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Ekaterina Boltunova

**RUSSIAN IMPERIAL SPACE OF
POWER IN THE FIRST POST-
REVOLUTION DECADE
(1917 – LATE 1920S)**

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(1917 – LATE 1920S)²**

This article explores how Bolshevik/Soviet authorities took on and adapted the Russian imperial topography of power i.e. the system of special structures that intended to convey state ideology (monuments to tsars and statesmen, emperors' residences with their various ceremonial spaces, administrative buildings, and those museums which play a role in power representation). The research traces the changing attitudes to the Russian Empire's space of power in 1917 – late 1920s that varied from destructing such spatial objects to adapting them to the objectives of propaganda. It argues that with the time being appropriation strategies (renaming, recoding, creating of revolutionary memorials etc.) appeared to have better prospects than straightforward disavowal or destruction. The imperial space of power provided some opportunities to propagate novel and/or universal connotations of power and gradually was found relevant for the needs of the Soviet regime.

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¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics. Faculty of Humanities. E-mail: ekboltunova@hse.ru

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The period following the events of 1917 has traditionally been perceived as the time when the pre-revolutionary social and political institutes were dismantled, and the generations of nobility, who acted as the custodians of cultural memory, were swept away³. Apparently, this feeling of an utter collapse was primarily due to changes in ideology, to the rise of new agencies that had no counterpart before the revolution and to an aggressive invasion into the conservative sphere of everyday life. At the same time, a huge shift in the standards of everyday life often fails to explain the cultural deep currents where this shift could have been less significant, while the realities of pre-revolutionary life remained somehow relevant, despite the scope of the change. We believe that the development and use of the discourse of power in early 20th century Russia is one of such social and cultural phenomena.

An analysis of how contexts of power – such as the space of power - are formed can help us prove this statement true. We define the ‘space of power’ as a set of spatial objects and guidelines embodying certain ideas and attitudes, including monuments to tsars and statesmen, emperors’ residences with their various ceremonial spaces, administrative buildings, and those museums which play a role in power representation. These objects had been emerging for several centuries, but in the end they all became part of a single representative space of the Russian empire. Within this space, power was positioned by means of various practices, including direct use of state insignia (the imperial coat of arms, as well as the arms of its constituent lands, imperial crowns, monograms, etc.), but also by often less explicit references to the symbolism of the four cardinal directions and specific gender and military connotations [Boltunova, 2015; Boltunova, 2014].

Objects which proved important for implementing imperial discourse of power were once again in demand as soon as in the first decade after the revolution. This article is an attempt to trace the changing attitudes to the Russian Empire’s space of power in 1917 – late 1920s, as well as to examine the prospects of borrowing and reproducing the discursive practices of power that originally existed in the representative space of pre-revolutionary Russia. This, in its turn, will help us assess the impact the latter had on the rise of early Soviet power project.

The perception of imperial space of power in late 1910s and early 1920s can thus be studied as linked to the symbolic constituent which always underpinned this space. On the one hand, this symbolism could be denied and the spatial objects then destroyed or used merely in the operational sense. On the other, an attitude could have been expressed by recoding the symbolism rather than denying it. The latter strategy allowed both admitting the symbolic capacity of an object and adapting it to the objectives of propaganda.

Between these two extreme paths ran the *via media* of turning an object into a museum. An imperial palace becoming a museum sent a very clear social message: the palace was

³ The author expresses her gratitude to Vladimir Makarov for his assistance in translation of the article.

declared part of the past, albeit the recent past. Not only did it change its function, but, being turned into a site of memory, it no longer lived. At the same time, as shown below, such a practice left the door open for potential appropriation of wider contexts within a space previously used as an administrative and ceremonial one.

An active disavowal of the imperial discourse of power by means of a direct and aggressive assault against the objects associated with it was an explicit feature of the first post-revolutionary years. Monuments - primarily the monumental statues of Russian monarchs - proved the most conspicuous victims. Only a handful of examples would suffice. In 1918, the Alexander II monument in Nizhny Novgorod was torn down [Sokol, 2006, 102]. In 1919, the same fate befell the two sculptures celebrating Peter the Great: “Peter Rescues the Drowning” and “The Tsar Carpenter”, which were then melted down [Sokol, 2006, 51]. In 1928, the Alexander I statue in Taganrog followed suit [Sokol, 2006, 79]. At the same time, a more abstract symbolism of monuments shaped as columns and obelisks (rather than statues) often helped them survive the first post-revolutionary years.

Notably, a specific situation in a region and the attitudes of regional powers were probably a more important factor than the implementation of Lenin’s monumental propaganda plan. While Odessa lost its statue of Catherine the Great [Sokol, 2006, 64], the Petrograd authorities spared it. The Nicholas I monument in Kiev was torn down three years after the revolution [Sokol, 2006, 83], while its counterpart in the northern capital survived amidst calls for its demolition, which have been voiced since the February revolution [Sokol, 2006, 85].

The new authorities found themselves in a more difficult situation vis-a-vis palaces. While it had been possible to classify noblemen’s mansions in accordance with their owner’s attitudes – from ‘progressive’/‘pro-Revolution’ to ‘regressive’/‘*ancien regime*’, the palaces of the Romanovs proved a more difficult challenge. In this respect, a decree of 1918 is quite telling. Signed by Lenin, it mandated the destruction of monuments to “tsars and their henchmen” (*tsarei i ikh prispeshnikov*). The decree laid the foundation for the monumental propaganda plan mentioned above. The plan aimed to dismantle a whole range of monuments, replacing them with those dedicated to people more important for the Russian revolution (Marx, Engels, Robespierre, Spartacus, Byron, etc.) [Okhrana kul’turnogo naslediya, 2000, 388]. It is worth mentioning that the decree made absolutely no mention of the numerous palaces, wholly concentrating on statuary.

The fact that the authorities had difficulty formulating a unified position on imperial palaces is just as obvious as their determination to deny support to spontaneous acts of revolutionary vandalism. The People’s Commissariat of Education put some effort into it, with an order “On administering the affairs of the former Ministry of the [Imperial] Court” signed by Commissar A.V. Lunacharsky as early as in November 1917. The order dealt with protecting the

former property of the court and provided that the personnel of the Ministry in full, as well as the members of artistic and historical committees at palaces must stay in their jobs and carry on with their functions of maintaining, preserving and cataloging the respective collections [Sbornik dekretov, 1919, 121]. Also significant are the Lenin-signed telegrams demanding enhanced control over the royal palaces in Yalta to prevent looting [Lenin, 1970b, 309].

The authorities also urged citizens of Russia to protect works of art. A good example can be found in the poster “Citizens! Preserve the monuments of art!” designed by N. Kupriyanov in 1919, which clearly showed what kinds of heritage should be preserved. Alongside with the statues of the Anichkov Bridge, old scrolls, books, coins and chalices, the poster featured an image of Tauride Palace. The logic of the poster mandated the protection of this building as crucial for the history of Russian revolution, but also important is the very fact that a palace was listed among the objects to enjoy protection.



Fig. 1. Kupriyanov N. *Citizens! Preserve the monuments of art!* Poster, 1919

Later on, the authorities provided a more detailed and systemic explanation, such as that in a series of articles by A.V. Lunacharsky, published in 1926 in the *Krasnaya Gazeta* under the

general title of “Why we protect the palaces of the Romanovs (Travel notes)” [Lunacharskiy, 1982, 161-177].

On the whole, the palace buildings in late 1910s and early 1920s did not suffer such massive destruction as monuments, largely because demolishing them would have proved very difficult. It was much easier to use them for hosting various institutions and agencies, or turn palaces into residential housing. The empire’s mainstay – the Winter Palace – almost immediately after the revolution housed communal apartments and an orphanage [Zhurnaly zasedaniy Soveta Ermitazha, 2001, 138; Konivets, 2014, 213]. There were plans to turn Alexander Palace in Tsarskoye Selo into a penal colony for children [Elistratova, 2015, 143-144]. Tver Road Palace became the home of the local Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, and Petrovsky Road Palace in Moscow now housed the Academy of the Air Forces.

Sometimes the actions of the new authorities hinted at a certain continuity in the use of a building, e.g. when St. Michael’s Castle in St. Petersburg (which was the home of the Emperor Nicholas Engineering School prior to the revolution), in 1918 was given to Petrograd Engineering Officers’ Courses, several months later to be renamed School of Military Engineering [Asvarishch et al. 2004, 450]. Similarly, the Faceted Chamber in Moscow’s Grand Kremlin Palace now hosted a canteen, while the nearby Golden Chamber was turned into a kitchen for public servants, including the Sovnarkom personnel and their families, as well as the delegates of various conferences and congresses. Since the time of the Tsardom of Muscovy, both palaces hosted the frequent *stoly* – feasts commemorating important royal events (births, baptisms, name days, coronations, etc.) [Zabelin, 2000, 348-428]. The Soviet canteen thus arose as a case of unexpected continuity in the functional use of the same space.

Unlike the exteriors of the imperial residences, their interiors were seriously damaged, which led to the loss of internal logic in the structuring of a number of palaces in late 1910s and early 1920s. This damage actually began after the events of February 1917, rather than in October. A staffmember at a Peterhof palace described the panic in late winter of 1917 as follows, “When the first news of the [February] revolution arrived from St. Petersburg, the local authorities of Peterhof, scared of [these] developments, began rescuing the palace property in extreme haste. As a result, in several days numerous palace buildings, the old palaces of the Lower Court, the ground floor of the Grand Palace and a part of Alexandria palaces were cleared of all furnishings. Here and there, furniture, porcelain and bronze lay side by side in disorderly heaps, large and small pieces thrown together. Many pieces were broken and lost in the course” [Izmaylov, 2015, 316].

The events that followed left as strong an impression on palace administrators as the panic in February 1917. In the days of October revolution the personnel of Oranienbaum palaces discussed the rumors that the Grand Palace in Tsarskoye Selo had been burnt down [Benua,

2006, 151]. They also had to take measures to prevent looting [Benua, 2006, 168-169, 200-202]. On top of that all, the German offensive against St. Petersburg in 1918 led a to forced evacuation of many pieces from the Winter Palace, the Hermitage and suburban palaces to Moscow. Apparently, in many cases (including that of Peterhof) the evacuation created the same degree of chaos as the 'rescue' operation at the news of Nicholas II's abdication⁴. Items from the collections of imperial palaces stayed in Moscow for several years.

Due to all of these factors, by mid-1920s the recently museumified palaces had to begin a thorough reconstruction of their rooms and spaces on the basis of studying archival data, photos and pictures. In the Winter Palace, the trashed imperial suite of Nicholas II was restored in 1922 [Nesin, 1999, 7]. Reconstruction of the interiors of Peterhof palaces (Alexandria, the Lower and Farm palaces, as well as the Cottage) took almost two years (1924-1925). 1926 saw the start of a large-scale restoration of the Monplaisir in Peterhof, as well as the Marly and Hermitage [Izmaylov, 2015, 322].

The first post-revolutionary decade was also the time when the Bolsheviks looked for the ways of recoding the space of power they inherited from the empire. Results could vary. Frequently, they resorted to displaying their victory over the *ancien regime*, representing the object as a military trophy.

This was typical for monuments, above everything else. There were many cases when a statue of an emperor was taken down, but the pedestal would survive to host a new monument. The famous statue of Alexander III near St. Saviour's in Moscow was destroyed in 1918, but the plinth outlived it for a considerable time. It was left in order to support the monument to 'Labour liberated'.⁵ In Simferopol, the Liberty Monument replaced the statue of Catherine II on the same pedestal. The busts of A.V. Suvorov and Ya.I. Bulgakov, as well as the statues of G.A. Potyomkin-Tavrichesky and V.M. Dolgorukov-Krymsky were removed in 1920, and the busts of Marx, Engels and Lenin appeared instead [Sokol, 2006, 66]. In the same year, the monument to Alexander II the Liberator was destroyed in Kazan and replaced with a plaster statue of a worker [Sokol, 2006, 95]. In 1925, the statue of the Liberator in Vladimir gave way to that of Lenin, and in 1928 a monument to the communist leader became a part of the grand monument of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty in Kostroma [Sokol, 2006, 92, 173]. In all of these cases, the pedestal of the monument remained the same.

Elsewhere, a symbolic shift could be achieved by relocating the existing monument. After the revolution, the Peter the Great monument in Petrozavodsk was moved from the main square to the small park in front of the city museum [Sokol, 2006, 45]. In Taganrog and Tula the statues of the founder of the empire were relocated to the local museums [Sokol, 2006, 453-454].

⁴ M.M. Izmaylov remarks that preparing for the evacuation was hasty and things were packed without due consideration and "distinguishing items of true value from the insignificant ones" [Izmaylov, 2015, 316].

⁵ The project was never realized [Sokol, 2006, 156].

In these cases – on the regional level, as we suggested earlier – the local authorities, most likely, deemed it impossible to completely erase the references to Russia’s first emperor.

Sometimes, the recoding turned into outright mockery. A conspicuous case is the change of inscription on the pedestal of the Alexander III monument, erected shortly before the revolution at the Nikolaevsky Terminal in St. Petersburg. In 1919, the original inscription, “To the Royal Founder of the Great Siberian Railway” was destroyed and replaced with *The Scarecrow*, a poem by Demyan Bedny, which mocked the ‘inglorious’ emperor [Shaposhnikova, 1996].



Fig. 2. Alexander III monument by P. Trubetskoy (*To the Royal Founder of the Great Siberian Railway*) with a poem by D. Bedny (*The Scarecrow*) on its pedestal. Photo, early 1920s

The imperial palaces got involved in similar, but more complex practices of recoding. One of the most significant approaches was to bury prominent revolutionaries (and sometimes, to erect a small necropolis) in front of a palace. Such graves appeared near Gatchina Palace, in

the palace parks of Tsarskoye Selo and Pavlovsk, near Mariinsky Palace in Kiev. There was an attempt to create a memorial of such kind near the Winter Palace.

Other locations closely linked to the imperial discourse of power which now also featured a necropolis include the Moscow Kremlin walls in Red Square and the Field of Mars and St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg. These memorials, which first started to appear after the February Revolution, kept rising in importance. Originally known as the graves of the ‘victims’ of revolution, they were later renamed memorials to the ‘heroes’ of the revolution [Kotova, 2010; Matveev 2002, 260-275].



Fig. 3. St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg. Photo, current view

However, these new burials in the territory directly adjacent to a palace (most frequently, in the square in front of the main entrance) had a number of specific features. We must begin by emphasizing the non-cemetery status of the burials, which is due to the exceptional nature of the practice endowed it with a new symbolism. These new symbols eroded the semantic boundaries

of the palace complex as we knew it and became its new centers, wrestling this role away from the palaces proper. Moreover, the revolutionary burials became starting points for the discursive unfurling of the symbolism of the new regime. The memorials and monuments erected here, together with renaming the square itself, created a new space which appealed to emotion, thus making the territory fit for a series of the rites of belonging, celebrating the new idea (such as rallies, civic processions, military parades, public oaths, etc.)

As the canon of a revolutionary event was still unwritten in late 1910s and early 1920s, these public events in front of palaces could take various shapes. In 1920, the third anniversary of the revolution was celebrated with a reenactment of the storming of the Winter Palace. It is in the same context that we should place the game of chess played by I. Rabinovich and P. Romanovsky in summer 1924. The whole Uritsky (Palace) Square was turned into a huge chessboard, with the Red Navy and Red Army men playing as white and black pieces respectively. Among other participants were Red cavalry and machine gunners. This event aimed to promote and popularize chess, which soon achieved exceptional popularity in the Soviet Union. It provided a unique chance to represent a whole range of symbolic meanings and contexts. The idea of live men representing chess pieces turned both Romanovsky and Rabinovich into military commanders sending their small armies into battle. Locating this battle in the former Palace Square made it a direct reference to both the events of autumn 1917 and the Civil War which had ended only shortly before.

At the same time, the new forms of ritualization and appropriation practices were unable to completely erase previous contexts. In many cases, imperial and Soviet-time monuments coexisted remarkably well. Up to early 1950s, there were three monuments in front of the emperor's palace in Gatchina: the memorial to the fallen Red Army soldiers (1919), the grave of pilot A.I. Peregudov, Hero of the Soviet Union (1944) and the statue of Paul I which was erected as far back as 1851. Understandably, such coexistence was largely accidental: the People's Commissar of Education personally intervened to thwart the plans to take down the monument to the emperor [Georgievskaya, 2009, 85]. Nevertheless, this once again emphasizes the role of the palace as a symbol which transgresses its own boundaries as P.A. Florensky famously noted. Hence, the attempts to fully eliminate the imperial context were doomed to failure.



Fig. 4. Gatchina Palace square. Photo, before 1941

Another point of interest is the coincidence or unexpected overlapping of several distinct symbolic elements. This is what happened to the imperial and Soviet-time semantics of red colour. A conspicuous example is the Winter Palace. By the time of the Revolution the palace was red, having been painted this colour in 1880s-1890s, under Alexander III. Nicholas II kept up the tradition by repainting the whole of the palace walls brick red, without making the orders and décor stand out in a different colour. The palace was made almost monochrome, which can be clearly seen even in black-and-white photos of the time. The Winter Palace was indeed brick red in colour when it was stormed by the “red” revolutionary soldiers and remained this way for a considerable period of time after the revolution.

Up to mid-1930s, there were numerous attempts to use this fact to prop up the new symbolic order. Many artistic interpretations of the palace strove to rethink the colour of its walls as part of the new context of the revolution (N.I. Altman’s “A sketch of decorating Uritsky Square for the anniversary of the October Revolution” (1918). B.M. Kustodiev’s “A parade in Uritsky Square on the opening day of the 2nd Congress of the Komintern, July 1920” (1921), R. Frentz’s “The storming of the Winter Palace” (1927), V.V. Kuptsov’s “ANT-20. Maxim Gorky” (1934)). In Nathan Altman’s sketch the red color of the palace fits into the general color scheme of the square with its bright red decoration. In a similar way, Vasily Kuptsov in his aerial view of

the parade in Palace Square merged the red facade of the palace and the red cloth the revolutionary slogans were painted on into a single context.



Fig. 5. Altman N.I. The decoration of Uritsky Square for the anniversary of the October Revolution. Sketch, 1918

Some names of palace objects were retained as matching the propaganda policy of the new regime. The Soviet staircase in the Old Hermitage, with its name originally derived from the sessions of the State Council (*Gosudarstvenny Soviet*) [Sokolova, 1982, 142] which took place in that building, preserved its name as it now referred to one of the institutions of the new regime.

In late 1910s and early 1920s, a number of palaces were reopened as museums. Several museums appeared in the Winter Palace. In 1917, Elagin Palace opened its doors to visitors [Nemchinova, 1982, 40-41], in 1918 the Grand Peterhof Palace followed suit [Izmaylov, 2015, 326]. There were plans to open a museum at the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow as well, as suggested by Lenin in mid-1918. On December 12, 1918, the Sovnarkom adopted a resolution to “take steps to use the rooms of the Grand Kremlin Palace as museum, especially to present a historical view of the everyday life of the tsars” [Lenin, 1970a, 212, 418, 454].

The Winter Palace is the most notable example of the attitudes to the imperial space of power. In 1920s it was turned into an experimental space which tested every possible approach, from destruction to appropriation. At the outbreak of the revolution it had an unusual status of

the emperor's residence turned into a military hospital.⁶ In the first years of the new regime the palace underwent a wave of destruction, with some of its interiors lost and a part of collections sold [Gosudarstvennyy Ermitazh. Muzeynye rasprodazhi 2006, 387-463]. The palace now had residential apartments and the so-called "Palace of the Arts", featuring various events and performances. In 1926, a cinema was opened in the palace [Konivets, 2014, 213].

Ideologically, Bolsheviks almost immediately focused on the space around the Winter Palace. Palace Square was renamed Uritsky Square after M.S. Uritsky, head of the Petrograd CheKa. The square was the venue for Red Army parades and various civic processions. In 1918 a monument to A.N. Radishchev was erected on the quay side of the palace. There was an idea to put a monument to the Decembrists in Palace Square [Konivets, 2014, 230], while the Petrograd Soviet called for the opening of a revolution necropolis in front of the palace [Polyakova, 2005, 125].

A number of museums were opened in the Winter Palace in the first post-revolution decade. Besides the Hermitage, the palace housed the Museum of the Revolution (since 1920) and the Museum of Youth (since 1931). In 1922 the Historic Chambers museum was opened in the private suites of Alexander II, Nicholas II, later expanded into the chambers of Nicholas I [Konivets, 2014, 273-274].

The museums of the Winter Palace found it hard to coexist [Konivets, 2014, 256-262, 267; Zhurnaly zasedaniy Soveta Ermitazha, 2009, 17]. The proceedings of the Hermitage Council show that was difficult to bring all the institutions to work together on such issues as maintaining the palace buildings, distributing available spaces, registering newly acquired items, returning the collection stranded in Moscow, etc. [Zhurnaly zasedaniy Soveta Ermitazha, 2001, 34, 38-40, 45-46, 138, 115, 146-147; Zhurnaly zasedaniy Soveta Ermitazha, 2009, 36, 52, 92, 119, 151, 153].

At the same time, on the ideological level the museums of the Winter Palace could act in a consolidated way. The Museum of the Revolution, which was housed in the ceremonial halls of the Neva Suite, the Eastern Gallery and the Rotunda, held a number of propaganda exhibitions devoted to the "year 1905", "Khodynka [disaster]", "White Terror", "Imperialist War", "Days of February [1917]" [Konivets, 2014, 256]. The Hermitage, which treasured works of West European and Russian art, also aligned its exhibits with the new social and political stance and the Bolshevik version of history. Thus, in 1924 St. George (Throne) Hall of the Winter Palace started to display a collection of 15th - 17th century European weaponry. The spot where the imperial throne had once stood now featured some spears and swords, with a sign saying that these were "Weapons of the Great Peasant War in Germany, 1525" [Pashkova, 2008, 58-59].

⁶ John Reed provides a good description of what transpired at the palace in October 1917, and of various kinds of people who filled the ceremonial halls of the residence — foreign visitors, wounded soldiers from the battlefields of World War I, livery-clad footmen, yunkera (cadets at military schools), etc.) [Reed, 2012, 128-132].

The place where the monarch sat was thus not left vacant. The cult of the monarch was succeeded by the cult of anti-imperialist struggle, which was evidently elevated to the status of a “holy war”, since the weapons were displayed right under the preserved baldaquin. The German context was also far from accidental, promising struggle for the global revolution.

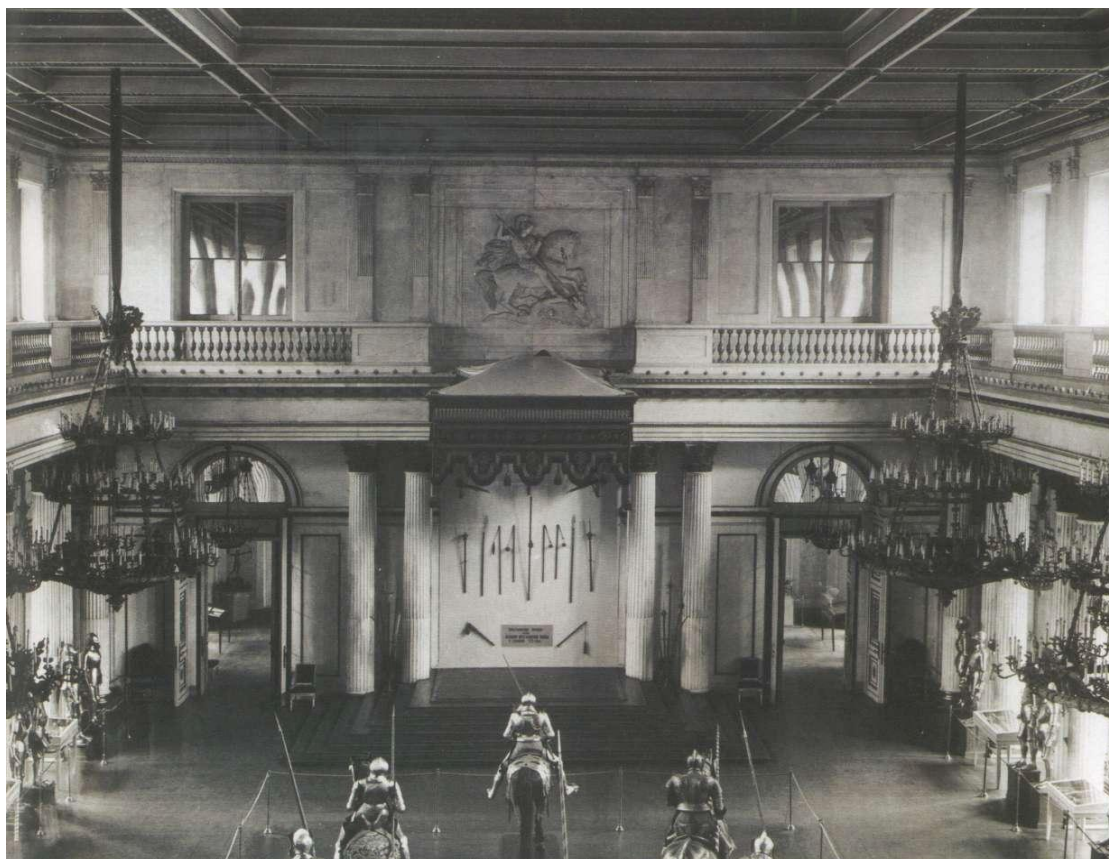


Fig. 6. St. George (Throne) Hall in the Winter Palace. The collection of 15th - 17th century European weaponry. Photo, before 1941

The Historic Chambers proved the odd one out among the museums of the Winter Palace, as its logic was incompatible with the idea of recoding. Unsurprisingly, in 1926 this museum was closed [Konivets, 2014, 285]⁷.

On the whole, the experience of the late 1910s and early 1920s showed that for the secular objects which shaped the imperial discourse of power, appropriation had better prospects than straightforward disavowal or destruction. The imperial space of power provided some opportunities to propagate novel and/or universal connotations of power and gradually was found relevant for the needs of the Soviet regime.

It is also confirmed by the very choice for the seat of the government after it relocated to Moscow in 1918. Although they could have chosen any of the administrative buildings in the old

⁷ V. Nesin's suggestion that the Historic Chambers museum was closed due to a huge interest among the public might be not entirely unreasonable. The new authorities might have considered this unacceptable in the context of the upcoming 10th anniversary of the October revolution [Nesin, 1999, 7].

capital, the Bolsheviks decided in favour of the Kremlin as the nucleus in the city's topography of power. Although their choice was largely motivated by security concerns, an important place in it belonged to the logic of urban cityscape, where the Kremlin acted as both the actual and the symbolic focal point of the city.

Of special interest was also their choice of the Senate building for the Sovnarkom. The very fact that the Bolsheviks placed their supreme body of executive power into the former residence of the highest body of state power of the Russian Empire reveals that they both understood the topography of power and to an extent strove to follow the existing paradigm as early as in 1920s. Notably, the Lenin Mausoleum as the crucial construction for the new regime was ultimately erected at the Kremlin wall in alignment with the Senate building, as if emphasizing and enhancing this area of power.

Moreover, since mid-1920s the new regime started to make use of the ceremonial halls in the Grand Kremlin Palace – the main imperial palace in Moscow. In the first years after the Soviet government's move to Moscow, almost all of the meetings of the supreme executive took place in a small hall between Lenin's study and his apartment in the Palace of the Senate [Bazhanov, 1992, 23, 27-28]. However, in 1923, with Lenin now in semi-retirement, the Sovnarkom cast an eye on the Grand Kremlin palace. The September 1923 Plenary session of the RKP(b)'s Central Committee was held in the Throne Room – the main ceremonial hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace⁸, thus anticipating the grand receptions of the Stalin era which would be held in the palace for the following several decades.

⁸ Stalin's secretary recalls a curious episode which happened during one of the sessions. Trotsky, angry with some of the decisions made at the session, decided to walk out of the hall and slam the door. However, his move failed. "The hall had a huge and massive iron door. Trotsky pulled the door hard to open it, and slowly it gave way. He could have realized that there are doors you just cannot slam. But Trotsky was too incensed to think of that and now pushed it to shut with a loud bang. The door yielded with the same slow gravity. The intended impression was that of a great leader of the revolution, disappointed with his perfidious henchmen, severing his ties with them by slamming the door in a fit of temper. But in fact it looked more like an annoyed man with a goatee fumbling with a door handle, overpowered by a massive sturdy door. Didn't come out as nice as planned" [Bazhanov, 1992, 31]. This is a strange echo of an episode described by N. Durova, the "Cavalry maiden", who after an audience with Emperor Alexander I failed to open a huge palace door.

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Ekaterina Boltunova

National Research University Higher School of Economics. Faculty of Humanities. E-mail: ekboltunova@hse.ru

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