

VLADIMIR KROGIUS: RUSSIA OPENS ITSELF TO EUROPE IN GRAND BAROQUE STYLE

Note: This paper which has been specially prepared for this newsletter by architect Vladimir Krogus of INRECON, Moscow is based on publications on Russian art history mainly by V. Zgura (1926), B.Vipper (1978) and A. Icomikov (1990).

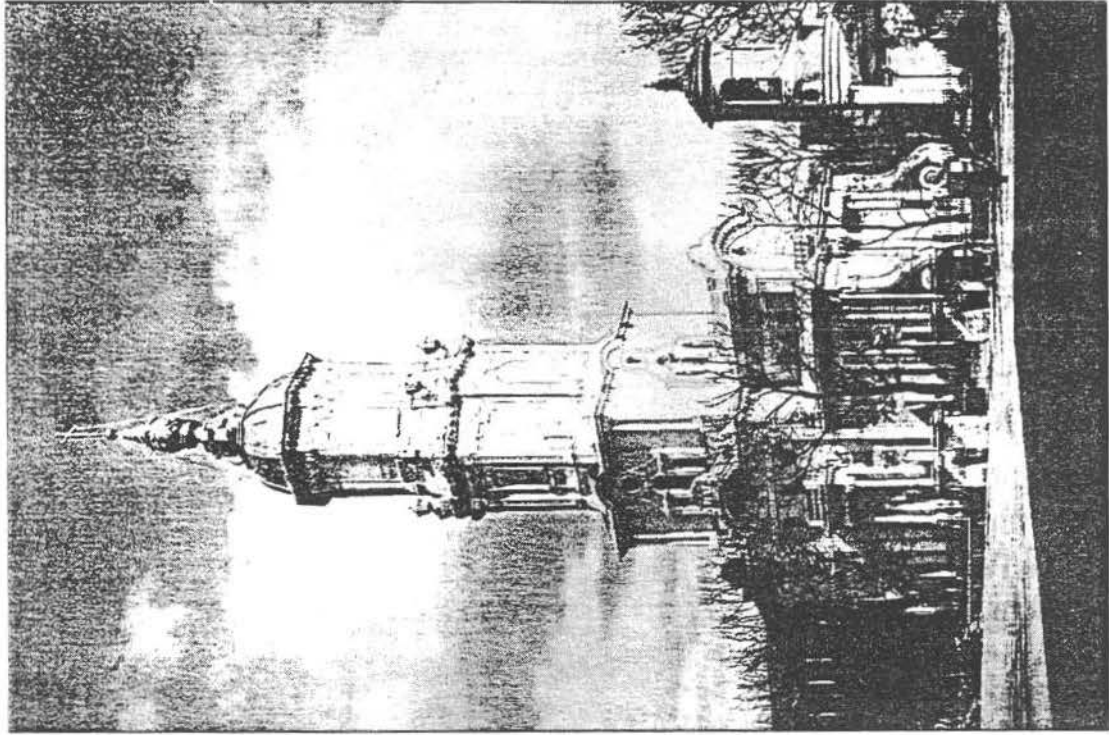
It could have been by pure coincidence or may be, by divine Providence, that my country's opening to the present time world, the act which was now and then nicknamed as 'the window's cutting open to Europe by Peter the Great' happened at the time of the domination of the Baroque style in the history of art. The artistic refinement of the Baroque style, its brightness, its festivity, its elegance became the fine space frame for the admission of Russian high society, architects and artists to the modern, enlightened environment of early modern history.

In a comparatively short time Russian art departed from the deep rooted medieval concern with religious themes and stagnation in the creative process to the civil art masterpieces that were created by outstanding individuals. This was also the time of the importation of new town planning ideas which led to the establishment in Russia of the Baroque principles of urban regularity which soon replaced the traditions of the Middle Ages with their reliance on Byzantine canons. This transition of Russia to the new Baroque mode of life took much more time than it was necessary to cut open a window when constructing a traditional peasant log cabin. In fact this transition had began soon after the end of the great discord in the country of the early seventeenth century and the accession to the throne of the new dynasty of the Romanovs. In the beginning the Romanovs tried to conserve the traditional values of life, but at the same time they also gradually admitted innovations coming from Western Europe, then at the height of its Baroque splendour. In this respect the period between the last third of seventeenth century up to the middle of eighteenth century can be named as 'the age of mutations'.

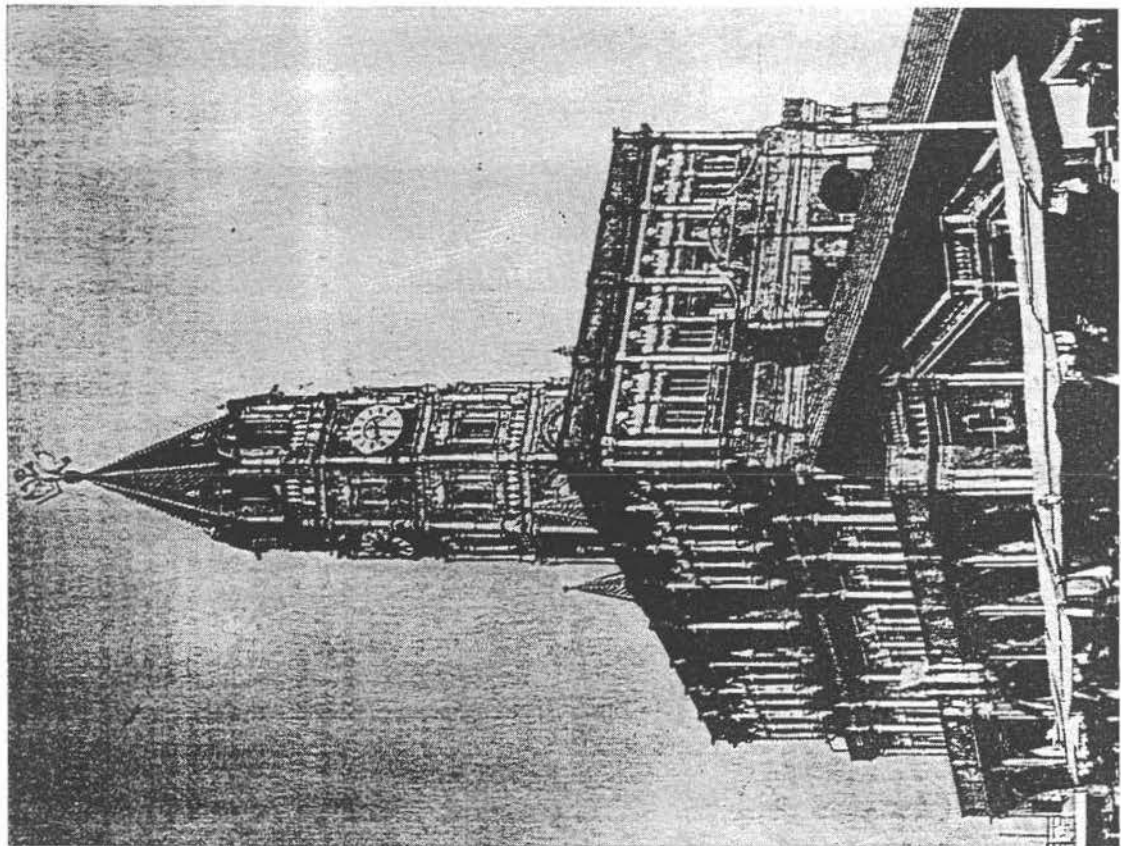
At this time, once can identify many ideas and approaches that were imported from Ukraine, the large part of which had been included into the Moscow State as a result of the Russian-Polish wars of this century. In the field of art these ideas and approaches were decidedly Baroque; they had been brought to Ukraine from Poland and other Western countries.

Soon such signs of novelty formed the art direction that was widely known as 'The Moscow (or Naryshkin) Baroque' – a rather conditional term. They represented the first steps to the new style affecting mainly the outer image of buildings. It was the usage of the universal artistic language of architecture, of the architectural orders' of regularity in elevations' rhythm and proportions, of putting decorations on walls, of the combination both curved and rectilinear contours.

The architecture included the first public building in Russia – the Sukhareva Tower in Moscow (1698 – 1701, Michael Choglokov), where the mathematics and



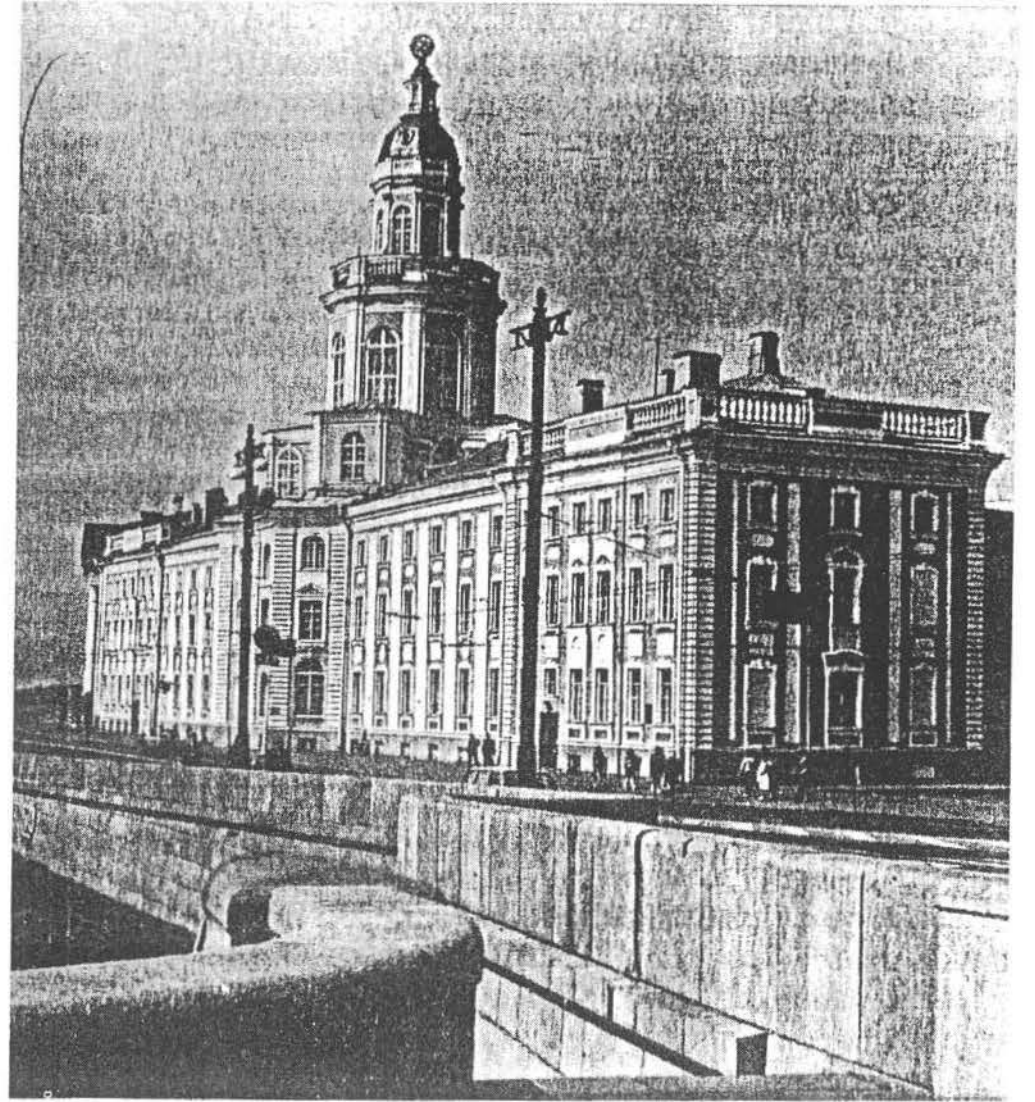
Archangel Gabriel Church, Moscow



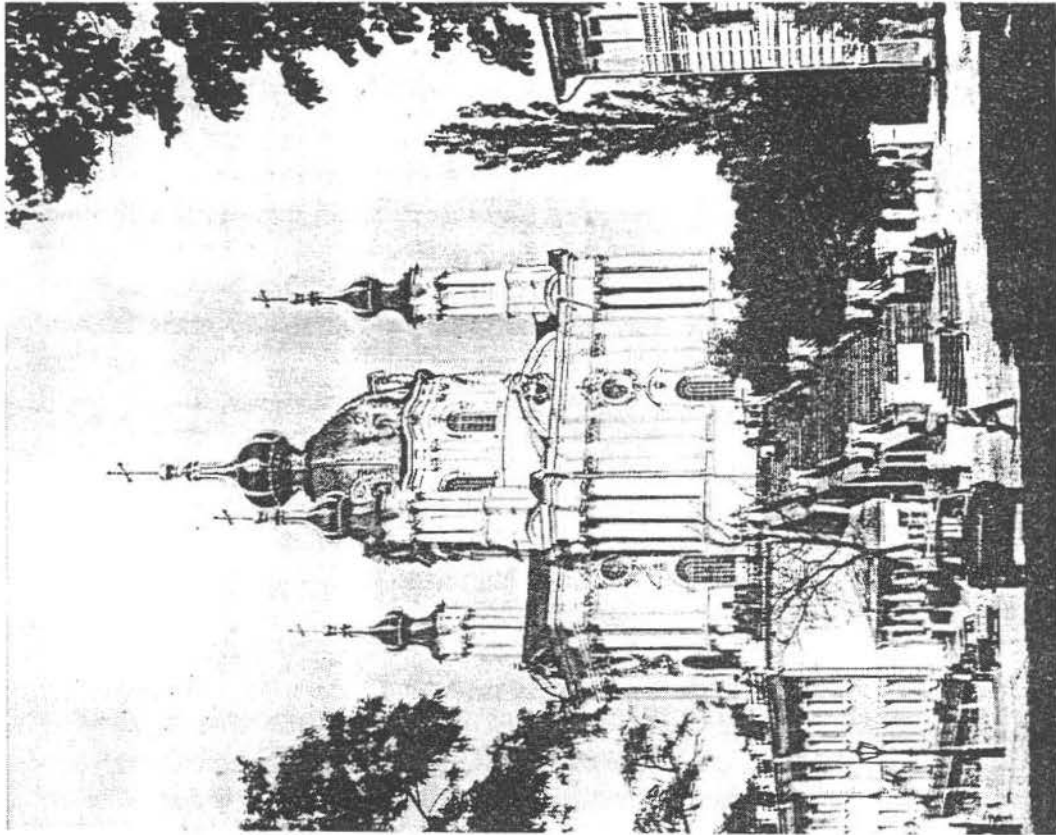
Sukhareva Tower, Moscow



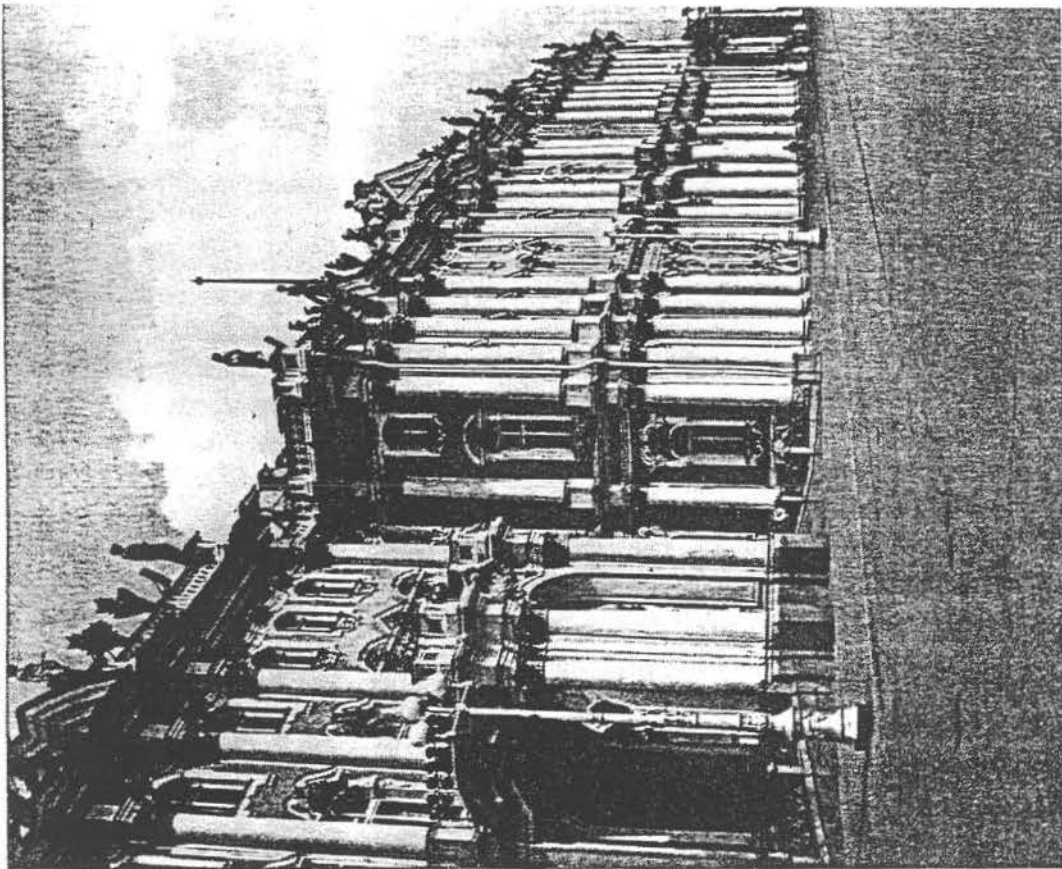
St. Petersburg Cathedral



Kunstkammer Museum, St. Petersburg



St. Andrew Church, Kiev



Winter Palace, St. Petersburg

navigation schools were located and the archangel Gabriel Church in Moscow (1701–1717 architect Ivan Zarudny from Ukraine) which was built for the Czar's favourite Prince Alexander Menshikov as the tower 'under the bells'.

The Peter the Great reforms of the early eighteenth century represented the pinnacle of the age of change in Russia. This period was characterised with the active, emphasised use of modes and forms that were imported from Western Europe, mainly from Holland. The most important applications were the Baroque principles of the spatial organisation of the urban environment. The main site of this application was the new Russian capital of Saint Petersburg. This period of the time covering the four early decades of the eighteenth century was usually named as 'Peter's Baroque' or 'Petersburg Baroque'. From the new Baroque capital, of St. Petersburg, the new style gradually spread throughout the country.

Two excellent examples of this period occur in two buildings in St Petersburg: they are the St. Peter's and St. Paul's Cathedral within the fortress (1712-1733), by architect Dominico Trezzini the 'Kunstammer' Museum (1718 – 1734), by architects Andreas Shluter, Michael Zemtsov, and other).

After a rather difficult time carried by the disturbances of the 1740's and 1850's a period of stabilisation followed characterised by the penetration of new ideas of enlightenment and new civil culture's development. In architecture and fine art this was the period named as 'Russian Mature Baroque'. Its success was linked with the activity of a whole constellation of bright masters of Baroque architecture. The brightest star was Bartholomeo Francesco Rastrelli (1700-1771) who had come to Russia with his father in the age of 16 and then became the main court architect of the Empress Elizabeth, the daughter of Peter the Great. The Rastrelli style was within the common frame of the Baroque approach, with the use of its Italian, French and Holland lines. But the master also developed the Russian national tradition of spatial organisation around the big central building, of many-coloured images. He especially liked and used the smart combination of green or sky-blue colours with white and gold, the gilt woodcutting, the sculptural plastic.

The most famous works of Rastrelli were undoubtedly palaces and parks in St Petersburg itself and its surroundings. The close links of his projects with Russian national traditions could be seen in the churches that were built with their typical five-cupola structure. Two examples of Rastrelli's architectural masterpieces were: the Winter Palace in Sankt-Petersburg (1754-1762) and the St. Andrew Church in Kiev (1747-1753).

It can be said that the life blood of the Russian Baroque spirit was realised in the works of B. Rastrelli and his colleagues. In Western Europe the Baroque replaced the Renaissance, in Catholic countries it was the style of the counter-reformation. In Russia, Baroque replaced deeply rooted medieval traditions and soon became the symbol of a modern life style marked by great enlightenment. The history of art in Russia never experienced Rococo. The Baroque style declined in popularity in the early 1760's and was soon changed without any struggle into neo-classicism which represented the final transition of Russian art into the modern world.