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Lithuanian Troy: Preservation and Interpretation of Kernavė, a UNESCO World Heritage Archaeological Site

ABSTRACT

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Contemporary Kernavė is a small town, located 35 km north-west of Vilnius, on the right bank of the Neris River. However, the names often used to describe the Archaeological Site of Kernavė are the “Troy of Lithuania” or the “Mecca of archaeologists” (Bitner-Wróblewska *et al.* 2002). The cultural landscape and numerous archaeological objects situated in the area testify to the cultures which have existed there since the Final Palaeolithic to this day. The Kernavė Archaeological Site, an area of unique archaeological and historical value, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2004. The interpretation of archaeological heritage is important for the understanding of the origins and development of modern society; it is also important for promoting the understanding of the need for its preservation (see Carman 2015). The paper seeks to present the Archaeological Site of Kernavė in regard to its preservation, management and interpretation.

Keywords: Kernavė Archaeological Site, hillfort, archaeological heritage preservation, archaeological heritage interpretation

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Introduction

The Kernavė Archaeological Site can be seen as a microcosm of Lithuanian archaeology – it is the only complex of archaeological sites in Lithuania which comprises five hillforts, several open settlements and burial grounds, the medieval Lower and Upper Towns, as well as other archaeological monuments representing the period from the Final Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages. Moreover, it is one of the most picturesque places in Lithuania (Figs. 1–2).

The continuity of human habitation in Kernavė provides evidence that since ancient times, it had been developing into a regional centre,

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Fig. 1. A bird's eye view of the hillforts, the Pajauta Valley and the contemporary town of Kernavė (Photo by Z. Baubonis)

which evolved into one of the major centres of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the historical sources, the name of Kernavė was mentioned in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (*Reimchronik*, 191) and the *Livonian Chronicle* of Hermann von Wartberge (*Chronicon*, 40), describing the 1279 march of the Teutonic Order to Lithuanian lands as far as Kernavė, the domain of Traidenis, the Grand Duke. Kernavė became a distinctive political, administrative and commercial centre at that time; it is also the first definitively known residence of the ruler (Dubonis 2009, 161; Baronas *et al.* 2011, 323–324). Thus, the period from the second half of the 13th c. to the end of the 14th c. appears as the most prominent phase in the life of Kernavė. In 1365, the Teutonic Order burned down Kernavė on its way to Vilnius. In 1390, once again, the castles of Kernavė were set on fire by their defenders, who did not manage to protect the place and had to retreat. The medieval town and castles were never reconstructed and sank into oblivion for long centuries. In the 15th c., people settled down on the spot where the contemporary town of Kernavė is. Nevertheless, as one of the most ancient settlements and the first



Fig. 2. A view of the hillforts from the upper terrace (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė. Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

capital of Lithuania, Kernavė was mentioned in the legendary part of the 16th-century *Lithuanian Chronicles* (*Lietuvos metraštis*, 61–62, 71; Vėlius 2017b).

With the aim of preserving the archaeological heritage of Kernavė, the State Kernavė Archaeology and History Museum-Reserve was founded in 1989. On 20 June 2002, the Kernavė Museum-Reserve was granted the status of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė. In 2004, as a testimony to its exceptional importance, the Kernavė Archaeological Site (the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė) was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1137>). The site is treated as an example of an integral cultural landscape, remaining almost intact up until the present day. The importance of the site is based on the following two criteria:

Criterion (iii): The archaeological site of Kernavė presents an exceptional testimony to the evolution of human settlements in the Baltic region over the period of some 10 millennia. The property has exceptional evidence of the contact of pantheistic and Christian funeral traditions.

Criterion (iv): The settlement patterns and the impressive hillforts represent outstanding examples of the development of such types of structures and the history of their use in the pre-Christian era.

History of the Archaeological Site

The vision of the glorious past of Kernavė, facilitated by the ideas of Romanticism and promoted by the researchers and writers of the 19th c., was a powerful stimulus to acquire knowledge about it. In the middle of the 19th c., Kernavė attracted the pioneers of Lithuanian archaeology. The hillforts of Kernavė were first excavated in 1857, when Ludwik Władysław Kondratowicz-Syrokomla spent two days excavating on the Altar and the Castle Hill hillforts. He wrote that on the first day of the excavations on the Altar hillfort, “we spent half an hour excavating the rampart and discovered, as some brick debris showed, traces of the foundation of that Lithuanian *Sanctum sanctorum*”. On the second day of the excavations, “after a whole day of hard work digging and with nothing except some small bones (we are not certain, though, if those were human bones) unearthed, we had to postpone our search for the gods and heroes of Kernavė until happier times” (Syrokomla 1860, 109). Both Konstanty and Eustachy Tyszkiewicz carried out some excavations on the surrounding burial mounds (Kulikauskas and Zabiela 1999, 55; Vėlius 2017a, 27–28).

During the interwar period, more attention was given to the archaeological heritage of Kernavė. The headmaster of the Kernavė Primary School, Juozas Šiaučiūnas, initiated the collection of archaeological finds in order to accumulate exhibits for the local school’s museum. With no archaeological excavations, just relying on the scanty historical sources, romantic legends and the finds collected by his pupils, Šiaučiūnas described the exceptional significance of that archaeological locality: “the sands have already started conversing in the language of those tiny archaeological finds collected by pupils of the primary school of Kernavė. On their little knees, they have crawled all over the ground, deftly searching through every small tuft. Whatever found – will never perish [...]. There are numerous collections reflecting the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages. We are looking forward to a word from an archaeologist” (Šiaučiūnas 1933, 10). During the interwar period, the prominent Lithuanian archaeologists Petras Tarasienka and



Fig. 3. Archaeological excavations on the Mindaugas Throne hillfort in 1979 (Photo by A. Luchtanas; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

Jonas Puzinas visited Kernavė, but no archaeological excavations were carried out there at that time (Vėlius 2017a, 28–29).

Systematic archaeological investigations of Kernavė were started by Vilnius University only in 1979 (in 1980–1983, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Institute of History) because of a landslide on the eastern slope of the Mindaugas Throne hillfort, caused by the spring thaw (Fig. 3). At that time, the four hillforts, reminiscent of the legendary medieval capital, and poor historical data were the only, as it was then thought, information sources on this site, representing a narrow chronological period of the 13th to 14th centuries. Systematic archaeological research facilitated the discovery of new archaeological objects and substantially expanded the territory of the site under protection. The research revealed the Archaeological Site of Kernavė to be a multi-layered reflection of the entire prehistory of Lithuania. Moreover, new archaeological discoveries are being unearthed every year (Vengalis and Vėlius, 2017; Vengalis 2017; Vėlius 2017a; 2017b).

The past four decades of archaeological excavations in Kernavė identified important sites of settlements and burial grounds from the Stone, Iron and Middle Ages, as well as sites from later historical periods. The earliest traces of habitation, which are dated to the Final Palaeolithic (10th–9th millennia B.C.), were found in the valley of the Neris. The majority of the finds from the Stone Age, including one sunken featured building, belong to the Mesolithic Period (Luchtanas 1998). Archaeological research identified traces of habitation during the Neolithic Period and revealed evidence of a homestead from the Bronze Age (Vengalis 2014a). Kernavė is well-known for the Brushed Pottery Culture burial grounds – as many as two burial sites, dating back to the 1st millennium BC, have been discovered in the Neris valley (Luchtanas 1992; 1996a; Baltramiejūnaitė and Vengalis 2010). These sites are extremely important sources for researching the burial rites of this culture. As early as the final centuries B.C., the first settlement on a hill – the Altar hillfort – was erected. Homesteads on the other hills were established only in the 5th c. The available data suggest that the Iron Age settlement in Kernavė might have been the largest in this region, and it serves as an illustration of the general development of the settlement system in entire Eastern Lithuania (Vengalis 2012; 2014b; 2015; Vėlius 2012). There is a notable abundance of barrows from the 1st millennium situated in Kernavė and its surroundings; barrows representing various chronological periods were excavated (Vėlius 2000; 2018; Luchtanas 2006; Baltramiejūnaitė and Vengalis 2010). However, not enough precise information on the beginnings of the medieval town has been revealed yet (Vengalis 2012).

The archaeological findings essentially supplement the scarce written sources from the 13th–14th centuries. By the 13th c., the Iron Age settlement in the Pajauta Valley had acquired features of a town. The Lower Town of Kernavė was discovered in 1986 and a comprehensive archaeological investigation was carried out there from 1986 to 1995 (Luchtanas 1988; 1990a; 1996b; Karnatka 1994). During the 13th–14th centuries, the defensive complex of four hillforts, which Kernavė is so famous for, was formed. The residential castle of the duke, protected by the defensive system of three hillforts, was situated in the central one, the Altar hillfort (Luchtanas 1994). The Mindaugas Throne hillfort (Kulikauskas and Luchtanas, 1980; Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1982; 1984a) and the Lizdeika hillfort served defensive purposes. The Castle Hill hillfort must have been inhabited

by craftspeople; it was well-fortified and also performed a defensive function (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1984b; Luchtanas 1986). It turned out that the Castle Hill hillfort comprised a part of the Upper Town, which was discovered in 1998 and excavated in 1998–2001 and afterwards (Vaičiūnienė 2000; 2001; 2002; Vėlius 2006; Vengalis 2007). The fifth hillfort – the Kriveikiškis – was discovered in 1989, at a distance of about half a kilometre to the east (Luchtanas 1990b; Vėlius 2015). It might have been used as a place for performing rituals (Vėlius 2005). According to the currently available data, two burial grounds dating back to the 13th–14th centuries, which illustrate different burial rites, were situated in Kernavė. Individuals – most apparently, ordinary townspeople – were buried inhumated in the Kriveikiškis burial ground. This burial ground was comprehensively researched (Vėlius 2005). In the other 14th-century burial ground excavated on the former Kernavėlė riverbed in the Pajauta Valley, Kernavė dwellers were cremated and buried in the water, i.e. supposedly followed an “old pagan” custom (Vengalis 2011). Presumably, the different burial rites illustrate the religious and ethnic complexity of the community of medieval Kernavė.

Archaeological investigations were also conducted at archaeological sites dating from later historical times. The first church of Kernavė was built before 1430 (Baliulis 2005, 169). Studies of the territory of the old Kernavė churches revealed the foundations of a church, which was built in 1739 (dismantled in 1933), and a bell tower, as well as graves from the 15th to 18th centuries (Jankauskas and Luchtanas 1990; Jankauskas 1992; Baltramiejūnaitė *et al.* 2013). In 1992, the site of the Kernavė manor, which was mentioned in historical sources since 1398, was excavated (Vėlius 2017a, 38).

Preservation and management of the Archaeological Site

Before the systematic research on the hillforts started in 1979, the four hillforts were the only objects under protection. The surrounding fields and the Pajauta Valley were utilised for various economic purposes involving activities that caused damage to archaeological heritage objects (Vėlius 2017a, 30). In order to ensure their preservation, a protected territory (cultural reserve) was established in 1989 (Vadišis 2017).

Today the Cultural Reserve of Kernavė includes the territory of the Reserve (194.4 ha) with its cultural heritage objects, an open-air

exhibition, and the specialised Museum of Kernavė Archaeological Site. The Museum's collection includes over 23,000 finds collected during the years of archaeological investigations. The Reserve encompasses nineteen cultural objects from various periods that are inscribed on the Lithuanian Register of Cultural Property and benefits from the strictest regulation regime in Lithuania. Moreover, the buffer zone of the Cultural Reserve comprises of 2455.2 ha and is divided into the physical impact protection sub-zone (118.3 ha) and visual protection area (2336.9 ha) (see <http://www.kernave.org/en>).

The management of the site falls under the responsibility of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė. The Administration is responsible for maintaining the territorial complex of cultural properties in Kernavė and upholding the complex's authenticity; for carrying out scientific research of archaeological and historical properties in the territory of cultural reserve and within its buffer zone; for implementing museum activities (collecting, recording, preserving, conserving, restoring and exhibiting the Museum's collections); for controlling development activities in the territory of the Reserve and the buffer zone; as well as for promoting cultural heritage education and tourism.

The currently effective protection system of the Archaeological Site of Kernavė ensures favourable conditions for the preservation, management and interpretation of archaeological heritage.

Interpretation of the Archaeological Site: a historical perspective

The legends and the hillforts crowning the impressive Pajauta Valley facilitated interest in Kernavė as a place of exceptional importance already in the 19th c. Teeming with legends, the 19th-century Kernavė emerges as one of the major symbols of the old Lithuanian State and the last bastion of pagan religion. Ideas of Romanticism urged people to look for the grandeur of the distant past and Kernavė featured in many works of history of that period, including *Dzieje Litwy opowiedziane w zarysie* [An Outline History of Lithuania] by Konstancja Skirmuntt (1886), Simonas Daukantas' *Lietuvos istorija nuo seniausių gadynių iki Gediminui d.L.k.* [The History of Lithuania from the Ancient Times until Gediminas, Grand Duke of Lithuania] (1893–1897) and *Darbai senujų*

lietuvių ir žemaičių [The Deeds of Ancient Lithuanians and Samogitians] (1822), and *Dzieje starożytne narodu litewskiego [The Ancient History of the Lithuanian Nation]* by Teodor Narbutt (1835–1841). The pagan Kernavė was extolled in the historical novel *Pojata córka Lezdejki albo Litwini w XIV wieku [Pajauta, Lizdeika's Daughter, or Lithuanians in the 14th Century]* by Feliks Aleksander Bernatowicz (1826), who described Kernavė and its chief pagan priest Lizdeika. Following the publication of the novel, the hillforts and the Neris valley were given the romantic names by which they are known today.

During the interwar period, the primary place for creating the identity of Kernavė became the museum. It was opened in the Kernavė Primary School in 1930, on the 500th anniversary of the death of Vytautas the Great, which was celebrated with much pomp all over the country.

The founder of the museum (one of the first regional museums in Lithuania) was Šiaučiūnas, the headmaster of the Kernavė Primary School, who first came to Kernavė in 1928 as a teacher. Assisted by his pupils, he started to collect random archaeological finds and accumulate ethnographic objects; using his own money, he would buy various relics from the locals, and within two years, he managed to amass enough exhibits to form the basis of his future museum (Vitkūnas 2005b, 718–721).

Šiaučiūnas was guided by his vision to create the museum as a space for fostering the national spirit and the idea of statehood. “We want to take advantage of the moment and link the awakening of their [residents’ of Kernavė] national awareness with the spirit of Vytautas the Great and to build a medallion of Vytautas the Great into the wall of the school building on the day of the opening of the museum,” wrote Šiaučiūnas to the Inspector of Primary Schools of the Ukmergė district in 1930 (Šiaučiūnas 1930). An important role in developing the idea and mission of the museum was played by the hillforts – the “eye witnesses” of the glorious past. It is worth mentioning that during the interwar period, the hillforts enjoyed special attention: they were preserved by granting their guardianship to municipalities, the Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union and various public organisations (Bakonis 1994, 29). The location of the town of Kernavė itself also facilitated the narrative of the national state. Kernavė appeared to be situated right next to the demarcation line which was established because of the Polish-Lithuanian armed conflict. The conflict concerned the territorial control of the Vilnius



Fig. 4. The first local museum opened in the Primary School of Kernavė (Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

Region, including the city of Vilnius, which, as the historical capital of the nation, was indispensable to the modern Lithuanian identity. The idea of regaining the historical capital of the nation was actively promoted by the Union for the Liberation of Vilnius (see Buchowski 2006). The Union adopted Petras Vaičiūnas' poem "Hey, world, we will not rest without Vilnius!" as its anthem. These words became a slogan reflecting the national spirit. A model of Vilnius' Castle Hill hillfort (Gediminas' Tower), which was set up next to the Primary School in Kernavė, also reflected the atmosphere of the time (Fig. 4).

However paradoxically, at the time when the museum was established, the archaeological sites attracted far less attention of professional archaeologists as compared to the mid-19th c. Most probably, the "failures" of the first excavators of Kernavė initially dampened the interest of professionals (Tautavičius 1972, 29). Being fully aware of the importance of scientific research, Šiaučius wrote in the daily "Lietuvos Aidas" in 1930 that "the abundant collections describing the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages" held in the museum were awaiting "an archaeologist's word" (Šiaučius 1933, 10). It is worth



Fig. 5. Celebration of the 900th Anniversary of Kernavė on the Mindaugas Throne hillfort in 1940 (Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

mentioning that in 1935 Šiaučiūnas' activity was acknowledged by the State Archaeological Commission of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania (Kvieskienė 1972, 70).

By the fatal year of 1940, the museum had collected 630 exhibits, including archaeological finds from the Stone and Bronze Ages, ancient money, weaponry, and different relics of everyday life. Despite the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union, Šiaučiūnas tried to continue his activity (Fig. 5), until he met the fate of thousands of interwar Lithuanian intelligentsia. Accused of betrayal, on 17th June 1941 he was arrested by the People's Commissariat for State Security of the Lithuanian SSR (NKGB) and exiled to a corrective labour camp in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. In 1942 he was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment in correctional labour camps and in 1943 he died a tragic death in the taiga (Poškienė 2017, 15–17).

Though some of the museum exhibits were lost during the years of Nazi occupation, a number of artefacts were rescued and the museum, separated from the school, was reopened in 1945. In 1948, the museum was moved to the nationalised building of the rectory of the Blessed



Fig. 6. Celebration of the Rasos Feast in 2017 (Photo by J. Vitkūnas; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

Virgin Mary of the Scapular Church in Kernavė. The idea of the museum was inevitably subject to changes: though the exposition had to be supplemented with themes representing the Soviet life, an effort was still made to also include objects that introduced the prehistory of Kernavė and its natural and cultural heritage. From 1963, the museum began operating on a “voluntary basis” and in 1965 it became a branch of the Trakai History Museum and was renamed the Kernavė History Museum. After the repair works to the museum building were completed, a new, professionally displayed exposition was opened in 1968, where the heritage of Kernavė was presented following the principle: exhibits of archaeology, ethnography and the manor culture, then objects presenting the Soviet life (Kvieskienė 1972; Vitkūnas 2005b).

Several important hillfort maintenance projects were already started in the 1970s; nevertheless, some of the hillforts were used for ideological purposes during the Soviet occupation (Zabiela 2005; Poškienė 2014, 78). However, the idea of Kernavė as the ancient centre of pre-Christian



Fig. 7. Current exhibition of the Kernavė Archaeological Site Museum (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

religion was maintained. As early as in 1967–1969, the first Rasos Feast (the summer solstice) was celebrated in Kernavė (Fig. 6). Soon the festival was accused of being a “gathering of nationalists” and officially banned. Nevertheless, it became an annual ritual that continues to this day (Trinkūnas 2005). Paradoxically, due to its rather apolitical content, the narrative of paganism was more or less tolerated during the Soviet occupation (Putinaitė 2004, 21–67). It became established as one of the pillars of national identity and is still actively promoted (see Grigas 2018).

Soon after the restoration of Lithuania’s independence in 1993, one of the largest state programmes for archaeological heritage preservation – the “Hillforts’ Preservation Programme” – was launched (Vaitkuvienė and Baubonis 2004; Zabiela 2005). Moreover, the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania declared the year 2017 “A Year of Hillforts”, thus facilitating a new phase of interest in these objects of archaeological heritage.



Fig. 8. The town in the Pajauta Valley, the 13th–14th centuries. Excavations in 1995 (Photo by A. Luchtanas; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

The State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė

Vytautas Ušinskas, who became the first director of the Reserve in 1989, envisaged it as based on two principal components: the Reserve territory with elements of the historical landscape and objects of archaeological heritage and the Museum of Archaeology and History itself. Back then, it was already being deliberated whether the findings of archaeological research would make it possible to reconstruct a part of the medieval Kernavė – not where that town had originally been situated, in the Valley of Pajauta, but rather in an archaeologically neutral location (Andrašienė 1987). As a display of authentic remains *in situ* would not have been possible due to conservation related difficulties, it was also planned to mark the location of archaeological objects on the surface of the ground (Andrašienė 1987; Tiškutė 1989). It was understood that the preservation and interpretation of archaeological heritage was a complex and multidimensional process, which, however, did not have to be confined to a “traditional” museum exposition.



Fig. 9. The *ex situ* reconstruction of the medieval town of Kernavė: an open-air museum (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

With the restoration of Lithuania's independence and the return of the rectory to its legitimate owners, the Kernavė Archaeological and History Museum had to be relocated. In late 1992, the building of the Kernavė House of Culture (cultural centre) was transferred to the museum, and in 1993 one of its exhibition halls already housed exhibits from the prehistory of Kernavė.

A new exposition, upgraded with interactive technologies and visualisations of the Kernavė Archaeological Site, opened its doors in 2012. The archaeological finds are exhibited in the context of the life of prehistoric communities: their everyday routines, trades and crafts, and burial traditions. Re-enactors have reproduced artefacts in a manner which simulates how they might have been made and used; such visualisations considerably enhance the interpretation of authentic archaeological finds. Moreover, school children of various ages and visitors with sight disabilities are invited to join in educational activities which provide a better insight into different



Fig. 10. The *in situ* visualisation of a burial ground from the Brushed Pottery Culture (1st millennium B.C.) in the Pajauta Valley (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

aspects of everyday life during the prehistoric and medieval times (Fig. 7). In 2018, ca. 13,000 visitors came to the museum and ca. 3,500 participated in the museum's educational programmes.

The visitor infrastructure (including walking paths, information panels to introduce the cultural heritage objects, etc.) has also been installed in the Reserve. Ca. 120,000 visitors come to the site every year.

As the specifics of archaeological heritage (with the majority of archaeological heritage objects being hidden under a layer of soil, people are not able to recognise or understand them without properly presented interpretation) causes a gap between the “place” and the “text”, archaeological reconstruction remains one of the most popular tools of archaeological interpretation. An initiative to construct a medieval castle in the most excavated Šeimyniškeliai hillfort in Anykščiai, as well as the reconstruction of the Grand Dukes' Palace in Vilnius are examples of attempts to convey to the public the most “visible” information about the past. Such information allows visitors to view a “realistic” picture, crossing a language barrier,



Fig. 11. The *in situ* visualisation of a road paved with wood (5th c. A.D.) in the Pajauta Valley (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

and thus gives them an opportunity to imagine the past. However, reconstruction is highly limited in contemporary heritage conservation practice and each case can be a target for academic criticism (see Bumblauskas 2006).

Nevertheless, archaeological reconstructions are undoubtedly appreciated by the wider public (Blockley 2000). The attempt to “visualise” the past also facilitated the creation of an open-air museum of the reconstructed 13–14th-century craftsmen’s yards in Kernavė. This project differs from the above-mentioned examples: the reconstruction was carried out *ex situ* and is based on archaeological data. A total of 1,753 m² of the Lower Town area (situated in the Pajauta Valley) was researched and an approximately one-metre thick cultural layer was discovered there (Fig. 8). Due to the high level of groundwater, the remains of wooden structures as well as organic artefacts (wood, leather, antler and bone) were very well preserved. Research was carried out in three homesteads: of a craftsman who worked with antler and bone, of a jeweller, and, most probably, of a blacksmith (Vėlius 2017a, 33). Thus, the reconstruction of the yards is an attempt to present an *ex situ* visualisation and interpretation



Fig. 12. Foundations of the church in Kernavė (1739): *in situ* visualisation (Photo by D. Vaičiūnienė; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

of the medieval town of Kernavė based on the findings of archaeological research in the Pajauta Valley. The space of this open-air museum is used for education and tourism purposes (Fig. 9).

Attempts were made to visualise *in situ* the other exceptional finds – a burial ground from the Brushed Pottery Culture (1st millennium B.C.) (Fig. 10) and a *medgrinda* (a road across swampy areas paved with wood, 5th c. A.D.) (Fig. 11). The foundation of the church (1739) was also marked on the surface of the ground (Fig. 12).

The idea of “archaeological reconstruction” encompasses not only structures, but also “experimental archaeology”, which is closely related to “living history” activities in Lithuania. It means that activities are linked to experiences and demonstrations (educational and presentational tools) and re-enactment (a recreational pursuit), rather than to experimental archaeology as a research tool (Outram 2008, 2). Living archaeology is probably the most widely used form of education about archaeological heritage and its interpretation that strives to promote ideas of heritage preservation and integration, in addition to pursuing the aims of education through entertainment and emotions. Living history festivals are the most popular form of archaeological interpretation in Lithuania. The Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė was one of the first to start pursuing



Fig. 13. Making Neolithic pottery during the festival of Experimental Archaeology “Days of Live Archaeology in Kernavė” (Photo by J. Vitkūnas; Collections of the Administration of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)

this activity: the International Festival of Experimental Archaeology “Days of Live Archaeology in Kernavė” has been annually held at the Kernavė Archaeological Site since 1999 (Vitkūnas, 2005a) and attracts ca. 20,000 visitors every year (Fig. 13).

Summing up, a variety of methods is used for the presentation and interpretation of the archaeological heritage of the Kernavė Archaeological Site. The ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) Charter on the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (ICOMOS Ename Charter, 2008) emphasises that it is necessary to use a full range of measures intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of a cultural heritage site including informational panels, museum-type displays, formalised guided tours, lectures and multimedia applications. Heritage interpretation is placed in the heart of the preservation process.

It can be stated that the interpretation of the Archaeological Site of Kernavė follows the principles of the Charter. Nevertheless, different

kinds of heritage objects within the Reserve do not enjoy the same level of public interest.

Hillforts are the most representative and definitely the best-perceived objects of archaeological heritage in Lithuania. Being indispensable components of the landscape (there are almost 1,000 hillforts in Lithuania), hillforts have been an essential element of national identity and cultural memory since the 19th c.

The following ideas for hillforts' interpretations are prevailing: hillforts are seen as symbols of statehood, as symbols of fight and as outposts of the pre-Christian Baltic religion. However, being an important component of the Lithuanian landscape, the interpretation of hillforts is also linked to the aesthetic perception of nature. The latter approach is widely used in the tourism sector.

The Archaeological Site of Kernavė could be described as a “meeting point” of these diverse visions, thus witnessing the importance of this place for Lithuania and the world¹.

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