

Ancient Peoples in the Territory of Latvia 1st –12th century AD

Specific burial practices and artefact forms serve to distinguish several different archaeological cultures, connected with the ancestors of the Couronians [64–65]*, Latgallians, Selonians and Semigallians [61], and Finnic groups [62,63]. In the Middle Iron Age (400–800 AD) and the first half of the Late Iron Age (800–1 000 AD), the archaeological cultures of the Early Iron Age underwent complicated processes of ethno-cultural change, developing into the Baltic peoples (Couronians, Semigallians, Latgallians and Selonians) and Finnic peoples (Livs, Estonians and Vends) that we know from written sources. In the second half of the Late Iron Age (1 000–1 200 AD) the distinctive culture of Latvia's indigenous peoples reached its highest point of development.

The dead were buried together with a wide range of grave goods. Specific peoples' territory of residence can be traced by characteristic burial traditions, various forms of ornaments, tools and weapons. The Couronians [66–70] lived along the Baltic littoral of western Latvia and western Lithuania. The Latgallians and Selonians [71–78] inhabited eastern Latvia, the Selonians lived along the left bank of the Daugava and in north-eastern Lithuania, while the Semigallians [79–82] lived in the basin of the River Lielupe, in southern Latvia and northern Lithuania. In the 10th and 11th century in the lower reaches of Daugava and Gauja developed and flourished the culture of the Livs. [83,84]. By the River Ālande, in the Couronian area, a Scandinavian colony existed for two centuries (650–800 AD) [85,86]. These colonists were Gotlanders and Svear from Sweden's Lake Melar area.

Well-preserved textiles from cemeteries permit reconstruction of Latgallian [76,78], Selonian [71] and Liv [83,84] garments and the whole dress. Latgallian men wore a shirt, trousers, jacket, belt, puttees and footwear, while the women had linen shirts, woollen skirts, woollen shawl, puttees and footwear. They wore crown-like headdresses. Couronian, Semigallian and Liv women, by contrast, wore long dresses fastened at the shoulders by pairs of dress-pins or brooches.

The woollen shawl was the most ornate item of female dress, decorated with geometric designs of bronze rings and edged with card-woven bands and tassels. From the late 12th century, bronze decoration began to be replaced by glass beads.

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