

Two asbestos-tempered Early Metal Period pottery types in the Eastern Finland, c. 3000-1500 calBP and their connections with protolanguages

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Abstract

This paper concentrates on two Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age (i.e. Early Metal Period) pottery types in Finland: Luukonsaari and Sirnihta Wares. This time period was important for the forming and development of the cultural areas later recognized as Iron Age farming societies (coastal groups) and hunter-gatherer societies (inland and northern groups), where the latter was also the economical context for the two types of pottery studied here. This was also the period when the Saami and Finnic languages appeared for the first time in the linguistic map of the area of modern Finland due to which we also discuss the potential connections between these ceramic types and these two groups of languages.

We start with the basics by exploring the typological aspects of these pottery types and by presenting new radiocarbon dates connected with them as until now they have been only vaguely defined and dated. Bayesian modelling of the existing dates together with our new dates puts Luukonsaari Ware in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (c. 2800-2100 cal BP), whereas Sirnihta Ware is considerably younger, belonging to Early Iron Age (c. 2000-1450 calBP).

Once a solid typo-chronological background is set, we discuss more general questions such as 1) the contacts of Luukonsaari and Sirnihta Ware to other contemporary pottery groups (e.g., Paimio, Morby, Kjelmøy, and Anttila Wares) 2) the importance of Textile Ware in the formation of asbestos-tempered Luukonsaari and Sirnihta Wares and 3) potential connections with the proto-languages spoken in the region.

We conclude that populations using Luukonsaari and Sirnihta Wares probably had connections with contemporary pottery groups as both Sirnihta Ware and Luukonsaari Ware share typological features with the contemporary rock-tempered Morby Ware from the coastal regions even though they differ in their temper material. There is also an interesting connection between Textile Ware and the two studied pottery types. Textile Ware was usually rock-tempered, but there is also evidence of asbestos-tempered Textile Ware that date close to the start of the Luukonsaari period and exist in the same geographical area (Kainuu and Northern Savonia; see also Lavento 2001).

Considering the connections with languages and archaeology, it needs to be borne in mind that archaeological continuity rarely correlates with linguistic continuity (see e.g. Aikio & Aikio 2001; Piha et al 2022). As a result, correlation between archaeological and linguistic continuity can be proven only if linguistic studies on the language in question allows it. Based on Germanic loanword evidence Saami and Finnic were spoken in Finland during the Early Iron Age, possibly already in the late phase of Late Bronze Age (Häkkinen 2010, Kallio 2015, Schalin 2018). Thus considering the proposed times and the suggested locations of Proto-Finnic in Estonia (Lang 2020) and Proto-Saami in Finland (Aikio 2006), the most likely connection between these two proto-languages and the two pottery types studied here is the one with Proto-Saami and Sirnihta Ware.

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