

# Semigallia

during the period  
of the Crusades



Tomas Baranauskas

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of the Crusades**

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# Semigallia before the Crusades



The view of the Lielupe from the Hillfort of Mežotne. Photo by T. Baranauskas

Semigallia is a region covering the northern part of the Lowlands of Middle Lithuania and the southern part of the Lowlands of Middle Latvia (the Semigallian Lowland). In the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, this region as well as the neighbouring lands were flooded by the wave of a great Aestian migration and got inhabited by the tribes which left the Aestian Barrow Culture<sup>1</sup>. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, this culture broke into separate cultures of the Semigallians, the Samogitians, the Latgalians, and the Selonians<sup>2</sup> and the abovementioned tribes were the closest in terms of their origin. The lands of the Semigallians were located in the Mūša-Lielupe basin (in the Middle Ages, the Lielupe was called simply the *Semigallian River* – *Semegaller A*<sup>3</sup>).

The Semigallians were one of the most northern Aestian (Baltic) tribes and this might have determined the name of their land: Semigallia – Žiemgala – literally means the Northern End<sup>4</sup>. Such an interpretation prevails among the linguists but there are other explanations too: some researchers (mostly historians) see the Latvian name *Zemgale* as more authentic and deriving from the Latvian word *zems* meaning *low* (Lithuanian – *žemas*); therefore, they tend to use the form Žemgala – literally *the Low End* – even in Lithuanian<sup>5</sup>. However, the Latvian form *Zemgale* must have been influenced by the German form *Semgallen*, which was in use for many centuries<sup>6</sup>. There is also a version deriving the name of the Semigallians from the name of some river based on root Žeim-<sup>7</sup> and even from the name of the river in Eastern Lithuania called the Žeimenas (earlier probably the Žeimė)<sup>8</sup>, but it disagrees with the archaeological data.

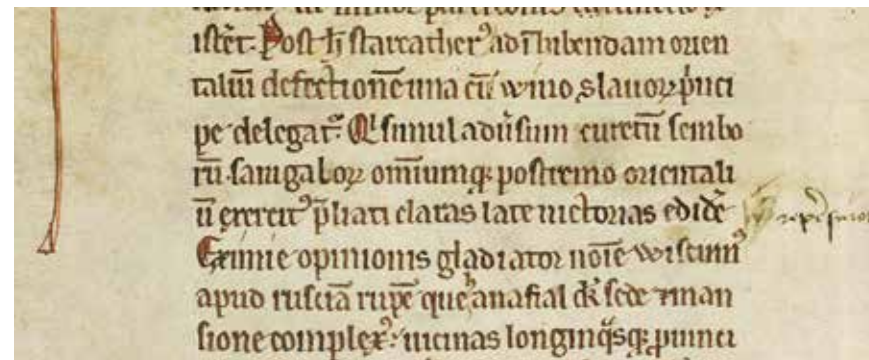
The Semigallians had their own language, which was of the same origin as modern Latvian and Lithuanian. We know quite little about it: the only remains of the Semigallian language are several place names and personal names preserved by the written sources and, maybe, some traces in the Latvian and the Lithuanian dialects, which were formed in the former Semigallian territory.

In the early stage of the research of the relics of the Semigallian language, it was assumed that its features had been closer to the modern Latvian<sup>9</sup>, but later investigations led to the conclusions that it had been more similar to Lithuanian and Prussian<sup>10</sup>. One way or another, Ghillebert de Lannoy, the Flemish knight who travelled through Curonia, Semigallia and Latgale in 1413, made a clear distinction between the Curonian, the Semigallian, and the Latvian languages<sup>11</sup>.

The early Semigallian history is reflected in Scandinavian sagas telling legends of the Viking Age (the 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century). Most of these legends have reached us as recorded by Saxo Grammaticus, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Danish historian, who usually referred to the Semigallians as the Hellespontians. This was because many medieval chroniclers interpreted the Latin name of the Semigallians – *semigalli* – as Half-Galatians perceiving *semi-* as a Latin prefix meaning *half* and *-galli* as the Gauls or Galatians. The Gauls were Celtic tribes, which dominated a large part of Europe before the Roman conquest, and some of them, namely the so-called Galatians, crossed Hellespont in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and settled in Asia Minor, modern Turkey. Some of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers including Saxo Grammaticus tried to relate the Semigallians (or Half-Galatians) to the Galatians and the reference to the Semigallians as to the Hellespontians reflected how Saxo Grammaticus imagined their origin.

When narrating the story of these Semigallians-Hellespontians, Saxo Grammaticus added the tale about Ermanaricus (or Hermanaricus), the mighty king of the Goths, who ruled Eastern Europe in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. According to an earlier account by Jordanes, the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Gothic historian, Ermanaricus subdued the Aestians with his “wits and courage”<sup>12</sup>. Saxo Grammaticus presented his own version of the legend: he identified the Aestians as the Curonians and the Sambians (which was quite accurate) and turned the Hellespontians (the Semigallians) into the murderers of Ermanaricus. However, according to the earlier version of Jordanes, Ermanaricus was murdered by the Rosomons, a poorly known tribe presumably of Germanic origin: Saxo Grammaticus must have invented the involvement of the Semigallians all by himself<sup>13</sup>.

The oldest authentic legend about “the Hellespontians” provided by Saxo Grammaticus is related to Ragnar Lothbrok, the semi-legendary warlord of the Danish Vikings who lived in the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and perished during



The reference to the Curonians, Sambians, and Semigallians (*Curetum, Semborum, Samgalorum*) conquered by Starkad in *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus – the only place in this work where the Semigallians are mentioned under their name: usually they are called the Hellespontians. The Lassen Fragment (1275), the Royal Library of Denmark (NKS 570 2°)

the siege of Paris in 845<sup>14</sup>. According to Saxo, after a long fight, Ragnar defeated and killed Dian, the king of “the Hellespontians”; Daxon, his son and heir, fled to the Russian prince who was his maternal uncle<sup>15</sup>. However, Ragnar defeated Daxon and the Russian prince and forced Daxon to pay tribute. Most probably right after this operation, on his way back to Denmark, Ragnar also attacked the Curonians and the Sambians who “hailed him victor” and paid him tribute to avoid the devastation of their lands<sup>16</sup>.

Another story provided by Saxo Grammaticus about the fights with “the Hellespontians” involves warlord Hading and his son Frothi. Hading must be the Viking warlord Hasting known in Western Europe in the 850s. Hading’s (and probably Frothi’s) attack on the Curonians and “the Hellespontians” must be the attack of the Danes of 853 mentioned by Rimburtus in *The Life of St. Anskar*. According to Rimburtus, the attack on Curonia was unsuccessful and the Danes lost a lot of gold which they had previously captured somewhere else. Where? This might be explained by the narration of Saxo Grammaticus according to which Hading attacked “the Hellespontians” and set fire on the Castle of Daugava ruled by their king Andwan; he seized the castle and captured Andwan who had to pay his ransom in gold. Researchers link the Castle of Daugava with the Hillfort of Daugmale near the Daugava River<sup>17</sup>.





Ragnar Lothbrok and his sons Ivar and Ubba pay homage to the idols. A 15th century miniature from the Harley collection of the British Library (MS 2278, fol. 39r)

After the fights of the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, the relations between the Semigallians and the Scandinavians became more peaceful. For the Scandinavians, the Daugava River was an important part of the trade route to Rus' and Constantinople. The town of Daugmale prospered throughout the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century. It had a strong castle: its hillfort survived until today and its top still has an area of 3,800 m<sup>2</sup>; the foot settlement occupied an area of about 2 ha and there was a port at the confluence of the Daugava and the Varžupīte<sup>18</sup>. This was the main trading centre at the lower reaches of the Daugava and in

Semigallia in general. Scandinavians also settled there. The establishment of the Danish colonies in Prussia, Semigallia, and Karelia in the 10<sup>th</sup> century is also mentioned in the Danish *Annales Ryenses*<sup>19</sup>.

A new stage of the Semigallian-Scandinavian relations began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Ingvar's Saga says that King Olof Skötkonung of Sweden sent his son Anund and Ingvar (the hero of the Saga) to the Semigallians (*Seimgaler*) to get their tribute to Sweden<sup>20</sup>. This story is not quite accurate as, according to the Ingvar's Saga, Ingvar died during his voyage to the eastern lands in 1041 at the age of 25, which would imply that he was born in 1016 and could not take part in any military activities during the reign of Olof (c. 1021–1022) due to his young age. In reality, Ingvar must have taken part in the operation of King Anund Jacob of Sweden, Olof's son and heir, which must have taken place c. 1035. As the Swedish forces approached, the Semigallians summoned an assembly, which had to decide whether to pay tribute or not. Ingvar was very eloquent and persuaded the Semigallian prince and other chieftains to concede and pay tribute to Sweden in goodwill. Only three Semigallian chieftains disagreed and challenged the Swedes in the fight, but they were defeated.

This was an important turning point in the life of Semigallia because regular trade relations with Sweden were established at that moment. They are reflected

in the 11<sup>th</sup> century runic stones built in memory of merchants who traded with the Semigallians: namely, to Thorstein in Grönsta, to Svein in Mervalla, and Audar in Gökstenen. Besides that, there is a box used to keep scales found in Sigtuna and dating to the same period: it bears the runic inscription stating that the scales were received from a Semigallian man (*simskum mani*). The most precise inscription of the name of Semigallia can be found on the runic stone of Mervalla: 𐌺𐌹𐌿𐌸𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 – *Simkala*, which could have been pronounced as *Sæimgala*; other runic stones bear only hypothetical references to Semigallia. Still, if these inscriptions are interpreted accurately, no other Baltic tribe had such an intensive trade relationship with Sweden and was mentioned in the Swedish runic records more often than the Semigallians<sup>21</sup>.

In the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Ruthenian princes also tried to subdue the Baltic tribes: not only the Semigallians, but also the Lithuanians, the Latgalians, the Livs, and even the Curonians were listed among the tributaries of Rus'<sup>22</sup>.



Mervalla stone with the runic inscription saying, "Sigríðr had this stone raised in memory of Sveinn, her husbandman. He often sailed a valued cargo ship to Seimgalir, around Dómisnes". Photo by Bengt A. Lundberg, 1985, CC BY Riksanantikvarieämbetet



The report of the Tale of Bygone Years on the battle between the princes of Polotsk and the Semigallians in early 1107. The illuminated transcript in the Radziwiłł Codex (15th century), the National Library of Russia

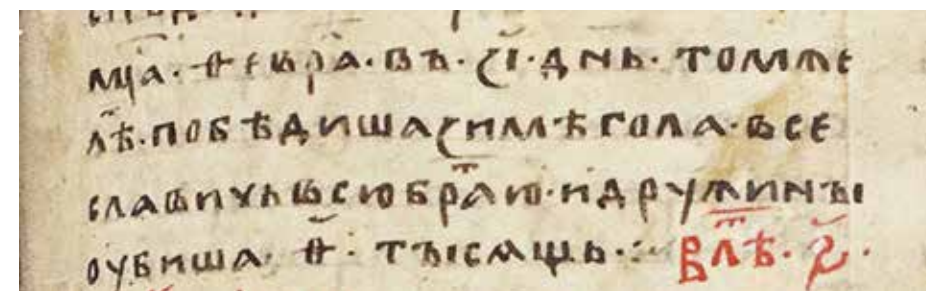


The box of the Sigtuna scales with a runic inscription. An illustration used in an article by Otto von Friesen, 1912

Princes of Polotsk from the house of Vseslav tried to turn these claims into reality. At the beginning of 1107, they summoned a huge army and invaded Semigallia but suffered an overwhelming defeat: their troops were destroyed and, according to Nestor, the chronicler of Kiev, as many as 9 thousand Ruthenians were killed<sup>23</sup>.

It is not clear whether the princes of Polotsk tried to subdue the

Semigallians after that, but one thing is definite: they maintained control over the land of the Livs northwards from the Daugava till the 1180s. Daugmale, which stood on the southern bank of the Daugava, found itself in the immediate proximity of the vassals of Polotsk to which the Semigallians were unwilling to bend the knee. This undermined the trade on the Daugava route and Daugmale suffered a considerable decline in the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>24</sup>.



The report of the Tale of Bygone Years on the battle between the princes of Polotsk and the Semigallians in early 1107. The transcript in the Laurentian Codex (1377), the National Library of Russia (Collection No. IV.2., Collection 550, Accession No. 219, p. 95)

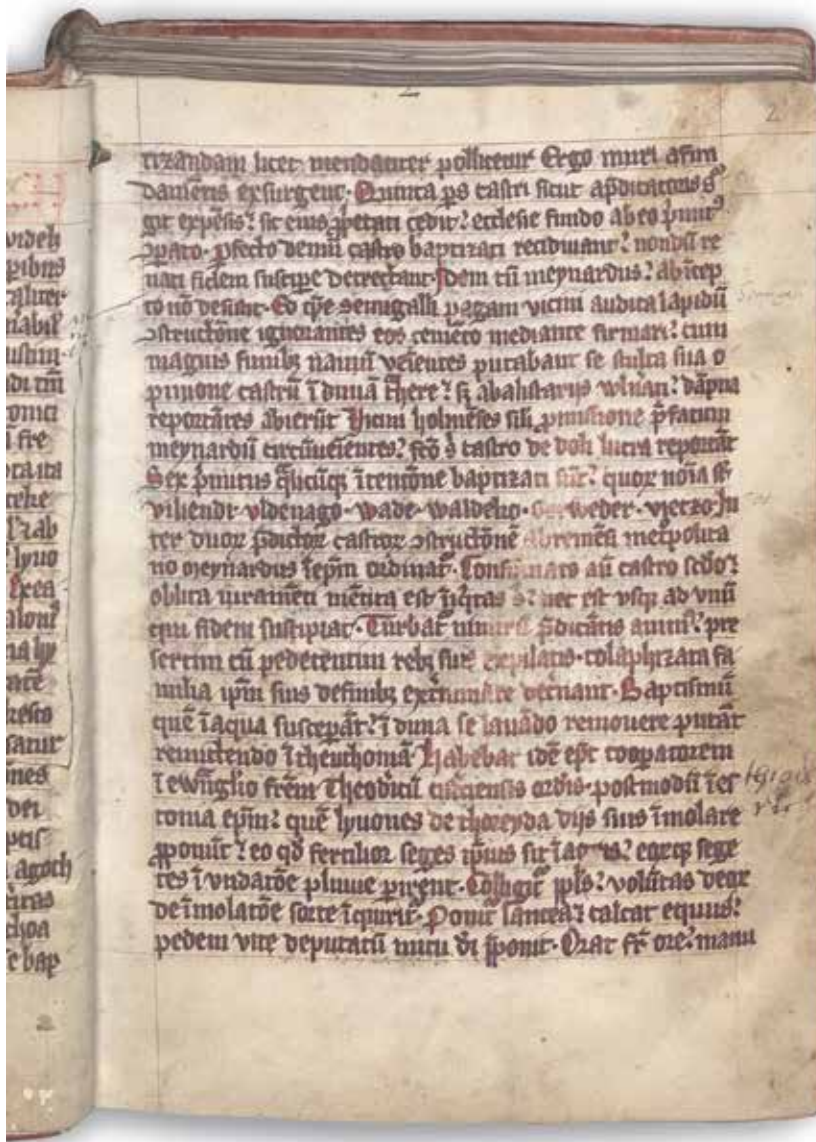


# The Establishment of Riga – the Breaking Point in the History of Semigallia

However, the final blow to the Semigallian trade was cast by German merchants who appeared at the mouth of the Daugava in 1180. Missionary Meinhard came with them. In 1184, after acquiring the permission of Prince Vladimir of Polotsk, he built the first Catholic church at Uexküll (*Ikšķile*) and baptized some of the Livs.

The next year, using a recent attack by the Lithuanians as an argument, Meinhard persuaded the Livs to build a masonry castle and offered his help. In return, the whole community of the Livs of Uexküll (*Ikšķile*) agreed to convert to the Catholic faith. Shortly afterwards, the neighbouring community of the Livs of Holme (*Salaspils*) followed the suit and also got a masonry castle in return for conversion. Meinhard built these castles with the help of the stonemasons he invited from Gotland. The appearance of the Catholic communities protected by masonry castles which were a novelty in this region enabled Meinhard to seek the title of a bishop and he was anointed as the Bishop of Uexküll (*Ikšķile*) by Archbishop Hartwig II of Bremen in 1186<sup>25</sup> (Pope Clemens III issued his final approval in his bull of 1 October 1188<sup>26</sup>). All these events happened in the neighbourhood of the Semigallian Daugmale – right across the Daugava.

From the very beginning, this German-controlled territory was closely related to the German merchants and their proactive business, which undermined the commercial interests of the Semigallians. Hence, they understandably tried to retaliate. They attacked the Castle of Uexküll (*Ikšķile*) right after its construction, but all in vain. Later, the Germans told the tale that the Semigallians, being unaware that the boulders of the castle walls were cemented with mortar, tried to draw them down to the Daugava with ropes<sup>27</sup>. However, this is a wandering



The oldest transcript of the Chronicle by Henry of Latvia – the page from the Zamoyski Codex (early 14th century) telling how the Semigallians tried to destroy the Castle of Uexküll (*Ikšķile*) (Biblioteka Narodowa, Biblioteka Ordynacji Zamojskiej w Warszawie, Rps BOZ 25, p. 1v)





The ruins of the 12th century Ikšķile church, photo from Wikipedia.org

tale told about attackers of numerous castles<sup>28</sup>. For instance, there was a later tale about the Curonians who allegedly tried to destroy the masonry Castle of Arensburg (Kuresaare) on the Island of Saaremaa in a similar way<sup>29</sup>.

The first two bishops of Uexküll (Ikšķile), namely, Meinhard and Bertold, still had issues with ascertaining power in their diocese and encountered the resistance of the Livs. In 1198, Bishop Bertold managed to enter his diocese only with the help of his army and was immediately killed at the battle. Nevertheless, in 1200, Albert, the third Bishop of Livonia, arrived with a new army and

took the country under control. He relied on brute force alone and spent most of his time in Germany recruiting soldiers for the Crusades.

In Livonia, Albert started reforms right after his arrival. First of all, he decided to found the German city of Riga and forced the Livs to allocate the ground for it. Bishop Albert chose the equally militant missionary Theoderich of Treiden (Turaida) as his main assistant and sent him to Pope Innocent III with a plea to organize a crusade against the pagans living on the banks of the Daugava and to ban the trade visits to the Semigallian port at the mouth of the Lielupe<sup>30</sup>. The pope satisfied the request<sup>31</sup>. In 1201, Bishop Albert returned with a new army of Crusaders and founded the city of Riga, to which he moved the centre of his diocese. In 1202, Theoderich of Treiden, the abbot of the Monastery of the Order of Cistercians at Dünamünde (Daugavgrīva), also founded the monastic military Order of the Brothers of the Sword to fight the pagans<sup>32</sup>.



The seal of Bishop Albert of Riga of 1225 (Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Zb. dok. perg. nr. 4493)

# Viestartas, the Duke of Western Semigallia

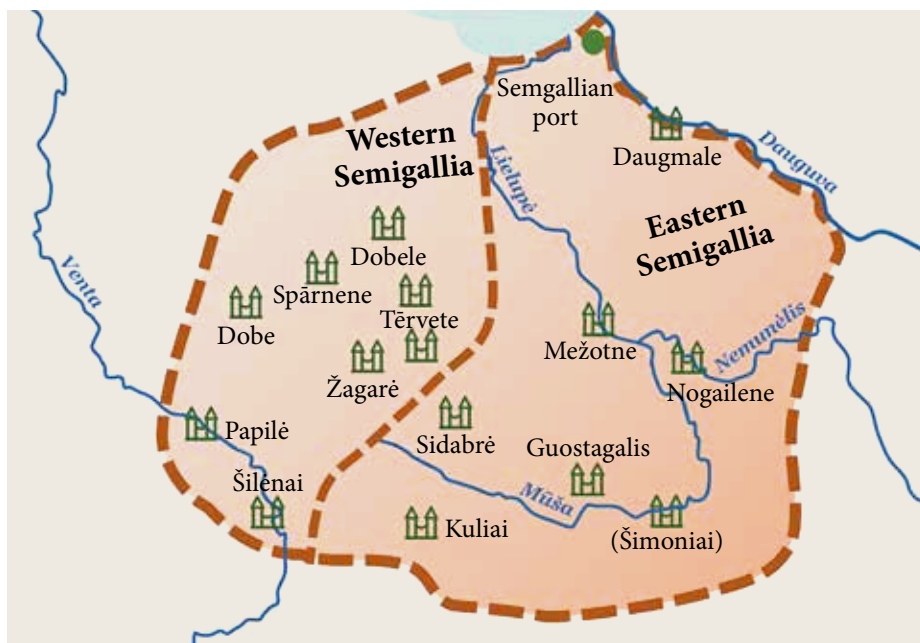
After the Semigallians were pushed away from the Daugava River and lost the opportunity to trade via their port, they understood that they were dealing with a power they were unable to fight back against efficiently. The moods of the Semigallians shifted towards making peace with the Germans of Livonia. They also felt the threat of the emerging Lithuanian state that sought to draw Semigallia into its sphere of influence. In the winter of 1201–1202, the



Viestartas. Painting by Artūras Slapšys



Žvelgaitis. Painting by Artūras Slapšys



Semigallia c. 1200. By T. Baranauskas

Lithuanians almost attacked Semigallia: they made a short-term truce with Riga and tried to invade Semigallia from the side of the Daugava – this attempt was halted only because the Lithuanians learned that Prince Vladimir of Polotsk invaded their country<sup>33</sup>.

At that time, Tērvete emerged as the Semigallian political centre. Duke Viestartas of Tērvete united Western Semigallia under his rule and became the most powerful Semigallian duke of the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, he decided to give priority to the fight against Lithuania and, therefore, to establish friendly relations with the German colony of Riga. In 1202, the Semigallians attacked the Castle of Holme for the last time and, after suffering a defeat, made a pact of peace and friendship with Riga<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, this “friendship” was far from equal, because the ruling on the blockade of the Semigallian port remained in force and the Germans of Riga even used military force against the merchants who tried to drive through the trade ban in 1203<sup>35</sup>.

Meanwhile, Viestartas waged war against Lithuania for eight years (1201–1208). The most dramatic episode of this war took place in March 1205, when Viestartas persuaded the Germans of Riga to join forces and attack the Lithuanian



army on its way back from the raid to Estonia.

The Lithuanians had some 2 thousand men summoned for this raid: their army had to attack Southern Estonia. When it was passing by Riga, Duke Žvelgaitis left the army along with some companions and paid a visit to the city where he received a friendly welcoming. According to Henry of Latvia, who left a record on this case, Žvelgaitis was a wealthy and powerful man who had told his companions that he would destroy Riga on his way back.

After the Lithuanians left, Duke Viestartas persuaded the citizens of Riga and the Brothers of the Sword to ambush the Lithuanians on their way back from Estonia. The Lithuanian army was slaughtered by the united forces of the Germans and the Semigallians at the battle, which took place near Ropaži. Žvelgaitis was found in a sledge and Theoderich Schilling, a servant of the bishop of Riga, stabbed him to death with a spear. Afterwards, the Semigallians cut off his head and carried it to their country<sup>36</sup>. The Battle of Ropaži was the first major defeat the Lithuanians suffered in Livonia<sup>37</sup>.

The attempts of Viestartas to maintain an alliance with Riga are also proved by the fact that the



A Semigallian warrior. Reconstruction, Jelgava History and Art Museum of G. Elias. Photo by T. Baranauskas

Semigallian force of 3 thousand men came to the aid of the Germans of Riga and joined them in their campaign against the rebellious Livs of Turaida in 1206<sup>38</sup>.

In return, Viestartas expected to get German aid against Lithuania. In February 1208, seeking to avenge the earlier Lithuanian raids against Semigallia, he invited the Germans of Riga and the Brothers of the Sword to organize a joint campaign against Lithuania but he suffered an overwhelming defeat during this raid. When the Lithuanians retaliated with a raid on Semigallia, they were also defeated<sup>39</sup>. The German aid turned to be not as efficient, as Viestartas had expected. The Germans were also far from happy with their cooperation with the Semigallians and decided “never to fight with one pagan against the other”<sup>40</sup>. Besides that, the German expansion started threatening Semigallia too: in 1208, the forces of the bishop of Riga and the Brothers of the Sword took Sēlpils (the Castle of the Selonians)<sup>41</sup> and set foot into the lands southwards from the Daugava, which they had not attacked before. Thus, after the turbulent events of 1208, the friendship between Viestartas and Riga came to an end. Reports about hostilities between the Semigallians and the Lithuanians stopped as well.

The first sign of the emerging alliance between the Semigallians and the Lithuanians appeared in the summer of 1210 when both joined the alliance of the Curonians and the Livs against the Germans of Riga. True, after the alliance was made, the military actions were undertaken only by the Curonians and the Lithuanians: the Curonians attacked Riga and the Lithuanians attempted to lay siege on the Castle of Kukenois (Koknese); both attacks failed<sup>42</sup>. The sources provide no information about any activities of the Semigallians.

The turning point in the Semigallian-Lithuanian relationship took place in 1219. In 1218, Bishop Albert of Riga anointed the first bishop of Selonia – Abbot Bernhard von Lippe (1218–1224) – and the threat of the direct German expansion into Semigallia emerged<sup>43</sup>. At that moment, Duke Živinbutas who had ascended to the throne slightly earlier ruled Lithuania. Živinbutas achieved a long-term peace with Viestartas. In the winter of 1218–1219, Viestartas allowed the Lithuanian forces to pass through Semigallia to attack Estonia<sup>44</sup>.

Meanwhile, Bishop Albert of Riga started attacking Semigallia. In the summer of 1219, the Semigallians of Mežotne submitted to him and converted to Christianity asking to protect them from the Lithuanians and the Semigallians loyal to Viestartas. Bishop Albert came to Mežotne with the army of crusaders,



The Semigallian woman by the Castle of Mežotne. By Cao Viet Nguyen,  
© Rundales novada dome

including Duke Albert of Saxonia and Anhalt. Three hundred of the Semigallian families were baptised and the Germans left their garrison in the castle<sup>45</sup>. A site for the construction of the cathedral church for Bishop Bernhard of Selonia and Semigallia was allocated at the castle too. This must have also been the moment when Bishop Albert outlined the borders of the Selonian and Semigallian Diocese, which were approved by Pope Honorius III on 25 October 1219<sup>46</sup>.

After learning about the submission of Mežotne to the Bishop of Riga and its conversion, Viestartas mobilised his army and stormed the castle but was fended off. Then, he blocked the communication between the garrison of Mežotne and Riga via Lielupe and prevented the arrival of reinforcements. The Germans were forced to retreat, whereas the Semigallian community of Mežotne apostatized and surrendered to Viestartas. After being united under the rule of Viestartas, the Semigallians allied with the Lithuanians and the Curonians and attacked Livonia, namely the vicinities of the Castle of Holme<sup>47</sup>.



The siege of Mežotne. By Cao Viet Nguyen, © Rundales novada dome

In February 1220, the crusaders' army led by Bishop Albert of Riga, Master Volkwin of the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, and Duke Albert of Saxonia carried out a second attack on Mežotne and laid siege. Viestartas tried to help the besieged defenders of the castle and brought some Lithuanians to aid him, but the Lithuanians refused to engage in fight, arguing that they were unwilling to break their peace agreement with Livonia. After a long fight, Mežotne was taken: the castle was burnt down and the community was converted to Christianity once again<sup>48</sup>.

Bishop of Selonia and Semigallia Bernhard von Lippe started developing an ecclesiastical organization in the country and intensified missionary activities involving the Cistercian monks too<sup>49</sup>. However, the missions were impeded by the resistance of the Semigallians provoked by atrocities of the Brothers of the Sword: they were seizing the domains of the Semigallians and causing many other grievances. Moreover, the Brothers of the Sword attempted to seize the lands



and the belongings of Bishop Bernhard himself. He was forced to plea to Pope Honorius III, who authorized Bernhard to apply excommunication against the Brothers of the Sword by his bull of 2 February 1222<sup>50</sup>.

Under such circumstances, despite the failed cooperation attempt of 1220, the Semigallians continued to seek an alliance with Lithuania. In 1225, Papal Legate William of Modena arrived in Livonia and Viestartas agreed to meet him. However, he refused to be baptized; he only agreed to accept the preacher appointed by the legate and to consider the possibility of conversion in the future<sup>51</sup>.

Viestartas never resumed the alliance with the Bishop of Riga or the Order of the Brothers of the Sword. He was still bothered by the loss of Mežotne. Meanwhile, after the death of Bishop Bernhard of Selonia and Semigallia, his successor Lambert (1224–1230) acquired the repeated affirmation of the borders of his diocese from the pope<sup>52</sup> and continued the attempts to gain control over the country. On 21 March 1226, Bishop Albert of Riga proclaimed with the permission and under the will of Legate William von Modena that “Bishop Lambert, ceding Selonia in good will, shall be assigned the entire Semigallia with all its belongings, but the bishop shall preserve the income he was acquiring from Selonia until he acquires the respective domain in Semigallia”<sup>53</sup>. This meant that Lambert concentrated all his forces for the conquest of Semigallia and that Western Semigallia, which was still under the rule of Viestartas, became his immediate target. However, the attack on the domain of Viestartas was undermined by the disagreements between Bishop Lambert and the Brothers of the Sword. In the heat of that, Lambert excommunicated individual Brothers



The Seal of Bishop Lambert of Selonia and Semigallia (Toll R. Siegel und Münzen.... Reval, 1887, lent. 45:a)



The seal of the Order of the Brothers of the Sword (Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs – Latvijas valsts vēstures arhīvs, f. 8, apr. 3, kaps. a, nr. 20)

and even the entire Order several times and the Order was forced to plea for intercession to the pope and Bishop Albert of Riga<sup>54</sup>.

In 1228, the army of the crusaders (pilgrims) gathered in Riga and it was larger than ever before<sup>55</sup>. Seeing the growing threat of the Livonian attack, Viestartas allied with the Curonians and cast the preventive blow. On August 20, 1228, the Semigallians and the Curonians devastated the Cistercian Monastery of Dünamünde (Daugavgrīva) near Riga and slaughtered its monks<sup>56</sup>.

In response, Master Volkwin attacked the domain of Viestartas with the Brothers of the Sword and pilgrims and found him at his castle (most probably, at Tērvete)<sup>57</sup>. Viestartas met the invaders with his army and fought them in the field, but the Semigallians lost the battle. The fight claimed the lives of 1,600 Semigallians and their army was forced to retreat. Afterwards, Master Volkwin pillaged Semigallia for 3 weeks taking a lot of captives and other booties<sup>58</sup>.

At that time, Bishop Lambert was in Germany where he was searching for assistance to convert Semigallia to the Catholic faith<sup>59</sup>, but his further fate remains unclear. Most probably, he returned to Semigallia and made peace with the Order of the Brothers of the Sword satisfying its territorial demands<sup>60</sup>. One way or another, he was forced to resign eventually<sup>61</sup> and the initiative of the conquest and the conversion of Semigallia was seized by the Order of the Brothers of the Sword.

Viestartas retaliated to Master Volkwin's attack next year: in 1229, he attacked the vicinities of the Castle of Ascheraden (Aizkraukle) in Livonia.

Unfortunately, the returning Semigallians were overtaken by the army gathered by the Commander (Komtur) of Ascherade Marquart von Burbach (Bauerbach). The Brothers of the Sword attacked the camp of the Semigallians, five hundred of them were killed, and Viestartas fled with nothing but a burning stick in his hand. Commander Marquart tried to capture him but the mighty Viestartas managed to defend himself with that stick: he hit Marquart in the face and the Commander of Ascherade lost his teeth, whereas Viestartas managed to escape to his castle and save his life<sup>62</sup>. This implies that the battle took place somewhere on the outskirts of the domain of Viestartas as the castle was not far away (this castle may have been Dobeļe).

The historical sources provide no more information about Viestartas. Some historians assume that he died shortly afterwards; however, considering that this duke showed himself as a strong and healthy man during his last fight, he could have lived at least till the Battle of Saulė (1236)<sup>63</sup>. On the other hand, even if he survived, his reign came to an end, as shortly afterwards the Brothers of the Sword conquered all of Semigallia. Historical sources provide no details of these tragic events, but they could have claimed the life of Viestartas.

Most probably, Western Semigallia surrendered to the Livonian Germans in the summer of 1230<sup>64</sup>. So did Northern Curonia about the same time<sup>65</sup>. It looks like Lithuania tried to provide some aid to the Semigallians and the Curonians who became the target of the Order of the Brothers of the Sword but came under attack itself and was laid waste when Master Volkwin invaded the Lithuanian Land of Nalšia in 1229 or 1230<sup>66</sup>.

On 9 August 1231, the Livonian Germans divided the newly subjugated lands of Western Semigallia and Northern Curonia: Bishop Nicolaus of Riga granted one-third of them to the citizens of Riga (the other third was to be assigned to the Brothers of the Sword<sup>67</sup>). Eastern Semigallia with its centre in Mežotne, which was called Upmale (the Land of the River) and which was assigned to the Bishop of Semigallia<sup>68</sup>, was not divided at this stage. Shortly afterwards, the citizens of Riga and the merchants of Riga started quarrelling over the newly acquired lands and Bishop Nicolaus decided to assign a third of Semigallia exclusively to the merchants of Riga on 16 February 1232; the citizens of Riga were reimbursed with the Curonian lands instead<sup>69</sup>.

At this stage, the partition of Semigallia no longer involved Bishop Lambert of Semigallia who must have resigned before these events. However, a new bishop of Semigallia emerged unexpectedly and his actions sent shockwaves across the



The Act of the Partition of Saaremaa, Curonia and Semigallia between the Bishop Nicolaus of Riga and the citizens of Riga of 9 August 1231 (Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs – Latvijas valsts vēstures arhīvs, f. 8, apr. 3a, lieta nr. 21)

whole of Livonia. This bishop was Baldwin of Alna – a Cistercian monk from Aulne in modern Belgium. He arrived in Livonia in 1230 as a vice-legate of the pope authorized to decide who was to become the successor of Bishop Albert of Riga after his death (Baldwin decided in favour of Nicolaus).

However, Baldwin did not confine himself to this task alone and started pushing through his own rule in Livonia. He rewrote the agreements with the newly subjugated Curonians who now became entitled to convert to Christianity maintaining their political independence from Riga<sup>70</sup>. Baldwin saw himself as the only eligible lord of these lands. In 1231, he went to Pope Gregory IX to acquire further authorization and the approval to his agreements with the Curonians.

The pope showed support to Baldwin's aspirations. On 29 January 1232, he anointed Baldwin the Bishop of Semigallia and the papal legate to Livonia, Gotland, Finland, Estonia, Semigallia, Curonia, and other newly-converted



lands<sup>71</sup>. Shortly afterwards, the pope granted him even more authority: to rule the entire Curonia<sup>72</sup>, to take under his control the lands of the Livonian and Estonian neophytes where the boundaries of the dioceses were not set<sup>73</sup>, to look after the dioceses of Revel, Vironia and other Livonian, Finish, and Estonian dioceses until they get bishops<sup>74</sup>, and forbid Christians to make peace or a truce with the pagans or the Ruthenians<sup>75</sup>. The pope ordered the Church of Riga, its citizens and the Order of the Brothers of the Sword to return Semigallia to Baldwin and transfer him all the lands they had previously acquired from Bishop Lambert<sup>76</sup>. Finally, the pope even authorized Baldwin to discipline Bishop Nicolaus of Riga for the ill-fulfilment of his duties<sup>77</sup>.



The seal of Bishop Baldwin of Alna of Semigallia (Toll R. Siegel und Münzen.... Reval, 1887, lent. 45:b)

One might assume that, after receiving such authorization, Baldwin had to become the most powerful man in Livonia, but this was not the case. Baldwin also understood that he got too much and that he could ascertain his rights only by force. Therefore, before going back to Livonia, he recruited some troops in Germany and led them to the crusade against the Order of the Brothers of the Sword itself! Baldwin arrived in Livonia in July 1233, and shortly afterwards attempted to seize Revel (Tallinn). However, the Brothers of the Sword managed to fend him off<sup>78</sup>.

Simultaneously, the Brothers of the Sword sent their envoys to Pope Gregory IX persuading him to take the powers of the legate from Baldwin on 9 February 1234. After learning that, Baldwin rushed to the pope with a grievance against Bishop Nicolaus of Riga, the Order of the Brothers of the Sword, and the city of Riga. After receiving Baldwin's letter with a long list of serious accusations, Pope Gregory IX summoned the accused to answer the charges at the Curia



The Battle of Saulė. Painting by Artūras Slapšys

on 20 November 1234. Formally, Baldwin of Alna remained the Bishop of Semigallia till 1236, when he finally lost the dispute at the Curia and was forced to resign<sup>79</sup>.

The German rule in Semigallia didn't survive any longer. On 22 September 1236, the Lithuanians won an overwhelming victory against the Brothers of the Sword at the Battle of Saulė and the Semigallians joined the Lithuanians once again hunting those Brothers of the Swords who managed to flee the slaughter<sup>80</sup>. The Order of the Brothers of the Sword lost most of its members at this battle and found itself in the crisis it couldn't survive: it was annexed to the more powerful Teutonic Order in 1237. After the Battle of Saulė, almost the entire Semigallia (maybe, except for the lands adjacent to Riga<sup>81</sup> and the Daugava) and Curonia (except the Land of Vanema) got rid of the German rule and allied with Lithuania which proved to be the only force capable to fight the German expansion efficiently<sup>82</sup>.

For the fifteen following years, the Teutonic Order left Semigallia in peace<sup>83</sup>.

# Semigallia Conquered by the Germans in 1251–1259

In 1249, a domestic war broke out between Grand Duke Mindaugas of Lithuania and his nephew Tautvilas. During this war, Mindaugas converted to Christianity and allied with Landmaster Andreas von Stirland of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order in the spring of 1251<sup>84</sup>. This opened new opportunities for the Teutonic Knights to expand into Lithuania, Semigallia, and Southern Curonia.

The Teutonic Order helped Mindaugas fend off the attack of Tautvilas and his supporters from Samogitia at the Castle of Voruta (near modern Anykščiai)<sup>85</sup> and this way got an opportunity to invade Samogitia together with the troops of Mindaugas<sup>86</sup>.

Afterwards, most probably in the second half of 1251, Landmaster Andreas von Stirland invaded Semigallia, which complicated the communication with his new ally Mindaugas. Besides that, the Teutonic Order sought to seize an opportunity, as the Semigallians no longer had the backup from the side of Lithuania. According to the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, Andreas von Stirland devastated Semigallia to such an extent that the Semigallians offered to pay tribute to the Order themselves<sup>87</sup>.

The process of solidifying the German rule in Semigallia took at least two years. The Order had to



Mindaugas. Painting by Artūras Slapšys



The Act of the Partition of the Eastern Semigallia (Upmale) of April 1254 (Latvijas Nacionālais arhivs – Latvijas valsts vēstures arhivs, f. 5561, apr. 2, lieta nr. 3)

share the subjugated lands with the Livonian bishops, which were traditionally entitled to two-thirds of the conquered territories in Livonia. Thus, before the Semigallian conquest, the ecclesiastical rule in Livonia underwent a major reform. First of all, the Semigallian Diocese was liquidated and its lands were transferred to the Archdiocese of Riga by the verdict of Lyon of 3 March 1251<sup>88</sup>.

This reform was not difficult because the Selonian diocese, which had been established in 1218 and in 1226 became the actual Semigallian Diocese, existed only formally after the Battle of Saulė of 1236, and the Germans had no actual control over any territory in Semigallia or Selonja at that time. The Chapter of the Semigallian Diocese led by provost Heidenreich resided in Riga<sup>89</sup>. Bishop Arnold of Semigallia, the first known successor of Baldwin, was mentioned in





The Act of the Partition of Western Semigallia of April 1254  
(Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich, perg. 25, 1254, N. J. 25)

1246–1247 only in Germany (Bremen and Cologne) and, on 5 December 1247, Pope Innocent dismissed him at his own request and nominated Heinrich von Lützelburg, a Franciscan monk, instead<sup>90</sup>. Heinrich von Lützelburg was the last bishop of Semigallia during the period of 1247–1251. As the Semigallian Diocese was liquidated in 1251, he was nominated the bishop of Curonia and kept the only real property of the bishop of Semigallia, namely, a house in Riga, which now became the house of the bishop or Curonia.

Therefore, in 1251, Semigallia was claimed by Bishop Nicolaus of Riga. He issued an act (without the month and date) assigning one-third of Semigallia to the Chapter of Riga based on the allegation that two-thirds of Semigallia had been assigned to the Diocese of Riga by the pope. The dating of this act is a bit controversial, because, along with the date of 1251, it also bears the reference to

the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of the rule of Bishop Nikolaus<sup>91</sup> which would begin only on 8 April 1252<sup>92</sup>. It is likely that the Chapter of Riga prepared the draft of the act without the exact date at the end of 1251 but it was affirmed by Bishop Nicolaus only in April 1252, or even later. This partition of Semigallia within the Diocese of Riga was only preliminary because Semigallia was not yet divided between the Bishopric of Riga and the Teutonic Order.

The verdict of 3 March 1251, which liquidated the Semigallian Diocese, also foresaw that Riga was to become the centre of the Livonian and Prussian archbishopric, but Albert Suerbeer who was nominated the Archbishop of Livonia and Prussia on 9 January 1246<sup>93</sup>, resided in Lübeck and moved to Riga only after the death of Bishop Nicolaus<sup>94</sup>.

Bishop Nicolaus died in the second half of 1253 and from that moment Riga became the real centre of the archbishopric. Archbishop Albert Suerbeer came to Riga the same year and one of his first acts was the confirmation of Bishop Nicolaus' donation of one-third of Semigallia to the Chapter of Riga<sup>95</sup>. Therefore, based on the decisions taken in 1251–1252, the upcoming partition of Semigallia was to take place between the Teutonic Order, Bishop Albert Suerbeer of Riga and the Chapter of Riga.

In April 1254, shortly after Albert Suerbeer had moved his residence to Riga, two acts of the partition of Semigallia (one for Western Semigallia and the other for the Eastern one) were drawn up. Therein, Western Semigallia was referred to as simply Semigallia and Eastern Semigallia, which stretched on the banks of the Lielupe, was called Upmale – literally, the Land of the River<sup>96</sup>. The Teutonic Order was represented by Eberhard von Sayn, the vicar of the Grand Master, who was in charge of the construction of the Castle of Memel and the partition of Northern and Southern Curonia in 1252–1253. The partition of the Semigallia was his final accomplishment in Livonia.

The act of the partition of Western Semigallia listed 6 Semigallian lands which were divided into three parts – two lands in each: Silene (*Silene*) and Žagarē (*Sagera*) were assigned to the Archbishop of Riga, Dobene and Sparnene were given to the Chapter of Riga, and the Teutonic Order received Tērvete and Dobeļe<sup>97</sup>.

The lands assigned to Archbishop Albert Suerbeer were the most southern and stretched in the territory of modern Lithuania: in Žagarē, the archbishop eventually built a new castle at the Hillfort of Aukštadvaris (or Žvelgaitis)

which differs from the Semigallian hillforts in size and form and contains no archaeological finds from before the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>98</sup>; Silene most probably was situated at the Hillfort of Šilēnai near Kuršēnai<sup>99</sup>. The lands assigned to the Chapter of Riga and the Teutonic Order were located in the territory of modern Latvia.

The German control of the country was absolute during this period. Advocates (Vogts) of the Teutonic Order were installed at the Semigallian castles, which fell under its rule,<sup>100</sup> and the Semigallians were forced to take part in the military operations of the Teutonic Knights. In 1256, they were mobilized for the campaign of Landmaster Anno von Sangerhausen carried out against Samogitia<sup>101</sup>; and in 1259, they were summoned to the army of Landmaster Burkhard von Hornhausen, which was to defend Curonia from the Samogitian invasion<sup>102</sup>. By the way, this operation of the Livonian Landmaster turned into a disaster: after successfully raiding Curonia, the Samogitians managed to retreat unharmed. This made a bad impression, especially considering that several months earlier the Samogitians had broken the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Skuodas (also in Curonia). The Samogitians turned out to be invincible! And the Semigallians could no longer ignore the question of whether the time was right to throw off the yoke of the Germans and unite with the Samogitians?

## The Semigallian Uprising of 1259–1272

It didn't take long for the Semigallians to decide. In the same year 1259 they rose in arms under the leadership of Skabis (*Schabe*), ousted the advocates (Vogts) of the Teutonic Order, and apostatized<sup>103</sup>. Shortly afterwards, in the winter of 1259–1260, the Teutonic Knights made their first attempt to reclaim Semigallia.

The united army of the Teutonic Order, the Livonian bishops and the Danes from Tallinn led by Landmaster Burchard von Hornhausen attempted to besiege Tērvete and, after their attempt failed, they built their own castle in the Land of Dobene (which belonged to the Chapter of Riga)<sup>104</sup>. It is assumed that the castle was built at the Hillfort of Mežakalns, in front of the Hillfort of Incēni, on the opposite bank of the Avikne Brook, which was the site of the Semigallian Castle of Dobene (Dobe)<sup>105</sup>. Building castles at hostile lands and using them to block the castles of the enemies was a new tactic for the Order. This tactic was applied not only in Semigallia but also in Samogitia<sup>106</sup>.

The Samogitians came to the aid of Semigallians in early 1260, but their attempt to destroy the Teutonic Castle of Dobene failed<sup>107</sup>. Nevertheless, on 13 July 1260, the Samogitians annihilated the Teutonic army at the



Skabis. Painting by Artūras Slapšys





A model of the Castle of Mitau (Jelgava), Jelgava History and Art Museum of G. Elias.  
Photo by T. Baranauskas

Battle of Durbe, the Curonians and the Prussians rose in arms too, and the Teutonic garrison of Dobene was forced to abandon the castle as the Order was no longer able to supply the provisions<sup>108</sup>. The crisis of 1260 forced the Teutonic Order to leave the Semigallians alone for some time.

The second military campaign against the Semigallians was carried out only in 1264–1265. Two major raids were performed into the Semigallian inland. Comparing to the campaign of 1259–1260, the tactics were altered: there were no more attempts to take or block the Semigallian castles and only the open countryside was laid waste. This implies that the Teutonic attack devastated a large part of the country.

The Teutonic campaign was provoked by the events in Lithuania, where Vaišalgas, the only living son of Mindaugas, was fighting for the throne. In 1264, at the request of Vaišalgas, Livonian Landmaster Konrad von Mandern mobilized his forces to support his coup but this turned out to be unnecessary as Vaišalgas managed to seize power all by himself. Then the Landmaster split his army into two and used them to attack Curonia and Semigallia. One of the armies burned down the Curonian Castle of

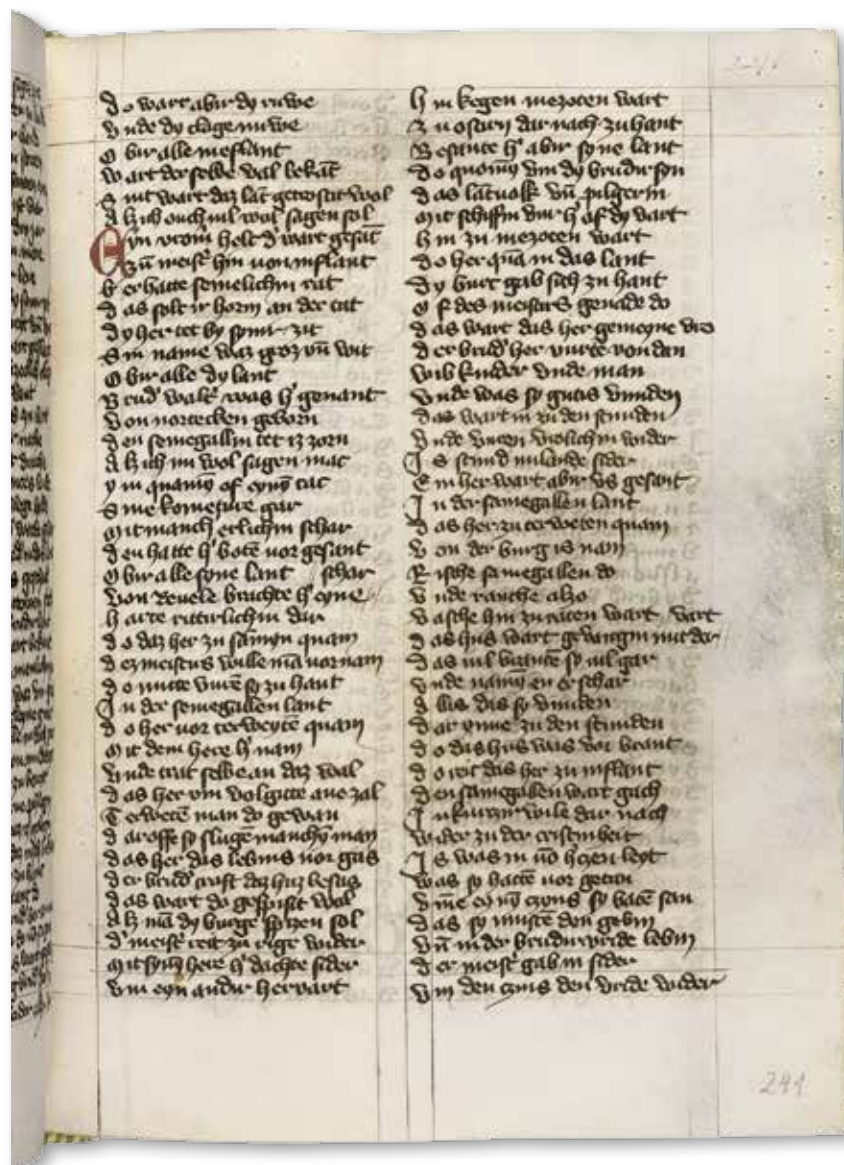
Griežē and the other one led by the Landmaster invaded Semigallia. After laying the land waste, the Landmaster marched back to Riga but was ambushed by the Semigallians most probably in the vicinity of the future town of Mitau (Jelgava) and suffered a defeat, which claimed the lives of 20 brothers of the Order and 600 other soldiers<sup>109</sup>. Therefore, in the following 1265, the Teutonic Knights built the Castle of Mitau in the northern reaches of Semigallia and this castle became the basis for their further attacks<sup>110</sup>. Nevertheless, it didn't prevent the loss of the considerable part of the Teutonic army during the second raid on Semigallia in 1265 or 1266: it was separated from the main forces and didn't make it to Mitau; this time, 10 brothers of the Order were killed<sup>111</sup>.

Exhausted by misfortunes, Konrad von Mandern resigned and his successor Otto von Lauterberg halted all military operations against the Semigallians for three years. When he finally organized a raid against Semigallia in early 1270, he was forced to cancel it because of the Lithuanian invasion into Livonia<sup>112</sup>. Otto von Lauterberg followed the Lithuanian army to Estonia, but here he was killed at the Battle of Karuse along with 52 brothers of the Order.



The monument to Konrad von Mandern in Jelgava. Photo by T. Baranauskas

# Semigallia under German Rule for the Second Time in 1272–1279



The Livonian Rhymed Chronicler, the transcript of Heidelberg, the page telling how Semigallia was conquered in 1271–1272 (Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, cpg 367)

For the second time, Semigallia was conquered by Livonian Landmaster Walter von Nordeck who came to Livonia to replace the late Otto von Lauterberg. He prepared for the war against the Semigallians well. On 27 August 1271, planning the Semigallian conquest, he concluded an agreement with Archbishop Albert Suerbeer of Riga stating that:

“If we, the Master and the brothers, succeed in building a castle at Tērvete or any other castle in our part [of Semigallia] within one year counting from



The model of the Castle of Tērvete, Jelgava History and Art Museum of G. Elias. Photo by T. Baranauskas





Hillfort 1 of Žagarė (the Hill of Raktuvė). Photo by R. Ginkus

the nearest holiday of St. Michael, so that Semigallia would be returned to the Catholic faith and subjected to the rule of the Church of Riga as it used to be, the abovementioned lord bishop will grant us one of his castles, whichever he prefers, namely Silene or Žagarė (Syrene scilicet aut Sagare) with all its belongings to reimburse us for the work and expenses incurred and to be incurred to provide for the castle [we plan to build]...”<sup>113</sup>

The Chapter of Riga also concluded a similar agreement promising to grant the Order the Castle of Dobene or Sparnene<sup>114</sup>. Therefore, the Order was to obtain one half of the newly conquered Semigallia instead of one third.

Shortly afterwards, the Teutonic Knights attacked the Castle of Tērvete. After a long and bloody fight, many of the defenders were killed and Tērvete was taken. The Order stationed a garrison in it<sup>115</sup>. In April 1272, they organized another raid. The Teutonic army boarded ships and sailed up the Lielupe to the Castle of Mežotne. The garrison was taken by surprise and surrendered with next to no resistance, but the Teutonic Knights seized the belongings of the surrendering Semigallians and took them into slavery<sup>116</sup>. Finally, during the third raid in June 1272, the Teutonic Knights burned down Žagarė<sup>117</sup>, which was called Raktė (*Ratten*) in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle describing these events:

*Not long afterwards, an army was  
once again sent out into Semigallia.  
When it arrived at Terweten,  
it took some daring Semigallians  
from the castle  
and hurried on to Ratten.  
The expedition captured the castle,  
burned it, and took  
everything it found there.  
After burning the castle  
the army rode back to Livonia.  
Shortly thereafter  
the Semigallians flocked  
back to Christianity.  
They were sincerely sorry  
for what they had done earlier.  
They asked to be allowed to pay tribute  
and live at peace with the Brothers.*<sup>118</sup>

Here, Žagarė (Raktė) emerges as one of the most important Semigallian centres the fall of which led to the surrender of the entire country. In other words, Semigallia is divided not into two parts, namely, into Western Semigallia



The Act of the Partition of Dobene and Sparnene of 1272 (Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Zb. dok. perg. nr. 4505)

with the centre at Tērvete and Eastern Semigallia (Upmale) with the centre at Mežotne as the acts of 1254 imply, but Southern (or South-western) Semigallia with the centre at Žagarē is set apart too. Or speaking more precisely, we can say that Žagarē rose as an alternative centre of Western Semigallia which took the lead after the fall of Tērvete.

The Semigallian capitulation mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle was accepted on 6 July 1272 by Archbishop Albert Suerbeer of Riga, Provost John of the Chapter of Riga and Livonian Landmaster Walter von Nordeck.

The transcript of the act (its translation into German) has survived to the present day. According to the act, the Semigallians agreed to let the German garrisons into their castles and perform military service and labour duties<sup>119</sup>.

Following the earlier agreement, the Chapter of Riga granted the Teutonic Order the Castle of Dobene with its surroundings on 7 October 1272. The act concluded on this occasion provides a detailed description of these lands<sup>120</sup>. There is no information on which of the promised castles was granted to the Order by the Archbishop of Riga. Most likely, it was Žagarē which had been conquered by the Order and which was closer to its domain than Silenē (Šilēnai) located at the most southern outskirts of Semigallia.

However, less than seven years after this conquest, Semigallia rose in arms again and broke free from German rule.



# The Semigallian War of 1279–1290



The fight between the Semigallians and the Teutonic Knights. From the festival celebrating the Battle of Garoza in Joniškis, 2013. Photo by T. Baranauskas

On 5 March 1279, the Lithuanians pursued the Teutonic Knights returning from the raid on Kernavė, the patrimony of Grand Duke Traidenis, overtook them on the Daugava near the Castle of Ascheraden (Aizkraukle) and won a decisive victory: Livonian Landmaster Ernst von Ratzeburg and 71 brothers of the Order were killed<sup>121</sup>. During the battle, the Semigallians withdrew from the Livonian army and fled helping the Lithuanians win<sup>122</sup>. When the remnants of the Livonian army were returning via Mitau, some Teutonic knight offended Semigallian Duke Nameisis by slapping across his face<sup>123</sup> or even hitting his teeth<sup>124</sup>. This gave Nameisis an excuse to break with the Teutonic Order and rise in arms. However, he sought to justify his decision and even sent envoys to Archbishop Johann von Lune of Riga presenting the gravamen regarding the oppression and murderous atrocities the Teutonic Knights were committing in Semigallia<sup>125</sup>. This attempt to maintain the relationship with the archbishop enabled Nameisis to promote the legal justification for his actions and helped the Semigallians to find some allies in Riga later.

Shortly after the Battle of Aizkraukle, still in March, the Semigallians of Tērvete seized the outer bailey of their castle, whereas Nameisis, who arrived to their aid after a four-day siege, also took the castle<sup>126</sup>. The Castle of Tērvete hosted the convent of the Teutonic Knights including 15 brothers of the Order. Neither of them escaped: some perished in the battle; the rest were captured. Some of them were sentenced to death by the Semigallians and others were sent to Lithuania<sup>127</sup>. The fact that the Semigallian captives were sent to Lithuania, as well as the continuous cooperation with the Lithuanians during the subsequent fights, shows that the Semigallians led by Nameisis recognized Grand Duke



Nameisis. Painting by Artūras Slapšys

Traidenis as their sovereign and acted hand in hand with Lithuania<sup>128</sup>. As the result of this uprising, the Teutonic Order managed to hold only the Castle of Mitau built in 1265.

In the beginning, the Teutonic Order was able to respond to the Semigallian uprising only with minor raids against Dobeles and Tērvete; they were carried out from Curonia by Johann von Ochtenhausen, the Advocate (*Vogt*) of Goldingen (*Kuldīga*), sometimes assisted by the Commander (*Komtur*) of Goldingen<sup>129</sup>. Nameisis helped the plundered lands fend off the invaders; sometimes, he suffered losses like in the battle near the abandoned Castle of Babote (near the modern Jaunpils), which claimed the lives of 50 Semigallians<sup>130</sup>.

In the winter of 1279–1280, Nameisis organized a larger raid against Riga. Marshal Gerhard von Katzenelnbogen, acting as the Livonian Landmaster, managed to mobilize the Teutonic Knights of Livonia and the pilgrims in time. Although only 9 brothers of the Order arrived<sup>131</sup>, they brought a lot of the local Latvian soldiers. The author of the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle gave honourable mention to one Brother from Wenden (*Cēsis*) who came with a hundred Latvian men: their banner was red with a white stripe in the middle<sup>132</sup>. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the flag of the Republic of Latvia was based on it. After learning about the size of the Teutonic army, Nameisis decided to retreat. The Germans went into pursuit and caught up with the Semigallians near the Lielupe. As the Semigallians were crossing the frozen river, the ice broke and 30 of their horsemen fell into the water. They left the horses and managed to get out, but the Teutonic Knights got tempted by the potential booty and went to get the abandoned horses. Meanwhile, Marshal Gerhard von Katzenelnbogen was chasing the Semigallians without noticing that only a small squad of 38 men was following him<sup>133</sup>. Nameisis attacked the chasers, some of them were killed, and

others ended up captured. The leader of the pilgrims, a knight from Westphalia, was among the killed, whereas Gerhard von Katzenelnbogen was captured. Like after the capture of Tērvete, the captives were sent to Lithuania where Gerhard was killed in a sort of gladiatorial duel<sup>134</sup>.

On 13 July 1280, the newly appointed Livonian Landmaster Konrad von Feuchtwangen came to Riga. As soon as he arrived in Livonia, he took every effort to mobilize the Teutonic forces and save the situation: he agreed with the Livonian bishops and the Danish vicegerent in Estonia about a joint campaign against Semigallia<sup>135</sup>. In the early spring of 1281, a huge army was concentrated in Riga: it was joined by the Danish troops sent by Odoard, the vicegerent of the king of Denmark in Tallinn, and the Bishop Friedrich von Haseldorf of Dorpat (Tartu) arrived in person. The target of the Teutonic army was the Semigallian Castle of Dobeles<sup>136</sup>. However, as soon as the Teutonic army took the outer bailey and laid siege to the very castle with a catapult, it learned that the Lithuanian army was approaching. The Landmaster ordered to lift the siege, cut down the catapult, and march onto the Lithuanians. The armies met at Slackenappen the exact location of which is not clear: it must have been somewhere southwards from Dobeles. The Lithuanian army turned out to be comparatively small, so it didn't dare to attack the Teutonic host directly; instead, the Lithuanians lured it into marshes and retreated<sup>137</sup>. This way, they suffered no loss and the siege of Dobeles was successfully lifted.

After the failure of the first attack, Landmaster Konrad von Feuchtwangen immediately started organizing the second one. In August 1281, an even larger army was gathered: along with the abovementioned bishop of Dorpat (Tartu) and Danish vicegerent Odoard who now arrived in person, it was joined by the troops of two other Livonian bishops of Riga and Leal (Lihula). Moreover, it was joined by the pilgrims led by Prince Vitslav II of Rügen (1260–1302) recruited



Teutonic knights. From the medieval festival at the Castle of Medininkai in 2014. Photo by T. Baranauskas



by the Bishop of Dorpat (*Tartu*)<sup>138</sup>. After the Curonian troops joined the campaign later on, the overall Teutonic army reached 14 thousand men<sup>139</sup>. This should have encouraged Konrad von Feuchtwangen and he decided to attack the very Semigallian capital – Tērvete.

As soon as the Teutonic army approached Tērvete, it laid waste to the country and harvested all the rye from the fields, as the crops were already ripe. The defenders of Tērvete burned the outer bailey to prevent the invaders from using it as coverage. The Curonian troops also burned down the outer bailey of Dobeles on the way and joined the main force at Tērvete. It looked like the castle had no chance of withstanding the upcoming siege.

Nameisis played his last card: he sent his envoys to the Teutonic camp asking for peace and promising to convert to Christianity once again. Landmaster Konrad von Feuchtwangen felt so close to achieving his goal that he refused to listen, but the Semigallian offer impressed Prince Vitslav II of Rügen.

Landmaster Konrad von Feuchtwangen tried to persuade him that

*harm will come of this  
clamouring for Christianity.*<sup>140</sup>

However, all in vain. The Prince of Rügen insisted on accepting the Semigallian offer and Konrad von Feuchtwangen had no power to object to the influential leader of the pilgrims. So, the peace with the Semigallians was made: they swore to pay tribute and cease all the hostilities against the Christians<sup>141</sup>. The Teutonic



Konrad von Feuchtwangen. From *Alt- und Neues Preussen* by Christof Hartknoch, 1684



The Hillfort of Tērvete. Photo by T. Baranauskas

Order was forced not only to lift the siege of Tērvete without taking the castle but also to stop the war against the Semigallians. It is also worth admitting that the peace treaty did not oblige the Semigallians to let the Teutonic Knights into their castles and this way the Semigallians promoted their independence from the Order. Konrad von Feuchtwangen was so disappointed with the result of this campaign that he resigned shortly afterwards.

The arrogant statement Konrad von Feuchtwangen made during the siege of Tērvete, namely, his words that the Semigallian “clamouring for Christianity” would bring “harm”, must have given Prince Vitslav II the worst impression of the Order, and the later information by Peter von Dusburg that around 1289 the Prussians colluded with the Prince of Rügen offering him their submission in return for ousting the Order from Prussia is no surprise<sup>142</sup>. These negotiations

clearly demonstrated what Vitslav II thought of the Order several years after his crusade to Livonia.

After the Peace of Tērvete, Nameisis remained a vassal of Traidenis and led the Lithuanian army to the raid against Christburg in Prussia in the autumn of 1281. He never returned to Semigallia (most probably, he died shortly afterwards), but the Teutonic Knights later interpreted this operation as a breach of the peace agreement<sup>143</sup>.

At about the same time, Lithuania changed its rulers. Daumantas who pursued a more peaceful relationship with the Teutonic Order became the grand duke and in 1282 he made peace with the Teutonic Order and the Archbishop of Riga covering his entire realm. Thus, the period of 1281–1286 featured a lull in the relations between Lithuania and Semigallia on the one side and Livonia on the other.

Only in 1286, the first sign of the upcoming storm appeared: some minor Lithuanian (most probably, Samogitian) duke called Skarijotas (or Skirjotas) invaded Livonia with his troops<sup>144</sup>. The raid was small and unsuccessful (Skarijotas was killed in the battle), but it gave Livonian Landmaster Willekin von Endorf an excuse to resume the war against Semigallia<sup>145</sup>. Surely, the attack by Skarijotas was only a formal pretext.

According to the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, Semigallia was attacked next winter after the raid of Skarijotas<sup>146</sup>, most probably, in December 1286. The Teutonic army included the troops of the Livonian bishops (probably, those of Dorpat and Leal) and the Danish vicegerent of Estonia, as well as some pilgrims. The army assembled by Lake Babīte and went to Mitau on sledges. In Mitau, it picked the provisions, which had been prepared beforehand, and marched



Traidenis. Painting by Artūras Slapšys

onto Tērvete. Here, the Castle of Heiligenberg was built in front of the Castle of Tērvete on the orders of the Landmaster. It was equipped with ample provisions and munitions, including two catapults. A garrison of three hundred men was left in it. Afterwards, the main army retreated leaving the garrison of Heiligenberg to continue the fight<sup>147</sup>.

The next day after the retreat of the main Teutonic forces, a large Samogitian army arrived in Tērvete and set up a camp by the Castle of Heiligenberg<sup>148</sup>. This could have happened in late December 1286 or early January 1287<sup>149</sup>.

After the arrival of the Samogitians, the area between the Castle of Tērvete and the Castle of Heiligenberg was turned into a constant battlefield. The fights claimed the life of one brother of the Order but the losses of the Samogitians and the Semigallians were much more painful. Finally, the Samogitians decided to storm Heiligenberg. For 10 days, they were building many siege engines and

Reconstruction of the 13th-century Tērvete: 1) the Hillfort of Tērvete; 2) the first outer bailey of the Hillfort of Tērvete; 3) the second outer bailey of the Hillfort of Tērvete; 4) the Holy Hill – Heiligenberg (the Swedish Hill or the Old Hillfort); 5) the Hill of Birds; 6) the settlement; 7) the Monastery Hill. Painting by N. Jērums.

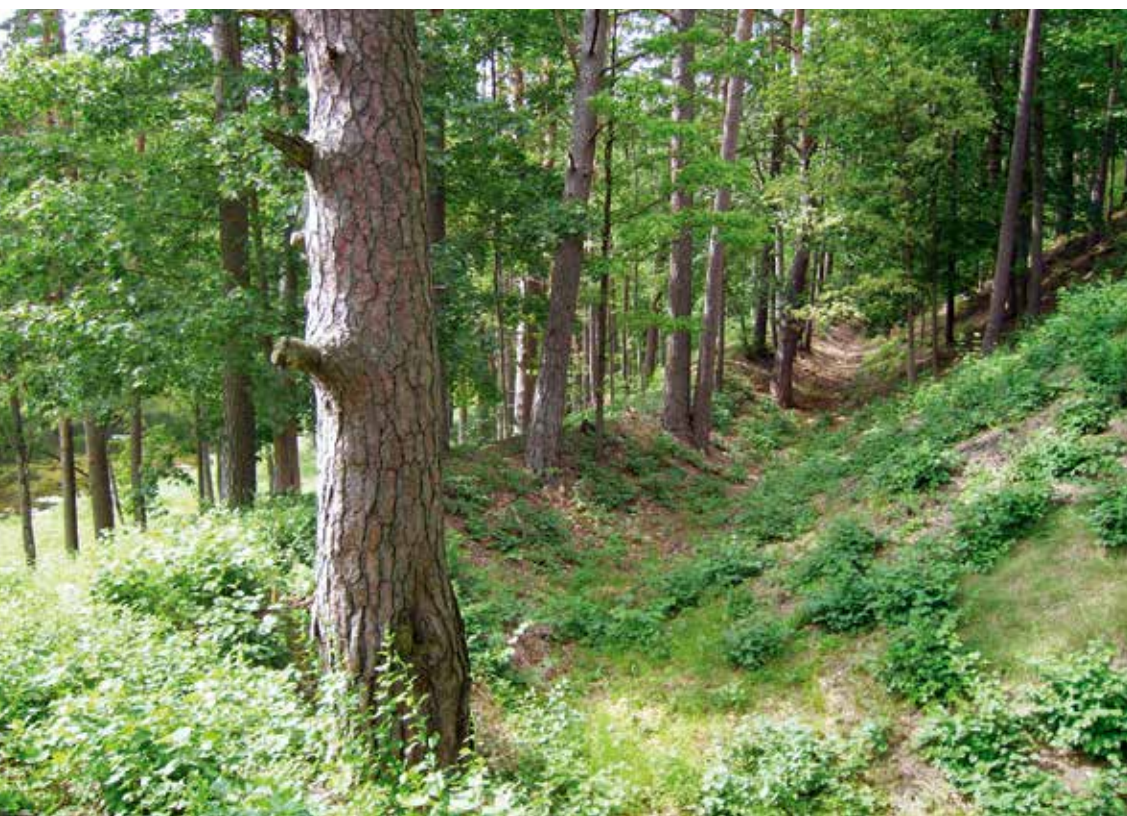




filling the ditches encircling the castle with brushwood. Meanwhile, the Teutonic Knights were also reinforcing their stronghold by excavating new ditches and building other barriers. The assault began on the eleventh day but, despite the persistence of the Samogitians, the Teutonic Knights managed to fend it off. They had a lot of arrows which they used to shoot the attackers. The Samogitian siege engines were hit by the catapults and had to be abandoned. The Samogitians stopped the attack only in the evening. They collected and burned the bodies of the fallen, the total number of which reached about 350, not counting the badly wounded, many of whom died on the way home. The losses were so heavy that the Samogitian army started rumbling with discontent and finally decided to retreat. The Semigallians stayed at Tērvete for 3 more days. Afterwards, they burned their castle and retreated to Raktē (Žagarē)<sup>150</sup>.



The fights by the Castle of Heiligenberg. The painting on the stand by the Holy Hill, 2006. Photo by T. Baranauskas



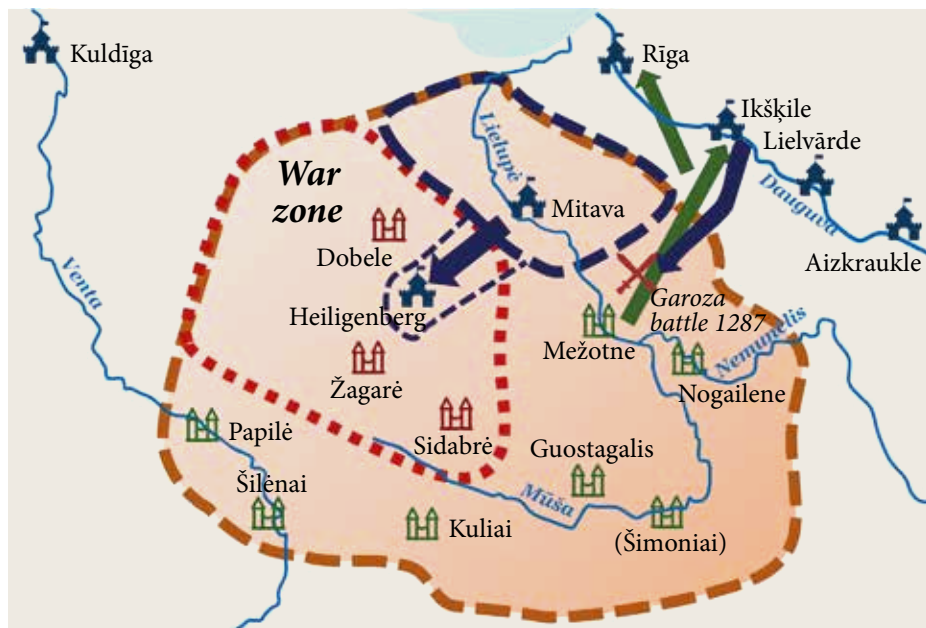
The rampart of the Holy Hill. Photo by T. Baranauskas

Raktē became the new centre of the Semigallian resistance. From there, regular attacks on Heiligenberg began. The garrison of Heiligenberg raided Raktē and Dobeles, and the Semigallians retaliated<sup>151</sup>. Thus, as in 1272, Žagarē became the political centre of the fighting Semigallians, whereas Heiligenberg became the base of the Teutonic Knights in the country<sup>152</sup>.

To stop the attacks, the Semigallians assaulted the Castle of Riga on 11 March 1287 and defeated the Teutonic guards stationed nearby: 5 brothers of the Order got killed and 10 were wounded. After a short retreat and rest which must have taken place somewhere around Mežotne, the Semigallians repeatedly attacked the banks of Daugava on March 23 and burned the outer bailey of the Castle of Uexküll (*Ikšķilē*), which was ruled by the vassal of the Archbishop of Riga.

The Landmaster Willekin von Endorf hastily gathered some troops and marched out to pursue the Semigallians. In the evening of 26 March 1287 he set up a camp in the forested valley in the upper reaches of the Garoza Brook (not far from Mežotne). On the early morning of March 27 the Semigallians unexpectedly showed up near the Teutonic camp. After noticing the approaching Semigallians, the Teutonic Knights gathered in a narrow meadow near the brook together with their servants, pilgrims, citizens of Riga, and some of the Livs and the Latgallians (the other part of the Livs and the Latgallians fled immediately). Then, the Semigallians attacked with full force. Volmar von Bernhausen, the head of the Spanish Commandery of the Order who was visiting Livonia at that time, charged the Semigallians on his horse drawing some of the Teutonic Knights





Semigallia during the fights of 1286–1287. By T. Baranauskas

after him. He organized two attacks, but got killed during the second one. Then, the Semigallians blocked the Teutonic Knights from their horses, which were tied to the trees in the forest, and surrounded them. Most of the backup soldiers fled and were pursued by the Semigallians afterwards. Meanwhile, the Teutonic Knights who were encircled were slaughtered. The battle claimed the lives of Landmaster Willekin, Volmar von Bernhausen who was his equal in terms of status, and 42 brothers of the Livonian and other branches of the Order<sup>153</sup>.

After this defeat, the military activities of Livonia were paralysed for the entire year, and the garrison of Heiligenberg, which was getting no provisions, had to halt its raids. The Semigallians also incurred losses: the battle claimed the life of their commander whose name was not recorded. As the centre of the Semigallian resistance was Žagarē, this commander could have been the duke of Žagarē. Therefore, we can suspect that the change of the name of Žagarē into Raktē, which happened during this period and was short-lived was related to the rule of this commander and strategist: the name Raktē could have derived from



The Battle of Garoza.  
Painting by Artūras Slapšys



The medal in memory  
of 730 years of the Battle of  
Garoza. Author Andrius Bitaitis

a personal name (based on the current surnames: Lithuanian – Raketis, Rakutis, Rektinas; Latvian – Rekte, etc.)<sup>154</sup>.

The new Landmaster Kuno von Hattstein, appointed to replace the late Willekin von Endorf, arrived in Livonia only in early 1288. The situation of the garrison of Heiligenberg, which held for the entire year without acquiring provisions in the Semigallian encirclement was desperate at that moment, so the first task that the new Landmaster undertook was an urgent campaign to deliver provisions to Heiligenberg. It happened already in February 1288<sup>155</sup>. Kuno von Hattstein summoned an impressive army



The Semigallian commander killed  
at the Battle of Garoza. Painting  
by Artūras Slapšys





The Teutonic knight. From the festival celebrating the Battle of Garoza in Joniškis, 2013. Photo by T. Baranauskas

for this campaign: it included the citizens of Riga, Estonians, Latvians, and the troops of the bishops of Dorpat and Leal.

Part of the army (six hundred men) was sent to attack the Castle of Dobeles on the way. After burning the outer bailey, it returned to the main troops. Then the entire army was assembled at the camp by the Castle of Heiligenberg, where it was inspected: it turned out that there were over six thousand men in total<sup>156</sup>. From Heiligenberg, the army marched on Rakte. In this case, the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle provides one of the most detailed descriptions of the siege:

*They rested well that night  
and sang Mass  
the next morning at daybreak.  
Shortly afterward,  
when they had eaten, the army set out*

*and proceeded to the castle at Racketen  
in orderly fashion.*

*The great army was not sighted  
until it arrived before the gate.*

*They met little resistance,  
and broke into the outerworks  
while the men, women, and children  
fled toward the castle.*

*They left their horses, cattle  
and possessions lying  
behind in the houses  
and hurried toward the castle gate.*

*There they defended themselves  
and destroyed their bridges.*

*This worked to their advantage later*



The Teutonic knights. From the festival celebrating the Battle of Garoza in Joniškis, 2013. Photo by T. Baranauskas



The Semigallian warriors. From the festival celebrating the Battle of Garoza in Joniškis, 2013. Photo by T. Baranauskas

*when the assault began,  
because the embankment itself was icy and slick,  
and no one could get a foothold there.  
The Christians were thus unable to reach the wall,  
even though they tried hard enough.  
Everyone who did not escape into the castle  
was slain in the outerworks,  
and much booty  
in horses and goods was taken.  
The army was encouraged.  
When evening came*

*they made camp there  
and pitched their tents  
on a field near the castle.  
The Brothers' army lay before Racketen  
for three days.  
During this time many men were shot  
(I cannot give you the numbers),  
and the large and numerous outerworks  
were burned to the ground.  
This dismayed the Semigallians,  
and their hearts grieved  
at their losses.  
Then the army broke camp  
and set out for Riga.  
They arrived safely...<sup>157</sup>*

In the spring of 1288, the Lithuanian army came to the aid of the Semigallians. The united Lithuanian and Semigallian force counting seven thousand men in total attacked Livonia, mostly the lands of the archbishop of Riga.



Hillfort 2 of Žagarė (the Hill of Aukštadvaris or Žvelgaitis). Photo by R. Ginkus





The Samogitian horsemen. From the festival at the Hillfort of Ivangėnai, 2015.  
Photo by T. Baranauskas

Meanwhile, the Teutonic Knights invaded Semigallia once again, as the Semigallian army withdrew from the country. They divided their army into two groups: one of the groups (the Curonian troops) attacked Dobeles and burned down its outer bailey for the second time, whereas the other marched on the Castle of Sidabrė. The inhabitants of the outer bailey of Sidabrė were caught off guard. The Teutonic Knights started a slaughter of armless people there: only 20 women and men managed to escape to the castle; 250 were killed and 60 got captured. The resistance of the defenders of the castle and the fire, which broke out in the outer bailey, prevented the Teutonic Knights from laying siege, but they took massive booty<sup>158</sup>.

One can assume that the Teutonic Knights won an easy victory. However, Landmaster's decision to attack Semigallia instead of defending Livonia was perceived controversially and ruined the relationship between the Teutonic Order and the Archbishop of Riga. Moreover, the Teutonic Order lost its reputation as the defender of the country. The Lithuanians and the Semigallians were allowed to roam Livonia unchecked. The lands of the archbishop of Riga suffered most of all and many captives were taken from there. One of those captives was Johann von Uexküll (*Ikškilė*), the vassal of the archbishop of Riga, who got captured while defending the poorly protected domain of his liege lord, as six hundred soldiers from archbishop's lands were taken by the Teutonic Knights to the Semigallian campaign.

Since the Teutonic Knights who had left Livonia unprotected were responsible for the captivity of Johann von Uexküll (*Ikškilė*), they redeemed themselves by arranging for his release to avoid a conflict with the archbishop. In return for releasing Johann, the Lithuanian side requested the Teutonic Knights to destroy the Castle of Dünaburg (Daugavpils) built on the Daugava and the request was satisfied (Dünaburg was rebuilt only in 1313<sup>159</sup>). This was an impressive strategic victory for Lithuania, and the Semigallians played their part in it too.

After the campaign of 1288–1289, the Teutonic Knights were organizing regular raids from the Castle of Heiligenberg: initially, they targeted Sidabrė and afterwards – Dobeles and Rakte. The outer baileys of these castles were burned down and their surroundings were devastated. The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle provides only the summary of the events:

*Many times it happened  
that two forces would  
simultaneously burn the outerworks  
of both Racketen and Doblein.  
They were helpless to stop them:  
whenever the Brothers approached,  
they abandoned outerworks,  
for whoever did not escape into the castle  
was either killed  
or taken prisoner<sup>160</sup>.*



Artefacts from Sidabrė (Kalnėlis):  
an axe-shaped pendant, a ring,  
and a fibula. Joniškis History  
and Culture Museum

The economic life of the Semigallians was completely disrupted. Crops could not be harvested, so there was a threat of famine. The winter of 1289–1290 became the turning point.

Later, when the archbishop of Riga got into a serious quarrel with the Teutonic Order and took the side of Lithuania and Semigallia, he presented a complaint to the pope claiming that the Teutonic Order destroyed the Semigallian Diocese: allegedly, before casting the final blow, the Teutonic Knights summoned the Semigallian nobles to a feast and slaughtered them all with extreme cruelty cutting their heads off<sup>161</sup>. Prussian chronicler Peter von Dusburg provides more detailed information. According to him, in 1289, the Prussian raiders assisted by a traitor named Peluse attacked a wedding feast, which most probably was held at the castle of the elder duke of Samogitia and was attended by almost all of the top-rank nobles of Lithuania: as many as 70 Lithuanian dukes including the lord of the castle were killed in the slaughter<sup>162</sup>. It is obvious, that the Semigallian nobles who were already integrated into the political community of the Lithuanian state must have been among the guests of this ill-fated wedding<sup>163</sup>.



Semigallian war axes  
(11th–13th century) from  
the Budraičiai burial ground  
(near Žagarė). Joniškis  
History and Culture Museum

Afterwards, by the end of 1289, the Semigallians were forced to burn the Castle of Dobele: some of its defenders retreated to Raktė, others went to Lithuania<sup>164</sup>. Shortly afterwards, the Teutonic Knights came for Raktė too:

*The castle at Racketen was attacked  
just like Doblein.  
They defended themselves for a while,  
but they were raided so often,  
and everything in the vicinity was burned so thoroughly  
that they despaired of their lives.  
Many of them were killed  
and famine oppressed them.  
They abandoned their castle  
and their ancestral lands,  
forfeiting them to the Teutonic Knights,  
and went off to another land.*



*I never asked  
what misfortunes befell them there.  
A commander was appointed  
to supervise Heiligenberg for the Master,  
and he was pleased at the news.  
He burned the Brothers' prize,  
the castle Racketen<sup>165</sup>.*

The Castle of Sidabrė remained the last one standing but now all the might of the Teutonic Knights was targeted at it. In 1290, the exhaustion caused by the famine and the raids of the Teutonic Knights provoked a mutiny among its people: some of them decided to retreat to Lithuania, whereas others, who wanted to stay in their homeland, barricaded in the castle and sent a message to the Commander of Mitau that they were ready to surrender. The Teutonic Knights came to Sidabrė, burned the castle, ravaged its surroundings, and took those who surrendered to Mitau.

The Teutonic Knights had no plans to entrench in the devastated land in the nearest future. After suppressing the Semigallian resistance, they also burned Heiligenberg – their only stronghold in the rebellious Semigallia – in the same year of 1290. A big part of Semigallia was turned into wasteland but it remained within the Lithuanian realm. Even the devastated districts of Žagarė and Sidabrė continued to be held by Lithuania at least nominally. The Teutonic Knights retreated and left these lands alone at least for three decades<sup>166</sup>.

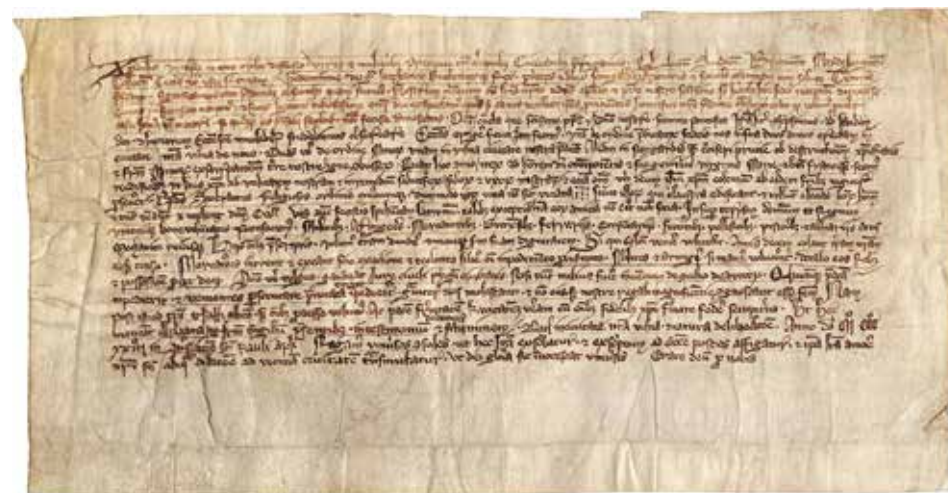


A medal in memory  
of 730 years of Sidabrė.  
Author Andrius Bitaitis

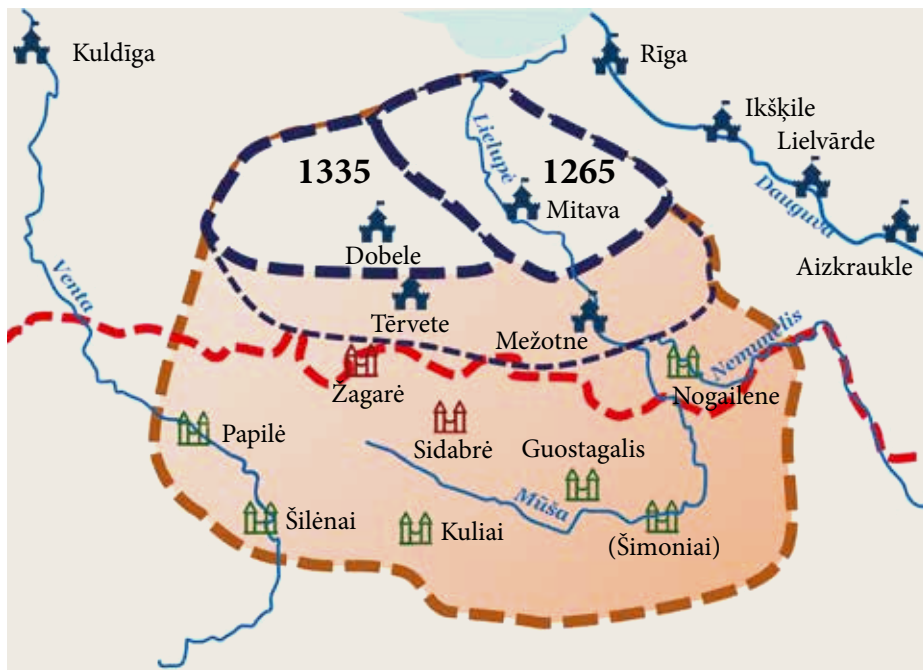
## The Setting of the Lithuanian-Latvian Border

In the summer of 1322, Grand Duke Gediminas of Lithuania who also bore the title of the Duke of Semigallia wrote to Pope John XXII blaming the Teutonic Knights for turning a part of Semigallia into a wasteland and stating that “they leave the lands empty like in Semigallia and many other places. But they say that they do that to protect the Christians”<sup>167</sup>.

In the title of Gediminas, Semigallia was distinguished as one of the main constituents of the Lithuanian realm along with Lithuania itself and Ruthenia<sup>168</sup>. The Teutonic Order resumed expansion into the northern part of Semigallia



A contemporary copy of the letter of Gediminas of 25 January 1323 where he uses the title of the king of the Lithuanians and the Ruthenians and the lord and duke of Semigallia (Latvijas Nacionālais arhivs – Latvijas valsts vēstures arhivs, f. 673, apr. 4/K-18, lieta nr. 18)



Semigallia conquered by the Germans and the area of their influence in the first half of the 14th century (after 1321). By T. Baranauskas

in 1321<sup>169</sup> and proceeded slowly throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century until it finally solidified its rule over the land<sup>170</sup>.

The Semigallian language eventually disappeared. In his letter of 26 May 1323 to the Franciscan monks, Gediminas was still asking to send him preachers able to speak Semigallian<sup>171</sup>, but Guillebert de Lannoy, a Flemish knight and voyager, was the last one to mention this language: he heard it being spoken in some villages of Curonia and Semigallia when he travelled to Riga through these lands in 1413<sup>172</sup> as well as northwards from Riga<sup>173</sup> where the Semigallian language was probably used by Semigallian migrants.

The southern part of Semigallia eventually got permanently integrated into the Lithuanian state and, after the reign of Gediminas, the use of the name of Semigallia was abandoned: the Lithuanian part of Semigallia was annexed to Samogitia.

This laid the grounds for the partition of Semigallia: its northern part was included in the domain of the Livonian Germans and eventually repopulated (mostly in the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>174</sup>; it became a part of Latvia. Meanwhile, the southern part was simultaneously integrated into Lithuania.



Guillebert de Lannoy, a Flemish knight and voyager (Guillebert de Lannoy; 1386–1462)



# Afterword

The Semigallians as a separate tribe must have existed for over 1,200 years: from the moment when the Semigallian ancestors settled in the basin of the Mūša–Lielupe at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries to the moment when Semigallia was divided between Lithuania and Livonia in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the Semigallian history is now represented only by mute archaeological monuments; written records start occurring only from the beginning of the Viking Age (9<sup>th</sup> century).

Nevertheless, the last age of Semigallian history, namely the 13<sup>th</sup> century, left a deep footprint in the historical sources, which reveal the brave spirit of this tribe and its aspirations for freedom. These sources also provide some of the Semigallian names and give an insight into the personalities of the most notable Semigallian leaders – Viestartas, Skabis, and Nameisis.

This was a dramatic period of the Crusades and the Semigallian struggles for freedom and survival. The Semigallians lost their freedom and territorial integrity. The city of Riga, the main centre of the German expansion, was established too close to the Semigallian border. The fact that Semigallia resisted this expansion for such a long time and with such persistence is even more remarkable than the comparatively unfavourable ultimate result of the fight. And this result cannot be characterized as an absolute defeat too.

The Semigallians were aware of the threat the German expansion was posing to them quite early and chose the path of allying with the Lithuanian state. In 1279, this led to Nameisis deciding to integrate into the Lithuanian realm and to become a vassal of Grand Duke Traidenis. Initially, it helped the Semigallians protect most of their lands and, in the long-term, about half of Semigallia remained free from German rule.

During the reign of Grand Duke Gediminas, Semigallia was still seen as an important structural unit of the Lithuanian state and mentioned in the title of its ruler. Later, the Lithuanian part of Semigallia got integrated into Samogitia and

turned into its northern periphery. The Semigallian tradition in Lithuania was forgotten and has been revived only since the 20th century as part of a restored historical self-awareness.

Paradoxically, in the part of Semigallia conquered by the Livonian Germans, the name of Semigallia was not forgotten and its use continues uninterruptedly until today. Therefore, there has never been a need to revive the historical tradition of Semigallia in Latvia: it was enough to support and nurture it.. However, as the name of Semigallia had a different fate in the Lithuanian and the Latvian (Livonian) parts of Semigallia, it was considered for a while that the historical Semigallia was almost identical to the part which ended up in Livonia (and later in Latvia). Only recent archaeological studies have made possible the reconstruction and broader understanding of Semigallian territory and the discovery of Lithuanian Semigallia.

The course of history doomed the development of the Semigallians and the Semigallian language sank into oblivion. Nevertheless, both the Lithuanian and the Latvian parts of Semigallia still speak sister languages, Lithuanian and Latvian respectively, and the memory of Semigallian history is still honoured. This means that Semigallian history did not come to a tragic end after all. Semigallia was transformed but its narrative continues in Lithuania and Latvia. Semigallian cultural footprints are still visible in the Semigallian landscape and they still live in the hearts of the people who live on this land.

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- 159 *Vartberges Hermaņa Livonijas hronika* = *Hermann de Wartberge chronicon Livoniae*, p. 64–65.
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- 172 Lelewel J. *Gilbert de Lannoy i jego podróże*. Poznań, 1844, s. 26–27.
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Normunds Jērums

# The Footprints of the Teutonic Knights at the Hillforts of Western Semigallia



The travel route for visiting the hillforts of Western Semigallia. By T. Baranauskas

## The Castle of Mitau (Jelgava)

Location – on an island between the Lielupe and the Driksa, the eastern part of the old town of Jelgava, Jelgava, Lielā iela 2.

Written sources refer to Jelgava as, *Mitowe*, *Myitowe Mithovia*, *Mitthovia*, *Mithowe*, etc. In 1242, the papal legate Wilhelm von Modena authorized the Teutonic Order to build a castle on the border of Semigallia by the Lielupe River. According to the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, Livonian Landmaster Konrad von Mandern started building the Castle of Mitau on an island between the Lielupe and its loop Driksa in 1265. The bull by Pope Clement IV of 25 May 1266 implies that the Castle of Mitau was already being constructed at that time. Most probably, the works were finished the same year. The Chronicle of Hermann von Wartberge states that the Castle of Mitau (*Mithow*) was built in 1265 and that the Brothers of the Order took shelter there after an unsuccessful raid on Semigallian villages.

The Castle of Mitau was a so-called water castle, access to which was blocked by water barriers. There is no information about the first wooden castle. The 14<sup>th</sup>-century castle was a comparatively small masonry building sized 30×35 m. The corners of the castle were enforced with tower-type constructions. On the



The old Castle of Mitau (Jelgava) according to the print of 1703



The new Castle of Jelgava built in 1738–1772 instead of the old one.  
Photo by Jelgava Tourism Information Centre

southern side, there was a gate leading from the main keep to the outer bailey. The castle was built of boulders, squared dolomite blocks, and bricks.

The Order used the new castle as a base for its attacks against the Semigallians. The document of 1272 mentions Commander (Komtur) of Mitau Johann. Altogether 17 Commanders of Mitau and 7 administrators appointed by the Livonian Land marshals are known from 1272 to 1495. According to A. Tulse (1942), the first Castle of Mitau was wooden. This agrees with the fact that it was built rapidly and that the next castle constructed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was of a regular shape and included no earlier buildings.

The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle mentions that in summer food, munitions, and weaponry were shipped to the Castle of Mitau down the Lielupe and that the Livonian Order used it in winter trying to seize the Semigallian castles. Historical records also give the account of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century events when the Lithuanian army seized the Castle of Mitau along with the settlement in the winter of 1345, and captured the local priests along with 8 brothers of the Order and 600 of the common folk. The Lithuanians attacked the Castle of Mitau in 1376. In 1738, the Castle of Mitau for the last time was destroyed under the order of Ernst Johann von Biron to clear the site for the construction of his new palace.

## The Hillfort and Medieval Castle of Dobele

Location – Dobele, Dobele Parish, Dobele Municipality, the right bank of the Bērze River.

The masonry Castle of Dobele (*Doblen, Dubelene, Dobelen, Dobblene, Doblin, Dobbleena*) stands on the western outskirts of the Dobele Town, on the right bank of the Bērze River, on a steep eminence between the Bērze River in the east and a deep springy ravine in the west. The first written record on Dobele dates to 1254: it was mentioned in the Act of the Partition of Semigallia between the Teutonic Order and the Archbishop of Riga.

The wooden Castle of Dobele was the centre of the Dobele Land and one of the strongest Semigallian castles with a settlement nearby. The wooden castle stood on a steep eminence. The hillfort was separated from the settlement with a deep ditch and, most probably, a rampart which was typical of Semigallian castles. The western slope of the hillfort is 9 m high, the northern one – 12 m, and the



The Castle of Dobele. Photo by L. Jankauskienė





A reconstruction of the Semigallian Castle of Dobeles. Drawing by N. Jērumš

eastern slope going down to the Bērze River – 15 m. The Castle of Dobeles is often mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle reporting the events in Western Semigallia in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. From 1279 to 1289, the Castle of Dobeles managed to withstand six attacks by the Livonian Order. Dobeles may be called the only Semigallian castle never taken by the Teutonic Knights during the entire period of the Baltic Crusades. The archaeological excavations of 2020 revealed that the cultural layer at the castle was up to 2 m thick. The discovered stone axe and fragments of flint imply that the first settlement on the hillfort of Dobeles arose before our era.

The archaeological excavations of 1977 revealed that the outer bailey of Dobeles was well fortified and intensively inhabited too. The excavations were performed in the eastern part of the outer bailey and a roughly 1 m thick cultural layer was found there. Remains of a 2–2.5 m thick wooden defensive wall were discovered as well. Both the hillfort and the outer bailey exposed a lot of



A 3D model of the Hillfort of Dobeles, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)

12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup>-century household items, potsherds, jewellery, and weaponry elements and their fragments. In 1289, the garrison of Dobeles burned the castle and moved to Rakte. Somewhere in 1335–1347, the Livonian Order built its own masonry castle on the site of the Semigallian wooden one. The church – the castle chapel – was also built here. After 1730, the castle was deserted and gradually turned into a ruin.



The gate of the Castle of Dobeles. Photo by T. Baranauskas

## The Hillfort of Tērvete (Cukurkalns)

Location – Tērvete, Tērvete Parish, Dobeles Municipality, the right bank of the Tērvete Brook.

The Hillfort of Tērvete is one of the most famous and recognizable hillforts in Latvia and the entire Baltic Region. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Tērvete comprised of the Castle of Tērvete and the foot settlement was the political and economic centre of the Tērvete Land and the entire Western Semigallia. It was ruled by Semigallian dukes Viestartas (*Viesthardus*, *Vesthardus*, *Vestardus*, *Vester*), Nameisis (*Nameise*, *Nameyxe*, *Nameise*), and probably also Skabis (*Schabe*). In the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century, Tērvete was the best-fortified hillfort in Semigallia and one of the strongest castles in all the lands of the Balts. Henry of Latvia, the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle, and other written records mention Tērvete (*Thervetene*, *Terventhene*, *Terweten*) or its inhabitants (*Terwetein*) in 1219 and from 1254



The reconstruction of the Castle of Tērvete. Drawing by N. Jērums



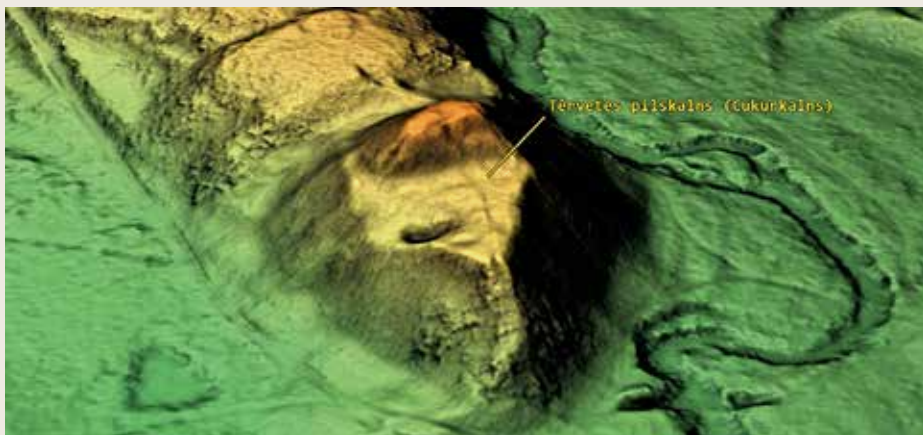
The Hillfort of Tērvete. Photo by N. Jērums

to 1286 mostly in the context of the Semigallian freedom fights or in the acts partitioning Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga.

The Hillfort of Tērvete is part of a huge archaeological complex including three other hillforts, namely Monastery Hill (Klosterkalns), Holy Hill (Svētais kalns), and the Hill of Birds (Putnu kalns), the outer bailey of the Hillfort of Tērvete with the medieval castle ruins, the ancient settlement, and the burial ground. Extensive archaeological excavations at the Hillfort of Tērvete were performed in 1951–1960 under the leadership of E. Brīvkalne (1951–1959) and F. Zagorskis (1960). Their results have revealed that Tērvete had been inhabited since the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD. Altogether, 4,692 artefacts were found at the archaeological complex of Tērvete, of them – 3,966 were discovered at the Hillfort of Tērvete itself.

The Hillfort of Tērvete and its 17–19 m high terrace along with the rampart create an approximately 30 m high bulwark on the right bank of the Tērvete Brook. From the east, the hillfort is protected by a 9 m high rampart and a ditch separating the hillfort from its two outerworks. The slopes of the hillfort were naturally steep, but they were made even steeper when the fortifications were constructed. The hillfort has a triangular 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> large hilltop. At its northern





A 3D model of the Hillfort of Tērvete, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)

part, there is a rounded pit – most probably, the location of a former well. At its widest spot by the rampart, the hillfort is about 45 m wide. The hilltop is orientated eastwards and westwards with the rampart by the eastern edge. The Hillfort of Tērvete has an exceptionally thick cultural layer reaching up to 7.5 m in the northern part. In the past, the hillfort was surrounded by water barriers from two sides, namely the Tērvete Brook and a man-made pond on the north-eastern side.

The Hillfort of Tērvete was protected with several defensive lines and blockhouse-type defensive walls built of wooden logs with tower-type constructions. During the last habitation period, the defensive walls of the castle were wattle-daubed with clay and the roofs were covered with ceramic tiles. The yard of the castle hosted dwelling houses and auxiliary buildings; there were jewellery workshops too.

In the 11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century, an outer bailey was constructed on the eastern side of the hillfort; its area occupied about 2,900 m<sup>2</sup>. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the slopes of the outer bailey were fortified with a low rampart; traces of the defensive wall built of horizontal logs were found there. The hilltop of the outer bailey also hosted dwellings and auxiliary buildings; dimensions of the two of them were identified and equalled 6×4 m and 5×6 m respectively. At the foot of the hillfort,

there was an ancient settlement covering an area of about 10 ha; there were dwelling houses and auxiliary buildings too.

The Hillfort of Tērvete is one of the most famous archaeological sites in Eastern and Northern Europe. Many historical sources mention it as an economic, political, and power centre of the Semigallians. The Hillfort of Tērvete is considered to be the central object of the archaeological complex and it is mentioned in all the Semigallian tourism guides. Due to its prominence, the hillfort along with the Nature Park of Tērvete is also included in Lithuanian and Estonian tourism routes. Along with the Nature Park of Tērvete and the reconstructed 12<sup>th</sup>-century wooden castle of Tērvete, the Hillfort of Tērvete is one of the most appreciated, visited and known historical, cultural, and natural tourism sites in Latvia.

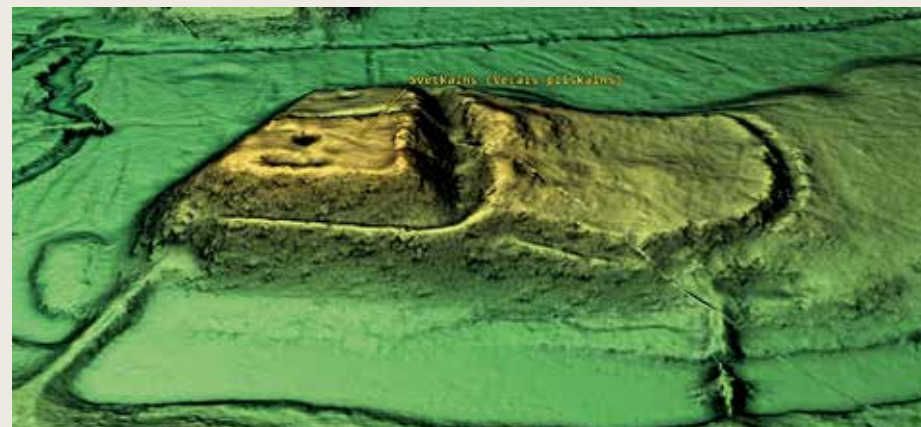
## The Holy Hill of Tērvete (the Swedish Hill) – a hillfort

Location – Tērvete, Tērvete Parish, Dobeles Municipality, the right bank of the Tērvete Brook, 200 m north-westwards from the Hillfort of Tērvete Hillfort.

The Holy Hill of Tērvete (the Swedish Hill or Heiligenberg) is located on the right bank of the Tērvete Brook, 200 m north-westwards from the Hillfort of Tērvete. The hillfort is divided into two parts; it has well-fortified slopes and a system of ramparts and ditches. The outer bailey lies eastwards from the main hillfort; the two are separated with a deep ditch crossed by the so-called Ancestors' Bridge. In ancient times, there was a man-made pond between the Holy Hill and the Hillfort of Tērvete; the remains of the defensive rampart are still visible. The eastern side of the hillfort is separated by a 7 m deep ditch and the frontal defence line. The Holy Hill of Tērvete represents an important shrine of the ancient Semigallians and a source of their material culture. Research by N. Jērums has established that the Hillfort of Tērvete was inhabited at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which implies that the old Semigallian castle stood on Holy Hill where distinct fortifications are still visible. It can be assumed that the Semigallians built a new castle due to the clash with the prince of Polotsk in 1107 preparing for the war. Written sources reveal that Prince Yuri Vseslavich

of Polotsk attacked Semigallia trying to subjugate it in 1107 and suffered an overwhelming defeat losing an army of nine thousand men.

The Holy Hill of Tērvete is also mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle in the context of the Semigallian fights against the Livonian Order. The castle was built under Landmaster Willekin von Endorf in 1286 when the Teutonic Knights entrenched at the Holy Hill (*Heiligberg*) near the Castle of Tērvete. According to the Chronicle, before going back to Riga, the Landmaster equipped the castle with food, munitions, crossbows, arrows, spears, two catapults, and a garrison of 300 men. Several days after the Landmaster returned to Riga, the Semigallians and the Samogitians were forced to burn the Castle of Tērvete and retreat to Raktē being unable to oust the Teutonic Knights from Holy Hill. The Order often



A 3D model of the Hillfort of the Holy Hill of Tērvete, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)



The Holy (or the Swedish) Hill of Tērvete. Photo by T. Baranauskas

organized its raids against the Semigallians from the Castle of the Holy Hill. After 1290, Landmaster Kuno decided that the Castle of Holy Hill had served its purpose and ordered to destroy it; the garrison was told to return to Riga.

The name *Swedish Hill* is related to the events of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Northern War: in 1701, King Charles XII of Sweden attacked the Castle of Kalnamuiža from Holy Hill. The fact that the hill is called Holy Hill implies that the ancient Semigallians must have turned it into a shrine after they moved into the new castle built on the Hillfort of Tērvete.



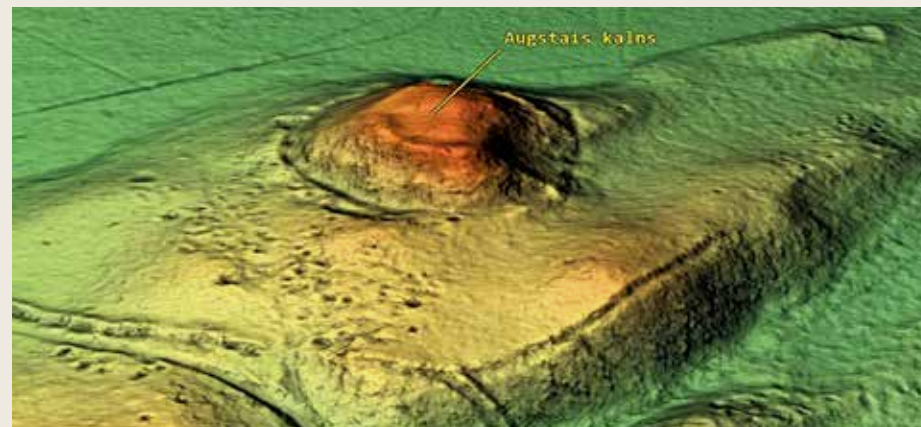
## Silakalns (the Forest Hill) or the High Hill

Location – Mežmuiža, 300 m southwards from the graveyard of Sils, Vilce Parish, Jelgava Municipality.

Silakalns (the Forest Hill) or the High Hill is also known as the Forest Hill of Mežmuiža or the Hill of Plate. Silene was one of the Semigallian lands mentioned in the Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga of 1254. Silene (*Sillene*) was mentioned as one of the Semigallian lands listed there. Silakalns is an approximately 20 m high hill stretching northeastwards and southwestwards. It is fortified with a ditch and an approximately 1 m high rampart by the eastern and the northern edge. The top of the hillfort is about 50 m long and 20–30 m wide. The Beaver Marsh (*Bebru purvs*) surrounds the hillfort from the south and the west making it inaccessible from these directions. The cultural layer on the top and the slopes of the hillfort is over 1 m thick. Eastwards from the main hillfort, there were two fortified outer baileys. The hillfort was inhabited

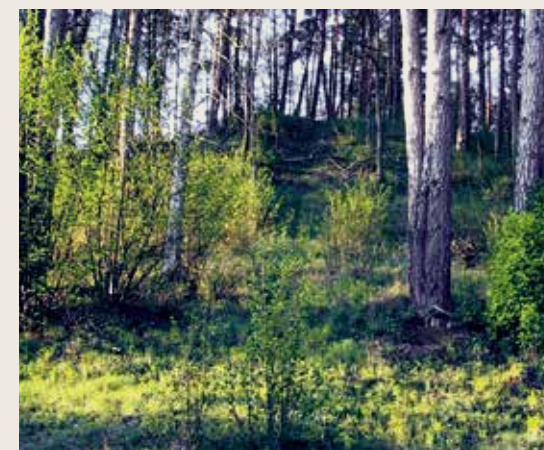


The reconstruction of the Castle of the Silakalns. Drawing by N. Jērums



A 3D model of the Hillfort of Silakalns, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)

already before our era and the discovered potsherds reveal that its habitation continued in the 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century too. The recent studies began to question whether Silakalns should be perceived as the centre of the Silene Land: certain Lithuanian historians tend to locate its centre at the Hillfort of Šilėnai (Kuršėnai Eldership, Šiauliai Municipality). Therefore, there is a question what castle used to stand on the High Hill and to which of the Semigallian lands it used to belong: Tērvete, Žagarė or Silene?



The Hillfort of Silakalns.  
Photo by N. Jērums





The Hillfort of Raktuvė, Žagarė. Photo by G. Zabiela

## The Hillfort of Raktuvė (Raktė), Žagarė

Location – 700 m eastwards from the Hillfort of Žagarė, Žagarė, Joniškis District Municipality.

The Hillfort of Raktė or the Hill of Raktuvė stands 700 m eastwards from the Hillfort of Žagarė called the Hill of Aukštadvaris or Žvelgaitis. The Hillfort of Raktė is about 6–7 m high on the right bank of the Švėtė (Svėte) River. It is located about 100 m south-eastwards from the river and surrounded by damp meadows on all sides. The hillfort has an oval top and is about 70 m long (from the northeast to the southwest) and 30 m wide.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Catholic cemetery was established on the hillfort. When new graves were excavated, various artefacts dating to the late Iron Age were found. Numerous potsherds were also found on its north-eastern outskirts, in the area between the hillfort and the river. During the archaeological excavations of 1996, an ancient settlement covering an area of about 2 ha was discovered on the

northern and eastern outskirts of the hillfort. This foot settlement continued to be inhabited throughout the entire Iron Age. In 1999, the north-western slope of the hillfort was subjected to archaeological excavations too. According to recent archaeological data, the cultural layer of the hillfort is up to 2.3 m thick. The hillfort was inhabited before our era as well.

The first mention of Raktė (*Ratten, Racken, Rakel, Racketen*) in written records occurs in 1271 when the forces of the Livonian Order led by Landmaster Walter von Nordeck managed to seize the Semigallian castles of Mežotne, Tērvete, and Raktė. The castle of Raktė was mentioned for the second time in 1286 when the Semigallians burned the newly rebuilt Castle of Tērvete under the pressure of the forces of the Livonian Order and retreated to Raktė located 20 km southwards from Tērvete. In 1288, the forces of the Livonian Order led by Landmaster Kuno von Hattstein attacked the Castle of Raktė once again and destroyed its outer bailey but the castle withstood the siege. The Castle of Raktė was mentioned for the last time in 1289: the Semigallians from Dobeles retreated here but the forces of the Livonian Order managed to break through the gate and destroy the Castle of Raktė along with its outer bailey. The name of Raktė was mentioned once again in 1426 in the delineation of the border between the Livonian Confederation and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

## Hillfort of Žagarė – the Hill of Aukštadvaris

Location – Žagarė, Joniškis District Municipality.

The Hillfort of Žagarė, also called the Hill of Aukštadvaris (or Žvelgaitis, or the Bald Hill), is located in the town of Žagarė, Joniškis District. The first written record of the name of Žagarė appears in 1254 in the Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga. Žagarė along with Silene (*Silene et Sagare cum suis terminis*) was allotted to the Archbishop of Riga. Žagarė is also mentioned in the Agreement between the Livonian Order and the Archbishop of Riga of 27 August 1271 foreseeing the construction of a castle in Žagarė or Silene.

The Hillfort of Žagarė was built at the highest point of an oblong hill standing on the left bank of the Švėtė River. The hillfort is oriented north-eastwards and south-westwards and has a form of a trapeze. The length of the top is 55 m and



The Hillfort of Aukštadvaris (Žvelgaitis), Žagarė. Photo by R. Ginkus

its width varies from 50 m in the southwest to 68 m in the northeast. The total area of the top is 1,800 m<sup>2</sup>. It is encircled by a 1 m high and 10 m wide rampart. At the foot of the south-western slope of the hillfort, there is a 14 m wide and 1 m deep defensive ditch, while the ditch stretching at the foot of the north-eastern slope of the hillfort is 2 m deep and 14 m wide. There also was a 3 m wide terrace by the north-eastern slope. The archaeological excavations have revealed that the cultural layer at the hillfort was up to 1.2 m thick and that there was an ancient settlement north-eastwards from the hillfort; its total area covered 3 ha.

The Hillfort of Žagarė was never mentioned in the context of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Semigallian fights against the Teutonic Knights. It can be assumed that the hillfort was fortified in 1272 and that the castle stood here until the early 14 century as the archaeological finds imply.

The archaeological excavations revealed that there were two stages of the settlement on the hillfort: the first one dated to the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century and the second one – to the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century when the hillfort hosted the Manor of Žagarė mentioned in historical sources since 1495.

## The Hillfort of Sidabrė (Kalnelis)

Location – Kalnelis Village, Joniškis District Municipality.

The Castle of Sidrabene, Sidrabe or Sidabrė (*Sidobren, Sydobren, Sydober, Sydobre*) used to stand at the confluence of the Sidabrė and the Vilkaušis Brook in the territory of modern Lithuania. The castle is mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle in relation to the raid the army of the Livonian Order and its vanguard led by Landmaster Kuno von Hattstein undertook against the Semigallians in 1289–1290. The fact that Sidabrė was not mentioned in the earlier Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga of 1254 implies that it belonged to the Land of Upmale.



The Hillfort of Sidabrė (Kalnelis). Photo by N. Jērums





The Hillfort of Šilėnai. Photo by V. Valskys

The Castle of Sidabrė is located at the Kalnelis Village, 3 km north-westwards from modern Joniškis. The archaeological complex of Sidabrė includes a hillfort and an ancient settlement. The slopes of the hillfort are 4–6 m high. The top is oval and about 70×45 m large. Northwards from the hillfort, there is an approximately 130×40 m large outer bailey. There also was an ancient settlement south-eastwards from the hillfort; its territory covered about 6 ha. The archaeological excavations performed at the foot of the hillfort have revealed that the cultural layer was about 90 cm thick. There also was a 1 m deep and 4 m wide defensive ditch at the foot of the hillfort. The cultural layer of the hillfort was formed in three stages, namely the 5<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century, the 11<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century and the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century. But the earliest stage of the hillfort habitation dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle mentions the Castle of Sidabrė as the last Semigallian stronghold destroyed by the forces of the Livonian order in 1290.

Some of its defenders submitted to the Teutonic Knights and went with them to Mitau (Jelgava), while other Semigallians refused to surrender and retreated to Lithuania to continue the fight against the Livonian Order.

For the last time, the Hillfort of Sidabrė (*ein geberg Sydobber, Suddoberschen bergh*) was mentioned in the Treaty of 1426 delimiting the Lithuanian-Livonian border. At present, the hillfort hosts a cemetery and a church.

## The Hillfort of Šilėnai

Location – Šilėnai Village near Kuršėnai Town, Šiauliai District Municipality.

The Hillfort of Šilėnai may be the location of the centre of the Semigallian Land of Silene (*Sillene*) mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century sources. Silene was one of the Semigallian lands listed in the Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga of



The Hillfort of Šilėnai. Photo by A. Bitaitis



1254. The Hillfort was arranged on a separate hill on the left bank of the Venta River. The hillfort represents an oval and oblong hill stretching in the eastern-western direction. The dimensions of its top are 28×22 m. The hillfort has a 10 m wide, 2 m high and 70 m long rampart encircling the top from the south, the west and the north. The hillfort is approximately 11–12 m high and its slopes are steep. An ancient settlement covering an area of about 2 ha has also been discovered south-westwards from the hillfort. There is a 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup>-century burial ground located 700 m away from the hillfort too. The hillfort used to be inhabited till the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

## The Hillfort of Jurgaičiai (Domantai) – the Hill of Crosses

Location – Šiauliai District, between the villages of Jurgaičiai and Domantai.

The Hillfort of Jurgaičiai is located on the left bank of the Kulpė River. The hillfort is oval 25 m long and 17 m wide and oriented eastwards-westwards. The western edge of the hillfort is reinforced with a 13 m long, 2.5 m high and 14 m wide rampart; the slope measures 7 m in total. At the foot of the hillfort, there is a 10 m wide and 0.5 m deep ditch with a 19 m wide and 2 m high rampart on the other side. The eastern side of the hillfort is reinforced with a 17 m long, 3 m high and 15 m wide rampart; the slopes of the hillfort are 6–8 m high. The hillfort was named after the nearby villages of Jurgaičiai and Domantai.

There also was an ancient settlement at the foot of the hillfort: it stretched eastwards and northwards and covered an area of 3 ha. The archaeological investigations of the settlement took place in 1990, 1991 and 1993. The cultural layer on the territory of the settlement was up to 1 m thick; the finds included a silver fibula, iron knives, arrowheads, glass beads, animal bones, and potsherds. The period of the settlement habitation dates to the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century. There is also an ancient cemetery located 200 m away from the hillfort: its burials date to the 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the data acquired during the hillfort research, it has been established that the hillfort was inhabited from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The written sources of the 14<sup>th</sup> century mention the events of



The Hillfort of Jurgaičiai (Domantai) – the Hill of Crosses. Photo by J. Danauskas

1348 during which the Teutonic Knights burned the Castle of Kuliai, which is identified with the Hillfort of Jurgaičiai.

The hillfort has been known since the 19<sup>th</sup> century; there was a chapel at its western end. During Soviet times, in 1961 and 1975, all the crosses were cleared from the hillfort. Now there are about 200 thousand crosses built on the top and the slopes of the hillfort with narrow passages in between. The hillfort is perceived as a sacred place of the Lithuanian Catholics and is visited by thousands of pilgrims and tourists every year.



The Hillfort of Papilē. Photo by S. Kazlauskas

## Hillfort 1 of Papilē

Location – Papilē Town, Akmenē District Municipality.

Hillfort 1 of Papilē is located on the left bank of the Venta River at its confluence with a nameless brook. The hillfort was built on the range of hills stretching from the north to the south. The dimensions of the hillfort are 55×25 m. It has a rectangular form with rounded corners. The total area of the top is about 1,400 m<sup>2</sup>. The hillfort is fortified with a 20 m wide and 5.5 m high rampart stretching along its southern edge. Its slope in the north is 9.5 m high. The road leading to the top was on the southern slope of the hillfort along the rampart leaving it on the left. The slopes of the hillfort were steepened; its slope going down towards the Venta River is about 20 m high and the western slope is 15 m high. Southwards from the hillfort, in front of the rampart, there was an outer bailey covering an area of 2,500 m<sup>2</sup>. The hillfort also had a foot settlement that stretched westwards and northwards and covered an area of some 3 ha. The archaeological investigations of the site were performed in 1986, 1998 and 2000.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hillfort 1 of Papilē was turned into a cemetery similarly to the Hillfort of Raktē. The slopes of the hillfort are now covered with leafy trees. In 1955, an ancient burial ground was discovered some 300 m away from the hillfort; its burials date to the 17<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century.

The hillfort was inhabited already in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC and habitation continued till the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Castle of Papilē is mentioned in written sources of the 14<sup>th</sup> century: it was attacked by the forces of the Livonian Order in 1339 and 1359.

## The Hillfort of Incēni (Dobe)

Location – Kokmuiža near the Avīkne Brook, Vītiņi Parish, Dobele Municipality.

The Hillfort of Incēni or Dobe (*Dobēn*) is a Semigallian hillfort located 5 km from the Auce–Ezere highway, on the bank of the Avīkne Brook near Kokmuiža previously called *Dobesberg* (the Hill of Dobe). The Hillfort of Dobe stands out in the surrounding landscape as a 20 m high well-distinguished separate hill with an outer bailey, which is several meters higher than the adjacent conformation and has artificially steepened slopes. The top of the hillfort is almost rectangular



A 3D model of the Hillfort of Dobe, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)





The reconstruction of the Castle of Dobe. Drawing by N. Jērums

and has rounded corners. Its approximate dimensions are 35×40 m. The southern edge of the hillfort is enforced with a 70 m long and 7 m high rampart.

The Hillfort of Dobe forms a complex together with the Hillfort of Mežakalns. The name of Incēni occurred only in modern times due to the adjacent Incēni Homestead. The hillfort was arranged by fortifying one of the hills belonging to the Dobe Range. Ernests Brastiņš, a researcher of hillforts, saw this hillfort as the location of the Castle of Sidabrē as there was the Sudrabiņi Homestead and the Sudrabbirze (the Silver Birch Wood) nearby.

It is assumed that the Hillfort of Incēni was the centre of the Land of Dobe with a well-fortified castle on the hillfort and a large ancient foot settlement stretching south and south-eastwards which is featured by a thick cultural layer

in the area. As for the written sources, the Land of Dobe (Dubene) was listed as one of the Semigallian lands in the Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga of 1254. The Castle of Dobe (the Hillfort of Incēni) is considered to be the centre of this land. The Land of Dobe is also mentioned in the Act of the Partition of Semigallia between the Livonian Order and the Chapter of Riga of 1272 where one of the lands is referred to as *Castrum Dobene*. The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle reports that the Livonian Order built a castle on the hill at Dobe after the unsuccessful siege of Tērvete in the winter of 1259–1260. Most historians assume that the abovementioned castle was built on the nearby Hillfort of Mežakalns. However, as neither of these two hillforts has been investigated archaeologically, this hypothesis cannot be scientifically proved yet.



The Hillfort of Incēni (Dobe). Photo by N. Jērums

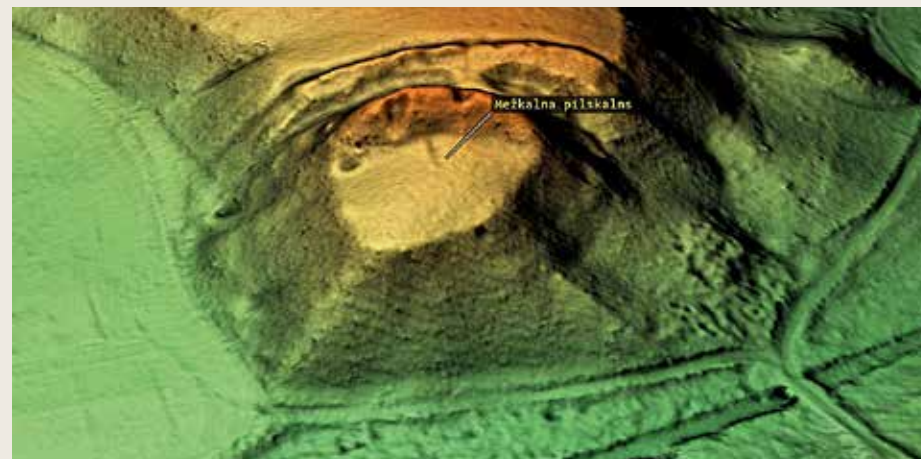


## The Hillfort of Mežakalns, Incēni

Location – Kokmuiža near the Avikne Brook, Vītiņi Parish, Dobe Municipality.

The Hillfort of Mežakalns (the Forest Hill) is closely linked with the Hillfort of Dobe located some 100 m north-westwards from it. The hillforts are separated by a ravine of the Avikne Brook and the road going from Kokmuiža. The hillfort is separated from the 2 km long range of hills by a deep ditch and a rampart. The hillfort also has a large outer bailey, which is separated from other hills by a rampart, which is still visible.

The hillfort is covered with large trees, mostly oaks. On the side of the brook, it is separated from the other hillfort by two ditches and ramparts. The first rampart is 10 m high and the second is 4 m high. The top of the hillfort is about 60×70 m large. The cultural layer of the hillfort is not intensive: only pieces of charcoal have been found so far. It is assumed that the Hillfort of



A 3D model of the Hillfort of Incēnai (Mežakalns), [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)



The Hillfort of Incēni (Mežakalns). Photo by N. Jērumis

Mežakalns hosted the wooden castle of the Livonian Order built in 1260 after the unsuccessful attack on Tērvete as reported in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle. According to this source, the Teutonic Knights built the Castle of Dobe during the cold winter of 1259–1260 (or 1258–1259). The castle had to protect the country from the Lithuanians and serve as a base for the raids against the Lithuanians and the Semigallians. The Chronicle also tells that the Teutonic castle was unsuccessfully attacked by the Samogitians. After the famous Battle of Durbe, 1260, the Livonian Order lost control over the Curonian lands and decided to abandon the Castle of Dobe to avoid an attack by the Samogitians. However, we have to admit that there are several versions regarding the location of the Castle of Dobe: there is a hypothesis that the Castle of Dobe was built in Curonia at the Hillfort of Vormsati (Nīkrāce Parish, Kuldīga Municipality) as there was the Homestead of Dobe nearby.

Two important hoards were found at the foot of Mežakalns. The first one was discovered in 1869 when deepening the ditch: 1,260 individual artefacts the total weight of which amounted to 120 kg were found at the bottom at a depth of 45 cm. This hoard is one of the most famous in the Baltic Region. It included jewellery, weaponry, household items, and blacksmith's tools. The hoard dates to the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century and is assumed to be a sacrificial offering made after a successful



military campaign or battle. The second hoard of Kokmuiža (Līgotņi) was discovered in 1929 near the first one and the total weight of its artefacts amounted to 16 kg. The hoard included 130 broken and burnt items (jewellery, weaponry, and tools).

## The Hillfort of Spārņi (The Hill of Spārņi)

Location – the eastern bank of the Spārņi Lake, Īle Parish, Dobeles Municipality.

The Hillfort of Spārņi (The Hill of Spārņi) – the Land of Sparnene was mentioned in the Act of the Partition of Upmale and Semigallia between the Teutonic Order, the Archbishop of Riga, and the Chapter of Riga of 1254. Sparnene was one of the Semigallian lands listed in it. Considering the name of the adjacent Spārņi Lake, historians assume that the well-fortified hillfort on its bank must have been the centre of the Land of Sparnene.

The Hillfort of Spārņi is oblong and stretches northwards and south-westwards. The hillfort is approximately 30 m high. Its top is oval and

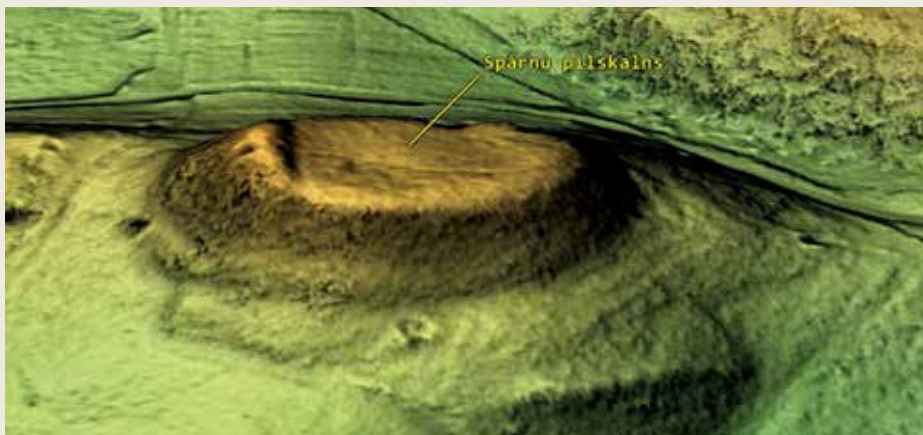


The Hillfort of Spārņi. Photo by Dobeles Municipality



The reconstruction of the Castle of Sparnene. Drawing by N. Jērums





A 3D model of the Hillfort of Spārņi, [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)

reinforced with a 2 m high rampart along the northern edge. The slopes of the hillfort are very steep and rise with an altitude of almost 45° which is a rarity for Semigallian hillforts. Such steepness is maintained around the whole hillfort and along the entire height of the slopes, which is about 10 m. The dimensions of the top are approximately 30×40 m. The hillfort is well maintained; it offers beautiful vistas of the Spārņi Lake. Westwards from the hillfort, there was an ancient settlement. Its cultural layer is about 30–90 cm deep and contains animal bones and burnt wattle daub. The ancient settlement was built on a small hill near the lake. Its slopes were distinctively steepened and fortified with the rampart covering the south-western edge. The hillfort was inhabited during the period of the 9<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century. Its cultural layer is about 1 m thick. The artefacts found at the Hillfort of Spārņi and its vicinity include wheel-made potsherds, a penannular silver fibula, 2 silver ingots, a bronze pendant, etc.

## The Hillfort of Babote (The Hill of Kartavas)

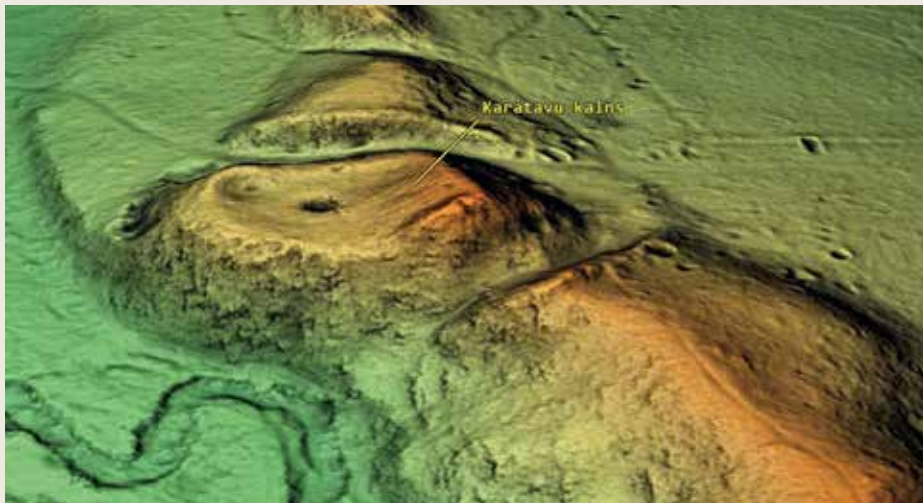
Location – Jaunpils Parish near Sparvas, Jaunpils Municipality.

The Hillfort of Babote (*Baboten*) or the Hill of Kartavas is located in the Jaunpils Parish of the Jaunpils Municipality, near the Homestead of Sparvas by the loop of the Bikstupīte, 1 km southwards from the Jaunpils Manor. The Hillfort was arranged at an approximately 100 m long hill called the Hill of Kartavas. The hillfort was separated from the hill by excavating a deep ditch and using the sand to build a 7 m high rampart at the southern edge of the hillfort. The top of the hillfort is surrounded by an approximately 1 m high rampart. There is also a pit in the centre of the top – most probably the place of a well, like in other Semigallian hillforts. The cultural layer of the hillfort is about 90 cm thick.

The Act of the Partition of the Semigallian lands of 1272 implies that the Castle of Babote was the centre of a separate district (*provincia*) in the Land of Dobe (*Dobene*). The hillfort is also mentioned in the Livonian Rhymed



The Hillfort of Babote (Kartavas), [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)



A 3D model of the Hillfort of Babote (Kartavas), [www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv](http://www.latvijas-pilskalni.lv)

Chronicle in the context of the events of 1279: there was a battle at the Hillfort of Babote between the Semigallians of Dobeles led by Nameisis and the united forces of the Livonian Teutonic Knights and the Curonians led by Johann von Ochtenhausen, Advocate (Vogt) of Goldingen (Kuldīga), which tried to escape them.

## Jaunpils

Location – Jaunpils Village, Jaunpils Municipality.

Jaunpils was a Teutonic castle of the Dobeles Commandery and a district centre. The exact date of its construction remains unknown: Jaunpils was mentioned for the first time in the list of the castles of the Order of 1411. Jaunpils along with the castles of Mitau (*Jelgava*), Dobeles, Frauenburg (*Saldus*) and Skrunda formed the defensive line stretching from the Lielupe to the Venta, which protected Livonia from the attacks of the Lithuanians.

Jaunpils is a typical water castle built on a small peninsula surrounded by a millpond on three sides. On the fourth side, in the east, the castle was protected by a defensive ditch, which was filled in subsequently during the period of the manor. The layout of the castle represents an irregular tetragon. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a huge cannon tower was added to its southern corner. The buildings of the castle were two-storey with deep cellars underneath. During the reconstruction of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a new dwelling block was added on the external side of the north-eastern defensive wall, as well as a small gate tower and a kitchen to the north-western wall. The central gate to the castle has always been in the south-western wall. The layout of the castle is trapezoid; the length of the sides is 40.5 m and 29.6 m. The diameter of the round cannon tower is 11.5 m. The castle was built of boulders but bricks were also used for the upper part of the walls.

Nowadays, one can stay in the castle for a night, enjoy meals, and get acquainted with Jaunpils history and the exhibit of the castle.



The Castle of Jaunpils. Photo by M. Pileckas



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