

Scenic Wallpaper – First Quarter 19th Century Western European interior décor in Latvia

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Abstract. In the early 19th century French scenic wallpaper rapidly gained popularity as the preferred type of interior décor in the homes of country noblemen and rich merchants. The main characteristic of this type of wallpaper is the continuous and unbroken depiction of panoramic scenes that feature exotic countries, prevalent outdoor hobbies and scenes from the natural world, transforming each room into an almost illusory space. Thus the nature was carried indoors in a rather poetic way. It has been established that scenic wallpaper was used in a number of interiors found in the territory of present-day Latvia. This article will present a detailed analysis of these interiors.

Keywords: scenic wallpaper, interior, wallpaper trade.

Introduction

Many experts within the wallpaper manufacturing industry regard scenic wallpaper as one of its highest achievements, not just because of the complex technologies required to produce it but also of its artistic value. Scenic wallpaper differs from the other types of 19th century wallpaper in a considerable way - just like a painting this wallpaper depicts unbroken and continuous scenery without repeating some or all of its elements. It is printed on individual rolls that join together and cover every wall in a room, creating a very special almost outdoor like atmosphere. Scenic wallpaper was exclusively manufactured in France [13] with earliest examples dating back to the late 18th century. Its ascend to popularity started after the French Manufacturers' Show in 1806 and culminated in 1865 [11].

Scenic wallpaper was immensely popular during the first part of 19th century as evidenced by the vast number of wallpaper produced. It has been established that over seven decades 115 scenic wallpaper designs were created in France and almost 90 of those designs were actually manufactured [10]. One of the main reasons behind this growing popularity was the fact that manufacturers were able to present popular scenes and contemporary issues in an aesthetically pleasing way that suited rooms of various configurations. The main subject matter of scenic wallpaper can be divided into three broad categories: 1) depiction of famous literary works or military achievements; 2) illustrations of well-known journeys and exotic countries; 3) depiction of everyday hobbies and entertainment [12].

In terms of the situation in Latvia, there are only five documented instances that confirm the use of scenic wallpaper in historic interiors, and each one of these instances should be given due attention. What could have been the main reason for choosing

scenic wallpaper? How widely available was this interior décor in the present-day Latvian territory and what trade routes were utilised in its acquisition? The answers to these questions will provide new insights and contribute towards the research of 19th century Latvian interiors.

Methodology

Information about the use of scenic wallpaper in Latvia has been acquired from a number of historic sources: documents owned by the Monuments Board, written eyewitness testimonies and photographic collection at the Herder Institute in Marburg. Various research articles dedicated to scenic wallpaper were analysed and put into context. For the purposes of this research, the most relevant articles were 'Schweizer Landschaftstapeten des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts' (1991) – a book by the German researcher Verena Baumer-Müller, and 'French Scenic Wallpaper 1795–1865' (2000) – exhibition catalogue put together by Odile Nouvel-Kamerer, main curator of 19th century objects at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. In order to establish potential links between paper manufacturers and Latvia, the widest historic wallpaper archive at the Musée du Papier Peint de Rixheim (MPP) in France was contacted. This archive largely consists of materials from one particular manufacturer – Zuber.

Results and discussion

The enticement of scenic wallpaper

In 18th century public fascination with exotic countries and the accompanying desire to travel was on the increase. Italy had always been a popular travel destination, however picturesque Swiss soon seized this position. Intellectuals of the

Enlightenment period were mainly responsible for this growing interest in Swiss as they focused their attention on enhancing the quality of life of 'common' people. The image of an independent Swiss peasant with a monumental mountain scene in the background was used as an idealised example of the romantic and carefree life of shepherds. Books about journeys and exotic lands, antique mythology and articles devoted to it were the most read literature at the time. It reflected the romantic mood of the population and created a desire to embed such scenery in everyday life.

Johan Wilhelm Krause, Professor at the University of Tartu, observed a spectacular example of such romanticised dramatisation of daily life while he worked as a governor in Vidzeme (1786–1796). He remembers visiting Baron Fersen of Vecsalaca together with his employers. Baron's manor house was on the banks of the river Salaca. During the second day of their stay, the party went for a ride in the park and its nearest surroundings. As soon as Baron Fersen's carriage had reached the main gate, trumpets sounded from the tower, the nearby Chinese temple had a flag up and canons fired three times. The party carried on with their journey. They came to a halt near a pile of rubble on the left hand side as the Baron shouted – stop! The rubble turned out to be ruins of an old castle. Baron had considerably improved the modest remnants. There was a knights' hall, a chapel with hermit painted on wooden floorboards and an underground prison with pictures of snakes, lizards, toads and a horse skeleton painted on its walls complete with a castle madam overlooking the collapsed tower from her cross-bared window. The party left the ruins behind and crossed a swamp, which the Baron had proudly named after the mythical river Styx in Ancient Greece. For the rest of their journey birch groves replaced meadows followed by a few romantic huts, some sheep with pretty shepherdesses and children, as well as a collapsed windmill, tiny ponds and a birch thicket. According to Krause, that was Arcadia! As they progressed, the journey continued to grow more and more melodramatic – a characteristic inherited from the Baroque period. They came across the Land of Peace or in other words – a cemetery in the midst of firs featuring a funeral show. The party went past an unfinished Ancient Teutonic Valhalla and stopped at the Rose Garden. Behind it was a dairy where workers dressed in Swiss costumes were making butter and cheese. There was a statue in the nearby peasant's hut, which suddenly came to life and became an Estonian peasant [7].

Despite the obvious dislike of Baron's ostentatious and shallow nature that can be detected throughout Krause's scrupulous description of their journey, the scripted walk is a typical example of the romanticised and idealistic worldview that dominated the late 18th century. Travel journals and

antique mythology studies ignited the desire to experience and enjoy at least some of this beautiful world in everyday life. Wealthy landowners shaped park landscapes according to their imagined narrative. French wallpaper manufacturers were quick to respond and offered to transform certain park motifs into scenic interior décor, so that the desired effect could also be enjoyed indoors. Skilled artists used exceptional quality graphic art as a starting point to create spectacular and idealised panoramic scenes. Two of the most popular scenic wallpaper subjects have already featured in afore mentioned park trip – the Arcadia with its idyllic life of shepherds and 'Swiss Landscape' with appropriately dressed actors. It was mainly thanks to the wallpaper manufactures in the early 19th century that these two subjects became widely available as beautiful images.

An almost complete palette of the main scenic wallpaper subjects emerges when literature studies and passion for exotic lands is supplemented with hunting, which was the most popular hobby of the rich at that time. Thus this modern and contemporary interior décor managed to closely and successfully resemble the idealised and heroic world that everyone wished to live in.

5 examples of scenic wallpaper in Latvia

Jacquemart et Bénard: Chasse de Compiègne

The most well known example of scenic wallpaper in Latvia was found in the dinning room at Mežotnes Palace (district of Bauska), which was owned by Count Leven. It displayed scenes from Chasse de Compiègne wallpaper by the Paris-based company Jacquemart et Bénard, designed by the French artist Carle Vernet (1758–1836). The scenic wallpaper consists of 25 rolls and feature country noblemen going on a hunt. It begins with the carriage of Queen of Napoli leave castle though the main gate heading towards the Compiègne forest, followed by an elaborate scene of deer stalking, moving on to crossing of the river and feeding the game to dogs and culminates with a picnic in the meadow. This wallpaper was only ever issued twice – once in 1812 and then, for the last time, just after 1815. Interestingly, both editions are slightly different, in the 1812 version the cavalry is dressed in red, whereas in the second edition they are wearing blue [10].

In the case of Mežotnes Palace this difference could allow for a more precise date of the interior decoration to be established, unfortunately this idea has to be abandoned because major building works began in 1798 and interior decoration took place from 1802 until 1817 [8]. It is plausible that the first edition wallpaper was still available to purchase after 1815. Therefore the wallpaper inside the castle could have been either the first or the second edition. The choice of wallpaper could have been linked to

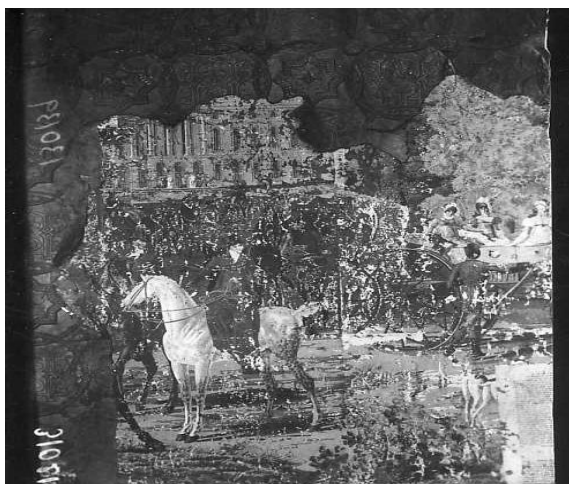


Fig. 1. The Mežotne palace dining room interior with fragments of the 1st and 2nd columns of the *Jacquemart et Bénard* company's *Chasse de Compiègne* scenic wallpapers [Source: photo by Pēteris Ārends from LVVA f.1630., a.1., 1.103. neg. No. 31015]



Fig. 2. The fragment of the 4th and 5th column of the *Compiègne* hunting scenic wallpaper [Source: photo by Pēteris Ārends from LVVA f.1630., a.1., 1.103. neg. No. 31012]

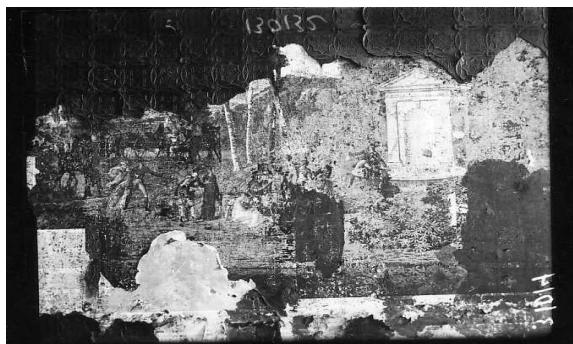


Fig. 3. The fragment of the 21st –25th column of the *Compiègne* hunting scenery scenic wallpaper with a picnic near the well [Source: photo by Pēteris Ārends from LVVA f.1630., a.1., 1.103. neg. No. 31014]

Charlotte Leven's youngest son Johan Leven who made the castle his permanent abode in 1817, which is when it is believed 'the interior works inside the castle had been fully completed' [8]. It has been established that at first an illusory pattern of painted laurel leaves framed the panels on the dining room walls, and scenic wallpaper was only a later addition [8].

First information about the Mežotnes Palace reaches the Monument Board in 1932. It states "Inside the room currently fitted with a stage for school use where the walls had been previously covered with relief leather wallpaper, the latter has been partially removed. It has revealed hand painted wallpaper from the early 19th century (Empire period) – [wrong observation – L.L.]. The uncovered fragment features a well, surrounded by ladies and gentlemen. ... [Undecipherable word, possibly, colours – L.L] are too bright and in several places have been coated in brown to match the colour of leather wallpaper" [9]. It was noted that this wallpaper "...is considered to be very rare and not just in Latvia" [9], however no further information can be found to indicate that the wallpaper has been successfully preserved. After all, it is understandable as the Mežotnes Palace was partially demolished during the Second World War and not renovated until 1959, however in those days interior decoration was treated in a rather brutal way [8].

On 5 July 1933 architect Pēteris Ārends (1900–1960) documented this wallpaper in his photographs. Black and white images show partially revealed wallpaper fragments from the first and second roll depicting leaving of the Compiègne castle, a nobleman riding his horse on the fourth and fifth roll and picnic at the well, which was spread across twenty-first to twenty-fifth roll (See Fig. 1.–3.).

It is likely that such wallpaper was also found in the Kleisti Manor House in Riga, which belonged to von Vegesack family. The only remaining evidence is the childhood memoirs of Fridrich von Brackel (1830–1896), the grandson of Vegesack, dated 1830–1839. He writes: "As kids, we were very fond of the dining room wallpaper, it was the sort that covered the whole room and depicted a royal [fürstliche] deer hunt. Gentlemen in wigs and big hats, ladies in riding costumes wearing coquettish hunting hats, chase dogs, the running deer – all of it captured our interest again and again, we could not get enough of this scene" [2]. It is near impossible to find the actual prototype of this description. The memoirs mention a few significant characteristics that enable certain wallpaper to be identified. This description seems to fit *Chasse sous Louis XIII* - scenic wallpaper from *Clerc & Margueridon*, where all participants of the hunt are

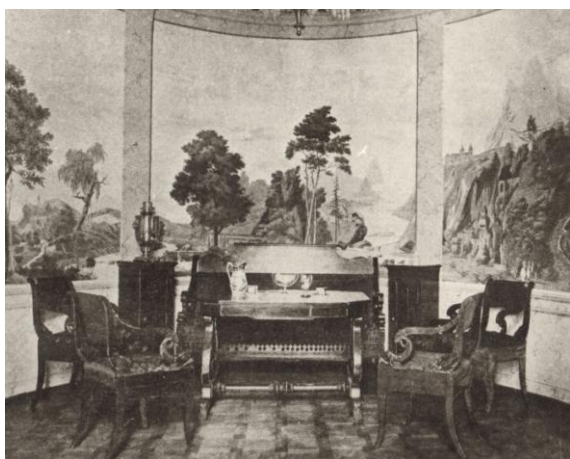


Fig. 4. The round salon of the Bišu estate with Zuber company's *Vues du Suisse* scenic wallpaper, 1912 [Source: Pirang 1912]



Fig. 5. Zuber company's *L'Arkadie* scenic wallpapers in Laidi manor house photographed in 1924 [Source: Herder-Institut Marburg, Bildarchiv, Inv. No. 135358]



Fig. 6. Scenic wallpapers from an unknown manufacturer with the *Forum Romanum* panorama in the former Inčukalns manor house interior [Source: Herder-Institut Marburg, Bildarchiv, Inv. No. 135377]

shown wearing old-fashioned costumes and large wigs while charging after their chase dogs and deer. However there are two hindrances. First of all, there are no known examples of this wallpaper or any information that it had even been produced. Secondly, wallpaper researchers are familiar with just the advertising lithography – those were usually manufactured to test the market before a new product was fully developed. The lithography is dated around 1845 [10], which matches similar products by this company, but does not correspond to the date indicated in *Brackel's* memoirs. The lithograph is a mirror copy of the Compiègne hunt and has been recreated in the style of *Louis XIII*. This leads to a plausible conclusion that it could have actually been *Jacquemart et Bénard* wallpaper in the Kleisti Manor House, especially since *Chasse de Compiègne* is the only wallpaper out of the four produced where hunting was actually depicted in the manner characteristic to noblemen.

Zuber: Vues du Suisse

Scenic wallpaper was used in another Manor House in Riga – Bišumuiža. A photograph showing the interior of a round salon that has Swiss scenic wallpaper has been in circulation since at least 1912, when it was published by Heinz Pirang as part of an article about manor houses in Riga [14]. This picture lacked detailed annotation and was responsible for urging researchers to wrongly and fruitlessly search for painted interiors later on, meanwhile the paper wallpaper has not survived till the present day.

Vues du Suisse (1804, design author Pierre Antoine Mongin, 1761–1827) by Zuber is one of the first scenic wallpapers, which along with *Les Sauvages de la mer Pacifique* (1804) by Joseph Dufour began the popularity wave of exotic panoramic interiors after the French manufacturers exhibition in 1806. In total 1280 sets of scenic wallpaper were sold from 1804, when *Vues du Suisse* wallpaper was first issued, to 1823 [1]. The magnificent Swiss mountain landscape consists of 16 rolls and features the most significant sightseeing spots – the Staubbach Waterfall, Oberhasli valley, Reichenberg castle and Furka glacier – together with a romanticised and idealised yet ethnographically precise depiction of the life and costumes of Swiss peasants [1].

According to Kampe's lexicon, Bišumuiža's living quarters were built in 1818 - same time as the Brandenburg's sugar manufacturing factory [6], and authorship for the construction plan has been assigned to the structural engineer Daniel Johann Gottfriedt (1768–1831). Thus this wallpaper must have been hanged shortly after the building works were completed.

Zuber: *L'Arkadie*

Scenic wallpaper has also been found in Laidi Manor House (district of Kuldīga, civil parish of Laidi). It featured *L'Arkadie* (1812, design author Pierre Antoine Mongin) by Zuber. A complete *L'Arkadie* landscape consists of 20 rolls, and only first four have been captured in a photo taken at the Laidi Manor House (Fig. 5.). The wallpaper advertising brochure states: "This décor is designed in a heroic style and depicts a content and peaceful landscape, which is why it has been named after Arcadia – the famous Greek region" [10]. The brochure goes on to instruct the reader that this wallpaper is intended for a three-way wall decoration (plinth, landscape and tile) and provides a detailed description of each scene. The Arcadia scene originated from „*Les Idylles*” (1756) – a popular poem by the Swiss poet Salomon Gessner (1730–1788) [10]. It was soon translated in several languages and in 1802 published with Gessner's original illustrations.

Karl Gotthard Ernst Manteuffel (1756–1834), the owner of the Kazdanga Palace, built the Laidi Manor House for his daughter Johanna Lambsdorf (1787–1846) and it took from 1809 to 1811 to accomplish this task. There is a photograph from the Manor House at the Herder Institute in Marburg that captures a somewhat shabby room with magnificent wallpaper. Unfortunately this wallpaper also has not survived till the present day.

Manufacturer unknown: *Forum Romanum*

Finally, the last known example of scenic wallpaper in the current stage of this research comes from the former Inčukalns Manor House. The only remaining evidence is a photograph showing a fragment of wallpaper that depicts a landscape over the width of 5 rolls. It features *Forum Romanum* with the Coliseum in the background, and viewer is given the impression of standing next to the Venice Embassy and overlooking the antique city centre (Fig. 6). Despite the fact that landscapes of Rome and Italy were a popular subject matter for scenic wallpaper, it has not been possible to establish neither the manufacturer of this particular wallpaper nor its full composition.

So why is it that only five scenic wallpaper examples are known to the present day historians? Firstly, the disappearance of scenic wallpaper was dictated by changing fashion trends. The second part of 19th century saw the decline of scenic wallpaper as other forms of interior décor slowly replaced it. For instance, the afore mentioned Mežotnes palace where scenic wallpaper was covered over with a paper imitation of relief leather wallpaper, which encapsulated the fashion sense of the Historicism in a far better way. Secondly, the customs policy of the early 19th century applied strict rules to imported goods from foreign countries. Researchers have

TABLE 1
The scenic wallpaper sales activities in Riga and Jelgava, in 1820, 1821 by Zuber company.

Year, distributor	Name of wallpaper	Num.	The price of one wallpaper in France francs
1820 T.G. Kempffe, Riga	<i>Les Vues de l'Indostan, 1807</i> (Views of India)	1	30,00
	<i>Les Vues d'Italie, 1818</i> (Views of Italy)	1	40,00
	<i>La Grande Halvétie, 1815</i> (Large Switzerland)	1	40,00
	<i>L'Arkadie, 1812</i> in chocolate tonalities	1	18,00
1820 Gabriel I. Löwenstein, Jelgava	Views of Italy	2	44,14
1821 Charles Bötticher, Riga	Large Switzerland	1	40,00
	Views of Italy	1	40,00

[Source: author's construction]

acquired only one manufacturer's accounts from that period, which belong to the Zuber Company and cover the first quarter of 19th century. Initially these accounts were stored in Zuber's archives but during the second half of 20th century everything was added to the collection at the Rixheim wallpaper museum. Zuber's accounts have detailed information about each trade deal, middlemen and supplier's delivery address. As indicated by the delivery address, first instances of direct trade with Riga and Jelgava were recorded only as late as 1820. This was largely due to the ban on imported wallpaper implemented by the Russian Empire and aimed at protecting local manufacturers. In 1820 Russia briefly opened its market [3]. Zuber were quick to use this opportunity and despatched their sales agents immediately. As a result T.G. Kempffe shop in Riga stocked four different kinds of scenic wallpaper [15] while Gabriel I. Löwenstein in Jelgava had two identical ones [15] (Table 1).

The limited stock of scenic wallpaper in Riga and Jelgava could be explained as a test strategy adopted by the company. In 1821 there was only one further delivery of scenic wallpaper to Riga, confirming the assumption that Zuber were on the look out for a profitable market in this region but failed to find a suitable location. Last delivery went to *Charles Bötticher's* company [15]. In comparison, in 1820 Zuber dispatched four sets of *La Grande Halvétie* wallpaper, three sets of *Les Vues d'Italie* wallpaper

and one set of Les Vues de l'Indostan wallpaper to Tallinn and trusted all further sales to Jean Martinsen and C. E. Riesenkauff [15]. However this was also a small stock and no subsequent orders were received. There are several explanations at play here. It is possible that the local market was simply too small. Potential customers were able to purchase desired products at a number of other locations such as Lübeck, Leipzig, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Warsaw and main French cities etc, where they could choose from a range of scenic wallpaper from different manufacturers. The fact that *Vues de Suisse* (1804) wallpaper, which was produced by Zuber, was found in Bišumuiža supports this assumption, as their accounts contain no records of a delivery to a local supplier. The same applies to the Laidi Manor House and Mežotnes Palace as wallpaper for both had been purchased before the ban was lifted.

Besides, as the trade with Russia was badly affected by the customs policies demanding a steep duty tax for foreign products, wallpaper prices outside of the Russian Empire were actually lower and more affordable. For example, five franks had to be paid as tax for each roll of French wallpaper [3]. The dramatic differences in price between wallpaper purchased in Riga and Petersburg or Moscow indicate that this tax rate did not apply to the provinces of Kurzeme and Vidzeme. Les Vues d'Italie wallpaper and La Grande Halvétique wallpaper (each consisting of 20 rolls) was sold for 150 franks a piece to suppliers in Petersburg and Moscow [16], which is almost four times more expensive than the same wallpaper purchased in Riga. However, in comparison to Warsaw, Riga loses out as over there it cost only 30 franks [16] and even less in Germany and France. Despite these differences in price, from 1819 to 1822 a total of 175 Zuber scenic wallpaper sets were sold in Petersburg and Moscow alone [5]. All available range was represented: Les Vues d'Italie, La Grande

Halvétique, La Petite Halvétique (1818), Les Vues de Halvétique and Les Vues de l'Indostan as well as grisaille printed L'Arkadie in chocolate, sanguine, dark brown and grey tones. In 1822 the ban was applied once more and foreign wallpaper trade was prohibited until 1841 [3]. It is plausible to assume that other major wallpaper manufacturers were just as active as Zuber and vigorously marketed their products while the borders remained open.

Conclusion

To summarise the main points from the afore mentioned examples of scenic wallpaper in Latvia, it is clear that this interior décor was used in older already established manor houses (Kleisti Manor House and Inčukalns Manor House), as well as in newly built modern Neoclassicism style homes that belonged to the local aristocracy or rich merchants. This type of wall finishing covers the period from 1810s until the end of the first quarter of 19th century. It is well evidenced that on two occasions scenic wallpaper was used as a dining room décor, quite possibly it was also found inside the Laidi Manor House as well as in the round salon at Bišumuiža. This matches examples from other countries where scenic wallpaper is still being used or has been found in salons, dining rooms and on some occasions – billiard rooms [4]. None of the afore mentioned scenic wallpaper samples have survived until the present day, which is more likely to be the result of changing fashion trends instead of the lack of quality, as the 1930s report by the Monument Board clearly stated that the uncovered wallpaper in the Mežotnes Palace was still bright alas already covered over by a new layer of wall finishing.

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