

SPOON-SHAPED PENDANTS IN THE CULTURE OF THE LIVONIANS AND INHABITANTS OF ANCIENT RUSSIA IN THE 11TH–13TH CENTURIES: PRELIMINARY STUDY RESULTS

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Abstract. In the culture of the ancient Livonians and Russians there was a particular group of pendants in the shape of household utensils, mostly made of copper alloys. This article deals with spoon-shaped pendants discovered in the settlements and burials of the second part of the 11th–13th century. Spoon-shaped pendants were rather rare for ancient Livonians. We have collected information about 19 finds from the Daugava region. In the territory of ancient Russia, about one hundred items have been found. In the historiography, spoon-shaped pendants were regarded as pagan amulets associated with the idea of satiation, wealth, and well-being. In our opinion, due to the late date of the items and their widespread distribution in Christian lands, they could be miniatures of the Eucharist spoons used in Orthodox communion.

Keywords: adornments, amulets, spoon-shaped pendants, Eucharist spoons, Christianity, Livonians, Ancient Russia

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1. Introduction

In the 11th–13th centuries, people often wore pendants. This tradition was extremely widespread. Similar items can be found in different regions. This is especially relevant for neighbouring peoples. For instance, wearing different types of pendants was a particular trait of the culture of the ancient Livonians and ancient Russians. Among various amulets and symbolic items, there was a particular group of pendants in the shape of household goods, mostly made of copper alloys. They represent miniature keys, scoops, strainers, knives, and spoons.

This article deals with spoon-shaped pendants. Our aim is not only to describe the finds from the Lower Daugava region but to view them with reference to the European context and to define their date and origin as well as to study the symbolic meaning of these tiny spoons.

2. Finds of Livonian spoon-shaped pendants

The first discovery of a spoon-shaped pendant in the territory of Latvia comes from the collection of archaeological materials that was gathered after the flood of 1837 in Aizkraukle (see Table 1, No. 1). Images of this pendant were published several times. These appeared on the pages of the first archaeological monographs: in *Necrolivonica* by Friedrich Kruse (Kruse 1842. Annex G, Table 53, No 2) and *Die Graben der Liven* by Johann Karl Bähr (Bähr, 1850. Table XII, No. 14). However, the pendant was depicted in these studies as a single item and the context of the find was unknown. Therefore, F. Kruse published this pendant in the same image with a set of weights. This happened because of the similarity of these items with modern pharmacy equipment. There was an idea that in ancient times such scales could be used for weighing expensive spices, and tiny spoons were the tools for pouring them onto the scales. Though Kruse was not entirely confident in the fact that the set of weights and the spoon were indeed found together (Kruse 1842: Annex E, No. 1). Nevertheless, the author supposed that the purpose of the scales was for weighing silver and refused the previous interpretation for the spoon-shaped items (Kruse 1842: Annex E, No. 26). However, J. K. Bähr confidently correlated the find from Aizkraukle with other Livonian pendants-amulets, he called them mysterious things (*räthselhafte Dinge*) (Bähr 1850: 8). Thus, since the 19th century in Baltic literature, due to the find from Aizkraukle, spoon-shaped pendants were thought to be a typical sort of adornment for the Livonian culture.

In the 1930s, Valdemārs Ģinters excavated Daugmale hillfort. There he discovered some additional spoon-shaped pendants: two intact items (Table 1, No. 3, 5) and three fragments of handles (Table 1, No. 2, 4, 6). Francis Balodis published one of the intact pendants in his article about works of art in Latvian archaeological material (Balodis 1936: 141; Table 5, No. 8).

Table 1. List of Livonian Spoon-shaped Pendants.

No.	Object	Inv. No.	Year of discovery	Burial/section	Length	Width (scoop)	Width (handle)	Ornament	Comments	Publications
1	Aizkraukle	RDMI 693	1837	af	84.16	20.4	6.3	c	r	Kruse 1842: Tab. 53: 2; Bähr 1850: Tab. 12: 14; Katalog 1896: Tab. 26: 8; Aspelin 1884: 279, No. 2075
2	Daugmale	A 9964: 131	1933	rampart, hole 4	–	–	6.36	c	h	–
3	Daugmale*	6. VIII. (2)	1936					c	–	Balodis 1936: 141, Tab. 5:8; 1938: Tab. 178: 8
4	Daugmale	A 9964: 5321	1936	A2	–	–	6.42	?	h	–
5	Daugmale*	A 9964: 5674	1937	A3	–	–	–	p?	d	–
6	Daugmale	A 9964: 7400	1937	S, bottom	–	–	6.4	c	h	–
7	Asote	VI 15: 1953: 289	1953	C	34.9	10	3.07	–	–	Šnore 1961: Tab. V: 33; Radiņš 2012: 121, Fig. 229: 10
8	Daugmale	A 11971: 1455	1966		–	–	5.91	c	h	–
9	Laukskola	VI 128: 1002	1968	97	59.46	18.68	5.35	p	–	Zariņa 2006: 362, Fig. 188: 1; Spirģis 2008: 206, Fig. 105: 6; Spirģis 2013: 128, Fig. 13: 11.
10	Laukskola	VI 128: 1389	1968	134	85.24	20.04	6.24	c	–	Zariņa 2006: 367, Fig. 193: 1
11	Laukskola	VI 128: 1389	1968	134	81.36	19.55	6.1	n	–	Zariņa 2006: 367, Fig. 193: 1
12	Laukskola	VI 128: 1639	1968	af	70.53	17.34	5.13	c	r	–
13	Laukskola	VI 128: 1639	1968	af	69.01	16.4	5.4	c	r	–
14	Rauši	VI 146: 668	1972	102	63.27	18.57	5.17	p	–	–
15	Rauši	VI 146: 690	1972	105	62.75	18.75	6.66	p	–	Svarāne 1991: 41, Fig. 4: 14
16	Laukskola	VI 128: 4743	1972	Object 375	69.38	17	4.24	–	–	Kurisoo 2021: 152, Fig. 3.71: 2
17	Laukskola	VI 128: 7409	1975	490	66.79	17.26	4.9	c	r	Zariņa 2006: 270, Fig. 135: 12, 383, Fig. 209: 3
18	Daugmale	A 12705: 220	1987		–	–	6.28	n	h	–
19	Daugmale	A 13186: 169	1988	af	69.38	17	4.24	–	–	–

Object: * – item was not examined personally; Inv. No. : RDM I, A, VI – inventory numbers of the collections of the National History Museum of Latvia; Burial/section: af – stray find; ornament: c – cast, n – net, p – points; comments: r – rub sore, h – handle, d – item is deposited at the Museum of the History of Medicine (Rīga).

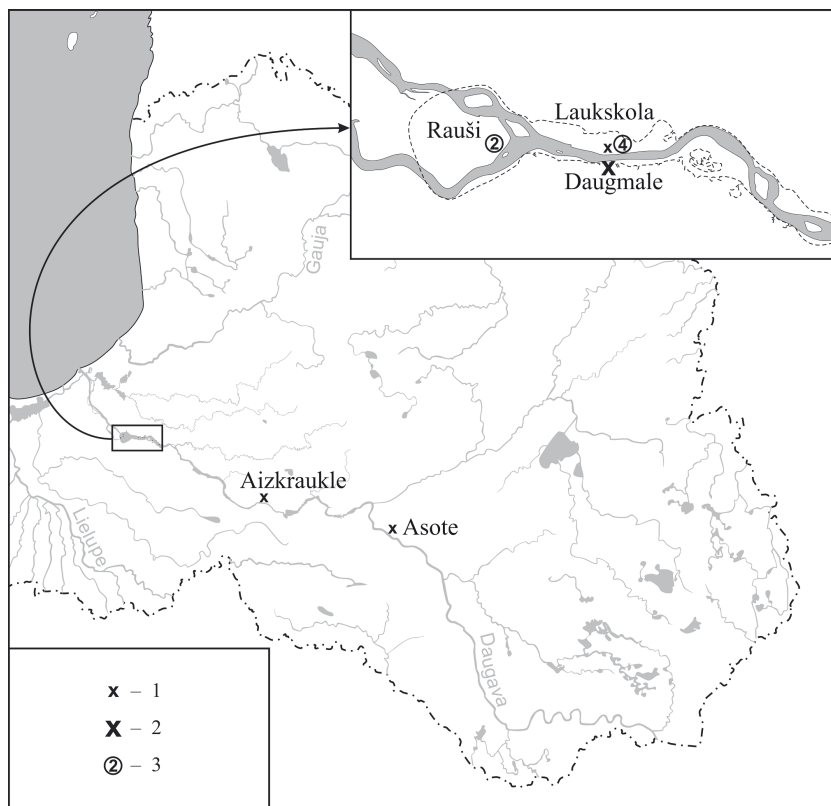


Figure 1. Distribution of spoon-shaped pendants in the territory of Latvia:

1 – stray find; 2 – eight stray finds; 3 – finds in the context of burial inventory noting the number of examples.

One other spoon-shaped pendant came from the Asote hillfort excavated by Elvīra Šnore in 1953 (Table 1, No. 7). This researcher published this find in her monograph on this site (Šnore 1961: Table V, No. 33).

Between 1967 and 1975, the Institute of Latvian History excavated Livonian burial grounds due to the construction of the Rīga hydroelectric power station. These studies brought broad and well-documented information on the sites as well as the most important finds of the spoon-shaped pendants. Two pendants were found in two burials at Doles Rauši (Table 1, No. 14, 15) and four items in three burials at Salaspils Laukskola (Table 1, No. 9–11, 17). Anna Zariņa published images of spoon-shaped pendants from Salaspils Laukskola

along with comprehensive information about the burials in her monograph (Zariņa 2006: 270, 362, 367, 383, Figure 135, No. 12; Figure 188, No. 1; Figure 193, No. 1; Figure 209, No. 3). Dagnija Svarāne published a rough picture of one of the spoon-shaped pendants from Doles Rauši in her article about Livonian pendants (Svarāne 1991: 41, Figure 4, No. 14).

In addition to the pendants found *in situ* in burials with rich material, three spoon-shaped pendants were discovered at the Salaspils Laukskola settlement (Table 1, No. 12–13, 16). The other finds – the intact find and the two fragments – came from Daugmale (Table 1, No. 8, 18, 19).

3. The distribution of spoon-shaped pendants

As of now, we have collected information about 19 spoon-shaped pendants from the Daugava region (Figure 1).¹ On the Lower Daugava, such items were only found at four sites. They came from Daugmale hillfort (8 examples), Salaspils Laukskola burial ground (4) and settlement (3), Doles Rauši (2) and Aizkraukle (1) burial grounds. All spoon-shaped pendants from the burials are intact, but the finds from Daugmale are mostly fragments – pendants without scoops. The Livonian finds represent a kind of enclave – as with the exception represented by the finds at the Latgalian hillfort of Asote; they are unknown in the other Baltic States, but were widespread in ancient Russia.

As we previously noted, spoon-shaped pendants were widespread in the territory of ancient Russia. Archaeologists had found them in country burial grounds and settlements as well as in cities such as Novgorod (Sedova 1981: 26, Figure 7, No. 10–12),² Pskov (Salmin, Salmina & Priburova 2010: Figure 3g), Serensk (Zajdževa & Saračeva

1 The Livonian sites on the Lower Gauja have not been sufficiently studied. Perhaps further research in this region will expand the area of distribution of the spoon-shaped pendants. We know about such finds from this region, but they come from illegal excavations. Due to ethical considerations, it is not possible to discuss them in this article.

2 Novgorod Museum Reserve. Online collections. <https://novgorod-iss.kamisccloud.ru/entity/OBJECT?query=%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0> (Accessed on 21.03.2022)

2011: Figure 97, No. 31), Suzdal,³ Yropolch Zalessky (Sedova 1978: Table 6: 11), Ryazan (Uspenskaja 1967: 117), etc.

The authors of this article have gathered information on nearly one hundred of these items. The work is in progress and currently we have only approximate numbers. The largest number come from the northwest of ancient Russia (26 finds from Novgorod region, 7 from St. Petersburg region, 3 from Pskov region and Karelia). We know of about 8 finds each from the Upper Volga region (2 from Yaroslavl region and 6 from Tver region), Central Russia (3 from Moscow region and 5 from Vladimir region), and Southern Russia (3 from Kaluga region and 5 from Brjansk region), 14 pendants from Smolensk region, and 4 from Vologda region.

4. The typology of the Livonian spoon-shaped pendants

All the pendants from the Livonian sites were made of copper alloy using a casting technique. The length of the intact examples is about 60–85 mm, the width of the scoop – 16–20 mm, the width of the handle – 4–7 mm. The find from Asote is smaller than most of the other finds; its length is 35 mm (Figure 5: 7).

Most of the finds have an arched-like part between the scoop and handle. The scoop has a tear-drop shape and is almost a plate. The typology of spoon-shaped pendants is based on the shape and ornamentation of the handle. The first and most widespread type of ornamentation on the handle is a pattern, which imitates weaving (Figure 2). Items with this decoration usually have holes in the end of the handle for hanging. The diameter of the hole is a little bit larger than the width of the handle.

The second type of ornamentation is rougher and has the shape of a zigzag or net. Handles with this decoration have a flat surface (Figure 3: 11, 18). There are also examples of this type of pendant without ornamentation (Figure 3: 1, 4). These have handles with wavy edges like the items with ornamentation imitating weaving; however, the hole for hanging is smaller and shifted from the end of the handle. The handle has three roundish lugs at its end (Figure 3).

3 The State Catalogue of the Museum Fund of the Russian Federation. <https://goskatalog.ru/portal/no./collections?id=1497084> (Accessed on 08.12.2019).



Figure 2. Livonian spoon-shaped pendants with imitation of weaving on the handles (numbers correspond to those in Table 1). Copper alloy:

2 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 9964: 131); 3 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (from: Balodis 1936: 141, Table 5, No. 8), 8 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 11971: 1455); 17 – a pendant from burial 490 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128: 7409); 12–13 – pendants from the settlement at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128: 1639).



Figure 3. Livonian spoon-shaped pendants with zigzag or net ornamentation on the handles (numbers correspond to those in Table 1). Copper alloy:

1 – a pendant from the burial ground at Aizkraukle (stray find) (RDM I 693); 4 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 9964: 5321); 11 – a pendant from burial 134 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128: 1389); 18 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 12705: 220).

The similarity of both types is obvious. This is also shown by finds with a transitional form. For instance, the find from Salaspils Laukskola burial 134 with weaving ornamentation has a handle with three round projections on the end (Figure 5: 10). One of the finds from Daugmale is a fragment of a handle with weaving ornamentation; it has an enlarged part near the hole for hanging (Figure 5: 6). Such a shape for this part is typical for items with the second type of ornamentation.



Figure 4. Livonian spoon-shaped pendants with handles with even edges (numbers correspond to those in Table 1). Copper alloy:

5 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 9964: 5674; photo from the card catalogue of the National History Museum of Latvia); 9 – a pendant from burial 97 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128: 1002); 14 – a pendant from burial 102 at Doles Rauši (VI 146: 668); 15 – a pendant from burial 105 at Doles Rauši (VI 146: 690).

The third type of ornamentation is a row of small points in the centre of the axis of the handle (Figure 4). Spoon-shaped pendants with this kind of decoration have even edges.

All the variants of Livonian spoon-shaped pendants are similar to the ones from ancient Russia. An item analogous to the one found at Asote has been known in the Smolensk region (Rjabinin 1988: Figure 1, No. 18). The items made using a casting technique were also widespread in the territory of ancient Russia. However, spoon-shaped items made using a complex technique including cutting, forging, embossing were found in northwestern Russia. This group is not numerous and is

represented only by 5 items from the northwest of ancient Russia (the city layers of Novgorod⁴ and Bokovo burial mounds) (Pronin 1978: Figure 211, No. 4; Pronin 1979: Figure 207, No. 1). Currently, only one cutout Livonian spoon-shaped pendant with a narrow handle is known; it is from the settlement at Salaspils Laukskola (Table 1, No. 16).



Figure 5. Livonian spoon-shaped pendants from Daugmale, Asote, and Salaspils Laukskola (numbers correspond to those in Table 1). Copper alloy:

6 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 9964: 7400); 7– a pendant from Asote hillfort (VI 15: 1953: 289); 10 – a pendant from burial 134 at Salaspils Laukskola; 16 – a pendant from Object 375 at the settlement at Salaspils Laukskola; 19 – a pendant from Daugmale hillfort (A 13186: 169).

4 Novgorod Museum Reserve. Online collections. <https://novgorod-iss.kamiscloud.ru/entity/OBJECT/183493?query=%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%B0&index=13> (Accessed on 08.12.2019); <https://novgorod-iss.kamiscloud.ru/entity/OBJECT/308989?page=2&query=%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%BA%D0%B0&fund=11&index=58> (Accessed on 08.12.2019).

5. Ways of wearing the Ancient Russian spoon-shaped pendants and their chronology

Spoon-shaped pendants were a part of various adornments. As our aim is to focus on the finds, we shall describe the pendants from the territory of ancient Russia only briefly. In the Upper Volga region, spoon-shaped pendants were suspended from chains as well as zoomorphic pendants, fangs, small tinklers; the finds were discovered in burials dating from the end of the 11th to the 12th century (Žukova & Stepanova 2010: 55, 132, 194; Figure 21, 118, 124) (Figure 6: 1–3). There was another way of wearing spoon-shaped pendants in the area between the Volga and Dnieper. Here, they were suspended from an arched chain-holder (Figure 6: 4) or a ring along with other types of adornments (knife-shaped, key-shaped, zoomorphic pendants, etc.) (Rjabinin 1988: Figure 1, No. 18).

In the northwest of ancient Russia, spoon-shaped pendants were also discovered in female inhumations dating from the second half of the 11th to the first third or first half of the 12th century. They were suspended from a belt or were part of the compound breast pendants. In the complex of breast pendants (Figure 6: 5–8), spoon-shaped items could also be found along with knife-shaped, key-shaped, bird-shaped pendants as well as zoomorphic ones (Spicyn 1896: tabl. VII: 15; tabl. XV: 14; Spicyn 1903: tabl. XXI: 3; Brandenburg 1895: tabl. VII: 7) – the so-called leucrotas (Spirgis 2012). Only four finds of spoon-shaped pendants were discovered in the northern part of ancient Russia (Markarov 1990: 149–150, 156; tabl. XVI; tabl. XIX: 19, 31). Three of these came from the burials of two women and a child at Nikol'skoe III on the Kem' River dating from the second half to the last third of the 11th century.

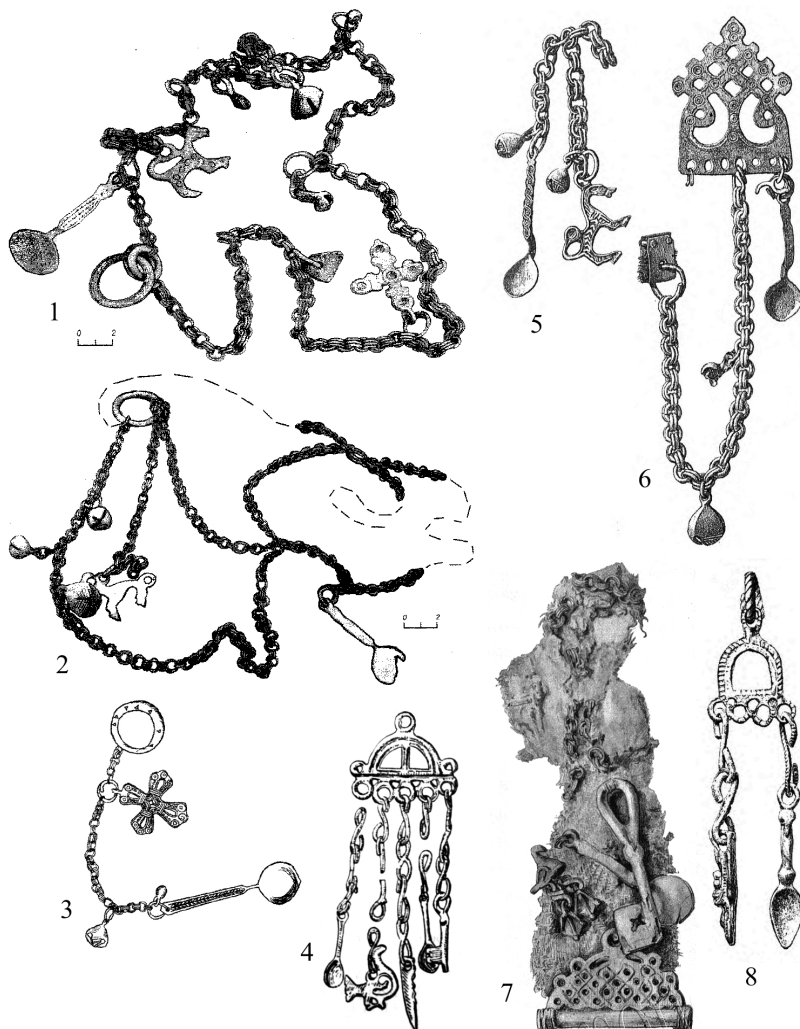


Figure 6. Ancient Russian adornments with spoon-shaped pendants. Copper alloy:

1–2 – adornments from burials at Saragozha (Žukova, Stepanova 2010: Figure 118); 3 – an adornment from burial mound 1 at Ust'-Keza (Žukova, Stepanova 2010: Figure 124: 8); 4 – an adornment from burial mound 18 at Kohany (Rjabinin 1988: Figure 1: 18); 5–6 – adornments from burial mound 80 at Kalihnovshchina (Spicyn 1903: tabl. XXI: 3, 6); 7 – an adornment from Kuznecy and Chalyh (Brandenburg 1895: tabl. VII: 7); 8 – an adornment from burial (LXXX) at Beseda (from: Spicyn 1896: tabl. VII: 15).

6. Livonian burial complexes with spoon-shaped pendants and their chronology

The Livonians wore spoon-shaped pendants as part of chain-like adornments along with other amulets. Salaspils Laukskola burial number 97 belonged to a young woman, 18–20 years old (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Plan of burial 97 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI AA 128: 1: 103).

Her head was pointed to the north. There was a typical set of Livonian adornments that included two neck rings, two necklaces consisting of glass beads, cowries, and a silver coin pendant (minted in Canterbury, an Anglo-Saxon denarius – Aethelred II, “Long Cross” type, 997–1003 (Berga 2006: 436)). There was an iron knife in the leather scabbard with bronze binding on the waist, spiral bracelets and rings on the hands. The spoon-shaped item and other amulets (a bronze cross, bird-shaped pendant, tinkler, needle case, omega-shaped pendant made of wire, amber pendant, two bear claw pendants, and a leather circle with 12 small bronze rings) were hung from a chain-like adornment supplemented with oval brooches and openwork chain-holders (Figure 8).

Burials of children were the other type of complex containing spoon-shaped pendants. These burials were pointed to the northwest. In three burials, there were necklaces consisting of glass beads with cowries, remains of tin pendants, bronze tinklers (Figure 9: 3, 4, 7, 10; 12: 8). In Salaspils Laukskola burial 134, the necklace also included two pendants made from coins (Lower Saxony, Otto-Adelheid denarius, 991–1040; Swabia, Emperor Henry II/ Conrad II, 1014–1039 (Berga 2006: 436)) and a round silver pendant (Figure 9: 4). The spoon-shaped pendants were situated on the chest (Figure 9: 7). They were suspended from chains consisting of paired small rings or twig-like iron details along with bronze crosses, tinklers, bird-shaped adornments, claw amulets, and walnuts (Figure 9: 1, 3, 7, 10; 10: 3; 12: 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14).

It is also worth mentioning the bone chain-divider – shaped like a fish – from Doles Rauši burial 105 (Figure 10: 5).

In Salaspils Laukskola burial 490, a birch bark box was near the waist of the deceased. Inside there was an iron knife and key, a bone comb and various pendants (bronze knife-shaped, spoon-shaped, hatchet-shaped, zoomorphic ones (leucrota and bird-shaped), three tinklers, an amber pendant, a predator’s claw, a pendant made of a walnut shell, and a tin item) (Figure 11).

In some burials, bone combs (Figure 8: 5; 9: 13; 12: 2), amber pendants (Figure 8: 8; 10: 6; 12: 6), iron knives (Figure 8: 29), and spindles were (Figure 9: 5, 8) near the waist of the deceased. There were also spiral rings (Figure 8: 21–28; 9: 9; 12: 16) and bracelets (Figure 8: 19–20; 9: 11, 12). In Doles Rauši burials 102 and 105, a ceramic wheel pot was near the skeleton’s right foot (Figure 10: 1; 12: 12). Finds such as iron nails and remains of boards show the use of coffins (Figure 9: 2; 12: 18).



Figure 8. Inventory of burial 97 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128):

1 – a neck ring (981); 2 – a twisted neck ring with two rings and two spirals (980); 3 – a necklace consisting of beads and cowries (979); 4 – a necklace consisting of beads and a coin-pendant (978); 5 – beads from a dress decoration (977); 6 – fragments of pendants; 7 – oval brooches with a chain-like adornment (997-1001); 8 – two tinklers with a cruciform slit and an amber pendant (1004, 1006); 9 – an omega-shaped pendant made of wire (1005); 10 – a cross (1003); 11 – a spoon-shaped pendant (1002); 12 – a bear claw pendant (1008); 13 – a bird-shaped pendant (1009); 14 – a pendant (?) in the form of a leather circle with 12 small bronze rings (1013); 15 – a twin nut (1011); 16 – a tinkler with a cruciform slit (1010); 17 – a pendant made of a predator claw (1008); 18 – a tinkler with a cruciform slit (1007); 19 – a needle-case (1012); 20 – a one-sided comb (985); 21–28 – spiral rings (986–993, 995); 29–30 – spiral bracelets (982–983); 29 – a knife in a scabbard (984); 32 – a piece of amber (976).

1, 19 – iron; 2, 7, 9–11, 13, 16, 18, 21–30 – copper alloy; 3 – glass, cowries; 4 – glass, silver, amber; 5 – glass; 6 – pewter (?); 8 – copper alloy, amber; 12 – bone; 14 – leather, copper alloy; 17, 20 – bone, copper alloy; 31 – copper alloy, leather, iron; 32 – amber.



Figure 9. Inventory of burial 134 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128):

1 – a bear claw pendant on a chain consisting of paired rings (1391); 2 – a nail (1395); 3 – two tinklers on a chain consisting of paired rings (1388); 4 – a necklace (1393) consisting of glass beads with silver and gold foil, two coin-pendants and a round pendant with the symbol of the Eucharist (Spirģis 2016); 5 – a spindle whorl (?) (1385); 6 – cylinder details from a cloth ornament (1394); 7 – chain-like adornments: two tinklers with a cruciform slit on a twig-like chain and two spoon-shaped pendants on a chain consisting of paired rings (1389); 8 – the spiral of a spindle (?) (1387); 9 – a spiral ring (1384); 10 – a tinkler with a cruciform slit (1390); 11 – a spiral bracelet (1383); 12 – a spiral bracelet (1382); 13 – a two-sided comb (1386).

1 – bone, copper alloy; 2 – iron; 3, 6, 7, 9–12 – copper alloy, 8 – copper alloy, wood; 13 – bone.

Due to the discoveries of spoon-shaped pendants in rich and well-dated burial complexes, the period when they existed is clear. Salaspils Laukskola burials 97 and 134 relate to the second chronological group of Livonian burials. Due to the presence of elements of chain-like adornments on oval brooches (Figure 8: 4), burial 97 can be regarded as the earliest one and dating to the end of the 11th century

(Spirģis 2008: 44, Table 1: 74; 328, Figure 134: 74). The double-sided comb from burial 134 indicates that it dates to the 12th century (Figure 9: 13). The latest complex is burial 102 from Dole Island. Due to the presence of spherical tinklers with straight slits, this burial can be related to the third chronological group (the end of the 12th to the beginning of the 13th century). Thus the Livonian spoon-shaped pendants appeared at the end of the 11th century and existed until the beginning of the 13th century. Taking that into account, we can suppose that spoon-shaped pendants modelled after the ancient Russian items were also produced there. The find of the defective example from Daugmale hillfort supports this idea (Figure 5: 18). In the 12th century, as a result of the spread of Orthodoxy, the production of various Christian symbols and amulets was organised in the Lower Daugava region (Spirģis 2012, 2013). However, what did the spoon-shaped pendants signify?



Figure 10. Inventory of burial 105 at Doles Rauši (iron items: eight nails and fragments of a knife (?) were not preserved) (VI 146):

1 – a wheel pot (693); 2 – three spirals (691); 3 – a bird-shaped pendant (690); 4 – a spoon-shaped pendant (690); 5 – a chain-divider in the shape of a fish (690); 6 – an amber pendant (692).

1 – ceramic; 2–4 – copper alloy; 5 – bone; 6 – amber.

7. Discussion: interpretation of the spoon-shaped pendants

As in neighbouring areas, the spread of the spoon-shaped pendants among Livonians came with some radical changes in funeral culture. People refused the rite of cremation and began using coffins and Christian symbols (Spirģis 2013). In different lands and among different peoples, Christianisation had its own specific traits. Recently, researchers have noted that acquaintance with the new religion had begun long before the “official” baptism described in written sources. The Estonian archaeologists Tõnno Jonuks and Tuuli Kurisoo even proposed a special term – prehistoric Christians (Jonuks & Kurisoo 2013). Perhaps the spoon pendants we are interested in could also be associated with Christian symbols?

Today we regard the metal spoon just as cutlery, but in Medieval Europe, a spoon was an extraordinary curiosity. For a long time, people used to eat with the help of a knife. During the meal each person would cut a piece of food, put it on a slice of a bread or a simple wooden board – the predecessor of a plate – and eat it with the help of a knife or using their hands. Wooden ladles were used only for a sauce or soup. People would just drink soup straight from the bowl (Foss'e 2010: 70). During a feast, spoons were used only by monks, but they were kept in the monastery refectory (Mulen 2002: 47). In medieval art, images of spoons are found only in some Byzantine depictions of the Eucharist (Taft 1996: 233–234).

So what could be the purpose of the spoon-shaped pendants that we analysed in this article?

Apart from the rare and successful unitary explanations of the purpose of spoon-shaped pendants (for example, B.A. Rybakov regarded them as a tool for folk medicine (Rybakov 1987: 543)), for a long period, archaeologists considered them to be pagan amulets promoting the satiation, wealth, and well-being of the owner (Rjabinin 1988: 58, 62; Sedova 1981: 26; Svarāne 1991: 42). The explanation of how these items were used – from the perspective of paganism – has a weak point. In the 11th–12th centuries, the inhabitants of the eastern Baltic did not use spoons in everyday life.

The spread of wooden spoons in the urban life of ancient Russian cities in the 10th–13th centuries (Kolčín 1971: 11) was probably influenced by monastic culture. As a type of cutlery, these spoons had a deep scoop.

This is why, according to other researchers, the pendants could be attributes of St. Martha (Spirģis 2013: 129–130) or representations of Eucharist spoons (Semenčuk 2001: 301). We also consider that these items were connected with Christian symbolism.



Figure 11. Inventory of burial 490 at Salaspils Laukskola (VI 128):

1 – beads (7403); 2 – an amber pendant (7404); 3 – a chain of S-like links (without number); 4 – a one-sided comb (without number); 5–10 – spiral rings (7412); 11 – a twig-like chain (7407); 12 – a bear claw pendant (7411); 13 – a fragment of a knife (without number); 14 – a pendant made of a walnut shell (without number); 15 – a key (without number); 16 – three tinklers with cruciform slits (7410); 17 – a zoomorphic pendant (leucrota-shaped) (7407); 18 – a bird-shaped pendant (7406); 19 – a knife-shaped pendant (7408); 20 – a spoon-shaped pendant (7409); 21 – an axe-shaped pendant (7405).

1 – glass; 2 – amber; 3, 11, 13, 15 – iron; 4 – bone, copper alloy; 5–10, 16–21 – copper alloy; 12 – bone, 14 – walnut shell.

The cult of St. Martha in Western Europe relates to the Frankish legend about the migration of Martha, Mary Magdalene, and Lazarus to Marseille (Voraginskij 2018: 115–118). We do not possess any additional information about the cult of this saint within the region of distribution of the spoon-shaped pendants. So, it seems to be more probable that these items were associated with the symbols of the Eucharist according to the Orthodox rite.

It is worth mentioning that the Eucharist is the main sacrament for Christians. Taking the “Sacramentum sacramentorum” brings Christians into unity with God. In fact, public worship lasting a week is just a preparation for the Eucharist. Baptism provides only an entrance into the Church, while communion is the most important sacrament – a Christian’s “passport”. Regular taking of the Bread of Life is a necessary condition for the salvation of the soul.



Figure 12. Inventory of burial 102 at Doles Rauši (VI 146):

1 – tinklers (663); 2 – a one-sided comb with case (671); 3 – a bird-shaped pendant (667); 4 – round and spiral details from a cloth ornament (673); 5 – textile remnants with tinklers and fragments of a twig-like chain (662); 6 – an amber pendant (669); 7 – a bird-shaped pendant (666); 8 – remains of a necklace consisting of grey beads (661); 9 – a spoon-shaped pendant (668); 10–11 – crosses (664–665); 12 – a wheel pot (675); 13 – spirals (672); 14 – the remains of a walnut (without number); 15 – fragments of chains (662); 16 – a fragment of a spiral ring (672); 17 – a bracelet (673); 18 – nails (674).

1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9–11, 13, 16, 17 – copper alloy; 2 – bone, copper alloy, leather; 5 – textile, copper alloy, iron; 6 – amber; 8 – glass; 12 – ceramics; 14 – walnut shell; 15 – copper alloy, iron; 18 – iron.

According to historical sources in the Greek Church, the Eucharist spoon was widely introduced between the second half of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century. In ancient Russia, the Eucharist spoon was mentioned in interpreting the Liturgy, which was translated from Greek by the 12th century (Afanasjeva 2012: 83, 85). In this source, the Eucharist spoon was associated with the Blessed Virgin who took the “bread of heaven”. It concerned a kind of Eucharist ritual, where small parts of Christ’s body – in the form of the host – which had been pierced by the Holy Lance were immersed in a bowl of water-diluted wine – the Blood of the Lord. The priest administered communion to the congregation by giving parishioners wine-soaked bread from the Eucharist spoon. Formerly, in the course of the Liturgy, the body of Christ was just put into the parishioner’s hands or placed into the mouth and washed down with wine. The appearance of a special spoon was associated with the idea that a man was unworthy of taking the Eucharist bread, and the spoon began to symbolise the Holy Spirit, through which the Flesh and Blood of the Lord was received (Taft 1996: 222).

Medieval Eucharist spoons were small – the size of a modern teaspoon. According to the specifics of the ritual Eucharist, as spoons were used just to “catch” a piece of bread, they were made with a flat scoop in order to minimise the flow of liquid.

In Orthodox Christianity, only a priest could hold the Eucharist spoon. The finds of such items are rare. The Byzantine examples have an image of a cross. An abbreviation of the Greek letters “Epsilon” and “Chi” can be seen on the bowls, which stands for the New Testament expression “in Christ” and was used during communion. Only one such item was discovered in Eastern Europe in Kyiv province (Xanenko & Xanenko 1909: Table XII: V: 252). This is why Eastern European and Scandinavian scholars considered the finds of the lead-tin spoons to be connected with this Eucharist ritual (Musin & Stepanov 2007: 118). However, further studies of the material did not prove this relationship. In ancient Russia, Eucharist spoons were probably wooden (Musin & Stepanov 2007).

Spoon-shaped pendants are almost two times smaller than the Eucharist spoons. They may have served as symbolic representations of Eucharist spoons. This interpretation turned out to be very convincing as we took into consideration the flat scoop of the pendants and the

depiction of a cross on some ancient Russian finds as well as numerous cases when spoon-shaped items were in the same complex with crosses.

The discovery of Christian symbols attests to the taking of sacraments by children and can be regarded as evidence of a definite level of Christianisation of society. The first generation of neophytes was baptised as adults. Only after the missionary phase, when Christianity affected the core population, were people baptised in childhood and godparents looked after their religious upbringing. For adults who were involved in the Christian community and performed church rituals, such symbolism was less important.

In the Western Church, Eucharist spoons were not used. Parishioners took communion with “unleavened” bread (prepared without using yeast) that symbolised the Body of the Lord, which the priest dipped in wine – the Blood of the Lord. Beginning in 1215 they received communion only with the Body of the Lord. It should be mentioned that the Latin polemic texts blamed the Greek Orthodox Church for the introduction of Eucharist spoons (Taft 1996: 224–225). Ancient Russian written sources give us information that there was a restriction on the spread of the Latin rite in Novgorod Land. Orthodox Christians were prohibited from taking Latin sacraments (Podskalskij 1996: 280–301, 309). Thus, the spoon-shaped pendants could, in particular, be symbols of Orthodox communion.

8. Conclusion

In the territory of ancient Russia, spoon-shaped pendants emerged in the second part of the 11th century. Overall, archaeological complexes with spoon-shaped pendants could be related to the spread of Christianity in ancient Russia. There could have been several centres for their production, as we see a large concentration in the Dnieper region, in the central area of ancient Russia, and in Novgorod Land.

At the end of the 11th century, the pendants spread among the Livonians. Taking that into consideration, we can suppose that spoon-shaped pendants modelled after the ancient Russian items were also produced there. The symbolism of the spoon-shaped pendants could be associated with the Orthodox variant of the Eucharist, as a special spoon was used in the rite.

The defining of the religious affiliation of Eastern Europeans during the period of Christianisation is very important and urgent for archaeology. For this reason, the study of funeral rites and the symbolism of artefacts is of particular significance for this issue. Thus, the spoon-shaped pendants could be a symbol of Orthodox communion. In a border zone like the lands inhabited by the Livonians, these could be a supplementary confessional marker.

This article represents a first step in the investigation of the spoon-shaped pendants. At the moment, not all of the finds from Eastern Europe have been taken into account. Further work, including the study of technology, compilation of typological series of similar finds, thorough correlation with other finds from the burial complexes, and perhaps metallographic studies, will allow us to obtain more complete data.

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Mārksōnad: ehted, amuleti, lusikripatsid, armulaualusikad, kristlus, liivlased, muistne Venemaa

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