

LITHUANIAN LOCAL RESEARCHES

“Lietuvos Valsčiai” Monograph Series
Collected Scientific Papers

Archaeology

The 2002–2005 Scientific Papers Vol. **1**(2)

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*The edition is dedicated
to the Millenium of Lithuania
1009–2009*

Archaeology

Lithuanian Local Researches:
“Lietuvos Valsčiai” Monograph Series
Collected Scientific Papers
Studies Carried out in 2002–2005

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Top Cover
Medvėgalis Mound. 2005. Photo by Gintautas Zabiela

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Preface

Established in 1994 the Versmė Publishing House is dealing only with preparation and publishing of the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” (Lithuanian Rural Districts)—a series of local monographs devoted for the Millennium of Lithuania (1009–2009). Fourteen series of the monographs with a total number of book pages being 15,400 have already been issued. Now more than 30 books in this series are being prepared for press (see www.versme.lt). After all, the pre-war Lithuania had had more than 400 rural districts, thus, the total series set should embrace a similar number of volumes...

For the attainment of high quality of books, before 2006 inclusive, the Versmė organised 58 special research expeditions to the local areas under description with 1,148 authors of the monographs published or being in preparation having taken part. Together with scholars of other science branches, archaeologists Dr. Gintautas Zabiela, Prof. Dr. habil. Mykolas Michelbertas, Dr. Vykintas Vaitkevičius, Dr. Linas Kvizikevičius, Dr. Birtutė Salatkienė, Dr. Manvydas Vitkūnas and Julius Kanarskas et al. took part in these expeditions. Over 90 degree holders in different science fields are the authors of the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” series.

The first monographs of “Lietuvos Valsčiai” were based on descriptive articles. Later, as the scholars joined this work and scientific papers were accumulating, it was decided to form an independent authoritative Commission for Scientific Papers with its members being highly qualified experts in the fields covered in the series to evaluate the quality of the papers presented. I am honestly grateful to the Commission members Academician Prof. Dr. habil. Algirdas Gaigalas (nature), Dr. Artūras Judžentis (language), Prof. Dr. habil. Irena Regina Merkienė (ethnology, Commission head), Prof. Dr. habil. Stasys Skrodenis (folklore), Academician Prof. Dr. habil. Antanas Tyla (history) and Dr. Gintautas Zabiela (archaeology) for strictness in reviewing and the important work done. Only papers approved by the Commission are noted as the scientific works in the series.

For the first time, the Commission-approved scientific papers were published in the “Seredžius” monograph in 2003 (15 papers). Later such papers appeared in the following monographs: “Kvėdarna” (2004, 6 papers), “Papilė” (Part I, 2004, 11), “Tauragnai” (2005, 4), “Musninkai. Kernavė. Čiobiškis” (2005, 7), “Laukuva” (Part I, 2005, 10) and “Papilė” (Parts II and III, 2006, 10 papers).

The issue date for books prepared depends greatly on funding. Since the sale of the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” volumes on history and ethnical culture do not cover all expenses of preparation and publication, the permanent support is necessary. Unfortunately, state institutions do not provide systematic support of this activity, and local governments further the publishing of the series only partly. Therefore, the Versmė tries to find sponsors and funding sources, but the accumulation of funds necessary for publishing activities takes much time and is rather indefinite. Due to permanent lack of funds, the printing of the books is slow. To speed up the issue of scientific papers presented for the series, the Versmė allocated a part of its own resources to publish separate subject volumes of the “Lithuanian Local Researches” containing scientific papers on nature, archaeology, history, ethnical culture, langu-

age, folklore, and sociology presented to the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” series. We try to reach such an order that the time span from preparation/presentation of the papers to the Commission and their publication did not exceed one year.

The “Lithuanian Local Research” collection had started with the “Gamta” volume consisting of scientific papers (written in 2002–2005) dealing with biology, geography and geology (issued on August 11, 2006), since this part of local research was the first to be compiled under the guidance of Academician Algirdas Gaigalas, Chief Editor of this volume, assisted by our tireless Editor Vida Girininkienė.

I am sincerely thankful to the archaeologist Dr. Gintautas Zabiela, who is the Chief Editor of “Archeologija” (Archaeology, Lithuanian Local Researches Vol. 2) for his initiative, perseverance and diligence in preparation of this second volume for publication.

I think that the “Lithuanian Local Researches” accumulating scientific investigations from various local areas in one collection will help people, in a general European and global context, to recognise Lithuania that is to celebrate its millennium but is not known enough yet. On the other hand, it will also be useful for future works. I hope that the collected scientific papers issued under the private initiative and funding will attract the attention, appreciation and support of state and science institutions; moreover, the well-timed issue of the collection volumes will be a stimulus for researchers to take more active part in local investigations and become authors of the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” series.

We are kindly waiting for comments and proposals of readers and hope that the “Lithuanian Local Researches” edition will find its place in general space of local scientific investigations.

We would like also to inform that the present volume of the “Lithuanian Local Researches” as well as other serial parts issued before and scientific papers prepared for publication are available on the www.llt.lt web site.

Petras Jonušas
Publisher of the “Lietuvos Valsčiai” series
and the “Lithuanian Local Researches”
Vilnius, March 15, 2007

Sending off the starting volume of the local archaeology researches within the series of *Lietuvos Valsčiai*

Gintautas Zabiela

Klaipėda University

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Bulky monographs of the *Lietuvos Valsčiai* series issued by the Versmė Publishers contain also an element of works dealing with the archaeology. Although modern-day archaeology covers nearly entire our history from the traces of the first human settlements to the life in 20th century, many Lithuania's areas cannot boast of abundant archaeological investigations. Even in the areas, where such investigations have been done, the material collected is often deposited in museums and archives and is not available for the general public. This is especially true when speaking about not only important regional investigations unvalued, but also some significantly wider researches. Yet more archaeology finds lie dormant in the soil, and only a small part of them is known to the science. The enormous gap formed between the knowledge potential and real investigations is hardly possible to be filled in the nearest future, but we must make every effort. The articles on archaeology published in the above-mentioned series of monographs try to bridge one of such gaps, and brought together they make a separate volume of scientific works collected. So, we discuss here the first volume of this collection.

Lithuania being a small state having rather short history (people settled here about 12 000 years ago, and its statehood was formed 800 years before present) would presume too much to issue many archaeological publications. Already in the first decade of the restored Republic of Lithuania a certain system was formed with the redistribution of influence spheres taking place now. "Lietuvos archeologija" (Archaeology of Lithuania) and "Archaeologia Lituana" represent general achievements in archaeological science of Lithuania, "Archaeologia Baltica" covers a wider region, while "Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje" (Archaeological Investigations in Lithuania) notify about the latest field researches. A niche of popularisation remains unoccupied, although some time ago (1994–2002) "Baltų archeologija" (The Archaeology of the Balts) pretended to it. There is no special magazine for publication of archaeological material as a primary source either. The present volume does not pretend to this niche, since its mission is thought to be significantly wider. This is the collection of local scientific papers pursuing to concentrate the works on archaeology and adjacent fields (e.g. numismatics), which appear in separate volumes of the *Lietuvos Valsčiai* series and meet the requirements for scientific papers. A lively interest in local history strengthened in Lithuania during the 1990s, when beside 15 books published by Versmė, dozens of works, differing in themes and size, appeared on the history of certain localities of Lithuania. Some of them contained also archaeological articles. Many towns and townships had organised scientific conferences with the reports published later in various editions. Finally, quite a few books appeared recently about history of some areas (mainly villages) as reminiscences of participants of the historical events or as works (descriptive) of local lore. Some of

them contain archaeological material. To put all this together, a rather deep stream of archaeological publications is formed that comprises very different aspects of the discussed things. To divert it with care towards the science would be advantageous both for the knowledge of the local history, in particular, and the archaeology, in general. Moreover, it would enable to attract more people into the local investigations, to improve their quality and ensure that the works ready for publication were put into public circulation sooner. The author of this introduction sees such a mission of the present publication.

In order that the start was successful, the first periodical to deal with the archaeology within the Lithuania's local researches is compiled of the best articles from the books published by Versmė. Six authors present their works on archaeology of various Lithuanian localities, i.e. those of general character (Papilė by B. Salatkienė, Kartena by J. Kanarskas, Kvėdarna by M. Michelbertas) and special studies (sacred sites in Laukuva and Seredžius environs by V. Vaitkevičius, the 13th–14th c. town of Kernavė by M. Vitkūnas, and Seredžius township by L. Kvizikevičius). The seven mentioned papers make up only 18% of the archaeological articles published in the monographs of the *Lietuvos Valsčiai* series (in all, 39 articles in 15 volumes). There were no such articles in the first three volumes. Thus, the average makes 3 archaeological articles per volume, but their number reaches 5–6 in some volumes. The *Lietuvos Valsčiai* series volumes have now taken the leading position in Lithuania's local researches on archaeology, hence, confirming that the edition comprising such researches is necessary.

Keeping the first volume in hand, the long view should be taken. The future seems to be perspective, but will it be viable? Now this depends on many things. Number of monographs being prepared for publication and their authors is growing, thus, we would not be starved of good articles for the next volumes. One more advantage is that the thematic edition of local researches enables to publish the edited works in expedite way and avoid getting them stale or stuck in a desk drawer. Moreover, the better nurtured articles, which can, if necessary, be supplemented or revised further, will find their way into the monographs. On the other hand, the history of Lithuania's archaeology knows cases when a good start has not been followed by a proper finish. The fate of this new publication depends on each person who handles it. If we want to rejoice at rich prehistory and early history of the local areas, we must support the researches as much as we can. Nobody except us will do this anymore.

Summaries of scientific papers

Seredžius on the basis of archaeological data

/SEREDŽIUS

By Linas Kvizikevičius

Lithuanian History Institute

On the basis of archaeological and written sources the author investigates the formation and urban development of little town Seredžius on the Nemunas River banks in the Dukedom of Samogitia (*Žemaitija*) in the 16th–18th c. period. The history of the town was not investigated till now, therefore first of all the paper deals with the attributions of the town founders and the town establishment date problems. The author proved that the 1551–1556 founding date that was dominating hitherto was false. The name of the town was given to Seredžius in 1579. The real date of its establishment is unknown, but it is thought the founders of the town were the Sapiegas. The documents of 1580 and the later ones show that Seredžius was the Sapiegas' estate of Mežireči.

The archaeological sources and the numismatic material show that since the middle of the 16th c. the increase in exchange of small coins took place and the professional calculating means—counting metal discs—began spreading in the town that was formed in the first half of the 16th c.

The cultural strata topography shows that Seredžius was formed in the Nemunas River valley, in the territory between the rivers Pieštė and Dubysa, in the site of a pre-Christian grave-yard. In the 16th c. the centre of the town covered 4 ha area. The farmsteads were founded around the church at some distance from it and at a little cemetery. The buildings were spread one from another at some distance. The urbanized former Dubysa castle site (the Sapiegas' estate territory) was in the western part of the town, at the confluence of the rivers Dubysa and Nemunas. The area of the central part of the town didn't increase but the whole territory of the town spread. Some farmsteads sprang up on the other side of the Pieštė Rivulet in the western part of the town. In the 17th c. the town was made up of several parts: the nucleus—the most densely populated site in the centre around the church, its western part—the territory beyond the Pieštė River, the farmsteads situated in the north-east part, at the terrace. A separate part from the western side limited by a water canal made up the manor established on two hills. The territories among these parts remained empty during the whole 16th–18th c.-s (even the 19th c.) period—most probably vegetable gardens and pastures were there. The planned space structure of Seredžius formed in the 17th c. and it survived without any more significant changes up to the end of the 18th c. During the spring flood of 1829 the whole town was destroyed and then it was built in a new site at some distance from the Nemunas River.

The sacred sites of the Dubysa River lower reaches /SEREDŽIUS

By Vykintas Vaitkevičius

Lithuanian History Institute

The paper is dedicated to the Balts' pre-Christian sacred sites at the Dubysa River's lower reaches, 11 sacred sites, 8 sacred rivulets and springs among them, have been fixed here. We think that such traditions of sacred sites have originated from the tribal period (the 1st millennium—the beginning of the 2nd millennium). Their sources should be sought in the regional Balts' religions variants.

Natural and mythical sacred springs' properties ("to boil", not to freeze, to flow east/south, to flow together from 9 springs, to supply life, vivacity and light) allow to establish the reason due to which these sites have become of special importance. We are of the opinion that it was the projection of "Vital water" mythologema into the real life surrounding man.

The most ancient times of Kvédarna

/KVĖDARNA

Mykolas Michelbertas

Vilnius University

Archaeological findings are abundant in the locality of Kvédarna. There are traces of the Neolithic Age (4th–2nd millennia B. C.) in the locality. More data are available from the old Iron Age (1st–2nd c.). Kvédarna's environs were rather densely populated at that period as can be judged from the findings at the burial sites of Paragaudis and Pajūralis and materials from the Kvédarna–Padievaitis piliakalnis (mound). The burial customs, shrouds, and beliefs of the 1st–4th c. are discussed in the article. Quite abundant are archaeological data from the 9th–13th c. The Kvédarna–Padievaitis hill with a wooden castle was the centre of the Kvédarna lands at this period and played an important role in the defence of Samogitia. The investigations of Kvédarna and Paragaudis burial sites provide evidence that the customs of burial were changing at the end of this period. The burials of horses are appearing, and a change to the burning of the dead takes place at this time. The communities of the Kvédarna's locality were maintaining close links with other Baltic tribes and more remote people, preserving numerous traits of spiritual and material culture characteristic of Samogitia.

Some archaeological monuments of Papilė and their research /PAPILĖ I

By *Birutė Salatkienė*

Šiauliai University

Papilė and its environs' archaeological monuments have been known in literature since the beginning of the 19th c. though they have been little investigated. This paper tries to review their research and the prehistory data accumulated already at present since the Late Neolithic Age (the 3rd–2nd millenium B. C.) till the formation of the Lithuanian State.

Papilė archeological monuments are Papilė I mound (castle hill) and the settlement at its foot, Papilė II mound and Papilė burial-ground, Būriškiai, Klaišiai and Skabeikiai finding places. Papilė middle school museum collection has accumulated all the Stone and Bronze Ages archeological handicraft wares found in the environs of Papilė–Duobiškiai, Dusai, Klaišiai, Papilė itself, Skabeikiai, Rimšiai, Griežiai. The stone hatchets found in the mentioned finding sites testify that the most ancient people's life traces in Papilė environs found so far reach the Late Neolithic Age.

Papilė I mound is located in the southwest town outskirts, on the left bank of the Venta River, at its confluence with a nameless rivulet; the acting cemetery is here at present. The settlement at the foot of this mound was investigated by A. Varnas in 1998 and 2000. 160 finds in all were found here, they are glued ceramics items with coarse and flat surface, ceramics items made of clay, iron work implements, bone and brass ornaments. The researcher dates the settlement and the mound as well on the basis of those finds the beginning of the 1st millenium A. D.–the first ages of the 2nd millenium. Papilė II mound is located on the right bank of the Venta, beside the old cemetery 1 km distance east from Papilė I mound, it is also called the Benefit Mountain. The mound ground hasn't been investigated and A. Varnas having researched the protuberant northwest part carrying out reconnaissance excavations in 1986 didn't find neither cultural stratum nor archaeological finds and other traces of human activities.

A flat level burial ground was found on the Eastern Venta bank in front of the mound situated on another bank, it was excavated by J. Naudužas in 1955 but he didn't announce his research material. Summing up, 180 m² area was researched in all and 16 graves and one pit with earlier destroyed graves bones were found, some accidental finds were found as well. The graves are situated in rows directed northeast and southwest. The grave holes are oblong, quadrangular, with rounded corners, of 2.8 × 0.95 m and similar size, of 54–70 cm depth. 5 male and 9 female graves were researched; the others are badly destroyed. The graves are oriented in two directions–north–northwest and east–southeast directions. All the dead were buried lying on their backs, with stretched out legs, with arms folded on their chests, breasts and waists, though there wasn't any strictly established order of folding arms. It is seen from the review of Papilė burial ground finds that most of them are rather well known–one-edged swords, fixed into and cased spearheads, axes, knives, awls, strings, pins, buckles, bracelets. Some rather rare finds were a spiral collar wound

with wire, a collar with unbent loops, a twisted collar, a string of kauri cockle-shells, a spearhead out of Damascus steel, a flat lacework buckle, zoomorphic hooks, amulets out of animal bones and teeth. Kauri cockleshell strings, the collar with unbent loops and the flat lacework buckle should be without any doubt assigned to the imported articles. Papilė burial ground finds are dated the 7th–16th c.

There is no unique opinion concerning the ethnic dependence of the burial ground. I. Vaškevičiūtė attributed Papilė environs to the southern Semigallian region. R. Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė agrees with this archaeologist's opinion. R. Jarockis defines the borders of Semigallia along the rivers of Lielupė and Mūša, he doesn't attach Papilė to Semigallia. The analysis of burial ground finds show that a greater part of them are characteristic of North Middle Lithuania region. May be that Papilė environs were an ethnically mixed region, and the Samogitian and Semigallian influence in it during the burial ground exploitation period that extended for almost the whole millenium from the 7th until the 16th c. could change and fluctuate.

Only one archeological find from every–Būriškiai, Klaišiai and Skabeikiai–site from the 6th–11th c. A. D. is known. The circumstances of their finding allow to guess that burial grounds were in the mentioned villages.

It should be stated while we have no other reliable data so far that people were living in Papilė environs in the Late Neolithic Age, so the data available by us show. Papilė environs belong to the region that enters the Littoral culture area (the last quarter of the third millenium B. C.–the middle of the second millenium B. C.). During the first ages A. C. Papilė environs enter Samogitia and North Lithuania burial-mounds culture territory. During the period of the 5th–9th c. Papilė environs are assigned to a mixed region in the northern part of which the Semigallians lived and in the southern one–the Samogitians. The similar situation survived in the 10th–13th c. The problem of Papilė environs dependence remains finally unsolved so far.

It is necessary to discuss Papilė environs archaeological monuments relation in the end of the review. Papilė I mound with its foot settlement and the cemetery situation and their dating allow to state that both these monuments were left by the same community. Two Papilė mounds so close to one another also attract attention. Papilė mounds are too little investigated to allow to make more concrete conclusions about their purpose, however the concentration of archaeological monuments in nowadays small town and the absence of other mounds in the vicinity show that Papilė was a significant economic (trade), military, administrative and cult (religious) centre of a large area. Papilė survived as such local centre during the state formation period, too, when the mounds entered a wider defense system during the time of fights against the Livonia Order. The latest finds of Papilė burial ground reaching the 14th–16th c. show that after the destruction of the mound (in 1339), life didn't stop here, the settlement survived.

The sacred sites of Laukuva /LAUKUVA I

By Vykintas Vaitkevičius

Lithuanian History Institute

The paper is devoted to the sacred sites of Laukuva before the Christian era. Almost 50 objects that have survived or been destroyed but had been described are presented on the basis of archaeological, historical, linguistic and folklore data. Sacred hills and stones dominate among them. Bogs, fields and water reservoirs make up a comparatively small part of those monuments.

These sites should be mentioned among the analysed ones in the paper: the complex of Šiauduva sites (3 hills, a lake, a river) that is believed to have had a great religious importance, the Palokysčio Krivė's hill which, as it is believed, served as a meeting site for the representatives of several *valsčiai* (local administrative units), the Kaštaunaliai Panų benches hill—a hypothetical site of girls initiations. Some peculiar pile-form stones (tall stones) were standing in the environs of Laukuva up to the first half of the 20th c. Their mythical sense is associated with the images of posthumous souls (*vėlės*) existence: it was believed that a soul (*vėlė*) remains in the earth, water, a tree or stones for a while.

It was concluded while analysing the distribution of Laukuva sacred sites, their natural and cultural peculiarities, that most of them were established in the middle of the first millenium and at the beginning of the second millenium. Some of them did not lose their mythical and religious importance even up to the 19th–20th c. (e.g. sacred stone of Kikoniai, the sacred river of Šiauduva).

Kernavė in the 13th–14th c. (people's every day life and occupations)

/MUSNINKAI. KERNAVĖ. ČIOBIŠKIS

By Manvydas Vitkūnas

Vilnius University

The research data of Kernavė archaeological monuments' complex present a lot of information about East Lithuania's inhabitants' material and spiritual culture, about ethno-cultural changes that took place in this region since the Stone Age till the Middle Ages. In the 13th–14th c. Kernavė was one of the most important Lithuania's administrative-political defensive and economical centers. It was the town, whose main population part's livelihood source became not agriculture and close to it farming branches, but trades, commerce and, most probably, waging war.

Three main functional zones have been established in the Middle Ages town of Kernavė: administrative-defensive (the mounds, except the Pilis (Castle) Hill), living-defensive (the mound of The Pilis (Castle) Hill) and the living one (the town in the valley of Pajauta and the part of the town north from the mound of Lizdeika

Hill). The mound of the Hill was the principal castle of Kernavė and the Ruler's residence, in which a great part of luxury witnessing things was accumulated.

The inhabitants of Kernavė specialized in different trades, they had mastered various production technologies while agriculture, cattle-breeding, hunting and fishing were auxiliary occupations for the most part of the population. Merchants used to come here from foreign countries while the merchants from Kernavė also took part in the regional commerce and trade activities.

The everyday life features of the 13th–14th c. Kernavė were similar in many attitudes to the daily life of East Lithuania's country population of later periods. The cultural orientation of Kernavė town population was directed towards that of Eastern Slavonic towns. The analysis of Kernavė–Kriveikiškiai cemetery shrouds witnesses it. The results of anthropological research don't confirm the supposition that a greater part of Middle Ages Kernavė people were made up of the comers from the Kernavė lands. The similarities of material culture were influenced first of all by the political and ethno cultural contacts of ethnic Lithuanian lands population with the Slavonic lands population that were in the composition of the Lithuanian State.

In the 14th cent. Kernavė was burnt twice during the hostile war marches (1365 and 1390). The archaeological research data fixed in the written sources confirm these historical facts. The fire of 1390 stopped the development of Kernavė.

The investigations in Kernavė are continued. Their data will assist to answer many still unsolved problems and they will allow knowing better the past of the Lithuanian nation and one of its least known pages—its everyday life.

Kartena environs pre-history /KARTENA

By Julius Kanarskas

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.