



Soomevere silver hoard

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EXCEPTIONAL STORY OF DISCOVERY

The silver hoards that have been added to national archaeological collections in the last decades have mostly been discovered by hobby archaeologists using metal detectors. Therefore the hoard discovered in Soomevere, Viljandi County in 2012 stands out as exceptional. This hoard was spotted with the naked eye – strange spangles that had melted out of the snow on a field glittered in the sun. The person who discovered the hoard thought at first that these were aluminum slats and therefore picked up only a few bigger pieces, intending to use them as bases for nails in his construction work. These ‘pieces of sheet metal’ stayed in his drawer for nearly a year and a half, until he happened to watch a broadcast ‘Ringvaade’ on Estonian National Television, where Mauri Kiudsoo, one of the authors of the present article, introduced archaeological finds and as illustration demonstrated Viking Age silver coins. These coins were surprisingly similar to the ‘nail bases’ found on the field, and the discoverer decided to contact the National Heritage Board. Archaeologists arrived at the site and immediately dispelled any doubts – indeed a Viking Age silver hoard had been discovered. Inspection of the find location and supplementary research pits uncovered even more silver coins and objects both on the field and in the deeper strata of the topsoil. No recent digs on the field were recorded. In order to secure the collection of all scattered remains of the hoard that cultivation of the field (ploughing, harrowing) may have spread and to determine their original hiding place supplementary archaeological investigations were conducted.

INVESTIGATIONS AT THE FIND SITE OF THE HOARD

The find location of the hoard was investigated on four occasions, of which the last expedition took place in the spring of 2016 (Kiudsoo & Tamla 2016). First, the range of the spread pieces of the hoard was determined and research pits were dug to study the stratigraphy of the find site. It turned out that there was no cultural layer at the find location and in its vicinity, i.e. the treasure must have been hidden or buried for a reason at the distance from the dwellings of the time. Therefore it was decided that the best method for collecting the remains of the hoard that over time had been spread to a large area of 300 m² was mechanical peeling of the land surface. Following the example of Swedish archaeologists, such a method was first applied in Estonia in 2013 at the find site of the Kõue I hoard (Tamla & Kiudsoo 2014, 211–212 and references).

In Soomevere, the soil was peeled in *ca.* 10 cm thick layers down to the layer untouched by human activity – i.e. down to the light colored moraine below the plough layer that was exposed at the depth of 30–35 cm. Only at one single place a slight 6–8 cm thick blackish-grey



Fig. 1. Trace of ploughing appeared on the light moraine.
Jn 1. Künnijälg heledal moreenil.
 Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo

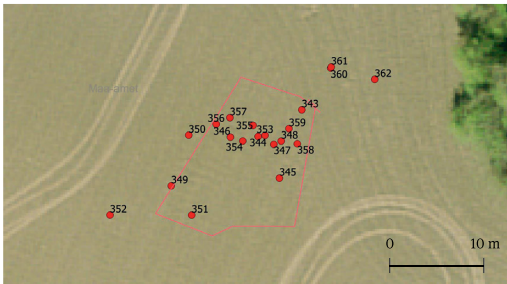


Fig. 2. Excavation and concentration area of hoard remains. Find plan based on GPS-data.
Jn 2. Kaevandi asukoht ja aardejääkide kontsentratsiooniala GPS-andmetel.
 Compiled by / Koostas: Nele Kangert



Fig. 3. The youngest coin of the Soomevere hoard was minted in the Mint of Hermann III, Archbishop of Cologne (1089–1099).
Jn 3. Soomevere aarde noorim münt on vermitud Kölni peapiiskopi Hermann III (1089–1099) rahapajas.
 Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas



Fig. 4. Coin minted in Schleswig by Svend Estridsen, King of Denmark.
Jn 4. Taani kuninga Svend Estridsen Schleswigi rahapajas vermitud münt.
 Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

stripe that contained pieces of coal was detected on the moraine – a trace of ploughing that had scraped the natural layer a little deeper (Fig. 1). Each peeling of the surface was followed by careful examination of the studied area, and the removed soil was checked with metal detectors. A distribution map of the coins and other finds, based on their GPS-data, was drawn up (Fig. 2). The area with the densest concentration of finds was determined, which probably was the original hiding place of the treasure. In this area some coins and objects lay deeper than in other places, straight on top of the light moraine layer. Considering the observations made during the excavation and the stratigraphic measurements, there is reason to believe that at the time of hiding the hoard the soil layer mixed with little humus (the present plough layer) that lay on top of the natural layer untouched by human activity, must then have been somewhat thinner. This assumption could explain why there were no obvious marks hinting at the hiding place: such marks were destroyed through cultivation of the land.

CONTENT OF THE HOARD

The Soomevere hoard (AI 7450) contained the total of 186 coins: 148 German, one Hungarian, 13 English (Anglo-Saxon), three Danish, four Anglo-Scandinavian pennies, one Byzantine miliaresion, and 16 Arabian dirhams.¹ Several coins had, due to the heaviness of the soil or for some other reason, broken in half or into even smaller fragments. Since the most recent coin of the hoard had been minted during the reign of the Archbishop of Cologne Hermann III (1089–1099), the *tpq* of the hoard is 1089 (Fig. 3). A rarity is a coin minted by the Danish king Svend Estridsen in Schleswig after 1066 (Fig. 4). Of such coins, the earliest minted in Schleswig, which is considered the direct successor to the Viking Age Hedeby trading centre, only about half a

¹ List of the coins is given in Kiudsoo & Tamla 2016.

dozen are known in Northern Europe, among them four coins in Estonia. Three of these originate from another silver hoard discovered in 2014 from Kõue in North-West Estonia (Leimus & Kiudsoo, 2017, 355–360).

In addition to coins fifteen finds of various ornaments were also discovered, with a total weight of 111.6 grams. The heaviest was a bracelet with open ends (45.1 g), which is also the only entirely preserved adornment (Fig. 5). The remaining 14 objects are fragments of several jewellery items of different size and weight (Fig. 6). The type and form could be determined for four fragments from a peak-arched penannular brooch and a pin belonging to the same artefact, eight fragments from two thin open-ended bracelets and one fragment of a silver sheet pendant. Similarly to coins, the ornaments are broken and deformed due to tillage and the weight of the soil. The hoard contained no intentionally fragmented ornaments or hack silver.



Fig. 5. Fully preserved bracelet in situ.

Jn 5. Tervena säilinud käevõru in situ.
(AI 7450: 1.)

Photo / Foto: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 6. Silver ornaments from the Soomevere hoard.

Jn 6. Soomevere aardes sisalduvad hõbeehted.
(AI 7450: 1–14.)

Photo / Foto: Jaana Ratas

SOOMEVERE HOARD IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLIER DEPOSITS FROM VILJANDI COUNTY

The distribution and content of prehistoric silver hoards discovered in Estonia and the neighbouring areas suggest that the Peipsi–Pihkva Lake catchment area played a significant part in inland contacts with outsiders, considering especially the major role of waterways of the time. In the second half of the 11th century the distribution of hoards widened considerably in the eastern part of Estonia, coinciding almost entirely with the catchment area of the Peipsi–Pihkva Lake. Since there is virtually no evidence of prehistoric waterways in the

central part of Estonia, it is likely that the West European silver coins of the Soomevere hoard also reached central Estonia from the east, i.e. along the Narva–Peipsi waterway. This hypothesis is supported also by the known Iron Age archaeological finds from central Estonia, like the content of silver hoards from the third quarter of the 1st millennium, which is similar to hoards discovered in South-East Estonia. Since the Roman Iron Age (1st–5th century AD) the Põltsamaa–Pilistvere–Võhma area, which included also Soomevere together with the Türi drumlins region, south-western part of the Pandivere uplands and eastern part of central Estonia formed a distinctively separate core settlement area in central Estonia, which adjoined also a large part of the later North Viljandimaa (Kiudsoo 2013a, 69–81 and references).

The present state of studies knows five silver hoards from the second half of the 11th century in vicinity of Soomevere. Three of them (Vahamulla, *tpq* 1054; Olustvere, *tpq* 1080; Lõhavere, *tpq* 1084) have been studied in detail by Arkadi Molvõgin (1994, nos 35, 54, 59). The find site of the Lõhavere hoard was more precisely localized in 2013 during archaeological research carried out there (Kiudsoo 2013b, 3–4). Dating of the Vahamulla hoard is problematic due to the scarcity of the known coins.² The hoard was discovered prior to 1912 at a distance of less than two kilometers from the Soomevere hiding place.

Earlier numismatic literature has paid no attention to the Late Viking Age hoard connected with the Lõhavere hill fort, or rather – the remains of the hoard. The few coins discovered in the central part of the hill fort could be associated with the hoard only after 2005, when the manuscript about the 1961 excavations reached the archaeological archives of Tallinn University (Tõnisson 1961). In addition to the Anglo-Saxon coins and their Scandinavian imitations³ the hoard contains at least one Anglo-Norman penny, minted during the reign of William I in 1083–1086 (AI 4133: 1965). Recent studies consider this coin the latest mint of the hoard (*tpq* 1083). According to the excavation plans, lists of finds, and reports of the archaeological studies of Lõhavere hill fort, stored at the archaeological archives of the University of Tallinn, there is reason to believe that some of the items belonging to the hoard may be located at the unstudied area. The Late Viking Age coin find, connected to Lõhavere hill fort, is important evidence that the site had been in use as a stronghold already in the 11th century. Archaeologist Evald Tõnisson, who had excavated at Lõhavere for many years, distinguished two separate habitation stages there, from which the earlier dated from the 11th–12th century (Tõnisson 1988, 250).

The similar dating of Late Viking Age hoards from central Estonia seem to suggest that at the end of the 11th century the region may have undergone some sort of destruction. It is likely that all the above mentioned hoards were hidden or left in the ground due to one and the same event.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOOMEVERE HOARD FOR LEARNING ABOUT EARLIER HISTORY

The Soomevere hoard dates from the richest prehistoric period, which in the last years has been called also Post Viking Age in the Estonian context (since 1060; Kiudsoo 2016, 151).⁴

² At the time, Learned Estonian Society received only 11 coins minted in Germany to its collections (AI 5000/312, *tpq* 1054) (Molvõgin 1994, no. 35).

³ Some of the coins listed as finds of the Lõhavere hoard never reached the archaeological collections. Six items have been published by Ivar Leimus and Arkadi Molvõgin (2001, no. 6).

⁴ It is not easy to establish the chronological boundaries of the Viking Age. It could even be regarded as impossible, for the simple reason that it began and ended at different times, depending on the chosen criteria and territory. Scandinavian archaeology has formerly used a chronological framework: *ca.* 790 to 1050 AD. Recently, however, it has become common in Scandinavia to set the year AD 1100 as an approximate terminus for the period. It is nevertheless a common opinion that the Scandinavian rural churches built of stone should be assigned to the Middle Ages. Dendrochronological dating of timber frames in these churches has often yielded results around the year 1100, and therefore this could be considered as the period boundary (Anderson 2016, 10). Based on the numismatic evidence, even the year around 1140 (the hoard of Burge, Lummelunda) has been considered plausible.

This is the period when the Baltic-Finnic tribes reached the peak in their trading, reflected also in the abundance of silver hoards in the Estonian territory. Nearly 80 hoards have been discovered in Estonia that date from the last four decades of the 11th century and beginning of the 12th century, which is far more than in any other Baltic Sea country at the time. Silver reached Estonia as part of international trading (Kiudsoo 2016, 76–83). This applies directly only to coins, as the majority of silver ornaments found in the hoards were made by local craftsmen.

From a scientific point of view, the Soomevere hoard is especially important due to its find context and the studies carried out on the site: the approximate size of the silver hoard was determined and its hiding place was localized. The coins contained in the assemblage permitted a more precise dating of the hoard (*tpq* 1089), which in turn provides a basis for a more accurate dating of the various kinds and types of ornaments (including wide-arced horseshoe brooches with plated ends, silver sheet pendants and bracelets with open ends) found not only in the Soomevere hoard, but also in other hoards from the end of the prehistoric period in Estonia, crafted by local craftsmen. The Soomevere hoard is a vivid example and another proof that the work of Estonian jewellery makers developed rapidly at least a century earlier than had been thought so far, i.e. in the third quarter of the 11th century (Tamla & Kiudsoo 2014). It was an era when silver (in the form of coins) that was essential for making jewellery reached this region in a far larger quantity than in any other historic period in Estonia. The fact that the Soomevere silver hoard was the first discovery made after World War II that was a chance find from the region which was handed over to national authorities is also significant from the scientific point of view.

ASSESSMENT OF THE FINDER'S BEHAVIOR

The young man who discovered the Soomevere hoard received a reward for his discovery. The decision to reward the finder was based first and foremost on the fact that he had discovered the silver coins and other items by chance, and not using a searching device. He was recognized for his law-abiding and unselfish conduct, i.e. the finder had notified the National Heritage Board about his discovery and the find site and had handed over all discovered objects.

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SOOMEVERE HÕBEAARE

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Viimasel paaril aastakümnel on Eestis avastatud hõbeaardeid enamasti metallidetektorite abil. Seetõttu saab Viljandimaalt Soomeverest 2012. aastal põllumullalt palja silmaga leitud muinasvara pidada erandlikuks. Soomeveres toimusid uuringud neljal korral, neist viimane 2016. a kevadel. Tõdeti, et aare oli oma algsest peidukohast maaharimisega laiali kantud u 300 m² suurusele alale. Kuna leiukohas ja selle lähimbruses puudub kultuurikiht, sai “aardejääkide” kokku korjamiseks kasutada pinnase mehhaanilist koorimist. Muld eemaldati buldooseriga u 10 cm paksuste kihtidena kuni 30–35 cm sügavuses paljandunud inimtegevusest puutumata heleda moreenini. Vaid ühes kohas oli looduslikku pinda riivanud adrajalg (jn 1). Aardejääkide levikukaart koostati leidude GPS-andmete põhjal (jn 2). Nii selgus leidude kontsentratsiooniala, mida pidasime peitvara kõige tõenäolisemaks algseks asukohaks. Lisaks oli suur osa münte ja esemeid just seal otse heleda moreeni peal. Uuringute käigus tehtud tähelepanekute ja situatsioonimõõdistuste alusel väidame, et inimtegevusest puutumata pinnasele ladestunud vähese huumusega mullakiht (praegune künnikiht) oli vara peitmise ajal mõnevõrra õhem. See seletaks ka asjaolu, miks aarde algset asukohta markeerivad sissekaeve piirjooned puudusid – need on põlluharimisega hävitatud.

Soomevere aardes on 186 münti (148 Saksa, 1 Ungari, 13 Inglise, 3 Taani, 4 anglo-skandinaavia penni, 1 Bütsantsi milrees ja 16 Araabia dirhemit). Kuna noorim münt on vermitud Kölni peapiiskopi Hermann III (1089–1099) valitsemisajal, on aarde *tpq* 1089 (jn 3). Rariteetne on Taani kuninga Svend Estridseni Schleswigi rahapajas peale 1066. aastat löödud münt (jn 4). Hedeby kauplemiskeskuse otseks järglaseks peetava Schleswigi esimesi rahasid on Põhja-Euroopast teada vaid pool tosinat, sh neli eksemplari Eestist.

Lisaks müntidele on Soomevere aardes üks tervena säilinud käevõru (jn 5) ja neliteist ehteasja katket (jn 6), millest on määratavad ühest hoburaudsõlest, kahest käevõrust ja ühest rinnalehest pärit fragmendid. Esemete purunemine ja deformeerumine on toimunud sarnaselt müntidega pinnase raskuse ning maaharimisriistadega kokkupuutel.

Eesti ja naaberpiirkondadest avastatud aarete levik ja koostis osutavad sellele, et Peipsi-Pihkva järve valgala etendas sisemaises suhtluses üliolulist rolli. Alates 11. sajandi teisest poolest on aarete levik Eesti idaosas laienenud ja kattub suuresti Peipsi-Pihkva

järve valgala ulatusega. Kuna Eesti keskosa läbinud veeteede kohta puudub muinasaja kontekstis tõendusmaterjal, on alust arvata, et Soomevere aardes sisalduvad Lääne-Euroopa rahad jõudsid Kesk-Eestisse idast, s.o mööda Narva-Peipsi veeteed. Seda hüpoteesi toetab ka Kesk-Eestist teadaolev arheoloogiline leiuaaines, sh Kagu-Eestile sarnane I aastatuhande kolmanda veerandi hõbeaarete koostis. Alates vanemast rauaajast moodustas Põltsamaa-Pilistvere-Võhma piirkond, kuhu kuulus Soomevere koos Türi voorestikuga, Pandivere kõrgustiku edela- ja Kesk-Eesti idaosaga omaette hõimualana tuntud Kesk-Eesti asustustuumiku, millega liitus ka suur osa hilisemast Põhja-Viljandimaast. Soomevere piirkonnast on praeguseks teada viis 11. sajandi teise poole hõbeaaret.

Soomevere aare pärineb kõige hõbedarikkamast muinasaja perioodist. Umbes 1060 algas läänemeresoomlaste kaubanduses kõrgaeg, mida peegeldab ka siinmail avastatud hõbeaarete rohkus: 11. sajandi neljast viimasest aastakümnest ning 12. sajandi algusest on meil teada ligemale kaheksakümmend aaret, mida on kordades rohkem kui ühelgi teisel Läänemere maal sel ajal. Pole kahtlust selles, et hõbe jõudis Eestisse rahvusvahelise kaubavahetuse tulemusena. See keh-tib otseselt üksnes rahade kohta, sest kaalukama osa nimetatud perioodi aaretes sisalduvatest ehetest on valmistanud kohalikud ehtemeistrid.

Teaduslikust aspektist on Soomevere leiul oluline tähtsus avastamiskohas toimunud uuringutulemusi silmas pidades: tehti kindlaks aarde ligikaudne suurus ja lokaliseeriti selle peitmiskoht. Aardes sisalduvate vermingute määrangud võimaldasid peitvara täpsemalt dateerida (*tpq* 1089), mis omakorda annab aluse nii Soomevere aardes kui ka Eesti muinasaja lõpuperioodi teistes hõbeaaretes esinevate mitmete ehteliikide ja -tüüpide (sh laiakaareliised plaatotstega hoburaudsõled, hõbeplekist rinnalehed ja lahtiste otstega käevõrud) valmistamisega tegelenud kohalike ehtemeistrite taieste täpsemaks dateerimiseks. Soomevere aare on järjekordne näide ja ühtlasi tõetus sellest, et kohalike hõbesepade töö sai hoo sisse vähemalt sadakond aastat varasemal ajal kui seni arvati, ehk siis hiljemalt 11. sajandi kolmandal veerandil (vt ka Tamla & Kiudsoo 2014). Tegemist on ajajärguga, mil meie alale jõudis hõbedat kordades rohkem kui mistahes teisel Eesti ajaloo perioodil. Vähetähtis pole teaduse vaatevinklist ka fakt, et Soomevere leiu näol on tegemist esimese sellest regioonist pärast II MS avastatud ja riigile üle antud hõbeaardega.