

**Nineteenth-Century Papier Mâché Chandeliers in Lithuania:  
From History to Attribution and Reconstruction  
by Ph.D. Alantė Valtaitė-Gagač**

*In the summer of 2017, during the restoration of the historical palace of the noble Pac family on Didžioji Street in Vilnius, fragments of a papier mâché [1] chandelier that once hung in the palace were found. New material collected for the theoretical reconstruction of this artefact has prompted the author to write about rare chandeliers made from this material and found in Lithuania that have not yet received research attention.*

Due to the lack of available data on the existence of pulped paper (so called *papier mâché*) chandeliers in Lithuania, chandeliers made from this material were not analysed. The leading West European publications about the history of chandeliers most often contain only brief mentions of wooden chandeliers [2], while pulped paper light fixtures remain outside the scope of analysis. It might have to do with the fact that very few specimens have survived, as well as the negative opinion, not exactly justified, that papier mâché chandeliers often only imitated expensive bronze chandeliers. The most data on papier mâché chandeliers and the workshops that manufactured them in Russia were presented by the Russian researcher Igor Sichev in his comprehensive book *Russian Bronze (Русская бронза: Энциклопедия русского антиквариата, 2003)*. The book *Japanned Papier Mâché and Tinware c.1740–1940* by the English researcher Yvonne Jones (published in 2012) was helpful for a better understanding of the features of this technique.

The French were the first to adopt the pulped paper technology developed in ancient China back in the 2nd century. In the 15th century, they produced architectural details, containers of various function and other artefacts. In the fourth quarter of the 17th century, the papier mâché technique was known in England, and by the middle of the 18th century, the artisans of this country had fully mastered it [3].

It is worth mentioning two methods that are used to prepare papier mâché: customary moulded soft/fluid, and layered, which was patented by Henry Clay from Birmingham in 1772 [4]. The method of layered paper sheets allowed making larger objects, such as relief plates, trays of various shapes, backs of chairs, table-tops and other types of furniture. For the production of chandeliers having a great many small ornamented details, the older and more customary moulded papier mâché technique was used.

So far there is no information as to when the production of papier mâché chandeliers in West Europe started and in which factory. The Russian researcher Igor Sichev established that the first papier mâché chandeliers in Russia were more widespread in Moscow and the provinces, and it was not until after 1810 that they became popular in St. Petersburg, which was the capital of Russia at that time. In Moscow, chandeliers were supplied by *V. K. Voronova*, *V. Elchinskov* and *Aleksandr Zeinlein* factories (operated in 1930), and the famous factory owned by Mr. *Dobkura*. St. Petersburg masters were also specialised in the production of wooden, paper and mastic [5] chandeliers. It is known that *Friedrich Kretan* sold chandeliers already from 1815, and in 1830, quite many sculptors and masters were employed by the *Kretan* family-owned company [6].

At the present time, several examples of papier mâché chandeliers in Russia and Sweden are known. A spectacular chandelier with 140 candles decorates the White Column Hall in the Yusupov Palace in St. Petersburg from 1830 (<https://yusupov-palace.ru/ru/node/278>). A nineteenth-century papier mâché chandelier hangs in the Gripsholm Castle in Sweden (70km west of Stockholm). Besides, the catalogue of the exhibition of light fixtures held in the Hermitage in 1975 includes two papier mâché chandeliers. One of them, having a simple composition and lavishly decorated with moulded floral ornaments, was made in the middle of the 19th century (Inv. Nr. ЭРРз-3156).



The other, dated to the early 19th century, features a figurine of a playful Cupid on a swing (ill. 1) (Inv. Nr. ЭРРз-3201) [7].

It is quite likely that they were manufactured in one of the above-mentioned workshops in Russia.

**ill. 1** Papier mâché chandelier, early 19<sup>th</sup> c. Russia. The State Hermitage Museum. Photo from: Игорь Сычев, *Русская бронза*, Москва, 2003, p. 133.

While preparing a doctoral dissertation *The Heritage of Chandeliers in Lithuania from the 17th Century to the 1930s* in 2009–2015 [8], the author browsed through a significant amount of church, manor and urban household property inventories. A single description of paper chandeliers was found in the act of visitation of the Bereza Carthusian church (Brest district, Belarus) from 1820; it was not given attention at the time and was not mentioned in the study.

The surviving iconography of interiors also provides information about the existence of papier mâché chandeliers in Lithuania. In the extension of the main room, also called the Green Room, of the Pienionys manor from the late 19th – early 20th century, a Cupid-shaped chandelier can be seen (ill. 2)



**ill. 2** Papier mâché chandelier in Pienionys manor, Lithuania. Photo from: A. Vojevodskaitė. *Buv. Pienionių dvaro architektūros ansamblio ir parko istorinių tyrimų ataskaita*. Vilnius, 1984. Archive of the Cultural Heritage, f. 5, ap. 1, b. 2279.

[9] A closer look at its contours shows that it is almost identical to the Cupid-shaped chandelier held in the Hermitage (ill. 1). This chandelier of the Pienionys manor can be dated to a similar period as its analogue in Russia, as the new manor house was built and furnished in the early 19th century.

In the production of chandeliers, papier mâché was very often used in combination with wooden and iron elements. Only the proportions of the materials differed – in some artefacts, carved wooden details were dominant, and in others, pulped paper mouldings prevailed. In 2009, the chandelier from the Vilnius Cathedral Basilica of Saints Stanislaus and Vladislaus, currently kept in the Lithuanian Art Museum was described (<http://www.sietynupaveldas.lt/cards/83>) [10]. Its stem is wooden, painted white, some places are gilded, and the lower crown of the chandelier is comprised of wooden eagle heads interspersed with decorative papier mâché plates. The act of visitation of Vilnius Cathedral from 1828 contains a mention that two magnificent chandeliers hanging in the centre of the cathedral and the presbytery were brought from Vienna in 1803. Another two chandeliers from the Bystryca Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (Grodno district, Belarus) and the Šlienava Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Kaunas district, Lithuania), which most probably did not survive, are also attributed to this unidentified workshop in Austria [11].

One of the most interesting and impressive examples of chandeliers made from the material in focus has been found in the former Pac Palace at 7 Didžioji St. in Vilnius. Before the building was converted into a hotel, thorough archaeological, architectural and poly-chrome research was conducted starting in 2014. Uncovering layer after layer of wall décor, brickwork and interior spaces offered an opportunity for art historians to reconstruct the rich history of the palace's development [12]. As the works continued, in the summer of 2017, while clearing the unused auxiliary servants' staircase, metal and moulded constructions were found. When all the fragments were extracted, it turned out to be the remnants of a chandelier that once hung in the palace (ill. 3)



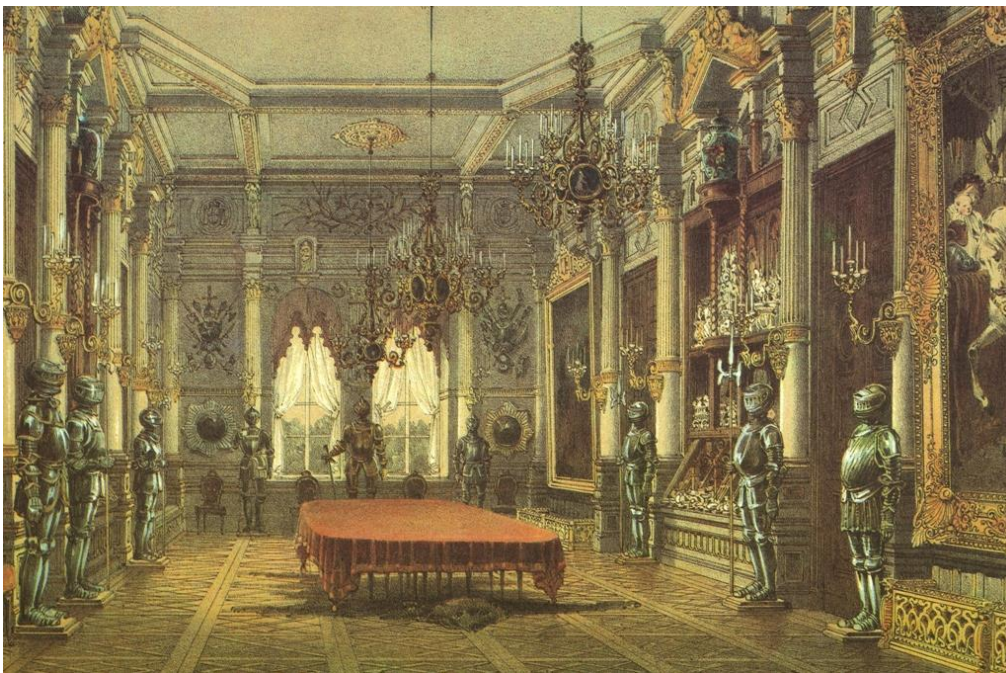
**ill. 3** Fragments of the chandelier found in the former Pac Palace. Photo by P. Jarmala, 2017.

The attribution of the chandelier is facilitated by its stylistics. Replicated and freely combined decorative elements from different periods (neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic) suggest that the chandelier was manufactured by professional and skilled masters in the period of Historicism, i.e. in the middle of the 19th century.

Though the surviving details were quite revealing about the original appearance of the magnificent chandelier and the approximate time of its production, the lost upper and lower parts of its stem made it difficult to realise the total structure of the artefact. For the sake of theoretical reconstruction, the author was looking for analogues in palace interiors abroad and albums of historical development of light fixtures, until the photographs of the interior of Duke Wittgenstein's Palace from the late 19th and early 20th century were found. They allow us to advance two hypotheses: 1) the remains of the chandelier found at 7 Didžioji St. may have originated from the Verkiai Palace; 2) the chandeliers for both the Wittgenstein and Pac palaces or the military offices of tsarist Russia that were based in these buildings were ordered from the same workshop.

In the middle of the 19th century, the former Pac Palace was already used as a military headquarters of tsarist Russia. Yet, the documents of this institution contain no mention about the acquisition of such an expensive chandelier [13], thus presently the first version seems more plausible, and we are going to analyse it in more detail.

Circa 1840, the Verkiai Palace was acquired by the Russian duke and German prince Ludwig Adolf Wittgenstein. He converted the eastern servants' quarters into a palace and sumptuously furnished its interiors. Almost immediately after the reconstruction, in 1848, Vasily Sadovnikov captured its most opulent hall, called the Knights' Hall, or a dining room, in one of his watercolours, whose colour reproductions were multiplied as part of *The Vilnius Album* published by Jan Kazimierz Wilczynski in 1842–1875 (ill. 4).



**ill. 4** Chandeliers in the dining room of the Verkiai Palace. Chromolithography after Vasily Sadovnikov, 1848, from: Jonas Kazimieras Vilčinskis, *Vilniaus albumas*, 1987.

In the chromo-lithograph, the view of the chandeliers is not very precise, but distinctive and easily recognisable details stand out: round medallions, S-shaped branches with scrolls and five candleholders at the ends, and a specific bent of the branches. The designer of the Knights' Hall was the architect of Swiss descent, Simon Bernar [14]. Three large chandeliers must have been produced on commission specially for this space, possibly by Russian masters who were skilled in the use of papier mâché technique, or in Western Europe.

In the early 20th century, the Dukes Wittgenstein moved to Germany. As the estate changed hands, the palace gradually deteriorated. During World War I, art treasures collected by the dukes were plundered. Most probably during the wars, chandeliers were scattered in different places, and one of them may have been taken by tsarist officers to decorate their premises on Didžioji St.

A cubic-shaped wooden fragment of the stem of this sumptuous hanging light fixture has survived (ill. 3). At its top, one, two, three and four notches marking the place of a concrete branch were made at each corner. This largest surviving wooden part of the stem was decorated with moulded papier mâché medallions representing hunting scenes (ill. 5).



**ill. 5** Fragment of the chandelier found in the former Pac Palace. Photo by P. Jarmala, 2017.

The analysis of the surviving fragments shows that the chandelier had eight branches. Only seven of them have survived to this day: three larger and four smaller.

Though the condition of the chandelier is regrettably poor, the crumbled décor shows the features of the papier mâché technique and the assembling of papier mâché details on the artefact.

Interestingly, not all the elements of branch decoration were made from pulped paper. Some details were likely made from wood for the sake of durability (ill. 6).



**ill. 6** Fragments of the chandelier found in the former Pac Palace. Photo by P. Jarmala, 2017.

Referring to archival iconographic material and the features of the discovered artefact, we can assume that the fragments of the chandelier found in the former Pac Palace may belong to one of the three chandeliers from the dining room of the Verkiai Palace. So far it is the only chandelier surviving in Lithuania with so many papier mâché décor details.

The analysis of papier mâché chandeliers in Lithuania allows us to make several conclusions: 1) according to the data found in the sources and the amount of the surviving chandeliers, pulped paper chandeliers were quite rare artefacts in the 19th century; 2) sumptuous palace interiors of nobles and magnates were decorated with chandeliers made from inexpensive papier mâché materials; 3) pulped paper chandeliers were distinguished by the originality of forms and ornaments

The full version of the article with more photographs and a complete list of literature and sources can be found at: <http://www.sietynupaveldas.lt/welcome#articles>

## SOURCES AND LITERATURE:

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