

THE CHEST GAZETTE

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HILL OF  CROSSES

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The Hill of Crosses is a major site of Catholic pilgrimage in northern Lithuania, 12 km from the city of Siauliai. It is believed that the first crosses on mound of Jurgaitis (in Siauliai district) were put up 1831 and 1863. After the third partition of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, Lithuania became part of Russian Empire. Lithuanians unsuccessfully rebelled against Russian authorities in 1831 and 1863. These two uprisings are connected with the beginning of the hill: as families could not locate bodies of perished rebels, they started putting up symbolic crosses at the site of a former hill fort.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the hill was taken to be a sacred place, and believers set up their crosses in the hope of grace. This hill became a sacred place, it was frequently visited by people, it was the place of praise, worship and indulgences.

When Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, the Hill of Crosses was destroyed, because the hill, the existing crosses and the chapel testified Lithuanian religiosity, which contradicted the Soviet ideology prevailing at the time.

Soviet Union's authorities tried to destroy the Hill of Crosses, and that is why in 1961 wooden crosses were burned, metal crosses were removed into scrap metal, stone and concrete were beaten and drowned in a Kulpes stream. In the same year about 5.000 crosses and the chapel were destroyed. The Soviets worked hard to remove new crosses, and bulldozed the site at least three times.

On September 7, 1993 Pope John Paul II visited the Hill of Crosses, declaring it a place for hope, peace and sacrifice. The Hill of Crosses is still used today as a place for Lithuanians to pray for peace and for their country. The Lithuanians continue to erect wooden crosses and the exact number of crosses is unknown, but averagely estimated at about 200.000.

Pious Lithuanian people were not going to refuse to build crosses. That's why the hill is also the whole obstacle to the strengths of faith. Though Russian Empire and Soviet Union's regime banned building crosses, Lithuanian didn't give up that tradition. Therefore it is a symbol of the nation's struggle for independence.

The Lithuanian art of cross-crafting (kryždirbystė) is inscribed into the UNESCO list of immaterial world heritage. This place is inscribed into the UNESCO list too. Visiting this place is to survive an incredible atmosphere and move people into a magic and to a spiritual world. You have to visit it to experience it.



The Hill of Crosses



Algimantas Dugnas, 25.05.2021