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## The Communist Way: a Look upon Soviet Archaeology in Occupied Latvia

### Abstract

This article examines the history of archaeology in Latvia during the Soviet occupation (1940–1941; 1944–1991), trying to understand the consequences brought in the field of archaeology by the single-party led experiment of communism. The research is based on archival studies and uses the historical method, source criticism and historiography. Author explains the nature of the prescribed theoretical and methodological guidelines as well as actual implications of the ‘communist way’ in archaeology. The article challenges the common belief that archaeology and prehistory were ideologically freer than other branches of history during the Soviet era.

**Keywords:** *Communism, Marxism, history of archaeology, archaeological thought, Latvia, Soviet Union*

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# Komunistyczna droga: spojrzenie na sowiecką archeologię na okupowanej Łotwie

## Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje historię archeologii na Łotwie podczas okupacji sowieckiej (1940–1941; 1944–1991), próbując zrozumieć konsekwencje, jakie na polu archeologii przyniósł jednopartyjny eksperyment komunizmu. Badania opierają się na studiach archiwalnych z wykorzystaniem metody historycznej, krytyki źródłowej i historiografii. Autorka wyjaśnia, jakie były zalecane wytyczne teoretyczne i metodologiczne, a także rzeczywiste implikacje „komunistycznej drogi” w archeologii. Artykuł podważa powszechne przekonanie, że archeologia i prehistoria były ideologicznie bardziej wolne niż inne gałęzie historii w czasach sowieckich.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *komunizm, marksizm, historia archeologii, myśl archeologiczna, Łotwa, Związek Radziecki*

## 1. Historical-theoretical introduction

By studying the history of archaeological thought, one can get the impression of a unilinear line of development of the discipline and clear progress in the interpretation of archaeological data.<sup>1</sup> Trends in American anthropology and British social sciences have played major role in the history of archaeological theory. Meanwhile, in other parts of the world, there have been cases where archaeology has often developed under geopolitical and ideological rather than scientific considerations. In Latvia, the study of prehistory and archaeology has always been linked to the history department. According to Bruce Trigger (1937–2006), such local preference leads archaeologists to be interested only in the history of a specific country and people, rather than in a broader comparative perspective.<sup>2</sup> In a way, one has to agree that Latvian archaeology is indeed still operating within the cultural-historical tradition even in the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Trigger 2006, pp. 28–39, 385.

<sup>2</sup> Trigger 2006, p. 22.

century. This local tradition was broken only by the Soviet occupation period, during which the Soviet variant of Marxist thought appeared in Latvian archaeology. As Trigger places Soviet archaeology among the early functional-processual archaeology<sup>3</sup>, theoretically the ‘backward’, nationalistic archaeological thought of Latvia was rapidly modernised just thanks to the change of political power in the country. One might wonder why this presumed ‘progress’ was immediately discarded with the restoration of independence? To answer this question, it is necessary to delve deeper into the history of Latvia and its unique experience of implementing the process of ‘building of communism’.

Although ‘communist thought’ itself allegedly is quite old, the term ‘communism’, however, is rather new and has been used since the 30s-40s of the 19th century. As a political ideology, it is based on Marxist theory. The core of this theory was outlined in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which was first published by two German intellectuals Karl Heinrich Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) in London.<sup>4</sup> The *Manifesto* formulated the principle of class struggle. According to authors, an equal classless society could be created if the proletariat would seize the political power violently. Private property should be liquidated in order to become a collective property. Marx believed that bourgeoisie had unjustly concentrated capital and means of production in their hands so proletariat must forcefully expropriate it.<sup>5</sup> For Marxists culture is subordinate to economic relations. This economic determinism made culture into a class issue – culture is not apolitical.<sup>6</sup> Cultural and archaeological heritage undoubtedly had to be treated under this theoretical framework – as material goods with certain economic outcomes. This idea was very much in contrast with the pre-World War II understanding of Latvia’s archaeological heritage as a source of national pride.<sup>7</sup>

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) Marxism-Leninism was the official ideology. Marxism-Leninism (sometimes known as Stalinism), or state socialist ideology, emerged after the death

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<sup>3</sup> Trigger 2006, pp. 326–344.

<sup>4</sup> Marx; Engels 1848.

<sup>5</sup> Šiliņš 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Marx; Engels 1848, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Vasks 2015, p. 90.

of Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924). This particular reading of Marxism was founded by Joseph Stalin (1878–1953). Marxism-Leninism is based on the thesis that it is possible to build socialism in one country. Marx's original emphasis was shifted from the idea of worldwide revolution to the priority of domestic political issues. Stalin put forward the thesis that the class struggle would intensify as socialism approached and this justified the need to strengthen the repressive state apparatus and carry out mass repression. The need to modernise society became the justification for the forced industrialisation and collectivisation of agriculture, which came at the expense of the decline in the standard of living of the population, created huge disproportions in the economy in favour of heavy industry and made many sections of the population lawless slaves of the state machine.<sup>8</sup>

Philosophical speculations were codified and transferred to legislation. The single permissible theoretical approach for scientific research was Marx's – Engel's dialectical materialism. The basis of Soviet archaeology was historical materialism<sup>9</sup> proclaimed as the exclusively true scientific method.<sup>10</sup> According to it, the aim of archaeology was to research the regularities between forces of production and social relations in ancient societies.<sup>11</sup> However, the science of archaeology and its organisation was not based solely on this theory, so we cannot call this period simply by the name of historical materialism. Soviet archaeology is surprisingly multi-layered and has also colonialist, nationalist, chauvinist and other aspects that are not often fully explored in the histories of science.

Due to communist occupation, Latvia was forced to adapt the Marxist worldview. Time from 1940 until 1941, with a short break of Nazi occupation, and 1944 to 1991 in the history of Latvia is generally referred to as Soviet or communist occupation period. The Republic of Latvia was illegally declared Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (Latvian SSR), annexed by USSR and a totalitarian communist occupation regime was established for almost 50 years.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rozenvalds 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Artsikhovskii 1955, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Strazdiņš 1952, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Artsikhovskii 1955, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Saeima 2005.

The Soviet period is still not clearly assessed in Latvian archaeology. Archaeologist Andrejs Vasks has proposed to divide it into two smaller periods – from 1945 to 1959 and from 1960 to 1990. The first period in his view is characterised by the integration of Latvian archaeology into the ideological and organisational system of the USSR, the emergence of a new generation of archaeologists and the resumption of archaeological excavations, while the second period is introduced by the beginning of excavations on an unprecedented scale in the territories of the huge construction projects that were being developed as a result of rapid industrialisation. This kept almost all Latvian archaeologists busy in the field for a long time, and there was physically not enough time for theoretical contemplation.<sup>13</sup>

The author of this article does not really agree with such a division, because it could not be said that something had changed significantly in terms of theory. In any case, with Stalin's death, Marxism was not abandoned by science. For instance, even in the 1980s, it was discussed in internal meetings of the Institute of History that, for example, the cult sites in the territory of Latvia were worth studying because of the lack of a Marxist interpretation of the problem,<sup>14</sup> given that this is a very important argument for scientific objectivity.

If we look back at Latvian archaeology shortly before the 1940 occupation, we see a picture where archaeology is a science of national importance and deserves a certain respect in the eyes of the government and the public. In the period of authoritarian rule in Latvia of the 1930s, archaeological and ethnographic heritage served as important cornerstones of Latvian identity, especially in contrast to the art and urban planning produced by the hated German conquerors.<sup>15</sup>

The archaeological sector was made up of people who considered themselves Latvian patriots. In order to crush this very well acknowledged nationalism and possible ideological resistance, the Soviet authorities kept archaeologists under their radar. The rapid reorganisation of cultural policy under the USSR system and the introduction of Marxism-Leninism into practice affected archaeological science and monument protection legislation as early as 1940. Latvia's archaeological family has never been

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<sup>13</sup> Vasks 2016, pp. 8–9.

<sup>14</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 517, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Vasks 2015.

large. It was a few dozen people, and it was all based on personalities. In the existing institutions disloyal employees were identified and replaced. With the war, the discipline's key figures were scattered. Francis Balodis (1882–1947) and Voldemārs Ģinters (1899–1979) themselves emigrated to Sweden in 1944. Eduards Šturms (1895–1959) fled to Germany, Hugo Riekstiņš (1904–1998) to the USA. Rauls Šnore (1901–1962) was deported (1944), and the head of the Archaeology Department of the History Museum Elvīra Šnore (1905–1996) was replaced by Lūcija Vankina (1908–1989) when she returned from her unsuccessful attempt to flee the country. Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942) was arrested and later killed, Ādolfs Karnups (1904–1973) was sentenced to death, which was commuted to imprisonment in Astrakhan. Many others were repressed.<sup>16</sup> In terms of personalities, Latvian archaeology lost ground, and very few remained in place. There are certainly many who are not really identified at all, who had studied, worked in excavations, who had planned to spend their lives in archaeology during the interwar period, but were simply forced to abandon their future plans. During the Soviet occupation, a whole new generation of archaeologists emerged, where, interestingly, women played a much bigger role (this was very much the post-war reality in many fields). With the Soviet regime's penetration into all spheres of life, the few researchers who remained from the previous generation, could not avoid re-evaluating, deconstructing and denying everything that had been done before.<sup>17</sup>

What remained mostly unchanged in Latvia after the end of the war, at the beginning of the second Soviet occupation, was primarily the archaeological material – monuments and museum collections (museum collections looted by the Nazis were returned to Latvia in 1946<sup>18</sup>). And here was work for the ideology of the victors of the war. How can one and the same thing be explained in completely opposite ways? How to make Latvian prehistory Soviet, more communist, and explain away the whole Western orientation? It quickly became clear that there was an urgent need to produce new texts, to find the 'right' archaeological evidence and to draw the 'right' conclusions.

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<sup>16</sup> Vasks 2016, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Cimermane 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Vasks 2016, pp. 7–8.

As soon as 1940s there already were propaganda texts and guidelines made for Latvian archaeologists. The question remains, to what extent Latvian archaeology was actually Marxist or communist during these years? With the restoration of Latvian independence, efforts began to get rid of Marxist ideology in science<sup>19</sup>, but was it successful?

For now, in Latvia this topic is a barely considered research problem, since the current historiography of Latvian archaeology deals little with theoretical questions and ideological implications of the regime. The relevance of this issue, however, lies in a fact that 30 years have passed since the collapse of USSR and generational change give us an opportunity and a sufficient distance for critical examination of the period, which still has many unanswered questions.

Notably, this dark period of European history often seems to be disregarded or overlooked in Western historiography. Within European archaeology, the production of knowledge is conducted differently according to political and historical experiences. As Western Marxists lean towards critical heritage studies alongside ‘reactionary populism’ and neo-liberalism as the trending issues that demand deconstruction<sup>20</sup>, similar disappointment with capitalist ideology affects archaeological thought in some ex-communist countries.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile Latvian archaeology is quite resigned towards theories too reminiscent of the dogmatic Marxism once experienced.<sup>22</sup> Soviet propaganda managed to convince many Western intellectuals.<sup>23</sup> Some see the dissolution of Soviet Union as an unwanted outbreak of ethnic nationalism.<sup>24</sup> The experience of the Baltic States is different. Current studies suggest evaluating Soviet regime in post-colonial context.<sup>25</sup> Estonian archaeologist Priit Ligi (1958–1994) harshly wrote:

It is highly typical for a Western archaeologist to speak about the damages brought by the Third Reich while completely forgetting the former Soviet empire (1993, p. 31).

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<sup>19</sup> Šnē 2002, p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> Ruibal, González, Boado 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Dragoman, Oanță-Marghitu 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Sne 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Trigger 2006, p. 326.

<sup>24</sup> Kohl 1998, p. 224.

<sup>25</sup> Paberžytė, Costopoulos 2009, p. 96.

According to Ligi

In the West, Soviet archaeology was often seen in much too positive light (e.g. Lamberg-Karlovsky 1989; Trigger 1989). This was partly due to language barriers and partly a product of naive ‘Marxist solidarity’ (Ibid.).

Russian archaeologist Leo Klejn (1927–2019) has also pointed out the lack of general understanding in the West about the nature of Soviet archaeology.<sup>26</sup> Soviet archaeology tends to be understood as a Russian or Muscovite archaeology<sup>27</sup> ignoring the regional differences and individual efforts made in each Soviet republic. The ways in which occupied countries comprehend their history also differ. Even if the experiences at that time were more similar, today the cultural memory differ and the place of ‘Soviet story’ in each post-Soviet country’s history can be radically different. While Latvian archaeologists seem to avoid Marxism at any form, Romanians, for example, seek to separate Soviet so-called *vulgar* Marxism from a Western approach as somewhat better.<sup>28</sup> Taking Romania as an example, one has to wonder whether the applicability of Marx’s ideas in archaeological practice does not receive too much credit in such cases, benefiting from the problems of the economy and socially ideological disappointment in capitalism.

Deconstructing the Slavic ethnic studies and state propaganda is a separate theme in some post-Soviet countries.<sup>29</sup> Iurie Stamati concentrates on pan-Slavism and Russian nationalism as main elements of Moldovan Soviet archaeology. According to his research, Moldovan Soviet archaeologists did not apply Marxist or Marxist-inspired methodology at all.<sup>30</sup> In-depth research has also been carried out on East German and Polish Slavic archaeology focussing on simplified applications of ethnic-linguistic markers to archaeological data with all its ideological connotations.<sup>31</sup> The latest developments in Slavic issues were also discussed at the European Association of Archaeologists

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<sup>26</sup> Klejn 2012, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Kohl 1998, p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Dragoman, Oanta-Marghitu 2006, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Stamati 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Stamati 2019, pp. 243–244.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Kluger 2020.



Annual Meeting 2021<sup>32</sup>, proving that all of this is still present after the end of the Soviet Union.

Despite the fact that from time-to-time individual studies on Soviet archaeology and its manifestations in different places are published<sup>33</sup>, the author of this article has not yet come across a single complete and honest study of the Latvian experience. Nor do we see in-depth analyses or challenging scholarly debates of Soviet archaeology as a whole and the impact of Marx on it in the global discourse on the history of archaeology in recent years, as the case is, for example, with the historiography of Third Reich archaeology and the sins of Gustaf Kossinna (1858–1931).<sup>34</sup>

Typically, internationally circulated Latvian archaeological historiographies tend to have toned-down arguments compared to what is written in Latvian.<sup>35</sup> This article is intended as a local case study of a specific – Latvian variant of Soviet archaeology. So far, Latvian archaeologists have not been eager to express in-depth stories of positive or negative experiences with communism. Similar sensitivity towards Soviet period can be seen in Lithuania.<sup>36</sup> Similarly to Czechoslovakia Latvian academics have little experience with constructive self-criticism. Shame as an aspect could also be relevant.<sup>37</sup>

As the archive sources and scientific literature show, in many official documents, monographs or publications the ideological slogans, quotations from Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin or other ‘prominent archaeologists’ was an obligation. The proverb went that paper could handle anything. Today scientists who worked under the Soviet rule say that it meant nothing to them, they just wanted to do their job paying little or even no contribution to the regime. Was it just pretending, conjuring innocent forms of speech in the introduction and conclusion of the text?<sup>38</sup> Was it only a question how well one mastered the ability to speak between the lines<sup>39</sup>; or rather a deeper influence of this political

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<sup>32</sup> Reichenbach, Milosavljević, Broka-Lāce 2021.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Lozny 2017.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Arnold 1990; Arnold 2006; Cornell, Borelius, Kresa, Backlund 2008.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Mūgurevics 1999 versus Zemītis 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Paberžytė, Costopoulos 2009, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> Krekovič, Bača 2013, p. 262.

<sup>38</sup> Dragoman, Oanta-Marghitu 2006, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Lang 2006, p. 32

ideology can be traced in Latvian archaeology? Looking back on science in Soviet Union, the statement that archaeology was a safe place to hide from ideology<sup>40</sup>, does not make sense. Scientific work under totalitarian regimes always leads to discussion about the nature of ‘acceptable’ professional practice and ethical standards or compromises.<sup>41</sup>

The aim of this paper is to re-evaluate the history of Latvian archaeology during the Soviet occupation period, thus initiating academic discussion among Latvian as well as foreign researchers about the outcomes of ‘communist way’ or approaches in archaeology. The term ‘communist’ instead of materialist etc. archaeology has been chosen in this paper to emphasize the influence of the Communist Party’s one-party dictatorship regime on the scientific processes of the time under study. The Soviet occupation regime in Latvia is generally understood as the ‘communist era’. Archaeological science in the Latvian SSR was subordinated to the official ideology. Regardless of how much of the idealised socio-economic order described in Marxist theory was actually achieved, the author considers it indisputable that the ruling ideology in the Soviet Union was communism, and that a communist regime existed on Latvian territory from the 1940s until 1991. The communist state in Latvia was characterised by the following features: nationalisation of land and other resources, collectivisation, all political parties except the Communist Party were banned, a centralised planned economy prevailed, a proletariat was created, the agrarian state model was replaced by heavy industry, there was no freedom of gathering, strike, or travel, and the state carried out extensive censorship.<sup>42</sup> It could not be said that all the expropriations, social transformations and violence against reactionaries in the Soviet Union did not align with Marx’s ideas on how to build a communist world.<sup>43</sup> This article focuses on the ideological aspect and the author believes that the discussion about how ‘real’ Soviet communism and Marxism were<sup>44</sup> is irrelevant and in fact tries to downplay the active role of Marxism in Soviet crimes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> E.g. Vasks 1999, pp. 7–8; Kōnsa 2006, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Tarlow 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Strods 2005.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Marx 1887, p. 542.

<sup>44</sup> Resnick, Wolff 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Saeima 2005; Courtois 1999.

There are different approaches for how to address this period, as almost every country has chosen a different way of talking about it politically and historiographically.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the experience of other post-Soviet countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic States chose to follow a strict anti-communist path after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Politically, Latvia considered decommunization to be an essential factor in returning to the community of democratic countries. Since the beginning of the independence movement, the communist regime has been consistently recognised here as criminal and all remnants of this ideology as something to be eradicated. While in Germany the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is seen as an integral part of the history of the united Germany, in the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia) the communist regime is associated only with the occupying power. It was not created and maintained by the Baltic peoples themselves, as was the case elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, and responsibility for the regime's crimes is therefore claimed from the successor to the occupying power, the Russian Federation<sup>47</sup> and individuals who collaborated with the Communist Party and other occupation structures.<sup>48</sup> Following the Latvian historiographical tradition, the author has chosen to use such terms as 'communism', 'Marxism' and 'Soviet' as synonyms in this article.

The research is based on archival studies by using historical method, source criticism and historiography. A large preparatory study for this article was done in the archive of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences, the leading institution of archaeology in Soviet Latvia, which is stored in the State Archive of Latvia<sup>49</sup>. The material is mostly previously unpublished.

In this article the meaning and practice of Soviet archaeology will be explained: who were the main actors; what kind of ideas were approved as correct, and what was considered wrong; what new ideas and theoretical approaches archaeologists had to learn? What kind of implications the regime had on scientific life? In the end some reflections on the remains of the communist experiment are given.

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<sup>46</sup> Cerūzis 2015, p. 326.

<sup>47</sup> Cerūzis 2015, pp. 340–341, 360.

<sup>48</sup> Strods 2005, pp. 226–227.

<sup>49</sup> LVA, corpus 2371, description 1.

The article deals relatively extensively with the period of the introduction and implementation of the Soviet system, the 1940s-50s. Due to the word limit, the author has not touched so much on the Soviet decline phase, but overall the sources show that despite Stalin's death and many other societal changes over time, science, including the field of archaeology, remained under the control of the official ideology and the Communist Party until the last days of the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> People who lived and worked with the Soviet system say that it was so deeply refined that it worked almost naturally. Everyone knew what they could and could not say.

## 2. What was the Soviet archaeology like?

In terms of methodology, Soviet archaeology began to differ significantly from all other archaeologies around the second half of the 1920s. They sought to make the study of archaeological materials relevant to society by linking it to the Marxist discipline of history. An essential part of the process was to harshly and negatively criticize the existing authorities of the discipline. The discipline underwent a total reorganisation, and archaeology was even renamed 'the history of material culture'.<sup>51</sup> It seems that the original version of Soviet archaeology was even more revolutionary than the one that was implemented, however some of the innovations just did not work.

When Latvian archaeology 'joined' the Soviet archaeological system (around the 1940s), Soviet archaeology (Soviet Union existed from 1922) had already undergone quite a few changes following tense ideological and political struggles within the country.<sup>52</sup> This formation period is aptly described by Leo Klejn:

Disruption of normal conditions for scholarly work came to be the norm, along with new repression. Many archaeologists perished ... others languished in camps and exile ... It became very dangerous to hold a scientific post ... denunciations of professional opponents and rivals ... (Klejn 2012, pp. 27–28).

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<sup>50</sup> Mugurevics 1999, p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> Bulkin, Klejn, Lebedev 1982, pp. 274–275.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Trigger 2006, pp. 326–344; Klejn 2012.

World War II and the Soviet Union's repressions against Latvians in general did reduce the number of practicing archaeologists, thus inducing heavy losses to the discipline as a whole. Only few archaeologists from independent Latvia continued to work in the discipline.<sup>53</sup>

The creation of Marxist approach in Soviet archaeology was not entirely the work of Communist Party, as Bruce Trigger points out – it was not providing archaeologists with specific guidelines and the officials had small understanding of how it should look like.<sup>54</sup> There were several attempts to interpret archaeology in Marxist or communist terms.

The most frequently used Marx's quote on archaeology was this:

Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic forms of society, as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not the articles made, but how they are made, and by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs. Instruments of labour not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labour has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions under which that labour is carried on (Marx 1887, p. 128).

Historical materialism argued that history follows unbreakable order driven by the development of technology, which causes changes in production etc.<sup>55</sup> The reality of archaeological excavations and artefacts did not always yield such clear-cut explanations. This theory was based on abstract *a priori* Hegelian dialectical schemata with little possibility of alignment with facts on ground.<sup>56</sup>

In the meantime, Soviet archaeology boasted about its interdisciplinarity and ability to combine wide range of sources:

The Soviet archaeologist has become a historian! (...) He is no more an archaeologist in a narrow sense (Šnore 1952, p. 31)!

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<sup>53</sup> Vasks 2016, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Trigger 2006, p. 330.

<sup>55</sup> Kolakowski 2005, p. 456.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

Soviet science had to seek causes of societal development in the conditions of material life, the way material goods were produced, studying the forces and relations of production. In addition to the formal processing of the material, the task of the Soviet archaeologist was to analyse the archaeological material as an important source of socio-economic history.<sup>57</sup>

Klejn explains ‘the reconstruction of all aspects of the historical past’ can be seen as the main goal of archaeology which positioned itself as a ‘specialised history’ – ‘archaeological history’ or ‘history with a spade’. It is possible that the still formalized understanding of Latvian archaeology as a branch of history that studies the past of humanity based on material sources<sup>58</sup> can be considered a Soviet heritage.

The necessary historical information was to be extracted from archaeological sources by applying common sense and the general theoretical apparatus of history.<sup>59</sup> In Soviet Union history was not considered an actual science until it accepted the schematic regularities of the development of society.<sup>60</sup>

Historical materialism procured a complex methodology encompassing history, archaeology, and ethnography.<sup>61</sup> Soviet archeology was strongly opposed to the English school of functionalism and the psychological trend in the United States – it was considered anti-historical, colonial. In the meantime, the USSR were proudly studying ‘complex class struggles’<sup>62</sup> with its universal scientific toolkit. It was definitely not easy for Latvian archaeologists (who at the beginning barely knew Russian!) to adjust themselves to the new system. Archive sources show that they were sent to Moscow and Leningrad (currently Saint Petersburg) to learn how to organize work.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> Vasks 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Klejn 2012, p. 62–63.

<sup>60</sup> Anonymous 1951, pp. 120–121; Šnore 1952, p. 35.

<sup>61</sup> LVA, corpus, 2371, description 1, file 40, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 11, p. 14.

### 3. The leaders of thought

At the beginning there was no clear sense of duties and subordination relations regarding what rules to observe and who has the right to make archaeological excavations.<sup>64</sup> With a decree of 7th February of 1946 (No. 94) made by Council of People's Commissars of the Latvian SSR, Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences (until 1959 – Institute of History and Material Culture) was established.<sup>65</sup> During the Soviet occupation this was one of the most important institutions engaged in archaeology. Archaeology was subordinate to the Sector of the History of Material Culture.

Since this was such an important institution, politically reliable people were recruited. For example, from 1946, the scientific secretary of the Institute of History, later vice-director and then director, was Aleksandrs Drīzulis (1920–2006), a historian who graduated from the Moscow Institute of History and Archives in 1942, who has held leading positions in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Latvian SSR and was chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR (1985–1989). One of the most prominent historians of the Institute in the early years was Jānis Zutis (1893–1962), a Marxist-Leninist scholar and a winner of the Stalin's Prize, who had remigrated from Moscow. Both of these historians were not archaeologists, but they were entitled to write on ideologically sensitive topics. It is likely that several of the Institute's researchers did not actually have the necessary education and professional qualifications<sup>66</sup> and that they were in fact serving as agents of the state security organs.

However, the Department of Archaeology became the workplace of many archaeologists who also conducted most of the excavation work and oversaw most publications concerning Latvian archaeology.

An even more centralized system was planned, since the Institute wanted to take over the Central History Museum, but apparently, the Museum resisted and continued doing its own excavations.<sup>67</sup> However, monument protection did fall under the Institute of History as a specific

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<sup>64</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 15, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Šuvajevs 2000.

<sup>67</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 11; file 40, p. 9.

branch.<sup>68</sup> Archival research shows that Latvian archaeologists had worked on the draft law about heritage protection, but the Soviet Union came up with regulations for all federal countries so the local law was never implemented.<sup>69</sup>

The very first five-year plan of the Institute states that the Institute of History and Material Culture History considers the instructions given by Stalin in his speech of February 9th, 1946 to be the basis of its work.<sup>70</sup> Scientific work was carried out in the field of history, archaeology and ethnography, as well as an additional sector of auxiliary historical sciences was organized. The plan states that the systematic study of the problems of Latvian history from the point of view of dialectical and historical materialism must be started from scratch, and that the history of Latvia according Marxist viewpoint does not exist yet. Consequently, in the five-year plan the Institute included a wide range of collective work on the Latvian history program and the development of a systematic course in Latvian history for the needs of educational institutions and the public. The plan envisages the study of yet unexplained or less elaborated problems and periods of Latvia's history, paying special attention to issues of 'topical significance'. Much attention has been paid to the 'centuries-long struggle of Latvian peasants and city dwellers against the ancient enemies of Latvian people – German slaveholders'. The work plan of the Sector of Material Culture History provided a wide-ranging study of the Latvian people's relations with the Russian people.<sup>71</sup>

Trending archaeological problems in 1946 covered three main directions: the research of material culture of Eastern Latvia and relations with Slavic peoples in the Iron Age, carrying out archaeological excavations in Latvia and investigations of Latvian hillforts.<sup>72</sup>

The development of the first topic was entrusted to Elvīra Šnore. The intention to study the issue of ethnic boundaries of Latvian tribes, material culture and relations with Slavic peoples in the Late Iron Age was motivated due to lack of previous research. This scientific study had to provide material that would allow to 'properly resolve' issues

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<sup>68</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 11, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, pp. 2, 6.

<sup>70</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 1, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> LVA, f. 2371, apr. 1, l. 1, lp. 4.



concerning the degree of feudal development in Latvia before the invasion of German conquerors. During the overall research program, several archaeological excavations had to be conducted alongside studies of existing museum materials and their systematization. The plan included elaborating a critique of the earlier historiography, thus ‘revealing incorrect and tendentious assessments of ancient Latvian culture’. Two monographs were planned to be published in this research area in the period of 1947–1950.<sup>73</sup>

Institute started its work with huge plans for archaeological excavations in Latvia. The new regime saw expansion of excavation work as extremely important.<sup>74</sup> To study the relations of Latgalians with the Slavs, already in 1948 around 40 burial grounds were excavated in 8 different places.<sup>75</sup> Nukši burial ground was fully explored – in 1947 and 1948 together – 218 graves were uncovered, but the main outcome of this was the opportunity to ‘study the property and social differentiation of society in this era’.<sup>76</sup> The individual traits or deeper understanding of past was not necessary.

It is also worth noting that the topic *Investigation of Latvian hillforts*, which was the most widely studied archaeological topic of independent Latvia, became one of the main goals also during the Soviet occupation. On the one hand, it is self-evident, because the hillforts are one of the most numerous and remarkable archaeological monuments in Latvia. On the other hand, they were perceived as symbols of power and ideologically significant sites. Soviets had to dismiss such blasphemous ideas as hillfort ‘lines of defence’<sup>77</sup> against Slavic invaders in Eastern Latvia and find evidence of centuries long friendship between Baltic and Slavic peoples instead.<sup>78</sup> Archaeological investigation had a very clear purpose – to legitimize and justify the Russian presence in the territory of Latvia. Therefore, excavation sites were carefully selected.<sup>79</sup>

The fact that the choice of research objects during Soviet era was selective is evident in the criticism of previous research. Archaeological

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<sup>73</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 1, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 35, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Mugerēvičs 2010, p. 21; Vasks 2015, pp. 97–98.

<sup>78</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 2, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

monuments had been studied from the point of view of their protection, the choice of objects had been random, and they had been studied fragmentarily.<sup>80</sup>

As it was later revealed, Soviet archaeology understood as researched only a completely excavated, destroyed object. Starting from 1940s the task of Soviet archaeologists was to carry out systematic research of hillforts and settlements. Burial grounds had to be fully uncovered. It was considered a complex method, with which it would be possible to study the communal production forces and social relations in the territory of the LSSR until the 13th century.<sup>81</sup> At some point, we can see traces of positivist approach here: only by digging everything up, we will achieve the goal.

Separately from archaeological research, Institute of History particularly highlighted the topic *Development of feudalism and class struggle in Latvia during the period of serfdom*. This problem had a trending significance and the closest relation to the assessment German invasion during 13th century. According to the new agenda, questions about the farmers' mass struggle against serfdom were insufficiently answered and wrongly highlighted previously. In addition, it was considered important to depict the main stages of feudalism and the development of class struggle in Latvia during the period of serfdom<sup>82</sup> (until the 18th century, when the Russian Empire invaded).

#### 4. What's right/ what's wrong?

Throughout its existence, Soviet archaeology was characterized by do's and don'ts, which distinguished scientific views from non-scientific ones. The researcher's nationality, circle of relatives and friends, financial situation or political affiliation were important factors in judging his/ her scientific capacity. The main postulates allowed by Soviet archaeology can be traced back to sources from the 40s to the 50s. After that, the consolidation of archaeological thought followed, with theoretical issues only addressed during controversial cases.

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<sup>80</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 30.

<sup>82</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 1, p. 7.

At first the main focus were on fighting the ‘bourgeois nationalist’ thought. All previous studies of Latvian archaeology were dismissed as narrow-mindedly bourgeois, tendentious and falsifying.<sup>83</sup> The Latvian school of archaeology was called descriptively confined, one-sided and biased as it was mainly concerned with determining the chronology of artefacts or types of graves following the ‘formal typological method’.<sup>84</sup> Soviet archaeologist had to pay more attention to linguistic research<sup>85</sup> because it was considered that archaeological typology studies did not show the kinship and close relationships between Baltic and Slavic tribes. Nationalistic archaeologists in their opinion had purposely ignored these linguistic similarities.<sup>86</sup>

In 1947 Institute of History had put on its agenda a research project *Fascist [sic] conception of history in Latvian archaeology*.<sup>87</sup> However, one of the very first publications, which Institute of History released, was the collective monograph called *Bourgeois nationalists – counterfeiterers of Latvian history*.<sup>88</sup> Introduction states that

(...) the teachings of Marx – Engels – Lenin – Stalin have such power because they are the only correct and truly scientific teachings (Strazdiņš 1952, p. 3).

This regime was considered the most scientifically and theoretically sound model of society, pairing science with ethical categories. The lack of ‘truthfulness’ and ‘rightness’ were the common accusations against any non-Marxist scientific statement.

The so-called Latvian nationalists or ‘bourgeois nationalists’ were accused of not recognizing Slavophile doctrine that Russian people have a mission to save Europe from its doom. Historians were seen as propagators of the significance of Western civilization in the history of Latvia.<sup>89</sup> Aleksandrs Drīzulis wrote that:

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<sup>83</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>85</sup> Artsikhovskii 1955, pp. 14–15.

<sup>86</sup> Zutis 1948, pp. 35–36.

<sup>87</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 13, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Strazdiņš 1952.

<sup>89</sup> Švābe 1958, pp. 4–10.

Nationalists are orienting the Latvian nation and its development towards the rotten Western capitalism and degrading bourgeois culture (Drīzulis 1952, p. 42).

The question, however, is whether this hatred of Latvian nationalism was ideologically justified as a Marxist idea, or whether it was a classical imperial Russian chauvinism from the 19th century? Since the ‘founding fathers’ Marx and Engels didn’t give a clear theory of the national question, it remained an unsolved theoretical and practical difficulty for their followers.<sup>90</sup> It is also notable that Marx systematically looked down on Russia and expected revolution more likely to occur in developed countries like Britain. Regarding ancient civilizations, he was little interested in others than Greece.<sup>91</sup> It is however possible that Soviet Union saw itself as historical nation in opposition to the small Latvia tasked with a non-historical mission – to be the subject of greater powers.

The Soviet obsession with **ethnicity** in prehistory was suspicious, since Marxism aimed to reflect on class not nation as the main explanatory unit. The research so far confirms that:

Though the Marxism which was practised in Soviet archaeology is often called dogmatic, there were clearly cases where the dogmatic Marxist scheme of development of prehistoric society came into conflict with Russian national romantic ideas and, consequently, ‘revisionism’ was immediately possible and Marxist views had to take second place (Ligi 1993, p. 37).

Legitimizing landownership became one of the main goals of archaeology as a science. Similar emergence of ethnic studies is witnessed in Lithuania and Estonia as a specific feature of Soviet archaeology.<sup>92</sup> In every research one of the most important themes was the ethnicity<sup>93</sup>, Latvian anthropology<sup>94</sup>, anthropological type determination<sup>95</sup> and the class struggle between anthropological groups<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Kolakowski 2005, pp. 424–425.

<sup>91</sup> Kolakowski 2005, p. 425.

<sup>92</sup> Oras 2012.

<sup>93</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 296, pp. 29, 31–35.

<sup>94</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 180, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 210, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 344, p. 29.

The methodology of ethnic studies paradoxically was the same as for cultural-historical archaeology, equating archaeological cultures with later ethnic groups without deeper theoretical discussions.<sup>97</sup> However, even today Latvian archaeology does not question the complex and scientific approach<sup>98</sup> of Soviet ethnogenesis studies. From a wider perspective, questions of ethnicity in archaeology always tell more about the questioner than the research object. The need to know who lived where comes with the need to confirm the existing division of the land. Historiography of Latvian archaeology in this case has taken many turns. The Soviet occupation forces had to fight the previously created national ideology. Scientists of free Latvia were accused of not paying attention to the clarification of the stages of development of society; they were supposedly searching for the Latvian national characteristics in prehistorical times instead. The opinion that Scandinavian and Germanic influences had been crucial in Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age cultural development in the territory of Latvia was considered wrong. For example, according to Marxists tin and copper – which aren't naturally available in the territory of Latvia – during Bronze Age were mainly imported from South-East, primarily mentioning Southern Russia.<sup>99</sup> It is astonishing that until the late 1980s, the exaggeration of the importance of cultural and historical contacts between the Baltic peoples and the Slavs was still a hot topic, which was especially important to highlight at the few international conferences that Latvian researchers could attend.<sup>100</sup> However, today researchers on the contrary would emphasize the meaning of South-Western trade relations with Scandinavia.<sup>101</sup>

Soviet archaeologist had to prove that previously favoured migrationist ideas were wrong and racist. Changes in material culture could be explained with diffusionism and extreme evolutionism.<sup>102</sup> Šnore condemned Francis Balodis propagated idea about change in material culture caused by migration.<sup>103</sup> Generally, Soviet archaeology was not

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<sup>97</sup> Lang 2006, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> Zemītis 2021, p. 34.

<sup>99</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 645, p. 34.

<sup>101</sup> Vasks 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Zutis 1948, pp. 9–12.

<sup>103</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 33.

entirely against migration theories, but it did not like the idea of conquest and invasion. The process of peaceful assimilation in the prehistoric period was more desirable under the influence of current historical processes. It was also important to stress the development of local forces of production<sup>104</sup>, because, according to historical materialism and Marxism in general, there had to be material preconditions to pave the way for communism.

#### 4.1. The repentance

During the first years Soviet science in all fields operated according to the following principle:

The task of the research is to reveal and refute the views of Latvian bourgeois science on the mentioned issue, thus providing a discussion of the topic from a Marxist-Leninist point of view.<sup>105</sup>

To unmask, debunk, discredit or publicly redeem the sins of wrong thoughts of your colleagues, teachers and oneself seems to be the very first thing that regime asked of its scientists in order to pass the ritual of initiation into this pseudo-religious ideology. This strong passion to search for moral, ethical truth becomes clear only when we look at Soviet science in the context of its relationship with religion. All makes sense when we view the books of Soviet history as religious texts. Estonian scholar Jaan Undusk reveals Soviet history as a sacred history. Undusk has drawn parallels between medieval breviaries and Stalin's book *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*<sup>106</sup> as a rhetorical example of how one should write about history. Undusk shows the similarity of Soviet historiography to religious literature.<sup>107</sup> Slavonic-Russian people thus emerge as the 'chosen people' in dominant historical narrative to fulfil the prophecies of almighty communist saints.

A distinctively 'religious' example of public confession was given by Estonian archaeologist Harri Moora (1900–1968). Moora had long scientific relations with Latvian archaeologists before Russian

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>105</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 2, p. 19.

<sup>106</sup> Anonymous 1951.

<sup>107</sup> Undusks 2016, pp. 139–141.

occupation, but he also was one of the very first to introduce the ‘new archaeology’ for wider public. In his work about primitive community and early feudal society in the territory of Latvian SSR Moora tries to rewrite the history on new terms. First oddity in this work is the unscientific intolerance towards previous researchers<sup>108</sup>, including self-criticism.<sup>109</sup> He publicly declared his previous work to be unscientific and based on idealistic perception of history. He admitted that previously he did not understand how the development of production types accorded to different material goods form the basis of historical process. He had perceived archaeological monuments formally – as do all bourgeois archaeologists. The researcher also admitted that he had disproportionately exaggerated Western influences in his works, while reducing the role of the East Slavs. Moora also confessed that he had treated ethnic phenomena un-historically. In the end, he categorically condemned his gross anti-popular mistakes, promising subsequently to conduct only a scientific Marxist-Leninist history of the Baltic nations.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4.2. The pressure

The presence of official ideology in Soviet Union was all-pervasive. Archaeologists had to spend their time studying Marxist ideology in order to raise the ideological and political consciousness.<sup>111</sup> Along with the scientific qualification, one had to keep up with the political trends.<sup>112</sup> Reports tell us that the archaeologist’s level of indoctrination and participation in Communist’s Party was never particularly satisfactory.<sup>113</sup> In some sources, there is a condemnation that scientists themselves have not been quite socially active and have never given ideological lectures, only listened to guest lecturers, so they were forced to prepare these lectures themselves.<sup>114</sup> Some did involve themselves in ideological activities more.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Moora 1952, pp. 5–8.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 3, p. 15; file 27; file 210, p. 6; file 250, p. 4.

<sup>112</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 9, p. 10; file 23, p. 27.

<sup>113</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 23, p. 1-3.

<sup>114</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 11, p. 12.

To improve scientific and ideological qualification the archaeological sector staff had to report regularly on achievements in their field across the whole USSR.<sup>116</sup> An example shows how the regime promoted self-censorship in 1948 with a resolution of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Analysing the state of Soviet archaeological science, the resolution found that, in addition to significant achievements, there were also major problems: there are no sincere Bolshevistic criticisms and self-criticisms; archaeologists do not raise fundamentally important issues as the main directions of research; self-humiliation in front of bourgeois science is observed; archaeologists are not working hard enough to expose the latest views of Western bourgeois archaeologists; due to the insufficient development of the new archaeological methodology, the bourgeois typological research method continues to live on in the discipline etc.<sup>117</sup>

The formalist and idealist ‘Montelian approach’<sup>118</sup> was formally discouraged in Soviet archaeology, but in reality it was extremely hard not to use standard archaeological methodology when the ideological one did not provide a comprehensive way to obtain necessary information. Nevertheless, a scientific work could be denounced if, for example, foreign authors were widely quoted with no corresponding criticism of them.<sup>119</sup>

Well-known textbooks such as *Introduction to Archaeology* by Artemiy Artsikhovskiy (1947) were also not immune to criticism. Artsikhovskiy’s book was accused for apolitical tone and lack of polemics against reactionary theories. The author did not emphasize such issues as the socio-economic characteristics of the society and ethnogenesis enough.<sup>120</sup>

Vladislav Ravdonikas (1894–1976) was listed among the authors with whom one must be careful. His book *The history of primitive society* (1939) was criticized for recounting an excessively wide range of bourgeois theories and formalist schemes. He had apparently ‘unmasked’ these theories very briefly or not at all. His work was misguidedly dominated

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<sup>116</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 11, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 22.

<sup>118</sup> Trigger 1984, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 24.



by foreign archaeological and ethnographical material, emphasizing foreign scientists over the local ones.

The conclusions Šnore drew from this resolution were that Latvian archaeologists must also be aware not to introduce such mistakes into their own works. It was suggested that only by openly acknowledging your mistakes and their causes one can learn to avoid them. At the meeting of the Institute, it was clearly stated that more than ever before, the task of Latvian archaeologists was to expand Bolshevistic criticism and self-criticism, which was allegedly the real driving force of scientific development.<sup>121</sup>

After the first setbacks, archaeologists learned to censor and express themselves more and more smoothly.<sup>122</sup> Later, there was even a belief that it was possible to bypass the regime and serve national interests.<sup>123</sup> In a way, the work in the field of archaeology during the years of Soviet occupation does represent a certain pattern of national resistance. Guntis Zemītis has written that the inheritance of traditions was manifested in the methodology of excavations, in the recording of archaeological material, in the typology of artefacts, but above all was the desire to study and preserve Latvia's archaeological material as a national treasure an important part of the national heritage.<sup>124</sup>

## 5. What's really new?

In the new Marxist approach to history, one of the first most visible changes from previous science was the problem of periodization. Now the periodization of archaeology was not based on the system of three eras, but on the developmental forms of human social self-organization or social formations.

Jānis Zutis, for example, argues that there were kin and tribe relations in Mesolithic era territory of Latvia. He notes that archaeological finds in the territory of Baltics do not give any evidence of the forms of social structure of that time, but if we consider the general laws guiding evolution of primitive communal system and if we use analogies with

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<sup>121</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 24.

<sup>122</sup> Zemītis 2021, p. 40.

<sup>123</sup> Cimermane 2005, p. 17; Lang 2006, p. 39.

<sup>124</sup> Zemītis 2021, p. 31.

other, better researched places with a similar degree of development in material culture we can assume that the first inhabitants of Baltics brought with them also matriarchal tribal community.<sup>125</sup>

The idea about prehistorical matriarchy in the territory of Latvia derives from Engels's work about *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), where he arbitrarily uses anthropological data about North American Iroquois applying them to all societies that, according to him, live on a similar stage of development. Engels states that:

the rediscovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilized peoples has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy. It enabled Morgan to outline for the first time a history of the family in which for the present, so far as the material now available permits, at least the classic stages of development in their main outlines are now determined. That this opens a new epoch in the treatment of primitive history must be clear to everyone. The matriarchal gens has become the pivot on which the whole science turns; since its discovery we know where to look and what to look for in our research, and how to arrange the results (Engels 1884, p. 11).

Following this theory there was a widely accepted opinion that the tribal community in Latvia consolidated during Neolithic era after primitive agriculture and cattle breeding began to develop. When people started to use metals and plough the land, matriarchy was replaced with patriarchy.<sup>126</sup> Today it is clear that this idea was grounded in 19th century's understanding about gender roles, exploiting sexist arguments about the femininity of older cultures, which submitted to the more aggressive, patriarchal societies. According to Engels, the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy was related to the first traces of inequality in society. This is evidenced by the increase in the number of luxury items in burials<sup>127</sup>, suggesting that inequality is not possible in a feminine society.

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<sup>125</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 17.

<sup>126</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 19.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

With no actual analysis based on research, Marxists declared that the existence of collective burial mounds which appear in the Bronze Age were a clear evidence of the highest state of development of primitive communal system – a fully developed tribal community.<sup>128</sup>

During the Soviet period, the periodisation of history was entirely subjected to speculative assumptions about socio-economic formations.<sup>129</sup> The teachings of Marxism-Leninism about the formation of primitive communal system were considered the objectively valid basic laws of societal development. Those who are engaged in research of Latvian prehistory problems should also take this into consideration.<sup>130</sup> This basic thesis of a so-called primitive society is still relevant in the scientific community as late as the 1980s.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, archaeology had to provide material indicating the existence of class inequality as far back as possible. For instance, in Soviet archaeology those studies that did not highlight the inequality of grave inventory were deemed undesirable.<sup>132</sup> If the class struggle and its aggravation were not ‘properly’ reflected in prehistory, then it would be difficult to prove the entire course of Latvian history in the terms of Marxist periodization. Therefore, the previous school of Latvian archaeology was accused of ‘bourgeois class conciliation policy’ for finding a similar level of wealth in the grave material.<sup>133</sup>

The totalitarianism of Marxist science showed its real face in those situations when one dared to question its ideological milestones. If you wanted to work in the field there were certain scientific questions that required a so-called ‘proper understanding’. In archaeology, the proper understanding of tribal community was considered one of the most important scientific problems.<sup>134</sup> The new propaganda accused previous scientists, the so-called bourgeois nationalists, of being incapable to admit that ancient Latvian tribes could have had primitive communal society with no private property, classes, without exploitation and

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>129</sup> Ivanovs 2005, p. 265.

<sup>130</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 29.

<sup>131</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 517, p. 11.

<sup>132</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 33.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>134</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 27.

monogamous families.<sup>135</sup> Meanwhile Marxists were never actually able to prove any of their theories with real facts. One of the most ambiguous criticisms against the scientists of independent Latvia was that they did not emphasize the hypothetical nature of their statements and the insufficient amount of archaeological data.<sup>136</sup> In the meantime, Marxist-Leninist science forgot to apply the same standards towards itself.

## 6. What was the scientific life like?

Most international scientific contacts were held among socialist states. All Latvian archaeologists had to be informed about the current scientific achievements in the USSR.<sup>137</sup> A deeper collaboration was established with Estonian and Lithuanian scientists who joined in sessions of Baltic archaeologists.<sup>138</sup>

When attending the 1949 Baltic Congress of Archaeologists in Leningrad, archaeologists had to discuss the theses of their reports and edit texts in accordance with the Institute.<sup>139</sup> Experts were concerned whether, for example, the report would address the problem of common features with Russian culture.<sup>140</sup> At the same time, it was recommended to not mention the too specific stone ship burials, so called devil's boats (Latvian: *velna laiva*) at least in the theses, since it is a problem 'too narrow'. It is clear that these sites showed Latvia as closer to Scandinavia than to Russia, but it was not desirable to emphasize this connection. In the paper about excavation in Riga, critics advised the author to clarify that she disagrees with German historiography on the founding of the city. One of the recommendations was to exacerbate the problems.<sup>141</sup>

It was difficult for archaeologists to learn the new way of speaking. From time to time, they received friendly reprimands, like:

the consolidation of the Ancient Russian state should be highlighted as the cause of our cultural flourishing (LVA, corp 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 31.).

<sup>135</sup> Zutis 1948, p. 27.

<sup>136</sup> Šnore 1952, p. 34.

<sup>137</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 30, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> LVA, corp 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 25.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

In this case, the classical Marxist thesis about the development of local productive forces was forgotten.

In the paper about discoveries regarding the first millennium BC, Lūcija Vankina had accurately criticized the misconceptions of bourgeois researchers, but she had not sufficiently reflected on the progressive development of productive forces and relations. She was told that it is necessary to prove the existence of patriarchy with archaeological material. The ethnic problem should also be discussed in more detail<sup>142</sup>, noting that no ethnic distinctions can be found here in the Neolithic.

Despite big preparations and efforts to criticize bourgeois research, the Baltic Congress of Archaeologists in Leningrad concluded by criticizing everyone for the still living bourgeois ideological traditions and insufficient emphasis on the development of society and productive forces. The social class determined nature of bourgeois ideology should be criticized more.<sup>143</sup> Afterwards Latvians considered this session to be of great importance, marking an important turning point in their work: 'With this session, they felt admitted to the USSR family of archaeologists as full members' wrote Šnore (LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, p. 34).

When someone had to attend scientific conference abroad, the person was examined even more seriously and questioned before.<sup>144</sup> Scenarios were played out with possible questions that scientists from the Western world could ask, and one was trained to answer so that the honour of Soviet science would not be damaged.<sup>145</sup> The attitude towards colleagues from outside was bizarre just because they were considered theoretically wrong.

Latvian scientists from exile were perceived as a threat. One odd episode was recorded – in 1968 a young Soviet archaeologist (Andris Caune) had sent some excavation photos to Latvian professor Jēkabs Ozols (1922–2013), based in Western Germany, who published them to inform the exile Latvians about the archaeology news in Latvia. That almost cost Caune the career and he was treated as a traitor of the State. Afterwards everyone was strongly warned not to take photos or make drawings during the excavation. The methods of work and archaeological

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>143</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 54, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 373, p. 30.

<sup>145</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 359, pp. 31–34.

finds were considered an object of industrial espionage.<sup>146</sup> Klejn says that Soviet archaeologists hid behind superiority, pride and narcissism, while the reality was poverty, isolation, and backwardness. However, even when the regime collapsed, there were many who continued to distinguish ‘we-they’ from Western science, clichés did not disappear.<sup>147</sup>

Was it just Stalinism? Some would argue that after the death of Stalin Soviet Union was no more a totalitarian country, thus the ideology probably weakened and allowed more academic freedom.<sup>148</sup> For now, the sources suggest that the peculiar ‘communist way’ was never abandoned. However, at the end of the 60’s the rhetoric against other approaches was no longer so uniformly dogmatic:

This did not mean the end of the ideological struggle, but it did alter its nature: the struggle became less barbed in form, but deeper in content (Klejn 2012, p. 40).

An example of how the stamp of a ‘politically unreliable’ person had an impact on your entire academic life is Jānis Graudonis (1913–2005). Soviet repression against him manifested itself in his dismissal from the post of school principal in 1946 due to political distrust, his dismissal from the Institute of History in 1949, and his dismissal from the job at the school again in 1951 for being a ‘bourgeois nationalist’. He had entered the aspirant programme of the Moscow Institute of Archaeology, from which he was expelled for political reasons, but in 1961 he was not allowed to defend his PhD thesis on grounds of being a bourgeois nationalist. In 1962 he was even prosecuted for this at an open party meeting of the Institute of History. In 1963, the Communist Party banned him from being appointed chairman of the society for the protection of nature and cultural monuments, despite the wishes of its full assembly.<sup>149</sup> The man who is today known as one of the foremost authorities in Latvian archaeology spent his entire career in Soviet Latvia fighting ideological oppression. He never gave up on archaeology, but it is possible that many young potential scientists never overcame the repressions of the regime, and that is why we do not even know their names today.

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<sup>146</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 359, pp. 26–29.

<sup>147</sup> Klejn 2012, pp. 10–11.

<sup>148</sup> E.g. Vasks 2016, pp. 8–9; Zemītis 2021, pp. 25–26.

<sup>149</sup> Graudonis 2008, pp. 91–92.

Despite the lack of discussions, archival research suggests that Latvian archaeology under Marxist approach was a significantly dogmatic, one-sided way of thinking, with no great diversity of ideas and practicing a rather morbid seclusion. The atmosphere was oppressing – as can be well observed when one reads the protocols of Institute’s meetings.

## 7. What’s left behind?

From a theoretical viewpoint, Soviet archaeologists had mastered the art to avoid sensitive issues and stay in ideological comfort zone.<sup>150</sup> Over time, archaeologists did learn to exploit ideological tutoring that they had obtained. One instance where archaeologists did not hesitate to use Marxist slang was the communication with such organizations of which something was needed – financially or materially. It was profitable to use topics important to the Soviet Union as threats to achieve the desired end:

Excavations are going to be of great importance at Union level, both scientifically and politically (...) we address the issue of Slavic and Latvian friendship (...) we’ll show the culture of the local peoples before the German conquest (...) (LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 15, p. 7).

It was a characteristic way to show it would be ideologically wrong, perhaps even dangerous to refuse to provide the necessary resources. Once, when expedition experienced lack of finances, the Institute wrote to local city’s executive committee:

Given that Baltic German and Latvian bourgeois historiography has made extensive falsifications in Latvia’s ancient history, archaeological excavations must play a crucial role in achieving Marxist enlightenment in Latvia’s history (LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 35, pp. 4–5).

Motivating factors included the fact that historians will use archaeological material for historical textbooks following a special order of the Communist Party.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Paberžytė, Costopoulos 2009.

<sup>151</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 35, pp. 4–5.

The development of Soviet archaeology, an object of pride, in reality was greatly exaggerated.<sup>152</sup> Since no statistics in the USSR ever went downwards, archaeological work also had to be done more, with an increasing number of excavations, finds, publications, conferences every new year. Perhaps that is why archaeologists have remembered this as a time of endless achievements<sup>153</sup>, there is even a talk of a golden age in Latvian archaeology.<sup>154</sup> However, it is more likely a myth. Archival source research shows that there could have been many more achievements, but the system itself always stopped short of funding, did not give researchers time and many laws and regulations did not work at all in real life. It seems that the generous government support for archaeology is greatly exaggerated in historiography. The situation when funding for scholarly trips was reduced by 50% and researchers had to choose whether to go to Moscow and Leningrad or still perform excavations in Latgale was not unusual.<sup>155</sup>

It is clear from the internal documentation of the Institute that they were aware of the problems – the insufficient number of publications, lack of equipment and space, the slow improvement of scientific qualification.<sup>156</sup> While the amount of archaeological expeditions in the Soviet Union correspond to that of a great power, it lagged far behind in the level of actual science regarding publications and international conferences.<sup>157</sup>

## 8. Conclusions

Over the course of its existence, Soviet archaeology underwent many transformations and despite its far-reaching centralisation, it never actually manifested itself identically in all parts of its vast territory. That is why we desperately need more localized research. It is not possible to understand the archaeological practice conducted in Latvia today while the history of discipline itself is unclear. Just like in Lithuania and other

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<sup>152</sup> Klejn 2012, pp. 9–10.

<sup>153</sup> Mugurevics 1999.

<sup>154</sup> Zemītis 2021.

<sup>155</sup> LVA, corp. 2371, descr. 1, file 40, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>157</sup> Klejn 2012, p. 3.



post-Soviet countries, in Latvia the policies and paradigms adopted during Soviet period have been crucial in shaping archaeological thought at many yet unrealised levels. The avoidance of in-depth theoretical problem solving, as well as the positive attitude towards ethnic studies, are the most visible relics of Soviet archaeological thought in Latvian archaeology.

Research so far suggests that archaeology was not a safe place to hide from ideology. Communistic science texts clearly stated that the level of ideologization was high in the field of history, since it was considered a powerful weapon of class struggle on the ideological front.<sup>158</sup>

Today looking back on the way science was conducted in a seemingly communist approach, it is clear that in this kind of research there was no room for individuality, for original solutions or scientific discussions. Science served to legitimize some already given 'necessary opinions'. At the beginning of the five-year period, all the correct ideas had already been expressed; all that remained was to fill in the plan with the correct research results.

Soviet archaeology and its practice in Latvia still need to be questioned. For example, the Soviet rule and the communist worldview was also a huge challenge in the field of cultural monument preservation. Communist experiment failed to safeguard heritage from devaluation and destruction. Even though the legislation that had to protect cultural heritage in USSR was oriented towards good heritage sustainability praxis, in real life it did not work due to human limitations. This topic is still not yet fully understood in Latvian historiography, and is not discussed in this article, as it requires a separate publication or even a monograph.

To sum up, the Soviet communist economic and political system was harmful for archaeology as a scientific discipline, since it initiated utilitarian and materialistic attitude towards heritage and past in general. This approach to archaeology has left deep marks and implications in the current archaeological thought of Latvia, but more research is needed to comprehend them.

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<sup>158</sup> Strazdiņš 1952, p. 5.

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## Abbreviations

IVA – State Archive of Latvia (*Latvijas Valsts arhīvs*)

LZA LVI – Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences (*Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Latvijas Vēstures institūts*)

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