Hilkka Hiiop

ADDITIONS TO MANOR MURALS WITH THEMES OF ANTIQUITY IN ESTONIA¹:
ARUKÜLA

The Aruküla Manor was founded in the second half of the 17th century. Its owners were among the most outstanding noble families in Estonia – from the middle of the 18th century, the manor belonged to von Knorrings, along with the Ervita, Udeva and Norra manors; and from the 1820s until its expropriation it belonged to the von Toll family. The current Empire-style appearance of the building dates back to the von Toll era.

A thorough historical survey of the manor’s history was compiled by Ants Hein in 2000.² Based on his information, there were two great building eras in Aruküla. In the late 18th century, at the initiative of Fromhold Gotthard von Knorring, a grand manor complex was constructed, but the household fell into neglect after the death of Karoline, the lady of the manor, in 1798. And sometime after that, a fire broke out at the manor. The main building was restored, but it seems the renovation was quite careless. In 1812, control of the manor was assumed by Frommhold Gotthard’s oldest son Karl Georg. The writings of Theodor von Bernhard, who was a man of letters and Karl Georg’s stepson, pro-

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/BJAH.2016.12.09
Translated by Juta Ristsoo.


The last great construction period at the manor did not take place until the early 20th century, or more precisely to 1908, when Eugen von Toll, the manor lord at the time, altered the room interiors: a new layer of plaster was applied; ceiling cornices added, and all the stoves and interior doors replaced. Based on earlier research on the interior finishing, Ants Hein states that “almost none of the interior details from the late 18th or early 19th century can be found, most of them date back to the early 20th century and represent the Classical Revival period”.

In 2014, when the larger-scale restoration work started at the Aruküla manor house with the support of a grant from the Norwegian government, everyone was convinced that very little of the interior design from the manor’s glory days had survived. Therefore, the restoration project call only for the stucco and a few historical revival fragments from the later period to be restored.

In the summer of 2014, a team from the Cultural Heritage and Conservation Department at the Estonian Academy of Arts was invited to restore the quite characterless fragments from the later period. However, the conviction that the earlier research had not been in thorough enough – in both the direct and figurative sense – motivated the conservators, with the agreement of the heritage protection officials, local government representatives and builders, to conduct additional research in the building. This research, which was filled with surprises, discovered that the earlier finishing from the manor’s heyday existed under the early 20th century layer of plaster and – what was most unexpected – the thick layer of plaster was hiding large murals!

The job of removing the plaster from the murals found in three rooms was started in January of 2015. Now that the earlier layers in these rooms have been totally revealed, one is saddened by the fact that only fragments of the painted compositions have survived; and they are filled with holes hammered to secure the next layer of plaster. On the other hand, the extent of the surviving murals allows us to confirm that they are of very high quality.

The surviving mural snippets provide an idea of the compositions that emphasised the door and window openings and highlighted the grandeur of the rooms. Based on the fragments found in two of the rooms, one can surmise that the windows and doors were surround-

---


4 Ants Hein, Ajalooline õiend ja arhitektuurialalooliselt väärtuslike detailide inventariseerimine, 22.
ing by imposing compositions with columns that culminate in figural painting fields. The murals in both rooms had been inspired by antiquity – one seems to depict a figure in Etruscan-style shades of reddish-black.
The third room with mural finds is located at the opposite side of the manor, next to the vestibule. In the current floor plan, it is a small ante-room that leads into the manor’s imposing hall. Murals were found on three walls of this room and represent imitations of marble blocks that were subtly painted and covered all the walls in the room. A lunette surrounded by a fine egg-and-dart motif is located above the door. The same surface continues in the vestibule, but the murals have not survived. This was a very important discovery related to the history of the manor’s construction, and clearly revealed a slightly oppressive floor plan – apparently, the vestibule and anteroom had originally been connected and the separating wall had been added later. The room with the earlier murals was re-plastered at the same time. A mirrored arch and new ceiling painting added, which depicts finely modelled ornamentation intertwined with military regalia. This was also white-washed over. In addition to removing the thick coat of plaster covering the wall murals, during the conservation work, the surviving ceiling paintings

...
of the manor, which used military emblems that correspond the manor owner’s interests on the both the and inside.\textsuperscript{7}

\textbf{Hilkka Hiiop: Additions to Manor Murals with Themes of Antiquity in Estonia: Aruküla}

**Keywords:** Baltic Manor; Manor Murals; Aruküla; von Knorring; von Toll; Conservation; Documentation

**CV:**

Hilkka Hiiop (PhD) is the conservation specialist in Art Museum of Estonia as well as the assistant professor and coordinator of the artefact conservation branch at the Estonian Academy of Art, Department of Conservation. She has studied and worked as a conservator in Berlin, Amsterdam and Rome, supervised a number of conservation and technical investigation projects in Estonia, curated exhibitions, and carried out scientific research on topic of conservation and technical art history.

---

\footnote{5}{For more about restoration see: Hilkka Hiiop, Kalju Palo, "Aruküla mõisa kihiline ajalugu", Muinsuskaitse Aastaraamat 2015 (The National Heritage Board, Heritage Protection Department of the Tallinn City Planning Department, 2016), 47–50.}


\footnote{7}{Ants Hein also suggests that the murals date back to the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century: Ants Hein, "Tundeline teekond läbi nelja mõisa ja 170 aasta. Järvamaa mõisakoolides kultuurilooslase pilguga", 80–82.}