Material from the Aukštakiemis (Aukštakiemiai, formerly Oberhof) grave site near Klaipėda excavated in 1886–1888, 1893–1895 provides a "classic" example of Baltic culture in the Lithuanian coastal region in the first millennium AD (Tischler 1889: 14–23; Tischler 1890: 25–26; Jentsch 1896: 123–124; LAA, vol. III, 1977: 23. No 31). Despite the fact that it has never been published in full, this material has been used by scholars for more than a century, and well known sketches of these artefacts bear witness to the special value of a grave site that was in use between the second and thirteenth centuries. As the work of W. Nowakowski has shown, it is possible to collate fragmentary data from works of former Eastern Prussia's prehistory into a certain whole — a quarter of the Aukštakiemis grave site's grave complex has already been reconstructed successfully (Nowakowski, 1999: 110–118).

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the image of one exceptional Aukštakiemis grave site find, viz. an enamelled disc, according to the description given by the original discoverer of grave site O. Tischler, and analogous material available to the present Author from archaeological literature. Unfortunately this unique artefact was an accidental find at the grave site. In 1886 it was handed over to the then Provinzial Museum in Königsberg, but no drawing of it was ever published.

The brass millefiori enamelled disc found in the Aukštakiemis grave site by O. Tischler has been noted for many years now by scholars as an example of a Roman import on the territory of what is now the Lithuanian Republic (Michelbertas 1972: 32). Hitherto Tischler's detailed description of the disc has been the only source available to help us imagine what this find looked like (Sitzung 1897: 38–39). The description of the disc's form and decoration, as is often the case, leaves room for each reader to form different visual associations. The present Author attempted to read the text of Tischler's paper on the enamelled Aukštakiemis disc carefully in the hope that it would be possible to reconstruct the decoration. Tischler describes the disc as follows:

Die Scheibe hat 46 mm Durchmesser und einen herabgebogenen Rand. Sie ist durch eine Reihe concentrischer Vertiefungen gegliedert in einem mittleren vertieften Kreis von 17 mm Durchm. und 3 vertiefte Reifen von ca. 3, 3,6, 3,9 cm Breite, welche durch niedrige Stege von einander getrennt sind. Diese Zonen sind mit mosaikartigem Email erfüllt, welches jedenfalls auch einst die Mitte bedeckte, die aber schon in alter Zeit ziemlich ungeschickt von einem 9 mm breiten Loch durchbohrt ist, so dass sowohl hier vollständig, als in den 3 Reifen zu einem kleinen Teil das Email herausgefallen ist, mit bisher nicht ausgewittert, wie dies die
der Bronze anhaftende Sandschicht zeigte. Das mittlere Zone enthält eine Reihe kleiner schachbrettartiger Täfelchen von rotbraun Grunde umgeben. Die Täfelchen sind aus 9 feinen 4eckigen Plättchen gebildet, in den 4 Ecken und in der Mitte ein weisses Quadrat, in den Mitten der Seiten ein blauenes. In der 1. und 3. Zone treffen wir Täfelchen ähnlich schachbrettartig aus 5 mal 5 Quadraten gebildet von blauem Grunde umgeben. Das mittltere Quadrat ist rot, von hier gehen aber nach der Mitte der Seiten je 2 blau, so dass ein blaues Kreuz entsteht, die Eckrinden sind ebenfalls blau, die drei ubrigen Quadrate an jeder Ecke sind weiss und bilden einen zusammenhängenden rechten Winkel. Da nun die 4 Ecken und 4 Arme der blauen Kreuze mit dem gleichfarbigen umgebenden Grunde zusammenfiessen, so hat man scheinbar eine Zone sichrigliegenden Malteserkreuze mit rothen Mitte auf blauem Grunde. In jeder Zone sind diese Kreuze unter sich gleich, in der inneren aber kleiner als die äusseren. Die eingeschmolzenen Glasmosaik, das sogenannte Millefiori-Email...ist soweit abgeschliffen, das sie mit der Metalloberfläche in einer Ebene liegt (Sitzung 1887: 36–39).

The present Author followed the description to recreate the decoration of the edge of the disc (Fig. 1). Such precise glass art is evident from millefiori beads, which are rare finds in decorative items from the territory of the modern Lithuanian Republic (Michelbertas 1972: 45). Substantiation of the fact that our understanding of Tischler's text is correct, is provided by another example of Roman millefiori enamelled technique, a colour photograph of which was published in an academic British Museum publication (Potter 1997:65. Fig. 52). This is a small bronze box, 4.6 cm high (the Aukštakiemis disc), that was found in Essex in a second-century grave. In a short annotation to the illustration Potter stresses that this is a rare example of boxes which were produced in the north-western provinces of the Roman Empire. They could have been used as inkwells. The Essexen box is hexagonal with fully enamelled sides. Three of the box's six sides have two enamel bands "soldered" into the metal at the top and bottom and their chessboard decoration and colurs match exactly the decoration of the middle part of the Aukštakiemis disc.

The basic motif of the other enamelled plates on the box's side is identical with the "Maltese Cross" ornamentation on the Aukštakiemis example, except that in the British find the Maltese Cross is blue on a white background, but it also has a red inner square. The same and/or very similar chessboard decoration motifs were used producing another Roman bronze box (Pyxis), which was found among impressive male grave goods in the Bosphorus (Das Gold der Barbarenfürsten 2001: 18, 101. Fig. 1. 6.5.1.).

Fig. 2. A small bronze box inlaid with millefiori decoration from the Bosphorus (Kerch, the Ukraine) (according to Das Gold der Barbarenfürsten, 2001: 18, 101. Fig. 1. 6.5.1.1.)
J. Antoniewicz was the first to attempt to use the descriptive data from the Aukštakiaiems plate when he investigated the origins of round enamel plates from male grave 2, Szwajcaria barrow No. 25 (Suwałki pow., Poland) and the distribution of this type of Roman artefact in the Baltic Region (Antoniewicz 1961: 16-19, Table V:1; Antoniewicz 1962: 186–191, Fig. 1, 2, 3). Drawing attention to the fact that the so-called “Roman enamelled plates” had various uses, as decorations on round brooches, pendants and mountings, Antoniewicz restricted himself to plates with knobs. This construction detail links plates found in Szwajcaria, Aukštakiaiems, the Kvite and Smagaðrøa grave sites on Gotland, and the Jevnaker site near Oslo (Antoniewicz 1962: 189–190, No. 3). Antoniewicz guessed that the Aukštakiaiems plate had the same type of moving fastening band—a stud with a decorative head on the enamelled side like the examples from Jevnaker and Kvite. Indeed, in the photograph provided of the Jevnaker find (Antoniewicz 1962: 187, Fig. 1, to the right) we can see a hole in the centre of the disc plate and that reminds one of Tischler’s description. However, the ornamentation on the Jevnaker plate is only one enamelled concentric rim of three filled with different coloured quadrangular enamel fields and this differs from the more complex decoration on the Aukštakiaiems plate. Antoniewicz was more interested in the general type of construction of enamelled plate so he did not attempt a reconstruction of the Aukštakiaiems disc’s ornamentation, noting that there was only a very hazy understanding of the decoration on the disc (Antoniewicz 1962: 190, No. 23). In fact the closest analogue to the “Klippeda” disc is in terms of millefiori enamelled plate from the Smagaðrøa grave site (Almgren, Nerman 1923: 103, No. 411, Fig. 187; Montelius 1887: 52, Fig. 81). The latter has identical three bands on the edge and the decorative motif on the brooch is twofold. The plate had a level surface with a non-moving closing stud on the inside top side. In the centre of the enamelled top is a quadrangular field of chessboard millefiori plates arranged in chessboard fashion (Fig. 3).

W. Nowakowski attempted to reconstruct the Aukštakiaiems find, treating it like an enamelled brooch typical of influx of imports into western Baltic territory in the late Roman Period (Nowakowski 1995: 61, Table XVIII:11). In the illustration the millefiori decoration was recreated following the example of the round enamelled plate from the Smagaðrøa grave site on Gotland (Almgren, Nerman 1922: 106; Antoniewicz 1962: 190, Fig. 2). Nowakowski recreated the millefiori decoration in the middle of the brooch which was severely damaged during excavation and left the three concentric rings on the edge of the disc blank. However, Tischler did describe the decoration on the perimeter areas of the disc. At present we can only speculate whether the centre of the Aukštakiaiems disc was covered with enamel in the same way as the plates from the Smagaðrøa grave site. Perhaps there was a band-stud with a decorated head in the centre of the disc as in the case of the Jevnaker find.

O. Tischler dated the Aukštakiaiems disc/brooch to the end of the second century or the beginning of the third century on the grounds that it was found in a part of the grave site which is typified by “simple crossbow brooches with bent foot” and coins minted before AD 180 (Tischler 1887: 48). Production of the so-called “enamelled Roman plates” began in the northern provinces beyond the Rhine as early as the end of the second century. Previously it was thought that these artefacts appeared in the northern Barbaricum later, because the Smagaðrøa grave with an enamelled plate was dated to circa AD 350-400, and Szwajcaria barrow 25 grave 2 to the fifth century (Antoniewicz 196: 16–17; Antoniewicz 1962: 188–191). Roman round brooches with chessboard millefiori plates are found most frequently in the western areas of the Barbaricum in Germanic inhumation graves from the trans-Elbe region. On the basis of grave-goods they are dated to the third century, most probably the second half of the century (Becker 1996: 47, Table 59: 3). A small number of millefiori enamel beads are found in Lithuania alongside material from the third-fourth centuries (Michelbertas 1972: 45). The Aukštakiaiems enamelled disc was most probably produced in a workshop in the western part of the Roman Empire, in what is now Northern France, Belgium, the lands irrigated by the Northern Rhine, where craftsmen learned how to use the difficult millefiori enamelling process to decorate vessels, round brooches and other goods in the first centuries AD. It is most likely that it came to what is now the coastal land of Lithuania by sea (the Baltic Sea).

It is difficult now to say whether the enamel disc from Aukštakiaiems was a brooch or a mounting. Another enamelled disc was excavated as an accidental find in the Pleškučiai/Pangesai (Pleschkutter) grave site. A. Bezenberger described it as having silver marks and that it was enamelled in red in the centre with small nails for fastening (Bezenberger 1892: 221). R. Madyda–Legutko links the Pleškučiai plate with enamelled Roman belt (baletas) studs, which are represented by the Szwajcaria barrow 25 male grave 2 plate and the aforementioned millefiori enamelled plate from the Smagaðrøa grave site’s male grave on Gotland. R. Madyda–Legutko checked the dating of the latter graves and attributed the Szwajcaria grave to the C3 Period and the one from the Smagaðrøa grave site to C2 (Madyda–Legutko 1992: 110–111, Table XII: 5, 6) thereby placing the appearance of the aforementioned artefacts in graves earlier than was thought hitherto.

The accidental nature of the circumstances surrounding the Aukštakiaiems enamelled disc find make providing a more exact dating and specifications as to its function more complicated. This would have been easier if we had a set of goods from a closed grave. Nevertheless, this find bears witness to the appearance of a high-class Roman artefact from the western provinces among the inhabitants of the Lithuanian maritime zone in the late Roman Period.

Fig. 3. A bronze disc inlaid with millefiori enamel from Smagaðrøa grave site in Gotland (Sweden) (according to Almgren, Nerman, 1923, 106, pld. 187).
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Kėdainiai is a middle-size periphery town, situated on the pictorial banks of the Nevėžis River, in the centre of Lithuania. The town’s kernel is the Old Town, which covers 87 hectares and is an urban monument of the Republic. There are 29 historical streets and 4 market squares, each located on the Old Town’s edges by the ancient roads, which led at that time from Kėdainiai to Vilnius, Kaunas, Samogitia, Prussia and Livland.

The 15th century Gothic St.George’s Church and now one of the last three remaining town halls, built in the middle of the 17th century is a beautiful feature of the Old Town. Other surviving buildings include the 17th century Reformed and Lutheran churches, 18th century St. Joseph’s Church, three 18th–19th century synagogues, the Russian Orthodox church and some 17th–19th century guilds’, merchants’ and townpeople’ houses (Fig. 1).

The early past of Kėdainiai is not described in historical sources. The locality, that can be linked with Kėdainiai, was mentioned for the first time in 1372, when a troop of the Livland Order, led by a Marshal Andrew von Stenberg, ravaged villages of the Nevėžis river basin (Livenijos kronikos 1991: 198). Up to the first half of the 15th century Kėdainiai had belonged to the Great Duchy of Lithuania (Buszynski 1973: 25). From the middle of the 15th century the town was owned by Lithuanian noblemen Radvilos (Litovskaja Metrika 1915: 77, 118). At the end of the 15th century the Polish chronicler Janusz Długosz used the term “oppidum” (“oppidum Kleidany”) or town, in reference to Kėdainiai (Długosz 1877: 19).

Historical sources do not provide with information about Kėdainiai in the 14th century and the town in the 15th century.

More information about the early past of Kėdainiai comes from archaeological investigations, which have been conducted since 1985. In 1992–1993 a cultural layer of the 14th–15th century with fragments of wooden buildings and numerous findings was excavated during the investigations of the two oldest approaches – the Old Market square and the Great Market square (Juknevičius 1994: 70–77; 1995: 10–13). The findings provided with information how the small village, situated on the Right Bank of the Nevėžis, in the beginning of the 14th century developed into a large town-type settlement.

A small village covering about 4 hectares was established in the beginning of the 14th century on the Nevėžis river right bank’s marshy lower terrace, on the place that is now the Great Market square. At that time, the level of the Nevėžis bank, where the first farmsteads were established, was 2 metres lower than the