

## **Contribution to the spiritually history of Estonia**

### **Upa prophet stone**

#### **Õilme Salumäe**

The prophet stone as a natural boulder is not only a token of natural but also of cultural value. The stone has a perimeter of 11 m, height of 2.2 m and width of 2.3 m. According to folktales about the Saaremaa epic hero Suur Tõll (Great Tõll), his wife Piret has been said to carry the boulder here in her apron. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the meetings to spread the Word of God, carried by the Herrnhut movement, took place at this stone. These meetings became an essential milestone not only in the development of the local protestant church but also of the beginning phase of the development of the Estonian nation.

The protestant awakening movement, known as the Unity of Brethren or Herrnhuter reached the ancient-Livonia in 1740s. This movement, laying stress on a personal religious experience, was the first one to allow spreading the Word of God and message of prayer outside official sacral buildings and next to educated pastors it could also be done by ordinary religious devotees. The best known meeting place of the Unity of Brethren in Saaremaa became the Upa prophet stone, then standing in a bleak field, where Upa Jürgen who had a fame of a local prophet and his wife Triinu shared their religious experience. On Sundays, together with local peasants also Germans from nearby mansions and from Kuressaare gathered for prayer meetings and also Eberhard Gutsleff jr (1690-1749), the pastor of St.Lawrence parish in Kuressaare and superintendent of Saaremaa, preached here.

Although the first wave of the Herrnhut movement got a drawback already in 1747 when Eberhard Gutsleff got arrested and sent to prison in St.Petersburg (where he died as a martyr) as the governmental authorities feared riots, the movement of the Unity of Brethren survived and influenced at a high scale both secular and clerical life during the coming centuries. Taking the Bible, the first Estonian edition of which was published in 1739 with the support of the Unity of Brethren, as well as reading and writing skills into the people has to be considered the favour of the Unity of Brethren. They also laid by giving the common people a possibility for self-expression, basis to the still strong traditions of choral singing and brass bands, preparing thus the later development of national self-assertion and awakening movement.

Upa prophet stone became a symbolic starting-point in the history of Saaremaa Christian Free and Baptist congregations in 1897 when three believers Peet Sauer, Juhan Põitel and Juhan Kahu who had come from Hiiumaa to Saaremaa to bring over religious belief, stopped on their way to Kuressaare for a prayer at this stone. As a result of that missionary trip, Kuressaare Zion congregation was established.

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German version [here](#)

Estonian version [here](#)

Pictures [here](#)

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