

SUMMARY

Kartena environs pre-history /KARTENA

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Kretinga Museum

The picturesque banks of the biggest, west Lithuanian Minija River always attracted people's eyes. It is believed that the ancient hunters and fishermen which lived on the Baltic Sea coast in the late Palaeolithic era used to come here. Still some stone axes, picks and other handicraft wares being found in Kartena environs allow to state that people have been living here only since the third century A. D. They were sea-coast inhabitants whose trade was hunting, fishing, gathering, also agriculture and cattle-breeding.

In the Bronze Age (the 8th–6th c. B. C.) the sea-coast population cultivated land, bred domestic animals, lived in separate settlements near the rivers, used stone, bone, timber and bronze articles. It is believed that one of their settlements in the 8th–6th c. B. C. was at the confluence of the rivers Minija and Salantas in the village of Sanseriai (a bronze axe, other polished stone wares were found here).

In the second half of the first century B. C. constant settlements of farmers and cattle-breeders' tribal communities began coming into existence, they usually settled at the river confluences in not-strongly fortified places. Such communities lived in the villages of Baubliai and Gintarai at the Minija River and in the village of Vėlaičiai at the Alantas River. The people already used imported iron wares and about the fourth century B. C. they learnt to make iron from local ore (e.g. in Lazdininkai, Kretinga district). The dead used to be burnt by their relatives and their remains were buried in burial mounds. Such dead burial custom dominated in the whole West Lithuania since the second millenium and it is attributed to the Western Balts mound culture sphere.

People used to go on living in the villages of Gintarai and Vėlaičiai in the first half of the first millenium as well and new communities settled in the villages of Kalno Grikštai, Sakuočiai and Sauseriai. While changing production and social relations, and agriculture having become the main producing farming field, in the first half of the first millenium the tribal community developed into a territorial one. At that time the communities' hill forts of Gintarai and Vėlaičiai, the ancient settlement of Kalno Grikštai were abandoned. The newly formed little territorial communities settled at some distance from castles, nearer to water reservoirs, pastures, fertile lands. They used castles only when dangers threatened.

The burial grounds of Gintarai, Kalno Grikštai and Sakuočiai show that the dead in the 2nd–6th c. were buried unburnt, in hollowed coffins with cerement and their graves were surrounded by stone wreaths joined between themselves.

Besides, warriors and farmers, artisans lived in those communities, they made weapons, work tools and adornments. Not a few decorations were imported. Roman coins, enamel and glass beads, silver tabs found in the graves witness trade relations between Kartena environs population and Roman empire provinces.

Since the 7th c. West Lithuanian tribe Kuršiai (the Kurlanders) lived at the Lithuanian coast. The member of population significantly increased in the environs of Kartena during their epoch. About the 7th–10th c. they built wooden castles on the hill forts of Dauginčiai, Kašaičiai, Kartena, Martynaičiai, Nausodis, Vėlaičiai and Sanseriai. The cultural layer is hardly noticeable of many of those hill forts, therefore it is believed that the main function of these castles was a defensive one.

The settlements of agriculturists and artisans came into existence not far from castles, at their feet. The burial grounds of Gintarai, Kartena, Raguviškiai, Sauseriai show that the dead in the 9th–13th c. were buried both unburnt and burnt and since the 10th c. the custom of burning the dead dominated.

The written historical sources witness that in the 13th c. the environs of Kartena belonged to the largest Kuršiai (Kurlanders) land–Cėklis and the main defensive, administrative and economical centre of the environs was the castle of Kartena whose name was mentioned for the first time in 1253.

During the struggles against the crusaders in the second half of the 13th c. the Kurlanders' castles and settlements were destroyed, a great part of their inhabitants were killed or deported to other regions. Only about the 14th–15th c. the village of Kartena formed the population of which still observed pagan traditions–they buried their close relatives with weapons, work tools, ornaments, even with their pets and used to carry out rituals with fire.

In the 16th c. the manor of Kartena was built. Its buildings were wooden, heated by earthenware and abundantly decorated flat tiles stoves. This manor was destroyed about the middle of the 17th c. and a new one was built nearer to the confluence of the rivers Minija and Alantas in the neighbourhood of which the little town of Kartena developed.