



Archaeological excavations near Nõo churchyard

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INTRODUCTION

Archaeological investigations in Nõo, Tartu County, were conducted in May 2024 in the area designated for the planned parking area for public transport. The excavation area was located 150 m south of the medieval parish church of Nõo, on the eastern side of Oja Street (Fig. 1). The study area is located north of the Nõo stream on the bank of a natural floodplain.

There were no protected archaeological monuments in the study area. The investigation was carried out in an area where archaeological deposits were identified during preliminary investigations (Tammet & Kraut 2023). In the autumn of 2024, the extent of the occupation layer was also specified by trial pits under the supervision of Ants Kraut (OÜ Muinasprojekt). The work was coordinated with the National Heritage Board (MA). As a result of the preliminary investigations, it was decided to partially archaeologically investigate the area in order to clarify the nature and age of the identified deposits. The research was conducted by archaeologist Mihkel Tammet (OÜ Muinasprojekt) and Silver Jäger, who worked as an assistant on the site.



Fig. 1. Location of the investigation area. 1 – the parking area for buses, 2 – the excavation area, 3 – a moist area affected by springs.

Jn 1. Uurimisala asendiplaan. 1 – busside parkla, 2 – kaevand, 3 – niiskem allikane koht heinamaal.

Map / Kaart: Mihkel Tammet

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND EARLIER INVESTIGATIONS

The St Laurence church in Nõo (Germ. *Nüggen*) was built in the third quarter of the 13th century (Alttoa 1994). No archaeological investigations have been conducted in the church itself; however, small-scale rescue excavations were carried out in the churchyard in 1998 (Jonuks & Tvauri 1998) and 2015 (Malve 2016).

In 2019, archaeological investigations were carried out immediately to the south of the present Nõo churchyard directed by Heiki Valk. During the studies, a layer rich in finds was identified in the area between the road and the churchyard; the unearthed coins were associated with church fairs. During the excavations, a layer of a settlement site presumably in use from the Final Iron Age until the Modern Period was also identified (Valk & Kiudsoo 2020).

In 1994, trial excavations directed by Villu Kadakas and Jaak Mäll were carried out at the site of the Nõo parsonage, located approximately 100 metres southwest of the church, yielding finds dating from the 17th–18th centuries (TÜ 151). Archaeological investigations were also directed by Peeter Piirits in 2020 at the location of the former parsonage building (Piirits 2020), identifying parts of the building's basement structures.

A settlement site (reg. no. 12893) has been identified on the banks of the Nõo stream, in the southern part of Järve Street, approximately 400 m east of the study area discussed in the present article. This was discovered by Andres Vindi in 1994 (Vindi 1994). No archaeological excavations have been conducted at the settlement site, but the fragments of earthenware collected from its surface (TÜ 230) date from the 13th–15th centuries.

EXCAVATIONS

During the preliminary investigations conducted in 2023, a 5–10 cm thick, well-separated carbonaceous occupation layer was found at the eastern side of Oja Street (Tammet & Kraut 2023, photo 2; 3). Before the planned 2024 earthworks for the parking lot for buses, a trial trench was dug to identify the existence and extent of this deposit in the parking lot area (Fig. 2). Medieval and early modern finds were found in the trench. Since the existence of occupation layer was also confirmed in the parking lot area, it was decided to archaeologically investigate the area of 200 m² (Fig. 3).

Since it was determined during the preliminary investigations that the occupation layer is exposed at a depth of 20–35 cm from the ground, a 20 cm thick layer of sod was stripped from the area under investigation. Further investigations were carried out layer by layer. The archaeological deposits were sieved. A metal detector was used for the recovery of metal objects.

The occupation layer consisted of two distinct strata (Fig. 4). The uppermost layer (Layer 1) varied in thickness, measuring only 15 cm in the southern part of the excavation, 25 cm in the northern part, and up to 30 cm in certain areas. The layer was excavated in two stages. The upper part of the layer (1a) was characterised by intense carbonaceous soil, which in the lower part of the layer (1b) was mixed with manure and peat. The majority of the finds originated from the lower part of layer 1b. Layer 2, a 5–10 cm thick greyish and charcoal-rich deposit, had survived only in patches in the southern part of the excavation area.



Fig. 2. A trench, which marks the eastern boundary of the excavation area.

Jn 2. Proovikraav, mis paiknes kaevandi idaservas.

Photo / Foto: Silver Jäger

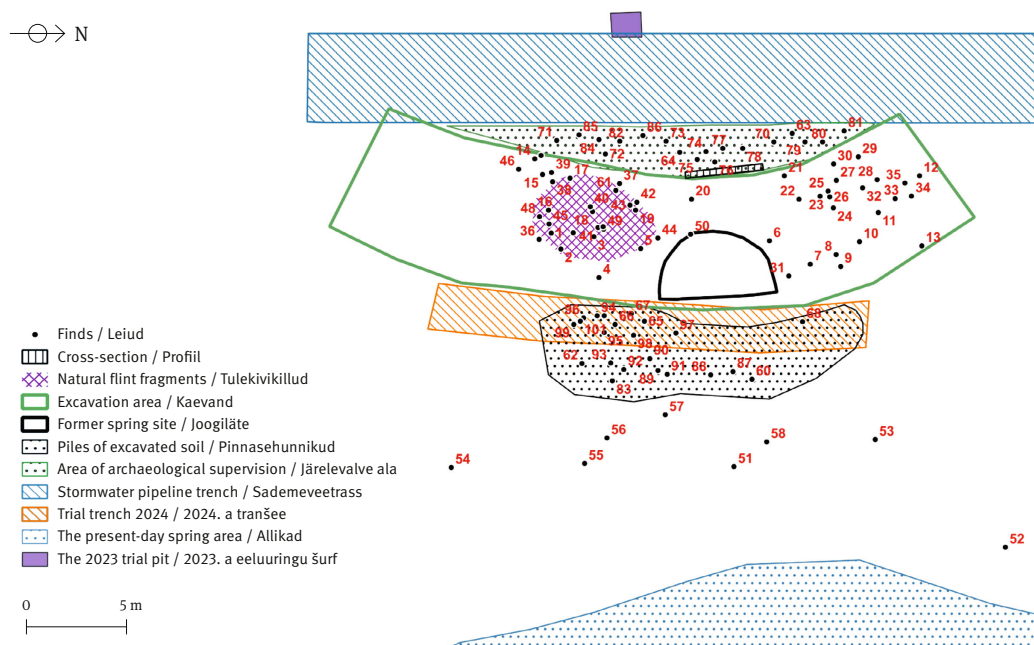


Fig. 3. Excavation area.

Jn 3. Kaevandi plaan.

Drawing / Joonis: Mihkel Tammet



Fig. 4. Cross-section of the excavation area.

Jn 4. Kaevandi profiil.

Drawing / Joonis: Mihkel Tammet

THE FINDS

A total of 101 artefacts were recovered during the investigation. The most numerous category of finds were coins, 64 in total (Table). Most of the coins were minted by local landlords, dating from the period of Medieval Livonia (until 1558), and their proportion in the assemblage is 56%. The oldest coin is a *scherf* minted in the Diocese of Tartu by Dietrich IV Resler (1413–1441). The upheavals of the Livonian War and the subsequent conflicts between Sweden and Poland (1558–1625) are represented by 26 coins. From the period of the Swedish rule (1625/29–1710), only a single specimen was found – namely, a *schilling* struck in Riga town mint under the reign of Charles XI (1660–1697). This coin was discovered in the upper part of Layer 1. The coins were mainly found from Layer 1. They were mostly without holes, which indicates that they were lost while in circulation.

Table. *Coins. In the case of foreign coins, not the time of their minting, but the date of their first appearance in circulation in Livonia has been considered when connecting them with time periods¹*

Tabel. *Mündid. Välismaiste müntide seostamisel kindlate ajastutega pole arvestatud nende verimisaega, vaid aega, mil nad ilmusid Liivimaa raharinglusse*

Compiled by / Koostanud: Andres Tvauri

BR – bishopric / piiskopkond

ABR – archbishopric / peapiiskopkond

No. / Nr	Issued by / Müntija	Denomination / Vääring	Items / Münste
MEDIEVAL, after the monetary reform in the 1420s			
1	Visby, 14th c. second half	örtug	1
2–10	Livonian Order, Tallinn, c. 1425–1555	penny	9
11	Tartu BR, Dietrich IV Resler (1413–1441)	sch erf	1
12	Tartu BR, Andreas Peper (1468–73)	penny	1
13	Tartu BR, Dietrich V Hake (1485–1498)	sch erf	1
14–15	Tartu BR, Johannes III Rope (1499–1505)	sch erf	2
16	Riga ABR, Silvester Stodewescher (1448–1479)	penny	1
17	Tartu BR, Johannes V Blankenfeld (1518–1527)	penny	1
18–25	Tartu BR, Johannes VI Bey (1528–1543)	penny	8
26–31	Livonian Order, Riga, Wolter von Plettenberg, 1532 (2), 1533 (3), s.d. (1)	penny	6
32–33	Livonian Order, Tallinn, Hermann von Brüggenei-Hasenkamp, Riga, 1537 (1), 1538 (1)	schilling	2
34	Riga ABR, Koknese, Wilhelm von Brandenburg (1540–1547)	schilling	1
35	Tartu BR, Hermann II Wesel (1552–1558)	penny	1
36	Livonian Order, Riga, Wilhelm Fürstenberg, 1558	schilling	1
37	Livonian Order, Tallinn, 16th c.	schilling	1
EARLY MODERN TIMES, Livonian War and time of the Polish Rule			
38	Poland-Lithuania, Vilnius, Sigismund I, 1520	1/2 groschen	1
39	Russia, Novgorod, Ivan IV (1533–84)	kopek	1
40	Russia, Pskov, Ivan IV (1533–84)	kopek	1
41–43	Russia, Tver, Ivan IV (1533–84)	denga	3
44	Russia, Moskva, Ivan IV (1533–84)	denga	1
45	Russia, 16th/17th c.	denga	1
46–47	Riga Free town, 1574	schilling	2
48–51	Riga Free town (1563–1579)	schilling	4
52	Sweden, Tallinn, Eric XIV, 1564	schilling	1
53–55	Sweden, Tallinn, Eric XIV (1560–1568)	schilling	3
56	Sweden, Tallinn, John III, 1585	fyrk	1
57–61	Sweden, Tallinn, John III (1569–1592)	schilling	5
62	Poland-Lithuania, Dahlen (Dole), 1572	schilling	1
EARLY MODERN TIMES, Period of the Swedish Rule			
63	Sweden, Riga, Charles XI, (1660–1665)	schilling	1
EARLY MODERN TIMES, Russian Empire			
64	Russia, Nikolai I, 1842	kopek	1

¹ To facilitate the comparison of the composition of the coin assemblage under discussion with the coins recovered south of the Nõo churchyard in 2019, the table has been formatted in the same way as in the article presenting the 2019 investigations (Valk & Kiudsoo 2020, tab. 1).

In addition to the coins, three penannular brooches made of copper alloy with long, rolled terminals were recovered from Layer 1 (Fig. 5: 1–3), dated to the 14th–16th centuries. Seven belt studs made of copper and iron alloy (Fig. 5: 4–10) were found, which may originate from leather straps that were part of the horse's equipment. A horseshoe (TÜ 3263: 38) was also found in Layer 1. A signet ring made of copper alloy was unearthed in a heap of excavated soil (Fig. 5: 11), dating from the 16th–17th centuries.

During the research of Layer 2, a penannular brooch with a diamond-shaped cross-section and small rolled terminals (Fig. 5: 12), a tinkler bell (TÜ 3263: 63) and a spiral finger-ring made of a flat copper alloy band (Fig. 5: 13) were found, possibly dating from the Late Iron Age. Two horseshoes (TÜ 3263: 36, 44) and a horse ice-iron were also found in Layer 2. An iron crossbow bolt (Fig. 5: 14) from the 13th–14th century was found, which could have ended up in Layer 2 during hunting or combat.

Only a few sherds of pottery were recovered: two undated earthenware fragments (TÜ 3263: 59) from Layer 2, and a single fragment of glazed redware (TÜ 3263: 41) from Layer 1. The scarcity of ceramic finds indicates that this is not a typical occupation layer of a settlement.



Fig. 5. Finds from Layer 1. 1–3 – penannular brooches, 4–10 – belt studs, 11 – a signet ring. Finds from Layer 2. 12 – a penannular brooch, 13 – a spiral finger-ring, 14 – a crossbow bolt.

Jn 5. Leide kihist 1. 1–3 – hoburaudsõled, 4–10 – rihmanaastud, 11 – pitsatsõrmus. Leide kihist 2. 12 – hoburaudsõlg, 13 – spiraalsõrmus, 14 – ammunooleots.

(TÜ 3263: 16, 9, 71, 42, 43, 20, 65, 49, 6, 7, 63, 5, 15, 48.)

Photo / Foto: Mihkel Tammet

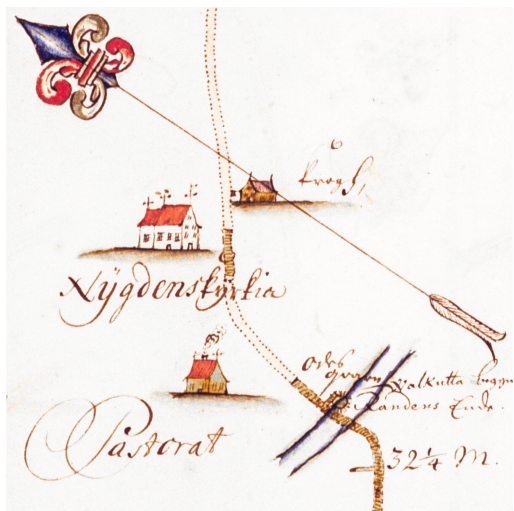


Fig. 6. The Nõo parsonage, church, tavern, and the watermill located by the bridge across the Nõo River on the 1695 road map.

Jn 6. Nõo kirikla, kirik, kõrts ja üle Nõo jõe viiva silla juures asuv vesiveski 1695. aasta teede kaardil.

Map / Kaart: RA, EAA.308.2.70, p. 69.



Fig. 7. Nõo church in the 1920s, view from the south by the old mill dam (Oja Street).

Jn 7. Nõo kirik 1920. aastatel, vaade vana veskitammi (praegune Oja tänav) lõunakaldalt.

Photo / Foto: Gustav Zopp, Võrumaa Museum (VK F 1265: 9 F/n)

DISCUSSION

The assemblage of finds recovered during the investigations discussed here is broadly similar in both composition and overall character to the material uncovered in front of the Nõo churchyard during the 2019 excavations (see Valk & Kiudsoo 2020, 128–137). These findings were interpreted as the remains of annual church fairs (Valk & Kiudsoo 2020, 143). According to an alternative interpretation, the coins ended up in front of the Nõo churchyard as a result of earthworks associated with the replacement of the church floor, during which material from between the walls was displaced (Kiudsoo 2023, 150). In the case of the coins discovered in 2024, however, this interpretation is unlikely, as the examined soil contained no brick or lime mortar fragments, nor any traces of human bones. However, the coin assemblages collected in 2019 and 2024 differ markedly in their composition. In 2019, the majority of coins dated to the 17th–18th centuries, whereas the 2024 assemblage consists almost exclusively of 15th–16th-century coins. Moreover, coins from the 13th–14th centuries were also recovered in 2019, but none were found in 2024.

It is possible that the area investigated in 2024 was situated on the periphery of a former fairground. As the site was located on the waterlogged bank of the Nõo stream, its use differed from that of the area directly in front of the churchyard. It cannot be ruled out that this area was used as a place for trading animals at church fairs. It can be assumed that one of the reasons was the natural springs located here, easily accessible as the watering place for animals. Manure may have got into Layer 2 because the site was used as a water-

ing trough. Studs and fragments of horse ice-iron found in the same layer may also refer to animals at the site. Later, probably in the 17th century, when a watermill was built on the Nõo stream (Fig. 6), the water regime changed, and the springs may have disappeared, as a result of which the drinking place shifted further east to the vicinity of the tavern built in the 17th century, where there is also a pond today (Fig. 7).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the research, the existence of an occupation layer was identified. The finds mainly consisted of coins from the 15th–16th centuries. Some finds from the 13th–14th centuries were also found, possibly associated with a settlement located on the banks of the former floodplain of the Nõo stream. It is likely that in the medieval and early modern periods, there was a watering place for animals in the studied area, which may have been related to church fairs. The above would also explain the coin finds, which cover a relatively long period from the 15th to the 16th century.

One of the most important results of these studies can be considered the discovery of an essentially new type of archaeological monument *in situ* in Estonia – a watering place of animals, which will allow for the search and identification of such objects at other places of public gathering (churches, taverns, etc.) in the future.

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ARHEOLOOGILISED KAEVAMISED NÕO KIRIKUAIA LÄHEDAL

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Arheoloogilised uuringud tehti Nõo alevis seoses busside parkla ja ümberpööramiseks rajamisega. Uuringuala (jn 1) paiknes 150 m Nõo keskaegsest kihelkonnakirikust lõuna pool, Oja tänavast ida pool, Nõo oja põhjakaldal. Sel kohal ei olnud kaitsealust muistist, kultuurikihi olemasolu siin tuvastati 2023. aasta eeluuringutel. 2024. aastal uuriti arheoloogiliselt läbi umbes 200 m² suurune ala (jn 2 ja 3).

Pärast umbes 20 cm paksuse pealmise mättakihi eemaldamist paljandus kuni 40 cm paksune kultuurikiht, milles eristati kaks ladestust (jn 4). Kultuurikihi ülemine osa (kiht 1) oli 15–30 cm paksune ja sisaldas rohkesti sütt. Alumine osa kultuurikihist (kiht 2) oli looduslikul aluspinnasel jälgitav vaid kohati. Seda kihti iseloomustas suur turba- ja sõnnikusisaldus.

Valdav osa leidudest saadi kihist 1. Enim leiti münte, mida saadi 64 (tabel). Müntidest 36 oli vermitud 15. sajandil ja 16. sajandi esimesel poolel. Valdavalt olid need kohalike maahärrade nimel löödud vermin-

gud. 26 münti olid jäänud maha 16. sajandi teisel poolel või 17. sajandi alguses Poola võimu ajal. Vaid üks münt pärines ajast, mil Lõuna-Eesti oli Rootsi võimu all.

Kihist 1 leiti ka kolm vasesulamist laiade rullotsatega hoburaudsõlge (jn 5: 1–3), rihmanaaste (jn 5: 4–10) ja vasesulamist pitsatsõrmus (jn 5: 11). Kihi 1 leiuaines pärineb 15.–16. sajandist. Kihist 2 saadi kitsaste rullotstega vasesulamist hoburaudsõlg (jn 5: 12), kuljus ja spiraalsõrmus (jn 5: 13). Veel leiti kaks hobuserauda, hobuse jäänael ja ammuoleots (jn 5: 14). Kihi 2 leiumaterjali võib ajandada 13.–14. sajandisse.

Kuna kogu kaevandi alalt leiti vaid kolm savinõukildu, pole siin tegemist asula kultuurikihiga. Üldjoontes sarnaneb kogutud leiuaines 2019. aastal Nõo kirikuaia vahetult lõuna poole jäävalt alalt saadud leiukogumiga, mida on tõlgendatud kui tõendeid iga-aastastest kirikulaatadest või kiriku seest pärit

pinnasena. 2024. aastal uuritud kultuurikiht ei pärine tõenäoliselt kirikust, sest selles puuduvad täiesti tellise- ja lubimördipuru ja inimluud. Kuna 2024. aasta kaevand paikneb 2019. uuritud alast umbes 100 m kaugusel oja kaldal, paiknes siin arvatavasti kuni 17. sajandini loomade joogikoht, mida kasutati laatadele müügiks toodud loomade jootmiseks. Viimasele viita-

vad ka hobuseriistade leiud ja sõnnik kultuurikihis. 17. sajandil rajati Nõo oja vesiveski (jn 6) ja loomade joogikoht viidi tõenäoliselt ida pool paiknenud kõrtsi juurde (jn 7). Käsitletavate kaevamiste kõige olulisem tulemus on loomade joogikoha tuvastamine. Sedalaadi muistiseid paikneb tõenäoliselt muudegi Eesti kihelkonnakirikute läheduses.