



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

7 Case study 2: Burial sites and natural sacred sites as places of collective memory

In this chapter I will take a closer look at three types of sites: 1) Iron Age stone graves 2) Medieval rural cemeteries, and 3) natural sacred sites. The common denominator for these sites, besides archaeologically detectable human remains and artefacts, is the belief in supernatural, which is often recorded in local places related folklore.

7.1 Archaeology and place-related folklore

The idea of collecting traditional folklore originates from the Romantic movement popular in Europe during the first half of the 19th century, which in Estonia was introduced by Baltic-German scholars and priests. Romantic visions of the primordial and legitimate innocent past have also left their footprint in the Estonian local folk tradition. This is especially relevant when assessing the records collected in the 1920s, when the newly born nation state was in the yearning for a heroic past. For example, the prehistoric hillforts were often associated with the mythical giant-hero Kalevipoeg, who was the protagonist of the Estonian national epic compiled by Friedrich Reinold Kreutzwald and first published in 1862 (Kreutzwald 1862). The published stories of Kalevipoeg started to live their separate lives and became part of related folklore that was (and is) strongly rooted in the local landscape. The Vooremaa region is especially rich in confabulated stories about Kalevipoeg.

The general idea that folklore is based on something very archaic and invariant can be quite deceiving. Like with landscape, the most characteristic feature of folklore is its dynamics as it is in permanent change. But even though the same story can never be told twice in exactly same manner, the folk stories have common key elements which may tie them to the same root, and also the place. These unifying elements or typologies allow folklorists, ethnologists, archaeologists and landscape historians to look for overall generalizations and tendencies in folklore formation.

The process of folklore creation can function also in a backward way: once an oral story or a fairy tale becomes a printed text, it is subsequently canonised, and from this recorded written text other small derivations of the text go back into oral elaboration. Through this process, new meanings to landscape features are attributed which were not present in the oral tradition before the published text. Experts in folklore generally “blame” the Grimm brothers in this respect, as they gave us a large corpus of fairy tales which then were projected back on to the landscape, creating a whole new mythical-geographical world. In a similar manner, published

fairy tales and creation myths collected by Kreutzwald have later become incorporated in objects of oral tradition.

The assumption that folktales in Europe are rooted in pre-Christian oral traditions and beliefs systems is very commonly accepted by researchers without further critical consideration and is often taken for granted. The mechanism behind it might actually be driven by Christianity itself, which dwells on religious dualism between good and evil. The concept is very simple: there can be no good without evil. Nico Roymans has pointed out that with the introduction of Christianity, new values which became dominant, in principle differed significantly from pre-Christian concepts (Roymans 1995, 3). Thus, we can assume that even if some of the folklore layers might be of pre-Christian origin, the impact of Christianity is so profound that we actually cannot often make the difference between temporal sub-layers. When taking a closer look at the examples demonstrated in the current study, they mostly convey Christian values, and even the references to ancient pagan times are given through a Christian prism.

It has been claimed by Heiki Valk (Valk 2006, 311) that the continuity of pre-Christian oral traditions lasted longer in Estonia than in the Scandinavian or western European countries. This was mainly possible due to the survival of the traditional agrarian society, which in large extent was still illiterate at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Thus, different techniques of memorizing and conveying oral data (e.g. singing and storytelling) were important methods of social interaction. *Runo*-songs have been considered as one of the oldest and most archaic sources of archaeological information, possibly reaching back to the Iron Age or even further back in time (Kama 2017a). Again, dating different motifs in these songs and stories is highly debatable, and can never be pin pointed exactly.

At the same time, a vast number of songs and stories take place – literally – in certain settings in the landscape, which is why they are connected to specific toponyms or place-related descriptions. In oral histories of landscape, we are dealing with concepts of time set in a specific place in the landscape. In these stories the connection between time of the day or the year and various landscape features, such as lakes, rivers, valleys, hills, stones, burial grounds, is often of special importance. Common are legends of creation: how and why did different landscape features come into being? Stories of ethics are also relatively common: for example, what to do with accidentally unearthed human remains? Or how to behave in nature? Finding a treasure or stumbling upon unexpected wealth is also a common motif in an economically “poor” peasant society.

Place-specific stories are often related to archaeological sites and enable researchers to “play” with the various interpretations of the archaeological record.

So far, the main added value of the recorded oral tradition for archaeological research has been for locating new archaeological sites in the landscape (Valk 2006, 313). Specific place-related local names – toponyms – have been very useful for identifying prehistoric hillforts, medieval rural cemeteries, and even Iron Age stone graves. In local lore, the stories of finding treasure or bones are relatively common and equipped with place names may lead to new archaeological discoveries. The study of natural sacred sites is exclusively dependent on oral information, which often is just a place name, and thus the debate whether these sites can be considered as archaeologically relevant at all, is still ongoing. For example, in the case of Vooremaa, it was not possible to find any additional oral data except the toponym for 7 natural sacred sites out of 38. This may indicate that these places have been considered important for some time in the past, but that nobody remembers anymore exactly why.

From the database of archaeology and local lore developed by the Archaeology Department of the University of Tartu it was possible to connect 157 archaeological sites in the study region with different records of local folklore. The amount of folkloristic information on different sites can be quite uneven: some outstanding sites can have more than 10 different records, others just one. Of course, the folkloristic dataset can never be fully complete or absolute, for new information from various sources are constantly being discovered and even “new” stories are added to the historical storylines. Thus, the numbers presented in the current study are rather provisional, and probably will be adjusted as a result of more detailed research. Still, I find that the data at my disposal for Vooremaa is representative enough to draw some further conclusions.

As can be deduced from the table presented below (Table 10), medieval rural cemeteries, stone graves, and natural sacred sites are most commonly associated with local oral tradition. Also, hillforts as outstanding landscape features are frequently mentioned in folkloric sources.

Site type	Nr sites	Most common key words
Battlefield	3	Swedish/war
Chapel	5	Old chapel/Northern War/Swedish burials
Church	6	Old church/sinking underground/destroyed at night
Cup marked stone	5	offerings/oak grove
Hiis forest	1	Offerings
Hill	2	Plague/battle

Hillfort	8	Kalevipoeg/sinking town or church/treasure/ offering place/Swedish king
Hoard	3	Shepard/soldiers/ploughing
Monastery	1	Monastery
Mound	1	Gold/treasure/burials
Offering site	7	Pagan idols/oak grove/church
Offering spring	10	Healing eyes and skin/offering silver/holy
Offering stone	7	Offering coins and food/Kalevipoeg
Offering tree	1	Healing
Refuge site	6	Swamp/Northern War/secret road
River ford	1	Swedish times
Road	2	Swedish times/Devil
Rural cemetery	42	Bones/war/plague/Swedish soldiers/offering/ crying or foaming tibia/ghosts/chapel/treasure
Spring	1	vodka burning
Stone	3	Kalevipoeg
Stone cross	2	Swedish general/war chief
Stone grave	26	Chapel/church/monastery/grave
Stray find	6	Battle/Swedish times/road/grave
Tree	1	Money tree
Undefined burial grounds	2	Old battlefield/crying and foaming bones
Wooden causeway	5	Secret road/hillfort/manor/treasure
	157	

Table 10. Archaeological sites with recorded oral folk tradition, and main story types.

7.2 Iron Age stone graves

Currently, there is information about at least 62 stone graves in Vooremaa (Figure 42).

Archaeological excavations have been conducted only at 9 of them: 1) Kärde (Hausmann 1895; AI 1918); 2) Kõola, two graves (Schroeder et al. 1889; Moora 1922; Moora 1950; AI 4024:1-272); 3) Vaidavere (Moora 1942); 4) Kõrenduse (Lavi 1978a; AI 4775:1-2, 3-5; AI 4866); 5) Nava, two graves (Moora 1945; Moora 1946; AM 3968:1-44); 6) Toovere (Moora 1947; AI 3979:1-33) and 7) Kobratu (Moora 1935; Schmiedehelm 1937; AI 3357:1-351)

Only two locations in the study area – Nava and Endla (Tirma) villages – can probably be associated with Pre-Roman Iron Age stone-cist graves²⁷, and might me dated to 1st century AD.

Most of the graves are *tarand*-type stone graves, which are characteristic for the Roman Iron Age (50 – 450 AD) all over Estonia. Typical *tarand*-graves of central and southern Estonia were generally constructed of large granite boulders, which were placed in the form of rectangular enclosures – *tarands*. The typical *tarand*-grave consisted of several such rectangles built next to each other in succession, forming one large grave. The inner spaces of the graves were usually filled with smaller stones and gravel. Archaeological excavations have demonstrated that remains of cremation burials in *tarand*-graves were usually spread more or less evenly all over the grave, which suggests that the graves served first and foremost as collective burial place (Lang 2007b). Other studies (Laul 2001) claim that each *tarand* in the grave represented one family or one generation. Generally, *tarand*-type stone

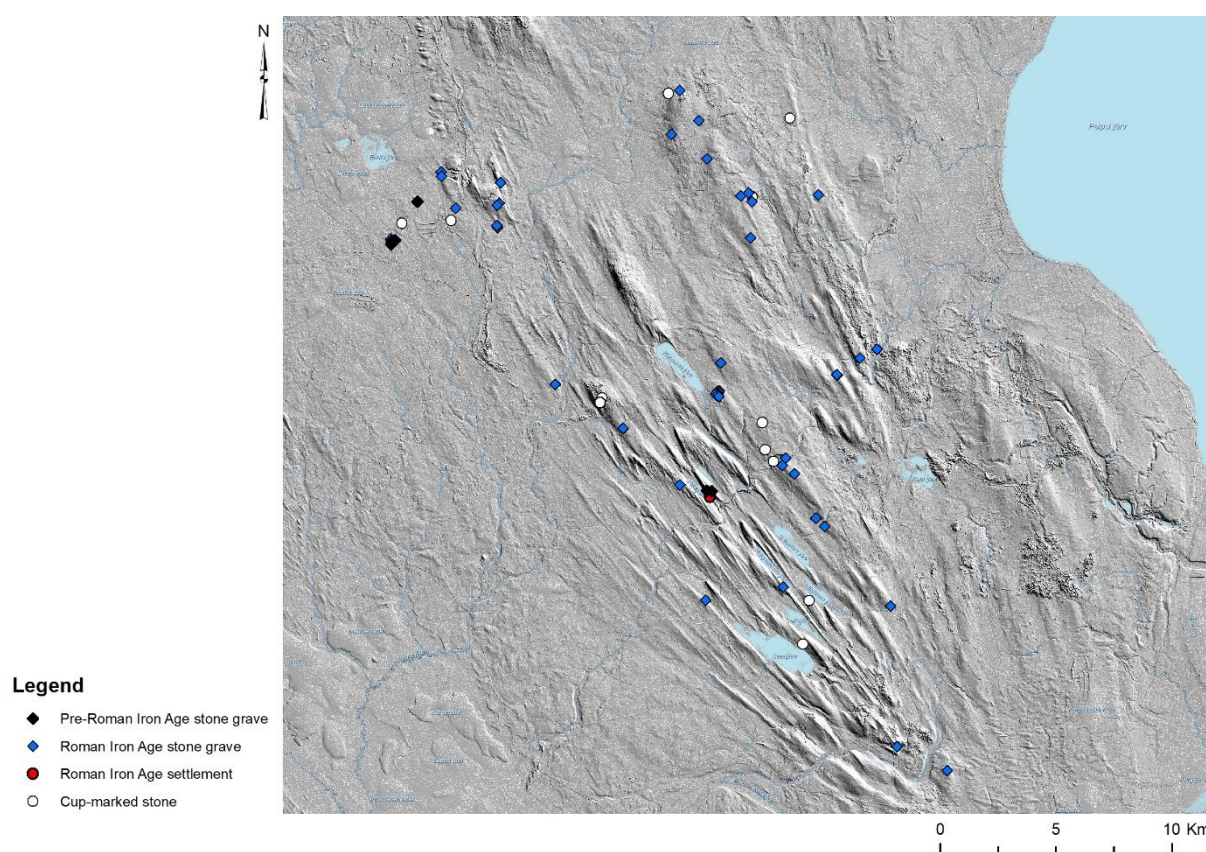


Figure 42. Iron Age stone graves and cup-marked stones of Vooremaa. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

²⁷ Stone-cist graves – the earliest type of stone graves built (1200 – 400 BC) in Estonia. Usually single inhumation burial situated in limestone cist in the middle of the grave surrounded by stone circles. Although the building of new graves ended around 400 BC, the burials continued till around 1. c AD, sometimes even up to the medieval times.

graves in Vooremaa were built between 2nd – 5th century AD, but also could have been used later for secondary burials.

The two largest clusters of listed stone graves, in the villages of Järvepera and Roela are the most questionable in the sense of burials and cultural layer. They very clearly stand out from the rest of the graves for their location density, and the fact that nothing archaeological has ever been discovered from the sites. Such concentration of graves is characteristic to Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age stone-cist graves, but nothing else points to that specifically. Even though the Järvepera graves have been in the middle of arable fields at least since the 17th century, there are no recorded findings of bones, artefacts or local folklore that inform us about the monuments. This may suggest that they are not graves at all, but heaps of stone collected from the surrounding fields over the centuries. If this is correct, they are signs of permanent historic cultivation, but do not necessarily mark “fossil” fields. Contrary to Järvepera graves, the Roela graves are located on top of a drumlin covered in forest and can be illustrated with numerous stories of local folklore.

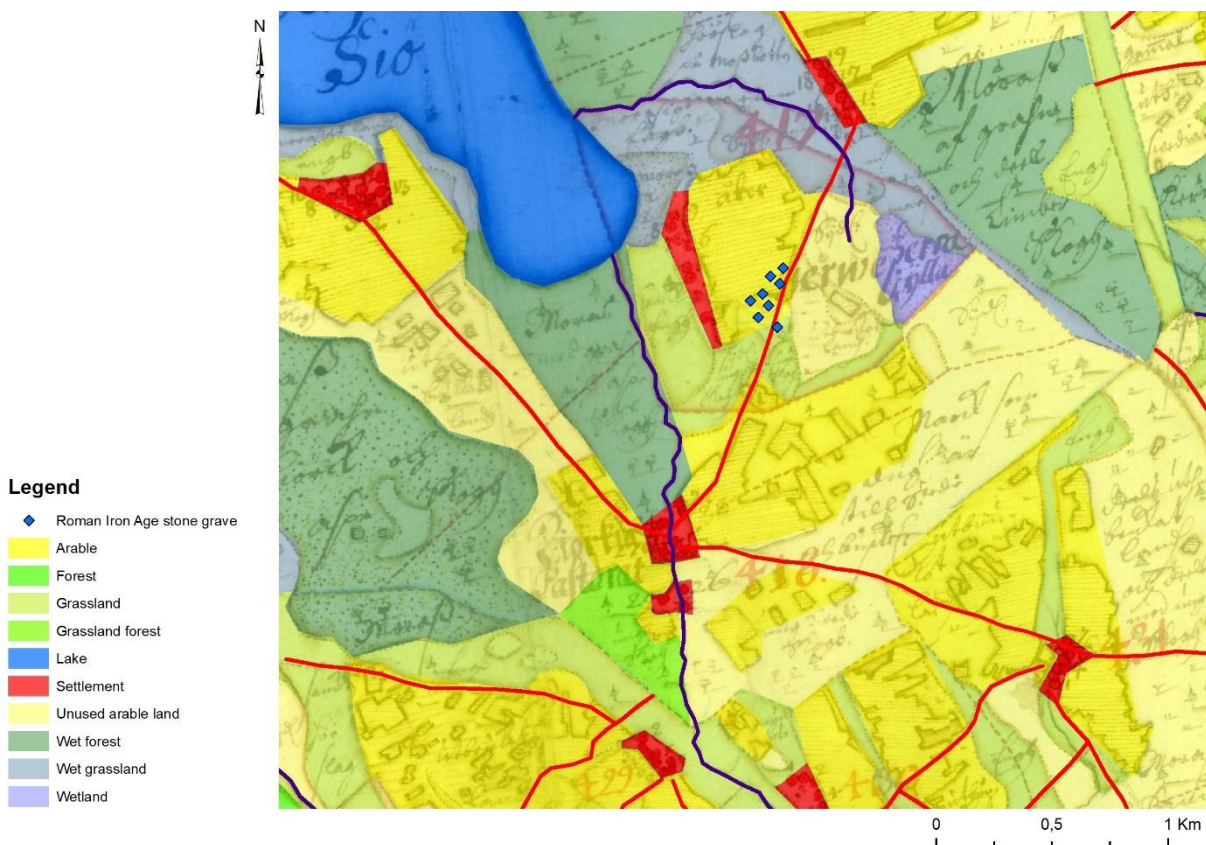


Figure 43. The cluster of Iron Age stone graves in Järvepera village in the 17th century landscape.

Valter Lang has suggested (Lang 2007b, 198) that because of the primitive architecture and relatively poor material culture in the *tarand*-graves of Vooremaa, the region remained

peripheral hinterland compared to central and northern Estonia during the Roman Iron Age. Based on analogy, all the *tarand*-type graves in Vooremaa have been dated to the 2nd – 5th century AD. During roughly the same period, between the 1st – 5th century AD, the pollen diagram of Raigastvere (Pirrus 2010) demonstrates a steep growth of spruce (*Picea*). What is interesting, is that the ratio of spruce had gradually been declining since around 2000 BC, and then made a sudden jump in the 1st century AD. The landscape started to open up again in the 5th century AD. This can either be explained with population decline or changes in subsistence economy and land use. The peak in spruce population also correlates with a decrease in crop cultivation. Interestingly enough, at the same time, the erection of stone graves, which demanded communal organisation, does not support the idea of population decline compared to previous periods.

7.2.1 Soil and elevation of Iron Age stone graves

The position of stone graves vis-a-vis soil types and elevation is as relevant as in the case of the settlement sites and hillforts. In fact, the distribution of Iron Age stone graves indicates that they are more often centrally located in arable complexes – 45 out of 62 stone graves in the study region are positioned on the most fertile *stagnic luvisols* (n=30) and *mollic luvisols* (n=15). Only seven stone graves can be found in the *gleyic* transitional zones, which are more suitable as meadowland and hayfields than for crop cultivation (Table 11; Table 12).

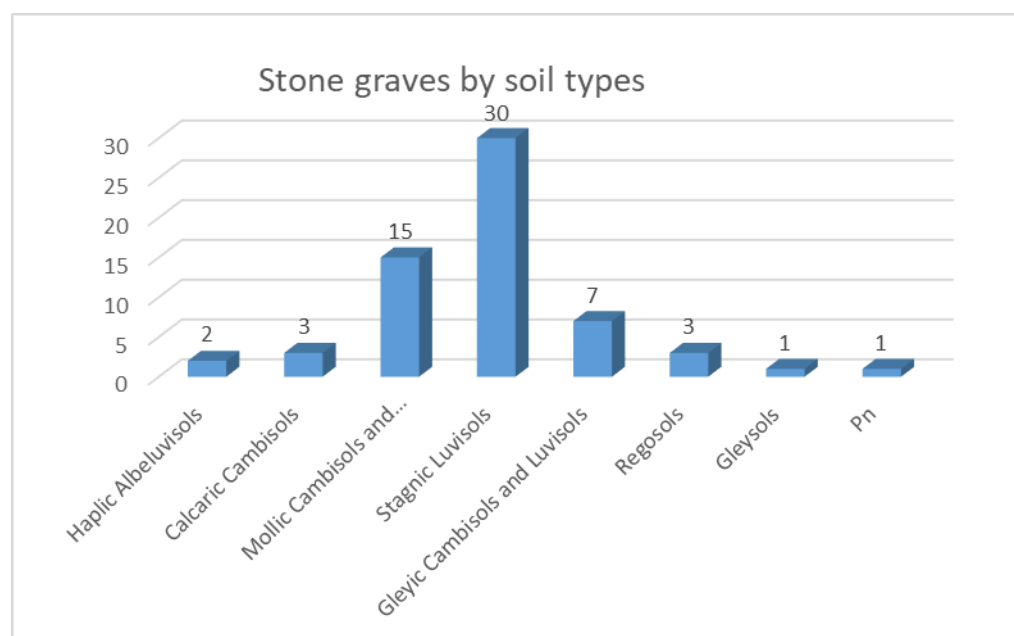


Table 11. Stone graves by soil type.

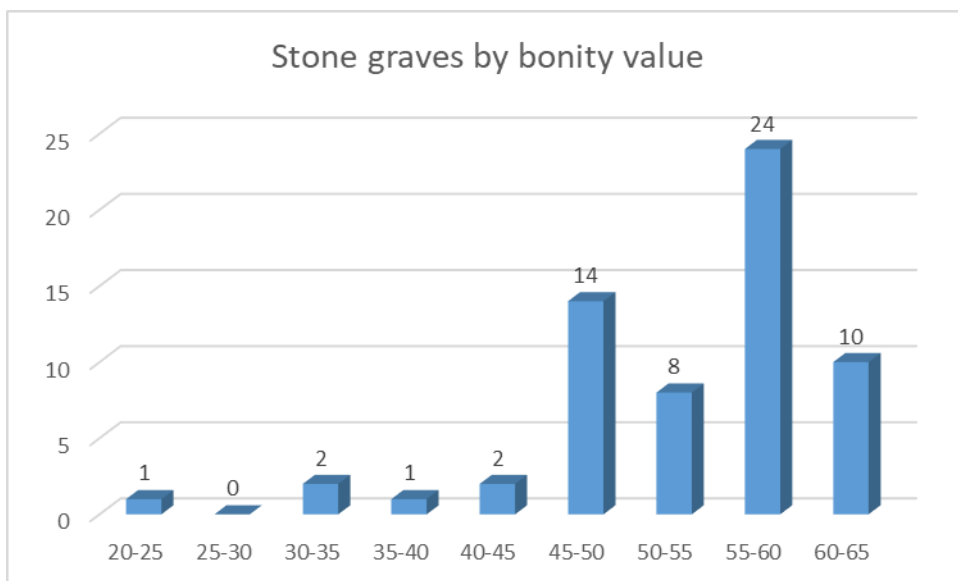


Table 12. Stone graves by bonity value.

Iron Age stone graves, especially the *tarand*-type graves, have often been built on elevated locations in the landscape. Because *tarand*-type graves were built of large granite boulders on top of the ground, they had to be erected on mineral ground, which does not allow the stones to sink too much. Thus, we can see that more than 80 % of the stone graves have been built at the elevation of 80 – 110 m above sea level; lower heights are comparatively marginal (Table 13).

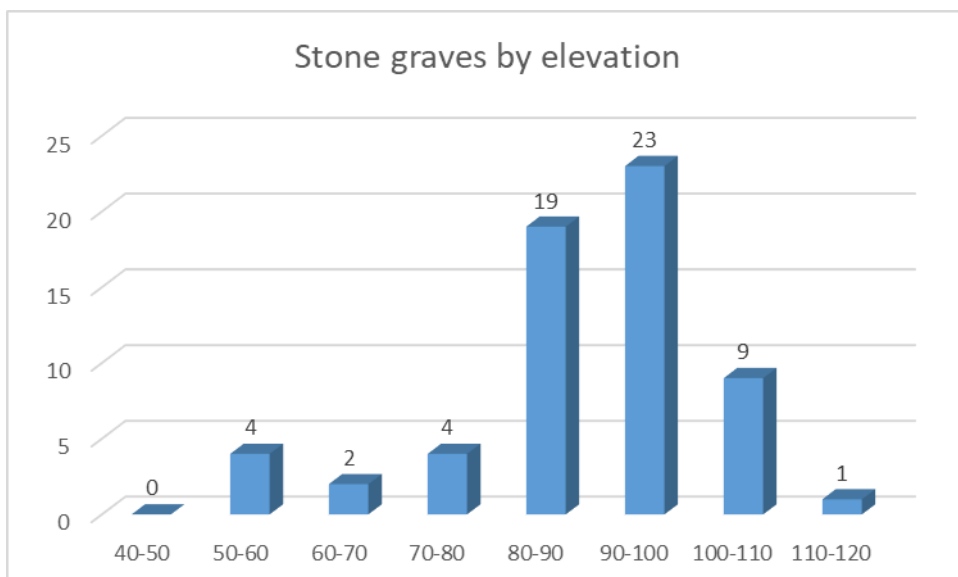


Table 13. Stone graves by elevation.

7.2.2 Historic land use around Iron Age stone graves

It was possible to analyse 17th century land use in the vicinity of 25 out of the 62 stone graves;

Landscape feature	1684	
	25	%
Settlement (1)	1	4,0
Arable land (2)	22	88,0
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	5	20,0
Grassland (4)	6	24,0
Forest (5)	2	8,0
Wetland (6)	0	0,0
Water (7)	2	8,0
Road (8)	18	72,0
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0

Table 14. Historic land use around Iron Age stone graves in 1684.

37 sites are located in the northern part of the study area, which is not represented by the 17th century regional maps. Land use in 1839, 1935 – 1939, and the 2010s could be analysed for all the 62 stone graves.

In the 17th century landscape Iron Age stone graves are not situated directly in or close to historic villages – a pattern that differs significantly from the settlement sites discussed in Chapter 6. Only one stone grave is located closer to a settled area than 150 m. Almost 90% (n=22) of the stone graves can be associated with cultivated land on the 17th century maps. The connection between stone graves and the historic road network is also quite evident – 72% (n=18) of the stone graves are situated in close vicinity of 17th century roads. Bush (n=5; 20%) and grassland (n=6; 24%) are less relevant, and forest with only 8% (n=2) even more marginal. Surprisingly, only two (8%) stone graves could be associated directly with waterbodies, and none were in close vicinity to swamps or wetlands (Table 14).

By the first half of the 19th century the land use patterns changed considerably. Settlement was spread more widely, and we can see that c. 30% (n=18) of the stone graves were located near villages. At the same time, compared to 1684, the overall proportion of graves in arable land had dropped to around 60% (n=37), whereas the proportion of graves in unused farmland/fallow land (n=16; 25.8%) and forested areas (n=10; 16.1%) have slightly risen. We can also find 7 sites near wetland areas, but these mostly include stone graves in the areas not represented by the 17th century regional maps. The road network on the Livonian Special map of 1839 is not as detailed as the 17th century maps, and only 21% (n=13) of the stone graves can be associated with roads.

Both in the 1930s and 2010s, the proportions of stone graves in settled areas (around 30%) and arable land (around 85%) remained almost the same (Table 15). Also, the proportions of stone graves in bush- and grassland were exactly the same. The only considerable difference is with respect to forested areas, where the proportion of stone graves increased from 14.5% in the 1930s to 24.2% in the 2010s. In the 2010s the landscape around one stone grave in the village of Kobratu was radically altered also by gravel extraction.

Landscape feature	1930s				2010s			
	25	%	62	%	25	%	62	%
Settlement (1)	6	24,0	19	30,6	5	20,0	18	29,0
Arable land (2)	24	96,0	52	83,9	25	100,0	53	85,5
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	1	4,0	2	3,2	1	4,0	2	3,2
Grassland (4)	3	12,0	3	4,8	3	12,0	3	4,8
Forest (5)	0	0,0	9	14,5	4	16,0	15	24,2
Wetland (6)	2	8,0	2	3,2	0	0,0	0	0,0
Water (7)	1	4,0	3	4,8	2	8,0	4	6,5
Road (8)	20	80,0	39	62,9	17	68,0	34	54,8
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	4,0	1	1,6

Table 15. Historic land use around Iron Age stone graves in 1930s and 2010s.

7.2.3 Folklore related to Iron Age stone graves

It was possible to find records of oral folk tradition for 26 Iron Age stone graves in the Vooremaa region. One of the stories, that well exemplifies how Iron Age stone graves have been interpreted by local peasants as church or chapel foundations, goes as follows. The story is collected in 1895 (Mss 91 (1)):

¾ verst (c. 0.8 km) east from the Roela manor, next to the road to St. Petersburg is a higher place, which is called Church Hill by the local people. Even though, the hill has lots of holes, and small valleys, it is a cultivated field, and provides good harvest. Like with many places, there are lots of folk stories about the hill. Specifically, that once on this place churches were being built. But they were never finished, the builders made lot of effort without result, for the work of the previous day was never seen on the next day. Everything which was built during the day, was destroyed in the night. One day the builders saw many big birds flying towards west, crying: “pala kirik, pala kirik”²⁸. The builders followed the birds and managed to get them on the left shore of the Amme River, where at the moment Palamuse church is standing, and built the church there without problems. Some also think that the name Palamuse,

²⁸ Can be interpreted in two ways: 1) Pala, as a place name shortened from Palamuse 2) “põle” – burn; as if the birds were crying out: burn, church, burn!

which at first was called *Pala*, came from the crying of the birds. The church used to own a lot of land, and was earlier a church-manor, called *Palamoisa* (*mõis* – manor in Estonian).

In this example, we can see how two different stories have been mixed up. Firstly, it is a story to explain the strange quadrangular stone formation in the middle of the forest, away from the main settled areas, regarding them as foundation for a church, which was never finished.

Secondly, it is a story about how the church in Palamuse was built, and how the village got its name from the church manor. In reality, it was quite the opposite: the church was dedicated to the Apostle St. Bartholomew, which obviously was difficult to pronounce for the local peasants, and at that time was “transformed” into the much more convenient “Palamuse”.

The explanation for *tarand*-graves as church or chapel foundation is so widely spread, that this type of oral tradition can be related to at least 19 stone graves in the region. Three stone graves have thought to be old remains of a monastery, and for them toponyms, such as *Muugemägi* (Monk Hill) and *Munkade kabel* (Monk Chapel) have been used.

Only in three cases the stone graves were addressed as old burial places, and two graves were associated with ghosts and supernatural lights. Also, an ancient temple and judgement place, where village elders used to gather, was mentioned (Figure 44).

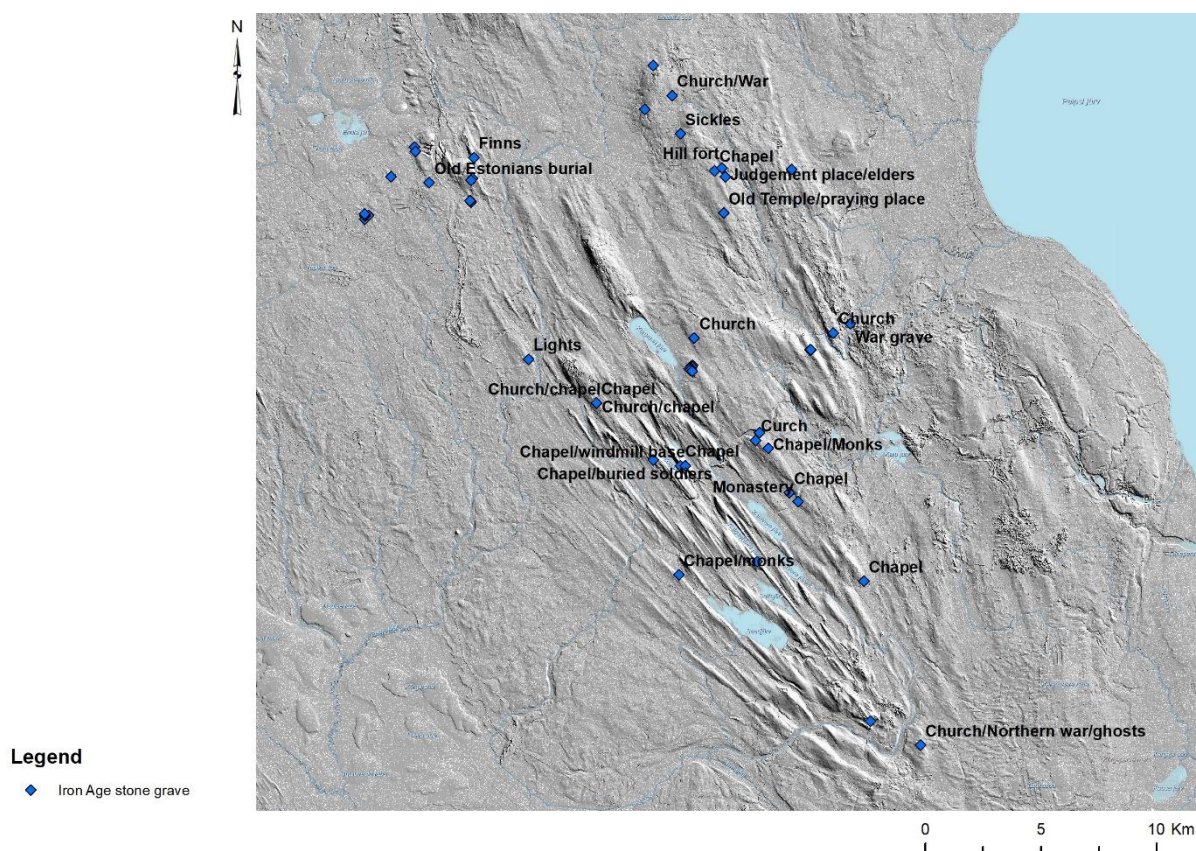


Figure 44. The main story-types associated with Iron Age stone graves. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

We can see that the folk tradition on Iron Age stone graves is quite pragmatic and the explanations are mostly to do with old constructions. Because rural farm buildings were traditionally made from wood, stone graves were never associated with old farms, but rather with churches, chapels, and monasteries. It is noteworthy that the old graves were very rarely addressed as ancient burial grounds or places of supernatural creatures. This gives the impression that the memory of the stone graves as *burials* had been lost in the oral tradition, and the places were explained and interpreted through Christian worldview and were not anymore addressed as burial sites.

7.2.4 Example 1: *tarand*-graves of Nava village

In 1945 – 1946 one of the two *tarand*-type graves in the Nava village was partly excavated by Harri Moora and Marta Schmiedehlm (Moora 1945, 1946). In the local oral tradition, the place is still known as *Kabelimägi* – Chapel Hill. The excavations revealed that the earliest burials in the grave where 4 inhumation burials.

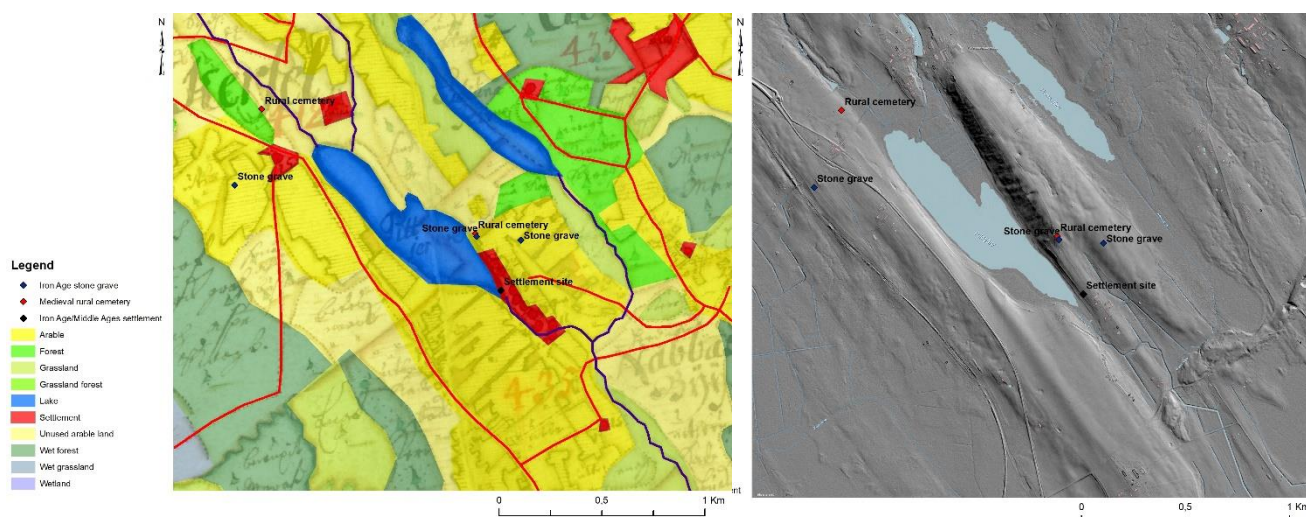


Figure 45. Archaeological sites in Nava village in the 17th century landscape and today's elevation map. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

These could be dated to the 1st century AD on the basis of shepherd's crook pins that were deposited as grave goods next to the bones. On top of the inhumation burials a *tarand*-type stone grave had been erected. During the excavations two *tarands* were examined in closer detail. The later burials were exclusively cremations. The finds from the cremation layer included 5 spiral finger-rings, 3 simple bracelets, a couple of knives, and some pottery (AM

3968:1 – 44). According to artefact typology, the grave was used from 2nd – 5th century AD (Lang 2003, 59, 2007b, 198). Surprisingly no brooches, which are most common type of ornaments in *tarand*-graves, were found. In the Medieval period, Chapel Hill was again used as a burial ground, this time as a rural cemetery. The settlement site (AI 5056:1 – 14) on the foot of the Nava drumlin has been inhabited since 2nd century AD. Nava village is one of the few places where continuous habitation has been attested from the 2nd century AD till today (Figure 45).

7.2.5 Example 2: Kõrenduse *tarand*-grave

Salvage excavations were carried out in the Kõrenduse *tarand*-grave in 1975 – 1976 by archaeologist Ain Lavi (Lavi 1978a). In oral folklore, the grave hill is also called *Muugemägi* hill, which probably derives from the word *munk* = monk, suggesting that according to the local communities the rectangular formation of the boulders represented the foundation of a Christian stone building, in this case monastery. A very similar toponym – *Muukede kabel* (Monks' chapel) has also been attributed to another *tarand*-type stone grave in the village of



Figure 46. Kõrenduse *tarand*-grave in 1970s (Lavi 1978a).

Vaidavare.

The *tarand* grave in Kõrenduse had been partially destroyed by gravel extraction and was exposed to severe erosion. In the course of excavations at least 7 adjacent *tarands*, which were built in several rows, were exposed. The stone constructions of the grave resembled

honeycomb, which was a formation more characteristic to early *tarand*-graves than to the later typical ones with rectangular *tarands*. The site was rich in grave goods: more than 380 artefacts (AI 4775; AI 4866), including pottery and various types of brooches and bracelets. The metal ornaments dated the grave to 2nd – 5th century AD. A few finds could also be dated to the end of the Iron Age (Lavi 1978a; Lang 2007b, 198). There is some archival data on another probably similar stone grave from the village of Kõrenduse, 850 m NW from the excavated site. Unfortunately, the grave was already destroyed at the end of the 19th century (Tiitsmaa 1921, 6).

7.3 Medieval rural cemeteries

Medieval rural cemeteries are usually positioned on higher gravel or sand hillocks, which are mostly located 100 – 200 m from the village centre. Rural cemeteries were simultaneously in use with the “official” graveyards next to parish churches. They are one of the most informative archaeological site types in the study of Estonian rural society from 13th – 18th century. Rural cemeteries were often situated next to the main roads and were later discovered in the course of gravel extraction for road pavement. Old forgotten cemeteries have also been found during construction works for new dwellings or cellars. Although there are at least 75 different rural cemeteries (Figure 47) in the Vooremaa region, only 19 of these sites are listed as state protected heritage sites. Only the cemeteries in Tuimõisa (Mark 1962; TaM A 64; AI 4290; AI 4196), Koimula (Tõnisson 1957; AI 4155:1 – 19), Nava (Moora 1945), Välgi (Kustin 1959; AI 4209:1 – 152; ERM A 479:13 – 25), Vedu (Lavi 1987; AI 5457:1 – 60),

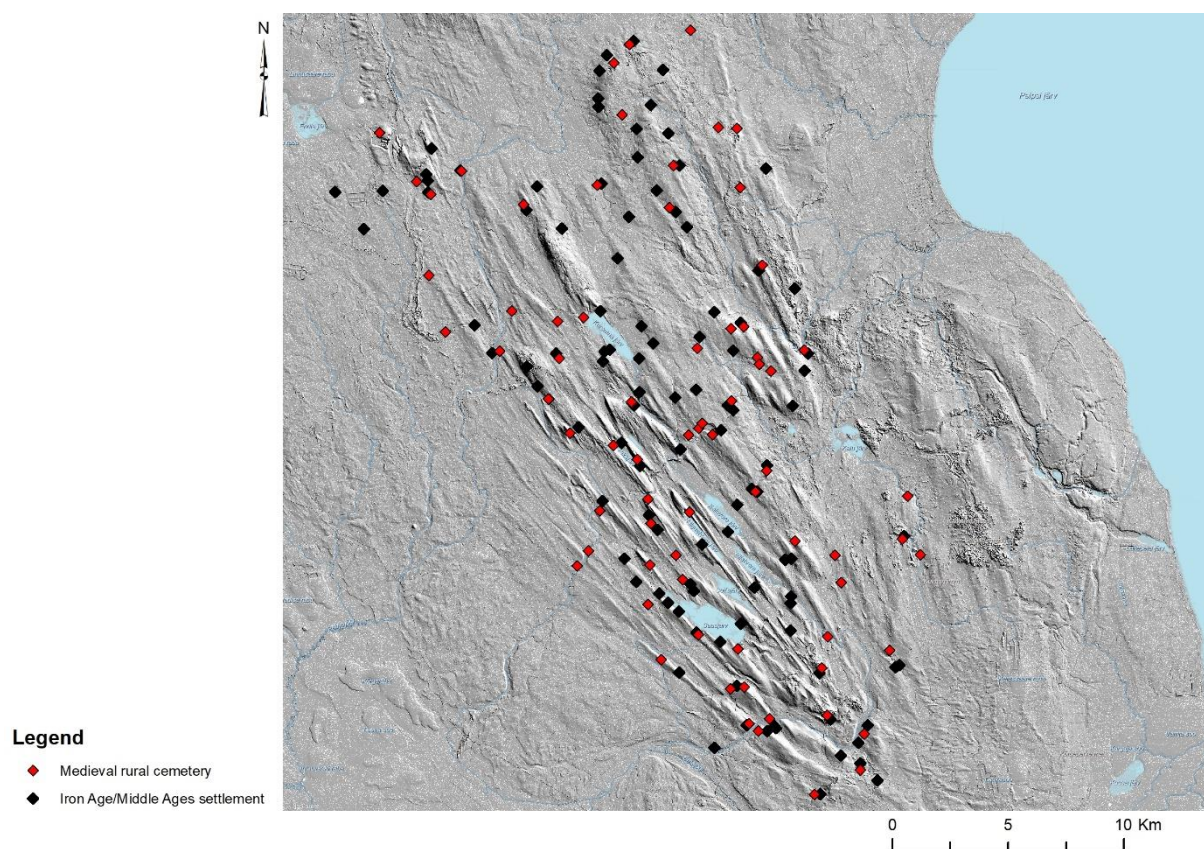


Figure 47. Medieval rural cemeteries in the Late Iron Age/Medieval settlement patter. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

Kobratu (Moora 1935; Schmiedehelm 1937; AI 3357:1-351), and Kõrveküla (Vaas 1923; AI 2544: 1 – 30; AI 2545: 1 – 58) have been excavated.

Archaeological records demonstrate that rural cemeteries were continuously established from 13th to 18th century. A number of cemeteries were already used in the Final Iron Age. For

example in Vedu village 11th – 13th century cremation burials were discovered underneath a 16th – 18th century rural cemetery (Lavi 1994). Although in several cases medieval cemeteries are situated next to or on top of the Iron Age *tarand*-graves, the burial sites have never been used continuously: there is always a chronological gap between stone graves and medieval cemeteries. For example, both in Nava and Kobratu the burial of cremation remains in the stone grave ended in the 5th century AD, but additional inhumation burials did not start before the Christianisation in the second half of the 13th century AD. Thus, it can be assumed that the remembrance of the old pre-Christian burial grounds had already been forgotten. At the same

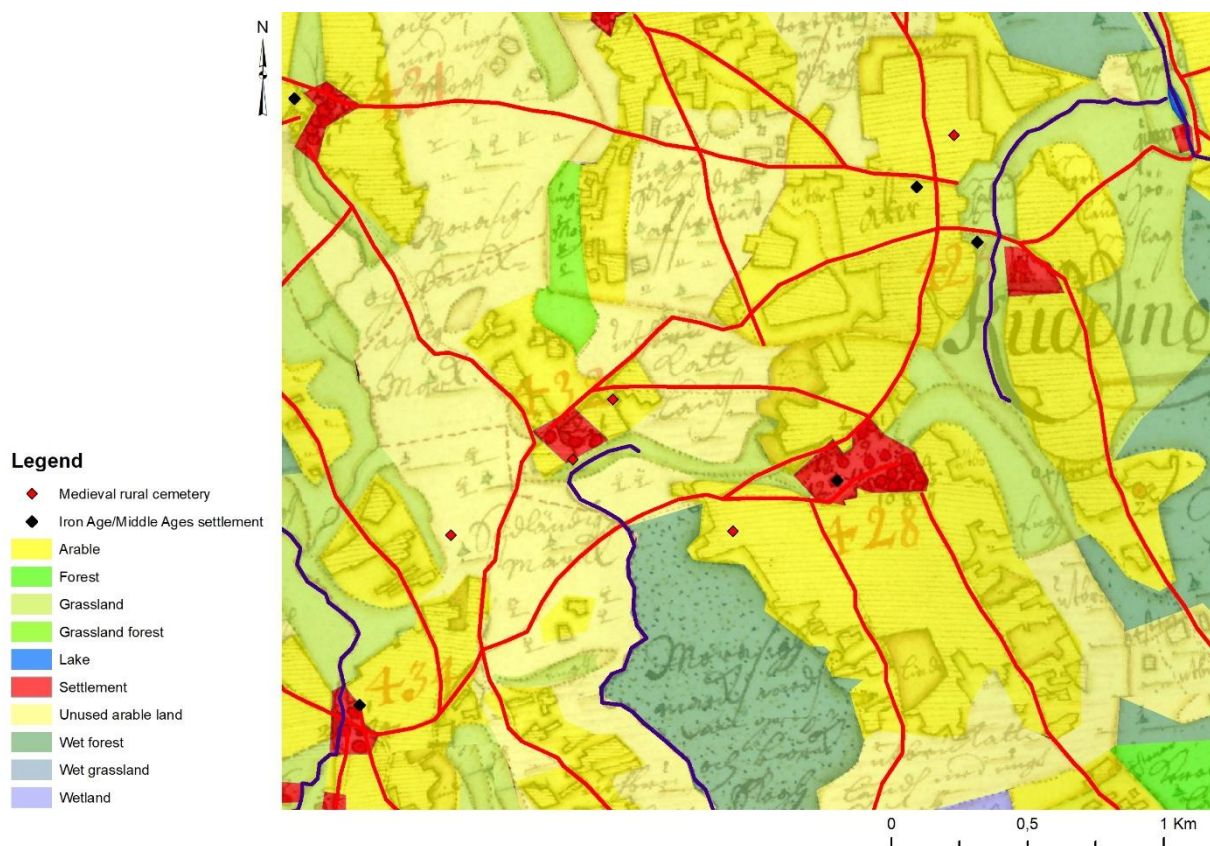


Figure 48. The villages of Ehavere, Vaidavere, and Kudina have five recorded rural cemeteries recorded in a small area. The position of medieval cemeteries correlates well with the 17th century settlement pattern.

time, it can be argued that the rural cemeteries situated away from the parish churches were established on old pagan sites on purpose. Still, the time gap between burials of the two completely different religions is at least 800 years, and the continuity of collective landscape memory seems highly unlikely.

Heiki Valk, the primary researcher of South-Estonian rural cemeteries, has demonstrated in his PhD study (Valk 2001) that these cemeteries were usually used by only 2 – 4 villages forming a “burial territory” of 3 – 5 km in diameter. Occasionally, several cemeteries used in different periods of time could also have belonged to a single village (Figure 48).

Although, the deceased were generally buried with small grave goods, such as jewellery, tools, and coins, the graves were very clearly of a Christian nature. Coins with small nominal value became especially common in the 16th and 17th century. Small chapels and stone crosses were also erected on these cemeteries. Amongst local people toponyms like *Kalmemägi* (Grave Hill), *Kabelimägi* (Chapel Hill), and *Surnumägi* (Dead Hill) have often been used (Figure 49). Somewhat more place-specific toponyms for rural cemeteries in Vooremaa include: *Kalmuväli* (Grave Field), *Kalmeorg* (Grave Valley), *Surnuluemägi* (Dead Bone Hill), *Kirstumägi* (Coffin Hill), *Kirikumägi* (Church Hill), *Kalmu haud* (Grave tomb), and *Kabelikink* (Chapel Hillock).

Rich location-specific folklore has been recorded in connection to rural cemeteries. Popular elements in the stories transmitted by the local communities include ghosts, strange voices, bleeding and crying bones, hidden treasures and weapons. At the same time the rural cemeteries were considered part of the Christian life world.

When looking at medieval cemeteries in a wider Northeast-European context, it appears that there were always perceived as inseparable from the church. To be buried in consecrated soil was a social norm, and every Christian's right. In Livonia, burials in churches and church

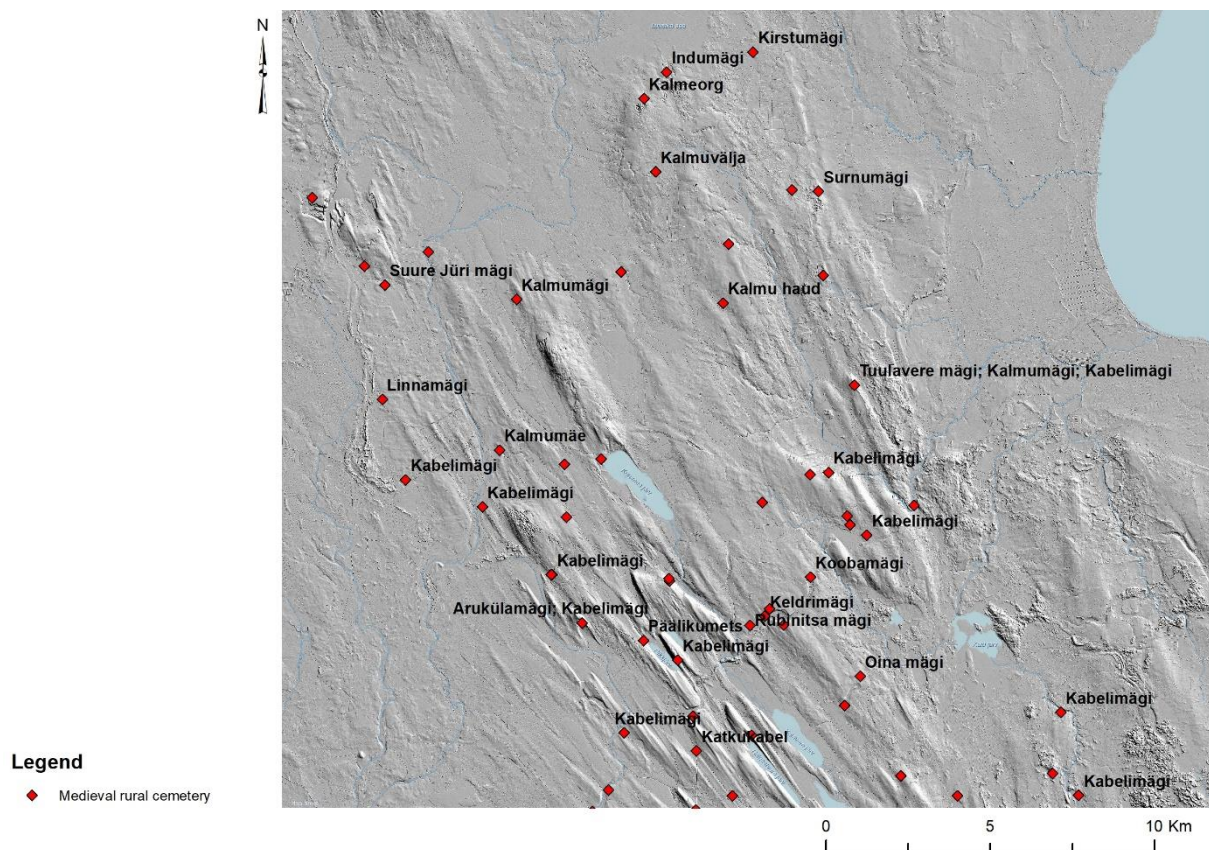


Figure 49. Variety of toponyms for rural cemeteries in the northern and central part of Vooremaa, *Kabelimägi* (Chapel Hill) being the most popular one. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

yards were prohibited in 1773 by Catherine II for health reasons. After this law, most modern cemeteries were established at some distance from the churches and villages. The tradition of rural cemeteries continued until the 1720s, though there are records of burials still in use during the 18th century. In the south-eastern corner of Estonia medieval rural cemeteries were even still in use in the middle of the 19th century (Valk 2001).

Heiki Valk has pointed out that the distance from churches, manors and main roads has no effect on the density of rural cemeteries. Instead, the distribution of burial grounds “follows” the overall settlement pattern (Valk 2001). Valk claims that the rural cemeteries were not located on the borders of the villages to be shared between them, but specific cemeteries belonged to specific villages. Also, in the case of Vooremaa this claim seems to be true. Still, when comparing the distribution of the cemeteries with the 17th century settlement pattern, the number of rural burial grounds will not have been considerably higher than the number of settlements. In sparsely inhabited hinterlands, farm graveyards were also used. Baltic-German landlords usually had their own family graveyards with small chapels.

7.3.1 Soil and elevation of rural cemeteries

With respect to soil types, the distribution of medieval rural cemeteries is very similar to that of the stone graves – 38 cemeteries out of 75 in the study region are positioned on the most fertile *stagnic luvisols* (19) and *mollic luvisols* (19). The third most common soil formation includes *gleyic cambisols* and *luvisols* (10), which have proved to be more suitable for grass lands. The remaining soil types are marginal, altogether a large spectrum of different soil types is represented (Table 16).

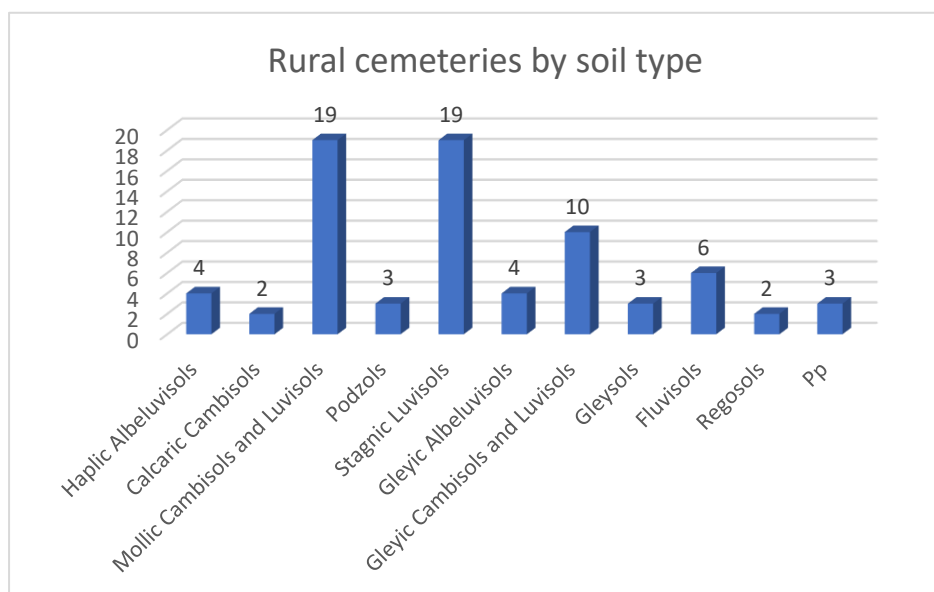


Table 16. Medieval rural cemeteries by soil type.

The analysis of soil bonity value in the close vicinity of rural burial grounds indicates that the cemeteries were established next to relatively fertile lands – 53 sites out of 75 were situated on soils with bonity value between 45 and 60 (Table 17).

When analysing the elevation of the rural cemeteries in Vooremaa, we can see that they are

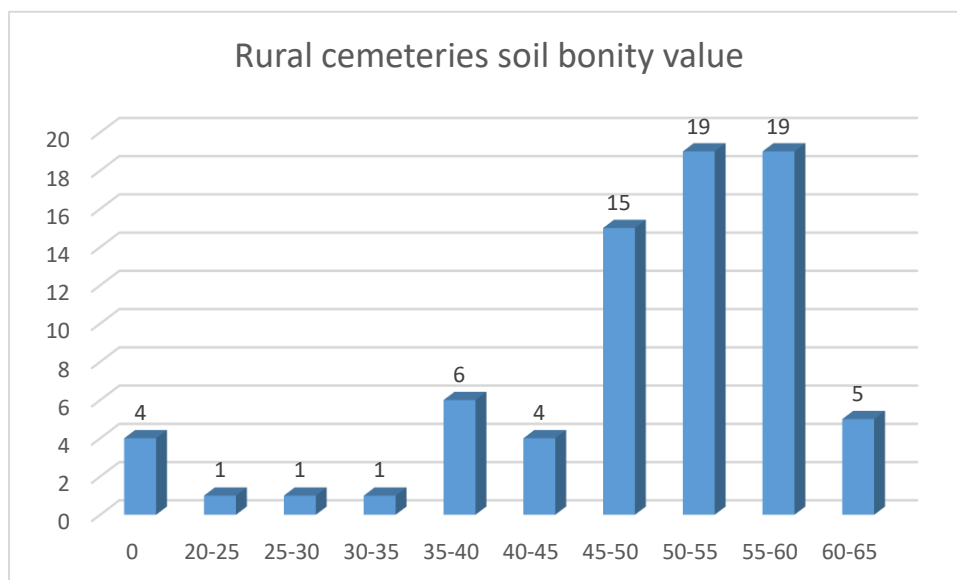


Table 17. Soil bonity values around Medieval rural cemeteries.

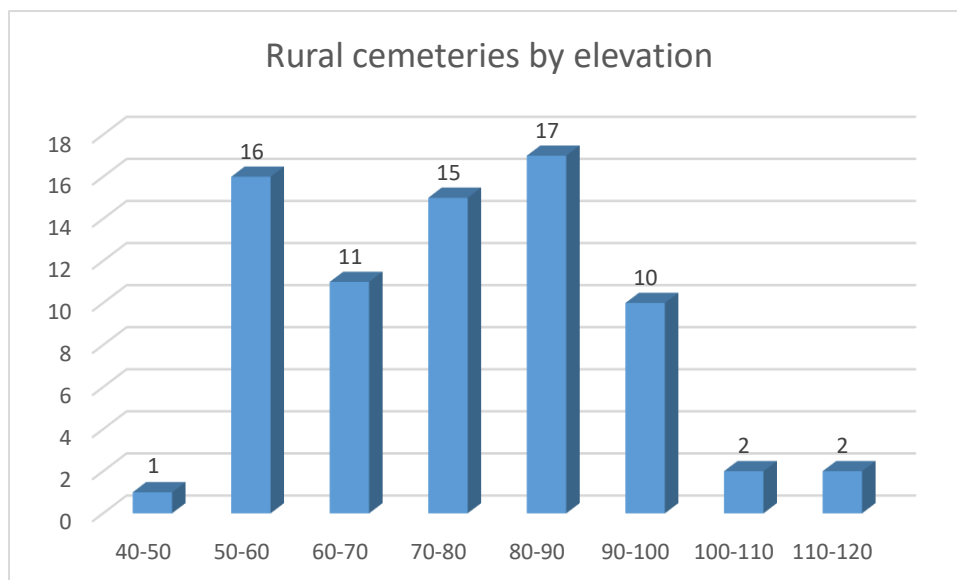


Table 18. Rural cemeteries by elevation.

quite evenly distributed between 50 – 100 m asl, with the highest portion situated between 80 – 90 m above sea level. Only one site is situated lower than 50 m, and four sites are positioned higher than 100 m above sea level (Table 18).

7.3.2 Historic land use around Medieval rural cemeteries

For 52 out of 75 rural cemeteries we have information on the 17th century land use in their vicinity; 23 sites are situated in the northern part of the study area, which is not covered by the 17th century regional maps. Land use in 1839, 1935 – 1939, and 2010s could be analysed for all of the 75 medieval burial sites.

Early Modern regional maps are one of the most efficient sources for locating and studying the position of medieval and post-medieval rural cemeteries vis-a-vis the settlement pattern. Rural cemeteries are almost always situated close to 17th century villages, but seldomly in the core area of the village. Most commonly the cemeteries were established on the outskirts of the villages or in between two villages. Ideally, each larger village or two smaller villages should have its/their own burial place.

In some cases, such as the cemetery in the village of Kudina (Figure 50), the burial mound is even depicted on the map, signified in Swedish as *Höga Berg* (High Hill, but also Burial Hill

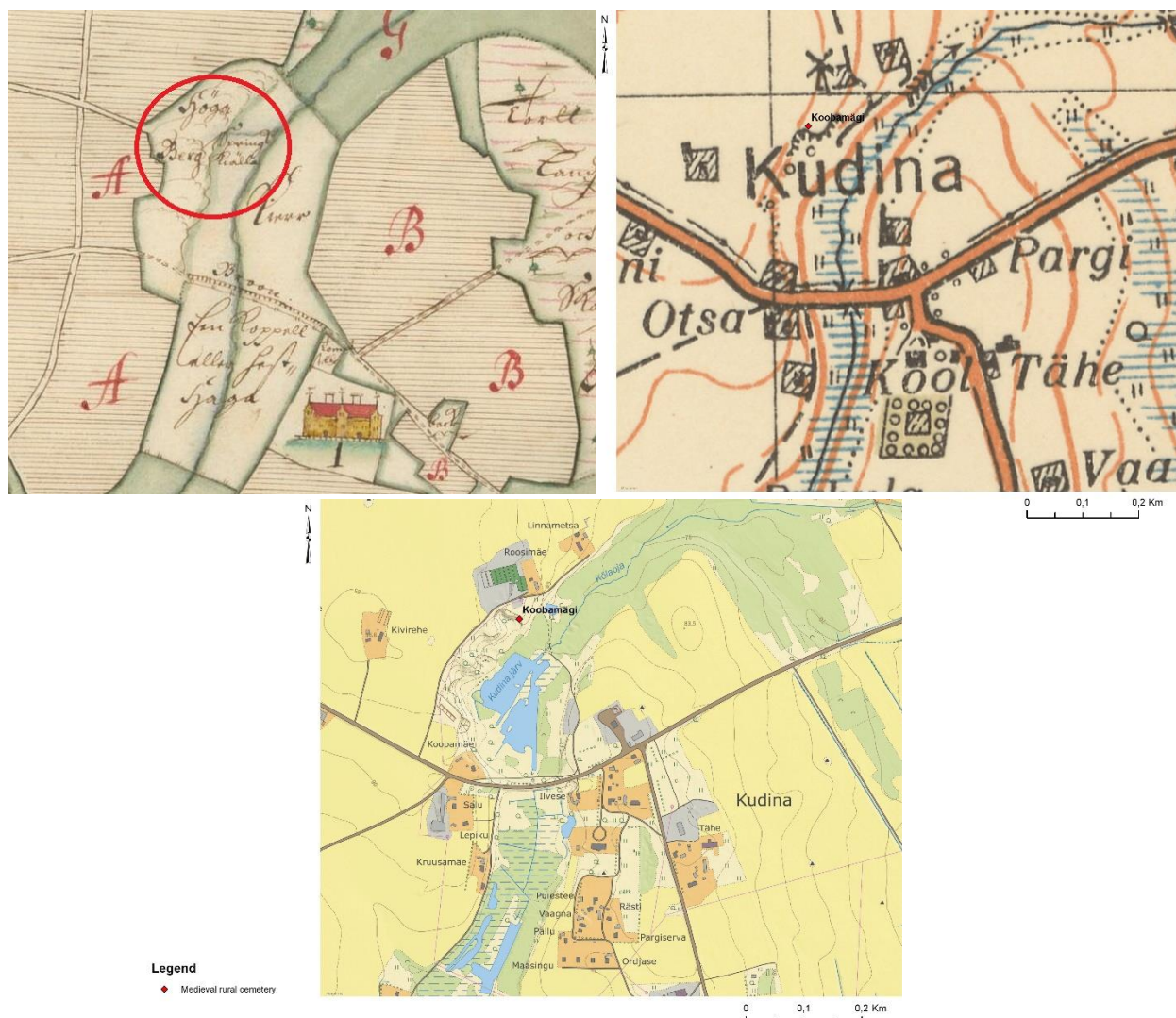


Figure 50. Kudina Koobamägi rural cemetery in 1684, 1930s and 2010s. EAA 308-2-..., 1930s topographical map, Estonian Basic map: Estonian Land Board.

in Old Swedish). From Rücker's Special map of Livonia we can deduce that at least from 1839 a windmill was situated on the same hill. Later also the toponym of *Veskimägi* (Mill Hill) was added. Unfortunately, the original *Höga Berg* has partly been destroyed as a result of gravel extraction, and today the place is known as *Koobamägi* (Cave hill). This is an excellent example of how the current function of the place is reflected in the change of toponyms, demonstrating the dynamics of the landscape through name giving as well. Apparently, with the erection of the windmill, the hill was not considered relevant as a burial place anymore, and the toponym changed from Burial Hill to Mill Hill. Later, when the windmill was left unused, the hill became a good location for gravel digging, and again, the toponym was changed – this time to Cave Hill.

In comparison with archaeological settlement sites, which were mostly located in close vicinity of historical villages of the 17th century landscape (Table 19), rural cemeteries were

Landscape feature	1684	
	52	%
Settlement (1)	10	19,2
Arable land (2)	37	71,2
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	17	32,7
Grassland (4)	22	42,3
Forest (5)	15	28,8
Wetland (6)	7	13,5
Water (7)	11	21,2
Road (8)	22	42,3
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0

Table 19. Historic land use around rural cemeteries in 1684.

located at some distance of the 17th century villages (n=10; 19.2 %), but still very often on or near arable land (n=37; 71.2%). Also, grassland (n=22; 42.3%) and unused arable land or bushlands (32.7%) are relatively common. Even though rural cemeteries have often been associated with trees and forested areas (Valk 2001), historical maps indicate that less than one-third (n=15; 28.8%) of the sites were actually located in woodland areas. In the 17th century, more than 42 % of the rural cemeteries (n=22) were situated near large roads. Waterbodies could be found closer than 150 m to a peasant cemetery in 11 cases (21.2 %).

Compared to the 17th century land use, in 1839 less arable land was actively used (Table 20), and from the 75 sites 42 (56.6%) was positioned on or near arable land at this time.

Landscape feature	1839			
	52	%	75	%
Settlement (1)	10	19,2	20	26,7
Arable land (2)	32	61,5	42	56,0
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	17	32,7	23	30,7
Grassland (4)	19	36,5	30	40,0
Forest (5)	9	17,3	12	16,0
Wetland (6)	6	11,5	7	9,3
Water (7)	7	13,5	14	18,7
Road (8)	18	34,6	26	34,7
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0	0	0,0

Table 20. Historic land use around rural cemeteries in 1839.

Surprisingly, at the same time the proportion of forested areas around rural cemeteries has dropped to 16%. Compared to the end of the 17th century, the ratio of bush and grasslands remained almost the same in 1839. As pointed out already earlier, the road network on the Livonian Special map lacks detailed information, and smaller local roads are not always depicted on the map. Thus, only around 1/3 of the rural cemeteries could be associated with roads on this map. It can be concluded that there are no substantial differences between the land use at the end of the 17th century and the land use system in 1839.

In the 1930s the proportion of inhabited areas around medieval rural cemeteries achieved its peak with slightly more than 60% of the sites situated near villages or single farms from this period (Table 21). Also, in the 1930s, almost 95% of the medieval rural burial grounds were

Landscape feature	1930s			
	52	%	75	%
Settlement (1)	31	59,6	46	61,3
Arable land (2)	52	100,0	71	94,7
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	2	3,8	4	5,3
Grassland (4)	15	28,8	21	28,0
Forest (5)	6	11,5	7	9,3
Wetland (6)	5	9,6	7	9,3
Water (7)	5	9,6	10	13,3
Road (8)	33	63,5	49	65,3
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	4	7,7	5	6,7

Table 21. Historic land use around rural cemeteries in 1930s.

located on or near arable lands. The first quarter of the 20th century was also the time when most of the archaeological burial places were discovered and scientifically described and recorded. An important factor in discovering new sites was that the land was still cultivated

with horse and plough, which enabled for the farmers to quickly notice strange artefacts and human bones. In the 1930s the proportion of bushland and forest dropped to its minimum, and as a result less than 10% of the rural cemeteries were located in or near woods at that time.

The landscape of Vooremaa changed dramatically during the second half of the 20th century

Landscape feature	2010s			
	52	%	75	%
Settlement (1)	25	48,1	40	53,3
Arable land (2)	45	86,5	66	88,0
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	4	7,7	6	8,0
Grassland (4)	9	17,3	11	14,7
Forest (5)	28	53,8	36	48,0
Wetland (6)	1	1,9	1	1,3
Water (7)	10	19,2	16	21,3
Road (8)	36	69,2	53	70,7
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	2	3,8	2	2,7

Table 22. Historic land use around rural cemeteries in 2010s.

(Table 22), and by the 2010s the percentage of rural cemeteries in a forested environment had risen to almost 50%. This again indicates that the myth of Estonians as the “forest people” is more or less a creation of the 20th century. At the beginning of the 20th century also sand and gravel extraction for road building started to expand, and at least 5 medieval cemeteries in the region were partly destroyed during such activities. Later, when the mineral resources had been exhausted, the depressions were filled with water, and turned into artificial lakes, for example in Lähete.

7.3.3 Folklore related to Medieval rural cemeteries

In Vooremaa region, medieval rural cemeteries have been the most “fertile” type of archaeological sites for local folklore. Out of the 75 identified rural cemeteries at least 42 can be associated with local stories, which equals 56%. In my opinion, this objectively demonstrates that the unexpected discovery of human bones in the context of later land use activities, including the quarrying of gravel, is a very strong motive for storytelling. While not all the oral records specifically mention human bones, most of the stories reflect the notion of an old burial ground in one way or the other. Frequently reoccurring keywords in the stories about rural cemeteries include “bones”, “war”, “plague”, “Swedish soldiers”, “offerings”, “crying” or “blood foaming bones” (specifically: tibia), “ghosts”, “chapel”, and “treasure” (Table 23, Figure 51).

The oral tradition of rural cemeteries conveys a message of warning: these are the places, which should be avoided, especially during nighttime or special weekly days, such as Thursdays. Thursday night was the time for the occurrence of supernatural and staying at

Key words	Nr of sites
Bones/burials	21
War/soldiers	12
Church/Chapel	11
Swedish	11
Crying tibia	6
Plague	5
General	5
Treasure	4
Ghosts	2

Table 23. Main key words related to folklore of rural cemeteries.

home was therefore strongly advised.

A very special story type associated with medieval cemeteries describes a crying or blood foaming tibia, which is usually encountered in strange surroundings at night. The intertextuality of the story of the crying tibia, also known as the whining shinbone, has been discussed in detail by the Estonian folklorist Mare Kalda (Kalda 2008). The story was first published already in 1866 by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald in his compilation of ancient

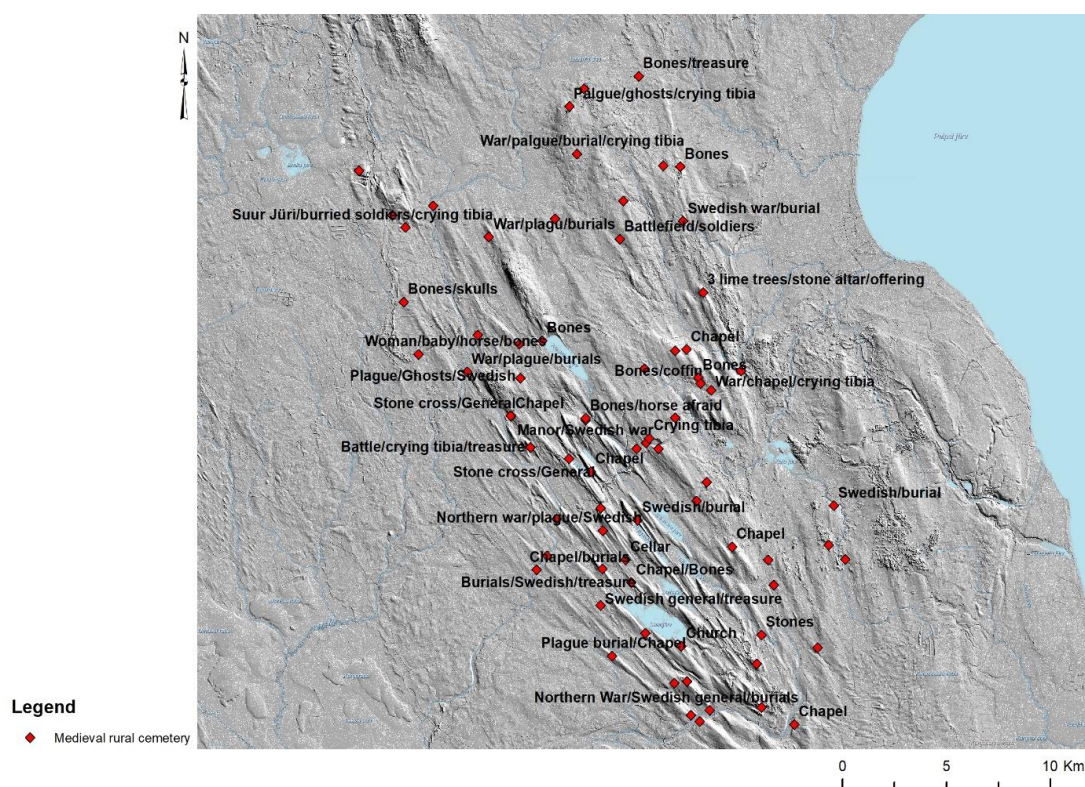


Figure 51. Distribution of different story types related to Medieval rural cemeteries. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

Estonian folk tales (Kreutzwald 1866). The story of the whining shinbone is one of the examples of how a published fairy tale can re-enter the process of local folklore formation.

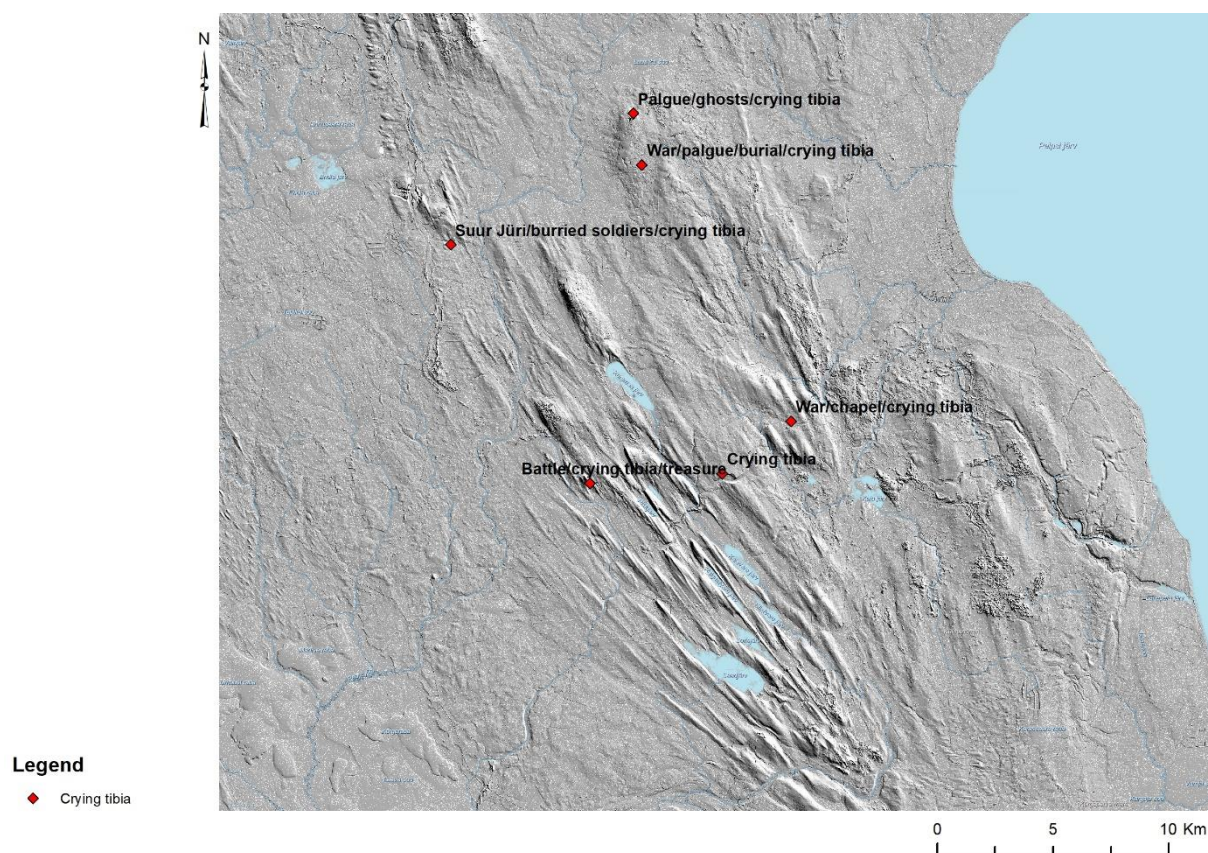


Figure 52. Distribution of the crying tibia story type. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

In short, the story is about a dead body left behind unburied at a battlefield during a war. Because the body has not received a proper Christian burial, it appears as a whining and blood foaming tibia to people who have accidentally stepped off their regular path or lost their way in the darkness. The crying tibia is normally found by a brave young man, who gives the bone a proper burial, and later stumbles upon unexpected treasure (Kalda 2008). The original published story takes place in a valley in a north Estonian village named Aruküla. Yet, the village name of Aruküla is relatively popular, which is one of the reasons why the story type has spread all over Estonia. Both place-related characteristics (valley, toponym) also repeatedly occur in the story versions recorded from Vooremaa (Figure 52).

One version of the story collected in 1896 (Mss 88a (5)) near Kaarepere manor, 30 years after the first publication, goes as follows:

The old stories say that in Kaarepere manor in Aruküla village there is an old battleground, where a shinbone was whining: “Oi, Oi!” Especially on Thursday nights it was crying very loudly, frightening the local people. Then a good and brave

man went to see what happened, but first was scared off and had to run away. Yet, he got braver and proceeded towards the sound. After a while he saw in front of him a white bone with one end raised up high making horrible noise. What did he do now? He grabbed the bone from the ground, squeezed it pretty heavily, and stepped straight forward with the bone in his hand. Soon to his great amazement, in front of him, the man discovered a passage to a cave in which he saw lots of gold and silver coins. Now the bone started to talk, and said: "Look now, this is your reward for saving me, for I have been in prison here for a long time, scaring people". Then the bone was silent again. The man buried the bone in peace and carried the money home. Since then the people of Aruküla were never scared off by the bone anymore. The valley in which the storey took place is situated 1 verst (1,067 km) south from Kassinurme manor.

The story-type of crying or blood foaming tibia occurs in Vooremaa at least in 6 different rural cemeteries, two of which are located in the villages of Aruküla. Five of these cemeteries are associated with war, battles, and dead soldiers. The toponyms used for these places describe valleys, fields, and hills of the dead: *Kalmuvälja* (Grave Field), *Kalmeorg* (Grave Valley), and *Kabelimägi* (Chapel Hill).

The folklore about rural cemeteries can also be a mix of different motifs and story layers. One of the examples from the Leedi village, collected in 1929 (Karu 1929, 12), is as follows:

According to the old folk this is an ancient battlefield and burial ground. Often strange animals and ghosts were seen over there. Once the coachman of the Leedi manor house was passing. Suddenly, a big pig ran to the coach, and grabbed one of the wheels between its teeth. The coachman whipped the horses, and finally, the pig was left behind. This was not an ordinary pig. Besides that, blood foaming bones crying "umbluu" have been seen over there. When the bones were buried, the crying stopped.

7.3.4 Example 1: Vedu rural cemetery

In 1987 Ain Lavi excavated the rural cemetery in Vedu village, Äksi parish. Next to the Vedu village cemetery stands an offering linden, which among local people is known as the Holy Lime tree. About 300 – 500 m south-west from the cemetery, an occupation layer of an Iron Age settlement site has been discovered. The earliest records about the Vedu cemetery

originate from the Äksi parish archaeological description from 1921, when the old housewife of the Riibaku farm discovered human bones during land cultivation around the Holy Lime

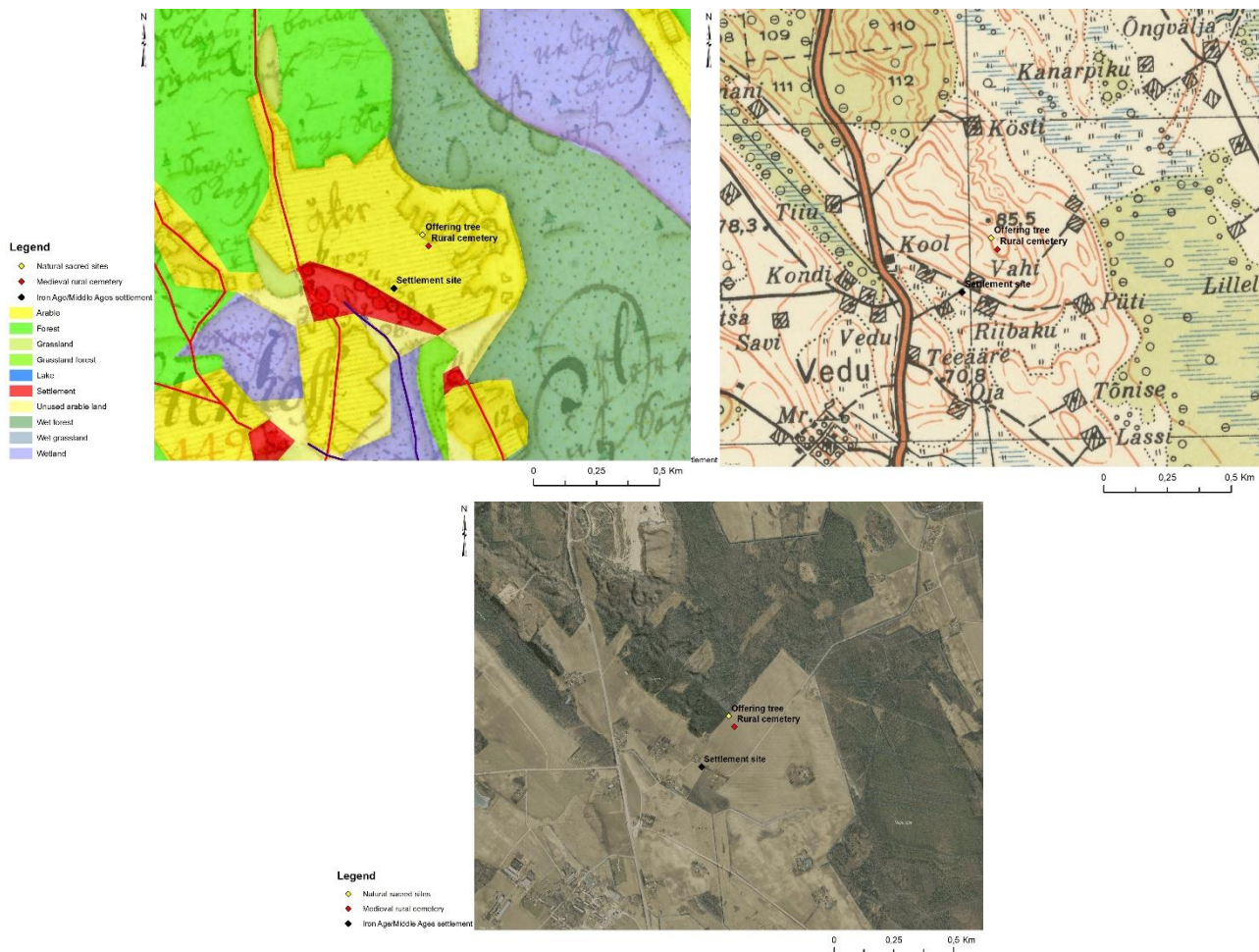


Figure 53. In Vedu village the proportion of the forest area as gradually grown over the past 330 years. Vedu village in 1684, 1930s, and 2010s. EAA 308.2.68, Estonian Land Board.

tree (Jürgens 1921a, 1). In 1984 Ain Lavi double-checked the archival record, and after having found human bones proposed the site for the official archaeological heritage listings. According to the 1921 description the Holy Lime Tree was standing in solitude in the middle of arable fields. Today it is surrounded by thick spruce forest (Figure 53). The excavations in 1987 revealed that the burial ground was multi-layered, containing cremations and inhumations from the Final Iron Age up to the Pre-Modern period. The earliest burials were dated to the 11th AD, the latest to the 18th century AD. The skeletons from 16th – 18th century were buried very closely on top of each other, only 30 – 60 cm below the surface (Lavi 1994).

7.3.5 Example 2: Pupastvere Chapel Mound

At the end of the 19th century some human bones, finger rings and brooches were unearthed from a gravel pit next to the yard gate of Tuisu farm in the village of Pupastvere (Figure 54). Where these finds are located at present is unknown (Jürgens 1921a, 10). The site has never been systematically excavated and investigated, and all the information we have is based on an oral account written down in 1921.

This account on the Pupastvere Chapel Mound reads as follows (ERM 76, 7/9):

There is nothing extraordinary to notice about an ordinary gravel mound with a large extraction pit, where the farmer takes gravel for road pavement. The old people tell that there used to be a chapel. With digging, lots of dead bones and ornaments are found, which point to a former burial place. Because the place is named Chapel Mound, there must have been a chapel at this location. Chapels were built during Christian times, thus the burial place, of course, is not the oldest, but much younger and is a remnant of Christian times. Besides bones of the dead and ornaments nothing has been excavated. No ashes, pottery sherds or burnt bones, which are found from pagan graves, have been detected. The ornaments are generally made of bronze: bracelets, finger rings, brooches, bells, necklace beads. The finger rings are usually spiral-like. Madis Hein, the owner of the farm, gave 3 brooches to the Tartu County Museum. He said that the



Figure 54. During the collectivisation in the 20th century a dairy barn has been built next to a Medieval rural cemetery in Pupastvere village. Photo: Martti Veldi

bones, and ornaments were dug from quite deep, about 2 feet or even deeper. I think this was an old plague grave. The chapel might have been there at the same time with the Muuge (Kärkna) monastery, which lies about 2 versts (2,1 km) further away in the place where the river Amme joins the river Emajõgi.

7.4 Natural sacred sites

Natural sacred places, such as holy groves, offering stones²⁹, offering springs³⁰, and other places of nature-related spiritual practises (for more details: Jonuks 2007; Jonuks 2012; Jonuks 2009a; Kaasik et al. 2007) are the third main type of sites with recordings of collective memory.

According to the prevailing understanding in Estonia (Torp-Kõivupuu 2007, 34) natural sacred sites are areas or single sites in nature, which can be associated with acts of offering, sanctity, healing, praying or other spiritual practises with folkloristic, archaeological, historic or ethnographic evidence earlier than 20th century (Figure 55). A natural sacred site can also be a complex of several single sites, such as trees, springs and/or stones in close vicinity.

Ahto Kaasik, one of the spokespersons of active neopagans in Estonia, has pointed out that natural sacred sites are in fact the oldest nature conservation areas in the world (Kaasik 2016). This notion can be paralleled with Simon Schama's idea of the Yosemite national park as a semi-natural environment, where the visitors can feel themselves safe and sound, but also be in touch with a primal, wild, and mythical landscape (Schama 1996).

All together there is data on 38 (including 19 listed) different natural sacred sites in Vooremaa (Table 24). Conventionally, cup-marked stones without further folkloristic data about ritual

Type of site	Nr
Offering stone	12
Offering spring	11
Offering site	7
Cup-marked stone with folklore	5
Offering tree	2
Hiis forest	1
	38

Table 24. Variety of natural sacred sites in Vooremaa.

²⁹ Natural boulders used as places making offerings to the supernatural, also for healing.

³⁰ Natural springs used primarily for healing purposes, coins and silver for traditionally exchanged for better health.

practices have not been considered as natural sacred sites. Also, sites which could not be located precisely because of the geographical/topographical inaccuracy of folkloristic information, have not been taken into account.

In the search for locating natural sacred sites, toponymics has been widely applied. However, it has to be kept in mind that toponyms and place naming had and still has its own dynamics, which is affected by many aspects. For example, the word “*hiis*” – holy place – was very common for naming new farm properties after the land reform in 1919. Such places might have nothing to do with historic natural sacred sites, but are completely new names inspired by the national-romantic movement (Jonuks et al. 2014, 106).

Because natural sacred sites generally lack archaeologically detectable cultural layers³¹, the most important sources for locating and studying such places are archival records, folklore, and oral histories.

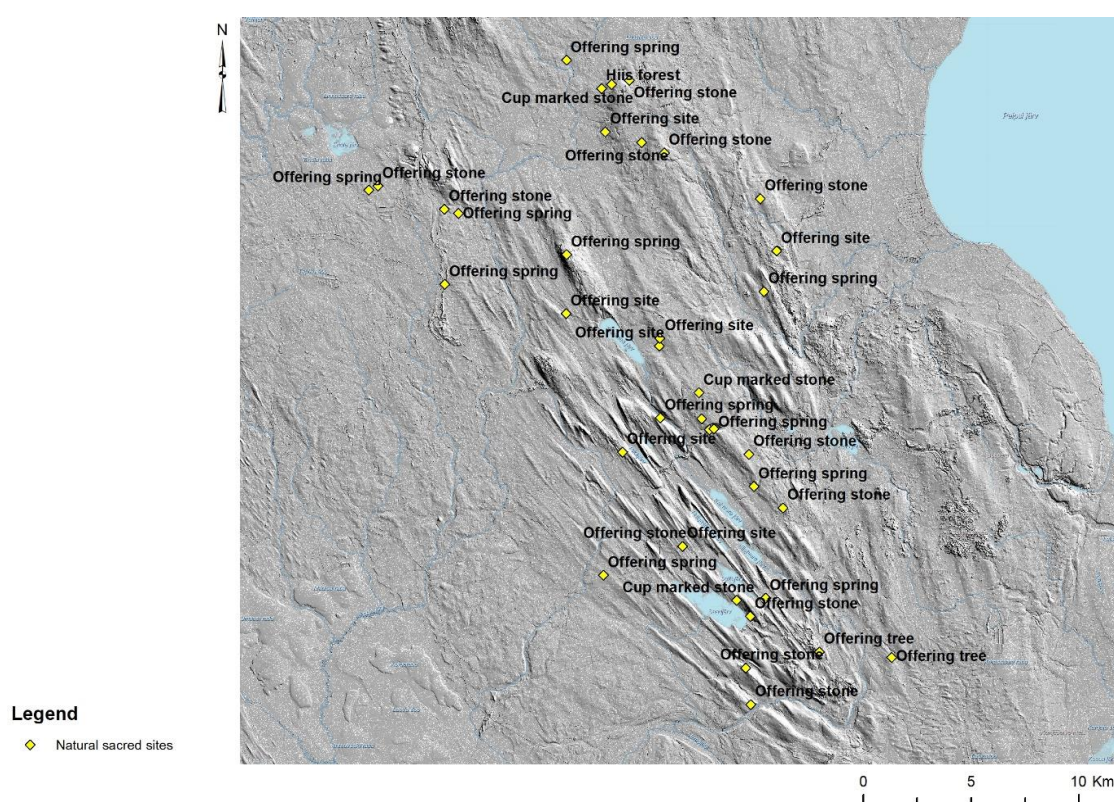


Figure 55. Distribution of natural sacred sites in Vooremaa. LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

³¹ Although coins are common offerings today, in the past most of the gifts were probably of organic matter, such as crops, meat, beer and another foodstuff.



Figure 56. Offering linden in Vedu and offering stone in Saadjärve villages. Photos: Martti Veldi.

Absolute dating of natural sacred sites is very problematic, and oral sources are a very unreliable source for dating as well. Due to the general lack of archaeological observations and finds, the primary sources for dating natural sacred sites are written records of orally transitted information. Oral folklore is strongly influenced by its relatively late collecting time, mostly the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, and also by the *Zeitgeist* of romantic nationalism. This does not mean that the recordings cannot contain earlier elements, but without proper in-depth analyses further assumptions should be avoided (Jonuks et al. 2014, 105).

It has been pointed out (Jonuks et al. 2014, 105–106) that natural sacred sites in Estonia have always been considered without a second thought as “timeless and old”, which automatically makes these sites non-Christian, and thus pre-Christian, originating at least from the 13th century. Most of the sites we know of were probably used as places of prayer and contemplation during the Medieval and (Pre)-Modern times. As said, none of the natural sacred sites of Vooremaa have archaeologically been excavated or systematically investigated. Thus, there are no radiocarbon dates or finds that could provide these types of sites with absolute timeframes.

Nonetheless, Kaasik and Valk have suggested (Torp-Kõivupuu 2007) that natural sacred sites could roughly be dated based on their location in the landscape, especially in connection to other archaeological sites, such as graves, settlements and hillforts. When analysing the position of natural sacred sites in comparison with other archaeological sites in the landscape we can detect an obvious connection between sacred sites, burial places, and settlement sites.

Still, the natural sacred sites tend to be located at a distance from the Iron/Middle Age settlement sites. Out of 38 sacred sites only four are situated closer to a settlement site than 300 m. With the increase of the buffer area, the number of sites of course also rises. Already 10 natural sites are situated closer to a settlement site than 600 m. The number of stone graves and rural cemeteries near natural sacred sites likewise increases with the increase in surface cover of the buffer zone. Even though the connection between settlement sites, burial grounds and sacred sites is obvious, it cannot be considered a reliable bases for (roughly) estimating the age of the natural sacred sites. We have no solid indications that any of the natural sacred sites have been used simultaneously with the burial places. It is much more plausible that the burial places have been the inspirational source for folklore creation, and that the oral tradition has very little to do with the possible practises carried out there in the deep past. In my opinion, therefore, the surrounding archaeological sites cannot be used to “timeframe” the use of the sacred sites.

7.4.1 Soil and elevation of natural sacred sites

In the distribution of natural sacred sites with respect to soil types (Table 26), two types of sites are recognizable – (A) sites that are clearly connected to settlement and arable land,

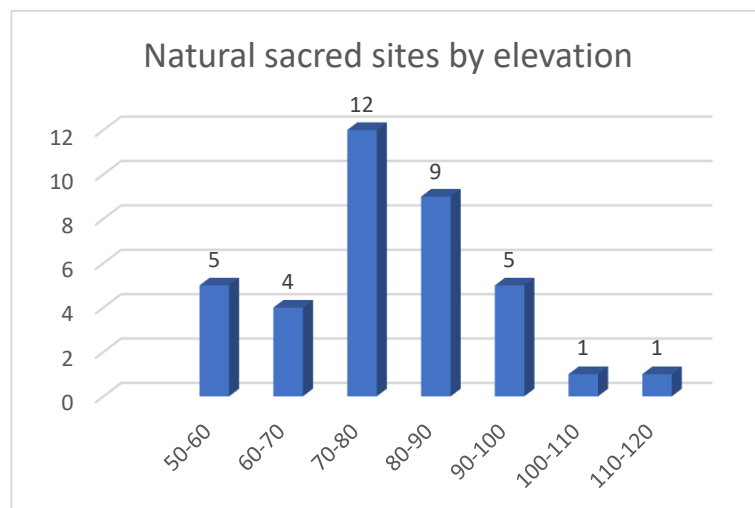


Table 25. Natural sacred sites by elevation.

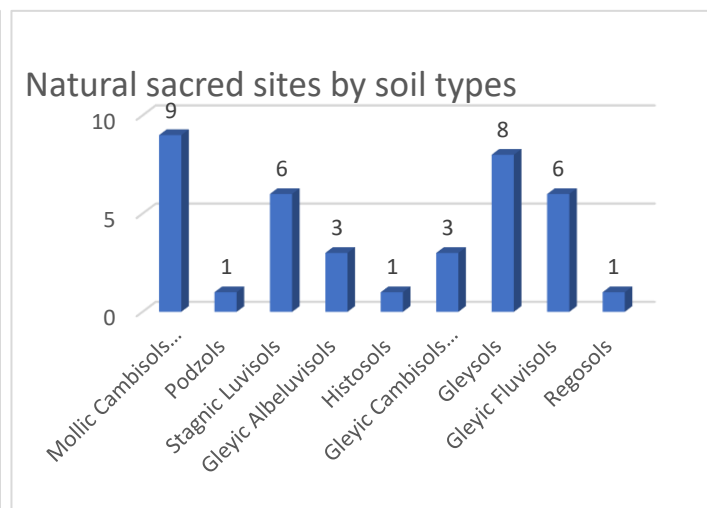


Table 26. Natural sacred sites by soil types.

which are located on fertile soils, such as *mollic cambisols* and *luvisols* (n=9), and *stagnic luvisols* (n=6), and (B) sites that are situated on or near grassland type of soils, such as *gleyic albeluvisols* (n=3), *gleyic cambisols* and *luvisols* (n=3), or in wetter – temporally flooded – areas with *gleysols* (n=8) and *gleyic fluvisols* (n=6). Offering stones are more likely situated near grassland type of soils and offering springs near wetland type of *gleysols* or *gleyic fluvisols*.

The elevation of natural sacred sites roughly corresponds to the overall distribution pattern in landscape elevation (Table 25), and most of the sites are positioned somewhere in the middle between 70 – 90 m asl (n=21). Only two sites are higher than 100 m asl.

In the village of Paduveri there is both an offering spring and an offering stone at the opposing ends of the village, situated 1 km apart in wet forested areas, at some distance from the arable lands. The historic village – with the archaeological settlement – is located on higher ground in between the sacred sites. Also, Iron Age stone graves are located in the

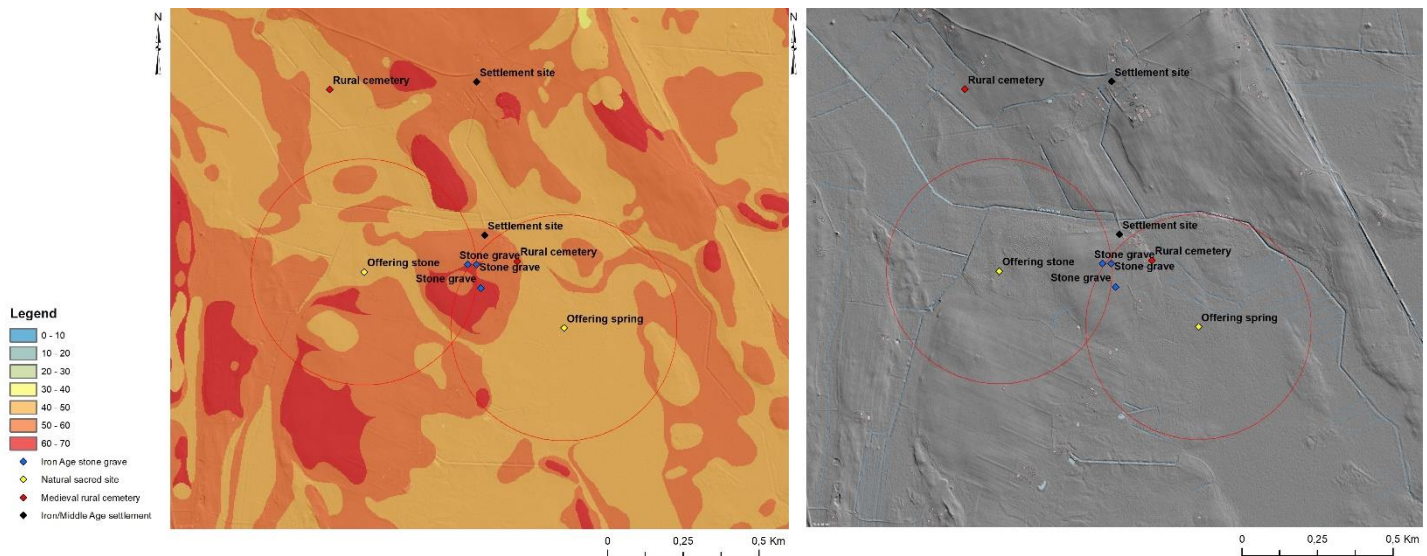


Figure 57. Burial places and natural sacred sites in Paduveri village. The soil and elevation map demonstrate, how the historic settlement and the Medieval cemetery are located on the edge of arable lands, stone graves in the middle, and natural sacred sites on the outskirts of the settled area. Soil and LIDAR map: Estonian Land Board.

middle of the fields, and the Medieval rural cemetery is located on the edge of arable fields and forested area (Figure 57).

7.4.2 Historic land use around natural sacred sites

The land use around natural sacred sites hillfort in the 17th century could be analysed in the case of 22 sites. In total 16 sites are located outside the area represented by the 17th century maps. Land use in 1839, 1935 – 1939, and 2010s could be analysed for all the 38 sites.

In the 17th century landscape only 5 (22.7%) natural sacred sites out of 22 were situated closer to settlements than 150 m (Table 27). When doubling the buffer zone to 300 m, also the number of natural sacred sites doubled to 10. This might indicate that closeness to (former) settlement areas was not a significant factor in the location choice for natural sacred sites. At the same time, at the end of the 17th century, more than 80 % (n=18) of natural sacred sites were located in on near arable fields. Also, the position next to roads (n=14; 63,6%), and

grasslands (n=11; 50%) seemed to have been of high relevance. Interestingly, only four sites (18.5%) were in or near forested areas in the 17th century.

In the 19th century (Table 28) the proportion of natural sacred sites in or near arble land dropped to 44.7 % (n=17). In correspondence with the decrease of arable land, the amount of

Landscape feature	1684	
	22	%
Settlement (1)	5	22,7
Arable land (2)	18	81,8
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	3	13,6
Grassland (4)	11	50,0
Forest (5)	4	18,2
Wetland (6)	0	0,0
Water (7)	4	18,2
Road (8)	14	63,6
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0

Table 27. Historic land use around natural sacred sites in 1684.

bushland or unused arable land around natural sacred sites rose to almost to 40 % (n=15). At the same time, only 5 sites (13.2%) were located in or near forested areas. The proportion of grasslands near natural sacred sites remained exactly on the same level (50%) as at the end of

Landscape feature	1839			
	22	%	38	%
Settlement (1)	8	36,4	12	31,6
Arable land (2)	9	40,9	17	44,7
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	10	45,5	15	39,5
Grassland (4)	12	54,5	19	50,0
Forest (5)	2	9,1	5	13,2
Wetland (6)	2	9,1	3	7,9
Water (7)	5	22,7	6	15,8
Road (8)	7	31,8	12	31,6
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0	0	0,0

Table 28. Historic land use around natural sacred sites in 1839.

the 17th century. Even though, the portion of sacred sites which are situated close to roads fell considerably (31.6%). This change can probably be attributed to differences in cartographic detail between the maps of 1684 and 1839.

At the beginning of the 20th century (Table 29) the proportion of arable land around the natural sacred sites rose even more, and in the 1930s was on the same level as in 1684 with 81.6%. Also, the proportion of settled areas grew considerably in the 1930s, and by that time

more than 50 % of the natural sacred sites were situated near villages or single farms. Again, surprisingly only 3 sites (7.9%) were located in forested areas³². This conveys a notion that natural sacred sites were very much part of the open cultivated cultural landscape. At the start of the 20th century also gravel and sand quarries were established, which meant irreversible impact on the surrounding landscape.

Landscape feature	1930s			
	22	%	38	%
Settlement (1)	14	63,6	20	52,6
Arable land (2)	20	90,9	31	81,6
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	2	9,1	7	18,4
Grassland (4)	12	54,5	21	55,3
Forest (5)	2	9,1	3	7,9
Wetland (6)	3	13,6	5	13,2
Water (7)	3	13,6	4	10,5
Road (8)	15	68,2	26	68,4
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	2	9,1	2	5,3

Table 29. Historic land use around natural sacred sites in the 1930s.

While in the 1930s the landscape was largely cultivated and open, in the second half of the 20th century forest started to take over, and by the 2010s already more than 50 % of the

Landscape feature	2010s			
	22	%	38	%
Settlement (1)	8	36,4	11	28,9
Arable land (2)	17	77,3	29	76,3
Unused arable land/bush land (3)	3	13,6	4	10,5
Grassland (4)	7	31,8	9	23,7
Forest (5)	11	50,0	20	52,6
Wetland (6)	1	4,5	1	2,6
Water (7)	5	22,7	6	15,8
Road (8)	12	54,5	22	57,9
Gravel/Sand quarry (9)	0	0,0	0	0,0

Table 30. Land use around natural sacred sites in the 2010s.

natural sacred sites were located in reforested areas, compared to less than 8 % in the 1930s. The proportion of the forested areas increased mostly at the expense of natural grasslands, which had dropped from 55 % in the 1930s to 23 % in 2010s. Also, the amount of arable land had dropped slightly (76.3 %). The gravel quarries established at the beginning of the 20th century were turned into artificial waterbodies by the end of the century.

³² Traditionally, natural sacred sites have been considered as organic part of forested areas.

7.4.3 Folklore related to natural sacred sites

It was possible to find records of oral histories for 31 natural sacred sites. For 7 sites the only reference to the sanctity of the place is provided by its toponym. The most common story types related to sacred stones (n=12) are about offering coins or food offerings meant to get help against diseases or ask good fortune for crop harvest.

In one specific case even, bird sacrifices were carried out when hail or rain had damaged crops (Erala offering stone; E 54622 (2)). At least two of the offering stones in oral folklore are related to the epic giant Kalevipoeg, who supposedly had used one of the stones with special markings in Kodisma village as a whetstone, and the other one in Saadjärve village as a sling stone. Also, stories about offering coins on the same stones have been recorded.

Several other stones are linked to stories about Kalevipoeg as well, but only two of them are also known as a sacred offering stone.

One of the more complete records about offering practises on a sacred stone, and punishment after misconduct in a holy place, comes from the Pedasi village (ERA II 274, 494/6 (127)):

This was told by my farther, when he was still a child – this was more than hundred years ago – people had a special custom, there was a stone on the field, of course away from the houses. People used to take things, I cannot remember exactly on which Thursday, was it once a year, or more often, but on Thursday, women would go all together and bring offerings onto the stone. Whatever they could get their hands on, whether it was foodstuff, cloth, or wool, it did not matter. This was an offering to god. At that time, two old crooked pine trees used to grow on the field. People did not believe that someone was capable of chopping them down. They were gods, and misfortune would happen to those who would want to harm the trees. But an old man decided to chop those trees down. After that the old man developed a hump. And then the people believed that the old man had done a great sin, which resulted in his hump. This was the belief. My farther told that, and he believed in that. These pine trees were growing at the end of the village green, I do not know in which end. In the same place there was the offering stone.

Besides offering stones, offering springs (11) are the most common type of natural sacred sites to be related with giving and healing. The most common practise was offering silver coins or scraping silver from ornaments into the spring, and in return it was believed that the water of the spring was good for healing, mostly eyes. In the case of one specific offering

spring in Endla village it was thought that the water also helped cattle after wolves had attacked (ERA II 238, 583 (7)).

A special type of natural sacred site is *hiis*, which can be defined as a natural holy place or area in general, very often with holy trees, or with conspicuous/special landscape features, such as hills, valleys or waterbodies. Offering stones and offering springs can also be part of a larger areal *hiis*. In the Vooremaa region there are at least 8 sites that can be addressed as *hiis*. As an impact of the romantic movement, *hiis* was often imagined as a holy grove of oak trees, which was a perfect place for quiet contemplation. Also, in oral tradition, single holy trees are often considered as remains of a larger holy *hiis*-forest, which was cut down during the Christianisation or by “cruel” people, such as Baltic-German landlords:

In the ancient times here was an oak hiis. In the ancient times of freedom, people used to gather here, give offerings and worship the idol that was in the hiis. The idol was later taken to Harju County, away from the enemy, and the hiis was chopped down (Jürgens 1921b, 43).

7.4.4 Example 1: Laiuse Blue spring

Laiuse *Siniallikas* (translation in English: Blue Spring) is situated in the village of Vilina, next to the farmstead also known as Siniallika farm. The place is of great natural interest – very high on the drumlin (138 m asl) there is a bowl-shaped depression with mesotrophic mire (Figure 58). These depressions are also known as kettle holes³³. From several historic maps, we can learn that the kettle holes were signified with specific toponyms and were considered important landscape features. The Blue Spring is situated in the middle of the mire.

Geological coring has demonstrated that 12 – 13 m below the Blue spring kettle hole is a impermeable layer of clay where the water stagnates. As a result, the depression has been overgrowing with peat. This process is still going on. The toponym Blue Spring is also directly related to the clay layer, which gives the water a bluish-grey reflection. Similar toponyms have been attributed to several other offering springs in Estonia.

³³ A kettle (kettle hole, pothole) is a shallow, sediment-filled body of water formed by retreating glaciers or draining floodwaters.



Figure 58. Laiuse Blue Spring is located in the middle of mesotrophic mire.

The Laiuse Blue Spring is very well recorded in oral folk tradition, which was published already in 1882 by M. J. Eisen (Eisen 1882; Eisen 2002). People believed that the spring helped both against drought and excessive rainfall. The water was believed to heal eyes, face, and skin, including pimples, freckles, smallpox, and measles.

The account recorded by Eisen is as follows (Eisen 1882; Eisen 2002):

In the old times, this spring was very famous in the surrounding lands, for people believed it could send rain and drought, and by this ruin or bless the grain/crops. When it caused drought, three widows by the same name had to clean and dig it open during sermon. Each of them had to carry a spade, a rake, a hook, a loaf of bread, and a church hymnbook. When it was raining too heavily, the spring was filled up, and it helped right a way. Once three widows named Anne opened up the spring too much, extensive rain followed. The women were in great distress, because everybody wanted to punish them for that. At a second occasion three women from far away came to clean the spring, but when they had only reached the Sootaga tavern, the people already were leaving the church, and their journey was in vain.

They also tell, that three widowers of the same name could clean the spring. Once they tried, but arrived too early before the sermon, and decided to pass time at the Sootaga tavern, where they drank too much and forgot about the sermon.

Once people wanted to measure how deep the spring is. For this they tied several ropes together, attached a stone to one end and sank it off in the spring. When they pulled the rope out, the stone was missing. Then they used a pot filled with stones, but when they pulled the pot out, they were frightened to see a ram's bleeding head

harvest. If this story has any pre-Christian stratum, it will be very difficult to detect. It is much more plausible that the ritual is originally connected to the cult of St Anne (also known as St Anna), who was the mother of Mary, grandmother of Jesus but also a widow. The cult of St Anne was widely spread in medieval Livonia, and she was the patron saint of women, miners, and the main protector from storms. St Anna's day is celebrated on 26th of July.

7.4.5 Example 2: Õvanurme *hiis*-site

Between the villages of Raigastvere and Õvanurme lies a small sandy hillock (Figure 60), which according to the local oral tradition has been regarded as ancient holy offering hill, also called *Hiimägi* (*Hiis*-hill) and *Hiisaare* (*Hiis*-island). It is a complex site, comprising of three different monuments: an offering hill, an ancient burial ground, and an offering stone. Similar to the Vedu rural cemetery and Holy Lime tree, the offering place in Õvanurme is adjacent to medieval rural cemetery. The discovery of bones and artefacts is most probably the cause of the rich folklore and stories – related to offerings – that have been attributed to



Figure 60. Õvanurme natural sacred place has been recorded on the cadastral map of 1930s. 1930s cadastral map: Estonian Land Board.

the site.

The discovery of Õvanurme medieval cemetery – according to the account recorded in 1921 – happened as follows (Jürgens 1921b, 4–5):

About 10 years ago (1911) the farmer Mihkel Ponna, while digging for sand, found 6 skeletons, that according to Karl Aaslava were buried in the following order: ===. The dead were buried on their sides, with their heads pointing towards the South. One

of them had a bronze brooch on its breast, which is now in the possession of Mihkel Ponna, who promised to give it to me, but this has not happened yet. At a short distance from these 6 skeletons was a smaller one, which the locals thought to belong to a child. The skeletons were reburied at the bottom of the sand pit.

7.5 Conclusion

It is complicated, but also biased to apply the datings of the surrounding archaeological sites to the natural sacred sites, because we have no factual evidence that these sites were used simultaneously at all. The creation of the folklore of the sacred sites most probably results from contemporary interpretations of (fragmented) bones from the stone graves and Medieval cemeteries. Stories about offerings or chapels related to the stone graves more likely derive from the quadrangular appearance of the *tarand*-type graves, which resemble a stone foundation. Some of the stones with a flat surface might also have looked like a possible altar for sacrifice. Again, the imagination of pre-Christian sacrificial practices are projected to the past through a Lutheran prism.

Keeping this in mind, it is most probable that the sanctity of natural sacred sites was attributed to the places with the introduction of the Romantic Movement in Estonia in the second half of the 19th century. Continued use of these sites as places of religious practise from the pre-Christian period up to the present day must be considered highly unlikely. Alternatively, natural sacred sites could be the “product” of synchronic processes mixing the life stories of Catholic saints with Romantic nature worship, which resulted in unique rural folk Catholicism more similar to paganism than Christianity in the eyes of local Lutheran priests.

Laiuse Blue Spring is a very good example of how – without deeper knowledge – saint-related Catholic devotion could be misinterpreted as a pagan ritual. The connection between Estonian natural sacred sites and Catholic saints is still very much an uncharted territory and has great potential in explaining the meaning of similar sites. It would be shortsighted to assume automatically that all natural sacred sites are pagan in their origin. On the basis of current evidence, the oral history of natural holy places cannot be traced back further than the 19th century, when Estonia was already very clearly a Lutheran country. Catholic influences in place-related stories could date from before the 16th century, and pre-Christian elements – if any – from before the 13th century.

The Estonian local feasting traditions and the “rural folk calendar” are mainly based on the life histories of Catholic saints, but in some cases the transformations from Catholic traditions into local folk customs have been so profound that traditions are considered pre-Christian and consequently pagan in origin. Thus, the most basic question is: where do those transformations and influences come from? Are they “just” the outcomes of complex religious syncretistic development, and the origins and absolute time depth of different stories are impossible to conceptualize? The results of this research tend towards such a more “relativistic” explanation. In line with this, it would be reasonable to deal with natural sacred sites as complex and layered phenomena. The virtue of landscape is to present old and new meanings at the same time, creating a synthesis of collective social memory as a dynamic palimpsest.