

Early Russian Architecture 989-1703

Christopher Wood

The history of Russian architecture may be dealt with in terms of the five major phases listed below. In this chapter and the next, only the first three phases will be examined in detail. Phase 1: Early Principalities: Kiev, Novgorod and the 'Golden Ring' (10th century to 13th century) Church architecture evolved in Kiev and Novgorod (11th century) and in Rostov - Suzdal and Vladimir (12th century). This phase was inaugurated by the arrival of Christianity in Russia from the Byzantine Empire. Monumental stone architecture was used almost exclusively for ecclesiastical monuments; most secular buildings were of wood and far less substantial. The Princes of Old Rus dominated church building. In consequence, the construction of monuments followed the flow of power from Kiev and Novgorod to the cities of the 'Golden Ring' (Suzdal, Vladimir, etc). Architectural styles were handed from one centre to the next. Byzantine models were slowly modified and indigenous features emerged. After the Mongol invasions, the architectural tradition which had grown up was handed on to Moscow. Phase 2: Moscow and the Rise of the Tsars (1300 - 1700) Moscow threw off the Mongol (Tatar) yoke in 1480 and drew other centres of Russia into its orbit by the 16th century. Architecture in this phase also reflects the intimate relationship between Church and State. In the earlier phase secular power had ebbed and flowed as contenders had vied for control of the principalities and the Church had stood for continuity of culture. With the rise of the Tsars in this phase, the Church increasingly came to be controlled and manipulated by secular autocrats and this wrought subtle changes to church architecture. This period is characterised by a fascinating adaptation of Italian Renaissance architectural influences to traditional Russian building types. It also sees a blossoming of peculiarly Russian decoration and colour in buildings such as St Basil's, Moscow. Phase 3: St Petersburg (18th Century) Peter the Great abjured the xenophobia of his predecessors and opened Russia to the influences of the west. The most powerful expression of this change in Russian architecture was the creation of his great northern city, St Petersburg. In its architecture and that of palaces nearby at Peterhof and Pavlovsk we see a brilliant adaptation of the western Baroque, Rococo and Neo-Classical styles to Russian needs and conditions. The shift in orientation did not bring with it political change toward a less centralised state. Russia remained an autocracy without a strong, independent aristocracy or middle class. The grandeur and richness of palatial architecture in this phase reinforced the authority of the Tsars. It was also used to emphasise Russia's position as a world power able to compete with the west. Phase 4: The 19th Century The 19th century saw the slow and rather tentative development of capitalism in Russia. This was manifested in a growth of bourgeois individualism which was distrusted by the Tsars. In architecture it saw the onset of eclecticism and historicism through the influence of cities like Paris and London; the Neo-Gothic style, for example, was particularly popular. The use of western historicism also led to a revival of the style of traditional Russian architecture of the first two phases. This was particularly popular amongst conservatives and reactionaries. At the end of the 19th century there was a revival of the Imperial Neo-Classical style of St Petersburg, an attempt by the authorities to reassert their cultural hegemony. Phase 5: Soviet Architecture The early years of Communism in Russia saw a flowering of modernist internationalism which was to inspire foreign architects as diverse as Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. At first, the new Communist State seemed to lead the world in political, social and cultural experiments. Under Stalin, however, this gave way to a grandiose style in which massive buildings constructed to house State organs and as huge residential blocks came to be covered with bombastic decorations. Socialism in one country thus saw a search for a peculiarly Russian type of 20th-century architecture. The megalomania of the great 'towers' of Moscow was, nevertheless, inspired by New York skyscrapers. Phase 1: Early Principalities: Kiev, Novgorod and the 'Golden Ring' (10th century to 13th century) The Slavs had inhabited southern and central Russia from the

time of the Scythians (700 - 3rd century BC). In the 10th century they invited Varangian (Scandinavian) lords to impose order upon their lands. The development of the Principality of Kiev witnessed the transition from a nomadic to a settled society. The Kievan princes repeatedly invaded Byzantium, which was forced to recognise them. The Byzantine Church meanwhile achieved its first conversions amongst the pagans. Although Kiev has lost much, the city still boasts a number of monuments which speak of its former lustre. 'The mother of Russian cities', stands on bluffs overlooking the Dnepr river, and in the Middle Ages benefited from the river trade between Scandinavia and Byzantium. It was founded in the 9th century and in 989 its ruler, Prince Vladimir (980-1015 AD), embraced Christianity, making the city the first home of the Greek Church in Russia. The city and its surrounding principality flourished in the 10th and 11th centuries. Christianity brought with it opportunities for cultural expression. For example, it brought literacy; the monasteries of Kiev became the first literary centres in the region and the first repositories of manuscripts. The principality, nevertheless, experienced constant political anarchy because of struggles between heirs to the throne. One such led to the succession of Yaroslav of Novgorod. He gained the sobriquet mudriy ('the wise') because he established the Novgorod code of laws; this became the kernel of the Pravda russkaya, or Russian code. Yaroslav the Wise's stable rule was bolstered by the creation of diplomatic links (through marriage) with the Byzantine Empire, Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, Norway and Sweden. He also controlled the election of the metropolitan of Kiev, choosing at one point a Russian in place of the usual legate from Constantinople. Kiev was sacked by the Tatars in 1240. It was held by Lithuania from 1320 to 1569, and by Poland from 1569 to 1654 before being annexed to Moscow. In the 19th century it flourished due to industries like sugar refining. Its population suffered greatly during the Second World War under the Nazis. Capital of the Ukrainian SSR from 1934, it became the third largest city of the USSR until its dissolution in 1992. Novgorod (literally 'New Town'), was founded in the 9th century by the Varangian Norsemen who established the embryonic Russian state. By the 12th century the city, called 'Lord Novgorod the Great', was Russia's biggest. Novgorod's northern location allowed it to trade with Western Europe through rivers which led to the Baltic. This brought western ideas to the region. Novgorod's citizenry threw off the yoke of the Kievan princes in 1136 and established a quasi-democracy whose leaders were hired and fired by a citizens' assembly, the veche. Novgorod had a strong, simple style of church architecture, icon-painting and folk music. Unlike Kiev, the city was spared by the Mongol invasions and experienced a flowering of culture in the 13th century. In the 15th century, however, Novgorod was drawn into the orbit of Moscow. Ivan III of Moscow attacked and annexed it in 1477, and Ivan the Terrible razed the city and slaughtered 27,000 people for conspiring with the Swedes. The founding of St Petersburg in 1693 led to its eclipse as a trading city. Today, it is a regional centre (pop. 190,000), with one of Russia's best preserved Medieval Kremlins and still retains outstanding religious and secular architecture from the 11th to 19th centuries. The conversion of the principality to Orthodox Christianity led to an efflorescence of church building in Kiev and Novgorod. These early churches followed Byzantine models and many were built by Byzantine masters. The largest and most intricate is the Cathedral of Divine Wisdom or St Sofia (1037-1055), Kiev, which was commissioned by Yaroslav the Wise and built by Greek masters and artisans. Its interior contains extensive mosaics as well as frescoes. The Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kiev Cave Monastery (1073-1078) and St Sofia in Novgorod (1045-1052) are also from this period. Russian churches developed a simple plan called the 'inscribed cross' with a cuboid core surmounted by a dome supported by piers. The core was crossed by two intersecting aisles. The locations of interior bays were marked on the exterior walls by pilasters culminating in curved gables (zakomari) whose forms reflected the barrel vaulting inside. These churches were constructed of thin brick, rough stone and heavy mortar. In the 12th century their exterior walls came to be covered by stucco. We know little of other architecture of this period. Many churches, like secular buildings, were also built of wood. No examples have survived so we must infer what they would have been like from later 16th- and 17th-century examples. Kiev's most interesting religious complex is Pecherska Lavra (Caves Monastery), made up of gold domed churches, monastic buildings housing various museums and caves in which the original monks lived and were buried. The upper and lower lavras stem from an original complex, the first monastery of Kievan Rus',

which was founded in 1051. At the centre of the original monastery was the great Cathedral of the Dormition; only one of its towers remains today. It was modelled upon St Sofia, Kiev, and became the model for the 12th-century churches of Russia's Golden Ring (Rostov, Suzdal', Vladimir, etc). Most other churches are from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Both lavras contain caverns in which the monks lived and were buried through the ages, as well as underground refectories and chapels. Tombs of a number of famous monks, including Nestor, one of the authors of the oldest Eastern Slavic Chronicle, *Tales of Bygone Years*, reflect the importance of the monastery for the literary history of the region. Novgorod developed variants upon Kievan and Byzantine models partly in response to its harsher winter climate and partly through influences from the west. Kievan churches had three apses following Byzantine practice. These were reduced to one in Novgorod. Churches of this city also tended only to have one central dome, which dominated the building. The most important innovation, however, was a change in the construction of the roof below the dome. Kievan and early Novgorodian churches had followed the Byzantine model in which the roof line echoed the disposition of chapels within. By the time the Cathedral of the Annunciation was built in Novgorod (1374), this system was replaced by four great pitched roofs covering the four arms of the church. The development of the pitched roof could not have occurred without the use of the quadrant arch, imported from North Western Europe. Pitched roofs were evolved in order to cope with the large amount of snow which fell in this northern region. Many 14th-century churches in Novgorod were built by merchants. Elsewhere, as will be seen below, church building was almost exclusively the prerogative of princes. The third important region of 'Old Rus' is the 'Golden Ring' in which are found cities which inherited the mantle of Kievan Rus in the twelfth century. This region was first settled by Finno-Ugric tribes, but in the 10th century it was colonised by the Slavs who were drawn by its rich forests and tillable land. During the 11th century, Kievan princes extended their authority over the region. In 1024, Yaroslav the Wise suppressed a rebellion incited by pagan priests in the Suzdal' area. The princes strengthened settlements like Rostov and Suzdal', which came to form a major principality. Kiev's control over the region became increasingly tenuous; it experienced pagan uprisings and the constant threat of sack by the Volga Bulgars. Wars of succession in Kiev eventually led to the shift of power to the young principality. The town of Suzdal' was fortified and for a short time became a princely residence. It was soon overshadowed by the fortress of Vladimir, which had been established nearby on the Klyazma River by Vladimir Monomakh, grandson of Yaroslav the Wise, in 1108. Monomakh was the last great grand prince of Kiev and he gave the Suzdal' principality to one of his sons, Yury Dolgoruky, who built a number of churches in the region. It was Yury's son, Andrey Bogolyubov who moved the capital of his principality from Suzdal to Vladimir. And in that year [1160] the Church of the Holy Mother of God was completed in Vladimir by the devout and beloved of God Prince Andrei; and he decorated it with wondrously many icons, and precious stones without number, and holy vessels, and covered it with gold for by his faith and devotion to the Holy Mother, God brought him masters from all lands... (Laurentian Chronicle) Vladimir today boasts three of the most beautiful churches in Russia. Typical of religious monuments in this region, they are constructed not of brick and mortar like the churches of Kiev but of limestone, and have rich exterior sculptural programs. Their design is also more precise than those of the other two centres. The construction of the Assumption Cathedral (1158) in Vladimir marked the city's new status as centre of the kingdom. Originally a three-aisled church, it was extended to five aisles in the 1180s when it also gained its four outer domes. The church, which once held one of Russia's most revered icons, the Vladimir 'Icon of the Mother of God' (now in the Tret'yakov Museum, Moscow), has a number of early frescoes, including a masterpiece by Andrey Rublyov and Daniil Chorny, the 'Last Judgement' (1408). At Vsevolod III's St Dmitry (1193-1197), facade sculpture can be seen at its most profuse and finest. Here, King David charms a veritable menagerie of beasts, accompanied by mythological scenes such as the Labours of Hercules and an abundance of vegetation. It is difficult to trace the origins of this profusion of facade sculpture, which stands in stark contrast to the unadorned simplicity of Kiev's and Novgorod's church walls. Some scholars argue for influences by western Romanesque architecture, transmitted to Vladimir through the trading city of Novgorod. The style of the sculpture, however, suggests a very different influence, that of Armenian churches of the east. The village

of Bogolyubovo, 11 kilometres from Vladimir, is the site of Andrey Bogolyubsky's princely palace and stronghold (1158-1165) on a hill overlooking the Klyazma River. Little remains of the stronghold, but one of the masterpieces of Russian architecture, Andrey's nearby Church of the Intercession on the Nerl (1165) is a perfectly proportioned stone building which has carved images of King David surrounded by birds and beasts which are enraptured by his music. Within its simple single-domed interior are sculptures of twenty lions. Yury Dolgoruky commissioned the Church of the Transfiguration in Pereslavl'-Zalessky (1152-1157) and Andrey Bogolyubsky initiated construction of churches in Vladimir including the Cathedral of the Dormition (1158-1160). Vsevolod III built the Cathedral of St Dmitry, Vladimir (1194-1197), and enlarged the Dormition (Assumption) Cathedral. To this period also belongs the Church of the Virgin in Suzdal' (1222-1225). The princes of Suzdal and Vladimir had asserted their authority over the local aristocracy, and had also managed to impede the development of the process of democratisation seen in the evolution of the veche of the trading city, Novgorod. The churches of the 'Golden Ring', unlike those of Novgorod, were built exclusively by the princes. They were usually palace churches and were of great importance to the development of later Russian architecture since the great royal churches within the walls of Moscow's Kremlin owe their origins to these princely chapels. In these churches we see the evolution of a style of architecture we may call uniquely Russian and which was to act as the springboard for the development of the architecture of Muscovy. The particular pattern of this evolution from Byzantine roots through subtle influences from the west and the east to something new is uniquely Russian. It has none of the extraordinary richness and variety of the development of contemporary architecture in Europe. Rather, it is characterised by a keen balance between powerful conservatism and tentative experiment. To a great extent, the nature of this pattern was determined by geography and this can be understood if we contrast the environment in which it evolved to that of western Europe. Western Europe at this time saw the development of Romanesque and Gothic styles within each of which there is a fascinating range of regional variations. This is particularly true of the Romanesque style, in which a number of diverse monuments such as the great religious complex of the cathedral, baptistery and 'leaning tower' of Pisa, the fascinating churches of Sicily which fuse northern, Muslim and Byzantine elements, and the great basilicas on the Santiago pilgrim route at Tours, Conques, Toulouse and Santiago, are just a few examples. The Romanesque and Gothic periods also saw a growth in the variety of types of buildings. We may witness the Romanesque Palace of the Kings of Navarre (Estella), the magnificent merchant palaces of Venice, the tower houses of San Gimignano, the beautiful hospice of Beaune, and evidence of the early university buildings of Padua, Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. The explosion of building activity in Western Europe between the 11th and 14th centuries accompanied a dramatic increase in population, the widespread clearing of forests, the development of agricultural technology, and a steady increase in traffic and trade between such teeming centres as Florence, Venice, Lyon and Bourges. An innovative entrepreneurial class developed as well as new institutions, such as town councils, all of which required new types of buildings. The situation was very different in Russia which, with the exception of Novgorod, did not see the growth of a powerful and wealthy bourgeoisie. We look in vain for the stylistic and typological variety we enjoy in the West. It has already been noted, for example, that the only monumental buildings in this region were churches. We encounter in Russia a very gradual development of subtle, somewhat idiosyncratic, regional variations upon one predominant church type. These divergences were not nearly as broad or profound as in the west. A complex set of factors further explains this conservatism. The area now encompassed by Western Russia and the Ukraine was clearly divided between northern lands which were dominated by dense forests penetrated by rivers, and southern steppe. The climate in the north was harsh, all communication must be by water due to the impenetrable nature of the forests. People toiled to create small clearings in which to farm. The forests protected communities, isolated them and gave them an abundance of wood yet little good building stone. Although the network of rivers such as the Dneper allowed trade between the Baltic and the Black Sea, and thence Byzantium, the orientation of the lands around Novgorod tended to be westward. This part of Russia was therefore open to influences from Germany and Scandinavia which were, nevertheless, far more sporadic than those coursing across Western Europe and the

Mediterranean world. The southern part of the country was made up almost exclusively of open steppe lands. The early history of these grasslands is one of close ties to the Byzantine Empire as well as of countless invasions of different nomadic peoples who coursed from the south and the east across its exposed expanses. Nomads do not build great cities and so this region did not have a tradition of urbanism like that bequeathed to Western Europe by Ancient Rome. Great distances and varying degrees of isolation, as well as small populations, naturally militated against an enriching cross-fertilisation like that borne of easy communications between, say, France and the teeming cities of Northern Italy. Poor communications in turn inhibited the development of a variety of civil, secular institutions such as universities, banking houses, palaces, mansions and hospitals which characterised such cities as Padua and Paris. The isolation of both the north and the south from the outside world and from each other, and their small populations, help explain why Russian architecture developed within a more restricted stylistic range than in Western Europe. It also suggests why building activity was restricted to churches, which were somewhat like beacons of civilization in a large, empty world. Differences in topography and materials, orientation and patterns of settlement between north and south on the one hand account for the subtle differences between the ecclesiastical styles of Kiev, Novgorod and the 'Golden Ring'. It has already been noted that Russia's history is characterised by the close relation between the church and the state. The Byzantine Emperors, who inspired early ideas of statehood amongst the Eastern Slavs, maintained a very close, almost symbiotic, relationship with the Orthodox Church. In government, ritual and symbolism it is almost impossible to distinguish between Church and State in the way in which we distinguish between the monarchies of Medieval Europe and the Papacy. The architectural expression of this relationship was predominantly ecclesiastical because it inhibited the desires of princes to express power in other, secular, ways. The social and intellectual forces and influences which led to the revolution of the Gothic in such cathedrals as Chartres were also absent from Russia. Even though French monarchs and high dignitaries played a key in the funding of, and are depicted in, the sculptural programs and stained glass in, Chartres, they did not play as pervasive a role in its construction as did Yaroslav the Wise in the erection of St Sofia (1037-1055), Kiev. The great theological school of Fulbert was more important for the evolution of the Gothic style than its princely patrons. The burgeoning middle classes and lesser aristocrats of the region of Beauce also played an albeit lesser part at Chartres. In Russia church construction was almost exclusively the domain of the princes. Not even the Church played an equal corporate role. The intellectual and artistic ferment which produced the great French cathedrals was also absent from the Russian lands. For example, the form and iconography of Chartres could not have evolved had not Aristotelian scholars and the builders of Al Andalus (Islamic Spain) prepared the way. No such density and diversity of influences was present to attenuate the Byzantine intellectual and cultural authority upon Russian ecclesiastical architecture. The subsequent history of the Orthodox Church in Russia tended to nourish conservatism and xenophobia. The attempt at the Council of Florence (1426) to mend the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches encouraged the Russian Church, which distrusted Western Catholicism, to see itself as the custodian of local values and Eastern traditions. The Fall of Constantinople and Greece to the Ottoman Turks (1453) gave the Russian Church an even more important role as the focus of Orthodox traditions. The preference shown by early Russian rulers for Byzantine liturgy, the conservatism of early Russian ecclesiastical architecture and the gradual development of idiosyncratic features may in part be explained by complex and subtle relationships between notions of power, the nature of ritual and the meaning of light. When we take into account the isolation of this world we may understand that, as a number of commentators have stressed, the Russian people have displayed throughout their history a predilection for collectivism in preference to the individualism of the west. This would encourage people to defer to authorities which could best express this collective spirit through rituals which required particular types of architectural spaces and settings. Many commentators have remarked that the Russian people love ritual; this is certainly the impression one gains on witnessing an Orthodox service today. Ritual is like tradition. It can be used to reinforce venerable ideas and institutions because one of its key attributes, that which makes it effective, is changelessness. So strong is the link between venerability and ritual that a sovereign who wishes to assert

his right to rule may use ritual to suggest that his claims are immutable and enduring. The British Empire 'invented' traditions and rituals such as the Changing of the Guard which were made to look older than they really were (the uniforms were Napoleonic, the ritual invented at the turn of the 20th century) in order to suggest that its right to rule was sanctioned by time. It is easy to understand, therefore, that the setting for rituals which merged religious and secular power - church architecture - should be conservative. The chronicles tell us that when Vladimir sent his envoys to the churches of the world in order to choose between the Christianity of the East, that of the West, and Islam, the beauty and opulence of Byzantine church interiors and of the ritual which took place in them decided the Russians upon Orthodoxy. Vladimir himself was attempting to establish his rule and would therefore wish to associate himself with forms and practices which would impress his people with their richness and solemnity. He obviously understood his new capital, Kiev, to be modelled upon Tsargrad (Constantinople). The great capital had stood as a link to the ancients, a bastion against paganism and the infidel, exemplar of richness and beauty and custodian of culture since 330 AD. It is understandable that, in a world constantly devastated by invasion and fratricidal wars a ruler should appropriate as much as possible of the status of Constantinople.

A clue to the nature of the beauty which attracted the Russians to Byzantine ritual and style may be found in a passage describing Kiev in Ilarion's Oration to Prince Vladimir: And gaze upon thy city, radiant in its splendour, upon churches flourishing, upon Christianity increasing, gaze upon thy city, illuminated with holy icons, brilliant, surrounded with fragrant darkness, filled with hosannas and divine song. This telling passage speaks of the richness and beauty of the new Constantinople in terms of the harmonies of song, the fragrance of incense and above all in terms of the lustre of churches and their icons. It has been stated that a particularly potent force in Russian culture is brilliant light and bright colour. Architectural examples from the polychrome St Basil's to the rich blues of Pavlovsk, would seem to bear this out. There is a long period between Russia's short summers and her sparkling winters, when a carpet of snow reflects light, brightening the landscape. In the interlude between summer and the season of snows, colour is drained from everything by a bleak half-light. Could it be that the love of light and colour, seen equally in folk art and in church interiors, is a reaction against a bleak environment? Scholars have certainly suggested that one particularly powerful way in which the power and glory of the Orthodox Church was expressed to the people was the dramatic contrast between the dingy interiors of their small wooden dwellings and the high, airy brilliance of church interiors. Light had, of course, been a fundamental ingredient of liturgy and art in Byzantium. The language of the Church is filled with allusions to light (to Christ as the light of the world, to the brilliance of the Heavenly Jerusalem, etc.). The use of sparkling mosaics to cover church interiors, lit by a myriad lamps and candles, amounts to the creation of an architectural illusion of heaven on earth. This message was born in Byzantine architecture in the stark contrast between the relatively unadorned facades of churches and their rich interior decoration. The early churches of Kiev and Novgorod tended to accentuate this contrast. Ilarion's use of the words 'fragrant darkness' to describe a Russian church interior does not contradict this point. For it is the contrast between the brilliant icons and their ambience which is crucial. Medieval people believed that the cosmos was illuminated in degrees of brilliance which were associated with spiritual hierarchies. The sombre interior ambience therefore served merely to accentuate the brilliance of the holy images and thus the notion of a heavenly city upon earth. It has already been noted that the Russians inherited the centrally-planned church from Byzantium. Although there may once have been basilicas modelled upon Bulgarian churches, these wooden buildings gave way to the first masonry churches built in Kiev and Novgorod. The central plan in the form of an inscribed cross encouraged the creation of an extremely high, narrow core space which lifted the central cupola far above the believers below. Russian church builders took this element of Byzantine architecture and greatly accentuated it. Russian churches also differed from Byzantine precedent in the multitude of subsidiary domes which were added to the structure. In profile the upper part of these churches seem like pyramids: all the subsidiary domes were kept strictly subordinate to the central one. From the time of the civilisations of the Ancient Near East the dome has been a symbol of heaven. The high central space of a

Russian church, like that of its Byzantine model, expressed the relationship of the worshipper to his God. The domes of churches were decorated, following strict canons dictating the iconography of church decoration, with an image of Christ Pantocrator. This ethereal zone of the church was illuminated by large windows puncturing the drum beneath the dome. Russian churches had few windows in their lower walls. The windows in their drums therefore steadily increased in size in order to flood their upper zones with more and more light, accentuating the ethereal quality of the dome and its Christly image. As drums grew in height, so the transition between the lower cubic mass of a church and its upper zones became more and more distinct from each other. This is best seen in the churches of Vladimir. Russian churches in this way began steadily to diverge from their Imperial models. The decoration of Russian churches also became steadily more profuse. In the very earliest churches such as St Sophia in Kiev, this decoration was in large part mosaic. The prevalent medium, however, came to be fresco. Decorative richness was also increased by the ever greater elaboration of iconostases. Russian church builders favoured two dimensional imagery above sculpture. This is probably due to the fact that sculptures are more corporeal than paintings, which are flat or create illusory space. Only in the great churches of the Vladimir - Suzdal region, notably S. Dimitrii, Vladimir (1193-7), are the outer walls of churches adorned with sculptural programs of a richness to equal the Cluniac and Gothic churches of western Europe. The absence of exterior sculptural decoration elsewhere in Russia was due in part to an absence of workable stone and of sculptural skill. It may also be due to the desire to differentiate the richly decorated, heavenly interior from the terrestrial world outside. In the mid-13th century the devastating invasion of Batu, grandson of Chingis Khan, destroyed the autonomy of the region. Vladimir fell to the Mongols (Russians call them Tatars) in 1238 and Kiev in 1240, initiating a period of Mongol overlordship of 'Old Rus'. Novgorod escaped Mongol invasion in 1240, and its prince, Alexandr Nevsky, also repulsed the armies of Sweden and the Teutonic Knights. Nevsky entered posterity as a national hero. The Mongol 'Golden Horde' ruled Russia from Saray, exacting tribute and military service from the population. This distinctly Russian form of feudalism allowed the princes some autonomy as long as they paid their dues. Local rulers also had to present themselves at court regularly; this principle was to become important later when it was appropriated by the tsars. The Russian Church at this time benefited from the Mongol belief that wise men should be respected, and was exempted from tribute. From 1448 on the Church elected its own Metropolitan. The Mongol invasion initially saw a decline in church building which only recovered in the 14th century. This break was very significant for the evolution of Russian art and architecture as it caused a decline in Byzantine influence upon Russian style and led to the emergence of an autochthonous vocabulary of form. Interlude: Wooden Architecture The genesis of uniquely Russian variants upon the basic Byzantine church form in the next, Muscovite, phase, of the development of Russian architecture holds within it a fascinating problem for the historian. The innovations which give Russian churches their idiosyncratic appearance must have come from somewhere. The prevalent building material in Northern Russia was, of course, wood. People of Kiev in the Middle Ages spoke disparagingly of citizens of Novgorod as carpenters and it would seem that long before masonry construction was brought to Russia with Orthodox Christianity, there was a vital and very ancient tradition of building in wood. The problem for the historian is that we may only perceive tantalising glimpses of this heritage in open air museums (Kiev, Novgorod, Suzdal) in which are clustered 17th- and 18th-century examples. Early literary descriptions note that most of the buildings in Russian cities were of fir. An English traveller, Giles Fletcher, wrote of Moscow in 1588... The streets of their cities and townes instead of paving are planked with fir trees, planed and layed even close the one to the other. Their houses are of wood without any lime or stone, built very close and warme with firre trees planed and piled one upon another. They are fastened together with dents or notches at every corner, and so clasped fast together. Betwixt the trees or timber they thrust in mosse (whereof they gather plenty in their woods) to keep out the aire. Fletcher remarked that fire was a constant danger. Russian houses, however, were easily replaced. As early as the 16th century the Russians had simple, gabled, prefabricated houses which could be bought at a special market. A number of the wooden churches of Russia, like the Church of the Transfiguration, Khizy (1714), are fantastic in conception. They differ radically from the basic form of all Orthodox churches, a cube

surmounted by a dome, as they boast a proliferation of gables and onion domes rising in a pyramidal crescendo. The liveliness of these buildings is almost diametrically opposed to the lucid, rational simplicity of masonry Byzantine tradition churches. This is in part due to the possibilities of the medium, for wood is lighter, more easily tooled and, despite its tendency to burn or rot, stronger for its weight than stone. Because so few early examples survive it is impossible to say for certain that the late, intricate, churches of the 17th century grew from earlier, much simpler prototypes. We can only surmise also that a number of these churches evolved not only from traditions of wood constructions mediated but were also influenced by masonry churches. It is likely that though they came from disparate traditions and seem diametrically opposed to each other, nevertheless the Greek and indigenous traditions did influence each other in crucial ways. Although the design of wooden buildings became ever more intricate, nevertheless, their construction was fundamentally the same; all wooden buildings were built by laying logs horizontally on top of each other. All carpenters must take into account one particular limitation, the length of available wood. Intricacy was achieved by the multiplication of parts of similar construction rather than the creation of some radically new principle of design and construction. Early wooden secular and ecclesiastical buildings took the form of a simple shed with a pitched roof. Of fundamental importance to later Muscovite masonry architecture was a second form, a tower of octagonal plan. This form, which seems to have developed before the late 13th century, allowed carpenters to enclose a larger space with logs of limited length. Churches like St Nicholas, Panilovo (1600), the Church of the Dormition, Ustye (c.1519) and SS Florus and Laurus, Rostovskoe (1755) are all of this type. An octagonal tower with a tent roof rose from the crossing of four sections which were like the nave, apse and transepts of a centrally-planned church. These octagonal towers became progressively higher and the proportions of the churches ever more vertical. This was carried to extremes in churches such as the Church of the Dormition, Kondopoga (1774). Phase 2: Moscow and the Rise of the Tsars (12300 - 1700) Anyone who enters the Kremlin will understand the symbiosis between religious and secular power under the Tsars who inherited the role of church builders from their princely predecessors. The churches of the Kremlin are vessels for the rituals of tsarist power. Meanwhile, the development of the fortified monastery and the fortified palace complex (kremlin) are intimately intertwined. Moscow was founded in 1147 by Suzdal' Prince Yury Dolgoruky. It became Russia's capital in the 15th century, lost this status in 1712 to St Petersburg, and then regained it in 1918 after the Bolshevik Revolution. This phase of Russian architectural history is determined to an extent by the dramatic swings of the tsars between interest in the west and xenophobia. Ivan III, for example, realised that in order to live up to his claim to be a national monarch, he must adopt the court style of European and Byzantine rulers and make of Moscow a cosmopolitan city. Others defined their positions in relation to their nation by adopting policies which closed Russia off from the west and encouraged the country to look inwards upon itself and back to its own unique heritage. In part, the uniqueness of Russian architecture comes from this ambivalence.

With the decline of the Mongol Empire, Novgorod flourished and Moscow, which had hitherto been a minor centre in the principality of Vladimir, rose to power. By the mid-14th century Moscow had eclipsed Vladimir and in 1328 the seat of the metropolitan of the Russian Church was transferred there. Ivan III 'The Great' (1462-1505) brought Yaroslavl', Rostov, Ryazan' and Tver' into the orbit of Moscow. He also subjugated the city republic of Novgorod in 1477 and formally rejected Tatar overlordship of Russia in 1480. Although Ivan III could boast an impeccable lineage from the blood lines of the Kievan princes, the nature of his and his successors' power was different. Succession in a direct line from father to son took the place of Kievan succession through fraternal superiority, which had led to constant war. This brought greater stability, allowing two successive dynasties to build an autocratic state. It also concentrated power in Moscow, which came to dominate Russia as no other city had done. At the centre of Moscow was the Kremlin, which, with its palaces and churches was a symbol and locus of power without parallel in most countries. At this time Byzantine protocol and ritual became steadily more prevalent at court. This emphasised the authority of the ruler. In 1547, Ivan III's grandson was crowned 'Tsar'. This new title, which took the place of princeps, was a Slav corruption of 'Caesar', and denoted greater authority. Henceforth

leadership of Russia became ever more autocratic. The status of other princely families was decreased in relation to that of the tsar and the aristocrats (boyars) assumed the role of state functionaries whose duties and status were strictly codified. (This process would reach its climax when Peter the Great adopted the new title Emperor.) The status of farmers was steadily reduced until they became virtual chattels of the wealthy. This is of importance to architectural history as the peasantry provided an extremely cheap labour force for massive building projects. Ivan II's successor continued his conquests. Vasily III (1505-1533) annexed Pskov and captured Smolensk. Ivan IV 'The Terrible' (1533-1584) initiated his reign by having himself crowned tsar in a ceremony closely resembling the coronation of Byzantine emperors. He imposed a virtual dictatorship over Russia. In 1552 he annexed the territories of the Kazan' khaganate (Kazan' Tatars) and opened relations with Western Europe. His successor Fyodor I (1584-1598) was not interested in secular rule, which was carried out by the boyar (aristocrat) Boris Godunov. He was elected tsar on Fyodor's death (and the extinction of the Rurikid line) and ruled from 1598 to 1605. The rise of Moscow was accompanied by a revival of art and architecture in the late 15th century. During the reign of Ivan III, for example, the Kremlin, hitherto a wooden citadel, was given masonry walls. This revival, however, should in no way be confused with the 'Renaissance' of classical literature and art in Italy. Although Ivan III imported Italian masters whose knowledge of engineering and skill in construction made possible a new monumental architecture, this did not lead to an efflorescence of the classical tradition but rather to a fusion of Renaissance influences with traditional Russian forms. Aristotle Fioravanti, for example, took the Dormition Cathedral of Vladimir as his model for the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. He used iron tie rods, stronger brick vaulting, deeper foundations and round columns to span greater areas and create a better lit, more spacious church. Italian influences (and brick construction, which now replaced limestone) may also be seen in Alevisio Novi's Cathedral of the Archangel Michael (1505-9), the Faceted Palace (1487-1491) and the Bell Tower of Ivan the Great (1485-1516). The Moscow style of architecture came to be authoritative for the whole nation. The styles of Kiev, Novgorod and Vladimir, which had each varied Byzantine prototypes in its own way (reflecting the political fragmentation of the time), were amalgamated in this new style. This mingling of the different strains of Russian architectural tradition formed a cocoon within which Italian architects like Fioventi wrought their structural variations. The Moscow style which slowly emerged from these fusions differed from all precedents in two ways. These may best be seen in the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Kremlin (1484-1489) in which the tsars were baptised and crowned. This cathedral differed from the earlier churches of Kiev, Novgorod and Vladimir in the way in which its iconostasis was conceived as a permanent partition wall which divided its interior into two quite separate spaces. The public area of the church thus became a wide, shallow, rectangular room with a very different spatial meaning from the interior of a Greek or early Russian church. Moscow's rise to power saw an efflorescence of icon painting as iconostases became ever more intricate, grandiose and sophisticated. This may be seen in the works of Andrey Rublyov whose wonderfully luminous, transparent paint, his delicate but direct lines, and the exquisite tenderness, compassion and humble dignity of his figures' gestures and demeanour justify his status as the greatest of icon painters. The Cathedral of the Annunciation derived its basic plan (four-pierced, three-apsed, with entrances on three sides) from Vladimir. The roof builds up in a pyramid formed by a proliferation of small gables; this was inspired by earlier architecture from Pskov and may have derived from wooden churches. The gables have ogee arches which had been introduced to Pskov from the west. The external articulation of the walls, however, performs a fundamentally different function from that of all earlier churches. The pilasters and blind arcades which graced the facades of churches in Kiev and Vladimir had reflected the disposition of interior members such as chapels and vaults. The Cathedral of the Annunciation's exterior decorative system, on the other hand, bears no relation to its internal articulation and structure. The tendency of exterior decoration to become divorced from the internal logic of the building is a feature of the Muscovite style, which was to become more and more pronounced in later periods. It reflects that love of colouristic, decorative effects which is so uniquely Russian. The evolution of a style of architecture in which the exterior became a skin of colourful decoration which seems to bear little logical relationship to the interior can be seen at its most powerful

in the extraordinary Cathedral of the Intercession on the Moat, better known as St Basil's (1555-1561). This building, which was constructed to celebrate Ivan IV's conquest of Kazan' and Astrakhan, seems asymmetrical and almost capricious, despite its symmetrical plan. At its centre is a 'tent tower' a form which made possible by Italian masonry construction techniques in the 16th century. It was henceforth used throughout Russia. The tent tower forms the centrepiece of St Basil's and is surrounded by eight chapels. The illusion of asymmetry is due to the differing colour patterns of the onion domes which were added to these eight chapels in 1600, giving the church's profile an extraordinarily lively, picturesque appearance.

Another feature of St Basil's is the pronounced verticality of its proportions. The builders of Kiev, Novgorod, Suzdal and Vladimir gave their churches higher drums than their Byzantine prototypes in order that larger windows could flood the heavenly zone within with light. The development of the onion domes which, by the 17th century, were placed upon narrow octagonal drums, gave Russian churches extremely lively, picturesque profiles without reference to interior symbolic space. A form which owed its origins to symbolism and liturgy thus slowly gained the function of enlivening the building's profile. Deliverance from the Tatar yoke was accompanied by a monastic revival in Russia. An example is the monastery of Sergiev Posad which was founded by St Sergy of Radonezh in 1345 and rebuilt after the Tatar invasions of the following century. It became increasingly important, gaining the status of lavra in 1744. Sergy of Radonezh (1314-92), the most significant church figure of the 14th century was not a metropolitan but a humble monk. Around his hermitage, in the wilds 70 km north-east of Moscow at the place subsequently named after him, Sergiev Posad (in Soviet times Zagorsk), was to develop one of the greatest of Russian monasteries, dedicated to the Holy Trinity (and eventually also to its saintly founder). Sergy's work provided the stimulus for a revival of monastic life. New foundations proliferated, by contrast with the pre-Mongol period, in areas which were hardly populated, even unexplored. In Sergy's lifetime there were perhaps 50 new monastic houses; the number was to be trebled within a century of his death. After a period of civil war which is known in Russian tradition as the 'Time of Troubles', in which the Poles and Swedes occupied Moscow and Novgorod respectively, Mikhail Romanov (1613-1643) was elected tsar. He and his successors, Aleksey Romanov (1613-1645) and Fyodor III (1676-1682) established order again, consolidated the administration of such areas as Siberia, and expanded their territories. The Cossacks of the Ukraine accepted them as overlords, throwing off the sovereignty of the Polish monarch because they preferred the tsars' Russian Orthodoxy to the Poles' Roman Catholicism. The incorporation of the Ukraine introduced motifs from the Ukrainian Baroque into the Russian architectural tradition. In this period patterns were set which were of profound importance to Russian history and distinguish it from that of the West. In ritual and observance the Russian Church grew steadily away from other Orthodox Churches and, after the only schism between religious and secular powers in Russian history (1668), Church and State became inseparable: the tsar acquired a semi-divine status. During the long reign of Aleksey Romanov, masonry churches were built on an unprecedented scale. These included Patriarch Nikon's New Jerusalem (Resurrection) Monastery (1658-1685) outside Moscow and Metropolitan Iona Sisoevich's walled group of churches and residences in Rostov (1670-1683). These monasteries, which resembled kremlins, were built at a time when the Church was losing its power and independence to the tsars. Their huge size and the attempts of the metropolitans who built them to reproduce the Holy City of Jerusalem in Muscovy reflected their desire to steer the Russian Church back to the Orthodox mainstream. Many older monasteries, including the great Trinity-Sergius Monastery at Sergiev Posad, were enlarged or rebuilt in the 17th century.