

1.7 Talking ruins: The legacy of baroque garden design in Manor Parks of Estonia

Authors

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ABSTRACT

The late 19th-century and early 20th-century 'grand era' of manor parks in Estonia coincides with a period when English gardening ideas dominated Europe. What is less recognised, however, is that manors in Estonia possess formal French-inspired gardens dating from the mid-18th century (the introduction of Baroque design in Estonia was delayed). Today, about 600 complete manor ensembles remain, retaining distinctive structural characteristics which date from the 18th-19th centuries. It is quite typical that in old parks of Estonia Baroque and English garden styles have merged, giving them a unique and original character. This research reports on archival study, field investigation and map analyses of 45 protected manor parks in Estonia. The analysis suggests that, despite the relatively short period (ca. 1730-1770), formal Baroque gardening was the dominant style practised in Estonia. The movement had a significant influence on local garden design, and on landscape planning more broadly. The Baroque elements in manor lands include formal geometric spaces, axial connections between landscape and buildings, orchestrated vistas and tree-lined roadways. Within the Baroque garden, formal plantings, pathways and water features were arranged in classical configurations. Finding physical traces of Baroque artefacts today is difficult because many manor parks were destructed during the Soviet era in the latter half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, archival materials and present-day visits to garden ruins in manor parks suggest that formal Baroque gardens dating from mid 18th-century manor lands were vivid and sophisticated ensembles of formal terrain, tree allées, sculptural elements and finely orchestrated water elements.

KEYWORDS

landscape design, park planning, manor parks, Baroque garden design, Estonia

INTRODUCTION

The Baroque garden design movement has given to mankind some of the most splendid and grandiose examples of spatial arrangement in the built and natural environment. For example, the legendary park at Versailles near Paris ranks amongst the world's greatest achievements in garden design. However, after the rise of ideals of equality one of the key ideologies of the French monarchy – formal Baroque design – fell out of favour during the 18th century. As the popularity of Baroque design waned in Western Europe, however, formal garden design continued to be practised in Estonian manor parks during 19th century by local German-influenced gentry.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 2,017 manors in Estonia (Rosenberg 1994). Today, about half this number survives, and approximately 400 manor parks are protected as natural or heritage areas. These protected manors are preserved (Sinijärv 2008) and they have been visited by experts who have conducted dendrological inventories (Sinijärv et al. 2007). For the most part, the manors and manor parks display 19th-century design characteristics of English landscape parks. Ideas governing manor park design, and the cultural features evident in manor lands, originate from two places. First, manor park design was imported to Estonia from northern and central Germany (Maiste 2005). Therefore, parallels with Germany's contemporary developments – the most famous English-style park being the one in Wörlitz – are useful for understanding the movement that inspired Estonian garden design (Rolf 2007). Second, local Estonian heritage is reflected in manor park design, celebrating local history and local culture. Features of Estonian origin in manor parks are especially evident from the late 19th century and early 20th century, the most splendid period of local manor culture, when existing manors were reconstructed and new manors were established. Shortly after, in 1919, manors were abolished in Estonia.

The late 19th-century and early 20th-century 'grand era' of manor parks in Estonia coincides with a period when English gardening ideas dominated Europe. Surprisingly, however, more than one-third of Estonian manor parks display traits of formal design. There were manor parks established in the 17th century, but unfortunately they are poorly documented and they have practically disappeared today. The major influence of the Baroque style arrived relatively late to Estonia, delayed by the Great Northern War and economic hardship in its aftermath. In one of the earliest examples of Baroque garden design in Estonia, Czar Peter I established Kadrioru park in formal Baroque style near Tallinn in 1718. In the 1740s and 1750s, various manor parks were founded in Estonia and many established formal garden elements (Hein 2007), while at the same time in Western Europe the era of formal Baroque park design came to an end (Turner 2005).

Although there are about 400 relatively well-preserved manor parks in Estonia, most appear today as park ruins. Twentieth-century events in Estonia – including World War I, World War II and the Soviet occupation – caused great losses within the parks as well as poor maintenance of manor land.

Now, to properly preserve the natural environments of manors, radical restoration efforts are needed. However, such restoration works face a number of challenges. For instance, it is often difficult to know whether formal garden elements, which appear to possess Baroque characteristics, are actually authentic

Baroque artefacts or are instead late 19th-century additions to the landscape. To distinguish between the two, it is helpful to identify which features characterise original Estonian Baroque-style gardens and to assess whether or not these features are still in evidence, even in a state of ruin, today. Determining the authenticity of garden elements that appear to date from the Baroque period is challenging for two key reasons. First, the original manor park plans and detailed design documents for manor projects are seldom available for study. In their absence, researchers usually rely on contemporary land-use plans. Secondly, the Baroque elements within manor landscapes are generally fragmented and in poor condition. These two challenges are interrelated, because without original plans it is difficult to identify the original elements of composition.

In this article, we provide a detailed study of Baroque elements of manor parks in Estonia, focusing on various elements of the built and natural environments, including spatial structure, design, characteristics and distinctive features. The research employs archival study, field investigation, and map analyses of 45 protected manor parks in Estonia (Heringas 2009). The objective of the research is to identify the formal, Baroque garden elements and develop trends about spatial construction and the relationship between manor landscapes and their surroundings. In most cases, due to a lack of primary research material, it is impossible to draw conclusions about single artefacts such as sculptures, vases, staircases, or pergolas. Instead, we focus on larger trends and broad design themes. In addition, the research provides an opportunity to better understand the evolution of landscape design in Estonia and the influence of manor landscape planning.

More broadly, this research situates the Baroque gardening movement in manor landscapes as a unique phenomenon in Estonian cultural history. Despite the relatively short period (ca. 1730-1770) that formal Baroque gardening was the dominant style practised in Estonia, it has had a significant impact on local garden design and landscape planning.

AN OVERVIEW OF ELEMENTS AND STRUCTURE OF HISTORIC ESTONIAN MANORS

The territory of Estonia was conquered by German knights during the 13th century. Gradually, a system of manors was developed, whereby large agricultural estates accounted for the majority of agricultural production. From the 17th century onward (and possibly earlier but no evidence remains), the manor centres, with economic and administrative functions, started to flourish as important sites of garden design. Manor owners established elaborate parks near the main manor buildings for their private enjoyment. Until the 19th century, manor parks remained almost the only form of garden design in Estonia.

In the design of manor parks, the most important model was formal Baroque gardening as developed to maturity in France during the 17th and 18th centuries. Thereafter, English-style landscape gardening was favoured in Europe. In Estonia, both styles were influential.

In a typical Estonian manor, a Baroque park space is formed by the connection of the front yard with the main building ensemble, or *cour d'honneur*, on the central axis (see figs. 1, 3). An entrance road provides access to the front yard. The largest part of the manor centre, or backyard, lay behind the main building. The structures are characterised by geometric order and well-defined forms of plants and plantations. Although there is a focus on physical order, the spatial structure of the park in some manors is not symmetrical nor does the central axis focus on the main building (Maiste 2005).

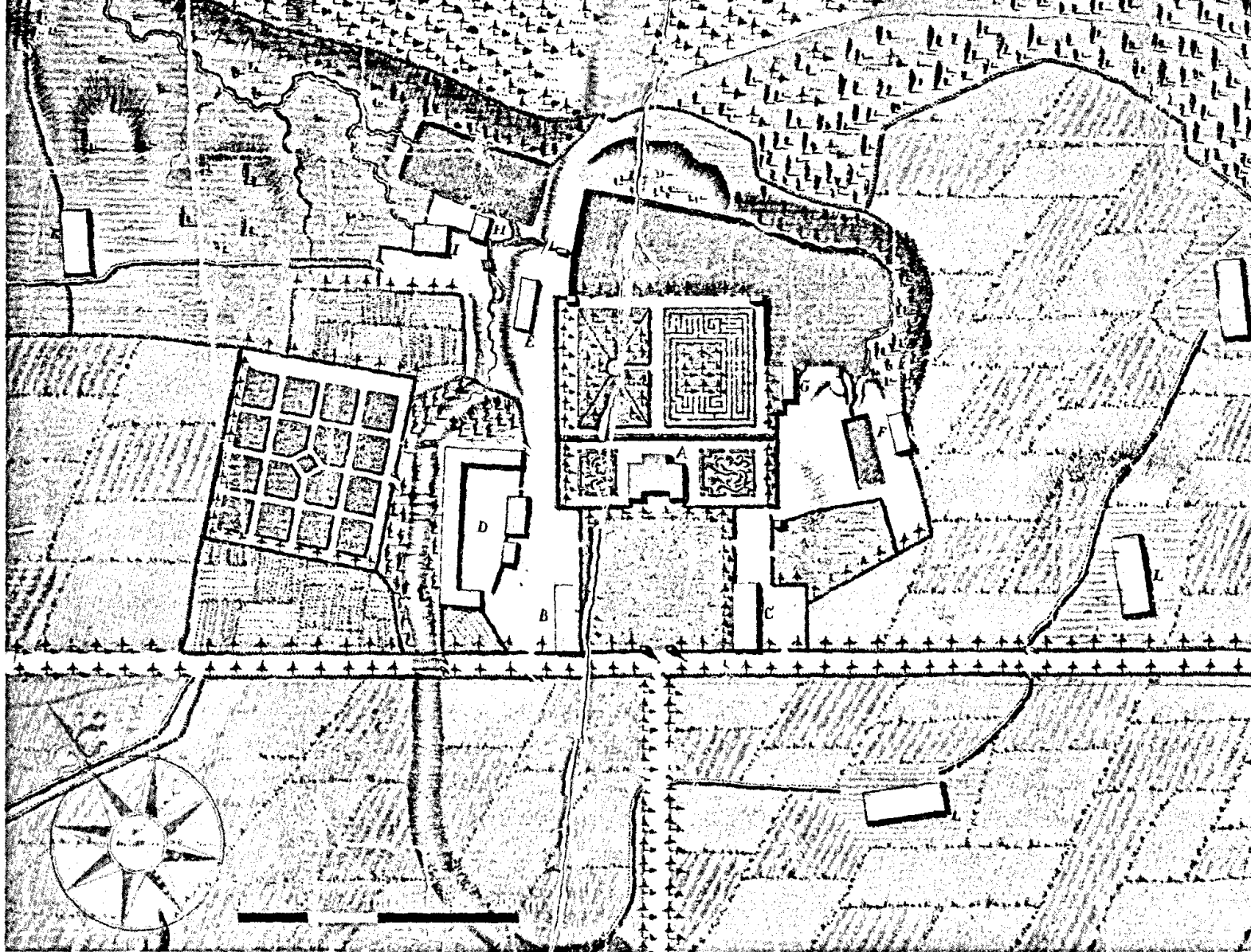


Figure 1. Plan of Palmse manor centre (1753). Source: Pahlen, G.F. 1753. Plan der Hoflage von dem Guthe Palms. See also full colour section in this book

The Baroque front yard of an Estonian manor complex is characteristically a spacious area, featuring a circular entrance road from the main gate to the main building entry. An open front yard provided opportunities for imposing views of the front façade; similarly, the view outward from the manor house windows, stairs and balconies focuses on the formality of the landscape design and its central axis. The front yards are usually among the best-preserved parts of the manor ensembles, having maintained their structure and visual and functional connections to the landscape. The largest part of a manor park is typically the backyard, with a formal garden and an adjacent landscape park. The design of these spaces was carefully planned. The backyard was typically divided symmetrically into smaller geometrical parts. It can be assumed that the backyards of Estonian manors, in the immediate vicinity of the main buildings, were more exclusively designed; typical surviving elements of backyards are allées of tree, terraces, water features and park boundary systems, such as stone walls.

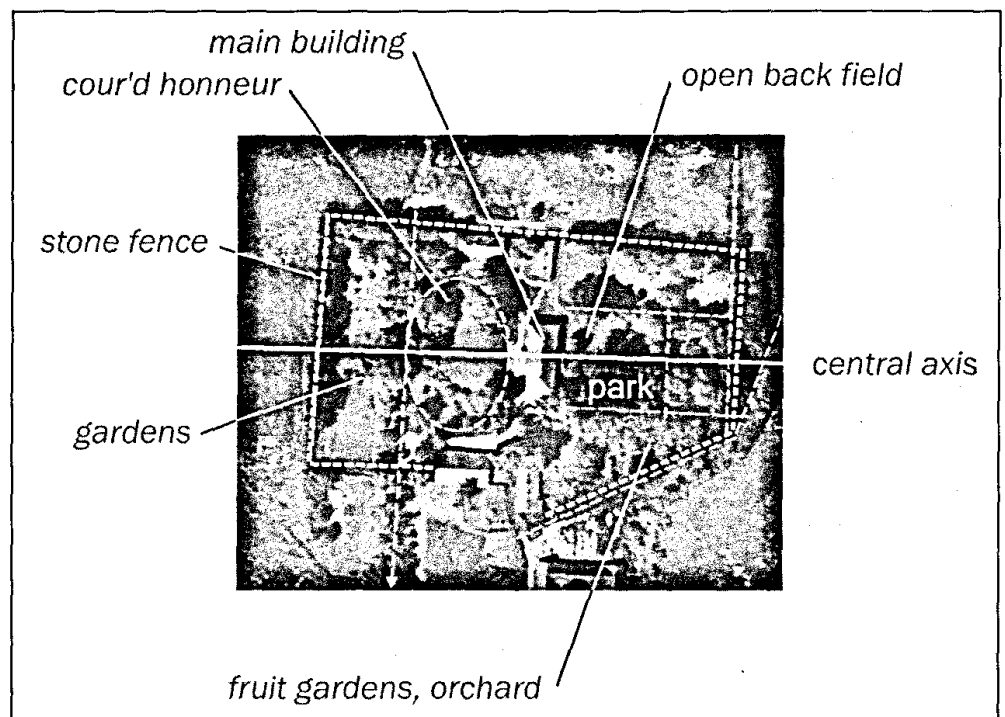
INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES ON GARDEN DESIGN IN ESTONIA

The oldest preserved manor landscapes in Estonia date from the second half of the 18th century – when Estonia was recovering from war and plague – during an important time for building and reconstructing manors (Maiste 2005). During this period, local garden design tended to follow one of two design philosophies. In the first, garden ensembles were created according to the above-mentioned Baroque principles of classical French formal design. This is evidenced by original landscape-planning documents produced in Estonia during the 18th century. The most famous is the 1753 plan of Palmse manor (see figs. 1, 2). In addition, there is evidence that classical French gardening literature was used by local garden designers in Estonia. These works – including André Mollet's *Le Jardin de plaisir* (printed in Stockholm in 1651) and Claude Mollet's *Théâtre des plans et jardinages* (printed in Paris in 1652) – were included in the library of the owner of Anija manor, Jacob Stael von Holstein (Hein 2007). The existence of newly-established Ba-

Figure 2. Palmse manor centre (1753).
Source: Plan of Manor Palmse 1753.



Figure 3. Schematic map of spatial composition of Vasta manor centre.
Source: Nurme 2007. See also full colour section in this book



roque gardens in Estonia was confirmed by contemporaneous travellers. For example, the well-known architect Johann Wilhelm Krause produced a number of sketches in the 1790s that clearly depict formal design principles and even single Baroque garden elements in manors in northern Latvia, which at the time formed, together with southern Estonia, the province of Livonia (Janelis 2009).

The second gardening method – an English-style landscaped park – spread throughout Europe during 18th century. In 1785, *Theorie der Gartenkunst* by Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld was published, which significantly influenced the design of Baltic German gardening (Nutt 2008). Various manor landscapes founded or reconstructed in Estonia during the last quarter of the 18th century and the early years of the 19th centuries, such as Vatla, Aaspere and Õisu, are Baroque in structure, however landscape elements, including winding paths, irregular ponds and varied terrain, are formed in typical English ‘picturesque’ landscape design.

In fact, the English gardening style was dominant in virtually all new manor landscapes established in Estonia after 1770 (Hein 2007); the pre-eminence of this style gave rise to several beautiful landscaped parks in the 19th century. Nevertheless, the formal style was still dominant in older manor centres, probably because manor centres were already set in 18th-century landscape design and favoured the symmetric relations of the buildings and the park typical of Baroque layout (Maiste 2005). Moreover, the landscape parks surrounding the manor centres had matured to their best by the mid-19th century, and the desire and will to radically rearrange them was understandably weak.

A study of existing plans, drawings and postcards suggests that the designers of manor gardens in Estonia were often more conservative – drawing inspiration from formal, classical structure – than landscape designers elsewhere in Europe. This claim is supported by the built form of several parks created in the mid-19th century; for example, the general design principles evident in manor gardens in Raikküla, Hummuli, or Purila, where the spatial configuration of park elements, especially those closest to manor buildings, has been inspired by the ideas of formal Baroque design. A unique trait from the second half of the 19th century is a mixture of both styles, which is evident in Estonia in late 19th century and early 20th century manor gardens (e.g. Taagepera) or reconstructed manor landscapes, e.g. in Kärstna or Olustvere.

There are several explanations for the popularity of formal Baroque gardening in Estonia. The use of regular *cour d'honneur* as late as in the 19th century cannot be explained by the late arrival of original ideas to Estonia. On the contrary, the idea of ‘freely flowing nature’ used in Germany in one of the first great English style parks in Wörlitz (Gerhard & Erfurth 2000) was almost simultaneously applied in Estonia in Vana-Vigala manor in 1766, when ‘*Der Englische Garten*’ was constructed (Hein 2007).

In addition, the use of formal Baroque garden elements in Estonian manors may be attributed to the introduction of techniques by international experts. For example, many Baltic Germans had family ties with building masters from Germany and, to a lesser extent, from Russia, Sweden and the Netherlands. For instance, the complex of Hiiu-Suuremõisa was planned by Swedish-French engineer Joseph Gabriel Destain (Särg 2006), Sagadi has been attributed to French-Italian-Russian architect Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli (Maiste 1983) and the largest Baroque-style park in Estonia, Kadriorg, was designed by the Italian architect Niccolò Michetti (Kuuskemaa 1985). The relationship between these designers and manors in Estonia demonstrate the great international mobility of landscape architects in the 18th century.

Although there are many examples of trained landscape-design professionals who planned manor gardens, the majority were laid out by the manor owners themselves, and the results reflect their knowledge, taste and views. For example, for a manor envisioned as a villa to be used as refuge from city life,

an owner's garden design may have promoted peace and tranquillity (see Ackerman 1993 for a thorough analysis of villas and gardens). These ideas connect the local park design to Western European ideals (Kuuskemaa 1985).

A detailed review of spaces within manor parks protected by the National Heritage Board of Estonia (Heringas 2009; Vaine 2009; Mihkelson 2010) reveals evidence of formal Baroque spatial construction in 150 of 293 manor gardens from the final decades of the 19th century (National Heritage Board of Estonia 2009). Certainly, not all sites date from the 18th century as they are partly a result of the later designs which illustrate the vitality of formal design. At the same time, we often see mixed-era design, especially in parks reconstructed at the end of the 19th century, where formal Baroque structures, English-style planting systems and historical details intertwine (Nurme 2009).

MANOR STRUCTURE AND ELEMENTS

The formal Baroque garden is a distinct element of the manor landscape due to its compact nature and integration – both visual and structural – with the built and natural composition, formed from carefully-chosen axial relationships. Due to the axial structures, manor parks are visible and often dominant in the cultural landscape. The ensemble core, formal garden and landscape elements that are compositionally connected within a typical manor can produce a dramatic visual impact. For example, in Suure-Lähtru, the length of the main road and viewshed along the central north-south axis of the park is 1,200 metres. From the main road, perpendicular intersecting side roads emanate east and west, which in turn provide views of 1,400 metres (Nurme 2009).

Usually, contemporary circulation systems in manor landscapes are focused on roadways established during the grand era of Estonian manors. Therefore, the roads approaching the manor centre from the outskirts are in most cases similar to the original planned circulation system, which makes it possible to observe the park in the landscape from the perspectives that the designers originally planned.

Tree allées line roadways that lead to focal points in the landscape; in addition, tree allées form the boundaries of components of the landscape, delineating the border, for example, of the formal garden from the landscaped park (see fig. 4). Usually, design motifs within this landscape have been preserved only in a fragmented fashion and therefore they are less readable today. However, there is evidence of topiary cuttings, which are a key feature of a formal garden. The study of parks in situ gives valuable information about 'invisible' elements (Järvela 2009); for example, a geo-radar technique has been used to detect buried pathways (Artes Terrae 2010).

In Estonian manor landscapes, low dry-stone walls or higher mortar stone walls often serve as boundaries. Usually, the landscaped park was separated from other sections by walls and gates. In many places, such walls have been preserved, along with occasional gateposts and gate structures.

Water features, including ponds and fountains, were carefully designed, using natural characteristics of the landscape, to be integral features of the garden. For example, a formal garden could include rectangular ponds, circular islands, or a pond system connected with canals (see fig. 5), e.g. in Elistvere (Map of Elistvere manor 1825) and Õisu (Maiste 2008; Map of Õisu manor 1908).



Figure 4 .Luke manor park and tree allées (2008). Photo by S. Nurme, Autumn 2008.

Figure 5. Õisu manor park and canal (2008). Source: Photo by S. Nurme, Autumn 2008.



Terracing the land was an important technique of Baroque garden design, however terraces divided with structural support walls – such as those in Luunja park (Map of Luunja manor 1827) – are quite rare. Most of the original terraces were formed from sloping sections of garden. On one hand this is an indication of Scandinavian influence, and on the other hand it shows relatively mature formal garden design. Stone walls make the garden boundaries more rigid and unnatural, while grass-covered slopes suggest less control and greater organicism.

Engravings, photographs and postcards depicting the former milieu of Estonian manors suggests that, at least during the second half of the 19th century, garden design techniques produced rich, vivid environments. The landscapes in the images depict picturesque views of wooden bridges, pavilions, sculptures and flowerbeds (Nurme 2009), suggesting that much of what people admired in European formal Baroque parks was evident in Estonian manor parks.

Unfortunately, finding physical traces of Baroque artefacts today is difficult because there was much destruction of the cultural heritage of manor parks during the Soviet era in the latter half of the 20th century. As a result of short-sighted practices and a lack of cultural awareness, many manor centres were subdivided into smaller plots, used as construction sites, or abandoned and laid waste. Therefore, today, there is unfortunately little hope of uncovering additional examples of Baroque artefacts in what appear today to be clumps of old trees surrounded by undergrowth that mark the old manor gardens and landscaped parks.

Based upon the compositional features of preserved manor parks and historical documentation of destroyed manor parks, we suggest that manor parks dating from the second half of the 18th century possess classical Baroque garden features, and such features are evident even today, more than a century after they were first established. The rise of manor culture after the Great Northern War enabled the creation of elaborate manor estates, which give distinctiveness to local landscapes. Road networks on manor lands, which unified the manor ensemble together with the orchestrated views of the landscape, gave shape to the manor land, thereby giving shape to the local Estonian landscape which is still visible today.

CONCLUSION

Formal Baroque gardens in Estonia (created between ca. 1730 and 1780), in their purest form, were based on classical Baroque garden design. Due to its late rise compared to Western Europe, the Baroque structures remained an essential part in the design of Estonian manor parks throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, regularity in garden design was never fully forgotten, which is evident in the landscape plans of 19th-century manor centres and may be observed in the parks today. It is difficult to determine how many Baroque gardens in Estonia are authentic, dating from the mid-18th century, and which were rebuilt at a later time using French garden design inspiration. As a result, our research allows us to describe the general spatial-design characteristics of a Baroque garden but we cannot fully articulate the detailed formal design when original garden design documents are not available.

Unfortunately, a lack of reliable archival material and a lack of opportunities to view preserved elements in gardens today prevent us from better describing the Baroque gardening period in Estonia. However, many manor lands today exhibit the essential values of Baroque gardens, and this provides opportunities to experience the elements of formal garden design that is still evident in the Estonian countryside more than 250 years after the gardens were established.

A formal Baroque garden was intended to sparkle like the contemporaneous music of Händel. Such gardens, characterised by grandeur and dramatic spaces linking manor centres with other manor features, such as a landscaped park, formed memorable views into the distance. Formal terrain, tree allées forming enclosing 'pillars' and finely orchestrated water elements contributed to the sophisticated ensembles. If a visitor still senses surprise, amazement, playfulness and joy when visiting an unreconstructed park – despite destructive physical transformations of historic landscapes during past centuries – then it is surely an authentic Baroque garden and its uplifting atmosphere prevails.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this research was presented at the First Landscape Archaeology Conference at the VU University in Amsterdam, sponsored by the European Geosciences Union, the Cultural Heritage Agency and the Royal Academy of Sciences in the Netherlands in January 2010. When this article was written, Daniel B. Hess was a Fulbright Scholar at Tallinn University of Technology, Tartu College, Estonia.

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