**Teacher case**

Текст предназначен для подготовки учителя к уроку. Во втором разделе содержится дополнительная информация, которая будет полезна при выполнении задания № 6 (об архитектуре храма), задания № 7 (об археологических находках). Дополнительную информацию для задания № 8 можно найти во втором и третьем разделах (о кирпичной кладке стен, белокаменных украшениях и фундаменте храма).

**1. General information**

The Church of the Ascension has been added to UNESCO’s List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage along with two other sites of the Russian capital – the Moscow Kremlin and Red Square ensemble and the Novodevichy Convent. The architectural concept of the Church of the Ascension was untypical of its epoch and became a visual incarnation of cultural interaction between Russia and Europe within the frames of European Renaissance architecture. Traits of various cultural traditions such as Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic and Old Russian meet and interact in the architecture of the church so that its uniqueness was valued even by contemporaries. Since the consecration of the church in 1532, it has been an architectural dominant of the grand-ducal and royal palace ensembles of Kolomenskoye. It also gave an impulse to the development of a new movement in ecclesiastical architecture opening a sequence of amazing tent-roof monuments.

The opening of the renovated ground floor exposition at the Church of the Ascension was timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of its inclusion into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994. In Russian architecture, the basement or low ground floor of a stone or wooden dwelling or a church was traditionally used for household purposes. However, in the XVI-XVII centuries, a church basement or ground floor could serve as a burial place.

The inner space of the ground floor is divided into two sections: the narthex and the room under the church. In the first hall (the narthex) you can see replicas of measurement plans and XIX century restoration projects from the museum stock, the icon of Our Lady of the Sovereign as well as an interactive space including a film screen and an electronic kiosk. In the second hall (the room under the church) you will find genuine fragments of white stone carved décor as well as archaeological objects. Following the chronology of the exposition, we offer to start the tour from the room under the church.

**2. Room under the church**

The exhibits are displayed in a big glass showcase in the center of the hall. In the cruciform showcase that replicates the general plan of the church, you can see everyday life items, details related to the period of the church construction and decoration as well as fragments of white-stone carving.

By the XIV-XV centuries, a big village had already developed on the bank of the Moskva River. It was frequently mentioned in written sources such as testaments of Moscow Dukes and others. At that time Kolomenskoye made part of the grand-ducal household. The Church of the Ascension was the first stone church built in this region. It was erected on the right bank of the Moskva River in the first third of the XVI century by order of Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily III.

Excavations around the church revealed cultural layers dating back to the XV – beginning of the XVI century including numerous fragments of everyday life items. Some of them you can see in the showcase, namely numerous fragments of ceramic ware (pans and pots, a scoop, a rattle-ball and a spindle whorl) and metal items (part of a flat copper bracelet with notches, a knife, a hook, a stitching awl and a spur of a noble horseman). You can also see a fragment of China porcelain item with blue underglaze painting, a unique (!) discovery for Moscow of that time. The oak pile and fragments of floor tiling on display date back as late as the period of construction and interior finishing of the church. During the building works the floor was covered with triangular ceramic tiles of brown and black colours put in the envelope pattern.

The whole set of items seems to be more urban than rural as it includes objects of military and palatial everyday life which emphasizes the increasing role of the countryside residence at that time.

According to one of the existing versions, the Church is an incarnate prayer of the Grand Duke of Moscow Vasily III and his young wife Elena Glinskaya to God for an heir to the throne. The royal couple went on a pilgrimage to monasteries and churches and their prayer that sounded all over the country was embodied in the innovatory and uncommon architecture of the Church of the Ascension in Kolomenskoye. Researchers suppose that the foundation of the church may have been laid in 1528 or 1529 when Vasily III together with his young wife made a pilgrimage to the monasteries and churches all over the country vowing to build new churches in hope of the birth of an heir.

As the official chronicles state, the church was consecrated on September 3rd, 1532. That event was a true feast for the grand-ducal family, the court and the church, which was reflected in the miniatures of *Illustrated Chronicle of Ivan the Terrible*. The enlarged copies of the miniatures are used for the showcases decoration and represent the scenes of the church consecration and decoration as well as the feast organized to celebrate the event.

The top members of the Church hierarchy including Metropolitan of All Russia Daniil took part in the consecration of the church. There was the ruling couple (Vasily III and Duchess Elena) with their recently born son Ivan. The big feast given by the Grand Duke lasted for three days. The status of the guests feasting at the ducal courtyard and a voluminous record in the chronicles show the importance of this event.

The author of the project is unknown but many researchers suppose that it was Italian master Pietro Annibale, or Peter Hannibal. In Moscow, he was called Little Petrok meaning ‘the younger, junior Peter’. He was among the architects who arrived in Moscow from Rome in 1528. Until 1539 he lived and worked in the Duchy of Moscow.

The architecture of the church as well as décor elements that have not been found in earlier Russian architecture speak in favor of the Italian origin: the church has pilasters with classical carved capitals in the shape of acanthus leaves and windows in the shape of semicircular arches resting on half-columns with volutes, details typical of Renaissance architecture. Other elements include ogee arches common for late Middle Ages and Renaissance in Italy (especially, for top parts of the portals) and gables, or pointed triangles of Gothic blind arches.

The fragments of white stone carving that used to decorate the church but crumbled from the facade of the building at various historical epochs convey an idea of how the master originally decorated its creation. In the showcase, you can see fragments of carved white stone capitals, window architraves, corner pilasters, shaped bricks and white stone blocks. Carved ornaments have floral motifs: you can trace images of acanthus leaves, palm trees and grapevines.

A lot of white stone or limestone was used to decorate the Church of the Ascension. White stone was still commonly used to build foundations and basement or low ground household floors as well as to create elements of architectural décor. Masters could easily process wet limestone: they cut, turned and dressed it working it up into a needed shape. But eventually the material would become fragile, mushy and darker under the influence of external factors. You can see it if you look at the exhibited pieces of white stone carving: some of them were burnt in flames of the medieval fire that took place in Kolomenskoye in 1571 after the attack of Devlet I Giray, Khan of the Crimean Khanate.

A most important task of the present exposition is to conserve and display the authentic XVI century brickwork and white stone décor elements that have not greatly changed and are of interest both as engineering and architectural art pieces not typical of medieval Russia.

The thickness of the walls reaches 2.5 to 3 metres which causes high humidity and low temperatures inside the church in any seasons. The walls of the ground floor are particularly massive. If you look into one of the two loophole windows that give no light but provide ventilation, you will see how thick the walls are.

In the XX century during the restoration works the floors were totally replaced; the inner walls and the vaults wanted partial re-facing. Fortunately, most of the genuine interior details have survived so that we can imagine what the church looked like in older times, before its facade was painted white. The solemn-looking combination of the dark-red brick and the white stone décor elements is astonishing.

The design of the ground floor included half-columns with order elements, and above the arch connecting the two premises there was a magnificent portal with white stone carving details. The latter is on display at the next hall. Fragments of the ancient carving can be seen only on the side parts of the portal. Apparently, the portal suffered the same fate as the large portals of the upper level – the carving was chipped. The entrance to the ground floor from outdoors is also decorated with an ogee arch supported by columns with order elements which echoes with the upper décor of the main premises.

**3. Narthex**

It is for the first time that you can see the measurement plans and the XIX century restoration projects in full scale and have a more complete idea of the early research and restoration of the church.

The height of the church is impressive even nowadays – 62 metres, 28 metres of which goes to the stone tent roof. In the first half of the XVI century, the church remained the highest building of Russia.

The main monolith part of the church built of large-size brick includes the ground floor, a tetragon above it, an octagon, an eight-facet tent roof and an eight-facet dome drum surmounted with a small dome and a cross. The connection between the lower part of the church and the upper octagonal part is disguised with rows of triple ‘kokoshnik’s’ (ogee-shaped decorations that resemble a unanimous Russian woman’s headdress) from which the eight-facet pillar seems to ascend. The façades of this pillar are decorated with pilasters while the pointed triangular blind arches – gables – adorn the walls of the tetragon, all creating the impression that the entire building is striving upwards. The main element of the church and its chief compositional innovation is the tent – the elongate multi-faceted pyramid rising up into the skies. The skillfully calculated proportions of the tent, massive and light at the same time, are emphasized with a network of white stone diamond-shaped beads.

From the very moment of its creation the Church of the Ascension was the object of great interest. Its history was full of secrets and enigmas. Notably, a wave of interest for the church creation history and unique architectural style rose of the XIX century in the scientific and artistic circles.

In one of the corners of the narthex you can see an opening in the floor showing a fragment of the white stone fundament filling of the church dating back to the 1520s or 1530s. The church was constructed on an unusual fundament. A huge foundation pit was dug on the slope of the river terrace, and then its bottom was strengthened with oak piles. The limestone blocks form huge fundament with a depth that varied from 7.8 to 4.5 metres.

The ground floor of the church is of interest not only as part of an architectural masterpiece but also as a space full of mysteries. Archaeologist Ignaty Stelletsky tried to find here the famous ‘library of Ivan the Terrible’. In the 1920s, a pit many metres in depth was sunk through the stone fundament under his supervision. The library was never found, but the works helped to discover the secret of the ancient fundament.