

Kernavė (Lithuania)

No 1137

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Republic of Lithuania
<i>Name of property:</i>	Kernavė Archeological Site (Cultural Reserve of Kernavė)
<i>Location:</i>	Vilnius county, Širvintos district, Kernavė town.
<i>Date received:</i>	23 January 2003
<i>Category of property:</i>	

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*. In terms of *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* this is a *cultural landscape*.

Brief description:

Kernavė Archeological Site, in eastern Lithuania, represents an exceptional testimony to some 10 millennia of human settlements in this region. In the valley of the River Neris, the site has preserved the traces of ancient land use, as well as remains of five impressive hill forts, part of an exceptionally large defence system. Kernavė was an important feudal town in the Middle Ages. It was destroyed by the Teutonic Order in late 14th century, but the site has continued in use till the modern times.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The archaeological site of Kernavė is situated in the eastern part of Lithuania, about 35 km northwest of Vilnius. The landscape in this region consists of sandy hills and results from the formations generated during the retreat of the last glacier. The earliest human settlements date from the late Paleolithic period (9th to 8th millennia BCE). The valley of the river Neris occupies the major part of the cultural reserve. The land use is characterised by hayfields and pinewoods. The lowest parts of the valley are partly marshlands.

Kernavė is a complex ensemble of archaeological properties, encompassing five hill-forts, some unfortified settlements, burial sites and other archaeological monuments dating to the late Paleolithic period to the Middle Ages. In the centre of the cultural reserve, at the edge of the upper terrace, there are four hill-forts standing beside each other. The fifth hill-fort, distanced eastwards about 0.5 km from the main group, dominates the cape of the terrace created by the deep canyon of the Kernavė stream. The settlements, a burial site and historical monuments dating back to the Iron Age occupy the remaining part of the upper terrace.

At the foot of the hill-forts, in the Pajauta valley (ca 25 ha), there are the remains of the medieval town of Kernavė under the alluvial deposits of the river Neris.

The unfortified settlements and burial sites of the Stone and Iron Ages were situated close to the river in the narrow stretch of the riverside. The largest burial site of the 13th-14th centuries is localized on the upper terrace of the river Neris, northwards from the Kriveikiškis Hill-fort.

The later periods of history are represented by the sites of the Kriveikiškis village (15th-19th centuries), the town of Kernavė II (15th-20th centuries), the estate of Kriveikiškis (15th-20th centuries CE), the remains of the old church of Kernavė (15th-19th cent.) and related sites.

The nominated area consists of the following properties:

A. Hill forts: a) Kernavė hill-fort I, also known as the Aukuro Kalnas, Barščiu Kalnas, Šventas Kalnas (1st cent. BCE-14th cent. CE; 1.3 ha); b) Kernavė hill-fort II, also known as Mindaugo Sostas (4th-14th cent. CE; 1.08 ha); c) Kernavė hill-fort III with a settlement, (7.4 ha); Lizdeikos Kalnas, also known as Smailiakalnis, Kriveikiškio Piliakalnis (6th-14th cent. CE); d) Kernavė hill-fort IV, also known as Pilies Kalnas, Igulos Kalnas, Piliavietė (13th-10th cent. BCE to 6th-14th cent. CE; 5.82 ha). e) The Kernavė, Kriveikiškis Hill-Fort (14th cent. CE; 1.48 ha).

B. Ancient settlements: a) The ancient town of Kernavė (13th-14th cent. CE; 23.87 ha). b) The ancient town of Kernavė II (15th-20th cent. CE; 0.75 ha); c) The ancient settlement of Kernavė (from 9th-8th millennia BCE to 4th-5th cent. CE; 26.87 ha); d) The ancient settlement of Semeniskės I (4th to 8th cent. CE; 5.21 ha); e) The ancient settlement of Semeniskės II (2nd-3rd to 5th cent. CE; 4,7 ha).

C. Burial sites: a) The burial site of Kernavė (8th to 1st cent. BCE; 0.75 ha); b) The Kernavė, Kriveikiškis burial site (13th-14th cent. CE; 8.01 ha).

D. Other built structures: a) The site of the old church of Kernavė (15th-19th cent. CE; 1.2 ha); b) The site of the Kriveikiškis village (15th-19th cent. CE; 2.88 ha); c) The site of the Kernavė, Kriveikiškis estate (15th-20th cent. CE; 5.39 ha); d) The wooden chapel (18th cent.); e) The masonry chapel-tomb (19th cent.); f) The parsonage (1881).

History

The earliest reliable reference to Kernavė is from 1279, and the site has been associated with various legends and stories in later times. Over the past 25 years, the history of the site has been subject to archaeological research, which has contributed to clarify various aspects especially in the early development.

The earliest traces of inhabitants have been discovered at the river Neris in the Pajauta valley. The representatives of the Swiderian culture, late Paleolithic Age hunters, came here in the 9th-8th millennia BCE, followed by more settlements in the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, due to the river rich in fish, and the vast hunting terrain on the upper terrace of Neris.

The first centuries CE have been called the Golden Age in the culture of the Baltic people. The development of iron making from bog ore, and the intensification of agriculture and stockbreeding accounted for a demographical growth. From the 1st to 4th centuries CE, large settlements were scattered over several kilometres on the banks of Neris and in the Pajauta valley. Some hills were adapted to defence (Aukuro Kalnas, Mindaugo Sostas and Lizdeikos Kalnas Hill-Forts). During the great migration of peoples at the end of the Roman period, the wooden fortifications of Aukuro Kalnas were burnt down by nomads, possibly the Huns, and the settlements in the Pajauta valley were deserted. The climate also deteriorated; the level of ground water became higher, and living in the valley was no more possible. New settlements were established on the upper terrace of the river in the vicinity of the hill-forts.

The ancient tribal centre became an important feudal castle at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries. The residence of a duke was set up on Aukuro Kalnas, the other hill-forts serving for defence. Craftsmen and merchants settled down at the hill-forts. By the mid 13th century, Kernavė was a feudal town. The craftsmen working for the ducal court inhabited the upper part of the town on the Pilies Kalnas Hill-Fort. Specialised craftsmen lived in the lower town in the Pajauta valley. Each homestead (7-9 acres), surrounded by high fences, contained several buildings: a dwelling house and two or three workshops. The burial ground was situated outside the town in the Kriveikiškis Hill-Fort. Funeral customs, as well as the discovered cerecloths, reflect not only the traditions of the last pagan state in Europe, but also attest the influence of neighbouring Christian countries.

The most flourishing period of medieval Kernavė was from the end of the 13th century to the first half of the 14th century. Kernavė was one of the major towns of Lithuania, as well as a grand ducal residence. In 1365, it was attacked and devastated by the Teutonic Order. Another assault by the same order finally destroyed the ancient capital of Lithuania in 1390. The town and the castles were never rebuilt. The inhabitants settled on the uppermost terrace on the site of the present town. The remains of the ancient town were covered with thick alluvial deposit, conserving even organic remains. The life in the Pajauta valley and on the hill-forts ended abruptly, and the site remained an archaeological resource till the present day. The Pajauta valley was never built over; most of its territory was pasture and meadows. Some land reclamation works were carried out in 1966 and 1986, but it was stopped with the start of archaeological finds. All farming activities, with the exception of haymaking, were banned when a Reserve was established in 1989.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The nominated land of the Cultural Reserve (194.4 ha) is in State ownership.

The area is protected by various legal systems and general master plans, including the Law on Protected Areas (IX – 628, 4 December 2001).

The purpose, protection and usage of the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė are set forth by the Regulations of the

State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė approved by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 1745, 5 November 2002.

Management structure:

The management of the Cultural Reserve is the responsibility of the Administration of the Cultural Reserve, which consists of a professional director and vice director, assisted by a small but efficient team. It is the sole management authority which, after a recent change, answers directly to the Ministry of Culture.

There is a precise buffer zone, divided into a zone called the sub zone of physical protection and the sub zone of visual protection. Regarding the decisions affecting the park or the buffer zone, there is close liaison with the county/district inspector from the Department of Cultural Heritage.

The tasks of the Cultural Reserve as set forth in the Management Plan are in accordance with the requirements of the World Heritage Committee.

The site museum is managed by a professional director, who is member of the park staff, as part of the park management.

Resources:

The finances for the conservation and management come from the budget of the Administration of the Cultural Reserve.

The personnel of the Cultural Reserve consists of 34 staff members starting from 2003.

The site is in the phase of creating visitor facilities. The number of visitors was ca 48,000 in 2002.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

Criterion ii: The integrity of the archaeological properties of Kernavė represents stages of settlement in this region covering a period of 10,000 years. The natural landscape was being corrected and partly changed for adoption of a more convenient lifestyle and to meet the demands of defence (the defence system of the hill-forts). Thus the cultural landscape of Kernavė developed in the course of history is a perfect example of symbiosis between the environment formed by natural processes and human activities through centuries.

Criterion iii: The archaeological monuments of the Kernavė site represent all the archaeological cultures having existed in this region. The wide spectrum chronologically of the properties enables the analysis of the prehistory of the entire region. The medieval heritage – the town, burial site and five hill-forts – are of special importance. This is a unique example of the urban civilization of the last pagan state in Europe. It was one of the main political and economic centres in the Great Duchy of Lithuania with the ancient pagan culture of Lithuania, though already affected by the European Christian traditions. The elements of the East Orthodox, West Catholic and the local pagan culture form a single harmonious unity in the medieval cultural heritage of Kernavė.

Criterion iv: The cultural landscape of Kernavė developed in the course of history illustrates the settlement stages of the place and the development of fortifications (the defence system of the hill-forts). The entire medieval material culture, the immovable cultural properties as well as archaeological finds exemplify one of the fundamental times in the European history, i.e. the conversion of pagan society into a Christian one.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the nominated site in August 2003.

ICOMOS has also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management.

Conservation

Conservation history:

Much of the site was abandoned since the end of the 14th century, and it was covered with alluvial layers of soil, which protected it. No serious adverse activities have taken place on the site. The site was declared a Cultural Reserve in 1989.

State of conservation:

Much care is taken to improve general conservation condition, which already is quite good. The steep slopes of the hill-forts, especially on the north sides, are subject to erosion which is effectively monitored and controlled by physical protection measures intended to stabilise the slopes. The regeneration of natural conditions at the bottom of the valley, especially the marshlands, originally caused by neglect of the drainage system from Soviet times, will now be enhanced where possible and has a positive effect on the conservation conditions of the organic features and other remains in the buried deposits.

Organic conservation at many sites within the reserve is very good, and impressive constructions have been found. Materials recovered in investigations have received excellent treatment at the Laboratory for Conservation and Restoration in Vilnius. Recently, a staff member of this facility has been transferred to Kernavė and is now involved with conservation of objects on site and preliminary treatment.

Management:

The management of the Cultural reserve is well taken care of. It is noted that there is no committee consisting of representatives of all the stakeholders (eg the municipality and private landowners), though these will be involved through the process of drawing up a master plan for the spatial planning in the buffer zone. The local population is involved in many ways with the park and relationships with the park management appear to be good.

The borders of the buffer zone make sense as they encompass all the most important elements within the valley of the river Neris as well as some important remains on the plateau above the valley. There are six small farms within the general area of the reserve which are not

included but have been added to the high-protection part of the buffer zone. Only one of these, directly south of the hill-forts, has a negative visual impact; at the same time, it has no historical value. It is no longer inhabited and its removal awaits the purchase of the property by the State which is foreseen but has not been effectuated so far.

Renovation work is being done in an existing modern building to serve as a visitor centre and museum, as well as to house the administration of the park, a restoration facility and storage. The present museum space of about 200 m² will be extended to some 800 m², with space for reconstructions to provide the necessary interpretation for visitors. In terms of tourism development, however, much work is still needed in order to create the necessary facilities for visitor management. A limited private initiative in the village of 200 inhabitants is already evident.

Risk analysis:

From the point of view of future development, the buffer zones are well done. The area of the village of Kernavė, which will undoubtedly be subjected most to development, is least sensitive to possible negative effects *as far as visual aspects are concerned*. However, any developments in the SW part with visual impact, would have negative consequences for the experience of the place as a whole.

The area of Kernavė has some small-scale development related to the improvement of infrastructures, but these do not create any specific risk to the site. There has been some risk of flooding in the valley of the river Neris; the last flood was in 1971. However, a new dam has since been constructed which helps to control the waters. There is also a risk of grass fires in dry season. However, the management structure has foreseen systems of prevention.

Authenticity and integrity

The centre of the Kernavė Cultural Park is magnificent in landscape terms, with a superb view on the hill-forts. The 'power of the place' is immediate and directly apparent even to the inexperienced casual visitor. The cultural landscape surrounding it, is virtually intact and the winding river and the SW part of the buffer zone provide an attractive scenic background.

There are no problems of authenticity on the nominated property. The cultural sites have been subject to little, and only superficial, forms of human intervention since they were abandoned at the end of the 14th century, and the historical cultural landscape of forests and small farmsteads that surrounds them is nearly unspoiled by recent development.

Where agricultural activities took place in the past, the plough zone is not more than some 15 cm. One remaining power line traversing the park will be replaced by a buried one along an access road that is currently being rebuilt (as a dirt road). There are no plans for reconstructions on the various sites, as these would diminish the existing high level of authenticity. While important for understanding the site, such reconstructions will be provided in the new museum/visitor centre.

It is noted that the modern town of Kernavė is very close to the nominated area. The town itself is important being

the entrance to the museum area, and it is also in the nominated buffer zone. It is therefore essential that its development and any changes to the built fabric be kept under control in order not to detract from the visual and structural integrity of the place.

Comparative evaluation

The archaeological site of Kernavė has been compared to archaeological sites in the region, eg Biskupin (Poland) that refers to the early Iron Age; Birka and Hovgården (Sweden, World Heritage in 1993) refers to the Viking Age; The Burial Site of Sammallahdenmäki (Finland, World Heritage in 1999) dates from the Bronze Age. These sites focus mainly on specific periods. Kernavė instead stands out covering an exceptionally wide spectrum of cultures over a long period of time. The finds of the site have also survived exceptionally well.

The main focus of the cultural reserve of Kernavė is the defence system of the five hill-forts, which is an exceptional testimony to the period concerned. Generally, such forts are single buildings.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The archaeological site of Kernavė has been proposed as a cultural landscape comprising testimonies from some ten millennia of human occupation and interaction with the environment. The nominated property is an exceptional testimony to the understanding of the pre-Christian history of the Baltic region, before its destruction by the Teutonic Order and the conversion of the population to Christianity at the end of the 14th century, the last region in Europe. While still retaining its pagan traditions, the site also offers an exceptional testimony to the impact that Christianity had in this cultural context. Furthermore, the site represents an outstanding example of defence systems in northern Europe, using a chain of hill-forts with wooden structures.

Evaluation of criteria:

The site is proposed on the basis of *criteria ii, iii and iv*.

Criterion iii is referred to the archaeological site of Kernavė as an exceptional testimony to the pre-Christian cultures in the northern part of Europe. Seen in the context of currently known sites, Kernavė is in many ways exceptional and outstanding for the region. It represents a continuous occupation of the site from 8th or 9th millennium till the end of the 14th century, after which the site has not been subject to disturbance by development. The soil has guaranteed an exceptional level of preservation of organic material, thus contributing to the great scientific interest of the finds. The site also provides an exceptional testimony to the final period of the Pagan culture in this region, the last to be converted to Christianity.

Criterion iv is referred to the types of settlements that developed in Kernavė, and especially the remarkably complex defence system with the impressive hill-forts. Considering its well preserved remains, the site is an outstanding representation of the evolution of particular

types of settlement structures in the pre-Christian era in the Baltic region.

Criterion ii has been proposed by the State Party, referring to the continuous evolution over 10 millennia, and an example of a symbiosis between the environment and human activities. ICOMOS feels that these aspects are better relevant to the criteria iii and iv. While the site may have been subject to interchange of human values on developments in construction techniques or settlement patterns, the available knowledge is still too limited to justify criterion ii.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

While complimenting the State Party for the respectful presentation of the site, ICOMOS recommends attention to be given to the development of visitor facilities, currently under way. Furthermore, taking into account the various modern structures within the buffer zone, including the farms and the town of Kernavė, ICOMOS stresses the need for continuous monitoring and control of change in respect of the quality and significance of the heritage resources.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

Criterion iii: The archaeological site of Kernavė presents an exceptional testimony to the evolution of human settlements in the Baltic region in Europe over the period of some 10 millennia. The site has exceptional evidence of the contact of Pagan and Christian funeral traditions.

Criterion iv: The settlement patterns and the impressive hill-forts represent outstanding examples of the development of such types of structures and the history of their use in the pre-Christian era.

ICOMOS, March 2004