

Problems of Research related to Cremation Cemeteries in Häme

During the Merovingian and Viking Periods two forms of burial were practised in Häme: cairns of stones and earth and cremation cemeteries laid on level ground. The cremation of the deceased is common to both. During the Early Iron Age in Finland, cairns were the most common form of burial (Kivikoski 1966, 43) and cremation cemeteries on level ground have been assumed to have come into use during the late 6th century, however, mainly in the Merovingian Period (Kivikoski 1966, 50).

In Häme, burial cairns were erected of stones and earth on the surface of the ground and without a pit for the deceased. Most cairns are without structures and were built with the support of large stones that were already in place. In some cases there is larger so-called main stone in the centre or a ring of stones around the perimeter. The area and height of the cairns vary, but they are usually low and roundish or longiform. Cairns may occur singly but already in the Migration Period cemeteries of several cairns are in use.

The oldest cairns in Häme date from the Late Roman Period. It has been previously assumed that the area was depopulated and the Iron Age burial finds indicate the arrival of a new population in the Häme lake district along the Kokemäenjoki river (Kivikoski 1955, 43). According to present studies it is more probable that Iron Age culture spread among an earlier population in the form of cultural influences brought by the use of new materials and also possibly through the arrival of new settlers in small groups (Huurre 1979, 145–146). The cemeteries have been interpreted as evidence of a more stable form of settlement. This may have been the result of agriculture becoming the basic means of livelihood, which may also have brought about the adoption of new beliefs with ensuing changes in burial customs.

According to Oiva Keskitalo (1979, 124) the typical cairn form of the Roman Period was low and without a main stone, the use of which in construction he generally links to the cairns of the Migration Period (*op.cit.*, 125). Eeva-Liisa Nieminen maintains that about half of the hitherto investigated Migration Period cairns in Häme were constructed with main stones, and a considerable part of the remainder were erected around two or several larger stones already standing in place (Nieminen 1980, 113). Although it is not usually possible to indicate definite closed groups of finds, it seems as if the primary burial was at the foot of the main stone or in the area between the central stones. The artefacts and bone fragments belonging to the burial could, however, extend over several square metres.

The Late Roman and Migration Period cairns cannot always be distinguished from each other with certainty as the artefact types found in them are in many cases from the time of transition between the periods (Nieminen 1980, 187). On the other hand, the number of cairns that were in consistent use from the Migration Period to the Merovingian Period is smaller. One of these is Peltokutila in Kalvola, mainly used at the end of the Migration Period and the early Merovingian Period (Nieminen 1980,



Fig. 1. Hattula (Tyrväntö), Retulansaari. Iron Age cairns. Photo A. Äyräpää 1933.

45). This may have been originally constructed with a central stone and the oldest burial is in a small cairn erected around the central stone. The grave construction was extended for further burials by adding to the stone setting both next to and on top of the primary burial. Without doubt, cairns were added to also in other cases of secondary burials, although distinct observations of this have not always been made.

None of the Early Iron Age cairns were singly in use over many generations. Even the use of many cairn cemeteries in Häme seems to span only a couple of centuries. The longest periods of use seem to have been in the cemeteries dated to the Merovingian and Viking Periods. On the other hand, it must be stressed that in the larger cairn cemeteries excavations have only extended to a few cairns, not all of which can be dated with accuracy. The undated cairns are either completely without finds or the material contains only burnt clay, unburnt bone or potsherds that do not provide any precise dating. They form a problematic group and have been interpreted either as cairns from field-clearing or as sacrificial cairns and in some rarer cases as poorer burials. Very little burnt bone has been found even in cairns with artefacts that have been interpreted as burials. Investigations of the areas between cairns are few in number.

Cremation cemeteries on level ground have usually been described as burial grounds without traces above ground or at the most with stones protruding. Beneath the turf there is a stone setting of 1–4 layers which may cover several hundred square metres. The remains of the funeral pyre are scattered among the stones and



Fig. 2. Pälkäne, Rönni, Kokkostenkärki. Cairn 2. The cairn is without structures and was built with the support of large stones that were already in place. Photographed after removing the turf. Photo A. Hackman 1930.

the burial-ground is of a collective character (Kivikoski 1966, 51). However, also closed finds have been found in these cemeteries.

It has been assumed that the above form of cremation cemetery developed from the cairn so that stones and earth added with later burials gradually lowered the form of the cairn and made its edges indistinct. It has also been suggested that separated stone settings grew together with subsequent burials (Kivikoski 1966, 52). The mixing of burials has been explained by the fact that they could no longer be distinguished on the surface. Critically viewed, the above assumptions are based on the idea that the cremation cemeteries came about during a long period through the ignorance or indifference of their users. One reason that has been suggested for the lack of constructions is the poor knowledge of traditions among the younger generation of new settlers in Häme (Kivikoski 1955, 63). It has also been proposed that the mixing of burials was a result of the effects of grave-robbing. If it is assumed that cremation burial grounds had been robbed, this must have been relatively easy supposing that they were clearly visible on the surface of the ground.

Regarding this problem there are thus two assumptions based on different premises:

- 1) the cremation cemeteries are of collective nature for the reason that originally separate burials could not be distinguished on the surface and were thus disturbed by later burials.

- 2) the cremation cemeteries seem to be collective because the originally visible and thus easily robbed burials had been disturbed.



Fig. 3. Valkeakoski (Sääksmäki), Hiittänmäki. A cairn with a ring of stones around the perimeter. Photo J. Sarkamo 1960.

In my opinion, a better explanation would be that the cremation burial grounds were basically collective cemeteries where also single burials occur. In construction they resemble the Early Roman Period cemeteries that have been compared to the tarand cemeteries, e.g. the Penttala cemetery in Nakkila. This idea is not new in itself; A. M. Tallgren combined the Penttala cemetery and the Saramäki cemetery in Maaria with clearly later cemetery sites, such as Ristimäki in Kaarina, under the heading »level-ground cemetery» (Tallgren 1931, 113–114, 123, 124). Also Keskitalo regarded the tarand cemeteries as the forerunners of the level-ground cremation cemeteries (Keskitalo 1979, 135). On the grounds of datings there are no objections to this theory. Of the level-ground cremation cemeteries in Häme at least Värilä in Pälkäne and Lentolankärki in Hauho came into use already in the 4th century AD (Keskitalo 1979, 133). It must be noted that these cemeteries remained in use more or less throughout the whole Iron Age. Outside of the area of Häme Late Roman Period

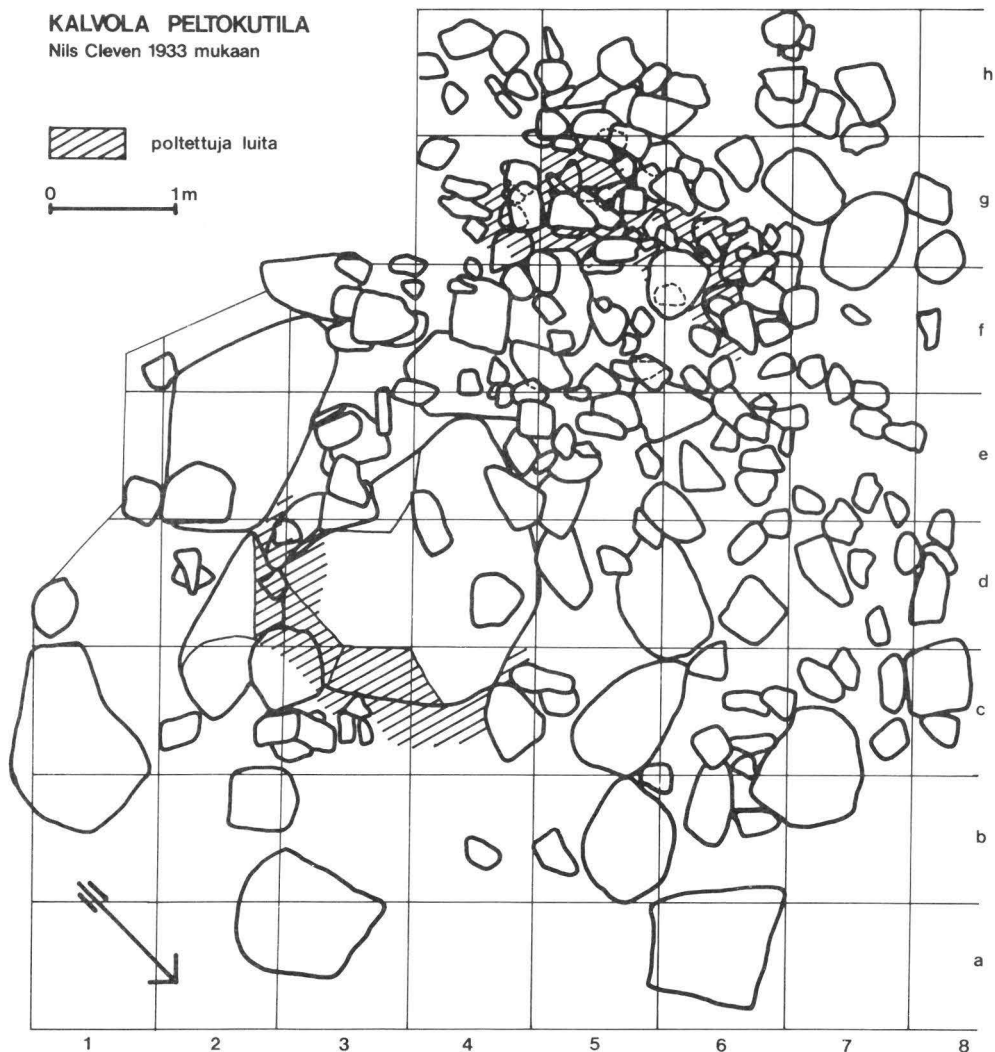


Fig. 4. Kalvola, Peltokutila. The cairn according to Niils Cleve 1933. //// = burnt bone.

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finds have come to light in cremation cemeteries for example in the Saramäki cemetery in Maaria. However, certain other level-ground cemetery finds cannot be regarded as evidence for the adoption of this form of burial already at that stage, as they are from connections that were not in consistent use later (Keskitalo 1979, 134).

A central problem of research is, surprisingly, distinguishing cairns from cremation cemeteries. According to Kivikoski, their boundary is not fixed and in many cases we may just as well refer to low cairns as to small level-ground cremation cemeteries (Kivikoski 1966, 52). The core of the problem may be that archaeologists have not been able to agree upon the actual meaning of these terms.

The interpretations should be based on the actual burial, which should be reconstructed on the basis of excavation results. In principle, there are no problems



Fig. 5. Hauho, Kalomäki. Part of the stone setting of the cremation cemetery on level ground uncovered. The cemetery continues in the turf-covered area. Photo L. Söyrinki 1970.

with graves dug into the ground; the area of the burial is at most limited to the size of the pit. This is often limited by a coffin, urn or other object where the deceased or his remains were placed. In burials above ground the situation is different. In a cremation the grave could be on top of the pyre or the remains of the deceased could have been transported to the actual place of burial. How was this limited in the latter case? If the cairn was erected around one or several larger stones, it would be obvious that the stones were chosen (or placed) beforehand and the cremated remains would be taken to a small area by the main stone or the central stones after which a cairn would be erected. Although a stone setting had preceded the burial it would seem natural that the primary burial would be at the bottom of the cairn. Later burials could then have been made by digging pits in the cairn or by adding stones and earth. In my opinion, the basic idea of the cairn must be interpreted as having covered the burial completely.



Fig. 6. Hauho, Kalomäki. Part of the stone setting of the cremation cemetery on level ground. Photo P. Luppi & L. Söyrinki 1971.

How then did the cremation cemeteries come about? There are clearly cemeteries where single burials were given up in favour of collective burials, but there are also ones where several burials were carried out in a short period with a relatively thin stone setting or with burials in an area without stones having been placed. What was the appearance of the cremation cemetery in its first stages of use? In my view, a cemetery must have had from its very beginning definite limits either clearly visible in the terrain or otherwise known, or it would not have come about. On the other hand, it was not thought necessary to cover each burial carefully with stones, as there are often finds in cemeteries from on top of the stone setting and even from areas without placed stones. Although the artefacts belonging to one burial may be scattered in a wide area, finds of burnt bone and artefacts generally seem to be concentrated in the same areas in the cemetery. In certain cemeteries it can be observed that finds of different date are located in different parts of the cemetery, although there is no definite vertical stratigraphy. There are however differences in the structure of cremation cemeteries just as these occur in cairns.

A problem common to both cairns and cremation cemeteries is assessing the number of deceased. Usually there is not »enough» bone material in relation to the number of deceased as estimated according to the numbers of artefacts. This may of course be caused by the fact that not all of the remains of the pyre were collected. Another reason may be the fact that not all of the deceased were cremated. In this respect there may be differences in burial practices in various periods. Estimates of the number of deceased in situations where there are no closed finds are highly



Fig. 7. Hauho, Kalomäki. A closed find in the cremation cemetery on level ground. Photo L. Söyrinki 1971.

uncertain. It is impossible to estimate the average wealth of the burials. The number of closed finds in relation to other material varies greatly among cemeteries. Especially in the 10th century the number of closed finds seems to have increased, a possible result of the spread of inhumation burial.

Comparisons have not been made of artefact material from contemporary cairns and cremation cemeteries. Such an analysis may show whether the cremation cemeteries were used on the average by poorer or more wealthy segments of the community than the cairn cemeteries. The cremation cemeteries may indicate equality among members of the community through the mixing of rich and poor burials without any distinct differences. However, it is not known whether all members of the community were buried in the cremation cemeteries or whether more prominent persons received a more individual burial.

How can the parallel existence and survival of two different forms of burial from the Late Roman Period to the Viking Period be explained? For cemeteries in

consistent use the explanation is in the preservation of inherited traditions. It cannot be claimed that the cremation cemeteries would have come about with cairns as their prototypes through negligence with respect to tradition as there are chronologically contemporaneous cairn cemeteries in use through several generations with separate burials in cairns. Nor can all cremation cemeteries on level ground be interpreted as misexcavated dwelling sites. Is it possible to assume that the forms of burial represent different population groups? Are the cairns related to the original population and how should their relationship with the so-called Lapp cairns (Fi. Lapinrauniot) be interpreted? If the cremation cemeteries represent new settlers, possibly from the mouth of the Kokemäenjoki river, why had they come as far as Hauho and Pälkäne? Was there not enough room elsewhere? On the other hand, there is an Epineolithic site at Lentolankärki in Hauho and the relationship of this to the cemetery at the same location has not been investigated. Epineolithic pottery has also been found in cairn c of the Kirstula cemetery in Hämeenlinna (Keskitalo 1979, 93).

More research is required regarding the relationships between the cemeteries and earlier settlement. Also the analysis and comparison of chronological distributions of artefacts in different burial forms could be carried out with more certainty with material from totally excavated cemeteries.

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