

# NEWLY DISCOVERED MARKS OF DWELLING IN LAKE SĀVIENA (LATVIA)

**JURIS URTĀNS**

**Abstract**

In 2014 and 2015, new underwater archaeological sites were discovered in Lake Sāviēna in the east of Latvia. The first site, according to C14 dating, goes back 4510 +/-55 years. In the other site, artefacts and ceramics from the Late Iron Age were discovered. Here, on the shore of the lake, adjacent cultural occupation of the settlement was discovered. It is possible to make preliminary conclusions that the shores of Lake Sāviēna had been inhabited for a long time, which was certainly associated with the lake's waters.

Key words: lake dwelling, flying lake, underwater constructions, settlement.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/ab.v23i0.1307>

In Latvia, a peculiar type of ancient dwelling site has been discovered, studied and assessed: lake dwellings (Apals 1965a; 1965b). In English, it is more accepted to call them pile dwellings, due to the numerous discoveries of Bronze Age pile dwellings in the Subalpine region (Menotti 2004). In the case of Latvia, lake dwellings are not constructed on piles, but on a range of logs in shallow parts of lakes; therefore, in Latvia, 'lake dwellings' or 'lake castles' are more common names for these archaeological sites.

Lake dwellings were discovered in Latvia in the late 1950s and 1960s by Jānis Apals, the first Latvian underwater archaeologist. He confirmed repeatedly in his publications (Apals 1964, 5, 1965b, 45, 1965a, 3; Apals, Zelmenis 1998, 2ff.) that searching for lake dwellings was to a large extent based on folk records. Folk tales about personalised lakes which used to fly are widespread in Latvia (Urtāns 2011). These legends belong partly to the mythological section of Latvian folklore. Folk texts about flying lakes go as follows: A Lake disliked something on its original site. The site was swampy, the people were not friendly to the Lake, the Lake did not like its name, and so on. Lakes, like people, clashed between themselves; one Lake stole water from another, and so on. When a Lake was up in the air looking for a new place, it had a new name, which was known only to that Lake. Usually, when a person randomly guessed the name of a Lake, the Lake plunged into its new location, and sank a farm or a village with people. To confirm the truth of the legend, people used to show logs or log constructions under the water on the bottom of the lake. Particularly significant is the final mention in legends that in the corner of a sunken house, an axe carved into the wood can be seen.

In later times, in collecting folklore on the Vidzeme Flying Lakes, the direct correlation between Flying Lakes and particular lake dwellings with archaeological findings, is not always visible. In other words, there were lakes with lake dwellings, for which respective legends were not fixed, and lakes without appropriate legends, in which, however, lake dwellings were detected.

Thanks to research carried out by J. Apals in the mid-1960s in Vidzeme, ten lake dwellings are known. At the same time, the first archaeological excavations took place in lake dwellings under his supervision. At the beginning, the Jaungulbene Ušuru lake dwelling was selected for deeper study, but later wider archaeological research took place on Āraiši lake dwelling or Āraiši lake castle. This extensive research led to the approbation of a new type of Latvian archaeological dwelling place. In the circumstances, with the humidity and water, organic material and wooden constructions were very well preserved. This led to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Āraiši lake dwelling (Apals 2005). This reconstruction is currently one of the most popular archaeological sites in Latvia.

Apals and other researchers have explained the role of ancient lake dwellings in Latvian history. It is currently assumed that lake dwellings appeared in Latvia with the expansion to the north of the Latgalian. Latvian lake dwellings date back to the second half of the first millennium AD (LPA, 1974, 143ff.; Apals, Mugarēvičs 2001, 311ff.).

The last lake dwelling in Vidzeme was discovered in the mid-1960s. In later times, Jānis Apals and other underwater explorers, emphasizing the work of the diver Voldemārs Rains (1996), specified the size and posi-

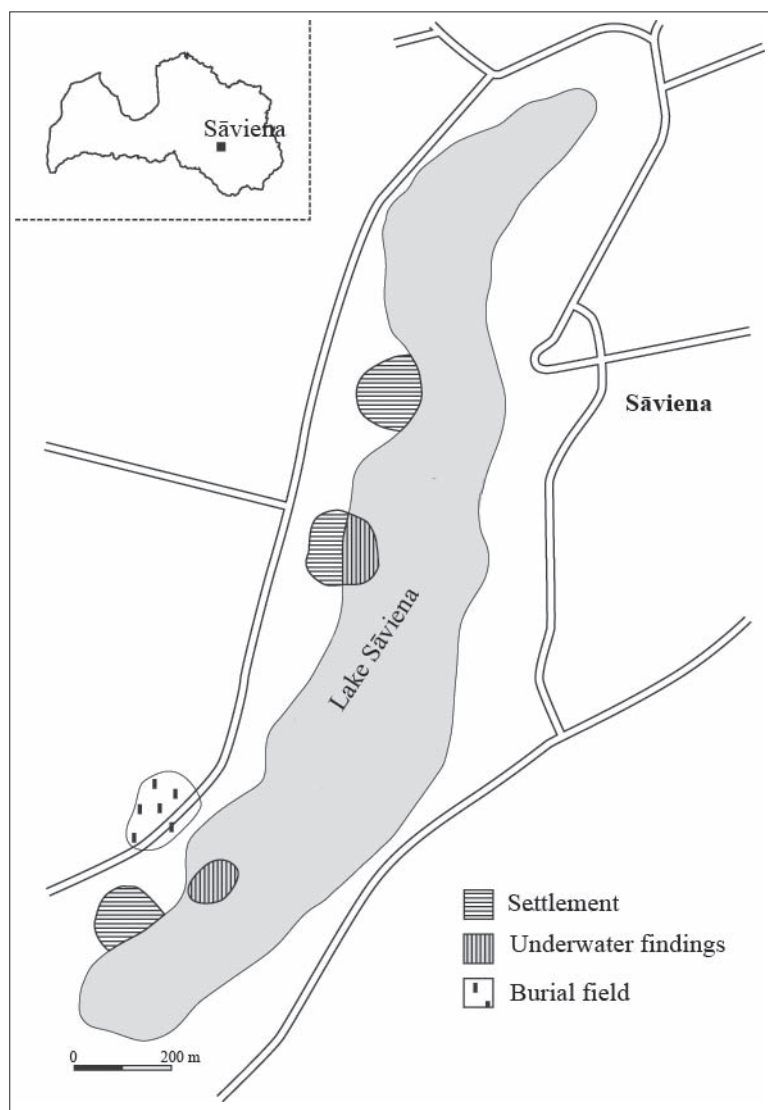


Fig. 1. The archaeological sites by Lake Sāviena.

tion, and obtained new material for dating and interpreting the meaning of Latvian lake dwellings (Apals 1996, 11ff.; Urtans, Rains 2006). New lake dwellings were not discovered in Latvia after the 1960s.

In the course of the search for lake dwellings, Jānis Apals and other underwater explorers discovered several lakes with minor wooden structures; however, they were not attributed to lake dwellings (Apals 1964, 5, 1965a, 3).

Considering the peculiarities of the Vidzeme lake dwellings and their location, and bearing in mind the ancient terrain and cultural landscapes, it is possible to distinguish some characteristics of Latvian lake dwellings:

1. Lakes containing lake dwellings are connected with folklore about flying lakes and houses flooded by falling lakes;

2. Lake dwellings are situated in shallow water on boggy or marshy islands;

3. Lake dwellings are situated not far from the coast;

4. Often opposite a lake dwelling on the coastal elevation or on the headland, a settlement from the same period is situated;

5. Not far from the lake dwelling and coastal settlement, a burial ground is situated (see also Urtans, Rains 2006).

Not all lake dwellings bear the above-mentioned characteristics, but a trend is visible.

In 1989, the construction of a new road led to archaeological excavations of the Joksti burial ground in Sāviena, under the supervision of the author (Fig. 1). Exploring the 427-square-metre area next to the road, it could be established that the Joksti cemetery dates from the ninth to the eleventh century AD. On one side of the cemetery, burials supposedly of early Christians were discovered dating from the 13th or 14th century. In total, 37 burials were excavated.

At that time, the shores of Lake Sāviena were surveyed, and two previously unknown settlements were discovered (Fig. 1). One of the settlements was situated about 200 metres from Joksti cemetery on the headland, which on one side was marked off by Lake Sāviena, but on the other by today's overgrown bay of the lake. Jakstiņi farm was situated in former times on this headland. In 1989, the farm was in ruins. Next to the ruins of the house, on the periphery of the settlement, ten-square-metre-large excavations took place, and the cultural occupation of the settlement was discovered.

About 800 metres from Joksti cemetery and settlement on the headland, four to five metres above the water level in Lake Sāviena, in a similar relief situation, the cultural occupation of another settlement was discovered. This Ozolmuiža settlement occupies about 1.5 hectares. The pottery from both settlements bears evidence that they are contemporary with Joksti cemetery,



Fig. 2. A view of Lake Sāviena and the find place at Joksti (photograph by Juris Urtāns).



Fig. 3. Lake Sāviena. The find place at Rubēņi (photograph by Juris Urtāns).



Fig. 4. Lake Sāviena in 1866 (after Stawenhagen, 1866). The view shows the place where finds were discovered on the bottom of the lake, and the settlement of Rubēņi on the shore of the lake.

and were dated generally from the first millennium AD.

Material from these investigations was published in a short article (Urtāns 1990). The field research in the sites at that time was not continued.

In 1990s, in the archive of my father, the archaeologist Vladislavs Urtāns, a short record written in August 1961 was discovered. In this record, Urtāns, referring to a local resident, gave information that the remains of ancient wooden structures were noticed in Lake Sāviena near the coast. This information was not linked to any specific landmark. Since Lake Sāviena is about six kilometres long, and 200 to 300 metres wide, without more specific details, finding the site seemed impossible.

Some years later, the publication of a folk legend was discovered. A legend about Lake Sāviena was published in 1933 in a youth magazine (Grāvītis 1933). Another similar legend was recorded in 1936, and published in 1991 (Ancelāne 1991, 274). The content of both legends is similar:

‘Where Lake Sāviena is situated nowadays, before there used to be a farm. Once two sisters from the farm noticed a rain cloud coming. One said to the other: “Let’s flee, sister, let’s flee, sister! Sāvs, Sāvs is coming!” This was the name of the flying lake, and therefore the lake fell on the farm and the sisters. The sister who mentioned the name of the lake escaped, but the other one drowned. Later, one could see the logs of the sunken houses on the bottom of the lake.’

These legends were not specifically linked to a particular site. However, taking into account the features of Latvian lake dwellings, in cooperation with the Association of Underwater Cultural History, in the summer of 2014, efforts were undertaken to find the site. Knowing about settlements on the headland of the lake and the burial ground situated nearby, and asking local people about obstacles in the lake to fishing and nets, they mentioned the continuation of the headland in the lake opposite the Joksti burial ground and settlement (Figs. 1; 2).

It turned out that there is an oblong sand-bank under the water. On it, at a depth of

1.5 to 2.5 metres, in an area of about 20 by 30 metres, the remains of timber, separate logs and poles and burnt wood and charcoal were discovered. Some of the timber was hewn with an axe. Stones broken and burnt by the fire were discovered, too. It is thought that they came from old ovens. Unfortunately, efforts to find some early artefacts or ceramics failed. The sandbank was not characteristic of Vidzeme lake dwellings and their wooden structures. The remains of the wooden structures were covered by mud. However, a radiocarbon analysis of a charcoal sample gave a date of 4510  $\pm$  55 years (Tln3592)<sup>1</sup>, which allows us to date this site to the Neolithic era.

Local inhabitants said that a few hundred metres from the newly discovered archaeological site, in the shallow water of the lake, the activities of people with metal detectors took place. Walking near the shore and holding a conventional metal detector above the water, some artefacts were found. The site was situated close to the previously mentioned Ozolmuiža settlement, but not directly in it (Fig. 1).

This site (Fig. 3) under the water was examined in 2014 and 2015. Artefacts and ceramics from different eras, both the Iron Age and the time of the existence of the manor, were found in a wide area on the bottom of Lake Sāviena. On the bottom of the lake, separate piles and lying logs were found. Opposite the find place on the lake shore, the cultural occupation of an unknown extended settlement (Rubeņi settlement) was discovered (Fig. 1). However, on checking the lake bed against the Ozolmuiža settlement, no archaeological evidence was observed.

The remains of the buildings of Ozolmuiža manor are situated in the newly discovered Rubeņi settlement. The terrain has been changed partly by the manor buildings. This place was depicted in 1866 in Wilhelm Stavenhagen's book (Stavenhagen 1866) (Fig. 4). Here, you can see the site where underwater discoveries were made, some Ozolmuiža outbuildings on a settlement, Sāviena palace opposite the lake, and the lake headland with the Ozolmuiža settlement and the cemetery location.

Opposite the settlement, on the bottom of the lake, there was much more pottery, of which a large part was from the 18th and 19th centuries, the times of the manor. However, non-thrown pottery was also found under the water. At present, it is difficult to say whether it was one big settlement on the shore, or whether there were two separate settlements. The area has been partly changed by the construction of the manor buildings and other activities.

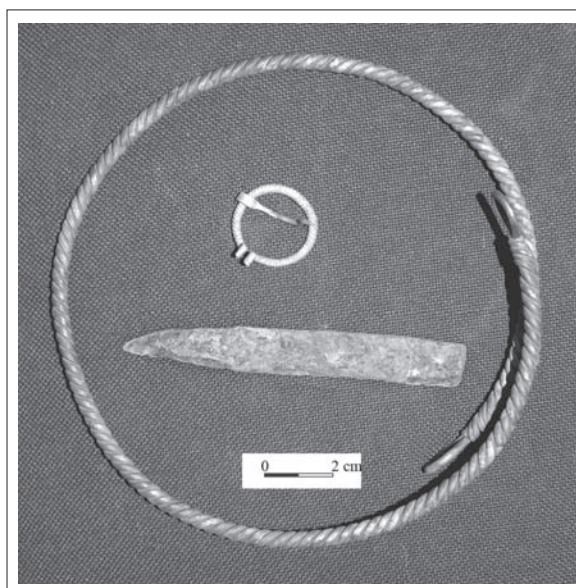


Fig. 5. The bronze neck-ring, horseshoe-shaped brooch and iron knife from Lake Sāviena (photograph by Juris Urtāns).

An intact bronze neck-ring with twisted bow and loop ends, and a bronze horseshoe-shaped brooch with rolled ends, were found on the bed of the lake, a few metres away from each other, and about 20 metres from the coast (Fig. 5). At the time, both artefacts were pronounced to be the colour of gold. Neither constructions nor any other finds were stated in the immediate vicinity. About 20 metres away from the site, on the bed of the lake, there was a construction of several piles. A piece of an iron knife was also found there (Fig. 5).

Neck-rings and brooches are characteristic women's jewellery of the Latgalian and other Baltic tribes in the Late Iron Age (ninth to twelfth century AD) (LPA 1974, 229ff.; Šnore 1987, 15ff., 20; Kuniga 2000, 39ff., 50ff.). Two intact items of bronze jewellery lying near each other on the lake bed could have got there under special circumstances. It might be attractive to see some sacral activities there: the jewellery was thrown into the lake as an offering; but unfortunately this cannot be proven. It may also be explained as evidence of an old accident. Separate items of jewellery have often been found in the internal waters of Latvia, especially in the west of the country (Urtāns 1991).

Among the finds from the bottom of the lake was a hoe-shaped tool made of wood (Fig. 6). It is possible that this is not a hoe, but a utensil connected with cooking. Similar finds come from Āraiši lake dwelling (Apals 1979, 2; Fig. 6). This tool is currently in Madona Museum undergoing the process of dehydration and preservation. It should be mentioned that J. Apals discovered ceramics from the 14th or 15th century in a flooded Medieval settlement in Lake Balote

<sup>1</sup> Tallinn University laboratory, Estonia.



Fig. 6. The wooden hoe-shaped tool shortly after its discovery (photograph by Juris Urtāns).

(Apzināšanas ekspedīcijas 1963, 21; Apals 1964, 5), which is situated not very far from Lake Sāviena.

A few preliminary conclusions can be made about the findings in Lake Sāviena:

1) Evidence of human activities which date back to the Neolithic era has been obtained in Lake Sāviena. It is possible that we can speak about a permanent human presence on this site;

2) At the end of the first millennium AD, and in the first centuries of the second millennium AD, the shores of Lake Sāviena were inhabited, as is shown by archaeological findings, two or three settlements on the shore of Lake Sāviena, and a corresponding burial ground;

3) Pottery characteristic of the Iron Age was also found under the water. It is not clear whether it indicates a dwelling above the level of the lake. Piles on the lake bed are not so prominent as to be considered the remains of ancient dwellings. The formation of a cultural occupation on the bottom of the lake may be connected with unknown reasons;

4) Intact bronze jewellery on the bottom of the lake might be attributed as an offering in the course of ancient rituals; however, this cannot be proven.

Research in 2014 and 2015 in Lake Sāviena and on its shores shows that there was a long-inhabited, vast and important residence with farm land, which was certainly associated with the lake's waters. Unfortunately, it is not possible at present to say that a new lake dwelling has been discovered in Lake Sāviena, but there is always room for hope. Let us remember that some of the previously discovered Vidzeme lake dwellings, for example, in Lake Ižezers, are not marked by intensive cultural occupation, as in Āraiši or Ušuri lake dwellings. Studies of the bottom and the shoreline of Lake Sāviena give a new life to old material in the under-

standing of the model, which was certainly associated with water.

## Abbreviations

Referātu tēzes – Referātu tēzes zinātniskai sesijai, veltītai ... gada arheoloģiskajiem izrakumiem un etnogrāfiskai ekspedīcijas Latvijas PSR teritorijā. Rīga.

Zinātniskās atskaites – Zinātniskās atskaites sesijas referātu tēzes par arheologu, etnogrāfu un folkloristu ... gada ekspedīcijām. Arheoloģijas sekcija. Rīga.

LPA – Latvijas PSR arheoloģija, 1974. Rīga.

## References

### Literature

- ANCELĀNE, A. (ed.), 1991. *Latviešu tautas teikas: Izcelšanās teikas. Izlase*. Rīga.
- APALS, J., 1964. Hidroarheoloģisko pieminekļu apzināšana. In: *Referātu tēzes 1963*. Rīga, 4-5.
- APALS, J., 1965a. Hidroarheoloģisko pieminekļu apzināšana 1964. gadā. In: *Referātu tēzes 1964*. Rīga, 3-4.
- APALS, J., 1965b. Klāstu mītnes Latvijas PSR teritorijā. *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas Vēstis*, 5(214), 45-62.
- APALS, J., 1979. 1979. gada arheoloģiskie izrakumi Āraišu ezerpilī. In: *Zinātniskās atskaites 1979*. Rīga, 8-13.
- APALS, J., 1996. Āraišu arheoloģiskā brīvdabas muzeja organizēšana un Latvijas ezeru apsekošana. In: *Zinātniskās atskaites 1994. un 1995*. Rīga, 10-15.
- APALS, J., 2005. Rekonstruktion der befestigten Inselsiedlung des 9 Jhs. In Araisi (Lettland). Vorbericht. In: F. BOTH (ed.). *Von der Altsteinzeit über „Ötzi“ bis zum Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Experimentellen Archäologie in Europa von 1990–2003*. Oldenburg, 147-160.
- APALS, J., MUGURĒVIČS, Ē., 2001. Vēlais dzelzs laikmets (agrie viduslaiki) 800. – 1200. G. In: *Latvijas senākā vēsture, 9. g. Kr. – 1200. g.* Rīga, 290-377.
- APALS, J., ZELMENIS, M., 1998. *Āraišu ezerpils. Teikas un vēsture*. Rīga.
- Apzināšanas ekspedīcijas*, 1963. Apzināšanas ekspedīcijas 1962. gadā. In: *Referātu tēzes 1962*. Rīga, 19-21.
- GRĀVĪTIS, A., 1933. Teika par Sāvienas ezeru. *Latvijas Jaunatne*, Nr. 10(94), 316.
- KUNIGA, I., 2000. *Kristapiņu kapulauks 8. gs. Beigas – 12. gs.* Rīga.
- LPA, 1974. *Latvijas PSR arheoloģija*, 1974. Rīga.
- Latvijas senākā vēsture, 9. g. T. Pr. Kr. – 1200. g.*, 2001. Rīga.
- MENOTTI, F. (ed.). 2004. *Living on the lake in Prehistoric Europe – 150 years of lake dwelling research*. London.
- RAINS, V., 1996. Zemūdens arheoloģijas pētījumi Latvijā. In: *Zinātniskās atskaites 1994. un 1995*. Rīga, 91-93.
- STAWENHAGEN, W.S., 1866. *Album Kurlandischer Ansichten*. Mitau.
- ŠNORE, E., 1987. *Kivtu kapulauks*. Rīga.
- URTĀNS, J., 1990. Pētījumi Sāvienas Jokstu senkapos. In: *Zinātniskās atskaites 1988. un 1989*. Rīga, 162-166.
- URTĀNS, J., 1991. "Pār Ventiņu mani veda". *Labietis*, 81, 2776-2778.

- URTĀNS, J., 2011. The mythical flight paths of Lake Sauskas. *Archaeologia Baltica*, 15 (*Archaeology, religion, and folklore in the Baltic Sea region*), 31-34.
- URTĀNS, J., RAINS, V., 2006. New Discoveries in Latvian Lake Dwellings. In: A. HAFNER, U. NIFFELER & U. RUOFF (eds.). *The new View. Underwater Archaeology and the Historical Picture. Proceedings of the 2nd International Congress on Underwater Archaeology Rorschlikon bei Zürich, 21.–24. Oktober 2004*. Basel, 97-100.

Received: 28 January 2016; Revised: 10 March 2016;  
Accepted 24 May 2016.

Juris Urtāns  
Latvian Academy of Culture  
Ludzas iela 24, Rīga, LV-1003 Latvia,  
E-mail: urtans@lka.edu.lv

## SAVIENOS EŽERE (LATVIJA) NAUJAI ATRASTOS GYVENVIETĒS BRUOŽAI

**JURIS URTĀNS**

### Santrauka

Latvijos teritorijoje yra žinomos ir tyrinėtoms specifinės senovinės ežerinės gyvenvietės. Latvijos ežerines gyvenvietes XX a. 6–7-uoju dešimtmečiais atrado pirmasis Latvijos povandeninis archeologas Jānis Apals'as. Savo publikacijose jis ne kartą atkreipė dėmesį ir į tai, kad ežerinių gyvenviečių paieškoms labai padeda folkloro duomenų studijavimas. 6-ojo dešimtmečio viduryje Jānio Apals'o vykdytų žvalgymų Vidžemėje (*Vidzeme*) metu buvo atrasta 10 ežerinių gyvenviečių. Išsamūs archeologiniai tyrinėjimai buvo vykdyti Araišių (*Āraiši*) ežerinėje gyvenvietėje. Šiuo metu yra manoma, kad ežerinės gyvenvietės Latvijoje pasirodė latgalių ekspansijos į šiaurę metu. Žinomos Latvijos ežerinės gyvenvietės yra datuojamos I tūkstantm. po Kr. antrąja puse.

Įvertinus Vidžemės ežerinių gyvenviečių vietas, paleoreljefą ir kultūrinius kraštovaizdžius, galima išskirti kai kuriuos Latvijos ežerinėms gyvenvietėms būdingus bruožus. Turimi duomenys rodo, kad povandeninių archeologinių vietovių gali būti ir Savienos (*Sāviena*) ežere. 2014 ir 2015 m. pailgoje smėlio seklumoje, esančioje 1,5–2,5 m gylyje, apie 20×30 m dydžio plote buvo rasta medžio liekanų, rąstų, polių, sudegusios medienos ir anglių. <sup>14</sup>C metodu nustatytas anglies amžius yra 4510 +/-55 m. (Tln3592) (1–6 pav.).

Kita archeologinė vietovė yra keli šimtai metrų nuo pirmosios, taip pat po vandeniu. Čia yra pavienių stulpų ir rąstų, aptikta vėlyvojo geležies amžiaus dirbinių

ir keramikos. Krante priešais šią po vandeniu esančią archeologinę vietą buvo atrasta nenustatyto dydžio gyvenvietė ir vėlesnių dvaro pastatų liekanų. Ši situacija pavaizduota 1866 metų Wilhelmo Stavenhageno litografijoje.

Savienos ežero dugno ir pakrančių tyrimai leidžia naujai suvokti senesnių tyrimų duomenis ir suprasti gyvenviečių, kurios neabejotinai buvo susietos su vandeniu, specifiką.