

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH OF NĪTAURE MANOR

Jānis Zilgalvis

Latvian Academy of Sciences, Latvia

Abstract. The manor of Nitaure (Nitau) is located in Cesis County, where the roads to Riga, Sigulda, Piebalga and Ieriķi meet. The village of Nitaure began to develop only after 1887, when separate plots of land were separated from the manor for residential purposes. This time, however, the subject of research is the manor house and its owners, as well as the park, which, tidy and well-kept, delights not only the local residents. The history of the manor is closely linked to the von Fermor and von Stenbock-Fermor families. Research into the history of the manor is topical, as it is rich in events that have taken place throughout the ages. There is also a lot of evidence in the archives and other historical material.

Keywords: protection and preservation of architectural and cultural heritage, parks and gardens

Introduction

In this picturesque corner of Vidzeme, through which the Mergupe River runs, a group of buildings typical of a Latvian rural settlement can be found in one place, forming an image of the environment and landscape that has been preserved over time. These include the Evangelical Lutheran Church (1762–1769), the rectory (19th century), the ruins of the Order's castle (15th century), which have already been studied several times, the parish house 1, the mill and the manor house with a park and some outbuildings. The manor house is not an outstanding architectural monument, as it has been extensively rebuilt over time. However, it once reflected well the artistic style, taste and life of its time. It was surrounded by the rest of the manor centre, the park with ponds, and the environmental and landscape elements that corresponded to it. The Gentlemen's House is also a witness to all the events that took place here - grey everyday work, colourful festivities, passionate love, sadness and hope. It is also no stranger to the 1905 riots and the misery that followed. Perhaps that is why it is worth looking into the past of Nītaure Manor, and trying to conjure up for us what no longer exists and perhaps never will.

History and Owners

In 1759, the Russian Empress Elisabeth Petrovna (reign 1741–1761) granted the Nitaure manor together with other manors (Annenhof, Martzen and Moritzberg) to General Count Wilhelm Georg von Fermor (1702–1771) as a reward for his participation in the Seven Years' War². He came from a small family of Scottish nobility. He began his career in the service of Tsar Peter I of Russia (reign 1682–1725) and was promoted to the rank of colonel in 1725. He successfully participated in several battles in Europe and also in the East. By 1740 he was already Commandant of Viborg, and from 1746 Lieutenant-General and head of the building chancellery in St Petersburg. In 1751 he was appointed Governor-General of St Petersburg, Finland and Novgorod. In 1757 he was promoted Field Marshal, in 1758 he was created Count. He was admitted to the matriculate of the nobility of Vidzeme at the Landtag in 1759 [3]. In 1762, W. G. von Fermor was retired and the general was able to spend his old age in a quiet corner of the Vidzeme countryside. He chose Nitaure as his place of residence from the manors he received. Prestige and the desire to create a place for himself and his descendants to live in the best style of the time led him to build a manor house. The aim of the study is to summarise the solutions of the architectonic-historical construction of the manor and the compositional structure of the park. It includes the following

tasks:

- research of the archives of the Barons Stenbock-Fermor family, owners of Nitaure manor;
- assessment of the architectural stylistics of the existing and lost parts of the manor house;
- study of the compositional structure of the park.

The comparative method, based on archival material, is used to study the current and historical functional and compositional structure of the manor complex, considering the current situation of its functional circulation.

The work is believed to have begun after 1762. The earliest known depictions of the new manor house are drawings by J. K. Brotze from 1796 [4]. Other buildings are depicted next to the residence of W. G. von Fermor, such as the household servants' organ, the master's house, the barn, the cattle shed, etc. Gradually, a park was also created, first in French regular, later in English landscape. In the drawings by J.K. Brotze, the manor house was different from the one we see now. It was a two-storey building with a steeply pitched roof, the ends of which were partly chamfered. In the centre of the long facade was a three-bay bay with a triangular pediment and a Baroque double staircase leading to the ground floor, as the building had a high plinth. The corners and sides of the bay were decorated with rosettes. The architecture of the building can be attributed to the late Baroque period in Vidzeme [5]. However, it differed from other manor houses of the period whose construction is attributed to the Riga builder Johann Andreas Haberland, such as the manor house at Liepupe Manor (Pernigel).

The Count did not live alone in the newly built house. Already in 1738 he was married to Dorothea Elisabeth von Bruce (1714–1762). They had two children, the later Count Wilhelm (William) Georg von Fermor (1749–1828) and Zara Eleonora (1740–1818), who married Countess von Stenbock. Her husband was Count Jakob

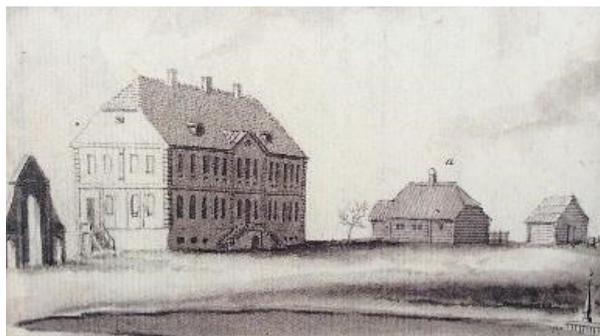


Fig. 1. Nitaures manor house. Drawing by J. K. Brotze, 1796 (fragment)



Fig. 2. Jakob Pontus Magnus von Stenbock [internet resources]



Fig. 3. JPortrait of Zara Eleonora von Fermor (1740 - c.1818). Ivan Vishnyakov, 1749. St Petersburg Academy of Arts Museum [internet resources]



Fig. 10. Maria von Stenbock-Fermor, b. Countess Kropotkin [internet resources]

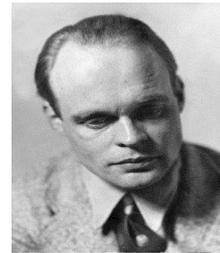


Fig.11. Alexander Stanbock - Fermor [internet resources]



Fig. 4. Portrait of Wilhelm (William) Georg von Fermor (1749 - 1828). Ivan Vishnyakov. 1759. Museum of the St Petersburg Academy of Arts [internet resources]



Fig. 5. Portrait of Wilhelm Georg von Fermor. Alexey Antropov. 1765. St Petersburg Academy of Arts Museum [internet resources]



Fig. 6. The tomb monument of Countess Dorothea Elisabeth von Fermor in the Lutheran Church in Nitaure. Drawing by J. K. Brotze, 1796



Fig. 7. The tomb monument of Count Wilhelm Georg von Fermor in the Lutheran Church in Nitaure. Drawing by J. K. Brotze, 1796

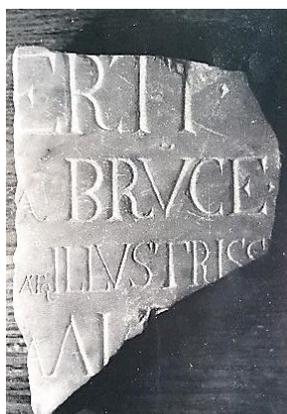


Fig. 8. A fragment of the tombstone of Dorothea Elisabeth von Bruus from the Lutheran Church in Nitaure [photo by the author, 1978]



Fig. 9. The graves of the Count's descendants and relatives preserved in a special compartment in the Nitaure cemetery. During the Soviet period, they were periodically and cruelly vandalised, but now the remaining monuments have been cleaned up [photo by the author, 2023]

Pontus Magnus von Stenbock (1744–1824).

It is interesting to note that one of the greatest Russian painters of the time, Ivan Vishnyakov (1699–1761), immortalised both of the Count's children on canvas when the family lived in St Petersburg. Portraits of children and ladies occupy a special place in his oeuvre. They are painted with particular care and feeling, delving into the inner world of the sitter. The little Countess Zara Eleonora in 1749 was painted according to all the rules of an adult parade portrait, full-figured, in sumptuous dress against a background of heavy drapery and theatrical scenery. According to Tatiana Ilyina, a scholar of Vishnyakov's work, this painting is a jewel of mid-18th century Russian painting [6].

The death of his wife Dorothea Elisabeth in 1762 brought changes to the Count's life in Nitaure. In her memory, W. G. von Fermor had a new stone church built on the foundations of the Order's castle, instead of the old wooden church, and gave it Dorothea's name. The church also houses her tomb. A trapezoidal plaque with a finely moulded cornice was placed on the plinth, with the text in the central part and the family coat of arms below. The top of the monument was decorated with angel figures. The monument was made of marble. The text mentioned, among other things, that D. E. Bruce was born in St Petersburg and died in the manor of Moritzberg [7].

Shortly after the church was built in 1771, the Earl died. Like his wife, he had a tombstone erected in the church. The work of art represents the Classical period, when memorial sculpture flourished in Latvia. The text on the monument, translated from a drawing by J.K. Brosse and published by Vitolds Mašnovskis, reads as follows "Here, under this sacred stone, rest the mortal remains of Wilhelm de Fermor, the highborn husband of the most holy friend of the German Emperor, the Supreme Military Commander of Ruthenia, Governor of Smolensk, who was a hero in both public and military life. He was a knight of the Russian orders of St Andrew, St Alexander, the White Eagle and St Anne, heir to the manors of Nitaure, Moeres, Milgravis, Anna and Marciena. Born in Pskov on 27 September 1702, died in Nitaure on 8 February 1771. The last frontier of all – death" [8]. The monument was crowned with an image of a mourning angel with a shield at its foot.

The two von Fermor monuments were drawn by J. K. Broce in 1796 [9]. They are the only source of information about the works of art that perished during the war.10 However, during a visit to the church in 1978, when the floor of the parish hall was being changed, the author of these lines managed to find a fragment of a marble memorial plaque with von Bruce's surname underneath, right next to the altar. The fragment has been lost over time, but the photograph is also a unique testimony of sorts [11].

The passing of W. G. von Fermor marked the end of a period in the development of the Nitaure Estate in which architecture and art played a significant role. From then on, such times



Fig. 12. The Lord's House after its burning in 1905. Livlands Zerstörte Schlösser



Fig. 17. Plan of the Nitaures manor lands. 1885 - 1888. [Latvia State Historical Archive, 1679. f., descr. 194, p.134]



Fig. 13. The Gentlemen's House from the park side [photo by the author, 2021]

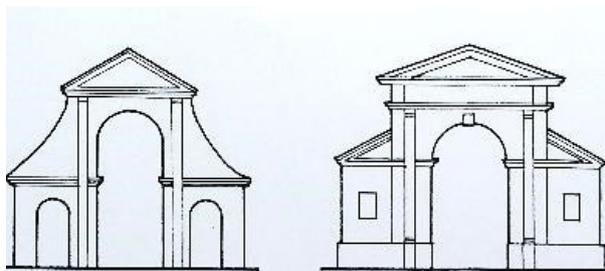


Fig. 18. Nitaure Manor Park Gate after the drawing by J. K. Brotze (left) and K. K. L. Hirschfeldt's Theory of Garden Art [drawing by the author]



Fig. 14. The Gentlemen's House from the park side [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 15. View from the porch of the manor house to the park [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 16. Parks [photo by the author, 2023]

of prosperity did not occur. Nitaure and other manors were inherited by the aforementioned son, also Wilhelm Georg (1823–1881), who married the daughter of General Count von Essen. They had no descendants. In 1785, W. G. von Fermor sold the Marzen estate, in 1786 he mortgaged the Mores estate and later also the Anna estate, which he had bought from his sister. After his death, the manor was inherited by Zara Eleonora's son, who added his grandfather's surname to his own and was called Stenbock - Fermor. In 1851, Lieutenant Count Friedrich von Stenbock - Fermor bought the manor from his relatives. From 1887 he lived independently in Riga. Only the manager P. Šmits stayed in the manor. After the Latvian agrarian reform, the manor was expropriated in 1920 to its last owner, Wilhelm Konstantin Stenbock - Fermor (1863–1937). His wife was Marija née Stenmor. Princess Kropotkin (1879–1958), sister of Prince Nikolai Kropotkin, a lady-in-waiting to Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna. Herbert von Blanches-hagen described V.K. Stenbock-Fermor in his memoirs in a peculiar way - he was distinguished more by his stiff dryness than by his count-like appearance [12]. W. K. Stenbock - Fermor was the father of the writer, screenwriter and politician Alexander Stenbock - Fermor. A. Stanbok - Fermor was born in 1902 in Nitaure, died in 1972 West Berlin. He fought in the Landwehr and later emigrated to Germany. He described his life in Nitaure Manor in his book *The Red Count*, published in Germany in 1973 [13].

In 1905 the manor house was burnt down. Only the walls remained, as seen in the Livlands publication *Zerstörte Schlösser* [14]. In the 1920s, after the Latvian agrarian reform, the building was renovated to house a school – new roof extensions, the central bay gable was removed and the layout was changed. It is not known exactly when the asymmetrical extension to the rear of the building, facing the church, was built. It was most probably in the second half of the 19th century, to which date the addition of the porch at the main entrance instead of the Baroque staircase can also be attributed. The building, renovated and reconstructed in the 1920s, has survived to the present day. It is the school that has brought this historic building to the present day and to the use it has enjoyed.



Fig. 19. Alley in the park [photo by the author, 2023]



Fig. 20. The lost barn near the manor house [photo by the author, 1978]



Fig. 21. The Lord's house and barn [photo by the author, 1978]



Fig. 22. Ruins of the gardener's house (?) [photo by the author, 1978]

The Park

The park has also been preserved to this day and, as already mentioned, is a pleasure to visit not only for Nitaurians, but also for visitors. At first it was a regular French-style park, but later it was transformed into a romantic landscape park. The analysis of the old manor parks shows that the Italian parks were characterised by their small size and narrow paths, as in Nitaure, while the French parks were character-

ised by flat terrain and gently sloping terraces leading to a pool of water, as in Nitaure [15]. Opposite the main entrance to the manor house is an avenue with a small circular pond in the middle. The park has benches with historic granite side supports, now restored. The ponds are also visible on the other side of the manor house, facing the church. J.K. Broce preferred to depict buildings in his drawings, but the park also contains a number of interesting features. One of them is a rather unusual structure, a free-standing gate at both ends of the manor house. It has three openings (the middle one is about twice as high) and artistic facade decoration. J.K. Broce writes in his comments on the drawings that the courtyard of the manor is not surrounded by a stone fence and the gate (portal) stands alone. It was apparently the entrance to the park or one of its parts, the so-called pleasure garden. Such gates were not uncommon in 18th-century estate parks in Europe. They are also to be found in K. C. L. Hirschfeld's *Theorie der Gartenkunst*, a popular book of the time, which served as a compendium of ideas and models [16]. According to K. C. L. Hirschfeld, gates can be used both as the main entrance to a garden and as a means of division. Looking at the Nitaure gate and one of the models, we can see the commonalities and also the differences. The Nitaure gate has a simpler decor and is closer to the Baroque style, but it is significant that the designers of our manor parks were no strangers to the most recent European findings. I would disagree that the ornate gates are not in keeping with the intended stone enclosure.¹⁷ Where could there have been an enclosure next to the manor house when it was and is closely linked to the park avenue and the surrounding natural environment, which is intimate, without expansive open spaces and distant vistas? It is also difficult to imagine the existence of a so-called enclosed garden in this location. Interestingly, the park was also created relatively late. For example, the commercial horticultural firm C. W. Schoch Nursery in 1898, 1896 and 1915–1920 included the customer from the Nitaures estate – Count von Stenbock, and the authorised recipient (gardener) was Jānis Bērziņš [18].

Manor buildings Little of the manor's historic outbuildings have survived to the present day. The land plan drawn up by the Reviser R. Mueller in 1885-1888 shows more than 15 larger or smaller buildings.¹⁹ Further away from the centre were the Big Inn or the so-called Yellow Inn on the old Riga - Pskov highway and a water mill, which today functions successfully as a guest house and inn. The barn almost next to the manor house, which was still in use in 1978, has been lost. It was a large, unwieldy building with a steeply pitched roof, the ends of which had been partially torn off. In 1978, the ruins were already occupied by the manor gardener's (?) house, a log building on a high rubble stone foundation.

Conclusions

1. The Nitaure Manor is not included in the list of national cultural monuments. It is a characteristic example of Vidzeme manor architecture from the second half of the 18th century, whose authenticity and historical patina, which has been partially lost over time, should be preserved.
2. The Gentleman's House is of great importance as part of the buildings of the manor centre, as it is an important element of the surrounding cultural and historical environment and landscape. This requires a serious approach to the management of the site and respect for the conservation areas. This includes not obstructing views of the landscape. This is particularly true of the compositional and spatial unity of the manor house, park and church. At present, anthropogenic pressures tend to erode the historically established spatial harmony.

3. Of particular value in Latvian cultural history is the connection with important personalities who lived and developed their quality of life on the territory of Latvia during the Russian Empire.
4. The study includes the author's first publication of photographs (1970) and provides additional unique information on the character and composition of the manor.
5. The material presented in the publication requires further research using digital scanning software, both for the location of historical footpaths in the park area and for the clarification of the historical layout of the rooms in the manor house before it was converted into a school, as well as for the interior design.

References

1. **Caune, A., Ose, I.** Latvijas 12. gadsimta beigu – 17. gadsimta vācu piļu leksikons. Rīga: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgāds, 2004., 353. lpp.
2. Jäger O. Weltgeschichte. 3. Band, Geschichte der neueren Zeit, Bielefeld un Leipzig: verlag von Belhagen & Klasing, 1909., S. 605., 608.
3. **Zilgalvis, J.** Grāfs Fermors un Nītaures skola. Māksla, 1996., 59. – 63. lpp.
4. **Johans Kristofs Broce.** Zīmējumi un apraksti. Latvijas mazās pilsētas un lauki. Rīga: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgāds, 2007., 4. sēj., 172. – 175. lpp.
5. **Lancmanis, I.** Vidzemes muižu arhitektūra. Rīga: Rundāles pils muzejs, 2015., 57. lpp.
6. **Ильина Т. Иван Вишняков.** Серия: Массовая библиотека по искусству. Ленинград: художники РСФСР 1980
7. Nītaures baznīcā atradies arī Dorotejas Elizabetes Brūsas māsas Natālijas Katarīnas Albrehtas (Albrecht), dzim. Brūsas, (? – 1761) kapa piemineklis. Zināms ir arī abu māsu tēvs – Roberts Brūss (1668 – 1720)
8. **Mašnovskis, V.** Latvijas luterāņu baznīcas. Vēsture, arhitektūra, māksla un memoriālā kultūra. Rīga: DUE, 2007., 3. sēj., 96. lpp.
9. **J. Ch. Brotze.** Sammlung Liefländischer Monumente... 6. sēj., 3. daļa, BM06188A, BM06205A
10. Pirmajā Pasaules kara laikā 1917. gadā baznīcu, kuras tornis it kā kalpoja par orientieri ienaidnieka karaspēkam, saspriecināja. To 1928. gadā atjaunoja pēc arhitekta P. Kundziņa (1888 – 1938) projekta. Atjaunotais dievnams iesvētīts 1928. gada 9. oktobrī. Skat. Grīnvalds J., Polis J. u. c. Iepazīsi Cēsu novadu. Cēsis: Cēsu rajona padome, 2001., 97. lpp., Mašnovskis V. Latvijas luterāņu baznīcas. Vēsture, arhitektūra, māksla un memoriālā kultūra. Rīga: DUE, 2007., 3. sēj., 87. lpp.
11. Autora personīgais krājums
12. **Blankenhagens H. fon.** Atmiņas no vecās Vidzemes. Klingenberga – Rīga. 1892 – 1913., 59. lpp.
13. **Stenbock – Fermor A.** Der rote Graf. Autobiographie. Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1973
14. Livlands zerstörte Schlösser: 1905 – 1906. 1. Teil: Riga und Wendenscher Kreis. 1906
15. **Antipovs, V., Zvirgzds, A.** Latvijas PSR vecie parki. Rīga: Zinātne, 1967., 146. lpp.
16. **Hirschfeldt, K. K. L.** Theorie der Gartenkunst, Leipzig: W. G. Weidmans Erben und Reich, 1780., Bd. 3., S. 125
17. **Johans Kristofs Broce.** Zīmējumi un apraksti. Latvijas mazās pilsētas un lauki. Rīga: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgāds, 2007., 4. sēj., 173. lpp.
18. **Pūka, T., Zunde, R., Zunde, I.** Latvijas dārznieki no sendienām līdz 20. gadsimta nogalei. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2010., 273. lpp.
19. Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (LVVA). Fonds 1679., apr. 194., lieta 134.

Author

In 1979, **Jānis Zilgalvis** graduates from the Faculty of Architecture of the Riga Technical University.

In 1990, he defends his doctoral thesis on the theme "The Latvian manor architecture from the second half of the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century. Since 1995, he heads the Department of Architecture of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection and from 2001 until 2014 – he is the dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of Riga Technical University. Since 2012, he is a full member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. He has more than 180 scientific and popular scientific publications, and he is the author of 21 books (for some books – a co-author). His main research directions are as follows: manor architecture and history of culture, sacred architecture, protection and utilization of the cultural heritage.

Kopsavilkums

Nītaures muiža (*Nītau*) atrodas Cēsu rajonā, vietā, kur sadalās ceļi uz Rīgu, Siguldu, Piebalgu un Ieriķiem. Nītaures ciema apbūve sāka veidoties tikai pēc 1887. gada, kad no muižas zemes tika atdalīti atsevišķi zemesgabali apbūvei. Taču šoreiz izpētes objekts ir kungu māja un tās īpašnieki, kā arī parks – kas sakopts un saudzēts priecē ne tikai vietējos iedzīvotājus. Muižas vēsture ir cieši saistīta ar fon Fermoru un fon Stenboku – Fermoru dzimtu. Tās izpēte ir aktuāla, jo muižas vēsture ir bagāta ar daudziem laikmetu gaitā noritējušiem notikumiem. Daudz liecību ir saglabājis arī arhīvu un citos vēsturiskos materiālos.