

You have downloaded a document from



The Central and Eastern European Online Library

The joined archive of hundreds of Central-, East- and South-East-European publishers, research institutes, and various content providers

Source: Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi

Studies on Art and Architecture

Location: Estonia

Author(s): Ieva Kalnača

Title: The Manifestations of Orientalism in Latvian Architecture and Art during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and First Third of the Twentieth Century as a Versatile Research Platform

The Manifestations of Orientalism in Latvian Architecture and Art during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and First Third of the Twentieth Century as a Versatile Research Platform

Issue: 01+03/2018

Citation style: Ieva Kalnača. "The Manifestations of Orientalism in Latvian Architecture and Art during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and First Third of the Twentieth Century as a Versatile Research Platform". Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi 01+03:130-152.

<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=711037>

The Manifestations of Orientalism in Latvian Architecture and Art

during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and First Third of the Twentieth Century as a Versatile Research Platform

IEVA KALNAČA

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries there was an emerging trend of orientalism in Europe. In a wider sense this term included the passion of members of Western society for oriental cultures and the intention to get acquainted with, to study, to describe and to depict these cultures. The term *orientalism* refers to the places where the culture of Islam was or had been dominant. Orientalism was at its peak during the second half of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries and in this period it also found its place in architecture and visual art in the territory of Latvia, which creates an opportunity for a variety of investigations, as there are still a lot of questions to be answered and facts to be discovered. Thus, the article is focused on the most significant examples of orientalist art and buildings influenced by neo-Islamic architecture in the territory of Latvia, as well as some objects from other Baltic countries.

The spread of orientalism in Europe

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries there was an emerging trend of orientalism all over Europe, gradually spreading to all of the Western world. Orientalism as a phenomenon of European intellectual life was, to a great extent, caused by Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Ottoman Egypt in 1798, after which, between 1809 and 1829, a huge scientific research, *Description de l'Égypte (Description of Egypt)*, was published, which also focussed on Islamic heritage. The scientific description, representation and interpretation of Islamic monuments in the territory of Egypt stimulated the wish to get better acquainted with other Eastern territories. Many lands outside Europe also became more easily

accessible due to colonisation, for example Algeria after the French conquest in 1830 and Morocco during the Hispano-Moroccan War in 1859–1860 and afterwards.

Thus, in a wider sense, the term *orientalism*¹ included the passion of members of Western society – artists, writers, scholars, diplomats, etc. – for oriental cultures and the desire to get acquainted with, to study, to describe and to depict different aspects of those cultures. The term *orientalism* refers to the places where the culture of Islam was or had been dominant, especially the Near East, India, Egypt and the Maghreb, as well as Spain, which was especially popular due to its closeness. Gradually newly created ideas started to emerge in Europe, which proclaimed the territories of the East to be an exotic, idyllic and harmonious world which needed to be discovered and appreciated first hand.² Many intellectuals, artists and architects toured the mentioned countries and were inspired by the richness of exotic motifs and aesthetic language there. They also left different kinds of testimonies: descriptions of their journeys, prints, photos, and serious investigations of Islamic architecture and art, paying attention to specific ornaments, colour schemes, materials, etc. With the spread of picture albums and research books, the Western world got acquainted with the aesthetic of oriental architecture. All of that led to the formation of a neo-Islamic style in architecture and to the rise of orientalist art in academic painting and graphic art.³ Orientalism was at its peak during the second half of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries and it remained popular even later. It is important to emphasise that the manifestations of neo-Islamic style were not isolated but intertwined with other architectural and decorative tendencies. The neo-Islamic style developed in the context of historicism, alongside other neo-styles, but from the beginning of the twentieth century it started to become entangled with art nouveau manifestations (as in both styles the interpretation and harmony of vegetal forms was vitally important⁴). Alongside the development of art nouveau and the rise of new styles, such as neo-classicism and art deco, neo-Islamic-style elements also appeared in edifices constructed in those styles, especially in art deco, due to its decorative diversity.

A quintessential figure in the development of the neo-Islamic style was the English architect and ornament researcher Owen Jones (1809–1874), who studied and depicted Islamic architectural elements in great detail and in 1842 published the first fundamental research on the Alhambra palace in Spain, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra*.⁵ The book was supplemented with more than

1 The term *orientalism* was used already in the nineteenth century but a turning point in the theoretical approaches to this phenomenon was the publication of Edward Said (E. W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), where he analysed the sense of superiority of the Western world over the oriental cultures, which included also patronising representations of them. Nevertheless, during the last two decades, various important critical reassessments have been published by historians, postcolonialists and also art historians (for example B. S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*. London: Routledge, 1994; A. L. Macfie, *Orientalism*. London: Longman, 2002; J. M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995; etc.).

2 M. del Mar Villafranca Jiménez, *La Alhambra como escenario del orientalismo: imagen y realidad arquitectónica*. – *Orientalismo. Arte y arquitectura entre Granada y Venecia*. Eds. J. Calatrava, G. Zucconi. Madrid: Abada, 2012, p. 16.

3 L. Thornton, *The Orientalists: Painter-Travellers*. Paris: ACR Edition, 1994, p. 4.

4 P. Greenhalgh, *Art Nouveau, 1890–1914*. London: V&A Publications, 2000, p. 115.

5 O. Jones, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra*. London: Jones, 1842.

a hundred chromolithographies, so it was possible to see the original colouring of the palace. Some years later, in 1856, Jones published his design sourcebook *The Grammar of Ornament*,⁶ with chapters dedicated to Arabic, Turkish and Moorish ornaments. The interest in Islamic architectural heritage increased steadily and in 1877 the French archaeologist and architect Émile Prisse d'Avennes (1807–1879) published a book on Arabic art, *L'Art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire*⁷ after almost twenty years of research in Cairo. Owen Jones and Émile Prisse d'Avennes, due to their publications, are considered two of the most important figures in the establishment of the new decorative language.

This interest in oriental culture and the desire for first-hand experience of those exotic lands gradually expanded among Baltic travellers. As a result of this interest, descriptions of journeys to such important cities of Islamic architecture as Cairo, Damascus, Marrakesh, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Samarkand, Granada, etc. can be found in periodicals of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century. This information promoted the expansion of new decorative interests, since those descriptions were sometimes very detailed, especially when dealing with the Alhambra palace in Spain. Thus, for example, the Latvian teacher and traveller Pēteris Ruckis wrote: '...the Alhambra astonishes the spectator with its adornments in Moorish style. Stone wall decorations where the light is shining through, ceilings which remind one of stalactites, gardens full of flowers and fruits, views of the corners of the palace and the whole city, everything creates a magnificent, unforgettable impression.'⁸ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first photos also appeared, both in periodicals and books dedicated to architecture.

This article is focused on the most significant examples of orientalist art and buildings influenced by neo-Islamic architecture in the territory of Latvia, and also mentions some artists and objects from other Baltic countries. Special attention will be paid to some unanswered questions and research paths that need to be followed, as this theme covers a lot of unexplored terrain.

Orientalism in Latvia during the second half of the nineteenth century. The art of Georg Wilhelm Timm

In many cases it is easier to deal with orientalist painters, since a large number of the artists who depicted Eastern motifs – cityscapes, landscapes, types of people, etc. – visited the Orient at least once in their lives. In those cases, the source of inspiration is clear, as they captured their own perceptions of the Orient and the feelings experienced there. Some orientalists travelled regularly to the same or different parts of the oriental world, and a few even moved there with a wish to get

6 O. Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*. London: Day, 1856.

7 É. Prisse d'Avennes, *L'Art arabe d'après les monuments du Kaire*. Paris: Morel, 1877.

8 P. Ruckis, *Pa Spāniju spāniešu-amerikāņu kara laikā* [Across Spain during the Spanish-American war]. – *Austrums* 1898, vol. 10, p. 258. All translations into English, if not indicated otherwise, are by the author of the article.

deeper knowledge of eastern culture and traditions. Others spent a relatively short time travelling there but the exotic experience was depicted in a large number of artworks.⁹ This is, for example, the case with Georg Wilhelm Timm (1820–1895), the Baltic German artist who initiated the use of oriental motifs in the context of art history in Latvia. Some years after having finished his studies at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg, Timm got acquainted with the French artist and orientalist Émile-Jean-Horace Vernet (1789–1863), and in 1845 accompanied him to Algeria.¹⁰ Vernet was an excellent companion as he had already travelled to Algeria previously and knew how to organise the voyage. During the trip and afterwards, Timm made a lot of drawings, watercolours and oil paintings depicting all that he saw and experienced in Algeria: sacral and profane architectural forms, the nature, different types of people, their clothing, lifestyles and traditions (fig. 1). In the themes he depicted, one can find all that surprised and astonished a European traveller. Timm's artworks can be compared to the paintings and drawings of the most important nineteenth-century orientalists: Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), Théodore Chassériau (1819–1856), John Frederick Lewis (1804–1876), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and others.

Analysing Timm's oeuvre, the source of inspiration for oriental themes and the reason why those motifs appear in his art are fairly clear. But there are still a lot of unanswered questions related to his oriental experience and legacy. As far as is known, the artist did not leave any written records of his trip and thus it is possible to judge his itinerary and programme only from his drawings and paintings. Nevertheless, there are other, thus far little-used sources, such as descriptions of the territory of the Maghreb, published by Latvian or Baltic German travellers in the local press at the same time that Timm went to Algeria. For example, in various works Timm depicted a story-teller, a special type of person, which becomes clearer by reading an article in a newspaper from 1845. The author wrote:

The Arabs are keen on telling each other about, and thus honouring, the good deeds of their forefathers. Each wealthy man has his own story-teller. All of his friends then gather around his tent or on the roof of his house (as they don't have such roofs as we do, but flat ones, like ceilings) and from night to night listen to all of the stories [...] They speak clearly and very fast, because they can pronounce all words so quickly, as if a European were reading from a book.¹¹

9 J. Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

10 A. Meinarte, *Georgs Vilhelms Timms – dzimis rīdzinieks [Georg Wilhelm Timm – born Rigan]*. – Brīvība 1 March 1995.

11 D. E., *Araberī [The Arabs]*. – *Tas Latviešu Draugs* 6 December 1845.

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, there were a considerable number of memoirs published about trips to Algeria and almost all of them help to analyse and understand Timm's orientalist artworks.¹²

Neo-Islamic style in Latvia during the second half of the nineteenth century

When talking about the architectural objects and interiors with neo-Islamic characteristics and influences, in many cases the conditions are more complicated and ambiguous, and it is not easy to find out how the architects or commissioners came to the idea of using oriental forms. It is worth mentioning that the types of buildings in which neo-Islamic characteristics are definable are versatile: manor houses, sacral buildings, summer houses, cafes and ephemeral architectural objects. In many instances, by analysing each particular object it is possible to define which object or sample book was used but it is not clear how it was done. Did the architect or the commissioner travel to those places or did they investigate the architecture and ornaments at home? There are still a lot of questions to answer.

The oldest known example of architecture and interior design which shows the use of Islamic ornaments in the Baltics is the neo-gothic manor house of Alūksne (the Alūksne New Castle), built between 1859 and 1863. In the main entrance lobby, there are mural paintings carried out in neo-Islamic style (fig. 2). Only a few of them have been uncovered, but one can see perfectly the two-colour stylisation of the Kufic script, arranged in bands, as well as an ornamental grid filled with palmette and vegetal motifs. The dominant tones are red, blue and ochre yellow and brown, which have lost their original brightness. A very similar wall decoration can be found in the Alhambra palace in Spain (Granada), one of the most celebrated Islamic monuments. One of the rooms, the Sala de los Embajadores (Hall of Ambassadors), shows the same motifs as the lobby of the Alūksne manor house; those ornaments were also reproduced in the above-mentioned book by Owen Jones.

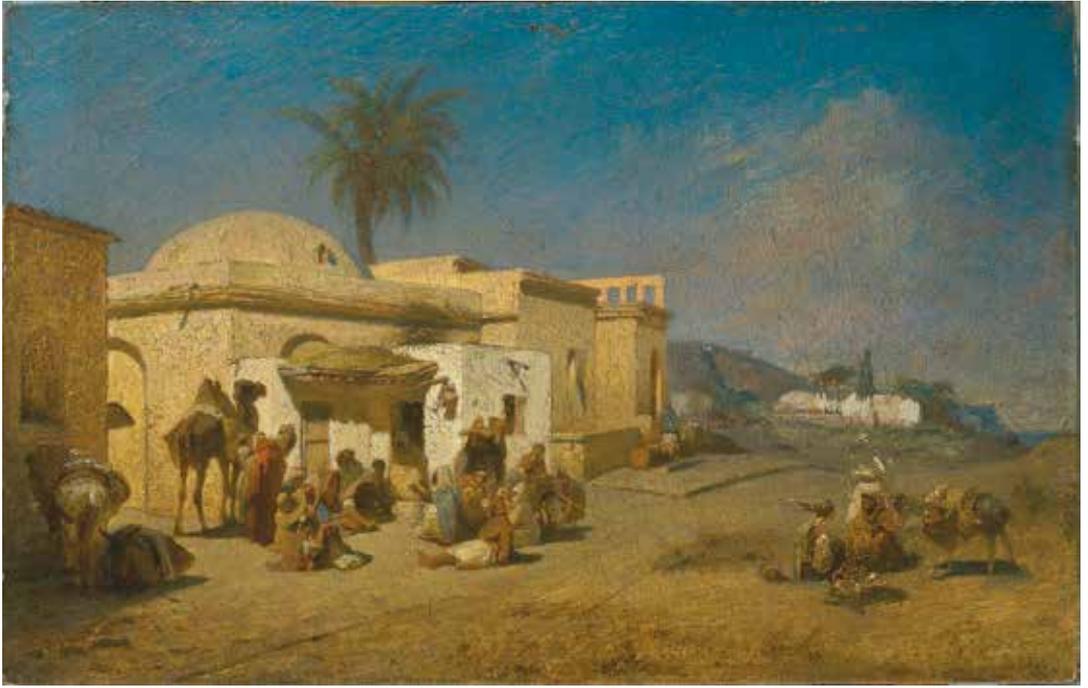
The construction of the manor house, and thus most probably also the interior design, was commissioned by Baron Alexander von Vietinghoff¹³; there are various presumptions about who the architect was (Paul Benjamin Polnaus from Prussia, the local master Robert Müller or Johann Daniel Felsko)¹⁴. The paintings were of particular importance as the lobby was the first place that guests saw and thus provided the first impression of the manor house. The paintings are richly decorated with oriental motifs, which shows the broad interests and exotic taste of the owner. But where had the baron or maybe the architect or decorator seen such decorations?

12 For example D. E., Araberi; Aus dem afrikanischen Reisetagebuch einer Dame. – Rigasche Zeitung 17 August 1849; H. von Holst, Ein Tag in Algier. – Baltische Monatsschrift 1867, vol. 15 (1), pp. 63–82, etc.

13 D. Bruģis, Historisma pilis Latvijā [Historicist castles in Latvia]. Riga: Sorosa fonds, 1996, p. 36;

M. Levina, Alūksnes Jaunā pils [The New Castle of Alūksne]. National Administration of Cultural Heritage (Latvia), Monuments Documentation Centre (NACH MDC), no. 08-04-II, III, IV-03-J, inv. no. 49239 III, 1999.

14 J. Zilgalvis, Neogotika Latvijas arhitektūrā [Neo-gothic style in Latvian architecture]. Riga: Zinātne, 2005, p. 76.



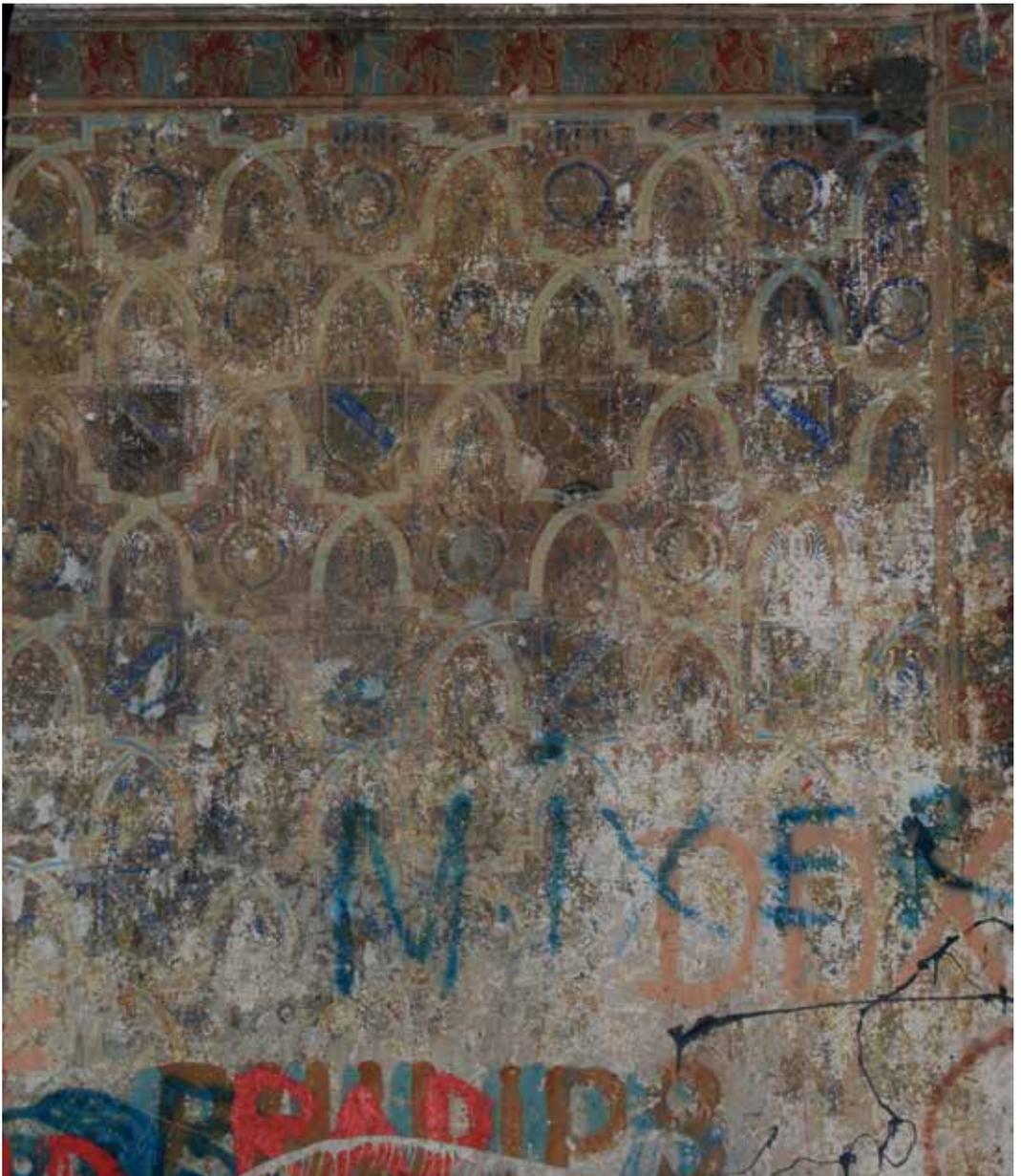
1.

Georg Wilhelm Timm. *Austrumu iela (Alžīrija) / Oriental Street (Algeria)* (1845-1846). Oil on wood. 20.5 x 46.3 cm. Latvian National Museum of Art, coll. no. GL-3548 / AMM GL-1686.



2.

Mural paintings in the Alūksne New Castle (ca. 1860–1865).
Photo by Ieva Kalnača, 2016.



3. Mural paintings in the tower of Valmiermuiža (ca. 1883).
Photo by Ieva Kalnača, 2013.



4.

Decoration in the Hall of Ambassadors (Sala de los Embajadores), Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain.
Photo by Ieva Kalnača, 2015.



5.

Max Scherwinsky. Pavilion of Coffee (1901).
Exhibition of Riga's 700th anniversary.
Reproduction from *Die Rigaer Jubiläums-
Ausstellung 1901 in Bild und Wort: Ein
Erinnerungsbuch*. Ed. M. Scherwinsky. Riga:
Jonck & Poliewsky, 1902, p. 56.



6.

Jāzeps Grosvalds. Zilie vārti Kazvinā / Blue Gate in Qazvin (1918). Tempera on paper. 16 x 23 cm.
Latvian National Museum of Art, coll. no. VMM Z-8664.



7.

Niklāvs Strunke. Illustration for *One Thousand and One Nights*. Reproduction from *Tūkstots un viena nakts. Arabiešu pasakas. IV*. Rīga: Leta, 1929.



8.
Private house in Jūrmala, 18 Dzintaru Prospect (ca. 1919). Fragment of a decoration on the third floor, 2013.
Photo by Edijs Udalovs, 2013.



9.
Decoration of the capitals, Alhambra palace, Granada, Spain. Reproduction from O. Jones, Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra. London: Jones, 1842.



10.

Mural painting from a flat at 7 Tērbatas Street, Riga.
Photo by Rihards Pētersons, 2016.

The next edifice, the Valmiermuiža tower, raises the same question. This three-storey tower is the only part still standing of the Valmiermuiža manor complex and 1883 is considered to be the year of its construction.¹⁵ The exterior has neo-baroque elements, while in the interior the walls and the ceiling of two storeys are covered by mural paintings in the neo-Islamic style (fig. 3). The ceiling paintings on the ground floor and the first floor are almost identical: they are composed of octagonal stars filled with vegetal and geometrical ornaments. The colours are bright blue, red, white and gold ochre, damaged by time but still recognisable. The wall painting on the ground floor has almost disappeared and cannot be analysed, whereas on the first floor it can be seen quite well in some parts. The mural painting is formed by a huge grid filled with palmette and shield motifs; the frame is covered with Kufic calligraphy. The main colour of the paintings is gold ochre, with accents of red, blue and white. It is worth mentioning that in research materials from 1987 an interesting and important fact is noted: on both storeys the metal fittings and remnants of a plaster rosette elaborated in the form of a *muqarnas* (stalactite) in the middle of the central star of the ceiling have been preserved.¹⁶ This kind of decoration, as an addition to paintings, would have been very logical and appropriate, as it is common both in Islamic and neo-Islamic architecture. Nowadays, only a fragment of the metal part can still be seen.

In neo-Islamic interior design, this kind of wall and ceiling decoration composed of paintings and plaster elements was usually used in special private or recreational rooms, where that kind of exotic and mysterious atmosphere was thought to be appropriate – smoking rooms, baths, bedrooms, boudoirs, etc. – so it is quite possible that exactly this kind of relaxation or entertainment space was arranged in the Valmiermuiža tower as well. As in the previously analysed case of the Alūksne manor house, the example followed in Valmiermuiža was the Alhambra palace in Spain. The wall decorations in Valmiermuiža are practically identical copies of those in the Hall of Ambassadors (fig. 4). Although Valmiermuiža has a long history and its owners changed many times, from 1773 on the property belonged to the Löwenstern family¹⁷, although not much is known about them. Consequently, there is a need to ask: why did the owner commission paintings in this style? As has been mentioned repeatedly in this article, during the second half of the nineteenth century there were several researches of the decorations and ornaments of the Alhambra palace published. The most complete and illustrative was the *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Details of the Alhambra* by Owen Jones. Did the owners of Valmiermuiža or the architect have the mentioned book or did any of them travel to Spain?

In this context, very recently an almost unknown fact has been discovered by the international research community and by Latvian art historians related to the Baltic countries becoming acquainted with the Islamic aesthetics and neo-Islamic style. The Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum possesses around 300 models

15 B. Guste, Valmieras muiža [The Valmiera manor]. NACH MDC, no. 08-04-III-51-V-5053, act no. 52428 II.

16 B. Guste, Valmieras muiža. NACH MDC, no. 08-04-III-51-V-5053, inv. no. 4502-17-KM, 1987.

17 J. Kalnačs, Valmiermuižas pils [The castle of Valmiermuiža]. – Liesma 9 December 1986.

of different halls and ornamental decorations from the Alhambra palace.¹⁸ A large number of them were made by Pavel Notbeck, a Russian architect and academician. Pavel Karlovich Notbeck (Павел Карлович Нотбек, 1824–1877) studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg under the tutelage of the architect Konstantin Andreyevich Thon (Константин Андреевич Тон, 1794–1881). In 1849 he graduated with a gold medal and was sent abroad for four years on a stipend from the academy. After visiting Germany, France and Italy, Notbeck arrived in Spain to study the surviving monuments of Islamic architecture. He was especially impressed by the extraordinary beauty of the Alhambra palace in Granada. At first, he dedicated himself to making drawings of different parts and decorations of the building, but that did not seem enough for him, so he decided to make models and plaster casts of the palace. He started with the room called the Sala de las dos Hermanas (Hall of Two Sisters) and was especially interested in the decorations of the Sala de los Abencerrajes (Hall of Abencerrages). Notbeck stayed there for ten years and made approx. 284 models; four of them are large-scale models of the Hall of Two Sisters (scale 1/4), the Hall of Abencerrages (scale 1/12), the Hall of Ambassadors (scale 1/8) and the Patio de los Leones (Court of the Lions, scale 1/12). The rest are smaller but still precise to the tiniest detail. As a supplement, Notbeck also compiled a handwritten catalogue, where he briefly described all of the models and sketches. After having returned to Saint Petersburg, Notbeck received the title of academician (in 1859) and honorary academician (in 1862) for his work in Spain and, what is even more important, all of the Alhambra models were handed over to the Imperial Academy of Arts. They were exhibited there in a special hall called the Alhambra room, which existed in the museum from 1863 till 1917. This room was erected mainly with pedagogical purposes, and thus these models from the Alhambra, exhibited in the halls of the academy, were shown to students and were some of the main factors in the spread of the neo-Islamic (also called Moorish) style in the Russian Empire. Thanks to this collection and the hall, the neo-Islamic style elements started to appear both in the facades and the interiors of the buildings of that time.

Later the heritage left by Notbeck was enriched with nine more models brought to Russia by two architects, Karl Karlovich Rachau (Карл Карлович Рахау, 1830–1880) and Karl Karlovich Kolman (Карл Карлович Кольман, 1835–1889). In 1861, after having finished their studies, they went to Granada and had a unique opportunity to work in the Alhambra as restorers from 1861 till 1863. Their task was to work on the restoration of the Torre de las Infantas (Tower of Infants) and during that process they both made a lot of drawings and sketches, some of which are also included in the museum's collection. In Spain both architects also bought some plaster casts of the Alhambra. When Rachau died in 1880, his relatives donated nine models of the facades and arches of the building to the Museum of the Imperial Academy of Arts, almost all from the Court of the Lions. Consequently, they were

18 E. Savinova, L. Kondratenko, The History of the Alhambra Models Collection in Russia: Its Role in Educating Future Architects at the Academy of Arts. Paper presented by E. Savinova at the conference *The Alhambra in a Global Context*, University of Zürich, 15–17 September 2016.

included in the collection of the museum. Those models were most probably made by Rafael Contreras.

Rafael Contreras Muñoz (1824–1890) was an artist and conservator-restorer of the Alhambra palace from 1847 till 1889. Besides his work as a restorer, he opened a special model-making workshop with the purpose of selling these models to tourists. They were high-class souvenirs and well-made miniature versions of a celebrated monument that was widely admired all over Europe. Plaster was a fairly cheap material and could be cast in moulds so that copies could be easily made of an original sculpture or architectural detail, and identical reproductions could be made for sale. Often the plaster model would then be painted. Karl Rachau and Karl Kolman also bought these models, just like a huge number of visitors to Granada.

Thus, the models and plaster casts belonging to the Imperial Academy of Arts, which were exhibited in the Alhambra room, could have played a role in the growing interest in oriental forms and especially ornaments from the 1860s onwards. This is not only relevant for the territory of contemporary Russia, but also for the territory of the Baltic countries. At that time a considerable number of architects were studying in the Imperial Academy of Arts (Reinhold Georg Schmaeling, 1840–1917, Alexander Schmaeling, 1877–1961, Karl Felsko, 1844–1919, Wilhelm Neumann, 1849–1919, et al.), so they were familiar with the Alhambra models; others could have visited the Alhambra room as well. This perhaps explains the presence of neo-Islamic elements, sometimes extremely precise and detailed, in the architecture of the second half of the nineteenth century, not only in buildings in Latvia, as discussed earlier, but also in the other Baltic countries.

Another excellent example is the Sangaste castle in southern Estonia. The Sangaste castle was commissioned in 1873 by the owner, Friedrich Georg Magnus von Berg (1845–1938), and built during the following years by the architect Otto Pius Hippus (1826–1883).¹⁹ The building is neo-gothic on the outside but one of the rooms, the 'Moorish hall', is clearly decorated in neo-Islamic style. Versatile Islamic elements are perfectly balanced: multifoil arches, stalactite motifs in the ceiling decoration, the use of arabesque, etc. The Baltic German architect studied at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg and, although this was before the creation of the Alhambra room, it can be assumed that he visited the academy afterwards and was inspired by the Alhambra decorations.

It is also important to find out who had actually visited Oriental countries, as was the case with the artist Georg Wilhelm Timm, mentioned earlier. One of the ways to discover those travellers is the local press, as mentioned previously in the article, where many of the voyagers published their impressions and memoirs. Another important source when dealing with the famous Alhambra is the guestbook of the palace. The first guestbook was given as a present from the Russian diplomat Prince Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorukov (Дмитрий Иванович Долгоруков,

19 A. Heins [Hein], N. Lukšionytė-Tolvaišienė, J. Zilgalvis, *Pilis un muižas Igaunijā, Latvijā, Lietuvā* [Palaces and manor houses in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania]. Rīga: Elpa, 2007, pp. 91–92.

1797–1867) in 1829 when he travelled through Spain²⁰ together with the famous American writer and diplomat Washington Irving (1783–1859). All of the guestbooks have now been digitalised and are excellent research objects which provide a lot of new information. A number of signatures of visitors from the Baltic countries have been found. For example, there are the signatures of ‘Georg von Lilienfeld aus Liefland’ in 1852, ‘Ernst Peter von Sivers aus Livland’ on the same day, ‘Alexander von Wolf aus Livland’ and ‘Baron Clement de Wolff’ in 1856 and others.²¹

Neo-Islamic style and Orientalism in the Baltics during the turn of the centuries

At the end of the century, more and more neo-Islamic style manifestations can be found in architecture and interiors, and in very versatile types of buildings, from summer residences and chalets to synagogues and ephemeral architectural objects. A good example is the Choral synagogue of Vilnius, commissioned in 1899 from the architect David Rosenhaus and opened in 1902.²² Its exterior presents a confluence of neo-romanesque and neo-Islamic style, and its interior, especially the *aron kodesh*, is made in neo-Islamic style, with Arabic adornments in stucco and wood using arabesque and *muqarnas* (stalactite) motifs. The upper part is crowned by a cupola. Also, in the synagogue of Riga, on Peitavas Street, commissioned in 1903 from Wilhelm Neumann and Hermann Seuberlich (1878–1938) and completed in 1905, the *aron kodesh* is elaborated in neo-Islamic style. There are two-colour horse-shoe arches, geometrical ornaments and stars and a cupola, as in the Choral synagogue in Vilnius. The use of oriental elements in those edifices is not surprising, as during the nineteenth century it was common throughout Europe to build synagogues using elements of Islamic architecture, since the time of Arab dominion over Spain was considered a golden age for the Jewish community.

Glaring and peculiar examples from the turn of the century are two ephemeral architectural objects which were constructed for the 700th anniversary of Riga, celebrated in 1901 with a huge exhibition dedicated to industry and crafts. The first object is the pavilion of a coffee factory (fig. 5) designed by the main architect of the exhibition, Max Scherwinsky (1859–1909). The pavilion was built in neo-Islamic style with forms derived from the Mamluk period in Egypt, which is famous for huge decorated cupolas with ornamental decoration, as well as polychromy. Those characteristics can be observed in the coffee pavilion: a rectangular construction with a richly decorated cupola and facades. The ornaments are mainly geometrical, with the use of an octagonal star. The architect himself confirmed the Islamic

20 B. Alcaraz Masáts, El Príncipe Dimitri Ivánovich Dolgorukov, <http://brunoalcaraz.blogspot.com/2013/03/el-principe-dimitri-ivanovich.html> (accessed 3 October 2016).

21 Libro de firmas de la Alhambra. 9 de mayo 1829 a 20 de mayo 1872. – Recursos de Investigación Biblioteca de la Alhambra, <http://www.alhambra-patronato.es/ria/handle/10514/813> (accessed 9 September 2016).

22 A. Cohen-Mushlin et al., Synagogues in Lithuania. Vol. 2: N–Ž. Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2012, p. 253.

influences, writing: 'The pavilion, constructed using the forms of mosques from Cairo, was an important attraction point for the public.'²³

The second ephemeral object from the same exhibition is the pavilion of a tobacco factory, also known as the pavilion of A. G. Ruhtenberg. This architectural object was constructed using examples of Ottoman architecture. The pavilion is quadratic with an octagonal tower, and is decorated with a small onion dome. Small domes of the same form adorn each corner of the pavilion. The walls are open, consisting of horseshoe arches, and the free spaces are decorated with star-like geometrical ornaments. The project of this pavilion was elaborated and constructed by Robert Häusermann's company, while the colours were selected by the Riga decorative painting company Kurau & Passil.²⁴

When analysing these ephemeral objects, it is necessary to take into consideration that various important universal expositions took place in different countries beginning in 1851, when the first Great Exhibition was organised in London. In those expositions Islamic architectural elements were present in pavilions from Eastern countries and from Spain. There were whole quarters dedicated to the oriental cultures, where one could see both replicas of important buildings built in previous centuries and newly erected buildings following Islamic traditions.²⁵ Many architects, including those from the Baltic area, frequented those exhibitions, and thus got to know more about Islamic architectural features. This aspect provides an important research field, as the experience of architects from the territory of Latvia in world's fairs has not been thoroughly investigated.

Orientalism in Baltic painting during the first third of the twentieth century

In the first decades of the twentieth century, there started to appear even more artists who depicted oriental motifs in their paintings and drawings. Some of them experienced the East directly, as was the case with Georg Wilhelm Timm in the mid-nineteenth century. Among Latvian artists from that period, the most significant ones were Gustavs Šķilters (1874–1954) and Jāzeps Grosvalds (1891–1920). The sculptor and water-colour painter Gustavs Šķilters, after having finished his studies at the Stieglitz Central Technical Drawing School in Saint Petersburg, obtained a scholarship to study abroad and lived in Paris from 1900 to 1905. During that time, he not only increased his skills, but also travelled to other countries, including Spain²⁶ and Morocco, as he desired to get to know their cultures, traditions and

23 Die Rigaer Jubiläums-Ausstellung 1901 in Bild und Wort: Ein Erinnerungsbuch. Ed. M. Scherwinsky. Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1902, p. 54.

24 Die Rigaer Jubiläums-Ausstellung 1901 in Bild und Wort, p. 62.

25 Z. Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

26 J. Siliņš, Gustavs Šķilters. – *Ilustrēts Žurnāls* 1926, no. 1, p. 4.

architecture²⁷. Šķilters painted various water-colours depicting the architecture and nature of those countries.

The most important figure from the first decades of the twentieth century who was interested in Oriental motifs was the artist Jāzeps Grosvalds. His first encounter with the Orient was when he visited Spain in 1913²⁸, where he depicted its Islamic architectural objects and described them knowledgeably in his diary. An even more extraordinary experience followed, as during the last year of World War I Grosvalds participated in a military expedition through the Middle East.²⁹ He then visited Egypt, parts of contemporary Iraq and Iran (then Persia), and on the way back Turkey. During the trip, despite the severe conditions, Jāzeps Grosvalds created a huge number of artworks depicting all that he saw during his trip: local people, their clothing and traditions, the unusual landscape, bazaars, richly decorated city gates and mosques (fig. 6). He also kept a diary and in one of the first places they visited, Alexandria, he noted: 'Alexandria was magnificent, with its multi-coloured bazaar; there I saw the Orient for the first time, the real 1001 nights, something that I had always dreamed of'.³⁰ After having returned to Europe, in 1919 Grosvalds produced a self-designed typewritten book about his experiences, *Tableaux persans (Persian Scenes)*³¹, which was published in 1978, with a lot of reproductions from his Oriental studies added.

Valdemārs Tone (1892–1958), who had an opportunity to travel around Mediterranean countries and the North African coast in 1913, is also worth mentioning.³² It is known that he returned home with various oil paintings and water-colours, which were exhibited at the third exhibition of Latvian artists³³, but unfortunately there is no further information about those artworks. Another, lesser known Latvian artist, Kārlis Hartmanis (1874–1954) from Liepāja, organised regular trips to the Middle East, India, Egypt, Spain etc., but although a lot of extensive descriptions of his adventures can be found in the local press, it has not been possible to find any artworks depicting oriental motifs.³⁴

Not only Latvians, but also Estonian artists, including Ants Laikmaa (1866–1942), who travelled to Tunisia in 1911³⁵, Roman Nyman (1881–1951), who visited Spain in 1923, and Eduard Wiiralt (1898–1954), who lived in Morocco for seven months in

27 K., Tēlnieks Gustavs Šķilters. – Latvijas Kareivis 14 October 1934.

28 Together with his older brother Oļģerds Grosvalds (1884–1962), a future politician and diplomat, who studied art history and received his Dr. phil. from the University of Munich in 1912. See E. Kļaviņš, Džo. Jāzeps Grosvalda dzīve un māksla [Džo. The life and art of Jāzeps Grosvalds]. Riga: Neputns, 2006, pp. 115–121.

29 In 1916 the artist was enlisted in the army. At first he served in the Riga front but then in Petrograd, where he stayed till the end of the summer of 1917, when ended up in London. At the end of the year, the officers of the Russian army, who were in London, were offered to join the Mesopotamian campaign. Grosvalds used this opportunity. See E. Kļaviņš, Džo. Jāzeps Grosvalda dzīve un māksla, p. 227.

30 E. Kļaviņš, Džo. Jāzeps Grosvalda dzīve un māksla, p. 229.

31 J. Grosvalds, Persijas ainās / Tableaux persans [Persian scenes]. Latvian trans. V. Strēlerte, with contributions by V. Bokalders and O. Grosvalds. Stockholm: Daugava, 1978.

32 Together with his brother, long-distance truck captain.

33 A. Jūrasteters, Valdemāra Tones 25 darba gadi [25 years of work of Valdemārs Tone]. – Rīts 10 December 1938.

34 K. Hartmanis, Ceļojums Austrumu Svētās zemēs un Eiropā [The journey to the oriental Holy Land and Europe]. – Zeltene 1927, June–March; K. Hartmanis, Ceļojums pa Spāniju un Portugāli [The journey to Spain and Portugal]. – Zeltene 1928, no. 19; K. Hartmanis, Indija un Ceilona – brīnumu un pasaku zeme [India and Ceylon – the land of miracles and fairy tales]. – Zeltene 1930, April–June, etc.

35 B. Pushaw, Admiration and Acceptance: Ants Laikmaa in North Africa. – Ants Laikmaa: Vigala & Capri. Ed. L. Pählapuu. Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuseum, 2015, p. 39.

1938–1939, need to be mentioned and analysed in the context of an orientalism discourse, as has been done on several occasions in Estonian art history. In the case of all those artists mentioned above, the interest in oriental motifs is evident and the source of inspiration for each artwork is clear, as they all saw the oriental lifestyle and architectural forms with their own eyes and depicted their direct observations.

Among those artists who used oriental motifs but did not travel to the oriental countries, of special importance are the book illustrators Sigismunds Vidbergs (1890–1970), Niklāvs Strunke (1894–1966) and Aleksandrs Apsītis (1880–1943), as well as the painters and graphic artists Ludolfs Liberts (1895–1959), Kārlis Padeģs (1911–1940) and Herberts Mangolds (1901–1978), who depicted the imagined Orient mainly during the second and third decades of the twentieth century by relying on descriptions, photos and works created by other artists. Oriental tales were at their apogee at that time, for example *One Thousand and One Nights* was published throughout Europe, including the Baltics (fig. 7).³⁶ Oriental motifs were also very popular in stage design, for example in the works of the Russian scenographer and costume designer Léon Bakst (1866–1924). It is clear that Latvian artists were influenced by the trend of orientalism during their formative years, as images of Eastern motifs were quite accessible: there were photos published in the press, designs in theatres, art in exhibitions, the above-mentioned Alhambra room was still open in the Imperial Academy of Arts, etc. Although each artist had his own approach to depicting and interpreting those unusual motifs, the fundamentals of this interest were the same.

Neo-Islamic style in the Baltics during the first third of the twentieth century

Many interesting manifestations of the neo-Islamic style can also be found in architecture, especially in the interior decoration of that period. There are two important types of buildings where the use of oriental elements was very popular: private residences in holiday resorts (Jūrmala is an excellent example) and the interiors of cafés. One of the most interesting examples is the dwelling at 10 Bulduru Prospect (built in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, architect unknown).³⁷ This edifice is adorned with multifoil arches (and octagonal stars) derived from the constructions of Almohades and Nasrids in North Africa and Spain, which were depicted in publications of Owen Jones and other researchers, and exhibited in plaster casts in the Alhambra room in Saint Petersburg. As the architect and commissioner remain unknown, the questions of who wanted this kind of decoration and why remain to be answered.

36 Tūkstsots un viena nakts. Arabiešu pasakas [The thousand and one nights. Arabian fairy tales]. I–IV. Rīga: Leta, 1924–1929.

37 R. Pētersons, *Architectural Styles. – Jūrmala: Nature and Cultural Heritage*. Ed. L. Slava. Rīga: Neputns, 2004, p. 226. See about 19 Bulduru Prospect (misprint of the English edition).

The private house at 5 Konkordijas Street (demolished in 2015), also in Jūrmala, built at the beginning of the twentieth century³⁸, reflects another mixture of neo styles: in this case neo-Islamic and neo-gothic. The decorative arches which adorn the facade of the ground floor derive their forms from Ottoman small form architecture of repose functions. So, in this case the source of inspiration is not the famous Alhambra palace, but Islamic architectural forms from another region. Most probably the architect or designer had seen this kind of exterior decoration in some oriental pavilion in a world's fair. A good example is the pavilion of the Bosphorus constructed in 1876 in Paris.

The most complete neo-Islamic style interior from private residences is to be found in the same city of Jūrmala, at 18 Dzintaru Prospect (built in 1919–1929, architect Eižens Laube).³⁹ The house, which in its exterior resembles an antique villa, has peculiar third floor interior decoration. It is built on two levels: a big polychrome wooden arcade with multifoil arches, decorated with vegetal ornaments (fig. 8), and a small multifoil arcade, made in stucco and decorated with an arabesque motif. Beyond the small white arcade, there was a painting on the wood called *A Landscape from 1001 Arabian Nights*. In the painting, there was a typical oriental landscape with an Ottoman-style mosque in the centre, which was reflected in water enclosed by mountains, palm trees and other vegetation. The painting was destroyed and as no colour photos have survived, only black-and-white, one can only imagine the bright blue, green and other tones. From various stories, it is known that the room was also adorned with luxurious oriental carpets. The big wooden arcade is an exact copy from the Alhambra palace, and even the colours are the same (fig. 9). In this case, the commissioner of the house is known: the businessman Georgs Rudzītis (1870–1934, also called 'Cabbage Rudzītis', as he dedicated himself to the business of cabbage cultivation), who loved art, music and dance. Most probably he decorated this room in such an exotic style because he organised different kinds of artistic performances, as also a small stage was set up there. He had close relationships with the opera singer Elza Žebranska (1903–1996) and the ballet dancer Edite Feifere (also Pfeifers, Pfeifere, Feifers, 1914–2005), who later acquired the house as a gift.

Of course, the same trend can be observed in other resort areas in the Baltic area, for example in Narva-Jõesuu in Estonia, where there are various private residences decorated with spectacular woodcarvings which reflect different forms of Islamic architecture.

In the 1920s, parallel to the activities of the previously mentioned artists and to the construction of private residences, oriental interiors appeared widely in entertainment venues and cafés, which also marks a common trend. It seems that the owners of cafés and dance clubs wanted to surprise the public with something special, something they hadn't experienced⁴⁰, and thus commissioned oriental inte-

38 Konkordijas iela 5, NACH MDC, no. 14–18/185.

39 K. Veinberga, Dzintaru prospekts 18, Ēkas arhitektoniski mākslinieciskā inventarizācija. Interjeru mākslinieciskā izpēte [18 Dzintaru Prospect, Architecturally artistic inventory of the building: an artistic study of the interiors]. NACH MDC, inv. no. 63882 III, 2004.

40 V. Banga, Izklaides vietas Rīgā un Jūrmalā [Entertainment venues in Riga and Jūrmala]. – Latvijas Arhitektūra 1999, no. 21, p. 28.

riors, which were popular all over Europe. Unfortunately, for different reasons, no examples of these interiors survive; therefore, it is only possible to make a judgement based on a few surviving photographs and descriptions. In Riga, there were several significant examples. Probably the most striking and complete interior was to be found in the nightclub Alhambra, in Riga, at 25 Brīvības Street (the Alhambra was located in a two-storey wooden house, constructed in 1875 in the first hotel outside the Old Town, called Frankfurt am Main).⁴¹ The interior in neo-Islamic style was designed in 1924 by the architect Kurt Bätge (1888–1963).⁴² In the photos one can see the use of multifoil arches, columns and pilasters covered with decorative tiles, using vegetal and geometric motifs and ornaments, and decorative friezes on the ceiling. After the opening, rapturous reviews appeared in the local press, for example: ‘This interior must be one of the most luxuriously elaborated in Riga [...] all in oriental style.’⁴³

On the corner of Elizabetes and Valdemāra Street during the 1920s, there was a two-storey wooden building with the café JAR inside. The main hall also had two floors and it was partly decorated with arches in oriental style. The Latvian Frīdrihs Skujiņš (1890–1957) has been mentioned as a possible architect of the café.⁴⁴ Also in the dance hall/café Barberīna (39 Brīvības Street), opened in 1931 and closed after two months, there was a special Turkish room with oriental arches, carpets and a wall painting depicting Constantinople (Istanbul) by night. The interior was elaborated by a decorator named Singer.⁴⁵ According to café visitors, its ‘waitresses were dressed in oriental clothing’.⁴⁶ Nearby, in the same street, in 1928 another cafeteria called À la Marquise was opened.⁴⁷ No precise details are known, but contemporaries remembered the oriental atmosphere. It is a challenge to analyse interiors when only a few or no photos have survived, as it is almost impossible to find direct sources of inspiration or models which were imitated there.

The last object to mention in this article is the interior of a flat at 7 Tērbatas Street, Riga. The building was designed at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Latvian architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928), but in many flats the interior decoration was changed later. This is also the case with the salon, which shows the use of oriental architectural elements and motifs. From 1938 the building belonged to the opera singer Milda Langenfelde (née Zulstere, 1902–1961), and she lived in one of the flats. The main salon was decorated according to the sketches of Langenfelde: she wanted colourful stained glass windows, multifoil golden arches, a wall painting with oriental motifs (mosques, minarets, and an exotic landscape with flowers and birds) (fig. 10) and a lot of pillows and carpets, some of which were

41 V. Banga, J. Lejnīeks, Krāsainā Venera Alhambā [A colourful Venus in the Alhambra]. – *Māksla Plus* 1999, no. 4, p. 31.

42 V. Banga, Izklaides vietas Rīgā un Jūrmalā, p. 31.

43 Dienas notikumi [Daily events]. – *Nedēļa* 25 January 1924.

44 Conversation with Latvian historian Voldemārs Eihenbaums, 14 April 2014.

45 ‘Barberīna’ – Rīgas vismodernākā izpriecas vieta [‘Barberīna’ – the most modern entertainment venue in Riga]. – *Pasaules Pasts* 20 September 1931; *Modernā Eiropa Rīgā: mēs dabūsim kafē-dansingu* [Modern Europe in Riga: we will get a café-dance hall]. – *Pasaules Pasts* 6 September 1931.

46 V. Banga, *Provokatīvā bohēma* [The provocative bohemian way of life]. – *Studija* 2002, no. 24, p. 69.

47 *Pēdējā Brīdī* 3 April 1928.

embroidered by her.⁴⁸ The guest room was created as a theatrical performance or stage design.⁴⁹ It can be safely assumed that Langenfelde's profession was crucial in her developing interest in exotic Eastern motifs, a mix of Islamic and Far East forms and aesthetic language.

Conclusions

To sum up, it is evident that the manifestations of orientalism in Latvia (and in the Baltic countries in general) provide a broad research platform, as there are a considerable number of examples both in architectural forms and interiors, as well as in visual arts. Some of the problems related to those tendencies have been solved, but there are still a lot of questions and also new aspects to be analysed. This article reflects the fact that both the architectural heritage and the visual arts of the Baltic area during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century can be related to the common interests of the Western world in terms of the exotic phenomenon of orientalism. It is necessary to continue investigations, especially to place the art of the Baltic countries in a larger context.

48 J. Mednieks, Milda Langenfelde. – Zeltene 1940, no. 7, p. 7.

49 A. Rubenis, V. Banga, Arhitektoniski mākslinieciskā inventarizācija, Tērbatas iela 7 [Architecturally artistic inventory, 7 Tērbatas Street]. NACH MDC, no. 8145, pp. 46–47.