

Ancient History of Latvia 10 500–1 800 BC

At the end of the Glacial Period, approximately 14 000–12 000 years ago, the territory of Latvia became free from the ice sheet. The first human settlers arrived in this tundra landscape in the Late Paleolithic (10 500–9 000 BC), 11 000–12 000 years ago, following the reindeer and keeping to the major river valleys and the shore of the Baltic Ice Lake [3]*. Their material culture reveals affinities with the Swiderian Culture of Central and Western Europe.

Natural conditions in the Mesolithic (9 000–5 400 BC) changed from cool and dry to warm and wet. People settled permanently on riverbanks and lakeshores, and subsisted from hunting, fishing and gathering wild plants. These people made weapons and tools from flint, antler, bone and wood [4,5]. They belonged to the Kunda Culture, which extended across a large area of the East Baltic.

The beginning of the Neolithic (5 400–1 800 BC) was marked by the introduction of pottery-making [7]. The Neolithic also witnessed the beginnings of animal husbandry and agriculture. In the Early Neolithic (5 400–4 100 BC), the Narva Culture developed locally on the bases of the Kunda Culture.

In the Middle Neolithic (4 100–2 900 BC), the representatives of the Pit-Comb Ware Culture arrived in the territory of Latvia from the north-east, regarded as the ancestors of the Finnic peoples [10–12]. In this period, amber was also extensively worked. In western Latvia there was the Sārņate Culture [9] while in the eastern Latvia – the Piestiņa Culture [13] that continued the tradition of the Narva Culture.

In the Late Neolithic (2 900–1 800 BC) representatives of the Corded Ware Culture, arrived in the area of present-day Latvia [14–16]. They practiced the techniques of polishing flint and drilling stone artefacts. It is believed that the representatives of the Corded Ware Culture were of Indo-European origin and that the roots of the Balts are closely related to the representatives of this culture.

In the Stone Age, the dead were buried in extended position in flat inhumation graves. In the Mesolithic in burials ochre was often used. Grave goods varied considerably in number, often being absent altogether.

* *The numbers in square brackets indicate the relevant showcases.*