

Society in the Late Iron Age

1 000–1 200 AD

Written sources indicate that, by the late 12th century, the indigenous peoples had developed their own states, or at least the process of state-formation was nearing completion [92]*. Social structure was complex: at the top of the hierarchy were the rulers, subordinate to them were district and village elders. The majority of the population consisted of freemen, with thralls at the bottom of the social scale [93]. The upper stratum of society lived in castles [94].

The Scandinavian sagas tell of trading and military activities in the territory of Latvia. The peoples of Latvia too became involved in these activities, and the Couronians became notorious for raids across the Baltic Sea [95].

In the late 12th century, Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the lower Daugava area, accompanying German merchants [96]. In 1184, in Ikšķile they built the first church, but Christian preaching did not find any response. Then, forcible Christianisation began [97–99]. From 1201, Rīga became the main base for the Crusaders, and developed into the largest town in the Baltic region. In the course of the 13th century, the whole territory of Latvia was conquered, subjugating the indigenous peoples. Some of the Couronian, Semigallian and Selonian lands remained outside the limits of the Crusader conquests, and were later incorporated into the state of Lithuania.

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