ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS OF THE UKRAINIAN SSR

THE BUILDING OF THE T.G. SHEVCHENKO UNIVERSITY IN KIEV
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(ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENT OF THE XIX CENTURY)

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The architectural monuments created by the Ukrainian people during their centuries long history are of the greatest value. More than two thousand of these monuments are under the greatest care in the Ukraine. They not only beautify our modern towns and villages, but also present a precious source for study of the history of our people, of their culture, art, architecture and building technique.

The founding of the University of Kiev was an event of great importance in the cultural life of the Ukraine. The University in Kiev was inaugurated in 1833.

In the competition for the best design of the university building the most prominent architects of St. Petersburg participated. As a result of this competition Academician V. I. Beretti’s design was approved on March 5, 1835. Later on the design underwent slight alterations, but on the whole the original scheme was not changed. The project having been approved, preliminary construction work of the university building began. Beretti was appointed chief architect.

The solemn laying of the corner stone took place on July 31, 1837. In July 1842 the University was transferred to the new building, which had not yet been finished. The building was fully completed only in 1843.
The construction of the University building shows the level of building technique at that time. The wide use of various kinds of brick vaults resulted in too much of the plan area of the building being taken up by unnecessarily thick walls and a great amount of strap and bar iron ties were used to take up the thrust of the vaults. The thickness of brick walls was determined empirically without any static analysis, which was typical of Russian building engineering of the XIX century. The proportions of the structures were assumed by intuition and by making trial model tests.

Fine cast iron structural members such as bases and capitals of columns, patterned floor tiles, torcheres, etc. were used, which was an innovation in civil building-engineering in Kiev at that time.

In 1842 Beretti raised the question as to the colour the outer walls of the building should be painted. He expressed the opinion that; «The walls might be painted yellow, the cornices and moulds white — the way all the city buildings are usually painted — or else the colour of lime. I, myself, think it better to paint the whole space from the socle to the column bases the colour of granite in sprays, while the rest — the moulds as well as the cornices — should be done in lime colour, so that the building would look as if it were made of the same kind of stone.»

But the author’s wish was not fulfilled and the Kiev University building just like the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg was painted the pompous-looking reddish-brown colour which has become a tradition.

Beretti’s ingeniously conceived suggestion of having artistic paintings made on the walls of the main premises and of mounting an allegoric sculpture group on the attic of the main facade portico was not carried out.

The fire of 1932 destroyed the roof and the wooden vaults over the entrance hall and the assembly hall. As a result of the restoration work the height of the entrance hall was lowered because the cylindrical vault was replaced by a gently sloping three centred one and the painting of the vault of the assembly hall done in the latter part of the XIX century was not restored.

During the Great Patriotic War the fascist invaders, retiring from Kiev on November 6, 1943, blew up the Kiev University building.

All that remained of this beautiful building was a big empty brick frame with partly ruined walls, vaults, staircases and cornices. The part of the building facing Vladimirskaya street suffered the least damage. The total damage caused by five explosions was estimated at 70 per cent.

In 1944—1945 the project of rehabilitating and reconstructing the Kiev University building was carried out by the Ukrainian branch of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR under the supervision of professor P. F. Alyoshin. The project preserved the former features of the architecture. At the same time all possibilities of adapting it to modern demands were taken into account.

The original appearance of the building was altered only in the western part, where two staircases were added: in the frieze of the facade, overlooking the

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Botanical gardens, window openings were cut to lighten up the premises of the newly designed fourth floor.

The three centred vault was restored in the interior of the entrance hall, the sloping cross vaulting in the lecture-hall under the reading hall was replaced by a flat reinforced concrete floor. The employment of reinforced concrete allowed the replacement of the heavy reinforced brick construction of the three flights of stairs in the southern and northern parts of the building as well as the construction of a fire-proof vault over the main staircase with slight alterations of its original shape.

The complete restoration and reconstruction of the T. G. Shevchenko University was finished in 1954.

The Kiev University played a substantial role in the forming of Kiev’s architectural aspect in the thirties and forties of the XIX century. It brought about the building up of the Vladimir street and making it a busy thoroughfare. It also led to the consolidation of the basis of the first classically strict architectural ensemble in Kiev, in the very heart of the city, and also designated the direction of another main roadway — that of the present Shevchenko Boulevard.

The erection of the University building is also bound up with the extension of the University Square (T. G. Shevchenko Square at present) and the improvement of street-planning along the western borders of the Botanical garden.

One may judge of the impression the completed University building made upon the contemporaries by the following quotations: «Vladimir street was laid through mounds which represented parts of the old fortress and through the great ruins of the church.
Design of the Kiev University building. Plan of ground floor.

Design of the Kiev University building.  
\[ a \] — plan of the third floor;  
\[ b \] — plan of the fourth floor.
Outside the Golden Gates the street picked its way through uneven, banky fields. The first high school and the Levashovsky Institute did not yet exist. The stately University building spread out on all sides among the expanses.

Here is the impression of another contemporary; "Among the ruins of the old city and the light structures of modern construction the University building gave the impression of a grand edifice".

The University building is situated at the crossing of the two main thoroughfares — Vladimirskaya Street and the Shevchenko Boulevard. By its location and architecture the building represents the compositional centre of a well-planned but not fully completed architectural ensemble.

A feature of the solution of the site's general plan is the free location of the University building on it in close agreement with the perspective development of the city. The principle of free standing buildings in the block advantageously differed from that of the perimetral continuous facade, which was at the time widely used in town-planning in this country.

It did away with the reserved nature of the block and opened up opportunities for including verdure on street housing sites. This principle was employed later on in the erection of other buildings in Kiev.

The erection of the University building in the district set aside for it was supposed to be the solution of part of a large scheme to build up the city with whole complexes, while harmonizing certain structures while the composition of the streets, squares and the city itself. This wide outlook connected with city planning is a vivid example of the progressive traits the Russian classical school of architecture possessed.

During the next decades the building up of the University site developed greatly. Next to the south facade of the University a library was built in 1914 according to the design of the civil engineer V. A. Osmak which was fully completed after the October Revolution and made to harmonize with the architectural style of the University building. Subsequently a symmetrical building was put up in the same architectural style. It was the humanities department of the University which was completed only just before the Great Patriotic war.

The clear cut system of the main and secondary axes of the buildings forming the main inner yard are the basis of the University development plan. The main axis, fixed in the plan by the axes of the eight column portico of the main facade and the facade facing the Botanical Garden serves at the same time as the axis of symmetry for the entire building. The secondary axes are the longitudinal ones of the transverse wings of the building and the inner yard. This system of coordinate and interconnected axes is the organizing basis for the further development of the plan, taking into account the specific features of the building as well as the economic, functional and sanitary engineering requirements.

The rooms in the building are arranged in groups functionally interconnected by the curriculum or by their common aims. There are various large areas of entrance halls, auditoriums and laboratories, well
placed in the plans of the building. To fit the main units of the plan compositionally and are conventional for higher educational institutions.

The wide corridors of the developed ring system connect numerous light, well-proportioned rooms, giving the planning its public building character. By varying the size and direction of these corridors, the architect succeeded in avoiding darkening as well as the monotony and dullness of plan solution, which are typical of official building of that time.

The uniform window spacing on the outer walls of the building and the coincidence of their in the opposite walls of the inner yard witnesses the use of a modular net of squares, whose sides are equal to the distance between the axes of adjacent windows. The use of a modular net in designing large buildings was a new and progressive method in those days. It brought clearness and coordination into the planning of the University building, simplifying the structural scheme, influencing the unity of architecture and the scale of the facades. The modular way of composing the plan enables the author to solve the problem of the interiors and the proportion of separate rooms very well.

We may thus consider the plan of the Kiev University building as representing a lucid and integral composition, functionally justified by the purpose for which the building was designed. In it the planning methods earlier applied in designing buildings for large educational institutions are further developed. This involves closer correspondence of the architecture of the building and its location with town-planning problems and allows an improved arrangement of suites of rooms and a more efficient correlation of the component parts of the plan. It also aims at simplicity, constructive clearness and achieves economy in the general solution.

The architectural appearance of the University building bears the monumental character peculiar to a big public building. The architecture of the main facade is especially expressive. It has been achieved by the contrast of the extended wall surface with the mighty vertical columns of the portico designed by using the ionic order throughout the entire height of the building. The portico is the compositional centre of the main facade organically linked with the mass of the wall. The monumental nature of the portico is enhanced by the introduction of a solid pedestal under the colonnade (with the exception of the passages), by the wide outer staircase with ramps and by replacing the traditional pediment by an attic, surmounted, according to the design, by an allegoric sculptural group.

The laconic character of the treatment of the wall 146 metres long, the massive rustic masonry of the ground floor walls, the granite socle and the introduction in the composition of the main facade of a high brick wall surrounding the University site—all this augments the monumental appearance of the University building architecture. The same purpose is served by the metrical spacing of the window openings in the bays and the broad blank surface under the crowning cornice preserved by reducing the height of the main windows which are not architecturally revealed in the main facade.

Thus, the principle of monumentality incorporated in the simple and static configuration of the plan found its expression in the space composition of the building. This continuity of the plan and the three dimen-
sions space solution has created the harmonious unity of the composition.

The University building architecture was intended to be viewed not only from the adjacent streets and the square but from the remote slopes of the Pechersk hill as well. Therefore, the building was designed very simply in masses, with no minute parts, extremely limited in decoration and variety of architectural details each of which has been elaborated, and very decisively executed.

The architectural order in the composition of the University building facade somewhat differs from the antique patterns, and from the rules as given in the treatises on architecture of the Renaissance period. This found expression in the reduction of the height of the outer columns, in the introduction of modillions in the crowning cornice of the Roman-Ionic order, in the free interpretation of the bases and capitals of the columns and pilasters as well as of certain elements of the interior of the main rooms of the University.

The composition of the facades of the building is resolved in different way, but this does not affect the unity of the architectural style and the scale of the edifice. The main facade is extremely laconic and plays a prominent role in the composition of Vladimirskaia street and the city as a whole. The execution of the rear facade is more plastic, picturesque and harmonizes with the scenery of the Botanical gardens. The idea of the composition of this facade is based on its being subdivided by the central and lateral projections which clearly display the axial pattern of the building plan. The central projection is embellished by the pilaster portico with a pediment, and the lateral projections, by semicircular apses with three-quarter columns of the Ionic order.

The side facades with projections at the ends and the modest entries to the inner yard are very simple and serve as links connecting the main and the rear facades, gradually merging with each other and thus augmenting their artistic expressiveness. The facades of the main inner yard are somewhat staggered but interconnected as to their architectural style and that of the facades of the outer perimeter of the building.

The unified character in the architectural style of the facades has been obtained by adhering to one and the same order, by rhythmically repeating similar architectural details, the same kind of materials, texture and colour.

The simplicity and restraint in the decoration which agrees with the purpose of the building draws one's attention to the interiors of the main University rooms. Various kinds of vaults are widely employed here. Great importance was attached by the architect to the vaults — not only to their constructive significance but also to the artistic side of the interior. Most of the rooms are square in plan or have derived from the square. The extended main halls of the first and second floors are brought to acceptable proportions either by projections of the transverse walls (library) or by projections of the walls with columns and arches (assembly hall). Extensive use was made of suites of rooms, connecting large halls and purely architectural forms (columns, pilasters, cornices, framing of openings, etc.) in the interiors of the main halls.

The volume and richness of decoration increases as we approach the main halls. This classical principle
is persistently followed in the solution of the inner premises of the University building. However, the order is not assumed as a basis for the whole composition in the interior of the principal premises. It testifies to a tendency to break with the sound principles of Russian classicism. Thus, whereas the principal proportions of the order are maintained in the entrance hall, the recreation rooms and on the upper landing of the main staircase, the columns of the assembly hall are too massive and the capitals and the entablature of the corinthian order are not high enough. The violation of strict unity in the interior is observed in the introduction of an original treatment of the Greek Doric order of the entrance hall into the Romanic orders of the other main premises of the building.

The Kiev University building is an outstanding monument of Russian classical architecture of the first half of the XIX century in the Ukraine. It occupies a notable place in the ensemble form of building in Kiev and is inseparably linked with its architectural appearance. The general monumental composition has been performed artistically and lends the building its imposing public character. The architecture is both simple and clear-cut. As to the effect the Kiev University building produces upon the on-looker one may say that it could be classified with that imparted by other architectural works of the kind which are not supposed to be effective but always leave a deep impression from the moment one sees it.

The Kiev University building has played an exceptionally large part in the cultural development of Kiev. It has been the scene of the pedagogical and scientific activities of many celebrated scientists — representatives of advanced Russian and Ukrainian culture—such as the well-known astronomer F. A. Bre- dikhin, the surgeon N. V. Sklifosovsky, the professor of economics N. I. Ziber, the mathematician D. A. Grave and others. Some of the most celebrated Soviet public figures as A. V. Lunacharsky, A. Y. Vishinsky; the great scientists: the historian E. Tarle, the physicist I. I. Kosonogov, the chemist V. P. Yavorsky, the mathematicians V. P. Yermakov, V. Y. Bukreyev and O. Y. Shmidt, the botanist V. I. Favorsky, the geologist P. A. Tutkovsky and many others enriched science by making contribution in various fields of knowledge.

T. G. Shevchenko was a member of the Archaeological Commission of the Kiev University. In March, 1847 the Public Education Department appointed him drawing teacher at this higher educational institution but he could not make use of this opportunity to teach for he was arrested in April the same year.

At the present moment there are thousands of Soviet citizens and many young people from the People's Democracies attending classes at the Kiev University.

The Kiev University is named after the great poet-revolutionary T. G. Shevchenko whose monument stands in the nice public garden just opposite the University building among age-old trees, wide paths and fountains.
Portico of the main facade.
View of University building from Bessarabka in the 'sixties of the XIX century.

The University building viewed from the park
View of University building ruins from the Botanical Gardens. 1943.

General view of University building from the Botanical Gardens. 1959.
General view of University building from Vladimir Street.

Interior of assembly hall.
Interior of the upper part of the staircase in front of the entrance-hall.

Entry to the entrance-hall.
Грицай Николай Алексеевич

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