LITHUANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY: INVESTIGATIONS AND FINDINGS
TO OUR READERS:

This modest publication is a brief overview of Lithuanian archaeology. It is part of the effort by the Lithuanian Archaeological Society to present a Day of Lithuanian Archaeology on September 19, 1998 in Bialygin, Poland.

At this event, archaeologists and art historians will demonstrate to the public, in a personal and interactive way, the techniques and processes of traditional Lithuanian craft production. We are eager to tell you more about our country, and to describe our archaeological sites and finds to people who are interested in Lithuania's past.

Each year, archaeological investigations take place at seven sites in Lithuania. The nation has more than 100 archaeologists; some are working in the Lithuanian Archaeological Society, which numbers 130 professional archaeologists.

We hope this publication will stimulate the reader to seek more comprehensive studies of Lithuanian archaeology. Therefore, only short surveys of the more important investigations are presented here. We also describe the national policy on the archaeological monuments and identify major artifact collections in Lithuanian museums.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Department of Cultural Heritage Protection for supporting this edition.

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The Paleolithic

The Mesolithic period starts with the Preboreal climatic period, c. 8000 B.C.C. and continues through the Boreal and part of the Atlantic periods. During the Preboreal period, the climate became considerably warmer. Forests developed up in on the territory of Lithuania, dunes and fauna increased, and rainfall increased. Very little is known about sites of the Preboreal period. They are usually found on the terraces of rivers. The most important sites are those of Dubičiai 2a and Palmeikiai. In the Preboreal and early Yoldia Sea period, Raimonds singles out the EarlyMesolithic culture dated to approximately the 8th millennium B.C. This culture is characterized by Palaeolithic traditions. During the period of the Boreal climate and the Ancylus Lake, inhabitants of Lithuania were considerably influenced by the Maglemosian Culture. The most conspicuous example of this is the Makomnyk 4 camp-site, up on the first water terrace. This site is dated to the 7th millennium B.C., and the inventory includes massive flint artifacts: arrowheads with a straight base, knives, scrapers, burins and other items. In the 7th millennium B.C., the Mesolithic Nemunas Culture began. On the basis of the topographical situation, sites of this period are divided into 3 groups. The earliest sites are found on flood plains. Main camp-sites have been found along the Nemunas and in southern Lithuania, including Paldvita, Kažemė, and Džiūnų. The flint arrowpoints from these camp-sites are massive and covered with a patina. Sites of the second group were set up during the period of the successful transgression of the Lithuanian Sea and are found on high terraces of rivers. The main sites include Žemėnai Kaniūkiškis 1, Neriesia 1, and Merkinė 1. Finds of this group are smaller. Transgression zones are found, and microliths become more frequent. Sites of the third group are found on flood plains, like those of group 1, but their flint artifacts show notable differences from those of group 1. They are usually small and not patinated. Mines sites include the Kampelkūnai 1, 2, and 3, Lapedėkiai, Dūmenyčiai 27, and 52. The Nemunas Culture was widespread in southern Lithuania, the Kalingrad area, and partially in Belorussia. Typical artifacts of this culture were flint items: spearheads with the point slanted to one side and a retouched stem, as well as spearheads with lanceolate blades. Frequently found are knives and blades. Wide use was also made of scrapers, burins and side-scrapers. Sometimes bones are found, as well as massive flint artifacts, such as oval axes and wedges. During the Boreal period, formation of another Mesolithic Culture, called the Kunda Culture, took place. It was widespread between Finland in the north and the Nemunas-Neris line in the south. This culture embraced the northern part of Lithuania. The main sites include Simos Kalnas 3, Spiģinas, Kūlikiai, Šaltalė. Finds of flint artifacts are scarce and of low quality. The best flint artifacts are made of imported flint the most characteristic being the Paliu type. Basic artifacts of bone, horn and antler include harpoons, spearheads, daggers, ice-picks, axes, chisels, and axe heads. Hunting in the Mesolithic was very different from that of the Paleolithic period, as forest animals which lived in small groups were hunted. The main hunting tool was the bow and arrow, though spears were also employed and pitsills were dug. It is probable that dogs were used in hunting. During the Mesolithic, the main fishing pattern was harpooning. During the second half of the Mesolithic, nets and weirs came into use. Netting 1 campsite has yielded a piece of linen best fibre which might have been from a net. In terms of flint production, the microlithic technique became established in the second half of the Mesolithic period, and a new method of blade production, the so-called technique of microliths, spread quickly. Several Mesolithic burials have been found at the Būžulis lake, on Spīņgaz Cape. The individuals were laid prone with one or other. Female burials were the best preserved burial. She had two holes in her breast and 7 amulets of perforated teeth of elk and wild pig on the chest and pelvis. The burial was dated to 5871 B.C. by C-14 method.

The Neolithic

The start of the Neolithic in Lithuania is traditionally associated with the appearance of ceramics. This is in contrast to many European countries, where the beginning of this period is associated with the emergence of an agricultural economy. Environmental conditions in the Neolithic were most favourable. These were the periods of the Atlantic and the Sub-Boreal climatic. Deciduous forest prevailed at that time. The Neolithic in Lithuania is divided into Early Middle and Later periods. This division reflects cultural changes and marks the arrival of new inhabitants. The Early Neolithic began in approximating the middle of the 5th millennium B.C. In the Early Neolithic, the two Mesolithic Cultures - the Kunda and the Mesolithic Nemunas Culture, which were called the Narva and Nemunas Cultures in the Neolithic period, continued and developed. They cover almost the same territories as during the Late Mesolithic. The Narva Culture encompasses the northern part, and the Nemunas Culture - the southern part. The same principal types of artifacts continue, and the beginning of a new period is only evidenced by ceramics, which are, unusually, very fragile. Ceramic vessels of both cultures included large pots with a painted base and a wide mouth. The clay paste features a substantial inclusion of plant fibre or ground shell. The necks have the shape of a L, C, or O. Ornamental motifs were very few, and they can only be seen in the decorative elements on the bases. Most of the Nemunas Culture sites have been found on flood plains. The main settlements include Dubičiai 3C, Ežerėnai 23a, Žapiški. Sites of the Nare Culture have been excavated in two zones: western Lithuania, as well as eastern Lithuania. The most important sites are Stventoji 18, 28, 4B, as well as Žventučius 18, and Žemaitėnai 18. In the Middle Neolithic, two new cultures reach Lithuania - the Comb and Pit Marked Pottery Culture from the northwest and the Globular Amphora Culture from the west. People of the Comb and Pit Marked Culture exerted the most substantial influence on the northeastern part of Lithuania. They were representative of hunting and gathering economy, while people of the Globular Amphora Culture were already a mixed food and livestock breeders. They have been believed to have introduced agriculture and stock breeding to the inhabitants of western Lithuania. Evidence of the Comb and Pit Marked Culture has been found in eastern Lithuania, at the Kietuštniai 1, Žemaitėnai 2 and some other settlements. Globular Amphora pottery has been found only at the Čvirkų 26, 27, and 28 sites. In the Early Neolithic, people became more sedentary and settlements grew larger. They were close to lakes and lagoons. Structures were rectangular, with gable roofs, supported by rows of lengthwise posts. They measured about 6.5 - 9 metres, and had an open fireplace inside. The prevalent hunting tools were bows with arrows, as well as spears. Fragments of bows have been recovered from the Stventoji 18, 4B, 23 settlements. They may have been about 2 m long. Fishing became especially popular in this period. Nets, weirs, fishhooks and other tools were used. Excavations at the Žventučius 28 settlement have yielded 6 pieces of fishing-nets. They were knitted of linen and wood. Dugout boats came into use. A model of such a dugout boat was found at the Žventučius 28 settlement.

The first animal domesticated in Lithuania was the dog. Bones of dogs have been found at Stventoji and at the Kietuštniai lake. Settlements of the Middle Neolithic were inhabited by large number of other domestic animals. Bones of livestock and small cattle were recovered at the Stventoji 23 settlement. The Kietuštniai 18
settlement has yielded numerous bones of cattle, horses and pigs. These domestic remains, however, account for only a small percentage of all bone findings. The first indicators of agriculture are found by the end of the Middle Neolithic. At the Sventoji I settlement, 345 artefacts were recovered, of which 14 were associated with the production of organic materials. These include flakes and blades of flint, obsidian and quartzite, as well as a number of stone tools, such as axes, chisels and adzes. The presence of these artefacts suggests that the inhabitants had access to a variety of raw materials, which were used for different purposes, including the production of tools and weapons. The development of agriculture, as evidenced by the presence of flint tools and artefacts, is a significant indicator of the transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a more settled one.

In this phase, the settlement was occupied by communities who relied on agriculture and animal husbandry. The presence of flint tools and artefacts, such as axes, chisels and adzes, indicates a high degree of skill and specialization in the production of these materials. The artefacts were not only used for practical purposes, such as cutting and shaping, but also for ceremonial and decorative purposes. This is evident from the presence of decorated flint tools and artefacts, which were used for ceremonial purposes and to mark the boundaries of the settlement.

The settlement of Sventoji I was not isolated from the rest of the region, as evidenced by the presence of imported artefacts, such as flint tools and artefacts, which were not locally produced. These artefacts suggest a network of trade and exchange between different communities, which is further supported by the presence of pottery and other imported goods. The artefacts were not only used for practical purposes, such as cooking and storage, but also for ceremonial and decorative purposes. This is evident from the presence of decorated pottery and other imported goods, which were used for ceremonial purposes and to mark the boundaries of the settlement.

The presence of a large number of flint tools and artefacts, as well as evidence of agricultural activities, suggests a high degree of specialization and skill in the production and use of these materials. This indicates a complex and organized society, which was able to produce a variety of goods and materials, including pottery, flint tools and artefacts, and agricultural products. The presence of these artefacts and goods suggests a high degree of social and economic organization, which was supported by the presence of a large population and a well-organized economy.