HUMANS AND COMMUNITIES I: ARCHAEOLOGY AND PREHISTORY



International Conference
29–30 October 2026
Latvian National Museum of History
Riga Castle, Pils laukums 3, Riga, Latvia

Programme

Wednesday, 28 October
Arrival of participants
17:00–18:00 Visit to Museum Collections Storage
(Pulka Street 8, Riga)

Day 1: Thursday, 29 October

CONTACTS AND INTERACTIONS

9:00–9:40

Registration and Coffee

9:40–10:00

Opening of the Conference

Dr. hist. **Toms Ķikuts**, Latvian National Museum of History
Dr. phil. **Valts Ernštreits**, University of Latvia, Interdisciplinary Research Incubator "The Beginnings of Latvia" ("Latvijas sākotne")
Ieva Siliņa, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia

10:00–10:40

Keynote Lecture

The Vikings Are Coming! On Scandinavian Influence on Societies in the Eastern Baltic Region during the Late Iron Age
Dr. **Volker Hilberg**, Archaeological Museum Schloss Gottorf (Schleswig, Germany)

10:40–12:00 / Session 1
"Contacts: Material Culture of the Iron Age"

Moderator: Dr. hist. **Andris Šnē**

This session explores contacts between Viking Age Scandinavia and the eastern Baltic through the evidence of material culture. Focusing on artefact distribution, cultural influences, mobility, and exchange, the papers examine Scandinavian, Baltic-Finnic, and Baltic connections across the Baltic Sea region. Particular attention is given to the Daugava River waterway as a key route of interaction, connecting communities, networks, and cultural traditions.

The Route from the Varangians to the Greeks: View from the Lower Reaches of the River Daugava
Dr. hist. **Arnis Radiņš**, Archaeologist, former Director of the Latvian National Museum of History (Riga, Latvia)

Baltic-Finnic and Baltic Influence in Viking Age Scandinavia: Preliminary Results of an Ongoing Project
PhD **Marika Mägi**, Foundation Osiliana, Tallinn University (Tallinn, Estonia)

Between Scandinavia and Semigallia: The Lower Daugava at the Beginning of the Viking Age
Mg. hist. **Jānis Ciglis**, Latvian National Museum of History (Riga, Latvia)
Mg. hist. **Austra Engīzere**, Latvian National Museum of History (Riga, Latvia)

Session Discussion

12:00–13:00

Lunch Break

13:00–13:40

Keynote Lecture

Integrative Research in the HistoGenes Archaeogenetic Project and Its Insights into Community Formation
Prof. **Tivadar Vida**, Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest, Hungary)

13:40–15:00 / Session 2 "Contacts: Ancestries of the Baltic"

Moderator: PhD **Lehti Saag**

This session explores the population history and genetic ancestry of communities in the eastern Baltic from the Stone Age to the Late Iron Age. Drawing on archaeogenetic evidence, the papers examine the origins, continuity, mobility, and genetic relationships of the region's populations, from the first settlers to Iron Age Semigallians, Livonians, and Latgalians. Together, they shed light on long-term population dynamics and contacts that shaped the genetic landscape of the Baltic.

The Stone Age in the Eastern Baltic: Revealing the Demographic History of the First Settlers
PhD **Lehti Saag**, Institute of Genomics, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia)

A Look at Iron Age (7th–11th-century CE) Semigallians from a Genetic Point of View
MSc **Jānis Ķimsis**, National Institute of Research and Innovation (Riga, Latvia)

Results from an Archaeogenetic Study of Historical Livonian and Latgalian Individuals from the Late Iron Age of Latvia
PhD **Alena Kushniarevich**, Institute of Genomics, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia)

Session Discussion

15:00–15:20

Coffee Break

15:20–16:40 / Session 3 "Contacts: Material Culture of the Stone Age"

Moderator: PhD **Valdis Bērziņš**

This session explores the role of material culture in shaping contacts and networks across the Neolithic eastern Baltic and northern Europe. Focusing on amber, beads and pendants, and Corded Ware battle axes, the papers examine the circulation of raw materials, artefacts, technologies, and ideas, as well as the mobility of people and communities. Together, they highlight changing patterns of exchange, connectivity, social transformation, and cultural interaction during the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE.

Late Neolithic Beads and Pendants: Cultural Contacts between the Eastern Baltic and the Nordic Regions
PhD **Malou Blank**, Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg (Gothenburg, Sweden)
Co-authors: PhD **Aija Macāne**, University of Latvia, University of Uppsala, University of Tartu
PhD **Marja Ahola**, University of Helsinki, University of Oulu

Connecting Communities, Changing Commodities: Amber Exchange in the Eastern Baltic Area during the 4th and 3rd Millennia BCE
PhD **Aija Macāne**, Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia); Institute of History and Archaeology, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia); Department of Archaeology, Ancient History and Conservation, Uppsala University (Uppsala, Sweden)
Co-author: PhD **Kerkko Nordqvist**, University of Turku, University of Tartu, University of Helsinki

Corded Ware Culture Battle Axes in Latvia: The First Results of a Nationwide Survey
PhD **Kerkko Nordqvist**, Department of Biology, University of Turku (Turku, Finland); Institute of History and Archaeology, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia); Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki (Helsinki, Finland)

Session Discussion

16:40–17:00

Short Break

17:00–18:00 / Discussion "The Future of the Past: New Questions, New Methods, New Communities"

Moderator: Dr. phil. **Valts Ernštreits**

Participants: Prof. **Tivadar Vida**, Prof. **Valter Lang**, PhD **Kristiina Tambets**, PhD **Marika Mägi**, PhD **Valdis Bērziņš**

18:00 / 19:00

Conference Dinner for Presenters

Day 2: Friday, 30 October

COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY

9:30–10:00

Registration and Coffee

10:00–10:40

Keynote Lecture

The Ethnolinguistic Landscape of the Eastern Baltic during the Bronze Age: When Did the Baltic Finns and the Balts Emerge?
Prof. **Valter Lang**, Institute of History and Archaeology, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia)

10:40–12:00 / Session 4 "Communities: Development of the Ethnic Landscape in the Eastern Baltic"

Moderator: Prof. **Tivadar Vida**

The session explores contacts and interactions between Baltic and Finnic communities in the Eastern Baltic from the Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. Drawing on evidence from historical linguistics, ancient DNA, and archaeology, the papers examine population movements, cultural contacts, and the formation and transformation of Baltic and Finnic communities over time. Particular attention is given to the emergence and spread of Finnic languages, changing burial practices, and new archaeological discoveries in the Estonian–Latvian border region, offering new insights into the complex ethnic and cultural landscape of the Eastern Baltic.

Ancient DNA in the Baltics
PhD **Kristiina Tambets**, Institute of Genomics, University of Tartu; Estonian Biocentre (Tartu, Estonia)

The Emergence of Baltic Finno-Ugric Languages
Dr. **Petri Kallio**, Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies, University of Helsinki (Helsinki, Finland)

New Information on Iron Age Burial Rites near the Estonian–Latvian Border: A Key to the Past of Northern Vidzeme?
Prof. **Heiki Valk**, Institute of History and Archaeology, University of Tartu (Tartu, Estonia)

Session Discussion

12:00–13:00

Lunch Break

13:00–14:20 / Session 5 "Communities: Everyday Life and Social Structure"

Moderator: PhD **Aija Macāne**

This session explores the organisation and everyday life of communities in late prehistoric Latvia, focusing on social identities, power structures, subsistence, and regional networks. Drawing on archaeological, historical, and scientific evidence, the papers examine how individual and collective identities were expressed, how political and economic power shaped communities, and how agricultural practices and food resources contributed to social life and cultural development from the Late Bronze Age to the medieval period.

Communities and Individuals in Late Prehistoric Latvia: Reflections of Identities in the Archaeological Record
Dr. hist. **Andris Šnē**, Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia)

Turaida and Satesele: Two Centres of Political, Economic, and Military Power in the Territory of the Gauja Livonians during the 11th–13th Centuries
Dr. hist. **Guntis Zemītis**, Turaida Museum Reserve (Turaida, Latvia)
Mg. hist. **Justīne Timermane**, Turaida Museum Reserve (Turaida, Latvia)

New Data on Stabe Isotope Values of Archaeological Cereals from the Territory of Latvia
Mg. hist. **Alise Gunnarssone**, Latvian National Museum of History (Riga, Latvia)

Session Discussion

14:20–14:40

Coffee Break

14:40–16:20 / Session 6
“Communities: Craft and Material Culture”

Moderator: Dr. **Volker Hilberg**

This session examines craft, material culture, and social identities among West Baltic communities during the Roman Period and Migration Period, with a focus on how objects reflect skills, social roles, cultural connections, and changing traditions. Drawing on woodworking tools, cemetery evidence, and ornaments, the papers explore the relationship between craftsmanship and social status, the interpretation of archaeological contexts, and regional patterns of continuity, innovation, and cultural exchange in the Baltic region.

Warriors and Craftsmen in West Balt Society: The Case of Woodworking Tools from the Roman and Migration Period
Dr. hab. **Anna Bitner-Wróblewska**, State Archaeological Museum (Warsaw, Poland)

Between History and Archaeology: The Katyčiai (Ger. Coadjuthen) Cemetery
Dr. **Šarūnė Valotkienė**, Archaeology Department, National Museum of Lithuania (Vilnius, Lithuania)

Chronological Indicators of the Final Stages of the Late Roman Period in the Eastern Baltic: A View and Comparison Based on Lithuanian Material
Dr. **Rasa Banytė-Rowell**, Department of Archaeology, Lithuanian Institute of History (Vilnius, Lithuania)

Identification of Bivalve Shell Temper in Middle Neolithic (3900–2900 BCE) Pottery: An Interdisciplinary Study
PhD **Vanda Haferberga**, Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia)
PhD **Valdis Bērziņš**, Institute of Latvian History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia)

Session Discussion

16:40–17:00

Coffee Break

17:00–18:20 / Session 7
“Communities: Intangible Culture”

Moderator: PhD **Kerkko Nordqvist**

This session explores intangible dimensions of community life through ritual practices, traditional knowledge, folklore, and language in the Baltic region. The papers combine natural science methods with archaeological, historical, and ethnographic approaches to examine how cultural practices and systems of knowledge were transmitted and transformed. Drawing on evidence from mortuary landscapes, pottery traditions, folklore, and Finnic linguistic heritage, they highlight the role of intangible culture in shaping collective identities, traditions, and relationships between people, places, and the past.

Setting the Stage for Iron Age Mortuary Practices: Landscape Dynamics in Latvia (1–1200 CE)
PhD **Normunds Stivrins**, Department of Geology, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia); Department of Geology, Tallinn University of Technology (Tallinn, Estonia)

What Can Folklore Text Mapping Reveal about the Chronology of Tradition? The Case of the Latvian Witch Legend Corpus
Dr. phil. **Sandis Laime**, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia)

The Finnic People of Courland from a Linguistic Perspective
Dr. phil. **Valts Ernštreits**, Livonian Institute, University of Latvia (Riga, Latvia)

Session Discussion

18:20

Closing of the Conference