

A bone spoon from Pirkkala

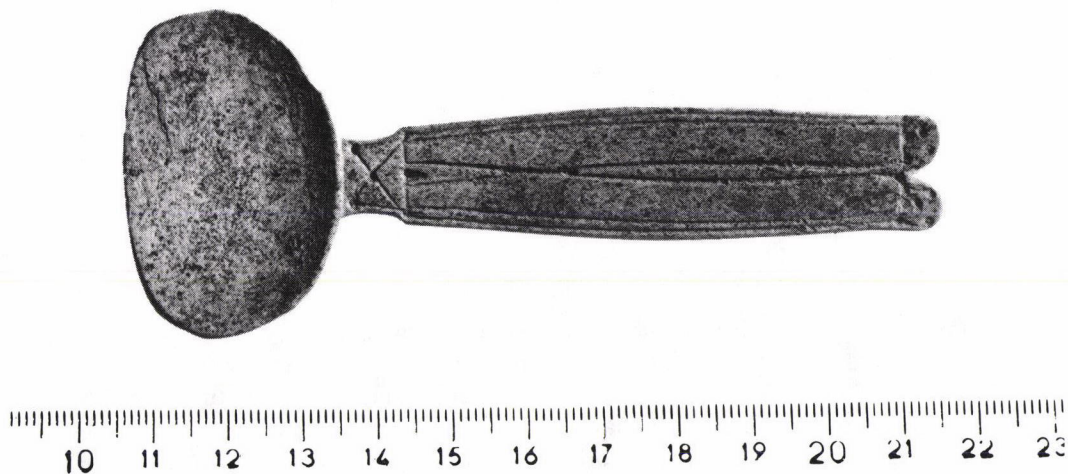
In Finnish soils, with their low calcareous content, organic materials such as bone and antler disintegrate at a fast rate. Objects of these materials are preserved only in especially favourable conditions, in moist marshy ground and in the detritus of lake bottoms. Fragments of bone artefacts have been found to some degree also in connection with Iron Age cremation burials, but other wise prehistoric artefacts of bone and antler are rare in Finland. In the autumn of 1987 a relatively intact prehistoric bone spoon was sent to the National board of Antiquities for study and accordingly this object of unassuming size raised the interest of experts.

The spoon was found on the north shore of Kotolahti Bay of Lake Pyhäjärvi in the village of Pirkkala in the commune of the same name, about 10 kilometres southwest of Tampere. The location of the find is about one kilometre northeast of the church of Pirkkala.

The spoon (National Museum catalogue no. 23788) is 10.7 cm in length and its material was microscopically determined as bone. The stem of the spoon is straight and of even width and tip of the spade-like bowl is even in form. The stem is decorated with two lines running parallel to the edge carved with a sharp-pointed knife in gouging technique. Between the lines are two crossing lines forming a X-shaped design. At the junction of the stem and the bowl is a design resembling a St. Andrew's cross as well as small pits. At the end of the stem are two bulbous extensions decorated with small pits.

The spoon was found by chance in a soil removed from an even field. There are no observations at the location of anything suggesting a dwelling site or a cemetery. In a field approximately 100 metres south of the location are finds of occupation layer possibly related to an Iron Age site (Miettinen 1974, p. 953, no. 30). In other respects, the pasture next to the field with its abundant vegetation suggests the possibility of remains of prehistoric occupation. Of special note is the location of a small water-spring in an outcrop of bedrock to the north side of the site of the find. The spring measures only 6–7 cm across and according to local tradition the spring, known as Neulalähde (Needle Spring) in Finnish, was venerated for healing purposes. The name may derive from the sacrificial nature of the site: needles and other objects were thrown in the spring to ensure luck.

The Pirkkala spoon is of a type mainly in use in the Late Iron Age with a straight stem of even width and a spade-like bowl. Several spoons of this type have been found in the cremation and inhumation graves of Birka (Arbman 1940, plate 151). The stem of these spoons is almost straight and of even width and the bowl is spade-like and not of cupped form as in Medieval spoons. Also the stems of the Birka spoons are decorated with lines along the edges and pits as well as various types of ornaments in the central part of the stem. Although the Birka material does not contain exact parallels to the Pirkkala spoon, it is nevertheless of the same type which was typical of the Scandinavian culture of the Viking period.



1. Bone spoon from Pirkkala

Two similar spoons have been found in Finland, at the Osmanmäki cemetery in Eura (Salmo 1952, p. 421, fig. 383; Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984, p. 339,343). In both of the spoons from Eura there are round protrusions decorated with dots at the junction of the stem and the bowl and at the end of the stem as well as incised lines running parallel to the edges. The centre of the stem is also decorated with lines and dots and there are plant ornaments on one of the spoons from Eura. Although the Pirkkala specimen differs from the Eura spoons, they can be classed under the same sphere of style.

Other Late Iron Age finds of bone or antler spoon fragments are from Hiukkavainio in Huittinen (NM 3574:271), Palviala in Karkku (NM 5203: 217) and Isoperanka in Suomussalmi (NM 18057:51 and 57; Huurre 1973, p. 86, Fig. 5). The Huittinen and Suomussalmi fragments are of the same spade-like type as the Pirkkala spoon. Of completely different type than the above West Finnish spoons is a small bone artefact, possibly part of a bone spoon, found in a cremation grave at Suotniemi in Käkisalmi (NM 2487:55). In the Suotniemi spoon one side of the widening of the stem is decorated with a line drawing of a man in festive garb with plant ornaments on the other side. Also the round lower part of the stem is decorated with finely-drawn lines. Compared with the West Finnish spoons the Suotniemi specimen is of a more refined character and it can even be seen as reflecting the influence of the court culture of far-off Byzantium. The spoon is part of the artefacts of a cremation burial of the 12th-13th centuries (Grave no. III, Nordman 1924, p. 148; Linturi 1980, p. 88—89) and it is somewhat younger than the Pirkkala spoon.

Ornamentation characteristic of the Pirkkala spoon also occurs in other wooden, bone and antler artefacts of the Late Iron Age. Wooden skis have twin lines around the edges and crossing lines in the centre as well as braided motifs. An example is a wooden ski from Vesilahti, radiocarbon dated to 920—1100 A.D. \pm 100 (Valonen 1970, p. 65—68). Similarities are partly due to the material employed, but also to the concepts and sphere of style of the Late Iron Age. An impressive artefact, probably dating to the end of the Iron Age, is a needle or awl or antler (NM 11380), found in the centre of Toijala. In this artefact the convex surface is marked with a skilfully executed looped band of

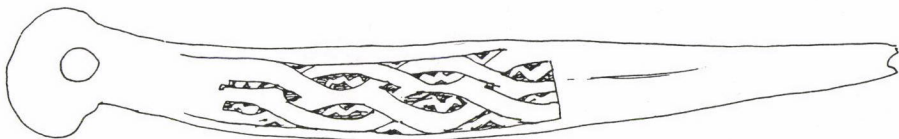
two parts and a zig-zag line filling the ovals of the braided design. Also to be noted are the fragments of a long-shaped artefact from Hiukkavainonmäki in Huittinen (NM 3574:271; Kivikoski 1973, fig. 947, p. 124). Also these fragments are decorated with lines and braided knot motifs.

Important in this connection are also Lapp (Saami) artefacts of wood, bone and antler. Especially the decoration of the spoons, the bag clasps of bone or antler and the lids of wooden containers employs motifs similar to the ones in bone described above. Common features in the decoration of the spoons are lines following the edges and knife-point ornaments, to quote T.I. Itkonen's description. In the stems of the bone spoons from Eura the rounded protrusions are characteristic features of style that occur especially in the decoration of the antler spoons of Lapland. There ornaments of this type are often perforated with small pendants (Itkonen 1945, p. 525—528). The common features mainly derive from influences from Late Iron Age and Medieval Scandinavian centres of trade. In Lapland they survived until late historically documented times.

Different types of spoons and scoops had been in use for a long time. The best-known specimens include the scoop-like spoons from Laukaa dated to the Stone Age with stems ending in animal's head motifs (Ailio 1912, p. 257—282) or the Corded Ware Period clay spoons from Kirkkonummi (Edgren 1984, p. 77). There are fewer finds of Early Iron Age spoons. These include a fragment of a bone spoon of the 6th century A.D. from Palomäki at Isokylä in Salo (Kivikoski 1973, p. 59, fig. 383). At the end of the Iron Age and in Medieval times ornamental spoon types were especially popular with impressive decorations in a number of cases (Granlund 1970, p. 451—458).

The vicinity of the Pirkkala find has so far not revealed any Iron Age sites or remains of special note. The situation is differed in the area of Nokia or northern Pirkkala on the opposite shore of Lake Pyhäjärvi. In this region Iron Age settlement appears to have been concentrated along the northwest shore of Lake Pyhäjärvi and the Nokianvirta River area. In the region are several significant Iron Age sites and remains dating from the Late Roman Iron age to the Crusade Period. Known from the vicinity of the spoon find are place-names and local tradition, part of which may be related to pre-historic times.

The Neulalähde spring near the find location is on a hilly outcrop of bedrock known as Hiittenmäki-Hiirenmäki and the spring has also been called Hiidenlähde, Hiidenkaivo (spring of well of the *Hiisi*) or Martinkaivo (Martin's well). It was mentioned above that local tradition refers to this place being used for sacrifices in ancient times. There is also a local tale according to which a treasure was placed in the spring (Koski 1967, p.130). In the vicinity are several other *hiisi* place-names, e.g. a field called Hiittenmaa or Hiirenmaa about 1.5 kilometres from the site on a promontory between Torpparinlahti and Lallinlahti Bays. Passing through this area is also an ancient winter road known as Hiittentie leading to Turku and Uusikaupunki. *Hiisi* place-names have usually been linked to the sphere of Iron Age beliefs and they may have been of central importance as places of worship (Tallgren 1933, p. 328). In many cases Iron Age cemeteries or cup-



2. Bone pin found in Toijala, 1:1.

marked stones are found near locations with *hiisi*-related place-names (Koski 1967, p. 172, Map 6).

Also the place-name of Pirkkala, first mentioned in written sources in 1374, is related to conceptions of a presumed heroic past in prehistoric times. The word is believed to derive from the Swedish *bjärkörätt*, which may be related to a prehistoric judicial system applying to rights of trade. The immediate point of reference that comes to mind is the Viking town of Birka, where such a system may have been administered. In the light of present research, however, such a connection with the Pirkkala place-name seems impossible. The archaeological record does not support the view of an ancient trading site or centre at Pirkkala, at least in the present area of Pirkkala, i.e. southern Pirkkala.

On the other hand it has been suggested that Pirkkala was the home region of the ancient taxationers of the Lapps, the Pirkkala men (Fi. *pirkkalaiset*). Recent studies have shown, however, that the concept came about only as late as the 19th century and the *birkkarlar* (Birk men) of historical sources were farmers permanently residing in the Tornionjoki River valley. In the unsettled times of the 13th century the King of Sweden had granted to these men special rights regarding the taxation of the Lapps (Vahtola 1987, p. 330). The old idea of the Pirkkala men as taxationers of the Lapps still survives in the area. In connection with the inspection of the spoon find, a local inhabitant remarked to me that the find was »from the heartland of the ancient Pirkkala men». The above viewpoints do not however exclude the possibility that the village of Pirkkala was a significant centre of the fur trade and wilderness traffic in ancient times. In addition to trading sites in connection with permanent settlement Iron age conditions appear to have also required temporary trading locations in the vicinity of water routes near fur-hunting areas. In this respect Pirkkala was at an ideal location near the water routes leading from the Iron Age centre of Lake Vanaja to Lake Pyhäjärvi. To the north the water routes led to the Lake Näsijärvi water system and the heartlands of Central Finland. The mouth of the Nokianvirta river is also close to Pirkkala with access to the Gulf of Bothnia via the Kokemäenjoki River. The Nokianvirta River also provides access to the north to the waters of Lake Kyrösjärvi, leading via a small isthmus to the Kyröjoki River and the rich Iron age centres of Southern Ostrobothnia. On the basis of the distribution of certain mainly 6th-century artefact types it can be deduced that Southern Ostrobothnia and Häme carried on trade in the period concerned. The routes crossing in the inland regions may have served as a link even between the Halikonlahti Bay settlement on the Gulf of Finland and Southern Ostrobothnia (Hirviluoto 1988). Kotolahti Bay in Pirkkala was at the junction of these diverging water routes and the Hiidentie winter road may have been in use already in the Iron Age.

Thus, an area like Kotolahti Bay may have been a temporarily used place for resting and the exchange of goods and possibly the scene of the yearly sacrifices of the wilderness hunters, leading to the rich local tradition of *hiisi* place-names. According to Gunvor Kerkkonen, place-names with the prefix *hiisi* may have centres of the fur trade and sites of worship (Kerkkonen 1953, p. 1—27; Saarenheimo 1974, p. 17).

At the end of the Iron Age hunting in the wilderness regions was apparently a well-organized activity of bodies of men with numerous members and it may have had its own specific hunting culture. The features of this culture are suggested by finds from along the former wilderness routes. The period of florescence of the wilderness hunting culture gradually came to an end around the beginning of modern times and subsequent periods have not finds relating to wilderness activities that are similar to those of the end of the Iron Age (Valonen 1970, p. 75).

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