

# COLLECTIVITY VERSUS INDIVIDUALITY: THE WARRIOR IDEOLOGY OF IRON AGE BURIAL RITES ON SAAREMAA

MARIKA MÄGI

## Abstract

The article presents an overview of burial customs on the Estonian island of Saaremaa from 1000BC up to Christianisation, discussing the social organisation behind the archaeological material. Special attention is paid to collective attitudes displayed in cemeteries where bones of different burials were completely mixed, and on transformation periods, which at times brought individual burials or the custom to deposit weapons in graves.

Key words: social organisation, burial customs, segmentary society, warrior aristocracy.

The culture on Saaremaa, the biggest island in Estonia, frequently considered together with the island of Muhu and other smaller islands and islets around it, differs from that of the Estonian mainland in several respects. From an archaeological perspective, it is essential to observe coastal Estonia, that is the Estonian islands and most of the coastal districts on the mainland, separately from the inland parts of the country. The peculiarity of Saaremaa is, however, obvious, even in the coastal Estonian context.

The topographical situation on islands near a mainland is inevitably a considerable factor in defining the local cultural development. Saaremaa has often been compared with Gotland, of which the area is approximately the same as that of Saaremaa, Muhu and surrounding smaller islands together, and where environmental conditions can easily be compared with those on the Estonian islands. Prehistoric remains on Gotland demonstrate cultural influences from all directions, and the archaeological evidence of the island differs considerably from that of mainland Sweden. In the case of Saaremaa, impulses from the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea prevail, although cultural communication with Gotland and other areas in the West should not be underestimated either, particularly during certain periods. The individual culture of Saaremaa took shape in accordance with its intensive communication with all overseas surroundings (Fig. 1).

The present article will concentrate on questions concerning collective attitudes and individualism in prehistoric society on Saaremaa, as indicated especially by burial customs, but also by other archaeological evidence. The central postulate is the idea of close mutual connection between individuality and warrior ideology in prehistory. The more pronounced “bellicose character” of Saaremaa prehistoric society, compared with the

rest of Estonia, is a phenomenon that has been pointed out by several archaeologists, leaving alone medieval historians. This article tries to analyse the origin and development of Saaremaa warrior society in a broader context.

## Social organisation on Saaremaa from 1000BC to 400AD

Stone Age burials on Saaremaa were individual inhumations (eg Jaanits *et al.* 1982, p.83ff. and p.99f.). Stone graves appeared in the Bronze Age, about 1000BC, contained the inhumed bones of several individuals deposited without any anatomical order, and few grave goods, at least during the first thousand years. The number of artefacts in graves increased, starting from the last century BC, but burials remained undistinguishable up to the middle of the first millennium AD.

Grave forms varied throughout the period from 1000BC to 400AD, and some of them included constructions that at first glimpse should imply individual graves. Stone cist graves dated to the Bronze Age and the first half of the Pre-Roman Iron Age always had cists built of stones in the middle of circular kerbs. Human bones in these cists anyhow belonged to several individuals, if there were any bones at all. It suggests that, although central cists inevitably possessed a special meaning for the people who were buried in the grave, the cist constructions cannot necessarily be seen as presenting individuality. The cists and their contents of human bones formed just a part of a communal burial ground, and were perhaps intended for emphasizing the members of a family or clan who were thriving more than average, had particular abilities, or had died in an unusual way. The same is valid for small rectangular or some-

V

THE ROLE  
OF WEAPONS  
AND  
WEAPONRY  
IN POLITICAL  
AND  
MILITARY  
LEADERSHIP



Fig. 1. Map of areas mentioned in the text.

times oval enclosures that characterised the graves of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Although archaeologists have suggested earlier that the enclosures surrounded individual inhumation graves (eg Lang 1996, p.321), later biological analyses have demonstrated that fragments of skeletons found in these enclosures belonged to several individuals (Kalman 2003). A similar picture appears in Roman Period tarand-graves or mortuary houses (Mägi 2005; 2006).

Biological analyses of inhumed bones have proven that most individuals in Saaremaa stone graves were represented only by parts of skeletons, which can hardly be explained only by surviving conditions. The osteological evidence in stone graves thus points to a custom of secondary burial (eg Mägi-Lõugas 1997; Kalman 1999, 2000a, 2000c). Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington have defined the custom of secondary burials as “the regular and socially sanctioned removal of the relics of some or all deceased persons from a place of temporary storage to a permanent resting place” (Metcalf, Huntington 1999, p.97). On Saaremaa, the secondary treatment of bones was practised without considerable changes throughout the Bronze Age and at least the first half of the Iron Age.

In one way or another, burials reflect the society in which the dead belonged. The secondary treatment

of bones, where the remains of individuals were intentionally mixed disregarding age and gender, characterised, to draw parallels with cultural-anthropological studies, primarily segmentary societies with extensive agriculture. In known societies where such burial rites were (or continuously are) practised, clan solidarity played an essential role, and people were often arranged in communal houses. The concrete perception of death and the afterlife can vary a lot, but rituals emphasizing a connection with ancestors normally hold a special significance (for cultural-anthropological parallels and the analysis of rituals see eg Carr, Knüsel 1997, p.167ff.; Metcalf, Huntington 1999, pp.79-161).

Segmentary societies usually coincide with early agriculture, and are often characterised by low-intensity cultivation. The

property of arable lands tends to be collective, family- or clan-based, and the descent system is frequently matrilineal. Somewhat paradoxically, several such societies have demonstrated a considerably aggressive militancy. There are formal leaders, “big men” or sometimes “big women”, called chiefs or at times even kings, who can supervise grandiose building projects, but their power base is actually weak and rests on personal authority. Such societies are divided into ranks, mainly according to clan membership. Investigated cases of segmentary societies, however, make up a very heterogeneous group (Fried 1967, pp.109-184; Keesing 1981, pp.177-300).

In European prehistory, European Megalithic Culture is normally presented as an example of a segmentary society. Burials in megalithic graves were also intentionally mixed, especially in the northern area of the culture (Andersen 2000). Still, collective graves of Megalithic Culture were replaced by individual burials, some of them abundantly equipped with weapons, already in the late Neolithic Period (Bradley 1998; Guilaine, Zammit 2005, p.158ff.). The shift towards individual graves marked the general transformation of society towards an actually stratified social organisation that has often been called chiefdom. Kristian Kristiansen (1987) has associated the ultimate development of segmentary tribal system with a strong emphasis on

the display of personal status. He suggested that the segmentary system in Scandinavia was replaced by chiefdom structures from approximately 1600BC as a result of settlement expansion and increased exploitation of the landscape. The transformation to chiefdoms was advanced along with the distribution of bronze.

The custom to mix human bones or to bury only parts of skeletons continued sporadically also together with individual burials, particularly in connection with probable sacrifices. The custom of excarnation by exposure lasted on the British Isles until the year zero, and in Poland and Sweden, graves with mixed burials are known even in rare cases as late as the Roman Iron Age (Kokowski 1992; Rasch 1994; Carr, Knüsel 1997; Bradley 1998, p. 159ff.; Guilaine, Zammit 2005). Exceptional were the areas inhabited by Baltic Finns, where collective graves stayed in use much longer.

The physical anthropologist Jonathan Kalman, who has analysed mixed burials in different stone graves, has pointed out that the dental caries prevalence rate on teeth from Estonian graves dated to the first half of the Metal Age was considerably lower than was typical of populations in communities which intensively practised agriculture, eg in Denmark during the same period. Since caries have been positively correlated with subsistence farming, which caused more sugar-containing plant material to become a larger source of food, the evidence suggests, according to Kalman, that even though farming played a substantial role in early Metal Age Estonia, the community was only in part relying on the consumption of cultivated crops (2000a, 2000b).

A similar correlation has been proposed by Deborah Shepherd, who has studied collective burial grounds in Finland in the second half of the Iron Age, stone cemeteries with cremations (Shepherd 1999, pp.33-47). She sees a connection between collective burial customs and slash-and-burn cultivation that was widespread in some areas of Finland until the 20th century. The slash-and-burn cultivation was supported by a system of expanded families. Shepherd points to the conservative character of burial rites, and to the possibility that collective traits in burial customs could survive much longer than both the form of subsistence and the social organisation from which they had originated.

The Estonian archaeologist Tõnno Jonuks, who deals with Estonian prehistoric beliefs, has explained the collective burial customs by the concept of “collective soul”, which was accompanied by the idea of “individual soul” since the fifth century AD (2005). The explanation is acceptable, still it is hard to believe that the concept of “collective soul” could emerge and develop

regardless of a corresponding social organisation, family system or mythology.

Grave goods in burial grounds of Saaremaa in the first half of the Metal Age, as well as in Estonia in general, also demonstrate some peculiarities compared with neighbouring areas. With a short exceptional period around the beginning of our era, the first half of the Metal Age in Estonia was characterised by a lack of weapons, while in the Roman Period, especially the second half, there was a great variety of ornaments in graves. In the areas around the Baltic Sea, a lack of weapons also defined Wielbark Culture in Poland (Kaliff 2001, pp.26-41; Pawleta 2003), while burial customs in these areas still manifested individuality. On Saaremaa, as well as in mainland Estonia, ornaments, as the only grave goods, seem only to support the vision of society that was reflected by communal burial grounds with mixed bones, a segmentary society in which clan membership prevailed over any kind of warrior occupation. Although ornaments in Estonian graves cannot be connected with individuals, due to the mixed character of the burials, most of them are believed to have been nongendered artefacts, ie used by both men and women. The same is presumably true for belt fittings and tools (predominantly knives) that have been found in graves from these periods.

Some types of ornaments might have been prestigious artefacts that were available only to the members of a ruling clan. The lack of weapons both in graves and deposits indicates that social status was not expressed through them, at least not in ritual behaviour. At the same time, it would be difficult to believe that weapons were not used, nor that they may have functioned as some sort of rank or clan membership tokens in real life. In the areas neighbouring Estonia, Roman Iron Age burial customs were characterised by clearly individual graves, and tended to be abundantly equipped with weapons contrary to the collective graves and their strong bias towards ornaments as nearly the only group of artefacts deposited there. The phenomenon can be interpreted as a reflection of a society in which warriors did not form an independent stratum as seems to have happened in the neighbouring areas, and where social prestige kept within a clan community was expressed through “soft” attributes, ornaments, and probably also the burial monument itself.

The rest of the archaeological evidence on Saaremaa is in a good correlation with the burial material: the first half of the Metal Ages was characterised here by only single fortifications and by a complete absence of weapon deposits. Data on dwelling sites of this time is scarce, but the settlement pattern presumably stayed quite egalitarian throughout most of the period. Late

## V

THE ROLE  
OF WEAPONS  
AND  
WEAPONRY  
IN POLITICAL  
AND  
MILITARY  
LEADERSHIP

Bronze Age fortified settlements, two of them known from southern Saaremaa, form the only exception. These sites have been treated as centres of settlement and political power in Estonian archaeological literature (Ligi 1995; Lang 1996, pp.337-455), although their location on the sea shore, at the border of arable fields, might better suggest a role within international trade routes.

The Late Bronze Age was a period of changes everywhere in Europe (eg Bradley 1998, pp.129-144). Pan-European impulses also reached the shores of Estonia, where, in the second half of the Bronze Age, the first stone cist graves were erected, along with single fortified settlements and the establishment of the first Celtic field constructions. The period of certain fortified villages and burial customs with some traits of individuality, however, lasted no more than a few hundred years, after which the fortified settlements were abandoned, and people began to bury the dead in stone graves, where the collective attitude was pronounced more than ever before. It is difficult to accept the picture presented by Priit Ligi and supported by Valter Lang (Ligi 1995; Lang 1995; 1996), according to which the Late Bronze Age brought along such crucial changes in Estonian prehistoric social organisation that from then on we can talk of proper chiefdom structures. The alternative is to interpret society as a segmentary society including some organisation, more egalitarian than really characteristic of chiefdoms.

In the first half of the Metal Age in coastal Estonia, especially on Saaremaa, there was also an era of about 150 years when some weapons, such as spears, socketed axes, and sometimes daggers, were deposited in graves. It happened around the year zero, in the final part of the Pre-Roman Iron Age. The same era was defined by the appearance of small fortifications; unlike the Bronze Age fortified villages, now presumably no more than fortified farms. These sites were abandoned around 50AD, simultaneously with the re-disappearance of weapons from graves, making space for the surplus of ornaments. The time around the year zero may be considered as the first attempt at creating a warrior society, without lasting success. It can anyhow be treated as a prelude to what happened four hundred years later.

#### Change in ideology: fifth to seventh century

The fifth to the seventh century was everywhere in Europe a period of considerable transformations in different spheres. These processes also touched Estonia, first of all the coastal districts and islands, ie areas

where exchange played an important role in the local economy. In burial customs, it was primarily mirrored in an abundance of weapons, placed in the burials, although with the number of ornaments at the same high level as before. As a new phenomenon, the custom of damaging grave goods intentionally began to spread: thus about half of all the artefacts found in the mortuary houses of that period on Saaremaa are represented only by fragments (Mägi 2006). In Finland, where the custom of damaging grave goods took off during the Early Roman Period with the so-called Käsämäki-type cemeteries, it has been taken as a sign of Swedish influence (Salo 1984, p.208). The spread of the same custom in coastal Estonia some hundred years later may be associated with cultural influences from the same direction.

Strong Scandinavian impulses can also be observed in the same period in other areas on the eastern and south-east shores of the Baltic Sea, where they were simultaneous with the appearance of abundantly equipped weapon burials, indicating the rise of a warrior aristocracy. The sudden cultural reorientation and transformation of society characterised particularly coastal zones, while in inland areas the changes in social organisation might have remained quite modest, at least according to archaeological evidence (eg Žulkus 2000; Bitner-Wróblewska 2001, p.121ff.).

The cultural impact from Scandinavia correlated with the increased importance of warriors in society. The same correlation is obvious on Saaremaa and elsewhere in coastal Estonia, where the sudden abundance of military attributes in fifth to seventh-century graves formed a striking contrast with the lack of weapons in earlier periods. A stronger resistance to the new structures, compared with southern neighbouring areas, is indicated in the persistence of collective burials. The manifestation of the warrior aristocracy remained less intensive and shorter-lasting than among the neighbours of Estonia, perhaps because the re-arrangement of social organisation took place in the frames of an old, clan-based, segmentary society.

The presentation of military attributes in graves, even though it did not last long, can be interpreted as a sign of the formation of a pronounced stratification in society. The definitions “segmentary society” and “chiefdom” are, however, very vague, and they may, in real life, take many different forms. The transformation from one type of organisation to another has never been possible to observe, and therefore remains obscure and difficult to define. Strong chieftains or (military) leaders can also appear in segmentary societies, but without having a solid ground for institutionalising their power.



Social changes that characterised northern Europe in the fifth to the seventh century also shook the society of Saaremaa, but were not able to change the local type of organisation dramatically. Society, as it emerged in the course of these centuries, can still hardly be defined as a chiefdom with a clearly manifested warrior aristocracy, as is known from the same period in Scandinavia, or, for instance, from “Beowulf”. On the other hand, the archaeological evidence on Saaremaa in the following periods, especially at the end of the Iron Age, leaves no doubt that social relations had strained and stratification increased.

### Saaremaa Vikings?

Starting from the eighth century AD, the dead on Saaremaa were buried in individual stone circle graves. These were entirely cremations, where burnt bones and remains of artefacts were in most cases brought to stone graves from a pyre somewhere else. Only few fragments of artefacts, as well as just a small part of the human bones, ended up in the graves, thus following the old tradition of partial burials. These remains were often surrounded with circular stone kerbs, and can be clearly considered as individual burials. The stone circle graves formed big cemeteries, which can presumably be interpreted as family burial grounds. Similar graves surrounded by stone circles were, during the same period of time, put into use on Gotland (eg Nylén 1958), and mutual connections between these two big islands in the Baltic Sea seem to have intensified in all spheres.

The stone circle graves that prevailed in Saaremaa burial customs up to the end of the tenth century were characterised merely by scarce finds. Weapon graves known from the Migration Period and the seventh century disappeared, although single weapons occurred sporadically in graves. Contrary to earlier burial grounds, the pre-Viking and Viking Age graves now contained rather few ornaments, or any other items for that matter, thus referring to an abrupt ideological change: it was apparently not considered important any more to supply the dead with artefacts for the other world. Even the few items that have been uncovered from graves of this period were only represented by small badly burnt fragments.

Trying to interpret the society behind these burial customs, the importance of clan membership seems to have diminished: at least, it was not found as relevant any more to manifest the clan community with intentionally mixed bones. On the other hand, there is not enough proof to talk about a triumphant warrior society either. No individual burial has been recorded

on Saaremaa in this period which could be defined as abundantly equipped with weapons. On the other hand, single-weapon deposits emerge now on Saaremaa as well, and the first hill-forts were erected in the eighth century (Lõugas, Mägi-Lõugas 1994). The archaeological evidence thus implies times of unrest and strengthening social relations: these are developments that could improve the position of warriors.

In the areas inhabited by Finnic peoples, collective stone cemeteries with mixed cremations remained in use on the Estonian mainland, in Finland and Karelia (Selirand 1974, pp.178-210; Shepherd 1999, pp.21-32; Uino 2003, pp.324-348), as well as in northern Couronia, down to the River Venta in the south, where collective burials in stone graves had been widespread already since the Pre-Roman Iron Age (Vasks 2006). Communal stone graves with mixed cremations can thus be defined as a burial custom dominantly characteristic of areas inhabited by Finnic ethnic groups in the eighth to the tenth century. Individual stone cist graves were rather exceptional in the Finnic cultural sphere, and were widespread only in coastal areas that altogether indicated intensive mutual communication between each other and with eastern Scandinavia. In addition to Saaremaa, where stone cist graves became a dominant grave form from the eighth to the tenth century, individual graves surrounded by circular stone kerbs occurred together with other kind of cemeteries also in northern Couronia (Šturms 1936, p.34ff.), in the areas of Votes and Isorians (Sedov 1987, p.39ff.), and in Karelia (Kochkurkina 1981, p.13ff.; Uino 2003, p.335f.).

In the neighbouring areas of Estonia, which were inhabited by ethnic Balts, the prevailing burial custom was the continuously individual grave, normally inhumation, often supplied with numerous grave goods, including weapons (eg Atgāzis 1992; Vaškevičiūtė 1992; Radiņš 1999; Šnē 2002). In these areas, archaeologists have found sufficient grounds to talk of a developed warrior aristocracy, whose status was manifested by weapons. The same has been assumed for southern Couronia, where the earlier prevailing custom of inhumations was gradually replaced by cremations in the course of the tenth and 11th centuries. As a tradition since the Roman Period, these individual graves contained great numbers of weapons, riding equipment and ornaments, both in male and female graves up to the 12th or 13th century (see eg Stankus 1995; Žulkus 1991, p.11; 2000).

Exceptionally in the Baltic cultural sphere, cremations in large burial pits have been recorded starting from the tenth century in Couronia south of the River Venta. These pits were probably filled with several lay-

## V

THE ROLE  
OF WEAPONS  
AND  
WEAPONRY  
IN POLITICAL  
AND  
MILITARY  
LEADERSHIP

ers of cremations, thus presenting collective attitudes otherwise unfamiliar to Baltic burial rites (eg Balodis 1940). Artefact material, as well as in certain periods' burial forms in Couronia, has demonstrated some sort of unity among Finnic peoples inhabiting other eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea throughout the whole of pre-history, a phenomenon that undoubtedly indicates very intensive communication between close neighbours. Can the large pits with several layers of cremations perhaps be considered as a reflection of the ideological impact from the north, adjusted to the local custom of individual cremation burials in pits?

Collective burial grounds with mixed cremations, as they were widespread among the ethnic Finnic groups in the second half of the Iron Age, were clearly a cultural phenomenon, reflecting an ideology different from neighbouring areas. These collective attitudes in the ritual sphere were presumably rooted in a more egalitarian social organisation. To use terms of political anthropology, we may probably still talk of a clan or perhaps a lineage-based segmentary society, where the position of chieftains was now remarkably strengthened. In Estonia, the process had probably reached the furthest on Saaremaa, where the burial custom of individual graves succeeded at manifesting itself and then to dominate the subsequent 400 to 600 years, at least as regards burials among the elite. Still, even on Saaremaa, social status was not presented posthumously through weapons, at least not through several weapons in graves. The situation changed dramatically in the 11th century.

#### Saaremaa before conversion

The 11th and 12th century was a period witnessing lots of weapons in graves. On Saaremaa, the 11th century brought along, in addition to abundant weapon graves, changes in burial customs that literally contradicted former developments towards individuality: the stone circle graves were gradually replaced by stone cemeteries without formal structures, similar to those widespread on mainland Estonia. Careful study of the documentation from earlier excavations at these sites on Saaremaa has anyhow pointed to several individual cremation burials inside these cemeteries, existing side by side with burial areas, where bones and artefacts had been completely mixed (Mägi 2002, pp.75-124). It is possible that these burials, normally surrounded by zones without finds, were somehow also marked above the surface, thus avoiding overlapping burials. In any case, the meanwhile lost or considerably diminished custom of collective burials reappeared on Saaremaa with the 11th century, while individuality was still reserved for some persons.

The 11th-century cemeteries on Saaremaa seem to have been characterised by a sudden increase in weapon burials. Up to 60% of all distinguishable burials now included weapons, and 25% of them included a sword as the primary token of high status (Mägi 2002, p.140). The situation was thus similar to Gotland, where the proportion of weapon burials reached 58% in the 11th century (Jakobsson 1992, p.139). The percentage of weapon burials among all distinguishable graves stayed approximately the same during the 12th century as well, but fragments of swords were now recorded in more than half of them. Particularly the 12th-century individual burials in such cemeteries were often conspicuous by abundant and often luxurious grave goods, which could hardly have been available for every person, or the family burying him or her (Mägi 2002, p.142). In those cases where the richly equipped individual burials were weapon graves, they frequently contained fragments of swords, pattern-welded spearheads, silver-plated spurs, silver ornaments, and other items that could be interpreted as status symbols. The evidence thus suggests a clear link between the emphasizing of individuality and that of high social status.

The rest of the archaeological material also implies strengthening tendencies towards more developed social stratification. On 11th and 12th-century Saaremaa, quite a number of new hill-forts were built, most of them functioning as political centres or trading centres. Archaeological evidence correlates with the data from written documents, telling us about the supremacy of Saaremaa warships on sea, and about the plundering raids of Saaremaa pirates to overseas areas. Everything indicates that the society on 11th and 12th-century Saaremaa was warlike and stratified.

The sudden increase in richly equipped weapon burials presumably points to a transformation period. There is no doubt that 11th and 12th-century society held warriors in high regard, and weapons had a significance as status symbols, both ritually and in real life. Social organisation had developed towards increased stratification, and society was ruled by a warrior aristocracy. In political-anthropological terms, 11th and 12th-century society on Saaremaa can be described as a chiefdom, with all the characteristics belonging to it. In the new social organisation, the affiliation to the chieftain started to prevail over other relationships; former clan communities, or at least part of them, were probably replaced by lineage systems; power was consolidated and was now held by single chieftains. Stratification processes brought along an increase in the frequency of armed conflict, which again led to an increase of the importance of armed retainers and a need to erect fortifications (eg Fried 1967, pp.185-226; Earle 1997, pp.1-16).

The former, clan-based organisation nevertheless did not disappear overnight, as it is, for instance, indicated in the return of collective burial customs. A transformation period in social organisation, especially when it is connected with the emergence of a new type of elite, may provoke the consolidation of former elite structures, whose reaction can be expressed through an intensified manifestation of power. Ian Hodder has demonstrated that ideology can also be used in a way that denies the presence of conflict within society, obscuring the real locus of social contradictions (1982, p.152). The continuity in using collective burial grounds probably reflects an ideological need to emphasize the unity inside the clan, although the social organisation had become more hierarchical and eventually grown out of the frames of the old systems. The pre-Christian society of Saaremaa, with its long-surviving biases towards more egalitarian social relations, which were obvious even as late as the 12th century, can probably best be compared with the society on Gotland before it was subordinated to the Swedish kings (Hyenstrand 1989; Carlsson 1990).

The lasting traditions of a segmentary society can also be seen in the use of weapons as posthumous status symbols. In the 11th and 12th century, when weapons only started to play an essential role in grave furnishings, some were deposited also in female graves, a phenomenon that characterises all areas inhabited by Baltic-Finnic groups (Mägi 2002, p.77ff.). Such weapons have been recorded only in graves that were otherwise abundantly equipped with items typical of women, predominantly ornaments, and can therefore be interpreted as symbols of social status, indicating that some women could achieve a leading position in their society. More egalitarian relations between genders are normally attributed to societies where social stratification is comparatively egalitarian, too (eg Kent 1999), which can fit the interpretation of Saaremaa before the 11th century. After the rise of the warrior aristocracy, weapons became symbols of power that, at least during the first centuries, were used for both genders.

## Conclusions

Burial customs that emphasize collective attitudes are, as demonstrated above, particularly characteristic of clan-based segmentary societies with low-level stratification. Being one of the most conservative parts of ritual behaviour, burial rites can nevertheless stay unchanged long after the alteration of social organisation. In the northern part of Europe, collective cemeteries with mixed burials stayed in use after the Neolithic predominantly in the areas inhabited by Finnic ethnic

groups, and surprisingly long, right until Christianisation. Behind this phenomenon can be seen a cultural sphere, ideology, and mythology that are different from the western and southern neighbours, which was probably also reflected in a more egalitarian social organisation and perhaps different family patterns.

Among other areas that were inhabited by Finnic groups, Saaremaa had a special position as a big island or even archipelago, where overseas communication had a stronger than average impact on local culture. Pan-European social changes also shook the society of Saaremaa, though for a long time without leaving permanent traces. Only the fifth to seventh-century transformation period brought along weapons in graves, and the custom of individual burials, which started to prevail on Saaremaa since the eighth century.

Weapons however re-disappeared from graves nearly completely at about the same time. Burial customs, as well as other archaeological evidence, suggest the rise of a warrior aristocracy only in the 11th century, when people began to deposit great numbers of weapons in cemeteries, particularly in individual cremation burials. At the same time, collective burials re-appeared on the island, perhaps indicating a reaction against the strengthening stratification in society. In 1227, when Saaremaa was officially Christianised, the society of the island was probably hierarchical and dominated by a warrior aristocracy, although biased by attitudes based on more egalitarian rank organisation among powerful clans.

Translated by the author

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## KOLEKTYVIŠKUMAS PRIEŠ INDIVIDUALUMĄ: KARINĖ IDEOLOGIJA SAREMOS SALOS GELEŽIES AMŽIAUS LAIDOJIMO PAPROČIUOSE

Marika Mägi

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama priešistorės laikų Saremos salos visuomenės kolektyvinio požiūrio į individualumą problema. Šis požiūris atskleidžiamas laidojimo papročių ir kitame archeologiniame kontekste. Pagrindinė straipsnyje diskutuojama idėja – tai prielaida apie priešistorės laikais egzistavusius artimus karių ir individo abipusius ideologinius ryšius.

Pasibaigus akmens amžiui Saremos salos gyventojų laidosenai buvo būdingi iš akmenų sukrauti kapai su kelių mirusiųjų kaulais, palaidotais be jokios anatominės tvarkos. Daugiau ar mažiau panašūs laidojimo papročiai tęsėsi iki pat I tūkstantmečio vidurio, per šį laikotarpį kapų formoms pasikeitus kelis kartus. Taigi osteologinė kapų medžiaga yra pagrindinis duomuo, leidžiantis apibūdinti antrinio palaidojimo paprotį ir ieškoti paralelių kultūrinės antropologijos tyrinėjimuose, visų pirma segmentinei visuomenei, besiverčiančiai išplėtotą žemdirbyste, aptarti. Saremos visuomenėje tokie laidojimo papročiai buvo praktikuojami net iki vėlyvojo geležies amžiaus, o giminės solidarumas juose vaidino svarbiausią vaidmenį.

Anksčiau buvo manyta, kad Estijoje socialinė visuomenės organizacija jau vėlyvajame bronzos amžiuje

leido pasukti vadystės (angl. *chiefdom*) link. Straipsnyje argumentuotai teigiama priešingai, kad visuomenės organizacija buvo labiau egalitarinė, daugiausia sąlygota giminių skaidymosi proceso, ypač pirmojoje metalo amžiaus pusėje. Tokia nuostata, be kolektyvinių laidojimo papročių, yra paremta ir kita archeologine medžiaga, pirmiausia tuo, kad kapuose nerandama ginklų. Toks reiškinytis gali būti interpretuojamas kaip visuomenės, kurioje kariai nesudarė atskiro sluoksnio, atspindys. Kitaip atsitiko kaimyninėse srityse, kur socialinis prestižas buvo išlaikomas giminės viduje ir pasireiškė per „negriežtus“ atributus – papuošalus ir, matyt, per pačius laidojimo paminklus.

Tačiau reikia išskirti tam tikrus transformacijų periodus, kuomet socialiniai ryšiai Saremos saloje buvo intensyvesni ir visuomenės stratifikacija išaugdavo. Tokie tarpsniai sutampa su visoje Europoje vykusiais procesais, kurie gerokai ryškesni Saremos saloje nei likusioje Estijos teritorijoje. Toks lemiamas laikotarpis buvo V–VII amžiai, kada pradedama mirusiųjų laidoti su ginklais, nors kapai kaip ir anksčiau lieka išmaišyti (turima omenyje specialiai išmaišyti mirusiųjų kaulai – *vert. past.*). Tačiau laidojimo su ginklais paprotys nesitęsė ilgai, VII a. pabaigoje kapuose įkapių vėl sumažėja. Mirusiojo su ginklais laidojimas interpretuojamas kaip visuomenės stratifikacijos proceso dalis. Stipresnis pasipriešinimas naujoms socialinėms struktūroms, lyginant su kaimyninėmis pietinėmis teritorijomis, šiaip ar taip buvo pažymėtas išlikusiu kolektyviniu laidojimo papročiu. Visuomenė, kuri tuo metu susiformavo Saremos saloje, vargiai ar gali būti prilyginta vadystei – su aiškiai apibrėžtu karinės aristokratijos sluoksniu, kokį žinome buvus Skandinavijoje, pagal plg. „Beovulfą“, senovės germanų epą. Stiprių vadų ar (karo) lyderių gali atsirasti ir segmentinėse bendruomenėse, net ir neturint tvirto pagrindo savo valdžiai institucionalizuoti. Individualūs degintiniai kapai akmenų vainikuose, kurie vyravo Saremos saloje VIII–X a., taip pat gali būti vertinami kaip pokyčių, vykusių V–VII a., rezultatas. Jų atsiradimas sutampa su pradžia intensyvesnio salos gyventojų bendradarbiavimo su Rytų Skandinavija, ypač Gotlandu, kur buvo praktikuojami panašūs laidojimo papročiai. Tačiau individualūs kapai akmenų vainikuose yra išimtinai reti finų kultūrų rate, kuriame vyravo kolektyviniai iš akmenų krauti kapinynai su degintiniais sumaišytais mirusiųjų kaulais. Bandant interpretuoti visuomenę, palikusių Saremos saloje iš akmenų sukrautus kapus, atrodo, kad giminių narių skaičius mažėjo, kol pagaliau paprotys tyčia maišyti mirusiųjų kaulus, taip rodant giminės svarbą, tapo nebesvarbus. Kita vertus, nėra pakankamai duomenų karių visuomenės triumfui pagrįsti.

### V

THE ROLE OF WEAPONS AND WEAPONRY IN POLITICAL AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP

Nors ginklų retkarčiais pasirodo kapuose su akmenų vainikais, tačiau Saremoje to meto individualių kapų nežinoma. Jei kapuose ginklų yra, tai jų negausu. Vartojant politinės antropologijos terminus, tokius kapus galėtume manyti vis dar buvus giminių ar galbūt linijinės segmentinės visuomenės dalimi, kurioje vadų pozicijos nepaprastai sutvirtėjo. XI–XII a. buvo laikas, kuomet kapų su ginklais atsirado daug. XI a. Saremos saloje, be pagausėjimo kapų su ginklais, laidojimo papročių raidoje vyko ir priešingų pokyčių: buvo tolstama nuo individualių kapų, t. y. kapai akmenų vainikuose pamažu užleido vietą iš akmenų krautiems kapinynams, nebeturintiems jokios taisyklingos struktūros. Tokie kapai buvo panašūs į plačiai žinomus žemyninėje Estijos dalyje. Išsami ankstesnių archeologinių tyrinėjimų Saremos saloje analizė parodė, kad šiuose kapinynuose šalia laidojimų vietų su sąmoningai sumaišytais degintiniais mirusiųjų kaulais būdavo ir keletas individualių degintinių kapų.

XI–XII a. Saremos kapinynuose staigiai daugėja kapų su ginklais. Tai leidžia manyti, kad yra akivaizdus ryšys tarp individualių kapų su ginklais ir aukšto socialinio statuso. Likusi archeologinė medžiaga rodo akivaizdžią griežtesnės visuomenės stratifikacijos tendenciją. Nėra abejonių, kad XI–XII a. visuomenė karius laikė aukšto socialinio sluoksnio žmonėmis, o ginklai tuomet tapo šio socialinio statuso simboliu, tiek šiame gyvenime, tiek pomirtiniame. Visuomenės socialinės organizacijos raida vyko visuomenės stratifikacijos link, visuomenė buvo valdoma karinės aristokratijos. Politinės antropologijos terminais, XI–XII a. Saremos salos visuomenė gali būti apibūdinta kaip turėjusi vadystės instituciją. Tuo pačiu metu saloje vėl atsirado kolektyvinių kapų. Tai greičiausiai rodo visuomenės socialinio susiskaidymo didėjimą. 1227 m. Saremos salos visuomenė oficialiai priėmė krikščionybę, – matyt, salos visuomenėje dominavo ir jai vadovavo karinė aristokratija, net jei ir buvo remiamasi šališkais egalitarinės visuomenės organizacijos požiūriais ir įtakingomis giminėmis.