

She is from the 21st
century: in memoriam
Rimutė Rimantienė
(25.10.1920–4.07.2023)

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Figure 1. Rimutė Jablonskytė-Rimantienė, 1980 (photographer unknown).

On 4 July 2023, the renowned Lithuanian archaeologist Rimutė Jablonskytė-Rimantienė died at the age of 102 (Fig. 1). The scientist was born on 25 October 1920 in Kaunas, into the family of the famous historian Konstantinas Jablonskis and the mathematician Sofija Landsbergytė-Jablonskienė (Fig. 2). From 1930 to 1938, she studied at the ‘Aušra’ Gymnasium for Girls in Kaunas (Fig. 3). As a schoolgirl, and later as a student, she surveyed archaeological monuments around Kaunas with her father, who was a member of the State Archaeological Commission from 1919 to 1936. Later, she used the material from the surveys in her scientific works. It is evident that her interest in the past was influenced by both her personal choices and the environment in which she lived. In her memoirs she wrote: ‘Yes, I chose archaeology, for the period of our country’s history it covers is still largely unexplored’. Traditions of intellectual families of the interwar period influenced the Jablonskiai family to start up a makeshift newspaper, the title of which translates as ‘A word from the grandchildren’, which was edited by Rimutė. With a good knowledge of Swedish and Norwegian (which was quite rare in Lithuania at the time), in addition to Russian, German and French, she translated several works

from the two Scandinavian languages, including the plays *The Wild Duck* and *Ghosts* by the playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906).

From an early age, Rimutė Rimantienė was active in the Scout movement. She was a member of the unit of Dr Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927) and edited the newspaper *Stovyklos aitvaras* (The camp’s kite) (Figs. 4–5). The Applied Arts Department of the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art holds a unique collection of flags of public organisations that operated between 1918 and 1940. In 1940, the occupying Soviet government closed down all public organisations in Lithuania, including the Lithuanian Scout Association. Some of the organisations’ flags were taken to the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art. Despite the repression and at the risk of their lives and the future of their families, the Scouts working in the museum managed to hide and preserve around 500 flags and other items from youth organisations of independent Lithuania. Notably, the bulk of this collection consists of flags and pennants of the Lithuanian Scout Union (Stuinienė 2010).

The Scout’s code of loyalty to ‘God, Homeland and Allies’ and the way of life were an integral part of Rimantienė’s life during Soviet times. She and other members of Jonas

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Figure 2. Julytė Petkevičiūtė (left) and Rimutė Jablonskytė (right) hanging onto a handrail. Palanga, ca. 1931–1934 (photograph by Konstantinas Jablonskis; from the archive of LNM MP 13789/52).



Figure 4. Giedraičiai Manor, Širvintai district. During the Scouts' trip around Lithuania. From left to right: cousin Aliūtė Lansdbergytė, classmate (?) Joana Abromikaitė and Rimutė Jablonskytė with the children of the manor owners in 1938 (photographer unknown; from the archive of LNM MP 13789).



Figure 3. Rimutė Jablonskytė, a pupil at the 'Aušra' Gymnasium for Girls, sitting on a well in the school yard. Kaunas, June 1936 (photographer unknown; from the archive of LNM MP LNM MP 13789/88).



Figure 5. Scout Rimutė Jablonskytė edits the newspaper *Stovyklos aitvaras*, Pažaislis, Kaunas, 1938 (photographer unknown; from the archive of LNM MP 13789/121).



Figure 6. With fellow students and Jonas Puzinas (in the centre, with Rimutė Jablonskytė to his left) visiting the archaeological exposition of the Museum of Culture in Kaunas (photographer unknown; from the family archive of Dovilė Svetikienė).

Basanavičius's unit were in contact throughout the period, celebrating Christmas Eve together and organising picnics; in 1960, she facilitated the initiation of the museum curator Kazimiera Kairiūkštytė-Galaunienė (1924–2016) as a Scout. Rimantienė helped re-establish the Lithuanian Scout Association and, in 2022, was awarded the Order of Gratitude and the Order of the Lily of the Lithuanian Scout Association for her contribution to the movement. Undoubtedly, the Scout's way of life was an asset for the archaeologist, as all those who took part in the archaeological expeditions organised by her confirmed that her life and work were organised in keeping with the statute of the Lithuanian Scout Association.

Between 1938 and 1940, Rimantienė undertook ethnography studies in the Faculty of Humanities at Vytautas Magnus University, as back in 1938 the faculty did not offer archaeological studies. Students with an interest in prehistory and local history opted for studies related to their field. Jonas Puzinas (1905–1978) brought together a group of talented young students interested in prehistory after his return from the University of Heidelberg in Germany, some of whom went on to become accomplished archaeologists (Fig. 6). Rimantienė herself wrote with pride that she was a student of Dr Jonas Puzinas (Rimantienė 2010b). From 1938 to 1939, Rimantienė studied in the General Education Department of the Kaunas Art School (Ramonienė 2006, p. 66). From 1941 to 1942, she continued her studies at Vilnius University, graduating on

23 May 1942 'with all the rights of a graduate and the title of archaeologist'. Her diploma work on large flint implements and the question of the Campignian culture in Lithuania should also be noted here.

It is worth mentioning that Rimantienė began her career as a museologist, archaeologist and lecturer in 1940–1941, holding a non-tenure position at the Vilnius Museum of Fine Arts (now the National Museum of Art). She also participated in archaeological investigations of the Upper Castle on Gediminas Hill (supervised by Włodzimierz Hołubowicz (1908–1962) and Helena Cehak-Hołubowicz (1902–1979), as well as excavations of several burial sites (Holubovičienė et al. 1940).

Knowledge of the researcher's life during the post-war, or rather Stalinist, period comes from an autobiography written in 1953 and published as a memoir in 2010 (NMKČ archive 1953; Rimantienė 2010a). The intimidating ideology introduced and enforced by the Soviets turned the post-war period into a time of violence, exile and total ideological repression, where neither academic freedom nor the values promoted by the Scouts had any place. Consequently, part-time studies at the University of Marxism-Leninism in 1946–1948 entered the biography of Rimantienė as a perceived inevitability. In the context of post-war realities, it is not surprising that in 1946 Rimantienė had to pass all the examinations for the specialisation in archaeology at Vilnius University and defend

a new thesis, thus obtaining a diploma of Soviet higher education and the qualification of a graduate historian.

In 1942, while still a student, Rimantienė began working at the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art in Kaunas as a research associate, and later as the senior keeper of the collections and the head of the Archaeology Department. She got married on 30 July 1949 to Juozas Rimantas (until 1940 Slapšinskas, 1908–1973), a famous Lithuanian bibliographer and librarian. She worked at the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum of Art until 1960. Undoubtedly, one of the brighter episodes in the biography of Rimantienė was between 1945 and 1947, when she taught at Vytautas Magnus University (known as Kaunas State University from 1946 to 1950), in the Faculty of History and Philology. It is surprising that she taught courses on European and Baltic archaeology and museum studies, which are not easy to prepare, even today with virtually unlimited access to sources and literature. Rimantienė returned to teach a course on the Baltic Stone Age at Vilnius University in 1972 and remained in this position until 1977. There is no doubt that her teaching at the university, as well as work at the Lithuanian Institute of History, has contributed to the emergence of several generations of talented Stone Age researchers and their continued support. Her supervision of

a number of Stone Age dissertations and her advice and extensive support to colleagues have strengthened Lithuanian archaeology in many ways (Figs. 7–8). The authors of this article are no exception, as Rimantienė was a teacher in all senses of the word.

Rimantienė chose the path of researcher in 1960 by joining the Lithuanian Institute of History, Department of Archaeology. She progressed from junior research fellow to senior researcher, remaining at the Lithuanian Institute of History until 1999. In 1962, Rimantienė successfully defended her doctoral thesis on the topography and periodisation of Stone and Bronze Age campsites in Lithuania and, in 1972, she was awarded the degree of Habilitated Doctor of Science for her work on the Prehistoric settlement of Lithuanian territory. As a speaker of a number of foreign languages, Rimantienė was invited to give presentations on the Lithuanian Stone Age and the unique investigation of the Neolithic settlements of Šventoji in the marshy coastal lowland at the Universities of Stockholm and Uppsala (Sweden) and Freiburg (Germany). She also presented papers at international conferences in Denmark, Poland, the Czech Republic and Latvia. It is clear that the results of her research and the most important ideas, insights and scientific hypotheses not only



Figure 7. Excavations of the Šventoji 6 settlement in 1985. Rimutė Rimantienė and Adomas Butrimas examining the finds. Excerpt from the 1986 film *The Expedition in Šventoji* (photograph by Grižas).



Figure 8. Excavations of Egliškiiai (Kretinga district) barrow no. 3 in 1974. From left to right: Valė Kevalaitytė, Rimutė Rimantienė, Elena Grigalavičienė and Ignas Jablonskis (photograph by Donatas Butkus; from KM GEK 233/8b).

stimulated the research of the Stone Age in Lithuania but also made the archaeology of our country visible in the Baltic Sea region.

Rimantienė began her productive research career by studying the earliest period of prehistory — the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, when the last glaciers withdrew from central Europe and the Baltic region. Questions about the beginning of the resettlement of these areas, periodisation and cultural attribution are important for understanding the ancient past. Therefore, considering Rimantienė's monographs, the first of which was *Paleolit i mezolit Litvy* (Palaeolithic and Mesolithic of Lithuania), published in Russian in 1971, it becomes apparent that this seminal study established the basis for understanding the concept and chronology of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic eras in Lithuania.

In the 1970s, the Lithuanian Institute of Archaeology began publishing atlases of archaeological sites and finds, which are essentially databases containing chronological and typological descriptions of sites and finds. The first volume of the series, *Lietuvos TSR archeologijos atlasas I: Akmens ir žalvario amžius* (Archaeology of the Lithuanian SSR, vol. 1: Archaeological sites of the Stone and Bronze Ages), from 1974, edited and written by Rimutė Rimantienė (with the exception of the article about polished Stone Age artefacts written together with Ona Bagušienė (pp. 84–205), describes archaeological sites known from the historiography, as well as those newly discovered sites and artefacts.

In the second half of the 20th century, there was only one study, *Lietuvos archeologijos bruožai* (Features of Lithuanian archaeology) (1961), which gave an overview of archaeological material from Lithuania from the Palaeolithic to the 12th century. For this reason, Rimantienė's *Akmens amžius Lietuvoje* (The Stone Age in Lithuania), published in 1984, was eagerly anticipated by scholars, students and all those interested in prehistory. This monograph summarised both her own and colleagues' research on Stone Age settlements (Figs. 9–10). The extended edition of this work was published 12 years later. Over time, Rimantienė's study came to be regarded as a textbook that has not lost its importance, even with the emergence of new data and a chronology based on radiocarbon dates.

The next stage of Rimantienė's life encompasses the almost 40-year-long research of Neolithic settlements in Šventoji (Figs. 11–14). This particular phase saw the publishing of monographs *Šventoji I: Narvos kultūros gyvenvietės* (Šventoji I: Settlements of the Narva culture) (1979) and *Šventoji II: Pamarių kultūros gyvenvietės* (Šventoji II: Settlements of the Bay Coast culture) (1980). A monograph summarising the research on these coastal settlements and adding new insights, *Akmens amžiaus žvejai prie Pajūrio lagūnos: Šventosios ir Būdingės tyrinėjimai* (The Stone Age fishermen of the seaside lagoon: The investigation in Šventoji and Būdingė), was published a few decades later (2005). This also appeared in German. The works on the settlements of Šventoji are impressive, not only because of the significance of the discoveries made



Figure 9. Excavations of the Margiai (Varėna district) settlement in 1980. Rimutė Rimantiėnė in the centre with assistants from the Children and Youth Tourist Station in Kaunas (photograph by Eugenijus Svetikas; from the archive of LNM MP 13789/249).



Figure 10. Excavations at Šakių Lanka (Varėna district) settlement in 1984. Rimutė Rimantiėnė records an excavated area (excerpt from the footage recorded by Grižas).



Figure 11. Rimutė Rimantienė in 1986 during excavations of Šventoji 4 settlement (photograph by Aldas Minkevičius; from the author's archive).



Figure 12. Excavations of Šventoji 4 settlement in 1986. From left to right: Nerijus Tauras, Vladas Kondrotas, Nerijus Gudaitis, and Jonas Vaičėnonis. Rimutė Rimantienė (right) records the excavation (photograph by Aldas Minkevičius; from the author's archive).



Figure 13. Participants of the excavation of Šventoji 4 settlement in 1996, inside the trench. In the first row from left to right: 1. Rimas Venteris; 2. Saulė Gričiutė; 3. Mikas Rimantas; 4. Valdas Steponaitis; 5. Kristina; 6. Liepa Gričiutė; 7. Eugenijus Svetikas; 8. Dainius Pušvaškis; 9. Virginija Ramanauskaitė; 10. Kamilė Juodagalvytė; 11. Gytis Grižas; 12. Eglė Gričiuvienė; 13. Rimutė Rimantienė (photographer unknown; from Grižas's archive).



Figure 14. Participants of the expedition to the Šventoji 4 settlement in 1996, at the camp. Standing from left to right: 1. an unidentified man; 2. an unknown boy; 3. Arūnas Chrapko; 4. Vladas Kondrotas; 5. Aldas Minkevičius; 6. an unknown boy; 7. Nerijus Tauras; 8. Dovilė Rimantaitė. Seated from left to right: 9. Rūta Senior from Kaunas; 10. an unidentified girl from Kaunas; 11. Rūta Junior from Ukmergė; 12. Ugnė from Vilnius, 13. Vesta from Kaunas, 14. Rūta from Kaunas, 15. Odetta from Vilkaviškis, 16. Rima from Kaunas; 17. Onutė Bagušienė, who, for many years, worked in restoration at the National Museum of Lithuania; 18. Ringailė Bagušytė; 19. Ramunė Daugėlienė, a friend of Rimutės, known by everyone as Ramė; 20. Rimutė Rimantienė; 21. Valė Kevalaitytė, founder and long-time head of the Young Archaeologists at Kaunas Tourist Station (photograph by Aldas Minkevičius).

there. In these studies, the author masterfully placed the discovered artefacts in a broader context, thus providing significant analogies and interpretations that are supported by the material of recent archaeological research in Lithuania and other countries. Only a few of Rimantienė's hypotheses needed to be revised as results from the latest environmental and interdisciplinary research began to emerge.

Studies of the Neolithic period on the coast of Lithuania are further addressed in another monograph by Rimantienė, titled *Nida: senųjų baltų gyvenvietė* (Nida: The ancient Baltic settlement) (1989). The monograph reveals how the lifestyle of the amber gatherers and fishermen of the Curonian Spit was shaped by the environment and describes the nature of contact between communities living there and on the mainland. The settlements of Šventoji and Nida are recognised as some of the most significant Stone Age coastal archaeological monuments investigated in central and northern Europe. The finds discovered on these sites were vividly recorded by Rimantienė, who noted the discovery of representations of God and man, as well as an ard — evidence of the fishermen's turn to land cultivation. The importance of her research is demonstrated

by the fact that each of her monographs has been favourably reviewed by scholars in Lithuania and in other countries. The finds and part of the archives on Nida and other coastal archaeological sites studied by Rimantienė are kept in the Lithuanian National Museum where they constitute the so-called Golden Fund. The museum's exhibition on the Lithuanian Stone Age is primarily constructed with Rimantienė's unique and exceptional finds. She devoted all of her time to studying these artefacts, and was very fond and proud of them.

After her retirement, Rimantienė continued to take an active interest in archaeological research. When the opportunity arose to translate her seminal work on the Neolithic settlement in Nida into English (*Nida: A Bay Coast culture settlement on the Curonian Lagoon*, 2016), she set to work with great enthusiasm on revising her old monograph, an important work for the entire archaeological community. Rimantienė has expressed the importance of spreading the message not only across 'her parish', but as widely as possible. In 2015–2016, Dalia Butrimaitė-Ostrauskienė worked as an assistant to Rimantienė and helped to edit and prepare the monograph for its translation. The



Figure 15. With President Valdas Adamkus after receiving the Commander's Cross of the Order of Grand Duke Gediminas of Lithuania on 16 February 2008 (photograph by Džoja Gunda Barysaitė; from the family archive of Dovilė Svetikienė).

following is the reminiscence by Dalia on her experience of working on the last study by the distinguished scientist:

It was fascinating to see Rimutė's dedication and sensitivity to every word, every sentence, every detail. You could sense that revisiting this study was incredibly important to her. She felt the need to revise and update the study of the settlement of Nida, which she did with great dedication, enjoying every moment of the task. Rimutė would always welcome her assistant with coffee and sweets, which she was very fond of herself. It was a way of setting the mood and preparing for work. In addition, our workplace was always comfortable and in tip-top condition.

Together they spent many hours polishing the text of the monograph, at the same time experiencing many unforgettable moments of wisdom, insight and the pursuit of a meaningful existence.

Returning to the main subject of Rimantienė's research, it is important to note that the settlement of Nida is one of the most famous and largest Neolithic archaeological sites in Lithuania and on the entire southeastern Baltic coast. Excavations in Nida that were carried out by Rimantienė between 1973 and 1978 continue to be regarded as highly

significant. An area covering more than 4600 m² was excavated to uncover a wide variety of finds, including some 100,000 pieces of pottery. The impressive collection of finds from this site was reviewed in the 1989 monograph, providing an insight into the material and spiritual culture of the Late Neolithic people. The remains of plants, flint and stone tools, a collection of amber ornaments, and the earliest known images of humans on ritual pottery in Lithuania are described in the book to shed light on the social and domestic economy, and spiritual and artistic views that were maintained by the people of that time. The greatest value of this monograph is the statistical processing of standard shapes and ornamentation of the Bay Coast Culture pottery. The latter study may serve as a basis for future studies into other archaeological monuments of this culture.

Rimantienė did a wonderful job of disseminating the results of her most interesting archaeological investigations in the coastal region by publishing a number of brief studies. In *Lietuva iki Kristaus* (Lithuania before Christ) (1995), the author aimed to reveal the lifestyle of the people through the pot sherds, flint and amber artefacts that they had created. Another similar study is titled *Kuršių nerija archeologo žvilgsniu* (The Curonian Spit from the

archaeologist's point of view) (1999) and is aimed at providing an overview of archaeological sites set within the landscape of the drifting dunes of the Curonian Spit.

Rimantienė also found the energy to review her life, starting from the school she attended, her family, the gloomy times of the Soviet occupation and the revival, her joys and disappointments, her path as a researcher, as well as her relationships with colleagues, in a memoir called *Aš iš dvidešimtojo amžiaus: Pluoštas archeologės prisiminimų* (I am from the twentieth century: A collection of memories of an archaeologist') (2010a). The last chapter of this book does indeed sound as if an accomplished scientist wandered into the 21st century and has suddenly found herself in a party of strangers and people she no longer understands, with nothing left to strive for. The authors of this text about Rimantienė have taken the title of her memoir and paraphrased it. We believe that Rimantienė's archaeological research and key conceptual insights will enable a whole range of students to further develop Stone Age research using modern interdisciplinary and traditional archaeological methods. Therefore, this particular point in the 21st century is, in fact, the time of Rimantienė. This is evidenced not only by the Stone Age research school she has assembled but also by the awards she has received. In 1993, Rimantienė was awarded the State Prize for her contribution to Lithuanian science, and in 1997, the Baltic Assembly Prize, and the Commander's Cross of the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas in 2008 (Fig. 15). In 2003, she became a Corresponding Member of the Institute of German Archaeology for her contribution to the study of Stone Age monuments and their dissemination, which is a particularly prestigious international award. So far, only three Lithuanian scientists have received this award. In 2021, Rimantienė was awarded the Martin Ludwig Rhesa Culture and Art Prize for her active and creative scientific research and cultural efforts that hold significance for the Curonian Spit and the preservation of Lithuania Minor's cultural heritage.

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Abbreviations

KM – Kretinga Museum, Kretinga.

LNM MP– Lithuanian National Museum, Auxiliary Fund of Primary Accounting (MP), Vilnius

NMKČ archive – M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum, Archive. Kaunas

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