

# HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT THE LOWER CASTLE

Sporadic archaeological investigations have taken place in the Vilnius Castle territory since the beginning of the 20th century, but interest in the palace of the grand dukes intensified only at the end of the century. Already in 1983 there was an idea to reconstruct the palace in Renaissance style and use it as a national art gallery. More concrete and consistent plans for research and investigation of the territory and for the reconstruction of the palace were developed when Lithuania started breaking away from the Soviet empire in 1987. The first investigations were carried out by the Design and Restoration Institute (*Projektavimo ir restauravimo institutas*), later by the Lithuanian History Institute under the direction of the academician and professor Vytautas Merkys, and since 1993 by the specially established Castle Research Center *Lietuvos pilys*. For many years, this complex research program – combining archaeology, architecture, history and art history – was led by archaeologists, architects, and art historians.

In 2000, the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania passed a law authorizing reconstruction of the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, and the following year the Government of Lithuania formally adopted a resolution confirming the conceptual plan for the reconstruction and use of the palace.

During the course of research lasting over two decades more than 500,000 various finds have been discovered that make up the main source of information on the history of the palace of the Lithuanian grand dukes, allowing their reconstruction based on scientific evidence and the installation of richly elaborated expositions in which the unique and numerous pieces testifying to the evolution of the Lithuanian state and the ruler's court can be displayed on location. The collection of archaeological finds gathered from the palace territory is one of the largest in Lithuania and represents the historical cultural heritage of the state and its rulers, and can justifiably be considered a national treasure, important towards learning about European heritage at large. Most of the finds reflect the development of Gothic, Renaissance and early Baroque architecture and art in Lithuania and in the region, the opulence of the court and aspects of everyday life, not to mention the close international cultural exchanges that took place. The indeed valuable archaeological finds discovered at the palace of the grand dukes of Lithuania have already been exhibited in Germany, Poland, Belarus and the Czech Republic.



Archaeological excavations near Sts Anne and Barbara Church, 1955–1961, LDKVR



Archaeological excavations in the courtyard of the Palace of the Grand Dukes in 2005: remains of a 4th–8th-century wooden settlement and the residence courtyard paving from the 16th–17th centuries, PTC



Archaeological excavations in the Vilnius Cathedral (then served as the Picture Gallery), 1988, PTC



Remains of 14th–15th-century wooden structures near the east wing of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, 2002, PTC



Archaeological excavations in the Vilnius Cathedral's catacombs: postmortem gilded crown of Alexander Jagiellon, Vilnius, 1931, Kazimierz Kwiatkowski (1893–1964), LDM



Archaeological excavations in the Vilnius Cathedral's catacombs: tomb of Barbara Radziwiłł, Vilnius, 1931, Kazimierz Kwiatkowski (1893–1964), LDM



Archaeological excavations in the south wing of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, 1989, PTC



South wing cellars of the Palace of the Grand Dukes, 1989, PTC