

SEARCHING FOR TRACES OF THE ORIGINS OF OUR ANCESTORS

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Not every Lithuanian archaeologist is ready to devote his or her life to Stone Age research. Investigating what existed prior to the appearance of civilisation would seem uninteresting and unimportant, unlike excavating a site like Troy, Kernavė or Voruta. It is difficult to boast to someone about finding several new Stone Age settlements or several flint artefacts that are not distinguished by their size or their ornateness, and it is all the more difficult to prove the importance and relevance of research in this era to scientific functionaries, the public, and often even to colleagues. Perhaps this is why there are so few Stone Age specialists in Lithuania and neighbouring countries, even though it should be exactly the opposite, according to the time scale the era encompasses (99.9% of the entire history of humanity). This is perhaps the reason why true Stone Age specialists are noted for their persistence, their strength of character, their firm opinions, their inclination towards the natural sciences, and so on. Algirdas Girininkas, who has already devoted almost four decades to researching this era, is one such Stone Age researcher (Fig. 1).

Girininkas' interest in archaeology and the region's ancient past was sparked by Vitas Valatka (1927–1977), a famous researcher of the Samogitian region and a museum curator. Together, they visited impressive central Samogitian archaeological sites, and participated in archaeological expeditions.

He has been able to pass on his passion for seeking out archaeological and other sites (a passion he acquired in his youth and still possesses) to many young people, some of whom have developed to become accomplished researchers themselves, or at least great enthusiasts for prehistory (Figs. 2–6).

Girininkas became interested in the Stone Age while studying at Vilnius University (Figs. 7–9), and his career as a researcher and a Stone Age specialist began at Trakai History Museum, where he worked after graduating in 1972. Unfortunately, his work at the museum was not in line with his dream. He was obliged to investigate nearby Iron Age barrows (Musteniai-Baubonys), instead of Stone Age objects. His heart was perhaps somewhat assuaged after a brief reconnoitring trip

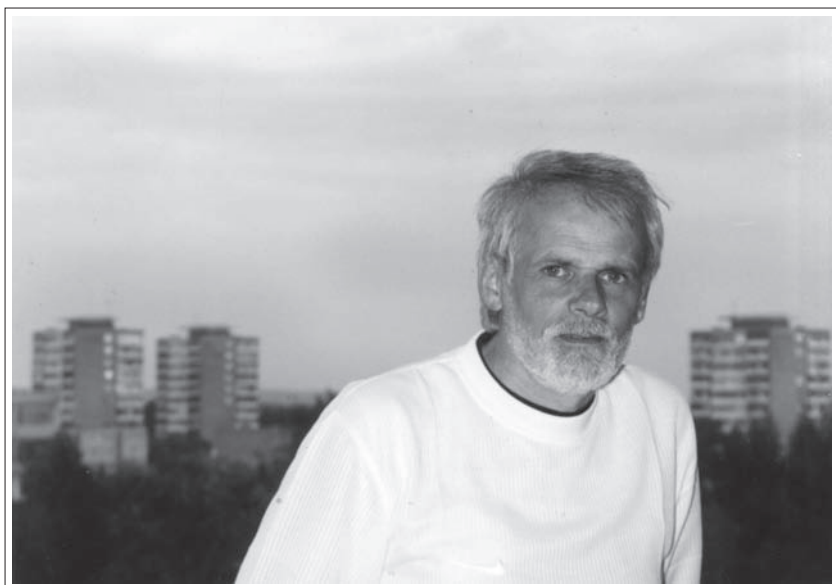


Fig. 1. Algirdas Girininkas in 2002.

around the immediate vicinity of Trakai, where he found his first archaeological objects (Strakiškės). His true vocation to study the Stone Age emerged after he had begun working at the Lithuanian Institute of History (1974–1993, 1998–2005), where it was possible to devote most of his time to research activities (Fig. 10). Together with Rimutė Rimantienė, he participated in the excavation of Šventoji (city of Palanga), Nida, Margiai 1, Barzdžio Miškas (Varėna district) and Šarnelė (Plungė district) Stone Age settlements (Fig. 11). He worked from 1980 to 1981 and 1985 to 1986 at the Leningrad (now St Petersburg) Division of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute of Archaeology, and participated in expeditions organised by the Russian Academy of Sciences (Fig. 12). In addition to his main work, this was an excellent occasion for him to learn about old scientific publications, which were then difficult to access and had become a bibliographic rarity, as well as the work of contemporary foreign scientists. Due to the Iron Curtain, these rarely reached Lithuanian libraries during the Soviet era. An opportunity also existed at that time at the Russian Academy of Sciences to delve into a new method: traceology (the determination of the function of tools on the basis of the wear marks left on them), which offered many new possibilities and advantages. Girininkas was one of the first researchers in Lithuania to use traceology in Stone Age investigations.

Between 1993 and 1998, he worked at the Lithuanian Cultural Heritage Scientific Research Centre. These were some of his most productive research years, when he published many scientific works, initiated the publication of the popular journal *Baltų Archeologija* (Archaeology of the Balts), and somewhat later worked in conducting various archaeological experiments (the reconstruction of a Stone Age building and an Iron Age barrow at Palūšė) and in creating new provincial museums or improving old ones (Fig. 13). Since 2005, he has continued his research activities at Klaipėda University Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology.



Fig. 2. A. Girininkas (left) and A. Butrimas during a fieldwalking survey at Lake Biržuliai in the Telšiai district, 1979 (photograph by V. Aleksiejūnas).



Fig. 3. On the Drūkšiai (now Drysviaty in Belarus) Castle earthworks in 1988. From left to right: A. Girininkas (third), D. Brazaitis and E. Šatavičius.



Fig. 4. During a fieldwalking survey in eastern Lithuania in 1988. From left to right: M. Iršėnas (first), D. Butrimaitė (seventh), A. Girininkas, E. Šatavičius (tenth), G. Zabiela (12th).

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Fig. 5. On the Budeliai (Kaišiadorys district) hill-fort site in 1996. From left to right: O. Lukoševičius, A. Girininkas' son Daumantas, A. Girininkas, L. Bukauskas.



Fig. 6. With his colleagues G. Piličiauskas and D. Brazaitis on a fieldwalking survey near Lake Kretuonas in 2005 (photograph by J. Žukauskaitė).



Fig. 7. His first research paper at a student conference in Kalinin (Russia) in 1970.

For his scientific research, Girininkas selected an area that had yet to be investigated: northeast-east Lithuania. Because it had no known or precisely identified and located Stone Age objects, he had to find them himself. Between 1974 and 1976, and in 1985, he discovered and excavated the Jara 1–3 ancient settlements (in the Anykščiai district), and beginning in 1977 he conducted regular investigations in the Kretuonas micro-region (Švenčionys district). He has discovered and excavated many Stone Age objects: Kretuonas 1–2, Kretuonėlė 1, Pakretuonė 1–4, Žemaitiškė 1–3, Kretuonys 1, and other settlements. Some of them are unique not only in Lithuania but also in the world. For example, a well-preserved cemetery dating from the early to the middle Neolithic era, and mysterious burials, sacrifices of the crowns of human skulls that should be assigned to the early Bronze Age (Fig. 14), were discovered at the Kretuonas 1 settlement, which was occupied for several thousand years; while a group of peat bog settlements with perhaps pole buildings and one of the earliest fortified settlements in the east Baltic region were discovered in the fields around Žemaitiškė. The Kretuonas micro-region has gradually become a sort of mecca for specialists, not only from Lithuania but also from neighbouring countries. In addition, thanks to Girininkas and several other archaeologists, it is the largest accumulation of archaeologically valuable objects from various periods currently known in Lithuania, and consists of more than 45 ancient settlements (40 of which have Stone Age cultural horizons), two hill-fort sites, 22 barrows, several old cemeteries, manors and mythological sites, and ancient defensive fortifications. Besides the aforementioned objects, there are also about 30 archaeological findspots that have yet to be precisely identified. Girininkas probably also revealed his talent for finding new archaeological objects, dozens of which he has found to date, and not only ones from the Stone Age but also from later eras: barrow cemeteries, cemeteries, hill-fort sites, Iron Age settlements, and so on. He has found famous objects such as the cemetery in Bajorai (Elektrėnai dis-

trict), which dates back to the earliest historical times and contains Yotvingian cremations, the Reškutėnai hill-fort site from the brief chronological period of Late Brushed Pottery culture, and so on. In addition to these, he has identified some very valuable archaeological sites during fieldwalking survey in the vicinity of Vilnius, on the banks of the River Pyvesa (Pasvalys district), and in the Švenčionys, Kaišiadorys and Varėna districts. Together with his colleagues Vytautas Kazakevičius and Vygasdas Juodagalvis, he surveyed the trans-Nemunas region (Užnemunė in Lithuanian), and with Adomas Butrimas, the shores of lake Biržulis in Samogitia.

Throughout his life, the main direction of his work has been the Neolithic era: the living conditions and economy of its people, the Neolithisation process, the ethnocultural situation, and reflections of the spiritual world. In 1982, he defended his doctoral dissertation *Vėlyvasis Neolitas Rytų Lietuvoje* (The Late Neolithic in Eastern Lithuania), and in 1998 his habilitation dissertation *Baltų Kultūros Ištakos* (At the Origins of the Culture of the Balts) by analysing these topics. The scientific questions and research results of these works have been presented to the wider public and to academic groups many times at various local and international conferences and seminars (Fig. 15).

Girininkas is among the archaeologists in Lithuania who have published the most. He has published dozens of serious analytical research articles, but his scientific source publications, annual articles in the publication *Archeologiniai Tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje* (Archaeological Investigations in Lithuania), information in encyclopaedic publications, conference papers and summaries, articles in the periodical press, and so on, are no less important. Taken all together, the list is impressive (See the bibliography in this publication) Much energy was required and consumed by his work on the editorial boards or as editor-in-chief of various scientific publications. Girininkas was for a long time editor-in-chief of the journal *Lietuvos Archeologija* (Lithuanian Archaeology) (volumes 17 to 29). He is also assistant editor-in-chief (since 2006) of the journal *Archaeologia Baltica*, which is published by Klaipėda University.

His abundant research activities have been crowned by seven monographs (four written together with co-authors). The studies *Kretuonas: Vidurinis ir Vėlyvasis Neolitas* (Kretuonas: The Middle and Late Neolithic.



Fig. 8. While studying at Vilnius University: a lecture by Pranas Kulikauskas (1913–2004) at Medininkai Castle in 1971. Girininkas is fifth from the left.

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Fig. 9. As a student-soldier on a camp at the Pabradė training grounds in 1971.



Fig. 10. With his colleague Vytautas Kazakevičius (1951–2005), outside the old Lithuanian Institute of History building in 1979 (photograph by R.V. Sidrys).



Fig. 11. R. Rimantienė and A. Girininkas during an expedition to the Žemaitiškė 1 settlement (Švenčionys district) in 1978 (photograph by V. Aleksiejūnas).



Fig. 12. An excavation of the Stone Age settlement near Lake Vištytis, directed by V.I. Timovejev, in 1981.

Vilnius, 1990) and *Baltų Kultūros Ištakos* (At the Origins of the Culture of the Balts. Vilnius, 1994) published material from nearly 20 years of research in the Kretuonas micro-region, allowing for many new insights and hypotheses to be raised. They are mainly devoted to issues of the Indo-Europeans and the ethnogenesis of the Balts. Girininkas has introduced a new player, Narva culture, into this research question. He was the first of the east Baltic archaeologists to note that Narva culture did not vanish in the Late Neolithic, but continued to exist in the early Bronze Age. In this way, he challenged the role of the Corded Ware culture of immigrant Indo-Europeans in forming the Balts, which had been advocated by many archaeologists. Girininkas presented a completely new theory for the formation of the Baltic ethnos: since no signs of a broader influence by Corded Ware culture on the local Narva culture have been found, since the latter still existed in the early Bronze Age, and since some of the artefacts they left have a great deal in common with those from the slightly later Brushed Pottery culture, the ‘Baltic nature’ of which leaves almost no doubt, it is possible to state that the old representatives of Narva culture were probably also Indo-Europeans, only northern members. Thus, it is necessary to search for the roots of the origins of the Balts in Neolithic-era Narva culture, and probably even earlier in the Late Mesolithic era.

In addition, both monographs describe in detail the development of Narva culture over millennia, as well as the material culture of the people of this culture, together with its ordinary bone, antler, clay, flint and amber artefacts. Meanwhile, the unique amulets portraying a human face, various bone and amber pendants, points with decorated tangs, and the burial (or sacrifice) of the crowns of human skulls that have been found around Kretuonas, allow us to draw more comprehensive conclusions about the outlook, beliefs and afterlife of the people of those times.

The publication *Lietuvos Istorija. Tomas I. Akmens Amžius ir Ankstyvasis Metalų Laikotarpis* (Lithuanian History. Vol. I. The Stone Age and Early Metal Period, Vilnius, 2005, written together with co-authors) is a recent research work acquainting the broader public with the country's early prehistory. In this work, Girininkas presents a somewhat newer, generalised image of the Neolithic era from the point of view of its historical development, and describes the lifestyle, economy, migrations and cultural processes of the ancient hunter-fisher communities.

His last and seventh monograph, *Lietuvos Archeologija. Tomas I. Akmens Amžius*, appeared on the eve of his 60th birthday. It is a synthesis combining ideas expressed by both the author and other researchers, and the discoveries made during difficult summer investigation seasons. In this book, he seeks to present the development of the communities that existed in Lithuania during the early prehistoric period (Stone Age), from the first hunter-fishers who arrived here after the withdrawal of the glaciers to the earliest metal artefacts that appeared in the early Bronze Age. The book likewise presents broadly the development of the local prehistoric cultures, as well as the specific and distinguishing characteristics of their material cultures. It does not ignore the various undiscussed immigrant cultures, such as the Finno-Ugric tribes representing Pit-Comb Ware culture, which considerably influenced the communities of north Lithuanian Narva culture during the middle to late Neolithic period. Its legacy can be heard to this day in the hydronyms-toponyms of lakes, rivers, and other objects. It takes a new look at issues of Funnel Beaker, Globular Amphora and Corded Ware cultures, which brought the first rudiments of production economies (agriculture and husbandry) to the eastern Baltic region. Neolithisation (the mastery and spread of the ideas of production economies) is one of the main fields in the work of researchers investigating the Stone Age, since the important economic, social and cultural changes that occurred in the course of this process radically altered the development of all of humanity, steering it on to the fast track to civilisation. Thus, in summary, it is possible to say that the monograph presents not only data collected bit by bit by archaeologists, but also valuable information accumulated by specialists in other fields: geologists, linguists, palaeozoologists, geneticists and anthropologists, which help us to portray and tell about early prehistoric times with significantly greater precision and detail.

As a scientist and a person, Girininkas is distinguished by many exceptional characteristics: warmth, intelligence, fairness, helpfulness, and a readiness to express a different opinion, although he has suffered more than once due to this last characteristic. With his innate abil-

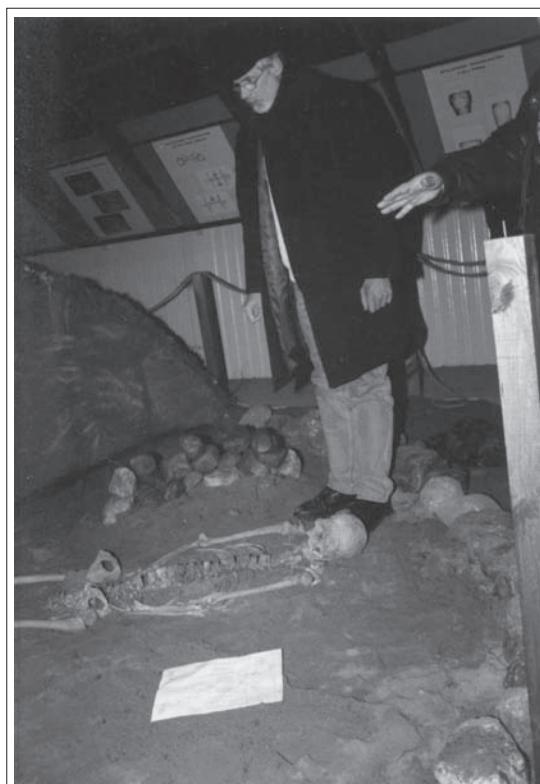


Fig. 13. Founding the Palūšė Museum in the Ignalina District in 2000.

ity to attract people (Fig. 16), Girininkas has nurtured and prepared many specialists for research work in the Stone Age and in other fields and times, people who are today successfully continuing to research prehistoric periods in the country's various regions. I have to admit that he also drew me, the author of this article, into the ranks of the *akmenologai* ('stoneologists'), and taught me to distinguish flint artefacts. Some of us are still participating in defending various dissertations, on doctoral studies committees, and in various advisory roles. This role is not bestowed on or acceptable to everyone, while others have too much of their own work to do. Just look at the value of the decade of investigations at the Kretuonas 1C settlement, where a severely destroyed site was investigated. Responding to a call for help published in the press, dozens of helpers interested in the country's ancient past came every year. In order to manage such a crowd, train them, motivate them, feed them and provide accommodation required extraordinary organisational abilities. This is probably the reason why the expedition developed its own rhythm, folklore and even mythology. For example, we could mention the mythical figure Babaužis, which was reincarnated during the summer as a tent against the rain and which quickly scattered the sodden clouds as soon as the rain started; or the terrible beast Janiotas, which continually parted the bulrushes on the lake shore with its scaly tail and projected a rich 'booh,



Fig. 14. Burials uncovered at the Kretuonas 1B settlement in 1980.



Fig. 15. The conference to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jonas Puzinas at the Vytautas the Great War Museum in Kaunas in 2005.

booh, booh’ across the lakeside fields in a voice that made the ground tremble and sounded like someone blowing over the mouth of a bottle. Rare folk songs and never-heard-before tales, which lasted several days and involved characters who mystically transport to our time, could be heard around the camp fire late in the evening. Such uniqueness made the community definitely worthy of the attention of ethnologists. Unfortunately, everything has remained in the memories of people scattered around Lithuania, in faded photographs from that time, in isolated diary pages, in letters, and so on. I remember as if it were today the lectures about Stone Age cultures and peoples, about the tools, weapons and ornaments archaeologists found, and the images of ever-changing slides on the yellowed walls of the expedition’s wagon late on quiet summer evenings.

He worked with others to popularise archaeology with no less enthusiasm and energy. A great deal of willpower and time were required for the preparation and publication of *Baltų Archeologija* (Archaeology of the Balts), a journal intended for the wider public. Every-

thing began from scratch: there was no editorial office, publishing experience, or experienced staff. The dry, heavy, mathematical work produced by archaeologists had to be turned into something understandable and interesting to everyone. This was truly difficult work. There are still only a few archaeologists who take up a pen more frequently. The daily requesting, and even begging, for articles, the coordination of topics, and the editing of the texts was all long and tiring work. In this way, 13 ever-thicker issues were published between 1994 and 2002. The most important fields, questions and news in Lithuanian archaeological research were illuminated and discussed in the journal’s pages. By reading the journal, people interested in prehistoric research could learn about the archaeology of the Baltic tribes, research on early cities, the results of the research on Vilnius’ Lower Castle and Royal Palace, the history and activities of the regional museums, the latest research data, unique archaeological artefacts, and so on. The first critical reviews of work published by colleagues saw the light of day in it, which, due to deeply rooted remnants of Soviet culture, was clear-

ly unusual for us and which many considered rather unexpected and even unacceptable. The fact that the publication of the journal was suspended and later discontinued, due to its frequently narrow scope and the indifference that overwhelmed Lithuania's archaeologists, must be deplored. It is a shame when one looks at other countries, where journals promoting archaeology are even published for schoolchildren.

The textbook *Lietuvos Priešistorė: Materialinės ir Dvasinės Kultūros Raida, Genčių Formavimasis* (Lithuanian Prehistory: The Development of the Material and Spiritual Culture and the Formation of the Tribes, Vilnius, 1997, together with O. Lukoševičius), which discusses concisely and in plain language archaeological eras, occupations, tools, living conditions, lifestyles and beliefs of prehistoric peoples, was written for schoolchildren and was quite popular. *Lietuva iki Mindaugo* (Lithuania up until Mindaugas, coauthored), a book with a similar content, was another popular publication intended for the wider public that presents both the country's early and late prehistory.

Girininkas' research interests are fairly broad and not limited to pure archaeology. He is also interested in closely related interdisciplinary scientific fields, such as zooarchaeology. Over several years, together with Linas Daugnora, he has accumulated a large palaeoosteological database from the Neolithic-Bronze Age, and published two monographs: *Osteoarcheologija Lietuvoje. Vidurinis ir Vėlyvasis Holocenas* (Osteoarchaeology in Lithuania. The Middle and Late Holocene, Vilnius, 1996) and *Rytų Pabaltijo Bendruomenių Gyvensena XI–II tūkst. pr. Kr.* (The Lifestyle of the Communities of the East Baltic Region during the 11th to the Second Centuries BC, Kaunas, 2004). Both of these studies allow us to look anew at the lifestyles of Stone Age and Bronze Age peoples, their economies and their subsistence. The monographs reveal the length and the complexity of the transition process from hunting and fishing to a production economy, i.e. to agriculture and animal husbandry, a process that lasted thousands of years.

Another interdisciplinary research field that is closely connected with the ethnogenesis of the Balts, and only based on the latest scientific achievements, is archaeogenetics. Articles that have appeared over the last few years attempt to connect archaeological material with data gathered by geneticists, and to look anew, with the assistance of the latest genetic achievements, at the genesis of the ethnos and the tribes of Lithuania's inhabitants.

Unfortunately, this is only a brief survey of the work of Algirdas Girininkas. Due to its diversity and multiple

levels, it is impossible to survey all of it: many of his accomplishments, his ideas on prehistory and the hypotheses he has raised still remain unmentioned. We leave them for his students to survey.

Algirdas Girininkas' service to research and archaeology in Lithuania has not gone unnoticed by scientists or by the public. By Decree No. 491 of 10 January 2006 of the President of the Republic, he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order 'For Merit to Lithuania'.

The work we achieve testifies about each of us: the greater work by some, the lesser by others, we boast about our good things, and forget about the bad. Algirdas Girininkas has devoted himself entirely to Lithuanian archaeology, searching every day for traces of the origins of our ancestors who belong firmly to the past. And today, in celebrating his 60th birthday, there is nothing left for us to do but to boast of the work that the teacher has accomplished ... and to await his next accomplishments.

Translated by Jeffrey Arthur Bakanauskas

Fig. 16. At the Lithuanian-Latvian border with his counterpart A. Vasks in 2005.

