Time never ceases to remind us of its relentless march, which cannot be stopped and which leaves both pleasant and bitter memories. Sometimes it seems that the bitter ones prevail ... but it can also be the opposite. Pleasant memories leave a deeper imprint on man and society ... or at least that is what we often wish to believe. The subject of the conference ‘People at the Crossroads of Space and Time (Footmarks of Societies in Ancient Europe)’ led participants to take a look at society, in search of layers and interlayers, and of signs of encounters and crossroads. This extremely wide subject allowed us to see individual people, especially those whom the march of time has carried to the afterworld, but who in one way or another were connected with this conference. I am referring to Professor Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn (1931–2012) and Dr Agnieszka Urbaniak (1975–2013).

It is well known that interest in a conference is determined by subjects of great relevance, and that this consequently determines the conference’s success. It is also a well-known fact that interesting thoughts and useful ideas in research come up in private conversations too. This is what happened when the subject for the regular conference to be held by archaeologists of the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology at Klaipėda University was being discussed. The idea to devote the 2011 conference to an analysis of society came unexpectedly and quite naturally during a private conversation with Professor Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn and Dr Anna Bitner-Wróblewska. The warm atmosphere in a Warsaw café, which was so popular among archaeologists, not only encouraged some serious discussions, but, as often happens, it turned the conversation towards distant and not so distant times. Anna Bitner-Wróblewska and I were listening to Professor Okulicz-Kozaryn talking about his father and prewar Vilnius. I cannot recall everything Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn said about his links with Lithuania, the small estate somewhere close to Kernavė, his family, and the Lithuanian words he pronounced so correctly. However, his ‘Lithuanian miniatures’, infused with pure feeling and a gentle sense of humour by his manner of speaking, can be compared with the writings of Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2004), that ‘citizen of the world whose nationality is a Vilnius dweller’. They are like the piano pieces played by Jerzy Okulicz-Kozaryn in his childhood, and which might actually have resounded through the halls of Trakai Castle, or else they might be merely interwoven memories ... (from Dr Tomasz Nowakiewicz’s letter to the author, with kind permission to quote in the preface).

As for the subject of the conference, we then agreed that the communities of different periods of the east Baltic Sea region had barely been studied. Thanks to the growing amount of new data obtained during every season of archaeological excavations, these communities look like a rapidly changing kaleidoscope, combinations of which are in many ways still shrouded in mystery. Although in our search for a subject and a definition of the area we used the east Baltic Sea region as a starting point, cultural crossroads and interregional contacts always lead researchers into a wider European space. Therefore, I hope that the articles from

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the conference ‘People at the Crossroads of Space and Time (Footmarks of Societies in Ancient Europe)’ published in volume 18 of Archaeologia Baltica.

Volume 18 of Archaeologia Baltica presents the second part of the conference papers, in which the authors discuss communities from the period extending from the Bronze Age to the towns of the Middle Ages. Most of the authors look at the development of society through the material of funerary sites. The articles are grouped into four chapters according to their subjects. The articles in the first chapter ‘Early Metal Age Societies: From our Theoretical Assessment to their Economy, Interregional Contacts and Rituals’ cover the Bronze Age to the Early Stone Age.

In her article ‘In Search of a Theoretical Assessment of Bronze Age Society in the Baltic Countries’, Agnė Čivilytė writes about the frequent instances of the uncritical application of theoretical models to east Baltic archaeology without reference to the region’s specific culture. Thus, the Bronze Age social structure is reconstructed according to a priori formulated precepts. The article discusses possible negative implications of such a transference of foreign theories, which leads to the prejudgement of expected results in regional archaeological studies.

In his article ‘The Structure of the Economy and Society in the Early Bronze Age in Lithuania’, Algirdas Girininkas claims that it is possible to identify two distinct territorial community groups on the basis of archaeological, palynological and zooarchaeological material, and economic and social structures. The first one inhabited the micro-region of Šventoji in the Baltic coastal area, whereas the second community inhabited an inland area around Lake Kretuonas.

In the article ‘Ritual Production, Distribution and Deposition of Late Bronze Age Hanging Vessels’, Immo Heske analyses Nordic Bronze Age hanging vessels and their cultural function in the Baltic Sea region on the basis of their distribution and production. In the author’s opinion, deposits with hanging vessels indicate that in some regions the composition of the deposits and the rites were identical. Consequently, we might suppose that there used to be extensive contacts, which are reflected in the common rites.

In their article entitled ‘Interregional and Multidirectional Contacts of Local Elites: Scabbards with Crossbars Decorated with Three or More S-figures in Northern Poland’, Tomasz Bochnak and Przemysław Harasim discuss connections between Oksywie culture sepulchral materials, that is, imported items such as metal scabbards with crossbars decorated with three or more S-figures. These sheaths were found together with items imported from La Tène culture and Roman territories. The authors present a comprehensive analysis of the provenance and distribution of the imported items, and attempt to define the origin of the scabbards and the character of the interaction between Oksywie culture societies and Celtic cultures.

The second chapter of the conference material in this volume is entitled ‘Parade Shields at the Crossroads of Germanic Cultures’, and discusses complex Germanic funeral customs and their reflection in various rites. In the first article in this chapter, ‘Just Recycled? A New Light on Roman Imports in Central Germany According to the ‘Central Little Farmstead’ of Frienstedt, Thuringia’, Christoph G. Schmidt discusses a very interesting monument (in terms of stratigraphy) situated not far from Frienstedt, Kr. Erfurt, in central Germany, which consists of a settlement, graves and presumably a cult site from the Roman Iron Age. Its settlement started at the end of the first century AD, and ended around 400 AD. About 1,500 pieces of bronze show a distinct connection with the Roman Empire in the third century, possibly in part due to Germanic soldiers recruited by the Roman army.

In her article ‘A Parade Shield from the Przeworsk Culture Cemetery in Czersk, Near Warsaw, Poland: An International Sign of Status in the Early Roman Period’, Katarzyna Czarnecka makes an in-depth analysis of a unique artefact found in the territory of barbarian tribes, a fashionable shield boss with rivets and a shield grip with silver decoration that was found recently in the Przeworsk culture cemetery in Czersk, in the Piaseczno district in central Poland. The bronze shield grip has silvered rivet plates with thimble-headed rivets, decorative filigree studs and openwork decoration. The techniques that were used to produce the shield grip are not clear, despite metallographic analysis. The shield has analogies in Scandinavia and the northern Elbe area. It was probably a parade shield, an international sign of a warrior elite in the Early Roman Period in the barbaricum.

The article by Joan Pinar Gil, ‘A Crossroads of Cultures in a Mosaic of Regions? The Early Visigothic Regnum from the Perspective of Small Finds’, is a survey of two insufficiently researched aspects of late fifth-century clothing in southern Gaul and Hispania, that is, multiculturalism and regionalism. Focusing on both aspects improves the understanding of a number of phenomena recorded in funerary contexts.
The third chapter in this volume is entitled ‘Balt Societies: An Attempt to Penetrate the Mist’, and focuses on an analysis of the social structure and funeral customs of communities of the circle of Baltic cultures. The articles in this chapter prove that the social structure of the circle of Baltic cultures was multifaceted, and had a number of unique aspects that are still unknown.

The article by Maciej Karczewski ‘On the Road to the Other World. Plants in the Burial Rites of Bogaczewo Culture (Roman Period, Northeast Poland)’ analyses macroscopic plant remains and charcoal uncovered in the fills of grave pits found in Paprotki Kolonia cemetery 1 (Bogaczewo culture) in the Masurian Great Lakes District. The analysis has shown that plants were put into the cremation pyre and the graves on purpose, and that they performed certain functions in funeral rites. The use of plants in funeral rites was connected with universal and complex symbolic meanings of plants. Some plants, especially corn, might have been put into graves as food. Research into plant remains allows us to draw conclusions concerning the former environment of this burial site.

In her article ‘Sambian-Natangian Culture Ring Decoration Style as an Example of Communication between Local Elites in the Baltic Region in the Late Roman Period’, Olga A. Khomiakova analyses artefacts ornamented in Ring decoration style that prevail in Sambian-Natangian culture from the early phase of the Late Roman Period.

In the article by Konstantin Skvortsov ‘The Formation of a Sambian-Natangian Culture Patrimonial Elite in the Roman Period in the Context of the Amber Trade’, the author discusses and characterises, in his opinion, the multilayered social structure of Aestian society which formed at the turn of the B1/C1–C2 periods. In his opinion, the development of the social structure of Aestian society and the processes of its stratification were related to the involvement of the people of Sambian-Natangian culture in amber trading. Since the Aestii possessed the largest resources of amber, they participated extensively in the trade.

In their article entitled ‘Did they Exist? The Question of Elites in Western Lithuania in the Roman and Early Migration Periods, and their Interregional Contacts’, Rasa Banyté-Rowell, Anna Bitner-Wroblewska and Christine Reich focus their attention on the search for a Baltic elite. The authors claim that no interregional status symbols have been recorded in this area, but it is possible to distinguish local prestige groups of certain artefacts in the graves of males and females from the Roman Period.

Only two authors’ work makes up the fourth chapter ‘Medieval Societies’. However, the chapter is very interesting, because it is actually the first time that burial practices, questions of the elite, imported items and the whole diversity of horse burial practices by Prussian communities from the Late Viking Period to the 13th century have been discussed in detail (Roman A. Shirokhov).

In his article ‘Civitas Rutenica in Early Vilnius in the 14th and 15th Centuries. The Socio-Cultural Aspect’, Rytis Jonačius discusses the Vilnius quarter called Civitas Rutenica that existed in the late 13th and 14th centuries, and was inhabited by the city’s Orthodox community, and the cemetery discovered in the central part of Civitas Rutenica. The funeral customs that were practised at the burial site show the cultural and social changes in the Orthodox community. Christian burial rites were practised in the cemetery. Several graves contained luxury grave goods, mainly jewellery, some of which was common to the Slavs, while the rest has local origins.

As usual, we conclude the publication with a book review. Volume 18 of Archaeologia Baltica presents a review by Gintautas Zabiela of a recent book on the subject of archival archaeology, the second volume in the ‘Aestiorum Hereditas’ (The Heritage of the Aestii) series.

Audronė Bluijenė

Editors’ Note:

In Volume No 17 of Archaeologia Baltica, the unedited versions of captions to the photographs illustrating the Preface were published. The editorial staff at Archaeologia Baltica would like to apologise sincerely to readers for this oversight.