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RITUAL WEALTH DEPOSITS IN ESTONIAN MIDDLE IRON AGE MATERIAL

The article discusses problems concerning the ways of defining and distinguishing ritual wealth deposits in archaeological material. Some characteristics of ritually interpreted wealth deposits are stated and a contextual approach to the problem is presented via the example of Estonian Middle Iron Age material. The main aim of the discussion is to show that the definition of ritual as well as the set of ritualizing contexts are closely related to specific research and its questions, and through that also to the researcher him-/herself. The multifaceted character of ritual is explained and therefore it is argued that it is necessary to talk about ritual through its variable characteristics specified in the framework of a specific study. As an example, a list of contextual criteria for distinguishing ritual wealth deposits in Estonian Middle Iron Age material is presented.

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Introduction

I have always been interested in the ways that religion and ritual are decoded in the archaeological material, especially in case of prehistoric archaeology, which usually does not provide us with any written material about past religious ideas and activities. This is why I decided to look at Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits in my MA thesis (Oras 2009). Wealth deposits and hoards are an intriguing set of material in relation to the discussion of interpretation of past ritual activity, because in contrast to burials or specific religious sites (e.g. temples, churches, and groves) wealth deposits seem to be a good example of material located on the edge of religion and profane or everyday life related activities. This paper is a work in progress towards the discussion of why archaeologists see religious ritual in some deposits and not in others. At this point I will distance myself from discussion about the relations and distinctions between profane and religious rituals, preferring to concentrate on rituals defined through religion. Such limits are connected to the main problem setting of my research at the moment and are necessary to focus my analysis. So my main problem at the moment is

the question: what defines a ritual and how can archaeologists argue for or against that kind of interpretation when studying wealth deposits?

First I will define my terms. When talking about a wealth deposit I refer to one or more object(s) of value that *is/are* hidden deliberately. Using the word “ritual” I have in mind an aspect of agency in religion in the widest sense, which includes two important components – practice and underlying mental concepts.

The question of interpreting prehistoric wealth deposits and the reasons for hiding them has been discussed (at least to some extent) in most Estonian archaeologists’ writings on the topic, which give examples of general treatments and specific, problem based studies. In numerous cases the interpretative potential of ritual wealth deposits has also been pointed out (e.g. Tõnisson 1962, 238; Tamla 1977; Jaanits et al. 1982, 289; Tamla 1985; 1995; Kiudsoo 2005, 139; Tamla & Kiudsoo 2005, 2; Jonuks 2009). Of course the topic has been even more widely discussed by various European scholars as well (e.g. Bradley 1982; Levy 1982; Hines 1989; Bradley 1990; Hedeager 1992; 1999; Fontijn 2002) not to mention the famous Scandinavian weapon finds (see e.g. Hagberg 1967; Ørsens 1988; Fabech 1991; Randsborg 1995; Ilkjær 2002; Jørgensen et al. 2003). However, most of these studies, especially the Estonian ones, tend to be limited by the notion that at least some of the wealth deposits can be interpreted via prehistoric religious and ritual activities. Mostly they provide remarkable examples outstanding from the general archaeological material due to some specific characteristics.

The confusing and perhaps also surprising aspect is that the identification and interpretation of ritually interpreted deposits seems to vary according to scholars, problems posed and periods under discussion. As Tõnno Jonuks (2009, 254) has pointed out, there seem to be no universally agreed characteristics of ritual deposits – the material is so variable that only some very general tendencies might be agreed. Therefore, there is actually a need for a broader discussion of how ritual deposits in general are methodologically distinguished in the archaeological material and treated in a theoretical framework of ritual in archaeology. These deposits offer a good opportunity to pinpoint some broad characteristics which help to argue for ritual wealth deposits in the archaeological material in the widest sense, i.e. not leaving us on the level of extraordinary single examples.

Some reflections on ritual in archaeology

The first issue to discuss is the overall question of what ritual is. This is the starting point before we can begin to look for ritual in wealth deposits. It becomes obvious when starting to read into this topic that ideas and definitions of ritual and its characteristics turn out to be quite variable, sometimes even controversial.

First, the problem is that there are difficulties in defining a ritual. The concept turns out to be multifaceted, there cannot be any universal criteria and the definition varies with individual scholars and problems (e.g. Bell 1992, 69; Jonuks 2005, 52). For instance, it can be regarded as a sum of formal, traditional and unchangeable

acts, something stable at the very moment of happening but still not absolutely coded by participants at the same time (Rappaport 1999, 24). On the other hand, it is characterized as something developing and changing (always transformed, reinterpreted, recreated) customized according to cultural and societal needs and therefore should definitely be interpreted in its contexts (Bell 1997, 82 f.). Ritual can be associated closely with both profane and sacral aspects of life (Rappaport 1999, 25 f.; Bradley 2003, 12; Insoll 2004b, 2 f.). In different specialists' studies it has even been stressed that by no means can ritual be related to religion only (Insoll 2004b, 2 f.), and due to its ambient entity it sometimes cannot or perhaps should not be clearly isolated from the profane life (Brück 1999, 316 ff.; Bradley 2003, 11; Insoll 2004a; Bradley 2005; Berggren 2006, 303). All in all, it seems to be a very broad concept which actually can be related to nearly every aspect of life. So the question is: what are we actually dealing with, when agreeing – according to the previously presented train of thought – that somehow it can be nearly everything almost everywhere and every time, but still predictably and reflexively something specific at the same time?

What all these definitions and ideas seem to have in common is that ritual is created through actions. Ritual is mostly and first of all characterized as practice related to an agent and specific activity (Bourdieu 1977, 114; Barrett 1996, 396; Bell 1997, 73; Rappaport 1999, 26, 405; Bradley 2003, 12; Insoll 2004a, 77 ff.). But how can one establish agency and actions happening centuries ago? In broad terms this must be on the basis of the material traces left during past actions that have survived to the present day. Due to temporal distance ritual activity in archaeology is a sum of material characteristics. There is no participant or agent to go and ask for the explanation of what they are doing and why. We only have material traces of it. However, it must be mentioned that we do have analogies from the anthropological and ethnographic material and these are definitely useful parallels when looking at ritual (and ritual wealth deposits) in the archaeological record.

But to make things even more complicated, ritual is not only characterized through material aspects. Ritual cannot only be based on material traces, as there are always mental ideas behind a ritual (Jonuks 2005, 51). There are numerous cultural, societal and other mental non-measurable and invisible aspects influencing ritual action (e.g. reasons behind the ritual, its purposes, when exactly, by whom and how actions are undertaken) (e.g. Bell 1992; 1997, 82 f.; Rappaport 1999, 138; Bradley 2003; Jonuks 2005, 49). These influential backgrounds are often much more vaguely represented by material means. They are rather in participants' minds influencing their activities (e.g. reasons and ideas when, how and why rituals take place). In archaeology we mostly rely on material data, but what we can do is to derive ideas and interpretations of past immaterial concepts through this data.

One important point that numerous previous scholars stress, which can be read between the lines in this paper, is that it is crucial to look at ritual in its context. Contexts are a means of decoding a ritual, helping hands in understanding and analyzing it (Bell 1997, 82 f., 171, 266 f.; Brück 1999, 332; Insoll

2004a, 12; Insoll 2004b, 3). And in case of ritual study, these contexts can be both empirical and measurable characteristics but they also involve more mental, social and cultural features. Catherine Bell (1992, 74) actually prefers to use the term “ritualization” or “ritualizing contexts” meaning

...the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions.

Therefore, bringing the concept of context into studying wealth deposits, contexts can be handled as the mediums ritualizing the depositional act through making distinctions (Renfrew 1994, 49 ff.) between different actions – they are what actually turn the deposition into ritual for an archaeologist’s eye. What is more, as Catherine Bell puts it, it is possible to identify three more or less universal components of every ritual i.e. formality, fixity and repetition (1992, 91 f.). So if these aspects can be seen, they are an extra argument for ritual interpretation.

Bringing those ideas into the discussion of decoding ritual wealth deposits in archaeology there are certain characteristics to be considered. First and foremost – the context of the wealth deposit. One conclusion that I have come to in my research so far, is that it is quite difficult to see ritual (in my case ritual deposits) *per se*. The idea of ritual deposits is achieved through looking at their various different contexts. In the case of prehistoric archaeology, these contexts are of course first and foremost material ones. Sites and artefacts, features and assemblages are the first level contexts which make it possible to recognize probable ritual in depositional acts.

As ritual does not include only material contexts, mental contexts must be considered as well. These are of course vaguer in the sense that our knowledge of past cultures, their developments and ideas (including for instance religion, ideology, economy, social relations, etc.) are based on the studies of material culture too. However, every period and area seems to have some certain sets of well argued mental characteristics (even if these are as broad as ancestor cult or hunter-gatherers). So in archaeology, these mental contexts that characterize the notion of ritual are mostly more general assumptions about past cultures based on our previous knowledge (interpretations) of cultural tendencies and characteristics. All in all, these various contexts and the analysis of them help to see whether a specific depositional act has been distinguished from others (from the ordinary activities) i.e. whether some acts should be interpreted as ritual ones. Therefore, the contexts on one side (as material archaeological data) and our previous knowledge on the other (as interpretation of different mental, historical and cultural contexts in time being) might lead us to look for – and persuade us to see – ritualizing contexts for wealth deposits hinting at a ritual that took place centuries ago.

Having these main characteristics of ritual’s constituents in mind I would like to try to define the concept of a ritual wealth deposit. I regard a ritual wealth deposit to be the result of an act of depositing an artefact or a set of artefacts in certain manner and into certain places (material contexts) that have public (or personal) acceptance as suitable for communication at both communal and religious level (immaterial or mental contexts). It needs to be added, that in this

case I see ritual as means of communication at both levels and foremost in between them, not at one level alone. The societal level comes from public acceptance and traditions and personal acceptance ought to be based on the public one, the religious level is what turns an act into a ritual (see the definition of ritual above). Specifications (certainties) of material contexts, i.e. what, how and where the items are hidden are the ones distinguishing ritual deposits from the others (Renfrew 1994). If one happens to distinguish a kind of formality, fixity and repetition, as pointed out by Catherine Bell (1992, 91 f.), in the contexts of different deposits, it shows that there must be some more universal and widely accepted cultural and mental ideas and backgrounds behind the depositional act. This is as an extra argument for interpreting deposit as a ritual or ritualized, as in its essence ritual ought to obey these characteristics.

Theoretical background: contextual archaeology

Before moving on to the specific case study of Estonian Middle Iron Age material of wealth deposits, I will make some points about contextual archaeology, because the notion of contexts has a central point in my research and in this paper. Contextualizing archaeological data according to a specific problem is quite widely spread in archaeology. To some extent all archaeologists start their studies with this, however the question is to what extent and how consciously this process is undertaken.

In post-processual archaeology the contextual approach is regarded as one specific methodology among the others. Ian Hodder (1986, 120, 139) explains the term “context” as a way to network and associate objects in different situations, though in a more narrow manner as a sum of various elements that have a meaning for an object. As in ritual studies, archaeologists acknowledge the diverse entity of a context(s), i.e. the relationships where objects are situated are not fixed and limited but rather heterogeneous and expansive. Not only must one deal with the empirical data of an object but also with its broader mental contexts. It is argued in a number of studies that besides the empirical archaeological context the context of past cultural and historical background cannot be excluded from the process of interpretation (e.g. Hodder 1986, 121 ff., 171; Patrik 2000, 124; Thomas 2000, 9; Bradley 2002, 10).

What is more, these contexts are not only applied to objects (archaeological artefacts) but are also intrinsic to a subject, a researcher (e.g. Wylie 1993, 24; Hodder 1999, 49 f.; Johnsen & Olsen 2000, 117; Tilley 2000, 425; Jones 2002, 6, 18; Trigger 2006, 456 ff. and the literature cited there in). Just as the contexts of an artefact define its interpretation, the context of the researchers affects the latter also. The influences start from the problems posed, hypothesis and data selection, theoretical background, where a scholar comes from, influence of a supervisor and technical gadgetry used for the analyses, etc., etc. It is important to acknowledge how these and many more aspects of a research process derive from the scholar

and his/her preferences, possibilities, previous knowledge, and numerous other invisible circumstances. As has been stressed in various previous discussions there is a certain amount of subjectivity encoded in every research (e.g. Preucel & Hodder 1996, 307; Leone 2005, 61 ff.; Tilley 2005; Trigger 2006, 484) – personal human background but also a broader scientific landscape subjective influences stand behind every study, influencing the final outcome. These are all relevant when trying to understand how a researcher is inescapably influenced by his/her own contexts and how this biases the results of research.

It should now become perceptible that the contextual approach includes a hermeneutic element in one way or another (see Shanks & Hodder 1998, 82; Hodder 1999). There seems to be a continuous dialogue between the researcher and his/her contexts and between the archaeological material and its contexts. For instance, understanding of a single object comes from its more general (archaeological) background (e.g. where, with what, close to what, etc. it was found). The latter, on the other hand, is influenced by the previous knowledge of cultural and historical aspects of a specific period and/or region. None of it can be seen as independent from previous research, influencing theories and methods providing this knowledge. And what is more, they are all in a way filtered by the mind, knowledge and skills of a single researcher, his or her background.

Robert W. Preucel and Ian Hodder (1996, 307) have proposed an approach to the process of research which takes account of the different contexts of the archaeological data and a researcher. Namely, an archaeologist should take the whole, a theoretical scheme, as the basis of research and interpretation, thereafter start to test individual parts (the data) against it, trying to coordinate and reconcile the whole and the parts. When a contradiction occurs, the whole as theory needs to be improved, critically evaluated and controlled by/against the data again and again and again. Of course there is a problem included, i.e. the evaluation of facts and theory, which is inevitably defined by researcher him-/herself, but I cannot see any other possibility of performing an archaeological study.

The latter is what I will do in the next section. Following this theoretical discussion of what constitutes a ritual in material record and how to define and trace it when studying wealth deposits; I would like to test these ideas on specific empirical data. At the same time I acknowledge that analyses start above all in the head of a researcher. The patterns he or she has in mind are based on previous knowledge, as well as on the knowledge gained in the research process (e.g. reading previous Estonian and European studies of ritual wealth deposits that I mentioned in the introduction). Theory and data are as a thread interlaced with different fibres: contexts of a material and a researcher.

Contextualising Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits

Estonian Middle Iron Age (AD 450–800) wealth deposits' material is remarkable, providing examples of different artefacts (from weapons to jewellery) found in various conditions (from bogs to dry land) and cultural landscapes

(from natural objects to the close vicinity of settled areas). As there has been no detailed research on the wealth deposits from this period, the main focus of my thesis was analogues and biases, spatial and temporal tendencies in the material. The second aim was to try to interpret the material and discuss whether ritual interpretation might come into question and why.

According to the theoretical framework discussed above in which it was determined that context turns an act into a ritual, a contextual approach was used for gathering and systematizing information about the 24 depositions known so far.¹ Unlike most of the previous research that has mainly concentrated on one to four individual cases, I intended to analyze the material as a whole. This involved pointing out contextual similarities and links between different depositions, and relating them to – as well as interpreting them on – the background of general Estonian Middle Iron Age archaeological material. This meant trying to see if these deposits are distinguished from the ordinary material, looking for the aspects of repetition and fixity and interpreting them through past mental concepts.

According to the contextual archaeology framework, the first task was to work out the most informative contexts in order to solve the stated questions. These were, of course, subjective choices based on some trial-error experiences and theoretical discussions, but nevertheless indispensable starting points. The important aspect was to explain and argue for some and against the others. So, various contextual aspects were taken into account in order to establish possible distinguishing characteristics of the deposits' contexts:

1. deposition forming artefacts – to find some specific common choices of artefacts hinting at distinctive and therefore probable ritual activity behind their deposit;
2. depositional conditions – to see specific common choices of deposition conditions and artefact placement hinting at distinctive and therefore probable ritual activity behind their deposit;
3. location in the cultural landscape – to see the usage of landscape and the choice of deposition location in the broader scale of settlement's border and activity areas, in connection with other probable ritual activity areas (e.g. burial grounds) hinting at specific interconnected structures in the placement of deposition;
4. chronology and general geographical distribution – to sort out closer and comparable depositions in spatial and temporal terms (i.e. presumably similarities in cultural/historical contexts).

I began by making a detailed contextual record of every single deposit. It became apparent that there actually are some clear distinctions among the material. Specific depositional choices of artefacts, depositional environment and their location in cultural landscape also matching in spatial and temporal terms became clear (see Fig. 1 and Table 1). It became obvious that these deposits with extraordinary artefacts, places of concealment and close dating, as well as geographical locations

¹ Four of them lack some important contextual data and unfortunately could not be included in the final analysis.

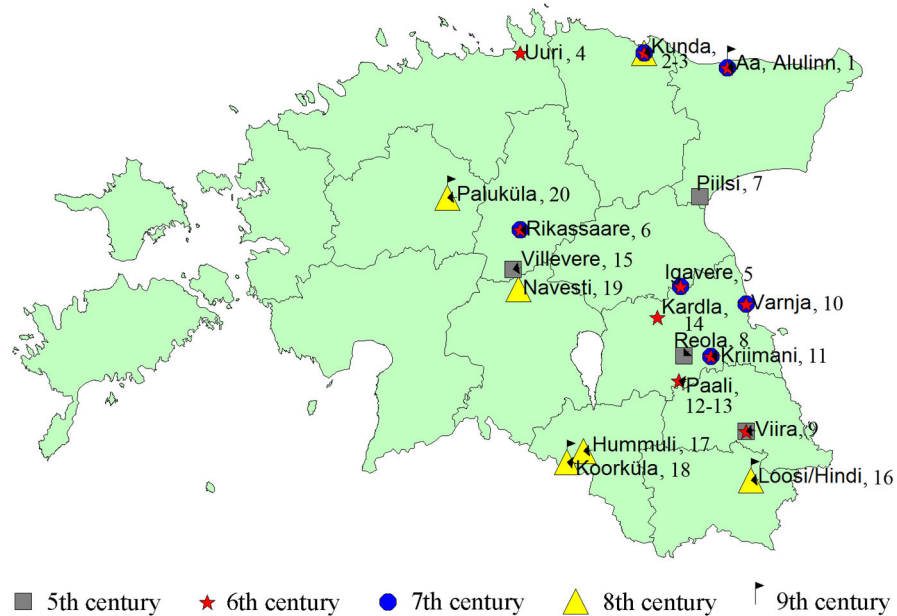


Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits.

are not just single examples of their kind, but they were rather groups of deposits with similar contextual characteristics. The latter shows that there must have been some socially accepted and widely practiced rituals behind them.

I was able to point out some patterns of certain spatially and temporally varying depositional (i.e. contextual) choices in 18 cases. These also formed comparable groups close both in geographical and datable terms (see Figs 1, 2). Not satisfied with descriptive results, I also tried to explain these ritually interpreted deposits (their premises, reasons, expected results and directedness) through past mental and cultural contexts. The latter was mainly done through the Estonian local specifics in archaeological record – so-called regional variations – combining the knowledge we have about the cultural, historical, economic, religious and social concepts in different parts of Estonia at different times. The latter include for instance regional differences in burial traditions (e.g. sand barrows in south-east Estonia, stone graves in north Estonia), land use systems (fossil fields in west and north Estonia), contact routes, settlements and fortifications, but also differences in physical landscape which dictate some of these cultural variations to some extent. I cannot and do not want to deny that the final interpretations of these groups are influenced by my previous knowledge, pre-assumptions and state of research. The final results formed six main groups² (for further discussion and reading see Oras 2009):

² Two deposits i.e. Uuri (no. 4) and Paluküla (no. 20) remain exceptional with their extraordinary characteristics not comparable to any other deposit group.

1. East-Estonian ornament finds from natural sites (dating 5th – 2nd half of 6th century): **Piilsi, Reola, Viira** (nos 7–9) (see also e.g. Moora 1935; 1962; Jaanits et al. 1982, 281; Aun 1992, 138 ff.). These are located inside remarkable natural objects (which can be seen as natural border areas) relating to some water body and remote from settlement areas. They consist of bronze ornaments, mainly rings. Relating these finds to some of the similar though earlier Scandinavian deposits e.g. Smederup, Falling, Sattrup, Lyngå, Sal and Käringsjön (e.g. Randsborg 1995, 87 ff. and the literature cited therein; Carlie 1998), it might be possible to talk about probable fertility cult in these three cases.
2. Central-Estonian southern part ornament sets from burial areas (dating 2nd half of 5th – 1st half of 6th century): **Kardla, Paali I & II, Villevere** (nos 12–15) (see also e.g. Hausmann 1914; Moora 1925; Schmiedehelm 1934; Jaanits et al. 1982, 286 f.). They are found close or next to burial areas close to settlement sites and formed by sets of mainly silver but also bronze ornaments (neck rings, bracelets, brooches, etc.). These finds have been mentioned as grave hoards related to some ritual activity other than burial (e.g. Schmiedehelm 1934; Jaanits et al. 1982, 289; Tamla & Kiudsoo 2005, 20, 24). According to the cultural landscape there are some hints of elite power relations and symbolic ritual consumption of valuables in the context of power relations.
3. Central-Estonian watery condition weapon finds (dating 6th – 7th century): **Igavere, Rikassaare** (nos 5–6) (see also e.g. Mandel & Tamla 1977; Jaanits et al. 1982, 283 f.; Tamla 1995). These two are found close to watery conditions and both findspots are at some distance from archaeological sites although from around 3 km there is a distribution of archaeological sites. Depositions consist of weaponry, some parts of tools can be seen as well. The interpretation cannot overlook the possibility of conflict situations and wealth accumulation in these areas. Therefore the interpretation as war sacrifices or offerings, war treaty in border zones to smith offerings might come into question (Mandel & Tamla 1977; Tamla 1977; 1995).
4. East-Estonian grave-related(?) silver vessels hoards (dating 6th – 7th century): **Kriimani, Varnja** (nos 10–11) (see also e.g. Jaanits et al. 1982, 287; Aun 1992, 142 f.). In most recent research the production of the vessels has been dated to the end of the 5th century (see Quast & Tamla 2010). However the hiding must have taken place in the following centuries (Quast & Tamla 2010). These are exceptional finds and in one case the previous grave as hiding site is evident. The vessels are of Byzantine origin and in a broader background the context of decay can be connected to the important bigger waterways (Lake Peipsi and River Emajõgi). This suggests that the Eastern road (*Austrvegr*) to East and South was in active use already in the Pre-Viking Age. These two vessel finds might be regarded as an introduction to the following period. The interpretation of hiding reasons remains unclear due to the exceptionality of these depositions, though in one case the fact that the vessel was found from the possible earlier *tarand* grave might refer to probable ritual activity.

Table 1. Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits

No.	Deposit	Artefacts	Environment	Cultural landscape	Dating	Geographical location	Reference
1	Alulinn	Weapons + tools	Bog/wetland	Natural border	1–13 cc. NE Estonia	AI 1103: 1–24; 1156: 1–12; 1983: 1–35; 2794: 6–22; AM 98: 1–18	
2	Kunda I	Weapons + tools	Bog/wetland	Natural border + Settlement border	1–7 cc. NE Estonia	AI 1858: 1–16; 1884–1890	
3	Kunda II	Ornaments	Bog/wetland	Natural border + Settlement border	7–8 cc. NE Estonia	AM 88: 112–115	
4	Uuri	Ornaments	Bog/wetland	Settlement border	6 c. N Estonia	AM A 287: 1–5	
5	Igavere	Weapons + tools	Bog/wetland	Settlement border	6–7 cc. E Estonia	AI 2712: 45–49	
6	Rikassaare	Weapons	Water	Natural border	6–7 cc. Central Estonia	AI 4484: 1–16	
7	Pihlsi	Ornaments	Water	Natural border	5–6 cc. E Estonia	AI 2719: 1–39	
8	Reola	Ornaments	Bog/wetland	Natural border	5–6 cc. SE Estonia	AI 4102: 1–11	
9	Viira	Ornaments	Dry land?	Undefined	5–6 cc. SE Estonia	AI 1529: 1–4	
10	Varnja	Vessel	Burial area?	Undefined	6–7 cc. SE Estonia	National History Museum of Latvia, DM I 1365	
11	Kriimani	Vessel	Burial area?	Natural border + Settlement border	6–7 cc. SE Estonia	AI 1270	
12	Paali I	Ornaments	Burial area	Settlement	6 c. SE Estonia	AI 3235: 90–92	
13	Paali II	Ornaments	Burial area	Settlement	6 c. SE Estonia	AI 3235: 235–244	
14	Kardia	Ornaments	Burial area	Natural border + Settlement	6 c. SE Estonia	AI 2415	
15	Villevere	Ornaments	Burial area	Settlement?	5 c. Central Estonia	AI 2489	
16	Loosi	Ornaments	Bog/wetland	Natural border + Settlement border	8–9 cc. SE Estonia	AI 712: 1–3	
17	Hummuli	Ornaments	Dry land?	Undefined	8 c. SE Estonia	AI 2019	
18	Koorküla	Weapons + tools	Water	Natural border	8–9 cc. SE Estonia	AI 1569–1571; AI 2712: 11 (Valga Museum)	
19	Navesti	Ornaments	Bog/wetland	Settlement border	8 c. Central Estonia	AI 3842	
20	Paluküla	Weapons + tools + ornaments	Bog/wetland	Natural border	8–9 cc. Central Estonia	AI 2483: 1–61; 2499: 1–9; 6512	



Fig. 2. Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits.³

³ No. 11 is a photo of Kriimani silver vessel from the photo archives of the Institute of History, Tallinn University (AI FK 6422: 1). All the other photos are taken by the author. For collection references see Table 1.

5. South-Estonian watery condition neck rings including the exceptional Koorküla find (dating 8th – 9th century): **Hummuli, Loosi, Navesti + Koorküla at Valgjärv** (nos 16–19) (see also e.g. Tamla 1977; Jaanits et al. 1982, 287; Kiudsoo 2005, 142). As is obvious from the group name these finds consist of silver neck rings only, most of them found in marshy areas. The Koorküla find of weapons and tools is added due to its spatial and temporal situation and it was found in the spring. The spearheads were thrust into the spring, therefore the deliberate placement of artefacts seems to give some extra argument for relating the deposit to some ritual activity (Tamla 1985, 139). The same applies to the fact that all three mentioned ornament depositions consist of neck rings only and are found in watery conditions (Tamla 1977, 162 f.). According to cultural-historic background these centuries were rather obscure and changeable times (according to previous researches especially in south-east Estonia). This was the period of the transition to the Viking Age, development of trade roads, imports and exports (Kiudsoo 2005, 146 f. and the literature cited therein). According to this pre-knowledge these four finds might be regarded as a ritual activity response to times of changes, instabilities, and contest on control over contacts, power (also its manifestation) and resources.
6. North-East Estonian wealth deposits from bogs (dating from Early Iron Age to Late Iron Age (1st – 13th centuries), dominated by Middle Iron Age artefacts): **Alulinn, Kunda I & II** (nos 1–3) (see also e.g. Mandel & Tamla 1977; Tamla 1977; 1995; Jaanits et al. 1982, 283 f.). These finds show reuse of one and the same place over the centuries. They are located in naturally very boggy areas whereas settlement sites and burial areas are known nearby on dry land. Hidden artefacts vary from tools to weaponry and ornaments. In correspondence to dating of artefacts different interpretations of hidden deposition groups are probable e.g. fertility cult, war sacrifices, various-purpose offerings (Tamla 1977; 1995; Jaanits et al. 1982, 289).

As can be seen in the short review table (see Table 1) and as pointed out by Tõnno Jonuks previously (2009, 254), none of these ritually interpreted groups of deposits overlap entirely in contextual characteristics. The latter might be the result of the state of research, lack of detailed documentation when finding the deposit or related to the accuracy of archive materials. However, I argue that there are specific contextual links between these different deposits forming interpretational groups, which was the most important result of my MA thesis.

Discussion

To turn back from the data to theory, I have shown the multifaceted and variable character of ritual, especially when studying it in archaeological record, where we have only mute archaeological data to answer the question whether past people might have been performing a ritual when depositing items in certain

environment at certain time and place. The definitions of ritual and its main characteristics vary due to the character of the available data. Therefore it is necessary to begin by defining the specific ritual related research with the definition of what is to be studied. Only then it becomes possible to choose the most suitable characteristics for the study based on the theoretical discussions of what constitutes a research object (in my case ritual in the material of wealth deposits).

In my research the first and foremost central point is the material context of the deposits described in as great detail as possible. This idea is based on the theoretical argument that ritual is understood, defined, decoded and interpreted only in its contexts. Contexts on the other hand are also what suggest the ritual deposits through the concepts of distinction and extraordinary – i.e. in comparison with the others or ordinary deposits and their contexts. However to be honest, in case of Middle Iron Age Estonia the idea of “the others” becomes problematic to an extent as all the deposits are remarkable and distinguished in one way or another. There seem to be nearly no ordinary wealth deposits as all the finds strike the eye with some special characteristics. The idea of distinction here actually becomes evident in comparison with later period i.e. after 800 AD hoards and deposits corresponding to totally different contextual characteristics (e.g. mainly coins and ornaments in solid ground, often in the close vicinity or inside settlement, very rarely in watery conditions or burial areas). To the extent that these distinguishing contexts tend to repeat and overlap in the material record, it gives an extra argument for ritual related interpretation, because it shows that we are not dealing with just one weird bunch of material. Rather it makes explicit that there seems to be some broader cultural and mental agreement about this certain activity and the material aspects included. Analysis of the Estonian Middle Iron Age wealth deposits seems to show that the theory and the data fit into each other, proving that in most of the presented cases we might be dealing with ritual wealth deposits.

At the same time it needs to be stressed that both the definition as well as the distinguishing characteristics (material context) are closely linked to specific data. Therefore I cannot say that the same material contexts are the one and the only ones used universally when studying wealth deposits and trying to solve the question whether some of them might be ritual ones. Probably the same goes to the definition as well, i.e. it might develop and change as the main data is changing or added. Choices of analyzable contexts then vary in the frameworks of specific data, problems (questions about the ritual), and actually they might even vary within the same ones. What matters is argumentation and correspondence to the material. So to open up a new area for my further research I would finally like to point out a list of more detailed contexts which might be useful to look at when questioning whether some wealth deposits should be seen as ritual ones. I have not been able to go through all of these in my study of Middle Iron Age Estonian material, but from the experience I have had in the study of this topic so far, these seem to be quite promising to consider:

1. deposition forming artefacts – artefacts and their assemblages: function, usage, signs of wear (e.g. ornaments, weaponry, tools; worn out or not used; intact or damaged);
2. depositional conditions – depositional environment: watery conditions, firm ground, different markers on landscape; artefacts' placement in a deposit: is there any specific selection or placement activity evident in artefact placement? (e.g. weapons and ornaments deposited in separated areas or placed in remarkable arrangement);
3. location in the cultural landscape – relations with natural objects, their changes and/or inhabited sites from the same or close archaeological periods (e.g. relation with contemporaneous burial areas, settlements, etc.; natural border areas between settlement structures);
4. dates and geographical distribution – contact areas and peripheries; culturally closer and comparable depositions in spatial and temporal terms.

I have not yet achieved the goal of finding definitive broader characteristics enabling more general research, comparisons and interpretations of ritualizing contexts for wealth deposits. The examples given above show evidently that probably it is impossible to create a check-list for ritualizing contexts of wealth deposits which can be applied universally. Rather it is always a combination of characteristics. However, I do hope that at least some of the discussed contexts can be considered as helpful when starting to look at probable ritual deposits among the ordinary ones. Though, most importantly it needs to be stressed that the ones presented here are based on the explanation of what ritual and ritual wealth deposits represent to me in this stage of research.

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Ester Oras

RITUAALSED PEITVARAD EESTI KESKMISE RAUAAJA MATERJALIS

Resümee

Juba mõnda aega on mind huvitanud küsimus, kuidas eristada ja uurida religiooni ning rituaali arheoloogilises materjalis – eriti muinasaja kontekstis, kus meil puuduvad vastavate tegevuste kohta kirjalikud allikad. Peitvarade leiudematerjal on selle küsimuse lahkamiseks äärmiselt huvitav, sest vastupidiselt kalmete ja spetsiaalsete religiooniga seotud muististe (näiteks templid, kirikud, hiiekohad) tõlgendamisvõimalustele võib neid vaadelda ka kui majanduslikke ning igapäeva-eluga seotud varakogumeid. Käesolev kirjatöö on osaks minu jätkuvast uurimisest teemal, kuidas arheoloogid näevad mõnede varapeidete taga religiooni ja rituaali, teiste taga aga mitte.

Peitvaradena mõistan ühest või enamast väärisesemest koosnevat leiukogumit, mis on tahtlikult peidetud. Rituaalina pean silmas religiooni tegevuslikku aspekti kõige laiemas mõttes, mis sisaldab endas kahe olulise komponendina ka tegevuslikke ja mentaalseid osiseid.

Peitvarade tõlgendamine rituaalsetena on kõne alla tulnud mitmetes nii Eesti kui ka välisriikide vastavateemalistes kirjutistes. Ometi näib, et see küsimus on enamasti lahendatud üksikute erandlike näidete kaudu, kuid puudub laiem diskussioon sellest, mis need rituaalsed peitvarad on ja miks neid just nõnda tõlgendatakse. Rituaalsena interpreteeritud varakogumid ja nende tunnused varieeruvad vastavalt uurijale ning konkreetsele probleemiasetusele. Seetõttu näibki olevat vajadus laiemas diskussioonis järele, kuidas rituaalseid peitvarasid metodoloogiliselt eristada ja kuidas neid vaadelda rituaalikäsitluse laiemas raamistikus.

Rituaali definitsiooni muudab keeruliseks selle mitmetahulisus: seda võib vaadelda ühtaegu kui formaalse, traditsioonilise ja muutumatu, kuid samas ka pidevalt areneva ning muutuva tegevusena. Rituaalil on seosed nii religiooni kui igapäeva-eluga ja seda ei saa täielikult profaansest elusfäärist lahutada. Ometi on definitsioone ühendavaks tunnuseks tõdemus, et rituaali luuakse tegevuse kaudu. Samas ei iseloomusta rituaali mitte ainult materiaalsed tunnused, vaid ka mentaalsed karakteristikud. Neid kõiki võiks nimetada rituaali kontekstideks.

Arheoloogias muutubki rituaal nähtavaks kontekstide kaudu (viimaseid võiks nimetada ritualiseerivateks kontekstideks), st kontekstid on need, mis viitavad, et teatud materiaalsed allikad on märgid minevikus toimunud rituaalist: ritualiseerivad kontekstid on need, mis eristavad rituaalse n-õ tavalisest. Peamiseks konteksti-allikaks peitvarade puhul on konkreetse leiukogumi ja tema leiukeskkonna analüüs. Nendesamade materiaalsete kontekstide kaudu avaldub vähemasti teatud määral ka rituaali mentaalne ja tegevuslik aspekt. Paraku on aga paljuski need viimased nn mineviku kultuurilised kontekstid loodud uurija enda poolt, st nad on arheoloogilise allikmaterjali tõlgendused. Seetõttu on iga uurimuse puhul oluline teadvustada ka uurija enda kontekste, tema eelteadmisi ja erinevaid uurimistööd mõjutavaid tegureid (alates tehnilistest võtetest ning lõpetades juhendaja rolliga). Uurimisprotsessis toimubki pidev dialoog uurija ja uuritava, ka teoreetilise raamistiku ning konkreetsete andmete vahel, mille käigus teineteist täiendatakse, uuendatakse ja luuakse. Nõnda on teatav subjektiivsus kodeeritud igasse uurimusse.

Rituaalile kui uurimisobjektile omistatud üldiste tunnuste arutluse abil leian, et sobiv definitsioon minu uurimisobjektile, st rituaalsetele peitvaradele, võiks olla järgnev: teadlikult valitud viisil ja paika peidetud ese või esemekogum, millel on vastavalt avalik (ka personaalne) heakskiit, sobimaks suhtluseks nii sotsiaalsel kui religioosel tasandil. Sotsiaalne mõõde tuleneb laiematest tavadest ja traditsioonidest, religiooni mõõde aga muudab peitmistegevuse rituaalseks. Teadlikud eristatavad valikud esemetes, nende paigutuses ja peitmiskohtades peitmistegevuse ajal, mis on tänapäeva uurijale nähtavad erinevate kontekstide analüüsi kaudu, võimaldavadki eristada rituaalseid peitvarasid n-õ tavalistest. Kui nende kontekstide taga on võimalik näha ka teatud vormilisust, kindlaksmääratust ja korratavust, viitab see teatavatele laiemalt levinud kultuurilistele ning mentaalsetele tagamaadele, mille mõjutusel peitmistegevus on toimunud.

Eesti keskmise rauaaja peitvarade materjal pakub äärmiselt erinevaid ja huvitavaid leiukontekste. Oma magistritöös püüdsingi kõiki leide analüüsida tervikuna, vaadeldes leiukogumite omavahelisi seoseid ja erinevusi, kontekstide kattuvusi ning kõrvalekaldeid. Põhimõtteliselt ikkagi katse- ja eksitusmeetodil selgitasin välja analüüsiks kõige informatiivsemad leiukonteksti aspektid. Viimasteks olid: leiu moodustanud esemed, leiukeskkond, paiknemine kultuurmaastikul, dateeringud ja geograafiline levik. Nende tunnuste alusel õnnestus eristada kuus suuremat peitvarade leiugruppi, mille kontekstid omavahel suuresti kattuvad ja mis on lähestikku ka ajalises ning ruumilises mõõtmes (vt joon 1–2 ja tabel 1). Varasemate kultuuriliste kontekstide ja Eesti-siseste kultuuriruumide arheoloogilist materjali ning selle tõlgendusi arvesse võttes pakkusin välja ka esmased peitvarade tõlgendused, millest enamik kaldub pigem rituaalse tõlgenduse suunas:

1) Ida-Eesti looduspaikadega seotud ehteleiud (5. sajand kuni 6. sajandi I pool):

Piilsi, Reola, Viira peitvarad, mis koosnevad peamiselt pronksehetest, eriti võruleiud, ja seostuvad vesikeskkonnaga. Need on leitud loodusliku liigenduse poolest tähelepanuväärselt kohalt, omalaadselt looduslikult piirialalt, asustusaladest eemal. Teadliku eseme- ja kohavaliku alusel ning Skandinaavia vastavate analoogiate põhjal võiks neid tõlgendada kui võimalikke viljakusrituaalide märke;

- 2) Kesk-Eesti lõunaosa kalmetega seotud ehtekomplektide leiud (5. sajandi II pool kuni 6. sajandi I pool): **Kardla, Paali I ja II, Villevere**, mis koosnevad erinevatest ehetest, peamiselt hõbedast. Need on avastatud kalmetest või nende vahetust lähedusest, leiukoha naabruses on kahel juhul teada samaaegne asulakoht. Arvestades piirkonna ajaloolis-kultuurilist konteksti, võiks leiukogumeid ja vastavat kohavalikut tõlgendada kui laiemale kogukonnale suunatud demonstratiivset võimu legitimeerimise või kinnistamise soovi väärisesemete rituaalse peitmistegevuse kaudu;
- 3) Kesk-Eesti vesikeskkonnaga seotud relvleiud (6.–7. sajand): **Igavere, Rikasaare**. Peitvarad koosnevad eranditult raudesemetest (domineerivad relvad) ja on avastatud märgaladelt. Leiukohti ümbritseb muistisetühi vöönd, kuid ümbruskonnas on teada mitmed tihedamale asustusele viitavad arheoloogilised andmed. Kõne alla võiks nende puhul tulla tõlgendus sõjakuse ja võimuvõitlusega seostuvate rituaalidena, alates relvaohverdusest kuni konflikti osapoolte lepingute sõlmimise ning piirialade märkimiseni, ka sepavara ohverduseni;
- 4) Ida-Eesti keskosa kalmetega (?) seotud hõbenõude leiud (6.–7. sajand): **Kriimani, Varnja**. Kuigi nõude valmistusaeg on käesolevas kogumikus esitatud uute andmete alusel dateeritud 5. sajandi lõppu, võis nende varaseim peitmistegevus toimuda ilmselt järgnevail sajandeil. Peidetud on Bütsantsi päritolu hõbenõud, ühel juhul varasemasse tarandkalmesse, teisel juhul on seos kalmega lahtine. Leiukohad seostuvad selgemalt oluliste veeteedega (Peipsi järv ja Emajõgi) ning seetõttu võiks eeldada peitvarade tõlgenduse seotust väliskontaktidega, täpsemalt kui varaseid vihjeid järgneva arheoloogilise perioodi kaubandussuundadele. Võimalikule nõude rituaalsele tarbimisele viitab vähemasti Kriimani puhul leiukoha varasema kalmega seostamine;
- 5) Lõuna-Eesti märgaladega seotud kaelavõruleiud + relvaleid (8.–9. sajand): **Hummuli, Loosi, Navesti + Koorküla Valgjärve ääres**. Leiud on avastatud märgaladelt ja neis on esindatud üksnes hõbedast kaelavõrud. Koorküla leiu moodustavad muude metallesemete kõrval odaotsad, mis olid allikasse torgatud. Kõik leiupaigad seostuvad suuremate veekogude elik tollaste oluliste liiklusteedega (sh Idateedel osalusega) ja johtuvalt ajaloolis-kultuurilisest taustast võiks neid pidada otseseks märgiks nii koondunud rikkustest kui võimalikest kontakt- ning konfliktsituatsioonidest, seostudes ilmselt võimu demonstreerimisega, aga ka ressursside ja kontaktide valdamise eksponeerimisega;
- 6) Kirde-Eesti sooladega seotud leiud (1.–13. sajand): **Alulinn, Kunda I ja II**. Leidude dateeringud ulatuvad vanemast rauaajast nooremasse rauaajaga ja ühest kohast või lähedastest piirkondadest on leitud nii tööriistu, relvi kui ehteid. Lähedal on teada arvukalt samaaegseid muistiseid, kuigi leiukohad ise paiknevad teatavatel looduslikel piirialadel. Neid võiks tõlgendada kui aja jooksul muutunud ja arenenud erinevate rituaaltegevuste märke, mille taust võis ulatuda vastavalt ühiskonna arengutele ning ideoloogiale näiteks viljakuskultusest sõjakuskultuseni.

Ometi ilmneb, et ühelgi juhul pole need n-õ ritualiseerivad kontekstid täielikult kattuvad, kuigi teatud ühenduslingid eristuvad selgelt. Selle läbi saabki veel kord

kinnitust tõdemus, et universaalseid rituaalile viitavaid kontekste pole võimalik välja tuua. Lahenduseks ongi tõdemus, et kuna rituaal kui kontseptsioon on äärmiselt mitmepalgeline, on oluline leida selle tegevuse kõige määravamad aspektid konkreetse uurimuse raames, st rituaali definitsioon tuleb luua vastavalt peamisele probleemküsimusele. Selle kaudu on omakorda võimalik eristada n-õ ritualiseerivaid kontekste, st neid tunnuseid, mis aitavad eristada rituaali n-õ tavalisest, eriti juhul, kui nende materiaalsete kontekstide puhul on võimalik eristada teatud korduvaid ja sarnaseid tunnuseid ehk kontekstide kaudu väljendatud käitumusmustreid. Viimane pakuks justkui lisatõestust, et teatud varapeitmistevõtmiste taga on laiemad kultuurilised ja mentaalsed taustsüsteemid ning tegemist pole ainult ühe erandliku näitega.

Ometi tuleb rõhutada, et nii rituaali definitsioonid kui kontekstuaalsed tunnused johtuvad olemasolevast ja uuritavast arheoloogilisest materjalist. Kui muutub materjal ja laieneb teoreetiline taustsüsteem, teisenevad teatud määral ilmselt ka definitsioonid ning kontekstuaalsed tunnused. Pealegi, oluliste kontekstide valiku puhul on tegemist ka üsna subjektiivsete otsustega, mis kahtlemata sõltuvad ka allikate iseloomust ja varasemast dokumentatsioonist. Et käesolevat teemat edasi arendada, pakun lõpetuseks välja veidi laiendatud nimekirja neist kontekstidest, mida peitvarade uurimise puhul võiks võimalike ritualiseerivate kontekstide eristamisel arvestada:

- 1) esemed ja nende kooslused, sh funktsioon, kasutus, kuluvusaste, terviklikkus;
- 2) peitmiskeskond, sh märgalad, kuiv maa, maapealsed märgistused; esemete paigutus, muuhulgas sõltuvalt esemeliigist;
- 3) paiknemine kultuurmaastikul, sh seosed loodusobjektide, asustuspiiride ja teiste muististega;
- 4) dateeringud ja levik, sh kontaktalad ning perifeeriad.

Ma pole veendunud, kas käesolevaga on õnnestunud pakkuda teatavaid laiemaid tunnuseid, mis võimaldavad eristada, analüüsida ja võrrelda rituaalseid peitvarasid kogu arheoloogilises materjalis. Esitatud näited viitavad ju selgelt, et neist kontekstidest pole võimalik luua n-õ kontrollnimekirja, mille tunnustele peaksid kõik peitvarad vastama. Pigem on tegemist siiski teatavate kombinatsioonidega neist nimetatud kontekstitunnustest. Siiski loodan, et vähemasti mõnedest neist võiks abi olla, kui hakata arutlema teemal, kuidas üht konkreetset peitvara tõlgendada. Oluline on aga rõhutada, et kogu see probleemilahendus tugineb uurija loodud definitsioonile sellest, mis on rituaalsed peitvarad ja kuidas neid arheoloogilises leiumaterjalis näha.