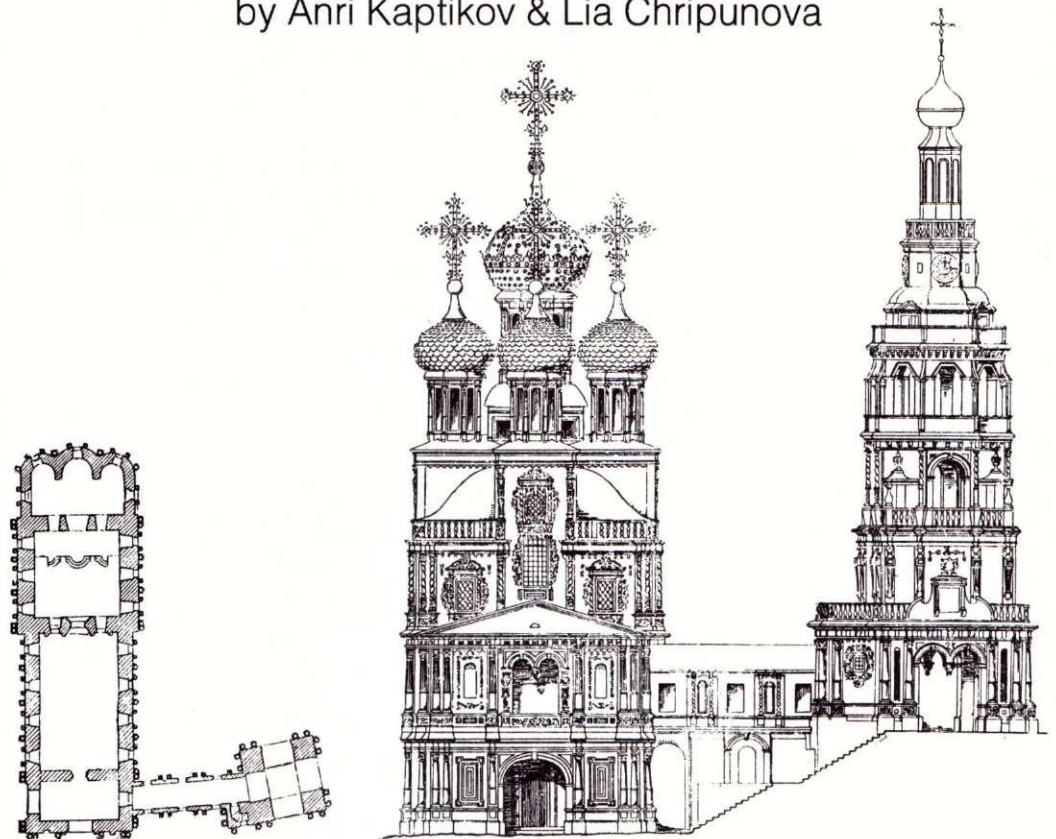


The Baroque Style on its Way to Siberia

by Anri Kaptikov & Lia Chripunova



The Nativity, or Stroganov, Church (17th and early 18th century). The Western façade and plan of the second floor.

THE DYNAMIC AND SPLENDID baroque architecture, one of the great international styles, has also manifested itself in Russia in a conspicuous way. The specific historical development of the country, its enormous territory, its religious and cultural traditions, contributed however to an extraordinary partition into periods of the Russian Baroque, and also to its artistic originality and variety.

Already in the buildings of the 17th century a picturesque asymmetry of volumes and a rich façade decoration replaced the earlier severe forms, which had been influenced by the By-

zantine and Romanesque styles and were barely touched by the Renaissance. This so-called “patterned” style is by most art historians considered as a pre-Baroque stage.

In 1680–1690 the first wave of Baroque architecture flourished in Russia, the so-called “Muscovite” or “Naryshkin” Baroque (named after the Boyar family Naryshkin, related to the mother of Peter I). In this style the traditional Russian tall building construction with diminishing volumes started in Moscow to interact with decorative details of the European Baroque. They were mediated by Poland and the

Ukraine: twisting columns, quaint frontones and so on. Borrowed motives were reshaped, falsely interpreted and according to an expression of academician Igor Grabar, turned into curly interlacing and flowering. The most colourful examples of the “Muscovite” Baroque were the centralized tier churches with an “eightfold on a square” (i. e. an octahedron on a cube), such as the Pokrov Church in Phili (Pokrov= the Feast of the Protecting Veil of the Virgin) and our Saviour as Archpriest (Spas na Uborach) near Moscow and others.

The reforms of Peter I, who founded the Russian empire, and his policy of Europeanization, led to the introduction of Western modes of architecture. To find models for his building enterprises Peter chiefly oriented himself to Protestant countries: Holland, Northern Germany, Denmark and Sweden. The Baroque architecture of these countries with its characteristic simplicity and decorative restraint best suited the practical utilitarian mentality of the Tsar.

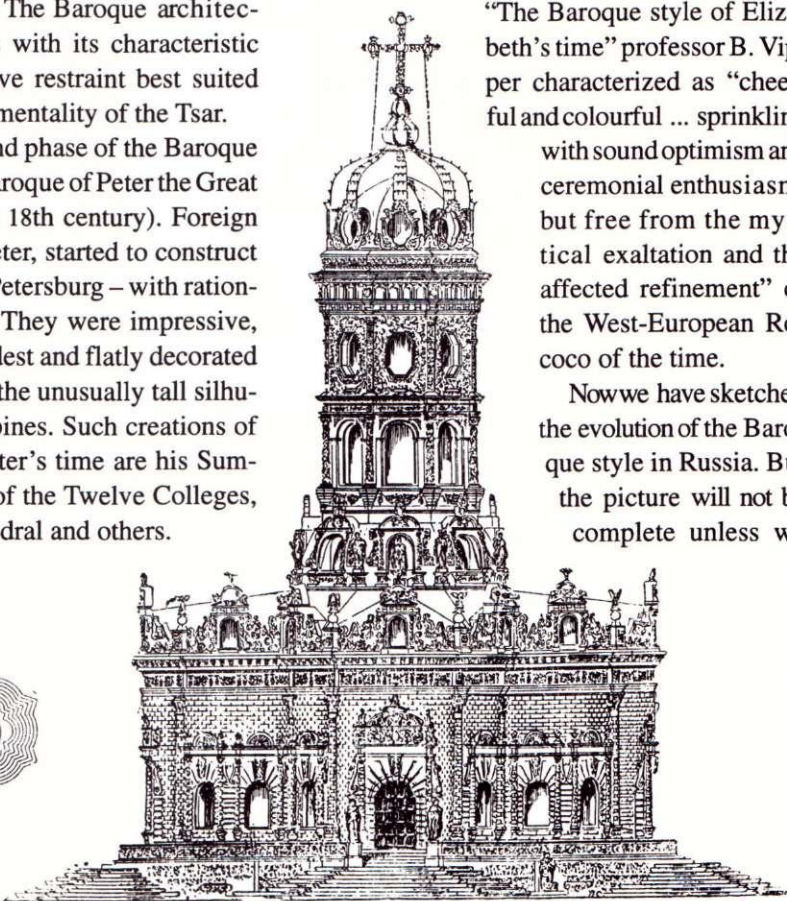
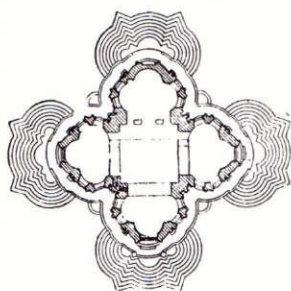
Then began the second phase of the Baroque period in Russia – the Baroque of Peter the Great (in the first third of the 18th century). Foreign architects, invited by Peter, started to construct the new capital – Saint Petersburg – with rationally planned buildings. They were impressive, not because of their modest and flatly decorated façades, but because of the unusually tall silhouettes of the roofs and spires. Such creations of leading architects of Peter’s time are his Summer Palace, the House of the Twelve Colleges, SS Peter and Paul Cathedral and others.

The Russian Baroque culminated during the reign of Peter’s daughter Elizabeth (1741–1761). The rise of a powerful Russian empire stimulated a luxurious court life with growing demands in architecture, expressing itself in an extraordinary rich and imposing style. It was demonstrated by Elizabeth’s favourite architect B. B. Rastrelli (in Peterhof, Tsarskoe Selo, the Winter Palace and the Smolny monastery) in an immense scale, not finding its equal throughout Europe, combining clearly defined volumes into a strictly composed scheme. The decor was arranged with distinction.

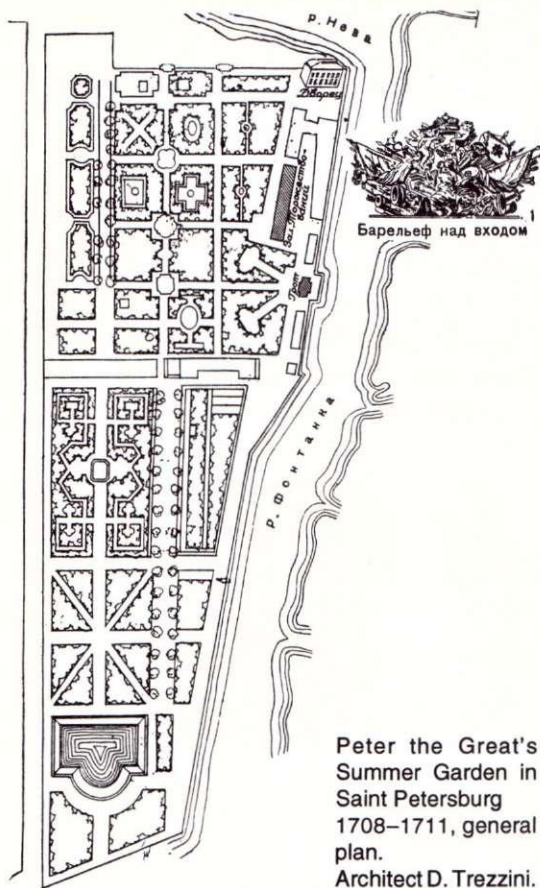
Also in this third and final stage of the Russian Baroque, the curvilinear outlines, the spatial overflowing, the ponderous treatment of the walls and the intense contrasts of the *chiaroscuro*, so familiar in Italy, were almost absent.

“The Baroque style of Elizabeth’s time” professor B. Vipper characterized as “cheerful and colourful ... sprinkling with sound optimism and ceremonial enthusiasm, but free from the mystical exaltation and the affected refinement” of the West-European Rococo of the time.

Now we have sketched the evolution of the Baroque style in Russia. But the picture will not be complete unless we



“Muscovite” Baroque: The Church of the Virgin of the Sign (Znamenie), at Dubrovitsi in the Moscow region. 1690–1704. The Western façade and the plan.



Peter the Great's Summer Garden in Saint Petersburg 1708-1711, general plan. Architect D. Trezzini.

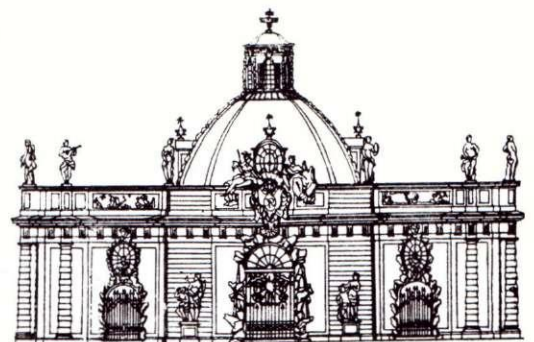
consider the fact that aside from its enfolding in the capitals (first in Moscow, then in Saint Petersburg and Moscow) there also existed another line of development in the boundless spaciousness of the country. It is necessary to point out that typical regional nuances often became established as solid traditions, and this phenomenon can be traced throughout the history of Russian architecture.

National artistic features from earliest times were reinterpreted in an original way in separate regions and towns, where the environment contributed to the specific formation of schools of architecture. These schools continued to maintain their influence also during the Baroque period. Moreover, the Baroque style was so deeply rooted into the Russian provinces that it dominated there until the end of the 18th and

19th centuries. In the meantime the Neo-classical style had since long gained foothold in the capitals.

Even if the Russian Baroque, introduced by foreign architects in Saint Petersburg, preserved its originality, the national features were manifested more vigorously in the provinces. The reason for this was not only the remoteness from the centre, but above all a more conservative taste. The cultural innovations of Peter were encountered there with different degrees of hostility. The peasants, city-dwellers and the inclusive main part of the merchants were still attracted by architectural ideals of the time preceding Peter. Consequently, architecture in the provinces stubbornly held on to Old-Russian traditions, varying the devices of the "Muscovite" Baroque. From the Baroque of Peter's and Elizabeth's times, never accepted in detail, there were some retarded and uncoordinated influences, mainly in the decor. Misunderstood by the local masterbuilders, there was also some Bulgarian influence in "the clear volume" style, which was interpreted in an original and folkloristic way.

The profoundly national character of the provincial creations can be explained by the fact that now since long there was no academic training in architecture and neither any influence of a proper European standard. The organization of the building activity was essentially medieval. The head of the building workshop (artel), the contractor, quite often combined the two functions of planning architect and that of constructor. He could move about without a preli-



Cave in the Summer Garden 1724, Western façade.

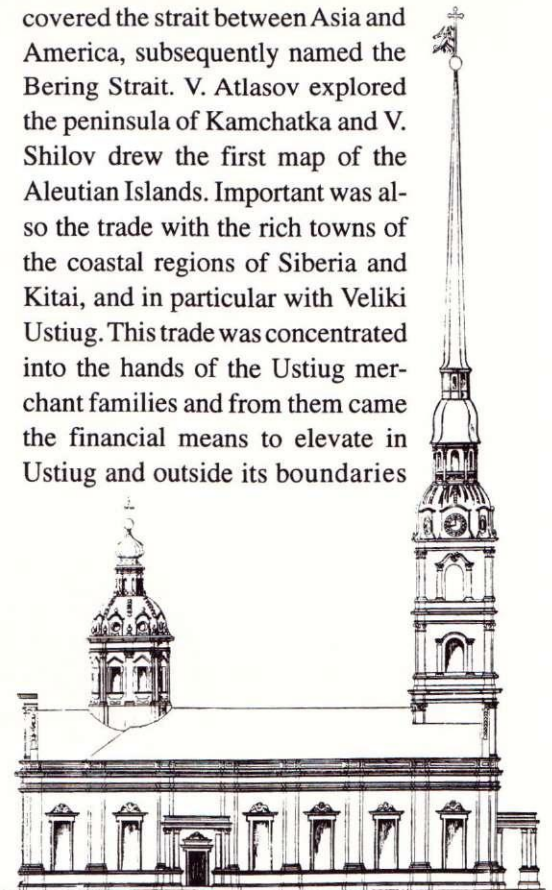
minary composition of sketches, taking as a point of departure an already existing building, or creating a “model” on the basis of his customers instructions. It is also necessary to point out that in the provinces as in previous times most churches were constructed in stone. They were shaped in a local version of the Baroque style.

The Baroque style of Northern Russia deserves particular attention. According to scholarly opinion there the Russian tradition from time immemorial was preserved most carefully in its social antropological purity, in the life-style, folklore, architecture, icon-painting and art industry. This gigantic territory (called in Russian the Pomorje) is extending from Lake Ladoga to the Ural mountain range and adjoins to the White Sea and the Arctic Ocean.

Here in 1584 the oldest Russian seaport sprang up – Arkhangelsk. Still in the 18th century, when Saint Petersburg had become the “window to Europe” it maintained its fundamental importance.

It is essential to point out that through the harbour of Arkhangelsk, there was always export of commercial wares, not only from the whole Pomorje and its surrounding area (in particular with Viatka) but also to a considerable extent with Siberia. To put it more exactly, the emigration to the coastal region played a main role in the assimilation and colonization of Russian Siberia and the Far East. Some emigrants made important geographical discoveries during the 17th–18th centuries. For example S. Dezhnev dis-

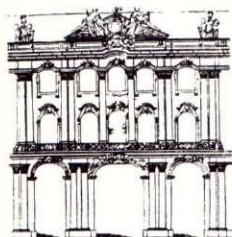
covered the strait between Asia and America, subsequently named the Bering Strait. V. Atlasov explored the peninsula of Kamchatka and V. Shilov drew the first map of the Aleutian Islands. Important was also the trade with the rich towns of the coastal regions of Siberia and Kitai, and in particular with Veliki Ustiug. This trade was concentrated into the hands of the Ustiug merchant families and from them came the financial means to elevate in Ustiug and outside its boundaries



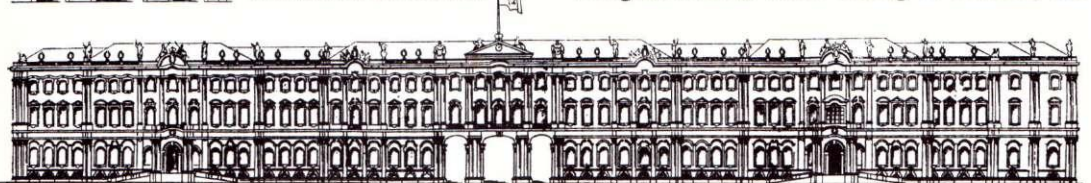
Peter's Baroque in Saint Petersburg: SS Peter and Paul Cathedral 1712–1733. Architect: D. Trezzini 1721–1733, Northern façade.

numerous Baroque churches in stone. The inhabitants of the towns in the Pomorje, in particular those in Viatka and the Ural competed in trade and church construction with the inhabitants of Ustiug.

As a result some interesting regional schools of Russian Baroque were formed, which “were thread” on the passing trade route. (This route passed from Moscow to Arkhangelsk through Vologda, Totma, Veliki Ustiug to Tobolsk, the



Elizabeth's Baroque:
Tsarskoe Selo 1752–1756,
main façade.
Fragment of the main façade.
Architect B. B. Rastrelli.



capital of Siberia, through three seaport towns there and to the Ural towns Solikamsk and Verhoturie. There also existed a road to the Ural and Siberia through the territory of Vjatka.

These schools usually were centered in a town within a strictly determined territory, subordinate to secular and religious authorities, although the administrative borders not necessarily corresponded to the sphere of influence of the architectural schools. Besides, not every town, even if a big one, created its particular school. Thus, one cannot for instance count Vologda as a distinctive school because of the extreme heterogeneity of its monuments. With all evidence, however, we have the right to speak of a school in Arkhangelsk, in Veliki Ustiug, in Totma, in Viatka and also in the Ural with its center in Solikamsk. The Siberian Baroque was partitioned into two schools, that of Tobolsk (including the mountain area and the eastern school of Ural) and that of Irkutsk.

These schools often reflected the typical features of the Russian provincial architecture in the 18th century, in their style and building practices as well as the enormous height of the buildings. Their location along the common trade route enhanced the possibility for the customers and constructors rapidly to get acquainted with the achievements of their neighbours. Nevertheless every school has its specific chronological development, reflected in its compositional and decorative devices.

Unfortunately, for a long time these monu-

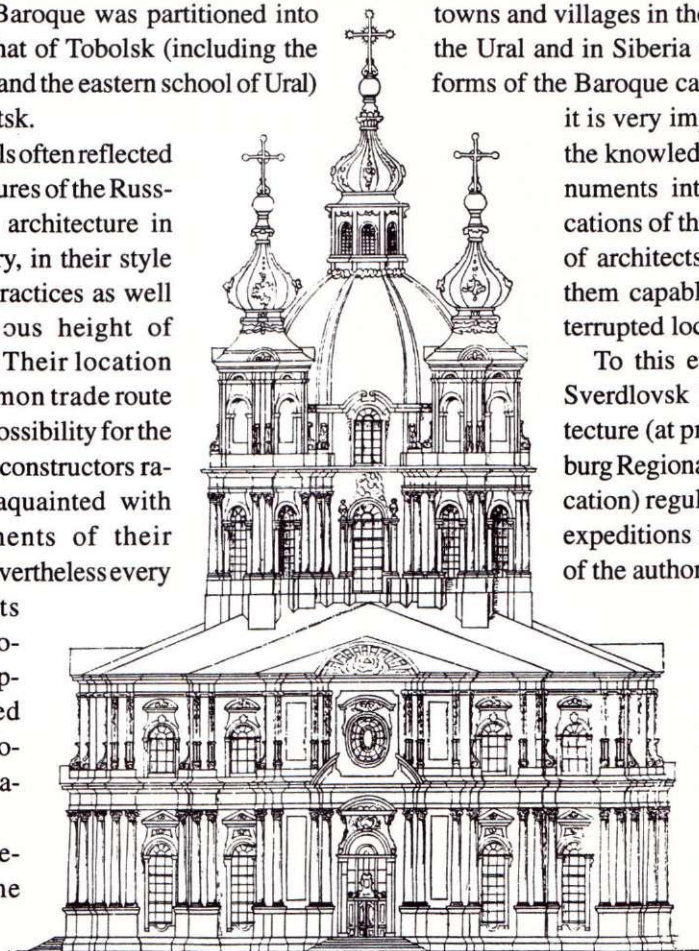
ments were not the object of research. The art historians concentrated their interest to remarkable building complexes in the capitals and considered the monuments as stylistically retarded and primitive. This state of affairs did not promote their preservation. So many buildings have been annihilated or find themselves in an utterly neglected condition.

This contempt for the local tradition naturally resulted in a featureless and monotonous contemporary architecture. Only in most recent times we began to realize in Russia the necessity to maintain regional specificity and historical continuity in new building construction and to associate to the idiom of the old local architecture. And as far as the silhouette and the spatial distribution of the volumes are concerned, many

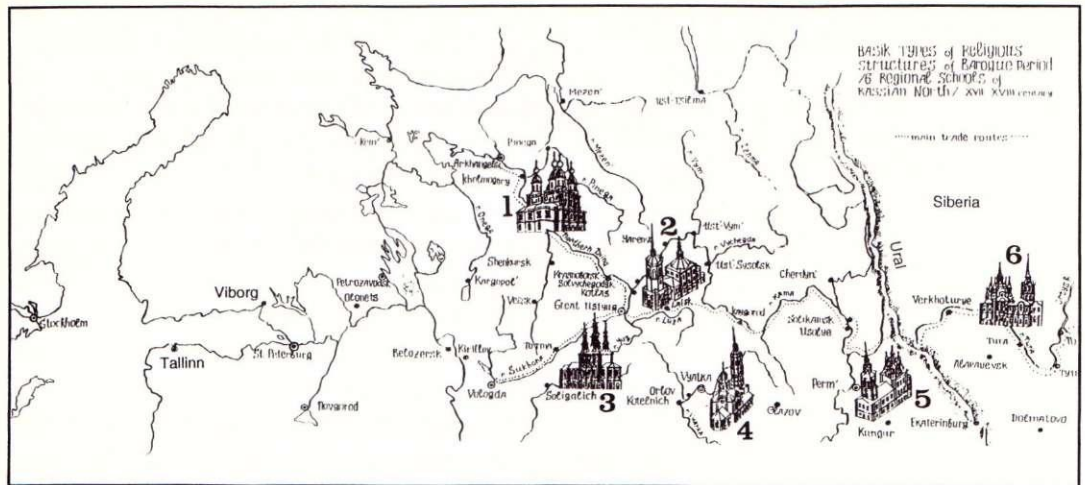
towns and villages in the Russian North, in the Ural and in Siberia are outlined by the forms of the Baroque cathedrals. Therefore it is very important to integrate the knowledge about these monuments into the formal educations of the young generation of architects, in order to make them capable to revive the interrupted local tradition.

To this end students of the Sverdlovsk Institute of Architecture (at present the Ekaterinburg Regional Centre of Art Education) regularly participated in expeditions under the direction of the author of this article. The

aim of these expeditions was to explore the variety of the regional architecture of the Baroque style. The route conformed as a rule with the old lines of communication on land



The Smolny Monastery in St Petersburg. Western façade of the church 1740–1757. Architect B. B. Rastrelli.



Fundamental types of regional schools of Russian architecture. 1. A cathedral near Arkhangelsk (1709–1743). 2. The Holy Trinity near Veliki Ustjug (1753–1778). 3. The Holy Trinity near Totma (1788). 4. The Makarov Church near Viatka (1770–1775). 5. The Transfiguration near Kungur (1763–1781). 6. The Zaharev Church near Verkhoturie (1750–1776).



Provincial Russian Baroque architecture: The Church of Lalsk.



Students measuring the Pokrovski Church at the river Lusa.

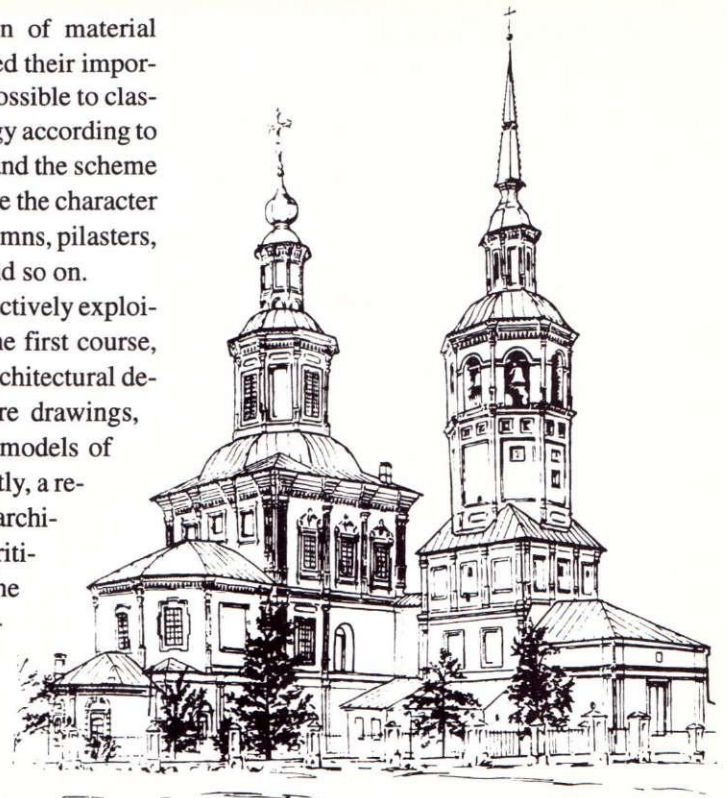
and on the waterways. Along these lines it was logical to expect stylistic similarity of the monuments and a possibility to group them into schools. Our expectations were not deceived. A

considerable quantity of little known and completely forgotten churches of the 18th century were recorded with measuring and photography. A part of them has been identified as original

masterpieces. This accumulation of material from the regional schools revealed their importance in all its plenitude. It was possible to classify the monuments into a typology according to the disposition of their volumes and the scheme of their façades and to systematize the character of their decorative elements: columns, pilasters, corniches, window ornaments and so on.

The collected material is now actively exploited in the students courses. In the first course, when they are taught to master architectural design they are required to prepare drawings, perspective views and classical models of regional monuments. Consequently, a regional approach to the history of architecture is a contribution to art criticism and a patent stimulus for the reformation of contemporary architecture.

We hope to pursue this work by a detailed characterization of the various Baroque Schools, to be found on the way to Siberia.

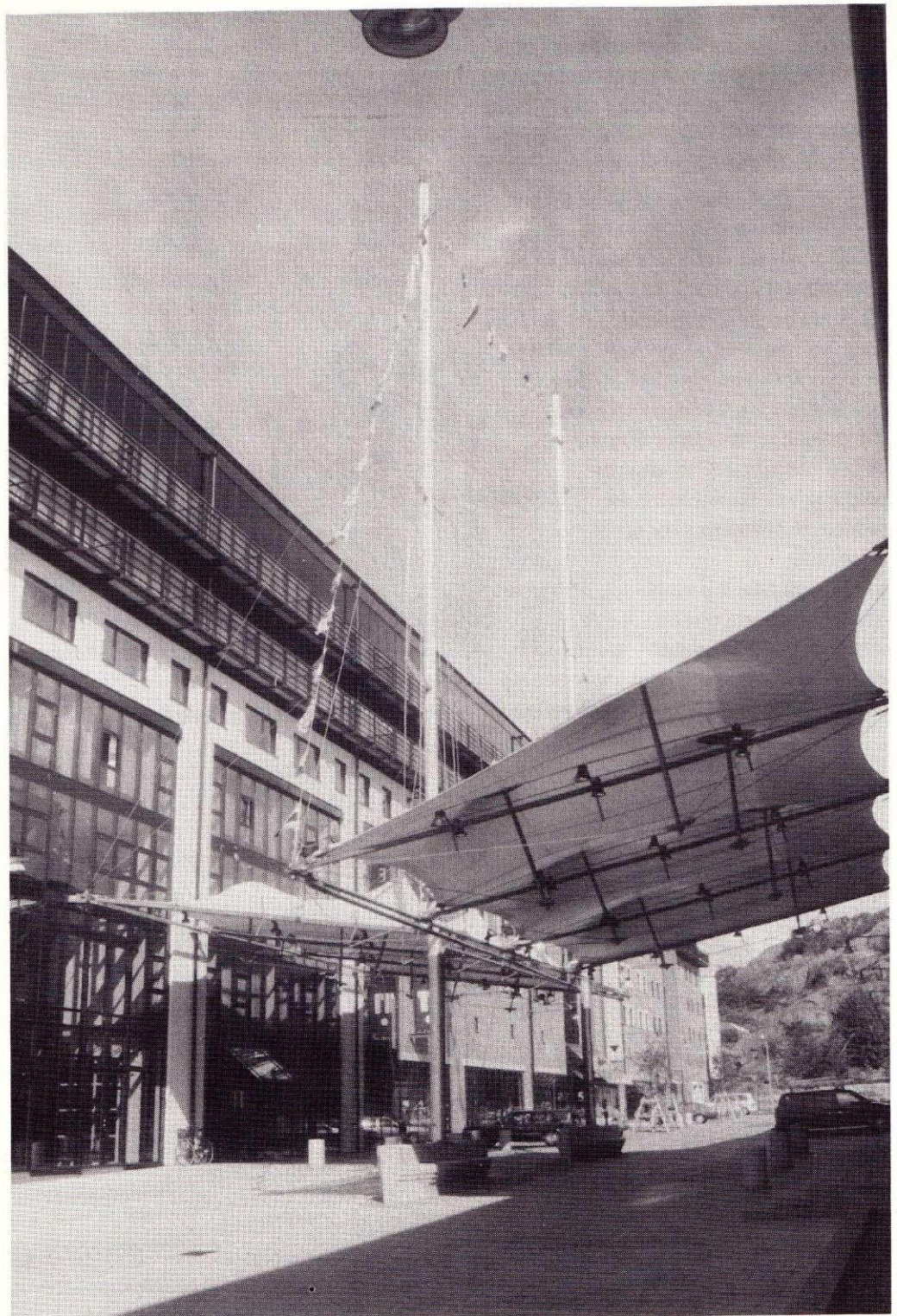


Provincial Russian Baroque architecture: Students' drawing based on measuring.



Anri Kaptikov, Dr. of Arch. Professor, & Lia Chripunova, doctoral student in Architecture, The Ekaterinburg Centre of Art Education, Ekaterinburg, (former Sverdlovsk) Russia.

Translation from Russian:
Elisabeth Piltz.



Entrétaket av tunn kapellväv är upphängt i två pelare och det spänner över gaturummet mellan två ombyggda varvshallar. Foto: Ola Nylander