



# Ristimäe stone grave on the island of Muhu

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## PREQUEL

In spring 2014, forest fire broke out on *Ristimäe* (Eng. Cross Hill) premises in Nurme village, Muhu Island. The fire, started by careless grass burners, was soon extinguished and the damage was not very extensive: only a small part of the pine grove and bush undergrowth perished. Due to this, the forest became transparent and the cairn under the trees came into view (Fig. 1). A man from the Nurme village, Mihkel Mägi, went to explore it and with the help of a metal detector found a fragment of a bronze brooch (Fig. 2). He immediately reported his discovery to the heritage inspector of the Saare County, but for some reason his report was not paid attention to. For a year the brooch, handed over to the Muhu Museum, and its findspot were forgotten, but M. Mägi remembered them when uprooting of the trees and bushes damaged by fire started on Ristimägi. This prompted him, together with his neighbour Rein Saksakulum, to ask the landowner for permission to investigate the cairn. In April 2015 they went to the spot several times and dug out a lot of artefacts. ‘We saved the finds, because if the tractor had gone over the cairn one more time, nothing would have survived there’, the men explained. Heritage Conservation Act § 32.2 (see [tinyurl.com/Act32-2](http://tinyurl.com/Act32-2)) only allows to remove the found thing in case it is endangered, but in principal, it is strictly prohibited, since this will sabotage the find context.



**Fig. 1.** View of *Ristimäe* stone grave after forest fire, from the north-west.

Jn 1. Vaade kivikalmele pärast metsatulekahju.  
Pildistatud loodest.

Photo / Foto: Nele Kanger



**Fig. 2.** Fragment of a penannular brooch with widening ends.

Jn 2. Fragment laienevate otstega hoburaudsõlest.  
Photo / Foto: Tarvi Toome

## FIELD DAY OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD ON THE FINDSPOT

On 29 April 2015, the National Heritage Board made a trip to Ristimägi to inspect the cairn and finds recovered there. The finds, most of which were deformed by high temperatures or



**Fig. 3.** Ristimäe stone grave, view from the south.

**Jn 3.** Vaade Ristimäe kivikalmele lõunast.

Photo / Foto: Ülle Tamla



**Fig. 4.** View of the area, where the tractor had crossed over the grave several times, from the west.

**Jn 4.** Vaade kohale, kus traktor oli sõitnud korduvalt üle kalme. Pildistatud läänest.

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo

deliberately damaged, indubitably belonged to a cremation burial. The eastern shore of an erstwhile bay, about 9 m above sea level, had been chosen for the burial site. As a result of the land rise, the erstwhile bay has dried and today it is used as a meadow and a pasture. Today the burial site stands out on the terrain as a SW – NE-oriented mound, about 200 m long, 30–80 cm high and 15–20 m wide at the foot (Fig. 3). Since a lot of stones have been heaped on the top and at the sides of the mound from the fields, and a road has been dug through its southern end, it is still vague whether it is a single burial site or several joint ones. Three trial pits were dug in the northern, eastern and western parts of the cairn. Each of them revealed compact stone settings, upon which, and also between the stone layers, the soil was evenly dark, sporadically bluish-black and coaly. Across an approximately 3 m wide area, where the tractor transporting the burnt trees and bushes had crossed over the cairn, deep cuts disturbed the surface (Fig. 4). In one of these a partly melted fragment of a bronze chain and about ten burnt bone fragments were found; in the same area M. Mägi and R. Saksakulm had recovered most of the found artefacts (Tamla 2015).

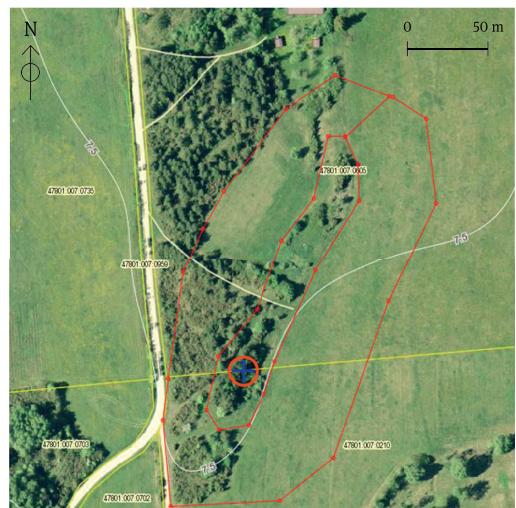
On the basis of the observations made on the spot, it was considered necessary to suggest that the stone grave on the premises of Ristimäe and Kaasiku should be taken under protection (Fig. 5). The landowners got permission to cut the trees and bushes damaged by fire, but not to root them up since the rooting would further damage the grave constructions, burials and grave goods in the different layers. The owners were also informed that in a zone of 50 m around the cairn the permit of the National Heritage Board must be obtained for constructing buildings and roads and digging ditches, and for any other earthwork and digging.

## FINDS FROM THE RISTIMÄE GRAVE AND THE DATE OF THE BURIAL SITE

The total of 65 find numbers of metal artefacts were recovered from Ristimägi. The overwhelming majority of them bear traces of having been in fire. Many of the artefacts have been deliberately broken or deformed. In addition, 11 burnt bone fragments, including a skull fragment, were found; these still need to be determined. All metal finds were placed in water-filled cases, and therefore the change of environment did not cause fast oxidation. However, storing in water does not grant long-term preservation of metal and hence the finds were handed over to be conserved. After the conservation the finds were handed over to the Archaeological Research Collection of Tallinn University, and registered as state property.<sup>1</sup>

Classification of finds by their material and artefact types reveals that bronze ornaments and costume accessories prevail: neck- and belt-chains (Fig. 6: 1), chain-holders (Fig. 6: 2), decorative pins (Fig. 6: 3–4) and pins from headdress, neck rings (Fig. 6: 5) and bracelets (Fig. 6: 6–7), pendants (Fig. 6: 8) and finger-rings (Fig. 6: 9). Belt buckles (Fig. 6: 11) and knife sheaths (Fig. 6: 12) are also made of bronze. Two artefacts are made of silver: a small brooch with oval frame and iron pin (Fig. 6: 13), and a circular sheet pendant with a suspension loop of sheet bronze (Fig. 6: 14). The number of iron tools and commodities is surprisingly small: a bridle and four knives. The same can be said about weapons, represented by a battle axe with traces of fire (Fig. 6: 15), a bronze chape of a scabbard (Fig. 6: 10) and a half of a sword hilt.

The period of use of the Ristimäe grave can be indirectly defined on the basis of artefacts discovered there. Generally they belong to artefact types well known in Estonian archaeological material, typical to the 12th – 13th centuries sites. Such items are, for instance, five large cross-headed decorative pins, united cross hands of which are marked by four small holes (Fig. 6: 4). Three of them bear traces of melted tin decoration. Such pins were used to fasten breast chains and their counterparts can be found in female burials in Kaarma, Muhu Viira, Kärla, Paiküla and Valjala cemeteries (Kustin 1958, 50, plate II: 1; Selirand 1975, 94, plate XI: 3; Mägi 2002, 104, plate 133: 1). The four large chain-holders with a wavy lower edge (Fig. 6: 2) and fragments of two knife sheaths (Fig. 6: 12) are contemporaneous with these late decorative pins. The knife sheaths represent women's knife sheaths of the so-called Saaremaa type, which have a rhomboid extension at the mouth. After the 13th century such sheaths were not made any more (Kustin 1962a, 88–89; Selirand 1970, 174). The finger-rings with a transversely grooved thicker middle part and overlapping loose ends are also characteristic to female burials of the 12th – 13th centuries on Saaremaa (Kustin 1958, 51). Ristimäe finds included six such specimens. One of these was in the find assemblage (Fig. 6: 9) consisting of about ten



**Fig. 5.** Chart of the Ristimäe grave together with the protection zone. Red ring marks the area where the concentration of the discovered grave goods was the highest.

**Jn 5.** Skeem kaitse alla võetud Ristimäe kalnest koos kaitsevööndiga. Punane sõõr tähistab ala, kust oli avastatud kõige tihedamalt hauapanuseid.

Base map: Estonian Land Board / Aluskaart: Maa-amet.

<sup>1</sup> AI 7401.

wire-wrapped rods, a couple of small chain fragments and two larger iron rings, all partly melted and stuck together.

The few finds that could be dated to an earlier period include a broken double-cross-headed decorative pin with lower terminals connected by straight spikes (Fig. 6: 3). Ornaments of this type appeared in the 11th century (Mägi 1997, 46), but their later use alongside with pins of new shapes cannot be precluded either (see Selirand 1974, 146; Kustin 1962b, 414–415). The dating of the axe, belonging to M type by Jan Petersen's typology of axes is also problematic (Fig. 6: 15). This type is characterized by a broad blade with curving sides, a curved edge, short neck and extensions on the shaft-hole. It is supposed that the manufacturing of such battle-axes started in Scandinavia in the 10th century; from there they spread until East and Central Europe and were used at least until the 14th century (Kivikoski 1973, 117, No. 874; Atgāzis 1997, 60–62; Thunmark-Nylén 1998, plate 257–259, 304; 2006, 311–313).



**Fig. 6.** Metal artefacts recovered from Ristimägi: 1 – fragment of a belt-chain, 2 – chain-holder, 3–4 – decorative pin, 5 – neckring, 6 – bracelet, 7 – fragments of a spiral bracelet, 8 – cross pendant, 9 – find assemblage consisting of a finger-ring, wire-wrapped rods, chain fragments and iron rings, 10 – chape of a scabbard, 11 – belt buckle, 12 – knife sheath, 13 – silver brooch, 14 – silver sheet pendant, 15 – battle axe.

**Jn 6.** Ristimäelt avastatud esemeid: 1 – vööketi fragm., 2 – keekandja, 3–4 – ehtenõel, 5 – kaelavõru, 6 – käevõru, 7 – spiraalse käevõru fragmendid, 8 – ristripats, 9 – esemetekogum, milles on sõrmus, varrasahelikud, ketijupid ja rauast rõngad, 10 – mõõgatupe otsik, 11 – pannal, 12 – noatupp, 13 – hõbesõlg, 14 – hõbeplekist rinnaleht, 15 – sõjakirves.

Photo / Foto: Tarvi Toome

The specific feature of the Ristimäe axe is a curved ledge, parallel to the edge, forged on each side of the blade. A similar ledge can be noted also on the axe among the grave goods of the female cremation burial XXVIII of Rahu, dated to the 12th century (Mägi 2002, 90, plate 83: 3), which may suggest the same manufacturer.

## SUMMARY

In the Ristimäe grave the deceased have been buried after cremation on a pyre. Deciding by the finds recovered there, the grave was used during the Final Iron Age in Estonia. This is not surprising, because in the 12th century and at the beginning of the 13th century the custom of cremation burials, where remains collected from the extinct pyre were buried in stone graves, prevailed in Estonia. Estonian stone graves have been regarded as family burial sites, where all members of the family, including those who died in infancy, were buried. Most of the stone graves of that period are above-ground cairns, without any marked structure. Some of them are so low and with so few stones, that they remain unnoticed on the present-day terrain. This can be said primarily about the stone graves on the thin soils of west and north Estonia, where during the last decade amateur archaeologists using metal detectors have provided useful information for discovering the graves (Kiudsoo *et al.* 2012, 238–241). In other places, including Saaremaa and Muhu, cremated dead have been buried in higher cairns, which were evidently quite conspicuous on the erstwhile terrain. This is also confirmed by the Ristimäe stone grave, erected on a higher shore of erstwhile bay or backwater. Although the ancient burial site was forgotten, its popular name – Ristimägi – was preserved in the name of the farm where it was located.

On 15 May 2015, Directive No 17-A of the Director General of the National Heritage Board the Ristimäe prehistoric grave/cemetery was taken under temporary protection. Expert panel for archaeological monuments presented Mihkel Mägi and Rein Saksakulm, discoverers of this grave, archaeology books, but they were also reminded that seeking objects of cultural value with metal detector requires training in this field.

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## RISTIMÄE KIVIKALME MUHU SAAREL

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2014. a kevadel sai Muhu saarel Nurme külas Ristimäe talu maal hooletust kulupõletamisest alguse metsatulekahju. Pärast seda muutus mets avatuks ja põõsarägust tuli nähtavale kivivare (jn 1). Seda läks pärast põlengut metallidetektoriga uudistama Nurme küla mees Mihkel Mägi ja avastas pronkssõle katke (jn 2). Muu muuseumile üle antud ese ja selle leiukoht ununesid ära, kuid meenusid Mägilie uuesti siis, kui Ristimäel alustati kahjutules kannatada saanud puude ja põõsaste väljajuurimist. 2015. aasta aprillis käidi kivivarel koos naabri mehe Rein Saksakulmuga mitmel korral ning kaevati välja suur hulk esemeid. „Me päästsite leiud, sest kui traktor oleks veel korra üle vare sõitnud, ei oleks seal midagi alles jäänud“, öigustasid mehed oma tegevust. Ka muinsuskaitseasendus lubab hävimisohus kultuuriväärtusega esemed oma kohalt eemaldada, kuid üldjuhul on see rangelt keelatud.

29. aprillil 2015. aastal tegi Muinsuskaitseamet väljasöidu Muuhumaale Nurme külla, et vaadata üle Ristimägi ja seal välja kaevatud esemed. Leiud, millest suurem osa olid körges kuumuses deformeerunud või tahtlikult purustatud, osutasid üheselt põletusmatustega kalmele. Selle rajamiskohaks on valitud omaaege merelahe idapoolne kõrge kaldapealne (jn 3). Nüüdisaegsel maaistikul eraldub vana matmispaik u 200 m pikkuse ja 30–80 cm kõrguse kamardunud künkana, mille laele ja servadesse on kivikoristusega veetud hulganisti kive. Kuna vare lõunaotsast on läbi kaevatud ka tee, jäab esialgu lahtiseks küsimus, kas Ristimäel on üks või mitu liitunud kalmet.

Kivivaresse kaevati kolm prooviaukku, üks põhja-, teine ida- ja kolmas lääneossa. Neis kõigis paljandus tihe kivilade, mille peal ja kivikihtide vahel oli muld tume, kohati söesegune. Kohas, kust traktor oli kalmost korduvalt üle sõitnud, olid tekkinud sügavad roopad (jn 4). Ühest roopast leiti sulanud pronksketi jupp ja kümme-kond põlenud luutükikest. Samast piirkonnast olid M. Mägi ja R. Saksakulm välja kaevanud ka suurema osa nende avastatud esemetest (jn 5).

Tulenevalt leiu koha ülevaatamisel tehtud tähelepanekutest peeti vajalikuks esitada Muinsuskaitseameti peadirektorile ettepanek Ristimäe ja Kaasiku kinnistutele jäätava kivikalme kaitse alla võtmiseks (jn 5). Kalme peal ja selle servas tulekahjustusi saanud puud ja põõsad lubati maaomanikel eemaldada, kuid nende juurimine keelati ära, kuna see rikuks kalmerajatist ja selle erinevates kihtides asetsevaid matuseid ning hauapanuseid. Ühtlasi anti maaomanikele teada, et kivivaret ümbrisseval 50 m laiusel alal ei ole lubatud Muinsuskaitseameti loata ehitamine, teede, kraavide ja trasside rajamine jt mulla- või kaevetööd.

Ristimäält avastati 65 leiuunumbrit esemeid, mida talletakse riigivarana Tallinna ülikooli arheoloogia teaduskogus (AI 7401). Neile lisanduvad 11 põlenud luutükikest, mille täpsem määramine seisab ees. Leidude liigitamine materjal ja esemeliikide kaupa näitab, et ülekaalus on pronksist ehteasjad ja riitetuse juurde kuuluvad esemed: kaela- ja vööketid (jn 6), keekandjad (jn 6: 2), linikupee- ja rinnanöelad (jn 6: 3–4), kaela- ja käevörud (jn 6: 5–7), ripatsid (jn 6: 8) ja sõrmused (jn 6: 9). Pronksist on ka rihmapandlad (jn 6: 10) ja noatuded (jn 6: 12). Höbedast on ovaalse raamiga sõlg, (jn 6: 13) ja ümmargune rinnaleht (jn 6: 14). Vähe on töö- ja tarberiistu: rauast suitsed, neli nuga ja mõned riputuskonksud. Sama saab öelda relvade kohta, mida esindavad sõjakirves (jn 6: 15), pronksist valatud mõõgatupe otsik (jn 6: 10) ja mõõga poolik käepide. Ristimäe kalme leidude näol on üldjuhul on tegemist Eesti arheoloogilises materjalis hästi tundud esemetüüpidega, mis on iseloomulikud 12.–13. sajandi muististele. Üksikud esemed, mille juures võiks kõne alla tulla mõnevõrra varasem dateering, on pooleks murtud kaksikristpeaga rinnanöel (jn 6: 3) ja laia laba, kitsa kaela ja kahepoolsete silmalappidega sõjakirves (jn 6: 15).

Ristimäe kivikalmesse on sängitatud põletatud surnud. Leidude põhjal otsustades oli kalme kasutuses muinasaja lõpuperioodil paari sajandi vältel. Eesti kivikalmete kohta arvatakse, et need olid perekondlikud matmispaigad, kuhu sängitati kõik pereliikmed. Enamik selle ajastu kivikalmeid on maapealsed kindla struktuurita kivikuhilad. Harju- ja Läänemaal on need olnud sedavõrd madalad ja väheste kividega, et jäavad tänapäeva maaistikul tihti märkamatuks. Viimasel kümmendil on neid aidanud avastada otsinguvahendi kasutamise loaga hoiarheoloogid. Saaremaa ja Muhus on põletatud surnuid maetud kõrgematesse, omaaegsel maaistikul ilmselt hästi silma tornanud kivikangrutesse. Kuigi Ristimäe matmispaik oli pikalt unustusehõlmas, säilis selle rahvapärane nimetus talunimes, mille maal asub alates 11. maist 2015 kaitsealuseks kuulutatud muistis.

Arheoloogia eksperdinõukogu ettepanekul kingiti kalme avastanud Mihkel Mägilie ja Rein Saksakulmule arheoloogiaalaast kirjandust, kuid ühtlasi toletati neile meelde, et kultuuriväärtusega esemete otsinguvahendiga otsimiseks tuleb läbida vastav koolitus.