Summary: The paper deals with the problem of architectural agenda of Russian empress Catherine the Great. The keen interest of the empress was to create an ideal word full of images of great civilizations of the past particularity of Roman empire. At the same time she thought of the buildings created in the days of her reigning as “future antiquity”. It was necessary for her to impart properties of a classical ideal to her actions and structures. Taking her actions and structures. Taking herself mentally off from the present at the distance of two thousand years, the empress created a point of view so outstanding the contemporary epoch that the latter in a retrospective approached classics and was equated to antiquity. Key words: Architectural history, Russian classicism, Catherine the Great, Charles Cameron, the epoch of Enlightenment

Catherine II was not simply a rich, pleasant or even brilliant client; she can be considered a client absolutely exclusive in the history of architecture. She did not possess any extremely refined taste or pathetic art intuition; she was upset, when money or materials were stolen too impulsively. Her chief virtue was her special understanding of time which the Emperor expressed in many structures throughout all her reign. Fortunately, she herself explained her attitude to the interlacing of images of the past, the present and the future which the architects realized in the appearance of her residences. On the 5th of June, 1779 Catherine II wrote to baron Melchior von Grimm about the discovery in Rome mosaics which had been “an ornament of the boudoir of the late [Roman — D. Sh.] Emperor Claudius” and ordered «make so that they will be obtained [...] they can be placed in my apartment which [...] in two thousand years will be carried from here by the order of the Emperor of China or any other silly tyrant owing most of the world [...] 225 gold coins for the floor of the boudoir, intended to serve three such [...] persons as [Emperor] Claudius, me and the future Emperor of China or some other silly tyrant owing most of the world [...], and, above all, at the time of the transformation of the tremendous empire she kept her attitude to it, at least, from the outer side, as to such an eternal-improved “Garden Kingdom”.

Catherine II characterized her reign in the letter to her permanent correspondent the ambassador of Saxe-Gotha to Paris Baron Friedrich von Grimm [...] It is a kingdom of Fine Arts [...] Raphael, the Baths of Titus [...] gardens of Tsarskoe Selo and wonderful buildings of Prince Potemkin [...] they all took their places next to legislomania [...] There is such a disease called legislomania [i.e. a passion to compose legislations], the Empress is hipped on it [...] earlier she composed principles only [...] now everything that steers to superior occupies her [...] ».

The image of the kingdom of Fine Arts, where passion for composing legislation rules, is essential for understanding Catherine’s reformation of Russia. There is a legend that once during a game Catherine II was to complete the phrase which one of her nobles began. «Mes chateaux en Espagne [...] », wrote he. « [...] They are not there, and I build on something to them every day [...] », completed the Empress. During Catherine II’s reign general boundary survey, which changed the system of using of the territory of the European part of the country, was set; not only the capital cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow were re-planned, but also regular plans for about 400 settlements were made out — for all administrative centers of Russia. The Commission for Roads changed traffic network of the Empire. Exemption from state service for nobles instilled another character into rural living and provided blossom of Russian estate culture, i.e. construction of tens of thousands country estates with manor houses and parks. During Catherine’s epoch both towns and the countryside changed radically.

Her ideas were being realized a research of the most contemporary methods of “actuation of every concern”, as they said at that time, took place. Conscious and systematic choosing of those elements which formed new organization and image of the country was conducted in the building of palaces and parks. The Commission for Roads changed traffic network of the Empire. Exemption from state service for nobles instilled another character into rural living and provided blossom of Russian estate culture, i.e. construction of tens of thousands country estates with manor houses and parks. During Catherine’s epoch both towns and the countryside changed radically.

1. Sbornik Imperatorskogo russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva, v. XXIII, St. Petersburg, 1878, p. 20 (Сборник Императорского русского исторического общества, т. XXIII, с. 20).
As the result the period under Catherine II became the epoch of the strongest international links in the history of Russian Architecture. Catherine II made Classicism the official and over-all style of architecture of Russian Empire. Classical ideal was a measure of civilization and improvement, an instrument drawing Modernity nearer to Antiquity. The Empress organized a wide net of agents her to trace not only political but also art events throughout Europe. Besides Russian masters were to begin studies in St. Petersburg and then had to continue learning abroad, the Imperial Academy of Arts was to control it. Nevertheless, masters invited from different European countries were of greater importance in the development of Russian architecture.

It was Antonio Rinaldi who realized the ideas of Catherine II at the beginning of her reign.


As the result the period under Catherine II became the epoch of the strongest international links in the history of Russian Architecture. Catherine II made Classicism the official and over-all style of architecture of Russian Empire. Classical ideal was a measure of civilization and improvement, an instrument drawing Modernity nearer to Antiquity. The Empress organized a wide net of agents her to trace not only political but also art events throughout Europe. Besides Russian masters were to begin studies in St. Petersburg and then had to continue learning abroad, the Imperial Academy of Arts was to control it. Nevertheless, masters invited from different European countries were of greater importance in the development of Russian architecture.

It was Antonio Rinaldi who realized the ideas of Catherine II at the beginning of her reign. He was born in 1709 and studied in Napoli under Luigi Vanvitelli. In 1754 Rinaldi became the architect of the successor to the Russian throne Grand Duke Pyotr Fyodorovich, the future Emperor Peter III. From this position, he was switched over to his spouse, who after the coup and his husband’s strange death became Empress Catherine the Great. According to her conception the largest in Russia Rococo ensemble appeared in 1762–1774 in Oranienbaum on the Baltic sea 40 miles from St. Petersburg.

The Empress’s palace in Oranienbaum, called the Russian, resembled in its exterior decoration style King Frederick the Great’s Palace in the park Sans Souci in Potsdam, especially before adding of the second story already in XIX century. The fact is quite explainable — not only Peter III’s tastes but Catherine’s ones at the beginning of her reign corresponded to the preferences of King Frederick the Great, the unquestionable leader among German monarchs of the Enlightenment. In the Chinese Palace by Antonio Rinaldi, as well as in the work by Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff in Sans Souci ensemble, the style of the Baroque of Elisabeth I’s epoch and Catherine’s phase of the development of Russian art between half-Baroque and half-Classical grand monumental-palace facades seems to be a compromise between the Baroque of Elisabeth I’s epoch and Catherine’s Classicism. With them the Rococo brief life in the capital almost became exhausted. Though Classicism prevailed soon, the playful principle inherent from the Rococo didn’t vanish. In many successive constructions of Catherine II in Antique, Gothic and Chinese styles the Rococo appeared as if it “spoke up” its “unsaid words”. «In the next world when I meet Caesar and Alexander and other old friends I will [...] search out Confucius [...] I would like to intellectualize with him», wrote Catherine II to Grimm.

At the turn of 1760s and 1770s the greatest Chinese ensemble was under the construction in another Imperial residence Tzarskoe Selo outside of St. Petersburg. Architects of different nationalities took part in its development. They were firstly Italian Antonio Rinaldi, Germans Georg Velten and Johann Gerhard, Russians Vasily, Ilya, Pyotr Neelov and then Briton Charles Cameron. Anyone approaching Tzarskoe Selo from St. Petersburg was to pass an arch of Great Chinese Caprice. He was met by a “rocky hill” pierced with a summer house in the form of a Chinese joss-house. To the left, vividly painted gateway topped with a summer house in the form of a model for his monument erected in the center of the Great Pond. The pond used to play the role of the Mediterranean or the Black Sea in various allegories according to interrelations with the monuments dedicated to one or another victory. The commissioner’s role was defining in choosing models for the monuments as for the style of the wing, i.e. Zubovsky Block, erected for her private lodging with Georg Velten; their stylistic characteristics testify unquestionably the advent of Classicism in Russia. In front of it Quarenghi will built the Concert hall and the Kitchen-Ruin underlining the taste for Antiquity.

Emergence of new architecture began as early as the closing years of Empress Elisabeth I. The initiative originated from her lover Ivan Shuvalov and was interlinked with his interest in French art. With his efforts the Moscow University was established, and in 1757 he inclined the Empress to establish the Academy of Arts in Moscow. Shuvalov commissioned a design of an appropriate building to Jacques-François Blondel. Meanwhile the Empress decided that the Academy of Arts had to be in St. Petersburg. Russian architect Alexander Kokoreshin was assigned to adjust Blondel’s drawing to the new site.

Shuvalov decided it was necessary to invite a French architect to St. Petersburg. He succeeded in persuading Jacques-François Blondel’s cousin Jean-Baptiste Michel Vallin de la Mothe, 30 years old, to come to Russia. The latter had just graduated with brilliant success from the French Academy in Rome 11. Not only Blondel but also Jacques-Germain Soufflot recommended him to the Russian court, which was the evidence that the young man had a high reputation amongst the Parisian architects. He was to take part in constructing the first building for the Academy of Arts and to become its first professor of Architecture. Shuvalov considered rightly that before following the European fashion it was necessary to qualify those who would realize the new artistic conceptions. He wrote: “We don’t have beaux arts since there is no a single […] skillful artist; the reason is that the young […] people proceed to the studies without any base neither in foreign languages nor in basis of […] sciences essentially urgent for arts” 12.

Shuvalov was sent with honor to a travelling abroad and one of close to the Empress men Ivan Betskoj was appointed as the President of the Academy of Arts. On June 28, 1765 a foundation-stone of the Academy building was laid stately according to the plan developed by Kokorinov and de la Mothe including the main façade which was Blondel’s design modified by de la Mothe. The edifice had to “claim the direction” for forming new architecture in Russia according to the Empress’s conception. The building of the Academy of Arts on Vasilyevsky Island in St. Petersburg is like a huge rectangle 140 m long and 125 m in width, comprising the main state building overlooking the Neva River and other parts intended for classrooms. A circular block surrounding the circular yard is inscribed in its middle. The façade with the front to the Neva embankment possesses a typical for Blondel’s school composition of building with rusticated base, the upper floors united by a great order, avant-corps at the corners and the projecting central part crowned with a cupola. The dissemblance between the structure and Blondel’s design are considerable. De la Mothe and Kokorinov employed more “modern” for those times variant of Classicism. Here the desire for geometry and for interaction of big masses is more noticeable and it is more perceived in the plan. It is especially emblematic that where Blondel offered the Corinthian order, the more severe Roman Doric order was used. The cupola was also shaped more laconically.

Other great buildings by de la Mothe were located in Nevskiy Prospect, the main avenue of the city. The shopping arcade, which was designed in 1759 but construction of which was delayed, and the catholic church of St. Catherine, laid to his design in 1763, revealed the new character of the buildings carried in the forms of Classicism. Next to the Winter palace in 1764–1775 he laid up the Small Hermitage. Its façade opens onto the Neva and has survived as the architect conceived it with a great Ionic colonnade and pronouncedly state high basement level. The building of the Hermitage disposed from the Neva, was built by the other architect who played noticeable role in generation of Russian Classicism — by Georg Velten 13. He worked on when de la Mothe left Russia for his hometown of Angoulême.

Georg Velten was born in St. Petersburg. He was a son of the German chief-cook of Peter the Great, studied in Stuttgart and Berlin, and when he returned he worked with Bartolomeo Rastrelli. At the beginning of the Twentieth century Igor Grabar wrote that Velten’s creative work was «fine, without shadows […] light, graceful, but not monumental», of which dawned, or at first eye of the first ray of emerging day of classical Petersburg 14. Among his buildings, mostly of 1770s, there are the Throne Hall in the Great Palace in Peterhof, the renowned lattice of the Summer Garden, several churches in St. Petersburg.

The influence of French Classicism grew in Russia architecture. It was caused not only by de la Mothe’s work but by return of the first graduates of the Academy of Arts who had continued their education abroad. In 1765 Vasily Bazhenov, who studied under Charles de Wailly in Paris, returned to St. Petersburg as well 15. After his triumphant completion of training and the success of his designs at all the contests, he visited Italy where he was granted the degree of the professor of the Academy of Saint Luke and the membership of the Academy of Bologna. In 1767 Bazhenov was sent to Moscow to prepare a reconstruction design of the Moscow Kremlin, we will reprise later 16.

1768 another architect Ivan Starov, who studied as well under Charles de Wailly in Paris, came back to Moscow 17. First the young architect didn’t receive any prestigious commissions. He was appointed to the Commission responsible for planning provincial towns 18. Only in the early 1770s when he built the Church of St. Catherine and Count Orlov and thus became personally known to the Empress, he was commissioned with an important design in St. Petersburg.

In 1775 he was assigned to raise up a new cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky Lavra, at that time the residence of St. Petersburg and Novgorod Metropolitan Gavriil, the chief of the Russian Church. It was a major structure which was to be an example of new religious architecture. Starov created a type of a church associated little with the Orthodox tradition. He followed the concept of an ancient cathedral, which was recognized in the theory of French Classical architecture by 1760s as the result of the works of Abbots Jean-Louis de Cordemoy and Mark-Antoine Laugier 19.

Starov erected a cathedral with a Latin cross in plan and with two belfries on the west facade, a wide transept, a cupola and semicircular choir. Complete circular order played a significant role in Starov’s works. The west facade possessed the monumental Tuscan portico. The dome with a colonnade resembled the design of the Church of St. Geneviève in Paris by Jacques-Germain Soufflot. In the interior or the architect presented a compromise solution in respect of the controversy between the French theorists upon preference of columns or pillars in religious architecture, which was known to him due to studying under de Wailly. New appearance of Moscow was of special role in the program of reformations by Catherine the Great. Denis Diderot speaking to the Empress insisted on locating the capital in the center of the state. He didn’t like St. Petersburg’s location definitely: «A state with its capital placed at the edge of the country looks like an animal with its heart on the top of its little finger […]» 20. Diderot advised: «It will be natural for Your Majesty to have a Great Palace in Moscow» 21. She agreed with the idea, but her intentions were passing on. She wanted a palace introducing the image of her “enlightened” Russia.

The gigantic complex, if had it been completed, would have become the greatest European classical construction to replace the Kremlin. Only the ancient cathedrals, symbols of Russian history and Orthodoxy, would have been preserved. In the place of the wall of a great cathedral the design of new buildings would have originated, built in the most modern for that epoch style. The language that the architecture “spoke” was cooperation of the past

and the future — quite in the spirit of the French classical Theory. From Roland Fréart de Chambray to Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand ideas allowing realization of the parallels between Antiquity and Modernity appeared there in it 22.

Bazhenov’s design was the concentration of ideas for Moscow’s monumental centre carried off in classical forms. On one of the obelisks, built in honor of the palace’s laying, he inscribed the lines «What was Greece during the Antiquity and what Rome could have generated is what the Kremlin wants to house in its grandeur…» 23. The territory of the Kremlin was considered by him as a huge triangular structure. He built up the sides of the triangular along their borders. High walls of the classical buildings rose up on the Kremlin Hill, and a “historical” perspective revealed it — «What was Greece during the Antiquity and what Rome could have generated that is what Rome could have generated» 24. The demand to send “Italians” marked the change of the Russian court’s architectural agenda. First of all it concerned the aspiration for greater authenticity of applied antique patterns and for direct inserting, if possible, of archeological fragments into buildings under construction 25.

The aspiration for originality and concreteness of antique ideal generated the desire to appeal to architects acquainted with Roman monuments since birth or due to long time spending in Rome. The Empress’s agents started seeking such specialists.

Johann Friedrich Reiffenstein and Anton Raphael Mengs, prominent men in Roman artistic society of that time, took part in the process. The Empress wrote, «[…]the sweetest Mengs […] had conducted negotiations for two architects in the way suitable for congress peace talks […]» 26. And then she added «I am hipped on Mr. Cameron, a man of Scottish persuasion […] a mighty great draughtsman educated on antique monuments, famous due to the book on baths of Ancient Rome […]» 27.

The first of the architects of the new generation who came into Russian art of building at the turn of the 1770s and 1780s was Charles Cameron. Catherine II constantly emphasized Cameron’s relations not with British but with Italian architecture, to be precise with international Roman society of architects, artists and researchers of antique monuments. «I have one more man besides Quarenghi and Trombara, named Cameron, who spent many years studying architecture in Rome […]», insisted the Empress 28. She thought that Cameron was a Jacobite noble and was brought up at the Pretender to British throne court, which was hosted by villa Albani in Rome. Nevertheless she wasn’t willing to take a clean break with French classical traditions and in particular with its Roman roots. Speaking about Charles Cameron she wrote that her architect, «involved in building at Tsarskoe Selo […] was full of reverence for Clérisseau» 29. The Empress bought more than thousand views of Rome and its suburbs from Charles-Louis Clérisseau who had lived a number of decades in Italy and had become a “cicerone” not only for Russian aristocracy but for English and American men of education, as Robert Adam and Thomas Jefferson 30.

The Empress appealed to three sources of authentic, as it seemed to her, interpretation of antique architectural heritage. And all three originated from Rome. Quarenghi represented the Italian tradition, Clérisseau — the French school in Rome, and Cameron — British, the latter, to be precise, played a role of “Roman Scottish” from amongst the number of devotees of the British throne pretender Prince Charles Stuart while they lived in the Villa Albani in Rome. If you add close relations with German con-

23. Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического общества, cit., v. XXII, p. 18.
24. Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического общества, cit., v. XXII, p. 20.
26. Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического общества, cit., v. XXII, p. 156.
27. Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического общества, cit., v. XXII, p. 120.
29. The Empress bought
30. Сборник Императорского Русского Исторического общества, cit., v. XXII, p. 157.
ноиссюр античности Менгс и Реифенштейн, кто жили в Вечном городе и были преемниками святых Винклермана, также появляется визуализация встречи из разных источников в России, которая вызвала Европейскую классицистическую трансформацию в 1780-х.

Чарльз Камерон был родом из Лондона и родился в 1759 году. Сначала он учился у своего отца, также архитектора, и затем поступил в Академию художеств в Лондоне, где обучался у Джона Норта. В 1776 году он был направлен в Италию, чтобы изучить античные мотивы и декоративные элементы. В 1780 году он вернулся в Россию, где начал работать над проектом для Екатерины II.

Его работы включали в себя создание архитектурных структур в стиле античности, а также интерьера для залов и комнат. В его работах сочетались элементы Рококо и классицизма, но наибольшую известность он приобрел за счет своего творчества в области интерьера.

Один из его самых известных проектов — это внутренний интерьер Грандиозного зала в Екатерининском дворце в Царском Селе. Здесь он использовал античные мотивы и декоративные элементы, которые он изучил в Италии. В его работах сочетались элементы Рококо и классицизма, но наибольшую известность он приобрел за счет своего творчества в области интерьера.

Его работы были высоко оценены в Екатерининском дворце, и его имя стало синонимом архитектурного искусства в России.

Из-за отсутствия доступа к первоисточникам и недостатка информации о конкретных проектах и работах Камерона, его творчество и влияние на архитектуру России за 1780-е годы остается предметом дальнейшего исследования и изучения.
irreproachably chasté style and at the same time... picturesque.38

The Empress appreciated Quarenghi’s talent in full. She wrote to Grimm: «Quarenghi creates delightful things for us: the city through its already filled with his structures; he is erecting a bank, exchange, crowds of stores, shops and private houses. His buildings are as good that couldn’t be better.39 In fact, the Italian artist was the most popular in Petersburg at that moment.

Among Quarenghi’s buildings in Moscow, the Gostiny Dvor in Kitai-Gorod stands out. It belongs to the most outstanding works by the Italian master. The latter decided to use the unified dominant architectural method for the grand complex. In his design he surrounded the entire quarter with two-tiered order arcade of colossal Corinthian order with a through passage behind the columns and two-storied shops arranging oval inner court, which he intended to decorate with equally grand Corinthian pilasters.

Catherine II commissioned the architect to build a palace for her elder grandson the future Emperor Alexander I in 1792 and the architect managed to finish it by 1796 in the life time of the Empress. In comparison with other buildings by the master, the Alexander’s Palace has though clear, but incomparably more complicated structure. His most effective part is the central open gallery consisting of two rows of giant Corinthian columns set apart from each other and crowned with balustrade. At the sides, it is flanked with projecting avant-corps which have huge gate arches as equally big as the gallery’s orders.

Quarenghi worked a long while in Russia. After Catherine II’s death his practice didn’t cease. He worked both under Paul I and Alexander I. The most outstanding works by the Italian master couldn’t be better.39

Unfortunately, Pella hasn’t survived; practically all her pictures disappeared or were destroyed. We can judge the architecture of the ensemble mainly through the drawing on the hand fan which probably belonged to Catherine II 40. However, no doubt, Pella remains one of the greatest undertakings of Russian classical architecture of the late 18th century, comparable in its grandeur only with the Kremlin Palace by Bazhenov. Pella is the greatest achievement of Starov; in spite of the fact that the palace is undeservedly forgotten in the history of European classical architecture. In its scale and it is comparable with the famous concept of rebuilding of Versailles by Boullée 41.

The composition of Pella’s ensemble was a complex, although rational one. The main structure with a grand entablature in the middle fronted the Neva. Long colonnades stretched from the main structure and drew onto twenty-four blocks of equal size. Catherine II wrote: “[…] all my country palaces are only huts in comparison with Pella, which is being erected like Phoenix42. The reference to Phoenix by the Empress is of particular interest: it reveals the Empress’s intention. The palace destined for new Alexander was assimilated to the Arabic bird which dies and revives to a new life. Catherine the Great hoped that the grandson she conceived to be constructed, for “new Alexander the Great of Macedonia”. Stately, rationalistic and in emphatically classical style, the ensemble corresponds with the image of the future Alexander’s Empire, as Catherine II pictured it to herself. Decoring was delayed till her death.43

Russian Classicism with its scope of undertakings appeared to be not so much realization of the theory of creating a architecture in Antique style, but expression of a kind of believe in improvements for new life and vision of the future through the ideal of the Antiquity, which was embodied in Russian buildings of the epoch of Catherine II’s Enlightenment.

REFERENCES

11. I. Grabar, Historia ruslskogo isuskstva (История русского искусства), Moscow, Knebel, 1912.
14. A. Mikhailov, Bajenov (Баженов), Moscow, Strogostad, 1951.
26. I. Romanov, Zapodnie adchiteta Bajenova (Западные архитекторы Баженова) в. XXIII, St. Petersburg, 1878 (Сборник Императорского русского исторического общества).
29. F. Vigil, Zapiski (Записки), v. I, Moscow, Krug, 1928.