

THE RENAISSANCE PALACE OF SIGISMUND AUGUSTUS

A new phase of expansion of the Renaissance palace is associated with the rule of Sigismund Augustus (Grand Duke of Lithuania, 1529/1544–1572 and King of Poland, 1530/1548–1572). In 1544 he was named vicegerent (ruler in fact) of Lithuania by his father Sigismund the Old and in that same year came to Vilnius with his wife, Elisabeth of Austria (Habsburg). Massive construction work began immediately at the palace and continued until about 1553. Sigismund Augustus' goal was to build a new residence (*Domus nova*) next to the old residence of his parents (*Aula regia antiqua*). Thus the new northern and western wings came into being and joined with the older southern and eastern wings to form a palace with an enclosed courtyard, while a Renaissance garden was established to the side of the residence. Within the territory of the Lower Castle in Vilnius, not far from the palace, Sigismund Augustus also commissioned the building of his family mausoleum – the Church of Sts Anne and Barbara.

The chief architect of Sigismund Augustus' construction work was the Italian architect, sculptor, and stonemason Giovanni Cini from Siena. He was helped by his brother Bartolomeo, a stonemason. Others who worked there for several years were: the Flemish architect Frederik Unstherffe, the Polish stonemason Benedict from Sandomierz, and the architect and military engineer Job Breiffuss, who became the caretaker of the castle and chief supervisor for all of Sigismund Augustus' construction work. The local conglomerate from Bystrica was used widely here again for the palace exterior and interior touches – the window edging, portals and cornices – as well as stone imported from Livonia.

By the time of Sigismund Augustus, the palace already boasted a large library, impressive tapestries, weapons, armour, paintings, as well as hunting trophies. The papal legate, Bernardino Buongiovanni, is even noted to have observed the palace's treasure and jewels. The palace became a center for the dissemination of Renaissance culture and art.

This palace was witness to the romantic love story of Sigismund Augustus and Barbara Radziwiłł. Emissaries from across Europe and even the Near East were received at the palace. Albrecht of Hohenzollern, the Duke of Prussia and a cousin of Sigismund Augustus, visited the palace time and again. He later sent his cousin different gifts from Königsberg to Vilnius. In 1562 the marriage took place in the Palace between John III Vasa, the future king of Sweden, and Catherine Jagiellon, the sister of Sigismund Augustus. This marriage paved the way for the Swedish Vasa dynasty to take up the ruler's throne of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Council of Lords and the Parliament of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania met here. The Statutes of Lithuania (the code of laws of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) were compiled and edited here. The Lithuanian Metrica (chancellery records of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) was kept here as well as the treasuries of Lithuania's rulers and of the Grand Duchy.



Portrait of Sigismund Augustus, the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, Peeter Danckers de Rij (?), ca 1643, ZKW-PHKN



Double portrait of two of Sigismund Augustus' wives, Elisabeth of Austria and Barbara Radziwiłł, Vilnius, 1543–1551, MNK



Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania from the northwest side – the so called *New Palace (Domus nova)* of Sigismund Augustus, Pranciškus Smuglevičius, ca 1797, MNK



Tapestry *Daniel Meets Arioch* (from the set *The Story of Nebuchadnezzar*), cartoon artist from the circle of Bernard van Orley, Brussels, Flanders, 1550–1560, LDKVR
A set of twelve tapestries with a comparable theme was brought to Lithuania and Poland by the first wife of Sigismund Augustus, Elisabeth of Austria.



Reliquary donated to the Vilnius Cathedral by prelate Mikołaj Jasiński, possible testimony of the opulence of Sigismund Augustus' treasury, Vilnius, Lithuania or Nürnberg, Germany, mid-16th century, LDM



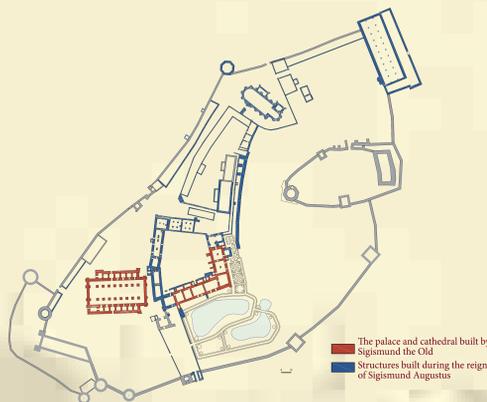
Stove tile with the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, 16th century, LDKVR



Ring with a precious stone, enamel, 16th century, LDKVR



Part of a vault support, conglomerate, 16th century, LDKVR



Construction at the Vilnius Lower Castle during the reign of Sigismund Augustus, Rasa Abramauskienė, 2013, LDKVR



Book from the Vilnius residence library of Sigismund Augustus, Vilnius, 1557, VUB, RPL



Tapestry with the combined coat of arms of Sigismund Augustus the Grand Duke of Lithuania (from the set *Armorial Tapestries of Sigismund Augustus*) commissioned for his Vilnius residence, Antwerp (?), Flanders, 1544–1548, LDKVR