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PEACEFUL LANDS OR A DANGEROUS FRONTIER: THE KRIVICH–LITHUANIAN BORDERLAND AT THE END OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM AD IN THE LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

ABSTRACT

The article addresses two main issues. The first concerns the reconstruction of the distribution boundaries of archaeological sites associated with the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrow Culture and the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture in the interfluvium of the Western Dvina (Daugava) and Neman during the last centuries of the first millennium AD (9th–10th centuries, up until the early

11th century). The second issue explores the nature of relations among the population of this frontier: whether these relations can be characterised as peaceful coexistence or as conflict involving different groups of frontier dwellers competing over territory and resources. Both issues are examined based on archaeological evidence.

Keywords: archaeology of the borderland, Krivichs, Lithuanians, Smolensk-Polack Long Barrow Culture, East Lithuanian Barrow Culture

A Region at the Edge of Scholarly Vision: A Brief Characterisation of Sources and Research History

It should be noted from the outset that the author does not intend to provide a detailed review of the history of the study of the Baltic–Slavic contacts and the formation of settlement boundaries of specific ethnocultural communities in the late first millennium AD in the Western Dvina (Daugava) – Neman interfluvium. The literature on the history of the formation of the Baltic-Slavic borderland in this region, and the possible changes in its boundaries during the last centuries of the 1st and the early centuries of the second millennium AD, is vast and diverse, as are the perspectives of researchers.

Efforts to address this issue have been undertaken by historians, linguists, archaeologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, and specialists in historical geography, toponymy, and onomastics, who have employed a wide range of sources and analytical approaches. The conclusions reached by these authors have varied considerably, often due not only as a result of differences in the sources

used and methodological approaches, but also due to personal preferences of the researchers, particularly regarding the adoption of the Baltic- or Slavic-centric perspective. Given the substantial body of specialised literature on this subject, this article is limited to referencing the most significant studies.¹ Referring to these works enables us to avoid going into detail on the analysis of historiography, as this topic warrants a separate, comprehensive study, and instead focus on the characteristics of the archaeological sources available to us and the methodological approaches to their analysis.

The purpose of this article is to raise and address two main questions. The first is an attempt to reconstruct, in as much detail as possible, the boundaries of Slavic and Baltic settlement in the interfluvium of the Western Dvina and Neman during the final centuries of the first millennium AD. The second question concerns the nature of relations among the populations of this frontier: can they be characterised as peaceful coexistence, or as conflicts between different groups of frontier dwellers over territory and resources? Archaeological sources will

¹ Alekseev 1966, 66–82; Ochmański 1981; Luhtan, Ušinskas 1988; Kurila 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; Lisejčykau 2020.

be used to address both of these questions. However, before delving into the analysis, it is necessary to make a few methodological reservations, which are crucial in the context of this study.

The region between the Western Dvina and Neman rivers is not mentioned in written sources dealing with the historical geography of Eastern Europe at the turn of the first and second millennia AD. Being extremely remote from the main centres of written culture, this territory, together with its population, lay outside the 'field of vision' of the authors of such texts. This circumstance might appear to justify the exclusion of written sources from the discussion of the issues addressed here. In practice, however, this is not entirely the case. The text of the 'Tale of Bygone Years' contains several references to the territory occupied by the Krivich people at the end of the 1st millennium AD: 'Beyond them reside the Krivichians, who live at the headwaters of the Volga, the Dvina, and the Dnieper, and whose city is Smolensk'.² There is information under the year 862 that 'the first settlers ... in Polotsk, Krivichians'.³ At the same time, while describing the settlement of Slavic tribes in Eastern Europe, the chronicler notes that 'Other tribes resided along the Dvina and were called Polotians on account of small stream called the Polota, which flows into the Dvina'.⁴ Further, a certain understanding of the territory occupied by the Krivichi in the mid-10th century can be gained from the text of '*De Administrando Imperio*' by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. In his description of the way of life and occupations of the Rus', he provides the following information: 'Their Slav tributaries, the so-called Krivichians and the Lenzanenes and the rest of the Slavonic regions, cut the 'monoxyla' on their mountains in the time of winter, and when they have prepared them, as spring approaches, and the ice melt, they bring them on to the neighbouring lakes. And since these lakes debouch into the Dnieper, they enter thence on to this same river, and come down to Kiev... The severe manner of life of these same Russians in winter-time is as follows. When the month of November begins, their chiefs together with all the Russians at once leave Kiev and go off on the 'poliudia' which means 'rounds', that is,

to the Slavonic regions of the Vervians and Drugovichians and Krivichians and Severians and the rest of the Slavs who are tributaries of the Russians. There they are maintained throughout the winter, but then once more, starting from the month of April, when the ice of the Dnieper River melts, they come back to Kiev'.⁵ Without going into details, one can state that Constantine placed the Krivichi in the region of the upper Dnieper and its tributaries.

The territory inhabited by the Lithuanians is generally reconstructed based on later references, the number of which has steadily increased since the 12th century. However, the early references to the Lithuanians are relatively few and lack clear geographical context. For instance, in the undated section of the chronicle, the Lithuanians are mentioned among the peoples 'who pay tribute to Rus'.⁶ Yaroslav the Wise is recorded as having launched a campaign against the Lithuanians, although the exact location of which remains unspecified, in either 1040⁷ or 1044.⁸ The first mention that somewhat localizes the territory occupied by the Lithuanians is found in the 'Annals of Quedlinburg': *Sanctus Bruno, qui cognominatur Bonifacius, archiepiscopus et monachus, XI. suae conversionis anno in confinio Rusciae et Lituae a paganis capite plexus cum suis XVIII, VII. Id. Martii petiit coelos*.⁹

This brief review of written sources mentioning the Krivichs and Lithuanians is presented with a specific aim: to clarify the foundation upon which archaeological reconstructions of the settlement areas of various East European ethnocultural communities in the late first millennium AD have been developed. In essence, both the present authors and our predecessors (i.e., previous generations of archaeologists) have tended to view the ethnographical landscape of Eastern Europe at the time of the formation of the Rus' state 'through the eyes of the author' of the 'Tale of Bygone Years'. Whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, whether we take the annalistic data on faith or treat them hypercritically, we still view the 'map' of the settlement of the Slavs and their neighbours through the eyes of the 'hypothetical Nestor'. This shape

² Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetor 1953, 55; Let's also quote the original text of the chronicle: *Кривичи же сѣдѣху на верхѣ Волги . а на верхѣ Двины и на верхѣ Днѣпра . ихже градъ есть Смоленскъ туда бо сѣдѣху Кривичи* (Lavrent'evskaja..., column 10).

³ Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetor 1953, 60; Original text of the chronicle: ... *первыи насельници...* [въ] *Полотъски Кривичи* (Lavrent'evskaja..., column 20).

⁴ Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetor 1953, 53; Original text of the chronicle: *[инии сѣдодоша на Двинѣ и нарекошася Полочане] рѣчьки ради ѣже втечетъ въ Двину. и манемъ Полота. ѿ сея прозвашася Полочане* (Lavrent'evskaja..., column 6).

⁵ Moravcsik 1967, 57, 59, 63.

⁶ Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetor 1953, 55; Lavrent'evskaja..., column 11.

⁷ Lavrent'evskaja..., column 153.

⁸ Nassonov 1950, 181.

⁹ Giese (ed.) 2004, 527; To be fair, it should be noted that the 'Annals of Quedlinburg' are the only source to mention the borderland of Lithuanians and Rus' as the location of Bruno's death, while other chroniclers offer different versions of where the incident took place (Font 2013, 43–45; Baronas 2008).

our research perspective, and archaeologists should always bear it in mind. In the context of the present study, this particularity in the formation of the ‘fields of vision’ of researchers studying Baltic-Slavic ethnocultural contacts at the end of the first millennium AD is of fundamental importance.

The Krivichs and Lithuanians and their archaeological counterparts

In modern archaeological literature, it is widely accepted that the Krivichs mentioned by the chronicler correspond to the Smolensk–Polack Long Barrow Culture (its primary name – the Smolensk Long Barrow Culture – is also often used), while the Lithuanians in the written sources are identified with the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture.

The primary name of the Smolensk Long Barrow Culture, proposed by E. A. Šmidt, reflects the original focus of research attention. E. A. Šmidt conducted his studies in the Smolensk region and identified the defining characteristics of the culture based on excavations carried in this part of its territory. At the same time, he clearly recognised that sites belonging to this culture extended far to the west, along the Belarusian course of the Western Dvina and in the region of the upper reaches of the Neman; nevertheless, he did not attempt to delineate the western boundaries of the culture’s area.¹⁰ Further research demonstrated a high degree of similarity in both material culture and burial rites among populations of the Smolensk–Polack Long Barrow Culture (hereinafter referred to as SPLBC) in the eastern (Smolensk Dnieper and Dvina regions) and western (Belarusian Dvina region and Dvina–Neman interfluvium) parts of its range.¹¹ Despite this, the Smolensk region continues to be regarded as the ‘core’ area of the culture, while the territory of the Belarusian Dvina region and the Dvina–Neman interfluvium are often interpreted as an extensive ‘western periphery’. This situation is partly explained by the more intensive study of the Smolensk area, owing to detailed publications of the results of E. A. Šmidt’s long-term research,¹² the monograph by V. V. Enukov’s published in 1990,¹³ which remains a key reference for studies of the SPLBC, and the extensive work carried out over recent decades by V. S. Nefedov in the sites in Smolensk region.¹⁴ In addition, the central role of the Smolensk

part of the SPLBC distribution is reinforced by the analogistic tradition, which locates the Krivichs ‘at the headwaters of the Volga, the Dvina, and the Dnieper’.

Under such circumstances, the question of clearly defining the western limits of the distribution of SPLBC sites was only rarely raised by researchers and, when it was, it was addressed rather cautiously. As a result, these boundaries were often depicted on the map with in a highly schematic manner.¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that this caution in defining the western extent of the Krivichs settlement area in the Belarusian Dvina region and the Dvina–Neman interfluvium was largely influenced by the extent of research and publication of burial site excavations in the area (Fig. 1).¹⁶ In general, the western boundary of the SPLBC sites’ distribution remains undefined and is depicted by most scholars in a notably ambiguous manner.

The boundaries of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture (hereinafter referred to as ELBC) are well-established,¹⁷ although its eastern borders remain insufficiently researched due to the modern state border between Lithuania and Belarus dividing the cultural area (Fig. 2). Consequently, since the 1990s, Lithuanian archaeologists have focused on the ‘Lithuanian’ part of the ELBC, while the ‘Belarusian’ sites have largely been overlooked.¹⁸ Moreover, ELBC antiquities in Belarus have not been systematically studied in recent decades. When Belarusian researchers have engaged with the ELBC, they have primarily relied on data derived from excavations conducted between the late 19th century and the 1970s–1980s.¹⁹

Thus, the region of the Slavic-Baltic borderland selected for analysis is, for various reasons, itself situated ‘on the border’ and frequently lies ‘beyond the field of vision’ of most researchers studying the early medieval antiquities of the forest zone in Eastern Europe.

At present, the most detailed attempt to characterize the eastern boundaries of the ELBC, based on the analysis of archaeological sites located between the Western Dvina and Neman rivers, was undertaken by L. Kurila.²⁰ The distribution boundaries of East Lithuanian and Slavic sites outlined by him generally not met with serious criticism (Fig. 3). In his study, however, L. Kurila does not differentiate between burial sites associated with the Slavic population, categorizing them as either cremation cemeteries (necropolises of the SPLBC) or inhumation cemeteries (necropolises of the Christianised Old Russian population). This combined treatment of the two categories

¹⁰ Šmidt 1968.

¹¹ Enukov 1990, 3–104; Štychaŭ 1992, 41–61.

¹² Šmidt 1968, 3–62.

¹³ Enukov 1990.

¹⁴ Nefedov 2000; 2007; 2011; 2012; 2020.

¹⁵ Enukov 1990, 15–16, Fig. 1; Štychaŭ 1992, Fig. 1.

¹⁶ Plavinskij 2019, 111.

¹⁷ Kurila 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2016, Fig. 1.

¹⁸ Kurila 2016, 192–195, Fig. 1.

¹⁹ Zveruh 1989, Fig. 1; Miadzvedzeŭ 1999 385, Fig. 96.

²⁰ Kurila 2005a.



Fig. 1. Area of distribution of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture archaeological sites. After Enekov 1990 with additions by M. Plavinski.

of burial sites does not significantly affect his conclusions, as his primary objective was to establish the eastern limits of the ELBC. For present study, however, it is essential to determine the boundaries of the ELBC dis-

tribution within the Western Dvina–Neman interfluvium, since the settlement limits of the Krivichs and the Old Rusian population during the 11th–13th centuries do not always coincide at a micro-regional level.²¹

²¹ Plavinski 2017, 160–197.

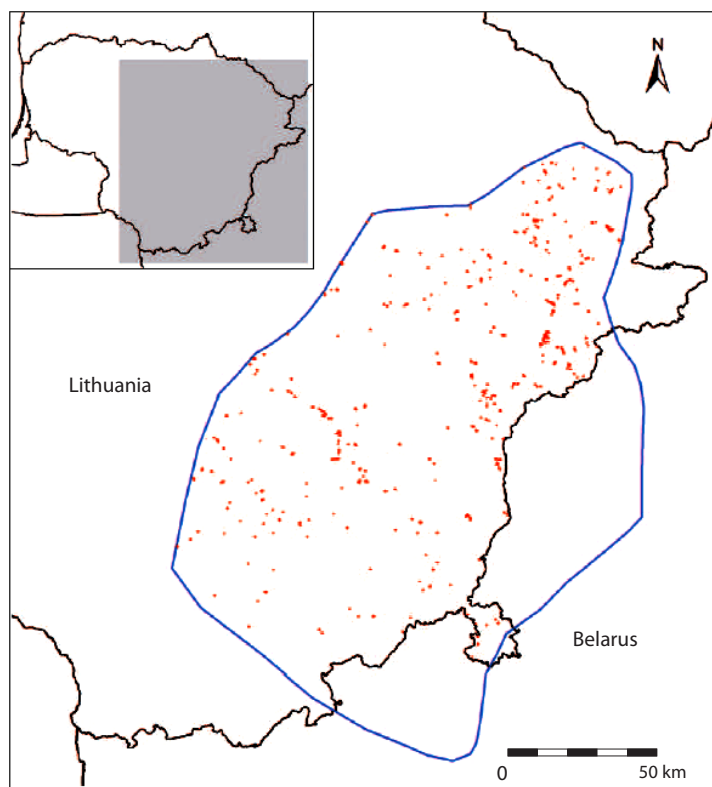


Fig. 2. Area of distribution of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture archaeological sites. After Kurila 2005a.

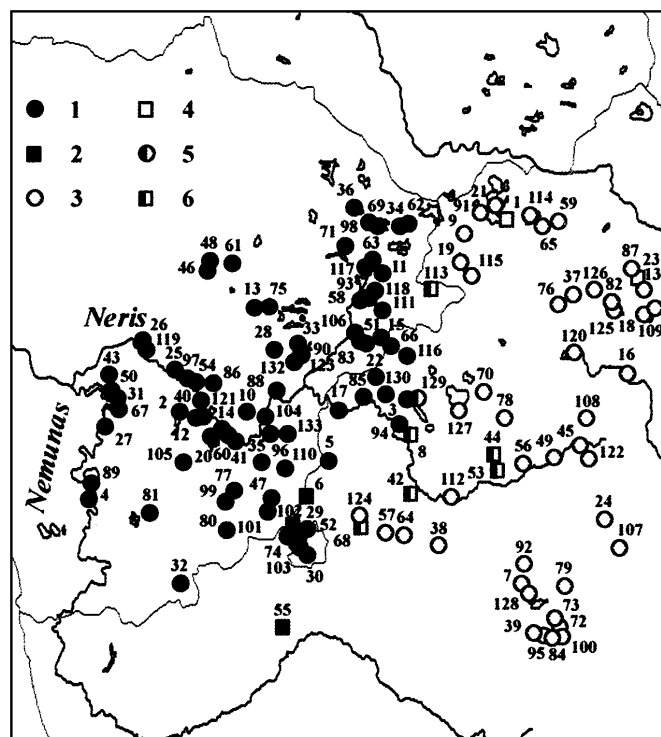


Fig. 3. Ethnicity of barrow cemeteries in the interfluvium of the Western Dvina and Neman rivers: 1 – Lithuanian barrow cemetery, 2 – Lithuanian barrow cemetery with certain Slavonic elements, 3 – Slavonic barrow cemetery, 4 – Slavonic barrow cemetery with certain Lithuanian elements, 5 – barrow cemetery of mixed ethnic dependence, 6 – barrow cemetery of unclear ethnic dependence. After Kurila 2005a.

Western Boundaries of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrow Culture: Criteria for Definition and Limitations of Existing Source Material

The limited scope of the present publication precludes a detailed analysis of the characteristics of individual categories of SPLBC archaeological sites, as well as a thorough description of the criteria for attributing (or not) specific sites to this cultural group. Accordingly, only a series of introductory remarks is offered here. The archaeological sites of the SPLBC in the interfluvium of the Western Dvina and Neman are divided into burial sites (barrow and flat cemeteries) and settlement sites (hillforts and open settlements).

The basis for classifying a particular barrow necropolis as a Krivich burial site lies in a comprehensive analysis of the peculiarities of its burial rites,²² the presence of hand-made pottery with pronounced shoulders characteristic of the SPLBC (Fig. 4), and female jewellery typical of this culture (Fig. 5).²³ Only 'pure' SPLBC barrow cemeteries were included in the mapping. These comprised sites where, on the one hand, at least several barrows containing burials typical of this culture had been excavated, on the other hand, excluded the following categories: a) barrow cemeteries with cremations lacking diagnostically significant material and precise dating; b) necropolises in which isolated SPLBC burials were recorded, but whose overall cultural attribution remains uncertain; c) barrow cemeteries dominated by inhumation rites in which only isolated SPLBC cremation burials were identified.

The currently known flat cemeteries and individual burials of the SPLBC remain few. The excavation materials from most of these sites have already been published.²⁴

In the case of settlement sites, the primary criterion for their classification as SPLBC sites is, first and foremost, the presence of characteristic pottery with pronounced shoulder in the cultural layer (Figs. 6: 6–8; 7: 1–12, 14; 8: 6–9; 9: 1–7, 9–12). The vast majority of known open settlements are located near contemporaneous hillforts. Separately located SPLBC settlements in the interfluvium between the Western Dvina and Neman rivers are rarely attested, which is likely due to the nature of the rural settlements of this culture. These were probably short-lived, single-yard farmsteads or small farmstead villages. Notably, the only mapped settlement not located near a hillfort was discovered during the excavation of the Skema-2 settlement, with materials dating from the Neolithic to the late Middle Ages.²⁵

To determine the western boundaries of the SPLBC, archaeological sites located in the territories of Braslaŭ, Miory, Šarkauščyna, Hlybokaje, Dokšycy, Liepieľ, and the right-bank part of the Polack district in the Viciebsk region, as well as the Miadziel, Viliejka, and Lahojsk districts of the Minsk region, were mapped. A total of 36 sites were included: 18 barrow cemeteries, one flat cemetery, five hillforts, one open settlement, and 11 site complexes (eight hillforts with adjacent open settlements, two hillforts with open settlements and barrow cemeteries, and one hillfort with a flat cemetery located on its summit and a nearby barrow cemetery).

Peaceful Lands or a Dangerous Frontier?

After defining the boundaries of the distribution of SPLBC sites in the interfluvium between the Western Dvina and Neman rivers, we can address the second question posed at the beginning of the article: namely, an attempt to characterise the relationship between the population that left these sites and their western neighbours – the people of the ELBC tradition. To define the boundaries of this culture, we used the catalogue of East Lithuanian Barrow Culture cemeteries prepared by L. Kurila (Fig. 3).²⁶

The resulting map makes it possible to outline the contours of the boundary between the two archaeological cultures at the end of the first millennium AD. One of the most evident patterns revealed by the map is that the western part of the SPLBC distribution does not represent an area of uniform settlement. Instead, two distinct concentrations of sites can be identified. The first is located in the Braslaŭ Lakeland, and the second occupies the territory of the right bank of the Vilija River in its upper reaches, extending northwards as far as Lake Narač and the watershed between the right tributaries of the Vilija River and the left tributaries of the Dzisna River (Fig. 10).

Across this area, the SPLBC and ELBC sites show little or no direct spatial overlap. This pattern suggests that, by the end of the first millennium AD, there was a strip of 'no man's land' between the populations of these two cultures. The closest spatial proximity between the Krivichs and Lithuanian sites is observed near Lakes Drysviaty (about 15 km) and Narač (about 25–27 km) (Fig. 11). It should be emphasized that only those sites that can be dated to the end of the first millennium AD and can be attributed to the SPLBC with the highest degree of confidence have been plotted on this map.²⁷

²² Enukov 1990, 13–47; Plavinskij, Tarasevič 2022, 274–288.

²³ Enukov 1990, 52–93; Tarasevič 2020.

²⁴ Plavinskij, Tarasevič 2022, 288–294; Plavinski *et al.* 2024.

²⁵ Čarnjauski 2003, 44–45.

²⁶ Kurila 2005a.

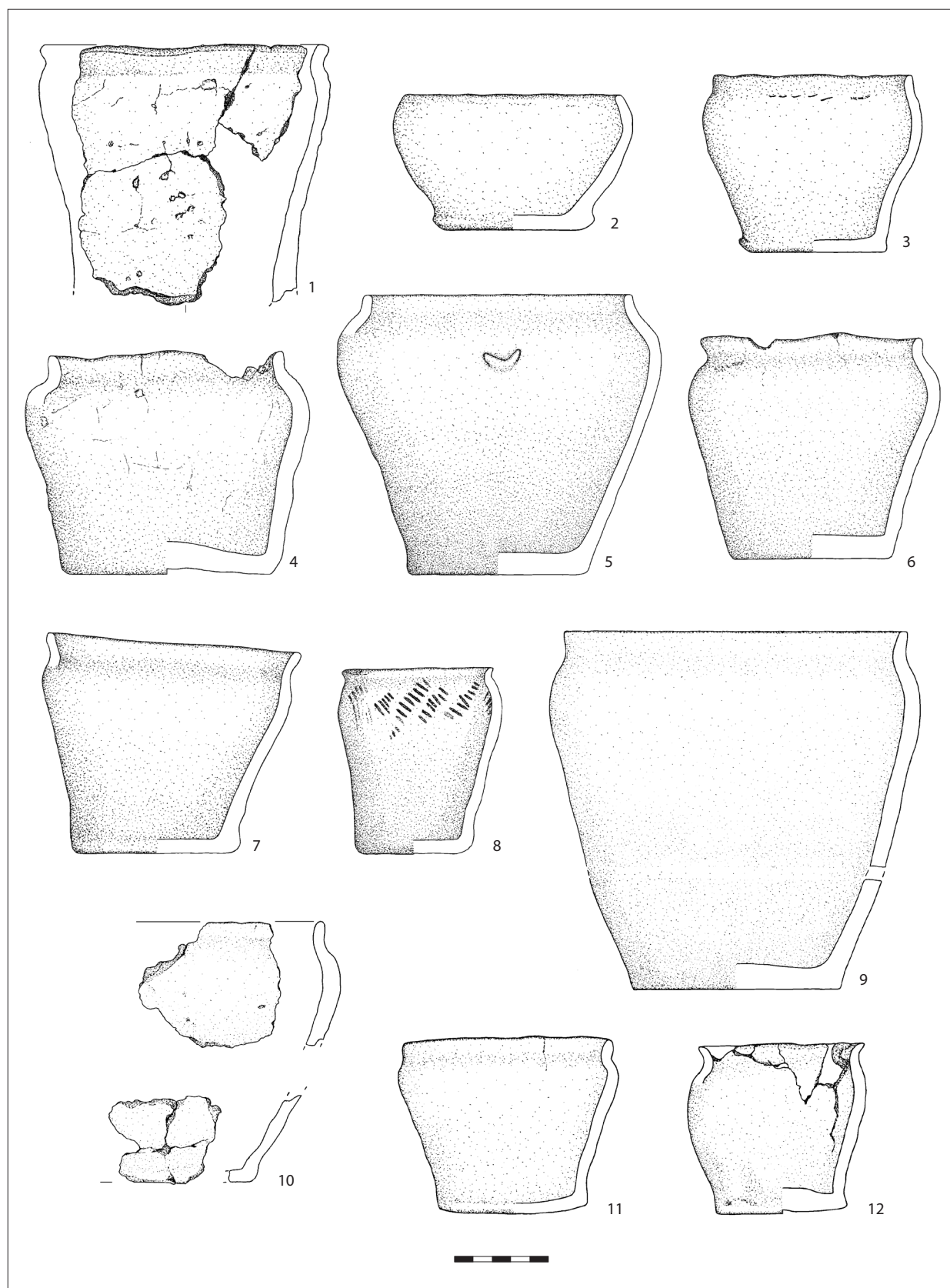


Fig. 4. Handmade pottery from the barrow cemetery Opsa: 1–2 – barrow 4, 3 – barrow 1, 4–6 – barrow 2/14, 7–8 – barrow 3/15, 9–12 – barrow 20. Drawing by M. Plavinski.



Fig. 5. Typical female ornaments of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture: 1–2 – temple rings with sickle-shaped ends, 3 – round ornamented plaque, 4 – trapezoidal pendant, 5 – bi-S-shaped holder, 6 – three-hole holder. Drawing by V. Tarasevič.

What archaeological criteria can be used to assess the nature of the relations between ethnocultural groups living on opposite sides of the delineated boundary?

Traditional material indicators of heightened military tension and recurrent conflict along the border zone between archaeological cultures in the forest belt of Eastern Europe during the first millennium AD include the following:

1. Evidence of military raids on neighbours, including traces of destruction of rural settlements, indications of attacks on, or the burning and demolition of, hillforts, features that may directly record episodes of conflicts;

2. The construction of new fortifications and the reinforcement of existing ones, which may indirectly indicate increasing military tension between the populations of neighbouring archaeological cultures;

3. The militarisation of funerary practices, specifically increasing frequency of burials containing weapon and elements of equestrian equipment.

Which of these phenomena can be identified in the border zone between the SPLBC and the ELBC (with particular reference to the 'Krivichian' side of this frontier)?

There is little evidence to assume frequent raids by the Eastern Lithuanian population on the lands inhabited by the SPLBC population. Notably, there is no marked concentration of SPLBC hillforts along the western border of the cultural area when compared with its interior regions. Nor is there archaeological evidence suggesting that the western neighbours systematically attacked Krivichs hillforts. In those cases where traces of assaults and fires have been found on SPLBC hillforts located on the western limits of the cultural area, either the available data are insufficient to identify the potential attackers, or the destruction may be attributed to process connected with the incorporation of the western margins of the Krivichs settlement area into the sphere of influence of Old Rus' centres of power, as appears to have been the case in the Braslaŭ Lakeland.²⁸

No evidence of the militarisation of funerary practices is observed in the borderland between the ELBC and the SPLBC. It is well known that the funerary practices of the ELBC frequently display a pronounced military component, whereas in the SPLBC burials, weapons are virtually absent across its territory.²⁹ This pattern is

²⁷ Possibly, the joint mapping of all Slavic sites in the interfluvium between the Western Dvina and Neman rivers (including both earlier sites belonging to the Bancaraŭščyna Culture and later necropolises and settlements of the SPLBC) will help deline-

ate this boundary more clearly and provide certain insights into the dynamics of its change (or lack thereof).

²⁸ Plavinski 2017, 164, 182, 189.

²⁹ Enekov 1990, 68.

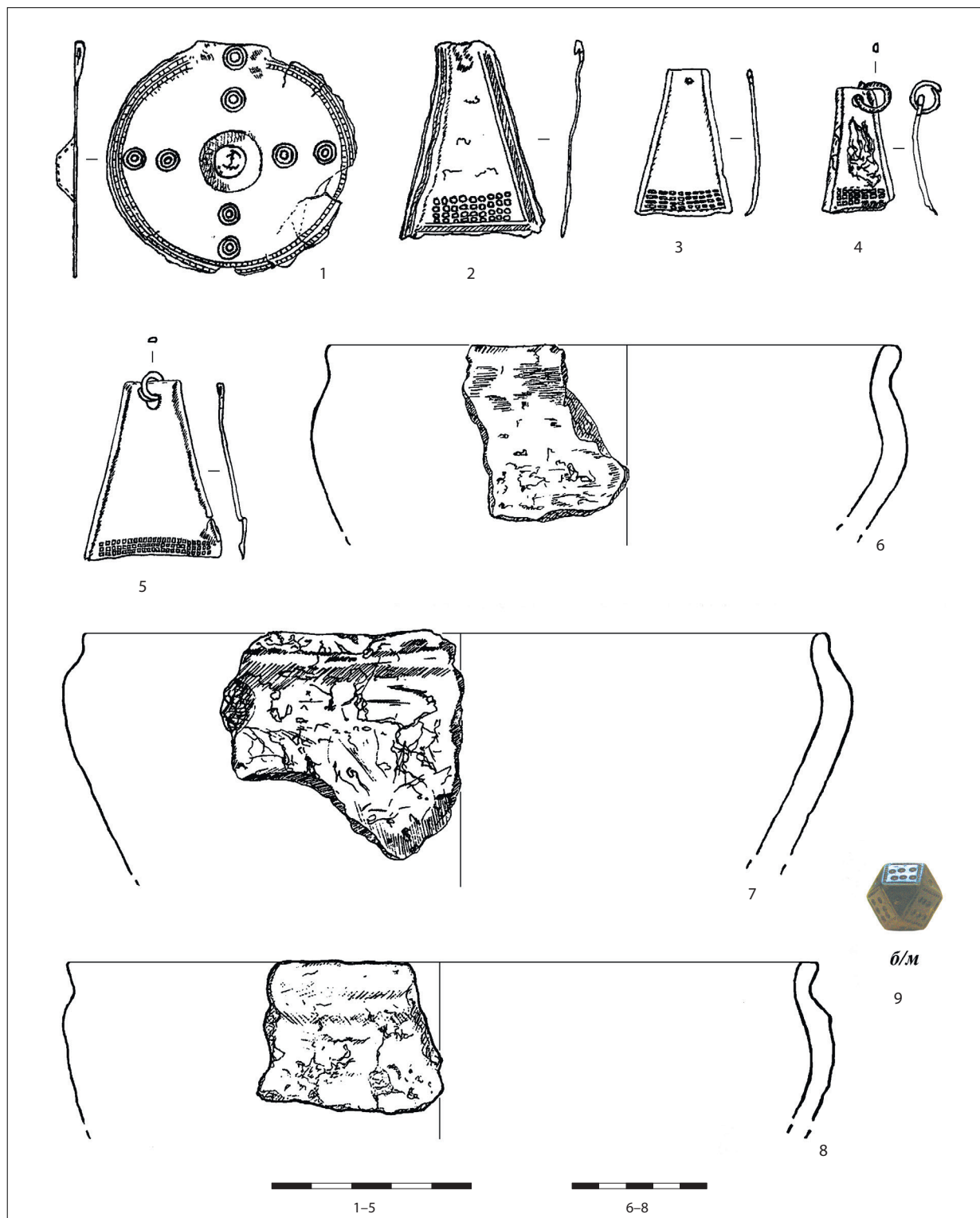


Fig. 6. Materials of the last quarter of the 1st millennium AD from the hillfort (5, 9) and open settlement (1-4, 6-8) Zazony: 1 – round ornamented plaque, 2-5 – trapezoidal pendants, 6-8 – handmade pottery, 9 – weight. 1-8 – by A. Yehareichanka, 7 – by A. Sahonchyk.

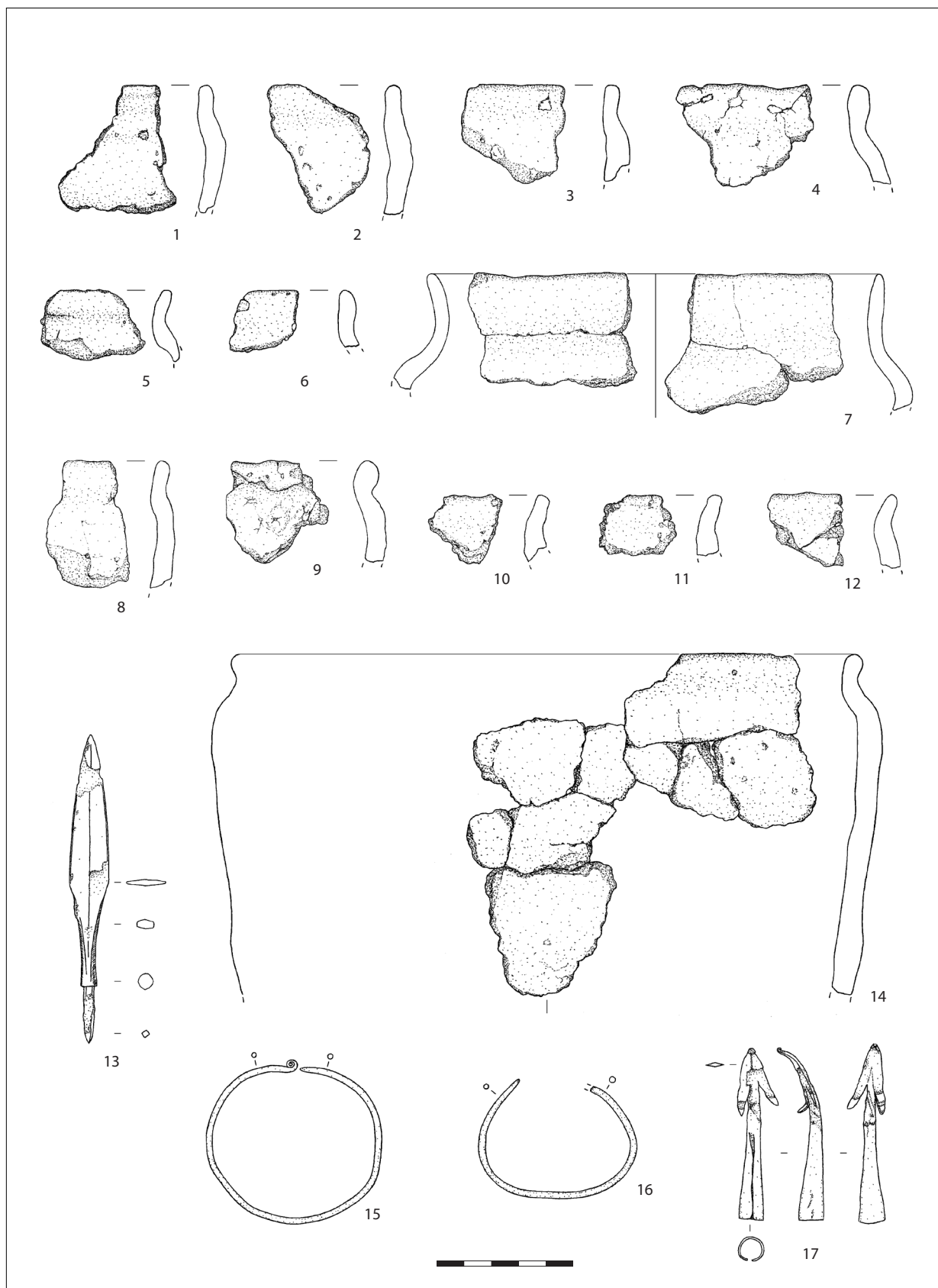


Fig. 7. Materials of the last quarter of the 1st millennium AD from the hillfort Svila-1st from the excavations in 1974 (1–6, 13–17) and 2022 (7–12): 1–12 – handmade pottery, 13, 17 – arrowheads, 14 – upper part of the handmade pot, 15–16 – temple rings, 14–17 – grave goods from the burial 2. Drawing by M. Plavinski.

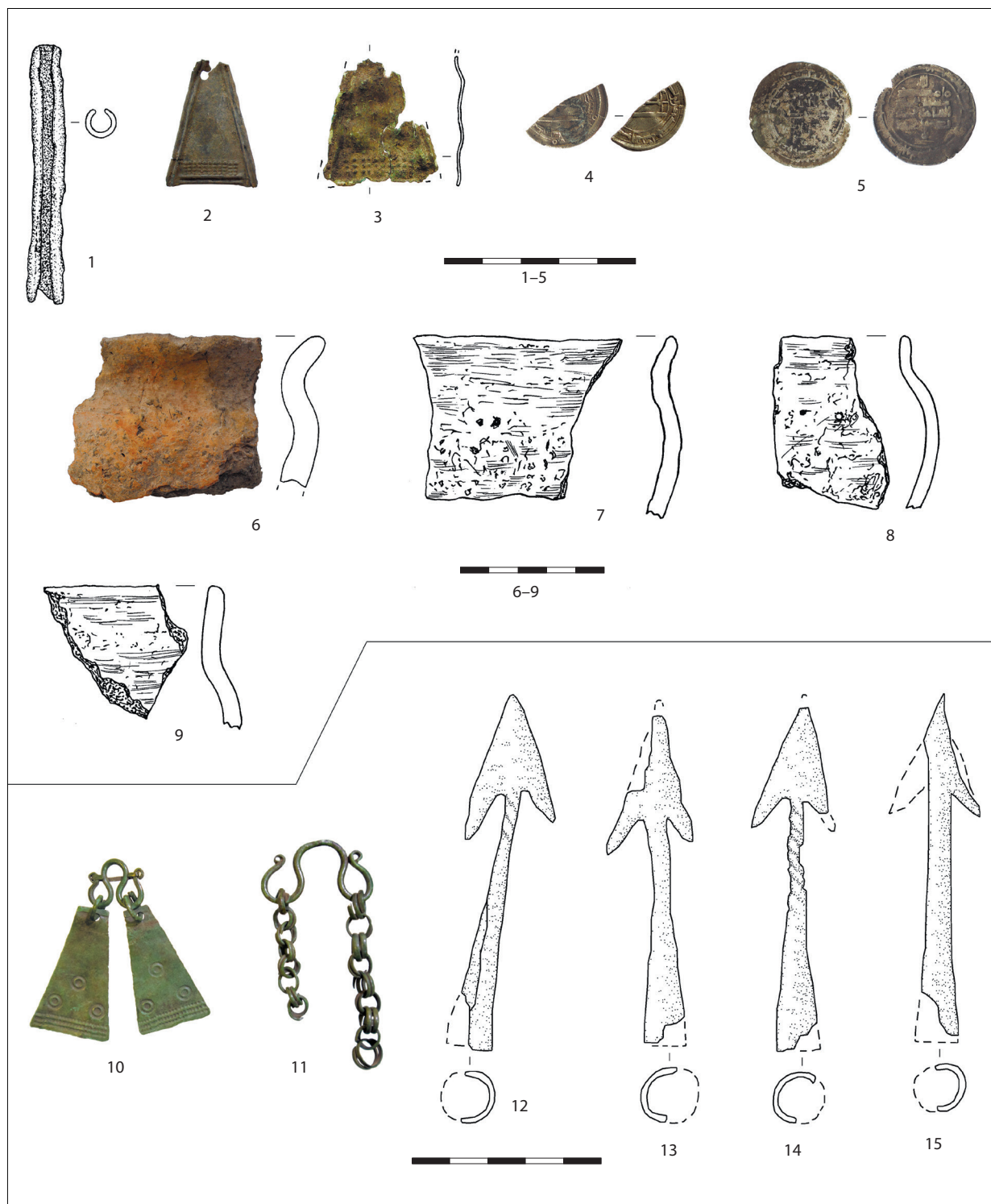


Fig. 8. Materials of the last quarter of the first millennium AD from the hillfort Haradziec on the river Mniuta (A) and hillfort Jazna (B): 1 – tinder tube, 2–3 – trapezoidal pendants, 4 – fragment of dirham (Abbasid, Harun al-Rashid, Madinat al-Salam, 188 A.H. (803–804), 5 – dirham (Samanid, Nasr ibn Ahmad, al-Shash, caliph al-Qahir billah, 321 A.H. (933), 6–9 – handmade pottery, 10 – bi-S-shaped holder with trapezoidal pendants, 11 – bi-S-shaped holder with chains, 12–15 – arrowheads. 1–6 – drawing and photo by M. Plavinski, 7–9 – after Štychaŭ 1992, 10–11 – by V. Tarasevič, 12–15 – by V. Shadyra and processed by M. Plavinski; coin definitions by V. Rabcevič.

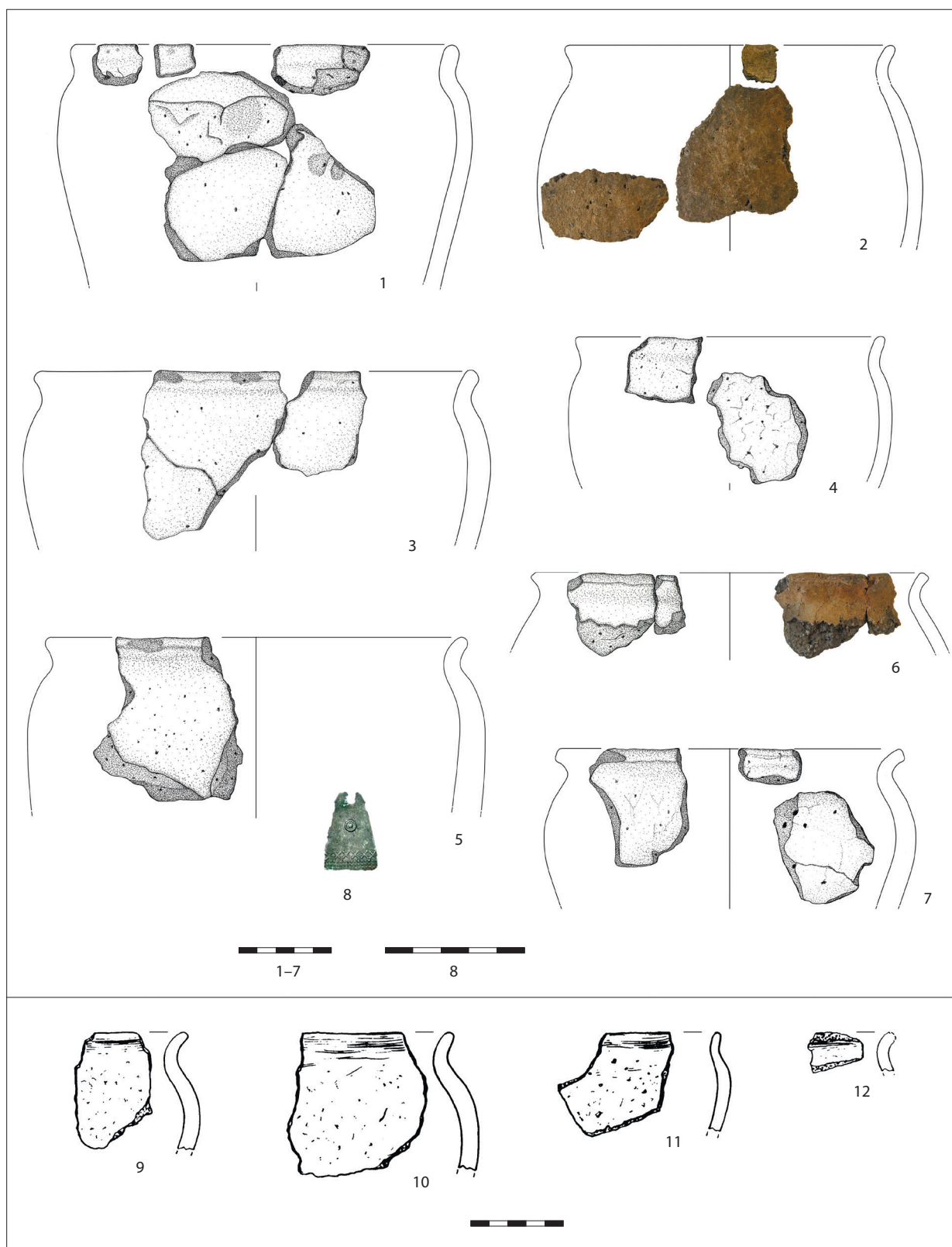


Fig. 9. Materials of the last quarter of the first millennium AD from the hillfort and open settlement Haradzišča (A) and hillfort on the island Zamak on lake Miadziel (B): 1–7 – handmade pottery, 8 – trapezoidal pendant from the hillfort, 9–12 – handmade pottery. 1–7 – by V. Makouskaya, 8 – after Eremeev 2023, 9–12 – by M. Tkachou.

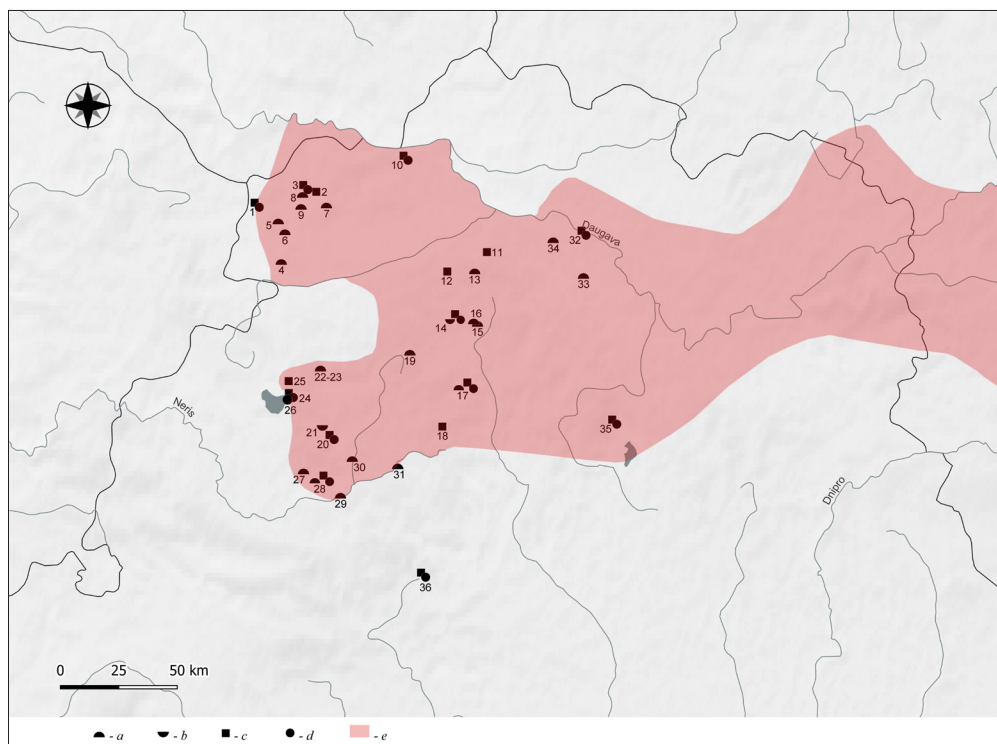


Fig. 10. Archaeological sites of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture on its western borderland: 1 – Drysviaty, 2 – Braslaŭ, 3 – Zazony, 4 – Vuscie, 5 – Opsa, 6 – Daŭbor, 7 – Achremaŭcy (Białmonty), 8 – Racki Bor, 9 – Pahošča, 10 – Prudniki, 11 – Jazna, 12 – Haradziec on the river Mniuta, 13 – Čarnievičy, 14 – Svila-1st, 15 – Peravoz I, 16 – Peravoz IV, 17 – Biruli, 18 – Vituničy, 19 – Varhany, 20 – Haradzišča, 21 – Naŭry I, 22 – Milty I, 23 – Milty II, 24 – Mikołcy, 25 – Zamak on lake Miadziel, 26 – Skema-2, 27 – Halinova, 28 – Rečki, 29 – Sosenka, 30 – Hury, 31 – Izbišča, 32 – Polack, 33 – Plusy, 34 – Rudnia, 35 – Kastrycya, 36 – Staroje Haradzišča; a – barrow cemetery, b – flat cemetery, c – hillfort, d – open settlement, e – area of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture. Map by M. Plavinski, processed by V. Makouskaya.

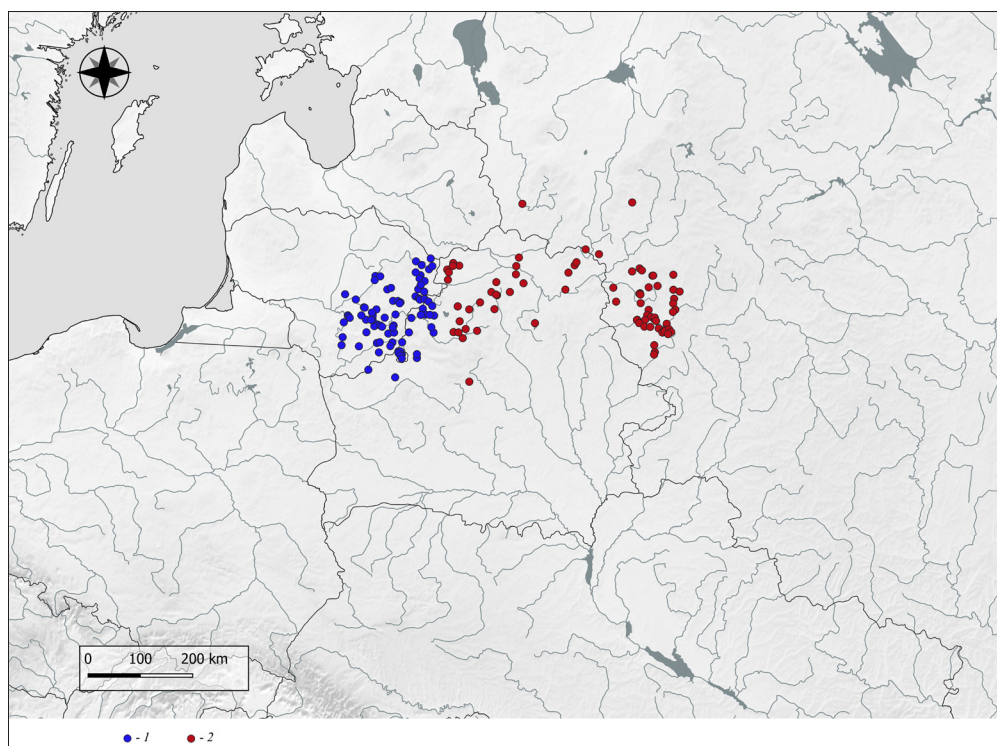


Fig. 11. The borderland between the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture and East Lithuanian Barrow Culture: 1 – cemeteries of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrows Culture (by M. Plavinski), 2 – cemeteries of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture. After Kurila 2005a, 12 with additions by M. Plavinski, prepared by V. Makouskaya.

also true for the burial sites on the western periphery of the area associated with this culture.

Overall, the archaeological evidence allows us to characterise the borderland between the SPLBC and ELBC in the last centuries of the first millennium AD as a relatively stable region, lacking indicators of major upheavals or significant military conflicts. Between the two populations, there is an extensive buffer zone – ‘no man’s land’ – with a minimum width of approximately 15–25 kilometres.

It is much more difficult to characterise the degree of interaction and mutual influence between the SPLBC and ELBC populations. Such assessment is based on the analysis of certain categories of artefacts, most commonly jewellery. Within historiography, the assemblages of female jewellery associated with the SPLBC (Fig. 5) are viewed to be of Baltic origin. This impression was formed based on assumptions that such female ornaments as headbands made of spirals and ferrules, various types of neck rings, and spiral and V-shaped arm rings are characteristic Baltic forms that were adopted by the SPLBC population from Lithuanian tribes or Latgalians.³⁰ V.V. Enukov has even classified trapezoidal pendants, which are among the most widespread types of Krivichs ornaments, as Baltic elements.³¹

However, the attribution of a Baltic ‘ethnic’ origin of the majority of the listed types of jewellery is not obvious, and in some cases, such as with trapezoidal pendants, it is incorrect.³² In general, it has become apparent that the interpretation of many of these types of female ornaments within the SPLBC reflects a histographical construct that emerged during early attempts to identify typological analogies and subsequently gained the status of an established tradition through repeated citation. This refers to the fact that the much richer Baltic burials simply ‘overshadowed’ the extremely low-inventory and poor cremations of the SPLBC. Consequently, when researchers found some analogies to the Krivich ornaments in burial sites in Lithuania or Latvia, these analogies in the Baltic lands were obviously much more numerous, leading to the conclusion about their primacy and, by extension, their Baltic origin or influence.

A more detailed analysis of specific categories of ornaments found within the SPLBC area and on the territories of Lithuania and Latvia allows several aspects of their presumed Baltic ‘ethnic’ attribution to be reconsidered. Twisted neck rings with conical ends, common-

ly considered one of the ‘Baltic’ elements within the set of ornaments of this culture, can serve as an example. However, analyses of these finds show that the primary area of their distribution covers not only eastern and central Lithuania and eastern Latvia, as traditionally believed,³³ but also the western part of the SPLBC region (Fig. 12). It is therefore plausible that the SPLBC population initially adopted this type of ornament from their western neighbours; subsequently, however, twisted neck rings with conical ends became an integral component of the jewellery of this culture. A similar process may be inferred for V-shaped arm rings. With regard to spiral headbands, there is strong evidence to suggest that this type of female ornament was already in use by the Slavic population of northern Belarus, namely, among the bearers of the traditions of Bancarauščyna, by the third quarter of the first millennium AD.³⁴ Accordingly, headbands of Baltic origin appear to have been adapted by the Slavic population of northern Belarus before the spread of SPLBC sites in this region. It is therefore likely that the widespread presence of such headbands in the costume of Krivich women represents a legacy of traditions of the Bancarauščyna Culture rather than the result of direct borrowing from Baltic populations.

Thus, to date, it is highly problematic to identify any Western borrowings in the SPLBC women’s ornaments. Undoubtedly, such borrowings occurred; however, it is currently problematic to isolate them within the overall body of archaeological finds.

Reverse borrowings are rare, but nevertheless attested. Within the area of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture, two finds of typical SPLBC sickle-shaped temple rings are known. Two silver examples originate from a hoard discovered near the village of Pirčiupiai, in the Varėna district (Fig. 13: 1), which was deposited in the second half of the 9th century.³⁵ The literature also reports data on the discovery of sickle-shaped temple rings during excavations at the Aukštadvaris and Stakai barrow cemeteries.³⁶ However, in the case of the Aukštadvaris barrow cemetery, this information is incorrect, as is evident from the photographic documentation published with the excavation results of this necropolis.³⁷ By contrast, the image of the temple ring from burial 5 of barrow 8 at the Stakai barrow cemetery has never been published; nevertheless, A. Tautavičius describes it³⁸ as being identical to the specimens from the Pirčiupiai hoard.³⁹

³⁰ Enukov 1990, 54–57, 80–82; Sedov 1974, 32; Šmidt 2012, 47–49.

³¹ Enukov 1990, 80.

³² Gavrituhin 1997.

³³ Lietuvos 1978, 30–31; Radiš 1999, 172.

³⁴ Plavinski 2017, 37, 41; Plavinskij, Tarasevič 2021, 301–305.

³⁵ Grimalauskaitė, Remecas 2020, 88.

³⁶ Sedov 2001, 86.

³⁷ Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1959, 10 pav.

³⁸ Tautavičius 1958, 78.

³⁹ My sincere thanks to L. Kurila (Institute of Lithuanian History, Lithuanian Academy of Sciences) for his valuable consultations on the finds of temple rings from the burials of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture.

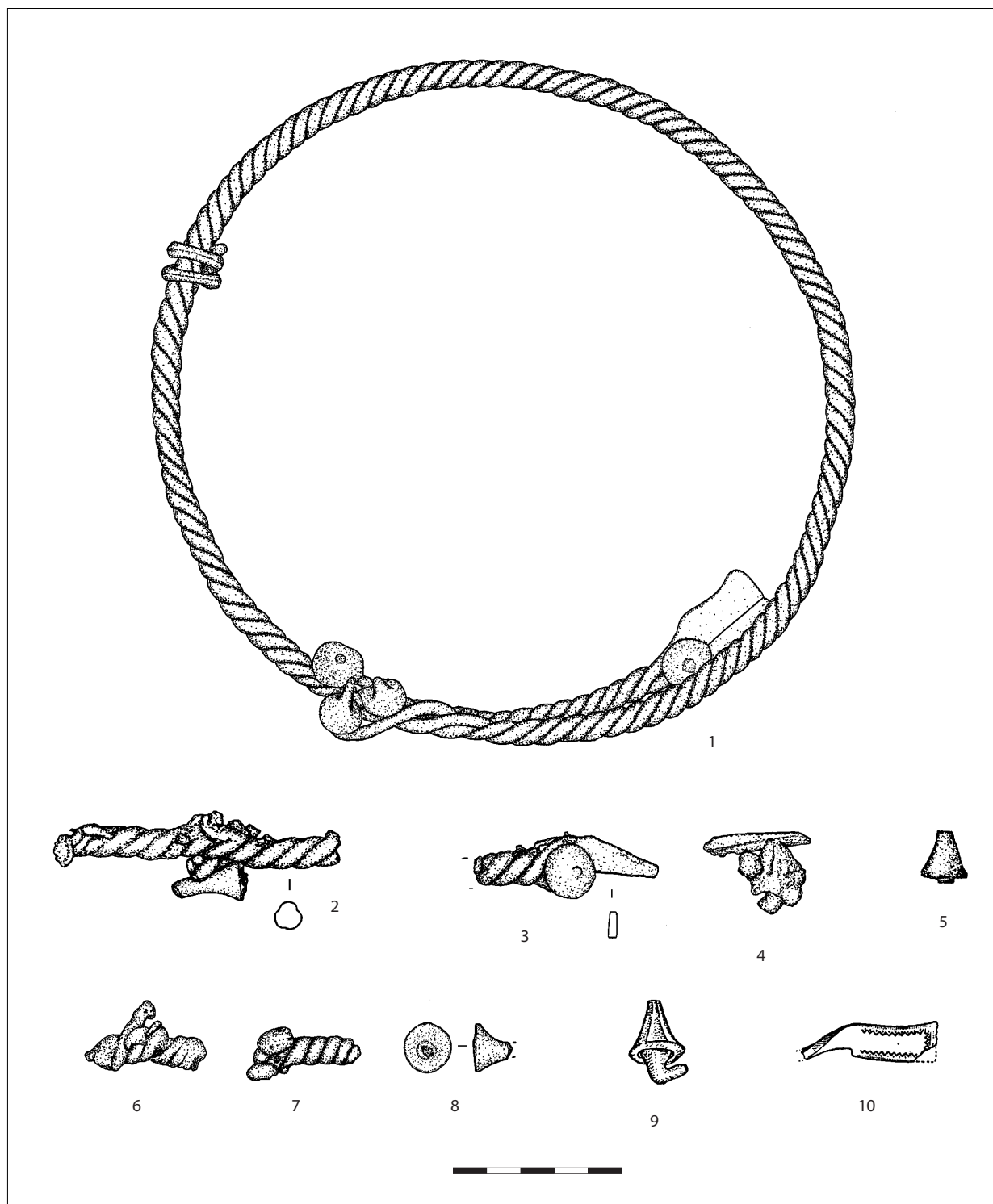


Fig. 12. Finds of twisted neck rings with conical ends from the Smolensk–Polack Long Barrows Culture area: 1 – Pahošča barrow cemetery, barrow 7, burial 2, 2 – Opsa barrow cemetery, barrow 1/13, 3–4 – Racki Bor barrow cemetery, barrow 3, 5 – Daūbor barrow cemetery, barrow 3, 6–8 – Milti I barrow cemetery, barrow 4, 9 – Sosienka barrow cemetery, barrow 13, 10 – Rudnia barrow cemetery, barrow 12. 1–4, 6–8 – drawing by M. Plavinski, 5 – after Enukov 1990, 9 – by J. Zverugo 1989, 10 – by A. Liaudanski.



Fig. 13. Female ornaments of the Smolensk–Polack Long Barrows Culture in the area of the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture: 1 – hoard from Pirčiupiai, which includes two sickle-shaped temple rings, 2 – three-hole holder from hillfort Hałšany. 1 – after Grimalauskaitė, Remecas 2020, 2 – after Ken'ko 2015.

In addition, a three-hole holder typical of the SPLBC was found at the Hałšany hillfort (Fig. 13: 2).⁴⁰ Based on such a limited number of finds, it is difficult to argue for close contacts, especially given that the temple rings from the Pirčiupiai hoard represent hack silver and therefore cannot be interpreted as evidence of direct contacts between the SPLBC and the ELBC.

Preliminary Findings and Research Perspectives

This section summarises the main results of the study and formulates answers to the two questions posed at the beginning of the article. These answers must be regarded as highly preliminary, given the current state of the available source material.

The current reconstruction of the boundaries of Krivich settlement in the interfluvium of the Western Dvina and the Neman in the final centuries of the first millennium AD is as follows: the western part of the SPLBC territory was unevenly populated. Two groups of sites can be distinguished – one in the Braslaŭ Lakeland and another stretching from the upper reaches of the Vilija River in the south to Lake Narač and the left-bank tributaries of the Dzisna River in the north (Fig. 10). Across the entire border zone, sites of the SPLBC and ELBC show little or no spatial overlap. On the contrary, there appears

to have been a strip of ‘no man’s land’ between them, with a minimum width of at least ca. 15–25 kilometres (Fig. 11).

Overall, the relationship between these two ethno-cultural groups appears to have been relatively peaceful. Archaeological sources provide no grounds for speaking of a significant militarisation of the borderland population or frequent military raids against neighbouring groups. The borderland between the Smolensk–Polack Long Barrow Culture and the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture at the end of the first millennium AD (9th–10th centuries, up to the beginning of the 11th century) can therefore be characterised as relatively stable, with no significant outbreaks of violence or frequent military conflicts. At the same time, analysis of the material culture associated with the SPLBC and ELBC traditions indicates lack of active or close contacts and exchanges between them.

The available evidence suggests that this borderland was remarkably stable and the populations on either side maintained a rather limited level of contacts. Moreover, it can be further proposed that this border zone was established well before the spread of SPLBC sites into the Western Dvina–Neman interfluvium, a process that began no earlier than the mid-8th century.⁴¹ The formation of this borderland likely began as early as the period of the Bancaraŭščyna Culture (third quarter of the first millennium AD), and possibly even earlier – during ex-

⁴⁰ Ken'ko 2015, 25.

⁴¹ Plavinskij 2019, 111.

pansion of the Kievan Culture traditions (the Zaozer'ye-Uzmen' type antiquities) into the Upper Dvina Region and the Dvina-Neman interfluvium, bringing with them the tradition of using combed pottery.⁴² Accordingly, defining the westernmost extent of Bancaraŭščyna Culture sites should be considered as one of the primary objectives for future research. Without such work – based on detailed cataloguing and mapping of Slavic sites

in the Dvina-Neman interfluvium from the third quarter of the first millennium AD – it will be difficult to reconstruct the dynamics of the borderland, to assess contacts between the Krivich and Lithuanian population in the final centuries of the first millennium AD, and to fully understand the process of the formation of the Smolensk-Polack Long Barrow Culture.

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⁴² Eremeev 2023, 9.

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