

● **THE MAIŠIAGALA HILL-FORT**
Regina Kulikauskienė

The Maišiagala hill-fort, which has been on the crossroad of significant historical events for long centuries, looms on the verge of Maišiagala townlet, at the distance of 28 km northwest of Vilnius. It was excavated in 1971-1973 (headed by Regina Kulikauskienė). The hill-fort was set up on a hill as high as 20 m, surrounded by the Dūkštas rivulet on two sides, encircled by a 3-5 m deep ditch and a rampart of the same height. It once had a huge forework, also surrounded by another rampart.

The oldest cultural layer, found in the depth of 3.5-4 m, reveals that in the first centuries A.D. the hill was inhabited by people of the Brushed Pottery culture. It was later abandoned for a long period of time and inhabited again only in the beginning of the 2nd millennium. At that time the hill was fundamentally reconstructed, elevated to the present height, and its entire foot was encircled by the above mentioned rampart and a ditch, filled with water.

The cultural layer formed on the flat hilltop at that time has yielded numerous finds: remains of a burnt down building, skeletons of sheep suffocated in fire, countless bones of domestic animals, remains of charred grain, agricultural equipment (sickles, scythes, ard and ploughshare coulters). All this witnesses a developed farming. It has also been established and confirmed by historical sources that there was a strong castle on the hilltop, which served as one of the foreposts against the marches of the Crusaders to Vilnius. References to marches in the year 1365, 1387 and 1390 are found in written sources. During the last march, the castle was finally destroyed. Historian Dlugosz mentions that the Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas (died in 1377) spent his last days in the castle of Maišiagala. People often call this hill-fort the grave of Algirdas.

In the 13th-15th centuries, the Maišiagala hill-fort and its castle were in the centre of an emerging town. Further development of the town was facilitated by construction of a church built close to the castle in 1387.

During the last stage of existence, the hill-fort was turned into a manor. The older inhabitants of Maišiagala still keep calling the hill-fort "the hill of Bonn".



● **KERNAVĖ**
Aleksiejus Luchtanas

Kernavė represents an impressive complex of archaeological, historical and natural resources. Although it is a land that evokes the primeval past of Lithuania, the Middle Ages are the most dynamic and interesting period of Kernavė's history. Kernavė first is mentioned in the written sources in 1279. At that time, it was considered to be the ducal seat of Traidenis (1269-1282), the powerful Grand Duke of Lithuania. Certainly, Kernavė functioned as one of the major economic and political centres of the early medieval Lithuanian State. Its population of 3 000 inhabitants at that time is in contrast with today's population of only 500. Medieval Kernavė was a town of artisans and merchants, and it was situated near a defensive nucleus consisting of a castle complex. Both the town and the castles were wooden. The town was destroyed once in 1365, but it was rebuilt again. After the last crusaders' attack in 1390, however, the town failed to rise again. Residents were either massacred or they retreated.

Upon losing its strategical importance, the town was not rebuilt in the same place. During the following six centuries, a two metres thick alluvial deposit from the river covered the town and in this way excellently preserved its ruins. Kernavė is a unique archaeological complex - not only the location of the earliest medieval capital of Lithuania - but a compact concentration of some 40 sites from different time periods, within a relatively small area of 200 ha. The major features of the reservation are its five adjacent hill-forts and the scenic Pajauta valley. The valley has settlements dating from the Late Paleolithic to the Iron Ages, a

well preserved culture-layer of a medieval town (XIII-XIV cent.) and a wooden trackway (III-IV cent.), together with its cemetery and a sacrificial offering place. The upper terrace of the Neris river bank has barrow cemeteries and a large XIII-XIV cent. flat burial ground. In sum, the chronology of Kernavė archaeological sites spans all of Lithuania's prehistoric and early historic periods - from the Late Paleolithic (IX-VIII millennia B.C.) to the XVIII cent. A.D.

Amateur archaeological investigation of Kernavė began during the early 19th century. Modern scientific excavations, however, started in 1979, sponsored by Vilnius University. Nineteen field seasons have encovered a total of 7 500 m, but this represents only 2 of the site complex. On the basis of this research, the first and for the time being the only museum of such type, i.e. the State Archaeological Museum-reservation of Kernavė, was established in Lithuania in 1989. It covers a territory of 199.2 ha.

The first inhabitants of the region of Kernavė arrived about

9000-8 000 B.C. Temporary camps of hunters and fishermen began to appear along the banks of Neris river. Settlements became more abandoned during the Mesolithic period (8 000-4 000 B.C.) and especially in the Neolithic period (4 000-2 000 B.C.). By the Bronze Age, we can identify an archaeological culture: the Brushed Pottery culture of the eastern Balts. Before Kernavė was excavated, this culture was primarily known through excavations of hill-forts. Very few burials had been found. Three types of cremation graves from this period, however, have been discovered at Kernavė. In the first ages A.D., iron tools and weapons began to be produced from the iron ore of local swamps and lakes. Agriculture and cattle raising prospered, and the local population grew rapidly. Kernavė was settled at this time, principally in the fertile valley of Pajauta. The settlement had access to the fortified hill-forts by means of a hidden wooden trackway through the marshes. It is the oldest road found in Lithuania.

About A.D. 300-500 the Pajauta valley was abandoned and its



inhabitants resettled on top of the Castle Hill, the Mindaugas Throne Hill-fort and near the Lizdeika Hill-fort. This may have been the result of the damp climate or frequent attacks by enemies. On the Hill of the Offertory Shrine a wooden castle was built, which served as a residence of the tribal nobility. Archaeological excavation has been directed towards the medieval town and to the sites of the ancient castles. Over 3000 m have been excavated.

During the 11th-12th centuries, Kernavė evolved from a tribal center into a feudal citadel.

Quarters of craftsmen and merchants were set up near the residence of the Grand Duke. The Offertory Shrine Hill-fort was defended by two adjacent hill-forts, the Lizdeika Hill-fort and the Mindaugas Throne Hill-fort. Settlements appeared in the fortified upper town, on Castle Hill, and at foot of the hill-forts in the Pajauta valley. By the 13th century, Kernavė had the appearance of a typical feudal town, including a network of streets. The Pajauta valley provides favourable conditions for the