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RUSSIAN MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE 18TH CENTURY: SURVIVAL AND REVIVAL

Russian architecture of the 18th century is not associated with the Middle Ages. During the one hundred years that the best European masters worked in St Petersburg it became a full-fledged part of European Baroque and then neo-Classicism.

However, the vast Russia is not confined to St Petersburg. The architecture of Moscow, the old capital, retained many late medieval forms up to the 1750s¹. Much more of medieval architecture remained in other regions of Russia, to which European forms seeped through, as a rule, through Moscow² and with great delay. Medieval Russian architecture of the 18th century is yet to be comprehended as a phenomenon, but studies and publications of landmarks made in the past decades provide sufficient material for preliminary conclusions about its nature. This phenomenon is not specifically Russian: it just manifested itself with greater prominence by dint of huge distances. Similar processes occurred in all European countries, as can be illustrated by the architecture of Lower Brittany, Lecce, etc³. English historiographers were the first to ponder on the

¹ Sedov, V.I.V. "Elizavetinskoye barokko v Moskve, ili V teni Rastrelli" (Elizabethan Baroque in Moscow, or in Rastrelli's Shadow) // *Project Klassika*, No. 8 (2003), pp. 155–61.

² Pluzhnikov, V.I. Sootnoshenie ob'yomnykh form v russkom kultovom zodchestve nachala XVIII v. (Correlation of Dimensional Forms in Russian Religious Architecture of the Early 18th Century) // *Russkoye iskusstvo pervoi chetverti XVIII v. (Russian Art of the First Quarter of the 18th Cent.)*. Moscow, 1974, pp. 81–108.

³ See, for instance, Fréal J. *Calvaires et enclose paroissiaux de Bretagne*. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1981; Danieli F. *Fasti e linguaggi sacri: il Barocco leccese tra riforma e controriforma*. Lecce: Edizioni Grifo, 2014; *Le gothique de la Renaissance / M. Chatenet, K. De Jonge, M. Kavalier, N. Nußbaum ed.* Paris: Picard, 2011

existence of medieval forms in the stylistic environment of New Europe and to name the trend Survival in contrast to Revival, the deliberate replication of medieval forms in the period of Romanticism and Historicism¹. I deemed it pertinent to use the existing English terms to describe Russian processes in order to stress their universal nature.

This text is about medieval forms in regional architecture of the 18th century, their latent survival and purposeful revival. Before passing on to examples illustrating the various aspects of the above processes, a brief survey of the general situation is called for.

St Petersburg was the indisputable centre of construction from the 1710s: a 1714 decree banned the construction of stone buildings outside the new capital. Although it was not enacted immediately and there were numerous exceptions, it did break the masonry tradition in Moscow and the rest of Russia. After it was rescinded in 1728–9, the tradition was revived everywhere in a different way. A new European type of building that presupposed a detailed plan and, consequently, the creator architect started spreading in Moscow and nearby provinces. In this case architecture could be (and more often than not was) a modest provincial replica of that of St Petersburg. Medieval forms *per se* did not survive in it. The old medieval method of building “after a fashion” survived and thrived in the remote regions, where the influence of Moscow and even more so of St Petersburg took time to reach. It did not presuppose any precise design, and the building was born from the interaction of the client, contractor, artel foreman and master builders, each adding something of his own to the image of the building under construction². Such an approach did not make for any stylistic unity of the building, which could take on diverse stylistic forms. The present study aims to determine which of them go back to the medieval tradition and to trace the ways of their combination with one another and with new European forms.

As stylistic descriptions of forms of Russian architecture are ambiguous and at times controversial, it is necessary to briefly review terminology. Four basic styles can be singled out, whose forms are found in Russian regional architecture after its revival in the 1730s. Forms of the so-called *uzorochye* (patternwork), the leading style of suburban architecture of the 1630s–1680s, will be referred to as pre-Petrine. Architectural forms of Left-bank Ukraine that came to Russia in the 1680s and different variations of the emergent Naryshkin style are classified as medieval. Although the name of the latter and its stylistic essence

¹ Gothic Survival // *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*. Vol. 2. Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 205–8.

² Buseva-Davydova, I.L. *Spetsifika arkhitekturnoi deiatelnosti v Drevnei Rusi i v pervoi polovine XVIII v.* (Specifics of Architectural Activity in Old Rus and in the First Half of the 18th Cent.) // *Slovar arkhitektorov i masterov stroitel'nogo dela Moskv XV – serediny XVIII veka* (Glossary of Moscow Architects and Builders of the 15th – mid-18th Centuries). Ed. I.A. Bondarenko. Moscow, 2008, pp. 667–85.



The Church
of the Troitse-Scanov
Convent, 1795–1808
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2004.



The Church of St
Basil of Caesarea,
Derevni, 1797, 1837
Photo: Nikita Rybin,
2012.

are a subject of debate¹, its distinction from the subsequent Baroque is fundamental to the present paper. The Baroque is usually divided into Petrine and that of Empress Elizabeth's period, but the exquisite forms of the latter rarely reached the provinces. The distinction between the different variants of classicism is even less pertinent to them.

Studies have been confined mostly to stone churches as the only fairly numerous and reliably dated type of buildings. As far as geography is concerned, regional architecture developed longer and most successfully in Northern Russia, along the Vyatka River, in the Urals and in Siberia, that is, in lands where nobility domains and hence estate culture were nonexistent. Distinctive regional schools also formed around ecclesiastical and administrative centres of Central Russia even in the immediate vicinity of Moscow (Suzdal, Yaroslavl, etc.). After summarising the vast empirical material, the paper cites cases illustrating obvious trends. The amassed material is, however, insufficient for a statistically precise analysis (including frequency and regional specifics), which is a job for the future.

The main survival mechanism is preserving the old spatial composition while renovating some of the décor. In general, spatial composition is the most conservative element of medieval architecture, whereas décor is more responsive to stylistic innovations. Thus, the type of church with piers and five domes modelled after the Moscow Cathedral of the Dormition (1475–9) survived successfully throughout the 16th and 17th centuries almost unaffected by patternwork, and on to the early 18th century. True, almost no church with piers was built after the 1710s (the Church of the

¹ "Severnyi manierizm" kak forma khudozhestvennogo myshleniya perekhodnogo vremeni. K voprosu ob osobennostyakh "naryshkinskogo stilya" ("Northern Mannerism" as a Form of Artistic Thinking in the Transition Period. On the Problem of Naryshkin Style Specifics) // *Iskusstvoznanie*, No. 2, 2002, pp. 334–73.



Dormition in Kineshma, 1745, was the last large church with six piers¹), and their reappearance in the 1740s was a conscious Revival of that type sanctioned by a special decree of Empress Elizabeth². A noteworthy fact is that this Revival was embodied not only in the forms of the Elizabethan Baroque (the St Nicholas Naval Cathedral of St Petersburg, 1753–62, S.I. Chevakinsky), but also in traditional forms (see below). The type of a five-domed parish church without piers (with a cloistered vault) that evolved in the 1630s proved just as lasting³. It successfully acquired first

The Church
of Archangel
Michael, Tobolsk,
1745–1749
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2003.

¹ Vdovichenko, M. V., *Arkhitektura bolshikh soborov XVII v.* (The Architecture of Large Cathedrals of the 17th Century). Moscow, 2009, pp. 334–6.

² Fedotova, T. P., *K probleme pyatiglaviya v arkhitekture barokko pervoi poloviny XVIII v.* (On the Problem of Five Domes in Baroque Architecture of the First Half of the 18th Cent.) // *Russkoye iskusstvo barokko. Materialy i issledovaniya.* Moscow, 1977, pp. 70–87.

³ Tarabarina, Iu. V., *Russkaya arkhitektura pervoi treti XVII v.* (Russian Architecture of the First Third of the 17th Cent.) Extended abstract of dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Arts. Moscow: MGU Publishers, 1999.

the Naryshkin¹ and then Baroque décor and remained in use up to the beginning of the 19th century.

The Troitse-Scanov Convent outside Narovchat was a graphic example of the combination of the traditional church type with new décor. Built to a single plan, it comprises a five-domed church surrounded by an irregular square of the convent walls with built-in structures, three corner towers and a bell-tower standing on the church axis. The two-storied church was built in 1795–1808 and is one of the largest Russian churches of the turn of the 19th century. It is of the traditional type with four piers, but its apses are visually balanced out by a tall western narthex with a Baroque semi-circular gable. The presence of a tall narthex throughout the width of the church was quite uncharacteristic of the church type and was evidence of the influence of new architecture. The church has a wonderful décor of a spectacular, yet provincial version of early Classicism (which became outdated in St Petersburg by the early 1780s). The ground floor is decorated with fanciful rustication while the upper floor is nearly entirely covered with light décor. Wide and flat pilasters are especially outstanding with panels with representations of cherubim for capitals. The arrangement of windows does not correspond to the structure (four rows with two piers), which was already typical of 17th-century churches. That placement made it possible to liken the two central parts of each of the façades to a two-columned portico with a gable put on a cornice and squeezed in between the side drums.

¹ Merzliutina, N.A., *Traditsionnye besstolpnye khramy naryshkinskogo stilya* (Traditional Naryshkin Style Churches without Piers). Extended abstract of dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Arts. Moscow: GII Publishers, 2002.



The Church of the
Transfiguration,
Rogozha, 1756–1770
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2008



The Church
of the Ascension,
Saviour-Sumorin
Monastery, 1796–1801
and 1825
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2015.

Overall, the church of the Troitse-Scanov Convent is a graphic example of provincial architecture trying to keep up with the metropolitan fashion.

The Church of St Basil of Caesarea (1797) in the village of Derevni near Rostov Veliky is a colourful example of a five-domed parish church with a new décor. It has a vertically elongated quadrangle typical of the Yaroslavl school and large onion domes (newly restored). Despite its late date, its décor has even pre-Petrine forms, including an arcature belt in imitation of *zakomar* gables and ogee architraves of the skylight windows. The faceted drums, the apse and architraves with a broken pediment of the lower tier are all typical of the Naryshkin style. A panel over the doorway and round window-like panels between the lower and upper rows of windows bespeak Baroque influence. Only the bulky six-tier bell tower, built in 1837, reflects the influence of Classicism with its pilasters, semi-columns and flat pediments. The Derevni church thus combined all the stylistic layers possible in provincial architecture of that period.

Combinations of new compositions with elements of décor of the preceding style are rarer, yet not infrequent either. The Church of Archangel Michael (1745–9) in Tobolsk, the then capital of Siberia, is a good example. It is a two-storeyed church with one dome, a refectory and bell tower on its axis, the so-called “ship design”, which developed at the turn of the 18th century. The church and the bell tower are crowned with typically baroque forms. The quadrangle has a high vault with the so-called *poluglavie* (semi-circular pediments over the central wall segments) and the bell tower has a vault with lucarnes. These compositions associated with the early Baroque buildings in Russia (from the late 1690s) took final shape in the architecture of the Church of St John the Warrior on Yakimanka, Moscow (1709–17). Given its Baroque spatial composition, the Tobolsk church comprises numerous Ukrainian elements in the upper tier and pre-Petrine

The Church of the
Transfiguration,
Vladimir, 1779–1811
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2015.



The Church
of St John the
Precursor,
Shirokovskoye,
1784–1793
Photo: Lev Maciel, 2002.



panels in the lower tier. The combination of motifs so heterogeneous in time is explained by the replication of the forms of the neighbouring Church of the Epiphany, the ground floor of which is of the pre-Petrine period (1690–1) and the upper floor dates from the time when Ukrainian masters were active in Tobolsk (1737–44)¹. Each tier of the Church of Archangel Michael has retained “genetic memory” of the original combinations of forms, while overall the church turned out to be an unexpectedly modern “stylisation” of historical stratification for the mid-18th century.

Another bright example is the Church of the Transfiguration in Rogozha (1756–70) outside Ostashkov. It is of the “octagon-on-quadrangle” type, which was most common in the 18th century and whose origin is associated with the Naryshkin style. However, the octagon is crowned with five domes, not cross-shaped (oriented with respect to the cardinal directions) as is occasionally encountered in the Naryshkin style, but diagonal, which is almost mandatory for *uzorochye*, with befitting onion domes and *zakomars* at the base of the side domes. The bell tower is also archaic with its wooden tent-like top. The architraves are even more remarkable: pre-Petrine on the octagon and the ground tier and baroque in the

¹ Maciel Sánchez. L. Svet Lavry in partibus infidelium: “ukrainizmy” v arkhitekture Sibiri XVIII v. (The Light of the Lavra in partibus infidelium: Ukrainisms in Siberian Architecture of the 18th Cent.) // *Arkhiturnoye nasledstvo*. Issue 54. Moscow, 2011, pp. 144–57.



middle tier and on the windows of the central tholobate. Overall, Rogozha is the opposite of Tobolsk: in the latter the combination of forms of different styles was genetically justified while in the former all ties are, on the contrary, broken: Baroque architraves decorate the pre-Petrine drum, the pre-Petrine architraves, conversely, the Naryshkin quadrangle, and so on. At the same time the details are expressive quality work, all proportions are well coordinated and in general the building produces a harmonious impression.

There are curious examples of an approach when a church that is completely new in form actually reflects archaic architectural ideas. One such example is the Church of the Ascension of the Saviour-Sumorin Monastery outside Totma (1796–1801 and 1825, attributed to V.M. Kazakov). Scholars cite this church as an example of Moscow Classicism¹, which is well justified as far as its main structure is concerned. From the point of view of Survival the refectory is noteworthy for its unusual height compared with the main structure: its double-floor height area was superposed on a semi-basement. The refectory has an elegant neo-Classical décor in the spirit of Quarenghi, along with an unusual composition of the side façade: the narthex incorporated into the refectory structure is singularised by an additional Italian window, which makes the façade asymmetrical. The rather unusual forms for neo-Classical refectories can be supposedly explained by the local tradition of building two-storeyed churches of ship design with their tall two-storeyed refectories. The asymmetric façade may be the result of the custom to visually single out the refectory part below the bell tower (e.g., in the village of Tsareva, 1779). Customary spatial thinking is thus “articulated” here in the neo-Classical architectural language.

The Church of St John the Baptist, Kargopol, 1751
Photo: Lev Maciel, 2007.

¹ Bocharov, G.N., Vygolov, V.P. *Solvyehodsk. Veliky Ustyug. Totma*. Moscow, 1985.



The Church of SS
Peter and Paul
in Severouralsk,
1767–1798
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2002.

In rare cases archaic forms survived practically in full with but a minimum of contemporary architectural forms. Some churches of Kargopol and its environs exemplify such archaism. A spectacular example is the Church of St John the Baptist (1751), a monumental five-domed church looking like 16th and 17th-century churches. It has a two-pier structure, low narthex, three semi-circular apses, relatively small windows and other features that are little different from those of 17th-century cathedral type churches. The octahedral windows topping the quadrangle typical of Naryshkin style churches are the only element of the Petrine period (but not Baroque!). As for the Ukrainian form of the domes, it is not clear whether they were original. This rejection of innovations by Kargopol clients and builders may be explained by the nearly complete absence of contacts between the Kargopol masonry tradition and other centres (Vologda, Ustyug and Arkhangelsk are hundreds of kilometres away from Kargopol) and, consequently, contemporary architectural trends.

Russian architecture also saw Revival, and even more than one. To begin with, a “Gothic taste”¹, sometimes referred to as pseudo- or false Gothic, appeared in the time of Catherine the Great in imitation of the English Gothic Revival. Although it could also be interpreted as reference to medieval Russian architecture², it had nothing in common with its forms. The distinction between native and West European Gothic was eventually drawn by the 1830s, when two Revivals – neo-Gothic *per se* and Russian

¹ Khachaturov, S.V. *Goticheskii vkus v russkoi khudozhestvennoi culture XVIII v.* (Gothic Taste in Russian Artistic Culture of the 18th Cent.). Moscow, 1999.

² Kirichenko, E.I. *Russkii stil* (Russian Style), Moscow, 1997; Lisovskii V.G. *Arkhitektura Rossii XVIII – nach. XX v. Poisk natsionalnogo stilya* (Russian Architecture. 18th – Early 20th Cent. Search for a National Style). Moscow, 2009.



style – began to take shape and develop. The latter, which contemporaries sometimes called Moscow-Yaroslavl and pseudo-Russian in the Soviet period, is often referred to as Russian Revival by English-speaking historiographers. None of them is in any way related to the Survival processes considered above.

I have a hypothesis that the above medieval tradition, which “survived” in the 18th century, had its own Revival. I mean the conscious recourse of church builders to forms that had already ceased to be used in their region, a phenomenon yet to be understood by historiographers. The so-called Pokhodyashin churches of the North Urals constitute short of the only example described so far. Three stone churches – of St John the Precursor (1754–76) in Verkhoturys, of the Presentation of the Virgin (1767–76) in Karpinsk and of SS Peter and Paul (1767–98) in Severouralsk – were commissioned by the conservative merchant Maksim Pokhodyashin. They successfully reproduced the forms of local Naryshkin style churches of the early 18th century (above all, of the Church of St John the Precursor (1721–8) in Krasnoye already after the Baroque forms had become common there in the mid-18th century¹.

Analysis of various regional traditions makes it possible to presume that the above phenomenon was common and could take different forms.

On the one side, it could have been dictated by the desire to reproduce some admired specimen. Thus, a small church of St John the Precursor built

The Church
of the Meeting
of the Lord, Zaostrovie,
1808–1878
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2007.

¹ Kaptikov A. Iu., “Pokhodyashinskie tserkvi Urala” (Pokhodyashin Churches of the Urals) // *Arkhitekturnoye nasledstvo*. Issue 38 (1995). Moscow, pp. 374–8.



The Church
of the Presentation
of the Virgin,
Kargopol, 1785–1802
Photo: Lev Maciel,
2007.

in the village of Shirokovskoye beyond the Urals in 1784–93 in minute detail reproduced the unique forms of the finishes of the nearby Cathedral of the Dormition of the Dalmatov Monastery (1707–20). These forms, which have not survived to our day, were the result of Naryshkin style masters' experiments with the cross-in-square five-domed church: the lucarnes serving as the base for the lateral domes were placed at the centre of the broken pediments stretched throughout the width of the quadrangle walls¹. Despite the spread of exquisite forms of Tobolsk Baroque in the region in the 1770s (the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Shadrinsk, 1771–7)², the builders of the small church in the village belonging to the monastery deliberately reproduced the archaic forms of the admired halidom.

There are even more specific examples. The Church of the Transfiguration (1164) built in Vladimir by Andrei Bogolyubsky was pulled down after a fire in 1778. Its foundation was soon used to raise a new church (the exact date of its construction is unknown³) with a quadrangle typical of the period topped with a small octagon on a high vault. Some details are provincial Baroque. The builders also wonderfully reproduced some features of 12th-century Vladimir-Suzdal architecture, most likely guided by

¹ Maciel Sánchez L.C., "Artel Dalmatova monastyrya i arkhitektura Sibiri XVIII v." (The Dalmatov Monastery Artel and 18th-century Architecture of Siberia) // *Academia. Arkhitektura i stroitelstvo*. No. 4, 2012, pp. 21–8.

² Maciel Sánchez L.C., "Tobolskoye barokko" (Tobolsk Baroque) // *Academia. Arkhitektura i stroitelstvo*. No. 3, 2013, pp. 46–51.

³ *Svod. Vladimirskaya obl.* Part 1. Moscow, 2004, p. 428.

the forms of the burnt-out church. Although reproduced not quite exactly, they are still recognisable. The band of blind arcades is not below the windows, but at their level, most likely due to lack of space. By analogy with Vladimir-Suzdal churches, the portal is a rowlock arch, keel-shaped as typical of the 15th-18th centuries, instead of the semi-circular one. As a result, the Church of Transfiguration in Vladimir is in spirit attuned to Gothic Revival in reproducing an old church as a fact of venerable age rather than an extratemporal thing of worship.

Another Revival version is oriented to old fashion as such, to some archaic architectural image. That tendency grew stronger as regional architectures came to the end of their development as a sort of defence reaction of the outgoing medieval world outlook (and construction method) in the face of stifling neo-Classicist regulation.

A good example is the Church of the Meeting of the Lord in Zaostrovie not far away from Arkhangelsk. It was founded in 1808, the upper floor altar was consecrated in 1827, and work on the church was completed in 1878. Despite its modest status of a parish church, it is of the five-domed piers cathedral type. Such parish churches were built in the environs of Kholmogory in the late 17th century¹, the last one of this type being the Trinity Cathedral of Arkhangelsk (1708–43). Later on churches topped with a small octagon typical of Northeastern Russia became common there. At the very end of the century the local church builders all of a sudden reverted to the extremely conservative type of building². In the environs of Arkhangelsk they built the Church of the Epiphany in Emetsk (1792–1808, has not survived) after the Trinity Cathedral of Arkhangelsk and the Trinity Cathedral (1800–17, has not survived) in Pinega, in which Classicist features were more manifest. The Zaostrovie church is emphatically monumental: its décor (primitive Baroque and Classicist architraves) is fine and light, merely emphasising the might of the cubic space. The sanctuary apses are absent and the placement of the main altars on both floors (there are six of them) is uniquely designated with a narrow portico on paired columns. The domes have a spectacular exaggeratedly bulbous shape. Overall, despite somewhat coarse details, the builders managed to convey the image of an old northern church, impressive in its might. Due to the late date of its foundation and extremely protracted construction the Revival of medieval architecture merged in it with the Russian Revival of modern history: the church itself epitomizes the close of a long medieval tradition while its tent-like bell tower already reflects the influence of the Russo-Byzantine style projects of K.A. Thon.

¹ Vdovichenko, M.V., *Arkhitectura severnykh soborov XVII v.* (Architecture of Northern Churches of the 17th Cent.) // *Pamyatniki russkoi arkhitektury i monumentalnogo iskusstva XVI–XX vv.* (Monuments of Russian Architecture and Monumental Art of the 16th – 20th Centuries). Issue 7, Moscow, 2006, pp. 27–62.

² Maciel Sánchez, L.C., *Khramy arkhangelogorodskoi shkoly* (Churches of the Arkhangelsk School) // *Arkhiteturnoye nasledstvo*. Issue 55. Moscow, 2011, pp. 77–87.

It is worth citing one more specimen of even greater archaisation. The Church of the Presentation of the Virgin was built in Kargopol in 1785–1802. It has nothing but Naryshkin (“ship design” and the faceted skylight windows) and pre-Petrine (“crown” architraves at the turn of the 19th century!) forms without any reference whatsoever to Classicism or even Baroque. Its appearance should not be surprising given the special conservatism of the Kargopol school. However, a close look at the dates of the landmarks will show that starting from the 1770s many of them featured both Baroque and schematised Classicist elements, to say nothing of the spectacular cathedral bell tower in early Classicist forms built by visiting masters (1772–8)¹. In this context the pointedly archaic forms of the Presentation Church a mere 50 m away from the aforementioned bell tower can be interpreted not as latent Survival, but as intentional Revival.

The fact of Survival was on the whole never called in question, yet this vast realm of architecture represented by thousands of landmarks deserves more extensive and in-depth research. As for Revival, the above arguments attest to the need to ponder at length on this little known and fairly rare phenomenon. Its specimens are evidence that the ability to differentiate between layers of the historical past and interest in doing so began to spread from the mid-18th century also in the conservative and in fact still medieval environment of Russian regional clients and builders.

¹ Maciel Sánchez, L.K., Kamennaya arkhitektura Kargopolya kon. XVIII v. (Stone Architecture of Kargopol of the Late 18th Cent.) // *Academia. Arkhitektura i stroitelstvo*. No. 3, 2015. P.58–65.