



# Search for the site of the St Matthew's Day Battle in Vastemõisa, Viljandi County

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## INTRODUCTION

The search for the 1217 Battle of St Matthew's Day (HCL: XXI) site has become an annual large-scale event for licensed detectorists, taking place in this format for the seventh time in 2024. Over the years, metal-detecting surveys have been conducted in the villages of Vanamõisa, Kobruvere and Sürgavere in Põhja-Sakala rural municipality. These surveys have yielded numerous finds, among which the most significant from an archaeological perspective are the Viking Age hoard of silver coins discovered in Vanamõisa (Konsa *et al.* 2019) and an iron bloom from Sürgavere (Jegorov 2023). In addition, data relevant to the settlement history of the area from the Stone Age to the Modern Period have been obtained (Konsa 2020). Previous searches have also produced isolated weapons, such as a crossbow bolt from Vanamõisa and sword pommels from Kobruvere, although these belong to earlier or later periods. No finds that can be directly linked to the 13th-century battle have been identified.

In 2024, the search for the battle site was carried out in present-day Vastemõisa village (historically part of the Suure-Jaani parish), located approximately 12 km northwest of the stronghold of Viljandi.

## PREVIOUS FINDS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN VASTEMÕISA

A stream flows through the modern village of Vastemõisa and has been dammed to form a lake of approximately 4.2 hectares. The earliest archaeological finds from the area are Stone Age flint and quartz flakes discovered at two find spots north of the Vastemõisa stream. One of these (TÜ 2437) is located west of the lake on the property at Vastemõisa tee 26, while the other (TÜ 2438) lies northeast of the lake near the manor house. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, two stone adzes (TÜ 455; PāMu A 700) and two shaft-hole stone axes (AM 268, 269) were recovered from the fields and forest of the Vastemõisa manor, though the exact find locations remain unknown. In addition to these, two more stone adzes (PāMu A 695, 705) were found near the Roosu farmstead.

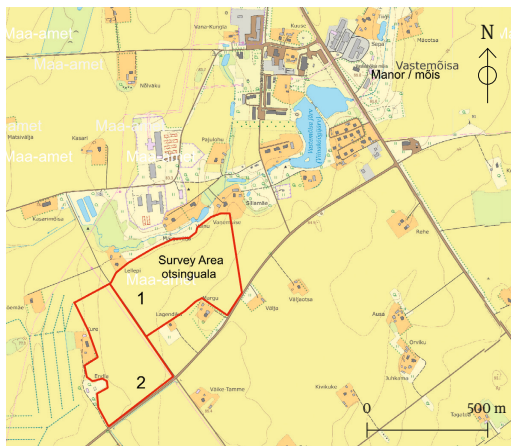
The name Vastemõisa derives from a medieval manor belonging to the Teutonic Order. The precise date of the manor's foundation is unknown, but it is first mentioned in written sources in 1554 under the name *Niggenhaue* (Johansen 1930, 130). Originally, however,



**Fig. 1.** Vastemõisa manor (no. 49) and the village of Järavere (no. 50) on the 1683 map.

**Jn 1.** Vastemõisa mõis (nr 49) ja Järavere küla (nr 50) 1683. aasta kaardil.

Map / Kaart: RA, EAA.308.2.200



**Fig. 2.** Survey areas in the village of Vastemõisa in 2024.

**Jn 2.** 2024. aasta otsingualad Vastemõisa külas.

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board / Maa- ja Ruumiamet

the area was home to the village of Järavere, which no longer exists. An occupation layer containing Late Iron Age and medieval ceramics (TÜ 571; TÜ 2437) has been found near both the southern and western shores of the lake.

According to the Polish land revision of 1584, the village of Järavere (*Jarawer*), with eight farms, belonged to the state manor of Vastemõisa (*folvark Wasth moyza*) (Polnische Akten, 174). On 17th-century maps<sup>1</sup>, the manor is marked south of the stream and west of the main road. Of the seven farms in Järavere, five were located close together on the southern bank of the stream, southwest of the manor (Fig. 1). The manor appears in its current location – north of the Vastemõisa stream and on the eastern side of the road – by the late 18th century, as indicated on the 1797 map of Viljandi County published by Mellin (1797).

The historical centre of Järavere village, on the southern bank of the stream, was situated between the present-day Vanemuise and Lellepi farms (Fig. 2). On the 1825 map (RA, EAA.2072.3.5/II/a, sheet 9), the village still appears as a dense row of farmsteads aligned east–west, with strip fields extending to the south. However, by 1830, the village lands had been incorporated into the manor estate. By the time of the 1901 *one-verst* map (RA, ERA.T-6.3.172, sheet 287), no buildings had remained of the former village.

The 2024 survey took place in the fields that once formed the core area of Järavere village, south of the Vastemõisa stream.

## METHODOLOGY

The principal organiser of the search was detectorist Sten-Erik Unt, who selected the survey areas in consultation with archaeologists. The event was carried out in collaboration with the National Heritage Board (MA) and followed pre-agreed search protocols. The participants submitted a group search notification to the MA and agreed not to claim any finders' fees. The documentation of finds was coordinated by the MA. Altogether 100 detectorists and seven find recorders took part in the fieldwork.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the regional map from 1683 (RA, EAA.308.2.200), two manor maps of Vastemõisa exist from the 18th century, both based on base maps drawn in the final decades of the 17th century (RA, EAA.308.6.208, sheet 1; RA, EAA.308.6.210, sheet 1).

Metal-detecting was conducted over an area of approximately 30 hectares of arable land (Fig. 2). In the morning, the search was carried out in a field east of the village road (Survey Area 1). At the beginning of the search, the detectorists lined up along the edge of the field and moved in formation across to the eastern boundary and back. The find recorders were distributed among the detectorists and moved with them in the field, assisting in the identification and documentation of finds (Fig. 3). When a detectorist discovered an archaeologically significant object, a recorder determined its location using GPS. The mobile application GeoTracker ([geo-tracker.org](http://geo-tracker.org)) was used for documentation, with an average horizontal accuracy of 3–5 metres in open terrain. At midday, the participants gathered and the finds collected thus far were jointly reviewed. In the afternoon, fields west of the village road were surveyed (Survey Area 2).

In accordance with the agreed search rules, signals from ferrous as well as non-ferrous metals were investigated. All scrap iron and modern rubbish were collected from the fields and placed into designated containers, which were subsequently inspected by an archaeologist. The scrap metal was taken to a recycling facility, and the money received was donated to charity.

The finds collected during the search vary in terms of locational accuracy. Some were recorded *in situ* with precise GPS coordinates; others were assigned to specific fields or field sections. Finds from the collection containers can only be associated with the general search area. Most of the finds were retrieved from the ground based on metal detector signals.



**Fig. 3.** Detectorists and find recorders in reflective vests working in Survey Area 1.

**Jn 3.** Detektoristid ja helkurvestides dokumenteerijad esimesel otsingualal.

*Photo / Foto: Nele Kangert*

Although the find depth was not recorded, it is known that the artefacts originated from the ploughsoil and topsoil, typically at depths of up to 30 cm. A few finds were collected from the field surface without the use of a detector in both survey areas. Archaeologists also collected flint and potsherds, some of which were also noticed by detectorists.

Detectorists were permitted to keep finds that were not deemed necessary for inclusion in archaeological collections and that were not classified as scrap metal. For example, coins dating from the 18th century or later were not added to the collections and could be kept by the finders.

## RESULTS

Artefacts were distributed across an area approximately 600 metres east–west and about 500 metres north–south. The majority of finds came from Survey Area 1, specifically from the part of the field located just east of the village road. Roman Iron Age finds were recovered only from Survey Area 1, where they were concentrated in its northeastern part. Finds from other periods were present in both survey areas.

A few flint flakes, interpreted as Stone Age knapping waste, were collected from the surface of the field. These finds are consistent with previously known traces of Stone Age activity in the Vastemõisa area.

The oldest metal find was a bronze sestertius minted in 192 CE, during the final year of the reign of Roman Emperor Commodus (Fig. 4). Although the coin is quite worn, the obverse still shows a recognisable laureate head and the letters AVREL from the inscription *L AEL AVREL COMM AVG P FEL* (*Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus Augustus Pius Felix*). The reverse depicts Hercules standing on the right, with one foot on a ship's prow, resting his club on a rock, and receiving ears of corn from Africa, who is standing on the left.<sup>2</sup> A few other finds may also be associated with the Roman Iron Age. A hundred metres from the coin find spot, a bracelet with tapered rounded ends and decorated with grooves along the edges was found (Fig. 5). In Viljandi County, a similar bracelet has previously been found in the Ülpre *tarand*



**Fig. 4.** Coin minted in 192 CE under Roman Emperor Commodus.

**Jn 4.** Rooma keiser Commoduse münt, vermitud 192. aastal pKr.

Photo / Foto: Maili Roio

<sup>2</sup> American Numismatic Society. Roman Imperial Coinage III, Commodus 641. OCRE <http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.3.com.641>.



cemetery (Vassar 1956, fig. 41: 4). In addition, 60 metres from the bracelet in Survey Area 1, a dark blue, faceted glass bead was found, which may also date from the same period as the previous finds. The sherd of striated pottery, also collected from Survey Area 1, may likewise be related to these finds, although this type of pottery cannot be dated very precisely, as it was in use in southern Estonia over a long period, from the Bronze Age until the 5th century CE (Laul 2001, 174).

In addition to the sesterlius, the following coins were added to the archaeological collections: a quarter of a Viking Age Arabic silver coin, a 15th-century *schilling* from Tallinn, four 15th–17th-century silver wire *kopecks*, and several 17th-century Swedish coins.

From weapons, only a fragment of a socketed spearhead was found in the survey area. Before conservation, it is difficult to determine whether it dates from the prehistoric or medieval period.

The majority of the non-ferrous metal finds consisted of jewellery and clothing accessories. These included several artefacts datable to the 11th–13th centuries (Fig. 6), such as a bracelet with twisted motives, rings with thickened fronts, cross-shaped pendants, an animal-shaped pendant, a chain-holder, cross-headed pins, a barrel-shaped bead, a hexagonal belt link, a two-part buckle with a pointed oval front, a mount with vegetal ornamentation, and a strap end in the form of an animal head.



Fig. 5. Fragment of a bracelet with rounded ends.

Jn 5. Katke ümarate otstega käevõrust.

Photo / Foto: Maili Roio



Fig. 6. Selection of 11th–13th-century jewellery and belt fittings found during the survey.

Jn 6. Valik otsingul leitud 11.–13. sajandi ehteid ja vööosi.

Photo / Foto: Maili Roio

The remaining metal finds, comprising ring brooches, bells, lozenge-shaped pendants, shield-shaped and signet rings, mounts, buttons, keys, locks, an iron axe, and other artefacts, can be associated with the medieval and early modern rural settlement documented in written sources.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Over the past decade, the number of Roman coins discovered in Estonia has increased significantly, primarily as a result of detectorist activity (Koovit & Kiudsoo 2023). Most of the Roman coin find spots are located along the coast or near rivers flowing into the sea. On the mainland of Estonia, Roman coins tend to cluster around Lake Võrtsjärv and the rivers of the Lake Peipus catchment area (Kiudsoo 2013; Kriiska & Dreving 2016).

The distribution pattern of Roman coins is clearly linked to waterways, and in this respect, the Vastemõisa find fits the pattern well. The Vastemõisa stream has been partially straightened in modern times, but it is a natural tributary of the Raudna River, which belongs to the Pärnu sub-catchment and ultimately drains into the sea.

It has been suggested that some Roman coins may have ended up in the ground during the Viking Age or, alternatively, may have been brought to Estonia as souvenirs by Baltic Germans travelling to Italy in the 19th century (Koovit & Kiudsoo 2023; Kiudsoo 2019, 49). However, the find location of the Vastemõisa coin and the proximity of other contemporary artefacts strongly suggest that it represents a genuine deposition and points to Roman Iron Age habitation in the area.

In addition to the Roman coin, a surprising number of Late Iron Age finds were also recovered from the survey area. Two Late Iron Age settlement sites in a different location were already known in Vastemõisa. Therefore, prior to the fieldwork, we assumed that the village core shifted westward to the location shown on the 17th-century map only in the 16th century, when the Polish-period state manor was erected. However, the results of the fieldwork indicate that settlement at the spot later known as the early modern centre of the village of Järavere had already begun in prehistoric times. This also rules out the possibility that the Battle of St Matthew's Day in the 13th century took place there. The site of the battle thus remains an unsolved mystery.

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- RA, EAA.308.6.208.** Charta öfwer Wastemoise Hoff och några Bönder, uti Fellins Gebiet och St.-Johannis Kirchspiel. (*Map in RA.*)
- RA, EAA.308.6.210.** Charta über Wastemoise in den Pernoschen Creiseise und St. Johannis Kirchspiel belegen. (*Map in RA.*)
- RA, EAA.2072.3.5/II/a, 9.** Concept Charte von dem im Livländischen Gouvernement Pernauschen Kreise und Gross St. Johannisschen Kirchspiele belegen publiquen Guthe Wastemois. (*Map in RA.*)
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## MADISEPÄEVA LAHINGUPAIGA OTSINGUD PÕHJA-VILJANDIMAAL VASTEMÕISAS

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Madisepäeva 1217. aasta lahingupaiga otsingutest on kujunenud detektoristide iga-aastane suurüritus, mis Sten-Erik Undi eestvedamisel toimus 2024. aastal seitsmendat korda. Nende aastate jooksul on läbi otsitud põlde Põhja-Sakala valla Vanamõisa, Kobruvere ja Sürgavere külas. 2024. aastal toimus lahingupaiga otsing Vastemõisa külas (Suure-Jaani kihelkond), mis jääb Viljandi linnusest ligi 12 km loodesse.

Siinsed vanimad arheoloogilised leiud on kiviaegsed tulekivi- ja kvartsikillud, mida on avastatud kahest Vastemõisa ojast põhja poole jäävast leikohast. Vastemõisa sai oma nime ordumõisa järgi (esmamaining 1554 *Niggenhaue*). Esmalt oli siin tänaseks kadunud Järavere (*Jarawer*) küla. Hilisraua- ja keskaegse keraamikaga asulakihti on leitud nii järve lõuna- kui ka läänekalda lähedal. 17. sajandi kaardi järgi paiknesid Järavere küla seitsmest talust viis tihedalt koos Vastemõisa oja lõunapervel mõisast edelas (jn 1). Tolleaegne külatuumik jäi tänapäevaste

Vanemuise ja Lellepi talude vahele ja see oli üks 2024. aasta otsingualasid.

Metallidetektoritega otsiti läbi kokku umbes 30 hektari suurune ala (jn 2–3). Detektoriga otsijaid oli 100 ja dokumenteerijaid 7 inimest. Leidude asukohad dokumenteeriti mobiilirakendusega GeoTracker.

Otsingualalt leiti mõned tulekivikillud, mis seostuvad teadaoleva kiviaegse inimtegevusega Vastemõisa piirkonnas. Vanim metall-leid oli Rooma keiser Commoduse valitsusaja lõpus 192 pKr vermitud pronksist sesterts (jn 4). Ahenevate otstega vase-sulamist käevõru (jn 5), tumesinine tahuline klaashelmes ja riibitud keraamika võivad samuti olla rooma rauaaegsed. Rooma müntide levik Eestis on otseselt seotud veeteedega ja ka Vastemõisa asukoht sobitub olemasolevasse muistis. Vastemõisa oja on Pärnu alamvesikonda kuuluva Raudna jõe looduslik lisajõgi, millel on ühendus merega.

Relvadest leiti otsingualt ainult üks rauast putkega odaotsa katke, mille puhul on raske täpselt öelda, kas see on muinas- või keskaegne. Värvilisest metallist esemetest põhiosa moodustasid ehted ja riie-tuse metallosad. Nende hulgas oli ka 11.–13. sajandi esemeid (jn 6) nagu plettornamendiga käevõru, pakseneva esiosaga sõrmused, ristripatsid, looma-kujuline ripats ja keekandja, ristpeaga ehtenõelad, helmes, kuudisekujulised vahelülid, kaheosaline pannal, taimornamendiga vöönaast ja loomapeakuju-line rihmakand.

Ülejäänud metallesemed (nt rõngassõled, kulju-sed, rombikujulised ripatsid, kilp- ja pitsatsõrmused, naastud, nõöbid, võtmed ja lukud, rauast kirves,

mündid jm) seostuvad juba kirjalikest allikatest teada kesk- ja uusaegse külaasustusega.

Otsingul leitud hilisrauaaegsete esemete suur arv oli mõneti üllatuslik, kuna Vastemõisast oli kahes teises kohas juba hilisrauaaegne asula kultuurkiht teada. Seepärast oletasime enne välitöid, et Järavere küla tuumik nihkus lääne poole, 17. sajandi kaardil näidatud asukohta alles 16. sajandil Poola-aegse riigi-mõisa rajamisega. Välitööde tulemused näitavad aga, et asustus Järavere küla varauusajast teada asukohas sai alguse juba muinasajal. See välistab ka võima-luse, et 13. sajandi Madisepäeva lahing toimus just seal. Lahingu täpne toimumiskoht jääb seega endiselt lahendamata mõistatuseks.