Kirbižu manor house: architecture and cultural history

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Abstract. Kirbižu manor house (Kūrbižu) is located in the Rural Territory of Vitrupe of the Municipality of Limbaži, less than ten kilometers away from the sea. Together with the lost Bisteri (Bisterwolde) estate, it is an ancient von Aderkas family estate which belonged to it over 400 years. Despite the various changes, the manor house and several outbuildings are still adorning the centre of the estate. There is also preserved the known as the landlord’s new residential building and the park near the Vitrupe River. Unfortunately, there has been lost almost all the household complex and from 52 ever existing estate buildings there are left less than ten of them. The time tooth, people’s neglect and economic decline have well enough impoverished this corner of Vidzeme.

In 2006, there started revival of the remaining part of the estate. There was restored the cellar granary, reconstructed and restored the manor house, removed the stable, landscaped the park. During these works and before that, there was carried out the architectural – artistic and cultural – historical research.

Keywords: architectural heritage, estate’s architecture and cultural history, monument survey.

Manor house and its architecture

After the Great Northern War, the economic life was gradually restored and only in 1730, in the 40′ies there could have arisen an idea to build a new manor house in the Kirbižu estate. Then, the landlord Otto Magnus von Aderkas in 1740 was 64 years of age and hardly in his old age he would have been planning to start building of a new home. It would be advisable to remember the bad financial situation of the estate after death of Otto Magnus in 1753. Therefore, there must be assumed that the builder of the manor house would have been his son-a lieutenant of the Swdish army – Georg Dietrich von Ardekas who inherited the property at the age of 33 years – in his prime years. It is, therefore, likely that the wooden residential building was built after 1753.

In turn, K. von Aderkas writes that in the end of the 17th century, the old building of the Bisteri estate was located in the place of today’s Melbārži house on the bank of the Vitrupe River, about six kilometers upstream from the present Kirbižu manor house. After the fire, the estate owners moved to the Kirbižu estate where in the first half of the 18th century there was built a wooden residential house which in the second half of the 19th century was bricked with red bricks and plastered [1]. In turn, the architect H. Pirang writes that near Perringele (Liepupe) there is located the Kirbižu estate owned by the family of von Aderkas for 400 years and the manor house is built of wood and it is a copy of the manor house of the Liepupe estate [2]. There is no doubt that both buildings are similar if we assume that the manor house of the Kirbižu estate is built after 1753 and the completion year of the manor house of the Liepupe estate – in 1751 is certain. Therefore, one should partly agree to that written by H. Pirang but only in relation to the external appearance which we can see today. In Liepupe, m in front of us there is a stone building, the author of which is a bricklayer having arrived from the land of Saxony to Riga – Johann Andreas Haberland (J. H. Haberland), father of the famous architect of Riga – Christoffer Haberland. 250 years ago, the manor house of the Kirbižu estate was not covered by plastered bricks and, hence, its architectural image and the facade solution were different. Thus, about similarities we can only speak within the spatial solution of the volume. As concerns a specific sample search, one should recall the manor house of Ungurmuža (Qrellen) where in 1762 there was discovered a rot and after that it was decided to build a new stone building. As a model, the owner of the estate Helen Julian von Kampenhausen (H. J. von Campenhausen) had selected the manor house of the Liepupe estate. In this context, a copy of the front yard facade project of the Liepupe manor house was made (1762) [3].

It should be noted that the new Bisteri estate location in Kirbižu was not so far unknown since in the late 17th century-the early 18th century land plans, there is indicated a manor house (Fig. 1) with a mill at the Vitrupe River [4].

The time of building a manor house – 1750 is witnessed by the news that in 1750 the carpenter George Finck (G. Finck (1730–1808)) [5] arrived at the estate. He has spent the longest time of his life in this place since in 1761 in the Liepupe church there was baptized his son Georg Friedrich who also learned the carpenter's trade, worked in Pärnu and in 1793 became a citizen of this town [6].

And in 1772, at Kirbižu there was born his second son Otto Christian who also learned the carpenter's trade, from 1803 worked in Jaunjelgava, later at Blome estate (Kulsdorf) in the parish of Vitrupe where he also died in 1821.

In 1782, G. Finck made a palpit altar for the Liepupe Lutheran Church (1777–1784, J. K. Širmeisters) [5].
Elsewhere, without any references it is indicated that this work was done together with the wood carver Karl August Erlich [6].

About life of G. Finch at Ķirbiţi, there gives proof the fact that his services were needed for a long time and as you can see, just in 1750 when possibly began his career as a carpenter in building the new manor house.

So, the original manor house of Ķirbiţi estate was a log house in the smooth corners of the house on a boulder stone socle floor. It was well proportioned, symmetric, covered with a mansard roof. The horizontal beams were covered by a 3.5 cm thick and 22 cm wide planking but from the inside they originally could be simply painted. At the building's front façade sides there were wings but in the center-a mezzanine with a triangular pediment containing an oval window. In the center of the other longitudinal facade there was located a rizalite with a triangular pediment. At the main entrance, there was built a porch based on toscanic order columns. These graceful columns on high podiums with the facets decorated, existed even in March, 1952, as shown in a photograph from the Ķirbiţi school materials – Grade 7 girls organize a housekeeping afternoon for all the pupils. The photo is now kept in the Limbaži Museum. The original porch solution is also seen for now in the oldest known photograph of the manor house as known from 1920 [7]. The photo might be taken after the foundation of the Monument Board in 1923 but the building's roof is made of shingles, in the main facade of the window openings it is with six windowpanes without the top leveling. It must be assumed that in 1920 it has been rephotographed from an earliest photo (Fig. 2).

The columns with all the podiums in 1960’ies were changed to stone columns on simplified but profiled podiums as shown in several 1960’ies photographs [7].

The podiums lost their own profiles over time and in 2004 they had already been reduced to a simple base on a little wider elevation (Fig. 3).

Over time, the symmetric manor house has also historical layers. It is a two-storey outhouse in the left end of the building. With the gabled ridged roof covered volume part was also a log house and its ridge height coincided with the mansard roof breach eaves. This outhouse should be subject to the first half of the 19th century. Later, maybe, in the middle of the 19th century it would have been supplemented by another outhouse that was covered with a single sloping roof and architecturally it was not particularly expressive. These supplements were made in the kitchen end of the manor house and associated with the economic functions.

Cellar

Constructing a cellar under all the building, obviously, was not needed, so in the middle two sections are filled up. In general, the cellar contains ten larger or smaller rooms that are communicating but in some places available from narrow corridors. The cellar could be reached by two external staircases. One was located on the river side at the side of the rizalite, the other one – in the so called household end by lifting a trapdoor in one of the later outhouse rooms. Both parts of the cellar in which the above mentioned entrances led were not connected with each other.
The cellar rooms are covered with cylindrical domes, they are built from boulder stones in mortar and plastered. Thickness of the outer wall is approximately 1.3 m, the internal walls – from 1.2 m to 0.6 m. In the ceiling of several rooms, there are walled in hooks, in the walls-rings. In some places of the thick walls there are made niches, supposedly, there were shelves. Comparing the cellar layout with first floor layout, the walls are logically arranged in both ends in which there are located toward the backyard existing wings and in the middle part where there is located the hall with a staircase. But the cellar walls do not fully comply with the first-floor layout which is located under the Great Hall in the center. Has the further construction idea changed after building of the cellar? It is also not understood why a narrow, approximately 40 cm wide aisle is created in the cellar under the floor. It is interesting to note that the floor of some cellar rooms was covered with dolomite plates approx. 40x40 cm.

Layout and the spatial structure

Layout of the manor house as a whole is traditional – in the hall or hallway which housed the stairs to the second floor symmetrically followed the Great Hall from which as it was generally accepted there was no way out to the park as in this side of the building there was basically no park but there could be a small garden. On both sides of the Great Hall in the anfilade followed rooms one by one. Also, from the hall or foyer the rooms on both sides were organized into the anfilade. As for the wings, the principle of the anfilade was not fully respected. The household entrance was located in the left end (Fig. 4).

The hall and hallway are fairly spacious rooms (as opposed, for example, to Ungurmuiža) and it also has its own representation meaning. The lightings in both sides of the main entrance and the relatively comfortable, not pressed location of the stairs in the room prove it. From the hallway to the left, we can come in a large room which could have the role of representation, it had two windows and from it you could come in the later so–called Eclectic Hall. In the first half of the 19th century or in the middle, this room was divided into two parts, thus, dividing the historic oven–in each room half of it.

From the hallway or hall to the right there was even a larger room with two windows which, undoubtedly, had the meaning of representation. From the Great Hall on both sides, the rooms were arranged by the anfilade principle. On the right, going through one room there was seen the so–called chapel, presumably made in the second half of the 19th century, on the left – the Eclectic Hall. The second floor was probably built party or inhabited only during the summer months.

Carpentry testimonies

In a series of rooms there was preserved a 19–35 cm wide plank floor, considered to be a valuable testimony of carpentry of those times. But two other rooms impressed with their floor cover in the compositional and carpentry performance. The Great Hall floor boards consisted of an ornament in the center of which there was a circle, from all the perpendicular sides there were worked in three floor boards. Besides, in this room the floor boards were not grooved but pegged. The room around the perimeter was surrounded by two boards but the four central squares covered boarding which was perpendicular to the two side walls of the room. This floor board cover which refers to the 18th century is not very common for manor houses in Latvia and the houses of the rich townsmen. Something similar can be found only in Riga, in the Mentzendorff house.

In turn, the floor of the Eclectic Hall was covered by an oak parquet created in an ornamental design. The floor of the room around the perimeter was surrounded by two boards, in its center there were six squares through which the floor was divided into twelve larger squares. These boards were arranged in such a way that they all were mutually perpendicular. It should be noted that this unique parquet over time was covered and its coverage was countless times recolored. It was found only during probing.

A surprise occurred in dismantling of quite a historic wooden floor covering in another room. Under this cover there were ancient floor boards with a decorative paint. The floor of the room around the perimeter was painted dark brown in a band which from the rest of the floor plane, which was painted light brown, was separated by a black line. In the manor house of Ķirbiži, a series of historically valuable door leaves has been survived, one of them is in the main entrance (the inner eaves), attributable to the first half of the 19th century reflecting the classicism style.
They are divided in two door panels from which the top one is rectangular but the bottom close to a square.

Both door panel surfaces are grooved but the top door panels between the grooves are with a fold. Between the two door panels there is an ornamental spiral ornament that somewhat resembles the spiral hook hinges of this door in the horizontal position. The already mentioned hook hinges and bolt of the door have survived to our days. The door that has survived to our days which dates back to the 18th century and shows that the door leaves over time have been changed, has metal parts. Unique door leaves from the 18th century have survived in one of the upstairs rooms. They are wide, four rectangular panel doors. Such panel division is rare and unusual. The leaves are hinged up in magnificent spiral hook hinges the surface of which is richly decorated. The artistic design of these hinges is very similar to the front door leaf hinges of the manor house but the details vary slightly as an individual blacksmith's work (Fig. 5).

The stairs to the attic floor were located in the traditional place of all the 18th century manor houses. For comparison, there can be named the manor house of Ungurumiţa, the manor house of Tăşu estate, the manor houses of Liepupe and Katvari where the staircase is located on the left side of the hallways. The stair railings are believed to be rebuilt in the second half of the 19th century but the beginning of the stairs pillar and bishops are said to be the original, from the mid–18th century.

Initially, in the 18th century, on the first floor of the manor house there were six pane windows which by this division but made later in some places have survived up to our days. In the main façade, the two windows on both sides of the main entrance in the beginning of the 20th century, were transformed—enlarged, creating rounded upper corners and panes divided according to the style of those days. In the decor there is used the so-called capital of Riga.

Ovens and elements of the heating system

During reconstruction and restoration of the manor house, there were found two parts of a tile, after which it may be concluded that in the first half of the 18th century, there was located an oven in the manor house, the tiles of which were decorated with a painting in the cobalt technique complementing the plastic decor (Fig. 6). In the center of the tile, there was a shape imitating embossed, baroque panels.

The paintings were in the corners of the panel (floral presentation), coloured was one of the panel profilings but in the center there is likely to have been a scene with some plot. It is not possible to tell what was depicted on other oven tiles glazed black with embossed ornaments and a storyline scene. This tile stove should be attributed to a later time—the second half of the 18th century.

The stoves having served their time and by the indoor furniture changes seemed outdated, they were replaced by new, according to the aesthetic and comfort requirements of the time. One stove was from the classicism period—its corners were emphasized by a decorated projection in the form of a lizen but in particular there was decorated the mantlepiece. At the top of it there was a palmete motive but at the bottom—alternatively chained rosettes and profiled parallelepipeds. A number of ovens and separate tile finds give evidence of the heating system changes in the eclectic period. One of them is a white glazed tile oven that has a simple profiled cap and a mantlepiece similar to it with a pediment close formations in the upper part.

There is no doubt that in the manor house there were placed the well-known Riga company’s I.C. Zelm tile stoves as evidenced by the found tile fragments with the brand’s name. Probably, the same firm had produced tiles for the oven in the so-called Eclectic Hall. Tiles of this oven were glazed dark brown with an embossed ornamentation. The stove or the flue door are quite interesting details in the 18th, 19th century estate houses. Such details were also found in the manor house of Kīrbīži. In the centre of one door there is a chariot with horses. In the background, this circle is crossed by arms attributes—poleaxes and spears. In the door corners, there were acanthus leave twining. The door probably came from Russia as similar door was accidentally found by the author of this article in 1978, while visiting ruins of the just burnt manor house of the Vecate estate. In the reverse side of the oven

Fig. 5. Hinge of the internal door [Source: drawing by the author]

Fig. 6. An oven tile from the manor house of Kīrbīži estate. The first half of the 18th century [Source: drawing by the author]

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Separate finds

During reconstruction of the manor house when the structure was seen—above the cellar cover, in the interfloor coverings, in the removal of covering of the attic wall to place a new insulation, etc., there were found several interesting and unique evidences.

About the agricultural product duties to the estate in the 18th century tells an interesting find in the attic of the manor house. They were five wooden rods of different length the meaning of which at first even very erudite specialists were unable to explain. As it later turned out, they were the duty accounting receipts, dated with the years 1737, 1767 and later years. Their one end was made a little thinner to be able to write the name of the estate and the year on it. In one end of the rod, there was a hole with a string loop threaded in it in order to hang this item on the wall for the sake of the order. On the rod, the length of which was different—an average of 65 cm surface there were carved stripes with different slopes, crosses, etc. And for a non-knower it was associated with ornamentation. But each cut line, probably meant either cereals or flax or one of the other products. One such receipt was in the estate, the other with the peasant or fisherman's homestead owner who had paid his duties. Why wasn’t it done in writing? It should be borne in mind that one part of the people did not know how to write and this kind of documentation was simpler. It took some time and the peculiar wooden receipts could be thrown away but the man of those times no longer needed these things but he didn’t throw them out as simple as we are doing it today. They were placed in the attic—who knows, maybe, one day they will be useful—and forgotten by the time when during survey of the manor house they again saw the light of day, this time as a unique things that tell the story of the life of the estate for nearly 250 years ago (Fig. 7).

An interesting testimony was also found on the second floor of the manor house, in the central room on the courtyard side. In order to glue wallpaper on the logwalls, at first they had to be covered with newspapers or other similar paper material. At Ķirbiži, instead of newspapers, there were used not yet bounded together pages of the book of songs, believed to be from the mid–19th century. Then, the glued wallpaper—over the course of time in several layers but in the end they were glued to slats of wood and the walls were plastered. It was possible to see all these layers in 2006 when the wall probing was done. The cultural layer is not conceivable without crockery fragments. Such ones were also found in the manor house of Ķirbiži and they belonged to four different plates and one cup. One of the plates was decorated with an ornamented border, another could represent the Meissen porcelain factory, judging by the cobalt blue ornaments, yet another was decorated with blue-green drawing and supplemented by an embossed decoration. In turn, the cup as it can be judged by the four fragments was decorated with storyline scenes with buildings and cattle near the forest, in an unusually bright greenish hue.

Interior

The most valuable discovery in the interior there was in the room on the second floor when while removing the ceiling finish of a later time, there were revealed fantastic mid–18th century ceiling paintings which comparatively to other places were in a pretty good condition. The ceiling plane of the room was dividend in six parts by open cover beams. In the middle of the ceiling, on both sides of the middle symetric beam, there was highlighted a square shaped, profiled cornice imitative a baroque square where the decorative composition of the cross beam was different. What was in this square which exposing the ceiling was tinted in a red–brown shade is not known. The ceiling beams were especially richly painted. A geometric ornament was changed by the achantus leaf twists, with rather naive spirals trying to link all this in a single composition.

The boards placed between the berams were painted with spiral shaped ornamentation which in the ends were supplemented by twists of plant leaves (Fig. 8). These ornamentations were not the same everywhere, their painting solution was different.
reconstruction works. On a grey background there were depicted achantus leaf twists in a baroque frame, grape leaves’ twists and other motives.

Supposedly, the lobby wooden walls were covered with marble but in some other first-floor rooms, after removal of the plaster, there was revealed a blue–grey shading. An interesting discovery was the wallpaper of later periods, also the Soviet time finishing in the central rooms of the second floor. It was covered in several layers and in some places well–preserved. In the wallpaper shading dominated the reddish, brownish, greenish–grey tones. The wallpaper is related to the 19th century.

The Eclectic Hall is related to the second half of the 19th century. The room ceiling was covered by cassetted wooden ceiling based on consoles. The walls of the room were rather high covered with panels, the bottom of which was covered with panels but at the top as vertically arranged staves in a frame. A profiled cornice concluded the panel at the top. In a single artistic composition there were made the door portals and the door leaves. In the portal there were used grooved bands, positive brilliant rusts but in the supraports – at the panel bottom placed panel motives linking them with the ceiling plane ornaments.

The restoration and reconstruction works of the manor house have been finalized. All the cultural and historical values as possible have been saved. The environment has been arranged and supplemented with new elements. Unfortunately, there is gone the housing situation which we can see in the land division plan of 1920’ies (Fig. 9).

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INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHOR:
Kopsavilkums. 2006. gadā sākās Ķirbiţu muiţas atlīšanās un kultūrvēsturiskā izpēte. Šī muiţa kopā ar zuduo Bīstera muizju bija sens fon Aderkas dzimtas pārvalde, kas tai piederējās vairāk kā 400 gadus.


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