



Figure 1. Front cover of *Latvijas Arheoloģijas Rokasgrāmata*. (source: <https://www.arheologubiedriba.lv/>)

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

*Latvijas Arheoloģijas Rokasgrāmata* [Handbook of Latvian Archaeology]. Andrejs Vasks and Gunita Zariņa (eds.). Riga: Zinātne, 2021 – 678 pp.

Summary publications providing background information on archaeological sites and their research are important not only for the scientific community but also for the general public. They provide a concentrated source of key information about the archaeological periods and individual sites, their types and research results. The Handbook of Latvian Archaeology, published in 2021, summarises the development of Latvian archaeological science, archaeological sites, artefact types and the latest research. The publication invites the scientific community and public interested in archaeology and archaeological science to get acquainted with Latvia's rich archaeological heritage. Publications of this size and nature related to archaeology in the eastern Baltic region are rare, therefore this short review will give an overview of the contents of this publication and its importance for the development of research in archaeology.

The Handbook of Latvian Archaeology is a large encyclopaedic publication consisting of 678 pages. It has been compiled by a team of 48 contributors, including scholars from various faculties of the University of Latvia, the National History Museum of Latvia, the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, the Latvian Academy of Culture, and the National Heritage Board in Latvia. The book itself is divided into nine chapters summarising the history, theory and discoveries of Latvian archaeological science. The articles within them are short, ranging from one to three pages, giving a concise outline of the subject under discussion. Many of the articles are enriched with illustrations, tables, drawings and diagrams. The publication has been peer-reviewed by three reviewers.

In the table of contents, the reader immediately notices that the different chapters are linked to different colours. For example, the chapter on interdisciplinary methods in

archaeological science is highlighted on each page with a blue tab, the history of Latvian archaeology with a red tab, and so on. Given the size of the publication, this makes it easier to understand the content of the book and prevents one from getting lost in the large amount of information. Each chapter concentrates on a specific topic. Chapter I gives an introduction to archaeological science, both generally and in Latvia. This chapter is further divided into sub-topics that focus on the theory of archaeology, research and dating methods, the meaning of archaeological terms (autochthons, culture etc.) and periodisation in Latvian archaeology from the first evidence of humans in the Final Palaeolithic to the beginning of the New Ages (the end of the 18th century). Chapter II introduces interdisciplinary science fields used in archaeological research. The chapter gives an overview of bioarchaeology, numismatics, and palaeobotanical and palaeogeographical fields, and explains them in much more narrow fields, like aDNA studies, zooarchaeology, iconography, stable isotope studies etc. In Chapter III, authors present the history of Latvian archaeology. This is done through five sub-chapters which chronologically cover the period from the 19th to the 21st century. Chapter IV constitutes the largest part of the book. It gives very concentrated information on archaeological sites with photographs, pictures and drawings of finds, and plans. Sites are described in alphabetical order. This chapter introduces readers to the most important types of archaeological sites known in the territory of Latvia, for example, open-air and fortified settlements, hillforts, burial grounds, sacred places, etc. Chapters V and VI continue with the presentation of different types of artefact studies. Chapter V describes the diversity of archaeological tool categories, and objects related to tableware and hygiene often found in old town cultural layers, while Chapter VI seeks to introduce specific raw materials, their importance throughout the millennia and how they were processed. Chapter VII focuses on the subject of ethnicity, i.e. the origins and development of Balts and the Baltic-Finnic tribes. This chapter covers archaeological data of all Baltic ethnic groups known in the territory of Latvia. The last two chapters (VIII and IX) cover archaeological heritage management and the handling of excavated archaeological material in Latvia. These chapters mainly give information on institutional aspects and their role in preserving and presenting archaeological heritage for the needs of society.

One of the most important parts of this book is the list of references. Even though the book is quite considerable in size and scope, it is unable to thoroughly present all of the known archaeological material from the territory of Latvia let alone give comprehensive data comparisons with adjacent regions. Therefore, in the references the reader

can find a list of the most important published works on various topics covered in the handbook. This leaves the handbook as the option for the search for basic knowledge and information on archaeological heritage, while relevant references provide sources for further, more profound, research on the subjects.

The entire handbook is in Latvian. This is a big obstacle to the dissemination of information on the subjects discussed in it to a wider audience abroad. The summary in English gives only basic information on the chapters and is quite short. The good news is that editors of this handbook are working on an English-language version of this book with updated information on some of the subjects. This new version of the handbook should be available in early 2023. This is a big step towards its wider distribution to an international audience.

Handbooks or encyclopaedias usually consist of a large number of pages and contain particular systems in order that the reader does not get lost in the contents. The Handbook of Latvian Archaeology has a clear system based on different chapter colours, while sub-chapters titles appear in the upper-right corner of each page. However, for easier access to the abundance of information in this book, an electronic version would be a nice option. Also, an e-book version would provide greater access to the book.

To sum up, the Handbook of Latvian Archaeology is an important asset to Latvian and eastern Baltic archaeology. It provides a large quantity of information on the important researched subjects of prehistoric and historic archaeology, and gives further leads for their more in-depth study. The handbook was acknowledged by the Latvian Academy of Sciences as one of the most significant achievements of Latvian science in 2021.<sup>1</sup> For both a scientific audience and the general public, this publication offers much more open access to and knowledge of Latvia's archaeological material and research achievements.

<sup>1</sup> Sprede, A. *Patriotisma paraugs – Latvijas arheoloģijas rokasgrāmata* (lu.lv). Available from: [https://www.lu.lv/parums/lu-mediji/zinas/zina/t/69940/?fbclid=IwAR1pbilUHU59DZdDqxkx2z6zqn0vwwvWIkHo9yCH\\_DV5CiDC9Ei4BjsTFDuY](https://www.lu.lv/parums/lu-mediji/zinas/zina/t/69940/?fbclid=IwAR1pbilUHU59DZdDqxkx2z6zqn0vwwvWIkHo9yCH_DV5CiDC9Ei4BjsTFDuY)