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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Obituary: Janis Apals (17 September 1930 - 21 February 2011)

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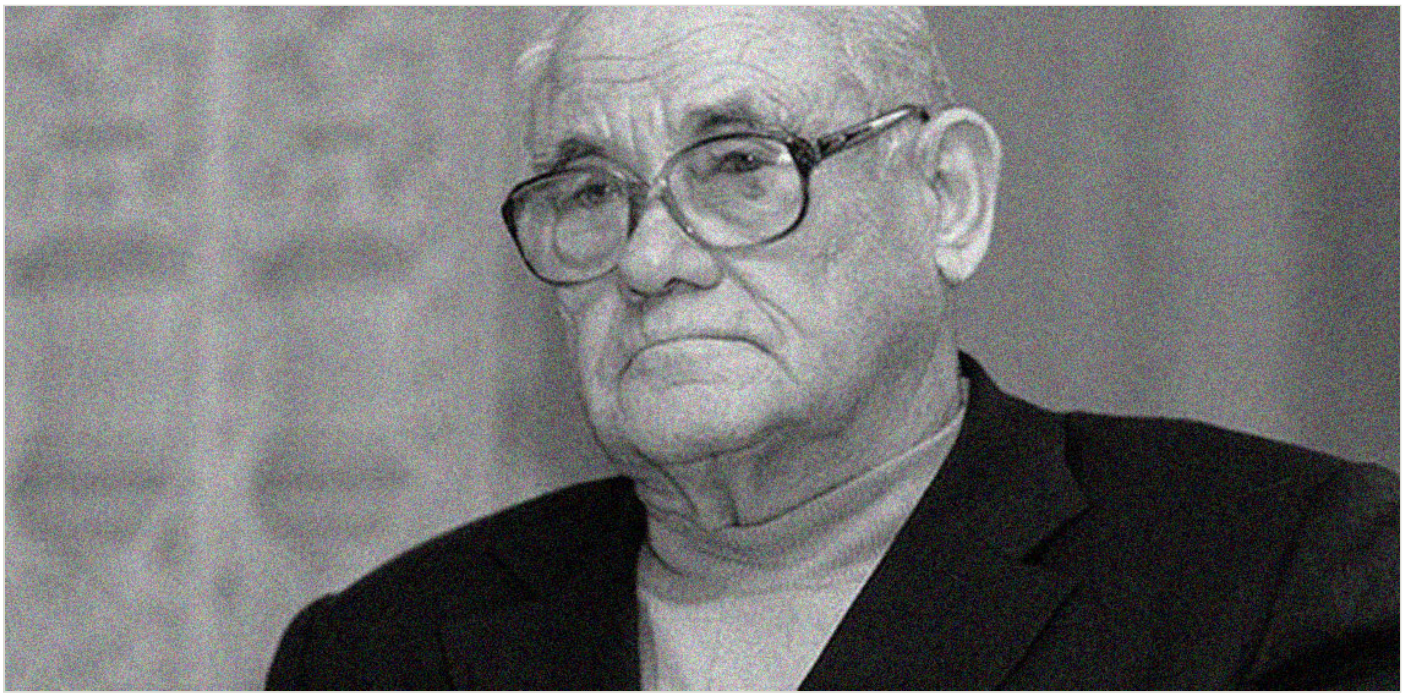

With Jānis Apals, who died at the age of 80 after a short illness, the international world of experimental archaeology looses a valued friend and colleague. EXARC remembers Jānis Apals as an energetic archaeologist, standing strong for his ideas and always willing to explain about the beauty of Latvia and, very importantly, its wonderful past as revealed through archaeology.

> The pioneer that he was, he brought experimental archaeology and archaeological open-air museums in Latvia from the very beginning to the prosperity where it stands now.

It was at the end of the 1950s, when the young teacher Jānis Apals, decided to examine to what degree ancient Latvian legends carried any historical truth. He checked over 100 lakes and found 10 ancient settlements: a new category was defined and listed: lake fortresses. He was also important to underwater archaeology.

He excavated Āraiši Lake Fortress, a Latgallian site dating back to the 10th century AD. But nobody in Latvia had thought before to actually make the original site rise again as a (re)constructed archaeological open-air museum. In the mid 1990s, though it was exactly this that he did – real pioneering and groundbreaking work for experimental archaeology in Latvia as in those days, doing experiments was rarely done. Jānis showed, if you follow a good strategy, you can learn a lot about the past through experimentation. The research of the Lake Fortress and making the site come to life again became the archaeologist's life's fulfilment. Nowadays Āraiši Lake Fortress is visited by over 10,000 tourists yearly. Āraiši Lake Fortress is Jānis' monument where we remember him.

The pioneer that he was, he brought experimental archaeology and archaeological open-air museums in Latvia from the very beginning to the prosperity where it stands now; with so many more people involved. We thank You for that.

It should be mentioned that thanks to Jānis Apals, the archaeological excavations in Cēsis Medieval Castle started in the 1970s, the leadership of which later was taken over by his wife Zigrīda Apala.

Jānis, his wife Zigrīda and colleagues from Āraiši Lake Fortress hosted one of EXARC's very first meetings. In 2002 they was just a handful of foreign archaeologists from EXARC who came to Latvia. Even though Jānis did not speak English, he made his point about how important it was to show EXARC to Latvia and Latvia to EXARC. Those foreigners brought knowledge, but went home with so much more. We had very good discussions on the philosophy of experimentation and everything seemed to be possible. Now, thanks to that meeting in 2002 and what followed, EXARC stands strong. We thank You for that.

With his museum Āraiši Lake Fortress, Jānis was one of the first of our members. When in the years 2006-2009 eight museums across Europe joined in a European project called liveARCH, Jānis was one of those who convinced Āraiši Lake Fortress to join. With his energy and vision, he helped keep the international project on the right track.

Jānis, you made many friends in EXARC as well as in liveARCH. We are all very sad to lose you. You were our Nestor and we miss you so much. We see Zigrīda, who stood beside you so long and we support her with this enormous loss. A far friend you were more valuable than a good neighbour.

Farewell!

Keywords experimental archaeology
archaeological open-air museum
construction of building
education
lake dwelling
tourism

Country Latvia

Biography Janis Apals

(17/09/1930 – 21/02/2011)

1930	- Born
1956	- Graduated from Latvia University, Faculty of History and Philosophy
1959-1993	- Research associate in the Institute of History of Latvian Academy of Sciences
1964-1992	- Participated in and led numerous archaeological excavations
1993	- Dr.h.hist.
1997	- Honorary Doctor of Latvian Academy of Sciences
1994	- Chief researcher in the Institute of Latvian History of Latvian Academy of Sciences
1994	- Chief of the board of the public foundation The Āraiši Lake Fortress Foundation
1994	- Co-author of the reconstruction project for the Āraiši Lake Fortress and scientific leader of reconstruction work
1995	- Awarded the Spīdola Award for the research and reconstruction of the Āraiši Lake Fortress
2001	- Co-author of the book Ancient History of Latvia
2011	- Died

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