

Chapter 11

**SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND POWER
STRUCTURES IN THE LATE IRON AGE
HARJU DISTRICT**

Valter Lang

Abstract

The concluding chapter provides an overview of the emergence and development of power structures in Harju district during the Late Iron Age. Based on archaeological evidence and written sources, two typical fort districts are distinguished at the end of the Iron Age, one with its centre in Keava and the other at Lohu. There was a third fort district west of them, with the centre in Varbola, but the latter differed from the common hill forts, being most probably an early urban centre. In the crusades of the early 13th century Varbola pursued an independent policy to ensure its freedom and peace for trading. The fourth province was in the north-eastern part of Harju, with its centre presumably located in Paunküla; the latter, however, lacked a fort as its base.¹

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Introduction

The fieldwork within the Keava research project lasted for six seasons. Fresh knowledge on both previously known sites (the hill fort of Keava and settlement sites I and II of Linnaaluste), as well as the newly discovered sites (the hilltop site of Võnnumägi and settlement site III of Linnaaluste), was obtained in the course of the work. Landscape surveys resulted in discovering numerous archaeological sites also outside the Keava complex, i.e. in the neighbouring Rapla parish and the western part of Juuru parish; of these sites, the ring wall of an enclosure at Lipa was also excavated (not treated in this volume). On the other hand, some sites regarded as archaeological monuments so far (such as the forts of Seli and Voose) have been excluded from the list of antiquities as a result of recent fieldwork. The archaeological studies have been complemented by the first palaeoecological fieldwork carried out in the mires of Verevainu and Linnaaluste.

This chapter aims to put the individual sites in a broader context; i.e. that of the whole Harju district. As the development of human settlement prior to the Late Iron Age is handled in a separate paper (chapter 9), I will focus here on the administrative structure of the whole district at the end of prehistoric times.

The hill forts in prehistoric Harju district

Analysing the Late Iron Age settlement and society in prehistoric Harju district, the first task in expanding the existing knowledge (cf. Lang 2002) was to specify the nature and date of all probable hill forts, as these were presumably the central places of the time. Apart from the Keava project, only the hill forts of Varbola and Lohu II had been archaeologically excavated, although there were numerous other sites in Harju district taken to be hill forts. As we cannot draw conclusions about the structure of settlement and society unless the location of contemporary centres is known, it appeared to be of great importance to find out whether all these small and hypothetical forts really were hill forts, and what their date was. The chronicler known as Henry of Livonia mentions that during the siege of the hill fort at Lohu in the winter of 1224 a part of the army was sent to three smaller forts of the district to make them surrender through threatening violence (HCL 1982, XXVII: 6). If one of these three forts was in Keava, where were the other two? Further, all too often it is difficult to assign a date to a hill fort without carrying out excavations. For example, archaeological excavations had already shown that the fortifications on the Võnnumägi hill belonged to the Early Pre-Roman Iron Age rather than the Viking Age, as initially was expected relying on the morphological features of the site. Similarly, the enclosure of Lipa, which had initially been dated to the Middle Iron Age, turned out to be of Early Iron Age date (Konsa et al. 2006). There were no problems neither with the hill fort of Varbola, which has been thoroughly excavated, nor with the fort at Lohu (true, the bigger one has not been sufficiently excavated, but its defensive features

leave no doubt that the fort belongs to the Final Iron Age). The detailed chronology of the Keava hill fort was also available by that time, and there was one radiocarbon date acquired from the Viking Age hill fort at Ahisilla (Mäesalu 2008). What had to be done was to explore the character and age of the hypothetical hill forts of Seli, Ravila, Ohukotsu, Russalu, and Voose. Surface surveys and trial excavations were carried out at these sites to complete the task in 2005–2007.

The following provides a brief review of the Middle and Late Iron Age hill forts in prehistoric Harju district, starting with the ones archaeologically excavated and thus undoubtedly hill forts, and finishing with those of rather uncertain character (Fig. 11.1).

Keava

The results of the excavations at Keava and Linnaaluste (chapters 1–3) show that during the Pre-Viking and Viking Ages, we are dealing with a fort-and-settlement centre characteristic of many other places in Estonia and neighbouring countries. The hill fort was probably not permanently inhabited, at least not before phase III; otherwise the ground would have yielded much more traces of human activity. In this respect the complex of Keava/Linnaaluste differs from, for instance, Iru and Rõuge, but on the other hand is similar to several complexes in Viru district (Pada, Narva). The occupation layer of the fortified part of the Viking Age fort-and-settlement complex at Lohu in the central part of Harju district

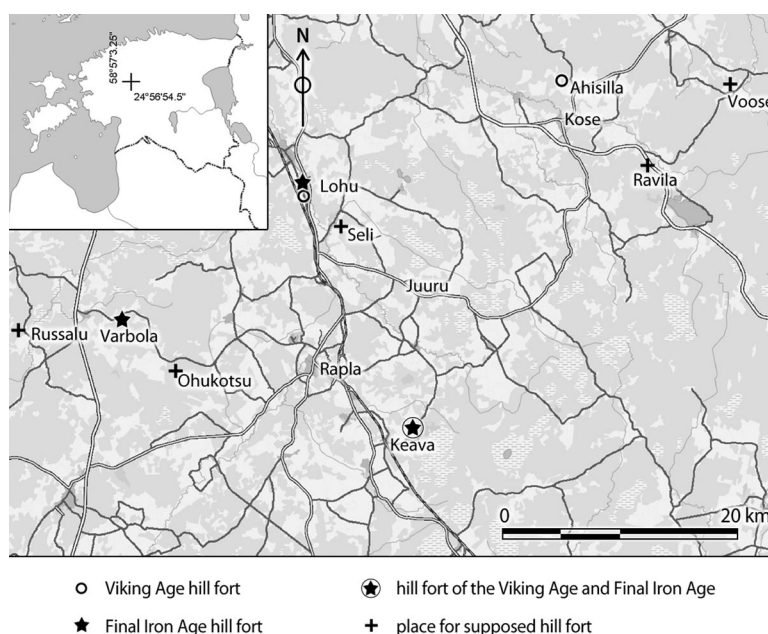


Fig. 11.1. Hill forts and sites which were earlier supposed to be hill forts in prehistoric Harju district.

was also rather poor in finds: an 88 m² excavation yielded only 160 potsherds and an iron awl (see below).

Around the middle of the 11th century, i.e. approximately the same time when, according to the chronicles, Prince Izjaslav ‘visited’ Keava, the hill fort III at Keava was burnt down and settlements I and III were at least partly abandoned. At the same time a new settlement (Linnaaluste II) was established somewhat farther from the hill fort. There is no doubt that the new settlement was founded by the same people who had previously lived in the Linnaaluste I/III settlement. Disintegration of the fort-and-settlement complex in the course of the 11th century is a phenomenon characteristic of almost the entire Estonia, and has parallels in some other countries as well. Given this, the reasons for abandoning the fort-and-settlement centres cannot be found in single events, for example raids to the forts (although the restless character of the era might have facilitated the process). More probably, the explanation lies in more general tendencies of the socio-economic and political developments of the society, which will be discussed below. As for the settlement II of Linnaaluste, excavation results prove that it has been in its place through the Middle and Modern Ages up to date.

In the courtyard of the hill fort, directly next to the rampart there were dwellings with stoves, which belonged to layers IV and V. No houses were located in the middle part of the compound whereas a lot of rubbish, such as animal bones and broken artefacts, has been dumped there. On the northern side of the hill fort, under the rampart there was a hidden gateway, which had wooden walls at the time of phases III and IV but was entirely made of stone during phase V. The find assemblage is rich and versatile, including artefacts of precious metals, remains of bone and bronze working, weapons, ornaments, tools, and abundantly hand-made as well as some wheel-thrown pottery (chapters 2 and 4). One of the rarest finds is the silver bracteate coined in Tallinn after 1219. Together with four crossbow bolts from the first quarter of the 13th century, this coin is a telling evidence of the fact that the hill fort of Keava was maintained until the German-Danish conquest.

The settlement pattern in the surroundings of Keava had become rather dense in the Viking and Final Iron Ages. The LCD (Johansen 1933), composed in the early 13th century, lists 23 settlement units with altogether 133 ploughlands in the southern part of prehistoric Harju district. And indeed, in the course of the project we have found archaeological evidence such as a settlement site or cemetery in the vicinity of most of these places (see chapter 9, Fig. 9.2).

Varbola

Jaanilinn in Varbola (see Tõnisson 2008, 196 ff.), is one of the biggest among the Estonian prehistoric strongholds, and has been repeatedly mentioned in the chronicle of Henry of Livonia, as well as in East Slavonic chronicles (Fig. 11.2). Located on the northern edge of a limestone elevation, it belongs to the group of promontory hill forts. The rampart, which entirely encircles the fort’s interior, makes the site similar to common ring forts; however, Varbola is much larger.



Fig. 11.2. The ring fort at Varbola (after Tõnisson 2008, fig. 81). 1 stone heaps, 2 archaeologically excavated stone heaps, 3–5 excavation plots, 6 well.

The interior of the hill fort extends over approximately 2 ha; including the rampart and its outer foot, the whole area of the hill fort covers about 5 ha. The overall length of the rampart is 576 m. It is 7–10 m in height, if measured at its outer foot (including the natural limestone elevation as its base, and 2–7 m if measured at the hill fort interior). There is a defensive ditch on the south-south-eastern outer side of the rampart, 10 m in width and 2–3 m in depth, while a shallow hollow is also observable on the western and eastern sides of the rampart. There are three gateways on the eastern, western and northern sides of the hill fort, with ancient

roads passing through them. The western gateway has been excavated: it was a 2.2–2.4 m wide passage through the rampart with side walls piled of stones and supported by thick wooden posts, and perhaps there was a tower-like construction above or next to the gateway. In the middle of the courtyard there is a 15 m deep well. Approximately 90 stone heaps covered with turf are scattered over the interior of the fort. The excavations have shown that these are the remains of *keris* stoves, and therefore they mark locations of former dwellings. Outside the area covered with stone heaps, the courtyard of the hill fort also accommodates a medieval and early modern cemetery, which is later than the occupation phase of the hill fort.

Archaeological excavations have been carried out at Jaanilinn of Varbola since the 1930s (Laid 1939; Moora 1955, 84 ff.), particularly extensively and systematically between 1974 and 1989 (for a brief overview, see Tõnisson 1999). The completely excavated area covers approximately 1350 m². The find assemblage is very abundant (ca 4560 index numbers altogether) but has not been studied in any greater detail so far (see, however, e.g. Tamla & Kallavus 1998a). The great majority of finds come from the 12th and 13th centuries, whereas single items probably belong to the 11th century as well (Tõnisson 1999). Radiocarbon dates (955 ± 35, 910 ± 30 and 845 ± 35 BP; Tõnisson 2008, 198) suggest that the excavated gateway was probably built at the beginning of the 12th century and repaired in the second half of the century.

Archaeological surveys have also been carried out in the surroundings of Jaanilinn. As a result, several sites have been discovered and partially explored, for example prehistoric and medieval settlement at Keldrimäe ca 1 km north of the hill fort, as well as the core of the village of Põlli.

Lohu

Hill fort I at Lohu in Hageri parish, also called Jaanilinn, is located on a flat elevation 3–4 m in height on the right bank of the Keila River (see Tõnisson 2008, 199 f.). The hill fort lies in a bend of the river so that in south-south-east and west the site borders water (Figs 11.3 and 11.4). The courtyard of Jaanilinn, covering about 6500 m², is in the west, north and north-east surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped rampart, which rises 3–5 m above the hill fort interior, and 6–9 m above the surrounding ground outside the hill fort. Together with the rampart, the area of the hill fort extends over 1.5 ha. The rampart presumably consisted of dry stone walls supported by wooden constructions, and its slopes are relatively steep even today. On the northern, north-eastern and eastern sides of the rampart there is a 20–25 m wide and about 2 m deep defensive ditch separating the hill fort from the river bank that extends farther north and north-east. On the external side of the ditch there is an ambiguous rampart-like formation, in places 2 m in height, which probably served as a fore-defence. The rampart is absent on the southern side of the hill fort that immediately borders the river; however, here the ground rises about 0.5 m higher than in other parts of the hill fort interior. A gateway was located in the eastern corner of the hill fort where a path leads to the interior

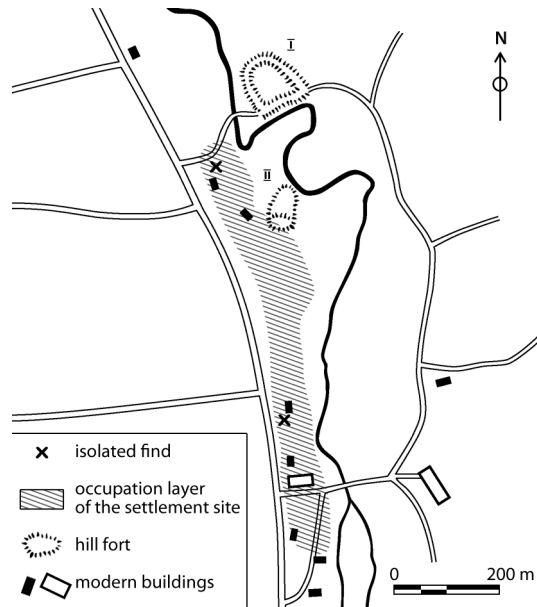


Fig. 11.3. Two hill forts and a settlement site at Lohu (after Jaanits et al. 1982, fig. 223).



Fig. 11.4. Aerial photo of hill fort I at Lohu (AI).

of the site even today. Next to the gateway, on the elevated end of the rampart there was probably a tower-like construction, mentioned as *summitas municionis* ('top of the fort') in the description of the 1224 siege by Henry of Livonia (HCL 1982, XXVII: 6).

The compound of Jaanilinn at Lohu, the south-western and west-north-western portions of which are lower than its other parts, is covered with an occupation layer. Excavations, carried out by Adolf Friedenthal in 1914 and obviously very limited in extent, yielded besides potsherds an axe and a belt buckle. The hill fort can be equated with *castrum Lone*, i.e. the hill fort of Loone, mentioned in the chronicle of Henry; this name is used even today. The village in the vicinity of the hill fort was also mentioned as *Lone* by Henry.

The hill fort II of Lohu is located 250 m south of the above Jaanilinn, on the left bank of the river so that an end of the south-west–north-east stretching and 3–4 m high promontory borders water (Tõnisson 2008, 200 ff., fig. 96). The courtyard of the hill fort, approximately 1000 m² in extent, is rectangular in shape and lowering towards the north-east, i.e. the river (Fig. 11.5). There is a bow-shaped rampart on the south-western side of the fort; it is 1.6 m high in the middle parts but is lowering towards its ends. The initial height of the rampart was probably 3–3.5 m, and its width, measuring on the foot, up to 6–7 m. A gateway was presumably located in the north-western corner of the site, and it was defended by taller tower-like timber or plank constructions in the middle and western parts of the rampart. Another gateway may have been located in the north-eastern corner of the fort, and the road that was probably running along the river terrace and served as a connection with Jaanilinn, may have ended there. An extensive open settlement was located in front of the hill fort's rampart.

The hill fort was discovered in 1974, and the excavations of the same, as well as following year, explored the easternmost end of the rampart and the adjacent part of the interior; in total, 88 m² were excavated (see Tynisson 1976; 1977). The rampart consisted mainly of limestone while granite stones were fewer in number; the presence of earth and sand was observed between the stones. The outer side of the rampart was piled as a dry limestone wall with remarkably big limestone plates (up to 120 × 80 cm) in its lower part, whereas the interior side of the rampart consisted mainly of granites. The charred logs on the inner foot of the rampart came from rectangular timber constructions, which supported the rampart on its inner side and served as both dwellings and defensive installations at the same time. After they burned, the rampart's inner side collapsed.

The find material of the excavations is limited to mainly a few sherds of Viking Age hand-moulded pottery. The hill fort was immediately adjacent to the open settlement site, and the fort must have been quite weak in terms of fortifications. More considerable defensive constructions were probably not established before the early 13th century, as evidenced by the radiocarbon dates of the charred logs found on the inner foot of the rampart (810 ± 60 and 790 ± 60 BP; Tõnisson 2008, 202). It may be that the site served as a fore-fortification on the road to the larger and more significant stronghold north of the village of Lohu.

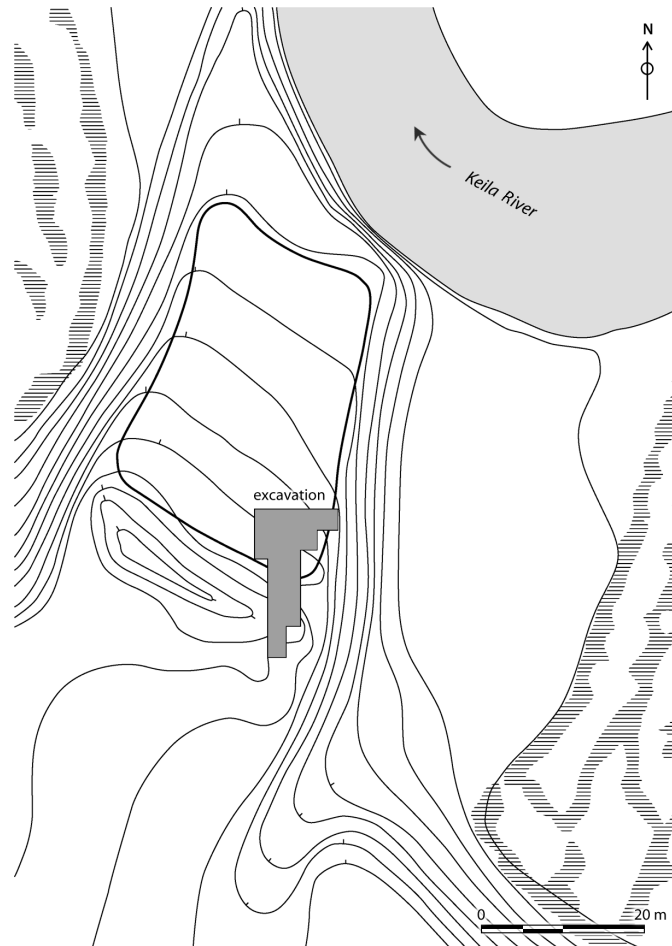


Fig. 11.5. Hill fort II at Lohu (after Tõnisson 2008, fig. 96).

Seli

The probable hill fort of Seli (or Pirgu) on the bank of the Atla River in Juuru parish has been viewed as the most probable among the above-mentioned sites whose status as a hill fort has been doubtful. Here is a horseshoe-shaped bank, with the opening towards the steep slope that borders the river (Fig. 11.6). The bank has been badly damaged in places, but its better preserved sections rise up to 1.5 m above the surrounding ground and are 8 m in width in their lower parts. The area surrounded by the bank covers approximately 7500 m². Seli is rather similar to the early ring forts erected on flat ground.

In 2006 two excavations were made through the better preserved sections of the bank in its southern part. The excavations revealed that the bank consisted of gravel and moraine, heaped up as a result of entirely natural processes (Fig. 11.7).



Fig. 11.6. Presumable ring fort at Seli (map: Estonian Land Board).



Fig. 11.7. Excavated section of the 'rampart' at Seli. Photo by Valter Lang.

There were no traces of human-made defence constructions such as, for instance, stone walls. True, one of the excavation plots yielded a post hole, which was tightly packed with big stones and contained remains of rotten (and not charred) wood. It is beyond doubt that the feature was relatively recent because the stones were covered with only a thin layer of turf, and in places the turf was even

absent. Obviously there had been a cattle enclosure or something similar built on or across the bank. Numerous trial pits showed that there was no and had never been an occupation layer in the enclosed area.

Geologist Atko Heinsalu, who visited the site, was also convinced of the natural origin of the bank, and consultations with another geologist Anto Raukas reached the same conclusion. Most probably the bank resulted from the effect of water that heaped up sediments during the smelting and retreating of the last ice sheet. Naturally, we cannot preclude that the enclosure was used as a refuge or, for example, a place for performing some cult activities; however, excavations yielded no evidence for that. The mentioned possibility of probable use finds some indirect support from the fact that the surroundings of Seli are particularly rich in cup-marked stones (no comparable density in other parts of Harju district; see Fig. 11.8). The mighty semicircular bank on a high riverbank may have made a significant contribution to the sacredness of the place.

Ahisilla

A relatively small (35–70 × 89–90 m) hill fort is located at Ahisilla near Kose. This is a narrow promontory at the crossing of two streams with steep shore banks. The plateau of the fort is quite even but this is most likely a result of field cultivation at this place. The rampart has also been destroyed during the cultivation. In the occasion of road building over the supposed place of the rampart in 1977, some remains of burnt timbers were found that were later dated to 1100±40 BP (Mäesalu 2008). As there was no occupation layer discovered on the plateau, the fort had been probably without permanent settlement.

Ravila, Voose, Ohukotsu, and Russalu

A closer look at the remaining ambiguous sites (Fig. 11.1) mentioned above established that none of them can be regarded as a hill fort. At Rõõsa in Ravila there is a higher hill, which has rather steep slopes in the north-west and north. Despite that, there are neither human-made defences nor occupation layer on the hill.

At Voose, a north-north-east–south-south-west stretching ridge, approximately 1 km long and rising several metres above the surrounding ground, has been regarded as a hill fort by local people. One spot in the lowermost part of the ridge (a field of the former Nuhja farm) allegedly yielded pieces of charcoal and some artefacts (Jung 1910, 74; Laid 1923, 69). This place had been totally ploughed away by the 1920s (Känd 1925, 44). An inventory of the site in 2005 revealed no signs of human-made fortifications, nor were there traces of occupation layer. At a few places, however, there were low and narrow earth baulks running across the ridge, but these were probably a result of the former field cultivation. In conclusion, there was no hill fort at Voose.

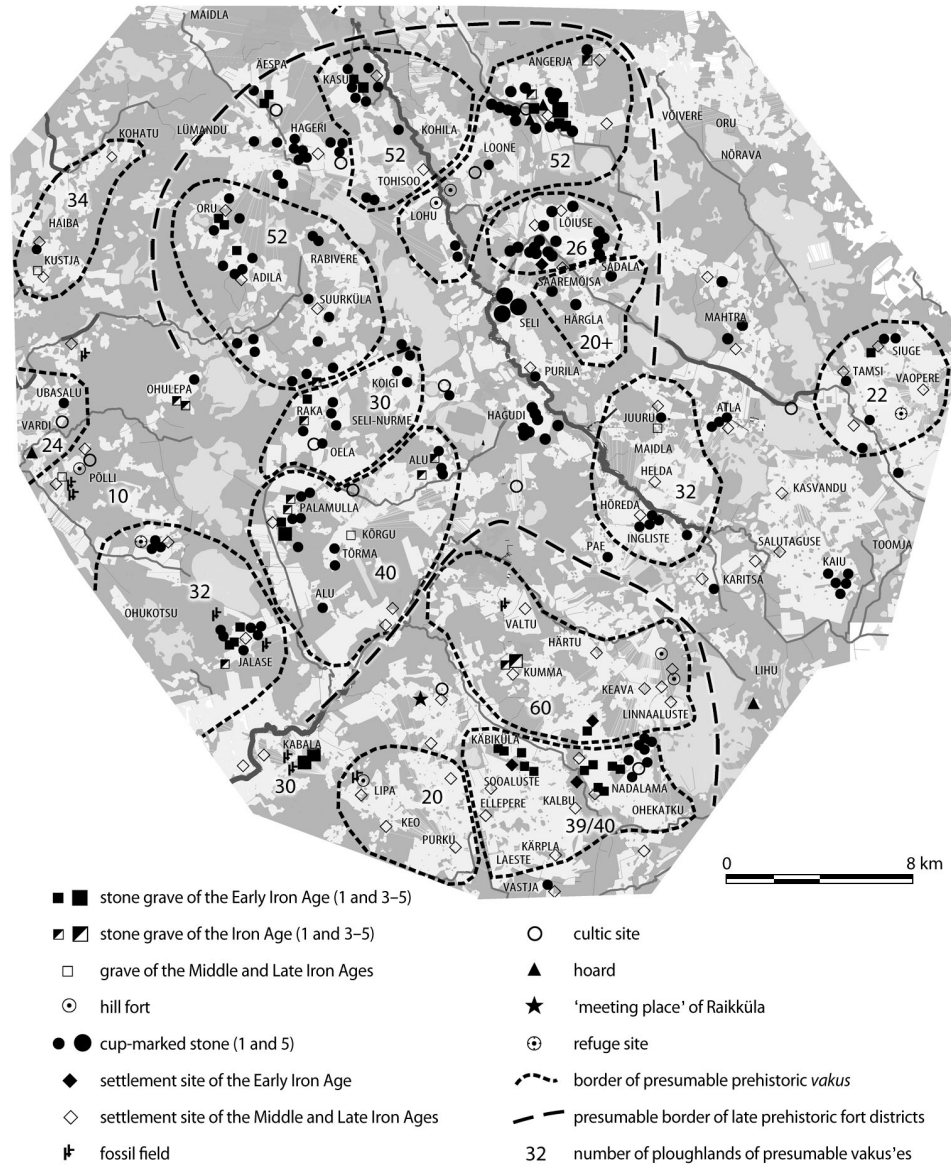


Fig. 11.8. Prehistoric sites and presumable *vakus*'es in central and southern Harju district (after Lang 2002, fig. 4).

The hill fort of Ohukotsu has been known in the folk tradition as a site connected to the hill fort of Varbola with an 'underground passageway' (see Lepik 1925). It is located 3 km north of the manor of Ohukotsu, on a former village pasture, which stands fully forested today. The ridge is about 250 m long and 200 wide, with relative height of up to 7 m; the surrounding area is low and wet and often

flooded in spring. There was a farm, called Linnamäe (*'farm of the hill fort'*), on the hilltop, but it had been abandoned and stood in ruins already in the 1920s. There are no human-made defensive constructions on the hill, and cultural layer is absent as well. It is possible that the hill, lying far from villages in the middle of bogs and forests, was used as a refuge.

In Russalu (Nissi parish), a hillock in the wood next to a lower marshy plain has been regarded as a former hill fort (Laid 1923, 70). The hillock is irregularly oval along the north–south axis, approximately 80 m in length and 60 m in width, and rises only 2–3 m above the surrounding ground level. The northern and southern ends and the eastern edge of the hillock are relatively well distinguishable from the surroundings, while the western edge is rather smoothly sloping. The top of the hillock is uneven. The plan of the site in the inventory of Nissi parish by Marta Schmiedehelm (1925) depicts an arch-shaped ditch on the eastern foot of the hillock, and a stone fence on its western side. In E. Tõnisson's opinion (2008, 199), the site leaves quite an ambiguous impression. The occupation layer and clear traces of human activity are absent. Moreover, there are other similarly low elevations of various shapes and sizes in the surroundings of the described hillock.

In conclusion, none of the questionable hill forts appeared to be a genuine hill fort. However, some indirect data suggest that Seli may have been an Early Metal Age cult site and Ohukotsu may have served as a refuge. On the other hand, there is evidence for a possible hill fort at Ahisilla in the north-eastern corner of the district.

Therefore, the list and temporal sequence of Middle and Late Iron Age hill forts in Harju district is as follows:

Keava, phase I: 5th–6th centuries;
Keava, phase II: 8th–9th centuries;
Keava, phase III: 10th century – first half of the 11th century;
Lohu II, earlier layer: (9th?) 10th century – first half of the 11th century;
Ahisilla: 9th century – first half of the 11th century;
Keava, phase IV: second half of the 11th century – first half of the 12th century;
Keava, phase V: second half of the 12th century – 1224;
Jaanilinn of Lohu (I): 11th century – 1224;
Lohu II, later layer, probably belonging to the same system with Jaanilinn: early 13th century;
Jaanilinn of Varbola: (late 11th?) 12th–13th centuries.

As we can see, the tradition of building hill forts has been 'primeval' only at two locations: Keava (from the Migration Period until the end of prehistoric times) and Lohu (from the Viking Age until the end of prehistoric times). The centre in Varbola emerged only by the beginning of the 12th century, and the stronghold at Ahisilla obviously remained rather short-lived.

Fort-and-settlement centres

Both at Keava and Lohu a complex consisting of a hill fort and an open settlement on its foot, or in other words – a fort-and-settlement complex, developed in the second half of the first millennium. In neither case is it completely clear how this occurred, because no excavations were performed at the settlement site in Lohu, and those at Linnaaluste remained relatively limited in extent. For example, it is not known whether the open settlement was present during the phase I of fortification of the Keava hill fort, or in other words, whether the hill fort and open settlement appeared at the same time. According to the existing knowledge, the hill fort was not permanently inhabited at this time, though we cannot exclude that the houses of the time remained outside the excavated area. It is notable that the longitudinal sides of the hill, which have rather good natural qualities for protection, had been already fortified in the Migration Period, i.e. the local community had enough capacity and need to fortify all sides of the hill fort. To provide a comparison here, we can mention that phase I of the hill fort at Iru (which also falls to the Migration Period) lacked fortifications on the longitudinal sides of the hill, and only the ends were provided with defence constructions (Lang 1996, 56 ff.). In Iru the hill fort was established in the 5th or 6th century, while the open settlement in its vicinity appeared not before the 7th or 8th century; the hill fort was destroyed in the early 11th century, and after that the open settlement shifted somewhat farther from the hill.

The present data seem to suggest that the scheme of development of Iru also applies to Keava, with a difference in the fact that we do not know where people lived in the 5th–6th centuries – whether on the hill, in the open settlement, or both. As phase II of the hill fort also lacks firm evidence of permanent occupation, the second mentioned possibility seems to be most likely, i.e. people lived somewhere in the vicinity of the hill, and the latter was used at times of danger. There is no doubt, however, that in the 7th–8th centuries the settlement I of Linnaaluste was already present and continued to grow during the following centuries. The heyday of the fort-and-settlement system in Keava fell in the 10th and early 11th centuries when the open settlement reached its maximum extent and a group of people permanently inhabited the hill fort (phase III). After the end of phase III of the hill fort the settlement of Linnaaluste I/III was also abandoned, at least in its major part (chapter 3), and the settlement II of Linnaaluste, which has been in its place until today, was founded somewhat farther away from the hill fort.

As for Lohu, we only know that a certain period within the Viking Age saw permanent occupation both in hill fort II, as well as in the open settlement in its close vicinity. It is not impossible that the hill fort appeared next to an already existing settlement as the result of fortifying one part of the latter, very much in the same manner as for instance in Rõuge (Jaanits et al. 1982, 257 ff.). The village remained in its place even after abandoning hill fort II in the 11th century when probably hill fort I (Jaanilinn) was established (the date is uncertain, but

most probably it was not before the second half of the 11th century or even 12th century). Thus, unlike in Keava, this is a hill fort and not an open settlement that changes its location.² As mentioned above, hill fort II was fortified again for a short time at the end of prehistoric period, probably as a fore-fort of the mighty hill fort on the other side of the river.

The fort-and-settlement system of both Lohu and Keava developed in places which, within a radius of 6–7 km from the fort, lack traces of settlement from the preceding period, i.e. the Roman Iron Age or even the Migration Period (Fig. 11.8). The same is true for Ahisilla. In other words, the fort-and-settlement complexes were the first settlements in these places. This fact implicitly refers to a transformation in the power relations, which took place in the Migration Period or Viking Age at the latest: three communities separated from the existing agrarian settlement network and established fortified centres in completely new places. It is notable that the old settlement districts did not witness anything like this, or in other words, no fortifications were established there. The same was observable in Iru, although there the earlier settlement units were much closer to the new centre, at the distance of only 2–3 km. Whether and to which extent the establishment of the fort-and-settlement centres was accompanied by the concentration of settlement to the new centres (as was the case in Iru) is not clear, because there is not enough information about the surrounding sites. However, a certain settlement shift, related to the process under discussion, is likely.

The centre at Ahisilla was probably rather short-lived, and it may well be that it was never fully elaborated. Centres at Keava and Lohu, on the other hand, gained power and extended their influence over the surrounding settlements throughout the following centuries. But the real fort districts did not develop there before the Final Iron Age, after separating the hill forts and adjacent open settlements from each other.

Hill fort districts in the Final Iron Age

In the 11th century, probably in its middle decades, the fort-and-settlement complexes disintegrated both at Keava and Lohu as well as almost everywhere else in Estonia. At Keava, as mentioned, the settlement moved away from the foot of the fort and the latter was built stronger, and at Lohu a new and somewhat bigger fort was erected on the other side of the river while the settlement most likely remained in the same place. This is another re-structuring of the power relations, which this time concerned first and foremost the relation between the residents of forts on the one hand and residents of open settlements on the other:

² Toomas Tamla (pers. comm.) has drawn my attention to the fact that because there have been no excavations at the settlement site we actually know nothing about the probable horizontal shift of the village of Lohu, for instance farther away from the hill fort during its move. A relatively large area of this settlement site allows such a shift to stay unnoticed without having more exact data from excavations.

physical separation on the landscape created symbolic social separation between these groups. The settlements that so far had enjoyed certain special status as a result of the immediate presence of a stronghold and socially and politically influential nobility, turned to common rural villages, similar to any other in the district. Moreover, the character of these districts transformed in conjunction with the growing ambitions of the fort-dwellers, and as a result fort districts developed. A fort district is a unit within which the farms and villages had the obligation to pay taxes to the residents of a certain hill fort, thus maintaining the fort.³ A hill fort may have belonged to a single noble family, which is rather likely in the case of the relatively small hill fort at Keava, or to several such families residing in the vicinity (Lohu perhaps). On several occasions the chronicle of Henry mentions how a part of a hill fort was given to some nobleman (e.g. HCL 1982, XI: 2, XIII: 1). This implies not only dividing a hill fort as a place for residing, but rather dividing the fort district and related incomes. It is beyond doubt that the local peoples knew the custom of dividing a hill fort (district) between several noblemen long before the arrival of Germans.

The character and boundaries of the fort districts in ancient Harjumaa have been treated in more detail in one of my earlier articles (Lang 2002). According to this treatment, a fort district was made up of *vakuses*, while the latter consisted of villages, where the number of ploughlands (as given in the LCD; see Johansen 1933) had a common denominator in order to better share the obligations. A fort district was presumably made up of a group of *vakuses* which had the same number of ploughlands, or at least a common denominator for the latter. For example, in the surroundings of the Lohu hill fort an ancient *vakus* contained either 26 or $2 \times 26 = 52$ ploughlands, while the whole fort district may have had at least four *vakuses* with altogether 182 ploughlands (Fig. 11.8). However, there are settlement-historical reasons to suggest that the district may have had 130 (or even more) additional ploughlands (Lang 2002, 147 f.; about a different opinion see Markus 2007). The *vakuses* of the Keava fort district included 20, 40, or 60 ploughlands; there were three such *vakuses* with 120 ploughlands (op. cit., 148). Rather clear concentration of *vakuses* can be observed in the north-eastern corner of prehistoric Harju district where the accounting system was based on 12 or $2 \times 12 (= 24)$ ploughlands. The number of *vakuses* was four, and they comprised a total of 84 ploughlands (op. cit., 149). There was no hill fort in this district at that time, as the archaeological survey established that the hypothetical one at Voose was not a fort.

³ Taxation of farms and villages by the fort-dwellers is recurrently mentioned in the chronicle of Henry. The Livonians accepted priests in their hill forts and demanded submitting one measure of grain per each plough for the expenses of each priest (HCL 2003, II: 7). In 1220 the order knights sent their priest, called Salomon, to Ridala, and "...they collected taxes from all their territories [for him], as formerly they were always accustomed to do" (HCL 2003, XXIV: 6). When King Viesceka arrived the hill fort of Tartu in 1224, the local residents in the fort "received him with joy [...] and gave him tribute from the provinces lying round about" (HCL 2003, XXVII: 5).

In the surroundings of Varbola, one of the biggest and mightiest forts in Estonia, such grouping of *vakuses* cannot be observed, however: the groups of villages are too different in size and the settlement pattern too varied in terms of density and location of sites (see more in Lang 2002). At least three differences come to the foreground when one compares Varbola with Lohu and Keava or several other Final Iron Age centres in northern Estonia (e.g. Varangu and Rakvere). First, the hill fort of Varbola is located well away from other settlements rather than within an area of dense and ancient settlement. Second, Varbola is remarkably bigger than other hill forts,⁴ and defended by mighty stone ramparts. This implies that the available resources for building and defending the site were several times bigger than usual. In the wars of the early 13th century Varbola was never conquered, and only once, in 1212, the Russian army had enough courage to besiege it.⁵ And third, Varbola is later in date than the other forts, belonging mainly to the 12th and 13th centuries; the surrounding settlement pattern, as sparse as it was, dates relatively late as well. It seems that the groups of *vakuses* around the old centres of Keava and Lohu had been fully established by the time of Varbola's foundation. The existing taxation system could not be easily changed but the new centre had to be fitted in the existing patterns. Tax obligations of villages based on the number of ploughlands was probably a rather traditional issue and not amenable to considerable transformations.

Taken together, prehistoric Harju district seems to have had two so-to-say typical hill fort districts at the end of prehistoric times – these of Keava and Lohu, which began to evolve in the Pre-Viking Age, or in the Viking Age at the latest, and had a common denominator for the number of ploughlands of their *vakuses* (i.e. for the amount of obligations) (Fig. 11.8). In addition to these two, the Voose–Rooküla–Mustla area in the north-eastern part of the district accommodated the third formation, which had four analogous *vakuses* but no hill fort (Lang 2002, fig. 2). The fourth unit was the stronghold of Varbola, the surrounding *vakuses* of which did not have any common denominator for the number of ploughlands (op. cit., fig. 1). One may assume that the influence of Varbola was much more extensive than that of the other discussed centres. The chronicle of Henry makes an impression that the inhabitants of Varbola were sometimes regarded as equal to the inhabitants of the whole district, and not provinces or single hill forts as one might expect; i.e. they were mentioned together with the inhabitants of Saare, Harju, Viru and Järva districts (see HCL 1982, XXVI: 11, XXVII: 3), though were still regarded as inhabitants of Harju. There is reason to believe that the hinterland of Varbola extended to a certain degree into the lands of the neighbouring districts of Rävåla and Läänemaa (Tõnisson 1999).

⁴ The surface area of the compound of the hill fort in Varbola is three times larger than at Lohu, and even 20 times larger than at Keava. Given these figures, one may speculate that the building and maintaining of a stronghold such as Varbola required a hinterland of at least one thousand (if compared to Lohu) or even a couple of thousand (compared to Keava) ploughlands.

⁵ The residents of Varbola may have escaped sieges and capitulations because of their foresighted and anticipating tactics to give hostages to the Germans and Danes (e.g., HCL 1982, XXIII: 9, 10) and silver to the Russians (HCL 1982, XV: 8).

The special position of Varbola can perhaps be explained by the fact that it was not a common fort, such as for example Keava and Lohu. It was as early as in the 1930s when Eerik Laid (1939, 204 ff.) drew attention to the markedly sparse settlement around the fort of Varbola and, in view of that, assumed that as an early town it to a certain degree subsisted from its inhabitants' preoccupation as traders and craftsmen. Deciding from the (survived) remains of the 90 stoves or in other words dwellings, the number of permanent residents of the fort may have reached 600–700, and in critical situations even more, given that several hundreds of men were needed to defend the 576 m long rampart of the fort. It is not plausible that the inhabitants of Varbola subsisted from field cultivation because there was not enough arable land in the vicinity to feed such amount of people.⁶ It is more likely that the main preoccupations involved handicraft and trade, which have also left numerous traces in the ground. It is not entirely impossible, however, that other fort districts (Lohu and Keava and perhaps some others as well) helped maintaining the fort of Varbola. But if this was the case, one must explain the underlying reasons for such behaviour, unless these other hill forts were the dependants of Varbola; this, however, would require much more developed feudal relations than present at the time. It is more likely that Varbola was not a common fort district or, in other words, it was an early urban centre with strong fortifications and remarkably numerous inhabitants who subsisted from handicraft, trade⁷, and to a lesser degree also stock raising and field cultivation (see also Lang 2004). Unlike the fort districts, the hinterland of the early urban centre was obviously not organized as a definite system of tax-paying *vakuses* but had other principles instead, which is the reason why the boundaries of this hinterland cannot

⁶ The results of a settlement archaeological study in northern Estonia (see Lang 1996, 366) show that ca 130–140 ploughlands would have been needed to feed 90 families. The LCD records only 22 ploughlands within the 5 km radius and 115 ploughlands within the 10 km radius from the fort (a corner of Lääne district within these 10 km was not recorded in the LCD, but a few villages there would not change the overall picture). It is not plausible that the fields of the fort-dwellers were more than 3–5 km away from the fort, and thus it is likely that the breadcorn had to be obtained as an exchange article or tribute from farther villages.

⁷ Perhaps it is relevant in this context to refer to Paul Johansen's (1964/2006) opinion that the inhabitants of ancient Harju owned the right for trading in the harbour of Tallinn. Similar phenomenon has been recorded in Finland where *Hämeen tie* ('road of Häme') ran from the centre of Häme county, 100 km away from the sea, to the 'harbour of the people of Häme'; also in Latvia the centres of Semigallians, more than 50 km away from the seashore settled by Livonians, had their own harbour in the mouth of the Lielupe River (ibid.). According to Kersti Markus (2007), there was possibly also a water-route connection between Varbola and the Bay of Matsalu via the Kasari River. Geological measuring made by Alar Rosentau (pers. comm.) also confirmed that the Kasari River was a thousand years ago somehow navigable (for smaller vessels) until rather close to the fort. However, although there was a possible water-route connection, the actual location of the ring fort at Varbola was certainly not chosen for this reason only.

As signs of trading, one may also mention the Final Iron Age hoard of 64 German coins found in the surroundings of Varbola, unfortunately without any firm find context (Tõnisson 1962, 191), and the hoard of two silver finger-rings as well as the collection of fragments of silver ornaments discovered in the fort of Varbola (Tamla & Kallavus 1998a, 21).

be revealed by analysing the number of ploughlands. The hinterland, which provided primary products and where one's own production and fruits of trading were marketed, may have included villages from near and far, from other hill fort districts and outside them, from Harju, Rävalla, and Lääne districts. Although Varbola was located on the borders of three provinces – *a propos*, similarly to prehistoric Tallinn – it still remained within Harju district, and therefore its inhabitants were presented as among these of Harju in the chronicle of Henry.

Before proceeding with a close look at the territorial division of prehistoric Harjumaa, I will analyse the relevant information provided by Henry in his chronicle.

Prehistoric Harju district and the campaigns of the early 13th century

The first campaign of the crusaders to Harju district, which according to the chronicler was situated “in the midst of Estonia where all the tribes round about were accustomed to assemble for annual meetings in Raikküla”, started on the 15th of August 1216 (HCL 1982, XX: 2). The invaders had recruited guides from Sakala district, and upon arrival spread across “all the roads, villages and provinces of that land” (Fig. 11.9). Finally, “we assembled at the big village of Lohu, which is on a stream in the midst of the country, and resting there for free days we laid waste all the land in the surroundings and got up to the villages of Rävalla”. The army left on the fourth day, i.e. 18th of August, having collected a huge number

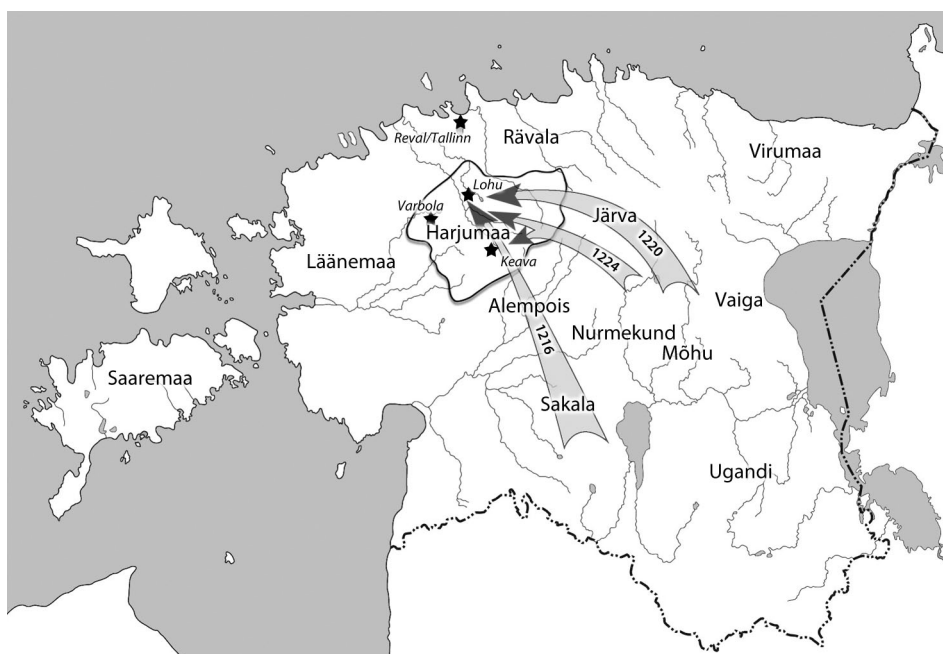


Fig. 11.9. Crusade campaigns against the Harju district in the early 13th century.

of oxen and sheep as a plunder. A great army of the Estonians followed the invaders, but did not attack because “the lot of their gods fell on the opposite side”.

The description of this campaign (in which Henry himself participated) reveals some interesting facts. First, the invaders went to Harju through Sakala, which means that they must have passed through the district of Alempois, which, however, is not mentioned in the chronicle. Further, they must have entered Harju district in its southern part, i.e. through the fort district of Keava. The expression “all the roads, villages and provinces of the land” is with minor variations repeated in the descriptions of several campaigns, which makes one careful in concluding that the district comprised several provinces. This is, however, still beyond doubt because the provinces (in plural) have also been mentioned elsewhere in the chronicle (HCL 1982, XXIV: 2). At least two of the provinces, Keava and Lohu, were plundered during the campaign of 1216. It seems that none of the hill forts were disturbed; moreover, they are not even mentioned by the chronicler. This is particularly curious in the case of Lohu, as the invaders encamped, literally, in front of its gate for three days (Fig. 11.4). These circumstances disclose the tactics of the crusaders: the main effort was put in plundering of the surroundings and causing as many damages and collecting as much loot as possible, while the hill forts, which were difficult to seize, were left untouched. No efforts to baptize someone were made during the campaign under discussion.

At the outset of the year 1220, after a campaign to Järva district and a battle with the men from Saaremaa by the village of Kareda (HCL 1982, XXIII: 9), the Germans encamped again in the vicinity of the village of Lohu. It is likely that this time they entered Harju in the east, presumably heading over Kose right for Lohu. Again, Henry does not mention the hill fort of Lohu next to which the camp was set up. Instead he tells about the fort of Varbola, which sent its representatives “to us asking for terms of peace, and for us to leave their lands”. Volquin, Master of the Order, agreed but demanded that the residents of Varbola accepted baptism and gave hostages. The hostages were indeed given while Henry does not write about carrying out the baptizing. It is likely that the latter did not occur, as sending priests to the so far inaccessible fortress would have been a remarkable event for the Germans; Henry, a priest himself, was also present this time, and he would not have left this event unnoticed. The hostages, however, were returned to their fathers at the request of the Danes (HCL 1982, XXIII: 10). According to the chronicle the Danes had not commenced baptizing the inhabitants of Harju by that time (though it occurred later in the same year), and they claimed the right over them (or, in fact, over the whole northern Estonia, which later became a subject of hot debates between the Germans and Danes) referring to earlier agreements between the Germans and King Valdemar. However, the whole story also implies that there could have been a certain agreement between Varbola and the Danes, as the hostages were returned to the residents of Varbola and not, for example, to the Danes. One may even assume that the inhabitants of Varbola had already accepted (or promised to accept) baptism by the Danes (see also below).

Far more tragic was the fate of these people who upon arrival of the crusaders hid in the underground caves “to which they were always accustomed to flee” (HCL 1982, XXIII: 10). These were probably the caverns of Iida near Kuimetsa, the biggest karst caves in Estonia (HCL 1982, 211, comment 54 by Enn Tarvel). The Livonians besieged the caves, lit fires in front of their mouth, and thus put, according to Henry, about a thousand people to death through suffocating, while survivors were killed or captured; in addition, a huge amount of loot fell in the hands of the invaders.

Harju district (or parts of it besides Varbola) was baptized by the Danes in the same year of 1220, immediately after Rāvala (HCL 1982, XXIV: 2). After the baptizing, the Danes encouraged the people of Harju to raid against their neighbours in Järva district to make them accept the rule and baptism of the Danes instead of these originating from Riga. As the chronicle tells, no less than nine raids were undertaken against the people of Järva, and as a result the latter indeed replaced their lord and baptism with new ones. Subsequently, the provinces of Harju were subordinated to the bishop of Rāvala.

The last bigger campaign proceeding from Riga to Harju took place at the beginning of 1224. The initial plan was to go against Tartu but then resting by Lake Burtnieki in northern Latvia,

...they recalled the Danes who were in continuous troubles and against whom all the adjacent lands and pagan tribes had been fighting for a long time; and they gave up their journey to Tartu and went with all their army into Harju and besieged the hill fort of Lohu, fighting with them for two weeks, building machines and paterells and a very strong wooden tower, which they pushed up near the hill fort, so that they could dig at the fort from below and to better attack them from the top (HCL 2003, XXVII: 6).

The defenders surrendered when the digging of the hill fort seemed to reach its goal and the rampart was about to tumble down. The besiegers seized all they could, “gave the men back to the Danes and sent them back to their villages as free people” while the hill fort was set on fire. But

...the Germans, meanwhile, sent some men from their army to three other lesser hill forts lying round about, and threatened war upon them unless they surrender. And these three adjacent hill forts surrendered to the Rigans, sending them tribute and a great many ‘*waipas*’ (carpets) during the same campaign (HCL 2003, XXVII: 6).

This section of the chronicle raises a series of questions. According to the text, Henry did not participate in the campaign, and thus did not eyewitness the events. The first matter of interest is the sudden change in plans, the decision to help the old rivals Danes⁸ instead of attacking Tartu, which was under the direct rule of Riga. Another curious aspect is attacking the hill fort of Lohu where the

⁸ True, already in 1222 an agreement with the Danes on the division of lands had been concluded in Saaremaa (HCL 1982, XXVI: 2). In Sulev Vahtre’s view (1990, 162), Harju district may have been the target of the campaign from the very beginning, as there is no need to go to Tartu over Lake Burtnieki (*Astigerwe*) area. Heiki Valk suggests, however, that the crusaders still went via the district of Ugandi (not besieging Tartu at that time) and reached Harju district from the direction of Järva (see Lang & Valk 2011).

army had been peacefully camped at least twice in earlier times⁹ (although the fort is mentioned by name for the first time only now). The reasons for choosing the hill fort of Lohu instead of Tartu as a target are unclear; perhaps the inhabitants of Lohu were those who besieged Tallinn together with the people from Varbola, or who by repeated raids forced their neighbours in Järva to replace their German lords with the Danish ones. In the former case, the joy of the Danes about the German help (HCL 1982, XXVII: 6) could be easily understood, while in the latter case it remains entirely incomprehensible.

The chronicle tells about digging into the slope of the hill fort during the two-week siege so that the rampart of the fort was in real danger of collapsing. However, no traces of such a dig can be observed at the hill fort of Lohu. True, one of the hill fort's sides with no rampart allegedly sank into the river. If the sinking occurred as a result of digging the slope of the hill from below, we must assume that the 'very strong tower' of the besiegers was built on the ice cover of the river. It is highly questionable whether the ice was capable of bearing such a load, and whether the besiegers were willing to take that risk. Moreover, the discussed side of the hill looks very even and untouched, and it is reasonable to think that this steep slope defended by the river never had any earthwork erected on it. A completely different situation is in Keava where a hollow in the hill's slope is visible even today, and where archaeological excavations have proven that the rampart had really been torn down (chapter 1). The chronicler does not write about the siege of Keava, although mentions disturbing and threatening three smaller hill forts of the district until they surrendered. This, however, must be considered nothing more than a muddle, because archaeological investigations have not identified other forts of the time in Harju district besides these in Varbola, Lohu and Keava. Conquering and burning down of three forts has also been mentioned by Henry in conjunction with the first campaign against Soontagana (HCL 1982, XIV: 10; see also Vahtre 1990, 163) – despite the fact that there were no other forts beside the one at Soontagana, which this time remained unconquered this time. The overall impression is that the described events of 1224 occurred at Keava rather than at Lohu; Henry may have had placed these events at Lohu because this was a name and place he knew well – unlike Keava, which was probably an unknown or forgotten name. Also, the hill fort of Keava was the first when approaching from the south.

Power structures in prehistoric Harju district in the Final Iron Age

It is apparent from the chronicle of Henry that the district of Harju comprised several provinces, one of them Varbola. Henry uses the term 'province' to mark

⁹ It might be concluded from this that the inhabitants of Lohu and the Rigan Germans maintained a certain friendly relationship. On the other hand, it is known that the Germans, on their way to St. Matthew's Day battle, peacefully encamped next to the fort of Viljandi, which at this time was in the hands of the Estonians. True, in 1211 Viljandi had been baptized, though not conquered (HCL 1982, XIV: 11, XXI: 2).

various types of territories – prehistoric districts (Est. *maakond*), parishes (*kihelkond*), and fort districts (Lang 2002, 154). Therefore it is by no means clear what exactly the ‘province of Varbola’ stood for. It may have been a parish, a fort district, as well as the relatively amorphous hinterland around the early urban centre of Varbola. According to the LCD, post-conquest Harju district had two ecclesiastical parishes: the large parish of Hageri (covering the middle, southern and western parts of the district), and the parish of Kose in the north-eastern corner of the district (Johansen 1933, 194; see also Markus 2007). It was only in the 1240s when the parish of Juuru was separated from that of Hageri. The short list of the LCD mentions three provinces (Johansen 1933, 188). The north-easternmost corner of the district that became the parish of Kose was indeed discernible as a separate unit in the Final Iron Age. The other provinces of Harju, on the other hand, seem to have united into a single ecclesiastical parish, regardless of their nature and character, already before the LCD was compiled.

It is clear from the chronicle of Henry that Varbola maintained a special position in the crusades of the early 13th century. The inhabitants of Varbola pursued their own policy, which was completely independent from the rest of Harju, and entered, perhaps at quite an early stage of the conquest, into an agreement with the Danes residing in Tallinn. The possible existence of such agreement becomes evident where the chronicler tells how the men from Saaremaa visited Varbola to familiarize themselves with the paterell, “which the Danes had given to the people of Varbola as their subordinates” (HCL 1982, XXVI: 3). It is plausible that armaments were donated to allies rather than enemies or the defeated. Moreover, the Danes defended the people of Varbola (or, in other words: their own interests) in the ‘hostage crisis’ of 1220, which was described above.¹⁰ It is not clear what the inhabitants of Varbola gave in return, besides allowing themselves to be baptized (it is known that in 1222 some priests resided in the fort indeed). Were it trading and the right to use the harbour that made Varbola to cooperate with the new lords of Tallinn? It is likely that the supposed agreement with the Danes prevented the conquerors from Riga from turning against Varbola during their campaigns to Harju district, even after the 1224 overall uprising of the Estonians, in which Varbola also participated. The inhabitants of Varbola seem to have shown little initiative in fighting against the conquerors, which is not what we might expect from such a strong centre. They were separately mentioned only in conjunction with the two sieges of Tallinn in 1222 and 1223, but at least on the latter occasion the initiative came from the army of the Pskovian Prince who was invited to Estonia by the people of Sakala. On the former occasion, however, the inhabitants of Varbola may have been among the initiators, considering that some of the besiegers first gathered in Varbola (HCL 1982, XXVI: 5). Perhaps the residents of Varbola saw these campaigns as a way for pursuing their

¹⁰ True, the inhabitants of Varbola did not reciprocate: in 1222 they did not prevent men from Saare, Harju and some other seaside provinces, who had gathered in Varbola, from killing some Danes and priests who resided in the stronghold (HCL 1982, XXVI: 5). Perhaps the earlier “friendly” relations had come to an end due to strained political relationships.

own ends, for instance in view of the (future) right of use of the harbour at Tallinn? All these implicit circumstances depict Varbola as a unit with its own separate policy resting on peace and freedom – though only their own freedom, as they do not seem to have been much concerned about the fate of the rest of the country. Conversion was not a problem for them in achieving their goals, since there is no other occasion of baptizing recorded in the chronicle that passed so unnoticeably as that performed in Varbola.¹¹

In addition to Varbola, which was probably an early urban centre with its own economic hinterland (embracing the western part of Harju district, quite likely also Rävåla and the areas of Lääne district that bordered Harju), there were two common fort districts in prehistoric Harju – Lohu and Keava. The north-western border of the fort district of Keava was probably running on the Rapla–Kabala line along the Konovere River; in the east and north-east it bordered with the unsettled area of hillocks (Hills of Keava) and bogs of Keava, Palasi, and Ilmsi, while the southern border remained in the uninhabited forested area between the districts of Harju and Alempois (Fig. 11.8). *Vakuses* of the Lohu fort district evidently concentrated on both sides of the Keila River from Kasu at least to Härgla, perhaps reaching even slightly farther south up to Rapla and Juuru. Mires and wetlands on the Järlepa–Pähkla line may have formed the east-north-eastern border of the district, while the west-south-western border is more questionable. In E. Laid's view (1939) the latter was located north-east of the Hageri–Koigi line, i.e. along the later border between the ecclesiastical parishes of Hageri and Juuru, not far from the hill fort of Lohu. It is likely, however, that the fort district of Lohu also included the *vakuses* immediately west of the above line, between Iira and Lümandu; these *vakuses* were separated from Varbola by a ten kilometre wide zone of mires and forests.

Neither Keava nor Lohu have yielded hoards of precious metals. However, reference should be made of the silver hoards found in the village of Angerja (Tamla & Kallavus 1998b). The settlement site with Viking and Final Iron Age finds yielded two assemblages of ornaments, including import items, which had been buried at the end of the 12th or the beginning of the 13th century. A certain connection between Angerja and Lohu becomes evident from the fact that after the conquest a part of Angerja (eight ploughlands) and a part of Lohu (four ploughlands) were enfeoffed to Hænrich fan Anger, a vassal probably of local Estonian origin (Johansen 1933, 766; Moora & Ligi 1970, 87 ff.). This may reflect partial maintaining of prehistoric power relations, or in other words, the nobleman Hænrich from Angerja may have had been the chief (or one of the chiefs) of the hill fort of Lohu. Here one should recall what Henry said about returning the people to the Danes and sending them back to their villages after

¹¹ According to Paul Johansen (1933, 206) and Kersti Markus (2007), there also was an early ecclesiastical parish called Hertele around Varbola, which probably lost its importance and disappeared after the abandonment of Varbola in the mid-14th century. The existence of a church or chapel in the fort of Varbola has not been proven as yet; however, the medieval and early modern cemetery in its courtyard (Laid 1939) makes this quite possible.

the capitulation of the Lohu hill fort (HCL 1982, XXVII: 6). This message reflects not only the fact that the inhabitants of several surrounding villages found shelter in a hill fort in times of danger, but also the circumstances explaining how strongholds such as Lohu belonged to several villages or groups of villages (*vakuses*) headed by elders.

Finally, we should mention the north-eastern corner of the district where a group of *vakuses* with its own peculiar accounting system for ploughlands could be observed between Voose–Rooküla–Mustla (and there were probably some more *vakuses* farther in the west). The border of the later ecclesiastical parish of Kose with Hageri and Juuru ran in the uninhabited zone of forests and bogs immediately east of the Mahtra–Pahkla line. Although in the Final Iron Age there was no hill fort in the district, one may still assume that at least the four above-mentioned *vakuses* with the same number of ploughlands belonged to a single owner. It is not impossible that the three hoards from Paunküla, dating from the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries (Tõnisson 1962, 191 f.; Tamla & Kallavus 1999; 2000), refer to the location of the relevant power centre. In addition, hoards have been found at Voose and Kose (Tõnisson 1962, 191; Leimus 1986). Obviously, the district and power of the local noblemen was too weak to build a hill fort as usual.

Summary

The first fortified power centres developed in Keava during the Migration Period and Pre-Viking Age, and at Lohu probably not before the Viking Age. Both of them were fort-and-settlement centres, as in many other places in Estonia. Something similar was probably about to emerge at Ahisilla in the north-eastern corner of Harju, but the process seems to have remained unfinished. All three centres were established at certain distances from the existing settlements, which seems to reflect significant social transformations in the entirely agrarian society of the time. In the 11th century, the centres of fort-and-settlement in Keava and Lohu were reorganized into fort districts, where groups of villages, united as *vakuses*, had common duties to establish and maintain a hill fort. At the end of the 11th or beginning of 12th century a new stronghold was founded in Varbola, much bigger and stronger than any other hill fort. It seems that Varbola was also located away from settlements; at least the villages in its surroundings are not much older than the fort. The sparse *vakuses* of the area do not have a common denominator for their numbers of ploughlands, and therefore the hinterland of this centre must have been organized differently from Keava and Lohu. There are several reasons to view Varbola as an early urban centre, which had certain rights of use in the harbour of Tallinn and pursued its independent policy in regard of the foreign rule in Tallinn and Riga, as well as Novgorod. The fourth administrative unit, presumably with its centre in Paunküla, is discernible in the north-eastern corner of the district, where a group of *vakuses* with similar number of ploughlands but no fortified site can be found.