



Viking Age votive deposits from Varja, north-east Estonia

Mauri Kiudsoo

*Tallinna Ülikool, Ajaloo Instituut (Institute of History, Tallinn University),
Rüütli 6, 10130 Tallinn, Estonia; mauri.kiudsoo@tlu.ee*

Hoards that come to light from aqueous environments are usually regarded as votive deposits. They represent property their hidere did not intend to put into use again, or intended it to be used after their death (Tvauri 2012, 291). Various researchers have connected aqueous environments, which include open water, bogs, marshy land, etc., mostly with supernatural powers and after-life, consequently, with ritual activities (Oras 2009, 32). Among ten prehistoric hoards found in Estonia in 2014 there are at least three votive deposits. All of those have been found in the same region.

In March 2014, Mikhail Stadnik and Eduard Kessel, using a metal detector, discovered some objects of cultural value in the Varja village, Lügánuse municipality in Ida-Viru County. Documenting the findspots of these objects revealed a surprising fact that these specific finds actually mark three different findspots located at a distance of approximately 180 m from each other. It appeared that the first find, a bronze ornament, was an eye fibula (Fig. 1: 1; Fig. 2), dating from the Roman Iron Age (2nd/3rd centuries AD), whereas the coins belonged to two different Viking Age hoards (Fig. 1: 2–3; AI 7264–7265).

Both the historic maps and the information obtained from the trial pits clearly indicated a former wetland where different systems of pipes had been used for drainage (Kiudsoo & Leimus 2014a, 4). Salvage excavations took place on 3 April, supervised by Mauri Kiudsoo and Nele Kangert (Fig. 3).

The first silver hoard of Varja contained 50 coins from the Islamic countries (6 ex.), Byzantium (1), Germany (29), England (8) and Scandinavia (6), some of which, apparently, originated from a single necklace, together with sheet pendants and a clay bead. Varja II (Fig. 4) was slightly larger and in addition to hack-silver (95.39 g) included 91 coins which were struck in the Islamic countries (4), Germany (64), England (13) and Scandinavia (10). In both cases their youngest Anglo-Saxon pennies are these of the Cnut's Short cross type dated to ca. 1029–35, the latest German deniers belonging to the rule of Konrad II as Emperor (1027–29).



Fig. 1. Distribution map of the Varja finds (Basic map of Estonian Land Board).

Jn 1. Varja leidude levikukaart (Maa-ameti kaardiserveri aluskaart).

Joonis / Drawing: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 2. Eye fibula.

Jn 2. Silmiksõlg.

(AI 7263.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 3. Rescue excavations of the Varja silver hoards.

Jn 3. Varja hõbeaarete päästekaevamised.

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 4. Small part of coins and raw silver from the Varja II hoard.

Jn 4. Mõningaid münste ja toorhõbedat Varja II aardeleiuist.

(AI 7265.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo

Despite the very close location and the same *tpq* (*terminus post quem*) of finds, their compositions differ. The issue is not the origin of coins – in both finds they come from the same lands. Both deposits also contained small fragments of scales and, Varja II, in addition, two corroded weights of 1 örtug. It is the degree of the fragmentation of coins and the amount of hack-silver that is significant. Five coins of the total 50 (10%) in Varja I were fragmented, and even 27 coins of 91 (30%) in Varja II. Varja I contained just one fragment of a silver arm ring and a tiny piece of silver which might have been a cubooctaedric button of a small penannular brooch. Varja II, on the contrary, included 26 pieces of hack-silver – fragments of ornaments, of different ingots, silver wire and even a whole small hammered ingot. Hence it may be concluded that two different hoards were deposited noticeably close to each other almost simultaneously in the early 1030s (see Leimus & Kiudsoo in print).

Varja I and II hoards are important discoveries in Estonia, both for their find context and their depositing time. Most of our prehistoric silver hoards date from the last four decades of the 11th century, i.e. from the peak of the Balto-Finnic trade (Kiudsoo & Kallis 2008, 178–179). Hitherto we had no coin hoards from the period immediately preceding it. That is to say that in the 1020s the coin flow to Estonia was interrupted and recurred only thirty years later. Since we know a number of coin finds of the second quarter of the 11th century from the neighbouring countries, their absence in Estonia probably refers to certain causes (Leimus 1996, 44), one of which might be the conquest of Tartu by the Russian grand duke Yaroslav the Wise in the 1030s (Kiudsoo 2014b, 24–25). Varja II silver hoard is outstanding in Estonian context also for its high proportion of raw silver, including hack-silver resembling in appearance the contemporaneous finds from Gotland (see Stenberger 1958).

For example, there are two rhombic-cross-section ingots, likely originating from spirally wired silver rods. Spiral rings of such type have scarcely been found outside Gotland and their findspots, like Varja, are located near the waterway that connected the most important late Viking Age centre of the Baltic Sea area with north-west Russia (Kiudsoo & Kallis 2013, 43–44).

Besides the silver hoards and the eye fibula the locations of two other find assemblages in the fields of the Varja village were documented. The first (Varja III; AI 7266), containing bronze ornaments, came to light a few hundred metres north of the findspots of the hoards (Fig. 1: 4) and, at the present stage of studies, can be also dated to the first half of the 11th century. The main items of the deposit were bracelets (Fig. 5); while a double-cross-headed decorative pin, covered with tin foil (Fig. 6) is especially noteworthy. The nature of the other find (Varja IV; Fig. 1: 5; AI 7267) needs to be determined by further archaeological studies. Besides the environment (one-time wetland), the diversity of the silver, bronze and iron artefacts (Fig. 7) in its composition should be emphasised. Like the votive deposit of Alulinn, which was discovered in the same region already in 1869 and last year's discoveries considerably supplemented it with Viking Age bronze ornaments, among other item types (Oras 2014), the Varja IV find could also consist of artefacts thrown in the same place over a longer period.

The surroundings of Varja are dominated by former marshland, the middle part of which, located southwards, is still called Hiiesoo (Eng. 'Marsh of the sacred grove'). It cannot be precluded that this wetland has been traversed by a north-south-directional log trackway that connected the stronghold in the Alulinn marsh with Kohtla (Odris). In 1549 a monk's way (*mönckenweg*) has been mentioned, running across the marsh along the same route (Tõnisson 2008, 234).



Fig. 5. Bracelets from the Varja III hoard.

Jn 5. Käevõrud Varja III aardest.

(AI 7266: 2, 7, 9, 11.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 6. Decorative pin (in situ ?) at the location of the Varja III hoard.

Jn 6. Rinnanõel (in situ ?) Varja (III) peitleiu asukohas.

(AI 7266: 14.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo

Fig. 7. Some artefacts from the Varja (IV) votive deposit.

Jn 7. Esemleid Varja (IV) ohvrileiust.
(AI 7267: 2, 4, 6, 8.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



From the territory of the wetland of approximately 70 km², mainly from its fringe areas, at least seven finds, analogous by their find context, have already been discovered.¹ Those finds have mostly been interpreted as votive offerings (Oras 2009, 68; Anderson 1926; Vassar 1938, 5–6; Lang 2007, 247; Oras & Kriiska 2014, 62–63). The Mustmäta find of bronze neck rings, which has been dated to the 3rd – 4th centuries AD (Lang 2007, 247), was discovered in 1940 in the vicinity of the Varja hoards. The hoards also include the oldest Viking Age silver hoard ever found from the northern part of Estonia. In 1923 the find (*tpq* 837/8; Leimus 2007, no. 2), consisting of 500–600 Arabic dirhems, was discovered in the territory of the Kohtla oil shale mine (Järve I), which had previously been a damp pasture. The coins lay right under the turf and there was no sign of a vessel that might have contained them (Moora 1923). The geographical peculiarities of the findspot allowed Walter Anderson to suggest that the coins had not been initially buried, but they had sunk in a lake that then gradually became a pasture (Anderson 1926). Not far from that place the find assemblage discovered in a former swampy pasture at Järve village consisted solely of weapons, mostly fragments, altogether 79 index numbers. The objects were located in peat soil, within an area 10 m in diameter (Vassar 1938). It is possible that originally the weapons had been deposited into a spring or a bog pool (Tvauri 2012, 293). This last mentioned find dates, like the Järve (Kohtla) silver hoard, from the first half of the 9th century (Mandel 1991, 114).

In the rest of Estonia only one silver hoard has been recorded in a situation analogous to Varja and Järve I (Kohtla) – in central Estonia near Laiuse (Jõgeva County). In May 2013, a sacrificial deposit (*tpq* 1088) was discovered there. Archaeological studies brought to light various finds from the Late Iron Age (*ca.* 800–1200/1250) from an area more than 500 m long, including a coin hoard consisting of at least 21 coins and fragments of scales. The finds were located in the peripheral part of one-time fen, the upper layer of which had mineralized because of drainage and ploughing (Kiudsoo 2014a, 221). Considering the whole find context, it seems likely that the small hoard as well as the other finds had been cast in the fen as votive offerings. Similar to Varja hoards, fragments of horse bones have also been found in the Laiuse findspot (Kiudsoo & Leimus 2014b, 28).

¹ Alulinn I and II (AI 1103, 1156, 1983, 2794; AM 98), Järve I/Kohtla (AI 2589, 4192), Maidla (AI 3203; Tönisson 1962, no. 43), Järve II (AI 3448), Mustmäta (AI 3890), Kohtla (TÜ 2309).

REFERENCES

- Anderson, W. 1926.** Der Chalifenmünzfund von Kochtel. *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Dorpatensis, B. Humaniora, VII: 2.* Dorpat.
- Kiudsoo, M. 2014a.** New interesting prehistoric coin finds in 2013. – AVE, 2013, 221–228.
- Kiudsoo, M. 2014b.** Varjaagidest kreeklasteni. Narva-Peipsi-Velikaja-Dnepri veetee. – Uurimusi Saatse Seto Muuseumi auks. *Setumaa kogumik*, 6. Tallinn-Saatse, 17–32.
- Kiudsoo, M. & Kallis, I. 2008.** Metallurgic complex in Tõdva village, Harjumaa. – AVE, 2007, 175–182.
- Kiudsoo, M. & Kallis, I. 2013.** Viikingiaegne Vomentakæ. Höbedast, rauast ja territoriaalsest jaotusest. – Arheologia kogumik. *Harjumaa uurimusi*, IX. Keila, 32–48.
- Kiudsoo, M. & Leimus, I. 2014a.** Varja aarde- ja peitleiud. Ekspertdihinnang. (*Manuscript in MA.*)
- Kiudsoo, M. & Leimus, I. 2014b.** The first Late Viking Age sacrificial deposit from Estonia. – Suomen Numismaattisen Yhdistyksen julkaisua n:o 7. Tutkimusta ja keräilyä. Suomen Numismaattinen Yhdistys 1914–2014. Helsinki, 28–36.
- Lang, V. 2007.** The Bronze and Early Iron Ages in Estonia. *Estonian Archaeology*, 3. Tartu.
- Leimus, I. 1996.** Numismaatika alused. Tartu.
- Leimus, I. 2007.** Sylloge of islamic coins 710/1–1013/4 AD. Estonian public collections. Estonian History Museum. Thesaurus historiae II. Tallinn.
- Leimus, I. & Kiudsoo, M. in print.** A new Anund Jakob penny from an Estonian hoard. – Myntstudier. <http://www.myntstudier.se>
- Mandel, M. 1991.** Eesti 8.–13. sajandi mõökade tüpoloogiast ja dateerimisest. – Arheoloogiline kogumik. Ed. by L. Jaanits & V. Lang. *Muinasaja teadus*, I. Tallinn, 101–133.
- Moora, H. 1923.** Araabia rahade leid Kohtla põlevkivi-kaevanduses. 6. juulil 1923. (*Manuscript in AI.*)
- Oras, E. 2009.** Eesti keskmise rauaaja peitvarad. Magistritöö. Lund-Tartu. (*Manuscript in TÜ.*)
- Oras, E. 2014.** Alulinna peitleid: 2014. aastal avastatud lisamaterjal. Ekspertdihinnang. (*Manuscript in MA.*)
- Oras, E. & Kriiska, A. 2014.** The Kohtla weapon deposit: preliminary results. – AVE, 2013, 55–64.
- Stenberger, M. 1958.** Die Schatzfunde Gotlands der Wikingerzeit. Bd.1. Stockholm; Uppsala.
- Tvauri, A. 2012.** The Migration Period, Pre-Viking Age, and Viking Age in Estonia. *Estonian Archaeology*, 4. Tartu.
- Tõnisson, E. 1962.** Eesti aardeleiud 9.–13. sajandist. – Muistsed kalmed ja aarded. Arheoloogiline kogumik, II. Ed. by H. Moora. Tallinn, 182–274.
- Tõnisson, E. 2008.** Eesti muinaslinnad. *Muinasaja teadus*, 20. Tartu-Tallinn.
- Vassar, A. 1938.** Kaevamisaruanne Jõhvi khk. Järve vl. ja kl. Laasiku tl. maal 6.–10. sept. 1937. a. (*Manuscript in AI.*)

VIKINGIAEGSED RITUAALSED PEITVARAD KIRDE-EESTIST VARJAST

Mauri Kiudsoo

Märgaladelt päevavalgele tulnud leiukomplekse tõlgendatakse tavaliselt kui rituaalseid peitvarasid, milliseid nende omanikud ei kavatsenudki kasutusele võtta või lootsid seda teha pärast oma surma. Samuti on vesikeskkonda – sood ja rabad, niisked lammialad jne – seostatud peamiselt üleloomulike jõudude ja teisepoolsusega ning sellest lähtuvalt rituaalse tegevusega. 2014. aastal Eestist leitud kümmekonna eelajaloolisest ajast pärineva aarde hulgas oli vähemalt kolm ühest ja samast piirkonnast avastatud rituaalse peitvarana klassifitseeruvat leidu.

2014. aasta märtsis leidsid Mikhail Stadnik ja Eduard Kessel metallidetektorit kasutades Ida-Virumaalt Lüganuse vallast Varja külast mõningaid kultuuriväärtuslikke esemeid. Nende leiukohtade fikseerimise käigus selgus, et tegemist on kolme erineva, üksteisest u. 180 m kaugusel paikneva leiukohaga. Ilmnes, et esimesena avastatud pronksist ehte näol on meil tegemist rooma rauaaajast (2/3. saj pKr.) pärineva silmiksõlega (jn 1: 1, 2), mündid kuuluvad aga kahe erineva viikingiaegse aarde koosseisu (jn 1: 2, 3). Nii ajalooline kaardimaterjal kui ka proovišurfidest saadud informatsioon osutas selgelt omaaegsele märgalale, mille kuivendamisel oli kasutatud erinevaid дренаazitorustike süsteeme. Arheoloogilised päästekaevamised, mida kureerisid Mauri Kiudsoo ja Nele Kangert, viidi Varja aarete leiukohas läbi 3. aprillil (jn 3).

Varja I aardest on praeguse uurimisseisu juures teada lisaks 50 mündile kaks hõbedast rinnalehte, üks käevõru fragment (kaaluhõbe) ja imepisike toorhõbeda tükk. Muust materjalist valmistatud esemetest avastasime muinasaegse kaupmehe elukutsega seonduvate klappkaalude osised ja ühe savist helme. Varja II aare (jn 4), millesse kuulub ühtekokku 91 münti ja u. poole marga väärtuses toorhõbedat (95,39 g), sisaldab samuti mõningaid kaalude detaile. Toetudes aarete noorimate müntide määrangule, võib oletada, et mõlemad kompleksid on maapõue sattunud 1030. aastatel.

Varja I ja II aarde näol on tegemist oluliste avastustega. Seda nii leiukonteksti kui ka maapõue jäämise aja tõttu. Pärineb ju enamik meie muinasaegseid hõbeaardeid 11. sajandi neljast viimasest aastakümnest ehk siis läänemeresoomlaste majanduslikust kõrgajast. Vahetult sellele eelnenu perioodist meil aga siiani mündiaarded puudusid. Nimelt katkeb 1020. aastatel mündivool Eestisse, taastudes alles kolmekümne aasta pärast. Kuna naabermaadest teame me 11. sajandi teisest veerandist arvukalt mündileide, peaks nende puudumine Eestis viitama mingitele konkreetsetele põhjustele, millistest ühena tuleb kõne alla Tartu vallutamine Vene suurvürsti Jaroslav Targa poolt 1030. aastatel. Varja II hõbeaare paistab Eesti kontekstis silma veel ka toorhõbeda kõrge osakaalu poolest, meenutades oma välisilmelt Gotlandi samaaegseid leide.

Lisaks hõbeaaretele ja silmiksõlele fikseerisime koostöös metallidetektoristidega Varja küla maadel veel kahe erineva leiukogumi asukohad. Esimene (Varja III), mis sisaldab pronksehteid (jn 5–6), tuli päevavalgele aarete leiukohtadest mõnisada meetrit põhja poolt (jn 1: 4) ning on praeguse uurimisseisu juures dateeritav 11. sajandi esimesse poole. Varja IV leiukompleksi olemuse kohta (jn 1: 5) on enne arheoloogilisi uuringuid raske midagi täpsemat öelda. Lisaks leiukeskkonnale (kunagine märgala) väärrib eraldi rõhutamist sellesse kuuluvate hõbedast, pronksist ja rauast valmistatud esemete (jn 7) eriaegsus. Sarnaselt piirkonnast juba 1869. aastal avastatud Alulinna ohvrileiule, millele saadi eelmisel aastal oluliselt täiendust viikingiaegsete pronksehete jms näol, võib ka Varja IV leiu puhul olla tegemist pikema aja jooksul ühte ja samasse kohta heidetud esemetega.

Varja ümbruse domineerivaks elemendiks on omaaegne soola, mille lõunas asetsev keskosa kannab siiani nimetust Hiiesoo. Nimetatud märgala territooriumilt, peamiselt siis selle servaaladelt, on tulnud päevavalgele juba vähemalt seitse leiukonteksti poolest analoogset leidu: Alulinna I ja II, Järve I (Kohtla), Maidla, Järve II, Mustmäta, Kohtla, milliseid on enamasti interpreteeritud kui omaaegseid ohvriande. Mustmäta pronkskaelavõrudest koosnenud leid, mida ajaldatakse 3–4. sajandisse pKr, avastati 1940. aastal kogunisti Varja aarete lähinaabrusest.