



Hoard from Sarve, Hiiumaa – reviewing local history

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2024, metal detectorist Erki Järvekülg discovered ten fragments of silver coins, a penannular brooch, a mount and a needle from four different locations in Sarve village on the island of Hiiumaa (Fig. 1). He reported the discovery to the National Heritage Board (MA), but fieldwork on the site to recover the potential hoard was delayed. It was finally carried out in early December 2024 by OÜ Arheograator together with the original finder and another hobby searcher, Illar Salusoo. An area of 1.39 m² was stripped of soil to recover the rest of the hoard, and an area of 600 m² was metal detected, revealing two more fragments of silver coins. In autumn 2024, the detectorist discovered five more or less intact silver coins and a smaller coin fragment 387 metres west from the first coins. Although all the coins are poorly preserved, they offer an extremely rare glimpse into life in Iron Age Hiiumaa as shown in this preliminary study.



Fig. 1. Location of the site on the southeastern side of Hiiumaa.

Jn 1. Leiukoht Hiiumaa kaguküljel.

Map / Kaart: Monika Reppo, RStudio („osmdata“ package / pakett)

THE SITE

The surveyed area was situated in the former Pühalepa parish, in Sarve village, on a natural seaside gravel ridge – the Ristiranna embankment (Fig. 2), which is used as a seaside grazing field for sheep. The findspot of the first (Fig. 2, red) and second coins are respectively 355 metres northwest and 320 metres north of Naistlaiu (Sarve) harbour, 4.25 km south of Heltermaa harbour, and 1.45 km west of Kaevatsi islet. The brooch was found furthest to the east, 500 metres from the second coins (Fig. 2, black). There are no sites under protection in the vicinity,

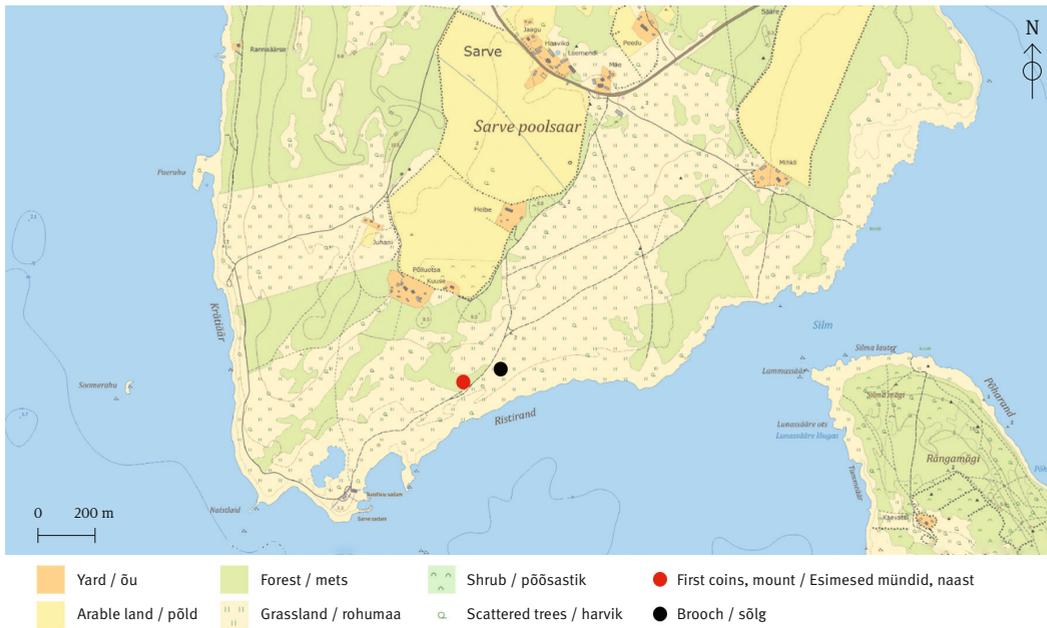


Fig. 2. Sarve peninsula and the findspots on a basic map.

Jn 2. Sarve poolsaar ja leiukohad põhikaardil.

Map / Kaart: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board / Maa- ja Ruumiamet; Monika Reppo

the closest protected site is the 19th-century Soonlepa manor complex, which the village historically belonged to, situated 2.4 km northeast of the first coins. The closest archaeological site, the 17th-century Valipe fortified house, is located 5 km northeast. Soonlepa (Somelepis, Somelep) is first mentioned in 1453, and Valipe is first mentioned in 1529 (Kallasmaa 2010, 230, 272). They appear on a 1704 map as Sumpel and Wallipä respectively (RA, EAA.1.2.C-IV-1, f. 1). Unfortunately, this and other historical maps that depict the area are poor in detail and severely distorted regarding the coastline or any significant details, even the locations of the villages can be mirrored or incorrect. No roads are shown on maps of the peninsula until 1792 when Kaevatsi road connecting Soonlepa to the coast is first depicted (RA, EAA.46.2.34, f. 1). Today, this road leads to a unique underwater causeway which is used to drive to Kaevatsi islet by car, but unlike tidal causeways, it is always submerged. On this map, Sarve is situated on the shore at the end of the road.

The first map depicting farmland in Sarve village dates from 1830 (RA, EAA.46.2.366, f. 15). The map cuts off by the first findspot, but the area is depicted as a grazing field (Ger. *Viehweide*). The layout of the farmland southwest of the heart of Sarve village (north and northeast of the findspots; see Fig. 2) is the same as today, indicating very few changes in land use in the last 200–300 years. Mäe road, which connects the village to the shore and then runs along the coast to Naistlaiu harbour, is also partially shown on this map. No archaeological surveys or excavations have been carried out in the area before, apart from surveys at Valipe and Hanikatsi islet (5 km south). There are two undated historical stone jetties at Naistlaiu harbour.¹ During World War II, a series of artillery gun pits were dug along the beach, and one of these sits directly southwest of the findspot of the first coins. At least

¹ https://eelis.ee/default.aspx?state=2;-294849174;est;eelisand;;&comp=objresult=parandobj&obj_id=-2126731944,17.04.2025.

two large shells fell here, according to locals,² one near or on the harbour, i.e. southwest and south of the sites, and the other northeast of the findspots. Artefacts and shell fragments from this period can therefore be found along the beach.

FIELDWORK

As the discovery of the second coins had yet to be officially reported when fieldwork started, the research plan only included the study of the first site. Despite this, the second spot was documented. The findspots of the first coins and mount were studied first (Fig. 2). The coins were found scattered between and above the roots of a birch tree on the flat, narrow grassy top of the natural gravel ridge; the mount was found around 5 metres south from the coins by a juniper bush near the bottom of the slope of the ridge facing the sea. An area of around 30 metres in diameter encompassing the two findspots was investigated with two metal detectors. To assist in difficult weather conditions and to get an initial idea of the distribution of finds, all spots with a signal were marked with a tag and number before any objects were removed (Fig. 3). Most of the finds were from the World War II period or later and were not kept. A thin folded copper sheet may have been older and perhaps used as a strap end.³ The survey also revealed a fragment of a silver coin around 5 cm and half of a silver coin at the depth of 15 cm.



Fig. 3. The findspot of the silver coins on the gravel ridge by the sea. The tags mark signals received during metal-detecting.

Jn 3. Hõbemüntide leiukoht kruusasel seljandikul mere ääres. Valged sildid markeerivad otsinguvahendiga saadud signaalide asukohti.

Photo / Foto: Monika Reppo

Considering the location of the two coin fragments and the findspot of the rest of the coins, a 100 × 106 cm trench was dug with a 40 × 70 cm extension towards the sea. Soil was removed in 5–10 cm spits; the removed soil and exposed surface were then metal-detected both with a pin-pointer and two metal detectors. Here, organic-rich topsoil was deposited over a layer of loose coarse gravel intertwined with tree roots, which lay on densely packed fine gravel. No cultural layer or further artefacts were identified; only signs from retrieving the coins during the original metal-detecting were seen. No traces of a storage vessel or textile, or leather pouch were found. The brooch was found 116 metres northeast from the rest of the finds (Fig. 2) along the same natural gravel ridge at its eastern end by some erratic boulders on the beach, around 10–15 cm below the surface, which has minimal vegetation, and it is exposed to the elements. The area around the boulders was metal-detected, and the findspot was documented. It appears to be a chance find.

Interestingly, the second findspot was roughly at the other, western end of the same ridge. Similarly to the first coins, this findspot also sits on a flat, narrow grassland on the gravelly

² Oral information, 3.12.2024.

³ All finds from August 2024 are detailed in the expert report on the finds (Leimus 2024) but without a site code or individual numbers as the list of finds will be put together by the MA. This means the expert report on the site survey (Reppo 2024) does not include a list of finds either. At the time of writing, all finds are yet to be handed over to Foundation Hiiumaa Museums where they will be stored.

ridge, lined by trees. Although this site was not excavated, a large boulder had been removed from its original spot, likely by the farmer, which had left a 40 cm deep pit. The hole dug in this spot by the detectorist was still visible in December despite the snow and sleet, revealing dark grey sandy organic-rich topsoil on top of loose gravel, as seen in the trench dug at the first findspot. As the site is not under protection and remains unexcavated, the findspot of the second coins is not shown on Figure 2. It was not possible to study the findspot of the needle – it was also at the gravelly beach, but the finder was unfortunately unsure of the exact location, as several months had passed since the initial discovery.

THE FINDS

As of now, we know of 18 coins from two findspots, all of which – except for one Hungarian denar (no. 18 in the table) – were minted in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (hereafter referred to as German) (Table). The coins have likely been disturbed and dragged across the beach by hummocky ice. This has damaged the surface of the coins, broken them apart, and made them brittle. Additionally, probably due to long-term use, the coins are mostly very worn, which makes their identification even more difficult.

The coins found in the two different locations, nearly 400 metres apart, are similarly worn and in places covered with blackish patina. They are also similarly dated. It remains unclear whether they could represent coins from the same original deposit. The rarest of the coins in the first hoard is a denar, minted at the time of the Konstanz archbishop Warmann

Table. Attribution of the coins⁴

Tabel. Müntide määrangud

Compiled by / Koostanud: Ivar Leimus

No. / Nr	Mint / Müntla	Ruler / Valitseja	Years / Aastad	References / Viited	Weight / Kaal	Remarks / Märkused
1	Remagen or Andernach?	Cologne imitation	from 1056	Dbg. 337; Häv. 317	0.7	Broken rim
2	Lüttich	Emperor Heinrich III?	1046–56	Ilisch 2014, 34.29?	0.63	
3	Utrecht	Bishop Wilhelm de Ponte	1054–76	Dbg. 542; Ilisch 2000, 10.5	0.55	
4	Groningen	Bishop Bernolf	1040–54	Dbg. 559; Ilisch 2000, 18.3	0.22	Frg.
5	Dokkum	Count Brun III	c. 1050–	Dbg. 499; Ilisch 2000, 21.19	0.55	2 frg.
6	Goslar <i>et al.</i>	Otto and Adelheid	1st half of the 11th c.	Hatz 1961, V	0.76	
7	Goslar <i>et al.</i> ?	Otto and Adelheid, imitation?		Hatz 1961, V or VI?	0.22	Frg.
8	Emden	Count Hermann	c. 1050–70	Dbg. 773; Kjellgren 1993, p. 17–18	0.22	Frg.
9	Mainz	Archbishop Willigis	975–1011	Dbg. 801 or 802	0.7	
10	Mainz?	Emp. Konrad II?	1027–1039?	Dbg. 790?	0.8	2 frg.
11	Speyer	Anonymous	c. 1002–39	Dbg. 836; Berghaus 1954, p. 213	0.89	
12	Speyer	King Heinrich III	1039–46	Dbg. 830	0.61	Pierced
13	Speyer	King Heinrich III	1039–46	Dbg. 830	0.43	Frg.
14	Worms	King Heinrich IV	1056–84	Dbg. 846; Leimus 2000	0.4	Cut half
15	Konstanz	Bishop Warmann	1026–34	Dbg. 1684	0.71	
16	Unidentified		1060–70s?		1.01	
17	Unidentified				0.23	Frg.
18	Esztergom	Andreas I	1046–61	Huszar 1979, 9	0.52	2 frg.

⁴ The coins found from the second findspot are indicated by the darker background in the table.

(1026–1034) (Fig. 4). It is the first of its kind from Estonia. The newest firmly attributed coin in the hoard was minted in Worms during the reign of King Heinrich IV (1056–1084) (Fig. 5). It was also the only coin which had been cut in half. This means the *tpq* of the hoard cannot be earlier than 1056.

The second hoard contains one very worn coin that deserves separate consideration (Fig. 6). One side of the coin depicts a cross with pellets in the angles, which was the most common design motif on coins of that time. On the other side, however, a structure with three (?) towers and an arched gate can be vaguely discerned. This type of design did not appear on German coins until 1057 and originated in Cologne (Häv. 350). Following Cologne's example, this motif was adopted in many other mints of the Holy Roman Empire, for example, in Utrecht from around 1060 onwards (Ilisch 2000, 10.12, 1317–20, 22–24). However, as far as is known, such towers never appear together with a simple cross on the other side of the coin. It is therefore likely that this is an imitation, the exact time of minting and origin of which remain unknown so far. The composition of the finds indicates that they belong to a larger group of coin hoards found from Estonia which began accumulating in the 1060s. Considering the identification of the youngest coins, the Sarve hoard(s) could not have formed before the 1060s–1070s.

The square silver mount (Fig. 7), which was found slightly south of the first coins, measured 11 × 12 mm. It was gilded on the outer side and embossed with a single row of dots along each edge. The middle of the mount is domed and has four lopsided dots which form a clover or flower. Each corner has a circular pierced hole to take rivets and to attach the mount to leather or textile. Unlike the coins, the mount is medieval and dates from the second half of the 13th century, at the earliest (Pregla 2015, 686). Although these types of mounts have been



Fig. 4. *Konstanz, Bishop Warmann (1026–1034).*

Jn 4. *Konstanz, piiskop Warmann (1026–1034).*

Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus

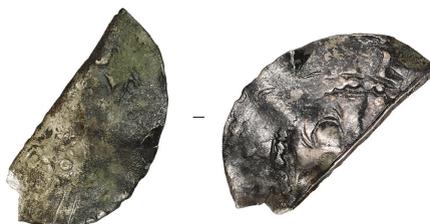


Fig. 5. *Worms, King Heinrich IV (1056–1084).*

Jn 5. *Worms, kuningas Heinrich IV (1056–1084).*

Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus



Fig. 6. *Germany, unidentified mint and ruler, 1060–70s?*

Jn 6. *Saksamaa, määramata müntla ja valitseja, 1060.–1070. aastad?*

Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus



Fig. 7. *The gilded mount.*

Jn 7. *Kullatud naast.*

Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus

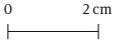


Fig. 8. The needle has a drilled eye, the body is unfinished, but the tip is worn smooth. The findspot of the needle was not identified.

Jn 8. Nõelal on puuritud silm, selle pealispind on töötlemata, kuid nõelaots on siledaks kulunud. Nõela leiukohta ei tuvastatud.

Photo / Foto: Frank Lukk



Fig. 9. The penannular brooch found by some erratic boulders at the beach.

Jn 9. Hoburaudsõlg rändrahnude juurest.

Photo / Foto: Tarvi Toome

long, sharp pin is formed from a narrow trapezoid, which is 20 mm wide at its widest point. A dotted line runs along the longer edges of the looped trapezoid which means the decoration continues on the back of the loop. There have been some further decorations in the middle of the pin loop, but the surface of the brooch is too worn for identification. The debate over the exact dating of the brooch is ongoing, but based on current evidence, it likely dates from the end of the Iron Age (ca. 12th–13th century). Three brooches with similar round, undecorated frames and polyhedral facets are kept at Gotland Museum (GFC4207, GFDEP776, GFDEP779). One of them (GFC4207) is also the same size as the brooch from Sarve. Unfortunately, they lack pins and contextual information, although they were found from Gotland, 250 km south-west of Sarve.

OTHER CONTEMPORARY ARTEFACTS AND SITES FROM SARVE, PÜHALEPA, AND HIIUMAA

Late Iron Age and Early Medieval artefacts have rarely been found from the island of Hiiumaa. Also, metal-detected finds are generally reported in much lower numbers from the island than from elsewhere in Estonia. However, as seen from the finds described above, the well-known title of *insula deserta* given to the island in 1228 (LUB VI, 2718), should not be taken at face value – it is probable that finds are simply not being reported. At the same time,

associated with clothing, church textiles and reliquaries, domed mounts with pierced corners have also been used on book covers (Howsam 2016, 44, 92, 94, type B.1.3; Russow 2021, 120–121).

The copper alloy needle (Fig. 8) is 10 cm long with a head that is wider than the tip. The tip is slightly curved, round, and worn at an angle. The eye of the needle is circular and has been drilled. Symmetrical circular eyes are common for Iron Age and Early Medieval needles. The needle likely dates to the 12th–14th century based on other examples from Europe (Reppo 2013, 27). Considering the shape and the wear at the tip of the needle, it was likely a nalbinding needle although it may have been also used as a large bodkin for doing up garments or other textile objects, such as packaging or sacks.

The undecorated, ridgeless frame of the penannular copper alloy brooch (Fig. 9) is 5 cm in diameter and round in section. The ends of the open frame are upright with faceted, polyhedral terminals which are decorated with asymmetrical, round raised dots slightly off the centre of the rhomboid and square facets. The dots are worn and no longer visible on all facets. The loop of the

most archaeological sites from the island are poorly studied and dated.⁵ Still, some burial sites (Villamaa/Vilimaa in Kõpu peninsula), iron smelting sites (Kõpu; see Saage & Oks, this volume), and fields (Kõpu and Hanikatsi islet) are associated with the Late Iron Age period. Whilst the 11th–12th-century field remains on Hanikatsi islet (Lang 1997, 2) are 5 km south of the findspot in Sarve, some chance finds are known from the village and Pühalepa parish. In 1923, the discovery of some undated bones and coins was reported 1.3 km northeast from the findspot of the coins in Mihkle (Mihkli farm), potentially from a stone grave (Vaas 1923, 17). In 1860, a hexagonal bronze belt link was found by the former parsonage in Sarve (Hansen 1885, 10). These are common artefacts in Estonian archaeology, dated to the 11th–13th century.

In 1864, a chain belt composed of 16 bronze rings connected with hexagonal bronze belt links in the same style was found in a field near the 13th-century church in Pühalepa (Tallgren 1925, 92–94, Abb. 121; Vaas 1923, 11–12). Another hexagonal bronze belt link from the 11th–13th century, a 13th-century trapezoid pendant, and a crossbow bolt were found outside the churchyard during fieldwork in 2022. Pühalepa church is located 6.9 km northwest of the studied site in Sarve (Reppo & Malve 2023, 196–197). An Iron Age penannular brooch has also been found from Pühalepa (Lõugas 1975, 104). In 2015, two silver coins were deposited at Hiiumaa Museum from the parking lot of Pühalepa church, which were dated to the middle and second half of the 13th century. Until now, these were the oldest reported coins from Hiiumaa (Leis-Aste 2018). This means the coins from Sarve are one of the most important archaeological finds of the past decade from the island.

SARVE – AN IRON AGE HARBOUR?

The location of the site is generally poorly depicted on historic maps with the coastline distorted and not representative of the actual area. However, in written records, the first information about Sarve can already be found from 1254. A harbour that is called *Sarwo* – *portus qui dicitur Sarwo* – is mentioned in a contract between the prince-bishop of Osilia (Saaremaa), Heinrich and the Livonian emissary of the Teutonic Grand Commander Eberhard von Seyne, where the harbour is left under the bishop's rule (LUB VI, 2736). The same document makes note of two islets as part of the boundaries of the prince-bishopric – *duas insulas quarum una vocatur Oriwocko (al. Oryok) et alia Ronku (al. Rauky)* – Orjaku is now the western part of Kassari, Reigilaid lies west of Orjaku. Both are located southwest of the Sarve peninsula and are thought to have marked the westernmost point of the prince-bishop's territory. This also means *Sarwo* clearly refers to Sarve, which is at the easternmost point of the territory (Koit 1952, 75–77).

Based on the water level rise models, with an estimated land rise of +2.5 m in the last 1,000 years, the findspot was directly on the then beach (Fig. 10). It indicates the presence of a Late Iron Age harbour site nearby. Although several Viking Age and Late Iron Age harbours have been found and studied in neighbouring Saaremaa (Mägi 2023, 66–67, 78; Mägi 2024), the site in Sarve would be the first of its kind in Hiiumaa. At present, only chance finds are known from the gravelly ridge at Sarve, and no cultural layer or structures were identified with the small trench to retrieve the rest of the coins. Therefore, parallels from Saaremaa could prove helpful in determining the precise location or locations of the harbour in Sarve in the future. For example, the harbour site at Mullutu in southern Saaremaa is also characterised by a very thin layer of soil and the general lack of a cultural layer despite a multitude of archaeological artefacts found scattered along the former shoreline (Mägi 2021, 108, 116–118).

⁵ Only 44 archaeological sites are currently under heritage protection on the island, most of them stone graves.

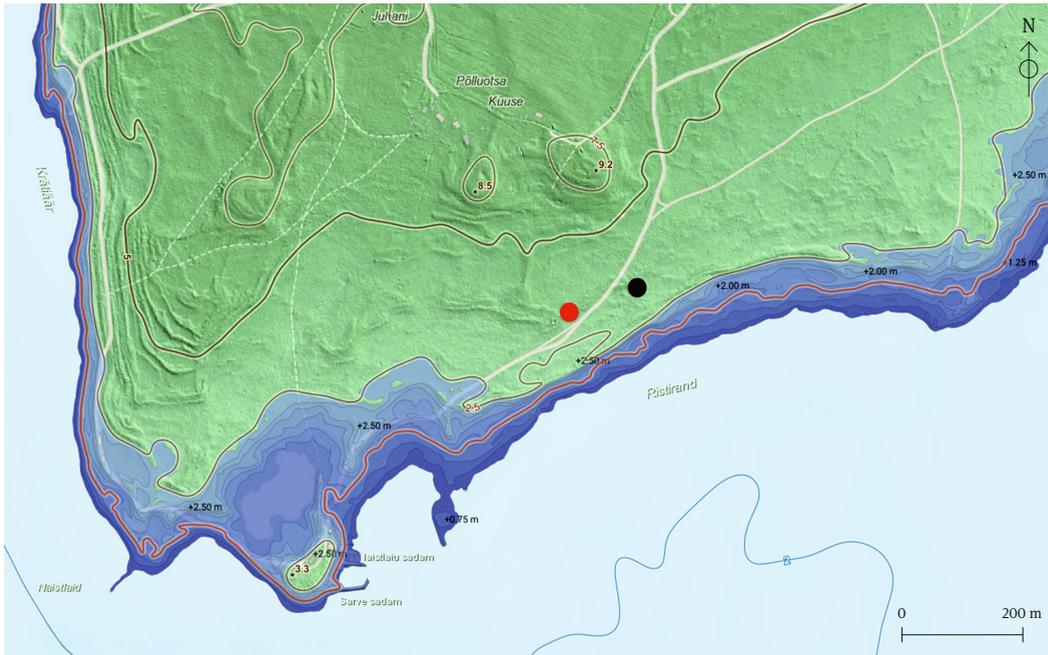


Fig. 10. The findspots on the water level rise model (+2.5 m) of the Land and Spatial Development Board. The currently unexcavated findspot of the second coins is not shown here.

Jn 10. Leiukohad Maa- ja Ruumiameti veetaseme tõusu mudelil (+2,5 m). Hetkel kaevamata teist müntide leiukohta pole näidatud.

Map / Kaart: Estonian Land and Spatial Development Board / Maa- ja Ruumiamet; Monika Reppo

CONCLUSION

The silver coins and other artefacts found along the seaside gravel ridge in Sarve village, Hiiumaa are a remarkable find in the study of the island's past. Not only are these the oldest coins ever found from Hiiumaa – they also indicate that this was likely a Late Iron Age mooring site. The significance also lies in written sources supporting the claim and suggests that the harbour mentioned in 1254 was already known in the second half of the 11th century. This means the area has high potential for substantial archaeological discoveries in the future.

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SARVE AARE TÄIENDAB HIIUMAA ESIAJA KÄSITLUST

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2024. aasta augustis avastas detektorist Erki Järvekül Hiiumaalt Sarve külast (jn 1) neljast erinevast leiukohast kümme hõbemündi katket, hoburaud-sõle, ehtenaastu ja nõela. Võimaliku aarde väljaselgitamise välitööd toimusid sama aasta detsembrikuus, need korraldas OÜ Arheograator ning osalesid leidja ja detektorist Illar Salusoo. Leiukohad asuvad endises Pühalepa kihelkonnas Sarve külas mereäärsel kruusasel seljandikul (jn 2). Läheduses ei ole kaitsealuseid arheoloogiamälestisi ning piirkonnas ei ole varem uuringuid läbi viidud, välja arvatud Valipel ja Hanikatsi laiul, mis jäävad leiukohtadest vastavalt 5 km loodesse ja lõunasse. Ka on ajalooline kaardimaterjal napp ning ebatäpne. Viimased 200–300 aastat on leiukohal olnud rohumaa *resp.* karjamaa.

Otsinguvahenditega otsiti läbi 600 m² ala ning kaevati 1,39 m² suurune šurf esimese mündileiu võimalike maasse jäänud müntide kogumiseks (jn 2 punasega). Mündid (jn 4–6) oli detektorist leidnud seljandikul kasvava kase juurte vahelt ja pealt (jn 3). Käesoleva uuringu käigus leiti veel kaks fragmenti, kuid jälgi kultuurkihist ega müntide võimalikust hoiunõust või -kotist ei saadud. Hiljem loovutas leidja Muinsuskaitseametile veel viis münti ja ühe väiksema fragmendi, mille oli leidnud esimesest müntide leiukohast u 400 m läänes, ligikaudu kruusaseljandiku läänepoolsest otsast.

Kokku on praeguseks üle antud 18 münti ja mündikatkendit (Tabel). Kõige haruldasem münt esimeses leius on Konstanzi piiskopi Warmanni (1026–1034) ajal vermitud denaar, mida varem pole Eestist leitud.

Noorim kindlalt määratav münt on vermitud Wormsis kuningas Heinrich IV (1056–1084) ajal. Teisest mündileiust saadi veel üks väga kulunud, kolme? torniga väravaehitist kujutav denaar (jn 6), mis ei saa oma kujunduse põhjal olla vermitud enne kui 1060.–1070. aastatel. Niisiis ei saa ka see aare olla kujunenud nimetatud ajast varem.

Müntidest viis meetrit lõunas, seljandiku nõlvalt leitud 13. sajandi teise poole kullatud hõbenaastu (jn 7) leiukohast täiendavaid leide uuringu käigus ei saadud. Puuritud ümmarguse silmaga ja tõmbi otsaga vasesulamist nõela (jn 8) leiukoht paraku ei selgunud. Tüpoloogiliselt võiks nõel pärineda 12.–14. sajandist. Vasesulamist hilisrauaaegse fassetitud otsanuppudega hoburaudsõle (jn 9) leidis Järvekül teistest leidudest 116 meetrit kirdes sama kruusase seljandiku idapoolsest otsast suurte rändrahnude kõrvalt pinnasest (jn 2, must). Ka siit ei saadud rohkem leide. Leitud hõbemündid ja esemed on haruldane täiendus saare mineviku uurimisel.

Need pole mitte ainult vanimad Hiiumaalt leitud mündid, vaid viitavad ka sellele, et Sarve rannariba oli hilisrauaajal sadama- või sildumispaigaks. Seda toetavad nii veetaseme mudel, eeldusel, et maa on selles kohas 1000 aasta jooksul tõusnud ligi 2,5 meetrit (jn 10) kui ka Sarve sadama esmamainimine 1254. aastal ning analoogsed sadamakohad Saaremaal. Seega on tulevikus Sarve küla rannaäärselt alalt suure tõenäosusega oodata veelgi enam Hiiumaa ajaloo jaoks märgilisi avastusi.