

● **THE VIDGIRIAI CEMETERY**
Valdemaras Šimėnas

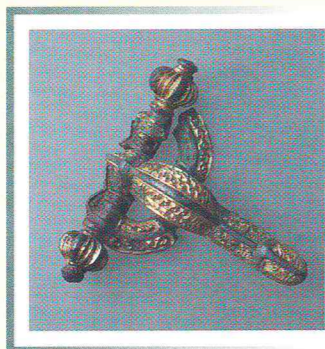
The Vidgiriai cemetery is located on the Lower Nemunas in Šilutė District, the former Klaipėda land. It stands out as one of the richest cemeteries in Lithuania. The cemetery occupies a small sandy elevation in the northern part of a village near a cemetery of the 19th-20th century. The first references to the cemetery are found in archives, dated to 1932. It was then that the first finds were revealed during excavations of sand. As time passed, however, the cemetery was forgotten. In the seventies, due to excavations of sand and land rectification works, the cemetery was badly damaged. It was re-discovered in 1984. During excavations carried out in the period from 1986 to 1998 (1986-1990, 1994, 1996-1998) an area of 1840 sq. m. was excavated, yielding 62 inhumation and 1 cremation burial, as well as 29 round (ritual?) pits. The excavations were headed by Dr. V. Šimėnas (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 couples (Graves 29 and 30, 39 and 40, 38 and 41). 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 includes stepping pits with steps, 50-25 cm high and 15-25 cm wide, 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 in traditional rectangular pits. Quite a number of graves showed evidence of plank coffins. This diversity of burial rites shows that the community, which used the cemetery, was not stable and obviously contrasted from the ethical and social point of view.

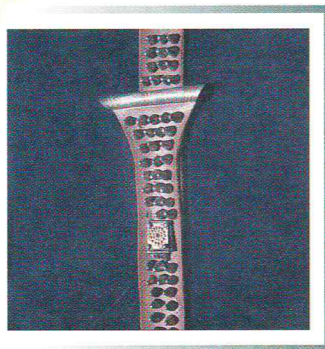
The buried individuals were richly furnished with grave goods. In some burials 25 different burial goods were found. The prevalent grave goods in male burials include weapons and inventory of riding clothes as well as ornaments. Finds of working tools were less common. Spears were placed at the bedhead, and pointed battle knives-daggers were laid at the right shoulder or 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 socketed, 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 extremities were placed into burials. The riding bits were of notably different shapes: shape H, with two- and three-jointed mouthpieces made of iron and bronze. Spurs were also frequently found. They were made of bronze and had straps decorated with silver plates and buckles (found in pairs), or made of iron with outwardly curved ends (found solitary). In some burials, a scythe was placed at the feet. Both men and women used to wear a lot of ornaments. Quite a lot of ornaments are made of silver and some are gilded. They include neck-rings, brooches, bracelets and rings. Special notice should be made of a shoulder strap found in grave 23. It was made of small silver cones, a gilded



ornamented plate and a gilded nozzle cylinder fastened to a piece of leather. Frequently found in graves were belt buckles, some made of iron and oval-shaped, others made of bronze with a thickening on the clip. Exceptionally rich burials were found in male graves 2, 23, 26, 30 and 32.

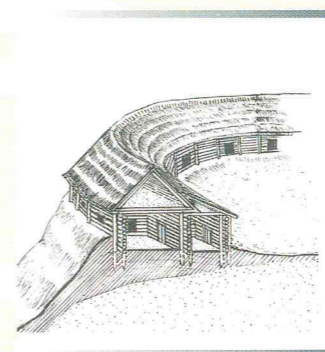
The prevalent finds in female burials were ornaments and tools. Special notice could be taken of headbands with bucket-shaped pendants (which might have been also used to decorate the borders of caps), made of a silver plate and filled in with wax. Recurrent burial goods comprise crook-like iron pins (some specimens were up to 40 cm long) with a pendant of several amber beads on one end; the buried individuals had neck-rings of diverse shapes on the necks, crossbow brooches with a long, zoomorphic (animal), or a star-shaped foot on the chest, and bracelets with thickened terminals, spiral rings or rings with an expanded central part on the hands. Particularly frequent were necklaces of lathed amber beads (the Basonian type) at the waist or arms. It was quite often that isolated amber beads were attached to other articles. Tools, which are worth, include delicate decorated spindles of limestone and awls. Among female burials, a few more rich burials, namely 21 and 29, are worth mentioning.



All the burials that have been excavated are dated to the second half of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century. Such a narrow chronology of this cemetery is very important in dating the evidence from other cemeteries. The Vidgiriai cemetery can be therefore treated as a Lithuanian model site of the middle of the first millennium. Quite a number of finds, their production technologies, ornamental patterns and burial customs have close analogues in central Europe (the Middle Danube) and in the Baltic Sea Islands (Gotland and Oland). This shows relations of the period and event indirect influences, and indicates migration to the region of the Lower Nemunas in the middle of the 5th century. Thus, these processes can be associated with the consequences of the Great Migration.

● **THE AUKŠTADVARIS HILL-FORT**
Vytautas Daugudis

The Aukštadvaris hill-fort is located in Trakai District, on the southwestern verge of a small town, on the left bank of the Verknė, on the shore of St. Pilaite (Zomkelis) lake, set up on an oblong hillock rising 9-15 m high. Its flat hilltop is 80 m long and 50 m wide in the central part, while remains of a subsiding rampart, visible on the verge, are 0.5-1.5 m high. During the years 1957-1960, archaeologists of the present Lithuanian Institute of History excavated an area of 958 sq.m. in the southwestern and western parts of the hilltop (headed by Vytautas Daugudis), and an area of 2400 sq.m. - in the former foot settlement on its southwestern, southern and eastern hillsides (headed by Aldona Gerdvilienė). A cultural layer of 0.5-4 m was found at the hill-fort, while the settlement revealed a cultural layer which was 0.5-2.5 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-fort was inhabited by a family community close to the ancestors of the Balts, the Jatvingians, in approximately 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 were overground rectangular wooden houses of a post-construction, with open fire-places inside the dwelling premises. At that time, people had very few metal articles, due to which only stone, bone and ceramic items have been basically found both 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 levelled summit of the hill-fort. The longhouse was divided into a lot of dwelling chambers, measuring 3x4 and 4x4 meters, with open fire-places, and household premises. In that part of the hill-fort 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 brass brought from other lands were thus found in the area of the above mentioned building and its surroundings as well as sherds of typically Baltic modelled pottery with a brushed surface. At that time, people started building settlements close to the hill-fort, especially its southern hillside.

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 neighbouring tribes and various nomads rambling from as far as the then southeastern parts of Europe, who left quite a number of iron arrow-heads in the territory of the castle. In this period, along with articles made of bone, clay and other materials, inhabitants of the castle were already making wide use of artefacts manufactured from metals (iron, brass). At that time, the number of farmsteads in the foot settlement, where various craftsmen were most probably concentrating, had considerably increased.

In the 10th-14th centuries, the castle was further fortified with an earthwork of up to 6 m high, which also had a double wooden defensive barrier, about 2 m wide, on top of it. Excavations inside the barrier revealed burnt structural remains of 6 dwelling houses and 3 out-buildings, measuring about 4x4 m in size. The buildings were constructed of wood beams joined in the corners, the dwelling chambers had wooden floors and stoves made of clay and stones in the corners. One of these buildings had been owned by a jeweller, as indicated by tools and unfinished 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 territory 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, most probably during an attack of the Crusaders, who often ravaged the area, especially on their way to Trakai and Vilnius.