

Egidijus Abromavičius

Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology of Klaipėda University, Lithuania

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS ON THE SITES OF ŽALIOJI STREET OF
ARMALĖNAI VILLAGE IN 2012 AND THE CEMETERY OF THE FORMER
PRISONER OF WAR CAMP IN MACIKAI VILLAGE IN 2014
METHODS. RESULTS. PROSPECTS.**

Methods

Introduction. When examining the history of the camps in Macikai Village of Šilutė District, archaeological site surveys are very important and complement the image of WWII and the post-war history in Lithuania. On the basis of the project ‘The House of Death 1939–1955. Message from Resurrected Memory’, in 2013 the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania commissioned two archaeological surveys on the sites of the cemetery on Žalioji Street of Armalėnai Village of Šilutė District and the old cemetery and the former complex of WWII prisoner of war and Gulag camp in Macikai Village of Šilutė District. The archaeological survey was conducted by a group of archaeologists consisting of Egidijus Abromavičius, Edvinas Ubis, Daumantas Kiulkys and Miglė Urbonaitė. The archaeological survey was carried out in May–November 2014. All measurements were carried out using GPS/GNSS Receiver EPOCH-35 reference station and also metal detector XP GMAXX GOLD.

Archaeological survey of Žalioji Street area in Armalėnai Village of Šilutė District

On 11 November 2011, in Žalioji Street on the western edge of Armalėnai Village, an excavator was digging a trench for water pipes for a newly constructed house, when at a depth of approximately 1.2 m human remains were discovered. The number of skulls indicated that there were remains of 10 bodies. On this basis in May–June 2012, archaeological survey was carried out in this area.

Review of previous studies. The first archaeological survey in the said area started in 2012, when geophysical prospecting was carried out by Dr Sebastian Messal, under the international scientific cooperation agreement between the Baltic Sea Region History and Archaeology Institute of the University of Klaipėda and the Roman-Germanic Commission (Römisch-Germanisches Kommission) in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). The magnetic field was measured on the site with a

5-channel magnetometer SENSYS DLM 98/5, the total area measured was 1.5 ha. When analysing the recorded magnetic field measurement data, several locations of large-size pits, which could have been used for burial, were identified. In 2012, a group led by Abromavičius conducted an archaeological survey in the area of Žalioji Street: ten 2 m × 5 m trenches, one 2 m × 2 m trench, and two 2 m × 1 m trenches were examined. A total area of 108 sq. m was investigated. Further examination showed that there could be a total of 7 mass graves in this location, each 1.6 m × 20 m in size (Scheme 1).

Historical data. In performing the research three unpublished sources were used: Rimantas Maslauskas' "Report. Complex search data on Macikai labour camp and cemetery. 8 April 1999. Vilnius–Šilutė"; Soviet security (NKVD) interrogation protocol dated 16–18 November 1944 of Dovydas Stučka; and memoirs of Hilda Petraitytė about the burial of Russian prisoners of war (POWs) in 1943–1944 in Armalėnai, the land of farmer Koblencas (deciphered on 24 November 2011 by Ignas Giniotis, an employee of Šilutė Museum).

Following the analysis of these historical sources it was identified that in the winter of 1942/1943, about 40 Soviet prisoners of war died daily, mostly from exhaustion and diseases. Initially, they were buried about 500 m away from the prisoner of war camp. According to Stučka's testimony dead naked prisoners were carried on a sledge and buried in pits in groups of 20–25 bodies. The witness stated that in autumn 1944 there were about 60 such mass graves near Macikai and additionally some 200–300 individual graves were identified outside the camp, in front of watchtower No. 3.

According to Petraitytė's testimony, in 1943–1944 there was a shortage of spaces to bury dead prisoners by the river in Macikai, so the land of farmer Koblencas in Armalėnai Village began to be used for burials. The burial place was about 1.5 km to the southeast of the prisoner of war camp. According to the witness, only Soviet POWs who died of typhus epidemic were buried there. Dead naked bodies of the deceased were covered with overcoats and brought on stretchers by Soviet prisoners of war. The deceased were buried in oblong pits (trenches) 2–3 m wide, oriented in a north-south direction. Burial pits were dug up in two rows in the area of current Žalioji Street. Groups of 20 bodies were buried. At first 10 bodies were laid to rest, then their bodies were sprinkled with bleach, then another 10 bodies were laid on top and sprinkled with bleach and buried.

The aim of the archaeological survey. The main aim of the archaeological survey in Žalioji Street in Armalėnai Village to continue and complete the research started in 2012, to identify whether there were mass graves in the southern part of the street, to perform the archaeological survey on the hill about 150 m west of Žalioji Street (Schedule 1), where in 2012 abnormalities

were identified during the magnetic survey, and to identify whether people had in fact been buried in a pit, which had been formed using explosives, as testified by witnesses

Results

Results. In order to complete the survey started in 2012 in the area of Žalioji Street, in 2014, four 2 m × 5 m trenches were additionally investigated, total area of 40 sq. m: during archaeological surveys in the southern part of Žalioji Street two 2 m × 5 m trenches and two 2 m × 5 m trenches about 150 m west of the Žalioji Street (Scheme 1). WWII POWs who died in the camp in 1943–1944 were buried on the western edge of Armalėnai Village (currently the area of Žalioji Street). According to witnesses, these were Soviet prisoners of war. This is attested by human remains discovered in 2011 during excavation of the trench for a water pipe and individual finds. The examination showed that in 2012 all burial places were most likely identified, because in 2014 no new burial sites or individual finds were detected. It was established that the mass burial site of WWII prisoners of war of Macikai camp covered an area of approximately 0.4 ha

No burials were detected in Trench 1 and Trench 4.

Archaeological survey of the old cemetery and also of the former complex of WWII prisoner of war camps and Gulag camps in Macikai Village of Šilutė District

Historical data. The historical complex of camps and graves in Macikai Village enlisted in the Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage consists of WWII prisoner of war and Gulag camps, the punishment room and graves.:

1. Macikai prisoner of war and Gulag camp. Between 1941 and 1944, there was a Nazi POW camp on the site. From 1941 soldiers from Belgium, England, France, Poland and Soviet Union were detained there and starting from 1943, in a separate part of the camp, mainly air crews from England, France and the US were detained. Between 1944 and 1948, there were two prisoner of war camps on the site: Šilutė prisoner of war camp No. 184 and hospital No. 2652 specifically for prisoners of war, where German soldiers and soldiers of their allies were detained. In 1945, Gulag 3rd corrective labour colony was set up in Šilutė (Macikai) and until 1955 people convicted in Lithuania and outside Lithuania were imprisoned there. The site is in the north-eastern part of Macikai Village, 1.5 km to the north of the Šilutė–Žemaičių Naumiestis Road, on the left bank of the River Šyša, and to the southeast of Hermann Sudermann Street.

2. Punishment room is located in the south-western part of the camp and was built in the early 20th century. Between 1939 and 1955 it was a place for the isolation and torture of prisoners. In 1995, a museum of former prisoner of war and Gulag camps was opened in Macikai..

3. Graves were located in the northern part of the camp. Executed or deceased prisoners of these camps were buried here between 1939 and 1955.

In 1955, pursuant to an order of the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Lithuanian SSR, Pagryniai Home for the Disabled was opened in Macikai Village. In 1982, a new three-storey residential building was built for this institution. In 1988, a building for disabled children (capacity – 70 people) was built. Currently, this social care institution is called Šilutė Home for the Disabled.

Results of archaeological surveys. The main aim of archaeological surveys is, in consultation with the client, to provide details of the boundaries of the cemetery of Macikai POW camp and to identify the layout of the graves in the cemetery. In June–November 2014, a total area of 435 sq. m with various size of trenches was investigated and 82 archaeological finds were made. The main group of the finds were everyday household items such as copper spoons and aluminium food containers. A large part of the finds consisted of the buttons of the uniforms of Belgian Army troops showcasing an image of a lion.

Trench 1 of 2 m × 20 m in the northern part of the cemetery (northwest-southeast direction) was investigated. Seven pits for graves and two pits for camp rubbish were detected. The rubbish pits contained many finds, mostly buttons of the uniforms of Belgian Army troops.

Trench 2 of 2 m × 20 m about 40 m southeast of trench 1 inside the cemetery (northwest-southeast direction) was investigated. Three utility pits were detected with such finds as dishes, buttons of the uniforms of Belgian Army troops, mugs, water flasks, glass bottles, and rusty unidentified iron items.

Trench 3, which was 80 sq. m and polygonal shape, was 23 m north of trench 2 inside the cemetery (in the northeastern part) was investigated. Under the top soil, the foundations of a building of about 70 sq. m were unearthed. A number of household items, such as copper spoons, food containers, etc. were detected.

Trench 4 of 2 m × 20 m about 35 m southeast of trench 2 inside the cemetery (northeast-southwest direction) was investigated. Six utility pits with finds, among which a Russian kopeck coin, were detected.

Trench 5 of 1 m × 10 m near the western part of the cemetery, outside the cemetery fence on the bank of the River Šyša (north-south direction) was investigated. In the southern part a pit profile was unearthed which might have been a grave. No finds were detected.

Trench 6 of 2 m × 20 m in the southern part of the cemetery, outside the cemetery fence (west-east direction) was investigated. Two 0.3 m wide excavations were detected in the western part of the trench, both across the trench, about 0.5 m apart. Compared with the Plan of Macikai Concentration Camp made by Edmundas Stankevičius in 1995, this was most likely the north-west side of the fence of the labour camp. This fence surrounded the “Russian zone” (Scheme 3). No finds or items were detected.

Trench 7 of 1.5 m × 25 m (37.5 sq. m) near the northern part of the cemetery, about 10 m north outside the cemetery fence (west-east direction) was investigated (Scheme 2). No finds or items were detected.

Trench 8 of 1.5 m × 25 m (37.5 sq. m) near the northern part of the cemetery about 10 m north of the cemetery fence and about 10 m to the east from trench 7 was investigated (Scheme 2). No finds or items were detected

Prospects

Looking to the future it can be said that the research into this recent past (which at first glance is not even the area of archaeology) will gradually gain momentum. As a result of the surveys conducted in Armalėnai and Macikai it transpired that we know very little, whereas whatever is available in storage in the archives does not tell the whole truth. With the help of the latest archaeological research methods, we can collect the missing historical data more accurately and better and reconstruct the daily life of those times.

A separate issue is the mass burial sites detected in Armalėnai. What should be done with them? Since urbanisation of the area has started, this is a relevant question. On the one hand, once the burial site has been established, it could be left as it is; on the other hand there are some thoughts regarding reburial of the remains. There are examples of this in Vilnius where Napoleonic troops were excavated and reburied. However, such work requires not only long spiritual reflections, but also huge financial resources. Reburial would mean destruction of the archaeological-historical monument. So I think we need to discuss this issue and decide what to do. This is important not only to the scientific community, but also for the people who live there and for the entire Macikai POW camp complex.

The issue of Macikai is easier to deal with, because we have a clear site of the POW camp. The main issue to be resolved is the tidying up of the monument and preparation for social purposes. This question should be addressed to the local government of Šilutė, while both historians and I are ready for consultations at any time.

Thank you for attention.

