

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 Fromhold Gotthard's oldest son Karl Georg. The writings of Theodor von Bernhard, who was a man of letters and Karl Georg's stepson, pro-

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1 For more about manor murals on subjects related to antiquity see: Hilkka Hiiop, "In the Footsteps of Classical Antiquity. Influences of the Antique in Estonian Manor Murals", *Baltic Journal of Art History*, 3 (2011/2012), 225–252.

2 Ants Hein, *Ajalooline õiend ja arhitektuuriajalooliselt väärtuslike detailide inventariseerimine*, 2000 Manuscript in the archives of the National Heritage Board, A-3861, 8, 15–16. The following article has also been compiled based on the historical survey: Ants Hein, "Tundeline teekond läbi nelja mõisa ja 170 aasta. Järvamaa mõisakoolidest kultuuriloolase pilguga", *Mõisast kooliks. Eesti mõisakoolide teejuht*, ed. by Pille Epper (Tallinn: Museum of Estonian Architecture, 2015), 48–85.



Fig. 1. The front façade of the Aruküla Manor after restoration. Photo: Peeter Säre.

vide us with a great deal of interesting material about the lifestyle in the manors of the region.³ In this period, the Baltic German cultural elite visited Aruküla and the members of the family themselves were also very interested in art and literature.

However, the manor's main building did not acquire its neoclassical appearance until the Tolls took control of the manor when the Knorrings were forced to sell the manor in 1820 to Karl von Toll, who had a brilliant career in the Russian military. As one of the most outstanding members of the Toll family, Karl von Toll was sufficiently wealthy and ambitious to immediately undertake large-scale reconstruction at the Aruküla Manor – it was then that the manor acquired the Empire-style appearance we know it today. Aruküla Manor's grand columned portico with a triangular frontispiece and the impressive stucco decorations with military emblems date back to the period of reconstruction undertaken by Karl von Toll and the landscape paintings on the fake windows on the façades on the second floor to the late 1830s.

³ Theodor von Bernhard, *Jugenderinnerungen* (Leipzig: Verlag S. Hirzel, 1893), 84–85. Cited: Ants Hein, *Ajalooline õiend*, 2000.

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”.⁴

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 arhitektuuriajalooliselt väärtuslike detailide inventariseerimine*, 22.



Fig. 2. The small anteroom leading to the hall, where two historical painting layers are displayed and the reconstructed vestibule with paintings of building blocks. Photo: Villu Plink.

Fig. 3. The later ceiling painting using military emblems. Photo: Villu Plink.

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

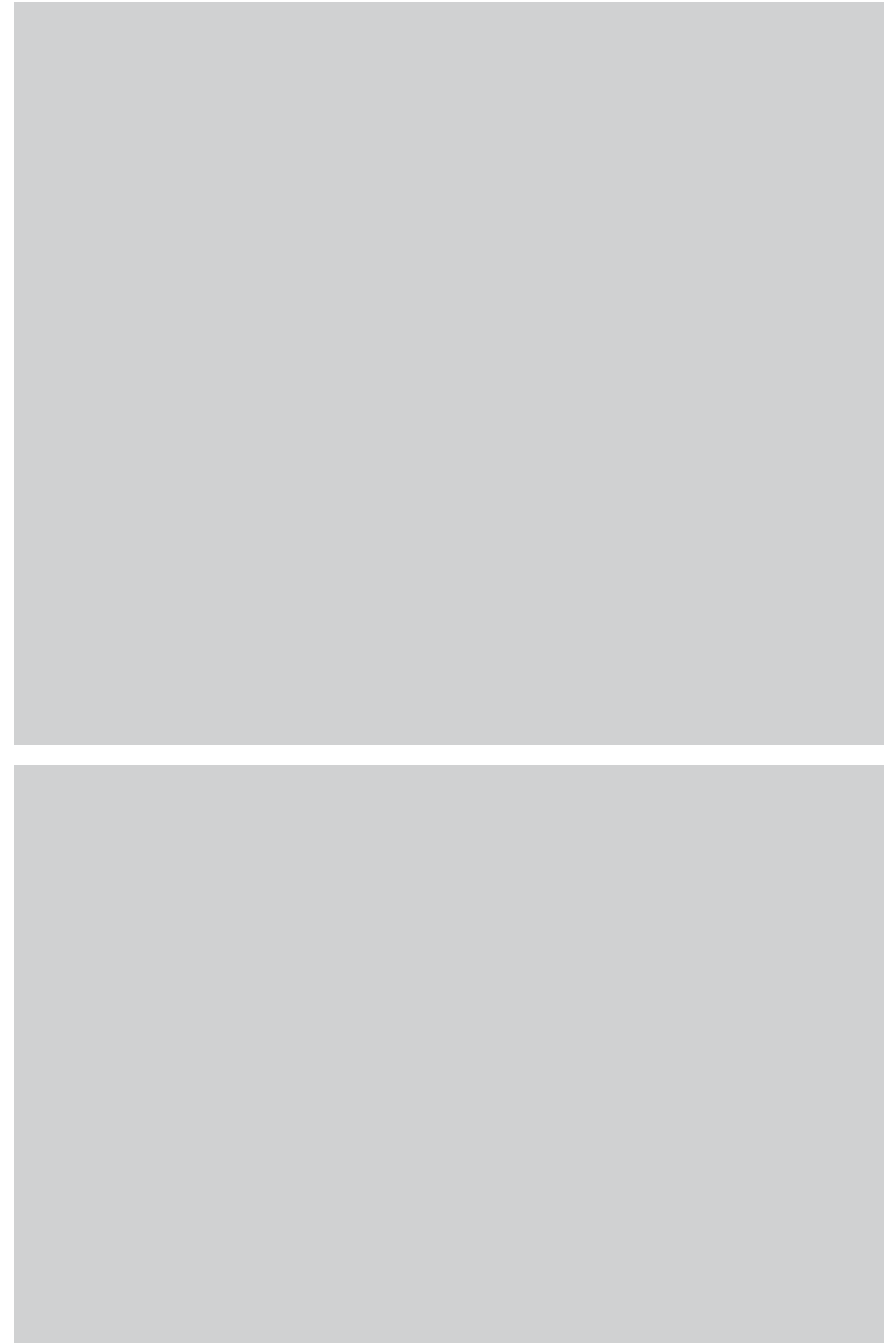


Fig. 4. A and B. A fragment of the imposed columns that surround the door of the enfilade, which indicate the dislocation of the door openings in regard to the murals. Photos: Villu Plink.



Fig. 5. A surviving fragment of a figural painting that was centred over the door opening depicts a figure in Etruscan-style shades of reddish-black with an amphora-style vessel. Photo: Villu Plink.

with an amphora-style vessel; another, a plump Amor-type little boy with wings and a spear. The door openings of the enfilade cut into the grand painted columns, and the painting fields above the doors are no longer centred. Therefore, it seems that probably the doors were shifted in the course of the renovations in the early 20th century compared to their original locations in the neoclassical solution. The current stucco cornices extend onto the murals, which in turn confirms the assumption that all the interior stucco dates back to the later period after the 20th century reconstruction.

We can only surmise what the rooms were used for. Three metal hooks are installed in the plaster of the rear wall in one of the rooms with murals. Considering the general colouration of these elements and the room generally (primarily bright green and pink), one could assume that this was the lady of the manor's bedroom, and the hooks were installed to hold the canopy above the bed. And the small corner room, next to the supposed bedroom, where murals depicting columns have partially survived above the doors and windows, could have been the lady's boudoir or salon.

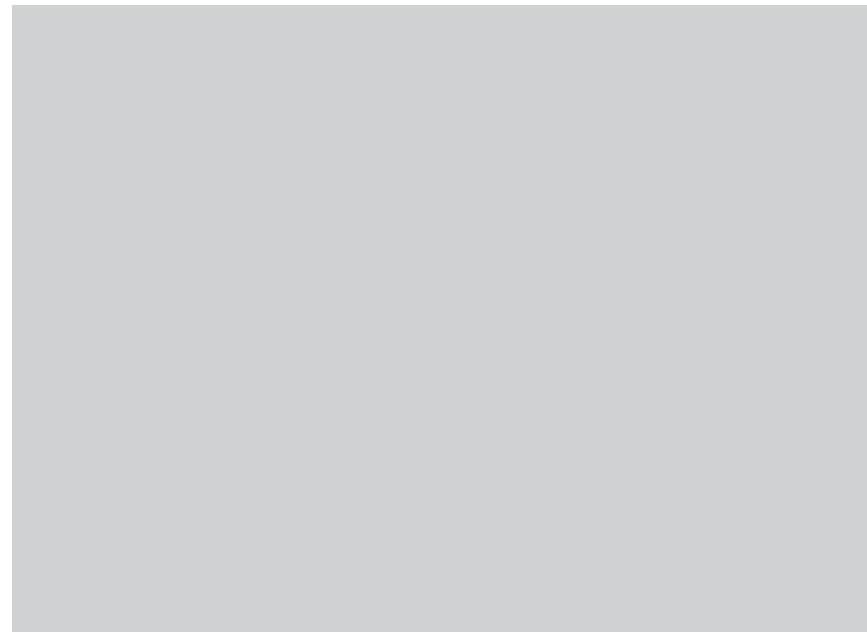


Fig. 6. The processing of revealing the mural from under the layer of plaster. Photo: Taavi Tiidor.

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 anteroom 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



Fig. 7. The processing of revealing the mural from under the layer of plaster. Photo: Taavi Tiidor.

were also freed of the layer of lime render, and the two mural layers were displayed simultaneously.⁵

Which reconstruction period at the Aruküla Manor these murals belong to is still unconfirmed – based on the stylistic nature of the paintings, they have been attributed to the last decade of the 18th century, when the manor was renovated by the Knorrings. As such, they fit in perfectly with the circle of richly decorated manors in Järva County (Norra, Liigvalla, Varangu, Kiltsi)⁶, which all acquired their grand murals during this period. The ceiling painting in the vestibule, which is part of second finishing layer, could be tied to the reconstruction in the 1820s undertaken by Karl von Toll and the general Empire-style appearance

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.

⁶ Read more: Hilkka Hiiop, “In the Footsteps of Classical Antiquity. Influences of the Antique in Estonian Manor Murals”, 225–252; Hilkka Hiiop, “Antiigi peegeldus Eesti mõisamaalingutel”, *Eesti kunsti ajalugu III* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, forthcoming).

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

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CV:

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⁷ Ants Hein also suggests that the murals date back to the late 18th century: Ants Hein, “Tundeline teekond läbi nelja mõisa ja 170 aasta. Järvamaa mõisakoolidest kultuuriloolase pilguga”, 80–82.

