

About the Expression of Masonic Ideas in the Estonian Architecture Scene in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries

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Summary

Abstract: Connection between Freemasonry and Palladianism. Iconography between Freemasonry and architecture. Dessau *Philantropin* school and impact on Estonian and Livonia manor culture and on park design. Typical portrait of a Freemason of the Enlightenment era – Otto Friedrich von Pistohlkors and his Palladianistic manor house Rutikvere.

The roots of the new Freemasonry can be found in England and Scotland. Freemasonry reputedly developed from guilds of masons. In 1717, the members of four London masons' lodges joined into one Grand Lodge, becoming the umbrella organisation for the entire Freemasonry movement in Europe. According to another version, the roots lie in late medieval Scotland where, after the Protestant conversion, a number of universities were opened and the share of the educated middle class subsequently increased. Some gathered in 'science clubs', which developed into research associations and Freemasonry lodges typical of modern times. Scotland is the only area where the Freemasons' lodges have been openly operating since 1718, and the movement is still going strong today.

Freemasonry should be regarded as a phenomenon of the 18th century: an intellectual movement, beyond nations and state borders, within the Enlightenment. In two countries – France and the German states – the En-

lightenment and the Freemasonic movement are seen as largely coinciding, because the great Enlightenment figures Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, Voltaire, Denis Diderot, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Friedrich Schiller and others were also Freemasons. The requirements of brotherhood, charity and high morals characterised the Freemasons everywhere. Belonging to a Freemason lodge in the 18th century was a sign of independent thinking – the boldness necessary to oppose the authority of the Church, and the political maturity to understand that the previous social relations in society had exhausted themselves. The Enlightenment required a new type of social communication: open discussion, polite social behaviour and tolerance; this form of communication was used by the Freemasons in dealing with one another in their lodges. The Freemasons' cosmopolitanism meant a chance to be a guest in other European lodges while studying or travelling. The lodges offered information, brotherly treatment and material support.

Juri Lotman pointed out two trends in the development of Freemasonry: the first was connected with the emergence of democratic ideas in the 18th century, and it aspired to enlightenment and equality – co-operation between different social groups aiming to move towards truth and light. This trend did not include the closeness, elitism or mysticism characteristic of the second trend. It is essential to stress that the history of Freemasonry can roughly be divided into two parts: rational and open, i.e. enlightened Freemasonry, and the mystical-occult branch. The latter has often caused Freemasons to be seen as a speculative secret organisation.

The current article focuses on the ideas of the 'enlightened' Freemasonry and the aim is to introduce the spread of their ideas in

the Estonian architectural culture of the late 18th–early 19th centuries. Many influential people belonged to the Freemasons’ organisations, whose activities were crucial in improving the architectural outlook and life environment in Estonia and Livonia. Architects, master builders and artists moved in the sphere of influence of Freemasonry as well. The present article suggests another approach that helps us to see new ways of explaining and interpreting already familiar works of architecture. As the relations between Freemasonry and architecture have not yet been examined in Estonia, the current short article only manages to point out some of the more significant problems and persons, which will open up new research perspectives in this area.

Connections between Freemasonry and Palladianism

In 1723, J. Anderson wrote and published the Freemasons’ constitution in London, *The Constitutions of the Freemasons, containing the History, Charges, Regulations of that most Ancient and Right worshipful Fraternity. For the Use of the Lodges*. The document describes the traditions and laws of Freemasonry, gives the addresses of the lodges and lists of masters. From the point of view of architectural history, it is significant that the constitution also noted the architectural preferences of the Freemasons. They turned back to the style of Augustus-era Ancient Rome, as people at that time could appreciate the geometry of the buildings and historical styles (what they had in mind was the architectural legacies of Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece and Sicily). The legacy of the architect Vitruvius, who worked during the time of Augustus, was restored by Andrea Palladio and was brought to England by Inigo Jones. The Freemason Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of

Burlington, was considered the best architect of the early 18th century. A popular concept should be revised here, namely that the triumph of neo-Palladianism in Great Britain in the early 18th century is associated with the second-generation Whig aristocrats who rejected the old Stuart-era monarchy and supported the Hanover dynasty, choosing to express their political views via the neo-Palladianism evident in the synthesis of Platonism and Protestantism. A significant role in the development of British neo-Palladian aesthetics was also played by the ideas of the Freemasons.

Iconography between Freemasonry and architecture

Metaphorically, the Freemasons used elements of architecture in order to impart moral values. In their buildings, the amateur architects-Freemasons expressed the society’s aspirations towards ideals, balance, harmony and clarity, which could be conveyed in architecture by distinct geometrical bulks and elements borrowed from Egyptian and Ancient Roman architecture. An illustrative example here is the Freemason’s certificate awarded to Gustav Adolf von Stackelberg in 1797 by the *Loge Royal York de L’Amitié (Royal York zur Freundschaft)* in Berlin. The certificate includes numerous architectural symbols. Analysing the design of the Freemasons’ certificates, there is an association with the interior design of manor houses in Estonia in the second half of the 18th century, where wall panels, arches spanning doorways, and stoves are decorated with scenes showing putti with various attributes. As the Freemasons’ symbols are not straightforward, the best way to express them is via halls and salons adorned with relevant decor elements, and the sculptural forms of parks. In the artistic analysis of Estonian manorial com-

plexes, we should, thus, also consider the Freemason background of their owners. Among the grandest mansions of the era, where the owners belonged to lodges in Tallinn, were Freemason-owned estates, e.g. Rägavere, Mõdriku and Vana-Vigala.

Impact of Freemasons' ideas on the shaping of human environments

One of the main aims of the open and enlightened Freemasonry was charity. On the initiative of Prince Leopold III Friedrich Franz von Anhalt-Dessau, a study and instruction establishment called *Philantropin* was opened in 1774 in Dessau; it was meant for children of both the nobility and the bourgeoisie. The school was headed by the liberal German educational figure Johann Bernhard Basedow. *Philantropin* educated a number of children from Estonia, Livonia and Kurland. For example, the list of Dessau students includes the sons of the manor lord of Rõngu, Count Ludwig Wilhelm von Mannteuffel, and the sons of Ludwig von Mengden, Benedictus Andreas von Helmersen, the Tõstamaa manor lord, and the Ropka manor lord's son, Count Paul von Sivers. The von Igelström, Korff and Viettinghoff families sent two sons each to the school. Comparing the listed representatives of the noble families with, for example, the lists of Freemasons active in the early 19th century in Riga and Tallinn, many names are repeated there, e.g. von Zoege-Mannteuffel, von Viettinghoff, and von Korff. In 1779, Freemasons from Riga also visited *Philantropin* and established several schools for poor children, according to the same principles, in Riga.

Wörlitz was the place where the first English park in continental Europe was established. The parks of this 'Garden state' were divided into two types – those for beauty and those for practical usage, because uniting the

beautiful with the useful was the leading idea of the Enlightenment era, both in education and in life in general. Some have seen Freemason allegories in the park design in Wörlitz, e.g. in the design of the sphinxes at the entrance of the Georg garden, in the Doric style monoptere designed in 1794 by K. von Erdmannsdorff, imitating an ancient Temple of the Sibyl in Tivoli, and in the grottoes-temples of Vulcanus and Aeolus, which are seen as allegories of Fire and Air.

We draw a parallel here between the Wörlitz park design and the parks in Eleja and Alūksne manors in Latvia, as both owners – J. F. von Medem and H. von Viettinghoff – were Freemasons. The Wörlitz park design and the ideas of the Dessau *Philantropin* school certainly had an impact on Estonian and Livonia manor culture and economy, primarily on park design.

The ideas of improving society introduced by the Freemason movement were evident in the first academic society established in 1795, the Livonian Practical and Economic Society, whose members included several prominent Freemasons, e.g. Peter Heinrich Blanckenhagen and Count Ludwig August Mellin. The progressive-minded noblemen elected Georg Friedrich Parrot as head of the society, and he was the one who drew up the first programme, or plan of action. G. F. Parrot was extremely capable and quite a new type of person in our cultural space, and his vigorous social activities reflected the most advanced ideas of the Enlightenment, which aspired to improve the human environment and advance education. This is evident in the design of his personal seal, with the word VERITAS, which contains a pair of compasses underneath. Secondly, the seal made after the re-opening of the University of Tartu shows a pyramid, sphinx, ladder, a pair of compasses and other Freemasonic symbols

which, considering the heyday of the movement, were sufficiently eloquent visual sources to allow us to interpret the two first decades (1802–1822) after the re-opening of the university in terms of enlightened Freemasonry.

Typical portrait of a Freemason of the Enlightenment era – Otto Friedrich von Pistohlkors

A typical representative of an enlightened Freemason is the Baltic German nobleman Otto Friedrich von Pistohlkors (1754–1831), with Scottish roots, who as an amateur architect redesigned his own mansion. In 1798, he completed the plan for a new main building. The design shows a neo-Palladian country house, with four Ionic pillars marking the front facade (considering von Pistohlkors's Freemasonic background, this is the symbol of Wisdom). We can draw a parallel here with the early 18th century British architectural culture, where an amazing number of amateur noblemen-architects worked during Lord Burlington's time. J. Harris emphasises that this was a very British phenomenon and the term 'amateur' had no derogatory shade of meaning at all. The same process occurred in Estonia in the late 18th–early 19th centuries, raising the question: how significant was the role of a master builder in completing a building, considering that the main concept was provided by the nobleman himself?

Around the manorial complex, Pistohlkors designed an English park. There are still signs of a canal system, several rows of exotic coniferous trees were planted behind the main building, and a splendid view of the surroundings opened from a multilayer hill where there probably used to be a pavilion. Besides, he was a keen botanist, maintained an arboretum at his manor and introduced new plant and tree species. He also published *Domes-*

tic Tree Species in Livonia and the Botanical List of Their Different Species.

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