

The Kukaveitis Sacred Site

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Jan Długosz (1415–1480), the historian to the estate of Casimir IV Jagiellon, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland, provided data about the fact that Grand Duke Algirdas (1345–1377), dressed

in purple clothing sparkling with gold edging and a coat bound with a gilded silver belt, was cremated together with his best charger, which was covered with blanket woven with pearls and precious stones, in one of the special forests (*speciales silvas*), in which Lithuanian families had created special hearths (*speciales focos*) to cremate the bodies of the dead. This location was in a forest called Kukaveitis near Maišiagala castle and settlement (*in silva Kokiveithus prope castrum et villam Miszeholy*).

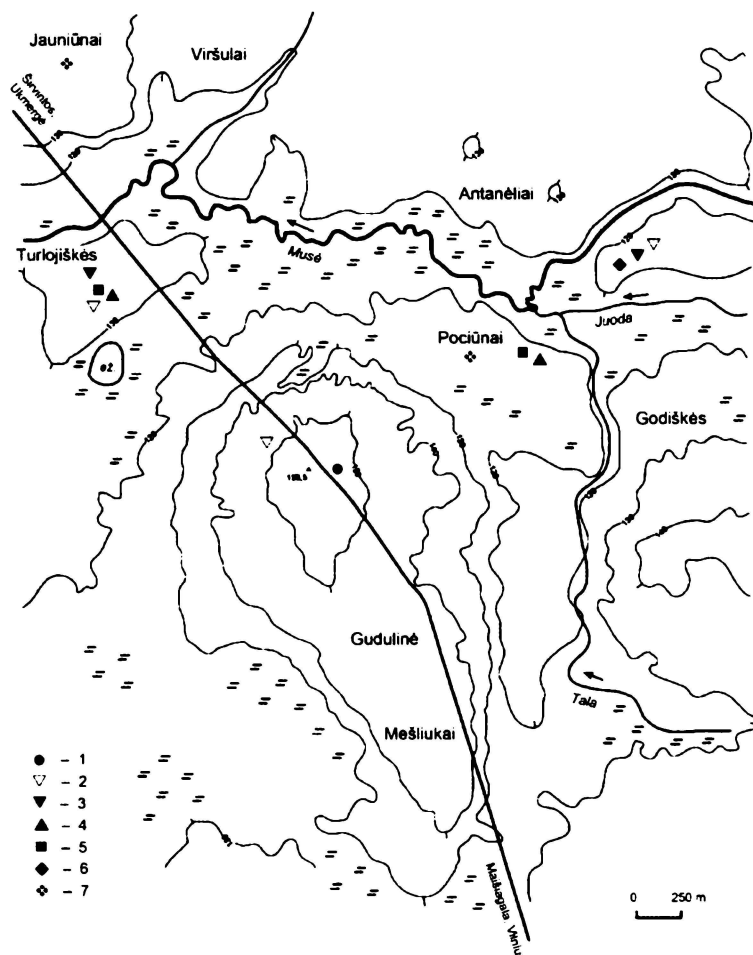
The Kukaveitis sacred site and its approaches:

- 1) Kukaveitis lone farmstead (marked approximately);
- 2) Stone – Bronze Age findspots; 3) an unenclosed Iron Age settlement; 4) East Lithuanian barrows; 5) a findspot with artefacts from the second half of the 14th century; 6) a hoard findspot; 7) hoard findspots (identified to the accuracy of the inhabited locality). Drawing by V. Vaitkevičius

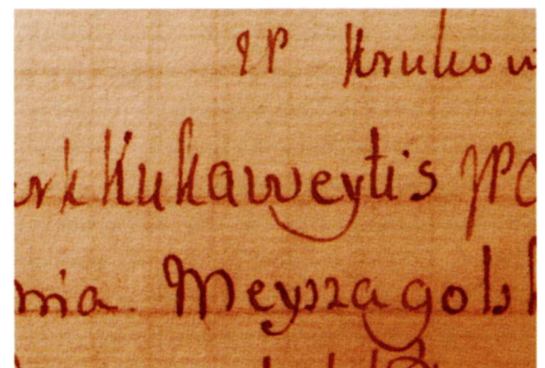
In the spring of 2002, Historian Mirosław Gajewski showed the author of this article a description of the parishes of the Vilnius deanery, from which it was seen that in 1784, i.e. more than 400 years after aforementioned events, a lone farmstead 3.5 km to the N of Maišiagala castle mound was still called Kukaveitis (*Kukaweytis*). A hope then arose of locating the Kukaveitis sacred site and, for the first time in the history of the investigation of the Lithuanian state, of getting close to the site where the remains of pagan Lithuania's ruler were cremated and perhaps even his burial site!

In 2002 a search for historical documents was begun in the archives and libraries and in 2004 the first field survey was organised. In 2008, the Gudulinė sacred site, which is called Kukaveitis (a total of about 40 ha), was granted legal protection, but so far a judicial dispute is ongoing in respect to the validity and legality of this decision.

The most important results of the conducted investigations are presented below: the Kukaveitis



The Kukaveitis entry in the 1775 inhabitants' tax register for the Vilnius Palatinate, one of the last times the location is mentioned in historical sources. The document is preserved in the Lithuanian State Historical Archive.

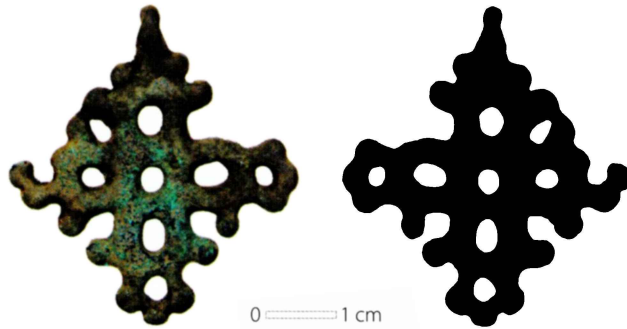


sacred site was located on the basis of historical documents, and the development of the cultural landscape surrounding it is presented on the basis of the data preserved in museums, described in literature, and collected during field surveys.

No 16th–18th-century document: court cases, property inventories, or parish and parish settlement descriptions, which mentions the name Kukaveitis, gives a hint as to the old Lithuanian sacred grove. But they do provide precise data about a land holding, a lone farmstead (*zascianek* in the original document), called Kukaveitis, which existed beyond the territory of Mešliukai village on the one side and beyond that of Pociūnai village on the other. The identification of the location of the Kukaveitis lone farmstead is a necessary condition for determining the site of the sacred Kukaveitis grove that existed in the 14th century.

In carrying out the valakas land reform in Maišiagala circa 1555–1560, the surveyor surveyed the land that was recorded for Maišiagala church to the ruler's advantage and the church's disadvantage. Therefore in 1560 General Inspector Abraham Koncza assigned several holdings from the ruler's land fund, including part of Kukaveitis, about 19 ha in size, which remained beyond the boundaries of the state village of Mešliukai after it had been surveyed using the valakas system, to Bishop Walerian Protasewicz (1505–1579) as compensation for the losses. The field of poor land, then called Kukaveitis, was partially covered by a forest and partially used as a hayfield (*pola Lesu Zarosley y po czasti Senožati Hruntu podloho*).

Bishop W. Protasewicz soon registered the received part of Kukaveitis in the name of Vilnius Canon Vaitiekus, the eldest son of Lenardas Daugėla Narbutas who owned the adjacent manor, and from the late 16th century to 1787, and perhaps even longer a constant dispute occurred over possession of the holding called Kukaveitis (or more precisely, apparently over three or even four parts of it) among the heirs of Vaitiekus Narbutas, the priests of Maišiagala church and owners of both Maišiagala and Bartkuškis manors. In the late 18th century, the use of the name Kukaveitis stopped due to unknown circumstances, perhaps due to the lone farmstead being unoccupied.



In the 15th–18th-century historical sources written in Latin, Belarusian, and Polish, the name, Kukaveitis, is not uniform, but varies, for example as *Kokiveithus*, *KaKoweytis*, *Kokoweytys*, *Kukoweytis*, *Kukoweytys*, *Kukowaytys*, *Kukeweytis*, *Kukuweytis*, etc. The name's spelling sometimes even differs at different places in the same document, on the same page, or on sequential pages, for ex.: *Zascianek Kukoweytys...* and *Zascianku Kukuweytis...*, *Zascianku Kukoweytis...* and *gruntu Kukeweytis...* Despite this, there is no doubt that the Kukaveitis lone farmstead 3.5 km outside of Maišiagala castle mound is the same *Kokiveithus* 'near Maišiagala castle and settlement', which J. Długosz also calls the place where the remains of Grand Duke Algirdas were cremated.

On the basis of historical documents, the Kukaveitis sacred site was located near Gudulinė and Pociūnai on the S edge of Širvintos District. This is the central part of a large high ridge that rises above the neighbouring fields and boggy lowland and is located to the SW of the confluence of the Musė, Juodė, and Tala. Mešliukai village and Gudulinė lie to the S of this height, Pociūnai lone farmstead to the E. The height is bisected lengthwise by the Vilnius–Širvintos road and gas mains; three mobile telephone towers have also been built there.

From the 1845, 1865, and 1900 topographic maps, it is seen that in the mid – second half of the 19th century the height was surrounded on the SW, W, and NW by forests, which joined the huge Bartkuškis forest massive on the W. Today it is only possible to speculate what area the sacred grove called Kukaveitis could have occupied in the 14th century: 30, 300, or some other number of hectares. Attention was directed to the N or highest part of the height, which is marked by especially pictures-

A cruciform pendant (second half of the 14th century) found in surveying the approaches to the Pociūnai barrow site. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius



Half of a 10th–11th-century pennisular brooch from the Pociūnai barrow site. Photo by V. Vaitkevičius

que views in all directions. During the 16th–18th centuries this site could have been on the W edge or in the vicinity of Kukaveitis lone farmstead. The height's surface forms further to the N and NE have survived with little change while more or less flat fields extend to the S, perhaps the result of long ploughing. (The soil is heavy clayey or sandy loam.) Only several farmsteads of the many once there remain after the melioration.

The archaeological sites attesting to the cultural environment of the Kukaveitis sacred site in prehistoric and early historic times: Stone Age camp sites, unenclosed settlements, East Lithuanian barrows, and hoard findspots, are concentrated near the river Musė and its tributaries.

Flint artefacts dating to the Late Mesolithic – Early Neolithic (6th–4th millennium BC) are found in Godiškės and the territory of the Turlojiškės and Plikiškės barrows. It is possible to judge from the completely exhausted cores and small flakes that there was a severe shortage of raw materials in this area, and the flint industry itself was very expressionless. A boat axe with a cylindrical butt that is characteristic of the Late Neolithic was found prior to Second World War in the fields of Plikiškės. In the Soviet era, a stone axe with a shaft hole was found on the height of the Kukaveitis sacred site, but was unfortunately not preserved.

The recorded Bronze and Iron Age sites reflect all of the main stages of East Lithuanian prehistory: the Žalioji settlement the Early Bronze Age (c. 2000–1750 BC), Sadūniškės hillfort the Late Bronze Age (1st millennium BC); and the early horizon at Maišiagala castle the last stage in the Striated Ware Culture (first centuries AD).

A dupondius of Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161), which was minted in 153–154, was in excellent condition, and was found by treasure hunters at the Turlojiškės settlement site, dates the settlement and hand made ceramics with rough surfaces to the late 2nd–3rd centuries; analogous ceramics were also found in excavating the grounds of the Godiškės manor site.

There were cremations from the mid – second half of the 1st millennium in the East Lithuanian barrows at Turlojiškės. Despite the great destruction, about twenty barrow mounds have survived

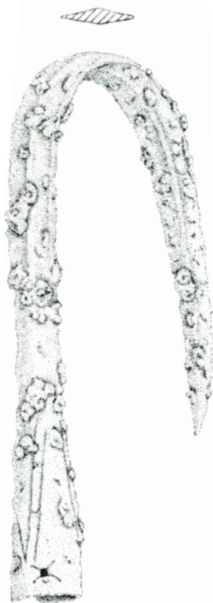
here. It is impossible to say how many have been destroyed, as was confirmed by the cremation from the second half of the 5th–6th centuries that was excavated in the gas main route in 2008. It is possible that the grave goods: an axe-hammer, a socketed spearhead, and a knife, from a Pajuodžiai barrow cemetery cremation destroyed by treasure hunters comes from the same mid – second half of the 1st millennium.

Helena Cehak Hołubowiczowa (1902–1979) and Włodzimierz Hołubowicz (1908–1962) excavated a 9th–11th-century inhumation horse burial with a bridle bit and sickle in 1935 in one of the Plikiškės barrows. There are a total of about thirty mounds in two barrow groups in the forest near Plikiškės.

The finds from the destroyed cremations at Turlojiškės and Pociūnai illustrate the 10th–11th-century East Lithuanian barrow period. Parts of characteristic male and female grave good assemblages were found at Turlojiškės: a decorated rectangular chaplet plate, coil beads, an awl with a twisted shaft, fragments of a twisted wire neck-ring, a massive, triangular cross-section bracelet, and a spearhead with a socket decorated with arched designs (Petersen type E). Fragments of a triangular cross-section bracelet, a twisted wire neck-ring with conical terminals, and fragments of a penannular brooch with faceted and flaring terminals were found at the Pociūnai barrow site.

The hoard of silver ornaments and Arabic dirhams found in Jauniūnai in 1949 should also come from the second half of the 10th–11th centuries. All three of the coins given to the museum were minted in different periods: 8th, 9th, and the first half of the 10th centuries (the last during the 914–943 reign of Nasr II ibn Ahmad, a ruler of the Central Asian Samanid dynasty).

Six early Medieval findspots should be mentioned separately: a late 19th-century find near Bartkuškis of a lion-shaped bronze aquimanile, a holy water vessel, manufactured in Lower Saxony in the first half of the 13th century (today preserved in one of the museums in Hamburg); a round cast button characteristic of the second half of the 14th century that was found by treasure hunters in a field to the N of the Turlojiškės barrows; and an



0 — 3 cm

The Petersen type E spearhead with a decorated socket (c. 10th century) from destroyed Turlojiškės barrow 4. Drawing by S. Mikšaitė



openwork cruciform pendant dating to the same period that was found in surveying the area to the N of the Pociūnai barrow site. At an, unfortunately, undetermined location in Pociūnai, in 2007 treasure hunters found more than 70 of the first Lithuanian coins with a Vytis (mounted knight) and a double cross symbol (dating to the second half of 14th century). Two Prague groat hoards hidden in the fourth quarter of the 15th century were found in Šiauliai (1981) and Godiškės (2004).

In summary, it is necessary to stress that the historical data places the Kukaveitis sacred site near Gudulinė on the edge of Širvintos District and narrows the search area to roughly 150 ha. Field surveys and excavations organised during 2002–2010 on the approaches to the Kukaveitis sacred site and in Plikiškės, Turlojiškės, Godiškės, and Pociūnai show that this was a long inhabited region, which was distinguished in the Iron and Early Middle Ages, among everything else, by exceptional finds such as a Roman imperial coin, a Petersen type E spearhead, an Arabic dirham hoard, an aquimanile, and 14th–15th-century coin hoards. This allows the vicinity of Maišiagala to be compared to the nearby Kernavė and Vilnius microregions and allows the assertion to be made that the connection of the Kukaveitis sacred site with the 14th-century grand ducal dynasty is not accidental or fabricated.

Part of the funeral rites of Grand Duke Algirdas, i.e. the cremation of his remains at Kukaveitis, is one of the biggest archaeological mysteries. There is no doubt that in the future complex excavations based on modern methods will yield more information, which will be more precise, about the Kukaveitis sacred site and its history.



The approximate location of the Kukaveitis sacred site as seen from the S.
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius

A sculpted edge iron fitting with signs of plating with non-ferrous metal from the Gudulinė sacred site.
Photo by V. Vaitkevičius