



# KÕUE WEALTH DEPOSIT AND SIMILAR LATE IRON AGE FINDS IN ESTONIA

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## INTRODUCTION

On the 26th of August 2013 new landowner of a part of Kõue settlement site (Reg. No. 18549) dug a trench next to the house for water pipes and found a bronze deposit consisting mainly of bronze ornaments from the 11th – 12th centuries (Figs 1, 2). The work was conducted without consulting with the National Heritage Board and with no archaeological surveillance.

Unfortunately, the finder realised that the objects were an archaeological find with cultural value only after he had disassembled and washed the finds. He then contacted the National Heritage Board, who sent a Senior Inspector to the spot, who collected the items and made a primary report. On the 1st of September 2013 a small scale excavation was conducted at the find place in order to investigate the find context. The settlement site is located in Kõue village, Harjumaa (historical Kose parish) (Fig. 3: 1) Archaeologist Mati Mandel discovered the site in 1979 during a landscape survey, he inspected the site additionally in 1982. He found seven pieces of hand-made pottery<sup>1</sup>, a little lump of slag and a 12th – 13th century penannular brooch, which was handed over by a local habitant of Kõue.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that Kõue village has been mentioned in *Liber Censius Daniae*, according to which a village Køy with 19 plough lands is said to have existed in the area of present Kõue (Johansen 1933, 454).

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of excavation results and artefacts. Additionally, Kõue find offers a good reason to look at other similar find assemblages, which could shed light upon the meaning of wealth deposits consisting mainly of bronze ornaments from the 11th – 12th centuries.

## EXCAVATIONS AT THE FIND PLACE

The landowner dug the trench a few meters away from the west side of the building. The find spot was situated in the west side of the trench. A hexagonal, ca. 1.5 m<sup>2</sup>



*Fig. 1. Preparations for excavations.  
Jn 1. Ettevalmistused kaevamisteks.  
Photo / Foto: Ulla Kadakas*

<sup>1</sup> Determined by Mati Mandel (AM).

<sup>2</sup> Mati Mandel (pers. comm.). Finds from both years AI 5582.



Fig. 2. Wealth deposit from Kõue.  
 Jn 2. Kõue peitvara.  
 (AI 7134: 1–13.)  
 Photo / Foto: Tuuli Kurisoo

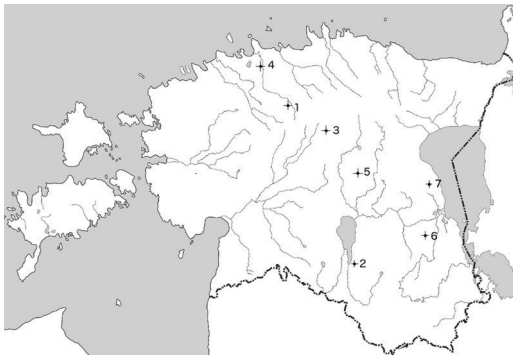


Fig. 3. Distribution map of similar wealth deposits to Kõue. 1 – Kõue, 2 – Pühaste, 3 – Öötla, 4 – Jüri, 5 – Puidivere, 6 – Kurista, 7 – Savastvere.

Jn 3. Kõue leiuga sarnaste peitvarade levikukaart. 1 – Kõue, 2 – Pühaste, 3 – Öötla, 4 – Jüri, 5 – Puidivere, 6 – Kurista, 7 – Savastvere.

Drawing / Joonis: Keijo Raamat

excavation plot was made, a pinpointer was used to find out the distribution of metal objects and the soil was removed with shovels. Simultaneously, the soil dug out from the excavation pit was checked with a metal detector.

After removing the 20th century square stone pavement and compressed sand under the pavement, a layer of debris occurred, which consisted of modern rubbish, including crown corks and fragments of plastic. The stratigraphically earlier layer was soil that varied from dark brown to grey in colour and had been disturbed by roots and gardening. That layer contained a few pieces of burnt granite and tiny pieces of charcoal, undatable fragments of metal objects, pieces of burnt clay, fragments of animal bones

and a sherd of faïence pottery. In the depth of 73 cm a fragment of green glass bead which probably belonged to the wealth deposit was found.<sup>3</sup>

Following that, a similar, but more intensive occupation layer with fewer disturbed areas was unearthed. The soil was dark grey and more solid, but towards the virgin soil it became randomly loamy. Five sherds of wheel-thrown pottery and a round lead bullet were found. Intact natural loam occurred in the depth of 110 cm. In the depth of 111 cm two chain links were found from a probable mole tunnel. In addition, a rumbler bell was found at the bottom of the water pipeline trench. It seems likely that these finds had originally belonged to the wealth deposit.

The mixed nature of layers made it impossible to distinguish the traces of the original pit of the deposit. Moreover, no indications of a burial or a construction were found. The wealth deposit may have been hidden in ground at the settlement. However, it is possible that the Kõue finds were buried in the vicinity of a building or some aboveground landmark/monument which marked the location, but no traces confirming this speculation were found.

## CONTENT OF THE WEALTH DEPOSIT AND DATING

### *Breast chain and its components*

The largest part of the find assemblage is a massive breast chain (approximately 2 kg), which extended over the shoulders to the back. It consisted of four rows of chains attached to lunula-shaped chain-holders, which were divided with four rectangular spacers and a central plaque (Figs 2, 4). The shape of its central plaque is quite unique – only one equivalent find is known from Jüri (AI 3542). Probably all 22 separate links have been part of a breast chain. It is highly plausible that all twenty pear-shaped rumbler bells with four grooved petals may have belonged to the breast chain, because half of them had been preserved with chain fragments. Two bird-shaped and one rectangular openwork bronze pendant could also have been used to decorate the breast chain. Two of them have bronze links attached to a hanging hole, which are analogues to the chain links and one pendant has a loop, which is formed of wrapped bronze wire and could be attached to a breast chain.

It is often referred that massive breast chains were common women's ornaments in the Late Iron Age (e.g. Mägi & Ratas 2002, 203; Selirand 1974, 142; Tvauri 2012, 147). In fact, there are only few examples known from the Late Iron Age with a datable find context<sup>4</sup>: a presumable wealth deposit from Öötla (see below) from the first half of 11th century (Tvauri 2012, 147), 12th century hoard from Savastvere (Tamla & Kiudsoo 2005, 42) and only two cases are known from Kukruse inhumation burials (Kukruse VI

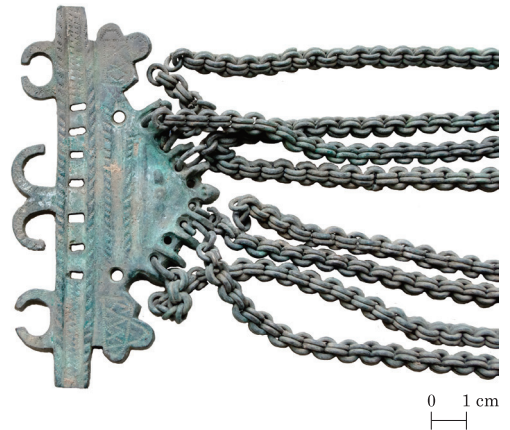


Fig. 4. Central plaque of Kõue breast chain.

Jn 4. Kõue rinnakee vaheplaat.

(AI 7134: 1.)

Photo / Foto: Tuuli Kurisoo

<sup>3</sup> All measurements are given from the building foundations.

<sup>4</sup> The author knows only a few examples of stray finds (e.g. AM A 127) that indicate that the actual number of massive breast chains is quite small.

and VII, see Jonuks & Lõhmus 2010, 14–17), which date back to the first half of the 13th century. Thus, such massive breast chains are rather rare in the Estonian Late Iron Age material, whereas short breast chains, dominantly with one row of chain, were one of the most popular adornment types. Based on anthropological determination, both massive breast chains belonged to elderly women (Jonuks & Lõhmus 2010, 15, 17).

Unfortunately, the Kõue breast chain had been hidden without pins, which could help to clarify the time of concealment (for the forms and dates of Viking Age breast pins, see Mägi 1997; Selirand 1974, 143–149; Tvauri 2012, 143–144). Other finds that may be linked to the breast chain had been in use over several centuries. Such rumbler bells spread from the end of the 10th century to the early 12th century (Tvauri 2012, 154 and citations therein), bird-shaped pendants spread mostly during the 12th – 13th century, when at least some were locally produced (Selirand 1974, 153). The rectangular openwork bronze pendant, possibly depicting a stylistic fire-steel or a boat, is the only known specimen for the author, thus it could not be used for dating.

### **Neck rings**

According to the typology of Tvauri (2012, 158–159), Kõue neck rings belonged to the type of bronze neck rings with knobbed overlapping terminals, which usually have a faceted knob on one terminal and a ribbed surface with a hexagonal cross-section and a tip resembling the head of a nail on the other. The latter is somewhat thicker in the case of the Kõue rings and may be regarded as a subtype or interpreted as an artistic expression (Fig. 5). In addition, these rings may have been silver-plated,<sup>5</sup> that has not been noted with other similar neck rings. All neck rings of this type are believed to have been made by one craftsman, who presumably produced them in the first half of 11th century (Tvauri 2012, 158–159).

According to the finder, all items seemed to have been placed inside the neck rings, a similar practice is known from Pühaste (Vassar 1938). It can be speculated that the Öötla find was similarly placed.

### **Beads and cowrie shell**

Two bronze beads (bi-conical and round) and remains of presumably a dozen glass beads (bi-conical, round and ribbed) made from green glass were found. Colourful necklaces were usually preferred as finds from other wealth deposits and



Fig. 5. Example of the terminals of Kõue neck rings.

Jn 5. Näide Kõue kaelavõrude ottest.

(AI 7134: 2.)

Photo / Foto: Tuuli Kurisoo

burials have indicated (see also Tvauri 2012, 149). In addition, a cowrie shell was found, which may have been used in same necklace with the beads. Cowrie shells generally reached Estonia at the end of the Final Iron Age and during the Middle Ages, but some examples from Pre-Viking or Viking Age are known from south Estonia (Tvauri 2012, 149).

<sup>5</sup> Determined by Tarvi Toome (AI) during conservation.

### ***Leather strips***

Additionally three short leather strips may have belonged to the find assemblage. The finder of the wealth deposit and the Senior Inspector of the National Heritage Board who collected the items forwarded contradictory information about the location and find contexts of the strips, therefore their belonging to the find is not clear. However, the length of strips indicate that if they were used, it was possible to use them for binding thin (parts of) objects only.

In conclusion, the excavations could date the assemblage to the 11th – 12th centuries, most likely to the period from the second half of the 11th century to the first half of the 12th century.

### **OTHER SIMILAR FINDS**

This article concentrates only on those finds that share similar characteristics with the Kõue find: that is date, composition and find context. Therefore burials, wetlands and single stray finds without contextual information are excluded. However, it is possible that some bronze ornaments found as stray finds (especially massive breast chains or neck rings) could have been hidden for similar reasons.<sup>6</sup> The composition of the find assemblage included here should consist dominantly of bronze ornaments, especially similar neck rings or massive breast chains and finds should be dated to the period from the second half of 11th century to the first half of 12th century.

With these limitations three similar wealth deposits – Pühaste, Öötla, Jüri (Fig. 3: 2–4; Table 1: 2–4) are known. These were found by chance and only find spots from Kõue and Pühaste have been archaeologically investigated. Unlike the Kõue find, the wealth deposit from Pühaste was found from solid ground without any indication to a settlement site (Vassar 1938). The massive breast chain from Jüri was hidden under a stone; no further contextual information that could imply to a burial or a settlement site was provided.

Also wealth deposits from Pudivere, Savastvere and Kurista should be mentioned, although they correspond to the characteristics in a more general way (Fig. 3: 5–7; Table 1: 5–7). The wealth deposit from Pudivere was found from solid ground, presumably in a birch wood case, consisting of a few bronze ornaments, some of them fragmented, and remains of textile (Table 1: 5). In contrast, the find assemblage from Savastvere settlement site was extremely rich, in addition to numerous bronze jewellery it included some silver ornaments and everyday objects (Table 1: 7). The find assemblage from the remains of a building on Kurista hill fort composed only of a few ornaments and was exceptional for its find context (Table 1: 6).

### **GENERALISATION AND MEANING**

For all find assemblages except Savastvere it is distinctive that they are not complete jewellery sets. The absence of functional jewellery, such as pins and brooches, stood out, which may be explained by the intensive use and practical nature of these ornaments. On the other hand, some ornament types were numerous, for instance five neck rings from Öötla or several finger rings from Pühaste and Savastvere (Table 1: 2, 3, 7). The amount of adornment was also different from burial material where a smaller number of artefacts was used. In addition, most of the wealth de-

<sup>6</sup> However, I have included the find assemblage from Öötla, which is without authoritative context and could originate from a burial or hidden as a wealth deposit (Tvauri 2012, 146). After taking into account finds from burials, it seems more likely that the Öötla find represented something similar to Kõue and Pühaste and may be treated as a wealth deposit, not as grave goods.

Table 1. Content and contextual information of wealth deposits discussed.

Tabel 1. Käsitletud peitvarades sisaldunud leiud ja leiuinfo.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Tuuli Kurisoo

<i>Find context / Leiukontekst</i>	<i>Dating of the wealth deposit / Peitvara dateering</i>	<i>Object / Ese</i>	<i>Material / Materjal</i>	<i>No. / Arv</i>	<i>Other / Muu</i>
<b>1. KÕUE (AI 7134)</b>					
settlement site	second half of 11th century to the first half of 12th century	massive breast chain, with two lunula-shaped chain-holders, four spacers and central plaque	bronze	1	-
		neck ring	bronze	3	could have been silver-plated
		bird-shaped pendant	bronze	2	-
		rectangular openwork pendant	bronze	1	-
		bead	bronze	2	-
		bead	glass	29 (12)	-
		cowrie shell	-	1	-
		chain link	bronze	22	-
		rumbler bell	bronze	20	-
		leather strip	leather	3	belonging to the wealth deposit is not clear
		<b>2. PÜHASTE (AI 3667)</b>			
solid ground	first half or the middle of the 11th century (Mägi 1997, 47; Tvauri 2012), 12th century (Selirand 1974, 138; Tõnisson 1962, 231)	bead	glass	100	including fragments
		bead	tin	19	-
		bead	amber	2	-
		neck ring	bronze	3	-
		short breast chain fragments with two chain-holders	bronze	18	-
		chain link	bronze	7	-
		bracelet	bronze	5	-
		plate	bronze	1	-
		spiral tubule of thick bronze wire	bronze	58	-
		finger ring	bronze	8	-
		plaque	tin	296	-
		a piece of wood with cutting marks	wood	1	-
		<b>3. ÖÖTLA (AM A 110)</b>			
unknown	middle of the 11th century (Tvauri 2012, 147)	massive breast chain, with two chain-holders, four spacers and central plaque	bronze	1	-
		neck ring	bronze	5	-
		bracelet	bronze	4	-
<b>4. JÜRI (AI 3542)</b>					
under a stone	second half of 11th century to the first half of 12th century	massive breast chain, four spacers, and central plaque	bronze	1	-

<i>Find context/ Leiukontekst</i>	<i>Dating of the wealth deposit/ Peitvara dateering</i>	<i>Object/ Ese</i>	<i>Material/ Materjal</i>	<i>No./ Arv</i>	<i>Other/ Muu</i>		
<b>5. KURISTA (AI 5756)</b>							
Hill fort, in the remains of a building	middle of the 12th century (Lavi & Tõnisson 2008, 228)	rumbler bell	bronze	7	-		
		bracelet	bronze	2	one is fragmental		
		neck ring	bronze	1	fragmental		
		mount?	bronze	1	fragmental		
		cross-pendant	bronze	1			
		bead	glass	14			
<b>6. PUDIVERE (AI 4194)</b>							
solid ground, in case made of birch wood	second half of 10th century to the 13th century (Luik 1999, 142–143); 12th century (Tõnisson 1962, 232)	short breast chain fragments with two chain-holders	bronze	1	-		
		comb-shaped pendant	bronze	1	-		
		finger ring	bronze	2	-		
		bracelet	bronze	3	-		
		penannular brooch	bronze	1	without pin		
		plate	bronze	2	-		
		textiles (tablet woven bands) and bronze spirals	wool, bronze	1	-		
		spiral tubule of thick bronze wire	bronze	1	-		
		<b>7. SAVASTVERE (AI 3355)</b>					
		settlement site	12th century (Tamla & Kiudsoo 2005, 42)	massive breast chain, with two lunula-shaped chain-holders, four spacers, central plaque and round spacer	bronze	1	-
breast pin	bronze			6	-		
spacer	bronze			3	-		
chain	bronze			1	fragment		
chain link	bronze			ca. 20	-		
neck ring	bronze			7	-		
bead	glass			15	-		
cross pendant	bronze			9	-		
comb pendant	bronze			5	-		
coin pendant	silver			10	-		
round silver pendant	silver			2	-		
lunula-shaped pendant	bronze			1	-		
rumbler bell	bronze			9	-		
icon-pendant with depiction of Jesus	bronze			1	-		
rumbler bell shaped pendant	bronze			2	-		
penannular brooch	bronze			1	-		
bracelet	bronze			13	-		
interweaved bracelet	bronze			1	-		
finger ring	bronze			15	-		
small spade	bone			4	-		
awl?	bronze			1	-		
tweezers	bronze			1	-		
knife sheath	bronze			1	fragment		

<i>Find context/ Leiukontekst</i>	<i>Dating of the wealth deposit/ Peitvara dateering</i>	<i>Object/ Ese</i>	<i>Material/ Materjal</i>	<i>No./ Arv</i>	<i>Other/ Muu</i>
Savastvere cont.	12th century (Tamla & Kiud- soo 2005, 42)	mount	bronze	3	-
		spiral tubule	bronze	91	-
		chatelaine chain	bronze	4	fragments
		ring	bronze	10	-
		textile	wool	3	fragments
		object	bronze	5	fragments
		object	iron	2	fragments
		object	bone	2	fragments
		fang	bone	1	-

posits comprised at least some fragmental ornaments or bronze plates, which could have been used for casting (Table 1: 2, 5–7). However, it should be stressed that the general nature of these find assemblages indicates that jewellery therein was used as ornament, not as scrap metal. Most of the ornaments were of high quality, for instance beads from Pühaste were certainly expensive and exclusive (Tvauri 2012, 148–149, fig. 111), neck rings from Kõue may have been silver-plated and fragments of textile from Pühaste could have been part of festive clothing (Table 1: 1–2).

Artefacts, the compact nature of deposits and the find contexts refer to a single event of hiding. It is highly possible that wealth deposits in question were planned to be hidden temporarily. It is almost impossible to estimate whether they were hidden in emergency or found in their usual place of storage. Only Kurista wealth deposit may have been found from its original place of usage. In the case of Jüri, the unusual find context and absence of other finds may suggest that the most valuable jewellery – a massive breast chain – was hidden in a hurry.

The composition of all aforementioned wealth deposits (dominantly personal ornaments) suggests that their meaning was related to a number of values. Categorisation using a specific interpretative term (such as ‘economic’) does not entirely express the nature of the deposits (see Oras 2012). Of course, economic aspects and connections to status played an important role in the meaning of personal ornaments, but furthermore, they carried aesthetic and emotional values. Moreover, artefacts in one deposit could have had different value and meaning (‘proper’ ornaments vs. bronze plates and fragmental ornaments), but they all belonged to one owner who hid them together as valuables.

After analysing the Kõue find and other similar wealth deposits, it seems likely that all these cases represent a separate practice. The number and distribution of such deposits is too small to interpret them as separate phenomena. Instead, the general nature of finds indicates that most of the jewellery was used for ornamenting. It is plausible that all wealth deposits belonged to wealthy women and ornaments were probably hidden temporarily together with other valuables.



## CONCLUSION

Small-scale excavations on the find spot of the Kõue wealth deposit gave results that the settlement site has been used with different intensity from the second half of the first millennium AD to the present day. The find assemblage from Kõue belonged most likely to the period from the second half of the 11th century to the first half of the 12th century. Almost all the artefacts from the Kõue find were bronze adornments, most notable among them was a massive breast chain, probably decorated with pendants and rumbler bells. All analysed find assemblages consisted of valuable adornments, used in festive situations, and in some cases of other valuables as well. The find contexts and the nature of such finds indicate that all the analysed wealth deposits were hidden temporarily and should be approached as separate event.

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**KÕUE PEITLEID JA TEISED SARNASED EESTI NOOREMA RAUAAJA LEIUD***Tuuli Kurisoo*

26. augustil 2013 kaevas kaitsealuses Kõue asulakohas (Harjumaa, Kõue küla, kultuurimälestiste reg nr 18549) värske maaomanik torudevahetuse eesmärgil kraavi ja leidis peamiselt pronksehetest koosneva 11.–12. saj peitvara (jn 1, 2). Endises Kose kihelkonnas asuva asulakoha (jn 3: 1) avastas Mati Mandel, kes inspekteeris seda 1979. ja 1982. a. leiumaterjaliks seitse käsitsikeraamika kildu, šlakitükk ja 12.–13. saj hoburaudsõlg (AI 5582).

Kaevetööd toimusid Muinsuskaitseameti loata ning järelevalveta. Peale leiukogumi lahti võtmist ja leidude pesemist sai leidja aru, et tegu on arheoloogiliste esemetega, ja teavitas Muinsuskaitseametit, välitööd leiukohal toimusid 1. septembril 2013.

Peitvara leiukohta tehti u 1,5 m<sup>2</sup> suurune kaevand. Uuringute käigus lisandus kedrakeramika kilde, dateerimatuid raudesemete katkeid, loomaluid, uusaegne püssikuul ja sinise maalinguga fajanssnõu kild. Kultuurikiht oli väheintensiivne ja segatud, sissekaevet ei õnnestunud tuvastada. Kaevamiste käigus ei avastatud ühtegi konstruktsiooni ega viidet võimalikule kalmele. Võimalik, et peitvara on maetud kas asulakoha piires maa sisse või peidetud mõne uuritud alalt välja jäänud ehitise või maapealse tähise lähedusse.

Kõue leiu kõige silmapaistvam osa on massiivne neljarealine rinnakee, koos luunulakujuliste keekandjatega, vaheplaatide ja üsna unikaalse kujundusega keskplaadiga (jn 4). On tõenäoline, et üksikud ketilülid, kuljused ning ripatsid kuulusid rinnakee juurde.

Kõuest leitud kaelavõrud olid levinud 11. saj, kuigi nende naelapeakujuuline ots on paksem kui teistel leitud kaelavõrudel (jn 5). Kõue kaelavõrud võisid olla ka hõbetatud, mida analoogsetel esemetel seni täheldatud pole. Leidja sõnade kohaselt olid ülejäänud esemed kaelavõrude sees. Kaks pronkshelme, algselt (?) u 12 rohelise värvusega klaashelme ja kaurikarp võisid moodustada ühe kaelakee. Lisaks võis leiu juurde kuuluda kolm lühikest nahariba.

Võttes arvesse kõikide leidude dateeringuid, pole võimalik Kõue peitleidu väga täpselt ajaldada, vaid selle saab dateerida 11.–12. saj, ilmselt 11. saj teise poolde ja 12. saj esimesse poolde.

Arvestades leiukonteksti, esemeid ning dateeringut, võiksid Kõuele kõige lähedasemad vasted olla Öötlast, Pühastest ja Jürist (jn 3: 2–4; tabel 1: 2–4) pärinevad peitleidu. Veidi laiemalt käsitledes tulevad võrdlusmaterjalina kõne alla ka Pudivere, Kurista ja Savastvere leiud (jn 3: 5–7; tabel 1: 5–7).

Kõikidele leiukogumitele (v.a Savastvere) on iseloomulik, et need pole täielikud ehtekomplektid, puudu on peamiselt praktilise otstarbega ehted nagu rinnanõelad ja sõled. Teisalt esinevad peitvarades mõned ehtetüübid tunduvalt rohkearvulisemalt kui matustes. Lisaks leidub peitvarades katkiseid esemeid ning pronksplekki, mida saaks pronksivaluks kasutada. Siiski tundub, et peitvarades olevate ehete otstarve on seotud esmajoones ikkagi ehtimisega, mitte vanametalliga. Leiud ja leiukontekstid viitavad, et leiukogumid peideti ilmselt korraga ning tõenäoliselt ajutiselt.

Peamiselt ehetest koosnevad peitvarad viitavad, et nende tähendus oli seotud erinevate väärtustega ja sildistamine ühe terminiga, nt majanduslik, ei anna edasi nende täielikku olemust. Ehete juures olid olulised nii majanduslik külg, seos staatusega kui ka esteetiline ja emotsionaalne väärtus. Lisaks ei pea kõik leiu ühest peitvarast kandma samu väärtuseid ja tähendusi ("korralikud" ehted vs pronkspleki tükk ja katkised ehted), aga need kõik kuulusid ühele omanikule, kes peitis neid kui väärisasju üheskoos ja korraga.

Käsitletud leidude põhjal tundub tõenäoline, et iga avastatud peitvara on olnud seotud omaette praktikaga ning nende pinnasesse peitmine ei moodusta terviklikku nähtust. Ilmselt on iga peitleid kuulunud jõukale naisele ning olulised ehted ja teised väärtuslikud esemed peideti maa sisse lühiajaliselt, lootuses need hiljem välja võtta.