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THE KOLGA MANOR 'CHAPEL' THAT ISN'T A CHAPEL

Grandfather was now lying in a large, two-storey hall in a wing that was rarely used because it was difficult to heat. This room was transformed into a kind of chapel; the walls were covered with green spruces, the coffin on a high frame was in the middle of the room, surrounded by a semi-circle of greenhouse plants. It was lined on all sides by tall pedestals covered with black cloth, on which candles in heavy silver candlesticks burned. The room was constantly filled with muffled song or low-pitched voices reciting biblical passages, as village elders had come from all the manors asking for the privilege to guard the majorat estate's deceased lord.¹

This is how Theophile Bodisco describes the 1885 funeral of Carl Magnus Reinhold Stenbock, the 'great' 19th-century lord of Kolga Manor, who was nicknamed Apa. The room where Stenbock's funeral took place has been called the Kolga Manor Chapel, and it has been recorded as such in both literature and living memory. The focus of this article is the interior of this exceptionally well-preserved northern *avant-corps*, which has survived almost untouched, i.e. the same room that has been called the chapel. A brief survey is also provided of the fragments of the finishing details that have been preserved in the other rooms of the manor house. The article

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1 Theophile Bodisco, *Vana vabahärja majas* (Tallinn: Huma, 2001), 216.

is based on research dealing with the building's interior finishing (in 2014)² and archaeology (in 2021),³ which has been conducted by the Estonian Academy of Art, and on information obtained in the course of the on-going conservation.

In the Estonian context, Kolga is a truly a gigantic manor, which was owned by the powerful noble families of De la Gardie and Stenbock. At the end of the 17th century, the manor passed from the de la Gardie family to the Stenbocks through marriage, and remained in their possession until it was nationalised in the Soviet era. The two major stages of construction are evident in the existing main building, i.e. the older Baroque section was completed in the late 1760s, to which an impressive Neoclassicist front façade was added in the early 19th century.⁴ Having survived difficult times during the Soviet period, when the building was used as both living and administrative space, only remnants of the historic interior have survived to the present day. The only exception is the elegant monumental reception hall of the northern *avant-corps*, where its magnificent illusionist décor has been preserved. Still, the surviving fragments of the paintings enable some hypothetical generalisations to be drawn, based on the historical phases of the manor's construction, as well as the stylistic assessments and the stratigraphic situation that has been identified.

2 *Kolga mõisa peahoone siseviimistluse uuringud*, ed. by Hilikka Hiiop, Kaisa-Piia Pedajas, Kristina Aas, Helen Volber, Kaarel Truu (Tallinn: Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation at the Estonian Academy of Arts and H & M Restuudio OÜ, 2014), https://muinas.artun.ee/static/files/003/kolga_koos_low.pdf [accessed 10.12.2021].

3 Student internship in the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation at the EAA, supervisor Villu Kadakas.

4 The exact date of the reconstruction is unknown. The most prevalent view is that it took place in the 1820s. See for example: Heinz Pirang, *Das baltische Herrenhaus*, Teil II (Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1930), 34; Helmi Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend* (Tallinn, 1956), National Heritage Board's archive P-915, ERA.T-76.1.815, 14; Epp Kangilaski, *Kolga mõisa ajalooline õiend* (Tallinn, 1977), National Heritage Board's archive P-3362, ERA.T-76.1.3265, 26, 34; *Eesti arhitektuuri ajalugu*, ed. by Harald Arman, H. Papp, Uno Kammal, Helmi Üprus (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1965), 356; *Eesti arhitektuur*, ed. by Villem Raam (Tallinn: Valgus, 1997), 27. However, in a later historical assessment, Epp Kangilaski dates the Neoclassicist reconstruction of the manor as having occurred earlier, at the turn of the century. See Epp Kangilaski, *Kolga mõisa täiendav ajalooline õiend* (Tallinn, 1987), National Heritage Board Archive A-1912, ERA.T-76.1.12166, 21. The family tradition also supports the earlier dating by associating the reconstruction with the years 1800–1803. See Jimmy Norrman, Torbjörn Suneson, Jarl Stenbock, *Vårdprogram för parkanläggningen vid Kolk herrgård, Estland. Conservation Program for the Park of Kolga Mansion, Estonia* (Uppsala: Institutionen för landskapsplanering Ultuna SLU Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet, 1999), 13.



FIG. 1. DATE ON THE INSIDE OF THE DOOR BENEATH THE STAIRS. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

THE INTERIORS OF KOLGA MANOR – FRAGMENTS, FRAGMENTS, AND MORE FRAGMENTS...

For decades, researchers have been looking for the earlier, so-called heart of the De la Gardie building inside the current manor house. This article does not take a position regarding the discussion on the building's architectural history, but rather states that only a single detachable detail in the entire building – the Baroque doors beneath the stairway leading from the lobby to the *piano nobile* – alludes to an earlier layer. The year 1669 is painted on the inside of one of the doors. The authenticity of the date is supported by the archaic nature of the doors and their clear distinction compared to the much sharper carving of the wooden staircase balustrade. However, this does not necessarily confirm the location of the previous building 'inside' the current one, as wooden elements are movable. (Fig. 1)

Findings related to the interior finishing more definitely support the existence of the next construction phase, for the dating of which the year 1768 and the monogram CMS, which are carved into the



FIG. 2A AND 2B. YEAR AND CARL MAGNUS STENBOCK'S MONOGRAM ON THE STAIRCASE RAILING. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

wooden staircase balustrade mentioned above, provide firm grounds. The monogram refers to Carl Magnus Stenbock, the manor owner at the time of the construction. (Fig. 2 and 3)

One of the rarest finds in the building – the painted floorboards – date back to this building phase. The 18th century was a period when painted floors became popular in formal rooms. However, practically none have survived in Estonia. The painted pattern that creates a geometric spatial effect is comprised of light-yellow diamond shapes



FIG. 3. STAIRS LEADING FROM THE LOBBY TO THE (MAIN) FLOOR ON THE SECOND STOREY. THE DOORS BENEATH THE STAIRS AND THE STAIR RAILING SEEM TO DATE FROM DIFFERENT ERAS. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

with a border of brown and ochre-toned diamond shapes in a zig-zag pattern.⁵ (Fig. 4a and 4b)

Another rare detail, the stucco décor of the arched ceiling on the first floor of the building's south wing, can be linked to the same era, as its style and rustic character are associated with the Late-Baroque / Rococo period. (Fig. 5a and 5b)

In several rooms, in addition to the obvious Baroque details, an earlier layer can be found beneath the presumably Neoclassicist plaster, which has been perforated to improve the adhesion of the subsequent plaster layer. To the delight of the researchers, several painted fragments are still visible on the previous layer, which despite of their fragility can be dated back to the pre-Neoclassical period. In terms of style, they are more closely associated with Early Neoclassicism but either way, the material dates back to the final

⁵ Anita Jõgiste, *Eesti mõisahoonete puutpõrandad. Stiililine ülevaade ja restaureerimisproblemaatika*. Master's thesis (Tallinn: Estonian Academy of Arts, 2016), 48–49, <https://muinas.artun.ee/download/newwin-download/oid-8254/8254.pdf?what=orig&show=1> [accessed 13.12.2021].



FIG. 4A. PAINTED FLOORBOARDS FROM THE BAROQUE PERIOD. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

FIG. 4B. DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FLOORBOARD PATTERN. DRAWING: ANITA JÖGISTE.

FIG. 5A. BAROQUE STUCCO IN THE ROOM WITH AN ARCHED CEILING ON THE *PIANO NOBILE*. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

FIG. 5B. DETAIL OF THE BAROQUE STUCCO PARTIALLY REVEALED FROM BENEATH SUBSEQUENT LAYERS OF LIME. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.





FIG. 6. FRAGMENTS OF THE EARLY CLASSICIST SUPRAPORTE PAINTING. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE

decades of the 18th century. (Fig. 6) Indications of 18th century Early Neoclassicism have also been seen in the stucco ornamentation (cornices and ceiling rosettes with laurel wreaths and bead trim moulding) in the south wing on the second floor, which could suggest that both the stucco and the painted fragments date from the same stage of finishing.⁶

A group of paintings that have been found in various parts of the building, most of which follow the boundaries of the fixed height dado panels and the (wooden) frames surrounding the openings, is associated with the Neoclassical reconstruction that was carried out in the early 19th century.⁷

This was followed by the 'Historicist layer' from the latter half of the 19th century, individual fragments of which can be found in

6 Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend*, 20.

7 The finished layer starts at about 10 cm from the windows and continues to about 85 cm from the floor.

various parts of the manor. However, their (stylistic) interconnection is rather arbitrary.

Additionally, a finishing layer that probably dates back to the early 20th century is clearly discernible. During this period, the north-eastern rooms of the manor house, including the northern section of the central corridor, was given a geometric ornamentation.

FULLY PRESERVED NORTHERN AVANT-CORPS HALL, THE SO-CALLED CHAPEL

Compared to the fragmentary situation described above, the two-storey-high space in the northern *avant-corps* of the manor house stands out with an exceptionally complete décor. This is a distinguished interior jewel in the manor house itself as well as in the local cultural space in general. Much has been written about it, but its contradictory construction stratigraphy and the interpretation of its function provide a reason to once again ask when it was built. And what was this strange and sumptuous space used for?

The space is totally covered in a combination of stucco and paintings, and constitutes a masterful ornamental whole. The painted surfaces are divided into horizontal belts by stucco décor: the painted frieze decorating the area between the two-storey windows is edged with a stucco dentil cornice and bead trim moulding. In places, the three-dimensional stucco transforms into a painting that repeats the same motif, creating an illusory alternation of two- and three-dimensional surfaces, i.e. a *tromp-l'oeil* or optical illusion. On the second floor, the lower part of the windows is partially covered by a stucco balustrade. A painted horizontal zone, i.e. rosettes in *grisaille* or grey tones with mascarons and festoons borrowed from antiquity, the quality of which is extraordinary, is placed between the painting fields above the lower window areas and doors. (Fig. 7) Painted arched recesses, where a rosette is painted at the tip of the arch, create a similar spatial effect in the second storey zone of windows. The same composition is in certain instances also situated in actual three-dimensional recesses. An alternating rhythm of massive stucco corbels and rosettes situated on an ultramarine blue background supports the ceiling cornice.

Besides the wall surfaces, the painted cassette ceiling formed a spatial whole that, for some reason, was replaced by a robust concrete



FIG. 7. A PAINTING DETAIL WITH A THREE-DIMENSIONAL ILLUSION IN THE NORTHERN AVANT-CORPS (BEFORE RESTORATION). PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

ceiling in the mid-1980s.⁸ Today, all that is left of the original ceiling is a few black-and-white photographs, which show that it seemed to have survived in its entirety before replacement. In addition, detailed measured drawings of the ceiling have preserved the ornamental scheme.⁹ The illusory cassette ceiling was accented by large painted rosettes: one in the centre and two halves on the edges. The ceiling's original colour is known to us based on only the laconic description attached to a graphic black-and-white measured drawing: it seems that in contrast to the pastel tones of the wall surfaces, strong blue-yellow-brown colours were used to paint the rosettes, thus making the ceiling the focus of the room.

8 During the period starting in 1984 when the Kirov Fishing Kolkhoz was managing the manor house.

9 *Kolga mõisahoone ülesmõõtmistööd ja sondaažid* (1957). Drawing: T. Böckler. Object: The former Kolga Manor, currently Kostivere Sovkhoz. Drawing: View of the northern wall of the church space, National Heritage Board's archive Ü-58, ERA.T-76.1.13423; *Kolga peahoone*. (1972–73). Drawing: A. Kukkur. Project: Kolga manor building; drawing: pattern of the painted ceiling of the so-called 'church', 1973. National Heritage Board's archive K-66/I, ERA.T-76.1.17050; *Restaureerimise tööprojekt. Endise Kolga mõisa peahoone arhitektuur-ehituslik osa*, köide I (Tallinn, 1989). Drawing: A. Kukkur. National Heritage Board's archive P-8793, ERA.T-76.1.8901.

It is unclear why the painted original was replaced with concrete. Maybe the reason was its poor condition. According to Üprus, 'the illusionistic painted cassette ceiling had been badly damaged, and later, recklessly repainted when the ceiling was repaired. This is especially true of the central rosette.'¹⁰

In previous studies, the room has been considered to have been completed when the *avant-corps* were constructed, thus associating it with the Neoclassicism of the 1820s and linking it to one of the most prestigious spatial examples of that period.¹¹

Only Epp Kangilaski, in her 1987 report, has attributed the décor to the Historicist period.¹² What she based her assumption on is not clear from the report.

Already in the course of research carried out by the Estonian Academy of Arts in 2014, a layer of painting, i.e. simple floral ornamentation in warm ochre tones, was noticed framing the windows beneath the current décor. (Fig. 8) This led to doubts about the possible concurrence of the architectural layout of the *avant-corps* and the interior décor. Recent findings, which testify to an even more

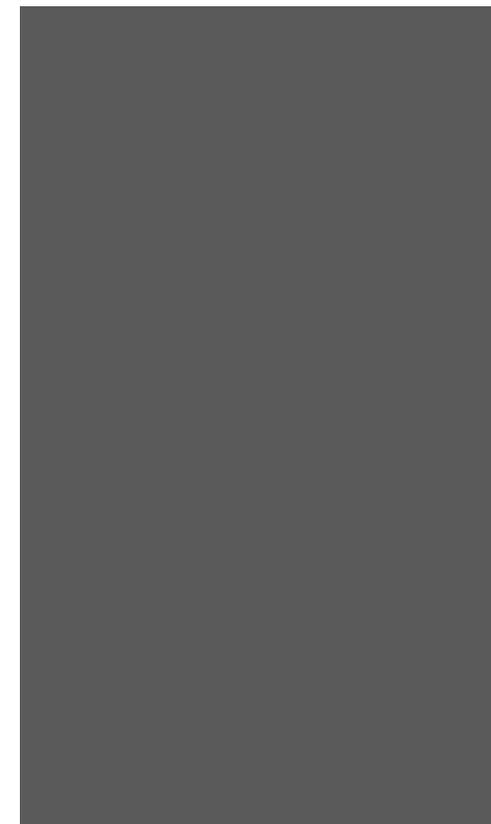


FIG. 8. MODEST FLORAL ORNAMENT BENEATH THE ILLUSORY CLASSICIST DÉCOR. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

10 Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend*, 23.

11 See e.g., *ibid.*, 14, 22–24.

12 Kangilaski, *Kolga mõisa täiendav ajalooline õiend*, 22.

complex stratigraphy, have added spice to the research story, i.e. not only the simple floral ornament found in 2014 exists beneath current paintings. There are at least two more decorative layers underneath.

How can the magnificent paintings be associated with the construction history of the *avant-corps* if they are actually the third or even fourth finishing layers in the room? A partial solution to this contradiction could be sought in a review of the architectural genesis of the manor. One of the goals of the archaeological research¹³ conducted on the building in 2021 was to resolve the central issue related to the paintings, i.e. when were the building's daringly protruding *avant-corps* built and how do the various finishing layers relate to their construction? Indeed, looking at the character of the wall masonry, and focusing on the décor of the front and back façades, we can confidently refute the former assumption that the *avant-corps* were built in the early 19th century along with the protruding columnar porticos. The assumption that the Baroque building already followed the current perimeter of the foundation, where two long, protruding end *avant-corps* and a portico at the centre of the building articulate the front façade, is quite convincing. This is convincingly confirmed by the greenish Baroque-era plaster articulated by white pilaster strips, which also continue beneath the current Neoclassical décor of the building's front façade. And it covers the entire perimeter of the building! (Fig. 9) At some point in the early 19th century, a third floor with Venetian windows was added to the *avant-corps* and an imposing triangular pediment and pillars were installed on the central portico. A new plaster finish that suited the Neoclassical aesthetic was 'glued on' to the frontal façade. This also created an interesting contrast between the front and back façades of Kolga Manor, which now are almost a textbook example of the history of style from two different eras: the Baroque and Neoclassicism.

Now, with this knowledge, let's return to the interior of the manor and take a fresh look at the paintings. And indeed, the multi-layered stratigraphy is limited to the first floor of a room and there is only one layer of paintings on the 'second' or Venetian-window level of the same room. Since the entire finishing pattern that currently exists corresponds so clearly to the later building stage, we can

13 Student internship in the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation at the EAA, supervisor Villu Kadakas. See Villu Kadakas, 'Ehitusarheoloogia Kolga mõisa peahoones', *Muinsuskaitse aastaraamat 2021*. To be published.

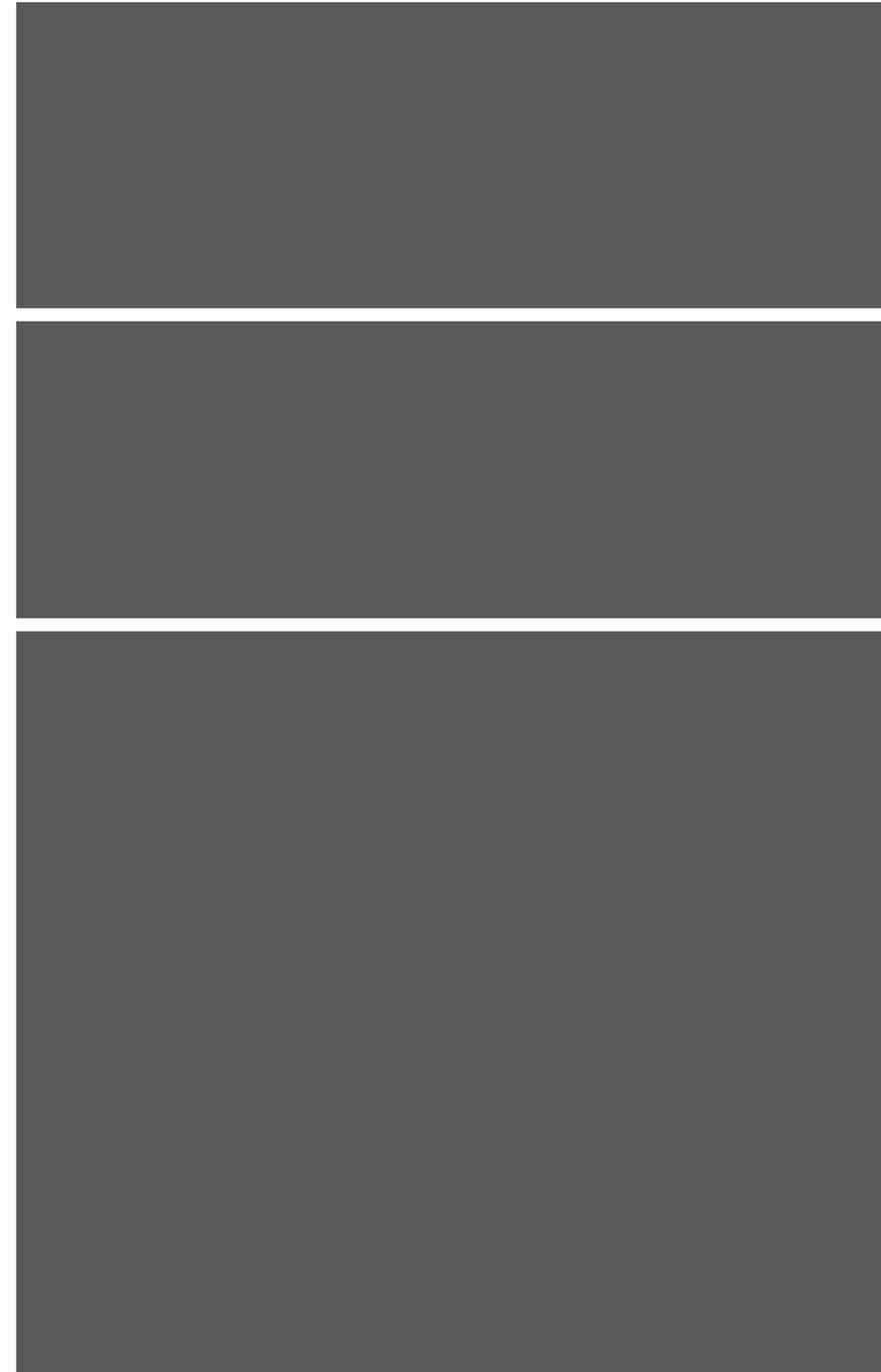


FIG. 9A. DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BAROQUE-STYLE FINISHING OF THE MAIN BUILDING'S FRONT FAÇADE. DRAWING: KATERIIN AMBROŽEVITS AND KÁTHI NIMAN.

FIG. 9B. THE REAR FAÇADE WITH A BAROQUE-STYLE FINISH, ARTICULATED WITH PILASTER STRIPS. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

FIG. 9C. THE REAR FAÇADE WITH A BAROQUE-STYLE FINISH, ARTICULATED WITH PILASTER STRIPS, DETAIL. PHOTO: MARTIN SIPLANE.

quite confidently say that the current paintings were indeed created concurrently with the Neoclassical reconstruction. However, this does not convincingly explain the multi-layered nature of the room's lower zone (three earlier finishing coats), but it does confirm that the *avant-corps* were constructed earlier. Naturally, the question also arises as to whether the original division of space corresponded symmetrically to the southern wing, or whether the room was always the size of a hall. Based on the previous finishing layers, it can be confirmed that this space has never been divided by a partition.

In connection with the new findings, a legitimate question arose about the (initial) function of the space. In the research and published articles, it has been called the chapel or private (home) church¹⁴; and this knowledge has also been passed down from generation to generation in local memory as well as in folklore. However, Üprus had already raised questions about the 'substantive meaning' of the supposed church, saying that this is 'initially unresolved, but apparently it was a room for home prayer, as was the case in many imperial castles in Russia and elsewhere'.¹⁵

By mentally removing the second floor with the Venetian windows and re-examining the nature of the paintings, we see a large room, but one that definitely is not religious in nature. This is not changed by the construction of an additional floor or the nature of the currently visible spatial layout, which makes it even more monumental (the height of the room is about 9 meters) and ceremonial. The virtuosic composition of all the elements that have been borrowed from antiquity into a whole allude more to an exclusive ballroom – a space where the sound of music is heard, not the word of God. The family chronicle also speaks quite clearly about a large ballroom (which, truth be told, was also used as a morgue in the winter).¹⁶

14 Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend*, 19, 24; Kangilaski, *Kolga mõisa ajalooline õiend*, 26; Kangilaski, *Kolga mõisa täiendav ajalooline õiend*, 22; also see *Eesti arhitektuuri ajalugu*, 359; *Eesti arhitektuur*, 27.

15 Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend*, 24.

16 Norrman, Suneson, Stenbock, *Vårdprogram för parkanläggningen vid Kolk herrgård, Estland. Conservation Program for the Park of Kolga Mansion, Estonia*, 13. According to Ulvi Meier, the director of the Kolga Museum, the descendants of the Stenbocks who have visited the manor have always refuted the claim that it was a home chapel. It was called the 'ballroom' or 'cold hall'. The local peasantry apparently started using the description of 'home chapel' in connection with the death and funeral of Count Carl Magnus Stenbock (see Bodisco, *Vana vabahärja majas*, 216).



FIG. 10. DESIGN OF THE NORTHERN AVANT-CORPS. PHOTO: OTTO KLETZL, 1940; BILDARCHIV PHOTO MARBURG (FM152040).

THE FATE OF THE HALL IN RECENT HISTORY

The earliest known photographic documentation of the hall dates back to 1940.¹⁷ (Fig. 10) In the photo, we see a room with its finishing nearly intact. If it's true that it was completed in the early 1800s, then the room had survived almost intact for 140 years. This is very unusual because, not only in the prosperous Kolga Manor, but also under more modest conditions, interiors were usually updated once or twice a century. The reasons were both pragmatic and aesthetic, i.e. the rooms needed renovation, but fashions and tastes also changed. The question of how to explain the long-standing preservation of the existing interior cannot be answered here. Perhaps the reason was

17 Photographer Prof. Otto Kletzl (1897–1945), who photographed German-owned property in March–November of 1940. In total, there are more than 2,500 photographs (for more, see: <https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/fotomarburg/bestaende/uebernahmen/fotokampagne-baltikum-1940> [accessed 13.12.2021]). Photo: Deutsches Dokumentationszentrum für Kunstgeschichte. Bildarchiv Foto Marburg (<https://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20431743?medium=fm152040>) [accessed 13.12.2021].



FIG. 11A AND B. DESTROYED RELIEF PAINTINGS IN THE NORTHERN AVANT-CORPS. DETAIL. PHOTO: OTTO KLETZL, 1940; BILDARCHIV PHOTO MARBURG (FM152040).

its uniqueness. Based on the research results, we do know that the lower zone of the room, an area extending about three metres up from the floor, where the marbling is visible in the photo, has been repainted. The only missing details are the reliefs above the doors, which turned out to be such expertly created illusory paintings that they really did seem to be embossed plates.¹⁸ It is not known why and when those paintings perished. It probably happened in the early Soviet period, as they are already missing from photos that were subsequently taken during the period when making photos was more common. (Fig. 11a and 11b)

By 1940, it seems that the room was being used as a storages space. If, in the other rooms photographed at the same time by the same photographer, we see the manor furniture and the family portraits still hanging on the walls, then this room is clearly not in use – the

18 Based on the photos that had been available to researchers, these were thought to be easily removable embossed plates. However, a photo recently scanned in the Marburg archives confirms that these were paintings.

floor is missing, and it is filled with random rubbish. How long the room was used during the Stenbock era is unknown. The only scrap of information about the use of the 'chapel' dates back to the funeral of Count Carl Magnus Reinhold Stenbock in 1885.¹⁹

If the manor house was divided into apartments and offices during Soviet times, according to the locals, this strange high-ceilinged space was only used to dry laundry.²⁰ Obviously, it was unreasonable to heat such a large space, which was already true when it was a manor house.²¹

Fresh winds began to blow once the manor was transferred from the Kahala Sovkhoz to the Kirov Fishing Kolkhoz in 1984. The establishment of the Lahemaa National Park in 1971 also resulted in the preparation of large-scale restoration plans for four splendid manor complexes, i.e. Palmse, Sagadi, Vihula and Kolga. The plan was to turn the Kolga manor house into a centre for science and culture.²² A thing or two was accomplished, but unlike the other three manors (which are much more modest in scale), the work here was discontinued. One of the rooms where restoration was started is the hall that we are interested in. The entire room was filled with wooden scaffolding. For some reason, the magnificent ceiling with its paintings was removed – whether this was due to its poor condition, which made it impractical to save, is difficult to determine in retrospect. In any case, the centre of the room and the focal point of the composition was permanently lost. As already stated above, the information on the ceiling is in the form of a couple of black-and-white (detail) photographs and measurement drawings, which among other things include a concise colour scheme of the ceiling. According to Üprus, 'The illusionist painted cassette ceiling has been [...] later recklessly repainted when repairing the ceiling, especially with regard to the central rosette.'²³ When, to what extent, and by whom the ceiling was repainted remains unknown. This information seems to be in contradiction to the untouched condition of the walls.

19 Bodisco, *Vana vabahärja majas*, 216.

20 Thanks to Riina Laanet, the Kolga gallerist, for collecting information on the local tradition.

21 Bodisco, *Vana vabahärja majas*, 216.

22 Fredi Armand Tomps, interview at Kolga Manor, 7 August 2021, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64wLPzz4OCg> [accessed 13.12.2021].

23 Üprus, *Kolga loss. Ajalooline õiend*, 23.

Without knowing the circumstances, it would be a thankless task to assess the activities back then, but it is clear that restorers never climbed the scaffolding. The new ceiling was obviously installed using extremely crude methods. Not only was the ceiling finished with rough concrete, but the concrete was splattered all over the decorated walls and windows. In any case, it can be said that the greatest destruction of the space, which had remained nearly intact for almost a couple of centuries, took place in a relatively short period of time and was motivated by the desire to renovate the space.

Together with the ceiling, the stucco décor along the edge of the ceiling was also destroyed -- the entire stucco décor of the upper zone has been replaced by copies made by the legendary stucco master Cornelius Tamm.²⁴ Only the original rosettes beneath the ceiling have survived, but even those survive only partially.

Thereafter, the work ground to a halt and neither visitors nor specialists were able to see the room filled with massive scaffolding for almost 40 years, thereby making this unique room even more mythical.

In 2021, the work that had been interrupted was restarted.²⁵ Considering the fact that the painting pigment was so powdery that the massive layer of dirt, which had accumulated on the painting surface, was the main binder keeping the pigment on the wall, one must once more express surprise that the paintings had not simply perished due to clumsy Soviet builders or excessive moisture. The primary task of the conservators was to carefully clean and consolidate the severely damaged surfaces. Although the conservation of the room involves a great deal of technical work, the greatest challenge was the decision concerning the ceiling. One option would have been to exhibit the brutally genuine concrete ceiling that honestly contrasts with the delicate original painting as a sign of another past. Another option would have been to reconstruct a ceiling as close to the original as possible. However, insufficient source information made it difficult to accomplish this, and installing a copy to assume the role of the original would not have been ethically acceptable. It

24 Cornelius Tamm (1924–2005) was one of the most active stucco restorers working in Estonia at that time, who, in addition to other large objects (e.g. Rägavere), also worked in Kolga, where he continued to work after the manor was returned to the Stenbocks in 1993.

25 Contractor H & M Restuudio OÜ and the Estonian Academy of Arts. Work was still underway when this article was written.

was decided to create a simplified and modernised version based on the original, i.e. a three-dimensional, original-scale illusionist cassette pattern in the most neutral grey hues possible. However, the idea to recreate freehand rosettes was rejected. The ceiling is obviously new and differs from the original even without closer examination. At the same time, it forms a spatial whole and recreates a unified aesthetic combination with the historical walls.

IN CONCLUSION

What has the recent research and ongoing conservation work added to the interpretation of the interior in Kolga Manor's northern *avant-corps*? As is known from previous studies, the room's décor probably dates back to the period of a Neoclassical reconstruction in the early 19th century. Only the building section itself dates back to the earlier Baroque period, which also explains the existence of previous finishing layers under the current one. The Neoclassical approach transformed it into a two-storey space and masterfully added an illusory design. However, the room, which for a long time has been called the '(home) church' or 'chapel', probably had a secular function and was used as a ballroom or music room.

This space, one of the finest examples of Estonian decorative arts, which has been closed to researchers and visitors for decades, or rather hidden behind scaffolding, will soon be reopened, and hopefully in its former role as a (music) hall.

HILKKA HIIOP: THE KOLGA MANOR 'CHAPEL' THAT ISN'T A CHAPEL
KEYWORDS: KOLGA MANOR; INTERIOR FINISHING; ILLUSIONISTIC DÉCOR; CONSERVATION OF WALL PAINTINGS AND STUCCO

SUMMARY

In the Estonian context, Kolga is a truly a gigantic manor, which was owned by the powerful noble families of De la Gardie and Stenbock. The focus of this article is the interior of the two-storey-high space in the northern *avant-corps* of the Kolga manor house, called the

'chapel', which has survived almost untouched. A brief survey is also provided of the fragments of the finishing details that have been preserved in the other rooms of the manor house. The article is based on research dealing with the building's interior finishing (in 2014) and archaeology (in 2021), which has been conducted by the Estonian Academy of Art, and on information obtained in the course of the on-going conservation.

What has the recent research and ongoing conservation work added to the interpretation of the interior in Kolga Manor's northern *avant-corps*? As is known from previous studies, the northern *avant-corps* room's décor probably dates back to the period of a Neoclassical reconstruction in the early 19th century. Only the building section itself dates back to the earlier Baroque period, which also explains the existence of previous finishing layers under the current one. The Neoclassical approach transformed it into a two-storey space and masterfully added an illusory design. However, the room, which for a long time has been called the '(home) church' or 'chapel', probably had a secular function and was used as a ballroom or music hall.

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