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***Teemu Väisänen, Monika Reppo, Sanna Lipkin,
Arvi Haak, Kristiina Johanson, Villu Kadakas,
Mairi Kaseorg, Tuija Kirkinen & Tiina Väre***

Bridging shores: Joint meeting of the Finnish and Estonian archaeologists

The Archaeological Society of Finland and the Estonian Association of Archaeologists held their first joint event on April 4, 2025, bringing together a group of Finnish and Estonian archaeologists at the House of Science and Letters in Helsinki. The day's goal was to get to know colleagues working in the neighboring country, hear about current research conducted in both countries, and brainstorm ways to strengthen cooperation between the societies (Fig. 1).

The first session of the day focused on the activities of archaeological societies, collections, and databases.

Sanna Lipkin began the series of short presentations by presenting the activities of the Archaeological Society of Finland. The society was established in 1982 and currently has about 240 members, including students and supporting members. In recent years, the society has, for



Fig. 1. The meeting organisers: Left: Monika Reppo and Teemu Väisänen opening the meeting; Centre: Sanna Lipkin presenting the activities of the Archaeological Society of Finland; Right: Ulla Kadakas presenting the activities of the Estonian Association of Archaeologists. Photos: T. Väre.

instance, commented on reform drafts for the “Law on Archaeological Heritage”, conducted questionnaires on Equality and Equity, and formulated an Equality and Equity Plan in 2022 (Åkerblom & Lipkin 2023; Lipkin & Väre 2024). Since 1984, the Society has published two journals, *Muinaistutkija* and *Fennoscandia archaeologica*. *Muinaistutkija* started as a newsletter for the members, and even though it has evolved into a scientific publication taking in both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles, book reviews, interviews, discussions, and travel stories, it remains a membership benefit that will, after a short embargo, be available for all readers online. Whereas *Muinaistutkija* is primarily targeted at Finnish and Swedish readers, *Fennoscandia archaeologica* publishes only in English and aims to serve as a publication for various topics within archaeology within Fennoscandia and its neighbouring regions. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, it also publishes shorter papers, book reviews, and discussions. Monographs of the Archaeological Society of Finland has been published since 2011, and currently, there are twelve volumes published, including monographs, doctoral dissertations, and *festschriften*.

Teemu Väisänen continued by presenting archaeological collections and databases in Finland. Since 2011, new archaeological finds have been centralized in the archaeological collections of the Finnish Heritage Agency, except maritime archaeological finds managed by the Maritime Museum, as well as finds from urban excavations conducted by the University of Turku and the Turku Museum Centre, which have been incorporated into the respective institutions’ own collections. In addition, some regional and local museums hold local collections that were assembled before the centralization of collections at the Finnish Heritage Agency.

Finds held by the Finnish Heritage Agency can be accessed online through digitized find catalogues and excavation reports. These resources have been centralized in the Cultural Environment Service Window (www.kyppi.fi). It should be noted, however, that the database contains incomplete information on the collections of regional and local museums. In addition, some find catalogues are not publicly accessible online due to privacy concerns arising from the presence of personal data. Photographed finds can be accessed through the *Finna.fi* database, whereas information on citizen finds has been published in the *FindSam-*

po database. Finds from the University of Turku and the Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum have also been 3D modelled and made available for viewing on the Sketchfab platform. The most recent database to be launched is the AADA database, which contains information on approximately 38,000 archaeological finds ranging from the Mesolithic Stone Age to the Iron Age (Pesonen et al. 2024).

Ulla Kadakas, in turn, presented the activities of the Estonian Association of Archaeologists, as well as the current state of archaeological research in Estonia. The society was founded in 2022 to promote scientific research and education in archaeology, to ensure the preservation of archaeological heritage, and to represent and protect the professional interests of its members. Since 2023, the society has selected a Monument of the Year and has contributed to promoting the chosen sites, for example, through its website or with informational signs.

Monika Reppo introduced archaeology databases and repositories in Estonia, focusing on digital collections. The publicly accessible central database for 59 museums across Estonia, MuIS (www.mu.is.ee), holds information for 3,000,000 artefacts, including archaeological finds. All entries have persistent URLs. The databases for the archaeological research collection at Tallinn University (talar.arheoloogia.ee; email arheoloogiakogu@tlu.ee to request access), TALAR, and the collections at the University of Tartu (tara.ut.ee; email riina.juurik@ut.ee), TARA, have restricted databases with guest access to certain features. TARA is in the process of being transferred to a different platform in the near future, whilst the collections in Tallinn will be closed from June 1st, 2025, until spring next year for moving. Information on cultural heritage sites in Estonia can be found from Kultuurimälestiste register (register.muinas.ee), which has multiple sub-databases such as the registry for wrecks or heritage sites. UTs DataDOI allows for self-archiving datasets (datadoi.ee), which some Estonian archaeologists have taken advantage of. Additional information on sites can be found from the National Archives of Estonia maps (ra.ee/kaardid) and documents (ais.ra.ee) or, more specifically for archaeology, Digital Archaeology in Tallinn, DATALL (gis.tallinn.ee/arheoloogia), which is also the newest and largest collection of data on studied sites in Estonia.

Arvi Haak spoke of archaeology exhibitions and publications in Estonia during the last decade. As the Archaeological Research Collection of

Tallinn University (former Institute of History) is moving away from the house at 6 Rüütli Street, the permanent archaeology exhibition there is closed since May 2025. Thus, the only exhibition covering Estonian history at the national level with a significant archaeological part is located at the Estonian National Museum in Tartu. The exhibition “Encounters” (<https://www.erm.ee/en/content/encounters>) was opened in 2016 (main curator Kristel Rattus, archaeology coordinator Marge Konsa, with over 30 archaeologists collaborating) and offers a journey from the present up to the Stone Age. A recent permanent display at the Estonian Maritime Museum includes a medieval cog find, and many local museums have an archaeological part in their permanent displays. However, it has become increasingly common to replace permanent displays with thematic exhibitions, some of which may include some archaeological elements (e.g., Haapsalu and Narva).

The Estonian Association of Archaeologists has organised a yearly travelling exhibition of archaeological fieldwork results of the previous year since 2023. This is yearly displayed in eight to ten locations, and is also later available online (<https://arheoloogideliit.ee/naitused/>). However, the most successful outcome of the museum work has been temporary thematic exhibitions, which have focused on a wide range of topics, such as animals, burial customs, anniversaries of Tallinn and Tartu, and the Vikings. The exhibition of Saaremaa Museum, called “[Vikings before Vikings](#)” and focusing on the ship burials from Salme, Saaremaa island, is currently on display at the Vrak museum in Stockholm (until 1 November 2026).

The publications on Estonian archaeology include a new treatment of Estonian prehistory (Kriiska et al. 2020), art history (Markus 2023), several thematic volumes, e.g., “Eesti linnaehituse ajalugu” (Hansar 2019), and a monograph “Finnic be-comings” (Lang 2018), also available in Finnish (Lang 2020). In addition to several doctoral theses published as monographs (e.g., Tõrv 2019, Kurisoo 2021), several collections of articles have been included in the series “Muinasaja teadus” (e.g., Luik et al. 2022), while a number of local history volumes published either annually or biannually contain contributions on local archaeology. The three-volume monograph on the history of Tallinn has a voluminous archaeological section (Kala & Tamla 2019). The journal [Archaeological Fieldwork in Estonia](#) is an English-language publication of articles on re-

cent fieldwork results, while [Tutulus](#) offers a popular science approach to recent archaeological research. Finally, the scientific journal [Estonian Journal of Archaeology](#) is open to contributions which have a connection with Northern Europe and the Baltic area in particular.

The second session of the day focused on current archaeological research in Estonia.

Kristiina Johanson presented the current state of archaeobotany in Estonia by introducing a few recent case studies and emphasising the significance of archaeobotany in reconstructing historical ecosystems and human diets. Recent research efforts in Estonia, particularly a collaborative article detailing the history and current state of archaeobotanical studies, reveal a rich yet uneven coverage of plant remains across different periods and locations. The presentation addressed the challenges posed by the lack of specialists and the scarcity of systematic sediment sampling. It highlighted that most data on plant remains has been obtained from development-led excavations, and a substantial share of archaeobotanical material has been gathered by hand-picking, not from sediment samples (Johanson et al. 2025). The presentation also discussed the need for microbotanical studies and introduced a multi-proxy study from Pada, where analyses of pottery food crusts comprised stable isotope analysis, organic residue analysis, and microfossil analysis. The study indicated the dietary composition of past inhabitants, revealing the presence of both plant and animal substances (Chen et al. 2023). The final segment detailed the implications of the study of stable isotopes ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$) of plant remains, introducing a recent comparison of the values of charred barley, wheat, and rye grains from Tartu (Estonia) and Mankby (Finland). The study shed light on ancient agricultural practices and the potential use of various manuring strategies, pointing out that while the grains from Tartu were potentially fertilised by the manure of domestic animals, then in Mankby the fields could have been manured by fish waste or mixed fertilisers (Lempiäinen-Avci et al. 2025).

Martin Malve presented research on the 18th-century plague burial ground on the outskirts of Tallinn. The cemetery dates to 1710, when Tallinn suffered from the most prominent outbreak of plague, which caused more deaths than any previous epidemic in the town. The cemetery reflecting the victims of this outbreak was archaeologically excavated in 2018–2021 and remains the largest burial ground of its kind disco-

vered in Estonia so far (Malve & Tvauri 2021). In his presentation, Malve discussed his observations from the osteological studies of the 117 individuals buried at the cemetery.

Ragne Kangro gave a presentation on metal detecting in Estonia, covering topics such as legislation, regulations, collaboration practices, and recent noteworthy finds. In Estonia, a permit is required to use metal detectors or other search devices outside densely populated areas. To obtain a permit, applicants must be at least 18 years old, pay a 50 € state tax, and complete a 38-hour training course. Prior to each search, the detectorist must notify the National Heritage Board. After the search, a report must be submitted within 30 days via the National Registry of Cultural Monuments. All finds handed over to the National Heritage Board are assessed by experts and conserved if necessary. The finder is entitled to a reward for their discoveries.

Villu Kadakas presented an overview of building archaeology in Estonia, discussing its key topics, challenges, and historical development. Building archaeology in Estonia was initiated in the late 1950s by an art historian, Villem Raam, who had also been trained as an archaeologist at Tartu University. His studies focused on medieval rural churches and monastic sites (Padise, Piritä). At first, architects led the excavations in castles (e.g., Kalvi Aluve in Kuressaare, Haapsalu, Virtsu) and the town wall of Tallinn (Rein Zobel). They were all employed by a state institute for the study and restoration of cultural monuments. Since the early 1970s, it included a department of archaeology, with the first generation of medieval and urban archaeologists (Jaan Tamm, Toivo Aus, etc.), trained and encouraged by Villem Raam as regards field study of stone buildings. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the state institution was closed. The field study was continued within private companies, with little contact with academic institutions. An overview was given of typical building materials (limestone), also of ruined and standing monument types in the focus of building archaeology: rural and urban churches, monastic sites, castles, town defences, manor buildings with medieval origin, various types of urban housing, city infrastructure, also Early Modern manor houses as a recent development.

Mairi Kaseorg presented an overview of her upcoming doctoral project, which is set to begin in September 2025, if funded. Her research will focus on burial pottery in Western Estonia and the Islands from the

Bronze Age to the (Pre)Roman Iron Age, aiming to shed new light on the culture and chronology of these regions through detailed ceramic analysis. In addition to outlining her own research plans, she also introduced the PaleoMIX project, led by the Archemy Group at the University of Tartu. This initiative seeks to bridge the humanities and natural sciences through the application of bioarchaeological methods to tangible cultural heritage. The overarching goal of PaleoMIX is to establish a Research and Innovation Hub at the University by strengthening local expertise through collaboration with international institutions. The Archemy Group employs a wide range of interdisciplinary approaches to investigate themes of diet, health, and migration.

Arvi Haak and Monika Reppo finished the Estonian session with a presentation on a waste-based research project focusing on global connections and consumption in Estonia, influenced by the discovery of the late 15th-century landfill in Tallinn. Funded by the Estonian Research Council, the project (PRG2026) brings together both early career researchers and established scholars at Tallinn University to study how strongly the everyday material (human and natural) environment of the eastern Baltic was affected by the supraregional/global agency and early globalisation. Three work groups focus on 1) global networks and their reflections in local material culture and documentary evidence (Erki Russow, A. Haak, Tuuli Jõesaar, Heidi Luik, M. Reppo, Astrid Wendel-Hansen), 2) consumer behaviour and human-environment relations as reflected in human skeletal remains (Ülle Agurauja-Lätti, Linda Vilumets), and 3) the exploitation of domestic and wild fauna in a changing economic situation (Lembi Lõugas, Sander Nuut). The project runs out at the end of December 2028, and several publications are planned as part of it, some have already appeared in print (e.g., Johanson et al. 2024; Reppo 2024; Tomson et al. 2024).

The third session of the day, in turn, provided an overview of research conducted by Finnish archaeologists.

Teemu Väisänen opened the session by giving an overview of archaeological excavations carried out in Finland during the 2020s, the clear majority of which were rescue excavations conducted due to land use (Väisänen 2024). In his following presentation, Väisänen presented the practice of metal detecting in Finland and the underutilized research potential of the finds. In Finland, the use of metal detectors is

generally not restricted, apart from limitations related to the protection zones of archaeological sites. As a result, the hobby has become well established. Between 2019 and 2024, a total of 17,851 find reports were submitted through Ilppari.fi, the national online reporting service launched in 2019. One report may include several finds — for instance, the 1,334 reports from the Satakunta region alone include 11,668 individual objects or fragments. Due to the large number of finds, only a fraction has so far been catalogued or studied. In his work at the Satakunta Museum, Väisänen has reviewed citizen-reported finds from the Satakunta region. The systematic review of the finds, their typological dating, and analysis using GIS in relation to known archaeological sites have enabled a more nuanced understanding of prehistoric settlement in Satakunta. Collaboration with metal detecting enthusiasts has also been pursued more deeply in the region, so that good practices would spread more widely and the hobby could better support research.

Tuija Kirkinen presented her research on microscopic remains of soft organic materials, i.e. fur, feathers, and plant fibres that have been extracted from soil samples. As an example of the results, the recent study of the Late Mesolithic Skateholm I and II cemeteries in southern Sweden, especially graves XV and 58, were described. For example, in grave XV, small fibres recovered in the head area of the deceased indicate that his headgear was made of owl feathers, and mustelids, hare, and bat fur/body parts. In addition, bast fibres indicate that the body was tied or wrapped with rope or thread, or the deceased was placed in a container made of bark. This research underlines the importance of systematically collecting soil samples in archaeological excavations, as, in addition to all other analyses, it is possible to trace even microscopic remains of soft organic tissues preserved in the sediment.

Sanna Lipkin presented recent and ongoing work on textile documentation and understanding emotional bonds. The project she recently ran, ‘Daily and afterlife of children (1300–1900): New perspectives in identifying childhood in the past’ was funded by the Research Council of Finland (2019–2023). During her personal funding for an Academy Research Fellow (2017–2022), Lipkin studied funerary attire as an indicator of the status of children and focused on the emotional bonds children and adolescents formed and how these bonds shaped their lives during the Post-Medieval period (Lipkin 2024).

After these projects Lipkin has led a research group at the University of Oulu that participates in the TEXTaiLES consortium led by Athena Research Centre in Greece (<https://textailles-eccch.eu/>). Textile digitisation tools and methods for cultural heritage (TEXTaiLES) project is a sister project for the ECHOES (<https://www.echoes-eccch.eu/>) that implements the EU Commission's vision for creating a European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage (ECCCH). The platforms and tools created will help to tackle challenges due to national, local, legal, and organisational barriers and ensure the digital continuum of heritage digital twins. The TEXTaiLES will employ artificial intelligence, 3D digitisation, internet of things, Cloud/Edge computing, robotics, digital twins to capture and visualise the visible and non-visible characteristics of cultural heritage textiles. The project will develop universal, portable, and affordable textile data acquisition, digitisation, restoration, and curation tools and a handbook of the TEXTaiLES solution that will be suitable for training purposes. The use cases include Greek ancient textiles, textile collection from Pompeii (Italy), Greek Bronze Age clay sealings, textile imprints on the human plaster casts from Pompeii, Benaki Museum collection, former Royal Tatoi Estate collection (Greece), Turku Cathedral Museum collection, collection of the Opera Theatre Archive in Rome and Textile Museum St. Gallen collection (Switzerland).

Tiina Väre introduced her results concerning the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ data from Luistari, Eura (Etu-Sihvola et al. 2022) in the context of the grave goods (see also Väre 2024). There appears to be a moderate negative correlation between the value of the grave goods and the $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values. Additionally, when the individuals were divided into two groups according to the value of their grave goods, those with more elaborate ones had significantly lower $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values. If ample grave goods are interpreted as a sign of high status, which is not unproblematic, this is quite unusual. Typically, animal protein-rich diets elevating the $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values are linked to the elite, while the commoners were believed to eat, cultivate, and gather simple plant nutrition. However, as cultivation in cold Northern Europe required resources such as land, labor, and tolerance against crop failures, and traditional means of livelihood were simpler to operate, she wonders, maybe mainly the elite invested in cultivation and ate the products. In her presentation, she asked if the major societal changes and climatic warming connected to the co-occurring intensification

of cultivation may explain the finding. It is justifiable to ask whether the difference in the burial decorations, instead of vertical hierarchy, reflects horizontal differences such as the variety of cultures or religions within the population using Luistari. Further, perhaps instead of cultivated products, the observed differences are explained by cultural customs related to fish consumption. Väre asks if these findings should be considered just a coincidence, or are similar patterns observed in other samples.

In the end, Kalle Virtanen presented the topic of his dissertation, which focuses on the pile dwelling located in Lake Koorküla Valgjärv in southern Estonia.

Following the official seminar program, the day continued with a visit to the Helsinki City Museum. The evening concluded with a shared dinner, where lively discussions on cross-border cooperation carried on. It was agreed to stay in contact, and over the course of the evening, plans began to take shape for the next meeting to be held in Estonia, along with potential joint archaeological heritage trips organized by the participating societies (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Archaeologist eagerly listening to their colleagues. Photo: S. Lipkin.

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