

A newly discovered hoard of Bronze Age artefacts from western Latvia

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Abstract

The article discusses a hoard of Late Bronze Age artefacts recently discovered near the River Venta in western Latvia. This is only the seventh Bronze Age hoard from Latvia. The find consists of eight to nine whole and fragmentary bronze artefacts. This publication describes the circumstances of discovery and presents an analysis of the artefacts, their chronology and metal composition, seeking to place the hoard within the general context of Late Bronze Age Europe. The objects constituting the Liedikas hoard have been conserved and are held at Kuldīga District Museum.

Introduction

The Bronze Age in the territory of present-day Latvia (1800–500 cal BC) is the time when people became acquainted with bronze artefacts, and when they mastered and applied the skills of working this metal. But even though the period has this significant name, dominant among the archaeological finds from Latvia are objects of clay, stone, bone and antler. Bronze artefacts are rare and may be considered elite objects. Initially, such items were brought to Latvia from central Europe and Scandinavia, but in the course of time, local production of bronze artefacts began, using imported raw materials. Altogether, more than 300 bronze artefacts have been found in Latvia (54 of them dated to the Early Bronze Age (1800–1100 cal BC), and 249 to the Late Bronze Age (1100–500 cal BC)), with a relatively higher concentration of stray finds in western Latvia (Vasks 2024, pp. 60, 73–74) (Fig. 1). Until recently, only six Bronze Age hoards were known in Latvia. There are a further four to six hoards in Lithuania and one in Estonia (Vasks and Vijups 2004, p. 15; Luchtanas and Sidrys 1999, p. 42, 48; Čivilytė 2014, p. 97, 146, 158–159; Čivilytė and Mödlinger 2010, p. 146; Lang 2007, pp. 246–247).

Considering the rarity of Bronze Age hoards in the Baltic region, the staff of Kuldīga District Museum were most surprised when, in the spring of 2023, Lauris Klestrovš from the Padure area told them he wished to hand over to

the museum a hoard of Bronze Age artefacts discovered in the municipality of Kuldīga. Inspection of the original artefacts, which were brought to the museum the next day, resolved any doubts as to the age of the objects. In accordance with the laws of the Republic of Latvia, the set of artefacts, documented as a hoard, was added to the museum collection as a donation, and information about the find circumstances was recorded in the museum's archive and the archive of the National Heritage Board.

This is the first academic publication to examine the newly discovered Liedikas hoard. Researchers of the Early Metal period from Latvia and the neighbouring countries have discussed the previously discovered Bronze Age hoards from Latvia within the context of the period or in relation to particular sites (Šturms 1936, p. 143; Graudonis 1967, pp. 80–81, 94–97, 163; Graudonis 1989, pp. 41–42; Lang 2007, p. 248.; Vasks 2015, pp. 127–131; Vasks 2021b, p. 381). A comprehensive analysis of the Bronze and Iron Age hoards from Latvia is given by Vladislavs Urtāns in his 1977 monograph, in which he discusses the find circumstances, composition and significance of the hoards. An analysis of the exceptional 'scrap' hoard of bronze artefacts from Staldzene, discovered in 2001, is presented in a separate volume authored by archaeologists Andrejs Vasks and Armands Vijups (2004). An important aspect of research into ancient hoards is analysis of the metal composition of the artefacts, which provides insights into metalworking, contacts and trade routes, and helps to

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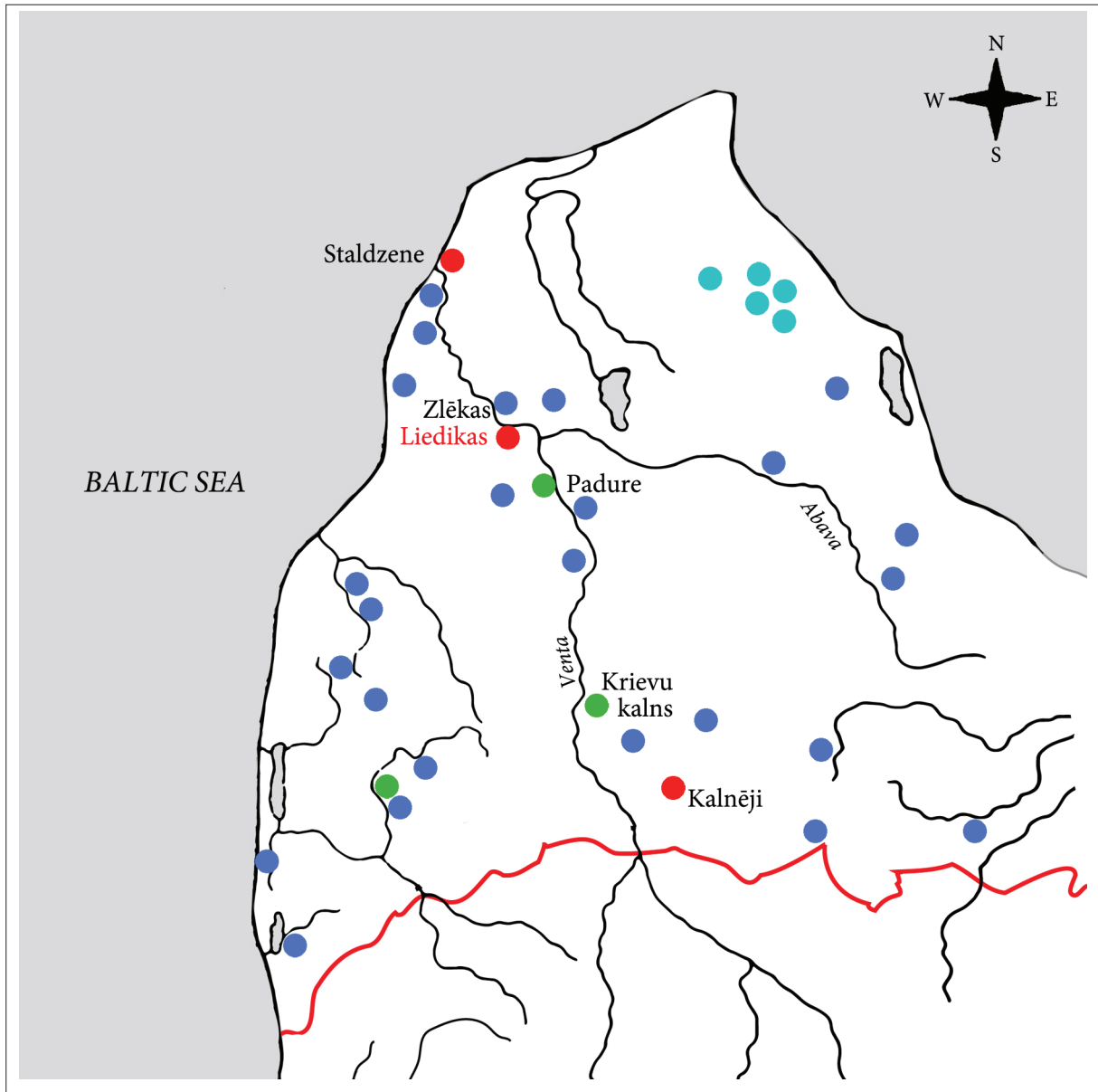


Figure 1. Evidence of the Late Bronze Age in western Latvia: hoards (red), archaeologically excavated hillforts (green), ship settings (light blue), stray finds of artefacts (dark blue) (after Vasks 2021a, p. 46, supplemented by the author).

resolve a range of other questions. Although analysis of the metal composition of bronze artefacts from Latvia had already commenced in the mid-19th century (Kruse 1842, p. F1–F10), there have been few scientific studies on this subject (Daiga 1962; Chernykh et al. 1969; Anteins 1988; Graudonis 1989, pp. 87–89). The most recent data on the composition of Bronze Age artefacts from hoards found in Latvia is given in the above-mentioned 2004 publication on the previous discovery of a Bronze Age hoard in western Latvia (Vasks and Vijups 2004, pp. 45–48).

Outside of Latvia, the characteristic European Bronze Age practice of concealing hoards has been discussed by many Bronze Age researchers in Denmark, Sweden, Britain, Germany, Poland and other countries, but these works focus on the Bronze Age centres in Scandinavia

and in central and southern Europe. Unfortunately, these publications do not consider the finds from peripheral areas, such as the Baltic states (Harding 2000; Jensen 1993; Jensen 1997; Kristiansen 1998; Sarauw 2015; Szczurek et al. 2025). It is hoped that the present article will serve to introduce the research community to this hoard, newly discovered on the bank of the Venta, so that it comes to be more widely considered when analysing developments in the Late Bronze Age.

1. The circumstances of discovery of the hoard

The group of Bronze Age artefacts was found on the left bank of the River Venta in Ēdole Parish, not far from the boundary with Padure Parish (approximate coordinates:

57.086088, 21.784018), at some distance from the currently known archaeological sites. The closest site, lying 1.8 km south of the find spot, is Tigve hillfort, which has not been archaeologically investigated. On the bank of the Venta about 7 km upstream is Paventas hillfort, likewise unexcavated, and 4 km downstream are the Iron Age, medieval and early modern archaeological sites around Zlēkas (Mugurēvičs 2000). The closest ancient sites where Bronze Age habitation has so far been established are Padure Beltes hillfort, 17 km upstream on the left bank of the River Venta, and a possible Bronze Age habitation site by the Zlēkas ferry, 4 km downstream (Vasks et al. 2011; Mugurēvičs 2000, p. 77).

The environs of the find spot are nowadays sparsely inhabited. The closest farm is Lielvirši in Padure Parish (ca. 1 km S–SSE of the find spot) and Liedikas in Ēdole Parish (ca. 1 km to SW). Since the distance to the closest farms is the same, the hoard that came to light in 2019 has been named the Ēdole Liedikas hoard, after the nearest farm in the same parish, a farm that appears on present-day maps and those of the interwar period.

The hoard from the bank of the Venta was, unfortunately, not found in the course of archaeological excavation, and in consequence, only the general circumstances of the discovery are known. According to the information given to the museum by Klestrov, who was present at the moment of the discovery, the hoard of bronze artefacts, consisting of eight to nine objects, was found in late March or early April 2019 by Padure resident Agris Spulģītis. He discovered the artefacts while prospecting in the area with a metal detector, searching for objects from the Second World War. The finder, having received the response on an internet portal that the objects were of no value, because such pieces occur on a mass scale in central Europe,

did not consider the items he had found worth giving to a museum and accordingly left them in his garage. The artefacts belonging to the hoard were brought to Kuldīga District Museum in spring 2023 by Padure resident Lauris Klestrov. Aware of the culture-historical significance of the finds, following the death of the finder, he assembled the items of the hoard once again, with the help of Mārtiņš Melbergs, and handed them over to the Kuldīga District Museum, along with the information he remembered.

According to the information given to the museum, these whole and fragmentary bronze artefacts had been found together at the edge of the steep left bank of the Venta, in the northern part of Kuldīga municipality. This is a very meandering stretch of the river. In the present day, there are several approximately 90 degree bends in the river close to the find location (Fig. 2). The objects belonging to the hoard were discovered on the steep slope of the left bank of the river, about 2 m below the top of the slope. Next to the find spot is a large, naturally formed ravine running perpendicular to the course of the Venta.

The objects were apparently found together (diameter of the location 50 cm) at a shallow depth, the largest items closer to the surface, and the smaller ones up to 60 cm deep. At the time of discovery, the objects were described as being covered with plant matter — possibly birch bark or aquatic plants. (Even after conservation treatment, there are preserved impressions on the objects.) When the group of finds came to light, the spot was surveyed by metal detector, but no further metal artefacts were found in the immediate vicinity. Neither were any sherds of pottery or bone fragments observed in the surrounding area.

Once the objects constituting the Liedikas hoard had been added to the collection of Kuldīga District Museum, conservation treatment was performed. This work was

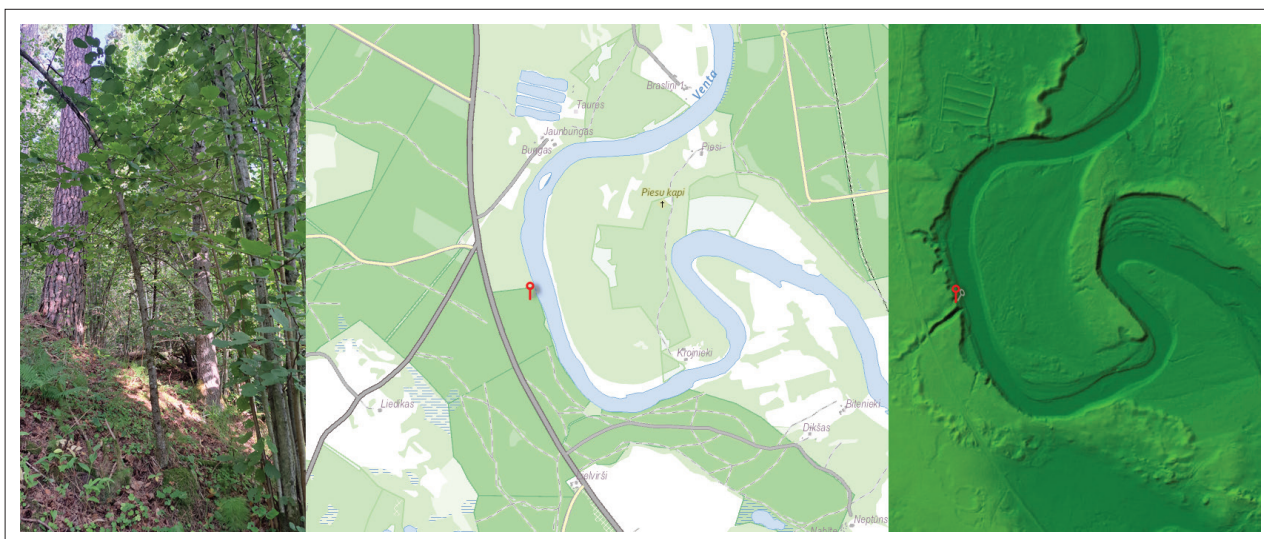


Figure 2. Find spot of the Liedikas hoard (<https://www.lvmgeo.lv/kartes>) (photograph by I. Rozentāle, 16.08.2024).

undertaken by Anita Burkovska, master conservator of archaeological materials at Ventspils Museum. She noted that the presence of similar residues on seven to eight of the objects confirms that they had been exposed to the same environment for an extended period. The corrosion on the ornamented disc differs from that seen on most of the other items in the hoard. On the other hand, the layer of dirt on the disc corresponds to that observed on the phalera, providing indirect evidence that all of the objects belong to the same hoard. The difference in corrosion products may have come about because of variation in the chemical composition of the artefacts, or because of differences in non-professional cleaning or storage following the hoard's recovery up to the time it reached the museum collections.

2. The items in the hoard

The Liedikas hoard may be counted as a multitype hoard, consisting of different types of objects deposited together. Moreover, in the case of this hoard, they also represent different functional groups. The Liedikas hoard consists of four or five well-preserved and four fragmentary bronze objects belonging to different groups: weaponry, ornaments and horse-trappings. They include a bracelet, a possible belt decoration, a dagger, horse harness ornaments and fragments of several deformed objects (Kuldīga District Museum, No. KNM 44351–44359) (Fig. 3). The total weight of the items in the hoard is approximately 889 g.

One item in the hoard that definitely relates to dress and belongs to the ornaments group is a solid bronze bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection (Fig. 3.5, 4). The bracelet measures 9.3×9.1 cm. The bow of the bracelet is segmental in cross section, 2.3–3.1 cm wide and about 1 cm thick. The lateral projection is 5.2 cm wide and 2.1 cm thick, and is decorated with a herringbone motif on one side and two rows of oblique lines on the other. On either side of the projection, the bracelet is ornamented with six to seven lines that terminate in a row of oblique lines running in the opposite direction. The bracelet weighs 418.07 g.

Bronze bracelets with a pronounced lateral projection from the Early Metal period have been found in only two other places in Latvia. In western Latvia, there is a stray find from Matkule hillfort, a rather narrower and simpler example of this bracelet form (Vaska 2019, p. 37). More closely resembling the newly discovered bracelet in terms of form and ornamentation, although significantly wider, is a solid bracelet found in 1942 at Dole Ķivutkalns. The bracelet was discovered at a shallow depth in the course of ploughing on the plateau of this Early Metal period hillfort (Graudonis 1967, p. 97, Table 24.18). Researchers have linked the find to the Ķivutkalns third hoard (Graudonis 1989, p. 42; Vaska 2019, p. 34), although this remains un-

proven. Another bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection and herringbone ornamentation has been found at Kalniškiai in the central area of Lithuania, in this case coming to light at a depth of 3 m during the digging of a pond (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 72; Bliujienė et al. 2023). In the Late Bronze Age, such items, known as 'kidney bracelets' (German *Nierenarmringe*, Polish *bransolety nerkowate*) or bracelets with a pronounced lateral projection were widespread in northern Germany and Poland, but the lateral projection on these pieces is more rounded, and they differ fundamentally in their ornamentation from that of the aforementioned items found in Latvia and Lithuania (Tyniec 1990; 1989/1990). The differences in the form of the lateral projection and the decoration indicate that the bracelets from Ķivutkalns, Kalniškiai and Liedikas were most probably made in the Baltic after the example of central European pieces.

One more item in the newly discovered hoard could belong to the ornaments group: this is the ornamented discoidal object (Fig. 3.2, 5). This approximately 2 mm thick disc has a diameter of 12.5 cm and weighs 182.26 g. On the front face, there is an arrangement of geometric ornamental elements that is more complex than the designs on other Bronze Age artefacts from Latvia. The rim of the disc is decorated with a raised braid, running right along the edge, and a row of dots. The central field is divided into four equal segments by rows of herringbone ornamentation. The central part of the disc is adorned with a quatrefoil, the contour of which consists of three ridges running in parallel. At its centre is a large concentric circle, connected to four smaller spirals by lines perpendicular to one another. A break is discernible at the centre of the disc, indicating that the object is incomplete. The other side of the disc is flat, with a small, circular projection — a rivet — at its centre. The rivet may have held a bronze point at the centre of the disc, such as is seen, for example, on the earliest tutuli and discoidal belt fittings from Vellinge and Muldbjerg in Denmark, Asige and Flarken in Sweden, and other finds (Montelius 1986, pp. 130–133; Kristiansen 1998, p. 381; Oldeberg 1974, p. 220, Fig. 1700, p. 386, Fig. 2937; Larsson 2017, pp. 12–13).

The object is unique among archaeological finds from the Baltic states, and direct parallels have not been found in the archaeological material of Europe either. Although herringbone ornamentation, curving lines and spirals were widely used in decorating the surfaces of Bronze Age objects in Europe, examination of the academic literature did not yield any examples of identical designs on artefacts of bronze or other materials. However, the composition does exhibit a pronounced similarity with that of the bronze shields used in Italy, corresponding to the parallel previously noted by Danish archaeologist Kristian Kristiansen between belt fittings from northern Europe and Italian bronze shields (1998, pp. 166–167).

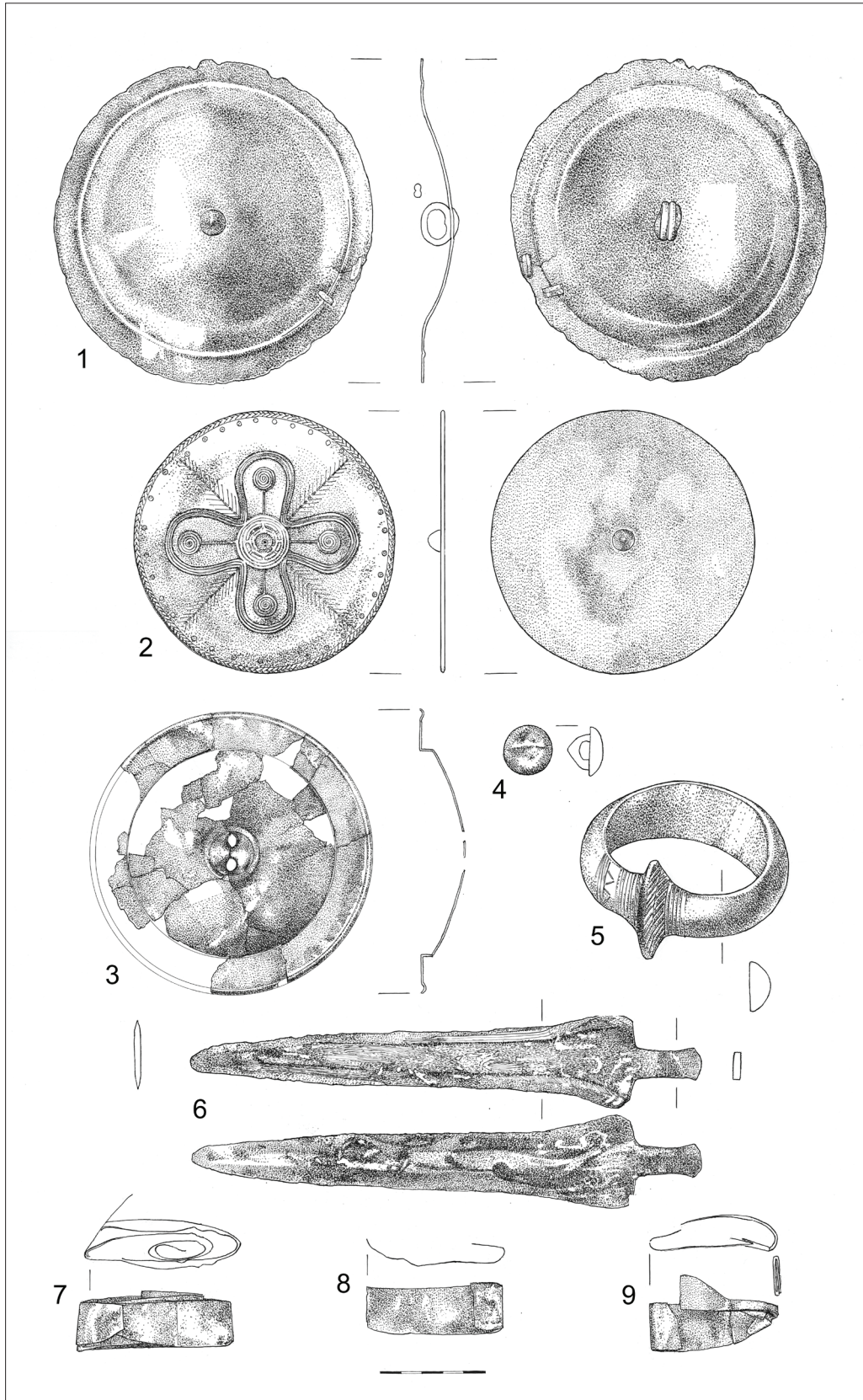


Figure 3. The artefacts of the Liedikas hoard before conservation (drawing by A. Ivbule). Kuldīga District Museum, KNM Za 3710.



Figure 4. The solid bronze bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection, after conservation (photograph by L. Vilerte) (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM 44351).



Figure 5. Ornmented discoidal object, after conservation (photograph by L. Vilerte) (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM 44352).

Considering the similarities in size and form, and the use of the solar motif in the ornamentation, the decorative disc in the Liedikas hoard may, with some hesitation, be considered a belt fitting. On the other hand, the absence of any evidence for the mode of attachment (rings or loops), and the close contact between the rivet and the discoidal base are features that challenge this theory. Discoidal belt fittings were used in the Bronze Age in Denmark and Sweden. Best known among such finds is the earliest piece discovered with the burial of the Egtved girl, which included well-preserved fragments of the tunic and skirt, as well as a plaited belt with a discoidal bronze fitting decorated with a design consisting of spirals and lines (Brøndsted 1939,

pp. 72–86). These circular objects and the use of circles and spirals in their ornamentation tend to be interpreted as relating to the widely practised solar cult of the Bronze Age.

Only one item in the newly discovered Liedikas hoard belongs to the weapons group. This is a bronze double-edged dagger measuring 24.3 cm in length, with a short tang of rectangular cross section, flattened at the tip (Fig. 3.6, 6). The blade is 21 cm long, with a width of 4.3 cm at the tang and 2.7 cm in the middle, and a thickness of about 3 mm. The object weighs 99.48 g. There are minor casting flaws on the blade, next to the tang.



Figure 6. Double-edged dagger, after conservation (photograph by L. Vilerte) (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM 44354).

A dagger is a handled weapon that differs from a sword by its smaller dimensions (length up to 35 cm (Seger 1984, p. 23)). The origin of daggers goes back to the Stone Age, when they were made from flint, whereas in the Bronze Age dagger blades made of bronze appeared in addition to flint weapons. The dagger is a useful tool and a close-combat weapon, indispensable for fighting in restricted spaces. However, not all bronze weapons of the Early Metal period were used for combat. Since a large proportion of the bronze weapons and armaments found in Europe lack traces of use, or else their characteristics make them unsuitable for combat, researchers consider that many served for status affirmation and rituals, rather than actual combat (Harding 2000, p. 307; Vasks 2024, p. 195; Vasks 2015, p. 133). Whether the dagger from the newly discovered hoard was used for practical purposes is hard to say at the present stage of research.

The Liedikas dagger is the first find of an Early Metal period bronze dagger from Latvia, apart from two pieces discussed in the academic literature that come from Saldus and Koknese. A bronze item found in the town of Saldus and held since 1966 at the Janis Rozentāls Saldus Museum of History and Art, although dated in the museum records to the period 760–500 BC (Janis Rozentāls Saldus Museum of History and Art, No. SVM 2057), must be regarded as a present-day object. The piece found at Koknese, measuring 52–53 cm in length and with rivet-holes for attaching a handle, has been viewed by weapons researcher Māris Atgāzis as a transitional form between daggers and swords, and he refers to it as a sword (Atgāzis 2002, p. 350). However, the context of discovery is unclear, with no definite connection to the Bronze Age of the Baltic. South of Latvia, in Telšiai or Raseiņiai and Klaipėdos districts of Lithuania, four bronze swords have been found that pre-date the Liedikas piece (late Period II – early Period III), at least one of which (24 cm in length) should actually be assigned to the category of daggers. These objects have parallels among the archaeological finds from central Europe (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 28, Table VIII; Merkevičius 2011b, p. 21, 130–131). Recently, in 2011, another type of Early Bronze Age dagger was uncovered in Lithuania and it has a typological resemblance

to the objects found in Poland and Sweden (Merkevičius 2011a). On the other hand, the four Late Bronze Age daggers found in Lithuania display parallels with Scandinavian finds, although these are significantly smaller than the piece from Latvia (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 46; Merkevičius 2011b, p. 135). Period V bronze blade fragments found in Estonia likewise have their origin in Scandinavia (Lang 2007, p. 118). It should be noted that parallels for the bronze dagger in the Liedikas hoard may also be identified in Scandinavia (Larsson 2017, pp. 44–46; Montelius 1917, p. 53, 79).

This is the second Bronze Age hoard from Latvia to include items relating to horse harnesses. Previously, U-shaped decorations for a horse harness have been found among the bronze objects constituting the Staldzene hoard, recovered in 2001 (Vasks and Vijups 2004, p. 11). The Liedikas hoard includes one whole and one fragmentary decorative disc of the kind referred to in foreign literature as a phalera (in English), *Phalere*, *Zierscheibe* or *Pferdeschmuckplatte* (in German) and *фанапа* (in Russian). These are primarily linked to the decoration of horse harnesses, although certain authors suggest that a phalera could also have served to adorn human attire (Przymorska-Sztuczka et al. 2024, pp. 12–13). The diameter of the intact disc in the Liedikas hoard varies from 15.0 to 15.5 cm; it is convex, rising to a height of about 1.7 cm. Weighing 109.71 g, this is a circular object with a raised central part and a flat rim separated by a low ridge. At the centre of the disc, a double loop of circular wire has been attached by means of a circular rivet. The loop served to fix the decorative disc to leather straps. The disc has been repaired: cracks in two places by the edge have been fixed with flattened bronze wire (Fig. 3.1, 7).

The second of the discovered discs is broken into 20 pieces, and some of the fragments are missing (Fig. 3.3). Its original diameter was slightly smaller than that of the intact disc (approximately 13.6 cm). It is more markedly convex, and the decorative ridge follows the outer margin of the object. Most probably belonging to this disc is a bronze button measuring 2.3 cm, which could have been placed on the central part of the disc for the purpose of attaching straps from the back (Fig. 3.4). The diameter of



Figure 7. Decorative disc (phalera), after conservation (photograph by L. Vilerte) (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM 44353).



Figure 8. Fragmentary bronze artefacts, after conservation (photograph by L. Vilerte) (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM 44358–44359).

the button corresponds to an impression in the surface of the fragmentary disc. Although buttons of this kind were very widespread in the southeastern and central parts of central Europe, in this region too, their function remains unclear. The majority of researchers note that they could have had diverse applications: as an element of human attire, as part of the horse harness or as an item of armour (Tarbay 2015, p. 93). Thus, at this stage in research, it is impossible to say conclusively whether the button derives from the fragmentary phalera.

Objects relating to horse harnesses occur quite commonly in Late Bronze Age hoards from Europe. For example, there are about 33 such hoards from southern Scandinavia, and about 60 from the southwestern part of the Baltic Sea region (Sarauw 2015, p. 14). Noteworthy among these is a major hoard (about 4.9 kg) from Bækkedal in northern Denmark, dated to 900–700 BC, which, in addition to men's and women's items, includes well-preserved

bronze and leather components of a harness for two horses. Thanks to this find, and also considering finds of similar bronze objects from hoards, researchers have been able to offer a possible reconstruction of a Bronze Age horse harness, where the decorative discs or phalerae are placed at the horse's cheeks, breast and flanks. The find also indicates the mode of attachment of the disc. On the Bækkedal disc, a wide leather strap with a slit in the middle has been fitted onto a bronze loop at the back of the disc and then fixed in place by a narrower strap threaded through the bronze loop (Sarauw 2015, pp. 7–8). It is possible that the Liedikas phalera was attached to straps in the same way.

The newly discovered hoard also includes several fragmentary objects, whose function is not clearly determinable. Three undecorated strips of sheet metal, with a thickness of about 0.2 mm and a width of about 2.2 cm, were found rolled together; one more, an 8.2 cm long fragment with a folded-back margin, was recovered separately

(Fig. 3.7, 3.8, 8). Once the three rolled-together fragments were separated in the course of conservation, it was found that one end of each fragment (both ends, in one case) tapers gradually, similarly to a neck-ring from the burial site of Kõmsi in Estonia and the decorative bronze belt plates from central Europe (Jaanits et al. 1982, p. 188; Lang 2007, p. 181; Gimbutas 1965, p. 127). However, at the present stage of research, it does not seem absolutely clear that the Liedikas fragments actually belong to the neck-rings or the belt fittings group. The separated strips are 12.2 cm, 18 cm and approximately 17 cm long (Fig. 3.7, 8). There is an interesting fragmentary item with a preserved connection between its two parts in this hoard (Fig. 3.9, 8). This consists of an elongated, undecorated sheet metal plate: on one side, the ends have been bent around the flattened end of a bronze bar of rectangular cross section, the other flattened end of which has broken off. The function of this object is, unfortunately, not clear. Presumably, these fragmentary and deformed objects, with a total weight of 39.91 g, were intended for remelting, in order to produce new bronze artefacts, as with the pieces in the Staldzene 'scrap' hoard.

3. Dating the hoard

Since the Liedikas hoard was not recovered during a professionally conducted archaeological excavation, no suitable samples are available for radiocarbon dating. Accordingly, the approximate date of concealment has been established by analysing the artefact forms, seeking parallels among archaeological finds from the Baltic region and across Europe.

The kidney bracelets, the group to which the Liedikas bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection may be assigned, are generally dated in central Europe to Period V–VI of the Bronze Age, the widest distribution being attained in Period V. The earliest forms of these bracelets, however, occur already in Period IV in Germany and the Netherlands. Starting from Period V, the distribution of kidney bracelets extended to Poland, and some have also been found in Scandinavia (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 57; Arnoldussen and Steegstra 2021, pp. 54–55). The simple bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection found on Matkule hillfort in Latvia has parallels among the Period V finds from central Europe (Hundt 1997, p. 58, 65, Table 25, 47; Tyniec 1990, p. 64, 72, 86, 100). Considering the form and ornamentation of the lateral projection of the pieces from Kalniškiai and Ķivutkalns, which differs from this element of the central European bracelets, they are considered as belonging to a typologically later group of kidney bracelets, although direct analogues have not been identified among the central European finds. The Kalniškiai find, which is smaller and lighter but typologically most similar to the Liedikas

bracelet, is dated by Lithuanian archaeologists to the end of Period V or the beginning of Period VI (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 57, Fig. XXII.1), or even to the end of the 2nd millennium BC or the first half of the 1st millennium BC (Bliujienė et al. 2023). The outwardly similar bracelet from Ķivutkalns does not provide any pointers for more precisely dating the Liedikas piece either, because the date of 950–750 BC that was initially applied in the research literature to the Ķivutkalns bracelet (Graudonis 1967, p. 97; Graudonis 1989, p. 42; Mugurēvičs and Vasks 2001, p. 171) has been challenged in subsequent research (Vaska 2019, p. 34), in which it was considered as too early in view of the find context: it was found in the ploughsoil, in the upper part of the hillfort cultural layer. It should be noted that the Ķivutkalns bracelet was not recovered during archaeological excavation, and so the considerations relating to the stratigraphy of the cultural layer cannot be conclusive for dating the piece. In light of the above, it must be concluded that, until analogous finds to the Liedikas bracelet are recovered in a more precisely dateable context, it would be premature to date the ornamented bracelet from the Liedikas hoard with a pronounced lateral projection any more precisely than to the first half of the 1st millennium BC.

The hollow decorative discs, or phalerae, may be dated to Period V–VI of the Bronze Age based on similar finds in Scandinavia and central Europe. Finds of horse-trappings from hoards in Poland, fairly close to Latvia, are useful for helping date the phalerae in the Liedikas hoard. The Kaliska II hoard from northern Poland, in addition to weapons and women's dress decorations, also contained horse-trappings, including 41 phalerae, several of which correspond typologically to those of the Liedikas hoard. Based on artefact typology and radiocarbon dating, the Kaliska II hoard has been assigned to the 8th century BC (Szczurek et al. 2025). The simpler and slightly smaller phalerae in the Elgiszewo hoard, found near Torun in Poland, are dated to the 8th century BC (Gackowski et al. 2024, pp. 11–12). Phalerae from hoards in Mecklenburg and Poland, and likewise pieces from East Prussia, have been assigned to Period V (Hundt 1997, p. 59, 60, 65, Table 25, 42, 44; Gaerte 1929, p. 89; Piotrovski, ed. 2013, pp. 489–497; Sprockhoff 1956, pp. 264–265). Geographically closest to the Liedikas hoard are phalerae finds from the Klein Drebnau hoard in the Kaliningrad region and the Eskelhem hoard on the island of Gotland. The Klein Drebnau hoard contained, alongside the ornaments, horse harness decorations, including five phalerae, typologically similar to the Liedikas objects. The Klein Drebnau hoard is dated to Period V of the Bronze Age (Stöckmann et al. 2021, pp. 179–182). The Eskelhem 12 bronze phalerae, the origins of which may be linked to central Europe as well, are somewhat younger and are dated to the Hallstatt C phase. It may be noted that the pieces from Eskelhem are

similar in form to the Liedikas phalerae but differ in terms of the ornamentation of transverse lines along the margin and in the centre, while the fastening is supplemented with a decorative projection (Jensen 1997, pp. 180–182, 313). Objects related to horse harness were also found in southern Lithuania. The Baudėjos hoard contained several bronze decorative discs, smaller than the Liedikas phalerae, and have been assigned to Period VI (Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, p. 60, 67–68, Fig. XIX). The phalerae in the above-described Bækkedal hoard from Denmark, which are typologically very similar to the Liedikas finds, are dated along with the hoard to the 9th–8th century BC, as are the phalerae in the Fogdarp hoard from southern Sweden (Sarauw 2015, p. 3; Lindblad 2019, pp. 11–12). Considering these parallels in the central European and Scandinavian archaeological material, the Liedikas phalerae may be dated to approximately the second half of the 9th century BC or 8th century BC.

Bronze daggers and swords of similar form to the double-edged dagger in the Liedikas hoard, with a flattened tang, straight shoulders and lacking rivet holes are dated to Periods IV–VI in the archaeological material from Scandinavia (Montelius 1917, p. 53, 79; Brøndsted 1939, p. 179; Larsson 2017, pp. 44–45; Randsborg 1972, Plate IV, VI, XII) and central Europe (Hundt 1997, p. 62, Table 55, 57, 104; Piotrovski, ed. 2013 p. 487). In terms of form, the most closely similar piece so far identified in the research literature comes from Kubikensborg in Norrland, Sweden. This dagger was found in the mid-19th century, possibly at a burial site. In contrast to the Liedikas find, the Kubikensborg dagger has ornamentation on the blade and is dated to Period V of the Bronze Age based on the character of the ornamentation (Larsson 2017, pp. 44–46; Montelius 1917, p. 53, 79).

Bronze buttons resembling those in the hoard were most widely used in the southeastern part of central Europe and appear in Period BrD of the central European periodisation, being more widely utilised in Hallstatt AI and continuing in use right up to the Iron Age (Tarbay 2015, p. 93). In terms of the Latvian periodisation, the Late Bronze Age clearly falls within the interval when such buttons were in use. Moreover, the presence of broken fragments of bronze artefacts in the hoards is more characteristic of the second half and end of the Bronze Age (Gackowski et al. 2024, p. 12), and in this regard the Liedikas hoard corresponds to the general trends of the European Late Bronze Age.

The wide chronological range of the objects constituting the hoard is not unusual for this period. Many hoards of bronze artefacts from the close of the Bronze Age include objects representing different chronological periods (Jensen 1997, p. 214, 216), or else forms that remained typical for an extended period. Judging from those object types

for which parallels have been identified among archaeological finds in Europe, the Liedikas hoard was concealed in the second half of the Late Bronze Age. Similar pieces in the archaeological material from Scandinavia and central Europe are assigned to Periods V and VI of the Bronze Age. Although Periods V and VI are considered to be dated slightly different than previously thought based on interdisciplinary research in southern Scandinavia (Olsen et al. 2011, p. 272), regarding the Baltics, in the absence of extensive interdisciplinary research on this region, the author in this article uses the periodisation adopted in Latvia, referring to Period V as the time from the mid-9th century to the mid-8th century, and assuming the end of Period VI to be around 500 BC (Vasks and Vijups 2004, p. 14).

Relatively close parallels could be found in the European archaeological material for the dagger and the horse-trappings in the Liedikas hoard. Objects belonging to these same typological groups have been found in bronze artefact hoards from Period V or the beginning of Period VI dated typologically and by radiocarbon dating. As economic activity and bronze circulation in northern Europe declined during the 6th century BC, the territory around the Baltic Sea became a very marginal zone during the period from the end of the 6th century BC right up to the end of the 1st millennium BC (Jensen 1997, pp. 218–219), and so it is unlikely that the items in the hoard could have been concealed later than the 6th century BC. Accordingly, at the present state of research, concealment of the Liedikas hoard may be dated to the 8th–7th or, less probably, the 6th century BC.

4. Metal composition of the objects in the hoard

In the course of conservation work on the Liedikas hoard, after the cleaning of dirt and corrosion but before the addition of a protective layer, the metal composition of the artefacts was determined. The calculations are based on the fundamental parameter method. Considering the culture-historical value of the artefacts and the need to retain the patina protecting the surface of the objects and helping to preserve them, the surface at the measurement points was not additionally cleaned for the purpose of metal assay. Since the results of the measurements depend on how clean the measurement points are, they may not be absolutely precise. Although areas cleaned by the conservator, where the original patina could not be retained, were selected as measurement points, it was not possible to find equally clean points for measurement on all of the pieces.

The composition of the artefacts in the Liedikas hoard was determined at the laboratory of the Assay Office of

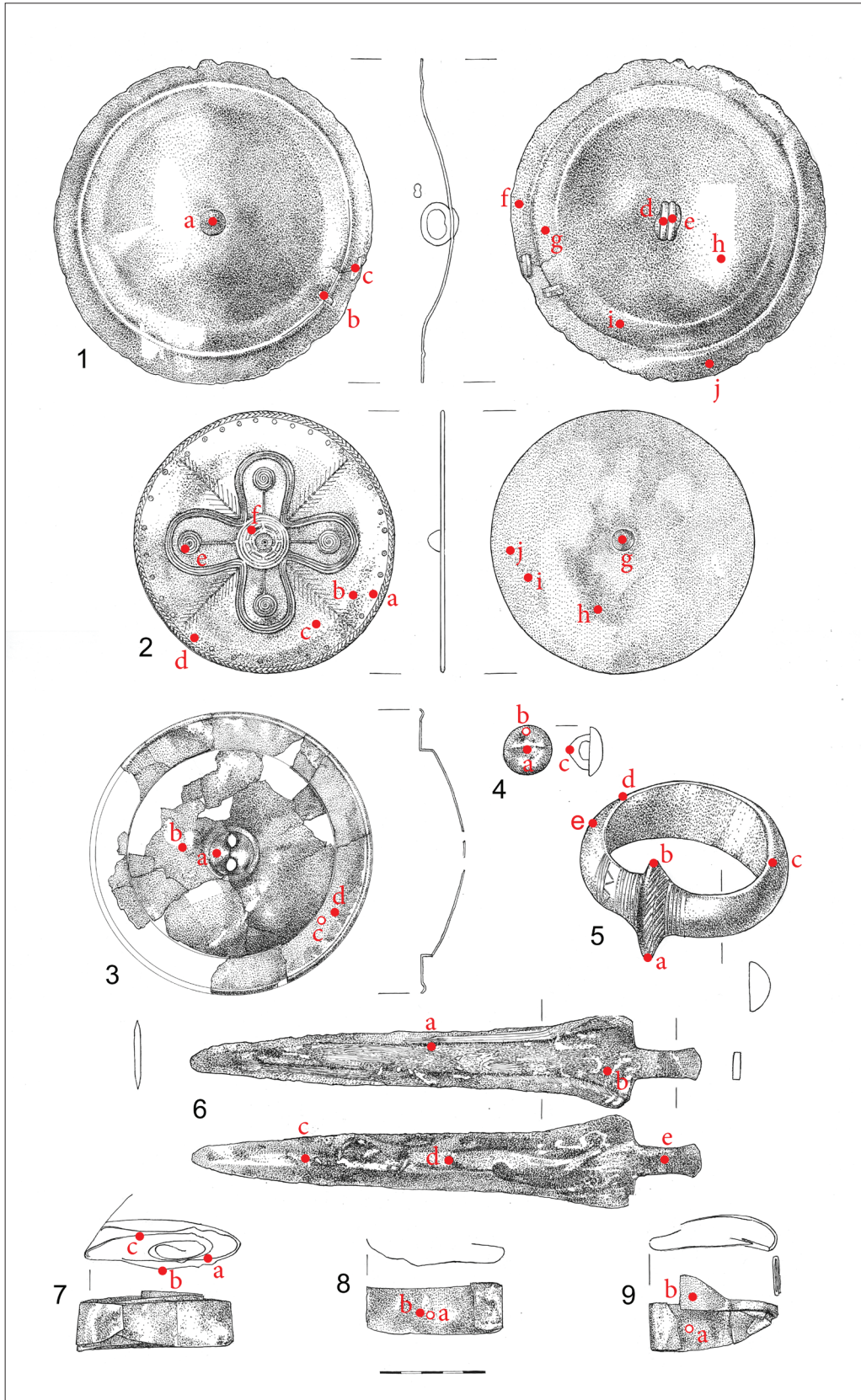


Figure 9. Measurement points for determining the metal composition (drawing by A. Ivbule, supplemented by the author).

Table 1. Metal composition of the artefacts in the hoard (Kuldīga District Museum, KNM Za 3796).

| Measurement point | | Cu | Pb | Sn | Sb | As | Ag | Bi | Fe | Zn | Ni |
|---|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Decorative disc or phalera (KNM 44353) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1a | | 68.45 | 3.92 | 21.56 | 2.93 | 1.72 | 0.72 | 0.09 | 0.39 | 0.06 | 0.08 |
| 1b | | 47.76 | 4.42 | 37.69 | 4.93 | 3.03 | 1.73 | 0.07 | 0.10 | --- | 0.21 |
| 1c | | 50.66 | 4.53 | 34.00 | 5.32 | 3.25 | 1.47 | 0.09 | 0.09 | --- | 0.48 |
| 1d | | 69.07 | 3.29 | 22.07 | 2.90 | 1.32 | 0.82 | 0.07 | --- | 0.30 | 0.12 |
| 1e | | 73.71 | 2.97 | 18.37 | 2.70 | 1.10 | 0.71 | 0.05 | --- | 0.18 | 0.17 |
| 1f | | 80.84 | 1.54 | 14.88 | 1.53 | 0.64 | 0.29 | --- | --- | --- | 0.21 |
| 1g | | 83.92 | 1.03 | 12.80 | 1.33 | 0.40 | 0.24 | --- | --- | --- | 0.24 |
| 1h | | 84.88 | 0.84 | 12.03 | 1.25 | 0.34 | 0.26 | 0.10 | 0.10 | --- | 0.24 |
| 1i | | 42.40 | 4.95 | 45.56 | 3.42 | 2.16 | 0.99 | 0.10 | 0.23 | 0.05 | 0.09 |
| 1j | | 35.90 | 5.36 | 51.53 | 3.53 | 2.35 | 0.95 | --- | 0.18 | --- | 0.07 |
| Ornamented discoidal object (KNM 44352) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2a | | 83.43 | 1.05 | 10.38 | 2.44 | 1.29 | 0.38 | 0.03 | 0.27 | --- | 0.59 |
| 2b | | 83.12 | 1.16 | 10.39 | 2.41 | 1.48 | 0.38 | --- | 0.32 | 0.03 | 0.57 |
| 2c | | 76.93 | 1.26 | 14.70 | 2.95 | 2.48 | 0.54 | 0.03 | 0.46 | 0.03 | 0.50 |
| 2d | | 85.83 | 0.72 | 9.53 | 2.23 | 0.74 | 0.34 | --- | 0.18 | --- | 0.33 |
| 2e | | 80.27 | 1.11 | 11.88 | 2.50 | 1.60 | 0.45 | --- | 1.35 | 0.18 | 0.54 |
| 2f | | 81.22 | 1.56 | 11.16 | 2.32 | 1.85 | 0.45 | 0.02 | 0.72 | 0.12 | 0.46 |
| 2g | | 85.92 | 1.25 | 8.05 | 2.67 | 1.09 | 0.47 | 0.04 | --- | 0.03 | 0.45 |
| 2h | | 83.06 | 1.08 | 10.41 | 2.45 | 1.59 | 0.39 | 0.04 | 0.23 | 0.03 | 0.59 |
| 2i | | 85.32 | 0.84 | 9.25 | 2.22 | 1.09 | 0.34 | --- | 0.17 | --- | 0.60 |
| 2j | | 70.43 | 2.38 | 18.18 | 3.59 | 3.60 | 0.61 | 0.03 | 0.53 | 0.04 | 0.46 |
| Decorative disc or phalera, fragmentary (KNM 44355) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3a | | 82.67 | 0.08 | 15.33 | 0.25 | 0.43 | --- | --- | 0.50 | --- | 0.46 |
| 3b | | 65.61 | 0.55 | 30.35 | 0.48 | 1.42 | 0.05 | --- | 0.86 | --- | 0.40 |
| 3c | | 82.52 | --- | 15.59 | 0.25 | 0.44 | --- | --- | 0.50 | --- | 0.45 |
| 3d | | 48.88 | 0.26 | 46.34 | 0.69 | 1.81 | 0.08 | --- | 1.31 | --- | 0.37 |
| Button (KNM 44356) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4a | | 71.86 | 12.94 | 0.12 | 9.97 | 3.92 | 0.34 | 0.05 | --- | 0.03 | 0.71 |
| 4b | | 66.88 | 18.95 | 0.07 | 9.54 | 3.43 | 0.28 | 0.03 | --- | 0.07 | 0.70 |
| 4c | | 73.39 | 11.86 | 0.15 | 10.25 | 3.32 | 0.34 | --- | 0.06 | 0.10 | 0.50 |
| Solid bronze bracelet with a pronounced lateral projection (KNM 44351) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5a ¹ | | 73.20 | 8.84 | 8.63 | 5.20 | 2.50 | 0.79 | 0.07 | 0.27 | 0.10 | 0.34 |
| 5b ² | | 53.28 | 16.18 | 12.93 | 8.32 | 6.87 | 1.43 | 0.15 | 0.56 | 0.13 | 0.10 |
| 5c | | 51.33 | 11.33 | 18.75 | 8.57 | 7.05 | 1.71 | 0.16 | 0.61 | 0.10 | 0.37 |
| 5d | | 54.63 | 11.69 | 16.31 | 8.44 | 6.34 | 1.49 | 0.15 | 0.39 | 0.08 | 0.43 |
| 5e | | 69.51 | 7.94 | 9.97 | 5.16 | 5.21 | 0.96 | 0.11 | 0.43 | 0.12 | 0.52 |
| Double-edged dagger (KNM 44354) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6a | | 72.37 | 2.51 | 18.50 | 3.22 | 2.11 | 0.80 | 0.05 | 0.07 | --- | 0.30 |
| 6b | | 72.46 | 2.55 | 18.33 | 3.24 | 2.01 | 0.69 | 0.07 | 0.24 | --- | 0.30 |

¹ Cleanest measurement point.

² Most obscured measurement point.

| Measurement point | | Cu | Pb | Sn | Sb | As | Ag | Bi | Fe | Zn | Ni |
|---|---|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| 6c | | 57.52 | 3.68 | 29.58 | 4.62 | 3.04 | 1.16 | 0.10 | 0.06 | --- | 0.20 |
| 6d | | 79.93 | 1.57 | 14.16 | 2.43 | 1.00 | 0.54 | --- | 0.12 | --- | 0.17 |
| 6e | | 66.45 | 2.65 | 22.72 | 3.91 | 2.56 | 0.99 | 0.07 | 0.13 | --- | 0.36 |
| Strips of bronze sheet (3 pieces), rolled (KNM 44359) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7a | | 89.01 | 0.54 | 7.07 | 1.83 | 0.56 | 0.37 | --- | --- | --- | 0.55 |
| 7b | | 89.02 | 0.59 | 7.04 | 1.83 | 0.55 | 0.36 | --- | --- | --- | 0.56 |
| 7c | | 88.39 | 0.76 | 7.67 | 1.69 | 0.55 | 0.34 | --- | --- | --- | 0.53 |
| Strip of bronze sheet with one edge folded back (KNM 44358) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8a | | 88.68 | 0.69 | 7.53 | 1.63 | 0.53 | 0.33 | --- | --- | --- | 0.53 |
| 8b | | 88.36 | 0.75 | 7.70 | 1.70 | 0.51 | 0.35 | --- | 0.03 | --- | 0.53 |
| Deformed fragment of an artefact of bronze sheet (KNM 44357) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9a | 1 | 84.66 | 1.14 | 10.17 | 2.08 | 0.95 | 0.49 | --- | --- | --- | 0.45 |
| 9b | 2 | 88.36 | 0.59 | 7.84 | 1.74 | 0.53 | 0.37 | --- | --- | --- | 0.52 |

Latvia. The elemental composition indicated in Table 1 was obtained from individual measurements obtained with the Fischerscope X-Ray XDAL 237 SDD (SN 100146847) energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer. The Bruker Mistral M1 (SN M1 0103 1114) energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer was used for measurement verification and the Shimadzu EDX-7000P (SN Q25245400011 SA) energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectrometer was used to verify the absence of light elements (Mg (12) to Ti (22)). All finds were weighed using a Sartorius LA 2000P (SN 16706033) precision balance.

The metal assay indicated that the objects in the Liedikas hoard were made from multicomponent bronze. Tin (Sn) is the main element alloyed to the copper (Cu). However, in the case of the solid bracelet, tin and lead (Pb) are present in similar proportions, whereas in the cast button, the content of lead and antimony (Sb) exceeds the tin content. In addition to these metals, silver (Ag), nickel (Ni) and arsenic (As) are also present in the artefact composition. The composition of certain objects also includes trace amounts of iron (Fe), zinc (Zn) and bismuth (Bi) (Fig. 9; Table 1).

5. The reasons for concealment of the hoard

In archaeology, a hoard is considered an artefact or group of objects intentionally hidden in the ground or water, under rocks, in a building, etc. Bronze Age hoards could consist of single objects or several objects deposited together. These might be deposits of one particular type of object, or might include objects from different functional groups. The objects found in Bronze Age hoards include women's and men's ornaments, weapons, tools, items for personal hygiene and ritual objects. The concealment of hoards of

bronze artefacts is one of the characteristic cultural phenomena of the Bronze Age in the southern part of Scandinavia and central Europe, where the main Bronze Age centres were located. This is a phenomenon that continues throughout the whole Bronze Age, but the intensity of the practice varies, with a marked decrease in the number of concealed hoards in Period III. This has been linked to social change and to reduced availability of the raw materials due to regional changes. The maximum number of bronze artefact hoards occurs in Period V of the Bronze Age, falling in Period VI in Denmark while continuing in importance in central Europe (Jensen 1993, p. 157). The mean weight of hoards in Period V was approximately 1 kg, but much larger hoards of bronze objects also occur (Sarauw 2015, p. 5). There is no universally accepted explanation as to why, across Europe, bronze artefacts occur in such large numbers in hoards but are so poorly represented on settlement sites and burial sites. This pattern has been interpreted as relating to the Bronze Age world outlook, but the archaeological evidence does not, unfortunately, permit a comprehensive explanation.

In seeking to determine the reasons for the concealment of Bronze Age hoards, researchers have tended to systematise them. Accordingly, two major groups of hoards are distinguished: votive hoards (offerings) and economic hoards (wealth accumulations or items buried in times of danger). A very characteristic phenomenon in Bronze Age Europe is the concealment of hoards for religious purposes in wetlands and bodies of water, and at boundaries with wet areas, although votive hoards were also buried on farmland. Similarly to central Europe and Scandinavia, testifying that the tradition also influenced the peripheral region corresponding to the present-day Baltic states, bronze artefacts dated back to the Bronze Age have been found in the water and in wetlands in Latvia and

Lithuania as well (Urtāns 1977, p. 129; Grigalavichene and Miarkiavichius 1980, pp. 66–88; Bliujienė 2010, p. 138). It should be noted that if the stray finds of Bronze Age artefacts from wetlands or near bodies of water were to be carefully reassessed and their context evaluated, the number of Bronze Age hoards from the Baltic states could turn out to be greater than the 12–14 currently known.

Besides votive hoards, there are also economic hoards from the Bronze Age, presumably buried in times of danger or with the intention of accumulating property. A Bronze Age hoard from Latvia assigned to this group is the 5.6 kg Staldzene ‘scrap’ hoard, consisting of broken bronze objects originating in Scandinavia. Researchers have expressed the view that it may have been buried at the coast in a time of danger by people who were bringing objects intended for remelting (Vasks and Vijups 2004, p. 17). Likewise, in the view of archaeologist Vladislavs Urtāns, the second Kivutkalns hoard, consisting of a bronze axe, a bracelet and a dress-pin, was concealed on this hillfort site in a situation of danger (Urtāns 1977, p. 73, 132).

Regarding the motivations for concealment, it may be noted that these are difficult to assess for such remote periods, and may easily be misconstrued. Moreover, in primitive societies, the economic, social and ritual sphere are all closely connected, and cannot be considered in isolation. This means that there could have been several mutually non-exclusive reasons for concealing a particular hoard. The question arises as to whether we can explain the possible motivations behind the concealment of the newly discovered Liedikas hoard?

Since the Liedikas hoard was not discovered in the course of archaeological excavation, assessing the context of its concealment is problematic. According to information from its discoverers, the hoard was found on the steep bank of the River Venta, close to the top of the bank, not far from a large ravine cut by a smaller river or stream that entered the Venta. The shallow depth of the hoard, as reported by the finders, is not a secure indication that it was buried at a shallow depth in the Bronze Age, because the steep bank of the Venta could have been subject to subsidence during the several millennia that have passed since that time, thus bringing the buried artefacts close to the sloping surface of the riverbank.

The position of the Liedikas hoard, high above the water line, allows us to exclude the possibility that the objects were intentionally submerged or sank accidentally, as is the case with many Bronze Age votive hoards recovered from bodies of water or wetlands. However, this factor does not absolutely exclude the possibility that the hoard held some kind of religious significance. Bronze Age researchers nowadays entertain the possibility that not only those hoards buried on wetlands and on ploughland but also hoards deposited on dry sites close to water bodies

could have had a ritual aspect, one that related to the nearby water body. For example, the Period V hoard from Fogdarp in southern Sweden was buried at a depth of 1 m at the edge of a valley connected with the lake Östra Ringsjön, and the artefacts in the hoard, in the view of researchers, display a link to the solar cult and cult of divine twins so widely practised in the Bronze Age. Also pointing to a religious context, in the opinion of researchers, is the considerable depth at which the hoard was buried (Lindblad 2019, p. 29, 21).

In the case of the Liedikas hoard, it needs to be borne in mind that the River Venta was an important Bronze Age waterway. Hillforts from this period have been archaeologically excavated along the banks of the Venta (Padure Beltes (Vasks et al. 2011) and Skrunđa Krievu kalns (Doniņa et al. 2014)). Inland waters were in ancient times regarded as the safest travel routes, avoiding the storms that could be encountered on open waters and likewise the risk of getting lost in the forest, the problems of transporting loads where roads were poor or absent altogether, and the risk of animal attack. However, travel along rivers and lakes did not exclude the possibility of human attack. As seen in the archaeological material from Latvia (the establishment of fortified settlements, an increase in the number of weapons and the elite character of these objects), warfare — in the form of raids and minor skirmishes — was an essential characteristic of the Bronze Age. Accordingly, considering the location of the Liedikas hoard, in the immediate proximity of a waterway at a location that could be recognised because of the adjacent deep ravine, it is possible that the hoard was buried in a time of danger by someone travelling along the Venta. This could have been a merchant or a craftsman — a metalworker bringing the necessary raw materials and bronze objects.

Researchers generally interpret the religious or secular character of hoards not only based on the find context but also by considering hoard composition and assessing the character of the buried artefacts. Unfortunately, the composition of the Liedikas hoard does not provide absolutely clear evidence for analysing the motivation behind its concealment. This is not a ‘scrap’ hoard like the Staldzene find, which researchers have assigned to the group of economic hoards. The Liedikas hoard includes an intact bracelet and a dagger blade, a repaired phalera and fragmentary objects, as well as broken pieces of indeterminate artefacts. The occurrence of broken fragments in hoards from this period is, in the view of researchers in the present day, not always an indication that these hoards are economic in character. It has been suggested that the fragmentation of the objects could also have had a ritual aspect (Rezi 2016, p. 409; Čivilytė 2014, pp. 161–167). However, the presence of good quality, undamaged items, repaired objects along with scrap metal, and the occurrence of markedly multifunctional objects in the Liedikas hoard challenges

its interpretation as a sacred hoard. The author tends to support the interpretation that the hoard was concealed with the intention of preserving or protecting the bronze objects that were so exceptionally valuable at this time, along with metal as a raw material for new products, the owner never managing to return and collect them.

6. The hoard in the context of Bronze Age Europe

The items concealed in Bronze Age hoards — their quality, quantity and characteristic forms — have provided a basis for current ideas about Bronze Age society, economy, networks of contacts and religious views. Undoubtedly, the newly discovered Liedikas hoard is an important testimony from the Bronze Age in the Baltic but how does it fit into the overall context of the European Bronze Age, and does it reflect common or different features to those generally observed?

Studies on the Bronze Age quite naturally tend to emphasise southern Scandinavia, central Europe and southern Europe, because this region includes the major Bronze Age centres, the mines that provided the ores for bronze, the metalworking centres and a wide network of connections, which link even geographically very distant regions. But what is happening further north in this period, in Latvia? Bronze Age researchers in the Baltic recognise that this region may be regarded as peripheral. Even so, the phenomena characteristic of the Bronze Age are still observable (Vasks 2015, p. 134; Lang 2007, p. 260). It should be emphasised that the Baltic also formed part of the extensive Bronze Age communications network, even if the region commonly falls outside the limits of published maps of the European Bronze Age. The finds of imported objects and influences on the local production indicate that at the beginning of the Bronze Age the main direction of contacts from western Latvia was oriented towards the south, whereas in the Late Bronze Age (1100–500 cal BC), alongside the southern direction, the western, i.e. Scandinavian, direction also became important. Even though the raw materials for bronze production are not available in Latvia, major and minor bronzeworking centres developed along the banks of rivers, engaged in melting down imported raw materials and producing new artefacts for local use as well as casting bronze rings resembling bracelets which were intended for exchange (Vasks 2022, pp. 5–26).

So far in Latvia, major archaeological excavation has been undertaken along the banks of the River Daugava, in connection with the construction of hydro power stations, and this has given a picture of prehistoric processes in this river basin. Meanwhile, western Latvia, where the Liedikas hoard was recovered, has seen much less research. The

fortified settlement sites investigated to date, Padure Beltes and Skrunđa Krievu kalns, as well as the ever-increasing number of stray finds of bronze artefacts from the banks of the Venta, indicate that this river formed part of the Bronze Age communications network (Fig. 1). However, it is not yet possible to offer a detailed reconstruction of processes in the local region of the River Venta during the Late Bronze Age. This will be possible once Bronze Age sites have been excavated more extensively, enlarging the available body of evidence. For example, the Liedikas artefacts are among the few finds of imported Late Bronze Age artefacts from the Venta basin, where stray finds of objects of traditional eastern Baltic forms have predominated until now (Vasks 2024, p. 75). However, to use this fact for reconstruction processes in the region would be overly bold, because the overall number of finds is small.

In addition to the far-reaching communication network, the European Bronze Age is also characterised by the widespread practice of concealing hoards, the bronze artefacts being more concentrated in hoards than on settlement or burial sites. In Latvia, too, the tradition of concealing hoards is observed in this chronological interval. Because there are so few finds, it is problematic to analyse their ritual significance. Nevertheless, the occurrence of several Bronze Age hoards in wetlands indicates a link to the tradition, widely represented in more southerly areas, of concealing votive hoards in water bodies or sites close to water.

It appears at the present stage of research that concealment of the Liedikas hoard did not have a sacred character. Rather, it could have been buried in order to protect the valuable items in conditions of danger. The Liedikas hoard relates to another important feature of the second half of the Bronze Age and reflects Bronze Age economic processes in the Baltic. The presence of scrap metal and damaged items indicates that they may have been intended for remelting, corresponding to the Late Bronze Age hoards interpreted as 'scrap' hoards (Lang 2007, pp. 118–119; Vasks and Vijups 2004; Harding 2000, p. 236). Accordingly, the discovery of this hoard in the immediate proximity of the Venta provides additional support for the idea that this river was an important waterway in the Bronze Age. The Venta connected the Baltic Sea with the inland areas of western Latvia, facilitating not only the supply of the necessary raw materials for bronze artefacts and trade in these materials but also the spread of new ideas and skills in the region, as well as the maintenance of continuous contacts with other Bronze Age centres. The diverse composition of the Liedikas hoard, along with other finds of bronze artefacts from the banks of the Venta, testify to the availability of bronze in the societies of this area, their high level of development and their craft skills.

The items constituting the Liedikas hoard were not produced in the Kurzeme region (with the sole possible exception of the solid bracelet), and have parallels among artefact forms in Scandinavia as well as central Europe. This makes it problematic to determine the route by which the hoard as a set of items reached western Latvia (unless they were assembled locally). On the other hand, the co-occurrence of artefacts from different regions of Europe in one hoard links the Liedikas case to the practice observed in Europe of depositing together items representing a wide geographical area. The Vénat hoard provides a striking example. This hoard from France includes objects encompassing a wide region, from the islands of the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the Baltic coasts (Kristiansen 1998, p. 152). And such examples may also be found close at hand: the hoards on Gotland, not far from western Latvia, include not only pieces typical of Scandinavia but also typical central European artefacts (Jensen 1997, pp. 180–183). These hoards also have a very wide chronological span, indicating the need for caution when assessing the time of concealment of the Liedikas hoard. Considering that it was not possible to find direct parallels for all of the artefacts in the Liedikas hoard, it would be premature to offer a more precise date than simply the 8th–7th or, less probably, the 6th century BC.

Not only in terms of its composition but also with regard to the artefacts' ornamentation and functions, the Liedikas hoard corresponds very well to the general trends of the European Bronze Age, although there is also a local element, represented by the solid bracelet. The spirals on the decorative bronze disc are typical of the ornamentation of the European Bronze Age artefacts in a wide region from the Mediterranean right up to northern Europe. The use of spirals and concentric circles in artefact ornamentation has been linked to the widely practised solar cult, which could be connected with the spread of farming. Folklore motifs involving the sun travelling in a cart or boat, and the divine twins as protagonists of mythology have been linked to expressions in Bronze Age material culture: artefact ornamentation and petroglyphs as well as sculptures, the best-known example being the representation of a solar disc in a horse-drawn cart, recovered from Trundholm bog in Denmark (Kristiansen 2012, pp. 69–86; Lindblad 2019; Kaul 2013, pp. 238–252).

The horse, as representation or sacrificial animal, is regarded as a characteristic attribute of the solar cult. The horse cult is one of the most distinguishing features of Indo-European culture (Zemītis 2004, p. 87). The presence and agricultural role of the horse in the Early Metal period in Latvia is attested by finds of antler bridle bits as well as horse mandibulae exhibiting a specific kind of wear (Tereško 2021, p. 452; Vasks 1994, p. 58, Table VII:19–20; Graudonis 1967, p. 92, Table XVIII:10–11). The archaeological evidence of a horse cult in Latvia in-

cludes horse skull, jaw and tooth offerings on Early Metal period sites. A horse-head representation on the head of a bronze dress-pin could also reflect the special status of the horse (Zemītis 2004, pp. 90–91). In central Europe and Scandinavia, horse-trappings are often present in Bronze Age hoards, and are more commonly found together with items relating to women rather than men. The bronze horse-harness decorations found in Bronze Age hoards from Latvia, namely the Staldzene hoard and the newly discovered Liedikas hoard (Vasks and Vijups 2004, p. 11, 71; Kuldīga District Museum, no. KNM 44353, 44355), have direct parallels in Scandinavian and central European finds. However, in the case of the Liedikas hoard, in the absence of comprehensive information about the context of concealment, it is hard to assess the ritual significance of the phalerae and their connection with the solar and horse cult.

To conclude, it may be stated that the composition, artefact forms, their ornamentation and the mode of concealment all correspond entirely to the generally observed features of the European Bronze Age. This further strengthens the assertion that the River Venta had an important role as a Bronze Age waterway, and that western Latvia exhibits the overall developmental pattern of the Bronze Age, reinforcing the idea that the Baltic region should not be overlooked in general treatments and maps of the Bronze Age.

Conclusions

The Liedikas hoard received by Kuldīga District Museum in 2023 constitutes a vivid testimony from the European Bronze Age and a reminder that the Baltic was an essential part of the cultural map of Bronze Age Europe. This hoard, only the seventh Bronze Age hoard from Latvia, shows direct parallels with archaeological finds from Scandinavia and central Europe, reflecting the wide network of contacts that existed in the Bronze Age. Judging from the artefact forms, the hoard was concealed along the middle course of the Venta in the 8th–7th century or, less probably, in the 6th century BC, testifying to the importance of this waterway during the Late Bronze Age and the influence of general Bronze Age trends on the local societies.

The Liedikas hoard may be counted as a multitype hoard, consisting of different types of objects deposited together. It includes four or five intact and well-preserved bronze artefacts along with four fragmentary artefacts, which belong to the weapons, ornaments and horse-trappings groups. These include a solid bracelet with a lateral projection; an ornamented discoidal object, possibly a belt decoration; a double-edged dagger; two horse-harness decorations or phalerae; and several fragments of deformed objects. At the present stage of research, the find

location and composition of the hoard indicate that it was concealed for economic reasons. It may be suggested that the valuable bronze objects were buried by a trader or metalworker travelling along the River Venta in a time of danger, who chose a place easily identifiable from natural landmarks. However, considering that the boundaries between the secular and the sacred sphere were not as rigid as they are today, the reasons for concealment of the hoard could have been more complicated.

This article provides a general overview of the composition of the Liedikas hoard and the circumstances of its discovery, and offers initial interpretations. By making this recent find known to the research community, the author seeks to stimulate more comprehensive study of the hoard in the future and its incorporation into general treatments of the European Bronze Age.

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Abbreviations

Arch. Lituana – Archaeologia Lituana

Archeol. Baltica – Archaeologia Baltica

Lietuvos arch. – Lietuvos archeologija / *Lithuanian Archaeology*, Vilnius

Dan. J. Archaeol – Danish Journal of Archaeology

FA – Fennoscandia Archaeologica

J. Archaeol. Sci. Rep. – Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports

Praehist Z – Praehistorische Zeitschrift

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Naujai aptiktas Vakarų Latvijos bronzos amžiaus dirbinių lobis

Inna Rozentāle

Santrauka

2023 m. Kuldygos rajono muziejaus darbuotojų didžiausią nustebimą sukėlė muziejui dovanoti unikalūs bronzos amžiaus dirbiniai. Pagal radimvietę dirbiniams suteiktas Liedikos lobio vardas. Lobis atrastas Kuldygos savivaldybės Ēduolės (Ēdole) seniūnijoje asmens, ieškojusio Antrojo pasaulinio karo liekanų. Liedikos lobis yra tik septintasis bronzos amžiaus lobis, žinomas iš Latvijos. Lobio sudėtis rodo tiesiogines paraleles su Skandinavijos ir Vidurio

Europos archeologine medžiaga ir atspindi plačius ryšių tinklus, egzistavusius bronzos amžiaus pabaigoje. Sprendžiant iš radinių formų, lobis buvo paslėptas Ventos upės vidurupio atkarpoje VIII–VII a. pr. Kr., galbūt ir VI a. pr. Kr. (1, 2 pav.). Liedikos lobis liudija šio vandens kelio reikšmę vėlyvajame bronzos amžiuje, plačius Vakarų Latvijos regiono bendruomenių ryšius ir bendrųjų bronzos amžiaus tendencijų poveikį šio regiono visuomenėms.

Liedikos lobis gali būti priskiriamas daugiatipiui lobiui, sudarytam iš skirtingų tipų kartu deponuotų dirbinių. Jį sudaro keturi ar penki sveiki, gerai išlikę bronziniai dirbiniai ir keturi fragmentiškai išlikę artefaktai, priskiriami ginklams, papuošalams bei žirgo pakinktams. Lobį sudaro masyvi apyrankė su ryškiu šoniniu išsikišimu, ornamentuotas disko formos radinys, galimai buvęs diržo apkaustas, dviašmenis durklas, du žirgo pakinktų papuošimai, arba faleros, ir keli lūžę deformuotų dirbinių fragmentai (3–8 pav.).

Liedikos lobyje esantys radiniai pagaminti iš daugiakomponentės bronzos lydinio (9 pav., 1 lent.). Pagrindinis varį legiruojantis elementas yra alavas, tačiau masyvios apyrankės atveju nustatytas alavo kiekis artimas švino kiekiui, o lietame nedidelės sagos pavidalo dirbinyje švino ir stibio kiekis dominuoja alavo atžvilgiu. Be to, šių radinių elementinės bronzos sudėtyje aptikta sidabro, nikelio ir arseno; kai kuriuose dirbiniuose nustatyta geležies, cinko ir bismuto pėdsakų. Bendras lobyje esančių dirbinių svoris siekia apie 889 gramus.

Bronzinių dirbinių lobių slėpimas yra vienas būdingiausių Europos bronzos amžiaus kultūrinių bruožų. Dabartiniame tyrimų etape Liedikos lobio radimo vieta ir jo sudėtis leidžia manyti, kad lobis buvo paslėptas ekonominiiais, o ne sakraliniais motyvais: manoma, kad šis iš natūralių kraštovaizdžio orientyrų lengvai atpažįstamas taškas buvo pasirinktas kaip vieta vertingiems bronzos dirbiniams paslėpti pavojaus metu prekiautojo ar metalo apdirbėjo, keliaujančio Ventos upe. Vis dėlto, turint omenyje, kad bronzos amžiuje riba tarp sakralios ir profaniškos sferos nebuvo tokia griežta kaip šiandien, lobio slėpimo priežastys galėjo būti sudėtingesnės.

Į muziejų patekęs Liedikos lobis yra ne tik vertingas archeologinių šaltinių, susijusių su Vakarų Latvijos regionu, papildymas ir ryškus Europos bronzos amžiaus paveldas, bet ir priminimas, kad Baltijos regionas sudarė neatskiriamą Europos bronzos amžiaus kultūrinio žemėlapių dalį.

Visi šio lobio dirbiniai yra restauruoti ir saugomi Kuldygos rajono muziejuje.