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# RIMUTĖ JABLONSKYTĖ-RIMANTIENĖ (1920–2023) REMEMBERED

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*“May every Lithuanian archaeologist love archaeology like their own child...”*

Rimutė Rimantienė



Fig. 1. R. Rimantienė in her home, 2020. *Photo by G. Grižas.*  
Pav. 1. R. Rimantienė savo namuose, 2020 m. *G. Grižo nuotr.*

Sadly, a great and famous Lithuanian archaeologist, Dr. Rimutė-Jablonskytė Rimantienė, passed away on July 4, 2023, aged 102. Her legacy is defined by an endless love of archaeology and a philosophical attitude, which encourages us to rethink the meaning of archaeology in these troubled times. Rimantienė underwent good and bad phases during her long life.

Rimantienė was born in Kaunas in 1920, only two years after Lithuania gained independence from Tsarist Russia. Her father, Konstantinas

Jablonskis, was a judge at the Regional Court of Kaunas from 1922–1939. Her mother, Sofija Landsbergytė, was a mathematician and a relative of the first President of Lithuania after it regained independence from the former USSR in 1990.

Rimantienė descended from a line of distinguished scholars, including her grandfather, Jonas Jablonskis, a famous linguist. From 1881 to 1885, Jablonskis studied classical languages at the University of Moscow where his professors encouraged him



Fig. 2. R. Jablonskytė in Palanga, 1930–1935. Photo by K. Jablonskis, National Museum of Lithuania.  
Pav. 2. R. Jablonskytė Palangoje, 1930–1935 m. K. Jablonskio nuotr., Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus.

to focus on his native language. In 1901, he wrote a book titled “Lithuanian Grammar,” which was published in Tilsit, East Prussia, because the Tsarist regime prohibited the printing of Lithuanian books. Jablonskis was exiled from Lithuania in 1902 and permitted to return in 1903. He eventually standardized the Lithuanian language and developed a modern dialect-free version of the language, also known as *Standart Lithuanian*.

Konstantinas Jablonskis, Rimantienė’s father, was a distinguished historian and an amateur archaeologist. He studied law at the University of Moscow and later worked at the Lithuanian Archaeological Commission from 1920 to 1925. His nonvocational interest in archaeology sparked more of the same in his daughter, who then went on to formally study and vocationally master the field, making it her bread and butter. Jablonskis surveyed hundreds of kilometers in archaeological sites with



Fig. 3. R. Jablonskytė on the well of the “Aušra” girls’ gymnasium, Kaunas, 1936. National Museum of Lithuania.  
Pav. 3. R. Jablonskytė ant „Aušros“ mergaičių gimnazijos šulinio, Kaunas, 1936 m. Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus.

Rimutė. Together, they walked across the banks of the rivers of southern and central Lithuania.

In 1938, Rimantienė graduated from Aušra Gymnasium in Kaunas, a girls’ high school. Her uncle, Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis drove Rimutė and his daughter Aliutė Landsbergytė, around Italy in his Mercedes Benz. They visited many sites, including Naples and Pompeii, and drove to other countries. In Germany, they observed Nazi symbols and banners promoting Hitler’s nationalist ideology, propagating ideas such as *ein Volk, ein Reich*, and *ein Führer*.



Rimantienė studied at the University of Kaunas from 1938 to 1940, where she read her first archaeology book, *Urgeschichte Ostpreussens* (“The Prehistory of East Prussia”) (Gaerte, 1929). At Kaunas, Rimantienė’s work was supervised by Jonas Puzinas, the first Lithuanian professional archaeologist and the scholar who introduced the cultural-historical approach to archaeology in Lithuania. Rimantienė went on to write her first archaeological study in 1941, which analyzed the Stone Age settlements of Skaruliai and Puvočiai. Rimantienė later transferred to Vilnius University. In 1962 she successfully defended her dissertation as a candidate of historical sciences, the dissertation being titled “Periodization and Topography of the Lithuanian Settlements of the Stone and Bronze Ages” at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuanian SSR. In 1964, her article “Some Questions About the Lithuanian Paleolithic Period” (Rimantienė, 1964) was published and became the introduction to her fundamental monograph published in Russian “The Paleolithic and Mesolithic Periods in Lithuania” (Rimantienė, 1971).

At the time, the Soviet regime persecuted and forcibly deported thousands of Lithuanians including archaeologists such as Pranas Baleliūnas. Three Lithuanian archaeologists emigrated to the United States: Jonas Puzinas, Marija Gimbutienė, and Vladas Nagevičius. Only four professional archaeologists remained in Lithuania by the end of WWII. Namely, Petras Tarasenko, Pranas Kulikauskas, Regina Kulikauskienė, and Rimutė Rimantienė.

The Communist regime started harassing Rimantienė during the second Bolshevik occupation of Lithuania in 1945. Rimantienė was secretly detained and questioned for several days. Her father advised her to cry and scream if and when they start questioning her.

Notwithstanding those difficult times, meeting the love of her life was the silver lining of this period. One day, Rimantienė was advised that a



Fig. 4. R. Jablonskytė in 1943–1945. *National Museum of Lithuania.*

Pav. 4. R. Jablonskytė 1943–1945 m. *Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus.*

young male librarian, named Rimantas, wished to speak with her. He asked if her father wanted to go to Königsberg to view ancient documents in East Prussia. Unfortunately, the documents were unavailable because Königsberg was destroyed during the war. Thereafter, Rimantienė and Rimantas met frequently, visited various sites, and went for many walks. In 1946, he organized a trip to Žemaitija, a historic Lithuania area, and Rimantienė joined. By 1948, it was very clear that they were bound to get married, and ultimately tied the knot in 1949.

The newly wedded couple witnessed significant political changes in the country – even narrowly escaping deportation to a Siberian gulag in October 1951. As Rimantienė describes in her memoirs, a group of six men, Russians soldiers and Lithuanians, loudly knocked on the door in the middle of the night (Rimantienė, 2010, 199–209). They informed the couple that they were going to be expelled from

Lithuania to Siberia with only two hours to pack. Rimantienė and her husband were placed in a truck and transported to a railroad station where hundreds of Lithuanians were being prepared for deportation.

However, Rimantienė had a well-connected sister, Jūratė, who lived nearby. She was a medical doctor who once treated the child of a senior Communist party woman. The latter offered to assist Jūratė in the event of an emergency, without necessarily promising much. Jūratė asked the Communist woman for help after her sister and brother-in-law were on the cusp of deportation, which almost definitely saved them from being taken away to Siberia at the eleventh hour. In 1953, Rimantienė and her husband celebrated Stalin's death with a bottle of fine cognac.

Some American archaeologists and anthropologists did not fully appreciate the dangers of being expelled to Siberia. After I informed an American cultural anthropologist about the risks that Rimantienė had experienced, the former replied that the latter could always continue her research in Siberia without taking into account the brutality of the situation at hand. Rimantienė would have likely died in Siberia had she been deported as planned.

Rimantienė worked at the M. K. Čiurlionis museum in Kaunas from 1942 to 1960. She started to publish her first works in Russian to reach a broader audience in the Soviet Union and countries behind the iron curtain. From 1960 to 1999, she worked at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuanian SSR (*today – Lithuanian Institute of History*) in Vilnius. In 1962, Rimantienė was awarded a doctorate in Archaeology by Leningrad State University; and in 1966, she created the first cultural-chronological system for Lithuanian Stone Age settlements (Šatavičius, 2016, 12).

Rimantienė's archaeological research and educational mission continued despite the difficult conditions imposed by the Soviet occupation. She trained several distinguished Lithuanian

archaeologists such as Adomas Butrimas (Butrimas, 2000; 2016), Algirdas Girininkas (Girininkas, 2015), and Vygantas Juodagalvis (Juodagalvis, 2010).

How shall we remember her? Rimantienė's students and followers wrote touching tributes to her legacy. A. Butrimas published his article in honor of her 95th birthday in *Archaeologia Lithuana* (Butrimas, 2016). Five years later, Agnė Čivilytė conducted an interview with Rimantienė (Čivilytė, 2020) to celebrate her 100th birthday and reflect on her towering career. Čivilytė dedicated the 46th volume of *Lietuvos Archeologija* to Rimantienė's works and personality.

I personally became acquainted with Rimantienė after staying at her house in Vilnius on four different occasions. I was hosted hospitably by a woman with a remarkably strong personality, a pan-European thinker, and an intellectual titan with a sense of humor and conviction. I remember her as a dreamer, always planning for the future and moving forwards. She at no point complained or bemoaned the challenges that faced her. As our friendship further developed, I also had the pleasure of exchanging letters and publications with her.

Rimantienė specialized in the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras; her monumental works immensely improved our understanding of the Stone Age in Lithuania and the Eastern Baltic region (Rimantienė, 1971; 1974; 1994; 1995). In 1997, she received the Baltic Assembly Prize for Science for her archaeological investigation of Baltic history and art. She was a talented polyglot who spoke French, German, Swedish, Polish, Russian, Norwegian, and Lithuanian. Her fluent command of the foregoing languages enabled her to publish many scientific articles and literary works. She even translated a book titled "Kristina" from Norwegian to Lithuanian.

Rimantienė was a prolific writer in her own right. She published almost thirty monographs, and nearly 100 articles in different languages all over the world. She authored key works that were published



in widely acclaimed international peer-reviewed journals such as *Antiquity* (Rimantienė, 1992a), *The Journal of World Prehistory* (Rimantienė, 1992b) *Journal of Indo-European Studies* (Rimantienė, 1980b; 1991; 1996b). Her monograph study in German “The Stone Age in Lithuania” was published in 1994 (Rimantienė, 1994) by the Roman-German Commission, and the publication on the archaeology of the Curonian Spit, “The Curonian Spit Through the Eyes of an Archaeologist,” was published in Lithuanian and German in 1999 (Rimantienė, 1999).

Rimantienė published her seminal book titled, “Stone Age Fishermen at the Seaside Lagoon” (Rimantienė, 2005a), and subsequently translated this monograph of 525 pages from Lithuanian to German, featuring impressive illustrations of her own (Rimantienė, 2005b). In 2016, Rimantienė’s monograph “Nida: A Bay Coast Culture Settlement on the Curonian Lagoon” (Rimantienė, 2016) was published together with new texts and figures as a sequel to the Lithuanian book, “Nida: senųjų baltų gyvenvietė / Nida: An Old Baltic Settlement” (Rimantienė, 1989). This book was her last scientific publication.

Practicing as an archaeologist in Lithuania differed from doing the same in Western Europe due to the strict censorship rules imposed by the Soviets. In 1966 and 1971, the International Congresses of the Prehistoric Sciences were held in Prague and in Belgrade respectively. Moreover, Rimantienė was not a member of the Communist Party and managed to avoid Communist dogma and bureaucracy while pursuing her career.

Rimantienė joined the Soviet delegation to attend the Prague Congress. Soviet archaeologists were isolated from the rest of the world given the regime’s prohibition of establishing contact with foreign scholars. In her memoirs, Rimantienė describes how paranoid the Communist authorities were at events such as the Prague Congress (Rimantienė, 2010, 293–301).

Archaeologists were unable to participate at events abroad unless they received prior authorization from party officials at their institute, university, or museum. Even then, the KGB closely monitored their activity at international conferences. These meetings only yielded a small number of Soviet archaeologists, since most archaeologists did not receive permits to attend. Somebody like Leo Klejn of Leningrad, who was not afraid to challenge the regime, had limited opportunities to travel abroad, including East Bloc Socialist countries such as Poland or Hungary.

As a non-partisan scholar, Rimantienė had to fight officials in Vilnius for permission to attend the 1966 congress, and only succeeded after she was endorsed by a party archaeologist, I. Artyomenko from Moscow. Another Lithuanian archaeologist, Regina Kulikauskienė, also received the same permission. Archaeologists traveling to Prague had to attend information sessions in Moscow about behavior in a foreign country several days before departing by train.

In Prague, all archaeologists were accommodated in one hotel. The Soviets prohibited their scholars from communicating with their foreign colleagues, which included exchanging pleasantries with them on elevators and common areas. Soviet participants were transported to sites, museums, and meetings by bus. Marija Gimbutas, the eminent Lithuanian-American archaeologist also attended the Congress, where she reconnected with Rimantienė and Kulikauskienė, her former classmates at Vilnius University. They met discreetly at a restaurant for dinner and conversed at greater liberty in Lithuanian.

Rimantienė was a successful and well-read archaeologist. She managed to establish and maintain contacts with archaeologists beyond the Iron Curtain in countries such as Finland, Switzerland, Germany, Poland and the United States. As such, she was supported by many international scholars. Since communists did not permit certain archaeologists to



Fig. 5. Stop frame from G. Grižas's film "Šakių lanka", 1984. Video footage by G. Grižas.

Pav. 5. Stop kadras iš G. Grižo filmo „Šakių lanka“, 1984 m. G. Grižo filmuota medžiaga.



Figure 6. R. Rimantienė's 100th anniversary, 2020. Photo by G. Grižas

Pav. 6. R. Rimantienės 100-asis jubiliejus, 2020 m. G. Grižo nuotr.

be mentioned, codenames were used to correspond with some archaeologists. For example, Puzinas's code name was Pupulis or Papuninis (Butrimas, 2016, 18).

Although Soviet scholars were able to present their papers in a variety of languages, their written material had to be published in Russian. Rimantienė presented her paper in German at the Prague Congress in 1966 (Rimantienė, 1970). Her generation had learned German in the days when it was the pan-European language of scholarly discourse, and the authorities evidently tolerated Rimantienė's linguistic independence.

Rimantienė was regarded as an innovator and female role model during the 1960s – an era when men typically conducted archaeological fieldwork. She excavated Forest Neolithic sites such as Šventoji, Būtingė, and Nida (Rimantienė, 1979; 1980a; 1989; 2016). Forest Neolithic sites (6000–4000 BC) differ from contemporaneous Mesolithic sites in that the former feature pots with simple vessels and pointed bottoms (Milišauskas, 2011). Being a scientist, mother and wife requires discipline. Her

expeditions were always punctual and meticulous. She swam in the Baltic Sea every morning, regardless of the weather.

After visiting Rimantienė in Vilnius, she took me on a memorable trip to Šventoji in West Lithuania. Šventoji means sacred in Lithuanian – in many respects that is how Rimantienė felt about her team. She humbly requested me to bring some sausage as a modest token of appreciation for her team's hard work. As German archaeologist, Jonas Beran, recalls: "At the Šventoji excavation camp, we were again warmly welcomed by Prof. R. Rimantienė and cared for. She was once more absolutely impressive as a passionate and strong excavation leader of 71 years. She is just completely unique!" (Beran, 2022, 30).

Although Rimantienė was an active field archaeologist, she understood that archaeology requires more than theory and abstract pontification. Šventoji features more than 30 well-preserved sites, each of which reveal some valuable information about prehistoric settlements in the East Baltic region. The sites yielded various "sacred finds," including famous staffs with the carved heads of

female elks (Iršėnas et al., 2018). According to Rimantienė, the staffs represent the worship of a deity and women played a significant role in Northeastern European societies (Milišauskas, 2011). These sites also include Forest Neolithic wooden figurines and pendants made from the teeth of aurochs, wisents, elks, seals, and boars. People hunted harbor seal, ringed seal, gray seal, and harp seal in Šventoji (Milišauskas, 2011). Amber artifacts were also among the many exceptional finds in Šventoji. Sixty-six of them are displayed at the Palanga Amber Museum where they are called the “Šventoji amber treasures,” dating back to the early, mid, and late Neolithic periods. Based on her excavations in Šventoji, she concluded that the transition to farming in the East Baltic region involved three phases.

First, hemp, millet, and emmer remains are rare and the bones of cattle and sheep and/or goat comprise only 2% of faunal samples at Šventoji (Rimantienė, 1997). Narva and Globular Amphora communities in Northern Poland traded products and information. Second, a Globular Amphora settlement was established at Šventoji 6 site, dated to 2750 BC (Rimantienė, 2002). Shovels, hoes, hand ards, and threshing implements were used. Third, the Bay Coast culture, a variant of the Late Neolithic Corded Ware Culture was developed. As such, Rimantienė’s research and excavation work promoted the idea of farming as a principal source of subsistence at the time.

Like many scholars in Eastern and Central Europe, Rimantienė argued that the migration of Indo-European speaking people resulted in an influx of pastoralists from the Steppe Lands to the Southeastern Europe in the Late Neolithic period. Thus, she associated the Bay Coast (Corded Ware) culture with prehistoric populations speaking early dialects of Latvian and Lithuanian (Rimantienė, 1996a).

As a specialist in restoration, Rimantienė preserved wooden artifacts with polyethylene glycol which she acquired from her colleagues in Denmark and Leningrad as well as Lithuanian colleagues in foreign countries. According to her student Butrimas, Rimantienė amazed the local and foreign restoration specialists with her professional knowledge (Butrimas, 2016, 20). The very presence of perfectly restored artifacts from Šventoji and other sites at the National Museum of Lithuania is a testament to Rimantienė’s professionalism and organizational skills.

A few years ago, Marek Zvelebil, a British archaeologist, visited the State University of New York at Buffalo where I am a full-time professor. He planned to give a lecture about important archaeological excavations in Europe. Before starting his lecture, he announced the lecture was going to be about Šventoji and spoke obsessively about it for forty-five minutes, emphasizing its significance as a site of interest for archaeologists from around the world.

In 2002, I dedicated my book titled, “European Prehistory a Survey” to two great female Lithuanian archaeologists, Rimutė Rimantienė and Marija Gimbutas. I argue that Rimutė Rimantienė, the doyenne of Lithuanian archaeologists, and her classmate, Marija Gimbutas, enriched European archaeology (Milišauskas, 2002).

Latvian archaeologist Ilze Loze described Rimantienė, as “A colleague who deserves to be not only respected but also loved [...] for her loyal friendship, because she could always put her own work aside if her colleagues needed any help. Her responsiveness, humanity, benevolence, the warmth of her heart characterizes Rimutė as a person, and her firmness, perseverance, drive, [and] iron discipline defines her as a scientist” (Butrimas, 2016, 22).

In 2020, Rimantienė celebrated her 100th birthday. She passed away two years later and was buried next to her husband Juozas in the Antakalnis

cemetery in Vilnius. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, announced that the country had lost a great scholar who was one of the creators of modern Lithuanian archaeology.

She is survived by her two sons Gytis and Augis, and her daughter Dovilė. Her death is a great loss to Lithuanian and European archaeology. Rimantienė's impressive discoveries at Šventoji and other sites are well-known among her European peers. Her synthetic contributions to prehistory will endure for a long time. Her accessible scientific writing style makes for an easy read. Even if new generations apply modern methods of interpreting old material excavated by Rimantienė (Piličiauskas, 2018), her explanation of archaeology's mission remains front and center. Keeping secrets of the past at the back of our minds, mindful of the fact that we will never fully understand them, was essentially her life motto. The demise of Rimutė Rimantienė marks the end of an era for giant archeologists.

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