

# Leg rings in archaeological material from Latvia

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In Latvia's Early Iron Age archaeological material there is one unusual category of ornaments – leg rings. Leg rings have been found in tarand graves already since 70'ties of 19<sup>th</sup> century's, but because of specific burial traditions, where artifacts are mixed together with cremated bones and are located between piled stones and soil, these artifacts were incorrectly interpreted as bracelets. First time leg rings *in situ* (it is – on legs above the ankles) were found in 1930, when Rauls Šnore excavated barrow No 24 in the cemetery of barrows and tarands in Makašānu Salenieki (Fig. 1). They are produced from thick bronze tin. Diameters of leg rings are 87–91.5 × 74–90 mm, widths of ring are from 18–20.5 mm (Fig. 4: 3–8).

First publications about this discovery in Salenieki were in Estonian Scientific Association's (Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft) collected articles in 1935 (Šnore, 1935) and journal "Senatne un Māksla" (Antiquity and Art) in 1936 (Šnore, 1936). Also Harri Moora in his famous research "Die Eisenzeit in Lettland bis etwa 500 n. Chr." for sub-chapter about hollow bracelets has given title "Die hohlwandigen Arm- und Beinringe" which says that he has written here about both bracelets, and leg rings (Moora, 1938, S. 408–418). In this research as the only certainly identified leg ring he mentioned find from the barrow No 24 in Salenieki, but for all other finds he used term "hohlwandige Ringe" or "Ringe". In the book "Latvijas PSR arheoloģija" (Archaeology of Latvia's SSR) in the chapter about Early (Roman) Iron Age written by Janis Graudonis (Latvijas, 1974, 119.–120. lpp.) there is expressed opinion that hollow bracelets have been used also as a leg rings. So in Latvian archeology the division in bracelets and leg rings hasn't been established. Also Estonian colleagues have similar opinion. For example, in Silvia Laula's monograph about formation of Iron Age cultures in South-Eastern Estonia, one leg ring from IV(forth) tarand in tarand burial field Virunukas she mentioned as bracelet and dated it with

3<sup>rd</sup> (third) century (Laul, 2001, p. 147–148, Fig. 58:1). In the opinion of Jānis Ciglis, this dating is too late.

Dating of hollow leg rings in literature is quite vague. R. Šnore the barrow cemetery in Salenieki dated very widely – from Early Iron Age to beginning of Middle Iron Age, conceding that beginning could be even in Pre-Roman Iron Age. He doesn't give particular dating to artifacts from barrow No 24 (Šnore, 1936, 43–44. lpp.). The most precise dating for leg rings and first type of hollow bracelets is given by H. Moora. He dated them with 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century. However J. Graudonis dated them with 2<sup>nd</sup> century and around the year of 200.

Because of all these above mentioned indeterminations, it follows that there is necessary to look again at the leg rings in archaeological material of Latvia, trying to separate leg rings from hollow tin bracelets and trying to precise the dating.

In Latvian archaeological material there are about 25 leg rings known from ten places. It's hard to say exact count of finds, because in some sites they were fragmentary. In this count there are also included five rings which perhaps could be used as the bracelets, found in modern cemetery of Baltinava, tarand of Vīksnas kapusils and tarand II of Raunas Kaugars (Fig. 2.).

First type of hollow bracelets, divided by H. Moora (Moora, 1938, S. 408–414) contains leg rings and bracelets from thick bronze tin. Thickness of tin is around 0.5 mm. They have overlapping ends and closing of ends is a little bit rounded, exception is a finding from Viļaka. Second, later type of bracelets (Moora, 1938, S. 414–416) is from thicker tin and ends are not overlapping anymore, also they are narrower as in first type.

Still – the only one certainly identified leg ring is from the grave A in the barrow No 24 of Salenieki, where, according to the R. Šnore, a woman was buried. In the report of excavations there is quite general overview of the barrow. I'm quoting:

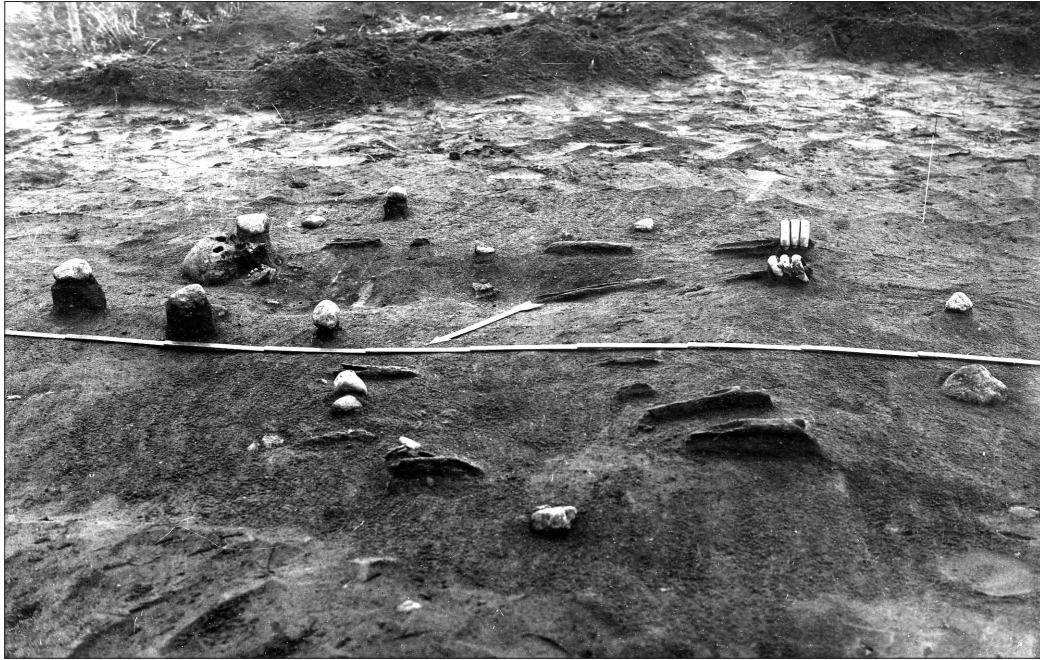


Fig. 1. Burial with leg rings “in situ” from the cemetery at Makašānu Salenieki (Barrow No 24, grave A).

*1 pav. Palaidojimas su apykojais in situ, Makašānu Salenieki (pilkapis Nr. 24, kapas A)*

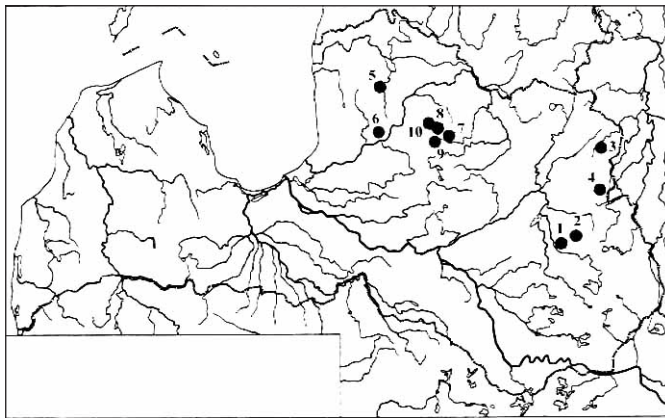


Fig. 2. Distribution of leg rings in Latvia: 1 – Aizezeri, 2 – Salenieki, 3 – Viļaka, 4 – Baltinava, 5 – Saulieši, 6 – Auciena Dumpji, 7 – Vīksnas kapusils, 8 – Kaugars I; II, 9 – Mūšiņa, 10 – Strante.

*2 pav. Apykoju paplitimas Latvijoje: 1. Aizezer; 2. Salenieki, 3. Viļaka, 4. Baltinava, 5. Sulieši, 6. Auciena Dumpji, 7. Vīksnas kapusils, 8. Kaugars I, II, 9. Mūšiņa, 10. Strante*

“Barrow No 24 has converged together with a barrow No 23, which is located to North-West from it. Height of the barrow is 0.95 m, diameter – 9 m. The shape of barrow is almost circular. There are two deep and wide pits in the center of barrow and one in the North-Eastern side. Barrow has been covered with bent-grass and bushes and also there were some stump on it. Inside the barrow there is only 1 big stone in the North-Eastern side, in the rest of the barrow there are a lot of small and medium size stones, especially deeper (in upper layers they are not at all). If they have

some significant meaning, it is not definable, but apparently they do not. Maybe it’s sub-soil?” In the middle of barrow there were six graves (Fig. 3). Grave A is in the depth of 80 cm and orientated from North-East to South-West, where head is in the North-East. On the legs (above the ankles) were six hollow leg rings (three on each leg). Above those leg rings were preserved birch bark. So – either all body of the dead was covered with birch bark or just the legs.

Grave B was in the depth of 70 cm and orientated from North-East to South-West, where head is in the

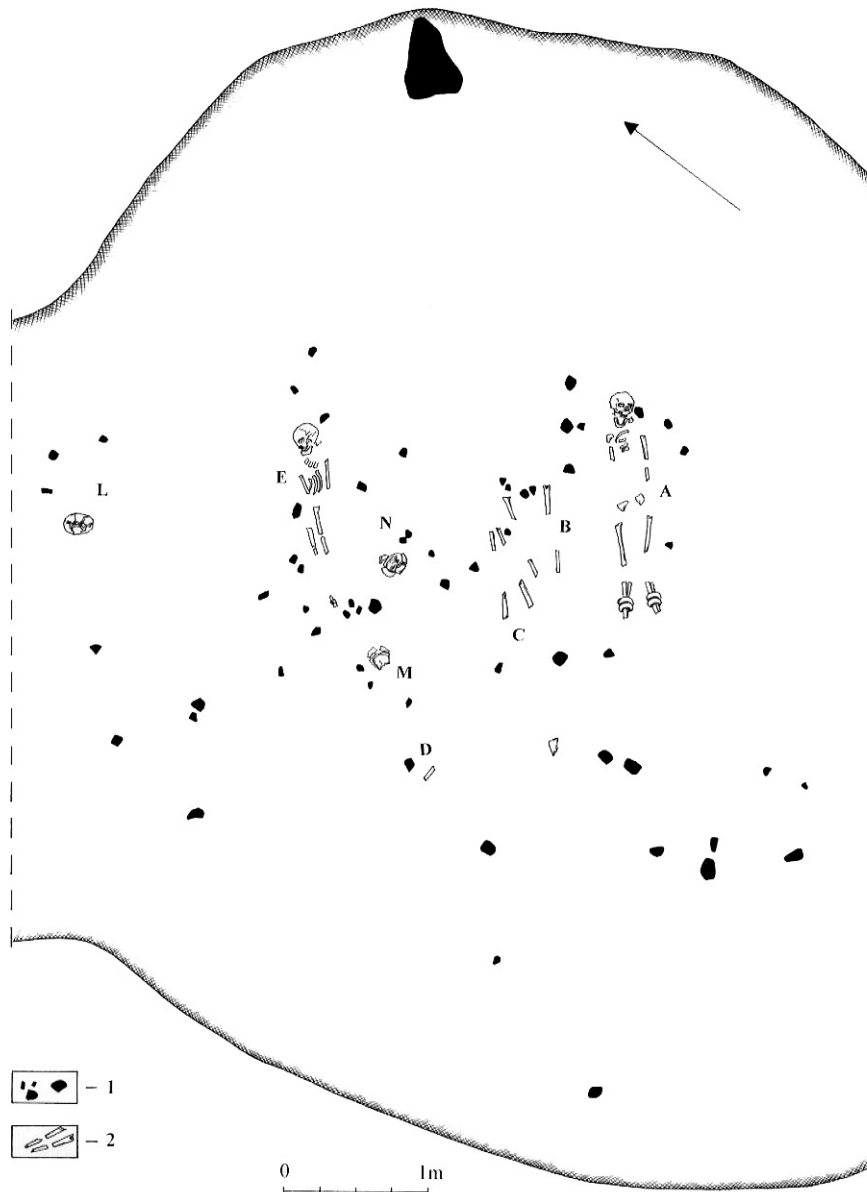


Fig. 3. Plan of the barrow 24 at Makašānu Salenieki: 1 – stones; 2 – skeleton's bones  
 3 pav. Pilkapio Nr. 24 planas, Makašānu Salenieki: 1 – akmeņu vainikas; 2 – griaučū  
 kaulai

West. Grave C is in the depth of 65 cm and orientated from South-West to North-East, where head is to South-West. From Grave M only compressed skull was left in the depth of 75 cm. Similar situation was seen in the grave N, just depth of it was 85 cm. Grave E was in the depth of 95 cm, but it also was not in a good condition, it seems orientated from North-East to South-West, where head is in the North-East. There were found bronze finger ring on a finger bone (Fig. 4:2), which probably be-

longs to this grave E. One more skull was found in one side of the barrow in the depth of 92 cm.

Based on these facts, we can make a conclusion that in this barrow there were six or seven inhumation graves. Grave goods are only in two graves. Excluding leg rings in grave A, there were found also two fingerings – one made from bronze bent round wire (found in the territory of barrow No 23 according to the report plan), other made from bronze bent little



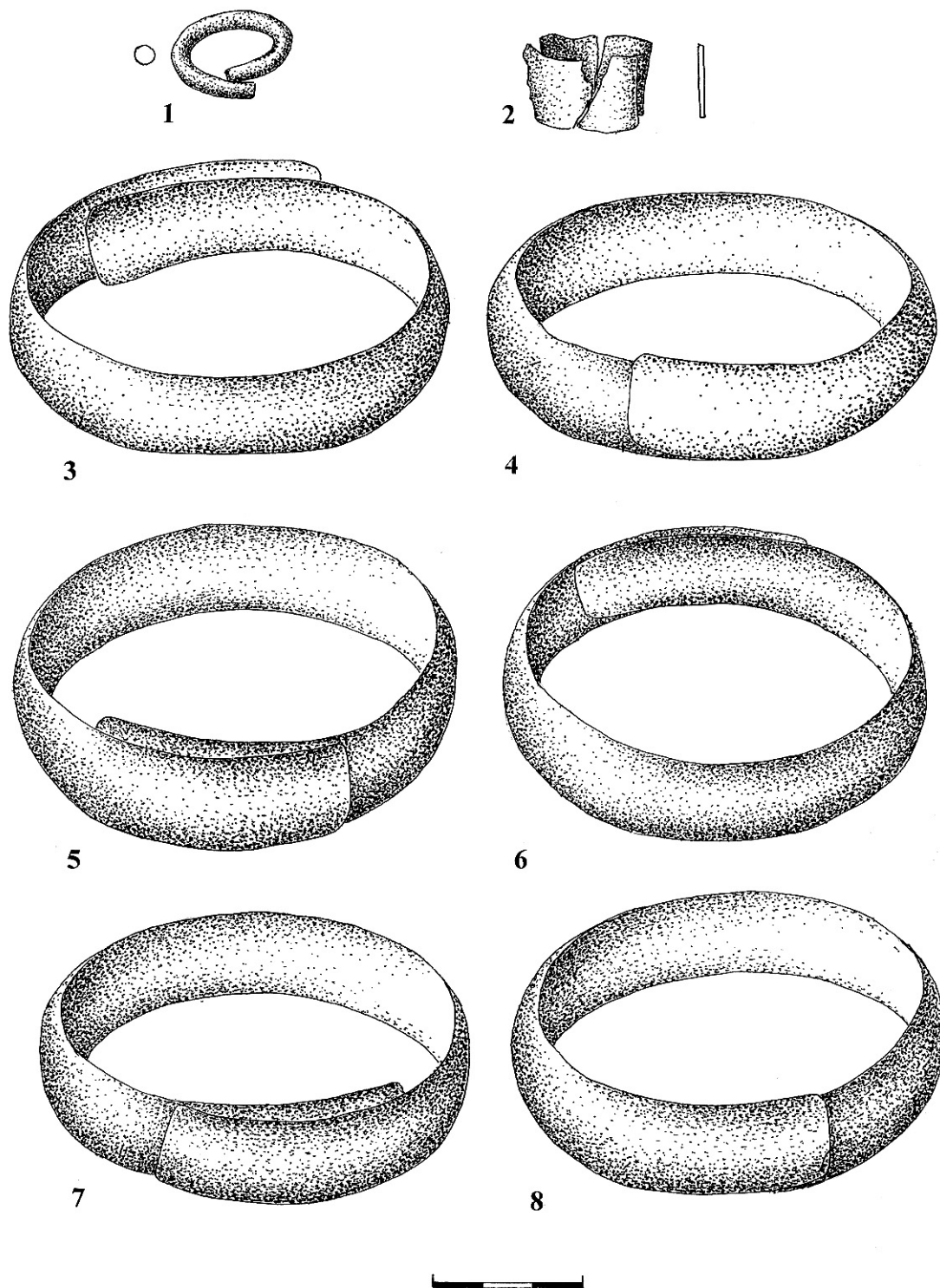


Fig. 4. Finger rings (A 10886; A 10885) and leg rings from the barrows No 23 and No 24 from the cemetery at Makašānu Salenieki (A 10884:1–6).

4 pav. Žiedai (A 10886, A 10885) ir apykojai, rasti pilkapyje Nr. 23 ir Nr. 24, Makašānu Salenieki (A 10884:1–6)

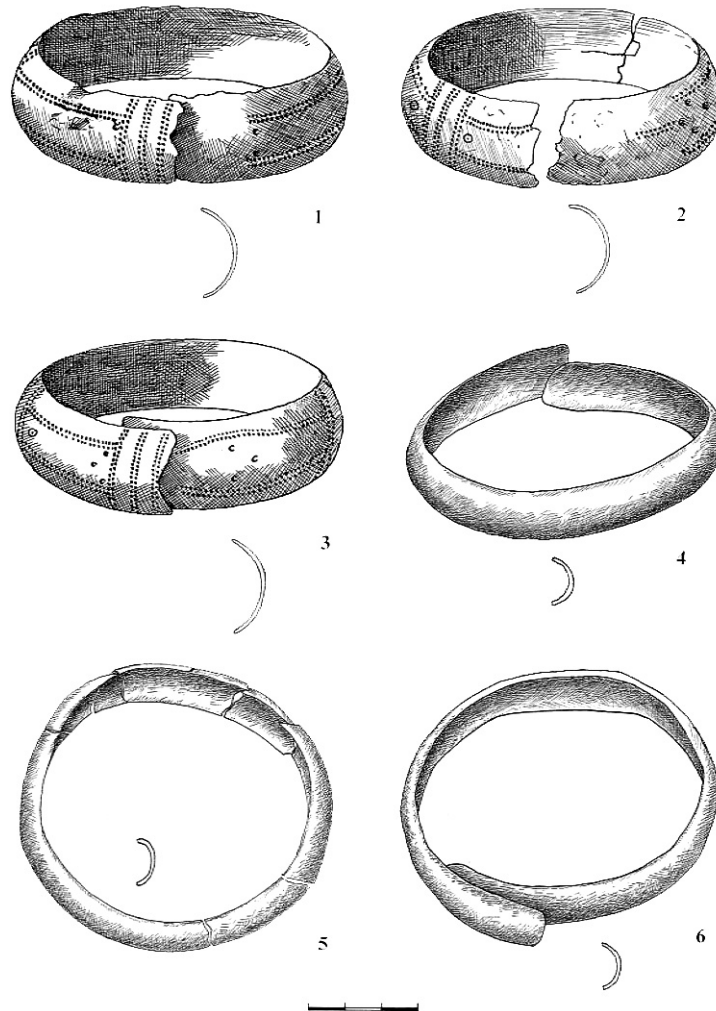


Fig. 5. Leg rings from the cemetery at Sakstagala Aizezeri (1–3) (A 2618–2620) and bracelets (?) from the barrow No 16 from the cemetery at Makašānu Salenieki (4–6) (A 18878:1–3).

5 pav. Apykojai iš Sakstagala Aizezeri kapinyno (1–3) (A 2618–2620) ir apyrankės (?), pilkapis Nr. 16 Makašānu Salenieki (4–6) (A 18878:1–3)

plate (Fig 4:1–2). These artifacts makes dating of the grave more difficult.

In grave A of the barrow No 16 from Salenieki cemetery there were found three bracelets (?) which are similar to those above mentioned finds found in the grave A from the barrow No 24 (Fig. 5:4–6). This grave was greatly damaged by digging in the barrow a dead cow. At the beginning the supervisor of excavations had doubts if they really are bracelets. It's very well seen in the report. At the beginning in the report he has written that in the bracelets there were found very putrid remains of leg bones, later it was crossed out and rewrite as remains of arm bones with bronze

tin bracelet on one of it. Other two bracelets were found without bones, and one of the bracelets was broken with spade during excavations. Their diameter is approximately the same as those rings which were found in the barrow No 24, only they are narrower. Widths of bracelets (?) are from 13–14.5 mm unlike leg rings which have width 18–20.5 mm. R. Šnore in his publications finds in grave A of the barrow No 16 called as bracelets. Anymore it's not possible to check what R. Šnore has ascertained, and we have to assume that these grave goods in grave A from the barrow No 24 are bracelets, even though size is the same as for leg rings.

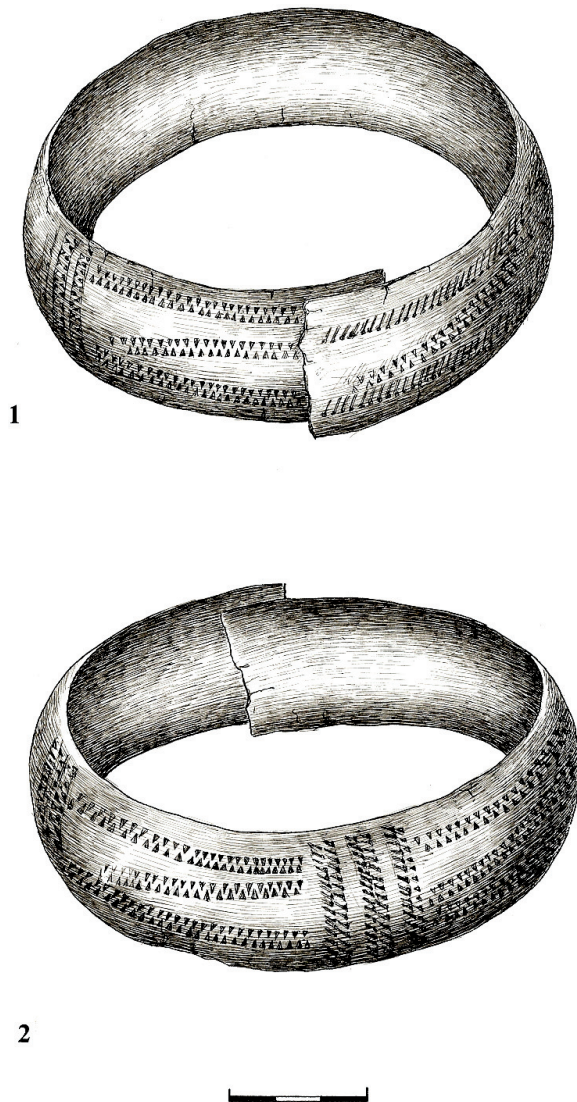


Fig. 6. Leg rings from the cemetery at Viļaka (A 10148:1–2).  
6 pav. Apykojai, Viļaka (A 10148:1–2)

In the one side of barrow there was discovered one more grave – grave B, where from the grave goods were only two little tubes made of bronze tin. Barrows No 20–22 are converged together and here in grave F were found fragments of broken bracelet on arm bones. Comparing the size of rings, this is smaller than all certainly identified leg rings and that is clear proof to identify it as a bracelet. Width of ring is around 15 mm.

Examples from barrow burial field Salenieki indicate that it is problematical to separate leg rings from bracelets. The main criterion is diameter of hollow rings. Supposedly, as leg ring diameter we have to accept similar or bigger size as it is for rings from barrow No 24 of burial field Salenieki, and size for those

leg rings are – lengths are 87–91.5 mm, widths are 74–90 mm, widths of the ring are from 18–20.5 mm.

Leg rings from territory of Viļaka conform the best with before mentioned criterion. (Radiņš, 2012, 78. lpp., Fig. 142.) Their diameter is around 11–12 cm × 10.5 cm, width of ring – 3.3 and 3.4 cm. Both leg rings are decorated (Fig. 6). Circumstances of the finding are not clear. They are found in the garden of district forester B. Jozuus and mentioned as leg rings in press. (Skats, 1940). Place where leg rings were found is close to Lutheran church. Supposedly this is the same place where the artifacts dated with 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century are found, which are in Warsaw, Krakow and Torun (Bitner-Wróblewska, Ciglis, Radiņš, 2005). In Viļaka there should be the barrow or flat burial field from 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century.

Three leg rings have been found in Sakstagala Aizezeri burial field (Fig. 5:1–3). Diameters of leg rings are around 10 cm and widths – 2.6 cm. They were discovered in a mound where later were established cemetery of Late Iron Age. In Latvian archaeological literature has spread out an opinion that there is a burial field with tarands, but in documentation of 1932 trial excavations there is said nothing about piled stones, and that leads to make a conclusion that it is not a tarand cemetery. Most feasibly there could be barrows similar to those in Salenieki, which later had been destroyed. The other possibility is that there could be flat cemetery with inhumation burials. Later in this place has been found tutulus (Moora, 1838 b, Fig. 6) and bracelet with oval ring and thickened ends. (Moora, 1938 a, Fig. 59:2).

Right now there is no material which would allow dating leg rings in North-Eastern Latvian barrow burial fields with later period than the end of phase B2 (Ciglis, 2007, 23.–38. lpp.). In Salenieki cemetery barrow No 32 is overlapped by tarand No 34. In the tarands of Salenieki there is artifacts already from the phase B2, it means that barrows are bit earlier. In Salenieki there are discovered three tarands and all of them are archaeologically researched. There is any leg ring found between few hundreds of artifacts from these tarands. There is only one hollow bracelet, but comparatively it is from thick tin and belongs to H. Moora's distributed second type, which is bit later. Example from Salenieki allows to make conclusion that during phase C1 H. Moora's first type of bracelets and leg rings already



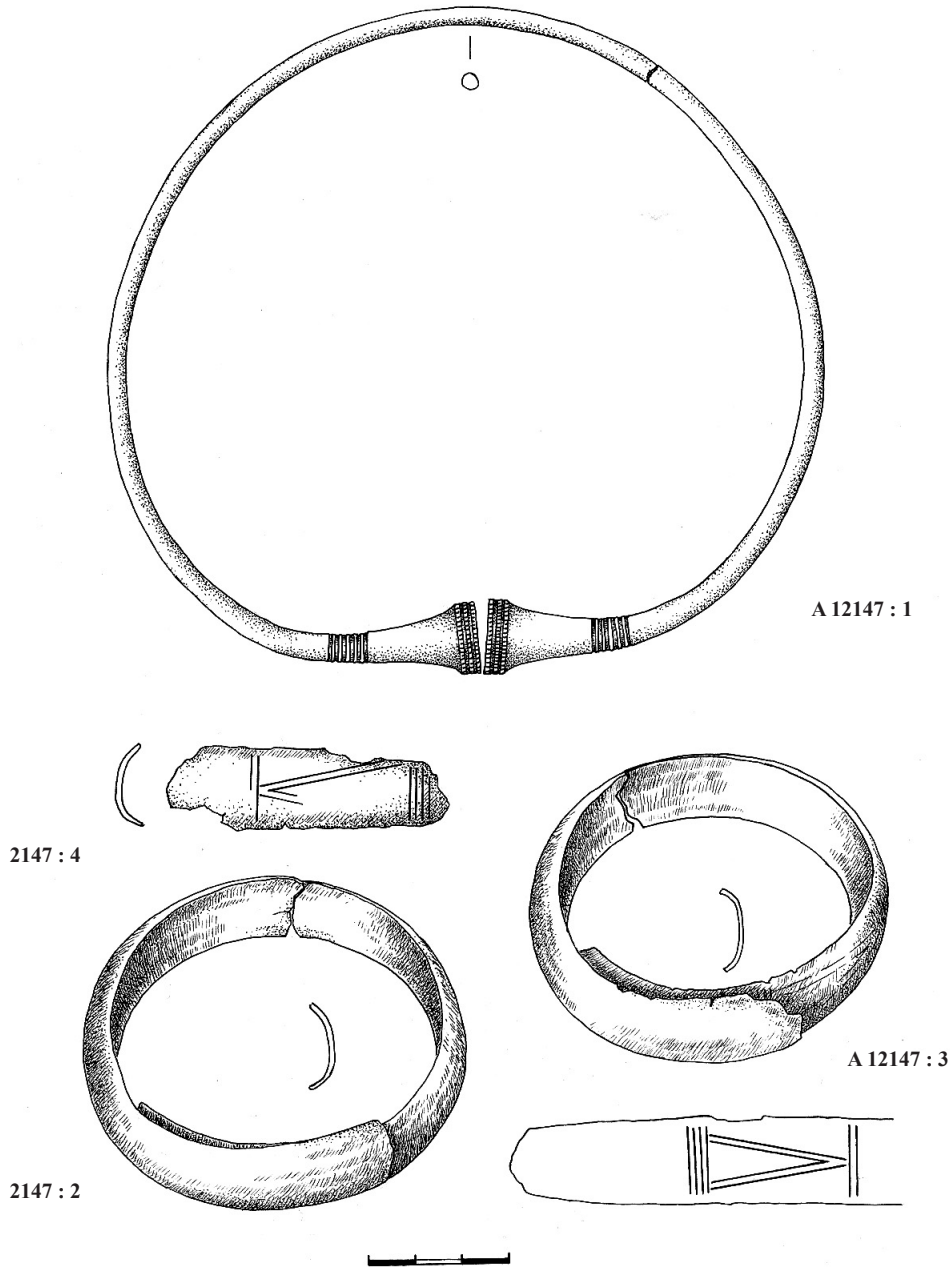


Fig 7. Artifacts from the cemetery at Baltinava (A 12147:1–4).

7 pav. Radiniai, Baltinava (A 12147:1–4)

was out of use. Approximately to the beginning of using these bracelets are attributed a material from tarand of Laidzes Lazdiņi (Шноре, 1970). But it is located on Western side of Latvia. Between more than hundred artifacts there is no one which could be dated with the phase B2, later artifacts are from the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. There isn't known any leg ring or hollow bracelet yet. So – leg rings in Latvian archaeological material is dated with phase B2 or even a bit earlier –

with the end of phase B1, it is 1<sup>st</sup> century's second half – 2<sup>nd</sup> century's first half. This dating is confirmed with find of leg rings or bracelets similar to leg rings from cemetery of Baltinava. Bracelets together with neckring with trumpet-shaped ends in Baltinava have been found in 70'ties of 20<sup>th</sup> century when excavating a grave (Fig. 7).

Leg rings have been found not only in the barrows of North-Eastern part of Latvia, but also in tarand bur-

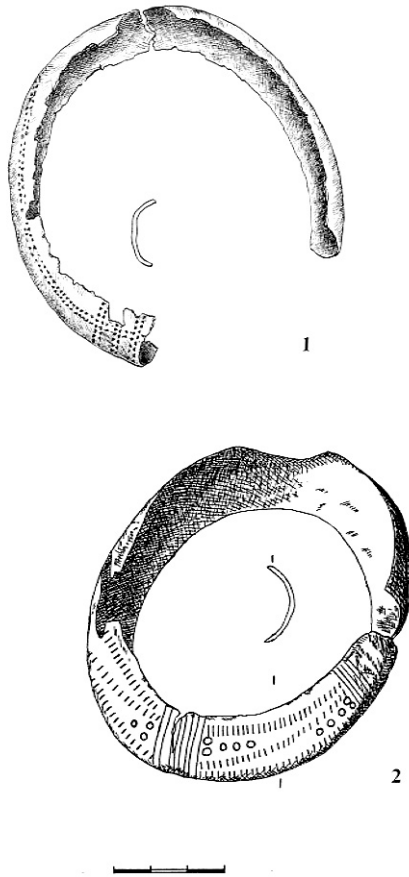


Fig. 8. Leg rings from the cemeteries at Jaunbuertnieku Saulieši (1) (A 3590) and from the tarand I at Raunas Kaugars (2) (AI 1236:1).

8 pav. Apykojai iš Jaunbuertnieku Saulieši (1) (A 3590) ir tarand I tipo Raunas Kaugars (2) (AI 1236:1) kapinynu

ial fields of Baltic Finns. These finds mostly are only fragments. Complete leg rings has been found only in tarand No I of Raunas Kaugars (Archaeology Centre at University of Tartu AI 1236:1) (Fig. 8:2), Jaunbuertnieku Saulieši cemetery (Fig. 8:1) and in the tarand Raunas Mūsiņas (Moora, 1929, Taf. XXIII:7), but fragments are known from Auciema Dumpji, Raunas Strante, tarand I and II of Raunas Kaugars. Almost all of them by their size are similar to finds from Salenieki burial field. However, motive and character of ornament are very similar to leg rings from Viļaka and Sakstagala Aizezeri.

From tarand burial fields also are given the widest leg ring known up to now. It comes from the tarand Raunas Mūsiņas and the width of it was around 4.2 cm (Moora, 1929, Taf. XXIII:8). Widths of complete leg rings from Kaugara and Mūsiņas burial fields are around 2 cm, similar size to those known from Salenieki. Leg rings from Jaunbuertnieku Saulieši are a bit narrower (Fig. 8:1). Their width of ring is around 1.8 cm. But finds from Vīksnas Kapusils are even more narrow. Their width of ring is around 1.4 cm. Most probably these finds are leg rings, however possibility that they have been used as bracelets can't be excluded.

Almost in all tarand burial fields where the leg rings are found, there are also other artifacts dated with phase B2. Exception is Raunas Mūsiņas where other artifacts are later. Same also in all other burial fields there are artifacts dated with later period than phase B2. But there is also an exception – Auciema Dumpji where all artifacts – neckring with trumpet-shaped ends, fragment of hollow neckring with hollow trumpet-shaped terminals, ribbon-like bracelet, Knob-ended bracelets and eye fibulas fully correspond to the chronological framework of phase B2. This doesn't speak against conclusions, that in material of North-Eastern part of Latvia leg rings are dated with phase B2. So – leg rings and hollow bracelets beside eye-fibula and neckrings with trumpet-shaped ends are one of the earliest categories of finds in these burial fields.

An origin of leg rings isn't clear. Hollow rings from thick tin are well known in Late Bronze Age and Pre-Roman Iron Age in Eastern Prussia (Engel, 1935, Taf. 104:f; 105:h; 120:k). However, origin of leg rings found in the territory of Latvia is problematical to connect with material from Eastern Prussia. They have totally different shape and they also are separated by large chronological time period. Most probably it is a local form. Proof for that is hollow artifacts made from thick tin by local craftsmen already in Pre-Roman Iron Age. Good example for this is widespread of cup-shaped ornament in territory of Latvia and Estonia, where they were made locally.



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## APYKOJAI LATVIJOS ARCHEOLIGINĒJE MEDŽIAGOJE

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Santrauka

Tarp Latvijas ankstyvojo geležies amžiaus archeologinių radinių aptinkama viena neįprasta papuošalų kategorija – apykojai. Apykojų randama kai kuriuose *Baltijos finougrų tarand tipo* kapuose, bet tai dažniausiai tik fragmentai. Sveiki išlikę apykojai buvo rasti *tarand I* kape Kaugars and Mūsina kapinyuose Raunoje ir Saulieši kapinyne Jaunburtniekuose. O fragmentų – Auciema Dumpji, Viksnas kapusils Raunoje, Sulieši laidojimo paminkle Jaunburtniekuose ir *tarand II kape* Kaugars kapinyne Raunoje. Datavimą B2 periodu patvirtina radiniai pilkapiuose Šiaurės Rytų Latvijos laidojimo paminkluose, kurie jau nebeegzistuoja

B2 periode. Pavyzdžiui, alavinių kulkšnies apykojų ir rąkų apykojų buvo aptikta trijuose pilkapiuose, bet nė viena nebuvo aptikta *tarand tipo* akmenų kape Salenieki laidojimo paminkle, kur seniausieji radiniai gali būti datuoti B2 periodu. Pilkapiai yra senesni (ankstyvesni) ir gali būti datuojami B2 periodu todėl, kad vienu atveju kapo akmeninė konstrukcija yra virš pilkapio. Panašų datavimą patvirtina ir tai, kad kulkšnies apykojai akmenų konstrukcijos kapuose dekoruoti labai panašiais motyvais kaip ir apykojai Viļaka ir Aizezeri Sakstgaloje.

Iš anglų k. vertė Violeta Vasiliauskienė

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