



A new find of Islamic coins from Pusi on the western coast of Lake Peipsi

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INTRODUCTION

The hoard was found with a metal detector around the year 2010 from the village of Pusi, east of the village of Haapsipea and about two kilometres to the south from the town of Kallaste. The findspot lies on the coast of Lake Peipsi about 40 km to the northeast from the town of Tartu. The coins were delivered to the National Heritage Board only in 2020 (Smirnova 2020). The authors of the present article contributed to the study of the hoard: the finding circumstances have been described by Maria Smirnova, who received the hoard from the finder; the hoard itself was analysed in detail by Ivar Leimus and its location on the landscape was specified by Krista Karro.

INVESTIGATION OF THE SITE

The findspot was investigated by the authors of this article on 13 April 2021. According to the finder the topsoil had been brought to the place from elsewhere, but the trial pit dug on the field suggested that no soil had been brought there. The present day landscape also corresponds with the map of 1684 (RA, EAA.308.2.68.1), where a small field between lower land has been marked on that spot (Fig. 1). The ground is slightly higher compared to the surroundings, with a small



Fig. 1. The 1684 map of Kodavere parish. 347 – Haapsipea village, 342 – Pusi village, x marked in blue – the approximate findspot of the hoard.

Jn 1. Kodavere kihelkonna kaart aastast 1684.

347 – Haapsipea küla, 342 – Pusi küla, sinine x – aarde leiukoht.

(RA, EAA.308.2.68, p. 1.)

creek directly in the north and an old road passing the site on the eastern side. The displacement of the coins on a 3 × 3 metre area also suggests that the hoard had been disturbed by ploughing.

The 50 × 50 cm pit was dug in the approximate central area of the higher field. The soil was dark-brown, fine-grained and did not contain any stones or finds. The reddish sandy natural bottom soil was revealed in the depth of about 40 cm. Such soil is typical to field areas and corresponds well with information from the 17th-century map mentioned above.

In conclusion it is possible to say that the hoard was found *in situ* and there is no reason to speculate that it had been brought there with soil from elsewhere.

THE HOARD

The coins were found spread in a 3 × 3 m area and buried under a 5–25 cm layer of soil. The hoard contains 76 coins: 1 Abbasid, 63 Samanid, 2 Samanid governors of Khurasan, 9 Volga-Bulgarian dirhams and a counterfeit coin.

The coins of the Samanid dynasty are mainly struck during the reign of Nasr ibn Ahmad (46 pcs) whereas the coins of the preceding emirs Isma'il ibn Ahmad (5 pcs) and Ahmad ibn Isma'il (9 pcs) are less numerous. The three halves of coins are not identifiable more precisely. The Samanid dirhams are overwhelmingly minted in Samarqand and ash-Shash as usual in the Nordic finds of the 10th c. (e.g., Kovalev 2002; Leimus 2007, 206–396). Also, seven (?) coins originate from Andaraba. The other significant mints of the Samanids – Balkh, Ma'din and Naysabur yielded a small number of coins each.

The dirhams of a Samanid governor of Khurasan Ahmad ibn Sahl are considerably rarer. One of them is struck in Andaraba (Fig. 2: 65), which was a customary mint for the ruler. However, the other coin of him comes from a rare mint of Banjhir (Fig. 2: 66; Fig. 3). Until recently, only the Banjhir coins of Ahmad ibn Sahl from the years 303 and 306 AH have been recorded (Lowick 1975, 145, nos 400–401, pl. 10; Schwarz 1995, 24).¹ Now we have an additional dirham from 305 AH, which lacks an Arabic character *s* (س) beneath the reverse legend, standard for other minting years.

In addition, there are nine dirhams in the hoard that most probably have been produced in Volga-Bulgarian centres and imitate Samanid coins (Fig. 2: 67–68, 70–72, 75).

Besides the genuine dirhams there was a counterfeit of a dirham in the hoard. The impressions of the obverse and reverse, produced by pressing thin silver sheets onto a real coin, have been joined together and, possibly, filled in between in order to retain the weight (Fig. 2: 76; Fig. 4). By now, the filling is lost and the coin weighs considerably less (1.24 g) than a genuine dirham (3 g in average). Until now, that kind of fabrications were not known from Estonia.

Chronologically, most of the hoard's coins come from the first three decades of the 4th c. AH (Fig. 5). The most recent coin of the find bears the year 331 AH (= 942/3 AD). Thus, the hoard of Pusi fits well into a broader group of Estonian hoards that starts from the 940s (Leimus 2004, 160, tab. 1; Leimus 2007, 29, no 13). During this particular decade the enlargement of the hoarding area of finds of Islamic dirhams as well as their number all over eastern Europe can be observed. Marek Jankowiak explains the described feature with the flourishing slave trade that headed to Volga-Bulgaria from the North on the one hand. In addition, the relocation of trade routes, the formation of Slavonic 'tribes' as well as the emergence of centres like Gnezdovo, Novgorod and Gniezno must have played their role in these processes (Jankowiak 2021, 167–174).

¹ Authors thank Dr Vladimir Nastich (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) for the information.



Fig. 2. Coins from the Pusi hoard. The numbers correspond to Table 1.

Jn 2. Münte Pusi aardest. Numbrid vastavad tabelis 1 olevatele.

Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus



Fig. 3. Ahmad ibn Sahl, Banjhir, 305 AH = 917/8 AD.
Jn 3. Ahmad ibn Sahl, Banjhir, 305 AH = 917/8 AD.
 Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus

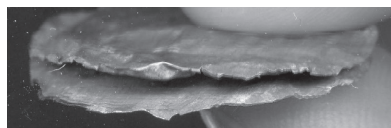


Fig. 4. A counterfeit dirham.
Jn 4. Valedirhem.
 Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus

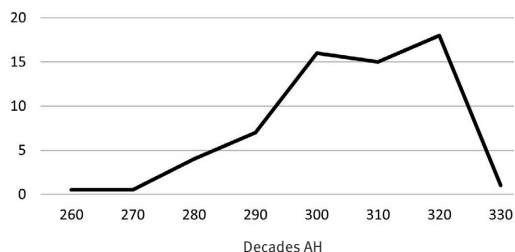


Fig. 5. Chronological distribution of coins in the Pusi find.
Jn 5. Pusi leiu müntide ajalane jaotus.
 Graph / Graafik: Ivar Leimus



Fig. 6. Suspension loop removed.
Jn 6. Kand on eemaldatud.
 Photo / Foto: Ivar Leimus

However, on the other hand, there is reason to ask whether the high number of hoards could reflect the losses in population. The possibility that it may have been the result of a natural catastrophe cannot be excluded here. The geologic studies of the Greenlandic ice have revealed that its highest acidity during the last 1500 preceding years was achieved just before the mid-10th century. The ice acidity, most probably, implies the rising volcanic activity (in 934 AD Eldgjá in Iceland erupted heavily), which could lead the average temperature to decline. That may have brought along crop failures with accompanying famine, eventually leading to high mortality. Thus the gathered assets remained buried and were not unearthed until now (Dansgaard 2005, 81–82; Leimus 2004, 159, 161, 165, fig. 11, 13; Leimus *et al.* 2018, 27–28).

As a rule, the dirhams of the Pusi hoard are well or even very well preserved. Only four coins have been pierced in order to be used as pendants. However, the edges of the holes are sharp. Possibly, the pierced coins were never worn as ornaments. One coin has had a silver suspension loop that was cut or sawed off (Fig. 6). This is the only case we can be confident that the coin had functioned as a pendant. The compactness of the coin bulk in the find as well as their overall good condition allow us to conclude that they circulated for a very short period (if at all) and have been obtained in the same time, more or less.

Remarkably, 17 cut coin halves were recorded in the hoard. A bigger or smaller piece has been cut off from 12 additional coins, as well. Splitting of one dirham had been left unfinished. There is a difference regarding fragmentation of the Volga-Bulgarian and other Islamic dirhams. If two thirds of the Volga-Bulgarian coins (six pieces out of nine) have been cut, broken, etc., the proportion of fragmentation among the other dirhams is around one third (23 pieces out of 66). This may refer to different routes of arrival of the

coin groups in the find. The Volga-Bulgarian imitations may originate from a territory where fragmenting of coins was much more spread than in the area of departure of other, whole dirhams. Probably, coins in the hoard were mixed already before they were obtained by the last owner.

The location of the hoard fits well into the general picture. The surroundings of Lake Peipsi and the River Emajõgi is densely covered by finds of Islamic coins (Leimus 2007, nos 4, 8, 14, 16, 19, 21, 25, 35; Fig. 7). Mauri Kiudsoo has quite convincingly connected the appearance of the Islamic coins with the great trade route that headed from Rus' (the Pskov lands) down the Velikaya River, Lake Peipsi and the River Narva to the Baltic Sea (Kiudsoo 2014; Leimus *et al.* 2018, 41–42). This hypothesis is also supported by the fort-and-settlements established on the eastern shore of Lake Peipsi, which could only be meant to serve water-borne traffic (Kiudsoo 2016, 32).

Table 1. List of coins. The coins with an asterisk are shown in Fig. 2.

Tabel 1. Müntide loetelu. Tärniga tähistatud mündid on esitatud joonisel 2.

Compiled by / Koostanud: Ivar Leimus

No / nr	Dynasty / dünastia	Ruler / valitseja	Mint / müntla	Year AH / aasta	Weight / kaal	Remarks / märkused
1	Abbasids	al-Mu'tamid billah	Unknown	Unknown	2.16	Piece cut off
2	Samanids	Isma'il ibn Ahmad	Balkh	294	3.44	
3	Samanids	Isma'il ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	287	2.76	
4	Samanids	Isma'il ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	288	2.80	
5	Samanids	Isma'il ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	286	3.05	
6	Samanids	Isma'il ibn Ahmad	Unknown	28x	1.29	A half
7	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Andaraba	297	2.06	Piece cut off
8	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Andaraba	3[01]	4.02	
9	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Samarqand	296	3.06	
10	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Samarqand	301	3.07	
11	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	ash-Shash	297	1.70	A half
12	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	ash-Shash	[29]8	2.43	Piece cut off
13	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	ash-Shash	30x	2.94	
14	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Unknown	2[9]x	1.34	A half
15	Samanids	Ahmad ibn Isma'il	Unknown	300	1.71	A half
16	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Andaraba	308?	2.90	
17	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Andaraba	30x	2.71	
18	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Andaraba	(3)15	2.98	Pierced
19	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Balkh	313	2.56	Pierced
20	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Balkh	317	2.73	
21	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Ma'din	304?	3.60	
22	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Ma'din	320	4.57	
23	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Naysabur	325	2.22	Twice pierced
24	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Naysabur?	324	0.96	Cut fragment
25	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	302	2.96	
26	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	310	2.96	Pierced
27	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	315	2.92	
28	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	316	3.06	
29	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	316	2.92	
30	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	317	2.87	

No / nr	Dynasty / dünastia	Ruler / valitseja	Mint / müntla	Year AH / aasta	Weight / kaal	Remarks / märkused
31	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	322	3.01	
32	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.90	
33	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.48	Piece cut off
34	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.41	
35	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.34	
36	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.15	
37	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	323	3.07	
38	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	324	2.72	
39	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	327	3.24	
40	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	32x	3.44	
41	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	32x	2.14	Piece cut off
42	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Samarqand	331	4.11	
43	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	303	2.52	Piece missing from the edge
44	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	304	1.56	A half
45	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	308	2.73	
46	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	308	2.70	Silver suspension loop cut off
47	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	309	3.45	
48	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	316	3.50	
49	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	316	3.19	Piece missing from the edge
50	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	316	2.84	
51	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	317	2.89	
52	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	31x	3.08	
53	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	32x	2.85	
54	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	?	0.94	A half
55	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	31x	2.09	A half
56	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	323	1.28	A half
57	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	325	3.68	2 fragments
58	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	32x	2.65	Piece missing from the edge
59	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	32x	1.79	A half
60	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Unknown	Unknown	1.59	A half
61	Samanids	Nasr ibn Ahmad	Andaraba?	Unknown	1.36	A half, rv. all سن
62	Samanids	Unknown emir	Samarqand	Unknown	2.06	A half
63	Samanids	Unknown emir	Andaraba?	3xx	1.50	A half, obv. beneath 𐬰𐬀
64	Samanids	Unknown emir	ash-Shash	Unknown	1.46	A half
65*	Governor of Khorasan	Ahmad ibn Sahl	Andaraba	304	3.07	
66*	Governor of Khorasan	Ahmad ibn Sahl	Banjhir	305	4.54	
67*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	'Andaraba'	'303'	3.49	
68*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	'Balch'	'77 or 79'	2.96	
69	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Suwar		3.37	Leimus 2007, 3436
70*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Unknown		2.50	Piece cut off
71*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Unknown		1.86	Piece cut off
72*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Unknown		1.72	Piece cut off
73	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Bulgar		1.58	A half, Leimus 2007, 3466
74	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Bulgar		1.35	A half, Leimus 2007, 3495–3497
75*	Volga-Bulgaria	'Nasr ibn Ahmad'	Unknown		1.35	A half
76*	Counterfeit	Nasr ibn Ahmad	ash-Shash	318?	1.24	Consists of two halves

A RECONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPE OF PUSI IN THE 10TH – 11TH CENTURY

Before becoming a border between two countries, Lake Peipsi was rather a connecting link of the communities living on its shores and also served as a network of communication (Karro 2012a). Landing sites on the shores of Lake Peipsi were part of the infrastructure of this network. It could be argued whether the trade route from the Pskov lands down the Velikaya River, Lake Peipsi and the Narva River to the Baltic Sea (Fig. 7) passed the eastern or the western shore of Lake Peipsi, but both are possible. Landing sites on the western shore might have been used in regional communication as well.

Ancient cemeteries or burial buildings and hoard finds in the coastal area often refer to possible harbour sites on the coast in the vicinity. It is not always so easy to find the actual landing site, as the cultural layer has been destroyed by later villages in the same places. However, archaeologists can at least make assumptions based on the above-mentioned archaeological sites and the topography of the coast (e.g. Mägi 2004 and references). Pusi is one of such places on the shore of Lake Peipsi (Karro 2010).

A cemetery with burials from the first half of the II millennium has been discovered in the village of Pusi (monument no 12785 in the National Register of Cultural Monuments).² It has not been excavated, thus the actual span of burial time is unknown. However, the owner of the land where the cemetery is located has a bracelet (Fig. 8), which she found during building work of an underground cellar decades ago in the location of the cemetery. The bracelet dates from the 11th century (Mägi-Lõugas 1995, 308–309).

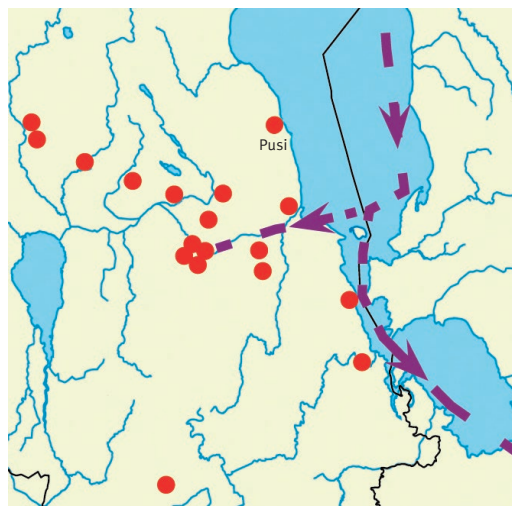


Fig 7. Dirham finds from the Lake Peipsi-Pihkva basin.

Jn 7. Dirhemileiud Peipsi-Pihkva järve valgalal.

Map / Kaart: Mauri Kiudsoo



Fig. 8. Bracelet from Pusi cemetery.

Jn 8. Pusi kalmistult leitud käevõru.

Photo / Foto: Krista Karro



² There is not much scientific information about the cemetery. Officially the cemetery has been dated to the first half of the II millennium (1000–1500 AD), but only a single find originating from the 11th century has ever been shown to archaeologists. However, other similar cemeteries, which are also located on the coast of Lake Peipsi and have been studied more profoundly, often date from the 10th or 11th century to the medieval and Early Modern period, thus the same has been assumed about this cemetery by the archaeologists who discovered it.

Similarly with other cemeteries in the coastal zone of Lake Peipsi (Raatevi, Alasoo, Lahepera, Ranna) the burial period in Pusi was also probably longer than just one century. In some cemeteries burials may have begun in the 10th century (Ranna, Raatevi), in some places in the 11th century (Lahepera, Alasoo) (e.g. Karro 2010; 2012b; 2015); thus, it is not possible to decide the time span of the cemetery on the basis of a single bracelet, which was the case in Pusi. However, the hoard hidden a century earlier refers to human activity, possibly a vicinity of a harbour site in that area even before the 11th century. It is also possible that the cemetery was used a century earlier than the oldest known find refers.

The shoreline topography in Pusi has been suitable for a landing site even in later periods. After all, there is presently a small harbour there as well (Fig. 9). The peninsula where the cemetery is located is rather steep and the shoreline has probably not changed there a lot since the utilisation period of the cemetery. The landing site itself was most likely located near the estuary of the small creek. The land is lower there and the shoreline setting might have changed more since the Late Iron Age than in the steeper part, but the exact site has not been located.

It has been illustrated by Kiudsoo (2014) that Islamic coin hoards mark the trade route from the Pskov land to the Baltic Sea via Lakes Peipsi and Pskov. The hoard from Pusi seems to confirm this, showing human activity in that area in the 10th century. The hoard and the cemetery in the place with a suitable shoreline topography for a harbour site complement each other. After all, a waterborne trade route in the 10th and 11th centuries needed places on the shore where traders could rest and replenish their supplies, and above of all – trade.



Fig. 9. Location of archaeological sites in Pusi. Orange diamond – the hoard, red cross – the cemetery, red dotted line – main road on the 1684 map.

Jn 9. Muistised Pusi külas. Oranž romb – aare, punane rist – kalmistu, punane punktiirjoon – peatee 1684. aasta kaardil.

Map / Kaart: Maa-amet 2021 (source); compilation by / täiendused: Krista Karro

CONCLUSION

The dirham hoard found in the present village of Pusi is an interesting, but not very surprising find, since the Lake Peipsi–Pihkva basin together with the Rivers Velikaya and Narva has been used as a trade route for centuries. The hoard dates back to the 10th century. There is a cemetery dating from at least the 11th century close to the findspot of the hoard, and the combination of such sites located in the coastal area might indicate a landing site in the vicinity.

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UUS ARAABIA MÜNTIDE LEID PUSILT PEIPSI LÄÄNERANNIKULT

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2020. a anti Muinsuskaitseametile üle hulk araabia hõbemünste ja nende katkendeid, mis leiti 2010. a Tartumaalt Peipsiääre vallast Pusi külast. Artikli autorid käisid 2021. a kevadel leiukohta üle vaatamas, kuna leidja andmeil pärinesid mündid mujalt toodud pinnasest. Leiukohale kaevatud šurfi uurimistulemuste põhjal võib väita, et piirkonda ei ole pinnast juurde toodud ning aare pidi olema oma esialgsel kohal. Ka müntide paiknemine u 3 × 3 meetrisel alal viitab vaid selle laiali kündmisele. 1684. a kaardilt on

näha, et sellel kohal oli ümbritsevast maastikust veidi kõrgem ala, mida kasutati põlluna. Leiukoha lähedusest läks 17. saj-l mööda peamaantee; tänapäevane maanteeetrass jääb veidi lääne poole (jn 1).

Aardes oli ühtekokku 76 münti: 1 Abbasiidide, 63 Samaniidide, 2 Samaniidide Horasani asevalitseja ja 9 Volga-Bulgaaria dirhemit ning üks valeraha (jn 2–4).

Kronoloogiliselt pärineb enamik münste Hidžra 4. sajandi kolmest alguskümnest (jn 5). Aarde noorim münt kannab aastaarvu 331 (= 942/3 AD). Seega kuu-

lub käsitletav leid arvukasse 940. aastatel alguse saanud Eesti aarete gruppi. Sel aastakümnel laienes nii hästi islami müntidest koosnevate aarete areaal kui ka nendest koosnevate aarete hulk kogu Ida-Euroopas. Sel nähtusel võis olla nii majanduslikke kui ka kliimaatilisi põhjuseid.

Mündid on säilinud hästi või väga hästi. Nii mündihulga kompaktsus kui ka müntide seisukord lubavad järeldada, et nad on käibinud väga lühikest aega ja saadud enam-vähem ühekorraga. Lisaks äratatakse tähelepanu, et Volga-Bulgaaria müntidest on tükeldatud 2/3, kuna ülejäänud dirhemitest vaid 1/3. Tõenäoliselt viitab see asjaolu aardes kokku saanud müntide erinevale lähtealale.

Oma paiknemiselt sobitub Pusi aare hästi 10. saj leidude konteksti. Peipsi ja Emajõe ümbruses leidub tihedalt araabia müntidest koosnevaid aardeid, mida seostatakse Läänemerelt Narva jõge ja Peipsi ning

Pihkva järve mööda Venemaale suundunud kaubateega (jn 6).

Pusil on 10.–11. sajandil ilmselt asunud sadamakoht (jn 7), millele viitavad nii araabia müntide leid ranniku lähedalt kui ka matmispaik otse järve kaldal (jn 8). Matmispaigast on teada 11. sajandi käevõru (jn 9), kuid ilmselt ei ole põhjust arvata, et kalmistut kasutati ainult ühe sajandi vältel. Peipsi järve kaldal on mitmed kohad, kus kunagisel rannikul topograafiliselt sobivate kohtade juures paiknevad kalmistud viitavad pigem kunagistele järvele mineku kohtadele kui püsivatele elupaikadele (nt Raatvere, Alasoo ja Lahepera) ning Pusi tundub olevat üks sellistest kohtadest. On raske öelda, kui palju Pusil asunud sadamakohta kaugkaubanduse (Velikaja – Pihkva – Peipsi – Narva – Soome laht) kontekstis kasutati, kuid leitud dirhemiaarde põhjal võiks oletada, et mõnevõrra siiski.