

Chapter 8

**HIIS-SITES IN THE PARISHES OF RAPLA
AND JUURU**

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Abstract

Holy places of Rapla and Juuru parishes in the surroundings of Keava hill fort in northern Estonia will be discussed in this chapter with special emphasis on a sole archaeological study at folkloristically known *hiis*-place at Paluküla. It shows that different holy places of one area had different meanings and probably also different ritual practices. Also a connection between medieval churches and pre-Christian cult places, an important issue in popular history, will be discussed.¹

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Introduction

The chapter discusses sites connected with *hiis*-lore in the parishes of Rapla and Juuru in the southern part of the (pre)historical Harju district. *Hiis* means a holy place in Estonian folk religion during modern times, but the word most likely had the same meaning in prehistory. The classical meaning of *hiis* is connected with forest but forest was probably not the vital part of the site but the place itself, which created the holiness, and forest only accompanied it (see about different etymologies and different ‘types’ of *hiis*-sites Jonuks 2007; 2009b). Although several sites that are important in Estonian *hiis*-tradition and popular history are situated in the observed region, a summary treatment of the holy sites in this area was absent. This chapter does not seek to be an exhaustive overview either. In order to do this, more preliminary investigations should be conducted. However, I will try to observe the distribution of places with *hiis*-toponyms and *hiis*-tradition in these parishes and point to some important examples.

The present chapter relies largely on materials gathered by Jüri Metssalu from the Estonian Folklore Archives (ERA), Estonian Cultural History Archives (EKLA), Department of Archaeology of the University of Tartu, Institute of the Estonian Language and National Heritage Board (Metssalu 2006). In addition, Metssalu has conducted fieldwork to collect new folk tradition and compiled the distribution maps of the holy sites of Rapla and Juuru parishes. Unfortunately the initial plan to write the current chapter jointly could not be realised, but hopefully more studies discussing the holy sites of this area will be published in a short while. Therefore the emphasis in this article lies more on the problems of methodology and source criticism.

Estonian researchers started to examine *hiis*-sites quite recently. In spite of the important role of *hiis*-sites in Estonian prehistoric and popular religion and their special ideological meaning in the identity of Estonians, the first Estonian treatment specializing in *hiis*-topic was published only in 1998 (Remmel 1998). Since then *hiis*-sites have attracted more and more attention and by now it can be stated that the topic of *hiis* has become very popular (see also Jonuks 2007; 2009b; Kaasik & Valk 2007 and references therein).

Folkloristic sources

There are several sources for Estonian *hiis*-studies. Among these folklore has attracted the most attention and it is the major source in the current article as well. Already the first general conclusions at the end of the 18th century in the article of Cristfrid Ganander in *Mythologia Fennica* were based on folklore. Therefore the folkloristic part of the *hiis*-topic is certainly the most studied (see also Koski 1967; Ränk 1980; Remmel 1998; Kütt 2007). The *hiis*-lore of Rapla and Juuru parishes (and perhaps even more than other Estonian regions) contains numerous travelling motifs. Although religious sites and their connection with

travelling motifs have until now not been specifically studied, one can agree with Mall Hiimäe (2001) that the stories about flying lakes and hills or towns and churches sunk underground in Estonian folklore refer to special places. Lakes and hills take wing, churches and towns sink underground after breaking a specific important rule that is usually connected with purity requirement. Thus, although travelling motifs themselves are universal and stereotypical, their location in landscape refers to places with special rules. Considering similar demands and norms of behaviour in *hiis*- and offering sites, it could be suggested that with stories about towns and churches that have sunk underground or lakes and hills that have flown elsewhere, holy places are mentioned where the motif of holiness has disappeared or changed in popular tradition (cf. also Lobach 2011). A folklore text on Ohekatku Oore Lake could be observed as an example:

A lake with beautiful clear water was near the Ohekatku Oore village. But the women of the village did not much respect the cleanliness of the lake, but they went to the lake to wash dirty laundry and even child's nappies; the lake was very displeased, and left altogether, while leaving it said "lake leaves a mark in place of *hiis*". At this moment instead of the mentioned lake there is a bog surrounded by fields (H III 30, 206/7 (2)).

In the following I thus argue that an important place in landscape is indicated in folklore text. Folk tradition concentrates on mentally important places and points out that the place is/has been significant for the tradition bearer. The surviving folk tradition can actually derive from rather later times and may not be connected with the initial meaning(s) of the place. However, the concentration of tradition refers to special places in common landscape or room. While studying predominantly prehistoric and medieval *hiis*-tradition in this chapter, it is difficult to use the folklore text itself or its motifs in the interpretation. Therefore I concentrate on landscape and the site in a specific location referred to in folklore, but not on the meaning emanating from the text.

The *hiis*-tradition of the southern part of the Harju district represents a rich collection of traditional motifs among which there are classical *hiis*-bans, travelling motifs, as well as national romantic religious images from the 19th century.

The authentic Estonian *hiis*-tradition mostly contains prohibiting motifs, e.g. forbidding to cut trees, break twigs, etc. This is nothing unique and similar traditions are known for comparable holy sites, for example *küso* of the Mari (Toidybek 1998) and the *lud* of the Udmurt (Lintrop 2003). In addition the ban to ruin holy sites is universal, the examples of which can be found from almost every region and all religions with sacral areas (see e.g. Insoll 2006, 231). In addition to folk religion sites similar rules have also been used about Christian sites, and Jaan Jung describes how the people who had demolished Risti chapel in Viljandimaa got sick after the deed and died (Jung 1898, 220).

Although the *hiis*-tradition has been intensely studied, the bans of *hiis*-sites have been interpreted directly and without source critical approaches. The folklore has been considered authentic, adequately reflecting the behaviour of past people in, and their attitude towards, *hiis*-sites. Lately a few changes have been discerned

that offer somewhat more source critical approach besides the common treatment. Ülo Valk (2005, 40) has suggested that the *hiis*-tradition that has as a rule been projected to the past, does not reflect “direct attitude towards nature, but rather images of what the relationship should have been”. Due to their rigidity the kind of bans – not to cut trees or bushes, pick berries or damage the *hiis* in some other direct or indirect way – were hardly constantly followed in real life, the bans and standards rather showed how people *should have* behaved in *hiis*-sites. The fact that customary law does not derive from what people actually do, but reflects other issues, has been demonstrated also by law-historians (see Watson 1995). In some ways it is similar to the whole process and aim of folklore – not to present reality but the ideal world, how it should have been and functioned (see Honko 1998). Ideal culture has been defined by Lauri Honko as follows:

/...it/ does not present the collective only from inside out. It also works inside the community as a control mechanism. While studying folklore process, it has an important role, among other things, in stressing central values as well as key-symbols, mythologies, rituals and explaining social value-system. Ideal culture is one way to define group identity (Honko 1998, 78).

So with the help of these *hiis*-laws people defined their relationship to *hiis*-sites every time, and thus they do not present the rules of how people actually behaved in *hiis*-sites.

The motifs of *hiis*-bans have mostly been presented in a declarative form, stipulating that it is not allowed to break twigs or pick berries in *hiis*-sites. There are warning texts, like for Paluküla *hiis* (Fig. 8.1):

Another case was that many alders had been cut down from Hiie hill. It meant bad because before the trees surrounding the offering stone were holy. And the prediction came true. This year many animals died in the village (ERA 15, 723 (2)).

Another tradition of *hiis*-lore, which probably reveals an authentic tradition, reflects offering in *hiis*-sites. However, in case of these motifs source criticism must be considered since these are more receptive to adopt several common romantic offering descriptions. There are still many folklore-texts in the observed area that may reflect considerably authentic images without later additions and stress new and fresh offerings.

Offering the first/fresh/new has been a thoroughly discussed topic in Estonian folk religion (Eisen 1996; Paulson 1997). The offering of the first part as a thank offering has also been the research object of religion historians for a long time; therefore the phenomenon itself will not be analysed at this point. Descriptions of bringing offerings exist about many *hiis*-sites of the region, stressing the vagueness of the purpose – it was important to achieve the protection of ‘the god of Hie’. The texts mostly do not reveal how the exact offering places looked like and in the descriptions of *hiis*-sites the romantic motifs of purity and sublimity have usually been emphasized. Still, there is an exceptional text recorded in 1889 about Haakla *hiis*:



Fig. 8.1. Paluküla *hiis*-hill, pictured from the south. Photo by Tõnno Jonuks.

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

Such an honest description of rotten gifts is the best proof that the storyteller herself had seen these offering sites and the custom of bringing offerings was alive.

Another important motif that could also be found from the previous text is a fence built around *hiis*-sites. The function of the fence was to prevent animals from going to the holy area as well as indicating that this was a sacral place (Kütt 2007). The same tradition is also known in case of the Udmurtian *lud* (Lintrop 2003). Stone fences connected with *alkas*-sites are known from Lithuania (Šturms 1946, 19 f.) and Latvia where a barrier of larger stones has surrounded the holy hill of Zebrene (Urtāns 2008, 72 f.). The surrounding and protecting of holy sites with fences can probably be considered a relatively universal phenomenon.

In Estonia the records of fences surrounding *hiis*- or offering sites usually derive from folk tradition. Only Gustav Vilbaste has used the phenomenon of the fence surrounding the *hiis*-site in his analysis of the *hiis* in Saunja village,

Kuusalu parish (see Vilbaste 1947). There was a grove, which he supposed was the *hiis*, surrounded by a stone fence near Hiiealuse (a place under the *hiis*) depicted on a map from 1693. Such constructions can also be most helpful in studying holy places with an archaeological method as due to a lack of cultural layer and stray finds there is no methodology of how to excavate such places.

The fence at Paluküla *hiis*-hill

Until now only single archaeological investigations have been conducted on *hiis*-sites known from folk tradition. One of these is the Paluküla *hiis*, a dominating hill over surrounding marshy plains east of the Keava Mire, on the border of Rapla and Juuru parishes. A stone fence on the slope of a kettle basin was studied there, the location of which did not refer to a common everyday purpose. The fence was situated on the slope of the basin and not on its higher edge, wherefore it was not efficient for restricting the movement of animals or people. By the start of excavations the fence was heavily buried under eroded soil leaving only the topmost stone layers visible, which seemed to indicate the great age of the fence. In addition the fence had not been laid carefully within its entire length; a part of the fence was only marked by a row of stones with openings between the stones, rather resembling a 'symbolic' border, similarly to the stone row that encircled the Zebrene hill in Latvia (Urtāns 2008, 72 ff.). All these different aspects together, in addition the location of the fence in a *hiis* known from folk tradition, referred to a possibility that we might be dealing with the enclosing fence familiar from the *hiis*-tradition.

In the course of the investigations the fence was unearthed, its layout was documented and a 1.5 m wide trench was excavated through it (Fig. 8.2). As a result it appeared that the fence had been built on the slope on the kettle basin, the side closest to the basin reached the height up to 1 m, but the side closest to the slope diminished correspondingly to the rise of the slope. Plenty of charcoal particles were found under the fence that were dated to 160±30 BP (Ta-2861), which with 95.4% of probability corresponds to the time span between 1664–1953 years cal BC². On both sides of the fence a similar 50–60-cm thick layer of sandy soil was distinguished with two layers discerned inside. The lowest, a 30 cm thick sandy soil layer had probably been deposited before the establishing of the fence. On top of it there was a 20–30 cm thick soil layer, which also contained sand but relatively less. Finds to help date the fence could not be found from any of the layers. Only a few well-preserved sherds of sheet glass were collected from the topmost soil layer, which also did not contribute to the temporal contextualizing of the fence.

After the excavations a view was put forward that the fence had probably been laid not to restrict the movement of animals or people but rather to protect

² Calibrations by OxCal 4.0 IntCal 04, Bronk Ramsey (2008).



Fig. 8.2. Opened stone fence on Paluküla *hiis*-hill. Photo by Tõnno Jonuks.

the slope and inhibit the erosion of soil to the basin, but many questions remained unanswered.

The date of the fence could not be specified and according to the radiocarbon sample the fence generally belongs to the Modern Age. The function of the fence could not be explained either: the fence is most probably connected with the nearby patch of field, although we cannot exclude a connection with a certain Modern Age ritual establishment. The above mentioned ‘symbolic’ part of the fence marked by a row of stones probably represents the technique of erecting a stone fence where only the base of the fence is marked with stones but the fence itself is built of twigs if necessary. Presuming that the purpose of the fence was to prevent the erosion of soil, there was no need for a more massive stone structure than just one layer of big stones.

In addition, five test-pits were dug near the fence, on the treeless tip of Reevimägi (a part of the same hill). Only clean and ‘pristine’ ground could be detected in test-pits with no traces of soil moving. A completely different result was offered by the test-pits on the plateau between the tip of Reevimägi and the fence where up to 80 cm thick even soil layer was distinguished. No interim strata were discerned within the layer. While the edges of the plateau were somewhat higher than the middle part, an opinion was formed that the plateau might be

artificial and the initial tip of the hill could have been dug off. However, it could not be explained during the digging where the thick soil layer came from. The same plateau was from the one side restricted by the excavated stone fence and thus a work hypothesis was suggested that we might be dealing with a field patch.

To sum up, the interpretation of the excavation results of the stone fence in Paluküla *hiis* is rather complicated and it cannot be unambiguously connected with fences encircling holy sites that are known from *hiis*-tradition. Considering that the fence was established during the Modern Age, as indicated by the radiocarbon sample under the fence, the first question would be what kind of sacral meaning did the hill have? At the time when the fence was established on one part of the hill, a possible field was in use next to it. The 80-cm thick soil layer of the plateau next to the fence refers to long-time human activity (resp. cultivation). The land has also been cultivated elsewhere on the hill, especially in the western part of Reevimägi where the base of a field border can still be followed on the gentle slope. As a general context it is important to point out that at the beginning of the 18th century the activity of Herrnhuter was widely spread in Estonia as a result of which Christianity finally reached local people (Laur 1995). The 18th century could also be considered the time when rituals and burying in Estonian village cemeteries actually ended (Valk 2001). So the general background of that time does not exclude the possibility of ordinary fields on the former holy places.

The material remains of Paluküla *hiis* are not solely associated with modern traces. On grassland approximately 300 m south of the hill there are mounds resembling stone graves. However, the mounds have been named stone graves only by conjecture and only one of these has yielded a pottery sherd (see Tvauri 2002b). A stone grave on the land of Ale farmstead in Paluküla is mentioned by A. M. Tallgren (among the occasional notes from Rapla parish, AI). Similarly to several stone graves that were probably founded in connection with a powerful and imposing natural object (see Jonuks 2007), in case of Paluküla the link between the hill and the grave-like mound can be seen. In addition, according to folk tradition there is a cemetery probably belonging to the historical times near the *hiis*-hill.

Also the find assemblage found from the land of Kunilepa farmstead in the 1920s could indirectly be connected with Paluküla *hiis*. The assemblage included five swords, three of which were curved, 21 spearheads, four knives, 21 brooches, two ring-headed breast-pins, two neck-rings, four bracelets, etc., altogether 70 items (AI 2483; 2499). Later also a bracelet (AI 6512) was collected from the same place. The find assemblage was obtained from a small swamped depression on the land of Kunilepa farmstead and was dated around 800 AD. The Kunilepa assemblage has been interpreted in several ways: it was considered a collection of artefacts from a grave-robbery (Lang 2007b, 257) but also an offering in the swamp (Mägi 2006, 7). Moreover, it has been suggested that we are dealing with an assemblage of scrap iron for a local smithy, which is indicated by pieces of raw iron found from the same area (Mägi & Haljak 2000).

Archaeological sources about holy places from the rest of Estonia

As already mentioned, archaeological sources have been the least used for studying Estonian *hiis*-sites (see also Jonuks 2011). It is argued that it has not been possible to identify any cultural layer or stray finds connected with offering, gathering, etc. practices; also hearths or other features on *hiis*-sites that have interested archaeologists are so far lacking. Therefore we cannot investigate *hiis*-sites with currently available archaeological methods.

Perhaps the most numerous archaeological finds from *hiis*- and offering sites are coins. Unfortunately the find records are occasional and have mostly been compiled by amateurs. In addition the coins have usually not been preserved as they are quickly acquired by collectors and have no documentation. The finders are not very keen to share information either, since it is an illegal activity in Estonia. Therefore the coin finds from Estonian *hiis*-sites are at the present completely unstudied.

Coins associated with offering sites that have reached museum collections and can be identified originate in the early Modern Age (e.g. AI 2536: 7, offering stone in Tõrva village, Saarde parish) up to the 18th–19th centuries (e.g. AI 4933, from offering spring in Lümandu village (Märjamaa parish). One coin from 1731 was found at Kiiu-Abla offering place in Kuusalu parish ERM A 424: 2); some coins emerged even at end of the 20th century (Silmaallikas at Helme; Tvauri 1997b).

Coin finds from offering sites are not known in the observed region. Coins have probably been sought from the most famous *hiis*-site of the area, the above-discussed Paluküla *hiis*, and several other offering sites, as indicated by test pits. Unfortunately, neither the coins nor information of their finding has reached any museums.

There are also many problematic aspects with few single finds from *hiis*-sites. Most of these finds have been collected when the place was being destroyed, either by digging gravel or construction works. Therefore neither the find context nor its provenance from cemetery or offering site can be ascertained. However, the dating of the solitary finds is remarkable. The majority of finds collected from the folkloric *hiis*- or offering sites (in case of the latter predominantly offering springs) belong to the final centuries of prehistory (i.e. 12th–13th centuries) (Jonuks 2011). The greater part of the material consists of jewellery: brooches, breast-pins, and bracelets. This date correlates well with the date of Latvian offering springs (Urtans 1988, 11). The absence of medieval finds is characteristic as well since subsequent artefacts that appear in *hiis*- and offering sites are coins from the Modern Ages.

Among archaeological finds from the places with *hiis*-toponym a spearhead from a stone setting located on the land of Hiiepere farmstead in Palamulla village in Rapla parish, should be mentioned (AI 2712: 6). We are here dealing with a grave find and it can only be connected with *hiis* on the basis of farmstead toponyms.

Discussion: are holy sites merely a mass of folklore places from the historic past?

The sources used to investigate *hiis*-sites do not exactly enable to date holy and other similar, predominantly folkloric places. Therefore we cannot set them into a context in the archaeological sense – by using only sources directly connected with *hiis*, we have no idea when the sites were actually taken into use and what was initially emphasized. However, connections of *hiis*- and offering sites with other places still provide a diverse picture of their usage periods, and links between different kinds of sites can be found in different periods (see Jonuks 2007).

It is clear that the kind of differentiation, as well as looking for, and finding connections between sites is problematic. A good parallel can be drawn from the long-term research tradition of cup-marked stones in Estonia. Through time cup-marked stones have been associated with different sites since the Late Iron Age up to the Late Bronze Age stone graves or fossil fields (see Tvauri 1997a and the references therein).

It is also worth remembering that when we look at the whole archaeological material, considerably less folkloric *hiis*- and offering sites are known that could be assumed considering the settlement system. Therefore, with the available data we cannot compile a more comprehensive scheme of the logic of location of holy places and other sites. We could only accept that the majority of the past folkloric material is lost for us. Considering the late recording of *hiis*-tradition it is clear that the distribution pattern mainly refers to the system of holy sites, which have been used or considered important during the last couple of centuries. However, as it was said above, it is likely that even if the content of folklore has changed in the course of time, the site referred to in folklore, could (but not necessarily) have been important much earlier. As a large part of the Late Iron Age settlement sites of the area has been located in the same spot through the Middle and Modern Ages, we can make assumptions about the past holy sites on the basis of contemporary material.

The connection of holy sites with settlements

In Estonian studies the connection of *hiis*-sites with settlements from the Late Iron and Middle/Modern Ages has been essential, although different aspects have been stressed (see Koski 1967; Valk 2004). E.g. the *vakus*-analysis by Valter Lang (2002, fig. 4; chapter 11, Fig. 11.8) presents ‘cult sites’ in the study area that are mostly located in the periphery of *vakus*-areas or even in zones between those. This seems to confirm the concept of *hiis* by Veikko Anttonen (1992) as a holy and liminal area that is situated on the border of the everyday world but in connection with it. However, the distribution map is based on the sites under state protection enlisted by the National Heritage Board. This list offers only an arbitrary choice of cult sites and does not consider the majority of folkloric sites.

True, by the time of completing the map the overview of the local tradition of Harju district was not yet realized and the Keava-project had just begun.

Considering the known archaeological sites, primarily settlements, and holy sites in folklore, it seems that unlike the above-mentioned concept, the connection between settlement/settlement centre and holy site can be observed. Thus folkloric *hiis*-sites are known from the surrounding of almost all settlement centres. The same has been suggested in the site-analysis of the neighbouring region, Järva district (see Lätti 2005). The connection between settlements from the Final Iron Age to the Middle and Modern Ages and *hiis*-sites is apparent in Viru district as well (Jonuks 2007). Therefore it would not be right to emphasize the aspect of natural exception or isolation in Estonian *hiis*-tradition. A large part of *hiis*-sites have probably been connected with settlements and the *hiis*-site has been emphasized as the place for conducting communal rituals, where the location in the centre of inhabited world is naturally important.

The above does not mean that all *hiis*-sites are situated in settlement centres. There are several folkloric *hiis*-sites in the research area that are situated far away from any settlement. These seem to refer to liminality and stress the isolation established by natural conditions (cf. Anttonen 1992). A good example of this kind of holy sites is offered by *Järvehiis* ('lake-*hiis*') at Loosalu on an island in a bog lake. The dating and contextualizing of these holy sites is especially complicated since they can hardly be associated with other sites. The idea of these liminal or 'hidden' holy sites seems to be to emphasize their isolation from outside, especially the everyday world. Only scarce archaeological finds are known from these places, one among the few is a small and simple penannular brooch (AI 2513: 67) from the island of holy *hiis* in the Pärnu River in Tori parish.

I have earlier suggested that these 'hidden' *hiis*-sites could have become important only during the Middle Ages after the deploration of the tradition of worshipping *hiis*-sites started (Jonuks 2007). However, it can be suggested that *hiis*-sites on bog islands, river islands, etc. could have been important already before, but they had a different meaning than the *hiis*-sites connected with settlements. What could have been the difference of meaning remains only on a level of speculation. While analysing the folk tradition concerning 'settlement *hiis*-sites' and 'hidden *hiis*-sites' all over Estonia, a general trend emerges that the latter lack, with a few exceptions, the tradition of common festivities. Thus the holy sites situated on (bog) islands and elsewhere in isolated places could instead be connected with individual activities, which were not accompanied by collective celebrations.

Hiis-sites connected with churches

Both Rapla and Juuru parishes offer an excellent example of the intertwining of parish church and *hiis*-tradition. West of the Baltic Sea, the connection between non-Christian holy sites ('*lund*') and medieval churches is a long discussed topic

(see Fabech 1999; Vikstrand 2001, 276 ff.; Andrén 2002). In Estonian context the links between *hiis*-sites and churches is indicated in nationalist history treatment emphasizing the founding of churches into pagan holy sites.

In addition to the connection between churches and pagan cult-sites also the building of parish churches into some settlement sites has been discussed (Tamla 1993), whereas mostly the initiative of local elite family has been considered an important feature (see Mägi 2002, 154). Lang has also suggested that prehistoric provinces (later parishes) could have partly fulfilled the same functions as medieval church parishes comprising law, cult activities, conducting celebrations and meetings (Lang 2002, 154).

Naturally there were several reasons for the establishment of parish churches in these particular places, all of which have not been archaeologically followed. For example the church in Keitise village in later Järva-Jaani was erected a few kilometres from the Final Iron Age settlement site (see Läti 2005). Whether the Christian church was built in the middle of the village, into an earlier *hiis*-site or a cemetery or even in a place with an unknown role, in case of all the previous examples one thing is important – by choosing a place like this the importance of the particular location of church in addition to its religious and social meaning was once again emphasized.

Two medieval parish churches are situated in the observed research area – Rapla and Juuru, and both have folkloristic *hiis*-tradition attached to them. However, neither church was erected in the centre of prehistoric parishes/provinces. Juuru parish was separated from the initially large Hageri parish only in the 1240s (see more about the settlement history of the southern part of Harju district in Lang 2002 and chapter 11) and the church was established around 1300 AD (Raam 1997, 99). At that time, according to the LCD, *Jurize* village with 7 ploughlands was there (Johansen 1933, 391) and also a cultural layer of Final Iron Age settlement was found. Rapla parish was initially a part of Hageri parish as well. The initial Rapla church was probably founded in the middle of the 13th century and the building of a new stone church has been dated to the last quarter of the century (Hein & Raam 1997, 94). Unlike the former, no signs of prehistoric settlement have been found there, although according to the LCD *Rapal* (Rapla) had 8 ploughlands (Johansen 1933, 566).

Medieval finds have been gathered from the immediate surrounding of both churches: a round brooch, a chain holder and chain fragments (AI 4202: 1–3) from Juuru and a penannular brooch (AI 2295) from Rapla – but the more extensive use of the area cannot be dated on the basis of finds from churchyards only. While the round brooch belongs to the Late Middle Ages and comes from a churchyard burial, the chain holder from Juuru church could belong either to the Final Iron Age or the beginning of the Middle Ages. It is more likely that the chain derives not from the context of the Final Iron Age inhumation cemetery, but more likely from first burials around the church in late 13th century. A similar phenomenon, jewellery belonging to the Final Iron Age found from the cemeteries around the churches established in the 13th century, has been noticed elsewhere in Estonia

(Tamla 1993). The Rapla church established at the end of the 13th century and the 13th–14th-century penannular brooch also refer to the possibility that the area of churchyard was used as burial site already in the first half or middle of the century.

The *hiis*-lore of both churches primarily represents widespread travelling motifs. The church of Juuru has texts with a classical plot describing how the place for a church is sought with the help of an ox, and popular etymology through the roots (Est. *juur*) of holy oaks is used to explain the name Juuru. A similar text is known for the church of Rapla where oxen are used to choose the proper place for the church until the oxen find the right place in Rapla *hiis*.

It seems likely that no folklore has preserved about the pre-church function of either of the places. Folklore refers to the common folklore motifs associated with holy sites but it is not possible to date whether these originate in the Iron Age or were added in the Modern Ages.

It is unlikely that the churches of future parishes were erected in an ‘empty’ place. What was the function of these places before building the churches remains unclear. It has been shown in research history that in the 13th century churches were established in the middle of settlements, in cemeteries from the end of prehistoric times, former cult site, etc. (Moora 1956; Tamla 1993; Mägi 2002, 155; Jonuks 2009a, 321). It seems most likely that the choosing of places for churches mostly depended on local conditions and it was not important to erect churches exclusively on former holy or burial sites. Also on parish level the church places did not need to be the most central. Despite the important social role and social rituals of both, Late Iron Age Estonian religion and medieval Christianity, the medieval churches still probably represented different beliefs, different ideology and thereby different ritual practice than earlier. Therefore all places that were previously religiously important were not suitable for erecting a church and the new spot was probably chosen on the basis of local factors.

In the case of both Rapla and Juuru churches their location close to the Final Iron Age settlements seems to have been a significant factor. But considering the location of Rapla church on a slightly higher mount on the bank of a river, a possibility should be considered that the church was really built on an earlier holy or gathering site.

Hiis and other holy sites

It is most likely that holy places have never been one entity, being just ‘holy’, but different holy sites probably carried different meanings that could partly overlap. I presume that *hiis*-sites represent a more extensive and communal tradition than offering springs, stones, etc. At the same time it is possible that despite different meanings their locations could overlap. However, the national romantic image in numerous folklore texts depicting the *hiis* with an offering stone and a spring as compulsory elements, does not obviously hold true. From one side these texts can be explained with national romantic influences that provided the folklore with *hiiekivi* (‘*hiis*-stone’) and *hiieallikas* (‘*hiis*-spring’) as obligatory

requirements. However, it seems more plausible to explain these motifs on the basis of the *ideal* (cf. Honko 1998) emphasized in folkloric sources. It means that in ‘original’ folk tradition and folk religion there was a certain awareness of an *ideal hiis-site* with *hiiekivi* or offering stone and it was repeated in folk tradition, despite the fact that there is no, and maybe never was, a stone in a particular *hiis-site*. At the same time this *ideal hiis* does not originate in late romantic treatments but this ideal was organically inherent to folk religion. In this way the descriptions present in several folk records about *hiis-sites* where an offering stone “has been”, but “is no longer there”, could be explained. Thus, there has been an ideal order in the past lost by now which is reflected by folklore texts. Unfortunately very few preliminary studies have been completed on the topic and general conclusions cannot thus be made.

The parishes of Rapla and Juuru present numerous examples of offering, curing or holy springs and stones. However, only in single cases it is possible to analyse their coincidence with *hiis-sites* and places with *hiis-tradition*. In the case of springs their similarity with ‘hidden’ holy places seems to be clear – these are situated further away from the settlement and express a certain isolation from everyday world with their location (for example *Õrdeallikas* in *Oblu* village). But in their case the location and natural peculiarities (outflow towards north or east, etc.) have probably been more decisive factors than isolation. At the same time there are also springs with offering folklore and possible offerings, situated in the centre of prehistoric villages, for example *Tõrma* and *Kunda* in northern Estonia.

In case of offering stones the principles of choosing are the most significant. It seems that usually the stone was chosen for offering proceeding by its unique position or appearance. Thus crickets, cockroaches and empty bags have been offered to the cross-marked border stone marking the crossing of three districts at *Mäeküla* (RKM II 402, 421/2 (28)).

Cup-marked stones have been popular offering sites as well. In Rapla parish among the seven local offering stones with a recorded tradition, four are cup-marked stones and in case of the stone with signs in *Kõnnu* it has been emphasized that whereas

there are no holes in the stones, then it is very doubtful if these really are stones of *hiis* (*hiiekivid*) as people tell or are they some other important stones (ERA II 225, 563 (18)).

Since the present research area, Rapla and Juuru parishes, is situated in the marginal zone of the distribution of Estonian cup-marked stones (see Tvauri 1997a), keen interest in cup-marked stones that are relatively rare on landscape is understandable. Although I cannot present any statistics in the current state of research, it seems a general trend that in northern Estonia where cup-marked stones are common, they have not attracted attention; however, in central and southern Estonia where cup-marked stones are rarer, these often tend to become offering stones (Fig. 8.3).



Fig. 8.3. Offering stone in Vastja. Photo by Tõnno Jonuks.

“In Harjumaa, in the municipality of Kehtna, Vastja village, on the field of Separi farmstead, close to the river there is an offering stone. It has 60 holes. Every farm has had its own offering hole where the offered corn was placed. The bigger the farm, the bigger its hole. The leader of the village had the biggest hole. It can be seen even now. It is in the middle of the stone. In every autumn part of fresh corn was sacrificed to god Uku. When landlords came, offerings were forbidden and people were forced to convert to ‘German’ belief. Despite that people still were bringing secret offerings. But if the landlord heard about it the offerer got fifty snaps. Being afraid of whipping step by step people converted to ‘German’ belief. The *hiis* and offering stone were forgotten. The landlord had all the holy trees in *hiis* cut down. But the offering stone was saved. Then Separi farmstead was bought. Other stones were removed from the field but this one was not dared to destroy because hands of the one who breaks the offering stone, will rot” (ERA II 165, 407/8 (1)).

Summary

The parishes of Rapla and Juuru offer considerably different holy sites of folk religion. This chapter did not attempt to provide a generalizing overview of the holy sites in the area. I rather tried to place single examples into temporal context and thereby propose possible dates and the initial religious meaning. It is clear that holy places have been used by very different religions from Estonia’s past. Depending on these religions also purposes and functions of holy places were different and so some places have probably been used for a long time, others for shorter. So far it is mostly the problem of our methodology that we are not able

to use any better sources than the predominantly undatable oral tradition. Few archaeological excavations have not so far reached any breakthrough in studying holy sites. But every new study will bring us closer to the better understanding of the system of the past holy places.

Besides chronological problems the oral tradition also indicates several different kinds of holy places that probably were used simultaneously. So it is very likely that offering stones or springs were rather used on personal occasions, but larger sites, called *hiis*, were also used by a larger community and served as gathering sites. Investigations at Paluküla were the first of that kind on such sites. The stone wall that was found resembles those described in oral tradition. The date to Modern Age does not exclude its connection with a sacral site either. But still, there is no other evidence to show that the wall was built to protect or mark some particular site on the holy hill. We also should not exclude the possibility that the fence could have been built there with the purpose to protect a small field.

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