

The Finnic past of Northern Vidzeme: space, traces and questions

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Talking about

- *Origins of the Finnic people in the Baltic Sea region
- *Finnic people, including the Livs, in Northern Vidzeme: former presence and disappearance
- *When, why and how did they disappear?

Mainly archaeological sources

Background and context

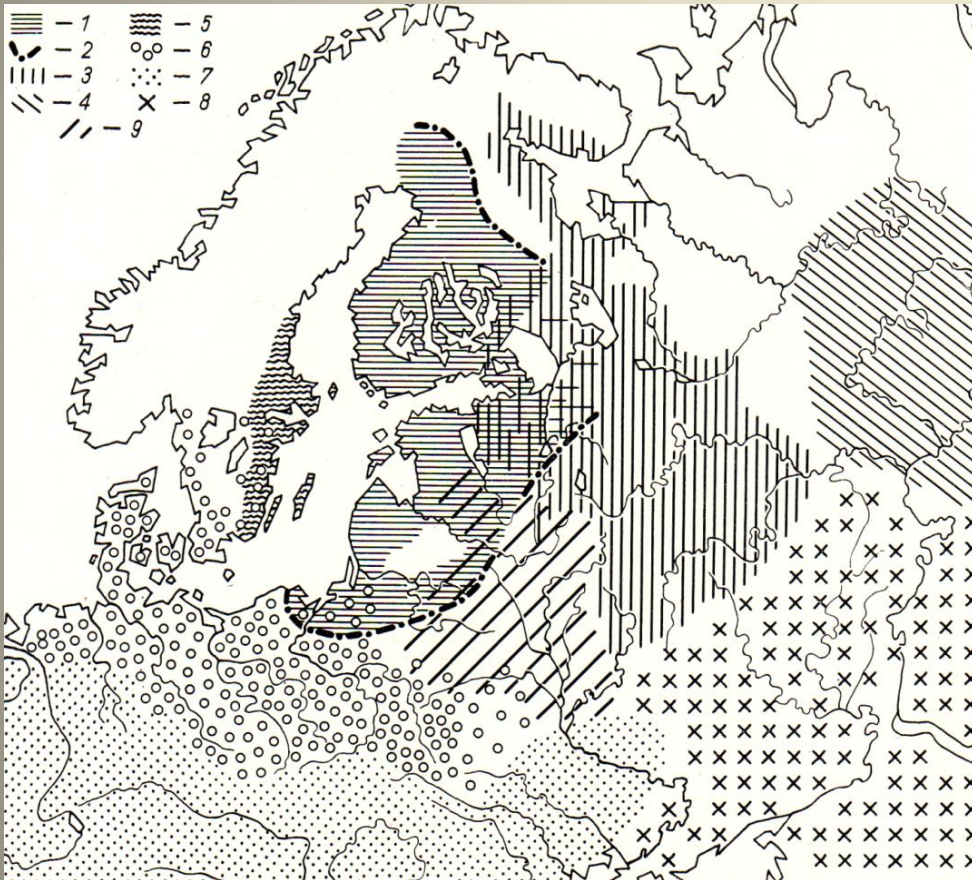


- Study of ethnic and cultural roots of the Estonian people
- Centre of excellence „Estonian roots“: archaeology, linguistics, archaeogenetics, folklore, archaeochemistry, archaeozoology, paleoecology
- Ethnic history of Estonia, with insights into the prehistoric Finnic past of Latvia see (in English)
- <https://www.eestijuured.ee/en/artiklid/esiaeg>

Arrival of the Finnic population

Former views:
together with Comb Ware

Ca. since 3900-3700 BC



but a big contradiction between
linguistic (ca. 2000 years ago)
and archaeological dates (ca. 6000
years ago)

Present views on the origins and (be)coming of the Finnic population

MUINASAJA TEADUS 28

VALTER LANG
läänemeresoome
tulemised

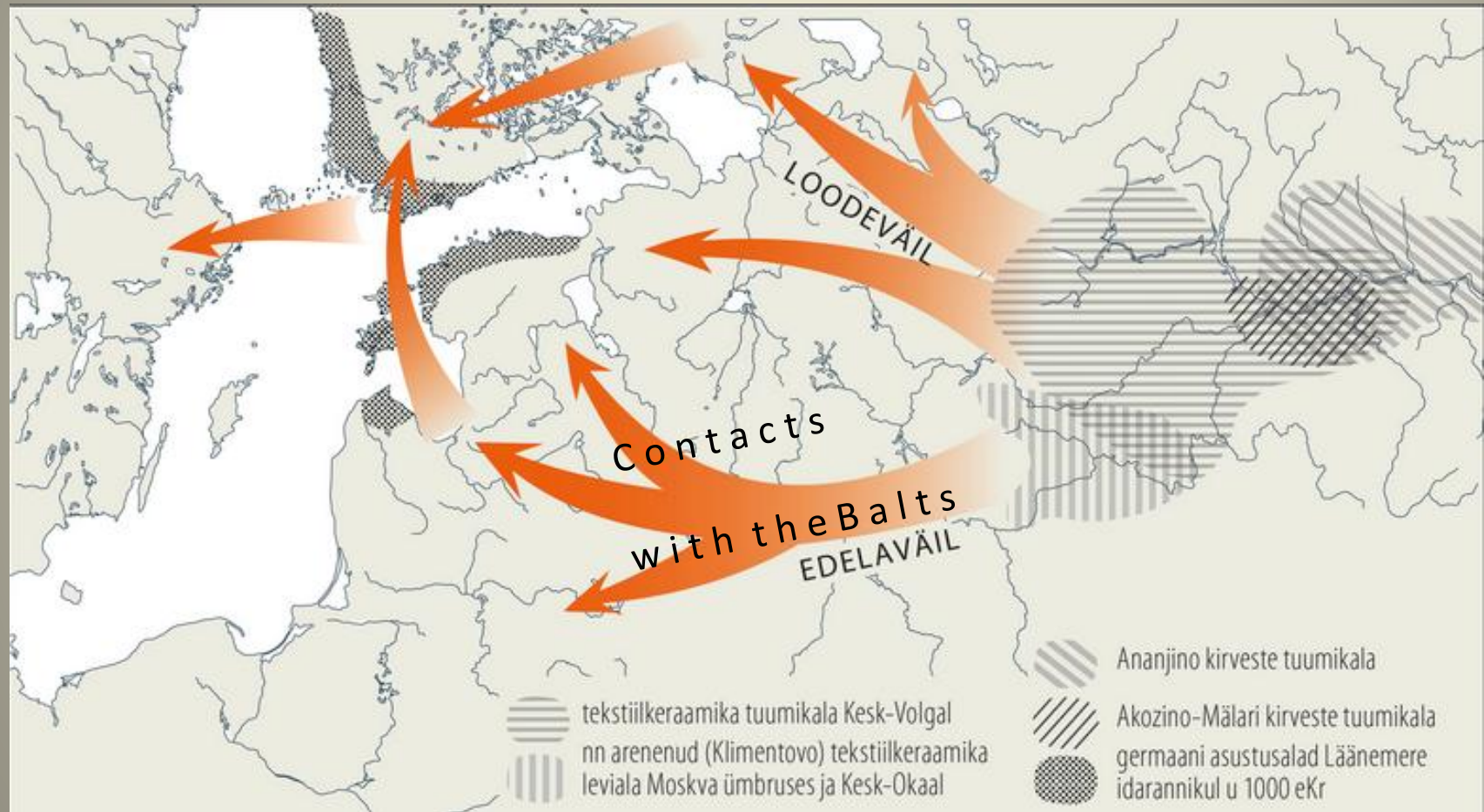


Valter Lang (2018):

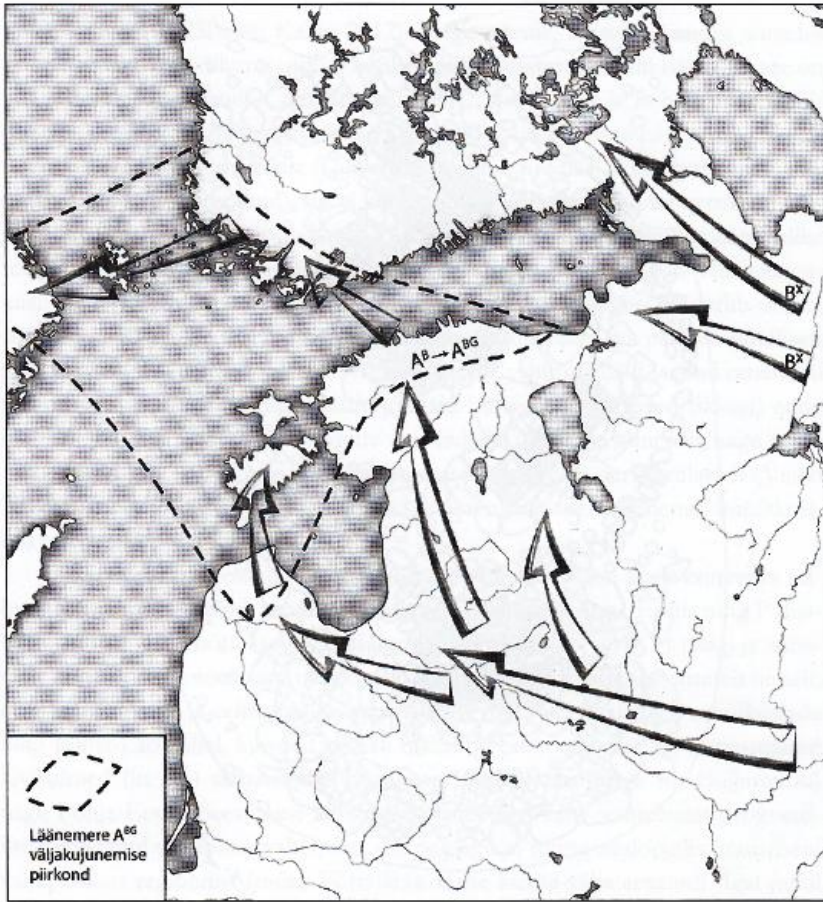
a new theory based on joint analysis of archaeological and linguistic sources,
no contradictions in dates any more

Origins and prehistoric migrations of the Baltic Finns or Finnic people in the 1st millennium BC

The Sami

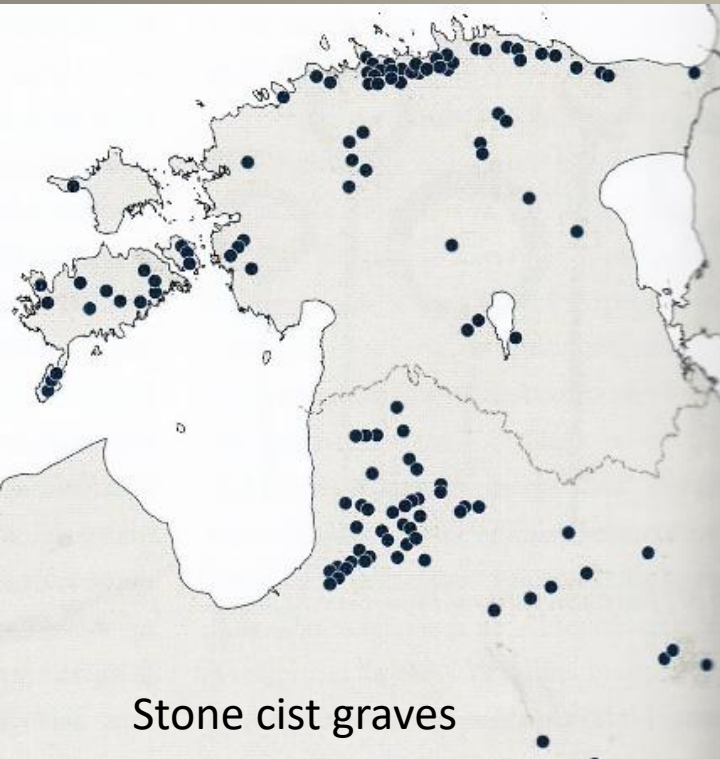


The arrival of proto-Finns in the Eastern Baltic area



Joonis 6.7. Läänemeresoome põhilised skemaatilised levikuteed Baltikumis ja Soomes ning läänemere A^{8G} kujunemise tuumikala.

- *A long-term process:
1200/1000-500 BC (ca. 3200-2500 years ago) along the waterways
- *Main route – the Daugava
- *Small groups
- *Different waves of coming
- *Contacts with the Balts on the way in present-day Pskov Land, Belorus and Latvia



Stone cist graves

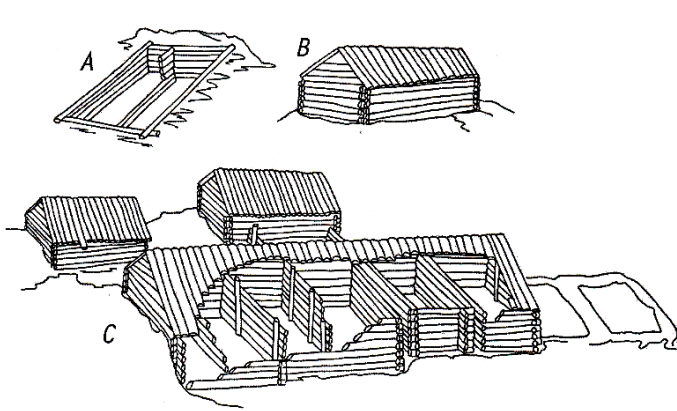
Earlier population in coastal Estonia
and northern Latvia - proto-Germanic people
stone cist graves
from the Bronze Age (1300/1100)
to ca. 400 BC)

Jõelähtme stone cist graves cemetery near Tallinn



Early tarand grave cemeteries

800-500 BC- ca 100 AD

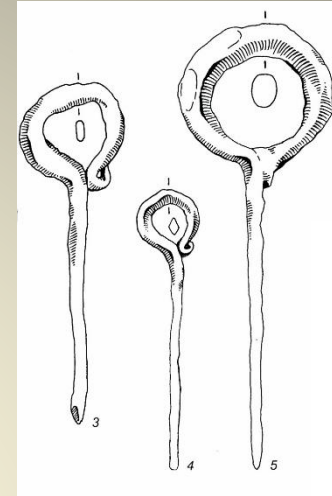


Joonis 5.9. Surnumajade rekonstruktsioone Ahmõlovo vanema kalmistu materjalide põhjal (Petrushev 2000, jn 47).

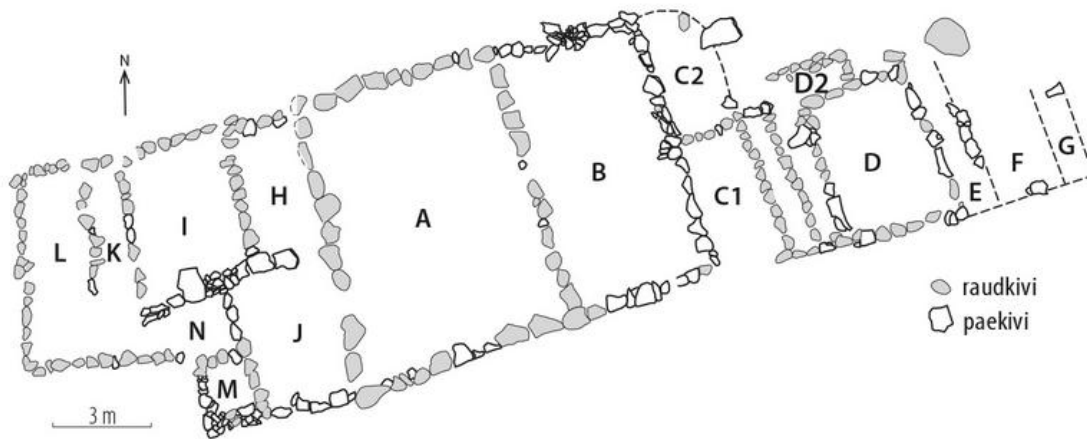
Imitations of the wooden „houses of the dead“ of the Volga-Oka Finns

Materjal: not timber, but stone (idea from the local Germanic population)

shepherds crook pins



spoon-shaped temple ornaments



The Finnic immigrants
and the locals
got mixed
with earlier local proto-
Germanic population (who
buried the dead in stone graves)

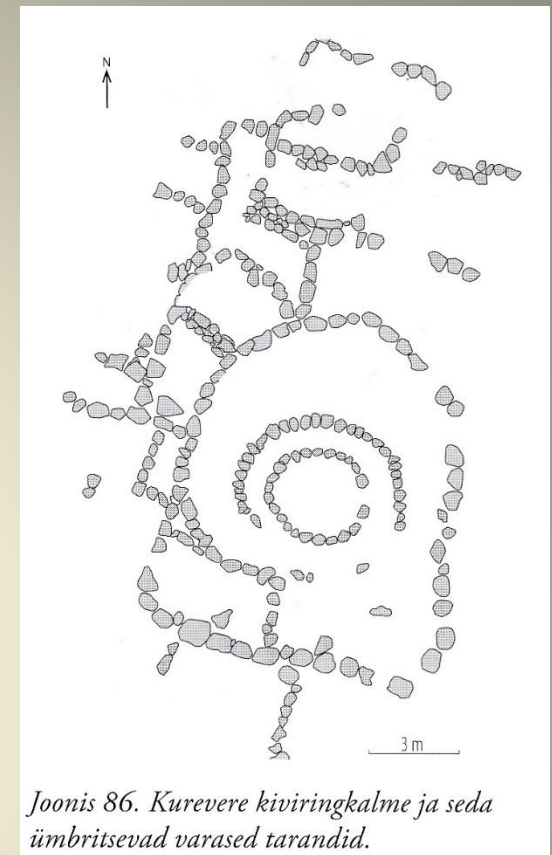
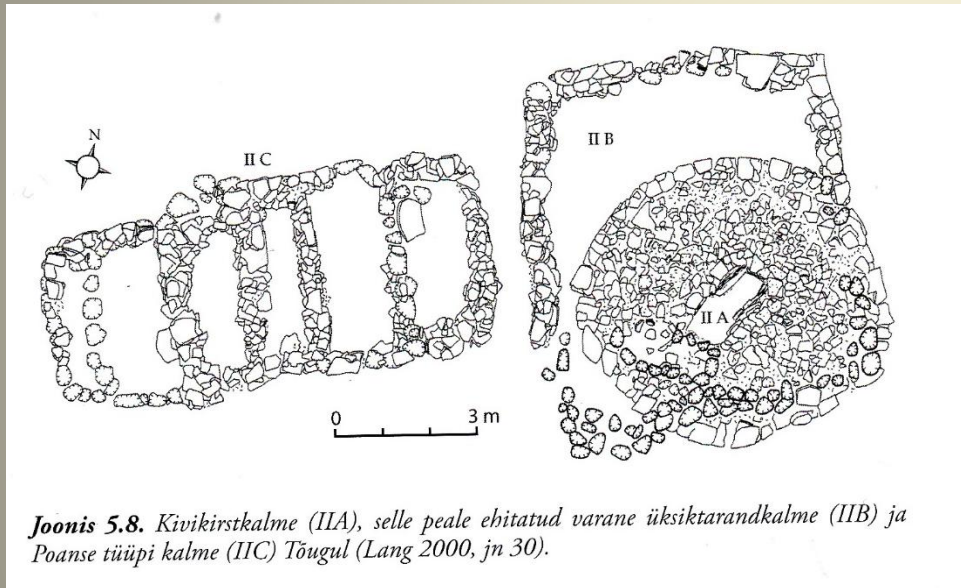


Distribution of
stone cist graves
(Lang 2007)



Distribution of early tarand graves
(Lang 2007)

Getting mixed with proto-Germanic people is shown by merging different constructions: early tarand structures and stone cist graves in the same cemeteries

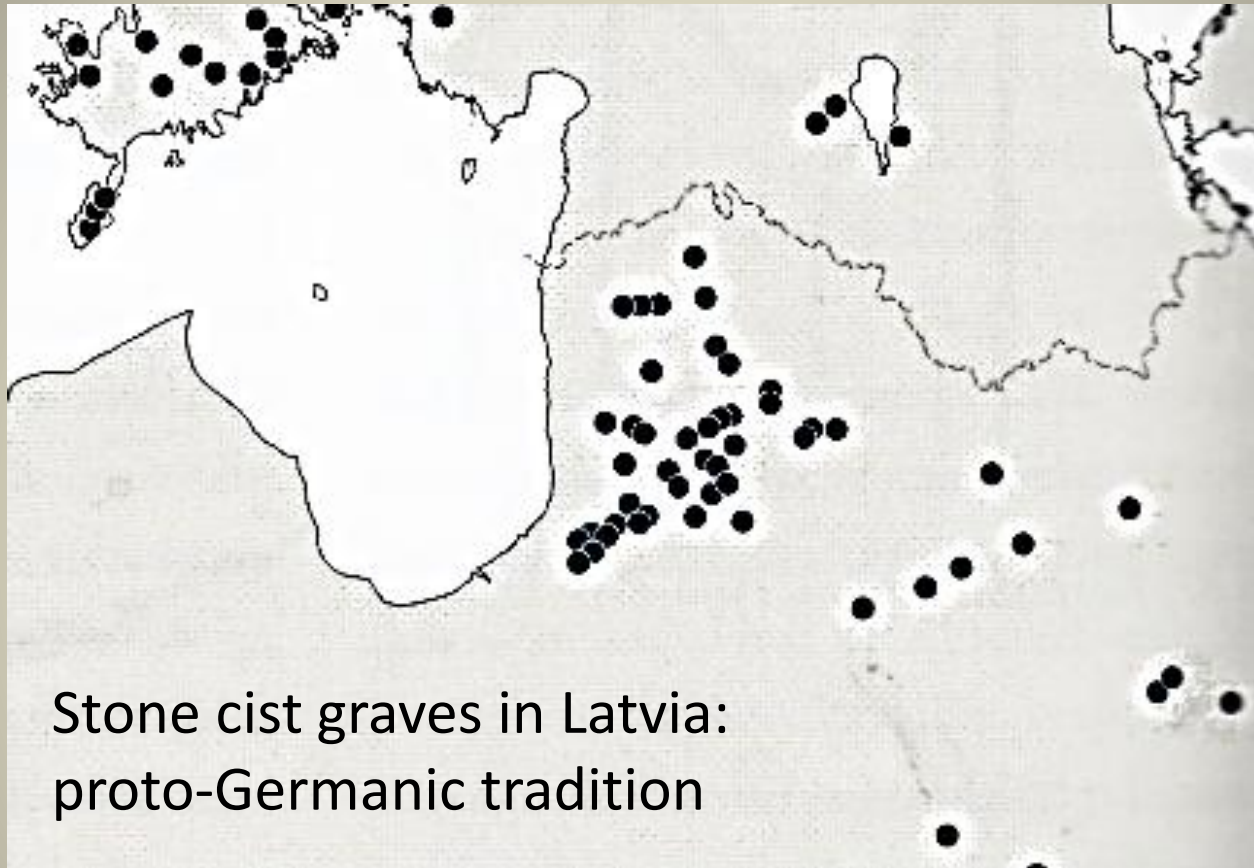


Finnic language becomes predominant
Proto-Germanic people get assimilated

Early Germanic loan words in Estonian



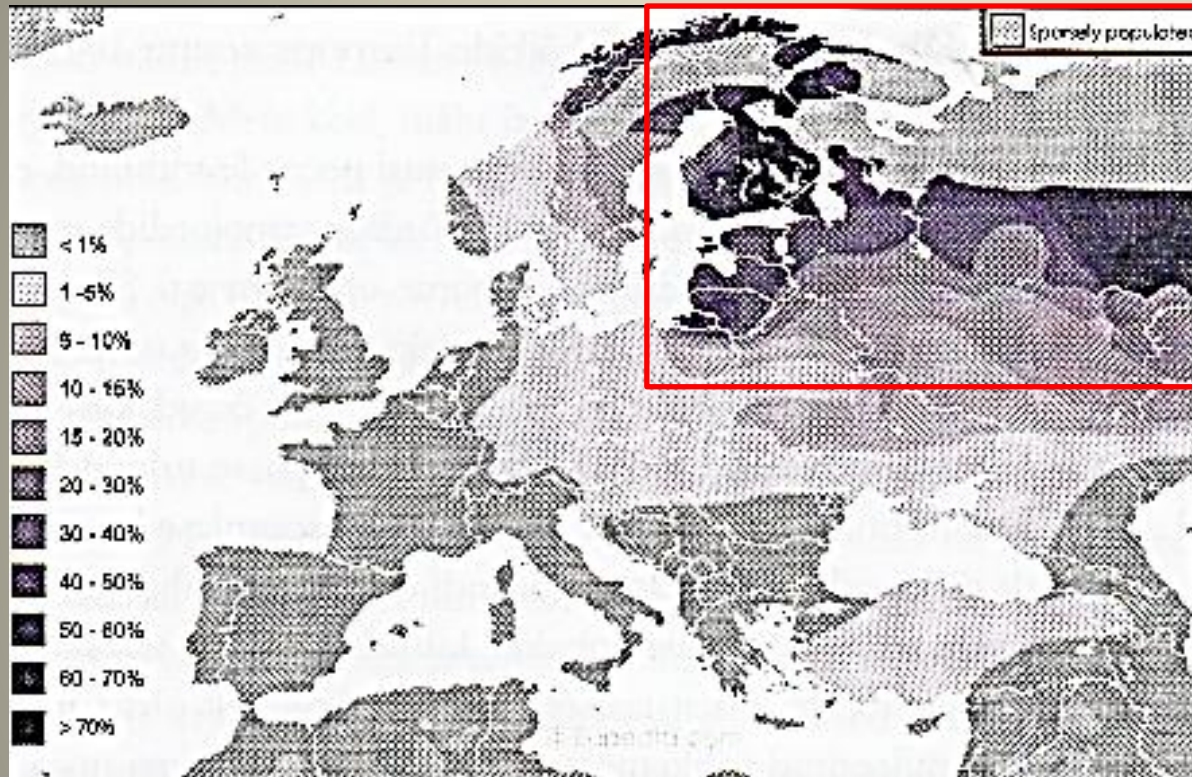
Traces of pre-Finnic population in Vidzeme



Stone cist graves in Latvia:
proto-Germanic tradition

Hydronyms and toponyms:
before the arrival of the Finns some Baltic language
was spoken in Northern Latvia (Kallio 2015)

Acient DNA of Finno-Ugric and Baltic populations shows eastern origins



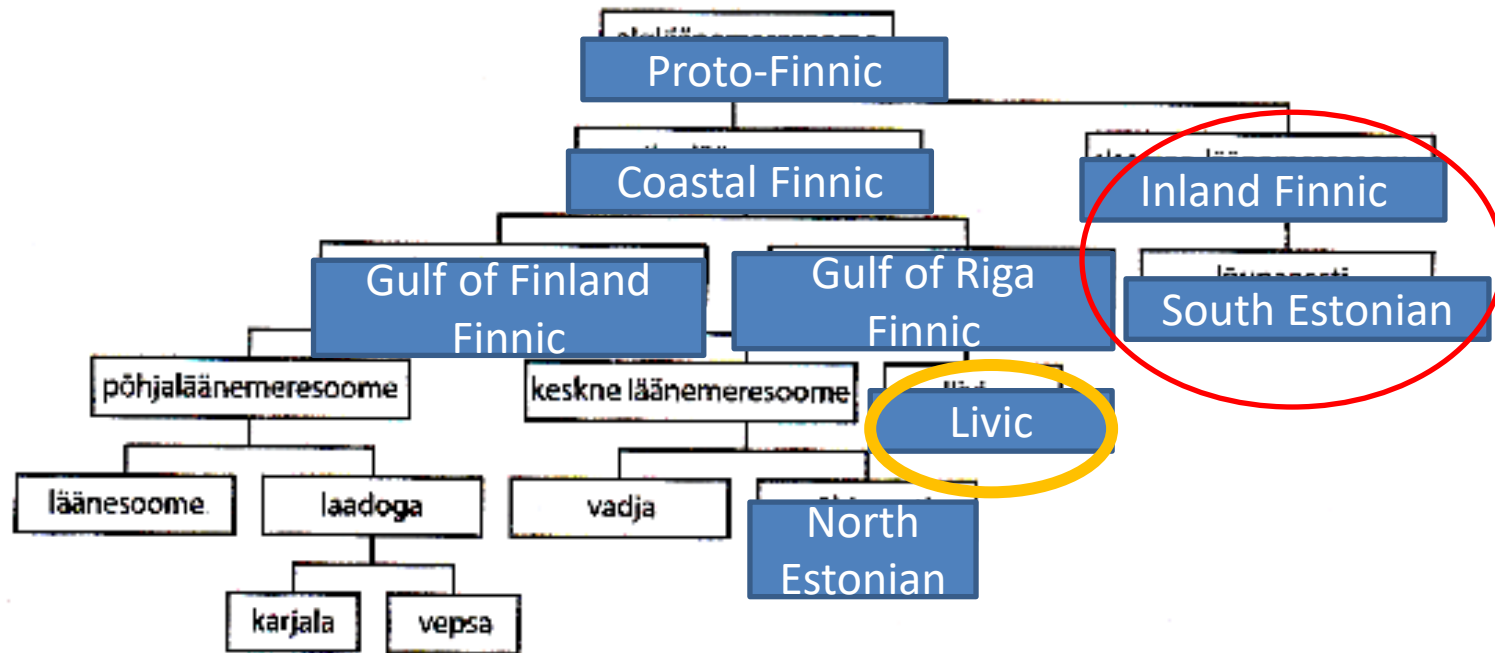
Distribution of a specific genetic subgroup haplogroup N3a – originating from Siberia, Urals, and Volga region

NB! N3a present:

in early tarand graves, but not in Bronze Age stone cist graves and Scandinavia

both among Finnic and Baltic populations

History of the Finnic languages

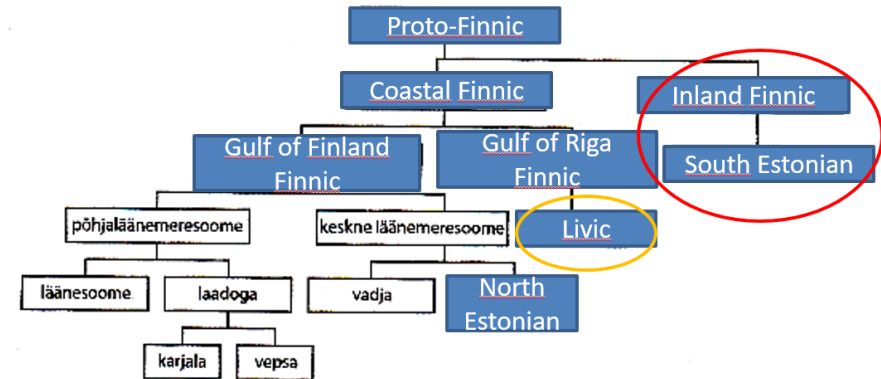
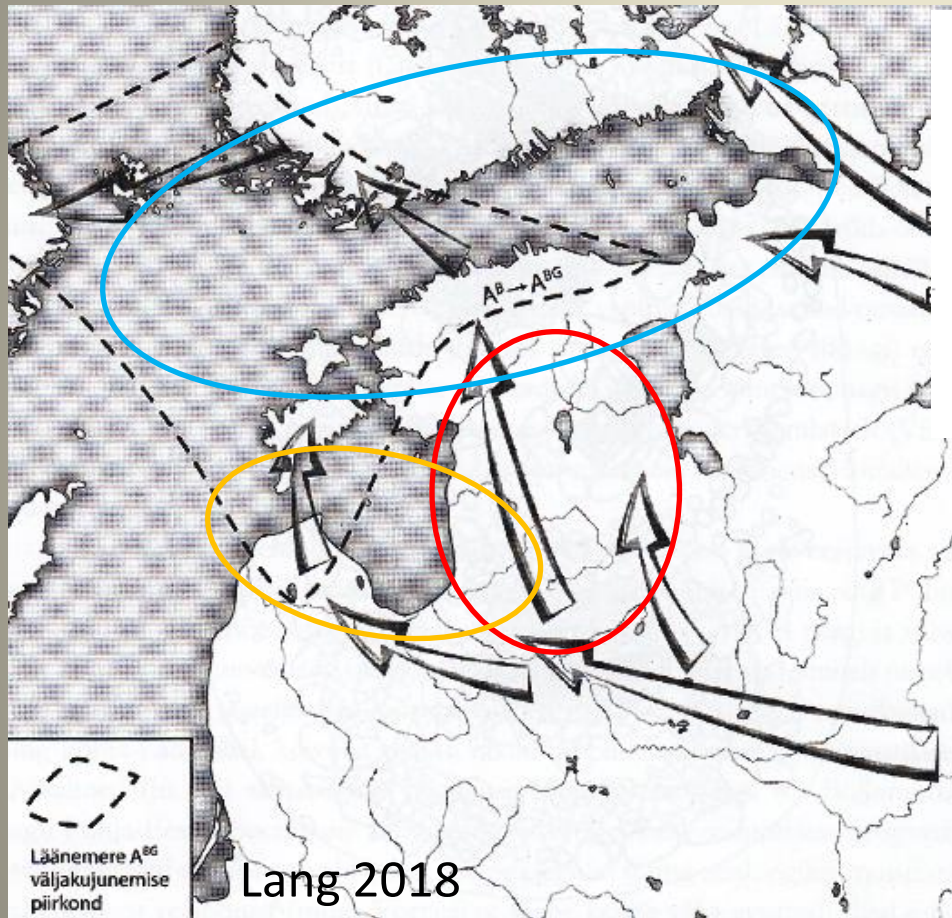


Joonis 7.1. Algläänemeresoome hargnemise skeem Petri Kallio (2014, jn 1) järgi.

Pekka Sammallahti and Petri Kallio (2014)

South Estonian language in the first separation from the Proto-Finnic ca. 2000 years ago

Language history processes in space



Kallio 2014

Roman Iron Age

1st-5th cc.

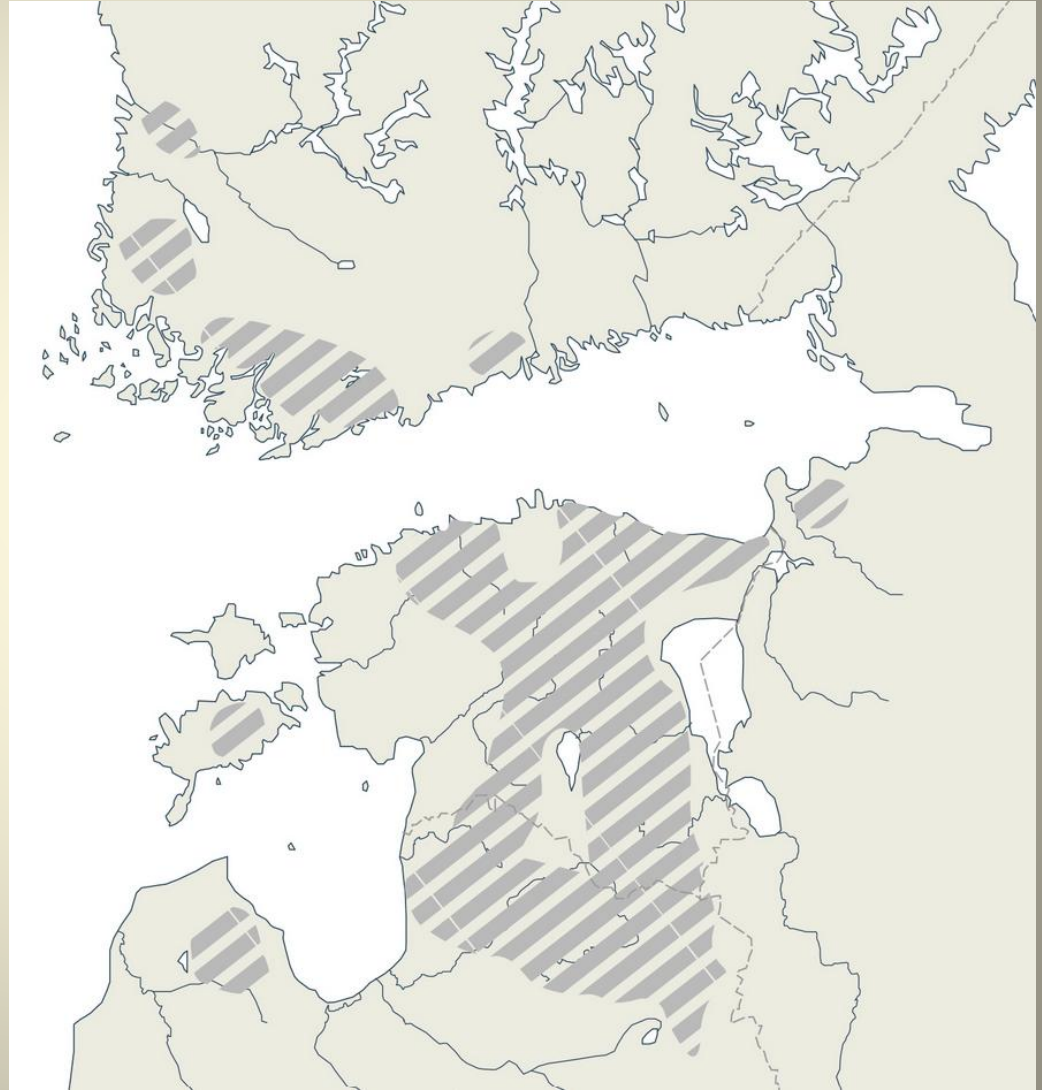
Finnic cemeteries:
typical tarand graves

- Rectangular boxes or cells made of bigger rocks and filled with stones
- Cremation burials

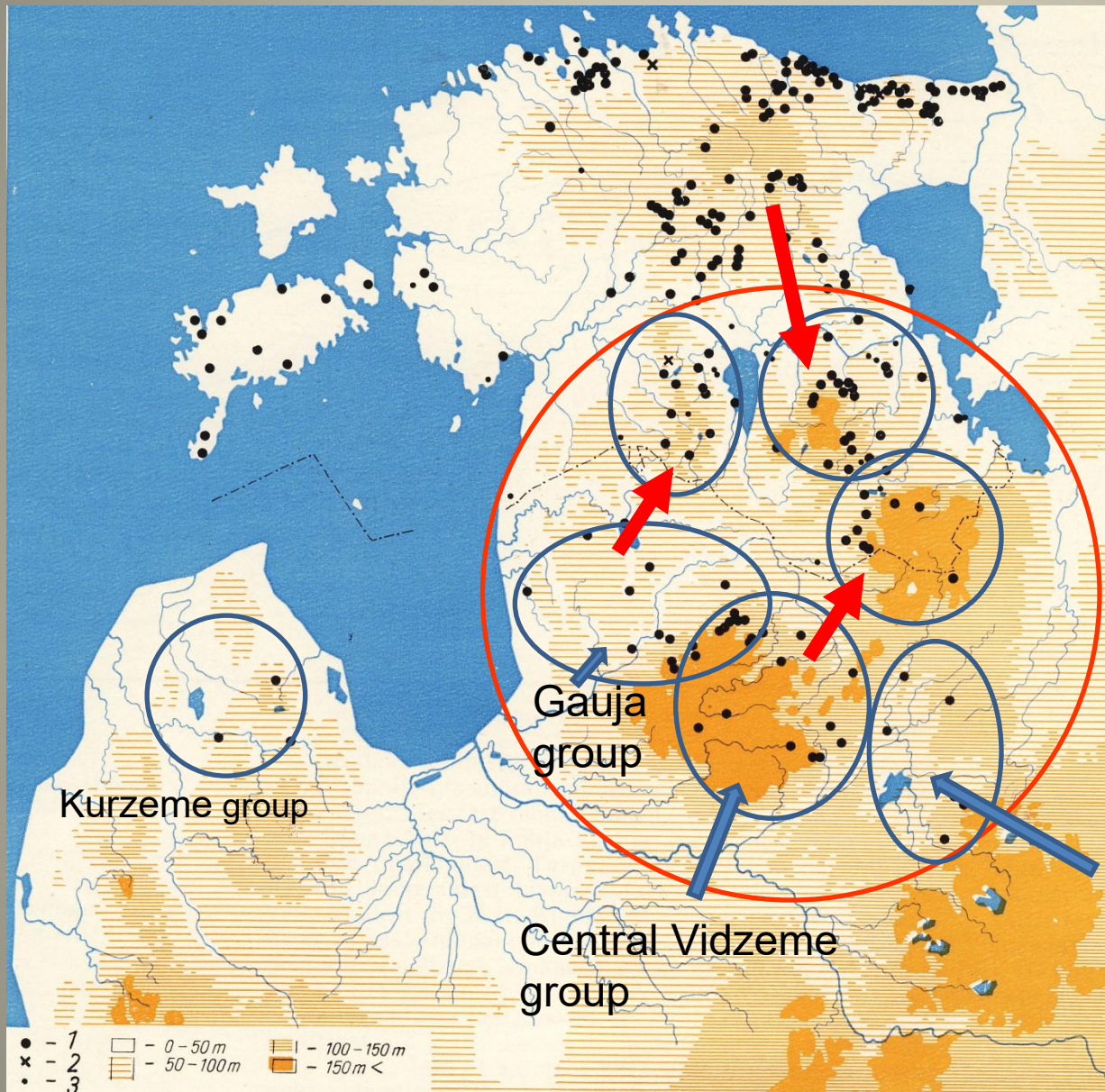


Roman Iron Age 1st-5th cc.

Typical tarand
cemeteries in
Estonia
Finland
Ingermanland
Northern Vidzeme,
incl. Metsepole
Northern Kurzeme



Tarand
cemeteries in
southern
Estonia and
northern Latvia
(Laul 1982)



Communication between groups of tarand graves in Estonia and Latvia based on disc brooches (Olli 2019)

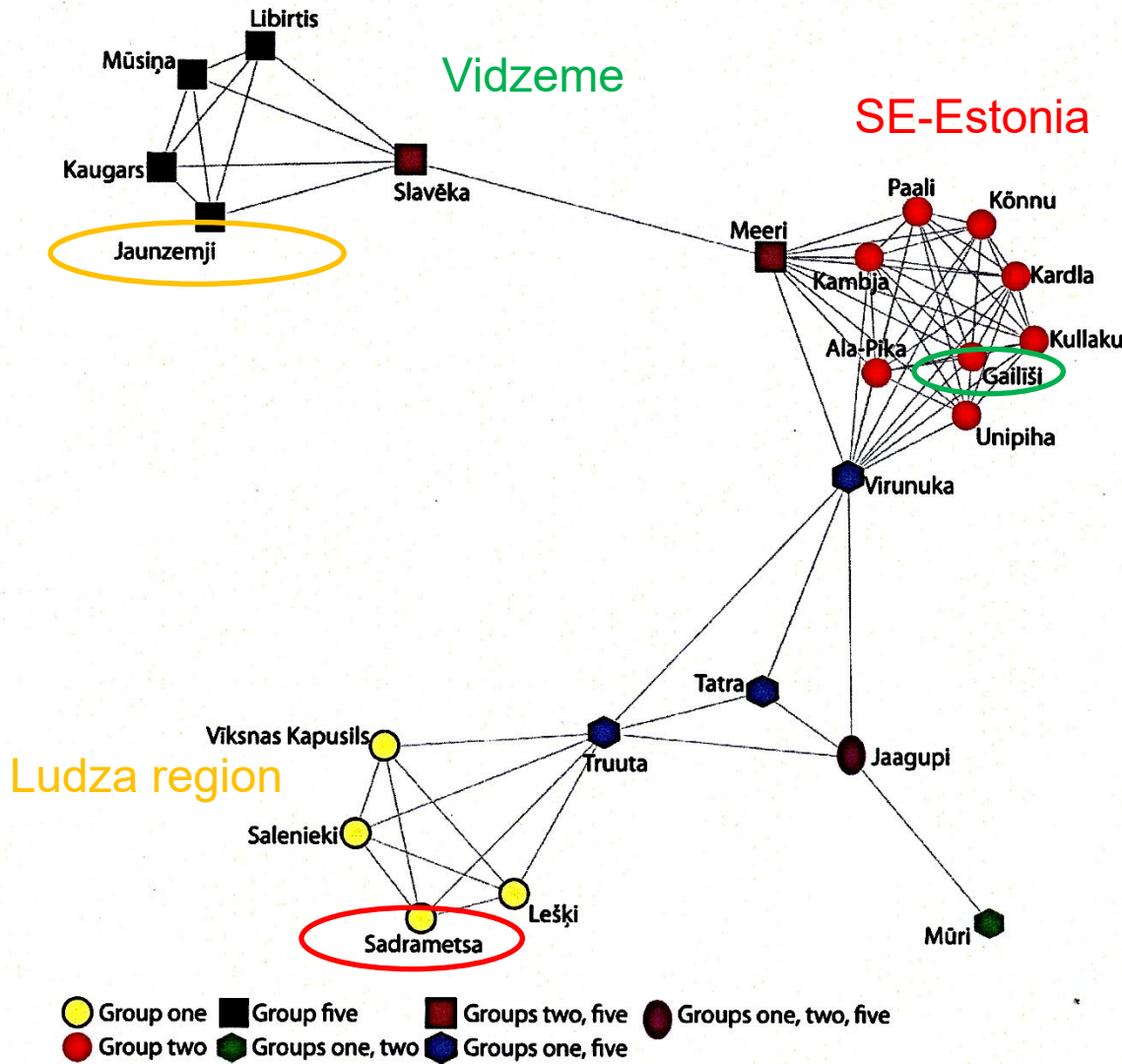
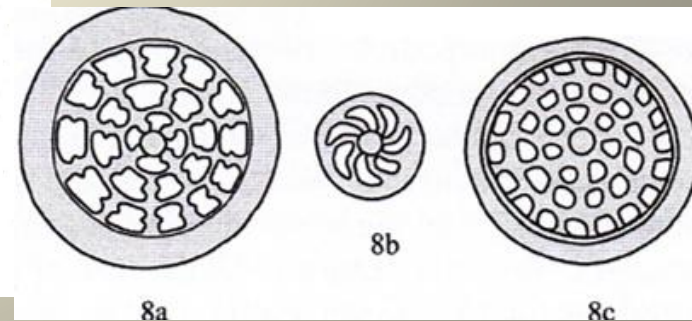
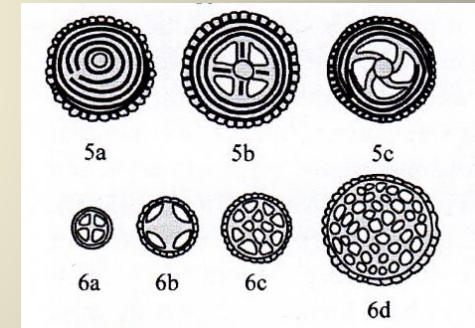
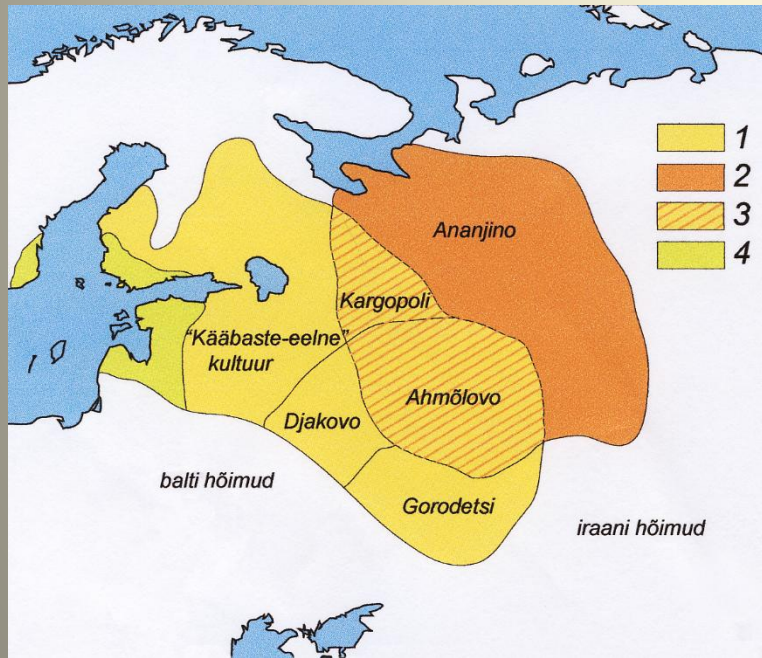


Fig. 4. Network of disc brooches.



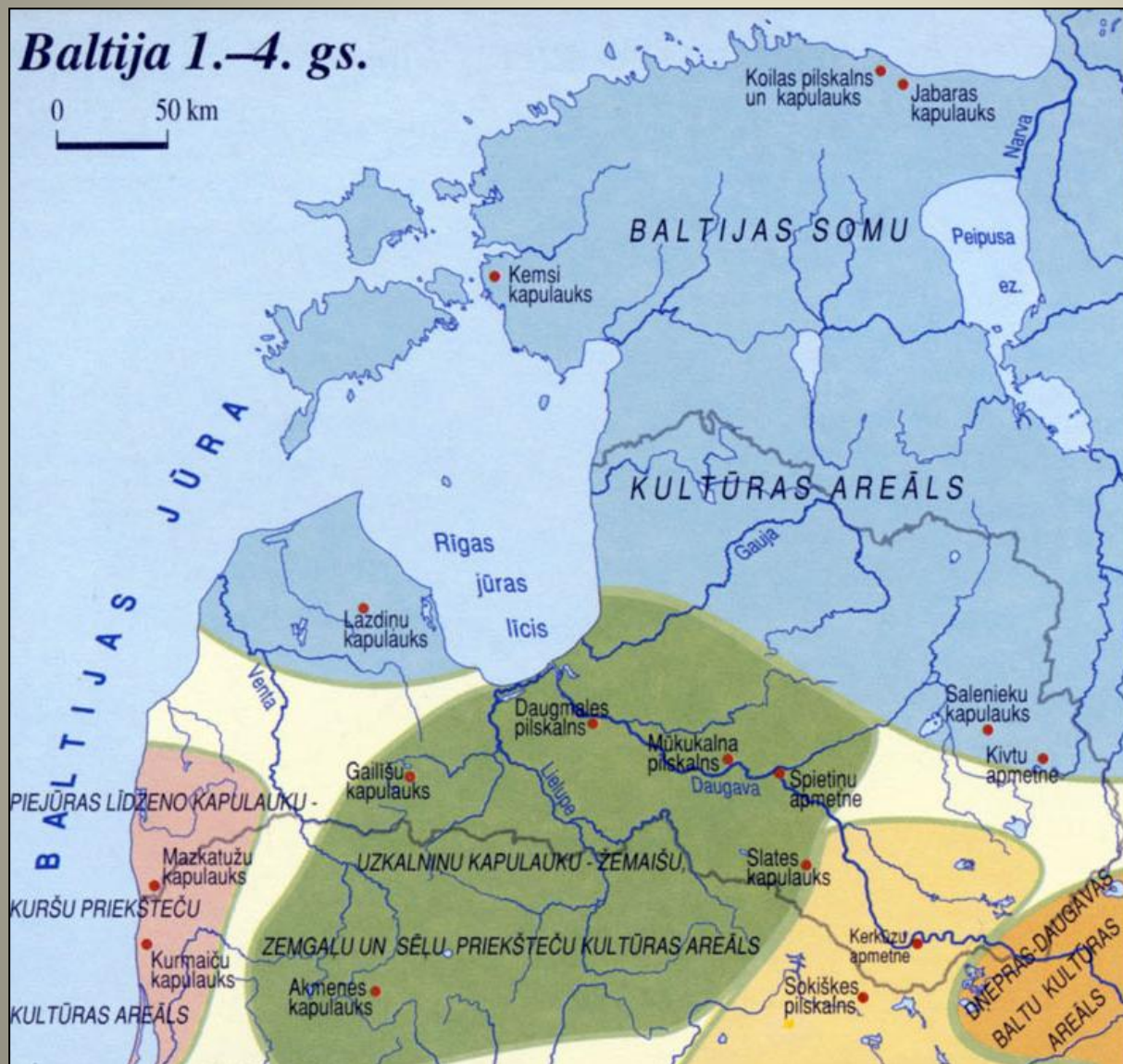
Textile-impressed pottery in the Roman Iron Age in south Estonia and Vidzeme



Finnic cultural unity

Roman Iron Age

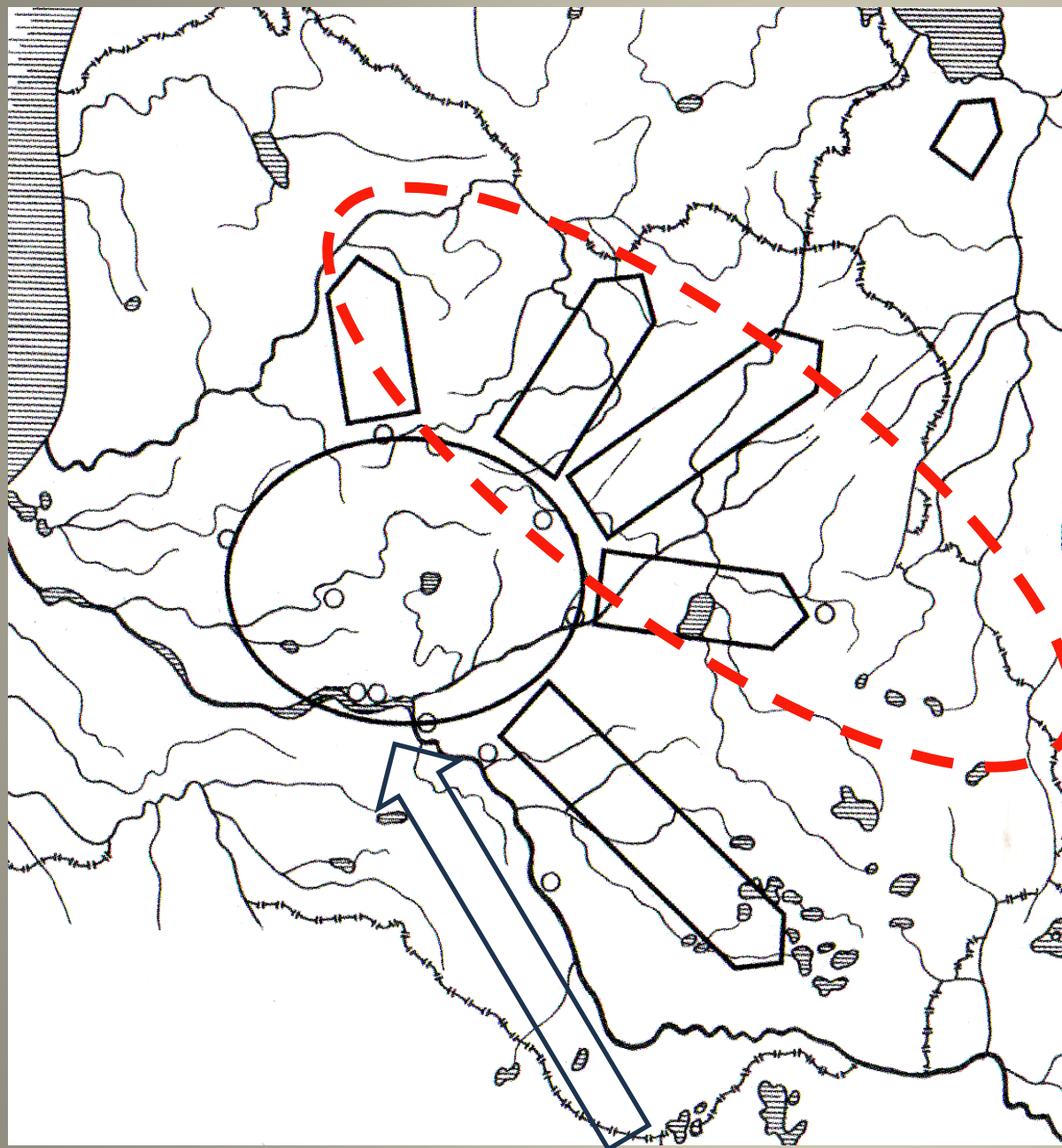
(Latvijas vēstures atlants 1998)



Area of Finnic population

Great disasters of the 5th and 6th centuries

- Thre Great Migration Period
- Climate catastrophy of 536 and 537: volcanic dust covers the sky for 2 years -> crop failure -> hunger
- Justinian's plague: 541-542 – 25 million die in the Mediterranean basin
 - > Crisis of mid-6th century in Scandinavia, Estonia
 - > Big cultural discontinuity in Estonia (in cemeteries, material culture, ritual practises)
- Tarand graves are abandoned and deserted in south Estonia and north Vidzeme in the 5th and 6th centuries



Finnic areas get greatly
depopulated

Latgallian expansion
since the Migration
Period.

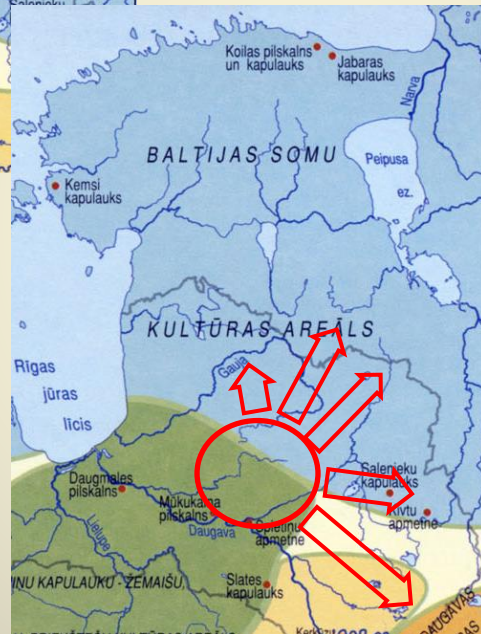
(map: Radiņš 2006)

Baltija 1.–4. gs.



Changes of Finnic– Baltic ethnic border

(Latvijas vēstures atlants 1998)

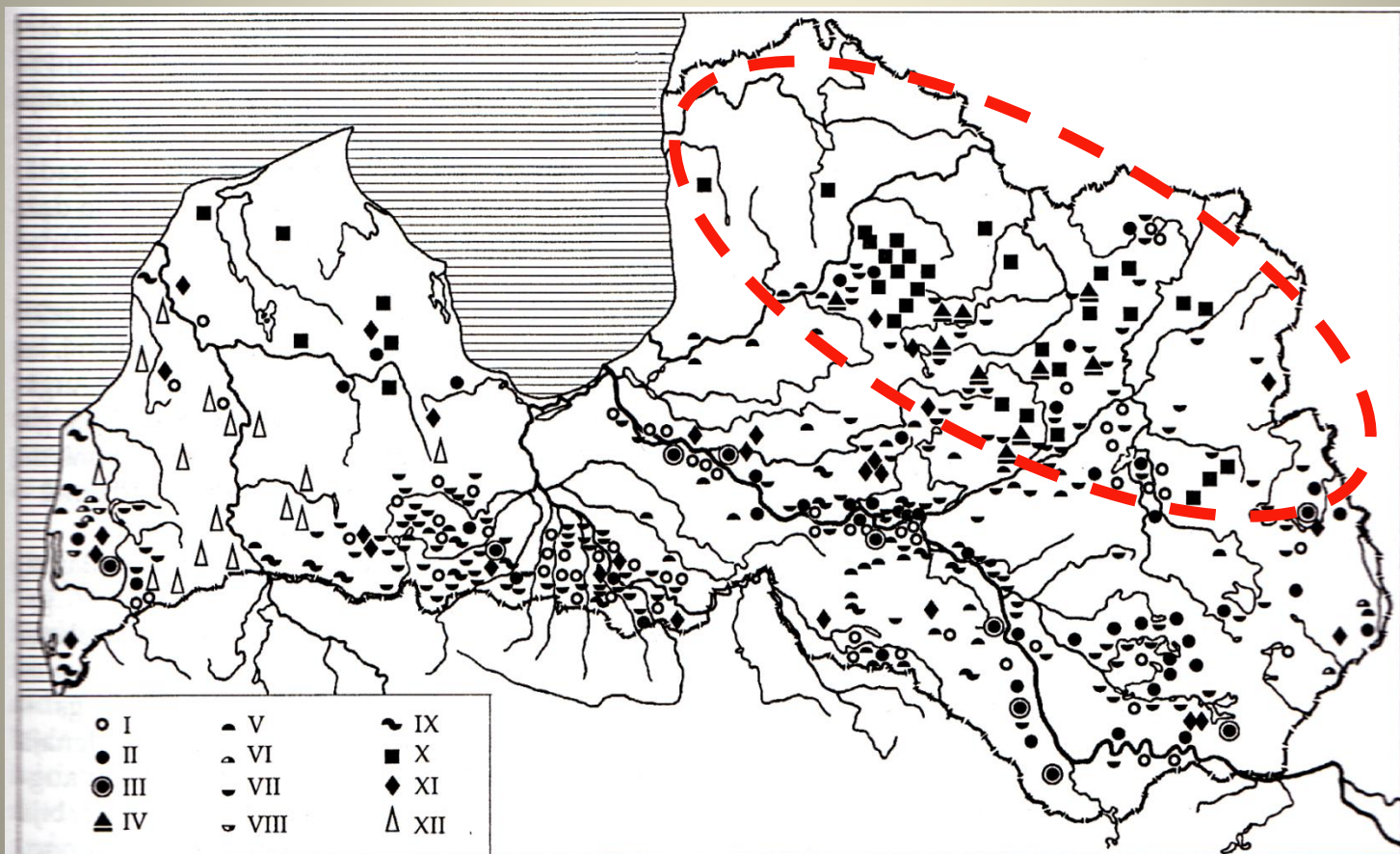


Baltija 5.–10. gs.



Fate of the Finnic population in Vidzeme in former area of tarand graves?

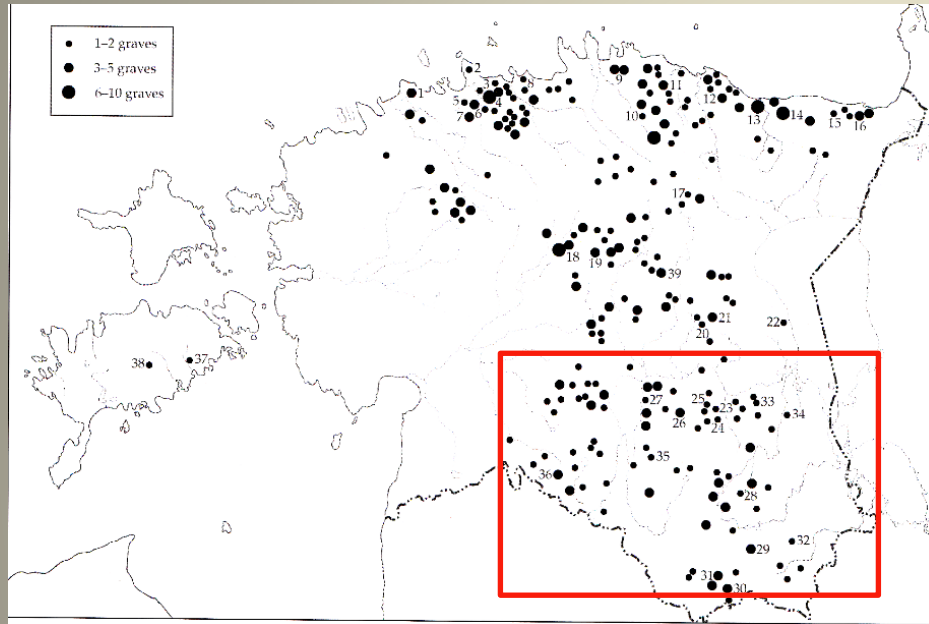
The Finnic people, except for the Livs (incl. in Kurzeme) and Vends of Cēsis disappear from Latvian historiography



175. att. Apdzīvotība Latvijā 5.–8.gs.: I – apmetne, II – pilskalns, III – pilskalns ar apmetni, IV – ezerpils, V – uzkalniņi ar skeletkapiem, VI – uzkalniņi ar ugunskapiem, VII – lidzenie skeletkapi, VIII – lidzenie ugunskapi, IX – uzkalniņi ar ierakstiem vidējā dzelzs laikmeta skeletkapiem, X – akmeņu krāvēju kapi, XI – depozīti, XII – tuvāk neraksturojamas atradumu vietas

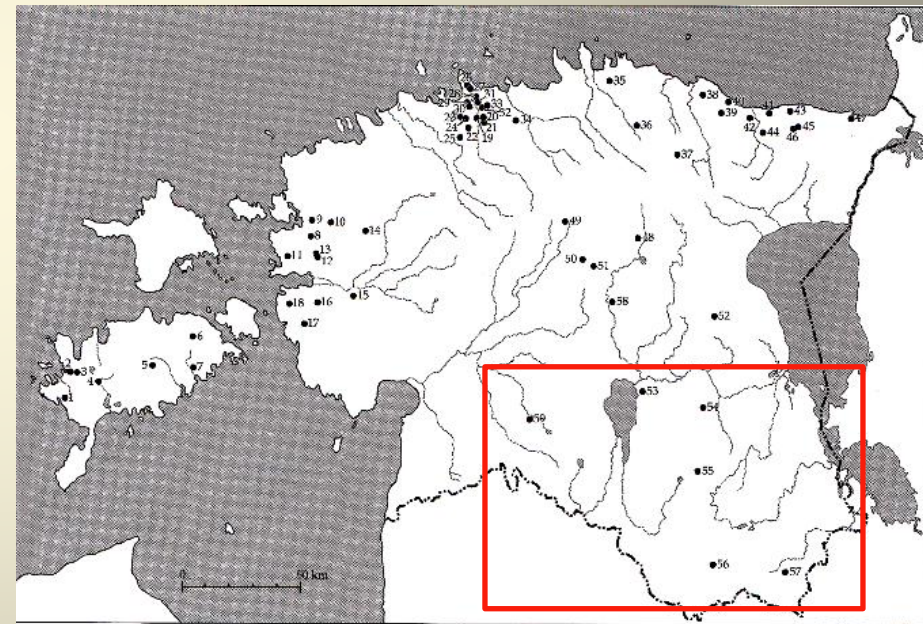
Did they really disappear?

Which were processes after the Roman Iron Age in southern Estonia that remained Finnic?



Roman Iron Age Cemeteries (Lang 2007)

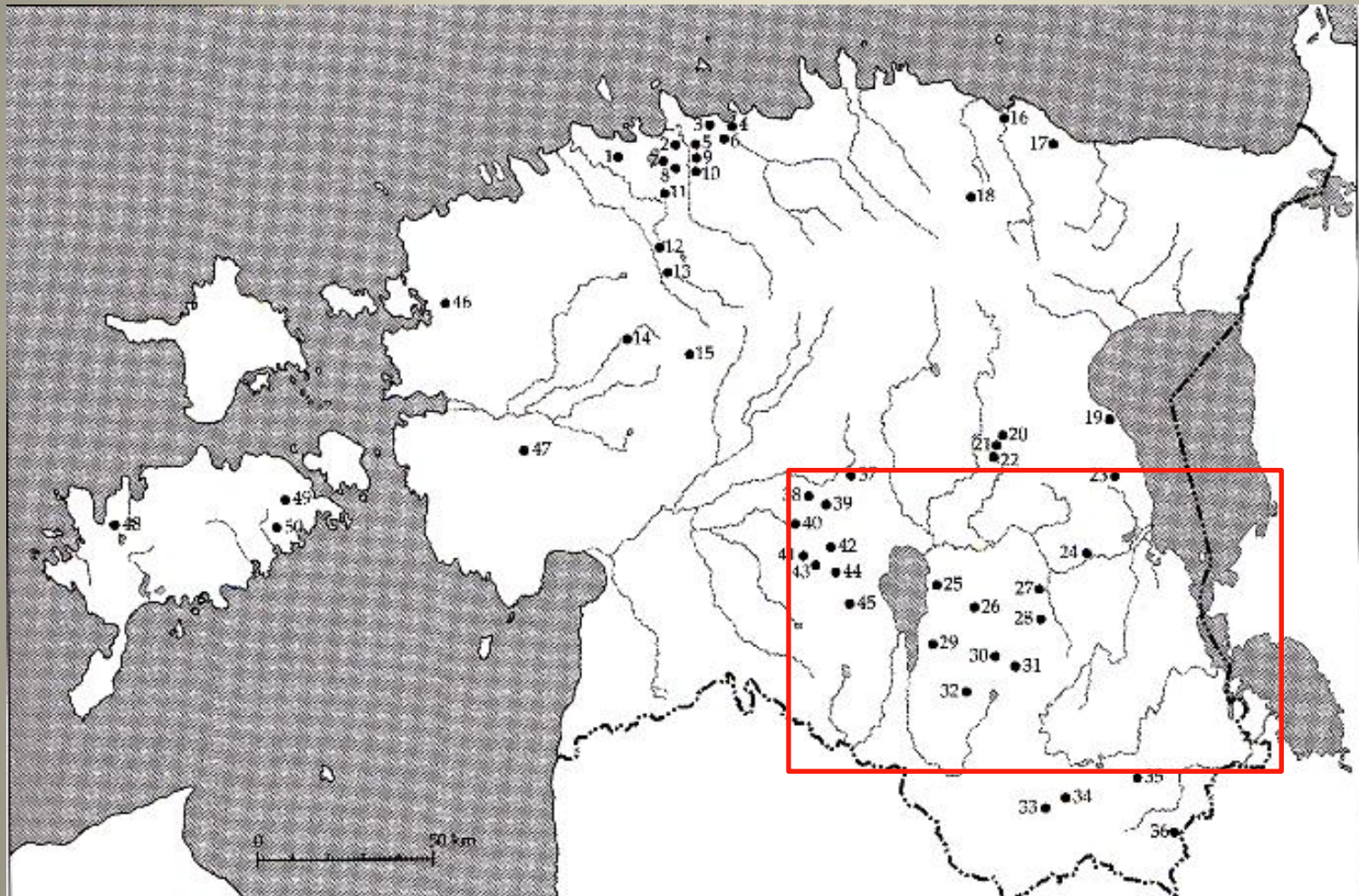
Cemeteries disappear



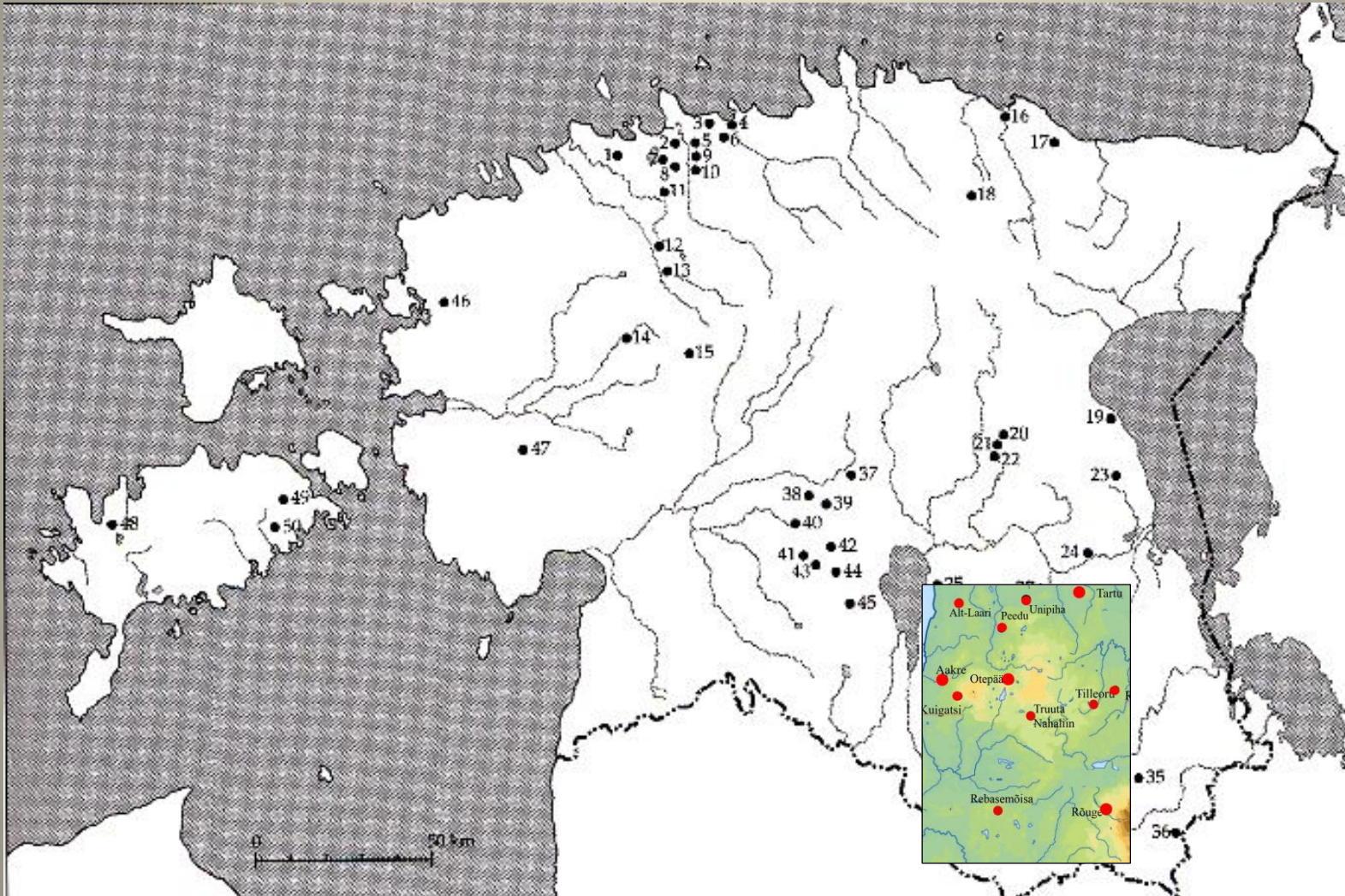
Migration Period Cemeteries (Tvauri 2012)

Continuity of open settlements

500-1000 AD (Tvauri 2012)



Viking Age hill forts in areas without cemeteries



Fate of the Finnic population?

„Finnic“ graves disappear, but settlement sites and hill forts remain in the 6th-13th centuries in Estonia

Henry of Livonia: there are many people in Southern
Estonia

-> Finnic people did not disappear but their graves become archaeologically „invisible“:

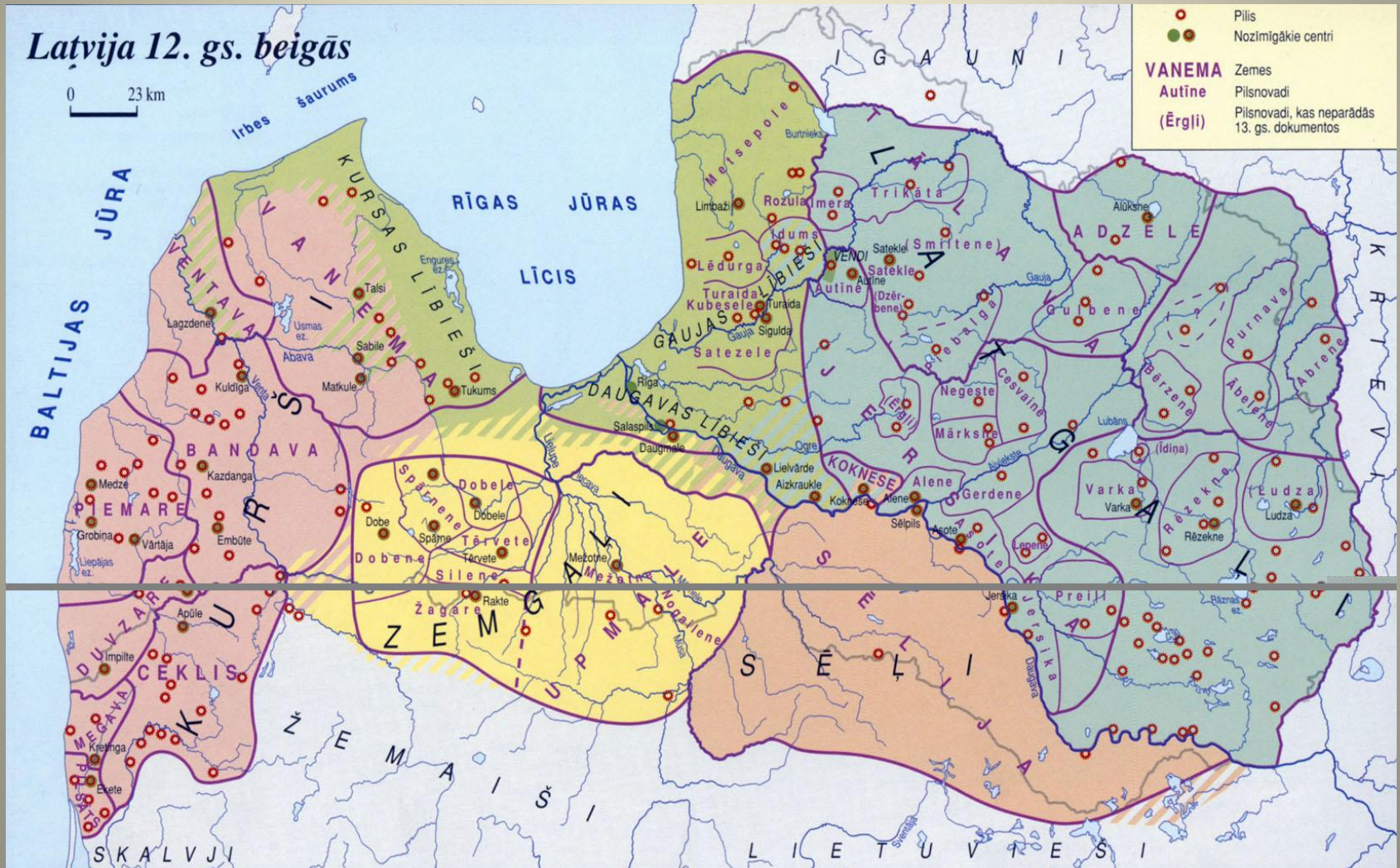
flat burial grounds without grave goods?

Hidden preservation of the Finnic population can be suggested, beside the Latgallian newcomers, also in northern Vidzeme.

Ethnicities of Latvia in late 12th century

Latvijas vēstures atlants (1998)

How reliable in ethnic terms in northern Vidzeme, outside the Livic areas?

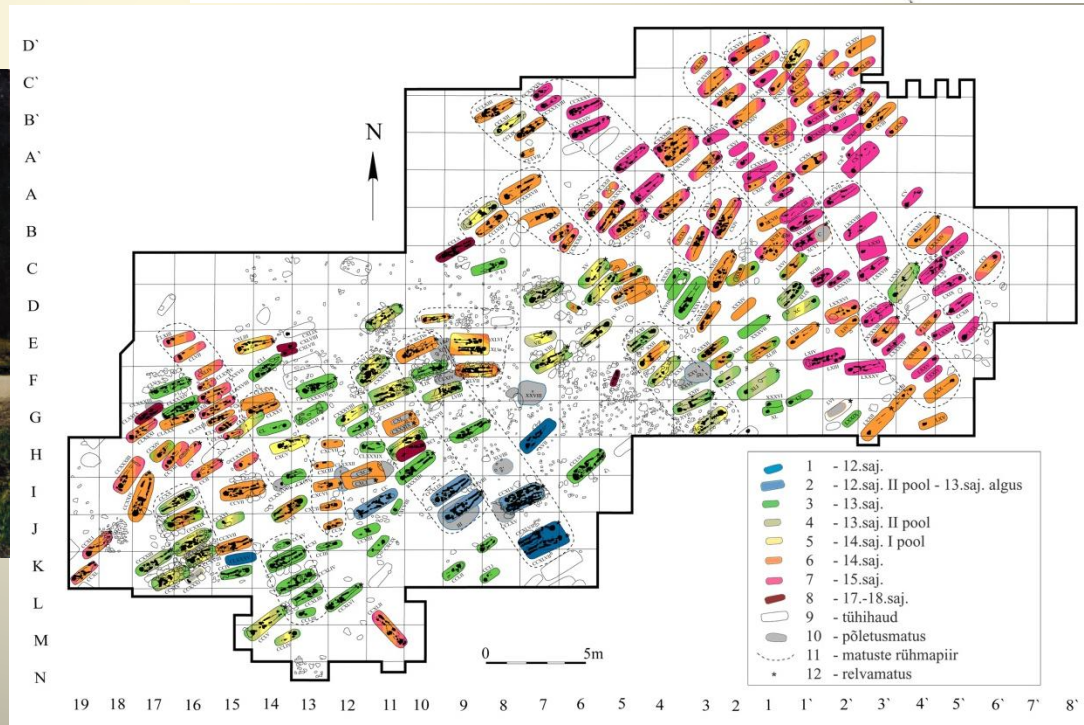


What about the situation in the Late
Iron Age and Middle Ages
in areas east of the Livs?

Siksälä Cemetery

starting point for a critical view

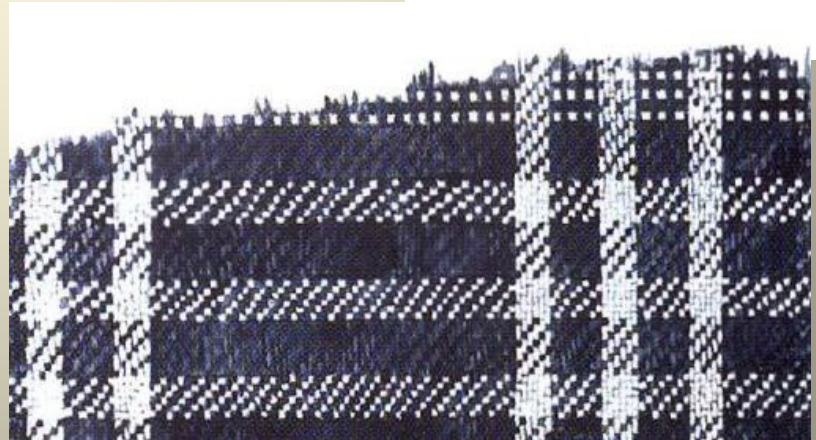
Excavated in 1980-1993
by Silvia Laul and Jüri Peets
Ca. 300 excavated graves
8th century – ca. 1450/75 AD
(Laul, Valk 2007; Valk. Laul 2014)



Inhumation graves ca. 1225-1475

Female costume
typical for Eastern
Latvia:

villaine



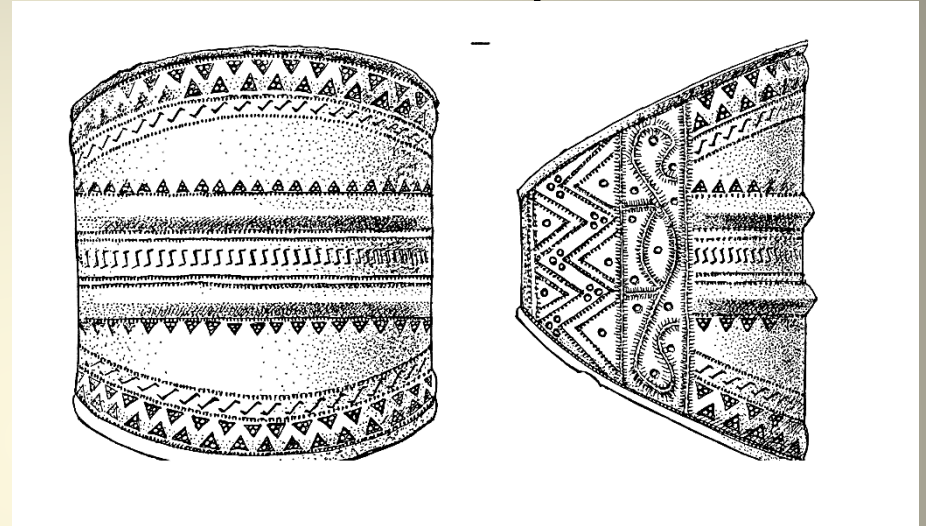
Inhumation graves
ca. 1225-1475

vainags





Shield-shaped bracelets
late 13th- mid-15th
century



Necklaces of cowry shells





Antropo- morphic pendants

Siksälä: find assemblage typical for
northeastern and eastern-Latvia

However, Siksälä cemetery has Iron Age Finnic background

Ca. 700/800-1000 AD

„Invisible“ graves

Flat cremations without grave goods

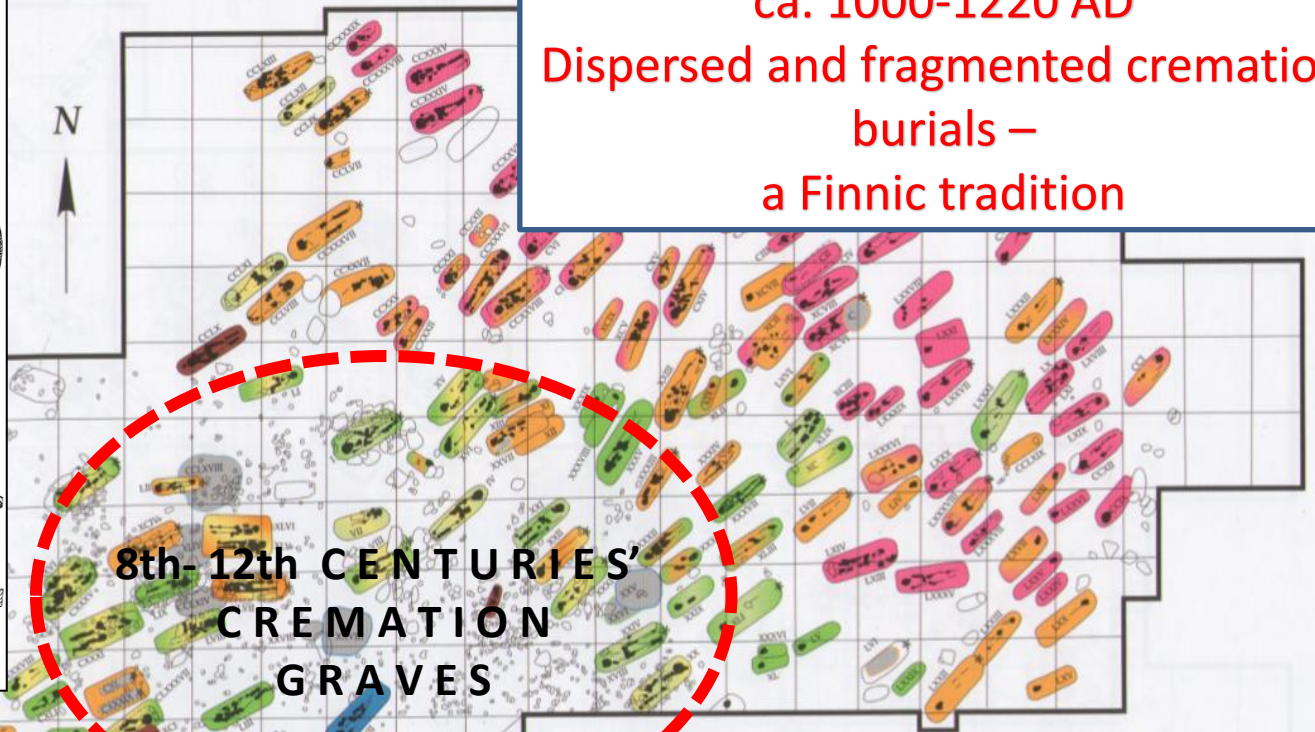
Burial areas below the level of ploughing (40-70 cm)

Important also for understanding the reasons for
the missing Finnic graves in northern Latvia

Siksälä Cemetery

ca. 1000-1220 AD

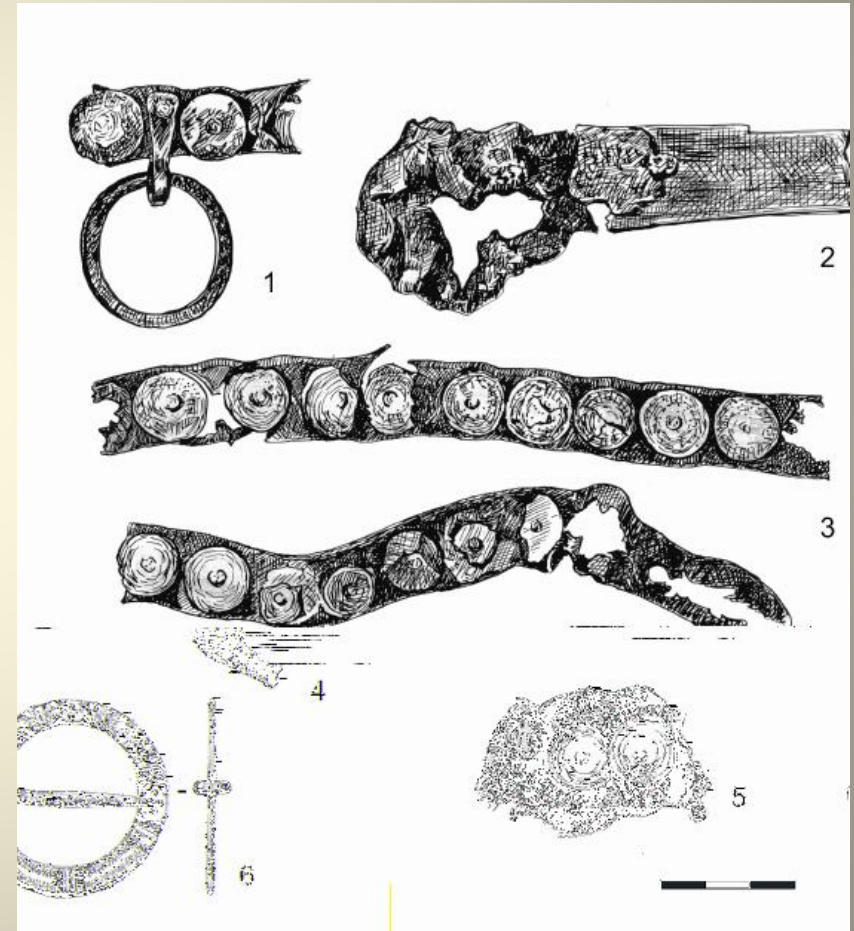
Dispersed and fragmented cremation burials –
a Finnic tradition



Non-Latgallian traits in Siksälä inhumation graves

- Gender based opposite orientation untypical for Latgallians, but typical for SE Estonia (Võrumaa):
men – oriented towards SW, women - towards NE
- Barrows with stone structures
- Finnic traits in costume

Other cemeteries with similar finds in the region



Kendiši (Setomaa)

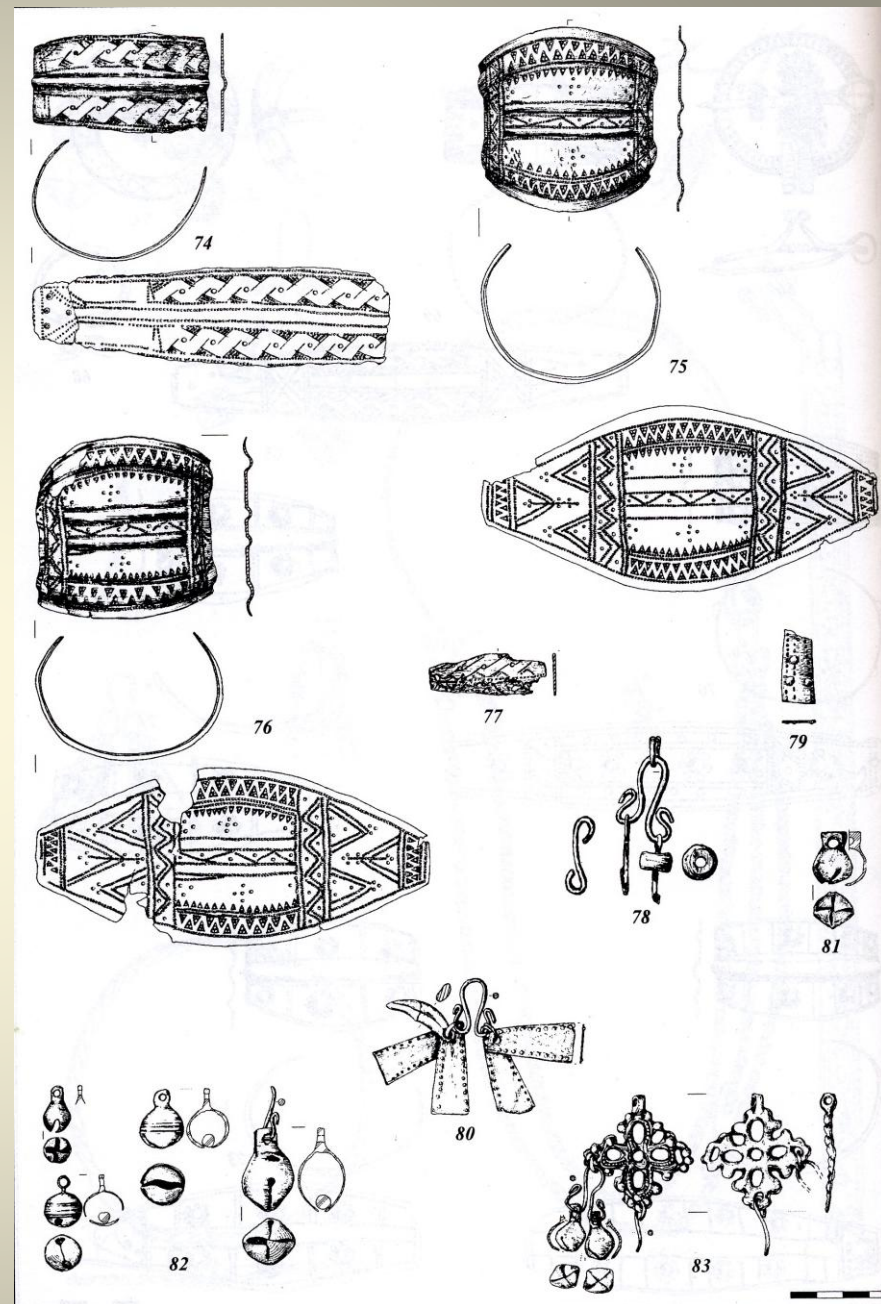
Vinski (Setomaa)





Viļaka (NE corner of Latvia)

„Somugru senkapi“



Škilbeņu Danilovka (Latgale)

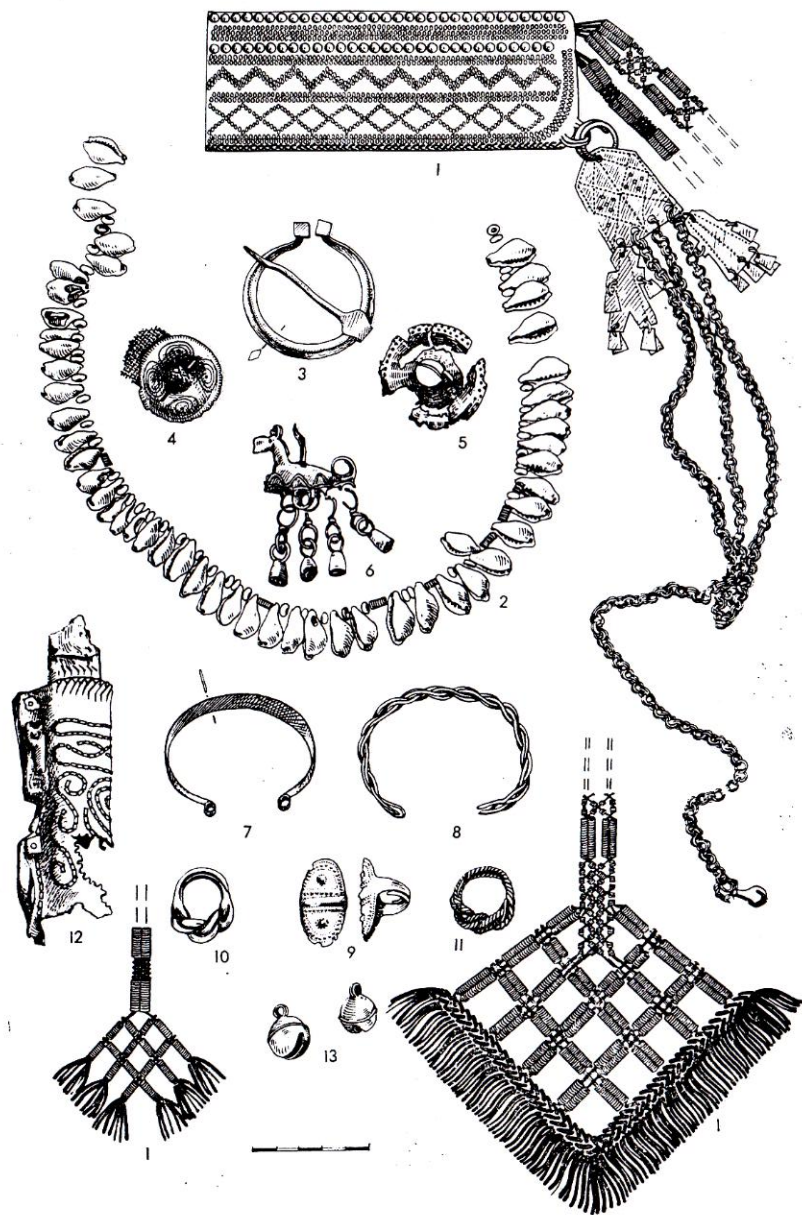
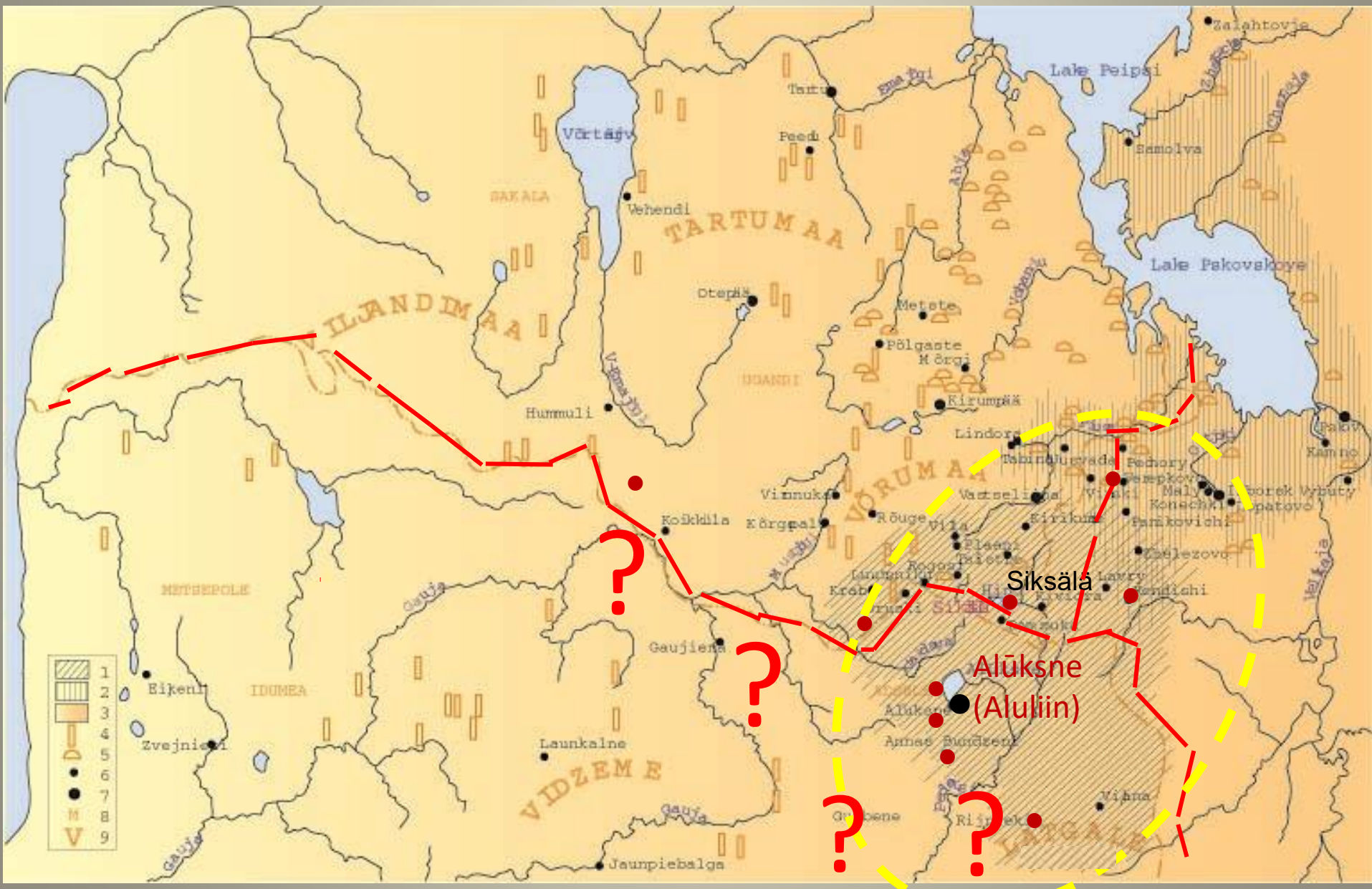


Рис. 15. Инвентарь женского погребения в жальнике № 4. 1 — венок, показан в реконструкции А. Зарини, 2 — ожерелье, 3—5 — фибулы, 6 — подвеска-конек, 7—8 — браслеты, 9—11 — перстни, 12 — ножны, 13 — бубенчики; 1 — шерсть, бронза, стекло, олово; 2 — каури, стекло, бронза; 3—11, 13 — бронза, 12 — кожа и бронза

A bigger area of culturally similar sites



Russian chronicle: the Chud of Ochela

1179/80: Novgorodian chronicles:
prince Mstislav

- “...went with the Novgorodians against the Chud, against Ochela, and burnt their country” “Mstislav
- * ...went with 20 000 Novgorodians against Ochela, against the Chud, had war in all country of the Chud, and came back with many prisoners and cattle.”

The Chud of Ochela =

- *mixture of Finnic substrate and Latgallian newcomers
- *predominant Finnic language (“the Chud”)

Questions

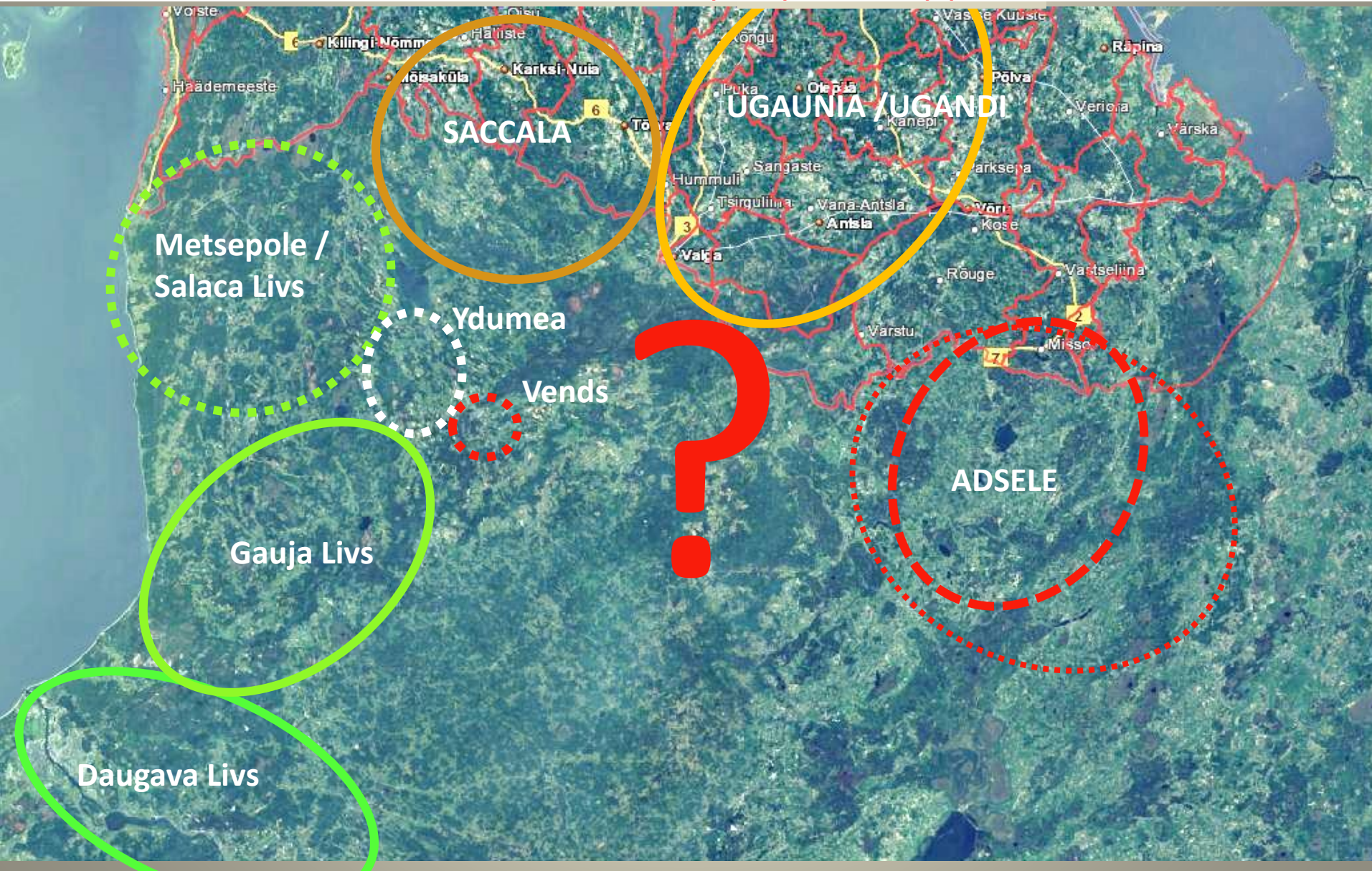
Vainags and villaine of Eastern Latvia: are they just only „Latgallian“ features?

„Hidden“ Finnic presence also in other parts of northern Vidzeme east of the Livic areas?

Are there other archaeological traces of non-Latgallian population?

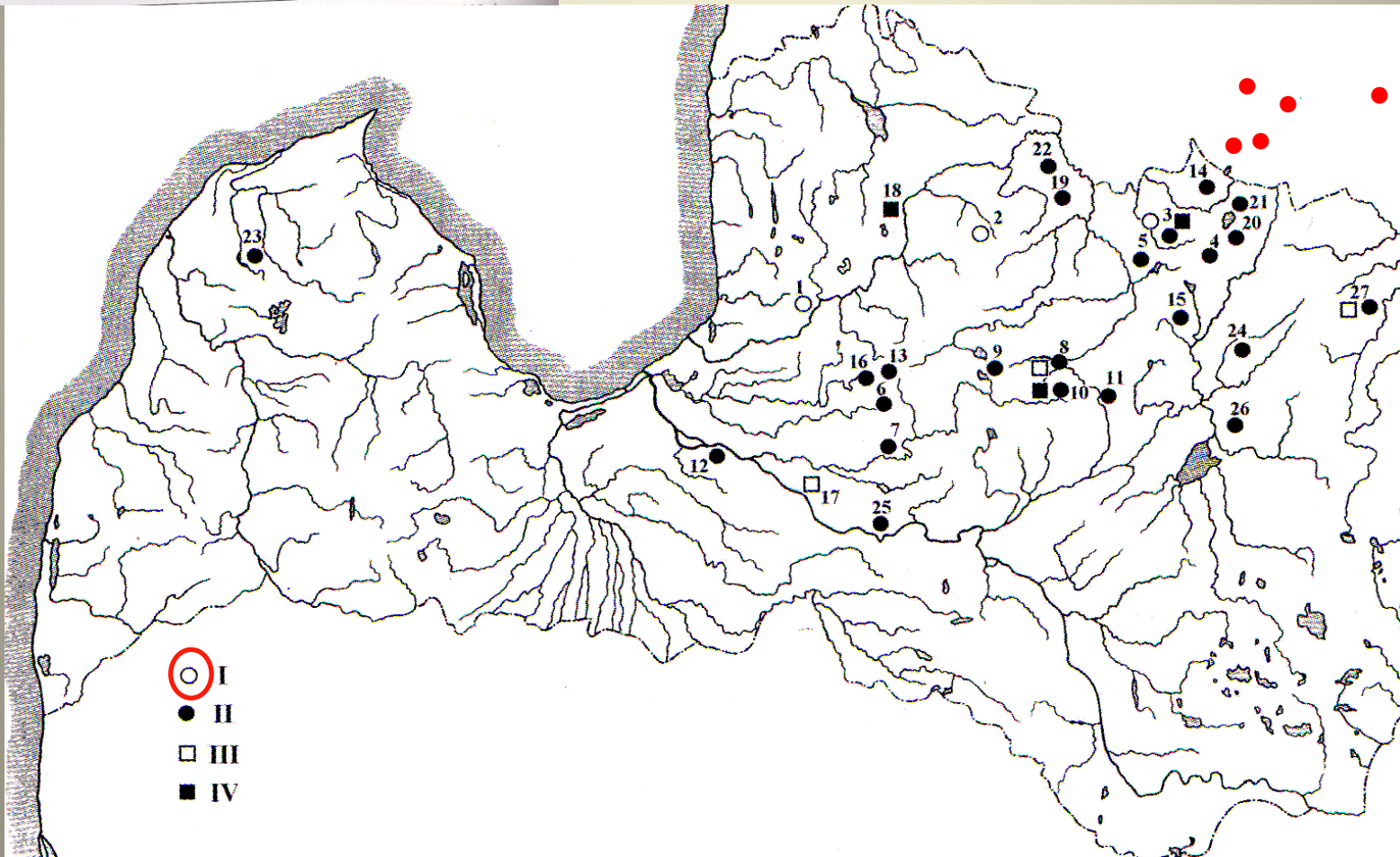
What about lands between Atzele and the Livs in the Late Iron Age and Middle Ages?

When did the Finnic people disappear?



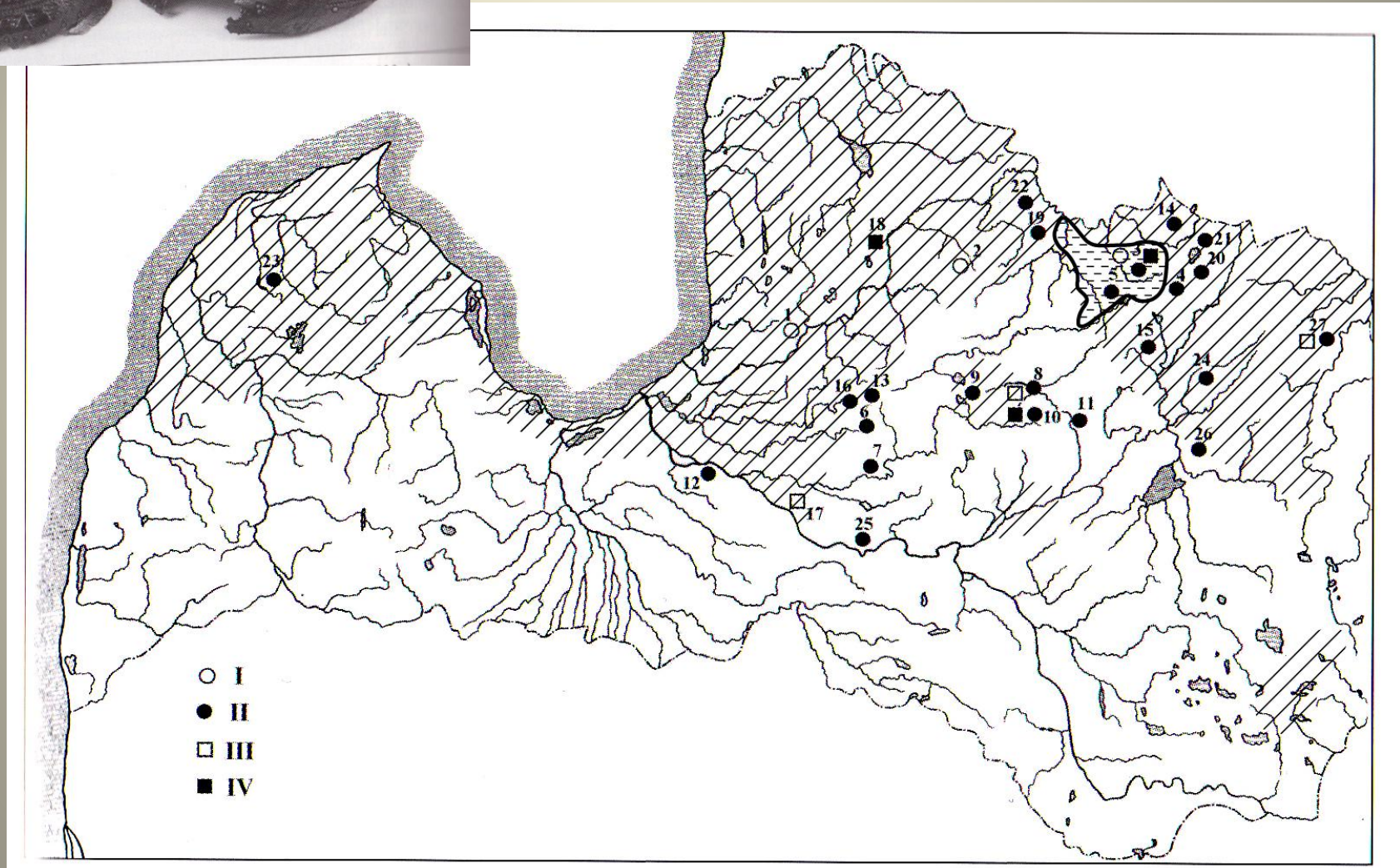


Shield-shaped bracelets
late 13th-15th cc.
(after Vaska 2006; authors' additions)
Made in Alūksne?
A Finnic ethnocultural marker?

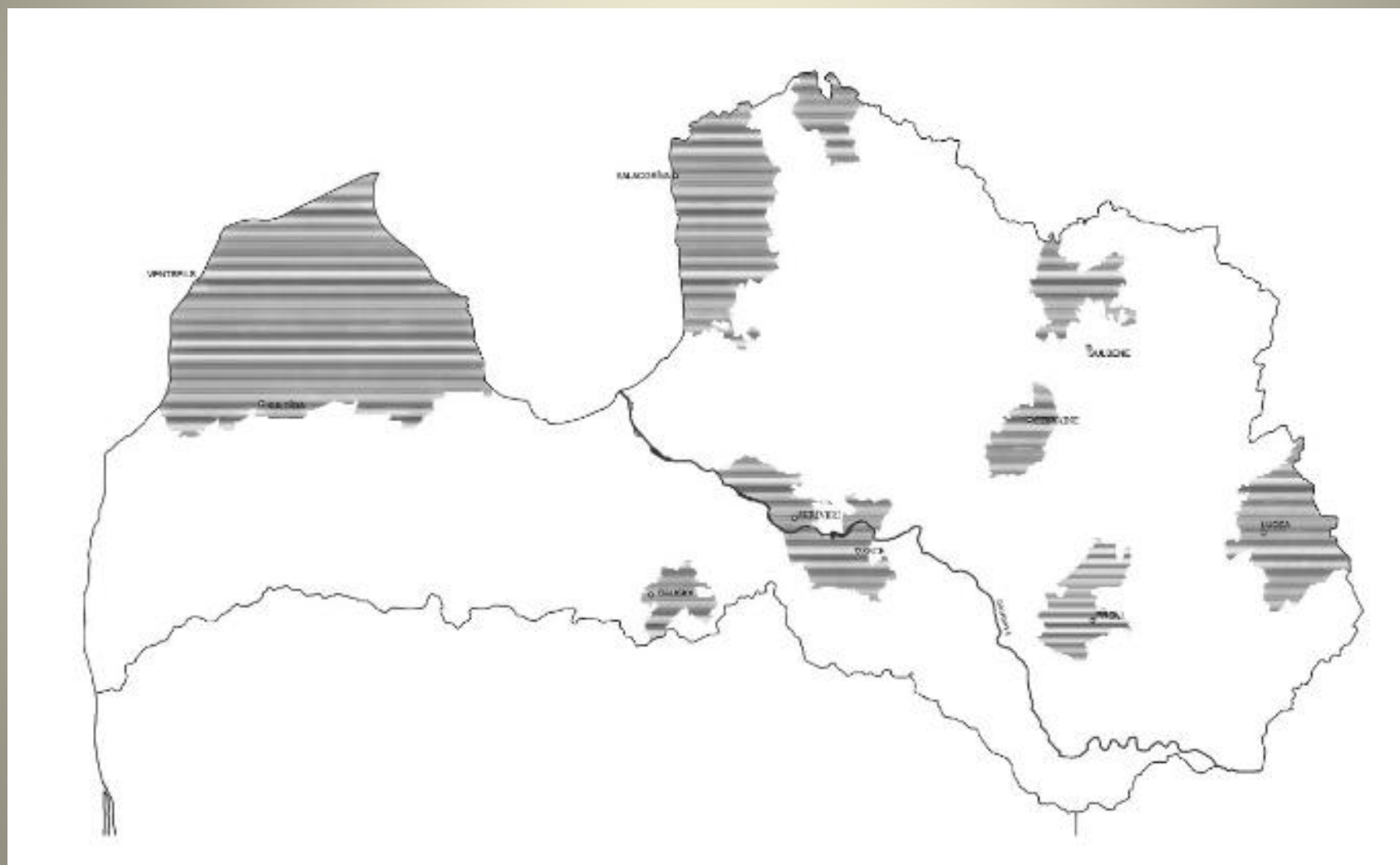




In areas with Finnic features in
the ethnographic material
(after Saulvejds Ciermanis 1964)



Finnic or Finnic-like features in Latvian subdialects, based on fonetics and mophology (Anna Stafecka 2021)



Common features in the popular culture of northern Vidzeme and southern Estonia

Long farm house with dwelling, drying and threshing crops under one roof

Archaeology: the house type is formed in the 15th-16th centuries



Common features in the culture of northern Vidzeme and southern Estonia

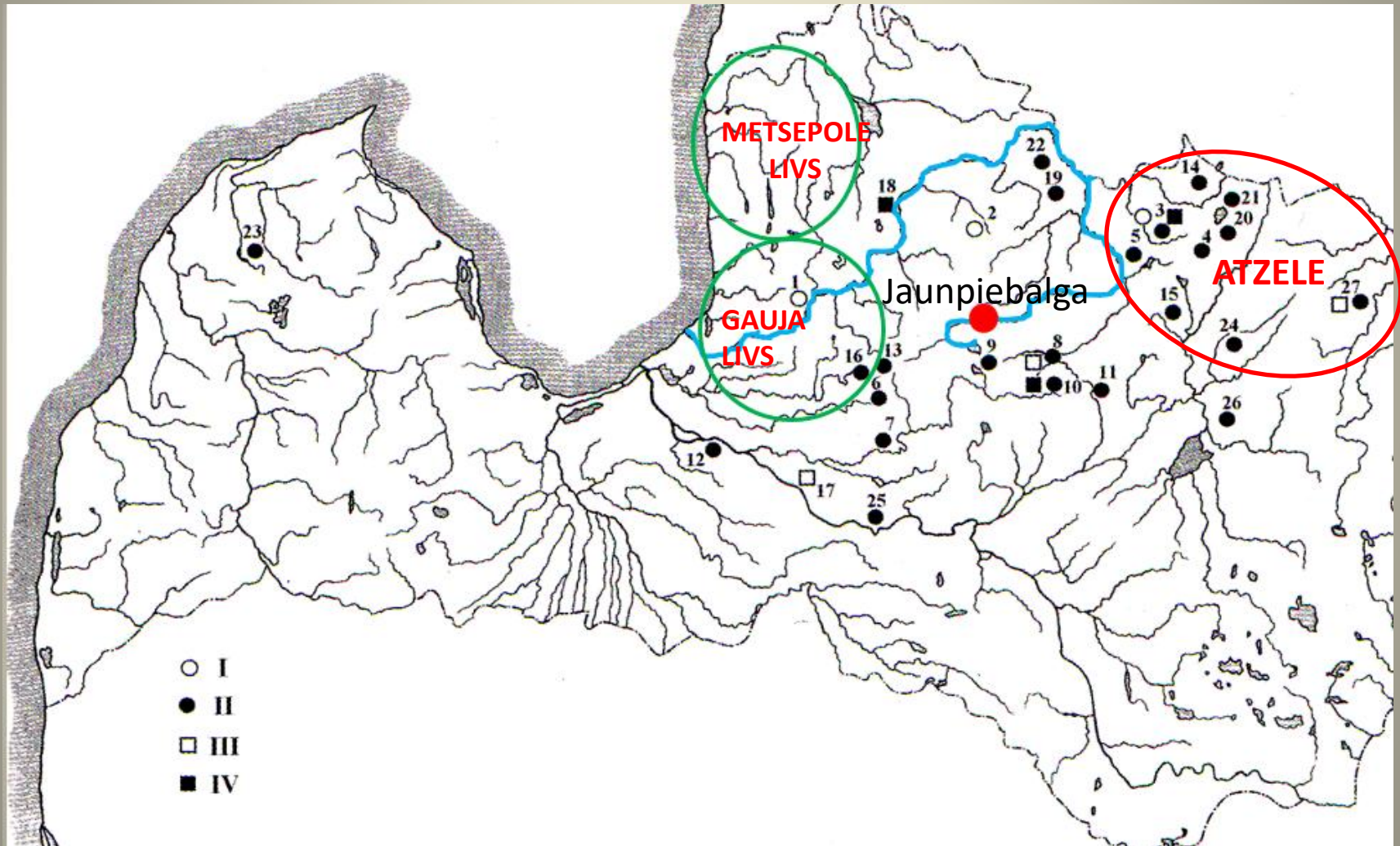
Trees with cross-marks:
Cross cut into the trunk on the way to the cemetery during the funeral procession
- to hinder haunting and/or to lock the soul of the dead into the tree



Unfortunately, concerning Northern Vidzeme

Few archaeological excavations
Limited archaeological information
Limited research interest

Jaunpiebalga cemetery, 11th-14th centuries



Jaunpiebalga

finds – almost identical with
those from Siksälä

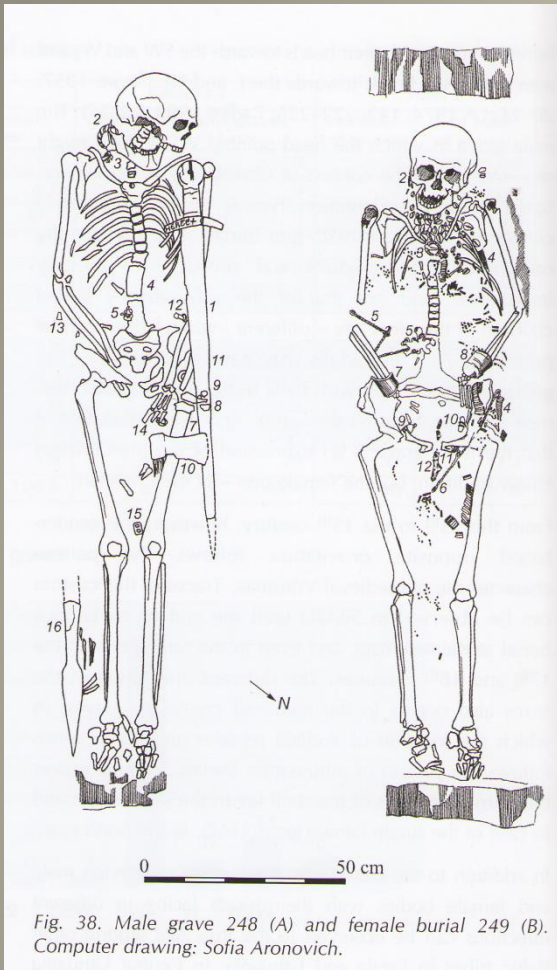
Burials in barrows – not
Latgallian, but Livic custom



What about the Livs?

- Daugava Livs – many excavations
- Gauja Livs – excavations in the 19th century and 1960s
- Most poor information about the Metsepole Livs

What about communication between
Atzele and the Livs?

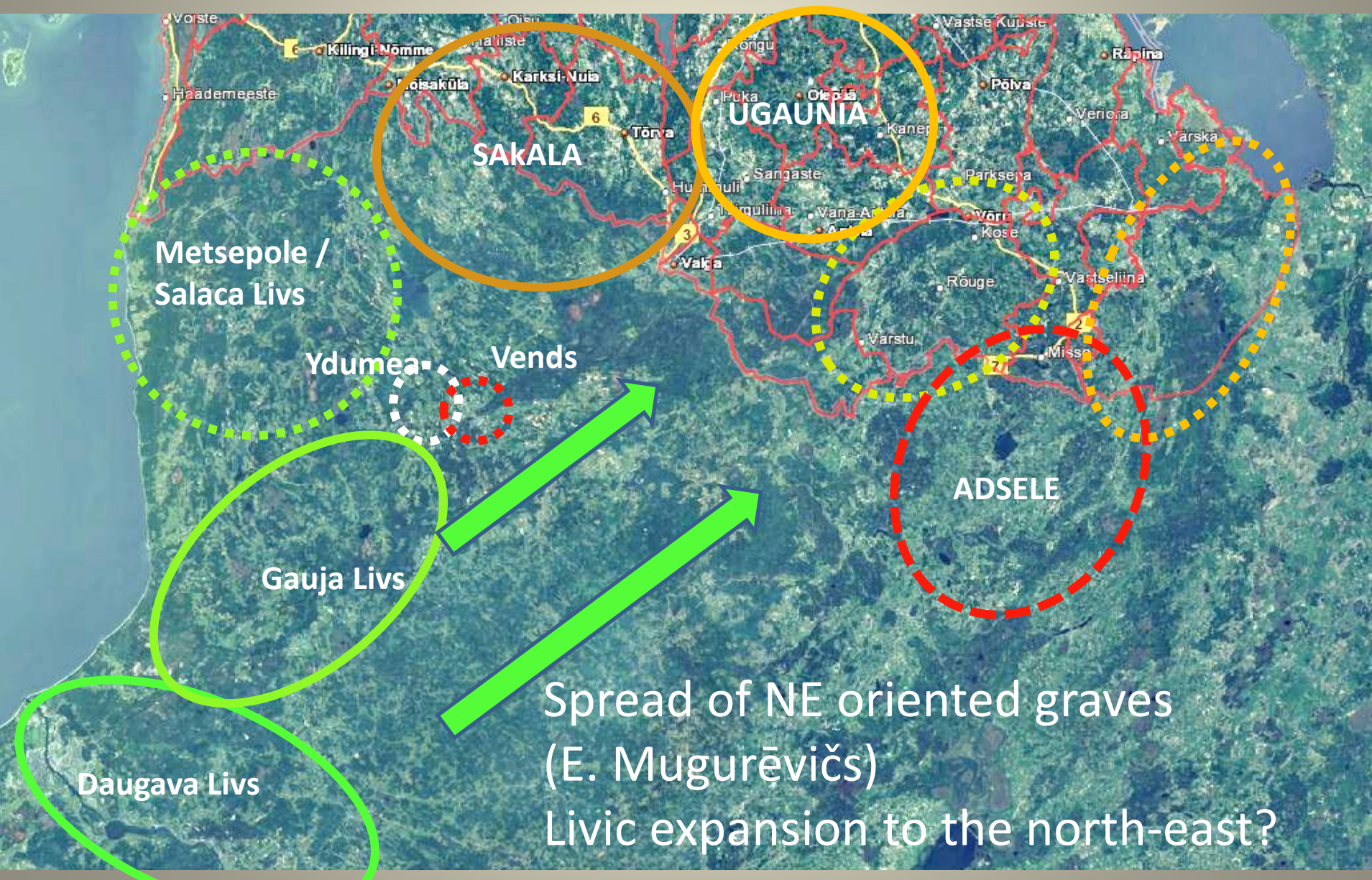


Siksälä “swordman’s wife”
early 14th century

The „Livic“ direction of
communication, reflected in
14th-15th cc. craniology



Livic expansion (?) in the 14th-15th cc.



Spread of NE oriented graves
(E. Mugurēvičs)
Livic expansion to the north-east?

Geographic spread of the Livic identity?

Lībis, lībieši in toponyms (Hirša 1994)



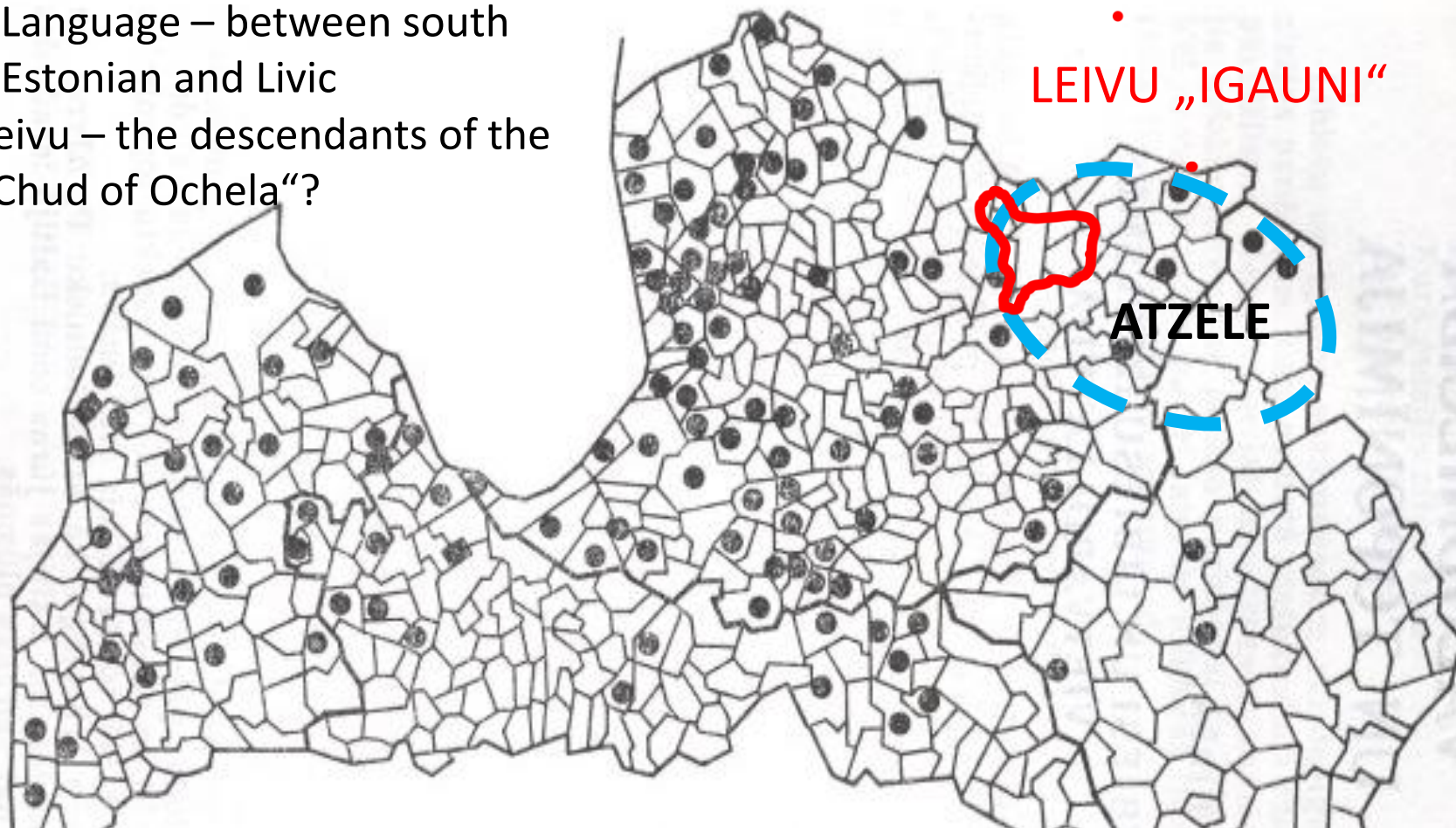
Geographic spread of the Livic identity?

The Leivu < Līvu – a Finnic language group

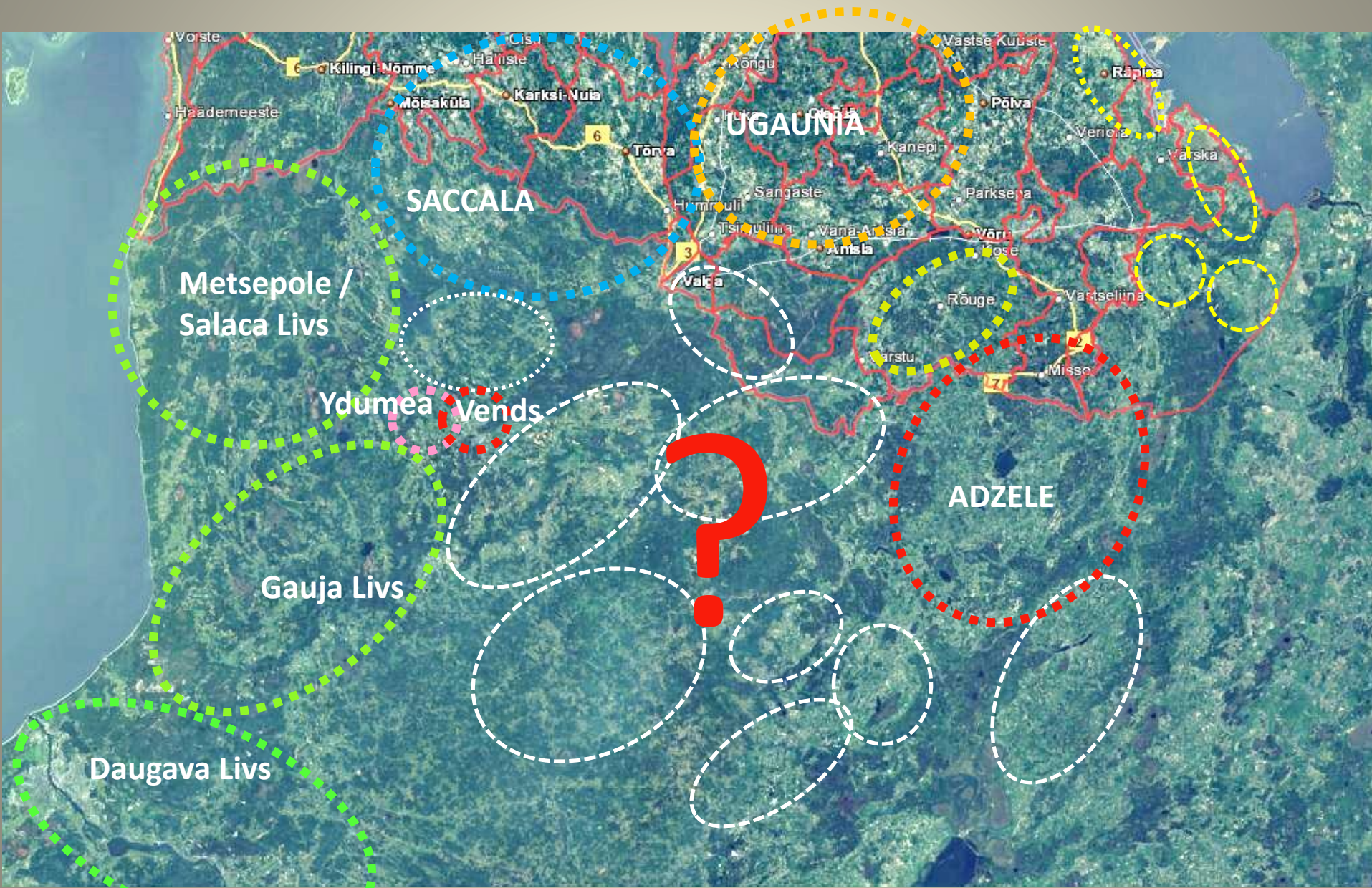
The last speaker died in 1988

Language – between south
Estonian and Livic

Leivu – the descendants of the
„Chud of Ochela“?



Late Iron Age and medieval Northern Vidzeme - a network of local/regional communities/identities





Thank you!
Paldies!