

= Mindaugas =

Mindaugas (German : Myndowen , Latin : Mindowe , Old East Slavic : ?????? ? Mendog , Belarusian : ?????? or Mindoh , c . 1203 ? fall 1263) was the first known Grand Duke of Lithuania and the only King of Lithuania . Little is known of his origins , early life , or rise to power ; he is mentioned in a 1219 treaty as an elder duke , and in 1236 as the leader of all the Lithuanians . The contemporary and modern sources discussing his ascent mention strategic marriages along with banishment or murder of his rivals . He extended his domain into regions southeast of Lithuania proper during the 1230s and 1240s . In 1250 or 1251 , during the course of internal power struggles , he was baptised as a Roman Catholic ; this action enabled him to establish an alliance with the Livonian Order , a long @-@ standing antagonist of the Lithuanians . During the summer of 1253 he was crowned King of Lithuania , ruling between 300 @,@ 000 and 400 @,@ 000 subjects .

While his ten @-@ year reign was marked by various state @-@ building accomplishments , Mindaugas 's conflicts with relatives and other dukes continued , and Samogitia (western Lithuania) strongly resisted the alliance 's rule . His gains in the southeast were challenged by the Tatars . He broke peace with the Livonian Order in 1261 , possibly renouncing Christianity , and was assassinated in 1263 by his nephew Treniota and another rival , Duke Daumantas . His three immediate successors were assassinated as well . The disorder was not resolved until Traidenis gained the title of Grand Duke c . 1270 .

Although his reputation was unsettled during the following centuries and his descendants were not notable , he gained standing during the 19th and 20th centuries . Mindaugas was the only King of Lithuania ; while most of the Lithuanian Grand Dukes from Jogaila onward also reigned as Kings of Poland , the titles remained separate . Now generally considered the founder of the Lithuanian state , he is also now credited with stopping the advance of the Tatars towards the Baltic Sea , establishing international recognition of Lithuania , and turning it towards Western civilization . In the 1990s the historian Edvardas Gudavičius published research supporting an exact coronation date ? 6 July 1253 . This day is now an official national holiday , Statehood Day .

= = Rise to power = =

Lithuania was ruled during the early 13th century by a number of dukes and princes presiding over various fiefdoms and tribes . They were loosely bonded by commonalities of religion and tradition , trade , kinship , joint military campaigns , and the presence of captured prisoners from neighboring areas . Western merchants and missionaries began seeking control of the area during the 12th century , establishing the city of Riga , Latvia in 1201 . Their efforts in Lithuania were temporarily halted by defeat at the Battle of Saule in 1236 , but armed Christian orders continued to pose a threat . The country had also undergone incursions by the Mongol Empire .

A treaty with Galicia ? Volhynia , signed in 1219 , is usually considered the first conclusive evidence that the Baltic tribes in the area were uniting in response to these threats . The treaty 's signatories include twenty Lithuanian dukes and one dowager duchess ; it specifies that five of these were elder and thus took precedence over the remaining sixteen . Mindaugas , despite his youth , as well as his brother Dausprungas are listed among the elder dukes , implying that they had inherited their titles . The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle describes him as the ruler of all Lithuania in 1236 . His path to this title is not clear . Ruthenian chronicles mention that he murdered or expelled several other dukes , including his relatives . Historian S.C. Rowell has described his rise to power as taking place through " the familiar processes of marriage , murder and military conquest . "

During the 1230s and 1240s , Mindaugas strengthened and established his power in various Baltic and Slavic lands . Warfare in the region intensified ; he battled German forces in Kurland , while the Mongols destroyed Kiev in 1240 and entered Poland in 1241 , defeating two Polish armies and burning Kraków . The Lithuanian victory in the Battle of Saule temporarily stabilized the northern front , but the Christian orders continued to make gains along the Baltic coast , founding the city of Klaipėda (Memel) . Constrained in the north and west , Mindaugas moved to the east and southeast , conquering Navahrudak , Hrodna , Vawkavysk , and the Principality of Polotsk , but

there is no information about any battles for those cities . In 1246 by Chronic of Gustynia he was baptized by Orthodox church in Navahrudak , but later because of political situation he was re @-@ baptized by Catholic church . In about 1239 he appointed his son Vai?vilkas to govern these areas , then known as Black Ruthenia . In 1248 , he sent his nephews Tautvilas and Edivydas , the sons of his brother Dausprungas , along with Vykintas , the Duke of Samogitia , to conquer Smolensk , but they were unsuccessful . His attempts to consolidate his rule in Lithuania met with mixed success ; in 1249 , an internal war erupted when he sought to seize his nephews ' and Vykintas ' lands .

= = Path to coronation = =

Tautvilas , Edivydas , and Vykintas formed a powerful coalition in opposition to Mindaugas , along with the Samogitians of western Lithuania , the Livonian Order , Daniel of Galicia (Tautvilas and Edivydas ' brother @-@ in @-@ law) , and Vasilko of Volhynia . The princes of Galicia and Volhynia managed to gain control over Black Ruthenia , disrupting Vai?vilkas ' supremacy . Tautvilas strengthened his position by traveling to Riga and accepting baptism by the Archbishop . In 1250 , the Order organized a major raid through the lands of Nal?ia into the domains of Mindaugas in Lithuania proper , and a raid into those parts of Samogitia that still supported him . Attacked from the north and south and facing the possibility of unrest elsewhere , Mindaugas was placed in an extremely difficult position , but managed to use the conflicts between the Livonian Order and the Archbishop of Riga to further his own interests . He succeeded in bribing Order Master Andreas von Stierland , who was still angry at Vykintas for the defeat at the Battle of Saule in 1236 , by sending him " many gifts " .

In 1250 or 1251 , Mindaugas agreed to receive baptism and relinquish control over some lands in western Lithuania , in return for an acknowledgment by Pope Innocent IV as king . The Pope welcomed a Christian Lithuania as a bulwark against Mongol threats ; in turn , Mindaugas sought papal intervention in the ongoing Lithuanian conflicts with the Christian orders . On 17 July 1251 , the pope signed two crucial papal bulls . One ordered the Bishop of Che?mno to crown Mindaugas as King of Lithuania , appoint a bishop for Lithuania , and build a cathedral . The other bull specified that the new bishop was to be directly subordinate to the Holy See , rather than to the Archbishop of Riga . This autonomy was a welcome development . The precise date of Mindaugas ' baptism is not known . His wife , two sons , and members of his court were baptized ; Pope Innocent wrote later that a multitude of Mindaugas ' subjects also received Christianity .

The process of coronation and the establishment of Christian institutions would take two years . Internal conflicts persisted ; during the spring or summer of 1251 , Tautvilas and his remaining allies attacked Mindaugas ' warriors and the Livonian Order 's crossbow @-@ men in Voruta Castle . The attack failed , and Tautvilas ' forces retreated to defend themselves in Tviremet Castle (presumed to be Tverai in Samogitia) . Vykintas died in 1251 or 1252 , and Tautvilas was forced to rejoin Daniel of Galicia .

= = The Kingdom of Lithuania = =

Mindaugas and his wife Morta were crowned during the summer of 1253 . Bishop Henry Heidenreich of Kulm presided over the ecclesiastical ceremonies and Andreas Stirland conferred the crown . 6 July is now celebrated as Statehood Day (Lithuanian : Valstyb?s diena) ; it is an official holiday in modern Lithuania . The exact date of the coronation is not known ; the scholarship of historian Edvardas Gudavi?ius , who promulgated this precise date , is sometimes challenged . The location of the coronation also remains unknown .

Relative peace and stability prevailed for about eight years . Mindaugas used this opportunity to concentrate on the expansion to the east , and to establish and organize state institutions . He strengthened his influence in Black Ruthenia , in Polatsk , a major center of commerce in the Daugava River basin , and in Pinsk . He also negotiated a peace with Galicia ? Volhynia , and married his daughter to Svarn , the son of Daniel of Galicia , who would later become Grand Duke of Lithuania . Lithuanian relationships with western Europe and the Holy See were reinforced . In 1255

, Mindaugas received permission from Pope Alexander IV to crown his son as King of Lithuania . A noble court , an administrative system , and a diplomatic service were initiated . Silver long coins , an index of statehood , were issued . He sponsored the construction of a cathedral in Vilnius , possibly on the site of today 's Vilnius Cathedral .

Immediately after his coronation , Mindaugas transferred some lands to the Livonian Order ? portions of Samogitia , Nadruva , and Dainava ? although his control over these western lands was tenuous . There has been much discussion among historians as to whether in later years (1255 ? 1261) Mindaugas gave even more lands to the order . The deeds might have been falsified by the order ; the case for this scenario is bolstered by the fact that some of the documents mention lands that were not actually under the control of Mindaugas and by various irregularities in treaty witnesses and seals .

Mindaugas and his antagonist Daniel reached a reconciliation in 1255 ; the Black Ruthenian lands were transferred to Roman , Daniel 's son . Afterwards Mindaugas 's son Vai?vilkas received baptism as a member of the Orthodox faith , becoming a monk and later founding a convent and monastery . Tautvilas 's antagonism was temporarily resolved when he recognized Mindaugas ' superiority and received Polatsk as a fiefdom . A direct confrontation with the Mongols occurred in 1258 or 1259 , when Berke Khan sent his general Burundai to challenge Lithuanian rule , ordering Daniel and other regional princes to participate . The Novgorod Chronicle describes the following action as a defeat of the Lithuanians , but it has also been seen as a net gain for Mindaugas .

A single sentence in the Hypatian Chronicle mentions Mindaugas defending himself in Voruta against his nephews and Duke Vykintas ; two other sources mention " his castle " . The location of Voruta is not specified , and this has led to considerable speculation , along with archeological research , concerning the seat of his court . At least fourteen different locations have been proposed , including Kernav? and Vilnius . The ongoing formal archeological digs at Kernav? began in 1979 after a portion of the site named " Mindaugas Throne hill @-@ fort " collapsed . The town now hosts a major celebration on Statehood Day .

= = Assassination and aftermath = =

The Livonian Order used their alliance with Mindaugas to gain control over Samogitian lands . In 1252 he approved the Order 's construction of Klaipeda Castle . Their governance , however , was seen as oppressive . Local merchants could only conduct transactions via Order @-@ approved intermediaries ; inheritance laws were changed ; and the choices among marriage partners and residencies were restricted . Several pitched battles ensued . In 1259 the Order lost the Battle of Skuodas , and in 1260 it lost the Battle of Durbe . The first defeat encouraged a rebellion by the Semigalians , and the defeat at Durbe spurred the Prussians into the Great Prussian Rebellion , which lasted for 14 years . Encouraged by these developments and by his nephew Treniota , Mindaugas broke peace with the Order . The gains he had expected from Christianization had proven to be minor .

Mindaugas may have reverted to paganism afterwards . His motivation for conversion is often described by modern historians as merely strategic . The case for his apostasy rests largely on two near @-@ contemporary sources : a 1324 assertion by Pope John XXII that Mindaugas had returned to error , and the Galician ? Volhynian Chronicle . The chronicler writes that Mindaugas continued to practice paganism , making sacrifices to his god , burning corpses , and conducting pagan rites in public . Historians have pointed to the possibility of bias in this account , since Mindaugas had been at war with Volhynia . Pope Clement IV , on the other hand , wrote in 1268 of " Mindaugas of happy memory " (clare memorie Mindota) , expressing regret at his murder .

In any event , the Lithuanians were not prepared to accept Christianity , and Mindaugas ' baptism had little impact on further developments . The majority of the population and the nobility remained pagan ; his subjects were not required to convert . The cathedral he had built in Vilnius was superseded by a pagan temple , and all the diplomatic achievements made after his coronation were lost , although the practice of Christianity and intermarriage were well tolerated .

Regional conflicts with the Order escalated . Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod , Tautvilas , and

Tautvilas 's son Constantine agreed to form a coalition in opposition to Mindaugas , but their plans were unsuccessful . Treniota emerged as the leader of the Samogitian resistance ; he led an army to C?sis (now in Latvia) , reaching the Estonian coast , and battled Masovia (now in Poland) . His goal was to encourage all the conquered Baltic tribes to rise up against the Christian orders and unite under Lithuanian leadership . His personal influence grew while Mindaugas was concentrating on the conquest of Ruthenian lands , dispatching a large army to Bryansk . Treniota and Mindaugas began to pursue different priorities . The Rhymed Chronicle mentions Mindaugas 's displeasure at the fact that Treniota did not create any alliances in Latvia or Estonia ; he may have come to prefer diplomacy . In the midst of these events Mindaugas ' wife Morta died , and he took her sister , Daumantas ' wife , as his own . In retaliation , Daumantas and Treniota assassinated Mindaugas and two of his sons in fall 1263 . According to a late medieval tradition , the assassination took place in Aglona . He was buried along with his horses , in accordance with ancestral tradition . After Mindaugas ' death , Lithuania lapsed into internal disorder . Three of his successors ? Treniota , his son @-@ in @-@ law Svarn , and his son Vai?vilkas ? were assassinated during the next seven years . Stability did not return until the reign of Traidenis , designated Grand Duke c . 1270 .

= = Legacy = =

Mindaugas held a dubious position in Lithuanian historiography until the Lithuanian national revival of the 19th century . While pagan sympathizers held him in disregard for betraying his religion , Christians saw his support as lukewarm . He received only passing references from Grand Duke Gediminas and was not mentioned at all by Vytautas the Great . His known family relations end with his children ; no historic records note any connections between his descendants and the Gediminids dynasty that ruled Lithuania and Poland until 1572 . A 17th @-@ century rector of Vilnius University held him responsible for the troubles then being experienced by the Polish ? Lithuanian Commonwealth (" the seed of internal discord among the Lithuanians had been sown " .) A 20th @-@ century historian charged him with the " destruction of the organization of the Lithuanian state " . The first academic study of his life by a Lithuanian scholar , Jonas Totoraitis (*Die Litauer unter dem König Mindowe bis zum Jahre 1263*) was not published until 1905 . In the 1990s historian Edvardas Gudavi?ius published his findings pinpointing a coronation date , which became a national holiday . The 750th anniversary of his coronation was marked in 2003 by the dedication of the Mindaugas Bridge in Vilnius , numerous festivals and concerts , and visits from other heads of state . In Belarus , there is the legendary Mindaugas ' Hill in Navahrudak , mentioned by Adam Mickiewicz in his 1828 poem *Konrad Wallenrod* . A memorial stone on the Mindaugas ' hill was installed in 1993 and a metal sculpture of Mindaugas in 2014 .

Mindaugas is the primary subject of the 1829 drama *Mindowe* , by Juliusz S?owacki , one of the Three Bards . He has been portrayed in several 20th @-@ century literary works : the Latvian author M?rti?? Z?verts ' tragedy *Vara* (*Power* , 1944) , Justinas Marcinkevi?ius ' drama @-@ poem *Mindaugas* (1968) , Romualdas Granauskas ' *Jau?io aukojimas* (*The Offering of the Bull* , 1975) , and Juozas Kraliauskas ' *Mindaugas* (1995) . Coronation of Mindaugas and creation of the Grand Duchy is the main topic of the 2002 Belarusian novel *Alhierd 's Lance* by Volha Ipatava dedicated to the 750th anniversary of the coronation .