



The architectural ensemble of the Kazan Virgin Monastery from the Kazanka river
Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

architectural history of kazan city in photographs (by frank whitson fetter)

Tatyana Krasheninnikova

Historian, Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, tatyana.vdovina@mail.ru

Ramina Abilova

Historian, The State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan, ramina.abilova@gmail.com

This paper is dedicated to the architectural history of Kazan depicted in photographs by an American economist Frank Whitson Fetter (1902-1991). He visited the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the summer of 1930. During this visit he spent 6 weeks in Kazan, the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Here Fetter studied the Russian language with a tutor. At present, the photographs he took in Kazan are kept at the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University. As an amateur photographer, Fetter took many photographs of Kazan and its outskirts. But his photos differ from tourists' typical snapshots. Fetter had an interest in the Soviet propaganda. Historic and architectural sights were captured by the photographer if only they were paired with the information of the ideological or economic content. Nevertheless, Fetter's photographs contain much important information about the architectural history of Kazan. The authors made an attempt to examine Fetter's series of photographs which was named "Disappearing Kazan" (precisely, "Kazan Temples"). The leading research method used in this study is a dichotomy of concepts -visible/ invisible. The findings of this research can be of some interest to historians.

keywords Frank whitson fetter, Photography, Architectural history, Kazan, Temples, Duke library

The invention of photography laid down a photo chronicle of architectural history. In the late XIX –early XX centuries, in different countries amateur photographers took lots of specific photographs of local surroundings. In England, they witnessed a real boom in recording the material remains of the past to preserve and transfer their images onto the future generations¹. In the first half of the XX century, photographers from different countries were captured by the process of ousting the old to the new, “in which even the recent past is constantly being used up, swept away, torn down, thrown out, traded in”². Eugène Atget photographed disappearing Paris in the beginning of the century. Berenice Abbott shot a rapidly changing New York in the 1930-es. The American economist, Princeton University graduate Frank Whitson Fetter caught his chance to take amateur photographs depicting the formation of a new Soviet state.

Fetter came to the Soviet Union within the tourist program in the summer of 1930, having made a long journey across Europe from Paris to Warsaw. The main purpose of his trip was to learn the Russian language. In Moscow, Fetter stayed for six days. Then he took the route to the East, to the city of Kazan located on the Volga river about 800 km far from Moscow. At that time, Kazan was the capital of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1920). The city's population was a bit over 200, 000 people.

Fetter arrived in Kazan on July 4th, 1930 and spent a month and a half here. He rented a furnished room with full board in downtown. Fetter explored the city and its surroundings, and visited cinemas, gardens and parks. In letters to his wife Elizabeth (Polly) he often shared his impressions with her. Fetter drew a parallel between the Russians and the Spaniards. After watching some films with Charlie Chaplin in one of the Soviet cinemas he wrote to his wife that Russians like Spaniards enjoyed watching comedies: “The Russians are like the Spanish ... they like there comedy in big doses ...”³. He continued mastering the Russian language and made good progress. And again he remembers his Spanish class: “I don't think I'm quite as far ahead as I was with Spanish when I'd been at it this long ...”⁴.

Fetter had a camera *Leica*, which enabled him to photograph a lot. As a result, we have more than 300 photographic images of Kazan and its surroundings. They all are kept in the library of Duke University⁵. The photographic films that Frank Fetter used in Western and Eastern Europe, while taking photos there, were developed in the salon *Kodak*. It is supposed that some photographic films that Fetter used for taking pictures in Kazan were developed by him in domestic conditions. This is evidenced by the quality of the development that can be observed at a certain magnification of shots.

We have identified two series of photographs by Fetter: *Kazan Temples* and *Wooden Kazan*. They can be united by one common topic *Disappearing Kazan*. Most of Fetter's Kazan faded away. It is his photographs that connect us with the past, which is gone, and prove that it was. It should be noted that the causes and the time of the changes in the architectural space of the city in these two cases are diametrically opposed. In the 1920-1930-es, the temple culture and the architecture of Kazan were destroyed purposefully.

This process took place against the background of the struggle of the ruling party of the Bolsheviks with religion and the propaganda of atheism, and the persecution and repression against the clergy who were accused of anti-Soviet activities. In 1928 the mass demolition of churches that were built after 1825 began. A number of temples were destroyed before Fetter's very eyes. Another part of the temple complex was dismantled a few years later; its image was depicted only in some amateur photographs. *Wooden Kazan*, on the contrary, had existed for decades and disappeared from the urban landscape only in the late XX –early XXI century. Along with residential buildings that were in dilapidated conditions, the buildings of historical and architectural value were knocked down. In this paper we will examine in detail the series “*Kazan Temples*”.

architectural history of kazan city in photographs (by frank whitson fetter)

In an essay by J. Berger "Understanding a Photograph", it was noted that the actual content of the photo is invisible; it manifests itself with time. As a result, the meaning of the image is fixed between the two poles: absence and presence. "The most popular use of the photograph is as a memento of the absent"⁶. Speculations over this series lead to another dichotomy of concepts –visible/ invisible: "A photograph, whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum"⁷. In this respect each photograph is a symbol of the presence of absence, or as identified by S. Sontag a "pseudo-presence"⁸.

Based on this approach, we investigated both visible and invisible in Fetter's photos. The visible part of the photo series forced us to answer the question "What is missing (invisible) and what is hidden behind visible in it?" We came to understanding that this concept might be the transition of epochs. His photographs and brief notes give reason to believe that the lens of his camera could capture some details of that past epoch and the period of the transition of epochs.

Further investigation of the photo series allows determining Fetter's viewpoint. It is the point of view of a professional economist, not a photographer (he was an amateur photographer). The architectural objects were in the focus of his attention when he recorded the urban landscape features. We can see close-ups of Orthodox cathedrals and churches, general plans of the construction of the Kazan Kremlin, etc. It should be underlined that architectural landmarks happened to appear in the photos if they carried the information of the ideological content, including Soviet propaganda. Despite the lack of close-ups of stylistic features of the architectural buildings, Fetter's photos contain a lot of important information about the history of Kazan architecture of the early 1930-es. Thanks to these fragments the whole picture is gathered which reflects the turning point in the architectural history of Kazan.



f1_Rykova street

(at present, Telmana street), Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

Fetter lived in downtown near the ancient Kremlin walls (**f1**). Most of this area of Kazan consisted of wooden buildings. Wood in Russia was the traditional building material since ancient times because it was available, traditional, and, what is most important, able to keep heat in 40 degree frosts. The camera lens of Fetter caught the decoration of the facade of the wooden houses, the trim on the windows, balconies, the gates, courtyards of the residents, firewalls, etc.

There were lots of Orthodox churches and monastic buildings towering over *the islands of wooden architecture* around. One of the largest architectural complexes at that period of time was Kazan Virgin Monastery. The construction of the buildings of the Monastery was connected with the great event of the 1579 year when the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God was found. First there was built a wooden church in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Frequent fires caused irreparable damage to the buildings of the Monastery. Only in the early XIX century, in honor of the Appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God in the city of Kazan there was built a stone cathedral in the classical style, which became the dominant feature of the architectural ensemble⁹.

The Monastery was abolished in 1920s. Its premises were transferred to the Soviet organizations that used the Monastery as a student hostel, a grain storage, etc. In May 1932, the main Cathedral was blown up. On the territory of the Monastery there were built manufacturing buildings of the tobacco factory and residential buildings. Thus, the major pre-revolutionary architectural complex was almost completely destroyed, some of its traces being preserved in the rare amateur photos though. The Bolsheviks chose the way of *tabula rasa* –the violent destruction of unwanted places of memory of the pre-revolutionary era. All sorts of reminders of the past contradicting the Soviet system of values were gradually eliminated out of public sight.

Fetter's photos allow restoring the image of the Monastery buildings of the transitional period. In three photos of 1930, he captured a moment when the Monastery was already abolished, the bells were removed, the monastic cells were inhabited by new tenants, but the Orthodox community of the Church still kept on going.

The first photograph depicted a general view of the architectural ensemble of the monastery from the Kazanka river (Cover image). The Monastery occupies a dominant position in the composition of the architectural ensemble. It is located on a high site, contrasting sharply with the residential wooden buildings in the frequently flooded low coastal part of the Kazanka river. In the center of the photo one can identify the main five-domed cathedral of the Monastery (blown up in 1932) and on the right –the 55-metre bell tower (lost after 1935). On the left, the Church of Saint Nicholas with a hemispherical dome is seen, which was destroyed in 1932.

The second picture shows a close-up of the Kazan Cathedral of the Virgin Monastery from Yapeeva street (**f2**). Fetter again chose an interesting angle that was rarely found in the pre-revolutionary photos –the exterior view of the altar part of the Cathedral. In this photo it is clearly seen that in 1930 the Cathedral was still towered by domes with crosses.



f2_The Kazan Cathedral of the Virgin Monastery from Yapeeva street

USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

architectural history of kazan city in photographs (by frank whitson fetter)

The third photo can be called one of the most important in this series, for it contains a bright omen of that time –the period of the transition of epochs (**f3**). The photo depicts the entrance gate to the Monastery from Poperechno-Kazan street (at present –Yapeeva street). The moment of the transition of epochs can be noticed due to the presence of two diametrically opposed, in their semantic meaning, symbols. We see a general view of the Kazan Cathedral and the entrance gate as a part of the past/ present. The over-gate part kept the images of Kazan Saints-Guria, Varsonofy, Herman and Hermogenes, who held the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God. These church symbols peacefully coexisted with the attributes of a new ideology –red flags installed in the brackets, which symbolized the power of the Soviets.



f3_The entrance gate to the Monastery from Yapeeva street
Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

The camera of Fetter recorded the meeting of two epochs, which for some time seemed to tolerate each other: the ideology of atheism and Orthodox faith. But the victory of the new power is obvious. In his letter to Polly, Fetter described his observations: “although it is not true that priests are shot at sunrise in Russia, they are not exactly the most highly respected members of the communists”¹⁰.

These three photos have an aesthetic appeal, which is to produce an effect of the *immediate presence* of Kazan Virgin Cathedral in the photographic image, despite its factual absence in the present day urban environments. They link the present with the past, showing the Cathedral *here and now*, accessing the architectural history of Kazan. Viewing photographs involves not only the mode of the object perception, but also perception in the temporal respect, which actualizes the problem of the absence of the Cathedral and the temporality of things. There emerges an ontological game: the Cathedral exists and does not exist.

Currently the historical value of these photos of Fetter has been actualized. In November 2015, a decree on the reconstruction of the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God was adopted. On the basis of archaeological researches, archival documents and visual sources, the restoration of the Cathedral is being planned. In this regard, Fetter's photographs turn out to be utterly important historical sources, as they date back to the time shortly before the destruction of the Cathedral.

The complex of the Kazan Kremlin became another object for Fetter (**f4**). In his photograph taken from the Northern side of the fortress, there were depicted the main buildings of the white stone edifices: the building of the Governor's Palace (XIX century), the Tainitskaya Tower (XVI century) and the walls of the former fortress. There is a visual image of two Orthodox churches –the Cathedral of the Annunciation (XVI century) and the Palace Church (XIX century). The Suyumbike Tower (XVII-XVIII centuries) stands out by its architecture and dominant position.

Its name is connected with the name of the Tatar Queen Suyumbike. Although the photo is in black and white, it is clear that the tower contrasts in color with the other buildings. Indeed, it is the only building that was made of red brick, while all Orthodox churches were originally built of Volga limestone; hence the name of the white-stone Kremlin originated. Due to the peculiarity of the foundation it leans in the direction of North-East by almost two meters. The tower was tightened by an iron belt during restoration works (1914-1916). In Fetter's photo one can easily notice the iron belt, which had covered the lower tier of the tower.



f4. The complex of the Kazan Kremlin
Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

This picture is the only one in the collection of Fetter, which depicted the state of architectural monuments that survived, almost without major changes, till our time. It might seem that the process of the destruction of Orthodox shrines on the territory of the Kremlin did not affect. However, the second image taken by Fetter from the southern part of the Kremlin makes this conclusion non-obvious. This is a picture of the Spasskaya tower of the Kremlin (f5). The tower is decorated with the portrait of Lenin and banners to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Tatar Republic. In the background, the domes of the Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery (XVI century), which was destroyed in the 1930-es, are visible. All churches and monasteries on the territory of the Kremlin were closed shortly after the 1917 revolution, but the buildings themselves for some period of time kept preserved. Although the building of the Cathedral of the Annunciation was preserved due to the fact that it was decided to use it for the storage of archival documents, and the Palace Church was used as a canteen for the Soviet workers, all the other buildings of the religious communities were wiped out. In this way, visually distinguishable in Fetter's photographs domes and Orthodox crosses of the Spaso-Preobrazhensky monastery once again return us back to the absent past, but still present in the visual space of Fetter.

Random churches and cathedrals were caught in frames when Fetter shot a general panorama of the urban space, or took a series of photos with a definite plot. Also we counted another 9 objects of the temple complexes. At the time of shooting on all dome coatings there survived crosses as the main symbol of the Christian Church. But no Church photographed by Fetter functioned at that time. St. Peter and Paul Cathedral (XVIII century) designed in the Russian Baroque style with rich decor and bright coloring made the only exception. Its decoration was sometimes called stony hanging gardens because the stucco was done in the form of flowers, leaves and fruits of grapes, pears, apples. The Cathedral was functioning until 1939. After its closing, it housed a planetarium. The return of the Cathedral to the bosom of the Orthodox Church took place in 1989.

architectural history of kazan city in photographs (by frank whitson fetter)



f5_The Spasskaya tower of the Kremlin
Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

In two panoramic photos of the central street of Kazan (Bauman street), in the background, there can be seen a silhouette of a 74 meter Bell Tower of the Cathedral of the Epiphany (the end of XIX century), which in the Soviet years was the city metropolitan Cathedral until it was closed in 1939. The temple itself (XVIII century) is not visible in the photo because it was located in the depths of the buildings. The Bell Tower is constructed in the eclectic style and combines modernized Russian motifs with geometric shapes. The decor items were made of gauged red brick; arched openings with pediments and arches in the upper tiers were used. These two photos are a vivid example of the transition of epochs –there are shown the Bell Tower and the symbols of the Soviet power: flags and new signs of government institutions. However, the Bell Tower has remained the main city-forming item and still continues to be an architectural symbol of the city. In the 1990-es the Cathedral of the Epiphany was returned to the Russian Orthodox Church.



f6_The destruction of the Church
Kazan, USSR, 1930, Frank Whitson Fetter

Suchlike changes in the modern architectural history of Kazan –the return of functions to ancient buildings and the restoration of ruined churches– evidence the reference to the past that had been wasted during the Soviet period of time. But, surely, not all losses will be reimbursed. They can continue to be present in the photos and be absent in the urban space. In one single photo of Fetter, the moment of the destruction of the Church, the location of which has not been established so far, is fixed. The photo depicts the dismantling of the upper tier of the tower **(f6)**. This photo can be called a symbol of the destruction of the old regime to build a new one. The bricks were used for the construction of roads. The bells were melted.

In modern Russian researches on the history of the city architecture, photography is rarely considered as a historical source. Most attention is paid to other kinds of visual sources – topographic surveys, old postcards, engravings, artistic paintings, etc. In recent years, attempts to restore the appearance of the lost architecture of Kazan by collecting and publishing photos from private and state archives are being made¹¹. Fetter's photos contain the effect of the presence of the past images although they are absent in the contemporary urban space. However, not all the gaps can be filled. At that period of time there were a lot of mosques in Kazan, but none of them were captured by Fetter. In few photos one can see the representatives of the Tatar population, but there are no photos of Tatarskaya Sloboda in Fetter's collection.

For certain, the practice of viewing Fetter's series of photos will depend on the experience of the viewer, for reading photographs "always historical" and "depends on the reader's knowledge"¹². In addition to visible objects –the analogue of reality– in a photo there is something invisible, which contains a set of additional meanings and implications for the viewer. In our case, Fetter's photos revealed the architectural history of Kazan at the crossroads. Thus, photographs by Fetter allow filling in the gaps in the architectural history of Kazan, and composing it from the wreckage of the past. It is worth mentioning that they restore our knowledge about the stone and wooden architecture of the city. Whereas the stone temple architectural ensembles were exposed to destruction in the Soviet times, the wooden ones were demolished in the post-Soviet period (1990-es - early 2000-es). This highlights the importance of the photographic collection of Fetter in the study of Kazan architecture history.

endnotes

1. See Elizabeth Edwards. *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012).
2. Susan Sontag. *On photography* (New York: Picador, 2001), 53.
3. The Letter to Mother dated by July, 21-st, 1930. Travel – Russia – Correspondence – 1930. Frank Whitson Fetter Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
4. The Letter to Mother dated by August, 2-nd, 1930.
5. "Images from the Frank Whitson Fetter Collection". Frank Whitson Fetter Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Accessed July 25, 2016. <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/esr/fetter/>.
6. John Berger. "Understanding a Photograph", in *Classic Essays on Photography*, edited by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 21.
7. Berger, p. 21.
8. Sontag, p. 28.
9. *The Miraculous Kazan Icon of the Mother of God. The Kazan Virgin Monastery*. Album. (Kazan: Center for Innovative Technologies, 2016).
10. The Letter to Polly dated by July 3-d, 1930.

architectural history of kazan city in photographs (by frank whitson fetter)

11. See, for example, Aidarov, Ravil S. *The Kazan wooden house in the XIX - early XX centuries. Watercolors & Drawings*. (Kazan: Kazan-Kazan, 2016); Milashevskii, G. A. *Old Kazan. Photo portrait. A book-album*. (Kazan: Zaman, 2005); Sanachin, Sergei P. *The architectural life of Soviet Kazan: An illustrated narration at the intersection of history and urban development in the period of 1918-1991*. (Kazan: Foliant, 2015)

12. Roland Barthes. "The Photographic Message", in *Roland Barthes: Image - Music - Text*. Ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1997).

bibliography

_Aidarov, Ravil S. *The Kazan wooden house in the XIX - early XX centuries. Watercolors & Drawings*. Kazan: Kazan-Kazan, 2016.

_Barthes, Roland. "The Photographic Message", in *Roland Barthes: Image - Music - Text*. Ed. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1997.

_Berger, John. "Understanding a Photograph", in *Classic Essays on Photography*. Ed. Alan Trachtenberg. New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980.

_Edwards, Elizabeth. *The camera as a historian: amateur photographers and historical imagination, 1885-1918*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012.

_ "Images from the Frank Whitson Fetter Collection". Frank Whitson Fetter Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Accessed July 25, 2016. <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/esr/fetter/>.

_Milashevskii, G. A. *Old Kazan. Photo portrait. A book-album*. Kazan: Zaman, 2005.

_Sanachin, Sergei P. *The architectural life of Soviet Kazan: An illustrated narration at the intersection of history and urban development in the period of 1918-1991*. Kazan: Foliant, 2015.

_Sontag, Susan. *On photography*. New York: Picador, 2001.

_The Miraculous Kazan Icon of the Mother of God. The Kazan Virgin Monastery (2016). Album. Kazan: Center for Innovative Technologies.

_Travel – Russia – Correspondence – 1930. Frank Whitson Fetter Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

CV

Tatyana Krasheninnikova. PhD, Associate Professor at Kazan Federal University (Russia). She holds courses "The Cultural history of Soviet Russia of the 1920-1930-es", "Current problems of modern history of Russia", etc. within the BA and MA programs. Her research interests focus on history of the Soviet Union (the USSR) and politics and ideology of the Soviet society. Tatyana Krasheninnikova studies diaries, memoirs and letters of the Soviet period of time with their further publication in Russian scholarly journals. Tatyana Krasheninnikova is the co-author of the book "The Historian Life's Journey" about the Russian historian E. Ustyuzhanin (2012). Her writings are found in volumes and in scholarly journals. She contributes to the forthcoming publication about the history of museums of the Republic of Tatarstan (2017). She is a continuing member of steering committees of Regional conferences for High school History teachers and pre-service teachers. Tatyana Krasheninnikova has presented at International conferences in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Kazan, Ryazan, among others.

Ramina Abilova. Senior researcher and photographer at the State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia). Ramina Abilova's main research interest focuses on amateur photographs of the rural population in Russia and their links to everyday life history. She examines amateur photographs and albums of Tatar villages in the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia) as primary sources in historical studies. Currently completing her PhD on the Russian historiography of photography at Kazan Federal University. Her papers about photography are published in different Russian journals ("Echo of Centuries", "Philology and Culture", "The Bulletin of Chuvash State University", etc.). She has presented at International conferences on photography in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, London, Helsinki, Leicester, etc.