



Archaeological excavations at a Bronze Age grave and a 6th – 10th century cult site at Saunamäe in Tõnija-Põlluküla village, southern Saaremaa

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Archaeological excavations at Saunamäe in Tõnija-Põlluküla, Saaremaa, were carried out in 2012–2014 as seminar excavations arranged for archaeology students of Tallinn University. The work was supervised by Marika Mägi, with Krista Karro and Riina Riiel as assistants in different periods. Finds from the excavations are stored in the Institute of History, Tallinn University (AI 7129).

LOCATION IN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The site was situated 20 m south-east from the Tõnija Tuulingumäe burial site and cult place (Fig. 1; Mägi-Lõugas 1997, Mägi 2001), thus forming a part of the same complex. Since the stony elevation was called Saunamäe (Eng. ‘Sauna Hill’) by some of the old local inhabitants, we decided to use the name for the new site. The small village with Saunamäe and Tuulingumäe in its centre is now called Põlluküla, but in the 1990s when Tuulingumäe was excavated it was administratively still a part of Tõnija village. Tõnija, Põlluküla and Rõõsa villages form a sort of a unit, without real natural borders between the households of neighbouring villages.

Traditional arable lands spread northeast and southwest from the Tuulingumäe-Saunamäe complex, while present-day fields north from these sites have been reclaimed from probable prehistoric wetlands (Mägi & Mägi 2002, especially fig. 5). These sites form a part of a belt consisting of Iron Age stone graves as well as other probable cult sites between the former wetland and arable land. Two stone graves are known only some tens of metres southwest from the Saunamäe site, and even more in the large area formerly called *Hiiemäe põllud* (Eng. ‘Hiiemäe Fields’), where remains of both fossil fields and stone graves have been recorded.

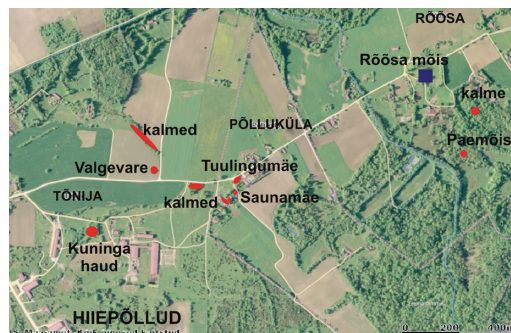


Fig. 1. The location of Saunamäe in cultural landscape.

Jn 1. Saunamäe paiknemine kultuurmaastikul.

Used map: X-GIS. Maaameti kaardirakendus.

Drawing / Joonis: Marika Mägi

They function as a settlement unit border which historically was known as Rõõsa village,¹ while the location of the present-day Tõnija village between arable lands and wetlands indicate later origin.

Since the most fertile lands in the vicinity of the Tuulingumäe-Saunamäe complex can be found around the later Rõõsa manor at the distance of 500 m from the sites, there is a reason to assume that people who used these sites for burials and ritual activities lived somewhere near the later manor.

Surface survey at the Saunamäe site had in the 1990s uncovered some potsherds similar to the later ones found at Tuulingumäe *tarand*-grave. Some people remembered that there had been a sort of depression in the middle of the Saunamäe hill, and some big stones of the probable kerb around the hill were still visible, suggesting that Saunamäe might be another *tarand*-grave similar to Tuulingumäe, although perhaps consisting of a single *tarand*. This presumption, however, proved to be wrong.

METHODS

Stone constructions without mortar are always complicated to excavate and interpret, which is particularly true in cases when roundish granite stones have been used. It is often impossible to say whether such stones are still in their original position or collapsed from some structure, and if collapsed, then from which direction. Since the stony elevation at Saunamäe seemed to be a structure consisting of several layers of stones, we decided to uncover the whole site – about 170 m² – at once. Former excavations, e.g. at Lepna funeral house (Mägi 2004), have proved this method to be the most productive, especially in comparison with the method to uncover and excavate only a sector per year. It was true for the Saunamäe excavations, too, where different structures had probably been very difficult to see, if a part of the site had been opened at once.

The site was excavated in structural layers, that is, categorizing similar stones or other characteristics as one layer. These layers, at Saunamäe all consisting of stones, were cleaned out, described, drawn, photographed, and then removed. In different sectors of the pit the depths of the structural layers varied, and not all layers covered the whole site. The pit was divided into five levels, with different layers in each of them. The uppermost, first, level consisted of stones right under the turf, and the fifth level rested on natural ground.

Shovels and brushes were used to clean the stones at all levels. All of the soil removed from the trench was sieved, and finds and bones measured from two different measuring points. Heights of the finds were also recorded, although the stones made it often very complicated to estimate the exact depth of particular finds.

STONE STRUCTURES AT THE FIRST TWO LAYERS

Although some local inhabitants had remembered a depression on top of the Saunamäe hill, nothing like that could be observed from the appearance of the site before the excavations (Fig. 2). Still, right after the turf had been removed, an area consisting of bricks, plastic, glass and other kind of building trash from the 20th century came into light in the middle of the southern half of the site. After removing the trash, a rectangular depression with approximate measurements 4 (NE–SW) × 3–4 m appeared. There were only some scattered stones in

¹ E.g. a map of 1873, depicting Rõõsa and Tõnija villages and Rõõsa manor; the village of Põlluküla does not exist yet (EAA 3724-5-2492).

the central part of it. The area had apparently been originally empty of stones, while stones collapsed from higher structures in all four sides formed the slopes of the pit (Fig. 3). In the middle part of this area the layer of modern trash reached natural ground.

Another depression was obvious right after the removal of turf in the NE-side of the structure. It also seemed to be rectangular (Fig. 4). The location of this depression at the edge of the stony elevation suggested that some stones were perhaps removed from here during later times. As for the depression southwards from the highest middle part of the construction,



Fig. 2. Saunamäe before excavations in 2012, view from NE.

Jn 2. Vaade Saunamäele kirdest enne kaevamisi 2012. aastal.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

the later origin did not seem logical, namely, it is difficult to believe that stones were taken from the middle of a stony elevation creating a regular triangular pit.

The structure was covered with a uniform stone layer consisting of mainly smaller limestones (Fig. 3). There were no finds from later periods. It is difficult to interpret the limestone layer in the general context of the structure at Saunamäe. It is possible that the smaller limestones were brought to the site later and spread evenly over the whole, by then already collapsed, stone structure. At the same time, it is unrealistic that just stones from some nearby field had been brought there. The layer of limestone consisted clearly of chosen stones, nearly entirely limestone pieces of a certain size.

Almost no finds were recorded between the uppermost limestone layer. At the second layer, when we started to uncover the layer of



Fig. 3. The first layer at Saunamäe, view from SW. The whole structure is evenly covered with a layer of lime-stones, while large foundation stones can already be observed at the margin of it. The depression has not been completely cleaned out.

Jn 3. Vaade esimesele kihile Saunamäel edelast. Kogu struktuur on kaetud ühtlase paekividest kihiga, samas kui suured vundamendikivid on servas juba näha. Lohk ei ole lõplikult välja puhastatud.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi



Fig. 4. The second layer at Saunamäe, view from NE. In front the depression in the NE-sector of the digs.

Jn 4. II kiht Saunamäel, vaade kirdest. Esiplaanil lohk struktuuri kirdesektoris.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

mainly granite stones right underneath the pieces of limestone, suddenly a great amount of potsherds came into light. The finds were not evenly spread, but concentrated in the western and the central part of the construction. Several animal bones were found together with the potsherds, but no human remains came into light at the first two layers of these excavations. All datable potsherds belonged to pre-Viking or Viking Period, and quite many of them were decorated (Fig. 5). A bronze finger-ring with double-spiral ends (Fig. 6: 2), found near the potsherds, can be dated to the same time.

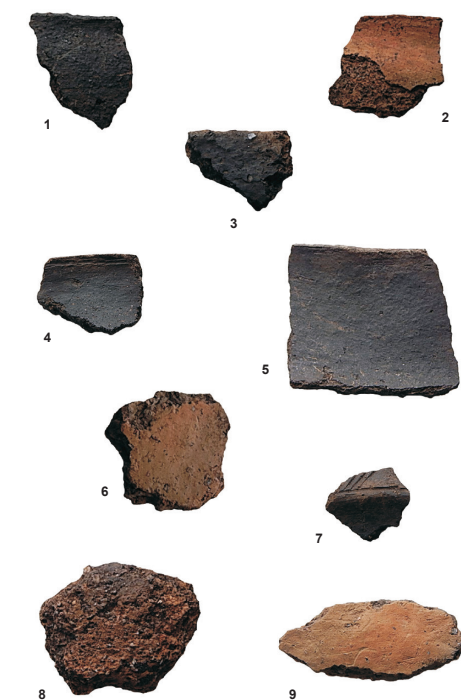


Fig. 5. Ceramics from Saunamäe.

Jn 5. Keraamikat Saunamäelt.

(AI 7129: 79, 101, 405, 40, 335, 79, 111, 15, 43.)

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi



Fig. 6. Metal and stone finds from Saunamäe. 1 – ring, 2 – finger-ring, 3–4 – buttons, 5 – bead, 6–8 – burnt fragments and beads from the stone circle grave. 1–4, 6–7 – bronze, 5, 8 – stone.

Jn 6. Metallist ja kivist leide Saunamäelt. 1 – rõngas, 2 – sõrmus, 3–4 – nööbid, 5 – helmes, 6–8 – põlenud fragmendid ja helmed kiviringkalmest. 1–4, 6–7 – pronks, 5, 8 – kivi.

(AI 7129: 482, 73, 49, 59, 113, 494, 495, 493.)

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

THE THIRD LAYER

Some structures started to be obvious only when we were cleaning the third layer of stones in the second year of the excavations. Around the central and highest part of the pit, the third layer consisted of approximately head-size roundish granite stones. At the marginal parts of the pit, some bigger stones under the head-size stones also came into light. It became more and more obvious that the head-size granite stones had once formed a part of a massive stone fence surrounding the whole structure (Fig. 7). In the neighbourhood, a similar massive stone fence had later, up to the 1970s or 80s, surrounded the Rõõsa manor, where a part of it has

now been restored. However, a great part of the Rõõsa fence is still collapsed, sometimes nearly to the level of the large foundation stones, and the way how the granite stones that once formed the fence have spread around the foundation resembles a lot the situation that we saw at Saunamäe (Fig. 8).

The layer of head-size granite stones was clearly thicker at the marginal parts of the site, and accordingly thinner closer to the otherwise higher middle part, which supports the interpretation of it as having collapsed from a surrounding stone fence. This was also suggested by the fact that all head-size granite stones were located quite loosely, surrounded by a lot of soil. This situation is typical for a gradually collapsing stone fence where grass and old leaves create a lot of humus between the loose stones.

In the middle part of our pit, in the squares 7–11/f–j, no layer of head-size granite stones was recorded (Fig. 9). Instead, there was a clear layer of smaller limestone slabs, and nine or ten big, mainly granite stones on top of them. In the southern half of the central area, near the depression or the area empty of stones, some structures that could be interpreted as places for big wooden posts or pillars were found. It is not necessary to dig holes for posts on a stony soil as it is at Tõnija; posts are, therefore, placed directly onto the stony ground and supported by stones around them. The post places consisted of middle-size stones clearly surrounding an area with a diameter of approximately 40 cm, and with only small pieces of limestone inside (fallen from the upper layer after the decay of wood) (Fig. 10). Two or three such post places were more or less certain, while some possible ones were recorded in a few other spots. However, nothing similar was revealed in other parts of the pit, just the southern middle part of the whole construction in the vicinity of the central depression, suggesting some pillars or wooden constructions only there. In addition, a 190 cm long ditch surrounded by collapsed granite stones, but filled with smaller limestone pieces was recorded in the squares 10–11/f–g (Fig. 9). It is possible that a horizontal log had blocked the way for collapsing fence-stones here, and when it decayed, the depression was filled with small limestone slabs from the upper layer.

The first human bones were also uncovered in the third layer. Pieces of a cranium together with some teeth were recorded around the post place no. 1 (Fig. 9). It is possible that the



Fig. 7. The third layer at Saunamäe, view from NW. The foundation of the surrounding stone fence, stones fallen from it, and the central structure are visible.

Jn 7. Kolmas kiht Saunamäel, vaade loodest. Näha ümbritseva kiviaia vundament, kiviaialt varisenud kivid ja keskne struktuur.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi



Fig. 8. Semi-fallen stone fence around the Rõõsa manor.

Jn 8. Poolenisti varisenud kiviaed Rõõsa mõisa ümber.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

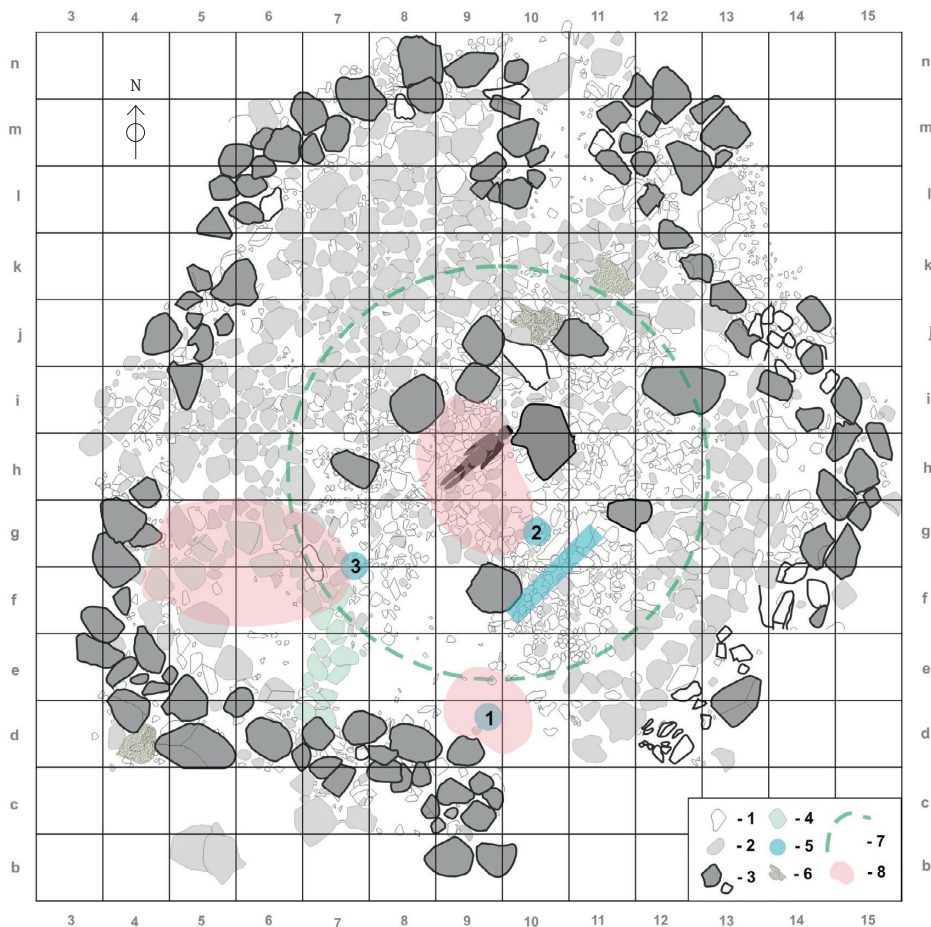


Fig. 9. Final layers at Saunamäe. 1 – limestone, 2 – granite stone, 3 – stones that are parts of some construction, 4 – stones surrounding the stone circle grave, 5 – post place, 6 – fireplace, 7 – Bronze Age mound, 8 – concentration area of finds. A square measures 1 × 1 m.

Jn 9. Viimased kihid Saunamäel. 1 – paekivi, 2 – raudkivi, 3 – konstruktsioonikivid, 4 – kiviringkalmet ümbritsevad kivid, 5 – postikoht, 6 – tulease, 7 – pronksiaegne kalme, 8 – leidude kontsentratsiooniala. Ühe ruudu mõõdud on 1 × 1 m. Drawing / Joonis: Marika Mägi

cranium had somehow been attached to the post. Some other human bones from different parts of skeleton together with a great amount of animal bones were located in the middle of the structure between the big granite stones on the uppermost part of the lower layer of small limestone pieces.¹⁴C analyses of these bones indicated that the cranium near to the post no. 1 belonged to the period of 776–420 BC,² and a piece of femur in the middle of the digs between the big stones originates from the period 750–403 BC.³ However, a horse tooth right next to the last one was dated to 474–646 AD,⁴ thus to the beginning of the period when the ceramics found at Saunamäe were used.

² Poz-59588, 2430±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability. All radiocarbon samples used in this article are calibrated with OxCal v4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2009); using IntCal13 atmospheric curve (Reimer *et al.* 2013).

³ Poz-59589, 2490±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

⁴ Poz-61928, 1485±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

THE FINAL LAYER AND STRUCTURES

It was difficult to understand the construction of the site after the first year of excavations. It was only during the last two years when the structures and the building history of Saunamäe became clearer.

The foundation of the massive stone fence around the elevation of Saunamäe was almost evenly 1 m wide and consisted generally of two parallel lines of big granite stones with smaller, often limestone slabs in between. No clearly straight line was kept as, for example, in the foundations of most *tarand*-graves; however, this is typical for many stone fences, including the one around the Rõõsa manor (see above).

Two entrances, one in the northern and the other in the southern end of the structure, were clearly visible. Especially in the southern part, right next to the area without stones, the fence turned 1.5 m southwards and ended with two upright stones. The wall foundation in the south-eastern part of the structure consisted of somewhat smaller stones, mostly limestone, but it was still clearly observable. There was also a possible entrance in the western part of the wall, and some construction had stood in the north-eastern part of it as well. The regular position of stones in the north-eastern part of the construction seems to suggest that the depression in the stone layer here was, however, not caused by some later activity, but indicated a constructional element.

In the south-western sector of Saunamäe a semi-circle of bigger granite stones was recorded against the surrounding wall, which altogether formed a kerb for a construction that resembled a pre-Viking or Viking Age stone circle grave (Fig. 11). The circle was filled with bigger granite stones and diagonal limestone slabs between them. Few strongly burnt fragments of bronze artefacts and some cremated bones, both characteristic for Early Viking Age graves as they have been recorded e.g. at Piila, central Saaremaa (Mägi *et al.* 1997), indicated that it probably was a grave. The stone circle grave at Saunamäe was built in the latest usage phase of this site after the surrounding massive wall had already been constructed.

Much less can be said about the construction in the midst of the pit, that is, the highest part of the Saunamäe hill (Fig. 12). The layer of collapsed roundish wall-stones was nearly absent there, and the highest point seemed to have been surrounded by ten bigger stones. It was difficult to estimate whether all the stones were on their original position; at least some



Fig. 10. Post place no. 1.

Jn 10. Postikoht nr 1.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi



Fig. 11. Stone circle grave and the central structure behind it, view from SW.

Jn 11. Kiviringkalme ja keskne struktuur selle taga, vaade edelast.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi



Fig. 12. Central structure and place where later the skeleton was found, view from SW.

Jn 12. Keskne struktuur ja koht, kust hiljem leiti skelett, vaade edelast.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

of them seemed to have lapsed down the slope. Stones in the north-western side of the middle part were nearly in parallel line with the possible log in the south-eastern side of it (see the description of the third level). In the south-western side a straight clear area between the head-size stones collapsed from the wall, and the small limestone slabs in the middle of the pit could be observed in NW–SE direction through the squares 7–8/e–g. It can hypothetically be assumed that a wooden wall or another log had stopped the collapsed stones here. Whether the big stones once had formed a clearer construction or whether there had been any wooden parts of it in addition to the big posts, was impossible to determine.

All big stones in the middle of Saunamäe stood on top of a layer consisting of smaller limestone slabs. The layer formed a nearly symmetrically circular low mound with the diameter of approximately 6 m (Fig. 9). All potsherds, animal bones and some human bones were unearthed from the top or the uppermost layer of the limestone slabs, while there were nearly no finds deeper between the limestone. As it turned out in the very last days of the excavations, the low mound was a grave from the Bronze Age. It was not clear whether the big stones were part of the later construction or had been placed on top of the Bronze Age grave when it was erected.

THE BRONZE AGE BURIAL

In the middle of Saunamäe in the Bronze Age mound a skeleton was found. It lay in a supine position with the head directed to the north-east (Fig. 13). There was no cist, at least no stone cist, but bigger limestone slabs had been laid under and over the skeleton. Radiocarbon analysis dated the skeleton to the period 1005–836 BC.⁵ All body parts were represented; however, the bones were eroded and fragmentary in most cases. Noticeable is the somewhat better preservation of the bones of the right body side. The skeleton was in anatomical order and covered with an individual mound. Both features were according to our present knowledge unusual in Late Bronze Age Saaremaa, where most burial places of this time were collective graves with fragmental bones of several individuals (Mägi 2007).



Fig. 13. The Bronze Age skeleton.

Jn 13. Pronksiaegne skelett.

Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

⁵ Poz-67812, 2775±35 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

The biological sex and age at death was determined according to common standards (Buikstra & Ubelaker 1994; White & Folkens 2000; Bass 2005; WEA 1980). Morphological traits were well observable on cranial bones, unfortunately the innominate bones were too fragmentary for sex determination. Based on morphological traits and osteometric data the biological sex of the buried individual is male, whose estimated age at death was between twenty to thirty years.

The length of the skeleton was measured in the grave and it refers to the body height around 160 cm. It is quite comparable to the other Late Bronze Age skeletal data from Estonia and Latvia, where the calculated average male body height is around 170–172 cm (Mark 1962; Gerhards 2005).

Unfortunately the long bones (femur, tibia, humerus, etc.) commonly used to estimate the body height, were preserved only in fragments. To assess the stature of the young male buried at Saunamäe the regression formula developed on the vertical diameter of femoral head (Giroux & Wescott 2008) was used. The model has been developed on population that is very different from the Saaremaa one, and can give us only a rough estimation of stature. The body mass is calculated according to Ruff and co-workers (2012). The calculated body height of the man was approximately 178 cm and the body weight around 73 kg.

Neither grave goods nor other Bronze Age artefacts were uncovered from the mound.

THE DISTRIBUTION AND DATE OF FINDS

A considerable amount of finds was revealed especially in the third and fourth layer, most of them potsherds and animal bones. All ceramics belonged to the period from the 6th to the 10th century AD, and quite many of them were decorated. The great majority of finds was concentrated in three locations, especially in the squares 5–7/f–g (Fig. 9). Only a small number of items were found in other areas.

We can emphasize that one of the concentration areas of finds remained right in the middle of the presumed central construction. Post place no. 2 was recorded in one edge of this area (Fig. 9). Another concentration area of finds was around post place no. 1, and the third one around post place no. 3 in the eastern edge of it. Probable offerings, food and drink in ceramic vessels, were thus put in places where there also had stood a massive wooden pillar. The connection is, however, less clear for post no. 3.

A great amount of potsherds and animal bones in the squares 5–7/f–g beside post no. 3 was found between the collapsed wall-stones in the plentiful and loose dark soil surrounding them. Clearly more finds were recorded in the upper layers, but they were located nearly entirely beneath the covering limestone slabs. A few finds were also unearthed together with the lowest stones on the natural ground. It can be assumed that the collapsing wall stones had broken the pots with meat and other food or beverages and that they had not been placed along the wall. It is worth noting that the soil between the collapsed stones was extraordinarily plentiful here compared to the other parts of the collapsed stone fence. It may indicate some wooden construction here, perhaps in the form of a platform or a gate; the latter can be assumed because of a gap in the stone fence right next to the concentration area of finds.

It is noteworthy that neither potsherds nor other artefacts that could be dated to the period before the 6th century AD were recorded at Saunamäe. A few fragments of human bones in the central part of the construction and around post no. 1 belonged to the Late Bronze Age or Early Pre-Roman Iron Age, and were thus considerably earlier. Still, these human bones were uncovered in the same spot and level as much later ceramics, as well as the animal bones

from the 5th – 6th centuries. All bones and finds were above or outside the Bronze Age grave. Finding human bones together with much later artefacts suggests that bones from some other grave or funeral house had been taken to the Saunamäe site in the course of some ritual activity (for re-depositing human bones, especially in houses, in prehistoric Scandinavia, see e.g. Carlie 2004, 141–144; for the custom in general, Bradley 2000, 117–122).

PRELIMINARY INTERPRETATIONS

Sites from clearly two different periods were revealed at Saunamäe. The oldest of them was a grave, a low mound made of small limestone slabs built in the Late Bronze Age. So far stone-cist graves or perhaps early *tarand*-graves of Kurevere type were known from this period. These were always collective graves with mixed, although mainly uncremated bones (Mägi 2007).

The Saunamäe grave was quite modest, without neither a stone cist nor a clear kerb of stones around it. Although its diameter was about 6 m, it was hardly more than 30–40 cm high, and there were no survived grave goods. The skeleton was poorly preserved. It is very difficult to find such graves, because they are not noticeable under the surface. Even when human bones were accidentally dug out from such a grave, they would not be recognized as a Bronze Age burial without ^{14}C dating due to the absence of grave goods.

It seems likely that the mound was kept clean of grass in during the following 1500 years, or at least the place was remembered. It is probably not accidental that a shrine was built right on top of the grave around 500 AD. The interpretation of its structures in this article is, however, very preliminary.

The central construction of the shrine consisted of large granite stones that were laid right on top of the limestones of the earlier grave. Perhaps it formed a closed room with approximate measurements 4×3 m in the NE–SW direction, where some parts could have been made of wood. At least two big wooden pillars with a diameter of 40 cm seem to have existed inside the construction, and another similar pillar also outside.

The central construction was probably used for making sacrifices, as is indicated by potsherds and animal bones in the middle of the enclosure. In addition, some fragments of human bones were found, but they were probably brought there from somewhere else. The human bones were dated approximately to 800–400 BC, but were found together with the Middle Iron Age or Viking Age material. Neither did these human bones belong together with the Bronze Age grave, since they were found on top or outside the mound.

More human bones from 800–400 BC were found around the presumable post right southwards from the central construction, where they probably indicated a cranium attached to or standing on the pillar. Still, the skull was also brought from somewhere else, since other finds around it belonged to the later usage period of the site. Bones and especially craniums may have been brought from one place to another in order to confirm the continuity and unity with ancestors. The significance of building a shrine on top of an old grave was thus manifested with using old bones in some activities practised there.

The central construction was surrounded by a massive granite wall. It could not be determined whether the wall was contemporaneous with the central construction or not. The most clearly marked entrance to the area was directly south from the central construction, next to the pillar outside of it. Another entrance to the area was in the northern side of it, where it led directly to an intensively used hearth right outside the northernmost end of the central construction. Strongly burnt stones with small pieces of charcoal were found in an area with a

diameter of approximately 1.5 m. Another hearth had stood right outside the surrounding stone fence in the south-western part of it, but some burnt stones and small charcoal were also found in other parts of the structure.

Although there were head-size granite stones from the stone wall that had collapsed outside the structure, definitely more of them were inside it. A possible explanation to this phenomenon may be that the collapsed stones outside the elevation were partly re-used for other buildings, or some of them perhaps thrown inside on top of the other stones. It is difficult to estimate how high the wall once had been, but considering that the foundation was seldom broader than 1 m, it could hardly have been higher than 150–160 cm (Fig. 14).

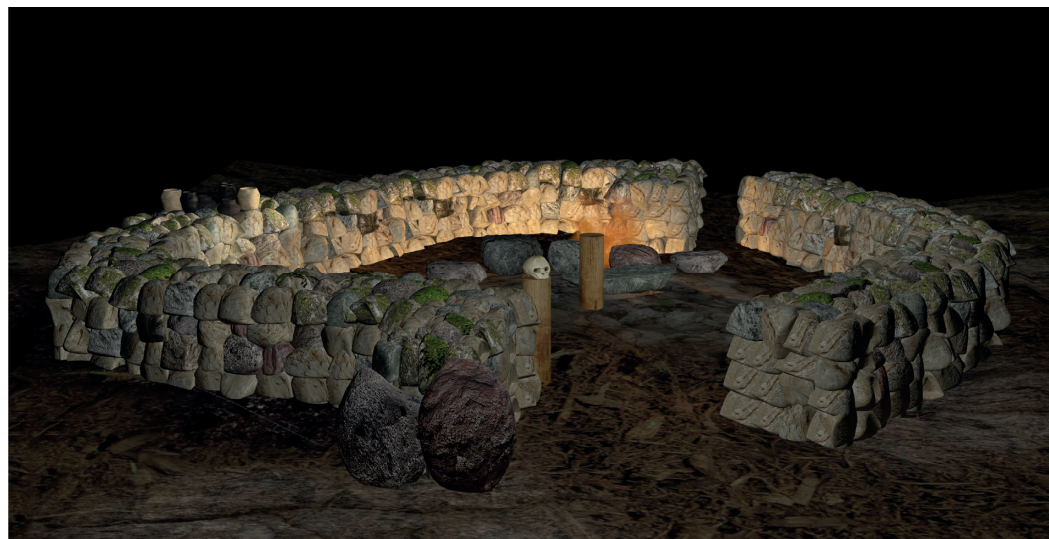


Fig. 14. A possible reconstruction of the Saunamäe shrine.

Jn 14. Saunamäe pühamu üks võimalik rekonstruktsioon.

3D model / 3D mudel: Marilyn Lõugas

There might have been two other entrances to the structure in the western and north-eastern sides. Their construction method or whether they were contemporaneous with the ‘main’ entrances, remained unclear. It is, however, certain that the latest phase in the structure was the stone circle grave that was attached to the inner south-western corner of the surrounding stone fence. Very few burnt bronze pieces and a small number of cremated bones is typical to the stone circle graves of Saaremaa before the 10th century. The significance of the dead in the Saunamäe stone-cist grave was emphasized by the site itself rather than numerous grave goods.

THE CULTIC COMPLEX AT TÕNIJA – SOME NEWER RESULTS

As it was described in the beginning of this article, people using the Saunamäe site most likely lived somewhere near the later Rõõsa manor. Saunamäe shrine at the distance of about 500 m from the dwelling site was situated at the edge of arable lands and formed a part of a bigger complex of graves and cult sites. The best known complex right beside Saunamäe was Tuulingumäe, where some ¹⁴C analyses made after the first interpretations of the site enable us to draw interesting parallels with Saunamäe, and should therefore be briefly mentioned here.

Firstly, ^{14}C analysis of bones from different *tarands* resulted in dates that seem to indicate deposition of older bones in some otherwise later *tarand*-buildings. Human bones were found only in *tarands* II and III, the latter being earlier according to its architectural details. According to the numerous finds in *tarand* III it was erected not earlier than the 4th century AD (Mägi-Lõugas 1997). However, analyses from two different skeleton fragments dated back to 120–220 AD and 110 BC – 60 AD,⁶ which seem to indicate that at least the bones from the second analysis were collected and deposited there from somewhere else, probably from the early *tarand*-grave in the vicinity. Bones in *tarand* II were of much later origin and fitted well with the find material – 400–550 AD.⁷ These data demonstrate that not just actual burials but single bones from other places were deposited in the probable funeral houses or *tarands* at Tuulingumäe, suggesting that these sites might have been more shrines than graves. However, neither bones nor finds from the period 800–400 BC have been recorded at Tuulingumäe, indicating that the bones at Saunamäe were apparently taken from some other site.

The cult site beside the complex of (presumable) graves at Tuulingumäe was dated, due to the lack of finds, very hypothetically to the Late Bronze Age or Pre-Roman Iron Age (Mägi 2001; Mägi & Mägi 2002). Surprisingly, ^{14}C analyses pointed to a much later date. A fire place beneath the stone platform or cult house with pits had been last used in 250–430 AD,⁸ and the building on top of it could, accordingly, been built or at least used contemporarily with the Saunamäe shrine. The biggest pit or post hole of the cult place outside the platform was dated with the help of charcoal on the bottom of it, and it belonged to the period 540–650 AD.⁹ Another smaller pit has not been ^{14}C -dated, but was stratigraphically located under the platform, thus being older than it.

The Tuulingumäe site, only 20–30 m from Saunamäe, probably formed a part of the same complex: small buildings of massive stone walls with posts and pits (Fig. 15). As it was characteristic to Saunamäe, too, no burials but only some tiny pieces from crania were found in the Tuulingumäe shrine, while a great number of potsherds and animal bones indicated offerings. Right next to the shrine another building – a *tarand*-grave – was standing where fragmentary human bones from different periods were collected. Two of the four rooms in this building were exclusively used for offerings as well, including only potsherds and animal bones, but no human remains. Another similarity with Saunamäe was that Tuulingumäe later complex was built partly on top of a Pre-Roman Iron Age site, indicating continuity between religiously meaningful constructions from different times.

The latest ornamented potsherds at Saunamäe can be dated to the 10th century, and some artefacts as well as some decorated potsherds found on top of the Tuulingumäe stone platform belonged to the 9th – 10th century, too (Mägi 2001). There had probably been a log building on top of the Tuulingumäe platform, indicated by a burnt layer. Radiocarbon analysis from this layer showed the period 1303–1453 AD.¹⁰ Although a random fire in the Middle Ages cannot be completely excluded, it also was the time when old cult places fell out of use in other places – at the Lepna funeral house only 1.2 km away the last fire made before the house collapsed was dated to approximately the same time – 1219–1395 AD and

⁶ Hela-1330, 1855±35 BP and Poz-14686, 2020±30 BP, both with 95.4% probability.

⁷ Poz-14684, 1595±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

⁸ Poz-14690, 1670±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

⁹ Poz-14688, 1470±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability.

¹⁰ Tln 3056, 519±50 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability. ^{14}C from bones right underneath resulted with 190–210 AD (Poz-14687, 1885±30 BP, calibrated with 95.4% probability). Bones from some other construction of the complex had probably ended up there when the pit was filled up.

1223–1411 AD.¹¹ No more offerings in clay vessels were made in Saunamäe after 1000 AD, but how long the site was tended to after that, and when the stone walls finally collapsed, is not possible to say.



Fig. 15. *Tuulingumäe-Saunamäe complex.*

Jn 15. *Tuulingumäe-Saunamäe kompleks.*

Photo / Foto: TV3

PRE-VIKING AND VIKING AGE SHRINES IN A BROADER CONTEXT

Stone has been used as preferred material for ritual constructions in many areas, including eastern Scandinavia that was culturally closely connected with Saaremaa (e.g. Kaliff 1997, 106–108). It was common in Bronze Age Uppland (central Sweden) to surround graves with fences of stone or wood (Victor 2002, 43–44). Enclosures, some of them large, others approximately of the same size as Saunamäe, are known in several cult places in southern Scandinavia, where they often occur in the same complexes with big gathering halls and magnate's farms (Jørgensen 2009).

Especially some cult sites in Uppland and Södermanland in eastern central Sweden stand out as similar to the Tönija complex, most of them excavated in the 1990s or around 2000. Lunda in Strängnäs, Södermanland was a complex of a settlement, a big hall, a cult house and a cult area. The latter was defined as 'activity place from prehistoric and historic periods', an open sacrificial site on a 140 m long and 10 m high rock ridge. The site was built of stones, although of less stones than Saunamäe, and contained unclear, often circular stone constructions with some finds – mainly potsherds, as well as a few human bones. The Lunda shrine had been used during a long period, but most intensively in the 6th – 7th centuries (Andersson 2004; Jørgensen 2014).

It is interesting to note that the cult house of Lunda was situated only 150 m from the open-air shrine, and therefore forms a kind of parallel to the situation in Tönija, where the

¹¹ Tln-2856, 709±57 BP and Tln-2943, 672±70 BP, both calibrated with 95.4% probability. Another ¹⁴C date from Tuulingumäe, taken in 1996, referred to the same period, but was neglected as probably contaminated.

Tuulingumäe cult-house was situated about 70 m from the Saunamäe shrine. The cult house of Lunda measured 6×3 m, had been built in wood and in post construction, and had one side open. Inside, in one part, there was a stone platform (Bäck *et al.* 2012, 108).

Several other cult houses have been recorded in eastern central Sweden, many of them dated to the Vendel Period before the Viking Age. A good counterpart for the house in Tuulingumäe seems to be a cult house in Sanda in Uppland that had a frame of big stones with a diameter of 1–2 m. The frame was open in one side and had a stone platform inside. Its area was estimated to have been 30–40 m², and the finds consisted mainly of shards of miniature pots, as well as other ceramics, an iron brooch, and few other artefacts (Bäck *et al.* 2012, 106).

The ritual site Lilla Ullevi in Uppland also revealed traces from different periods (Bäck *et al.* 2012; Jørgensen 2014 and references). A stone platform resembling the gable of a large hall building was dated to the 7th – 8th centuries, and seems to be another central Swedish parallel to the Tuulingumäe platform. The platform and some post holes near it seemed to resemble a hall built in Scandinavian traditional post-construction, while the platform with pits at Tuulingumäe very likely had had an Estonian traditional log building on top of it. Objects found in the Lilla Ullavi complex consisted of 65 amulet rings of 7th – 8th century dating, some mounts, an arrow and a spearhead; at Tuulingumäe platform, mainly ceramics but also an Early Viking Age penannular brooch and an axe were uncovered (Mägi 2001).

The Lilla Ullevi platform had in the 8th century been intentionally covered with a sand layer up to one metre thick, thus sealing the former cult place. Similar layers ‘closing down’ or ‘sealing’ cult places were recorded in several other cultic places in central Sweden, notably in Borg in Östergötland, Broby and Lilla Frescati in the Mälars area (Bäck *et al.* 2012, 15). The uppermost layer of limestone pieces, covering the complex of Saunamäe, can very likely be interpreted in the same way.

In the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, the closest parallels to the Tõnija complex can be found in Strazde in northern Couronia. The site with ten pits, probably used for sacrifices, has been interpreted as an unusual grave, or, more recently, as a cult place from the Viking Age (Mägi 2001 and references). Stone constructions similar to Saunamäe, with, according to the archaeologist excavating there, unclear kerbs of bigger stones, were also recorded in Tansi-Jaani, at the distance of only 7 km from Tõnija. The Tansi-Jaani site was dated to the Roman period with some reservations (Kustin 1962, 99); the lack of other finds but ceramics and no ¹⁴C analyses made it impossible to date it more accurately.

A peculiarity of the shrines at Tuulingumäe and Saunamäe is that the enclosed areas or buildings were comparatively small, compared with open-air sites. The platform at Tuulingumäe measured 8×7 m, and the area surrounded with the massive stone fence at Saunamäe was approximately 9×9 m, while the central construction was only about 4×3 m. Such areas were definitely not meant to accommodate many people. Shrines as these were rather meant for few selected persons to conduct special rituals. Whether these people were heads of a local dominating family or a clan, or specialized shamans or magicians, is not possible to say.

However, as it is demonstrated in another article in this book, the pre-Viking and Early Viking Age cult places in Saaremaa were not always small enclosures (Mägi *et al.* this volume). The Viidumäe site belonged roughly to the same time as at least part of the Tõnija complex, but was a large open-air sacrificial place. A common feature for all the shrines seems to be that they have parallels in eastern Scandinavia and in other coastal areas around the northern half of the Baltic Sea. Whether or how much it indicates similarities in mythology, is not known.

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ARHEOLOOGILISED KAEVAMISED SAUNAMÄE PRONKSIAEGSEL KÄÄPAL JA 6.–10. SAJANDI KULTUSKOHAL TÕNIJA PÕLLUKÜLAS SAAREMAAL

Marika Mägi, Raili Allmäe, Riina Riie, Krista Karro ja Jana Limbo-Simovart

Arheoloogilised kaevamised Saunamäel, vaid mõnekümne meetri kaugusel Tõnija Tuulingumäe muististe-kompleksist, korraldati 2012–14. a TLÜ üliõpilaste seminarikaevamistena. Igal nimetatud aastal toimusid kaevamised kolme nädala jooksul suvel.

Praegused Tõnija, Põlluküla ja Rõõsa moodustavad asustuslikus mõttes ühtse kompleksi. Vanimad asustatud punktid on põllumaade järgi otsustades Rõõsa ning nn vana Tõnija küla praegusest mõnisada meetrit lõuna pool. Tuulingumäe-Saunamäe kompleks jääb nimetatud asustusüksuste vahele, kuid mõnevõrra lähemale hilisemale Rõõsa mõisale. Koht on kunagiste põllumaade ja soo piiril, vööndis, kus leidub arvukalt kalmeid ja küllap ka muid kultusliku tähendusega kohti.

Saunamäe kaevamised toimusid struktuursete kihtidena, kusjuures korraga avati kogu kaevandi ala, umbes 170 m². Varasemad kaevamised rohkete kividega struktuuridel on näidanud, et kogu uuritava ala samaaegne avamine on tõhus meetod keeruliste varisenud kivistruktuuride tuvastamiseks ning seda tõestasid ka Saunamäe kaevamised. Sellest hoolimata tuli ka Saunamäe puhul mitmel puhul piirduda oletustega. Kaevamiste materjalid on täies ulatuses veel läbi töötamata ning siin esitatavad tõlgendused seega esialgsed.

Kohe mättakihi all paljandus kaasaegse ehitusprahiga täidetud ala, mis markeeris kunagist lohku, mida mõned vanemad inimesed Saunamäel veel mäletasid. Selgus, et tegu oli umbes 4 × 3–4 m alaga peaaegu kivistruktuuri keskel, kus kivid ilmselt juba algselt olid puudunud. Teine lohk paljandus kaevandi kirdeservas, algse arvamuse kohaselt võis selle põhjus olla hilisem sissekaev. Nagu kivide korrapärane struktuur nimetatud lohu ümbruses sügavamale kaevates osutas, oli siiski ka siin tegu pigem struktuuri mingi osa, kui hilisema lõhkumisega.

Kogu Saunamäe oli kaetud ühtlase, umbes ühesuguse suurusega paekividest koosneva kihiga, mille tõlgendus on ebaselge. Kihi homogeensus näib välistavat, et tegu võiks olla lihtsalt põllult toodud kividega. Samas puudusid selles paekihis praktiliselt täielikult leiud, mis see-eest ilmusid kohe nimetatud kihi all.

Struktuur hakkas mõnevõrra selguma alles teise kaevamisaasta lõpus, kolmanda kihi eemaldamisel. Selgus, et kogu küngast ümbritseb suhteliselt selgepiiriline suurtest raudkividest kiviaia vundament, mille peal ja kõrval oli umbes peasuurustest valitud raudkividest kiht. Viimane oli ümbritsetud rohke ja sõmera mullaga mis pärines lagunenud kiviaiast. Võrdluseks võib osutada, et samasugustest kividest ja umbes sama laiale vundamendile rajatud kiviaed on ümbritsenud hilisemat Rõõsa mõisa, kus see tänapäeval on osaliselt uuesti üles ehitatud, teises osas aga täiesti laiali vajumas.

Peasuurustest raudkividest kiht kaevandi keskosas peaaegu puudus, seal asetses kümme suurt, enamikus raudkivi, mida ümbritsesid peamiselt paekivid. Ilmselt polnud kiviaia varingukiht siia ulatunud.

III kiht oli kõige leiurohkem, leiud polnud aga jagunenud ühtlaselt, vaid kontsenteerusid kolmele alale. Valdav enamik leide olid 6.–10. sajandisse dateeritavad savinõukillud, osa neist ornamenditud. Samasse perioodi kuulusid ka üksikud metall-leiud. Koos savinõukildudega leidsime rohkesti loomaluud, kuid esimesed inimese põletamata inimuud tulid välja alles IV kihi väljapuhastamisel.

Neljandas kihis puhastasime täielikult välja kiviaia vundamenti. Põhja- ja lõunaküljel olid selles selgelt markeeritud sissepääsud, lisaks paiknesid oletatavad sissepääsud ka kaevandi lääne ja kirdeservas. Neist viimane oli seotud eelpool mainitud lohuga. Lääneserva tõenäolisele sissepääsule osutas kõige rohkemate leidudega ala sellest vahetult seespool. Potikillud ja loomaluud paiknesid siin peasuuruste varingukivide kihis rohke sõmera mulla sees, mis lubab oletada mingit kõdunenud puitkonstruktsiooni. Igal juhul olid savinõud toidu ja ilmselt ka joogiga varisenud koos müüriaga.

Teine, väiksem leidude kontsentratsiooniala paiknes lõunapoolse sissepääsu lähedal kohas, kus ilmselt oli olnud tegu puidust postiga – varingukivid ümbritsesid korrapäraselt 40 cm läbimõõduga ala, mille sees olid vaid pealmisest kihist varisenud väikesed paekivid. Lisaks muudele leidudele saadi siit inimese kolju tükke ja hambaid, millest tehtud ¹⁴C analüüs osutas, et need pärinesid leiuainestest märksa varasemast ajast, pronksiaja lõpust või eelrooma rauaaja algusest.

Teine arvatav postikoht tuli välja läänepoolse leidude kontsentratsiooniala idaservast, kolmas kaevandi keskosast suurte kivide lähedusest. Lisaks tuvastati kaevandi keskosas varisenud peasuuruste kivide rida, mis markeeris vaid väikeste paekividega täidetud vööndit. Võimalik, et siin oli asunud kas mingi sein või ka varisenud palk, mille kõdunedes sellest jäänud tühi täitis pealmisest kihist varisenud väikeste paekividega. Varingukivid moodustasid selge joone, millest sissepoole jäi kaevandi keskosa hoopis teistlaadne kivilade.

Muistise keskosa suurte raudkivide puhul mingit selgepiirilist struktuuri tuvastada ei õnnestunud, kuid välistada seda päriselt ei saa. Kivid paiknesid väikestest paekividest tiheda kihi peal ning vähemalt osa olid ilmselgelt oma esialgselt asukohalt libisenud. Selgema rea moodustasid suured kivid vaid keskosa loodejoonel, paralleelselt eelpool mainitud vööndi või võimaliku palgi kohaga. Võimalik, et umbes 3×4 m mõõtmetega ala oli olnud kaevandi keskel kas piirdega ümbritsetud või asus seal osaliselt puust ehitis.

Just selle ala keskel, suurte kivide vahel ning veel ühe tõenäolise postikoha kõrval oli kolmas leidude kontsentratsiooniala. Ka siit saadi lisaks 6.–10. sajandi keraamikale ja loomaluudele vähesel määral põletamata inimluid, mis dateeriti samasse aega, kui eelmise posti ümbrusest leitud kolju tükid. Samast leitud hobuse hammas andis aga dateeringuks meie ajaarvamise 5.–6. sajandi. Võib teha järelduse, et keskmisel rauaajal või viikingiajal oli siia mingite rituaalide käigus toodud kusagilt mujalt inimluid.

Kaevamistel paljandus ka kaks eriaegset matusekohta. Kaevandi keskosa struktuuri all tuli välja 5–6 m läbimõduga madal tihedast paeklibust kääbas, mille keskelt leiti inimese skelett. Skeleti peal ja all olid suuremad paeplaadid. Surnu pea oli asetatud kirde suunas, panused puudusid. Tegemist oli 20–30-aastase mehega, kelle luud olid säilinud väga fragmentaarselt. Luustiku pikkuseks hauas mõõdeti 160 cm, kuid reieluu pea diameetri põhjal arvutades võis mehe pikkuseks olla 178 cm ja kehamassiks 73 kg. ^{14}C analüüsiga dateeriti matus perioodi 1005–836 eKr. Kuna sellest perioodist oli Saaremaalt seni teada vaid segatud matuseid selgepiirilistes kivistruktuurides, näiteks kivikirstkalmetes või Kurevere tüüpi tarandikes, võib Saunamäe matust pidada ebatavaliseks. Samas on selge, et isegi juhul kui sedalaadi matuseid leitakse, ei pruugita neid pidada pronksiaegseteks.

Teine matus kuulus kompleksi kasutusaja kõige hilisemasse perioodi. Kompleksi edelanurgas, vastu ümbritsevat kiviaeda, tuli välja suurematest kividest kaar, mis meenutas viikingiaegsete kiviringkalmete ringmüüri. Ringmüüri sees olid suuremad raudkivid ja nende vahel paekivid; nendega koos leiti väheses koguses põlenud luid ja mõned tugevasti põlenud pronksesemete katked. Nii nimetatud leiud kui ka konstruktsioon annavad tunnustust, et siin oli tegu tõenäoliselt varasesse viikingiaega kuuluva kiviringkalme ning põletusmatusega.

Kompleksi arengut võib praegustel andmetel kujutada ette järgmiselt. Pronksiajal rajati madal tagasihoidlik paekivikääbas, mille alla oli maetud ilmselt ümbruskonnas olulist tähtsust omanud isik. Võimalik, et matusekohta hoiti rohust puhtana, igal juhul oli see ilmselt meeles, kui umbes 1500 aastat hiljem rajati täpselt samale kohale pühamu. Pühamusse toodi ohverdusi ning demonstreeriti järjepidevust ja sidet esivanematega kusagilt mujalt võetud inimluude abil. Umbkaudu samal ajal rajati arvatavasti ka kesket pühakohta ümbritsev massiivne kiviaed, mille kõrgus võis olla kuni 150–160 cm ning mis ümbritses umbes 9×9 m suurust ala. Veel hiljem, tõenäoliselt viikingiaja algul, maeti kompleksi põletatult veel üks inimene, kelle tarvis ehitati ühte nurka kiviringkalme.

Saunamäe moodustas ühtse kompleksi 20–30 m eemal paikneva Tuulingumäega, nagu näitavad viimasest aastaid peale kaevamisi tehtud radiosüsiniku analüüsid. Viimased osutasid, et Tuulingumäe tarandkalmesse oli samuti toodud inimluid mujalt, kuigi osa matuseid kuulus ilmselt ka leidude põhjal tarandkalmele antud dateeringuga kokku – nimelt dateeriti need meie ajaarvamise 5.–6. sajandisse. Tuulingumäe kultuskoht, millest leide saadi vähe ning mida varem peeti mõningate stratigraafiliste tunnuste järgi otsustades hilispronksiaegseks – eelrooma rauaaegseks, osutus radiosüsiniku proovide põhjal Saunamäe pühamu kaasaegseks. Sealgi olid hiliseimad leiud ja osalt ka keraamika viikingiaegsed. Tuulingumäe platvormi peal oli olnud arvatav puitehitis, millest oli jäänud ühtlane põlengukiht. Võimalik, et põleng toimus alles 14.–15. sajandil, nagu osutas üks radiosüsiniku proovidest. Kuigi pole võimatu, et nii hiline dateering tuleneb mõnest juhuslikust keskaegset tuletegemisest, on see ometigi kooskõlas ka 1,2 km eemalt Lepna surnumaja tuleasemelt võetud ^{14}C proovidega, mille kohaselt tehti viimast tuld enne hoone varisemist 13.–14. sajandil. Kas ka Saunamäe pühamu müüride ja muude konstruktsioonide eest hoolitseti nii kaua või varisesid need juba varem laiali, pole teada.

Mitmeid paralleele Tõnija kultuslikule kompleksile võib leida Kesk-Rootsi idaosas, kus enamikku neist on kaevatud 1990. ja 2000. aastatel. Lunda kultuskoht Södermanlandis oli ehitatud samuti kividest ning selles olid täheldatavad kiviringid. Leidude, peamiselt potikildude ja üksikute inimluude põhjal dateeriti koha intensiivsem kasutus 6.–7. sajandisse. Kultuskohast 150 m eemal oli asunud palkkonstruktsioonis puust kultushoone, mille üks külg oli lahtine ning sees osaliselt kiviplatvorm. Tuulingumäe kultushoonega veelgi sarnasem tundub olevat olnud Sandast leitud kivivundamendiga kultushoone. Ka see dateeriti eelkõige 6.–7. sajandisse ning selle sees oli väiksematest kividest platvorm. Sarnaselt Tuulingumäele ja paljudele teistele teadaolevatele kultushoonetele oli ka Sanda hoone üks külg lahtine. Lisaks tasub mainida 7.–8. sajandisse dateeritud kultuskohta Lilla Ullevis Upplandis, kust leiti pikkimaja meenutav kiviplatvorm.

Viikingiaegse paralleeli eriti Tuulingumäe osale Tõnija kompleksist leiab ka Strazdest Põhja-Kuramaal, kus avastati kümme ilmselt ohverdamiseks kasutatud auku. Võib veel märkida, et vaid 7 km Tõnijast eemal Tansijaanis on kaevatud üldjoontes Saunamäed meenutavat kivikonstruktsiooni, mis on ebamääraselt dateeritud rooma rauaajaga.

Märkimisväärne Tuulingumäe ja Saunamäe kompleksi juures on see, et need koosnesid suhteliselt väikesest piiratud alast ega olnud ilmselt mõeldud suure hulga rahva kogunemiseks. Sellised väikesed pühakohad viitavad pigem rituaalidele, mida sooritavad üksikud valitud isikud, kas perekonnapead või spetsiaalsed šamaanid. 2014. aastal Viidumäel avastatud ohverduskoht osutab samas, et mitte kõik saarlaste kultuskohad polnud väikesed piiratud alad. Märkimisväärne on siiski, et kõik siin artiklis mainitud kultuskohad asuvad Läänemere põhjaosa rannikualadel, seega samas, kus ka muidu näib alates eelviikingiajast kujunevat ühine kultuurisfäär.