



Fig. 1 Amber processing, Neolithic amulet production. ■

The Taste of the Past in Kernave

The activities of our remote ancestors are recreated at the Days of Live Archaeology

Jolanta Paškevičienė Lithuania

● This article introduces the International Festival of Experimental Archaeology at the cultural reserve of Kernave near Vilnius (Lithuania) which presents to the public crafts from the Stone Age to the 14th century.

“I find it so hard and I am so unwilling to return from the times before Christ to the twenty-first century,” says Aleksiejus Luchtanas, a professor of archaeology.

He has had to make this adjustment many times. Once a year, in early July, with his family and colleagues, Luch-

tanas becomes a participant, or a living exhibit at the international experimental archaeology festival at Kernavė. On these days, this little town, close to Vilnius, is full of curious people from all over Lithuania who are eager to see, experience and try the everyday life and crafts of our remote ancestors.

The process is more important than the result

This summer the State Cultural Reserve of Kernavė organized the “Days of Live Archaeology” for the seventh time. The festival presents prehistoric crafts, including the making of ancient ceramics, flint, amber and Neolithic amulets, and spinning and weaving. It also presents crafts from the early Middle Ages, such as jewellery, minting, weaponry and much more.

Participants must use only natural materials and replica tools. During the festival, the production process is re-enacted, the process in this case is more important than the result.

Ab ovo

“We first got the idea to organize an archaeological festival at Kernavė in 1998, after a visit to Biskupin in Poland,” says Jonas Vitkūnas, head of the Public Relations and Education Programmes Department at the reserve. “We were invited to demonstrate some old crafts at an established festival that had already been going on for a long time and that had a wide range of participants from all over Europe.”

The Kernavė reserve, having combed various museums, gathered a group of inquisitive minds and organized an inspection of the folk museum in Rumšiškės. It was like a dress rehearsal before leaving for Biskupin. The general atmosphere was quite earnest. The core that had formed for the presentation at Biskupin started to grow like a snowball. Staff at the Kernavė reserve developed the idea of recreating the production processes of their own archaeological findings. *“In Biskupin we decided that a festival like this should be held in Lithuania too, and that there would be no*

The VII International Festival of Experimental Archaeology

“Days of Live Archaeology in Kernavė”

During the festival, visitors have an opportunity to become acquainted with prehistoric and early medieval crafts, as well as old military skills, old lifestyles, the heritage of material culture and a recreation of the spiritual culture. The programme of the ‘VII International Festival of Experimental Archaeology’ (July 8-10, 2005) was added with new, not previously demonstrated crafts such as the production of bone musical instruments and bagpipes (Belarus), the yard (hostage) of a Prussian tribe (Russia), shooting from a crossbow (Sweden), demonstrations of old military skills (“Svinfulken” club, Russia), Lure music band (Germany), a Stone Age hunting camp (Poland), and an ensemble of old music – “Stary Olsa” (Belarus).

shortage of participants and spectators,” Vadišis recalls.

He was right. The following year, the “Days of Live Archaeology” in Kernavė were a hit. Entire families flooded the town to look at and to try ancient crafts. Participants could not hide their joy at their new roles and the opportunity to share their practical and theoretical knowledge, while the organizers marvelled at the huge number of people and the genuinely ancient atmosphere.

Attendance figures point to the festival’s future development. In 1999, there were only 27 participants. These years (2005), there were almost 260. The long lines of cars jamming the roads to Kernavė during these days are also a good indicator of its success.



Fig. 2 Sewing with bone needle. ■

Every year the festival features new ideas and each year a growing number of guests from abroad are invited to participate. “*This year we had visitors from all of the neighbouring countries,*” says Vitkūnas. “*A festival like this is also a forum for cultural exchange. It’s interesting to compare the cultural links between our museum materials*”.

“*We started with individual crafts,*” says Vadišis. “*Now we are trying to recreate archaeological cultures.*” This is how the Bavarian and Krivich yards came to the festival. Craftspeople from Munich and Wrocław brought them. The latter demonstrated the ritual striking of fire, the production of ceramics, cooking, woodcarving, and other crafts.

“*This year there was also a Prussian yard. Museum workers from Kaliningrad will demonstrate the production of sashes, metal casting, the production of weapons and a method of amber processing that differs from ours*”.

“*The main criterion for selection is professionalism. We require that the activity is not only being demonstrated but also explained. Beside this it has to correspond to the time that is being recreated in Kernavė which is from the Stone Age to the fourteenth century AD.*”

The festival has probably gained its popularity due to the opportunity it presents to people to find out and try things for themselves. The festival also provides a rare opportunity to compare different periods. Having observed how fire was made in the Stone Age, one can compare the process with how it was carried out several thousand years later by rubbing two sticks together. Having seen how prehistoric people made their stone axes, one can immediately compare them to the weapons of medieval warriors.

Apart from compliments from the organizers of similar festivals in other European countries, it manifested itself in a concrete fact.

A time machine

“It’s significant that this movement has spread and that people need it. It means our efforts have not been wasted,” says Aleksei Luchtanas, whose 25 years of activities in Kernavė go back to the very beginning. He started his first archaeological excavations there as a student.

“We managed to find not only the ancient spirit, mood and atmosphere, but also the smells,” jokes the professor, as he remembers the siege of 2004’s festival, which had over 10,000 visitors a day. In 2004 the ‘VI International Festival of Experimental Archaeology’ had over 32,000 visitors.

“Since it rained on the first days, we had to save the site from being trampled. Our helpers brought and laid down straw

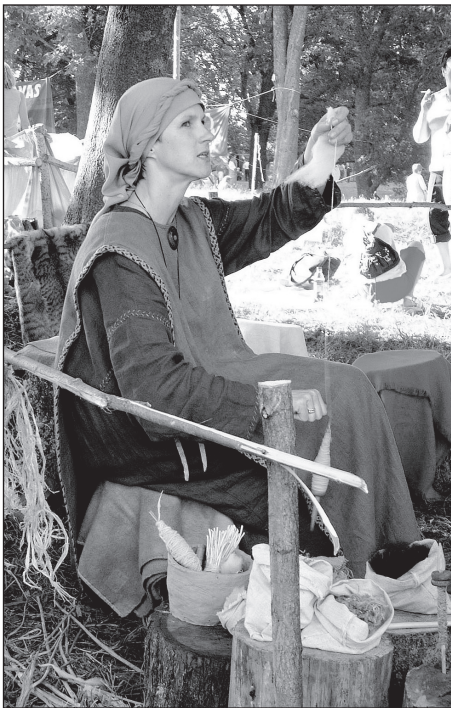


Fig. 3 Ancient spinning. ■



Fig. 4 Production of linden bark. ■

and hay to make it dryer. The smell of rotting grass, mixed with the smoke of a bonfire and boiling tar, created a really medieval atmosphere.”

Luchtanas always rejoices at the opportunity to return to the distant past. Although he can touch thousand-year-old things every day, to him, participation in the “Days of Live Archaeology” is a special pleasure. Along with his wife and children, he lives in a Bronze Age camp where the cooking of the period is demonstrated.

“In order to understand the past better, archaeologists simply have to experiment. Old techniques are forgotten and cannot be recreated without trials,” he says. *“Experimental archaeology is concerned with two issues,”* says Luchtanas. *“First, it helps a specialist to recreate a forgotten process and to understand his or her finding”.*

“But also, an archaeological experiment has an educational role, because it is intended for the public. The very title, live archaeology, shows that it is not the study of shards of pots in display cabinets, but the recreation of a living process”.

“It’s an opportunity, even if short-lived, to return to the childhood of humanity. For me, this feeling is very special. As if you take your place in a time machine and find yourself in a distant environment.”

Although experimental archaeology is a hobby for all the participants in the festival (they all have professions, jobs and live in the present), it creates an unusually strong kinship between people. A few participants even say that they live from festival to festival. *“These festivals are very important to me, and not only because you meet people who think along the same lines. They exist all over Europe,”* says Luchtanas.

Kinship and a sixth sense

“Dexterity and knowledge are not enough to resurrect archaeology,” says Daiva Luchtanienė, president of the “Pajauta” experimental archaeology club. *“For that, a feeling for history, or a sixth sense, is necessary”.*

“Pajauta is the name of the valley, surrounding Kernavė, and it is also the name of our club. It is more than just a club; it is a feeling, without which a member of our club would be blind and deaf.” At present, the club has 42 members,



Fig. 6 Glass bead production in the kiln. ■

who practice 26 crafts. Among them are museum curators, archaeologists, restorers, pharmacists and people from other walks of life, from all over Lithuania. The club activities demand much of their free time, but members of the families of many also take part.

“Practically all our children take part from an early age, some even from the cradle. The ancient clothes and footwear that they wear at festivals pass from family to family.”

The people of Kernavė and Pajauta have already reserved their places at other European festivals. They represent Baltic culture.

The Luchtanas family recreates ancient cooking. Depending on the period, not only the clothes and utensils but also the methods and spices change. They consider Jacqui Wood of the Celtic Village in Cornwall, England their teacher. She established an open-air museum of the early Iron Age and recreated Celtic cuisine.



Fig. 5 Stone Age hunters camp: skin milling. ■

Treasures of the Lithuanian Troy

Kernavė is the cradle of Lithuanian statehood. It is an invaluable complex of archaeological and historical monuments, with more than 25 years of archaeological research that is still in progress.

Anyone driving around Lithuania is sure to see several fortified hills, of which about a thousand have survived until today. Hill-forts were the main type of prehistoric settlement in the country from the Bronze Age to the end of the 14th century. However, nowhere in the Baltic Sea region can a complex of five hill-forts be found except at Kernavė.

The first inhabitants settled here in the ninth or eighth century BC, in the late Stone Age. From then on, the area was inhabited continuously until medieval times, and it still shows the traces of life from that period.

The 13th century was when Kernavė flourished, becoming a town of craftsmen and merchants in the Pajauta Valley between the River Neris and the hill-forts. The duke's castle stood on the main hill-fort, while the remaining four served as defensive fortifications for the castle and the town. During the rule of Duke Traidenis (1269–1282), Kernavė was the

main economic and political centre of emerging Lithuania, and its first capital.

In a raid by the Teutonic Knights in 1390, it was burnt. The wooden houses and the castle were never rebuilt, and the inhabitants left the Pajauta Valley to settle on the upper terrace, the site of the present village.

Although life has gone on here until today, Kernavė has preserved some intact cultural layers, providing invaluable information about our past and signs of the lives of the townspeople, inhabitants of the Lithuanian Troy.

The archaeologists who have been working at Kernavė since 1979 say that they have enough work for the next 100 years. The Archaeological and Historical Museum of the Kernavė Cultural Reserve already boasts over 15,000 exhibits, representing all the periods in its history. Although only about one per cent of the reserve's total area has been explored so far, Kernavė has been recognized as a unique archaeological and historical site within the context of both Lithuania and Europe. A UNESCO commission listed the cultural reserve as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.



Fig. 7 Yarn and cloth dyeing with natural dyes. ■

Summary

Tagе der lebendigen Archäologie in Kernave

Kernave bei Vilnius (Litauen) ist ein umfangreicher Komplex archäologischer und historischer Monumente, der als landes- und europaweit einmaliger Platz von archäologischer und historischer Bedeutung anerkannt ist. Einmal im Jahr, immer Anfang Juli, findet hier ein Internationales Festival der Experimentellen Archäologie statt. Während des Festivals erhalten die Besucher die Gelegenheit, sowohl urgeschichtliche und frühmittelalterliche Handwerkstechniken als auch Kampftechniken und frühere Lebensweisen kennen zu lernen. Jedes Jahr werden beim Festival neue Ideen entwickelt und jährlich werden mehr ausländische Gäste zu einer Teilnahme eingeladen, so dass das Festival auch ein Forum für den kulturellen Austausch darstellt. Das wesentliche Auswahlkriterium für eine Einladung ist die Professionalität; die durchgeführten Aktionen müssen nicht nur praktiziert, sondern auch erklärt werden.

Das Festival wurde durch einen Besuch des Festivals in Biskupin in Polen im Jahr 1988 inspiriert und erreichte seine große Beliebtheit vermutlich vor allem durch die Möglichkeiten für die Besucher, selber zu experimentieren und Hand anzulegen. Außerdem bietet das Festival die seltene Möglichkeit, unterschiedliche Perioden zu vergleichen.

“We met her on our first trip to Biskupin,” recalls Luchtanas. “We liked the idea that we could recreate the eating habits of past times from the remains of food we found. People find it interesting and unusual to mill grain with a stone, to bake a cake on a hot stone, and then to eat it.”

“We do not demonstrate Stone Age cuisine at festivals, for reasons of hygiene,” says Luchtanienė. “Usually, we show recipes from the Bronze Age”.

“We roast a seasoned goat kid on a fire, and cook various soups and porridges in ceramic pots on an open fire, spicing them with juniper berries and wild garlic. We also fry meat and bake primitive bread on stones”.

“The cooking methods that we show must be quick, so that a person not only sees the process but can also try the taste.”

Journées de l'archéologie vivante à Kernave

Kernave, près de Vilnius (Lituanie), c'est un vaste ensemble de monuments archéologiques et historiques, unique en contexte de Lituanie ainsi que de l'Europe entière. Une fois par an, début juillet, Kernave accueille un festival international de l'archéologie expérimentale. Les visiteurs peuvent y connaître des artisanats anciens, de l'époque de la préhistoire et du haut moyen-âge, l'art militaire et des modes anciens de vie. Chaque année, le festival présente de nouvelles idées et fait venir plus de spécialistes de l'étranger. Ainsi, il devient également une sorte d'échange culturelle. Quant au choix des invités, le professionnalisme s'impose comme critère principal. Il faut démontrer, mais aussi expliquer.

Le festival tire son origine d'une visite au festival de Biskupin (Pologne) en 1988 et sa renommée est probablement due à différentes activités que les visiteurs mêmes peuvent mettre à l'épreuve. Le festival offre encore une rare occasion de comparer des époques différentes.