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**A MESOLITHIC HUMAN FIGURINE
FROM RIVER PÄRNU, SOUTH-WEST ESTONIA:
A CENTURY-OLD PUZZLE OF IDOLS, GODDESSES
AND ANCESTRAL SYMBOLS**

More than a century ago, a small human sculpture made of elk antler was recovered as a stray find from the bottom of River Pärnu in south-west Estonia. It was originally widely used and interpreted in connection with Neolithic figurines from south-east Europe and considered a Mother-God. Later on the figurine was almost forgotten and mentioned only randomly in association with the Stone Age art of the eastern Baltic region. By now the sculpture has been dated to the Mesolithic by direct AMS-sample, thus being one of the oldest dated figurines found in the region. A new interpretation has been given that the sculpture represents a wrapped corpse.

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Introduction

In the early years of the twentieth century, an antler human figurine (PäMu 1 A: 501) was found in River Pärnu, south-east Estonia (Fig. 1). It is one of the rare archaeological finds from Estonia that already from the very first publications (Ebert 1913; Glück 1914) reached several wider studies about European archaeology (Tallgren 1922; Childe 1925; Gimbutas 1956). Due to some reasons, interest in the object was lost during the second part of the century. It was mentioned only passingly in a study about the Stone Age religion in Estonia (Jaanits 1961) and it has not been brought up at all in *Eesti esiajalugu* (Estonian Prehistory, Jaanits et al. 1982), which was a major study of Estonian archaeology for decades. Most likely, one of the reasons for such a random use was the absence of dating and therefore a speculative relationship with any specific archaeological period and culture.



Fig. 1. The figurine from the bottom of River Pärnu. Photo by Kristel Külljastinen.

The figurine

The 10 cm tall human sculpture is made of an elk antler and it was created with only very simple means. Two different ways of processing can be distinguished: cutting to create sharper edges and smoothing to express softer contours. With three wide grooves, the knees, waist and neck have been marked, and with a sharp cut the flat breast and chin are shown. The mouth has been cut in so that the round chin emerges. The face together with the hooknose has been designed by polishing. Eyes have not been depicted and this makes the statuette different from all other Stone Age figurines. Although slightly younger, the human figurines from the East European forest zone of the Late Mesolithic – Early Neolithic always have eyes and/or strong and protruding eyebrows (Butrimas 2000, 12). Eyes are marked usually with drilled holes, but it seems that the eyebrows alone were also good enough for that purpose (see Fig. 4: 6, 7, 9). The face of the Pärnu figurine has only a nose and a mouth, leaving the upper part of the face plane. In addition to the eyes, the sculpture is also missing details of the body. While the rest of the human figurines from the northern part of Eastern Europe have their hands marked with lines or carved, then in the case of the Pärnu example it had not even been tried. Also legs are missing, and therefore Marija Gimbutas has characterized the figurine as “with a single leg” (Gimbutas 1956, 189). According

to Gimbutas, the absence of legs and hands is common in the art of the Stone Age East European forest zone (*ibid.*). Still, the claim does not hold true and limbs, either more or less elaborated, have been marked in the majority of human figurines dated to the Stone Age.

The figure has been made from the tip of an antler branch. One can only agree with the suggestion by Eduard Glück that the antler branch was longer at the time of carving and it was used as a handle until it was cut (and broken) shorter from the pate after it had been finished (Glück 1914, 265). Because of that the surface of the pate remained uneven and a groove was formed.

Find context

It is not known when exactly the figurine was found. It was first mentioned by Max Ebert (1913, 520) as an example from the private collection of Friedrich Rambach, but the proper publication and description was presented by Eduard Glück a year later (1914, 265 f.). According to them, it can be assumed that the figurine was found either in 1911 or 1912.

The antler object was found from the bottom of River Pärnu in the town of Pärnu, upstream of the one-time brick factory Koksi (Glück 1914, 266), in the so-called Pauka crook, which is one of the richest find places of Estonian Stone Age bone and antler objects. The finds were collected mainly at the beginning of the 20th century, when sand and gravel was quarried from the bottom of the river. During the shovel-based quarrying, a rich collection of ancient artefacts was found from the Pauka crook. This site, which initiated the creation of many privately held collections, contained both hunting and fishing gear, but also axes, processed and unprocessed bone and antler, etc. In addition to the human figurine, another more symbolically interpretable artefact from the same site was a tooth pendant (PäMu 332: 1). Several human bones have also been reported (Glück 1906, 275), unfortunately not preserved till now. Previously it has been suggested that River Pärnu has eroded Stone Age settlements somewhere upstream and carried finds somewhat further (Jaaniets et al. 1982, 42), the finds have been resettled during sea-storms (Glück 1906, 278) or that River Pärnu is destroying some Stone Age site by the side-erosion (Indreko 1929).

According to a recent study (Rosentau et al. 2011) the site was a dry land at the time of producing the figurine (Fig. 2) and it was soon followed by the rapidly rising transgressive Littorina Sea, inundating large areas (Rosentau et al. 2011, fig. 8.3). Considering the excellent preservation of objects, which have no signs of erosion in sand or gravel environment, the interpretation that marine sediments are covering some Mesolithic sites seems most plausible. All known Mesolithic settlements at the lower reaches of River Pärnu from that time-period come from upstream and are slightly older than the human figurine – Sindi-Lodja I (7050–6700 cal BC) and II (7200–6650 cal BC) (Kriiska & Lõugas 2009, 168).

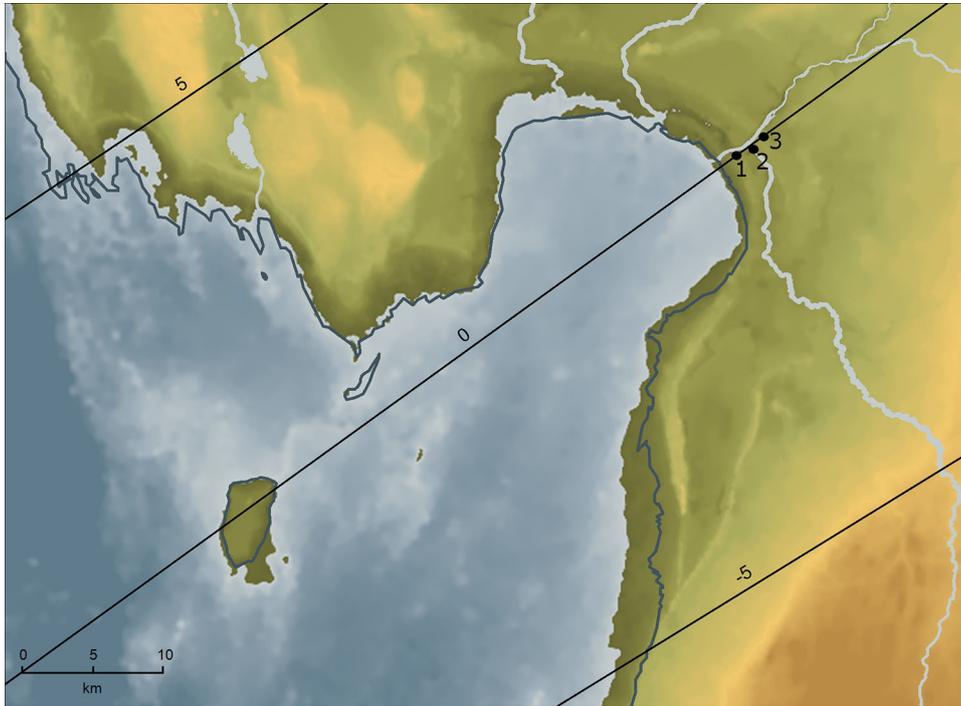


Fig. 2. The find situation of the figurine (modified from Rosentau et al. 2011). The find site of the figurine (1) and Mesolithic settlements Sindi-Lodja I (2) and II (3) are marked with dots. Pärnu Bay is represented before the Littorina Sea transgression ca 7000 cal BC.

History of research and first attempts of dating

Due to the lack of archaeological context of the figurine, several different interpretations about the date and meaning of this stray find have been used. However, some elements seem to appear universally since its discovery and during the following century. Eduard Glück was the first to call the figure an idol – “*eine neolitischen Idol*” (1914, 266), which is further interpreted as a half-made idol (*Vorarbeit eines “Idols”*) by E. G. Bliebernicht (1924, 15). Characteristically of the period, Glück also mentions that the figure depicts a dolichocephal and it has a grumpy face (*mit dolichocephalem Schädeltypus und finsterem Gesichtsausdruck*) (Glück 1914, 265). The general statement that the figurine represents a female also originates from very early papers (Glück 1914; Indreko 1931, 49; Moora 1932, 20). This is best illustrated in an apologising remark by Eduard Glück, according to whom the female shape is better expressed in the item than on its photograph (Glück 1914, 266). Identifying prehistoric human figurines as females can be considered a rather universal approach and if clear male characteristics have not been depicted, figurines tend to be generally understood as females (Lesure 2011, 12).

Without doubt the first problem with such a stray find is its temporal and cultural belonging, which creates a basis for further interpretations. As it was found in a river, the only possible method for dating it at the beginning of the 20th century was to compare its morphological similarities with other, better known and dated examples.

Although the proper publication of the find was made by Eduard Glück in 1914, it was Max Ebert in his paper (1913) on the overview of the archaeology of the Baltic countries, who made a claim that persisted in the interpretations of the figurine for a long time (Fig. 3). Ebert referred to the similarities between the antler figure from Pärnu and Finnish ceramic figurines, but suggested simultaneously that the figurine might be connected with the Neolithic Tripolye culture (4800–3000 BC) in Ukraine (Ebert 1913, 520). The latter argument has been repeated by several authors (e.g. Childe 1925, 162; Europaeus 1930). Julius Ailio even considered the Pärnu figure as a Mother-God (“*Muttergott*”) on the basis of the famous human figurines of Tripolye culture (Ailio 1922, 108). Referring to Ebert’s publication, Ilze Loze expressed the same position, stressing that morphological

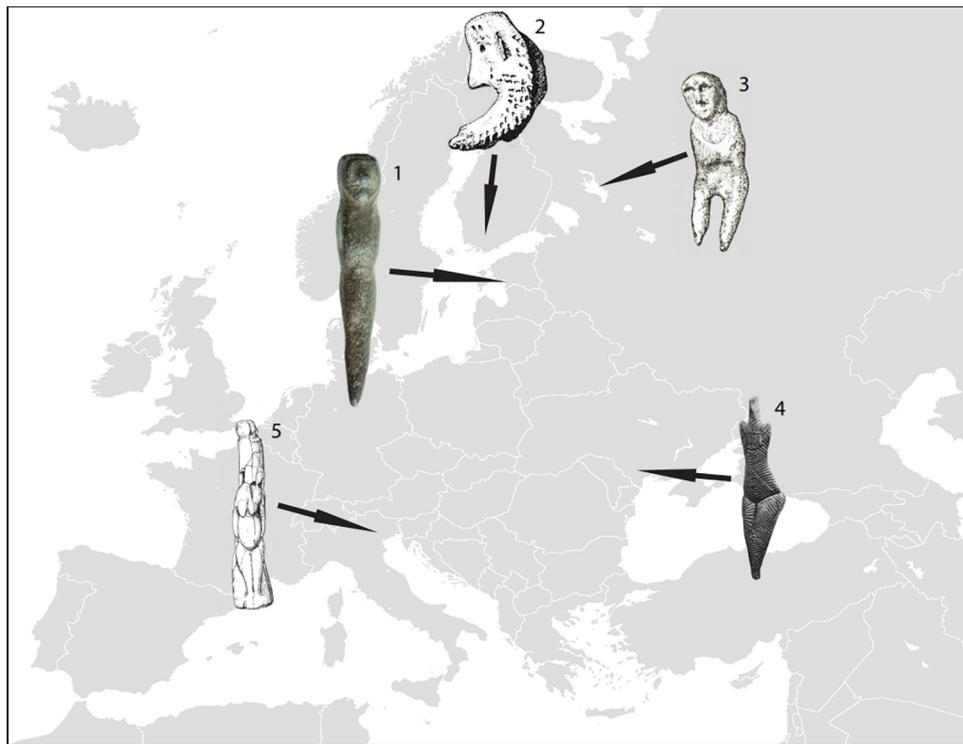


Fig. 3. Human figurines that have been used as analogies for the figurine from River Pärnu (1): examples from the Neolithic Finland (2), Mesolithic cemetery from Oleni Island, Russia (3), Neolithic Tripolye-Cucuteni culture, Ukraine (4) and Mesolithic site Gaban, North-Italy (5). Drawing by Kristiina Johanson.

analogies to the Pärnu figurine are absent in north-European Neolithic art (Loze 1987, 39). All these suggestions are based on the generalization that both the figurine from River Pärnu and those from south-east Europe are emphatically stylized, straight and tall.

Side by side with the interpretations directed to the south-east European analogies, a tradition existed to associate the figurine with the Finnish Neolithic ceramic figurines (Glück 1914, 234; Leppäaho 1937, 41) and thus it was dated to the Comb Ware culture (4000–2500 BC). Still, this interpretative branch remains exceptional and is not used by other authors. Only Richard Indreko supported the latter interpretation in the 1940s, to find proof to his claim that the figurine was not related to the traditional south-east European analogies (Indreko TÜ F 150, s 81, 192). It is true that similarities between the Pärnu figurine and the Finnish (and eastern Baltic) ceramic figurines are limited to the fact that they are all three-dimensional sculptures, but further resemblance is difficult to find.

Harri Moora has also suggested similarities of the artefact to the figurines from the countries along the Danube, but according to him it was Prussia that was the connection between the Baltic and southern Europe. He also suggested the cult of ancestors and death as a background to the figurine from Pärnu, yet without arguing it in any more detail (Moora 1930, 164; 1932, 20). Nor does he present any finds from Prussia as analogies, but it could be assumed that he kept in mind the famous Juodkrantė amber figurines (Klebs 1882). Still, a new idea arises with the article: the connection between the Baltic region and southern Europe does not have to be direct, as all the previous studies have tried to show; just the idea of making human figurines has been borrowed from there to the forest zone. The same idea is also repeated by Indreko (1931, 48), who suggested that during such a movement the semantics of the figurines probably changed. But Indreko also points to the significant differences between the Pärnu figurine and the ones from the Danube area (Indreko 1931, 50). A somewhat similar result is reached by Marija Gimbutas (1956, 190); according to her, the Nordic style of human figurines should not be understood as the outcome of the influences from the south, but as an independent cultural area, which is neither connected with the Palaeolithic nor the Neolithic south-European figurines.

However, despite such a vivid discussion of the object in the first half of the 20th century, it was mentioned only passingly in the second half, stressing that it depicts a female body (Studzitskaya 1985, 111; Loze 1987, 39). Besides formulating the dating and its cultural affiliation, interpretations gained much less attention. The only one belongs to Lembit Jaanits (1961, 67), according to whom the figurine could have been “a carrier of family ancestral souls”. During half a century the interpretations changed from that of the Stone Age idol or Mother-God to the one of a symbol of the soul.

Differently from the previous search for associations, Adomas Butrimas (2000, 10) has pointed to the similarity of the Pärnu figure to an antler human figurine found from the Mesolithic cemetery of Oleni Island in Lake Onega, north-

west Russia (Fig. 5). With this, Butrimas dates the Pärnu figure to the Mesolithic, instead of Neolithic like all previous interpretations.

It is apparent that all the previous interpretations of the artefact were based on the morphological similarities that it shared with human figurines from different archaeological contexts. Due to this, most authors have focused on the Neolithic as a major period of making human figurines. But it must be admitted that the Pärnu figurine is unique and a good analogy to it is missing. Throughout the history of research, three different directions of influence have been proposed: the Neolithic figurines from south-east Europe, Finnish Comb Ware culture ceramic figurines and the Mesolithic figurine from the Oleni Island cemetery, but they are all somewhat different from the Pärnu example, which makes it difficult to associate the figurine directly with any wider traditions.

Dating

As it was impossible to put the figurine into its chronological context on the basis of the morphological features only, it was dated by direct AMS-method¹. The first problem that was faced prior to the dating was poor documentation about the conservation. Eduard Bliebernicht, the keeper of collections at the Pärnu Museum, where the object had reached by the 1920s, was a farsighted man for his time and was also responsible for the conservation of the bone and antler objects found from River Pärnu. Unfortunately, no documentation has survived (and most probably was never produced) about the conservation process. According to his correspondence from 1921 with prof. Aarne Michaël Tallgren from the University of Tartu, Bliebernicht had suggested protecting bone objects by covering them with shellac (Saluäär et al. 2002, 110). Thus it could be assumed that the majority of the bone and antler collection from River Pärnu was also covered with shellac. The lacquer, spirit-based mix of natural raisins, could make the sample younger. The shellac-test with spirit produced a negative result and thus the dating was proceeded. The reliability of the AMS-dating was also supported by the raw material of the figurine – elk antler – which minimizes the reservoir effect.

The necessary amount for the sample was drilled out from the pate of the figurine for several reasons. First, it was the widest spot of the item, where it was possible to drill without causing any damage to the rest of the figure. Second, the pate was uneven anyway and was formed only when the figure was cut off from the antler branch. The surface was cleaned with spirit and 0.49 g of antler flakes and powder was drilled out. The age of the sample was measured with 95% probability to 6220–6020 cal. BC (conventional age 7240+/-40 BP) (Beta 317861)²,

¹ The dating was supported by the Museum of Pärnu and it was connected with the new exhibition at the Museum.

² Calibrated using programme OxCal version 4.2.4. Bronk Ramsay 2013, atmospheric curve Reimer et al. 2013.

which makes it currently the oldest dated figurine recovered from Estonia and also the oldest dated human figurine in northern Europe. The level of C13/12, which has been problematic for many dates from the eastern Baltic (see Eriksson & Zagorska 2002, 164), dropped from the permitted level only very little: $-21,4\%$ ³.

Human figurines from the Mesolithic in the Baltic and beyond

Humans have been among the most popularly used figures in the East-European forest zone art. However, they are rarely involved in worldwide debates about prehistoric figurines, where examples are preferred from south-east Europe and Near-East (see e.g. Bailey 2005; Lesure 2011 and references therein).

In addition to the Pärnu figurine, 11 human figurines from the Stone Age are known from the present-day Estonia, all from one site – the Tamula I hunter-gatherer cemetery/settlement in south-east Estonia (Fig. 4). Amongst those figures



Fig. 4. Human figurines from Tamula cemetery, Estonia (AI 6667: 12; 4118: 557, 849, 575, 576, 945; 3932: 155; 4118: 1746; 3960: 300; 4118: 1922; VK 3000/A 14: 197). Photo by Tõnno Jonuks.

³ The allowed range of C 13/12 in case of deer family should be between 17–21%.

six depict a human face and five the whole body (see more Jonuks 2009, 100 ff.). Most of the figurines have been found from the mixed occupation layer and cannot be contextualized for a more precise dating. Only a single figurine depicting the full body, which was found in burial no X, and three pendants depicting a human head, which were found at the knees of burial No. VIII, allow some further suggestions. As those burials have been dated to 4250–4000 cal BC and 4330–4070 cal BC, respectively (Kriiska et al. 2007, table 1)⁴, we can possibly also associate the rest of the pendants to the 4th millennium BC, as the stylistic features are remarkably alike. The major difference between the Pärnu example and the Tamula figurines, in addition to more than two millennia separating them, is that the latter are all small pendants made of bone plate and were possibly originally fastened to clothing. Similarly to the figurine from River Pärnu, the Tamula examples have also been deliberately stylized and only one of them has been carved with more details (Fig. 4: 7). On its shoulders lines have been carved, which have been interpreted as the depiction of clothing (Indreko 1931, 34). Unlike the sculpture from River Pärnu, the small pendants of bone plate from Tamula have their eyes or eyebrows marked. Such dissimilarity might be a key to understanding the statuette from Pärnu and it will be discussed further on. Another characteristic feature of the pendants from Tamula is that all pendants depicting a full body are broken. As several other pendants from the site are also broken, for instance, the ones depicting waterfowl, it is possible that the breaking of figurines might have been part of a burial ritual. I have previously interpreted human- and animal-shaped pendants from the cemetery as depictions of helping spirits of a shamanism-like religion (Jonuks 2009, 123). According to this, the figures that were attached to the ritual clothing might have been symbols of spirits that the owner used as helpers during the soul's wanderings or in other rituals. This is the reason why figures have been buried in the cemetery together with their owners. Possibly the breaking, or symbolic 'killing' of the figures of spirits during the burial helped to eliminate the spirits without the controlling owner who might otherwise have become dangerous to the living group.

Similarly to Estonia, anthropomorphic pendants found from the neighbouring areas – especially from the Baltic countries, north-west Russia and southern Scandinavia – represent forms rather similar to the ones from Tamula (see also Gurina 1997; Studzitskaya 1985; Nuñez 1986; Butrimas 2000; Iršēnas 2000; 2010; Larsson 2000; Kashina 2006). They are made of different materials: in addition to bone and antler, amber and in some regions also flint has been used. In a few cases some exotic raw material, sometimes with additional symbolic meaning have been discerned, like human skull (Butrimas 2000, 23) or sturgeon's bone (Iršēnas 2010, 182). Still, their dating is significantly younger than that of the find from River Pärnu, and they belong to the same time span as the

⁴ Kriiska et al. 2007 do not eliminate the reservoir-effect and thus the actual dates should be slightly younger. See more about the dating of Tamula site in Tõrv in print.

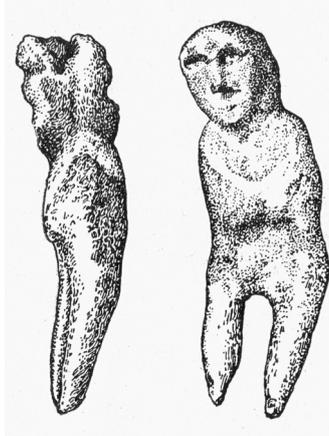


Fig. 5. A human sculpture from Oleni Island Mesolithic cemetery, north-west Russia (according to Gurina 1956).

examples from Tamula, around 4000 BC and onwards. Only one single human-shaped plate pendant from Besov No. 6, at Lake Onega, Karelia, has been dated to the Mesolithic (Lobanova 1995). It must be noted here that since it is difficult to date these tiny figurines directly, their exact dates are often either absent or derive from a wider context that cover a longer time span.

Human pendants made of bone, antler or amber plates share common features: the majority of them depict the front view of a human, usually limbs have been marked and the main elements of face are shown, the nose and eyes/eyebrows in particular, more rarely also lips and the mouth. Further elaboration is more varied and specimens can be found which have not been decorated at all or, on the contrary, are almost entirely covered with notches and dots.

While the previous examples represent plate pendants, three sculptural specimens come from the Mesolithic cemetery of Oleni Island, in Lake Onega, Karelia. The figurine from grave no 130 represents a rather different style, with its head missing and limbs elaborated. Another two pieces, from burials Nos 18 and 23 are more similar, depicting human sculptures. Skeleton 23 was accompanied by teeth pendants, a snake figure made of bone and an antler human figurine (see Gurina 1956, 221 f., fig. 120: 2). The 6.5 cm tall figure (Fig. 5) resembles the Pärnu example most, with the major difference that legs have been carved to it, but no sign of arms can be traced. The most significant difference is that the figurine from Oleni Island has two faces – a fully detailed depiction on the frontal part and an extremely stylized one behind the head (Popova 2001, 132). According to Gurina (1956, 221), the figurine from Oleni Island served a “ritual function”, although this statement is not explained any further. The third figurine from burial No. 18 (Gurina 1956, 221, fig. 120: 1) bears also remarkable similarities to the one from Pärnu. It is also considerably stylized, the body has been shaped by smoothing and no clear cuts can be found. Only the conical head, shoulders (or arms?) and hips come forth.

Burials Nos 18 and 23 from Oleni Island are located in a relatively younger part of the cemetery; burial No. 19 from the immediate vicinity has been dated to 6120–5471 cal BC⁵. This allows associating both burials with figurines also with the Late Mesolithic as the figurine from River Pärnu.

⁵ 6870+/-200 BP (Oshibkina 1990, 403), calibrated using Oxcal v4.2.4. Bronk Ramsey 2013; atmospheric curve Reimer et al. 2013.

Looking wider at the European Mesolithic art, the closest chronological analogy to the Pärnu figurine comes from the Mesolithic settlement from Gaban, northern Italy (Kozłowski 2009, 504). It is an obviously female statuette with emphasized breasts, made of a tubular antler of a red deer. The layer, where the figurine was found, is dated to between 6500–5500 BC, which corresponds well with the date of the specimen from River Pärnu. The figurine from Gaban is stylized, showing only the contours of a female body. Differently from the figurine from River Pärnu, the one from Gaban has clearly elaborated limbs, belly and breast, only the head is missing. Emphasis on these details makes it clearly different, as the Pärnu figurine lacks all other details except facial features.

To conclude, it seems that there is no direct and close specimen as an analogy to the sculpture from River Pärnu. Chronologically and morphologically the closest analogies come from the Oleni Island cemetery. These belong to the same time span and to the same geographical area; also the character of the figurines, especially the naturalistic style and hidden details of the body, are very similar.

Interpretation

To turn back to the figurine from River Pärnu the interpretation of the human is most interesting. Is it a concrete person from 8000 years back, or is it a depiction of a Mesolithic 'Man' (cf. Lesure 2011, 56)? The figurine seems to be emphatically stylized and considering the sharp and accurate cuts at the chin and breast it seems to be highly unlikely that no more details were carved because of lack of tools or skills. Considering the careful polishing, E. Bliebernicht's argument (1924, 15), according to which it is a half-made idol, does not seem to hold true. We could rather assume that the figurine was supposed to be as it is and this extreme stylizing is purposeful and thus also meaningful. As regards the commonness of limbs in all other figurines, the absence of these in the Pärnu example is especially striking. All this leaves the impression that the body of the figurine is depicted as covered, and it seems most likely that the sculpture represents a human who has been wrapped into something, most likely a dead body, wrapped into fur. Liv Nilsson Stutz (2006, 232) has regarded Finnish clay figurines as depictions of wrapped corpses, again based on the lack of limbs, although the facial features, especially eyes, of ceramic figures are clearly accentuated. L. Nilsson Stutz associated the emphasizing of eyes on figurines with the tradition of covering eyes with amber rings in the case of some burials, especially in Zejnieki, northern Latvia.

Although the wrapping of dead bodies is common in archaeological interpretations, as a rule, proofs have seldom been looked for it (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 296). Nevertheless, examples of wrapping can be found in different contexts, based on different arguments. For example, bear claws found among Iron Age cremation remains have been interpreted as a body wrapped into a bearskin during burning (Petré 1980; Sigvallius 1994, 76). On the basis of significant

markers of bone positions, Liv Nilsson Stutz has referred to some possibly wrapped Mesolithic burials from Skateholm I and II and Vedbæk-Bøgebakken in south Scandinavia (Nilsson Stutz 2003, 298 ff.) and even more in Zvejnieki in northern Latvia (Nilsson Stutz 2006). It is often unsure what has been used for wrapping; however, direct preserved evidences mostly point to bark and fur only on single occasions (*ibid.*, 231).

The interpretation of the statue from River Pärnu as a depiction of a corpse could explain why eyes have not been marked. Eyes seem to have been crucial for most figurines from the forest zone (Iršēnas 2010, 182) and this is a tradition that can be followed more globally. According to Ben Watson (2011, 95), eyes should be considered as fundamental elements in depicting a face for the entire humankind. Eyes could not be found only in cases when their carving was difficult due to the material, e.g. on flint figurines. In the case of flat bone pendants, eyes have usually been marked with holes or eyebrows. The Pärnu figurine is missing any signs of attempts to make eyes and thus the avoiding of eyes seems to be deliberate, with the most likely purpose to show a face without eyes – a dead face. Open eyes are the most vivid part of a human face while the glazed eyes are the most distinctive element of a dead person. Dangerous beliefs about the look of a dead person are known worldwide and can be regarded as universally human. There are also several cases of Stone Age burials in the Baltic region, in which a specific treatment of eyes can be observed. In Zvejnieki burial ground eyes of burials have been covered with amber discs (Zagorskis 1987; Zagorska 2008, 122); clay or slate discs were used to cover the eyes of the dead in Finland (Edgren 2006). At this point we should recall the human figurine found in burial No. 23 at the cemetery on Oleni Island in Lake Onega (Popova 2001, 132). The figurine has two faces: a natural human face with eyes and other details and an ultimately stylized face on the other side of the head. Could that depict the transformation from life to death? Or is this a representation of somebody capable of soul wanderings and trance rituals? Due to trance, human eyes change and the face acquires a death-like appearance. That could mean that the figurine from burial No. 23 can symbolize somebody who has two faces (*resp.* identities) – alive and dead ones.

I have previously suggested that human- and animal-shaped flat bone pendants might have been figurines of helping spirits in a somewhat similar religion as we know from contemporary north-Eurasian shamanism, and were probably attached to ritual clothing (Jonuks 2009, 123). The figurine from River Pärnu is missing all marks of being attached and also both its date and appearance are somewhat different than those of the plate pendants. It most certainly does not rule out the possible usage of the figurine as a symbol of a helping spirit, but several other interpretations are available as well. When using analogies from north-Eurasian contemporary indigenous cultures, like the Khanty, it can be assumed that the figurine might have represented a spirit who was supposed to protect a village, a family or a single person. In some cases they were representations of dead ancestors, sometimes more general anthropomorphic

domestic idols, carved out of a tree in a family grove (Jordan 2003, 170). Such figures inhabited houses, they were carried along on travels and they depicted dead ancestors who were supposed to guarantee safety to the living community (e.g., Vallikivi 2005, 121 and references therein). The oldest of such figures have been described already among the Nenets people in the 16th century, but belief in the protective power of ancestors can be regarded as universal and represented in all religions (see Insoll 2011 and references therein). The main difference of this interpretation and the Pärnu figurine is that all the known representations of ancestors depict somebody alive and thus capable of activity. According to Peter Jordan, the domestic idols were with “eyes and ears to see and hear all” (Jordan 2003, fig. 6.13). As we saw above, the Pärnu sculpture is deliberately shown as dead and passive, which indicates the different attitude towards the agency of dead ancestors. Considering the 8000 years that have passed since the making of the human sculpture, it is obvious that we should not look for any close parallels from the present world, and that Mesolithic beliefs behind that sculpture were unique and reflected this particular time.

As the sculptures from the Oleni Island cemetery seem to form a group most similar to the figurine from River Pärnu, it allows speculating that the Pärnu figurine may also originally come from a burial. The riverbank and the estuary were probably attractive to hunters and fishermen, and two known settlements from the vicinity indicate the Mesolithic habitation there anyway. In the early 1900s human bones have been found from the same location as the figurine (Glück 1906, 275) and thus the interpretation as a grave good seems plausible. Perhaps the connection of two water bodies – the river and the open sea – gave some additional mental meanings to the site. Several other religious artefacts have been found in similar ‘specific’ landscapes. The importance of the lower reaches of River Pärnu is also indicated by the find of a figurine of a waterfowl, dated to the same period, 6000–5840 cal BC (Jonuks 2013). Another example, an antler figurine of a viper, found on the shore of the present-day Narva River, north-east Estonia, probably belongs to the same period and landscape situation (see Rosentau et al. 2013, 928). Similar dates of all these figures suggest that the earliest preserved art in the Baltic region started around 7th–6th millennium BC as sculptures and it was later developed to smaller figurines and plaquettes.

Several cemeteries are situated in a similar landscape where different water bodies meet. The best-studied cemetery of Tamula is located at the mouth of River Võhandu, on the shore of Lake Tamula. Similar landscape use in the Mesolithic could be found all over northern Europe (Conneller 2011, 363). The choice of such a landscape, in which different sources of water meet, may conceal different reasons for regarding it as important. On the one side, the mouth of a (large) river is a good landmark, as it brings fresh water to the coast and is a good fishing site (comp. Butrimas 2000, 13; Lahelma 2005, 43). Such a liminal place marked by different water bodies could have been used as a settlement, a cemetery, a fishing site, but also as a holy place in the cosmology of Mesolithic people.

So we may conclude that the antler human figurine found in River Pärnu depicts most possibly a dead corpse wrapped in fur, and it probably portrays a dead ancestor. At the present state, both possibilities seem to be open: either it is a personal guardian spirit, and thus probably comes from a destroyed burial, or it is an ancestral figurine important for a wider group and thus it might come from some kind of camping/settling place. Both sites might have existed on that piece of land on the shore of the Pärnu Bay and can be covered with marine sediments at the present time. The figurine of a wrapped body and the tooth pendant are the only known examples found there indicating to a possible burial, while numerous other bone and antler objects rather point towards the settlement site.

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Tõnno Jonuks

**INIMKUJU PÄRNU JÕEST – SAJANDI JAGU IIDOLEID,
JUMALANNASID JA ESIVANEMAJD**

Resümee

Rohkem kui sajand tagasi leiti Pärnu jõest juhuleiuna sarveokstast 10 cm pikkune inimkujuke. Pärast avastamist jõudis see ühe vähese Eesti esemeleiuuna peagi mitmetesse laiematesse arheoloogiakäsitlustesse (Tallgren 1922; Childe 1925; Moora 1932; Gimbutas 1956). Kuna 20. sajandi algul oli figuuri võimalik vaid morfoloogiliste sarnasuste järgi dateerida, seostati kujukest ühelt poolt Soome kammkeraamika savifiguuride ja teiselt poolt neoliitilise Tripolje kultuuriga. Siiski oli selge, et Pärnu jõe inimfiguur ei ole otseselt mitte kummagagi seotud, ja nii vaibus suurem huvi kujukese vastu ning edaspidi kasutati seda vaid möödaminnes või eirati hoopis.

Figuur dateeriti radiosüsinikumeetodil aastatega 6220–6020 eKr ja nii on tegemist põhjapoolse Euroopa ühe vanima figuuriga. Samaaegseid kujukesti on mujalt Euroopast väga vähe teada ja parima analoogi Pärnu figuurile pakuvad mõnevõrra nooremad Äänisjärve Oleni saare kalmistult. Need kõik kujutavad inimest väga stiliseerituna ja edasi on antud vaid põhilised tunnused. Pärnu figuuril on välja nikerdatud vaid näo kontuurid ja ülejäänud keha on edasi antud põlveõnnalde, piha ning kaela õnaruste lihvimisega. Ehkki näol on esitatud suu ja nina, siis puuduvad silmad, mis kõikidel teistel kiviaegsetel figuuridel, eriti hilisematel neoliitistel, on kui kohustuslik element. Samas on nii Pärnu kui ka Oleni saare figuurid teostatud meisterlikult ja neid ei saa figuuride toorikuteks pidada.

Seega on kujukeste skemaatilisus ja detailinappus teadlik ning eesmärgipärane, seega ka tähenduslik. Figuuri keha oma puuduvate detailidega jätab mulje, nagu oleks see millessegi, tõenäoliselt nahkadesse, mässitud. Lisades siia puuduvad silmad, on tõenäoline, et selle figuuriga on kujutatud surnukeha, kellel ei ole enam elusa inimese tunnuseid (avatud silmi) ja kes on matuseks ette valmistatud (nahkadesse mässitud). Võimalik, et selle figuuriga on kujutatud mõnd surnud esivanemat, kes sellisesse kujukesse materialiseerudes pidi elava kogukonnaga kokku jääma. Antropoloogilistes kirjeldustes on surnud esivanemaid kujutavaid figuure tihti mainitud, kuid neid kõiki on kujutatud aktiivsetena: selgelt on edasi antud silmad, kõrvad ja suu, samuti käed-jalad ning tegemist on aktiivsete olenditega. Pärnu näide on aga kujutatud passiivsena. Juhul kui tõlgendus sellest figuurist kui surnukehast vastab tõele, viitab see hilisemate perioodidega võrreldes ühtlasi ka surnu erinevale agentsusele mesoliitikumis.