

CYRIL BRYNER

The “Runner” in Pskov Church Ornamentation

A decorative belt in the form of an indented frieze, which in Pskov is called a “runner” (*begunok* or *begunets*), surrounds the drums supporting the domes and graces the apses of Pskov churches to form one of their most distinguishing features. It consists of three bands, the two outer ones formed of quadrangles, while the inner one is made up of interlocking triangles whose apexes alternately point upward and downward (fig. 1). Above the *begunki*, on the drums, usually there are additional decorative “brows” formed by a series of indented arches. But these are not unique to Pskov and will not be dealt with in this paper. The ornamentation on the apses usually is composed solely of the Pskov *begunok*.

The Pskov *begunok* has been described as an import from Novgorod,¹ the product of a Western influence,² or an imitation of a pattern from a local folk craft in some other medium, such as wood carving.³ It is this writer's contention that it was invented in the middle of the fourteenth century by a Pskovian who independently devised his original design, which he derived from geometric figures available to most people in most ages.

The originality versus the derivativeness of the Russian arts is a perennial topic of debate. However, even those who defend their uniqueness often argue that the more developed or sophisticated Russian arts are original only in the sense that they come from a native folk tradition. Little consideration is given to the possibility of entirely independent creation. The Pskov *begunok* gives an opportunity for establishing this last possibility. It also illustrates still another kind of uniqueness: the integrity of an art form in the sense that it is peculiar to a certain time and place. Neither influenced from outside nor integrated with the outside, it is only transported intact as a sign of origin. Pskovian masons were famous throughout Russia because they contributed many practical skills and useful ideas which were incorporated into the general composition of Russian architecture, but the *begunok* remained a particular kind of addition, a Pskovian signature to work done.

The overwhelming influence of Novgorod, Vladimir-Suzdal, and Moscow in various periods of Russian art history has created crosscurrents which pose

1. S. V. Bezsonov, ed., *Istoriia russkoi arkhitektury* (Moscow, 1951), p. 43.

2. Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Arts* (London, 1916), p. 19.

3. M. M. Postnikova-Loseva, in Igor Grabar, ed., *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1953-64), 4:597.

difficulties in dating and placing. The uniqueness of the Pskov *begunok* offers a rare guidepost within this chaos.

Pskov church architecture may be divided into three periods. The first is represented by only two surviving edifices, the Preobrazhensky Sobor (1156) in the Mirozh Monastery, and Ioann Predtechi (1243) in the Zavelichi Ioannovsky Convent. Churches of this period may have dated back to 963, when Olga was supposed to have built a wooden one. In Dovmontov gorod, an appendage to the Pskov Kremlin (more properly called a *detimitsa*) built by the most famous of early Pskov princes, the Lithuanian Dovmont (1266–99), archeologists have unearthed twenty foundations, some of which have the features of the churches mentioned above.⁴ Their constricted altar space is reminiscent of Mirozh, while the round columns illustrate one of the earliest elements of Pskov construction.

In this first period, dating to the middle of the fourteenth century, Pskov was subject to Novgorod politically and was artistically subservient as well. However, Igor Grabar has pointed out that even in this period, Pskovian architecture had a number of distinctive features which in turn may have influenced Novgorod.⁵ The cramped character (*tesnota*) of the Mirozh church interior anticipated the proliferation of small churches, particularly in Novgorod and other Russian cities, replacing the large churches of early Kiev and Novgorod. The Mirozh church, small for its period, also introduces the innovation of constricting the altar space to make more room for the congregation in the nave. The façade of the Mirozh church introduces an asymmetry which was later to characterize both Novgorod and Pskov churches. While the façades of Novgorod churches were quite symmetrical, Mirozh employed two arches of very unequal height which gave the front a lopsided but at the same time pleasing appearance. The circular interior columns of the Ioann church are a departure from the square ones used in the first Novgorod churches and anticipated an evolution toward rounded or semirounded interior columns.

In the second period, when Pskov asserted its political and artistic independence in the fourteenth century, Pskov architecture still continued to be identified as an appendage of the Novgorodian. The general impression that the two made was quite similar: the classical simplicity of rough white plaster walls, small windows, and stark lines. However, there are some quite noticeable differences aside from the *begunok*, gabled belfries, and interior arches mentioned later in my text. The early Novgorod churches usually had three joining apses of equal height to each other and the wall of the nave.

4. N. S. Khrabrova and B. S. Skobeltsyn, eds., *Pamiatniki drevnerusskogo zoderchestva: Pskov* (Leningrad, 1968), illus. 8.

5. Igor Grabar, ed., *Istoriia russkago iskusstva*, Knebel ed. (Moscow, n.d.), 1:238–44.

Small Novgorod churches had one apse also of equal height with the nave wall. Pskov churches have three joining apses, the central one not quite reaching the height of the nave wall and the two side apses being considerably lower. Small Novgorod churches usually do not have side galleries, while Pskov's invariably do. The domes of early Novgorodian churches are only slightly flared but more so than in Byzantine churches. Pskov domes are more flared than the Novgorod ones but not to the extent of those in Moscow, which are supported by goosenecked drums, or the large seventeenth-century churches of Iaroslavl or Rostov Velikii. In the evolution of the onion-shaped dome, so characteristic of Russian Church architecture, Pskov assumes an intermediate place. Novgorod has a great variety of façades and *begunki*—including a variant of the Pskov *begunok*—while Pskov has restricted itself almost exclusively to one façade, as it has restricted itself to one *begunok*. The Pskov façade consists of four pilasters joined by a tripartite central arch with bipartite arches on either side.

The conquest by Moscow in the sixteenth century marks the beginning of the third period, which has its culmination in the seventeenth century. Moscow standards intrude not only into Pskov but throughout the whole of Russia. The present Pskov Kremlin Trinity Sobor which dominates the Pskov landscape is a typical Muscovite church with its bulbous domes and large windows, while the inappropriate buttresses supporting an unstable wall are a sad commentary on the decline of Pskovian craftsmanship.

By the time the *begunok* made its appearance the Pskovians were building with unpolished lime flagstones which they covered with a yellow-tinged plaster, while almost all of the rest of Russia was abandoning stone for brick. The Pskovian church of Saints Ioakim and Anna (sixteenth century) is one of the exceptions in which brick is employed. The bricks are lightly chipped off toward the outer ends of their edges, with the result that the triangular recesses come together in the depth of the cone. However, the church of Saints Ioakim and Anna marks the end of the period of the *begunki*. The indentations of the typical *begunok* ran straight back to form a right angle with the inner plane.

The first Pskov churches did not employ the *begunok*. The oldest surviving one in the Mirozh Monastery (1156) uses the simple arches of Saint Sofia, Novgorod (fig. 3), as does the second oldest, Ioann Predtechi (1243). The principal church of the Pskov Kremlin, the Troitsa, in its present 1699 form, is almost purely Muscovite in structure. The original was built in 1193.⁶ However, a seventeenth-century drawing of the 1365–67 church does not display Pskov *begunki*.

The earliest Pskov church with the *begunok* is the Rozhdestvensky

6. I. E. Grabar, ed., *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1954), p. 312.

Sobor (1310–13). But it was restored in 1493. The lavish embellishments added to the *begunok* suggest that the whole frieze belongs to the later date. Early examples of the Pskov *begunok* are to be found on Nikola Chudotvoretso Usokhi (1371, Grabar, but 1537, Sobelitsyn), Sergei s Zaluzhie (fourteenth century), Mikhail Arkhangel (1339, but redecorated in the seventeenth century), Saints Petr and Pavel (1373, restored in 1540). Of thirty-two surviving old churches, twenty-one have the *begunok*. Those without are the oldest and the newest. Only two fall within the *begunok* period, 1310–1540; and in view of the frequent restorations even these two, originally, may have had *begunki*. It would seem that this ornament originated by the second half of the fourteenth century and was well established by the early fifteenth.

In the time between the earliest stone churches (dating from 1144, according to the Pskov Chronicle,⁷ to the mid-thirteenth century) and the churches of the later fourteenth century, the Pskovians were too busy erecting their massive and extensive city walls to have time for stone churches. Employing the same plentiful flagstone used for the churches, they constructed nine kilometers of walls buttressed by thirty-nine formidable towers.⁸ These are entirely without ornamentation or the plaster used on the churches. The churches, on the other hand, seem to have inherited some of the massiveness of the protecting walls. The Mirozh Monastery church walls are about two meters thick. And, indeed, the churches were secondary points of defense in whose outer galleries the city's munitions may have been stored.

During the time associated with the building of the fortifications between 1250 and 1350, the Pskov Chronicle lists the erection of only three churches.⁹ Before this period, Pskov architecture followed Novgorod's, which was sovereign over her in the arts as well as politics. Pskov gained her independence as a city republic in 1348, and by the fifteenth century was building more stone churches than any other city in Russia, and thus marked her artistic as well as political independence.

In seeking the origin of the Pskov *begunok* one must heed the observation of the dean of Russian art historians, Igor Grabar, that the Pskov *begunok* is "very characteristic" rather than original.¹⁰ Certainly there are no figures more universal and basic than the square and the triangle, yet despite the obvious combinations in which they may be put together, the Pskov combination is unique, and its distinctiveness adds to the uniqueness of Pskov architecture.

The storybook decorativeness of the Pskov *begunok* is quite out of keeping with the grim city walls and helps transform what might have been

7. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

8. Khrabrova and Skobelitsyn, *Pamiatniki drevnerusskogo zodchestva: Pskov*, p. 5.

9. Grabar, *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, 2:316.

10. Grabar, *Istoriia russkago iskusstva* (Knebel ed.), 1:248–49.

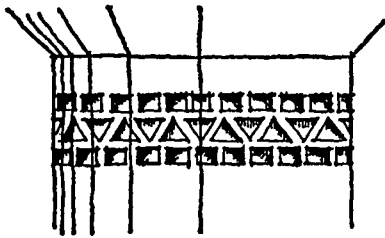


fig 1

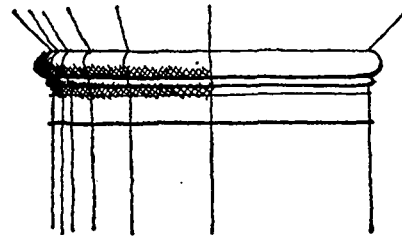


fig 2

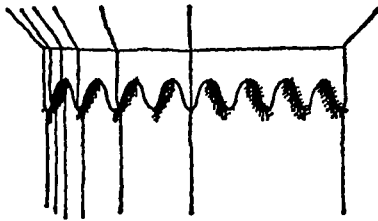


fig 3

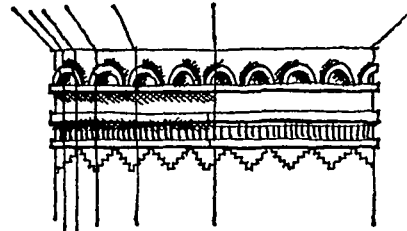


fig 4

stolid, squat lumps of churches into edifices of great charm. In investigating the possibility of a folk origin, it is pertinent in the light of Soviet historicism and nationalism to explore the most remote cultural association, the Scythian, since it has been argued that Scythian designs influenced a considerable area of European folk art extending beyond the borders of Russia.¹¹ Nor should one ignore the most proximate ethnic association of the Great Russian stock, the Finnic. The close association between ethnography and architecture in Russia is testified to by such a colloquial term as the *begunok* itself, as well as the use of a purely folk term, *kokoshnik* (woman's headdress), for a gable (*fronton*).

Also to be considered is the fact that related ornamentation surrounded the drums of structures in all parts of the world throughout all ages. Pskov may have borrowed from or have been inspired by the ornaments on the drums of churches or other parts of such edifices from within a number of Byzantine cultural realms—particularly from Novgorod, whose bishops reigned over the Pskov church even after that city had obtained her political independence.¹² Western artistic influences may have penetrated as far east as Vladimir as

11. Tamara Talbot Rice, *The Scythians* (London, 1957).

12. See A. Nikitsky, *Ocherk vnutrennei istorii Pskova* (St. Petersburg, 1873), for an account of Pskov's political and religious ties with Novgorod. For later ties with Moscow see Nikolay Andreyev, "Filofei and His Epistle to Ivan Vasil'yevich," "The Pskov-Pechersky Monastery in the Sixteenth Century," and "Was the Pskov-Pechersky Monastery a Citadel of Non-Possessors?" All are reprinted in Nikolay Andreyev, *Studies in Muscovy* (London, 1970).

early as the twelfth century, namely, Saint Dmitrii in Vladimir, dating from 1194. Pskov, located on the westernmost border, was directly in the path of these cultural intrusions. Besides the sometimes overwhelming Byzantine religious influence, the cosmopolitanism of Kiev and Novgorod at the height of their early glory cannot be overlooked, nor the continuing importance of Novgorod and Pskov as trading centers with the West.

The fact remains that the very basic and universal nature of the square and triangle makes them the property of the whole of humanity. They can be arranged into an almost infinite number of combinations without the benefit of cultural, historical, or technological promptings. The intriguing point is that such basic geometric forms have been arranged so simply and, one could say, unimaginatively, to create something as distinctive and exclusive as the Pskov *begunok*.

Decorations analogous to the Pskovian *begunok* are found on the drums of most Russian churches. Each architectural area has its characteristic design which tends toward greater elaboration and synchronization with neighboring areas. Frequently it is difficult to establish their antiquity, since the domes and drums of ancient churches have been the most perishable parts of these structures and, consequently, subject to reconstruction and remodeling. The most ancient Kievan and Chernigov churches, as they have come down to us, have simple moldings in masonry below the dome (fig. 2). Saint Sofia in Novgorod (1045–52) has arches which characterize many early Russian churches, including Pskov's, which may simulate the windows in the domes of the Byzantine churches of the Balkans and the original Saint Sofia of Constantinople (fig. 3). Vladimir-Suzdal employed its own more elaborate style with crenelated arches and blind windowlets (fig. 4), which Moscow borrowed for her earliest churches before she evolved her own baroque style (fig. 5). However, none of these decorative bands were employed as exclusively and consistently as Pskov did her own from the second half of the fourteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The bands of masonry (fig. 2) supporting the domes of the very earliest churches were not parts of the earliest structures. The domes of the eleventh-century Saint Sofia in Kiev were constructed in the purely Byzantine style, with windows extending to the height of the drum and beveling the dome, leaving no room for an encircling *begunok*. The exterior of the church—as was also the case of Novgorod's Saint Sofia—was of brick, stone, and mortar. It was over a century before exteriors were covered with plaster or faced with sandstone, creating the possibility of tracing increasingly elaborate *begunki* or other ornamentation. The domes of Saint Sofia, Kiev, went through a number of modifications until they finally assumed their present seventeenth-century baroque form. The less perishable small apses still retain the old

begunok. In churches throughout Russia this *begunok* type could consist of a single band or as many as seven—as in Saint Sofia of Vologda (1568–70)—and use various spacings and widths. Examples of figure 2 may be found in Novgorod; for example, Saint Georgii, Staraja Ladoga (end of twelfth century), Petr i Pavel na Sinichei Gore (1185), and Ilia Prorok (1455). In Moscow it decorates Kremlin churches and Nikola Miasnikakh (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries). Kostroma, Kalinin (Tver), Zagorsk, and Zvenigorod possess it, but not Pskov. This form of *begunok* is hardly a decoration, but simply a device to separate the drum from the dome which it frequently helped support. With the appearance of tent-shaped churches in the sixteenth century, there was less room for a decorative *begunok*, and a variant of this simple form was the logical choice for the constricted drum.

The arches of Saint Sofia, Novgorod (1045–52) (fig. 3), were the most frequent decorations on the drums of Novgorod churches down into the fourteenth century. The frequency and size of the arches varied greatly, in part controlled by the dimensions of the drums. The Novgorod arches were used in the first Pskov churches, and though found in other parts of the world, in Russia they seem to be restricted to the Novgorod-Pskov area—although a crenelated variant of the arch forms a part of designs in other Russian regions. Novgorod itself employed a number of other designs from quite an early date—for example, in Georgievsky Sobor, Iuriev Monastery (1119).

The highly decorative Vladimir-Suzdal *begunok* (fig. 4) is exemplified by three great twelfth-century churches built under the sponsorship of the Dolgorukis: Pokrova Bogoroditsa on the Nerl (1165), Dmitrievsky Sobor (1194–97), and Uspensky Sobor (1185–89), both in Vladimir. Though the Vladimir Uspensky was used as a model for the Moscow Kremlin Uspensky, Fioravanti preferred to use plain bands, similar to figure 2, on his drums. Part of the design, the crenelated arches and blind windowlets, is to be found in other parts of Russia. The windowlets or “brows” are located on Pskov drums immediately below the dome and above the *begunok*.

The Moscow prototype (fig. 5) is a stylized version of a decoration also found on many parts of Moscow buildings both religious and secular. There are more elaborate variants of this seventeenth-century aspect of the Moscow baroque, which also is characteristic of peasant wood carving, particularly on the columns of porches. As Moscow’s power and influence spread, this design established itself throughout the country.

The search for the origins of the non-Pskovian *begunki* is not the purpose of this paper. Such a search, it seems to me, would lead us to vaguer ground and material for separate papers. The consistency, restrictiveness, and frequency of the Pskov *begunok* in contrast to the others listed—and further classifications could be made—offer a more promising field for investigation

and might be used as a basis for other studies of Russia's rich and varied decorative art.

When Pskov craftsmen became Russia's leading architects in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Pskovian architectural methods and styles of a practical nature became diffused throughout the land. Pskovian bell gables served the increasing Russian preoccupation with bells, since early Byzantine architecture made no provision for belfries. Massive columns to support church domes had been among the elements most expensive and technically most difficult to construct. The collapse of the dome of the Uspensky Sobor in the Kremlin, and the inability of Russian masons to reconstruct it, had caused Ivan III to summon Fioravanti from Italy to do the job.¹³ Given the growing tendency to build small, inexpensive, quickly built churches which evolved into the "columnless" churches of Moscow, the Pskovian manner of supporting domes with low-slung arches rather than with columns was a valuable practical contribution. Though the arch as a support and the gable belfry may not have been Pskov inventions, they became identified with the Pskovian style. On the other hand, the Pskov *begunok* was of no practical value, and aesthetically competed with many other kinds of decoration. It could easily be dispensed with or replaced. Yet Pskov masters used the Pskov *begunok* as their trademark almost everywhere they worked. There are few churches in which they had a hand which do not carry this decorative embellishment.

Within the Moscow Kremlin itself, the Blagoveshchensky (1482–90) and Rizpolozhenie (1486) Churches, both constructed by Pskov masters, have Pskov *begunki*. However, Vasili Blazhennyi on Red Square, of which the Pskov master, Posnik Iakovlev, was one of the two architects, in spite of the variety of decorative elaborations, has no Pskov *begunki*. Perhaps the very uniqueness of this church, a quality for which its builders undoubtedly strove, inhibited Posnik from employing this traditional trademark. On the other hand, one of the most innovative and beautiful Russian churches, the sixteenth-century Spas Preobrazhensky, in the Moscow suburban village of Ostrovo, has them on its smaller turret drums. This church, together with the somewhat older churches in the villages of Kolomenskoe and Diakovo, marked the inception of the stone "tent-shaped" churches which revolutionized Russian religious architecture and were to be condemned as heretical, to no avail, by Patriarch Nikon.¹⁴

Variants of the Pskovian decoration are also to be found among the far-flung monasteries of Russia: on the Spassky Church (1537–42) (fig. 6) of the Spaso-Prilutsky Monastery near Vologda; on the sixteenth-century tower

13. "Patriarshaia letopis" in *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1897), pp. 155, 192.

14. E. E. Golubinsky, *Istoriia russkoi tserkvi*, 2 vols. in 4 (Moscow, 1880–1917), vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 148.

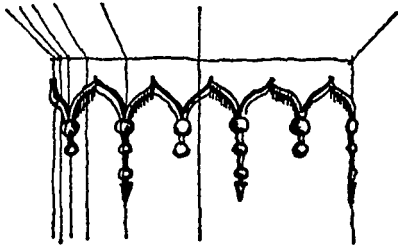


fig 5

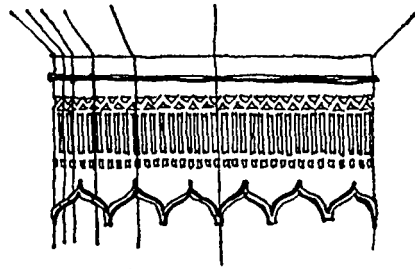


fig 6

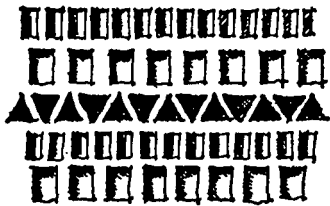


fig 7

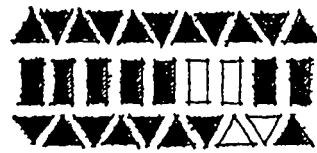


fig 8

(fig. 7) and Uspensky Church (1533) of the Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery on Siverskoe Lake; on the Rozhdestvensky Church (1490) (fig. 8) of the Ferapontov Monastery lying between Borodavskoe and Paskoe Lakes. At the Ferapontov Monastery the pattern is reversed—the squares forming the center row and the interlocking triangles the outer ones. At Spaso-Prilutsky the decorations are reduced to two rows, with the row of triangles above the squares on the minor drums and the design incorporated into a broader pattern on the central one. On the turret of Kirillo-Belozersk, the pattern is expanded to nine rows, the top five rows being repeated lower down the wall with the omission of the last row. The effect of the Pskov *begunok* is completely altered by these variants. Nor is it likely that these patterns were made by Pskov masters; the evidence points in other directions. These variants show how available the components of the Pskov *begunok* were and that their arrangement into the simple Pskov pattern by non-Pskovians was studiously avoided. In figure 6 the double triangle design which appeared in early Novgorod architecture is lost in the elaborate design below it. The nine rows of alternating rectangles and triangles (fig. 7), dating from 1635, are in the spirit of the increasing decorativeness of the Moscow style, which by avoiding the sequence of the Pskov pattern gives the impression that the latter was recognized as the private property of an alien area.

Historically all three monasteries have been associated with Moscow and Novgorod rather than with Pskov. It is argued that they were points of concentrated Muscovite influence which were to oust an earlier Novgorodian

sovereignty over these regions.¹⁵ The Spaso-Prilutsky Monastery was built under the direct orders of Ivan the Terrible, while the Ferapontov Monastery was built by Rostov masters under Moscow direction.¹⁶ The monastery where one would most expect to see the Pskov *begunok* in its unmodified form is in the Troitse-Sergieva Lavra at Zagorsk, in whose building Pskov masters had an important role. However, here there is no evidence of the Pskov *begunok* or its variants. Probably here the Vladimir tradition was too strong, or as in the case of Vasilii Blazhennyi, there were distractions that led the Pskovians away from implanting their *begunok*.

Both Novgorod and Moscow employed the motif of interlocking triangles—Novgorod considerably before Pskov, and Moscow after. Novgorod and Moscow used brick, giving the pattern a more regular appearance than in Pskov, where local rubble was used. This frequently gave the Pskov design an irregularity resembling freehand drawing in contrast with the geometric symmetry of Novgorod and Moscow.

In Novgorod, sovereign over Pskov from the dawn of Russian history to 1348, the interlocking triangle design appeared as early as the twelfth century—namely, in Blagoveshchenie na Machinie (1179) and Saint Georgii in Staraja Ladoga, as well as in later churches such as Feodor Stratilatov (1360), Spas Preobrazhensky, Torgovaia Storona (1374), Saints Petr and Pavel, Sofishkaia Storona (1406), Vlas na Volosovie (1407), Dvenadtsat Apostolov na Propastie (1454), and Saint Simon in the Zverina Monastery (1467). But this design was neither the first nor the last used by Novgorod, nor was it exclusive to that city. Most important of all, Novgorod employed the triangles without the two bands of squares. This created an entirely different aesthetic impression: the Novgorod frieze was an obscure element of a general design, while the Pskovian emphasizes the singularity of Pskovian drums and apses.

The Pskov *begunok* has been directly attributed to Novgorodian inspiration.¹⁷ But neither is the triangle unique to Novgorod. One can see Novgorod providing the beginning of an inspiration, but its completion by Pskov produces quite a different effect. The prominence of the Pskovian design, owing to the absence of other ornamentation and its larger size and rougher execution, gives it quite a different character from the Novgorodian design.

Also, it is believed that both Novgorod and Pskov were influenced by Russian wooden architecture. Wooden churches in Russia predated the stone and brick ones. Elaborate many-domed wooden churches were razed to make place

15. G. Bocharov and V. Vygodov, *Vologda, Kirillov, Ferapontovo, Belozersk* (Moscow, 1966).

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 217.

17. Bezsonov, *Istoriia russkoi arkhitektury*, p. 43.

for Russia's first stone churches in Kiev and Novgorod. For centuries after, wooden churches continued to be built side by side with the stone. They were regarded as more comfortable for winter services. But we can only surmise what these early wooden churches were like. Unlike the ancient stave churches of Scandinavia, none of the early ones have survived. The oldest existing churches of any size date from the seventeenth century—long after the architectural styles of Novgorod and Pskov had been set. However, since much of Russian architecture up to modern times, both religious and secular, has remained wooden and is traditional in character, we can guess about details of the lost architecture. Particularly striking are the carvings along eaves and around windows. These employ a variety of geometric patterns as well as flower and animal designs. It has been suggested that the Pskov *begunok* is an imitation of peasant carvings.¹⁸ However, the stark simplicity of the Pskov *begunok* has little in common with the rococo ornateness of Russian wood carving. Though Russian wooden church architecture coexisted with the brick and stone, the significant influence of the former was manifested only in the middle of the sixteenth century, when brick churches suddenly started to imitate the tentlike shapes of the wooden ones. Before this period, there seems to have been an inhibition against borrowing, and even in the seventeenth century Orthodox churchmen were shocked by this innovation.

A Western borrowing of materials and style seems even less likely. Rosa Newmarch wrote, speaking of Saint John the Baptist in Pskov: "The bricks used in this building are so like English or Dutch bricks in colour and baking that they are believed to have been imported from one of these countries. Double sloping roofs, perpendicularly intersecting, are typical of the Novgorodian period, and the style of covering, like the band of decorative work high up on the façade, is due to the German-Romanesque influence."¹⁹

Even though water transport was available via Chudskoe Lake and its rivers to the Baltic, it is difficult to imagine the Pskovians importing such a cumbersome commodity as bricks, considering the problems of transport in the thirteenth century and the fact that the Russians had been manufacturing their own for at least two centuries. The only decorative work on Saint John's is the modest Novgorodian arches (fig. 3). These are so universal that they can be found in the Rhine Valley on the cathedrals of Worms and Trier, and in the extreme West, on the cathedrals of Burgos and Salamanca. This commonplace Novgorodian design is more suggestive of a Byzantine influence; their loops replace the omitted arched windows of Byzantine churches. However, it would seem that Rosa Newmarch may have been looking at a church other than Saint John's, so devoid of ornament in its thirteenth-century aus-

18. Postnikova-Loseva, in Grabar, *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, 4:597.

19. Newmarch, *Russian Arts*, p. 19.

terity, and was describing the *begunok* so evident in other churches nearby. It is true that at one time Pskov was a great trading city and had contacts with the cities of the Hanseatic League. But even the Italian architects imported by Moscow were ordered to work in the Russian style, and the imprint of the Italian Renaissance, at least in churches, is limited to the shell-like gables of a single Kremlin church, Arkhangel'sky Sobor. Russian church architecture borrowed with reluctance from the West, and then only sporadically. With so many local sources of inspiration about her, it seems unlikely that Pskov would have gone to the West for such a confirmed ornamentation as the *begunok*.

There are a number of arts and crafts within Pskov itself which might have inspired the *begunok*. It has been suggested that it resembles the pattern of trammel nets.²⁰ Pskov is located on the fork of large rivers, and fishing is also done on the nearby Chudskoe Lake. However, the extensive twelfth-century murals in Pskov's Mirozh Monastery depict fishermen using nets with a diamond-shaped mesh.

The influence of embroidery seems a more likely source. The richness and variety of this craft would seem to present endless inspirations. It is true that because of its perishability, Russian embroidery hardly goes back beyond the sixteenth century. However, it may be assumed that even comparatively modern folk embroidery reproduces very ancient designs. Nineteenth-century embroidery from Northern Russia depicts pre-Christian goddesses.²¹ But as in the case of wood carving, the elaborateness of design does not suggest the *begunok*. It also might be noted that geometric patterns were more characteristic of the south than the north, to which Pskov belonged, and by far the most used geometric pattern in both regions was the rhomb.²²

Icons, bells, and jewels might also have had some relevance to our search. Pskov icons represent elaborately and solemnly dressed princes as well as saints. However, the decorated borders of their robes usually contain only round jewels.²³ Pskov craftsmen gained a reputation not only as builders of

20. Khrabrova and Skobel'syn, *Pamiatniki drevnerusskogo zodchestva: Pskov*, p. 9.

21. See L. Dint'ses, "Dokhristianskie khramy Rusi v svete pamiatnikov narodnogo iskusstva," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 1947, no. 2, pp. 67-94.

22. V. A. Aleksandrova et al., eds., *Russkie: Istoriko-etnograficheskii atlas* (Moscow, 1970), vol. 1, p. 103.

23. For examples of the round jewel ornamentation on borders see V. N. Lazarev, O. I. Podobedova, and V. V. Kostochkin, eds., *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura Pskova* (Moscow, 1968): Unknown saint, Mirozh Mural XIIc (p. 49), David, XIIc MS (p. 95), Pharaoh, 1477 (p. 104), End of the World, 1477 (p. 107), Paraskeva, XIVc (p. 121), Paraskeva Before the Judges (p. 128), and Descent into Hell, Michael the Archangel, n.d. (p. 140). See also Grabar, *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, vol. 2 (1954): Saint Nicholas, XIIc (p. 355), Saints Gregory, John Chrysostom, and Basil, XIV-XVcc (p. 363). See also A. Ovchinnikov and N. Kishilov, *Zhivopis' drevnego Pskova XIII-XVI veka* (Moscow, 1971): plates 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 20, 23, 27, 28, 31,

belfries but also as the casters of bells. Though these bells were elaborately decorated, their makers did not use the *begunok*, nor did the almost as famous Pskov silversmiths.²⁴

Sumerian and Akkadian pottery used the interlocking triangle in double rows.²⁵ Pottery in particular, including what is found on the territories of Russia both among Russian and pre-Russian civilizations, is a tempting area of investigation because of its antiquity, variety, and local distinctiveness, and especially because bowls resemble the drums supporting the domes of Russian churches and use a similar material. Scythian culture, the oldest and most admired of the Russian cultures to which Soviet historians try to trace their own, has a great wealth of design which may have had its influences on the whole of Europe. But in spite of the wealth of Scythian design, geometric figures are rarely used. The interlocking triangle makes a very infrequent appearance and then in a very subordinate role. The strongest religious influence on the Russians was the Byzantine, but the latter's architecture has nothing like the Pskov *begunok*. The nearest things to the *begunok* in Byzantine architecture are the decorations on column capitals whose ornate "embroidery" sculpture has little in common with the *begunok*.²⁶

The pagan Finns, whose lands the Russians appropriated, may have had a still closer affinity than Byzantium did.²⁷ One of the most distinctive Finnic crafts is the Ryijy-rug, which is used throughout Scandinavia. The oldest rugs date from 1495, but, as in the case of Russian embroidery patterns, we can presume a much earlier origin.²⁸ A much-favored border of these rugs is a zigzag with dots (fig. 9). This design is also used by the Russians in various arts and crafts, but less frequently. Among the Russians the dot is occasionally embellished into a heart as in an illuminated twelfth-century Kievan Evangelium, into a rosette, or some other figure. The zigzag is suggestive of the

40, 43. Plate 28 has circular jewels arranged in the pattern of the *begunok*. Plate 15 has diamonds; plate 41, a few triangles.

24. For a discussion of Pskov crafts see Lazarev et al., *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo: Khudozhestvennaia kul'tura Pskova*.

25. See B. L. Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia* (New Haven, 1963).

26. Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (New York, 1960), pp. 213-14.

27. For a discussion of pagan influences see Nikolay Andreyev, "Pagan and Christian Elements in Old Russia," *Slavic Review*, 21, no. 1 (March 1962): 16-23, and Georges Florovsky's "Reply." Of particular interest are the necklaces found in the *kurgany*. Most of these date from the eleventh century, though the concept of this kind of necklace, with its distinctive catch, is found in Scandinavian workmanship of the third and fourth centuries. The original concept may have come from the Orient and was taken up in Russia, Finland, and Scandinavia. The number and simplicity of the necklaces found in Russian *kurgany* would indicate indigenous workmanship. Notable in one of the examples illustrated is the use of triangles formed by the combination of three circles. See L. Niederle, *Zivot starych slovamu* (Prague, 1913), vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 646-58, and fig. 38, no. 4, p. 655.

28. See U. T. Sirelius, *The Ryijy-rugs of Finland* (Helsinki, 1926).



fig 9

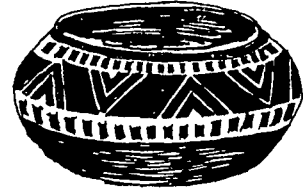


fig 10



fig 11

Drawings by
Brian Hemingway

interlocking triangles, and the dots, if moved outside the zigzag, assume the position of the squares in the Pskov *begunok*.

The primitive cultures of Siberia offer many examples, spread all the way to the Pacific Coast, of both the interlocking triangle and the zigzag design.²⁹ The design, strangely enough, which is most reminiscent of the Pskov *begunok*, belongs to a predynastic Egyptian bowl (ca. 3500–1100 B.C.) (fig. 10),³⁰ while a most elaborate *begunok*, reminiscent of the Pskovian, is to be found on the wood-carved sides of a hut in Central Siberia in the village of Bukhtarmintsy, Tomsk Province (fig. 11).³¹

The very universality of the triangle and the square suggests their spontaneous and original utilization by one individual in creating the *begunok* without promptings from local crafts or external influences. The triangle and the square have been arranged in so many ways in so many places, coming so close to but without matching the Pskov design. The influences may have come from many directions, but the actual arrangement was original. Bernard Berenson wrote: "every important district, every considerable town in Europe was distinguished for some specific thing which it could produce better than

29. S. V. Ivanov, *Ornament narodov Sibiri, kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Moscow, 1963).

30. Warren E. Cox, *The Book of Pottery and Porcelain* (New York, 1946), vol. 1, p. 32, fig. 37.

31. M. G. Levin and L. P. Potapov, eds., *Narody Sibiri* (Moscow, 1956), p. 196.

any other place and to which, therefore, its name was apt to be applied."³² This might be extended to say that every area makes its distinctive impression though its sources may be borrowed, and that the prominence and originality of the *begunok* make such an impression. Probably some Pskov master mason around the middle of the fourteenth century, guided more by the building materials at hand than by the example of designs in other crafts or alien architectures, drew up the plan of the *begunok* out of his own head. In spite of the great amount of building taking place, Pskov was a poor city with little territory, few resources, and constantly on the defensive against neighbors—both domestic and foreign—more powerful than she. Pskov had to build economically and rapidly. The simplicity and rough-hewn quality of Pskovian architecture are one of its principal charms, and it is a simplicity both classic and intimate. Undoubtedly, Pskovians regretted that they did not have the time or the money to make their churches more elaborate. But they were resolved to decorate them nevertheless. The decoration had to be both simple and striking. Stone had to be fitted together as easily as possible with the most elaborate effect. The creator of the *begunok* must have been a man of some influence in an age when architects were anonymous. The extensive Pskov chronicles, which record the building of many churches, give no hint about who he was. One of the few known architects and probably the most illustrious one, Master Kirill, who rebuilt Pskov's principal church, the Trinity, within the Kremlin during this time, should be dismissed as a possibility, because there is no evidence of the *begunok* in the drawings of his church. But the creator must have been an influential man closer to the people and less of a court architect than Master Kirill, to have imposed his concept so permanently and universally. He came along at the right time, when, after a century of inactivity which marked a break with the past and an opportunity for innovation, Pskov experienced a building boom in churches.

The rich and varied folk art of Russia, as well as of her neighbors and predecessors, has not proved to be a source. The folk art of the Pskovian area as well as of Russia's northwest, with its animal representations and nongeometric designs, exhibits a different spirit from that of the Pskov *begunok*. The only purely architectural influence from within Russia would be from Novgorod, which would also be a likely transmitter of foreign architectural influences. It has been indicated that despite Pskov's early political, religious, and cultural subservience to Novgorod, there was a certain reciprocity of cultural values, even in the earliest period. Pskov was a giver as well as taker, and very stubbornly held on to certain standards of her own. Novgorod almost stumbled onto the Pskov *begunok* by using the incompleting design before Pskov obtained her completed pattern, but subsequently was

32. Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (Garden City, N.Y., 1953), p. 215.

strongly inhibited from using the Pskov *begunok*. That the West or Byzantium was the source seems even less probable. The decorated drum was a very Russian departure from Byzantine architecture, whose squatty drums, pierced by windows, left little room for decoration; nor did the angularity of Gothic spires in the West lend itself to the elaboration of Russian-style *begunki*.