

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Church of the Ascension, Kolomenskoye
<i>Location</i>	Moscow South District
<i>State Party</i>	Russia
<i>Date</i>	November 1993

Justification by State Party

The Church of the Ascension is of great town-planning importance. It dominates the surrounding architectural and natural structures and unites all the elements of the estate. It is also a unique architectural and artistic monument, being one of the earliest tent-roofed churches in Russia and as such the progenitor of subsequent architecture.

The use of tent roofs has been a feature of Russian architecture from early times: the Church of Risopolozhenie on the Golden Gate at Vladimir is an example. Completing a structure with a tent roof was often used in the construction of defences in the early 16th century.

The builders of the Kolomenskoye church were undoubtedly master craftsmen, who were fully aware of the best of earlier structures. Thus its Renaissance detailing relates to the Cathedral of the Archangels in the Moscow Kremlin, which preceded the Church of the Ascension by a quarter of a century.

The architectural details of the Kolomenskoye church bear the imprint of the national features of Russian architecture, emphasizing height and free use of classic forms. Both the exterior and the interior of the church vividly demonstrate the unity of structural and decorative intent that is typical of Russian architecture.

History and Description*History*

The Church of the Ascension was built in 1532 by Prince Vasili III to commemorate the birth of the prince who was to become Tsar Ivan IV "the Terrible". The contemporary *Chronicle of Nikon* describes it as "that church highly remarkable for its height, beauty, and lightness and was no church like this one in Russia before". It was consecrated with great pomp on 3 September 1532 by the Metropolitan Dionissi, the Bishops of Kolomenskoye and Zraisk, and the whole of the synod in the presence of Grand Prince Vasili, Grand Princess Yelena, Tsarevich Ioann, and the brothers of the Tsar.

The church is situated in the Kolomenskoye estate, first recorded in 1339, when it belonged to Ivan Kalita, Grand Prince of Moscow. By the 16th century it had become a fortified stronghold. The palace complex was added later, in the 17th century, and it continued in use as an Imperial residence and estate until the 1917 Revolution.

Description

The ground plan of the church is in the form of a Greek equal-armed cross, with *raskrepovkas* (small protrusions) in the facade on either side. It is unusual in that it has no apse. It is constructed on a high basement *podklet*, the second gallery of which is an open gallery surrounding the staircase.

Three wide stairways with porches lead to the gallery from the north, west, and south; they are covered with vaulted roofs. There are small chambers under the north and south porches, two of which have fluted columns of brick and white limestone. Under the west porch there is the entrance to the main room of the basement; the semi-circular portal preserves the original white limestone decor of half-columns on fluted bases.

The massive vertical pillar rising from the basement is in three sections. The lower part is a cube (*chetvik*) with several protruding entrances (*prtvors*); it serves as the base of an octagon (*vosmerik*) with walls that carry smoothly up to the octagonal tent roof, which is crowned by a cupola on a drum.

The principal element of the facades - the pointed pediments above the arches of the basement, the strong corner *lopatki* (flat vertical protrusions on the walls) with decorative arrows between the carved network of faceted beads over the tent roof - were intended to lead the eye upwards to the cupola and its cross.

The interior of the church is small, since the walls are 3-4 m thick, but it is open to the top of the roof, 41 m above. The corners are decorated with pilasters which repeat, with some variations, the decoration of the exterior. Eight arches spring from the pilasters, and the octagonal drum that they support make a smooth transition to the soft outline of the tent.

The sloping of the tent is achieved through corbelling of the courses of brick. The tent is 20 m high; this is the first use of the traditional wooden tented roof for a stone structure. With its overall height of 62 m and the very thick walls, the whole structure retains the elegance of its silhouette and the dynamics of its composition.

The original iconostasis has not survived. It was replaced at the beginning of the 19th century by that from the Monastery of the Ascension of the Moscow Kremlin. The 16th century "Tsar's Gates", all that survives of the original iconostasis, are now in the Kolomenskoye Museum.

The so-called Italian (Alevisovsky) small brick, introduced by Italian architects at the end of the 15th century, was used for building the church. Carved details are in white limestone from the Moscow suburb of Myachkovo.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Church of the Ascension forms part of the Architectural-Archaeological and Natural Complex of the Museum Zone Kolomenskoye, which is protected by the State as a unique architectural monument. Its status is confirmed by the following legal instruments:

- Council of the People's Commissars decree "On registration and preservation of art and antiquity monuments, being in private, society and institutional property", 1918;
- RSFSR Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 1327, 1960;
- Moscow Council of People's Deputies Executive Committee Resolution No 666 "On development and restoration of the Historical and Architectural State Art Museum-Zone Kolomenskoye", 1990.

Management

The monument is owned and managed by the Museum-Zone Kolomenskoye, which is a State institution.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Much maintenance, restoration, and conservation work has been carried out on the church since the 18th century. In 1749 a number of elements, such as the roofs of the galleries and the parapets and columns

of the staircases of the porches, were restored. Considerable areas of the damaged surfaces of the brickwork were refaced at the beginning of the 19th century with brick specially made for the purpose. The interior was the subject of restoration in 1832-6, and the whole church underwent restoration "in accordance with ancient details and ornaments" in 1866-7 (mainly work on the octagon, the tent, and the cupola).

The first scientific restoration, based on research on the building, took place in 1914-16, when the original appearance of the north and south portals was revealed beneath later plaster. The north portal was stripped back to its original form in 1923.

A comprehensive research project in the 1980s revealed more of the history of the building, and identified the extent of the original features. It was also discovered that the entire exterior of the church had originally been covered by a thin layer of white plaster. On the basis of this research a major restoration project was carried out, designed to restore as much as possible of the building to its original appearance, using appropriate materials and techniques.

Authenticity

The church has undergone many alterations since it was built in 1532. The meticulous research in the 1980s and the subsequent restoration work has restored it to a high level of authenticity in form and materials, whilst the setting within the Imperial estate has been preserved.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

The original nomination of the entire Kolomenskoye estate was evaluated by ICOMOS in 1992. It was known to a number of members of the ICOMOS Bureau of the time, several of whom had visited it recently. It was not judged necessary to send an evaluation mission for the revised nomination in 1994, in view of the familiarity of ICOMOS experts with the monument.

Qualities

The Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoye occupies a key role in the development of Russian ecclesiastical architecture. It represents the first use of the traditional wooden tent roof design for a stone structure, and as such was influential in church design of much of Russia in the following centuries.

Comparative analysis

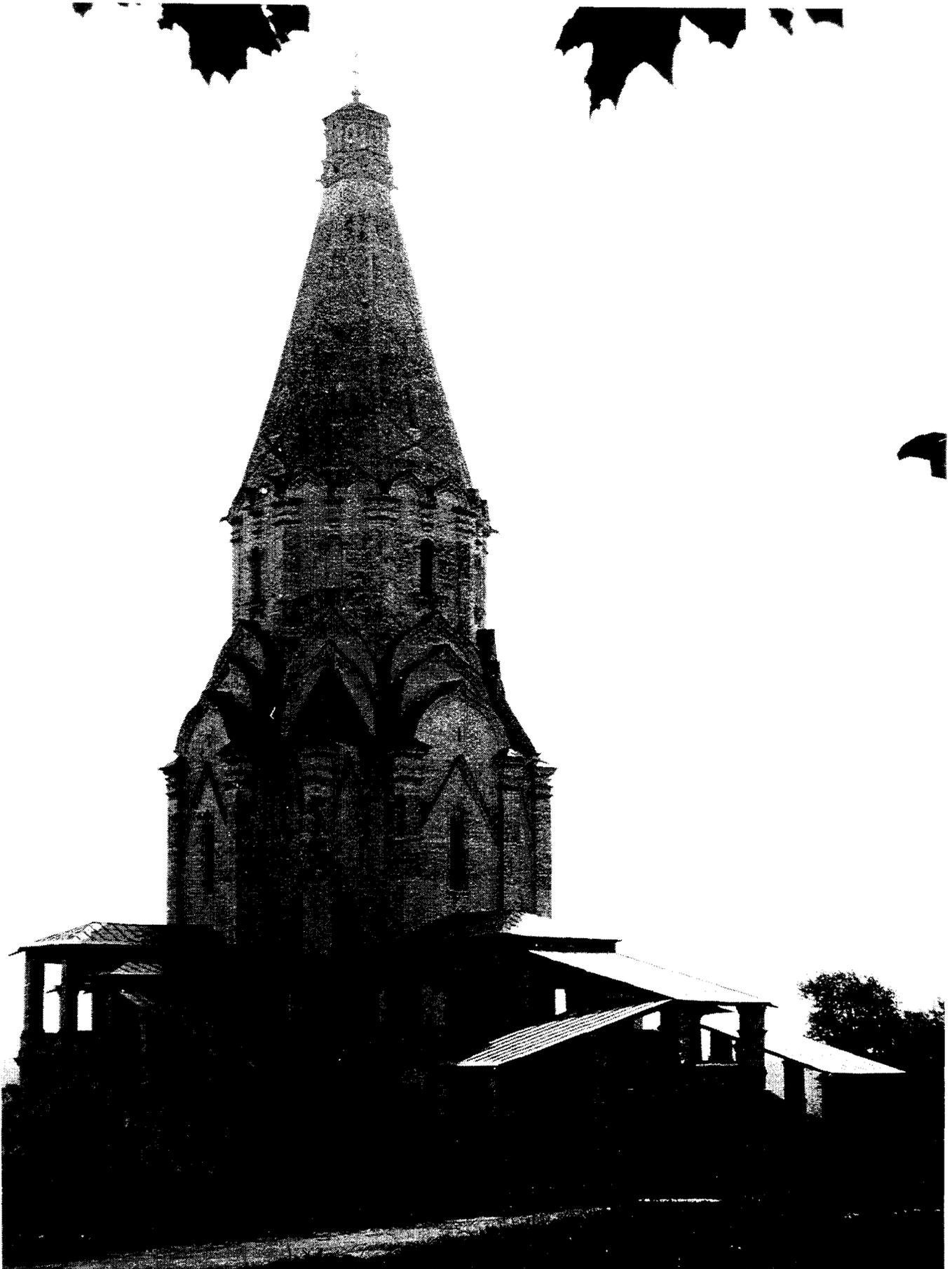
Whilst there are other 16th century churches in Russia that are similar in design, the Kolomenskoye church is of especial significance because of its innovative role. It is also one of the most impressive of the group, as a result of its association with the Imperial family.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion ii

- **Criterion ii** The Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoye represents an imaginative and innovative advance in Russian Orthodox church design which exerted a profound influence on developments in ecclesiastical architecture over a wide area of eastern Europe.

ICOMOS, October 1994



Kolomenskoïe : église de l'Ascension /
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