

EXCAVATIONS AT THE MEDIEVAL TOWN GATES OF VILJANDI

Heiki VALK

Tartu Ülikool (Tartu University), Lutsu 16—24, EE-2400 Tartu, Eesti (Estonia)

Rescue excavations directed by the Archaeological Laboratory of Tartu University were carried out in the centre of Viljandi near the plot at 22 Lossi Street. Trial excavations in 1991 established that in the area designed for a new building the medieval cultural layers had been totally removed in the course of constructing a house destroyed in 1944. However, in the spring of 1992, the 4 m wide sewage trenches at two sides of the construction site were found to have been designed to areas with undamaged cultural layers. Thus, unexpectedly for the building companies, the excavator works were stopped and rescue excavations started. The work was carried out in two trench areas: (1) in Lossi (Castle) Street and (2) near the south-eastern corner of the construction site, on the eastern side of the existing house on 20 Lossi Street. Near the latter plot the first archaeological excavations to investigate the medieval town wall had been effected already in 1979.¹

At Lossi Street the foundations and street pavements of the medieval Tartu Gate were disinterred (Plate XLI, 1, 2). As the medieval construction remains proved to be unexpectedly well preserved, the project for laying sewerage had to be changed in order to minimize the possible damage. In the course of the excavations, first the exact location of the medieval town gates was determined. Although in 1911, when a water tube was laid in Lossi Street, a general plan of the Tartu Gate was drawn,² it was not in any way connected with the surrounding buildings. Moreover, in the course of the recent excavations, the chart turned out to be incorrect in measures and seemed to be greatly a mechanically enlarged copy of the plan of the town fortifications from the 17th century.³

The excavation results suggest that the Tartu Gate was constructed in at least three different stages.⁴ The nature of the first stage(s) (Fig. 1, 1) can be studied mainly on the grounds of indirect data, including the earlier plans. The original gate, protected by a moat lying in front of it, was probably connected with a tower not projecting much out of the town wall. However, it remains unclear whether the town wall and the supposed gate tower were built simultaneously or at different times. Most likely, there was a drawbridge across the moat. Probably a thin wall with a flat surface, lying for about 4.5 m in front of the town wall (Fig. 1, 2), served as a bridgehead.

¹ Moora, H. Viljandi linnamüüri arheoloogiliste kaevamiste aruanne V. Kingisepa tn. 22 hoovis. Tallinn, 1979. (Manuscript in the archives of Eesti Ehitusmälestised: A-273.)

² Freymann, G. v. Überreste der mittelalterlichen Fellin. — Jahresbericht der Felliner litterarischen Gesellschaft 1912—1917. Fellin, 1918, VI, IX.

³ Stockholm, Krigsarkivet. Stads och fästningsplaner. Del VIII. Utländska kartor. Östersjöprovinserna. Fellin.

⁴ Field measurements and the general plan were made by M. Krigul and R. Laarmaa (Viljandi EKE Projekt Ltd).

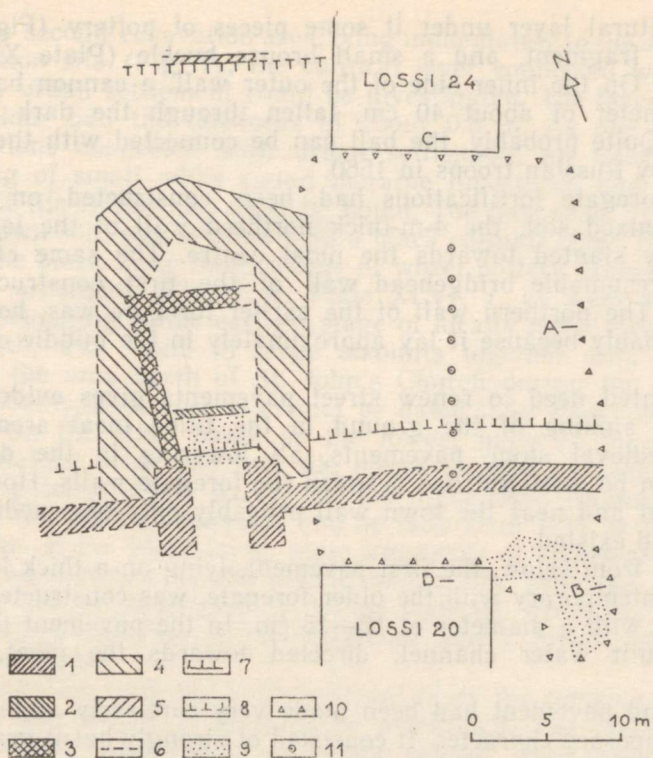


Fig. 1. Excavations in the area of the medieval Tartu Gates of Viljandi. 1 the earliest construction stage(s), 2 probable bridgehead, 3 the 2nd construction stage, 4 the 3rd construction stage, 5 probable bridgehead of the 3rd construction stage, 6 presumable wall surface, 7 edge of the moat, 8 presumable edge of the moat, 9 archaeologically excavated area, 10 edge of the construction site, 11 boring hole.

During the second construction stage, a rectangular foregate was added to the town gates (Fig. 1, 3). The foundations of the western and northern walls of the foregate with a thickness of 1.0 and 1.1–1.3 m were opened. Before the foregate was built, part of the moat had been filled with soil. Most likely, the discussed construction works took place in the middle or in the third quarter of the 15th century. As foregates, aimed at protecting the main gate from artillery fire, were not introduced into the fortification traditions before the mid-15th century, an earlier dating is evidently out of the question.⁵ The stoneware vessel fragments and a knife (Plate XLVI, 6–8) from the lowest cultural layers, lying on the filling soil of the moat, do not contradict the 15th century dating.

During the third stage of works (Fig. 1, 4; Plates XLI, 1; XLII, 1) the gate was strongly fortified. The wall on its western side was made thicker, so that the width of its foundation stretched to some 4.5 m. On the northern side the old outer wall was demolished and replaced by a new one with tooled surfaces and a thickness of about 4 m (Plate XLI). As the walls of the “third gate” have been pulled down at the level lower than that of the latest medieval street pavement, the width of the gate opening remained unclear. Between the new northern wall and the foundation of the former one, an area covered not by any medieval stone pavement but by a thin burnt layer was discovered. From

⁵ *Altoa, K.* Viljandi vanalinna kaitse- ja ehitustegevuse reguleerimise detailplaneerimine. Uurimistööd. Kõide I. Ajalooline öiend. Tallinn, 1977, p. 31. (Manuscript in the archives of Eesti Ehitusmälestised: B-3198.)

the dark cultural layer under it some pieces of pottery (Fig. 4, 1, 2), a horseshoe fragment, and a small bronze buckle (Plate XLIV, 5, 6) were found.⁶ On the inner side of the outer wall, a cannon ball of stone with a diameter of about 40 cm, fallen through the dark layer, was discovered. Quite probably, the ball can be connected with the besieging of Viljandi by Russian troops in 1560.

As the foregate fortifications had been constructed on the moat filled with mixed soil, the 4-m-thick northern wall of the latest period was strongly slanted towards the moat centre. The same can be said about the presumable bridgehead wall of the first construction stage (Fig. 1, 2). The northern wall of the earlier foregate was, however, not slanted; probably because it lay approximately in the middle of the moat area.

The repeated need to renew street pavements gives evidence of the considerable sinking of the ground in the filled moat area. So, four different medieval stone pavements, all lowering in the direction of the moat, can be distinguished between the foregate walls. However, outside the moat and near the town wall probably only one medieval street pavement had existed.

Counting from below, the first pavement, lying on a thick layer of red sand and contemporary with the older foregate, was constructed of rather small stones with a diameter of 10–15 cm. In the pavement the remains of a well-built water channel, directed towards the moat, could be observed.

The second pavement had been made very carelessly and it was evidently of temporary character. It consisted of strongly burnt granite pieces and rubble, which probably came from stove remains. As the pavement was covered with a similar sooty layer of debris, its construction may have taken place soon after the catastrophe of 1481 when the Russian troops captured the town of Viljandi. Quite probably, in the course of this attack also the town gates were destroyed: from the dark debris and from the sand bolster of the higher-lying, third pavement, two big iron nails (Plate XLV, 7, 8), meant for strengthening the gate planks, were found. The same layers contained also iron nails, a bottom of a stoneware vessel, four fragments of horseshoes, an iron and an antler artefact (Plate XLVI, 1–6, 9).

The two upper pavements (Plate XLII, 2) can both be connected with the last construction stage of the town gate and seem to come from the period after the year 1481, which is most likely the last year the primary foregate existed. The lower of the pavements was lying on orange sand and consisted of stones with a diameter between 10 and 30 cm, mostly 20–25 cm. From this pavement also a carefully made water-channel was found. Between the cobblestones two heel irons and a horseshoe fragment (Plate XLIV, 3, 4) were discovered.

The highest, fourth medieval pavement, lying on yellow clayish sand, was made of markedly big stones (30–50 cm). From the bolster of this layer two pieces of redware pottery decorated with deep lines, an iron artefact, and a horseshoe (Plate XLIV, 7–10) were disinterred. Among artefacts found between and above the pavement stones, an ox-shoe and an iron object, probably from horse's harness (Plate XLIV, 1, 2), should be mentioned. The well-built pavement must evidently be earlier than 1560 when the hostilities of the Livonian War started in Viljandi. Most likely, it dates from the second quarter of the 16th century. As the stones were strongly worn, the pavement must have functioned for a long time, probably still in the 17th century.

⁶ Finds from Lossi Street: Vilj. M 10322.

In the second excavation area, lying immediately to the south-east of the construction site (Fig. 1), the cultural layer connected with the earliest stages of urban settlement could be investigated. The layer of intensively black colour had the thickness of about 0.5 m. As one of the earliest constructions connected with urban settlement, an irregular pavement consisting of small white round moraine limestones and including also some roof tile fragments, must be noted. The pavement, lying on natural intact brown soil, was covered with a black cultural layer. From the lowest part of the black layer three sherds of wheel pottery decorated with wave and line ornament (Fig. 4, 4; Plate XLVI, 1, 2) were found.⁷ Similar pottery, belonging to the earliest stage of locally made medieval ceramics of Viljandi, was found in large amounts together with its production waste in the area north of St. John's Church during the excavations of 1991. Probably, such vessels cannot be dated later than into the mid-13th century. On the other hand, as the lowest parts of the black cultural layer contained brick and roof tile pieces as well as some fragments of imported pottery (Plate XLVI, 3), the layer must belong to the period following the German conquest and be later than 1215 or 1224. As to the middle part of the black layer, some fragments of stoneware with maroon surface, characteristic of the second half of the 13th and the early 14th centuries, can be mentioned as dating material. From the same stratum also a strongly profiled vessel fragment and a bronze plaque (Fig. 4, 3, 5) were found.

In connection with the black cultural layer the remains of a drainage system (Plate XLIII, 1, 2) must be mentioned. The ditches, with their bottoms on the upper surface of yellow subsoil, were supported from the sides by woven branch fences. The distance between the fence posts was 49—51 cm. For supporting the ditch walls, in one case also wooden boards had been used. Inside the ditches the organic matter was well preserved. Thus, from the ditches several fragments of timber vessels, two vessel bottoms of birch-bark, and numerous pieces of leather were found (Plate XLVII). The leather finds included both parts of worn artefacts, among them three shoe soles, as well as manufacturing wastes (Plate XLVII, 5—7). The preliminary results of soil analyses from the ditches, the black layer, and the underlying natural brown soil give evidence of vegetation characteristic of moist areas.⁸

The excavations yielded also information on the construction of the town wall: its foundation was opened in both investigated areas, i. e. at Lossi Street and at the SE corner of the house construction site (Fig. 2). In both places the town wall had a similar construction. The foundation with an average thickness of 1.7 m consisted of granite stones with a diameter of some 30—40 cm, packed with a mixture of yellow sandy clay and natural brown soil. Under the foundation most of the intact brown soil had been removed. The bottom of the town wall, made of loose stones, was supported from both sides by mixed yellow subsoil. Similar simple construction was exposed also in the excavations of 1979.⁹ On the grounds of the profile on the eastern side of the construction site, the foundation of loose stones, supported by mixed ground, had reached a height of some 50—70 cm. The higher-lying stones were already bound with lime mortar.

The profile of the house construction pit provided an excellent opportunity for observing the chronological relations between the town wall and the earliest cultural layers. As no traces of cultural layer could be

⁷ Finds from the site south-east of the construction site: Vilj. M 10323.

⁸ Soil samples analysed by Ulle Sillasoo.

⁹ Moora, H. Viljandi, pp. 3—5; Fig. 3.

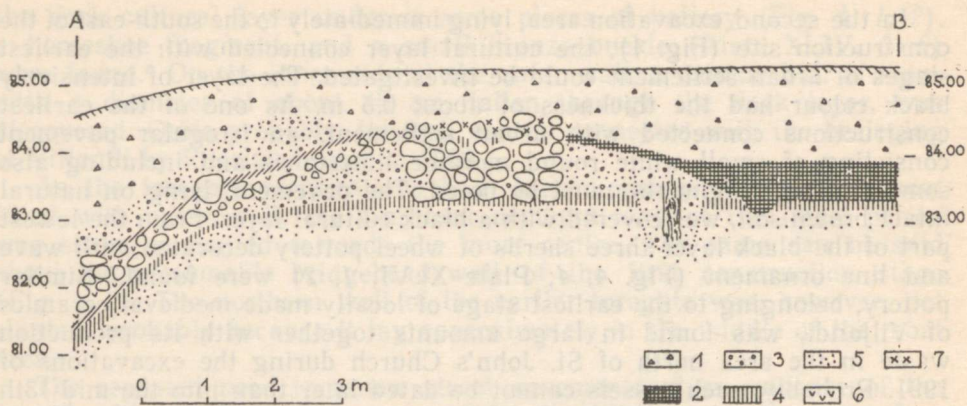


Fig. 2. Eastern profile of the opened area (the location marked in Fig. 1). 1 filling ground and debris, 2 dark cultural layer, 3 disturbed natural subsoil, 4 natural brown soil, 5 natural subsoil (sandy clay), 6 mortar debris, 7 fixed mortar.

observed under the mixed yellow ground lying on intact brown natural soil and supporting the foundation of the town wall (Fig. 2), the latter was apparently constructed before the beginning of intensive urban occupation. On the grounds of the wave-ornamented pottery from the lowest parts of the black layer, the foundation to the Viljandi town wall seems to have been laid in the middle, or at the latest, in the third quarter of the 13th century.

In the course of the excavations also some data about the nature of the moat were obtained. The eastern profile of the construction plot as well as the sections from 1979 and 1991 show that the moat started sloping about 2.5 m in front of the town wall. As the brown natural soil covered the sloping surface, the moat was apparently dug at the place of some earlier natural valley. Evidently, it was the existence of the valley that had determined the location of the medieval town border.

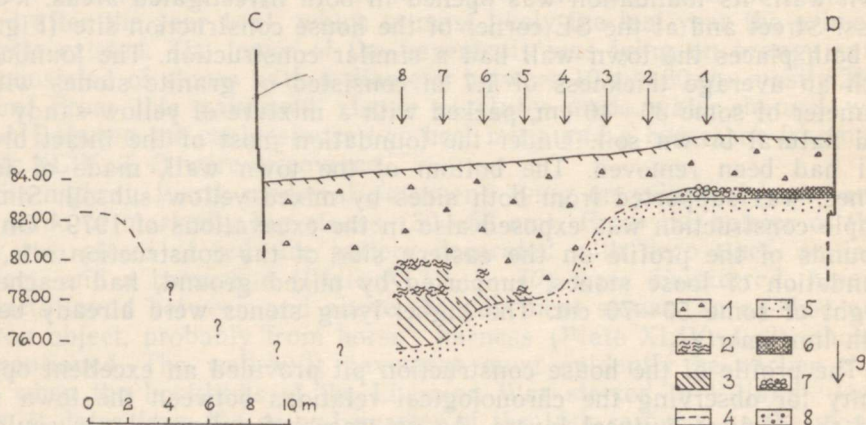


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the moat profile (approximate location shown in Fig. 1). 1 filling ground and debris, 2 water horizon, 3 muddy ground, 4 presumable bottom-line, 5 natural subsoil, 6 town wall foundation, 7 mixed natural subsoil, 8 location of boring holes.

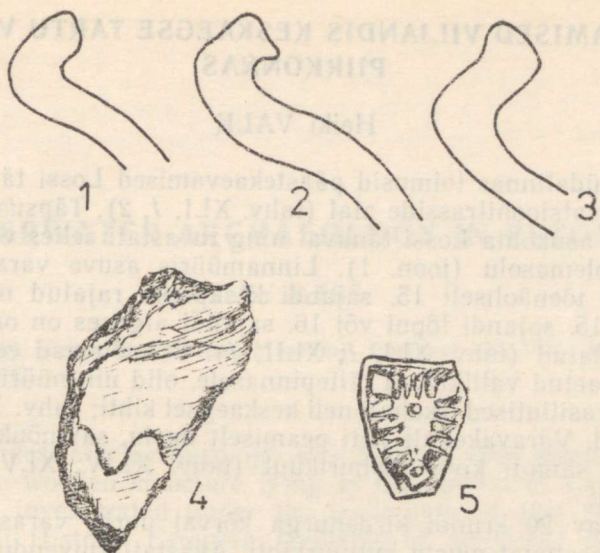


Fig. 4. Finds from Viljandi. (Vilj. M 10322:4, 3; Vilj. M 10323:27, 33, 26. — 1:1.)

In Lossi Street also the northern edge of the moat was discovered. It was supported by a low stone wall, serving maybe also as a bridgehead for a drawbridge (Fig. 1, 5). The area between the outer wall of the latest foregate and the moat was paved with small cobblestones. The northern edge of the moat with the presumable width of some 27 m was lying 9 m north of the outer wall of the foregate.

Certain information about the depth of the moat was received in 1991, when boring works aimed at determining the nature and preservation of the cultural layers were carried out in the area of the future building.¹⁰ On the grounds of the boring data, the presumable profile of the moat was reconstructed (Fig. 3). In the middle of the moat its bottom, covered with a layer of subsided muddy stuff with a thickness of about 4 m, lay about 7.5 m deeper than the foundation of the town wall. The extent to which the moat had followed the relief of the natural valley and which was the amount of human work remained unclear.

¹⁰ Boring works carried out by M. Krigul and R. Laarmaa (Viljandi EKE Projekt Ltd).

KAEVAMISED VILJANDIS KESKAEGSE TARTU VÄRAVA PIIRKONNAS

Heiki VALK

Viljandi südalinnas toimusid päästekaevamised Lossi tänav 22 ehituskrundi kanalisatsioonitrasside alal (tahv. XLI, 1, 2). Täpsustati keskaegse Tartu värava asukohta Lossi tänaval ning tuvastati selles vähemalt kolme ehitusjärgu olemasolu (joon. 1). Linnamüüris asuva varasema väravakoha ette on tõenäoliselt 15. sajandi keskpaiku rajatud nelinurkne eesvärav, mida 15. sajandi lõpul või 16. sajandi alguses on omakorda tugevasti kindlustatud (tahv. XLI, 1; XLII, 1). Et mõlemad eesväravad olid rajatud kinniaetud vallikraavi täitepinnasele, olid nii müürid kui ka väravakoha tänavasillutised (kohati neli keskaegset kihti; tahv. XLII, 2) tugevasti vajunud. Väravakohalt leiti peamiselt naelu, savinõukilde, kabja- ja kotsaraudu, samuti kivist kahurikuul (tahv. XLIV; XLV; XLVI, 5—8; joon. 4, 1, 2).

Lossi tänav 20 krundi kirdenurga kõrval uuriti varaseima linnalise asustusega seostuvat musta kultuurikihti. Avastati kuivenduskraavide süsteemi jäänused (tahv. XLIII, 1, 2). Kraavidest leiti nahkesemete ning vit-siknõude tükke (tahv. XLVII). Mustast kultuurikihist saadud leidude põhjal (tahv. XLVI, 1—4; joon. 4, 3—5) näib intensiivse elutegevuse algus vaadeldavas piirkonnas langevat 13. sajandi keskpaika või hiljemalt kolmandasse veerandisse; tumeda kivi ülaosa seostub nähtavasti 14. sajandiga.

Vundamendisüvendi profiili põhjal (joon. 2) on Viljandi linnamüür rajatud enne musta kultuurikihi kujunemist. 1991. aastal tehtud puurimiste andmed võimaldavad rekonstrueerida keskaegse vallikraavi sügavuse ja ristlõike (joon. 3).

РАСКОПКИ В ВИЛЬЯНДИ У СРЕДНЕВЕКОВЫХ ТАРТУСКИХ ВОРОТ

Хейки ВАЛК

Спасательные раскопки в центре Вильянди проведены в связи с подведением канализационной трассы к новостройке на ул. Лосси 22 (табл. XLI). Установлено место расположения средневековых Тартуских ворот, а также по меньшей мере три строительных этапа их возведения (рис. 1). На некотором расстоянии от первоначальных ворот были сооружены, видимо в середине 15 в., передние ворота, которые в конце 15 в. или в начале 16 в. были сильно укреплены (табл. XLI; XLII, 1). Поскольку передние ворота возведены на месте засыпанного оборонительного рва, то стены ворот и каменные мостовые (табл. XLII, 2) сильно накренились набок. Вещевой инвентарь довольно малочислен (табл. XLIV; XLV; XLVI, 5—8; рис. 4, 1, 2).

Недалеко от ворот исследован темный культурный слой с керамикой середины 13—14 вв. (табл. XLVI, 1—4). В темном слое обнаружены система осушительных рвов (табл. XLIII) и органический материал хорошей сохранности (табл. XLVII). Судя по профилю котлована под фундамент новостройки (рис. 2), городская стена сооружена раньше формирования темного культурного слоя, т. е., видимо, не позднее середины или третьей четверти 13 в. Реконструирован и профиль средневекового оборонительного рва (рис. 3).