

Resurrection of an imperial jewel: the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow

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It once stood as Imperial Russia's largest, most impressive church: the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow. Built over a period of fifty years, it stood for just under another fifty, before being obliterated in forty-five minutes on the orders of Josef Stalin. Its former site near the Moscow River flooded, forcing the rejection of plans to build an enormous Soviet Palace of Congresses. Instead, the gaping hole became a swimming pool, a haunting reminder of what had once stood in its place. Then, in the early 1990s, plans for reconstruction of the Cathedral were revived; in a mere six years, Christ the Savior has again risen, an exact copy of the former structure.

The history of Christ the Savior began with Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812. On Christmas Day, learning that the last remnants of Napoleon's Grande Armée had crossed the Russian border in defeat, Alexander I issued a manifesto from Vilnius ordering a memorial church erected. (1) "To signify Our gratitude to Divine Providence for saving Russia from the doom that overshadowed Her" he announced, "and to preserve the Memory of the unheard of Efforts, Loyalty and Love for Our Faith and Homeland displayed during these difficult days by the Russian People, We hereby intend to build a Cathedral in honor of Christ the Savior in the city of Moscow. May the Almighty bless Our intentions and fulfill them. May this Cathedral stand for centuries to come. May the incense of Thanksgiving, together with love and a desire to imitate the feats of Our Ancestors, glow before the Holy Altar of God for many years." (2)

Once Alexander had returned in triumph from Europe, riding at the head of his victorious army down the Champs Elysée in Paris, he announced an architectural competition for the new church. A number of designs were submitted, including one by Italian Giacomo Quarenghi, the great classicist responsible for the Emperor's own Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo. Quarenghi's plans called for a massive structure modeled on the Pantheon in Rome, with long, projecting Corinthian colonnades in imitation of St. Peter's Basilica in The Vatican. By the time, however, Quarenghi had fallen out of favor with the Imperial Family, replaced by the youthful and talented Carlo Rossi, who transformed St. Petersburg into an exquisite expression of what came to be termed "Alexandrian Classicism." His design, deemed by historian George Heard Hamilton "the boldest and most monumental transposition to Imperial Russia of the spatial geometry of Imperial Rome," was ultimately rejected.(3)

In 1815, the Emperor personally selected the design submitted by Alexander Vitberg, a young artist of Swedish extraction. Outwardly Vitberg's massive proposal was pure classicism: a tiered, rectangular structure, ringed with sweeping colonnades;

a wide drum; and a low, hemispherical dome, the whole decorated with statuary and military trophies.(4) But the straightforward appearance of the plan was deceptive, for its details cloaked a larger, symbolic significance. It actually consisted of three levels: a large rectangular base, on which the church itself-in the traditional Greek cross pattern-was to be set. Crowning the entire structure was the circle of the drum and dome. Vitberg was not only playing with the spatial relationships and complexities of the levels, but each carried a deeper meaning. The lowest level, sunk into the ground and providing the platform on which the church itself would stand, was itself to form a memorial church, its walls lined with memorial plaques carved with the names of those Russians who had perished in the war against Napoleon. In plans, it was represented as the "Memorial Sarcophagus," a gigantic coffin in which the sacrifices of the Emperor's heroic subjects would be forever commemorated, and where their names would be marked in this symbolic common grave. It was reached between a pair of Egyptian columns, the journey across the threshold symbolizing both passage from an ancient civilization and Empire to a modern successor, and an overt statement of the triumph of Orthodoxy over paganism. This not only promoted the primacy of the Orthodox faith-by entering the "Memorial Sarcophagus" one abandoned the heresies of the world to reach the triumph of Christian sacrifice and glory-but also employed, not accidentally, an Egyptian motif, so favored by Napoleon himself, to reinforce the ultimate ascendancy of Russian Orthodoxy. The second level, the actual church itself, to be built after a Greek cross, represented both the triumph of Christianity, and more overtly the domination of Russian Orthodoxy over both the pagan Empires physically and symbolically encountered below as well as death itself. Above, resting of four massive piers, was the circular drum and dome, the third stage in Vitberg's design, representing the mystical nature of God, its never-ending perimeter a visible reminder of an omniscient, omnipotent Creator, both beginning and end combined in one. Here, where a representation of Christ in Glory would gaze benevolently down on the worshippers below, the architectural and symbolic progression of the building's components came to its inevitable end. From the temptations and heresies of the world, one passed to sacrifice was drawn into the presence of God and joined by others, and finally returned to the eternal circle above. (5)

Alexander I, as architectural historian Kathleen Berton noted, was, by the time of the competition, increasingly interested in mysticism, and may have been drawn to Vitberg's design precisely because it combined these elements. Vitberg's proposal first called for the building to be erected in the Kremlin itself, where it would have dwarfed the medieval churches and palaces. (6) In the end however, he selected a site atop the Sparrow Hills, between the Smolensk and Kaluga Roads. It was here, on 12 October, 1817, that the cornerstone of the church was officially laid. (7)

As work continued on the plan, however, it quickly became apparent that the site selected was inadequate to the needs of the structure. The ground, undermined by moisture and shifting earth, soon proved incapable of supporting the building, and Vitberg was forced to alter his plans. But Vitberg, who had no architectural training,

continually altered his plans, confusing construction and leading the engineers involved to utilize wrong sets of measurements.(8)

After ten years of construction, Vitberg's Cathedral of Christ the Savior had gone no further than foundations for its lowest level. Continually over budget, and plagued with unforeseen problems, Vitberg was called before the Building Commission and asked to explain the delays. Worse still, hundreds of thousands of rubles marked for the construction costs had simply disappeared, and Vitberg was accused-wrongly, as a later investigation revealed-of having misappropriated funds.(9)The Senate ordered Vitberg brought to trial, where he was declared guilty and sent into exile to Vyatka, where, for ten years, he lived in extreme poverty.(10)

After the death of Alexander I in 1825, the project languished for several years, ignored by Nicholas I who, having come to the Throne amidst the chaos of the Decembrist Insurrection, had to focus his energies on solidifying the stability of the Dynasty and the State. In 1831 , however, the Emperor, having been advised by the Building Commission that Vitberg's plan was unworkable, decided to instead commission an entirely new structure, conceived as the fulfillment of Alexander I's own pledge to the Russian people. An open competition was held, and Nicholas-a passionate devotee of architecture-himself spent several months poring over the submissions.

On 10 April 1832, the Emperor made his decision, awarding the commission to Konstantin Ton. Born in St. Petersburg in 1794, Ton displayed prodigious talent at an early age; when he was nine, he was accepted as a student at the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts, becoming Rector of the Architectural Department at the age of nineteen; in 1831, after nine years of study in Italy, he returned to the Imperial capital, where he was elected a member of the Academy's Board. (11)



Konstantin Ton

Although Ton was responsible for a number of lesser works, he won great fame in 1829, when his proposal for the design of the Church of St. Catherine at Kalinka Bridge in St. Petersburg was personally selected by Emperor Nicholas 1. In entering the open competition Ton had been advised by Alexei Olenin, President of the Academy of Fine Arts, that the Emperor was seeking not a classical structure, but rather a building which imitated medieval Russian models. (12)

The resulting structure drew heavily on Moscow churches of the Rurik period, its imitating feature a series of tall domes resting above an immense cornice of decorative

arches, scalloped to resemble the ogival curve of a Russian kokoshnik.(13)

It was Ton's apparent familiarity with these elements of medieval Russian architecture that attracted Nicholas I. By the time of the competition to design the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Ton was widely regarded the foremost proponent of the Slavic revival style, newly energized in the reign of Nicholas I. By the 1830s, and following in the aftermath of the chaotic war with Napoleon, Russia had begun to turn its attention from the West, focusing inwardly its heritage and traditions. Although the style gradually crept into official and domestic architecture, it was most prevalent religious structures, where it attempted to both evoke a deeply-rooted heritage and, more importantly, a direct link to the roots of Byzantine Orthodoxy, forcefully aligning the ideas of Orthodoxy, Nationalism, and the Autocracy to mingle in a single presentation of undisguised power. That the usual results often produced a less than satisfactory synthesis of disparate elements was less important than the symbolic significance. (14)

The plan Ton submitted was modeled on a Greek cross. In style, it drew on existing Russian models including the Cathedral of the Assumption in the Kremlin, and the Cathedral of the Assumption in Vladimir, with five domes and broad facades. Unlike the medieval Russian prototypes, however, Ton's design focused largely on a vast, central drum, nearly a hundred feet in diameter, topped with a massive dome which, "except for its onion form," writes Richard Workman, "was more classical than Russian." (15) The four belfries with their subsidiary domes were much smaller, providing a repetition of the exterior elements of St. Isaac's Cathedral in St. Petersburg. These corner belfries, notes Workman, were "false and purely decorative in function, their artificiality suggestive of the impulse to imitate the past." (16) The exterior walls, of equal length and height, were decorated with traditional ogival zakomary, the arches gables representative of a Russian kokoshnik, divided by groups of pilasters and embellished with sculptural reliefs (17) Inside four enormous massed piers supported the vaults of the drum, while two-storey galleries ran down the sides of the nave.

Having completely abandoned Vitberg's plan, Nicholas I himself selected a new site for Ton's structure. It was, he declared, to be built a mile down a bend of the Moscow River from the Kremlin, on Volkhonka Street. The site was already occupied by the medieval Alexeievsky Monastery; when Ton's proposal proved too immense to be fit amongst the existing buildings, the Emperor simply ordered the old complex dismantled and moved to a new location at Sokolniki on the northern fringe of the city.(18) The whole of the area was cleared from Volkhonka Street to the bank of the river, providing some five acres on which Ton's church would be erected.(19) So much space was required as the structure would sit atop a granite terrace, extending to a massive staircase descending to the Moscow River itself, designed to provide a suitable stage on which the traditional Epiphany Ceremony could be held every 6 January. After two years of extensive excavations, supervised by the Special Commission for the Construction of the Cathedral, the foundation was dug and, on 10 September,

1839, Nicholas I himself laid the cornerstone for the new church, inscribed with a dedication: “Bequeathed by Alexander I Begun and Executed by Nicholas I.”(20)

From the very beginning, both the Emperor and the architect conceived the new cathedral in the same symbolic terms as had Alexander I and Vitberg. Not only would the combination of Slavic revival and Byzantine elements provide a visible link to both a real and imagined heritage, but the placement of the complex itself was rich with significance. Its immense height and shining dome had, writes Workman, been “blown into huge dimensions to memorialize 1812 and the entire Russian past.” (21) It would be visible from nearly every point along the center of Moscow, forming a horizontal line with the Kremlin and, beyond it, Red Square and St. Basil's Cathedral. This emphasized, noted historian Evgenia Kirichenko, “the bond with the history of old Russia, represented by the Kremlin, but also its independence from it.” Contrasted with St. Basil's at the end of the visual composition, Ton's church also “created a symmetrical effect by contrasting and celebrating the two buildings, the first raised to mark the conquest of Kazan by Ivan IV, and the second to commemorate Russia's deliverance from Napoleon.(22) The position of the new cathedral, raised on the orders of the Emperor himself, also provided a symbolic link between the power of the Autocracy, represented by the Kremlin itself, to the power of the Church, whose two principal Muscovite buildings would flank the complex.

The Cathedral took forty-six years to build and decorate. The Special Commission for the Construction of the Cathedral, headed by Prince Dimitri Golitsyn, Governor-General of Moscow, supervised the building, but Filaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, was charged with directing and selecting all interior work and furnishings.

The sheer amount of materials required by the project was immense, and much of the work itself was financed through private gifts and by public subscription.(23) The foundations were finished by 1839, while the lower walls took another two years to complete. Once finished, the second and third tiers were framed and the entire structure disappeared behind a veil of scaffolding, from which it would not emerge for nearly twenty years.(24)

As construction continued, the original design underwent a number of changes. Originally, Ton had conceived a wide, low drum crowned with an enormous gilded onion dome whose sheer size dwarfed the building; in 1840, he altered this to a modified cupola which, although it retained hints of the traditional bulbous shape, was more in keeping with the classical elements introduced into the structure. At the same time, the four corner belfries were altered to accommodate a bronze balustrade which ringed the roof, another element not in his original design.(25) The massed piers inside were finished by 1846, and joined to the pendentives, allowing work on the drum and dome, which required another three years of construction. After 1850, work began on the four exterior facades, with their pilasters, ogival arches, and sculpted reliefs; once the roof was set with metal plates, the interior decoration itself commenced, work which would take another thirty years.(26)

During construction of the Cathedral, work also continued on the granite terraces which

were to surround the structure. By late 1880, principal construction was finished, and Ton, by this time dying, came from St. Petersburg to view his church in its final stages. Unable to walk, his devoted pupils carried him through the building on a stretcher. On 13 December of that year, Alexander II officially granted the building the name of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, in accordance with the first Alexander's wish. Less than three months later, Konstantin Ton himself was dead, twenty five years after his Imperial patron Nicholas I. (27)

The finished Cathedral, which had cost an estimated 15 million rubles to build, was staggering in its size.(28) Covering some 73,000 square feet, it rose 338 feet into the Moscow sky, crowned with its immense gilded dome which could be seen by those traveling to Moscow from as much as twenty miles away. The four equal facades, faced in blocks of white marble set between ashen granite, were



The original Cathedral in the nineteenth century

240 feet long by eighty feet high with a ten foot cornice topped with thirty-foot high ogival arches above which circled the gilt bronze balustrade. The central projections of the facades, divided by massed pilasters, each housed three, thirty-foot high arched bronze doors, sculpted by Count Feodor Tolstoy with enormous representations of one of the twelve apostles. Each facade was also richly ornamented with forty-eight sculpted reliefs depicting both religious and military themes, the work of the famous Baron Peter von Klodt, Nicholas Ramazanov, and Alexander Loganovsky. (29)

The interior of the Cathedral, lighted by sixty windows, could hold up to 10,000 people; it had largely been finished under the direction of Alexander Rezanov.(30) Ton's plan

reflected a verticality which subordinated the exterior to the spatial interplay found within, drawing on both the complexities of existing models like the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and, as Evgenia Kirichenko points out, “a typically nineteenth-century flair for organizing internal space in original ways.” (31)

The floor was covered in an intricate mosaic of variegated marble laid in a swirl of geometric patterns, while the walls were finished in segmented panels of Italian marble porphyry, and Kievan labradorite, inset with malachite, jasper and lapis lazuli medallions and borders (32). “I dare not hazard an estimate of the entire cost of this Church,” recalled John Stoddard, “and I have found none that I could accept with confidence; but I may say, to illustrate the richness of its ornamentation, that one comparatively small section of Siberian jasper, inserted like a medallion in a marble wall, cost no less than fifteen thousand dollars.” (33) Between these panels stretched immense frescoes, the work of a handful of respected Russian artists including Vereshchagin, set within gilded frames designed by Victor Vasnetsov to incorporate dieval themes. (34) Reflecting the religious and commemorative nature of the structure, these included both religious and military themes, their shimmering surfaces encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones. (35)

The main nave of the Cathedral was flanked by two, two-storeyed galleries. The walls of the lower galleries were faced with marble plaques, inscribed with the names of the participants of the War of 1812, while their upper floors were given over to the Chapels of St. Nicholas and St. Alexander Nevsky, each lined with historical frescoes depicting key events in the struggle against Napoleon.(36)

At the center of the Cathedral, situated between the massed piers supporting the pendentives of the drum and reached by eight wide marble steps set behind a gilt bronze balustrade, Ton had constructed a unique iconostasis. Knowing that the traditional, multi-tiered altar screen would have interfered with the spatial lines so integral to his design, the architect instead placed a fifteen-foot high wall of white marble, carrying only two tiers of inset icons, at the center of which stood a forty-foot high, eight-sided white marble chapel, topped with a gilded tent roof modeled on that of the Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoye. Into this little building were set the central Royal Doors, flanked by openings on either side, the whole segmented by moldings and pilasters of gilt, malachite, lapis lazuli, and porphyry, and inset with icons. It was an architectural solution “unprecedented in the history of 19th Century church architecture,” noted Kirichenko, “and was never repeated.” (37)



The walls of the massed piers flanking the iconostasis were faced with enormous frescoes depicting St. Vladimir, St. Alexander Nevsky, while the percentiles between the arches of the dome carried representations of the four evangelists. A fresco of Christ Pantokrator crowned the arch above the iconostasis, while the twelve apostles were depicted in frescoes which circled the interior of the drum. The underside of the dome itself was painted with an allegorical work depicting the Holy Trinity, an immense white dove spreading its wings against a blue sky sprinkled with golden stars. (38)

The Cathedral was formally consecrated on 26 May 1883, in the midst of the ceremonies surrounding Alexander III's Coronation. A manifesto, written by the Emperor's confidant and advisor Konstantin Pobedonostsev, proclaimed the new cathedral a visible expression of "the centuries-old union of love and faith tying the Monarchs of Russia with the Loyal People." (39) The Emperor himself arrived at the Cathedral atop a white horse, followed by his family in a string of carriages; the whole of the square before the church was filled with a sea of people: Metropolitans and Bishops attired in their richly-embellished vestments; clergy holding aloft banners and icons; a regiment from the Preobrazhensky Guard; a massed choir; and the Moscow Sympathy Orchestra, playing Tchaikovsky's newly-composed 1812 Overture. The clergy led the group through the Cathedral in the Procession of the Cross, formally sanctifying and blessing the structure. A number of veterans from the war against Napoleon were presented before the priests conducted the formal service within the Church. At the end, the new bells pealed out into the Moscow sky, accompanied by the boom of artillery salutes, as the city celebrated its glorious new Cathedral. (40)

There was no denying the impact of the new Cathedral. Its sheer size made it impossible to ignore. Yet very few Muscovites were fond of the building. Its so-called "new National Style" was, declared architect Vassili Stasov, "neither new, nor national, nor even a style." (41) He condemned both the Cathedral and Ton's glittering new Grand Kremlin Palace as "multi-ruble losses," writing that they displayed "a great amount of richness, and a mechanical repetition of aspects of folk-lore on the outside, but no evidence of a sincere feeling for Russian national architecture, no evidence of real talent. (42)

In truth, the building suited no one but the clergy. Its final appearance, wrote art historian George Heard Hamilton, showed only Ton's "ineffectual attempt to graft Byzantine detail on a classical form." (43) Referring to the architect's "bastardized forms of ancient Russian and Byzantine styles," Kathleen Berton noted that the Cathedral of Christ the Savior "appeared lugubrious and depressingly heavy, vastly dwarfing buildings for some distance around, its scale entirely out of place. Viewed with the Kremlin in the background, it was a grotesque overstatement against the graceful group of churches and cathedrals within the Kremlin walls." (44)

For the next thirty years, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior dominated the religious life

of the former Russian capital. During Imperial visits to Moscow, the Emperor and his family usually appeared at a service within its walls. On 30 May 1912, Nicholas II—who had first set foot within the immense Cathedral during its sanctification following his father's coronation in 1883—returned to the Cathedral's ponderous structure, to himself dedicate a memorial to Alexander III. Joined by his wife and his mother, the Emperor arrived at the Cathedral beneath a cloudless Moscow sky, the square ringed not only with clergy but also members of the Preobrazhensky Guard—in place as much to prevent any hostile demonstrations against the monarch as to add a ceremonial military touch. At the center of the square, atop an immense pedestal, the statue was draped in white canvas, which billowed in the breeze from the Moscow River. At a signal, the canvas—attached to poles held by a half-dozen workers—was ripped aside to reveal the memorial. Metropolitan Vladimir blessed the statue as a nearby choir, robed in medieval costumes, sang hymns, all as Nicholas II himself, saber drawn and hand raised in salute led a symbolic military review past the figure. (45)



Sculpted by Alexander Opekushin, the statue, thirty feet high, depicted Alexander III seated on his throne, the Imperial Orb in one hand, the Scepter in the other, his shoulders cloaked with the Imperial Mantle, and the Imperial State Crown atop his head.(46) To fulfill the Emperor's request that the statue face the Kremlin across a bend in the Moscow River, it had been positioned with its back to the Cathedral itself. It was a cumbersome representation, as unwieldy in its size and refinement as the Cathedral itself.

Left: Alexander's statue before the Cathedral (Atlantis Magazine collection)

Five months after the February Revolution, the Cathedral witnessed the inauguration of a new Supreme Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, called to discuss the future of their faith. With the Dynasty fallen, and the Emperor as titular head of the Church along with it, the metropolitans and bishops faced a lack of leadership. During the Council, these men voted to reinstate the Patriarchate, an institution which had not existed since the reign of Peter the Great. The new Patriarch, Tikhon, was to see the Russian Orthodox Church through the Bolshevik Revolution and the increasing chaos which slowly enveloped its former world. (47)

In the 1920s, with the Russian Church under increasing persecution from the Soviet Government, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior came to be viewed as a

monumental eyesore, described within the press as “grotesque and totally inartistic,” a “poisonous mushroom on Moscow's face”, and a “source of slothfulness.”(48) Such views, originating from Josef Stalin and Presidium, sealed the Cathedral's fate. Beginning at noon on 5 December 1931, a series of explosions rocked the quiet of the snowy Moscow afternoon; in less than forty-five minutes, Ton's Cathedral had been reduced to a pile of rubble. Film director Sergei Eisenstein's cameras were rolling as



An anti-religious rally before the rubble of the former Cathedral, 1932.

the first charges erupted, capturing what one author termed “the most remarkable act of self-inflicted architectural vandalism of the 20th century.” (49)

To replace the former church, Stalin commissioned an international contest for the design of a new Palace of Soviets, conceived, writes Kathleen Burton, “on an unimagined scale.” (50) Stalin commissioned the structure to mark the first Five Year Plan, and more than 160 entries were submitted from around the world. (51) In the end, the commission was awarded to a team of Soviet architects, Boris Iofan, Vladimir Gelfreikh, and Vladimir Shchuko, whose design evoked clear echoes of the classical architecture so beloved by the 20th Century fascists. Curiously, the decision was heralded in the Soviet press with a distinct hint of the abandoned religious legacy of the old Russia. Soviet architects, the Chairman of the Project Committee told reporters, “are the only direct successors to ancient Rome,” a statement which would not have been out of place if uttered by Filaret himself when initially planning the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and discussing Moscow's status as “the third Rome.” (52)

The approved design called for a massive building, 1,034 feet high, modeled after a gigantic, stepped column, ringed with colonnades and crowned with a 328 foot tall, 6,000 ton statue of Lenin. It would have been the tallest building in the world, higher by just over twenty feet than the Empire State Building in New York City. (53) Construction began in 1936, when the enormous foundations were excavated but, like the builders of Ton's great Cathedral a century earlier, the soil, made moist by its proximity to the Moscow River, proved a stumbling block. Thousands of tons of concrete were poured, and the perimeter reinforced with iron debar, when the entire structure began an inexorable, unstoppable shift toward the river itself. Specialists from Germany and Great Britain were invited to consult, but could do no more than advise that the entire site be covered with several layers of concrete and steel, and the proposed building be raised several levels. The work was so extensive, and the need so vast, that fully sixteen per cent of the Soviet Union's annual output of concrete was poured into the excavations in a futile attempt to halt the seepage. By 1941 , the foundation had apparently been secured, and the Palace itself was in the process of being framed, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The struggle against Germany brought an abrupt halt to all of the work, and by 1942, the shortage of steel was so great that the framing was torn apart to provide material for the armed forces. By the end of the War, the structure, abandoned, had once again fallen victim to the ravages of the Moscow River Finally, Stalin ordered the project halted. (54)



Artist's drawing of the aborted Palace of Soviets

For ten years, the site itself stretched along the Moscow River, an enormous pit filled with mud in the summer and frozen over in winter. In 1958, hoping to at least utilize the excavations, Krushchev ordered an immense swimming pool built to the perimeters. The Moscow Swimming Pool, opened two years later, became the largest open-air pool in the world, the subject of carefully guarded anti-soviet jokes and whispers from the superstitious who “cackled and whispered that the site had been cursed when the great Cathedral was destroyed.” (55)

For thirty-four years, the Moscow Swimming Pool served as an ironic eyesore, a visible

reminder of what had once occupied the site. With the rapid changes wrought under Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as President of the Soviet Union Russians attempted to come to terms with their past, desires which most often took the form of nostalgic reflections and yearnings for what had come before 1918. A perverse logic—that the Soviet past must be rejected in favor of that which it had replaced—ironically echoed the very currents which had led to the destruction of so many artifacts of Imperial Russia, and led to calls for their restoration, even—as with the case of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior—when the structure in question was of little artistic or historic importance.

In February of 1990, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church met and approved plans calling for reconstruction of Ton's cathedral. An appeal was sent to the Government, asking for the return of the property to the offices of the Church to enable the structure to be rebuilt on its original site. Gorbachev himself approved the request, and in December, the first stones were laid in what would form a replica of Ton's original granite terrace surrounding the church.

In July of 1992, President Boris Yeltsin formally established "The Fund for the Recreation of Moscow," a committee designed to restore the city's architectural landmarks. A list of proposed projects was headed by the rebuilding of the Cathedral of Savior itself. Two years later, in autumn, 1994, the Moscow Swimming Pool was officially closed and dismantled. As soon as the site was drained, the foundations of the terraces and church were dug and quickly filled with concrete before the onset of the harsh Moscow winter. On 7 January, 1995, Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, presided over the formal consecration of the site as the cornerstone was laid. (57)

The reconstruction of the Cathedral was supervised by the Christ the Savior Cathedral Reconstruction Public Supervising Council, headed by Patriarch Alexei II and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. The latter was a controversial figure in the 1990s, called by his detractors, "an authoritarian mobster," and a man whose policies and statements gave rise to serious concerns. Luzhkov openly denounced the United States, accusing them of having engineered Russia's economic collapse, and initiated a round of harassment for Moscow's homeless, gay and lesbian, and ethnic populations, in a self-proclaimed effort to "return to our traditional values." (58) Although he became a driving force in the rebuilding of the church, Luzhkov's involvement with the project was to tarnish the effort.

The Council itself decreed that the Cathedral should duplicate the original building. Mikhail Posokhin served as Chief Architect on the project, assisted by A. Obolensky, D. Solopov, and A. Denisov. The interior decoration was carried out under the direction of Z. Tsereteli, supervising twenty-three crews of artists commissioned to work on the frescoes and mosaics. The Cathedral was built of concrete, faced with brick and overlaid with marble from the Chelyabinsk region in the Urals. The red granite for the terraces, balustrades, and staircases surrounding the church came from Balmor, Finland. (59)

There were, however, several deviations from Ton's original plans. To commemorate the Alexeievsky Monastery which had originally occupied the site, a new subterranean Church of the Transfiguration was built beneath the massive Cathedral, its interior decorated according to medieval Russian models. Another change was construction of a Hall of Church Sobors, lined with white Italian marble and with a Florentine mosaic floor, along with several assembly rooms and a Patriarchal Suite.(60)

Construction on the Cathedral took a mere five years. On 7 January 1996, the Patriarch, along with Yeltsin and Luzhkov, symbolically laid the last three bricks into the main wall. Eight months later, on 19 August, Alexei II presided over the consecration of the Church of the Transfiguration below the main Cathedral. By December of 1999, all interior work had been finished, including the frescoes and an exact duplicate of Ton's imaginative tent-roofed iconostasis. On 18 August 2000, Transfiguration Sunday in the Orthodox Calendar, the new Cathedral was formally consecrated during the canonization ceremony for Nicholas II and his family.

Although Yeltsin had issued a Presidential decree in 1995 ordering that no public money should be used in the construction, later reports revealed that more than \$200 million-of the \$500 million cost of the Cathedral-had come from the State Budget. Charges of bribery and corruption were rampant, and in January, 2003, Moscow Deputy Mayor Oleg Tolkachyov was forced to reveal that Moscow businessmen had been pressured to make substantial donations to the reconstruction fund to receive ordinary business permits and approval for leases or building projects. Current investigations into the revelations continue, apparently justifying suspicions about Luzhkov's involvement with the entire project.(61)

Despite the scandals, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior has once again risen to dominate the Moscow skyline, its immense golden dome a shining reminder of the lost glories of the fallen Romanov Dynasty, and the shifting currents of Russian history.



The Cathedral reborn

Source Notes

1. Bedon, 167.
2. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 18-20.
3. Heard Hamilton, 216.
4. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 65;. Workman, 384.
5. Heard Hamilton, 237; Berton, 168; Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 53.
6. Benton, 168.
7. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 62.
8. Berton, 168.
9. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 66.
10. Benton, 168-69.
11. Slavina, 7-26; Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 65.
12. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**. 65., Slavina, 43.
13. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 65; Slavina, 44.
14. See Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 60-65; Bromfield, 223,, and Slavina, 38-62, for further discussion.

15. Workman, 1:384.
16. *ibid.*, 383.
17. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 68; Slavina, 88; Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 67.
18. Slaving, 89.
19. Berton, 170.
20. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 68-69.
21. Wortman, 1 :384.
22. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 65.
23. Berton, 170.
24. Slavina, 90.
25. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrlsta Spasitelia**, 72-3.
26. Slaving, 90.
27. *Ibid.*, 90-91.
28. Newman, 243.
29. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 68; Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 82-87; Newman, 245.
30. Bedon, 170; Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 68.
31. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 68.
32. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 89-97.
33. Stoddard, 311.
34. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 71.
35. Stoddard, 310-11.
36. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 106-113.
37. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 71 .
38. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 68; Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 119-27.
39. Cited in Wortman. 2:233.
40. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 140-42.
41. Kirichenko, **Russian Design**, 65.
42. Benton, 171.
43. Heard Hamilton, 238.
44. Berton, 170.
45. Workman, 2:430-31.
46. Mawdsley, 141.
47. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 149.
48. *ibid.*, 150-52.
49. Mawdsley, 141.
50. Benton. 222.
51. *Ibid.*, 223.
52. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 158-59.
53. Berton, 224-25.
54. *Ibid.*, 225.
55. *Ibid.*. 225.
56. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 160-61.
57. *ibid.*, 162-67.

58. **The Christian Science Monitor**, 5 January, 1999.
59. Kirichenko, **Khram Khrista Spasitelia**, 166.
60. Ibid., 159-71.
61. **Moscow Times**, 17 January, 2003.

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