

# A DEFENCE INSTALLATION OF THE DEVELOPING LITHUANIAN STATE

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## Abstract

The Rėkučiai defence installation is in the eastern part of Lithuania between two lakes in wooded country. The installation was comprised of a rampart and a ditch in front of it. This defence installation from the 12th and 13th centuries belongs to the most important fortified area of the newly developing Lithuanian state. It extended about 50 kilometres from east to west, and was built as a defence against the Polotsk-Pskov duchies and the Livonian Order. Analogous defence installations include Kovirke (“Cow Wall”), a lesser fortification within the well-known Dannevirke earthwork fortification complex, as well as the ramparts left by Prussian tribes.

Key words: Rėkučiai, East Lithuania, defence installation, defence sector, Livonian Order, Pskov, Polotsk.

## Introduction

Since the oldest of times, people built various fortifications for defence purposes. The earliest enclosures in Lithuanian territory were fortifications known from Neolithic times (Rimantienė 1980, pp.36-44; Girininkas 1980, p.6ff.). The first builders of hill-forts in the Middle Bronze Age used to enclose their settlements (Kulikauskienė 1986, pp.16-18; Grigalavičienė 1986, p.54). Later, in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, ramparts built from tamped clay and earth and that encircled the flat hilltops were constructed around the hill-forts. Already in the Roman Period, in the first centuries BC, from the Rhine to the Danube in Europe, the Romans built huge fortifications that consisted of a rampart beside a ditch and lookout towers (Braun 1992, pp.9-32). A fortification complex known as Dannevirke emerged in the Viking period, along the border of present-day Denmark and Germany; its earlier phase was called Kovirke, and it was also comprised of ditches and adjacent ramparts (Andersen 1998). Almost all of the Late Iron Age hill-forts in Lithuanian, Latvian and former Prussian territory typically had frameworked ramparts, ie their foundations were timbered (Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė 1974, p.13f.). Usually ditches are found beside the hill-forts' ramparts that made the ramparts higher or were a part of the defence installations (Baubonis, Zabiela 2005, p.21). Isolated ramparts, found separately from hill-forts, have been discovered in Prussia (Okulicz-Kozaryn 1983; 1997), in Russian territory (Kuza 1985). One such defence installation was discovered and researched in east Lithuania, not far from the village of Rėkučiai (Fig. 1). Girininkas and Semėnas (1995), as well as Zabiela (1992), have written about this defence installation and the investigations. Having amassed more material on the Rėkučiai defensive rampart, a new research analy-

sis, together with an account of its strategic importance in the developing Lithuanian state, is presented.

## The site's localisation and research history

The Rėkučiai defence installation is in the Švenčionys district of the Švenčionėliai area, in the Pakretuonė forest, between Lake Žeimenis and Lake Vajuonis (Fig. 2; Plate VII: 3). It consists of a rampart and an adjacent ditch on its northern end; this indicates that the enemy had to attack from the north or northeast. The defence installation extends in a southeasterly direction from a bay of the eastern shore of Lake Žeimenis to the Vilnius-Daugpilis railroad. Approximately 60 metres of the installation's length was dug out while building the railroad in 1859–1862. From the railroad, the defence installation runs first along the left and then along the right bank of a rivulet, along the Pakretuonė forest, and turns slightly to the northeast before terminating in the ploughed fields of the village of Rėkučiai. Having fallen in stretches of cultivated land throughout the ages, at this point the defence installation has flattened out. Survey work confirmed that its eastern part lies in tilled fields. It must have extended in a northeasterly direction up to the western or northwestern shore of Lake Vajuonis, where the well-fortified Papravale hill-fort was used for defence at the time. The top of the defence installation's absolute height from sea level ranges from 148 to 165 metres (Fig. 3).

The length of the remaining defence installation reaches 845 metres, while the height of the rampart and the depth of the ditch next to it are not uniform. The highest point of the rampart is approximately 1.1 metres (from the present surface of the ground), while the width at its base ranges from five to 6.3 metres.

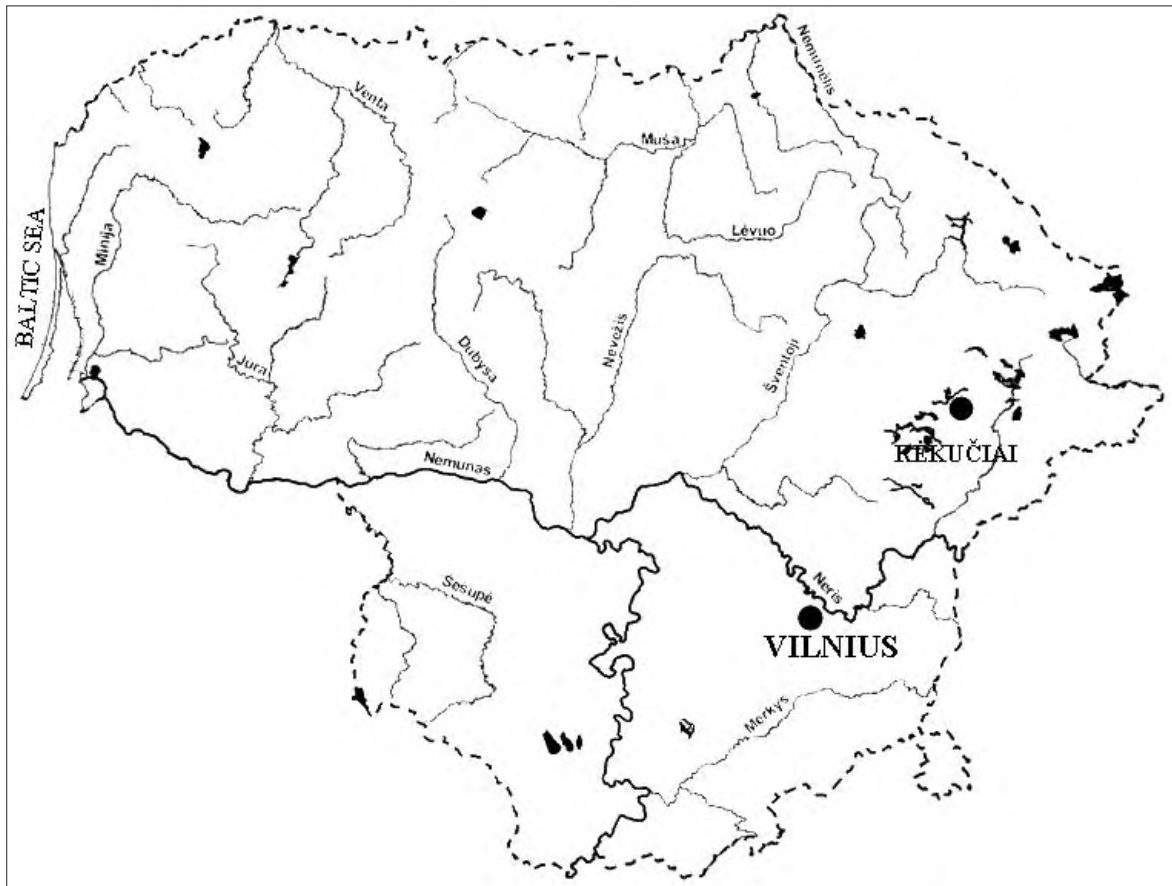


Fig. 1. Situation plan of the Rėkučiai defensive fortification.

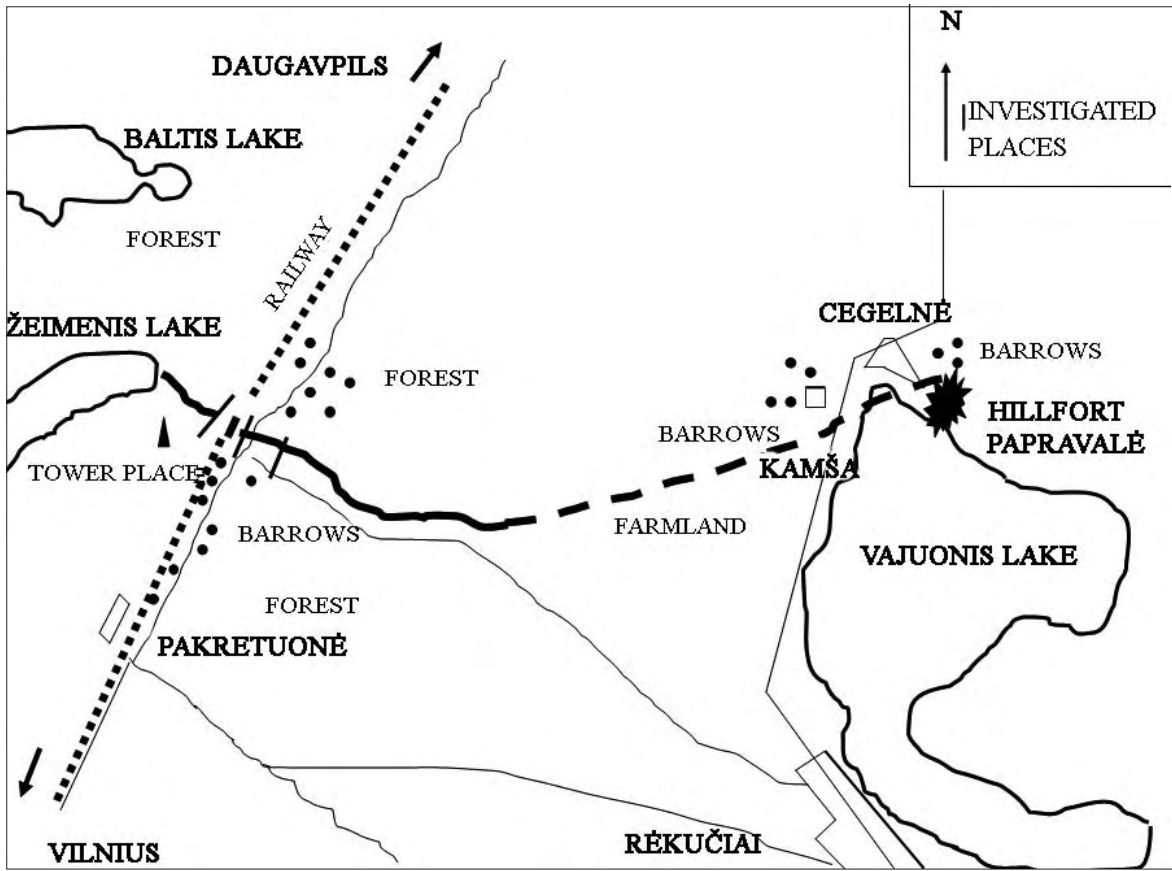


Fig. 2. Plan of the Rėkučiai defence installation.

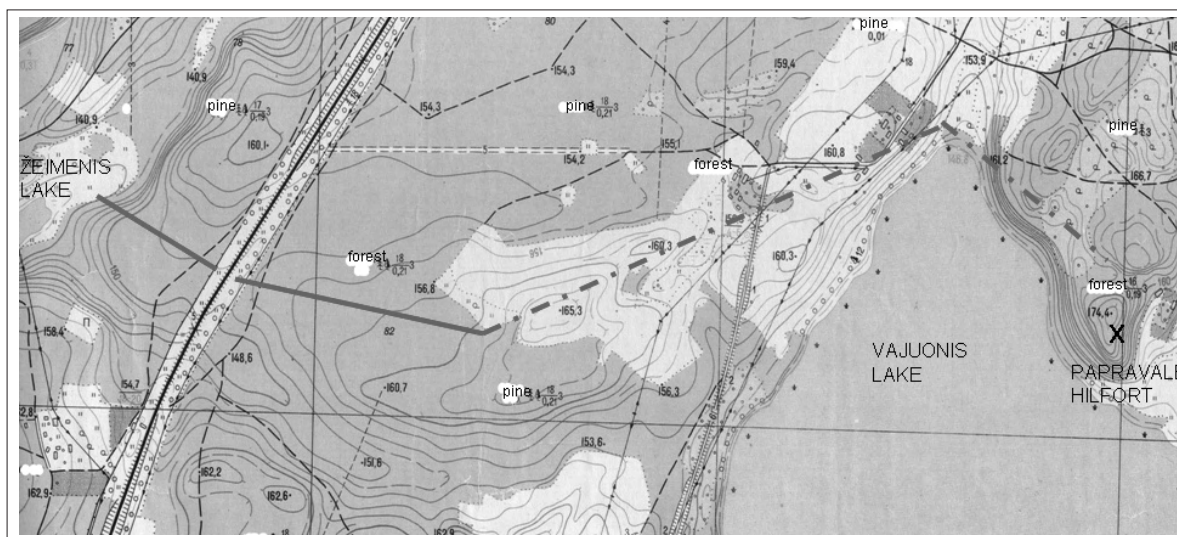


Fig. 3. Location of the Rėkučiai defence installation. Scale 1:10 000 cm.

A ditch remains beside the rampart along the northern side, from where enemy attacks were anticipated. The ditch's width throughout the entire known part of the defence installation is 4.5 to 5.5 metres.

The Rėkučiai defence installation was first mentioned on the archaeological map of the Vilnius province compiled by F. Pokrovskii. The map indicates that there was a rampart one verst (1,067m) from Rėkučiai that was 150 fathoms long (319.5m) (Pokrovskii 1893, p.52). A little-known archaeologist named Kaširskis wrote about the Rėkučiai rampart; he even excavated it in 1906. However, having found nothing in it, he left information about the site only in his excavation journal, which is currently in the St Petersburg Material Culture Institute's archives (Spitsyn 1907). A. Spitsyn, Kaširskis' teacher, published all of his student's excavation journals after his student's death. Moreover, after the 1906 excavation, Kaširskis gave a presentation about his research near the Rėkučiai village at a meeting of the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission the same year. However, aside from the fact that this defence installation existed, nothing in particular was really found out from this presentation. The Rėkučiai defence installation was also included in P. Tarasenko's archaeological site lists (Tarasenko 1928, p.344). The Rėkučiai defence installation was again encountered during the 1989 Kretuonas archaeological expedition (Girininkas *et al.* 1990, pp.191-193). Thus, the earlier known site was rediscovered.

### Archaeological investigations of the defence installation

The Kretuonas archaeological expedition (Girininkas, Zabiela 1992, p.48f.) and the Nalšia Museum (Semėnas 1994, p.52) investigated the Rėkučiai de-

fence installation in 1990, 1991 and 1994 (Figs. 2, 4). A better preserved 70-square-metre part of the defence installation, approximately 145 metres southeast of the railroad, was excavated in 1990. The width of the defence installation's excavated plot reached 11.3 metres. The rampart's width at the base reached 6.3 metres, its height one metre, the ditch's depth to the rampart's base was one metre, while its width was five metres. Upon removing the topsoil and sand, it became clear that underneath it was a frame-shaped construction notched together from pine timbers, while the up to 1.5-metre intervals formed in between them were filled with sand from the up to five-metre-high adjacent ditch that was on the northern side of the rampart (Fig. 5). This is how the bottom part of the rampart's framework was constructed. The diameter of the framework's timbers ranged from 14 to 20 centimetres. Remains of poles hammered vertically into the base on the outer side of the ditch were also discovered in the defence installation during the excavation. These poles must have comprised the overground part of the enclosure that had been on the northern end opposite the ditch and that were not preserved. Sharpened stakes up to 15 centimetres in diameter and 30 centimetres from the current ground surface were driven into the ground. Opposite the ditch, in a two-metre-long segment of the rampart's excavated area, two stakes were discovered pounded up to 35 centimetres deep into the soil. These stakes are presumed to have been an inherent constituent part of the entire defence installation. The ditch's slope from the rampart's side and a portion of the rampart were reinforced with 6×10×20 centimetre large rocks. It was established during the time of the excavation that the wooden framework part of the rampart had burned, since ashes, burnt-through timbers, and sand that had burnt to a red hue were discovered. Part of a field ploughed with a *žagre*-type plough (a wooden



Fig. 4. The Rėkučiai defence installation's excavation in 1990. The rampart's slope reinforced with rocks (photograph by Girininkas).



Fig. 5. The Rėkučiai defence installation's excavation in 1990: frameworks (photograph by Girininkas).

plough with a two-toothed ploughshare) was uncovered south of the first excavated plot of the rampart, on the sloping side of the Ravokas rivulet. For this reason, it is believed that while the rampart was in use, this area was open and was utilised for agriculture.

The most disturbed part of the rampart in a fire prevention strip east of the railroad was picked for excavation in 1991 (Figs. 6 and 7). Annually ploughed strips on both sides of the railroad damaged the defence installation. Just as in 1990, the excavation in 1991 uncovered part of an installed frame made of pine timbers. In some places of one section of the rampart, three frameworks, one on top of the other, were found jointed together, with wood charcoal and ash in the sand around them. Horizontally oriented timbers, piled one on top of the other in three rows, were found along the northern part of the rampart near the edge of the ditch (Fig. 5); these could have reinforced the rampart part of the construction from the northern side. A portion of the frames in the rampart had rotted rather than burnt through. Split and not split rocks 5×8×10 centimetres large were found on the rampart's northern slope from the ditch side. Just as in the first excavated plot, remains of sharpened, up to 20-centimetre-diameter timbers were found driven into the soil near the outer edge of the ditch and on its northern side.

The third plot was excavated in 1994. The plot was 30 metres northwest of the railroad and took in a disturbed portion of the defence installation that was in an 80-square-metre area of a fire prevention strip (Semėnas 1996, p. 52). Here, as in earlier excavation years, timbers with diameters ranging from 13 to 20 centimetres that had been laid in a framework fashion were found lying at the base of the rampart. They had rotted rather than burnt, and their contours were clearly distinguished in the sand. The remains of two, small, 12 to 14-centi-



Fig. 6. The Rėkučiai defence installation's excavation in 1991: rows of timbers (photograph by Girininkas).



Fig. 7. The Rėkučiai defence installation's excavation in 1991: location of timbers (photograph by Girininkas).

metre diameter sharpened timbers pounded vertically into the ground up to 35 centimetres deep below the present ground surface were found on the edge of the ditch near the rampart. Apparently, they were a part of a wooden defensive enclosure opposite the ditch, which had also been observed in the first two excavation plots. The remains of two more small, vertically hammered 12 to 15-centimetre diameter timbers were found on the southern side of the rampart's slope. They could have comprised a portion of the construction's top and strengthened the southern part of the rampart's slope as well as the framework's construction. The first artefacts were found in 1994 in the mound of the rampart: two whetstones and one stone artefact of unknown function. The whetstones could have been used for building the rampart's framework.

## The reconstruction of the Rėkučiai defensive rampart

An effort to reconstruct this defence installation has been made based on the data of three years of excavation. It is believed that the first obstacle for an attacking enemy must have been the wooden enclosure opposite the ditch. According to the research data, it could not have been a solid timber wall, but rather a barrier consisting of every two to four metres vertically hammered wooden timbers and a short wall interwoven from larger poles or notched together from smaller timbers that was supported by the vertically hammered stakes (Fig. 8). This obstacle could not have been tall, so that the enemy could not hide behind it.

Behind this barrier was a 1.5 to two-metre-deep and up to five-metre-wide ditch. The ditch's bottom and the rampart's slope from the ditch side were reinforced with rocks.

Behind the ditch was the rampart. It was reinforced both longitudinally and transversely by up to 20-centimetre-diameter timbers that were notched together into a framework. The frame that reinforced the base of the rampart had three or more rows. The pine timber framework constructed in this fashion was strewn with sand that was probably dug out from the defence ditch as well as with rocks.

The notched framework's length and width reached 1.5 metres. Just like the Rėkučiai defensive rampart, the upper layers of the Įpiltis (Kretinga district), Apuolė (Skuodas district), Aukštadvaris (Trakai district) and Punia (Alytus district) hill-forts of the ninth to 12th centuries were also found equipped with ramparts (Puzinas 1938, pp.122-123; Daugudis 1982, pp.66-70). The height of the Rėkučiai defensive rampart could have reached 1.5 to two metres from the surface of the ground at that time. Data confirming whether or not a wall of vertically hammered or dug-in timbers stood on the rampart is so far scarce. Only the timbers longitudinally placed one on top of the other found on the rampart's northern side in the second plot could have been used for the reinforcement of the rampart's northern portion or the bottom portion of the small defensive wall on top of the rampart. Its existence would also be testified to by the two adjacent

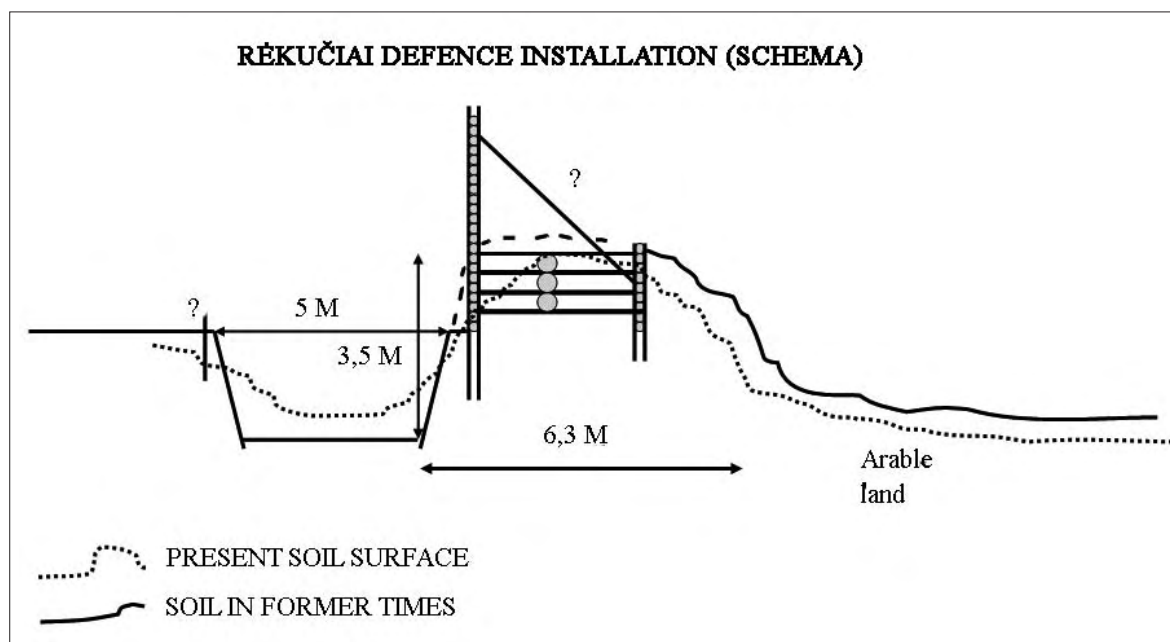


Fig. 8. A reconstruction of the Rėkučiai defence installation.

stakes vertically driven into the southern side of the rampart's slope discovered in the third excavation plot from 1994; these stakes could have supported either the small defensive wall above the rampart or some other construction standing on top of the rampart. According to current data, we believe that the general height of the rampart from the ditch's side could have reached about 3.5 metres. An additional 1.5-metre-high wall-cover could have stood on the rampart, so the height of the rampart together with the wall-cover from the bottom of the ditch's side could have reached 4.5 to five metres. Defensive ramparts constructed in such a manner are known not only in Lithuanian lands, but also in Germanic and Slavic lands in the tenth to 13th centuries (Andersen 1992, pp.18-21; Kuza 1985, p.216).

A tower, or maybe even several towers, might have stood in a particular place or places on the Rėkučiai rampart. V. Aliulis, a former rector of the Palūšė parish, mentions that until not long ago a small vale in the Pakretuonė forest, not far from Pavajuonis, was called "Iron Gates" (Aliulis 1996, p. 12). Local residents speak of how the "Iron Gates" could have been on the western side of the Vilnius–Daugpilis railroad, approximately 100 metres west of it and 90 to 100 metres south of the rampart (Fig. 2). This area was identified in the summer of 1992 by Martinkėnas, a resident of the village of Paversmis in the Ignalina district. According to his father's narratives, a "broma", or gate, used to stand in that place, and before the Second World War local residents still used to take rocks for construction purposes from that place. This place is currently distinguished by its topography as well. South of it is a deep valley, the channel of the River Ravokas, while a deep bank encircles the place along its northwest and

northern sides. No such natural environmental barriers exist to the east.

Mykolas Petkūnas, a former resident of the Ignalina district's Mačiuliai farmstead (not far from the village of Papravalė), remembers how his grandfather would tell stories about how the opening and closing of an iron gate could be heard in their village in the evenings. They used to call these gates "Vokė". When asked to identify this place, he pointed to the west, beyond the railroad and toward the Lake Žeimenis side of the defence installation. The same resident spoke of how battles used to occur in these places in olden days, and how the blood shed in these battles gave the name Raudonupis (Red River) to the one rivulet flowing into Lake Žeimenis. Upon excavating two archaeological prospecting pits in the place indicated by Martinkėnas, several flaked stones and two wheel-made pottery sherds were found. It is likely that the "gate" could have been a lookout or defensive tower in the defended territory south of the rampart, and that together with the defence installation it was part of a unified defensive system. Such a defensive system, in which fortified lookout towers were built on the inner side of a continuous defensive wall, was already known from the times of the Romans' battles with the barbarians (Germanic tribes) (Hussen 1992, pp.33-70; Braun 1992, pp.9-32).

#### The Rėkučiai defence installation in the light of other sites from the time

East of the Rėkučiai rampart, as mentioned above, is the Papravalė hill-fort that also has ramparts protecting

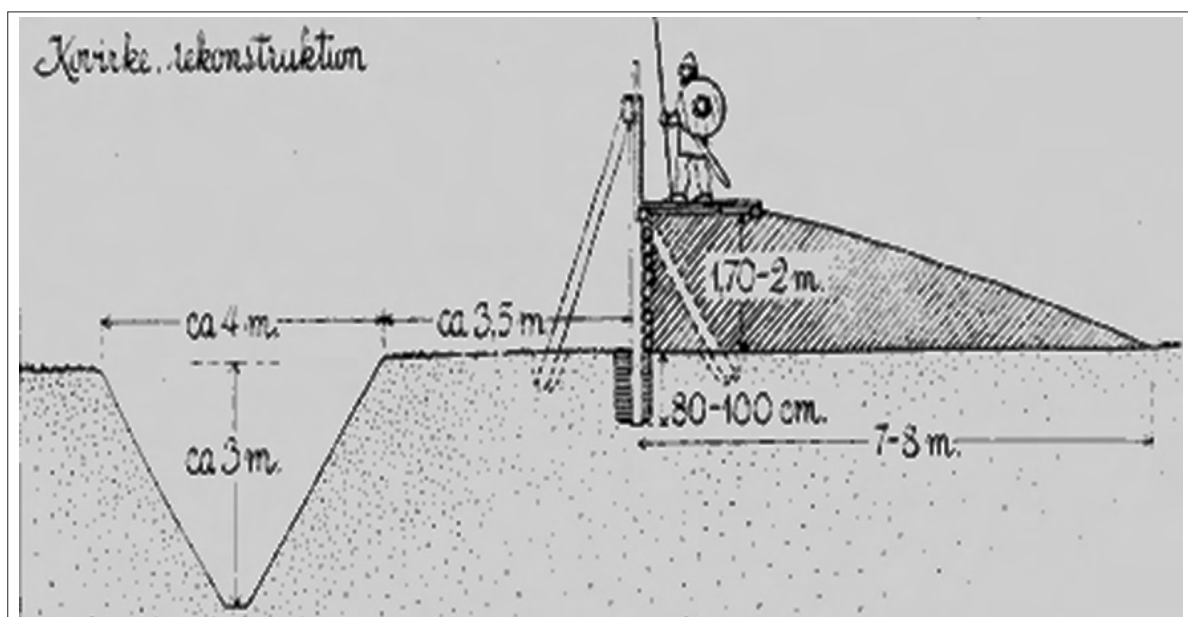


Fig. 9. The Kovirke (Cow Wall) defence installation.

the flat hilltop of the hill-fort. The width of one of the ramparts is 12 metres, while its height is 0.5 metres. The rampart was levelled over the course of time. Below the flat hilltop area is another ten-metre-wide and two-metre-deep ditch, behind which a one-metre-high and eight-metre-wide rampart was constructed. Behind this, a second six-metre-wide and one-metre-deep ditch was dug, with yet a third one-metre-high and five-metre-wide rampart behind it. This last rampart is similar to the long rampart of Rėkučiai. The defensive ramparts of this hill-fort and of Rėkučiai could have been contemporaneous and comprised a common defensive system.

Defensive installations analogous to that of Rėkučiai are known from the border of Germany and Denmark. There, the eighth-century defensive wall of Kovirke (Cow Wall), which is between the settlements of Selk and Kl. Rheide and south of Dennewerk (Andersen 1992, pp.18-21), was intended for battles with the Carolingians (Figs. 9 and 10). This fortification is very similar to the Rėkučiai fortification both in its structure and in its form. Only the Kovirke fortification is two metres wider and could have been one metre higher. Analogous defensive fortifications were left by the Prussian tribes. These were in the Curonian Isthmus at Krancu, Olendry, and other localities. Prussian lands were separated from each other by a so-called no man's land (wasteland). On both sides of the wasteland, the Prussians would establish systems of ramparts with wooden enclosures and small watchtowers. Often the wooden enclosures would be reinforced with earth and rocks (Okulicz-Kozaryn 1983, pp.207-213; Šneidreitas 1989, p.51f.).

The Kievan Rus' built ramparts with adjacent ditches to defend against the steppe nomads (Kuza 1985 p.216). The Bulgarians along the Volga had similar defensive fortifications. The Chronicle of Nikonas mentions that when attacking the Bulgarian town of Oshel (*Ashli*) in 1219, Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich encountered a defensive system that consisted of an oak fence construction, two ditches, and a rampart in between. The Bulgarians defended themselves while riding on the rampart (PSRL 1965, p.84f.). It is interesting to note that this defensive system was far from the actual town.

A rampart analogous to the Rėkučiai defensive fortification and not yet excavated has survived in the Pastovys area in Byelorussia (Fig. 2). The locals there assert that it was constructed by the Tartars. B. Kviklys wrote about this rampart (Kviklys 1989, p.704). The residents call it a Tartar rampart because a hoard of silver from Baghdad was found not far from it. Moreover, the date of the hoard is relatively late, thus, the date of the rampart was pushed forward to the 17th century (Riabtsevich 1977, p.42).

#### The Rėkučiai defence installation as a part of the northern Naššia defence line

The Papravale hill-fort on the northwest shore of Lake Vajuonis could have been an eastern fortification outpost of the Rėkučiai defensive system. So far, it is still unknown whether the rampart, whose eastern end currently stops in the cultivated fields of Rėkučiai, continued straight to the western shore of Lake Vajuonis, or whether it curved to the northwest and reached the Papravale hill-fort. The identical date of the hill-fort

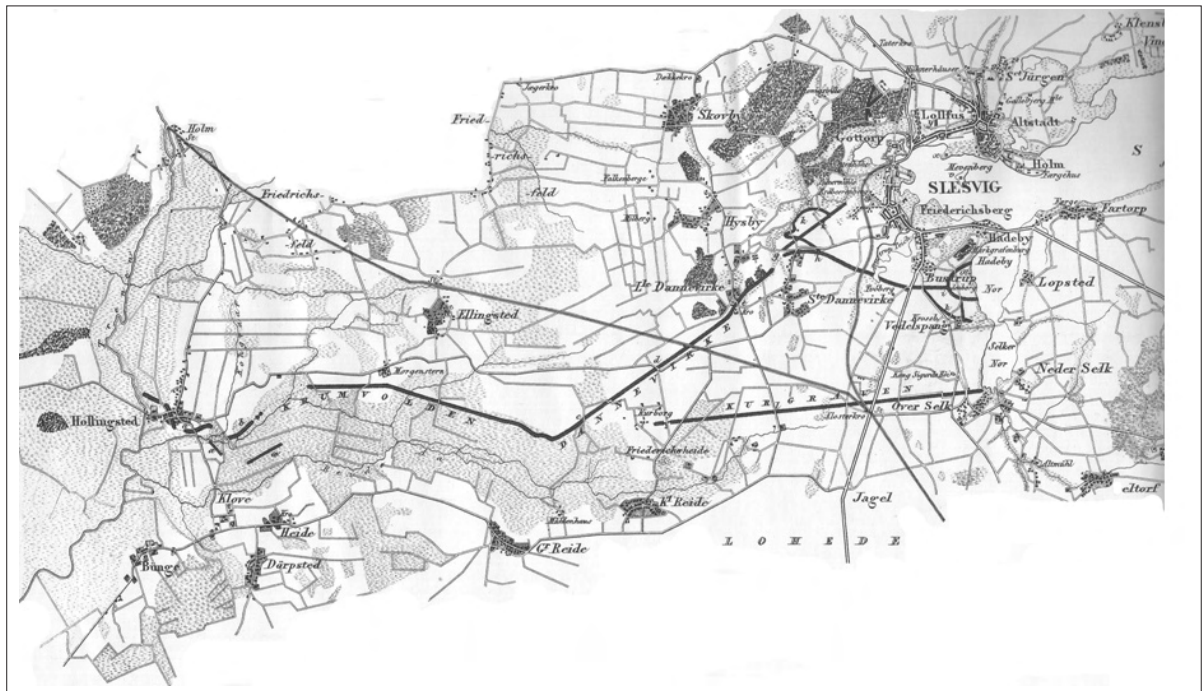


Fig. 10. The Dannevirke defence installation.

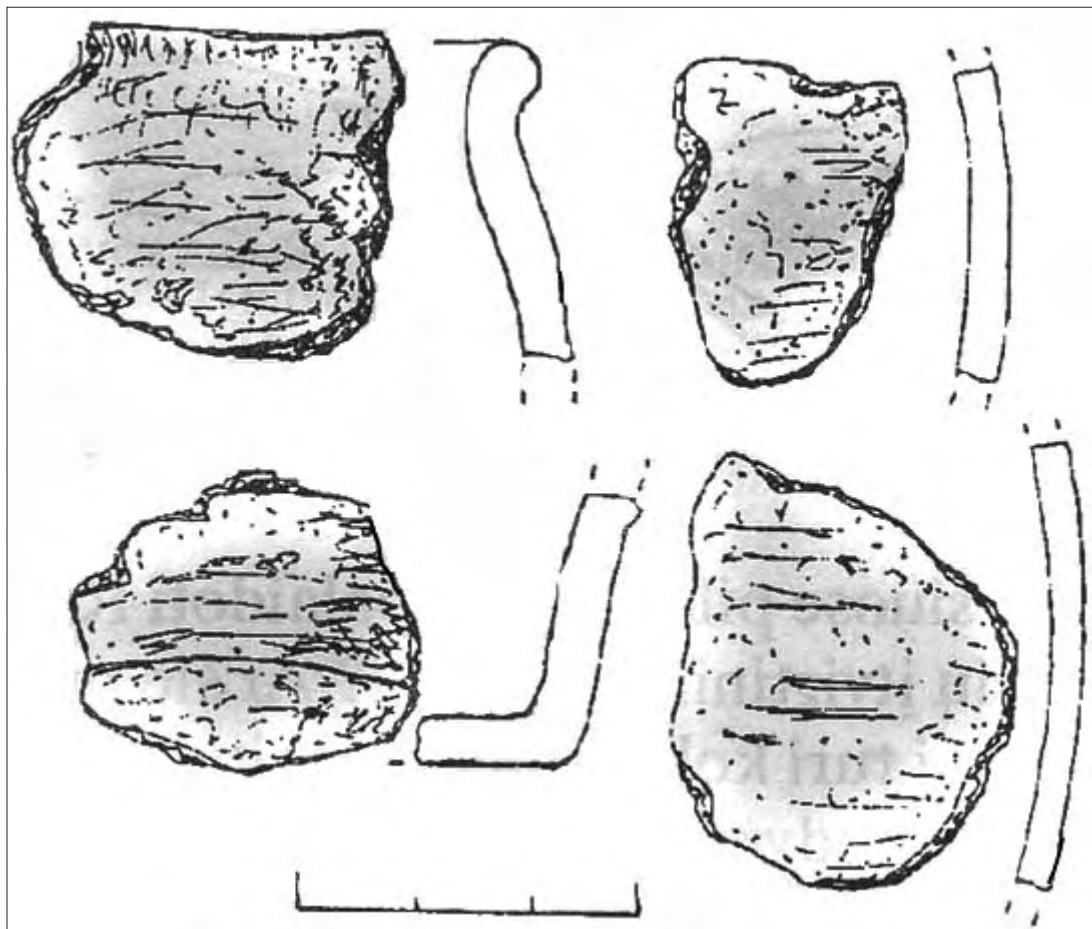


Fig. 11. Thrown pottery found in the top cultural layer of the Papravale hill-fort and in the Rekučiai "Gate" area.



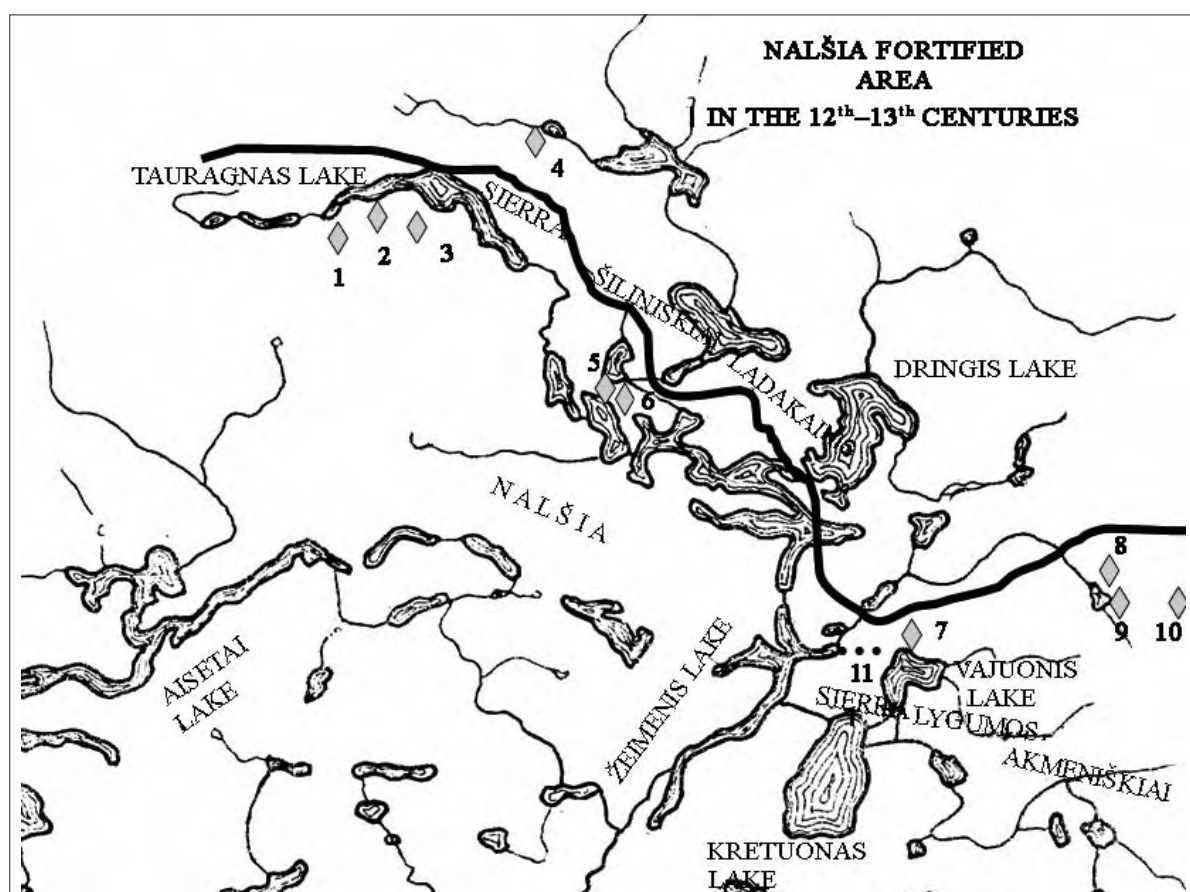


Fig. 12. The northern part of the Nalšia defence line: 1 Tauragnai hill-fort (1st mil. - beginning of 2nd mil.); 2 Taurapolis hill-fort (1st mil. - 15th cen.); 3 Sēla hill-fort (1st mil.); 4 Šeimatis hill-fort (1st mil. - beginning of 2nd mil.); 5 Papiliakalnē hill-fort (1st mil.); 6 Ginučiai hill-fort (first half of 2nd mil.); 7 Papravālē hill-fort (1st mil. - beginning of 2nd mil.); 8 Velioniai hill-fort (1st mil.); 9 Mažulonys hill-fort (1st mil. - 13th cen.); 10 Strakšiškē hill-fort (1st mil.); 11 Rēkučiai defence line (end of 12th - beginning of 13th cen.); 12 the estimated defence line of the northern part of Nalšia (end of 12th - beginning of 13th c.).

and the defence installation is testified to by the contemporaneous wheel-made pottery, dated to the beginning of the second millennium AD, found both at the Papravālē hill-fort and at the “gate” locality (Fig. 11).

Both the geographical situation and the excavated archaeological material show that the Rēkučiai defensive installation was designed to repel attacks of enemy cavalry, to stop it penetrating the area between Lake Vajuonis and Lake Žeimenis into Nalšia from the north (Fig. 12). The reconstruction of the defence installation presented in Zabiela’s article shows that the fortification was designed for the defence of infantry against infantry or cavalry (Zabiela 1992, p.26). However, the archaeological data from the excavations of 1994 would allow the assertion that the vertically hammered stakes found on the southern side of the rampart were apparently intended only to stop the mound of the rampart from sliding. The Rēkučiai fortification was evidently designed for struggles against horsemen. If this defence installation had been designed for foot soldiers battling against other foot soldiers or horsemen, then quite a lot of defenders would have been needed for

the rampart’s towers for the two-kilometre frontal defence. Additional guards on horseback were necessary, with a mobile cavalry troop in case of enemy penetration. The rulers of Nalšia, as suggested by the military organisation of the 12th and 13th centuries, could not yet maintain such a constant amount of soldiers for the wall’s defence. Even at the Battle of Durbē there were about 150 fallen Livonian brothers, and that was considered a large military force for that time. Of course, these brothers could have had the same number of servants and weapon-bearers. However, only a troop of cavalry could block an enemy’s sudden penetration into a particular defended area. Evidently, the cavalry of Nalšia also had to defend the Rēkučiai defensive fortification.

Four barrows in the Rēkučiai (Pavajuonis) barrow cemetery, located about 180 metres north of the central defensive fortification area, are distinguished from others by their size and shape. The largest has a diameter of 42 metres, two others over 30 metres, and one other over 22 metres. Aside from these barrows and those in the Sudota barrow cemetery (in the Švenčionys dis-

trict, four kilometres south of Švenčionėliai), no other barrows of such a size are known in Lithuanian territory. Perhaps the defenders of the Rėkučiai fortification were buried in these barrows? Whether or not these barrows have any connection with the fortification will be investigated in future excavations.

The Rėkučiai defence installation had much strategic significance in the first quarter of the second millennium. The inhabitants of Nalšia did not choose this area by chance. A water way was already known here since the Stone Age: the River Žeimenas, followed by a channel of lakes and small rivers up to the River Daugava. Moreover, this region was already densely populated since the Stone Age. This is suggested by the Iron Age barrow cemeteries along the shores of the River Žeimenas and Lake Žeimenis; the concentration of barrow cemeteries in these places is the largest in all of Lithuania. These barrows show that there were settlements nearby in the first and second millennia. Settlements were typically established near large roads. One such settlement, dated to the 14th century, was recently investigated on Lake Kretuonas' Plikoji Island (Štavičius 1994, pp.75-78). Another large settlement was in the territory of the current village of Rėkučiai.

The fortification of the area between Lake Žeimenis and Lake Vajuonis creates a natural defensive system of water that extends approximately 30 kilometres to the northwest and about 20 kilometres to the east and southeast. Many well-known hill-forts with adjacent settlements are found in the secured line of these natural barriers (lakes, rivers, hill crests): those of Ginučiai, Linkmenys (Ignalina district), Taurapilis, Tauragnai and Sėla (Utena district). East of the rampart, the defensive system of water was strengthened by the Papravalė, Mažulonys (Ignalina district) and other hill-forts. Moreover, this defensive tract has many hill crests, natural environmental barriers to cavalry. This includes the Šiliniškiai-Ladakalnis hillcrest northwest of the Rėkučiai defence fortification and the hill crest in the Lygumos-Akmeniškiai village territory east of Rėkučiai, that connects with the Daugėliškis hilly area at Ignalina. Thus, a northwest-east-southeast, approximately 50-kilometre-long defensive line was created both by people and by nature (Fig. 12). Taking into account the first millennium's first quarter's environmental situation (forests, rivers, bogs), the hill-forts' placement on high crests and their unification by agreed upon fire (beacon) signals, a sudden and unobserved invasion into Nalšia from the north and northeast in the 12th and 13th centuries was impossible.

## Defence from what?

In defence from what enemies was the Rėkučiai defence installation built? One would think that there could have been various different enemies, because the radiocarbon dating of the rampart's remains covers the junction of the 12th and 13th centuries. In dating the Rėkučiai rampart to the 13th century, it would be possible to assert that the Lithuanians were defending themselves against Selonian or Slavic attacks. The first variant is confirmed by linguistic and ethnographic research data. The Rėkučiai defensive fortification corresponds to the northern and northeastern boundary of the Dzūkai dialect area and coincides with the historical southern and southeastern boundary of Selonian expansion.

The number of Lithuanian enemies from the northeast and north increased at the beginning of the 13th century. First, the Livonian Order consolidated near the River Daugava in this period, and the Russian duchies of Polotsk and Pskov spread their influence. Lithuanians, the inhabitants of Nalšia, began to attack intensively the area along the Daugava at the beginning of the 13th century (Baranauskas 2000, pp.172-180; Gudavičius 1989, pp.30-35). Perhaps in fear of retaliatory attacks, they strengthened their defence line, into which the Rėkučiai defence installation fell (Fig. 13).

Moreover, the Livonian Chronicle does not mention the Rėkučiai area. Localities west of the defence line are mentioned more often. Apparently, the enemy had reliable information about this defence line and forced its way into Lithuanian lands through the western flank.

A judgement concerning the time that the Rėkučiai defensive rampart was built can also be made from historical information. Events before 1212 unfolded especially unfavourably for the Lithuanians, as Livonia and Polotsk formed an alliance directed against them in 1212 (Latvis, Vartbergē 1991, p.81). Other events that occurred later in the north also unfolded unfavourably for the Lithuanians: the Lithuanian alliance with Novgorod failed in 1213; Daugerutis, the treaty's creator, perished (Latvis, Vartbergē 1991, p.81). In addition, the Kuoknese castle in Latgala was subjugated by Polotsk. These events could have induced the Lithuanians to build the Rėkučiai fortification. According to these facts, we can guess the time that the defence installation was built, between 1213 and 1236 (the year of the Battle of Saulė), when the Samogitians became the main rivals of the Livonian Order, rather than the east Lithuanians. In the second half of the 13th century, relations with Gerdenis, Duke of Polotsk and Nalšia, improved. Gerdenis was even the suzerain of Polotsk (Polotskie gramoty 1980, pp.110-123).

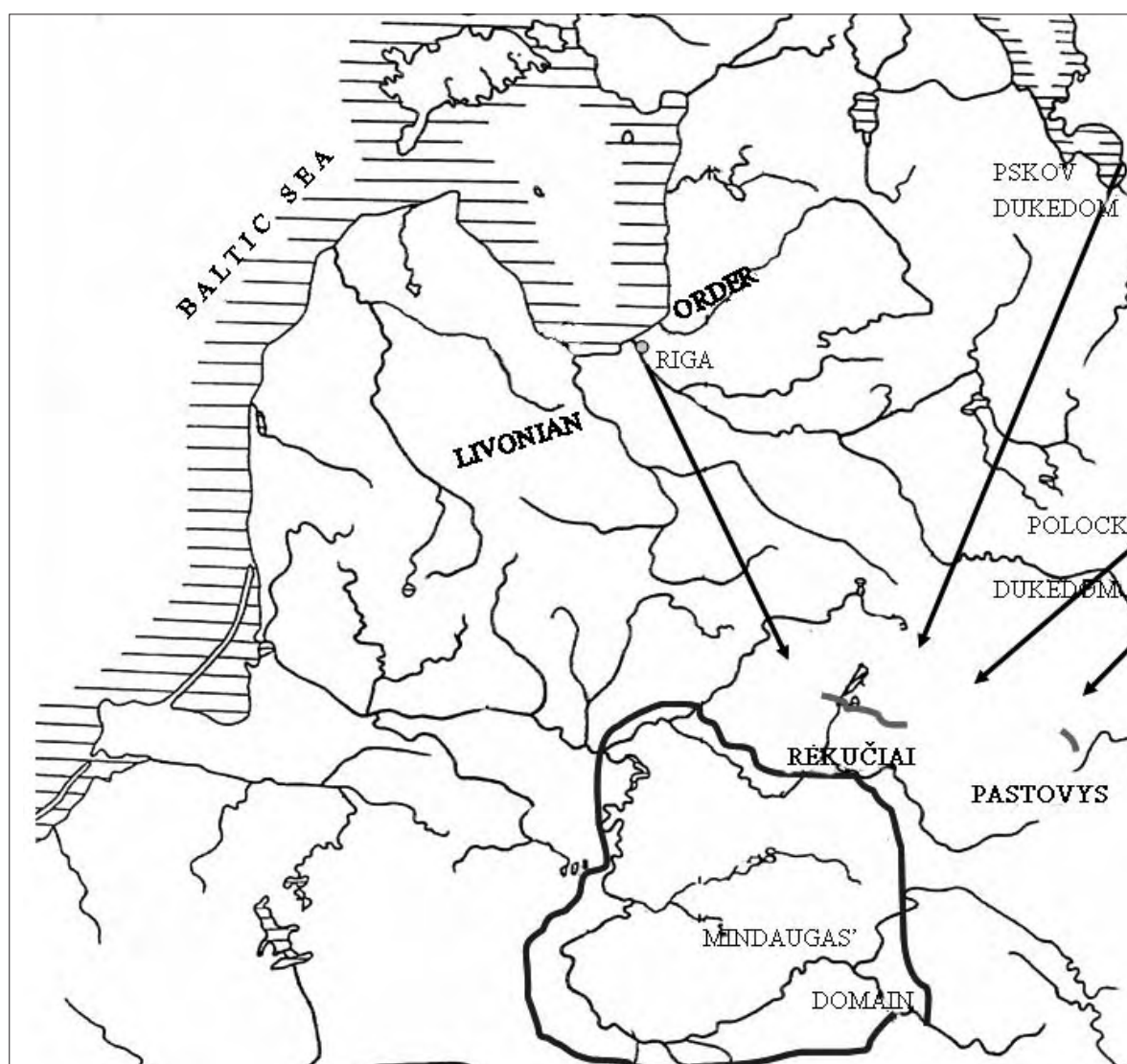


Fig. 13. Nalšia's defence at the beginning of the 13th century.

The 14th century would be too late a date for the Rėkučiai defence installation, since battles with the mentioned enemies resulted in an expansion of Lithuanian lands, and the defence line lost its earlier strategic significance. At this point, defence lines were drawn not by the fortifications of separate duchies, but rather on the scale of the Lithuanian state's entire castle system.

### Conclusions

1. Research into the Rėkučiai defence installation shows that it consisted of: a) an enclosure opposite a ditch; b) a ditch whose width measured up to five metres and depth up to 1.5 metres; c) a wooden, framework-fortified and earth-covered, up to 1.5 to two-metre-high and 6.3-metre-wide rampart, whose front slope was reinforced with rocks; d) a fortification that strengthened the rampart's southern and the slope's northern sides; e) a wall on the rampart from the front side (informa-

tion about this wall is scarce). Its structure corresponds with the rampart and ditch installations of hill-forts in Baltic tribe territory in the tenth to 13th centuries, as well as with the defensive fortifications utilised in the Viking period in Western Europe.

2. The Rėkučiai defence installation was a strategic military installation at the time when the Lithuanian state was forming. Its purpose was to stop a sudden enemy attack and not to allow cavalry to pass one part of Nalšia's northern defence line.

3. The Rėkučiai defensive rampart could have been used in battles against the Slavs (Polotsk, Pskov) until the beginning of the 13th century, and in Lithuanian battles against the Livonian Order at the beginning of the 13th century.

Translated by Indrė Antanaitis-Jacobs

## VIII

ARMAMENTS  
AND  
DEFENSIVE  
SYSTEMS

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## BESIFORMUOJANČIOS LIETUVOS VALSTYBĖS GYNIBINIS ĮRENGINYS

### Algirdas Girininkas

#### Santrauka

Rėkučių gynybinis įrenginys yra Švenčionių raj., Švenčionėlių sen., Pakretuonės miške, tarp Žeimenio ir Vajuonio ežerų (1–3 pav.). Rėkučių gynybinis pylimas pirmą kartą paminėtas F. Pokrovskio sudarytame Vilniaus gubernijos archeologiniame žemėlapyje. Čia nurodyta, kad vieno varsto (1,067 km) atstumu nuo Rėkučių yra 150 sieksnių (319,5 m) ilgio pylimas. Apie Rėkučių pylimą rašė mažai kam žinomas archeologas V. Kaširskis, kuris 1906 m. gynybinį įrenginį net tyrinėjo. Tačiau jame nieko neradęs, žinias apie paminklą paliko tik tyrinėjimų dienoraštyje. A. Spicynas, V. Kaširskio mokytojas, po savo mokinio mirties paskelbė visus jo tyrinėjimų dienoraščius. Tačiau iš šio pranešimo, be to, kad toks gynybinis įrenginys egzistavo, ko nors ypatingesnio nesužinota. Rėkučių pylimas įtrauktas ir į P. Tarasenkos sudarytus archeologinių paminklų sąrašus. Rėkučių gynybinį įrenginį iš naujo 1989 m. aptiko Kretuono archeologinė ekspedicija.

Išlikusio gynybinio įrenginio ilgis siekia 845 m, o pylimo aukštis ir šalia esančio griovio gylis nevienodas. Aukščiausia pylimo vieta yra apie 1,1 m (nuo dabartinio žemės paviršiaus), o plotis ties pagrindu svyruoja nuo 5 iki 6,3 m. Šalia pylimo iš šiaurinės pusės, nuo kurios būdavo laukiama priešo antpuolių, yra išlikęs griovys, kurio plotis visoje gynybinio įrenginio dalyje yra 4,5–5,5 m.

1990, 1991 ir 1994 m. Rėkučių gynybinį įrenginį tyrinėjo Kretuono archeologinė ekspedicija bei Našios muziejus. Tyrinėtose vietose gynybinio įrenginio plotis siekė 11 m. Pylimo plotis ties pagrindu – 6,3 m, aukštis – 1 m, griovio gylis iki pylimo pagrindo – 1,5 m, o jo plotis – 5 m (VII: 3 iliustr.). Tyrinėjant pylimą paaiškėjo, kad po juo iš pušinių rąstų buvo su-ręsta rentinio formos konstrukcija, o į susidariusius iki 1,5 m tarpus pripildyta smėlio iš greta, šiaurinėje pylimo pusėje, iškasto iki 5 m pločio griovio (4 pav.). Taip susidarė apatinės pylimo dalies karkasas (5–7 pav.). Karkaso rąstų skersmenys buvo nuo 14 iki 20 cm. Tyrinėjimų metu gynybiniame įrenginyje, išorinėje griovio pusėje, aptikta ir statmenai į pagrindą įkaltų stulpų liekanų: stulpai turėjo sudaryti neišlikusią antžeminę užtvaros dalį, buvusią iš šiaurinės pusės priešais griovį. Iki 15 cm skersmens kuolai buvo nusmailinti ir 30 cm nuo dabartinio žemės paviršiaus įkalti į žemę. Priešais

griovį buvo aptikta iki 35 cm gylio į gruntą įkaltų kuo-  
lų. Manoma, kad jie buvo neatskiriama viso gynybinio  
įrenginio sudėtinė dalis. Griovio šlaitą nuo pylimo pu-  
sės ir dalį pylimo stiprino aptikti 6 x 10 x 20 cm dydžio  
akmenys. Šiaurinį pylimo pakraštį tvirtino gulsčių rąstų  
eilė. Tyrinėjimų metu nustatyta, kad medinė pylimo  
karkaso dalis buvo degusi, nes aptikta pelenų, perdegusių  
rąstų, iki raudonumo perdegusio smėlio (8 pav.). Į  
pietus nuo tyrinėto pylimo pirmojo ploto, Ravoko upe-  
lio šlaito pusėje, atsidengė žagre arto lauko dalis. Todėl  
manoma, kad pylimo naudojimo metu ši žemdirbystei  
skirta vieta buvo atvira.

Tam tikroje Rėkučių pylimo vietoje galėjo būti bokš-  
tas. Buvęs Palūšės parapijos klebonas V. Aliulis mini,  
kad iki nesenų laikų vienas klonelis Pakretuonės miške,  
netoli gynybinio pylimo, buvo vadinamas „Vokės gele-  
žiniais vartais“. Pagal vietinių gyventojų pasakojimus,  
„Geležiniai vartai“ buvo vakarinėje Vilnius–Daugpilis  
geležinkelio pusėje, maždaug 100 m į vakarus nuo jo  
ir 90–100 m į pietus nuo pylimo (2 pav.). Nurodytoje  
vietoje, iškasus du bandomuosius šurfus, buvo aptikti  
keli skaldyti akmenys ir dvi žiestos puodų šukės, labai  
panašios į Papravalės piliakalnyje aptiktas puodų šu-  
kes. Tikėtina, kad „broma“ galėjusi būti apžvalgos ar  
gynybinis bokštas, esantis už pylimo į pietus ginamoje  
teritorijoje, ir su gynybiniu įrenginiu sudarė bendrą gy-  
nybos sistemą. Tokia gynybos sistema, kai apžvalgos  
bei įtvirtinti bokštai statyti vidinėje ištinės gynybinės  
sienos pusėje, žinoma dar iš romėnų kovų su barbarais  
(germanais) laikų.

Rėkučių įrenginys buvo tik dalis gynybinės linijos,  
kuri tęsėsi į šiaurės vakarus ir rytus. Į jos sistemą įėjo  
vienalaikiai piliakalniai ir natūralios gamtinės kliūtys:  
ežerai, kalnagūbriai, upės. Todėl šiaurės vakarų–rytų–  
pietryčių kryptimi susidarytų apie 50 km bemaž tiesi  
žmonių ir pačios gamtos sukurta gynybinė linija. At-  
sižvelgiant į I tūkstantmečio pirmojo ketvirčio gamti-  
nę situaciją ir ant aukštų gūbrių esančius piliakalnius,  
XII–XIII a. staigiai ir nepastebimai įsiveržti priešui į  
Nalšios žemę iš šiaurės ir šiaurės rytų pusės buvo neį-  
manoma (12 pav.).

Rėkučių gynybinio įrenginio analogijų žinoma iš Vo-  
kietijos ir Danijos pasienio. Ten VIII a. datuojama gy-  
nybinė siena Kovirke (Cow wall), esanti tarp Selk ir  
Kl. Rheide gyvenviečių, piečiau Dennewerk, buvo  
skirta kovoms prieš Karolingus (9, 10 pav.). Šis įvirti-  
nimas yra labai artimas Rėkučių įtvirtinimui tiek struk-  
tūra, tiek forma. Tik Kovirke įtvirtinimas yra dviem  
metrais platesnis ir galėjo būti 1 metru aukštesnis.  
Analogiškų gynybinių įrenginių paliko prūsų gentys.  
Jų būta Kuršių nerijoje ties Krancu, Olendry ir kt. vie-  
tovėse. Prūsų žemes vieną nuo kitos skyrė vadinamoji

niekieno žemė (dykra). Abiejose dykros pusėse prūsai  
įrengdavo pylimų sistemas, medžių užtvaras su sargy-  
bos bokšteliais. Dažnai medžių užtvaras sustiprindavo  
užpildami jas žemėmis ir akmenimis.

Pylimus su šalia esančiais grioviais nuo stepių klajo-  
klių statė Kijevo Rusia. Panašius gynybinius įtvirtini-  
mus turėjo ir Pavolgio bulgarai.

Nuo kokių priešų ginantis buvo pastatytas Rėkučių gy-  
nybinis įrenginys? Reikėtų manyti, priešai galėjo būti  
įvairūs, nes radiokarboninis pylimo liekanų datavimas  
apima XII–XIII a. sandūrą. Rėkučių pylimą datuojant  
iki XIII a., galima būtų teigti, kad lietuviai gynėsi nuo  
sėlių ar slavų antpuolių. Pirmąją versiją patvirtina kal-  
biniai ir etnografinių tyrinėjimų duomenys. Rėkučių  
gynybinis įtvirtinimas atitinka šiaurinę ir šiaurės rytų  
dzūkų tarmės arealo ribą, sutampa su istorine sėlių iš-  
plitimo pietine ir pietryčių riba.

XIII a. pradžioje lietuviams priešų iš šiaurės rytų ir  
šiaurės pusės padaugėjo. Pirmiausia šiuo laikotarpiu  
prie Dauguvos upės įsitvirtina Livonijos ordinas, ple-  
čia savo įtaką rusų Polocko ir Pskovo kunigaikštystės.  
XIII a. pradžioje Padauguvį intensyviai pradeda puldi-  
nėti lietuviai – Nalšios žemės gyventojai. Gal bijodami  
priešų atsakomųjų antpuolių, stiprino savo gynybi-  
nę liniją, į kurią įėjo ir Rėkučių gynybinis įrenginys  
(13 pav.).

XIV a. Rėkučių gynybinį įrenginį datuoti būtų jau per  
vėlu, nes kovose su minėtais priešais Lietuvos žemės  
išsiplėtė, gynybinė linija neteko ankstesnės strateginės  
reikšmės. Gynybines linijas jau sudarė ne atskirų ku-  
nigaikštysčių įtvirtinimai, o Lietuvos valstybės mastu  
formuojama ištisa pilių sistema.