

# Russian Style in Fashion: History and Modernity

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## Origin of the Term “Russian Style”

Russian style refers to a great history of craft, art and lifestyle. Nevertheless, it is difficult to define the term “Russian style” because of massive impact of other cultures, first of all Byzantine, Mongolian and Turkish.

So the term “Russian style” can be taken in a broadside approach. Ordinarily the “Russian style” is considered a wide range of atemporal elements, such as the rectangular cut of traditional clothing, multilayer style of wear, wide sleeves, fabulous textiles, magnificent decoration and ornamentation, in addition with their symbolic meaning and disposition.

For many centuries Russia, in particular Muscovy was not well known by western people. There were some political and economical contacts, but for the most the country developed in its own way. Western world knew almost nothing about Russian culture; the country was considered exotic and mysterious. In the XX century the situation changed; because of famous “Russian Seasons” arranged by Sergei Diaghilev and immigrants, who were to leave the country after Revolution, the Russian style came into fashion.

Today many western designers draw inspiration from Russian style. Exoticism and immaterialism of the Slavonic culture witch foreign artists; their collections are designed with cultural codes that refer to Russian traditions such as – kokoshnik, kerchief “babushka”, khokhloma painting and gzhel colors, etc. To get the meaning and to appreciate all these codes it is necessary to learn more about the country, its history and traditions.

## West meets East: the Russian Style Formation

A cold climate and the availability of locally produced textiles dictated the first form of the Russian fashion since antiquity. Close religious, political, economic, and cultural ties with the Byzantine Empire had a noticeable effect on the shapes of clothing, especially that of the nobility. The Viking origin of Russian rulers, the interaction with their Scandinavian neighbors in the north, and trade with Western Europe had a particular strong impact on this development.

Usually the Russian style is connoted with the Russian Tzardom<sup>1</sup>, its religion, customs and culture based both on ancient pagan and Christian beliefs, aesthetic ideals and Domostroy ethics. All these tendencies were embodied in clothing and fashion.

The Russian traditional clothing was created within centuries, chiseling lines and silhouettes, matching colours and patterns, designing golden and silver embroidery. In XV-XVII centuries a traditional Russian dress was modernized in accordance with western, in particular German and Polish fashion trends but the fundamental concept of multilayer clothing that secreted body shapes was kept. Magnificent precious garments of Russian nobles were examples of the Russian style of the time.

First of all it is necessary to describe a female beauty ideal. It was done by Johann Korb (1672-1741), an Austrian diplomat and traveler in the very best way. He wrote: "Women in Muscovy have shapely builds and pretty faces"<sup>2</sup>. The English doctor Samuel Collins (1619-1670) remarked that "The beauty of the women they place in their fatness. Narrow feet and slender waist are alike ugly in their sight."<sup>3</sup>.

The ideal beauty was considered a healthy tall white face girl with long dark hair and brown eyebrows. This was cultivated in terems, boyar palaces where Russian noble ladies spent all their lives. Women of nobility were isolated from the world and spent their lives praying and doing handicraft. Religion, society and family hierarchy controlled all spheres of their life and their values and behavior (Fig. 1, 2)<sup>4</sup>.

Court culture glorified corpulence and quiescence as an attribute of high social position. Noble garments were designed to create the illusion of full and static body shapes. According to customs ladies obscured the shapes of their bodies with dresses, leaving just face and fingers. Eastern fashion of multilayer clothing, the Christian body concept and the Russian ideal of fullness were combined in the idea of this costume (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1: A fiancée. Konstantin Makovsky. 1884. Serpukhov, Art historical Museum.

Dresses hanging in loose folds, double clothing made with damask textiles, golden or silver brocade, silk lined garments decorated with fur and feather – together all these shaped the pyramidal silhouette of women's clothing. Garments were supposed to support woman's appearance as graceful lord-like.

Uprush vertical line dominated Russian fashion. A wide hem med with golden fringes created a massive pedestal for a head crowned with a pearl drop coronet. This garment contoured a magic circle around a lady making her appear approachless and sinless. Usually noble dresses were more ornamented and finished in accordance with Eastern custom than western European court cloths. Expensive textiles, golden and silver embroidering, richness in colour, precious buttons, gems and jewels emphasized the social position of a wearer. The Tsar's and Tsarina's garments were so magnificent, bright and luxurious that they dazzled ambassadors and foreign visitors<sup>5</sup>.

Russian fashion of the XVII century embodied all cultural contradictions of the time. It was a mirror of historical and sociological aspects of the state. Developed from ancient Slavonic clothing, garments of Muscovy absorbed new contemporary cultural tendencies stipulated by closer contacts with foreign countries. Characteristic elements were borrowed from German, Polish and Byzantine costume<sup>6</sup>.



*Fig. 2: Kissing Custom (At the Feast of Boyar Morozov). Konstantin Makovsky. 1895. The State Russian Museum.*



*Fig. 3: Boyarysbnay at the window (with a distaff). Konstantin Makovskiy. 1890s. Nizhniy Novgorod, The Art Museum.*

### “Russian style” in Court Fashion of the XVIII-XIX centuries

At the beginning of XVIII century Tsar Peter I (1672-1725) initiated reforms in social, political and cultural spheres; these changes also touched fashion design. Dated 1700 the decreitive initiative forced people to follow western fashion.

According to a penalty controlled ordinance, citizens and gentry were ordered to wear a new type of clothing - camisole, culottes and buckle shoes for men, corset and pannier skirt for women. Moreover nobles were to use cosmetics, European fashionable hair style or puff wigs.

Tsar Peter the Great strived to make western fashion the new standard for Russian society. Nevertheless, it was difficult to change national traditions, customs and mentality. Western fashion stood in sharp contrast to Russian style in respect of design concept, cut, ornamentation and finishing. Many nobles were in opposition to reforms and old traditions were kept jealously; therefore, the instruction of western fashion and lifestyle struggled through; but garments in the Russian style lost to German, Saxon and French court fashion and a new beauty ideal aroused.



In spite of the fact that at the beginning of XVIII century the French court was a pacemaker in fashion Russian dress was developed under the strong influence of Dutch and German burger clothing. Tsar Peter's personal favors and a more active life style of Russian nobles contributed to a distinctly casual, functional and comfortable fashion design. The western influence on clothing, in the contrary did not mean that the national textile industry was kept down in any way. Tsar Peter provided strong support for domestic manufacturers and restricted the import of foreign goods.

In the reign of Catharina II (1762-1796) new aesthetics and beauty ideals came to fashion. Fashionistas and beauties of the epoch in their marvelous gowns were portrayed by the best painters (Fig. 4). Garments were considered to be a material exponent of state, social position, wealth and taste. Royal decrees regulated silhouettes, textiles and the decoration of a court dress that usually followed the French fashion. It seemed that traditional clothing was neglected and buried in oblivion, but westernization of Russian lifestyle as a reaction revived national identity.

It is hard to imagine but it was Empress Catharina II (1729-1796), originally a German princess, who understood the importance of national clothing to express the pride and character of the Russian nation. For the queen who was not inheritable to accede to the throne it was a way to gain the simple people's backing, to augment her power and subsequently to win



*Fig. 4: Portrait of Sarah Eleanor Fermor. Ivan Vishnyakov. 1750. Saint Petersburg. The State Russian Museum.*

support of Russian aristocracy. Catharine II as well as Dukes Riurik (830-879), the first Russian ruler, was not to descent, but she was a true patriot and glorified the Russian state, royalty and elite. The Empresses patriotism set a political and economic course, and fostered style in the fine arts, in literature and not least in fashion.

Immediately after the enthronement Catherine II began to bring Russian style in fashion. In 1782, for example, she signed an ordinance concerning the way of dressing for court events and parties. The regiment and unification of court garments was to show the national unity, to involve ladies into the state administration and to control profusion.

At court festivities she regularly set a good example and appeared in costumes that were inspired by the style of Tsarina Natalia (1651-1694). Catherine's garments were the beautiful result of the combination Russian and European style with graceful simplicity. She wore French-style dresses with typical Russian slashed sleeves, necklaces of pearls, fur caftans and shapkas.

From contemporary records of events we know that Empress used to go into society in a long white satin garment looked like a Russian sarafan with long sleeves, a transparent veil, diademed with tiny crown. Until the very last day she had aristocratic bearing, prance and elegant gait<sup>7</sup>.

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The English historian William Koks (1747-1828) who attend the royal court party in 1778 noted that the Empress was wearing a light green dress with curt train and long sleeves; her bodice made of golden brocade; she was rouged and coiffured with powder and brilliants. Barons were costumed in a French style; ladies appeared in skirts with small hoops and long hanging sleeves. Petersburg beauties had high headdresses and well rouged cheeks. Not luxury but a plain of precious gems that glittered all along dresses annoyed much<sup>8</sup>.

Of course court dresses in Russian style did not replaced French or German gowns and it did not pretend to be the new fashion. It was more reintroduction of Russian style elements into French dress (Fig. 5). Codes of traditional Russian clothing in a new cultural context made a quite piquant costume context of a concept "us vs. them". Court train and long slashed sleeves were the most characteristic attributes of Russian style. This type of sleeves in combination with a fashionable French panier skirt transformed an originally Parisian garment into a "Tsarina" of "Muskovian" style dress. Consequently a Russian style dress of the XVIII century was nothing more than a Gallicized sarafan created by Catharine II.

Catherine's reforms in the field of fashion were kindred and integral with the Tsar Peter's reorganizations. Through fashion Catherine strived to promote the idea of state majesty and national grandeur, but also royal succession of power and inviolability of government.

Despite the fact that European fashion developed under French dictate, parts of Russian traditional clothing were brought into fashion of the XVIII century. To give an example, after



*Fig. 5: Portrait of Catherine II in shugai and kokoshnik. Virgilius Eriksen. 1769. Saint Petersburg. The State Hermitage Museum.*

the famous visit of Tsar Peter the Great to France in 1716-1717, Peter's brown camisole, bob-wig and shapka amazed Parisians. In 1788 Rose Bertin (1747-1813), a great fashion designer of the time created a dress "à la Tsarina" for last French queen Marie-Antoinette<sup>9</sup>.

A rising interest in national identity related to Muscovy's history, architecture, art, culture and everyday life struck Russian society several decades later, in the 1820s and 1830s. In the intellectual world the role of Russia in world history and its path of development were argued with ardor. Debates about "ancient and modern" led to a New Russian Renaissance in the arts and culture. Romanticism of national folklore and traditional rustic life, but also folk legends and songs magnetized people. As a result Russian style garment went on to be the official court dress<sup>10</sup>.

Emperor Nicholas I (1796-1855), similar to his grandmother Catherina, manifested state politics through court fashion. In 1834 he issued an edict that regimented cut, silhouette and colour, but also textile, and the decoration of court garments. Ladies were recommended to wear a satin white petticoat, a velveteen surcoat with train, short balloon sleeves and bouffant skirt. Velvet colour, ornamentation in addition with golden and silver motifs were stipulated by the owner's status (Fig. 6).

A lady-in-waiting had to dress in green velveteen surcoat with golden embroidery. Maids of honor wore dark blue or scarlet gowns with silver sewing. Kokoshnik with white veil for

ladies respectively ornamented fillet for girls had to dome gracefully dressed heads. Countess Anna Sheremetieva (1811-1849), a lady in waiting of Empress Alexandra (1798-1860), noted in her diary that at a court party devoted to the Crown Prince the Empress and her ladies were dressed in silk sarafans and rosette kokoshniks<sup>11</sup>. This style survived up until to 1917 and its luxury and grand style impressed foreigners (Fig. 7). Most court dresses were designed by Olga Bulbenkova (1835-1918), a famous Petersburg couturier and nobles with a pleasure posured in ancient Russian dress (Fig. 8).

Clothing in Russian style was most prominently featured in the great balls and parties of the time. In 1883, 1896 and again 1913 glitzy costume balls were arranged for nobles. In 1903 the Romanovs solemnized the 290th anniversary of their Dynasty on the Russian throne; a splendid ball masquerade in the XVII century Muscovy style was given for this occasion<sup>12</sup>. Besides gaieties for the elite of the capital this event was to proclaim creeds and beliefs of young Emperor Nicholas II (1868-1918).

This was the last magnificent ball of the Russian Empire and it was remembered for its marvelous gowns. All makers were to craft images of historical characters in their garments. Nicholas II, for instance, wore clothing of Russian Tsar Alexis, Empress Alexandra (1872-1918) put on a gown of Tsarina Maria, the Grand Dukes and Grand Duchess were dressed in the Boyar style (Fig. 9)<sup>13</sup>.



*Fig. 6: A view of White Hall in the Winter Palace. Fragment. Adolf Ladurner. 1838. Saint Petersburg. The State Hermitage Museum.*





*Fig. 7: Portrait of Empress Alexandra. 1836. Franz Krüger. Saint Petersburg. The State Hermitage Museum.*

Thinking of old times, Grand duke Alexander noted that Nicholas II had had a desire to go back in time just for this one particular night. “Emperor and Empress appeared in garments of Muscovy Tsar and Tsarina of the late XVII century. Alex looked breath-taking but Nicholas was too short for his splendid costume”<sup>14</sup>.

The best designers and artists of the epoch worked for this court event. Sergey Solomko (1867-1928), follower of great artist Viktor Vasnetzov (1848-1926), couturiers Nadezhda Lamanova (1861-1941) and the Brisacs made wonderful garments delicately stylized to Tsar Alexis fashion. They created a well designed stylization of Boyar style clothing for noble guests. Designers gracefully combined the fashionable silhouette and codes of national clothing, spicing it with modern pure taste theatricalism, but reserving attributes, poetics of the epoch.



Fig. 8: Portrait of Princess Zinaida Usupova. Vladimir Makovsky. 1890s. Moscow. The State Historical Museum named after A. Pushkin.



Fig. 9: Picture of Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna in masquerade garments. Photogravure from a photograph by D. Asikritov. 1904. Scientific library of Russian Academy of Arts.

## Russian Seasons: Passion of all things Russian

Up until the beginning of the XX century for Europeans Russian culture and history in a way was exotic and oblique. This was changed by Duchess Maria Tenisheva's (1858-1928) activities and the triumph of Russian ballet in Western Europe.

As a great Russian connoisseur Duchess Maria Tenisheva founded a center for Russian art in Talashkino, her husband's domain. Objects designed by Talashkino masters and their exceptional skills were highly appreciated at Parisian exhibition in 1905.

Several years later in 1909 the Russian operas "Boris Godunov" and "Duke Igor", but also the ballets "The Firebird", "The Rite of Spring", "The Punch" were successfully staged in Paris by Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929). The performances were lavishly mounted by the brilliant artists Leon Bakst (1866-1924), Ivan Bilibin (1876-1942), Alexandre Benois (1870-1960), Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), members of Russian artistic union "The World of Art" (Fig. 10, Fig. 11). European audience was impressed by the romanticizing world of Russian fairy-tales played by best dancers and singers.

Activities like these contributed much to the popularity of Russian culture, history and fashionable style. “Russian seasons” made exotic gayness of colors and textiles, eastern spices and bright ornamentation. Stage costumes of famous Russian dancers Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), Tamara Korsavina (1885-1978), Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1950) inspired French couturiers. The passion for Russian style was so great that even Lady Elisabeth Bowes-Lyon wore a wedding gown designed with elements of medieval Slavonic style in 1921.

European designers were fascinated by the splendor of Russian clothing and many Parisian, Berlin and London fashion houses created collection à la Russe. Paul Poiret (1879-1944), Jeanne Paquin (1869-1936) designed garments decorated with fur, fringe, beads and gems. In 1910 to 1914 Poiret brought into fashion new collections inspired by Russian traditional clothing – saraphans, kosovorotkas, kokoshniks, kerchiefs etc. His famous garments “Kazan” (1912) and “Moskovit” (1914) were designed after the couturier had travelled to Russia. All these dresses were desired by western consumers who wanted to look like a Byzantine princess or even like a bird or an outlandish flower (Fig. 12).

After the revolution of 1917 many Russians left their country looking for a new home. The tragedy renewed the interest in Russia in European countries and Russian motifs once again were brought in fashion. At the beginning of the 1920s Russian craft and style was in great demand.



*Fig. 10: Design of a dress for a Knight. Ballet “The Firebird” by Sergei Stravinsky. Andrei Golovin. The Saint Petersburg State Museum of Theatre and Music. 1910.*





*Fig. 11: Russian dancer Anna Pavlova in a Russian style dress designed by Ivan Bilibin. 1912.*

The Parisian illustrated magazine “La Russie Illustrée” wrote: “And a Russian immigrant came to this city with velvet tread. It was a time when her mother and grandmother were dressed up by Worth and Poiret, but this young Russian lady has just escaped from absolute hell of revolution and civil war! Recently she was an angel of mercy at Denikin’s and English infirmaries in Constantinople. She came to the capital of female elegance and knocked a door of the fabulous maison de Haute Couture. And a massive door was opened for her, she conquered all hearts”<sup>15</sup>.

Many nobles forfeited their property and wealth; they were forced to earn their keeps by driving, teaching, sewing and modeling. In 1919 to 1929 some noble incomers established fashion houses over twenty in total that promoted Russian culture and Russian handicraft. Trade names “Kitmir”, “Irfe”, “Tao”, “Iteb”, in many cases covered up proud names of such families like the Romanovs, Yusupovs, Obolenskiys, Vrangels families<sup>16</sup>. The boutiques were situated at Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore, from Place Beauvau to Rue Royale. Soon Parisian fashion would soon come under the influence of Slavonic genius. Coats and tunics would be designed with Kazaks chic and dim recollections about infinite anguish of Holy Russia (Fig.13).

The best Parisian and London fashion designers particularly Coco Chanel as well paid a tribute to Russian style (Fig. 14). They designed new collections with Russian traditional cut,



silhouettes and decorative motifs under names such as “Kazak” (‘Vladimir’ Fashion House, 1921), “Myzhik” (‘Alice Bernard’, Fashion House, 1923). Designers of “Jean Patou”, “Lucien Leleong”, “Ninna Ricci” and “Madeleine Vionnet” were influenced by Slavonic exoticism; they gracefully combined traditional Russian clothing and Parisian chic. “Worth Fashion House”, an Haute Couture trendsetter, also stylized Russian ornaments and sold popular prints for fashionable dresses. Long fur coats with high “Boyar” collars, kosovorotka, embroideries became characteristic features of Worth’s collections.



*Fig. 12: Unknown lady in a Poiret style gown. Paris. 1913.*



Fig. 13: Design by Kitmir Fashion House. 1925.

In 1920s a young talented French couturier Jeanne Lanvin (1867-1946) created a collection of ethnic “pajamas” inspired by Russian folk. She combined fur collars, cuffs, pearl kokoshniks, Russian style kaftans and sarafans, embroidery, Rostov laces, with T-bar shoes, that were the fashionable craze of the day. The Lanvin’s kokoshniks became the top of fashion in the middle 1920s (Fig. 15).

Triumph and end of Russian elite establishment was short but bright. Fashion in Russian style faded and by the end of the 1920s passions for Slavonic style was quelled. In the middle of the decade Howard Carter (1874-1939) had discovered the tomb of Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun and a wave of passion for ancient Egypt conceived. Unfortunately, not all of Russian fashion houses could overcome the economic crisis of 1929. Most noble businessmen had no sense of entrepreneurship and could not meet new market demands and many Fashion Houses were closed; some of them, for example “Ardance”, continued to work until after World War II.

## The Russians are coming: Haute Couture Slavonic Style in the end XX- beginning XXI centuries

In the early 1970s a distinct ethnic style came into fashion and interest in Slavonic motives was revived. It provided a gateway to fame for Slava Zaitzev (b. 1938) who changed concepts of Soviet garments and designed a provocative collection of industrial clothing inspired by Russian traditional costume in 1963. This collection became a bright artistic protest against harsh reality in Soviet Russia. The collection was castigated by authorities but some foreign media such as "Paris Match" featured photo stories. Therefore, Slava Zaitzev and his style became well known among French designers.

Zaitzev was the founder of the first and only Fashion House in USSR; he used elements of Russian style for almost all his collections. Zaitzev was born and grew up in Ivanovo, the well-known textile region of the central Russia.



Fig. 14: Models of Ladies Coats by Worth, Chanel and Jenny. 1922.



*Fig. 15: Peach silk beaddress, Jeanne Lanvin. Circa 1925. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Rodman A. Heeren, 1961.*

Zaitzev's collections "Russian series" (1965-1968), "Russian Seasons in Paris" (1988), "1000th Anniversary of Christianity in Russia" (1988), "Nostalgia for Beauty" (1992-1993), "Memories of the Future" (1994-1995) were remarkable for real profligacy of colors and ornamentation, fox fur coats and shapkas, colored sewed ependytes, Boyar camisoles and waistcoats, long skirts scarlet or emerald high boots. Zaitzev collections are joyful symbioses of Russian art and craft, aesthetics of Russian clothing, simplicity of silhouettes and fleshpot of ornamentation (Fig. 16). Pillow laces, embroideries, bright colours, patch-work techniques as distinctly Russian cultural codes can be traced up until recent years.

Carmen de Tommaso (b. 1909), the founder and head of the famous French Couture House "Carven" invited Zaitzev to present his collection on Parisian catwalks in 1988. After the show Zaitzev was named Red Dior for his significant role in world fashion. Inspired by Zaitzev's style, foreign designers rediscovered Russia, its rich and varied cultural heritage.

Valentin Yudashkin (b. 1963), the first Russian designer who was admitted to Haute Couture Syndicate (1996), also successfully promoted Russian style. His collections "Frescos" (1994), "Catherine the Great" (Fall/Winter 1994/1995), "Russian Modern" (Spring/Summer 1998), "Anna Karenina" (Fall/Winter 1998/1999), were inspired by Russian culture. The designer combined European fashion trends with Russian style, carefully preserving originality of Russian culture, its spirit and beauty.

The European designers Giorgio Armani (b.1934), Roberto Cavalli (b. 1940), Christian Lacroix (b. 1951), Jean-Paul Gaultier (b. 1952) also were inspired by Russian traditions at various times of their careers. This new wave of interest was caused by radical political and social changes in the Soviet Union. In the West the interest increased, especially after the Soviet Union was collapsing and changing. Fashion is a social phenomenon that relates to politics. A new generation of designers began to use Russian motifs to show them to the West.



Famous designers of the Couture Houses “Christian Dior”, “Pierre Cardin”, “Kenzo”, “Sonya Rykel”, “Ferro” took the Zaitzev’s initiative up and several seasons later Russian shapkas, furs, high-necked coats and golden embroideries à la russe, color combinations paraded in their “Russian” collections<sup>17</sup>.

Sheepskin coats, Bolshevik military uniform, bast shoes, felt boots, sarafans, Orenburg downy shawls, Ballet, Constructivism, Tsar, Soviet times, Byzantine jewelry and Slavic folklore – for a talented designer Russian culture is a fount of inspiration. In the middle 1970s French designer Yves Saint Laurent (1936-2008) created his brilliant “Le Ballet Russe” collection (Fall/Winter 1976/1977). The collection was beautiful in its excess and opulence. Couturier presented A-silhouette dresses with full skirts, elegant knits “Matreshka”, marvelous Boyar-style jackets, Russian shawls and coats decorated with fur and floral prints. “Le Ballet Russe” was a fantastic collection on Russian popular themes that embodied in a full scope the creator’s fertility. But in comparison with art-deco style dresses of the 1930s the collection was too Orientate, too Slavonic and restless in its colours, ornamentation and textures (Fig. 17).

Russian alphabet and “prozodezhda” (industrial clothing developed in the 1920s) created by Lubov Popova (1889-1924) Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958) inspired “infant terrible” Jean-Paul Gaultier to design a collection with letter prints (Fall/Winter 1986/1987). The Malenkov’s field jacket decorated with golden stars turned Thierry Mugler’s (b. 1948) crank to create a collection of sexual women dresses. Balmain and Dior Couture Houses also successfully brought Russian style into fashion through long magnificent shubas and shapkas.



Fig. 16: “Origins” Collection. Slava Zaitzev. 2010.

Even in XXI century Russian style inspired western designers to create garments *à la russe*. But nowadays couturiers use not only traditional Russian elements but compose clothing with different cultural codes, tips and hypertext. Jean Paul Gaultier, Christian Lacroix, Antonio Marras (b. 1961) and others refer to Russian style for inspiration. They combine folk blouses, Boyar velvet jackets, Tzarina's golden embroideries, kokoshniks and ornamentation with balloon-sleeves dresses and frilled front of French courtesans.

In 2009 Antonio Marras designed for Kenzo Fashion House a ethnic collection inspired by Russian clothing of XIX century, "Les Saisons Russes" and novel "Doctor Zhivago" by Boris Pasternak (1890-1960). As an artist with brilliant artistic flair the Italian designer Marras was able to rediscover resources of Russian style and he transformed different elements and created a new artistic collage with strait skirts, traditional shawls, cotton floral prints and insertions. In spite of gayness this collection was truly Russian.



*Fig. 17: "The Primordial Russia".  
Valentin Yudasbkin. 1989. Valentin Yudasbkin's privat collection.*



*Fig. 18: "Paris Moscow" Collection. Karl Lagerfeld. 2009.*

Karl Lagerfeld (b. 1933) created his "Paris Moscow" collection for Chanel Fashion House (Fall/Winter 2009/2010) where he embodied all features of his artistic approach – grotesque, eccentricity, theatricism and redundancy. Fabulouse pearl kokoshniks, necklaces, wide precocious bracelets, muffs, luxurious textiles, finishing and decoration were inspired by ancient Byzantine clothing. Garments were enriched by golden embroideries, furs, and pearls but also egg-shaped scarlet bags, black leather coats of Soviet chekists, communist badges. All western and touristic stereotypes about Russia were mixed in this outlandish collection (Fig 18); it was a trip into Coco Chanel's biography through her men: Grand Duke Dmitry Romanov (1891-1942), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) who made her familiar with Russian culture and Slavonic folklore. Russian culture charmed Lagerfeld much and even Chanel boutiques were decorated in Russian style with matreshkas, kokoshniks and other attributes.

To summarize, we can conclude that for main Russian style stayed undiscovered by western designers for many centuries because of closedness of the country. Slavonic beauty ideal was far from the western fashion and it was considered to be strange and unpleasant by foreigners.

Because of Tsar Peter's reforms the Western world started to get familiar with Russia and its traditions. An eclectic combination of Russian spirit and western shapes of court fashion was accepted by Europe as a genuine Russian style.

Just after the triumph of Russian craft and Russian ballet at the beginning of XX century Europe appreciated significance of Russian culture for artistic inspiration. Developing from nostalgia felt by Russian immigrants, Russian style got great power in the fashion industry. It became piercing spring for imagination of fashion designers. Almost all world famous designers created one or several collections inspired by Russia. But they feel the trends and desires of modern women, who wants to be a beautiful, individual but not advertisements of their motherland.

Up until the present fashion Experts propose Russian style to their clients in spite of the fact that fashion brand must be French or Italian. Western consumers have different desires and they want their clothing to be creative, understandable, fashionable and of high quality. Now it is evident that garments that featured elements of Russian style can satisfy all this requirements.

Russian style as a trend of modern Haut Couture resonates with prêt-à-porter line and manifests in eclectically bright daft street fashion. Today simple people and Hollywood stars actively uses elements of Russian style such as shawls or shapkas.

History shows that Russian style is a split combination of traditions and modernity. It is an untemporal and versatile fashion that will come back again proposing new ideas and images.

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Fig. 17: A. Vasiliev: Russian Fashion. 150 years in Photography, Slovo Publishing, 2006, p. 386

Fig. 18: Photographer Ekaterina Chesnokova for RIA 'Novosti'



## Notes

- 1 Russkoye Tsarstvo- Russian Tsardom, the name of the Russian state between Ivan IV's assumption of the title of Tsar in 1547 and Peter the Great's foundation of the Russian Empire in 1721
- 2 Korb 1906, 127
- 3 Collins 1846, 208
- 4 Sorokina 2008, 5
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## Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel betrachtet die Autorin die Geschichte des russischen Stils in der Mode und analysiert den Einfluss der russischen Kultur auf die europäische Designermode.

Der russische Modestil entwickelte sich im Laufe einiger Jahrhunderte unter dem Einfluss Byzanz', Polens, Deutschlands und des Ostens und ist eine Art Synthese verschiedener Stile und Traditionen.

Im 17. Jahrhundert geriet der russisch-höfische Stil in Vergessenheit, da im aristokratischen Umfeld die französische und die deutsche Mode dominierten. Nach und nach erlebte aber der traditionelle russische Stil eine Wiedergeburt und kam Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts auch als Ausdruck nationaler Identität wieder in Mode.

Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts waren weder der russische Stil noch die russische Kultur in Europa sehr bekannt. Dank der Popularisierung der russischen Kultur sowie den Einflüssen von Immigranten und der so genannten „Russischen Jahreszeiten“ öffneten sich den europäischen Designern neue Quellen der Kreativität. Bis heute inspiriert die russische, traditionelle Tracht die Designer der Haute Couture.