Triumphal arch in Russia in the 18th-21th centuries:
evolution of function and meaning

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Abstract. The article characterizes the evolution of the function and meaning of the triumphal arch in Russia in the 18th-21th centuries. The most known examples of the triumphal arches built in Saint Petersburg, Moscow and other cities of Russia over the last three hundred years are analysed. The authors describe the various reasons for erecting these architectural structures as well as their style specifics and identify the relationship between the construction of the arches and the changes in the social ideals and political systems. The article draws an analogy between the triumphal arches in Russia and similar objects built in Western Europe throughout the indicated period.

1. Introduction
The steady interest of European and Russian art to such an architectural form as the triumphal arch is one of the remarkable socio-cultural phenomena in the 18th-21th centuries. Created and widely spread in Ancient Rome as an independent architectural structure, and later revived in European art in the 15th-16th centuries, the triumph arch continues to develop in the following period, remaining almost unchanged until the present.

It is remarkable that from a rationalistic point of view, the triumph arch is an unpractical structure as its main function is just to serve a symbol of the state power and might. Besides, erecting such an architectural object, often, of magnificent size, requires large material and labor costs.

As far back as in the ancient Roman time, passing under a triumphal arch was part of the ceremonial performances, i.e. activities that demanded thorough theatrical direction. That is why the choice of the place for the arch was important. Peter the Great I was well aware of this when arranging the first secular festivity, a procession of the triumphant troops throughout Moscow after the seizure of Azov. The triumphant arch (according to the sources) was not only the key organizing element in the composition of the procession itself, but also its conceptual center, glorifying and promoting the new policy of Peter I. Although the program of the pageant included European allegoric personages (Mars, Hercules, Neptune, and “Victoria”) that the townspeople crowd could hardly understand, the scale of the festivity resembling that of Madi Gras festival was undoubtedly impressive for the public. Besides, the inscriptions on the arch, the congratulatory one, in the name of the victors (“Hereby I felicitate you on the capturing of Azov .... “) and the humorous one, in the name of the defeated (“Ah, we have lost Azov and with this, got misery to ourselves”), were of a popular folk character that was close to the broad masses.

2. Research Relevance and Objectives
The research is based on historical sources, art materials, documents, and published memoirs. The comparative historical method has allowed the authors to draw several historical analogies. Erecting the triumphal arches as part of the celebration festivities with fireworks and processions becomes a frequent phenomenon in the 18th century. For example, in December 1702, three triumphal arches were built in Moscow to commemorate the seizure of Noeteborg (in Russia, they received the name “triumphal gates”). In 1703, four triumphal arches were erected to honor the return of Izhora land. In 1704, seven arches decorated with the images of Mars, Hercules, Bellerophon, Neptune, Juno, and the allegoric Hope, were built to celebrate the seizure of Mitava [1]. All this was supposed not only to cultivate patriotism but also to induce collective positive emotions in the masses and reconcile people from different social strata with the new political and life realities.

By that time, a tradition to engrave significant events and pompous festivities discussed by people for a long time had been formed. The fact that the engravings could be replicated and that there were often explanatory comments included in the composition, made them close to the sheets of the first newspapers addressed to the wide audience. The triumphal arch (the so-called "Marine gates") richly decorated with draping, sculptures, banners, and the portrait of Peter I, can be seen in the engraving by A.Zubob “The view of Vasilievsky Island and the triumphal entry of the Swedish ships in the Neva River after the victory in the battle of Gangut” (1714). The arch was located close to the water, on the embankment, just opposite Menshikov Palace, with its ornate front face turned to the Neva where numerous ships were passing, both the Russian squadron and captured Swedish ships (Fig.1).

One of the most crowded processions in Moscow for which seven triumphal arches were built is depicted in the engravings by A.Zubov (1710) and B.Picart (1711) “Ceremonial entry of the Russian troops in Moscow after the victory in the battle of Poltava, on 21 December 1709”. A contemporary described the festivity: “The procession was opened by the Life Guard Semenovsky regiment with trophies, … then, following the Preobrazhensky squadron, the Swedish captives - soldiers, two hundred and fifty officers and generals - as well as the trophy artillery, three hundred trophy banners, and the string of carts of Charles XII, taken in the battle of Pultava. The captives were over seventeen thousand people” [2].

There were other very impressive projects e.g. the triumphal arch commemorating the coronation of Anna Ioannovna from the album “Description of the coronation of Her Majesty Anna Ioannovna the Empress and Queen of All Russia, ceremonially celebrated in the reigning city of Moscow on 28 April 1730” (by the project of I.K. Korobov). Unfortunately, one can form an opinion on it only by the engravings.

Following Peter I, Catherine II paid a lot of attention to mass pageants as a method of public education and propaganda of the state might. The coronation festivities of 30 January and 1-2 February 1763 in Moscow, initiated by Catherine II and developed by the talented actor and director F. Volkov, were turned in the grandiose masquerade "Triumphant Minerva" in which "the foulness of vices and the glory of virtue" were to be manifested. “Chanting, jumps, dances, and loud-voiced appeals ‘Hurray! Viva Catherine!’ would not stop, and such was her triumph” [3].

In spite of the didactic character of the masquerade, the brilliance and diversity of the latter were supposed to unite the participants and spectators and to create the impression of commonality. The program of the festive processions also included the triumphal arches in Tverskaya Street (architect K.I.Blank), in Zemlyanoy Gorod and Bely Gorod, as well as the Voskresensky Gates in Kitay-Gorod and the Nikolsky Gates in the Kremlin (Fig.2).

3. Research results and analysis
In the Enlightenment period, when the social ideals changed and a new architectural style was formed under the influence of the classicism ideas, the triumphal arches turned to be even more appropriate than before. The great interest of European (and later, Russian) society in ancient Roman culture and its architectural objects resulted in the pilgrimage of the numerous tourists to Rome; also, the Roman architectural objects became a theme for landscape painting. In June 1775, in Khodynsky Field in Moscow, there was a public festivity celebrating the victorious peace concluded between Russia and
Turkey. Among the structures embodying the Black Sea, the Don, the Dnieper, and the Crimea Peninsula, were “triumphantly” decorated gates [4].

Classicism in Russia appeared due to the development of public democratic awareness. Ancient Rome was perceived as an ideal polity; and antique works of art, especially architecture, were considered primarily with regard to their use for the fatherland and its glorification. This is confirmed by the expanded construction of the public structures. Now the triumphal arches do not only decorate but also organize the urban environment. Periodically renewed, they gradually become familiar structures in Russia, though they are still the key elements in pageants, e.g. a festivity arranged by the Polish gentry’s military school in 1775 on concluding peace with the Ottoman Empire [5]. The description of this romantic performance in 1783 was accompanied by the author’s explanations: “The largesse of Catherine the Empress granted to the peoples in her power… is the main basis of this allegory” [6]. While in the first half of the 18th century, the triumphal arches were temporary structures, part of the spectacular program, now, following Roman traditions, they are built out of stone - not as small architectural forms but as significant architectural objects. The triumphal arches erected to commemorate significant events, become distinctive monuments intended to remind society of their existence in the years to come.

In the first half of the 19th century, a few arches related to Napoleon's wars appeared in Europe and Russia, some of them devoted to Napoleon triumphs, and some, to his defeats. In particular, in 1806, by the order of Napoleon, the world’s biggest triumphal arch (50 m high) was erected in the Champs Elysees in Paris; in 1808, the Arco della Pace (Arch of Peace) was built in Milan. However, many more triumphal arches were built to commemorate the victories over Napoleon’s troops. These are the triumphal arch in Tverskaya Zastava square in Moscow by the project of O. Bove (1814), the Narvskiye Triumphal Gates (Narvskiyie Vorota) in Stachek square in Saint Petersburg by the projects of D. Quarenghi and V.P. Stasov (1838), etc. (Fig.3,4).

The 19th century continued the tradition of using triumphal arches in the most important state ceremonies. This primarily related to coronation festivities. The ceremonial entry in Moscow began from Petrovsky Palace where the Russian monarchs used to stop over, and it proceeded along Tverskaya Street to the Kremlin.

The historical accounts of the coronation of Paul I on 5 April 1797 (Easter Sunday) say that besides the existing triumphal arches with the renewed murals, five new triumphal arches were built en route. They were the arches in Tverskaya Street by Zemlyanoy Gorod, at the Tversky Gates, at the entrance of Kitay-Gorod by Voskresensky Bridge, in Myasnitskaya Street by Kitay-Gorod, and at Zemlyanoy Gorod by Elokhov Bridge. At the gates, welcoming of the officials was to take place [7]. Pietro Gonzaga participated in building the triumphal arches for the coronation processions of Alexander I and Nicholas I. His sketches of the Voskresensky Gates of Bely Gorod, the Nikolsky Gates of Kitay-Gorod, the Voskresensky Gates with Iversky Chapel, as well as of the Red and Tversky Gates, still exist. On 17 August 1856, in Tverskaya Street, the ceremonial entry of Alexander II took place. The painter M.A. Zichy who illustrated “The ceremonial entry of Their Majesties in Moscow” depicted the Tverskaya triumphal arch (by the project of O. Bove) in the Coronation Album of Alexander II. In November 1894, during the funeral of Alexander III in Moscow, the Red Gates was "covered from top to bottom with black fabric and represented a dark arch around which there were shields draped with black crape and crowned with black two-headed eagles" [8]. In Petersburg, a large mourning arch with urns on the sides was built in Senatskaya square, and a dark arch with gonfalons, on Novobirzhevy Bridge. Widely known are the photographs of the triumphal arches and obelisk columns with the inscriptions “Lord, save the King!” and “Glory forever and ever”, through which Nicholas II was entering Moscow on 14 May 1896.

Peaceful political events were also becoming reasons for erecting triumphal arches. In particular, in 1858, the Amur Gates were built in Irkutsk when the city was celebrating the conclusion of the Russian-Chinese treaty on defining and fixing the state borders in the Amur River region. The Irkutsk chronicler Nit Romanov wrote about that event, “The news has received an overwhelming response among the Irkutsk merchant class and was pompously celebrated…” [9]. Triumphal arches in Russian provinces were built to celebrate local events; mostly it was connected with the visit of the Emperor and his family.
In 1813, the Moscow Gates were built in Irkutsk to commemorate the accession to the throne of Alexander I. According to the tradition, temporary triumphal arches were built in many Siberian cities in 1891 during the festive welcome of Cesarevitch Nicholas on his way back from his Far East journey. In many cities en route, the triumphal arches became the key elements in the street decoration. Cesarevitch Nicholas and the accompanying persons were passing through the wooden and stone triumphal arches decorated with banners, greenery, flowers, and ribbons, in Vladivostok (where the Nikolayevsky Triumphal Gates that were built on the Pacific shore as a symbol and bastion of the royal power), Nikolskoye (currently, Ussuriisk), Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, Sretensk, Nerchinsk, and Chita [10].

4. Discussion
Following the changes in the social ideals that influenced the style of architecture, decorative and fine arts, the appearance of the triumphal arches was also changing. The development of the national identity in Russia after the victories of 1812, the interest in the antique during the romanticism period, as well as the slogan “Orthodoxy. Autocracy. Nation.” proclaimed by Nicholas I in the early 1830s and made the basis for the state policy, influenced the interest of society in the national theme. In spite of the official character of the slogan, the so-called “Russian theme” was becoming popular in the second half of the 19th century. It opened ancient Russian art to society and was widely represented in the architecture of the eclecticism period. While the appearance of the triumphal arch in the classicism period was identical to its ancient Roman preimage, its décor (and sometimes, the shape) in the eclecticism period turned to other traditions, pseudo-Russian or even Gothic. In particular, the triumphal arches in Krasnodar (1888), Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk, Krasnoyarsk, Uralsk (that were all built in 1891) and Nizhny Novgorod (1896) were decorated with ancient Russian architecture elements, though they had kept their traditional appearance in general. The triumphal arches of 1891 in Vladivostok, Nikolsk (Ussuriisk), Irkutsk and Krasnoyarsk were built as voluminal hipped-roof pyramidal pavilions resembling the porches of the ancient Russian churches of the 16th-17th centuries.

In the late 19th century, there were efforts to build triumphal arches in the ‘modern’ style (Art Nouveau), e.g. in Chita and Omsk in 1891. However, the elegant light carcass structures could not convey the idea of the festive triumph that has always been the main idea of the triumphal arch. In the early 20th century when the volume-space composition of the arch started losing its familiar Roman appearance, there were experiments with the appearance of the triumphal arch that failed as well. That is why the triumphal arch returned to its traditional appearance in the 20th century.

In the 19th century, following the change in the social attitude, the initiative in building triumphal arches was taken by society and became its habit and probably, even a necessity. In particular, the Novocherkassk triumphal arch was erected by the order of Count M.I. Platov, the Chieflain of the Don Hoist; the Tifliss triumphal gates were built in Stavropol at the expense of the Gavriil Tamanshev, a merchant in the First Guild who was well known due to his charity activities.

In Soviet Russia, there were a few attempts connected with the construction of triumphal arches. In 1942, the newspaper "Literature and Art" announced a contest for projects commemorating the war heroes. Among the proposed projects, there was a three-span triumphal arch, the Arch of Heroes (architect L.N. Pavlov, 1942) for the Red Square. In 1945, three temporary triumphal arches made out of plaster stone and plywood were installed in Leningrad. We can still see one of them, “Glory to the conquering heroes” (architect A. Gegello), in photographs (Fig.5).

Two “classical” 40-m triumphal arches were built in 1952 in Volgograd at the first and last locks of the Volga-Don Canal that connected the two large rivers of European Russia and made Volgograd the ‘port of the five seas’. The inscriptions on the frontons (“Long live the Soviet people, the builder of communism!” and “Long live the great Lenin!”) were complemented with the images of banners and reliefs (Fig.6).

The construction of triumphal arches was resumed in the 21st century. In 2000, the “The Kursk Bulge” triumphal arch was built in Kursk, commemorating the victory of the Soviet troops at the Kursk Bulge. In 2003, the triumphal arch in Krasnoyarsk, marking the 375th anniversary of the city, was
erected. In 2006, the “Grozny” triumphal arch in Chechnya, commemorating the 30th anniversary of Ramzan Kadyrov, was built. In 2007, the triumphal arch in Nalchik, marking the 450th anniversary of the Russia-Kabarda union, was erected. In 2015, triumphal arches in Krasnoye Selo and Samara, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Second World war, were built. Besides, the work on the triumphal arch projects in Volgograd and Kaluga is in progress. The triumphal arch shape is sometimes used in sculpture (Memorial of the Afghan war veterans in Penza, 2010) and installation compositions (The Perm Gates, 2011).

Another remarkable current tendency is restoring the triumphal arches destroyed in the 1920-1930s. In 1998, the Tiflis triumphal gates in Stavropol (1841) were restored; in 2003, the Nikolayevsky triumphal gates in Vladivostok (1891); in 2005, the Tsarskiye Gates in Blagoveschensk (1891); in 2006, the Tsarskiye Gates in Ulan Ude (1891); in 2008, the Moscow triumphal gates in Irkutsk (1813) and Mariinsk (1891). The triumphal arches restored at the sites they were originally built at are now not so much the symbols of the events to mark which they were once built, as the signs of the glorious past of Russia. The arches manifest the nostalgic attempts of Russian society to restore the connection to that past, lost during the Soviet period. It is noteworthy that in September 2015, 8 triumphal arch models of different periods were created for the celebration of the 868th anniversary of Moscow.

5. Conclusions
The research results demonstrate that one of the reasons for the ‘vitality’ of the triumphal arch is a predisposition of society to habitual, established architectural forms anchored in the public mind. The fact that the triumphal arch has been reproduced over such a long time in different socio-cultural conditions clearly indicates that society needs symbols, especially those that can convey the ever-demanded idea of triumph in a spectacular visual form.

The analysis has shown that in the beginning of the 18th century, it was mainly an objectification means for the greatness of power and at the same time, part of the pageants. In the 21st century, the triumphal arch is a materialized idea of victory. This evolution of the meaning and function of the triumphal arch reflects the social-psychological changes that have taken place in society over the three hundred years.

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Figure 1. The Marine Triumphal Gates, Saint Petersburg;
Figure 2. The Triumphal Arch in Tverskaya Street, Moscow;
Figure 3. The Triumphal Arch on Kutuzovsky Prospekt, Moscow (architect O. Bove);
Figure 4. The Narvskiye Gates (Narvskiye Vorota), Saint Petersburg (1814-1838);
Figure 5. The Triumphal Arch in Leningrad (1945, architect Gegello);
Figure 6. The Triumphal Arch at Volga-Don Canal, lock 1, Volgograd.