



The Dubingiai Castle Site Church

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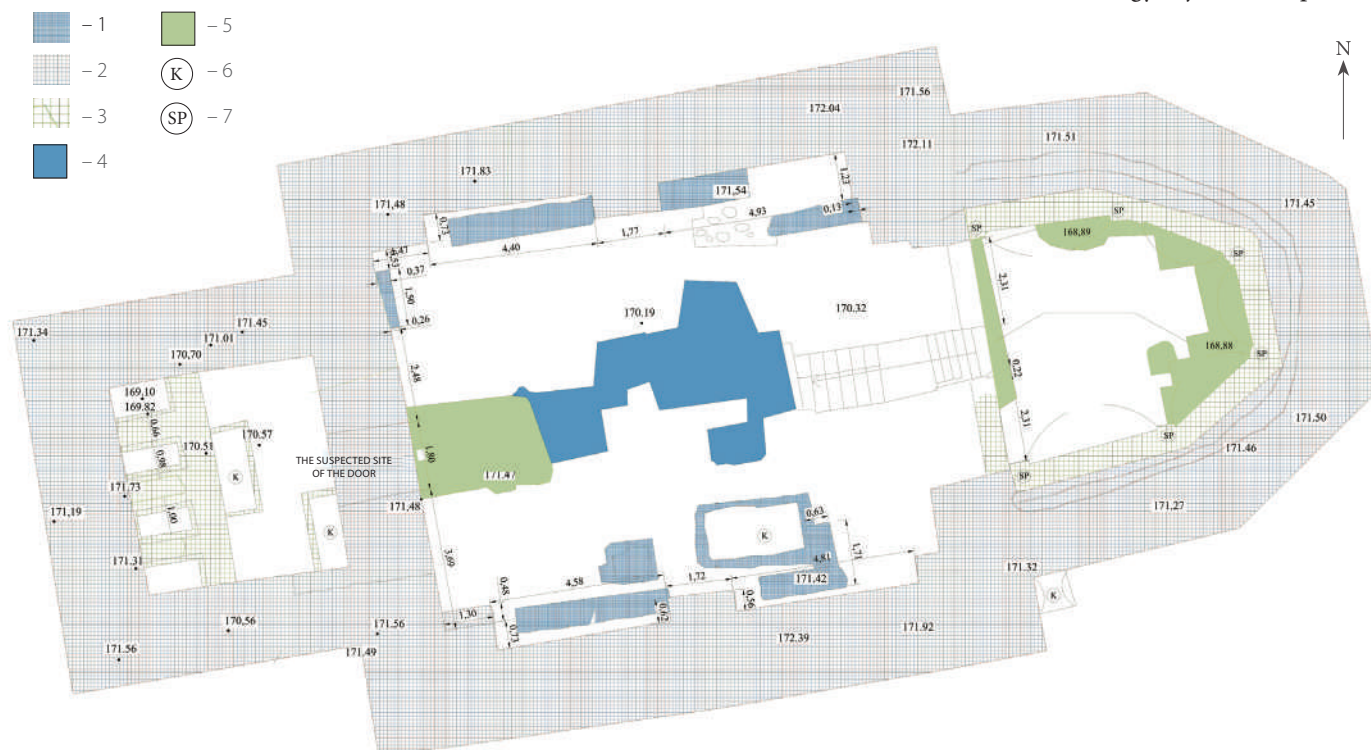
Dubingiai in the 19th
century (1870).
Drawing by N. Orda

The foundations of the Dubingiai churches: 1 – 1577–1588; 2 – until 1620; 3 – 1620 (1621) – 1640; 4 – the remains of the stage I brick floor (1577–1588); 5 – the remains of the stage II brick floor (1620 (1621) – 1640); 6 – the crypt; 7 – the base of a vault. Drawing by R. Zilinskas

Dubingiai is a small town in Molėtai District, about 40 km from Vilnius, and near Lithuania's longest lake, Asveja, which is also called Lake Dubingiai. Asveja with its branches extends over 29 km. The lake has six islands and on the largest, Castle Island, which is near the town of Dubingiai, is the Dubingiai Castle site. Today it is a peninsula about 500 m long and up to 200 m wide. The remains of the 15th–17th-century palace of Duke Radziwiłł (Lith. Radvila) of Lithuania and the Evangelical Reformed church still survive on it.

The excavation of the Dubingiai Castle site was conducted during 2003–2010, was headed by Albinas Kuncevičius, and included the archaeologists: Rimvydas Laužikas, Ramūnas Šmigelskas, Gintautas Striška, and Ėrika Striškienė. The public establishment Kultūros Paveldo Akademija [Academy of Cultural Heritage] conducted the excavation.

For the first time during an excavation the entire complex of non-intrusive test methods were used on one Lithuanian archaeology object: aerial pho-



tography and computer image filtration, thermo imaging, and geoprospecting. The most modern method of recording such objects, 3D scanning, was used for recording the unearthed church and palace foundations.

The Dubingiai project was also interesting in respect to heritage management. The Cultural Heritage Department organised the management and conservation of the unearthed foundations of the former Dubingiai church and the construction of a burial crypt and sarcophagus, while the State Service for Protected Areas and the owner of the castle site, Asveja Regional Park, continually take care of the mound's management and adaptation for tourism. The discovered and identified remains of the representatives of the Radziwiłł family of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were solemnly reburied at the Dubingiai Castle site on 5 September 2009. The unearthed palace remains will be displayed under a special, modern museum shell. The scientific research results have been presented in detail in articles and a monograph (Kuncevičius A., Jankauskas R., Laužikas R., Stankevičiūtė D., Rutkauskaitė I., *Radvilų tėvonija Dubingiuose*, Vilnius, 2009).

This article presents the history of the Dubingiai Castle site and palace and the results of the interdisciplinary investigation of the 15th–17th-century church site, including one of the most important recent Lithuanian archaeological finds, the excavation of the Radziwiłł family burial site. Another article is devoted to the results of the Radziwiłł palace investigation.

The first mention of the name Dubingiai in historical sources is when the 14th-century Teutonic Knight chroniclers mentioned the wasted land of Dubingiai in 1334, 1373, and 1375. The conducted archaeological investigations do not allow the assertion to be made that the centre of the Dubingiai lands mentioned in the 14th century was the Lake Asveja island (now the castle site), which is distinguished by natural conditions that are convenient for defence. It is very likely that part of the current hill was used as a castle site. The construction of the later castle buildings probably destroyed it, and at the most likely site, a log rest house, the foundations of which remain to today, existed even in prewar times (1938–1939).

The further development of the castle site in written sources can be followed only from the early 15th century. At that time Dubingiai belonged to the grand duke. Polish Historian Jan Długosz (1415–1480) mentions that in 1415 Jogaila (1348–1434) with his royal entourage visited Lithuania and Grand Duke Vytautas (1392–1430) of Lithuania and stayed at Trakai, Kaunas, Veliuona, Ukmergė, and later Dubingiai. After the victory at the Battle of Žalgiris/Grünwald (in 1410), the construction of the castle at Dubingiai was probably discontinued and the locality became a royal hunting estate. On 8 February 1420 Vytautas wrote a letter

General view of the Dubingiai church foundations (2007).
Photo by R. Laužikas



Fragments of a
marble gravestone.
Photo by R. Laužikas



0 2 cm

A fragment of the 17th-
century church floor.
Photo by R. Laužikas



from Dubingiai to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights and mentioned that the grand duke had erected a church in Dubingiai. How and when it became the private property of Radziwiłł has not been precisely determined. It is asserted that Mikołaj Radziwiłł (1509/1510) acquired the first holdings at Dubingiai in the second half of the 15th century.

More written knowledge about Dubingiai Castle is encountered starting in the mid-16th century. Barbara Radziwiłłowa (1520–1551), the wife of Grand Duke Sigismund II August (1548–1572) of Lithuania, lived here for almost five months beginning in 19 November 1547. She stayed in a masonry house, which was well fortified on the water side. The residential building was probably not new since the basement caved in under the habitable rooms. It is possible that she stayed part of the time in the

castle erected by Vytautas. In 1547, the Radziwiłł family, after becoming dukes of the Holy Roman Empire, consistently adhered to the religious principle established by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, *Cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), which means that each duke had the right in his holdings to establish the religion of his choice. On the basis of this principle, in 1565, Mikołaj Radziwiłł Rudyj (1512–1584) took the Dubingiai church from the Catholics and gave it to the members of the Evangelical Reform Church. In the mid-16th century, a second wooden Evangelical Reform church was erected in Dubingiai at his initiative.

From the death of M. R. Radziwiłł until the early 17th century no larger construction work occurred at Dubingiai. The first half of the 17th century when, at the initiative of Janusz Radziwiłł (1579–1620), a new masonry Evangelical Reform church and adjacent masonry rectory were erected here circa 1620, can be called the greatest period of Dubingiai's prosperity. After the death of J. Radziwiłł, his work was continued by his brother Krzysztof Radziwiłł (1585–1640). At his initiative, the palace was reconstructed and considerably enlarged (almost doubling the area), while the church's basements were transformed into the Radziwiłł family mausoleum. In 1655, the Dubingiai church and palace were ransacked by the Russian army. The remains of the Radziwiłł family members were desecrated and, after the war, were again reburied in the church's crypt after its renovation. After the Great Northern War began, fearing another desecration of these remains, they were hidden inside the church. It was mentioned that in 1734 Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (1702–1762) looked for, but was unable to find the buried remains of the Biržai branch of the Radziwiłł family anywhere in Dubingiai.

In the second half of the 17th century, after Biržai became the main Radziwiłł castle, the period of Dubingiai's decline began. The palace collapsed, and attempts to repair it were short-lived and ineffectual. At this time it was no longer fit for habitation (the building being derelict, several windows being bricked up, and others missing their glass), and therefore beside it, circa 1655, Bogusław Radziwiłł (1620–1669) oversaw the erection of a new

wooden residential home. In 1735 the church's roof and internal wooden structures were consumed by a fire started by lightning. In 1760 the church wall, which had cracked at the altar, collapsed and the arch at the vestibule collapsed. In 1740, the rooms of the masonry palace are said to have had vaulted ceilings, but they were empty and entirely without windows or doors.

During the late 18th–19th centuries, the centre of the Dubingiai holdings was already elsewhere, i.e. at the Dubingiai estate, which is near Lake Ilgis. The church and palace buildings were dismantled for their bricks. Perhaps the last person to see the view of the castle site was the artist, Napoleon Orda (1807–1883), who recorded its S side from the opposite shore of Lake Asveja in 1878 with Romantic style embellishments.

In conducting construction work on a tourism villa in 1939, a road was laid to the castle site. Broken stones and bricks were taken from the church site. In removing the rubble, the church crypt was discovered. An archaeological expedition was organised to investigate it and excavations were made on the church grounds at the Dubingiai Castle site. Specialists at the Vytautas the Great Culture Museum (headed by J. Lukoševičius) excavated the site of the apse and found basement vaults under it, which they photographed and drew.

Three churches, which replaced one another, stood at the Dubingiai Castle site: the Catholic church founded by Vytautas and the Evangelical Reform churches built by M. R. Radziwiłł and J. Radziwiłł. The first two were wooden churches, the third a masonry, Renaissance style church. During 2003–2007 all of the church's foundations and burial crypts were unearthed, the church interior excavated, and the churchyard investigated. In all, 673 m² were excavated at the former church site.

It is possible to associate only a few finds discovered at the church site with the 15th century. These are a stove tile fragment; a Vytautas type II coin, a Casimir (1440–1492) coin, and Alexander (1492–1506) pennies, which are probably from destroyed burials; a spearhead; an axe; and wallets. Absolutely no fragments of the foundations of the church built by Vytautas were discovered.

More finds are connected with the second church erected in the 16th century (after 1577). These include several church foundation fragments that allow the plan and dimensions of this church to be determined: the sanctuary could have been 7.23 m wide, but its length could not be determined due to later reconstructions. Perhaps in accordance with Renaissance principles of proportionality, it could have repeated the distance from the transverse beam support to the church's E wall (up to 5 m), or the sanctuary could have been square (7.23 m) or hexagonal, like the apse of the third masonry church. The depth of the 16th-century church's masonry foundation was 55 cm from the surface and the walls were 0.82–1.4 m thick. The construction materials consisted of 40–50 cm diameter stones (fieldstones) and 26–33 x 14–20 x 6–9 cm bricks. A light tan, heavy, hard, moderately



0 5 mm

The signet seal from burial 92.
Photo by R. Laužikas

Burials in the churchyard.
Photo by R. Laužikas



porous lime mortar was used. The church had a floor made of 21 x 19 cm unglazed ceramic tiles.

A burial crypt had been created in the church. It is possible to speculate that M. R. Radziwiłł and his family members were buried here during 1577–1588. And only later, after the masonry church was erected in the 1620s were their remains moved to the new crypt in the apse. The third church at the castle site was a Renaissance white stucco building with a narrower apse and a high square tower in the front. The church's exterior was 34.7 m long and 16.8 m wide at the nave, the church tower 10 x 7.5 m, the exterior of the nave 17.8 x 16.8 m, and the exterior of the apse 12 x 9.4 m. The depth of the masonry foundation was 2.6–3.2 m below the surface (depending on how deeply it had been destroyed). The total width of the tower and nave wall foundation fragment with the pillar was 2.98–3.04 m. The foundations gradually flared towards

the bottom. The construction materials consisted of 20–50 cm diameter stones (fieldstones), 27.1–30.9 x 12.5–17.5 x 6.4–9.6 cm bricks (average brick dimensions: 28.58 x 14.12 x 7.85 cm), and lime mortar. There were also smaller 25–25.5 x 12 x 5.5 cm bricks. It is possible to speculate that these bricks were used for the vaults. The church's floor was made of unglazed 26–27 x 27–28 cm ceramic tiles that had a black and white marble colour near the altar. The church probably had vaults decorated with crystal ornaments. The windows were stained glass. It had beavertail tile roofing. Fragments of M. R. Radziwiłł's marble gravestone and the marble communion table as well as a burial crypt under the church apse that were all found during the excavations should be connected with this church. The crypt occupied the entire area under the church presbytery. Its greatest width was 7 m and its length was about 8 m. A column, which supported the vault, was in the middle of the crypt. Stairs led to the crypt from the church's nave. The crypt was created using 6.8–7.3 x 12.9–14 cm bricks. After the crypt was built, a floor was laid. The bases of the crypt's vault and the remains of the brick paving have survived.

In conducting the excavations, 137 surviving inhumations as well as at least 321 remains from destroyed burials were discovered inside the church and in the churchyard at Dubingiai. Burials in the vicinity of the church began in the mid-15th century. Most of the burials are from the second half of the 16th to the mid-17th – early 18th century. On the one hand, this reflects the tendencies for growth and prosperity of the Radziwiłł holdings in Dubingiai and of the Dubingiai parish, and on the other hand, marks a period of wars and epidemics.

An anthropological examination of the remains at the Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine (Rimantas Jankauskas) managed to determine the sex of 241 individuals: 153 males and 88 women. An absolute male domination is noticeable at Dubingiai compared with both other Lithuanian cemeteries from a similar period and with the data from 17th–19th-century written sources. It can be explained as the effect of several factors. First of all the factor of social selection could have played a role. The majority of the studied burials were

A general view
of the reburials.

Photo by A. Kuncevičius



from inside the church, a more respectful burial site, from a Christian perspective, where parishioners and clergy with high social status were buried. But the historian, Mečislovas Jučas, has observed that in Dubingiai District a greater number of inhabitants performed military duties compared to other GDL districts. It is also possible to think that not just local people were buried in the vicinity of Dubingiai church, but also those people in Radziwiłł's entourage and those who had served them militarily.

The hypothetical size of the population of Dubingiai parish and the change in it according to an uncorrected life table ($e^0_x = 24$, $N = 458$) was about 43 people; after correcting for the number of newborns ($e^0_x = 17,5$, $N = 487$), the population was about 40 people (according to Acsádi G., Nemeskéri J. *History of human life span and mortality*, Budapest, 1970).

A W – E burial orientation predominated in Dubingiai: 127 (92.71%) with the head to the W, 2 (1.46%) to the E, 2 (1.46%) to the S, and 6 (4.37%) to the N. This orientation is characteristic of Christian funeral rites.

In summarising the individual grave goods from the burials in the vicinity of the former Dubingiai churches, the following unique finds were distinguished: amulets, small fittings, coffin fittings, fabric, earrings, belemnites, small loops, spearheads, hooked tags, pouch fittings, beads, coffins, ceramics, staples, axes, book fittings, miniature axes, coins, leather artefacts, knives, lacing, buttons, buckles, brooches, fire strikers, razors, pins, scapulars, nails, jetons, rings, engagement rings, and crotals. The most frequent duplicates among them are: nails (42 burials), coffins (78 burials), coins (17 burials), coffin fittings (11 coffins), ceramics (11 burials), knives (8 burials), and rings (5 burials).

In 2004, the remains of eight individuals (six males and two females) brought from another place were discovered in a specially constructed 1.5 x 1 m box buried in the soil under the communion table in the central part of the church. The manner of reburial showed that the remains of especially honourable individuals had been reburied at this site. Knowing that the Radziwiłł family had built this church and that they had been buried here in

specially ordered sarcophaguses, and considering that no source had mentioned the reburial of the remains of the Radziwiłł family members buried in Dubingiai at other sites in Lithuania or the burial of other noted individuals in the Dubingiai church, it was surmised that the burial site found during the excavation was the place where the remains of the Radziwiłł family members had been hidden (reburied). Because this burial contained no grave goods that would allow the individuals to be more precisely dated or identified, it was possible to establish or deny the identity of the individuals only through anthropological, historical, and artistic examination.

Quite a few unique features and pathologies characterised the remains. The post-mortem changes were rodent teeth marks visible near the foramen magnum and at other places on some skulls. This confirms the assumption that the remains were initially buried in sarcophagi or crypts rather than in the ground, and later reburied. The collective burial contained: one male 30–40 years of age, two males 40–50 years of age, two males over 50, one female 30–40 years of age, one female 40–50 years of age, and one individual of undetermined sex and age. A distinct discrepancy between the ossification of the skull sutures (some skulls being almost completely ossified, which attests to their older age) and the tooth wear (very little wear corresponding to a young age or eating very processed and meaty foods, which latter assumption is confirmed by the dental bones) is noticeable. Some skulls are externally very similar: large, wide faces, narrow noses, and very big eye sockets. Signs of multigravidity were found on the pelvic bones of one female (about 30 years of age). The changes on the pelvic bones and femurs of one male are characteristic of severe osteoarthritis of the hip joints. At least one male suffered from very advanced DISH (calcification of the ligaments and tendons), which is frequently associated with type II diabetes, which is usually caused by obesity.

After receiving state financing, an interdisciplinary group of investigators was created by reso-



0 — 5 cm

An early 17th-century stove tile with the Radziwiłł coat-of-arms.

Photo by V. Abramauskas



0 — 1 cm

A crotal and beads from the burials.

Photo by J. Butrimaitė

Discovered and identified remains of the representatives of the Radziwiłł family of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were solemnly reburied at the Dubingiai Castle site on 5 September 2009.
Photo by R. Viešnickas



0 — 3 cm



0 — 2 cm



0 — 1 cm

A brooch and fittings from the burials.

Photo by J. Butrimaitė

lution no. 842 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 5 August 2005: A. Kuncevičius and R. Laužikas (Vilnius University, archaeological investigations), historical data – Raimonda Ragauskienė and Deimantas Karvelis (Vilnius Pedagogical University, historical research), and Tojana Račiūnaitė (Vilnius Academy of Fine Arts, iconographic research). The biomedical investigations were co-ordinated by R. Jankauskas (Vilnius University) assisted by Sigitas Abrutis (Mykolas Romeris University Institute of Forensic Medicine; portrait and skull comparisons), Jūratė Dementavičienė (Vilnius University Hospital Santariškės Clinics; radiological investigations), Danutė Adamonienė (Occupational Medicine Center; chemical investigations), Jūratė Jankauskienė (Mykolas Romeris University Institute of Forensic Medicine), and Agnieszka Krzyżanska-Pilecka (Wrocław Medical Academy; DNR investigations). Ulm University (Germany) Professor and anthropologist Friedrich Wilhelm Rösing, who has a great deal of experience in forensic anthropology, was consulted on identification questions.

In summarising the available archaeological, historical, iconographic, anthropological, and other research data, it is possible to draw the conclusion that there are sufficient data to assert that the fol-

lowing Radziwiłł family representatives, reburied in the collective burial found at the Dubingiai Castle site in 2004, were identified: Mikołaj Radziwiłł Rudyj (1512–1584), Vilnius palatine, GDL chancellor, and GDL great hetman; Mikołaj Radziwiłł Czarnyj (04 February 1515 in Nesvyžius (Nesvizh) – 28 May 1565 in Lukiškės, Vilnius), GDL grand marshal, Vilnius palatine, and GDL chancellor; Elżbieta Szydłowiecka–Radziwiłłowa (1533–1562 Lukiškės, Vilnius), the daughter of Krakow Castellan and Kingdom of Poland Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki (1467–1532) and Zofia Targowicka (1491–1556), and the wife of M. Cz. Radziwiłł; Mikołaj Radziwiłł (c. 1546–1589, buried in 1590), son of M. R. Radziwiłł, GDL master of the hunt and Novogrudok palatine; Janusz Radziwiłł (1579–1620), grandson of M. R. Radziwiłł, GDL cupbearer, Vilnius castellan, eldest son of Krzysztof Radziwiłł Piorun (1547–1603) and his second wife, Katarzyna Ostrogska (1560–1579); and Ana Radziwiłłowa Sobkowna (d. 1578), first wife of K. P. Radziwiłł.