

THE MEDIEVAL BRICK CASTLE

It is believed that the first and only king of Lithuania, Mindaugas (ca 1236/1253–1263), could have had his residence in Vilnius. He is known for his attempted conversion of the state to Catholicism and for building the first cathedral. However 13th-century sources do not disclose where Mindaugas was crowned whereas Vilnius was first mentioned in 1323 in the letters of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas (1316–1341).

The medieval brick castle was built in Vilnius in the late 13th–early 14th centuries. A majority of the defensive walls of the Vilnius Lower Castle, whose combined length was over 1 km, were constructed during the reign of Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas, who transferred the Lithuanian capital to Vilnius in 1323. By the next year, 1324, papal envoys were among the guests who were received by Gediminas whilst seated in a hall (*in aula sua*) together with his advisors. Historians have remarked that already from the times of Gediminas, the duke who ruled Vilnius also ruled over the remainder of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas (1345–1377) coordinated and implemented his Eastern policies from the Vilnius castles, and continued to fortify the capital's defensive system.

Archaeological excavations at the grand ducal palace site unveiled the earliest brick buildings known to exist in Lithuania, as well as fragments of the defensive wall and towers that were built in the late 13th–early 14th centuries from stone and brick using the Baltic (or Wendish) brick bond method. All of these earliest Lithuanian brick buildings were concentrated in the centre of the Lower Castle, on a natural plateau surrounded by the Vilnelė River. Nearby, remains of wooden farmsteads and wooden plank lined streets were found.



Vilnius castles in the late 13th–early 14th century, Rasa Abramauskienė, 2013, LDKVR

1. Medieval brick castle with residential buildings
2. Medieval brick castle with sacral buildings
3. Upper Castle (wooden)



Detail from the *Map of the World*, possibly showing Vilnius castle, ca 1370–1390, ARS



Notarised copy of three letters from Grand Duke Gediminas. One of the letters mentions Vilnius for the first time, 1323, GSA PK



Gothic stove tile with the Columns of Gediminas, late 15th century, LDKVR



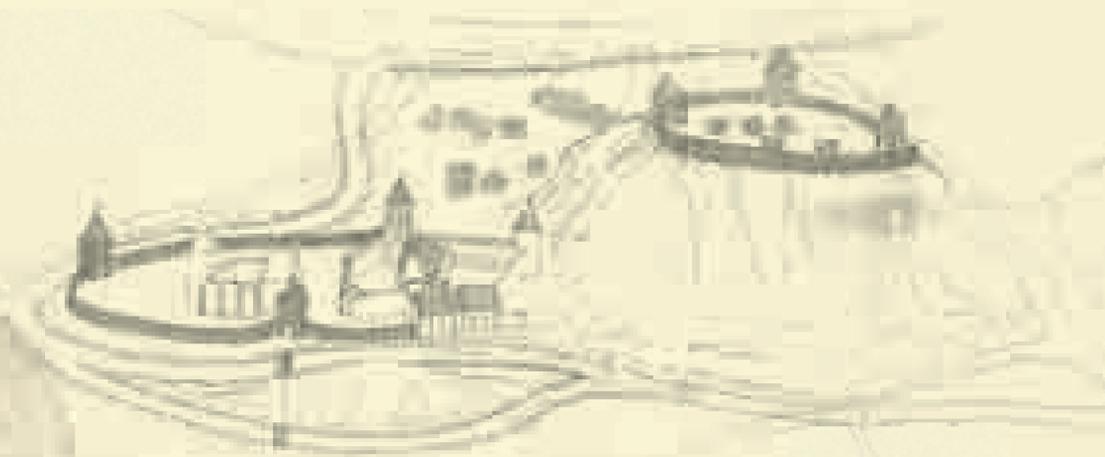
Remains of the late 13th–early 14th century brick buildings in the territory of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, PTC



Remains of the 13th-century wooden building, PTC



Floor of the first Vilnius Cathedral, PTC



Vilnius castles in the late 13th–early 14th century, Napaleonas Kitkauskas, 2006, PTC