



# Saaremaa and Kuressaare – past and present



# GEOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE





# Saaremaa (Ösel, Saarenmaa)

Saaremaa is the biggest Estonian island (maximum width over 100 km)

Saaremaa is connected by way directly to the neighbour island, Muhu (Muhumaa)

The northern neighbour is the Hiiumaa (Dagö, Hiidenmaa) island

A lot of free nature, open fields, forest and shores

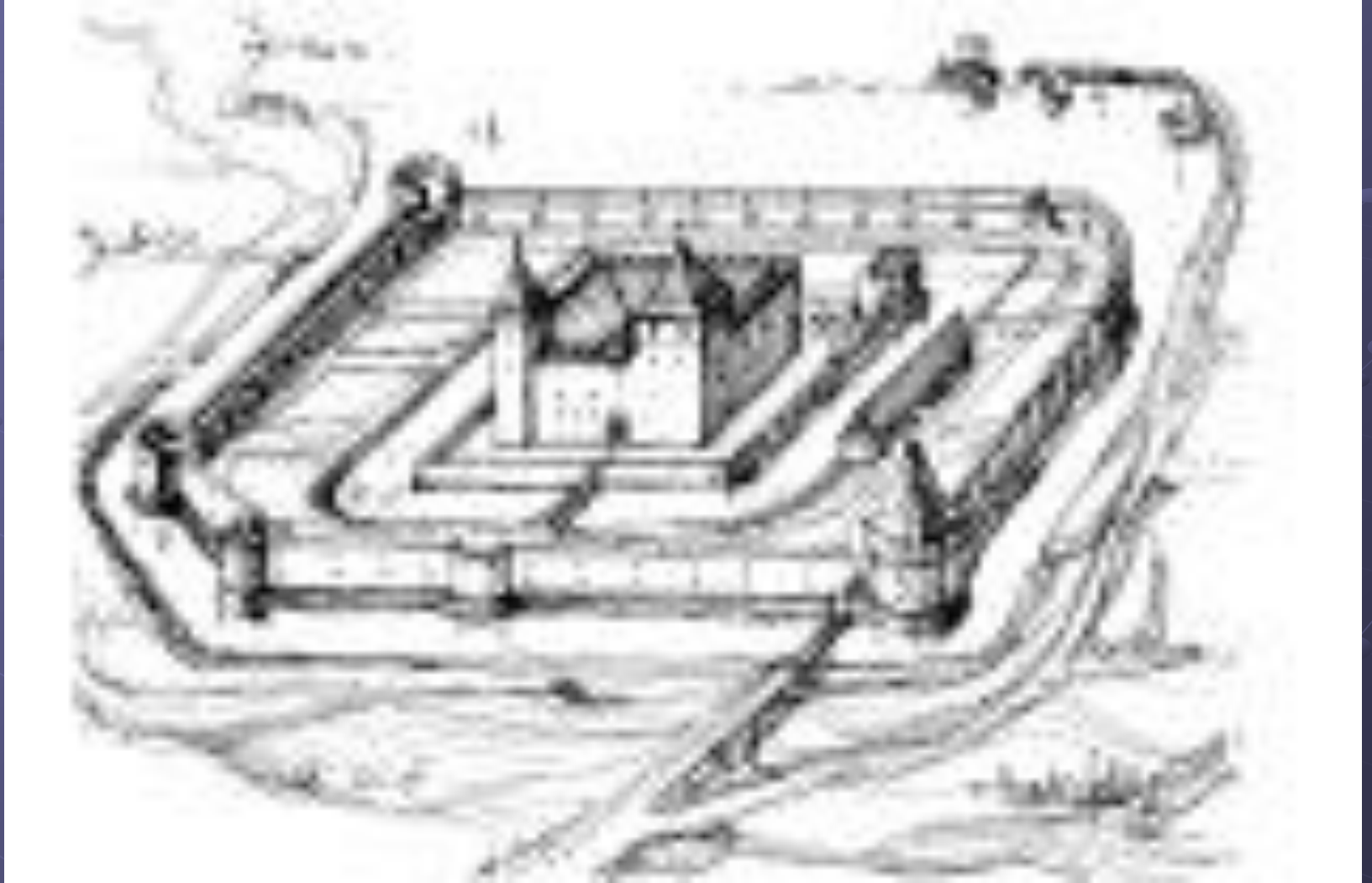
Unique flora and fauna



Famous natural places: Panga pank, Sörve peninsula, Kaali meteorite crater

Population about 40000, of which about 15000 in the capital Kuressaare (Arensburg)

# HISTORY





# Prehistoric time

Saaremaa has settlement since prehistoric times

Sacrificial stones can be found on the island, e.g. in Tumala

Dead people were originally buried into the earth, but in early metal age stone cist graves were established on the earth (until the first century AD)

Ship-shaped graves along the model of Gotland were built, too

Enclosure graves became popular during the roman iron age (about 50-450 AD) – burials through cremation

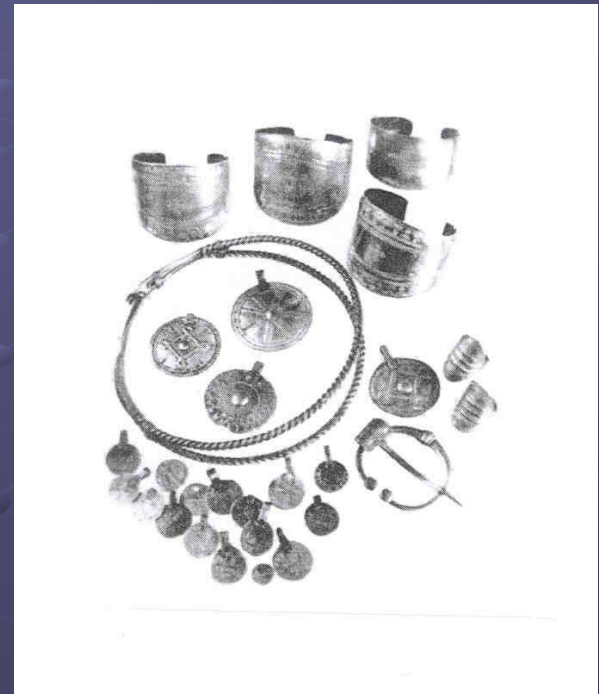
*An  
archaeological  
excavation at  
Jõelähtme,  
displaying the  
stone cist graves.*



*A small-dimpled sacrificial stone in  
Tumala (on Saaremaa).*

# Roman iron age

Tillage and animal husbandry became the basic fields of subsistence for the local inhabitants



On Saaremaa, fishing and hunting preserved a strong position

Estonians as a tribe are first mentioned by the roman historian Tacitus in 98 AD  
– the *Aestii* people

The Roman iron age was probably a peaceful period for Estonia incl. Saaremaa



# **The first fight for freedom 1208-1227**

## **- the fight against christianity**

A violent period began in the Middle age

Reinhard, a chorister of Augustinians, sent Theodorich to Estonia to spread Christianity (1191)

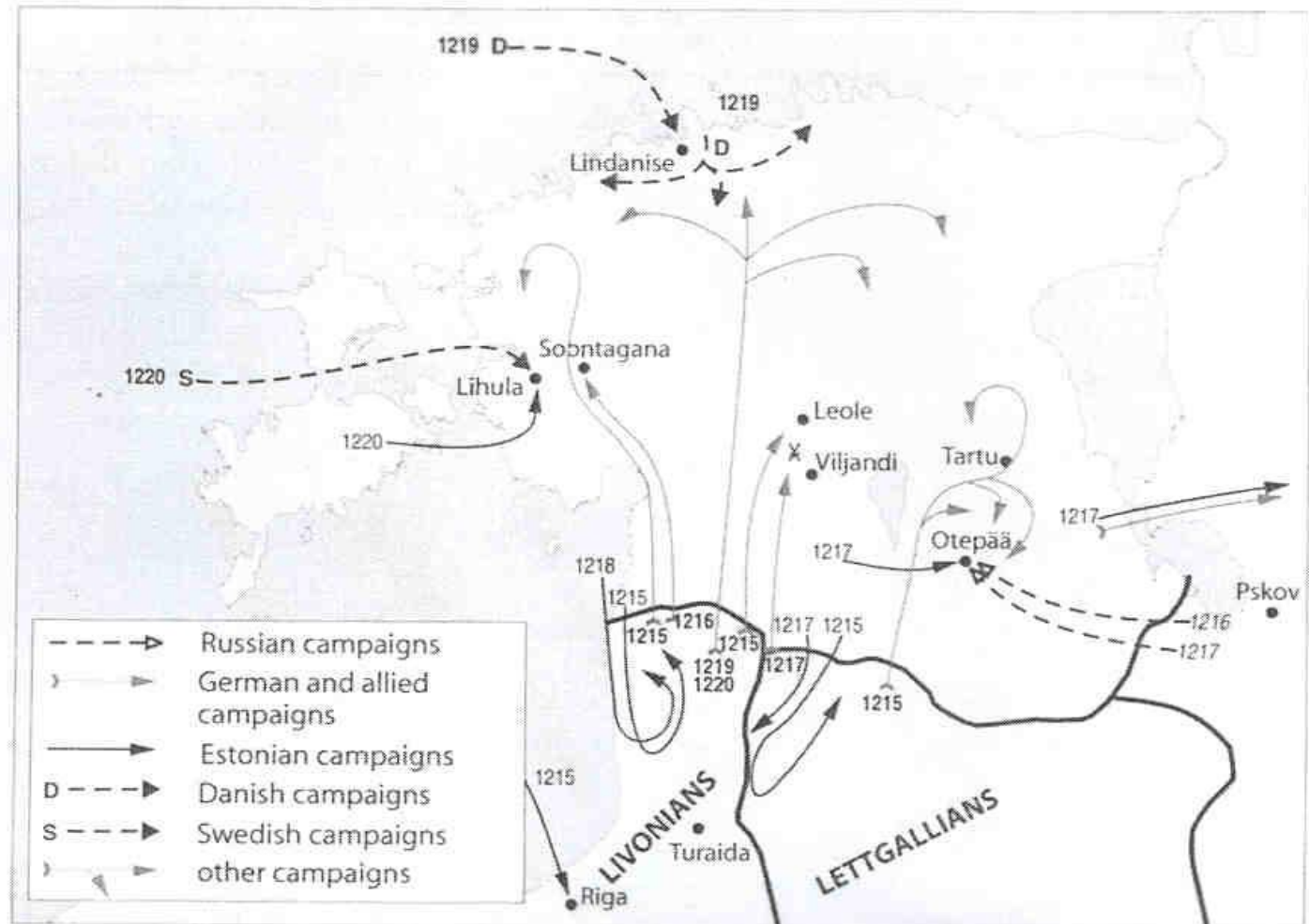
The real struggle for Estonia began in 1208 by Germans – saaremaa people participated by blocking the mouth of the Daugava river (1215) by old boats and stones

1220 a Saaremaa army attacked a Swedish fortress in Lihula (mainland) and managed to conquer it- about 500 Swedish soldiers died

Estonian attempts to conquer Tallinn ('Taani linn'), 'Danish city' failed

The Danish King Valdemar II Sejr came 1222 to Saaremaa and initiated construction of a fortress

*Military  
campaigns  
in the  
years  
1215-1221*



# **The first fight for freedom 1208-1227**

## **- the fight against christianity**

Saaremaa men went to Varbola and copied the construction of a catapult – the danes were forced to leave the fortress, which was completely demolished

The swords of Estonians were covered by German blood and dead enemies were left for dogs on the battlefield; the baptism was washed away and cremation was re-established at funerals

The *grande finale* of the fight against christianity took place on Saaremaa in January 1227

Germans started an attack with 20000 men. The men of Muhu fought six days against the invaders

The next remarkable event proceeded in Valjala, the biggest and strongest fortress on Saaremaa

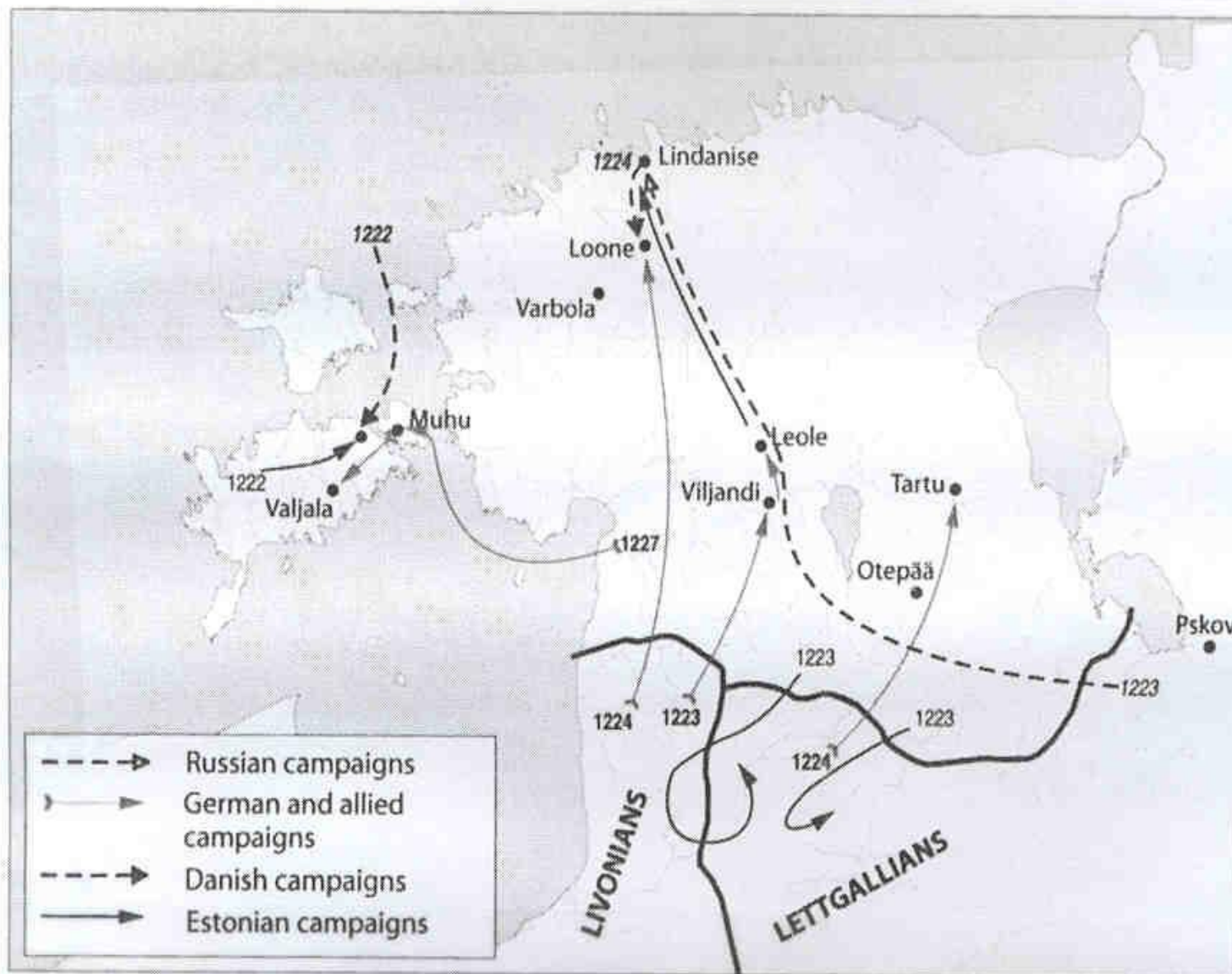
the leaders of Saaremaa opted for peace, and Germans agreed for negotiations

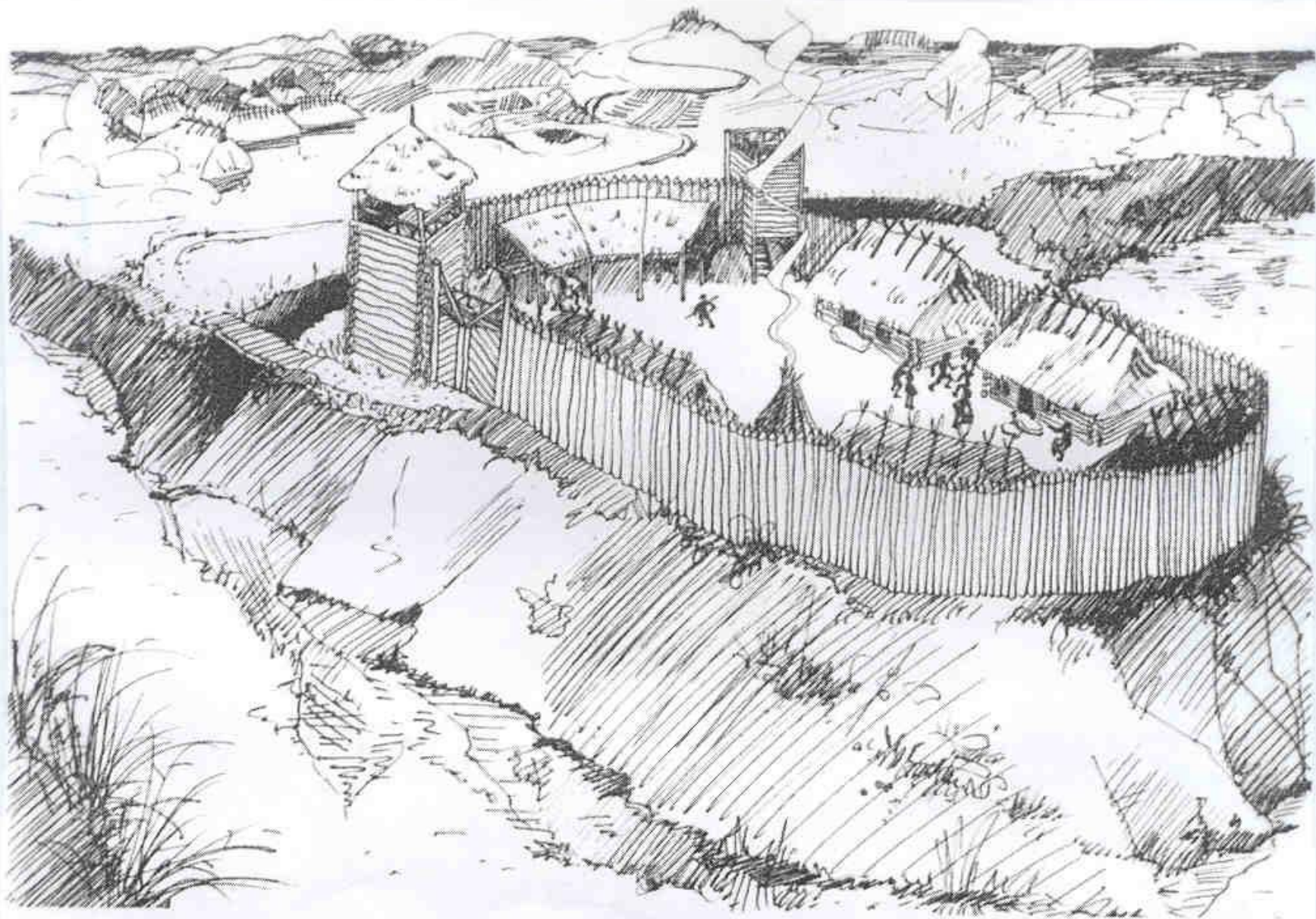
The priests baptized men, women and children on the entire island

The Estonians' ancient fight for freedom had come to its end



*Military campaigns in the years 1222-1227.*





*A reconstruction of a cape fortress.*





*A view of the courtyard from the ruins of the fortress of Valjala.*



# Old Livonia 1237

= The conquered territories in Estonia and Latvia

Secular power held by Livonian branch of Teutonic Order (Livonian Order)  
Saaremaa-Läänemaa diocese under the Archbishop of Riga

In 1241 a treaty was signed between people of Saaremaa and the Livonian Order (Christianity, taxes, local autonomy)



*Distribution of land in Estonia after 1237.*





# St. George's uprising (Juriöö)

## 23/4 1343 – 1345

A night for bonfire and hornblowing – suitable moment for an uprising

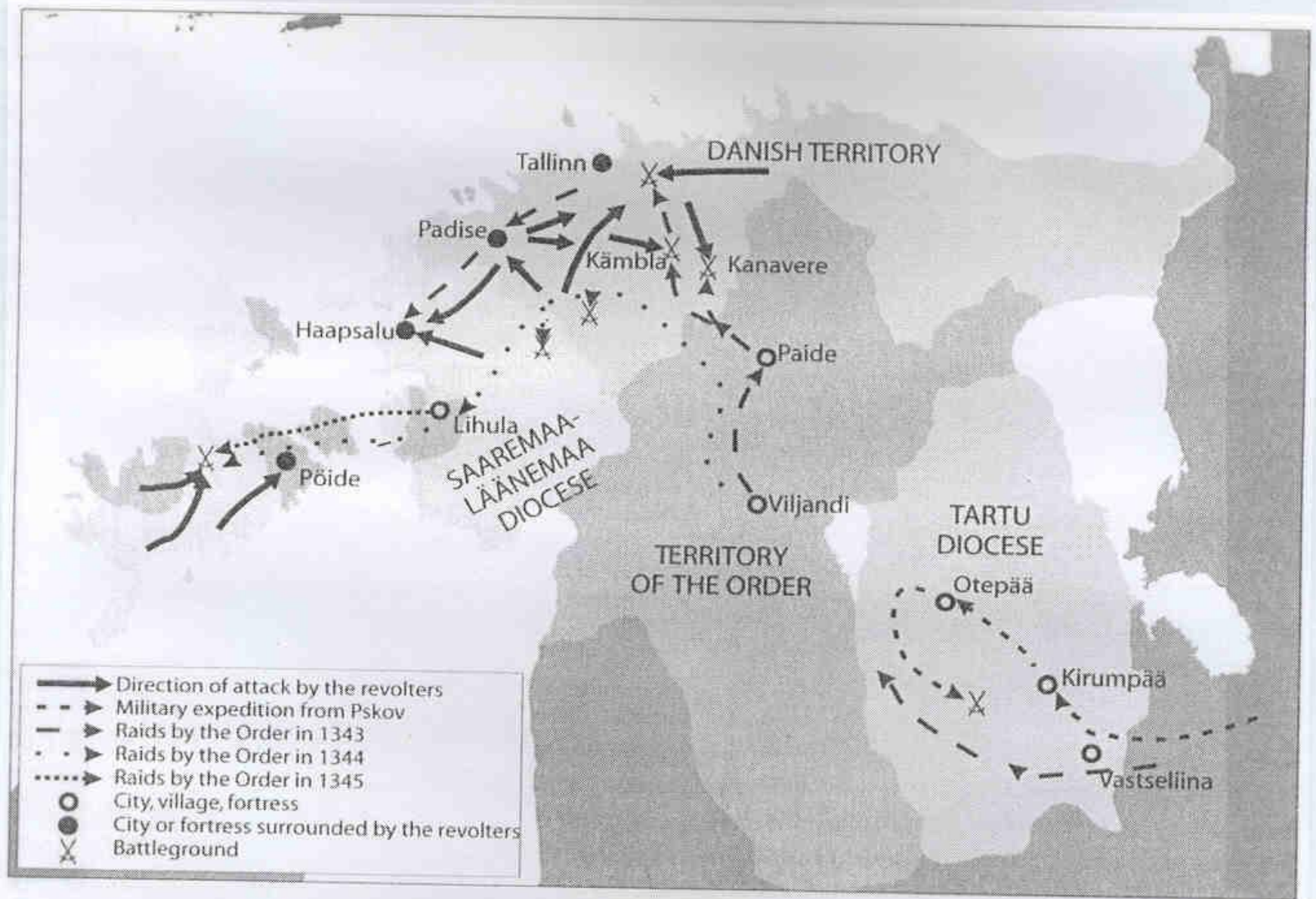
Germans were captured and killed, monasteries burnt down by the rebels  
Saaremaa people attacked the Pöide Fortress (church), forced the fortress to capture and stone the enemies to death.

In February 1344 the Livonian Order attacked the fortress in Karja, conquered it and hanged the king of Saaremaa, **Vasse** in his elbows

Warm weather forced the Livonian troops to withdraw – Saaremaa was free again

In early 1345, the Livonians gathered a large force and managed to occupy Saaremaa

St. George's day was a continuation of the ancient Estonian fight for freedom



*Events of St George Day's Uprising.*

# Livonian war 1558

Strong central states had developed in the Baltic area (Denmark, Sweden, Poland-Lithuania, Russia), which led to a battle of hegemony.

Ivan IV Terrible from Russia was active and commenced war preparations

Envoys from Saaremaa visited Hertig Johan in Turku castle, proposing to put the island under Swedish rule

In January 1558, the livonian war broke out – tatar Khan Alin attacked

The Danish king Fredrik II purchased the diocese of Saaremaa-Läänemaa in September 1559 and gave it to his brother, Duke Magnus of Denmark



# Danish rule - Saaremaa knighthood 1559-1645

Peace treaty between Sweden and Russia 1583 – western and northern parts of Estonia to Sweden

Saaremaa remained under Danish rule; Denmark conducted a **reduction**, which caused local dissatisfaction

Kuressaare obtained the rights of a city in 1563



In general, the Danish time implied good economic and spiritual development  
In 1665, after the Danish-Swedish war (1663-65), Saaremaa was given to Sweden



*Duke Magnus*

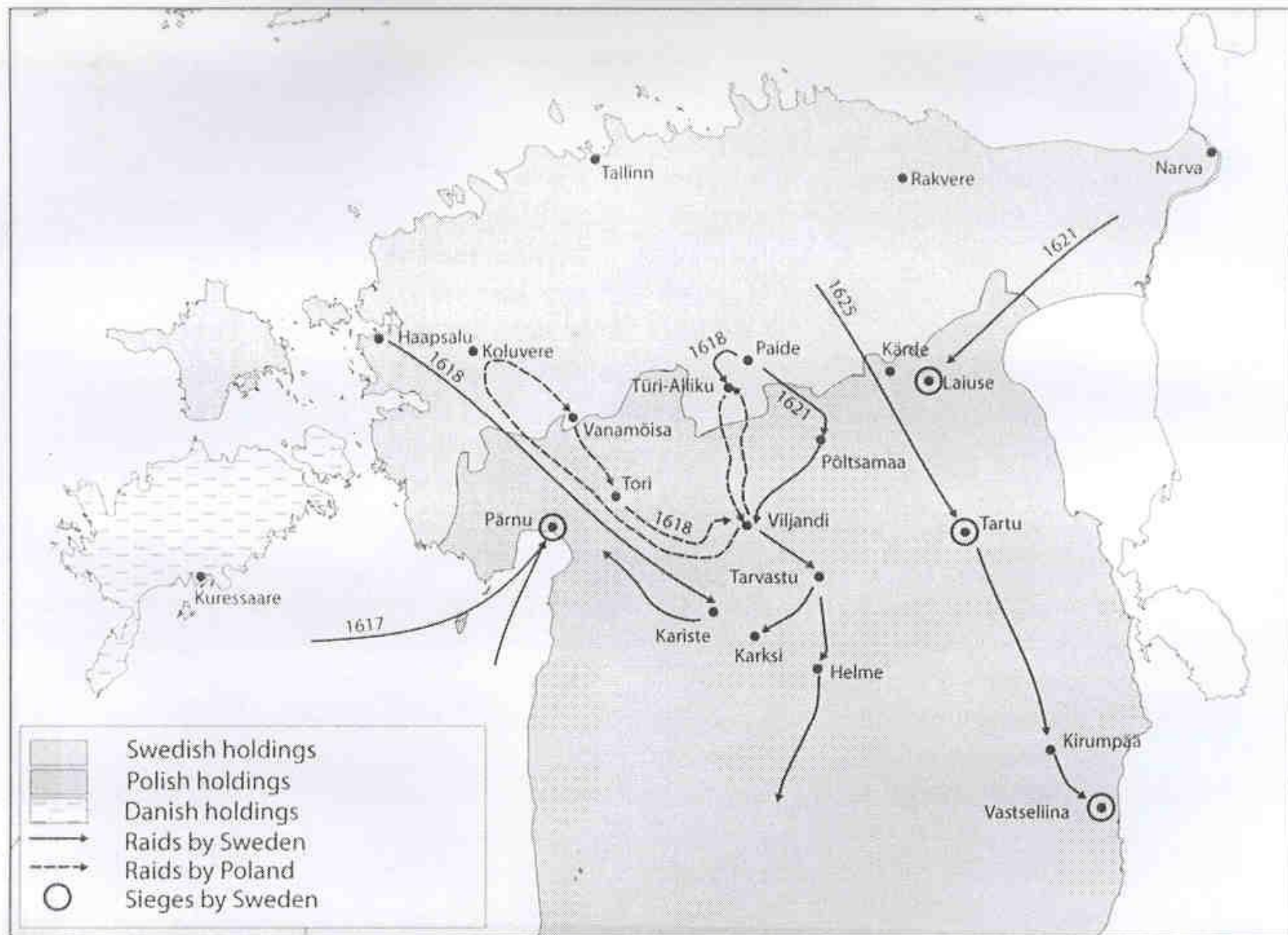


*King Erik XIV of Sweden*



*King Frederik II of Denmark*





*Main events of the wars between Poland and Sweden*

# Swedish rule 1629-1710

The Swedish rule started gradually; in 1660 the island Ruhnu (Runö) was occupied by Sweden, and in 1645 Saaremaa was annexed

The Swedish area was divided into two provinces:  
Estonia and Livonia

Saaremaa belonged to Livonia but preserved its special status (e.g. taxation system, own administration of the church)

Kuressaare was developed (construction of the town hall, Raekoda)

Agriculture was improved, but a great famine took place 1695-97

Lutheranism became the predominant form of Christianity

# Russian rule 1710-1917

The Great Northern War between Sweden and Russia broke out

1710 Russia takes the control of Tallinn;

1721 The Peace treaty of Uusikaupunki gave Estonia to Russia

1816 Serfdom was abolished from Estonia (Tsar Alexander I) – surnames were introduced

1865 Peasant regulation for Saaremaa – free peasants

National awakening starts during the 20th century; literature, theatre, music starts to flourish

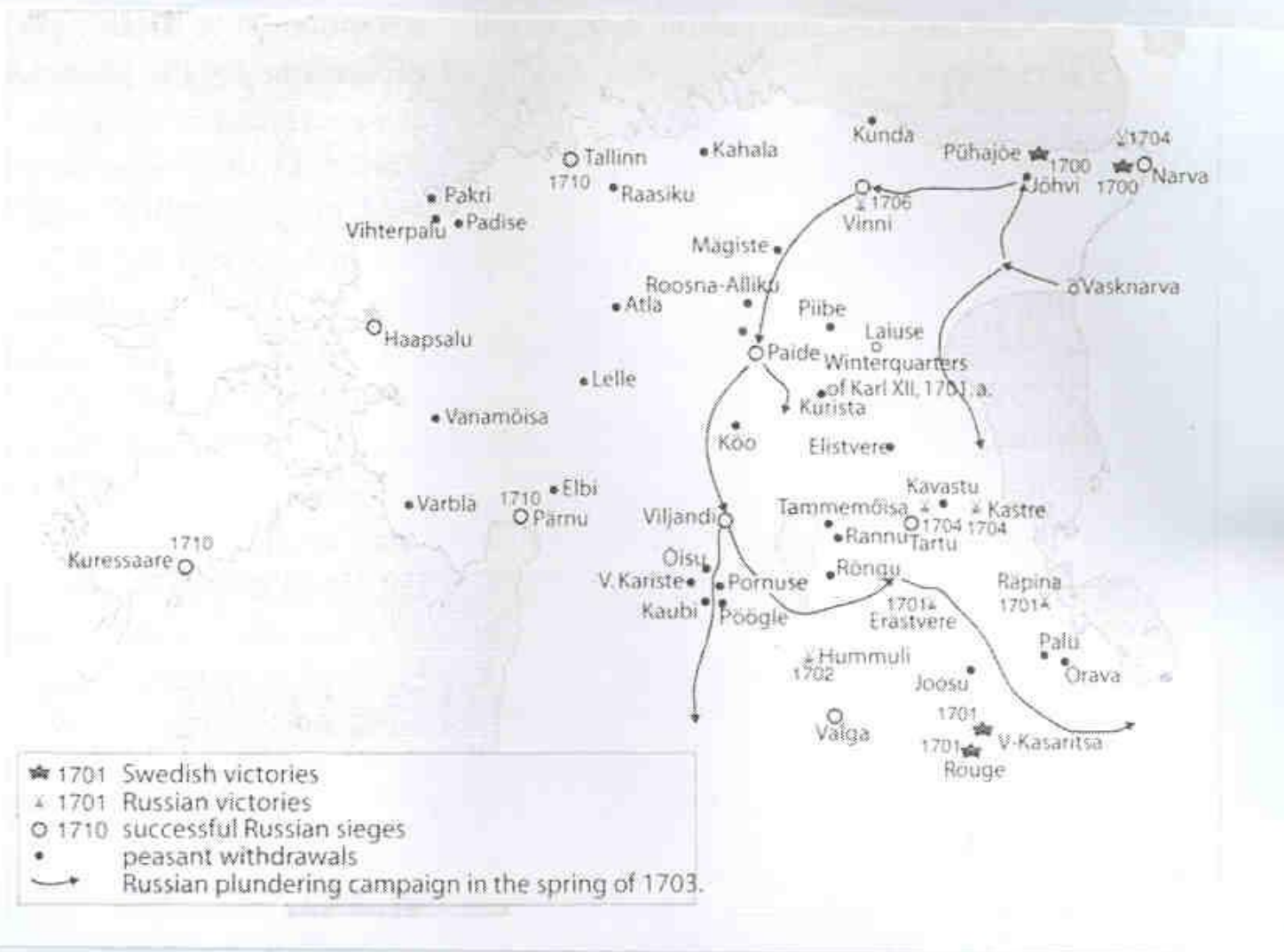
Written Estonian language is developed to a cultural language (Johannes Aavik from Saaremaa)

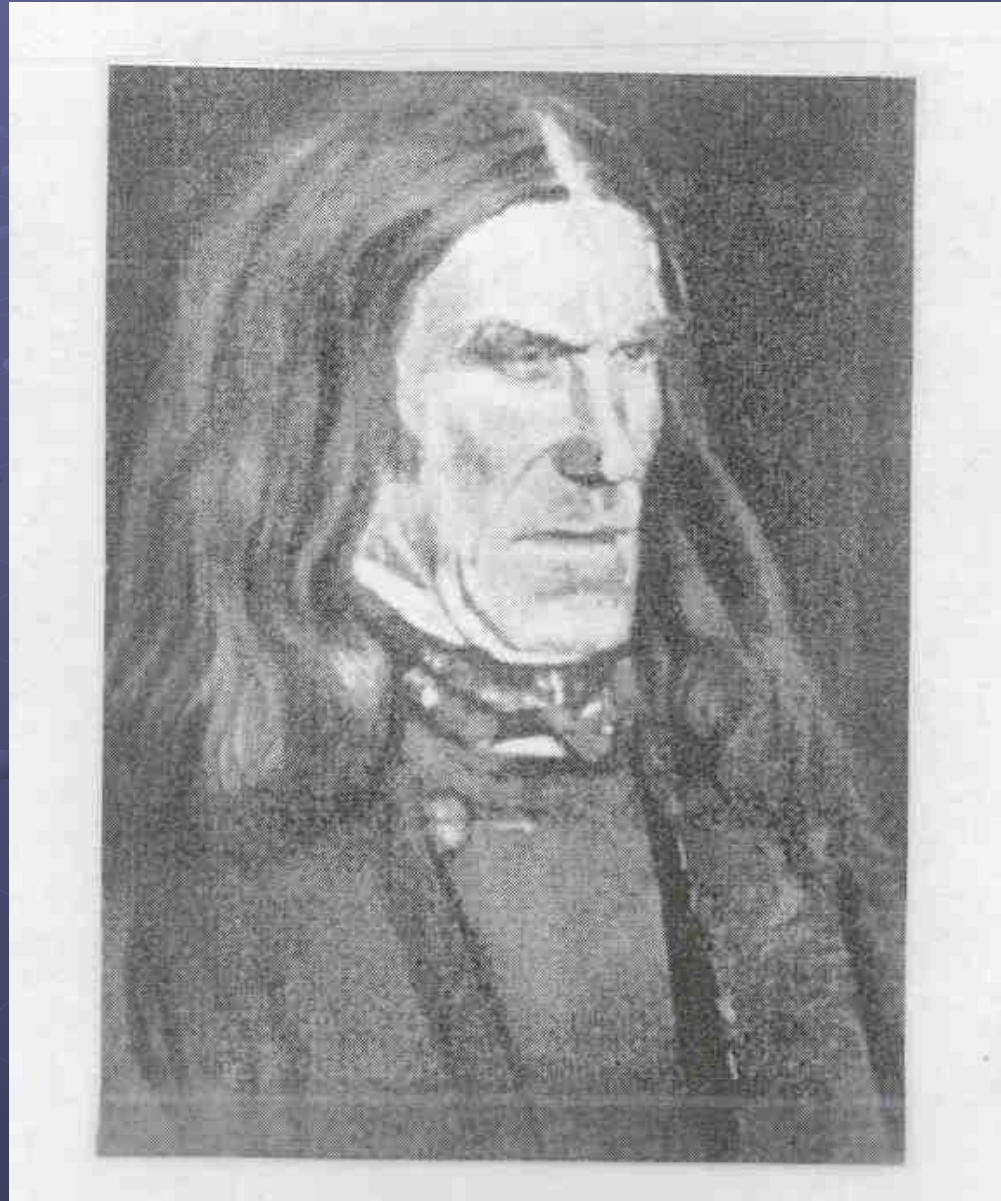
Tourism develops in Kuressaare

Lot of construction work in Kuressaare under the rule of vice governor Balthasar von Campenhausen (1745-1800) (in Kuressaare 1784-97)



# *Events in Estonia of the Great Northern War.*





# Fight for Estonian freedom 1917-1919

The rule of Estonia underwent several sudden changes after the abdication of tsar Nicholas II:

A 'gubernia' with autonomy under Kerensky government of Russia

October revolution was spread to Estonia, but the offensives of Germans and Estonian nationalists stopped it

Estonian war of liberty started and ended by Estonian victory

A boljsevik revolt broke out on Saaremaa in February 1919 but was suppressed in Upa (more than hundred people lost their lives)

The peace treaty in Tartu 1920 (with Soviet Russia) confirmed the Estonian independence



# Independence 1920-1940 \* Occupations 1940-1991 \* Independence 1991-

Estonia incl. Saaremaa enjoyed the full independence 1920-40

In July 1940, Estonia was annexed to Soviet Union and mass deportations started  
The Nazi-German attack in Estonia started in July 1941. Saaremaa surrendered in September 1941

The Red army won World War II and the Soviet occupation was re-established in 1944 – the final point was the Sõrve peninsula on Saaremaa (24.11.1944)

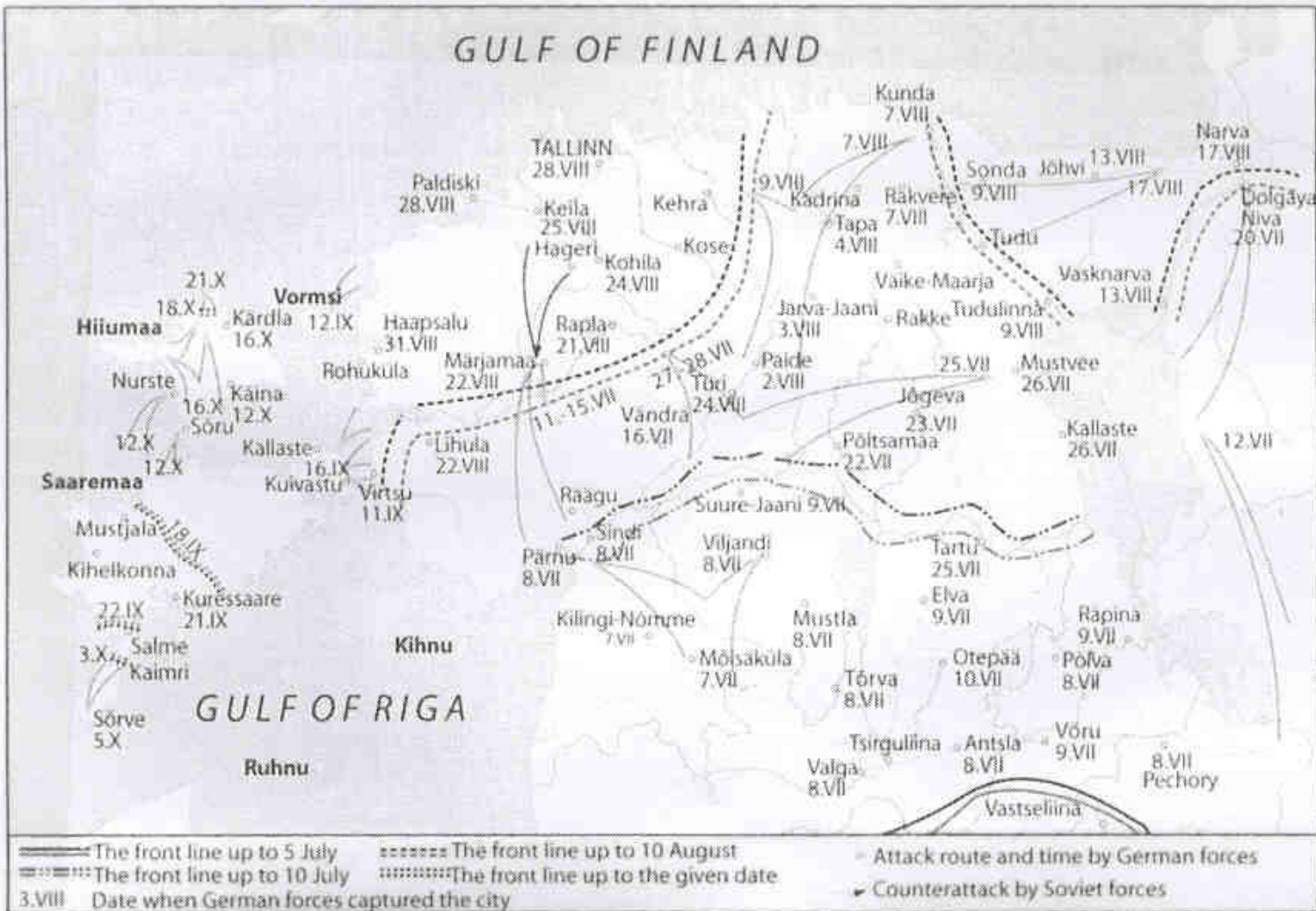
Saaremaa became a closed area for foreigners and even most Estonians

A new national awakening started in 1980s and led finally in August 1991 to full independency

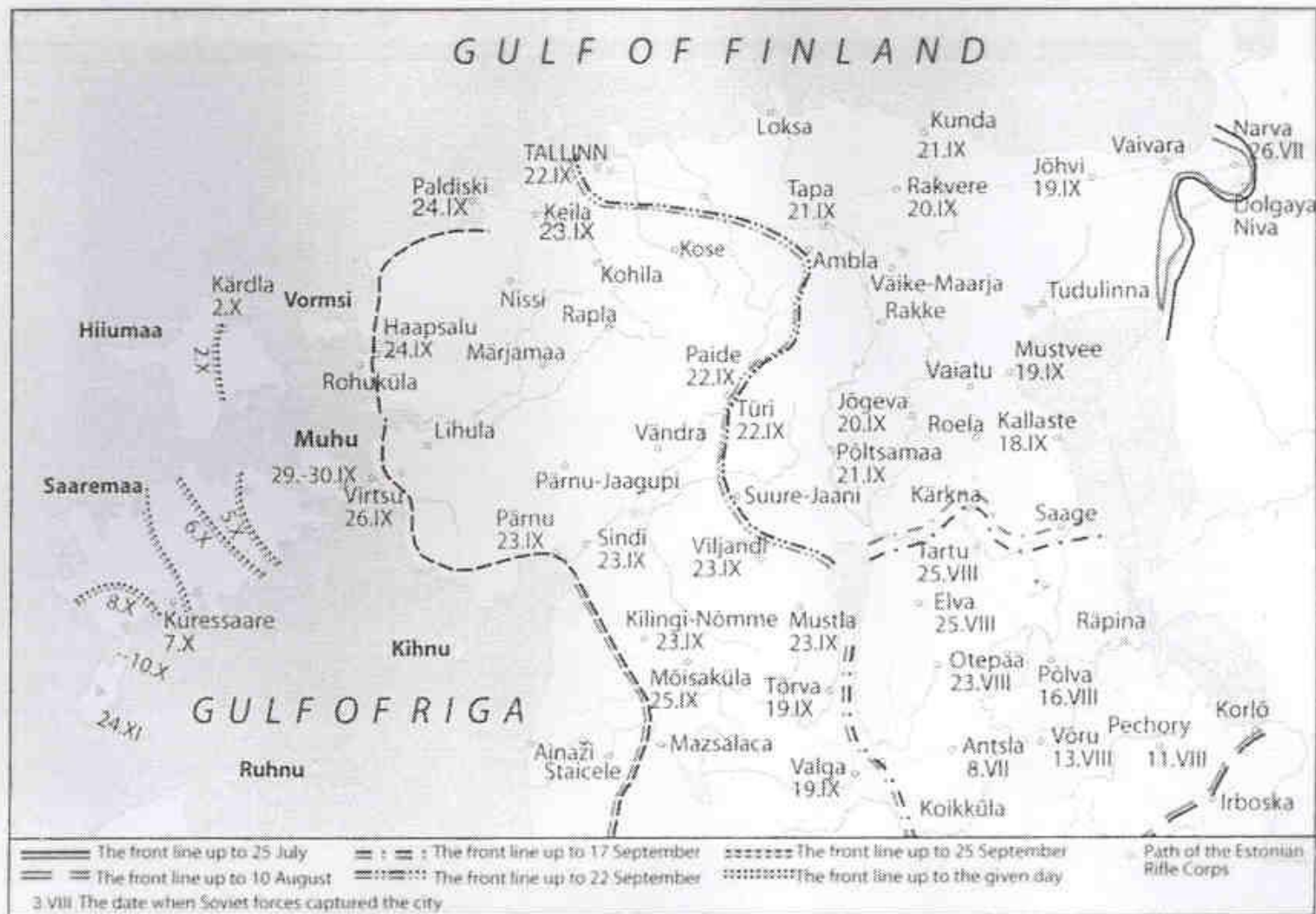
Presidents: Lennart **Meri** (1992-2001), Arnold **Ruutel** (2001-, from Valjala, Saaremaa)

# GULF OF FINLAND

*Hostilities in 1941.*



# Hostilities in 1944.





# ARCHITECTURE



# Medieval churches of Saaremaa

In the middle ages, an efficient construction of churches took place on Saaremaa  
Valjala church – the construction began in 1227

the church represents a combination of Roman and gothic style  
first stone church on Estonian soil

Kaarma church (end of 13th century)

Cathedral of Põide (end of 13th century)  
the cathedral resembles a castle (a tower from 17th century)

Kihelkonna church on western Saaremaa (1270)

Karja church (a bishop's church), well preserved since 14th century

Muhu church (approx. 1267) - known for its very pure and beautiful style

Valjala church







Cathedral of Pöide

## Kaarma church





Muhu church





# Kuressaare castle

The construction started approx. 1260 (a tower was raised on the eastern corner of the present castle)

The construction work was fortified by bishop Hermann II Osnabrueck (1338).

The work was finished at about 1380. The material is dolomite

Functionalistic construction principle: administrative centre and fortress

Today a historical, geological, geographical and biological and art museum, a church, a concert hall...

Well restored, with several exhibitions – a visit to the Kuressaare castle is a deep-dying into the past and present of Saaremaa



# Kuressaare city hall and weight hall Raekoda & Vaekoda

Brömsebo peace (1645) gave Saaremaa to Sweden

The construction of the city hall was initiated by Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie (1622-86), 'rikskansler', art mecenate, a favorite of Queen Christine of Sweden, M. D. G. was in Kuressaare 1648-54

M.D.G. made the first plan of the city hall in 1653 (today the plan is stored at the Swedish military archive in Stockholm)

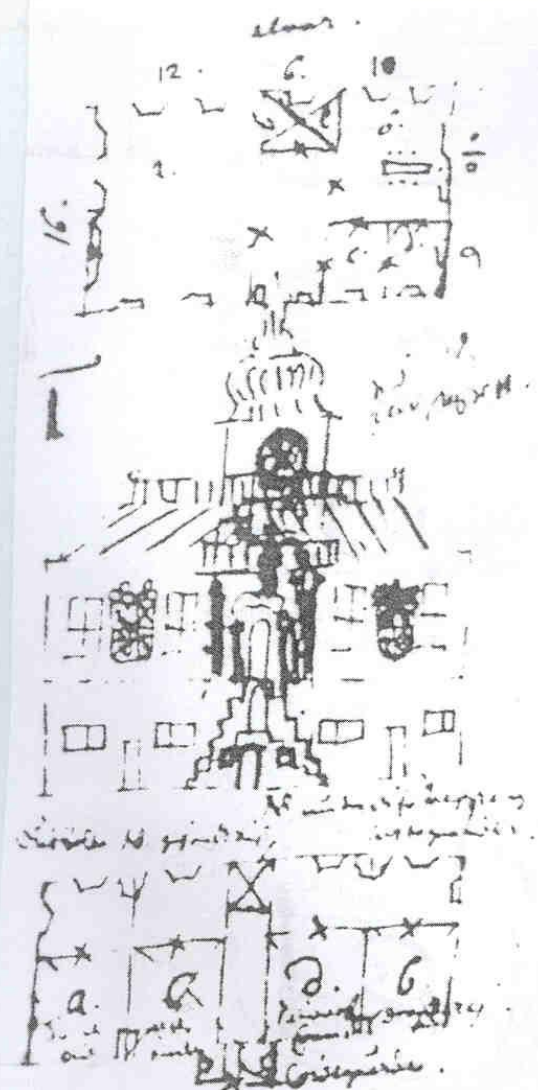
Construction of the city hall 1654-1670

The city hall represents nice barock architecture; it has undergone several changes, but underwent a professional restauration in 1961-1973, as the original barock arhitecture was restored in the entire building (Helmi Uprus, 1911-1978)





. Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, portree 1649. a.



Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie ideevisand Kuressaare raekoja ehitamiseks, 1653. a. (Originaal Rootsi Sõjaarhiivis).



In the front wall of the city hall is the text:

**SEMPER OFFICIO FUNGITUR UTILITATI HOMINUM  
CONSULENS ET SOCIETATI ANNO MDCLXX**

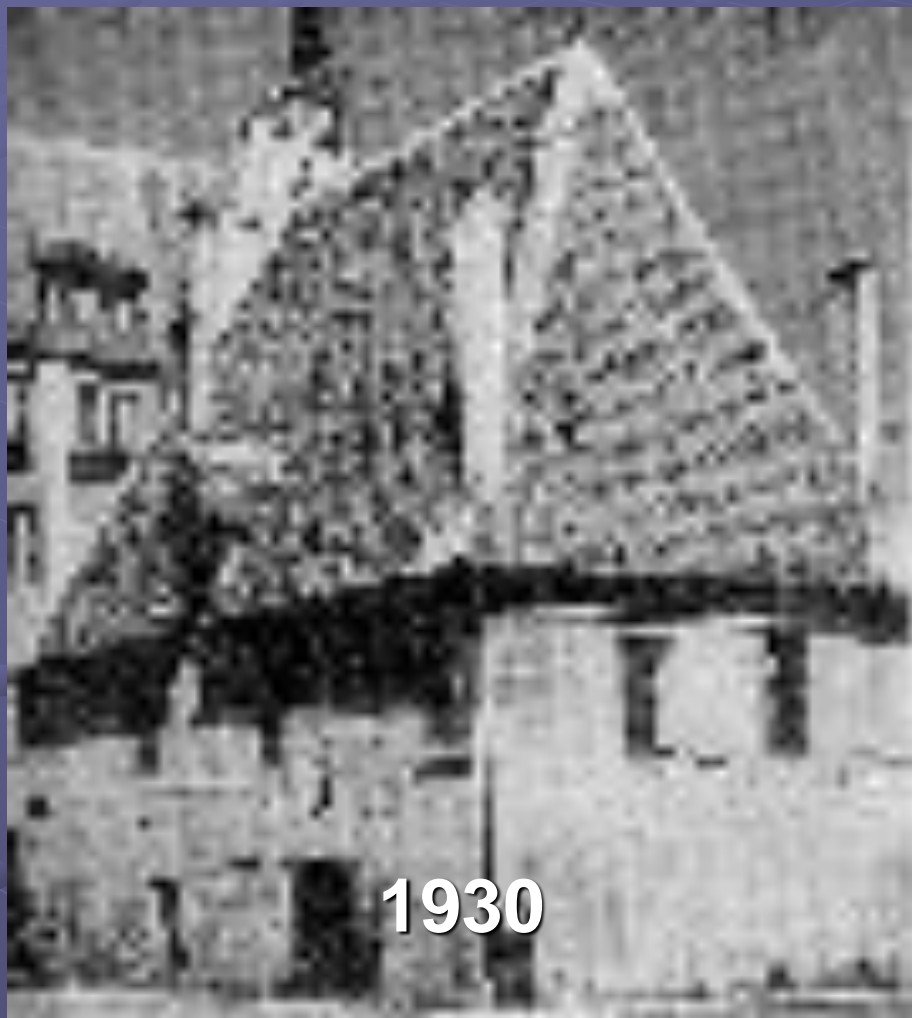


Today the building acts as a city hall and art gallery

**Vaekoda** (Weight hall); construction finished at 1663

The last one of its kind preserved in Estonia

Today it is a restaurant and a pub, where the intellectuals gather...



# Churches in Kuressaare

The orthodox Nicholas church  
-the construction finished 1790

- represents late classic style
- beautiful and balanced construction
- open during the services

The main Lutheranic church is the Laurentius church – destroyed and rebuilt





# Well-known Saaremaa and Muhumaa people

**Vasse**, the local Saaremaa king, 14th century

Duke **Magnus** of Denmark, 16th century

Magnus Gabriel **De la Gardie**, 17th century

Balthasar **von Campenhausen**, 18th century

Johannes **Aavik**, 19-20th century, specialist in linguistics, reformer of Estonian language

Oskar **Kallas** and his brothers 19-20th century,  
collector of folklore, journalist, teacher and diplomate

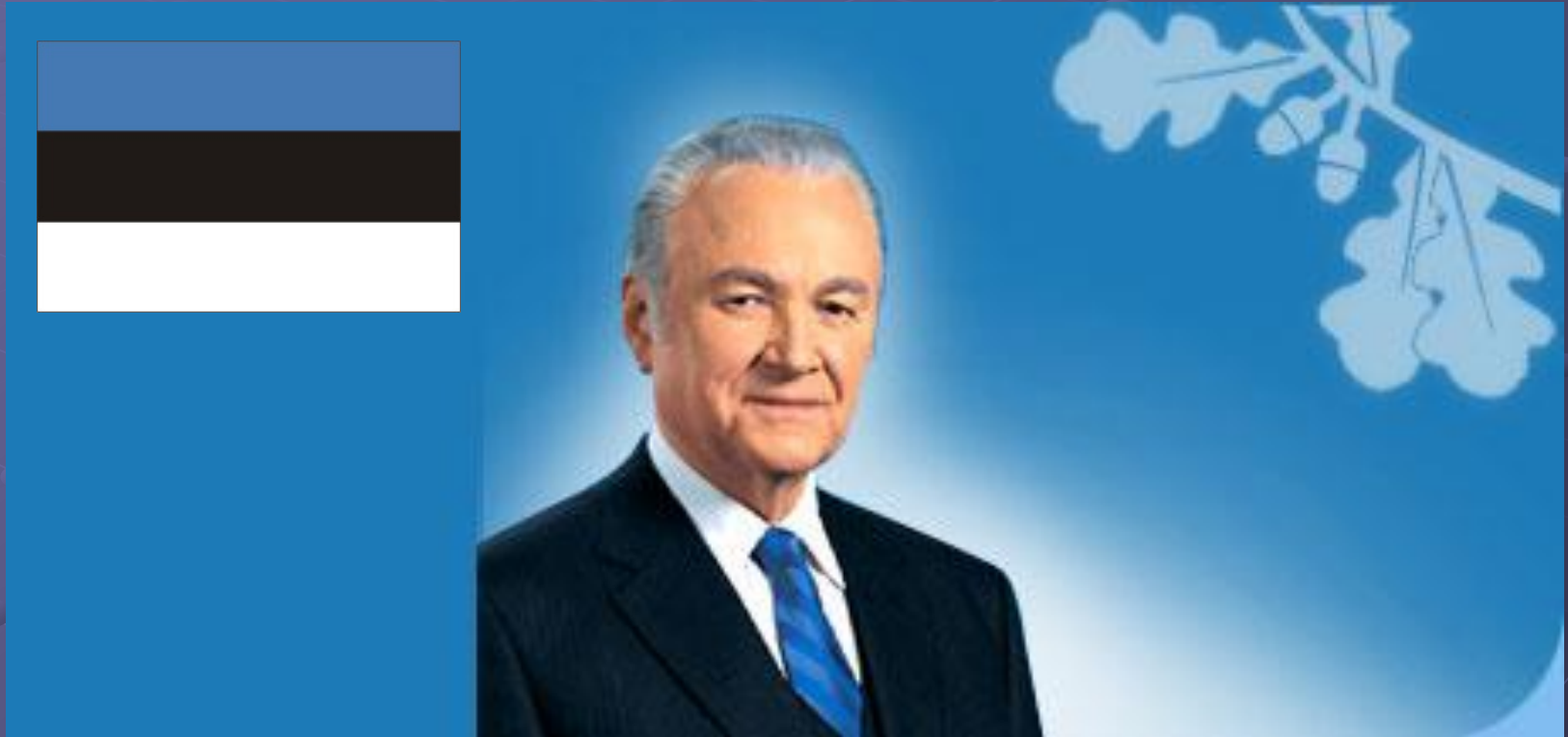
Aino **Kallas (Krohn)**, famous Finnish-Estonian writer, wife of O.Kallas

Herman **Aav** (+ 1961), Archbishop Herman of Finnish orthodox church over 30 years

Johan **Smuul** (+1971), Writer and poet from Muhu

Arnold **Ruutel** (\*1928), agriculture specialist, politician, President 2001

# FAMOUS PERSON



President Arnold Rüütel

# SAAREMAA IN FUTURE

Saaremaa is a vital part of Estonia – culturally, politically and economically, but preserving its special character and atmosphere

Traditional economic bases (agriculture, fishing, forestry, handicraft, small-scale industry) coexist with new ones, e.g. tourism, particularly cultural tourism

People immigrate and emigrate

A bridge might be built

Saaremaa is a peaceful crossing point for nations in Baltic area

Foto Olev Kaas 2002

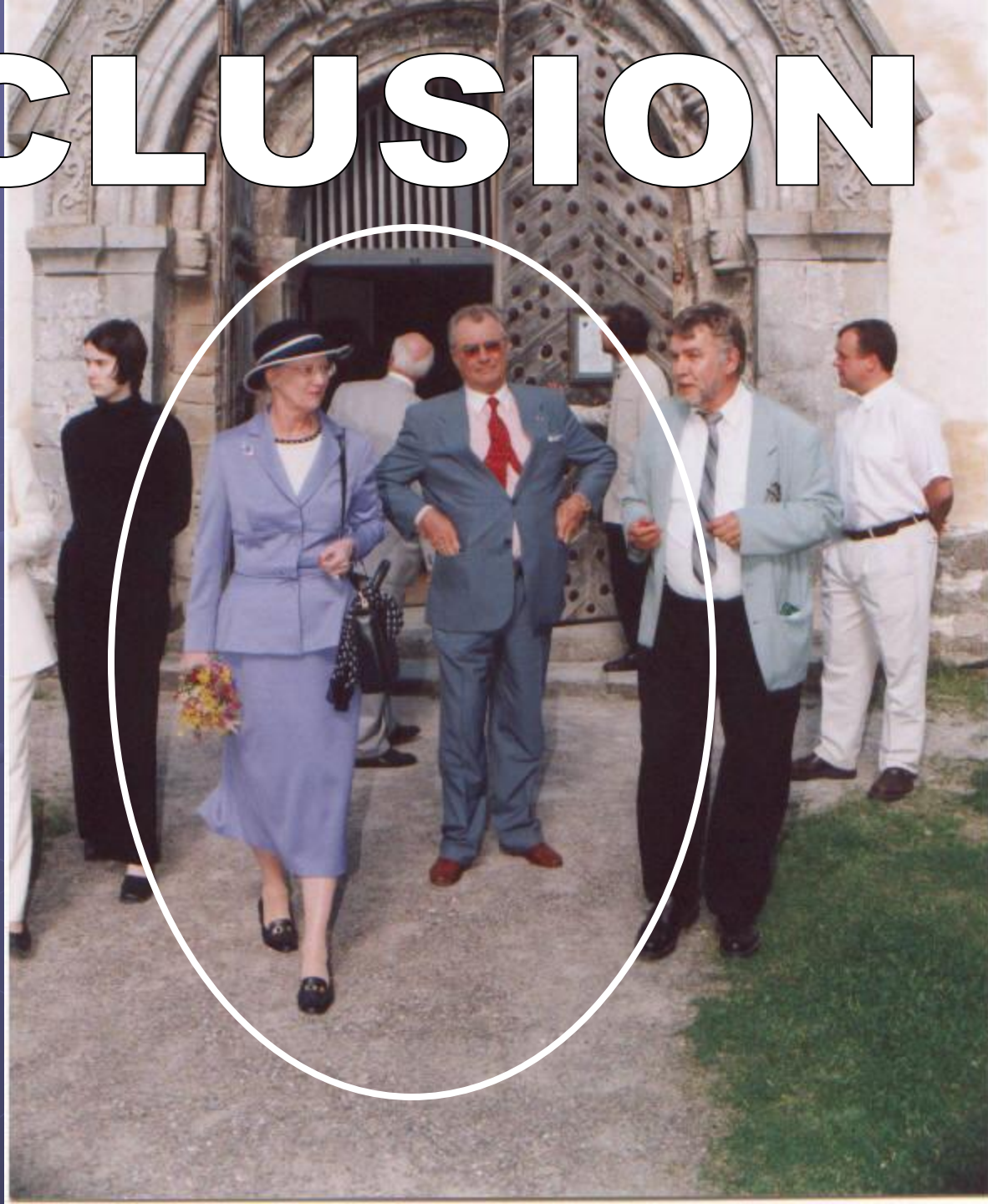




# CONCLUSION

‘Saaremaa is always on our map’

*The ruling Queen of Denmark, Margarethe II stated in 2001, during her visit to Saaremaa and left from Roomassaare with the royal yacht, Dannebrog*



# 'Taani kuninganna põikab juunis Saaremaale'

