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# THE FINERY OF THE ANCIENT SEMIGALLIANS

JĀNIS GRAUDONIS

Both the traditions preserved among the Latvians in their folk costumes, and the sets of jewellery obtained in archaeological excavations in Latvia serve to demonstrate the love of beauty of the ancient Latvians. We view with wonder and rapture the various splendid regional costumes and the harmony of the jewellery. But archaeological excavations in Zemgale have revealed something else as well: the ancient Semigallians had a highly ethical way of showing exceptional riches.

This was seen very clearly in the excavations at Kakužēni cemetery in Jaunsvirlauka parish, Jelgava District in 1976–1979 (the name of the site, after the farmstead on whose land it was located). The cemetery was located on the left bank of the Lielupe on a hill separated from the Kakužēni farmstead by a 150–200 m wide valley with the mouth of the former river channel (Fig. 1). Here, about 200 m east of the mouth of the

river Īslīce, there is a hill popularly known as “Miķelkalniņš” or “Mīklas Kalns”. “*Mīklas Kalns*” (“Mystery Hill”) is thought to be a more recent name for “Miķelkalns”, given when people could not account for the finds of human bone and artefacts.

The cemetery was discovered here in the second half of the 19th century, when the woods growing on Miķelkalniņš were cleared for agriculture. This led to digging by treasure-hunters. Only under the Republic of Latvia Miķelkalniņš was listed as a protected monument and the destructions were interrupted.

In 1970, Miķelkalniņš was included in the area due for land improvement work, involving the creation of a wide network of land drains (Fig. 2). In order to avoid destruction of cultural values, archaeological excavation took place in 1976–1979 in accordance with the law on protection of archaeological monuments (di-

rector of the archaeological team: Jānis Graudonis; artist: Ilze Siliņa; supervisors: Regīna Giluča and Dzintra Garkāne).

Only 77 burials were definitely identified in the course of excavations in the whole of Miķelkalns (Fig. 2), but the great number of finds of human bones (Fig. 3) showed that the burials had been greatly damaged. This was also shown by the fact that only 165 artefacts were recovered from the definitely identified burials, while 354 were obtained as stray finds from destroyed graves.

The treasure-hunters collected mostly bronze and silver artefacts, paying less attention to iron objects. This can be seen from the results: only 3 axes of 28 ones were taken from excavated graves, and only 4 knives of 52 ones were

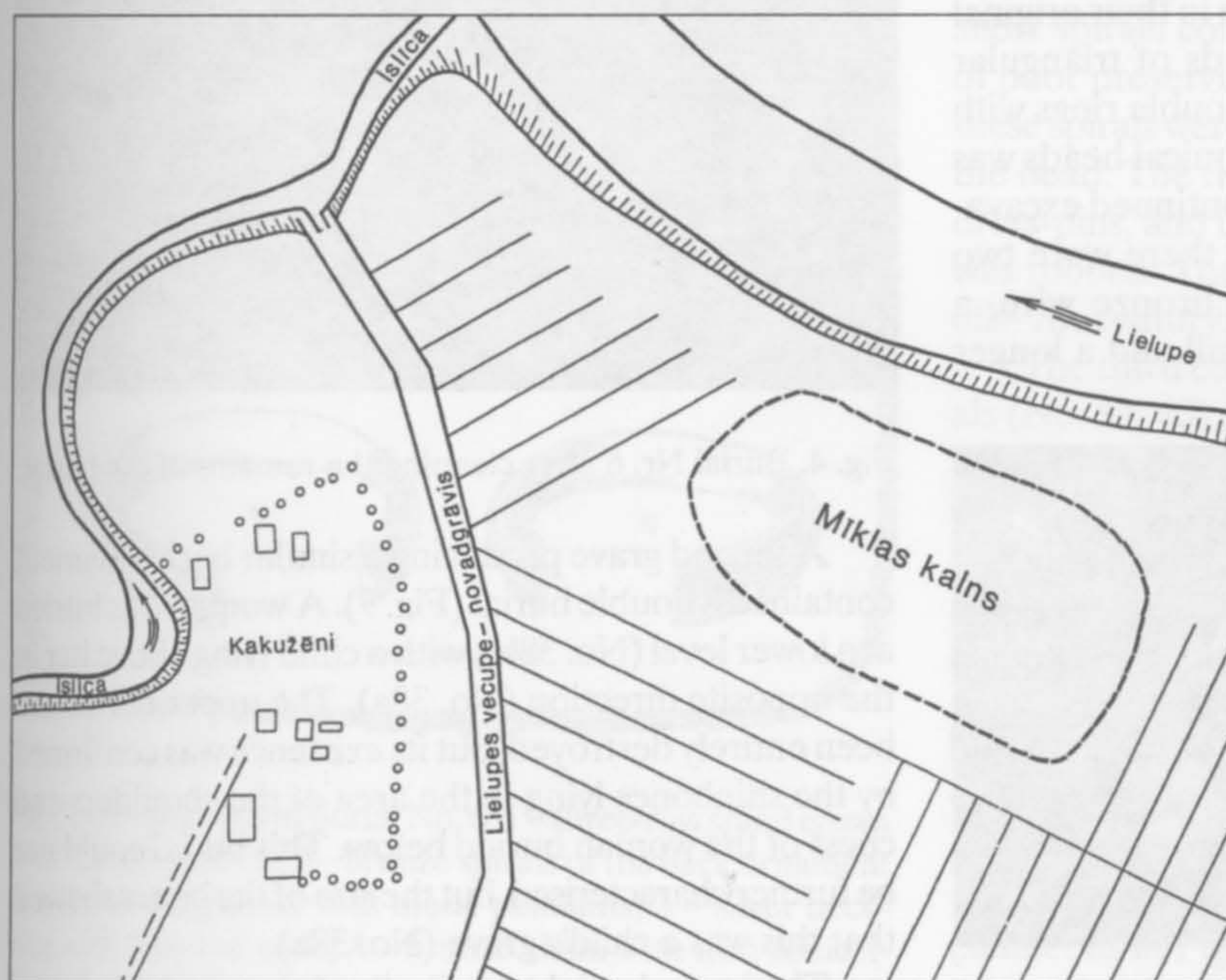


Fig. 1. Mīklas Kalns, location plan.





Fig. 2. Kakužēni Mīklas Kalns from the east.

collected in graves. The number of small finds was bigger: 72 spirals and 29 chain fragments. On the other hand, there were no neck-rings or brooches among the stray finds. A reason for the great damage, it seems, was the shallow depth of the burials, most lying only 30–50 cm deep.

Among the securely identifiable burials, three ones can be singled out as exceptional (No. 6, 39b and 40), which produced for the first time in Latvia special back ornaments, as well as three ones (No. 6, 54 and 67) that had silver neck-rings among the grave-goods.

One of these, burial No. 6 (Fig. 4) lay at a depth of 0.40 m. The burial was partially damaged: ploughing away of the top of the skull had torn apart the spiral crown, the spirals and three-hole spacers of which (Fig. 5:1) lay near the skull. Nearby was a silver neck-ring with faceted ends (Fig. 5:3). On the badly degraded bones of the forearm, that were in their original locations, there were bronze armbands of triangular section (Fig. 5:5, 6). A long chain of double rings with badly corroded iron dress-pins with conical heads was moved from its location (Fig. 5:4). Continued excavation of the grave brought a surprise: there were two bronze spirals of triangular-section bronze wire, a shorter one under the back of the skull and a longer



Fig. 3. Bones of the destroyed burials in the excavation area.

one under the shoulders, connected by a chain of bronze double rings with tongue pendants at the ends (Fig. 5:2). A grave with such exceptional grave-goods should have had brooches and finger-rings as well, but they were not found. The location of the spirals in the grave suggested that the shorter one had been worn attached to the back of the crown, the longer one adorning the shoulders (Fig. 6). The inventory of grave No. 6 is dated according to the three-row spiral crown, the armbands and neck-ring to the 6th century AD.



Fig. 4. Burial Nr. 6 after cleaning the remains of the burial.

A second grave producing a similar back ornament contained a double burial (Fig. 7). A woman was buried at a lower level (No. 38b), with a child lying above her in the opposite direction (No. 38a). The upper burial had been entirely destroyed, but its existence was confirmed by the shinbones lying in the area of the shoulders and chest of the woman buried below. This burial could not be further characterised, but the size of the bones showed that this was a child's grave (No. 38a).

The lower burial, at a depth of around 0.45 m, was of a woman (the mother?) (No. 38b), seemingly little



damaged (Fig. 8). The skull, at the depth of 0.45 m, lay turned somewhat to the right, the humerus with their distal ends somewhat spread apart and the bones of the legs in place (Fig. 7). The grave inventory was rich (Fig. 9): a three-row spiral ring with wide spacers slid down behind the skull, to the left of the skull there was a single-bladed dagger with the point upwards, and in the chest area there were dress-pins with fragments of a chain which were torn off. On the arm bones there were armbands with a raised mid-rib and hollow underside, and an iron awl in the area of the left shoulder. Possibly, the dagger and awl were from the destroyed burial No. 38a, because a dagger is an improbable find for a female grave, particularly in such a location in the grave. Again, there was a surprise: below the level of the skull there was a back ornament: under the skull there was a fairly long large spiral, with

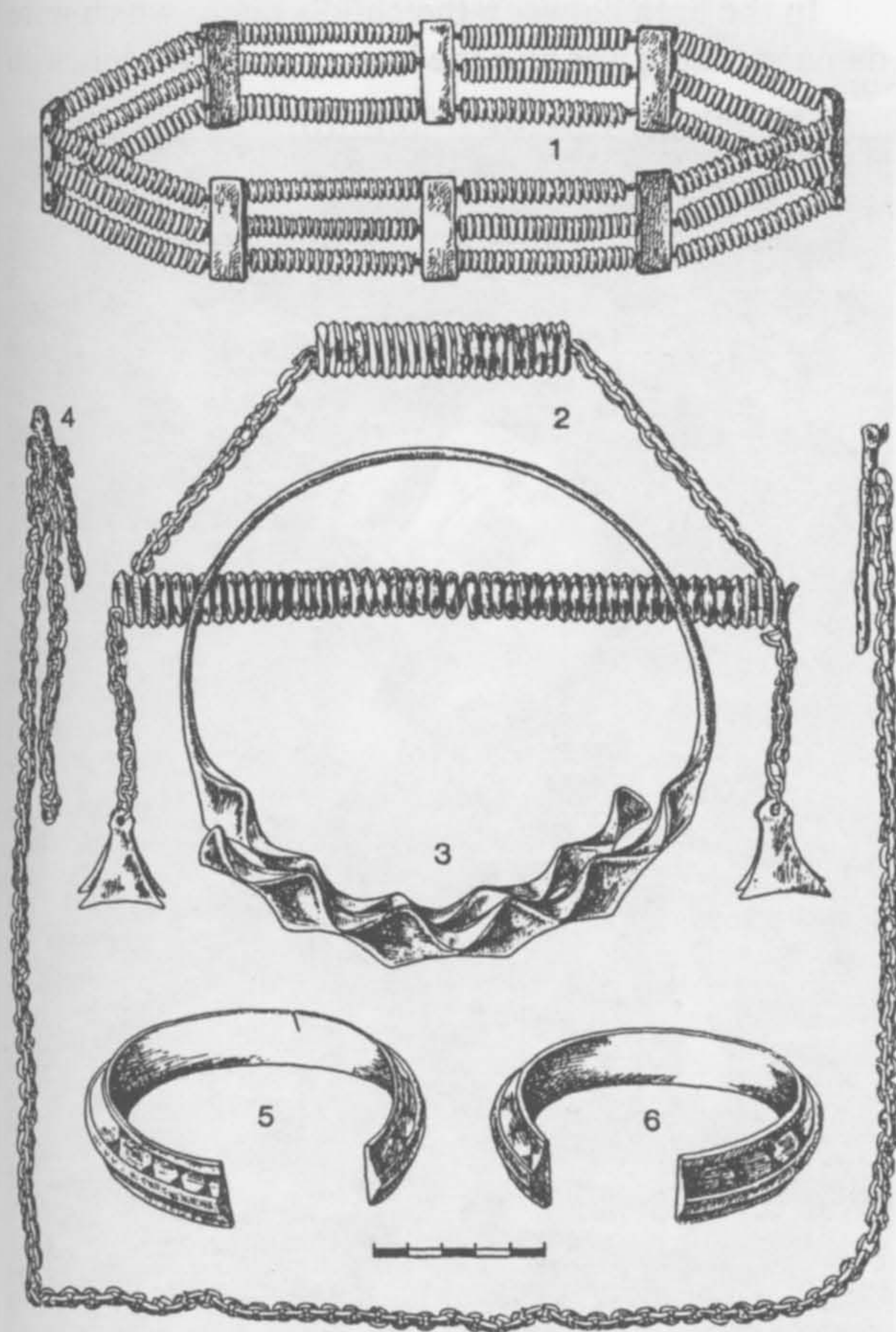


Fig. 5. Grave-goods of burial No. 6: 1 – three-row spiral crown with narrow spacers; 2 – bronze spirals of the back ornament and the linking chain with metal pendants; 3 – silver neck-ring with faceted ends; 4 – bronze chain with iron conical-head dress-pins at the ends; 5, 6 – bronze arm-bands with bow triangular in section.

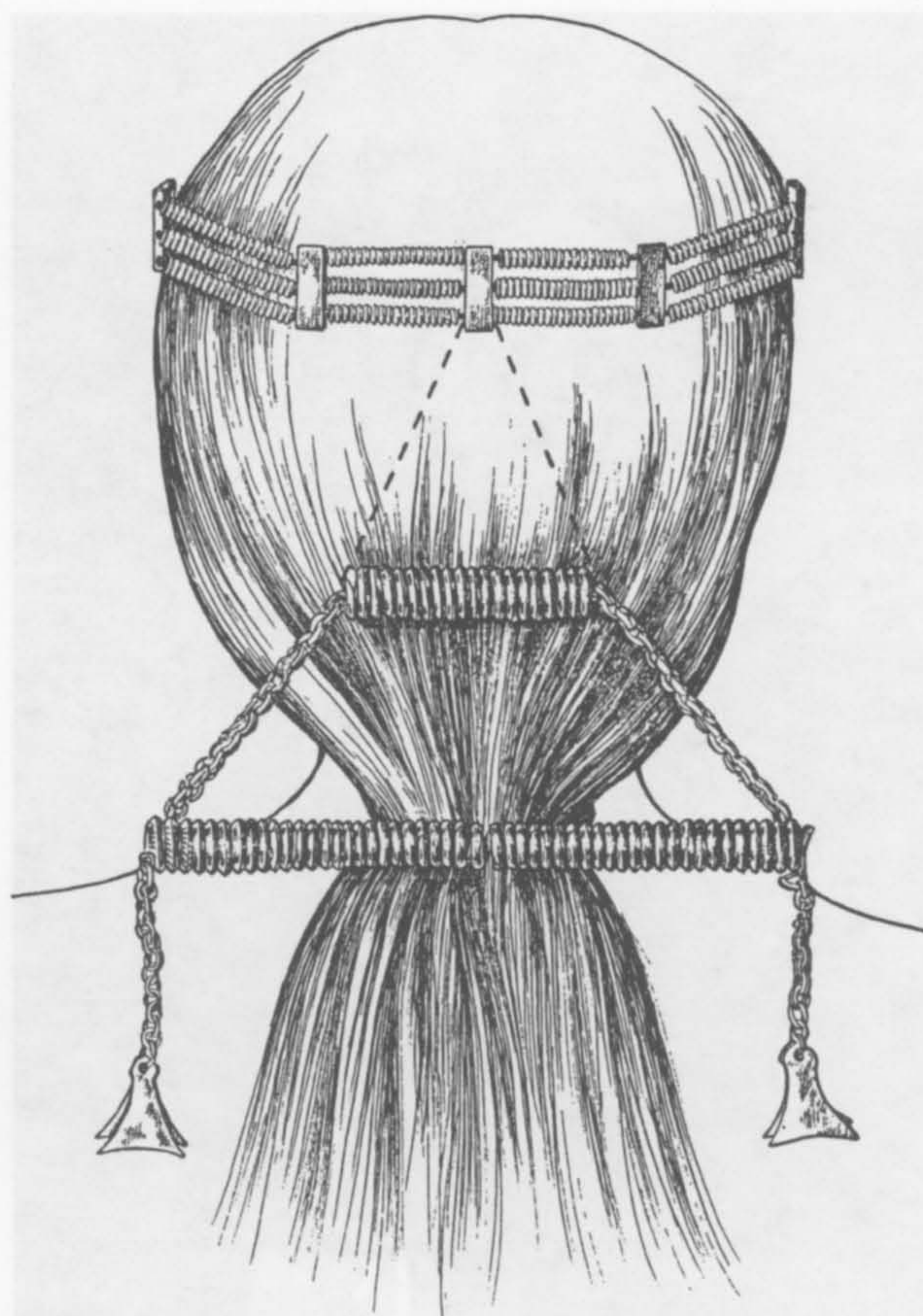


Fig. 6. Possible wearing of a back ornament.

another longer spiral in the shoulder region, and two short spirals connecting the ends (Fig. 9:2). Because of poor preservation, it is impossible to establish how these spirals were connected one with another and with the head. The remains of chains were attached to the dress-pins, and the lack of rings showed that the grave was robbed. The grave inventory can be dated to the 6th–7th century.

The third common grave also contained two burials (No. 39, 40) (Fig. 10). The upper burial, No. 39, in terms of bone size and burial orientation, that of a boy, was at the depth of 0.30 m. A dress-pin lying between the bones of the legs and an iron sickle also found there at the depth of 0.25 m might be grave-goods from this completely destroyed burial.

On removing the remains of this burial, one more burial, No. 40, was found 10–15 cm deeper (Fig. 11, 12), with a relatively well-preserved skeleton. Near the upper part of the skeleton, to east of the skull, there was a torn-off three-row spiral crown with broad spacers (similar as in Fig. 9:1), and next to the skull, partly underneath the spiral crown there were four spirals from a large spiral back ornament (one fairly long, one long



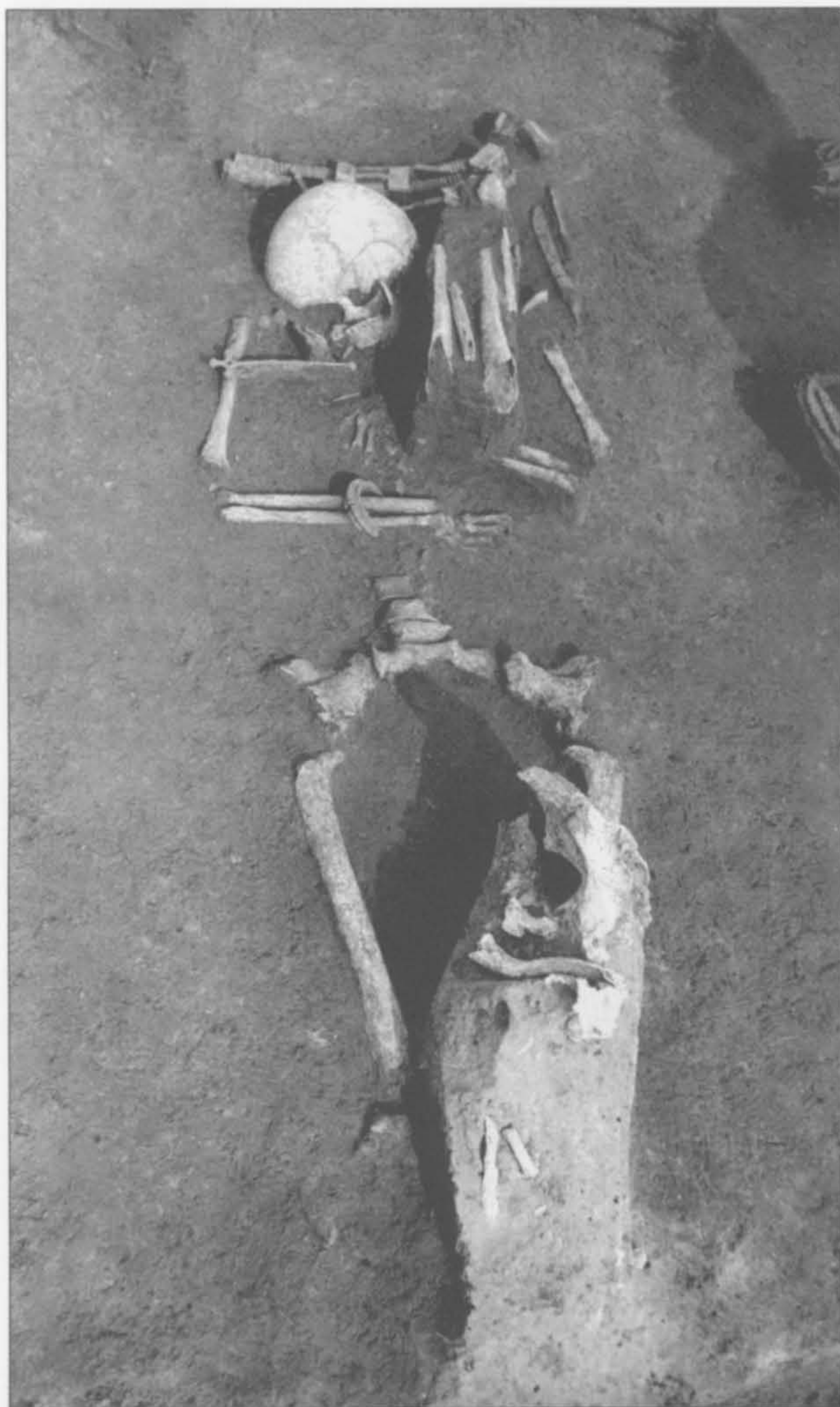


Fig. 7. Double burial (No. 38a, 38b). Fragments of the leg bones of the upper burial (No. 38a) can be seen, with the dagger and awl next to them.

and two short ones at the ends) (Fig. 12:2). In the area of the shoulders, there were two dress-pins of different lengths with mushroom-shaped heads, at the right elbow an iron awl and about 6 cm higher above the bones of the arm there was an iron sickle. This was a definite female burial, slightly damaged, however, because it is inconceivable that a woman with a fine back ornament might have dress-pins without a chain and would not have armbands or rings. The grave inventory is dated to the 6th century.

Also the badly damaged burial No. 54 was rich in grave-goods. Only slight remains of the skeleton and artefacts (Fig. 13) showed that the burial, at a depth of 50–60 cm, was of a male. Next to the skull, there was a silver neck-ring with faceted ends (Fig. 13:6), and on the upper part of the chest there was a bronze cross-bow fibula (Fig. 13:5). On the right arm there was an

armband with club-shaped ends (Fig. 13:10). In the area of the left arm there were an iron dagger, a socketed chisel and an iron socketed spearhead on its blade (Fig. 13:1–4), next to the skull and foot of the fibula there was a bronze spiral and next to the tang of the dagger there were another iron hook and chains. A tanged spearhead with two barbs may also belong to the inventory of this burial. The grave-goods serve to date the burial to the 6th century.

Also belonging to this group of rich burials is burial No. 67, indicated by the vertebrae and lower limb bones of a child oriented to north-South. Recovered from the damaged grave there was a silver neck-ring that was left by the treasure-hunters, with wound and ringed ends of the bow and with hook-and-loop terminals (Fig. 14:4). There were also spirals and some spacers from a damaged four-row spiral crown, as well as a fragment from a large spiral (Fig. 14).

In the area between the child's bones which were damaged there was also the lower jaw of an adult, with



Fig. 8. Upper part of burial No. 38b: behind the head is a three-row spiral crown with wide spacers; in the region of the left shoulder is a dagger and awl; dress-pins with cruciform heads on the upper chest; arm-bands on the arms.



other bones of the skeleton nearby. The impression was that this might also be a double grave, but unlike the previously mentioned graves, there the child's grave was the lowermost. When the adult's grave was robbed, the lower-lying child's grave was also badly damaged, but a neck-ring was left behind amid all of this damage.

Burial No. 67 is dated to the 5th–6th century according to the neck-ring.

These descriptions of burials and illustrations show that burial practices at Kakužēni (Mīklas kalns) cemetery did not differ from those recorded elsewhere. The

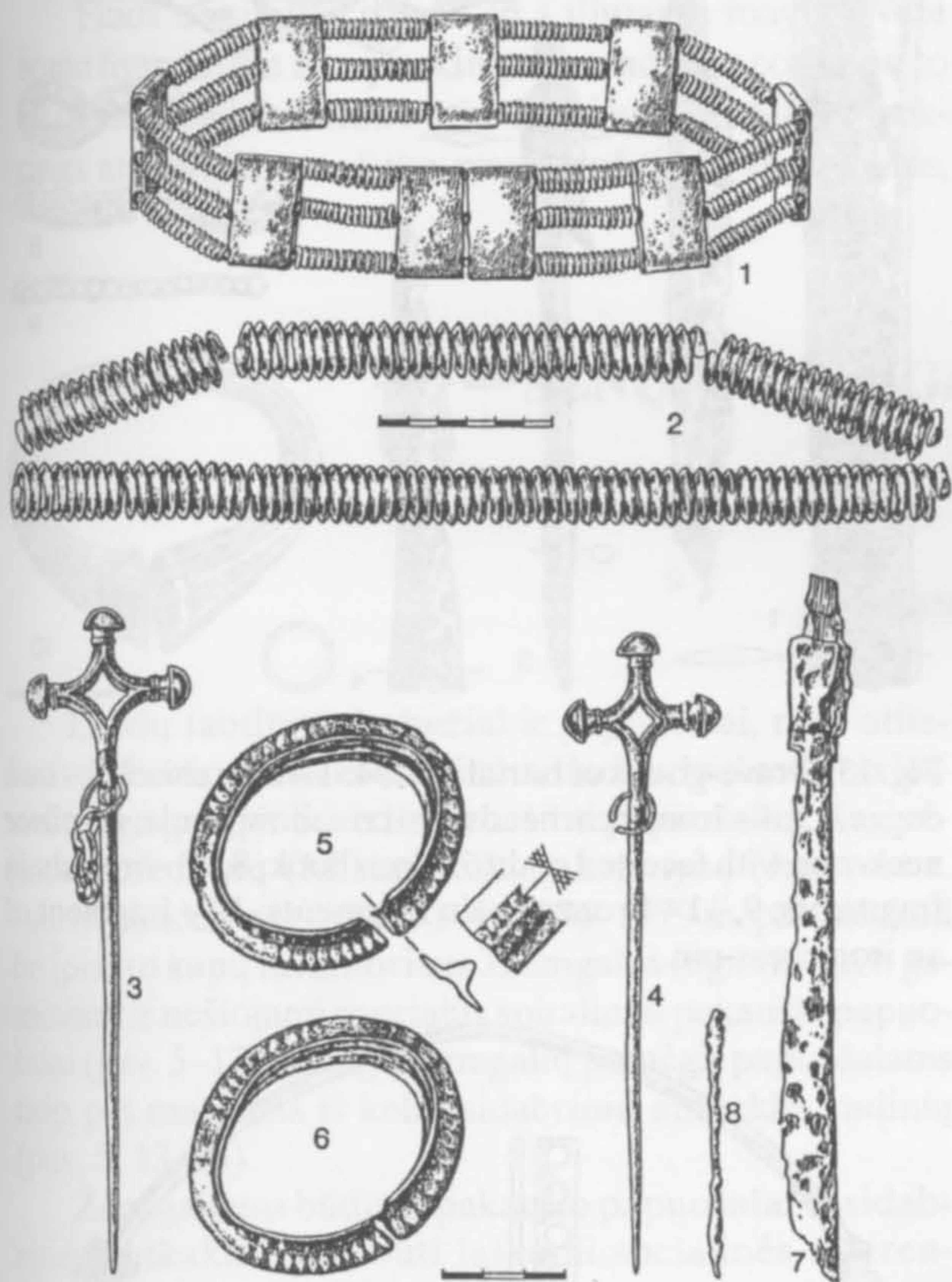


Fig. 9. Grave-goods of burial No. 38b.

dead were laid at various depths, and elsewhere too the grave-goods include ornaments (arm-bands, rings, brooches, chains, neck-rings, tools and weapons). Rare finds, worthy of attention and unique in Latvian archaeological material, are the splendid spiral ornaments on the back.

Also significant fact is that all large spirals found in the graves were made of triangular-section bronze wire of the same size. All of them had the same diameter – 20 mm. Evidently, they were made by local craftsmen, retaining one and the same form over an extended period of time. The location of the spirals clearly shows that the shorter spiral was the upper one and the long spiral was the lower one, connected to



Fig. 10. Common grave with burials No. 39 (upper) and No. 40 (lower).

the short ones and at the same time being the element that retained the whole set in a certain order and layout. The Latvian material provides no evidence to the means by which the long spirals (up to 35 cm) were prevented from bending. Luckily, the answer can be



Fig. 11. Upper part of burial No. 40: the torn-off crown behind the head; bronze dress-pins in the chest area; sickle and awl at the right elbow.



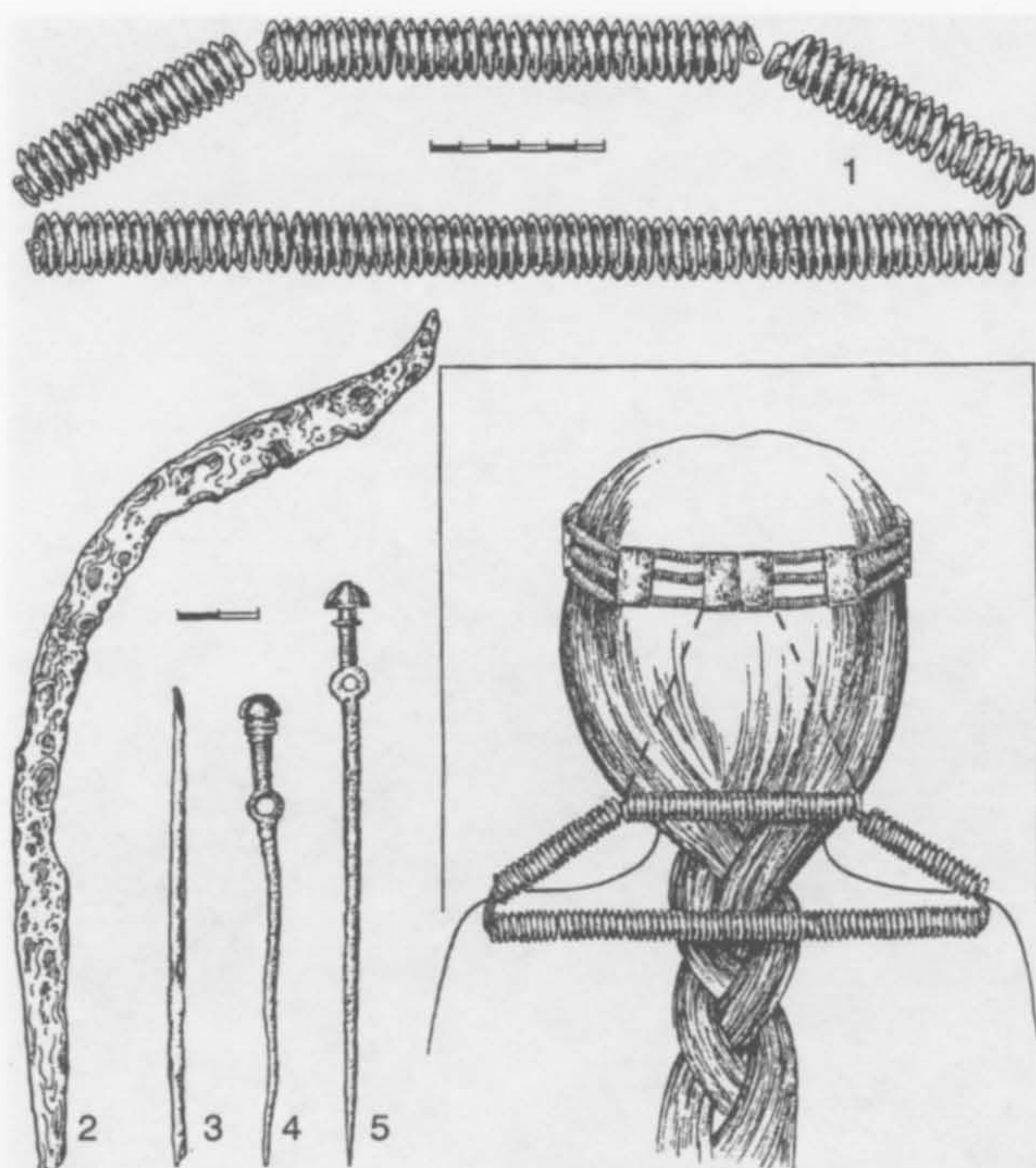


Fig. 12. Grave-goods of burial No. 40: 1 – three-row spiral crown with wide spacers; 2 – spirals of the back ornament; 3 – iron sickle; 4 – iron awl; 5, 6 – bronze dress-pins with mushroom-shaped heads; possible mode of wearing the spiral ornament on the back.

found from similar finds in Lithuania (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė, 1984). The article mentions the spirals found in many different locations (diameter – 18–22 mm, length – up to 37 cm). Twists of woollen fibre were found within them, as well as rods of juniper, inserted for stability. In Lithuania, they are found on sites from the 5th–6th century up to the beginning of the Late Iron Age. Spirals are mentioned by other authors too. Here, similar spirals (diameter 18–22 mm, of varying length) were found at 16 sites, and it is possible to establish that the spirals were retained by twisted woollen thread, the long spirals being prevented from bending by ‘rods’ of juniper. It can be suggested that juniper or hazel rods were similarly used in Zemgale to prevent the long spirals from bending. In Lithuania, such spirals occur over a wide area. They are dated to the 5th–6th century, and possibly remained in use until the early part of the Late Iron Age. In Latvia they were found only at Kakužēni (Miklas Kalns), being absent even at Ciemalde cemetery, where it seems that burial continued even after the Kakužēni cemetery was out of use. From this, we may conclude that spiral ornaments on the back were a characteristic feature of the Jaunsvirlauka district. Their occurrence in only a few graves, rich in grave-goods, can be regarded as an indication that there was material differentiation in the district

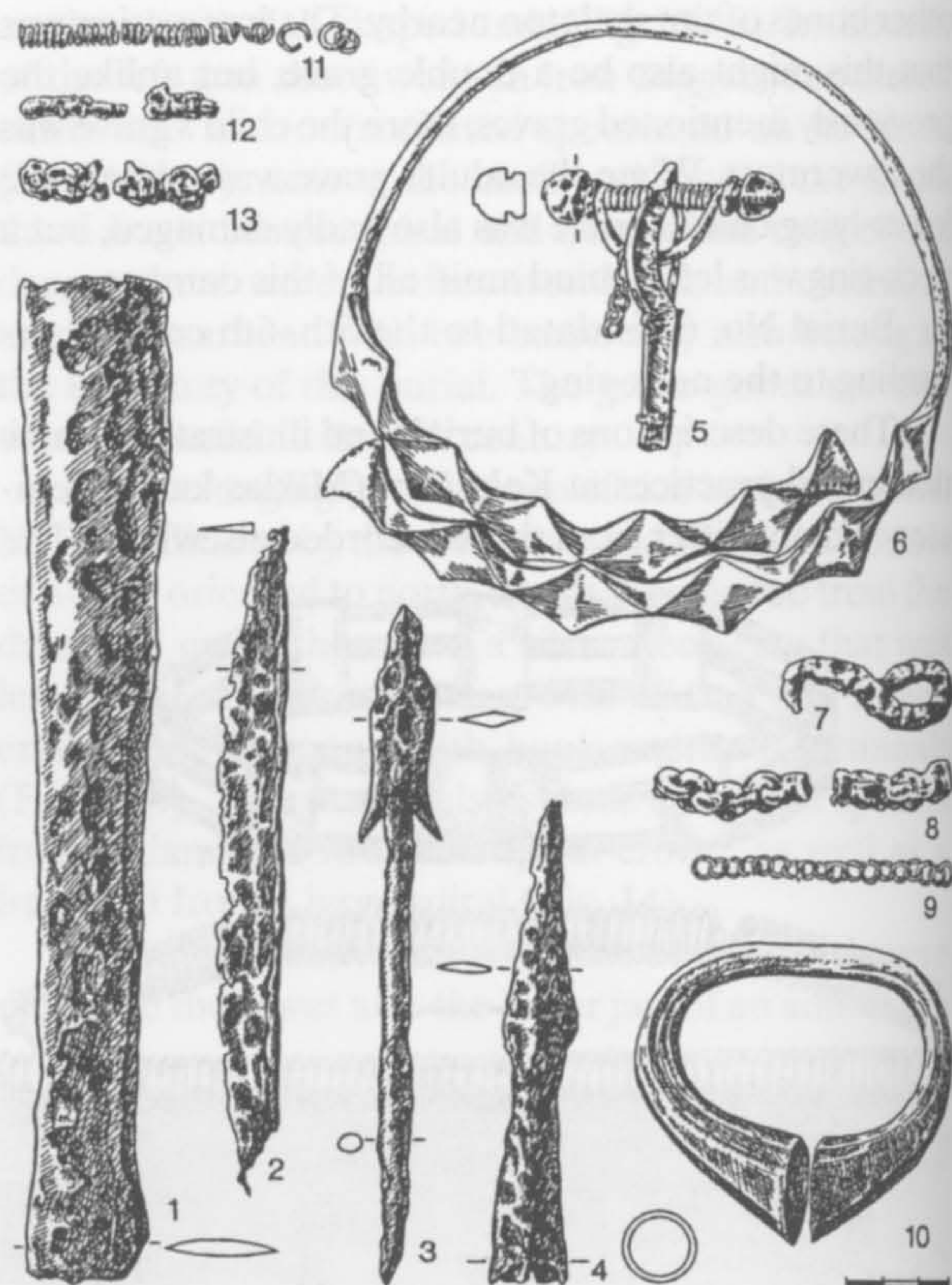


Fig. 13. Grave-goods of burial No. 54: 1 – iron chisel; 2 – iron dagger; 3, 4 – iron spearheads; 5 – crossbow fibula; 6 – silver neck-ring with faceted ends; 7 – iron hook; 8, 13 – iron chain fragments; 9, 11 – bronze chain fragments; 12 – fragment of an iron dress-pin.

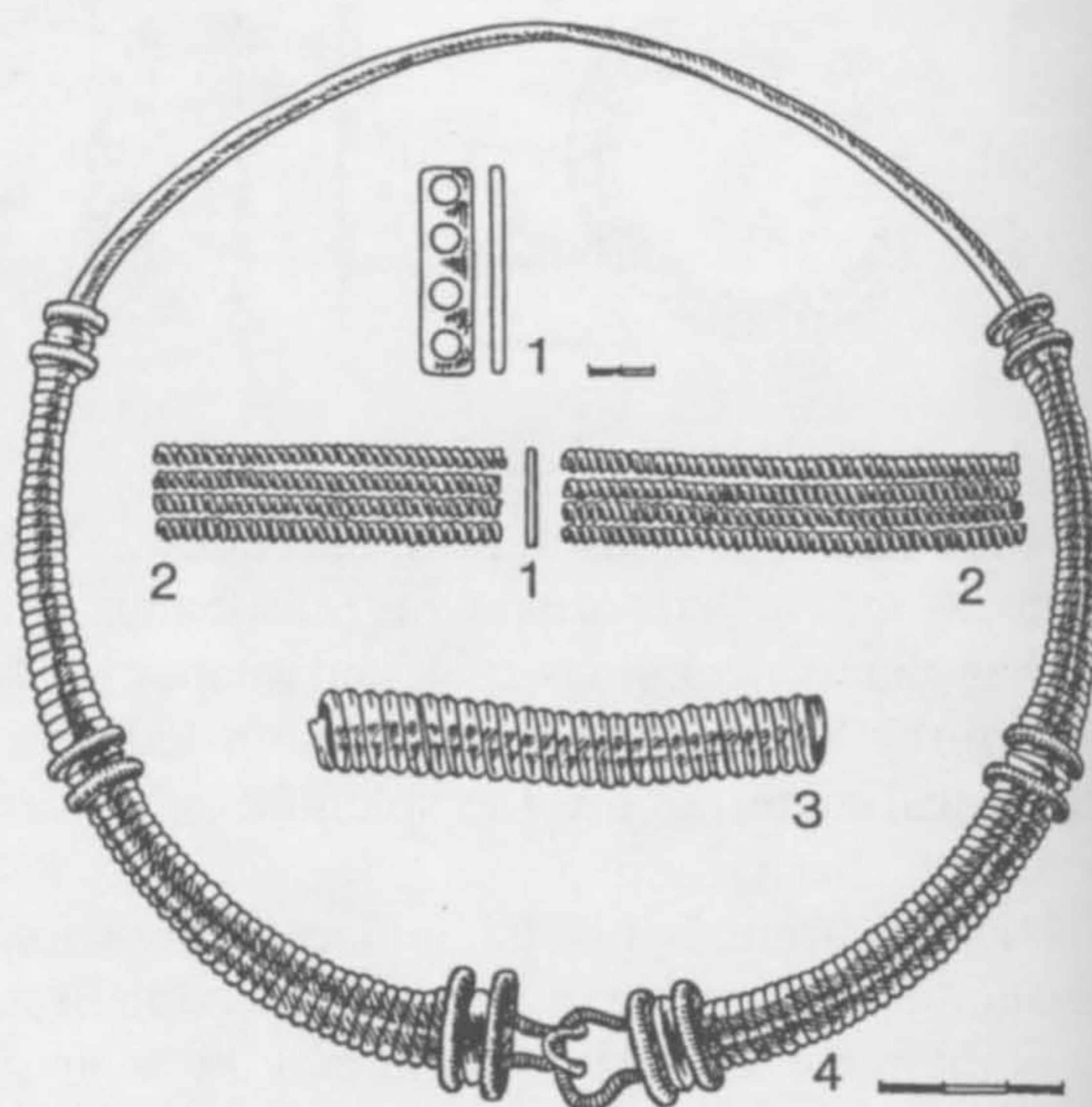


Fig. 14. Grave-goods of burial No. 67: 1 – narrow spacer of the crown; 2 – spirals of the spiral crown (long and narrow); 3 – large spiral; 4 – silver neck-ring with wound and ringed ends and with hook and loop terminals.



already during the Middle Iron Age. This is indicated clearly by the mentioned finds of silver neck-rings.

Both the large spiral ornaments and the silver neck-rings, which were found in such numbers (three from the excavations, one in the collections of the Latvian History Museum) in one cemetery, represent clear evidence of the wealth of the Semigallians of the Jaunsvirlauka district. The graves in which such riches occurred represent only 6.5% of all the graves unearthed during the excavations. Such the situation may be evidence not only of material, but also of social differentiation.

Finds of similar spirals in Lithuania may provide some foundation for speaking of a tradition common to all of the area inhabited by the Semigallians. Silver neck-rings are evidence of the wealth of these individuals,

while the large spiral ornaments on the back are evidence not only of the riches, but also of a tendency towards showing this wealth in an unusual way: by decorating the back. We can only imagine the splendid attire of the Semigallian woman adorned with brooches, chains, dress-pins and crown that shine like gold.

The silver neck-rings, as well as the spirals worn on the back are clear evidence of the Semigallian tendency towards personal adornment.

## REFERENCES

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# SENŪJŲ ŽIEMGALIŲ PAPUOŠALAI

Janis Graudonis

## Santrauka

Latvių tautiniai drabužiai ir papuošalai, rasti atliekant archeologinius kasinėjimus, liudija, kad senovės latviai mėgo grožį ir buvo linkę nešioti papuošalus. Kasinėjimai Kakužėnų (Miklas Kalno) kapinyne (Jelgavos r. Jaunsvirlaukio pag.) (pav. 1–4), 1976–1979 m. parodė, kad be įprasto kapų inventoriaus Žiemgalos regione buvo gaminami ir nešiojami specialūs spiraliniai pakaušio papuošalai (pav. 5–12). Senųjų žiemgalių pomėgis papuošalams taip pat matomas iš kelių sidabrinių antkaklių radinių (pav. 5, 13, 14).

Žiemgaliams būdingi pakaušio papuošalai ir sidabrinės antkaklės gali būti laikomi socialinės diferenciacijos regione liudijimu.

## ILIUSTRACIJŲ SĄRAŠAS

1 pav. Miklo Kalno situacijos planas.

2 pav. Kakužėnų Miklas Kalno vaizdas iš rytų.

3 pav. Kaulai iš suardytų kapų kasinėjimų vietoje.

4 pav. Kapas Nr. 6 išpreparavus griaučius.

5 pav. Kapo Nr. 6 inventorių: 1 – trijų eilių spiralinis apgalvis siauromis plokštelėmis; 2 – pakaušio papuošalo bronzinės spiralės ir jungiančioji grandinė su metaliniais kabučiais; 3 – sidabrinė antkaklė su ruplėtais galais; 4 – bronzinė grandinė su geležiniais kūgio formos smeigtukais galuose; 5, 6 – trikampio skerspjuvio bronzinės apyrankės.

6 pav. Galimas pakaušio papuošalų dėvėjimo būdas.

7 pav. Dvigubas kapas Nr. 38a, 38b. Matyti kojų kaulai iš viršutinio kapo Nr. 38a, o šalia jų durklas ir yla.

8 pav. Kapo Nr. 38b galvūgalis. Šalia galvos yra trijų eilių spiralinis apgalvis su plačiomis plokštelėmis; prie kairiojo peties yra durklas ir yla; smeigtukai su kryžminėmis galvutėmis virš krūtinės; apyrankės ant rankų.

9 pav. Kapo Nr. 38b inventorių.

10 pav. Bendras kapas Nr. 39 (viršuje) ir Nr. 40 (apačioje).

11 pav. Kapo Nr. 40 galvūgalis: susuktas apgalvis už galvos; bronziniai smeigtukai krūtinės srityje; pjautuvas ir yla prie dešinėsios alkūnės.

12 pav. Kapo Nr. 40 kapo inventorių: 1 – trijų eilių spiralinis apgalvis plačiomis plokštelėmis; 2 – pakaušio papuošalo spiralės; 3 – geležinis pjautuvas; 4 – geležinė yla; 5, 6 – bronziniai smeigtukai su grybo formos galvutėmis; galimas pakaušio spiralinio papuošalo nešiojimo būdas.

13 pav. Kapo Nr. 54 inventorių: 1 – geležinis kaltas; 2 – geležinis durklas; 3, 4 – geležiniai ietigaliai; 5 – lankinė segė; 6 – sidabrinė antkaklė pergniaužtais galais; 7 – geležinis kabliukas; 8, 13 – geležinės grandinės fragmentai; 9, 11 – bronzinės grandinės fragmentai; 12 – geležinio smeigtuko fragmentas.

14 pav. Kapo Nr. 67 inventorių: 1 – siaura apgalvio plokštelė; 2 – spiralinio apgalvio spiralės (ilga ir trumpa); 3 – plačioji spiralė; 4 – sidabrinė antkaklė apsukta žiedais ir kabliuku bei kilpele galuose.

Iš anglų k. vertė Inita Tamošiūnienė



# УКРАШЕНИЯ ДРЕВНИХ ЗЕМГАЛОВ

Янис Граудонис

## Резюме

Национальные латышские наряды и ювелирные изделия, найденные во время археологических раскопок, свидетельствуют о том, что древние латыши любили красоту и носили украшения. Раскопки в могильнике Какужени (Миклас Калнс) (Елгавский р-н) в 1976–1979 гг. показали, что кроме обычных предметов погребального инвентаря, на территории Земгалы изготавливались и носились специальные спиральные украшения на затылке (рис. 5, 6, 9, 11, 12).

Любовь древних земгалов к украшениям видна и из находок нескольких серебряных шейных гривен (рис. 5, 13, 14).

Характерные для земгалов затылочные украшения и шейные гривны могут служить свидетельством социальной дифференциации в регионе.

## СПИСОК ИЛЛЮСТРАЦИЙ

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