

LITHUANIAN HERITAGE FROM THE AIR

Through recording and collection to education

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Background and objectives

Over the last 50 years the territory of Lithuania has been photographed from the air five times. The resulting vertical air photographs and digital ortho-photographs, cared for in the archives of the Aero-geodesy Institute in Kaunas and the GIS centre in Vilnius, are open to the public and copies of the photographs can be acquired at reasonable prices. In 1996 the Department of Lithuanian Heritage Protection began a limited programme of aerial photography for purposes of heritage protection. At the present time the Department's archives hold over 2000 oblique air-photo images, representing more than 300 sites and structures of the Lithuanian cultural heritage.

The Culture 2000 project is enhancing these first steps in four main ways.

- By developing a digital database of air photographs of the Lithuanian heritage.
- By fully exploiting the new and existing air photograph as a tool in teaching local history.
- By supplementing the small but valuable programme of regular aerial photography undertaken by the Department in recent years.
- By joining the Europe-wide network of contacts provided by the Culture 2000 project and by organising an International Workshop in Lithuania.

Progress to the end of 2005

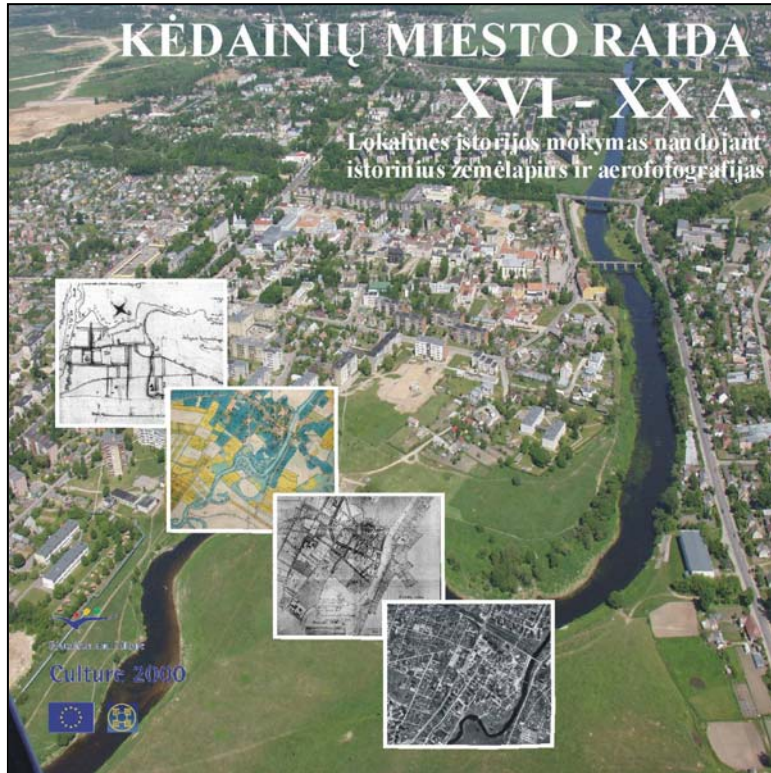
Good progress has been made on all four fronts. Because of time-clashes with other Culture 2000 events the International Workshop was held a year later than intended, in November 2006 at the University of Klaipėda, western Lithuania.

Digital database of air photographs and related data

The basic model for the digital database has been created. Vertical photographs covering 110 sites have been selected from the historical archives and have been digitised. The digital database is being developed on the basis of 'data packages', ie: collections of aerial photographs taken over a range of years, with attached texts containing information on individual heritage sites (such as a castle, town, hillfort or prehistoric enclosure). The packages will contain aerial photographs (black-and-white vertical photographs, ortho-photographs and oblique colour views) taken over a period of years. They will be constantly added to as new photographs are acquired. In implementing the project, interpretation and scientific investigation are being undertaken for sites and monuments detected in both the modern and the archival air photographs.

Education packs

Some 20 towns and townships with origins going back to prehistoric times have been chosen for the preparation of educational packs. The archaeological and historical information for seven of these has been selected and detailed preparation of the packs is in progress, four of them are already completed. The dating evidence lies in prehistoric features both within the towns/townships and in their immediate surroundings – Iron Age hillforts, burial mounds and settlement sites, for example. A castle, a church or an estate attached to the market place are the main components from which the towns and townships developed in the Middle Ages and post-Medieval period. The packs each contain historical and recent aerial photographs, supported by other archaeological data, historical information, cartographic material, ancient paintings and ground-based photographs. The information is being specially adapted for schoolchildren so as to show features of the local cultural heritage and to emphasise their importance for society, both historically and in the present day.



The title page from one of the education packs created as part of the Culture 2000 project, plus the Old Town of Klaipėda seen from the air, and snow-bound participants in the Klaipėda Seminar of November 2005.

Aerial photography

Between September 2004 and the end of 2005 fifteen hours of aerial survey were undertaken, producing about 850 images of approximately 250 cultural heritage sites, of which some ten archaeological sites were new to the record. Two days of field survey were organised to examine the previously unrecorded sites and to compile information for the national archive.

International Workshop/Seminar

The planned International Workshop on aerial archaeology and landscape studies took place at the new University of Klaipėda, on the western coast of Lithuania, on 16–20 November 2005. A total of up to 30 participants from Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Russia and the UK considered a range of topics of particular significance to the Baltic region. They also discussed the possibility of future co-operation in the promotion of aerial archaeology, culture and landscape studies. The meeting attracted coverage on radio, television and in the local press. A publication of the proceedings is under consideration, using 50% financial support from Klaipėda University and 50% from Culture 2000 funds.

Culture 2000 contacts

Academic staff and students from Lithuania took part in a number of meetings organised or assisted by the project, including the Culture 2000 and Aerial Archaeology Research Group meetings at Munich and Leuven in September 2004 and 2005, the Helsinki symposium in October 2004 and the aerial archaeology Training School at Barth, Germany, in June 2005.