Late Viking Age burial place and ritual deposits at Lööne, Saaremaa

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In spring 2018 the National Heritage Board of Estonia (MA) received information about detector finds from a field near Lööne village, former Valjala parish on Saaremaa. Small-scale archaeological investigations were thereafter conducted in spring and summer 2018, resulting in several metal finds, some of them forming in situ find complexes. Archaeologists participating in these surface surveys were Marika Mägi from Tallinn University, Nele Kangert and Anu Kivirüüt, both from MA. The object was defined as a Late Viking Age and Later Iron Age (ca. 950–1200 AD) burial place that was almost totally destroyed by agricultural activities. The finds are stored in Saaremaa Museum (SM 10847).

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AROUND THE FIND PLACE

The finds were scattered over an elevated part of the landscape next to a road between the present Lööne and Jõelepa villages. Jõelepa is the former Lööne (Germ. Köln) manor that was first mentioned in written sources in 1489, when the Bishop of Ösel-Wiek enfeoffed a small Cölle manor, the former estate of Clawes Stedinge, to Hans Scher (Saaremaa 1934, 784). The manor had a central position in the middle of arable lands, about 500 m south-east of the find place, and it seems to have had a predecessor in late prehistory, as is indicated by some finds. From the area of the historical manor household, a penannular brooch (SM 9257) has come to light, and there are rumours about a grinding stone and a 9th-century coin found in the nearest vicinity of it (Mägi 2018). In addition, a deposit find has been mentioned in Loona manor near Valjala in the 1920s (Karu 1924, 121), which is not preserved. Since no manor with the name Loona is known in the Valjala parish, the notice probably refers to the Lööne manor.

However, a central position in the agricultural landscape also characterises the present Lööne village 300–400 m west of the find place, where no prehistoric finds have been uncovered so far. Although the agricultural landscape around Lööne and Jõelepa points to approximately equal importance of these two places, Jõelepa’s status is emphasized by the finds mentioned above, suggesting that the people who were buried in the stone grave most likely lived where the later manor was situated. The stone grave was nevertheless between the two units and may have been used by both.

The elevation where the finds were uncovered is actually a low ridge starting from the road between Lööne and Jõelepa villages and stretching towards NNE. During the second half of the 20th century, stones from a broader area have been gathered to the highest ground, where they now form a stone heap. About 70 m north of the heap there is a low and wet
hollow (measurements app. 100 × 30 m), which can already be seen on historical maps. The
wet hollow, possibly a former spring or springs, may have played a role in the formation of
the sacral landscape at the Lööne burial ground.

THE BURIAL GROUND

The soil around the stone heap contained stones; the area of the stone grave has presumably
been about twice as large as the stone heap now. The finds collected with metal detector in
the stony part of the field were in pieces and burnt, thus characteristic to other Saaremaa
stone graves where cremations prevailed from the 10th century onwards. Most finds were
scattered over the area due to agricultural activities that were carried out in the place of
the former grave during several centuries. There are no grounds to believe, due to intensive
ploughing in the area, that any of these finds was collected in its original location.

What makes the Lööne grave somewhat
different from most other destroyed stone
graves of Saaremaa was an area (measure-
ments app. 80 × 50 m) between the road
and the present stone heap, identified on
the present-day orthographic map as darker
soil (Fig. 1). The area seems to be character-
ised by a concentration of finds (Mägi 2018).
There were other, fewer finds in the areas NE
and NW of the dark soil, but not on the other
side of the road or on the other side of the
stone heap.

This area, up to 40–50 m from the road
and indicated by darker soil, contained only
a few smaller stones. The humus layer was
up to 40 cm thick, and a thin, burnt layer
with tiny charcoal pieces was recorded in the
lowest part of it, right on top of natural sand
(Kangert & Kivirüüt 2018; Mägi 2018). The
charcoal was clearly the cause of the darker
colour of the soil in this particular area, which is visible until nowadays. There are data about
three in situ artefact complexes at the darker area (complexes nos 1–3), and one right outside
it. Detector finds from this area can be divided into two groups: broken artefacts without or
with few traces of fire, and strongly burnt artefacts typical to stone graves. The latter may
originate from the stone grave and had ended in the somewhat lower part of the field due to
ploughing. The first ones may be components of other, but destroyed find complexes.

FIND COMPLEXES

Complexes no 1–3 were excavated by metal detectorists before the arrival of archaeologists.
There are, however, descriptions of these finds, and their exact locations are more or less
precisely known. All find complexes can be dated to the end of the 10th century or around
1000 AD. Only a few artefacts in the complexes had fire marks. Complexes no 1–3 consisted
of artefacts that can be connected with men, while complex no 4 consisted of presumably
female attributes.

Fig. 1. The find place at Lööne. A – the area of dark soil,
B – stone heap, C – low and wet area, D – the area
where finds were uncovered. 1–4 – find complexes.

Jn 1. Lööne leiukoht. A – tumedama mullaga ala, B – kivi-
hunnik, C – madal vesine ala, D –leidude levikuala.
1–4 – leiukompleksid.
Base map / Aluskaart: Estonian Land Board / Maa-amet;
drawing / joonis: Marika Mägi
Complex no 1 (Fig. 2) was found in the depth of 30 cm, in the sooty lowest layer of dark soil. Neither bones nor stones were recorded, and there were no signs of a pit. Two knives had been laid directly on the sandy ground and covered with a shield that had its inner side upwards. Only an iron shield-boss had survived of the shield, while its wooden parts had burnt or decayed. The boss had been used as a vessel for several broken or only partly represented artefacts: iron bits, three penannular brooches, a belt with metal fittings, and an iron cylindrical padlock. Kangert and Kiviriüüt have reported that they later found some burnt bones in the vicinity of the find place (Kangert & Kiviriüüt 2018), but whether they belonged to humans or were at all connected with the find complex is unknown.

Fig. 2. Artefacts from complex no 1. Not all fragments are shown.
(SM 10847: 15, 13, 10, 12, 16, 15, 14, 9, 17, 4, 3, 2, 11, 5, 1, 6, 7, 8.)
Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi
Complex no 2 (Fig. 3) was ca. 7 m west of the complex no 1, in the depth of app. 30 cm, and consisted of a seax, a big penannular brooch with funnel-shaped terminals, iron bits and a belt with metal fittings. The partly preserved seax was found in vertical position, other finds along it, and the bits on top of the others. The brooch was broken into two parts, and at least one strap-divider had been in fire. It is unknown whether the fire marks were caused by the same fire that had created all the sooty area, or were results of some specific ritual. All artefacts had probably been placed in a cylindrical vessel of some perishable material (see also Complex no 4), which had stood on the ground. The sandy natural soil began right under the find. As for the Complex no 1, some cremated bones, as well as tiny metal pieces, perhaps originating from the same belt fittings, were reported near the find place during later investigation.

Fig. 3. Artefacts from complex no 2.
(SM 10847:19, 20, 22, 21, 18.)
Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi
Finds of complex no 3 have not reached the archaeologists, neither are photographs of them available. The find had consisted of a big penannular brooch, a smaller penannular brooch, a spiral bronze chain and iron bits. All finds were, as in the other complexes, found together in the sooty lowest layer above natural sand, close to complexes no 1 and 2.

Complex no 4 (Fig. 4) was uncovered by archaeologists 50–70 m WNW of the other complexes, outside the clearly observable sooty area. A layer with tiny pieces of charcoal started here in the depth of 20 cm, but was clearly less intensive than near the other complexes. The finds began to appear in the depth of 40 cm. They had been gathered in a cylindrical vessel with an oval cross-section (app. 23 × 15 cm, height 30 cm), perhaps made of bark, which stood vertically in a pit dug into the sandy natural ground.

The find consisted of iron scissors, bits, pieces of a chain arrangement, several broken compound neck-rings, a chain divider, an end plaque of a chain arrangement, pieces of four bracelets, and a broken penannular brooch (Fig. 5). The scissors and pieces of neck-rings were in vertical or diagonal position, most of other things along them. The bits were placed on top of the find complex, similarly to complexes no 2 and 3. The lower part of the vessel had probably been filled with some artefacts of perishable material, e.g. textiles or leather, since most of the chains and tiny bronze rings were recorded in the upper part of the find.

The compound neck-rings with an oval cross-section were widespread in Saaremaa, the Livic area and Semigallia, and dated to the 10th century or around 1000 AD (Mägi 2002, 107; Šnore 2009, 274–275). The bracelets belonged to the types II:3 and II:4 and can be dated to the same time (Mägi-Lõugas 1995, 84–94). Several artefacts were broken or deformed, and some of them represented by parts. None of the artefacts had been in fire, and no bones were found near the find. It was probably a ritual deposit dedicated to a female.

DISCUSSION
Find complexes without cremation deposits, sometimes placed in or near burial grounds, are known in different places in Saaremaa, coastal Estonia and the Livic area (e.g. Šnore 1996, 114–115), as well as in Couronia (Griciuviienė 2009). The custom also appeared in other districts, but less frequently. As some examples, similar find deposits are recorded in Viltina Käo-Matsi in Saaremaa (Mägi 2000; 2006), Keskvere and Kurese in West Estonia (Mandel 2003, 104–105, pl. LIV; 2017), Kõue in Harjumaa and Öötla in the other side of the wetland zone separating coastal Estonia from the rest of the country (Kurisoo 2014). Such artefact deposits in Estonia seem to characterise predominantly the Viking Age up to the middle of the 11th century, but some complexes, especially in inland Estonia, can also be dated to the 11th–12th century.
Fig. 5. Artefacts from complex no 4. Not all fragments are shown.


(SM 10847: 23, 24, 47, 43, 44, 45, 50, 48, 25, 53, 39, 30, 31, 32, 28, 52, 54, 20.)

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi
As mentioned above, some detector finds in the area of the dark soil at Lõõne that have not been in fire, may originate from other, similar complexes. The composition of these finds refers to the later half of the Viking Age as well. Several finds at Lõõne represent artefact types that otherwise are rare in Saaremaa stone graves. It is especially true for type II bracelets that very seldom have been found in the mainly 11th–12th-century stone graves on the Estonian islands and have been dated to the 10th century, although they can occur until the beginning of the 11th century (Mägi-Lõugas 1995, 284–294). In the Livic area, type II bracelets have been found in Laukskola grave 39 that probably is a burial of a Saaremaa woman and can be dated to the second half of the 10th century, too (Zariņa 2006, fig. 181: 4). Somewhat similar bracelets are known from the Öötlä find; they have been classified to type IV: 3 and dated most likely to the beginning of the 11th century. Type IV: 3 is, however, unusual and rare, and seems to be morphologically connected with bracelet types in Saaremaa (Mägi-Lõugas 1995, 299).

It is not exactly known how the Öötlä artefacts were found, but it seems to have been a collection of finds, perhaps in some container of perishable material (Tvauri 2012, fig. 108). The find also contained neck-rings with open overlapping terminals that belonged to the same types as in the Kõue find. Such neck-rings are dated to the first half of the 11th century (Tvauri 2012, 158–159). However, the type seems to have quite a local character; whether such neck-rings also were used in the 10th century, is unknown due to the shortage of find complexes in Estonian material before the 11th century. The faceted end knobs that were characteristic for these neck-rings resemble similar terminals of Viking Age penannular brooches (Mägi-Lõugas 1994), thus suggesting the same date for the neck-rings.

Another somewhat unusual artefact type at Lõõne is the end plaque of a chain arrangement. Four such plaques, some of them fragmentary, have been found at Lõõne so far, one of them in Complex no 4. Similar end plaques were widespread in coastal Estonia, Livic area and northern Couronia, but some specimens are also known from eastern Estonia (Kiudsoo 2016, 182–188). These plaques have been reconstructed as balances of the chain arrangement on the back of the body (Selirand 1974, 151; Kurisoo 2014; Kiudsoo 2016, 184–186). However, in all cases when arrangements with end plaques have been found in inhumation graves, they have decorated the front part of the bearer (Zariņa 2006, fig. 196: 1, 189: 2); actually, no chain arrangements of any sort (e.g. in Livic graves) have been recorded reaching as far as below the back of the deceased so far. No real arguments have been presented for the position of the aforementioned plaque in the back side, which is also unlikely for practical reasons (problems to fix the chains on shoulders). The Baltic Finnic women also tended to wear richly decorated headsets hanging down along the back, at least in the 12th–13th century and later (see e.g. Mägi et al., this volume), which had then hidden the end plaque, if it really had decorated the back side of the body.

The end plaques of chain arrangements were also found in the above described find complexes of Öötlä and Kõue. Some similar plaques in Livic inhumation burials are dated to the period 950–1050, but some others as late as the second half of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century (Zariņa 2006, 363; Spirģis 2008, 427). However, it is difficult, considering other finds in these particular burials, to date them to a later period than the mid-11th century. The Öötlä find can be dated to the beginning of the 11th century or, if the neck-rings belong to earlier times, to the 10th century. Complex no 4 at Lõõne belongs to the same time (see above). Some archaeologists believe that the Kõue complex was hidden in the second half of the 11th or the first half of the 12th century (Kurisoo 2014), although all its datable artefacts (neck-rings, chain holders) refer to the time around 1000 AD, and the dates of the other finds
are unknown or very broad. Such a late date to the otherwise similar find as the others men-
tioned in this text probably needs further justification.

Tuuli Kurisoo has described other deposit finds that she compared with the Köue find (Kurisoo 2014). Most of them were buried in settlements, while Käo-Matsi, Keskvere and Kurese deposits had been hidden in a burial ground. Lööne find complexes were recorded in a sooty area right next to a stone grave as well. All described complexes probably had a ritual character and, as indicated by the detector finds, there may have been other, similar com-
plexes. The sooty layer refers to a fire of wooden buildings or constructions that had burnt
down, while the lack of stones excludes the interpretation of the site as a stone grave similar
to other, mainly 11th–12th-century graves in Saaremaa.

Detailed interpretation of the site remains for the future, since planned trial excavations
at the sooty layer were hindered by the extraordinary dry summer in 2018 and discontinued
later. The find complexes from the second half of the Viking Age, which are rare in Estonian
archaeological evidence, are however extraordinarily valuable for artefact studies, as well as
for better understanding of ritual behaviour in the 10th – early 11th centuries.
REFERENCES


HILISVIIKINGIAEGNE KALMEKOHT JA RITUAALSED ESEMEKOGUMID SAAREMAAL LÕONES

Marika Mägi


Leiukoht paikneb endise Lõõne küla ja Valjala küla vahelisel alal, mis sarnanesid neljale teadaoleval kogumile. Leidud leiud olid aga põletamata, kuigi sageli katkised.


Leiukogumid 1–3 koosnesid 10. sajandi lõpuossa või 1000. aasta paiku dateeritavates leiutest, mida läbis võiks seostada eelkõige mehega. Kogum nr 4 kuulus samasse aegasse, kuid sildas naisega seotud asu.

Kogum nr 1 (jn 2) leiti 30 cm sügavusel, vahe-tult loodusliku liivakevi peal ol努d söesest kihist. Kunagiisest sissekaevast väidetavalt jälgis polnud ning leidjad ei tähistanud leiu juures ka luid. Leiukoht
hilisemal ülevaatusel registreeriti leiu läheduses mõnevörra siiski ka põlenud luid, kuid pole teada, kas need kuulusid inimesele või kas need olid esemekogumiga seotud. Kunagise maapinna peale oli ase-
tatud kaks nuga, nende kohale aga kilp, sisekülg ülespoole. Kilbikupla sees olid suitse, kolme hobu-
raudsõle, metallkaunistustega vöö ning rauast suru-
luku katked.

Kogum nr 2 (jn 3) leiti eelmisest u 7 m kauguselt, samuti 30 cm sügavuselt sõese kihi seest vahetult liiva pealt. See koosnes vertikaalsetes asendides olevast võõtlusnoast ning esemekatketest (suur hoburaud-
sõlg, võõ metallosad) selle kõrval. Kõige peal olid hunnikus suitsed. Asjad olid ilmselt olnud mingi silin-
derja kõdunevast materjalist anuma sees. Vähemalt üks ese oli põlemisjälgedega. Kogum nr 3 leiut arhe-
loogideni ei joudnud, kuid see leid olevat koosnenud ühest suuremast ja ühest väiksemast hoburaudsõlest, spiraalidest ja suitsetest, mis olevat paiknenud pinna-
ses sarnasel eelnevalt kirjeldatud kogumitele.

Kogum nr 4 paiknes ülejäänutest 50–70 m eemal, tahmasest laigust väljapool. Kuigi ka selle ümbruses tuvastati väikesi sõetükikesi, oli nimetatud kiht siin eelnevat hoopis vähem intensiivne. Leid olid pand-
dud mingi ovaalse põhjaga silinderja torbiku sisse ning asetatud looduslikku liivakihti kaevatud auku (jn 4). Kõige peal olid kobaras suitseid, seejärel verti-
kaalsetes asendis käärid, otsaplaad, kristne allapoole. Kääride kõr-
vall leiti hulgiselt kettide katkeid ja muid rinnake-
osi, kaasa arvatud üks otsaplaad. Lisaks tulid välja mitme ovaalse riistlööikega liitkaelavõru osad, neli kat-
kist käevõru ja hoburaudsõlgi (jn 5).

Ilma luudeta leikukogumeid on saadud mitme-
test kohtadest Saaremaal, Ranniku-Eestist, liivlase-
alt ja Kuramaalt. Osa sellistest on teada kalmetest (nt Käo-Matsi, Keskvere), teine osa aga arvatavat-
asulakohtadest (nt Kõue). Enamiku nimetatud lei-
kogumitest Eestis võiks dateerida viikingiaega, kuigi on teada ka hilisemaid taolisi leide. Lööne leikukogu-
mite veidi varasemate dateeringute võrelles enamiku Saaremaa kivivarekalmetega viitavad mõned neis lei-
dunud esemetüübid, näiteks II tüübi käevõru või rinnake otsaplaad, mis taavalsetel on 11.–12. sajandist.

Saaremaa kivivarekalmete võimalikud leidud Saaremaa kivivarekalmetega sõitavad ka mõned vastu tekitatud esemekatkestest, mis olevat olnud mingi ovaalse põhjaga silinderja torbiku sisse ning asetatud looduslikku liivakihti kaevatud aukus. Marika Mägi