

“Soviet Architecture and its National Faces ”: Soviet Architecture in Central Asia, 1920s-1930s

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Abstract

The thesis “*Soviet Architecture and its National Faces*”: *Soviet Architecture in Central Asia, 1920s-1930s* is devoted to the various ways Soviet Central Asian architecture was imagined during the 1920s and the 1930s. Focusing on the discourses produced by different actors: architects, Soviet officials, and restorers, it examines their perception of Central Asia and the goals of Soviet architecture in the region. By taking into account the interdependence of national and architectural history, it shows a shift in perception from the united cultural region to a set of national republics with their own histories and traditions. The thesis proves that national architecture of the Soviet Union, and in Central Asia in particular, was a visible issue in public architectural discussions. Therefore, architecture played a significant role in forging national cultures in Soviet Central Asia.

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Introduction

What architectural forms was adequate to embody the new Soviet reality was a relevant question during all period of its existence. However, it was compounded by many factors; one of the most complicated among them was the national question. Existence of strong regional architectural traditions and uneven technological development made the creation of new local Soviet architectural styles a challenging process in many republics. And yet Central Asia was the region where the encounter of complex nation-building history, century-long architectural schools and peripheral position led to the most vigorous discussions among architects and state officials during the 1920s and especially in the 1930s. This thesis addresses the emergence of national architectural styles in Central Asia by analysing architects' imaginations about the East and tracking the conceptual frames of theoretical debates in the course of national and political history. It is a story about the policy of the style but not the history: I argue that any given reading of "Soviet Central Asian architecture" served certain political goals, be it social improvement of local people or strengthening of national delimitation.

In 1924, the Communist party completed the first draft of the project of national-territorial delimitation in Central Asia. Two Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Turkestan ASSR and Kirgiz ASSR, as well as two separate states of the Emirates of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva, were divided into five ethnically-based republics: Uzbek SSR, Turkmen SSR, Tajik ASSR within Uzbek SSR, Kazakh ASSR and Kara-Kyrgyz AO (since 1926, Kyrgyz ASSR) within

RSFSR.¹ Thus, the national idea was embodied in the administrative and territorial structure of the region.

The Soviet project of modernity desired to remake the Central Asian periphery that was based on the assumption of the backwardness of indigenous peoples, whose way to communism promised to be longer than usual.² Another assumption was that architecture has a power to talk, change and teach: that it performs as a transmission device, being then a tool of rapid modernization. As Paul Stronski has noticed in his book on Soviet Tashkent, “Building a ‘Soviet city’ was not the end goal in itself, but the means to change the society it housed.”³ However, every brand new Soviet architectural project tended to look back at the traditional heritage of the region placed on the waiting list of modernity. The question was what could be saved and used in new projects and what had to be eliminated? The answer had changed significantly during 15 years, alongside the general flow of Soviet architectural history and national policy. The variety of answers as to how Soviet architecture in Central Asia should look and the reasoning behind them are the key questions of my research.

The chronological scope of my work covers the short period from the mid-1920s till 1939. I start with the year 1924, when Central Asia was created almost as we know it in terms of national borders, and I end with the year 1939, when the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (*VSKhV*), famous by the pavilions of union republics, triumphally opened in Moscow. This timeline is divided into several parts that are very different from each other in spirit. The first one is the 1920s, the time of flourishing avant-garde movements, relative

¹ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of nations: ethnographic knowledge and the making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 113.

² Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review*, 65 (2006): 231-51.

³ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010).

freedom in arts and liberating national policy. The state did not yet establish the only reading of Soviet architecture in Central Asia that led to a variety of creative viewpoints.

The next period begins in the late 1920s – the period of the Cultural Revolution – and continues until 1937. The process of nation-building in all cultural spheres got escalated that resulted in mobilization of the development of the national faces of Central Asian architecture. Institutionally, the key date of this time is the year 1932, when the Union of Soviet Architects was established and became the only professional institution. Apart from institutional reorganization, another important change referred to the issue of style. It was introduced through the announcement of the winners for the main architectural contest of these years, the Palace of Soviets. To the surprise of many Soviet and foreign modernists, the winning project was created in the classicistic style, moreover, the Committee recommended to use classical architectural heritage. However, what to do with the “Eastern” heritage of the USSR was not clear. With the consolidation of national republics on the background, this period presented the most inventive hybrids of national, classical and modern traditions.

The final point of my research is just a few years between 1937 and 1939. In 1937, during the First Congress of the Union, the principles of socialist realism in architecture were established that closed the door on a possible disagreement of the future ways of Soviet architecture. For Central Asia, it meant that new architectural language of national republics were tightly discursively defined. Right after that, the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow in 1939 consolidated the progress and showcased the new reading of exhibition pavilions for national republics and final guidelines.

Thus, the period from 1924 till 1939 is characterized by a transitional nature that makes it rich for inquiry. This was a time when the final doctrine was slowly developing. Final projects were defined by the creative principles and the architects’ backgrounds and

the knowledge on regional art and architecture also defined.⁴ Thus, a diversity of projects ranged from modernist to frankly eclectic; and all of them got an official feedback whether they fit current state goals or not. The official criticism in the press and the meetings of the Union gradually crystallized a new understanding of Soviet architecture on the national periphery. I am going to uncover this process: to demonstrate a range of the projects made from different viewpoints and analyse their ability to fulfill pragmatic goals. In the end, it will lead us to the final reading of the Central Asian architecture in 1939, the project found by trials and errors.

In structural meaning, the setting of my research involves several tensions, relations between which were shifting but anyway went throughout the history: a ruling centre and a dependent periphery, internationalism and nationalism, architectural structure and decoration, professional practice and amateurism. Soviet architectural practice for Central Asia reveals these conflicts very sharply. For instance, the relations and structural misbalance between Moscow-based architects who mostly offered the projects and got the commissions, and their local colleagues shed light upon the modus of architectural production in Central Asia.

In my research, I will bridge several narratives: architectural history dealing with the problems of style, form-making and planning, political history telling about Sovietization in Central Asia and national history that helps me to uncover the understanding of national building in republics. I want to show Soviet architecture being responsive to the political and national challenges of time; thus, its history cannot be written without taking into account the testimonies from other academic fields.

I argue that the discourse about Soviet architecture in Central Asia was very distinct and well defined by architects and party officials. It was a part of the debates about the

⁴Alexandra Selivanova, *Postkonstruktivism. Vlast i Arkhitektura v 1930kh Godakh*. (Moscow: BuksMART, 2019): 15.

position of national architecture but had its special characteristics defined by local context. As I will show, projects for Central Asia came into existence at the intersection of several actors' activity: architects, officials, researchers, and preservationists. The understanding of how Central Asian architecture should look changed. Most significantly, it followed the path of national policy.

Although "Sovietisation" was "an interactive and participatory process", which was to bring people into the revolution,⁵ in this research, I will concentrate on the actors from the centre due to the lack of sources. Mostly all actors I took into account were located in Moscow and only occasionally travelled to Central Asia if at all. There are independent architectural groups, architects, research institutions, professional institutions and unions. Thus, in this thesis, I deal with official and personal projections of Central Asia and the dreams about it reforging rather than with "work on the ground".

Bibliography

Central Asian studies are a continuously growing field and many kinds of research on cultural aspects of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s gave me insights on how to proceed with my project. The book based on post-colonial perspective *Central Asia in Art: From Soviet Orientalism to the New Republics* dedicated to **fine arts**. It deals with oil painting, a media imported in Central Asia only in the Soviet period.⁶ The author shows that "images and identities are interlinked constructs which inform each other"⁷ as the paintings produced an image of Central Asian people that tended to establish the differences and depict their otherness. The creation of national **literatures** for Central Asian peoples is the topic for several profound kinds of research. For instance, Katharine Holt analyses their place in

⁵ Francine Hirsch, *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, *Central Asia in art: from Soviet orientalism to the new republics* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016): 11.

⁷ Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, *Ibid.*, 10.

Russian-language literature by studying both books of non-Party writers and the work of national commissions in preparation to the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.⁸ Other works reflect on the invention of tradition in national literatures: through canonization of certain authors⁹ or even nearly mythological figures.¹⁰ A similar process happened in **films** production. In *Cinema, Nation and Empire* Cloé Drieu provides an excellent discovery on institutional structure, ideological goals of films, its perception and the ways they portray the people from the early 1920s till the rise of high Stalinism.¹¹ Oksana Sarkisova rather analyses only the representation of Soviet people in ethnographic movies, which together formed a ‘cinematographic atlas’ of the USSR and the way they formed the knowledge being a means of exploration of Soviet nationalities.¹² These books illustrate the connection between cultural production guided by state needs and the development of national republics. Although they are not dedicated to the architecture directly, they shed light on the mechanics of Sovietisation in all arts and media more generally.

Much has been also written about the architecture of Soviet Central Asia and the party’s role in the regulation of the architectural process. However, the questions of how Central Asian versions of architectural styles were forged and by which actors have yet to be properly addressed. Selim Khan-Magomedov was one of the first scholars who described early Soviet avant-gardist projects for Central Asia and identified key actors and institutions. However, he was mostly interested in the “classical” version of the avant-garde.

⁸ Katharine Holt, “The Rise of Insider Iconography: Visions of Soviet Turkmenia in Russian-Language Literature and Film, 1921-1935,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013).

⁹ Katharine Holt, “Performing as Soviet Central Asia’s Source Texts: Lahuti and Džambul in Moscow, 1935-1936,” *Cahiers d’Asie centrale*, no. 24 (2015): 213-238.

¹⁰ Evgeniy Dobrenko, “Gomer Stalinizma: Suleiman Stal’skii i Sovetskaia Mnogonatsional’naia literature,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2013): 191-249.

¹¹ Cloé Drieu, *Cinema, Nation, and Empire in Uzbekistan 1919 – 1937* (Indiana University Press: 2019).

¹² Oksana Sarkisova, *Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

Therefore, he evaluated its regional versions in the Soviet periphery as the “spoiled ones”, which brought alien traditional elements.¹³

Boris Chukhovich, Svetlana Gorshenina, and Greg Castillo have covered the early years of Soviet architecture (1917-1937) and introduced the notion of “oriental modernism” in architecture, born from synthesis. Among them, Castillo underlined the role of Soviet exhibitions in the construction of images of Soviet national republics. Describing exhibition pavilions as “unexplored hybrids” of modernism and traditionalism, he has come closer than others to the problem of national variation of style. Also, the very idea to turn to the architectural exhibitions is very fruitful, since the temporary exhibitions usually contributed by the leading architects served as “playgrounds” for them to train their images of Orient in micro-level and for the metropolitan audience. Gorshenina has elaborated the topic of the practices of heritage preservation in the region, which opens another angle on the issue: the politics of what is built always goes along with the politics of what is to be preserved or to be destroyed.

Paul Stronski’s work *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1920-1966* is one of the most relevant books for my research. Stronski followed the development of the capital of the Uzbek republic through decades and shows how modernizing Soviet projects was embodied in the new urban environment which were meant to Sovietize the population by reframing traditional life. Through the analysis of Soviet encounters with non-Russian urban culture, he argues that the “local officials and residents themselves participated in this effort to shape local identities and the urban environment”.¹⁴ This study offers a balance between architectural material and its political implications, but concentrates mostly on town-planning ideas and does not reflect on the problem of style.

¹³ Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Architektura Sovetskogo Avangarda. Vol. 1.* (Moscow: Stroyisdat, 1996).

¹⁴ Paul Stronski, *ibid.*, 13.

Hugh Hudson and Alexandra Selivanova have focused on the political history of early Soviet architecture and its transitional nature due to the tension between architects' artistic methods and the party's decisions. They only mention Central Asian projects among others. The same lack of Central Asian context makes the books of Boris Groys, Dmitry Khmelnickiy, Vladimir Paperny, and Mark Meerovich on the Stalinist architecture of the 1930s incomplete.

This overview shows that even though much research has been done in the fields of Soviet architectural history and Central Asian studies on the 1920s-1930s, the diachronic analysis on Soviet attitudes, both official and professional, towards the architecture in Central Asia still remains not yet considered. In short, Central Asia as a specific locus in architectural discourse with its own site-specific issues deserves special attention. The attempt to combine architectural, national and political context together can help to overcome this shortage.

Methodology

Studying the architecture of the Soviet Union involves several conceptual frameworks. I draw on post-colonial approach by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, whose book *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind* discussed Russian attitudes towards the East and analyse its Oriental modus.¹⁵ In recent Central Asian studies, Svetlana Gorshenina has described Central Asia as a pure Orientalist project.¹⁶ This point of view gives analytical benefits: I divide the Soviet imagination about Central Asia and Central Asia itself and notice the conscious efforts that were put to reform the region by the Soviets.

¹⁵ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Svetlana Gorshenina, Boris Chukhovich, "Srednjaja Azija kak fenomen chistogo orientalisticheskogo èksperimenta (1860-1990-e gg.)," In *Transoxiana. History and culture* (Tashkent: Institut Iskusstvoznaniya Akademii xudozhestv Uzbekistana, Institut Otkrytoe Obshchestvo (Fonds Soros), Centr po pravam cheloveka, 2004): 339-346.

This point of view defines my perspective: I take all five republics of Central Asia as a whole, as it was an object of Soviet construction. Also, it keeps my special attention on the discursive terminology of Soviet language about Central Asia. Seeing the language as a reflection of power relations and a definition of its own object is an adequate paradigm for reading Soviet sources.

The question of the nation-building is another key problem of my research. I find the approach of Francine Hirsch who uses the notion of *cultural technologies of rule* in the work on creating the Soviet Union and the role of ethnographic knowledge in this process. She defines it as different “forms of enumeration, mapping, and surveying that ‘modern’ states use to order and understand a complicated human and geographical landscape”.¹⁷ Three practises Hirsch scrutinises in her book are the census, the map and the museum, which served to centralize the power in the region and to modernize the lands.¹⁸ I argue that architecture as an industry that depended a lot on ethnographic knowledge and as media could be studied through this approach and seen as a tool of forging national policy.

At the same time, I do not want to exclude the personality of architects and their own visions. In this regard, I find the approach to the architecture of 1932-1937 introduced by Alexandra Selivanova extremely useful. In the recent book *Postkonstruktivism. Vlast i Arkhitektura v 1930kh Godakh*, she claims that modernists had to repudiate their ideas after 1932, but many of them still continued to use the functional method, just saturated the projects with details learnt from classical heritage.¹⁹ Although her book does not mention Central Asia, the idea that certain national details and motifs could be detached from the context and used for the composite projects gives a key to my material and fits my

¹⁷ Francine Hirsch, *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸ Francine Hirsch, *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*

observations very much. Also, it gives space to individual creative decisions that still existed even in the 1930s.

Sources

In order to unravel the intertwined narratives about Soviet architecture of the East, I will use a rich variety of primary sources. Essential sources for my research are Soviet architectural magazines published in Moscow: the official press played an essential role in this period, being a space for fervid discussion among architects and party functionaries and a tribune to announce new decisions. *Sovremennaiia arhitektura* [Contemporary Architecture] (1926–1930) is an example of avant-garde architectural magazine reflected on the topic before the time of Cultural Revolution and represented the professional approach of constructivists. Magazines *Arhitektura SSSR* [Architecture of the USSR] (1933–1937)²⁰, *SSSR na stroyke* [The USSR in Construction] (1930–1937)²¹, *Sovetskaya arhitektura* [Soviet Architecture] (1931–1934), *Stroitelnaia promyshlennost'* [Building industry] (1923–1937)²², *Stroitelstvo Moskvy* [Construction of Moscow] (1924–1937)²³, mostly represent the official discourse and served as a tribune for the transition of party's decisions. *SSSR na stroyke* was also a magazine used to portray Soviet achievements for a foreign audience because it was published in several European languages.

I also studied the materials on particular architectural projects in Central Asia. Since, unfortunately, I could not explore all of them, I picked up several most illustrative ones to show different stages and approaches to Soviet Central Asian architecture. Thus, I took a closer look at projects of constructivists Moisei Ginzburg such as the Government House in

²⁰ *Arhitektura SSSR* had been published until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, however I limit my exploration and the last issue I read was of 1939.

²¹ Like in case of *Arhitektura SSSR*, the magazine kept being published until 1940, the last single issue happened in 1949.

²² *Stroitelnaia promyshlennost'* had been published until 1949.

²³ *Stroitelstvo Moskvy* had been published until 1941.

Alma-Ata in the late 1920s, which melded the traditional forms of dwelling and rationalized ideals of a new way of living together. Then I concentrate on the projects of the early 1930s by Viktor Kalmykov for nomads of Asian steppe and for mountain areas. I'm especially interested in the figure of Kalmykov as he was born in Tashkent – he was both a practitioner and an insider. The projects of Moscow architectural institute' students for textile factories in Uzbekistan also could be included in this group. In the end, projects made in an eclectic manner will be topics for discussion as well; I am going to reflect upon the works of Alexey Shchusev (such as the Theatre in Tashkent) and others that exemplify certain turns and critical points.

In order to clarify the scientific context of architectural work and to understand what Soviet architects could actually know about the East, I will also focus on series of ethnographic and art historian publications on regional architecture²⁴ as well as on materials of the expeditions of the Academy of Science with the participation of architects, which took place in the 1930s.²⁵ Additionally, a study of a few Moscow exhibitions dedicated to the national art and architecture of republics such as ones organized by the Russian Academy of Artistic Science (*RAKhN*) in 1924 and in 1927²⁶ will provide the understanding of the image of the East and the way the latest achievements of Soviet architecture there were presented for a wider public. This last section of my materials is of special interest

²⁴ Such as: Boris Denike, *Iskusstvo Sredney Asii* (Moscow: Tsentral'ny Izdatel'sky Dom Sovetskikh Natsionalnostey, 1927), Petr Kornilov, *Issledovaniya iskusstva Sredney Asii* (Kazan: Tatpoligraf, 1930), Vladimir Chepelev, *Iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo oblastnogo soyuza sovetskikh khudozhnikov, 1935), Elizaveta Zhuraleva, *Iskusstvo Sovetskogo Turkmenistana* (Moscow-Leningrad: IZOGIZ, 1934),

²⁵ This important source illustrates the unity of the production of scientific knowledge about the region and production of architectural projects. Expedition to Kyrgyzstan: V. Belousov, Ch. Ryss and V. Kalmykov (eds.), *K Voprosu o Sotsialisticheskoy Rasselenii v Kirgizskoy ASSR. Trudy Kirgizskoy Kompleksnoy Ekspeditsii* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1939).

²⁶ I discovered the catalogue and the guidebook published for this exhibition dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the USSR: *Putevoditel po Yubileynoy Vystavke Iskusstva Narodov SSSR, Organizovannoy GAKhN*. Moscow: Mospoligraf, 1928.

because they acted as a tool for ‘virtual tourism’ giving a possibility to see other peoples of the USSR.²⁷

Thus, in regards to sources, the main limitation of my research is that I use mostly the evidence from the centre and do not involve the local sources. That’s why my research does not reflect on the implementation of architectural decisions and projects in reality and its level of success. Also, it leaves out a question of how local people reacted and interiorized the buildings: these topics require serious work with regional sources.

Structure

This thesis consists of three main chapters arranged in chronological order apart of introduction and conclusion. The first one is dedicated to the discourse about Central Asia since the mid-1920s until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1920s. I will analyse Moisei Ginzburg’s analytic approach to Central Asian heritage by reading both his theoretical works and architectural projects. Then, I touch upon preservationists as well as the institutions that studied the folk art and their role in shaping Central Asian architecture. I argue that there were a variety of approaches towards Central Asian architecture, many of which were based on the personal creative ideas and the views inherited from the pre-revolutionary time, while the state policy celebrated the national diversity.

The second chapter is dedicated to the transitional period from the early 1930s until 1937. My goal is to show the palette of approaches, from analytical to eclectic ones, during the time when the party was changing its cultural policy towards architecture but still had not delivered the finalized doctrine. I will analyse the projects of Viktor Kalmykov, Alexey Shchusev and others. I argue that many projects did not fit the developing doctrine “national in form, socialist in content” and offered their own vision of Central Asian architecture.

²⁷ Francine Hirsch, *Ibid.*, 188.

However, in the 1930s, the state filter worked to select the projects that would serve the nation-building and delimitation process.

In the third chapter, I discuss the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects and its understanding of architecture in national republics, including Central Asian. Also, I reflect on the importance of this event for architectural history in the USSR and on the ways the new architectural doctrine of socialist realism was established. By analysing the national pavilions at the All-Union exhibition in 1939, I come to the final point of the development of national styles for Soviet Central Asia, arguing that the national delimitation in architecture was officially formalized and the relationship of Russian and Central Asian architects became the central topic of discussion.

Chapter 1. Discourses on Central Asian Architecture in the 1920s: from the National Delimitation to the Great Transformation

The perception of Central Asia in Russia before the Revolution varied from the backward and dangerous borderland to be conquered to the attractive and intriguing object to be discovered.²⁸ Central Asia became “Russia’s own Orient” in contrast to which it could be constructed as a modern state.²⁹ In art and literature, it led to the appearance of many Orientalist works presenting the Orient as the very distinct Other, in Said’s terms.³⁰ However, there is still no final agreement among scholars to which extent and how this perspective can be applied to the Russian case due to both Russian ambiguous historical position and somewhat simplifying claims. Nevertheless, much historical material shows the relevance of Said’s key point: the use of cultural and scholar apparatus to study and talk about the Orient is a tool to govern it.³¹ For instance, the Turkestan Exhibit at the 1896 All-Russian Fair or rooms of Turkestan in the Russian exhibit hall at the 1900 Paris World Fair were clear representations of Central Asian exoticism and Russian colonial achievements.³²

Speaking about architecture on the site, the first European-like buildings appeared in Central Asia after the conquest of Turkestan by the Russian army in 1865. Generally, all new constructions, as well as new city planning decisions, served as the examples of “civilizing work of Russian colonialism”.³³ Russians perceived the traditional urban environment of Central Asian cities as chaos. In contrast, Russian attempts to bring regular

²⁸ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁰ David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “The paradox of Russian Orientalism,” in Patty Wageman and Inessa Kouteinikova (eds.), *Russia’s Unknown Orient: Orientalist Painting 1859-1920* (Rotterdam: Nai Publisher, 2010): 15-23.

³¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³² Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 84-86.

³³ Robert D. Crews, “Civilization in the City. Architecture, Urbanism and the Colonization of Tashkent,” in *Architecture of Russian Identity, 1500 to Present*, eds. Cracraft, Rowland (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018): 117.

planning and geometric order – for instance, the use of radial axes and street grids – were to be the “seeds of humane Christian culture”, according to the words of the governor-general of Turkestan Sergei Dukhovskoi.³⁴ New regular Russian settlement around Tashkent on the south and east from the historical city, across the channel, or the settlement Verny, future Kazakhstan’s capital Alma-Ata,³⁵ exemplifies this model. The resulting ‘dual’ city embodied the idea of two-worldness on the spatial level. Therefore, the new architectural style and town-planning system served as a manifestation of a new order that contrasted a “comforting regularity”³⁶ of imperial towns to the chaotic and filth disorder of Central Asian towns. Thus, the architecture helped to present and legitimize the power, and to produce the hierarchy by making the clear separation between Russian, understood as European, and Asiatic parts. However, after the Revolution, Soviet architects both inherited a lot of ideas from the pre-revolutionary era and, following the winding flow of Soviet national policy, dissented from many former attitudes. I argue that in the Soviet architectural scene of the 1920s there were still a variety of positions towards Central Asia while the notion of nation in a modern sense was barely applicable to them. These position ranged from the radical modernist to historicist one. However, according to the architectural magazines, it was not a very much-discussed topic. In this chapter, I will first start with the analysis of the general perception of Central Asia and national policy towards it. Then I will identify the main thinkers and institutions that were engaged in the issue of Soviet architecture in Central Asian lands. Therefore, I will not only reflect on architectural thinking about Central Asia but also discuss closer artistic biographies of some figures.

³⁴ Cited in Robert D. Crews, *Civilization in the City...*, 118.

³⁵ Anna Bronovitskaya, Nikolay Malinin, *Alma-Ata: Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Modernisma, 1955-1991* (Moscow: Musey sovremennogo iskusstva “Garage”, 2018), 15.

³⁶ Robert D. Crews, *Ibid.*

1.1 Imagining Central Asia in the early 1920s

The 1920s was a decade of creative architectural search that gave birth for avant-garde schools rejected architecture of the past times³⁷ and the era of speed reconstruction after Civil War – this was not an exception in Central Asia. The need for new architecture, apart from the ideological claims, was quite practical: the USSR experienced a deep housing shortage.³⁸ Although avant-gardists of different kinds played a pivotal role in the Soviet architectural landscape of the early 1920s and also got state endorsement in capitals and big cities, at the Central Asian periphery, the eclectic architecture based on regional traditions was common.³⁹ The understanding of Central Asia from the distance, especially among metropolitan architects, was exotic.

The All-Russian Agricultural and Industrial Crafts Exhibition happened in 1923 in Moscow is the key event that shows the Soviet Oriental imaginary of the early 1920s, before the national delimitation in Central Asia was developed. The main goal of the exhibition was to show the first achievements of the Soviet economy. Among the pavilions dedicated to the different economic sectors and different republics, there were the pavilions of Turkestan and Kyrgyz republic.⁴⁰ Turkestan pavilion, which was also called “Central Asian”, was made by prominent Russian Art Nouveau architect Fyodor Shekhtel and decorated by artist V. Razvadovsky. In the tradition of international fairs, the constructions were temporary: the Turkestan pavilion had wooden frames and was covered by plasterboards, cupola and details were made of papier-mâché (Fig.1, 2). In the explanatory

³⁷ Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Konstruktivism – Kontsepsiya Formoobrazovaniya* (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 2003), Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Racionalism – “Formalism”* (Moscow: Arkhitektura-S, 2007).

³⁸ Mark Meerovich, *Gradostroitel'naya Politika SSSR 1917-1929: ot Goroda-sada k Vedomstvennomu Poselku* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008).

³⁹ Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Avangarda. Prolbemy Formoobrazovaniya: Mastera i Techeniya* (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1996), 576-581.

⁴⁰ K. Afanasyev and V. Khazanova (eds.) *Iz Istorii Sovetskoy Arkhitektury 1917-1925: Dokumenty i Materialy* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1963), 174-175.

note, it was written, “All the wooden frame for Central Asian pavilion is done according to the drawings of Shekhtel... Paintings for columns of minarets and platbands for windows should be stencilled in Central Asian style.”⁴¹ Synthetic “Central Asian style” with no distinction exemplifies the modus of Oriental architectural production. Shekhtel was definitely inspired by mosques’ main portal and *iwan*, in particular, of Mughal domes, while the exposition presented the anthropological material contrasted to the modern displays of other pavilions.⁴² Such an approach did not get far away from the pre-revolutionary traditions of exhibitions and, as Zeynep Çelik has shown on the European world fairs, demonstrated the colonial imaginary and referred to a type “the replica of a building”.⁴³ Although much less is known about the pavilion of the Kyrgyz Republic, generally it shared the same approach (Fig.3).

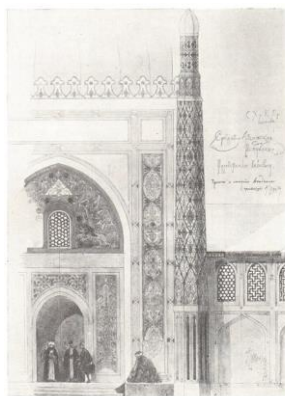


Fig. 1. Fyodor Shekhtel, Project for the Turkestan pavilion, portal. 1923 (Source: K. Afanasyev and V. Khazanova (eds.) *Iz Istorii Sovetskoy Arkhitektury 1917-1925: Dokumenty i Materialy* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1963), 178).

Fig. 2. Turkestan pavilion at the exhibition, 1923 (Source: Pastvu.ru).

Fig. 3. Pavilion of the Kyrgyz Republic, 1923 (Source: Pastvu.ru).

Russian architectural historian Evgeniya Kirichenko has claimed that “Orient style of the project [Turkestan pavilion] makes us see Shekhtel as an ancestor of the Soviet

⁴¹ “Iz poyaznitelnoy zapiski i programmy rabot po postroyke paviliona dlya Sredne-Asiatskogo paviliona,” In K. Afanasyev and V. Khazanova (eds.), *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴² Greg Castillo, “Peoples at an Exhibition. Soviet Architecture and the National Question,” in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism without Shore* (London: Duke University Press, 1997): 93-95.

⁴³ Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-century World Fairs* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 95.

doctrine famous as ‘culture national in form and socialist in content’ and anticipates such bright phenomenon as... neo-Uzbek style of Shchusev.”⁴⁴ However, this argument is not entirely accurate: while the outlook is resembling, the essence of the later Soviet architecture is different. The understanding of Central Asia and the concept of the nation had changed significantly during these two decades. More precisely, in the 1920s even after the national delimitation of the republics, Central Asia as well as the “East” still was a cultural or civilizational category for architects. While already in the late 1920s, it changed its meaning and gained national connotations in terms of ethnic communities attached to the certain territory thanks to the determined national policy. The views of centre architects and state considerations differed that, in the end, led to the radical state intervention to the architectural field in the 1930s. In the 1920s, the backward and oppressed nations, liberated by the Soviets from the former oppressor in Lenin/Stalin’s terms, enjoyed the autonomy, rights to use the native languages and special attention to local cultures to be improved.⁴⁵ The state-driven process of forming national identity was gathering speed – architecture would play its role in its.

1.2 State policy in Central Asian Architecture and City Planning

To understand the creative attitudes, first one needs to reconstruct the state priorities in the region. The general state paradigm towards Central Asia was the enlightenment of backward peoples. In public discourse, a bunch of elusive definitions such as barbarism,

⁴⁴ Evgeniya Kirichenko, *Fyodor Shekhtel: Zhizn, Obrazy, Idei* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2011), 320.

⁴⁵ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, no. 2 (1994): 420-430.

nomadism, deserts, and cotton were attached to the region.⁴⁶ Another set of clichés such as about “dirty feudal towns” was produced in architectural discourse.

As a whole, Soviet approaches towards traditional cities followed in many ways the imperial one; so many Soviet judgments recall imperial Russian vision of the region.⁴⁷ The key points of critique were the same: narrow dirty crooked streets, maze-like planning, and dirty water. In the end, these things became popular rhetorical devices in journalistic articles. However, the politics of Soviets towards Central Asian cities were different from tsarist politics. The imperial official tried to distance from the indigenous historical centre and build the new settlements in European style, segregated from the traditional ones, to underline the opposition of two civilizations. In contrast, Soviet planners, for instance, tried to actively remake the traditional way of life and transform the medieval cores of the cities. Their projects sought to unify previously dual Asian-European city and to equalize the population in the access to the Soviet modern achievements such as water sources, medicine, and new comfort housings. As Adeeb Khalid has argued, Soviet attempts to build citizenry were based on a homogenizing rather than differentiating approach: the natives were to be brought up to universal Soviet standards.⁴⁸ These standards were applied to all spheres of life, from sanitary norms to the liberation of women: architecture became a part of the unifying norm as well as an agent of changes.

In Central Asia, the second half of the 1920s was the time of the rapid change of urban landscape: the transformation of old buildings into new Soviet institutions, developing irrigation infrastructure, construction of housing complexes for workers,

⁴⁶ Oksana Sarkisova, “Edges of Empire: Representation of Borderland Identities in Early Soviet Cinema,” *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2000): 240.

⁴⁷ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010), 63.

⁴⁸ Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2006): 232-233.

although many plans remained on paper due to lack of the resources.⁴⁹ The magazine *Stroitel'naya promyshlennost* affiliated with *Strombyuro* (All-Union state bureau of materials industry by *VSNH*) reported the high pace of urban development in Central Asia and promised even greater perspective for new construction in the nearest future. “Turkestan in a form of old colony of the Russian empire has died”⁵⁰, they declared, therefore, the brand new republican and regional centres urgently needed new administration buildings.⁵¹ Apart from governmental buildings, housing shortage and reconstruction of factories also remained the issues to address. The multiple architectural contests announced in Moscow, for instance, for the republican hospital in Samarkand in 1926⁵² or the governmental house in Alma-Ata in 1928,⁵³ show that the search for a new kind of Soviet architecture on the East was the substantial task since the middle 1920s.

A priority task was the modernization of the construction industry. The Soviet authorities admitted weak technological development and the lack of cheap materials such as wood. According to their views, thanks to Central Asia’s warm climate the solution could be found in the use of light constructions and standardisation methods, which were widely promoted everywhere in the USSR. Also, the officials attempted to control the local construction market and fight against private contractors born by the New Economic Policy

⁴⁹ Paul Stronski, *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ M. Kaminsky, “Stroitelstvo Sredneaziatskikh Respublik,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 11 (1924): 738-739.

⁵¹ The estimated investments in new construction in Central Asia in 1925 was over 20 million rubles (vs. 6 million in 1924), including 4 million only for governmental buildings in Samarkand, the capital of Uzbek SSR, and 1 million for Dushanbe, the capital of Tajik ASSR. See: M. Kaminsky, *Ibid.*

⁵² P. Antipov, “Konkurs MAO na Sostavlenie Proekta Respublikanskoy Bolnitsy UzSSR v Gorode Samarkande,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 9 (1926): 659-660.

⁵³ “Dom Pravitelstva v Gorode Alma-Ata,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 5 (1928): 375-377.

(NEP).⁵⁴ In 1924, a local branch of *Gosstroy*, the state network of construction contractors' offices, called *Turkgosstroy* was established.⁵⁵

The question of town planning in the old and newly established cities was another important issue. The process of the national delimitation drove it: some settlements such as Sherabad in UzSSR had been assigned to be local or regional centres even before the construction works were finished.⁵⁶ Due to the specific climate conditions and landscapes, the recommendations for the European part of the USSR were considered as inappropriate. Furthermore, both traditional parts of Central Asia cities ("old cities") and Imperial Russian settlements ("new cities") did not fit new requirements. The latter was called "cities-doppelganger" or "cities of yesterday", while their clear radial or grid plans and streets wide enough for the military purposes recalled the tsarist power. The formers were not taken as cities at all: "Asian peoples such as Uzbeks do not have cities but, in essence, a big *kishlak*."⁵⁷

The evidence of the colonial mindset was widespread in the official press. Thus, the backwards features of old *tuzemnye* (aboriginal) cities were numerous and needed attention: winding and narrow streets with many dead-ends, fragmentation of the city fabric, absence of pavements, drainage, public parks. All of them became an obstacle on the way of social development. The closeness of traditional life was under critic as well: "The spirit of the East in its full power is that all the comfort (*uyut*), the luxury of gardens, all water springs are behind high fences."⁵⁸ This point exemplified antisocial tendency that ran against the open and equal community and implied wealth inequality – water was a precious source.

⁵⁴ V. Trofimov, "Sredi Turkestanikh Stroiteley," *Stroitel*, 1 (1924): 44-45.

⁵⁵ M. Lopukhin, "O Deyatelnosti Gosstroya VSNH," *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 10 (1924): 665-667.

⁵⁶ L. Voronin, "Sredne-Asiatskiye Goroda i Voprosy ikh Planirovki," *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 2 (1927): 131-137.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 133.

Such urban structure was explained by the way of living and the traditional inheritance system, which led to the non-controlling subdivisions of private parcels.

Thus, the key points for future development were identified. As Paul Stronski has rightly observed, “architects and artists studied the building traditions of Central Asia, declared most of them as ‘backward’, and then postulated how they could ‘improve’ local building designs with modern Soviet technology.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, all the mentioned backwards features usually related to Central Asia as a whole – “Soviet East” as a term to address Soviet policy on the national question and generalize the problems.⁶⁰ That, in turn, was a part of a wider question on nationalities and national culture. Although the manifestation of state authority was an important task of any capital cities, the “national face” of the architecture in national republics was not yet the topic for wide discussion on the official pages. However, there were several approaches among architects, both theoretical and practical, towards architecture at the Central Asian periphery.

1.3 Moisei Ginzburg: from Orientalist Architecture to the Constructivist Method

Architect Moisei Ginzburg (1892-1946) is mostly known as a leader of constructivists focused on housing problems and an author of such famous Moscow building as Narkomfin. The Eastern architecture and Central Asian as a part of it as another source of his architectural thinking and another topic in his works is usually underestimated. However, from the very beginning of the practice, Ginzburg was one of the few Soviet architects who was consistently reflexing on Eastern architectural traditions.

⁵⁹ Paul Stronski, *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ Masha Kirasirova, “The East as a Category of Bolshevik Ideology and Comintern Administration: The Arab Section of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East,” *Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 18, no.1 (2017), 8-9.

The interest to the national architecture can be found in his early years before he became constructivist: Ginzburg studied the folk architecture of Crimea Tatars for four years while living in Crimea, published the study *Tatarskoe Iskusstvo v Krymu* (“Tatar Art in Crimea”, 1922). One of Ginzburg’s first works was the pavilion of Crimea SSR for the 1923 All-Russian Agricultural and Industrial Crafts Exhibition, discussed above. (Fig. 4) The pavilion reflected the form, planning and details of traditional Tatar houses and the Khan palace in Bakhchisaray, Crimea. It was a simple whitewall building decorated by modest wall painting complemented by light wooden structures on the beams: balconies, staircases and galleries. The pavilion served as an exhibition space for the best achievements of local production, mostly, agro-products. This early encounter with the issue of national architecture was done in Oriental spirit: it reproduced the traditional types of Tatar buildings and served as a showcase of all architectural peculiarities in one place. Being part of the exhibition, Crimean Tatars were counted among “Eastern peoples.”



Fig. 4. Moisey Ginzburg, The Crimean pavilion at the All-Russian Agricultural and Industrial Crafts Exhibition, 1923 (Source: Selim Khan-Magomedov, “Moisey Ginzburg” (Moscow: M.S.Gordeev, 2011), 13).

Another important episode related to the studies of Eastern architecture is Ginzburg’s membership at the *RAKhN*, *Rossiiskaya Akademiia khudozhestvennykh Nauk* (State Academy of Artistic Sciences) was a scientific and art institution established by Narkompros and with the support of Lunacharsky. Its goal was the comprehensive study of

all art forms, the synthesis of art and science and methodology of art studies.⁶¹ Ginzburg belonged to the architectural subsection, the primary aim of which was the study of architectural monuments and the notion of architectural form.

The *RAKhN* conducted a sufficient number of expeditions, for instance, folklore expeditions to the Russian North, and individual research trips across Russia and abroad, since the folk art was of Academy's close attention. Ginzburg headed the Academy's expedition to Bukhara to study architectural monuments in 1924.⁶² Unfortunately, now I lack the sources that can shed light on his work in Central Asia. However, most probably it was the description and measurements of monuments because the expedition was organized on behalf of Bukhara Sovnarkom. After return, Ginzburg made an exhibition, "Art of Bukhara," based on materials and drawings collected during the expedition (3-6 February 1925).⁶³ The exposition in the *RAKhN* presented "a big number of exhibits reflecting the peculiarities of Bukhara, its value and the architectural development from the 10th to 19th century. The photos and drawings did not only represent the architecture of temples, mosques and palaces but also reflected on housing in Bukhara. Also, there were works of applied arts."⁶⁴ The exhibition and presentation made by Ginzburg were successful: as the bulletin of *RAKhN* reported, it attracted more than 100 visitors, including many members of nationalities and of institutions engaged in Oriental studies. Ginzburg's findings were evaluated by the Turkestan Commission, which included such prominent researchers and restorers as Zasyarkin and Denike. It decided to take some of the monuments under state

⁶¹ See: Nikolay Plotnikov, Nadezhda Podzemskaya, Yuliya Yakimenko, eds., *Iskusstvo kak Yazyk – Yazyki Iskusstva. GAKhN i Esteticheskaya Teoriya 1920kh* (Moscow: NLO, 2017).

⁶² Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Moisey Ginzburg* (Moscow: S.E. Gordeev, 2011), 12.

⁶³ "Vystavka 'Iskusstvo Bukhary'," *Byulleteni GAKhN*, 1 (1925): 41.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

protection and select others to be restored.⁶⁵ In the same year, Ginzburg also made a research trip to Turkey to study Islamic and Byzantine architecture.⁶⁶

This demonstrates Ginzburg's very special interest in the architecture of Central Asia and, wider, of the East; also, it shows Ginzburg's engagement into preservation activity. Being in search of architecture, which is adequate to the present day, he studied the forms of the past. In the same year, Ginzburg published his theoretical work *Stil i Epokha* ("Style and epoch", 1924) where he argued that each architectural style is the way "to organize an isolated space," reflected the vital factors and determined by cultures.⁶⁷ Thus, his special concern to the forms of Central Asian domestic architecture is the interest in culture-specific organizational habits.

These considerations would be developed in his constructivist stage. By 1925, Ginzburg formed a group of constructivists or *OSA* (Organization of Contemporary Architects, 1925-1930). Among all architectural groups of the 1920s, only constructivists formulated a clear statement about the development of new architecture in Central Asia. More precisely, that made Moisey Ginzburg, a leader of the *OSA*. Also, he was an executive editor of the group's magazine *Sovremennaya arkhitektura* (Contemporary architecture), the main media to share constructivists' architectural views. There he published two seminal articles in 1926: "*Zhivoy Vostok*" (№5-6, 113) and "*Natsionalnaya Arkhitektura Narodov SSSR*" ((№5-6, 113-115).

Generally, the constructivists' architectural method of work was not site-specific; moreover, it tended to be universal, i.e. to be applied in any cases. First, I will address the general provisions. The credo of constructivism was that the construction followed the function. Another assumption was that material surrounding had a transformative power and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Selim Khan-Magomedov, Ibid.

⁶⁷ Moisei Ginzburg, *Stil i Epokha* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1924), 17.

could help to change human nature and to expedite the assertion of communism. Thus, it defined the task for the new architecture: it should have been based on the rational organisation of the processes and clear understanding of the aim of the building.⁶⁸ For instance, before the creation of the plan of a new factory, an architect should take into account all supposed manufacturing and labour processes and graph them. In case of construction of a dwelling, an architect needs to account all domestic labour processes.⁶⁹ This defines the main principle of constructivists – functional planning, which was useful for any architectural types, from kindergarten to the public kitchen. Another significant issue was the constructivists’ obsession with the architectural construction understood as an architectural core in contrast to the decorated facade understood as an unnecessary shell that just covers the constructional gaps.⁷⁰ This construction/décor tension will reveal itself many times in the story of Soviet Central Asian architecture.

Theoretically, such a functional method would work universally. But as Boris Chukhovich has noted, there was the paradox of the “modernisms on the periphery”: while modernism generally tried to invent universal international language and fought against any kind of historical connotations, being placed on the non-Western periphery, it took local agenda into account.⁷¹ The disproportion between “default” Russian locality and “labelled” Central Asian locality is underlined by the fact that the architecture in Central Asian even needed a special discussion as if Central Asia constitutes a particular problematic case and the working methods should be adapted. This attitude structurally corresponds to the special position of the Russians among other Soviet nationalities: it was a sort of “non-nation” or

⁶⁸ Moisei Ginzburg, “Tselevaya ustanovka v sovremennoy arhitekture,” *Sovremennaya arkhitektura*, 1 (1927): 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁰ Mariya Silina, “Diskussii ob Ornamente v Sovetskoy Arkhitekture 1920-1930kh Godov,” In I. Bondarenko (ed.) *Khan-Magomedovskie Chteniya*, Vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Kolo, 2017): 208.

⁷¹ Boris Chukhovich, “Orientalism modes of modernism in architecture: Colonial, Postcolonial, Soviet,” *Etudes de Lettres*, no. 2-3 (2014): 264.

“default-nation” with no national rights while others could benefit from being non-Russian.⁷²

In the articles “*Zhivoy Vostok*” and “*Natsionalnaya Arkhitektura Narodov SSSR*”, Ginzburg merged the functional method and the observations he made earlier in Bukhara: according to him, the functional method executed in the right way should have solved the problem of national architecture. Ginzburg saw the potential for further development of Central Asian architecture: “Typical neighbourhood of Eastern *kishlak*, *aul*, or city is the starting point for the development of the national architecture of the East, valuable material for the future construction. Household and climatic peculiarities reflected in the structure of the squares and streets, in the house’s body are the national prerequisites, which should serve as a background and ensemble for the new growing East.”⁷³ As architecture represents the social conditions, consequently, the revival of old decorative architectural forms would lead to the revival of “atavist national idea.” Thus, all mosques and other public building represented, according to Ginzburg, “Dead East” and, therefore, could not be used for present days, as well as all other old architectural decorative forms of any national style. (Fig. 5) In contrast to these “grave monuments” that belonged to museums, “living Eastern city and its households” represented “Living East” that gave an architect material to work. Ginzburg’s preferred “a plain dwelling of a poor Muslim” over “brilliant mosques and mausoleums”. In simple “clarity of forms of this primitive architecture”, “flat roof”, “ascetic whiteness of flat faces”, and “texture of surfaces” of Eastern dwellings⁷⁴ he saw inner and modest functionality. In the articles, Ginzburg also evoked Dagestan republic, for which he just made a project of the House of Soviets in Makhachkala, as another example. Thus, he

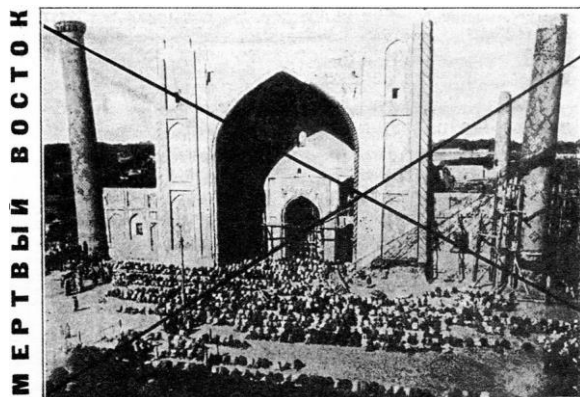
⁷² Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, no. 2 (1994): 434.

⁷³ Moisei Ginzburg, “*Zhivoy Vostok*,” *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 5-6 (1926): 113.

⁷⁴ Moisei Ginzburg, “*Natsionalnaya Arkhitektura Narodov SSSR*,” *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 5-6 (1926): 114.

treated the East as a generic term that covered a big part of the non-Russian world. Ginzburg saw nationality is a host of functionality – the key concept of his architectural theory. He proved that such seeds were to be discovered and used by Soviet architects. According to him, this quality belonged to a collective bearer, peoples of the East. He did not speculate on the national differences but stated that all nationalities obviously had different *living cultures* that in the future, being processed by architects, would define “individual national faces of republics”.

Later on, in 1934, Ginzburg summarized his views on the role of domestic architecture and its potential in the book “*Zhilishche*” (“Dwelling”) published in 1934, while working in the Section of typification in *Giprogor*. In the opening chapter “*Kultura zhilishcha*” (“Housing culture”), he analysed the evolution of various housing tradition in the world, its value for contemporary architects and articulated the specific “living culture of the East,” among others. It included planning features such as non-symmetric structure or inner yards, use of carpets as well as isolation of the inner living space from the outside world and different parts of the dwelling from each other, which are helpful for the concentration of a person.⁷⁵ The living culture of the East was considered as another brick in Ginzburg’s search for peoples’ architectural rationality.



⁷⁵ Moisei Ginzburg, *Zhilishche. Opyt Pyatiletney Raboty nad Problemoy Zhilya* (Moscow: Gosstroyizdat, 1934), 24.

Fig. 5. Moisei Ginzburg, Collage “Dead East” (Source: Moisei Ginzburg, “Nazionalnaia arhitektura narodov SSSR,” *Sovremennaya arkhitektura*. no. 5-6 (1926): 113).

Ginzburg showed how to apply these principles in action by himself. His project made for the contest of governmental house of the Kaz ASSR in Alma-Ata organized by Moscow Architectural Society won the competition.⁷⁶ (Fig. 6, 7) As the architect explained, his project flowed from the living and climatic conditions of the region. Thus, an open terrace beneath the main hall on the pillars was to be multifunctional space: an open vestibule, space for rest, waiting room, easy way to the garden and the information office.⁷⁷ However, nothing really reminds us of any kinds of traditional architecture in the building outer composition: such building could be built anywhere. Ginzburg, and constructivists in general, focused on the organizational principles and construction ideas and completely ignored décor. For him, such building was the embodiment of the distilled functions typical for Kazakhstan way of living and regional conditions, therefore, fully suitable for local habits. However, constructivists came to the paradox: in attempts to create a “new face of national architecture,” the “face” turned to be very resembling all others.

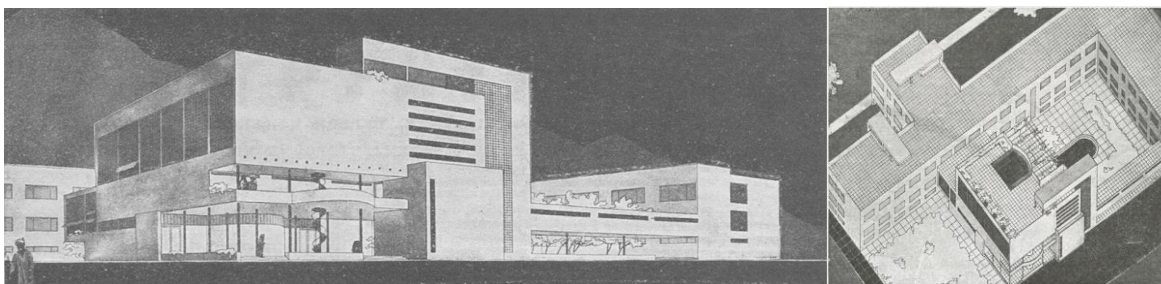


Fig 6. Moisei Ginzburg, The Governmental House in Alma-Ata, 1927-1931 (Source: Moisey Ginzburg, “Dom Pravitelstva v Alma-Ata (KSSR),” *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 3 (1928), 75).

Fig 7. Moisei Ginzburg, The Governmental House in Alma-Ata, Axonometry of the Inner Yard (Ibid.).

⁷⁶ “Dom Pravitelstva v Alma-Ate,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 5 (1928), 375-377.

⁷⁷ Moisey Ginzburg, “Dom Pravitelstva v Alma-Ata (KSSR),” *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 3 (1928), 75-77.

1.4 Preservationists and their Role in Debates on Central Asian Architecture

Restoration of old buildings and construction of new ones proved to be two sides of one coin in the policy about architecture. Since 1920 when Narkompros issued the resolution on protection of the monuments and established *Turkomstaris* (the Turkestan Committee for the Affairs of Museums and Preservation of Monuments of Antiquity, Art and Nature), restoration works in Central Asia took place.⁷⁸ In the research based on the works of Soviet preservation committees in Central Asia, Vera Tolz and Svetlana Gorshenina have shown that national delimitation of the republics escalated the preservation activity and turned it into ethnocentric manner, however, not instantly.

The crossing of two fields, preservation and architectural practices, led to the appearance of projects made in Central Asian “national spirit.”⁷⁹ Indeed, one of the examples of such convergence was the works of Alexander Udalenkov (1887-1975) resided in Leningrad. He headed the expedition of *Glavmusey* by Narkompros and *RAIMK* (the Russian Academy of History of Material Culture) to Samarkand. The main object of studies was the complex of Shah-i-Zinda.⁸⁰ Among the other eight members, the artists Kuz'ma Petrov-Vodkin and Alexandr Samokhvalov also took part in the expedition. The goal was to make the measurements, analysis of constructions and make proposals for future restoration. After 1926, Udalenkov became the head of the fundamental Turkestan expedition that made more than 400 photographs and copies of decorations, studied technological decisions and

⁷⁸ Svetlana Gorshenina, Vera Tolz, “Constructing Heritage in Early Soviet Central Asia: The Politics of Memory in a Revolutionary Context,” *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2016): 77-115.

⁷⁹ Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Avangarda. Prolbemy Formoobrazovaniya: Mastera i Techeniya* (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1996), 581.

⁸⁰ A. Yakubovsky, “GAIMK i IIMK i Arkheologicheskoe isuchenie Sredney Asii za 20 let,” In S. Bibikov (ed.), *Kratkie Soobshcheniya o Dokladakh I Polevyh Issledovaniyakh IIMK, Vol. 6* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1940): 15.

made measurements of the monuments.⁸¹ The architectural projects of Udalenkov, for instance, his project for the Palace of Labour in Ashkhabad, were definitely inspired by the traditional architecture of mausoleums. (Fig. 8)

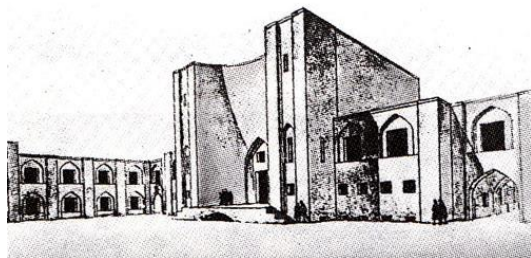


Fig. 8. Alexander Udalenkov, Project for the Palace of Labour in Ashkhabad, 1927 (Source: Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Arkhitektura Sovetskogo Avangarda. Prolbemy Formoobrazovaniya: Mastera i Techeniya* (Moscow: Stroyizdat, 1996), 582).

However, the influence of Central Asian studies on architecture is still not very well explored. Not all architects had a luck to travel to Central Asia personally: the architectural magazines and scientific publications became the way to explore the national architectural tradition remotely. The magazines showed the increasing interest in publications dedicated to the question of preservation of architectural monuments in Central Asia in 1927-1928.⁸² They included the articles of prominent orientologists and architectural historians such as Boris Denike and Boris Zasyrkin. Boris Denike (1885-1941) was a researcher of Medieval Islamic art and the second director of the Museum of Oriental Cultures established in 1918 in Moscow. In 1926-1928, he organized three expeditions to Central Asia, to Termez and published the book *“Iskusstvo Sredney Azii”* (“Central Asian Art,” 1927). Boris Zasyrkin (1891-1955) was an architect and restorer, who also took part in the expeditions of the Museum and the Central Restoration Workshop in Central Asia, made several publications

⁸¹ G. Dluzhnevskaya, “Deyatelnost Akademii Istorii Materialnoy Kultury v Oblasti Vostokovedeniya v 1919-1940kh godakh,” In A. Dyagterev and Yu. Alexeev (eds.) *Ot Drevney Rusi do sovremennoy Rossii. Sbornik statey v chest 60-letiya A. Dyagtereva* (Saint Petersburg: Russkaya kollektsiya, 2006): 347-371.

⁸² See: N.M., “Voprosy Restavratsii,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 3 (1927), 199; B. Zasyrkin, “Iz Itogov Arkhitekturnoy Restavratsii,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 4 (1928), 306-312; B. Zasyrkin, “Pamyatniki Arkhitektury: Zametki po Stroitel'noy Kulture Sovetskogo Vostoka,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 1 (1930), 70-77; A. Lovengarg, “V Muzee Vostochnykh Kultur,” *Stroitel'stvo Moskvy*, 3 (1927), 18-20.

on the restoration process of Central Asian monuments.⁸³ In 1934, Zasyppkin was arrested and exiled in Uzbekistan, where he continued his works and after 1953 became the head of the Department of the Protection of Architectural Monuments of Uzbekistan.

Their observations were widely published, for instance in the magazine *Stroitel'naya promyshlennost*. (Fig. 9) According to the editors, Central Asia materials as well as cheap but promising construction techniques such as various types of bricks, brickworks or ceilings could enrich the Soviet school. Central Asian minarets were of special attention of architects: very high and yet sustainable structures in the seismic region provoked the interest in the building supplies, mortars and construction methods.⁸⁴ All Central Asian buildings were called “petrified seismographs”⁸⁵ that “recorded” the data for several centuries, therefore, proved to be a great source to study earthquake-resistant structures as well as the history of seismic activity in the region.

According to Zasyppkin, one of the most important features of Central Asian architecture was “the clear division between construction forms and decoration,”⁸⁶ – the idea that corresponded to the main architectural problem of the 20th century. Contrary to constructivists, they didn't limit their research only to one side: both construction elements and, for instance, ornament took their attention.⁸⁷

The mutual influence of restorers and architects is an episode that played a role in the development of the architectural understanding of Central Asia in the 1920s: the latter

⁸³ See: Boris Zasyppkin, *Arkhitekturnye Pamyatniki Sredney Azii. Problemy Issledovaniya i Restavratsii*, Vol. 2. (Moscow: TsGRM, 1928); Boris Zasyppkin, *Arkhitektura Sredney Azii* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1948).

⁸⁴ Boris Zasyppkin, “Iz Itogov Arkhitekturnoy Restavratsii,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 4 (1928), 306-312.

⁸⁵ Boris Zasyppkin, “Pamyatniki Arkhitektury: Zametki po Stroitel'noy Kulture Sovetskogo Vostoka,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 1 (1930), 70.

⁸⁶ Boris Zasyppkin, “Iz Itogov Arkhitekturnoy Restavratsii,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 4 (1928), 312.

⁸⁷ Boris Denike, *Arkhitekturny Ornament Sredney Azii* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Vsesoyuznoy Akademii Arkhitektury, 1939).

provided the architectural and historical knowledge, therefore, formed the understanding of Central Asian cultures. However, the rise of their mutual influence only occurred in the 1930s. Addressing architectural material in their writing, both Zasyepkin and Denike referred to Central Asia as a whole region rarely accentuating the national differences. The notion such as *stroitel'naya kultura* (“construction culture”), evoked by them regarding Central Asia in general, reminds Ginzburg’s “housing culture” and shows that even years after the delimitation Central Asia was perceived and conceptualized as an integrated cultural region.



Fig. 9. The cover of the magazine “*Stroitel'naya promyshlennost*”, 2 (1928) and the article of Boris Zasyepkin, “*Iz Itogov Arkhitekturnoy Restavratsii*,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 4 (1928) (Photo of A. Pronina).

1.5 The RAKhN: National Architecture at the Exhibition of the Soviet People's Art

The *RAKhN* has been already introduced earlier in the context of Ginzburg’s expeditions to the East. However, especially in the late 1920s, the *RAKhN* became a scientific centre that carried out the researches on national cultures. For instance, in 1926, a new subsection for the study of the art of nationalities was established. It aimed to discover

“the creative elements for establishing the international proletarian culture” that were found in national cultures.⁸⁸

Exhibition activity was the central focus of the Academy work with “popular masses”: only in 1923-1929 the *RAKhN* organized 191 exhibitions in the USSR. Research and demonstration of folk art and national peculiarities of art production was another one.⁸⁹ I would like to concentrate on the jubilee exhibition timed to the tenth anniversary of the Revolution in 1927 that presented the picture of the development of national architecture. The exhibition was a kind of early stocktaking in the formation of national artistic and architectural schools and “the first practical attempt to establish alive cross-cultural communication between the nationalities of the USSR.”⁹⁰ The exhibited national schools strictly complied with administrative national delimitation, however, small peoples also were presented within the main sections. As the guidebook stated, the exhibition became the first opportunity for the oppressed nationalities to demonstrate their creativity in a new status of equal citizens instead of “despised *inorodtsy* (aliens)”⁹¹, using of the pre-revolutionary term for non-Russian peoples. The new Soviet nationalities showed that “they had overgrown the stage of anonymous art... left the primitive ‘ethnography’ and ‘exotism’... and took the road of the qualified art.”⁹² The latter implied the Sovietization of just liberated traditional arts.

⁸⁸ A. Lunacharsky, “Khudozhestvennoe Tvorchestvo Nationalnostey SSSR,” In *Iskusstvo Narodov SSSR*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: GAKhN, 1927), 16-17.

⁸⁹ Yulia Yakimenko, “Rol’ Akademii Khudozhestvennykh Nauk v Formirovanii Novoy Kartiny Mira” Yazyk Veshchey. Filosofiya i Gumanitarnye nauki v Russko-Nemetskikh nauchnykh svyazaykh 1920kh Govod <https://gachn.de/files/data/Yakimenko.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2020), 1-8.

⁹⁰ V. Lavrov, “Arkhitectura na Vystavke Iskusstv Narodov SSSR,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 11 (1927), 774-777.

⁹¹ A. Volter, “Znachenie Vystavki Khudozhestvennoy Promyshlennosti i Narodnogo Iskusstva,” In *Putivoditel po Yubileynoy vystavke Iskusstva Narodov SSSR* (Moscow: GAKhN, 1928), 6.

⁹² Yakov Tugenholdt, “Vsesoyuzny Smort Iskusst (Vystavka Iskusstva Narodov SSSR),” *Rabis*, 46 (1927). Cited in Yulia Yakimenko, 8.

Most of the exhibits were the works of applied arts and fine art and sculptures made by local artists, for instance, works from the Kyrgyz ASSR, Uzbek SSR, Turkmen SSR and Kazakh SSR were exhibited. Architecture played a less important role in the exposition. Thus, for instance, there was no architectural exhibit in the Central Asian section, while Armenian SSR, Georgian SSR, Belorussian and Ukrainian SSR displayed only a few exhibits. It suggested that in 1927, the general development of national architecture, an art form that required big investments and educational centres, was in arrearages of other art forms – and Central Asia illustrated this thesis more than other republics.

While the exhibition promoted the diversity of Soviet national cultures, the architectural section faced criticism from Modernist architects. Thus, architect Viktor Lavrov commented: “‘Backward peoples’ have to eliminate their backwardness with an accelerated tempo... There is a need in new public buildings that demand its design of the architects, while the vast expanses of the SSSR with completely different climatic and living conditions support the great variety of new solutions and types of buildings.”⁹³ He found the exhibits of Caucasian section archaic, inappropriate and hindered the development of new architecture as they revived the pre-revolutionary styles and *decorativizm*; this fact he explained by a big distance of the region from the capitals of the new culture, first of all, Moscow.

* * *

Central Asian architecture was a part of a wider question of national architecture in the Soviet Union. Relying on the data taken from the magazines, from all mentions of Central Asia in the architectural press, 26 % were made in the 1920s, in contrast to the rest 74 % – in the 1930s (31 mentions in the 1920s, 87 in the 1930s, 118 in total). The 1920s was the decade when big constructions were not affordable that made the discussions

⁹³ V. Lavrov, *Ibid.*, 774.

theoretical. Meanwhile, active preservation and restoration activity in Central Asia came to the fore already in the 1920s.

As I tried to show, the 1920s offered a diverse range of voices about the future development of national culture and the place of Central Asia in it. While general state narrative showed Central Asia as backward borderland to be developed by the formation of national cultures, creative groups and institutions also offered their own vision of what if national architecture in Central Asia.

Constructivists applied the functional planning method to national republics. Their method conceptualized by Moisei Ginzburg was based on scientific research of the national way of living and environmental conditions that led to the unique planning solution. The primary source for their work was cultures that exemplified all the best that could be found in the Eastern architectural practice. Such focus, first, shows 1) the modernist interest in constructions vs. external decoration and in subconscious functionality, 2) the class approach merging with the national approach.

In contrast, the people who worked on the restoration of Central Asian monuments among several collectives such as of the Museum of Oriental Cultures, the Central Restoration Workshop, *RAIMK* in Central Asia demonstrated the interest in a wider range of architectural issues from construction to decorations. Their findings were seen as a valuable source of material for architects.

The *RAKhN* that was the state institution with a special interest in national arts promoted a wider understanding of national cultures where architecture only played a little part, while the products of applied arts made for export were of importance. Their agenda followed the general line of the national policy before the ‘Great Transformation’. In 1927, there were no architectural exhibits from Central Asia that could illustrate the national development at the *RAKhN*’s exhibition, mostly, due to the lack of local cadres. However,

already in several years, such projects will appear, while the state attitudes towards national question are going to change as well.

Chapter 2. National Architecture in Central Asia in the 1930s

In the 1930s, the Cultural Revolution transformed the architectural world of the 1920s. The party consistently seized control of all cultural and scientific institutions.⁹⁴ This led to the infringement on architects' freedom and the monopolization of architectural decision-making processes by state institutions. In this chapter, I study the influence of the new political order and its novel approach to national heritage on architectural projects in Central Asia. I argue that the question of Soviet Central Asian architecture of the 1930s gained much attention in architectural criticism. By analysing main discursive tropes about Central Asia, I will demonstrate an important turn of the 1930s – determined efforts made to forge national style in Central Asian republics. The various attempts to build up the reasoning behind the new architectural style are the subjects of my analysis. Also, I argue that it was the national question that played an important role in anti-modernist critique since Modernist failed to fulfill the needs of Soviet national policy.

The institutional reform did not happen instantly. In 1929, the *VOPRA* (All-Union Society of Proletarian Architects) was formed. Its members, young initiative proletarian architects, students of famous modernists and active party members, trail blazed new ways to talk about architecture. As Alexandra Selivanova has shown, *VOPRA* did not have any an articulated theoretical program; their declarations consisted mostly of vociferous criticism of Modernist groups.⁹⁵ Their growing control over the architectural planning process with the support of high party officials began to change the perspective of architects. A professional who previously was fully responsible for his or her work and principles now gave way to an instrumental figure whose works could be easily corrected by non-

⁹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Cultural Revolution as Class War," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928 – 1931*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, 1978), 8-40.

⁹⁵ Alexandra Selivanova, *Postconstructivism: arkhitektura i vlast v 1930kh godakh* (Moscow, Buksmart, 2019): 47.

professionals or interpreted in various manners.⁹⁶ The level of professional discussion decreased, and the campaign against “formalists”, i.e. modernists of the 1920s, gained momentum. It resulted in the founding of the Union of Soviet Architects, which replaced all independent architectural groups that all had their own vision of what constituted “proper” Soviet architecture in Central Asia. It became the only central institution to control the architectural process and had regional branches throughout Soviet republics. Ex-VOPRA leaders like Karo Alabyan, Ivan Maza and their followers took the highest position in the Union and all architectural educational institutions. The modernists had no choice but to become members of the Union. Though they were allowed a semblance of maintaining their professional independence, they worked under were under the supervision of the ideologically vetted colleagues in reality.

This institutional reform also affected architectural periodicals. By the early 1930s, some magazines like *Sovremennaya arkhitektura* by the OSA followed the destiny of independent architectural groups. New editors-in-chief from among VOPRA members controlled the rest of the magazines. Most importantly, new magazines were established. *Arkhitektura USSR* was established in 1933 and occupied a distinct niche of the central architectural magazine that covered topics from all parts of the USSR. Karo Alabyan became its editor-in-chief; before that, he worked in the short-lived magazine *Sovetskaya arkhitektura* (1931-1934).⁹⁷ *SSSR na stroyke* was also established in 1930 and dedicated not only to the architectural issues but also modernization in all spheres. It targeted the foreign audience and therefore covered only the most important achievement in Soviet building industry – for export. All articles in these magazines passed through censorship filters of party architects who were necessary members of the editorial boards.⁹⁸ The “direct

⁹⁶ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*, 57-60.

⁹⁷ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

speeches” of architects were also edited. This is to say that the architectural magazines served not just for fair reporting about the course of architectural discussions but also information management and manipulation. For these reasons, we can read their content as a unified prescriptive message that broadcasted a current centrally-endorsed vision of Soviet architecture rather than a subtle expression of diverse, personal creative views. Some pieces definitely diverged from officially-endorsed designs but only in a guarded, limited way. Thus, I am not going to look for an “objective truth” while dealing with these magazines: I am interested more in their discursive content and disciplining tenor. I believe it can help to uncover the reasoning and aspirations of the Soviet project.

2.1 The birth of the new style

At the beginning of the 1930s, Soviet culture turned to national traditions in many respects. “All of Soviet life was to become as ‘national’ as possible as quickly as possible.”⁹⁹ This led to the transformation of all cultural spheres. For instance, the directive to study the musical culture of non-Russian nationalities and create new collective repertoires followed closely nation-buildings programs in the republics.¹⁰⁰ The same process, for instance, can be found in literature: at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, Maxim Gorky instructed writers from the republics to rediscover their national literature and use it as a basis of socialist realism, “national in form and socialist in content”.¹⁰¹ However, this policy applied mostly to chosen republican nations; Russians from the “default nation” also became a full-fledged member of “friendship of people.” All

⁹⁹ Yury Slezkine, *Ibid.*, 438.

¹⁰⁰ Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism. From Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 2007), Ch. 6.

¹⁰¹ Maxim Gorky, *Sovetskaya literatura* (Moscow, Goslitizdat, 1934).

efforts were concentrated on titular nations.¹⁰² Meanwhile, Central Asia finalized its republican composition: Tajik SSR succeeded Tajik ASSR in 1929, Kyrgyz ASSR and Kazakh ASSR became constituent republics of the USSR in 1936.

Architecture had to follow these trends. The year 1932 is commonly acknowledged as the birth date of a new style: the committee advised architects “to use the best devices of classical architecture” while announcing the results of the main Soviet architectural contest for the Palace of Soviets.¹⁰³ This became a turning point that identified an official shift in the architectural agenda with the consequences for all architectural spheres and regions, including Central Asia. The recommendation was very general and universal, but the Central Asian case needed more clarifications due to varied local traditions. What constitute “classics” in the context of Central Asian building designs? In the 1930s, it was the architectural press that provided guidance. The decade was characterized by an increased number of articles dedicated to Central Asia. I discovered 72 mentions in the magazines that commented on how new Soviet Central Asian architecture should look. These articles appeared alongside similar ones dedicated to the other regions with strong national traditions different from Russian, like those of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Buryatia and others.

First of all, both architects and critics understood that local contexts and traditions should be evaluated and included in new projects. The consensus among critics was that “the architecture of the Soviet East is the bearer of a big tradition, despite its outside primitiveness.”¹⁰⁴ The editorial “Problems of national architecture in the Soviet East” published in *Arkhitektura SSSR* was the first attempt to give guidelines that lay the foundations for further discussions. They defended Central Asian monuments as important

¹⁰² Yury Slezkine, *Ibid.*, 442-446.

¹⁰³ Ivan Maza, *Sovetskoe isskusstvo za 15 let* (Moscow, Izogiz, 1933), 553.

¹⁰⁴ Lazar Rempel, “Arkhitektura narodnogo zhilishcha Sredney Asii,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 32-39.

sources of architectural inspiration: “For Soviet architecture, we use not only the experience of the Parthenon's constructors, the Roman water system, Renaissance cupolas or Gothic cathedrals but also the richest creative works of non-European peoples, first of all, Asian.”¹⁰⁵ Soviet architecture not just from the national periphery but, for instance, in Central Russia, could also use non-classical international heritage. We can likewise find traces of Egyptian, Assyrian and other ancient civilizations in the projects of Soviet architects of the 1930s. However, it did not work another way: Central Asian heritage was for use in the architecture of Central Asian republics only, while Roman classics or Ancient Egypt were relevant to use everywhere, despite local contexts. Officially all republics were encouraged to study each other's heritage, the cross-usage was not approved. Though Central Asian heritage in Central Asia served as a sort of analogue of Egyptian monuments: ancient, non-classical and mysterious. Moreover, Asian tradition was considered to be a special kind of exotic ingredient, which is able to enrich and bring an “endless wealth of colours” of flourishing cultures in Soviet architecture.

The right to use the findings of national architecture despite the fact they technically belonged, in Marxist doctrine, to “feudal society” was found in Stalin's works on the national question and in the works of Marx and Lenin: “As Marx said, the class struggle is international in content and national in form: the same approach works for architecture”.¹⁰⁶ But to use only national heritage was not enough. The article proposed “to fertilise national cultures by European classical experience”¹⁰⁷ as if the national culture is a raw material needed to be civilized. The usual way to put it was that the assimilation of the heritage should have happened in a *critical* manner. The proposed middle ground for the architect laid between two excesses: European modernism that rejected the national specificity and

¹⁰⁵ “Problemy Nazionalnoy Arkhitektury Sovetskogo Vostoka,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 8 (1934): 1-3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

“reactionary nationalist” style that resurrected feudalism. The latter was usually associated with the use of the forms taken too explicitly from the religious architecture (mosque portals, details of *mazars*, etc). The new method gave leeway for mistakes.

2.2 Late Modernist Projects and their Criticism

New national and architectural policy declared Modernists the first targets of harsh criticism. When researchers of Soviet architecture explained its sources, they usually underlined the differences in creative programs, Modernists’ interest in construction over decoration, their independent views and reluctance to obey.¹⁰⁸ I argue that Modernists’ failure to adapt to the requirements of architecture in national republics was another serious reason. By the 1930s, visually identical projects made by modernists were considered as the examples of, in Marx term, “Great Russian chauvinism.”

The projects that had been completed just several years earlier were retrospectively criticized in the Union’s party cell. For instance, Ginzburg was charged with a miscalculation of bearing structures in his project for the *Turksib* office in Alma-Ata.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Kazakhstan architecture as a whole in Alma-Ata was portrayed as “suffering from the constructivist obsession. The formalistic buildings by Ginzburg, Fridman, Gerasimov have already lost their artistic merit in the professionals’ eyes and never had it in workers’ eyes. They spoil the streets and do not let to create new ensembles.”¹¹⁰

However, many architects trained in Modernist way continued to make projects in the 1930s. I would like to discuss the work of Viktor Kalmykov, a student of the Moscow

¹⁰⁸ See: Alexandra Selivanova, *Postconstructivism: arkhitektura i vlast v 1930kh godakh* (Moscow, Buksmart, 2019), Ch. 1; Danilo Udovički-Selb, *Soviet Architectural Avant-Gardes: Architecture and Stalin’s Revolution from Above, 1928–1938* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ I. Struchkov, “K Chemu Vedet Kvartirnichestvo,” *Stroitelstvo Moskvy*, 4 (1931):25-26.

¹¹⁰ “Arkitektura Soyuznykh Respublik,” *Arkitektura SSSR*, 7 (1937):

VKhuTEIN (Higher Art and Technical Institute) and a member of the *ASNOVA* (Association of New Architects), therefore, clearly trained in a modernist way. In 1932-1933, he was a member of the complex Kyrgyz expedition of the Academy of Science. Such alliance of ethnographic expedition and the architect was a unique case in the history in Soviet architecture. The goal of the expedition was to define the scientific basis for future urban development: national architectural traditions typical for people of Kyrgyzstan were to be processed. This would help to develop a site- and culturally specific approach and to prevent copying of the projects made for other regions as well as “unscrupulous” copying of historical architectural forms.¹¹¹ Kalmykov made a field study of the traditional forms of Kyrgyz architecture in different natural areas to employ his findings and rational local innovations in the project of dwellings for settling nomads. This work happened in the context of *korenizatsia*, the campaign that implied reforming the migrating villages of steppe into fixed settlements, and it was a part of *korenizatsia* agenda.¹¹²

His original projects made in 1933-1934 indeed used the best devices of national architecture: for instance, the different kinds of light tent constructions, cupolas, traditional circular planning, etc. Although at this time, the development of the round housing was a trend in European and Russian architecture,¹¹³ Kalmykov saw this type of planning as principle innovation traditional nomadic culture: “A national yurt, a favourite form of dwelling in settled and settling kolkhozes, which is still in use in cattle countries, should get

¹¹¹ V. Belousov, Ch. Ryss and V. Kalmykov (eds.) *K Voprosu o Sotsialisticheskome Rasselenii v Kirgizskoy ASSR. Trudy Kirgizskoy Kompleksnoy Ekspeditsii* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1939).

¹¹² Fyodor Sinitsyn, *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Kochevniki: Istoriya, Politika, Naselenie* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2019).

¹¹³ See multiple publications on this topic: L.V., “Kruglye Doma,” *Stroitelstvo Moskvy*, 12 (1926), 25; G. B. Krasin, “Novye Planirovki v Zhilstroitelstve Moskvy,” *Stroitelstvo Moskvy*, 5 (1929), 3-9; G. Krutikov, “Krugloe i Polukrugloe Zhilishche,” *Stroitel'naya Promyshlennost*, 9 (1927), 618; P. Osipov, “Standartnoe Krugloe Zdanie dlya s.-kh.Poselka,” *Stroitelstvo Moskvy*, 5 (1930), 14-15; N. Lukhmanov, “Tsilindricheskiy Dom,” *Stroitelstvo Moskvy*, 5 (1929), 16-22, dedicated to the works of Konstantin Melnikov.

a number of improvements and sanitary, hygienic and architectural additions.”¹¹⁴ (Fig. 10) He purified traditional forms by distilling its constructive essence and transformed them into modern projects that can be produced on an industrial scale. Although none of these projects was embodied in reality, another project might help us to imagine how Kalmykov’s “advanced yurt” could have looked. (Fig. 11) The temporary pavilion for the construction section of *VSPbK* (All-Union Council on Physical Culture) was made by Kalmykov in Tashkent after 1934. This building demonstrates the hybrid between local constructional peculiarities (a tent-like building with a central column) and Modernist method (focus on the structure, windows).

However, in the 1930s his work was perceived as “an old movement of abstract experimentations” and formalist exercise.¹¹⁵ His discreet analytical method and not explicit use of visual national heritage were criticized. Multiple round houses that created various patterns in plan were literally read as a joke. Kalmykov was born in Tashkent, and his origin could not be ignored by critics who described him as “active character who is in love with sand and sun, colours and forms of Central Asia.”¹¹⁶ Thanks to his place of birth, Kalmykov “did not imitate but really felt the national architecture” – but, apparently, not seriously enough. In the 1930s, there was no space for such an ambitious and inventive project.

¹¹⁴ Viktor Kalmykov, “Nash Proekt,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 5 (1933): 24.

¹¹⁵ R. Khiger, “Chetyre arkhitektora,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1936): 45-53.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

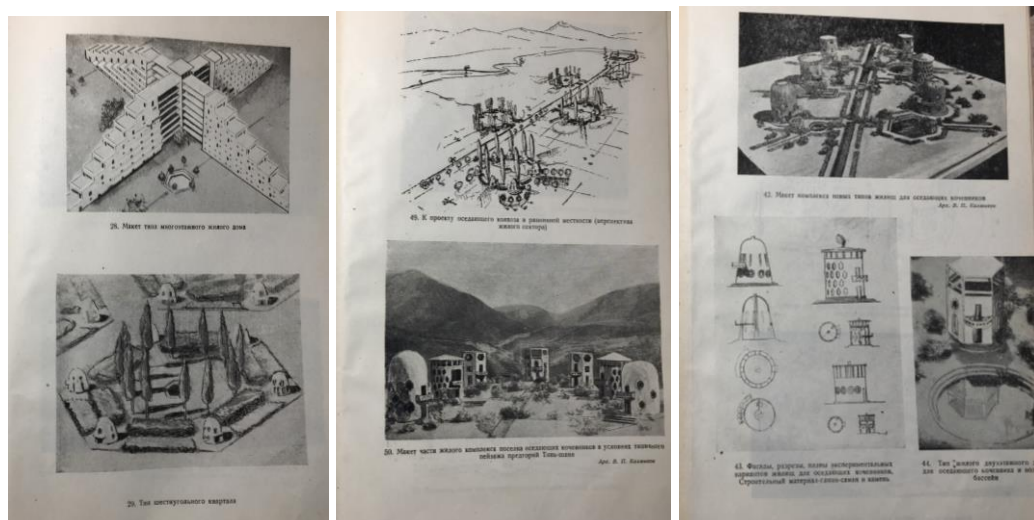


Fig. 10. Viktor Kalmykov, Projects for the resettling nomads, 1932-1933 (Source: . Belousov, Ch. Ryss and V. Kalmykov (eds.) *K Voprosu o Sotsialisticheskome Rasselenii v Kirgizskoy ASSR. Trudy Kirgizskoy Kompleksnoy Ekspeditsii* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk, 1939), appendix).



Fig. 11. Viktor Kalmykov, Temporary pavilion for the construction section of VSPhK (All-Union Council on Physical Culture) in Tashkent, after 1934 (Source: Archive of the Canadian Centre of Architecture).

2.3 In Search of National Architectural Traditions

Soviet architecture in Central Asia had to find a narrow middle ground between Modernist ideas and contrary examples of excessive restoration/preservation aspirations. The latter was also numerous and were to be banned. Thus, the project for a confectionary factory in Ashkabad made by K. Boguslavsky deserved such a comment: “A person has designed a mosque in Ashkabad but for some reasons he has called it ‘a factory’.”¹¹⁷ An

¹¹⁷ Karo Alabyan, “Protiv formalizma, uproshchenchestva, eklektiki,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 4 (1936): 5.

author was charged with the insensitivity: making a Soviet factory out of a mosque design was nearly immoral. (Fig. 12)

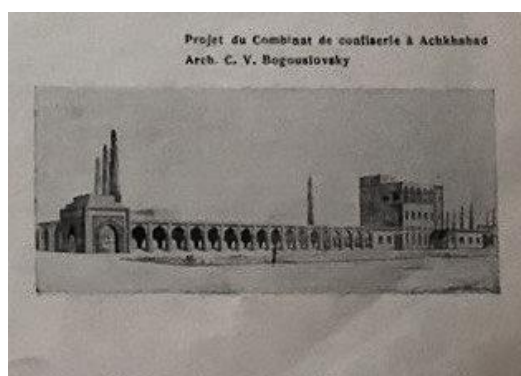


Fig. 12. K. Boguslavsky, The Project of the Confectionary factory in Ashkabad (Source: *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 4 (1936): 5).

The theatre project in Alma-Ata by I. Likhachev was also criticized for non-critical revision of the art of the “feudalist era” in national republics.¹¹⁸ Paradoxically, some projects that previously were endorsed by critic could be revised. Thus, the project for the theatre in Tashkent by Shchusev was first supported because of the pompousness and richness of forms, monumentality and the use of “Eastern galleries surrounding the building.”¹¹⁹ (Fig. 13) Just six months later, the same project appeared in the editorial “The synthesis of arts”, where the main weaknesses of Soviet architecture such as “superficial *dekorativizm*” and “eclectic imitations” were brought up.¹²⁰



Fig. 13. Alexey Shchusev, The Project of the Theatre in Tashkent, 1934 (Source: *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 12 (1934): 14).

¹¹⁸ “Po linii naimenshego soprotovlenia,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 4 (1934): 50-51.

¹¹⁹ V. Kokovin, “Proekt teatra v Tashkente,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 12 (1934): 14.

¹²⁰ “Sintez iskusstv,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 7 (1935)

The term *eclecticism* became the main tool for criticizing projects as well as one of the worst and most dangerous characteristics that promised no future for the project or even for the architect. It could be easily used to criticize any project. Dangerous intonations were heard in this quote of the main Union's architectural theorist Ivan Maza: "Eclecticism is not a style: it is even not a non-style – it is opportunism."¹²¹ "Eclecticism" implied a "mechanical connection" between architectural details taken from different traditions, for example, Asian, Classical and Gothic. The overuse of details or the "non-harmonical" conjunction of them led to the label of eclectism. The roots of this practice lay in the poor knowledge of architectural traditions of the region, though the use of the term was rather situational. According to the criticism, this architecture was *bad* because it constituted "easy solutions" that did not require creative work.¹²²

Also, as it was admitted, the proclaimed principle could not have been applied equally in all five republics due to the different traditions of local architecture. For example, the authors of the project for the State University of the KASSR in Alma-Ata pointed out:

Kazakhstan did not have a developed urban architecture; Alma-Ata is a typical bureaucratic centre on the colonial periphery of the Russian Empire... The only original Kazakh form is the *yurt* (tent), but it could only be used in the individual dwelling projects. In public buildings neither constructive principles (not to mention artistic and compositional devices), nor building techniques could be used.¹²³

This feature somehow justified modernists' projects for Kazakhstan where one could find no direct references to the traditional school. At the same time, the idea to create a new national style based on the stereotypical "Oriental" details and ornaments was considered as a rude stylization.¹²⁴

The possible solution to borrow artistic decisions from neighbouring republics was likewise deemed inappropriate: it would have just stopped the development of a distinct

¹²¹ Ivan Maza, "O prirode eklektizma," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 5 (1936): 5-7.

¹²² "Po linii naimenshego soprotivleniya," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 4 (1934): 50-51.

¹²³ N. Selivanov, V. Sergeev, N. Petrov, "Zdanie universiteta dlya Alma-Ata," *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 8 (1934): 20-21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Kazakh style. Then, upon what sources of inspiration were architects to rely? The most common answer was simple: Greco-Roman antiquity. Antiquity served as a kind of “default option”, the universal language that will work in any case. Not surprisingly, the authors of the cited article also chose the classical order as a basis and adjusted it for “contemporary Soviet style’.

2.4 How to Deal with the Heritage of “Our Outstanding National Cultures”

The terms and arguments we discussed earlier made the theoretical basis for the development of Soviet Central Asian architecture in the 1930s. Thus, according to Soviet critics, one of the most important ways to accomplish the development of a new national style in Central Asia was to research and creatively adapt heritage. National architectural heritage was perceived as a kind of “cultural arsenal”, a promising base of the material from which one could choose good models and “recycle”. However, not everything worked equally. To acquire a skill to make only correct choices, an architect should have studied the art and architectural history of the region and its way of living.

The development of scientific knowledge on Central Asian architecture that started in the late 1920s gained momentum. Soviet expeditions and commissions for heritage protection resulted in more publications.¹²⁵ The magazines of the 1930s are full of articles describing different aspects of preservation, restoration and studies of Central Asian monuments. The numbers only increased yearly and exceeded the number of publications

¹²⁵ See, for instance: B. P. Denike, *Iskusstvo Sredney Asii* (Moscow: Central publishing house of the USSR nationalities, 1927), P. E. Kornilov, *Issledovaniya iskusstva Sredney Asii* (Kasan, 1930), V. N. Chepelev, *Iskusstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana*, (Leningrad, 1935), E. V. Zhuraleva, *Iskusstvo Sovetskogo Turkmenistana* (Moscow, Leningrad, 1934), etc.

dedicated to other national cultures.¹²⁶ Among the authors of these notes, there were many prominent orientologists apart from Zasyppkin and Denike, whom we discussed in the previous chapter. It is important that most of the contributors like Lazar Rempel, Shalva Ratiya, Pert Kornilov and others, started their studies of Central Asian architecture in the late 1920s or in the early 1930s. Among them, Lazar Rempel (1907-1992) enjoyed a special status. Being both a bright scholar and an active member of the party group at the Academy of Architecture, he played an ambivalent role. Unlike others, Rempel published not only educational articles on particular monuments in art history sections of magazines but pronounced on political issues related to Central Asian national architecture. Rempel was a student of Boris Denike in Moscow State University.¹²⁷ His critical and sarcastic attitudes towards his teacher educated in pre-revolutionary school can be seen in this quote from the memoirs:

At the third Congress on Iranian archaeology, the youth surrounded Boris Petrovich and accused him of fawning over Western scholars... Denike could not say anything more convincing 'I say, that is only what I am holding on to!' I did not know how not to laugh because of such as 'self-criticism'.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See, for instance: B. Zasyppkin, "O resultatakh arkhitekturnoy restavratsii," *Stroitel'naya promyshlennost*, 1 (1930): 306-312; Lazar Rempel, "Pamyatniki Khivy," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 9 (1936): 46-51; Sh. Ratiya, L. Vorinin, "Pamyatniki: Barak-Khan mavzoley," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 10 (1936): 67-73; L. Kashkarova, "Arkhitekturnye tipy i motivy narodnogo zhitel'stva," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 15-19; P. Kornilov, "Arkhitekturnye pamyatniki Bukhary," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 5 (1936): 62-64 and others.

¹²⁷ In 1937, Rempel became a victim of the Purge and was exiled as a 'traitor of the Motherland family member' in Uzbekistan. Before that, his wife T. V. Vyaznikovzeva was arrested as a Trotskyist. Rempel's book on Italian fascist architecture in Roma published two years before also played a significant role in his fate. There he underlined some positive city planning findings, which, as he believed, could be incorporated in Soviet practice. The book received a drubbing from the party critics (see "An Advocate of Fascist Art," *Soviet Art*, May 11, 1937, No. 22 (368): 2). The place of the exile let him to continue his research. He lived in Bukhara, Samarkand, Dzhambul (currently Taraz, Kazakhstan), and Tashkent. During the Thaw, he made a successful career at the Institute of Art Studies of the Academy of Science Uzbek SSR, became professor at the Tashkent State Art Institute, published a lot of work on Central Asian art and architecture, organized research expeditions. In 1990, he came back to Moscow and published his memoirs.

¹²⁸ Lazar Rempel, *Moi Sovremenniki* (Tashkent, Izdatel'stvo literatury i Iskusstva imeni Gafura Gulyama, 1992), 45.

It shows that belonged to the new generations of orientologists that made their names in the Soviet period. Their expertise on particular monuments and national traditions was put at services of creation of new Soviet architecture in republics. Orientologists' findings were supposed to be the "food for architects' thoughts" in search of solutions for national question in architecture. In the 1930s is, transnational, multi-ethnic understanding of cultural production was replaced by an ethnocentric understanding of heritage following the delimitation of national republics and resulted in the appearance of independent republican preservation committees.¹²⁹ This helped to develop the national focus in architectural practice. Moreover, even those monuments like cult buildings that previously were excluded from the discussions now got included into "safe" scientific museum or art historian discourse. The architectural heritage was steadily neutralised for architects' use by losing its unacceptable religious and class connotations. And every architect was expected to become a bit of a historian.

How was Central Asian heritage perceived? There was one trope that usually followed this discussion: Central Asian architecture acquired some specific *pravdivost* (faithfulness) and sensual veracity that worked as a natural means of expression.¹³⁰ The appeal to emotional perception was also common in architectural criticism of the Stalinist era.¹³¹ Central Asia, in Orientalist manner, was perceived as a colourful, generous, and cheerful land that could awaken the sense and emotions. On another hand, it served as a metaphor of pristine lands (vs. depraved) untouched by Western civilization and, therefore, so wonderfully faithful and true. Uncovering and embodiment of these natural qualities were also important tasks for Soviet architects.

¹²⁹ Svetlana Gorshenina, Vera Tolz, "Constructing Heritage in Early Soviet Central Asia: The Politics of Memory in a Revolutionary Context," *Ab Imperio*, 4 (2016): 110-113.

¹³⁰ S. Polupanov, "Zhiloy Dom v Starom Samarkande," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 47-50.

¹³¹ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*, 227-229.

Another quality praised by Soviet architects was *rationality*.¹³² It was found in the creative projects made by suppressed classes. Peoples of five republics were considered to be the bearers of some architectural wisdom to be extracted. These possibilities were seen, first of all, in domestic architecture. Historically developed and therefore proven ideas such as planning solutions, main technical constructions and solar shading systems were positive ideas. All characteristics that accumulated “centuries of experience” and were defined by given conditions (climate, geography, seismology) were deemed worthy of emulation. For instance, building orientation with respect to the cardinal directions or the construction of “double roof” to protect the living space from overheating were reasonable inventions to use. Some types of traditional buildings were seen as possible prototypes for Soviet buildings: for instance, a madrasa being a place of collective meetings was a nominee to be a Soviet club.¹³³ A special discussion was dedicated to the materials. Architectural press urged to use the most of local materials such as clay bricks since it would have significantly reduced the cost of construction works. Surely, there were much more things to fix, primarily, those reflecting the social structure of Central Asian society. For instance, the close nature of the traditional household was criticized: the house and private space should be unified with public space in the society that supposed to be transparent.

The same logic lay in the background of urban planning decisions. On the one hand, old medieval cities of Central Asia such as Bukhara and Samarkand were criticized as feudal and needed a lot of corrections. On the other hand, paradoxically, theorists claimed that they were closer to the stage of socialism than, for instance, any of big European capitals wallowing in the bourgeois way of living.¹³⁴ Thus, their way to the stage of a real modern city was supposed to be faster and straight. Backward nationalities had to go through

¹³² P. Stronski, *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³³ V. Lavrov, “Zhilishchnaya Arkhitektura Srendeziatskogo Goroda,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 8 (1934): 40-47.

¹³⁴ L. Rempel, “Narodnoye Zhilishche v Sredney Asii,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 32-39.

accelerated development on the progress scale, and architects could help. So architects, again, had just to extract the right components, which could lead to the socialist future, and throw away those, which cannot be used. The chaotic town planning, the absence of the idea of an architectural ensemble, a non-regular city with no clear borders, dead-end alleys, and all these features had to be reformed and organised.¹³⁵ The language of modern architecture was understood as too straight: the “mechanical Europeanization” of the cities was not the way. The explicit dual structure of Central cities with the polarization of traditional and European parts should have been eliminated on the basis of the research of social, constructive, technical, sanitary and hygienic issues.¹³⁶ The new types of quarters with blockhouses and developed social infrastructure would create a new urban environment, which in turn would inevitably lead to the formation of the proletariat, a class of new citizens with new psychology.

Some of the traditional craft technics were noteworthy, for instance, traditional décor. Thus, Uzbekistan majolica was used as decorative “wrapper” for the brick walls; the Moscow-based critics believed: "Architectural majolica has a great future!"¹³⁷ However, the border between the overuse and reasonable use was quite elusive.

¹³⁵ V. Lavrov, *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ V. Lavrov, V. Popov, “K Probleme Rekonstrukcii Gorogov v Usloviyakh Sredney Azii,” *Sovetskaya Arkhitektura*, 3 (1931): 30-37.

¹³⁷ A.S. Bashkirov, “ArkHITEKURNOE NASLEDSTVO: MAYOLIKA V ARKHITEKTURE,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 9 (1934): 56-62.

2.5 What to do? Soviet Architecture in Search for References in International Context

When one does not know what to do, a suitable reference could be of great help. This observation concerns such a model example for Soviet Central Asian architecture taken from the international architectural scene. The examples of architecture both modern and traditional, so much-desired by Soviet architects and party leaders, was found in Turkey. As Adeeb Khalid has shown, we can trace many historical parallels between the early years of the Soviet Union and Kemalist Turkey. Comparing their shock modern polity and claims for mobilization, Khalid concluded that both states tried to homogenize population and to force them to overcome their backwardness.¹³⁸ Indeed, the cultural reforms sought to solve the same antagonism between universal and national. The language reforms, the women emancipation, the subjugation of religion to the state had to raise the cultural level and ‘civilize’ people but at the same time to “Turkify” them.¹³⁹

However, the Turkish case was not portrayed as a strong guide for the Soviets, it seemed to be more like an adequate reference from a country that solving similar problems. In the 1930s, several Soviet delegations that included architects visited Turkey and explored new Turkish architecture. One of the goals of the visits was to negotiate the construction of two big textile plants in Kayseri (1935) and Nazilli (1937) – a part of sufficient financial help from the USSR to the fraternal people of Turkey. Therefore, the reality looked more like a mutual exchange of Soviet-Turkish architectural ideas: Soviet architects noted and endorsed Turkish developments, Turkish colleagues got, apart from two new plants, a showcase how to work with local heritage.

The trace of Soviet-Turkish parallelism in architectural discussions is relatively new. However, the contemporaries understood these similarities very well, including those who

¹³⁸ Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2006): 233.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 243-251.

were in search of new architectural decisions. Several articles describe the cultural situation in Turkey after the Turkish War of Independence as in some ways similar to the Soviet. In the architectural sense, it meant, firstly, the co-existence of traditional architecture and modern architecture brought in Turkey by European architects, mostly Germans and Austrians and, secondly, the need to develop the new style trimming between these two approaches. Soviets critics and architects who made visits to Turkey published their notes on the page of the professional press. They glorified the achievements made by Turks in this field. "Old Turkey is becoming a thing of the past," wrote the journalist O. Bubnova, a member of the Soviet delegation in Turkey. "New Ankara is a Europeanized city of straight lines, a symbol of republican Turkey, the embodiment of the straight and undiminished will of Kemalists who managed to ensure national independence."¹⁴⁰ In critique, traditional Ottoman architecture served as an analogue of backward Central Asian one. The restoration of old styles was not appropriate or even obscurant due to the new developed economical and technical conditions. At the same time, the projects made by invited Western architects in the 1920s who were supposed to be the teachers of Turkish architects were also criticised. These imported ideas "could not tag along with the nature of Turkish art".¹⁴¹ Therefore, the young architects had selected the third way and "refused both the ordinary stylization of architectural forms of Old Turkey and literal copying of the last movements of Western architecture to Turkey."¹⁴² A prominent Soviet constructivist Ivan Nikolaev made the same argument: "We believe that a harmonious union between the compositional decisions taken from the national past and the new developments of the construction industry is possible."¹⁴³ Curiously, to root this idea in history, Nikolaev brought up the Seljuk period of architecture that represented, according to him, another example of Western-Eastern synthesis, between

¹⁴⁰ O. Bubnova, "Arkhitertura Ankary," *Arkhitertura SSSR*, 3 (1934): 45-46.

¹⁴¹ Semikh-Ryustem, "Neskolko Slova o Turetskoy Arkhitekture," *Arkhitertura SSSR*, 6 (1934): 62.

¹⁴² Ibid., 47.

¹⁴³ Ivan Nikolaev, "Soverskaya arkhitektura v Turtsii," *Arkhitertura SSSR*, 6 (1934): 58.

Greek-Roman and Turkish architectural traditions.¹⁴⁴ How exactly it was executed remained unclear. Lazar Rempel provided one of the more or less concrete examples. The Presidential Palace in Ankara designed by Austrian architect Clements Holzmeister (1930-1932) was the closest attempt so far “to solve specific national objectives”. Rempel explained, “With a measure of sensitivity, Holzmeister combines the moderate constructivism and the external features of national originality, however, not in a stylized manner.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the building combined, using the words of the Austrian ambassador, “the modern architectural notions of the West with the ancient cubism of the Asian steppe.”¹⁴⁶ The palace is very different from the grandiose historical style of the past: it has flat roofs, undecorated walls and cubist forms; at the same time, it relies on the classical plan with an inner courtyard and arcade galleries with perforated roofs.¹⁴⁷ The work of Kemalists in style-creation was evaluated by Soviet critics if not fully completed but at least moving in the right direction. The Soviet architecture should have followed the same way and studied the experience of fraternal peoples of the East. As a Turkish comrade concluded on the pages of *Architecture of the USSR*, “In Ankara, we do not fight about style. Everybody loves new art.”¹⁴⁸ Obviously, there were Turkish own critical discussions and fights, but how much Soviet authorities would love to say the same!

Two big textile plants in Kayseri (1935) and Nazilli (1937) were designed by Soviet architects and built by Turkish contractors. Turkish Sümmmerbank with the help of Soviet long-term loans and Soviet trust *Turkstroy* paid the construction.¹⁴⁹ Being part of the Kemalist program of rapid modernisation, they were placed in the remote corners of

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁵ Lazar Rempel, “Arkhitectura Srednego Vostoka,” *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 7 (1935): 51-57.

¹⁴⁶ Cited by Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 57.

¹⁴⁷ Esra Akcan, Ibid., 58-60.

¹⁴⁸ Semikh-Ryustem, Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Esra Aksan, Sibel Bozdogan, *Turkey: Modern Architecture in History* (London, Reaktion Books, 2012), 40-41.

Anatolia. In Nazilli, Soviet architects designed the textile factory and a coal-fired plant.¹⁵⁰ The complex in Kayseri (Fig. 14, 15) is particularly interesting. Besides the general planning by Nikolaev and industrial complex with a power plant, sheds and machine shops designed by E. Popov, it also included workers' housing (A. Pasternak), a social centre with cinema, library and other utilities (I. Milinis).¹⁵¹ The project was made in a constructivist manner, however, employed some national features. For instance, Nikolaev used the fountains and pools to enrich the landscape and to create a more comfortable microclimate; also, he envisaged the greening project with local species of trees. In terms of planning, symmetric composition with central axes, close and open yards to keep the sun off were chosen. The influence of the Seljuk style with specific faceted regular prisms covered by pyramidal or conical hip roofs is obvious in the bureau building.¹⁵² In Kayseri, they had created not just an industrial complex but a completed urban area with the settlement and developed infrastructure.

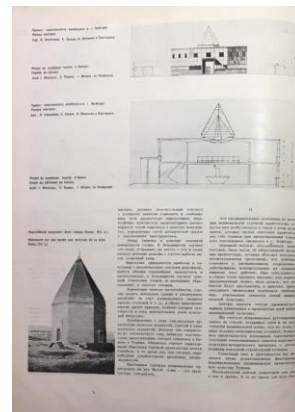


Fig. 14. Plant in Kayseri (Source: *Stroitel'naya promyshlennost*, 5 (1935): 46).

Fig. 15. Ivan Nikolaev's project and an example of Seljuk monument (Source: "Sovetskaya arkhitektura v Turtsii," *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 6 (1934): 58).

Another case of practical interest for Soviet architects was Iran. The environment resembled that in Central Asia: deserts, urban areas depended on public utilities and water

¹⁵⁰ "SSSR stroit tekstilnyi kombinat v Turcii," *Stroitel'naya promyshlennost*, 5 (1935): 46-47.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Ivan Nikolaev, *Ibid.*, 56-61.

supply, canal system.¹⁵³ The urban redevelopment projects in Isfahan, Shiraz and other cities, for instance, the radical intervention of new straight avenues that cut the fabric of old cities, deserved the attention of Soviet architects. In addition, the search for “their own national architecture”, exoneration from “imperialist guardianship” and rejection of constructivism movement warmed their hearts.¹⁵⁴ It was worth to study Iranian new experience as well as architectural history. Like in the Turkish case, Soviet interest in Iranian architecture came along with the interest in economical dominance in the region and providing financial aid for Iran.

2.6 What not to do? Soviet Architecture and the Negative Examples of “Western Imperialism”

The Soviet architectural press was not less full with negative examples of how the Soviet architecture should not look like. Obviously, all the examples came from the “capitalist world”, which unlike the USSR did not equalize the population of their former or current colonies in rights. Nations oppressed by capitalists powers could not develop their own harmonic tradition. True nature of Soviet architecture in Central Asia was illuminated by a comparison with “colonial Western architecture”. If “capitalists suppressed the national cultures and produced the false architecture of European Art nouveau style which took its origin in stylizations,”¹⁵⁵ Soviet architects took another way and did not copy any ready samples but only use some elements for “creative synthesis”.

¹⁵³ Lazar Rempel, “Arkhitectura Srednego Vostoka,” *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 7 (1935): 51.

¹⁵⁴ Back then Russian authors used the term “constructivism”, which is exclusively applied to the Soviet architecture in contemporary bibliography, to all schools of the Modern movement architecture worldwide.

¹⁵⁵ Lazar Rempel, T. Vyaznekovtseva, “Za Granicey, Kolonialnaya arkhitectura,” *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 11 (1934): 42-54.

A key article on this topic is “Colonial Architecture” that was written by Rempel together with an art historian and his wife T. Vyaznikovzeva. The main point of their critique is the levelling out of the national architectural features: “At the cost of the suppressing the people’s creativity capitalism produced the *world architecture*... It downplayed the richness of all national forms.”¹⁵⁶ However, under the mask of anticolonial arguments one also can read clear antimodernist claims, for instance, in authors’ affront to “houses-machine” we read famous Corbusier’s principle “the house is a machine to live in”. Moreover, in official rhetoric, the modernism as an architectural movement became tantamount to the capitalist system, therefore, inappropriate in the communist country. At the same, this criticism addressed capitalist architecture that was not able to discover the richness of national architecture as a whole.

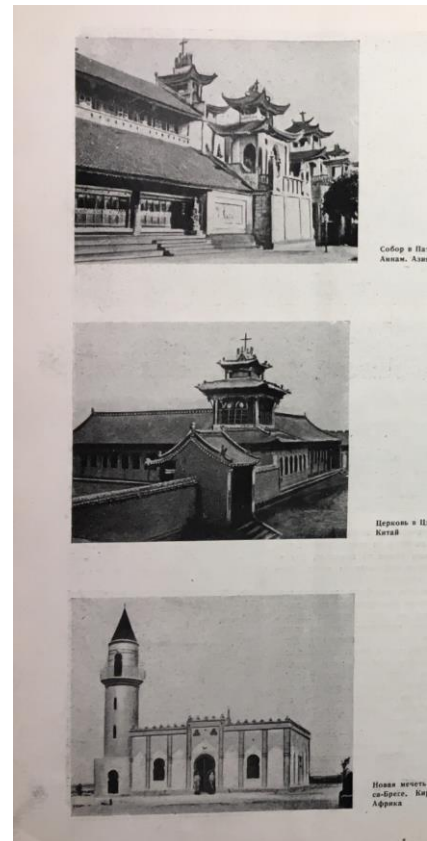


Fig. 16. Examples of colonial style in China and Africa (Source: Lazar Rempel, T. Vyaznekovtseva, “За Гранiceй, Колониальная архитектура,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 11 (1934): 42-54).

Another point concerns the so-called “colonial style” in architecture. Outpacing the postcolonial approach in several decades, authors criticize European architectural production in the empires for the appropriating parts of local style without a context. Rempel and Vyaznikovzeva scrutinize the projects of the second half of the 19th century in Australia, Dutch East India, East Africa, and North Africa. They came to the conclusion that local colonial styles tried to combine European traditions of different types, from Gothic style to Renaissance and Baroque taken from the metropolis, with local heritage. However, in doing so, the traditional cultures are not being respected, “they are distorted and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 42.

trivialized”.¹⁵⁷ Sometimes the colonizers did not use the elements taken either European tradition, or from the local one, so various kinds of alien stylized architecture, being the products of colonizers creativity, were made and inculcated in these regions. “Unbridled exotics”, “eclectic approach” and “vulgar mixture of styles” in the result¹⁵⁸ – this criticism reminds us of the articles on many Soviet projects made for Central Asia (Fig. 16).

At the same time, the article replicates the logic discussed earlier in part on the notion of heritage. As we already know, there are all kinds of heritage, progressive and not. In the discussion of French architecture in Algeria, they said, “French people developed a model plan language good enough in any villa in Saint-Tropes or in Paris-Plage and glued a Mauritanian façade to it. Their main mistake is that they canonized Mauritanian architecture and, therefore, they acquired its reactionary features.”¹⁵⁹ As in Central Asian case, the planning ideas, the structure of the houses, ventilation and sun protection systems and other “rational and democratic” features were considered progressive, while others were not. National differences were important to the extent they could find practical applications and meet the requirements of the socialist society.

Countries of the Middle East, whose conditions reminded those of Central Asia, deserved special attention in the press. Thus, the architecture of Syria and Palestine, colonies of France and the UK, suffered from the same illness, according to the critics. In Syria we find the mixture of “exotics” and constructivism made only “for tourists and commercial needs”; Palestine also used “the imported constructivism, this belated height of fashion”, just a little bit changed in “Arabian-American style”.¹⁶⁰ The richness of epithets and the arguments here are to say that the true national style cannot exist in the capitalist system while colonizers suppress the local peoples.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 44-47.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶⁰ Lazar Rempel, “Arkhitektura Srednego Vostoka,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 7 (1935): 54.

In contrast to the general assumption that Soviet architectural process was excluded from the international context, I tried to show that Soviet architects and critics were vice versa very interested in it. The former looked for the new architectural decisions, the latter – for positive and negative references on the map of colonial or ex-colonial states. The reasoning behind the right and wrong examples for Central Asia provided in the press were very much due to the political and social state development and, most importantly, current international relationships of the Soviet Union. They proved: new Soviet architecture in the East could not be created until the East “wakes up” and overcomes its backwardness. At the same time, they showed: the rationale that will form a basis for true national architecture could be found in any national heritage, from the Islands of Bermuda to the Philippines. The real task was to separate the wheat from the chaff.

* * *

The national architecture in Central Asia in the 1930s developed rapidly: it represented by increased numbers of new projects and attention it got in theoretical discussions. Unlike in the 1920s, Soviet architecture in Central Asia tended to correspond to the national delimitation of republics. The architectural focus now included not only construction decisions and planning ideas, although they were the safest borrowing, but also decorative elements. Partial use of traditional décor became welcomed, however, more evident copying of forms of cult buildings was not. Findings of Soviet orientologists played an important role in this development. Mobilized to teach architects, even though only on the pages, they supplied them with historical references and ideas.

Not evident parallelism with the Turkish case shows that Soviet side was keen to find the references in the development of national styles. Also, it suggests that the Soviet

model was seen as an applicable solution for other cultural regions: by extension, for the “East” that included Turkey, and wider – for all oppressed nationalities in the world.

Chapter 3. The Architecture of National Republics at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects and after

The First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects happened on 16-26 June 1937 in the Pillar Hall of the Houses of the Unions in Moscow. This event marked a new era in several senses: institutionally and symbolically, it marked the first all-Union gathering of Unions members and was needed to show complete loyalty and controllability of the architects.¹⁶¹ In a didactic sense, the Congress hit the final note in the reeducation of non-party members and ex-modernists who had to publicly admit their mistakes and associate themselves with the official views. As Alexandra Selivanova has shown, all their speeches were written and approved by party-members.¹⁶² After 1937, no one had any doubts that socialist realism was the one and only creative method in Soviet architecture. Another goal of the Congress was to demonstrate the achievements in all spheres of architecture and identify future challenges. Architecture in national republics was an important part of the agenda; thus, the Congress included “national sections” with the presentations of national representatives devoted to the architectural achievements and problems in national republics. Among others, there were the sections of the Kazakh SSR, Tajik SSR, Turkmen SSR and Uzbek SSR. In this chapter, I am going to analyse discuss the Congress’ agenda on the national question and its proceedings and then the change in official discourse on national architecture on the eve of the Congress. In absence of archival evidence, I will identify the range of architectural problems chosen for the discussion, the accomplishments selected to strengthen or to get rid of. I argue that the Congress became the final point in the long story of the development of Soviet national architectures in Central Asia that took almost fifteen years. It entrenched many provisions discussed before. In the final part of the chapter, I will touch upon the preparations to the *VSKhV* (All-Union Agricultural

¹⁶¹ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*, 289-291.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 292-295.

Exhibition) devoted to the achievements of National Economy that happened in Moscow in 1939. The exhibition included pavilions of Central republics that, as I argue, became the showcases of how to deal with national styles after the Congress.

3.1 National Architecture at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects

The history of the First Congress was full of troubles and reconsiderations. The event had been postponed for several times; at the same time, the party cell of the Union tried to do the best in organizing the most important architectural event in the face of the Central Committee and Stalin personally. Its agenda covered many wide topics, for instance, architectural education, the Palace of Soviets and the Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow, current developments of architecture abroad and Union's charter. Karo Alabyan, the executive secretary of the Union, conductor of main ideological provisions and leader of the event, opened the Congress and headed this section "Tasks of Soviet architecture"; architects Alexey Shchusev and Nikolay Kolli were chosen to accompany him. The topic about national architecture took a prominent position: the reports made by representatives of national republics offered by the local party organization with the approval of the Union's leaders¹⁶³ were co-rapporteurs of the opening and most important section.¹⁶⁴

The presentations aimed to report on positive results and current challenges as well as to prove their great national traditions as it happened three years ago at the Congress of Soviet Writers. According to the proceedings published on the pages of *Arkhtektura SSSR*

¹⁶³ Alexandra Selivanova, *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁶⁴ Mark Meerovich, "Soyuz Sovetskikh Arkhitektorov SSSR. Istoriya Sozdaniya i Nachalny Period Sushchestvovaniya," *Arkhtekton: Izvestiya Vuzov*, 2 (2017), http://old.archvuz.ru/PDF/%23%2058%20PDF/8Architecton%2358_Meerovich.pdf (accessed June 9, 2020).

but in a concise form, all speeches had the same structure and repeated the same clichés about the rise of the local economy, construction of new building and infrastructure, beautification of the cities. All of them, not only Central Asian, touched the issue of national styles and the ways of using it in Soviet architecture. Thus, the representative of Uzbekistan V. Mukhamadov introduced the problem of local cadres, moreover, according to him, Moscow residency of architects who made a city-planning project for Tashkent could explain its lack of success: “The city project of Tashkent was developing not in Tashkent but in Moscow. This is, indeed, one of the reasons for the project’s abstractness.”¹⁶⁵ He referred to a “people’s genius” – a kind of communal national spirit, whose achievements such as traditional walls, ornaments, utensils were still not enough used and understood. “The first tentative steps in this direction” made by the architect Stefan Polupanov were criticized. New local cadres and members of the regional branch of the Union as well as the involvement of Uzbek engravers, mosaicists and muralists could have helped in this situation. The critique of the modernist project of Chirchikstroy complex for being “architecturally faceless and miserable settlement” and describing Shchusev’s Navoi Theatre (by this time, after edits, Shchusev and his project enjoyed the turn of anger into mercy) as city’s embellishment showed the preferences of the author and the epoch.

The Kazakhstan representative T. Basenov picked up the theme of modernism critics: “These callous and boring buildings had lost these artistic qualities in the eyes of architects (in the eyes of workers, they had never ever had them)... Other architects swung to the opposite extreme and started to copy the classical details mechanically.”¹⁶⁶ Comparing to the other republics, Kazakhstan had indeed much fewer architectural monuments. However, T. Basenov did not accept the lack of resource architectural heritage. He rhetorically asked why one could not use the motifs of Kazakh dwellings or traditional

¹⁶⁵ “Arkhitertura Soyuznyh Respublk,” *Arkhitertura SSSR*, 7-8 (1937): 19.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

ornaments. The main opponents in these imaginary arguments were the “Great Russian chauvinists”, who denied the right of Kazakhstan for its own national heritage. It shows that if before “democratic” heritage of housing culture and planning ideas was the central thing to borrow, now impressive and remarkable architectural monuments became the sources of architectural development and reasons to be proud. However, at the same time, in order to prevent nationalistic readings, Kazakh delegation warned of the risks of excessive and limited concentration on national issues, which could hinder the development of world culture.¹⁶⁷ Likewise Uzbekistan colleagues, they underlined the need for local cadres but also insisted on the Union’s supervision. The positioning of the relations between Moscow and Kazakh architects in this speech is very significant. According to T. Basenov, it was the lack of Moscow supervision and feedback that led to the shortcomings of the projects made by “young and few Kazakh architects”. Also, he appealed for more serious attitudes of Moscow architects towards their “projects for the periphery,” as in future, these projects would serve as guidance for local architects.¹⁶⁸ On the one hand, this tricky argument reproduced the paternalizing logic but, on another, removed all responsibilities for possible deviations from the state vision of national architecture to Moscow architects and planners. Both proactive and protective, such a tactic entrenched the distribution of power and knowledge: although it was national republics that possessed their heritage, it was Moscow specialist who should have taught them how to use in a proper way. Additionally, it implied the poor knowledge of local traditions in the center.

The Turkmenistan representative used a similar argument: the republican architectural youth needed the “highly competent supervision” and looked for “right ways to create true socialist architecture.”¹⁶⁹ Though, they were not satisfied with the quality of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 27.

Moscow help: the town planning projects for Ashkhabad were to be remade, the housing projects were perceived as “imitations of feudal buildings” with the enclosed yards not effective for ventilation. The conclusion “they seem to think that one can do defective projects for the remote republics,”¹⁷⁰ sounded more like a warning for Moscow architects: the words put in the representatives’ mouths definitely targeted the Moscow audience. Common claims to study the use of colours, light-and-shade, water surfaces, materials, constructions used in seismic zones and to launch the production of tiles routinely formed the rest of the text.

The speech of Kh. Taurova, a representative of Tajik SSR was the most conventional with no direct requests. Tajikistan, which was the least developed republic, reported on the achievements that included two first ethnic Tajik graduate architects from the Central Asian Industrial Institute, power plants and new buildings that “took into account the peculiarities of Tajik national culture, ways of living and climate conditions,” all of which were made by Russian architects.¹⁷¹ The Kyrgyz SSR, which became a separate republic only in 1936 with the adoption of the 1936 Soviet Constitution, did not have its own representatives at the Congress. The reason for this is still not clear from the sources. However, Kazakhstan, which gained this status exactly in the same year being transformed from the Kazakh ASSR within the RSFSR into Kazakh SSR, had its own delegates.

Indeed, all the speeches had a lot in common and shared the same concerns. Significantly, the very language used by national missions in their presentations internalized the common tropes of Moscow discourse on Central Asia. The differentiation between centre and periphery, the need for supervision, the “progressive” and “regressive” parts heritage (“The traditions of our nomadism that had generated the dirty *kibitka* are

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 26.

collapsing”¹⁷²) show who owned the narrative. The relations between centre and periphery became one of the central points in the discussions of national architecture. The Congress noted:

With satisfaction and joy had noted the growth of national architectural cadres in Union republics, at the same time, acknowledged gross insufficiency of the help provided to national cadres by the Union, project organizations and educational institutions. The Congress considers that one of the most important tasks of architectural society is full cooperation in the improvement and ideological education of young architectural forces, especially, in national republics and also the development of the national forms in architecture in our republics.¹⁷³

The representative of the Central Executive Committee Vlas Chubar, who also made a welcome speech at the Congress from the Party side, echoed by saying “the creation of Soviet architectural *styles* is a big serious matter; it should be approached with beautiful solution models ... of the Palace of Soviets and other projects”¹⁷⁴ (*italics mine*). Both of these quotes implied the leading position of Moscow in acquiring new methods of architectural work that they had to share. Educational institutions were supposed to be a channel to spread knowledge. Regarding visual language, the Congress did not provide more clarifications. But it was not its role: usually, it was defined on a case-by-case basis. Routine mentions of national heritage covered both monumental forms of architecture, housing tradition (in case of the lack of the former), applied art and decorative works such as tiles, carvings and ornaments.

The Congress played its role: it consolidated discursive theoretical and practical achievements of the Union, subordinated the non-party members and pointed out faults. Folk art and particularly Central Asia was an important topic, however, unlike the Congress of Soviet Writers, the one among others like urban development and city planning. Another

¹⁷² Ibid., 27.

¹⁷³ “Rezolutsiya S’ezda po Dokladam o Zadachakh Sotetskoy Arkhitektury,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 7-8 (1937): 6.

¹⁷⁴ “Rech Zam. Predsedatelya Sovnarkoma SSSR Tovarischa V. Ya. Chubarya,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 7-8 (1937): 9-10.

goal of the final endorsement of socialist realism happened but rather discursively. Socialist realism celebrated at the meeting was a political rather than aesthetic concept that lacked a clear definition: one barely could define formal essence as well as navigate within the polemics. As Danilo Udovički-Selb has shown, the Union members were expected to feel it instinctively.¹⁷⁵ Generally described as “veracious” it appealed to non-rational categories. Nevertheless, the function of realism in architecture was more important than the coherent definition: the architecture should have operated as a transmitting machine sharing ideological messages.¹⁷⁶ As a famous Soviet art critic and theorist David Arkin mentioned in his speech at the Congress, “Socialist realism is the vast broadening an architect’s worldview,” that implied also cultural and national dimensions, the breadth of the USSR and its diversity. In the case of Central Asian republics, these machines also served to include the region in the Soviet architectural system and form a conventional vocabulary of national style assembled from “progressive” features found in history.

3.2 National Architecture under Discussion in 1937

In 1937, the change happened in architectural language and in topics of architectural discussions was very notable. For instance, the first issue of *Arkhitektura SSSR* in 1937, which started with quoting all thirteen chapters of the new Stalin Constitution, dedicated the rest of the volume to the folk art and architecture. Vernacular traditions in Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia (in Samarkand, Khiva and Bukhara), Georgia and Armenia as well as on decorative art of Russians and Kazan Tatars occupied the headlines. Russian classical tradition in the face of Matvey Kazakov, a Russian Neoclassical architect of the 18th

¹⁷⁵ Danilo Udovički-Selb, *Soviet Architectural Avant-Gardes: Architecture and Stalin’s Revolution from Above, 1928–1938* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 203.

¹⁷⁶ Catherine Cooke, “Beauty as a Route to ‘the Radiant Future’: Responses of Soviet Architecture,” *Journal of Design History*, 10, no. 2 (1997): 137–160.

century, and, of course, Alexander Pushkin, who embodied the best features of Russian artistic genius and also had some relation to architecture, found their place on the pages. Even in the context of the publications of the 1930s, such new content looked very conservative and retrospective. It illustrated the agenda: the closer to the Congress, the more space was devoted to architectural traditions of all kinds.

By 1937, the Soviet critics already developed to the discursive language to talk on Central Asia and the role of native traditions in Soviet architectural scene. The concept of “folk art” referred to nationalities, which among visual and decorative arts also included architectural traditions, became a central notion and main value. However, the concept referred only to the selected nationalities, which had acquired their autonomy: only titular nations were mentioned as bearers of traditions. The folk art had to be actualized: “Folk art is not just an infinitely rich source of art themes, stories and images, motives, forms in the past but an immortal perennial spring of contemporary art – in the present,”¹⁷⁷ informed the editorial of *Arkhitektura SSSR*. All the best architectural achievements such as Parthenon were proclaimed as made with an eye on the native art. Moreover, “the authentic classical art was, in essence, the authentic folk art.”¹⁷⁸ Folk national arts were presented as “liberated” by Soviets in the same way as the nations themselves were liberated from the colonial rules. Employing both national and class considerations but, again, in a very selective manner, Soviet critics came to the conclusion that “in the historical context of world architecture, Greco-Roman heritage was just one of many ways of architectural development,”¹⁷⁹ which equalized the oppressed and previously paternalized native traditions with the recognized classics. All previous attempts to use national tradition, for instance, “Russian art nouveau” or “Russian style” were claimed to misbalanced,

¹⁷⁷ “Narodnoe Tvorchestvo,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 12.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

paternalized and, as we remember, eclectic. However, the decolonizing logic of Soviet critics and art historians led to another consequence: it undermined the status of architecture as a professional activity, although this process had started even earlier with the creation of the Union and control over independent architects. It proclaimed architecture as a collective result of national mind and wisdom. Anonymous and not very well defined folk architectural activity became an example for professional practice on the All-Union scale. Moreover, the study of traditional architecture was to be helpful in developing “folk amateur activities”.¹⁸⁰

Not all characteristics of native traditions had passed the filters used by Soviet critics, as raw folk material had to be processed first. By 1937, there were two main and prospective issues for current Soviet architectural practice: traditional housing types and decoration, which applied to all national traditions including Central Asian. If housing types were of close architects’ interest since the 1920s, a concern for decoration had been developing gradually. From the modernist denial of any decorations it came to be “fresh and vital” mastery to enrich both kolkhoz and urban architecture. Apart from just decorative quality, the craftsmanship of materials and the skill to link décor with the construction were other important abilities.

The possible locus to show the local mastery and creativity was kolkhoz; since 1935, kolkhozniki were invited to submit their own architectural offers.¹⁸¹ One of the examples was a club built in the kolkhoz named after Stalin in Old Bukhara, which “had a U-shaped plan with an open yard; in accordance with local construction traditions, it got a flat roof and a rich carved cornice.”¹⁸² (Fig. 17)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸¹ L. Kashkarova, “Kolkhoznaya Samodeyatelnost v Arkhitekture”, *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 15.

¹⁸² Ibid., 17.



Fig. 17. Club building in the kolkhoz named after Stalin in Old Bukhara. (Source: L. Kashkarova, “Kolkhoznaya samodeyatelnost v arkhitekture”, *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 1 (1937): 19).

At the same time, the national art needed a live embodiment of “national genius” to show the mentioned principles in action. Soviet architecture needed new heroes, preferably, local. It is indicative that in 1937 the figure of the ethnically national architect appeared on the pages of architectural magazines for the first time. In the issue of *SSSR na stroyke* fully dedicated to Tajikistan (no. 2, 1937), among local *udarniki truda* and kolkhoz’ directors, one can discover the mention of Aminov, an architect of the showpiece kolkhoz “Komintern” in Leninabad.¹⁸³ (Fig. 18-20) He is captured in the photo in traditional clothes, wearing a quilted *chapan* with a belt and a skullcap, looking at, perhaps, a building drawing and discussing it. Aminov built in “Komintern” a new *chaikhana* for 1500 persons, a traditional type of building and public place, kolkhoz headquarters and a nursery. Traditional forms and construction methods are conspicuous: raw bricks were produced just at the place, traditional wooden carving together with Soviet slogans and portraits decorated the walls and interiors of *chaikhana*. It was the first time when a Moscow magazine had published projects made by a local architect. In the article, the role of local craftsmen was consciously underlined:

Here, under the carved vaults of this amazing building [*chaikhana*] created by Tajik people’s architects, brigades gathered to have a rest after midday heat in the fields, to drink a cup of fragrant green tea, to eat a bunch of sweet grapes, to savour a slice of

¹⁸³ “Rod Bobokalovykh,” *SSSR na Stroyke*, 2 (1937): 14.

melon for which the pleasant lands of North Tajikistan are famous, the lands, which are reserved for kolkhoz forever.¹⁸⁴

If before national craftsmen were only mentioned as supportive forces enabled to help with decoration or other secondary tasks, now they took the first place. However, it is important to recognize that the projects were created for the kolkhoz, i.e. a rural area: this can explain why the image of a national architect was used. In 1937, a national architect could only be found there –the system of architectural education was still in its infancy in Tajikistan. Thus, the space of architectural creativity was divided between a city and a village and, consequently, between architects came from the centre and local ones.

Animov, the man of the people, became the representation of the idea of free and wise folk art, which could show new ways for Soviet architecture. However, we still do not know anything about him: Animov was more a function-character than a personality. Significantly, this story appeared in *SSSR na stroyke*, the magazine that transmitted only great positive achievements of Soviet economy for abroad. So in the Tajik issue mentioned above, the architectural project in kolkhoz was mentioned just among other kolkhoz achievements such as livestock and fruits as well as republican achievements such as cotton, electric plants etc. Thus, architecture was embedded into the presentation of national economical prosperity and served as another kind of resource, which included the heritage as a whole, techniques and human resource as pillars of tradition. Indeed, in such context, the appearance of a non-Tajik architect would ruin the picture.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 18.



Fig. 18. Architect Animov and his works (Source: *SSSR na Sroyke*, 2 (1937): 14).

Fig. 19. The interior of the *chaikhana* in kolkhoz. (Source: *SSSR na Sroyke*, 2 (1937): 15).

Fig. 20. Details of the *chaikhana* (Source: *SSSR na Sroyke*, 2 (1937): 18).

The voices of local masters can be rarely found in the centre magazines. However, more often they were mentioned and quoted collectively as a common voice of people's tradition.

3.3 The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition and National pavilions

The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition opened in 1939 was to be the live embodiment of Socialist realism architecture or, in the words of Greg Castillo, “the incubator of the new folklore architectural equivalent”.¹⁸⁵ The nationalities I will focus on the history of Central Asian pavilions at the Exhibition to the extent they enrich our understanding of the national styles for republican use.

The project had a long and complicated story. It started under the supervision of the main architects Vyacheslav Oltarzhevsky in 1935, much before the Congress, and was supposed to open in 1937. However, in 1937, the exhibition committee was restructured, Oltarzhevsky was accused and exiled. The built pavilions and the master plan were to be revised. Some of the pavilions that were already built were demolished and remade (for

¹⁸⁵ Greg Castillo, “Soviet Orientalism: Social Realism and Built Tradition,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlement Review*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (1997): 33.

instance, the Main Entrance, the pavilion of Ukraine SSR).¹⁸⁶ According to the original plan, only Kazakhstan had its own wooden pavilion, while other three republics, excluding Kyrgyzstan, had to settle for one common pavilion (Fig. 21).¹⁸⁷ The architect of this project Polupanov wrote “The exhibition pavilion of Uzbekistan where the exhibits of the Turkmen SSR and Tajik SSR would take place represents the unity and friendship of Central Asian peoples. There is one common entrance to the yard through the propylaea and then – three separate entrances in each part.”¹⁸⁸ Also, this project did not take into account the latest Central Asian SSR, Kyrgyzstan. In 1937 this project and representation of Central Asian at *VSKhV*, in general, were reviewed: three additional pavilions of the Turkmen SSR (Fig. 24), Kyrgyz SSR (Fig. 25) and Tajik SSR (Fig. 26) were added, the first project became the Uzbek SSR pavilion (Fig. 22), Kazakhstan got a new pavilion (Fig. 27). Next to the pavilion, Polupanov also made an Uzbek *chaikhana*, an impressive wooded structure covered by carving with a traditional *hauz* in the centre and murals made by Uzbek masters (Fig. 23). This change happened just right after the First Congress and followed the decisions on national delimitation. The depended position of the Tajik SSR and Turkmen SSR did not fit the picture: it would surely have broken formal ethnic hierarchy, which by 1937 already got its final edition. The building of national cultures, including architecture, of ethnic groups that were lucky enough to get their republics, was doubled down on, while the others without their territory were neglected.¹⁸⁹ However, apart from political and subornation reasonings, the former project had another significant shortcoming. How would it be able to solve the essential architectural problem: what architectural tradition to use, given the fact that all republics had their owns but had to share one building? I think that the

¹⁸⁶ V. Tolstoy, ed., *Vystavochnye ansambli, SSSR 1920-1930e gody: materialy i dokumenty* (Moscow: Galart, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ A. Rogachev, *Velikie stroyki sotsialisma* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2014), 326.

¹⁸⁸ S. Polupanov, “Opyt Razrabotki Natsionalnyh Motivov v Arkhitekture Uzbekistana,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 7-8 (1937): 19.

¹⁸⁹ Yuri Slezkine, *Ibid.*, 445.

idea to avoid a common pavilion came from, apart of national aspirations of the republics, the understanding that it would represent a pure Oriental mixture of Tajik, Turkmen and Uzbek vernacular traditions so much criticized before.

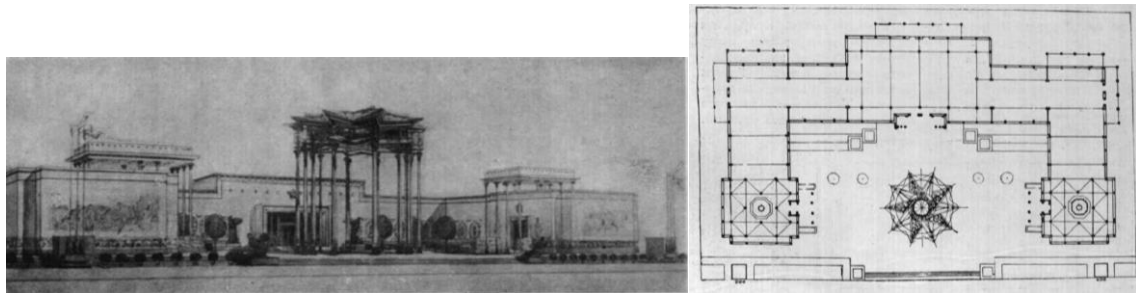


Fig. 21. S. Polupanov, The Pavilion of Central Asian republics and the plan, 1937 (Source: *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 2 (1937): 33).



Fig. 22. S. Polupanov, Pavilion of Uzbekistan, 1939.

Fig. 23. S. Polupanov, Pavilion Chaikhona by Pavilion «UzbekSSR» (Source: *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 2 (1937): 33).

All republican pavilions had their peculiar traditional outlook combined with the classical matrix: “indisputably Soviet yet recognizably regional.”¹⁹⁰ As the buildings were the mediums between national cultures and visitors, the architectural design had to be simplified and adapted comparing to the original historical view, for instance, in the Uzbek SSR pavilion.¹⁹¹ At the same time, if the pavilions of the republics such as Kazakhstan that lacked the monumental tradition, as Tatar architect I. Gainutdinov suggested, the design

¹⁹⁰ Greg Castillo, “Peoples at an Exhibition. Soviet Architecture and the National Question,” in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism without Shore* (London: Duke University Press, 1997): 91.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

details could be borrowed from the applied arts, for instance, embroideries.¹⁹² Curiously, this logic reminds the similar instructions made, for instance, in the creation of national languages a decade before: “The principle material of the Tatar literary language should consist of elements taken from the native language... If a word does not exist in the Tatar language, it should, whenever possible, be replaced by a new artificial word composed of stems that exist in our language.”¹⁹³

The mastery of decorations was outstanding thanks to about numerous native artisans who used their skills to complete the projects made by Russian architects.¹⁹⁴ This relation replicated the usual division of architectural labour for projects in Central Asian republics where local masters always took a secondary role. The *VSKhV* was a live master class in the theory and practice of Socialist realism in real time. Then, this practice and the synthesized new styles were to be sent back to the republics.

In the case of exhibition pavilions, the mantra of socialist realism “national in form, socialist in content” gets a very literal reading. The buildings, indeed, had a national exterior and interior design being just expensive and impressive exposition halls. Meanwhile, the “content”, i.e. the expositions of the republican achievements, was essentially socialist, since it contained only the evidence of progressive economical and socialist developments. For instance, the exhibition of Kyrgyz SSR included the displays “The Stalin Constitution”, which gifted the Kyrgyz the status of the socialist republic, “The victory of kolkhoz system”, “Industrialization of Kyrgyz SSR”, dozens of displays on various kinds of crop and animal production.¹⁹⁵ It was the exhibits and the story they told that mostly made up the socialist essence with the ultimate goal to overcome the “backwardness”. The content, however, was packed in very precious boxes.

¹⁹² I. Gainutdinov, “Paviliony Soyuznyh i Avtonomnyh Respublik,” *Arkhitectura SSSR*, 1 (1939): 6.

¹⁹³ Cited in Yury Sleskine, *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁹⁴ Greg Castillo, “Soviet Orientalism: Social Realism and Built Tradition,” 38.

¹⁹⁵ *Pavilion Kirgizskaya SSR. Putevoditel* (Moscow: Ogiz, Selkhozgiz, 1939).

According to the speech of Chubar at the Congress, quoted above, it was supposed to be a bunch of national styles, not a single one. Though cemented by the socialist realism doctrine, they provided various products. By challenging national specificity, it turned to be international, since it can be applied to any kind of national heritage. Developing the spatial metaphor of “a communal apartment of Soviet nations” nicely employed by Yuri Slezkine, one could say that the *VSKhV* was indeed a yard of a communal block or a street that shared. On this street, facades were needed to identify your neighbours and to boast the splendour, deep traditions and modernity of each other houses.

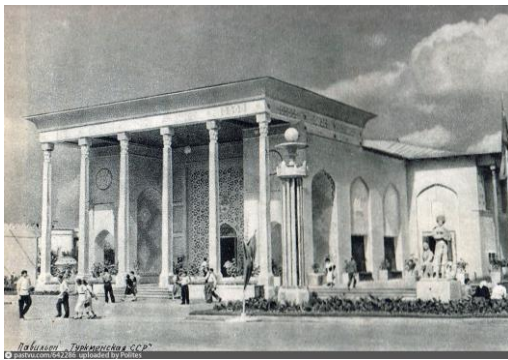


Fig. 24. The Pavilion of the Turkmen SSR, 1939 (Source: pastvu.com).



Fig. 25. The Pavilion of the Kyrgyz SSR, 1939 (Source: *VSKhV* Guidebook, 1939).



Fig. 26. The Pavilion of the Tajik SSR, 1939 (Source: pastvu.com).



Fig. 27. The Pavilion of the Kazakh SSR, 1939 (Source: pastvu.com).

Conclusion

Soviet Central Asia was a special locus in Soviet architectural ecumene but, at the same time, it had to share the general requirements of national policy and architectural thoughts of the time. Being a part of the imagined Soviet East, it made a big way from the united cultural region to a group of ethnically-based national entities, though sharing common past. I traced the development of attitudes towards “Soviet Central Asian architecture” to show: architecture helped to make this happen.

Soviet architecture in Central Asia became a meeting point of several subjects: centre-based architects, Party leaders, research institutions, preservation committees as well as local people, architects and officials. Although in my research, I concentrated on the first side, I showed that the search for new faces of national architecture was a product of many involved wills and considerations.

However, the very structure of this process implied the depended position of Central Asian republics that had to learn from elder fraternal people. Moreover, the institutional network was a tool to control the development of architectural processes on the periphery and, thereby, to bring it closer to centre.

The case of Central Asia shows that though the Soviet cultural system is usually perceived as prescriptive and unifying, locality makes difference. A bundle of Central Asian colonial past and native cultural traditions was to be taken into account by Soviet architects and bureaucrats. Therefore, my research poses a bigger question. Was there a Soviet architecture or Soviet architectures? I think the study of Central Asian architectural history shows that a variety of regional architectural variants with both central and local actors involved into its production is a more relevant scheme.

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