



Saka Late Viking Age silver hoard from north-east Estonia

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DISCOVERY

Information about the discovery of the Saka hoard reached the National Heritage Board late in the evening of 31 August, when amateur archaeologist Eduard Kessel telephoned Kalle Merilai, Senior Inspector for Ida-Viru County. Eduard Kessel informed Senior Inspector Merilai that he had discovered a silver spiral ring while working with a metal detector in a field at the old crossroads of Tallinn – St Petersburg highway and Kohtla-Järve road. K. Merilai, rushing to the spot, established that a hole, with a depth of about 30 cm had been dug at the western edge of the cadastral unit named Kolga in Saka village. A spiral ring, partly cleaned, could be seen in an upright position (Fig. 1).

After photographing the findspot and determining its location by GPS, the find was excavated by K. Merilai and E. Kessel. It appeared that instead of a single artefact there was a larger find assemblage. Its gradual cleaning and removal from the ground was documented by photographing (Fig. 2). The work ended with collecting soil samples. The same night, Merilai informed the head office of the National Heritage Board of the find by an e-mail with photos attached.

FIND CONTEXT

K. Merilai's opinion was that E. Kessel had left the silver spiral ring and artefacts beneath it in the position he had found them, it is confirmed by a number of photos taken on site (Figs 1 and 2: 1–6), and can thus be considered reliable. The first photo depicts the situation the inspector observed when arriving at the site: in a hole with a diameter of about 20 cm a silver spiral ring, covered with greenish oxide, is seen in an upright position, partly cleaned from the soil (Fig. 1) The second photo was taken when, after removing the soil, the ring



Fig. 1. A partly cleaned silver spiral bracelet discovered by Eduard Kessel.

Jn 1. Eduard Kesseli avastatud ja poolenisti välja puhas-tatud hõbedast spiraalvõru.

Photo / Foto: Kalle Merilai

dropped on one side and revealed that there were two rings, one pressed into the other. In this photo we can also see that a flatwise neck ring came to light beneath the rings (Fig. 2: 1). In the next photos we can see that there were two neck rings: similar in appearance, but slightly different in size, the smaller ring placed within the bigger (Figs 2: 2, 3). The next photo was taken after removing the spiral rings and a smaller neck ring, when strips of birch bark were discovered on the bottom of the pit (Fig. 2: 4). Figure 2: 5 depicts a detail of the ring body of the larger neck ring with birch bark sticking to it. Figure 2: 6 depicts the bottom of the pit after the silver artefacts had been removed and strips of birch bark better cleaned. Since the photos taken on the spot show that the soil upon and between the silver artefacts was distinctly darker than the soil with birch bark strips on the bottom of the pit, we may assume that the find assemblage was located beneath the topsoil layer. K. Merilai did not observe any finds characteristic to settlement sites – pottery fragments, charcoal, bone and clay fragments or burnt stones – by the hoard or in the field around it.



Fig. 2. Selection of photos depicting the gradual excavation of the Saka hoard.

Jn 2. Valik Saka aarde järkjärgulist väljakaevamist kajastavatest fotodest.

Photos / Fotod: Kalle Merilai

COMPOSITION OF THE HOARD

The two neck rings (Figs 3, 4) are the largest among the silver artefacts of the hoard, the larger weighing 193.1 g and the smaller 150.6 g. These are typologically similar ornaments, with a middle plait of several wires and flat oval end plates with fastening hooks. The plait of each neck ring consists of four smooth strands with a round cross-section and two thin twisted wires, plaited 2 by 3, so that the plait is loose in the middle and tight at the ends. The attachment of the end plates to the plait is similar on both rings: the end of the plate was screwed

into a cone, the end of the plait was pushed into it and the cone was firmly pressed together. Such precarious attachment has been steadied by a longer wire in the plait, which was pushed out of the tip of the cone at each end, bent back like a hook and firmly pressed against the side of the cone. The smaller neck ring (Fig. 4) has a thin silver wire together with a linen cord wound four times around one end of the plait, probably to fix the loosened attachment. The plate ends of both neck rings are decorated with stamped geometric ornaments; the patterns on the end plates of the smaller neck ring are identical whereas on the larger neck ring they are entirely different. Such difference suggests repairing of the neck ring by replacing the broken end plate.

The two spiral rings (Fig. 5) are outwardly similar but nevertheless differ by the number of coils and weight: the ring with ten coils weighs 104.8 g and the one with nine coils 102.7 g. These are erstwhile silver ingots, made from a thin silver ribbon, about 10 mm wide, with a 1 mm high ridge running along the middle. The loose ends of the spiral have been flexed to S-shape and each has a wire ring through one of the hooks (Fig. 6). The rings are of the same size (diameter 20 mm) and made from silver wire with a round cross-section. Before winding it into a ring a couple of centimetres of each end of the wire were flattened, the wire was then wound into a ring, the ends interlacing at length, and the flattened ends were several times twisted around the ring body.

The hoard also contained small fragments of birch bark. Since the bark strips and pieces had no holes made by a needle or an awl, it is unlikely that silver was deposited in the pit in a box or wallet made of birch bark. It seems more likely that before depositing the hoard the pit was deliberately lined with deliquescent birch bark. For the same reason silver artefacts could have been covered with it.



Fig. 3. The larger neck ring of the Saka hoard.

Jn 3. *Saka aarde suurem kaelavõru.*

(AI 7575: 1.)

Photo / Foto: Viire Kobrusepp



Fig. 4. The smaller neck ring of the Saka hoard.

Jn 4. *Saka aarde väiksem kaelavõru.*

(AI 7575: 2.)

Photo / Foto: Viire Kobrusepp



Fig. 5. Two spiral rings of the Saka hoard.

Jn 5. *Saka aarde kaks spiraalvõru.*

(AI 7575: 3, 4.)

Photo / Foto: Viire Kobrusepp



Fig. 6. Saka hoard. A wire ring attached to the spiral ring

Jn 6. Saka aare. Spiraalvõrule lükitud traatrõngas.

(AI 7575: 3a.)

Photo / Foto: Viire Kobrusepp

DATING OF THE HOARD

Saka hoard contained no coins, thus the dating cannot be based on minting and the circulation period of coins. Therefore dating was based on artefact typology, which allows to date them indirectly relying upon external features (e.g. the kind and type of artefact, its material and technological peculiarities). The two silver neck rings (Figs 3, 4) with plaited ring bodies and plate ends belong to a Late Viking Age artefact type that was widespread in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. They were usually made of precious metals (mostly silver, gold was rare), bronze specimens were less frequent. The oldest are specimens found from West and East Slavonic territories and dated to the 9th century; in Scandinavia, Finland, Karelia and NW Russia dating approximately from the 10th – 11th centuries. The neck rings found there are mostly of silver (e.g. Korzuhina 1954, plate XI: 2, XIII: 1, XIV: 4, XV: 2; Stenberger 1958, 83 ff; Tönnisson 1962, 210 and literature cited there; Hårdh 1976, plate 1: II 2; 2: 3–5, 7, 8; 31: 1; 46: 1; 51: III; Duczko 1986, 8–9 and literature cited there; Jensen *et al.* 1992, 134–135; Hårdh 1996, 41 ff; Zachrisson 2006, fig. 1; Tomanterä 2008). The oldest of Estonian finds is the specimen from the Kostivere I hoard (RK, 707, plate 28: 4), which can be dated to the 11th century on the basis of the Frisian coins in the same hoard (*tpq* 1068; Molvõgin 1994, no. 46). The vast majority of Estonian neck rings has been found in the northern part of the country and come from hoards, dated to the 12th – early 13th century, hidden or left in the ground for some reason in the last centuries of the Late Iron Age (Tönnisson 1962, 211–213; Tamla 1991, 158; Tamla & Kallavus 2000, 153–159). The common feature of these neck rings

is the technique of attaching end plates to the plait, which can be observed also on the neck rings of Saka hoard. The manufacturing of externally similar neck rings continued in Estonia longer than anywhere else, at least to the 15th – 16th century (Linnus 1938, fig. 26). The medieval specimens differ from prehistoric ones by their material (copper alloy with minimum silver content), end plates, which were considerably larger and with engraved decorations, and a thick ring body of tightly plaited thin wires. In view of all this we may assume that the neck rings of Saka hoard date from the Late Iron Age and may be the work of local craftsmen. The two spiral silver ingots (Fig. 5) also belong to the same artefact type. This is a typical Late Viking Age find in southern Scandinavia and the eastern part of Central Sweden, but quite rare in the Baltic countries (Hårdh 1976, 94). Among them several variants can be discerned on the basis of the cross-section, the shape of terminals, and ornamentation (e.g. Stenberger 1958, 123 ff; Lundström 1973). The distinctive feature of the specimens of Saka hoard is the silver ribbon with a low ridge that was used to make them, and ends terminating in an S-loop. In Estonian hoards we can find three analogies to them: rather well preserved specimens in the Vaida and Kumna hoards (Molvögin & Leimus 1995, 104–105, fig. 3; Tönnisson 1970, 221, fig. 3: 4) and a couple of centimetres long fragment from the Linnakse hoard (Leimus *et al.* 2014, plate 25.2: 9). The *tpq* of the Vaida hoard is, according to A. Molvögin (1994, no. 78) 1153; the coins of Kumna hoard have been dated, according to Tönnisson (1970, 223), into two temporally differing groups, the older dating from the first half of the 11th century and the later from the early 13th century. The coins of Linnakse hoard were minted in the second half of the 11th century and the *tpq* of the find is 1059 (Leimus *et al.* 2014, 571).

When dating the Saka hoard we must discuss in particular the rings of silver wire, attached to the spiral ingots (Fig. 6). Their making was utterly different from plain wire rings, in which the ends of the wire were interlacing or just pressed firmly together. Rings of ‘Saka type’ have flattened ends, interlacing at length and twisted around the ring body for several times. Such rings of silver wire were most likely means of payment. They occur over quite a large territory, and are related everywhere to the finds of the Viking and the Late Viking Age. They have been used in various ways: on bracelets, one or several at a time (e.g. Stenberger 1958, figs 2: 9, 19: 11; Hårdh 1976, plates 10: I, 4; 13: II, 3, 18: I, 4, III, 2; 20: 6; 22: II 1; 26: II, 39: 6, 7), on the loop of pendants (e.g. Kivikoski 1973, plates 126: 1140; 127: 1146; Hårdh 1976, plates 3, 27, 32; Jensen *et al.* 1992, plates 12, 211, 238, 269, 271; Knape 1994, photo p. 79; Zachrisson 2006, fig. 2), or forming belt-, head-, or neck ornaments together with coins and/or bits of plait (e.g. Kivikoski 1973, plate 87: 763; Hårdh 1976, plates 4: 57, 58; 38: 20; Jensen *et al.* 1992, plate p. 277). Before the discovery of Saka hoard such rings had been discovered at least in three Estonian hoards: Paunküla II (*tpq* 1009; Leimus 2007, plate 158), Laiuse (*tpq* 1088–1089; Kiudsoo & Leimus 2014, figs 1, 2, 4, 6) and Vaida (*tpq* 1153). They all weigh *ca.* 1 g.

SUMMARY

The Saka hoard is a lucky one, because the amateur archaeologist who discovered it followed the legislation and acted accordingly: immediately informed the inspector of the National Heritage Board about the find, left it in its original position until the inspector arrived, and carefully helped to clean it. Thanks to his conduct it was possible to document the find context of the hoard in detail, including dozens of photos, which is essential for the interpretation of the find. For example, the observations and measuring made on the site of discovery allow us to affirm that the hoard had been hidden or deposited in the ground, in a shallow pit

with a diameter of about 20 cm. Since the bottom of the pit was at a depth of about 35–40 cm from the ground, tillage had not touched the artefacts. The observations about the birch bark were also important. The preliminary dating suggests that the Saka hoard had remained in the ground from the 11th or early 12th century.

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SAKA HÖBEAARE

Ülle Tamla

2015. aasta hilissuvvel avastas hobiarheoloog Eduard Kessel Ida-Virumaalt Saka küla maadele jäävalt Kolga kinnistult metallidetektori abil hõbedast spiraalvõru ja andis sellest otsekohe telefonitsi teada piirkonna muinsuskaitseinspektor Kalle Merilaile. Pärast leiukohal avanenud pildi jäädvustamist (jn 1) hakati võru mullast välja puuhastama. Siis selgus tōsiasi, et tegemist pole ühe eseme, vaid suurema leiukogumiga. Selle sisu jätkjärguline väljapuhastamine ja mullast väljavõtmise dokumenteeriti fotodega, millest mõned ilmekamad on näha joonise 2 pildigaleriis. Aarde avastamiskohas ja selle lähiümbruses asulakohale osutavat leiumaterjali ei tähdeldatud.

Saka aare koosneb kahest kaelavõrust (jn 3, 4), kahest spiraalvõrust ja neile lükitud kahest röngakesest (jn 5, 6). Kõige kogukamad on välistelt üsna sarnased, kuid kaalult ja mõõtmeltelt veidi erinevad kaelavõrud, milles suurem kaalub 193,1 g ja väiksem 150,6 g. Mõlema ehte valmistamisviis on olnud ühesugune: keskel on neljast ümmarguse ristlõikega jämedast vardast ja kahest peenikesest keerutraadist punutud palmik ning otstes haakidega suletavad ovaalsed lamedad plaadid. Kaelavõru plaatide pealispinda kaunistab geomeetriline muster, mis on väiksema võru plaatidel ühesugune (jn 4), ent teineteisest täiesti erinev suuremal vörul (jn 3). Selline erinevus osutab ehte parandamisele, kus purunenud plaat on asendatud ilmselt mõnelt teiselt kaelavõrult võetud kujult ja mõõdult enam-vähem sobiva, kuid kaunistuse stililt ning teostuselt erineva plaadiga.

Väliselt üsna sarnased on ka kaks spiraalvõru, ehhki ühel on spiraalikeermeid kümme ja teisel üheksa (jn 5). Tegemist on omaaegsete hõbedakangidega, mis on valmistatud õhukesest ja madala harjaga hõbepleksi lindist, mille lahtised otsad on koolutatud S-kujuliseks. Mõlema spiraalvõru ühe otsa külge on lükitud hõbetraadist 20 mm läbimõõduga röngas. Erinevalt lihtsatelt traatrõngastest on nende pikalt vaheliti ulatuvas ja mitu keerdu ümber rönga keeratud traadiotsad lapikud (jn 6). Seda tüüpi röngaste näol võib samuti tegemist olla omaaegsete maksevahenditega. Koos traatrõngastega (neist kummagi kaal on u 1 g) kaalub kümnekeermeline kang 104,8 g ja üheksakeermeline 102,7 g.

Saka aardes puuduvad leiu täpsemat dateerimist võimaldavad vermingud. Seetõttu võeti leiukogumi dateerimise aluseks esemetüpoloogia, mis lubab välistele tunnustele ja paralleelheidudele põhjal selle vanust kaudselt määrata. Kaks punutud kaare ja plaatotstega hõbedast kaelavõru on Põhja-, Kesk- ja Ida-Euroopas tundtud ja laialt levinud hilisviikingiaegne esemetüüp, mida valmistati põhiliselt väärismetallidest (enamasti hõbedast, vähem kullast), harvemini pronsist. Vanimateks peetakse lääne- ja idaslaavi aladel leitud 9. sajandiga dateeritud eksemplare; veidi hiljem, u 10.–11. sajandil, kodunes see esemetüüp ka Skandinaavias, Soomes, Karjalas, Venemaa edelaosas ja Eestis, kust on leitud põhiliselt hõbedast valmistatud vörusid. Eesti leidudest on vanimaks peetud Kostivere I höbeaardes sisalduvat eksemplari, mis samas kogumis olnud friisi müntide vernimisaja põhjal (*tpq* 1068) võidi valmistada 11. sajandil. Valdag osa punutud kaare ja plaatotstega Eesti kaelavõrudeidest on saadud maa põhjapoolsest osast ja pärinevad 12.–13. sajandi algusega dateeritud aaretest. Nende vörude ühistunnus on punutise ja otsaplaatide spetsiifiline ühendamise tehnika, mida näeme ka Saka aarde kaelavõrudel: punutise otsad on surutud ovaalseste plaatide õhemaks taotud ja torvikukujuliselt kokku keeratud otstesse, mille tipust ulatub välja üks pikemaks jäetud ja vastu torbiku seina tagasi painutatud punutise varras. Sama tüüpi kaelavõrude meisterdamine jätkus Eestis kauem kui kusagil mujal, vähemalt 15.–16. sajandini. Keskaegsed eksemplarid erinevad aga muinasagsetest kehvema materjali (minimaalse hõbedasisaldusega vasesulam), tunduvalt suuremate ja enamasti graveeritud mustriga otsaplaatide ning paljudest peentest traatidest tihedalt kokku punutud jämeda kaareosa poolest. Ülalöeldut arvestades on kindel, et Saka aarde mõlemad kaelavõrud on pärit nooremast rauajast ja suure tõenäosusega valmistasid need kohalikud ehtemeistrid.

Ühte esemetüüpi kuuluvad ka kaks spiraalset hõbedakangi (jn 5, 6), mis on iseloomulikud hilisviikingiaegsete leiud lõunapooleks Skandinaavias ja Kesk-Rootsi idaosas, kuid üsna haruldased Baltimaades. Nende hulgas eraldatakse välistele tunnustele (nt ristlõige, otste kuju, ornament või selle puudumine) alusel mitmeid erinevaid variante. Saka aarde spiraalvõrude eripäräks on nende valmistamiseks kasutatud õhuke paeljas hõbelint, mille keskel on madal hari ja mille mõlemad otsad on koolutatud S-kujuliseks. Eesti leidude hulgas on neile kolm paralleeli: terviklikumad eksemplarid Vaida ja Kumna aardes ja fragment Linnakse aardes. Vaida aarde *tpq* on A. Molvõgini järgi 1153 ja Linnakse aardel on see 1059. Kumna aardes sisalduvad mündid on E. Tönnisson dateeritud kahte ajaliselt erinevasse grupperisse, milles varasemad pärinevad 11. sajandi esimesest poolest ja hilisemad 13. sajandi algupoolelt.

Saka aarde dateerimisel tuleb eraldi peatuda spiraalvõrude külge kinnitatud hõbetraadist röngakestel (jn 6). Eripärasel moel valmistatud ja u 1 g kaaluvaid esemeid võib pidada hilisviikingiaegseteks hõbedakangikesteks, mida lükiti ühe või mitme kaupa spiraalsetele hõbedakangidele, kinnistele käevõrudele, pisteti läbi ripatsi kanna või moodustati neist koos augustatud või kokku rullitud müntidega eraldi ehteid. Enne Saka aarde

avastamist oli seda tüüpi röngakesi Eestist teada vähemalt neljas aardes: Paunküla II (*tpq* 1009), Laiuse (*tpq* 1088–1089), Vaida (*tpq* 1153) ja Kumna (11.–13. saj.).

Saka aardel on olnud önnelik saatus, sest selle avastanud E. Kessel käitus seaduskuulekalt: andis oma avastusest kohe teada muinsuskaitseinspektorile, jättis tema kohale saabumiseni leiu avastamisasendisse, aitas seda inspektoril välja puhastada ja dokumenteerida. Tänu niisugusele tegevusele saadi suure põhjalikkusega fikseerida aarde leiukontekst, sh jäädvustada leidude algne asend ja nende mullast väljavõtmine kümmetelole fotodele. Leiukohal tehtud tähelepanekute ja mõõtmiste põhjal saab väita, et väärivara oli peidetud või mingil muul põhjusel asetatud 35–40 cm sügavusele kaevatud u 20 cm läbimõõduga lohku, mille põhja oli pandud kasetohtu. Tohtu oli kääritud ka kaelavõrude ümber ja võimalik, et seda oli pandud ka vara katteks. Esialgse dateeringu põhjal jäi Saka aare maapõue 11. sajandil või 12. sajandi alguses.