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Preface

The current issue of the *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* deals with the archaeology of buildings, offering an overview of sacred and secular constructions dating from the Pre-Roman Iron Age to the Modern Age. The articles are largely based on the research carried out at the Institute of History of Tallinn University in the framework of the target-financed project "Land, sea and people: Estonia on its way from the Iron Age to the Medieval period. North Estonia, West Estonia and Estonian islands 600–1600 AD".

Buildings represent a very significant part of the living environment. The reconstruction of the outlook, function and symbolic meaning of past buildings offers possibilities for better interpretation of the ancient worlds. Archaeologically, this is often a difficult task, as in northern Europe houses have traditionally been built of wood. Corner-joined horizontal log houses, which have existed in the local architectural landscape since the Bronze Age, leave no significant traces in the ground that could be "read" after hundreds and thousands of years. This makes the reconstruction of the one-time buildings often a highly hypothetical undertaking.

The remains of stone buildings tend to be much better preserved, especially the ones in which mortar has been used as the stone-binding material. This technique was brought to Estonia by the German and Danish conquerors in the 13th century. Stone constructions were mainly erected in towns, while in the countryside that building type remained uncommon throughout the Middle and Modern Ages, representing usually either the reigning spirituality (churches) or mundane power (strongholds and manor houses). The ruins of stone buildings may, however, pose mysteries to archaeologists, for the function of buildings may not always be unambiguous. An illustrative example would be 13th-century stone churches which, besides being places of worship, were also used for collecting and storing worldly goods and for offering shelter in troubled times.

In addition to the wider distribution of stone houses, the emergence of towns brought about a new lifestyle. The medieval townsmen differed from the peasants in their thoughts and attitudes, but also in their living environment. A medieval town has often been preserved to the present day, either in the form of complete buildings or as ruins that lie under various construction layers. This creates new challenges to archaeological research and evokes the question of the necessity of a symbiotic existence of the new and the old.

The articles in the current special issue examine many of the above-mentioned topics. Marika Mägi's article deals with sacral constructions from the first half of the Iron Age and the Migration period. The author suggests that those could have originally been corner-joined horizontal log houses, erected either on stone foundations or built on the ground.

Ain Lavi's article about prehistoric and medieval village buildings concentrates mainly on corner-joined horizontal log houses and their archaeological remains. Different parts of the buildings have been analysed separately, with special attention to their development in the course of time and using numerous ethnographic examples for comparison.

The article by Villu Kadakas considers a medieval monastic complex at Padise and the possible functions that the different rooms in the building might have had. The construction history of the Padise monastery has been studied for over half a century, but archaeologists were involved in interpreting medieval constructional substance only at the beginning of the new millennium. Using methods that are particular to the discipline of archaeology, the author sets forth new hypotheses concerning the development of the earlier part of the monastic complex.

Using the example of medieval Vyborg, Mervi Suhonen (PhD student of the University of Turku) discusses urban lifestyle. The article gives an overview of the cooperation between Russian and Finnish archaeologists in the archaeological investigations carried out in Vyborg, and presents the possible ways of approaching the subject and the methods used. Even though more detailed research of the development of this easternmost town of medieval Sweden has been going on only for the last decade, many important results have already been achieved – an inventory report has been composed, based on the examples of Finnish and Swedish medieval towns, novel scientific methods have been applied, the relationships between the town and its hinterlands investigated, etc.

The issues concerning medieval constructions are certainly far more complex than the current articles may imply. On the other hand, the archaeology of buildings has been receiving very little attention, remaining the playground of architects and building historians rather than of archaeologists. It means that in the earlier decades, greater emphasis has been on the building than on archaeological remains. The editors of the present issue hope that the articles presented will be signalling a change in that sphere.

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