

Preface

In recent years, particular attention has been directed towards the eastern Baltic Sea region, where interdisciplinary archaeological research has gained new momentum. Here, the latest modern archaeological methods are employed both in fieldwork and in the analysis of archaeological material. Building on this progress, *Archaeologia Baltica* maintains a strategic focus on publishing studies that advance our understanding of the region's prehistory and protohistory. Research that once resembled isolated fragments of a much larger puzzle is now beginning to form a more coherent picture, grounded in contemporary scientific findings. This is reflected in the metrics of Volume 31, published a year ago. Each article in that volume has been viewed well over two thousand times, and the number of downloads exceeds more one thousand (<https://e-journals.ku.lt/journal/AB/current>). In other words, with its articles increasingly cited abroad, the journal has become better known and more widely read.

Volume 32 of *Archaeologia Baltica* explores how communities established their identities within Holocene landscapes. They made full use of local natural resources and environmental features to enhance various aspects of their daily lives, activities that in turn contributed to the continual reshaping of the landscape. The chronological span addressed in this volume extends from the Late Mesolithic to the end of the Viking Age.

The volume opens with a paper by Lukas Gaižauskas, 'Interpreting the structure of Gailiūnai 2 and Varėnė 2: Two different cases of Late Mesolithic campsite organisation in southeast Lithuania'. It should first be noted that relatively few archaeological sites of any period are known in southeastern Lithuania. Gaižauskas's study, which seeks to reconstruct the internal organisation of the Late Mesolithic campsites at Gailiūnai 2 and Varėnė 2, therefore makes an important contribution to our understanding of the initial development of such structures as campsites and land-use practices in southeastern Lithuania. The patterns of internal spatial organisation at both sites are characterised through the analysis of the spatial distribution of flint artefacts and through flint refitting. To establish the chronology of the Mesolithic campsites and the associat-

ed sunken features, AMS ^{14}C dating was applied to calcined bone and burnt wood. The refitting method, which has rarely been used in archaeological investigations and analysis of finds, revealed that both campsites witnessed limited flint-working activities and that the communities themselves were highly mobile. A comparative study of the two sites has revealed the diversity of Late Mesolithic campsite types, which suggests that sandy campsites have the potential to serve as comprehensive sources for understanding the lifestyle of Mesolithic communities.

In their article 'Earth pigments and magnificent Stone Age burials on the shores of Lake Burtnieks', Vanda Haferberga, Artis Kons and Ilga Zagorska discuss the possible use of earth pigments (iron oxides) or ochre derived from sources in the surrounding environment. The area around the lake is characterised by an exceptionally high concentration of archaeological sites, most notably the Riņņukalns settlement and the Zvejnieki archaeological complex, the latter renowned across Europe. Traces of ochre use have been found across the region's burial sites. Drawing on ethnographic and folkloric parallels, the authors argue that ochre was used here from the Middle Mesolithic to the Neolithic. Red ochre symbolised fire and blood, serving as an essential element in the transition of the deceased into the afterlife. However, the source of the ochre itself had never been investigated. Geological surveys of the Lake Burtnieks shoreline, conducted by the authors, indicate the presence of coloured earth pigment deposits in the area. During the survey, samples of earth pigments and ochre collected from archaeological sites were analysed using X-ray fluorescence and X-ray diffraction to determine their chemical composition. Although iron-oxide pigments were identified in the vicinity of archaeological sites, the results indicate that their colour characteristics cannot be directly associated with those used by the communities of the time. It is likely that these deposits simply were not encountered during the authors' investigations. Nevertheless, it remains possible that Stone Age communities obtained their ochre from other locations, potentially from easily accessible sources along the River Salaca, particularly near its confluence with the Staicele tributary.

Numerous archaeological sites and individual findspots dating from different periods have been identified along the banks of the River Venta in Latvia and Lithuania, highlighting the importance of this river. In her article ‘A newly discovered hoard of Bronze Age artefacts from western Latvia’, Inna Rozentāle draws attention to Bronze Age hoards, at least three of which are currently known. The author presents one of these, recently discovered on the right bank of the River Venta near its confluence with the River Abava, at Liedikas in the Kuldīga municipality. Dated to the 8th–7th centuries BC or possibly even the 6th century BC, this small hoard comprises only four or five complete and well-preserved bronze objects, along with four fragmentary artefacts. These objects can be classified as weapons, jewellery and elements of horse tack. However, their condition indicates that they were deposited as scrap metal. The Liedikai hoard testifies to the importance of the River Venta as a waterway in the Late Bronze Age. Its composition shows direct parallels with the Scandinavian and Central European archaeological record and reflects the extensive communication networks that existed at the end of the Bronze Age. Moreover, this bronze scrap hoard, weighing only about 889 grams, illustrates one of the ways in which the communities living along the banks of the Venta acquired non-ferrous raw materials.

Kotryna Alma Bojarskaitė, Ieva Masiulienė and Dalia Kisielienė, in their article ‘Archaeobotanical evidence from the Bandužiai (Žardė) Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age settlement in western Lithuania’, present the results of archaeobotanical analysis from this extensive archaeological complex. The Žardė–Laistai–Bandužiai complex, located in southern Klaipėda, comprises several sites with evidence of economic activity, including iron collection, processing and smelting. It is likely that some of the metal artefacts found at the neighbouring Laistai and Bandužiai burial sites were made using locally obtained iron.

Building on this broader understanding of the site, the article presents the first comprehensive study of the archaeobotanical material from the Bandužiai (Žardė) settlement, which is among the most extensive in western Lithuania and provides valuable insights into its economy and environment. The extensive collection of burnt and unburnt plant remains, recovered from various archaeological features, some of which were dated using AMS radiocarbon analysis, demonstrates that these features span a period from the Late Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. Notably, no material from the Roman period was identified. Examination of the charred and waterlogged grain remains shows that barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) comprised the largest proportion of cultivated cereals, followed by rye (*Secale cereale*), whereas wheat (*Triticum* sp.) was much less common. The remaining cultivated species play a considerably smaller role in the archaeobotanical assemblage. These include common millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), oats

(*Avena* sp.), broad beans (*Vicia faba*) and peas (*Pisum sativum*). These findings enhance our understanding of local agricultural development, settlement organisation and human–environment interactions, while also contributing to broader studies of prehistoric communities in the eastern Baltic region.

The final contribution to the research article section of Volume 32 is Gintautas Zabiela’s article, ‘Publications of hillfort research during the Soviet Period: A case study of the Narkūnai hillfort on the 50th anniversary of its investigation’. The article emphasises the importance of prompt publication, illustrated by the 1986 report on extensive investigations carried out at the Narkūnai hillfort in eastern Lithuania (Utena district) between 1976 and 1978. The published material and analysis of finds cover the full span of the hillfort’s use, from its initial occupation to its final phase. Although these excavations and their publication by Regina Volkaitė–Kulikauskienė and Pranas Kulikauskas took place nearly half a century ago, the data and insights continue to serve as a reference point for researchers today. Furthermore, Zabiela emphasises not only the value of prompt publication but also the decline in new excavations at hillforts, which means that the study of past phenomena increasingly depends on earlier work, such as the Narkūnai hillfort publications.

The volume concludes with an article by Algirdas Girininkas, written in honour of his and ours colleague Vladas Žulkus, entitled ‘Enchanted by the Baltic: On the 80th birthday of professor, habilitated doctor, and academician Vladas Žulkus’. Composed with great respect and in the spirit of one Samogitian addressing another, the article highlights Professor Žulkus’s contributions to Lithuanian archaeology. The text further acknowledges his investigations into the Klaipėda Castle site, the old town and the surrounding region. The underwater investigations initiated by Žulkus in Lake Plateliai and the Baltic Sea brought prominence to Klaipėda University and the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology. Girininkas’s text complements the exhibition ‘Archeologija Vakarų Lietuvoje: penki tyrimų dešimtmečiai pro Vlodo Žulkaus akitinius’ (Archaeology in western Lithuania: Five decades of research through the eyes of Vladas Žulkus), organised by the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology and opened at Klaipėda Castle in April 2025.

We hope that Volume 32 of *Archaeologia Baltica* provides readers with valuable data and perspectives to inform, support or challenge their research. The editorial team wishes you a rewarding reading experience.

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