

Latin Inscriptions in Saint Petersburg

St Petersburg is very young — in 2003 it celebrated its tercentenary. Nevertheless, the classical heritage was strongly used in the building programme of the city in the middle eighteenth — first half of the nineteenth centuries. At the same time, one can not be surprised by the statement that in St Petersburg Latin inscriptions cannot obviously be part of every day visual experience. You may never expect to run across them, and the more so they surprise you when actually found. To date one can speak of approximately 40 samples of such texts. Later we gonna look at some of them.

Several years ago it was decided to collect and edit Latin inscriptions in St Petersburg. Annual publications appear in the magazine of SPb Classical Grammar School (Gymnasium classicum Petropolitanum). We hope that in the nearest future this might end in *Corpus* (or rather *Corpusculum*) *Inscriptionum Latinarum Petropolis*.

According to the place where one can see Latin inscriptions, they are grouped by four categories: 1) monuments; 2) public buildings; 3) private houses, and 4) epitaphs. The last category won't be discussed in this report today.

First of all, I would like to concentrate upon **monuments**.

One of the most famous Latin inscriptions in St Petersburg — in the sense that almost everybody in the city knows it — can be seen on the monument to Peter I (the so-called 'Bronze Horseman') by a French sculptor E.-M. Falconet. The opening ceremony took place in 1782. An inscription done in Russian and in Latin reads: "To Peter the First — Catherine the Second" (PETRO PRIMO CATHARINA SECUNDA MDCCLXXXII (ПЕТРУ ПЕРВОМУ — ЕКАТЕРИНА ВТОРАЯ). The words are incised on the granite pedestal, so-called 'Thunder stone', discovered on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. The author of the text was Falconet himself. While deciding between several versions he took decision in favour of the shortest one, which speaks for itself.

On Basil Island in front of the Naval Cadet Corps and facing the Neva River one can see a monument to Admiral Ivan F. Krusenstern (1770–1846). Ivan F. Krusenstern (or Adam Johann Ritter von Krusenstern in German) was born into a Baltic German family in Estonia. In 1803–1806 he led the first Russian round-the-world voyage. One of his main points of interest was exploration of eastern boaders of the country — namely, Kamchatka, the Kurils, and Sakhalin. Upon his return, Krusenstern wrote a detailed report published in **Saint Petersburg** in 1810.

The German text was followed by an English version and subsequently it was translated into French, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, and Italian.

The place for the monument in front of the Naval Cadet Corps was chosen on purpose: for 20 years Krusenstern was director of the institution. The statue was commissioned for his birthday centenary to the sculptor I. N. Schroeder and the architect I. A. Monighetti. The Latin inscription on the pediment reads: “SPE FRETUS”. It nicely plays with the name of Krusenstern’s ship — she was called “Hope” (“Надежда”).

On the opposite side of the Neva River next to St. Isaac’s Cathedral stretches the former building of the Manège of the House Guards Regiment. It dates from the very beginning of the 19th century (1804–1807). The architect of the building was G. Guarenghi — the author of several elegant classical style constructions in St Petersburg. The main façade boasts of a grand classical portico. On both sides of it one can see figures of Dioscuri brothers done in Carrara marble. G. Guarenghi commissioned his compatriot Paolo Triscorni (otherwise Triscornia) to cut two Dioscuri statues. As far as we know, Triscorni’s junior brother, who owned a going marble shop in St Petersburg at the time, mediated between Paolo and Guarenghi. The statues were made in Italy in 1810 and delivered to Russia ten years later — in 1817. As this was the year of Guarenghi’s death, we do not know whether he had witnessed his project’s close-out. One can easily notice that Dioscuri are designed after the model of the famous antiques statues put up before the Quirinal Palace in Rome. A simple Latin inscription on the pedestal of the left statue mentions the sculptor’s name, material, and the date. It reads as follows: “PAOLO TRISCORNI FECIT / CARRARA A<NNO> MDCCCX”.

Not far from the Manège there is another building, which main entrance is emphasized by means of two lion figures also by P. Triscorni. I am talking about the house of Duke Lobanov-Rostovsky (1788–1866). Descendant of an old noble family, he was one of the most famous collectors and book-hunters of his time. He had a wonderful collection of materials on Russian princess of the 11th century Anne of Kiev who became the wife of the French king Henry I. Lobanov-Rostovsky also owned ca 700 portraits of Queen Mary Stuart and he also edited 3 volumes of her correspondance.

The house we are looking at was erected to the design of A. Montferrand in 1817–1820. As one can see, it has an usual triangular shape in order to occupy the whole

block next to the most eminent work of the architect — St Isaac’s Cathedral. It took forty years to build this cathedral which is considered to be the 3rd large domed structure in the world: after St Peter’s in Rome and St Paul’s in London. Montferrand proudly left us his self-portrait and placed his figure in the corner of the western pediment of the cathedral: as you see, he holds a diminished copy of the cathedral.

Now we are back to the house of Duke Lobanov-Rostovsky. P. Triscorni carved two beautiful lion figures to be placed in front of the main entrance. True to himself, as in case of Dioscuri, Triscorni made his lions to the model of similar statues — this time from Florence. On the support of the left lion one can hardly read an almost faded Latin words, which we saw already before: “PAOLO TRISCORNI FECIT / CARRARA”.

These lions had become literary characters. A. Pushkin in his poem “The Bronze Horseman” describes a terrible flood of 1824 in St Petersburg. The main hero of the story, Eugene, saves his life sitting on one of the lions. Here you can see an illustration to the poem by a St Petersburg painter A. Benois: it depicts the house of Lobanob-Rostovsky and Eugene himself.

The latest example of a Neo-Latin inscription in the city is seen on the monument to the first architects of SPb. The monument was opened twelve years ago, in 1995. The sculptor of the project is M. Shemyakin. Unfortunately, the monument was badly damaged by vandals and almost nothing is left. The only surviving part of the monument is the granite wall with a window shape opening, which was supposed to symbolize a “Window to Europe”. The opposite side of the wall is still decorated with an inscription in Russian and Latin. The Latin version of the text belongs to A. Gavrilov and S. Takhtajan. “HIC APUD / AEDEM SANCTI / SAMPSONII / HOSPITATORIS / QUIESCUNT / PRIMI URBIS / PETRINAE ARCHITECTI / AEDIFICATORES / CIVES”. The monument is placed in the courtyard of one of the oldest buildings in the city — St. Sampsony’s Cathedral — where originally the first St Petersburg cemetery had been. St. Sampsony was considered to be the patron of foreigners, that is why many descendants from Europe who came to the city in 18th first half 19th centuries were buried in this very cemetery. Gi. Trezini (1670–1734) from Switzeland — the first architect of St Petersburg who designed St Peter and Paul’s Fortress — was among them.

No pictorial evidence of Trezini himself is preserved, but what we do have is a portrait of the architect Petr M. Yeropkin (ca 1689–1740), who was also buried next

to St. Sampsony's Cathedral. He was the author of the first general layout of St Petersburg: he proposed 'radial' plan of the city, with three main streets springing from the Admiralty (the ship yard). Yeropkin's last (but not least) work was the so-called "Ice Palace" built by order of Empress Anna. It was designed for "buffoonery marriage" which took place during festivities of 1740. Last year it was decided to rebuild the "Ice Palace".

The city has two samples of architecture that continue ancient tradition of Roman triumphal arch inscriptions. The so-called Narva Triumphal Arch (or 'Gate' in Russian) was put up to commemorate the victory over Napoleon in 1812. The arch we see today is the second one built in 1837 by V. Stasov, which replaced the previous wooden structure but retained its general features. One can observe that Stasov was imitating triumphal arches which have a single opening flanked by half columns and columns at the corners. The most elaborate examples of the type are the Arch of Titus at Rome (which you can see on the picture) and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum (ca 114). The decoration of the Narva Arch includes dedicating inscriptions, list of battles, names of the Guards regiments, which took part in them.

The top of the arch — right beneath the beautiful chariot — is decorated with an inscription done in Russian and Latin. It says: "VICTRICIBUS ROSSICIS LEGION[IBUS] IMP[ERATORIS] CORP[ORIS] CUSTOD[IBUS] GRATA PATRIA D[IE] XVII (*septimo decimo*) M[ENSIS] AUG[USTI] AN[NO] MDCCCXXXIV (*millesimo octingentesimo tricesimo quarto*)" ("Победоносной российской императорской гвардии признательное отечество в 17 д. августа 1834").

While the Narva Gate were constructed by Stasov to the model of Roman triumphal arches, the Moscow Triumphal Gate follows — more or less — the Greek prototype. The architect had in mind Athenian Propylea by Mnesikles. The gate in the shape of a Doric portico glorifying the military triumph is a sample of Empire style. It is interesting to note that before the gate was cast of iron Stasov had done a full-sized model of wood. The arch was supposed to commemorate the victories over Turks and Persians in 1820-s–1830-s.

The text of an inscription — again done in Russian and Latin — belongs either to Stasov himself or to the Emperor Nikolai I. "VICTRICIBUS COPIIS RUTHENICIS / IN MEMORIAM RERUM ET TURCIS DEBELLANDIS AC POLONIS PACANDIS C[=G]ESTARUM / ANNIS MDCCCXXVI–XXVII–XXVIII–XXIX–XXX–XXXI / 1838" ("Победоносным российским войскам, в память подвигов в Персии, Турции и при усмирении

Польши в 1826, 1827, 1828, 1829, 1830, 1831 годах. 1838”). The fate of the Gate and its inscription was not extremely smooth. In 1918, after Poland had become independent the inscription was destroyed for political correctness reasons. In 1936 the whole construction was dismantled, during the Second World War the cast-iron blocks were used for putting anti-tank obstacles. The arch was restored only in the late 1950-s. Finally, in 2003, when the city was celebrating its tercentenary and after consulting the General Consulate of the Republic of Poland the full version of the text was returned to the arch.

Now we pass to inscriptions on **public buildings** including churches and medical institutions.

While walking along the Nevsky prospect one can see a fine building of the Polish Roman-Catholic Church of St. Catherine which is one of the best samples of the transitional period between baroque and classical styles. The building of the oldest and largest Catholic Church in SPb was erected between 1763 and 1782 by the architects J. -B. Vallin de la Mothe and A. Rinaldi. A citation from *Mathew: XXI* crowns the main entrance: DOMUS MEA DOMUS ORATIONIS EST. (M)ATH: XXI CAP. ANNO DOMINI MDCCLXXXII. DIE. It might be worth mentioning that the same words in Old Russian are inscribed on the southern façade of St. Isaac’s Cathedral, which is the largest Orthodox Church in the city (“Храм мой храм молитвы наречется”).

Another Catholic church bearing the Latin inscription is that of St. Stanislav. D. I. Visconti built it in 1823–1825 in classical style. The plot for the future construction was bequeathed by Archbishop Stanislav Bogush-Sestrentsevich who was buried there in 1826, hence the name of the church. Being a controversial political figure, he made an important contribution to the Russian educational system: he made for the opening of the first all-estate school in the country and left his private residence to house the school. A Latin inscription above the entrance of St. Stanislav is the beginning of the famous thanksgiving hymn “TE DEUM LAUDAMUS” ascribed to St. Ambrosius Mediolanus. The inscription was restored quite recently — in 1998.

The Clinic building, which belongs to the SPb Military Medical Academy, is also decorated with a Latin inscription. The Clinic building was designed by A. I. Arens in 1908 (he was the architect of the Medical Academy in 1908–1910). In front of it there is the monument to S. Botkin who was a prominent physician and worked at the Academy for more than 25 years. The text of the inscription is divided into two parts

between two relieves on the left and the right wings of the semicircular façade of the Clinic building (the corner of Botkinskaya ul. and Sampsonijevsky pr., 5). Relieves represent various scenes from medical practice. The Latin inscription reads: LABORE ET SCIENTIA, ARTE ET HUMANITATE — these words are a quintessence of medical treatment. The first part of the phrase (in reversed form) is quite popular as a university motto (University of Queensland (Australia); University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg): SCIENTIA ET LABORE.

Sometimes Latin was used in decoration of **private residences**. Five buildings in different parts of the city welcome visitors with the word “SALVE”. Two buildings you see were planned as houses for rent. They date from the beginning of the last century: 1903 and, respectively, 1914. Both houses are found in the so-called Petrogradskaya Part (Borough) of the city, which was actively built over in Art Nouveau style in the first decade of the 20th century.

(26) Another fine building (Litejny pr. 46) originally erected in the middle nineteenth century received its ornamental medallions with Latin inscriptions only at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first one reads: “DOMUS PROPRIA DOMUS OPTIMA”. These words go back to Aesop’s story of a turtle (Aesop. 108 Hausrath) that refused to come to Zeus’ wedding ceremony. The turtle was sentenced to carry its “test house” forever. The phrase in its Latin form became quite popular in Europe as a heraldic device. In many languages one can find examples of similar proverbial sayings (English: “One’s own hearth is worth gold; French: “Il n’est trésor que de vivre à son aise”; or Russian “В гостях хорошо, а дома лучше”). The second inscription “DIES DIEM DOCET” seems to be a quintessence of Publilius Syrus’ line: “Discipulus est prioris posterior dies” (Sent. 123). As you see, the house is a fine example of Art Nouveau style with eclectic ornamental devices. A fancy grille in the courtyard is a diminished copy of the famous 18th century grille of the Summer Garden in the central part of St Petersburg.

An impressive building faced with light-coloured ceramic tiles — the decoration typical of Art Nouveau in SPb — a century ago belonged to Pel family. Teaching professor and famous pharmaceutical chemist, Alexander Pel (born in 1850) worked successfully on new types of medicine. At the beginning of the twentieth century his brand new hormone containing “Spermin” was the only medicine exported from Russia. Nowadays one can visit a pharmacy, which is in the same building where Pel’s chemist’s shop was. He owned it together with his sons. Upper part of the house

has a Latin inscription: “ORA ET LABORA”. Pel did not belong to the nobility; nevertheless this motto of Benedictines on the façade of his house looks almost like a proud heraldic device.

Apart from this quasi-device there are three samples of real coat-of-arms with Latin inscriptions on them. The first one can be seen on the Sheremetev Palace, which is a beautiful example of Russian baroque style of the mid 18th century. It was built by S. I. Chevakinsky and F. S. Argunov, the latter a serf of Count Sheremetev. The main façade has been preserved except for a few changes. The Palace is also called the “Fountain House”, because it stretches along the embankment of the Fontanka River, city’s boundary in the 18th century. The building is closely linked with the name of the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) who used to live in the former garden outbuilding of the “Fountain House” for about 30 years since 1920ies. Now her former flat houses Akhmatova’s memorial museum. Many of her poems were written in this very building. Here she worked on her famous “Poem without a Hero”, which epigraph reads as Sheremetev’s family heraldic device: “DEUS CONSERVAT OMNIA.” Here you can see the text on the side gate of the palace. As far as we know, Sheremetev’s family came in the 17th century from Prussia. Of this reminds golden crown on the coat of arms: it was an emblem of Prussian rulers.

Another example of a Latin heraldic device belongs to the family of Mecklenburg-Strelitzky: it proudly declares “FUIMUS ET SUMUS.” Nowadays the building houses one of the city’s public libraries, which is popular among schoolchildren and students. The third Latin motto embellishes the pediment of the house on Nevsky pr., which now belongs to the Russian Theatrical Union. It reads: “PRO FIDE ET PATRIA”. This was a heraldic device of Branitsky, who owned the mansion in the first part of the 19th century.

To sum up, as we have just seen, Latin inscriptions in SPb are not numerous. They are rather curiosities that appeared in spite of the national traditions. At the same time, they cover various spheres of public and private life: they glorify families and victories; they praise God; they teach; they show peculiar taste for unusual in Art Nouveau architecture.