



Architecture of Oblivion: Ruins and Historical Consciousness in Modern Russia

By Andreas Schönle

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Despite attempts to promote the aesthetics of ruins in Russia—from Catherine the Great’s construction of fake ruins in imperial parks to Josef Brodsky’s elegiac meditations—ruins have never achieved the status they enjoy in Western Europe. While the Soviet Union was notorious for leveling churches, post-Soviet Russia has only intensified the practice of massive destruction and reconstruction.

Architecture of Oblivion examines the role of ruins in the development of Russia’s historical consciousness from the 18th century to the present.

Investigating the meaning and functions ruins have acquired in Russian culture, Schönle looks at ideological reasons for the current disregard for the value of ruins and historical buildings, in particular by political authorities, and reveals how ruins have often become a site of resistance to official ideology and an invitation to map out alternative visions of history and of statehood.

An interdisciplinary study of Russia’s response to ruins has never been attempted, although the topic of ruins has garnered considerable interest in Western Europe and in the U.S. This original work from a leading authority on the subject will appeal to historians of Russian culture and thought, literature and art scholars, and general readers interested in ruins.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This is a most important book, tracing the history of an idea so elusive yet so pervasive that only the most nuanced of approaches is capable of sketching its parameters without reducing it to cliché and caricature. Schönle dips deeply into literature and poetry, philosophy and history, architecture, painting, photography, prints, and the urban fabric itself in search of answers to a question of great relevance to all interested in the nature of modern Russia: what is it in Russia’s attitude to its past that makes it so indifferent to ruins, so hostile to the preservation of that past’s remains? This is intellectual history that is both imaginative and intellectually rigorous, a combination of historical sources and deeply personal aesthetic responses to the events of history.”—Wendy Salmond, Chapman University

About the Author

Andreas Schönle is Professor of Russian at Queen Mary, University of London and author of *The Ruler in the Garden: Politics and Landscape Design in Imperial Russia*.

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