РУССКИЙ ВЗГЛЯД НА ЗАРУБЕЖНЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ

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Русский взгляд на американскую архитектуру конца XIX — начала XX в. (Часть 3)

Russian View of American Architecture in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries (Part 3)

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Аннотация. В третьей части статьи продолжают рассматриваться технологии американского городского строительства на рубеже XIX–XX вв. Развитие городской инфраструктуры требовало иных подходов к застройке города. Все это побудило русских архитекторов заняться изучением информации о технических инновациях в Западной Европе и Соединенных Штатах. В статье рассматривается исследование «американского стиля» в архитектуре русскими архитекторами конца XIX — начала XX в..

Ключевые слова: визуальная коммуникация, национальное культурное наследие, диалог между поколениями, кросс-культурная коммуникация.

Abstract. In the third part of this article continue to be considered the technology of American urban development at the turn of 19–20 centuries. Urban infrastructure development required a different approach to city development. All this prompted the Russian architects to study the information on technical innovations in Western Europe and the United States. The article deals with the study of the «American style» in architecture Russian architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords: Cossacks, the education system, moral-sense constructs, types of students.

American Pragmatism and the New Urban Environment

But however significant the role played by the French school in American design, Russian observers were more interested in the practical results of American technical developments. In 1895, Viktor Evald — the editor of *Zodchii* and one of the most frequent commentators on American civil engineering — provided an account of skyscraper construction in New York and Chicago, with particular attention to methods of foundation support for the steel frames. Impressed by the size and technology of such large structures, Evald took a dim view of their aesthetic qualities and predicted that they would create an urban environment in which "some of the main streets will be enclosed between two rows of tall, gloomy cubes, with small, separate windows in which the sun never peers. Such streets will resemble narrow canals or streams, flowing at the base of deep ravines."[1] This poetic image was followed by the quite accurate observation that American skyscrapers were intended for use between eight and five, after which time the central areas of American cities became depopulated.

Subsequently, Evald wrote a book entitled *Structural Characteristics of Buildings in North America*, and in 1899 he continued his analysis of the American skyscraper with an extensive report on a fire at the sixteen-story Home Life Insurance Company building on Broadway Avenue, constructed in 1893. His observations regarding the still-far-from-ideal methods of fire prevention in tall buildings were based, in large part, on data from the German publication *Thonindustrie-Zeitung*, which represented the producers of fire-retardant ceramic shields. The article concludes with a humorous touch:

[1] Nedelia stroitelia, 1895, no. 29:155; the article is entitled "Sky Cities."

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Let us remark in conclusion that because of a translation mistake, several of our Russian newspapers described this event [the fire] as deliberately arranged to test the efficiency of fire brigades and the safety of such structures. Such is the strength of habit: to ascribe to Americans the most incredibly original escapades.[2]

By the beginning of the century, reports on skyscrapers and fires in American cities appeared in roughly equal measure. In 1903, *Zodchii* published a technical review of recent progress in the area of skyscraper construction, with special attention to new methods of insulating the steel frame from the effects of intense heat (many of these advances were introduced after the Pittsburgh fire of 1897). Drawing upon books by Joseph Freitag and William Birkmire — prominent American civil engineers specializing in the design of skyscrapers — the writer attributed the extraordinary increase in tall buildings in America to three basic developments: the cheap and efficient production of high-quality rolled steel; the production of new types of fire-resistant coating for steel frames; and the introduction of rapid elevators[3].

Fire had, of course, been an enemy of Russian cities from time immemorial; yet there was a specific interest in the spectacular effects of fire on the new American urban environment, even though the lessons to be learned from these conflagrations had limited applications in Russia. The 1904 issues of *Zodchii* contained several items on this subject, among which was a report on the devastating Iroquois Theater fire, in which some four hundred died, and a survey of measures for fire safety in other major Chicago theaters, including the Auditorium[4]. A subsequent article described methods of fire prevention developed by the firm Adler and Sullivan[5]. The culmination of this inflammatory obsession appeared in the journal's extensive coverage of the great Baltimore fire of February 1904. Based on reports in the *New York Herald*, *Zodchii* provided a general description of the disaster and its effect on the city in the first article[6]. The second article took a more technical approach, examining the conditions of large structures after the fire. The conclusion, bolstered by information from the German publication *Stahl und Eisen*, discussed the remarkable progress in protecting steel frames from fire damage[7].

By the end of 1904, the "Great American Disaster" theme seems to have been exhausted, with the notable exception of the widespread coverage of the San Francisco earthquake throughout the Russian press. One of the three articles in *Zodchii* on the earthquake, entitled "American Energy," emphasized the extraordinary speed with which resources were applied to reconstructing the city, and concluded: "If you compare this colossal vital energy and strength with what we have done and are doing to revive Syzran, which suffered no less than San Francisco, then the picture is very disheartening"[8]. Similar remarks on American resilience had appeared in a report on the Baltimore fire, and in each case there is a contrast — implicit or explicit — with Russian responses to such catastrophes.

In addition to these extensive reports on major topics of interest, *Zodchii* continued to print numerous smaller items on the American scene, as evident from a sampling of bulletins in 1905, including articles on the construction of the Hotel Bellevue in Philadelphia; a concrete dam near Ithaca, New York; compensation for American architects; and the endowment of the University of Chicago by John D. Rockefeller. Of considerably greater length was a series of articles by the Russian architect Aleksandr Dmitriev based on his tour of the United States — the first such report since the one by Sergei Kuleshov almost thirty years earlier.

Unlike Kuleshov, Dmitriev was an architect of considerable distinction, and a number of buildings that he designed are still well preserved in Leningrad[9]. This did not, however, make him a more astute observer of American architecture, and his articles appear disjointed in comparison with the series by Kuleshov. In his defense it must be noted that Dmitriev covered more territory — a function of improvements in the American railroad network since 1877 — and Dmitriev admitted that his account only skimmed the surface of a vast topic. Nonetheless, his tour from New York to Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.; St. Louis; Yellowstone Park; Chicago; Niagara Falls; and Boston does not convey cogent impressions of any of these locales[10]. In addition, he quite openly considered the centers of America's major cities to be aesthetic disasters, despite the fact that his stated purpose in visiting the United States was to study new applications for iron and steel used for construction. His own work was quite conservative in terms of its style and technical approach. From the beginning of his series of articles, he declared his preference for American suburbs, such as Cambridge, Massachusetts, where churches, museums, homes, and similar buildings could be seen without the clutter of skyscrapers.

[2] Nedelia stroitelia, 1899, no. 8:58-59.
[3] Zodchii, 1903, no. 51:605-8.
[4] Zodchii, 1904, no. 8:86-89, and no. 11:137-38, with material from Deutsche Bauzeitung.
[5] Zodchii, 1904, no. 17:207-8.
[6] Zodchii, 1904, no. 26:303.
[7] Zodchii, 1904, no. 39:431-35, with numerous photographs of tall buildings standing among the ruins.
[8] Zodchii, 1906, no. 37:357-58.
[9] For a concise survey of Dmitriev's work, see B. Kirikov, "Arkhitektor A.I. Dmitriev," Arkhitektura SSSR, 1979, no.2:31-34.
[10] Zodchii, 1905, no. 30:337-39; no. 31:345-46; no. 35:381-85; and no. 36:395-98.

Dmitriev's report has its piquant moments, for example, in his marvelling description of Coney Island, including an exhibit hall with dioramas of the Battle of Santiago, Cuba (1898), and other great moments from American history. At the same time, Dmitriev was appalled by the proliferation of billboards and signs. His brief but favorable view of Washington, D.C., includes a description of a Romanesque-style house designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, whose work he admired without attempting to place it within the framework of modern American architecture. In contrast to the sedate impression of Washington, St. Louis and its 1904 International Exhibition were portrayed in sharply critical tones. No mention was made of the significant Viennese presence at this event — represented by Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Olbrich, and Gustav Klimt — yet Dmitriev allotted considerable space to ridiculing the exhibit "Journey by Train through Siberia" — a crude attraction that attested to American interest in the Trans-Siberian Railway.

After the pleasures of Yellowstone Park, Chicago seemed to Dmitriev overwhelming and distasteful: "By its wealth, as by its filth, Chicago can easily compete with St. Louis. In general, slovenliness must be considered typical for North American commercial and industrial cities"[11]. Nonetheless, he praised the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, and extolled the Arthur Orr house in that city for its comfort and pleasing design. Similar sentiments — that architecture was the expression of tranquillity and wealth — were applied to his description of Boston, which interested him less than Cambridge and its university. On the Harvard campus, Richardson was again lauded for his design of Sever Hall and Austin Hall, both of which were illustrated in photographs, as were a number of other mansions and buildings that Dmitriev admired during the tour. Almost all of them were built of natural stone in the Romanesque style.

Dmitriev's concluding essay is both amusing and indicative of an ambivalence toward America that was typical of European travelers. Upon returning through Italy, he noted: "After the uniformity of American towns, Naples — despite its picturesque filth — seems remarkably attractive." It is not clear why he should distinguish between the filth of St. Louis and that of Naples, but one can sense a fatigue both with the "new" in American culture and with the concomitant rejection of the past — above all in its major cities. Nonetheless, he recognized America's technological superiority, a merit he seems to value least: "From an engineering point of view, America is the most interesting country in the world"[12]. In addition, Dmitriev pointedly commented on the freedom with which he was allowed to view and examine whatever he chose, even including government buildings. This latter observation is italicized in the text and provides another oblique reference to the political situation in Russia. It should be noted that Dmitriev's series of articles was based on a lecture he gave before the Petersburg Society of Architects on January 18, 1905 — nine days after Bloody Sunday, the fateful workers' demonstration in St. Petersburg. *Zodchii*, for its part, avoided mention of revolutionary disturbances throughout the 1905-7 period.

Visions Of The Skyscraper

For most of its final decade of publication, *Zodchii* reported with regularity on new developments concerning American skyscrapers. Articles appeared on the Singer Building in 1906, on the Metropolitan Life Building in 1907, and on buildings by Francis Kimball in 1908. There were also reports on the completion of other major structures, such as New York's Penn Station and the New York Public Library. A brief notice in 1908 commented on the "gigantomania" of Ernest Flagg, probably the most active builder of skyscrapers in New York: Flagg "dreams of constructing a building as high as one thousand feet.... Even the Yankees have had second thoughts about this. There are reasonable people thinking of raising the question of a law to set limits on the flights of artists beyond the clouds"[13]. Yet after 1908, for no clear reason, the number of articles on America underwent a sharp, if temporary, decline. In 1909, the only item on America dealt with air pollution in Chicago; in 1910, there was a single report on a new bridge in Philadelphia; and in 191 I, R. Bernhard reviewed R. Vogel's book *Das amerikanische Haus*, reflecting a growing curiosity about the American design of the detached house and its suitability as a model for suburban development around Moscow.

The reappearance of articles on American architecture and technology in *Zodchii* was due, in large measure, to the Sixth International Congress on Materials Testing, held at New York's Engineering Societies Building in 1912. Given the standards of the time, it is noteworthy that the journal's correspondent was a woman, Maria Koroleva, about whom regrettably little is known. Her dispatches provide detailed and highly technical accounts of the proceedings, as well as an analysis of the construction of New York's Woolworth Building by Cass Gilbert[14]. To Russian observers, the Woolworth Building represented an extreme example of the American mania for

[11] Zodchii, 1905, no. 31:346.
[12] Zodchii, 1905, no. 36:398.
[13] Zodchii, 1908, no. 40:375.
[14] Zodchii, 1912, no. 46:455-59; no. 47:467-70; and no. 48:479-81.

the office tower — a mania that went beyond the limits of economic feasibility, according to the writer of an article on the building, who also noted that its primary function was to serve as a trademark for the Woolworth firms[15]. In a series of postcards entitled "Moscow in the Future," dating from 1913, visionaries in Russia were producing fanciful sketches of a "new Moscow," which bore a distinct resemblance to midtown Manhattan." Indeed, the first tentative steps in this direction had already been taken with the completion of Ivan Rerberg's modest tower for the Northern Insurance Company in central Moscow in 1911[16].

The increasingly specific technical descriptions of the engineering involved in the construction of skyscrapers and their skeletal steel frames indicate that Russian builders were prepared to undertake such projects. World War I and subsequent events, however, postponed the large-scale application of this technology until the late I940s. The most significant statement of this convergence between American and Russian goals in civil engineering appeared in Nikolai Lakhtin's two-part survey of the latest techniques for the use of steel and reinforced concrete in New York's skyscrapers[17]. For Lakhtin, Russia's economic future clearly pointed toward the American model in urban architecture:

Industry, trade, and technology are developing, prices for land parcels are growing, telephones and other communications cannot always satisfy demand; in short, circumstances analogous to those in America are gradually arising in our urban centers. These circumstances make it necessary to construct tall buildings, which must be erected on a steel frame[18].

With this imperative in mind, Lakhtin analyzed the tall building from foundation to wind braces and made detailed drawings of key points in the steel column and girder structure. The same message, regarding the convergence of Russian and American architectural conditions, was propagated at the Fifth Congress of Russian Architects in 1913 by Lakhtin and Edmond Perrimond, both of whom had recently attended conferences in America and returned to Russia convinced of the relevance of the new American architecture[19]. In a separate article, Perrimond described developments in cold storage, sanitation, and water systems, and in steel construction during a visit to the Third International Refrigeration Congress, held in Chicago in 1913[20]. Despite his admiration for such technology, Perrimond was critical of the unhygienic conditions he found in the United States (one wonders in comparison to what).

With the onset of war, visions of growth, progress, and technical development receded, and with them the possibilities of an American-style construction boom in Russia. These visions were undoubtedly unrealistic or premature; Lakhtin once went so far as to compare the subsoil of St. Petersburg with that of New York to assess whether it could support tall buildings. During the war years, references to America dwindled, with the exception of a series of detailed articles written in 1916 by Roman Beker on small community library buildings in America. Beker presented a highly favorable view of these structures because of their design, and also because they seemed to express the democratic belief in education for the people[21]. In 1917, America's entry into the war on the side of the Entente produced renewed interest in the United States; but at the end of 1917, *Zodchii* ceased publication. In a wholly unintended irony, the last article published in the journal bore the title "American Engineers and the War"[22].

American Architecture As Cultural Model

Although *Zodchii* was considered the most important publication in its field, it was by no means the sole source of information in Russia on American architecture. Lay publications such as *Birzhevye vedomosti* brought unique perspectives to American technology and construction; and at the beginning of the century, new architectural journals such as *Stroitel* — not to be confused with *Nedelia stroitelia* — and *Arkhitekturniye motivy* also provided reports on developments in America. Furthermore, advertisements for American products, from Otis elevators to various plumbing systems, appeared in lavishly illustrated Russian architectural annuals. In 1906, for example, St. Petersburg's Annual of the Society of Architect-Artists contained an advertisement proclaiming the virtues of a "patented American water-supply system" for private homes. Above the text was an illustration captioned "the Kewanee system in operation," showing a neighborhood home owner watering the grounds of his half-timbered frame house, with a septic system and pumping equipment drawn in cutaway[23]. It seems anomlous that in 1906 — a year of social crisis and widespread violence — Russian architects could imagine

15 Zodchii, 1912, no. 52:522.
16 See E. I. Kirichenko, Moskva: Pamiatniki arkhitektury 1830-1910-kh godov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), 95-99.
17 The tower has survived very well in contemporary Moscow. See photograph in William Craft Brumfield, The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 284.
18 Zodchii, 1913, no. 18:203-11, and no. 19:215-21.
19 Zodchii, 1913, no. 18:204.
20 Compare to Koroleva's report on papers read at the technology section of the Fifth Congress, Zodchii, 1914, no. 3:27.
21 Zodchii, 1914, no. 12:140-42.
22 Zodchii, 1916, no. 46:412-16, and the three subsequent issues, with floor plans, photographs, and a bibliography.
23 Zodchii, 1917, no. 47-52:226-29.

building for a population of middle-class suburban home owners.

Indeed, an element of fantasy reigns over many Russian perceptions of American architecture, even those expressed in the pages of solid professional journals — not to mention the more imaginative, if less reliable, passages from literary works such as Maksim Gorkii's *City of the Yellow Devil* (1906). This air of unreality must be attributed in part to the different levels of development between Russia and America at the time, and to the great physical distance separating the two countries. Yet for all of these limitations, there is evidence to suggest that the extensive Russian reporting on American architecture established a receptivity to technology that would continue — and in some respects increase — after the revolution, despite considerable barriers to exchanges of information[24].

Beyond the specific function of America as a model in civil engineering and architectural design, there is the broader issue of cultural perception, which *Zodchii* was uniquely qualified to convey. Although technical concerns are of obvious importance to members of the architectural profession, architecture as an art and as a building technology also participates in the social and cultural values of the environment that it shapes. In this respect, Russian reports and articles on American architecture reveal a continual measuring. America is seen as the ultimate standard, regardless of Russia's more immediate relation to Europe. Paradoxically, this taking of measure reflects, on a deeper level, a type of nationalism that seeks a model commensurate with its own aspirations. Only America, with its continental sweep and boundless energy, provided a comparable scale for the challenges confronting Russian builders[25].

No other form of endeavor in Russia expressed this relation to America as clearly as architecture, with its emphasis on both the pragmatic and the cultural. Whatever suspicions Russian thinkers such as Dostoevskii might harbor toward American culture, the material from *Zodchii* suggests that the two countries have often perceived in each other a set of values and characteristics that are tacitly admired and accepted as one's own. Hence the willingness of Russian observers to repeat the terms of American boosterism — "colossal," "enormous," and "fast" — even while offering skeptical comments. One suspects that these are the terms that have appealed to the Russians' own sense of destiny — terms that, despite immeasurable social and cultural differences, indicate in the broadest sense the presence of shared ideals and common standards.

[24] Ezhegodnik obshchestva arkhitektorov-inzhenerov, 1906, no. I, advertising supplement: xxxvill.

[25] Extensive reports based on personal observations of American architecture began appearing again in the Russian architectural press in the 1980. For example, Stroitel'naia gazeta published an interview with a faculty member at the Leningrad Engineering and Construction Institute, who had visited American construction sites in 1985 and gave a positive account of what he saw. Even the terms used are reminiscent of those in Zodchii. "Bystree — znachit pribylnei", Stroitel'naia gazeta, March 3, 1987, p. 3.