



1. SINGE-EDGED SWORD. Iron. First part of the 15th century. Karmėlava.
2. SPEARHEAD. Beginning of the 15th century. Iron. Mastekiai. Grave No 39
3. POMMEL. Iron. 13th-14th century. Lithuania
4. STIRRUP. Iron, silver 11th-12th century. Veršvai
5. STIRRUPS. Iron, silver 11th-13th century. Rimalsiai
6. SNAFFLE. IRON. 13th-14th century. Russia
7. SWORD. "Desiukiškės" type sword manufactured from metal, wooden handle covered with leather, pommel encrusted according the 14th century Lithuanian ornaments

Leičiai possessed their patrimonial land and conducted service to the sovereign: they were his force in war campaigns, fought in battles, enforced the sovereign's rule in annexed lands, served as guards in border castles, collected taxes.

Historical sources of Lithuania dating back to the 14th c. – the first half of the 15th c. supplies data about a social group of the Lithuanian ruler's service people referred to as *leičiai* „leityūs“ (*leythey, Wytolten eynen konyng der Leytten*).

Leičiai – is a social stratum of the old state of Lithuania which existed in the 12th – 16th centuries. As it is indicated by historical sources, territories inhabited by *leičiai*, as a social stratum and service people of the Lithuanian sovereign, were referred to as **Lietuva, Lietava (Lietuva):** *Leičių /Lietuvos* Field of Anykščių District; *leičiai / Juma* of Lasasinos Manor of Slanimo District; *lietavėnai* of Karšuvos District related to *Leitkapių* areas in Viduklės, Batakių Districts. It emerged that the meaning of the name **leitis** "lietuvis, Lietuva" as "service person of the sovereign's

court" was known in relatively early Lithuanian historical sources before their mass escalation: *das land Litten, die Litschen konige* (1348), *von der fart <...> krygen Litten* (1433). Historical sources from the period of the rule of Vytautas the Great reveal the dualism of the word. A participant of Luck Conference in January 1929 told in his letter about the emperor's intent to honour Vytautas the Great with a wreath of the King of *Lietuva* (Lithuania) - *leičiai (leitjiai) - machen herczog Wytolten eynen konyng der Leytten*. Whereas Vytautas the Great in 1407 presented in abundance his people *leičiai (leytey)* from Kareikiai to elder of Vilnius Manvydas.

Leičiai were understood as Lithuanians and a social structure of the nation of Lithuanians in a certain compact territory. It is testified by historical sources and dialects of the Lithuanian language from the middle of the 14th century to the end of the 16th century and later. They were like extraordinary service Lithuanians who lived among the Lithuanians in general.

Leičiai – colonial warriors. In the lands annexed to the state of Lithuania *leičiai* established permanent administrative territories called *Lietuva* (Lithuania) or by other versions of the name (*leičiai* as one of the versions of the meaning of the name). It signified the court of the sovereign of Lithuania. Legally the territories were an exception in the rule of the local customary law – an archaic form of immunity existed – "dependence to **Lietuva** (Lithuania)".



1. COMBAT KNIFE. Iron. End of the 14th – first half of the 15th century. Daugirdava.
 2. SPUR. Silvery iron. Beginning of the 15th century. Lithuania.
 3. KNIFE SCABBARD. Leather. Scabbard trimmings from brass and bronze.
 4. COMBAT AXE. Metal, axe handle – wooden, covered with brass
 5. SPUR. BRASS. 15th century. Lithuania
- 4 Lithuanian national coat of arms Vytils depicted in the tapestry on order of Polish-Lithuanian King Zygmantas Augustas

The most abundant data about the *leičiai* comes from the historical sources of the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century: *leičiai* were dispersed in the manors of the grand duke's courts in Trakų and Vilniaus Voivodships. However, *leičiai* can be found quite distantly from the Lithuanian ethnical lands: the manor of Lasasina (Lososna) in Slanimo County, several manors of Kijevo District near River Prypiat. A small town in the southeast of Ukraine, Podolia, near Kamyanets-Podilsky, *Lietava* also gives interesting food for thoughts. There are also *Liatiči* and *Leticiv* nearby. The history of the famous Kamyanets-Podilsky Castle gives the answer. It is the most remote majestic castle of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the current Lithuania. It has been standing there for over 700 years founded, according to the annual, by four grandsons of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas, sons of Karjotas: Jurgis, Aleksandras, Teodoras and Konstantinas at the permission of sovereign of Lithuania Algirdas. Podolia was used like a highroad by Tartars and later Turks on their way to the west. Barrier was made up by a system of castles – apart from Kamyanets-Podilsky there were also Skala Podilska, Chortkovo, and other. Garrisons guarding the castles, especially the ones on the state border, would rotate, however, a part of them must have been inhabited in the locations of service which probably must have given origin to the place names *L(i)etava, L(i)etičiv, Liatiči*. Nowhere else in Ukraine or the entire eastern part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania such place names *L(i)et-* occur in such abundance. The intrigue is only heated by the fact that a stream called *L(i)etavka* flows near *L(i)etava*.

Russian annuals of the 13th-14th centuries use the name **Litva not only for the territory and its inhabitants Lithuanians but also for military forces, often an armed escort of the sovereign or of his soldiery.** One of the annuals, Lithuania Gediminas, sons of Karjotas: Jurgis, Aleksandras, Teodoras and Konstantinas at the permission of sovereign of Lithuania Algirdas. Podolia was used like a highroad by Tartars and later Turks on their way to the west. Barrier was



1. BROOCH. Designed to button a coat, silver or brass, handmade
2. TUNIC. Crimson colour, natural wool. Decorations on tunic: Columns of Grand Duke Gediminas family
3. PURSE. Natural leather, handmade with brass ornaments
4. PENDANT. Brass. 11th – 12th century. Found in Didvyčiai cemetery, Plungė district
5. CHAIN ARMOUR. Manufactured of 10 mm metal rings. Buttoned in front with 4 straps
6. CHAIN ARMOUR HOOD. 10 mm metal rings. Edge of hood made from brass rings.
7. UNDER ARMOUR TROUSERS. Single layer felt bordered with leather, fastened with six clasps, leather thigh protection



Historian H. Lovmianskis has analysed two messages dating back to the times of Mindaugas. The first one refers to events in 1238: *"Po tom že lete Danilž že vozvede na Kondrata Litvou Minždoga"* ("And in that year **Danilo (duke of Galicia-Volhynia) raised Lietuva against Conrad (duke of Masurians)**").

The second message reports about a campaign of Lithuanians to Russia: *"Pridoša Litva i voevaša okolo Peresopnice Aišgyno Roušjkovič"* ("**Lietuva came and Aišvinas Ruškavičius fought near Peresopnica**").

H. Lovmianskis provides the following interpretation of those messages: **"In both cases just like in many others Litva does not refer to the origin or land of Lithuanians but to their platoons, forces, of Mindaugas in the first case, and of Ruškavičius in the second."** So it was a known fact for historians that in the 13th-15th centuries *Litva* was also the name for armed guard of the sovereign or war leader and his escort during military campaigns.

1. SWORDS. 13th century. Šilainiai, 2341, Raudonė, 2354. Kejėnai
2. SWORD. 13th century, Desiukiškės
3. HELMET. Metal, 2 mm width. Inside layer: leather holder fastened with metal clasps to metal part of helmet
4. SHOULDER-STRAP. Metal, 15 mm width, parts joined with straps. Shoulder protection additionally fastened to chain armour with leather straps. Edges of shoulder protection binded with 15 – 2 mm brass stripe.
5. ARMOUR GLOVE.
6. SPEARHEAD. Iron. First half of the 15th century. Munkaviškės



Investigation reveals that *leičiai* also served as **border guards, garrisons of border castles.** Settlements of *Litavių (lietuvii, lietavėny)* and *Leičių (from Leitkapių)* in the southeast Samogitia must have appeared there in the end of the 13th-the first decade of the 14th century. These were established by sovereign of Lithuania Vytenis and inhabited with his people – *leičiai* (Lithuanians). They formed several separate or one out of several territories subordinate to the central authority only for the defence from German in the southeast of Lithuania. **Leičiai – were a kind of border guards, soldiers of the first line of defence.**

A similar territory must have been in the manor of Gegužinė-Perelozai on the confluence of Neris and Šventoji. In that area *leičiai* have been known since the beginning of the 16th century, there is also a settlement named Rukla with a mound. This settlement is associated with Ruklys, son of Mindaugas. Just like everywhere else places once inhabited by *leičiai* here left marks – place names related to the name of *Lietuva*: two streams *Lietauka*

(Lietava) and *Lietavočka (Lietavėlė)*, and a village *Litovka*. A small territory administered by the son of Mindaugas could have been mapped out to cover the water way to the depth of the country and to repress Tautvilas as a part of his domain was awarded to Ruklys. The confluence of Šventoji and Neris, a strait gate to Nemunas, was an important commercial crossroad. **Leičiai could have been guards and keepers of the state customs.**

To sum up, defensive fortifications of our state were built in the first half of the 13th century-the beginning of the 14th century. For example, term "terminos Letvinorum" (Lithuanian borders) first appear in the sources of the German Order in 1243. According to the data available **the earliest sources service people of the sovereign leičiai/Lithuanians knew to be state border guards.** They could have also simultaneously served as police for suppressing the discontent of local population and nobility with the activities of the central authority.

In the times of the rule of Lithuanian sovereign (1295–1316) a new order

was introduced for guarding state border castles, the duty was entrusted on a two-month basis for cavalry garrisons from the most remote locations of the state. Peter of Duisburg describes the order in the Chronicon terrae Prussiae (The Chronicle of the Prussian Land): "There was a custom in Lithuania observed almost without any exceptions regarding the guard of border castles: Lithuanian king (Vytenis) assigns a certain number of armed men to guard one of the castles, say, for one month, or for a longer period of time...".

Leičiai differed from the mentioned garrisons; they were permanent tiller settlers of the castle area. They would take care of the castle in peacetimes and defend during wars. The *leičiai (leitiška)*, Lithuanian type of state border guard service was more ancient than the one recorded during the times of the rule of Vytautas.

Leitis (lietis) – lietuvis (A Lithuanian person), Leita (Lieta) – Lietuva (Lithuania). The stratum of *leičiai* had several features characteristic solely to them. To begin with, the Lithuanian form of the name **leitis**. The form **leitis** is substan-

EFFECTUATORS OF THE RULER'S WILL
STATE BORDER GUARDS
MOUNTED RULER'S BODYGUARDS
COLONIAL WARRIORS



■ 14th century soldiers of Lithuania in commemoration of the 600 year anniversary of Žalgiris (Grunwald) battle.



■ Brotherhood of Late Middle Ages reconstructors "The Messengers of Middle Ages"



■ 14th century soldiers at Žalgiris (Grunwald) battle imitation in commemoration of the 600 year anniversary of Žalgiris (Grunwald) battle



■ Vytautas the Great and escort at Žalgiris (Grunwald) battle imitation in commemoration of the 600 year anniversary of Žalgiris (Grunwald) battle



LEIČIAI

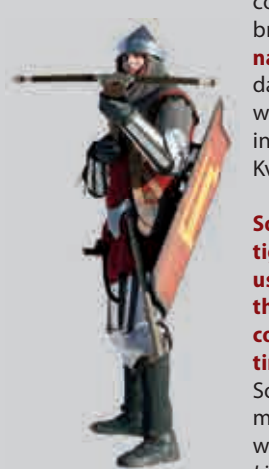


tivised adjective *leita*. **Leitis is a person who belongs to leita (leita is represented by the Lithuanian sovereign in this case).** Algirdas Patackas shared interesting observations on the topic. According to him, in Ancient Greek *leitō* stands for no other than a state, authority (*which is significant bearing in mind that state and authority in the Middle Ages was equated to the ruler!*). *Leiton* was the name for the city hall building by the Achaeans, the most ancient Greek tribe and the earliest settlers from the North; another form is *leitourgia* – service, “work for payment” to the state; *leitourgos* – a public servant, licitor. According to A. Patackas, perhaps *Lietuva (Lithuania) also means a state, a union of authorities - lietų (leity), and lietuvis (a Lithuanian) – a person, a citizen of that state of prestate?* This idea of our signatories of the Act of Independence seems perfectly logical with regard to the fact that the Lithuanian and the Greek languages belong to the same group of the Indo-European languages.



Linguist S. Karaliūnas associates the root *liet-* (*leit-*) with its equivalents in Germanic languages (which belong to the Indo-European language family too): *ge-leite* – “escort, armed guard, convoy” of the German language, *leido* – “escort” of the Lowlanders’ German language, *lid* – “platoon, escort” of the Old Frisian language, *lith* – “escort, troops” of the Old Icelandic language, etc. What is more, the Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language gives “**state, authority(?)**” as one of the meaning of the word *lieta*: “*The envoys numbered up to six tens, nearly all of them represented grandeas of Samogitia, all stalwart, and even the very men of lieta among them*” (M. Valančius). “*And he was a man of lieta, understanding in war and in house economy*”, “*He handed over his authority by giving the staff of lieta, or household control, a so-called krivilė*” (S. Daukantas). It must be taken into account that **the notion of authority embraces martial arts, military duty, service for the state, state officer’s service, i.e. everything that contributes to the**

strength of authority and state. Historical research testifies that the explanation of the service of *leičiai* as *Lietuvos*, Lithuanian is absolutely precise. It was inclusive of legal, administrative, and duty-related characteristics of the social stratum of *leičiai*. There existed legal, duty-related-territories inhabited by an extraordinary group of people who conducted the service of *leitis*, *Lietuva* for the sovereign. The ethnical meanings are confused because the same word was already used to refer to the meaning of the word *lieta*: “*The envoys numbered up to six tens, nearly all of them represented grandeas of Samogitia, all stalwart, and even the very men of lieta among them*” (M. Valančius). “*And he was a man of lieta, understanding in war and in house economy*”, “*He handed over his authority by giving the staff of lieta, or household control, a so-called krivilė*” (S. Daukantas). It must be taken into account that **the notion of authority embraces martial arts, military duty, service for the state, state officer’s service, i.e. everything that contributes to the**



■ Reconstruction of the 14th century Lithuanian soldier

a warband called *leita*, *lietuva*, *lietava* in the ancient society of Lithuania was considered a fact supported by cultural, historical, and linguistic evidence. **Leita** and its derivative **leitiai** referred to an armed escort, its members, warriors,” – maintains linguist S. Karaliūnas. **It is exactly this military term that gave origin to the collective noun** (compare: *bernava*, *broluva*, *šišava* – concentration of male servants, brothers, children, etc.) to **Lietuva, the name of Lithuania**, and the process is dated approximately the 10th century which correlates with the mentioning of the name of Lithuania, *Litua*, in Kvedlinburg’s annals.

The sovereign established his courts where the centralised power of Lithuania had to penetrate, the strategic locations of the state: on the state border, on the most important water and land ways, or where a strong opposition to the central power thrived. *Leičiai*, the Lithuanians of the sovereign, were distinguished legally, by duty fulfilled, and from the administrative point of view, from the others. **They are the establishers of the state and the ones who implement the power of the sovereign.**

During a certain period *leičiai* began conducting service to the Lithuanian ruler and cultivating their land for the needs of the ruler, and restricted their natural freedom only nominally. **Leičiai were the social structure of the Lithuanian society conscripted and formed by the sovereign originating from the Lithuanian ethnical tribes.** **The ethnical name for leičiai indicates that they share their Lithuanian decent with the sovereign. Leičiai, lietuviai (Lithuanians) are his servants. Doubtlessly it was a direct and powerful between them and the sovereign of Lithuania. Leičiai are the Lithuanians of the Lord.** According to S. Karaliūnas, it is an archaic social and political structure, warband of the future nation of Lithuania. For that reason the meaning of *leičiai* as “social milieu, service” and as “Lithuanians, ethnics” existed side by side in the historical sources. The social milieu concentrated around the Lithuanian sovereign and called by one of the synonyms of Lithuanians and the name of their state ensured the extension and enhancement of the sovereign’s rule.



■ Reconstruction of the 14th century Lithuanian soldier

Conclusions
■ We can sum up that *leičiai* were an outcome of a state organisation moving away from the Lithuanian tribal society, vassals of the leader of one of the strongest Lithuanian noble families (kins) (or collective leader) assembled from Lithuanian tribes from the end of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century. They supported the Lithuanian sovereign in extending his power throughout the Lithuanian families, and later – among neighbours.
■ Historical sources dating back to the period from the first half of the 13th century to the beginning of the 14th century maintain that *leičiai* protected a part of the state border of Lithuania. They used to establish the ruler’s courts across the lands of neighbouring Lithuanians, Balts, and Belarusians that were still not under his rule. For that reason and as the conveyors of the sovereign’s power they had to serve as the initial officers of local administrators of the state. In some of the territories *leičiai* would repress and keep down the moods opposing the central

authority while expanding the influence of Lithuania.
■ In the lands of the state of Lithuania *leičiai* used to establish administrative territories called *Lietuva* (Lithuania) or by other versions of the name (*leičiai* as one of the versions). The same terms were applied to refer to the court of the sovereign of Lithuania. Such territories were legally distinguished from the local customary law. So an archaic form of immunity existed – “dependence to *Lietuva* (Lithuania)”.
■ *Leičiai* are particularly closely related to the name of Lithuania, Lithuanians, and the versions of the name because they were in direct dependence to the political organisation supervised by the

sovereign. It is one of the meanings of the name *Lietuva* (Lithuania). *Leičiai* would expand and embed the organisation in Lithuanian and neighbouring lands via the courts of the Lithuanian sovereign. For that reason there were more than one meaning of the name *Lietuva*: a name of the political structure of the Lithuanian sovereign, the name of his courts in the state, the name of his military units, the name of his closest servants and the entire service, one of the lands of Lithuanian tribes, and eventually the name of the entire state.
■ Historical data collected allows drawing the timelines of the existence of the social layer of *leičiai*: from the end of the 12th century to the middle of the 14th century.

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