Ten (eleven) years since regulating the use of metal-detectors in Estonia: lessons learned

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Presentation outline

- Background information
- Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) of 2011 and lessons learned
- Heritage Conservation Act (HCA) of 2019 and lessons learned
- Treasure hunters? Citizen scientists?
- MetDect/EDAO
- Summary
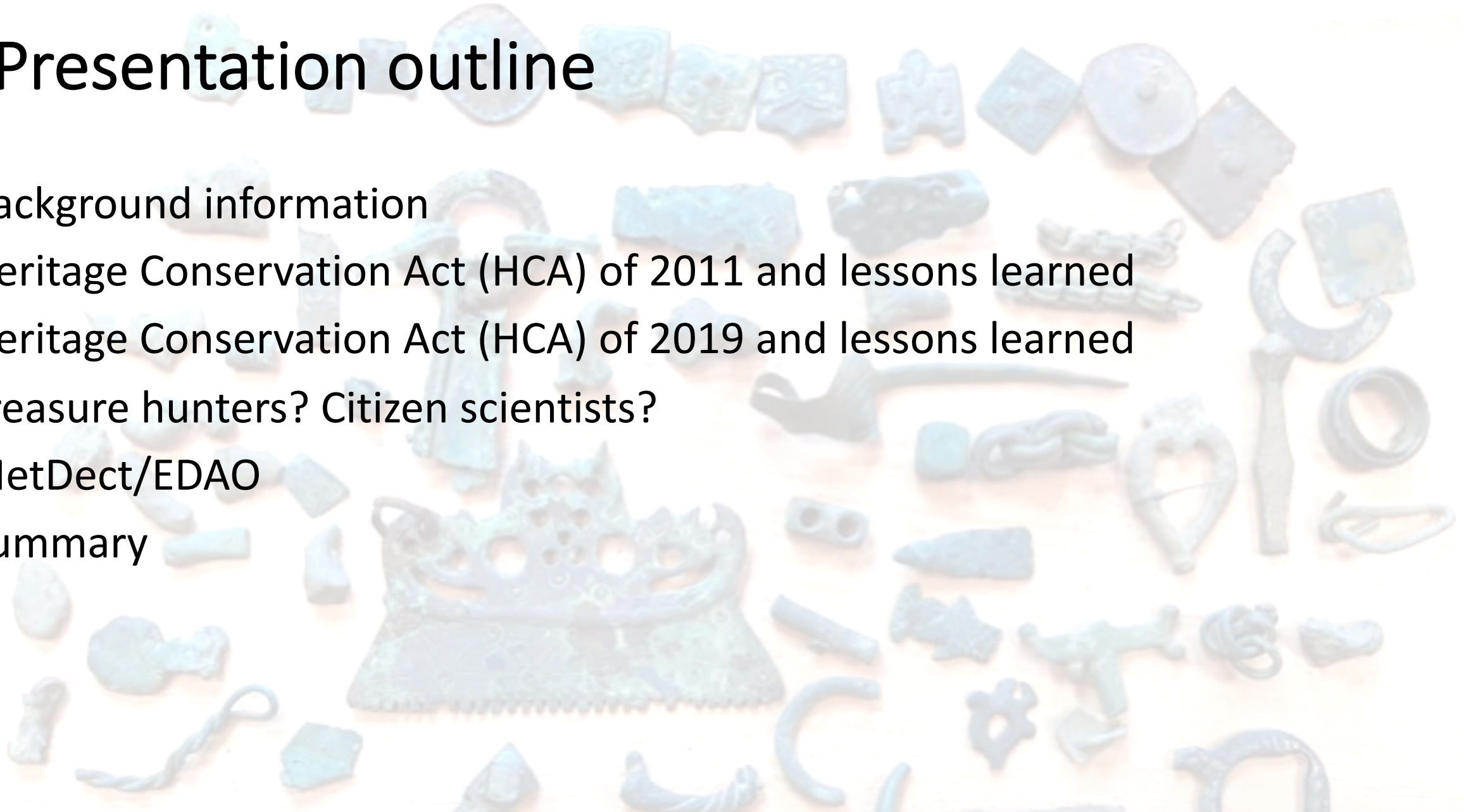
Before regulations

- All archaeological finds belong to the state since the HCA of 1925
- Metal-detecting as a hobby since the late 1980s
- Trust-based system
- Throughout the 1990s and 2000s only a few artefacts and/or find spots were reported annually
- Signs of illegal search activities
- Coin rich Estonia (Viking Age coins!)

➢ Loss of information
➢ Concern about heritage protection
➢ A need for a regulation

The HCA of 2011 and lessons learned

The use of metal-detectors is regulated since 2011:

- Training, search permits (valid one year), annual search reports
- The use of metal-detectors is forbidden on the monuments and in the buffer zones of monuments
- System started to work well, but…

Lessons learned:

➢Unclear wording = easy to dispute the law

➢Several types of devices (metal-detectors, magnets, sonars etc.)

➢Annual search reports lack the detail

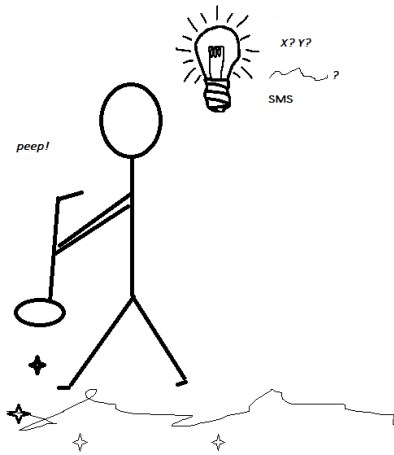➢Loss of information (no overview of search activities)

The HCA of 2019

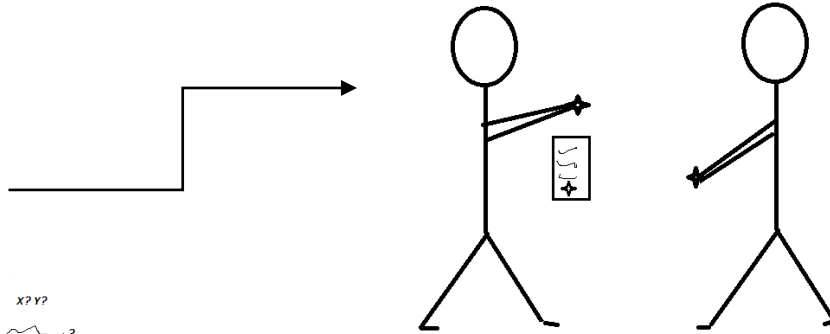Similar content, but more detailed descriptions of rights and responsibilities:

- The search permit is needed when using metal-detector, magnet, or sonar (i.e. searching devices) outside of a densely populated area regardless of the intention

- Better wording (e.g. artefact with cultural value = archaeological find)

- Notification system (obligation to notify the NHB prior the search activity)

- Shorter deadline for reports (one month) and longer validity of the licences (five years)
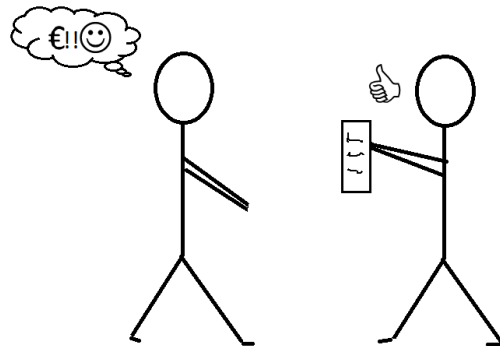
Estonian system in a nutshell

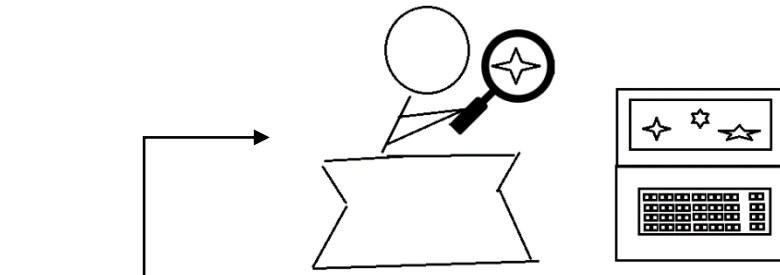Thinks of a place, notifies the authorities, including the land owner

An archaeologist determines the artefacts and studies the find spot, submits an expert opnion

Hobbyist hands over the finds and search report to the NHB

Metal-detecting enthusiast discovers finds. Notifies the NHB, stops digging, describes* the find spots

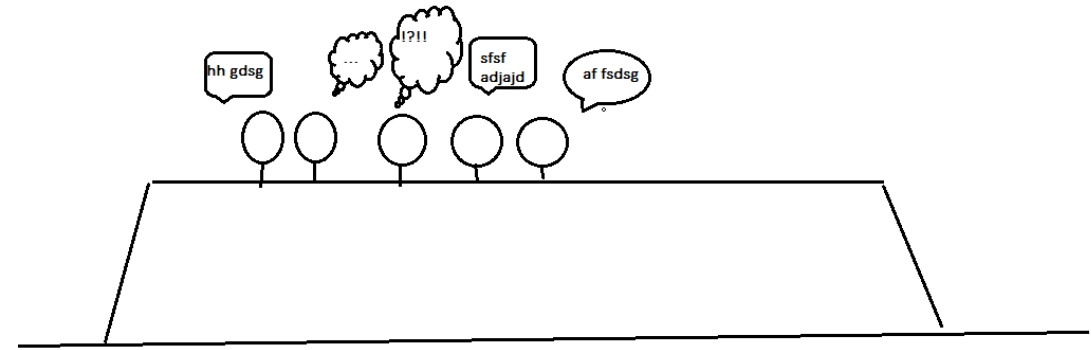The committee of experts looks through the expert opinions, makes decisions

The NHB gives feedback to the hobbyist and rewards the finder if applicable

Lessons learned:

➢ Completely overburdened system, more archaeologists needed

➢ (massively) Delayed feedbacks and rewards

➢ Unreasonably difficult to protect new archaeological sites in Estonia → hundreds, if not thousands archaeological sites unprotected → these issues are amplified because of the large number of hobbyists (e.g. rediscovering these sites etc.)

➢ Digital Dark Age at the NHB when it comes to the public finds
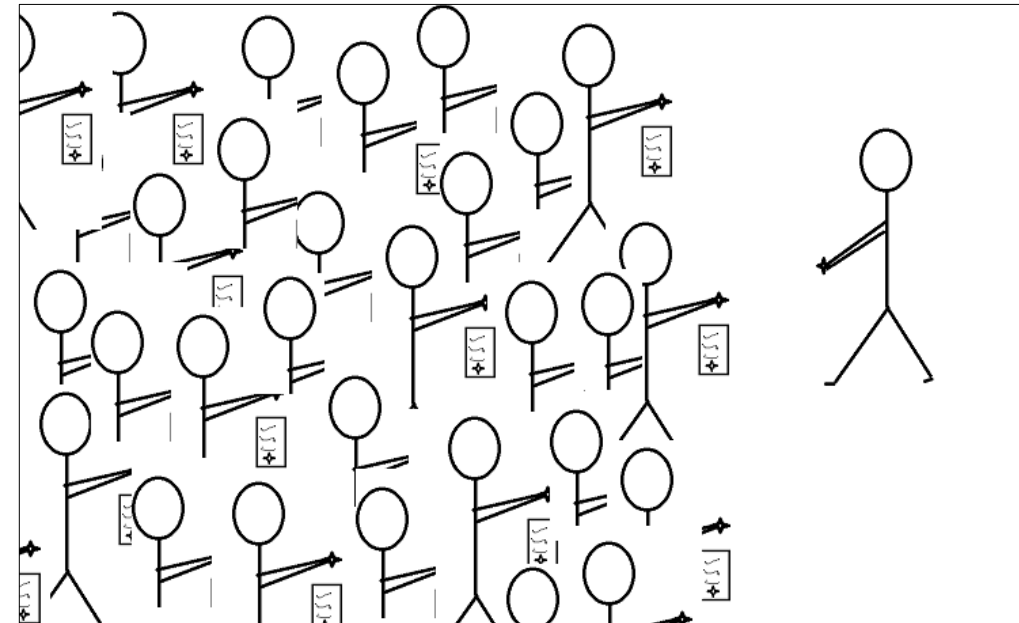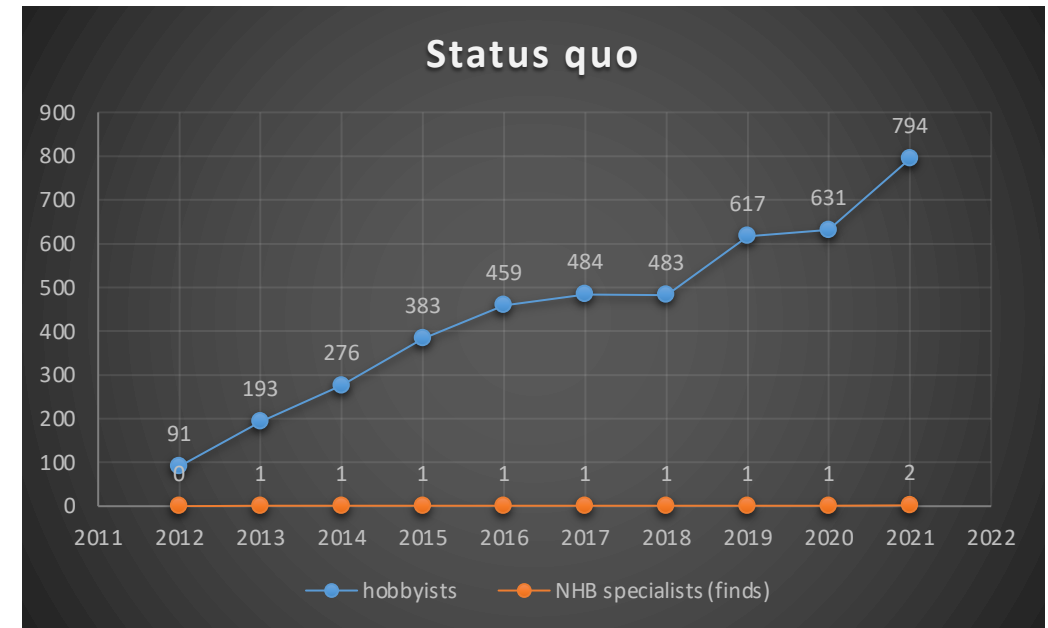
From treasure hunters to citizen scientists


treasure hunters

untapped potential

citizen scientists

Additional push: MetDect/EDAO

Metal-detected past: a study of long-term developments in settlement patterns, technology and visual culture on the example of metal-detector finds from Estonia (acronym MetDect)

- To demonstrate that vast number of metal-detector finds is crucial for understanding how changes in the archaeological record translate into changes in society

- MetDect database (more than 40 000 entries)
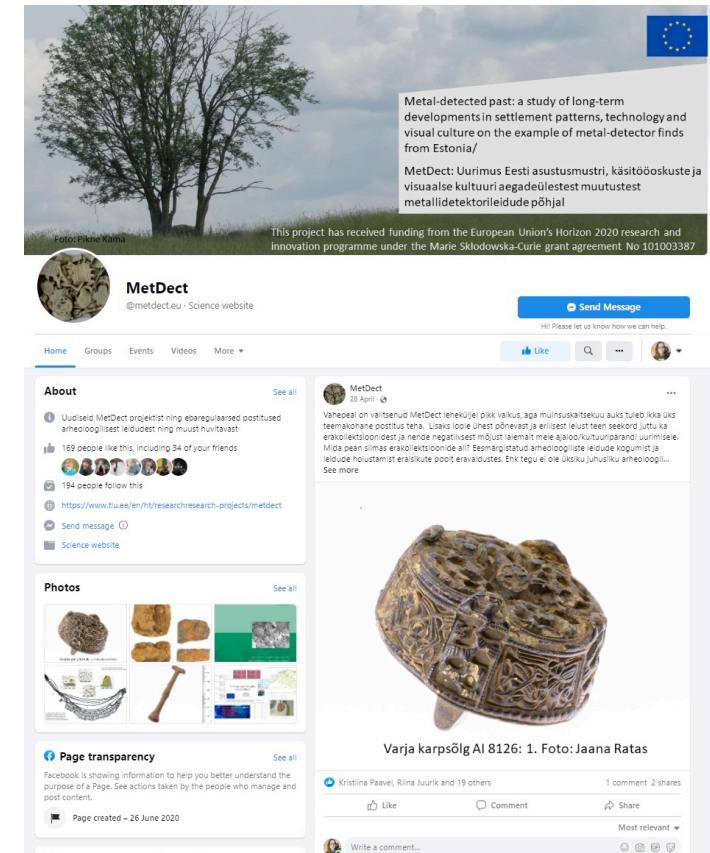
MetDect Facebook page: educational stories about metal-detector finds

Additional push: MetDect/EDAO

Atlas of the Estonian metal-detector finds and mapping the ontologies of metal-detector finds (acronym EDAO)

- To create an atlas of the metal-detector finds

- To make the MetDect dataset more accessible and interoperable by mapping the ontologies of metal-detector finds to the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model standard
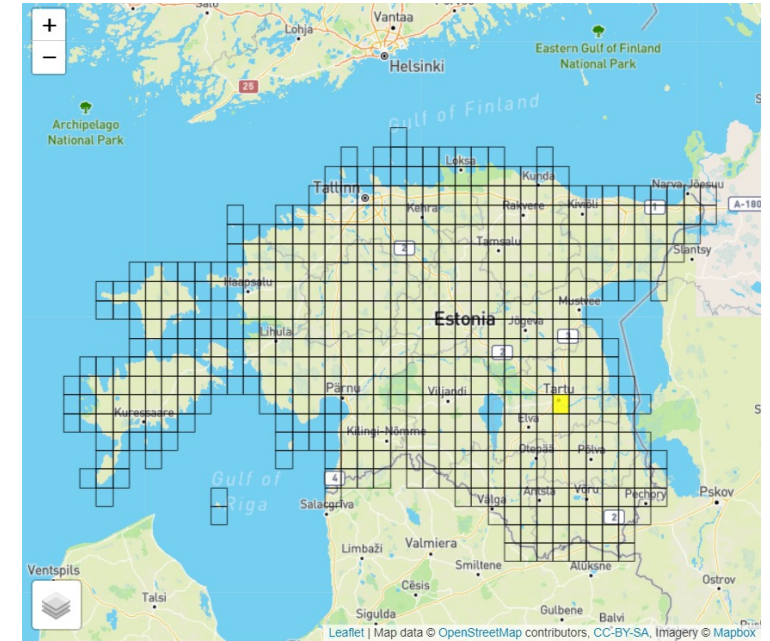
Summary

- Trust-based system = too good to be true

- Estonia system seems like a good solution (training, reporting, rewards, feedback), difficult one to implement in practice (more resources needed)

- A lot of untapped potential (how to engage them in a best possible way?)

- More emphasis on public outreach, popularising archaeology and archaeological heritage
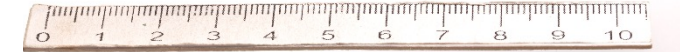
A socketed axe from Puhkova dating from the Late Bronze Age (1100–500 BC). It belongs to the Akozino-Mälar type of socketed axes and this is only the fourth specimen found in Estonia. Photo: K. Paavel

A hoard of Swedish copper coins from Vaidavere, tpq 1654 (11 104 coins). Photo: K. Vimberg

The oldest metal object (copper adze) recorded in Estonia with a 4000–2000 BC date and is also an exceptional find in North-Eastern Europe. Photo: J. Ratas

Early Viking Age box brooch of Gotlandic origin. Photo: J. Ratas

Thank your for you attention!