

## Eija Ojanlatva

### A LATE IRON AGE SILVER DEPOSIT FOUND AT NANGUNIEMI, INARI, FINLAND

#### Abstract

A silver deposit consisting of four neck-rings made of braided silver wires was found in September 2003 in the northernmost part of Nanguniemi cape in the municipality of Inari, Northern Finland. Nanguniemi is situated on the southern shore of Lake Inari, about 20 km north-east of Ivalo, and about 30 km east - south-east of Inari. All four silver neck-rings differ from each other. The study of the deposit has just begun and interpretations are still very much open.

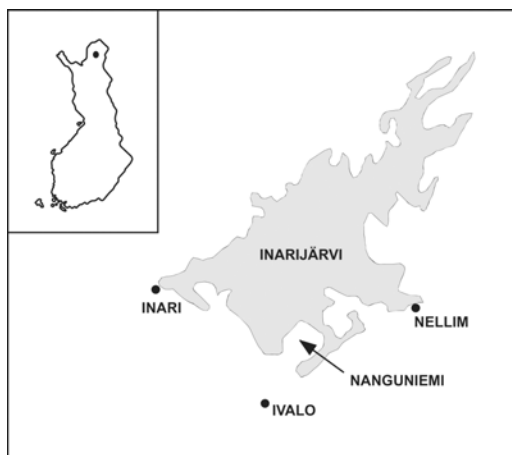
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#### INTRODUCTION

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003 writer Seppo Saraspää was looking for lichen for his draft reindeer in Nanguniemi in Inari (Fig. 1), when he saw a promising lichen spot on a stone boulder. While he was clambering onto the rocks, his eye caught something unexpected. At first glance it looked like a snake or perhaps a woman's hair band. Saraspää decided to have a closer look. He quickly saw that what he had found was a silver neck-ring. He looked around and concluded that the ring had fallen out of a small cave nearby. He peeked inside the cave and noticed that there was still something in there but decided to leave the objects untouched. He immediately contacted Tarmo Jomppanen, the director of Sámi Museum Siida, and brought him the ring he had found.

The deposit was further investigated on September 23<sup>rd</sup> by its discoverer, Seppo Saraspää, with the help of museum curator Arja Hartikainen and the author. Saraspää said that he had seen some birch bark and also something else in the cave. The excavation team took proper documentation equipment and packing materials along with them. Looking at the boulders from



*Fig. 1. Nanguniemi cape by Lake Inari.*

a distance, it was impossible to tell where the cave was. A large rock, tilted down above the cave entrance made the latter invisible to observers until they at least bent down on one knee. The cave was examined with a flashlight, and the researchers discovered that it contained at least three more neck-rings. The rings were lay piled on top of each other over two small stones,



*Fig. 2. Three neck-rings in situ in the cave. Photo Arja Hartikainen.*

and a birch bark plate was placed between the rings and the stones (Fig. 2). The rings and the bark were lifted together carefully over a piece of cardboard, and the package was placed in a box for transportation. The soil under the rings was collected in a plastic bag so it could later be examined in the museum's lab to ensure that there are no more artefacts to be found. The soil was carefully cleaned off the rings, and the birch bark was stored uncontaminated for later radiocarbon dating.

### THE NECK-RINGS

All four silver neck-rings in the recent find differ from each other. They are made of braided silver wires (Fig. 3). The neck-rings are woven so that they narrow towards the ends, which show geometric ornamentation consisting of point-triangular and circular stamps. There are very

beautifully curved hooks at the ends of the rings. All of the rings are practically undamaged and very well preserved. Only one of the hooks is broken.

The ends of three rings are triangular and flattened, with a small ridge in the middle line at the ends. Only the ends of the neck-ring with the pendants have a different shape. The smallest ring weighs about 216 grams, and its length is 48 centimetres. The ring is made of 8 twisted wire pairs making up altogether 16 wires. The middle sized ring weighs about 308 grams, and is about 51 centimetres long. The ring is made of 4 twisted wire pairs, and an approximately 1 millimetre thick twisted silver thread is wrapped between these pairs. The longest and heaviest ring weighs about 380 grams, and is about 62 centimetres long. It is made of nine twisted wire pairs.

The fourth ring is different from the others. It is made of four braided wire pairs, weighs about



*Fig. 3. All four silver rings from Nanguniemi. The dark one in the front of others was found by Seppo Saraspää. Photo Arja Hartikainen.*

224 grams, and is about 53 centimetres long. This particular ring has three axe-shaped silver pendants that are symmetrical and decorated by stamps. On the top of each pendant there is a riveted loop made of thin plate. The pendants are made of thin plate, and their height is about 5 centimetres including the loop. All pendants have an embossed vertical line in the middle, and the decorations have been stamped only on the other side of the pendant around the vertical line and the pendant's edges. Stamps used on the axes show triangular and circular imprints, as well as a short and patchy stroke-shaped stamp used on the axes hanging laterally. The centre axe pendant has carved lines instead of stroke stamps. Between the lateral pendants and the neck-ring there are two braided twofold wires about five centimetres long. The middle axe pendant has three twofold wires. Small rings are found at the ends of these wires. The first ring goes around to the pendant's loop and the other is fastened to the neck-ring's wire with a thin silver thread. The ends of the ring are rhomboid and flat. It also seems that the end parts are not separate, but that they have been hammered from the wires.

#### SILVER DEPOSITS IN NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA

Late Iron Age silver hoards are among the most interesting archaeological find types in Northern Scandinavia. Nanguniemi's silver deposit is the only one so far recovered from the Inari region. From Northern Finland alone there are five known silver deposits, and they are all dated 1050-1200 AD (Björkman 1957:29-30; Huurre 1983:396; Koivunen 1991:135; Zachrisson 1984:102). The closest similar deposits or sacrifices in Finland were found in the municipalities of Kuusamo and Ylitornio. The youngest of them is the Lämsä silver hoard from Kuusamo. It was found 50 years ago, in 1953, at a depth of about 40 centimetres underground. The Lämsä deposit yielded four neck-rings which are made of braided wires, one necklace with an axe pendant, three horseshoe-shaped brooches, and two bracelets (Björkman 1957:17-26; Kivikoski 1973: Abb. 1035, 1074-1076; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1983:389; Okkonen 2002: 62-63).

Similar silver neck-rings or fragments of them have also been found in Tavajärvi in Kuusamo, Aatservainen in Salla and Lohijärvi in Ylitornio (Björkman 1957:17; Huurre 1983:362, 395; Koivunen 1991:135; Okkonen 2002:60; Zachrisson 1984:102). The hoards of Tavajärvi and Aatservainen were found in Eastern Finland, from the area which Finland lost to the Soviet Union (Russia) after the World War II. The Tavajärvi silver hoard contains six neck-rings which are made of braided wires, seven horseshoe-shaped brooches, one convex shield-shaped brooch, four arm-rings, and two axe-shaped pendants belonging to woven necklaces (Huurre 1983:362; Okkonen 2002:60). The artefacts of Tavajärvi were placed beside a rock table about 200 metres away from Ukonlahti, so they can quite easily be interpreted as a sacrifice (Äyräpää 1937:63; Huurre 1983:399; Okkonen 2002:62). The Aatservainen hoard has unfortunately been mixed with other remains found in Southern Finland, in Raisio and Janakkala during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One can certainly tell that a twisted neck-ring made of two silver wires was found in Aatservainen (Bäcksbacka 1975:65, 67, 76; Huurre 1983:354). The Lohijärvi deposit from Ylitornio involved one silver neck-ring and one horseshoe-shaped brooch with faceted knobs (Koivunen 1991:135).

Silver neck-rings have also been found in hoards or in sacrificial deposits in Northern Norway and Northern Sweden. None of these braided neck-rings have so far been found in grave contexts in Northern Fennoscandia. Zachrisson (1984:72, tab. 13, 103) points out that most of the braided silver neck-rings, altogether 17 of them, have been found in Northern Norway, from the Troms area, near the fjords. Among these can be noted the following sites: Eidet indre, Bothamn and Flatvollen. The Troms area has yielded four axe-shaped silver pendants, one was recovered from Eidet indre and three from Bothhamn. Two neck-rings have come from Northern Sweden, one from Unna Sáiva and one from Karesuando Idivuoma. From Sweden there are two larger and four smaller axe pendants made of silver plate. They were all found in Gråträsk, which Zachrisson (1984:72, tab.13, 100) classifies as a metal deposit produced by a Saami population.

## DISCUSSION

The study of the Nangunemi silver deposit has just begun, and thus interpretations of the find are still very much open. On typological grounds and on the basis of previous finds, the silver deposit can be dated to the Late Iron Age, approximately between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Whoever put the hoard in the location from which it was recovered took care to place the rings in a cave where they were protected from snow, melt water, sunlight and, of course, from other people. The site is probably a hiding-place. It lacks bone and antler material, and there are no signs whatsoever of it having been a sacrificial site. At this stage of research it is difficult to tell if the hoard belonged to a local inhabitant or to a foreign trader in the wilderness. Quite another problem is the identification of the place or region where the rings were manufactured. A few researchers assume that neck-rings of this type were produced in Karelia or in the Eastern Baltic region. Some think that they originate in Gotland or in Western Finland, and still others think that they might have been locally produced (Björkman 1957:30, 32; Hårdh 1976:48, f. 52; Huurre 1983:398; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1973:112-113; Okkonen 2002:64-65). The key to solving the problem of the origin of these neck-rings lies in their cultural context in the Inari region. It might be a good start to look at the Late Iron Age settlement around Lake Inari. Another important avenue for the solution of this problem is the study of possible trade routes from Lake Inari to Varangerfjord in Northern Norway.

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