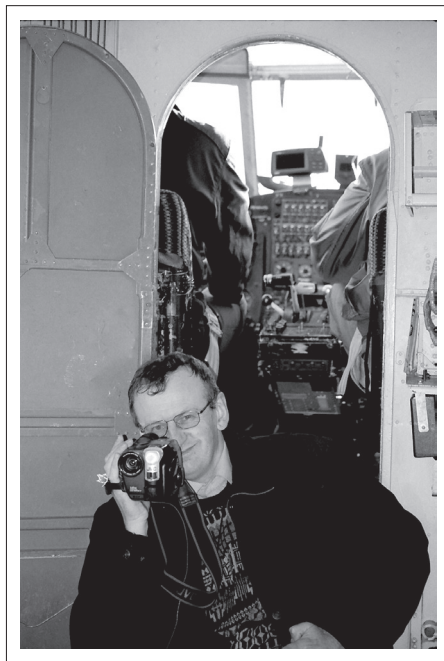


## AN ARCHAEOLOGIST AND HIS ROAD TO VORUTA

### ALBINAS KUNCEVIČIUS

My friend and colleague Gintautas Zabiela is celebrating his fiftieth birthday. I first learned about this from my colleagues at Klaipėda University, Vladas Žulkus, and Audronė Bliujienė, the editor of this publication, who decided to mark the anniversary by dedicating this issue of *Archaeologia Baltica* to him. They asked me for an assessment of Gintautas Zabiela's work, and I agreed with great pleasure. We have known each other for years. I know his work thoroughly, I consult it regularly, and quote from it during my lectures and in my own work. And I suggest that archaeology students do the same.



Gintautas Zabiela takes aerial photographs of hill-forts for the Atlas of Lithuanian Hill-Forts; January 2005 (photograph by Z. Baubonis).

I accepted, but it took me a long time to get round to it. This is an honourable jubilee. Therefore, it would be unfair to simply enumerate his past work or repeat exhaustive data about his person and his career, espe-

cially considering his busy schedule and his inquisitive mind, and his willingness to see and learn anything.

I racked my brains for quite a while, trying to think how I could tell readers about my friend. I tried one way, but quickly became bored, as what I had written seemed more appropriate for a jubilee toast or a formal report. Then I tried another way, but again something was wrong. And then I had the idea that the best thing to do would be to have an informal talk with Gintautas. An interview might be unusual for a research publication; but in this case it is the perfect opportunity to tell readers about his, in my opinion, highly successful research career as an archaeologist, and to discuss the situation in archaeology in Lithuania at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

*Associate Professor Dr Gintautas Zabiela, I have invited you for a talk, because my friends and your colleagues from Klaipėda University have asked me to write an article on your work and about you to mark the occasion of your fiftieth birthday. First, I got a call from Professor Vladas Žulkus, and then from Dr Audronė Bliujienė, editor of the university's publication Archaeologia Baltica. Audronė also asked me, 'You know, Gintas has a good sense of humour, so maybe you can try and write something "informal". I tried, but the result was not exactly what I'd wanted. I think I know you quite well: we are nearly the same age, we both work on the archaeology of historical times; we meet quite often to discuss issues concerning archaeology or monument protection; and we've had the chance to spend longer together on several occasions (such as on that bus trip from Germany, or at Bamberg University's conference on Mediaeval archaeology). But let's start from the beginning. I know that you were born on 11 May 1962 in Vaitkuškis, in the Anykščiai district, but went to Leliūnai secondary school in the Utena district, and left in 1980 with a gold medal. I've even tried to find Vaitkuškis on Google, but could not; although, as far as I remember, when we were passing*



With his parents in the village of Vaitkuškis (in the Anykščiai district) in 1964.

*Leliūnai once, you mentioned that it was the village where you were born.*

That's right, I went to Leliūnai secondary school. I was born ten kilometres from Leliūnai, in the village of Vaitkuškis, which is in the Anykščiai district. There used to be a single farmstead there in the 19th century, and then two farmsteads in the first half of the 20th century. That's where I was born. There is nothing left there now. Land reclamation destroyed everything. In 1968, my parents moved to the village of Juškonys, situated two kilometres away. I went to primary school in Juškonys, and then, from the fourth grade, I went to Skiemonys secondary school for four years. At that time, they started merging the smaller collective farms into larger ones, so the former Lenin collective farm was joined to the Anykščių šilelis collective farm, and in 1975 my parents moved to Leliūnai. Leliūnai was always a larger centre, and even had a church. Therefore, from the eighth grade till when I completed school, I lived in Leliūnai.

*I am intrigued by the fact that you left secondary school with a gold medal, but you nevertheless chose archaeology. At that time, there was no separate study of archaeology at the university. Why did you choose archaeology? When someone finishes school with excellent results, they can choose from among other more prestigious professions, both nowadays and then. Why archaeology? Even now, in my capacity as a lecturer, I might add that far from every applicant is highly motivated or well informed about his or her future profession.*

When we moved to Leliūnai in the summer of 1978, the history teacher Vidmantas Kutka was looking for people to help in the excavations of Diktarai burial site. They needed five or six people to work there during the summer, for five rubles each. This old burial site was one of the many sites explored by Vytautas Urbanavičius. Most of the burials there date from the 16th century. Diktarai is three or four kilometres from Leliūnai. So we would ride to the excavation site by bike. That was my first encounter with archaeology. During the excavations, I worked as an ordinary worker, a digger, but I enjoyed it. There were excavations, preparations ... and the number of graves found there was quite large, maybe a hundred. We excavated throughout the summer, although, as you know, Vytautas Urbanavičius would always excavate quite fast. We would start digging in the morning, after two or three hours we would have uncovered a grave, and then we would keep busy till the end of the day with the preparation. That was the daily routine. But I enjoyed all those things. I was fascinated by the science and the profession. I began looking at which educational institutions I could enter, and it was clear that there was no choice other than to study history at Vilnius University.

*So you mean that you had no other ideas, only archaeology?*

Only archaeology. I knew what I wanted to do. Even at school, when we had to write essays and fill in all kinds of questionnaires about future professions, my teachers could not quite grasp what I meant by 'an archaeologist'. Of course, they knew what archaeology was, but

I

TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE



Beside the Pedersborg hill-fort in Denmark during the conference 'Castella maris Baltici 5', September 1999.

it was rather strange that a ninth or tenth-grade school-boy was so eager to pursue a career in a profession that was hardly ever mentioned at school.

*Then we can say that to a certain extent it was Vytautas Urbanavičius who inspired your interest in archaeology and guided you. Let's go back to your studies. When you entered the university to study history, at that time it was only possible to specialise from the third year. Did you change your mind during your studies? I remember from my experience that Pranas Kulikauskas, the only archaeologist at the university, had nearly finished working as a lecturer, whereas Aleksiejus Luchtanas, who had recently completed his studies and his military service, was only just beginning. If we compare those times with the present-day state of studies in archaeology at the universities of Vilnius and Klaipėda, the situation then was quite different, and specialised studies, especially the practice, were based on personal aspirations and ambitions.*

As far as my studies were concerned, I tried to go deeper into archaeological subjects on my own. Although Pranas Kulikauskas was still lecturing, he was about to retire. During those two years, Aleksiejus Luchtanas was doing his military service and did not lecture. During the first year of our studies, we took a course entitled 'Fundamentals of Archaeology', and our lecturer was still Associate Professor Pranas Kulikauskas. From then until my third year, when spe-

cialised studies in archaeology began at the university, the period was actually an interregnum. It was a time of generational change. Then Professor Dr Mykolas Michelbertas came to teach at the university, but he came slightly later and did not teach me. Now I joke that I studied archaeology at the university only up to the birth of Christ, and then nobody lectured on later times ... the Iron Age, let alone later times ... I was not taught those subjects at university. On the other hand, there was Vladas Daugudis' specialised course, and a very good course in anthropology by Professor Dr Gintautas Česnys. Also, Dr Jonas Stankus gave lectures on metals and the analysis of them, and Mykolas Michelbertas gave a course in numismatics.

*And what about field trips?*

After my first year, in the summer of 1981, there were excavations at Obeliai burial site, headed by Vytautas Urbanavičius. At that time, they were excavating the burial site on the lake shore. I spent a month or so there. As you know, archaeology covers a wide range of historical periods. However, I was not sure yet which way to turn. I knew that the Stone Age did not appeal to me. Furthermore, by that time, I knew more about research into late-period burial sites and their materials. However, I was trying to vary the possible sites for my field trips as much as I could. After my second year, I joined the Šventoji expedition headed by Dr Rimutė Rimantienė. Although the site



The 5th International Slavonic Conference in Novgorod, Russia, at the end of September 1996. First row, left to right: Valdemaras Šimėnas, A. Maesalu. Back row: Aleksiejus Luchtanas, Ala V. Kviatkovskaya, Vladimir I. Kulakov, Daiva Luchtanienė, Gintautas Zabiela.

dated from the Stone Age, I was curious to see how they excavated it. In the summer of 1983, I took part in the excavations at Giedrio Street, around the present-day Ministry of National Defence, in Vilnius. Those were large-scale archaeological excavations of Medieval Vilnius. They were headed by Vytautas Ušinskas, and there was a large group of archaeologists working with him: Vygandas Juodagalvis, Kęstutis Katalynas, and others. Then, in the autumn of the same year, Vytautas Urbanavičius discovered and began excavating the burials at Obeliai. That was an absolutely unique experience ...

*Obeliai is both a unique monument and a site of impressive excavations. By that time I already worked in the monument protection system, and we went to Obeliai to have a look at the excavations. That was where we first met. It is hardly possible to describe the excavation site to someone who did not see it with his own eyes. A huge pile of mud and bullrushes dug out of the lake, an impressive abundance of machinery mobilised from collective farms, and an unusual washing facility consisting of those machines; fountains of water and mud, the screening of the washed-out mud with a metal detector, which was a rare gadget at that time, and, of course, an abundance of finds. The process was arranged in such a way that it looked like a well-organised conveyor belt, or even a small factory ... A unique monument, and a unique experience ...*

I was entrusted with operating the metal detector. That was what I did most of the time there. I also drove a dumper truck, which would spread on the shore the soil dug out of the lake bottom with an excavator, and then carry the soil and load it into the washing facility. The people who washed the soil were Naglis Puteikis and Rimas Sereičikas. All of this is recorded in Vytautas Urbanavičius' documentary on the finds and excavations at Obeliai. We worked every day, even at weekends, from morning till night. Vytautas Urbanavičius made sure that I was allowed to miss all my commitments at the university, except military training. I worked like that all through September. And in 1984, during my final year, from the spring, I got a job with the Institute for Monument Restoration Design, because I'd already worked on the excavations at Giedrio Street. During my work with the group, the first excavations were carried out at the Arsenal (now the Museum of Applied Arts), where the archaeologists Albertas Lisanka and Vladas Daugudis worked. The summer of 1984 is 'missing', because the university's Department of Military Training took the students to its military training camp for a month and a half. I still managed to go on an archaeological survey expedition in the autumn of 1984 to Obeliai, together with Vytautas Urbanavičius, in search of the old settlement. Late in the autumn of 1984, I think from November, excavations in Vilnius Cathedral began. Large-scale excavation work was carried out there because of the installation of the air-conditioning system. I worked

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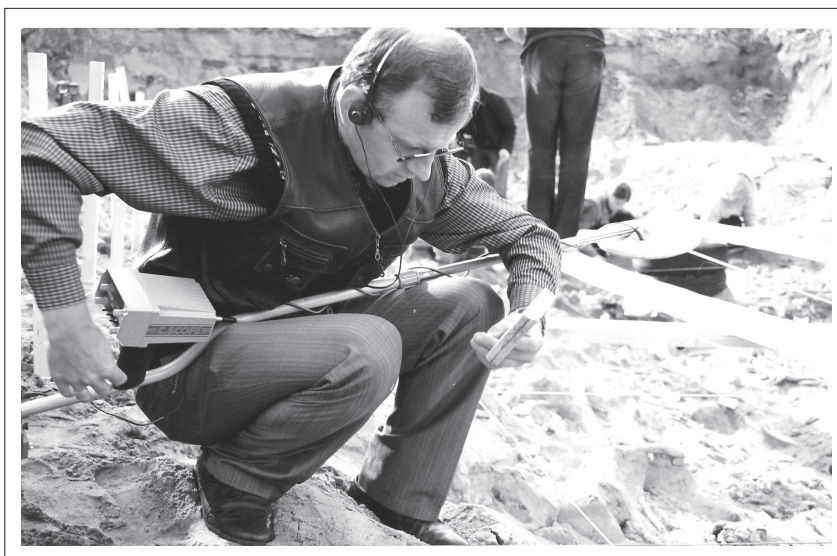
TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE



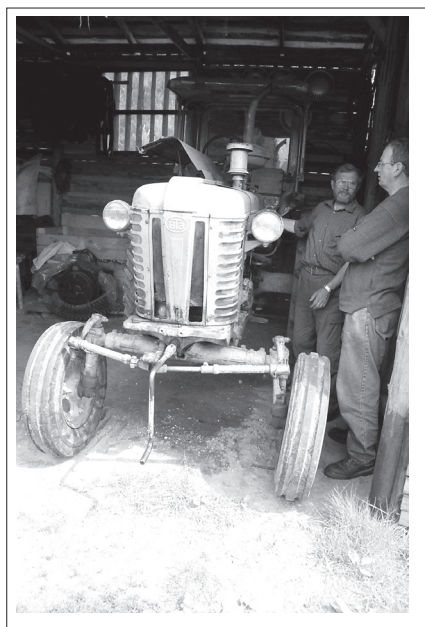
An underwater survey of pile settlements in Lake Luokesai around 2000. Giedrė Motuzaitė and Gintautas Zabiela (right) (photograph by A. Girininkas).



From left: Zenonas Baubonis, Stasys Kasparavičius and Gintautas Zabiela, before a flight to take aerial photographs of Samogitian hill-forts; May 2006.



During archaeological excavations of a cemetery of soldiers in Napoleon's Grande Armée in Vilnius in September 2002.



Gintautas Zabiela talks with the owner of an estate in the Kelmė district about his collection of tractors and other antiquities; July 2004 (photograph by Z. Baubonis).

I

TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE

The discovery of Daubėnai (in the Kretinga district) ancient settlement in December 2011 (photograph by V. Vaitkevičius).



A survey in the Kretinga district in November 2011. Left to right: Gintautas Zabiela, and the students Karolina Gieštaitė and Vita Bukontaitė (photograph by V. Vaitkevičius).



there all through the winter until March. At that time, a personnel shuffle was going on at the Scientific Methodological Council for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage [SMC], a monument protection institution. Romas Olšauskas resigned as head of the Archaeology Department and took another job, and his colleague Bronius Dakanis was appointed as the new head of the department. So, while I was still a university student, I went to work at the SMC's Archaeology Department as a senior methodologist. The first archaeological expedition took place while I was still a student, in 1985, during which staff from the SMC, including both of us, went to Raginėnai. The expedition lasted quite a long time, but the excavation work lasted a very short time ... Besides, we didn't find anything. The main work of the SMC was to survey archaeological monuments in provincial districts. For me, the first assignment was to survey the archaeological monuments of my native Utena district in 1985. Before a survey like that, we would make preparations for a long time, collect all the available material on earlier archaeological surveys, and archival information on potential monuments; and then the actual survey works in the district would last for a couple of months, followed by writing up the report. It was enough work for the whole of 1985.

*If we can go back to your study years ... Although there was perhaps no clear lecture system, your field trips and monuments are quite impressive. Obeliai, as we all now agree, is a unique site. However, Šventoji, Vilnius Cathedral and the excavations in the Old Town at Giedrio Street, which rank among the most extensive excavations so far, or the Arsenal, where a settlement from the Pre-Christian period and a large number of wooden remains of historical Vilnius were found, have all become 'classics' of archaeological excavation, and the importance of the material collected during these excavations is now regarded as the standard. As far as I know, you didn't work long at the SMC, and I assume that your career as an archaeologist and a researcher began after that job. I know from my own experience: the work is interesting, but it is hardly comparable with purely scientific work.*

You may be right. However, I think that at this point I should explain why I chose that particular subject for my scientific research. For my university graduation paper, I selected a subject pertaining to the Iron Age, non-fortified settlements of the Iron Age.

*This is news to me. For some reason, I was sure that you had always been interested only in hill-forts, and*

*it never occurred to me that initially your subject was quite different.*

When I came to work for the SMC, it turned out that Algimantas Merkevičius, who had already worked there for some time, had chosen the same subject, and even published an article with the same title. It was obvious that it was not worth competing in the subject, where the range of research was quite narrow. As I was the second, and besides, Algimantas Merkevičius was slightly older than me, he told me that he wanted to continue working on the subject, and, naturally, I stepped aside. I had to choose another subject. At that time, there were two subjects that had hardly been researched and that were interesting to me: late-period hill-forts and manor sites.

*Did you think of these subjects yourself, or did someone give you a suggestion? I can understand the subject you selected, late-period hill-forts. But this subject is also quite complicated and very wide. Historical times, fragmentary research material published here and there by other archaeologists ... Besides, as far as I remember, Vladas Daugudis also tried to work on the subject. Some research into it was done by Regina Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė and Pranas Kulikauskas. So we might say it was a bold choice. As for manor sites, by that time they had hardly been researched by archaeologists, and they were not actually regarded as objects of archaeological interest. In fact, archaeological research on manor sites is still waiting for dissertations.*

That might be true, although Vladas Daugudis was more interested in the wooden structures found in hill-forts, and if we recall his articles, it is obvious that he was interested in the hill-fort material dating from earlier times. Actually, I didn't think that late-period hill-forts were a complicated subject. To me, they looked full of promise. Hill-forts had been excavated and the archaeological material that had been found in them was kept in museums. Meanwhile, manor sites by that time had not been researched. So the material from manor sites had to be 'dug out' first. Of course, most of the material for archaeological dissertations is 'dug out'. At first, when I had to choose a subject, I had some doubts. Of senior archaeologists, I only knew Vytautas Urbanavičius more or less closely. I met him and told him about my ideas and my reasons. He suggested that I work on late-period hill-forts.

I

TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE



During excavations of the moat of Kaunas Castle: Algirdas Žalnierius and Gintautas Zabiela (right) (photograph by V. Vaitkevičius).



A survey of Rėva forest hill-fort (in the Vilnius district) during a frost of minus 20 degrees in January 2010: Zenonas Baubonis and Gintautas Zabiela (right) (photograph by V. Vaitkevičius).





During the preparation of the 'Atlas of Lithuanian Hill-Forts': Gintautas Zabiela takes a photograph of Berzgainiai hill-fort in the Ukmergė district in 2004 (photograph by Z. Baubonis).

*So this means that in this case, too, Vytautas Urbanavičius was involved in your archaeological choice?*

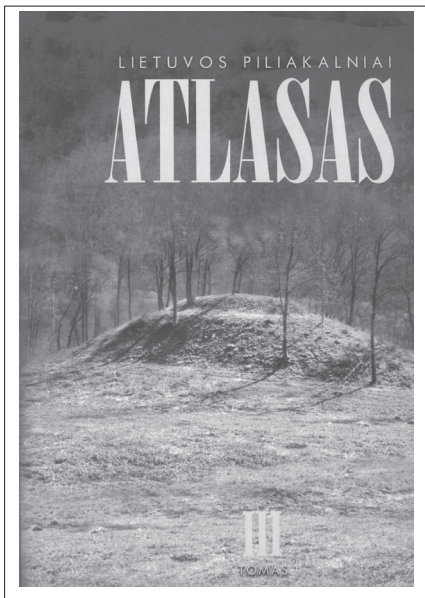
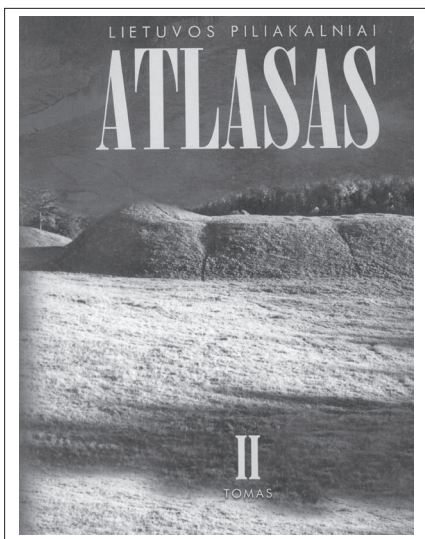
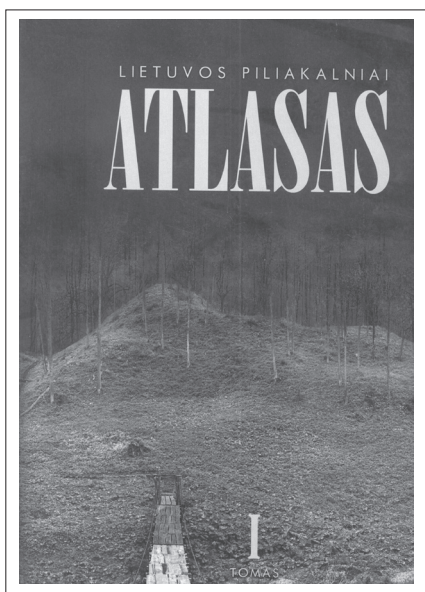
In this case, he was 'involved' as far as I got him 'involved'. In fact, I had no one to give me advice, because I didn't know any other very competent archaeologists so well at that time. So I chose my research subject around 1986, when I was still working at the SMC. I began excavating hill-forts on my own shortly after that. At first they were rather small-scale excavations of Antalgė hill-fort in the Utena district. The necessity to investigate Antalgė hill-fort became obvious after a survey expedition, during which it turned out that the monument had been so badly damaged by cows, and was being virtually destroyed, that there was no other way to preserve it but by excavating. In the autumn of 1986, during the survey expeditions, I discovered the second hill-fort of Antatilčiai in the Ukmergė district. I excavated it in 1987, because there, too, there were archaeological rescue works.

*Can you remind me what exactly happened when you chose the subject for your dissertation? As far as I remember, the subject had to be approved by the Lithuanian Institute of History? Is that right?*

At first, nobody approved the subject I had chosen. It was officially approved slightly later, in 1988, when I went to work at the Institute of History. Then it was mandatory to have the subject declared and approved. I went to work at the institute, because, as you remember, the SMC was only a bureaucratic institution and, along with survey expeditions and reporting, there was a lot of bureaucratic work to do. At that time, the Sąjūdis reform movement appeared in Lithuania, and the Institute of History began expanding. As far as I know, you too were one of the first of the wave of new employees, so to speak.

*I was employed by the institute in 1987, when they started forming a group to research Vilnius' Lower Castle, headed by Vytautas Urbanavičius. Adolfas Tautavičius, the longstanding head of the Archaeology Department, joined the group too. Vytautas Kazakevičius was appointed the new head of the department. Actually, it was a kind of reshuffle, and after a long pause there arose an opportunity to go and work at the institute through an informal tender. I say 'informal', because at that time, at least from 1980, when I graduated from the university, there were no public tenders at all.*

You could say that I came to work at the institute with the 'second wave'. I believe the institute was allowed to increase its staff then, because after me, a little later,



The covers of the first volume of the 'Atlas of Lithuanian Hill-Forts', compiled by Zenonas Baubonis and Gintautas Zabiela in 2005. The complete publication consists of three volumes, which weigh around 15 kilograms.

Arvydas Asadauskas, Kęstutis Jankauskas, Romas Jarockis and Giedrius Puodžiūnas came to work there too. Well, I forgot to mention that I knew Vytautas Kazakevičius, the head of the department at the time, from my student field trip, when he was excavating the Plinkaigalis burial grounds. I took part in that field trip in 1983. The excavation was interesting, but quite complicated, because the ground was so hard that we had to break it with a crowbar. On the other hand, we had interesting visits to the neighbouring regions and monuments, and last but not least, there was excellent fishing. As you know, Vytautas Kazakevičius was a keen angler.

*You worked for quite a long time and in different positions at the institute.*

I began my career at the institute in the autumn of 1988, and I worked there until the very end of 2005. There's another fact that I haven't mentioned: I worked as a senior archaeology expert for the Inspectorate of the Cultural Heritage for five months in 1991.

*Well, you would occasionally return to heritage protection. You haven't moved away from it now, either. When you came to the institute, you found Vladas Daugudis there, doing research into hill-forts. The academician Regina Kulikauskienė was still working there too. Did you have opportunities to communicate with them?*

I had more opportunities to talk to Vladas Daugudis. He still worked at the institute, and for some time we even worked in the same room. However, he would only occasionally come to the office. We would talk for a while, but he did not excavate hill-forts any more at that time, and then he retired altogether. He joined the group doing research into the Vilnius castles, as well as taking part in the excavations of the Hill of Three Crosses. Regina Volkaitė-Kulikauskienė would also occasionally come to the office, and she would not actually get involved in the department's work.

*So you came to the Institute of History, and researched late-period hill-forts ...*

Yes, I had a scientific subject to work on, and the important thing is that at that time the institute had the funds to finance excavations. The choice of the monument to be excavated in 1989 was more related to monument protection, because I went to excavate the decaying hill-fort at Guogai (Piliuona). The excavations were financed by the institute. From there, I went to excavate Mažulonys hill-fort. At that time, in the autumn and winter of 1988, I was sent on an academic

I

TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE



Šeimyniškėliai hill-fort (in the Anykščiai district) from the west, a view of the site in November 2004 (photograph by G. Zabiela).

trip to St Petersburg, and I stayed there for more than a month, until I had collected all the material available about Mažulonys that I needed for my work. I also found the only remaining file of Vladimir Kashirsky, containing his biography and a large number of other interesting items, which deserve a separate and lengthy story. The archives there were huge, but not catalogued at all, and I had to carry out my assignment very quickly. The staff were very friendly, and when I explained to them what the situation was and what I needed, they suggested that I see the director. It turned out that the director of the archives was the archaeologist Alexander Mikhailovich Mikhlayev's wife, and this helped us to understand each other very well. I was able to access the archives freely, and use the materials however I wanted or needed. It was obvious that the main object I'd chosen for excavations was Mažulonys.

#### *But why Mažulonys?*

Earlier excavations, abundant finds, eastern Lithuania. A hill-fort and a region hardly researched. For instance, the hill-forts of Samogitia had been excavated more extensively by that time. Vladas Daugudis had excavated there. When we made arrangements for the expedition, a number of problems arose. First of all, Mažulonys hill-fort was heavily overgrown with trees. It has only recently been cleared of trees and bushes. For that reason, excavations were not possible on the hill. During the first year, we dug a trench across the settlement at the foot of the hill. We also discovered another unknown hill-fort next to the first one. Large-scale works could only begin in 1990. I don't think I even had a driving licence at that time. Anyway, I didn't have a car of my own, that's for sure. All the people involved in the expedition had to get

from Vilnius to Ignalina by train, and then go another seven or eight kilometres by bus. Despite this, I still intended to continue the excavations in Mažulonys in 1990. A wagon for accommodation had already been taken there, but then the economic blockade began. No local buses were running. There were problems with transport and food. Mažulonys is a village, and it was impossible to buy food there. It was at that time that Anykščiai suggested that I should go on an archaeological survey expedition there in the spring.

#### *What exactly do you mean by 'Anykščiai'?*

The manager of the local museum was Vytautas Balčiūnas. There were other enthusiasts and cultural professionals there too ... They even provided the labour and found cheap accommodation ...

#### *So we are talking about the excavations of the Šeimyniškėliai hill-fort?*

At first the intention was to investigate Anykščiai, its area and the prehistoric monuments there, but there was no talk of Šeimyniškėliai at the time. Initially, it was not even included in my plans. It was such a famous, well-known and large hill-fort, that there was no good reason to excavate it. Besides, the question of funding was not quite clear. And last but not least, Mažulonys was already included in the excavation plans. First I surveyed the district's monuments. Among the monuments which we discovered and which had not been known before was the Anykščiai manor site; it is still being researched. A new residential neighbourhood had been designed for that site. As the economic blockade had not yet ended, we excavated only sites within walking distance of Anykščiai. Šeimyniškėliai could

also be reached from the town on foot. Voruta was the legendary hill-fort believed to be the site of Mindaugas' castle. The people of Anykščiai had already started putting the hill-fort, which was overgrown with trees, in order. We dug the first trench, and the very first finds indicated that it was a very solid late-period hill-fort. The finds suggested that it was exactly the site mentioned in the legends. So the excavations were gradually stepped up.

*Nowadays Šeimyniškėliai is not only the site of Voruta, Mindaugas' castle, but also the only Lithuanian hill-fort that has been comprehensively and fully excavated. But let's talk a little about your dissertation. This work, which you defended and then published as a separate book entitled 'Wooden Castles of Lithuania', has become a classic work and, if we are speaking of late-period hill-forts, an indispensable guide to me and to others who are interested in the wooden castles of the Balts.*

Maybe I should mention that the writing process of the dissertation was to some extent influenced by the changing situation. Until then, in Soviet Lithuania, the procedure for defending dissertations was slightly different. Quite often, they were defended in Russian research institutions, and our colleagues who had defended their dissertations in earlier times had had no choice but to write them in Russian. Just like you, I had to wait a little until the new procedure for defending dissertations was worked out. So I waited until 1993.

*How long did the excavations of Šeimyniškėliai hill-fort last? They were large-scale works, and you excavated not only the entire site, but also a huge clay rampart.*

They lasted for twenty years. Sometimes for whole summers, sometimes shorter. It is an area of nearly three thousand square metres. Besides, before that I had seen and even taken part in archaeological excavations in Sweden. I could see how the excavated soil was screened there. We did the same in Šeimyniškėliai. It takes a long time to screen soil. By 1989, we were already allowed to visit West European archaeological centres. The first person to go on such a visit was Vytautas Kazakevičius, who was the head of the department, and then it was my turn. During the visit, it turned out that the Swedes still kept not only part of the finds, but also the reports on the Apuolė excavations. Those were Professor Birger Nerman's archives. In the spring of 1989, Swedish archaeologists came to Lithuania, and one of their intentions was to see Apuolė. They suggested that Birger Nerman's archives be pub-

lished. As I was interested in late-period hill-forts, I got involved in the project, which actually lasted seventy years, because for various reasons the book about the prewar excavations of Apuolė and Birger Nerman's work was only published in 2010.

*And all this time you were working at the Lithuanian Institute of History ...*

For five months in 1991, I worked at the Inspectorate of the Cultural Heritage. It was when the institution was just being established. Although the inspectorate could not be directly involved in archaeological excavations, we nevertheless managed to hold a staff development course at Šeimyniškėliai, which was attended by a number of monument protection personnel, for whom it was their first excavation experience. It was much easier to carry out excavations while working at the Institute of History, because the institute provided financing. During the excavations, it became obvious that there was quite a large number of similar late-period hill-forts, where only small areas had been excavated. Therefore, we decided to excavate at least half the site at Šeimyniškėliai first. Then the decision was taken to excavate the entire hill-fort. From a research point of view, it is important that what we have is not a mosaic made up of parts of different hill-forts, but an image of a single, comprehensively excavated, highly important and solid hill-fort, and a wooden castle.

*At the institute you even worked as deputy manager for research affairs ...*

When I defended my dissertation, I was promoted to the position of senior researcher. Vytautas Kazakevičius, who was the head of the department, had mentioned several times, half-jokingly, that I would be promoted to head the Archaeology Department as soon as I had defended my dissertation. As it later turned out, he wasn't joking. He didn't want or like the bureaucratic work that the head of department had to do. He was an academic researcher in the true sense of the word. He enjoyed doing scientific research and excavating substantial archaeological monuments, but he didn't like routine office work. It was he who recommended me to the management of the institute. When Antanas Tyla became director of the institute, he offered me the position of deputy manager. It was not an empty position, because Arūnas Mickevičius had been in charge of those matters, and he had done a lot as far as publishing was concerned. Then I was given the opportunity to go for a half-year post-doctorate traineeship at Bamberg University in Germany. It goes without saying that I had to resign from all my posts at the institute. I handed



With his wife Aušra, and daughters Migle and Laura, in Vilnius in August 2003.

over my position as department head to Algirdas Girininkas, who had worked at the institute for a number of years, but at that time was working at the Institute for Monument Protection, and was in charge of publishing the magazine *Baltų archeologija* (Baltic Archaeology). He also wanted to go back to academic work.

*We often talk about the fact that following the restoration of the country's independence, archaeological institutions were decentralised. The only purely scientific archaeology institution, not to mention museum and training centre, was split ...*

From today's perspective, the decentralisation was beneficial. Obviously, there was no other way out. All Western countries have several archaeological centres. In those countries, there is no centralisation as there was in Lithuania during Soviet times. Furthermore, it is important that at that time we managed to get rid of a function that was not exactly the function of the Lithuanian Institute of History, granting permits for archaeological excavations. Nowadays, it is the function of institutions for monument protection. Despite various discussions, this was done quite smoothly.

*And how did you end up at Klaipėda University?*

Quite by accident. On the sad day of Vytautas Kazakevičius' funeral in Marijampolė, Algirdas Girin-

inkas, who was then the department head, asked me whether I would be willing to go and work at Klaipėda University, together with him and most of the department's staff. I had no special plans to change my place of work at that time, although I'd always wanted to do some lecturing. It is obvious that the reason for the move was the ever-worsening situation at the Institute of History. The institute had stopped growing, both in terms of quantity and quality. Well, if Algirdas Girininkas and Vidas Žulkus had not invited me, perhaps I would still be working there. The first archaeologist to leave the institute for Klaipėda was Vytautas Kazakevičius. It should be mentioned that the first members of staff to leave the institute for Klaipėda were not junior researchers but the older generation, who had already written their dissertations. Klaipėda University, especially when Vidas Žulkus became rector, had immense growth potential.

*When you started working at Klaipėda University, your archaeological research changed a little too. I've noticed that you are more involved in excavations in the Old Town, and especially on the former castle site in Klaipėda; although you haven't given up hill-forts either.*

I have been excavating hill-forts far less in recent years. Prior to the establishment of Klaipėda University, the main archaeologists in the city had been Vidas Žulkus

and Jonas Genys. They both took managerial positions. The excavations of the town were taken over by other archaeologists. Although I took part in these excavations, from the point of view of earlier excavations, I was more interested in the excavations of the former castle site. As for excavations of hill-forts, the programme for the restoration of hill-forts that were under the threat of destruction, financed by the Department for the Cultural Heritage, was a significant stimulus. I tried to use the funds for excavating a nearly destroyed late-period hill-fort. That way, as many as ten hill-forts were excavated.

*I would say that, along with your book about wooden castles, another very important work of yours is 'The Atlas of Lithuanian Hill-Forts'. Probably that was prompted by your interest in hill-forts too?*

Thanks to my interest in hill-forts, I've collected a lot of material. Besides, it was important to know the exact number of hill-forts in Lithuania. New, previously unknown hill-forts are discovered almost every year. The earlier 1975 edition of the atlas of hill-forts was not exhaustive. The descriptions were very short, the illustrations were few and of poor quality, and the publication contained no plans or maps. The publication of the new atlas of hill-forts was financed by the Ministry of National Defence. The preparation of the atlas took two years. Zenonas Baubonis and I had to visit more than a thousand places. Some of them had to be visited several times, for the photographs or the plans.

*The monograph 'Wooden Castles of Lithuania', 'The Atlas of Lithuanian Hill-Forts' ... what other major research works would you like to mention?*

'A History of Archaeology'. Pranas Kulikauskas was my lecturer, but we were not on close terms. We had the opportunity to discuss things in detail when he was celebrating his jubilee. He had prepared the outlines of his lectures, but we both agreed that the text of the future book should be supplemented with archival data and illustrations.

Our talk ends with Gintautas Zabiela's story of his move to Klaipėda University. His colleagues and students could give a better assessment of his work there.

After our talk, it is clear that it is possible to achieve a lot in archaeology, research and life if you know exactly what you want, and try to achieve your goals through hard work. Gintautas Zabiela's childhood

dream has come true. Despite the changing circumstances, which were not always favourable, he has remained faithful to the targets of his chosen area of research and his life. He chose a subject and monuments to research on his own, and then for the first time in Lithuania, and perhaps in all the Baltic lands, he conducted comprehensive research into a hill-fort, which gave him the opportunity to claim and prove that the site of the legendary castle of Voruta was the hill-fort of Šeimynėliškiai, not far from his home village.

I would like to congratulate my friend and colleague on this important anniversary. I would also like to congratulate him for all his past work, and I'm sure that there are a lot of publications and finds ahead. Good luck!

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I

TO  
GINTAUTAS  
ZABIELA,  
A FRIEND  
AND COLLEAGUE