



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## A landscape biography of the 'Land of Drumlins': Vooremaa, East Estonia

Veldi, M.

### Citation

Veldi, M. (2020, December 3). *A landscape biography of the 'Land of Drumlins': Vooremaa, East Estonia*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138482>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138482>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/138482> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Veldi, M.

**Title:** A landscape biography of the 'Land of Drumlins': Vooremaa, East Estonia

**Issue date:** 2020-12-03

### 3 The study of cultural landscapes in Estonia – an historic overview

The establishment and development of academic archaeology and geography in Estonia have very similar headsprings and histories. Both disciplines were blown to life by Finnish professors in the 1920s and have always been strongly influenced by the Finnish and Swedish schools of research. Even during the 50 years of Soviet occupation (1944 – 1991) the connections with Fennoscandia were maintained as much as the ruling political regime enabled. The following, brief overview is not intended to be complete, but to highlight some of the influential researchers relevant to the study at hand.

#### 3.1 Cultural geography

The Finnish influence is especially visible on cultural geography, which was introduced by the first professor of geography at the University of Tartu – Johannes Gabriel Granö<sup>5</sup> – in the 1920s. Reflecting on the work of the German geographer Siegfried Passarge, Granö introduced the concept of landscape (*maastik*) in Estonian geography (Kurs 2009, 61). From there it was adopted in archaeological research as well. He defined landscape as a certain part of earth, a regional unit, characterized by specific combinations of relief, water bodies, flora and fauna, and human occupation (Granö 1922).

Granö divided the environment into two realms: 1) the close surroundings or milieu in which one moves 2) landscape as distant environment, which extends from one or two hundred meters from the observer to the horizon (Granö 1924).

Granö introduced the system of dividing Estonia into larger landscape regions based on their specific features. One of these regions was also Vooremaa in eastern Estonia, which was – as outlined already in the preceding chapter- characterised by oblong moraine drumlins with swamps and lakes. Granö actively took part in designing a new scientific terminology for geography. For example, the Estonian word *voor*<sup>6</sup> for drumlin was one of the inventions introduced by the commission of geographic terms to which Granö contributed (Kurs 2009, 67).

Granö's most profound legacy was the start-up of a series of geographical volumes of Estonian counties, first in the series to be Tartumaa (Rumma et al. 1925). This grand plan

---

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Gabriel Granö (1882 – 1956), Finnish geographer, professor of geography at University of Tartu (1919 – 1923).

<sup>6</sup> Derived from the Finnish word *vuori* – hill(ock).

involved 11 detailed volumes, of which eight were published before the Second World War and the three remaining ones were never materialised. Granö's influential book *Pure Geography* originally published in German 1929 and Finnish 1930, was translated into English in 1997 (Granö 1997). His international influence on geography as scientific discipline has been discussed e. g. by Michael Jones (Jones 2003a).

The study of landscape and its relation to people in the Estonian geography was also very strongly influenced by the works of Edgar Kant<sup>7</sup>, who's research on Estonian rural and urban settlement (republished collected works: Kant 1999; Kant et al. 2007) was of vital importance for the development of the Estonian geographical thought, especially cultural and human geography. In his approach Kant applied spatial analysis to various geographical aspects, and in addition to demographic and economic data (Tammiksaar et al. 2013) also incorporated an innovative cultural perspective (Pae 2006, 12). It has been argued (Tammiksaar et al. 2018) that Kant was the first in the world to apply central place theory in empirical geographical research. During the Soviet period, Kant's writings were prohibited and kept in a special closed collection only to be used under extreme supervision. After the collapse of the Soviet Union his works were rehabilitated. The importance of Edgar Kant's legacy has been discussed by amongst others Anne Buttimer (Buttimer 2005) and Kennth Olwig (Olwig 2017)

An important work on landscape types in Estonia was published by August Tammekann in 1934, where he described Vooremaa as striped landscape (*viirgmaastik*).

In 1940 Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union, which also brought profound changes in conducting scientific research. The cream of the researchers who had established themselves in the 1920s and 1930s emigrated, hoping to continue their work elsewhere. For example, Edgar Kant fled to Sweden, where he became the professor of economic and social geography at the University of Lund. The new generation of Soviet Estonian geographers were mostly forced to focus on the physical geography and natural landscape, as was typical to the Russian school of geography (Palang 1998a, 11).

The Soviet approach to geography largely resided in empiricism, aiming to prove that geography was built on "scientific communism". Scientific research had to be grounded in extensive statistics of empirically gathered data, converted into proper rhetoric according to the Marxist-Leninist classics (Peil 2006, 469).

---

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Kant (1902 – 1978), founder of Estonian human geography and human ecology, professor of economic geography (1934 – 1940; 1941 – 1944), rector of University of Tartu (1941 – 1944).

Although the main themes in Soviet geography remained concerned to issues of economy, industry and ideology, landscape was a key topic in these studies as well. Soviet landscape studies concentrated largely on physical geography, regional planning and nature conservation; human agency was mostly handled in terms of human influence on natural environment (Peil 2006, 472). Amongst the studies conducted in the field of cultural geography during the Soviet period those of Endel Varep (Varep 1968; Varep 1972; Varep 1976), Jaan Eilart (Eilart 1976), and Ott Kurs (Kurs 1980) can be considered most noteworthy. These studies were mostly concerned with the relationships between people and nature, and between society and environment.

Sprouts of the Anglo-American “cultural turn” in geography can be traced to the mid-1990s when cultural geography as a subject was incorporated to the Estonian university curriculum. The first substantial studies on cultural landscape were published in a collection of essays in 2001 (Palang & Sooväli 2001a). Since then, research on the Estonian landscapes from cultural-geographical perspective has matured each year with the focus on interpretation and meaning of the past and present landscapes (e. g. Kaljundi & Sooväli-Sepping 2014), rather than describing it through positivist data.

Considering the research conducted over the past two decades, the most influential works on cultural geography have been produced by Hannes Palang (e. g. Palang 1998a; Palang & Sooväli 2001b; Palang & Fry 2003; Palang et al. 2006; Palang & Sooväli-Sepping 2012), Tiina Peil (Peil et al. 2004; Peil 2006), and Helen Sooväli-Sepping (Sooväli 2004; Sooväli-Sepping 2015; Sooväli-Sepping 2017), who have frequently collaborated in joint projects coordinated by Tallinn University. Also, issues of sustainability and future of cultural heritage have been in focus (Palang et al. 2011; Palang et al. 2017; Palang et al. 2019).

Various aspects of historical geography in connection with socio-cultural processes have mainly been studied by Taavi Pae from the University of Tartu (Pae 2006; Pae et al. 2009; Pae et al. 2010)

### 3.2 Landscape archaeology in Estonia

According to Valter Lang (Lang 2006) professional landscape archaeology as a separate sub-discipline of archaeology did not start in Estonia before the 1990s., when cultural geography was emancipating as well.

However, the archaeological study of settlement patterns and their environmental setting can be traced back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the first professor of archaeology at the University of Tartu – Aarne Michael Tallgren<sup>8</sup> – initiated the second<sup>9</sup> nation-wide recording of archaeological sites. Tallgren published a thorough examination of Estonian prehistory in two volumes (Tallgren 1922; Tallgren 1925), backed up by distribution maps of sites and finds that formed the basis for analysing changes in settlement patterns. He also studied settlement histories in relation to changes in the natural environment. The general methodology and ideas developed by Tallgren remained solid for several decades (Lang 2006, 294). The only two noteworthy archaeological studies in Estonia focusing on the role of landscape and settlement conducted before the 1990s were Richard Indreko's account on the role of nature during the Stone Age (Indreko 1934), and a study of settlement development and landscape regions in central Estonia by Tanel Moora (Moora 1966). Both studies can be characterised as driven by economic and environmental determinism. Like in geography, the investigations in settlement archaeology during Soviet times were carried out within a positivist framework that enabled the inductivist reconstruction of subsistence strategies and their correlation with landscape regions and natural conditions (Lang 2006, 294).

An important shift in settlement and landscape archaeology of Estonia took place in the 1990s with the projects carried out by Valter Lang in Northern Estonia. Lang focused in a detailed way on long-term settlement histories of specific regions (Lang 1996; Lang 2000) from the Bronze Age to the end of prehistory. Lang's studies of two micro-regions of North Estonia can be considered as the first proper examples of landscape archaeology in Estonia. In the light of this study, Lang's research could also be addressed as landscape biography in several respects.

In Estonian archaeology, the 1990s also witnessed an essentially new international collaboration – PACT – between settlement archaeology and paleoecology. PACT focused on composing and analysing pollen diagrams from areas of archaeological interest (e.g. Veski et al. 1996). One of the outcomes of the project was the realization that human impact could be detected in regions where archaeological evidence was (still) absent (Lang 2006, 297).

In the 2000s, the Stone Age researcher Aivar Kriiska studied the earliest human settlement on the coastal areas and islands of Western Estonia, with an explicit emphasis on the transition

---

<sup>8</sup> Aarne Michael Tallgren (1885 – 1945) Finnish archaeologist and historian, Professor of archaeology at University of Tartu (1920 – 1923).

<sup>9</sup> The first recording of archaeological sites was carried out by a local priest and schoolteacher Jaan Jung at the end of the 19th century, mostly based on letters sent by local farmers about antiquities on their land.

from the settlement patterns of hunter-gatherers to those of the first farming communities (Kriiska 2001, 2002, 2003). Kriiska's contribution on establishing shoreline chronology (Jussila et al. 2004), based on sea level and land elevation data is still relevant for understanding the location of Stone Age settlements on the islands and in coastal areas.

In 2000 – 2008 Valter Lang supervised a large project that aimed at a reconstruction of the early settlement history of the micro-region of Keava in north Estonia. In addition to archaeological settlement data also the surrounding physical landscape and the oral tradition of local communities in the area was studied. The results of the project were published in a special issue of the *Estonian Journal of Archaeology* (Lang 2012).

Also in the 2000s, landscape phenomenology as a theoretical concept mostly inspired by the works of Christopher Tilley (Tilley 1994; Tilley 2004) and Barbara Bender (Bender 2002) was introduced in the Estonian archaeology by Gurly Vedru (Vedru 2002; Vedru 2004). Vedru's PhD research (Vedru 2010) explored the possibilities for understanding how people in the past (could have) perceived their surrounding landscape. One of the recent studies by Vedru (Vedru 2015) focuses on the aspects of remembering the archaeological past in the landscape: how the past was perceived in the past. The latest research within this new framework of landscape phenomenology was carried out by Andres Kimber (Kimber 2016), who for his MA degree studied the role of cup-marked stones in the Late Bronze Age/ Early Iron Age soundscapes of north Estonia.

### 3.3 Landscape archaeology and place-related folklore studies

In the recent decades place-related folklore studies have become an important part of landscape research in Estonia, especially in the field of archaeology. Oral tradition as a reflection of past perceptions and practices can be a rewarding source if approached critically. The Estonian folklore collections are stored in the Estonian Literary Museum, and are considered the largest in the world *per capita* (Valk 2006, 311).

Even though folklore research in Estonia was initiated already in the 1880s, the vast dataset that is produced since then was not applied in archaeological research until the 1980s. The main researchers of folklore-related landscape studies in Estonia are Mari-Ann Remmel (e. g. Remmel 1998; Remmel 2014; Remmel & Valk 2014), Pikne Kama (Kama 2016; Kama 2017b; Kama 2017a), Heiki Valk (e. g. Valk 2006; Valk 1998; Valk 2004; Valk 1999), Marju Kõivupuu (e. g. Kõivupuu 2011; Kõivupuu 2013; Kõivupuu 2014), Mare Kalda (Kalda 2002;

Kalda 2008; Kalda 2011), and Jüri Metssalu. Tõnno Jonuks has also applied insights from recent folklore in the study of ritual practices in archaeology (Jonuks 2009a; Jonuks 2009c; Jonuks 2012). In 2017 the first PhD completely dedicated to applying methods of folklore in archaeological research in Estonia was defended by Pikne Kama (Kama 2017a).

Two of the main problems with using oral folklore records for archaeological interpretations are their dating and plausibility. It is very difficult to assess the age of information contained in oral traditions, we only have reliable indications about when the material was collected by early ethnologists and others. It will not come as a surprise, therefore, that the topic of validity and temporal credibility of folklore has been discussed on several occasions in Estonian archaeological research (e.g. Valk 1998; Valk 1999; Jonuks *et al.* 2014).

### 3.4 Research history of Vooremaa region

The Vooremaa landscape region has been in the spotlight of numerous geographers, geologists, archaeologists, and local historians. Interdisciplinary landscape research demands the combination and integration of results and syntheses from various research fields. When looking at the research history of Vooremaa from this perspective, we can see a clear link between geography and history, which as academic disciplines progressed simultaneously and more or less “hand-in-hand”. Archaeology, for a long time, operated as a separate discipline.

The first wider registration of archaeological heritage of Estonia, including Vooremaa, was initiated at the end of the 19th century by a local schoolteacher Jaan Jung (1835 – 1900), who started collecting descriptions of archaeological sites by mail. By 1896 Jung had received 428 letters regarding places of archaeological interest (Tvauri 2006, 248), and published selected descriptions of archaeological sites in two printed volumes (Jung 1899, 1910). Unfortunately, the counties concerning Vooremaa remained unpublished, although plenty of records e.g. about hillforts and burial places can be found in the topographical archive kept at the archaeology library of the University of Tartu. The first archaeological excavations in Vooremaa were executed by Baltic-German scholars who were not yet professional archaeologists but shared a general interest in prehistory. In 1895, for example, Richard Hausmann (1842 – 1918), a professor of history at the University of Tartu, conducted small scale excavations at a stone grave in Kärde (Hausmann 1895).

The scientific research of geography and archaeology of Vooremaa can be associated with the first professors of the disciplines at the University of Tartu. Both, the professor of geography



Johannes Gabriel Granö (1882 – 1956) and the professor of archaeology Aarne Michaël Tallgren (1885 – 1945), were invited to University of Tartu from Finland to build up the freshly established departments of geography and archaeology. Granö and Tallgren soon initiated a campaign for describing the geography and archaeology of Estonian parishes. These parish descriptions were compiled with the help of local inhabitants and students specialising in geography and archaeology. The first published parish description dealt with the parish of Palamuse (EKS 1922) – the very central part of Vooremaa. The data gathered by the students was then collected into bulky volumes and published in the series *Eesti* (Estonia). The first volume, published in 1925 (Rumma et al. 1925), concentrated on the county of Tartumaa, which also covered the region of Vooremaa. From the local histories the best-known work from the pre-war period is the history of the Laiuse parish, published by the local priest Johan Kõpp (Kõpp 1937), who later became rector of the University of Tartu.

The registration of antiquities and the archaeological description of parishes was steered by the archaeology professor Tallgren with the ultimate goal to write down everything known so far about archaeological findings in Estonia, including stray finds. This in turn raised a wish for site protection, and already at the very beginning of the campaign in 1921 Tallgren made a proposal to the Ministry of Education and Social Affairs for drafting a heritage conservation act. Still, it took another four years for the act to be passed (Tvauri 2006, 249).

In Vooremaa, the fieldwork in the parishes of Laiuse and Torma (Moora 1921; Moora 1921) was carried out by Harri Moora (1900 – 1968), who later became the first Estonian to hold the professorship of archaeology at the University of Tartu. Harri Moora himself was born in Vooremaa, close to the prehistoric hillfort of Ehavere. In the other parishes of Vooremaa data collection was conducted by the archaeology students Adeele Jürgens (Jürgens 1921ab) and Aleksander Tiitsmaa (Tiitsmaa 1921). Later during his career, Moora carried out several archaeological excavations on hillforts and stone graves in Vooremaa. Still, Moora never looked at the region as a whole, but was primarily interested in single archaeological sites and local phenomena.

The parish descriptions were handwritten manuscripts based on a very simple, tripartite chronological division: 1) Stone Age 2) Iron Age 3) historical and uncertain findings. The students were expected to map all the antiquities of archaeological interest, and also to provide relevant information about the finders, conditions of recovery and oral (folkloric) information. Recording down the exact place was of essence, and sometimes turned out to be a difficult task, apt to mistakes, for example in orientation of cardinal points. At times, the

descriptions could take quite a literary and romantic flow. For example, the archaeology student Adeele Jürgens described a burial site and an offering place near Raigastvere village in 1921 in the following way (Jürgens 1921a, 4 – 5):

*Between the villages of Raigastvere and Õvanurme is a place that can be considered as one of the most beautiful (except the surroundings of lakes) in the parish of Äksi: hillocks with pretty crop fields, valleys with flowery meadows, and tall leaf tree forests. People know how to appreciate this beauty and call the place Valley of Flowers. Still, there is a veil of mystery over the Flower Valley. About 1 km from Õvanurme village, to NE from Andimetsa farm, on the finest spot of Flower Valley is Mäelt-Meose farm. From this place about 0,5 km to SW through a grove of birch trees, and from the same distance NE from Andimetsa farm is a small sandy hillock. The hillock measures 78 m in length and 56 m in with. The hillock is called Hiimäe hill (place to be believed of pagan ritual practices, for further discussion look (Jonuks 2007, 2009b) where people used to practice offerings. About 10 years ago the farmer Mihkel Ponna found from here 6 skeletons, when digging for sand. According to Karl Aaslava the dead were buried next to each other like this = = =. The dead were lying on their side with their heads oriented to the south. On its breasts one of the skeletons had a bronze brooch, which at the moment is in the possession of Mihkel Ponna, who promised to hand it over to me. This has not yet happened. Away from these 6 burials was another smaller skeleton, which by local people was thought to be from a child. The skeletons were reburied in the gravel pit.*

One method to locate the places described in the records is by applying cadastral and topographical maps from the 1930s, which still carry many historic farm names. For example, the offering site mentioned Adeele Jürgens is marked on the cadastral map of 1930 – 1944 with the toponym: *Hiiesaare* – Sacred Island (Figure 10).

The next wide-scale characterisation of archaeological sites did not take place until the 1970s, when a campaign for so called “archaeological passports” was launched. The aim of the passports was to collect all the important data on every specific site into one file. Besides topographic descriptions, photos and rather low-quality maps were included. An important aspect of the passports was adding information about the overall condition of the sites, and also instructions for further activities allowed or disapproved on the sites. In this sense, the site passports served as heritage guidelines to be followed on-site. Whether these guidelines

were ever introduced to the landowners or simply stored in archaeological archives, remains unclear.

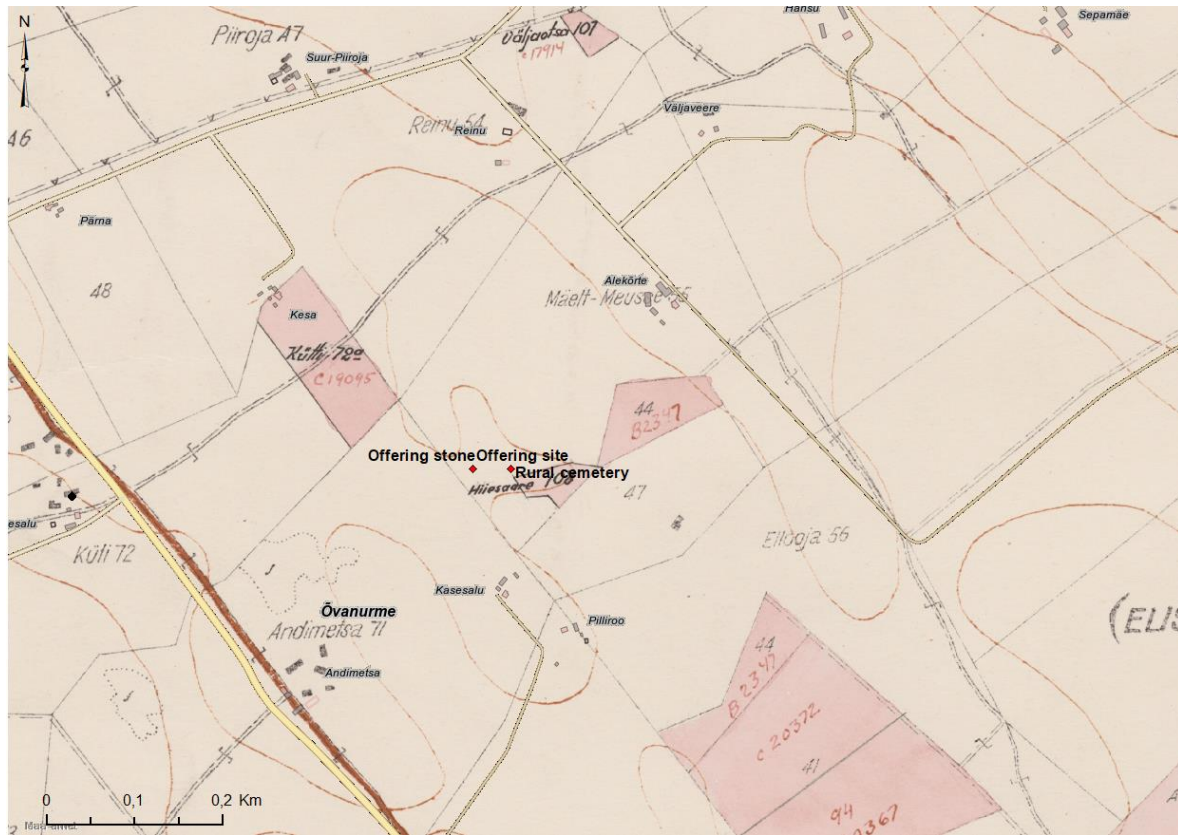


Figure 10. Õvanurme Hiiesaares offering and burial site on the 1930s cadastral map. Base map: Estonian Land Board.

Starting from the 1980s the main archaeologist of Vooremaa was Ain Lavi, who initiated archaeological excavations on several hillforts, stone graves, and rural cemeteries. In co-operation with the geographer Aarend-Mihkel Rõuk (1943 – 1997), Lavi conducted regular landscape surveys in Vooremaa, and other parts of Eastern Estonia. During these surveys many settlement sites were discovered. Most of the archaeological passports of Vooremaa have been compiled by Ain Lavi. Very often in these passports Lavi's text is illustrated with photos made by Rõuk. These photos convey now valuable information about landscape change in the region. As a geographer Rõuk was deeply interested in the morphology, formation and development of the drumlin field (Rõuk 1974; Rõuk 1976), but also in human interaction with the environment. Together with Reet Pirrus, Lavi and Rõuk published several studies on the geology and pollen samples gathered from the Vooremaa region (Pirrus et al. 1987; Pirrus et al. 1988).

Over the past few decades archaeological excavations at different sites in Vooremaa have been carried out by Estonian archaeologists Richard Indreko, Marta Schmiedehelm, Harri

Moora, Aita Kustin, Evald Tõnisson, Vello Lõugas, and Lembit Jaanits. Several small-scale landscape surveys have also been conducted by Heiki Valk and Andres Vindi.

Besides by Aarend-Mihkel Rõuk, the geomorphology of the region has been studied by Volli Kalm (Kalm 2006; Kalm 2012) and Maris Rattas (Rattas et al. 2003; Rattas 2004; Kalm et al. 2011), who were particularly interested in the different glaciations that took place in the Vooremaa region. Additionally, Alar Rosentau made reconstructions of the paleogeography of proglacial lakes in the Saadjärve Drumlin Field (Rosentau 2006; Rosentau et al. 2007). The geomorphological characteristics of the Vooremaa landscape region as a whole have been analysed by Ivar Arold (Arold 2005).