



Multivalent Russian Medievalism: Old Russia Through New Eyes

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Multivalent Russian Medievalism: Old Russia Through New Eyes

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

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Abstract

This thesis explores representations of medieval Russia in cultural and artistic works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an eye to the shifting perceptions of Russia's cultural heritage demonstrated through these works. The thesis explores the history of medievalism as a field of study and interrogates the reasons that medievalism as a paradigm has not been applied to the field of Russian studies to date. The first chapter is an investigation of architectural monuments incorporating Old Russian motifs, following the trajectory of the "Russian Style" in church architecture, one of the most prominent and best-remembered forms of Russian medievalism. Chapter two explores the visual representation of medieval Russian warriors, *bogatyri*, in visual and plastic arts, and the ways in which this figure is involved in the national mythmaking project of the nineteenth century. The third chapter focuses on the Rimsky-Korsakov opera, *The Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, investigating the ways that different medieval and modern elements come together in this work to present an aestheticized image of medieval Russia. In this analysis of diverse and far-ranging facets of Russian medievalism in the plastic, visual, literary and performing arts, the complicated relationship between medievalism and the prevalent discourse of nationalism is investigated, opening up new opportunities for scholarly intersections with other medievalisms – in Western Europe and beyond.

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For Jean-Luc

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, who challenges me to be a better person, teacher, and scholar every day. Without him, this thesis would have remained a collection of scattered ideas and roads not taken; it is to him I owe its very existence.

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To my family and friends near and far whose encouragement and love continue to keep me afloat across time and space, I owe you everything.

INTRODUCTION

There is a productive energy to be found in liminality. The in-between spaces, the borderlands and grey areas, are home to an attempted mediation between two or more different forces, and by dint of this, house an inherent indeterminacy and instability. This transitional space is, by its very nature as a place of overlap and transition between two discrete sides, familiar to both but also naturally foreign and othered. It is a place of questioning, of comparison, of perpetual negotiation and of forced hybridity, seldom resulting in a perfectly heterogeneous blend of elements, most often creating fantastic chimeras.¹

The medieval period fills this role of liminal space, of borderland, in many modern imaginations. It is conceived as a “middle age,” a period that bridges the end of Classical Antiquity to the dawn of Renaissance Humanism, and is largely considered an unknown, a “neither/nor.” Finding it tantalizingly distant from our current daily life, we succumb to the exoticism of the medieval, and therein, the fetishized beauty we attribute to the exotic. The medieval also holds the allure of the grotesque. It shows us a vision of our familiar selves, but that vision has been distorted by the funhouse mirror of time and distance, rendering it uncanny and strange. It is a zone “beyond” or out of reach of the present, and as such, is a fertile ground for imagination.

Out of this discourse of the medieval comes the field of medievalism, a term which describes the retrospective analysis of the medieval period and its cultural production. Medieval

¹ The discourse of liminality emerges from the field of poetics, and is largely used as a framework to consider issues of postcolonial spaces and the metaphorical resonances of shifting, sometimes artificial, boundaries. Important to this concept is the work of Homi Bhabha, who in particular addresses the interstitial nature of the post-colonial nation, which creates a hybrid, interrogatory space, in works like *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994) and particularly his chapter, “DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation.”

studies, and medievalism by extension, are traditionally grounded in the study of the Western European Middle Ages, from whence the field of inquiry and its surrounding concepts first emerged. Despite these origins, this field is expanding as contemporary scholarship finds it productive to explore other “medievals” that resist the typical Western European paradigms. Definitions are broadening and inquiry is deepening as these more traditional perspectives on medievalism are adapted to work on the fringes of the Western world and beyond: borderlands of a different sort. In recent years, the discussion of medieval studies and medievalism have broadened to include many “new” medievals that pose challenges to the frameworks and paradigms of a Eurocentric tradition. How does a discourse of medievalism fit into discussions of Africa or Oceania, for example? Should comparisons be drawn across chronological lines, or should similar but asynchronous traits be identified for comparative study? The Russian case, within which this dissertation is grounded, encourages a similar inquiry into definitions and methodologies. What is the Russian medieval, and how do we study it?

The Russian Medieval

One starting point for drawing boundaries around medieval Russia is to determine its end, and for this, many would argue that the reign of Peter I, “the Great,” decisively concluded Russia’s medieval period with his swift and far-reaching modernization efforts. The fact that the medieval period could possibly have stretched as far as 1698-9, when Peter returned from his embassy to Western Europe and began instating major reforms, is largely incompatible with the Western frameworks and timelines for what “medieval” signifies. On the one hand, proclaiming 1698 to be the end of the Russian medieval period ignores the very many changes Russian culture had undergone towards modernity before that point. On the other hand, the largely

agrarian nature of the Russian economy and the by-and-large feudal system of landownership that lasted well into the nineteenth century caused many progressives to call Russia “medieval” until the Bolshevik revolution.

Does Russia even have a “middle age?” Using such a terminology presupposes not only modernity that comes after, but also antiquity that comes before, and in the Russian case, this is problematic. We are left to question, should we consider the Greek tradition to be Russia’s real “antiquity,” inherited through Byzantium via Orthodoxy? Is the earliest age of Russia’s legendary history, chronicles that begin with the Genesis story and claim an unbroken lineage from the biblical flood, part of its medieval period, or is it something separate? Just as end points are controversial for the Russian medieval, so too are starting points.

This raises an important complication in medieval studies once we expand beyond the traditional European conception as such: what makes something “medieval,” then, if chronology is a faulty metric? I suspect that one of the reasons that the concept of medievalism has not grafted particularly well onto the Russian case is that scholars are uncomfortable with the indeterminacy of definitions. I know I have wrestled with this issue greatly. At what point is something “medieval,” and at what point is it “folk?” What elements of Russian religious or church art are “medieval” or even “Russian,” and which of them belong to a different, external tradition? Can appeals to either folk or ecclesiastic traditions in the modern era be grouped together as medievalism, as “medievalizing”? And if they cannot, where does one draw dividing lines between the two traditions, given the considerable overlap?

While this dissertation engages seriously with the concept of medieval Russia, it does so through the prism of a nineteenth-century perspective, looking not at the medieval as a historical phenomenon, so much as the ways in which the conceptual, imagined Russian medieval, served

as a source of inspiration in Russia's modern era. Therefore, in the context of this dissertation, it is not so crucial that we come to a consensus about the precise definition of medieval Russia in both time and space. These are questions that have occupied scholars for centuries, and as prevailing notions and political powers shift, inevitably so too will these conceptions of temporal and physical boundaries on the medieval. Of primary importance is not what *we* find to be medieval, but rather what served as inspiration in the "medievalist" mode that arose during the period of inquiry.

With regards to the blurred lines between folk, ecclesiastic, and medieval influences, I have chosen to be generous and inclusive in how I use the term "medievalism." Through my research into multiple forms of cultural production from the late nineteenth century, it is my conclusion that many of the artists and scholars who were captivated by the creative potential of the medieval period did not feel particularly confined by the same taxonomies that I find myself seeking. Rather, they saw their work as a place of artistic synthesis, and found the medieval period likewise to be a time of interplay between different cultural and artistic modes, a hybrid, liminal space. With that notion in mind, I have taken this opportunity to bring together far-ranging examples drawing upon a diversity of Russian "medievals," to show just how multivalent medievalism truly was in the Russian nineteenth century, and to untangle and articulate the different strains of medievalism that were called upon to serve diverse cultural and ideological purposes in the late imperial years.

Taxonomies and definitions

While the discourse of liminality belongs to the twentieth century, the fascination with the medieval-as-middle is far from a new phenomenon. Scholars and artists alike have long been drawn to the possibilities this medieval middle space holds in terms of artistic and cultural production. In any exploration of medievalism, the modern fascination with aspects of the medieval period, we can approach a number of different modes of medievalizing, each with slightly different manifestations and aims. In order to taxonomize, we can distinguish four major, sometimes overlapping medievalist modes: academic, mimetic, ideological, and creative medievalisms.²

Academic medievalism is an interest in the medieval period and its people, events, artistic works, material objects and philosophical-religious concepts as a focus of scholarly study above all. This is epitomized in the development of academic departments and journals focusing on medieval studies, and the expansion of archaeological, codicological, and linguistic-philological research with a medieval focus. Mimetic medievalism tries to create some kind of authentically medieval experience in the modern day. Early music ensembles playing on period instruments do so in the spirit of mimetic medievalism, as do historical reenactors who take pains to use period costumes and avoid anachronisms to as great an extent possible. The mimetic mode is also interested in conserving and restoring medieval objects and artifacts to an authentic and original state, often using period materials and technologies. Political or ideological medievalism uses the medieval period and its works, themes and ideologies to inform modern political thought. In this mode, the medieval past can be used as a foil by which to denounce and repudiate modern,

² These categories are informed by the work of German medievalist scholars, namely Ulrich Müller in his “Formen der Mittelalter-Rezeption II, Einleitung,” *Mittelalter-Rezeption* (1986) 507-10; also “Vorwort,” *Mittelalter-Rezeption III* (1988) III-VII. See also Albrecht Classen, “Types of Approaches to Medievalism,” in *Handbook of Medieval Studies* (2011) 853.

progressive tendencies. Similarly, aligning with a medieval past is sometimes used to lend legitimacy to political initiatives and movements, particularly when those initiatives are conservative or reactionary in nature.

The primary focus of this thesis is the last mode: the creative, artistic, and aesthetic impulse to medievalism. This creative medievalism incorporates medieval elements into modern works in a generative way, producing new, hybrid works that are inspired by and engage with the medieval period but do not necessarily aim to recreate a medieval experience. In this dissertation, I explore the aesthetic aspect of medievalism, and the way that medieval motifs and modern perceptions about medieval aesthetics find their way into visual, plastic, performing, and literary art of the late imperial era in Russia.

Borderlands are sometimes excluded from the spaces they limit, but they are nearly always integrative spaces, and hold great potential for synthesis between opposing cultural forces. Medievalism-as-borderland is one such integrative space, where different modes of cultural production work in conjunction with one another. Often, several of these modes will be found simultaneously as the motivation or result of one creative work or cultural impulse, and different modes may be more or less visible in certain works at different times. Just as the medieval period was imagined to be a period of cultural synthesis, the medievalist impulse in the nineteenth century resulted in a productive exchange of ideas. Collaboration across different cultural spheres became common, with artists, writers, and composers working together closely in the production of new creative works. This is evident in the rise and great success of mixed-media performing arts during this period, particularly opera and ballet, where music, costume, choreography, set design, and dance or text all come together in the creation of an artistic performance.

Beyond the hands-on interaction between artists that emerges in this creative synthesis, indirect intellectual collaboration is evident in many facets of medievalist art. Scholarly medievalism grew throughout the nineteenth century, with great developments in historical and archaeological studies and a dramatic increase in published materials on these topics. This great dispersion of new information would inform generations of artists and scholars to follow. Nikolai Karamzin's works were some of the first of a rich period of historical inquiry, and his *History of the Russian State (Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo, 1818-1829)* sparked new enthusiasm and interest in Russia's medieval past. Karamzin's work filled a void, as very little of the historiography in Russia to that point had looked inward at Russia's own history.

Following Karamzin, new research publications emerged, examining different facets of pre-modern Russian art, language, and culture, which then in turn informed and inspired artists and thinkers. As just one example, Butovsky's tome on Old Russian design and ornament (*Istoriia russkago ornamenta s X do XVI stoletie po drevnim rukopisiam, 1870*) brought medieval Russian design elements to the forefront of the Russian imagination, and also stimulated imaginations abroad. Many artists were engaged in scholarly research themselves, and many academics and intellectuals ventured into the art world. Some kept these two facets of their lives separate, like Pavel Mel'nikov-Pechersky. Pechersky's rich and fruitful ethnographic work into the Old Believer religious communities of the Russian north was sponsored by government initiatives to undermine and eradicate these sects, many of which had been living in isolation for years, attempting to preserve seventeenth-century traditions. His lasting legacy, however, remains his novels written under a pseudonym, providing a detailed and sympathetic description of rural Old Believer life. These novels served as inspiration for generations of artists who were

interested in both these fringe religious traditions, and also in an earlier, simpler way of Russian life.³

While some kept their artistic and academic interests separated, others embraced the notion of synthesis. Perhaps the best example of the diversification of endeavors that this period of Russian culture fostered was the work of Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), one of the greatest champions of medievalism in the arts. Stasov is known primarily as a critic of art and music, but his interests and influences ran the gamut, from philology and linguistics, to folklore and mythology, architecture, music, ballet, and the visual arts. He produced books, articles, and critiques on a wide range of themes, largely focused on the idea of Russia's pre-modern heritage and the expression of Russian national culture. Stasov was also a leading force in setting the direction that Russian art would take in the 1860s and onward. He was a scathing critic of art he found displeasing, but also provided financial support and entrée into the art world for young artists with recognizable potential. In this way, Stasov wielded great influence over emerging medievalist art, and encouraged the same intertwining of elements and intellectual spheres that he himself found productive.

Medievalism and Post-Napoleonic Nationalism

For Stasov, and for many of the artists and thinkers producing medievalist work, their quest to discover the past was as much or more a quest to understand and develop Russian national identity. As in Western Europe, Russian medievalism in all its forms tended to emphasize those elements of medieval culture that best exemplified Russia's cultural particularism, and thus the regional, ethnic, and linguistic differences emerging out of a medieval culture that differentiated

³ I. I. Nikonova, "M.V. Nesterov," in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (Moscow, 1968) 297-299.

the Russian people and nation. In large part, this search for the unique and valuable aspects of medieval heritage can be traced to the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, and the widespread cultural reactions that ensued. Following the dissolution of the Napoleonic Empire and the widespread denunciation of Napoleon's imperial project, nations across Europe were faced with a task: to establish and assert their national identities in opposition to the ideas of unification and empire.

Classical art and culture had been a source of legitimacy, gravitas and inspiration for much of Europe, Russia included, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Classical Antiquity had served as a model for art, architecture, and literature, presenting a mythology of a unified and common heritage emerging from Greece and especially Rome. Part of Napoleon's cultural project was the appropriation of this classical heritage, and positioning France and the French Empire as the culmination of all of Classical culture, and the rightful heir to Roman antiquity and its inheritance. Alongside the rejection of Napoleon and France came the rejection this cultural unification more broadly, which left a vacuum in the national mythologies and identities across Europe where Classical Antiquity had once stood.

Faced with the need to distance national identity from any presumed Classical heritage, European nations looked to local archaic traditions, cultural practices, medieval art, folklore, and linguistic particularities which could serve as foundations for national culture. This was especially fruitful in cases where historical ties to Classical antiquity were weak or nonexistent, away from the direct influence of the Mediterranean. Throughout Europe, medieval history and culture filled a role that had been lost with the rejection of empire, providing legitimacy and the myth of origin. European liberals reimagined the medieval as a period when their ancestors had rejected the unifying authority of the Roman Empire in favor of creating nations. For them, the

shift toward medievalism following a period of classicism and the fall of the Napoleonic Empire was a natural, parallel transition echoing the historical shift to the medieval period following the classical period and the fall of the Roman Empire.

In Russia, medievalism did not take on the same anti-imperial sentiment as it did in the rest of Europe, and in fact, Russia's first impulse following the Napoleonic Wars was to embrace neoclassicism, and through it, a sense of the universality of humankind. Eventually Russia did begin to reject the universality of neoclassicism in favor of the local, national, and ethnically Russian. Even still, rather than reject empire out of hand, Russia's imperial identity and heritage, rooted in the Byzantine tradition and Eastern Orthodoxy, remained an important element in the conceptualization of medieval Russia. Rather than railing against the concept of empire, Russia's medievalism focused instead on the opposition of Russia against Western Europe and Orthodoxy against the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, in Russia, some forms of medievalism were highly populist in nature, valuing the aesthetics and values of pre-industrial life, the peasantry, folklore, and handcrafts, while simultaneously, medievalism was used in support of the Russian empire, to assert the legitimacy of the Romanov dynasty and to uphold the autocracy.

With medievalism in nineteenth and early twentieth century Russia being a complex topic, it is only fitting that its study takes a varied form. In this dissertation, rather than follow one specific artistic mode or tendency, I examine a range of different art pieces and cultural artifacts, from the fields of architecture and the applied arts, visual art, and opera. Firmly grounded in an examination of aesthetic medievalism, this study shifts through different analytical modes grounded in different disciplinary practices. The dissertation is made up of three case studies, each exploring a different medium and a different approach toward medievalism.

Chapter one examines the role of ecclesiastic architecture in the development of medievalist idioms, and the ways in which monumental churches created very visible, lasting representations of the relationship between the Orthodox Church, the autocracy, and a sense of national past. This triad of forces, “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” was first codified in 1833 under Nicholas I as the tsar’s dominant ideological doctrine following the Napoleonic wars, and it had lasting effects on the way Russia’s strength and greatness were conceived from that point onward. The balance of these forces is perhaps no better seen than in the masonry churches that were erected to symbolize all three united, and the way that representations of “nationality” in these churches were largely drawn out of a medieval exemplars and the pursuit of an imagined past identity. A common impulse was to build churches in a “pure Russian style.” In most cases, that meant a rejection of traditionally “Western” elements in favor of medieval Russian ones. The visions of medieval Russia that were put to use for these church projects were often eclectic and “inauthentic” by modern standards, and provoked mixed reactions among their contemporaries. The buildings that were produced using medievalizing impulses took a variety of shapes, and a variety of very distinctive medievalist architectural traditions emerged across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This chapter follows a chronological development of medievalizing impulses in architecture, looking specifically at the ways that medieval buildings served as influences and sites of inspiration for the structures that were designed and built. Focus is given to design competitions for high-profile churches of imperial commission, analyzing the implications underlying the selection process wherein certain medieval design elements were chosen and others rejected. I also explore influences and building projects that fall outside the realm of

monumental church architecture, namely the importance of secular folk architecture on emerging medievalism. I consider contrasting traditions to these massive, monumental, national churches: small, local churches with a small number of parishioners, also working with medieval elements in the pursuit of a different vision of the medieval. I am particularly interested in the ways in which these small churches reflect a nascent modernist architecture and can be seen as in alignment with the avant-garde, their medievalist elements a part of this aesthetic. This crossover between modernism and medievalism was widespread and highly productive, and contrasts the supposition that medievalizing elements are always indicative of reactionism or political and artistic conservatism.

The second chapter of this dissertation engages with medievalism in the visual and graphic arts. I trace how the archetype of the native Russian warrior, the *bogatyr*, develops out of a tradition of oral legend, and becomes established in the fine arts world as an icon of medieval Russia. This iconic character, the *bogatyr*-warrior, evolves in complexity through canvas painting and the applied arts, and also finds fertile soil in other facets of culture. After the popularity of certain images of the *bogatyr*, most notably those by the painter Viktor Vasnetsov, this image is coopted for use in graphic design and advertising.

Bogatyri and other idealized medieval Russian figures appear in print advertising for luxury commodities during the late imperial years, often serving as a marker of Russianness to counterbalance the primarily Western European associations these goods held. This chapter also explores the political connotations of the *bogatyr*, and the role this character played in the self-fashioning and public persona of tsar Alexander III. *Bogatyr*-inspired statues are compared, including Paolo Trubetskoi's sculpture of Alexander III on horseback, examining the various

ways a *bogatyr* could be portrayed, and also exploring the relationship between this figure and an ideal of Russian valor produced for public consumption.

The third chapter of this dissertation looks to medievalism in the performing arts, specifically through a late opera of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakoff, *The Invisible City of Kitezh and the Fair Maiden Fevroniya*. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, medieval themes increasingly converged with a widespread cultural impulse to create a synthetic artistic experience in integrated art forms like ballet, theater, and opera. For many theorists, composers, writers, and artists, there was a natural kinship between the multisensory experience evoked by opera, theater, and ballet and the presumed immersive, holistic nature of a medieval interaction with art.

In *Kitezh*, Rimsky-Korsakoff and his librettist, Vladimir Belsky, blended a variety of medieval and related sources in order to create a compelling narrative about medieval Russia. Drawing upon legend, hagiography, and medieval chronicles, along with a sizable dose of modern inspiration, the creative pair constructed an amalgam of different characteristics of the Russian medieval, integrating a love story, an epic battle, and a mystical-symbolic denouement. This opera provides one example of the way early modernists found inspiration in ideas of medieval Russia, both as a backdrop for musical exploration, and also as an exploration of national identity.

Each of the three chapters addresses a different cultural milieu and creative medium, which differentiates this study from majority of works exploring medievalism, the “Russian Style,” or medieval elements of romantic nationalism in the arts. By and large, conversations exploring medieval elements in Russian creative works have existed within disciplinary frameworks, in studies of architecture or music or visual arts. These studies may sometimes draw

upon relevant scholarship from the fields of history or political science, but tend to explore one disciplinary arena deeply, rather than canvass many broadly. Informed by such studies, like Elena Borisova's rich work on the Russian style in architecture and applied arts, I have sought to bring together a variety of media into one study, and to alternate in-depth inquiry with a broad comparativism and an interest in far-reaching synthesis. I take inspiration from Western medievalists like Umberto Eco, who have approached the field with playfulness and a genuine willingness to explore the potential for connections outside traditional disciplinary boundaries. Most of all, I am inspired by the very medievalists who are the subjects of this study: artists like Vasnetsov and Vrubel, whose works are seldom bounded by conventions of medium and genre; scholars and critics like Melnikov-Pechersky and Stasov, whose writings have been influential far beyond their immediate spheres. Medievalists of the nineteenth century were united in a common passion for Old Russia, and this dissertation, in all of its facets, approaches the multitude of ways that passion appeared.

CHAPTER 1

MONUMENTAL MEDIEVALISM

Origins

Some of the most visible and lasting manifestations of the medievalist tendencies in the 19th and 20th centuries come in the form of monumental architecture. Buildings play an important role in the culture of a city; they are a very visible, open-air canvas on which value systems, power dynamics, and economic forces are inscribed. Architecture follows aesthetic trends and political currents, and can serve as a fossil record for these sometimes-ephemeral cultural elements. Buildings play a role in a place's identity, adding to the "character" of the cityscape and altering the impressions that the cityscape gives off. In this way, architecture has a high potential for propagandizing and for cultural manipulation. Those with the ability to erect buildings also have the power to shape a place's identity, how it will come to be known to outsiders, and the way inhabitants will interact with and react to public space.

Pragmatically, due to the enormous resources needed to complete large-scale architectural projects, from the available land to build upon to the construction materials and wages for architects and laborers, monumental architecture is by and large an elite form of cultural production. As such, this "fossil record" is often unbalanced, representing the interests of governments and wealthy institutions far more than the *vox populi*. Medieval-inspired architecture in Russia reached a peak in popularity at the turn of the twentieth century, most notably in church architecture, with increasingly elaborate buildings rooted in medieval Russian design being constructed across the Russian Empire. While to the casual observer these churches were simply following a popular architectural fad, in fact the ubiquitous Russian Style in church architecture represented much more than an aesthetic trend. The promulgation of these buildings and their medievalist influences emphasized an implied unity of Church and State, as well as a

conservative adherence to tradition and cultural history. It is little surprise that when political currents changed, few of these buildings survived.

Right after the Romanovs were deposed in the Russian Revolution, these ornate church buildings remained steadfast as large, space-consuming, showy icons of the toppled regime. In the decades following the Bolshevik Revolution, particularly during the Stalinist 1930s, the vast majority of these churches were demolished, and those that remained standing were initially subject to unceremonious treatment. One famous example is St. Petersburg's *Spas na Krovi*, which was stripped of its costly ornament and used as a temporary morgue and storage hangar in wartime. Another well-known case is the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which was razed and left abandoned because of a lack of resources to rebuild, only to later be transformed into a public swimming pool. The destruction or defacement, one might almost say humiliation, of these buildings, which stood as effigies of the *ancien régime* itself, is a fascinating cultural circumstance that warrants renewed attention. In this study, we will consider the history that precedes that cultural moment of Stalinist destruction, and the way that these buildings with their medievalist trappings came to represent more far more than just walls and ornate cupolas.

Medievalism in Russian architecture was far from homogenous, and while the most elaborate, largest, and most centrally-located examples of medievalist architecture were produced under the aegis of State and Church, that is far from the entirety of the movement. Medievalist architecture also emerged in the private sphere, frequently in the residences of urban businessmen, and particularly in Moscow. The emergent Moscow merchant class included many great patrons of medievalism in art and architecture, whose financial support helped solidify Russian medievalism as a powerful cultural trend. For many, the connection to medieval Russia had a necessarily religious connection; in some cases this was related to family ties to the so-

called Old Belief (*Staroobryadchestvo/Starovery*), a version of Eastern Christianity that had broken away from the Russian Orthodox Church in the seventeenth century. With the loosening of restrictions on the building of churches of various denominations, a large number of Old Believer churches were constructed in the early twentieth century, many using a dynamic combination of medievalist and modern elements. In other cases, the relationship between medieval elements, architectural design, and religion had less to do with the specific demands of a religious sect, and more with individual tastes and inclinations. The textbook example of this is the chapel at the Abramtsevo artist colony, the Church Not Made by Hands, which was realized by a group of artists and thinkers as a manifestation of their faith and artistic vision. In building this church by hand using medieval technologies, the members of the Abramtsevo group sought to recreate an authentic medieval experience. Their motivations for using medieval motifs and design elements had little to do with the political conservatism that fueled many of the monumental medievalist church projects, nor was it directly linked to a medieval version of Christianity, as in the Old Believer churches. Rather, medievalism was used for its aesthetic and cultural qualities, in an attempt to connect in some way to Old Russia and Russian cultural heritage.

This chapter examines the development and diversity of medieval elements in Russian church architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Church architecture is a special case, because a church building's form has a ritually and traditionally prescribed relationship to its function. As ritual spaces, they are imbued with symbolic resonances and designed to play a functional role in people's spiritual lives. A Russian Orthodox church is more than just a building; it is a community space, a symbolic representation of the cosmos,⁴ and a

⁴ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, 132.

physical embodiment of a people's faith and traditions. Church architecture tends toward the traditional, drawing upon established elements that reinforce a continuous tradition and a sense of inherited authority. For this reason, innovative or incongruous elements in church architecture are particularly interesting, as they rarely represent artistic choice alone. By default, innovation in a church building signifies a conscious decision to deviate from proscription or tradition in some way, and these deviations are always meaningful.

Developing a medievalist tradition

In the case of Russian Orthodox church architecture, medievalism is practically a given, because Orthodoxy strongly values adherence to tradition, and the most complete manifestations of the aesthetics of Orthodoxy come out of the medieval period. It is almost tautological to say that Orthodox churches employ medievalism as a stylistic design principle, because by definition, Byzantine Orthodoxy, and Russian Orthodoxy by extension, are fundamentally grounded in medieval elements.

Nonetheless, the architectural style of Russian Orthodox churches evolved over time, and from the Petrine period onward, saw significant deviations from its Byzantine roots. Along with his many cultural reforms, Peter I imposed Western baroque architecture on the structure of Russian churches, introducing a first real deviation from the Byzantine tradition. The Peter and Paul Cathedral, the first stone church in St. Petersburg, emerged between 1712 and 1733 as a fundamentally new kind of church building on Russian soil. Long and rectangular, with a bell tower over the west entry and a small barrel drum over the apse, but no characteristic domes, the structure of the Peter and Paul Cathedral had more in common with a Western Romanesque

basilica than a compact, square Byzantine church. Its ornamental scheme was similarly Western in design, eschewing traditional ornamental aspects from Russian architecture such as multiple onion domes, ogival arches, engaged colonnettes and string courses, and instead presenting clean, simple exteriors drawn from a Western European tradition.

Peter I's stylistic initiatives changed the rules for building Russian Orthodox churches.⁵ No longer was strict adherence to Byzantine tradition mandatory; it became a stylistic prerogative, and in some cases, even a statement against the norm. It is in this place of Western influence and stylistic flexibility that the earliest impulses of medievalism in church architecture can be found. There was a manifest interest in returning to tradition, to origins, to the more overt exploration of Byzantine influences in Russian church architecture.

An early example of this impulse is the Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church in the Alexandrowka Russian colony of Potsdam, Germany, near Berlin, consecrated in 1826. The colony of Alexandrowka was the project of Friedrich Wilhelm III, king of Prussia, who sought to commemorate the death of his friend, tsar Alexander I of Russia, and to recognize the small Russian population of Potsdam that had served the Prussian army during the Napoleonic wars. As the colony was meant to recall a traditional Russian village, the architects, Vasily Stasov and Karl Schinkel, turned to two main idioms in the construction of the colony's buildings: the secular wooden architecture of the Russian peasantry, and the small, compact, Byzantine-inspired churches of Russian Orthodoxy. The architecture of this village highlights the two main modes of medievalizing: turning to the peasantry and alternately the Church for inspiration, with the underlying assumption that both of these social constructs are effectively timeless, containing

⁵ See William Craft Brumfield, "The Turn to Western Forms", in *A History of Russian Architecture*, 1993. 199-390.

the essential kernel of truth and authenticity that underlies the medievalist sentiment. At this early stage, as the medievalist idiom began to develop, these two modes of medievalizing remained largely separate, and the secular, folk sphere did not yet intersect with the Byzantine, sacred sphere of influence, as we see in the Alexander Nevsky church (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Karl Schinkel and Vasily Stasov, *Alexander-Newsky-Gedächtniskirche*, 1826, Alexandrowka, Potsdam, Germany

This church largely eschewed the Western influences that had predominated Russian church architecture for the previous century. Its small structure followed the compact cross-in-square plan of an early Byzantine church, the same design that was prevalent among many small, provincial Old Russian masonry churches. Of its nine internal bays, six comprise a nave, or worship space, and the easternmost three make up a sanctuary space, culminating in a central apse protruding from the eastern wall. The inner division of space is echoed in the external decoration, with vertical pilaster strips subdividing the wall's surface into three fields. Under the influence of classical proportions, not entirely absent from this building, this vertical division of

space is mimicked in the horizontal mode as well, with three separate zones isolated by horizontal bands, in similar proportion to the vertical divisions. In elevation, the church is largely cubic, and is topped by five onion domes, each resting atop a colonette-ringed drum, in iconic Russian style. The doors are framed by ogival arches, also a hallmark of medieval Russian church architecture.

This church marks a new effort to embody Russianness in architecture, here in order to represent a cultural identity in a foreign land. It is a return to older, more provincial forms, rejecting the cosmopolitan, Western European influences that had infused Russian culture. While the Alexander Nevsky Church was built to stand in for Russian heritage abroad, it formed an early part of a larger cultural mission to rediscover and reassert Russian heritage on home soil as well, by embracing a pre-Petrine, medieval aesthetic that differentiated Russia from Western Europe.

In Russia, this style was slow in developing, compared to similar medievalist revivals in Western European architecture. In Germany, for example, there was a near-immediate reaction against classical architecture following the Napoleonic wars, with a rejection of the aesthetics of imperialism and an assertion of a local, vernacular (in this case, neo-Gothic) style. In Russia, the post-Napoleonic impulse did not immediately reject the Empire style. Russia's victory, at least at first, was framed as not only a national victory, but also a triumph of humankind. Contrary to the general trend in Western Europe, which at this transitional moment turned to an exploration of the gothic and medieval national identities, the immediate aesthetic response of Russian architecture to the Napoleonic wars was an increased flourishing of Neoclassicism, which emphasized not only the victory of the Russian people, but the triumph of all humanity. While some architects were experimenting with the medievalizing Russo-Byzantine style as a

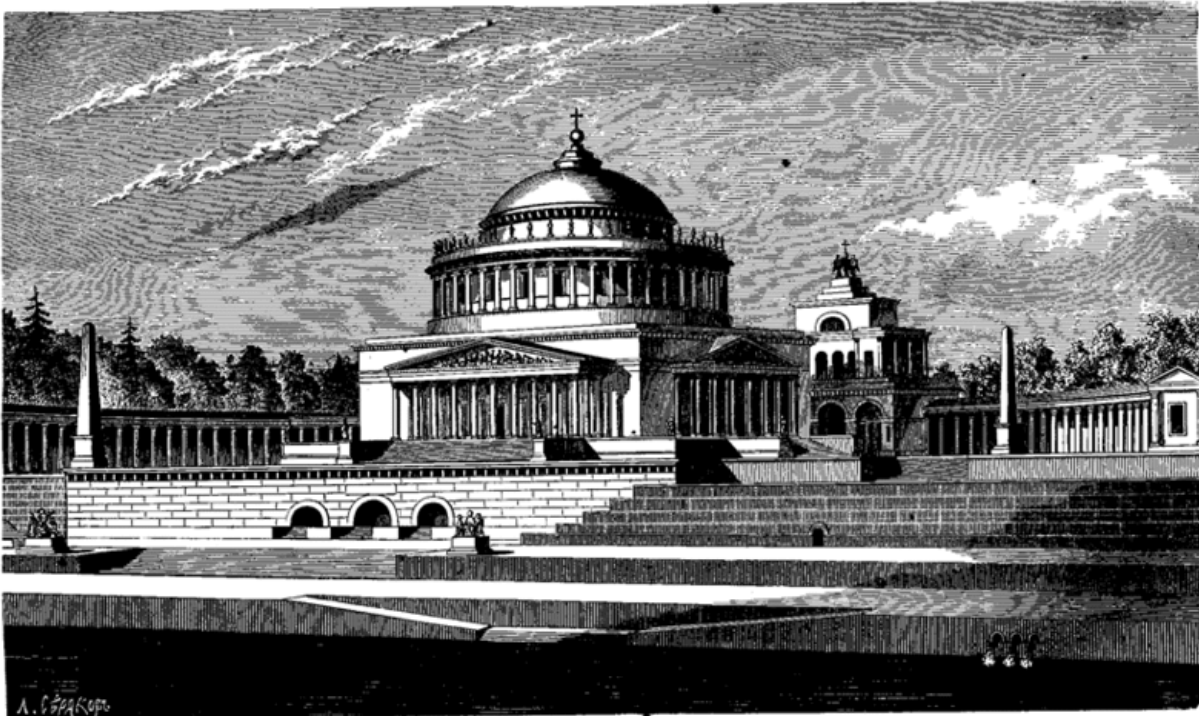
manifestation of national sentiment in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it was largely overshadowed by the reigning Neoclassical style until the 1820s.

New directions in medievalist architecture

The real turning point in the development of the Russo-Byzantine style of church architecture, and with it, the viability of medievalist architecture on a larger scale, happened during the development of the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. This building, which followed a long and unconventional path to its eventual erection, was first commissioned in 1813, with the final structure designed in 1830 and constructed between 1838 and 1881. The impetus behind construction was a commemoration of Russia's 1812 victory over Napoleon, and as such, the cathedral carried a political and social agenda. It was intended to be a physical representation of Russian valor and victory, and the different projects that were proposed for its realization showed the ways in which this national sentiment was expressed, and how the preferred mode of representation changed over time. This is particularly evident in this church's development, as the project underwent two distinct phases of construction under two different tsars.

In the first architectural competition of 1813, the submissions were varied, but largely united in their adherence to neoclassical styles drawn from ancient Greece and Rome. Many projects looked specifically to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the Roman Pantheon as models, including the winning project of this first competition, designed by Aleksandr Vitberg. Vitberg's project turned to St. Peter's Basilica, incorporating not only classical elements but also extensive

masonic symbolism, with an intention to convey a universality of mankind.⁶ Vitberg's project was accepted, and construction on it began in 1817, alongside commemorations of the fifth anniversary of Napoleon's retreat.



ХРАМЪ ХРИСТА СПАСИТЕЛЯ ВЪ МОСКВѢ,
ПРОЕКТЪ АНАДЕМИКА ВИТБЕРГА.

Доводено цензурою. С.-Петербургъ, 24 марта 1872 г.

1817 г.

Печатня В. И. Головина, Владимирская, № 15.

Figure 2: Church of Christ the Savior, project by Vitberg, 1817.

When in 1825 Alexander I unexpectedly fell ill and died, the main source of political and financial patronage for Vitberg's project evaporated. When Nicholas I assumed the throne, he ordered work on the project be halted. After a delay of nearly five years, the suitability and stability of the construction site atop Moscow's Sparrow Hills were called into doubt, the original plan was deemed unfeasible, and was abandoned.⁷ This was more than simply a case of

⁶ Evgeniia Kirichenko, "Alexander Vitberg's Fateful Design," *Khram Khrista Spasitelia v Moskve*, 1992

⁷ Snegirev, in his 1939 monograph on Vitberg, suggests that this official explanation was devised to discredit the architect, rather than reflecting on the actual suitability of the building site.

shaky foundations, however. The monumental project had been plagued by poor direction and financial mismanagement from the very beginning, which cast a shadow over such a symbolically significant project. In order to purge the project of its shady past, not only was the project scrapped, but Vitberg, the architect, was arrested and exiled on accusations of embezzlement.⁸ After a lapse, during which no progress occurred on the Christ the Savior project whatsoever, eventually Nicholas I reclaimed the idea and endeavored to start anew: an entirely new project under a new emperor, under different political circumstances and with a far different aesthetic.

A second Christ the Savior

The Cathedral of Christ the Savior constructed between 1838 and 1881 would look to medieval Russia for its architectural idiom, turning away from the popular Classical-Hellenic mode of the Vitberg design. Through this monumental project a new architectural style would become codified, one which firmly established Russian medievalism as a primary component of the state's agenda going forward, using representations of Old Russia to demonstrate the strength of the Russian state.

In the original architectural competition, only one architect, Andrei Voronikhin, had deviated significantly from the then-standard neoclassical model for monumental churches. Voronikhin's 1813 designs drew on Byzantium and early Russian Orthodox churches to establish a new

⁸ Most historians, including Snegirev, Kirichenko, and Akinsha, believe that Vitberg was more guilty of a lack of business acumen than actual embezzlement in the building fiasco, unintentionally allowing corrupt contractors and officials to pocket large sums of government funds. Aleksandr Herzen, who befriended Vitberg in Vyatka where they were both exiled, wrote: "Vitberg was surrounded by a crowd of rogues, men who look on Russia as a field for speculation, on the service as a profitable line of business, on a public post as a lucky chance to make a fortune. It was easy to understand that they would dig a pit under Vitberg's feet," (*Byloe i dumy*, 151).

grandiose, monumental style. Voronikhin's designs can be credited with inspiring a new approach to Russian-style architecture, specifically the treatment of domes and cupolas. Voronikhin proposed a variation on the traditional Byzantine-inspired five-dome design, enlarging the central dome out of standard proportions, and pushing the four surrounding domes outward toward the building's corners, changing them from structural roof elements into external, decorative bell towers.

Whereas this highly innovative treatment of medieval elements was disparaged in the first competition as being too Byzantine, by 1830, when it was decided that Christ the Savior would be rebuilt on a new site, it had become widely recognized as a viable and even standard way to represent Russianness architecturally. Rather than hold a contest for the new project, to the surprise of many, the emperor bypassed convention and directly appointed the relatively young and inexperienced architect, Konstantin Ton, to the enormous task of redesigning Christ the Savior.

Ton's career before this imperial commission was short. He trained at the Petersburg Academy of Arts, then traveled to Western Europe, studying ancient ruins and working on restorations of classical buildings. Upon his return to Russia, Ton's work gained the attention of the tsar with its promise of a new style: a turn away from the neoclassical, with its colonnades and porticoes, and an embrace of elements from ancient Russian and early Byzantine church architecture. Ton's first project in this style was the 1827 Church of St. Catherine in Ekaterinhof, which impressed Nicholas I greatly, appealing both to the tsar's aesthetic tastes and his cultural agenda.⁹

⁹ No longer extant, St. Catherine's was demolished in 1929, along with the majority of Ton's churches.



Figure 3: Konstantin Ton, Church of St. Catherine, Ekaterinhof, St. Petersburg, Russia

Ton's St. Catherine church highlights the particular kind of eclecticism that produced this new medievalist style. The church freely combines a mixture of design influences from different periods and regions of Old Russian architecture, as well as attributes from the academic, Western-influenced architecture that was in vogue at the time. Certain elements are highly characteristic of early churches of Vladimir and Suzdal', while other elements recall later Muscovite buildings, and others are distinctly neoclassical.

While Ton gained his official favor and fame from his Russo-Byzantine projects, he had no special training in ancient Russian architecture. During his training at the Academy of Arts in Petersburg, his formative education grew more out of field studies of the classical architecture and ruins of Western Europe than any work on Russian soil. This may explain the largely superficial quality of the Old Russian influences on Ton's design, as well as the wide diversity of forms these Russian elements take, across regions and eras of Russian architectural history.

Unlike later generations of Russian architects working in medievalizing styles, Ton was not interested in painstakingly reproducing Old Russian buildings with any degree of authenticity. Ton's buildings were evocative of a Russian architectural patrimony, but were not close replicas of any extant buildings, nor were they made to emulate any one particular period or style.¹⁰

In this early prototype of St. Catherine's, we can see the breadth of Ton's stylistic borrowings. Much of the surface decoration, from the white walls to the carved friezes, the vertical pilasters and the horizontal string courses all recall the monuments of twelfth-century architecture in the regions of Vladimir and Suzdal', in particular the heavily-ornamented Cathedral of St. Dmitry in Vladimir (c. 1194), and the Church of the Intercession on the Nerl (1166). The main body of the church (ignoring the attached bell tower, pictured to the left) recalls the traditional cross-in-square plan found in many Russian Orthodox churches, with each façade divided into three segments, reflecting the internal subdivision of space into nine square bays. The church's five domes also allude to the medieval cross-in-square plan, with the larger main dome located over the central bay, and with four smaller domes surrounding.

This five-cupolaed design, like Voronikhin's, pushed the external domes to the structure's perimeter on elevated drums. This structural plan changed the function of these domes. In traditional Byzantine churches, these smaller domes are often crucial structural elements, offsetting the force of the heavy central dome down onto the load-bearing perimeter walls. In these medievalizing churches, they became largely decorative. The increasing structural demands of larger internal spaces, taller buildings, and more grandiose domes required a different

¹⁰ Konstantin Akinsha, *The Holy Place*, 50.

approach to the roofline from these small compact Byzantine churches, instead, supporting much of the main dome's weight on massive reinforced masonry piers.

The visual effect of four surrounding domes supported on slender drums draws not only on a Byzantine inheritance, but even more strongly on a particularly Russian aesthetic tradition. Pentapolar churches with timber roofs and onion domes became a canonical architectural form in the post-Mongol period throughout Muscovy, emphasizing verticality and the interplay between cubic and pyramidal forms. Ton's structures differed significantly from these medieval Russian churches in size, materials used, and fundamental approaches to construction, but invoked a superficial familiarity to a longstanding tradition. Ton's architecture was characterized by the eclectic admixture of Byzantine and Russian design elements, on a structural framework that was greatly shaped by centuries of classical influence and technological development.

Exploring the Byzantine Style

Ton's newly developed style, with its Old Russian influences, quickly became known as the Byzantine Style. This term, referring to Russia's strong cultural debt to Byzantium, particularly in the development of Russian Orthodoxy, drew attention to the churches' retrospective qualities, and the complicated geographical and chronological factors at play in reincarnating medieval elements in modern times. In our discussion of medievalism, we need to consider which image of the medieval is reproduced, and what elements of a medieval past are upheld as the foundations of modern culture. Calling Ton's style "Byzantine," when it arguably has no direct connection to Byzantium, highlights some of these tensions in medievalism at this moment.

From an art-historic or archaeological perspective, there is very little in common between the new churches designed by Ton and his contemporaries and any medieval Byzantine architectural or cultural tradition. This disconnect was not the result of any ignorance about what was or was not truly “Byzantine,” or medieval Greek, but rather emerged out of a more metaphorical interpretation of the term Byzantine itself. For Russians in the nineteenth century, “Byzantine” applied to more than just a period of medieval Greek history. It also implicated the cultural heritage gained by Rus’ at its Christianization into the Eastern Orthodox faith, and early Russian manifestations of this Orthodox identity, especially in the arts. Thus, in a nineteenth-century quest for labels and terms to help define distinct elements of Russian local and historical identity, “Byzantine” became the preferred term to signify “medieval Russian,” with a particular emphasis on the importance of the church in the formation of a cultural identity.

The emphasis on a specifically Byzantine inheritance that emerged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century developed alongside a greater cultural and philosophical paradigm shift. In the first part of the nineteenth century, the dominant artistic style was classicism, and the belief still stood that this classical style was the manifestation of a widespread, even universal aesthetic language. But, in Russia as well as in Western Europe, this attitude lost traction, and instead, the idea arose that classicism reflected one of many possible national traditions: that of Greece and Rome. While this style was perhaps authentic and native to the Mediterranean, it rang false in Russia, which had its own cultural heritage and artistic traditions to follow.¹¹

The choice of the term “Byzantine” as the marker of Russian national identity is highly illustrative of the greater cultural context of the 1820s-1850s. First and foremost, it demonstrates

¹¹ This trend of rejecting classicism in favor of local medieval traditions was not just a Russian phenomenon, but could be found across Europe. An interesting parallel phenomenon is the uptake in interest in Gothic architecture in England and France, which nicely echoes the same progression from classical inspiration to medieval inspiration.

that the essence of Russia's exceptionalism lies in its faith and the institution representing that faith: Russian Orthodoxy. This connection to the Eastern rite of Christianity unquestionably set Russia apart from Western Europe. The Orthodox Church, despite the various reforms and shifts it had faced over its 850-year history, was nonetheless considered a stronghold of tradition, and served as a representation of unbroken continuity in Russian culture from the time of Vladimir.¹²

The focus on "Byzantine," rather than "Orthodox," also illustrates the way cultural heritage was being conceived at that time, as a primarily institutional inheritance from one great civilization (the Byzantine Empire) to another (the Russian Empire). Unlike later incarnations of Russian medievalism that would look to the peasantry and folk culture for sources of a native identity, the Byzantine style, like the Neoclassical and Empire styles it replaced, was largely interested in aesthetic representations of grandeur and power.

In this way, Ton's Byzantine style was a great success. It intertwined many varied elements from medieval Russian churches and superimposed them onto the framework of monumental church architecture that had been developed in previous decades, in order to create a style that above all conveyed the power of the Russian state and its people. The crowning achievement of this style was certainly Ton's realization of the Christ the Savior Cathedral.

¹² This same myth of unbroken continuity would be a fundamental tenet of the Old Believer tradition, which saw the seventeenth-century Nikonian reforms as a deviation from Russia's cultural heritage.

Influences on Ton's project

The eclectic combination of elements that linked Ton's new Byzantine style, as displayed in St. Catherine's, to ancient modes of Russian church building raised the young architect in the esteem of the newly-appointed tsar Nicholas I. In re-envisioning the long-dormant Christ the Savior project, Nicholas expressed a desire for a church that would demonstrate traditional Russian values, not modern Western ones, and called upon Ton to create a project for a new church, emblematic of the new regime. Like the project under Alexander, the Church of Christ the Savior would still commemorate the victory of 1812 in monumental fashion, on an enormous scale. Under Ton, however, the project would take a very different shape.



Figure 4: Ton's Christ the Savior Church, photographed in the early 20th century

One striking aspect of Ton's project for Christ the Savior is its remarkable similarity to his earlier church design, St. Catherine's. Comparison of the two churches shows the distinct hallmarks of Ton's Old-Russian-inspired style, so favored by Nicholas: the white walls with figural sculpted ornamentation, string courses, and ogival *zakomary* (decorative gables). The

layout is similar in both buildings as well, forming a squat cross with arms of equal length, sometimes called a Greek or St. Andrew's cross. This type of church effectively set the official style for ecclesiastic architecture for Nicholas's reign. When Ton published a two-volume album of similar designs in 1838, the tsar declared that these designs should serve as a model for all churches going forward.

Ton's new design also called for a relocation of the building site, away from Moscow's highest point on the Sparrow Hills. Although several sites were considered, the one that was ultimately chosen was a central, highly visible location on the Moskva River, where the Alekseev Monastery stood.¹³ This new location situated the church in close proximity to the Kremlin, and in juxtaposition not only with the Kremlin architectural ensemble, but also with the Church of the Intercession, or St. Basil's, on Red Square. St. Basil's was also built as a triumph to Russian victory, specifically Ivan IV's retaking of Kazan, and served as an icon of Russian strength. Ton's church represented a renewed assertion of Russia's strength alongside the old, in similar spirit if in very different style.

For one, Christ the Savior was designed to be a simply massive church. Where St. Basil's was comprised of small, interconnected chapels, like the cells of a honeycomb, Ton's church was an enormous, undivided open space, towering high above the previously unrivaled height of the Bell tower "Ivan the Great." The floor plan of the church took the form of a Greek or St. Andrew's cross, with four equal arms. Four massive masonry piers supported the church's main dome, and tracing the perimeter of the cross and the piers was an enclosed gallery, overlaying an octagonal geometry onto the cross-shaped foundation.

¹³ Much has been made in both scholarly and popular press about the significance of the Alekseev Monastery and the importance of its relocation in the name of this project. See Evgeniia Kirichenko, *Khram Khrista Spasitelia*, pp. 78-85.

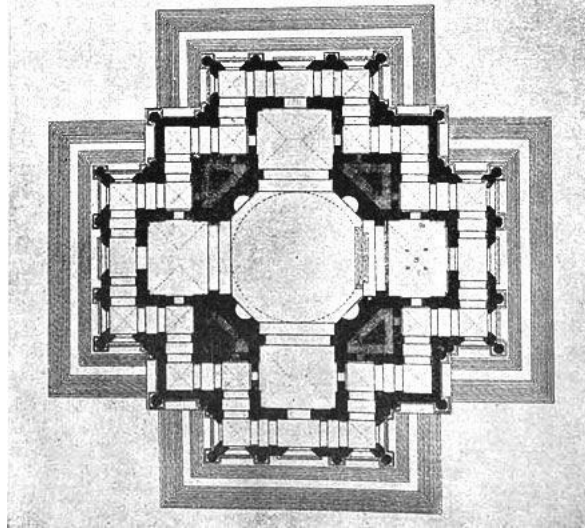


Figure 5: Ton's plan for Christ the Savior

Cross-shaped or octagonal churches are not particularly common in the history of Russian architecture. Evgeniia Kirichenko's extensive work on the origins and influences of this building suggests that the cathedral's unusual design can be traced back to the tent-roofed Church of the Ascension in Kolomenskoe (1532). Kirichenko argues that the Kolomenskoe Ascension contributes the octagonal shape and the surrounding gallery, as well as the absence of a semicircular eastern apse, so often considered a fundamental feature of Russian Orthodox churches.¹⁴

¹⁴ Evgeniia Kirichenko, *Khram Khrista Spasitelia* (1992). See also, Kirichenko's explication of the roots of this church in *The Russian Style*, 65.

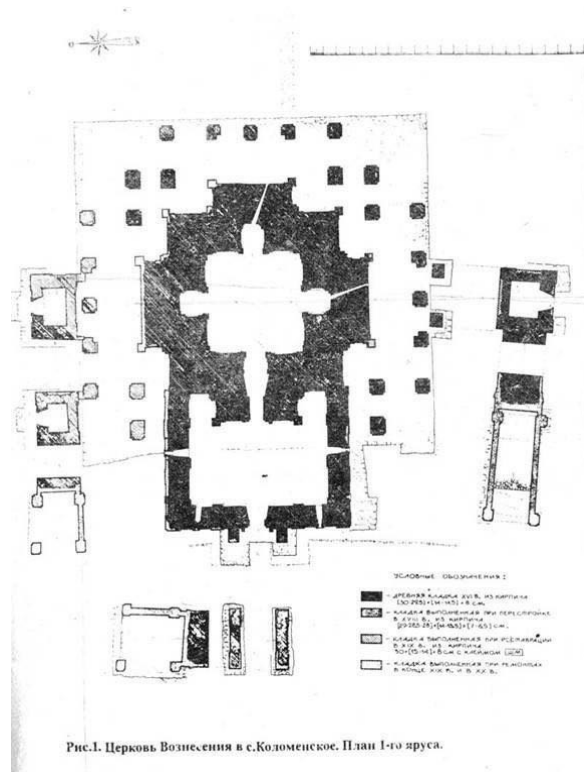


Figure 6: Plan for the Kolomenskoe Church of the Ascension

Kirichenko’s analysis seems to try to legitimize the Russian origins of Christ the Savior, positing as many “authentically Russian” sources for Christ the Savior as possible, while ignoring some clear incongruities that make the Kolomenskoe attribution less plausible. The Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoe is a far different church from Christ the Savior, in nearly every way. It is a small, compact building, whose octagonal shape emerges out of functional necessity to support its soaring tent tower. The heavy outer walls that form the octagonal shape are all load-bearing walls, thickly built to sustain the downward force of the steeply pitched roof segments. The small interior space is not divided into nave, narthex, and sanctuary, as most Orthodox churches are, but rather consists of a square chamber, with four

small protrusions at each side, pierced by small windows and corresponding to the arms of the cross.

Christ the Savior is an entirely different treatment of an octagonal plan. For one, its octagonal shape is not primarily structural, and the octagonal perimeter is not load bearing. Instead, the main weight of the church's towering dome is borne by the four piers directly below. This enables the walls of Christ the Savior to be thinner and pierced by windows, creating a greater sense of interior openness and allowing more light to enter. The cross-shaped platform of Christ the Savior highlights the secondary nature of the octagonal geometry; the plan is primarily an equal-armed cross, with an octagonal gallery, as opposed to a truly octagonal plan.

It is somewhat misguided to seek Russian inspirations for the structural aspects of Christ the Savior, particularly when Ton himself was far more familiar with the principles of neoclassical architecture than the ancient techniques of his homeland. It is not surprising, then, to realize that many more similarities can be found between the plan of Christ the Savior and one of its near-contemporaries, St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg. By looking at the two churches, we can see a shared architectural patrimony, not originating from Russia, but Rome.

St. Isaac's was drafted in 1818 by French architect Auguste de Montferrand, and was a showcase of neoclassical features, with its four columned porticoes with figural friezes and a rotunda of colonnettes supporting the large ribbed dome. Putting aside the stylistic differences in the exterior ornamentation schemes of these two buildings, however, we see that their forms are in fact very similar.

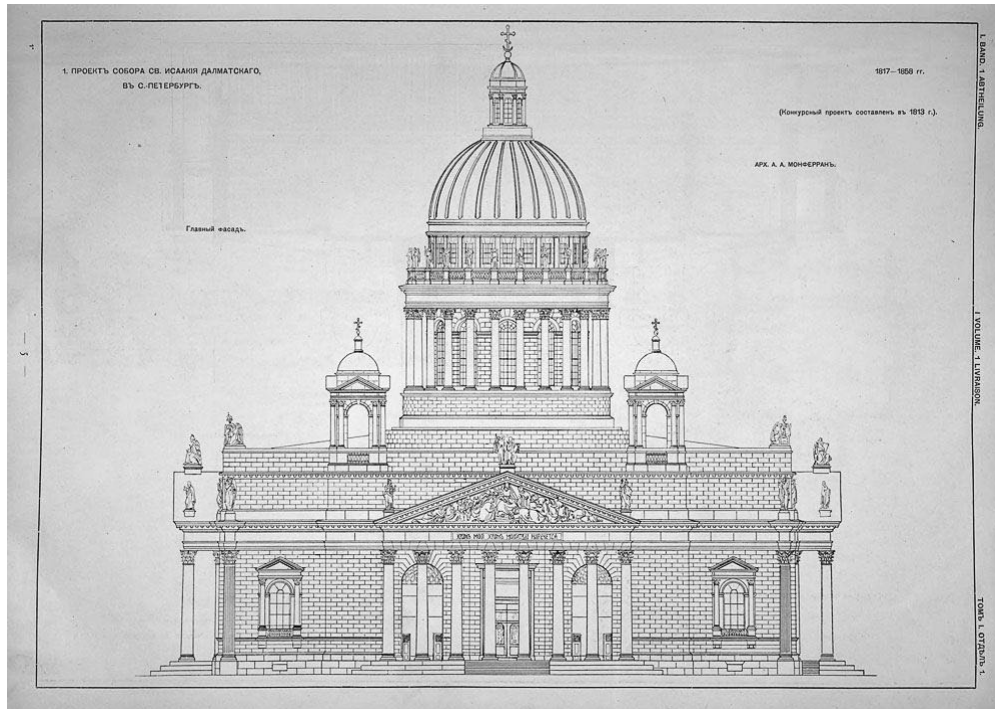


Figure 7: Montferriand's projected elevation for St. Isaac's Cathedral

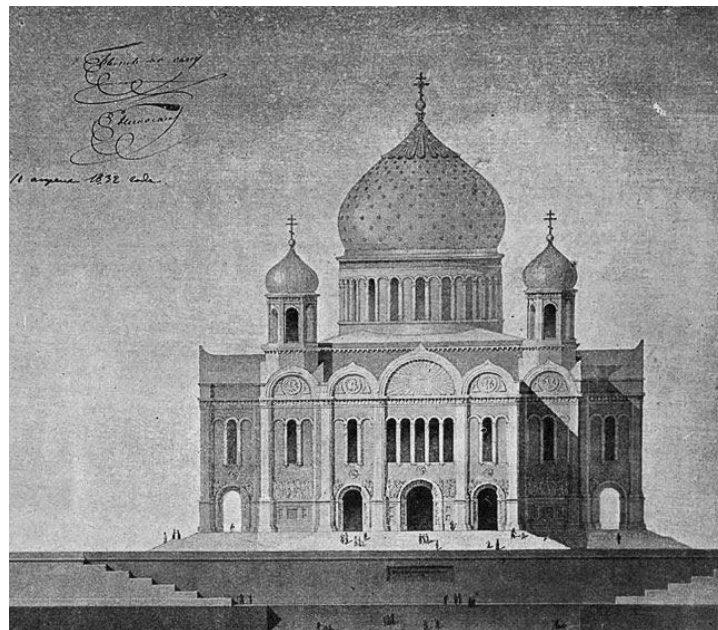


Figure 8: Ton's projected elevation for Christ the Savior

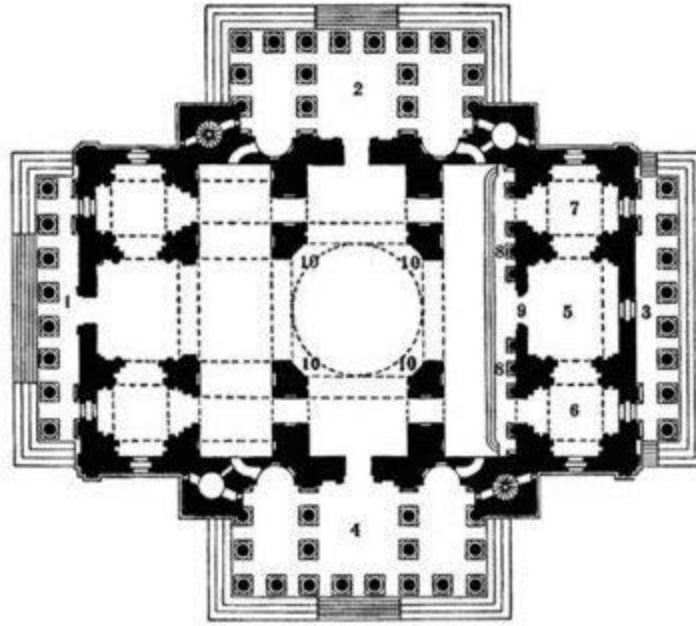


Figure 9: Plan for St. Isaac's Cathedral; compare to Christ the Savior, above

Both churches are built on a Greek cross platform, with four main facades projecting from the cardinal directions. They both feature a large central dome which occupies the central bay of the church, and which is elevated above the main roofline by a tall, pierced drum. In St. Isaac's, this drum is surrounded by a colonnade, while the Christ the Savior drum creates a similar rhythmic verticality through the alternation of applied, blind colonettes and pierced windows. The dome of St. Isaac's is hemispherical with ornamental ribs, while Christ the Savior is a bulbous onion dome, but the two domes are quite similarly proportioned.

Both St. Isaac's and Christ the Savior are primarily cross-shaped, but have a secondary octagonal geometry, which creates square protrusions at the gussets of the main cross. At these square protrusions in both churches, we find small, secondary domes supported high above the roofline. In St. Isaac's, these domes are hemispheres and the supports are columns, echoing the

main dome. In Christ the Savior, the small onion domes are supported by pierced drums, in exactly the same manner as the main dome.

These two churches are by no means identical, particularly in the way they treat the interior space. Despite the external cross-shaped profile of St. Isaac's, the main body of the church extends in a lateral rectangle, encompassing the eastern and western porticoes only. This space is then further divided into smaller bays by masonry piers, which support the wide, flat roof, and also provide internal subdivisions to the space of worship corresponding to the traditional symbolic division of Orthodox churches. Typically, Russian Orthodox churches are divided into three main zones, representing areas of increasingly greater sanctity, from the most profane narthex, to the neutral nave, to the holy sanctuary. In St. Isaac's, these divisions are supported by the structural piers, much as they would be in a traditional Orthodox church.

Christ the Savior, by comparison, takes a non-traditional approach to the church's interior space. The main altar is located to the east as expected in an Orthodox church, but because of the cathedral's unusual cross-shaped layout, this east end does not take the traditional form of a rounded apse. Instead, the altar is tucked into a niche, placing it not on the exterior wall, but actually rather near the geometric center of the building. The oddities surrounding the altar's placement do not stop here. Rather than being hidden behind an iconostasis, or icon screen, the altar is placed beneath, *within* the iconostasis, which takes a unique form. Rather than forming a two-dimensional screen, the iconostasis in the cathedral was made to look like a miniature tented church, and formed a canopy-like enclosure over the altar itself. Although the use of an altar canopy is an ancient practice, and in the Russian tradition could be found in fifteenth- and

sixteenth-century churches, it was not commonplace, and can be seen in part as an innovation to help grapple with the unusual geometry that the cathedral's interior provided.¹⁵

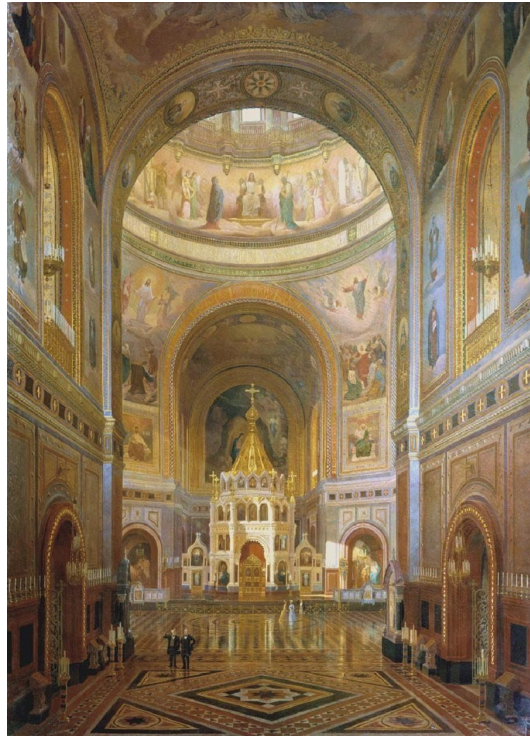


Figure 10: Interior of Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow (Fyodor Klages, 1883), depicting the view of the east end and altar/iconostasis

The internal geometry of the church and its innovative altar raised its fair share of criticism from contemporaries due to its break from tradition. As opposed to St. Isaac's, which maintained the proscribed layout of a traditional Russian Orthodox church within its Neoclassical Hellenic shell, Christ the Savior gave the outward appearance of an Old Russian church, but its interior broke strongly with the Russian tradition. It was not without precedent, however. One of the main inspirations for Ton's plan, with its strong symmetries and cubic proportions, can be found in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Like Christ the Savior, St. Peter's is fundamentally built on a Greek cross plan, with interplay of a cross-shaped interior space and an octagonal surrounding

¹⁵ For further description of the iconostasis, theories of its origins, and the controversy of the interior layout of Christ the Savior, see Kirichenko, *Christ the Savior*, 133-137.

gallery. In St. Peter's, unlike Christ the Savior, this gallery remains integrated into the main worship space, rather than being blocked off by walls.¹⁶

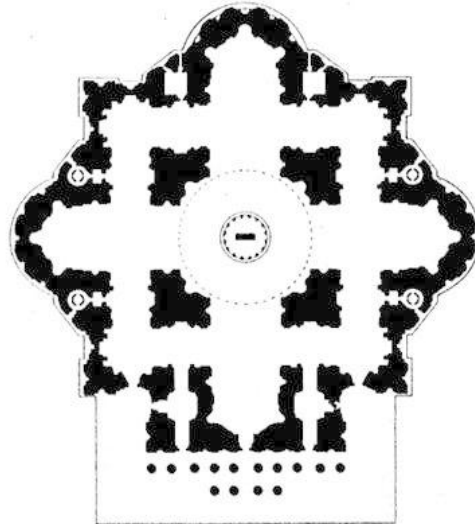


Figure 11: Michelangelo, Plan for New St. Peter's, 1546-64.

The altar in St. Peter's also provides a source of inspiration for Christ the Savior's unusual iconostasis. In St. Peter's Basilica, the altar is located at the central crossing of the church, in the geometric center of the Greek cross, under a tented canopy, or baldachin. This placement is noteworthy, as its central location emphasizes the proportional relationship of the church, and is a departure from the typical eastern positioning of the altar. In Christ the Savior, we see reminiscences of St. Peter's altar, not only in its near-central placement, but also in its elaborate canopy-cum-iconostasis.

¹⁶ Although the finished St. Peter's Basilica takes the form of a Romanesque basilica in the shape of a Latin cross, its original plan, first by Bramante and further developed by Michelangelo, as seen here, is in the form of a Greek cross.



Figure 12: Bernini's baldacchino, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

Recognizing the Western influences on Christ the Savior enables us to more thoroughly understand the state of architecture at this early-nineteenth-century moment, and the widespread emphasis on stylistic fusion. Christ the Savior, and the other Byzantine-style churches in Ton's oeuvre, did not seek to replicate Old Russian churches, but rather used a highly emblematic system of surface decoration and ornamental elements, alongside a select few iconic structural features, to invoke medieval Russia, all the while creating an entirely contemporary structure with modern building materials and techniques. Some scholars have pointed to the success of Ton's Byzantine Style as a reaction against the increasing eclecticism in architecture of this period, highlighting the fact that Nicholas I was particularly opposed to the so-called "Petersburg eclecticism" and its strong Western European influences. Ton's style certainly changed the

architectural landscape, introducing Russia's architectural heritage as a different source of stylistic inspiration alongside classical antecedents. However, this style too is "eclectic" in its own right, freely borrowing elements from a variety of architectural traditions to create something entirely new.

Ton's style is very pragmatic. One of the aspects of Ton's project that pleased Nicholas the most was its projected cost, significantly lower than the estimates for earlier projects for the church. Considering that the Vitberg boondoggle had caused a significant strain on the treasury, Ton's streamlined, relatively frill-free proposal was instantly appealing. This same pragmatism is reflected in the structural design of the church. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome was influential in the creation of Christ the Savior not only because of its status as an important church in the Western tradition. More importantly, St. Peter's has a highly sophisticated design, which takes full advantage of rectilinear geometry to create a massive interior space, as well as an impressive, tall-standing dome, with a minimum of material expended and with clear, clean lines, unlike, for example, gothic architecture which achieved similar results through the use of extensive buttressing and an emphasis on an elaborate external structure. In Ton's churches, in particular Christ the Savior, this same simplicity of line is preferred.

Ton's unique combination of pragmatism, Western-style monumentalism and Russian traditional aesthetics gained him favor with the tsar, but it drew heavy criticism elsewhere. For some, the combination of a Russian-styled exterior with a decidedly non-Russian interior was too great of a clash. Ton's Russian-style churches, all strikingly similar in external ornamentation and appearance, were mocked for their lack of feeling and for their decided non-Russianness, under an Old Russian veneer. Although great pains were taken to source primarily Russian materials in the building project, and to employ Russian artists and builders for its completion, at

the church's core was a referent not to the Russian homeland, nor to the roots of Russian Orthodoxy either in Byzantium or Kiev, but to Rome and the seat of the Roman Catholic tradition. Contentions with this disjuncture between the church's appearance and its structural form, and the various sources of inspiration it portrayed, soon informed the most fundamental questions in the development of medievalizing architecture, and medievalism in the arts more broadly.

Not all of the criticisms of Christ the Savior were levied on points of aesthetics or historical influences, though. For many, Christ the Savior was repugnant because of what it seemingly represented: an attempt by the threatened autocracy to exploit the myth of national grandeur and exceptionalism to reassert the importance and validity of the autocracy itself. In this vein, the medieval aesthetic of Ton's work was seen as a visible recognition of the tsar's rebuttal of the progressive, Western-leaning elements growing in contemporary Russian culture, instead supporting a conservative, "traditionalist" agenda. For much of Russia's growing liberal population, Ton's Christ the Savior project, and the medievalist style it embodied, symbolized both their own disenfranchisement and the anticipated reactionary politics of the tsar.

The second project for Christ the Savior did not rush to completion as planned, and in the meantime, another political inversion occurred, with the death of Nicholas I in 1855. When his son, the new tsar Alexander II, succeeded to the throne, a previously unknown wave of liberalizing policies would be implemented. Unlike his father, Alexander II was not particularly interested in drawing upon images of Old Russia, in particular, a northern, Muscovite or Novgorodian Russia, in order to assert and impose a sense of national unity. During the reign of Alexander II, as styles began to diversify, and as technological advances in steel reinforcement

changed the playing field for architects, Byzantium reemerged as an important source of inspiration for the monumental architecture that would develop mid-century.

Other Byzantines

Ton's "Byzantine Style" had invoked a Russian historical and religious past, but formally had very little in common with architecture of the Byzantine Empire. In contrast, the new wave of church architecture, known as the neo-Byzantine style, began to incorporate traces of recognizably Byzantine influence. Some distinctive features of these neo-Byzantine churches are their broad, shallow domes, and the frequent use of red or striated brick, in emulation of then-extant Byzantine-era churches. A prominent example of this style is the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tbilisi (1871-1897), designed by architect David Grimm.



Figure 13: David Grimm, Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Tbilisi

This neo-Byzantine style functions very similarly to Ton's earlier Byzantine style, which for disambiguation purposes I will refer to here as the Russo-Byzantine style. Each style borrows a

distinctly medieval architectural style for its exterior design, with some variations on a Greek cross structural plan. In the Russo-Byzantine style, this external design was derived from elements of medieval Russian churches, such as those from Vladimir-Suzdal. In the neo-Byzantine style, these medieval elements were not “local” to European Russia, but rather borrowed from Byzantium.

This borrowing, however, was not seen as a cultural importation, in the way that baroque or gothic architecture was considered a transplantation from Western Europe. It is important to remember that the Byzantine tradition was considered a fundamental part of Russia’s cultural history, and as we see in the moniker “Byzantine style” to an earlier wave of medievalizing, Russia’s Orthodox Byzantine inheritance was at times treated as the most important marker of cultural identity. Here, the evolution of the neo-Byzantine style shows a more explicit treatment of these underlying cultural roots. Byzantium was considered an integral component of Russian Orthodox culture, and after the fall of Constantinople, Russia considered itself the last bastion of the faith, inheriting the continuous tradition of Orthodoxy. With this in mind, we can consider the use of Byzantine elements as analogous to the use of medieval Russian elements: both styles are drawing on perceived cultural roots that are specific to Russia and the Orthodox faith, and very clearly eschewing Western influences.

Of course, although these two styles are similar in spirit, there is a marked difference, not only in aesthetics but also in interpretive ramifications. While the use of Old Russian and Byzantine elements is analogous in these churches, it is certainly not synonymous. Ton’s Byzantine style reflected, at least superficially, a Russian medieval tradition that largely grew out of Vladimir-Suzdalia, in many ways the ethnic and geographic heart of Old Russia. While manifestations of this centralized traditional Russian identity made for compelling symbols of

native Russian power in the capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg, they were not as well suited to be symbols of empire at the peripheries. In this way, the neo-Byzantine style filled a void, providing an idiom for church architecture that both recalled the roots of the Orthodox faith and was distinct from Western European architecture, but did not rely on stylistic elements from European Russia, which were alien to many of the empire's territories. The neo-Byzantine style allowed for as a "universalized" Russian Orthodox architecture, medievalizing in its own way, but divorced from questions of ethnic national identity.

In addition to the functional similarities between Russo-Byzantine and neo-Byzantine churches, and alongside their shared cultural inheritance, we can also see a similar structural arrangement in exemplars of the two styles, and through analysis of these buildings, see evidence of the more widespread attitudes regarding treatment of the interplay of form and function, or design and structure, in these two styles. Despite superficial dissimilarities between the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and Christ the Savior, both buildings are clearly part of a common tradition. Here, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral is built on the same Greek cross and square plan as Christ the Savior, with four nearly identical facades encased by a gallery. In the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, these facades are topped not by the gabled roof of the Russo-Byzantine style, or a classical pediment, but rather by a hemispherical apse. Although in elevation the church seems to mimic traditionally Byzantine architecture through its use of its four apses and corner squinches as structural support for the central dome, actually these elements are more decorative than structural. Not unlike Moscow's Christ the Savior, the external form alludes to one architectural tradition, but the actual structure makes little attempt to follow the same tradition or building techniques, instead producing large, symmetrical, and thoroughly modern edifices according to the style and technological capabilities of the time.

This highlights some of the philosophical considerations surrounding the architecture of the time. The first is the independent treatment of a building's external decoration and its structural form. Architectural innovation was not unique to the nineteenth century, and Russian church architecture of the eighteenth century shows a tremendous variation of ornamentation styles and plans. The difference that emerges in the early nineteenth century is the way that the external forms of these churches can surprise and defy expectations for the interior, as in St. Isaac's Neoclassical, symmetrical exterior giving way to a cross-in-square internal configuration. While in this case a Neoclassical exterior hides a "Russian" structure, the opposite happens in the case of Christ the Savior or the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, where the external ornamentation strongly alludes to one architectural tradition, but the internal structure does not correspond, making the external form "mere ornament. "This is noteworthy, because there would soon be a backlash against the independence of form and function.

Considering Form and Function

The main theoretical treatise supporting functionalism, or the integration of material, structure, and design, was that of Apollonarii Krasovskii, in his textbook, *Civil Architecture*. This book, first published in 1851 and reissued in 1886, was the main handbook for generations of Russian architects and civil engineers, and greatly influenced the wider conception of the relationship between form and function in Russia. Krasovskii categorized architects by their stylistic tendencies, identifying classicists, romantics (in either Gothic or neo-Byzantine style) and rationalists (with a division between aesthetes and technologists). The classicists and romantics, Krasovskii argued, considered the style of building before either its form or function,

which led to a chaotic intermixing of elements without substance or consideration of a building's function.¹⁷

Krasovskii advocated for a rationalist approach in architecture, which he described as a delicate balance of beauty and utility, an intentional pairing of form and function. While some saw Krasovskii's rationalism as incompatible with the highly stylized application of historical elements that abounded in the Russo-Byzantine and neo-Byzantine styles, others found a natural connection between historicism in architecture and rationalism, particularly if the historicizing structures were grounded in archaeological research and employed a thoughtful, rational treatment of building materials. The main proponent of this idea was Nikolai Sultanov (1850-1908), who was a student of Krasovskii, and was one of the foremost architects of the new nationalist movement in architecture of the 1880s, which would come to be known as the Russian style. Krasovskii's theory of functional rationalism would be fundamental in the evolution of mid- and late-nineteenth century Russian architecture, and would help lead to a reconceptualization of how medievalism would be used in new projects.

The principle of functional rationalism may seem completely unrelated to the whimsical, even ostentatious stylings of the Russian style of architecture that would develop in the middle of the century, with its excessive use of surface ornamentation and textured brickwork, rows upon rows of kokoshniki, onion domes of varied sizes, overall complexity and heterogeneity of form. What could seem less rational, less of a union between function and form? Nonetheless, the emergence of this ornate style is directly linked to an increasing dissatisfaction with the

¹⁷ Apollonarii Krasovskii, *Grazhdanskaia arkhitektura*, Petersburg, 1886, 5-12. See also: A.L. Punin, "Idei ratsionalizma v russkoi arkhitekture vtoroi poloviny XIX veka," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1962, no. 11: 55-58.

medievalizing styles of a previous generation, and in particular, the perceived “irrationality,” or disconnect between exterior appearance and interior function.

Political Pressures

With the crowning of each new autocrat, a new conception of monumental architecture was ushered in. These building projects, particularly those situated at the beginning of a new tsar’s reign, held an important social function, setting a visual, public representation of the new autocracy in stone. These monumental, commemorative churches drew on different visions of Russia’s historical identity in order to legitimize the new reign, to commemorate the past, to put forth a codified image of the autocracy’s relationship with the church, and to self-represent the autocrat’s intentions and vision.

When Alexander II fell victim to a terrorist attack on March 1, 1881, some of the earliest thoughts went to the construction of a memorial, such was the importance of architectural representation. The following day, plans to erect a memorial to the fallen tsar were underway. A chapel, designed by architect Nikolai Benois, was quickly erected on the site of the explosion, and donations began to pour in for the construction of a permanent monument.¹⁸ Alexander III supported the construction of a memorial, but had his own opinions about the shape the project should take. The tsar’s first directive emphasized that the project would be a monumental church, not the simple shrine that was originally planned. He had concrete parameters in mind: it have three apses in the traditional Orthodox style, accommodate 1000 people, and incorporate the site of the late tsar’s assassination in the west end as a dedicated shrine. Calls for anonymous projects

¹⁸ “V gorodskoi dume,” *Novoe Vremia*, 5 March 1881, 1; “Khronika,” *Molva*, 15 March 1881, 2; “Khronika,” *Novoe Vremia*, 29 March 1881, 3; “Ezhednevnoe obozrenie,” *Novoe Vremia*, 10 April 1881, 1.

yielded more than thirty submissions which were set before the St. Petersburg Architectural Society, nearly all of which were designed in some combination of Ton's Russo-Byzantine and the later neo-Byzantine style of the 1860s. Of these submissions, eight were selected to present to the tsar, the top four receiving prizes from the Architectural Society. Yet when set before Alexander III, none met the tsar's approval.



Figure 14: N.L. Benois, 1881, shrine to Alexander II on Ekaterinskaya Canal

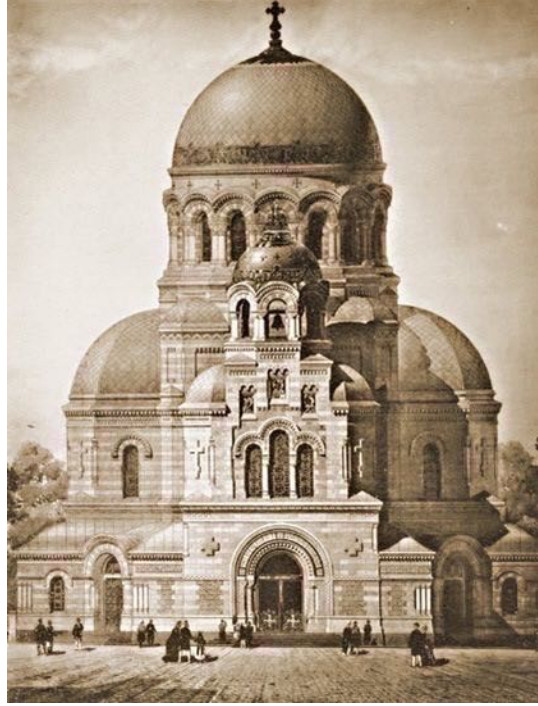


Figure 15: Winning project of the 1881 competition, “To the Father of the Fatherland”, Antoniya Tomishko, done in the neo-Byzantine style

“Seventeenth Century Yaroslavl”

When all eight projects were rejected on March 17, 1882, a second competition was issued, with a one-month deadline. The tsar clarified his vision for the memorial church with instructions to architects to produce a project that incorporated the site of the tsar’s assassination, and was designed “in pure seventeenth-century Russian style, as can be found in Yaroslavl, for example.”¹⁹ What exactly did Alexander have in mind? Yaroslavl boasted a high density of seventeenth-century churches, most of which were cuboid churches with five onion domes, each projected high off the main roof atop a drum. A common element of churches from this period was a detached belfry with a tent-roof (*shatër*), stacked octagon, or an octagon-on-square tower.

¹⁹ *Nedelia Stroitelia*, 1882, no. 12, p 89.

These belfries, as well as additional chapels, could be connected to the main building by a series of semi-enclosed galleries, drawing the different elements together into one connected architectural ensemble.



Figure 16 (top left): Yaroslavl Church of the Assumption; Figure 17 (top right): Yaroslavl Church of St. Elijah; Figure 18 (bottom left): Yaroslavl Church of St. John Chrysostom; Figure 19 (bottom right): Church of St. John the Forerunner, Yaroslavl.

With these stylistic considerations in mind, a new round of projects was submitted. Many architects took the tsar's call to imitate seventeenth-century Yaroslavl quite literally, and

produced a number of projects which attempted to faithfully create reproduce the “pure seventeenth-century Russian style.” Many of these designs integrated not only the unmistakable elements of seventeenth-century Russian architecture from Yaroslavl, but also more widespread “all-Russian” elements from Muscovite architecture and the so-called Naryshkin Baroque style, such as elaborate tracery on the external galleries, and rows of ornamental *kokoshniki*, or semi-circular corbel arches.

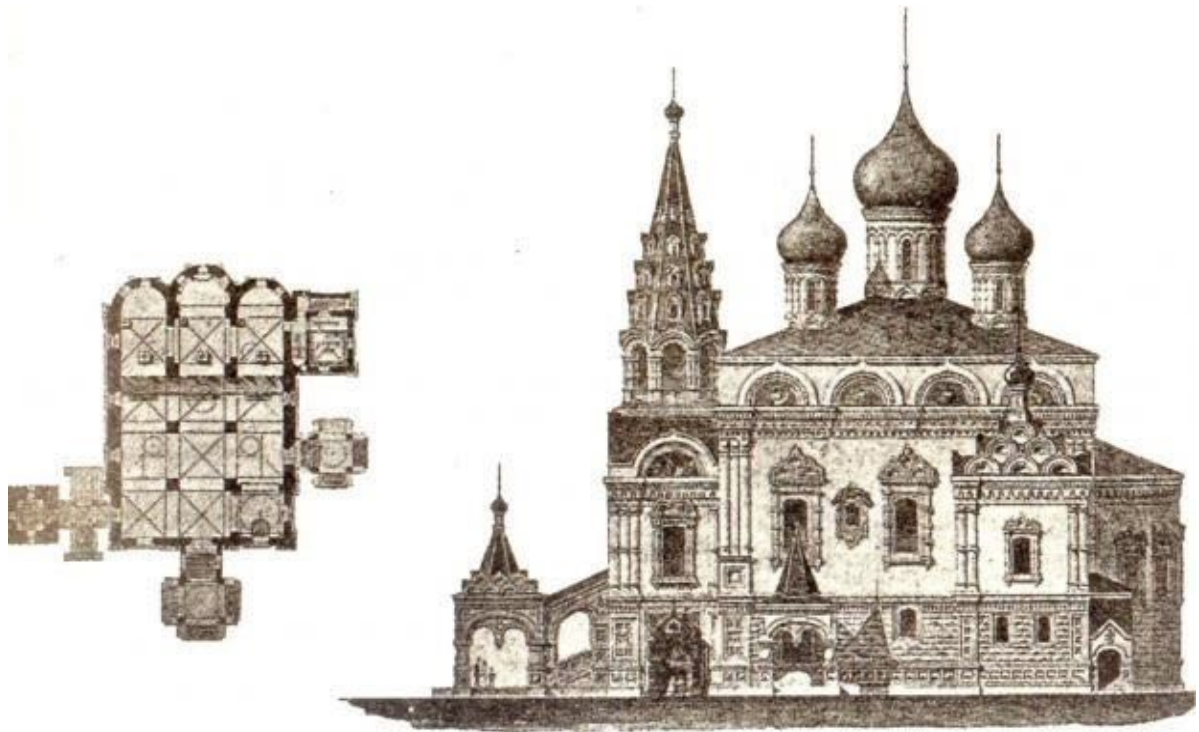


Figure 20: Project from the second competition: N.L. Benois, 1882



Figure 21 (left): Project by L.N. Benois, 1882; Figure 22 (right): Project by I.C. Bogomolov, 1882.

These designs reflected two dueling desires at play in late nineteenth-century architecture: faithful reproduction and artistic innovation. They each stay close to the spirit and form of seventeenth-century Yaroslavl churches, exploring and expanding different elements of traditional “pure” pre-Petrine Russian church architecture, yet are executed on a much larger scale than the seventeenth-century exemplars, and with more eclectic use of various Muscovite decorative elements. These projects, despite following the tsar’s rather vague instructions precisely, were nevertheless seen as unsatisfactory.

Perhaps Alexander changed his mind about what characteristics he wanted in the memorial church. Perhaps he had an ill-formed idea in the first place. Or, possibly, these “pure Russian” projects drew undesirable connections between the death of Alexander II and the murder of Tsarevich Dmitry, whose death signaled the end of the Rurikid dynasty and the start of the Time

of Troubles. Also built in the seventeenth-century Yaroslavl style, the Uglich Church of St. Dmitry on the Blood also functions as a commemorative church on the site of a murder, and functionally serves as a clear precedent for the St. Petersburg Resurrection Cathedral. The connection between the slain tsarevich and the tsar was not one that officials sought to emphasize, however. Although Alexander was “resurrecting” Old Russia, he hardly wished to imply that a new Time of Troubles was looming. It may be that certain associations with pre-Petrine Russia resonated too strongly in these designs which so carefully imitated the past.²⁰



ЦЕРКОВЬ СВ. ДИМИТРИЯ ЦАРЕВИЧА, ЧТО НА КРОВИ
въ Угличѣ, Ярослав. Губ.

Figure 23: Church of St. Dmitry on the Blood, Uglich

²⁰ Michael Flier notes that associations between Tsarevich Dmitry and Alexander II were feared by officials, but inevitably cemented in the popular perception through the unofficial moniker for the church, “Spas na Krovi.” See Michael S. Flier, “The Church of the Savior on the Blood: Projection, Rejection, Resurrection”, in *Russian Culture in Modern Times*, Vol. 17, no. 2, Robert P. Hughes ed., Irina Paperno ed., UC Press, Berkeley, 1994.

Divine inspiration and a winning project

Eventually, one project met the tsar's approval, at least conditionally. The project was designed not by a professional architect, but by a churchman, Archimandrite Ignaty (Malyshev). Ignaty claimed divine inspiration when presenting the design to the royal family: the Mother of God showed him the form of a building in a dream.²¹ Other stories say that he was preparing for Maundy Thursday services on Annunciation Day, March 25, 1882, just eight days after the second, "pure Russian" competition was announced, when he was inspired to draw a building. Immediately he realized that this building was the church that was meant to stand in memorial to Alexander II.²²

The project was only submitted after it was clear that the tsar was displeased with the results of the second official competition. Ignaty approached architect Al'fred Parland, with whom he had worked before, for assistance in preparing the submission. The archimandrite's project met initial approval, and the project proceeded with significant reworking by Parland.²³ Parland himself had submitted his own project to the second official competition, under the title "Starina" 'Antiquity'. Despite its failure to meet the tsar's approval, Parland's project foreshadows the kind of hodgepodge of styles and elements that the Resurrection Cathedral would come to exemplify. The design is orderly, symmetrical, and well balanced, with domes and roofs at different levels providing a pyramidal effect. Overwhelmingly, it is *busy*. There is no blank space, no unadorned surface, no place for the eye to rest. Each inch of the exterior is

²¹ Boris Kirikov. "Khram Voskreseniia Khristova (k istorii "russkogo stilia" v Peterburge)," *Nevskii arkhiv. Istoriko-kraevedcheskii sbornik*, ed. A. I. Dobkin and A. V. Kobak (Moscow and St. Petersburg, 1993), 204-245.

²² *Russkaia Starina*, 40 (October 1883): 261.

²³ For a detailed discussion of the various authorial influences on the work, see Michael Flier, "At Daggers Drawn: The Competition for the Church of the Savior on the Blood", in Michael S. Flier and Robert P. Hughes, eds., *For SK: In Celebration of the Life and Career of Simon Karlinsky* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994), 97-115.

decorated in some way, with some ostensibly Russian motif. In this way, Parland's project serves as a kind of sampler for what revival architecture could be: seemingly every possible permutation, brought together into one simultaneous, complicated whole. The result, a motley array of colors, textures, materials, and styles would not on their own meet the tsar's requirements. But, when combined with Ignaty's inspired vision, a winning match was made.



Figure 24: Alfred Parland, "Starina," 1882, western exposure

As the two collaborators worked together to produce an architecturally sound project based on Ignaty's vision, Parland's own stylistic influence was palpable. Many elements were lifted directly from his own earlier project, such as the octagonally-gabled rotundas, located in the west entrance of Parland's project and in the northern gallery of the joint project, and the echoing of the angular motif in zigzag courses, peaked kokoshniki, and open pediments on other towers.

The joint project adds even more stylistic diversity, with its two distinctive tent-towers, each topped by small onion domes. These tent-towers, with their rows of kokoshniki and small onion

domes, are a familiar element in many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russian churches, such as this late sixteenth-century Church of the Transfiguration in Ostrov, near Moscow.²⁴

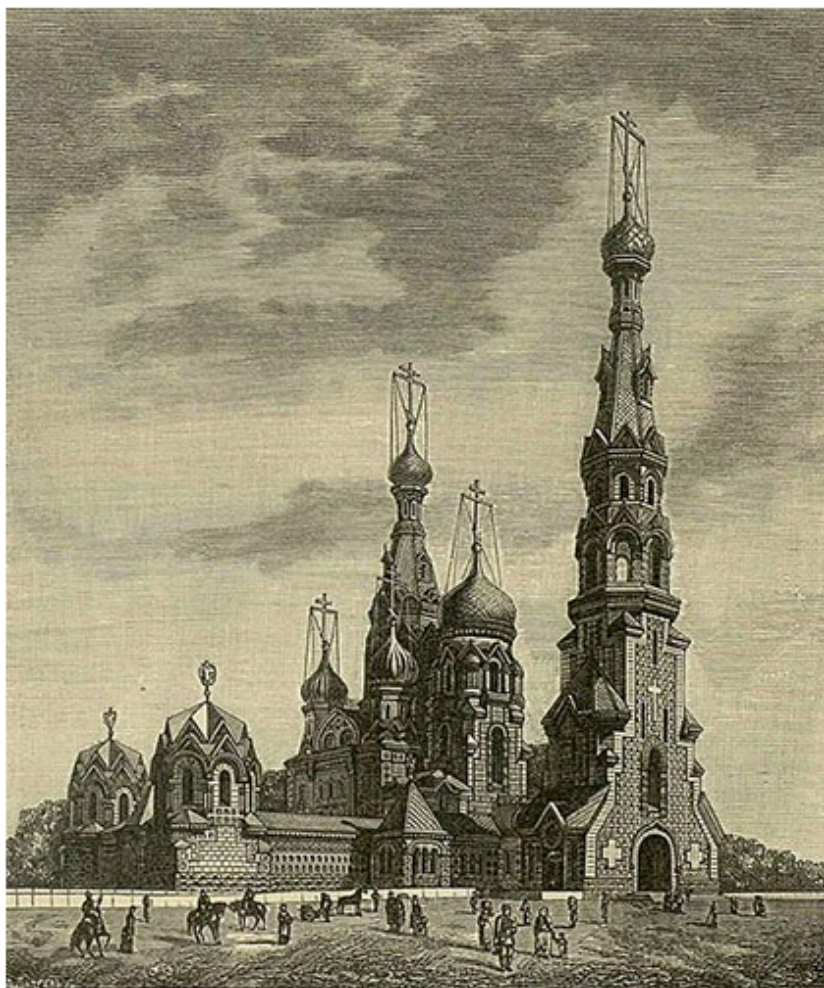


Figure 25: Ignaty and Parland, from the north-west, 1882

²⁴ (Источник: «Популярная художественная энциклопедия.» Под ред. Полевого В.М.; М.: Издательство "Советская энциклопедия", 1986.)



Figure 26: Church of the Transfiguration, Ostrov, late 16th c.

While tent-towers are relatively commonplace, the specific arrangement of a central tent-tower surrounded by onion domes of various sizes at various heights is immediately reminiscent of the iconic and unique Cathedral of the Intercession on the Moat in Moscow, commonly known as St. Basil's.

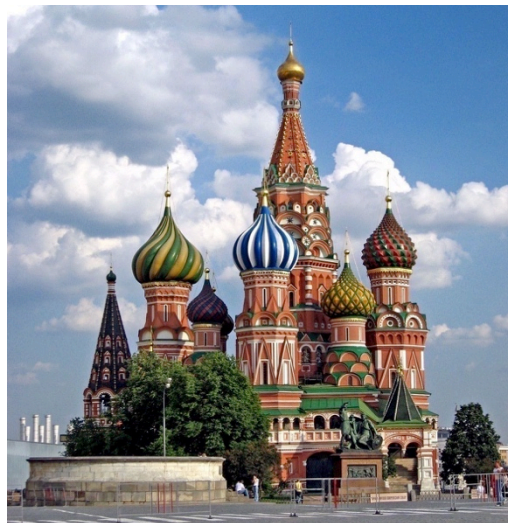


Figure 27: Church of the Intercession on the Moat ("St. Basil's"), Moscow, Russia

Finding origins

It is little surprise that St. Basil's was an inspiration for Parland and Ignaty's "pure Russian" project. Although the building itself is an anomaly in Russian architecture, its bold silhouette, bright (albeit modern) color palette, and varied use of different decorative elements had come to be seen as iconically "Russian." This, at least, was one of the central theses of Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's 1877 monograph on Russian art, *L'art Russe: ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée, son avenir*. This work, published in Russian in 1879, was an application of French rationalist architectural and artistic theories onto the Russian context.

This was one of the many works of the 1870s that addressed the question of "Russianness" in the arts, and found specific root examples of a national identity in medieval works. Interestingly, Viollet-le-Duc's study concluded that St. Basil's, and Russian culture writ large, inherited its distinctive elements by the grace of its "Asianness," and the Russian artistic heritage was fundamentally Eastern. This Orientalist perspective was not unique to Westerners, like the French Viollet-le-Duc, looking eastward at Russia. Russians, who had long held a dichotomy between the West and themselves, were also interested in considering the Asian roots of Russian culture, either through the cultural adaptations that occurred under the Mongol occupation, or through an earlier, Indo-European inheritance, theories of which were gaining popularity in the 1870s. Vladimir Stasov, in his 1868 treatise on Russian *byliny*, or folk epics, posited that many of these stories were fundamentally retellings of ancient Asian myths, a theory that met strong resistance from contemporaries, but would be reexamined again in the following decades.

Viollet-le-Duc's Russian study brought these ideas of Russian medievalism as a site of national identity to the West, but the premise therein grew out of a wider interest in exploring traditional decoration, and specifically from intellectual exchange between Viollet and Viktor

Ivanovich Butovsky. Butovksy was one of several scholars thinking about the relationship between Russian national identity and the applied arts, and in 1872, he released *The History of Old Russian Ornament*. In this same year, Vladimir V. Stasov published his own work on traditional decorative arts, *Russian Folk Ornament*, and also the periodical “Zodchii” (The Architect) was founded, under the leadership of illustrious Slavophile scholar Lev Vladimirovich Dal’. The journal’s focus was Russian architecture, with an emphasis on theoretical and historical discussions of Russian art, and the fundamental questions of the role of Russianness within these topics.

When Butovsky’s work on Russian ornament was released in Paris as *Histoire de l’Ornement russe: du Xe au XVIe siècle d’après les manuscrits*, it was received very favorably by Viollet-le-Duc, who reviewed it in his *Encyclopédie d’architecture*. In his review, Viollet lauded the new direction of art in Russia, marked by an emergence of a national artistic consciousness. He drew parallels between this Russian consciousness and similar trends on the European continent. According to Viollet-le-Duc, this national spirit in art was universal, and the Russian case was further evidence proving this theory. Taken by the idea of using Russia as a test case to further explore his rationalist theories, Viollet-le-Duc began work on “*L’art Russe: ses origines, ses éléments constitutifs, son apogée, son avenir.*” Never setting foot on Russian soil, Viollet-le-Duc relied heavily on Butovsky’s plates and analyses. In his conclusions, he stressed the importance of outward design and form as a marker of internal significance. For Viollet-le-Duc, St. Basil’s was a kind of archetype of what Russian architecture was meant to be. It is unsurprising, then, given the prevalence of rationalism among architects and thinkers at this period, that St. Basil’s would serve as inspiration for the largest medievalizing project of the 1880s.

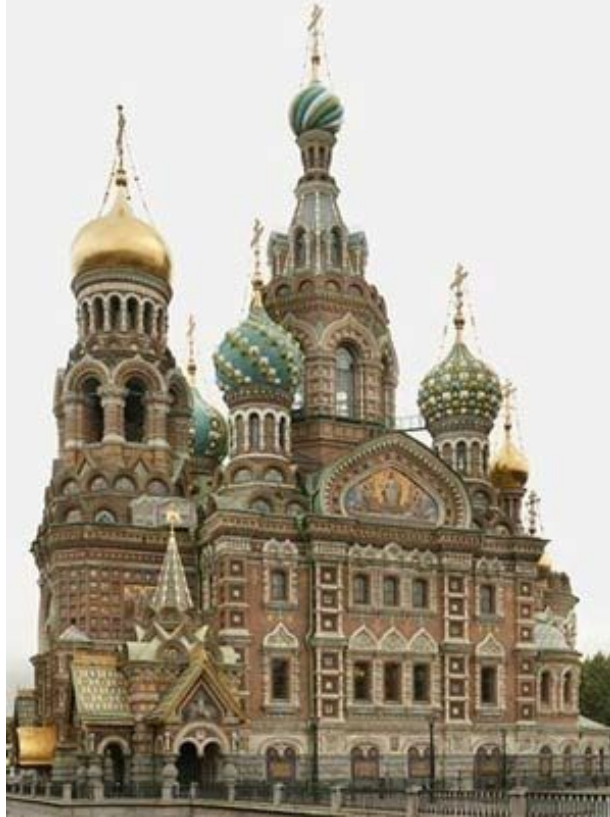


Figure 28: Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, *Spas na Krovi*, St. Petersburg, Russia

The gates of *Spas na Krovi*

The intricate metalwork and sturdy columns of the gates opposite *Spas na Krovi* at the boundary of Mikhailovsky Sad may not immediately register as a part of a unified architectural ensemble with the church, yet Parland, the architect of *Spas na Krovi*, saw the two as integral parts of one vision. Creating a barrier between the natural expanse of the gardens and the structural edifice of the church, these gates facilitate the transition between the two types of space by combining elements from both: foliate, organic metalwork and solid masonry columns.



Figure 29: The gates between *Spas na Krovi* and Mikhailovsky Sad, St. Petersburg, Russia

The columns merge these two spaces at their boundary, while recalling rich tradition of calligraphic manuscript design in the Russo-Byzantine style. The gates take familiar two-dimensional motifs of classical and Byzantine columns juxtaposed by floral arabesques, and bring them into the third dimension, such that visitors to *Spas na Krovi* must physically cross into the sacred space of the church by entering through gates wrought in the textures and patterns of this medieval manuscript tradition.

The interplay between the illustration of sacred texts and architectural representations is a long-held element of medieval manuscript design, especially in the Byzantine tradition. Columns, not only as vertical arrangements of text, but also as illustrated depictions of the architectural elements, were commonly used on the page to provide structural delineation as well as decorative interest, as was often the case for canon tables, or gospel concordances. Large illuminations, such as this Slavic frontispiece to the gospel of Mark, were often framed by columns and arches, creating a physical portal within the book to the interior reality of the image and its text.

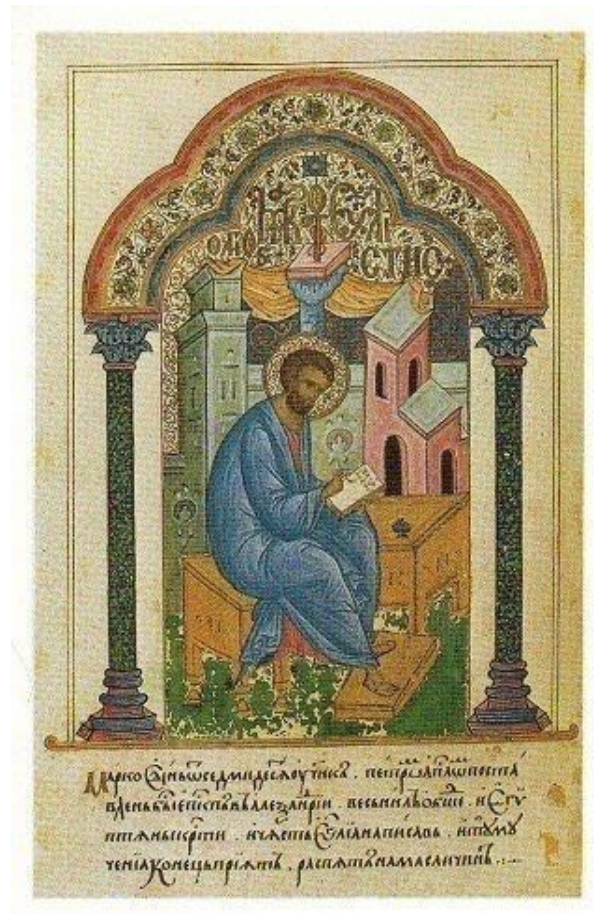


Figure 30: Illuminated Manuscript frontispiece, Gospel of Mark

Note in this image how rich foliate patterns are used as decorative filler to occupy the otherwise empty architectural space. Floral and foliate ornamentation was a common trend in both Eastern and Western manuscript traditions. These decorative elements often adorned the headpieces of manuscript texts in the form of carpet pages, densely illustrated page headers, providing a lavish “entryway” into the chapter or book. Note how, in this introduction to the Gospel of John, from a 15th century Muscovite Gospel book, the carpet page takes on certain architectural elements, with two foliate and gilded panels supported between marbled columns with fanciful leafy accents. Images such as this clearly influenced Parland’s design of the Mikhailovsky gates, with their interplay of highly stylized flora and dividing architectural columns.



Figure 31: Evangelie [Gospels], 15th c. Muscovite Russia, NYPL Spencer Collection

Of particular interest are the leafy capitals atop the manuscript “pillars” and the four- and five-petaled flowers circumscribed by scrollwork, which have parallel forms in the Parland gates. These elements, which are common motifs in medieval Byzantine and early Slavic manuscript illumination, are incorporated into the metalwork of the gates. Yet, in the gates’ design, they are imbued with a life and dynamism that is not found in the manuscript exemplars. Rather than

preserving the static circles and lines of the Byzantine motifs, the scrollwork employs asymmetrical patterning and swirling lines to create a heightened sense of motion and life. The sumptuous curves and natural asymmetry call to mind the aesthetics of the burgeoning *stil moderne*, or Russian *art nouveau*.

In the *stil moderne*, artists explored the diversity of organic forms and the interplay between geometric exactitude and random or natural variety. Highly stylized floral and foliate designs were frequently used in the Russian *stil moderne* tradition, something that is often linked to Western inspiration from the Arts and Crafts movement and examples in the applied arts. From even a quick analysis of some Russian *stil moderne* art objects, however, it is clear that Byzantine (and Byzantine derivative) art is a major influence on these designs. Take, for example, the following pieces of enamel and silverwork with *stil moderne* influences.



Figure 32: Fedor Rückert, Kovsh and Spoon, 1908-1917

These examples, a *kovsh* drinking vessel and an enameled spoon were both produced by the Moscow workshop of Fedor Rückert, 1908-1917, and are characteristic of a genre of applied ornament that was highly popular in late-imperial Moscow, particularly among the newly-wealthy merchant class.²⁵

The gates between Mikhailovsky Sad and Spas na Krovi bear the monogram of the commissioning monarch, Alexander III. The tsar did not have only one monogram; different representations of the tsar's initial appeared at different times. For this project, the tsar's initial is presented in its Old Russian form, *az*, rather than a more contemporary form. The initial "A" looks the same in the Cyrillic and Latin scripts, while "az" is unique to Slavic languages, and the choice to use the Old Russian initial in this project, as well as others, is not a politically or aesthetically neutral decision, and may stem from any number of motivating factors. From an aesthetic perspective, the incorporation of the Old Russian letter in a prominent place, indeed, in the only location of text that the fence holds, reinforces the reading of the fence as an Old Russian manuscript, echoing the sort of script that would be found on the manuscript page.



Figure 33: detail of the decorative initial on the metalwork gates of Spas na Krovi

²⁵ The tradition of ornamental *kovshi* is explored from another angle in chapter 2.

This Old Russian initial also places a stamp of national identity upon an otherwise neutral background, one which does not necessarily convey anything specifically Russian. The initial situates the construction of the gates in time and place, linking it with Alexander III's reign, but even more so, reflecting the tastes, style, and also political agenda that Alexander and Parland were interested in disseminating through this project.

Secular considerations

The diversity of medievalizing styles that emerged in connection with imperial commissions throughout the nineteenth century can be characterized by the superficial adherence to stylized, abstracted medieval design elements, imposed onto largely Neoclassical structures. The disconnect between design and structure of these buildings was immediately harped upon by critics, who saw these styles as representative of a larger social problem and symbolic of the autocracy at large: an impressive outward appearance, but with an insubstantial core. This situation began to change, however. In the last quarter of the century, as greater emphasis began to be placed on the preservation of pre-Petrine buildings and further archaeological studies were conducted on medieval and folk architecture, a new trend emerged. For perhaps the first time, serious emphasis was put on creating historically accurate reproductions. The concept of *authenticity* was not a new one, but more and more value was being attributed to historical objects and faithful reproductions thereof, resulting in a greater overall valuation of authenticity as a quality.

Although there is a smattering of examples of peasant or folk elements drawn from wooden architecture used by professional architects early in the nineteenth century, these buildings are

the exceptions to the rule. One of the earliest examples can be seen in Carlo Rossi's design for peasant houses in the village of Glazovo, drafted in 1815. These designs show a faithful application of ornament and use of materials, but the symmetry and balance throughout betrays the architect's devotion to classical principles, rather than the haphazard and organic arrangement of buildings found in peasant villages. Stasov's peasant houses of the 1820s in Alexandrowka, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, follow suit. Another early example of this revivalist peasant architecture is the Nicholas *domik* in Peterhof, designed by A.I. Shtakensneider in 1834.²⁶



Figure 34: Carlo Rossi, peasant houses at Glazovo, 1815

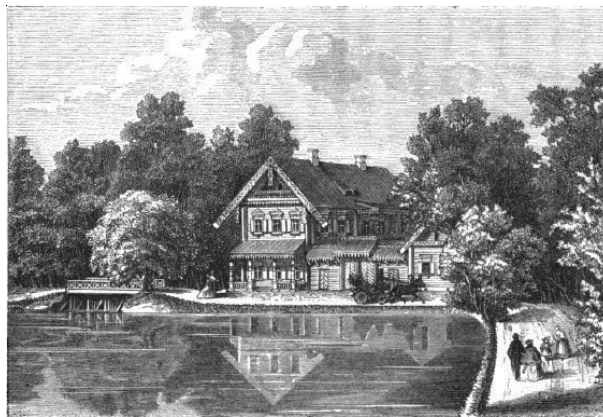


Figure 35: Andrei Shtakensneider, Nicholas domik, Peterhof

²⁶ А. Гейрот Описание Петергофа. [1501-1868]. Спб., 1868

These early “peasant-style” buildings show the first traces of the widespread interest by professional architects in revisiting local architectural traditions, including the using local timber and traditional building techniques, and incorporating ornamentation based on folk designs. Buildings in this Russian peasant style gained international acclaim toward the end of the century, particularly with the Russian Pavilion of the 1878 Paris Exhibition.

This conception of a Russian style was not based on medieval masonry churches, but rather sought out a folk idiom from extant wooden architecture, secular in nature. Here we encounter a further complication in our understanding of the medievalizing tendency in architecture. The development of the Russian style was influenced not only by historical medieval objects, but also by peasant art and material culture from the present and recent past. The newly-developing Russian style was not solely interested in historicized recreations of a medieval past, but also in the strengthening and utilization of those elements of Russian culture that had resisted the influences of modernization and Western liberalization, particularly the agrarian culture of rural Russia.

The interest in reconnecting with the peasantry and their art forms was widespread, and was manifest in the development of craft workshops and *kustar* studios, where traditional handicrafts were preserved, taught, and produced in large number. It was not only the autocracy who was interested in using the aesthetic impressions of medieval Russia to produce stimulating, significant new art and architectural pieces. These medievalizing tendencies were productive in art beyond state sponsorship as well, although, for pragmatic reasons, they produced very little non-state architecture, and even fewer churches.

Considering Abramtsevo

A notable exception to this is the church at the Abramtsevo artist colony, outside Moscow. This church, first planned in 1881, was the culmination of the work of artists at the estate of entrepreneur Savva Mamontov. Largely under the direction of artists Viktor Vasnetsov and Vasily Polenov, the church was designed in accordance with traditional medieval Russian architecture, as understood by historical study of extant old Russian monuments and ruins. Abramtsevo artists were influenced by historians such as Vasili Kliuchevsky (1841-1911), whose lectures on medieval Russian history at Moscow University conveyed a strong sense of “living history,” and inspired an interest in internalizing national history as a means to gain access to the roots of culture.



Figure 36: Abramtsevo Church Not Made By Hand, 1881

The Abramtsevo church was, in many ways, a study in historical construction methods. This church, called “Not made by human hands,” was, in fact, wrought by hand. The exterior was designed with Old Russian churches in mind, and reflects many aspects of Old Russian design, such as its small, human scale, asymmetrical ornamentation, and traditional building practices. It was constructed entirely using hand tools and simple rope-and-pulley technology out of locally-sourced materials. While the Abramtsevo artists did not write about the philosophical underpinnings of their task, clear connections can be drawn to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement in England.

Despite being conceived in the same year as *Spas na Krovi*, the Abramtsevo church is something quite different. Without a doubt, both churches are medievalizing. They each look to historical Russian precedents as their inspiration, and this inspiration is reflected in their outward forms. Yet there is a striking difference to how the medieval source material for each of these churches is used, and especially how they have come to be interpreted. While *Spas na Krovi* has become *the* symbol of the stodgy, reactionary autocracy, asserting a retrograde and repressive image of Russia’s identity, the Abramtsevo church is often interpreted as the nascence of modernism in Russian art, and part of a flourishing practice of intermingling old and new forms in the *art nouveau* tradition.

There is nothing inherently reactionary about medievalizing architecture, as the Abramtsevo church demonstrates. It does not necessarily epitomize a political agenda, nor can we see the medieval elements within as undeniably conservative. Questions of authenticity will always be raised in these medievalizing buildings, and the buildings produced will always only approximate the medieval to a greater or lesser degree, with a greater or lesser intention toward replication.

CHAPTER 2

BOGATYRI: ICONICALLY MEDIEVAL

Bogatyri Introduced

This chapter is an exploration of the figure of the *bogatyri*, warrior-heroes from the Russian oral folk epic tradition, the *bylina*. Of specific interest are the visual representations of these heroes and their cultural reach outside of the oral tradition. At the heart of this study is an investigation of how a cultural icon is made: the *bogatyr* of Viktor Vasnetsov's two well-known paintings, *Warrior at the Crossroads* (1878-1882) and *Bogatyri* (1898). I will examine precedents for these images, the development of Vasnetsov's style and vision from the earlier *Crossroads* portrayal to the later *Bogatyri*, and the immediate afterlife of this image, both within the fine art world in paintings and sculpture and in mass culture. For example, I will draw comparisons between Vasnetsov's images and Mikhail Vrubel's *Bogatyr* panel (1898), Pavel Trubetskoi's infamous *Monument to Alexander III* (1909), and contemporary advertising campaigns that draw upon this recognizable image.

Since its nineteenth-century comeback, the image of the *bogatyr* has frequently been co-opted for new nationalist and propagandistic purposes, to the present day. The popularity of this figure stems, in part, from its appeal to nationalist sentiment and resonance with political and cultural debates. In this analysis, I will explore the nationalist elements of the *bogatyr*, but also contextualize the image as part of a broader developing interest in ancient and medieval warrior figures within the discourse of Russian medievalism.

Although Russian epic tales have a long oral history, like many other elements of medieval Russian culture, the watershed period for their distribution and codification happened in the first half of the nineteenth century. The earliest collection of Russian epics, compiled in the mid-eighteenth century, was published in 1804 as *Ancient Russian Poems Collected by Kirsha*

Danilov.²⁷ The next and perhaps best-known contribution to the corpus of published folk songs and stories was Songs Collected by P.V. Kireevsky, a ten-volume edition compiled in the 1830s. The collection was published from 1860 to 1874, starting four years after Kireevsky's death, by P.A. Bessonov.²⁸ As the study of folklore developed from its amateur origins, the number of collected tales in song and prose, and of collectors, increased from the 1850s onward. Some other notable contributors to the folk song canon are P.M. Rybnikov and A.F. Gilferding, who published collections of living oral traditions in the 1860s and early 1870s²⁹.

The *bylini* that most captivated the collective imagination of nineteenth-century Russia are those featuring the *bogatyri*, the legendary warrior heroes of Kievan Rus'. These legendary heroes are, according to *bylini*, the loyal servants of Grand Prince Vladimir, the Christianizer of Rus'. While the Vladimir of these epics appears to be loosely based upon the historical figure of Vladimir of Kiev (958-1015), these legends remain largely ahistorical, combining different events and personages from Russian history as well as incorporating a fair amount of invented, fantasy material.

Early Visual Representations

Representations of medieval Russian warriors have a long history in the visual tradition, existing in both official/ecclesiastic and folk channels. Take, for example, the mid-15th century icon of the "The miracle of the icon 'Our Lady of the Sign'", depicting the 1169 battle between Novgorod and Suzdal', in which throngs of mounted soldiers with helmets, shields, spears, and

²⁷ Kirsha Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniia, sobrannye Kirsheiu Danilovym* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

²⁸ P.V. Kireevskii, *Pesni, sobrannye P. V. Kireevskim* (Moscow, 1860-74).

²⁹ P.N. Rybnikov, *Pesni, sobrannye P.N. Rybnikovym* (Petrozavodsk: Kareliia, 1989). Also, A.F. Gilferding, *Onezhskie byliny, zapisannye A.F. Gilferdingom letom 1871 goda* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1949-51). For more background on these sources, see James Bailey and Tatyana Ivanovna, "Introduction", An Anthology of Russian Folk Epics, New York, 1998, pp. xv-xxxii.

banners are shown going into battle. Likewise, the *Illuminated Compiled Chronicle* (16th century) depicts soldiers on horseback at the Battle of Kulikovo (1380), this time brandishing swords and wearing breastplate armor.



Figure 37 (left): Icon, “The miracle of the icon ‘Our Lady of the Sign’”, mid-15th c., tempera on wood, 133 x 90cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Figure 38 (right): “The Battle of Kulikovo”, illumination from *The Illuminated Compiled Chronicle*, 16th c., Academy of Sciences Library, St. Petersburg.

Of course, specimens of medieval armor were preserved, collected, and displayed, and the nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of armory collections as well as an increasingly scientific approach to these collections, with efforts to taxonomize and develop accurate dating schema. Moscow’s first public museum was the Kremlin Armoury museum, proposed by Alexander I in 1806. The museum merged existing collections of regalia, fine textiles (both secular and ecclesiastic), carriages, and medieval armor into one permanent exhibition for the

public. This assemblage of objects reflected the increased interest in preserving and assigning value to the material artifacts of Russia's martial past and its homegrown warriors.

Extant graphic and artistic representations of these warriors and their armor, particularly in the *Illustrated Chronicle* images, correlate at least schematically to the material evidence preserved in museum collections. Medieval Kievan Rus' soldiers wore plate-and-mail armor, as well as sphero-conical helmets, in which a rounded base led upward into a peaked cone. In medieval illustrations, armor is not generally used as a distinguishing characteristic between the different sides of a battle, with all soldiers depicted in effectively the same armor, as seen in the figures above.

The *lubok* tradition

Despite the reality of medieval warriors' armor and the material evidence therein, the first visual depictions of the *bogatyri* found in *lubki*, or folk woodcut prints, followed a different visual tradition and style of depiction to represent these folk heroes. Likely as a response to Western chivalric images taking root in Russia, the iconography of the Western knight, at the time new for Russia, mixed with other martial images from Greco-Roman antiquity to produce a new face and costume for the *bogatyr*.



Figure 39: *The Strong and Brave Bogatyr Ilya Muromets Rides Out*, 1868, 31x42 cm, lithograph, detail from *Russkie Narodnyi Lubok*, New York Public Library

In this *lubok*, or woodcut print, the “strong, brave *bogatyr* Ilya Muromets” fights the Nightingale Robber. While the elements of the *bylina* are all in place, the portrayal of these individual elements is surprising. Ilya is clad in a shirt of scale armor, with decorative knee-guards. Beneath him is a checkered saddlecloth, and he carries a spear, a bow (with which he has just shot the Nightingale Robber), and a round shield. None of these elements itself is altogether foreign to medieval Russian armor. The most incongruous aspects of Ilya’s presentation, however, occur from the neck up. Ilya wears a rounded, Roman-style helmet with a visor and plume, and sports a trim mustache on his otherwise beardless face. This image clearly draws on Western prototypes; such helmets were never used on Russian territory, and although the soldiers in earlier Russian depictions also had bare faces, mustaches were not common until the Petrine period. The generally nondescript background setting to this *lubok* only adds to the image’s cultural non-specificity. The small cluster of buildings in the far background bears no distinctly

Russian characteristics, and the octagonal tower and brick wall could as easily represent a small German village as a settlement in the Russian countryside. The Robber Nightingale's appearance, too, with a felt hat, calls to mind the Western European characters penned by the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen just as readily as any Russian prototype.

The simple explanation for this is that these *lubok* images were largely informed by Western exemplars of illustrated folk tales, in which the Western chivalric image of a mounted knight was widely popular as a romantic ideal. This woodblock tradition did not purvey any historically or archaeologically informed reproduction of these bogatyri, who were legends, after all, not historical figures. Instead, the images of the *bogatyri* in the *lubki* represented an idealized warrior, more chivalric knight than Russian peasant. reflecting one of the great tensions in Russian self-identification and self-representation that would shape the Petrine period and be a significant concern of in the shaping of Russian national identity in the nineteenth century.

Peter I and knightly depictions

The popularity of the knight, *rytsar'*, in Russian culture should come as little surprise. From Peter's time onward, the concept of the Western European knight gained significant traction as a iconographic shift took place in Russian culture, privileging Western models over native ones. Lindsey Hughes explored this iconographic shift in her analysis of visual depictions of Peter the Great, compared to those of his father, Aleksei Mikhailovich. Depicted in the traditional manner of the Muscovite leaders before him, Aleksei Mikhailovich is shown in portraiture "in the guise of a Byzantine emperor," referring primarily to the heavily-bejeweled regalia he wears. The prescribed iconography for a Muscovite tsar required that the tsar be shown holding the orb and scepter of office, and wearing the *Shapka Monomakha*, the "Crown of Monomakh" which legend

holds was transferred to Russia from Constantinople in the eleventh century.³⁰ This is exactly the presentation that Peter takes in his childhood portraits, like the one pictured below. Orb and scepter in hand, Peter is a near-replica of his father.



Figure 40 (left): *Unknown artist, Portrait of Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov, late 18th-early 19th c. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia*; Figure 41 (right): *Portrait of Peter as a 10-year-old boy, unknown artist*

Beginning in the young tsar's participation in the Grand Embassy to Western Europe in 1697-98, the images painted of Peter shifted drastically. Once abroad, Peter very consciously undertook a transformation of his royal image. Early portraits during his travels depicted him in the familiar Byzantine-style robes decked with furs, and wearing ornamental fur-trimmed headgear. While these portraits were drawn in the Western idiom, the kinds of material trappings they showed were not very different from earlier Russian images of the young tsar in the standard royal iconography.

³⁰ Lindsey Hughes, "Portraits of Aleksei and Peter I", *Picturing Russia*.



Figure 42 (left): *Le Grand Czaar de la Muscovie en son habit d'Empereur*, Jan Gole Feitgorn, 1697; Figure 43 (center): *The Grand Czar of Moscovy*, White, 1697; Figure 44 (right): *Petrus Felix Alexsus, Rusorum Magnus Czar*, Peter Schenck the Elder, 1697

Some of these early images from the Grand Embassy, like Gole Feitgorn’s engraving, adhere very closely to the Russian tradition in wardrobe and regalia as well as body positioning. Other images seem less influenced by the Eastern iconographic tradition, but nonetheless focus on “oriental” features such as Peter’s fur-trimmed cloak and hat, the brocaded jacket and his curved saber.

These depictions of Peter as an exotic anomaly would soon give way to a very different kind of image. These new paintings and engravings, such as the work by Kneller below, showed Peter in full plate armor, and represented in much the same way as a contemporary Western monarch would be shown.



Figure 45: Sir Godfrey Kneller (Gottfried Kniller), “Petrus Alexeewitz, Magnus Dominus”, 1698, oil on canvas, 241.2 x 145.4 cm, Royal Collection, London.

This shift in depictions signals a change in Peter’s self-presentation, as well as a new set of cultural images that would be introduced to Russia and broadly adopted upon the tsar’s return. In Kneller’s painting, Peter is transformed into the image of the chivalric knight in armor, decked in the ermine-lined robes of Western royalty, and with a traditionally European monarch’s crown in the niche behind him. Not only was the image of an armored knight brought onto Russian soil; with these widespread depictions of Peter in armor, the armored knight became an iconic image of Russian strength and a new image of timeless valor.

The extension of this image of the Western knight to the *lubok* images of the *bogatyri* then is not particularly surprising, given the influx of Western images throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the general privileging of those new Western images over earlier

prototypes. Prior to the *lubok* tradition there was no visual tradition of the secular, folkloric *bogatyri*, or of widespread secular art in general. Considering this, it makes sense that when these images were developed, they emerged in the new and popular idiom.

Vasnetsov and the changing face of the Bogatyri

Vasnetsov's *bogatyri*, which are best known through two iconic paintings, *Bogatyri* (1881) and *Warrior at the Crossroads* (1882), break away entirely from the *lubok* iconography for a different image of the Russian warrior. Vasnetsov's *bogatyri* intentionally diverge from the image of the Western knight, creating an image that would become iconic of late nineteenth century Russian cultural identity and national spirit, through the lens of these imagined medieval warriors.



Figure 46: V.M. Vasnetsov, *Bogatyri*, 1881, oil on canvas, 295 x 446 cm, State Tretyakov Museum, Moscow

Vasnetsov approached the painting of the *bogatyri* with a strong interest in Russian folk tales, combined with an interest in the details of Russia's history. The combination of these themes was very topical in the second half of the nineteenth century, which contributed to the popularity of Vasnetsov's works. There was an emerging interest in exploring the roots of Russian culture, both through the folklore and oral traditions that were ever increasingly being collected and distributed, and through archeological research and the development of historical museum collections. Vasnetsov's work forged the intersection of these interests, bringing extensive research and historical detail to his legendary and folk-inspired works.

Although Vasnetsov painted various *bogatyri* many times, it is his painting of the Kievan trio, Dobrynya Nikitich, Ilya Muromets, and Alesha Popovich, entitled simply "*Bogatyri*," that created an iconic image, not just of medieval Russian warriors, but what would come to be seen as the representation of an essentialized Russianness. We can speculate that perhaps the popularity of Vasnetsov's *bogatyri*, so different from the *lubok* image, was in part due to the backlash against overly-Westernized tendencies in art, and reflected a desire to produce an image of the *bogatyry*, and by extension, Russians, which registered as clearly non-Western.

Emerging from Vasnetsov's 1881 painting, *Bogatyri*, we see the following characteristics which form a new standard iconography: the *bogatyry* is large — almost larger-than-life; he is generally bearded (except in cases of youth, such as Alesha Popovich), and he is armed with a spear, mace, or bow and quiver of arrows, as well as with a sword and round shield. He wears lightweight mail and a conical helmet, not a full suit of armor. This treatment of weaponry and armor reflects the latest research and understanding of medieval Russian arms contemporary to the painting's production, emphasizing the relationship between the early Russian arms and Mongol warfare technology. While there was an obvious influence of Mongol culture during and

after the Mongol-Tatar occupation from the thirteenth century onward, it is clear that the warriors of Rus' had adopted elements of Mongol technology, which was particularly advanced and well-suited to the Eurasian terrain, even earlier, due to the frequent interactions between nomadic tribes and medieval Russian settlements³¹.

Each *bogatyř* is seated upon his horse, similarly large, which has long, flowing, sometimes braided tresses. Instead of the tall, lean and nimble horses that were preferred in the Western medieval tradition, Vasnetsov places his *bogatyři* upon Mongolian horses. Generally shorter and stockier in the body, these horses exaggerate the size of their riders by comparison, and their large heads and eyes give them a sympathetic, anthropomorphic appearance that Vasnetsov uses to his advantage, depicting his horses as particularly expressive and evocative. Unlike the horses depicted in artwork of Western chevalier traditions, these animals are not covered in heraldry or armor, nor are their manes and tails tied back or cropped. Their livery is lightweight, with stirrups and saddles but otherwise minimal harnessing. For adornment, they wear silver and gold jewelry; crescent-shaped medallions hang from the horses' chest straps with charms at their foreheads. The emphasis in this armor is clearly more on adornment than coverage or protection, and the figure seems to be one that will not encounter heavy battle.

The juxtaposition of horse and rider in the painting is striking. The horses, in the forefront, are just as active participants in the scene as the horsemen. The dynamism of the flowing hair and eager stare of the white horse on the left echoes the piercing gaze of his rider, Dobrynya Nikitich, actively drawing his sword, in representation of courage and valor. On the right, the pensive thoughtful figure of Alesha Popovich is reflected in his horse's demurred stature, head

³¹ For an in-depth discussion of the exchange of military technologies between the Muscovite Slavs and Mongols, see Donald Ostrovsky, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-cultural influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304-1589*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

lowered and eyes averted. The central figure, Ilya Muromets, surveys the scene off in the distance with restraint, and his horse's sideways glance reflects a similar moderation, occupying a space between eager action and passivity. These are mimetic figures, echoes of one another, coming together to create a unified, cohesive image of duty and bravery on the Russian steppe.

The landscape upon which these warriors are set is highly evocative. Rolling green hills splay across the background, with a band of deep green forest in the middle ground. In the immediate foreground, stony ground and sandy yellow grasses lie underfoot, with a cluster of fir saplings and a few stalks of wildflowers. These different zones invoke the heterogeneity of Russia's varied landscape: mountains, forests/taiga, steppe. There are no signs of civilization or of other human life; the only other creatures in the frame are two birds in the distance, falcons or golden eagles, one perched, one flying over an implied valley, reinforcing the sense of great open space and of the height and depth of the distant terrain. This landscape is untamed, untouched. It is unspecific, not tied to any time or place, but rather a sort of essentialized all-Russia, condensed into one monumental frame – steppe, forest, hill and dale. *Bogatyri* portrays medieval Russia as a broad, untouched expanse, an untamed wilderness, and it places these three warriors in the forefront as its guardians.³²

Vasnetsov's *bogatyri* took on a variety of forms as his exploration of this theme progressed. They could be proactive and triumphant, as in the 1881 painting, *Bogatyri*, but they could also convey complex psychological narratives, as in the 1882 painting, *Warrior at the Crossroads*. Both figuratively and literally, this painting depicts a different side of the *bogatyr*. Instead of the bold forward-facing trio, in *Warrior at the Crossroads* the *bogatyr* is alone, turned away from

³² This painting fits into a long tradition of Russian romantic landscape painting, using the natural landscape as a stand-in for Russian identity itself. For more on this, see Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia*, 2002.

the viewer and withdrawn in reflection. Rather than facing boldly outward toward the viewer in a scene of open acceptance of challenges to come, this warrior turns away, facing a petroglyph with an ominous message: “Как пряму ехати — живу не бывати — нет пути ни прохожему, ни проезжему, ни пролетному.” “Should you go straight ahead, you will lose your life; there is neither path to walk, nor ride, nor fly.” The inscription is poetic, and written in an Old Russian style to match the implied geographic and chronological setting of the work.



Figure 47: V.M. Vasnetsov, *Warrior at the Crossroads*, 1882, oil on canvas, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

In terms of visual presentation of the figures and painting’s iconographic elements, Vasnetsov’s *Warrior* fits into precisely the same mold as the earlier *bogatyri*. The rider is dressed in the same plate-and-mail chest armor, and carries the same accoutrement of weapons: spear, mace, and quiver of arrows. He wears a pointed helmet, and carries a circular, leather, metal-studded shield. The horse’s livery is of the same, simple type as shown in *Bogatyri*, including the high stirrups, which were a common feature of steppe-riders’ livery, important in allowing riders to stand, facilitating mounted archery.

Like the three *bogatyri* of Vasnetsov's earlier work, rider and horse echo each other in appearance and mood. Both figures are turned away from the viewer, gaze downcast, seemingly weighing the implications of the message they face. The written message is not the only harbinger of doom in the scene. The *bogatyr* and his horse are faced by their doubles in the frame: the desiccated skulls of a man and horse, evidence of the message's veracity and the fate they face. The painting is highly atmospheric: there is no action, no looming threat, just a still and quiet landscape, peppered by stones, and kept watch over by three black carrion birds.

Through these various iconic images of the *bogatyri*, Vasnetsov explored a range of psychological and symbolic possibilities for these characters. The *bogatyr* is not simply a triumphant figure. Alongside glory and victory, he faces hardship and challenges. This dynamic range in the depictions of the *bogatyr* allows this figure to be a robust metaphorical parallel for Russia itself.

Important to the development of the *bogatyr* iconography beyond the *lubok* in the nineteenth century is the deviation from earlier types, with conscious depiction of these heroes as Russian, or Slavs, not as Western European. This development of *bogatyr* iconography came at a time when Slavic identity was being reimagined, and when there was widespread thought about the links between ethnicity, culture, language, and national identity. Vasnetsov's paintings, with their emphases on Slavic, even Eastern armor, and on large, expansive landscapes and bodies draw strong contrasts with traditionally Western, classical depictions of mounted warriors. These are no French or Italian knights, no Byzantine foot soldiers, no Greco-Roman centurions. Nor are they Asian, Mongol, or purely Eastern. Vasnetsov's *bogatyri* are unmistakably Russian.

Roots in Russia and beyond

An interesting complication to the exploration of Russian *byliny* and the *bogatyri* therein comes to us from Vladimir Stasov, critic and, at times, amateur philologist. In 1868, Stasov published his philological study, “Origins of the Russian *Byliny*,” in which he argued that the roots of the Russian oral epics lay not natively in Russia, nor in Western Europe, but in Asia, carried over the continent by nomads, traders, and warriors from India, Persia, and Mongolia.³³ His essay incorporated a comparative analysis of Indian tales from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Panchantra*, which he most likely read in the 1859 German translation by philologist Theodor Benfey. Benfey’s own scholarship argued for Asian precedents for a great number of European folk tales, and Stasov was clearly convinced by Benfey’s theory of “cultural borrowing.”³⁴

While Stasov’s pronouncements about the foreign roots of Russia’s beloved national epics caused an outcry among many nationalists, there is a logic to his assertions in the support of a cultural-nationalist agenda. First, by tracing the roots of these Russian tales to ancient Indic sources, Stasov established a long and illustrious genealogy for these mythic cultural figures. Stasov’s insistence on the Asian heritage of Russian cultural elements had less to do with a suggestion that Russia had borrowed from other cultures, and more, perhaps, with the notion that a defining characteristic Russian culture was its close connection to the East, reinforcing its status as “other,” distinct from Western Europe.³⁵

³³ V.V. Stasov, “Proiskhozhdenie russkikh bylin”, in *Sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. 3, (St. Petersburg: Samokhdov, 1894), 948-1268.

³⁴ See V.E. Gusev, *Problemy folklor v istorii estetiki* (Leningrad: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1963) 160-175.

³⁵ Russia’s “Eastern otherness” became one of its cultural exports, at a time when across Europe, nations sought to portray elements of their cultural individuality as marketable features. While domestically, this orientalism was a complicated byproduct of an identity struggle and was even divisive, abroad, Russian exoticism was largely capitalized upon. This is how, while Western ballets and operas maintained the highest popularity in St. Petersburg,

This identification of Russia with Asia is a complicated element in the history of Russian nationalism, but it was also a persistent component in the development of a visual vocabulary for medieval Russia. In the *bylini* which inspired Vasnetsov's paintings, the Russian *bogatyri* largely fight nomadic Mongol invaders on the steppes of Russia's east, not the forests or taiga of European Russia. This carries over into the artwork of the nineteenth century. Vasnetsov's warrior at the crossroads stands on a desolate wasteland, not a tree in sight, and only the slightest bulge of a plateau in the distance. His *bogatyri* occupy a more heterogeneous landscape, with shades of green and small hills behind them, yet the foreground is still mostly seeded with yellowed grasses, a reminder of the eastern steppe.

Although the frame is full of eastern elements, the *bogatyri* are still characteristically depicted as ethnically Russian. Their hair and beards, with their light tawny brown color, take the shade called in Russian, "*rusyy*" which although etymologically removed from the name of the Rus' or Russian people, is often linked in folk etymologies, and is connected in the popular imagination to a Russian ethnic identity. The beards that these *bogatyri* wear reflect the Orthodox proscription against men cutting their facial hair. Despite this link to Orthodoxy, there are no crosses or any other explicit markers of religiosity anywhere in the painting. Like the *bylini* themselves, which are fundamentally secular tales, this is a secular scene, and the virtues that these warriors epitomize are earthly, not saintly ones.

the *Ballets Russes* were touring Western Europe and delighting foreign crowds with Eastern reveries like *Scheherezade* and *Sadko*.

Commercializing the *Bogatyri*

The *bogatyri* of Vasnetsov's monumental paintings quickly became the best-known, codified depictions of these medieval warriors. The popularity of these images was immediate, and the visual representations that Vasnetsov created soon overtook any previous ideas of the *bogatyr*, either in image or text, becoming the main cultural icon of medieval Russian warriors, and arguably of ancient Russia altogether. These images, originating in the world of fine art, quickly crossed the threshold into popular and commercial culture, and were often appropriated for advertising purposes.

At first, the transition of these images from high art to commercial culture was forged through the use of advertising as an ostensibly educational medium. An early example is the appearance of *bogatyri* on chocolate wrappers produced by the Einem confectionary company. Einem, ever innovative in its advertising, devised series upon series of collectable chocolate and coffee wrappers, encouraging consumers to purchase the entire line. One of these series of collectible lithographs was entitled "Our Painters and Their Works," or alternately, "Russian Painters and Their Works," and was released with an explicitly educational objective, to put Russian artwork and information about Russian artists into the hands of the average citizen. As seen below, each image included a portrait and brief biography of the artist, along with a reproduction of a representative painting from that artist's *oeuvre*. In this case, Vasnetsov's *Warrior at the Crossroads* is reproduced in miniature, with the main elements present, but most of the details simplified or distorted. In the miniature there are several inaccuracies compared to the original, such as the placement and number of stones in the scene, the number of birds, the shape of the path, and the configuration of the clouds. The portentous message on the stone is

illegible, and the two skulls, representing the death that lies ahead for both horse and rider, are either hidden or misshapen beyond easy recognition.



Figure 48: Chocolate wrapper enclosure, front and back. ‘Our painters and their works’ card, picture 3: *V.M. Vasnetsov. Warrior at a Crossroads*, 1896, color lithograph, 6.5 x 11 cm, Russian State Library, Moscow

One wonders what kind of knowledge these collectible cards are aiming to impart to the viewer. They give a general sense of the painting’s subject and composition, and the informational material provides a quick biography of the artist, with an almost exclusive focus on his artistic training. The rest of the text, in larger lettering and occupying more than half of the surface, advertises Einem chocolate and cocoa. While the focus is clearly primarily placed on promoting the company’s own products, and secondarily on bringing art education to the viewer,

there is a third implied aim in this combination of advertisement and art print: the branding of Einem as a truly Russian company, with strong national interests.

For the Einem company, which was founded by German immigrants and bore a distinctly non-Russian name, having clear ties to Western Europe had its benefits. For a chocolatier, having German origins signified that the company had associations with the longstanding luxury chocolate traditions in the West, and could stand as a mark of quality.³⁶ It was important, however, to emphasize the Russianness of the Einem company as well as its German connections. This Russianness is asserted in several ways in the example here: the repetition of the factory's location, Moscow, after each instance of the company's name; the double-headed eagle, symbol of the Romanov dynasty and the Russian empire; and the labeling of these artists and artworks both as "Russian" and significantly, as "ours." This possessive adjective links the Einem company with its audience, and more broadly with the Russian people. Interestingly, by choosing artists and works that were considered characteristically Russian in some way, and then distributing these images to the Russian people for mass consumption and education, the Einem company was effectively manipulating the popular perception of that Russian identity, using the image of the *bogatyr* among others to represent as well as influence the perception of national identity.³⁷

While Einem's use of the *bogatyr* was couched in an ostensibly educational framework, introducing the public to Vasnetsov's painting as an essential element of Russian national art, soon the *bogatyr* image was so well-known that it could be parodied for commercial purposes.

³⁶ Vladimir Gakov, "Einem: sila brenda", *Wonderbuild* No.3, March 2010, 70-74.

³⁷ After the Russian revolution, the Einem company was restructured to become first the State Confectionary factory No. 1, and in 1922, *Krasnyi Oktyabr*.

Take, for example, this 1909 poster from the Weiner Brewery in Astrakhan. In this image, a cartoonish *bogaty*r sits atop a white horse, dressed in much the same manner as Vasnetsov’s *Vityaz na rasput’e*. While the rider’s horse maintains the same averted, downturned gaze as the original painting, the *bogaty*r himself is portrayed in an entirely different light. As opposed to Vasnetsov’s *vityaz*, who is slumped over, pondering the weight of the inscription on the monolith, the Weiner Brewery *vityaz* lunges forward and thirstily draws his corkscrew-sword to do in the bottle of beer propped in front of him. Whereas Vasnetsov’s image can be seen as emblematic of Russia’s own difficult choices ahead, the beer poster eliminates the question of choice, emphasizing the agency of the warrior and his resolve to attain the end goal: not the perils of fate, but rather a tall Weiner beer.



Figure 49: Weiner advertising poster, Astrakhan, 1909

The rich philosophical subtext underlying Vasnetsov's painting, namely, its meditation on mortality, prophecy, and destiny, is erased, and instead of the wasteland of stones, skulls, and carrion birds, the poster paints a lush green meadow and adds a few jaunty flowers. The advertisement is apparently uninterested in exploring the complexities of the *bogatyr*, choosing instead to capitalize on a familiar and resonant image.

The use of the *bogatyr* imagery in this poster is more complex than simply co-opting an image from contemporary culture to make a clever advertising campaign. The *bogatyr* is a loaded image, rich not only with philosophical connotations, but more fundamentally with resonances of Russian national history and identity. By portraying an iconic image by a Russian artist of a recognizably Russian legendary warrior, a connection is forged between the foreign-sounding Weiner Brewery and a native Russian heritage.³⁸ This attempt at Russification is aided by the graphic design of the poster, which uses a stylized Cyrillic script for the company's branding. This script recalls *vyaz*, the ornamental Cyrillic script used in medieval inscriptions, manuscripts, icons, and metalwork. One of the hallmarks of *vyaz*, however, is its highly compact nature, leading to difficulty in legibility. Like the *bogatyr*, whose image is used to allude to a cultural tradition while making fundamental changes in presentation in order to serve as effective advertising, the script similarly retains the eye-catching characteristics of a medieval tradition, but is restyled in order to meet the ease of legibility needed for a compelling advertisement.

In the Weiner advertising poster, there seems to be no thematic link between the product and the specifically medieval aspect of the *bogatyr* image. This is not an ad for an "ancient-style" beer, nor does there seem to be a plausible geographic link between the brewery's location, Astrakhan, and the Kievan tradition of the *bogatyri*. The link, then, seems truly to be forged by

³⁸ For more information about the Weiner Brewery, see http://www.rupivo.ru/about_factory.php?id=43.

an interest in using the image of the *bogatyr* for its recognizability, its virile masculinity, and perhaps most importantly, for its Russianness. The Weiner Brewery, like many specialty manufacturers in Russia, had long capitalized on a “Western” identity and the connotation of value associated with the high quality of Western European luxury goods. The German name and heritage of the Weiner family facilitated the link between the company and longstanding brewing traditions of Germany, and the brewery clearly sought to emphasize its Germanic origins, particularly at its outset. Of the various types of beer brewed by Weiner, many had geographically European names: “Bavarian,” “Viennese,” “Bohemian,” and “Nürnberg,” to name a few.

The branding identity of the Weiner company was multifaceted, however, to reflect the complexities of Russian society. With a name like Weiner, the beer seemed to have a Germanic pedigree. To what degree, then, was it Russian? By launching an ad campaign that linked their beer with the iconic image of the *bogatyr*, an assertion was made: this beer is made in Russia, has its place in a Russian national tradition, and is the worthy refreshment for a thirsty Russian warrior. This advertisement also flatters its intended viewer, the urban Russian man, by drawing connections between its audience and the *bogatyr* with all of his implied virtues. By utilizing a cultural icon that had come to represent Russia and Russian masculinity, this advertisement deftly situates the Weiner Brewery in an ancient tradition as well as a contemporary milieu of medievalizing and lauding the imagined Russian national identity.

This linking of medieval Russian imagery with a foreign or foreign-sounding brand was a common advertising tactic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, not exclusive to the *bogatyr* image. Where the idealized medieval man was used to promote beer to Russian men in the

Weiner ad, an idealized medieval Russian woman became the face behind the Singer Sewing Machine Company's advertising campaign in the 1890s. In these ads, a young woman is shown wearing an elaborate Muscovite costume, complete with a pearl-studded *kokoshnik*, or traditional headdress, while seated at work behind a sewing machine. In the case of Singer's advertisements, the connection between this medieval ideal, with its imbedded notions of Russian nationality and tradition, is very intentionally being placed in apposition to a foreign, modernizing piece of industrial and domestic technology. This juxtaposition, like the image of the *bogatyri* and the beer, uses connotations of medieval Russia to counteract or add complexity to the preconceptions of a Western-oriented brand identity.³⁹

Beyond *Bogatyri*

Reactions and artistic responses to Vasnetsov's *bogatyri* appeared not only in the commercial sphere, but also within the *beaux-arts* milieu, as other artists further developed the image of the medieval Russian warrior that Vasnetsov had so popularized.

³⁹ For more on Singer's advertising tactics, see Olga Matich, "28 Nevsky Prospekt: The Sewing Machine, the Seamstress, and Narrative" in *Petersburg, Petersburg*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).



Figure 50: Mikhail Vrubel, *Bogaty*, 1898, oil on canvas, 321.5 x 222 cm, The State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Vrubel's *Bogaty* is a mammoth depiction of an epic hero. Although Vasnetsov's canvas is about 30% larger than Vrubel's, the *bogatyr* figure in Vrubel's work is larger than Vasnetsov's central figure in every dimension, and the horse is roughly double the size — and quite disproportionately so at that.

The painting is overwhelming in its details. The *bogatyr*'s clothing is ornately patterned and textured. His puffed sleeves show a gold-adorned brocade, with punched silver bands at the cuffs and shoulders. On the warrior's chest, he wears a vest of maille held by a silver belt. His legs sport a batik-patterned cloth, and his shins girded in leg-wraps made of metal buckles interwoven with leather straps — a motif that is repeated in the horse's livery. His saddle-cloth is also a golden brocade, with images of fish woven into the fabric. We see the *bogatyr*'s small face with his piercing blue eyes emerge from behind his copious red and grey whiskers. This is one of two

spots of exposed flesh we see on the *bogatyr*, the other being his large, gnarled hand placed on his right thigh.

Like the parallelism between horse and rider we saw in Vasnetsov's works, so too are the *bogatyr* and his steed made of the same substance in this painting. They are both overstuffed, bordering on grotesque. They are ornate to an extreme, albeit in somber hues, and they are, above all, largely static. Unlike Vasnetsov's warriors, this *bogatyr*'s stirrups hang low; it takes a stretch of the imagination to picture this corpulent figure moving at all, never mind pulling himself to standing in his stirrups and firing arrows at a gallop. Despite this, there is a subtle sign of motion in the frame: the horse's rear leg is raised, its white-haired hoof protruding from the undergrowth. Nevertheless, this smallest sign of activity can hardly counteract the overwhelming feeling of crowding, stagnation, and stillness in the frame.

The excess of detail keeps the viewer uneasily searching for shapes and figures, unable to decode the many elements in one glance. The eye keeps shifting across the image in search of clarity and recognizable forms. This is, in many ways, an embodiment of ideas about the Russian medieval: ornate, decorative, dark, static, and bloated. This figure is, to large extent, the anthropomorphization of a certain kind of perceived medieval. The idea emerges that medieval Russia is heavy and expansive, wielding brawny power, but slow moving and weighed down by its own size and ornament, and so large that even in an expansive space, it seems trapped and boxed in.

In the foreground of Vrubel's panel, two falcons are perched upon small sapling evergreens, strikingly similar to the young trees in the foreground of Vasnetsov's work. This foreground of new growth clearly became part of the *bogatyr* iconography, and the parallel to Vasnetsov's

well-known image heightens the comparison. The falcons echo the birds in Vasnetsov's paintings, where they serve as indicators of the painting's mood. One sits, tall and erect, on the lower left side of the canvas, chest broad, mimicking the posture of the *bogatyr* himself. The other, on the far lower right of the scene, looks as though it is swooping in to perch on a branch. Its wings are open yet curving inward, and its legs are outstretched, grasping onto the golden branch below it. The contrast between these two figures, so easily overlooked in the visual noise of the painting, is striking. They are a study in stasis and dynamism, motion and stillness. In an image that is otherwise so heavy, so motionless, this swooping falcon brings in a reminder of action and vitality.

There is a second trace of action in the scene, one that is even more easily overlooked. Despite the *bogatyr's* static pose, his horse lifts his left rear leg, bringing it out of the greenery and immediately below the foot of the *bogatyr* himself. With the three other limbs all rigidly extended and giving no hint of motion, this raised foot is puzzling, and suggests that the horse is not walking as much as posturing, perhaps showing a foot in imitation of the *bogatyr's* visible hand.

Despite being in the very foreground of the painting, much like the trees, the falcons are dwarfed and overshadowed by the *bogatyr* and steed which threaten to squeeze out the other figures, and even the surrounding scenery, entirely. The impression one gets of the *bogatyr* expanding to overflow the canvas' constraints is emphasized by the panel's irregular size and shape. This was not the artist's doing, but rather an alteration made by the painting's first owner, Malich, who cut the originally square composition into a narrower panel with a triangular top, in

order to fit a frame in his home.⁴⁰ The resulting dimensions squeeze in on the bogatyr and horse to such an extent that the horse's nose is cut off at the end. The foliage and twilight sky in the upper quadrant of the painting are likewise truncated into a triangular peak, cutting off the blood-red traces of illuminated foliage, and overtly emphasizing the triangularity of the painting's composition, drawing to a peak at the tip of the *bogatyr's* pointed helmet to nearly comic effect.

While Vasnetsov's *bogatyri* are depicted with a dewy academic realism, Vrubel takes these figures to a new level of abstraction. The figure of the *bogatyr* is spatially broad and expansive, and great emphasis is placed on the surface quality of the image, with repeating patterns and textures replacing Vasnetsov's naturalistic shading and contours. Vrubel turns the *bogatyr* into a mountain of a man, a truly larger-than-life, mythic character, no longer arguably historical in the slightest, but instead, monumental.

This treatment of medieval Russia, as monumental and gigantesque, can even be seen as a reaction to other medievalist works from the late part of the nineteenth century. While it is not an obvious inspiration, one can see parallels in the treatment of medieval Russia in Vrubel's work and the medievalism of monumental church architecture from the 1880s, such as St. Peterburg's iconic *Spas na Krovi*.⁴¹ In this painting, the *bogatyr* is portrayed in greater-than-human scale, and both his expansiveness and ornate decoration overwhelm his humanity: his small, ruddy face. This parallels *Spas*, which draws its ornamentation from small, medieval churches, but expands them to fit an entirely different, superhuman scale. Even in its formal structure, the

⁴⁰ The actual chronology of the cropping is unclear. There are letters between Vrubel and his sister Nadia, stating that he gave ("otdal") the painting to Malich in 1898, but then in 1899 he wanted to submit it to Diaghilev's exhibition. There were some interpersonal conflicts that prevented that from occurring, and Vrubel decided instead to try to submit it to the Academy exhibition in that same year.

⁴¹ For an in-depth analysis of *Spas* and its relationship to Russian medievalism, see the previous chapter in this dissertation.

bogatyr reminds us of a Russian revival church, with a solid, immobile, boxy base, crowned by an ascending pyramid, his helmet like a gilded dome, a shape that is further emphasized here by the unique cropping of the canvas. Whether or not Vrubel's *Bogatyr* was consciously influenced by medievalizing architecture of this period, it is clear that across a variety of media, similar forms and means of depictions were becoming codified in the new portrayal of the Russian medieval.

Bogatyr as Decadent

In comparison to Vasnetsov, whose work was lauded by renowned critic Vladimir Stasov and much of the artistic establishment of the period, Vrubel was immediately disparaged by Stasov and his followers as being nothing more than a decadent. While Vrubel's richly ornate style shares formal similarities with the decadent movement in art, Vrubel himself contested the moniker. Although Vrubel's work did not fit Stasov's model of art, likewise his work did not always fit comfortably in with other so-called decadents of the period, such as the World of Art group and its exhibitions, championed by impresario Sergei Diaghilev. *Bogatyr*, for example, was a point of contention between Diaghilev and Vrubel in the winter of 1898-9, as the painting was being completed. The artist had intended his work to enter Diaghilev's exhibition, but it was initially refused. Later, when Diaghilev approached Vrubel to request *Bogatyr*'s inclusion in the exhibition, Vrubel declined, preferring to submit the work to the Academy exhibition.

Vrubel wrote to his sister in January 1899, speaking about the *Bogatyr*: "The work is almost finished. I am so delighted by it that I want to risk showing it at the Academy exhibition — if it is accepted. After all, I am an attested decadent. This, however, is a misunderstanding; I believe that my new work will set the record straight". This statement is puzzling. Perhaps Vrubel

thought that by turning his efforts to distinctly Russian subjects with perceptible nationalist implications, he would shake of the “decadent” moniker and show his work had national merit. After all, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Academy made extra efforts to assert Russian nationalism under the aegis of Alexander III and cultural trends during his reign. Vrubel’s *Bogatyrs* fit the model of a “national” subject, and for this reason, perhaps he supposed that it would be accepted to the Academy exhibition, and even serve to reverse their judgment of him as a “decadent.” What he seems to have failed to realize, however, is how his *Bogatyrs* clashed with prevailing preferences for realist art.⁴²

Vrubel's other bogatyri

We can see the development of this image, of Vrubel’s imagined *bogatyrs*, through his earlier work, namely his 1896 panel, *Mikulka Selyaninovich*. This large painting shows two of the “mythological” *bogatyri*, Mikulka Selyaninovich and his encounter with Volga. The two figures are strikingly different; Mikulka on the left wears a peasant shift, and his horse is yoked with a plow, but otherwise the man and horse seem unburdened and free, unconstrained, with hair and garments freely flowing, giving an overall impression of youth, health, and freedom. The sky and ground are both sparse and uncluttered, evoking the wide expanse of the plains. Volga, on the right side of the canvas, is heavily girded in armor, which seems to weigh him down and swallow him whole. Unlike Mikulka, whose physiognomy is not only easy to discern but seems relaxed and poised, Volga is contorted into a stiff and unnatural pose under his armor. His horse, too, is elaborately adorned, and stands rigidly amidst the surrounding, encroaching vegetation.

⁴² Elizabeth Valkenier, *Russian Realist Art*, 134-138.



Figure 51: Mikhail Vrubel, *Mikulka Selyaninovich*, 1896, Charcoal on paper

The image of Volga shows a clear precedent for Vrubel's *Bogatyry*, which would be produced two years later, in the placement of the figures, down to the position of the *bogatyry*'s hand, the sideways glance of his horse, and the vegetation — tall, dense, crenulated trees in the background, with small spiky evergreens in the foreground. The same composition would also inform Vrubel's ceramic work, specifically his series of ceramic hearths produced in 1899-1900.



Figure 52: *Hearth*, 1899. Dom Bazhanova, St. Petersburg.

One of these hearths appeared in the Russian hall at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, where it was awarded a gold medal, and eventually was sold. In Russia, there are five of these hearths extant: in Moscow, at the Kolomenskoe museum, the State Tretyakov Gallery, and the All-Russia Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts and Folk Art; and in Petersburg at the State Russian Museum and at the Bazhanov house, at 72 Marata Street.

In all of Vrubel's images, whether on paper, canvas or rendered in ceramic, the *bogatyry* figure takes on exaggerated proportions. The broad, wide-shouldered, stocky bogatyr, larger than life amidst his environs, becomes Vrubel's standard iconography. In his massive expansiveness, the *bogatyry* models masculinity, and invokes Russia's own sprawling size. This sense of breadth and expansiveness takes on multiple connotations; in the sketch of Mikulka and Volga, the bulky and expansive physiognomy of both men draws them in parallel, as their youth and age are juxtaposed.

Vrubel's ceramic pieces place significant emphasis on the surface of the work, constructing the figures of the *bogatyry* out of patterned fields devoid of shading or texture, stylistically reminiscent of collage or mosaic. This same treatment of the surface quality and juxtaposed textured fields is found in Vrubel's canvas work, and create the complex, overly ornate impression that one finds in his *Bogatyr*. Vrubel's work explores the interplay between the three-dimensionality of applied arts and surface decoration, and the flat surface of canvas art. Deviating away from the realism of Vasnetsov's works, Vrubel includes heightened abstraction, with a greater emphasis on repeating patterns and textures, arguably drawing on folk patterns and motifs in this surface design to enrich connections between these medieval epic heroes and the Russian people.

Bogatyr as object and commodity

Vrubel's *bogatyr* hearths in particular show the market interest in these medieval characters and Vrubel's transitionally *art nouveau* representations of them. While the hearths were produced for an elite audience at high cost, they still mark a significant paradigm shift away from the easel painting of the *Peredvizhniki* of an earlier generation. They were produced in quantity, in a decorative, applied medium, and in style inspired by mixed media and the graphic arts. Vrubel's *bogatyr* hearths transform the figure of the *bogatyr* and the slice of Russian history that it represents into a veritable object and commodity, eagerly bought up by a segment of the up-and-coming merchant society.

These ceramics pieces, bridging the gap between fine and applied arts, are not the only instances of the transitional and highly material nature of medievalism towards the end of the nineteenth century. Medieval elements also found their way onto silverware and table services, particularly those pieces involved with hospitality and entertaining guests. *Kovshi*, boat-shaped drinking vessels traditionally used to serve mead in medieval Russia, saw a revival in popularity after having fallen largely out of use. These ornamental vessels saw a new life in the last decades of the 19th century, with exquisite examples produced by the Moscow Faberge workshop.

The object itself, a *kovsh*, was a relic of the medieval period. As utilitarian devices, *kovshi* had been in continuous production from at least the tenth century, originating as humble wooden ewers, and developing into elaborate, oversized display pieces made of gold or silver and set with precious stones.⁴³ From the seventeenth century, these were increasingly made for ornamental purposes, to present as gifts to dedicated servants to the crown in recognition of services rendered. While there was some variation over the years and across makers, the basic

⁴³ *Britannia and Muscovy*, Olga Dmitrieva, Natalya Abramova eds.; p. 248.

shape and design of these *kovshi* stayed relatively static into the 19th century. The standard presentation *kovsh* is wrought in silver and decorated with imperial symbols, often marked with a double-headed eagle perched at the *kovsh*'s prow. The bodies of these *kovshi* are often inscribed with florally-bordered cartouches, within which are found dedications to the recipients and descriptions of their loyal service.

The *kovsh*, being a medieval object in continuous use, with a set function in Russian culture and tradition, was in a particularly advantageous position to be reworked as a *medievalizing* object for a wider audience. They were accessible in some way. Although largely decorative, the *kovsh* served a ritual function in the appearance of good hospitality. While exclusive, expensive, and elite, *kovshi* were not only owned by the aristocracy. In fact, they had a strong connection to the merchantry, who would receive *kovshi* as gifts from the crown. They were already considered status symbols, and were displayed in the homes of some merchants. Thus, when a taste for a Russian medieval style began to grow, particularly among the burgeoning merchantry, the silversmiths of Moscow responded to the demand by reinventing the *kovsh* with an eye to both experiment and ornament.

The new generation of *kovshi* took the basic form of the drinking vessel, with its boat-shaped body and single handle, as a foundation for a variety of ornamental reveries, including the convergence of the *bogatyr* motif and the *kovsh* as a medium. In this elaborate *Bogatyr kovsh* produced by the Moscow Fabergé silver workshop, we see a different example of the *bogatyr* motif making its way into luxury art objects.



Figure 53: *Monumental Kovsh*, 1899-1908, Peter Karl Fabergé, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

These costly objects, like the *bogatyr* hearths and this *kovsh*, are clearly not made for widespread consumption in the same way that the Einem chocolates are, yet they emerge from a similar impulse. With ornamental objects such as these, money could purchase a tangible connection to a medieval history that was previously restricted to the aristocracy. There was not only a taste for medievalizing objects among art producers, but also a newly-moneyed market of buyers that fueled their production. These *bogatyri* were reified, made into tangible goods for sale, and the members of the Moscow merchant class were eager consumers.

Alexander III as *bogatyr* in life and in retrospect

The image of the *bogatyr* had far-reaching appeal, not only to artist-producers and merchant-consumers. The strength of this image, and its connections with masculinity and valor, made it a

favorite influence for tsar Alexander III's self-fashioning. The personal image that Alexander cultivated deviated greatly from the image of the tsars before him. Whereas his father, Alexander II, had been tall and athletic, Alexander Aleksandrovich was short and broad, looking more the part of a Russian *muzhik* than European monarch. This connotation was exacerbated by the tsar's bushy red beard that he grew out during the Russo-Turkish War. Although beards enjoyed popularity in Europe, they nonetheless held connotations of an older, pre-Petrine period in Russia's history, as well as drawing connections to Russia's clergy, peasantry, and Old Believers, all segments of contemporary society which, for various reasons, held onto aspects of Russia's ancient traditions. The ruddy beard, when worn by the monarch, took on deeper symbolic significance, occupying a role as a national symbol, representative of the tenacity of ancient traditions as fundamental elements of Russian cultural identity.

Court historian S.S. Tatishchev wrote, "The majestic simplicity of his bearing, the artless, expressive and perspicuous speech, even the broad, thick beard which he was the first member of the Ruling House to grow...and which so became the manly features of his face, all of this gave him the look of a Russian *bogatyr*', just as internally he was a *bogatyr*' in spirit."⁴⁴ This likening of Alexander to a *bogatyr*' was very intentional, and the image of Alexander as *bogatyr* was cultivated by court advisers and teachers from an early age, becoming an important aspect of the tsar's image.

In fashioning the tsar as a *bogatyr*, many of the uncouth and unbecoming aspects of Alexander's appearance and behavior were transformed into positive qualities, refigured as evidence of the tsar's sincerity and lack of European-influenced affectation. His broad, stout figure, so different from his slender, athletic father's, made an excellent foil for Alexander was

⁴⁴ Tatishchev, "Tsarevich Aleksandr Aleksandrovich," 29-30.

positioned as a “real Russian,” unrefined and rough around the edges, but ultimately strong, valiant, and genuine. The fact that Alexander was so often associated with the image of the *bogatyř* in life makes it hardly surprising that similar iconography would find expression in his memorial. This is doubly true, considering the clear affinity between the monumental, larger-than-life subject matter of the *bogatyř* on horseback, and the medium of monumental sculpture.

Five years after the tsar’s death, Count Sergei Yulyevich Witte spearheaded a competition for a monument to Alexander III. The competition drew entries from many established sculptors, but the favorite project was that proposed by Paolo Trubetskoy, a relatively unknown face in the Russian art scene at that point. Trubetskoy’s proposed project, along with his prior portrait work (particularly his portraits of Lev Tolstoy) gained him esteem among the royal family, especially with the Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna.

Upon which foundations?

During the monument’s development, Trubetskoy put forth two distinct visions for the statue’s base. In one version, the horse and rider stand on a rectangular pedestal; in the other, the figures are atop a roughly carved piece of granite, taking the shape of a cresting wave or rising cliff. Atop the stony foundation, the project bears strong resemblance to the iconic Falconet statue of Peter I on the Neva embankment. In its strong visual similarities, the Alexander statue’s homage to Falconet’s work is apparent, yet the differences are just as striking, suggesting a paradoxical undertone to Trubetskoy’s work.

Falconet’s *Peter* is a monument to the dynamism and forward motion of a revolutionary leader, with that dynamism very clearly rendered in the statue’s brass and granite. Peter’s horse

charges forward over the precipice of a cresting wave, here roughly carved from stone, toward the banks of the Neva. Both rider and horse are in motion; while the horse stands on his back legs, he is not rearing up to pull back, but rather is preparing to leap forward. The horse's mane and particularly long tail sweep backward, accentuating the forward motion of the figures.

By comparison, the Alexander III statue, particularly as envisioned in its initial plan, embodies the halting of forward motion. The stone upon which the horse and rider stand does not form a cresting wave, as in the Peter I statue, but rather drops off abruptly, like the edge of a cliff looking over an abyss. The horse is not poised to leap off, but rather has braced his front legs against the edge of the precipice, unwilling to continue further. The rider keeps the reins short and held tight, which wrests open the horse's mouth into a grimace and pulls his head into a contortion, without the rider ever even pulling back from a neutral position. The horse's mane and tail are bobbed short, eliminating any potential to express fluidity or motion. The tsar sits squarely and solidly in his saddle, perfectly balanced and static.

Differences between the two statues extend beyond the sense of motion or inertia, particularly in the characterization of the horsemen themselves. Whereas Peter is clothed in classical garb, encircled by flowing robes and wearing a crown of laurels, drawing connections between the emperor and the emperors of classical antiquity. Alexander is dressed in the military uniform of his own, cossack-inspired design.

In the final execution of Trubetskoy's statue, the stony precipice was eliminated in favor of a rectangular podium, which greatly reduced the similarities between the statue and Falconet's work. While this substitution removed some of the potential for satirical subtext in Trubetskoy's work, it also eliminated the main dynamic element of the piece, the rising cliff, leaving the end result entirely static.

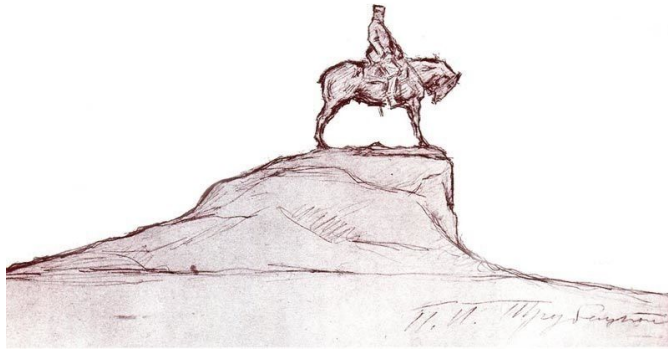


Figure 54: Trubetskoy's early sketch for the Alexander III monument



Figure 55: Falconet's monument to Peter I, St. Petersburg, Russia

Had the project been realized with the granite base, these two statues might have served as symbolic bookends to the Russian empire, one a tribute to Peter's innovation and new beginnings, and the other a sign of things ending, with the great horse coming to a forceful stop, reined in and pushed to the very edge, but never beyond.

The depiction of Alexander III on horseback differs so greatly from Falconet's Peter, that without the stone base to draw comparisons, the parallels between these two statues can become lost. Alexander is certainly no svelte classical emperor in robes and laurels; he is a stodgy, static figure in military uniform on a bloated horse. While this depiction is in many ways true to life, it also holds symbolic implications, and draws a referent to a different kind of Russian horseman, the medieval *bogatyr*, particularly of the exaggerated, semi-satirical type as seen in Vrubel's works.

Criticisms of Trubetskoy's Statue

The combination of unflattering elements in assembled in the Alexander III monument led to easy ridicule. The common nickname for the statue became "hippopotamus," referring either to the horse ("*obormot na begemote*", idiot on a hippopotamus), or the rider ("*begemot v epoletakh*", hippopotamus in epaulettes). Trubetskoy himself remained particularly tacit regarding the statue's interpretation, although he is said to have referred to the statue as "one animal atop another".

The statue's proportions recalled more than just a hippopotamus, however. This image of a large rider on an even larger steed was also reminiscent of the iconography of the *bogatyr*. Perhaps it is this reading of the statue that made it so favored by the tsar's family. Indeed, this vision of Alexander was a favorite of the tsar's widow, Maria Fedorovna. After the statue's creation, Nicholas II, the son of Maria Fedorovna and Alexander III, commissioned a commemorative Fabergé egg for his mother, which contained a miniature of the equestrian statue within it, plated in gold. These official commissions suggest that the iconography presented by Trubetskoy was a fitting image of the late tsar in the eyes of the royal family.

What critics saw as caricature and ridiculous weightiness were perhaps seen as intentional references to the *bogatyri*, who had come to be depicted as massive, larger-than-life, in their strength. These *bogatyri* had come to epitomize a native Russian power, which the late tsar had sought to embody, so in many ways the comparison was a desirable one.

Implications of Alexander as *bogatyr*

Tsar Alexander III is depicted seated atop a large horse, in a pose greatly evocative of Vrubel's *Bogatyr*. Although *Alexander's* proportions are not exaggerated to the extent of those of Vrubel's figure, both horseman and steed are massive, and give an overwhelming sense of weightiness. The horse even seems to strain under his rider's weight, knees locked and neck musculature bulging. Where Vrubel's *Bogatyr* gives the impression of being over-inflated in his brocaded garments, *Alexander* in bronze lacks all the whimsy and lightness of Vrubel's painting, and seems simply heavy. Whereas *Bogatyr* emphasizes the fantastic nature of the epic hero with its cartoonish appearance, *Alexander III* is an exercise in stark realism, clothing the tsar in plain military garb, with his horse wearing the simplest livery, mane and tail cropped close.

These same elements that produce the impression of a valiant Russian warrior in Vasnetsov's painting here convey a stodgy, immovable, oppressive ruler. Why the difference in interpretation? Part of the failure of this statue is the appropriation of visual imagery, in this case, the iconography of the *bogatyr*, without full consideration of the image's context. Few would disagree that it would have appeared farcical if Alexander had been dressed anachronistically in armor and with a mace hanging by his side. Yet by borrowing the posture and proportions of the *bogatyr*, sculptor Trubetskoy creates a visual disconnect which is not easily reconciled by the viewer. It is not apparent immediately enough that the statue's inspiration is the *bogatyr*, and

when the connection is made, there is still the mismatch of expectations: perhaps Alexander III saw himself a present-day *bogatyr*, and perhaps so too did his widow, Maria Fedorovna, who approved Trubetskoy's designs for the commemorative statue, but would the average citizen agree with this assessment?

Sculpted eleven years after the tsar's death, Trubetskoy's statue drew on existing images of the late tsar for inspiration, in particular, Valentin Serov's 1900 painting, *Alexander III Holding a Report*. Serov's influence on Trubetskoy's work is particularly strong; notice the similarities in the facial expression, the positioning of the tsar's torso and arms, down to the shape of the fabric folds of the sleeve and the crinkle of the sash. The only real difference is the statue's lack of fringed epaulettes, and, of course, the horse. Serov's *Alexander* shows the leader standing, holding a report, on the battlefield. In Trubetskoy's statue, the report has been replaced by the horse's reins, and he sits astride the massive beast.



Figure 56: Valentin Serov, *Alexander III holding a report*, 1900.

Serov's painting casts the late ruler in a somewhat unfavorable light. His eyes are downcast, a slight scowl crosses his face, and his posture, hand on hip and weight shifted to one side, conveys dissatisfaction with the news in the report he holds. Serov, a prominent portrait artist of Russia's impressionist Silver Age, did not agree with much of Alexander III's conservative politics. These attitudes seep into his painting of the tsar. Similar attitudes can be read into the Trubetskoy statue, despite the sculptor's avowal of neutrality.



Figure 57: Paolo Trubetskoy, *Monument to Alexander III*, 1909, bronze, *in situ* in Znamenskaya Ploshchad (now Ploshchad Vosstaniya)



Figure 58: Paolo Trubetskoy, *Monument to Alexander III*, 1909, bronze, Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Although the Alexander III statue drew significant criticism and even mockery, it also served as a source of artistic inspiration. Although explicitly a depiction of the late emperor, not a medieval warrior, the extent to which the statue draws upon *bogatyr* imagery did not go unnoticed by other sculptors. This Alexander-*bogatyr* connection was eventually actualized in statuary form, in a work that refigured the Alexander III statue explicitly as *bogatyr* on horseback. Designed by sculptor Alexander Kozel'sky for the Tercentenary celebrations of the Romanov dynasty in Kostroma, the 1913 Kostroma *Bogatyr* depicts a horseback *bogatyr*, using the Trubetskoy *Alexander III* as clear inspiration.

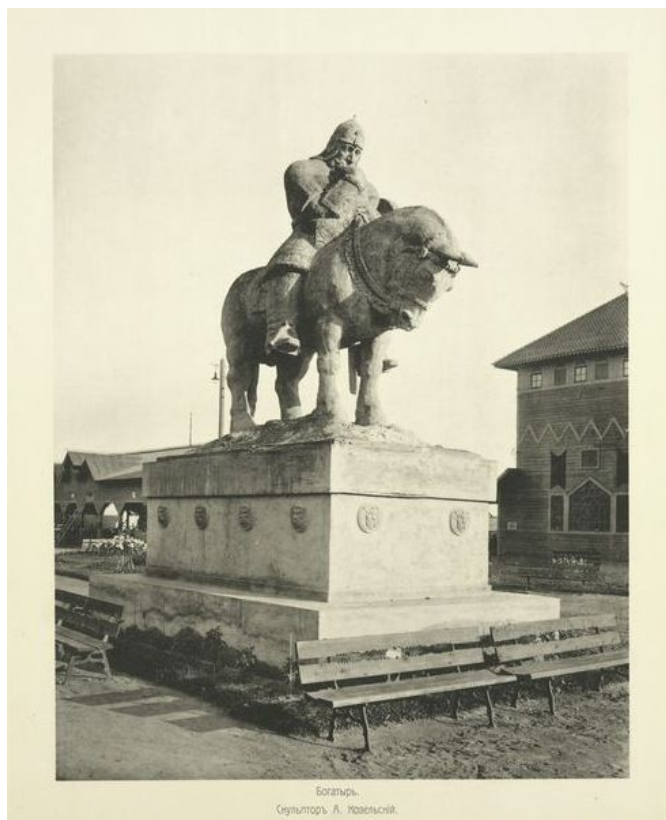


Figure 59: Alexander Kozel'sky, *Bogatyr*. 1913.

Both statues are incomplete expressions of the Alexander-*bogatyr* connection. The Trubetskoy Alexander III statue portrays the tsar stark and unflattering realism while implying the image of the *bogatyr*, and the Kostroma *Bogatyr* statue presenting a highly stylized, fairy-tale image while inviting comparison to the Alexander monument. Yet neither fully realizes the image of Alexander-as-*bogatyr*, only hinting at it from one angle or another.

The Kostroma *Bogatyr*' monument, erected in the middle of the Kostroma Tercentenary pavilion, does not represent a particular individual, but is rather a monument to an idea, to an ideal. This statue, clearly influenced in its iconography by the Trubetskoy monument, makes explicit the perceived links between Trubetskoy's representation of Alexander III and the figure of the *bogatyr*. Its connection with the tercentenary celebrations also reinforces the importance of

the *bogatyri* and medievalizing elements as national and dynastic symbols in the late days of the Romanov dynasty.

In Kozel'sky's *Bogatyry*, the horse and rider fit the same silhouette as Trubetskoy's: the same heavy-set carthorse (*bitiug*) with head down and front legs braced forward, and the same heavy, broad rider with sword hanging down. The horse's position echoes Vasnetsov's iconography for Ilya Muromets' horse in *Bogatyri*, as well as that in *Warrior at the Crossroads*, with the psychologically complex figure of the *bogatyry* considering the diverse paths ahead. It is reminiscent, too, of Trubetskoy's horse, pulled back by the bit. The horse is a composite figure, reaching a kind of neutral median: stocky and firm, neither corpulent like Vrubel's horse, nor emaciated like Trubetskoy's.

The rider, too, finds a cartoonish, vague middle ground. This rider is an "everyman," and inasmuch, is no one in particular. He is broad-shouldered and bearded, wears nondescript armor, and covers much of his face with his gloved hand, in a pensive, downcast stare. This is a very different treatment from Trubetskoy. Trubetskoy's monument to Alexander III presents the autocrat as he was in life, starkly and simply, without allegory or particular majesty. The bronze statue wears the same cavalry uniform that Alexander himself helped design for his troops, putting forth a portrait-like figure of the tsar. Kozel'sky's *Bogatyry* takes the opposite approach, and completely enters the realm of the mythological. The figure on horseback, much like Vrubel's *bogatyry*, is dressed in ornate armor, with detailed scrollwork patterns worked into the rider's boots and trim. On his left side, he carries a studded shield and wears a sword, holding the reins in his left hand, echoing the position of Ilya Muromets, the central figure in Vasnetsov's *Bogatyri*.

Many of the criticisms of Trubetskoy's realist *Alexander III* arose from the jarring disjunction between the medium of monumental sculpture, so frequently associated with laudatory, highly stylized, and mythologized images of leaders, and the sculpture's stark, unapologetic realism. Kozel'sky's *Bogatyr* can be seen as a solution to the discomfort felt in the Alexander monument. By recasting Trubetskoy's monument in pure mythological form, injecting it with the expected *bogatyr* iconography via Vasnetsov and Vrubel, Kozel'sky realizes the monumental image of the *bogatyr* in a way that the Alexander III monument was incapable.

The link between the *bogatyr*' statue and the celebrations of the Romanov tercentenary furthers the comparison between the two statues. The tercentenary celebrations were, not unexpectedly, highly retrospective in scope, but this was particularly emphasized by the fashion for the Russian revival, and the widespread trend for medievalism. The Kostroma monument, then, takes on many levels of signification. It is a signpost of contemporary tastes for antiquity, a reflection of an imagined, legendary cultural history, and an iconic representation of the dynastic family.

CHAPTER 3

KITEZH: A MEDIEVAL PARADISE LOST

The Legend of Kitezh

On the shores of Lake Svetloyar there is an invisible city, so they say. Or perhaps it is under the water. Or under the hill. But there it stands, intact and inaccessible. A real Russian city from the days of yore, from before the Revolution, before industrialization, before serfdom, before the Time of Troubles, before even the Tatar Yoke. This invisible, hidden, or submerged city of Greater Kitezh is an encapsulated remnant of a pure medieval Russia, preserved by divine intervention on the eve of its destruction by Batu Khan's invading troops in the first wave of the Mongol sieges. The truly devout can hear the bells of its cathedral tolling, and see steeples shining back in the water's reflection, and some can even enter this hallowed city.

The legend of the idyllically preserved city of Kitezh developed locally in the Nizhny Novgorod region, appearing in writing in the early seventeenth century, then developing under the influence of Old Believers, who found much in the legend that resonated with their own apocalyptic and isolationist beliefs. When the legend was first introduced to the wider Russian populace in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was couched in Old Believer rhetoric, and presented as an ethnographic curiosity, coming from a marginal, potentially threatening group. Over the next decades, public perception of the Kitezh legend and of the Old Believers would evolve. The efforts of authors such as Ivan Mel'nikov (pseudonym Andrei Pechersky) would do much to rehabilitate the Old Believers and their cultural inheritance within society at large. The Kitezh legend would also come to carry its own weight without the backdrop of the Old Believers and their oft-misunderstood beliefs. By the first decades of the twentieth century, Kitezh would come to symbolize freedom and escape from earthly tyranny, and would resonate in the works of modernist and avant-garde authors and artists such as Anna Akhmatova, Nikolai Roerich, and Zinnaida Gippius.

A crucial step in the rehabilitation of this legend was Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, *The Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, premiering at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater in 1907. This opera frames Kitezh as an earthly heaven and an authentically Russian utopia, building an image of an idealized, even edenic, medieval Russia out of religious, folk, and historical elements. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera is a pastiche of sources and genres, and the result is a composite vision of medieval Russia, factually inaccurate but conveying an essentialized, idealized view of the past.

This chapter explores the medievalism of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, investigating the compilation of historical, religious, and folkloric sources to build a particular image of Russia's medieval past, and the significance of this medieval construction in the greater trajectory of Russian Medievalism at the turn of the 20th century. As is the case with the other pieces of cultural production that this dissertation explores, I hope to show how this medievalizing vision stands independently, but also how it is a product of a pervasive trend in Russian culture through the late imperial and pre-Revolutionary period, and *Kitezh's* role in the creation of the modern conception of medieval Russia.

Crafting an Opera from *In the Forests*

In the winter of 1898-1899, when working on the fairy-tale opera *Tsar Saltan*, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and librettist Vladimir Bel'sky discussed the legend of Kitezh as a topic of interest for a future opera.⁴⁵ The idea of a Kitezh-inspired opera reemerged in correspondence between the two in May 1901, while the pair was working on *Snegurochka*, another fairy-tale piece. Rimsky-Korsakov and Bel'sky were not the only ones thinking about Kitezh at that time.

⁴⁵ Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, p 212

As part of his diploma work, the young Moscow Conservatory student Sergei Vasilenko composed and staged his own vision of the legend, “The Tale of the Great City of Kitezh and the Quiet Lake Svetloyar,” which appeared first as an opera (1900) and later as a cantata (1902).⁴⁶ Rimsky-Korsakov knew and was critical of Vasilenko’s opera.⁴⁷ Bel’sky and Rimsky-Korsakov eventually turned their attentions back to Kitezh in 1904, and in 1905 *The Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya* was more or less complete, although it was not publicly staged for another 2 years, making its official premiere at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg on 7 February, 1907.

Both Kitezh operas emerged from a growing interest in the Kitezh legend, which had been practically unknown in Russia’s capital cities a generation prior. Although it did not have national recognition, however, the legend was far from unknown. The Kitezh legend was widely popular among Old Believer populations of the Nizhny Novgorod region, and Lake Svetloyar, the supposed location of Kitezh, became a pilgrimage site for a cult-like following of devotees. In 1843, S. P. Meledin introduced the Moscow reading public to the legend of Kitezh, in his article, “Kitezh on Lake Svetloyar,” published in the journal “Moskvityanin.” Meledin was a librarian and amateur ethnographer from Nizhny Novgorod, and his article provided the Moscow readership with a description of the Kitezh legend and of the Old Believer communities from which this legend emerged.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For more on Vasilenko’s early work, particularly about the development of the Kitezh opera from Old Believer chants, see Elena Artamonova: “Sergei Vasilenko and the Old Believers,” 2013.

⁴⁷ Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: Vospominaniya, 1886 –1908*, 2: 280.

⁴⁸ Iu. G. Galai, “Avtor pervoi publikatsii o Grade Kitezhe na svetloyarskom ozere S.P. Meledin.” *Grad Kitezh, ozero Svetloyar v russkoi culture*. Nizhnyi Novgorod: Muz. A.M. Gorskogo, 1995, 38-44. Text of the Moskvityanin article can be found online at svetloyar.eu/publishing.htm

The Old Believers were not particularly well understood in the first part of the nineteenth century. The Old Believer movement (*staroobryadichestvo*) dates back to the seventeenth century, when Nikon, then the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, instituted a series of reforms to Russian religious practices. These reforms were far-reaching and affected many of the superficial, yet omnipresent, aspects of religious practice. For example, changes were made to the hand position used in making the sign of the cross, and written church texts were altered (including a change to the spelling of Jesus' name), in an attempt to bring the Russian church more in line with its Greek counterpart, the traditions of which were mistakenly considered to be more accurate and authentic. These changes, intended to purify and strengthen the Russian Church, instead fractured it irreparably, in what is known as the *Raskol*, or "schism". Those who resisted the changes became known as Old Believers, although the term misleadingly implies a homogeneity to the movement that never really existed. From very early on, those resistant to Nikon's reforms formed many different groups, and because these dissenters were strongly persecuted by both Church and State, many concealed their beliefs or went into hiding, making it difficult to accurately gauge the reach and breadth of the Old Belief.

Because so little was known about the Old Believers, living in hiding on the fringes of Russian society, they became an easy bogeyman for the popular imagination. Meledin's article on Kitezkh hints at this, with its concluding exhortation to readers to educate themselves against the damaging effects of the Old Believers' superstitions⁴⁹. In order for the Kitezkh legend to be better-received by the general Russian population, it needed to lose its connection to the Old Believers, or else the Old Believers' reputation needed to improve. While Rimsky-Korsakov's

⁴⁹ The Kitezkh cult had a somewhat negative reputation, with stories of charlatans taking advantage of pilgrims or fanatical devotees brought to harm by their own actions, neglecting food and shelter while spending cold nights on the shores of Svetloyar. Vladimir Korolenko presents an account of this cult activity in his essay, "Svetloyar, a Wild and Holy Place."

opera greatly cast away the Old Believer elements of the Kitezh legend, much of the rehabilitation of Kitezh and the Old Believer legacy was the direct result of the popular novel, *In the Forests*.

In the Forests was many Russians' first encounter with authentic (if fictionalized) Old Believers, who were not simply caricatures or stereotypes. This novel, written by Pavel Mel'nikov under the pseudonym of Andrei Pechersky in the 1870s, was the result of the author's first-hand experience living among the Old Believer sketes around Nizhny Novgorod. Mel'nikov-Pechersky went to the Old Believers as a government official, employed to learn about, report on, and ultimately undermine and destroy these sketes. In the course of this work, however, Mel'nikov-Pechersky gained an appreciation for the Old Believers and their way of life, and in his stories and novels sought to put a human face to this generally misunderstood population. These efforts were widely successful, and did much to demystify the Old Believers and Kitezh, which proves central to the work. The novel opens by highlighting the Kitezh legend's centrality to the worldview of the novel and the region's inhabitants:

The upper Transvolga - the edge of freedom. There the people are leisurely, sprightly, bright and clever. That kind of Transvolga north of Rybinsk, down to the mouth of the Kerzhens. Lower it's not the thing: there is a wooded thicket, the meadows of the Cheremis, the Chuvash, the Tatars. And still lower, beyond the Kama, where the steppe reaches, the people there are different: although they're Russian, they aren't the same kind as up North. There, it's a new settlement, whereas in the Transvolga up North, the Rus' of old settled among the forests and swamps. According to what the people say, the Novgorodians from the time of old Rurik settled there. The wound of Batu's destruction is still fresh there. They'll show you "Batu's warpath" and the location of the invisible city of Kitezh on lake Svetlyi Yar. The whole city stands there to this day - from the white-stone walls, gold-topped churches, from the monasteries, the decorated royal terems, from the boyars' stone palaces, the homes hewn from the incorruptible, old woods. The whole city, just invisible.

This introduction to the world of the novel sets it apart from the urban Russia many of its readers would have known, and also inextricably intertwines this world and the Kitezh legend. Even if

readers of *In the Forests* read no further than the first page, they would still learn about Kitezh, the invisible city in this remote wooded region, settled by the “Rus’ of old.”

Melnikov-Pechersky’s writing helped propel the Kitezh legend far into the cultural imagination of Russia’s intellectuals, not in the least by making the bearers of this legend, the Old Believers, appear more sympathetic to an Orthodox readership. The Old Believers of *In the Forests* were not bogeymen or demons, but rather hardworking Russians with a strong sense of tradition and a close connection to a more ancient vision of Russia. This was quite an appealing idea to many Russians who felt disenfranchised by Russia’s varied attempts at rapid modernization, and who felt that connections to an older, more “authentic” Russia were being lost in the process.

This feeling of loss was multifaceted. It included the loss of a primeval natural landscape to industrialization and deforestation, the loss of Orthodoxy’s primacy in an age of growing religious skepticism, and the loss of faith in the autocracy, as just some of its many elements. Each of these perceived losses helped to spark a renewed interest in Russia’s past, and Kitezh, a city led by the god-loving Prince Yuri, the preserve of the faithful set in the virgin forest, became a model example of the lost Russia many sought to recapture.

Clearly Kitezh was in the air in the late nineteenth century, but its image was changing. When Sergei Vasilenko created his operatic version of the Kitezh legend, “The Tale of the Great City of Kitezh and the Quiet Lake Svetloyar,” he took great pains to frame Kitezh as a local legend particular to the Nizhny Novgorod Old Believers. In his research for the opera, Vasilenko studied the Old Believers closely, and the finished opera incorporated many elements of Old

Believer chants.⁵⁰ Even the opera's title ties the "Tale" to its geographic locale, which makes it more specific to the particular Old Believer communities around Svetloyar.

In Rimsky-Korsakov's *Kitezh*, the focus of the legend is no longer its local, Old Believer heritage, but instead its universality and importance for all Russians. In order to facilitate this interpretation, Rimsky-Korsakov blends the Kitezh legend with elements from Russian folklore and the mainstream Orthodox tradition, creating a vision of Kitezh that is stripped of its Old Believer roots, and instead speaks of a lost past and a universal hope for salvation.

"What's in a name" - A maiden by the name of Fevroniya

In Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya*, the events of the Kitezh legend share the stage and the focus with the character of Fevroniya, whose introduction into the narrative serves many distinct purposes. On a purely pragmatic level, Fevroniya introduces a female voice into the otherwise male-dominated score, and also provides a love interest for *Kitezh*'s male lead, into the militaristic-religious narrative. According to Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs, he and Bel'sky had envisioned a connection between the legend of Kitezh and St. Fevroniya from their very first conversations about the project, in the winter of 1898-9, some five years before the real work on the opera would be undertaken.⁵¹ This section will explore the character of Fevroniya in *Kitezh*: the origins of her character, the roles and functions she plays in the opera, and the way her incorporation into *Kitezh* helps

⁵⁰ Elena Artamonova: "Sergei Vasilenko and the Old Believers," 2013.

⁵¹ N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*.

transform the Kitezh legend from a local and obscure Old Believer tradition into a universally-appealing, complex vision of Holy Russia onstage.

As a character from a medieval text and a canonized Orthodox saint, Fevroniya lends a kind of authenticity to the Kitezh legend. Fevroniya and her husband Peter have held a singular role in Russian culture as an Orthodox representation of fidelity, love, and the sanctity of marriage.⁵²

While this authenticity and familiarity is an asset to the construction of *Kitezh*'s medieval landscape, it is also a liability. Russian theater regulations at the time prohibited the portrayal of saints on a secular stage, making Fevroniya's appearance potentially problematic. In early drafts of the libretto, Bel'sky had altered his heroine's identity, renaming her "Alyonushka" or "Olyonushka." Andrei Rimksy-Korsakov, the composer's son, writes:

Fevroniya is the name of an Orthodox saint having a legendary hagiography celebrated by the church (June 25th; her date of death is reckoned to be 1228). True, the saint was not a virgin, but the wife of Prince Peter of Murom. But in another respect, her hagiography served as inspirational material for the Legend, which means that the retention of her name (without the Alyonushka mask) for the operatic heroine can only be attributed to censorship issues. Seemingly, the protorevolutionary period came to the rescue. The publication of the Legend took place during a time of limited "liberalization" in censorship (at least concerning church observances). Evidently, after inquiring with the official responsible for publication matters, a decision was made to reveal the pseudonym of the Legend's heroine, and a Russian saint entered through the scaffolding of the opera stage.⁵³

This name swapping sheds light on tensions within Fevroniya's character in *Kitezh*, caused by the interplay of elements incorporated from the *Tale* and intentional deviations from her saintly namesake. Is she really St. Fevroniya, despite all the differences the opera introduces? It

⁵² This role has been put to use in recent years by the Russian Patriarchate and government together, in the creation of The All-Russian Day of Family, Love, and Faithfulness (*Vserossiskiy den' sem'i lyubvi i vernosti*), instituted in 2008 as an element in the battle against climbing divorce rates and the declining population growth in Russia. The Moscow Patriarchate has since instituted a second devotional day to Saints Peter and Fevroniya, September 19, in commemoration of the transfer of their relics in 1992. For more on these holidays in the Patriarchate, see <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/424501.html>; <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/2674273.html>

⁵³ A.N. Rimskiy-Korsakov, *N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov: zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 5: 78.

also indicates another set of sources for the opera's heroine: the folk tale "Alyonushka and Ivanushka" as collected by Afanasyev, as well as the 1881 painting, "Alyonushka," by Viktor Vasnetsov. Ultimately, despite the potential complications that using a saint's name for their title character could present, Rimsky-Korsakov and Bel'sky chose "Fevroniya" over "Alyonushka" and all other names. This section will explore the characterization of Fevroniya in *Kitezh*, through the prototypes of St. Fevroniya and Alyonushka, with an investigation of the resulting figure: a medieval maiden, a romantic heroine, a peasant, a princess, and through the culmination of these aspects, an allegorical and prophetic incarnation of Holy Mother Russia and the mystical biblical figure of the Woman Clothed in the Sun from Revelation.

St. Fevroniya comes to us from *The Tale of Peter and Fevroniya of Murom*, a sixteenth-century text by Hermolaus-Erasmus based on earlier local traditions, arguably originating soon after the saint's death in the thirteenth century. The *Tale's* writing closely coincides with the canonization of Saints Fevroniya and Peter in 1547 by the All-Russian Church Council in Moscow, under Metropolitan Macarius. Both the *Tale* and the pair's canonization were part of a larger effort to introduce more Russian saints and in doing so, strengthen the Russian Orthodox Church. The principle characters of the *Tale*, Peter and Fevroniya, are not well-established historical personages, although a link to a historical Prince David of Murom, ruling from 1203 to 1228, has been hypothesized.

To fully understand the Fevroniya of *Kitezh*, we must look closely at the *Tale*, and how the character of Fevroniya is constructed therein. *The Tale of Peter and Fevroniya*, while chronicling episodes from the lives of two canonized saints, does not conform to many hagiographic expectations. It is lacking the commonplaces of Orthodox hagiographies that readers come to

expect, such as stories of the saint's estranged and prodigious childhood, a call to holy duty, and the practice of ascetic discipline. The stories of saints Peter and Fevroniya do not appear in the *Velikiye Chet'yi-Minei*, the official menologium of the Russian Orthodox Church, signaling the *Tale's* extracanonical status. One reason for its exclusion from the menologium is the *Tale's* "middle genre"; many of its elements are heavily influenced by oral folk traditions, and the *Tale* incorporates many secular features, causing some to call this one of Russia's earliest secular written works (despite its saintly subject matter), and it is also argued to be the first and only extant Old Russian love story.⁵⁴

The Fevroniya Tale

The Fevroniya *Tale* is divided into four sections: The diabolical serpent; the healing of the wounds; the boyars' intrigue; and monastic life and miracle of the tomb. The first episode is one of the more fantastical of the *Tale*, and serves as means of background, as neither Fevroniya nor Peter, the two eponymous characters, feature prominently until the section's very conclusion. In it, a diabolical serpent seduces and debases the wife of Prince Paul (Pavel) of Murom, by convincingly taking Paul's shape and coming to the princess' chambers. When the unnamed princess realizes the deception, she confesses to her husband, who devises a trap to slay the demon/devil: the wife is to trick the serpent into divulging the means of his own death (presuming that as a demon he has such foresight). The serpent explains that "death will come from Peter's hand and Agric's sword," which is the first mention of Peter, Paul's brother and co-

⁵⁴ Serge Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*. See also, Likhachev, D. i. S. and Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii dom) (1980). *Istoriia russkoi literatury X-XVII vekov : uchebnoe posobie*. Moskva, Prosveshchenie.

ruler of Murom.⁵⁵ Serendipitously, Peter comes upon Agric's sword, and when given the opportunity, he slays the serpent and restores order and marital propriety to Murom, as until this point, it is presumed that the demon/serpent is still maintaining illicit relations with Paul's wife. In eradicating the serpent, however, Peter is splattered by its blood, and soon is covered from head to toe with incurable sores and ulcers.

Seeking a cure for Peter's sores, aides travel to Ryazan', known for its doctors, where they find Fevroniya, a clever peasant maiden. She speaks in riddles and confounds the aides, but ultimately sends them away with a salve made from leaven and instructions for a cure, demanding to be wed to Peter as payment. The cure is successful, but when Peter reneges on his commitment to wed Fevroniya, his sores return. Ultimately they are married, much to the chagrin of the Murom boyars and especially the boyars' wives, who resent having a princess of low birth ruling over them. The boyars make several attempts to turn Peter against Fevroniya and to make him send her away, but their marriage is loving and pious, and Peter has no desire to quit his wife, nor break God's commandment to faithful matrimony. Fevroniya, for her part, manages to gain the upper hand in these intrigues by both fashioning miracles, and by outwitting the boyars. Fevroniya agrees to leave Murom if she is allowed to take one thing with her. The boyars agree readily, and Fevroniya departs, taking her "one thing," Prince Peter, with her. Eventually the boyars petition Peter and Fevroniya to return and rule Murom once more, as their strife had led them to destruction.

Peter and Fevroniya live quiet, peaceful lives ruling Murom, and in old age they take monastic vows. Fevroniya and takes the name Efrosinia, and Peter takes the name David. When

⁵⁵ Agric was a mythical bogatyr, or warrior, of Russian folk epics (bylini), who used his magic sword to kill evil beasts, such as the serpent in the *Tale*. Zenkovsky, 290.

Peter is nearing death, he entreats Fevroniya to join him, to die in the same day.⁵⁶ She puts him off, as she is finishing an embroidered altar-cloth (*vozdukh*, cf. Greek ἀεϛ) for the church, but when Peter insists that his death is imminent, she sticks her needle into the embroidery and the two die in the same hour of the same day. Thinking it improper to have a monk and a nun lie together in one tomb, their bodies are interred in separate graves, with Fevroniya outside the city, but the next morning they are found together in the joint tomb they had erected within the courtyard of the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin. The townspeople once more separated the bodies, moving Fevroniya again outside the city walls, but on the next morning both bodies had returned to the joint tomb, where they were allowed to remain. The *Tale* then ends with remarks about the miraculous powers of the saints' relics, firmly re-grounding the text in the realm of hagiographic conventions at its conclusion.

Situating Fevroniya

Placing Fevroniya into the Kitezh legend might seem like a stretch to some, but on further reflection, she is a surprisingly fitting choice. Although her chronology and location are not exact matches for the Kitezh legend, they approximate the time and place, making her a remarkably feasible, if contrafactual, persona to incorporate into an operative retelling of a legend. In terms of chronology, her story is set in the early thirteenth century, just like Kitezh. Saint Fevroniya is said to have died June 25, 1228, which is almost exactly ten years before Batu Khan's advance on Rus', placing Fevroniya in a very similar time period to the Kitezh legend. What's more, the chronologies of Kitezh are complicated, or confused, in the textual tradition. The date of Batu

⁵⁶ The formula, "and they died in the same day" is standard fare of folk-tales, akin to "and they lived happily ever after."

Khan's approach to Kitezh is recorded in variants of the *Chronicler* as either 6747 A.M. (1238 A.D.) or 6751 A.M. (1242 A.D.)⁵⁷, while the *Chronicler* alleges that it was written in 6646, 6676, or 6666, depending on the manuscript, suggesting a more metaphorical understanding of these dates.

Not only does Fevroniya's story have chronological proximity to Kitezh, but it also has geographic proximity. In the *Tale*, Fevroniya moves along the Oka river between Ryazan' and Murom, at the eastern edge of the Rus' principalities. Lesser Kitezh, located on the Volga, and Greater Kitezh on Lake Svetloyar, were said to be ruled by Iurii Vsevelodovich II, prince of Vladimir-Suzdal'. Prior to the Mongol invasions the principalities of Muromo-Ryazan' and Vladimir-Suzdal' had a long history of feuds and battles over territory, but their close proximity and placement along trade routes meant that the inhabitants also shared many cultural features. Both principalities also bore the brunt of the first wave of the Mongol invasions, and had Fevroniya lived some ten years later, she would have surely been affected by Batu Khan's forces.

⁵⁷ Komarovich, 175. Note the difficulty in maintaining accurate chronologies amidst different dating systems, as the conventions for the date of the origin of the world has varied in time and place, giving as much as a two-year difference in dates.



Figure 60: Map of Transvolga regions in historical context

The *Tale* does not mention Fevroniya’s place in a greater historical arc, nor does the narrative consider the occurrences that would take place a decade later. Hermolaus-Erasmus, writing the *Tale* in the mid-sixteenth century, was concerned with producing local Russian histories to strengthen the claims of the Russian Orthodox Church, but there was no need for him to emphasize the particular chronology of Fevroniya and Peter’s rule of Murom; simply situating them in Old Russia was enough. In fact, the *Tale* as written makes no mention of exact years; these have been introduced as part of the surrounding tradition, and in connection with the known death date of Prince David of Murom. Nonetheless, through the context of the St. Fevroniya tradition, we can see that Fevroniya belongs to the very last generation of the pre-Mongol Rus’.

The Mongol invasions mark one of the two major pre-modern “revolutions” which subdivide Russia’s medieval period. The changes that Russia undergoes in the period following the Mongol

invasions are great, and from that point onward, the period of “antiquity,” of pre-Mongol Rus’, becomes ossified in cultural memory as a sort of golden age, and fertile ground for imaginative representations of a Russia “long, long ago.” Here, we can see that Saint Fevroniya is situated at the cusp of this transition, and as such is a prime representative of this golden age, a pre-Mongol, purely Rus’ian Old Russia. This status becomes very valuable for Rimsky-Korsakov and Bel’sky in the creation of their *Kitezha*, which is very concerned with the presentation of a holy, untainted Russia. Who better to serve as the female romantic lead for such a project than Fevroniya, patroness of love and family, and one of the last princesses of the eastern Russian principalities completely ignorant of the Mongol threat?

Fevroniya - Personification

According to Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s own description of the sources of *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezha and the Maiden Fevroniya*, the opera was inspired by, among other texts, “one episode of the legend of Fevroniya of Murom.”⁵⁸ With analysis of both the opera and *The Tale of Peter and Fevroniya*, it is clear that *many* elements throughout the *Fevroniya Tale* have made their way into *Kitezha*, although some have been significantly transformed. An explanation for downplaying the connection between *Kitezha* and the *Tale* could stem from fear of censorship. While the opera does retain the name “Fevroniya,” no allusions to her saintliness appear, thus avoiding complications that could be caused by the prohibition of saints on stage. Even Rimsky-Korsakov’s phrasing, “the legend of Fevroniya of Murom,” strips away the hagiographic elements that would have been made more prominent by calling the text the *Tale of*

⁵⁸ Quoted in Rimskiy-Korsakov, N. A. *Rimskiy-Korsakov: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo*, 5: 75.

Peter and Fevroniya or the *Life of St. Fevroniya*. Despite such circumlocutions, Fevroniya of *Kitezha* shares far more with her saintly namesake than the events of one of the *Tale*'s episodes.

Fevroniya of the *Tale* is a wily peasant maiden whose healing powers, wit, and wisdom gain her the hand of prince Peter and with it, the title of princess of Murom. In the *Tale*, Fevroniya's sharp tongue and her skills as a healer allow her to transcend the social status of her low birth, and it is primarily her cleverness that helps her keep this elevated position, despite the discontent expressed by the Murom boyars. In *Kitezha*, Fevroniya likewise is a peasant woman with healing powers, who too is to be wedded to the prince, in this case, Vsevolod Yurievich⁵⁹. What is strikingly missing from Fevroniya of *Kitezha* is the cleverness, the wit, and ultimately, the agency that Saint Fevroniya possesses. Instead of riddles, Fevroniya of *Kitezha* speaks in platitudes. Her sharp tongue and practical wisdom have not been eradicated entirely, because Fevroniya of *Kitezha*, like her saintly counterpart, remains a vocal character, and is lauded for her wisdom. She has, however, undergone a transformation, and her source of wisdom is no longer internal cleverness, but instead external holiness. Fevroniya of *Kitezha* is less a font of wit and more a vessel, filled with love, mercy and compassion.

This transformation of Fevroniya's character flattens her, from the perspective of character analysis, and also removes some of the recognizable characteristics of Fevroniya's background (perhaps for censorship reasons, suggesting that the character is not *Saint Fevroniya* at all). At the same time, by rendering Fevroniya two-dimensional, with only her deep connection to nature and her moral compass to guide us in our reading of her character, she is simplified. The challenging aspects of Fevroniya's characterization in the *Tale*, particularly the blend of folkloric

⁵⁹ While a historical personage of this name did exist, there is no record of his actions during Batu Khan's siege of Vladimir-Suzdal'. He is presumed to have died in battle, perhaps at the Battle of the Sit with his father, Yuri Vsevolodovich, in 1238.

and secular elements into the hagiography, are eliminated. In this way, she is made less secular, less a product of a developing sixteenth-century literary corpus, and more an Orthodox icon. Like an icon, her essence is boiled down into clear and discernible traits, leaving no doubts about how she should be interpreted. In this way, we can argue that Fevroniya of *Kitezh* is made far more “medieval” than her twelfth-century namesake.



Figure 61: Icon of Peter and Fevroniya of Murom, anonymous, XVI c., Central Museum of Old Russian Culture and Art, Moscow

While on the surface this appears contradictory, Fevroniya’s transformation achieves two distinct goals. On the one hand, because of censorship regulations, Saint Fevroniya cannot

appear onstage, and as such, Fevroniya of *Kitezh* is lacking of many of Saint Fevroniya's specific attributes, her miracles, and her characteristic sharp tongue, making her more appropriate for the stage. On the other hand, while this new Fevroniya is not an Orthodox saint, she is exceptionally holy. Simplifying Fevroniya's character and by removing some of her complicated, less orthodox aspects, allows her to become a symbolic, iconic representation of piety.

Alyonushka

In Bel'sky's first full draft of the *Kitezh* libretto, the female lead was named "Alyonushka" or "Olyonushka." Scholarship on the opera has called this a "mask" that conceals Fevroniya's true identity, and has suggested that the sole reason for this alternate, temporary name was the fear of censorship, considering the prohibition of depicting saints on stage.⁶⁰ The name "Alyonushka" itself, however, comes with cultural associations that held strong resonance in late-nineteenth century Russia: the folk tale "Sister Alyonushka, Brother Ivanushka," and Viktor Vasnetsov's 1881 painting, "Alyonushka." In this section, I will explore how these two "Alyonushka"s influenced the character development of *Kitezh*'s heroine, and I will suggest alternate explanations for why, in the end, Fevroniya is not "Alyonushka."

"Sister Alyonushka, Brother Ivanushka" is a folk tale, found in Afanasyev's *Ruskiye Narodniye Skazki*, published between 1855-1867. In the Aarne-Thompson-Uther folklore classification system, it corresponds to type 450, the brother and the sister, and similar versions appear in many other European folktale traditions. In this tale, Alyonushka and her brother

⁶⁰ Simon Morrison, in his *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*, says, "Since the Russian government prohibited the depiction of saints on stage, St. Fevroniya of Murom was renamed 'Alyonushka' and 'Olyonushka' in the first draft of the libretto." (129). Andrey Rimsky-Korsakov too refers to the "Alyonushka mask" (in Morrison, 130).

Ivanushka are left alone to fend for themselves when their elderly parents die.⁶¹ As they wander, Ivanushka becomes thirsty, but upon each body of water that he encounters, his elder sister Alyonushka prohibits him from drinking, warning that he will be transformed into a beast. First, he sees a puddle in a cow's pasture, but Alyonushka warns that he will turn into a calf. Next, he sees a river where horses are drinking, but she warns that he will turn into a foal. Then he sees a lake with a flock of rams, but Alyonushka says he will turn into a lamb. Next he sees a stream where pigs are drinking, but she warns that he'll become a piglet. Finally, he sees water with a herd of goats drinking from it. He disregards his sister's warnings, drinks from the water, and is magically transformed into a goat kid.

Alyonushka, weeping with despair, ties a leash around kid-Ivanushka, and is soon found by a nobleman, who takes pity on her in her great sorrow. He marries her, and kid-Ivanushka comes to live with them. Soon, a witch becomes jealous of Alyonushka, and one day when the merchant is away, the witch casts Alyonushka to the bottom of the river, tied down by stones. The witch takes Alyonushka's clothes and assumes her form, and passes herself off as Alyonushka in her husband's house. Kid-Ivanushka, however, recognizes the substitution, and because of this, the witch tries to have him killed. He flees to the river, where he sings to Alyonushka, trapped below. The nobleman's servant follows kid-Ivanushka, and hearing the sound of someone under the river, brings the nobleman to investigate. They pull Alyonushka up from the riverbed, untie

⁶¹ In some versions of the tale, the parents are in fact a king and queen, and the princess Alyonushka finds her way to marry the king of a neighboring kingdom. For the purposes of this analysis, I am working with Afanasyev's second variant, tale number 261, which involves a peasant girl and a merchant. This variant includes, among other similarities to the *Kitez* story, the tensions with social mobility that are at play in *The Tale of Peter and Fevroniya* and *Kitez*.

the stone, dress her in bright clothes, and she is restored to life, more beautiful than before. Ivanushka's spell is also broken, and he is restored to his original human form.⁶²

Several fairytale motifs from *Alyonushka* directly pertain to our analysis of *Kitezha*: Alyonushka living alone with her brother, her discovery in the wilderness, her enviable social-climbing marriage, her resurrection from underwater interment, and her special relationship with animals. "Sister Alyonushka and Brother Ivanushka" opens with the death of Alyonushka and Ivanushka's parents, leaving the two alone to look after themselves. It is not clear where exactly they live, but in all variants of the story, Alyonushka and Ivanushka must then go on a journey, suggesting that they are unable to sustain themselves at home.⁶³ Although it is not explicitly stated, the implication is that this home is in a remote place, as their journey is a trial and the two quickly succumb to thirst, encountering no signs of civilization on their way. Compare this to Fevroniya: at the opera's opening, Fevroniya is living in the woods with her brother, a woodsman, and lives too far from the nearest church to attend regular services. Vsevolod, who has gone deep into the woods to hunt, is surprised to find her living so far from civilization. While the motif of a young woman living alone with her brother in the woods is hardly so unique in folklore that one is obliged to find its source, it is one of multiple motifs in *Kitezha* that can be linked to the Alyonushka tale.

Another folklore motif shared by *Kitezha* and *Alyonushka* is that of a prince finding a peasant maiden in the woods and marrying her, causing jealousy in others. Granted, in *Alyonushka* the "prince" is only a lord, or even a merchant in some of the story's variants, but nonetheless, he

⁶² A. Afanasyev, *Narodnye Russkie Skazki*. Moscow: Alpha-Kniga, 2008. 616-7

⁶³ In Proppian analysis, this tale has a double-dose of β , absention, with both the death of parents and the departure on a journey.

represents a stable future for an orphan girl and her transfigured/disfigured brother. The disparity in social status between Alyonushka and her husband is shown to be source of discontent: “They married and lived in a way such that good people were happy for them, and black-hearted people envied them.”⁶⁴ Though not stated outright, it is this envy which is the implied cause of the witch’s treachery, as the account of the witch’s evildoing follows immediately after the above quote. In *Kitezha*, *Alyonushka*, and in the *Tale of St. Fevroniya* as well, the envy of others towards the betrothed (*Kitezha*) or new bride (*Fevroniya*, *Alyonushka*) is a central conflict. In *Alyonushka*, the conflict is resolved magically when Alyonushka and Ivanushka’s respective enchantments are broken. In *The Tale of St. Fevroniya*, Fevroniya outwits the jealous boyars, who eventually resign themselves to being ruled by a peasant. In *Kitezha*, the boyars’ jealousy is attacked as unchristian and immoral. Despite the variety of resolutions of the conflict, these three stories function in parallel.

Another connection between *Alyonushka* and *Kitezha* involves the linked motifs of water and resurrection. In *Alyonushka*, the heroine is cast underwater, in some versions under a lake and in others under the sea, by a shape shifting witch. She is not drowned, but remains underwater and can be heard by her brother Ivanushka, the one character in the story who recognizes the deception enacted by the evil witch, and who stays faithful to his sister. Because of Ivanushka’s devotion to his sister, manifest when he returns to speak to her several times, the truth of her captivity and the witch’s trickery becomes known to others. Through the help of the good townspeople, Alyonushka is dredged up from the water, and in her resurrected form appears even more beautiful than before.

⁶⁴ Afanasyev, 616.

Compare this to the apotheosis of the Kitezh legend: due to the assaults of the godforsaken Batu Khan, the city of Greater Kitezh is submerged below Lake Svetloyar. There, it can only be seen and heard indirectly, through reflections in the water or the echoes of church bells. However, as legend has it, the city lives eternal in peace and beauty, and will be restored for the faithful believers at the Last Judgment as part of the heavenly kingdom. Clearly, both the Alyonushka story and the Kitezh legend attribute similar powers to the water, treating it as a barrier between the “real” world and an altered state of stasis, a place of waiting. The water also creates a positive transformation, making Alyonushka more beautiful, and making holy Kitezh divine. The link to the sacrament of baptism should be noted here: by emerging from the water, the baptized person is reborn “of water and Spirit,” newly sanctified.⁶⁵ Both *Alyonushka* and *Kitezh* can be read as allegories for baptism, on two very different scales.

Talking to Animals, part I - Alyonushka

When Ivanushka is transformed into a goat, Alyonushka’s relationship with him does not change, and she treats him with exceptional tenderness. When she marries, Alyonushka keeps the goat as part of the family, and kid-Ivanushka takes his meals at the table with Alyonushka and her husband. This special bond is amplified when Alyonushka is cast underwater by the witch. Kid-Ivanushka stands at the water’s edge and sings to his sister, and Alyonushka sings back in reply from under the water:

Ivanushka:

Alyonushka, my sister,

⁶⁵ John 3:5.

Swim up, swim up to the shore!
Blazing fires are burning,
Bubbling kettles are boiling,
Keen knives are a-sharpening,
They want to slaughter me!

Alyonushka:

Ivanushka, my brother,
A heavy stone pulls me to the bottom,
A cruel serpent has bitten deep in my heart!⁶⁶

In the folktale, Alyonushka's special ability to communicate with Ivanushka in his animal form is due to the pair's close bond and Ivanushka's magical transformation, not because of any special skills Alyonushka might have. This is shown by the fact that Alyonushka is not shown communicating with other animals, whereas Ivanushka is able to express his wishes to Alyonushka's husband, when he requests leave to go to the water's edge. While this is a very specific instance of being able to speak with animals, and is highly contingent on the exact conditions of this folk tale, it serves as an early prototype for Fevroniya of *Kitezh*, and her supernatural ability to communicate with nature.⁶⁷

Vasnetsov's "Alyonushka"

Vasnetsov's painting, "Alyonushka," depicts the folk heroine, seated by still water. Her floral, summery dress is tattered, her feet bare and dirty, her hair disheveled. She gazes off blankly into the distance with wide, tear-filled eyes. Around her, fallen yellow leaves signal a change of seasons, warning of the impending cold, which she seems utterly unprepared for with her light frock, short sleeves and bare feet. The sky, too, shows signs that the day is ending, as

⁶⁶ Afanasyev, 615.

⁶⁷ For more on this connection with animals, see below, "St. Sergius" and "Sleeping Beauty."

darkness creeps in along the edges of the frame. The water before her is dark and stagnant, and we can just barely see the girl's feet reflected; the rest of her reflection dissolves into the tenebrous water. The seated figure clasps her hands and knees to herself, perhaps in a defensive posture or perhaps to keep warm.



Figure 62: *Alyonushka*, 1881, Viktor Vasnetsov. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Entirely surrounding her is the Russian landscape. She is set in front of an impenetrable wall of pine and flanked by aspens, characteristic flora of northern European Russia. The figure occupies her own middle plane in front of this backdrop, but is surrounded on all sides, and the

river grasses in the far foreground make a screen between the viewer and the figure, emphasizing her encapsulation within this natural realm, and our own removal from the scene.

The painting is not a narrative tableau, and does not depict any recognizable scene from the “Alyonushka” story. We can suppose that the girl is mourning the loss of her brother Ivanushka from the folktale, but this is only speculation; Ivanushka is not shown here. In fact, aside from the seated girl and the flora surrounding her, the only other figures in the painting are a row of swallows seated on a branch above Alyonushka’s head, darkly blending into the trees behind them and easy to miss on first viewing.

The water and stones in the painting do hint at a scene toward the end of “Sister Alyonushka, Brother Ivanushka”: Alyonushka’s underwater imprisonment. In the murky water’s reflection, we can only see the stone, the girl’s feet and the hem of her underskirt. In the distortion of the water, this white band resembles a rope, tied around her ankles and binding her to the stone, in parallel with Alyonushka’s captivity in the story.

Even above water, Alyonushka seems trapped. She casts her vacant stare toward the water, with her head flopped lifelessly onto her hands, collapsed onto herself. The expression on her face is blank; she is the victim of inertia, trapped in the space between two “inhospitable” zones, the dark water before her and the thick, impenetrable forest behind her. Critics have read this painting as a depiction of grief, loneliness, and human isolation.

Vasnetsov’s “Alyonushka” made its public *début* as part of the ninth exhibition of the “Peredvizhniki” (Wanderers) group in March of 1881. This exhibition was scheduled to open at the Yusupov Palace on Sunday March 1, but the opening was unexpectedly postponed by the shocking news of Tsar Alexander II’s assassination that very day. When the strict mourning

lifted and the exhibition opened, the art-going crowds were met by, among other works, “The Morning of the Streltsy Execution,” by Vasily Surikov, a relative newcomer to the Peredvizhniki group. The striking political nature of the painting, combined with the grisly events connected with the would-have-been opening day, brought a surge of interest in the exhibition as a whole, and Alyonushka gained vast exposure in its first weeks of display.⁶⁸ After touring St. Petersburg and Moscow with the Peredvizhniki’s traveling exhibition, “Alyonushka” was acquired by the Tretyakov Gallery Board of Trustees in 1899. It became part of the Tretyakov’s permanent collection in Moscow, where it remains to this day.

Given this exhibition history, it is safe to say that Vasnetsov’s painting was well-known among the art-going public, and it is likely that this image had begun to influence the way in which people interpreted the “Alyonushka” story. Rimsky-Korsakov himself would certainly have been familiar with Vasnetsov’s painting. The composer and painter began a working relationship in the early 1880s: at the same time as Vasnetsov was finishing “Alyonushka” in 1881, he was beginning work on costume designs for Ostrovsky’s play, “Snegurochka,” with Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera of the same name in the works.⁶⁹

This well-known vision of Vasnetsov’s Alyonushka, sad, broken, and alone, is a far cry from the radiant, triumphant Fevroniya we see at the end of *Kitezh*. Regardless of the extent to which Rimsky-Korsakov and Bel’sky saw the Alyonushka story as inspiration for their female lead, the disconnect between this image of Alyonushka and their ideal for the opera’s heroine was likely enough to make the librettist and composer think twice about the name. Vasnetsov’s

⁶⁸ Churak, Galina. “Vasily Surikov: ‘I Loved Beauty Everywhere’.” *Masterpieces of Russian Art 2006* : 92–99.

⁶⁹ Letter from I.E. Repin to V.V. Stasov, 20 Dec 1881. Quoted in *Abramtsevo: Iskusstvo i zhizn’*, ed. Eleonora Paston. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 2003. p. 87.

“Alyonushka” was still very much in the public spotlight during the opera’s composition, and has remained an iconic image of human despair.

Fevroniya's role

So what *is* Fevroniya’s role in the opera? As already mentioned, her name alone brings along connotations of Russia’s medieval heritage, links to the Orthodox church, and a sense of piety, fidelity, and sanctified love, due to associations with Saint Fevroniya. But Fevroniya of *Kitezh* comes to represent far more. In this section, I will explore the characterization of Fevroniya as a Russian peasant princess, and investigate how this characterization informs the opera’s syncretic theology of natural compassion.

Fevroniya of *Kitezh*, like her saintly namesake as well as Alyonushka, comes from humble origins, but ends up in a much higher social stratum. It is a fairy-tale trope: a peasant girl meets a handsome prince, they fall in love and overcome their class divide, despite the objections of bystanders who find the match inappropriate, either out of jealousy or from strong convictions about the immutability of the social hierarchy. In *Kitezh* and the *Tale of Peter and Fevroniya*, although the romantic match is made in different ways, the end result is the same: Fevroniya is to become the princess, and the boyars’ wives criticize the choice, refusing to bow before a woman with no title and of lowly birth. In *Alyonushka*, the witch is clearly jealous of Alyonushka and covets her husband, who in different versions of the folktale is either a merchant or a prince, although the witch’s exact motivations and reasons for jealousy are not explored in the story.

Fevroniya is a peasant and is self-sufficient, a quality that is applauded in the opera as well as its sources. Fevroniya of *Kitezh* is an orphan who lives with her brother, a woodsman, and whose intimate knowledge of the forests where she lives allows her to live easily in the woods, if not always comfortably: “We have no great abundance, and the winter sometimes brings hardship, but then spring comes to the forest...and winter’s freezing cold is soon forgotten.”⁷⁰ Fevroniya understands the machinations of the forest, its inner workings and cycles, and is able to use her knowledge of plants to tend to Vsevolod’s wounds. Her connection to nature in the opera reinforces several stereotypes: peasants are innately in tune with nature, as they have not been corrupted by urban forces that would lead them away from a pure lifestyle; peasant women, in particular, are even more connected to the earth and its natural cycles; young peasant maidens have a unique innocence which allows them a privileged relationship with nature.⁷¹

This archetype of the peasant maiden in the forest appears in folklore across Europe, and persists today. Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) uses a strikingly similar vision of a peasant maiden in the woods, reasserting the archetype (and perhaps *Kitezh*’s legacy) in American popular culture. The comparison is an intentionally playful one, but it is worthwhile to note the similarities. Scene: an orphan maiden walks in the woods, hair untressed, feet bare, in a simple peasant dress, collecting plants (in *Kitezh*, she gathers tufts of long grass; in *Sleeping Beauty*, forest berries). She is the only person in sight, and yet is not alone, for with her song she is able to draw out her woodland friends, both birds and beasts. Her song in particular is likened to birdsong, doubled by the chirping of flutes in the orchestration. A prince, unfamiliar with these woods, discovers her, and is surprised to find a woman living alone and singing a beautiful song.

⁷⁰ *Kitezh* act I, Rehearsal number 27-28. p. 33-35

At first he assumes that she must be a supernatural being: a forest demon, or a woodland sprite. She shows him kindness, and they exchange promises of love, that are interrupted as one of the two lovers must return to his or her kinfolk (in *Kitezh*, Vsevolod returns to his hunting party, and in *Sleeping Beauty*, Briar Rose returns to the woodcutter's cottage where she lives with her fairy aunts).⁷²



Figure 63: *Sleeping Beauty*, Walt Disney Productions, 1959

Seeing as a very similar character to Fevroniya is portrayed as a cartoon fairy-tale heroine, it is worth reemphasizing the ambiguity of genre in *Kitezh*. Not only does it draw on diverse sources, but the resulting opera itself pushes at conventional genre boundaries. It is not a chronicle, nor a fairy-tale or a hagiography. [more on this, this is not the right place for this]

Fevroniya's intimate relationship with nature is not just secular savvy, but instead is a form of religious communion — and not an entirely Orthodox religious experience. For Fevroniya, all things are governed by two beneficial forces: the Lord God, who is also the sky above, and Mother Earth, who is the faithful consort of God: “Glory to you forever, bright sky, lord God,

⁷² *Sleeping Beauty*. <http://www.fpx.de/fp/Disney/Scripts/SleepingBeauty/>

glory on high! And glory to you, Mother Earth, who are faithful and strong for God.”⁷³ These two forces, male and female, align better with the pagan Rus’ian pantheon of deities than with Orthodoxy; the Rus’ god of light and sky, Yarilo, corresponds to the former, and the latter can be identified as Mokosh, or Damp Mother Earth⁷⁴. Rimsky-Korsakov clearly intended for this interpretation. In a letter to his friend and former pupil Vasily Yastrebtsev, written during the composition of the opera, Rimsky-Korsakov writes that the opera does have connections to the “Kupala cult,” a tradition stemming from a fusion of pagan practices and the celebration of John the Baptist. The connection to this cult was through the name of the lake where Kitezha was located: “Svetlyi **Yar**” (emphasis in original) or simply “Yar,” as characters in the opera refer to it. In the same letter, referring to a recent snowfall, the composer quotes a coachman’s song, “*Sneg i sila, Bog Yarilo,*” (snow and strength, the God Yarilo).⁷⁵ A similar rhyme appears in Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snegurochka*. Clearly, the composer has the pagan deity in mind as a fundamental aspect of the opera’s religiosity. These elements of paganism were considered an essential part of Russian folk religion, thought to be characterized by “*dvoeverie*”, or the syncretic intertwining of pagan and Christian elements.⁷⁶ Inclusion of pre-Christian Slavic deities not only helped to ground the opera in a Russian folk tradition, but also added “authentic color” to Fevroniya’s character.

⁷³ Kitezha, Act I, Rehearsal number 36

⁷⁴ For more on the pagan Slavic theological system, see Linda Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992.

⁷⁵ N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s V.V. Yastrebtsevym i V. I. Bel’skim*, p. 163.

⁷⁶ For a critical analysis of *dvoeverie* in historiography, see Eve Levin, “*Dvoeverie* and Popular Religion”, in Stephen K. Balatden (ed.), *Seeking God. The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (DeKalb, Ill., 1993), pp. 29-52. See also, Stella Rock, *Popular Religion in Russia: ‘double belief’ and the making of an academic myth* (New York, 2007).

Part of the success of the forest maiden archetype is the expectation that the forest is an exceptional place with its own rules.⁷⁷ The opera maintains a strong dichotomy between urban/civilized space and the untamed forest, and assigns clear value judgments to the two. Further, *Kitezh* is not set in just any forest. It takes place in the forests of the Russian northeast, the Transvolga region. This setting carries a great amount of historical and cultural resonance. By analyzing the opera's sense of geography and landscape, we gain a deeper understanding of the symbolic underpinnings therein.

The Geography of *Kitezh*

Kitezh, unlike many tales and legends, is set in a specific time and place. The opera opens in the Kerzhenets woods, a swath of dense forests and marshland in the region of the Kerzhenets river, a tributary of the Volga in the region of Nizhny Novgorod. Deep in these woods, about 90 kilometers deep into the forest north and east of the Volga river, is the small, oval-shaped Lake Svetloyar (called Svetlyi Yar, or simply Yar, in the opera), which is the location of Greater Kitezh, the great city of Prince Iury (Georgii) Vsevolodovich. The opera, and the legend of Kitezh which informs it, also concerns the city of Lesser Kitezh, situated on the Volga. Local tradition holds that Lesser Kitezh is one and the same as Gorodets, a city on the left (east) bank of the Volga, about 50 kilometers upstream of Nizhny Novgorod, founded in the mid-twelfth

⁷⁷ For more on the so-called "Enchanted Forest" in Western musical theater, see David J. Buch, *Magic Flutes and Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater*, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

century.⁷⁸ Like Lesser Kitezh of legend, Gorodets was destroyed in the siege of Batu Khan in 1238, although the same can be said of most of the towns of the Volga region.⁷⁹



Figure 64: Map of Transvolga, with locations of importance to *Kitezh* indicated

These three settings, Lesser Kitezh, the Kerzhenets forest, and Greater Kitezh, each represent a different symbolic space, moving from most secular and profane to most sacred, and simultaneously progressing from accessible and proximate to more remote and inaccessible. This section will explore the landscape and geography of these three settings, and will explore the symbolic and religious resonances implied therein.

⁷⁸ Gorodets: Maly Kitezh

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive analysis of the Kitezh-Gorodets comparison, see Komarovich, “Kitezhskaya Legenda.”

Lesser Kitezh, located on the Volga, is an urban and profane space. It is a crowded commercial center, and in the opera we see that this is where dissatisfaction and ill-will breed. It is in Lesser Kitezh that we encounter the villains of the opera: Grisha Kuterma the rogue and betrayer, the boyars who reject a peasant princess, and the invading Tatars. Lesser Kitezh is characterized by the voice of the crowds; in Act II, choruses of beggars, peasants, and boyars predominate the score.

Lesser Kitezh is also a site of human dominance over nature. The scene opens in a commercial square, lined with merchants' booths and facing an inn. These artifices with their rectilinear patterns underscore the sense of order imposed by society, which is counterbalanced by the disorderly behavior of the thronging crowds. The first figure who speaks in Lesser Kitezh is the Bear Trainer (*medvedchik*), who condescendingly orders his trained bear to perform a pantomime for the crowd: "Show us, little Mikhailushka, show us, foolish thing, how Pakhomushka unhurriedly goes to ring the bells, leaning on his cane, silently doing his work."⁸⁰ The bear is made to mimic a churchman, stumbling along with a cane. It is a comic scene, but clearly shows the power dynamic between man and beast; unlike in the forest, where a raging bear wounds Vsevolod and Fevroniya interacts with a bear cub respectfully and lovingly, here the trained bear is a plaything, subjugated by man for the purposes of low and sacrilegious entertainment, mocking the clergy in mime.

The presence of the bard/guslyar (gusli player) also helps to situate Lesser Kitezh in the earthly realm, and anchor Lesser Kitezh to medieval, folkloric Russia. The gusli is a traditional stringed instrument, a type of lyre, which is linked to the Russian bardic tradition. Boyan, the bard of *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, is a guslyar, and the instrument has come to represent the

⁸⁰ Act II, Rehearsal number 67, p. 71-2.

pre-Christian or extra-Christian oral traditions of the Slavic peoples. It is not traditionally linked to the Church, which does not use musical instruments in its services.

Lesser Kitezh is a representation of the secular and often sinful world, which, according to eschatological Christianity, will be destroyed at the Last Judgment. In *Kitezh*, the apocalypse is marked by the Tatars' invasion, which destroys the profane, but transfigures the sacred spaces: the forest and Greater Kitezh.

The Kerzhenets forest is an amorphous and transitional space between Lesser and Greater Kitezh, but is marked by being a strikingly different landscape. Forests are complicated. On the one hand, they can be foreboding, confounding, and treacherous. They are the domain of wild and dangerous beasts, and they can shelter outlaws and renegades. On the other hand, however, they can be considered a place of natural sanctuary, untouched by the deleterious effects of society.

As Christopher Ely has explored in his study on the concept of landscape in Russian literature and art, Russians were late in their appreciation of their natural resources and the beauty of the untamed wild forest.⁸¹ The Romantics' impulse to praise the rough and sometimes savage natural landscape did eventually come to Russia, which, as so often seems the case, made up for lost time by plunging headfirst into the adoration of the soil and fields, the woods and hills. This nineteenth-century newfound love for the Russian land is inextricably bound up in issues of nationalism and patriotism. For example, the Pochvennichestvo movement, roughly translatable as "Return to the Soil" (from *pochva*, soil) strongly linked a love for the Russian land with the idea of national exceptionalism, and rejected many foreign, "Western" influences

⁸¹ Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature* (DeKalb, Ill., 2002).

in culture and politics. The adherents of this movement, Pochvenniki, shared many ideals with the Slavophiles of the previous generation, who, in grossly oversimplified terms, rejected the impulse to align more closely with Western Europe (as the Westernizers, the opposing movement, supported), and instead sought a strengthening of native, Slavic or Russian causes in cultural and political spheres. Depictions of the Russian forest, then, often come with underlying sentiments in allusion to the Russian people, and a disappearing Russian heartland.⁸²

In *Kitezh*, the forest is beautiful. It is a sacred space, a “cathedral” to the Lord Sky and Mother Earth, and in the opera, is predominated by Fevroniya’s female voice, intertwined with birdsong. *Kitezh* presents the forest in two forms: in Act I we see Fevroniya’s earthly forest, and in Act IV, we see it transfigured into an edenic, enchanted forest. I will discuss the transfigured forest as part of a later discussion on Act IV; for now, let us consider the Kerzhenets forest as presented at the opera’s opening.

When Act I opens, Fevroniya is bundling grasses in the midsummer evening. She sings to the birds, who return her call. Soon, she is surrounded by birds and beasts, including a bear cub. The cub is docile and friendly with Fevroniya, not out of any forced training like the bear in Act II, but presumably out of a recognition of Fevroniya’s gentleness and compassion. Fevroniya likewise interacts with a wounded elk, who approaches her trustingly and receives her healing. These animals flee, however, when they sense a foreign presence, the arriving Prince Vsevolod. While Fevroniya is considered a part of the forest’s natural landscape, the Prince is an intruder. He does not understand the ways of the forest, which is demonstrated by his fear of nightfall and concerns of getting lost. By comparison, Fevroniya is versed in the cycles and patterns of the

⁸² Jane Costlow explores this, and the development of Russian environmentalism, in her study, *Heart-Pine Russia*, 2013.

forest; she speaks of the seasons and the familiar paths of rivers and streams. Vsevolod belongs to an urban sphere of artificial structures. Fevroniya is part of the natural space of organic structures, which are illegible to Vsevolod. Here, the forest is seen as a virgin space, and Fevroniya the maiden is an integral part of this space. She is not simply an inhabitant of the forest; rather, she is in complete communion with the forest, and can be seen as its human embodiment.

Although the forest only became a site of aesthetic appreciation with a nineteenth-century surge of Romanticism, the forest has long had positive associations in conjunction with Russian eremitic religious traditions. The Russian monastic tradition flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, inspired by the work of St. Sergius of Radonezh and his disciples. Soon, hermitage-monasteries sprung up in the remote outer fringes of the region, often in inaccessible and inhospitable places, such as the Kirillo-Beloozersk monastery in the far north, or the Solovetsky Monastery on the White Sea. The popularity of monasticism at this time was related to the renewed interest in asceticism and hesychasm, a mystical practice of Orthodoxy stemming from a Byzantine ascetic tradition of the fourth century.⁸³ The focus of this practice was individual communion with the divine through silent meditation and isolation, which required the removal of external distractions and reminders of the secular world.

Although Fevroniya is no ascetic hermit, she does share some similarities with St. Sergius. For Fevroniya, living alone in the forest is an ecstatic religious experience. Not only does she communicate with the animals of the woods, but she also find God in all aspects of nature. The idea that religious union can be found in the depths of the wilderness links Fevroniya with an ascetic and eremitic religious tradition, and this combined with her special relationship with

⁸³ Dirk Krausmuller, "The Rise of Hesychasm" Cambridge University Press 2008

animals, particularly the young bear cub, draws a strong connection between Fevroniya and the saint.

The *Vita* of St. Sergius tells that wild animals such as wolves and bears would visit Sergius' cell, but would not harm him, much like they do with Fevroniya. In a characteristic episode of the *Vita*, Sergius as a young man shares his last piece of bread with a young bear. A sort of Eastern Francis of Assisi, Sergius became known as the Russian patron of animals, and is often depicted together with this bear.⁸⁴



Figure 65: Mikhail Nesterov, *The Youth of St. Sergius*, 1897. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

⁸⁴ A comparison is easily made between St. Sergius in the Russian tradition and St. Francis of Assisi in the West.

The forest is considered a sacred space in the worldview of the opera, and located at the heart of this sacred space is Greater Kitezh. The pre-transfiguration Greater Kitezh is shown in Act III. As opposed to the marketplace scene and discontented inhabitants of Lesser Kitezh, in Greater Kitezh we see the Assumption Cathedral, the holy Prince Yuri (father of Vsevolod), and a chorus of the faithful. The infrastructure of urban secular life is not shown; in its place, we see the symbols of religion. Instead of reading Greater Kitezh as a second urban location in the opera, we should instead see it as a third type of space, akin to a monastery in its isolation and foundation in the Church, and also simultaneously the seat of righteous leadership and the throne.

These two roles, throne and monastery, are not logical bedfellows. A hermitage by definition is removed from the world of politics, whereas the seat of princely power needs to be accessible and secular. In order to reconcile this conflict, then, I suggest an allegorical reading which is substantiated by Act IV and the transfigured Kitezh: Greater Kitezh represents the Heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation. Prior to its transfiguration in Act IV, Greater Kitezh is an earthly approximation of this heavenly kingdom, and can be compared to the sanctuary of an Orthodox church, a representation of heaven, or as St. Simeon of Thessalonica posited, “what is above the heavens,” here on Earth.⁸⁵

St. Simeon’s description of the church also follows a tripartite structure: “The narthex corresponds to the earth, the church to heaven, and the holy Sanctuary to what is above

⁸⁵ St. Simeon of Thessalonica, *Book on the Church*, in *The Meaning of Icons*, Leonid Ouspensky, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982, p.60

heaven.”⁸⁶ The geography of *Kitezh* operates within the same semiotic system. In this framework, Lesser Kitezh is the narthex and the earth, the Kerzhenets forests are the church nave and heaven, and Greater Kitezh is the sanctuary, the holiest of holies, the kingdom of heaven.

In the religious topography outlined by the Patristic Fathers, east is the direction of the lost paradise, Eden. It is also the direction of the sunrise, which is linked to the coming of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven, the “Orient from on High.” In an Orthodox church, the east end is the location of the sanctuary, separated from the nave by the iconostasis.⁸⁷ In *Kitezh*, Lake Svetloyar occupies the same symbolic space as the iconostasis, providing a screen, a veil, behind which the inner sanctum, the city of Greater Kitezh, is protected. The unholy Tatars and Grisha Kuter’ma manage to cross the “nave” and approach the lake and see the reflected city veiled in mist, but are unable to penetrate beyond. By contrast, Fevroniya and Vsevolod enter the transfigured Kitezh and are resurrected. This watery transition invokes the sacrament of baptism, in which the faithful are reborn into a new, holy life by entering the water.

Just as the East represents heaven and the coming of Christ, the West represents hell and exclusion from heaven. In the topography of the Church, the westernmost antechamber of the building, the narthex, symbolizes “the unredeemed part of the world, the world lying in sin, and even hell.”⁸⁸ This is where catechumens and penitents remain, those who have yet to be incorporated into the body of the church. In *Kitezh*, this is the fate of Lesser Kitezh on the Volga,

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ In the 14th and 15th centuries there is a tradition of re-exploring the symbolic relationships of the earth and paradise/religious cosmology. Letter from Vasily, archbishop of Novgorod, to Fedor of Tver, 1347, on the nature of Paradise, comparing mountains to an iconostasis, on the other side of which were lights and rejoicing (Old Russian Literature Part 2 p. 53 - coursepack) - part of a tradition of reinterpreting cosmology

⁸⁸ Ouspensky, 27.

which is destroyed by the Tatars, and which fails to reach the transfigured state of the forests or Greater Kitezh.

The Transfiguration of Kitezh

In Act IV, we see the holiness of the forest and Greater Kitezh made manifest. The forests of Kerzhenets have become paradise, and Fevroniya is led to the now-transfigured Kitezh, a heavenly city nestled within. This moment of transfiguration brings the opera into the realm of the supernatural, and allows the symbolic richness of the opera to shine.

This fourth act has no precedence in the opera's myriad source texts, and is an imaginative fabrication of the composer and librettist: a representation of the transfigured Kitezh and the anticipation of Fevroniya's wedding. Nature has deviated from its usual seasons, and spring with its rebirth has come to the forests again. Fevroniya is surrounded by magical flowers, and she is joined by Alkonost, a mythical creature of Slavic folklore, half-bird, half-woman, traditionally representing sorrow.⁸⁹ Alkonost explains that she is the bird of mercy, and those who hear her sing will soon die.⁹⁰ Soon, Fevroniya is joined by Prince Vsevolod, although his part in the libretto is indicated as "*Prizrak*", or "ghost". The ghost explains that although he lay dead on the battlefield, thanks to God he is restored. Still in the forest, Fevroniya and the ghost declare their everlasting love, when Sirin, the bird of joy, prophesies that those who hear her song will have eternal life.⁹¹ The ghost offers bread to Fevroniya, saying, "He who eats of our bread will join us

⁸⁹ See Linda Ivanits, *Russian Folk Belief*, chapter 2.

⁹⁰ Rehearsal number 289, p. 297.

⁹¹ Rehearsal number 304.

in eternal joy,”⁹² reminding us of the eucharist. Fevroniya takes the bread and offers the crumbs to the forest birds around her, then entreats Jesus to receive her into his righteous kingdom.

How are we to interpret these moments of transfiguration? Vsevolod, once dead, is now alive once more. He shares his bread of eternal joy, and then takes Fevroniya with him to the glorious kingdom of Kitezh. Fevroniya’s final words of this first scene suggest that Vsevolod may even be Christ. The conflicting prophesies of Alkonost and Sirin suggest that Fevroniya will die, but will also have eternal life. In the interlude to the second scene, these birds explain that the shining kingdom and those within it will be born to new life. And in scene two, this heavenly kingdom is realized, as Fevroniya and Vsevolod prepare for their wedding feast.

And Kitezh, too, has not only become transfigured, but resurrected as well. In the two textual traditions of the Kitezh story,⁹³ ultimately, the Tatars manage to both kill the prince (in the legend, the elder prince, Georgii/Yuri Vsevolodovich) *and* destroy both Greater and Lesser Kitezh:

И егда прииде ко граду тому, нападе на град той со множеством своих, и взя той град больший китеж, что на берегу озера светлояра, и уби благоверного князя георгия, месяца февраля в 4 день, и поеха из града того нечестивый той царь Батый. И после его взяша мощи благоверного князя георгия всеволодовича. и после разорения того запустеша грады те малый китежь, что на берегу волги стоит. больший же что на берегу озера светлояра.

And when [Batu Khan] reached the city, he fell upon it with a multitude [of soldiers] and took that city of Greater Kitezh, on Lake Svetloyar, and killed the righteous Prince Georgii, on the fourth of February. And the ungodly Batu Khan left that city. And afterward, he usurped the power of prince Georgii Vsevolodovich. And after that, they

⁹² Rehearsal 310, “lento mistico”

⁹³ The *Kniga glagolemaya Letopisets* (the so-called *Kitezh Chronicler*) and the *Letopisets o ubienii blagovernogo knyazya Georgiya Vsevolodovicha*

destroyed the city of Lesser Kitezh, which stood on the bank of the Volga, and Greater [Kitezh], on the banks of Lake Svetloyar.⁹⁴

In the legend, the miracle of Kitezh's salvation is that it is saved *and* destroyed. It is preserved through the very act of its being demolished. The salvation of Kitezh happens not in avoidance of destruction, or in spite of destruction, but precisely *thanks to* destruction. It is the crux of the mystery of the Christian faith: through dying, one is born to eternal life.

In the *Kitezh* opera, this mystery is simplified. The Tatars never reach Greater Kitezh, and instead of being destroyed on earth to be reborn in heaven, the city is simply assumed into heaven by God's protective forces. This heavenly assumption reminds us of the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven, the traditional position of the Western Church on the end of Mary's life. Similarly, Fevroniya does not experience death in the course of the opera, despite the prophesy of Alkonost. She, too, is assumed into heaven entirely, drawing together a connection between Fevroniya and the Virgin. The Interlude to Scene II of Act IV shows the procession into the invisible city, and the scene opens with stage direction: "*zvon uspenskiy*," the ringing of the Dormition bell. The Dormition is the Eastern Church's position on Mary's death, suggesting that she "slept" or died a physical death and was only resurrected in body on the third day.⁹⁵ *Kitezh* blends the Eastern and Western traditions, ringing the Dormition bell in the Eastern rite upon Fevroniya's assumption in the likeness of a Western Mary.

The connections between Fevroniya, Mary (of both Eastern and Western traditions), and Kitezh do not stop here. One of the most significant correspondences between these three revolves around the idea of veiling, protection, and intercession. The city of Greater Kitezh is made invisible, but the act of becoming invisible is depicted as being covered by a veil. The

⁹⁴ Quoted in B.A. Komarovich, *Kitezhskaya Legenda*, p. 175-6

⁹⁵ Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, *Mary, Mother*, The Festal Menaion, London: Faber and Faber, 1984, p. 64

chorus sings in supplication to a heavenly queen, “Wonderful heavenly Tsaritsa, intercessor (*zastupnitsa*), cover Kitezh with your veil (*pokroi Kitezh-grad svoim pokrovom*), have mercy on us.”⁹⁶ “The lord God is covering Kitezh in a veil (*pokrovom*),” sings Prince Yuri⁹⁷. The youth sees the hill above Svetloyar clothed in a white cloud, “as a luminous wedding veil (*fatoyu*),⁹⁸”, and as the golden mist descends, declares, “my eyes are clouded by some kind of veil (*pelenoyu*).”⁹⁹ These images of veiling hearken to the Russian Orthodox tradition of the *pokrov*, meaning both “veil” and “protection”, and figuratively used as an allegory for Mary’s intercession on the behalf of the faithful. The image of Mary extending her veil in protection originated in the tenth century, when the Mother of God appeared to St. Andrew the Fool and his disciple Epiphanius at the church of Blachernae in Constantinople. In this miraculous vision, Mary removed her shining veil and extended it over the congregation in protection and to illustrate her intercession before God.¹⁰⁰ The Feast of the Intercession (*Pokrov*) is an important one in the Russian Orthodox calendar, and there is no doubt that this image of intercession is a direct inspiration for the staging of Kitezh’s transfiguration.

Fevroniya, too, is an intercessor, who works on behalf of the poor sinner Grisha. Grisha, the rogue, is unable to enter Kitezh, presumably because he is lacking faith. He betrays Fevroniya and his countrymen to the Tatars because he is weak and values his own life most of all. Despite this betrayal, Fevroniya remembers him from the heavenly Kitezh, and writes him a letter. In it, she prays for his repentance and salvation, and tries to teach him about the truth of Kitezh, that

⁹⁶ Rehearsal number 171.

⁹⁷ Rehearsal number 184.

⁹⁸ Rehearsal number 173.

⁹⁹ Rehearsal number 182

¹⁰⁰ Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons*, p 151.

the city and its inhabitants live eternally. The letter explains that those who desire Kitezh more than life itself are able to enter the magical city. Fevroniya takes on the role of intercessor, offering her prayers for Grisha and providing the keys to heaven.¹⁰¹

The final scene of *Kitezh* is not simply a representation of heaven. It is a depiction of the Heavenly Kingdom of the Last Judgment, and is strongly influenced by imagery from the biblical book of Revelation. Allegorical interpretations run together in this last scene, and there are many overlapping resonances. Just as the construction of *Kitezh* is a pastiche of historical, literary, and folkloric sources to create “medieval Russia,” this final scene pulls together a variety of images to create a composite “heaven” or “utopia.” It is not exclusively Russian, not just the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Bible, nor the Apocalypse of Old Belief, but something which transcends these sources.

In the final scene, the virgin Fevroniya, having been assumed into Kitezh before her marriage to Vsevolod, is preparing for her wedding feast. Because of the strong insinuation that the ghost Vsevolod is actually a manifestation of Christ, through the breaking of bread and Fevroniya’s prayers¹⁰², we can read this heavenly wedding as the wedding feast of the lamb: “Let us be glad and rejoice and give honor to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.”¹⁰³ Fevroniya indeed is made ready for the celebration, adorned in a gown of

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, St. Fevroniya is also linked to veils. In a rare detail of daily life in the *Tale*, we see Fevroniya in old age, embroidering a *vozdukh*, or a cover, for a church altar.

¹⁰² see above.

¹⁰³ Revelation 19:7.

silver stars and girded by a shining rainbow, and she flies on wings of joy while on her brow rests a crown of sorrows.¹⁰⁴ This finery recalls the woman of Revelation 12:

- 1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.
- 2 And she, being with child, cried, travailing in birth and in pain to be delivered.
- 3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.
- 4 And his tail drew a third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered to devour her child as soon as it was born.
- 5 And she brought forth a manchild, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God and to His throne.
- 6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.
- 7 And there was war in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,
- 8 and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in Heaven.
- 9 And the great dragon was cast out — that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world. He was cast out onto the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.
- 10 And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, “Now have come salvation and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night.
- 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death.
- 12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil has come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”
- 13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman who brought forth the manchild.
- 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the face of the serpent.
- 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.
- 16 And the earth helped the woman; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.
- 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and he went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁴ Rehearsal number 331.



Figure 66: “The Woman Clothed in the Sun,” detail from the 8th c. Commentary on the Apocalypse, Beatus Liebana, Facundus Beatus, 1047 AD, f. 186v

Fevroniya recalls this woman, an allegorical Mary figure, who is clothed in the sun, who is given wings, and who is protected by God in the wilderness. This woman of Revelation is a Christian symbol of the end times, but despite Russian Orthodoxy’s interest in the Last Judgment, the book of Revelation is not generally explored in Russian iconography to the extent that it is in the West. Likewise, Fevroniya’s maidenhood throughout the opera corresponds to Mary’s perpetual virginity, which is a theological belief not held by the Russian church. In Russia, Mary is most often referred to as the Mother of God (*Bogoroditsa*, cf. Greek *Theotokos*), which emphasizes her maternal nature over the virgin birth. The inclusion of these images that are more prevalent in Western theology than in Russia show an attempt to show the opera’s

conclusion as a *universal* heaven, not simply the view of the Last Judgment supported by the Old Believers or the Russian Orthodox Church.

Supporting this assertion is the way Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration uses bells in the final scenes. As Simon Morrison¹⁰⁵ has noted, the bells of *Kitezha* are Western churchbells, ringing out in clear and jaunty parallel F-major triads, not the complex major and minor chord patterns of traditional Russian bells. Rimsky-Korsakov did, in fact, call for a large number of authentic Russian bells in his score,¹⁰⁶ yet the effect they produce is more reminiscent of *Parsifal* than the peals from a Novgorod or Pskov bell tower. But that may be exactly the intention. While the earthly *Kitezha* had a fixed setting in Transvolgan Russia, the transfigured *Kitezha* transcends these geographic boundaries. Its bells are not Russian bells, and they are not exactly Western bells either, but a hybrid, intended to be familiar and simultaneously foreign, ethereal.

This blending of elements characterizes the opera from start to end, and it produces opposite yet complimentary results. First, it creates entry points into otherwise challenging material. By assembling a variety of eclectic sources and relying on all of them equally instead of privileging one particular narrative, the audience is given many opportunities to relate to and identify with any of the aspects presented. Perhaps the love story of Fevroniya and Vsevolod is the most appealing to one viewer, whereas the mystical transformation of *Kitezha* compels another, and the Tatar battle scene draws in a third. The range and diversity of the opera attempts a universal appeal in this manner.

Second, by creating a new narrative out of several existing sources, the authors are able to draw on the legacy and sense of authenticity of each of these sources and their associated

¹⁰⁵ Simon Morrison, *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*, 163-4

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

traditions, while at the same time selectively rewriting “history” in order to suit their own aesthetic and creative agenda. Ultimately, they are able to use this composite narrative to present an image of medieval Russia which complies with the post-Romantic idealization of the Russian forests, supports Russian nationalist and religious-messianic ideology, and also fits into the developing Symbolist aesthetics of the late nineteenth-century.

CONCLUSIONS

The interest in exploring and fantasizing about medieval Russia remains strong. In the economic development surrounding the 2014 winter Olympic Games in Sochi, a new theme park was constructed, Sochi Park. It was conceived as a kind of Russian Disneyland, bringing native Russian fairy tales to life for children and tourists, all deeply grounded in an imagined, local, folkloristic medieval. Much in the same way that Disneyland’s iconic buildings suggest a medieval Gothic architectural tradition, Sochi Park’s main hotel, “Bogatyr,” is built up with domes and towers, evoking Russian medieval architecture. Like Disney, whose “princesses” harken back to an imagined medieval chivalric tradition, Sochi Park capitalizes on folkloric figures and elaborate medieval-inspired costumes, giving a Russian flair to the tried-and-true theme-park Western “princess.”



Figure 67, Figure 68: Actors in stylized seventeenth-century Russian apparel help to give Sochi park its “folkloric” atmosphere. Photos from the Facebook page of *Tematicheskii Park “Sochi Park,”* 2013-2015



Figure 69: *Bogatyri* figures at Sochi Park

The fantastic environment that the creators of Sochi Park have made draws on a variety of eclectic influences, and the characters therein seldom have direct parallels to historical figures. Instead, they evoke a “Russian” spirit. Actors dress in elaborately ornamented costumes recalling seventeenth-century garb, and enact fairy-tale scenarios. To celebrate the holiday, Defender of the Fatherland Day, formerly Red Army Day, Sochi Park uses the corollary image of medieval, Russian valor: a *bogatyr*. The anachronism of this connection between a Soviet holiday and a medieval warrior bears no import on its applicability as a symbol; to celebrate “Men’s Day,” as the holiday is unofficially known, at Sochi Park, the *bogatyr* is an obvious choice.



Figure 70: This internet banner advertisement for Sochi Park depicts both a *bogatyr* on horseback, and also the hotel, “Bogatyr,” in the background, along with the anachronistic parabola of a rollercoaster in the distance.

The Sochi Park *bogatyr* is a recent example of a long tradition of drawing upon *bogatyr* imagery as a symbol of Russian valor, as discussed in chapter 2, even outside of the context of the autocracy. This tradition has more or less been continuous from the nineteenth century, and was used widely by the Soviets in propaganda poster art. In these images, modern soldiers were frequently figured as the doubles of medieval *bogatyri*, implying that they are following in an unbroken tradition, or even that the spirit and essence of these ancient warriors is present alongside the Soviet fighters. We see that the *bogatyri* of each era march forward in order to protect the *rodina*, the motherland. Other images show baby boys as *bogatyri*-to-be. In the image below, we see a sleeping baby with the caption, “Grow, warrior! The Soviet Army protects you!” The poster offers a patriotic message of social reassurance, but at the same time, reinforces the cycle of military involvement.

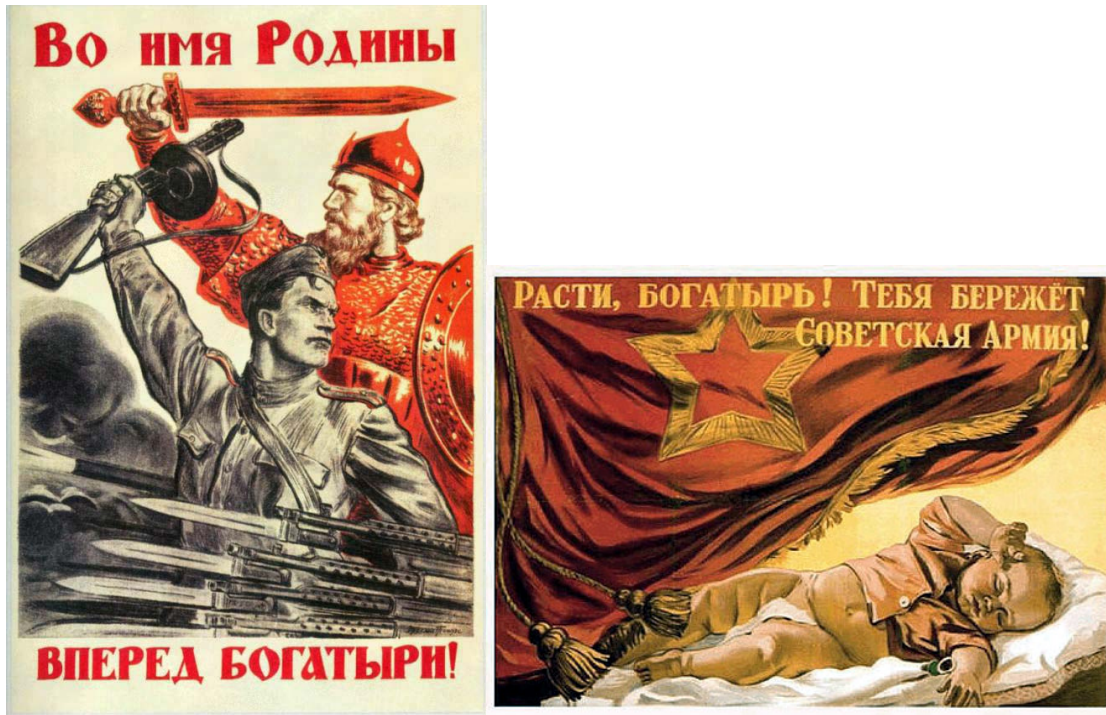


Figure 71, Figure 72: Soviet propaganda posters from the 1940s, linking contemporary soldiers to the image of the *bogatyr*

Medieval and folk art have found a new vogue in a new generation as well. Artists, experimenting with different modes of artistic expression, turn to folk motifs in new and surprising ways. Take, for example, graphic artist Andrey Kuznetsov's Lubok series of 2003. These pieces recast familiar Western narratives, such as *The Terminator*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *War of the Worlds*, and *Star Wars* (below) in lubok form. Using an invented seventeenth-century vocabulary and reimagining elements from these contemporary works as a medieval Russian might have, he embraces a medievalizing aesthetic and creates a delightful hybrid that surprises the viewer in the dissonance between its varied elements and the estrangement we feel from well-known modern works.



Figure 73: Andrei Kuznetsov, “Staryya Varsy,” 2003

In this *lubok*, Luke (Skywalker) is presented here as an epic figure, holding a fiery sword (light saber). He is accompanied by a) a flying dish (saucer), and b) an intelligent samovar, labeled PB ДВ, the pseudo-Old Russian rendering of R2D2. We see also the friend Chewbacca, “neither monkey nor dog, not speaking,” who holds vodka for Luke, whose arm has been cut off by his father. The *lubok* essentializes the story of Star Wars into a small number of narrative elements, and distorts them just enough to make them compatible with a perceived medieval worldview, to comic result.

Medievalism is not only a highbrow or offbeat artistic impulse. It has always been, and continues to be driven by commercial forces. Folk art has a strong popular appeal, and makes its

way to many media. A niche market has emerged for incorporating traditional Russian folk art designs into commodity and luxury goods: computer and phone cases, clothing, and vehicles. These run the gamut, from kitschy knickknacks to Ducati bikes with traditional porcelain ornamental design. Russian folk art objects have long been produced as tourist souvenirs and for export. This is an undercurrent in much of the folk-inspired medievalism of the nineteenth century: embracing Russian exceptionalism, and turning it into something profitable on the international stage.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE Design by Xenia Bystrova

GUYS GIRLY **IPHONE CASES**



Figure 74 (top left): “From Russia with Love” Russian folk-art inspired series on Threadless.com, an end-user-driven clothing and accessory site which crowdsources designs; Figure 75 (top right): Russian “folk art” car; Figure 76 (bottom left): website of Denis Simachev, with a line of luxury designs inspired by Khokhloma lacquerwork and Gzhel porcelain: cases for tech gadgets, clothing, even vehicles; Figure 77 (bottom right): Simachev’s trendy shop and bar in Moscow, open since 2006.

Like the *bogatyr kovsh* of Chapter 2, these medievalizing, folk art objects appeal to a domestic nouveau riche population that embraces an Old Russian aesthetic. But unlike the *kovshi*, or the ornamental lacquer spoons and porcelain that these designs emulate, these are functional objects that largely reflect today's technology and lifestyle. Folk designs are put to use as ornament, but the objects themselves are absolutely contemporary.

The impulse behind these objects is none too far removed from the impulse behind the *bogatyr* beer labels or art-nouveau *bogatyr* ceramic hearths of the nineteenth century. These impulses, too, are closely related to political populism and artistic movements that placed value on art from outside the academy, outside the establishment, and rooted in rural, peasant, native traditions. Much as it was then, there is an investment in connecting to an idealized vision of a Russian identity, strongly linked with tradition and history.

Medievalism continues to be an important and vibrant mode of artistic production. As artists continue to be intrigued by history and heritage, they continually find new ways to incorporate elements of a medieval past into contemporary art and design. Although there are countless other "pasts" that prove to be inspirational to modern culture, there will always be a draw to the imaginative possibilities of the medieval period, somehow familiar and yet so distant and removed from the present reality that it stands in for a fairy-tale fantasy land, a legendary "long ago" and "far away."

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