



# Archaeological monitoring at Roiu medieval settlement site in south Estonia

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## INTRODUCTION

The Roiu settlement site (no. 12795 in the National Registry of Cultural Monuments) was discovered by Andres Vindi (1991). Back then, the presence of a cultural layer was identified on the northern bank of the Mõra River at an area 200 m in length and 80 m in width (Fig. 1: A) and wheel-thrown pottery fragments and animal bones were collected from the site (Vindi 1991, 1). The site has been dated to the Medieval Period (in Estonia, ca. 1225–1560 AD). In autumn 2021 and summer 2022, archaeological research was carried out at the Roiu settlement site as collection tanks were added to the Roiu water purification station and a new water supply pipe was connected with the pumping station (Fig. 1: B). The water supply pipe was installed in an area that was already partially disturbed by the construction of the pumping station – a small area of exposed cultural layer was excavated *ad hoc*. The rest of the possibly preserved layer was left untouched and the pipes were installed by directional boring. In the case of the underground collection tanks, it was surprising that although they were planned to be installed in the middle of the settlement site, only an archaeological survey was required instead of an excavation or at the very least, a preliminary excavation. This gave the builder the wrong idea that this may be an area where no cultural layer is expected and as a result, the project did not take archaeological research neither into financial nor temporal consideration. Thus, it was decided to rebury the cultural layer that was exposed during the watching brief – to cover it with geotextile and a protective layer of sand and build the collection tanks above ground.

The artefacts collected from Roiu are not numerous, but they are still worthy of publication, with the aim, among other things, to draw attention to the necessity of studying medieval rural settlements in Estonia. Settlement sites from this period have rarely been studied during planned, scientific excavations. Investigations have mostly taken place as rescue excavations and additionally, medieval finds have been discovered during fieldwork on settlement sites from other periods (a summary of past studies: Valk 2006, 214–216). More

noteworthy (rescue) research has been carried out only on one site in the last decade – the Sargvere settlement in central Estonia (Saage *et al.* 2021). Yet it is unfeasible to study medieval settlement, its buildings, economy etc. focusing archaeologically only on towns, castles, monasteries, churches and burial sites where most of the archaeological research regarding this period in Estonia has been undertaken (Russow *et al.* 2006). Historical rural settlements require individual attention and have very limited coverage in medieval and post-medieval written sources.



**Fig. 1.** A – The medieval settlement site of Roiu (blue polygon) on the northern bank of the River Mõra and the investigated area (red circle), B – part of the open occupation layer in the area of the planned collection tanks, C – the occupation layer and the natural sand beneath it in a test pit.

**Jn 1.** A – Roiu keskaegne asulakoht (sinine hulknurk) Mõra jõe põhjakaldal ja uuritud ala (punane ring), B – osa avatud kultuurkihist kavandatavate kogumismahutite alal, C – kultuurkiht ja selle alune looduslik liiv proovivaugus.

Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet

Photo / Foto: Aivar Kriiska

## THE CULTURAL LAYER OF THE SETTLEMENT SITE AND FINDS

Archaeological monitoring carried out during stripping soil in the area of the planned collection tanks and digging trenches for the water supply pipes for the pumping station revealed that the settlement site has been partially disturbed by the construction of the pumping station and that the whole fill of the cut that has destroyed the cultural layer contained modern debris. Around it, however, a perfectly dark occupation layer with fragments of charcoal and rock debris has preserved at a thickness of up to half a metre (Fig. 1: B–C).

From the stripped and removed soil and cultural layer, 82 fragments of pottery were discovered as well as a few animal bones. Together with the finds from 1991 (TÜ 25), 178 sherds of pottery have been collected so far. 166 of the fragments are from simple wheel-made coarseware pots. The vessels have been made of clay mixed with sand or fine rock debris (Fig. 2: 1–5, 7), chamotte is visible in the cross section of one of the fragments (Fig. 2: 6). There are 137 body and six base fragments (Fig. 2: 4). Ornament, exclusively lathe-turned grooves, is present in the case of eight fragments (Fig. 2: 6–7). Two of the wheel-thrown pottery fragments show an N-type coil. This can be an adjustment made whilst forming the vessel, but it cannot be completely ruled out that they are local rural products, ‘mudpots’ (Est. *poripotid*) which were still made by coiling and wheel-throwing in the Setumaa district (southeast Estonia) in the middle of the 20th century (Niidu 1978; Kriiska 2004, 233–235).

There were 23 rim fragments, and these allow for a more accurate dating. The oldest are the rim fragments with a vertical rim (1) and of the northwest Russian style ware type 3: 2 (10) which are dated to the 12th–13th century (Fig. 2: 1; the types and dates here and later are from Tvauri 2000). Two of the fragments are of type 3: 3 (Fig. 2: 3) and can be dated from the late 13th to the early 15th century, six fragments belong to type 4 (Fig. 2: 5, 7), dating from the 14th–15th century and four fragments originate from type 5 vessel(s) (Fig. 2: 2), dating from the late 16th or early 17th century.

In the case of five pottery fragments found from the site, it is possible that they are from hand-moulded vessels and are from the Iron Age, most likely from the later stages of that period, i.e. ca. 12th–13th cc. All these fragments are from clay mixed with rock debris, one of them is from a thin-walled (4 mm) vessel, polished on either side. Additionally, a green-glazed greyware fragment and a



Fig. 2. Sherds of wheel-made pots from the Roiu settlement site.

Jn 2. Roiu asulakohalt kogutud kedrakeraamika killud. (TÜ 2957: 20a, 20b, 20c, 20d, 17, 20e, 18.)

Photo / Foto: Aivar Kriiska

fragment of a faïence vessel were found as well. It cannot be excluded that the former fragment is from a typical NW-Russian field flask from the second half of the 16th or the 17th century.

## SUMMARY

The pottery fragments found from Roiu suggest that the earliest settlement stage here was already during the Iron Age, most likely the Late Iron Age. If the wheel-thrown pottery fragments collected to date adequately reflect the history of the settlement, it is a site which was mainly used during the Middle Ages. There are only a few post-medieval finds and these may be intrusive finds redeposited by ploughing. The extent and intensity of the cultural layer indicates that a village rather than a single farm was located in the area.

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## ARHEOLOOGILINE JÄLGIMINE ROIU KESKAEGSEL ASULAKOHAL LÕUNA-EESTIS

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Roiu asulakoha (jn 1: A) avastas 1991. aastal Andres Vindi. 2021. aasta sügisel ja 2022. aasta kevadel toimusid asulakohal arheoloogilised uuringud seoses kogumismahutite lisamisega Roiu joogiveepuhastile, samuti uue veetoru ühendamisel pumbajaamaga. Veetoru kaevis rajati alale, mis oli suuremas osas pumbajaama ehitusega juba lõhutatud, väike osa paljastunud kultuurkihist kaevati läbi jooksvalt ning ülejäänud potentsiaalselt säilinud kihi osas paigaldati torud suundpuurides. Ehitatavate kogumismahutite alalt leiti ulatuslikult säilinud kuni 0,5 m paksune kultuurkiht (jn 1: B–C), mis maeti ja säilis mahutite all.

Uuringutel koguti 82 savinõukildu, neist enamik kedral valmistatud lihtkeraamilistest pottidest (jn 2). Koos 1991. aastal kogutuga on 178 savinõukildu, mil-

lest lähtub ka järgnev statistika. Ornamenti, eranditult sissetreitud jooned, esineb 8 killul. Servatükke on 23 ja need võimaldavad täpsemat dateerimist. Peaaegu pooled neist (Loode-Vene stiilis keraamika tüüp 3: 2 ja püstise servaga kild) on dateeritavad 12.–13. sajandisse, teised (tüübid 3: 3 ja 4), välja arvatud üks 16. sajandi lõpust–17. sajandi algusest pärit katke (tüüp 5), saab dateerida 13.–15. sajandisse. Leiti ka viis arvatavasti rauaaja lõpujärgust pärinevat käsitsikeraamika kildu ja uusaegse glasuurkeraamika ja fajanssnõu katked.

Niisiis on Roiu asulakoha saanud alguse juba (hilis)rauaajal, kuid põhiline kasutusaeg jääb kesk-  
aega. Uusaegne leiuaaines on vähene ja võib olla kantud sinna põlluharimise käigus. Kultuurkihi ulatus ja intensiivsus osutavad seal paiknenud külale.