

## HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# RUSSIAN ARCHITECTURE

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**Overview** Surviving architecture is frequently one of the most defining elements of any civilization, and this is equally true for Russian architecture. Throughout its long history architecture has been a mirror of Russia's history, and its people's self-perception and ideals. In addition, over the centuries peoples of diverse religions, origins and cultures have migrated into, invaded and colonized Russia, and Russian architecture reflects this tumultuous history. Russian architecture has taken traditional native forms and combined them with features derived from East Asian, Persian, Indian, Byzantine and Western European architectural styles.

## ANCIENT PERIOD

### Stone Age:

**Dolmens (Burial Chamber):** In the north-western Caucasus archeologists found 3,000 megalithic monuments known as dolmens that date to between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. The dolmens are built with huge stone blocks that look like tables and were supposedly used as burial tombs, however there is no solid evidence to support this theory.

### Iron Age:

**Kurgans (Tumuli):** Scythian and Sarmatian tumulis, burial mounds built over log houses, have been discovered in the area of the Dnieper River, the Strait of Kerch, the Kuban River and the Don River in southern Russia. The tumuli discovered in the region are the Alexandropol (Lugovaya Mogila), Chertomlyk, the Royal Tumulus (Tsarsky kurgan), the Golden Tumulus (Zolotoy kurgan), the Tumuli of the Seven Borthers (Semibratskaya Mogila), Karagodeuashkh, Kelermes, Kostromskaya, as well as many others.

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD

**Kievan Russian Architecture:** Kievan architecture can be classified as wooden or stone structures. After the adoption of Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the first examples of monumental church architecture in Kiev appeared during the reign of three Russian princes: St. Vladimir (Church of the Assumption of the Virgin-Destinnaya Tserkov), Yaroslav the Wise (Cathedral of St. Sophia) and Izyaslav (Monastery of the Caves-Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra). In the early period, Kievan architecture was under the strong influence of Byzantine architecture. However, from the beginning it also incorporated such Russian features as the preference for multiple cupolas, and, especially in the north, thick walls, small windows, and steep roofs to withstand the inclement weather as seen in the Cathedral of St. Sofia in Novgorod. The ancient Russian Chronicles also contain information about wooden churches built completely without nails, using only an axe.

**Cave Structures:** Early cave structures were used by hermit monks to hide from persecution, and built to provide parishioners shelter against enemy attacks. Kyiv-Pechersky Lavra, Zverinetsky and Anthony's Caves of the Trinity-St. Elias Monastery are well-known Kievan cave structures. The other most notable examples of the cave structures are Svyato-Spassky Cave Church (12<sup>th</sup> century) found near the small Russian village of Kostomarovo, Pechersky Ascension male Monastery (13<sup>th</sup> century) found in Nizhny Novgorod, Pskov-Pechersky cave-monastery (mid-15<sup>th</sup> century) found in Pskov oblast and Kalachevskaya Cave (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) used as an underground monastery found in the Voronezh region.

### Wooden structures:

**Klet'** – Used as a summer residence, a *klet'* is simple quadrangular structure made of wood or stone. If the *klet'* has some form of heating it is referred to as an *izba*.

**Izba (Khata)** is a single-room heated log dwelling in the countryside that lacks a chimney. Instead, the windows are used as an outlet for smoke, and the windows were kept small to protect against the cold and humidity.

**Khoromy (mansion)** Formed by linking several groups of houses with roofed passageways (*seni*), the structures of a *khoromy* were all located in one yard.

**Renaissance Architecture:** Renaissance architecture was introduced to Russia by Ivan the Great when he invited a number of Renaissance architects from Italy, like the Bolognese architect Aristotele Fioravanti, to come to Russia. Fioravanti was invited to rebuild the earthquake-damaged Cathedral of the Dormition in Kremlin, where he used traditional Russian style with a Renaissance sense of spaciousness, proportion and symmetry.

#### **Muscovite Architecture:**

**Kremlin Structures:** In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Italian architects were put in charge of designing the Kremlin structures. Instead of Renaissance, they had to use a traditional Russian style of architecture due to the demands of the ruling class. Such cathedrals as the Cathedral of Annunciation, Cathedral of Assumption, Cathedral of the Archangel Michael and the others are grouped around Cathedral Square. Also, the Palace of the Facets in the Kremlin was built by the Italian architect Marco Ruffo as a throne and audience chamber. Near the Kremlin, St. Basil's Cathedral, built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to commemorate the conquest of Kazan and the Astrakhan Khanate, combined earlier church architecture with styles from the Tatar east.

**Wooden Architecture:** From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Muscovite architecture liberated itself from the Byzantine style and modified it by using the traditional Russian style of architecture. Two of the finest examples of wooden structures are located at the Kizhi Pogost site on Kizhi Island which includes the 18<sup>th</sup> century Transfiguration Church with 22 domes and the Intercession Church with 9 domes.

**Tent-type (shatër-Russian Gothic):** This style was developed to prevent snow from piling up on the roofs of wooden churches. This type of architecture resembles the Gothic architecture of Western Europe. The Church of St. John the Baptist in Kolomenskoye and St. Basil's Cathedral on Red Square are two prime examples of this type.

**Kokoshniks:** In Russian church architecture the tent-type structure was replaced with successive rows of curved corbel arches known as *kokoshniks*. An outstanding example of this style is the Kazan Cathedral on Red Square.

**Cube-type structures:** Exemplified by the Church of the Intercession and the Winter Church on Kizhi Island, these buildings consist of a square main structure of pine logs supporting an octagonal prizma tower.

**Masonry (Stone) Structures:** Russian architects used the indigenous forms of wooden church architecture and adapted it to masonry architecture in Novgorod and Pskov. The churches of Kolomenskoye (Church of the Ascension), Ostrovo (Church of the Transfiguration) and Dyakovo (Church of St. John the Precursor) serve as prototypes for these structures.

**Muscovite (Naryshkin) Baroque:** Muscovite Baroque was the last original current in Russian architecture, combining traditional Russian architecture with elements of European Baroque architecture. The Novodevichy Convent and Donskoy Monastery are the best examples of structures built in this style.

**Petrine Baroque:** Petrine Baroque reflects a sharp departure from the influence of Byzantium, which lasted almost a millennium. It was a mixture of Italian Baroque, early French Rococo and Neo-classicism, Dutch civil architecture, and Danish and Swedish styles and movements. The Peter and Paul Fortresses, Kikin Hall and Menshikov Palace are well-known examples of this style. Its chief practitioners were Domenico Trezzini, Andreas Schlüter, Gottfried Schadel, Jean-Baptiste Leblond, Niccolò Michetti and Georg Johann Mattarnovi.

**Secular Architecture (Western Influence):** Russian secular architecture appeared simultaneously with the adoption of Western European styles, such as the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, designed by Bartolomeo Rastrelli in the Baroque style.

## NINETEENTH CENTURY

**Russian Revival (Russo-Byzantine Style):** Russian Revival, or Russo-Byzantine, architecture combines elements of Byzantine architecture with those of pre-Petrine Russian architecture. This style is the Russian interpretation of their architectural heritage that was part of the broader renewal interest in “national” architecture that occurred in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Grand Kremlin Palace and the Armory in Moscow are well-known examples of Russian Revival structures.

**Neo-Byzantine architecture:** In the 1850s during the reign Alexander II the Russo-Byzantine style was replaced by the Neo-Byzantine style for new churches. Although new state buildings would again be built in the Russian Revival style during the reign of his successor Alexander III, the Neo-Byzantine style remained popular down to the start of the the First World War. The Cathedral of Saint Vladimir built in Kiev and the Church of Dmitry Solunsky built in St. Petersburg are the first projects utilizing this style.

**Eclecticism:** In reaction to the strict, limited elements of classicism, Eclecticism attempted to expand the potential of architectural by combining elements taken from earlier styles. Popular until the first years of Nicholas II’s reign, Eclecticism utilized elements from Baroque, Renaissance, Neoclassical and Rococo styles. Andrey Stackenschneider’s Mariinsky Palace is one of the most prominent examples of this style.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY

**Art Nouveau (Stil Modern):** Exploring the possibilities of metal, glass and new technologies in architecture, Art Nouveau strove to use natural, flowing lines that allowed all elements of the building – balconies, staircases and doors – to be both aesthetic and functional. In the years just prior to the Revolution a number of Art Nouveau buildings were built in St. Petersburg and Moscow, such as the Vitebsk Railway Station and the Hotel Metropol. Now the Maxim Gorky House Museum, the Ryabushinsky House designed by Fedor Shekhtel and the Yaroslavl Railway Station are also prime examples of Art Nouveau architecture.

**Constructivism:** A purely Russian style, Constructivism emerged in Moscow after 1917 as an offshoot of Functionalism. Constructivist architects took their inspiration from futurism, suprematism, and cubism and argued that efficient structures were beautiful structures. The characteristics, capacities and limits of construction materials defined Constructivist architecture, and the Shukov Radio Tower in Moscow designed by Vladimir Shukov is one of the most prominent examples of Constructivist architecture.

**Stalinist Architecture:** Stalinist architecture was heavily influenced by the political conditions of its era. Everything from the design stage, through procurement of building materials, construction and final use of the structure was under tight governmental and bureaucratic scrutiny. Architecture was expected to reflect Soviet political ideology, and the massive, monumental style favored by the Soviet government reflected both the Soviet Union’s power the promises of Communism. The most prominent of the buildings from Stalin’s era, among them the Moscow State University building, were tall structures built in tiers that became known as the “wedding cake” style.

**Modernism (Functionalism):** Following the First World War a new architectural style emerged that, in contrast with previous architectural styles, advocated simple structures that were unadorned to point of leaving structural elements of the building exposed and undecorated. Critics of Modernist architecture claimed that it lacked imagination and stifled architectural expression. In Russia, the projects for skyscrapers designed by N. Ladovsky and V. Krinsky are examples of this style.

### Discussion/Questions

1. What did ancient people depict in cave paintings and petroglyphs? What was their purpose?
2. Compare the Muscovite Baroque and Petrine Baroque. What are the differences between these two styles?
3. Compare Soviet and Post-Soviet architecture and discuss the effect of this architecture on people. What ideals did these architectural styles attempt to convey?
- 4- Mass production and the cloning of tested patterns were the main approaches to the construction of cities in today’s Russia. Mass construction leads to a situation where many people are concentrated in a relatively small

territory. What messages does modern Russian architecture convey with these standart structures in comparison to earlier periods? Does it have its own esthetic, or is it simply functional? Why have regional styles of architecture dissapeared? Why has modern architecture become so uniform all over the world? Why have unique artistic styles been lost?

### **Reading**

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