

# Archaeological Survey of the Outer Islands of the Gulf of Finland in 2019

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## Abstract

In 2019, an expedition of the Institute for the History of Material Culture (IIMK) RAS conducted archaeological surveys on the following islands in the archipelago of Vneshniye Ostrova (Outer Islands, *Finnish*: Suomenlahden ulkosaaret) in the Gulf of Finland: Moshchny Island (Lavansaari), Maly (Peninsaari), Seskar (Seiskari) and Yuzhny Virgin (Itä-Viiri). Familiar sites were re-examined and new ones were revealed. On Moshchny Island, a cairn, a burial ground, a Bronze Age – Early Iron Age settlement, a stone foundation of a church of the Modern Period and a group of stone heaps were discovered. On Yuzhny Virgin island, stone structures including labyrinths, circles and heaps of stone were examined. The studied sites are culturally close to the antiquities of the northern littoral of the Gulf of Finland (the Vyborg region of Leningrad oblast and southeastern Finland).

## 1 Introduction

In 2019, an expedition of the Institute for the History of Material Culture (IIMK) RAS conducted archaeological surveys in the archipelago of the Outer Islands (Suomenlahden ulkosaaret) in the Gulf of Finland. These studies were part of an interdisciplinary scientific investigation organised by the Leningrad Regional Branch of the Russian Geographical Society. The work was carried out on the islands of Moshchny (Lavansaari), Maly (Peninsaari), Seskar (Seiskari) and Yuzhny Virgin (Itä-Viiri) that belong to the Vneshniye Ostrova islands in the Gulf of Finland<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1). In total, three trips, each lasting about a month, were conducted; most of the time was devoted to surveys on Moshchny Island (Lavansaari).

The history of archaeological investigation of the Outer Islands comprises two periods. The first is the pre-war period, when the islands were part of Finland. During those years, information from local residents

about particular archaeological sites and finds from the islands was accumulated and professional archaeological excavations and surveys were carried out. Afterwards, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these islands were unavailable for scientific explorations on account of being within the Russian border zone. During this period, Finnish researchers summarised and analysed the materials that had been already accumulated. Information on archaeological sites of the Outer Islands was collected and studied by T. Miettinen (1996) and summarised in a monograph by P. Uino (1997). A separate investigation by T. Edgren (1993) was dedicated to analysis of the results of excavations conducted by S. Pälsi at the cemetery of Suursuonmäki on Moshchny Island. In an article by C. Carpelan and P. Uino (2003), the available information about the finds and excavations of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the island of Bolshoy Tyuters (Tytärsaari) was summarised. A. I. Saksä considered the available data on antiquities of the islands

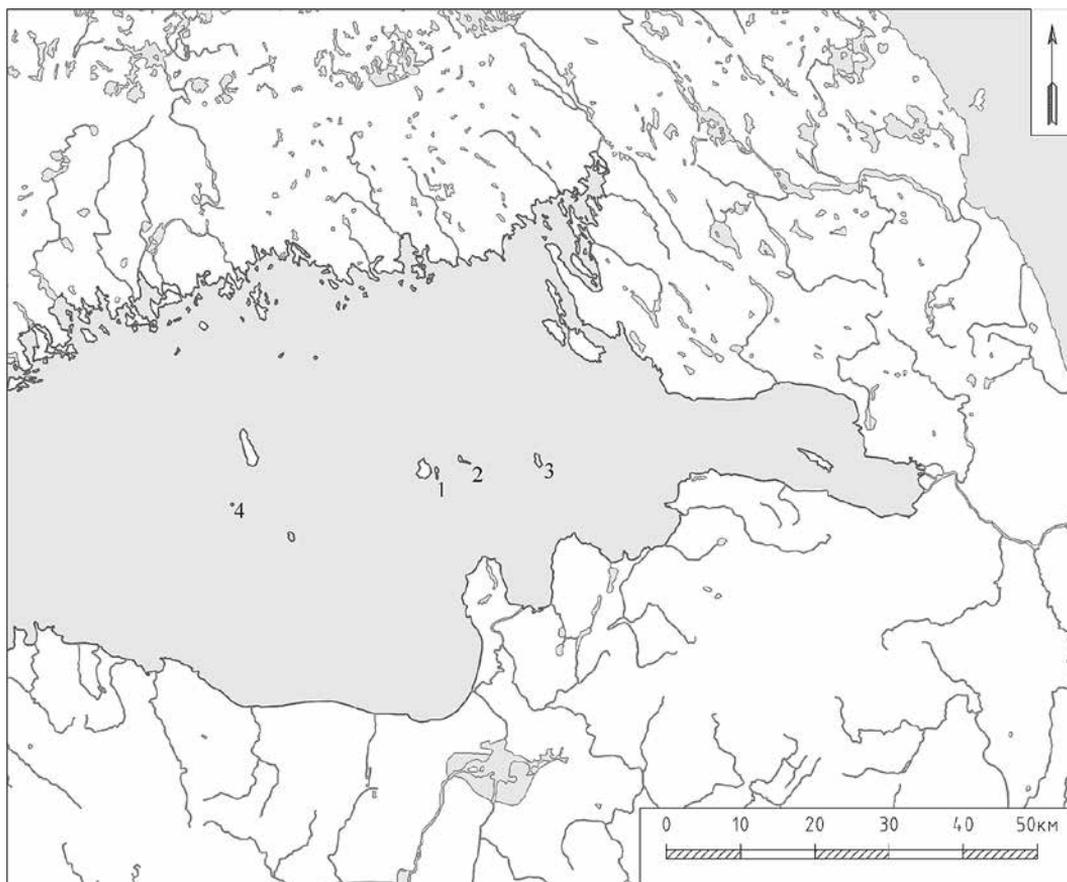


Figure 1. Islands of the Gulf of Finland where the archaeological surveys of 2019 were conducted. 1 – Moshchny (Lavansaari), 2 – Maly (Peninsaari), 3 – Seskar (Seiskari), 4 – Yuzhny Virgin (Itä-Viiri).

in the context of the evolution of archaeological cultures of the northern and southern coasts of the Gulf of Finland (Saksa 2014).

A new period of field studies on the islands began in 1999, when archaeological surveys were conducted by A. I. Saksa on Moshchny Island (1999), by G. S. Lebedev on Hogland (Suursaari) (2000), and by E. K. Blokhin on Hogland (2013–2015). However, the results of these investigations have not been published.

## 2 Field investigation of 2019

Moshchny Island. By the beginning of the surveying explorations on the island, the following sites were known: 1. burial ground

of Suursuonmäki with stone burial cairns where Sakari Pälsi carried out excavations in 1930; 2. stone burial cairn and stone circle known from 1926 onwards through information given by local teacher Johannes Suomalainen; 3. group of stone cairns revealed by A. I. Saksa in 1999. The investigations were started with the search for and examination of the known sites; after their re-discovery, surveys were conducted on the rest of the island. The efforts in 2019 on Moshchny Island resulted in the uncovering of sites dating from the Bronze Age to the Modern Period (Fig. 2).

Stone burial cairn of Suisaari. The promontory of Suisaari, separated by a sandy neck of land, is situated on the eastern section of

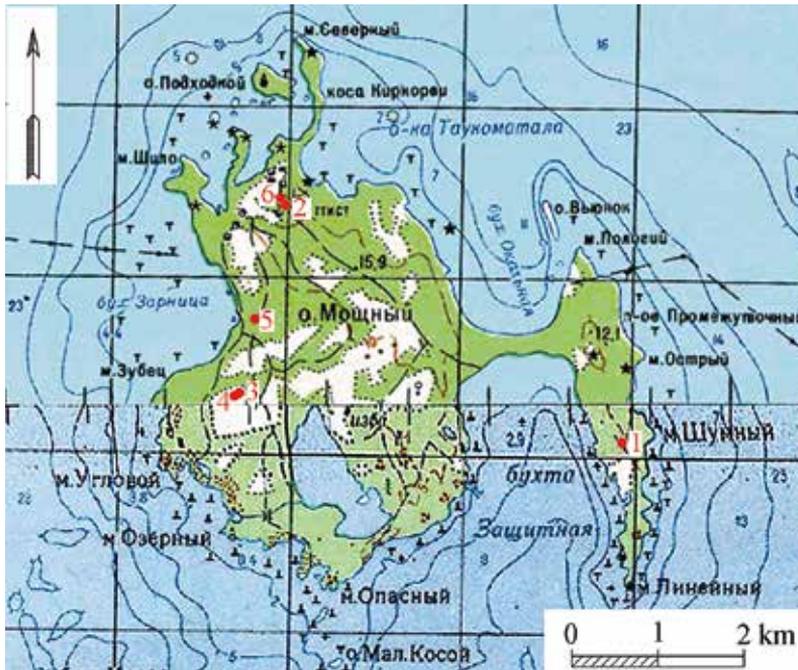


Figure 2. Map of Moshchny Island showing the revealed sites. 1 – burial cairn of Suisaari, 2 – settlement of Lavansaari, 3 – the cemetery of Suursuonmäki, 4 – burial cairn Suursuonmäki 2, 5 – a group of three cairns, 6 – a stone foundation of a church.

Moshchny Island. According to information by local teacher J. Suomalainen in 1926, a stone cairn 10 m in diameter and about 1.5 m high was located on the Suisaari Peninsula. In addition, J. Suomalainen made a note about the finding of a stone circle ca 7.5 m in diameter not far from the cairn (Edgren 1993; Uino 1997: 269–270).

During a survey of the peninsula, a stone cairn was found in the forest on the southern promontory of the upper terrace. It was situated on the southern spur of a ridge extended meridionally in the central part of the Suisaari Peninsula. The diameter of the cairn was 12–13 m, and its height was up to 1.4 m; it was constructed of waterworn boulders covered with turf (Fig. 3). The presumed height above sea level was about 8 m.

A group of cairns<sup>2</sup> on the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland west of Vyborg, near the village of Bolshoy Bor, was recently discovered and examined. This group is situated on a rock outcrop overlooking the sea 9.5–10.5 m above sea level. Four stone burial cairns were investigated; accumulations of calcined bones, pieces of charcoal and a

bronze knife were discovered beneath the mounds. It can be theorised, based on a combination of the topography, size and shape of the cairns, that these are Bronze Age cairns (*hiidenkiuas*), which are characteristic of the northern littoral of the Gulf of Finland (Meinander 1954: 116–117; Miettinen 2012; Lavento 2015). The investigated cairns were dated to between the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC (period IV, i.e. ca 1100–900 BC or slightly later). As the Suisaari cairn has a similar topography, size, and shape, we presume that it dates from the same period. However, a later dating cannot be completely ruled out since it is known from the example of excavations of cairns in Finland that a significant part of them belong to the Iron Age (Tuovinen 2002: 66; Asplund 2008: 73).

Settlement of Lavansaari. The settlement-site of Lavansaari was first discovered during the present investigations. It is situated in the northern section of the island on the site of an abandoned Finnish village. An explora-

tory trench was started with an area of 16 sq. m. (Fig. 4) 15 m to the east from the stone fence of the church, near the road crossing. In this trench, strata from different periods were revealed. Finds dated to the existence of the Finnish village from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were retrieved from the upper layer of grey-brown sandy loam – fragmentary bricks, iron nails and cramps, fragments of porcelain and clay ware.

Below, under a layer of grey sandy loam devoid of finds, a surface of yellow virgin sand was cleared and two complexes were investigated. One complex represented a hearth; it was located in a pit up to 0.4 m deep and was faced with stones over the bottom; in its fill, charcoal and dark-grey sand intercalations were detected (Fig. 5). The second complex was a spot of the cultural layer of a grey-yellow colour measuring about 1,4

× 2 m in area and up to 0,15 m thick. These layers were about 6 m above sea level.

In the course of the excavation of the spot of cultural layer and clearing of the hearth, fragments of ceramic pottery with a hatched surface were found. In total, 42 fragments were retrieved, possibly belonging to a single vessel with fragments of walls and bottom parts preserved (Fig. 6). The thickness of the vessel's walls was 0,7–1 cm; the clay paste contains a mineral temper of rotten stone; the sherds are brown in colour and their state of preservation is poor (exfoliation). The main peculiarity of the ceramic fragments is in the treatment of their outer surface. The latter is covered with strokes; these are mostly vertically arranged; the inner surface of the sherds is smooth. Possibly, the strokes were produced with a bunch of grass. It is difficult to reconstruct the shape of the vessel;



Figure 3. Burial cairn of Suisaari. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.



Figure 4. Settlement of Lavansaari. The location of the exploratory trench. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.



Figure 5. Settlement of Lavansaari. The hearth in the process of excavation. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.

the preserved walls show a straight profile, with the pot having had a flat bottom with a diameter of about 14 cm.

The closest parallels to the above pot are represented by ceramic vessels found on the island of Bolshoy Tyuters. Here, fragments of pottery with a hatched surface were found during excavations in the dunes. At least two vessels can be reconstructed; one is well-preserved and shows a flat bottom, practically straight walls and a gently curving S-shaped profile of the upper body. This type of pottery possibly belongs to the Paimio type, which generally is datable to within 1500–700 BC or to a younger group of the

Morby ware of the Early Iron Age (Carpelan & Uino 2003: 83).

During the excavations, it was presumed that the hearth and the spot of cultural layer with the pottery finds are synchronous; samples for radiocarbon analysis were selected from the hearth and charcoal intercalations. The analysis yielded seven dates indicating three differing chronological horizons. Three dates – 1010–909 calBC (2808±40 SPb-3062), 974–834 calBC (2765±40 SPb-3087) and 930–829 calBC (2745±50 SPb-3088) – are close to each other and after calibration with 68,3% probability suggest a time period between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.



Figure 6. Settlement of Lavansaari. Stroked pottery. Photo: I. Samovarov, 2019.

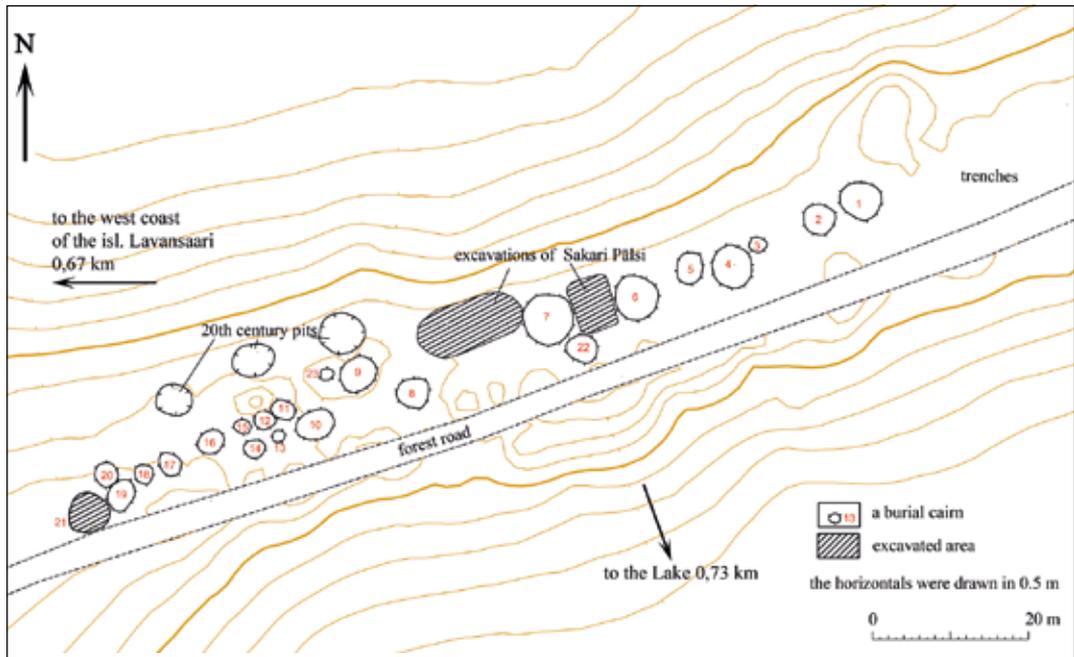


Figure 7. Topographic plan of the cemetery of Suursuonmäki. 2019

These dates were gained from the fragments of charcoal extracted from the spot of the cultural layer (samples SPb-3087, 3088) and from the hearth (sample SPb-3062). Another date obtained from the cultural layer corresponds to the pre-Roman Iron Age, i.e. 355–164 calBC (2175±40 SPb-3065). The other group of three dates from samples from the hearth indicates the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>3</sup>.

Another AMS date is obtained from the soot on one of the ceramic fragments: 161–55 calBC (2102±30 Hela-4803). As the soot sample on the pottery dates it more accurately than the charcoal from the cultural layer, this date can be considered the most reliable and the pottery can be attributed to the pre-Roman Iron Age. However, the presence of two other date ranges from the cultural layer and the hearth, with one belonging to the Bronze Age and the other to the medieval period, leaves open the question about the dating of the settlement.

The cemetery of Suursuonmäki. This cemetery was discovered by local teacher J.

Suomalainen in 1926. J. Suomalainen noted about the finding of 32 cairns. In 1930, investigations at the burial ground were conducted by S. Pälsi. He drew a plan of the cemetery, marking 28 cairns and excavating three of the mounds. Most of the cairns are of an approximately round plan with a diameter of about 3–4 m; one cairn was of an elongated form measuring ca 11 × 4 m. S. Pälsi carried out an excavation of this elongated cairn and of two other cairns with the roughly circular plan. Calcined human bones, ashes and charcoal, and pieces of resin were discovered in the cairns. In 1993, T. Edgren published an article where he described in detail and analysed the results of the excavations of this burial ground. Through samples from the excavations by S. Pälsi three radiocarbon dates were obtained, which, after calibration, indicate the last centuries BC – first century AD: 375 – 52 calBC (2165±60 BP Ua-2547), 151 calBC – 219 calAD (1975±70 BP Ua-2545) and 107 calBC – 236 calAD (1960±70 BP Ua-2546), calibrated with OxCal v4.4.2. In 1999, the burial site was explored by A. I. Saksa.



Figure 8. Stone foundation of the church. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.

The cemetery under study is situated in the western section of the island 0.7 km from the seashore, in a forest on a ridge elevated 4 m above the surrounding woodland. A visual examination revealed 23 cairns 1,5–6 m in diameter and up to 0,5 m high (Fig. 7). In addition, the locations of the two cairns excavated in 1930 were found. The cairns were laid from stones, the latter now covered with turf. The plan of the mounds is round-oval; the tops of most of the cairns are flattened. The cemetery is about 110 m long and 12 m wide. The cairns extend in a chain along a small height. The mounds are distanced 0,5–6 m from each other. A separately located cairn named Suursuonmäki 2 was revealed about 130 m westward from the burial ground. Constructed of stones, it has a diameter of ca 5,5 m and a height of up to 0,5 m. Its top is flattened and the surface covered with turf. The presence of two cairns to the west of the cemetery was mentioned by S. Pälsi. It is possible that it was one of these cairns that was thus found recently.

The closest parallel to the Suursuonmäki cairns is represented by the cemetery of Pyhtää Strukankalliot west of the city of Kotka. The cemetery consists of 10 stone cairns of similar dimensions, of which three were excavated. In the mounds, objects of the early Roman period were found, viz. fibulae, gold-glass beads, etc. (Miettinen 1997).

In addition, on Moshchny Island a group of three stone piles was revealed. This group was discovered in 1999 by A. I. Saksa in the western part of the island at the edge of a dune. According to A. I. Saksa, the definition of sites of this type varies widely and may be dated to the Middle Ages or the Modern Period.

A stone foundation of a church is preserved in the central area of the abandoned Finnish village near the settlement of Lavansaari (Fig. 8). This wooden church on a stone base was built in 1783 and destroyed during World War II. Its general dimensions are ca 18 × 23 m; the foundation is constructed of granite blocks; the width of the foundation is 0,35–0,6 m. The church is sur-



Figure 9. Yuzhny Virgin southern labyrinth. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.



Figure 10. Yuzhny Virgin northern labyrinth. Photo: M. Razzak, 2019.

rounded with a boulder fence and is octagonal in plan.

Seskar. At the southern extremity of the dune ridge extending meridionally along the entire island, a small fragment of pottery and a quartz flake were found. The ceramic fragment possibly belongs to a handmade vessel and can be dated widely to within a range from the early Iron Age to the Middle Ages. No new finds were discovered around its findspot. Surveys on Maly revealed no new sites.

Yuzhny Virgin. This is a rather small island with general dimensions of about 200 × 600 m, practically devoid of vegetation. Most of the island is constituted by terraces of stone pebbles. It is situated 10 km eastward from Hogland.

As early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the academician Karl Ernst von Baer, during his scientific expedition in the Gulf of Finland, made an unplanned visit to the island of Y. Virgin. He wrote a description of the island and of the stone structures found there; his article was published in 1844. Baer described a stone labyrinth and heaps of stone and discussed their analogues. This was the first work on labyrinths in Russia and the questions were raised as to the purpose and time of the construction of the mazes. Baer was of the opinion that they were constructed by the Finnish or Russian population during the medieval period (Baer 2014). There is also a schematic representation of the labyrinth on Y. Virgin drawn by the local teacher Emil Olenius in 1919 (Uino 2003).

The stone structures were examined in 2019. They are represented by two labyrinths (Fig. 9-10), stone circles and heaps of stone. The structures are located on the upper terrace ca 8 m above sea level. The mazes are about 7,7 m in diameter; their walls are constructed of a single course of stones. The state of preservation of these labyrinths is fairly good but the borders of some of the lines are rather blurred. The distance between the labyrinths is about 50 m. The circles are similar in their dimensions to the

labyrinths, and they have 1–2 external walls constructed of one course of stones; in their centres there are small heaps of stone. The stone heaps include two large ones about 1,5 m high and a group of smaller heaps up to 0,5 m in height.

Labyrinths are fairly widely distributed throughout Northern Europe. Usually they are close to the sea, being situated on islands and peninsulas near the shoreline. A small number of them are known in Sweden and Finland, as well as in Russia (particularly on islands in the White Sea). The closest analogues are found among the mazes on the southern coast of Finland: in total, about 200 labyrinths are known to exist in Finland (Uino 2003). Their easternmost examples, according to old Finnish data, are situated on islands of the northern littoral of the Gulf of Finland in the Vyborg region (Bel'skiy 2006).

## Conclusion

In the course of the expedition, explorations were conducted on the archipelago of the Outer Islands in the Gulf of Finland, viz. the islands of Moshchny, Maly, Seskar and Yuzhny Virgin. Of most significance are the studies on Moshchny Island, where six sites of archaeological heritage were noted.

The earliest period of the occupation of the islands seems to be that of the Bronze Age. On Moshchny Island we attribute the Suisaari stone cairn to this period. Perhaps at this time the islands were not yet permanently inhabited.

The next period, the early Iron Age, is represented by the cemetery of Suursuonmäki and ceramics of the settlement of Lavansaari (according to the AMS date of the soot on the ceramics). The size and final dating of the settlement of Lavansaari, where the stroked pottery was found, is difficult to determine on the basis of small-scale excavations; it may have been a short-lived settlement. The cemetery of Suursuonmäki contains at least 25 burial mounds and is located in the forest quite far from the seashore. Its size and

topography indicate that it belonged to the permanent inhabitants of the island.

The medieval period of the occupation of the archipelago has not been archaeologically investigated, although the first information of written sources about the residents of the islands dates back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, while beginning with the 16<sup>th</sup> century there are detailed data on the population size on the islands (Korhonen 1996). This probably reflects the research situation and it can be assumed that the data will be identified in further fieldwork. The period of the Middle Ages and the Modern Period comprise the stone labyrinths on the island of Yuzhny Virgin and the cairns on Moshchny Island, as well as the foundation of the church on Moshchny Island.

In terms of their situation, the Outer Islands is equally distant from the northern and southern coasts of the Gulf of Finland. Nevertheless, the sites of different periods on the islands are culturally closer to the northern littoral (Vyborg region of Leningrad oblast and southeastern Finland). The Suisaari burial cairn of the Bronze Age is related to the cultural group of the Bronze Age cairns (*hiidenkiuas*) that are widespread throughout the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland. On the southern coast, in Estonia, a slightly different funerary tradition was practised in the Bronze Age – here stone-cist graves were made (Lang 2007: 147–164; 2018: 162–167). In the early Iron Age, the construction tradition of stone cairns represented on Moshchny Island finds its parallels

in the cemeteries of Finland. During the same period on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, in Estonia and on the Izhora Plateau, the tradition of making tarand graves was widespread (Lang 2007: 170–219; 2018; Yushkova 2016). The closest parallels to the medieval stone mazes on Y. Virgin are also represented by the stone labyrinths of the northern littoral of the Gulf of Finland; about 200 of them are known in Finland, whereas only a few labyrinths have been reported from Estonia.

The investigations of 2019 demonstrated the importance of the continuation of the archaeological investigation of the islands. When summarising the available data, it must be noted that, at present, no archaeological traces of the permanent medieval settlement of the islands have been found, although its presence is known from written sources. In addition, the question of the time period of the earliest occupation of the islands has also not been solved. In the meantime, sites belonging to even earlier stages of the settlement of the Gulf of Finland region may yet be revealed.

## Acknowledgements

I thank A. V. Gilevich for translating the article.

This work was carried out within the framework of the Programme of Fundamental Scientific Research of the State Academies of Sciences, State Assignment No. 018420190007.

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## Notes

- 1 The Vneshniye Ostrova (Outer Islands) archipelago also includes the islands of Hogland (Suursaari), Bolshoy Tyuters (Tytärsaari) and Maly Tyuters (Pien-Tytärsaari).
- 2 The results of these excavations are discussed in A. Gorodilov's paper in the present collection.
- 3 1264-1282 AD (738±25 BP SPb-3063), 1261-1281 AD (745±25 BP SPb-3064) and 1261-1281 AD (745±25 BP SPb-3086).