

Sacred Landscape of Lithuania

Historical Evidence, Archaeology, Toponymy, Folklore,
and the Limits of Reconstruction

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Editorial principle. *The publication distinguishes documented fact, interpretation, and later tradition.*

Contents

1. Research summary
2. Scope of the study and key concepts
 - 2.1. Geographical and chronological framework
 - 2.2. What is meant here by a sacred place
 - 2.3. How claims were checked
 - 2.4. What a negative result means
3. How different types of sources are read
 - 3.1. Written sources
 - 3.2. Archaeology
 - 3.3. Toponymy
 - 3.4. Folklore and ethnographic records
 - 3.5. Spatial data
 - 3.6. Continuity
 - 3.7. From source to conclusion
4. Direct medieval evidence
 - 4.1. Ventis / Wentis near Veluona
 - 4.2. Rambynas: forest, hill, and stone
 - 4.3. Heiligenwalt on the lower Nevėžis
 - 4.4. Sethen and modern Šatijai
 - 4.5. Vilnius: the written fanum and the disputed temple of Perkūnas
5. When archaeology plays the leading role
 - 5.1. Obeliai: an unusual complex with an uncertain function
 - 5.2. Šliktinė: ancient deposits and a disturbed landscape
 - 5.3. Reškėtėnai: an ancient date does not always date a sacred place
 - 5.4. Trumponys: an artificial hollow, traces of fire, and no secure date
 - 5.5. What archaeology allows us to say
6. Toponymy, landscape, and later tradition
 - 6.1. Mikytai: a strong name and difficult dating
 - 6.2. Andriūnai and Doškonys: early observations and later stories of sacrifice
 - 6.3. The Perkūnas stone at Puvočiai: the name of Perkūnas without a proven cult
 - 6.4. Alkupio Šventkalnis: several strong clues side by side
 - 6.5. Padievytis, Dievyčio kalnas, and Šventupis
 - 6.6. When several lines of evidence really strengthen one another
7. Negative Evidence and Modern Reconstructions
 - 7.1. Šakiai: a modern Temple of Perkūnas and the 2001 field report
 - 7.2. Liškiava: the absence of an early layer and the limits of a negative conclusion
 - 7.3. Nečioniškis: when an original attribution should be rejected

- 7.4. Vilnius: why the Temple of Perkūnas can be rejected while the written testimony remains
- 7.5. How a detailed modern version of the past emerges

8. Christian and Later Sacred Places: What They Show

- 8.1. Vištytis: Šventas and Šv. Jono šaltinis
- 8.2. The Great Stone of Vištytis
- 8.3. Švendubrės Dzidziulis akmuo
- 8.4. Narkūnų Sveikatos versmė
- 8.5. Why later and Christian examples are necessary

9. Comparing the Results

- 9.1. Why a single ranking of certainty does not work
- 9.2. When a written source is sufficient without an archaeological altar
- 9.3. When strong archaeology does not provide one religious explanation
- 9.4. Why the number of publications is not the number of independent testimonies
- 9.5. The date of an event, the date of a record, and the date of an interpretation
- 9.6. What can actually continue across centuries
- 9.7. How to read negative results
- 9.8. Why later stories are often more detailed than early sources
- 9.9. Why alternative explanations are necessary
- 9.10. The overall result of the comparison

10. How to Show the Results on a Map

- 10.1. A map also makes a historical claim
- 10.2. Why the best-documented places often have only approximate geography
- 10.3. What kinds of places the map shows
- 10.4. One historical site does not always fit into one point
- 10.5. A research map and a guidebook serve different purposes
- 10.6. How to show uncertainty visually
- 10.7. What the reader should see in a site card
- 10.8. The main spatial conclusion

11. Conclusions

- 11.1. Specific sacred landscapes are genuinely documented
- 11.2. A sacred place did not have to be a temple
- 11.3. Archaeology reliably shows material traces, but not always their meaning
- 11.4. A name helps us search, but it does not replace evidence
- 11.5. Folklore most reliably dates the story itself
- 11.6. Continuity takes different forms
- 11.7. A negative result also matters
- 11.8. A precise coordinate is not the same as historical certainty
- 11.9. The thirty places belong to different historical types
- 11.10. What this study did not prove
- 11.11. What can be stated with reasonable confidence

11.12. Final conclusion

Appendix A. Short Register of the Investigated Places

Appendix B. How to Read the Evidence in This Publication

- B.1. Different sources answer different questions
- B.2. Confidence applies to a claim, not to the value of a place
- B.3. What “not established” means
- B.4. Continuity is always specified
- B.5. Geographical precision also requires evidence

Appendix C. Sources and Access Limitations

- C.1. How a source was selected for citation
- C.2. Limitations of the source base
- C.3. How direct quotations are used

Appendix D. Key Claims and the Limits of the Conclusions

Appendix E. What to Check in Future Versions

- E.1. Principle of revision
- E.2. Priority checks for future work
- E.3. What does not by itself require revision of the conclusions

Bibliography

- I. Primary Historical Sources and Critical Editions
- II. Archaeological Reports and Primary Field Publications
- III. Archival, Folklore, and Toponymic Materials
- IV. Modern Academic Studies and Specialist Catalogues
- V. Official Registers and Institutional Resources
- VI. Sources of Modern Reception, Local History, and Reconstructions

Notes

1. Research summary

Hundreds of places in Lithuania are associated with stories of sacred groves, sacrificial stones, springs, hills, fire, ancient gods, and unusual rites. Some of these ideas are based on medieval documents, others on archaeological finds, and still others on place names, folklore, or later local-history traditions. Popular accounts often combine these separate strands into a single story. A late legend, an old name, and an archaeological find may then appear to confirm one another even though they may have arisen at different times and referred to different places.

The purpose of this study was not to compile another list of pagan sanctuaries. We asked a narrower question: what exactly do the surviving sources allow us to say about particular places, and where does documented fact end?

Thirty places and landscape complexes from different parts of Lithuania were selected for comparison. The sample is not intended as a complete national catalogue. Its purpose is to compare different kinds of evidence. It includes places mentioned directly in medieval sources, archaeological complexes whose ritual interpretation is disputed, sites with old or sacred-sounding names, places associated with later religious practice, and modern reconstructions that can be checked against earlier material.

The results are uneven. For some places there are early documents that explicitly call a forest or settlement sacred. In other cases archaeology reliably reveals an unusual assemblage of finds but does not provide a single answer as to whether it was sacrificial, funerary, or served another purpose. Some places have a well-documented later healing, Christian, or mythological tradition, but no verifiable sequence of evidence allowing that tradition to be carried back into the pre-Christian period. Finally, there are popular reconstructions that specify a deity, the layout of a sanctuary, the position of an altar, and the nature of a ritual even though the early sources do not provide that level of detail.

One important conclusion concerns mapping. A precise modern coordinate does not mean that a historical location is equally precise. A medieval text may state with confidence that a sacred forest existed near a known settlement while giving no basis for drawing its boundaries. Placing a precise point on a map and labelling it “ancient sanctuary” would therefore create a new claim that is not present in the source. The map consequently distinguishes between precisely known modern objects, approximately reconstructed historical zones, and places for which a precise public location would not be justified.

The study confirms that within the territory of modern Lithuania there are several well-documented medieval places that sources genuinely associate with sacred status. At the same time, it shows the limits of such certainty. The words “sacred forest” do not by themselves establish the name of a deity, the form of an altar, the existence of a priesthood, or a specific ritual. A late legend does not automatically provide an ancient date. An archaeological layer does not automatically establish a religious function.

Uncertainty is not treated as a defect in this study. If a source allows only part of a story to be established, that is itself a result. Such limits provide a more reliable picture of the past than a detailed reconstruction built from assumptions.

2. Scope of the study and key concepts

2.1. Geographical and chronological framework

The main geographical framework of the study corresponds to the territory of the present-day Republic of Lithuania. This is a practical research boundary, not an assumption that modern state borders coincide with historical religious, ethnic, or political spaces.

Material from neighbouring regions is used only when it helps to understand a source, term, route, or historical context connected with a particular place in Lithuania.

The chronological focus lies on the late pre-Christian period, Christianisation, and the subsequent transformation of the religious landscape. Later material from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries is also included, but not as an automatic survival of paganism. It is treated as independent evidence for the history of memory, local customs, Christian sacralisation, local history, national culture, and modern neopaganism.

2.2. What is meant here by a sacred place

In this study, a sacred place is a space or natural feature to which a source or a documented practice assigns a special religious, cultic, or sacred significance.

This is a broad concept. It does not automatically mean a pagan sanctuary and does not imply the presence of a building. A forest, hill, stone, spring, stretch of shoreline, or a larger landscape zone could be regarded as sacred.

In one case, a medieval document explicitly calls a forest sacred. In another, archaeologists find an unusual assemblage of objects whose function remains disputed. In a third, an eighteenth-century Christian procession to a stone is reliably documented. All three places may be important to the history of sacred landscapes, but they answer different historical questions.

For that reason, the later Christian sanctity of a place is not used as evidence of a pre-Christian function. Equally, a direct medieval reference to a sacred forest does not justify inventing a cultic arrangement about which the document says nothing.

2.3. How claims were checked

Each substantive claim was checked separately. The first step was to establish which source contained it and when that source was produced. The next was to determine whether it actually referred to the place in question, how precisely that place could be located, and whether a later author was merely repeating an already published version.

This order matters because the number of publications proves nothing by itself. If one local-history account is repeatedly reprinted, ten publications do not turn it into ten independent testimonies.

Observation was also separated from explanation. An archaeologist may reliably record a layer of charcoal, a pit, a stone structure, or a concentration of objects. That is a material fact. Explaining why the feature was created and what it meant to people at the time requires a further step and may allow more than one interpretation.

The same rule was applied to written sources. If a document mentions a sacred forest, what is established first is the content of the document itself. The historian must then assess the genre of the text, the circumstances in which it was produced, its distance from the events described, and whether the historical name can be connected with modern geography.

2.4. What a negative result means

Lack of confirmation is not proof of the opposite.

If an excavation does not reveal a cult structure, this does not always mean that a place never had religious significance. A sacred forest may have had no structures at all. A small excavation may have missed the relevant area. Part of the landscape may have been destroyed by erosion, economic activity, or later construction.

A negative result nevertheless matters. If a specific popular account claims that a temple stood on a particular hill, while a targeted archaeological investigation finds none of the expected features and offers a simpler natural explanation, that account becomes less convincing.

Negative evidence is therefore used here not to prove the statement “there was nothing here”, but to test specific claims that can actually be examined.

3. How different types of sources are read

3.1. Written sources

The most direct evidence is a text that explicitly calls a particular place sacred or describes its cultic function. Even such a document, however, cannot be read as a ready-made archaeological plan.

At least three questions have to be asked of every written source. What exactly does it say? In what genre and for what purpose was the document produced? How confidently can the historical place it mentions be connected with modern geography?

This is especially important for the period of Christianisation. Most written accounts of pagan practices in Lithuania were produced by Christian authors, chanceries, or ecclesiastical institutions. They cannot be treated as neutral ethnographic records. This does not mean, however, that such texts should automatically be dismissed as fiction. Their evidential value depends on the precise wording, the genre, the proximity to the event described, and the possibility of independent verification.

A useful example is the document of Pope Urban VI from 1388 concerning the establishment of the Vilnius diocese. It does indeed contain an account of a pagan “fanum”, the destruction of idols, and the construction of a church “in eodem loco”, that is, in the same place. There is no doubt that this account appears in the document.¹ At the same time, the bull states that the pope did not have certain knowledge of all the circumstances described and ordered them to be investigated. The document is therefore important as an early official testimony, but it is not the pope's personal eyewitness account and it does not provide an architectural plan of a pagan structure.

Accuracy of translation matters greatly. If a source says “heiliger walt”, it means a sacred forest, not automatically a temple complex. If it uses the word “fanum”, the name of a particular deity cannot be added when the text does not provide one. The expression “sanctus vir” cannot, without separate grounds, be turned into the title of a supreme pagan priest.

An early date does not make every statement beyond dispute. A medieval chronicle may employ a literary convention, depend on another text, or describe another religion using concepts from the author's own culture. Written evidence must therefore always be read in light of its origin and purpose.

3.2. Archaeology

Archaeology is most reliable when answering what physically existed in the investigated area. It can establish the sequence of layers, the shape of a pit, traces of fire, the position of stones, the composition of finds, or features of a burial.

Function is harder to determine. The same material feature may allow several explanations. Fire may have been part of a rite, the trace of a conflagration, or the result of everyday activity. Bones may relate to burial, food, or sacrificial practice. A concentration of metal objects in water may represent a ritual deposit, but the word “ritual” by itself does not explain the specific meaning of the act.

The Obeliai complex illustrates the problem well. Archaeology securely establishes the existence of an unusual complex by the lake. Different explanations have been discussed in the scholarly literature, including burial in water and sacrificial practice.² What can be stated with confidence is therefore that the complex existed and was structured, while its precise ritual function remains a matter of interpretation.

Targeted negative results are equally important. If an archaeological investigation was undertaken specifically to test an alleged cult site and failed to find the expected features, that result must affect the final assessment. The extent of the excavation, the preservation of the area, and the nature of the proposed feature must all be taken into account.

3.3. Toponymy

Names such as Alkas, Alka, Šventas, Šventupis, Perkūnas, and other forms with sacred associations are valuable clues. They help identify places worth investigating and may sometimes preserve very old features of the landscape.

A name, however, is not the same as a function. Even if a word is genuinely connected with religious vocabulary, it may have been recorded late, transferred from one feature to another, or survived the original practice by centuries.

For that reason, the modern form of a place name is not enough. Early records, spelling variants, cartographic sources, and whether the name continued to refer to the same feature over time all need to be checked.

The name of a deity in a place name is likewise not ready-made proof of worship. A story about a stone split by Perkūnas, for example, may reliably document a mythological tradition without proving that an ancient temple stood beside the stone or that sacrifices were regularly performed there.

3.4. Folklore and ethnographic records

A folklore source first and foremost establishes that a particular story, custom, or explanation existed by the time it was recorded. If a motif was recorded in 1935, that proves its existence by 1935. It may be much older, but an earlier date requires separate justification.

A record becomes more valuable when the place, date, informant, collector, and archival unit are known. It then becomes possible to trace how the story of a place changed and which elements appeared earlier or later.

A separate problem arises when a printed publication returns to oral circulation. A local-history book, school text, museum display, or tourist sign can spread a particular version. Decades later it may be recorded from a local resident and appear to be independent folk confirmation. A late oral record therefore cannot automatically be treated as independent of printed tradition.

This does not make late folklore unimportant. It documents the cultural life of a place, healing practices, Christian customs, stories about mythological beings, and modern reinterpretations of the past extremely well. The limitation concerns dating alone: a late custom does not acquire a pre-Christian age without intermediate evidence.

3.5. Spatial data

In the study of sacred landscapes, the question “where exactly?” is itself part of the historical problem.

A document may securely name a forest without giving its boundaries. A chronicle may mention a settlement whose historical name can be linked with a modern village only through a combination of route information and toponymy. An archaeological excavation may be known with great precision while not coinciding with the object described in a later legend.

Modern coordinate precision therefore does not automatically increase historical certainty. A hill can be measured to the nearest metre, but that does not prove that the measured area coincides with the whole medieval sacred forest.

A point is used on the public map only where a point truly reflects the nature of the available knowledge. Elsewhere, an approximate zone, a historical locality, or no precise geometry at all is preferable.

Neighbouring landscape features are not merged automatically either. Strong evidence relating to a forest cannot simply be transferred to the nearest stone. If an archaeological complex was found beside a lake, its function does not pass to a neighbouring meadow merely because the meadow has a sacred-sounding name.

3.6. Continuity

The word “continuity” often hides several different phenomena.

A place name may survive while a rite disappears. The physical location may remain while its religious meaning changes completely. An old motif may live on in a later legend without any ritual having been performed continuously. A Christian practice may arise at a place with earlier sacred significance, or it may develop independently.

The question therefore has to be asked separately: what exactly continued, the name, location, story, practice, function, or local memory?

Simply placing a medieval account beside a twentieth-century story is not enough. Confident claims of continuity require intermediate evidence. The longer the chronological gap, the more cautious the conclusion must be.

3.7. From source to conclusion

No single type of source has universal priority.

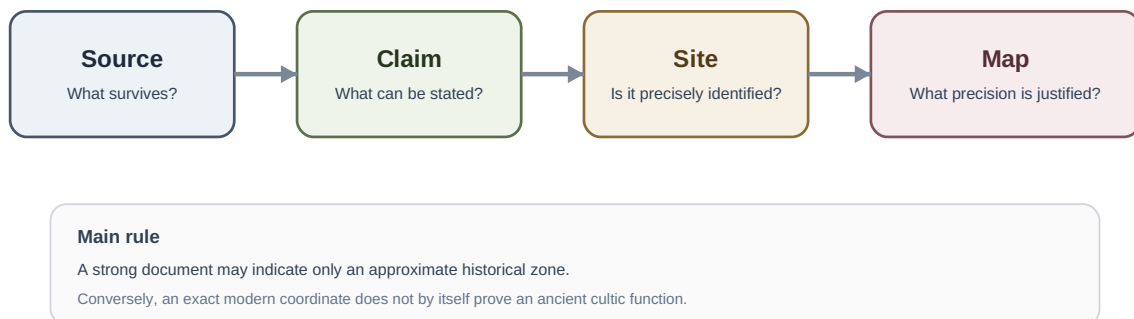
A medieval document may be sufficient to establish that a forest was called sacred even when no archaeological layer is known. Archaeology may securely demonstrate an unusual material complex without resolving its religious function. A place name may point towards a promising line of enquiry without dating a rite. Folklore may reliably describe a later tradition without proving its antiquity.

For each place, what matters is therefore not the number of arguments but the particular question that each source is capable of answering.

Fig. 1. How a source becomes a map. First the content of the source is established, then a testable statement is formulated, the historical location is identified, and only after that is an appropriate level of mapping precision chosen.

How a source becomes a map

Each transition is checked separately. The map should not be more precise than the historical evidence.



4. Direct medieval evidence

4.1. Ventis / Wentis near Veliuona

Ventis is one of the rare places for which two early documents survive with very clear wording. They do not describe a ritual and do not name a deity. Their value lies elsewhere: both texts preserve the memory of a particular forest landscape near Veliuona that had been regarded as sacred in pagan times.

In the records of Benedict Makrai's arbitration of 1413, the forest is called Vent or Ventus. On one page of the critical edition appear the phrases “*silva dicta Vent, que Sancta tempore paganorum vocabatur*” and “*silva dicta Ventus, que alias Sancta in paganismo vocabatur*”.³ In both cases the meaning is the same: the forest was called sacred in pagan times.

The text arose in a legal and territorial context. One party was formulating propositions that it intended to prove. The document therefore cannot be presented as an eyewitness record of a pagan rite. The reference to the former sanctity of the forest is, however, embedded in a description of territory and used to identify a locality rather than presented as a separate theological story.

In 1416 Wentis appears in a letter from Vytautas's chancery concerning the choice of a meeting place near Veliuona. The document refers to a locality about half a mile from Veliuona where the sacred forest of the Samogitians, called Wentis, had formerly stood.⁴

The two texts were produced in different years and for different practical purposes. They are not two eyewitness accounts of pagan worship and may have relied on the same local geographical memory. Their agreement is nevertheless important: the name, location, and understanding of the forest's former sacred status are attested in two separate documentary settings.

The documents say almost nothing about the cult itself. We do not know how the forest was used, whether it was associated with a particular deity, whether an altar existed, whether sacrifices were made, or where its exact boundary ran. Even the date when sacred use ceased is unknown. Both documents already speak of the sanctity of the forest as something in the past.

For mapping, this means an approximate historical zone near Veliuona, not a precise sanctuary point. Modern reconstructions may narrow the search area, but a reconstructed boundary does not become a directly measured medieval boundary.

The importance of Ventis lies precisely in this restraint. It is possible to say with considerable confidence that a particular forest was regarded as sacred while also acknowledging that the organisation of its cult is unknown.

4.2. Rambynas: forest, hill, and stone

At first sight Rambynas seems an even more obvious example of an ancient sacred place because the later history of the landscape is so rich. It includes the famous hill, stories of a sacred stone, numerous accounts of veneration, and a strong layer of Lithuanian cultural memory. Yet the very richness of the later tradition makes it necessary to separate different historical stages.

The medieval core is fairly clear. Lithuanian route descriptions from the late fourteenth century contain the phrase “Von deme heyligen walde von Rambyn”, referring to the sacred forest of Rambyn.⁵ This is a military-geographical text. The forest serves as a landmark on a route rather than as the subject of a religious description. The source reliably confirms the existence of a named sacred forest but says nothing about a particular ritual, stone, or temple.

Later evidence gradually shifts attention towards the hill and stone. Scholarly literature preserves a sequence of descriptions beginning in the late sixteenth century. These include prohibitions and requirements connected with visiting the hill, accounts of continuing veneration, information about a large stone, and later local traditions.⁶

This sequence cannot be presented as one continuous record of an unchanged rite. The medieval source speaks of a forest. Later authors increasingly focus on the hill and stone. A historical relationship between these elements is plausible, but the precise centre of sacred practice may have shifted and the tradition itself may have changed.

The physical landscape has not remained unchanged either. The large stone was destroyed in 1811. Major collapses of the slope occurred in 1835 and 1878, after which the relief continued to change.⁷ The modern appearance of Rambynas therefore cannot be treated as an untouched image of the fourteenth century.

Archaeological investigations in 2002 did not identify a diagnostic layer in the investigated area that would establish a specific cult structure. This does not cancel the medieval written evidence for a sacred forest. A forest sanctuary may have had no monumental building, and part of the historical landscape has been lost. Archaeology nevertheless provides no basis for adding a temple or altar that has not been found.

Rambynas should therefore be understood as a historically connected but changing sacred landscape. The medieval evidence for a sacred forest is reliable. The later hill, stone, and practices associated with them are well documented for later periods. Their relationship to the earlier forest is plausible at the landscape level, but it does not justify treating all these elements as one unchanged cult site over the course of centuries.

4.3. Heiligenwalt on the lower Nevėžis

The Treaty of Salynas of 1398 contains, in its description of the boundary, the phrase “sub silva dicta Heiligenwalt”, referring to a forest called the Sacred Forest.⁸ This is especially valuable because the name is used as a practical geographical landmark in a diplomatic description of territory.

The context provides good evidence that a forest bearing this name was a recognised part of the historical landscape. The document itself, however, gives neither its precise boundaries nor a description of its cult. It does not provide the name of a deity, a sacred fire, a priesthood, an altar, or the organisation of a religious centre.

The main difficulty is spatial. The historical position of the forest has to be reconstructed from the sequence of boundary landmarks, the location of Salynas, the courses of the Nevėžis and Nemunas, and later cartographic material. An error in identifying one reference point changes the entire reconstruction.

In 2025 Vykintas Vaitkevičius published a new study of the sanctuary near the mouth of the Nevėžis. The available abstract refers to an 1853 inventory and map of the Marva-Eiguliai state estate on which Salynas is marked. The author argues that this material makes it possible to refine the location of the sacred forest of 1398 substantially and places it on the right bank of the Nevėžis, extending into part of the Nemunas valley.⁹

The full article was not available during preparation of this publication. The proposed location is therefore treated as a serious modern hypothesis, but the map does not present it more precisely than the verified material allows. The same applies to a broader reconstruction that brings together a nearby elevation, a motif of sacred fire, a name associated with Perkūnas, and Romainiai. These elements may turn out to belong to one religious landscape, but each link between them requires its own evidence.

The later place name Gojus north of Raudondvaris should also be mentioned. Researchers have linked it with a possible remnant of the historical sacred forest. The comparison is interesting, but intermediate evidence between 1398 and the modern location is still lacking.

The secure conclusion is therefore relatively narrow: a forest named Heiligenwalt genuinely appears in the boundary description of 1398. Its approximate position on the lower Nevėžis can be reconstructed, but its exact medieval extent and its relationship with neighbouring religious sites still require further verification.

4.4. Sethen and modern Šatijai

Under the year 1362, the chronicle of Hermann of Wartberge mentions “villa Sethen, que dicitur sancta”, that is, the settlement of Sethen, which is called sacred.¹⁰ The wording is brief but direct. The reference to sanctity is not a modern inference from the village name but is present in the medieval text itself.

The chronicle does not explain why the settlement was so called. It contains no description of a temple, altar, specific deity, or religious office. The name Sethen itself also has no undisputed etymology that would allow it simply to be translated as “sacred place”.

The next difficulty concerns modern location. Older historiography associated Sethen, among other places, with Šėta. Identification with Šatijai near Kaunas now appears more convincing. An important role is played by another medieval text associated with Wigand of Marburg. It places Seten near the Neris and in connection with Sviloniai, which corresponds much better to Šatijai.¹¹

The same text mentions a captured “quendam sanctum virum”, literally a certain holy or sacred man. Nineteenth-century editions introduced the interpretation that this referred to a pagan priest. Such an explanation is possible, but it is not contained in the Latin phrase itself. The text gives no priestly title, no name of a temple, and no description of an office.

The accounts of Hermann of Wartberge and Wigand also cannot be treated without examination as two wholly independent testimonies. Scholars have pointed to possible dependence within the textual tradition, while the similarity of place and military context reinforces the need for caution.¹²

Two points can be stated with confidence. The medieval text of 1362 really does call Sethen a sacred settlement. Modern Šatijai is the most convincing location on the basis of the geography of the Neris and Sviloniai, but this identification remains a historical reconstruction rather than a name traced continuously through all intermediate documents.

The formula “a village of pagan priests with a temple” goes beyond the sources. The documents provide important and compelling material, but not that level of detail.

4.5. Vilnius: the written fanum and the disputed temple of Perkūnas

Vilnius shows particularly clearly why written evidence and archaeological interpretation should not be merged into a single argument.

The papal document of 1388 states that Jogaila destroyed a pagan “fanum”, broke the idols, and ordered a church to be built “in eodem loco”, in the same place.¹ This is early and significant evidence for an account in which the foundation of a Christian church in Vilnius was connected with the destruction of an earlier pagan cult place.

The document, however, contains an important qualification. The pope states that he does not possess certain knowledge of all the circumstances described and instructs the addressee to investigate them. The text therefore cannot be called papal confirmation based on personal verification. It records a serious official report circulating in the context of the establishment of the Vilnius diocese.

Equally important is what the document does not contain. It does not name Perkūnas. It does not describe the form of the building. It gives no dimensions, plan, or coordinates. The words “in eodem loco” establish a spatial relationship within the account itself, but they do not allow the “fanum” to be automatically equated with a particular wall, foundation, or room discovered by archaeologists centuries later.

In the twentieth century the early masonry structure beneath the present cathedral was interpreted in different ways. One proposal identified it as a temple of Perkūnas. Later reassessment of the architectural and stratigraphic evidence revealed serious problems with this reconstruction. Oksana Valionienė proposed a non-temple explanation of the so-called steps and pointed out that some traces of burning were not diagnostic.¹³ Darius Baronas likewise considers the strong claim of a proven temple of Perkūnas to have been substantially refuted and notes the absence of specific finds that could support such an attribution.¹⁴

This does not mean that the written report of 1388 should be discarded. It and the archaeological debate answer different questions. The document provides early evidence of a pagan cult place within the foundation story of the Vilnius church. Archaeology does not yet allow a particular discovered structure to be identified confidently as that very building, still less as a temple of Perkūnas.

The later tradition of Šventaragis must also be considered separately. It is important for the history of how the sacred centre of Vilnius was understood, but without intermediate evidence it cannot be read as a detailed explanation of the papal document of 1388.

For this reason, the appropriate representation on the map in this publication is the historical cathedral-castle area rather than a precise point labelled “Temple of Perkūnas”.

Fig. 3. Direct historical evidence and the precision of location. Ventis, Rambynas, Vilnius, Heiligenwalt, and Sethen provide strong early written evidence, but the historical locations of these places are known with different degrees of precision.

Direct historical evidence and localization precision

Strong early evidence does not mean that the ancient boundary of a site can be reconstructed precisely.

Allowed map precision	
Ventis / Wentis 1413 and 1416. Former sacred forest near Veliuona	Approximate zone
Rambynas A medieval route source directly mentions a sacred forest	Approximate zone
Vilnius 1388. Report of a pagan fanum and a church on the same site	Historical zone
Heiligenwalt 1398. Sacred forest used as a boundary landmark	Corridor or zone
Sethen / Šatijai 1362. Settlement called sacred	Locality

Conclusion: historical reliability and modern localization precision are assessed separately.

5. When archaeology plays the leading role

5.1. Obeliai: an unusual complex with an uncertain function

Obeliai presents a situation almost opposite to Ventis. There is no early written document explicitly calling the investigated place sacred. Archaeology, however, reveals an unusual and well-documented complex on the shore of a lake.

The main publication of the 1988 excavations describes a substantial concentration of finds in a water and shoreline context. Researchers recorded numerous objects, pottery, a stone or paved structure, and burnt human remains.¹⁵ This is not a chance collection of isolated objects. The complex existed, was organised, and belongs to the late medieval period.

The difficulty begins when its purpose is explained. The original investigators considered a sacrificial interpretation but, because of the human remains, preferred to describe the site as a water burial. That interpretation was soon criticised, and later scholarship has discussed other possibilities as well: funerary practice, secondary movement of cremated remains, sacrificial deposition of objects, or a combination of several ritual actions.¹⁶

It is especially important here not to replace the archaeological fact with the most striking explanation. We can confidently speak of a structured complex involving the treatment of objects and human remains. It is much harder to claim that this was specifically a sacrificial sanctuary or that the meaning of the actions performed there is known.

The presence of cremated bones certainly cannot be turned into a story of human sacrifice. The bones establish a connection with the dead, but by themselves they do not show whether these people were sacrificed, buried, or whether their remains were moved there after cremation.

A nearby meadow is known by the name Alkas. The name makes it relevant to the study of sacred toponymy, but the archaeological characteristics of the lakeside complex cannot automatically be transferred to the neighbouring meadow. The spatial proximity of the two places matters, but it does not prove that they had the same function.

Obeliai shows that strong archaeology does not always produce a strong functional interpretation. Sometimes we know very well what happened to material objects but understand much less clearly why it was done.

5.2. Šliktinė: ancient deposits and a disturbed landscape

Šliktinė is among the most impressive archaeological sites in the sample considered here. Two large assemblages of metal objects dating from the ninth to eleventh centuries were discovered in the valley of the Šata River. Later investigations identified a broader zone of additional finds.

In 2012 a systematic survey covered about 23,400 square metres. A total of 135 archaeological finds were registered, 131 of which the researchers associated with the previously known assemblages.¹⁷

Such a quantity of objects readily encourages a sacrificial interpretation, and this view became established in part of the literature. The archaeology of Šliktinė nevertheless requires particular caution because of the condition of the landscape itself.

Some of the finds from 1971 came from soil removed during construction of a canal. This soil had been displaced and spread across the valley. No finds were discovered in undisturbed soil in that zone. Drainage works and later economic activity further altered both the surface and the distribution of material.¹⁸

The present-day distribution map is therefore not a precise map of where the objects lay in antiquity. The original concentrations have to be reconstructed from field documentation, the history of the works, and the condition of the valley.

The metal objects themselves have parallels in Curonian burial assemblages. This does not exclude deliberate ritual deposition in water or wetland. Such parallels, however, do not allow all the finds to be reduced to one predetermined scenario.

Žilvinas Montvydas's 2013 study is also important because it drew attention to the long history of repeating the sacrificial interpretation without sufficiently reconsidering the circumstances of discovery.¹⁹ This is not an argument that no sacrificial practice existed. It is a call to return from a familiar label to the evidence itself.

The conclusion must therefore remain restrained. Large ancient assemblages of metal objects associated with a wet landscape existed at Šliktinė. Their organisation and scale require explanation. Ritual deposition remains a serious possibility, but the precise character of the rite and the original position of some finds have not been established conclusively.

These finds are also not used as archaeological proof for neighbouring Mikytai. The geographical proximity of the two places makes the possibility of a relationship interesting, but it does not allow evidence from one site to be transferred to another.

5.3. Rešketėnai: an ancient date does not always date a sacred place

The 2021 investigations at Rešketėnai were aimed, among other things, at reconstructing the original position of a cup-marked stone with a flat-bottomed hollow. The stone had been moved to Telšiai in 2002, so its original position had to be re-established.

Excavation of a total area of 54 square metres made it possible to identify the former position of the stone with considerable confidence and to record a stone structure associated with it.²⁰ This alone substantially improved understanding of the site because its original location no longer depended solely on memory and later description.

Materials from several periods were found, including flint, pottery, charcoal, and burnt granite. Radiocarbon analysis of the charcoal produced a date of AD 307-406. At first sight, such a date may invite an attractive formula: the sanctuary existed in the fourth century.

The author of the study does not make that conclusion. The charcoal is associated primarily with ancient slash-and-burn agriculture, while its relationship to the creation or use of a sacred place is regarded as unclear.²⁰

The distinction is fundamental. Radiocarbon analysis dates a specific sample, not every activity that later took place at the same point. Ancient human activity on the hill does not mean that the cup-marked stone was used at the same time or with the same function later tradition attributes to it.

Another detail proved particularly revealing. Beneath a small stone that appeared to be part of an older structure, material dating from 2001-2003 was found. This particular feature therefore appeared only after the main stone had been moved. A visually convincing stone arrangement turned out to be modern.

Rešketėnai demonstrates the value of archaeology even when it cannot answer the main question in a single word. The investigation restored the location of the feature, separated ancient traces of activity from modern intervention, and showed why one ancient date cannot be turned into the date of the entire sacred complex.

5.4. Trumponys: an artificial hollow, traces of fire, and no secure date

The original field report from Trumponys in 1972 establishes several important facts. The hollow in the stone was artificially made. The stone itself had been deliberately stabilised with an additional stone. To its north-west lay a separate pit containing granite flakes, charcoal, and ash, while some of the granite showed traces of exposure to fire.²¹

On a quick reading, this combination can look like a ready-made description of a sanctuary: a cup-marked stone, deliberate setting, and fire nearby. The same report, however, contains information that limits such an interpretation.

No objects, pottery, or bones were found in the pit. There is no reliable date relating specifically to this complex. Nor has it been shown that the cutting of the hollow, the setting of the stone, and the episode involving fire occurred at the same time.

Several explanations therefore remain possible. The fire may have been connected with working the stone, setting it in place, economic activity, or later use of the area. A ritual function is also possible, but the archaeological evidence does not allow it to be distinguished confidently from the alternatives.

This site is useful because archaeology both strengthens and limits reconstruction. It confirms human intervention much more securely than a simple story about an unusual stone. Yet the detailed report itself shows that the step from intervention to a specific ancient cult is not currently justified.

Fig. 4. Obeliai and Šliktinė. In both cases archaeology reliably confirms a material complex but does not compel a single explanation of its function.

Obeliai and Šliktinė: strong material evidence, but not one mandatory function

Both complexes are well supported archaeologically, but their exact meaning remains open to interpretation.

Obeliai		Šliktinė	
Archaeological basis	Strong	Archaeological basis	Strong
Context	Lake shore	Context	Wet valley
Chronology	Late Middle Ages	Chronology	9th-11th centuries
Secure conclusion		Secure conclusion	
The complex is real and structured		Large assemblages of objects are real	
What remains unclear		What remains unclear	
Funerary, sacrificial, or mixed practice cannot be selected unambiguously.		Part of the context is disturbed; the specific ancient deposition scenario remains disputed.	

Strong archaeology confirms the complex itself, but does not require a single explanation of its function.

5.5. What archaeology allows us to say

The four examples considered here show that archaeology does not work according to the simple formula “something unusual was found, therefore a sanctuary was found”.

At Obeliai the material complex is beyond dispute, but its function allows several explanations. At Šliktinė an enormous quantity of finds is combined with a disturbed landscape and debate over the nature of their deposition. At Rešketėnai excavation improved the location and chronology of individual events but did not date the sacred function. At Trumponys human modification and traces of fire are confirmed, while their purpose and date remain unclear.

Strong archaeology does not have to end with the name of a particular rite. Sometimes the most precise scholarly result is to describe the material situation securely while leaving several historically possible explanations open.

6. Toponymy, landscape, and later tradition

6.1. Mikytai: a strong name and difficult dating

Mikytai almost perfectly matches the modern image of an ancient sacred place. It has Alkakalnis, Velnio akmuo, a striking watershed landscape, stories about a well and trees, and later healing and religious traditions. This makes it especially useful for testing how far an impressive combination of clues can support a claim about an ancient cult.

The earliest securely dated printed reference found so far is from 1926. By then the hill was already called Alkos kalnas and was associated with an old sacred or sacrificial place.²² This shows that modern park and tourist infrastructure did not create either the name or its sacred interpretation from nothing.

The 1926 record does not, however, tell us when the practice itself began. The name Alka is important as a historical and linguistic clue, but it does not supply an automatic date. Later tradition may also have developed partly under the influence of an already existing interpretation of the name.

Archaeological investigation in 1971 did not confirm a specific ritual model beside Velnio akmuo. The stone cover was identified as natural. No diagnostic finds, charcoal, or ash establishing cult activity at the investigated point were found.²³

This does not prove that the natural landscape as a whole never had sacred significance. It does mean that archaeology currently provides no independent confirmation of a particular ancient rite.

Finds from neighbouring Šliktinė cannot be used for that purpose either. The two places belong to the same broader region, but the wetland deposits have their own history and chronology. Until a direct connection between the sites is demonstrated, the archaeological evidence from one belongs to that site itself.

Mikytai should therefore be regarded as a serious candidate for an old sacred space. The name, landscape, and later tradition fit together well, but the date when a sacred function arose and its specific nature have not yet been established.

6.2. Andriūnai and Doškonys: early observations and later stories of sacrifice

The history of Aukakalnis near Andriūnai and Doškonys is interesting because several lines of evidence genuinely converge here, but they arose at different times.

Records from 1935 preserve the name Aukakalnis and reports that charcoal, ash, and bones were encountered during ploughing.²⁴ This is no modern internet reconstruction, but neither is it a professional stratigraphic excavation. We know the observations of local people and collectors, but not the precise position of each material in the soil or its date.

In 1959 the documentation identified a more specific area on the north-western side of the hill. Blackened oak posts, charcoal, and dark soil were reported. This makes the history of the site more interesting, but the material again remains undated and is known through a record rather than modern archaeological documentation.

Detailed stories of sacrifice, *vaidilutės*, sacred fire, and even human sacrifice were recorded much later, mainly in the late twentieth century.²⁵ They cannot be used to explain charcoal found or mentioned decades earlier. Otherwise a late story begins retrospectively to explain an early observation.

There is also a spatial complication. A single physical hill is divided by an administrative boundary and is labelled differently in different registers and local traditions. For historical analysis it is one landscape feature, not several independent confirmations.

Aukakalnis therefore remains a strong candidate, but its strength lies in the combination of an early name, old material observations, and later tradition. These strands deserve to be considered together, but they do not justify using a late story about sacrificial fire to explain undated charcoal recorded in 1935 or 1959.

6.3. The Perkūnas stone at Puvočiai: the name of Perkūnas without a proven cult

The large stone near Puvočiai is associated with the name of Perkūnas and fits naturally into the river landscape of the Merkys. Such an object can easily be perceived as a ready-made ancient sanctuary. The earliest securely dated record found so far says much less.

A record from 1935 connects the stone with a story that Perkūnas struck it with lightning and split it.²⁶ This reliably establishes the mythological association by the first half of the twentieth century. Modern tourism therefore did not recently invent the connection.

But the story “Perkūnas split the stone” is not the same as the statement “people worshipped Perkūnas at the stone”. The known record contains no temple, altar, sacrifice, or description of a regular rite.

Later ethnographic tradition also records a youth or shepherd custom associated with the stone and the river. Young people jumped or slid from the stone into the water and then swam to another landmark. In recollections this could be associated with growing up. The custom is interesting in its own right, but a late record does not justify declaring it a surviving pagan initiation rite.

The river landscape also contains traces of economic activity, including fishing structures. They cannot be declared part of an ancient rite merely because they are close to a mythological stone.

Puvočiai demonstrates a simple but important distinction: the name of a deity in local tradition establishes a mythological association, but not necessarily the existence of that deity's cult at the place.

6.4. Alkupio Šventkalis: several strong clues side by side

Alkupio Šventkalis is a more complex landscape. Early twentieth-century material contains the forms Šventkalis or Szwentkalis, the name Šventkalnio dauba, Alkupis, and a kūlgrinda. In 1939 a story was recorded about prayers to pagan gods, the burning of sacrifices, and a supposed stone altar.²⁷

This combination looks very strong, but it needs to be separated into its parts. Ludwik Krzywicki's account of a pagan place of worship concerns neighbouring Parakalis, not automatically Šventkalis itself.²⁸ Archaeological finds and human remains from the wider area are likewise not archaeology of the particular hill. The kūlgrinda may have had a transport, economic, defensive, or other function.

The 1939 record is important as evidence of local tradition. Its language, however, already describes pagan religion through established concepts. The informant also does not claim personally to have seen the supposed altar. What is securely established is therefore the existence of such a story in 1939, not the existence of the rite it describes in the pre-Christian period.

Šventkalis remains a serious subject for further study precisely because the early name, landscape, and tradition converge. These clues cannot simply be added together to produce a proven religious centre.

6.5. Padievytis, Dievyčio kalnas, and Šventupis

Several striking elements are concentrated around Padievytis: Lake Dievytis, Dievyčio kalnas, Šventupis, a kūlgrinda, stories of sacrifice and fire, and healing practice. On a map they can easily appear to form one ancient complex. The sources, however, belong to different periods.

The lake name Dyvytis or Diwicze is known as early as 1563.²⁹ This is an important early toponymic fact. The name of the lake, however, does not date use of the neighbouring hill or establish the function of the stream.

For Dievyčio kalnas, an observation made by Ambraziejus Kašarauskas on 11 October 1854 is particularly interesting. He described a symmetrical hollow on the summit and, after digging into it, recorded a layer of ash, charcoal, and sand with charcoal below.³⁰ Compared with twentieth-century legends, this is genuinely an early material observation.

A mid-nineteenth-century investigation, however, was not a modern archaeological excavation. There are no reliable dating finds, no radiocarbon analysis, and no precise modern location for the investigated point. The traces of burning could have had ritual, economic, constructional, or other origins.

Šventupis provides a different kind of evidence. A 1939 record states that before the First World War people took water from it for the sick and associated its special power with the unusual direction of flow.²⁹ This is good evidence for a later healing practice. Stories of a place of sacrifice and vaidilutės with sacred fire are also known, but their late recording does not allow them to be transferred automatically into the pre-Christian period.

The kūlgrinda must remain a separate landscape feature. A road across wet ground does not become a road for ritual processions merely because it leads towards a place with a sacred tradition.

Padiėvytis is therefore better understood as a landscape in which several potentially related elements accumulated over different centuries. A historical relationship between them is possible, but it cannot be produced simply by overlaying evidence from 1563, 1854, 1939, and the modern map.

6.6. When several lines of evidence really strengthen one another

A place name, folklore, unusual relief, and later practice can together create a very persuasive picture. Their number matters, however, only when the origin of each strand is known and one is not merely repeating another.

Mikytai shows a strong combination of name and tradition with weak archaeological confirmation. Andriūnai and Doškonys add early material observations, but later language about sacrifice cannot be projected backwards. Puvočiai demonstrates the difference between the name of a deity and a cult of that deity. Šventkalnis shows the danger of merging neighbouring places. Padiėvytis shows how evidence separated by centuries can coexist within one landscape.

Several pieces of evidence are genuinely stronger than one only when they are independent and address the same historical question.

7. Negative Evidence and Modern Reconstructions

7.1. Šakiai: a modern Temple of Perkūnas and the 2001 field report

Šakiai is one of the clearest examples of a gap between a modern reconstruction and the results of archaeological investigation. In popular tradition, the place is called Perkūno šventykla, the Temple of Perkūnas, and is sometimes included in a broader system of supposedly pagan temples in the Jevonis valley.

In 2001, Bronius Dakanis and his colleagues investigated the supposed Šakiai hillfort. It is important that the site was examined precisely as a presumed hillfort, not as an already established monument. The total investigated area was 61 square metres in 18 test pits: thirteen pits measuring 2 by 2 metres, four measuring 1 by 1 metre, and one measuring 2.5 by 2 metres.³¹

The report repeatedly notes the absence of signs of an ancient settlement and of features characteristic of a hillfort. Isolated sherds of wheel-thrown pottery, later metal objects, and natural flint did not form a diagnostic ancient complex.

In their conclusion, the authors recommended that the presumed hillfort should not be entered in the register of immovable cultural properties. They considered the most likely explanation for both landforms to be natural origin followed by later human impact.³¹

This result directly contradicts claims that excavation confirmed an ancient hillfort or temple here. But it also does not justify the opposite claim, that 61 square metres proved that no symbolic or short-term use of the hill could ever have taken place. Archaeology tested a specific material reconstruction and did not confirm it.

Nearby is a small rise known as Aukuro or Aukmo kalnelis. Its name sounds as though it refers to an altar, but the report itself allows a geomorphological explanation. The small landform may have been a remnant or a strongly eroded part of natural relief. The name is therefore important for the history of local tradition, but it is not archaeological proof of an altar.

The history of the expression Perkūno šventykla is particularly important. The earliest printed example found in this research dates to Albinas Kurtinaitis's 2007 book *Garnio vaikai*. It contains a reconstruction of a system of temples, including a Temple of Perkūnas.³² This proves that such a version existed in print by 2007. It does not prove that Kurtinaitis himself invented it. An earlier author, local informant, or other publication may have existed and has simply not yet been found.

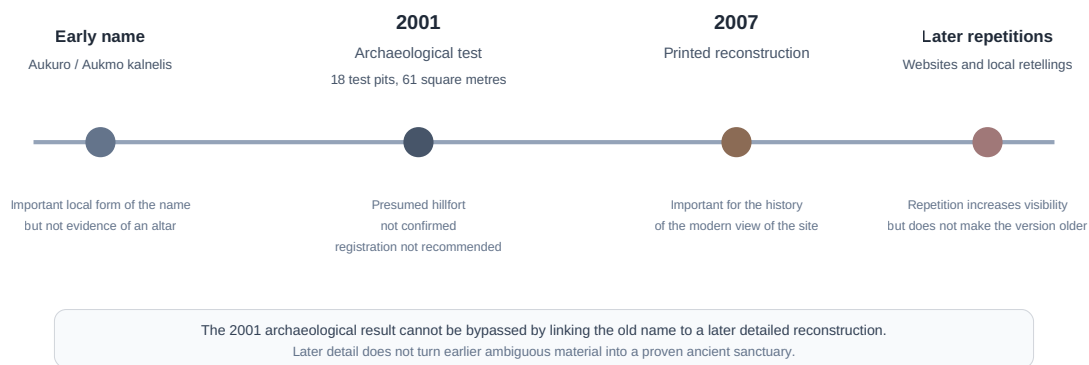
Šakiai shows how a historical story can become more detailed as it moves farther from the primary field evidence. Unusual relief and a sacred-sounding name provide a basis for interpretation. Later literature adds temples, deities, and a system of cult places. Tourist and internet descriptions then repeat the completed picture.

The point is not to ridicule such a tradition, but to establish when each detail appears and whether it has an independent basis.

Fig. 5. Šakiai: different historical layers. An old local name, the 2001 archaeological investigation, a printed reconstruction from 2007, and later repetitions cannot be combined into one continuous ancient story.

Šakiai: different historical layers, not one continuous story

The old name, archaeological testing, and later reconstruction belong to different periods.



7.2. Liškiava: the absence of an early layer and the limits of a negative conclusion

Liškiavos Bažnyčios kalnas, also associated with the name Alkakalnis, shows a different kind of negative evidence.

About 590 square metres were investigated here in 1975. The excavations produced a well-documented late medieval and early modern sequence: a church from the second half of the fifteenth century, later rebuilding, burials, and an estate phase.³³

For the question of earlier pre-Christian use, the conclusion of the primary publication is especially important: no evidence of use of Alkakalnis before the fifteenth century was found.³³

This is a significant negative result, but it is not proof of the absolute absence of an earlier history. The researchers themselves allowed that an ancient layer might have been destroyed by later construction. The accurate formulation is therefore that excavation did not confirm pre-Christian use in the surviving investigated area, while the possibility of a completely destroyed earlier layer remains an unproven hypothesis.

Liškiava helps show the difference between “not found” and “never existed.” Archaeology describes what survived very well. The history of a destroyed layer always requires greater caution.

7.3. Nečioniškis: when an original attribution should be rejected

Nečioniškis is important because it shows that not every sacred attribution needs to be preserved even as a “possibility.” Otherwise research becomes a catalogue of assumptions that cannot be falsified.

In 1992-1993, Raimondas Akavickas surveyed several unclear archaeological sites in the Utena district. The publication of the results reports three test pits at Nečioniškis. No archaeological finds or cultural layer were discovered, and the researcher noted no signs of an ancient cult place.³⁴

A local informant also associated the hill not with religious ritual but with practical wartime use, when property and livestock were hidden there.

This does not support a philosophical claim that nothing ritual ever happened on the hill under any circumstances. But the specific claim that it was an ancient cult place is not supported by the available evidence. Professional survey did not find the expected indicators, while local memory offers a compatible non-sacred explanation.

In such a case, it is reasonable to reject the original attribution until new independent evidence appears.

7.4. Vilnius: why the Temple of Perkūnas can be rejected while the written testimony remains

The Vilnius example has already been discussed in the chapter on written sources, but here it matters from another angle.

Early stone structures do indeed exist beneath the present cathedral. In the twentieth century, some researchers linked a square building, supposed steps, and burnt areas with a pagan Temple of Perkūnas.

Later reassessment revealed serious problems with this explanation. The so-called steps received an architectural explanation as part of a foundation or support system. The burnt deposits proved non-diagnostic and may be connected with fire or the cleaning of heating installations. There are no specific finds that independently identify the building as a pagan temple.³⁵

The claim that “archaeologists proved a Temple of Perkūnas beneath the cathedral” therefore does not withstand scrutiny.

But the negative conclusion applies specifically to this building and this interpretation. It does not cancel the papal document of 1388, which genuinely contains a report of a destroyed *fanum* and the construction of a church in the same place. The written source and the archaeological attribution answer different questions.

For the reader, it is particularly important to avoid a false choice between two extremes: either the Temple of Perkūnas has been archaeologically proved, or no pre-Christian cult space existed in early Vilnius at all. The sources allow a more precise answer. The early written testimony is significant, but identifying the particular excavated building as a Temple of Perkūnas is not confirmed.

7.5. How a detailed modern version of the past emerges

Comparison of Šakiai, Liškiava, Nečioniškis, and Vilnius shows that negative evidence works in different ways.

Sometimes it weakens only one specific reconstruction. Sometimes it shows the absence of an expected layer in the investigated area. Sometimes the combination of a field result and an alternative explanation makes it reasonable to reject the original attribution.

A modern sacred interpretation can nevertheless continue to circulate independently of archaeology. This does not require deliberate deception. A few understandable mechanisms are enough.

A sacred-sounding name suggests an interpretation. A later author connects it with familiar motifs of Baltic religion. A tourist description makes the story shorter and more confident. Internet copying removes the qualifications. After several repetitions, “possibly” becomes “a temple stood here.”

Scientific criticism in such a case does not need to erase the cultural history of the place. The modern reconstruction itself becomes part of that history. But it should be dated as a modern reconstruction, not presented as a medieval document or an excavation result.

8. Christian and Later Sacred Places: What They Show

8.1. Vištytis: Šventas and Šv. Jono šaltinis

The spring near Lake Vištytis is important because its sacred character does not need to be reconstructed. It exists in modern and recent tradition and is well documented.

A 2014 description by the Lithuanian Geological Survey records the spring, crosses, visits by believers, the collection of water, and stories about healing eye problems and wounds that were difficult to heal.³⁶ This is strong evidence of real religious and healing practice.

The known story about the origin of the cross is also Christian in character. According to local tradition, after a dream or an apparition of the Virgin Mary, a local resident erected a cross beside the spring.

This example matters precisely because the combination of the name Šventas, healing water, crosses, and veneration easily suggests a survival of a pagan sacred spring. But such a conclusion requires earlier independent evidence, which has not yet been found.

This does not make the spring any less sacred. On the contrary, it shows that a genuine sacred place can be very well documented within Christian tradition without a demonstrated pre-Christian predecessor.

8.2. The Great Stone of Vištytis

The Great Stone near Vištytis provides an earlier example of Christian sacralisation.

A known extract from a boundary document of 1776 contains the phrase “do kamienia wielkiego vulgo S. Troycy,” referring to a large stone commonly called the Stone of the Holy Trinity.³⁷

An important limitation remains. The content of the extract is known, but the exact archival reference has not yet been established. The known passage and its provenance can therefore be cited with confidence, but it cannot be claimed that the document has already been verified against the original archival unit.

Later tradition associates the stone with Christian processions and with the healing use of water that collects in a large hollow. There are reports of processions from around 1800, but this date comes from later transmission rather than from a document actually found from the year 1800 itself.

It is especially easy here to make a retrospective leap: a large boulder, water in a hollow, processions, and an old sacred name can be retold as an ancient pagan altar that was later Christianised. Such a history is possible, but the available sources do not prove it.

What is securely established is different. By the late eighteenth century the stone already had an explicitly Christian sacred name, and later religious and healing practices existed around it. Anything assigned to an earlier pre-Christian phase requires separate evidence.

8.3. Švendubrės Dzidziulis akmuo

The great stone at Švendubrė shows how a long history of a place can be well documented while still failing to provide an exact date for the beginning of its sacred function.

The stone is known from nineteenth-century historical cartography. Later sources record stories of its holiness, Christian crosses and other religious elements, as well as healing use of moss or particles from the stone.³⁸

This shows that the site is not a recent tourist invention. It has a long history in the local landscape and in religious memory.

But the best-documented sacred and healing strand belongs mainly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and contains a clear Christian layer. There is still insufficient intermediate evidence between this tradition and any supposed pre-Christian cult.

The historical value of the stone therefore does not depend on whether its pagan use is ever demonstrated. Later sacrality is a legitimate historical subject in its own right.

8.4. Narkūnų Sveikatos versmė

The spring near Narkūnai is another well-documented example of later healing practice.

A 1935 record names it Sveikatos versmė. People came for healing water and threw coins into the spring. There was also a story about a man who took money from it and subsequently went blind.³⁹

The spring lay at the foot of the Narkūnai hillfort. This proximity is striking, but it does not date the healing custom. The antiquity of the hillfort itself cannot automatically be transferred to the tradition of the spring.

The spring was destroyed during railway construction in the 1980s. We are therefore dealing not only with the history of sacrality, but also with the history of the loss of a specific landscape feature.

Narkūnai illustrates another common error. An ancient monument nearby and a later sacred spring may be historically related, but proximity alone is not evidence of continuity between them.

8.5. Why later and Christian examples are necessary

These places are included in the study not to contrast “real” pagan sanctuaries with “inauthentic” Christian ones. Such a contrast would itself be misleading.

Vištytis shows living Christian and healing sacrality. The Great Stone near Vištytis already has a documented Christian sacred name in the eighteenth century. Švendubrė preserves a long later religious history. Narkūnai provides good documentation of healing practice in the first half of the twentieth century.

All of these are real forms of sacred landscape.

For comparison, another point matters more. The more vivid modern sacrality is, the stronger the temptation to treat it as proof of a much older origin. But these are two different questions.

A later tradition may arise at a new place. It may appropriate an older landscape while changing its meaning. Only a name may survive. A particular motif may continue. And in some cases, genuinely long-term continuity may exist.

These possibilities can be distinguished only through intermediate historical evidence. The fact of modern veneration cannot substitute for it.

9. Comparing the Results

9.1. Why a single ranking of certainty does not work

Comparison of the thirty places showed that a single numerical scale would be more a convenient illusion than a useful scholarly tool.

An early written document, a precise modern coordinate, rich archaeological material, an old place-name, and a stable later tradition answer different questions. Combining them into one score would produce a number that hides the main issue: what has actually been established in each case.

Ventis illustrates the problem well. The written evidence for a former sacred forest is very strong, but the exact medieval boundary of the forest is unknown. Šakiai, by contrast, is easy to locate on a modern map, yet a precise coordinate for the hill does not prove the existence of an ancient temple. At Obeliai, the material complex is well known, but its function remains disputed.

The places were therefore compared not by a total score but by separate questions. How direct is the source? Does it refer to this particular place? How precisely can its location be reconstructed? Is the function known? Are different pieces of evidence independent? What is the chronology? Is there evidence that contradicts the popular version? Has the modern reconstruction become more detailed than the early sources?

This comparison is less suitable for an attractive ranking, but it shows the real state of knowledge much better.

9.2. When a written source is sufficient without an archaeological altar

Ventis, Rambynas, Heiligenwalt, and Sethen show that the absence of a discovered altar does not invalidate direct medieval testimony.

If a document calls a forest sacred or says that a settlement was considered sacred, that is an independent historical fact. It does not require confirmation by a monumental structure.

For Ventis, documents from 1413 and 1416 preserve the memory of a former sacred forest. A route description names the sacred forest Rambyn. The treaty of 1398 uses Heiligenwalt as a geographical landmark. Hermann von Wartberge writes of Sethen as a settlement that was called sacred.

All these texts have limits. They do not describe the structure of ritual and do not provide an exact map. Yet the lack of extra detail helps make the boundary of knowledge clearer.

A written source is strong for the question it actually addresses. It may securely confirm a historical name or sacred status while being entirely insufficient for reconstructing sacrifice, priesthood, or architecture.

9.3. When strong archaeology does not provide one religious explanation

Obeliai and Šliktinė show the opposite situation. Here the material basis is so substantial that the debate concerns not whether the complex existed but what it meant.

At Obeliai there are finds, cremated human remains, and a water-edge context. At Šliktinė there are large assemblages of metal objects associated with a wet landscape. Ritual explanations can be proposed in both cases, but they compete with funerary and other models.⁴⁰

A simple principle follows: a securely established material fact does not have to possess one securely established functional explanation.

The rule also works in reverse. A sceptical explanation does not gain priority simply because it sounds less romantic. If an economic, funerary, or accidental explanation is proposed, it too must fit the composition of the finds, chronology, and spatial context.

9.4. Why the number of publications is not the number of independent testimonies

The same idea can appear in dozens of books and websites. That does not mean there are dozens of independent sources.

At Sethen, two medieval texts cannot automatically be treated as two completely independent testimonies to a priestly centre. One text may have depended on the other, or both may have drawn on a common source. The Ventis documents of 1413 and 1416 were created for different practical purposes, but they may have relied on the same local geographical memory.

In archaeology, several articles may debate the same body of finds. The number of articles then indicates the scale of scholarly discussion, not the number of independent material complexes.

Particular caution is needed with neighbouring places. The archaeology of Šliktinė is not a second proof of Mikytai merely because the two are geographically close. The lakeside complex at Obeliai does not turn the nearby meadow called Alkas into an archaeologically confirmed sanctuary. The small hill near Šakiai does not transfer its tradition to the main hill without separate grounds.

There is another mechanism as well. A published version may enter a museum, a local-history book, a school story, or a tourist description and then return to oral circulation. Decades later, a record from a local resident may look like new independent confirmation of an idea that had already been spread in print.

What matters, therefore, is not the arithmetic of references but the origin of the information.

9.5. The date of an event, the date of a record, and the date of an interpretation

For many places, several different dates exist at once.

There is the presumed time of an ancient practice. There is the earliest record found of it. There are later repetitions. There is the moment when a scholarly or popular explanation appears. Finally, there is the modern tourist and religious life of the place.

Puvočiai illustrates the distinction well. The 1935 record proves that by then there was a story about a stone split by Perkūnas. It does not prove a cult of Perkūnas in the thirteenth century.

At Andriūnai, early reports of charcoal, ash, and bones appeared long before detailed stories of sacrifices and sacred fire. A later story cannot automatically be used to explain an earlier observation.

At Šakiai, field archaeology in 2001 did not confirm a hillfort or temple, while a detailed printed temple reconstruction is securely documented later. If those dates are reversed, the modern version begins to look like an ancient tradition that archaeologists were supposedly trying to confirm. The sources show a more complicated history.

9.6. What can actually continue across centuries

The word “continuity” sounds straightforward, but in practice it combines different phenomena.

A name may survive while a practice disappears. A place may remain while its religious meaning changes. A motif in a legend may continue without continuation of the ritual itself. A community memory may connect different historical stages of one landscape.

Rambynas shows this problem particularly well. The medieval source refers to a sacred forest. Later evidence increasingly focuses on the hill and the stone. There is probably a historical connection between these layers, but that does not prove one unchanged ritual centre lasting for centuries.

Vištytis offers another example. The modern Christian sacrality of the spring is well documented, but it does not in itself prove a pre-Christian predecessor. The Great Stone already has a Christian sacred name in the eighteenth century, but that does not tell us what happened there before the Christian phase.

Continuity therefore has to be demonstrated piece by piece: what exactly persisted, and what intermediate evidence confirms it.

9.7. How to read negative results

Negative archaeological results have different strengths.

At Nečioniškis, the original attribution as an ancient cult place rested on a weak basis, while professional survey found no cultural layer, finds, or signs of such a site. It is reasonable here to reject the earlier attribution until new evidence appears.⁴¹

At Šakiai, the negative result applies above all to the presumed hillfort and the modern material reconstruction of a temple. It does not prove that the natural hill never had symbolic significance.

At Liškiava, no signs of use of the investigated area before the fifteenth century were found, but intensive later construction leaves open the possibility of a completely destroyed earlier layer. This is a possibility, not an established fact.

In Vilnius the negative conclusion is narrower still. The identification of a particular stone building as a proven Temple of Perkūnas is not confirmed. The separate written report of 1388 concerning a *fanum* remains.

A negative result should change the precise claim it tested. It should not expand into the universal statement that “nothing sacred ever existed here.”

9.8. Why later stories are often more detailed than early sources

Modern culture prefers certainty. A sacred forest without a known deity or ritual is difficult to turn into a tourist story. It is much easier to name a temple, an altar, a priest, and a specific ceremony.

A characteristic process then develops. An unusual name suggests a possible function. A researcher or local historian proposes a hypothesis. A popular retelling removes the word “possibly.” A tourist page shortens the explanation once more. Eventually, the reconstruction begins to look like a long-established fact.

Šakiai is a striking example of this process. Puvočiai shows how the name of Perkūnas can easily move from a mythological story to a presumed cult. Mikytai shows the power of a name and an expressive landscape. Šventkalnis shows how several nearby features can mistakenly be assembled into a single temple centre.

The later version does not become useless because of this. It is a source for the cultural history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The error begins only when the date of the modern reconstruction disappears and it starts to be cited as evidence of antiquity.

9.9. Why alternative explanations are necessary

For every difficult site, it is useful to ask not only “what sacred interpretation is possible?” but also “what else could have produced the same evidence?”

At Šliktinė, intentional ritual deposition must be compared with funerary association, a military or social deposit, concealment of objects, and later displacement. At Andriūnai, material observations can be compared with economic and agricultural explanations. At Mikytai, an ancient sacred function is compared with the possibility of later reinterpretation of a striking natural place. For Heiligenwald, direct medieval testimony is separated from the hypothesis that a particular later Gojus represents a surviving remnant of it.

But symmetry matters. An alternative explanation also needs evidence. It does not become good simply because it is less spectacular.

9.10. The overall result of the comparison

Once sources, dates, and spatial components are separated, the sample does not divide into “proven” and “unproven” sanctuaries. Instead, several historically different groups emerge.

There are directly documented medieval sacred landscapes. There are strong archaeological complexes with disputed functions. There are places where names, folklore, and later tradition carry most of the evidence. There are well-documented Christian and healing sacred places. And there are sites that are important precisely because a popular ancient attribution did not withstand scrutiny.

This diversity is one of the main results of the study. The term “sacred landscape” is useful only when it does not erase the differences between these groups.

10. How to Show the Results on a Map

10.1. A map also makes a historical claim

A map often appears more neutral than text. Yet a single point on a screen already tells the reader more than it may seem.

A precise marker creates the impression that an ancient place is known to within a few metres. A hard forest boundary implies that its historical outline has been reconstructed. One symbol for a complex landscape visually merges all of its elements.

The map in this study should therefore not be more precise than the source.

If a medieval document reliably reports a sacred forest but gives only a relative location, the map should show an approximate historical zone. If a modern stone is known precisely but its ancient function is unproven, coordinate precision does not turn the hypothesis into fact.

This is especially important because the strongest written testimonies turned out not to be the most spatially precise.

10.2. Why the best-documented places often have only approximate geography

Early written testimony exists for Ventis, Rambynas, Heiligenwalt, Sethen, and the Vilnius case. But none of these examples provides a reliable ancient plan that would allow a precise marker for the “centre of the sanctuary.”

Ventis is known as a forest near Veliuona, but its medieval boundary must be reconstructed. Rambynas is associated with a sacred forest, while later tradition focuses on the hill and the stone. Heiligenwalt is reconstructed from a boundary description and historical geography. Sethen is linked with modern Šatijai through route geography and toponymy, but the identification remains reconstructed. The Vilnius document refers to a cult place and a church on the same site, but gives no architectural plan of the pagan object.

This is an important result. The strength of historical evidence and the precision of a modern coordinate are independent of one another.

10.3. What kinds of places the map shows

Instead of one layer of identical “sacred points,” the map distinguishes several types of historical situation.

The first group consists of five places with direct medieval testimony and only approximate ancient localisation: Ventis, Rambynas, Heiligenwalt, Sethen, and the Vilnius case.

The second group consists of four sites where the archaeological material is especially strong, but the religious function cannot be reduced to one undisputed explanation.

The third and largest group consists of fifteen places where toponymy, folklore, ethnographic tradition, or the later history of sacralisation carries most of the evidence, while the ancient function remains less certain.

Another four sites are important as cases in which a popular ancient attribution had to be limited or rejected after examination of field and written evidence.

Finally, two sites are distinguished as well-documented later or Christian sacred places. Their inclusion guards against the opposite error: the absence of proven pagan antiquity does not mean the absence of a real sacred history.

These numbers apply only to our sample of thirty places. They are not statistics for all sacred sites in Lithuania.

10.4. One historical site does not always fit into one point

Some places had to be divided into several spatial components.

For Rambynas, the approximate zone of the medieval sacred forest must be distinguished from the later hill and the lost stone. Their relationship is shown historically, but the map does not portray them as one unchanged centre.

For Šakiai, the main hill, the small Aukuro or Aukmo kalnelis, and the later reconstruction of a Temple of Perkūnas are treated separately. The modern temple scheme is not transferred onto the map of antiquity as an archaeologically established fact.

For Heiligenwalt, the forest of 1398, the later Gojus, Romainiai, and other elements of the broader reconstruction of the lower Nevėžis are considered separately. They are not merged into one polygon until the connection between them has been demonstrated.

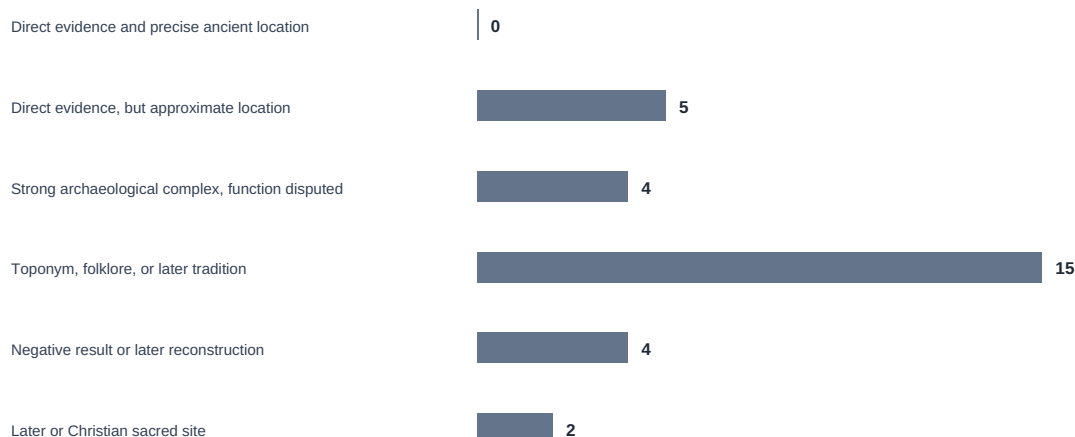
The same rule applies to Obeliai and Mikytai. The lakeside archaeological complex at Obeliai is not the same object as the nearby meadow called Alkas. Mikytai does not acquire the archaeological properties of Šliktinė.

The map therefore follows the same principle as the text: proximity is not identity.

Fig. 2. How the 30 investigated places are distributed. The categories describe the character of the available evidence and the permissible precision of public presentation. They are not a ranking of cultural value.

How the 30 studied sites are distributed

Categories describe the nature of the evidence, not the cultural value of a site.



No site combines direct ancient evidence with such a precise ancient location and boundaries that an exact centre or fixed boundary could be published as a fully established fact.

10.5. A research map and a guidebook serve different purposes

A research map should show not only the most attractive places but also negative results. Otherwise the reader may get the impression that the method always confirms the original hypothesis.

Šakiai, Nečioniškis, Liškiava, and the disputed Vilnius temple attribution therefore belong on the research map. They show the limits of reconstruction.

A future tourist or cultural guidebook may work differently. Its task is to help readers navigate interesting places, so it does not need to place every case where an ancient attribution failed at the centre of attention. But even a simplified guidebook should not turn the remaining places into a homogeneous list of proven pagan sanctuaries.

The same material can be used in both a research map and a guidebook if both clearly distinguish what is established, what is probable, and what belongs to later tradition.

10.6. How to show uncertainty visually

A warning about uncertainty should be visible before the reader even opens a site card.

A precisely known modern stone can be shown as a point. An approximate historical location is better shown as a zone. A route or boundary reconstruction may be displayed as a corridor. A complex landscape should consist of several related elements rather than one artificial point.

If every place is marked with the same symbol, the differences disappear even if the detailed text inside the cards remains accurate.

Colour should not turn the map into a simple “true” and “false” scheme either. Historical evidence is more complex than a binary judgement.

10.7. What the reader should see in a site card

A site card should immediately answer several questions that are understandable to the reader.

What is this place? What is the earliest reliable testimony associated with it? What exactly does that testimony allow us to say? How precisely is the place located? What are the main limitations and alternative explanations? Which layer is later or modern?

This order helps the reader see for themselves the difference between a direct document, an archaeological interpretation, and a later tradition.

10.8. The main spatial conclusion

An attempt to create a precise map of Lithuania's ancient sanctuaries would inevitably be more precise than the sources themselves.

A responsible map should show not only places but also the degree of spatial uncertainty. For some sites this is an exact modern physical object. For others it is only a historical locality, zone, or route. Sometimes refusing to give an exact point is more accurate than creating a false impression of knowledge.

In this sense, uncertainty on the map is not a defect but a substantive part of the result.

11. Conclusions

11.1. Specific sacred landscapes are genuinely documented

The first and most important conclusion of the study is positive.

The evidence for ancient sacred places in Lithuania cannot be reduced entirely to later folklore or national-romantic reconstruction. Documents from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contain specific reports connected with historically locatable places.

Ventis near Veliuona is described in documents of 1413 and 1416 as a former sacred forest. The route corpus mentions the sacred forest Rambyn. The treaty of 1398 uses the name Heiligenwalt. Hermann von Wartberge writes in 1362 of Sethen as a settlement that was called sacred. A papal document of 1388 preserves a report of the destruction of a *fanum* and the construction of a church on the same site in Vilnius.⁴²

These sources differ in genre and in the reliability of particular details. They do not provide one unified picture of a Baltic temple. But they are strong enough for a more limited conclusion: in late medieval Lithuania there were specific forests, settlements, and cult spaces that written tradition described as sacred or formerly sacred.

11.2. A sacred place did not have to be a temple

The better an early site is documented, the clearer the limits of our knowledge can sometimes become.

Ventis is one of the strongest examples, even though we know almost nothing about what happened inside the forest. The sources report its former sacred status but do not name a deity, altar, or ritual.

The same applies to Heiligenwalt and Sethen. The words of the sources are important enough to support the existence of a special sacred status. But they are insufficient for a detailed reconstruction of a religious institution.

This is why the broad expression “sacred place” is often more accurate than “temple” or “sanctuary” when those words create an image of specific architecture and ritual that the source does not describe.

11.3. Archaeology reliably shows material traces, but not always their meaning

Obeliai and Šliktinė demonstrate the existence of large and unusual complexes. Rešketėnai helps reconstruct the position of a site and date particular episodes of activity. Trumponys confirms deliberate working of a stone and traces of fire.

In all these cases the material evidence is significant. But moving from material evidence to religious meaning requires a separate argument.

Ancient charcoal does not automatically date a sacred function. Human remains do not prove human sacrifice. An assemblage of weapons and ornaments in a wet landscape does not in itself tell us to whom or why they were left.

Archaeology is most persuasive when observation is not confused with interpretation.

11.4. A name helps us search, but it does not replace evidence

Alka, Šventas, Aukuras, Perkūnas, and similar forms are genuinely important historical indicators.

Without toponymy, many places would never have entered the field of investigation at all. But the meaning of a word and the history of a particular site cannot be treated as the same thing.

Mikytai remains a serious candidate for an old sacred space, but the name Alka does not date a ritual. Puvočiai has a reliable 1935 record of a story about Perkūnas, but the story concerns a lightning strike, not demonstrated worship. Aukuro or Aukmo kalnelis near Šakiai does not turn the neighbouring hill into an archaeologically established altar.

A name suggests where to look and what to examine. By itself, it proves nothing.

11.5. Folklore most reliably dates the story itself

Folklore and ethnographic records are full historical sources. They show how people understood places, what actions they performed, and what stories they told.

But a record made in 1939 first of all proves that the corresponding story existed by 1939. It may preserve older memory, but that requires intermediate evidence.

It is especially important to consider the influence of print, museums, local history, and tourism. A modern reconstruction can enter local oral tradition and then return to the researcher as if it were an independent folk account.

The number of later repetitions therefore does not make a motif older.

11.6. Continuity takes different forms

The study did not confirm a simple model in which every pre-Christian sacred place automatically continues in Christian or modern tradition.

Sometimes a name may survive. Sometimes the place itself. Sometimes an individual story. Sometimes a practice receives a new religious explanation. Sometimes later sacralisation arises independently.

Rambynas probably shows a long relationship between different sacred layers of one landscape, but not one unchanged ritual centre. Vištytis shows real modern Christian practice without a demonstrated pagan predecessor. The Great Stone of Vištytis already has a documented Christian sacred name in the eighteenth century, but this does not prove a prehistoric altar.

Continuity has to be demonstrated through a specific feature, not assumed from the overall impression.

11.7. A negative result also matters

Not every interesting hypothesis is confirmed, and that is also a result.

Nečioniškis is a case where the available evidence does not support an ancient cult attribution. Šakiai seriously weakens the reconstruction of a hillfort and temple. Liškiava provides no evidence for use of the investigated area before the fifteenth century, although a completely destroyed earlier layer cannot be entirely excluded. In Vilnius, a specific stone building is not confirmed as a proven Temple of Perkūnas, while the separate written report of a *fanum* remains.

Such conclusions are not failures. They separate testable history from a self-reinforcing tradition.

11.8. A precise coordinate is not the same as historical certainty

One of the most important results concerns cartography.

The best-documented medieval places often cannot be mapped with modern GPS precision. Conversely, a modern stone or hill can be measured very precisely without knowing its ancient function.

A precise map of “ancient sanctuaries” that did not show degrees of uncertainty would therefore systematically be more confident than the sources.

A historical map must be able to show zones, localities, corridors, and several components of one landscape. Sometimes refusing to give an exact point is the more accurate scholarly decision.

11.9. The thirty places belong to different historical types

The thirty places investigated do not constitute thirty equivalent pre-Christian sanctuaries.

The sample includes direct medieval testimony. It includes strong archaeological complexes with disputed functions. It includes places known primarily through names and folklore. It includes later Christian and healing sacred places. And it includes sites where a popular ancient attribution proved weak or was rejected.

This heterogeneity is precisely what makes the sample useful. It allows us to see not only the presumed past but also the process by which knowledge about the past was created, changed, and tested.

11.10. What this study did not prove

The study did not prove that all thirty places are pre-Christian sanctuaries.

It did not show that every name such as Alka, Šventas, Perkūnas, or Aukuras denotes an ancient temple. It did not establish that every later healing practice is a survival of paganism. It did not prove that every unusual archaeological deposit is necessarily an offering to gods.

Archaeology did not prove a Temple of Perkūnas beneath the present Vilnius Cathedral. The Šakiai investigation did not confirm an ancient Temple of Perkūnas. A medieval sacred forest cannot automatically be equated with an exact modern forest boundary. Later folklore cannot be projected back into prehistory without intermediate evidence.

These limits are part of the result.

11.11. What can be stated with reasonable confidence

Despite these limits, the study provides several strong positive conclusions.

First, specific sacred landscapes genuinely appear in early written sources, and not merely in general descriptions of paganism but in connection with named forests, settlements, and a specific Vilnius case.

Second, historical sacrality can be established even when the exact ritual is unknown. Not knowing the function within a sacred forest does not cancel the fact that the source regarded the forest as sacred.

Third, archaeology makes it possible to separate material fact from later legend with confidence and can substantially weaken particular popular reconstructions.

Fourth, later Christian, healing, and mythological traditions have independent historical value. They do not need to be artificially made older in order to deserve study.

Fifth, uncertainty can be described systematically. It does not have to become either categorical denial or an endless “possibly.”

11.12. Final conclusion

Lithuania's sacred landscape cannot be represented by a single map of ancient temples.

The surviving sources show a different picture. There are documented medieval sacred forests and settlements. There are unusual archaeological complexes whose meaning remains disputed. There are names and legends that may preserve older memory but require dating. There are Christian springs and stones with their own centuries-long sacred history. There are modern reconstructions that have become part of culture even though they are not ancient testimony.

The most reliable approach is not to choose between credulity and total scepticism. For every claim, we should ask where it comes from, when it was first recorded, which specific place it concerns, and what it genuinely allows us to say.

That boundary between the known, the probable, and the reconstructed is one of the main results of this work.

Appendix A. Short Register of the Investigated Places

The table includes all thirty places and landscape complexes examined in this study. The formulations are deliberately brief. They show what the available sources actually support and the main limitation that should be kept in mind.

No.	Place	Region	What is supported	Main limitation
1	Šventaragio slėnis / Vilnius fanum	Vilnius	A document of 1388 reports the destruction of a pagan <i>fanum</i> and the construction of a church on the same site	The exact extent of the cult place and its archaeological identification with a Temple of Perkūnas are not established
2	Marijampolio akmuo su pėda	Vilnius District	A later mythological tradition associated with the stone is documented	The original spatial context has been disturbed; an ancient cult function is not proven
3	Obelių pieva Alkas	Ukmergė District	Alkas is recorded as a separate meadow name near Obeliai	The archaeology of the lakeside complex cannot be transferred to this meadow
4	Taitiškių Alkasala / Alka	Molėtai District	The name Alkasala / Alka makes the peninsula or island an important toponymic candidate	Independent confirmation of an ancient ritual function has not been established
5	Narkūnų Sveikatos versmė / Laimės slėnis	Utena District	Healing practice and the throwing of coins are documented in the first half of the twentieth century	The spring was later destroyed, and the pre-Christian antiquity of the practice is not proven
6	Nečioniškio kalva	Utena District	Targeted archaeological survey did not confirm the earlier attribution as an ancient cult place	A negative result does not mean that no symbolic actions ever occurred on the hill
7	Trumponių Laumių bliūdas	Molėtai District	An artificial basin, deliberate stabilisation of the stone, and a nearby pit with charcoal and ash are confirmed	The complex is undated, and its ritual function is not proven
8	Obelių ežero pakraščio kompleksas	Ukmergė District	A substantial late medieval lakeside complex with cremated human remains is archaeologically confirmed	Water burial, sacrificial practice, and other explanations remain disputed
9	Square building beneath Vilnius Cathedral	Vilnius	Later reassessment does not confirm it as an archaeologically proven Temple of Perkūnas	This conclusion does not invalidate the separate written report of a <i>fanum</i> in 1388
10	Švendubrės Dzidziulis	Druskininkai	The stone has a long nineteenth- and twentieth-century religious, healing, and folkloric history	A pre-Christian cult function has not been established
11	Rambynų šventasis miškas and the later hill complex	Pagėgiai	A medieval source directly mentions the sacred forest Rambyn	The medieval forest, later hill, lost stone, and modern cultural memory belong to different historical layers

No.	Place	Region	What is supported	Main limitation
12	Mikytų Alkakalnis	Skuodas District	The name, landscape, and later tradition consistently connect the place with sacred themes	Archaeology in 1971 did not produce diagnostic ritual structures or finds
13	Vištyčio Didysis akmuo	Vilkaviškis District	In a document of 1776 the stone bears the Christian name of the Holy Trinity; processions and healing tradition are documented later	A pre-Christian altar function is not proven, and the exact archival reference for the 1776 document remains unidentified
14	Perlojos Ašarinio kalnas ir ežeras	Varėna District	A connected tradition concerning the hill and lake is recorded in 1935	Later stories about a pagan temple and sacred fire do not date an ancient sanctuary
15	Ventis / Ventos šventasis miškas	Veliuona, Jurbarkas District	Documents of 1413 and 1416 describe Ventis/Wentis as a former sacred pagan or Samogitian forest	The sources do not describe the exact ritual and do not provide the precise medieval forest boundary
16	Nikiparos šaltinis	Varėna District	Later healing practices and customs connected with Joninės are documented	Pre-Christian continuity has not been established
17	Norulių girios Laumės akmuo	Varėna District	Later stories about a laumė and healing water are documented	Ancient cult use is not proven
18	Dievyčio kalnas	Šilalė District	In 1854 a depression with a layer of ash, charcoal, and sand was described against the background of later sacred tradition	The observation lacks modern stratigraphic dating and does not prove an altar
19	Šiauduvos Šventupis	Šilalė District	Healing practice and later ritual tradition are documented	The stream has been altered, and the antiquity of the ritual vocabulary is not established
20	Vištyčio Šventas / Šv. Jono šaltinis	Vilkaviškis District	Living Christian and healing veneration of the spring is well documented	Pre-Christian continuity has not been established
21	Kroku Lanka	Šilutė District	A long nineteenth- and twentieth-century mythological tradition connected with the watery landscape exists	Origin legends do not prove an ancient ritual sanctuary
22	Šliktinės depozitų zona	Skuodas District	A major ninth- to eleventh-century assemblage of metal objects in a wet landscape is securely confirmed	Drainage works and displaced soil disturbed the original context of some finds; a sacrificial function remains an interpretation
23	Rešketėnų šventvietė / original zone of the cup-marked stone	Telšiai District	Archaeology in 2021 substantially refined the original position of the moved stone	The radiocarbon date of AD 307-406 relates to ancient economic activity and does not date sacred use
24	Liškiavos Bažnyčios kalnas / Alkakalnis	Varėna District	The primary excavation publication found no evidence of use before the fifteenth century	A completely destroyed earlier layer remains a possibility, not an established fact

No.	Place	Region	What is supported	Main limitation
25	Alkupio Šventkalnis	Šilalė District	Early twentieth-century names and a 1939 record form a strong toponymic and folkloric strand	The kūlgrinda and neighbouring hills cannot be merged into one ancient cult centre without additional grounds
26	Presumed Šakiai hillfort / Aukuro kalnelis	Vilkaviškis District	Archaeology in 2001 strongly weakens the hillfort and material temple interpretation; by 2007 a Temple of Perkūnas reconstruction was already in print	The main hill, the small hill, and the later temple reconstruction belong to different historical bodies of evidence
27	Andriūnų-Doškonių Aukakalnis	Border of Alytus and Varėna districts	In 1935 the name and reports of charcoal, ash, and bones were recorded; a rich later tradition was recorded subsequently	The material observations are undated, and later sacrificial language cannot automatically be projected backward
28	Puvočių Perkūno akmuo	Varėna District	A 1935 record links the stone with Perkūnas and a lightning strike; a youth custom is known later	The deity's name and a later custom do not prove ancient worship or sacrifice
29	Heiligenwalt / sacred forest of the lower Nevėžis	Kaunas Region	The treaty of 1398 uses the forest Heiligenwalt as a boundary landmark	The exact forest boundary and its identity with the later Gojus are not established; the 2025 article was checked only through the available abstract
30	Šatijai / Sethen	Kaunas Region	The chronicle of 1362 calls Sethen a sacred settlement; Šatijai is the most convincing modern localisation	The connection between the medieval and modern names remains reconstructed, and the specific sacred function is not described

Appendix B. How to Read the Evidence in This Publication

B.1. Different sources answer different questions

The study uses written documents, archaeology, toponymy, folklore, ethnographic records, maps, state registers, and modern publications.

They are not combined into one overall score.

A written document may reliably report that a forest was called sacred while saying nothing about ritual. Archaeology may precisely show a concentration of objects without giving a single explanation for its function. A place-name may be a strong guide but may not date a practice. Folklore may securely record a twentieth-century tradition while proving nothing about the thirteenth century.

The important question in each case is therefore not “how much evidence is there?” but “what exactly can be established from each source?”

B.2. Confidence applies to a claim, not to the value of a place

A place may be culturally important, frequently visited, and genuinely sacred to a modern community while having weak evidence specifically for a pre-Christian function.

Conversely, a medieval document may strongly confirm the existence of a sacred forest even when no modern visitor point is known.

Scholarly caution is therefore not an assessment of a site's cultural importance.

B.3. What “not established” means

The phrase “not established” is not the same as “it never existed.”

It means that the available sources are insufficient for the stated conclusion.

If archaeology has not found a cult structure, that may weaken a specific temple interpretation. But a natural sacred place may never have had a building at all. If a later story lacks early parallels, it cannot be dated to pre-Christian times, but that does not prove that the motif must have arisen recently.

B.4. Continuity is always specified

The publication considers separately the survival of a name, place, story, practice, function, and local memory.

The survival of one feature does not prove the survival of all the others.

For example, an old name may survive after the ritual disappears. A Christian practice may arise at an earlier sacred place while changing its meaning. A later legend may preserve an old motif without continuous performance of an ancient ritual.

B.5. Geographical precision also requires evidence

A precisely located stone can be shown as a point on a map. For a historical forest whose boundaries are unknown, a precise point creates false certainty. For a route or boundary description, a zone or corridor is more appropriate.

The map should therefore not be more precise than the source.

Appendix C. Sources and Access Limitations

C.1. How a source was selected for citation

Preference was given to the earliest and most direct source that could actually be checked.

Priority usually went to a primary document, an archaeological field report, an original archival record, or a critical edition of a historical text. Modern scholarship was used for interpretation, for checking historiography, and for finding earlier sources.

State registers and official pages are useful for localisation and the history of protection, but registration itself does not prove an ancient cult function.

Local-history, tourist, and modern reconstruction materials are used mainly for the history of later reception.

C.2. Limitations of the source base

Several sources remained unavailable in full or require further archival verification.

The full text of Vykintas Vaitkevičius's 2025 article "Nauji duomenys apie šventvietę prie Nevėžio žiočių" was not available while this publication was being prepared. Bibliographic data and the available abstract were checked. The author's proposed spatial reconstruction of Heiligenwalt is therefore not treated as a basis for drawing exact boundaries on the map.

Eduards Šturms's *Die Alkstätten in Litauen* (1946) has been identified in the holdings of the National Library of Lithuania under shelfmark "C(LKA)vok.13/946", but the content of the required page was not obtained. For that reason Jaučakių Svirnakalnis was not included in the main sample of thirty places and remains for future verification.

For the Vištytis boundary extract of 1776, the content of the relevant formula is known but the exact archival reference has not yet been established. The conclusion is therefore limited to what the known passage itself permits.

Ambraziejus Kašarauskas's observation of Dievyčio kalnas in 1854 was checked through published works by K. Būga and Vykintas Vaitkevičius. The original manuscript or exact archival reference has not yet been found.

Some early sheets from folklore, toponymic, and archaeological archives have so far been checked through reproductions or quotation in reliable specialist literature rather than against the original sheet. Where this affects a conclusion, the provenance of the information is stated separately.

For Rambynas, the wording in *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, p. 677, has been confirmed through the edition and specialist literature. A direct image of the page remains a desirable addition to the next revision.

C.3. How direct quotations are used

A verbatim quotation is needed only when the wording itself has evidential importance.

If a medieval text says “heiliger walt,” the translation should not quietly turn this into a “temple complex.” If a document uses *fanum*, the name of Perkūnas is not added without separate grounds. If a chronicle says *sanctus vir*, the translation should not automatically create the title of a supreme pagan priest.

The translation must preserve the uncertainty of the original, not remove it.

Appendix D. Key Claims and the Limits of the Conclusions

This table gathers claims that are especially important for understanding the results of the publication.

Topic	What the sources support	What is not established or is rejected
Vilnius, 1388	The document reports the destruction of a <i>fanum</i> and the construction of a church on the same site	The document does not name Perkūnas; the particular square building beneath the cathedral has not been proven to be a Temple of Perkūnas
Ventis, 1413 and 1416	Two documents preserve Ventis/Wentis as a former sacred forest near Veliuona	Exact rituals, deity, altar, and the precise medieval forest boundary are unknown
Rambynas	A medieval route source directly mentions the sacred forest Rambyn	It is not proven that the medieval forest, later hill, and stone formed one unchanged cult centre
Heiligenwalt, 1398	A boundary document uses the forest Heiligenwalt as a landmark	The exact boundaries and identity with the later Gojus are not established
Sethen, 1362	The settlement is directly called sacred	The reason for this description and its specific cult function are unknown; Šatijai remains a reconstructed localisation
Obeliai	A large late medieval lakeside complex with cremated human remains is confirmed	An unambiguous interpretation as a sacrificial sanctuary is not established
Šliktinė	Large ninth- to eleventh-century complexes of metal objects are confirmed	A precise scenario of sacrifice to gods is not proven, and the original context of some finds was disturbed
Rešketėnai	The original location of the cup-marked stone was refined and ancient traces of activity were recorded	The radiocarbon date of ancient economic activity does not date the sacred function of the stone
Trumponys	An artificial basin, installation of the stone, charcoal, and ash are confirmed	The complex is undated and has no proven ritual function
Mikytai	The name, landscape, and later tradition form a persuasive combination of historical indicators	Archaeology in 1971 did not confirm a specific ancient ritual construction
Puvočiai	A story about the stone and Perkūnas already existed in 1935	The deity's name does not prove an ancient cult of Perkūnas at the stone
Andriūnai-Doškonys	Early records report charcoal, ash, bones, and features of the hill	Later stories of sacrifice cannot automatically explain the earlier material observations
Šakiai	Field investigation in 2001 did not confirm a hillfort; a printed temple reconstruction is known by 2007	Archaeology does not confirm a Temple of Perkūnas; it cannot be claimed that the 2007 author was the first creator of the idea
Liškiava	No signs of use before the fifteenth century were found in the investigated layers	The absolute absence of a completely destroyed earlier layer cannot be demonstrated

Topic	What the sources support	What is not established or is rejected
Nečioniškis	Targeted survey did not confirm an ancient cult place	There is no basis for retaining the attribution as a positive historical conclusion without new evidence
Vištytis, sacred spring	Modern Christian and healing sacrality is well documented	Pre-Christian continuity is not proven
Vištytis, Great Stone	The Christian name of the Holy Trinity is known from 1776; processions and healing tradition are documented later	A prehistoric function as a pagan altar is not proven

Appendix E. What to Check in Future Versions

E.1. Principle of revision

New sources appearing after publication should not silently rewrite an earlier conclusion.

Typographical errors, bibliographic clarifications, and broken links can be corrected without changing the substance. If a new source changes localisation, chronology, interpretation of function, or the strength of a historical conclusion, this should be reflected in a new version with an explanation of what changed and why.

The previous version should remain available so that readers can see why and on what basis the conclusion changed.

E.2. Priority checks for future work

1. Obtain the full text of Vykintas Vaitkevičius's 2025 article on the sacred place near the mouth of the Nevėžis. Check the 1853 map, archival reference, and the full argument for the location of Heiligenwalt.
2. Obtain Eduards Šturms, *Die Alkstätten in Litauen* (1946), especially p. 3, no. 25, if Jaučakiai is returned to the main sample or becomes a separate historiographical case.
3. Establish the exact archival reference and, if possible, obtain the original Vištytis boundary document of 1776 containing the formula "S. Troycy."
4. Obtain the original manuscript or exact archival reference for Ambraziejus Kašarauskas's 1854 record concerning Dievyčio kalnas.
5. Check the original 1935 and 1959 materials for Andriūnai-Doškonys, including the plan and records concerning posts, charcoal, and dark soil.
6. Obtain the original 1935 Lietuvos žemės vardynas sheet for Puvočių Perkūno akmuo and information about the informant. Separately establish the earliest record of the youth or shepherd custom.
7. Check the original folklore sheets for Šventupis and Šventkalnis, including informant details and possible influence from printed tradition.
8. Obtain and preserve an image of *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, vol. II, p. 677, containing the reference to Rambynas. If necessary, refine the earliest evidence for the later history of the hill and stone.

9. Search for an earlier source for the “Perkūno šventykla” reconstruction at Šakiai only if this could change the history of the modern version's origin. Failure to find an earlier publication must not be turned into a claim that Albinas Kurtinaitis originated the idea itself.

E.3. What does not by itself require revision of the conclusions

A new tourist page, another website repeating a familiar legend, or another repetition of a modern reconstruction is not in itself an independent reason to change a historical conclusion.

Revision is needed when a new early source appears, new archaeological material becomes available, a more precise archival record is found, an independently persuasive localisation is established, or evidence genuinely changes the existing argument.

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