

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

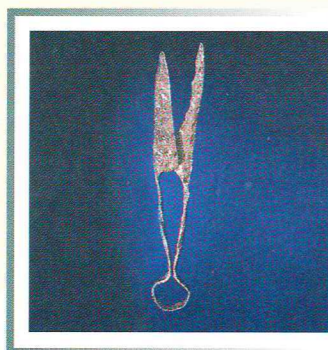
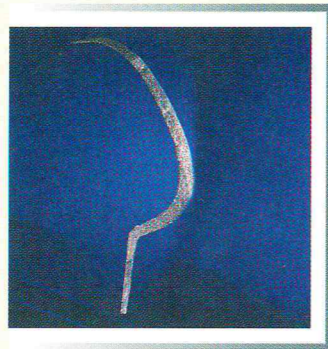
The Maišiagala hill-fort, which has been on the crossroad of significant historical events for long centuries, looms on the verge of Maišiagala townlet, at the distance of 28 km northwest of Vilnius. It was excavated in 1971-1973 (headed by Regina Kulikauskienė). The hill-fort was set up on a hill as 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

The Pajauta valley provides favourable conditions for the preservation of organic material, resulting in the recovery of an impressive number of wood, leather, bone, horn, and birch bark artifacts. The Kernavė collection of birch bark artifacts is in fact unique among museums in Eastern Europe.

Five households have been excavated in the lower town in Pajauta valley. One represents that of a craftsman who worked with bone, the other a jeweller. Local blacksmiths produced complex utensils for different functions, as well as weapons and household equipment. Full-time craft specialization existed. Artifacts testify to the high skills of the craftsmen.

Kernavė was noted for its trade and industry. Most of the products of local craftsmen were intended for regional exchange. Kernavė also participated, however, in long distance trade networks with Livonia, central and western Europe, Kievian Russia and the Near East. Many imported objects have been found, including III and XIII cent. glass beaker fragments, jewelry from the Near East, Kievian Russia and western Europe. The numismatic collection of the museum includes all of the primary types of the early Lithuanian coins.

Fourteenth century Kernavė represented one of the most important defensive outposts in Lithuania. Together with Medininkai and Trakai it formed part of the defensive system protecting Vilnius. After its devastation by the Teutonic Order in 1390, however, Kernavė lost its strategic status. This was largely due to the rapid growth of Vilnius and Trakai. In 1386-1392, Kernavė still had regional significance, but later it represented merely a small fort on the route to Vilnius. After the battle of Žalgiris (Tannenberg), Kernavė was only an average manor in the Grand Duchy. The fifteenth century town moved to another place - on the edge of the upper terrace of the Neris, where the present town is located.

Archaeological excavations encompassed not only old Kernavė, but the existing town as well. The site of the old Kernavė church was investigated (i.e. its location in 1420) as well as the XV - XVIII cent. cemetery near the church. In addition, excavations were carried out at the old Kernavė estate and in other areas of the town where the XV cent. layer continued.



● 13TH-14TH CENTURY CEMETERY OF KERNAVĖ

Gintautas Vėlius

The Kernavė cemetery dating to the 13th-14th centuries was found in 1993, after a long period of searching. In the Middle Ages Kernavė used to be a flourishing centre of crafts and trade, and it might have also been one of the first capitals of Lithuania. This assumption is testified by burials of the period which yield abundant grave goods. An area of 800 sq.m. has been excavated, but it accounts for only 10% of the whole territory of the burial ground. A significant part of grave goods found in the burials are ornaments imported from Kiev Russia and later centres of the Russian lands. All the graves (153) contained inhumated burials, with heads oriented to the west or a direction close to the west. This shows that the rite of cremation had been abandoned and inhumation started in Lithuania even before the official christening of the country. This shift of burial rites should be associated with the strengthening influence of the closest neighbours, both catholic and orthodox. Results of excavations at the cemetery, which have been continuing for four years, reveal the paleodemographical situation, the understanding people had of life after death, and, hence, their religion.



● OLD TRAKAI

Albinas Kuncevičius

Old Trakai is believed to have been one of the most important centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. According to Lithuanian annals, the state capital was situated here for some time. No mention is made in written sources of the whereabouts of Lithuania's oldest capital during the reign of King Mindaugas (r. 1236-1263). Although it has been confirmed by archaeological investigations that as early as the 13th century Vilnius was an important centre of craftsmanship and trade, it was only in 1323 that its name was first mentioned in written sources. The 16th century legend described in Lithuanian annals also maintains that the founding of the town of Vilnius was solely due to Grand Duke Gediminas who reigned in 1316-1341.



According to the same legend, Duke Traidenis (r. 1270-1282) ruled Lithuania from the Kernavė Castle. Gediminas, who was later to become Duke, supposedly lived in Kernavė at first, but a little later he moved the capital to another place where he had a castle built which he called Old Trakai. Somewhat later he moved the capital to Vilnius, where he also had solid castles built. His son Kęstutis went on to rule Old Trakai. It was in Old Trakai that Vytautas, the most prominent and popular ruler of Lithuania (r. 1392-1430), was born c. 1350. In the third quarter of the 14th century Kęstutis moved to the peninsular castle newly built near Lake Galvė in Trakai, some 5 km away from Old Trakai and he called the place New Trakai (it is the present-day town of Trakai). Old Trakai lost its significance and in the description of the roads of the Germanic Order of 1384-1402 it was no longer considered as a place to be attacked or a stronghold. The further development of Old Trakai was associated with the monastery and church of the Benedictines who were settled here in 1405 by Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas. At present, the building of the former monastery reconstructed in the 18th century and the church rebuilt in neo-Gothic style in 1899, still remain in the castle

area.

Old Trakai is now a small settlement with no remnants of a former castle visible in its southern edge. The place in which the castle once stood is an almost rectangular, level plot some 140 x 150 m in area surrounded by an impressive moat up to 40 m wide and 8 m deep. The buildings of the former monastery (now it is a parsonage) and church stand in the north-western part of the castle area.

Archaeological investigations in Old Trakai have been conducted since 1994. They are organised and carried out by the Historical National Park of Trakai and the Chair of Archaeology of Vilnius University. Dr. A.Kuncevičius is in charge of the expedition. A negligible part (some 400 square m) of the former castle area has been investigated to date. The investigations are being conducted in the southern, south-western and eastern

edges of the castle area, where the defensive wall once stood, and in the former court-yard of the castle, not far away from the entrance to it.

The investigations have revealed that the castle was surrounded by a solid masonry wall whose remnants have been found throughout the perimeter of the castle area. The masonry is approximately 1 m down from the present ground level, the remaining wall is some 2 m thick and up to 4 m high. On one side, the wall was built of coarse stone and on the other side of brick (in the western edge of the castle area the bricks are on the outer side, and in the eastern edge they are on the inner side). This is the so-called shell type of masonry, characteristic of the oldest masonry structures. The Baltic pattern was used for bonding bricks, i.e. two long bricks were followed by a short one. This brick-laying technique, the oldest in our country, was widely used in late 13th-early 14th c.c. The analysis of the wall and mortar used for its construction shows that the bricks (25-33 c.c. The

analysis of the wall and mortar used for its construction shows that the bricks and the composition of mortar are identical to those of the Upper Castle of Vilnius. However, differently from other defensive walls (in Kaunas, Krėva, Lyda and Medininkai), the entire outer or inner side of the wall of the Old Trakai castle was built of brick, whereas in other Lithuanian castles brick was only used for approximately 2 m-thick and several m-high portion of the walls. The peninsular castle of New Trakai was almost completely built of stone. The defensive walls of this castle and, probably, the masonry buildings inside the court-yard were roofed with so-called nuns, i.e. trough-shaped tiles. The archaeological investigations corroborate the vague statement found in the annals that the castle was built on an uninhabited hill grown over with forest, which was further confirmed by paleobotanic evidence. Incidentally, the name of the town of Trakai originates from the word *trakas*, meaning a felled or burnt out clearing in a forest.

The burnt castle of Old Trakai has never been rebuilt. Meanwhile, the castle of New Trakai has risen. It is not known why the old castle was abandoned and a new one was built in an uninhabited forest area.