THE VIGDIARIA CEMETERY
Valdomar Simians

The Vígdiara cemetery is located on the Lower Nemunas in Sliūda, near the former Žiopilės lands. It is cut out on one of the richest cemeteries in Lithuania. The cemetery occupies a small sandy elevation in the northern part of a village near a cemetery of the 20th century. The first references to the cemetery are found in archives, dated to 1932. It was then that the first finds were revealed during excavations of sand. At time past, a so-called burial mound was forgotten. In the seventeenth century, due to excavations of sand and sand rendition works, the cemetery was badly damaged. It was re-discovered in 1984. During excavations carried out in the period from 1986 to 1998 (1998), 1994, 1996-1998 an area of 1404 sq. m was excavated, yielding 62 inhumation and 1 cremation burial, as well as 29 round truu- aft or pits. The excavations were headed by Dr. V. Simians (Vilnius University).

The burials were situated in small groups, with quite large spaces in between. The burial pits were very large, with plenty of room left at the bed and the foot. There was a distinct tendency to bury men and women in opposing directions. Male individuals were buried with their heads oriented to the north and northwest, while females had their heads placed to the south and southeast. In some cases, bed-heads of male and female burials were put together to form a couple (Graves 29, 39 and 40, 38 and 33). Burials of children were concentrated a separate part of the cemetery.

As many as five types of burial were singled out in the cemetery. These include the traditional Lithuanian inhumation burials in rectangular pits without any additional stones or other constructions. The second type embraces graves in which edges of the pit were reinforced with clay, and which had a clay lining on the walls and the bottom of the pit. The third type of step-pits, with steps, 70-25 cm high and 15-25 cm wide, were made on one or both sides of the pit. In some cases the step was reinforced with planks. The fourth type includes large oval-shaped pits, and the fifth one - cremation burials with traditional rectangular or box-shaped bone pits. Quite a number of graves showed evidence of planked coffins. This diversity of burial rites shows that the community, which used the cemetery, was not stable and obviously contradicted from the ethical and social point of view.

The buried individuals were richly furnished with grave goods. In some burials 23 different burial goods were found. The prevalent grave goods in male burials include and weapons and invento-
ry of riding clothes as well as ornaments. Finds of working tools were less common. Spears were placed at the head, and pointed battle-knives/daggers were laid at the right shoulder or near the waist. Nearly all the knives have three or two grooves on the back. There was a solitary single-edged sword, found in Grave 32. Axes were rare among grave goods. They were mostly shackled, and only one specimen had a blunt end. Male graves often revealed a horse offering. The animal's head with a riding bit in the teeth and apparently its skin with bones of the extensities were placed into the burial. On the left bank of the Verline, on the shore of St. Pilaite (Zomžiški), located an abondon hilltuck rising 9.15 m high. Its flat hilltop is 80 m long and 50 m wide. The central part, while remains of a subsidiary rampart, visible on the verge, are 0.5-1.5 m high. During the years 1957-1960, archaeologists of the present Lithuanian Institute of Archaeology were placed at the flat hilltop. In the south-western and western parts of the hilltop (headed by Vytautas Daugalis), and an area of 2400 sq.m., in the form of a pottery settlement. On its southwestern, southern and eastern hilltops (headed by Aldona Čerdelienė). A cultural layer of 0.2-4 m was found at the hill-top, while the settlement revealed a cultural layer which was 0.5-2.3 m thick and, apart from various remains of wooden buildings and their traces, yielded as much as 1800 stone, bone, metal, and ceramic artefacts from different periods, as well as about 19000 sherds of modelled pottery and pots made on a potter's wheel, a lot of bones of domesticated animals and game, charred grains of millet, wheat, barley, rye, beans, peas, oats and vetch. The above mentioned finds served to establish that the hill-top was inhabited by a family community close to the ancestors of the Baltic Lituans, in approxi-
ately the 2nd century B.C. and used until the 16th-17th century. In the very beginning, the flat hilltop was about the size of two-thirds of the present hilltop. It was protected by a wooden defensive wall of a simple construction, about 2 m wide. Inside the wall, there would be a rectangular wooden houses of a post-construction, with open fire-pits inside the dwelling premises. At that time, people had very few metal articles, due to which only stone, bone and ceramic items have been basi-
cally found on the sites where buildings had stood and in their surroundings. In the 1st-4th centuries A.D., a long house of a post-construction, typical of the Baltic tribes of that period, stood on the verge of the deserted summit of the hill-top. The longhouse was divid-
ed into a lot of dwelling chambers, measuring 3.5x4 and 4.4 meters, with open fire-pits, and household premises. In that part of the hill-top which was closer to the river, there was also an iron smelting furnace, made of local bog ore. Quite a number of iron artefacts and items manufactured from raw branches brought from other lands were thus found in the area of the above mentioned flat hilltop and its surroundings as well as sherds of typically Baltic modelled pottery with a brushed sur-
face. At that time, people started building settlements close to the hill-top, and a slowly hilly landscape. In the 5th to 9th century A.D., the wooden Lithuanian castle under consideration had already been fortified with an earth-
work up to 3 m high, with a wooden double defensive barrier, about 2 m high, on top of it, and a defensive ditch, about 2.5 m deep and 6 m wide, was dug at the slope of the castle. All these fortifications provided quite a reliable protection for inhabitants of the castle against both surrounding tribes and various nomads roaming from as far as the then southeastern parts of Europe, who left quite a number of iron arrow-heads in the ter-
itory of the castle. In the period, along with articles made of bone, clay and other materials, inhabitants of the castle were already making widespread use of artefacts manufactured from metals (iron, bronze). At that time, the number of farmsteads in the foot settlement, where various craftsmen were mostly probably con-
centrating, had considerably increased.

In the 10th-16th centuries, the castle was further fortified with an earthwork of up to 6 m high, which also had a double wood-
en defensive barrier, about 7 m high, on top of it. Excavations inside the barrier revealed burnt structural remains of 6 dwelling houses and 3 out-buildings, measuring about 4.5x4 m in size. The buildings were constructed of wood beams joined in the cor-
ers, the dwelling chambers had wooden floors and stones made of clay and stones in the corners. One of these buildings had been owned by a jewell, as indicated by tools and unfinit-
ted articles found there. One of the out-buildings yielded quite a lot of burnt grains of rye, wheat, barley, peas, oats, beans, and vetch. In general, quite a large number of various iron, bronze and other artefacts, as well as sherds of pots made on a potter's wheel, have been found in the terri-
ory where the wooden castle of the said period had stood. At that time, the foot settlement was expanding considerably as well. This solid castle was doubtless owned by one of the more prominent Lithuanian dukes of the time, and was burnt down in the 14th century, mostly probably during an attack of the Crusaders, who often raided the area, especially on their way to Trakai and Vilnius.