

Moscow or the Third Rome: Politics and Archaeology

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Medieval Moscow; historical topography; politics; archaeology

The theory referring to Moscow as the Third Rome is widely advertised in Russian historiography. It's well known that during the 16th century the city of Moscow made permanent attempts to establish itself as both a capital of the new Russian Tzardom and as an Orthodox capital. The ideological definition was invented by Russian historians in the 19th century as a famous formula "Moscow – the Third Rome", which represented both the Moscow Tzardom and the Russian Empire as a successor to Mediterranean imperial and Christian powers – first of all Constantinople, to a lesser degree Rome, and even Jerusalem. This artificial politicized formula was willingly accepted by the Russian society in the late 19th century and is very popular until today. But there are few evidences on the existence of such an idea in the late 15th and 16th-century texts. Art historians tried to find the reflections of this idea in medieval iconography and architecture. But the results turned to be irrelevant.

A new attempt to describe the medieval image of Moscow as "the third Rome" has been undertaken again in the 1970s and 1980s by city-planners and architects. They suggested to see the reflection of the imperial and religious ideas in the practice of medieval urban planning. According to this hypothesis, both medieval master builders and their patrons created the city of Moscow following a certain "ideological project" which became reality between the late 15th and the early 17th centuries. This aspect was connected with such a significant concept in the Middle Ages as transfers of holiness, when the sacred topography of Jerusalem, for example, was re-created throughout medieval Europe.

The architectural version of the concept "Moscow – the Third Rome" contaminated a numerous number of publications containing the most fantastic "ideal schemes" of Moscow (Tab. 1). Today a lack of historical approach in this theory is evident, but the ideas are still attractive, especially for nationalistic and fundamentalistic Orthodox groups and sometimes even for governmental authorities. For example, the first three volumes of a luxurious recent publication "The History of the Russian urban-planning" are overfilled with the same "ideal schemes". It means that we cannot just dismiss this concept as an irrelevant historiographical phenomenon, but we must propose our own version of the urban and architectural development of the city of Moscow.

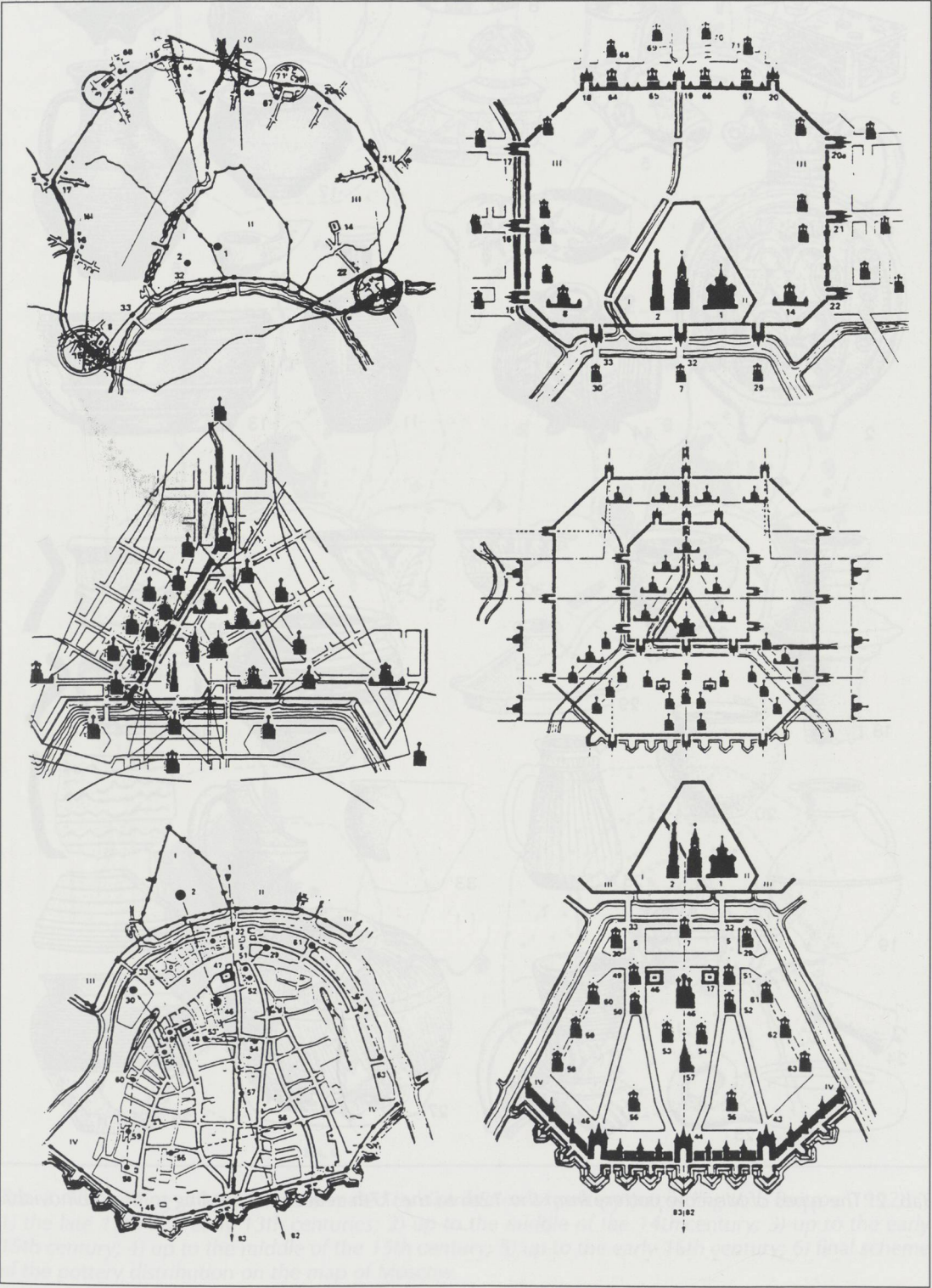
All Russian historians know that it is a difficult task because Moscow's urban history and architecture was not reflected in texts and depictions until the 17th century. Only a study involving archaeological excavations, architectural surveys and all of the available historical records could help. Since 1995, my colleagues and I are working on the reconstruction of the real history of the Moscow's urban planning. The project is undertaken in the frame of a special research program of the Russian Academy of Sciences. As an example, I shall show some preliminary results.

"The Seven Hills" and the Urban Development of Moscow

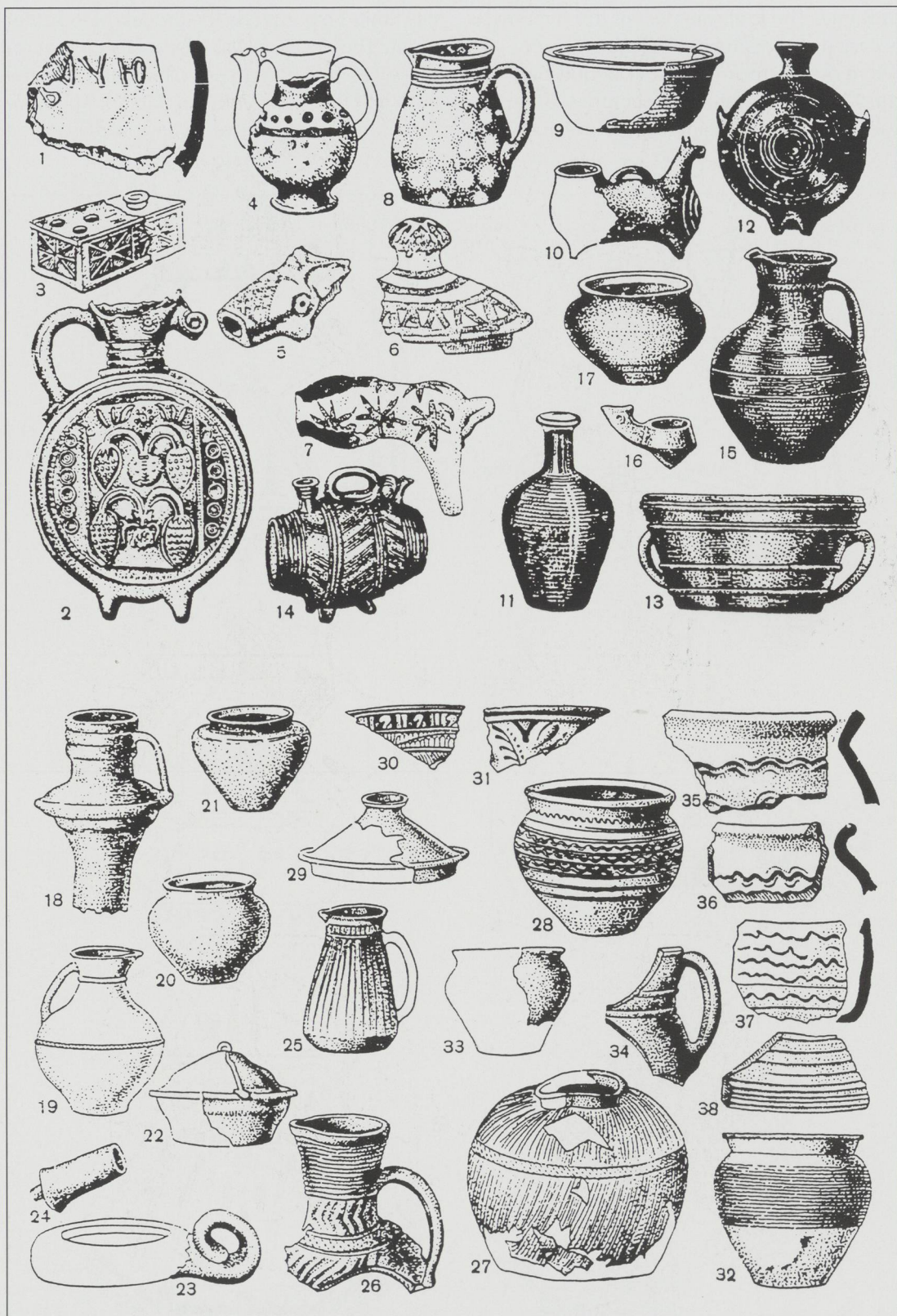
The concept "Moscow – the Third Rome" suggested that the city was founded as several independent urban cores, similar to seven hills

of Rome. The irrelevantness of this hypothesis is easy to prove archaeologically. There are no records for the period between the 12th and the late 15th centuries. But excavations and supervision within the medieval

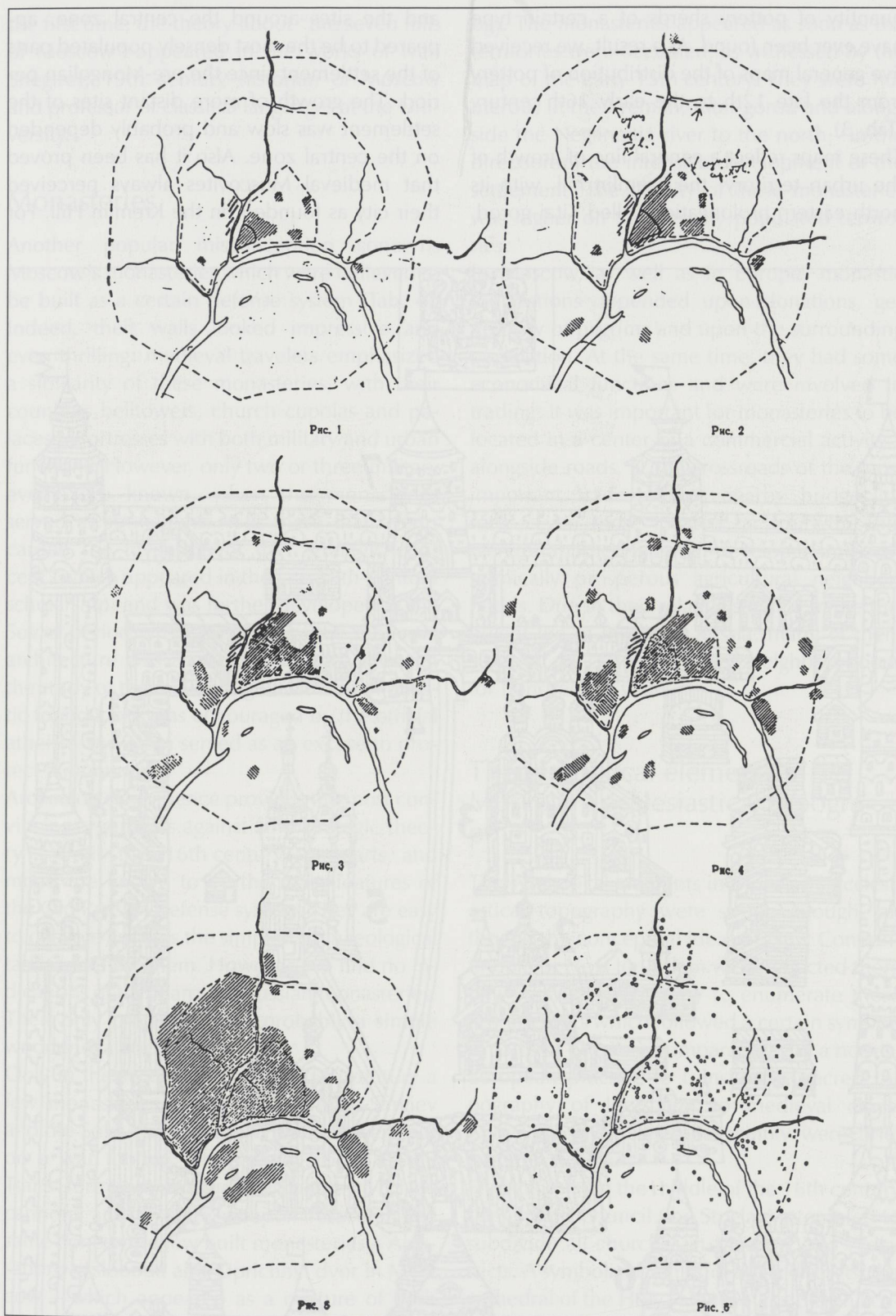
city limits help to study the process of its settlement. The first step was to establish the chronology of all pottery types dating between the 11th and the 17th centuries (Tab. 2). Then, we mark on a map all sites where a reasonable



Tab. 1: A typical example of the transformation of the real plan of Moscow into "the ideal scheme" (from the book of M. Kudriavtsev "Moscow – the Third Rome").



Tab. 2: The types of Moscow pottery from the 12th to the 17th century (according to M. Rabinovich).

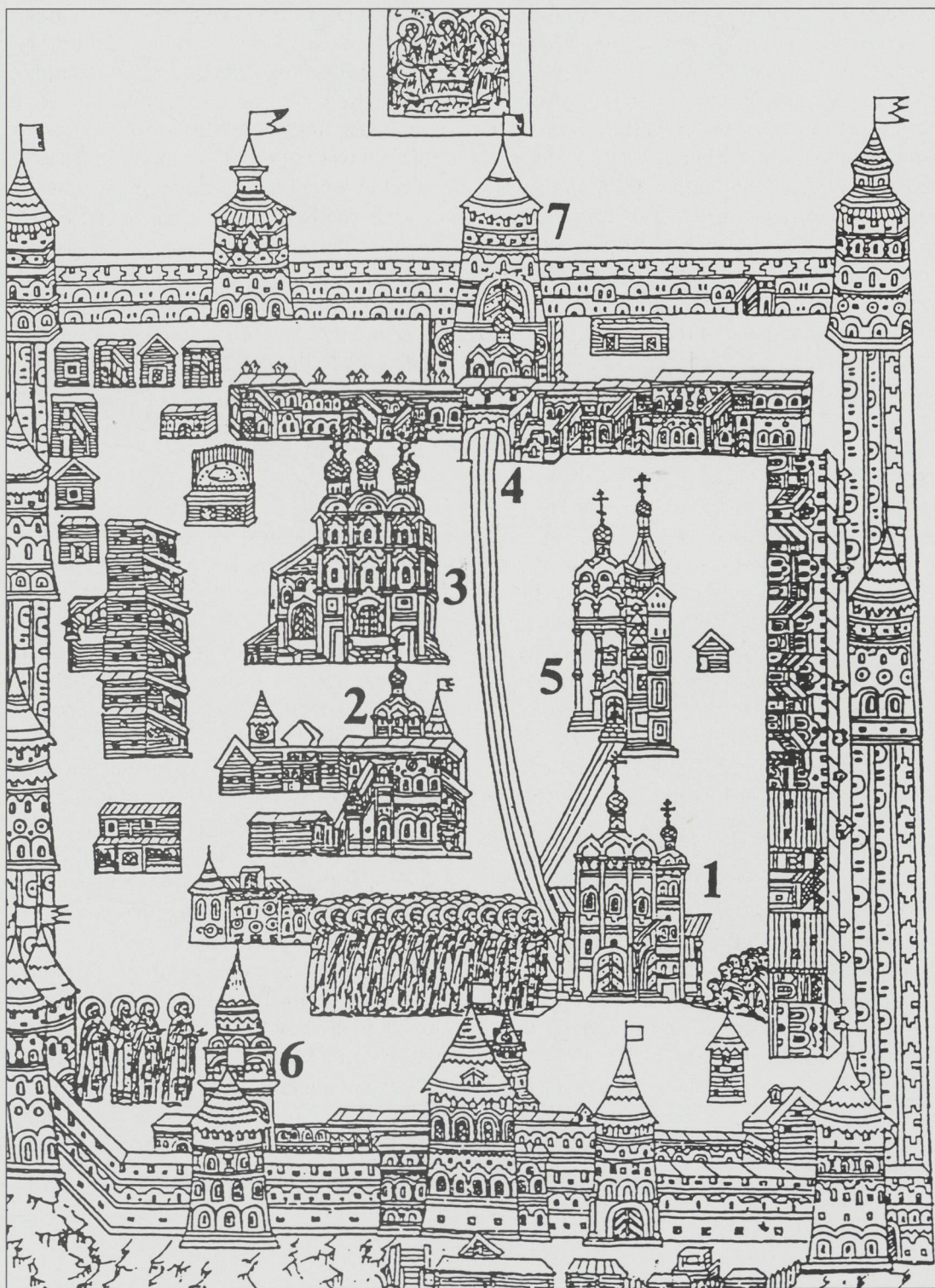


Tab. 3: The settling of Moscow as revealed by distribution of pottery (according to I. Boitsov, 1992): 1) the late 12th and early 13th centuries; 2) up to the middle of the 14th century; 3) up to the early 15th century; 4) up to the middle of the 15th century; 5) up to the early 16th century; 6) final scheme of the pottery distribution on the map of Moscow.

quantity of pottery sherds of a certain type have ever been found. As a result, we received five general maps of the distribution of pottery from the late 12th to the early 16th century (Tab. 3).

These maps reflect a general line of growth of the urban territory: the Kremlin hill, with its north-eastern prolongation called Kitai-gorod,

and the sites around the central zone, appeared to be the most densely populated parts of the settlement since the pre-Mongolian period. The growth of more distant sites of the settlement was slow and probably depended on the central zone. Also it has been proved that medieval Muscovites always perceived their city as founded on the Kremlin Hill. For



Tab. 4: Idealized depiction of a fortified Russian monastery (from the 17th century Russian icon).

the first time, the theory about "the seven hills of Moscow" appeared in the works of Ivan Snegirev, 19th century historian of Moscow and professor of classical languages at the University.

Monasteries

Another popular misconception concerns Moscow's monasteries which were believed to be built as a certain defense system (Tab. 4). Indeed, their walls looked impressive and even thrilling: medieval travelers emphasized a similarity of these monasteries, with their countless belltowers, church cupolas and palaces to fortresses with both military and urban functions. However, only two or three military events are known, when the monasteries served as strongholds. It is these that events caused the invention of the "strategic concept" which appeared in the late 19th-century scholarship, and was further developed in the Soviet period when the issue of the monastic architecture was a forbidden topic, although the study of the military significance of monastic foundations was encouraged by the official atheism and often served as an excuse to protect a monument.

Archaeological evidence provides the most convincing arguments against "the strategic theory". Until the 16th century, ramparts and moats are known to be the main features of the Old Russian defense system. They are easy to observe and it is the simplest archaeological task to identify them. However, we find no indications of them around Russian monasteries. Their only protection was probably a simple wooden wall or fence.

Only in the second half of the 16th century a few monasteries, such as the Troitse-Sergiev and the Solovetsky on the White Sea were put on a war footing. They were rebuilt as the Tsar's fortresses to quarter troops, to place cannons and to store weapon reserves. The same concerns anew built monasteries – Aleksandrova sloboda and Oprichnyi dvor in Moscow – which appeared as a mixture of both monastic and court architecture. However, their defensive functions are improbable. It is most likely, that Ivan the Terrible kept in these monasteries enormous values, collected as a result of his pillage.

The real role of monasteries in the urban development of Moscow is revealed by archaeol-

ogy. The monasteries appeared as soon as the territories were occupied, as witnessed by the map of the early 15th century. They were numerous in the Kremlin, Kitai-gorod and alongside the Neglinnaja river to the north – in the direction of the intensive development of the settlement. The density of these monasteries was higher on the densely populated territories.

In Moscow, as well as in Europe, monastic foundations depended upon donations, generosity of pilgrims and upon the surrounding population. At the same time, they had some economical functions and were involved in trading. It was important for monasteries to be located in a center of a commercial activity – alongside roads, at the crossroads of the most important trade routes, nearby bridges or fords. Even those located far from the city were established in a well-developed and economically prosperous agricultural neighborhoods. Due to their relative stability in the turbulent life of medieval Russia, many of them survived as centers of their neighbourhoods for hundreds of years.

The symbolical elements in Moscow's ecclesiastical topography

The symbolical elements in Moscow's ecclesiastical topography were strong enough, although the conceptual ideas of New Constantinople or New Jerusalem were reflected there only indirectly. It is easy to enumerate those few attempts which followed a certain symbolic pattern. They are comparable with a normal European practice to transfer the sacred topography of Jerusalem to medieval cities. Above all, these attempts mainly were brief and unsuccessful.

For example, in the middle of the 16th century the Church Council (the Stoglav) attempted to subdivide all churches in Moscow into 7 districts. A symbolical center of these districts, the cathedral of the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, was erected in the St Daniil monastery. However, the monastery, which was located at the periphery of Moscow, played no role in the further development of architecture or urban planning, and this new system never influenced the ecclesiastical topography of the city of Moscow.

A later attempt to rebuild the Kremlin as a symbolic copy of the Holy Places of Jerusalem was undertaken by Tzar Boris Godunov. It was of modest success. The Golgotha was erected on the Red Square, nearby St Basil the Blessed. In the early 17th century, inside the Kremlin, the Holy of Holiness and the Golden Sepulchre were under construction. But they never were completed, and we have no idea what they might have looked like.

The last significant project, the attempt of Patriarch Nikon to transfer the sacred topography of the Holy Places to Russia, was influenced by European examples, like the Franciscan idea of the Sacro Monte. The exact copy of the Holy Sepulchre, called the New Jerusalem, was built outside Moscow as a lonely artistic and symbolic experiment. It had no impact either on the development of Russian urban planning or architecture. We know no other significant attempt to transfer the topography or architecture either of Constantinople, Rome or Jerusalem to Moscow.

I would like to emphasize, that I do not oppose in general the importance of the concept of "The Third Rome" for the development of Moscow culture. Evidently, the idea of Constantinople (or, on a lesser scale – of Jerusalem or Rome) was somehow attractive for Moscow's rulers. But its impact was limited to the spheres of policy and theology. The sources of the regular urban planning of Moscow were more practical than ideological. They were rooted in a social character of a medieval Russian city.

Social or Ideological?

Indeed, the plan of Moscow had acquired some features of regularity, for example, round walls and straight parallel streets. Certainly they must have appeared as the result of the deliberate activity and deserve a special consideration. Are there any aesthetic, political and religious ideas concealed behind them?

As a capital of the principality, Moscow was not only deliberately built by its rulers, but it was deliberately populated by them. The Russian rulers tried to attract population by all means, starting from granted tax-relieves, free plots of land and even loans. But a war was a cheaper and a shorter way to populate a city. Moscow is an excellent example of changing

the demography on a war footing. Moscow was extremely successful in wars since the late 15th century. Due to this, the territory protected by the old walls outgrew over 20 times its original size in less than one hundred years. Hundreds of families were "transferred" to Moscow and settled there at the outskirts (we permanently meet the word "vedenetz" ("transferred person") on the 16th century graveslabs). It explains the appearance of regularly designed suburban areas laid out as grid extensions. Plots of land and even whole districts received a rectangular shape; streets came out wide and straight; parish churches were located at equal distances.

One can recognize it on the map of Moscow: it is easy to distinguish two main parts of the territory of Belii gorod. The eastern part, closer to the Kremlin, has an explicitly medieval plan, with a chaotic net of streets. Since the 14th century it was mainly occupied by estates of the Princely family. The western part, across the river, which was settled between the late 15th and the early 16th century, is quite different. It has a regular plan, with a net of long straight streets, crossed by wide "fire-protective" roads, with small squares marked by parish churches. In this part we found a lot of pottery unknown in the other parts of Moscow, but typical for Novgorod and Pskov.

The Italians

Another important aspect in the further development of Moscow's architecture and urban planning is connected with the Renaissance conceptual structures and architectural theories striving for the ideal of classical perfection. In the 16th century, the city of Moscow had turned into a megalopolis. Travelers compared it with London, Paris and Prague. The same processes of the reshaping of the urban planning which were taking place in European cities during the late medieval and new modern periods, had started in Moscow. It is well known that masters from Europe – the Italians, Germans, Dutch or English – played an important role in the reshaping of the city.

The Italians worked in Russia almost uninterruptedly for 70 years (1475–1543), and they were trusted in the most important governmental matters. This period of the increased contacts between the Moscow State and Italy

turned out to be of a crucial importance for Moscow's history: Moscow had started its gradual and steady drift to the West; it coincided with the rapid urbanization of Moscow; basic features of the Moscow urban planning and architecture were established during this period.

Two important stages are especially distinguished in the activity of the Italian masters in Moscow: the construction of the Moscow Kremlin, when the Kremlin fortress was completely rebuilt to befit the new role of the Moscow rulers among the European monarchs, and the formation of the system of the future topography of Moscow as the capital of the State. This system influences even contemporary city planning. To be exact, one can say that modern Moscow was born in the 16th century. The main role in the latter belongs to the Italian engineers, architects and city planners, who established the new "Moscow urban style". The construction of the Kremlin churches, palace and walls, and re-planning of the city of Moscow was not only a display of architectural skill. The Italians introduced to Moscow certain Renaissance ideas which were already widespread in Europe, but absolutely unknown in Russia.

Moscow's architecture adapted the Italian contribution during the whole century. Buildings erected under their supervision served as patterns until the early 18th century. Many distinctive edifices were erected in Moscow and surroundings in which architectural ideas from the earlier Italian monuments were used. But the actual quantity is not the important aspect – important are the architectural concepts introduced by the new Renaissance mentality to Russian architecture and city planning.

The central part of Moscow has been crucially reshaped. The territories alongside and nearby the walls were cleared; the whole medieval

district, with dozens of old or new yards, houses, churches and even cemeteries were demolished. New city gates in the built anew walls changed the directions of the main streets and caused deviations in church orientations. These changes are not recorded in written sources and could be proved only by archaeology. All axes of the Kitay-gorod churches correspond to the contemporary 16th-century streets, even in cases when they did not correspond to the traditional Eastern orientation, although the remnants of the yards, churches and cemeteries of the previous period have a different orientation, connected probably with another network of streets.

All this together means, that the features of the regular urban planning in the late-medieval Moscow were caused by peculiarities of the social development of the city as well as by the innovations of the early modern city-planning, brought from the West. An architectural version of the concept "Moscow – the Third Rome" seems to be, in such a context, irrelevant. Besides, it is supported neither by written, nor archaeological evidence. Moreover, archaeology brings us more and more information on the real process of the urban development of medieval Moscow.

Conclusion

Although archaeological study of Moscow's historical topography is just taking its first steps – it becomes evident that medieval Moscow appeared to be neither the Third Rome, nor the Second Constantinople, nor the New Jerusalem. Nevertheless, she is one of the youngest capitals of the Christian world and deserves a scholarly approach, similar to that applied by John Baldwin and Richard Krautheimer to Jerusalem, Rome, Milan and Constantinople.

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