

JELGAVA PALACE HISTORY

Livonian Order's palace and the residence of the Dukes of Courland

Livonian Order's palace

The palace designed by F. B. Rastrelli stands in the place of the former medieval castle of the Livonian Order, the later residence of the Dukes of Courland. The town of Jelgava has developed from the Semigallian port and merchants' settlement, named „Jelgeb" (town) by Livs. In the early 13th century the most severe battles with the Order of the Brothers of the Sword took place in Zemgale. The Order was formed in 1202 to conquer the peoples of the Baltic region.

In 1265 when the regular campaign against Semigallians had failed, Konrad of Mandern, Master of the order, started to build a strong point – a castle on the peninsula created by the River Lielupe and its confluent Driksa. It is likely that the castle had already been completed when the chronicler Hermann of Wartberge first informed about it in 1266. He called the place „Mythow"; „Mitau", the German name for Jelgava, had been derived from this name.

The state of the Livonian Order was divided in districts administrated by komturs and bailiffs. Jelgava medieval castle was also Komtur's residence; already in 1271 the Jelgava Komtur Johann is mentioned in documents.

Armin Tuulse, the researcher of Baltic castles, held that the first castle in Jelgava had been a wooden one. It was built according to early patterns of order castles. The main emphasis was laid on fortified outer walls with separate buildings attached to them. As the castle was erected on the island, it belongs to the so-called water castles.

In the second half of the 13th century a new type of castles – convent houses - appeared in Latvia. Their architecture, close to monasteries, was derived from Eastern Prussia. A convent house consisted of a common bedroom or dormitory, a dining room or refectory, a chapel, a chapter house and Komtur's apartments. All these premises were located on the first floor, always forming a closed quadrangular building block together with the ground-floor household premises and storages. The inner yard was enclosed by a multi-storey gallery – an outer corridor connecting premises. Towers were standing on the corners of the building.

Eberhard von Monheim, Master of the Order, directed construction of castles in Jelgava and Riga according to this type in the 2nd quarter of the 14th century.

The newly built medieval castle in Jelgava was a rather small rubble, dolomite and brick building (30×35m) with four quadrangular corner towers topped by battlement and pyramidal spires. The entrance gate was located on the southern side, leading from the convent house to the fore-castle zone of fortifications enclosed by a timber fence.

The architecture of the Livonian Order castles was severe and simple. Window apertures crowned with pointed arches were usually the only Gothic elements found in the buildings' exteriors. Jelgava medieval castle silhouette was enlivened by the battle-

ment on top of the towers, rarely found in Latvia. The only remains of interiors are the few bricks from the ribbed vaults found during the restoration works in 1955 – 1961.

Jelgava medieval castle had to withstand the attack of the Lithuanian forces led by the Grand Duke Algirdas already in 1345. The fore-castle was burned down and the castle was captured but not demolished. The last attack was mounted against the castle in 1376; after that Jelgava medieval castle became a peaceful centre of administration. A village developed near the castle on the left bank of the River Lielupe. In the mid-15th century it had turned into a small town of about 450 inhabitants. The trade route leading from Lithuania to Riga through Jelgava fostered its development. In 1492, the Jelgava District was handed down to the Land Marshal of the Livonian Order, Commander-in-Chief of the Order forces.

In the mid-16th century Livonian states entered the period of break-up caused by the Livonian War (1558 – 1583) in which Russian army led by the tsar Ivan IVth defeated the Order forces at the battle by Ērgeme in 1560. Former Livonian rulers looked for new supervisors. The Livonian Order, Riga Archbishop, landed gentry of Vidzeme and Kurzeme chose Poland.

The foundation of Duchy of Courland The growing of Jelgava

On 28 November 1561, the *Pacta Subjectionis* was signed but on 5 March 1562, the representatives of the Livonian estates gave the oath of allegiance to Sigismund II August, the King of Poland, and Gotthard Kettler, Master of the Order, relinquished the Order's attributes of power to the Prince Radzivil, the representative of Polish-Lithuan Commonwealth, becoming the Duke of Courland (Kurzeme) and Semigallia (Zemgale). Until 1566 Kettler was also the administrator of Livonia (Vidzeme, Trans-Daugava Duchy) supervised by Poland, and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish army located in that territory. He had chosen Riga medieval castle as his residence where he lived until 1572, residing also in Kuldīga, Jelgava and Sēlpils.

Importance of Jelgava started to grow rapidly since the 1560s. In 1568, the diet (Landtag) accepted the constitution of the Duchy that envisaged to organize subsequent sessions by turns in Jelgava and Bauska. In 1573, Jelgava received the privileges of town. Besides St. Anna's Church of Latvian congregation, construction of the German Trinity Church was started in 1574 but the school building – in 1577. In 1573, the Duke's family spent a longer period in Jelgava castle for the first time. The list of servants and courtiers compiled on 20 January 1576 mentions 113 people. In 1578, the Duke Gotthard and his family moved to Jelgava.

The reconstruction of Jelgava medieval castle Jelgava Palace – the residence of Duchy of Courland

In the mid-1560s the Duke Gotthard had made to start the reconstruction of the Jelgava medieval castle. On 19 October 1571, the Courland Court Marshal Jurgen Preiss wrote to the Duke: "One gable made according to foreign examples iz almost completed and would please Your Grace. The graceful Prince and Lord can trust me that foreign gables would adorn the whole building very much".

It is likely these works relate to a small edifice with a tower, represented in the early 18th century Jelgava medieval castle pictures: gables mentioned by Preiss and decorated with volutes of scrollwork (rollwerk) ornaments are also visible. The most authentic depictions of Jelgava castle are found in the Royal Library in Stockholm; one of them was made by the Swedish fortification specialist Karl Magnus Stuart in the early 1703, the other – by the engineer Johann Lithen in 1702, commissioned by the Vidzeme Governor General, Count Erik Dahlberg.

This small edifice has been mistakenly described in sources as the Duke's tomb church already since the late 18th century, but in fact it had been a dwelling house, most likely built as a widow residence for the Duke Gotthard's spouse Anna, born the Princess of Mecklenburg. The building features analogies with the Mecklenburg architecture of that time.

The Duke's family vault was located under the castle church consecrated in 1582 and included in the castle complex. The main block ran parallel to the River Lielupe but the other one, was arranged in a right angle. It is likely that the prolonged, narrow (about 7 metres), two-storey river-side block was built only in the 1580s. The premises were arranged in one long row without a system of corridors. The river-side façade had 13 windows with a gate in the middle of the block.

In 1997 and 1998, the remains of the Duke Gotthard's residence were unearthed – a cellar premise with two piers and six cross-vaulted aisles. The premise is slightly irregular; its length is about 11,7 – 12,5 metres but the width – about 7,3 – 7,4 metres. There is one window in the cellar, overlooking the former castle courtyard, the single entrance to the cellar led from the same side. During the archaeological excavations of 2001 – 2003 led by Dr. Hist. Guntis Zemītis, researcher of the Latvian Institute of History, remains of the residence walls with rubble basement and several layers of the first-floor brick walls were discovered.

Remains of the castle courtyard cobblestones are found in the depth of 2,2 metres; the pavement was initially made of dolomite stones.

The stove tiles found during archaeological excavations indicate that the castle had been decorated with stoves similar to those in other castles of Kurzeme – Bauska, Dobeles and Sēlpils. The stove examples relate to the entire period of Kettler's reign, from the 2nd half of the 16th century to the end of the 17th century. In Duke Gotthard and Duke Friedrich's times rather simple, concave tiles were used; but there are also more splendid bowl-shaped tiles with arabesque and Moresque ornaments typical of late Renaissance and Northern Mannerism.

Jelgava Palace in the Polish – Sweden wars' time

After the Duke Gotthard's death the Duchy was divided between his sons. The younger Wilhelm took over the Kurzeme region with administration centre in Kuldīga, the elder Friedrich – the Zemgale region. In 1617 the Duke Wilhelm lost his sovereign's rights. His brother Friedrich became the Duke of entire Courland, and Jelgava – the capital of the united Duchy.

The Duke Friedrich continued construction of the castle. The river-side residence was extended westwards by adding a new block. Near the church a gate passage with a

large hall above it was built. Continuing the building, the third block emerged, placed at a right angle in respect to the existing one.

Wars between Poland and Sweden in the territory of Courland lasted for more than a quarter of the 17th century. In September 1621, the Swedish forces led by the King Gustav II Adolf captured Riga but on 3 October the Superintendent of Jelgava castle Schroder surrendered to Swedes without battle. The castle was captured and demolished. In January 1622, the Polish forces captured Jelgava and besieged the castle. The siege ended as late as in June when the Swedish garrison surrendered. In 1625, military actions were resumed, the Swedish army moved to Jelgava and captured the castle after a brief siege. After the Truce of Altmark (September 1629), the Duke Friedrich could return to Jelgava. He wrote to his wife in 1630 about Jelgava castle being totally “empty and destroyed”.

The foundation of the fortification system

The fortification system with ramparts had functioned in Jelgava castle since 1621 but in 1648 the Duke Jacob started to build new fortifications around the castle and town. Castle ramparts were raised and five bastions – Chief Bastion, “Hard Edge”, Danish Bastion, Charniatsky’s bastion and Paul’s Bastion – replaced four previous roundels. Two ravelines, the so-called pincers, were projected on the castle’s southern and northern sides. Rampart system was enclosed by deepened moats.

Jelgava Palace in the Duke’s Jacob time

The newly-built fortifications still could not defend Jelgava castle when Swedish-Polish war was resumed in 1654. The Duchy of Courland managed to keep neutrality declared by the Duke Jacob for some time. During the night of 9 October 1658, the Swedish troops led by the Field Marshal Robert Douglas captured Jelgava castle by war ruse without declaring war. Soon after that Swedes occupied the whole Duchy, Jelgava castle was partly plundered but the Duke’s family was taken prisoners.

After Oliva Peace Treaty in 1660, the Duke Jacob was allowed to return to Kurzeme controlled by Poles at the time. In the late 1659, they had recaptured Jelgava; Jelgava castle after the Duke’s return was in a very bad condition – the Duke and his court had to stay in Grobiņa until October 1661 while the residence was put in order.

The Duke Jacob is mainly known in the history of Latvia for his successful policy of mercantilism, organization of manufactures and acquisition of colonies. He was also aware of the necessity of representation and outer splendour dictated by the epoch: the court of Louis XIV, the King of France, in Versailles set standards for the whole Europe. Also in Courland during the Duke Jacob’s reign monarch’s personality was strongly emphasized and splendid court life symbolized his power. The number of courtiers doubled in comparison with the Duke Gotthard’s time.

The exterior of Jelgava castle retained its simplicity; the effect of splendid interiors was mainly achieved by particular decorative accents. The finest type of wall finish was leather wallcoverings. The Jelgava castle inventory of 1654, for instance, mentions “eight pieces of gilded leather wallcoverings painted green, belonging to the Great Hall”.

According to the inventory of 1659, one box contained 14 pieces of wallcoverings with figures, 4 pieces – with coats of arms and 107 leather wallcoverings on the subject of Hercules. The second box contained 63 gilded pieces with fruits, 140 – with the image of Hercules and 149 Hercules' wallcover rims, 80 silvery leather wallcoverings with gilded fruits, but the third box contained 579 silvery and 150 gilded pieces of wallcover. Another favourite type of decoration was tapestries or embroidered wall covers that could be combined differently to create the desired effect in the premise. For this purpose weaving of wall tapestries was organized at the Mežotne manufacture.

Paintings were widely used to create interiors. In 1659, Jelgava castle storages held 19 portraits of different rulers, two large landscapes and one small landscape stored in boxes, but the rest of the collection was exhibited in various premises of the castle. After the Duchess Louise Charlotte's death each of her six children inherited six painted portraits.

In the mid-17th century court painters Paul Neubuhr and Magnus Hibbeus were in service of the Duke Jacob in Jelgava.

In 1651 description of the Duke Jacob's daughter Charlotte Sophie's christening reveals the Duchess' ante-room: "...beautiful, white bed cover embroidered in gold completely covering the base; corners adorned with rich lace studded with large pearls. The inside of the bed cover and curtain is white, embroidered with silvery and golden flowers. Four silver and golden chains are stretched over the bed; it is covered with a white canopy decorated in gold. The table cloths are also of white satin embroidered in gold ... two pedestals of gilded silver with candlesticks of gilded silver are placed near the table. Candles are lit in silver wall candlesticks and silver chandelier. There are two silver firewood holders with the coat of arms of Courland in the fireplace. The room is very beautifully and richly upholstered in silk, the floor covered with carpets."

The description of the Courland Landhofmeister Johann Friedrich von der Recke's wedding ceremony presents the Jelgava castle Great Hall in 1652: "...the hall is upholstered in green and gilded leather, there is a red and golden canopy but chairs on the large carpet are with silver brocade and multi-coloured flowers. The cloth on the table by which they got married was of the same material but cushions were of Flemish silk and embroidered in silk." The next morning the hall arrangement had been already altered: "...presents were given in the hall. Chairs and the table cloth were of green velvet that matched nicely with the green and gilded leather of wallcoverings.

In 1655, the Count Louis Henri Lomenie de Brienne, later French Minister of Foreign Affairs, arrived in Jelgava. In his travel notes he praises refinement of the Courland court and mentions an Italian painter from Nuremberg who had been working on 18 large panels depicting scenes from the Kurzeme peasants' lives, making sketches from nature.

Friedrich Kasimir

For the Duke Jacob's son Friedrich Kasimir, the court of Louis XIV in Versailles was the ideal to follow. His reign is typified by a luxury courtly life at the centre of the state affairs. Friedrich Kasimir also made to build a new, small place in the centre of Jelgava. In 1697, the walls of this building had already been completed.

Jelgava castle was partly reconstructed during the Duke Friedrich Kasimir's reign. "Stucco master" Fellhorn working on plastic decorations of ceilings as well as the Latvian "painter" Gederts Beikants are mentioned in this period. On 4 August 1688, 588 state thalers were paid to seven French upholsterers.

During Friedrich Kasimir's reign a new outer staircase leading to the second-floor hall was built, enclosed by a splendid portal. In 1694, a contract was signed with the master of Riga stone-masons Johann Bodemer for the new Jelgava castle staircase. It is likely that decorative details of cast iron – two columns and two dolphin figures – found in 1997 near the entrance to Kettler's cellar were the remains of this portal.

In 1695 – 1697, the church of Jelgava castle received a new organ. The instrument itself was made by master Cornelius Rhanaus from Liepāja; the woodcarvings of the prospect were made by the Ventspils shipyard woodcarver Nicolaus Soffrens, Junior and his apprentice Johann Hinrich Behse.

The Duke's treasury books mention many artists related to these reconstruction works, they are Duke's painters Nicolaus Kruse, Hartvig Bremer, Friedrich Anderson, David Spanier, Jacob Gotschalk and Kolenbing, Leonhard Schurmann who painted plafonds of Jelgava castle, court portrait painter Heinrich Christian Schurmann. Carpenters Franz Hinrich Rendorf, Samuel Kessner, Hans Georg Fischer and Martin Unselts have worked at Jelgava castle. Bricklayers and carpenters were mostly Latvians – Albrechts Kaupēns etc.

Uncle and guardian of the under aged Duke Friedrich Wilhelm, Duke – administrator Ferdinand continued construction and decoration of Jelgava castle. In 1700, he even had ordered a silver table with eight silver mirrors and two gueridons from abroad; the total cost reached 6000 state thalers.

The Northern War and legal consequences

In 1700, the Northern War broke out. The Duke Ferdinand joined the Saxon troops and Courland entered the war against Sweden. Russian-Saxon forces were defeated at the Spilve Battle by Riga on 19 July 1701 and Ferdinand fled to Danzig. On 22 July of the same year Jelgava surrendered to the Swedish Major-General Morner whose soldiers stayed in the castle until 1705. During this period Duke's library and archives as well as arms and flags were moved to Riga.

The fortification system of the castle was improved during the Swedish occupation. These works were supervised by K. M. Stuart.

In August 1705, Jelgava castle was besieged by the Russian army led by the Tsar Peter I; on 4 September the Swedish garrison surrendered. The castle was heavily damaged during the siege and fire. However, the Russian army could not hold Jelgava for a long time. On retreat on 10 April 1709, the Russian garrison command ordered to blow up the fortification ramparts of Jelgava castle and town. In November 1709, Peter I again came to Jelgava, freshly recaptured by Russian troops from Swedes. In Jelgava, Peter I discussed the marriage project between the Duke of Courland Friedrich Wilhelm and the Tsar's niece Anna Joanovna. Wedding took place in Petersburg, late 1710, but Friedrich Wilhelm suddenly died on his way back to Courland in January 1711.

The Duke Ferdinand lived in Danzig where he ordered to move the most part of Jelgava castle furnishings. According to Peter's I order, the widow Duchess Anna Joa-

novna settled in Jelgava in 1716 to strengthen the Russian influence in Courland. In 1718, restoration and reconstruction works were started at the castle in the centre of Jelgava built in Friedrich Kasimir's time. The building had to be adapted to the Duchess' needs.

The Duchy of Courland was heavily devastated during the Northern War; half of its inhabitants were killed by the plague of 1710. The old Duke Ferdinand had no progeny, therefore surrounding countries – Poland and Russia – considered incorporation of Courland.