

The settlements that were established on the river Nemunas from the ancient times were inhabited by the Baltic tribes: Sudovians and Yotvingians, Skalvians and Aukštaičiai (Highland Lithuanians), Samogitians (Lowland Lithuanians), and Curonians. Later, during the fights with the Teutonic Knights, the banks of the river became particularly important for the State of Lithuania in the process of its formation: a single system of defensive castles stopped the attacks of the Teutonic Knights and prevented easy access deep into the territory. It is assumed that in the territory of the Panemunė Castle there might have been the court of Grand Duke Vytenis of Lithuania, which, also, is the burial place of this famous Lithuanian ruler. Legend has it that Vytenis perished in 1315 in an attack on the Crusaders' Castle of Christmemel which stood in the environs of present Skirsnemunė. The two mounds raised in the park of the Panemunė Castle in the Romanticism epoch were said to be the graves of Duke Vytenis and of his wife.

The Panemunė Castle as it now stands on the higher terrace of the river

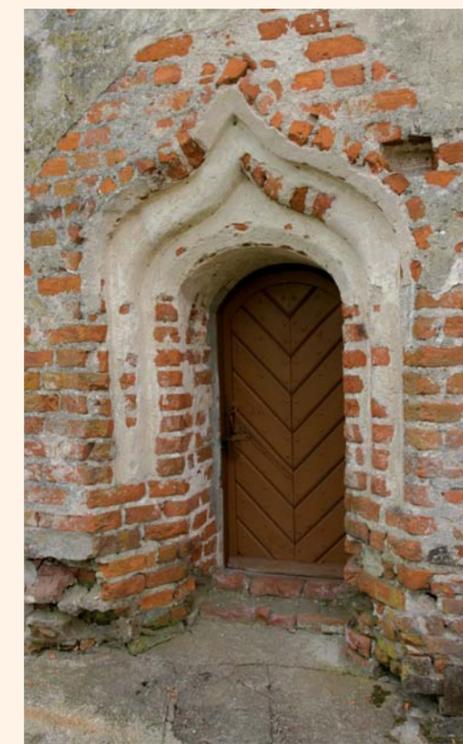
Nemunas was built later, after the end of the epoch of fights against the Teutonic Knights. Yet it was doomed to become a witness to many significant events in the history of the state.

In the 16th century, in this place there was the Panemunė manor of a nobleman, Chamberlain of Samogitia, Stanisław Stankiewicz-Bielewicz, which in 1579 was purchased by a noble of Hungarian descent Janusz Eperjesz, who came to Lithuania in the period of reign of Stephan Bathory and soon involved in Lithuania's political and economic life. He planned to build a brick residential castle instead of the old wooden buildings of the manor. It is believed that the construction of the castle commenced in 1604 according to the drawings of an architect of Dutch descent Piotr Nonhart, one of the most renowned architects who worked in Lithuania at that time. It is under his project that the palace of the Vilnius Lower Castle was also reconstructed to grand ducal order in the early 17th century. In Panemunė, on a high natural hill, two two-storey palace blocks were erected: the eastern

for residence and the northern one for household purposes, they were connected in the south and west by high defensive walls with four-storey towers on the south-eastern and south-western corners (only the south-western tower, which was still more heightened in the mid-17th century, has survived). The buildings of the castle enclosed the trapezium-shaped inner court.

The archaeologists have established that the depth of the foundations of the castle's eastern block is two metres, and on top of them the outer walls, almost one metre thick, are done in brick in the Renaissance way of bricklaying. On the southern side, towards the Nemunas, there was a park, adjacent to the castle. In the eastern part of the southern wall there was a brick two-storey Renaissance arcade and an ornate rim-framed exit to the park behind it. The influence of Gothic tradition which co-existed with defensive architecture of Renaissance style is reflected in the portal of the main entrance to the palace, decorated with a tapering arch. The reserved forms of the exterior of the building hid luxuriously furnished interiors. One can judge about their artistic view from archaeological finds only, the most impressive of which probably are fragments of ornamented, coat-of-arms-decorated tiles.

After Janusz Eperjesz' death, the castle passed on to his three sons: Krzysztof, Jerzy and Jan and, later, to one of them – the Master of the Pantry of Kaunas Powiat, Krzysztof Eperjesz. Archaeological excavations allow assuming that the castle was reconstructed in 1649 by changing the place, size and shape of most of its windows and doors, framing the parade entrance of the eastern block with a much wider rectangular portal than the former Got-



The portal of the southern entrance with a Gothic arch

hic one. Thus the castle palace acquired elements of mannerism or early baroque architecture, and the reconstructed arcade acquired features of baroque. The new owner shifted the living and representation quarters from the eastern to the southern block and, also, erected the north-western and north-eastern towers (only the former has survived). The north-eastern tower, unlike the other ones, was pentagonal; there, Krzysztof Eperjesz equipped a family chapel. Despite baroque elements, the plan and the architecture of the castle retained Renaissance style.

The castle built by the Eperjesz family is rich in elements of military purposes; its territory is surrounded by a defensive

water ditch. Quite austere and restrained in shapes, it primarily fascinates not by its architectural refinement but harmony of proportions, grandeur of shapes; the only adornment of the walls and high towers seems to be the rhythm of the windows and niches, crenels which, on the higher stories of the towers, are highlighted by cross-shaped openings. This typically Renaissance feudal castle of the early 17th century was designated not only for representation but also for protection against military conflicts arising from discordance between the nobles, as well as against the constant danger from Moscow or Sweden in the 17th century. Furthermore, the large, impressive residence was to perpetuate the owner's ambitions and to emphasize his military and economic power.

After Krzysztof Eperjesz' death, his heirs deserted the castle and its ownership was changing hands. In 1759, the manor with the castle was acquired by the Standard-Bearer of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Antoni Giełgud, who held the honourable position of the

Elder of Samogitia in 1783–1795. From then on, the castle was known under a new name as Giełgud Castle. The new owner reconstructed the castle and the park, and established a luxury representation residence for his family there. The old castle acquired some features of a lavish residence of Classicism style. During the reconstruction, the plan of the palace was changed: the northern block was torn down and the previously closed castle yard acquired the shape of the letter "U". Over the torn down northern block a fence was built. In the eastern block, new facade walls were erected and the western block was constructed. The reconstructed southern block was turned into the opulent residential part of the noble's castle. New details of the interior and decoration added to the rooms the feeling of cosiness and extravagance. Some living quarters and the hall were decorated with friezes of antique figures and decorative wall painting characteristic to Classicism aesthetics, adorned with cornices, white tile furnaces and fireplaces. The gallery opening up into the inner court was decorated with



Fragment of wall painting in the representation halls



The Panemunė Castle palace – a monument of Renaissance architecture



harbour-imitating wall painting. On the second storey of the south-western tower, instead of crenels, three windows were cut out and a library was equipped. In the southern block, a beautifully arranged park could be seen through the cut out windows: having dammed a rivulet, five ponds were formed, rest mounds were erected, summer-houses and a conservatory were built, and the so-called menagerie – an enclosure for fallow deer was equipped. This shows that the designers of the park were guided by the landscape aesthetics of Classicism and early Romanticism prevalent at that time.

After Antoni Giełgud's death in 1795, the castle passed over to his son, the former Court Marshal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Michał Giełgud, and in 1828 to his wife Eleonora Giełgudowa and children Antoni and Jan. Both sons were active participants in the Uprising of 1831. The General of the Polish army Antoni Giełgud became the chief leader of the Uprising in Lithuania. Having arrived from Užnemunė together with 16 thousand soldiers, in May 1831, he

crossed the river Nemunas at Gelgaidiškis and pitched camp not far from his patrimony. It is from there that the fights of the rebels led by him started in Lithuania. Unfortunately, as the rebels lost the Uprising, Antoni Giełgud was late with retreating and perished. His brother Jan Giełgud, participant of the Uprising, who by that time had taken care of the castle, retreated to Prussia. Accused of participation in the Uprising, both brothers were recognised state criminals; their castle was ravaged, partly destroyed and sacked, and in 1832 its ownership was taken over by



Fragment of tile of the Castle



Crenels on the first storey of the south-western tower

the Tsarist authorities. Only in 1867 the castle and the estate passed over to the noble Stanisław Pusłowski, who was the inheritor of the Giełgud family assets; however, he did not manage to renovate and maintain the huge residence: the castle's western block was made into a grain storehouse, the eastern block almost disintegrated, and the north-eastern tower collapsed in about 1919.

In 1925, the State of Lithuania expropriated the estate. In 1935, the castle was passed over to the Archaeology Commission of the Ministry of Education. From then on it was at the disposal of different cultural and educational institutions. Deserted and neglected, the castle was not reconstructed often; therefore its architecture has undergone relatively slight changes until our days. From the architectural point of view, today it is the most authentic residential castle of the 17–18th century in Lithuania. Out of its four blocks, the following three have survived: the oldest eastern, the most important in the 18th century southern, and the western one. At the corners of the latter, two of the previously four towers of the castle are standing. On the site of the northern block there are cleared and restored vaults beneath this part of the building.

In 1961, the Panemunė Castle was included in the List of Architectural Monuments of Lithuania.

Dr Rūta Janonienė



Crenel with a cross-shaped opening

Renaissance arcade of the Castle

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The Panemunė Castle is a unique architectural monument, in its majestic brickwork keeping historic memory and signs of the centuries-long cherished European culture of Lithuania.

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