

PRIIT LIGI IN MEMORIAM

On the 28th of September 1994 hundreds of lives were lost in the shipwreck of the car ferry "Estonia", en route from Tallinn to Stockholm. Among the victims was Priit Ligi, the head of the Department of Archaeology of the Institute of History of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. Four children lost their father, a wife her husband, a mother her son, and Estonian archaeology one of its most gifted representatives.

Priit Ligi was born on the 24th of May 1958 in Tartu. His father, Herbert Ligi, was a historian, subsequently professor at Tartu University. His mother, Reet Ligi (née Moora), was a teacher of English. There were also two sisters and one brother in the family. From 1965 to 1976 Priit Ligi attended Tartu Secondary School No. 2, and went on to study archaeology and history at Tartu University. Ligi worked as a research assistant at the Institute of History of the Estonian Academy of Sciences from 1981 to 1983. He spent the following three years as a post-graduate student at the Leningrad Department of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR, receiving the degree of *kandidat istoricheskikh nauk*, corresponding to a Western PhD. Upon returning to Estonia, he began to work at the Institute of History, first as a researcher, and from 1992 as the head of the Department of Archaeology. In 1992-1993 Ligi received a scholarship from the Swedish Institute, permitting him to work as a guest researcher at Stockholm University for eight months. From February 1994, he participated in the doctoral programme in archaeology at Stockholm University.

While still a student at Tartu University, Priit Ligi began to investigate the antiquities of the Votes, a small Balto-Finnic ethnic group in north-eastern Estonia and adjacent areas of Russia. Over a period of eight years (1980-1986 and 1989), Ligi excavated Votic burials initially at Jõuga, but also at Kuremäe, Sõrumäe, Lemmaku and Palasi. In addition to a number of articles, this topic was also the subject of Ligi's diploma thesis in 1981, and his

doctoral thesis in 1987. In 1993 the whole of the rich Votic material of Estonia was published in *Muinasaja teadus* no. 2. The material derives from excavations by Ligi and other archaeologists. This collection of articles by several researchers on Votic problems was compiled by Priit Ligi, and contains a substantial contribution by him. Basing on over a decade of research, Ligi was firmly convinced that there is no reason to speak of Slavonic colonization in the previously Balto-Finnic (including Votic) areas in the second half of the first millennium AD, as previously accepted, and he argued for the theory of language replacement by the local tribes. Having later become familiar with modern theoretical archaeology in Western Europe, Ligi returned to this position in his article published in *Fennoscandia archaeologica* X. On the 27th of September 1994, just before leaving by ferry from Tallinn, Ligi added the last corrections to his reply to the critics of this article, but this text could never reach the editor. In this sense, the archaeology of the Votes was Priit Ligi's main and most beloved subject of research until the tragic end of his short life.

After his post-graduate years and the defence of his thesis in Leningrad, Ligi began to investigate the Late Iron Age of Saaremaa. This was a new topic, and, as he himself repeatedly said, a return to his own roots, his father having descended from Saaremaa. Initial plans for research, drawn up with his father, were destined to remain unrealized owing to the death of Herbert Ligi in 1990. Priit Ligi also planned to prepare for publication Aita Kustin's thesis on the Late Iron Age of Saaremaa. This text had already been written in the 1960s, but had remained in manuscript form owing to Kustin's early demise. This project was never completed, as neither other plans for studying Iron Age settlement in northwestern Saaremaa and the harbours of the island, or interdisciplinary research on the cultural and environmental history of Saaremaa.

In 1991, Priit Ligi was given the opportunity to

participate in the excavations at Birka, which caused him to take growing interest in Western theoretical archaeology. The Iron Curtain of the Soviet period had effectively led to an almost total lack of modern theoretical literature in Estonia. Having received a grant from the Swedish Institute, Priit Ligi could delve into the "bottomless" libraries of Stockholm. Some time later, he published two articles on Iron Age society and studies of ethnicity in Estonia, which occasioned wide discussion and debate among Estonian archaeologists and historians. In 1994 he wrote yet another article on the development of Iron Age society, together with an introduction to theoretical archaeology, which will be published in no. 3 of *Muinasaja teadus*. Participating in the doctoral programme at Stockholm University, Priit Ligi intended to write a doctoral thesis on the theoretical aspects of Estonian archaeology. He was given a year's research position for

the purpose, and on the 28th of September 1994 he was on his way to Stockholm to begin work.

Priit Ligi's life was too short for any great number of completed works. Rather, there was a wealth of good plans, ideas, and topics with which he had only started. He was ahead of his times in many ways. His colleagues remember him as an honest and straightforward person, highly sensitive in questions of ethics and politics, but never refusing a good joke or (self-) ironic comments. Estonian archaeology has suffered an irretrievable loss.

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