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Scandinavian chieftains in Saaremaa? Archaeological investigations in Ure, a probable Roman Period sacrificial place

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The Roman Period in Estonia (AD 50–450) is rich in grave goods and sites. It is traditionally considered as a prehistoric period little influenced by Scandinavian culture, even though some finds certainly point to western contacts (e.g. Quast 2005; Lang 2007, 256–257). *Tarand* graves that were widespread in most of the country in the Roman Period contain very few weapons but numerous ornaments, and the latter belong generally to the same types as ornaments common everywhere on the southeastern and eastern coast of the Baltic.

Saaremaa, the biggest Estonian island with some smaller islands around it, has some particular characteristics regarding the Roman Period finds. It has been long believed that the 2nd and the 3rd centuries AD were empty of finds in Saaremaa and West Estonia, where the earliest classical *tarand* graves were erected only after these centuries. However, pollen analyses from Saaremaa do not suggest any gap in the overall settlement pattern during the 2nd–3rd century (the theories and results of several researchers have been summarized by Lang 2007, 90–93). Some ^{14}C analyses from Tuulingumäe grave and cult site complex in Saaremaa have later shown results that point to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD (Mägi *et al.* 2015), and some finds from this site can, according to parallels in Couronia, also be dated to longer periods of usage, including the 2nd and 3rd century. Still, our knowledge of the 2nd–3rd century culture in Saaremaa is really thin at best.

The finds in Ure, 3.5 km west of the Tuulingumäe complex enable us to shed new light on these 'empty' centuries. The site was found by hobby detectorist Sander Sikut some years ago, and was detected by archaeologists in 2019. Over 70 metal finds, dating from the 3rd to the 5th century, some of them made of gold and silver, were unearthed in an area of approximately 60 m^2. In 2020, archaeological excavations followed, opening a large part of the area where the metal finds had been recorded. The excavation was supervised by Marika Mägi. Finds are stored in Saaremaa Museum (SM 10862). Photos of all finds from Ure are available in https://osiliana.eu/en/home/#database.

LOCATION AND FOLKLORE

Ure, formerly a little hamlet that nowadays consists of a single farm, is situated near the place where three administrative units (former manor estates, now rural districts) meet. The site is surrounded by four clusters of arable lands, all marked with numerous archaeological sites from various periods: Tõnija stone graves and cult places, Kalju, Kalli, and Kogula stone graves. On a map from 1786, the area with finds is situated outside the arable lands, at the crossing of five roads (Fig. 1). The site was still uncultivated, and a small road ran across it in the 1940s (RA, ERA T-3.24.1294, p. 1), but at some point during the second half of the 20th century, the area east of the site started to be cultivated. The southern third of the site is cultivated even now, while the northern half is an area that, according to the locals, appears waterlogged during springtime. It is possible that a spring once trickled from the moist area before. It is probably the main reason why the two northern thirds of the area with finds have not been ploughed.

Fig. 1. *Map of the Ure area in 1786 displayed on the present-day map. The site of Ure is marked with a red ring.*
Jn 1. *Ure 1786. a kaart asetatuna tänapäevasele kaardile. Punase ringiga on märgitud Ure leiukoht.*
Relief map by Estonian Land Board / Reljeefkaart Eesti Maaamet; historical map / ajalooline kaart RA, EAA.2072.3.247

The place of the Ure site has never appeared as a stony rise on old maps, which may be due to the fact that it remained historically outside field boundaries. Stone graves normally stand out on 18th–19th-century maps, where they were often explicitly named individually. Although some smaller stone clusters can be found near the Ure site, there are no big stone heaps in the vicinity, otherwise characteristic for 20th-century land improvement works, as ancient stone graves and stone fences were pushed aside to clear large open fields. The newly cultivated land east of the site has been levelled, as demonstrated by a wet depression approximately 200 m east from the site, that is marked on all historical maps but is barely visible in our time.

There are several stories about the Ure area in folklore. The name Ure (sometimes Ure-Reo) refers to offerings or dead bodies (the word *reo* means dead body in the local dialect), and

several stories tell about 'strange things' that happen when travelling through the area. A boulder 260 m south of the archaeological site has been considered holy (Ure Rahn/Boulder), and a stone grave has been registered, but not excavated, approximately 700 m east of the Ure site. Some folklore stories refer to human bones that do not originate from any grave but nevertheless turned up somewhere in Ure (http://2it.ee/kodukoht/kohalood/ure-reo; accessed 30.06.2021).

DETECTOR SURVEY AND EXCAVATIONS

During the second archaeological surface survey in Ure in 2019 a gold serpent-head ring (see below) was found. To forestall a possible scenario in which the site would be plundered by illegal metal detectorists, another survey was arranged at the place immediately after the first one. All metal finds were recorded, their finding places carefully registered and described.

The excavations were made in the area with most finds in 2020. First, an area of 21 m² was opened; it was soon widened, and the final scope of the main excavation A extended to 43.8 m². In addition, excavation B (1.7 m²) was opened 23 m north of excavation A, at a place that seemed to have been seasonally flooded (although dried up in the warm summer 2020). The terrain nearest to the excavations (916 m²) was measured in order to create a digital elevation model (Fig. 2), and carefully tested with metal detector. As demonstrated by the model, the terrain sloped downwards towards north-east and north, and most of the finds were recorded along the slope.

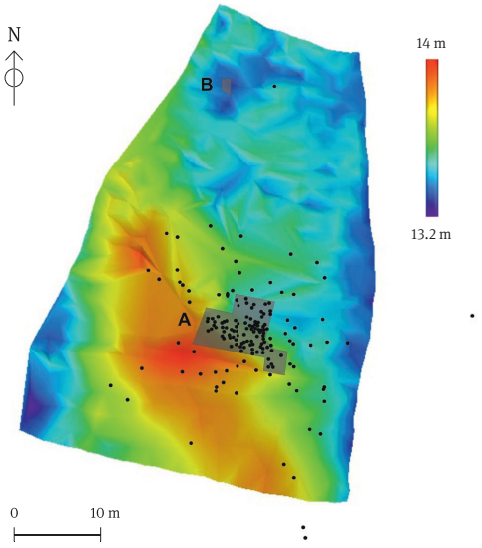

Fig. 2. *Digital elevation model and finds in Ure.*
Jn 2. *Ure kõrgusmudel koos leidudega.*
Drawing / Joonis: Marika Mägi

Finds were unearthed in very different depths, 7–30 cm from the surface. Excavation A was located in an area where in 2019 nearly all finds from the depths 20–30 cm (including the serpent-head ring) had been unearthed close to each other. The excavations in 2020 demonstrated that deeper-lying finds were really mainly recorded in this place, while the artefacts from other areas, including additional detector finds outside the excavation, were normally in the depth of 10–15 cm. Especially in the southern third of the site the finds had probably ended in the upper layer because of ploughing activities. It can probably also be true for some finds in the rest of the site, while artefacts deeper than 20 cm were presumably in their original place. Although not all the area where metal finds were detected was opened, it can be calculated that the area of the site had originally been 50–70 m², while single finds had ended up as far as 14 m away from the core area.

No stones characteristic for Estonian *tarand* graves, or stone graves in general, were noticed during metal detecting. The excavations confirmed that stones were very scarce, let alone proper layers of chosen stones, as normally characteristic for Estonian graves. The few stones found during the excavations were predominantly part of the natural ground, and not brought to the place intentionally. The ground consisted of shingle with some medium-size stones; the soil on top of it was everywhere brownish black, and apart from a few places,

contained only some smaller stones. The soil was quite thin, approximately 10 cm, in the highest part of the excavation, while in some other places the depth of the soil was 30 cm.

Some possible building remains were found in the eastern part of excavation A, at the edge of the slope (Fig. 3). Five 30–50 cm broad somewhat sooty patches contained tiny pieces of charcoal, and smaller stones surrounding areas approximately 15 cm in diameter indicated two, perhaps three possible post spaces. It is possible that a light wooden fence had been supported by posts along the upper edge of the slope that finally burnt down.

Fig. 3. *Probable post-places and sooty patches (marked with red color) along the slope.*
Jn 3. *Arvatavad postikohad ja söesed laigud (märgitud punase värviga).*
Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

Fig. 4. *Crossbow fibula (SM 10862: 26),* in situ.
Jn 4. *Ambsõlg (SM 10862: 26)* in situ.
Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

Bone finds that altogether were very fragmentary and small, could not be connected with the sooty patches, which excluded the possible explanation that the tiny pieces of charcoal had ended there when remains from a pyre were brought to the site. In 2019, a bronze crossbow fibula (SM 10862: 26) was found together with a tiny cremated bone fragment and some charcoal pieces in a small clear-cut sooty patch (app. 15 × 8 cm, depth 30 cm; Fig. 4).

In excavation B, 30 cm deep brownish soil was registered, which did not contain neither stones nor charcoal or any artefacts. The soil was characteristic for temporarily flooded areas (e.g. in Viidumäe; Mägi *et al.* 2016), thus confirming the information presented above that the area can be moist in the spring.

FINDS

The most metal finds from Ure were collected in 2019, but, as demonstrated by the excavations in 2020, some of the metal artefacts had still evaded our attention in these investigations (Fig. 5). In addition, some glass beads and two sharp-pointed oval fire striking stones were found. It is interesting to note that almost no pottery was found during the investigations, suggesting that the remains or offerings were not brought to the site in earthen vessels. The majority of finds in 2020 consisted of small, mainly cremated bone fragments (altogether 80–85 g, average length 2 cm), that frequently could not be determined. Fourteen fragments were, however, classified as cremated human remains.[1]

All 72 finds in 2019 were metal finds, while only 41 found in 2020 were other than bone fragments. Eighteen artefacts from both years were of silver or contained silver elements. Two finds were of gold. Except the gold ring and a few other finds, all artefacts were fragmented; however, only about ten finds, most of them small silver fragments, were clearly burnt. Several finds were so small that it was difficult to classify whether they had been in fire or not.

Metal finds included luxurious artefacts that have the closest parallels both in Scandinavia and in the Eastern Baltic areas. All could be dated to the 3rd–5th century, thus partly to the 'empty' period in Saaremaa's prehistory.

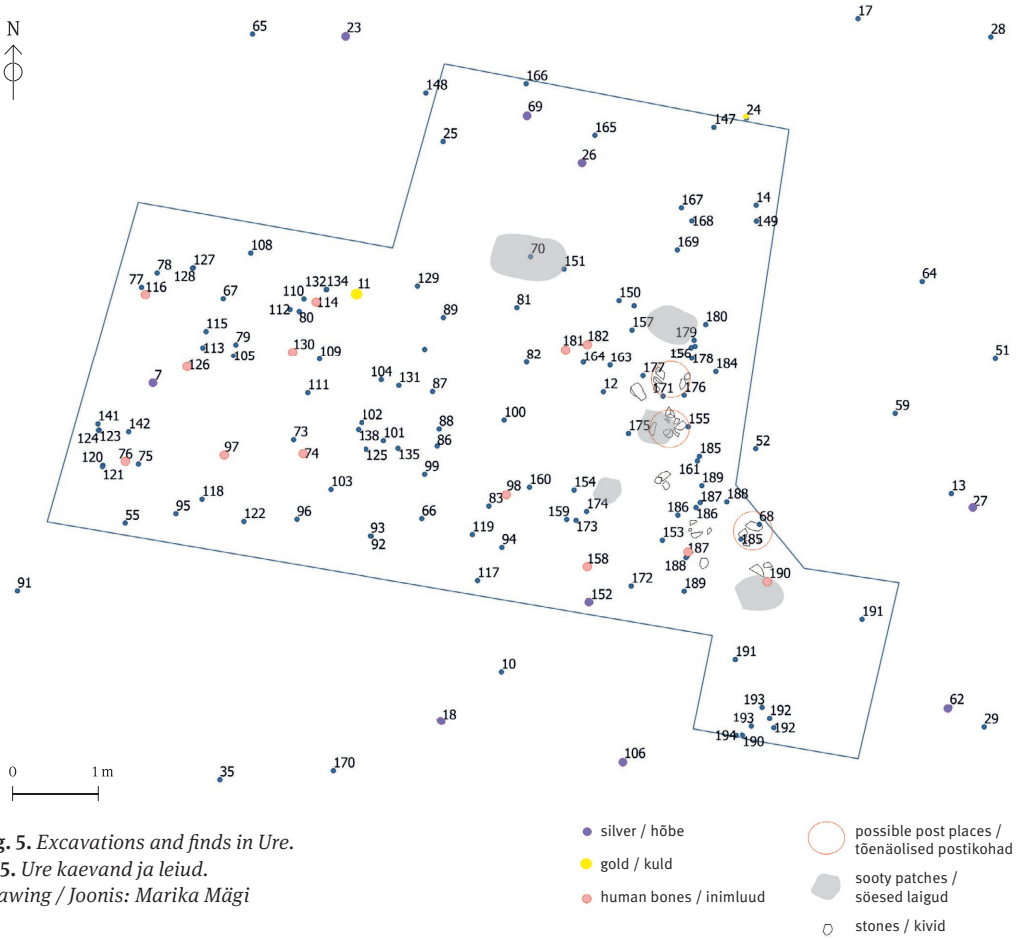

Fig. 5. *Excavations and finds in Ure.*
Jn 5. *Ure kaevand ja leiud.*
Drawing / Joonis: Marika Mägi

[1] The osteological material was determined by Raili Allmäe, (TLU).

Finds indicating chieftains from Roman Period Scandinavia?

The most attractive find from Ure is a serpent-head gold ring (Figs 6; 7: 1). As it was rolled together, it is difficult to decide whether it had been used as a neck-ring or spiral bracelet. The weight of the ring was 175 g, and it belonged to Type C of Roman Period gold rings (Hagren 1967, 10; Fernstål 2004, 186). Serpent-head gold rings in Sweden were concentrated in Gotland and Öland, in Denmark in the area around Stevns in East-Zeeland. 62 gold neck-rings and bracelets of this type were known in 2017, 37 of them from Sweden, 12 from Denmark, four from South-western Finland, and the others from Norway, Germany, Poland and Hungary (Törnblad 2017, 57–58). The ring from Ure belongs among the most massive ones of this type of ornaments, and is the first of its type found from the Baltic States.

In North and Central Europe gold rings were taken over from Roman and especially Greek culture, where gold serpent-head rings were considered to have magic properties. They were often associated with warriors, mentioned in written sources and depicted in visual culture. In the 3rd century Roman Empire, gold serpent-head rings were used as military marks of distinction especially for barbarian mercenaries. The great symbolic value of such rings is emphasized by various stories, according to which Emperor Julianus Apostata was crowned in Paris with a golden neck-ring in 360 AD (Hagberg 1967, 20–21 and references).

A little less than one third of gold serpent-head rings in the northern part of Europe have been found in burials, both in male and female graves. The others originate from sacrificial places or are stray finds (Törnblad 2017, 17, 27–28). The gold serpent-head rings have normally been associated with nascent royal dynasties in Roman Period Scandinavia, where they were produced during a comparatively short period from the mid-2nd – 3rd century AD (Reiersen 2018). Most researchers seem to agree that these artefacts had a very high symbolic meaning. Especially finger-rings of this type may have been used as tokens of vassalage, while neck-rings and bracelets indicated affiliation with royal dynasties. Since such rings have been found both in graves and sacrificial places, it is possible that their ideological value could not be transferred, and they had to be buried with their owners, or sacrificed when the owner perished, for example lost a battle (Fernstål 2004; Törnblad 2017).

Fig. 6. *Gold serpent-head ring (SM 10862: 11)* in situ.
Jn 6. *Kullast maopeaotstega võru (SM 10862: 11)* in situ.
Photo / Foto: Marika Mägi

Gold serpent-head rings have often been copied in bronze or sometimes silver, and their local versions have also been found in Estonia and Latvia (Quast 2005; Rundkvist 2021). The Eastern Baltic serpent-head rings have been classified as type D and considered local copies of originally Scandinavian gold rings (e.g. Hackman 1905, 214–215; Hagren 1967, 19). The eastern origin of type D can be supported by a depot find in Storkåge in eastern North Sweden that contained such a bronze 'degenerated' serpent-head ring together with several Baltic Finnic or eastern ornaments (Hjärne 1917). Valter Lang, who calls them 'neck-rings with alternate ridged end-plates' and also supports the idea of them being produced following Scandinavian fashion, mentions seventeen

items or their fragments in Estonia, and dates the rings to the 4th or the first half of the 5th century (Lang 1996, 153, 243; 2007, 212). The gold serpent-head ring in Ure is most likely made in Scandinavia and its presence in Ure is not accidental, as is very well indicated by other Roman Period finds that can be associated with Scandinavian royal dynasties, or at least war chieftains.

Five propeller-shaped belt fittings, two of them double-propeller-shaped (Fig. 7: 2–3, 5–7), are rare finds in the Eastern Baltic as well. In 1938, Harri Moora has reported of a similar strap end from Lejas-Kleperis in North Latvia and another one in Kambja in South Estonia (Moora 1929, pl. XXX: 14; 1938, 477). Sword belts decorated with similar fittings have been found in Scandinavian big weapon sacrifices, e.g. in Nydam or Ejsbøl. The fittings had been hanging from the lower edge of the belt, and were often made of silver, sometimes covered with gold plating. Such decorations are normally considered Germanic, but were clearly influenced by Roman fashion (Jørgensen & Petersen 2003, 267).

Fig. 7. *Scandinavian finds from Ure.*
Jn 7. *Skandinaaviapärased leiud Urest.*
(SM 10862: 11, 4, 90, 9, 117, 1, 33.)
Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

Propeller-shaped fittings found in Nydam pinetree-boat had been fixed to sword-belts and dated to the beginning of the 4th century. The most luxurious of these belts had presumably belonged to the commander, the others to his highest officers (Jørgensen & Petersen 2003, 267). It is perhaps worth noting that some other fittings of the Nydam commander's belt were decorated with small birds that resemble those on gold plating of a brooch in Ure (Fig. 8: 2, 4).

Fig. 8. *Crossbow fibulas found in Ure.*
Jn 8. *Ambsõlgi Urest.*
(SM 10862: 30, 18, 6, 62, 16, 23, 24, 26, 51, 15, 10, 22.)
Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

Very similar belt fittings had decorated a commander's sword belt in Ejsbølgård D weapon offering dated to 250–300 AD. Artefacts in Ejsbøl as well as in Nydam were burnt, and numerous boat rivets suggested that the artefacts had been burnt in a boat (Andersen 2003, 251–253). An arrow-head found at the same site is comparable with an arrow-head found in Ure (Fig. 9: 6).

Fig. 9. *Artefacts from Ure.*
Jn 9. *Esemeid Urest.*
(SM 10862: 65, 145, 164, 67, 136, 17, 171, 189, 14.)
Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

Sword-belts decorated with propeller-shaped fittings have been also found in sacrificial places (e.g. Skedemosse; Monikander 2010, 46) and in South Scandinavian elite graves, e.g. in a chamber grave at Lilla Jored (Sweden), Lærkenfeld (Denmark), or Sætrangist (Norway). All these graves contained also gold finger-rings. In Lilla Jored, a male grave from the second half of the 4th century, propeller-shaped pendants were found together with a massive gold serpent-head bracelet. Archaeologist Anders Rau has considered belts with such fittings as strong indicators of high social status, although not necessarily army commandership (Rau 2014).

Propeller-shaped fittings from Ure are made of bronze, but silver plating is still visible on some of them. The fittings represent two different shapes and may, or may not, originate from two belts. In addition, a hook (Fig. 7: 4) may have originally been attached to a scabbard (where the belt was fitted to the scabbard) as in a similar find from Nydam.

Finds that can be connected both with Scandinavian and local culture sphere are two oval fire striking stones with sharpening ends (Fig. 9: 7–8). Fire striking stones as in Ure have been reported in several (partly) Roman Iron Age deposits, most recently in Kohtla-Vanaküla in North-East Estonia (Oras *et al*. 2018 and references). Some items are known from the 6th–9th century barrows or stone graves, where they can also be dated to the Roman Period (Tvauri 2012, 88–89). In Estonian and Finnish archaeology, fire striking stones have been mainly discussed as ritual items (overview of different theories see Tvauri 2012, 298–299), while some Scandinavian researchers have pointed to their significance indicating social or warrior status (Monikander 2015).

Fire striking stones have been found in almost all Roman Period weapon deposits in Scandinavia, as well as in several offering places connected with water. Most of them are slightly irregularly shaped, while others are elaborated fancy items. The finest regularly shaped stones have been registered only in graves with numerous weapons, thus reflecting the warrior hierarchy. Anne Monikander believes that belts with such stones were part of festive attire and indicated elite men with a certain function in the society (Monikander 2015). The two elaborated fire striking stones from Ure can thus possibly be connected with the belts of two high-status warriors, as also indicated by the gold ring and belt fittings.

Finds indicating the local culture

Fragments of 15 crossbow fibulas were found in Ure, all of them representing types that were widespread along the eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea (for comparison between Scandinavian and Eastern Baltic fibulas, see e.g. Bitner-Wróblewska 2001). More than half of the fibulas had some elements made of silver, and two of them had parts covered with gold plating. One of the best preserved crossbow fibulas (Fig. 8: 1–3) was made of mainly silver and covered with gold plates that bore a decoration depicting small birds. The fibula type was characteristic to Estonia, as well as more generally to the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. In Couronia, such fibulas are dated to a longer period from the 2nd–3rd century onward. Estonian archaeologist Mari-Liis Rohtla believes, however, that the Ure type of fibula in Estonia most likely was produced in the 4th–5th century (Rohtla 2005, 126–127).

Several crossbow fibulas belong to types that in Couronia can be dated to the 3rd century, but may, according to parallels in Estonian mainland, also belong to the 4th–5th, sometime even to the 6th century (e.g. Fig. 8: 9–12; Rohtla 2005, 123–127; Couronian parallels see e.g. Tautavičius 1968, 131–133; Griciuvienė 2009, 33, 46). Roman Period fibulas are actually very rare finds in Saaremaa, especially from this period when, as much as is known from

e.g. Tõnija Tuulingumäe and Lepna complexes, the material culture demonstrated common features rather with Couronia than mainland Estonia (Mägi 2005). Some fibulas in Ure (Fig. 8: 5–6) were dated entirely to the 3rd century or the beginning of the 4th century, but at least one fibula (Fig. 8: 10) belonged clearly to the 4th–5th century (Rohtla 2005, 130–131).

The partly silver or gold fibulas in Ure were clearly more prestigious artefacts than is characteristic for most local stone graves. In addition, several burnt pieces of silver indicated other artefacts that had been made of silver, but were destroyed by fire. A decorated fragment of silver plate (Fig. 10: 8) and a piece of a silver neck-ring (Fig. 10: 1) testify of other silver ornaments that once had been part of the rituals executed in Ure. Among fragments of other ornaments registered at the Ure site were some Roman Period bracelets (e.g. Fig. 10: 7, 10), chain fragments of bronze and iron (e.g. Fig. 10: 6), a bronze neck-ring (Fig 10: 9), some glass beads (Fig. 10: 2–4) and possible fragments of dress pins (e.g. Fig. 9: 5), some of them probably shepherd's crook pins (Fig. 10: 5, 11).

Fig. 10. *Ornaments from Ure.*
Jn 10. *Ehteid Urest.*
(SM 10862: 7, 162, 150, 73, 56/60, 137, 66, 40, 185, 8, 55.)
Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

Small iron fragments indicated that several iron artefacts, including some weapons, had been present in the Ure site but not preserved. Iron fragments identifiable as pieces of knives were uncovered in nine cases (e.g. Fig. 9: 9). Other iron items consisted of a socketed axe (Fig. 9: 1), some socket fragments of other artefacts, possible spearheads (e.g. Fig. 9: 3), some arrow-heads (e.g. Fig. 9: 6) and a razor (Fig. 9: 4). Somewhat surprising was the shortage of pottery, except for three small sherds (e.g. Fig. 9: 2).

INTERPRETATION OF THE SITE

It is difficult to present a definitive interpretation of the Ure site. Organic remains found in this place, e.g. cremated bones or tiny pieces of charcoal, were very few and fragile, thus not enabling scientific analyses, at least at the present time. Artefact types uncovered in Ure had often been in use longer than one or two centuries and most of them lack direct local parallels. All datable finds can, however, be dated from the 3rd to the 5th century, which was probably the period when the site was used on different occasions.

The interpretation of the Ure site is connected with the evidence from two other sites at the distance of 3.5–4 km from it, both excavated during the last three decades: Tõnija Tuulingumäe and Lepna (Mägi-Lõugas 1996; Mägi 1997; 2005). Tuulingumäe was a long-used burial place and sacred complex that was, as indicated by ^{14}C analyses, also in use in the 3rd–5th century AD (Mägi *et al*. 2015). Lepna was a 5th–7th century mortuary house, according to the collected finds. Excavations at both these sites yielded abundant osteological material with totally intermingled fragments of human bones that mostly had not been in fire. Still, a small number of bones from both sites had been cremated as well (Mägi-Lõugas 1996; Mägi 1997; Niinesalu 2020). Scientific analyses, including radiocarbon dating of this material was long hindered for financial reasons, but are currently ongoing. The preliminary results from Tuulingumäe have already pointed to the very complicated history of these sites, where the period of use cannot be defined according to artefact typology only.

Even though the Tuulingumäe *tarand* grave is at least partly contemporary with Ure, the find assemblage demonstrates several discrepancies. In Tuulingumäe, as in other places in Saaremaa, crossbow fibulas were not found (except one fibula pin of bronze). The collection of 3rd–5th-century finds from Tuulingumäe, as well as artefacts from most other Estonian *tarand* graves, was altogether conspicuously less impressive than the local finds in Ure. The most common ornament in the former sites was a shepherd-hook or a profiled dress pin (Mägi-Lõugas 1996; Mägi 1997), artefact types that in Ure were represented only by a few fragments. A possible explanation is that the function of these two sites was different, and artefacts that were traditionally not deposited in graves were however sacrificed in other places. In Roman Period Estonia, it was also the case with e.g. weapons that were almost never put in graves but sacrificed, especially in wetlands (Oras *et al*. 2018).

Crossbow fibulas were recorded in great numbers in Lepna, although the fibula types there belonged to a slightly later period than those in Ure, and were found together with numerous weapons. The ideas of the Otherworld had apparently changed by the late 5th or the 6th century when the Lepna house was erected. Still, the finds in Ure demonstrate that the fibulas were used by the Saaremaa inhabitants for fastening their garment even earlier, in the Roman Period, but probably not when equipping the dead for the Otherworld.

Another aspect in material culture how Ure differed from Tuulingumäe but resembled Lepna was the scarcity of pottery. The large number of potsherds found at Tuulingumäe were presumably the result of different ritual meals held at the complex. Ceramics is a widespread

phenomenon also in later period burial places in Estonia, and the ritual meals on graves are still practiced in more traditional regions of the country (e.g. Valk 2017). Some potsherds mainly indicating smaller vessels, perhaps drinking cups, were also present in Lepna, although in much lesser amounts. In Ure, only three small potsherds have been found so far.

The most striking characteristics of the Ure site, when compared with Tuulingumäe, Lepna or other stone graves, is the very limited and fragmentary osteological material, the nearly total lack of stones and the location in No-Man´s-Land between different arable clusters, beside a wet place or former spring. It points to the possibility that Ure was predominantly not a burial but a sacrificial place. Similar sacral places are known from Roman Period Eastern Baltic and Scandinavia, the most well-known of them is probably Skedemosse on the island of Öland.

There are both similarities and discrepancies, when comparing Ure with the sacrificial places in Scandinavia. First, similarity in location catches the eye. Skedemosse is located where three Öland parishes (parishes in Öland are smaller administrative units than in Saaremaa) meet, and the same is valid for Ure. The location at the meeting point of different administrative units, but still surrounded by archeologically well-marked settlement clusters also characterizes other Roman Period sacrificial places in Scandinavia, e.g. Finnestorp (Hagberg 1961; Nordqvist 2017, 14, 28–31).

The votive deposits of Skedemosse accumulated over a period of several hundred, even thousands of years, while only a certain period 200–600 AD was marked by preserved artefacts (Hagberg 1967; Monikander 2010, 10–17). The long usage period was suggested by ^{14}C analyses of bones that were the most abundant finds on these sites. Among several species of animals, predominantly horses, bone fragments of 50 humans were uncovered from Skedemosse, and interpreted as human sacrifices (e.g. Hagren 1967, 58; Monikander 2010, 77–91).

In this aspect, Ure was a strikingly different site. Although numerous unburnt bone fragments of both humans and animals characterized other sacral place in Roman Period Saaremaa, Tuulingumäe and Liiva-Putla, the scanty bone evidence recorded in Ure consisted of only a few strongly burnt fragments. These belonged both to humans and animals who, differently from the Scandinavian sites, had been cremated during rituals. Cremated fragments of bones, mostly undefinable, were also reported in another recently excavated votive deposit in Estonia, Kohtla-Vanaküla (Oras *et al*. 2018).

The deposit of Kohtla-Vanaküla, consisting of about 400 sickles, spearheads, axes and some other items, deserves special attention in comparison with the Ure site. It was found by metal detectorists and excavated by archaeologists in 2013 and 2014 (Oras & Kriiska 2014; Oras *et al*. 2018). In the past, when the deposits were made, it was situated in a wetland beside a larger spring and surrounded by arable clusters marked with numerous archaeological finds. The location of the Kohtla-Vanaküla find in the cultural landscape has not been thoroughly discussed, but it does not seem to have been located in any liminal area between different settlement clusters, as it seems to characterize several somewhat similar deposits in Scandinavia, or the Ure site in Estonia. Sooty patches, some remains of wood and a probable post-place registered under the finds in Kohtla-Vanaküla enable to draw some parallels with the possible construction remains in Ure.

Archaeologists who excavated the Kohtla-Vanaküla site have pointed to the peculiar composition of artefacts there, as well as in some other North Estonian places, when compared with otherwise similar sites in Scandinavia and Latvia. Similar wetland deposits in

Scandinavia and in Kokumuiża in Couronia demonstrate very strong military connotations; in Skedemosse, for example, no finds clearly associated with women were detected (Hagren 1967, 108). Kohtla-Vanaküla contained both weapons and tools, particularly sickles were found in great numbers. It presented, therefore, a kind of combination of militarily and everyday life, a phenomenon that perhaps can be considered as local peculiarity (Oras *et al*. 2018).

The site of Ure demonstrated similar connotations, including both high status symbols referring to warriors and ornaments denoting a local status. Even though crossbow fibulas from Ure may have been used by both genders, these and other ornaments definitely have a connection with the sphere of female culture, too. Sickles as well as some hoes, as found in Kohtla-Vanaküla were used, at least according to ethnographic parallels, by both genders as necessary, but were considered in everyday life as well as in rituals as belonging to the female sphere (Selirand 1974, 96; Jaagosild 1976; 1978). In the 12th–13th century individual burials in North Estonia sickles were clearly female grave goods (Selirand 1974, 96). Although the ritual meaning of sickles as female tools is known only from later periods and the intermingled burials in Roman Period Estonia do not define the connection between certain burials and ornaments, it adds an interesting gender-specific aspect in the interpretation of both Ure and Kohtla-Vanaküla. The phenomenon of combined military and female-related artefact culture seems to have characterized several parts of Roman Period coastal Estonia.

Some artefacts found in Ure had been in fire, and several of them had probably been damaged in some other way. Small melted lumps of silver were remains of small metal artefacts that had been burnt. Strongly burnt bones and artefacts were widespread in stone graves in the Roman Period and later mainland Estonia, but in Saaremaa the earliest burial places predominantly with cremations date as far as is presently known only from the Viking Age, or, according to some obscure data, may also start from the 8th century (Mägi 2002, 125–126).

The custom of burning the offerings before depositing them to a sacrificial place was widespread in Scandinavia, where a great part of artefacts uncovered in such sites had been in fire (see overview of different practices in Oras 2015, 84). In Skedemosse rituals, fire seems to have played an essential role, as indicated by burnt artefacts and pieces of charcoal (Hagberg 1967, 109). According to publications, animal or human offerings in the Scandinavian sites seem, however, not to have followed the artefacts on pyre (Hagren 1967, 55–62; Monikander 2010, 77–91). Whether the bones were cremated or not in Ure is, on the other hand, not so crucial for interpreting the site. The bones recorded in Ure were unusually few for both a grave and a sacrificial place, even if considering the possibility that a certain amount of bones may have disappeared in the course of agricultural land improvement or ploughing. The lack of stones in Ure seems to indicate a different construction than Tuulingumäe, or even Lepna, as well. The possible post-places and sooty patches along the edge of the slope, as well as the comparatively small area of the finds, suggest a wooden construction or perhaps a building. How it was used, or whether the bones found there were sacrifices or burials, cannot be decided with certainty. Some researchers have also pointed to the possibility of both functions: e.g. that humans who died in some unusual way may have been buried in holy places as a kind of sacrifice (Monikander 2010, 90).

Some finds, as the gold ring and the propeller-shaped fittings, enable to draw further parallels between Ure and Skedemosse, where the biggest gold ring was approximately of the same size as the one in Ure. Seven gold neck-rings or spiral bracelets and a gold finger-ring were found together with eleven propeller-shaped fittings in Skedemosse. Gold rings both in Ure and Skedemosse were rolled together, but not cut into pieces or burnt as artefacts of other

metals. In both sites, pottery was almost or totally absent. Lots of finds in these, but also in several other similar places in Scandinavia, were found in the depth of approximately 30 cm from the present surface (Hagberg 1961; see also Nordqvist 2017, 21ff). The finding places in Scandinavia were normally a fen or a meliorated field, but are believed to have been covered by water at the time of their use. Ure finds were next to a one-time moist area, but on a slope or partly on the higher ground.

The appearance of the gold serpent-head ring and propeller-shaped fittings at the Ure site in Saaremaa poses several questions. Gold serpent-head neck rings as massive as the one in Ure are believed in Scandinavia to have acted as the insignia of the uppermost elites. Their appearance in both male and female graves has been explained by their function as signs of alliances that often were confirmed with intermarriages. These alliances or the ideological value of the symbols were not transferrable and had to be destructed when their owners died (Reiersen 2018). However, the propeller-shaped fittings, another status symbol of the same period in Scandinavia, can be connected with warriors, thus hinting that the person who once owned the gold ring of Ure was male. Was he a Scandinavian chieftain who perished in Saaremaa during an unsuccessful military action, and his status symbols as charismatic and potentially dangerous objects were then sacrificed in the lines of war-booty as in Scandinavia?

Silver and bronze serpent-head neck-rings of type D that have been found in Estonia and Latvia also enable alternative explanations. It is difficult to see how Scandinavian serpent-head rings could be copied, without having some models at hand. Coastal Estonian chieftains may have belonged to the same social circumstances as in Scandinavia, and used, at least partly, the same symbolic artefacts for expressing their status. The majority of finds in Ure were, however, Eastern Baltic artefact types, some of them conspicuously luxurious. The latter may have acted as insignia of the local upper classes much in the same way, as gold rings did in the Scandinavian cultural sphere.

The archaeological material along Estonian, Latvian and Finnish coasts demonstrates the formation of a shared cultural sphere of warriors starting, as was known by now, from approximately the 7th century (Mägi 2018, 423–424). This cultural sphere was characterized by similar artefactual material and probably also mental culture for warriors along both the eastern and western coasts of the Baltic Sea. The same items – weapons, belt fittings, and by the 10th century also ornaments – were used for demonstrating the status of warriors, while other ornament types as well as nearly everything connected with women kept their distinctiveness in different regions. The finds from Ure suggest that this common cultural sphere may have started to take shape much earlier, in the 3rd–4th centuries.

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SKANDINAAVIA PEALIKUD SAAREMAAL? ARHEOLOOGILISED UURINGUD URE ROOMA RAUAAEGSEL ARVATAVAL OHVERDAMISKOHAL

Marika Mägi

Rooma rauaaega on Eesti esiajaloos üldiselt peetud perioodiks, mil kultuurikontaktid Skandinaaviaga olid vähesed. Saaremaal lisandub sellele 2.–3. sajandit iseloomustav näiline leiutühjus, kuigi mõned analüüsid osutavad siiski selle aja asustusele. 2019.–2020. aastal Ures uuritud muistis (jn 1) aitab mõneti valgustada seda vähe tuntud perioodi.

Ure leiukoha avastas esmalt hobidetektorist, millele järgnesid arheoloogilised detektoriuuringud ja kaevamised. Umbes 60 m² alalt saadi üle 200 leiu, neist suur osa hõbedast ning mõned isegi kullast. Minimaalsel hulgal leiti ka väga väikeseid põlenud luutükke, neist 14 kildu olid ilmselt inimese luud. Keraamikat tuvastati vaid kaks kildu, kivid kaevandis üldjuhul puudusid. Suurem osa leide asetsesid piki omaaegset nõlvakut (jn 2), kust alumisest kihist tulid välja ka mõned võimalikud postikohad ja vähese söega laigud.

Ure on Saaremaa folklooris juba varasemast ajast tuntud koht. Leiukoha läheduses paikneb pühaks peetud Ure rahn, kuskilt olevat teada inimluid ning koht olla mingil põhjusel ebatavaline, kus juhtuvat igasugu asju. Torkab silma, et Ure leiukoht asub kolme või isegi nelja rikkalike arheoloogiliste leidudega asustusüksuse vahel, piiride kohtumiskohas, ajaloolistest viljelusmaadest väljaspool. 18. saj kaartidel ristuvad sellel kohal viis teed. Leiukoha kõrval olev ala on senimaani vahel liigniiske, seal võis kunagi asuda allikakoht. Põld rajati Ure leiukoha kõrvale ja osalt peale alles 20. saj teisel poolel.

Kaevand tehti kohta, kust eelnevatel detektoriuuringutel saadi enim sügaval (20–30 cm ümbritsevast maapinnast) paiknevaid leide, mis eeldatavalt olid kõik oma esialgsel asukohal. Kaevandi lõplikuks suuruseks kujunes 43,8 m² (kaevand A; jn 3; 5), millele lisandus 1,7 m² suurune kaevand liigniiske ala madalamas osas (kaevand B). Viimasest ei saadud kultuurkihti ega leide, tegu oli niisket ala iseloomustava pruuni mullaga, mis ulatus umbes 30 cm sügavuseni.

Selge kultuurkiht või inimtekkeline kivikiht puudus ka kaevandis A, kus oli tegu enam-vähem ühtlase pruunika, väheste väiksemate kividega mullaga. Suurem osa leide paiknes liigniiske ala suunas madalduval seljandikul. Nõlvaku ülemises servas paljandus alumises kihis kaks või kolm võimalikku postikohta, s.t poste toestanud väiksemad kivid. Samas registreeriti ka mõned vähese söega laigud. Viimased polnud seotud ei luude ega ka mingite muude leidudega. Võimalik, et nõlvaku serval oli asunud postidele tuginev puust tara.

Kogutud leidude seas esines nii skandinaaviapäraseid kui ka Läänemere idakallastel levinud luksuslikke esemeid. Skandinaaviapärastest leidudest oli silmatorkavaim massiivne (175 g) kullast maopeaotsaline võru (jn 6, 7: 1). Selliseid võrusid, eriti nii suuri, on leitud põhjapoolsest Euroopast veidi üle poolesaja ning neid peetakse Skandinaavias varajaste kuningasuguvõsade tunnuseks. Kullast maopeaotsaliste võrude sümboolne tähendus arvatakse olevat olnud erakordselt suur ning pärandamatu, millega seoses sellised võrud pandi kas omanikele hauda kaasa, hävitati või ohverdati omaniku surma või lüüasaamise järel.

Sellise võru sattumine Saaremaale polnud kindlasti juhuslik, nagu viitavad samast leitud propellerikujulised vöönaastud (jn 7: 2–3, 5–7). Sellised naastud kaunistasid Rooma eeskujudel valmistatud mõõgavöösid ning neid on muuhulgas leitud

Skandinaavia rooma rauaaegsetest relvaohverdustest, kus neid peetakse väepealike või kõrgemate ohvitseride tunnuseks. Nii kullast maopeaotsalised võrud kui ka propellerikujulised naastud dateeritakse 3.–4. saj.

Urest saadud ambsõled (jn 8), mitmed neist kas osaliselt või täielikult hõbedast ning vähemalt ühel juhul kaetud kuldplateeringuga, kuuluvad aga mitte Skandinaavia, vaid kohalikesse ehtetüüpidesse. Kõik need võib dateerida 3.–5. sajandini. Lisaks saadi käevõrusid, klaashelmeid, kaelavõrude katkeid, teravovaalseid tuluskive, naaste, putkkirves ning mõned arvatavalt odaotste putke katked (jn 9–10). Enamik leide olid olnud tules või katki, üsna rohkesti saadi sulanud pronks- või hõbetükke.

Ure leiukoha tõlgendamisel tuleb arvestada teiste läheduses kaevatud arheoloogiliste muististega, mis osaliselt kuuluvad Urega samasse aega. Eriti kehtib see Urest 3,5 km kaugusel asuva Tõnija Tuulingumäe tarandkalme kohta. Tuulingumäe osades tarandites leidus väga rohkesti segamini inimluid, millest suurem osa olid põletamata. Tarandeid täitis sellistele matmiskohtadele iseloomulik kivikiht, mis Ures täielikult puudus. Teistlaadsele muistisele viitab ka leiukoostis. Ehkki mõlemad muistised olid samaaegselt kasutusel, puudusid Tuulingumäel peaaegu täielikult ambsõled, v. a. ühe ambsõle nõel. Levinuimad ehted olid seal hoopis nõelad, mis jällegi olid vaid mõne üksiku fragmendiga esindatud Ures.

Ambsõlgi leidus samas üsna rohkelt Lepnas, Tuulingumäe läheduses paiknevas 5.–7. saj surnumajas, kuid need näisid kuuluvat veidi hilisematesse tüüpidesse, kui Ure sõled. Ka Lepna matusekohas leidus rohkesti põletamata inimluid, vähemal määral esines ka põlenud inimluid. Erinevalt Tuulingumäest või Lepnast leiti Urest üksnes vähesel määral peamiselt põletatud luid, mis olid pealegi väga fragmentaarsed.

Seega erineb Ure leiukoht umbkaudu samaaegsetest ja sama piirkonna matusekohtadest silmatorkavalt, mis võiks osutada koha erinevale funktsioonile. Liigniiske ala lähedus ja kivikihi puudumine võimaldavad pidada Uret kunagiseks ohverduskohaks. Kuldvõru, propellerikujulised naastud, asukoht kultuurmaastikul ja esemete põletamine lubavad tõmmata võrdlusjooni osalt samasse perioodi kuuluva Skedemosse ohverduskohaga Ölandil. Põhilise erinevusena võib esile tuua nii inim- kui ka loomaluude vähesuse Ures.

Ure näol on tegemist muistisega, milles leidub nii Skandinaavia varastele kuninglikele suguvõsadele iseloomulikke esemeid kui ka kohalikule ülikkonnale kuulunud väärismetallidest ehteid. Pole võimatu, et tegu oli mõne Skandinaavia üliku hukkumise või lahingus lüüasaamisega 3.–4. saj Saaremaal, misjärel temaga seotud sümboolsed ja potentsiaalselt ohtlikud esemed ohverdati. Samas on teada, et maopeaotsalisi võrusid jäljendati eriti Läänemere idakallastel pronksist ja vahel ka hõbedast. Võimusümbolite jäljendamiseks pidi olema võimalik neid esemeid korralikult vaadelda. Seega pole sugugi võimatu, et kullast maopeaotsalised võrud sümboliseerisid ka Ranniku-Eestis teatud kindlatesse ülimuslikesse suguvõsadesse kuuluvaid inimesi, kellel võib-olla olid perekondlikud sidemed Skandinaavia pealikega.

Rooma rauaaegse Skandinaaviaga varem arvatust tihedamatele sidemetele viitab teinegi hiljaaegu Eestist leitud ohverduskoht, Kohtla-Vanaküla. Sealgi olid segunenud nii skandinaaviapärased kui ka ilmselt kohalikud erijooned. Võib seega arvata, et eriti sõjamehi iseloomustav ühtne kultuurisfäär Läänemere eri kallastel, mis seni arvati olevat saanud tuule tiibadesse 7. saj ümbruses, hakkas tegelikult kujunema juba aastasadu varem.