

GABRIELĖ GUDAITIENĖ^aTHE QUEST FOR PALAEOLITHIC ART IN THE NERIS
RIVER VALLEY, CENTRAL-EASTERN LITHUANIA*Dedicated to the 100th anniversary
of the birth of Dr. Rimutė Rimantienė*

Abstract: Only a few artifacts discovered in Lithuania can be considered as examples of portable art from the Final Palaeolithic period. Three of them were found in the Neris river valley in central-eastern Lithuania: an engraved slate pebble from the Eiguliai 1A site, a notched blade from the Skaruliai 1 site, and a flint “figurine” from the Vilnius 1 site. Discovered by Rimutė Rimantienė and her father Konstantinas Jablonskis, these three finds were the first and for many years the only artifacts underpinning the discussion of art from the Lithuanian Final Palaeolithic. The debate on the tentative function of these items, initiated by Rimantienė, is reviewed in this study before presenting the results of the latest research on the subject between 2012 and 2017, carried out using a range of methods: visual examination, comparative analysis with other archaeological finds and reconstructed prehistoric tools, surface analysis under a microscope. The functional interpretation proposed as a result of these investigations in two cases disproves the identification of these artifacts as portable art.

Keywords: Final Palaeolithic, mobile art, engraved pebble, blade with notches, flint figurine, Mesolithic

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1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the human ability to create art is considered one of the most important features of the European Upper Palaeolithic overall. A quest for art attributes in the material culture of *Homo sapiens* has been in place from the beginning of archaeological research on this period. The archaeological data from Lithuania are very meager in the wider context, which cannot be described here in detail. What little there is of the Palaeolithic from Lithuania is dated archaeologically no earlier than the Final Palaeolithic.

The first humans appeared in the territory of modern-day Lithuania in the Final Palaeolithic, although it is possible, in theory, that some incursions into the region occurred before the Weichselian glacier. Several hundred years after the retreat of the glacier, around 13,500–13,000 BP, the southern part of the region became suitable for habitation (Girininkas 2009). During the next 3000 years roaming human groups left hundreds of temporary camps on the river banks and shores of the now extinct lakes located mostly in southern Lithuania (except for a few dozen sites further north). Palaeolithic hunters-gatherers were identified by different techniques of flint knapping, which they brought with them; these allow them to be recognized as separate archaeological units. The Swiderian is the most evident culture in the archaeological record, but up to five different cultural units (Brommean, Federmesser, Hamburgian, and Ahrensburgian) could have existed before the onset of the Mesolithic.

Sculpting, engraving, painting and drawing were all art forms known in Upper Palaeolithic Europe (Wildgen 2004; Milisauskas ed. 2002; Veil *et al.* 2012; Cook 2013; and others). Mesolithic portable art is also found all over Europe: the skills needed to ornament pieces of bone or stone are evident in many places, including northeastern Europe (Płonka 2003). The first humans to inhabit Lithuanian territory could have known how to prepare color pigments, engrave softer or harder material (wood, bone, antler, various kinds of rock), shape clay, paint and draw with the fingers and using special implements. There are no rock shelters or caves in the Lithuanian landscape. Most sites are situated on sandy river banks, hence the relative scarcity of Final Palaeolithic remains, whether stone artifacts, fragmented burnt bones, or other archaeological features. Little can be said also of the early Mesolithic portable art. Not many artifacts from Europe can be dated as early as the Preboreal period, among them some engraved pieces of bone, amber or stone bearing mostly a faint linear ornament, which were not always published (Clark 1936 [2014]; Płonka 2003, pp. 25–28). Thus, while the discussion of Late Palaeolithic art sources of inspiration and considerations on aspects of ornamented Mesolithic artifact functions in the northern region are ongoing in southern-central Europe, archaeologists in Lithuania are faced with searching for any kind of evidence of Final Palaeolithic art.

2. THE DEBATE ON THE EARLIEST ART FROM LITHUANIA

The oldest piece of art found in the territory of Lithuania was first discussed by Rimutė Rimantienė in 1941 when she published the Stone Age lithic assemblage discovered at the Skaruliai 1 site in central Lithuania (Jablonskytė 1941). The scholar, who was then in her early twenties, initiated her career as an archaeologist with this paper, in which she dedicated a whole page to a notched blade which she referred to as an 'amulet'. It was a regular flint blade with four notches on the sides, interpreted by Rimantienė as a long blade with notched sides and unretouched ends, symbolizing a human figure. The site, which was initially assigned to the late Mesolithic for lack of a better flint-tool typology and overall Stone Age chronology in Lithuania, is now recognized as belonging to the Final Palaeolithic, mainly thanks to Rimantienė's research from the 1970s on the classification of archaeological sites from Lithuanian territory. Later studies of, among others, archaeological finds from several sites situated in the lower reaches of the Neris river allowed her to identify three artifacts as tentative expressions of Palaeolithic art from Lithuania: the notched blade from Skaruliai and beside it an engraved slate pebble from Eiguliai and a flint figurine from Vilnius (Rimantienė 1984).

The Eiguliai 1A site, where the slate pebble with engravings was discovered, lies on the left bank of the Neris river in its lower reaches (Rimantienė 1971). The flint assemblage from the site demonstrated at least two phases of occupation: in the Final Palaeolithic (Swiderian culture) and in the Neolithic. Rimantienė described the slate pebble, which is 900 × 700 mm in size, as an engraved pebble with the lines cut with a flint burin, its function possibly related to magic or art (Rimantienė 1971; Rimantienė 1984). From the beginning, however, the interpretation was doubtful, even to Rimantienė who asked herself why were both sides of the pebble engraved, what kind of tool had been used to make the engravings and was there any visual information encoded in the markings (R. Rimantienė, personal communication, 2016). No satisfactory answers to these questions were forthcoming in the absence of specialist analyses of the artifact and because of a lack of comparative material (Rimantienė 1996). Based on a visual analysis alone, the artifact was considered a piece of *art mobilier*, portable art, from the Upper Palaeolithic (Wildgen 2004, p. 114). A similar engraved pebble, 250 × 400 mm in size, was found a few decades ago at the Sudota 3 site in Eastern Lithuania (Štavičius 2005, p. 294), around 140 km from the Eiguliai 1A site. The Sudota assemblage was dated to the Mesolithic based on the lithic typology and the pebble was considered to be engraved with a burin-like tool (E. Štavičius, personal communication, 2014). However, the impression from studying a photograph of the pebble (further examination of the artifact is pending) is that the engravings do not form any meaningful figure and are basically indecipherable.

The issue of the earliest art from Lithuania returned with a discussion of the expression in artistic form of some Mesolithic features of religion, but it turned out that there were no works of art dating from this period found in Lithuanian territory (Girininkas 2009, p. 114; Juodagalvis 2008, p. 97). The engraved pebbles

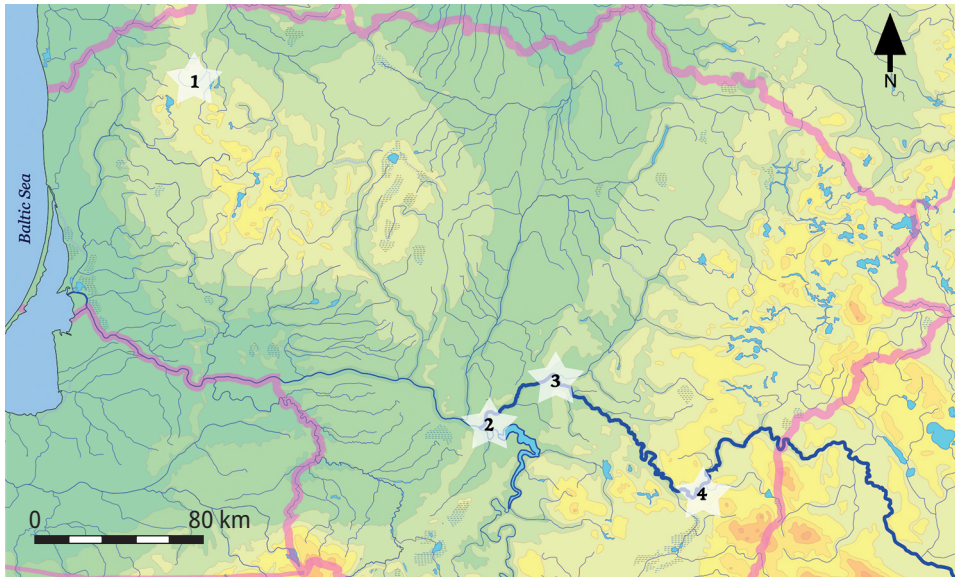


Fig. 1. Archaeological sites with finds of tentative Final Palaeolithic portable art
1 – Šarnelė; 2 – Eiguliai 1A; 3 – Skaruliai 1; 4 – Vilnius 1; the river Neris marked in stronger blue.

Processing by G. Gudaitienė

from Eiguliai 1A and Sudota 3 were known but were not taken into consideration until 2011 when a study of non-flint rock artifacts of Final Palaeolithic–Mesolithic age from Lithuania was launched. Their function was unclear and their attribution to prehistoric magic or art was rejected because there did not seem to be any information encoded in the engravings (Rimkutė 2012). It was suggested instead that the line engravings were either the effect of having something else cut on the stone surface of the pebble or an abstract ‘drawing’, a kind of aimless doodling. Rimantienė’s finding that the engravings were made with a sharp tool of some kind remained unquestioned.

In 2013, the archaeological data from the Final Palaeolithic–early Mesolithic sites in the lower reaches of the Neris river was re-studied, but a visual examination of the engraved pebble from Eiguliai did not clarify its interpretation, and only a few examples relevant for comparative studies were found in northern Europe.

Analyses carried out within the frame of the ‘Prehistoric Art: Ritual, Context and Symbolism’ project initiated in Lithuania in 2016 turned up a decorated bone dagger from the Šarnelė site, dated to the Younger Dryas, as the earliest known piece of Palaeolithic art ever discovered in Lithuanian territory (Rimkus *et al.* 2019). This reopened the discussion as to whether the engraved pebble from Eiguliai and the notched blade from Skaruliai were actually examples of portable art. Adding to this the flint figurine from Vilnius, we thus have a set of four artifacts that have been considered as examples of portable art from the Final Palaeolithic in Lithuania (Fig. 1).

3. PEBBLE FROM EIGULIAI 1A

A visual examination of the pebble from Eiguliai revealed that it was not polished or shaped in any way before being engraved, even though these processing techniques may have already been known as in the Mesolithic of the territory of modern-day Denmark (Marshack 1970, pp. 479–480). The artifact had no broken edges. Lines were incised on the front and back sides, scratched in rapid motion, absent-mindedly, without thinking of a specific drawing or design, differently than in the case of other known incised artifacts (e.g., Roc de Marcamps, France, and Balma de la Margineda, Andorra) (Marshack 1980, p. 117; Płonka 2003, p. 330). Engraved plaques of slate from southwestern Europe usually depicted animals and ornaments in a way that a modern human mind can understand (Pales 1981), unless the piece was a fragment of a bigger work of art (like the plaques from Cova del Parpalló, Spain, or Roc de Sers, France) (Schmidt 1922; Villaverde Bonilla 1994; Tymula 2002). Examples from Gravettian sites (e.g., Saut-de-Perron, France) show that sometimes such engraved plaques were perforated (Sieveking 1987). However, as said above, the Eiguliai pebble is not a fragmented artifact and it does not appear to have been formed in any way by manufacturing techniques that were intended to add artistic value.

Some examples of undecipherable engraved stone plaques are known from the Upper Palaeolithic Magdalenian period. The Les Eyzies and La Marche sites in France yielded some limestone and slate artifacts with engravings executed systematically and on purpose even if not figurative (Sieveking 1987). An engraved sandstone pebble from Radgoszcz 15 site, Poland, ascribed to the Swiderian and/or Ahrensburgian culture, could be considered as a parallel for the Eiguliai pebble (Kowalski, Płonka 2009). It is similar in size and flat, but the engravings are different: a few crossing lines in the form of an ‘+’ or ‘×’ mark.

Rimantienė observed the acute rather than perpendicular angle of the intersecting engraved lines on the pebble from the Eiguliai 1A site, and suggested in her written description of the artifact from the 1950s (kept at the National Museum of Lithuania) that the engravings could be intentional rather than traces of cutting something on its surface.

The engraved lines on some Mesolithic engraved pebbles from Sweden were straighter and deeper, cut in a set direction. They were regarded not as art drawings, but as traces indicating that the pebbles had been used as tools to work the edges of flint blanks. They had the very flat polished surface that is essential for working a blade edge (Sjöström, Nilsson 2009; Clarke *et al.* 2012). The lines on the Eiguliai pebble were not so deep and regular and the surface polishing could have been natural as a result of post-depositional processes. An engraved pebble found at the Mousterian site of Petit Abri de Laussel, France, was interpreted as a grinder for plant matter (de Beaune 2000, Pl. VII). Friction between two blunt pieces of rock resulted in rubbing traces that were not linear. Thus, despite a visual resemblance, the same functional interpretation cannot be applied to the Eiguliai pebble.

In 2017, the pebble was examined under a microscope, the incised lines were studied by tracing the ‘drawings’ on the obverse and reverse (Figs 2; 3) and the

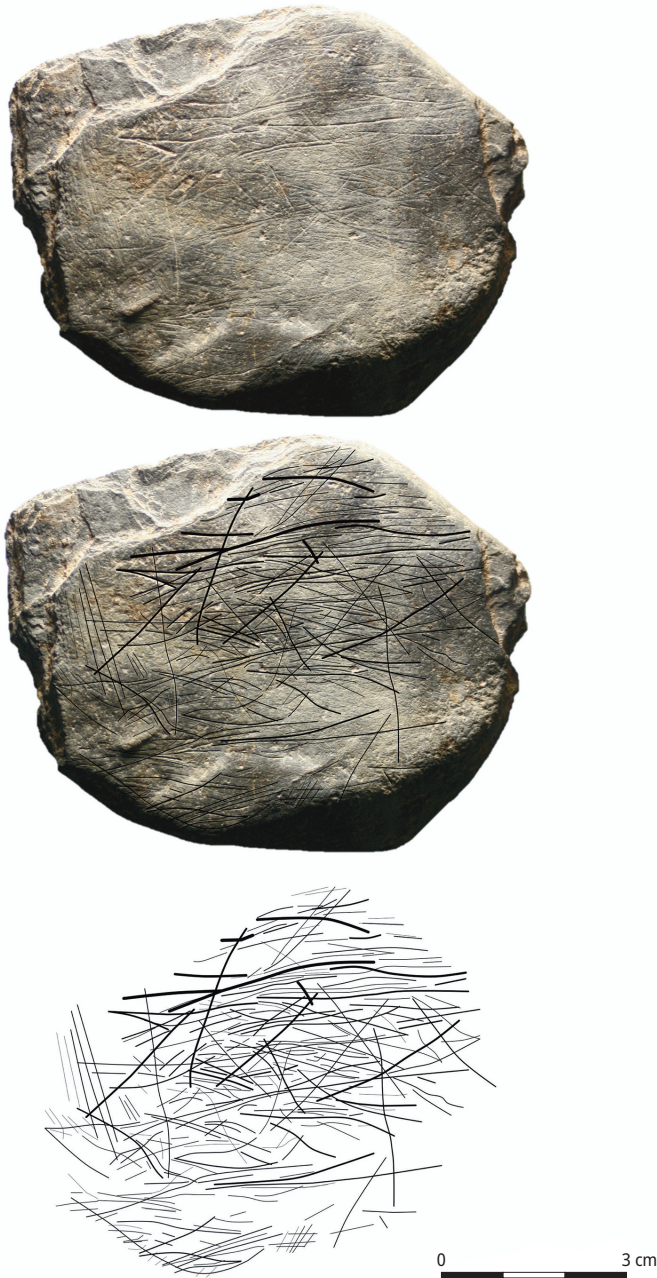


Fig. 2. The front side of the slate pebble from the Eiguliai 1A site showing an enhanced view of the engraved lines.

Vytautas the Great War Museum, Kaunas;
photo and drawing by G. Gudaitienė

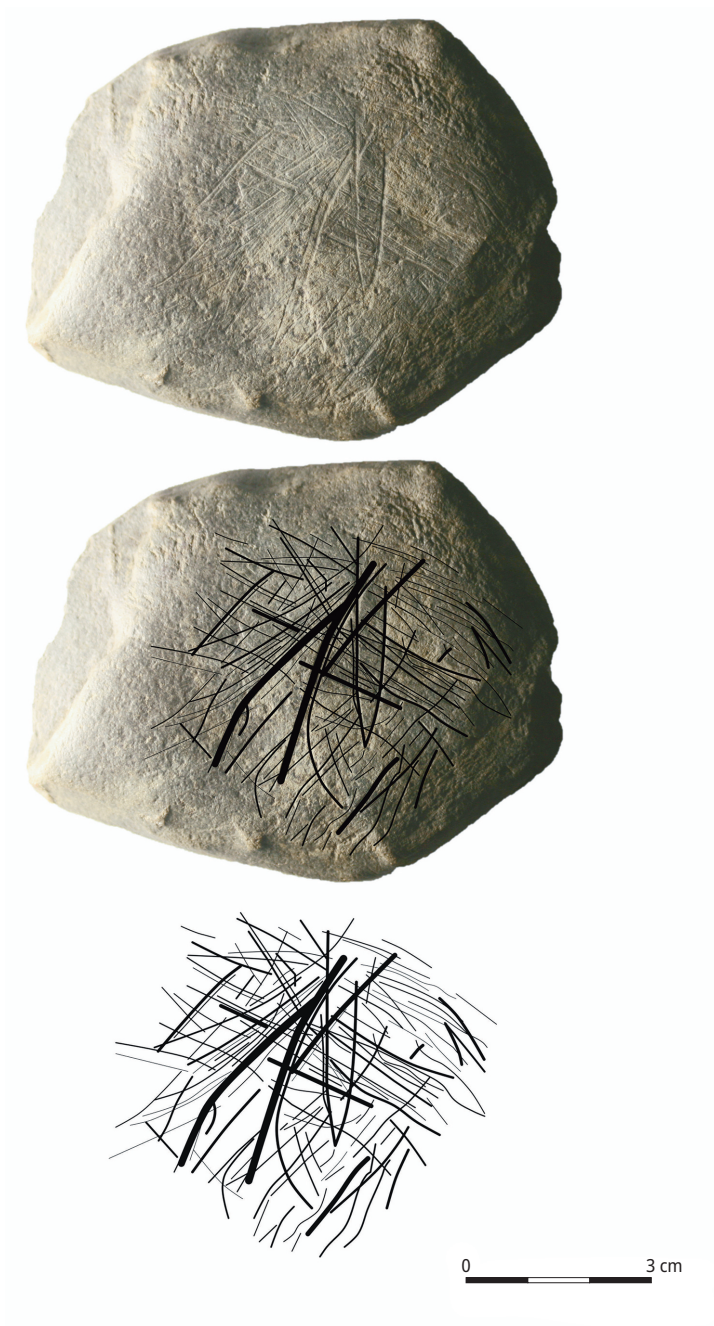


Fig. 3. The back side of the slate pebble from the Eiguliai 1A site showing an enhanced view of the engraved lines.

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photo and drawing by G. Gudaitienė

use-wear traces were compared with traces left on flint knapping tools used by modern reconstructors. The analyses were designed to answer the following questions: a – why were both sides of the pebble engraved; b – was the size of the pebble important? was it reduced before being engraved; c – why was this kind of rock chosen; d – was there any relation between the engraved line pictures on the two sides; e – were the lines engraved with the same tool and applying the same pressure?

The engravings on the pebble were studied under an Olympus SZX10 microscope at Vilnius University, with a magnification of either 10× or 40× depending on the features under consideration. The first step was to trace the engraved lines, and to check the existing assumptions concerning its function. The artifact was in storage at the Vytautas the Great War Museum in Kaunas for more than fifty years, but had undergone no special treatment on the surface and had been kept in a wooden drawer with little or no contact with other finds. Its condition was therefore suitable for carrying out the investigation as described above.

The following are the principal results of the analyses:

1. The engraved lines were of different width, depth, direction and length. Two basic directions were identified on one side, while only one direction predominated on the other side. However, many lines intersected, and some went in the opposite direction. The engravings were made with many separate motions. Also, tools of different width and sharpness were used every time new engravings were added, and the pressure strength differed as well. The multidirectional layout of the lines was related to how the artifact was held in the hand.
2. The engraved ‘pictures’ on both sides of the pebble had no margins. Some lines extended to the very edge of the pebble. Presumably, they were made in a rapid, undetermined and uncontrolled way.
3. One side of the pebble contained more engraved lines than the other; the lines on the more intensively used side were much thinner and shorter. Assumedly, one side was used more often, or a longer time was spent in engraving lines on it.
4. Some engravings were ‘V’-sectioned, others were ‘denticulate’ in form (∞). This feature refers to Rimantienė’s interpretation that the engravings were made with a flint burin. The use of a burin assumes different line profiles. However, because the width of the engravings differs, the assumption is that either the tool was used at different angles or a number of different burins were used.
5. The linear engravings on both sides of the pebble were traced under the microscope and studied after rotating it 90°, 180° and 270°. No recognizable figures were noted. The picture was shown to children 3–7 years old in order to exclude the subjective perspective of an adult and still there were no conforming opinions as to its meaning (children argued that it depicts a bunch of branches, trees, human feet in the water, *etc.*). While this little experiment was not a fully scientific study, the conclusion is that the modern human mind does not recognize any specific drawing engraved on the pebble surface.

The implication of the above is that the pebble from Eiguliai was not engraved with any intention to draw a picture and create a portable art artifact. Neither was it engraved in order to visually encode information to be passed on in this manner.

Instead, it was a tool used for working some other object, most probably to rub or rasp something, and the engraved lines are the use-wear traces. In addition, if a slate-to-flint contact is considered, it should be understood as *vice versa*: a flint piece might have been rubbed with a slate pebble. Thus, this tool might have been a plaque used to rasp the edge of a flint core before knapping.

This hypothesis was discussed with modern flint knappers, archaeologists Dr. Frank Moseler and Algimantas Kensminas (personal communication, 2014–2015) who stated that it was common practice to use sandstone/slate pebbles for flint core edge rasping. Use of hammerstones (usually quartz or granite) for the same purpose is also convenient, but professional flint knappers are more likely to use a pebble of a softer rock. This assumption also explains why both sides of the pebble were engraved and why the engraved lines were so different, made in a rapid and haphazard way. The rasping tool is used on both sides non-selectively, as convenient for any given stage of the flint working process. The similarity between the archaeological find in question and a modern rasping tool was obvious. The Eiguliai engraved pebble had the same multidirectional engravings and was of a similar size as a slate pebble used by flint knapper Kensminas. According to Kensminas, there were two requirements for choosing a proper pebble: it had to be of a soft rock, and it had to fit the hand. Moseler gave the same reasons for using a pebble of this kind for rasping the edge of a flint core. An opinion to the contrary was presented by professional flint-tool maker and experimenter Harm Paulsen who saw no need for an additional pebble, believing the flint knapping process proceeded much faster with only one tool held in hand.

Polish archaeologists have interpreted the engraved sandstone from Radgoszcz 15 as symbolically related to flint core and blade production (Kowalski, Płonka 2009). However, the Eiguliai pebble is regarded as a practical tool for the same purpose. A flint hammer with engraved figures of animals, discovered at the Upper Palaeolithic site of Windeck in Germany (Street *et al.* 2006), implicates the symbolic meaning of some of these tools and it might have been used for a long time by the same person. Even so, the Eiguliai pebble was too flat to be used as a hammer and cannot be compared with the tool from Windeck.

4. NOTCHED BLADE FROM SKARULIAI 1

The second artifact to be considered here is a notched flint blade from the Skaruliai 1 site, discovered by Rimantienė and her father on a sandy surface during one of the visits to the site in 1938–1940 (Fig. 4). In her diary, Rimantienė wrote: ‘Of other implements I have to mention first one little retouched bladelet with four notches and both ends broken. As the artifact has the so-called ortstein colouring, it can be added to the Palaeolithic collection of other finds of the same color. (We have to look at this artifact as a visual art thing – anthropomorphic, and with a magic meaning)’ (Rimantienė, not dated). The ‘anthropomorphic figurine’ was made from a blade with both ends detached. It has two pairs of notches on opposite sides, almost symmetrically formed with a steep retouch on the dorsal side. The

blade was very regular, detached from an unipolar core. The technique is typical of the Final Palaeolithic, the period to which the find was attributed, but was common also in the Mesolithic. While the patina covering factor was not considered here as a dating criteria, the patina was weaker than on most of the Final Palaeolithic finds from Skaruliai and, considering the findspot on a sandy surface, the piece must have been affected by post-depositional processes.

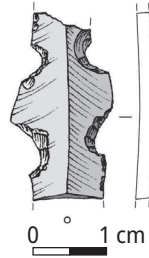


Fig. 4. The notched blade from the Skaruliai 1 site.

National Museum of Lithuania; drawing by G. Gudaitienė

Wolfgang Taute published it as part of the Skaruliai assemblage, which he identified as typical European Final Palaeolithic. Taute described it as a ‘notched blade’ (Randkerben) following Rimantienė’s suggestion (Jablonskytė 1941; Taute 1968) and considered it as “unique” (Unikum). However, its uniqueness is disputable, because other lithics with retouched notches were found at both Skaruliai sites (1 and 2, separated by 1.5 km) and the tool-making pattern as such appears to be quite common in a local context. Very few parallels are known from Europe: similar items were found at some Magdalenian sites in France and ‘notched implements (borer)’ (‘выемчатое орудие [проколка]’) are known from the Kamennaya Balka 2 site in Russia (Pershits *et al.* 1974; Gvozdover, Leonova 1977). The nearest parallel found by Rimantienė is a notched blade from Les Grottes de Grimaldi site; she noted the French archaeologists had no explanation of its purpose as well, and proposed to regard it as a figurine with possible religious connotations. However, the artifact from Les Grottes de Grimaldi, which was settled in the Late Palaeolithic–Neolithic period, can be taken into consideration as a comparative analogy for the dating of the Skaruliai artifact only with reservations. In J. Bordaz’s lithic typology, the blade falls under the category of a “bilaterally denticulated bladelet” (Bordaz 1970).

Notched blades from Ahrensburgian sites have been interpreted as partly retouched blades (Teilretuschierte Klinge) (Dürre 1971), but they are not as regular and symmetrical as the Skaruliai blade. The sites of Pushkary 1 and Mezin in Ukraine have also yielded notched blades; 62 flint finds from the Mezin site were described on typological-logical grounds as blades with scraper-notches on the sides and interpreted as scraping implements (пластинки с выемками-скребками по краям) (Boriskovs’kii 1949).

Similar artifacts (lamelles encochées, lames à encoche or lames à coche) were discovered at Mesolithic sites in France. They were identified as scraping tools (Shovkoplyas 1965; Brézillon 1968; Séara *et al.* eds. 2002) and this trend has continued among French researchers since the early 1920s when the Late Palaeolithic Aurignacian notched blades were first called by the term 'grattoir concave (simple)' (Capitan 1922, Pl. VI). However, the notches of the Skaruliai blade are too symmetrical and too close to one another to serve the purpose of scraping while holding the tool in hand (or even having it inserted into a handle). In France and Spain, similar artifacts are called 'lames de Montbani' after the original find place at Montbani in France. They are usually accompanied by microlithic trapezes and are ascribed to the Tardenoisian tradition, and are therefore dated to either the Epipalaeolithic or the Mesolithic (Merino 1980). Some Mesolithic notched blades have also been found closer to Lithuanian territory, e.g. Duvensee (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), Baume de Montclus (France), Weelde-Paardsdrank (Belgium) (Bokelmann 1971; Gehlen 2012).

Anthropomorphic flint figurines are known from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age in the northeastern Russian plain (Kashina 2002). Some examples of earlier date from Europe had no such recognizable form, and were usually interpreted as figurines and not implements primarily because they were made by retouching a flake all around its perimeter. Examination under a microscope revealed almost no traces of use-wear, confirming that these artifacts were not tools (Zamyatnin 1948; Fiedorczuk *et al.* 2007; Boroń *et al.* 2011). Some figurines of random form, made from flakes with a flat retouch, were identified in the Sukhona River basin, Russia, but they are typologically very different from the Skaruliai blade (Nedomolkina 2000).

In the Baltic region, portable art made of flint is rare. Neither have many anthropomorphic flint figurines, or at least objects recognized as pieces of portable art, been discovered in other parts of Europe, most of these at large sites where excavations have progressed full-scale (Weniger 1989; Fiedorczuk, Schild 2002; Pigeot 2004; Fiedorczuk *et al.* 2007; Schild 2009; Boroń *et al.* 2011; Boroń *et al.* 2014). In this context, the blade from Skaruliai is different in terms of the blank of which it was made and the retouching style that is indicative of a different flint-knapping and implement-making technique. In addition, flint figurines are usually dated to a later period. Thus, assuming a typological point of view, the blade should rather be attributed to the Neolithic–Bronze Age lithic assemblage from Skaruliai.

Both ends of the Skaruliai blade are detached, hence the case is difficult to interpret. Blades with notches on the sides have long been interpreted as microlith production waste (Berthelsen 1944), but following the reconstructions proposed by Bordaz, the Skaruliai blade notches should probably not be related to the tool-processing technique and blade division, because they are atypically too close together and done on two sides. Also, the blade was not broken at the notch (Bordaz 1970).

The Skaruliai blade could have been part of a larger object combining stone with a perishable organic material, which has not been preserved. It is difficult to reconstruct the appearance and use of an artifact for which not all the details are available. Examining the blade under a microscope, researchers took into account

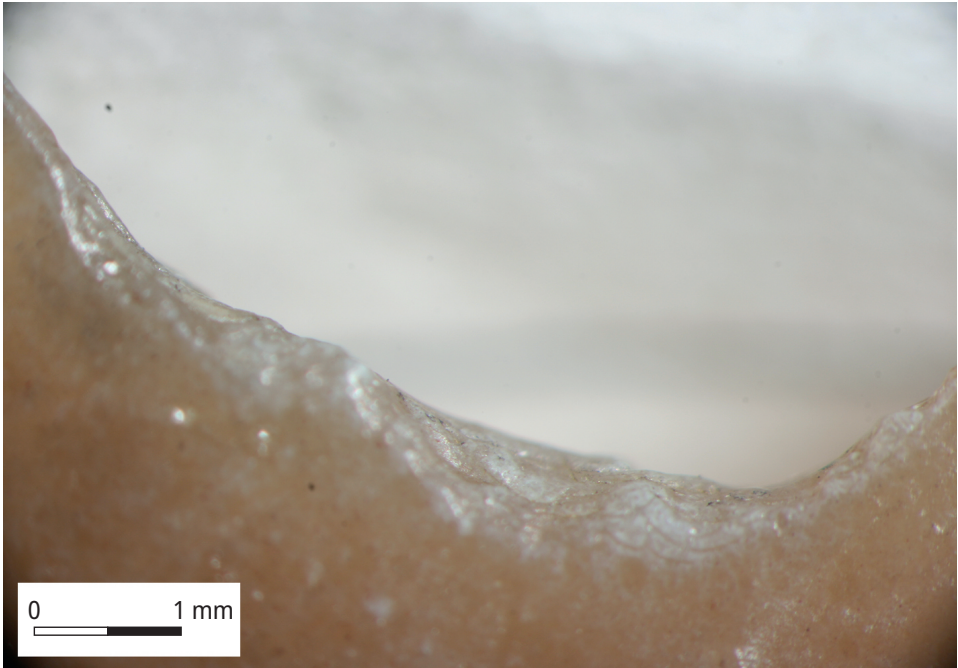


Fig. 5. The surface of one of the notches of the Skaruliai notched blade revealing polishing.

National Museum of Lithuania; photo by G. Gudaitienė

possible post-depositional processes as well as storage conditions in the past few dozen years (the blade was kept together with other lithics in a box without sufficient protection between the finds). The examination revealed a polished surface in the notches (Fig. 5), which could be the result of contact with soft material, or of sand rubbing on the surface (the context of the find should be kept in mind). There were also weak use-wear or friction traces on both ends and on the non-retouched edges of the artifact. They could be related to the storage conditions.

Suggestion of contact with soft material leads to different interpretations. The blade could be regarded as a fragment of a more elaborate artifact combined with leather, fur, or some other soft material. Also, it can be seen as a tool used for working soft materials. The latter could support the scraping interpretation of the notches.

5. NOTCHED BLADE FROM VILNIUS 1

Another presumed flint 'figurine' (Fig. 6) was discovered at Vilnius 1, a site situated on the bank of the Neris river, 120 km downriver from the Skaruliai 1 site. The two artifacts were already compared (Rimantienė 1984) and in 2017 the

retouched blade from Vilnius was reexamined. Visually, it looks like an anthropomorphic figure, but it is fragmented like the Skaruliai blade, missing both ends and therefore difficult to interpret. Marginal retouch gave the blade a specific form: narrowed to 0.6–1.0 cm on both sides, retaining the original maximum width of 3 cm of the blank at the outermost points on the left and right sides. This gave the impression of the ‘arms’ of a ‘figurine’. The original blank could have reached 10 cm or more in length, making the ‘figurine’ even ‘taller’. Use-wear marks on the distal left margin of the piece showed that it was used for some work like scraping after it had been broken. Thus, even if the original function of the artifact was related to aesthetic or sacral purposes, it was changed when someone used it as a tool for ordinary work.

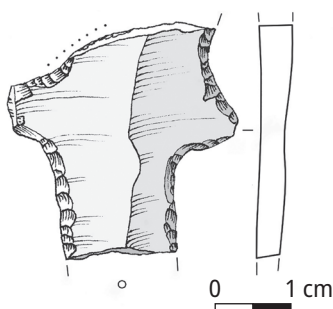


Fig. 6. A flint figurine from the Vilnius 1 site.

National Museum of Lithuania; drawing by G. Gudaitienė

The earliest stages of the Vilnius 1 site settlement were dated to the Final Palaeolithic based on the lithic assemblage and some specific artifacts (and attributed to the Magdalenian tradition, and the Ahrensburgian and maybe Swiderian cultures). Different flint-knapping technologies implicated at least two stages of site occupation in the Final Palaeolithic (Rimantienė 1996; Šatavičius 2001; Girininkas 2009; Gudaitienė 2018). The site was destroyed in the mid-20th century, eliminating any possibility for more finds other than the stray pieces coming from salvage operations. Judging by the flint-knapping technique, the ‘figurine’ was referred provisionally to the second stage of site occupation in the Final Palaeolithic, that is, the Ahrensburgian or Swiderian lithic assemblage (Gudaitienė 2018). The chronology of the reuse of the site is difficult to determine, but it was presumably by people who failed to appreciate the original purpose of the ‘figurine’, either because it was broken and had somehow lost its ‘sanctity’/significance, or because the new owner did not recognize the special meaning of this item. The change of function could have happened much later, maybe in the Neolithic. Any relation between this find and the notched blade from Skaruliai can be considered only with reserve taking into account the different technologies and possible different chronology.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Misidentification of portable art artifacts is one of the most common problems in studies of known prehistoric European art (Bednařík 1996). An in-depth study of three artifacts from the Neris river valley, which have been considered tentatively as portable art pieces from the Final Palaeolithic, has struck at least two of them from the list. The engraved slate pebble from Eiguliai, dated to the Final Palaeolithic, was identified as a tool used to rasp the edges of flint cores, while the notched blade from Skaruliai was interpreted as a fragmented tool, maybe used for scraping, perhaps dated to the Mesolithic period based on the flint-knapping technology. The artifact from Vilnius could be recognized as a fragment of a flint ‘figurine’ of some importance, later reused as a tool for other purpose. This ‘figurine’, along with the decorated bone dagger from Šarnele, makes for a very short list of Final Palaeolithic portable art from Lithuania, indicating the existence of some form of creative expression among the small groups of hunters-gatherers roaming through Lithuanian territory in this period. Indeed, portable art is in all likelihood the only type of art-related evidence to be traced archaeologically. Bone and flint were among the materials used for making decorated objects. New discoveries, studied contextually, will hopefully fill the gaps in the sum of knowledge on Palaeolithic art from Lithuania.

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