

# IN SEARCH OF A THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT OF BRONZE AGE SOCIETY IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES

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## Abstract

This article surveys tendencies in Bronze Age social research in the Baltic countries. It marks a new departure in archaeological scholarship in the region, and examines the influence of wider European theories on local Bronze Age research. The most important issue to be discussed is the uncritical application of theoretical models on 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 the possible negative implications of such a transference of foreign theories, which leads to the prejudgement of results in regional archaeological studies. Special criticism is levelled at the application of the pyramid social model, which offers a false interpretation of Prehistoric social structures on the basis of recent research. We offer new alternatives in the sphere of societal studies, which pay most attention to processes whereby people dominate as individual agents, rather than to the classification of archaeological material according to the nature or implied value of such material.

Key words: Bronze Age social investigations, theories, models, structures of society, social layers, hierarchical pyramid, perspectivity of social archaeology, Baltic countries.

## Introduction

Contemporary archaeological writing inevitably tends to be regarded as a creative undertaking. Let us imagine trying to complete a complex jigsaw of the human past from separate scraps of data (archaeological facts), while acknowledging the suspicion that we will never be able to find the last piece of the jigsaw. The search for the missing piece to complete the picture is a reflection of the relativity of archaeology. Although the answer will never sound as *quod erat demonstrandum*, understanding the lost past will always remain the aim of the science of archaeology. This creative process cannot be imagined without subjective interpretation and the construction of the scholar's own model, which in turn is influenced by particular archaeological, sociological, psychological or other academic theoretical bases. However, the boundary between the result of the scientific research and the influence of the theories is very fragile, because the automatic application of theoretical models to research *a priori* forms the scholar's conclusions. This is the problem we shall discuss in this article, choosing Bronze Age studies as an example. Most attention will be paid to an examination of social processes during the Bronze Age, as described in archaeological writing from the Baltic countries, because this subject has been studied the least so far. We will not attempt to reconstruct social structures, or to give them names; rather, we will note the application of certain theoretical concepts and trends in applying new research models to archaeological material from the

east Baltic region. It should be stressed that we shall examine only certain selected cases, because a review of social theory would require a separate study beyond the scope of this article.<sup>1</sup> We shall consider whether in discussions of this topic the mounting flow of theories is not distorting the objectivity of archaeologists, and putting them in danger of becoming lost in theoretical translation.

## Tendencies in studies of Bronze Age society in the Baltic countries

What Bronze Age society in the Baltic countries was like has not been studied by archaeologists satisfactorily. Whereas in Estonia and Latvia the first steps have already been taken to answer this question, in Lithuanian archaeology the study of this topic is still in the early stages. Algimantas Merkevičius was the first to suggest in his recent work that we try to reconstruct the basic features not only of Lithuanian Bronze Age society, but also of east Baltic society in general (Merkevičius 2005; 2007). It should be noted that in the works of Merkevičius and others, there is a strong tendency to come to a definition of Bronze Age society on the basis of various methodologies, English-language theoretical studies as a rule, and to ascribe that

<sup>1</sup> I will discuss this issue separately, in a chapter of a monograph which will be based on the research project 'Technology and Social Development in Prehistory: A study of Bronze Age Metal Objects' VP1-3-ŠMM-07-V-01-101 (2011–2014).

society to one or another category.<sup>2</sup> In most definitions, there is a preference for the term ‘chiefdom’.<sup>3</sup> All this clearly reflects the direct application to this region of theoretical terms.

A model of social structures is constructed on the basis of material from settlements and burials, as well as the analysis of single finds, such as the contextual analysis of finds. This represents an important and necessary step in developing our knowledge about Prehistoric society, because these things are the direct remains of activity by humans, as social beings, in the archaeological record (Lang 2007a, p.221). In almost all the work done in the Baltic countries, a comparative method is chosen, whereby the cultural situations of two regions, namely Scandinavia and the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, are compared. This is inevitable if we wish to understand and characterise the specific cultural identity of the east Baltic region. In fact, in the archaeological literature of the Baltic countries, we encounter repeated references to Bronze Age cultural links between the lands around the Baltic Sea, and a whole set of examples is provided to prove these contacts, such as the flanged axes of east Baltic type dated to the turn of the Early and Middle Bronze Age, which have been found in the Smørumovre hoard in Denmark (Aner, Kersten 1973, p.120ff., Taf. 63; Čivilytė 2007, p.101, Fig.5.4-5), Old and Middle Bronze Age Scandinavian imports found in Estonia (Lang 2007a, 38, Figs. 10; 11), or Late Bronze Age phenomena such as the hill-fort at Narkūnai (Lithuania), where Mälär type axes were produced. Such axes were used mainly in Scandinavia, and prevail in parts of Eastern Europe (Luchtanas 1982, p.8ff; Pydyn 2000, p.228ff, Yushkova 2011, p.278ff, Fig. 5). In this context, we might also cite the Staldzene hoard (Latvia), which contains artefacts imported from Gotland (Vasks, Vijups 2004). These and

many other examples allow us to speak not only of relations between the peoples of the region, but also about the region’s role in the Bronze Age world. On the basis of Sherratt’s centre-periphery theory (1993),<sup>4</sup> in the archaeology of the Baltic lands the eastern Baltic is referred to as the margin or even the periphery of the periphery of a centre or core, formed by Central Europe or Scandinavia in particular (Lang 2007a, p.44ff, p.260ff; Čivilytė 2005, p.329). The question still remains for future discussion as to what extent the centre-periphery-margin model can be applied to regions in which some processes, such as the spread of metallurgy, happen belatedly and more slowly. Maybe it is possible to relate this to specific cultural features connected not so much with natural, geographical and economic phenomena as with the internal interests and rules of separate groups.<sup>5</sup> However, let us return to the question raised in this article: is the theoretical transfer of Scandinavian models possible in order to get a better knowledge of the lifestyles of local societies?

#### From private ownership to settlement hierarchy in the Bronze Age: the social model of Valter Lang

In his study on the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in Estonia, Valter Lang pays a good deal of attention to the structure of society and relations between communities (Lang 2007a). He bases his argument on the example of southern Scandinavia, where a chiefdom-like

<sup>2</sup> Here we can refer to the influence of Anglo Saxon theories (e.g. C. Renfrew, A. Sherratt, S.J. Shennan) on Scandinavian authors (e.g. K. Kristiansen, H. Vandkilde), whose ideas are adopted by archaeologists in the Baltic countries (see below).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that, despite certain cases which advise against the excessive use of the description, this definition of society has taken root in English-language studies (Kienlin 2007, p.14, footnote 10). In recent decades, the issue has been discussed in the work of German archaeologists too, where some view the term chiefdom with caution, considering that a social structure took various forms, which transformed from one to another (*ibid*). For terms used by European archaeologists to discuss social structures and adaptations of them applied in Baltic archaeology, see Merkevičius 2005, p.40ff. For more on this, especially with reference to Estonia, see Luik 2007, pp.54-56 and cited literature.

<sup>4</sup> In archaeology, the beginnings of the centre-periphery theory lie in I. Wallenstein’s concept regarding the capitalist economic system. The most important aspect of his idea is the relationship between a mutually dependent centre and the periphery, whereby the periphery lacks raw materials and produces ordinary domestic objects, while the centre occupies a leading position. This idea was adopted later by the archaeologists J. Friedman and M.J. Rowlands, and, as we can see, it has later adepts (for more detail, see Bockisch-Bräuer 2010, p.60ff).

<sup>5</sup> To some extent, Sherratt himself pays attention to the fact that ‘the existence of copper working in areas where simple ores were easily available was not, therefore, simply a process of technical discovery. Copper was only consistently selected by later Neolithic societies as indigenous value systems altered with ecological and social change, and as daggers and axes became symbolically more important’ (Sherratt 1993, p.13). Sherratt uses this idea only in the case of copper metallurgy, but not in the case of bronze, when intercultural relations became much closer, and the level of the economic system and accessibility to stock in various regions was not the same. That is why centre-periphery relations were formed. According to Sherratt, the Bronze Age in Europe is a result of the process of the urbanisation of the Near East, and in neither the Neolithic nor the Bronze Age did Europe attain the level of the periphery of the Near East, but only served the role of *margin* (Sherratt 1993, pp.4ff, 13ff, 43).

society developed, with chiefs having contacts with Central Europe and the Mediterranean. These leaders attempted to imitate the lifestyles of the chiefs in those regions (Lang 2007a, p.46). Although we cannot find any scholarly references here, it is easy to recognise K. Kristiansen's model, which was outlined in considerable detail in 1984 (Kristiansen 1984, p.78ff), and has been repeated in his later studies.

On the basis of this model, which describes the social situation during the final stages of the Neolithic and the Early Bronze Age, when stable societies formed and their elites built monuments to themselves in megalith graves, which also served as territorial markers, Lang identifies the situation with the West Baltic Barrow culture area, noting that 'the find material and barrows indicate that a rather complex chieftom society, the leaders of which had contacts with southern Scandinavia and Central Europe, had evolved on the southeast shore of the Baltic Sea' (*ibid*). Lang gives more details when he describes a similar picture of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in Estonia. Furthermore, new elements appear, such as the private ownership of arable land and local metallurgy (Lang 2007a, p.229). We should note that it is quite risky to speak about land ownership solely on the basis of archaeological data, considering that even Medieval historians have great reservations when speaking about the private ownership of land during the so-called early period of formation of the state.<sup>6</sup> Land ownership is understood as the regular agricultural use of a plot of land (fields, meadows or pastures), combined with non-agricultural areas (forests and bodies of water). In Lang's opinion, fields were the most important criterion of ownership. The spatial setting of graves as land markers, as signs of continuity and tradition up to historic times, made Lang come to these conclusions concerning ownership rights over agrarian resources as a determinant in the emergence of a social elite. Although considerable evidence of arable land use has been found in north

<sup>6</sup> From a historical-geographical point of view, the formation of clear territorial boundaries (and also land ownership) is a relatively late phenomenon. We can speak cautiously of the earliest traces of the first separate plots of land on the basis of archaeological data only from the turn of the first and second millennia AD. These are the smallest territorial units, comprising one or more settlements. There are two clear models of land formation; the oldest tribal model and the later aristocratic one can be glimpsed in the treaty concluded by Lithuanian dukes with the Duchess of Volhynia in 1219. Negotiations between the Bishop of Riga and the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order in 1253 reveal the clear existence of separate territorial units, each of which had a network of settlements with their dependent lands, forests, water sources and populations (Dubonis 2011, p.37).

European archaeology,<sup>7</sup> we can say very little about field structure during the Early Metal Age, because usually such field structures survive only beneath barrows.<sup>8</sup> The so-called Celtic fields, which Lang takes as evidence for private land ownership, are quite a late phenomenon, which only spread during the Iron Age, even though traces of their existence in earlier periods can be found (Fokkens 2009, p.93). It remains completely unclear whether these Celtic fields were owned by individuals or by a whole community, especially since in north-central Europe and Scandinavia they are known only as huge complexes of arable land separated by high earthworks (Fokkens 2009, p.93). However, we should not deny the relevance of the research into Prehistoric field systems in archaeology.<sup>9</sup> Over a period of almost two decades, Lang and others carried out micro-regional fieldwork and excavations on field strip systems and cemeteries, mostly in northwest Estonia (2004; 2005). This data firstly allows Lang to see Bronze Age societies emerge and specialise in the utilisation of field systems. The use of territories in the Early Metal Age for economic purposes has been mentioned many times by scholars.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it seems clear that rather than ore resources, agricultural potential constituted the primary location factor for settlements, implying that agriculture formed the basis of the Bronze Age economy. By contrast, all other types of economic activity, including metallurgy, appear to have been regional adaptations to specific resources. It seems likely that agricultural production created the most wealth. Trade in high-quality metal products for agriculture-based economic centres may have been profitable as well (Bartelheim 2009, p.36ff). Moreo-

<sup>7</sup> In archaeological material, horses reveal the existence of arable land in the Stone Age and the Early Bronze Age. It is thought that fields were ploughed with oxen rather than horses. We also know that oxen were castrated (Fokkens 2009, p.90). We should add that one of the most important indicators of agriculture is field fertilisation, that is, long-term land care. This type of activity is known in northern Europe from around 1500 BC. At the same time, longer-inhabited buildings spread, and livestock was housed in them, too. Another important development in farming structure was the storage of food reserves. Most of our evidence comes from Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age archaeological complexes, while the earlier periods remain little studied (Fokkens 2009, p.91ff).

<sup>8</sup> H. Thrane notes that fields are the rarest and the most difficult to detect of the many direct and indirect criteria that confirm the existence of agriculture in Prehistory (Thrane 1990, p.483ff).

<sup>9</sup> In the Baltic countries, these questions are examined by A. Merkevičius and R. Nemickienė (2003). In Scandinavia, they are examined by H. Thrane (1990).

<sup>10</sup> Here we refer to a 2009 collection of articles *Die wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen der Bronzezeit Europas/The Economic Foundations of the European Bronze Age*.

ver, we should note that the opinion of traditional European archaeology is dominant, which overestimates the economic significance of the new resource, namely metal. In recent years, this point of view has begun to change fundamentally, as new debates unfold on the issue (Bartelheim 2009, p.34ff, and references). Without denying the fact that an economic basis always constitutes a fundamental factor for the establishment and conservation of power, the contrary view is propagated, arguing that it was not the discovery of metal that encouraged a social hierarchy to develop, but the flourishing of old economic factors, especially agriculture, that stimulated the development of metal production. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that the processes of metal production were subject to central coordination and control, but this was not necessary (*ibid*). According to Lang, a higher social status and wealth could also have resulted from many factors, such as higher biological productivity, resulting in increased work on and contributions from commonly worked farms in the hands of the prevailing centre of power (Lang 2007a, p.228).<sup>11</sup>

Lang's reconstruction of society in the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age is close to the traditional structural Marxist position<sup>12</sup> (seen, it should be noted, most commonly in studies of the period of transition between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age), to which K. Kristiansen also subscribes, when writing in the context of Megalithic culture and Single Grave culture, that social inequality and control of the circulation of prestigious metal artefacts, and the workforce required for working the land and other economic activities, together with the concomitant ideology of ancestor worship, formed the basis for hierarchical societies (Kristiansen 1984, p.76ff, p.79ff). Later in this article, we will look at questions of the analysis of material from cemeteries when we raise social questions.<sup>13</sup> At

the moment, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the structure of society is depicted according to the classic principle of a pyramid, on the top of which is the elite, and at the bottom, the largest and poorest section of society. It should be noted that Bronze Age palaeo-demographic research is not highly developed in Baltic archaeology, because of the lack of archaeological material available. This is noted by Lang too, as he maintains that the anthropological material from many graves needs to be studied thoroughly, and today it is not yet possible to present systematic, exhaustive or statistically reasoned knowledge about Bronze Age and Early Iron Age populations (Lang 2007a, p.222ff). Besides, palaeo-demographic research and anthropological research in European archaeology also have many drawbacks. This can mostly be seen in the reconstruction of social structures. On the basis primarily of cemetery material, we may divide Bronze Age society (as, in effect, Lang does) into families connected by kinship ties. It is these that form the social hierarchy. Lang calls such families 'nuclear families', the core of the group, which form kinship relations with other groups (Lang 2007a, p.225). Despite various methods of research, such as identifying the construction of graves, the position of grave goods, the number of individuals, and estimation of age and gender, the theory of families and kinship still cannot be proven.<sup>14</sup> In practice, although ethno-social studies present rather wide knowledge about kinship relations, these cannot be used directly for describing illiterate Prehistoric societies (Bockisch-Bräuer 2010, p.24). The social structure of the settlement pattern is an even more complicated subject; nevertheless, Lang's attempts at understanding separate micro-regions are up-to-date and very welcome. Quoting statistical methods (NAT), he draws the conclusion that over the 1,500-year period of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, there were always settlement units with different degrees of wealth and social status. While fortified settlements during the Late Bronze Age consisted of several families (30 to 50 individuals), open settlements were usually small sites with a thin cultural layer, and thus the settlements must have been relatively small (Lang 2007a, p.223ff). All this allows Lang to suggest the emergence of a stratified society, and a settlement hierarchy with functional and status-related differences between the settlement units. Even so, such a specific classification of settlements in hierarchical order is not obvious in itself, even though it would seem that archaeological

quite modest or even missing within the discipline' (Lang 2007b, p.79ff).

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed critique of Bronze Age research from the point of view of palaeo-demography and household relations, see Bockisch-Bräuer 2010, p.11ff.

<sup>11</sup> This 'myth of control' was criticised later in the works of Shennan (see Kienlin 1999, p.12ff).

<sup>12</sup> In this case, we should stress that the term Neo-Marxism is not used in a pejorative way, for example, without doctrines common in ex-socialist countries, but as a theoretical trend in humanitarian sciences, which grew up in Western Europe and found an application in social anthropology and archaeology during the 1970s and 1980s, and in certain very recent studies. In this trend, the role of economic and ecological factors, production, reproduction, circulation and consumption of goods and activities related to it in the appearance of a social hierarchy are stressed (for more, see Bernbeck 1997, p.95ff; Earle, Kristiansen 2010, p.11; Bockisch-Bräuer 2010, p.60ff).

<sup>13</sup> Lang mentions these problems in another article, where he notes that 'despite extensive experience in the excavation of graves and associated materials, theoretical discussions about many aspects of grave building, burial customs, the furnishing of grave goods, and other topics are still

data does not cast doubt upon it. We shall discuss this issue in more detail, when outlining the Latvian case.

### Bronze-working and settlement hierarchy: the social model of Andrejs Vasks

Similar ideas about Bronze Age society can be found in the work of Andrejs Vasks. In one of his latest articles, he tries to express innovatively the importance of working bronze as a form of elite self-expression (Vasks 2007, p.65ff). The author notes, drawing attention to the total corpus of bronze artefacts, that ornaments and toiletry articles are found predominantly in fortified settlements, while weapons and jewellery dominate among stray finds in hoards and graves. Admittedly, we must note that Vasks treats bronze axes, which are found most often, as weapons. This is what enables him to conclude that in the eastern Baltic during the Bronze Age, there existed a group of people who saw themselves as warriors (Vasks 2007, p.73). Agreeing with the view of E. Neustupny, which he cites, namely that warfare may have been ceremonial in character, without any loss of life (Neustupny 1998, p.67), Vasks stresses the representational significance of objects (in this case, weapons). He has good grounds for doing so, since the majority of the bronze axes are small in size and have no traces of wear. Indeed, to this day, archaeologists argue over whether to count axes as weapons or tools, and a final definitive answer to the question will most likely never be found. Therefore, it is dangerous to speak of the formation of a warrior class in this region. In fact, if we compare axes from the Early Bronze Age found in Latvia with axes found in Lithuania and the Kaliningrad district, the first really have almost no sign of use, while in the other regions mentioned the axes had been used (Čivilytė, Mödlinger 2010; Mödlinger 2010). Furthermore, we should note that according to the marks of usage found on Early Bronze Age flanged axes, we can refer only in one case to an axe which was used as a weapon, while in all the other cases axes were probably used in wood construction work (Čivilytė, Mödlinger 2010, p.138ff; Mödlinger 2010, p.118). Similarly, we are struck by the fact that the blades of socketed axes were worn down in a particular oblique way. Archaeology has examples showing that socketed axes were used for working wooden posts (Fischer 1999, p.40ff; Jennings 2008, p.122). But in no way can it contradict their prestigious importance, because their use in a representative action, when other members of society were watching, could have been prestigious. Besides, Vasks also pays attention to social practice, connected with

individual representation, and that is a new and unresearched sphere in the archaeology of the Baltic countries. He stresses that ‘the building of strong defences also had a purely psychological significance: to display the élite’s capacity for mobilising resources and organising building work’ (Vasks 2007, p.3). In further reasoning, the already-mentioned factor of organising the workforce, power and control is reflected in the formation of the social structure: like the barrows, hill-forts may have been connected with the symbolic idea of control over the land (Vasks 2007, p.73). Moreover, like Lang, Vasks classifies hill-forts and settlements according to their importance in the hierarchical order: hill-forts with, as a rule, powerful defence works, in which an intense process of metallurgy was going on, are treated by the author as centres for maintaining the social hierarchy or centres of power, and the lower level hill-forts and open settlements as being subsidiary to them (Vasks 2007, p.74). This model of the central role of hill-forts, defence fortifications-metal treatment-special assortment of bronze artefacts-rich graves near hill-forts and hoards, is widely used in research by German archaeologists (Jockenhövel 1974; 1980; 1982; 1990; Winghart 1994; 1998; Heske 2010). According to this tendency, hill-forts became the dwelling place of people of exceptional social status, centres for metallurgy and religion, or centres of control, and other settlements are put in hierarchical order according to their importance and dependence on each other. Here we would like to return to the question of settlement hierarchies mentioned above. European archaeology does not possess many examples showing metal-working activities *in situ*. The best known of these is the recently discovered fortified settlement of Feudvar in Vojvodina, which is dated to BzA2. It has a fine surviving metal workshop (Hänsel, Medovič 2004). This settlement and other fortified settlements (hill-forts) of the *tel* type which spread throughout southeast and central Europe are referred to by scholars as proto-urban settlements, or elite centres, where power was concentrated, and, among other things, they controlled the distribution of labour, which led to the development of separate specialities (Kienlin 2007, p.13). There is no doubt that Feudvar, which was home to around 1,000 people, assumed a central position in a large area of agricultural land and hunting spaces, but that at that time its surrounding area was not inhabited. Thus, it would be possible to speak of a change in the form of settlements, even of a concentration, albeit not a hierarchy of settlements with a central settlement and dependent settlements surrounding it (*ibid*).<sup>15</sup> Further-

<sup>15</sup> The classification of settlements according to a dichotic principle of *high* and *low* is typical of Lithuanian scholarship too. For example, A. Merkevičius claims that

more, we should note that settlements near hill-forts were not necessarily lower in status than the forts themselves. For example, the settlement at the foot of the Hüneburg hill-fort near Wattenstedt in Kreis Helmstedt (Germany), which is from the same time as the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, contains various refuse pits, buildings with stone floors, hearths and even the remains of metallurgical activity, such as metal-working waste, stone and clay casting moulds, and other objects used for making swords and bronze vessels (Heske 2010, p.9ff). Imported artefacts revealing the existence of long-distance contacts have also been found there. This so far unique example from European archaeology shows that metal-working took place in settlements at the foot of hill-forts, and that the settlements were certainly no less important than the fortifications (*ibid*). We should also mention the cautious view of the idealised treatment of the importance of hill-forts, because the situation with the research is not absolutely perfect. Because of this, it is difficult to decide whether hill-forts were centres for metallurgy. It is even thought that first of all they performed a defensive function (Biel 1987, p.15ff). However, Baltic archaeological material shows clearly that metal-working was practised at many hill-forts. The horizontal distribution of crucibles or moulds at Ķīputkalns (Latvia) presented by Vasks shows that in the earliest period of the hill-fort's existence, craft workshops were ranged along the perimeter of the plateau, next to the rampart. During the later phase of occupation at the hill-fort, bronze-working was practised not only along the perimeter of the plateau as before, but also in the buildings of the central part of the plateau. Evidently, the number of smiths had increased significantly in the later stage. This also indicates growing specialisation in bronze-working during the later stage, when this activity was of great importance to the economy of the hill-fort's residents (Vasks 2007, p.68, Fig. 2). Similar conclusions may be drawn from the Asva hill-fort in Estonia, where more than 800 moulds and crucibles were found. Asva was one of the largest bronze-working places in the east Baltic region (Lang 2007a, p.115ff). Even so, we should not exaggerate the rich evidence for metal-working in these hill-forts. We are struck by the fact that it is predominantly shards of clay moulds for making small pieces of ornaments, usually single ring objects, that were uncovered in these find sets. Perhaps further research into the specialised area of moulds will open up new prospects for interpreting the significance of hill-forts. Today we need to ask

fortified settlements, located mostly on the tops of hills, were a symbol of power, and enjoyed a higher status than unfortified settlements in lower places (Merkevičius 2007, p.102). As we can see, this is subject to debate.

whether we have reliable data and information regarding bronze-working performed at these sites, in order to categorise these hill-forts as metalworking centres of political-social significance.

In attempting to reconstruct the Bronze Age social structure through a study of metal-working, Vasks does not idealise the role played by this activity in the formation of social structures, since bronze-working was not the only factor contributing to the hierarchical development of society. He emphasises rightly that 'we may distinguish areas of greater social complexity from those with a less marked complexity' (Vasks 2007, p.75). Thus, in effect, Vasks assesses the social aspect of the interpretation of archaeological material cautiously, in order to show that, depending on its conditions and outlook, each society could develop in a different way, and thus theoretical models should be applied carefully, paying attention to particular given situations.

### The social pyramid: the model favoured by Algimantas Merkevičius

When examining society during the Early Metal Age in Lithuanian archaeology, the research may be divided into three groups. The first is cautious with regard to social structures on a hypothetical level, when, clearly detecting great differences in culture between the western and eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, scholars are wary in their evaluations of the structures of communities in the latter. They consider that during the Bronze Age, society experienced only minor differentiation, and lacked particular hierarchical features, or was even egalitarian (Luchtanas, Sidrys 1999, p.35; Čivilytė 2005, p.336ff).

The second group of scholars bases its ideas on studies of specific settlements and the reconstruction of economic systems (Grigalavičienė 1995, p.95ff; Daugnora, Girininkas 2004, p.168ff). In these studies, social processes are viewed through the prism of an economic system, as in the other Baltic countries. According to these scholars, changes in social relationships and the social hierarchy were determined by the move to a producing economy, the accumulation of wealth (usually in the form of livestock), the formation of private ownership of land, and even the formation of ruling institutions of male warriors (Daugnora, Girininkas 2004, p.16ff). It is worth noting at this point that the situation in the east Baltic region appears to have been different: it is hard to detect any economic changes here connected with the discovery of metals, and as before, animal husbandry and agriculture continued to dominate in this area (Čivilytė 2009b, p.105ff). It is in-

teresting that bronze artefacts are concentrated mostly in areas of agricultural land (Luchtanas, Sidrys 1999, p.28ff, Fig. 12). This phenomenon is noticed throughout southeast and Central Europe. It becomes clear by the remarkably close relationship between the distribution of Early Bronze Age settlement areas (the close link with the distribution of finds of Aunjetitz culture is particularly conspicuous) and the extent of loess and black earth soils with their well-known agricultural qualities (Bartelheim 2009, p.35ff, Fig. 1). Thus, we should be wary in assessing the alleged effect of metal use on changes in economic and social structures.

The third and most recent research tendency deals with the analysis of European theories, and applies them to specific archaeological examples. In Lithuania, Algimantas Merkevičius was the first to set out to study issues of the social structure, in articles devoted specifically to the subject (Merkevičius 2005; 2007). He uses social terminology, explaining the usage and meaning of certain terms in European archaeology, and applying what he regards as the most suitable of them to selected east Baltic communities (Merkevičius 2005, p.43ff). It is commendable that theoretical views appear in Early Metal Age research which allow us to imagine past processes more accurately, because in this way one archaeological phenomenon or another acquires a clearer shape. This is particularly relevant in studies of Prehistoric societies, because without knowing the context of earlier theories, it would be impossible to imagine or actually create new concepts. Noting 11 theoretical viewpoints with a significance in the study of Prehistoric societies, Merkevičius rightly stresses one of them, which claims that 'some aspects of society cannot be established on the basis of the evidence of material remains alone. The reconstruction of a past society is always subjective, and depends on our theoretical approaches and research methodologies' (Merkevičius 2005, p.43). All the same, the picture presented by Merkevičius clearly repeats the theories used in the archaeological studies mentioned above, with a clear leaning towards the views of K. Kristiansen. Just like Kristiansen (Kristiansen 1998), Merkevičius sees the reasons for the formation of a hierarchical society as lying in economic development, which was conditioned by the appearance of new technologies, as well as the advent and increasing use of new types of artefacts, especially made of bronze. The significance of farming and stockbreeding, the construction of new settlements, and the assimilation of more extensive territories are also emphasised. According to Merkevičius, society was changing, and its complexity also grew due to the intensifying specialisation of production, the concentration of wealth and power, property and political differentiation, the inter-

action and increasing dependency of certain groups of individuals, the construction of fortified settlements and barrow mounds, the need to protect property, and increasing conflicts, as well as the growing importance of warfare (Merkevičius 2005, p.43). Without reiterating the comments noted above on this matter, let us move on to Merkevičius' reconstruction of social structures.

Merkevičius selected certain groups of material objects for the reconstruction of Bronze Age society in the east Baltic region 'in order to reveal the level of society, its tendency towards alteration and a social structure, namely data about settlement sites, burials and artefacts' (Merkevičius 2005, p.45), or 'to analyse and interpret selected archaeological material, suggest some observations, and reconstruct some basic features of Bronze Age societies' (Merkevičius 2007, p.94). In agreement with other Baltic archaeologists, he considers that 'Bronze Age society in the Baltic region and certainly in Lithuania, as in some other European regions, was a naturally formed, rather small social unit, based on kinship relations.' He believes that 'this term can be applied to a separate, independent, or at least autonomous socio-political entity, which controlled a certain territory, had various common institutions, and more or less constant interactions of a diverse character, including economic, religious and others, as well as diverse interdependencies. This socio-political organisation had a common culture, both material and spiritual' (Merkevičius 2007, p.96). It is interesting that he imagines Bronze Age society in a very specific way as comprising three strata, which form a pyramid structure. By asserting that bronze artefacts in the east Baltic region are relatively rare, and truly valuable, and intended only for exceptional individuals, he classifies all the finds into items of bronze, amber and other materials, such as flint, stone, bone, antler and clay (Merkevičius 2005, p.4ff). This is the way a social pyramid is constructed. People with the right to use prestigious bronze objects, who were prominent members of society, and who may have been regional/tribal chiefs, were at the top of the pyramid. Next come individuals who used simpler and cheaper artefacts, who were understood to have been community chiefs, semi-professional warriors, wealthy craftsmen engaged in metalwork, or traders in metal artefacts or amber. On the third level of the pyramid were people who used flint, stone or bone 'copies of metalwork'. Although this group enjoyed a special status, its members were unable to acquire bronze artefacts, but used imitations of such objects to display their pretensions to having relations with those of a higher status.<sup>16</sup> The last, low-

<sup>16</sup> This opinion is shared in Heidi Luik's article, in which she claims that double buttons and carefully carved bone pins

est and largest part of the pyramid consists of members of society who used simple, non-metal artefacts, simple people of the third rank of 'dependents' (*ibid*).

All these people represented in the pyramid reflect the hierarchical layers of society. For Merkevičius, wealth and prestige are the most important factors in the model he constructs of social strata. This schematic presentation of social strata, based on criteria of wealth, is fairly common in archaeological writings.<sup>17</sup> The deceased with the richest graves, defined as a rule with reference to surviving grave goods, usually occupy the top of the pyramid, followed by those with less well-equipped graves. An ideal picture of the social structure evolves when the number of the richest graves is the lowest (to form the top of the pyramid), and after them come increasingly more of the rest of society (to form the middle and bottom of the pyramid).<sup>18</sup> However, this view is not at all clear. First of all, we must note the problems associated with this analysis of burials. There is little doubt that 'analyses of grave types, constructions and grave goods help us to define certain social groups of people of the period, to reconstruct the social status of individuals, and sometimes even to establish their occupations' (Merkevičius 2005, p.47). However, archaeological discussions over recent decades have revealed the risks inherent in interpreting burial material.<sup>19</sup> Serious questions have been asked as to whether burial customs were indeed followed according to particular hierarchical rules of Prehistoric societies, and whether it is possible to judge anything about the social structure from such data. After all, each burial ritual is not merely a direct reflection of the social hierarchy, but the constantly changing effect of the emotional attitudes of members of a given society who carried out the burial, and this can be traced only in part in archaeological finds.<sup>20</sup> In fact, when choosing an appropriate criterion in order to lay a special emphasis on the social stratum of the deceased, our arguments may become circular: despite what the archaeologists may consider to have been the main social indicator, the distribution of graves of wealthy and less wealthy cases is never clear; that is, it is difficult to distinguish one group of graves or the other (Clausing 1999, p.322; Bokisch-Bräuer 2010, p.25ff). Therefore, when interpreting burial material, we should never forget the relativity factor. After all, today's researcher will

may have been used by members of society on the second level of the pyramid (Luik 2007, p.55).

<sup>17</sup> For more detail, see Bokisch-Bräuer 2010, p.55ff.

<sup>18</sup> See Čivilytė 2009a, p.120.

<sup>19</sup> Here we refer to a 1999 collection of articles *Eliten in der Bronzezeit*, which presents a critical view on the unambiguous transfer of burial material, in order to get a better knowledge of social layers.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Böckisch-Bräuer 1999, p.535; 2010, p.32; Maran 2008, p.81; Turck 2010, p.93ff.

never know whether the grave he is studying has all the grave goods which were placed in the grave when the individual was buried, or whether he is working with only fragmentary material, if some pieces have simply disappeared. Moreover, what we find in graves should not necessarily be regarded as a reflection of the past reality.

Let us take, as an example, bronze weapons, which are one of the best indicators of social structures. A comprehensive trans-regional analysis of graves with metal weapons from the Bronze Age and the Iron Age in various regions of Europe has shown that the distribution of weapons in a rising hierarchical line *spearhead, dagger-sword* and its application for social reconstruction, especially with regard to rank, is not reliable. This is, first of all, because particular weapons in the burial customs of various regions had different meanings, and were regarded in different ways: in some regions, particular weapons dominate in graves, while in other graves they are completely absent, while they are found in hoards. Here we could talk about different burial traditions or deposition customs (Čivilytė 2009a, p.107ff). The fact that swords were placed in graves without other weapons does not necessarily mean that the deceased belonged to a higher rank. Besides, not only swords, but also spears, for instance, can be found in graves with exceptional artefacts such as carriages or gold dishes (Clausing 1999, p.56ff). For example, this statistic gives rise to interesting considerations: after studying graves with weapons from the Urnfield Period from the Alps to the southern boundaries of northern Europe, we can count 72 with swords, 33 with spearheads, and 41 with arrowheads (Clausing 1994, p.411, Table 4). Judging by the traditional view that grave goods which are found repeatedly and in large numbers represent a standard, while rare grave goods reflect the exceptional status of an individual, it would seem in this case that swords in graves are a normal phenomenon, while spearheads and arrows may be deemed to be special grave goods (*ibid*). This shows once more that the formulation *weapon = power = chief* is unreliable. An analysis of Early and Middle Bronze Age graves in Schleswig Holstein and Denmark shows how risky it is to draw conclusions as to social structure, and especially hierarchical differences according to rank, on the basis of grave goods. It turned out that neither the quality nor the quantity of grave goods allows us to discern clear hierarchical groups, because many unclear factors remain unresolved (Steffgen 1997/98, p.18ff). It is clear that the grave equipment and the wealth of the grave goods are not connected, because the graves of deceased people buried with especially wealthy and noteworthy grave goods are not necessarily formed from complex stone constructions



(Steffgen 1997/98, p.185ff). Noting these comments, new opportunities arise to assess the social significance of weapons. However, swords are usually found alongside special grave goods, and, what is more, they differ from other weapons in both size and decoration. On the whole, it is hard to deny the fact that swords embodied a person's high social status, because many later written sources state this too (Čivilytė 2009a, p.109ff). In the words of S.D. Bridgford, 'a sword may simultaneously be, or have the potential to be, a beautiful object, an efficient killing tool, a symbol of power and wealth, an implied or actual threat, a sacrifice, a gift, a reward, a pledge of loyalty and/or an embodiment of the idea of conflict' (Bridgford 1997, p.95). Consequently, the view that people buried with swords, such as the individual from the excavated barrow in the Kaliningrad district at Zaostrove near Primorsk (formerly Rantau, Kr. Fischhausen in East Prussia), did indeed enjoy an exceptional social status, is in no doubt, as Merkevičius notes (Merkevičius 2007, p.49). They were granted the honour of travelling to the kingdom of death with a sword. Besides, a very important sign of the Zaostrove sword, as a prestigious weapon, which it is essential to take note of, is that it is broken into several pieces. That was not an accidental fracture, but the obvious result of ritual action (Čivilytė 2004, pp.96-113). The burial ritual took place as the community gathered together, thus the breaking of a sword was a public act, legitimising the value of the sword, and also the position of its owner in society.

Another important matter, which takes our discussion further, is the classification of objects as being more prestigious and less prestigious. Even in the case of metal weapons, we have seen that this is no easy task. The classic view, prevailing among archaeologists, that the value of an object depends on the material from which it is made, has enforced the view universally that the possession of metal artefacts means prestige, along with membership of a higher social stratum. This reveals the existence of social inequality.<sup>21</sup> This thesis as an *a priori* statement became prevalent in all Prehistory investigations. Exceptional significance is granted to metal as a specific substance, mainly due to the cost of the raw material, mining it and the complexity of its production, and its variety of uses (Turck 2010, p.1). This is especially relevant for regions that are far from metallurgical centres, in a peripheral location, and not distinguished by an abundant number of metal artefacts, such as the eastern Baltic.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is not

<sup>21</sup> Refer to Turk 2010, p.2, footnote 7, for the difference between the terms *social differentiation* and *social inequality*.

<sup>22</sup> A. Merkevičius describes this region succinctly: 'The Bronze Age in the east Baltic area is a specific phenomenon compared to other European regions. There is no non-

surprising that this attitude is reflected in the model under consideration. While this opinion is not essentially wrong, we should not forget the advantages of other materials. Let us consider non-metal 'copies' of metal objects, or miniatures of them. The question whether 'copies' of metal artefacts were indeed produced due to a shortage of raw material (and this, according to the model under consideration, corresponds to the lower/poorer social layer) is raised most frequently in archaeological literature (Turk 2010, p.15). Let us remember Corded Ware axes and their metal analogues, copper axes of the Eschollbrücken type. In this case, it is highly likely that the latter imitated stone ones (Maran 2008, p.173). This shows that copies of metal artefacts may have been valuable prestige items that were also suitable for demonstrating wealth and status. In addition to these axes, which were found in hoards from Corded Ware settlements, there are plenty of examples from cultural contexts in Central and northern Europe dating from the fourth and third millennia BC (Pfyn, Michelsberg or Funnelbeaker cultures). Objects made of flint, jadeite or stone (although not imitations of metal objects), which as a rule were broken intentionally and are frequently found in hoards, testify to sacrificial rituals carried out by people, reflecting the prestigious meaning of the sacrificed objects and the social status of those who carried out the sacrifice (Maran 2008, p.178; Turk 2010, p.89ff). Numerous miniatures of copper axes made from clay, amber or other organic material in Central and southeast Europe could be interpreted not as children's toys, but more probably as part of the great prototype *pars pro toto*, thus more clearly emphasising the value of the full-size items, while not diminishing the importance of the miniatures (Maran 2008, p.178ff; Turk 2010, p.92ff). Interestingly, in the Bronze Age, when there were many more artefacts made from metal than in the Late Neolithic Period, stone axes did not lose their symbolic meaning. This is confirmed by the fact that they can be found together with other prestigious objects in so-called *Fürstengräber* graves (Turck 2010, p.97). Returning to the east Baltic Sea region under consideration here, a whole series of similar indicators can be found which allow us to refer to the prestigious significance of non-metal objects. Thus, the majority of flint axes in the Late Neolithic Period should be considered as deliberate single deposits and gifts to supernatural beings (Piličiauskas 2007, p.22ff). There is a very clear analogy between sparking flints and lightning; moreover, the aesthetic-symbolic value of light flint was pre-

ferrous metal ore in the region, but large quantities of amber are deposited along the east Baltic coast. Another specific feature of the region is the rather limited use of bronze artefacts during the period under consideration' (Merkevičius 2005, p.39).

ferred (*ibid*). From this, it would follow that stone axes were also particularly interesting, since in their form they match contemporary bronze axes.<sup>23</sup> Another good example is boneware, some of which is in imitation of bronze objects. The particular meaning of dazzling white bone is highlighted in stone-cist graves, in which grave goods are very rare, where spade-head bone pins were found. They were symbols expressing the high social status of the buried individuals, especially those in whose graves bronze objects were found beside these pins (Luik 2007, p.58). Indeed, we would agree with Heidi Luik that the occurrence of bone and antler copies of bronze artefacts in the Bronze Age context in the east Baltic region suggests that power was not very highly concentrated here (Luik 2007, p.55), but there is no way that we can ascribe the people who carried these copies to a lower social stratum. H. Luik is right to note that pins and buttons could also have possessed a certain symbolic meaning, and the shape and material of an object could each have expressed the wearer's belonging to a definite social group. The making and owning of certain bone artefacts could have been the privilege of a certain group of people. They must have had a high social status (Luik 2007, p.57ff). People in those times simply used what was available to them to express their social position.

So we should applaud Merkevičius' attempt to analyse archaeological material in as much detail as possible, for this is the duty of a scholar. However, we may dispute his overly uncritical application of theories, in order for us to form an image of the east Baltic region which does not differ at all, or differs only a little, from that of neighbouring countries that are rich in metals. Of course, we should not completely undervalue a specific and sometimes even unique cultural situation, but a more critical view of an idealised European Bronze Age Period and the position in it of the region under discussion would help us to appreciate better the historical importance of the Early Metal Age.

### Prospects for researching social processes in the Bronze Age

Let us return now to the issue of the formation of social hierarchies during the Early Metal Age, especially at the beginning of the period. The position of metal as a new material has been idealised too much by archaeologists.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps we ought to compare the situation in

<sup>23</sup> There is the stone axe from Aluota (Druskiiai, Lithuania), of which the form is analogous to contemporary bronze flanged axes (Girininkas, 2009, p.264, Fig. 201).

<sup>24</sup> For example, the expression of H. Vandkilde in the case of copper: 'Copper objects soon assumed important roles in creating and maintaining individual social identities relating to gender, status and rank; hence accentuated

the Late Neolithic with that in the Early Metal Age, in order to understand that processes took place in those times which are more similar than different, especially where the unchanged agricultural sphere is concerned. We may well wonder whether we archaeologists expect too much from metal, as we imagine its impact on human life and social structures. Undoubtedly, society before that period was not egalitarian, devoid of authority with equal opportunity to exploit natural resources and so forth. Indeed, only in a few areas in Central Europe have graves of the later phase of the Early Bronze Age been found in which the importance of some individuals, social leaders, was highlighted by rich grave goods and graves that took a lot of effort to build (Bartelheim 2009, p.35; Kienlin 2007, p.15). Perhaps archaeologists should not look so feverishly for terms to denote social structures, and free themselves from the bonds of chiefdom, and simply acknowledge that fortified settlements, the distribution of labour resources and collective activity could have existed even without the centralisation of power (Kienlin 2007, p.15).

Despite increasing caution connected with studies of Prehistoric community social structures, archaeologists are faced with new prospects for obtaining a closer understanding of multi-dimensional social structures. Bearing in mind the fact that in social territories there has been agreement for some time that prestige and high social standing are not determined solely by the accumulation of wealth or the use of prestige objects, we would like to discuss several possibilities, where a person plays the most important role as an active participant in all processes. Social factors could reside in technological processes. The production of objects is closely related to exclusive human activity, not depending on whether it was the daily round or a cultural sphere. The object comes into the world not at random, but influenced by human wishes and objectives. The form and the colour of the artefact and the material from which it will be produced and its function are not only the result of the craftsman's but of society's norms and traditions as well. For example, the so-called bronze flanged axes of Ubiedrze and Łuczewo types were made without casting seams, while axes of other types were used with clearly visible casting seams (Čivilytė, Mödlinger 2010, p.137). These and various other examples show that technology can be perceived and explored as a social phenomenon. More detailed research into this issue has begun in Baltic archaeology. In their article on Bronze Age bone artefacts in Lithuanian hill-forts, Heidi Luik and

social distinctions of various kinds. Social hierarchy and elitism walk hand in hand with metallurgical production' (Vandkilde 2007, p.41).

Liina Maldre have shown clearly that both the selection of materials and the production technology did not depend solely on forms and conditions of lifestyles, but also on social factors. They stress that the choice of raw material was based mainly on its availability, but also, for example, on the suitability of a certain skeletal part for making a certain type of artefact, and that the choice of a certain technique, raw material or tool could sometimes depend on some symbolic value attributed to it by society rather than on their real physical properties (Luik, Maldre 2007, p.5ff). Also of interest is the relationship of the maker of an object to his product. It is worth considering, for example, that moulds for various objects are very often found in hill-forts, but almost no finished products have been found in these sites. It seems that these settlements were primarily production and not consumption centres (Luik, Maldre 2007, p.30, footnote 5).

Similarly, we should consider the communication and mobility of people at that time. Objects did not travel on their own, they were brought by travellers by river or sea. Reading ethnological studies, we can find many examples reflecting the actions and identities of travellers in foreign countries. Archaeology can discern at least partly traces of such people, and foresee their behaviour in new social environments. This is indicated by the establishment of people from Scandinavia in northern Kurzeme, and by the Staldzene hoard, brought from Gotland to be deposited according to their customs (Vasks 2007, p.75).

The issue of human daily life and the economic system are very important in social investigations. The succession of the old lifestyle and the appearance of new changes in Bronze Age communities, when bronze objects and knowledge about metallurgy appeared, can also reveal some social relations, straightaway raising the question of the efficiency and demand for bronze objects in human life. This aspect is closely related to human daily life, which has not actually been easily discerned so far.<sup>25</sup>

However, what we call archaeological sources do not always provide a direct reflection of the past reality. We cannot reconstruct the past on the basis of them, but can only interpret them, creating new models. These models are new pictures emerging from a small part of the past human heritage and our intuition as investigators. Each archaeological object can be per-

<sup>25</sup> Everyday life in the Bronze Age was the subject of intense debate during the Congress of German Archaeologists in Bremen in 2011. It emerged that the everyday life of Prehistoric man cannot easily be reconstructed. Indeed, it was various and changing. Often, archaeologists have difficulty in deciding whether what at first sight seems ordinary activity can be regarded as an everyday matter.

ceived in totally different ways. An ivory equine harness fitting, which was found in a rubbish hole, was perceived by some archaeologists to have adorned a horse's head, while others imagined it on the head of a black-haired woman.<sup>26</sup> This example reflects our imagination as archaeologists, and the pictures created as well. The accuracy of such pictures depends on the precision of the methods we use and the questions we ask. The fact that a unique casting mould appears in a fairly poor set of metal artefacts from the east Baltic region, in which axes of the appropriate type were made, which were found in the same region in several places, cannot obviously mean that the local residents were accomplished metallurgists. The same could be said about particular finds from hoards and graves, or other archaeological evidence, which in effect may reveal the social identity of a given person. However, these are not the only indices of a hierarchical pyramid. Generally speaking, the recognition of the structure of an orally based illiterate society remains on the notional-theoretical and even speculative level (and let us not be afraid of this word), because their hierarchy can only be guessed at by modern people. Therefore, the search for new examples of what Lang calls 'correct interpretation of the relevant archaeological material' theories, categories and models is necessary, but we should not forget that each archaeological object is a separate source, behind which reside layers of a human as a changeable personality, with his attitudes and identity. It is also important not to forget that people in antiquity lived according to their own created rules, themselves choosing which objects they would use in daily life, or put into graves and hoards, and which things they would reject and ignore.

It is important to pay attention to the fact that we are speaking here about works which are intended for research into the social structure, but not about social archaeology as a separate branch of science, where the main role is played by man, as a human in action, who is forming a system of symbols. It can be understood (albeit never absolutely) only by delving more deeply into the context.

## Conclusions

Over recent decades, the results of studies relating to the Early Metal Age in the east Baltic region have been enriched by new articles and monographs focussing on issues of the social structure. In the detailed analysis and the interpretation of archaeological objects and the

<sup>26</sup> Franz Schopper and B. Wittkopp, 'Not an Everyday Matter at all: The Horse Equipment from Lebus Hill-Fort, or How Little Things tell Big Stories', paper read at the Seventh Congress of German Archaeologists, Bremen 2011.

contexts of single finds, we can see the evident impact of various theories.

It should be noted that a strong tendency may be observed in the most recent studies written in the Baltic countries to describe ancient societies according to various methods, and especially theoretical models, developed by Anglo Saxon or Scandinavian scholars.

In studies of the east Baltic region, a certain stress is laid on the role of economic and ecological factors, production, reproduction, circulation, consumption, and the control of goods in the development of the social hierarchy. Aspects related to private ownership, kinship and the monopolisation of power have also been emphasised.

There has been a subjective and uncritical application of certain archaeological models to the Baltic countries by archaeologists who ignore the huge regional cultural differences and the particular nature of the available data. An *a priori* formulated hierarchy of local society is based on a pyramid model. An ideal picture of a social structure evolves when the number of the richest graves is the smallest (to form the top of the pyramid), and after them come increasingly more of the rest of society (to form the middle and bottom of the pyramid). Such an assertive distribution of society is undoubtedly open to dispute, because many examples challenging this model of hierarchised pyramid exist in archaeology.

The same archaeological objects made of different materials do not necessarily signify a different social status. The question whether 'copies' of metal artefacts were indeed produced due to a lack of raw materials (metal) (and this according to the model under consideration corresponds to the lower/poorer social layer) is being asked more frequently by archaeologists. On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly clear that an object's prestige value could often be determined not by the material but by its form. Numerous miniatures of metal artefacts in stone or clay could be interpreted as part of the great prototype *pars pro toto*, thus more clearly emphasising the value of the first ones, though not diminishing the importance of the copies or miniatures.

Neither Prehistoric objects nor processes can be assessed in a mono-causal way. To avoid becoming lost in archaeological theories, modern archaeology formulates hypotheses supported by abundant data and analysis, and not simply by statements.

It is not always what we call archaeological sources that provide a direct reflection of the past reality. We cannot reconstruct the past on the basis of them, but only interpret them, creating new models. These mod-

els are new pictures, emerging from a small part of the past human heritage and our intuition as investigators. Each archaeological object may be perceived in totally different ways.

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## Abbreviations

- Arch. Korrb. – *Archäologisches Korrespondenzblatt*  
 AVE – *Archaeological Fieldwork in Estonia*, Tallinn  
 Interarchaeologia, 2 – A. MERKEVIČIUS, ed. *Colours of Archaeology. Material Culture and Society*. Papers from the Second Theoretical Seminar of Baltic Archaeologists (BASE) held at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania, 21–22 October 2005. Interarchaeologia, 2. Vilnius–Helsinki–Riga–Tartu, 2007  
 Lietuvos arch. – *Lietuvos archeologija* (Vilnius since 1979)  
 PZ – *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*  
 RGZM Monographien – *Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* (Mainz, since 1975)  
 UPA – *Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie* (Bonn, since 1989)

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## I

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## IEŠKANT TEORINIO BRONZOS AMŽIAUS VISUOMENĖS BALTIJOS ŠALYSE VERTINIMO

AGNĖ ČIVILYTĖ

### Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiamos bronzos amžiaus socialinių tyrinėjimų tendencijos Baltijos šalyse. Tai nauja sfera. Keliamas klausimas dėl europinių teorijų poveikio bronzos amžiaus tyrinėjimams. Svarbiausia straipsnyje aptariama problema – nekritiškas teorinių schemų taikymas rytiniame Baltijos regione, neatsižvelgiant į šio regiono kultūrinę specifiką. Dėl to bronzos amžiaus socialinė sankloda rekonstruojama pagal *a priori* suformuluotus teiginius. Straipsnyje kalbama apie galimas neigiamas tokio teorijų perėmimo archeologiniuose tyrinėjimuose pasekmes, kai primygtinai siekiama iš anksto numatyto rezultato. Ypač kritiškai vertinamas bronzos amžiaus visuomenės vaizdavimas piramidės principu, kuris, remiantis naujausiais tyrinėjimais, klaidingai atskleidžia priešistorinių laikų visuomenės sanklodą. Straipsnyje siūlomos naujos socialinių tyrinėjimų sferoje alternatyvos, kuriose svarbiausias dėmesys skiriamas ne archeologinių objektų klasifikacijai pagal medžiagas ar jų vertingumą, o tam tikriems procesams, kuriuose dominuoja žmogus, kaip veikiantis ir aktyvus individas.

### I

EARLY METAL  
AGE SOCIETIES:  
FROM A  
THEORETICAL  
ASSESSMENT  
TO THEIR  
ECONOMY,  
INTERREGIONAL  
CONTACTS  
AND RITUALS