

TRADE, WAR AND THE DIVERSITY OF RITUALS AT LATE PREHISTORIC HARBOUR SITES ON SAAREMAA

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Abstract

The article deals with Viking Age and Late Iron Age (800–1200 AD) maritime cultural landscapes on Saaremaa, the biggest Estonian island. In the course of an extensive study there since 2003, a number of Late Prehistoric and Early Medieval harbour sites have been identified. The archaeological evidence from these places suggests different uses of the sites. In the article, three harbour sites have been chosen for closer analysis. These sites represent different kinds of harbours at a local or regional level, as can probably be found in many areas around the Baltic Sea.

Key words: Viking Age, maritime landscapes, harbour sites, landing places.

Introduction

In Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland and Poland maritime landscapes have been the subject of archaeological research for decades. One of the pioneers at this field is Christer Westerdahl, whose research covers maritime cultural history in a broader sense, starting from historic sea routes and coastal landscapes and going up to sea-borne toponymics (Westerdahl 1989). He and the Gotlandic archaeologist and human geographer Dan Carlsson have formulated the main principles for defining a coastal cultural landscape and locating ancient harbour sites (Carlsson 1991; 1998). These principles have been successfully tested in neighbouring countries, including on Saaremaa (Mägi 2004; 2009).

Several investigations of the same kind can be pointed to in Denmark. An interdisciplinary project treating coastal areas on the island of Fyn should first of all be mentioned (Crumlin-Pedersen *et al.* 1996), which resulted in the demonstration not only of interlacing connections between the coastline, maritime activities and arable lands, but also sea routes and neighbouring areas on the other side of the surrounding straits. Similar research on the island of Zealand was carried out and published by Jens Ulriksen, who associated the different types and the development of the landing places primarily with political changes that took place in Danish society (Ulriksen 1998). All these aspects were also involved in similar research dealing with the use of coastal areas and archipelagos in Sweden and Finland, within the framework of historical habitation on coasts or islands, treated with interdisciplinary approaches, and with much attention being paid to changes in the natural environment and to different economic sys-

tems, first of all to the importance of fishing and seal hunting (Rönby 2003; Lilja 2008; Norman 2009).

In Estonia, similar investigations started in the mid-1990s, but took off only in 2003. Since then, extensive research has been conducted specially in the coastal areas of Saaremaa, with the main objective of defining the settlement pattern in areas closely connected with maritime activities, as well as locating Prehistoric and Early Medieval harbour sites. In recent years, the archaeological investigation of coastal landscapes has expanded to coastal areas of western and northern Estonia, continuing simultaneously on Saaremaa.

Terminology

A maritime cultural landscape is defined here not only as the physical terrain of a coast, but also as the sea in close proximity to the coast, where signs of human activity (such as shipwrecks, coastal defence buildings and jetties) are observable. Coastal areas on land comprise not only the areas immediately bordering the sea, but also the whole cultural landscape where maritime activities have played an essential role in the lives of the inhabitants of the hinterland. In most cases, it covers a zone up to five kilometres inland, but some researchers widen this area to 30 kilometres from the coast (Crumlin-Pedersen *et al.* 1996; Mägi 2004). The transformation of Estonia's coasts, caused by the upheaval of the land mass (up to 2.8mm per year), enlarges the area of research even more. All archaeological and historical sites located in this area (such as settlements, harbour sites, graves, ancient fields, churches and chapels, cult sites and cult stones), and their mutual relations, are the subject of the research.

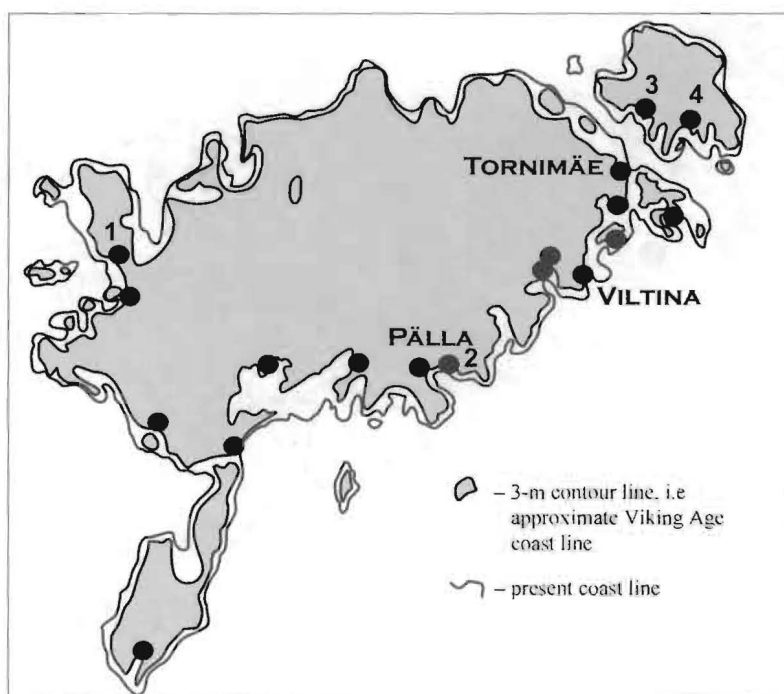


Fig. 1. Prehistoric harbour sites located on Saaremaa. Places mentioned in the article: 1 Kurevere; 2 Sutu; 3 Muhu hill-fort; 4 Mäla.

This article concentrates on harbour sites, and it is essential, therefore, to define the difference between what is called here a harbour site and other places which were suitable for landing boats and other water craft. An important aspect is the socio-political location in cultural landscapes: the hinterland, and especially the connection between the harbour or the landing site and its closest political, economic, cult or other centre. It is also important to remember that not all harbour sites need to be trading centres, although some researchers prefer to speak of trade and workshop centres only (for a discussion of this, see Carlsson 1991; Callmer 1991; Ulriksen 1998, pp.13, 259). On the other hand, rarely used and unimportant places for landing boats are seldom observable in archaeological terms.

I have preferred to use the term harbour site, defining it as a place oriented towards maritime activity and accessible to water vessels, and a place whose use is regulated by agreements and/or tradition, and which includes a hinterland. Accordingly, landing places with an accidental character cannot be interpreted as harbour sites in this text.

Case studies

Before 2003, Prehistoric harbour sites in Estonia had been excavated only randomly, and even these excavations had been carried out without proper prior knowledge of the probable character of such a site (Kustin 1967). Since the archaeological evidence of Prehistoric harbour sites is normally reported to have been rather

similar to that in 'normal' dwelling places, such places can be first and foremost defined as harbour sites due to their location and proximity to the coast at the time of their use (for criteria for locating harbour sites in Estonia and neighbouring countries, see Mägi 2004). Since 2003, several trial excavations at such coastal sites were conducted on the island of Saaremaa (Fig. 1), which in three cases led to larger-scale archaeological excavations.

Tornimäe: a Viking Age district harbour

The Viking Age harbour site at Tornimäe is located at the eastern end of the island of Saaremaa, on an elevation now nearly two kilometres from the coastline. The stretch of land between Tornimäe and the present coastline is, however, flat and temporarily waterlogged. Around 1,000 to 1,200 years ago, the area of the excavations was situated right next to the sea, providing a perfect view over the main part of the Little Strait (Fig. 2). To the east of Tornimäe, the island of Saaremaa was separated from the present peninsula of Kõrkvere by a strait leading from north to south. At Tornimäe during the Viking Age, the sea next to the coast was, according to the contour lines, deep enough to be navigable by sea-going vessels, while along most of the coastline the water level might have been too shallow for sailing.

West of Tornimäe lay some of the most fertile arable lands of the whole island, and several Prehistoric stone

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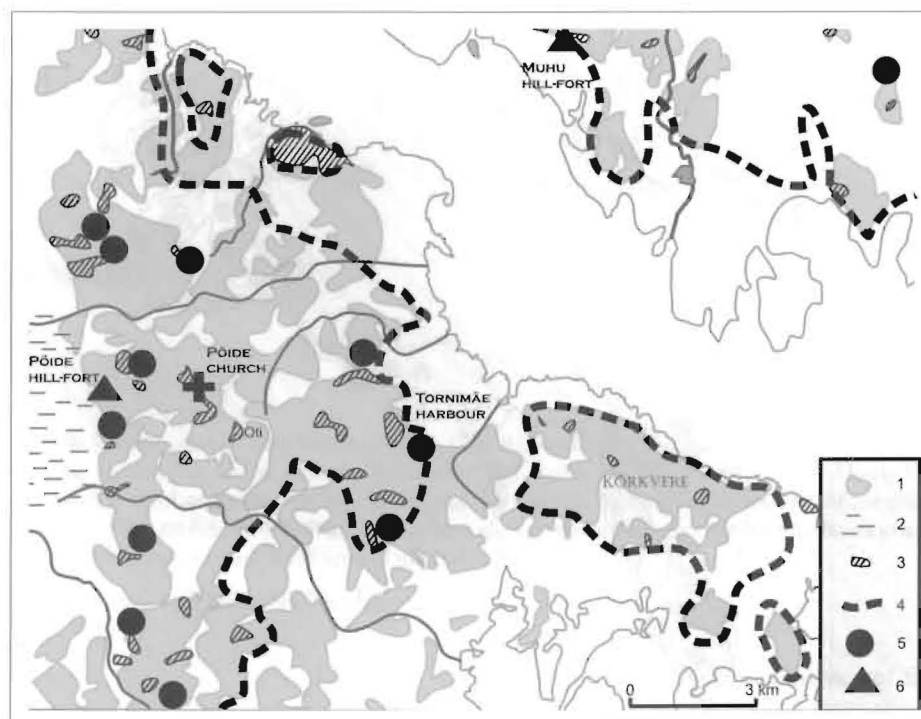


Fig. 2. Tornimäe and the surrounding cultural landscape today: 1 arable land (partly drained); 2 wetland, former lake; 3 dwellings; 4 approximate coastline 1,000 years ago; 5 Late Prehistoric stone graves; 6 Late Prehistoric hill-forts.

graves in the vicinity indicate that the settlement of this area goes further back in history. At 6.3 kilometres west of Tornimäe is the Viking Age hill-fort of Pöide (Lõugas, Mägi-Lõugas 1994; Mägi 2002b).

The area of the cultural layer at Tornimäe is approximately 3.5 hectares. In 1963, rescue excavations were carried out there on an area of 160 square metres by the slope, supervised by Aita Kustin (Fig. 3). Clusters of burnt stones, probably fireplaces, were unearthed, but she did not detect any building remains in the excavated area (Kustin 1967). This could have been caused by her excavation methods: the approximately 45° slope of Tornimäe hill was excavated in horizontal layers, not following the surface.

Another rescue excavation, also supervised by Kustin, was carried out in 1968. This time, only soil piled up in the course of road building was examined. Kustin estimated that approximately 1,600 square metres of the settlement were destroyed by the road building. She interpreted the site as an ordinary settlement, probably because of the lack of proper knowledge of the location of the Viking Age coastline: in the 1960s, exact maps were kept in secret files.

In 1997, the area of the cultural layer at Tornimäe was located with help of phosphate-mapping, and in 2004, 80 square metres was unearthed during archaeological excavations supervised by the author of this article. The area was slightly sloping, and the excavations were therefore carried out in strata following the surface.

This method made it possible to identify an area covered with smaller, burnt granite stones, which could be interpreted as the remains of a building partly remaining outside the excavations. In the uncovered area, the measurements of the construction were 8.5 by 5.5 metres. Whether the layer indicated one or more buildings constructed during the centuries when the harbour was in use remained unclear, however. The house or houses had probably been built in a log technique, as was the custom in Prehistoric, Medieval and even later Estonia. Neither post-holes, nor, for instance, burnt clay was found, but the majority of Prehistoric finds and animal bones were recorded in the area (for similar interpretations at archaeological excavations in other places in Estonia, including the Pöide hill-fort in the vicinity of Tornimäe, see Lõugas, Mägi-Lõugas 1994; Lavi 2005).

On the bottom layer at Tornimäe, right on the natural ground, slightly bigger limestone slabs formed a clear semi-circle, and had originally surrounded some probably wooden construction with a diameter of two to 2.75 metres. Similar (semi-) circles of stones have been detected previously at Estonian sites, and interpreted as some kind of storage buildings (Deemant 1986).

Finds from the different excavations at Tornimäe consisted predominantly of ceramics, most of them potsherds from quite simple cooking vessels, but the remains of more fine-grained, often carinated Viking Age bowls were also found (Fig. 4, see Plate VI). A few

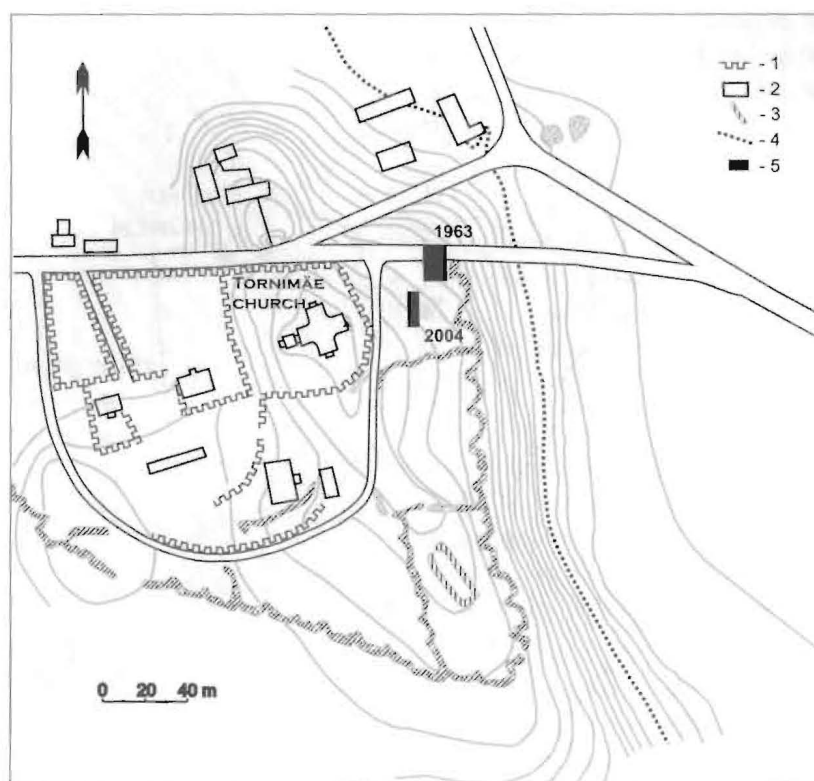


Fig. 3. Tornimäe harbour site with the excavation plots of 1963 and 2004, (from Kustin 1967): 1 stone fences; 2 present buildings; 3 trenches from the last war; 4 approximate coastline 1,000 years ago; 5 excavations.

potsherds seemed to be unlike the ceramics of western Estonia and the islands. The rest of the prehistoric find material consisted of bronze ornaments, pieces of silver plating, single weapons, glass beads, fragments of bone artefacts, and numerous finds of boat rivets. The most noteworthy was the considerable number of bones, among which domesticated animals, as well as seals and different sorts of fish, were represented.

Although altogether about 240 square metres of the sloping area at Tornimäe was uncovered, no constructions that could be directly connected with a harbour, like the remains of a jetty or a pier, were detected. However, according to some earlier descriptions, local peasants had found the remains of a 'wooden palisade' when ploughing on the slope (Luce 1811). Although the exact location and character of these finds remain obscure, it is likely that the 'palisade' originally formed a part of the harbour construction, or perhaps indicated a wooden jetty.

Pälla: the Late Iron Age river harbour

The site called Pälla or Pällamõis (Pälla Manor) is situated on southern Saaremaa near the church at Püha, on the bank of the little River Ristioja, 900 metres from the present coastline (Fig. 5). It was the location of the church two kilometres northeast of the site that in-

spired the search for a Prehistoric harbour site on the northwest coast of Sutu Bay. Archaeological investigations in the area started in 2004, with trial excavations both at Pälla and on the coast of Sutu Bay 2.5 kilometres from Pälla. The latter, however, proved to be a 16th-century site (Ilves 2006), most likely the smithy of a local manor by the coast, perhaps next to a local manor's harbour.

The area of the cultural layer at Pälla is approximately 0.2 hectares. Trial excavations were conducted there between 2004 and 2006, and were followed by larger-scale excavations in 2007 (Fig. 6; Mägi 2006; Mägi, Nurk 2008). The main finds were connected with the ruins of a late 16th to 17th-century building complex, probably functioning as the fortification of a small harbour for exporting goods from the local manor. In the remains from the early Modern period, the remains were detected of a well-preserved, up to 40-centimetre-thick extensive culture layer from the second half of the Iron Age.

The site remains some distance from arable land, and could therefore not have been used as an ordinary living place. Some potsherds suggest that the place could have been put to use as early as the middle of the first millennium AD, when it was situated right on the present coast, in the estuary of a small river. The location on the coast, and only a few hundred metres away from

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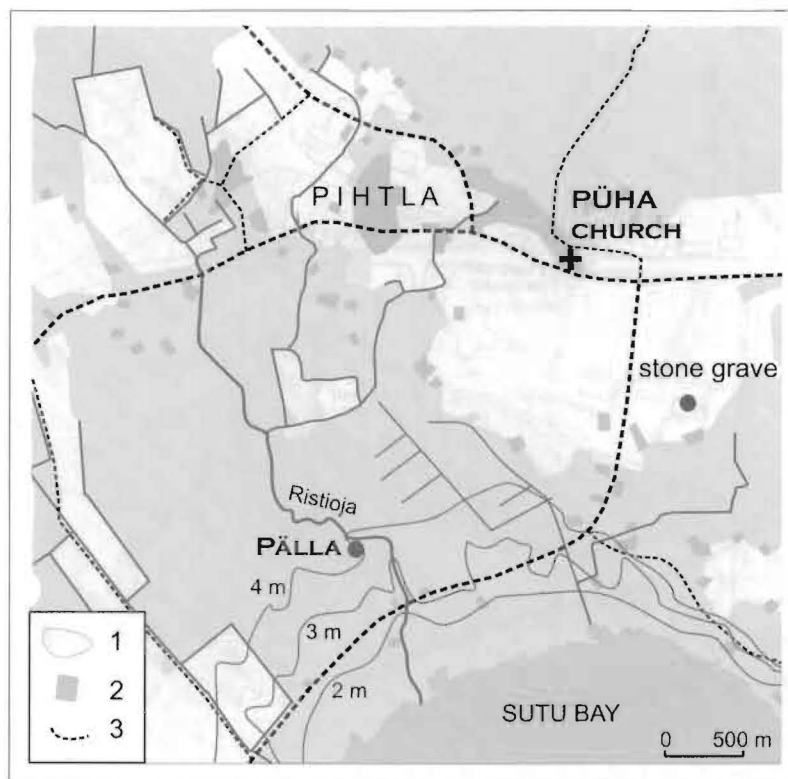


Fig. 5. Pälla and the surrounding cultural landscape today: 1 agricultural lands; 2 areas covered with buildings; 3 roads.

it next to a river, is suitable for a harbour, especially on the coast of Sutu Bay, which has been and still is very flat, making it difficult for sea-going vessels to find a place for landing. The River Ristioja was bigger before: the wetlands where it starts are completely drained now, and the former size of the river can be estimated from the river bed.

The early layer contained mainly animals' bones and potsherds from the final part of the Iron Age, as well as some pieces of single metal finds that could not be dated. Some of the potsherds belonged to the Migration or Viking Period. C^{14} samples dated the early layer to the Late Iron Age (cal. 895–920 AD/ cal. 955–1280 AD; TIn-2946) and to the 14th century (cal. 1301–1369 AD/ cal. 1381–1437 AD; TIn-3053). No Medieval artefacts, however, supported such a late date of use.

Except for one post-hole, there were no building constructions relating clearly to the early dwelling layer, but in 2007 the remains of a quay were uncovered on the bank of the former river at a point where the bank-terrace had been lowered artificially. In the yellow river or sea sand, dark impressions of a once wooden construction, a platform of planks that rested on posts, could be observed (Fig. 7). These could be interpreted as the remains of a quay, when the wooden parts of it had started to decay and were partly broken. Late Iron Age potsherds, animal bones and some pieces of iron among these impressions, together with the complete

absence of 16th or 17th-century finds, date the construction to the earlier activity layer of the site.

Viltina: a late Viking Age assemblage place

Viltina is nowadays a small village on the southern coast of Saaremaa, 600 to 800 metres from the sea (Fig. 8). The Prehistoric sites Asva and Randvere, two old settlement units one to two kilometres away from Viltina, can be pointed out. The importance of the area is emphasised by a small seventh to eighth-century hill-fort at Asva, in the same place where a fortified settlement, probably functioning as a centre for bronze casting and international trade, had been situated during the Bronze Age.

The fortified settlement of Asva, with a proposed landing place next to it, can be considered as a Bronze Age predecessor of the Viltina harbour. Here, the topographical conditions for a harbour site were favourable: it was a place on Saaremaa's generally shallow southern coast where the comparatively deep sea water of a protected inlet reached close to arable land. The actual harbour site moved gradually closer to the present coastline, in accordance with the upheaval of the land mass.

The search for a possible harbour site was inspired by the presence of several Late Iron Age stone graves

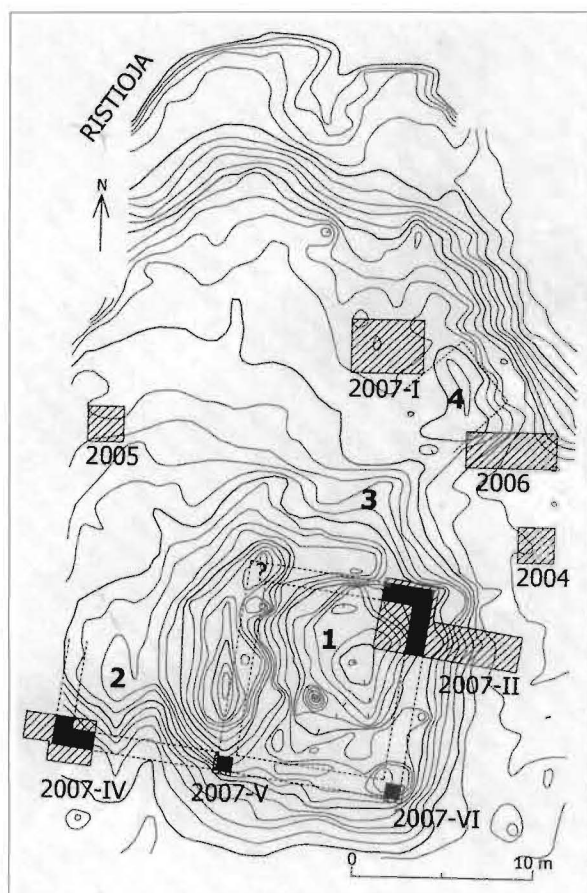


Fig. 6. Excavations at Pällamõis between 2004 and 2007, with reconstructions of modern period buildings.

right on the then coast, but some distance away from arable land. The largest cemetery, Viltina Rutiränk, was almost completely uncovered in 1940, and proved to contain not only a great amount of luxurious weapons and jewellery, but also a much greater variety of ceramics than in other cemeteries on Saaremaa (Mägi 2002a, p.60ff).

The harbour site was identified 50 metres northeast of the Rutiränk grave in 1999 (Mägi 2000), and excavated from 2004 to 2006 (Mägi 2006; 2007). Altogether, a 330-square-metre uncovered area was divided into six separate excavation plots, chosen in a manner that would enable an overview of the structure of the harbour site and the functioning of its different parts (Fig. 9). The total area where traces of human activity were detected was approximately 0.5 to 0.6 hectares, not counting the surrounding stone graves.

In the southern part of the harbour site, the boundaries of small and light buildings were uncovered (Fig. 10; No 1). Similar remains of buildings have been found at several Estonian, Finnish and Scandinavian settlement sites (Westerdahl 1989, p.101ff, Fig. 70; Lavi 2005; Norman 2009; Widerström 2009). The majority of these buildings had been erected in the traditional cross-beam technique, and the stone lines were appar-

ently the stones crammed between the lower beams of the walls. In addition, a light building with a circular ground plan was uncovered, indicated by a circle of boulders and the remains of a hearth inside it.

The buildings had been significantly rebuilt during the 150 to 200-year period of use of the place. The houses were probably relatively small, and erected close to each other, which seems to have been caused by the limited construction space. As will be demonstrated later, the site was probably surrounded by some kind of fence.

Although no ovens were uncovered inside the building remains at Viltina, two fireplaces with a deposit of cracked stones and a simple U-shaped fireplace built of stones and open on the top were detected. The absence of proper ovens implies that the houses were apparently needed only during the period when the weather was warmer.

The find material in the area of the remains of the building was not very abundant, consisting of potsherds, animal bones and metal artefacts. There was a considerable number of iron nails and boat rivets, the first of them presumably indicating wooden buildings. The most remarkable collection of finds was made in an area of approximately six square metres, consisting of several dozen boat rivets, nails, rivet fragments and other pieces of iron artefacts, as well as an auger and an axe, together with unburnt and burnt bones. The place was interpreted as being the waste pile of a carpenter's workshop.

In excavation plot No 4, a stone construction was uncovered that could be interpreted as the land-based parts of two piers. In this part, the slope had been considerably steeper, leaving the impression that the former seashore had been formed artificially in this place. Another similar section of the slope that had been dug deeper, at a distance of 16 metres from the first one, implied that there had been more than two piers at the Viltina harbour site.

In excavation No 4, two piers supported by posts had been built almost parallel with each other, at a distance of 4.2 metres, perpendicular to the coast (Fig. 11). The length of the piers to the one-time sea remains unknown; it might be suggested, however, that these buildings were repeatedly renovated. Single Viking Age and Late Iron Age potsherds and iron nails were gathered between the stones that lined the slope, indicating the use of the piers simultaneously with human activity in the surrounding area.

Other excavations on the sloping area (Nos 2 and 6), as well as some constructions next to the piers' remains, indicated that the edge of the former seashore was lined

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Fig. 7. Wood impressions at Pälla, indicating the Late Prehistoric quay (photograph by M. Mägi).

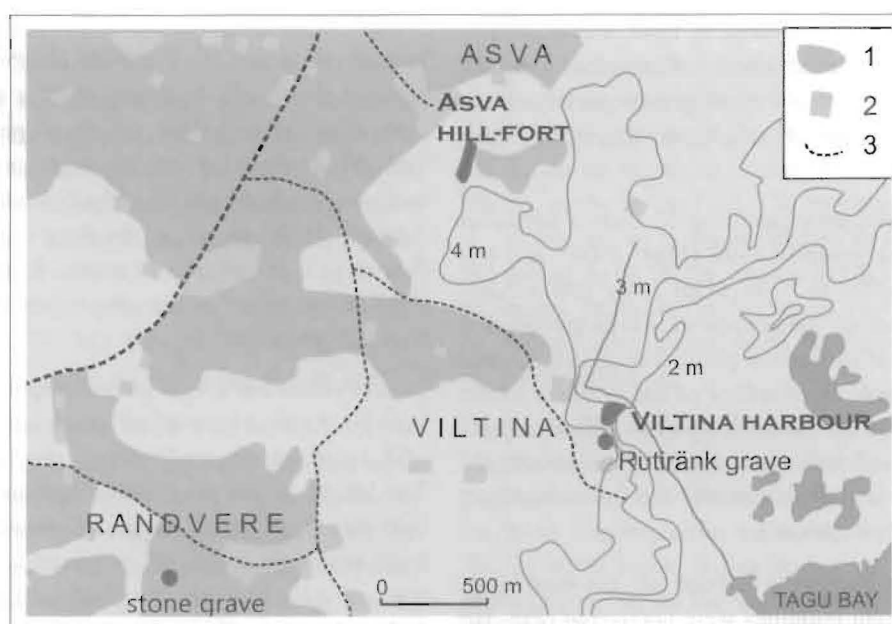


Fig. 8. Viltina and the surrounding cultural landscape today. 1 agricultural lands; 2 areas covered with buildings; 3 roads.

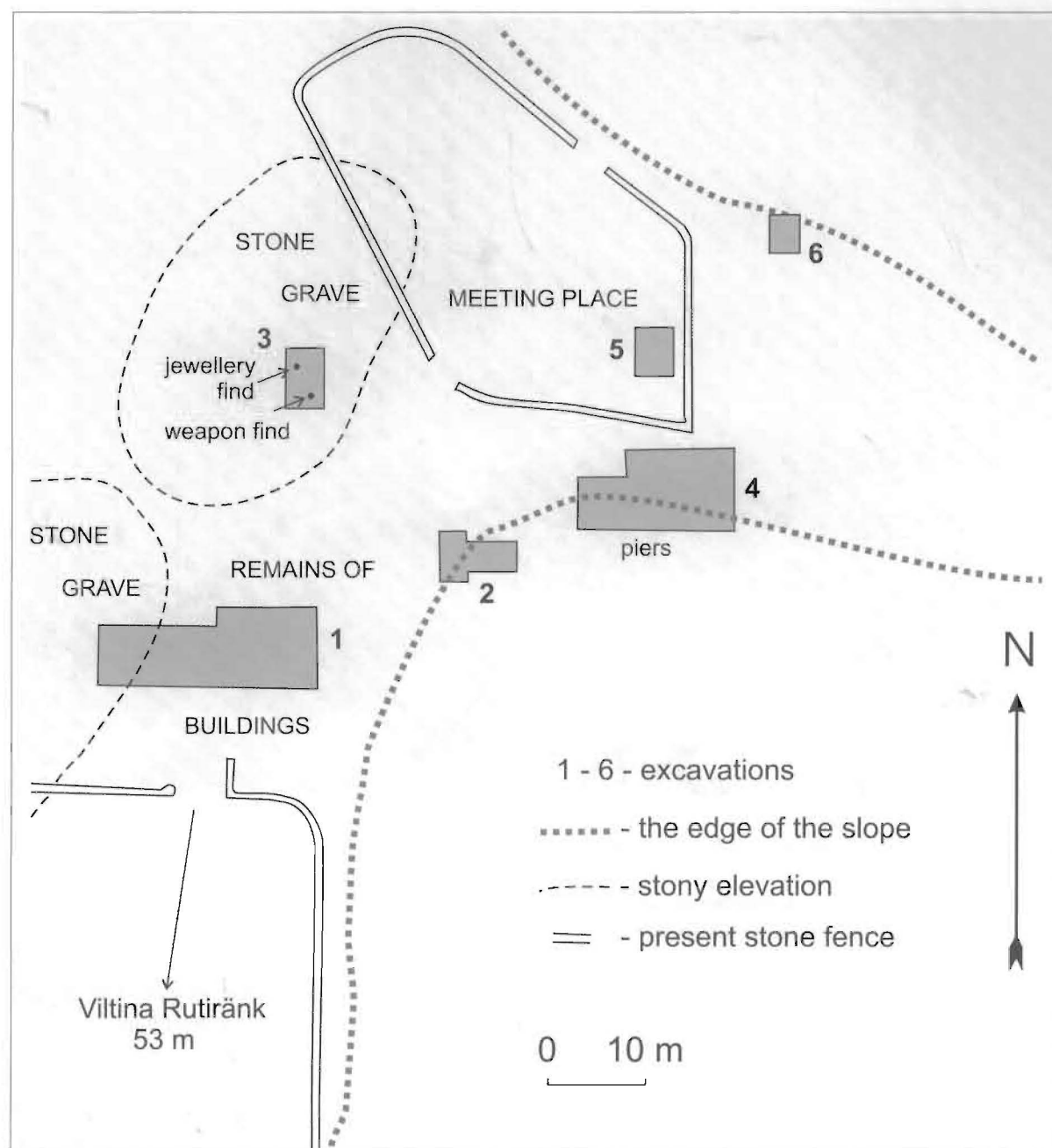


Fig. 9. Archaeological excavations at the Viltina harbour site between 2004 and 2006.

with a compound row of stones that resembled the foot of a stone wall. It might be suggested that a wooden barrier had been erected on top of the stone wall, perhaps surrounding the whole area of the harbour.

An area next to the piers (Nos 4 and 5) had been deliberately cleared of stones, and consisted of hard-tramped earth. The layer contained single potsherds, burnt and unburnt bones, some charcoal, and a few pieces of metal artefacts from the tenth to the 12th centuries. The area was interpreted as being a gathering place. Since the southern part of the harbour site had been densely covered by buildings, the need was obvious for an open place for meetings and other sorts of

activities. The area directly next to the piers was the most suitable for this purpose.

At harbour sites in Finland and Scandinavia, single burials directly inside harbour sites, as well as possibly sacrificed artefacts and sometimes even hoards, have been recorded (Lundström 1981, p.117ff; Carlsson 1999; Edgren 1995). This was the case also at Viltina. A stony elevation situated on the western border of the harbour site proved to be a stone grave of the same type as Rutiränk. In one excavation there (No 3), a densely packed stone layer with cremated bone fragments, Late Iron Age metal finds and pottery were unearthed. The most remarkable finds were two 11th-century collec-



Fig. 10. Building remains in excavation No 1 at Viltina (photograph by M. Mägi).

tions of finds, a set of female ornaments, and a set of weapons, the last found with a metal detector in 1999 (Mägi 2000). Both sets consisted of artefacts typical of Saaremaa, and could be interpreted as cenotaphs, or additional offerings in a stone grave.

In addition to the stone grave, four cremations were found in the excavated area of the Viltina harbour site. The cremations were located in the built area, or directly beside the buildings. As far as can be determined by the tenth to 11th-century molten metal artefacts, consisting mostly of a female's jewellery, at least two of the cremations had probably belonged to local women. A single cremation, foreign to Saaremaa, was unearthed next to the foot of the wall lining the coastal slope. Burnt human bones had been placed in a clay vessel and covered with a flat stone.

A comparison of the three case studies

The archaeological evidence from the three sites described above differs in several important respects, apparently in accordance with the variable functions they had. Firstly, differences in the characters of the occupation layers strike the eye. Both Tornimäe and Pälla were characterised by an extensive 30 to 40-cen-

timetre-thick cultural layer, while most of the area at Viltina was covered only with a very thin humus layer, and somewhat deeper dark soil occurred only in places. The find material was different as well. The activity layer at Tornimäe was rich in animal bones and fishbones. The number of animal remains was quite modest at Viltina and Pälla, while finds of fishbones were missing there altogether. At the same time, the natural conditions for preserving the bone material were similar at all these sites. It is, however, noteworthy that the soil at the Tornimäe site was mixed with ploughing and later occupation layers, implying that some of the animal bones there might have been from later centuries.

The great number of fish and seal bones among the find material at Tornimäe suggests that the function of the site might also, among other things, have included fishing and seal-hunting. The extensive activity layer, however, indicates a much broader use than just as a simple fishing harbour. All the fishbones collected from Tornimäe belonged to freshwater species (Lõugas 2008). Taking into account the generally frequent occurrence of domesticated animals' bones at Tornimäe, it might be suggested that the fish simply formed part of the food for people who were active at the site. It



Fig. 11. Pier remains in excavation No 4 at Viltina (photograph by M. Mägi).

does not necessarily indicate that the site was a special fishing harbour.

Approximately the same correlation characterised the ceramic finds. The number of Viking Age potsherds unearthed at Tornimäe was considerable, probably witnessing the very extensive use of the site, at least seasonally. Remarkably fewer ceramics were found at Viltina and Pälla. Quite a large part of the potsherds found at Tornimäe and Viltina represented Viking Age fine ceramic bowls with smooth black surfaces, frequently carinated and decorated with lines. At Tornimäe, these finds had exact parallels with several potsherds at Põide hill-fort, at a distance of 6.3 kilometres from the harbour site (Lõugas, Mägi-Lõugas 1994). During its Viking Age occupation period, the hill-fort was presumably connected with the political elite of the district (Mägi 2002b), and parallels in the find material there and at Tornimäe probably point to the central importance of the harbour site, at least at a district level. The central position of Tornimäe is also underlined by the strategically favourable location on the highest point next to the Little Strait sailing route.

However, neither were many potsherds of Viking Age fine ceramics found at Pälla. The rest of the Late Iron Age find material at Pälla consisted of fragments of iron and bronze artefacts that could not be dated. It is worth noting though, that although the Late Iron

Age habitation layer at Pälla had been preserved intact, the excavated area there was much smaller than at Tornimäe or Viltina, which without doubt affects the amount and the content of the find material.

A number of metal finds were collected from Tornimäe too, including some that might indicate handicrafts at the site (such as awls, semi-fabricated glass-beads and iron slag). Several finds at Viltina were also connected with handicrafts, but the most distinguishable feature of the Viltina find material, in comparison with the other two sites, as well as in most 'ordinary' dwelling sites, was the large amount of jewellery or accessories, including several precious metal items. In particular, a small collection of finds gathered in 1999 with a metal detector in the built area should be mentioned. It consisted of a piece of a silver pin, some weights, and Arab silver coins, and could be interpreted either as a small offering or a pouch lost or hidden in the buildings (Fig. 12). Several other small artefacts found in different parts of the Viltina site had not been exposed to fire, and thus apparently were derived from the settlement layer and not from a grave. These finds included the metal parts of belts and bridles that might have been accidentally lost (Fig. 13).

The archaeological evidence at Viltina suggests that the site was used only seasonally and during short periods, which did not leave many archaeological traces.

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Fig. 12. Silver items and weights found at Viltina during the surface survey trip (photograph by M. Mägi).



Fig. 13. Some artefacts found at Viltina (photograph by M. Mägi).

People who were active there seem, on the other hand, to have had a higher-than-average social status.

Another feature differentiating Viltina and Tornimäe from ordinary settlement sites was the large number of rivets, including boat rivets, and iron nails. In Pälla, boat rivets were absent, which, however, might again be explained by the relatively small size of the excavation that contained the Prehistoric layer there. In Viltina, approximately 200 iron rivets and nails, or pieces of them, were gathered, including over 100 possible boat rivets. Nails at Viltina were more numerous in areas with light wooden buildings and near the piers on the slope. Presumed boat rivets were also primarily gathered from the built areas, and to some extent from elsewhere.

Differences are also obvious when we take a closer look at the cultural landscapes surrounding these three sites. Harbour and trade centres at a regional or a higher level are often indicated by cemeteries in the vicinity, which frequently contain some graves distinct from local burials. There is data of some inhumation burials with artefacts, unfamiliar for Viking Age Saaremaa,

found at the site of the present cemetery less than one kilometre from the Viking Age harbour at Tornimäe. Unfortunately, these finds were not described properly (*Saaremaa ja Muhu* 1924, p.102). Some stone cemeteries, now demolished, have been recorded at a distance of one to two kilometres from Tornimäe. They might, however, also mark settlement units in the surroundings in the middle of arable land. The same is true for Pälla, where stone cemeteries can be found some distance away around the later church and manors. No stone grave has been recorded in the vicinity of the Pälla site.

The situation is quite different around Viltina, where it is possible to talk about a concentration of stone graves close to and even inside the harbour site, although there is little and not particularly fertile arable land in the vicinity. The abundance of graves in the, at first sight, marginal area also characterises Kurevere and Mäla on the Estonian islands (Mägi 2004). The abundance of burial places at Viltina, some of them with foreign features, seems to indicate the ritual significance of the place. It is possible that there really were only three Late Iron Age sites of this sort on the islands of Saaremaa and Muhu, Viltina, Kurevere and Mäla, which were all situated in spots that were easily accessible by sea, but somewhat away from agrarian settlement centres.

The location of Viltina on an agrarian and political periphery hardly enables us to suggest that the site functioned as a trading place, even though some transactions might have taken place there. Neither does the location make it suitable as a reloading place. The find material, which includes luxurious items connected with both men and women, does not support the possibility of it being a military harbour. The possibility of it being a fishing harbour is excluded by the total absence of fishbones, as well as by the abundance of prestigious artefacts among the find material. The archaeological evidence at Viltina altogether resembles that from Hiitis in the south of the Finnish archipelago, which can be interpreted as a site of ritual significance, while it also functioned as a harbour for ships sailing along the international trade route from Sweden to Tallinn (Edgren 1995).

So the most likely interpretation of the Viltina harbour site is that we are dealing with a specific place for ritual assemblages, where people gathered perhaps only once a year for some weeks. Such Late Prehistoric assemblages (*kārajad*) were the Estonian equivalent of Scandinavian *ting*. This way, Viltina can, for instance, be compared with the *Alting*-place on Iceland, which is known from Scandinavian sagas (for example, the story of Burnt Njall, <http://www.sagadb.org/brennu->

njals_saga.en). Landowners, or their representatives and their retainers, gathered for an *Alting* once a year for two or three weeks in order to discuss judicial proceedings, to make agreements and marriages, and to conduct rituals. Both men and women gathered there, and visitors had their own light buildings, which were used only during the *Alting*.

The functions of Tornimäe and Pälla seem to be much more practical. All aspects point to Tornimäe as being the most important of the two. Its importance is indicated by the much larger area of the site, the more extensive character of the cultural layer, and the location in the vicinity of political centres. The cultural layer suggests that the place was in use for a much longer period every year than Viltina, presumably during the whole navigable season, that is, for about seven months. In this time, Tornimäe was probably inhabited by people who looked after ships and sailors that landed there. The buildings in the harbour site are attributed to this purpose. There were probably also jetties or piers, although the remains of these have not yet been found. The visitors to the site arrived predominantly from Saaremaa and the surrounding shores of the Baltic Sea, but from time to time vessels from further away might also have landed.

Although visitors to Tornimäe harbour surely also traded with locals, it is hard to imagine the site as an international trading centre. There probably existed hundreds of similar harbour sites on the Late Prehistoric coasts of the Baltic Sea, some of them smaller, some bigger, and all of them 'invisible' in written sources. Only a few of them were important from the point of view of international trade, and can therefore be considered as nodal points. Søren Sindbæk has connected the location of nodal points with natural barriers on trading routes, where goods needed to be reloaded, or where it needed different skills to sail further. Regionally central harbour sites, on the other hand, were characterised by accessibility and a proper hinterland (Sindbæk 2009a; 2009b).

Viking Age Tornimäe was probably the most attractive harbour site for eastern Saaremaa and the island of Muhu. It was easily accessible, well protected topographically, and situated in a place that must have provided a perfect view over sailing routes. The Little Strait, which at present is not navigable any more due to the upheaval of the land mass, might have been a much used water route in Prehistory and in the first part of the Middle Ages, according to several archaeological monuments on both sides of it. The eastern part of Saaremaa, the most likely hinterland for Tornimäe, is also the most fertile part of the island. The size of the Pöide hill-fort, the biggest Viking Age fortification on

the island, is in correlation with the arable lands. The elite residing in the hill-fort presumably controlled the harbour at Tornimäe: that is, they guaranteed the safety of visiting ships, and in return collected tolls from them.

Carlsson has demonstrated how, from about 50 smaller landing places on Gotland, only six had developed into district harbours by the Viking Age (Carlsson 1998). Although connected with trade, somewhat surprisingly, most of the sites were characterised by a lack or a shortage of finds directly associated with trade, such as scales and weights, coins or imported items (Carlsson 1991; for the phenomenon in other areas, see Ulriksen 1998, pp. 113-142; Sindbæk 2009b). The same characterised Tornimäe, which can be considered a Viking Age centre of regional trade.

The Late Prehistoric river harbour at Pälla seems to have had a more local importance. Firstly, its area was less than a tenth that of Tornimäe. The scarcity of ceramics and animal bones suggests that people inhabited the site for a shorter period each year than at Tornimäe, or that not so much activity was carried out there. The lack of political centres in the vicinity might have made Pälla less attractive than Tornimäe to overseas visitors. Whether there were also buildings at Late Prehistoric Pälla is not known, because of the small extent of the excavations there.

It is possible that the river harbour was mainly used by local settlement units for exporting their agricultural products or other goods. Still, other functions were also possible. For instance, the site might have functioned as a military harbour, where ships from the surrounding areas gathered to sail on plundering raids or for other military actions. The sheltered location in the lower reaches of the River Ristioja, some distance from settlements, was suitable for a smaller military harbour of a more or less local character. Harbours that were meant for the organised gathering of ships with the objective of land defence, like the *ledung* harbours in Scandinavia, were probably situated closer to political centres, if they differed from 'ordinary' harbours at all (Westerdahl 1989, pp.246-258).

Further development

The subsequent development of the sites was in accordance with the different functions of the harbours.

Tornimäe also later remained a regional centre. In the 11th century, when the activity at the Pöide hill-fort stopped for the following 100 to 150 years, the Viking Age harbour site at Tornimäe was abandoned as well. This was, among other reasons, probably caused by

land transformation processes, which made the location too difficult to approach by ship. At approximately the same time, the Muhu hill-fort was founded on the opposite shore of the Little Strait, which became the political centre of the enlarged district. Next to it, another harbour site has been recorded (Mägi 2002b).

The hill-fort at Põide was rebuilt and put into use again in the 12th century, when it probably functioned as a trading centre. It can be presumed that its harbour site was still situated at Tornimäe, but now in another location closer to the present coastline. The hill-fort was finally abandoned in the 14th century. Some time in the Middle Ages, the Uuemõisa (*Neuenhof*) manor, a collecting-point for tax in kind for the Livonian Order, was founded in the middle of arable lands at a distance of about one kilometre from Tornimäe. The taxes were exported through Tornimäe, where the remains of the Medieval harbour may yet be found 800 metres north of the Viking Age harbour site, next to a still-visible stone jetty. Brick fragments found at Tornimäe also suggest that some buildings were situated there during the Medieval period.

By the 17th century at the latest, the harbour at Tornimäe was abandoned: the sea around it was too shallow, and the Little Strait was not navigable by larger vessels. On land survey maps from the 17th to the mid-19th century, the area of the former harbour site is only marked by bare fields. In the middle of the 19th century, a Russian Orthodox church was erected right in the middle of the Viking Age harbour site, and a small village gradually developed around it. At the present time, Tornimäe is the centre of the Põide municipality.

The river harbour at Pälla was abandoned in the 14th century at the latest. The site was situated among marshy forests, some distance away from settlements, and no human activity could be recorded there until the last decades of the 16th century. At the time a stone house with outbuildings was erected in the place of the old river harbour, probably by the owner of the Tõluste manor house, at a distance of 6.5 kilometres from Pälla.

The building of a small stone manor could have been inspired by resistance by some local vassals against the Danish king, or by the need for protection against rebellious peasants or marauders that were common in these times of unrest. Its location on the bank of a small river, however, implies that the foundations of the building complex might have been inspired by attempts to fortify the manor harbour for exporting local agricultural products.

The buildings had been abandoned by the beginning of the 18th century at the latest, when the importance

of manor harbours had diminished. At present, Pälla is just ruins, covered with trees and bushes in a forest outside the cultivated area.

The fate of Viltina resembles that of Pälla. After the site was abandoned in the early 13th century at the latest, its area remained unused, except for some limited agricultural activity in a part of it. The conversion to Christianity, as well as the changed political system that characterised 13th-century Saaremaa, excluded the use of assembly places like Viltina. In the Modern period, the hamlet of Viltina developed around the old harbour site, which is now marked by a few summer houses. The Viking Age harbour site is just a bushy area next to a wetland.

Conclusions

The three case studies demonstrate differences in Viking Age harbour sites, as is indicated by their archaeological evidence, and by their locations on the cultural landscape. Tornimäe could be interpreted as a central harbour at a district level. Pälla functioned as a trading or military harbour for a more limited area. Viltina was partly a ritual, partly a secular assembly site, probably serving several political districts. This way, the case studies probably represent three possible harbour types that were widespread on the Baltic Sea in the Viking Age. Although the importance of such sites in the everyday life of Viking Age people is hard to underestimate, harbour sites of a local or a regional character have remained generally invisible in written sources, and their localisation on the cultural landscape demands a special attitude in archaeological research.

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PREKYBA, KARAS IR ĮVAIRIOS SAAREMAA UOSTŲ GYVENVIETĖS VĖLYVAISIAIS PRIEŠISTORĖS LAIKAIS

MARIKA MĀGI

Santrauka

2003 m. pradėti intensyvūs Saaremaa pakrančių gyvenviečių struktūros tyrimai, kurie glaudžiai susiję su jūrine veikla, taip pat su vėlyvosios priešistorės ir ankstyvųjų viduramžių uostų gyvenviečių išsidėstymu (1 pav.). Šiame straipsnyje analizuojamos trys uostus turinčios gyvenvietės, kurios reprezentuoja skirtingus Baltijos jūros regione uostus turinčius gyvenviečių tipus tiek lokaliniu, tiek regioniniu lygmenimis.

Vikingų laikotarpio Tornimäe gyvenvietė yra rytiniame Saaremaa salos gale (2 pav.). Ji buvo tyrinėta 1963, 1968 ir 2004 m. (3 pav.). Prieš 1000–1200 metų tyrinėjamas plotas buvo gerai matomoje vietoje, virš pagrindinės Mažojo sąsiaurio dalies. Tyrimų metu buvo atkastos menamų statinių liekanos, bet be krosnių. Didžiąją dalį radinių sudarė keramika (4 pav., žr. įkliją VI), bronziniai papuošalai, pavieniai ginklai, stiklo karoliai, kaulinių dirbinių fragmentai ir keletas valčių.

Pälla gyvenvietė yra pietinėje Saaremaa salos dalyje, netoli Püha bažnyčios, prie Ristioja upelio, 900 m nuo dabartinio jūros kranto (5 pav.). Šios gyvenvietės tyrinėjimai vyko 2004–2007 m. (6 pav.). Čia buvo rasti XVI–XVII a. pastatų kompleksai, po kuriais aptiktas intensyvus vėlyvojo geležies amžiaus kultūrinis sluoksnis. Gyvenvietės vieta, esanti toli nuo ariamų laukų, rodo, kad čia būta ne paprastos, o uosto tipo gyvenvietės. Radiokarboniniu ¹⁴C metodu nustatyta, kad ankstyvieji gyvenvietės sluoksniai priklauso vėlyvajam geležies amžiui, o viršutiniai – XIV a. Pagrindinės uosto krantinės buvo upės pakrantėje (7 pav.). Didžiąją dalį radinių sudarė gyvulių osteologinė medžiaga ir puodų šukės bei keli metaliniai dirbiniai.

Šiuo metu Viltina gyvenvietė yra pietinėje Saaremaa salos pakrantėje, 600–800 m nuo dabartinio jūros kranto (8 pav.). Vėlyvojo vikingų laikotarpio uosto tipo gyvenvietė čia aptikta 1999 m. ir tyrinėta 2004–2006 m. Tirtas 330 m² plotas buvo suskirstytas į 6 mažesnius atskirus plotus (9 pav.). Pietinėje gyvenvietės dalyje buvo atidengtos statinių liekanos. Nedideli pastačiai stovėjo vienas greta kito (10 pav.). Kultūriniame sluoksnyje aptikta puodų šukių, gyvulių kaulų ir metalinių dirbinių, įskaitant ir geležines vinis bei laivų kniedes. Jūros kranto atšlaitėje buvo atidengtos čia stovėjusių akmeninių pastatų liekanos ir dvi prieplau-

kos (11 pav.). Susirinkimų ir ūkinės veiklos zona buvo netoli prieplaukų, spėjama, kad gyvenvietė buvo aptverta akmenine siena su medine užtvara virš jos. Statinių areale dešiniau nuo uosto gyvenvietės buvo aptikta keletas palaidojimų ir iš akmenų sukrautas kapas.

Visos trys gyvenvietės skiriasi keletu aspektų, ypač funkcinė priklausomybe. Tornimäe gyvenvietės kultūrinis sluoksnis buvo intensyviausias, jame aptikta daug gyvulių ir žuvų kaulų. Viltina gyvenvietės kultūrinis sluoksnis buvo plonas, o kai kur jo visai nebuvo. Gyvulių kaulų ir keramikos Viltina ir Pälla gyvenvietėse aptikta apylygiai. Viltina gyvenvietėje, skirtingai nei kitose dviejose, aptikta juvelyrinių dirbinių ir keletas vertingų metalų dirbinių (12–13 pav.). Visų trijų gyvenviečių gamtinė aplinka skirtinga.

Viltina uosto gyvenvietėje aptikta teritorija, kurioje kasmet po keletą savaičių galėjo būti atliekamos ritualinės apeigos. Tornimäe ir Pälla gyvenviečių paskirtis daugiausia buvo praktinė. Tornimäe aptiktas kultūrinis sluoksnis rodo, kad čia ūkinė veikla buvo intensyvesnė nei Viltina uosto gyvenvietėje ir vyko ilgesnį laiką, matyt, visą laivų navigacijos laikotarpį. Galima manyti, kad gyvenvietės buvo ir tarptautiniai prekybos centrai. Ypač tai akivaizdu Tornimäe gyvenvietėje, kur vikingų laikotarpiu galėjo plėtotis regioninė prekyba. Pälla uosto tipo gyvenvietė buvo labiau vietinės reikšmės ir galėjo būti karinis arba žemės ūkio produkciją eksportuojantis uostas.

Vėlesnė šių gyvenviečių raida funkcinio požiūriu buvo skirtinga. Tornimäe gyvenvietė ir vėliau išliko regiono centru. Pälla upės tipo uostas vėliau, jau XIV a., buvo apleistas, bet naujaisiais laikais, netoli pastačius dvarvietę, vėl atgijo. Viltina gyvenvietė XIII a. buvo apleista.

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