhutud aasta tagasi toimunud koristustöödega; kevadel oli hakatud samast kääpast liiva võtma ning siis tulid kääpa keskosas nähtavale üksikud suuremad kivid. Ümarkääpa läbimõõt oli 10–11 m ja kõrgus 1,1–1,2 m. Kääbast piiravat kraavi oli vaevu märgata vaid põhjajalamil. Kääbas oli kuhjatud kollasest liivast, milles oli väikesi sötükke, hallika ning valkja liiva laike ja viirge. Kääpa lääneosas oli samblakihi all näha suuremat sissekaevet (joon. 2: 2), mille põhi ulatus puutumata looduslikku pinnasesse. Sissekaeves täheldati sötükikesi ja põlenud liiva. Kääpakuhjatise all oli põhja-lõuna suunas piklik 5,7 x 7,5 m kääpaaluse

maapinna ala (joon. 2: 5), kus söesegust tumedamat liiva oli rohkem kääpa keskel. Kuhjatise ülaosas, tänapäevasest maapinnast vaid 5–7 cm sügavamal, tuli nähtavale põlenud luid (joon. 2: 9). Üsna suurte tükkidena säilinud luud asetsesid kuni 16 cm paksuse pesana u. 30 x 40 cm suurusel alal. Mingeid panuseid luude juures ei olnud. Antropoloog Raili Allmäe määrangul oli kääpasse maetud 25–30 aasta vanune naine. Tugevasti põlenud luud ja hammaste murenenud krooniosad osutavad sellele, et krematsioon pidi toimuma kõrgel temperatuuril.

Luupesast u. 1 m lõuna pool oli kääpakuhjatise keskosas, luudega peaaegu samal sügavusel, üks, ja sellest u. 20 cm sügavamal, veel teine raudkivi. Üksikuid põlenud luid leiti ka kääpa põhja- ja lääneosast. Luupesa põhja tasemel oli kääpakuhjatise kollane liiv märksa rohkem segatud. Eriti palju oli kollases liivas hallika ja helevalge liiva laiike luupesast ida ja kagu pool, mis osutavad sellele, et põlenud luid võidi panna algse kääpakuhjatise pinnale.

1999. aastal uuritud kääpa juures tõdeti erandliku asjaoluna seda, et kääbast ümbritsev kraav polnud kaevatud jalamile mitte katkematu süvendina (nagu see on tavaline Ida-Euroopa metsavöötme alal I at teisel poolel pKr levinud pikk-kääbaste kultuuri kääbastele Kagu-Eestis, sh Setumaal) vaid viie eraldi osana (joon. 2).

Nii kääpa ehitus kui ka põlenud luude paiknemine kogumina kuhjatise ülaosas osutavad sellele, et uuritud kääbast ei rajatud enne 8. sajandit. Kaudselt kinnitab seda dateeringut ka panuste puudumine, mis on iseloomulik pikk-kääbaste kultuuri hilisematele kääbastele. Kääpa edelaosast, kääpaalusesse maapinda kaevatud lohust korjatud söe dateerimine andis  $C^{14}$  proovi vanuseks  $850 \pm 40$  ja dendroparandusega  $835 \pm 50$  aastat. Saadud tulemus (12. sajand) näib olevat liiga hiline ja ilmselt ei dateeri see põletusmateriale kääbast. Kuna prooviks võetud süsi pärineb kääpa lõhutud osast, kus kääpakuhjatis oli hävitatud, on usutav, et saadud dateering näitab muistisest hilisema sissekaeve vanust.