



## ***Exhibit of the Month***

### **KEYS OF THE CELLS OF KAUNAS HARD LABOUR PRISON**

*Museologist Simona Gustaitytė*

- a bundle of 18 keys;
- iron and copper alloy;
- production technique - minting;
- bows with round loops, various bitting cuts;
- the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The beginning of the history of keys in Lithuania dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This is a period of massive iron keys. Over time, their size and material changed, as copper alloy and later silver and brass were introduced. With the improvement of lock mechanisms, the size of keys decreased, and the decoration elements of the bows became more prominent. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, bitting cuts were widely used. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, key production remained a blacksmith's craft, but at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century already their industrial production accelerated in Kaunas.

In the photos, you can see the keys used in Kaunas Hard Labour Prison (today - A. Mickevičiaus Str. 11), which take us back to the period of the First Republic of Lithuania (1918–1940). Prison cells and the prisoners' workplaces were locked here, such as a tailor shop, a bookbinding shop or a blacksmith's, jeweller's and a

bag and basket weaver's workshops. Carpenters and women prisoners had their workplaces in detached houses. At that time, the complex of the Hard Labour Prison consisted of 7 buildings.

The bundle of keys on display at Kaunas Ninth Fort Museum reminds us that the history of the Ninth Fort is also inseparable from the function of the prison. During the interwar period, the number of prisoners in the central Kaunas Hard Labour Prison grew rapidly: comparing the year 1921 and 1937, the number of prisoners doubled from 796 to 1,500, respectively, and the need for new places of detention arose. Due to the lack of funds, the Dimitravas Forced Labour Camp (since 1937) and Kaunas Ninth Fort (since 1924) became the divisions of the Hard Labour Prison, after adjusting them to accommodating prisoners.



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