

People from Pskov in Estonian towns in the 13th century according to archaeological evidence

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Received 12 January 2026, accepted 9 April 2026, available online 10 August 2026

ABSTRACT

The earliest towns in the territory of Estonia were founded in the 13th century. Their populations were multi-ethnic: in addition to the German merchants and artisans who dominated urban life, these towns were also inhabited by people of local origin as well as Scandinavians. The results of archaeological excavations indicate that in the second and third quarters of the 13th century, settlers of Rus' origin from Pskov took up residence in the towns of Tartu, Viljandi, and Tallinn. In all of these towns, the Pskovians lived on the outskirts, in their own district. Numerous archaeological remains have been uncovered demonstrating that the Pskovians were engaged in the production of pottery in Tartu, Tallinn, and Viljandi, and in the manufacture of glass beads in Tartu and Tallinn. These settlers were permanent residents of the towns rather than temporary visitors. By the 14th century at the latest, the Pskovians had assimilated into the local urban population. In the 15th century, Tartu was home to the St George's Orthodox Church, which belonged to Novgorodian merchants, and to the Pskovians' Church of St Nicholas; Tallinn likewise had a St Nicholas Orthodox Church belonging to merchants from Novgorod. These merchant churches are not connected with the Pskovian settlements that existed in these towns in the 13th century.

KEYWORDS

archaeology, Middle Ages, medieval Livonia, Kyivan Rus', Pskov.

Introduction

The population of medieval towns was multi-ethnic everywhere, including in Livonia (present-day Estonia and Latvia), where the earliest towns were founded in the 13th century by German and Danish conquerors. Although the emerging Livonian towns were dominated by immigrants of German origin, they also included the native population (Estonians, Latvians, and Livs), whom contemporary sources referred to collectively as non-Germans (*Undeutsch*). Medieval Tallinn was also home to Danes, Swedes, and Finns. Furthermore, in the 13th-century occupation layers of three medieval

Estonian towns – Tallinn, Tartu, and Viljandi – there is clear archaeological evidence of settlers of Rus' origin (Selart 2017).

The aim of this article is to present these finds. I seek to answer the questions of why, when, and from where immigrants of Rus'ian background arrived in the emerging towns of Livonia, and what activities they engaged in there. In addition, I discuss what became of the people of Rus' origin in these towns in the following centuries.

But how can one identify particular peoples – Rus'ians in this case – within the archaeological record? Certain types of graves, dwellings, heating structures, clothing, ornaments, or specific sets of ornaments are typically employed as 'ethnic markers'. To date, however, no 13th-century buildings, heating structures, or burials have been discovered in Estonia that might be associated with a population of Rus' origin. Such an association would rest on evidence such as Orthodox pectoral crosses or ornaments of Rus' provenance placed with the deceased. For this reason, my study primarily relies on artefact finds from the 13th-century layers of Estonian towns. These objects lack analogues elsewhere in Estonia or within the Germanic cultural sphere, yet they were characteristic of and widely distributed across the territory of Kyivan Rus'. Northwest Russian style pottery – especially of the Pskov type – was in extensive use in Estonia during the 11th–15th centuries, but it cannot be attributed exclusively to groups originating from Northwest Rus' (Tvauri 2025).

The founding of towns in Estonia

A historically pivotal period in the development of modern Estonia and Latvia was the Baltic crusades, as a result of which the region came under the rule of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order, Catholic bishops, and the Danish king, and was Christianised. German missionaries began their activities in the 1180s in the estuary area of the River Daugava. At the end of the 12th century, regular crusades and other wars against the native peoples began, led by the Livonian bishops, military orders, and the king of Denmark. The Livs were subjugated under German rule by 1212. Northern Estonia came under Danish rule in 1219. Southern Estonia was conquered by 1224, and the nobles of Saaremaa submitted to the German crusaders in 1227. Curonia and Semgallia were conquered and subjugated by the 1290s, and southeastern Latvia was conquered in around 1310. As a result of the conquest, a conglomerate of ecclesiastic states – medieval Livonia – was established (see Selart et al. 2025).

In the 13th century, the towns of Tallinn (Reval), Narva (Narwa), Tartu (Dorpat), Old Pärnu (Perona, Alt-Pernau), New Pärnu (Embeck, Pernau), Viljandi (Fellin), and Haapsalu (Hapsal) were founded in the territory of

present-day Estonia (see Pärn 2004a). Since archaeological evidence of a Rus' population in the 13th century has been found only in Tallinn, Tartu, and Viljandi, I will begin by taking a closer look at the emergence of these towns. The town of Tallinn was founded beside the Danish king's castle, Tartu beside the bishop's castle, and Viljandi beside the Teutonic Order castle.

Although the existence of urban settlements prior to the conquest has repeatedly been suggested for Tallinn (e.g. Kenkmaa 1937, 83–84; Moora 1953, 172–174; Tarakanova & Saadre 1955, 11–12; Tiik 1957, 53–54; Kang-ropool & Bruns 1972, 7–8; Zobel 1980, 10–11) and Tartu (e.g. Trummal 1980, 25–26; 1996, 534–536; 1997, 346; Metsallik 1995, 28–30; Mäesalu & Vissak 2002, 153–154; 2005, 18), no written records or archaeological evidence have been found for either Tallinn (Tamm 1993; 1995; Russow 2019a, 19; 2019b; 2020, 26; 2025, 75; Mäll & Russow 2003; Russow & Tamla 2019a; 2019b, 65) or Tartu (Tvauri 2001a; Pärn 2004a, 269–271). Moreover, no evidence of the existence of urban settlements in Livonia prior to the 13th century has been found in written sources (Tarvel 1999, 293).

It has also been suggested that, already before the 13th century, there was a hillfort in Tallinn located on the Toompea cliff, and that in the area of the later medieval town there were a market square and seasonal trading factories with churches belonging to Scandinavian and Novgorodian merchants (Johansen 1951, 41–42, 66–87; 1965, 122–123; Tiik 1957, 243, 377; Kleinenberg 1962, 242; Johansen & Mühlen 1973, 39–40; Tönnisson 1996; Zobel 2008, 38). However, no archaeological evidence has been found in Tallinn for any of these, including the pre-conquest stronghold (Tamm 1993; 1995; Sokolovskij 2003, 252; Russow 2019a, 19, footnote 38; Russow & Tamla 2019b, 65; Russow 2020, 30, 33). It cannot be excluded that the Lyndanise stronghold was located not on the Toompea cliff, but rather on the Tõnismägi hill situated to its south (Mägi 2015, 113–114, fig. 2.7). Unfortunately, this hypothesis can neither be confirmed nor refuted, since during the late 17th–18th centuries the Tõnismägi hill was lowered by 6–7 m, and the excavated soil was used to construct earthen fortifications along the southern side of the Toompea cliff (Alamaa 1966, 92; Loit 2003).

In Viljandi, there was indeed a stronghold before the German conquest, but no traces of a pre-conquest settlement have been found within the area of the medieval town (see Haak & Russow 2013).

Northern Estonia came under Danish rule in 1219, when King Valdemar II's troops captured the local stronghold called Lyndanise (HCL, XXIII, 2). In 1227, Tallinn and northern Estonia were seized by the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, who in 1238 returned these territories to the king of Denmark. In 1346, the king sold northern Estonia, including the town of Tallinn, to the Teutonic Order. The founding date of the town is not known. The word *civitas*

was used to refer to Tallinn in written sources for the first time in 1238, and in 1248 King Eric IV of Denmark granted Tallinn the Lübeck town rights. A directive issued in 1265 by Queen Margareta to surround Tallinn with a town wall pertains to the territory of the later medieval town (Kala 2002, 402–404; 2019a).

The German crusaders captured the stronghold of Tartu in 1224 (HCL, XXVIII, 3–8), and in the same year Tartu also became the centre of a bishopric. The town of Tartu is mentioned in written sources for the first time in connection with a military campaign by the Novgorodians in 1262 (Selart 2009b, 35). The earliest record of the existence of the Tartu town council dates from 1263 (Mäesalu 2024, 26). It is not known when the settlement was granted town rights by the Bishop of Tartu (Tarvel 1980, 27–28).

Viljandi finally fell into the hands of the German crusaders in 1223. A written record exists showing that Willekinus de Endorpe, the Master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order, confirmed the town privileges and established the boundaries of the town area in 1283 (LGU, I, 40).

Research history

Historians have primarily studied the ethnic composition of medieval Tallinn's population and the relations between different ethnic and social groups (e.g. Johansen 1934; Niitemaa 1949; Johansen & Mühlen 1973; Kaplinski 1980, 80–92; Mänd 2013; Naum 2014; Kala 2019b). The reason for this is that Tallinn's medieval archive has been preserved, whereas for other Estonian medieval towns written sources are insufficient to address this question. Historians have mainly focused on relations between Germans and non-Germans in the 14th–16th centuries, since written records from the 13th century, or concerning inhabitants of Rus' origin in the towns of the region, are extremely scarce. This limited material has been summarised by Anti Selart in his study 'Russians in the Livonian towns in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries' (2009). Separate studies have addressed the Novgorodian trading factory in medieval Tallinn (Kleinenberg 1962) and the location of the Russian quarter and churches in medieval Tartu (Alttoa 1985; 1998; 2017).

Among Estonian archaeologists, the ethnic composition of the population of medieval towns on the basis of archaeological finds has been studied by Arvi Haak (2011; 2015; 2022). Regarding Tallinn, Magdalena Naum (2014) has analysed the representations of ethnic groups mentioned in written sources in relation to the archaeological material. Heiki Valk (2004) has identified ornaments belonging to Estonians among the grave goods in medieval urban churchyards. Anton Pärn (2004b) and Ain Lavi (2012) have used building remains to research the non-German population of the towns

of Estonia in the 13th–14th centuries. The influence of social status and ethnicity on diet in medieval Tallinn has been studied through stable isotope analysis, including samples collected from skeletons discovered at Sulevimägi Street 4/6 that are presumably of Rus' settlers origin (Lightfoot et al. 2016).

Although archaeological traces of settlers of Rus' origin in 13th-century Estonian towns have previously been mentioned or described in the context of various research topics (e.g. Mäesalu 1999, 432; Tvauri 1999; 2000a; 2000b, 24–26; 2001a; 2022, 289–290; Kadakas & Nilov 2004, 167–171; Haak & Heinloo 2007, 32–34; Selart 2009b, 44–45; Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 129–130, fig. 3; Naum 2014, 666; Lightfoot et al. 2016; Haak 2019, 38–40; 2022, 252, fig. 8: 5; Russow 2019a, 34; 2019b; 2020, 29–31, 138–143; 2025, 89, 92–93; Jegorov et al. 2023, 144), a comprehensive overview of this subject has so far been lacking.

TARTU

The richest 13th-century material related to the people of Pskov has been found in Tartu, the vast majority of it recovered from a single archaeological trench. In the area of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden (Lai Street 30 plot), an excavation of approximately 630 m² was carried out in 1988–1991 (Fig. 1: 1). The excavation site was located directly on the inner side of the medieval town wall (Fig. 2). At a depth of 3–3.4 m from the modern ground level, there was a roughly 40 cm thick deposit containing numerous finds of Rus' origin dating from ca 1230–1260 (Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 129).

Although 35 years have now passed since the excavations, the finds from this layer have scarcely entered scholarly circulation. A brief overview of these excavations is available in only two academic articles (Mäesalu 2001; Malve & Mäesalu 2014). The Pskov-type pottery discovered there has also been discussed (Tvauri 2000a), and an overview of the spatial distribution of finds of Rus' origin within the excavation area has been provided (Haak 2022, fig. 8: 5).

The assemblage from this layer (TM A 43: A683–A2475) comprises 1792 catalogued finds. In addition, numerous finds of Rus' origin have also been recovered from the deposits immediately overlying the layer under examination. The majority of the finds recovered from the examined layer consist of pottery sherds, most of which originate from vessels that have close parallels in the 13th-century layers of the town of Pskov and of the Izborsk castle located in the Pskov Land (Tvauri 2000a, fig. 4). These vessels predominantly belong to the subtypes 3:2 and 3:3 of the Pskov-style ceramics as classified in Estonia (see Tvauri 2000b, 100–102, 104–105). Only a very small number of sherds from near-stoneware jugs of German origin were recovered from the 'Pskovian' layer of the University of Tartu Botanical

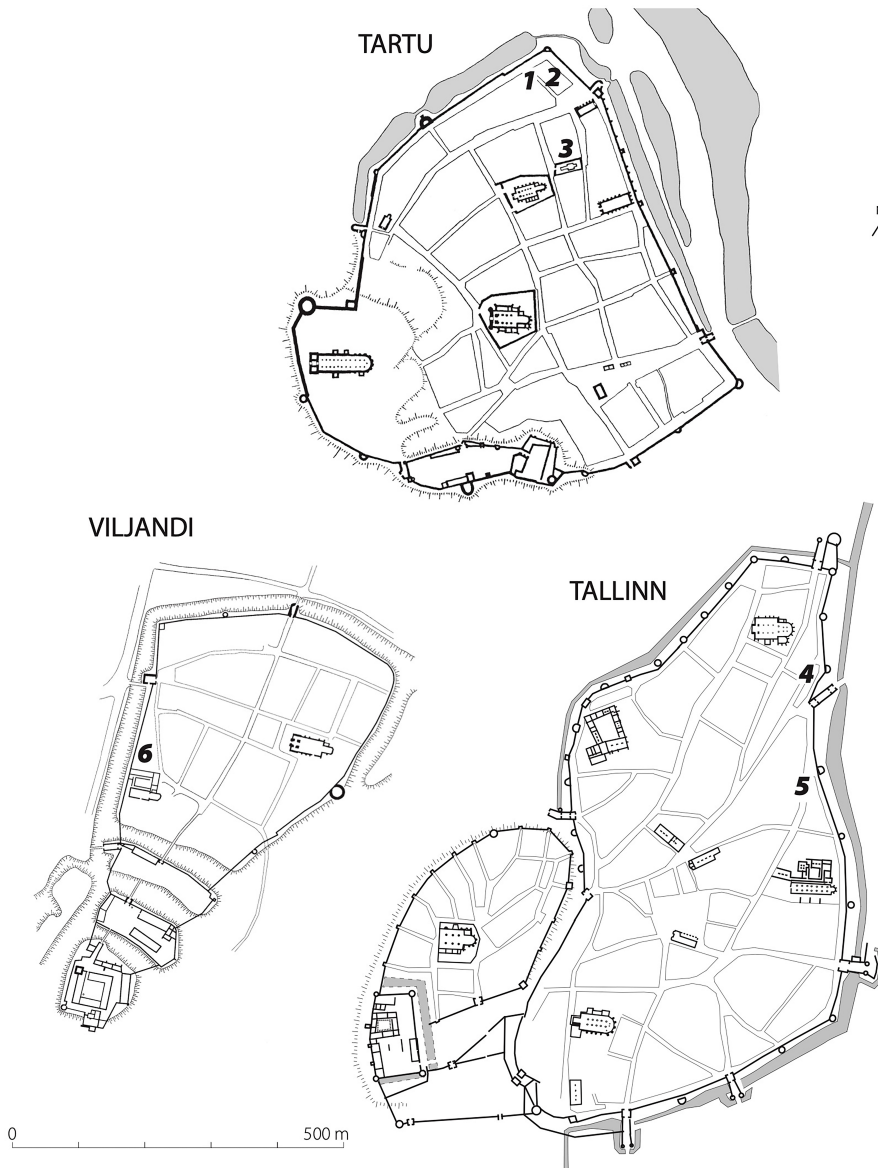


FIG. 1. The location of the settlement of Pskovians in the 13th century and the location of Novgorodian merchants' churches in the 15th century in Estonian towns: 1 – excavations conducted in the University of Tartu Botanical Garden in 1988–1991; 2 – remains of the St George's Orthodox Church, discovered in 1981–1982; 3 – remains of the St Nicholas Orthodox Church, discovered in 2025; 4 – archaeological excavation carried out in 2003 on the plot at Sulevimägi Street 4/6; 5 – St Nicholas Orthodox Church; 6 – archaeologically investigated pottery workshop area. Draft by Jaana Ratas.

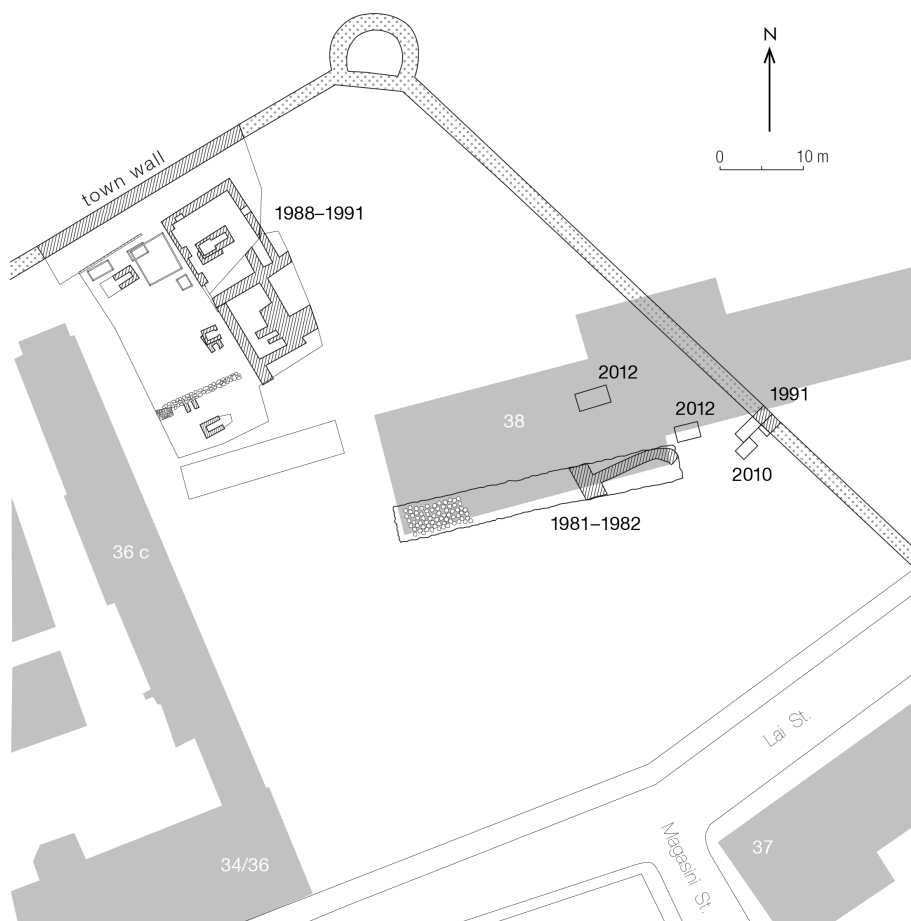


FIG. 2. Archaeological investigations conducted in the area of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden. Draft by Jaana Ratas.

Garden. Among the sherds of Pskov-style earthenware are fragments deformed by heat (e.g. TM A 43: A797, A816), which may represent production waste and thus constitute evidence of pottery manufacture in the immediate vicinity of the excavated area.

The most intriguing find from this context is a clay fragment inscribed with the first four Cyrillic letters, АБВГ (Fig. 3: 1). The letters appear to have been scratched into dried clay, which was later, most likely under accidental circumstances, subjected to burning. This flat clay piece, measuring 68 × 55 mm, had probably been placed between timber logs in a wall (Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 129). Several alphabets inscribed on birch bark have been recovered from the 11th–13th-century layers in Novgorod (Artsikhovskij & Borkovskij 1963, 20–21; Yanin et al. 2004, 15–16). One such alphabet was incised onto birch bark in the second third of the 13th century by a boy named Onfim, who is also the author of several other birch bark letters and

drawings discovered there (Artsikhovskij & Borkovskij 1963, 22–23; Yanin 1998, 55–63).

Objects characteristic of the material culture of Old Rus'ian towns include glass bracelets, of which at least 4000 fragments have been found in the Kyivan Rus' territories located within the present-day Russian Federation. Although the earliest glass bracelets found in the Kyivan Rus' date from the late 10th century, their widest distribution occurred in the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century (Stolyarova 2021, 507–508). From the Pskovian occupation layer of the excavation at the University of Tartu Botanical Garden, ten fragments of such bracelets were recovered (Fig. 3: 2). From elsewhere in Estonia, only a single fragment of a glass bracelet (Valk 1995, 64, pl. 24: 2) has so far been found, namely from the southern side of the medieval Tartu Cathedral, in a layer dated to approximately 1030–1061, when Tartu was under the control of Prince Yaroslav Vladimirovich of Kyiv (see Tvauri 2001b).

One of the most remarkable finds from the excavation at the University of Tartu Botanical Garden is the bottom part of a glass vessel (Fig. 3: 3), originating from a conical, thick-walled vessel. Of this artefact type, only one more fragment has been found in Estonia (see p 114). Fragments of such vessels have been discovered in 11th–13th-century sites of Kyivan Rus' (Shchapova 1972, fig. 2: 1, 5: 8, 8: 5–6, 9: 4, 10: 3). They were produced at least in Kyiv (Sergeeva & Zhurukhina 2018, fig. 1: 6; Khamaiko et al. 2022, 54–55). This is likely the earliest archaeological glass vessel fragment identified in Estonia.

A characteristic object of Kyivan Rus' material culture is the spindle whorl made of pink slate (Fig. 3: 4); nine such items were recovered from the excavation at the University of Tartu Botanical Garden. This excavation site is, in fact, the richest find spot for such artefacts in Estonia. A spindle whorl of this type (TM A 23: 50), which may also date to the 13th century, has been unearthed from the plot at Magasini Street 12a, within the area of the medieval town. Thirteen items have likewise been recovered from the occupational layers of the Jurjev stronghold and its adjacent settlement in Tartu, dating to approximately 1030–1061. From elsewhere in Estonia, only three spindle whorls of this type are known: one from the Maidla II stone cemetery in western Estonia (AM A 580: 2053), another as a stray find from Risti village in northwestern Estonia (Trummal 1964, 69), and the third from the settlement site at Pedajasaare in Setomaa, near the southeastern border of Estonia (Aun 2001, fig. 3: 1). Among other medieval towns in Estonia, a fragment of such a spindle whorl has been found only in Tallinn, in a refuse deposit from the last quarter of the 15th century uncovered in the Kalamaja suburb (AI 7909: 3195). The stone used for their production occurs in the vicinity of Ovruch, northwest of Kyiv, Ukraine. Spindle whorls made of pink



FIG. 3. Finds of Kyivan Rus' origin from the excavation at the University of Tartu Botanical Garden: 1 – clay fragment inscribed with the first four Cyrillic letters (TM A 43: A824); 2 – fragments of glass bracelets (TM A 43: A695, A1438, A1490); 3 – bottom part of a glass vessel (TM A 43: A1053); 4 – spindle whorl made of pink slate (TM A 43: A738); 5 – spindle whorl made of lead (TM A 43: A396); 6 – round brooch (TM A 43: A831); 7 – pendant cross made of mother-of-pearl (TM A 43: A1036); 8 – clay cupel-crucible (TM A 43: A897); 9 – fragment of a casting mould used for making a finger ring (TM A 43: A769). Photos by Arvi Haak.

slate appeared in northern Rus' towns at the end of the 10th century and remained widely used until around 1240, when their production came to an end owing to the destructive Mongol invasion (Kolchin 1958, 111; Rybakov 1965, 189–190, 194–196).

A spindle whorl made of lead (Fig. 3: 5) is a rare find in Estonia. One such artefact has been found in the southern part of medieval Tartu (Aun 1998, pl. II: 2), one in the southern suburb of medieval Tartu (TM A 126: 1731), two at Tarvastu castle in Viljandimaa (Valk et al. 2022, fig. 14: 7, 8), and one at the medieval settlement site of Olustvere (Tvauri 2025, fig. 3: 2). No parallels for this object have been found in western Europe. However, similar examples have been found in Russia, for instance, in layers dating from the 10th to the 15th century in Novgorod (Sedova 1981, 156–157) and Pskov (Sergina 1983, fig. 18: 6–12).

A round brooch made of tin (Fig. 3: 6) also has an almost identical counterpart known from the town of Novgorod (Sedova 1981, fig. 32: 4), where such brooches were in use from the mid-12th century until the late 14th century (Sedova 1981, 89). Another such brooch has been recovered from the area of the southern suburb of Tartu (Aun 2004, fig. 6: 3).

A find unique in Estonia to date is a pendant cross made of mother-of-pearl (Fig. 3: 7). Similar crosses have been discovered in Israel and Turkey, as well as in the territories of Kyivan Rus', including Pskov (Spirģis 2015, fig. 3: 3, 6). An object closely comparable to the Tartu pendant cross has also been found in Riga (Spirģis 2015, fig. 1: 1). The arms of the Tartu cross pendant resemble the dome of the chapel tower located above the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that mother-of-pearl crosses of this type represent pilgrim badges originating from the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem and dating to the 12th–13th centuries (Musin 1999, 96–97; Spirģis 2015; 2018; Mäesalu 2023).

Another noteworthy find from the 13th-century layer of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden is a clay cupel-crucible (Fig. 3: 8). Fragments of similar cupels have been found in the fill soil of the medieval moat at the Munga Street 18 plot. To determine the function of these cupels, elemental analysis was performed on the residues. Elemental analysis confirms the use of such cupels for local glass bead production in Tartu (Jegorov et al. 2023, 140–141, 144). Since the moat was filled in during the 19th century, these objects may have reached their findspot within soil excavated from the foundation pit of a building erected at that time.

In addition, it is necessary to mention the finds recovered from the 'Pskovian' layer, which, although not 'ethnic markers', nevertheless provide evidence of the activities and everyday life of the people who lived here. Four limestone casting moulds were found. One of them (Fig. 3: 9) originates from a mould used for casting finger rings, while in the case of the three others it remains unclear what was cast with them. In addition to the round brooch mentioned above, the jewellery finds include a copper-alloy penannular brooch, copper-alloy finger rings, fragments of copper-alloy bracelets, glass beads, and cowrie shells. Among the items related to production discovered there are also fragments of cylindrical clay crucibles, an iron awl, bone spindle whorls, spindle whorls made of limestone, and fragments of iron scissors. Among the household implements, one may mention knives, whetstones, padlock keys made of iron, fire-steels, and small pieces of dark-grey flint used for striking fire. Among the horse equipment, the finds include iron bridle bits, spurs, an iron curry comb, a fragment of a horseshoe, and ice nails fastened under the horse hoof. Other objects worth mentioning are an iron fishhook and bone combs.

TALLINN

The first reference to Rus'ians staying in Tallinn dates from the 1230s. It remains unclear, however, whether they were visitors or residents (Selart 2009b, 41). The Russian church located in the area of present-day Sulevimägi Street in Tallinn is first mentioned in written sources in 1371. References to this church appear repeatedly in Tallinn's municipal records up until 1413 (Tiik 1957, 243, 384–385). A record from that year describes the church as old or former (*olde*) (Tiik 1957, 383). Furthermore, a document dating to 1437 still refers to the former Russian cemetery situated at this site (Tiik 1957, 385).

Evidence for a Rus' settlement in the area of Sulevimägi Street is provided by the archaeological investigations carried out in 2003 on the plot at Sulevimägi Street 4/6 (Figs 1: 4 and 4), covering an area of approximately 600 m² (Kadakas & Nilov 2004, 167–171). Although no walls of an Orthodox church were uncovered, twelve burials (Fig. 4), oriented with their heads towards the west and without grave goods, presumably from the 13th century, were discovered, suggesting that a church had been located here (Kadakas & Nilov 2004, 170–171; Russow 2020, 30–31). The discovered burials were preserved only beneath one later building, most likely because its cellar had not been dug into the ground. The cellars of the surrounding buildings extended deeper than the level of the uncovered graves. During the construction of those buildings, both the church walls and the burials were presumably destroyed (Villu Kadakas, pers. comm., 25.02.2026).

Above the natural subsoil, in the northern and southern parts of the excavation trench, patches of an intense occupation layer were preserved (Fig. 4). From this layer, numerous earthenware sherds were collected, among which two vessel styles can be distinguished. A smaller portion of the sherds derives from pots of the Pskov style, belonging to types 3:2 (Fig. 5: 1; 6: 1) and 3:3 (Fig. 5: 2, 3; 6: 2), which closely resemble corresponding vessels recovered from the University of Tartu Botanical Garden excavation (see Tvauri 2000a, fig. 7). The majority of the sherds, however, belong to earthenware vessels imitating tripod pots, Paffrath-type globular pots, and stoneware jugs originating from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia (Fig. 6: 3, 4). Since the sherds of these German-type imitations also include fragments of vessels that were overburnt in the potter's kiln and broken during the process of production (e.g. AI 6648: 7/107, 7/110, 7/114), it can be assumed that such vessels were produced in the Sulevimägi Street area itself. In Tallinn's 13th-century layers, sherds of this type of earthenware are widely distributed (Mäll & Russow 2000, 123; 2003, figs 7–8, 13, 14: B–H; Russow & Haak 2018, fig. 6; Russow 2020, 160–165).

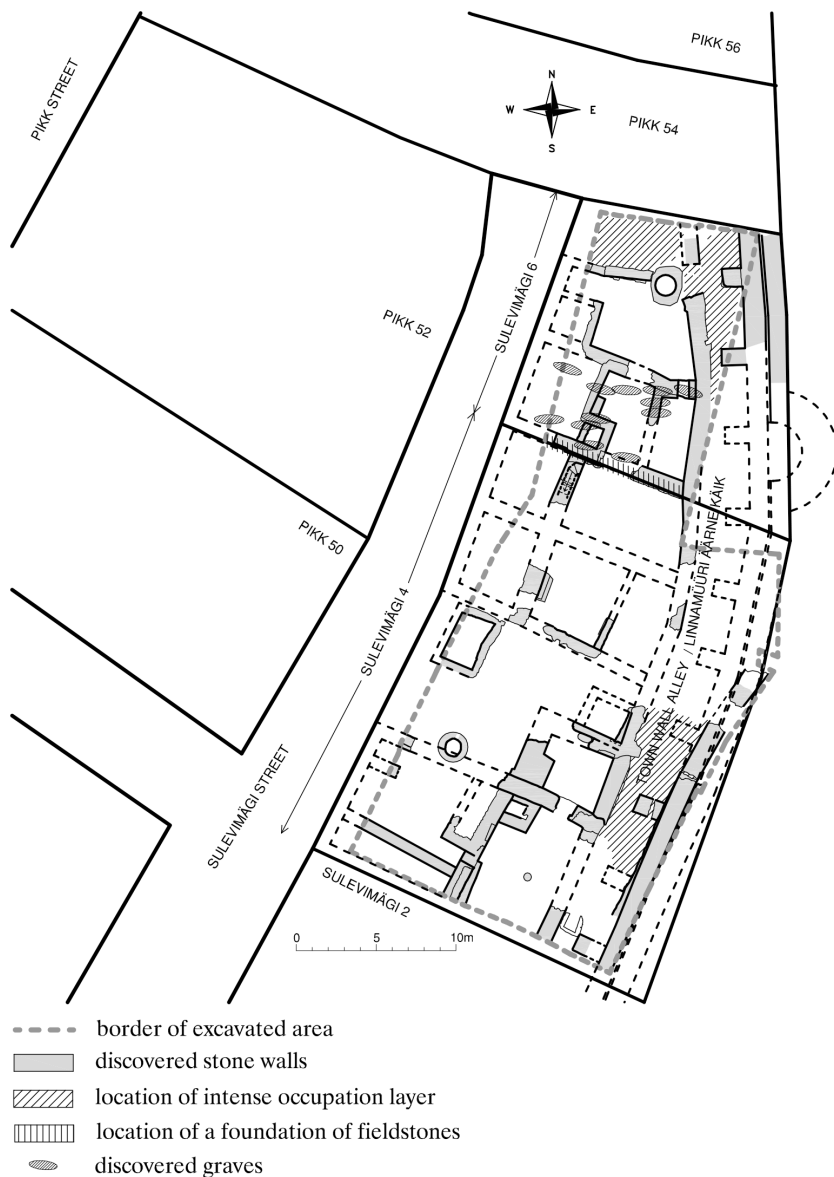


FIG. 4. Archaeological investigations conducted in Tallinn in the area of Sulevimägi Street 4/6. Draft by Villu Kadakas.

The finds also included evidence of glass bead production, namely flat melting cupel-crucibles (Fig. 7: 1), glass waste (Fig. 7: 2), and tiny beads, among which there are specimens of yellow opaque glass, green transparent glass, and blue glass (Fig. 7: 3; Russow 2020, 138). Glass beads likely produced here have been recovered from the oldest layers of the town of Tallinn, for example during archaeological excavations in the Town Hall Square and on Sauna and Aida streets (Russow 2020, 141). It is possible that

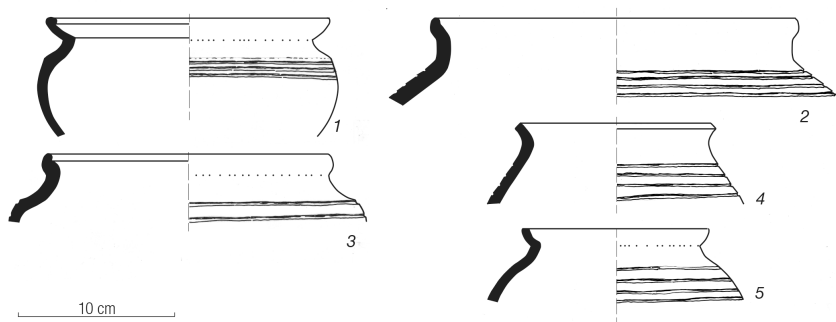


FIG. 5. Earthenware from the excavation at Sulevimägi Street 4/6: 1 – Pskov style 3:2 (AI 6648: 14/39); 2 – Pskov style 3:3 (AI 6648: 22/93); 3–5 – earthenware vessels imitating ware originating from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia (AI 6648: 6/94, 6/95, 6/97). Draft by Andres Tvauri.



FIG. 6. Earthenware from the excavation at Sulevimägi Street 4/6 (AI 6648: 14/39, 4/3, 23/505, 8/522). Photos by Andres Tvauri.

the yellow and also blue glass beads found on the neck of a woman buried in the 13th century in St Nicholas churchyard are also of local origin (Russow 2020, 38, 141).



FIG. 7. Finds of Kyivan Rus' origin from the excavation at Sulevimägi Street 4/6: 1 – clay cupel-crucible (AI 6648: 13/37); 2 – glass waste (AI 6648: 8/964); 3 – glass beads (AI 6648: 9/480–488). Photos by Andres Tvauri.

In addition, a variety of other finds were recovered from the 13th-century layer of the excavation at Sulevimägi Street 4/6. Among the jewellery and clothing accessories made of bronze alloy, fragments of two penannular brooches, a fragment of a cruciform-headed dress pin with connected terminals, fragments of a double spiral finger ring, a buckle, and a fragment of a tinker bell were found. Tools were represented by an iron auger bit and a bone spindle whorl. The household implements include a copper-alloy spoon, fragments of a padlock key, and pieces of dark grey flint. Among the horse equipment, there were an iron spur and an ice nail. An iron needle with a ring was also recovered (Russow 2020, 28). From the 13th-century find context of the excavation at Sulevimägi Street 4/6, fragments of window glass and a fragment of a limestone mortar were likewise uncovered. In addition, a particularly noteworthy find is a fragment of the foot of a glass beaker of Kyivan Rus' origin (AI 6648: 22/202). It derives from a vessel of the same type as a fragment recovered from the 13th-century layer of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden excavation (Fig. 3: 3).

During the 2003 excavations at the Sulevimägi Street 4/6 plot, twelve skeletons were uncovered. Stable isotope analyses of carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen from bone collagen were conducted on four of these skeletons in order to reconstruct aspects of the individuals' diet (Lightfoot et al. 2016). The results indicate that their dietary patterns were comparable to those of other medieval inhabitants of Tallinn previously studied. The findings suggest

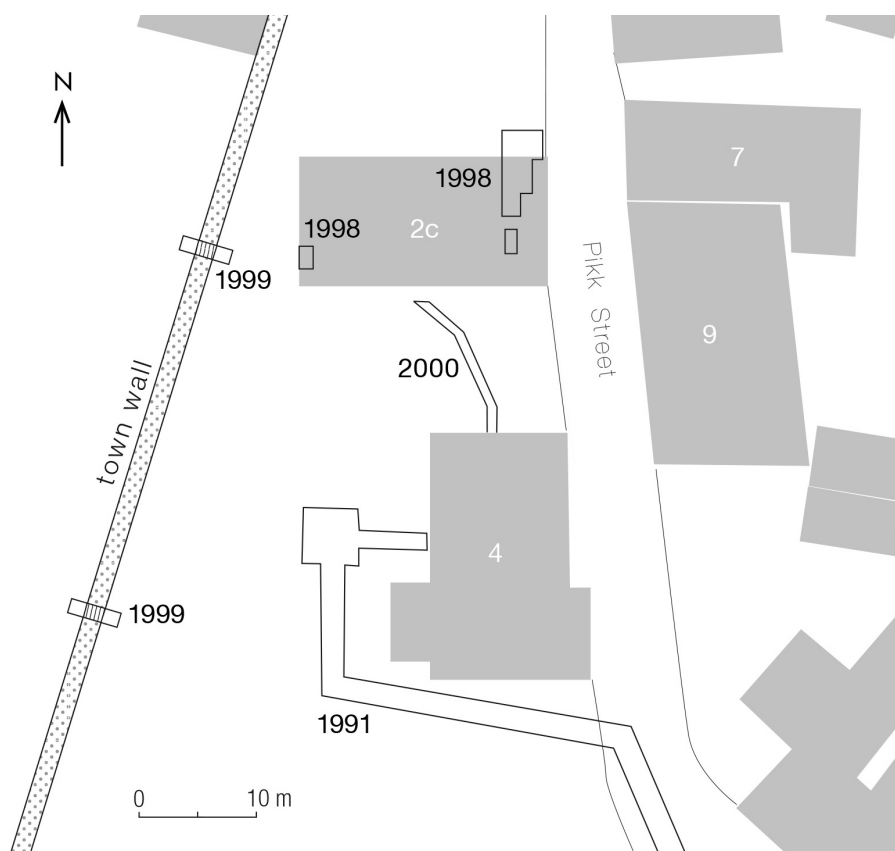


FIG. 8. Archaeological investigations conducted in Viljandi in the area of Pikk Street 4. Draft by Jaana Ratas.

a diet primarily based on C_3 plants (e.g. wheat, barley, rye, and rice) as well as on animals that had themselves consumed C_3 plants. The isotope values from two individuals interred in the Sulevimägi churchyard further indicate a possible minor C_4 component in the diet (most likely millet). It has been proposed that in medieval Estonia, millet was particularly consumed by members of the urban middle classes (Sillasoo & Hiie 2007, 89).

VILJANDI

Archaeological rescue investigations in the area of the medieval town of Viljandi, at the plot of Pikk Street 4 and its surroundings (Fig. 1: 6), were carried out in 1991 in connection with the construction of a heating pipeline, covering an area of approximately 175 m² (Fig. 8). On the natural subsoil, a 5–12 cm thick layer was identified, containing numerous sherds of earthenware vessels that had melted and bloated in the heat of a potter's kiln (Valk 1992, 2–13, 26–36; 1993, 7–8, 16–17, 20).

In 1998, excavations at the Pikk Street 4 plot uncovered the subterranean part of a potter's kiln, namely the stokehole and firing chamber (Fig. 8), which contained sherds from 20–30 vessels broken during firing (Tvauri 1999; 2000a). Test pits excavated during the same investigation revealed the remains of two additional firing chambers of potter's kilns dug into the natural subsoil (Tvauri 1999, 92). Another subterranean firing chamber of a potter's kiln was uncovered here in 2000 (Fig. 8; Tvauri 2001a). The pottery workshop had been established on former arable land, as directly evidenced by plough marks exposed in the virgin soil beneath this layer (Tvauri 1998, fig. 4; 2001a, fig. 3).

The earthenware pots and lids produced in the Viljandi pottery workshop are virtually indistinguishable from 13th-century ceramics of Pskov and from vessels of the same type found in the University of Tartu Botanical Garden excavation (see Tvauri 2000a, fig. 7). In addition to earthenware, only a few sherds of German stoneware were recovered (e.g. VM Pikk 4 1991¹: 9/2, 12/2, 16/2). Excluding the clearly Pskov-style earthenware, the other finds from the occupational layer resulting from the activity of the workshop cannot be associated with any particular place of origin or ethnic background. An exceptional discovery is a bone template used in shaping ceramic vessels (Tvauri 2000a, figs 2–4). Other finds include, for example, a circular lead pendant with an indeterminate image (Tvauri 2000a, fig. 5), a small penannular brooch of copper alloy (Tvauri 1999, fig. 3), a spiral tube made of brass wire, a tiny yellow glass bead identical to that depicted in Fig. 5: 3, a knife, and two iron padlock keys. Since no artefacts characteristically associated with the material culture of Kyivan Rus' (such as spindle whorls made of pink slate or glass bracelets) were recovered from the 13th-century occupational layer at Viljandi's Pikk Street area, it may be assumed that the Pskovians active here had not come directly from Pskov, but rather via Tartu.

The Pskovians in Tartu and Tallinn in the 13th century versus the Russian churches and merchant yards of the 15th–16th centuries

While finds of Germanic and Estonian origin in Tartu are distributed evenly across the 13th–14th-century urban space (see Haak 2022, fig. 8: 4), the material associated with Pskovian settlers from the 13th century is concentrated in specific locations (Fig. 1).

1 The finds do not have main numbers. They are housed in the Archaeological Collection of the University of Tartu.

All the 13th-century Pskovian settlement clusters under consideration existed at a time when these towns had not yet been surrounded by town walls. In Tallinn, the earliest phase of the town wall was erected in the second half of the 13th century, after 1265; however, the Sulevimägi Street area was incorporated into the walled zone only around 1310, when the fortified area was expanded northwards (Russow 2019, 32, fig. 9). On the basis of observations made during the excavations at the site of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden in 1988–1991, it has been concluded that the construction of the town wall, at least in this location, was begun in the final third of the 13th century (Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 130). The town wall of Viljandi was most likely built sometime around the year 1300 (Tvauri 2001c, 106; Haak & Russow 2013, 75). Archaeological investigation of the section of the town wall adjoining a pottery workshop located on Pikk Street revealed that the workshop was already located there before the erection of the wall (Tvauri 2001c, 106–107).

What became of the Pskovian settlement clusters in Tallinn, Tartu, and Viljandi after the 13th century? In Viljandi, the pottery workshop appears to have operated only for a relatively short period. Despite the tens of thousands of sherds resulting from pottery firing recovered here, the occupational layer associated with the workshop is only 5–20 cm thick, depending on the location (Valk 1993, 7, 18; Tvauri 1998, fig. 7; 2001a, fig. 2). The layer deposited above the workshop stratum contained finds dating from the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century (Valk 1993, 20).

In the excavations at the site of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden, no finds of Rus' origin were recovered from layers dating later than the 13th century. In the final third of the 13th century, two residential buildings were erected in the investigated area. One of them was constructed of brick, while the other was a half-timbered building. As evidenced by the preserved fire layer and a coin hoard dating from the 1320s found therein, these buildings were destroyed in the conflagration of 1329, which is known from written sources (Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 130). Both the timber-framed construction and the furnace of a heat-storage hypocaust discovered in the brick house are, in any case, characteristic features of distinctly German urban culture (see Tvauri 2009). It is likely that the Pskovian settlement there was destroyed in the course of the looting raid carried out by the Novgorodians in 1262 (Selart 2009b, 44–45), after which this area was incorporated within the town wall. Archaeological evidence does not permit the dating of the end of the Pskovian settlement with annual precision; however, no material later than the 13th century has been recovered from the 'Pskovian' layer.

The earliest written record concerning the Russian churches of St Nicholas and St George in Tartu dates from 1438 (Selart 2009a, 283; Alttoa 2017, 204). The Russian quarter of Tartu (*русский конецъ*) is mentioned for

the first time in 1474 (Alttoa 2017, 204). A description from 1498 provides information about the character of this Russian quarter (*Ruske ende*). It is said to have consisted of buildings surrounding the Russian church, which belonged to the townspeople. Previously, Russians had lived there, renting houses from Tartu citizens (Alttoa 2017, 203). On the basis of later written sources, it can be inferred that the reference concerned the St George's Orthodox Church. According to written sources, this church was situated next to the Russian Gate, between Lai Street and the town wall, and appears to have belonged to the Novgorodians (Alttoa 2017, 205–206).

Thus, the medieval church of the Novgorod merchants was situated near the area investigated in 1988–1991, likewise within the grounds of the present-day University of Tartu Botanical Garden. By 1555, the church had already been completely destroyed. According to written records, there were still two Russian churches in Tartu in 1481, but only one in 1498. Kaur Alttoa has suggested that the church of the Novgorodians was demolished by the authorities of Tartu after Tsar Ivan III of Moscow closed the Hanseatic kontor (St Peter's Yard) in Novgorod in 1494 and deported its merchants to Moscow (Alttoa 2017, 207).

The remains of the Novgorodians' St George's Church are most likely preserved beneath the greenhouse of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden. During archaeological rescue excavations in the winter of 1981–1982, an area measuring 33×4 m was partially investigated (Fig. 1: 2). A medieval wall built of bricks and fieldstones was uncovered, running approximately east–west. The eastern end of the wall, 143 cm thick, curved gently towards the south. At the western end of this wall, another stone wall was found, about 245 cm thick and oriented roughly north–south (Fig. 2). Within the construction debris surrounding the walls, human bones were present, and fifteen skeletons were uncovered along the northern side of the wall. The bodies lay on their backs, with their heads towards the west or northwest and their hands on the chest. Two burials contained traces of wooden coffins and iron nails originating from them. No grave goods were associated with the deceased (Aun 1982; Aun et al. 1983; Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 131). The rounded eastern termination of the wall is most likely the apse of a church (Alttoa 1998, 38). The excavations did not provide an answer to the question of when this stone church building was erected. It was established only that the stone church was not the earliest structure on the site – the remains of wooden buildings were discovered beneath its walls (Aun et al. 1983).

The other Orthodox church in medieval Tartu, the St Nicholas Church, was located about 140 m south of the St George's Church, in the area between present-day Rütli and Magasini streets (Fig. 1: 3). The location of this church was first identified by the historian Richard Otto, who placed it on the

site plan appended to his study on medieval monasteries in Tartu (Otto 1910, pl. III). The site of the church is evidenced in written sources. Specifically, Bartholomäus Wybers's revision book (1582–1658) (EAA.995.1.21865, fol. 92) and the 1616 revision compiled by the Polish authorities within the *Metrica* of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (RGADA, ф. 389, оп. 578, л. 7) indicate that it was located on the eastern side of Rütli Street near Lai Street (Altoa 2017, 205). During the period of Polish rule, the church was used by the Jesuits, and by 1613 it had been completely destroyed by the Swedes (Protocoll, 34), during the years 1600–1603, when Tartu was occupied by the Swedish army. The date of its construction is unknown. Scholars have suggested that this church may have belonged to merchants from Pskov (Otto 1918; Altoa 2017); however, definitive written sources to substantiate this assumption are lacking. Thus far, three human skeletons have been recovered from a pipeline trench on Magasini Street (Tvauri 2005, 4) and two additional skeletons from preliminary archaeological investigations in the courtyard of Magasini Street 10 (Bernotas & Liivak 2024, 9). These burials are presumed to have been associated with this church or its churchyard. During rescue excavations conducted in 2025, the preserved remains of the church walls were uncovered. The building was constructed of brick, and its plastered and whitewashed interior walls were decorated with wall paintings. As part of these investigations, more than 300 burials found within and around the church were examined (Malve 2025; Malve & Valk 2025). In situ burials and disarticulated human remains have also previously been discovered in the subsoil beneath the building at Rütli Street 21, which borders the plot at Magasini Street 10 (Piirits 1998, 7).

In the Sulevimägi Street area of Tallinn (Fig. 1: 4), the Rus'ian church and cemetery were abolished between 1397 and 1413 (Tiik 1957, 384–385). Leo Tiik has suggested that the church at Sulevimägi stood in the way of the construction of the town wall and was therefore removed (Tiik 1957, 387). In reality, however, the written sources do not reveal the reason for the abolition of this church and cemetery. From 1422 onwards, the sources begin to mention the stone St Nicholas Orthodox Church belonging to merchants from Novgorod. It was located about 180 m south of the excavation site at Sulevimägi Street 4/6, in the area between Vene (Russian) Street and the town wall (Fig. 1: 5). Under the same roof as the church there was a house where goods were stored and where Novgorodian merchants visiting Tallinn held their meetings. The church had no door opening directly onto the street, and at the demand of the Tallinn town council, the building complex contained no stoves. This regulation had been established to ensure that Russian merchants lodged in rooms rented from townspeople. The medieval church was demolished between 1822 and 1827, and in its place the present St Nicholas Orthodox Church was built (Kleinenberg 1962, 242; Selart 2009a,

281). No archaeological investigations have been carried out on the later Novgorodian church and merchants' buildings located on Vene Street in Tallinn.

The earliest reports of Rus'ian merchants in Livonia's largest city, Riga, date back to 1209 (Selart 2009b, 38). A Rus' quarter, later known as the 'Russian village' (*Russche dorp*), may have been established sometime after the 1212 treaty between the Prince of Polotsk and the Archbishop of Riga, and was possibly enclosed within the town walls during the 1220s or around 1230. The earliest written sources concerning the Rus' quarter in Riga date only from the late 13th century (Selart 2009b, 40). In addition to Rus'ian merchants, written sources from Riga in the 13th century also mention Rus'ian artisans (Caune 1994). Notably, some of the Rus'ian inhabitants referred to in Riga's 13th–14th-century sources were citizens of the town and property owners (Angermann 2003, 266; Selart 2009b, 39; Gonsovska 2018).

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that, similar to Tallinn and Tartu, glass beads were also produced in the Rus' quarter of Riga during the 13th century. Specifically, along the town wall at Trokšņu Street on the northern edge of the medieval town, a 20 cm thick occupational layer dating from the late 13th to the early 14th century was uncovered. This layer yielded remains and tools associated with glass bead production – faulty glass beads and their fragments, metal rods coated with glass, and cupel-crucibles (Caune 2004; Caune & Ose 2006, 459–460). In addition, stone moulds intended for the manufacture of ornaments in the Rus' style have been recovered from 13th-century layers of Riga. Andris Caune (1994, 204) has suggested that the Rus'ian craftsmen active in Riga during the 13th century were refugees originating from Rus' towns destroyed by the Mongols. From 1297 onwards, references appear to the St Nicholas Orthodox Church located in the 'Russian village' (Selart 2009b, 40). Unlike in Tallinn and Tartu, the Russian quarter in Riga remained in the same location from the 13th century until the Livonian War (1558–1583) (Caune 1994; Šterns 1996; Selart 2009a, 288–289).

In Tallinn and Tartu, the 13th-century Pskovian settlements were situated in locations different from those of the later Russian churches or quarters (Fig. 1). Although in Tartu the 13th-century Rus' settlement was located adjacent to the later Novgorodian St George's Church, the two were nevertheless separated by a street.

The numerous pottery sherds recovered from the excavation at the University of Tartu Botanical Garden and from Pikk Street in Viljandi unquestionably derive from ceramic vessels representing the Pskov manufacturing tradition. Although it has been suggested that the Novgorodians' St George's Church in Tartu may have been established already in the 13th century (Malve & Mäesalu 2014, 129), there is no evidence to support this. The fact that people of Pskov origin resided in the

northern corner of Tartu in the 13th century rules out the possibility that the Novgorodians could have built a church there. In the mid-13th century, Novgorod and Pskov were rivals, with part of the Pskov elite allied with the rulers of Livonia. In 1240, the Bishopric of Tartu supported the attempt of the Pskov nobleman Yaroslav Vladimirovich to become Prince of Pskov. That same year, at the invitation of Bishop Hermann of Tartu, the forces of the bishopric, the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order, and the king of Denmark conducted a military campaign that resulted in the conquest of Pskov and the installation of Yaroslav Vladimirovich as ruler. Already in 1242, however, Novgorod's prince Alexander Yaroslavich (later known as Alexander Nevsky) reconquered Pskov and deposed Yaroslav Vladimirovich (Maasing & Mäesalu 2024, 15–16). Written sources record that Yaroslav Vladimirovich, together with his relatives and supporters, spent a period of exile at the bishop's castle in Otepää after 1232 (Mäesalu 1993, 147; Selart 2001, 114–115; 2015, 133–134; Maasing & Mäesalu 2024, 14). Although written records of their presence in Tartu and Viljandi are lacking after the years 1232 and 1242, respectively, the archaeological material discussed above provides grounds to assume that refugees from Pskov also reached these towns.

The inhabitants of Pskovian origin in the towns of 13th-century Livonia were engaged in crafts, specifically in the production of pottery, glass beads, and copper-alloy ornaments. Later Russian centres, by contrast, primarily functioned as merchants' churches and warehouses. In Tartu, Orthodox churches may also have been used by fishermen and shoemakers of Russian origin, whose presence is attested in written sources from the first half of the 16th century (Tarvel 1980, 47, 52). Glass bracelets and spindle whorls made of pink Ovruch slate, discovered in the layer of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden, are artefacts that were used by women. This fact indicates that the people arriving from Pskov resided here in family groups. In later sources, by contrast, the Russian quarters of Livonian towns are associated primarily with merchants, who stayed only seasonally and did not own property in the towns.

In the case of Tallinn, scholars have previously assumed continuity between the hypothetical Russian trading yard that operated in the Sulevimägi area and those situated along Vene Street (see Tiik 1957, 383–385; Kleinenberg 1962, 254). However, in the light of the available evidence, it appears more likely that the Pskovian community at Sulevimägi assimilated and converted to Catholicism, so that by the late 14th century there were no longer Orthodox inhabitants in the city to make use of the own church and cemetery. The new church and trading yard on Vene Street were established for merchants from Novgorod. In Tartu as well, there may not have been a direct continuity between the settlement of refugees from

Pskov in the 13th century and the later communities that made use of St George's Church and cemetery, associated with Novgorodian merchants, and St Nicholas Church and cemetery, associated with Pskovian merchants.

In the 13th century, in addition to people of German origin and the local population, immigrants from Pskov also arrived in Tartu, Tallinn, and Viljandi, who by the following century at the latest appear to have adopted the Catholic faith and assimilated into the broader urban population. Similarly, the Rus' immigrants who settled in Riga during the 13th century assimilated by the following century at the latest, depending on their social standing, either into the higher-status German or the lower-status non-German segments of the population (Selart 2009b, 49–50).

At the earliest stage of urban development in Livonia during the 13th century, towns were socially and ethnically far more open than in the 15th–16th centuries, when nearly all trade and the majority of crafts came to be concentrated in the hands of German burghers. In the 15th–16th centuries, the Russian merchants present in the towns of Livonia were no longer residents of these towns but rather visitors.

Conclusions

The earliest towns in Estonia were founded in the 13th century following the German–Danish conquest and the Christianisation of the region. In addition to the German merchants and craftsmen who dominated urban administration, substantial numbers of Estonians and Scandinavians also resided in these towns. Archaeological evidence indicates that in the mid-13th century, settlers of Rus' origin arrived in Tartu, Viljandi, and Tallinn from Pskov.

In all of these towns, the settlement centres of the Pskovians were located on the periphery of the contemporary urban area: in Tartu in the area of the present-day University of Tartu Botanical Garden, in Viljandi on the plot at Pikk Street 4, and in Tallinn on the property at Sulevimägi Street 4/6. The Pskovian origin of these inhabitants is demonstrated primarily by the large quantity of pottery sherds characteristic of Pskov recovered from the aforementioned sites.

The substantial assemblage of finds indicates that craftsmen originating from Pskov lived in these locations as family groups and were engaged in pottery production (in Tartu, Viljandi, and Tallinn), the manufacture of glass beads (in Tartu and Tallinn), and the casting of small metal ornaments (in Tartu). From a mid-13th-century layer in the excavation area of the University of Tartu Botanical Garden, fragments of glass bracelets, spindle whorls made of pink slate originating from the region of Ovruch near Kyiv, a lead spindle whorl, and a tin penannular brooch decorated with vegetal ornamentation were recovered – artefacts characteristic primarily of the

material culture of Kyivan Rus'. From the same layer, as well as from a 13th-century layer at the plot at Sulevimägi Street 4/6 in Tallinn, fragments of glass vessels manufactured in Kyiv were discovered. These represent the earliest glass vessel fragments found in Estonia. The assemblage demonstrates that people of Pskovian origin were permanent residents of Tartu, Viljandi, and Tallinn in the 13th century rather than temporary visitors. At Sulevimägi Street in Tallinn, an Orthodox church and cemetery belonging to the Pskovian community were also present. The Pskovians were assimilated into the urban population of these towns by the end of the 14th century at the latest.

In the 15th century, the St Nicholas Orthodox Church belonging to the Novgorodians was constructed along Vene Street in Tallinn. Probably in the same century, the St George's Church of the Novgorodians and the St Nicholas Church of the Pskovians were built in Tartu; both have also been investigated archaeologically. These were churches of Russian merchants, and the associated trading courts were not connected to the Pskovian settlement that had existed in the area in the 13th century.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the article.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Arvi Haak, Villu Kadakas, Irita Kallis, Erki Russow, Anti Selart, and Heiki Valk for their valuable data, comments, and corrections. This paper was prepared as part of the Estonian Research Council project PRG1931 'Estonia in 1100–1400: native society, traditions and culture in the time of changes' and the Centre of Excellence 'Estonian Roots' (TK215), funded by the Ministry of Education and Research. The publication costs of this article were partially covered by the Estonian Academy of Sciences.

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Pihkva päritolu asukad Eesti linnades 13. sajandil arheoloogia andmetel

Andres Tvauri

RESÜMEE

Varaseimad linnad Eestis asutati 13. sajandil pärast Saksa-Taani vallutust ja maa ristiusustamist. Lisaks linnu valitsenud saksa kaupmeestele ja käsitöölistele elas neis arvukalt eestlasi ja skandinaavlasi. Arheoloogilised

allikad näitavad, et 13. sajandi keskel saabus Tartusse, Viljandisse ja Tallinna elanikke ka Pihkva linnast või Pihkvamaalt.

Kõigis neis linnades paiknes pihkvalaste asustuskeskus omaaegse linna äärealal: Tartus tänapäevase Tartu Ülikooli botaanikaaia alal, Viljandis Pikk 4 krundil ja Tallinnas Sulevimägi 4/6 kinnistul. Nende inimeste Pihkva päritolu näitab eelkõige mainitud leiukohtadest saadud suur hulk Pihkva-päraste savinõude katkeid. Kogutud arvukas leiuaines tõestab, et Pihkvast pärit käsitöölised elasid neis paigus perekondadena ja tegelesid savinõude tootmisega (Tartus, Viljandis ja Tallinnas), klaashelmeste valmistamisega (Tartus ja Tallinnas) ning väikeste metallehete valamisega (Tartus). Tartu botaanikaaia 1988.–1991. aasta kaevandi 13. sajandi keskpaiga kihist saadi klaasist käevõrude katkeid, Kiievi lähedal paikneva Ovrutši piirkonnast pärit roosast kiltkivist värtnaketrasid, pliist värtnakeder ja taimornamendiga kaunistatud tinast rõngassõlg, mis on omased eelkõige Kiievi-Vene-ainelisele kultuurile. Samast kihist ja Tallinnast Sulevimägi 4/6 krundilt 13. sajandi kihist leiti katkeid klaasanumatest, mida valmistati Kiievis. Need on vanimad Eestist leitud klaasnõude katked. Leiuaines näitab, et Pihkva päritolu inimesed olid Tartus, Viljandis ja Tallinnas 13. sajandil püsielanikud, mitte külalised. Tallinnas Sulevimäel oli ka pihkvalastele kuulunud õigeusu kirik ja kalmistu. Pihkvalased assimileerusid nende linnade elanikkonda hiljemalt 14. sajandi lõpuks.

15. sajandil püstitati Tallinna Vene tänava äärde novgorodlastele kuulunud Püha Nikolai õigeusu kirik. Tõenäoliselt samal sajandil püstitati Tartus novgorodlaste Püha Jüri ja pihkvalaste Püha Nikolai õigeusu kirikud, mida on ka arheoloogiliselt uuritud. Need olid vene kaupmeeste kirikud ja nende juurde kuulunud kaubahoovid ei omanud seost siin 13. sajandil eksisteerinud pihkvalaste asustusega.