

■ INTERARCHAEOLOGIA, 1 ■

Papers from the first theoretical seminar of the Baltic archaeologists (BASE)
held at the University of Tartu, Estonia, October 17th–19th, 2003

CULTURE AND MATERIAL CULTURE



BASE

Official publication of
the University of Tartu,
the University of Latvia and
the University of Vilnius

Interarchaeologia

Organisational and Editorial Board:

Valdis Bērziņš	University of Latvia
Marge Kōnsa	University of Tartu
Valter Lang	University of Tartu
Algimantas Merkevičius	University of Vilnius
Rēda Nemickienė	University of Vilnius
Andrejs Vasks	University of Latvia

Interarchaeologia is a peer-reviewed publication of extended presentations held at theoretical seminars of the Baltic archaeologists

Interarchaeologia, 1

Culture and Material Culture

Editor: Valter Lang
English editor: Alexander Harding
Lay-out: Meelis Friedenthal

Printed in Estonia by Pakett Press, Tallinn

ISSN 1736-2806
ISBN 9985-50-384-8

INTERARCHAEOLOGIA, 1

CULTURE AND MATERIAL CULTURE

*Papers from the first theoretical seminar of the Baltic archaeologists
(BASE) held at the University of Tartu, Estonia, October 17th–19th, 2003*

Edited by Valter Lang

Tartu – Riga – Vilnius 2005

■ Contents

Baltic Archaeological Seminar: An Introduction (<i>Valter Lang</i>)	. . . . . 7
Valter Lang Archaeological Cultures and Ethnic History: Some Examples from the East-Baltic Early Iron Age	. . . . . 11
Mindaugas Bertasius The Archaeology of Group: From Situational Construct to Ethnic Group	. . . . . 29
Algimantas Merkevičius Material Culture and the East-Baltic Bronze Age Society	. . . . . 39
Andris Šnē Understanding Power: On the Study of Late Prehistoric Social and Political Structures in Latvia	. . . . . 53
Vykintas Vaitkevičius Interpreting the East Lithuanian Barrow Culture	. . . . . 71
Tõnno Jonuks Principles of Estonian Prehistoric Religion with Special Emphasis to Soul Beliefs	. . . . . 87
Romas Jarockis Christian Coins in Pagan Graves? Artefacts, Texts and Research Traditions	. . . . . 97
Rasa Banytė-Rowell and Anna Bitner-Wróblewska From <i>Aestii</i> to <i>Esti</i> . Connections between the Western Lithuanian Group and the area of distribution of <i>tarand-</i> graves	. . . . . 105
Mari-Liis Rohtla Crossbow Fibula as a Reflection of Social Status and Relations	. . . . . 121

Audronė Bliujienė

Pottery in Curonian Cremation Burials. Some Aspects of Interaction across the Baltic Sea in the Late Viking Age and Early Medieval Period

.147

Kristiina Johanson

Putting Stray Finds in Context – What Can We Read from the Distribution of Stone Axes...

.167

**Baltic Archaeological Seminar:
An Introduction**

The meeting held in Tartu (Taevaskoja) in 2003 was not the first time archaeologists from the three Baltic States have met to discuss the problems concerning our common past. Communication and cooperation between the (East) Baltic – i.e. Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian – archaeologists is almost as old as professional archaeology in these countries. Between the two world wars, when the number of archaeologists was very small and the amount of work that had to be done very large, contacts and cooperation were also very close. A significant role in the development of East-Baltic archaeologies was performed by the Second Congress of the Baltic Archaeologists held in Riga in 1930, where more than a hundred researchers from twelve countries around the Baltic Sea met. The next meeting, held in Tartu in 1935, was much smaller (only nine foreign participants). After World War II, the archaeologists of the East Baltic could only meet either in the context of wider symposia also involving researchers from the neighbouring Soviet republics (the conferences held in 1949 in Leningrad and in 1951 in Tartu deserve mention here), or through personal contacts and friendship. Those contacts were sometimes quite close, indeed, bringing about the exchange of ideas and literature; nevertheless, they were occasional, and did not embrace the majority of archaeologists and the whole of our archaeologies.

Since the late 1980s, the archaeologies in three independent Baltic States have developed separately and independently from each other and, as it often seems, from the rest of the world as well. As it appears from several archaeological books published recently in Europe and covering general developments on the continent, the Baltic archaeologies are not in-

ternationally visible and recognised. This situation must change, and nobody but us, the Baltic archaeologists, can do it.

The **Baltic Archaeological Seminar (BASE)** was devised to be an international medium for Baltic archaeologists, who could come together and discuss the main current problems in the Baltic archaeologies. For the history of archaeology, it is worth mentioning that the idea of BASE was conceived at the *Püssirohukelder* Inn in Tartu on a lovely spring evening in 2002, when some Estonian and Lithuanian archaeologists were relaxing after a long work day. We recognized then that there was an urgent need for new ideas and interpretations in this rather traditional and old-fashioned branch of science in the Baltic countries. We also realised that it was extremely important to bring together in one room as many Baltic archaeologists as possible – those who think that the time is ripe to initiate CHANGES.

At that time we actually did not know what BASE really was or what it could become in the future. We thought that BASE should become our common idea that we would develop together. Therefore, SEMINAR ONE was launched just for the start, for the purpose of gathering the ideas and wishes of all of the participants. It was organised by the Chair of Archaeology of the University of Tartu and was planned as a two-day event: the first day was dedicated to seminar papers and discussions, and the second day to an excursion to archaeological sites and on-site discussions. A total of 22 participants from four countries took part in this event: twelve from Estonia, three from Latvia, six from Lithuania and one from Poland. Fourteen papers were presented at the seminar. It was decided by the participants that the

BASE would be continued in the following way: the seminars would be held every second year in different countries, while the extended articles written on the basis of seminar papers would be published in the year after the seminar. Thus the next seminar of BASE will be held in Lithuania in 2005, and this volume is the publication of eleven papers of fourteen presented in the first seminar in Tartu. It was also decided that an organisational and editorial board consisting of one senior and one younger scholar from each Baltic country would be chosen, with the tasks of both organising the seminars and preparing corresponding publications.

The leading theoretical question of the first seminar was how to interpret material culture – a problem that all archaeologists must deal with from the very beginning of their scientific research. The interpretation of the material culture of the past is indeed one of the central problems in archaeology. Since the development of archaeology as a science, the majority of research has concentrated on typology, chronology and chorology, and the dating of material objects. These subjects of research are definitely necessary, but should not be the final goal of archaeology. A. M. Tallgren already pointed out in the 1930s that in archaeology, forms and types, i.e. products, have been regarded as more real and alive than the society that created them. The brilliant systematization, regarded as exact, has not led, and does not lead, to an understanding of society. The mutual relations between material objects and society raise an extremely complex set of questions that cannot be solved within a small circle of researchers but need wider discussion.

The eleven articles presented in this collection are not strictly grouped into sub-parts; yet, they still follow a certain line of content. The first two or three papers place ethnic interpretations of material culture in the forefront. This topic has been ex-

tremely popular and important in the Baltic archaeologies since at least the 1950s. However, theoretical discussion of problems concerning the mutual relations between ethnicity and material culture has clearly been insufficient so far. Even in this collection one can recognise different attitudes to the analysis of this question, from the relatively traditional (cultural-historical) approaches to the more contemporary.

These papers are followed by those that concentrate more on the possibilities of social interpretations of archaeological evidence. What was the nature of the prehistoric societies in question? What was their social structure, how and when did hierarchization take place, and was social inequality established? How can one characterise power relations in different prehistoric periods? Questions like these were either not asked prior to the late 1980s or the answers were strongly biased by the Soviet Marxist approach.

The relations between material culture and the religious aspects of culture are a third but still minor topic. Here again, the previous understandings were strongly influenced by the Soviet Marxist ideology. Instead of the study of individual phenomena, there is now an attempt to see religion as a whole picture and as a narrative of a certain period. In addition to that, there is always the possibility of interpreting many religious aspects of culture differently from previous times, if new evidence has come to light and new approaches are introduced.

Finally, there are several papers dedicated to the analysis of cultural contacts within the Baltic region and reflections of material remains based on settlement archaeology. These have been rather traditional topics in our archaeologies, which does not mean that everything is already known, or that new approaches are impossible. The intra-regional contacts within the East-Baltic region are of special in-

terest here because they have so far been studied considerably less than the relations with more distant neighbours in Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe. One paper is dedicated to settlement archaeology and the role of stray finds in the analysis of changes in both settlement pattern and subsistence.

Such a division is highly conventional, however, as the majority of papers consider several aspects of culture. It should also be emphasised that the papers from the

first seminar that have been submitted for publication are not similar either in terms of their approach or in the understanding of the role of archaeological theory. Nevertheless, this is indeed the case in the Baltic archaeologies that we have at our disposal now. This is the situation at the beginning of the long road that BASE must follow in order to achieve a better understanding of the past.

Valter Lang