Competitive works of A.V. Shchusev (1873-1949)
and his participation in the international exhibitions

DOI: https://doi.org/10.52603/arta.2023.32-1.06

Rezumat
Lucrările de concurs ale remarcabilului arhitect A.V. Șchiusev (1873-1949)
și participarea la expoziții internaționale

On September 26, 2023, we will mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding architect of the first half of the XX century A. V. Shchusev (1873-1949). Aleksey Viktorovich was born in 1873 in Chisinau on Levskaya Street (today Shchusev Street, where the museum of this architect is located). During his 76 years of life, he managed to fully realize his talent in architecture, becoming the author of the masterpiece in the construction of the mausoleum on the Red Square in Moscow. He became a laureate of four Stalin Prizes, and educated more than one generation of talented architects. He also founded the State Museum of Russian Architecture.

On September 26 (October 8) of 2023 we will mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding architect of the first half of the 20th century Aleksey Viktorovich Shchusev (1873-1949) (Fig.1). It is known that in his family archive there was a certificate with the seal of the city of Olviopol, confirming the service of his great-grandfather Konstantin Shchusev “in the army as the Zaporozhie Cossack captain”. Thus, the ancestors of Aleksey Viktorovich were, presumably, irreconcilable fighters for the freedom of Ukraine – the Zaporizhzhya Cossacks, as in-
ARTA • 2023

directly evidenced by his surname, which has the Ukrainian root “Shchus” found in the name of the marsh bird. Also, the architect’s father, Viktor Petrovich, owned a plot of land in the Kherson province in Ukraine [7, p. 16]. Aleksey Viktorovich was born in 1873 in Chisinau in the estate on the street Leovskaya (today Shchusev Street, where the museum of the architect is located).

During his 76 years of life, he managed to fully realize his talent in architecture, becoming the author of a masterpiece in construction – the mausoleum on the Red Square in Moscow. He was the winner of four Stalin Prizes. He founded the State Museum of Russian Architecture, educating more than one generation of talented architects. “For 17 years, he completed 31 projects of monasteries, temples and chapels (whereas the number of projects for Soviet buildings in the same time was half of that” [2, p. 7]. He was one of the unsurpassed leaders of the neo-Russian style in architecture and created beautiful monuments included in the treasury of world art. A. Shchusev wrote in his article on urban planning: “The beautiful architecture of past centuries is being studied; the best traditions of the heritage of Russian architecture are being developed” [6].

Researching his many-sided creativity, we will focus on the most interesting competitive works of this great Master A. V. Shchusev. Throughout his life, while working on his main projects, he happened to take part in architectural competitions, about which, according to his brother Pavel Viktorovich Shchusev, he was skeptical, believing that it was difficult to do a good job in a short competition period. In 1897, a gold medalist of the Higher Petersburg Art School, Aleksey Viktorovich Shchusev was awarded the title of artist-architect with the rank of the 10th class. Subsequently, he was able to build on his own edifices [7, p. 43].

So, in 1901-1902 A. Shchusev with the architect V.A. Pokrovsky participated in the competition of the new St. Petersburg hospital, for which he did not receive a prize, despite the fact that the design of the construction was brilliantly presented in the English style by Pokrovsky. [7, p. 50]. A. Shchusev established himself as a talented restorer, architectural historian and excellent speaker. Besides, he proved to be an outstanding painter and decorator. As a real great Master of architecture, he spent much of his time in the forests of his construction sites. Many of his works were demonstrated and were successful at the exhibitions in Paris, Vienna and London in 1907, 1908 [7, p. 87].

Moving from St. Petersburg to Moscow in 1913-1917, the construction of the Kazan railway station became the main achievement of Shchusev’s creative activity. But this construction was preceded by a competitive architectural design of the State Bank Branch in Nizhny Novgorod in 1910-1911. “The whole architecture, layout, silhouette of this building, excellently designed graphically, were conceived in the character of the ancient Russian chambers. The composition included all the elements of the future Kazan railway station, such as the tower, the waiting room and the restaurant. The façade was designed rather modestly but in an original way; carved white stone being used for cladding” [7, p. 90]. But, unfortunately, this project remained unfulfilled. At the same time, it was highly appreciated, because it was at this time that the board of the Ryazan Railway was going to build a new railway station in Moscow and, for this purpose, invited architect Shchusev to participate in a closed competition. In this contest for the best project of the Kazanskiy railway station, the main competitors of Aleksey Viktorovich were the St. Petersburg architect E.N. Feleizen and the famous academician F.O. Shekhtel, who was the author of the project of the Yaroslavl railway station. Starting to design the station, Aleksey Viktorovich tried to solve the main problem of combining the motifs of folk art with the modern requirements of railway construction. He intended to use the construction of a large public building in the capital to create a monumental monument to the Russian people. The station had to be placed in the lowest part of the square, so the eventual building could become lost in the general ensemble. Therefore, Shchusev proposed to raise the structure on a pedestal, placing the railway tracks on two levels. This could emphasize both the architecture of the building itself and successfully demonstrate the level in the construction of stations. However, the technical department did not support Shchusev's progressive views, which is why the architect had to design a single-tier station building. A competitive design by Aleksy Viktorovich was made in the forms of Pskov-Novgorod and, in part, Moscow architecture with a high-rise tower in the center and other elements that were subsequently preserved in the existing station. It was recognized as the best, when considering the results of the competition on April 14,
1912 and was soon approved by the engineering council of the ministry (Fig. 2). Shchusev depicted the harmony and picturesque forms of the Old Russian appearance of the station in his design, in contrast to the few supporters of the forms of classical architecture for such buildings. Aleksey Viktorovich began to finally develop the project of the station after it was approved on November 12, 1913. Thus, "created on the basis of the age-old principles of folk art, it became a monumental monument that reflected the greatness of Russian folk art" [7, p. 88].

In 1913-1914 A.V. Shchusev designed the Russian pavilion at the XI International Art Exhibition in Venice (Fig. 3). He used "Old Russian motifs of the Moscow period, which gave the pavilion a completely modern look, reminiscent of the Kazansky railway station in its decorative architecture. Distinguished by its extraordinary softness and fine jewelry finish, its details were excellently drawn. The composition of the pavilion in the form of a Russian tower-room with a high roof, an external staircase and intricate decoration of windows in the form of extended pipes was masterfully arranged. Finished with smooth walls and completed with a sculpted crest, it harmonized very well with the architecture of Venice, despite its purely Russian character. An invitation to the opening of this pavilion in the form of a card has been preserved, where it is depicted in colors. The pavilion built with private funds was a great success at the 1914 exhibition.

On behalf of the Solodovnikov brothers, Shchusev prepared a project for the building of cheap apartments for workers and participated in the competition in 1915. Aleksey Viktorovich decided to create a whole series of such buildings, united by one idea: simplicity, good proportions and convenience of apartments for workers. Interestingly, "the facades of the houses were enlivened with patches of cozy balconies decorated with gratings of a simple but elegant pattern" [7, p. 121]. In the Russian character, in 1916 Aleksey Viktorovich prepared a project for a shelter for the children of fallen soldiers near Chisinau. "According to the initiative of Archbishop Platon (Zholtovsky), Exarch of Georgia, it was supposed to create a shelter for the children of fallen soldiers with a school, workshops, a home for the disabled and elderly priests, a hotel, a hospital and a church on a plot of diocesan land with an area of 120 acres" [2, p. 212]. The shelter was also intended for the girls who were supposed to be with some nunnerys. The architect intended to build a shelter on a hilly area, right on the highway. Having decided to keep the vineyards, it was "suggested to arrange a square for the approaching parishioners behind the garden, near the bell tower. According to the estimates, the total cost of the shelter was 700,000 rubles" [5, p. 490]. In general, the project was accepted, but it was not possible to implement (Fig. 4).

Another Shchusev's project, a skete on the estate of Prince I.D. Zhevakhov in the Poltava province, was completely opposite to his previous one. The general location was supposed to be on a meadow washed by a small river. There are two buildings for the disabled in front of the entrance. In the center, there was a common church for the monks, whose cells were located right in the depths. To the right, there were the cells of wanderers with a cave church. In front of the church there was a refectory building, a house for visitors and for the abbot of the monastery. [5, p. 490] Unfortunately, this project, as a private monastery, although conceived, remained unrealized too. "As a great and sincere artist, Aleksey Viktorovich, from the first days of the revolution, tried to participate in all government events aimed at raising our artistic culture" [7, p. 127]. During that period, decrees were issued regarding monuments, architectural competitions, renovation of Moscow, etc. In 1918, a special group of architects was created to redevelop the capital, headed by academician I.V. Zholtovsky. "I was the chief Master in the workshop, and the others were just Masters; there were also apprentices. We were called so, not wanting to be called just architects", Aleksey Viktorovich wrote [7, p. 127]. They were faced with questions on the reconstruction of the center and outskirts of Moscow, the greening of cities and many other questions, for the answers to which a number of competitions were held. In 1922, there was the first big competition of the Moscow Council with the goal to create a project for the building of the Palace of Labor in Moscow. Aleksey Viktorovich also became a participant in this contest with his own project (Fig. 5).

In 1925, Shchusev participated in the competition for the design of the House of State Industry in Kharkov. He decided to make the illustrations for the project of this large structure "perspective, made in Etching. But the heap of volumes, devoid of any plastic qualities, turned out to be a com-
Arta medievală, modernă, contemporană

Completely inappropriate topic for this. The etching was devalued by the plot and, in turn, seemed to emphasize the dryness and elementary nature of the architecture depicted on it. [1, p. 85].

The competitive project of the Central Telegraph in Moscow on Gorky Street in 1926, completed by Shchusev, earned universal recognition for the rationality, convenience and economy of the plan and constructive scheme (Fig. 6). At the same time, its architecture was distinguished by elegance, proportionality and original freshness, in which the features of constructivism were clearly manifested [1, p. 85].

The subject of another competition is the reconstruction of Moskvoretsky bridges: Big Stony (Bolshoy Kamenny), Crimean and Kransokholmskiy, which were outdated and had no connection with the Kremlin and other nearby areas of the city, which clearly violated the ancient traditions of building Moscow bridges. The well-known engineers and architects took part in this competition, including A.V. Shchusev. He, together with engineer G.P. Perederiy presented the project of the Big Stone Bridge with four spans growing to the Kremlin. On the Kremlin coast, the bridge ended with a high tower, decorated with sculptural bas-reliefs dedicated to the themes of the history of Moscow. All presented projects were studied, but the reconstruction became possible only in 1937. The vigorous activity of architects in the planning of Moscow posed new problems more and more [7, p. 128].

So, in 1922, another big competition was held for the project of the All-Union agricultural exhibitions. The project of Academician I.V. Zholtovsky, in which the main composition and all pavilions were based on the traditions and principles of classical architecture, used wood and reinforced concrete. A.V. Shchusev was appointed the chief architect of the exhibition in 1923. In less than six months, the landfill between the Neskuchny Garden and the Crimean Bridge had turned into a landscaped park with an exhibition [7, p. 132], where Shchusev used wooden construction in unprecedented volumes. “For the first time, ring dowels were used, original methods of building plank sheathing, a combination of wooden structures with reinforced concrete” [7, p. 146]. After the closing of the exhibition, the Gorky Park of Culture was created in its place. During the Second World War, Shchusev built a pavilion here to display the captured German military equipment. Later, he drafted a small concrete bridge on the ponds of the park.

In 1928, Aleksey Shchusev submitted to the competition a project of a two-span arched stone bridge for Tbilisi in Georgia. It was made with a lancet vault over its intermediate support with a picturesque lattice in the spirit of ancient Georgian architecture, which surpassed all other projects in terms of economy and monumentality, but, unfortunately it was never built [7, p. 160].

In the same year, architect Shchusev designed a monument to Christopher Columbus for participation in the international competition announced by the committee of South and North America. He conceived it in the form of a ball and a lighthouse located nearby and inside the ball was an auditorium, in which, under its stylobate, was supposed to be a museum named after Christopher Columbus. As a result of the competition, surprisingly, this project of a foreign architect was encouraged not even by a laudable word. However, this Shchusev’s idea was used by young American architects in 1939 at the World Exhibition in New York (Fig. 7), without indicating the original source [7, p. 174].

The Soviet era opened up great prospects for Shchusev to achieve major architectural goals. One of the most important is the design of Dneprstoy facilities. Aleksey Viktorovich gladly took part in the competition for the planning of Greater Zaporozhye, describing the main details in his article in 1934. “The competition announced for the design of the Palace of Soviets as a monument to the victory of socialism was of great social and political significance and served as a signal for the creative restructuring of Soviet architecture and its liberation from simplistic tendencies” [7, p. 158-159]. It was known that I.V. Zholtovsky and A.V. Shchusev participated in this competition. Aleksey Viktorovich prepared the detailed report about it in the articles: “On the project of the Palace of Soviets” (1931) and “Creative Directive” (1932).

Together with Professor I.S. Izhakevich he also took part in the international competition for the clearance of a floating bridge across the Zolotoy Rog in Constantinople. This project was not implemented, but for the technique in architecture, “the simple and clear continuous construction, made of metal, looked especially convincing. The project picturesquely emphasized the painted
portals and colorful pavilions built on the site of the drawbridge” [7, p. 205].

After 1936–1937 two all-Union competitions were held with the participation of A.V. Shchusev: for the design of the pavilion for the Paris Exhibition, built in 1937 by architect B.M. Iofan and on the building of the People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry in Zaryadye [7, p. 214-215].

By 1936, the construction of the Marks-Engels-Lenin Institute as one of the best works of Alexey Viktorovich was completed in Tbilisi, Georgia (Fig. 8). Back in 1931, Shchusev, having received an award for the design of this Institute, decided to turn this building into a monument reflecting the typical features of Georgian folk architecture. Realizing the multinationality of architecture, Aleksey Viktorovich deeply studied the culture of the people for whom he created the project, followed by the use of a national shade in the composition. In the design of the main facade of the institute, he used Bolnisi tuff for cladding, and gray basalt for the columns of the portal. The greatest Georgian Masters sculptors were engaged in the interior decoration of the building. Georgian colored marble, the advanced construction of lightweight pumice concrete, the manufacture of steel products with gold and silver notches for door handles and other details made this building majestic, which brought a fresh, cheerful stream of modern worldview. His undoubted merits served as a reason for Alexey Viktorovich to be awarded the Stalin Prize of the 1st degree in 1941 [7, p. 214].

By the same time, his competition project for a theater in Ashgabat, which he conceived and created, was inspired by “the architecture of one caravanserai” [7, p. 218]. Shchusev described his main merits as follows: “I remained on the basis of the classics, since I received such an education at the Academy of Arts. In some of my projects and buildings, I also used the heritage of the East and the national Russian creativity” [7, p. 221].

In the postwar period, Academician A.V. Shchusev took part in the competition for high-rise buildings in Moscow and gave the structure he designed in the Dorogomilovskiy district a “Russian silhouette with a golden top” [7, p. 257].

In conclusion, it is impossible not to note the highest professional level in whatever style the constructions were performed. And this irrefutably testifies that they are all made by the hand of the Master. And also, it should be emphasized that if we talk about the architectural creative path of Academician A.V. Shchusev, innovative competitive projects and achievements, then, undoubtedly, “all his works were united by a hot temperament, a sense of patriotism and deep respect for the creations of folk genius” [3, p. 190].

Sources and bibliography:
4. Речь и. д. председателя духовного комитета протоиерея Н.В. Лашкова при освящении и открытии Бессарабского сиротского приюта в временном помещении, в воскресенье, 20 декабря. В.: Кишиневские Епархиальные Ведомости, № 1-2, XLIX издания 3-10 января 1916 г./ Rech’ i.d. predsedatelya duhovnogo komiteta protoiereya Kh. V. Las-hkova pri osvyashchenii i otkrytiy Bessarabskogo priuyta v remennom pomeshchenii, v voskresen’e, 20 dekabrya. V: Kishinevskie Eparkhial’nye Vedomosti, № 1-2, XLIX izdaniya 3-10 yanvarya 1916 g.
Fig. 1. Photo of architect A. V. Shchusev (1873-1949) (D. Keipen-Vardits. Khramovoe zodchestvo A. V. Shchuseva. M.: Sovpadenie, 2013, s.1)

Fig. 2. Sketches of the Kazansky railway station in a perspective. 1912. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 92)

Fig. 3. Perspective of the Russian pavilion at the X1 International Art Exhibition in Venice. 1913. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. V. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 104)

Fig. 4. Perspective of the shelter for the children of fallen soldiers near Chisinau. 1916. Architect A. Shchusev. (Arkhitekturo-khudozhestvennyi ezhenedelnik, № 51, 1916, s. 487)
Fig. 5. Sketches for the building of the Palace of Labor in Moscow. 1922. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. V. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 133)

Fig. 6. Perspective of the Central Telegraph in Moscow on Gorky Street. 1925. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. V. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 147)

Fig. 7. Sketch of the monument to Christopher Columbus for the International participation. 1928. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. V. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 158)

Fig. 8. Sketch of the Marks-Engels-Lenin Institute in Tbilisi of Georgia. 1933-1934. Architect A. Shchusev. (P. Shchusev. V. Stranitsy iz zhizni academika A.V. Shchuseva. M.: S.E. Gordeev, 2011, s. 217)