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ARCHEOlogija 46

Lietuvos istorijos institutas

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# ARCHEOlogija 46

LIETUVOS  
ISTORIJOS  
INSTITUTAS

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# GREETINGS FROM OLD CENTRAL-EASTERN GERMANY: MEMORIES OF INTERESTING TIMES

Recent demands have unfortunately led to some neglect of our long and cordial contacts with Baltic archaeology and so we remembered this sensational anniversary too late! Nevertheless, an admiring greeting should not be allowed to simply missing!

Our first interest in and contact with Baltic archaeology was the result of material studies for my 1986 diploma thesis, which explored the especially rich, unpublished finds of pottery from the settlement sites along the Elbe river near the city of Magdeburg.

Parallels for the wave-decorated pots, the amphorae, and the beakers of early corded ware were found first of all in Switzerland and in the coastal settlements of the so called 'Haffküstenkultur', and later, mainly at Rimutė Rimantienė's excavations at Nida and Šventoji (Rimantienė 1980; 1989; 1992; 2005).

At that time my special interest was the problem of the origin of the corded ware cultural complex, the pan-European horizon, the settlement finds, and the battle axes.

In 1990 Jörn Jacobs (University of Rostock) and I, who had at that time worked on the Single Grave culture in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Jacobs 1991), took part in the international corded ware conference in Štiřín near Prague. This was our first international conference after all those 'revolutions' in Europe, which had led to a completely altered situation, new opportunities, and new challenges. Through the mediation of Christian Strahm and Miroslav Buchvaldek we got into a conversation with Prof. R. Rimantienė and Adomas Butrimas and were invited by her to visit Lithuania in order to study the Neolithic finds in the National Museum of Lithuania in Vilnius.

This trip, which also included my wife, Antonia Beran, in addition to Jörn Jacobs and myself, occurred in the summer of 1991 and was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service.

We were very cordially welcomed and supported in Vilnius by Prof. R. Rimantienė and all her Lithuanian colleagues.

We were given accommodation, cared for, and looked after in Vilnius, in the National Museum, and on trips across the country by Vygandas Juodagalvis and Rūta Juodagalvienė.

Vygandas even successfully managed to take us on a two-day drive through the Russian Kaliningrad district, which was actually still forbidden to foreigners at the time. But the two border crossings succeeded without any problems. Here too there seemed to be a positive spirit of optimism at the time.

For instance, in a kind of beach hotel or holiday camp in Sarkau (Lesnoi) we were welcomed in a friendly manner and were able to spend the night and have breakfast. They seemed to see us like the very first western tourists.

This was also the dramatic period of the Lithuanian independence movement. We still had to apply for visas in Moscow.

While drawing some particularly beautiful battle axes in a special exhibition in a bastion of the city fortifications of Vilnius, the news suddenly arrived that Russian police forces had occupied the radio station and that a military coup was soon to be expected.

Everyone, including us immediately ran to the square in front of the parliament in order to assemble the largest possible number of people so as to protect President Vytautas Landsbergis from being attacked or



Digging in the mud. Šventoji in June 1992. Left to right: Prof. Rimutė Rimantienė, Jens Parschau, Franziska Zschäck, Jan-Krzysztof Bertram, below, with a blue shirt, Jonas Beran. *Photo by A. Beran.*

seized. It was an impressive experience, even though no further trouble or violence occurred that day.

After obtaining railway return tickets, we left Vilnius with a warm farewell and some last funny discussions with Prof. R. Rimantienė on the characteristics of several of her colleagues as well as on communism, patriotism, and the future development of Lithuania and East Germany, taking with us a letter to Alexander Häusler in Berlin

concerning further cooperation and containing a sample from Šventoji for radiocarbon analysis.

In general, I wanted to get an impression of the Final Neolithic material in Lithuania. Against the background of the controversies about the origin of the corded ware cultural complex, I wanted to get an impression of the total occurrence of battle axes in an East Central European region closer to the centre of origin assumed by Miroslav Buchvaldek (Buchvaldek 1986, p. 150). These material studies in Lithuania actually helped me with several other studies on the Final Neolithic culture and also during the excavation and evaluation of early and late corded ware settlement sites in the Lower Lusatian lignite mining area in 2000/2001 (Beran 2008).

Another comparable study trip for corded ware, battle axes, and later history took me to Minsk in 2008 as guest of Mikola and Raissa Kryvaltsevich.

The battle axes recorded in Vilnius were published and discussed in detail only much later (Beran 2007), namely in a commemorative publication in honour of the 70th birthday of our academic teacher, Prof. Klaus-Dieter Jäger (1936–2019), who was always very interested in Lithuania.

Included in this investigation and consideration were also some very suitable pieces from the same prehistoric cultural area, Insterburg District (now Chernyachovsk, Kaliningrad Region, Russia) in the northeast of the former province of East Prussia. Originally part of the collections of the Insterburg Museum, they are now in the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology at the University of Halle and have already been used a number of times by me



An excavation break at Šventoji in June 1992. The same view as in Rimantienė 2005, Abb. 3, p. 3. Left to right: Jan-Krzysztof Bertram, Jonas Beran, Jens Parschau, Rimutė Rimantienė and Franziska Zschäck (with a blue headscarf). *Photo by A. Beran.*

in various ways, not only as Neolithic finds (Beran 1992; 1999). The north-eastern part of former East Prussia (Insterburg, Gumbinnen, and Tilsit/Ragnit Districts) was also known in Germany as ‘Preußisch-Litauen’ and is even now still called Little Lithuania by Lithuanians. In 1991 this area has been the subject of considerable interest and several new publications about its culture and history have been issued.

Another interesting connection with Baltic archaeology and a topic of conversations with my Lithuanian, Latvian, and Russian colleagues was my biographical research on the archaeologist, Carl Engel (Beran 1997). Born in Magdeburg, he was later very active in East Prussia, Latvia, and Pomerania, his name and publications still being well known.

Besides the Final Neolithic axes in Vilnius, I had also drawn some other stone tools and weapons from other periods. Of these, I was able, for example,

to use some of the famous Baltic snake head hoes (‘Schlangenkopfhacken’; Bagušienė, Rimantienė 1974, p. 102, Abb. 16, 245; 1984, 217, pav. 117) for a publication about the Mesolithic – Neolithic transition in Central Europe (Beran 2014).

We are currently able to use the publications of Prof. R. Rimantienė, especially those about Narva culture sites (Rimantienė 1979; 2005), for our project concerning Neolithic layers in Bernhard Gramsch’s 1977–1989 peat bog excavations in Friesack, which R. Rimantienė also visited about 40 years ago (Wetzel, Beran in press).

Some time later, as agreed with Prof. R. Rimantienė, V. Juodagalvis and Gytis Grižas came to us. Together we visited excavations as well as prehistoric and historical monuments in Saxony-Anhalt, Mecklenburg, and Berlin. Locations, which were gradually emptying of Soviet troops, such like military barracks were particularly interesting. In





Prof. Rimutė Rimantienė talking with Jens Parschau, Jonas Beran, Jan-Krzysztof Bertram, Antonia Beran and Franziska Zschäck.  
Photo by V. Juodagalvis.

many cases we were able to exchange ideas about our experiences in really existing socialism.

Next year, in the summer of 1992, we spent our holidays taking part in the excavation at Pionerski (former Neukuhren) by Vladimir Ivanovich Kulakow from the Moscow Academy of Sciences. We reached it by driving through Poland by a car owned by Jens Parschau (then at the Museum Fürstenwalde), together with Franziska Zschäck (Museum Hohenfelden, Thuringia), and Jan-Krzysztof Bertram (now University of Kırşehir, Turkey) and after enduring a very long wait and some troubles at the Polish-Lithuanian border, (which contrasted oddly with the brief friendly conversation we faced at the Lithuanian-Russian border at Eydtkuhnen (Černyševskoje), even though we did not have a visas to specifically enter the province of Kaliningrad). We studied the landscape and relics from archaeological and historical monuments all over the Sambian peninsula (Samland) and the environs of Kaliningrad (Königsberg).

From the Pionerski excavation, we travelled via Klaipėda to Šventoji in order to finally get to know

this famous place as well. From there we visited Liepāja and Rīga since we had already obtained visas for Latvia in Berlin. After leaving the Šventoji excavation and before driving back to Poland, we accompanied V. Juodagalvis to his own research district for a small test excavation.

I have to add that I almost stayed in Šventoji forever because while swimming in the Baltic Sea, I got caught in the strongest offshore current I have ever experienced.

At the Šventoji excavation camp, we were again warmly welcomed by Prof. R. Rimantienė and cared for. She was once more absolutely impressive as a passionate and strong excavation leader of 71 years. She is just completely unique!

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