

# CONTEMPORARY DEPOSITS AT SACRED PLACES: REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY PAGANISM IN ESTONIA AND FINLAND

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**Abstract:** This paper is based on fieldwork documenting contemporary deposits at sacred places in Estonia and Finland. We studied variations in these deposits in both countries and interpreted them on the basis of the known traditions of contemporary Paganism. Contemporary offerings bear evidence of the creative use of the past as well as international influences. The contemporary practices at sacred places, as demonstrated by material evidence, can be grouped under the following concepts: perceived continuity, revitalising traditions, syncretism, and ritual creativity. In Estonia, sacred places have been used more actively and more extensive deposits have accumulated than is the case in Finland. We also emphasise that sacred places are used by a broader variety of people than only members of Pagan communities, although other types of users are often ignored in research. The activities of the general public become visible particularly in the context of material culture studies, when all deposits are examined comprehensively.

**Keywords:** contemporary Paganism, deposits, material culture studies, sacred places

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Paganism<sup>1</sup> has grown rapidly in recent decades. Titus Hjelm (2016: 360) has stated that even though the recognition and research of different forms of contemporary Paganism have generally increased in the 2000s and 2010s, “there is variation in the intensity of emergence of contemporary

Paganisms in different social contexts”. Contemporary Paganism consists of many different branches from the more universal groups of Wiccans, druids, and neo-Shamans to local ethnic Paganisms and reconstructionalists (see Sjöblom 2000: 237). Eastern European Pagans differ from universal Paganisms, as their practices derive from what is believed to be national history, folklore, and customs, and they generally associate their beliefs with a limited geographical area and the pre-Christian traditions of a particular nation (see, e.g., Ivakhiv 2005). Such traditions are also called ‘native’, since these communities wish to emphasise their connection to the local history and nation. These groups usually have in common a perceived respectful relationship with nature and local sacred places (cf. Wallis 2003: 143). Thus, the growth of contemporary Paganism has also brought about an increase in contemporary deposits that have accumulated in large numbers at different places. When deposited in nature, these objects are directly or indirectly associated with traditional customs of venerating nature. Deposits are left as a personal sign of a wish or just the token of a visit. In various places, this has resulted in piles of rags and coins, but sometimes also more personal and unique objects are deposited.

The broader aim of this article is to provide an overview of contemporary deposits at sacred places and to study the reasons for visiting these places and depositing these objects. In this study, we concentrate on sacred places – natural sites that are currently used for leaving deposits and offerings. While additional criteria, such as sources or tradition, time, authenticity, or the purposes of visits, are usually associated with the definition of a sacred place (e.g. Kaasik 2007; Muinsuskaitseamet<sup>2</sup>), these factors are not considered as selection criteria in this study. The concept of a sacred place in this study therefore depends only on contemporary traditions and the presence of deposits, and it covers places that are protected by the Heritage Conservation Act, sites that have not (yet) gained this status, sites whose significance derives from oral tradition, and places that have been declared sacred only recently.

When we visited the sites, we recorded the contemporary deposits, taking field notes and photographs and paying special attention to different deposit categories. As archaeologists, we let the material remains speak for themselves. Data from interviews were used only to interpret the background of sites in Estonia and Finland. During this study, we did not conduct any structured interviews. The citations in this paper are based on our discussions with the informants during the fieldwork and e-mails exchanged prior to the fieldwork and while writing this article.

The comparison between Finland and Estonia is fruitful, as these two neighbouring countries form an interesting example with overlapping similarities



and differences. The main languages of both countries belong to the Finno-Ugric linguistic family, which has led to an abstract national narrative of shared history, worldviews, and beliefs. Such a concept is most clearly expressed in the activity of the Finno-Ugric Society (e.g. Salminen 2008), but the idea of shared national narratives lies behind many folklore and history studies. The national narrative is exploited by contemporary Pagan communities in both countries, as some groups feel that they represent the continuation of old traditions. However, the major difference is that the contemporary Pagan movement in Estonia, *maausk* (Earth Belief), has gained a more official status, whereas in Finland it remains rather marginal, is loosely organised, and struggles with the question of legitimacy (Västriik 2015; Hjelm 2016).

## PAGANISM IN ESTONIA AND FINLAND

It is rather difficult to estimate when and how contemporary Pagan traditions started in Estonia. In tandem with the development across Europe in the early twentieth century, a contemporary Pagan movement emerged in Estonia. The movement was called *Taarausulised* (Believers of Taara) after Tharapita, the only pre-Christian god known by name from the Chronicle of Henry of Livonia, dating back to the beginning of the thirteenth century (for more details see Vakker 2012). This movement had become inactive by 1940, when the Soviet occupation prohibited most religious organisations in Estonia and the leading members of the movement (mostly military officers and members with national sympathies) were deported to Siberia (ibid.: 192). The organisation was therefore disbanded in 1940, but individual members remained in Estonia and continued their activities in secret. On the etic level, following the national Pagan movement was probably seen as a part of resistance during the Soviet period.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation, partly following the ideology of *Taarausulised*, came up with a new idea – *maausk* (Earth Belief), represented by an organisation named *Maavalla Koda* (The House of Earth), referring to the religion of the land (i.e. Estonia). In contrast to the earlier *Taarausulised*, members of the new movement, called *Maausulised* (Believers of the Earth), stated that the movement should not be classified as neo-Pagan, as they claimed to be following Estonian oral tradition and thus the original worldview of Estonians since time immemorial.<sup>3</sup> Until the late 1980s, the movement was more or less invisible and remained a secret niche activity. The late 1980s saw the rise of all sorts of different religious movements, in the until then officially atheist society (Rohtmets & Ringvee 2013), and the *Maausulised* movement also

became an organised religion. Claiming to be following indigenous Estonian traditions, it fitted well into the broader mindset of the time, which emphasised nationality and the study and popularisation of Estonian culture and religion. In the 1990s, the activities of the *Maausulised* group remained limited, but the group has received nation-wide attention since the early 2000s, after its first campaign for the preservation of sacred places. Since then, several public campaigns have been organised to protect sacred places, which has offered a productive platform for the movement to popularise its views (for more details see Västriik 2015; Jonuks & Oras & Veldi 2018).

Leaving aside the academic arguments about the history and historical authenticity of the *Maausulised* movement, it is important to note that this movement has become highly influential not only among other contemporary Pagan movements but also in shaping contemporary Estonian identity (Jonuks 2018). For instance, in a poll from 2014 (Religious Trends in Estonia 2014), altogether 61.1% of respondents agreed that *maausk* is the real and original religion of Estonia, although only 4.1% identified themselves as Earth Believers. To quote Ringo Ringvee, this community has branded itself very successfully (Ringvee 2017: 64f.). Emphasising the uniqueness of Estonian culture, its great age, and its ability to preserve traditional phenomena that have long been forgotten in the rest of Europe, the movement has supported the national identity with pride. This viewpoint is indirectly supported by Estonian writers, who also combine the uniqueness of Estonians and their close relationship with nature (e.g., the trilogy by Valdur Mikita 2008, 2013, 2015). As a result, the views of this contemporary Pagan group are also shared by people who do not belong to this group but consider these views as characteristic of Estonians. It has also been supported by the activity of the *Maausulised* movement, in which the preservation and popularisation of cultural heritage has been more publicly visible than the spiritual practice (Jonuks & Oras & Veldi 2018). This is why their practices are so common and widely followed across the country, often with the reasoning that “these are our ancestors’ customs”. As a good example, even some pastors of the Estonian Lutheran Church share a similar approach and are active in protecting sacred groves (see below for more details). Various views are represented inside the community, some of them more radical, others more tolerant towards Christianity and modernisation. The ideological and religious background behind the practice of leaving deposits at sacred places also varies. The leaving of deposits is apparently one of the most visible and effective ways for the members of the *Maausulised* movement, as well as for outsiders, to express their support for the Pagan tradition in Estonia and, following the narrative established by this community, also to express their

national identity. These are probably the reasons why the Pagan movement has gained such an influential position in Estonian society that the country is even advertised abroad as following “nature-loving precepts of neo-paganism” (Economist 2017). This is also why sacred places across Estonia are covered with deposits of very different origins.

Since the early 2000s, Finland has demonstrated a steady growth in the number of people identifying themselves as Pagan and there is also a growing number of webpages and discussion forums related to contemporary Paganism on the Internet (Hjelm 2016: 360). However, already in the mid-nineteenth century, the publication of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* with its stories of sorcerers and magic led to attempts to revitalise the “old spiritual wisdom” in practice (Hjelm 2016: 362). However, it was only in the late 1970s that contemporary Paganism appeared in Finland in an organised form, using elements from Finnish folklore in its practice and aiming to reconstruct the folk religion (Heino 1997; Hjelm 2006: 35–36).

The late 1990s saw a resurgence in the interest in contemporary Paganism, which led to the formation of new associations. *Lehto – Suomen luonnonuskontojen yhdistys ry* (The Grove – association of Finnish nature believers; ‘ry’ stands for registered association), an organisation for nature believers, was established in 1998, and *Pakanaverkko ry* (The Pagan Network), an organisation for neo-Pagans and nature believers, was established in 1999. A second wave followed a decade later with *Taivaannaula* (Heaven’s Nail), which was established in 2007, and *Karhun kansa* (People of the Bear) for Finnish Faith (*suomenusko*) followers, which was established in 2010 and registered as an officially recognised religious community in 2013, the first contemporary Pagan group to gain this status. Some Finnish Faith followers do not identify themselves as contemporary Pagans. Iiro Arola (2011) has used the term ethno-Pagan to refer to contemporary Pagans who see local pre-Christian tradition as their main source. For example, *Karhun kansa* describes its function on its website as follows:

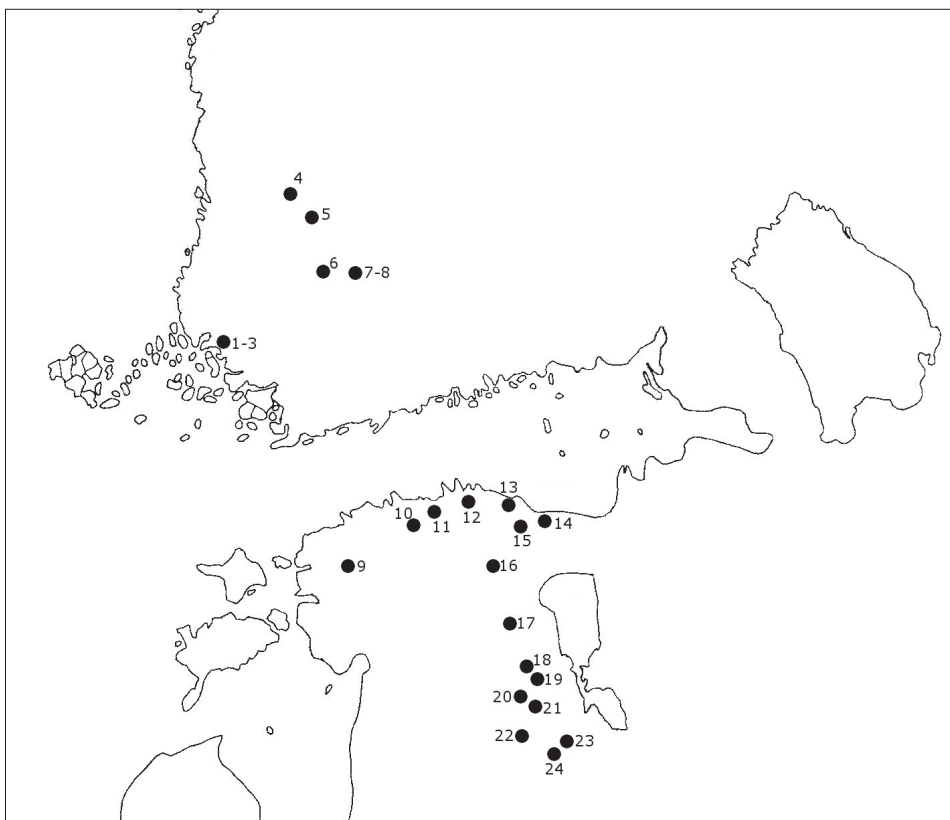
*The People of the Bear represents a Finnic ethnic tradition of belief. The main characteristics of our religious life are sublimating nature experiences, traditional calendar celebrations, family connections reaching to the afterworld, honouring different forces, especially the Bear, soul belief ... The People of the Bear gives its members the freedom to experience things within the limits of the Finnic worldview that traces its roots back to the ancient Ural. This is a living ethnic religion that has recognised the full depth of its roots.*<sup>4</sup> (emphasis by the authors)

*Taivaannaula* is an organisation for promoting Finnish folk belief and tradition. It also emphasises continuity, not from prehistory but from folklore dating to historical times. It does not consider or promote itself as a religious community but aims to preserve and keep alive traditional Finnish culture and folk beliefs. For this purpose, the organisation started a project in 2013 to map Finnish *hiisi* sites (sacred places) to raise awareness of sacred places in nature and to improve their protection. *Taivaannaula* has also worked together with the Estonian *Maavalla Koda*, as the two organisations share many ideas and activities, as well as an approach to popularising their views and beliefs. Since their activities at sacred places have resulted in materials similar to those of contemporary Pagan groups and their work on *hiisi* sites has had a big impact on the recognition and use of sacred places, we include their activities in this study.

Contemporary Pagan movements, particularly the leading ones, are usually viewed as the major groups using sacred places. Thus, members of these movements have more or less shaped the common understanding of meanings and practices related to sacred places. Less attention is paid to other possible audiences, particularly alternative Pagan movements but also individual visitors. It is obvious that an organisation is easier to reach and study than isolated individuals, who either conduct their own rituals or interpret what they see. But it also means that a large part of the users of sacred places is often ignored in studies. As they also do leave deposits, this amorphous group, involving people from very different backgrounds, becomes visible in material culture studies.

## CONTEMPORARY DEPOSITS IN ESTONIA AND FINLAND

In this article, we present deposits documented in surveys conducted at Estonian and Finnish sacred places that are used by contemporary Pagan groups or other groups that respect sacred places or express their beliefs, national identity, and so on, at natural sacred places. The survey in Estonia was conducted in September 2016 and included 16 sacred sites (Fig. 1). Most of these sites have been mapped occasionally over several years, providing background data that also demonstrated changes in deposits at sacred places. The fieldwork in Finland was conducted in April 2017, in south-western part of the country,<sup>5</sup> where sacred places are actively used. In the Turku region, three members of the *Taivaannaula* organisation acted as guides. Other sites were selected using information from the introduction to the *hiisi* project<sup>6</sup> and from an informant belonging to *Karhun kansa*.



**Figure 1.** Map of sites in Finland and Estonia studied during fieldwork (drawn by T. Jonuks). 1. Uhrilähteenkatu, Muhkuri, Turku (sacred spring); 2. Hüsilähde, Vähäheikkilä, Turku (sacred spring); 3. Virnamäki, Turku (cup-marked stones); 4. Timin mänty, Hämeenkyrö (sacred pine); 5. Tapparamäki, Tampere (cairn); 6. Sääksmäki, Rapola (cup-marked stone and hill fort); 7. Pikkuvahopää, Lepaa (cup-marked stone); 8. Tonttukivi, Lepaa (sacred stone); 9. Sipa (sacred tree); 10. Pärnamäe (sacred grove); 11. Kuusalu (offering stone); 12. Ilumäe (sacred tree); 13. Kunda (sacred hill); 14. Purtse (sacred hill); 15. Samma (sacred grove); 16. Ebavere (sacred hill); 17. Kassinurme (sacred grove); 18. Kiigeoru (sacred grove); 19. Võnnu (sacred tree); 20. Taevaskoja; 21. Rosma (sacred grove); 22. Tohkri Tammetsõõr (sacred grove); 23. Hinniala Päevapööramise Hill (sacred hill); 24. Miikse Jaanikivi (sacred stone).

## Coins and silver

Estonian contemporary deposits at sacred places are characterised by their great variety but are dominated by coins and ribbons. Both are globally universal groups of deposits and also recommended by the local Pagan groups.



These categories have references in historical sources from Estonia, as well as in oral tradition from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see, e.g., Busch 1937: 65–66; Valk 2001 [1999]; Jonuks & Friedenthal & Haak 2010), and some rare examples have ended up in archaeological collections. Coins have been deposited more frequently starting from the seventeenth century, when they lost their monetary value and became cheaper and thus also available for symbolic use (Jonuks & Friedenthal & Haak 2010: 277) (Fig. 2). Since then, coins have been most often mentioned as ‘superstitious offerings’ of local peasants (see Valk 2015 in more detail). In the late eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century, the depositing of coins became a touristic habit and coins started to be left at touristic places – in particular at springs and wells, but also in caves (Laime 2018). This is most probably also the background of most of the coins from Estonian sacred places during the twentieth century. In very few cases has it been demonstrated how coins were deposited throughout the twentieth century (e.g. the Helme spring; see Valk 2015, 2018).

Although a touristic purpose is obvious in most coin deposit cases, it can be followed mainly at widely-known public sites, such as public fountains. The large number of coins deposited at sacred places might also have a more personal character, although at some well-known sites (e.g. the Helme spring),



**Figure 2.** Coin deposits at Tammetsõõr, southern Estonia. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.

touristic purposes dominate. Technically, contemporary coins follow the old traditions – usually of low nominal value, most probably left as single items, and, according to the available explanations, intended as a sign of a personal visit. Other and more specific purposes are also available, like healing magic that is also referred to in folklore collections (Valk 2007a: 145ff.). In the oral tradition, coins are described as a medium – in the case of skin diseases, the affected place is touched with a coin, and the disease is believed to be attached to the coin. Thus, when the coin is deposited into a spring or left on a stone, it is hoped that the disease is also anchored there. Such specific purposes can be more numerous, including very personal reasons to deposit a coin at a particular site.

Most of the deposited and documented coins represent local currencies, either Estonian cents and crowns (1992–2011) or euros and euro cents (since 2011). Soviet coins from the second part of the twentieth century are not equally visible, partly because coins are buried under the soil by natural accumulation. The lower number could also indicate the episodic use of sacred places. Publicly known touristic sites, on the other hand, have yielded large numbers of Soviet coins deposited there as part of touristic trips (Valk 2018). Coins connected to specific countries, such as Swedish crowns and Russian roubles, might be more informative. However, the interpretation is twofold again; foreign coins may be associated with the usual touristic practices in which coins are left because there are already coins at the site, or foreign coins may reflect personal purposes. For instance, members of the large Estonian community who left Estonia during World War II and now live in Sweden often visit their childhood home and its neighbourhood, and thus a coin from the new homeland deposited at a sacred place in the country of one's origin may serve as a mental link for a particular person. However, there are many personal reasons for depositing coins (or any other objects, see below), and even detailed interviews of visitors to sacred sites might not provide a comprehensive picture.

Also in Finland, coins were found on cup-marked stones as well as in an offering pine called Tim's pine (*Timin mänty*) (Fig. 3). Still, it is noteworthy that coins are much rarer at Finnish sites than at Estonian sites. At Tim's pine, the coins were put in cracks in the bark. Both cup-marked stones and the offering pine are visited by tourists as well as by contemporary Pagans, so that it cannot be distinguished which group has left the coins. All documented coins were small euros and cents.

Whereas coins are used by a heterogeneous group of people, scraped silver could be considered as belonging to the area of revitalised folk beliefs. During our fieldwork, we were able to observe how a member of *Taivaannaula* scraped silver into the offering springs that we visited (Fig. 4). This tradition was so important to him that when, at one site, he noticed that he had left his knife





**Figure 3.** A coin deposited at Tim's pine. Photograph by T. Äikäs 2017.



**Figure 4.** Scraping of silver. Photograph by T. Äikäs 2017.

in the car, he went back to collect it. The scraping of silver at sacred places, particularly at springs, is also common in Estonian contemporary Pagan tradition. In Taevaskoja, southern Estonia, there is an information board with text and a picture instructing visitors on how to offer silver. The scraping of silver, but also other metals, such as copper, has been a widespread practice also in history, as indicated by dozens of silver brooches from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the collections of the Estonian National Museum. Eight of them have a legend saying that the brooches were used to scrape silver, while forty other brooches have similar scraping marks, although the corresponding legend is missing (Kuningas 2014). However, this practice is difficult to observe without witnessing the actual ritual at sites, as the amount of scraped silver is small and quickly dispersed in the environment.

### **Rags, ribbons, and other things tied to trees**

Rags and ribbons represent another broad and universal category of deposits. The earliest records from Estonia date already to the early seventeenth century (Olearius 1669: 33), and this deposit category has been represented ever since (Fig. 5). In some cases, the nails used to attach rags to a tree are also collected during archaeological excavations (Laid 1928). From the Soviet period we do not have documented examples of attached rags at sacred places. Rags and ribbons could still have been used, but documentary evidence is missing. Instead, during this period rags were frequently used during wedding ceremonies and attached to posts and trees that held stork nests (Hiimäe 1997: 15). This is related to the widespread folk tradition of storks being connected with fertility and childbirth (ibid.). The tradition of decorating stork nest bases with colourful rags is still common, although no specific study of this custom has been conducted so far.

Considering the universal tradition of leaving rags at different sites (e.g. Houlbrook 2016) and particularly considering their popularity in Estonia, it is surprising that the tradition is almost absent at Finnish sacred places, although there are a few references to it, for example in the case of Tim's pine (see below). The reason for the lack of rags and ribbons in Finland might be related to the fact that revitalising the use of sacred places in southern Finland is a relatively recent phenomenon. This tradition might nevertheless have also begun in Finland. It has grown somewhat in popularity after the start of the *hiisi* project in 2013. Our informant from *Taivaannaula* mentioned that the tradition of attaching ribbons to sacred trees was revitalised in Virmapyhä in Jämsä at the time of our fieldwork and people were encouraged to leave rags on trees. With the help of this information, we can currently follow the process of how a revitalised tradition is introduced into the Finnish context.





**Figure 5.** Rags and ribbons at Ilumäe (a) and Pärnamäe (b).  
Photographs by T. Jonuks 2016.

*a*



*b*

The contemporary Pagan community in Estonia has also contributed significantly to the popularisation of attaching rags, claiming it to be an old and unbroken tradition (Kaasik 2007: 44). Since the late 1980s, it was recommended to attach rags at sacred places with references to folklore and the Early and Modern Age descriptions. These recommendations were willingly adopted and began to be practised widely during the 1990s. The custom grew out of control and all sorts of materials were used, among others plastic bags, reflectors, and Christmas decorations – everything that was handy and cheap (Fig. 6). As a result, sacred places were and still are scattered with rags, but also all sorts of different objects (Fig. 7). Most definitely, the practice of attaching rags to trees cannot be associated only with the spread of the contemporary Pagan tradition. Universal touristic traditions have had a considerable influence on this practice, but people have also (re)interpreted deposits that they already see. The latter is probably one of the most important reasons for leaving various bindable objects, which sometimes have obvious personal meanings. Since the 2000s, the contemporary Pagan community has recommended using only organic materials, and later this evolved into a more personal practice where people were encouraged to weave ribbons themselves, preferably of red yarn (Fig. 8). Numerous self-made ribbons deposited since then indicate the ready acceptance of this recommendation and the active role of the contemporary Pagan group in shaping the way common people behave at sacred places, although plastic bags and other synthetic materials still appear.

In addition to rags and ribbons tied to the trees, in Estonia rags and yarn are also woven into more complex sets possibly carrying symbolic meanings. Due to the recommendation to use organic raw materials, woven items of natural and local materials, such as bark, grass, cones, and so on have also appeared (Fig. 9). Very rarely such materials have parallels in Estonian folklore, but organic and natural materials are easily associated with the contemporary ideology, which emphasises ecological and sustainable approaches. For scholars working with material objects, such deposits raise the interesting question of how to recognise intentional deposits after a certain period of time. This is also a good reminder of the fact that only a part of the offerings will be preserved at sites and that when any site is interpreted, the original variety of deposits could have been significantly broader, including organic materials, food, and so on.



**Figure 6.** A reflector with the name of the Liivalossi kindergarten at Kassinurme. A deposit by an ordinary visitor or an organised trip by the kindergarten? Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



**Figure 7.** An example of various materials and objects hung on a tree at Pärnamäe. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



**Figure 8.** Self-made ribbons at Kiigeoru. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



a



b



c



**Figure 9.** Natural deposits: tree bark (a), a snail shell (b), and a woven item (c) suspended from branches at Pärnamäe. Photographs by T. Jonuks 2016.

## Children's toys

The question of intentionality and purpose is critical also in the study of several other kinds of deposits. During the past few years, children's toys have emerged in Estonia as deposits at sacred places. They include, for example, toy cars, dolls, and teddy bears (Fig. 10). It is currently unknown who has left such deposits and for what purposes. Were they children or adults; were they members of a Pagan movement or just ordinary visitors? It is likely that children of the members of Pagan movements would follow the habits of adults of the same group and thus organic deposits would be expected instead of the usual plastic toys. A study conducted in the United States shows that at least there it is common for the children to follow their parents' Pagan spirituality (Fennell & Wildman-Hanlon 2017). The most common and widespread toys may rather reflect the occasional visit of children who have left a toy at the site just by following an already existing tradition.

## Food offerings

According to the oral tradition, one of the most common materials to be left at sacred places is food (Fig. 11). Traditionally, berries, bread, and beer are mentioned in folklore, followed by meat and meat products, eggs, milk, and other items (see Valk 2007b for examples). However, for obvious reasons, food remains are rarely preserved. Often the descriptions only mention food deposits,



**Figure 10.** A children's toy figure concealed or fallen between two tree trunks at Ilumäe. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



leaving the impression that the informants have known about the tradition but not witnessed it. In 1889, a local woman described a sacred grove in central Estonia as follows:

*People brought him [the god of Hiis/Hie] all kinds of things, new crops, wool, meat, dumplings, sausage, bread, buns, herring, salt, and so on, and thought and prayed that Hie would protect them and keep them from all unhappiness that inhibits the living. To keep animals from the holy site, a high fence was built around it. Still the offering holes (Hie augud) were revolting to see, since they contained pieces of clothing and meat and other food, which started to stink. This is what the people say. (H II 17, 127/9 (2), translation by the authors).*



**Figure 11.** Bread, candles, and a coin at Kassinurme (a) and berries on top of the sacrificial stone at Samma (b). Photographs by T. Jonuks 2016.

Such an emotional description of stinking offerings shows that the informant has most likely witnessed food offerings with her own eyes.

In the contemporary Pagan tradition, bread, porridge, and eggs are often deposited. Frequently food is deposited during calendar or communal rituals. In Virnamäki, Finland, food has been seen in the cup marks of a boulder after midsummer (Hukantaival, personal communication 2017). After All Saints' Eve, pieces of cabbage and a grave lantern with a burning candle were recorded at the same site (Fig. 12). However, these kinds of deposits disappear quickly and even eggshells are not preserved. A unique case was observed during this study in Finland: sugar was deposited into the cup marks of a boulder in Rapola, Sääksmäki. In addition, the leftovers of an unrecognised dried fruit or vegetable were found at the same place and bread had been noticed on the same cup-marked boulder already earlier. Without a doubt, foodstuffs have been and continue to be common materials for deposits, although they are quickly lost and difficult to study. In rare cases, the presence of dishes indicates food offerings. At Päevapööramisemägi Hill in southern Estonia, porringers and pots are stored (Fig. 13). This is a unique place – as it is not easily accessible and thus not a touristic site, it is mostly used by the members of *Maausulised*. Thus, the equipment for ritual porridge making is kept at the site, ready for use.

Candies have been left at several Estonian sites. On the roots of the Ilumäe linden tree, we observed a little basket once full of candies (Fig. 14). By the time of our visit, the candies were all gone, and only empty wrappers were left. A hole in the corner of the basket indicated that a mouse had consumed the candies, but people leaving the offering could also interpret the disappearance of the deposit as meaning that a spirit of the site had accepted the deposit. In some cases, candies have been found in Finland (e.g. Virnamäki, personal communication, Helena Ruotsala 2018). There is also ethnographic data of candies left in trees in Ingria by old people (Arukask 2017). In the latter case, the reason why candies were chosen for deposits is similar to the reason for choosing coins and ribbons: candies are rather cheap and handy, and wrapped candies can easily be carried in pockets. In 2018, another reason was suggested for using candies as an offering. According to oral tradition from Belarus, the purpose for depositing candies is the desire to secure a nice, sweet life, 'sweet as candy' (personal communication, Uladzimir Lobach 2018). All these reasons together make candies a very suitable deposit category. The actual reason can vary depending on the exact context.



**Figure 12.** *a – grain in the cup-marks of a boulder at Virnamäki after Midsummer (photograph by S. Hukantaival 2014); b – cabbage and a grave lantern with a candle on the same stone after All Saints' Eve (photograph by H. Ruotsala 2018).*

*a*



*b*







a



b

**Figure 13.** a – ritual site at the foot of the Päevapööramise Hill; fur and pots are stored in the shelter in the background (photograph by T. Jonuks 2016); b – the members of Maavalla Koda making ritual porridge at the Kunda sacred hill (photograph by H. Maiberg 2009).



**Figure 14.** A basket with candy wrappers at Ilumäe. Note the hole chewed by a mouse in the corner. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.

## Love and charm

Love magic is currently enjoying a wave of popularity (Hiiemäe 2017) and can in some cases manifest as deposits at sacred places. The best example of this is a little basket of offered apples and a postcard with a love spell on a stone below the Sipa linden tree in western Estonia (Fig. 15). Some other examples could also be associated with love magic or as humorous interpretations of it. At the Võnnu Mäesuitsu sacred tree (Tartu County, Estonia), a pair of men's socks was attached to the tree and a pair of female stockings left on the neighbouring branch (Fig. 16). Later on, other pairs of stockings were added to this tree, forming a good example of how one deposit can create a tradition that is reinterpreted by other visitors to the site. Still, in contrast to the Sipa example, the purpose is not clearly represented, and it can only be speculated whether the socks and stockings were tied to the tree because of reasons connected to love/fertility, just for fun, to reinterpret existing deposits, or for some other purpose. Moreover, leaving items of clothing and underwear at sacred sites is not a phenomenon unique to Estonia but has also been recorded in individual cases at a Sámi sacred place in northern Finland and more frequently in other countries (personal communication, Ross Parish 2017). Also twisted bracelets



attached to tree branches at several places across Estonia could possibly be associated with love or personal relationships.

At Tim's pine in Väheenkylä, Finland, a turquoise glass heart was deposited inside a hole in the tree (Fig. 17). This might also be an example of a love-related offering. Of course, the deposit does not have to be associated with love towards another human being but could also be related to love expressed towards a divinity, spirit, or nature.

Most of the love magic seems to be the result of personal rituals. In unique cases, the remains of other and even more complicated rituals can be preserved. On top of Ebavere Hill, a site with a rather complicated history (for more details, see Jonuks & Oras & Veldi 2018), a shrine has been built. Its centre is formed of an altar made of three larger stones, and remains of burnt blond hair were observed beside it in 2014. A similar example of burning one's own hair as a ritual was documented at the Isogaisa shamanistic festival in northern Norway (Äikäs et al. 2018). It is likely that the burning of hair and nails is a part of magical activities in different religious systems and may therefore occur often but leave no remains to be preserved or recorded.



**Figure 15.** A basket with apples and a postcard at Sipa. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2013. On the other side of the postcard, there is a love spell, reading:  
*We'll take yellow clay, my dear, and mould  
two figures – you and me. Now press them  
back into a shapeless clump and mould again – you and me!  
Half of you is me and half of me is you!*

**Figure 16.** Female stockings hanging in Mäesuitsu sacred tree, Võnnu. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



**Figure 17.** A heart-shaped pendant and coins at Tim's pine. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2017.



## **Magic, esotericisms, syncretism, and Christianity**

Sacred places under study often contained material references to magical and esoteric worldviews. It is interesting to note that in our study, all examples come from Estonia and none were recorded in Finland. For instance, we recorded round pendants with kabbalah signs hanging on tree branches at several sites in Estonia (Fig. 18). These are the objects most clearly associated with other belief systems than the local folk culture. A Celtic cross-shaped candlestick dominated by a bat-shaped creature at the Sipa linden tree might refer to Gothic or Satanist traditions, again alien to the traditional culture in Estonia but apparently linked with sacred places.

The most widespread non-traditional deposits are different crystals and gemstones. The inspiration to use gemstones as deposits most likely comes from very different sources, among others contemporary esotericism, New Age, contemporary Paganisms, and other spiritual movements where supernatural power and energy are ascribed to different kinds of crystals (e.g. Melton 2013). Angel figurines might also indicate visits by members of various contemporary spiritual movements (Fig. 19). Despite angels being associated directly with Christianity, they are also important in New Age and neo-spirituality, where angels represent protective spirits (Uibu 2014).

This kind of intertwining of very different spiritual movements could also be seen in the so-called *Ojo de Dios* (God's eye) decorations found at several places (Fig. 20). These woven stick objects are traditionally made in Mexico and Bolivia and placed on altars. Originally *Ojo de Dios* has symbolised the ability to see unseen things, with its four points representing earth, air, water, and fire. Nowadays Christians throughout the world have popularised this craft as a symbol of the one and only God. However, similar motifs have been found around the world, even in Finland and Estonia, where they have been used in folk culture as decorations on maypoles in Finland and at Christmas, New Year, and on other festive occasions in Estonia (Potts 1982: 60–67). These objects are also introduced into Pagan and spiritual practices, which is the most likely background for their appearance at Estonian sacred places. The importance of Central and South American spiritual practices in contemporary Baltic Paganisms is also known from Lithuania (Aleknaitė 2017).

Several examples referring to Christianity were also recorded at sacred places. These included Russian Orthodox icons hanging on branches at the Pärnamäe sacred grove (Harju County, Estonia), as well as individual neck-crosses at several other sites (Fig. 21). For instance, Äikäs has recorded similar examples from Sámi offering sites in northern Finland, where a silver cross pendant and a tract with the title “Jesus Christ your Saviour” had been left on

offering stones. Whereas the latter could be seen as an attempt to Christianise a ‘pagan’ sacred place, other interpretations for these and the Christian objects at Estonian sacred places could include leaving behind the Christian faith or the representation of a syncretic faith. Pärnamäe provides the most obvious example of a multifaceted audience using sacred places. Its location close to the capital makes this place attractive and easily accessible also to people living in the urban centre, who are interested in spiritual practices.

*a*



*b*



**Figure 18.** Kabbalah pendants at Pärnamäe (a) and Küigeoru (b) sacred groves.  
Photographs by T. Jonuks 2016.



**Figure 19.** Butterflies, Smurfs, and angels at Pärnamäe. Photographs by T. Jonuks 2016.



**Figure 20.** Ojos de dios at Pärnamäe. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.



*a*



*b*



**Figure 21.** A neck cross (a) and icon in a plastic bag (b) at Pärnamäe. Photograph by T. Jonuks 2016.

## SITE BIOGRAPHIES – SAME OBJECTS, DIFFERENT LIVES

We have selected two trees to present two different site biographies resulting in different levels of deposit accumulation. At Tim's pine in Hämeenkyrö, Finland, the deposits are hardly visible when one first encounters the tree, whereas at most of the Estonian sites ribbons, rags, and other deposits cover almost every inch of the tree. The practice is most clearly visible at Pärnamäe, which is close to Tallinn and thus easily accessible to visitors from the town (Fig. 7).

Tim's pine is an example of how meaning attached to sacred places can change with time (Fig. 3). In folk tradition, it was connected to healing toothaches. It was believed that when an aching tooth was pressed with a stick and the stick was left in this pine, the pain would also be left there. Even as late as in the 1930s, coins were offered into the cracks of the tree. There is also a folk tradition of leaving bear skulls and ribbons at the tree (for more details, see Kovalainen & Seppo 2006). Later, these beliefs were forgotten, and in the 1990s the pine was presented to local schoolchildren as just an old pine. At present, offerings have once again been made to the pine. The *hiisi* project by the *Taivaannaula* organisation has probably raised awareness of this place. Contemporary deposits include coins, a glass heart, and nails hammered into the tree. The latter example is exceptional in contemporary Pagan tradition, where the protection of sacred places is emphasised together with a ban on harming anything at a sacred place. However, according to oral tradition, nails have also been hammered into Estonian sacred trees. The most famous example is a linden tree from Ülendi, Hiiumaa Island, western Estonia. According to folklore (E 8 o 11, 81 (173)), rags and ribbons were attached to the tree with nails, some of which ended up in the archaeology collection of Tallinn University (AI 2679). But Tim's pine also has cut marks indicating the removal of some pieces of wood. Considering the history of the tree being used for medical purposes, the removed wood could also have been used for something similar.

The site is easily accessible to both contemporary Pagans and other people. It is mentioned on the *Retkipaikka* (Outing place) website, which offers articles related to natural places to visit. The website provides background information, folklore, coordinates, and a map of Tim's pine<sup>7</sup>. The article was published on 13 May 2016 and could have encouraged visitors to see the site since then. Also, *Taivaannaula* organised a trip to Tim's pine on the day of the *hiis* (hiisienpäivä) in 2017.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the long history of the place and different people visiting the site, the deposits left at the tree are still not easily noticeable. During our field trip, we walked around the tree a couple of times before we noticed the deposits in the cracks of the bark.

A significantly different life history is represented by a linden tree at Ilumäe, northern Estonia (Fig. 5). This is also a lone tree, which grows at the edge of

a buried cliff on a visually spectacular site. The location is near a historical road connecting the local manor and church, and thus most local traffic during more than a century passed by this tree. In the early twentieth century, the tree stood alone and was thus even a better landmark than now, as it is currently partly shadowed by other trees. There are a few records in the folklore archives referring to the tree as sacred (see, e.g., [www.folklore.ee/radar](http://www.folklore.ee/radar)). A new life for the tree began in the 1970s, when this area was included in the Lahemaa National Park. The tree became a touristic attraction, and it was acknowledged and known (see in more detail Kindel 2005: 62). During this time, however, it was only a touristic destination and no deposits were left. There are several detailed descriptions and photographs from the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Joonuks 1990) that do not mention any deposits. In 2000 Tõnno Jonuks communicated with an elderly man (born in 1910) from the nearby village of Muike, who confirmed that during his lifetime he had not witnessed any deposits or offerings. However, Ahto Kaasik, a former leader of *Maavalla Koda*, argued to have seen individual ribbons on the tree already in 1989 or 1990 (personal communication, A. Kaasik 2017).

The piling of rags and ribbons started in the early 2000s and has been a continuous tradition ever since. Meelika Kindel associates this start with a local folk festival in 2003 as a protest against cutting down forests and destroying nature (Kindel 2005: 81 and references therein). The fact that such a public call was made definitely had a major effect, although the tradition of tying rags and ribbons on trees was known at this place already earlier. Since then, the tree has been not only a touristic destination but also an increasingly important active sacred place. Tourist groups also participate in leaving rags and other deposits. It is interesting to note that some guides include the tree in the tour and others have stopped there only because the group requested it, as they personally do not approve of such massive visits and piling of deposits (see in more detail Kindel 2005: 81ff.).

Thus, these two examples demonstrate well how similar physical objects can acquire different biographies due to the activity of contemporary groups. Tim's pine has been left outside of major touristic routes even though it is mentioned as an attraction for nature tourists, and it has therefore been preserved in its original condition. Some deposits (like hammered nails) seem to be older, whereas the coins and glass heart represent contemporary traditions. The Ilumäe linden, on the other hand, was included in touristic routes and thus became widely known. In the 1990s, contemporary Pagans added another layer of practice, which was again developed further by the guides of the national park and local enthusiasts.

## CLEANING OF THE SITES

As the number of deposits at sacred places increases, the question of what to do with the material has become critical (cf. Finn 1997). The effect of contemporary Pagan practices at sacred places may vary from piling offerings to fire and graffiti damage. The positions of contemporary Pagans on sacred places may vary from a preservation ethos similar to that of heritage authorities to “claiming individual divine inspiration for whatever practices seem appropriate at the time” (Wallis & Blain 2003: 310).

The two most common strategies can be observed in Estonia and Finland – leaving all the deposits as they are or removing the ‘inappropriate’ ones. The leaving of deposits is usually justified with two arguments: the authorities do not know how to handle the objects, or all deposits are seen as meaningful and are thus left at the site. Removal has to be thoroughly argued and is thus also more open to analysis. There has been a tendency in contemporary Pagan movements to welcome all kinds of deposits but to restrict the use of inorganic materials. Some incidents in Estonia, where Pagan organisations interfere forcefully to guide traditions into the ‘right’ direction, illustrate this tendency most clearly. In several areas, sacred places have been cleaned of inappropriate deposits (like plastic bags and other synthetic materials), but these are usually not public events. The most well-known is the case at the Ilumäe sacred tree in April 2009, which was publicised in local news (see Virumaa 2009). As the cleaning was organised by *Maavalla Koda*, it also demonstrates their attitudes and beliefs. As all the deposits were considered as remains of meaningful acts, a ritual was conducted at first to protect the participants and ask the tree for permission to remove plastic bags and ribbons (personal communication, A. Kaasik 2017). The plastic deposits were then cut off from the tree and recycled. Organic and ‘traditional’ deposits (e.g. coins) were left in place with the argument that they follow historical tradition or will decay in the course of time.

Similar cleaning actions have also been carried out in Finland, although they have not been public events. According to our informant from *Karhunkansa*, some members have, as a part of their private rituals, cleaned inorganic materials such as plastic bags and bottles from sacred places, but left coins, since they can be considered as offerings (personal communication, Kiiski 2017). Similar cleaning of sacred places has also been conducted in other countries either by heritage authorities or local communities. In some cases, the regulations may result in radical solutions. As contemporary deposits left at a sacred place were taken as an offence by the indigenous Pueblo Indians at Chaco Canyon in the US, the National Park Service closed off Casa Rinconada to the public at least partly (Finn 1997: 177). The photographs by artist Sara



Hannant offer an interesting example of how removed deposits can gain a new meaning. She used cloths that were removed from a tree by a sacred well by the members of the Cornish Ancient Sites Protection Network to create artwork of the removed objects and “re-animated these discarded cloths using natural forces in keeping with the folk magic, symbolised by the four elements of air, earth, fire, and water”.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, these cases form a good example of how Pagan or local communities share the responsibility for behaviour at sacred places with legal authorities. However, broader discussion is often missing, and, depending on the interests of different sides, the purposes for cleaning the sites may also differ. National heritage authorities usually do not share the beliefs of Pagan groups and are concerned about preserving the site rather than keeping the place alive. A well-known case is Stonehenge, where English Heritage banned solstice parties because partying was perceived as secular and non-spiritual and therefore not appropriate for a sacred place (Wallis & Blain 2003). Members of the Estonian *Maavalla Koda* have published multiple articles in local newspapers to emphasise the unfitness of inorganic materials as deposits, and it currently seems that the amount of plastic objects is decreasing at most sites. As this issue is rather new in southern Finland and Estonia, the corresponding discussion mainly concerns northern Finland, where regulations on restricting the use of the sacred places of indigenous Sámi have been discussed and employed for decades. Especially in the case of the sacred Ukonsaari island, touristic infrastructure, including platforms and steps to the top of the steep island, as well as the fact that people are landing onto the island, are seen as inappropriate. Eventually all this leads to the issue of different interested parties claiming ownership of the sacred place and having the authority to make rules following their interests and ethical and professional values. This, however, is a subject for more thorough discussion in future studies.

## DISCUSSION: MINGLING IDENTITIES AND PROVING AUTHENTICITIES

In this article, we have discussed how different groups interact with sacred places by leaving a variety of different offerings and deposits. By describing the process like this, it appears to be a rather peaceful development where all kinds of different beliefs entwine into a ‘fuzzy spirituality’ (Uibu 2016). However, hidden tensions can be revealed, most clearly in cases where sites are cleaned of inappropriate deposits, but somewhat contradictory deposits are left. This illustrates well a potential conflict of interests between different parties that claim some activities to be inappropriate.

As stated above, some contemporary Pagan movements, especially *Maausulised* in Estonia, feel that they are directly continuing a ritual tradition dating from time immemorial, often identified as prehistoric times. Thus, they describe themselves as indigenous groups in Estonia.<sup>10</sup> We have used the concept of ‘native’ (in inverted commas) to make a distinction with the word ‘indigenous’ as referred to in the ILO Convention No. 169. It is not within the scope of this article to tackle the questions of historical vs. perceived continuity of ritual traditions more closely (see, e.g., Harvey 1997; Wallis 2003). However, as ‘native’ members of *Maausulised* have taken an active role in specifying the ways sacred places can be used and the concept of ‘indigenous’ is central to their discussion of the essence of *maausk* itself, this issue has to be discussed. Attaching objects to trees is a good example of this. As stated earlier, tying rags and ribbons to trees is an old tradition that contemporary Pagans have made visible again. In the Pagan rhetoric, the custom is claimed to be an old and unbroken tradition. However, there are no good historical examples known, and it currently seems that the tradition lapsed somewhat during the twentieth century. Thus, the Pagans are following an abstract tradition rather than a continuously practised custom. This is also well illustrated by the words of an anonymous member of *Taivaannaula*, who mentioned that the tradition of tying ribbons to trees is currently being introduced into Finland, although he simultaneously also considered it a historical tradition.

Such a discrepancy is explained by how the custom is perceived on different levels and by the attitude that a historical tradition that seems to have disappeared can be reintroduced without questioning its historical continuity. Similarly, while considering neo-shamans and their interpretations of the past, Robert J. Wallis (2001: 226) states that “neo-shamans are reconstructing the past in and for the present, for personal and communal spiritual empowerment. The authenticity of the reconstruction is not the main issue, merely its relevance and pragmatism for the practitioners”. As a result, occasional visitors follow the example of what is left at sacred places by Pagans and re-interpret what they see. Thus, other objects are also attached to the tree, such as plastic ribbons, reflectors, and Christmas decorations. These could be seen as a sign of ritual creativity where the old tradition and new meanings are intertwined. People can just leave things that they happen to have with them, such as reflectors, or the objects that might have a special meaning for them, as might be the case with pendants carrying different symbols. After this new involvement with sacred places, contemporary Pagans have again taken the lead in defining how to use these places by removing inorganic deposits.

In Estonia, sacred places are often associated with the members of *Maausulised*, who have in many cases started the traditions that other users follow and

mimic. This results partly from the high activity of this Pagan movement in publishing popular articles in local newspapers and journals (according to their own words, more than 700 newspaper articles and interviews were published from 2008 to 2012)<sup>11</sup> and thus shaping the general view of sacred places. In these discussions so far, sacred places are closely associated with Estonian history and national identity. Both currently dominating organisations, *Maavalla Koda* and *Taivaannaula*, distance themselves in public from religious movements and emphasise their cultural activities, which helps to understand their activity in taking care of cultural heritage. Especially in Estonia, therefore, the act of visiting a sacred place and leaving deposits has moved from the religious or spiritual sphere to the area of cultural heritage. Most visitors do not associate this practice with a Pagan movement but see it as an expression of their national feelings. This is most probably the reason why sacred places are so popular in Estonia, why they are often visited by people who do not identify themselves as Pagans, and why there is no religious conflict when Christians and pastors support such sacred places. Thus, an exclusive ‘native’ use of sacred places has become a manifestation of national identity.

A variety of blended worldviews can be recognised among people who visit sacred places. For example, angel figures and icons left at sacred places can manifest the syncretic worldview of the people visiting the sites. In some cases, we can see direct references to esoteric and magical practices like kabbalah pendants, angels, or rock crystals, which indicate the entwining of local Pagan and universal esoteric traditions. Kathryn Rountree has stated that individuals can combine Christian and Pagan belief elements in their identity, saying: “Some individuals now claim dual Christian and Pagan identities or hyphenated identities, combining elements of Christian and Pagan ritual, hence ‘Christo-Pagan’ and ‘Christian Witch’” (Rountree 2014: 82). Tiina Äikäs made similar observations when she interviewed the participants of the Isogaisa shamanistic festival in Norway (Äikäs et al. 2018). For example, some of the festival attendees identified themselves as both Catholic and shaman.

Even though Christianity and Paganism might seem like strange bedfellows, there are examples of pastors protecting old sacred places and even using them for church services, as has been the case in Rovaniemi, northern Finland. Local congregation have taken an old sacred place, *Somosen kirkko* (The church of Somonen), into use and built a bell tower, altar, and benches there (Äikäs 2015: 202). This kind of activity can be seen as an attempt by the church to show respect towards the old sacred places. Historical sources often give the impression that Christian authorities opposed the veneration of natural objects in Estonia and Finland, considering it as paganism (see, e.g., Jonuks 2009). However, due to the blurring borders of different religions nowadays, such

a sharp contrast no longer exists. The pastor of the Jüri Lutheran congregation in northern Estonia has been proactive in protecting a hill at Tõdva as an alleged sacred place. The main arguments for protecting the hill were related to the status of this sacred place as a symbol of national identity and its value as both natural and local historical heritage. As a result, different religious backgrounds did not cause any conflicts, as this sacred place was not perceived as a Pagan place but as part of Estonian cultural heritage. Christian crosses and icons at sacred places therefore do not necessarily indicate opposition but can be viewed as deposits with multiple meanings, similar to coins, ribbons, and other common items.

In this article, we have emphasised a distinction between contemporary Pagan offerings and touristic deposits. The difference between these two is, nevertheless, far from clear. Especially in northern Finland, shamanistic performances, even though ethically problematic from an indigenous perspective, are often organised for tourists (Äikäs 2015: 169–172), who may respond to the spirituality behind the event with varying intensity. In Rapola, Finland, silent meditation walks are organised, even though the advertisement does not mention any connection with the cup-marked stones in the area. Also the rich collection of Soviet coins from the Helme spring in Estonia is most likely associated with touristic activities, as the spring is located near the ruins of a medieval castle along a major road. Still, it would be erroneous to attempt to draw sharp divisions, as spiritual purposes may intertwine with touristic activities, thus blurring both sides. However, the touristic effect on the formation of deposits is obvious, as material objects are left not only at sacred places, as is traditional, but also in public pools, fountains, or at trees.

Coins, foodstuffs, and rags, as popularised by Pagan movements, dominate the offerings at sacred places. In addition to these, visitors have also reinterpreted what they see at the site or what they have learned from newspaper articles or books, which results in a wide variety of very different objects deposited. They consist of all kinds of ordinary and practical bindable objects: reflectors, plastic bags, and hair bands. Also simple woven items, like *Ojo de Dios*, simple representations of angels, and similar objects, are quite numerous. However, these items demand more effort than simply leaving a coin and thus reflect a more personal visit and purpose. Deposits could be divided into three groups: those connected with old traditions and revitalising old folk beliefs, those that seem to stem from ritual creativity and build new ways of communication with sacred places, and finally deposits that are left for touristic purposes by copying the already existing phenomena.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have documented a large variety of very different deposits at places considered sacred in oral lore. Despite the similarities between Finland and Estonia in the areas of folk culture, distant history, and approaches to nature, deposits left at sacred places are significantly different in the two countries. While deposits in Finland seem to represent either traditional food offerings or coins, deposits left in Estonia are very diverse, representing the versatile audience using the places. Sacred places are not perceived as related only to a Pagan belief system but as a sign of Estonian national identity and cultural heritage.

The situation in Finland, however, is very different. Even though there are several contemporary Pagan movements in Finland, they do not have an overarching influence on the general public, unlike in Estonia. This is probably also the reason why the selection of sacred places that are actively used for depositions is significantly smaller than in Estonia. This is even more remarkable, as according to the only comparative study of Estonian and Finnish sacred places (*hiis*) by Mauno Koski (1967, 1970), the number of such sites is more or less equal in both countries.

One reason for the lack of finds in Finland is that sacred places are mainly used by individuals, families, or small groups, and their location is not shared with others. This was suggested by the informant from *Lehto ry*, who also mentioned that calendar rituals are practised at different places around Finland each year, so that no particular place is chosen as a continuous ritual arena (personal communication, Krabbe, 2017). People can visit sacred places, but as the rituals are not organised, they do not leave easily recognisable marks like the more concentrated visits in Estonia. The same claim has also been made concerning Estonia, where the main categories of sacred places include personal or family-based and communal sites (Kaasik 2007: 42), but the first are difficult to access and study.

The reasons behind why different groups leave deposits at sacred places and how the places are selected still requires further study and will form the future direction of our research.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We recognize that the use of the term *pagan* can be problematic, since it has had negative connotations in the sense of a despicable person who did not practise the main religion. The term has nevertheless been established in research literature and is also used as an emic category by some contemporary Pagans (see, e.g., Sjöblom 2000). In this study, the concept *pagan* is therefore understood merely as an academic term with no qualitative implications.
- <sup>2</sup> National Heritage Board of Estonia; see <https://www.muinsuskaitseamet.ee/et/ajaloolised-ja-looduslikud-puhapaigad>, last accessed on 18 January 2019.
- <sup>3</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.maavald.ee/maausk/maausust/maausust>, last accessed on 18 January 2019.
- <sup>4</sup> See [http://www.karhunkansa.fi/about\\_pages/view/14](http://www.karhunkansa.fi/about_pages/view/14), last accessed on 18 January 2019 (translation by the authors).
- <sup>5</sup> Äikäs has also documented contemporary offerings at Sámi sacred places (Äikäs 2015; Äikäs & Spangen 2016; Äikäs et al. 2018). This abundant material is left out of this study or only used as comparative material, since these sacred places belong to a different cultural tradition and also the questions of their contemporary use relate mainly to different user groups than those at sacred places in southern Finland.
- <sup>6</sup> See <http://www.taivaannaula.org/perinne/hiisi/>, last accessed on 18 January 2019.
- <sup>7</sup> See <https://retkipaikka.fi/timin-manty-hammasarkyisten-auttaja/>, last accessed on 21 January 2019.
- <sup>8</sup> See <http://www.taivaannaula.org/2018/08/08/turussa-kuullaan-suomen-ja-viron-pyhista-paikoista/>, last accessed on 21 January 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> See <https://www.sarahannant.com/portfolio/numinous/>, last accessed on 21 January 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.maavald.ee/koda/taarausuliste-ja-maausuliste-maavalla-koda/65-tutvustus>, last accessed on 21 January 2019.
- <sup>11</sup> See [http://hiis.ee/files/Koondaruanne\\_2008\\_2012.pdf](http://hiis.ee/files/Koondaruanne_2008_2012.pdf), last accessed on 21 January 2019.

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

AI – Archaeology collection at Tallinn University

E – Folklore collection of Matthias Johann Eisen at the Estonian Literary Museum

H – Folklore collection of Jakob Hurt at the Estonian Literary Museum



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