



## Paparčiai Dominican Monastery

Algirdas Žalnierius

Paparčiai is a long inhabited locality in Central Lithuania (Kaišiadorys District) and is mentioned in 14<sup>th</sup>-century historical sources. There are two hillfort sites beside the village and a multitude of archaeological and mythological cultural objects in its vicinity. According to certain data, the first church in Paparčiai was erected at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Grand Duchy of Lithuania treasurer S. Beinart in 1649 gave Paparčiai manor and several outbuildings to the Dominican Order and in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century a brick monastery and church were erected there. The monastery was two-storey and together with the church formed a closed complex around a cloister. The church had seven altars decorated with sculptures and pictures. One of the altars had a miraculous picture of St Mary of the Snow, which the Dominican monks brought from Rome in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Chapel of St Dominic was added to the church's W façade in 1744 through the efforts of Count Romer. The cemetery was located in the W part of the monastery beside the church. The outbuildings stood to the NE of the monastery complex. The remaining part of the monastery's grounds was occupied by a fruit orchard, a large medicinal herb garden, and ponds. The monastery's entire grounds were enclosed by a masonry fence.

The Paparčiai Dominican monastery was famous for its noviciate, where monks who had received scientific training in Rome, Padua, and Naples taught, and for a library with several thousand 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup>-century theological, historical, philosophical, and legal books. After the Vilnius Dominican monastery was closed following the 1831 uprising against the Russian Imperial government, Paparčiai became the seat of Lithuania's Dominican province. But the monastery was closed several decades later for supporting the 1863–1864 uprising. Russian Imperial army units were stationed in it for several years and after they left, the monastery

remained empty until 1891. The monastery complex's buildings were later sold and demolished. Only part of the monastery's main gate and the more remote cemetery chapel have survived to the present time. A school, a children's care home and activity centre, and several utility buildings were erected on the monastery's grounds in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Paparčiai parish priest Bernardas Vidas Sajeta had the idea of putting the former grounds of the Dominican monastery in order and adapting them for the parish's needs. This idea was benevolently approved and both the local community and Kaišiadorys District Municipality contributed to its realisation. Through their joint efforts, the first archaeological, historical, and landscape reserve belonging a Lithuanian district municipality was created. It encompasses not only the former monastery, but also the area surrounding it which includes two hillfort sites, the Žiežmara river valley, and some of the cultural heritage buildings, the current

An excerpt from the 1853 plan of the land holdings of Paparčiai monastery: 1 – the monastery and church; 2 – the monastery's outbuildings; 3 – the monastery cemetery

church, and the village cemetery in Paparčiai village.

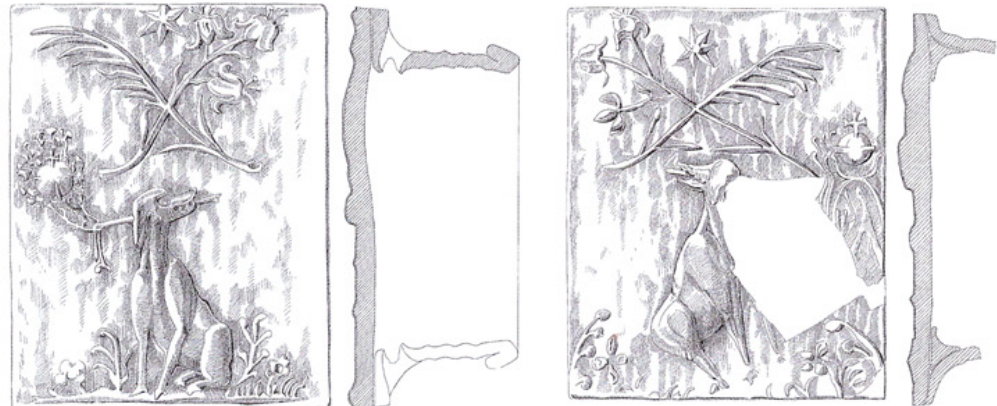
In the distant future the preparation of a project for putting the grounds of the former monastery complex in order is planned; it was therefore necessary to create at least a preliminary plan of the complex's buildings. More detailed plans of the monastery have not survived and the available mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century plans show only a very schematic arrangement of its buildings. Archaeological excavations were conducted at the monastery in 2000, 2002, and 2004. Only the W part of the grounds, where the monastery's buildings stood, has been excavated. Of them, just the masonry gates have

survived. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the demolished monastery buildings were buried under a 50–170 cm thick layer of rubble. Only the remains of the foundation of the Chapel of St Dominic, which was attached to the monastery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, are visible on the ground's surface. Therefore during the excavation, the search for the surviving foundations of the monastery's buildings was governed more by intuition.

During the investigation, 49 trenches of various sizes (a total of 404 m<sup>2</sup>) were excavated. At the excavated locations, the cultural layer was 0.8–1.9 m thick. Due to the very large scale of the work, many of the trenches were dug down to only the surface

Stove tiles from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the symbols of the Dominican order.

Drawing by V. Trečiokienė



The remains of the monastery's main gate after the archaeological and architectural investigations in 2000.  
Photo by A. Žalnierius



of the cloister and the churchyard or the floor of the buildings. In digging through the fill rubble layer created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, an effort was made to uncover as little of the surface of the surviving masonry walls as possible. The unearthed remains of the complex's building foundations and their co-ordinates were recorded.

Everywhere in the areas excavated on the monastery's grounds, a 20–40 cm thick layer of dark grey humus had been laid on top of the original ground's surface, which was yellowish, very damp clay loam, prior to erecting the monastery. The circumstances of the creation of this layer remain unclear. Although it is known from the historical sources that monastery founder S. Beinort gave the monks his own Paparčiai manor together with the buildings standing on it, nevertheless the monastery location could have been forested at that time. Finds were discovered in it only in 2000 when the monastery's gates were excavated. These were small sherds of 17<sup>th</sup>-century household ceramics, which found their way into the layer after the monastery had been built. No finds were discovered in the layer of humus on the monastery grounds, and on the basis of its composition, this layer is more reminiscent of cultivated or forest soil. Unfortunately, the palynological investigation of the humus was unable to ascertain how this layer was created because no pollen survived due to the soil's high acidity.

In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century a classic convent-type Dominican monastery with three buildings, a garth, a covered ambulatory, and a church standing on the W side of the monastery building complex was erected in Paparčiai. The monastery's grounds, consisting of about 4 ha, were enclosed by one masonry fence and divided by another into an enclosure and an area open to the laity. The enclosure included the masonry monastery, out-buildings, a vegetable garden, and ponds and was entered through the main gate which has survived to this day. This baroque gate has a façade decorated with pilasters and cornices. The main gateway was 2.34 m wide and has oblong fieldstones along its sides to protect the masonry wall. On the gate's S side was a 90 cm wide small gate and on the N a decorative niche. The top of the niche and the gateway were decorated with an arched cornice.

The monastery buildings stood in the W part of the grounds and occupied about 2 130 m<sup>2</sup>, the cloister 924 m<sup>2</sup>, and the church 629 m<sup>2</sup>. The entire monastery complex occupied about 3 685 m<sup>2</sup>. According to the currently available excavation data, it appears that the church was erected first.

The church stood in the part of the monastery open to the laity. To the W of the church was a cemetery occupying around 0.6 ha. The churchyard was entered through a gate erected beside the main monastery gate. The churchyard gate consisted of a large gateway about 2 m wide and a small gateway about 90 cm wide to the E of the large one. A 3.45 x 2.45 m masonry structure with no clear purpose stood to the W of the gate.



The church had one nave with a tower at the N end. The church walls survived to a height of 40–70 cm above the level of the floor and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century chapel walls up to 1.5–1.8 m. The church was about 43.2 m long and 15 m wide. The presbytery was 15.2 m long, more than a third of the church's length. This plan is more characteristic of Gothic than Baroque churches. But this is no lone exception as a Bernadine monastery with a similar plan was built in Tytuvėnai at around the same time. The nave was 17.14 x 11.41 m and its E and

Reconstructions of stove tiles from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing by V. Trečiokienė

W walls had three windows each. The walls were laid using 28.5–29.5 x 13.5–15.5 x 6.5–7 cm bricks and a Renaissance bond. The church had a plastered interior decorated with raised plaster floral ornaments. The floor was laid with grey sandstone square blocks, which were 43 x 43 cm or 44 x 44 cm in size judging from the impressions left in the floor, although fragments of floor laid with square clay tiles were also found. The church had no basement.

In 1744, the Chapel of St Dominic was built onto the church's W side. The chapel's entrance was created by cutting through the central window niche in the nave's W wall and the altar was erected against the chapel's W wall. The 10.02 x 9.52 m chapel was nearly square. A vaulted burial basement, which was not touched during this excavation stage, had been created under it. There are data that burial crypts had also been created in the presbytery and one crypt was found in the SW corner of the nave. The cloister ambulatory was attached to the church's E wall.

Three monastery buildings were attached to the church's E side. In places, the unearthed walls of these buildings survived to a height of up to 40–70 cm above the former floor level, but some had been demolished down to the ground's surface and in places down to the foundation. The walls had been laid using 30–31 x 14–15 x 6–7 cm bricks and a Renaissance bond.

The monastery's S building was erected near the church's E presbytery wall and the church's SE corner. According to the currently available excavation data, the building's length could have been about 53.4 m and its width including the S ambulatory 15.5 m. The room on the S side was 9.3 m wide and the ambulatory 3.2–3.25 m. Four former floor levels laid with clay tiles were found in the E part of the building. The level of this floor was probably raised regularly due to the high ground water level.

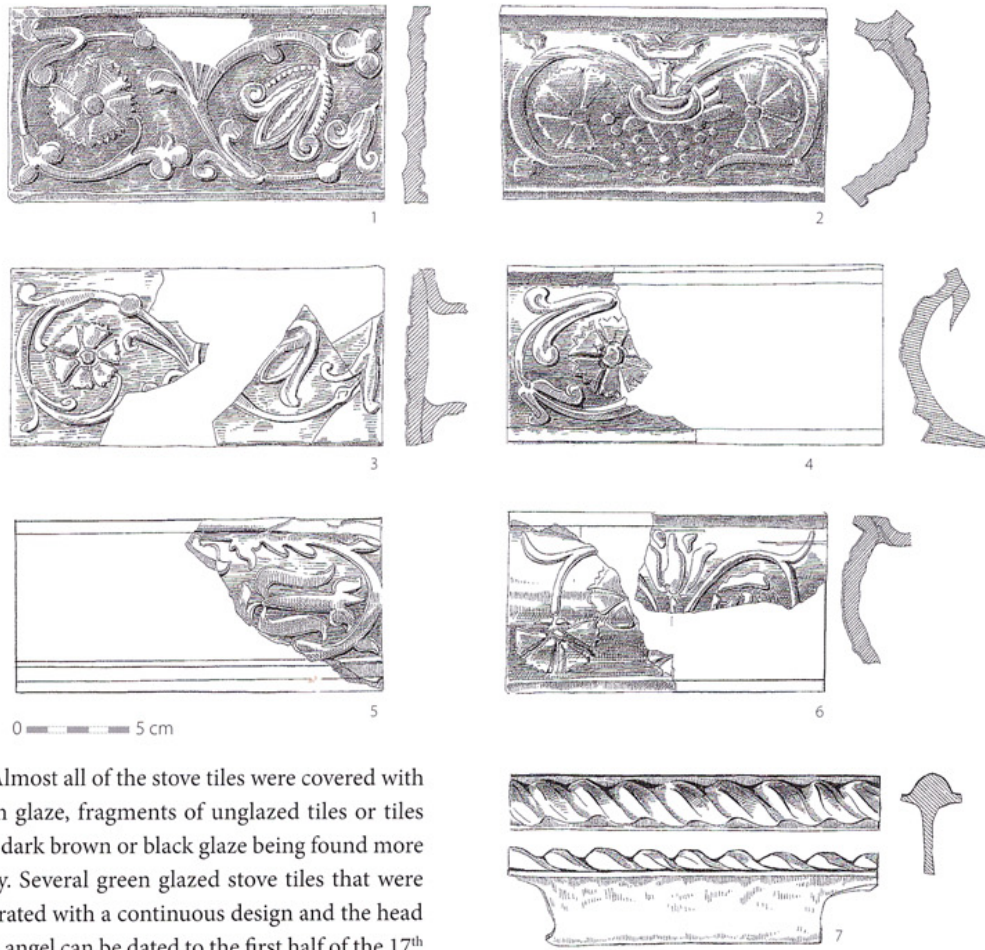
A rectangular, 17.11 x 12.2 m annex was attached to the SE corner of the E building. It had a brick floor and a 130 cm wide strip of fieldstone paving alongside the W wall. A wastewater gutter created from flat roof tiles was in the E part of the room. This was probably the monastery kitchen.

The monastery's E building was 50.4 x 14.72 m. At its N end stood a 10.6 m wide extension that projected over 4 m beyond the plane of the monastery's N building. The extension contained two rooms, in the back of which was a 3.5 m wide basement covered with a cylindrical vault half the thickness of a brick. The N building was 41.2 x 11.2 m. Its single room was 4.95–5 m wide.

According to currently available excavation data, the N and S buildings did not have a basement. One basement was found in the N end of the E building and there could have been more here. The greater part of the ground floor flooring of the monastery's rooms and ambulatory consisted of square 21 x 21 x 5 cm clay tiles. The floors in the church's sacristy and the monastery kitchen in the E annex were laid with ordinary bricks. The roofs of the monastery's buildings were covered with flat roof tiles with round ends. It appears that the original roofing survived until the demolition of the monastery since almost no fragments of other types of roof tiles were found.

The cloister is close to being a square with a 28.8 m long E side and a 32.1 m long S side (a total area of about 924 m<sup>2</sup>). It is surrounded by a 3.2 m wide ambulatory or open gallery. The garth could have been paved with fieldstones since paving remains were found in its W part. Because the monastery was built at a damp site, water collection and drainage ditches as well as flashing were created from fieldstones alongside the building exteriors.

During the excavation comparatively few finds were discovered. The greater part of them consisted of small fragments of 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup>-century stove tiles and household ceramics, which were not distinguished by a great deal of diversity and were found in the rubble layer covering the remains of the monastery buildings. The small quantity of finds and their small diversity is perhaps due to the fact that the bulk of the excavated layer consisted of rubble layers created in demolishing the monastery in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, the monastery stood abandoned for about 40 years after it was closed and there is no reason to doubt that during those years the tile stoves that stood in it were demolished and hauled away and that all of the fixtures were plundered.



Almost all of the stove tiles were covered with green glaze, fragments of unglazed tiles or tiles with dark brown or black glaze being found more rarely. Several green glazed stove tiles that were decorated with a continuous design and the head of an angel can be dated to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the former manor tile stove stood here prior to the construction of the monastery.

According to the currently available excavation data, it appears that the monastery's rooms were heated by stoves built in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and their green glazed tiles were decorated only with the symbols of the Dominican order. The tiles depict a dog sitting in a meadow and holding a burning torch or tree branch in its jaws. A ball with a cross (*globus cruciger?*) can be seen in the flames. Above the dog's head are crossed palm and lily branches and a six-pointed star. Only several small fragments of tiles were found with different decorations, from which it is difficult to judge the nature of the entire design. Only the frieze (*Frieskacheln*) and cornice (*Gesimskacheln*) stove tiles decorated with a stylised floral design were more diverse. The decorative moulding placed between

the stove tiles and separating the stove's façade from the frieze and cornice stove tiles is a rarer find. A tiled stove covered with 'pot-shaped' stove tiles (*Topfkacheln*) also perhaps stood in the monastery.

The household ceramics consist of small sherds of 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>-century oxidation vessels, large percentages of them hand thrown and glazed with various shades of green and brown glazes. Sherds of traditional, hand built cooking pots were also found.

Although the data obtained during the excavation has yielded only the most general image of the construction and development of the former Paparčiai Dominican monastery building complex, nevertheless it is sufficiently informative and shows directions for the further future work in putting the grounds of the former monastery in order.

Reconstructions of stove tiles from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

1-2 – frieze stove tiles (*Frieskacheln*); 3-6 – cornice stove tiles (*Gesimskacheln*); 7 – A decorative moulding tile.

Drawing by V. Trečiokienė