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Symposium Castella Maris Baltici VI

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On September 18–22, 2001 the Symposium Castella Maris Baltici VI was held in Lithuania. This is already the 6th symposium for the researchers of the medieval castles. The first symposium was held in Turku, Finland in 1991, the second – in Nyköping, Sweden in 1993, the third - in Malbork, Poland in 1995, the fourth - in Estonia in 1997, and the fifth – in Denmark in 1999.

The topic of the conference held in Lithuania was "Contacts and Genetically Dwellings in the Castle Buildings". Over 40 scientists participated in the conference from Denmark, Belarus, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Great Britain, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. In the conference there were not only reports presented but also the most famous castles of Lithuania visited in Vilnius, Trakai, Kernavė, Kaunas and Klaipėda.

The time of this conference coincided with the European Heritage Days "Defensive Fortifications in Lithuania".

This conference was organised by the Public Institution Academy of Cultural Heritage established by Vilnius University, Vilnius Academy of Arts, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and Department of Cultural Heritage Protection. The Symposium Castella Maris Baltici VI was sponsored by the Department of Cultural Heritage Protection.

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Dr. Albinas Kuncevičius
The castles all showed signs of having been built in a hurry, using the trees on the forested island or recycling objects (the side of a boat) as building material. There are no signs in the building of the castles, their houses and towers that point towards social ambition. They were not built as private castles, as is indicated in the folklore tradition, but purely as military strongholds.

In 1295 a treaty was signed between the Danish and Norwegian king. A very important part of the treaty dealt with the counterfeiting carried out on Helgøya Island. To the Danish king this was such a vital matter, that he agreed to the outlawths and the Norwegian king keep the island as long as they stopped coin production. No doubt the counterfeit coin production, to the amount we have been able to show took place on Helgøya Island, must have been an essential part of an economic struggle, as was the control of trading ships and the plundering of the Danish coasts in the first part of the 1290s. This makes sense, but cannot be the full story. Helgøya was not the only place for example where counterfeit coins were made. The outlaws produced them too at Huneheia in Halland, a much more secure place. Why did they not make all the counterfeit coins there instead of choosing the vulnerable Helgøya Island, so close to the Danish mainland? One explanation for this is that making counterfeit money and using an island situated in the middle of the Danish kingdom as a military base was an attempt on the part of the outlaws to humiliate and provoke the Danish king, topple his followers and get themselves back into power.

The overthrow of the castles.

In 1306 Erik Menvied captured Helgøya and burnt the castles to the ground. He wanted to get rid of the enemy threat in the middle of the kingdom, now that the war with the Norwegian king had moved to Halland. To this end he had assembled a large army of professional mercenaries. He can use these to capture the island. We get some indication of how this happened from the archaeological finds. It was not difficult for his war-experienced army to force their way up the cully to the island's high ground north of Skånebyen. We do not know whether this castle was seized straightforwardly, was besieged or surrendered. No weapons or parts of weapons were found on the excavations on Skånebyen. It is possible we cannot get close to an answer this way. When the army came up on the high ground they avoided direct confrontation at the first with the central castle at Flybakken and instead attacked Kastelbaken. The finds of 18 crossbow bolts and three spear points show that they had to fight to take the castle (Fig. 22).

We can suppose that all the inhabitants of the island fled up to the castles when the attack came. Arrow- and spearheads found on the open ground could be from the crossbow bolts and spears that the defenders used against the attackers. Only one crossbow bolt head was found on Flybakken. It is conceivable that they entered into negotiations to avoid unnecessary losses. The castle on Flybakken was a strong one for that time and there is no doubt that most of the defenders would have fled there. A hard fight would be necessary if this castle was to be taken. This gave the defenders a favourable negotiating position, which could assure them safe conduct to leave the island with both life and honour intact. Probably Erik Menvied had no outstanding claims against the defenders and was interested only in razing the castles to the ground. So we can see the white flag hoisted over Flybakken, after which the commanding officer and his soldiers, the manual workers, cooks and those who looked after animals, kitchen gardens and the like and their wives and children all left the castle and made for the ships which then sailed with them to Norway. A few Norwegian merchants were held back. Next, the king's men set fire to the castles. This occurrence can clearly be seen in the archaeological excavations as a black layer - filled with ash, charcoal and the burnt remains of buildings - which lay everywhere and sealed of the relics left behind after 16 years of life on the island.

We had expected that the story of Mork Stig and the outlaws on Helgøya would come to an end at this point, but here too our investigations brought surprises. Soon after the castle on Flybakken was burnt down, it was being rebuilt. Was it Erik Menvied who decided to build a castle here? Hardly, otherwise he would not have burnt the castle to the ground. Moreover he had other strong castles, which lay in a much better strategic position for a Danish king. The most probable explanation is that the Norwegian king wanted to assert his right to the island, as is discussed in the Hindsgavl agreement of 1295. He did this by sending men back to the island to start rebuilding the island's main castle. However, Helgøya did not have the same significance for him as it did earlier. The outlaws and their successors were no longer so important in the Nordic power-game, and after confirming his right to the island, he gave it up again. The castle was never finished and Helgøya disappears from Denmark's medieval history except in the songs in which Mork Stig and the island that got horns are still remembered.

Die retrospektive des Verteidigungssystems Trakai vom XIV.-XV. Jahrhundert

Die Stadt Trakai ist eine kleine Stadt auf einer schmalen Halbinsel, die von vier Seen umschlossen wird; sie ist vielleicht der am häufigsten von Touristen besuchte Ort in Litauen.


Es ist möglich, vier Bauphasen der gemauerten Burg auf der Halbinsel zu unterscheiden:

- Phase 1 – der Anflug des Baus der Burg vom Garde - Typ mit einem großen Turm (15x15m) auf dem nördlichen Teil der Halbinsel.
- Phase 2 – die Umsetzung des Plans der vorderen Burg mit sieben Türmen und den Verteidigungsmauern darzuentwirren.
- Phase 3 – der Abschluss des Baus der vorderen Teil...
Trakai is a small town situated on the narrow peninsular surrounded by four lakes. It is one of the most visited tourist sites in Lithuania. The town is attractive both for its unique natural surroundings and for its ancient history.

One can find name of Trakai mentioned in the written historic sources starting from the 14th century. Then it used to be one of the centres of the Lithuanian Grand Duchess. The foundation of Trakai was described in Lithuanian chronicles: \(*\) once the Grand Duke Gediminas left his capital city of Kernave for hunting in five miles distance across Neris river, and in the forest he found beautiful hill surrounded by the oak forests and plains; he fell in love with the site and he stayed there to live; he founded the city and named it Trakai - the place where Old Trakai was; and he moved his capital town to Trakai!\(^{6}\) Gediminas came into power in 1316 and in 1323 already his capital city was Vilnius. Therefore Trakai could have been the capital city only in the period between 1316 and 1323\(^{6}\) (A. Balulis, S. Mikulionis, A. Mikkinis 1991). Gediminas was a capital town of the Duchy. It is proven by not only historic sources, but also by the castles and their remains buried under ground and discovered here and there during archaeological excavations, to have been a very important fortification center during the period of wars with the Crusaders.

When talking about the fortification system of Trakai it is critical to note that it comprised not only of castles, but of numerous other fortifications as well. One can track two parts of fortification system - external and internal. The **external system** was formed of mounds and Tartar settlements in the surroundings. All the main roads leading to Trakai were defended (Fig. 1).

In the northern part a very important defence element was the **Brazuolė mound**. This is a hill - the top site with a quadrangle shape, and sides of 60, 200, 115 and 190 meters in length. At the bottom of the hill there is a 5–10 m - deep ditch (width at the top 40-50 m, width at the bottom 5–10 m). During excavations the large - format bricks were discovered in the ends of the mounds ramparts, which would imply that in 14th–15th centuries there could have been stone buildings (S. Mikulionis 1975).

In the eastern side between the lakes of Skaislys and Nerespinis there is the **Varnikai mound**.

In the southern part there is **Old Trakai site of the former castle**. The list of Russian Cities (1387–1392) published by M. Tichomirov indicates that the city of Old Trakai was built of stone (S. Mikulionis 1975).

The recent archaeological surveys made by archaeologist A. Kuncevičius prove the fact that the Old Trakai castle was built of stone. During there surveys the fortification walls of the castle were discovered. These were made of rather large bricks bound in accordance with baltic technique. A lot of large scale bricks (31.5 x 14 x 9 cm) were also used to build the still existing in the territory building of monastery and Neo gothic church.

The western part Trakai was protected by small lakes and swamps. Therefore, there was no need for any kind of fortifications.

Another critical part of the defense system was the **Tartar settlements**. Tartars and Karaims were invited to Lithuania by Grand Duke Vytautas at the end of the 14th century. These nations were known for their particular bellicosity and loyalty to Grand Duke. The Tartar settlements can mainly located by the existing names of localities and titles provided in the historic sources. One village near the road leading to Semeliškės is still called Totorai (Tartars). The documents deriving from the 18th century state that the Tartars owned the so-called island of Algirdas (now a peninsula) in the northern part of Lake Galve. Currently a lot of Tartar families are still living in the southern part of the city. Almost all of them are proud of their grandparents and ancestors living there since Vytautas times.

Trakai town and castles were enclosed in the ring of Tartar settlements (Fig. 1).

The internal city plan structure was caused by the defensive interests, or in other words the town itself was an internal system of defence.

There is an opinion that in 14th century Trakai was not a peninsula, but rather an island, or even several islands (Fig. 2). The main bastions were suggested by the land-

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**Fig. 1. External fortification system of Trakai (according to S. Mikulionis)**

**Fig. 2. Development of the Trakai town**

(available at A. Balulis, S. Mikulionis, A. Mikkinis)
scape. One can only guess the composition of Trakai internal defense system in its first stage of establishment based on the data of fragmented archaeological surveys. The remnants of wooden fortifications and ramparts were discovered in the south-west slope of the highest Trakai hill named Bernardinai hill. Researchers of Trakai make a hypothesis that the wooden castle was located here and to the North from this castle there was the suburbs of the castle.

In the second half of 14th century there were already two castles in Trakai – the peninsular and the island castle. It is still debated whether the constructions of these two castles started simultaneously, or one of them was erected earlier.

Before analyzing the kernel of the Trakai fortification system, although shortly must be mentioned other elements of it – the bridges.

In the northern part there was the bridge between Galve and the Totorikšės lakes, in the southern part the bridge situated at the isthmus of Bernardinai and Totorikšės lakes. This bridge is shown in an engraving of 17th century (Fig. 3) - author K. Shnops (A. Baliulis, S. Mikulonis, A. Mikšninas 1991).

The majority of historical sources mention Gulbės bridge as a boarder between Karaim and the catholic city. The place of said bridge has not been located until today, but perhaps the most convincing is the hypothesis of historian A. Baliulis, which suggest that the name of the bridge derives from the Russian name “lebednoj most”, which means drawbridge and which was used to bridge the peninsular castle and the town (A. Baliulis, S. Mikulonis, A. Mikšnis 1991).

It is necessary to mention the bridge between the peninsular and island castle. This bridge was mentioned in the Crusader’s chronicles. The remnants of the bridge were investigated in 1967 (S. Mikulonis 1975).

There is a hypothesis that Trakai churches and monasteries were located on the highest hills, fortified and built of stone were a part of fortification system. In the print of T. Makovskis we can see the church surrounded by the fortification wall (Fig. 3).

Very important elements of the internal fortification system were districts of the town, in which Tartars and Karaims lived. Tartars used to live in the Western part of a town, near the so-called Dudakšken Hill. Modern Traku street was called Tartar street in the 19th century, and the Tartar mosque was erected on this street. The name of the Lake Totorikšės also evidences that Tartars used to live in this part of a town.

In the Northern part of peninsular, which is still called the Karaime part because Karains used to live there. They formed the last line of defence which guarded the residence of the Grand Duke in the island castle.

Talking about the fortification system of this location, it is necessary at least briefly describe the peninsular and island castles.

Almost all the 19th - 20th centuries researchers of Trakai stated that the peninsular castle is older than the castle on the island. Nevertheless, the data of the architectural and archeological investigations of the last decades had denied this statement. Both castles were not constructed at once and formation of both took a long time. They were demolished and rebuilt several times.

The peninsular castle was built on the cape which was separated from the town by a deep ditch filled with water. This castle had two courtyards. The front part – forecastle - was separated from the back part by the ditch which had never been filled with water. In the forecastle, based on the recent data, there were seven fortified towers (Fig. 4). All the towers were of quadrangular shape, build of field stones and bricks. The bricks were mainly used to form the corners and edges of the windows and doors. More distinctive features of Gothic style are observed in the best preserved until today southern tower (Fig. 5). The sharp-ar-
One can trace four principal phases of construction of the stone castle

The first phase was the phase of planning to construct the "fenced"-type castle with a single huge tower in the northern part of the castle. The tower in plan had a quadrangle shape, 15 x 15 m with the walls 3.8–3.9 meters thick.

The remnants of this tower were founded under the current north-western tower in 1962 and in 1996 (A. Tautavičius 1962–64). The stone walls were demolished after the fire. It is difficult to describe precisely the building technique, but we know that the walls of the tower were built of field stones, and filled with small pieces of bricks and crushed stones.

The remains of two northern walls were used as the basements for the new Northern tower.

The remains of the defence wall from the same period were founded near the southern tower of the castle (S. Mikulionis 1975).

In 1377 Crusaders attacked new castle at Trakai, the negotiations between Duke Kęstutis and the marshal of the Crusaders, Gotfrid fon Linden, took place on the bridge between two castles. These events are described in the list of Vygard Marburger (J. Orda 1990).

The Trakai castles were attacked and demolished by Crusaders in 1382 and 1383 (S. Mikulionis 1975).

Based on these facts, we may suppose that the first phase of stone constructions on the peninsula was interrupted by the events at the end of 14th century—the wars with Crusaders and the death of Duke Kęstutis in 1382 (A. Tautavičius 1968).

The second phase was the phase during which the plan of the front part of the castle with seven towers connected by approximately 10 m high fortification walls. This period may be connected with the period of the Great Duke Vytautas. The time of his governing—1395–1430, was when the Crusaders attacked Lithuania 8 to 10 times per year. He needed strong castles. Of course, in this period the great reconstruction of the main fortifications was started.

According to the archaeological research, the whole front part of the castle was erected in a very short time. This is indicated by the similarity of brick wall constructions, structures of tower design and volume, as well as the identity of architectural forms.

All the towers are of square plan. The towers of the southern side, which were especially important for defence, were larger in size (13.5 x 13.5 m), and the towers at the fosse, which separated the frontal part of the castle from the one at the Hill of Sacrifices, were smaller. The smallest were the intervening towers of the southern and northern defence walls.

Their sizes on the drawing are consequently 8.6 x 8.7 and 6.9 x 6.3 m.

Apparently, the castle was be periodically attacked during its erection, partly destroyed and rebuilt again. Different brick wall constructions can be noted in different parts of the walls. Rows of large stones were reinforced with the pieces of crushed stones and brick mixture (fig. 5.6). Bricks with the following sizes of 29–31 x 13.5–14 x 8.7–9.2 cm were used for tower edges construction as well as for window and entrance openings formation.

The third phase was the phase of completion of constructions of the front part of the castle and building of the fortification wall around the Hill of Sacrifices (fig. 7).

Some researchers of the Trakai think that initially this part of the castle was built of wood and only later it was gradually replaced by the stone and brick walls. Different masonry constructions may prove the fact that the eastern part of the castle was constructed later than the western one. The inner surface of the defence wall is trimmed up with bricks when the core is constructed of stone rows covered with the whole and broken brick rows. We didn’t find this type of masonry in the fortress. Bricks are of 27.5–28 x 13–13.5 x 8–8.5 cm in size.

The fourth phase involved the construction of the buildings on the Hill of Sacrifices, which might never had been accomplished.

This is the phase when the appearance of the Gothic decorative elements might be found in the peninsular castle. During the archaeological excavations of 1992 and 1993 lots of nervure bricks were discovered at the Hill of Sacrifices (B. Lisauskaitė 1992). Unfortunately, no constructions of that period remained above the ground of the peninsular castle. Whenever underground researchers were carried out very fragmentary.

Having briefly described the peninsular castle we approach the main object of the Trakai fortification system—the castle on the island (Figs. 9–12).

The castle stands majestically out on an island in the Galve lake, which is called the Island of the Castle. The archaeological excavations showed that at the beginning of the construction these were three islands. One island was situated within the limits of the current central palace, fortress and the northwestern tower, the second one under the current southwestern tower and the third one under the southeastern tower. That the castle was built on three islands is also supported by the fact that the level of the water in the lake in the period of castle construction was around 1 meter higher than today (S. Mikulionis 1975).
Fig. 9. Trakai castle on the island

Fig. 10. The ruins of Trakai castle on the island at 1923

Fig. 11. Trakai castle on the island. Stages of construction (according to S. Mikulionis)

Fig. 12. Trakai castle on the island. Project of reconstruction (author B. Krimins)

phase of construction is interesting because the sizes of bricks (27.0 x 13.5 x 6.0 cm) and the triangle corrugation of the seams are the same as in the penultimate construction phase of the peninsular castle (S. Mikulionis 1975).

The architectural composition of the castle is dominated by the five-storey donjon in the centre of the facade of the central palace with parameters in the plan of 9.2 x 9.8 m. The Donjon contains the entrant-ce was covered from the side of the castle by the draw-bridge. The premises of the first and the second floors were covered with cylinder vaults; a wooden beam ceiling covered the fourth floors, and the fifth floors was covered by the star vaults.

The central palace comprised of two three-storey buildings and an internal courtyard of 11.5 m in width and 21 m in the length connecting them. The cellars are covered by the cylinder vaults, and other floors are
The main hall is a special premises which is covered by the nervure vaults, while traces of the polychrome and wall painting remnants of frescoes can be observed on the walls.

The forecastle was constructed in the third phase, the dynamics of which developed as follows: first of all the towers with fortification walls, then western casemates and finally the eastern ones. This part of the castle was constructed in the tower islands, mainy in the peat area. Here and there the foundations were put directly into water therefore, a specific wooden construction was put under foundation. The towers were erected in the most convenient highest points of the islands. The forecastle comprised of the four massive towers. The ground floors have a quadrangle plan with rounded upper floors. Only the central tower over the entrance gate has quadrangle shape in all the floors (10.4 x 11.45 m). This tower had a draw-bridge.

The Western casemates have two-storied. The premises of the first floor were covered by the wooden beam ceiling, and the premises of the second floor were covered by the nervure vaults.

In the third phase the construction of the castle was essentially accomplished. Just the southern casemates and small triangles were built a little later (S. Mikulionis 1975).

It must be mentioned that the round shaped towers in the forecastle of Trakai castle on the island were used as fence against the mass cannon fire which was the latest stage in the construction of Lithuanian fortifications (S. Mikulionis 1975).

This story is just a short excursion through the unique surroundings of Trakai town. It is only one version of the medieval fortification system, mainly based on the material collected by the architect S. Mikulionis, one of the authors of restoration projects of Trakai castles in 1960–1990. The further research, we hope, will provide additional data.

Conclusions

1. In 14–15 century Trakai was one of the best fortified strongholds of the Great Principality of Lithuania.

2. The kernel of Trakai fortification system – two stone castles were surrounded by other elements – bridges, Tartar and karaisa settlements, mounds.

3. Both castles were not constructed at once and formation of both took a long time. They were demolished and rebuilt several times.

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Medininkai Castle

Die Burg Medininkai


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