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NEW STONE CIRCLE GRAVES AT PIILA CEMETERY, SAAREMAA

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Excavations at the Viking and late Iron Age cemetery in Piila, Kaarma parish, central Saaremaa (Ösel), were started in 1989 and 1997 (Mägi *et al.* 1998). Excavations continued in 1998 under the supervision of Marika Mägi, while archaeology students Armin Rudi and Ulla Saluäär assisted. A. Rudi was responsible for grave VI and is the author of the part of this article concerning this grave. Raili Allmäe and Liina Maldre, both from the Institute of History, took care of the osteological material. The finds were stored in the Museum of Saaremaa (SM 1468: 239–413).

STRUCTURE OF THE GRAVES

Three additional graves were opened in 1998. When the area adjacent last year's trench was cleared of junipers, it became clear that the higher ground that was numbered as XIV in the unpublished report by Vello Lõugas in 1986, consisted of numerous graves and covered a much bigger area than he had suggested. Consequently, we abandoned the numbering system in figure and numbered the graves, uncovered since 1989, with Roman numerals. Stone circle graves that were found in 1998 were, accordingly, called V, VI and VII.

Two separate trenches were opened in the summer of 1998, one directly adjoining the southern end of last year's excavations, and the other 7 m northwards from the northern border of last year's trench. This choice was occasioned from the presumable location of graves under the surface. The trenches were made

large enough to cover a whole grave with its immediate surroundings. After two weeks, when it became obvious that we had time to open one more grave, the southern trench was widened even more southwards. Both trenches together eventually covered 77 m².

The stone structure of all of the graves, opened in 1998, differed from that of graves I-III (former numbering XIV: 1-3).

The central parts of graves V-VII were situated in the upper layers and marked with granite stones the size of about a man's head representing, typical infill stones for Estonian Iron Age graves. The stones were surrounded by ca 0.5-1.0 m wide tenuous zone of small limestones, perhaps former slabs that were broken into small pieces. No bigger limestone-slabs, like in graves I-III, referred to collapsed limestone walls. Graves V-VII could, therefore, be characterised as stone cairns with kerbs of big granite stones, laid directly onto the surface.

The zone of small limestones, surrounding all three graves, and grave IV from the previous year, could be interpreted as perhaps an adorning part of the grave structure. In some places, vertical limestone-slabs have survived, placed directly against the outer side of the kerbstones. Decorative intention - to cover the brownish granite stones with white limestones - could be the best explanation for these structures.

The small horizontal limestone-slabs, usually situated in two layers, could partly be classified as remnants of a limestone-pavement. The probable pavement covered most of the area outside the graves in our trenches (Photo 1).

It should be noted here that similar zones of limestones, surrounding the graves, were recorded also in other late Iron Age cemeteries on Saaremaa (Metsar 1950; Kustin 1965). Limestone zones around cremation deposits without obvious stone structures on top of them could be interpreted as graves resembling these in Piila, but without kerbs.

The Piila graves, as mentioned in the survey of last year's excavations, could to some extent be linked with some Merovingian Period and Viking Age grave forms on Gotland (Mägi *et al.* 1998, 101). As it could be assessed from the description above, graves V-VII had even more in common with Gotlandic grave forms. Stone circle graves on Gotland usually had circular low walls of limestone slabs, laid directly onto the ground. The graves were completely filled with rubble or a mixture of gravel and soil, and had a heap of the infill material on top of the grave

(Nylén 1958, 78–80, Fig. 14). The original appearance of Piila graves V–VII could have been similar to these graves on Gotland, being probably just a little bit lower. Another feature that differentiated graves V–VII from graves I–III was a clearly rarer appearance of ceramic in the trenches of 1998.



Photo 1. Stone kerb of grave V with a sector of grave VII and the limestone pavement between the graves, seen from NE.

Foto 1. V kalme kiviring koos osaga VII kalme kiviringist. Kalmete vabel on näha paeplaatidest sillutis. Vaade kirdest.

GRAVE V

(Photo 1; Fig. 1)

Part of this grave was uncovered in 1997, near grave IV. This year the kerb and heap of stones of grave V were completely unearthed. The kerb of the grave consisted of large granite stones, with a diameter of 40–80 cm. The grave was slightly oval, with an outer diameter of 4–4.2 m. A 75-cm-wide hole in the western side of the kerb could be interpreted as an entrance. Adjacent to the kerb, potsherds of a Viking Age carinated fine ceramic with a specific decoration were found. The virtual absence of potsherds inside the grave suggest that the bones, burned artefacts and other remnants of the pyre were brought to the grave with the fine ceramic bowl that was later broken outside the grave.

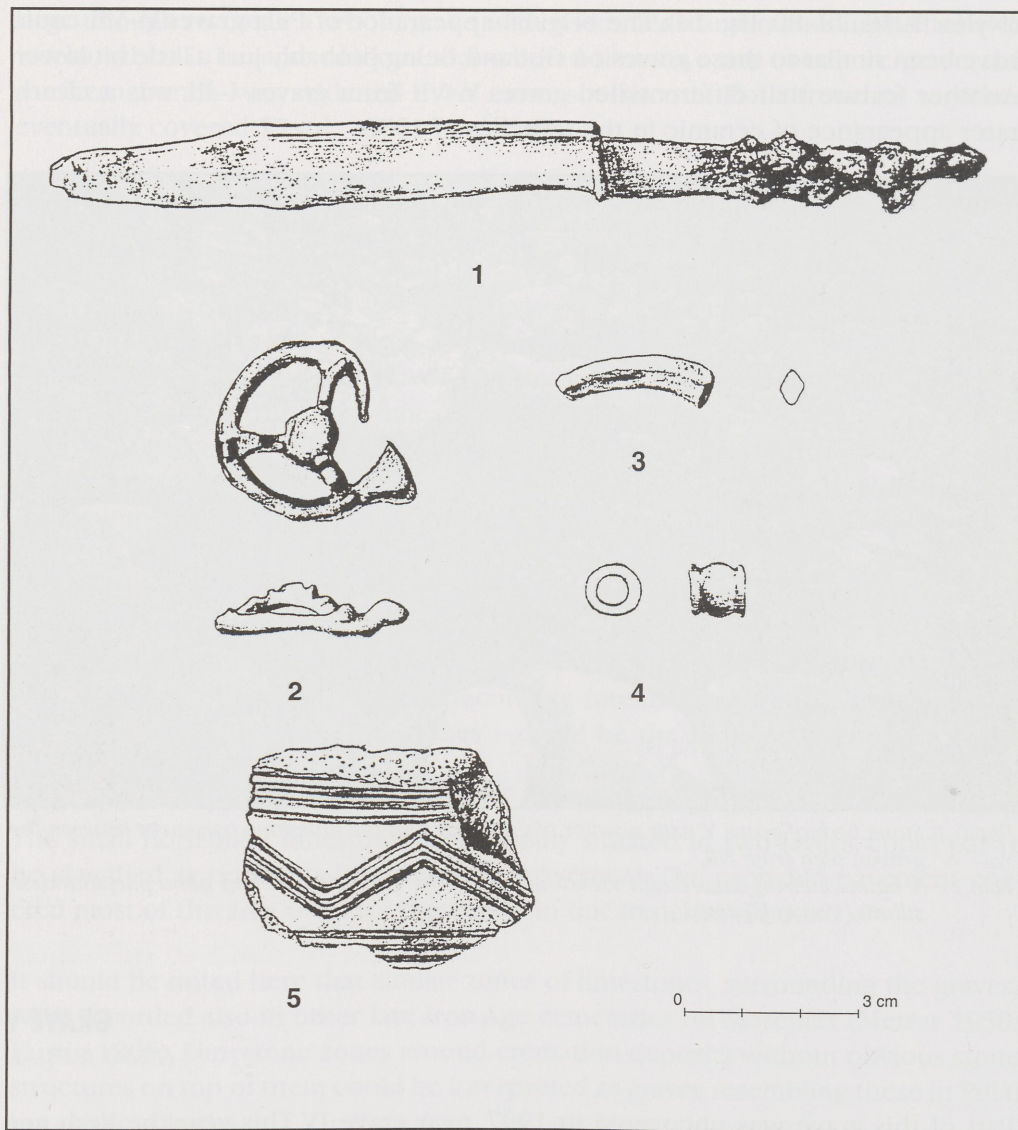


Fig. 1. Finds in grave V. 1 - one of the two knives; 2 - strap distributor; 3 - fragment of a penannular brooch; 4 - bronze bead; 5 - decorated potsherd.

Joon. 1. Leide V kalmest. 1 - üks kabest noast; 2 - ribmajagaja; 3 - hoburudsõle katke; 4 - helmes; 5 - ornamenditud potikild. 1 - 4 - pronks.

Most of the burned bones and artefacts were found in a spot, ca 0.5 m in diameter, almost in the centre of the grave. Only few charcoal pieces were registered. Both bones and artefacts were intensively burned, and only a bronze strip distributor could be recognized among the small melted pieces of bronze. Two iron

knives were found almost together above the kerbstones and were probably stuck there as offerings after the grave heap was erected.

A great majority of the cremated bones found in grave V belonged to a dog. On that account the grave resembled grave II, where also mostly canine bones were found (Mägi *et al.* 1998, 104 ff). The sex of the deceased in grave V was not possible to determine. The strip distributor and the decorated vessel dates the grave to the 10th–11th centuries.



Photo 2. Partly demolished kerb of grave VI with the cremation deposite in the middle of the grave, seen from E.

Foto 2. VI kalme lõbutud kiviring koos kalme keskosas paikneva matuselaiguga. Vaade idast.

GRAVE VI

(Photo 2; Fig. 2)

The excavated burial had not been preserved intact, about one third of its original SW section being destroyed probably through tillage. It can be assumed that a number of stones of the grave's inner structure were heaped on top of the cairn. The cairn's inner structure consisted of granite boulders, 0.5 m in diameter, which were set in a single circle with a diameter of ca 3 m. Outside the kerb was

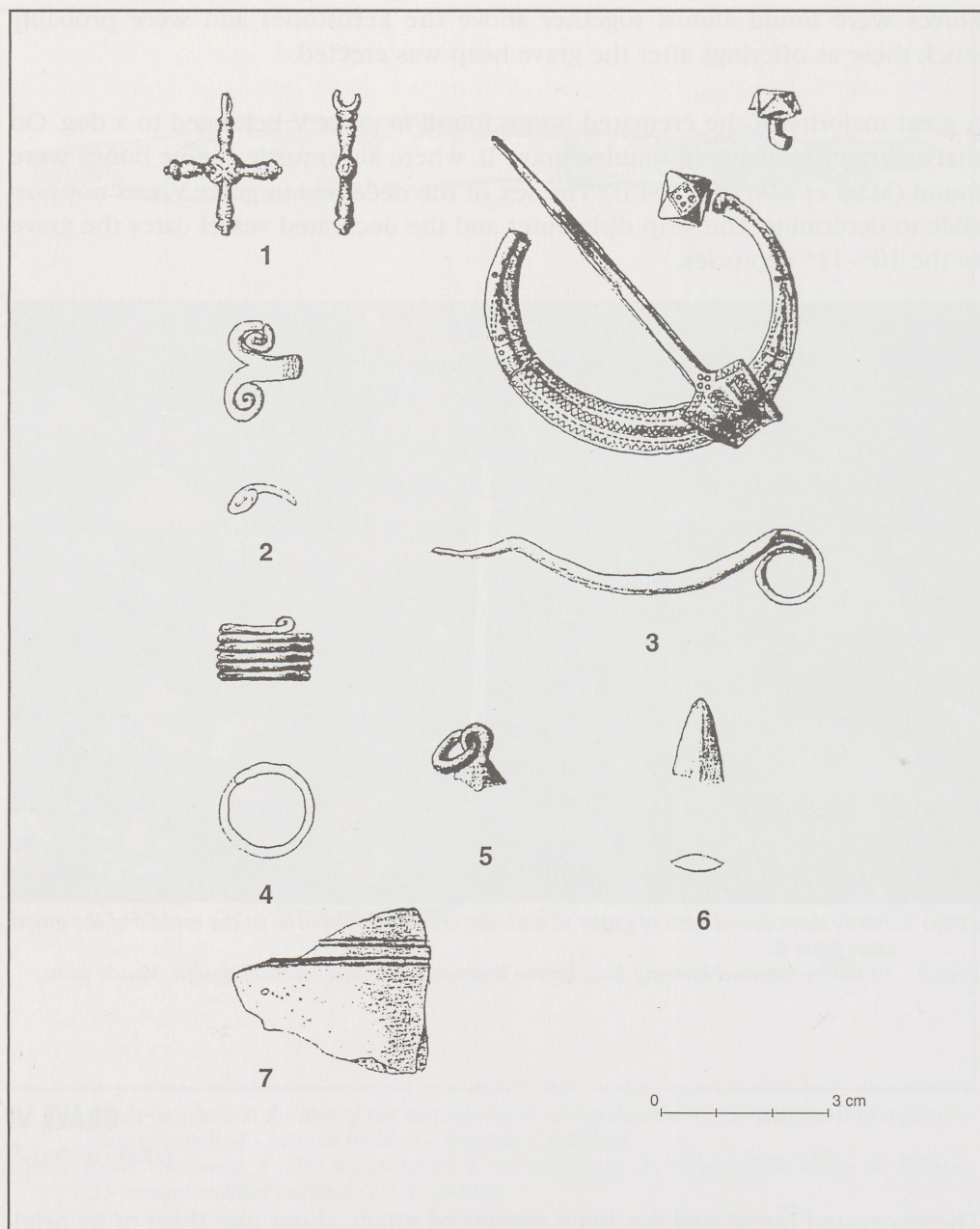


Fig. 2. Finds in grave VI. 1 - cross-shaped pendant; 2 - one end of a finger-ring; 3 - penannular brooch; 4 - spiral finger-ring; 5 - fragment of a bell; 6 - blade point of a spearhead; 7 - decorated potsherd. 1-5 - bronze, 6 - iron.

Joon. 2. Leide VI kalmest. 1 - ristripats; 2 - sõrmuse katke.; 3 - hoburaudsõlg; 4 - spiraalsõrmus; 5 - kuljuse katke; 6 - odaotsa tipp; 7 - ornamenditud potikild. 1-5 - pronks, 6 - raud.

detected a zone of limestone with a width of ca 1 m.

Most of the finds were clustered in the central section of the burial, a charcoal-rich area with a diameter of ca 1 m. The majority of the finds were uncovered under the stone filling, some finds were situated in the filling rubble. The most noteworthy among the artefacts were a cross-shaped pendant, fragments of penannular brooch, the blade point of a spearhead and several potsherds. A number of finds were uncovered along the western edge of the burial cairn, in an area where the destroyed section of the kerb would have been located. The artefacts had been exposed to fire, moreover, in a number of cases it was possible to indicate that different fragments of a certain artefact had endured different heating temperatures. The bones were distributed in a manner not dissimilar to that of the artefacts. The preliminary study revealed that most of the bones had been exposed to fire.

Deriving from the blade point of the spearhead, the deceased in grave VII had probably been male. The burial could be dated to the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century.

GRAVE VII

(Fig. 3)

Grave VII resembled grave V, consisting of a kerb and a stone heap. The northern part of the kerb was absent, probably demolished during the erecting of grave V (Photo 1). The stone heap of grave VII had probably been very low, and the big kerbstones started to unearth right under the turf. The outer diameter of the kerb was 3,8 m.

Most of the finds in grave VII came from an oval sooty spot in the middle of the grave, but a part of them were found also in the northern half of the grave structure, some of them outside the probable demolished stone kerb. The oval sooty spot in the middle of the grave was intensively black and contained a great amount of small pieces of charcoal and suggest that this was the original place of the pyre.

Finds from grave VII indicated that the deceased had been a woman. Though badly burned, pieces of a chain arrangement, chain holder and probable fragment of bronze bracelet were all female ornaments. Iron scissors, under the limestone pavement, just outside the grave could have belonged to the same burial. As grave

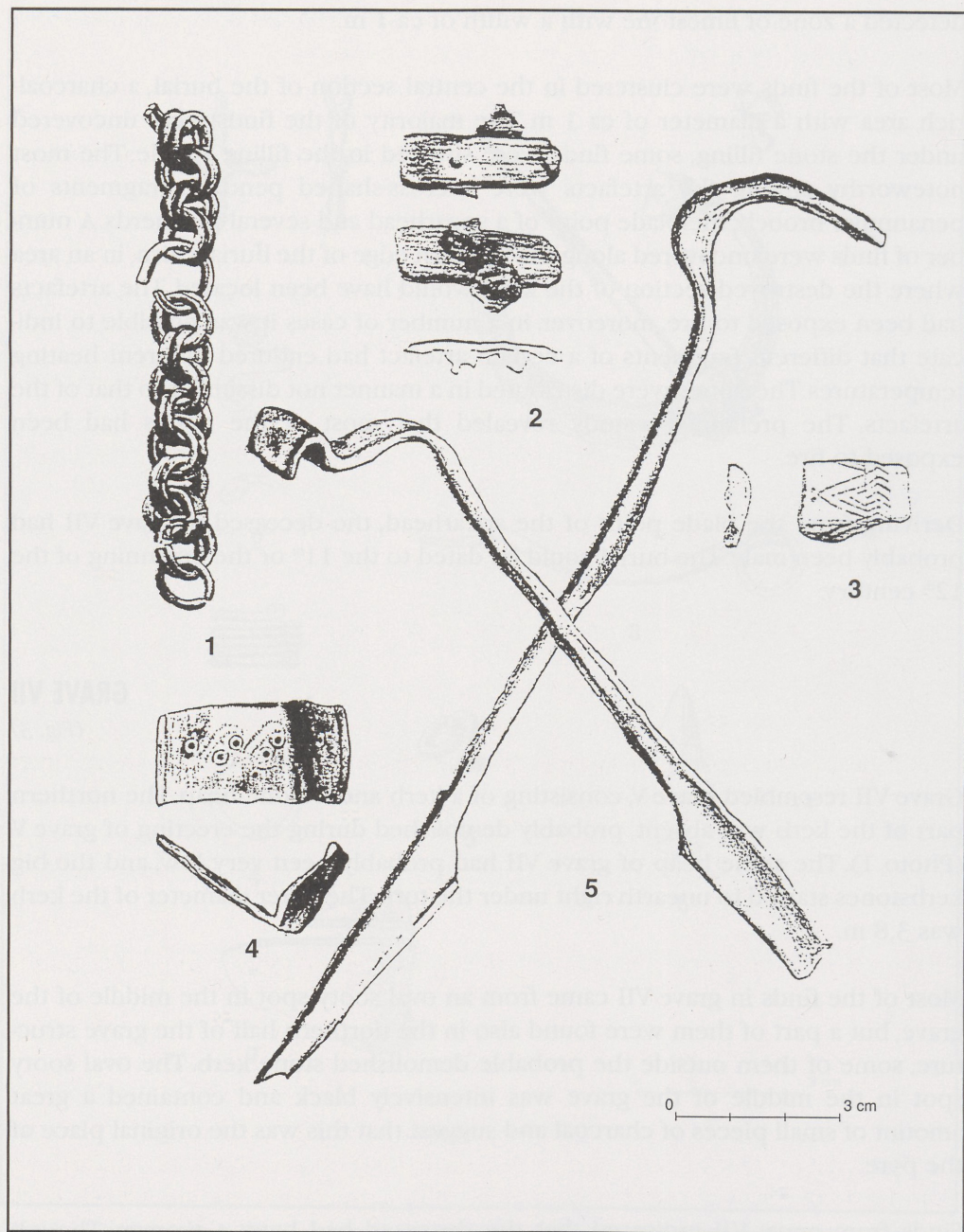


Fig. 3. Finds in grave VII. 1 - piece of chain; 2 - fragment of an ornament (?); 3 - fragment of a bracelet (?); 4 - fragment of decorated bone artefact; 5 - scissors. 1-3 - bronze, 5 - iron.
 Joon. 3. Leide VII kalmest. 1 - ketikatke; 2 - ehte(?) katke; 3 - käevõru(?) katke; 4 - ornamenditud luueseme katke; 5 - käärid. 1-3 - pronks, 5 - raud.

VII must have been later than grave V, it could be dated to the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century.

VIKING AGE GRAVES ON SAAREMAA

Investigation at Piila, compiled with reports of the earlier excavations on Saaremaa, show that various grave forms were used on Viking Age and later Iron Age Saaremaa. Three types of stone graves could be registered already among the seven graves that were uncovered in Piila 1997–1998, an amount that definitely was too small for determination of all Viking period grave forms on the island.

- 1) stone circle graves with limestone walls, laid on a foundation of granite stones (graves I–III);
- 2) stone circle graves with granite stone kerbs, covered with a low heap of infill stones (graves V–VII);
- 3) graves of big granite stones, obviously laid directly on the place of burned-down pyre.

As classified from plans of earlier excavations on Saaremaa, even more grave forms could be distinguished:

- 4) graves, consisting of cremation deposits, and covered with different stones without any specific structure;
- 5) graves, consisting of cremation deposits around or aside a very big granite stone;
- 6) graves, hypothetically covered with stone heaps, but without kerbs.

The list will probably be prolonged, in accordance with new sites to be excavated. The great variety of Viking Age grave forms was characteristic of all northern European countries. It should be noted here that cremation was the clearly dominating burial custom both on Viking Age Saaremaa and on the mainland of Estonia. On Saaremaa only a few obscure data refer to probable inhumation burials during the Viking Age. A single 10th–11th century inhumation burial was found at Laadjala, the central part of the island, at the end of the 19th century (Saaremaa

ja Muhu muinasjäänused 1924, 24). From the beginning of the 20th century, unburned human bones were found together with swords and other weapons near Tornimäe, one of the most important harbours of the island (*op. cit.*, 102). The possible cemetery has remained underneath a present graveyard and could therefore, unfortunately, not be investigated.

Stone graves, similar to these on Viking period Saaremaa, were spread also in West-Estonia, south-western Finland, central Sweden and on the island of Gotland (Jaanits *et al.*, 341–342; Karvonen 1998; Gräslund 1980, 72; Nylén 1958). The uniting feature in burial customs, practised in these graves, was cremation. Only on Gotland have both cremation or inhumation burial been found under the circular stone graves.

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UUED KIVIRINGKALMED PIILA KALMISTUL SAAREMAAL

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Arheoloogilised kaevamised Piila kalmeväljal jätkasid samas 1989. ja 1997. aastal toimunud väljakaevamisi. 1998. a. avati kolm kiviringkalmet, mis tähistati numbritega V–VII.

V–VII kalme ehitus erines mõnevõrra varem avatud kalmete omast. Kõigi kolme puhul oli tegemist suurematest raudkividest kiviringiga, mille sisemus oli täidetud enamasti 15–20 cm läbimõõduga raudkividega. Paekividest laotud müüre nende kalmete puhul ei täheldatud, küll aga oli kiviringidest väljapoole jääv ala kaetud mõranenud paeplaatidega, mis olid moodustanud midagi sillutiselaadset (vt. foto 1). Põletusmatused paiknesid omaaegsel maapinnal, enamasti kalmete keskosas täidisekivide all.

V kalme (foto 1; joon. 1) kiviring oli ovaalne, läbimõõduga 4–4,2 m. Selle lääneküljel oli 75 cm laiune sissepääsuava, mille kõrvalt leiti purustatud viikingiaegne ornamenditud peenkeramik nõu. Enamik leide ning põlenud luukillud paiknesid 0,5 m läbimõõduga alal kiviringi keskosas. Pronksist esemed olid tugevasti sulanud. Neist olid äratuntavad vaid rihmajagaja (joon. 1: 2) ning hoburaudsõle katket (joon. 1: 3). Luufragmentidest kuulus enamik koerale. Kalme kiviringi kohalt täidisekivide vahelt leiti kõrvuti kaks sinna torgatud nuga. Rihmajagaja ja savinõu põhjal võib selle kalme dateerida 10.–11. sajandisse.

VI kalme (vt. foto 2; joon. 2). Kolmandik kalme ringmüürist oli lõhutud. Kiviringi läbimõõt oli olnud ca 3 m. Umbes 1 m läbimõõduga sõene laik kalme keskosas sisaldas rohkesti põlenud esemekatkeid: ristikujulise ripatsi, hoburaudsõle, odaotsa tipu (joon. 2: 1, 3, 6) jm. Samast leiti ka põlenud luutükikesi ning keraamikakilde. Ripatsi ja hoburaudsõle põhjal otsustades võib kalme dateerida 11. sajandisse või 12. sajandi algusesse. Maetu oli ilmselt mees.

VII kalme (joon. 3). See kalme sarnanes V kalmega, mille kõrval ta paiknes. Osa kalmemüüri põhjapoolsest osast oli hävinud kõige tõenäolisemalt V kalme ehitamisega. Ringmüüri läbimõõt oli 3,8 m. Enamik leide saadi kalme keskosast, rohkete söetükikestega ovaalsest laigust. Leidudest enamik esindas sulanud rinnakee ning etete katkeid, mille põhjal otsustades oli maetu naine. Kalmest väljapoole jääva paesillutise alt leiti käärid (joon. 3: 5). Arvestades, et kalme pidi olema varasem V kalmest, võib selle tõenäoliselt dateerida 10. sajandisse või 11. sajandi algusesse.

Piila kaevamiste senised tulemused on võimaldanud eristada kolme erinevat viikingiaegset kivi-kalme tüüpi sellel kalmistul. Varasemate kaevamiste aruannete ja leiuplaanide analüüs lubab täheldada lisaks neile veel kolme tüüpi, kuid see arv võib veelgi kasvada uute kalmete kaevamistega. Viikingiaegsete ja hilisrauaaegsete kalmetüüpide rohkus on iseloomulik ka Eesti naabermaadele. Saaremaa kalmete lähimad paralleelid on teada Lääne - Eestis, Soomes, Kesk - Rootsis ning Ojamaal.