Discovering Russia: The Books of William Brumfield about Russian Architecture

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This article is the result of several discussions between William Craft Brumfield and Nikolai Dmitrievich Glushchenko, journalist and cultural historian. It provides the perspective of a Russian architectural preservationist toward the work of American architectural historian, Slavicist and photographer. The author gives special attention to W. C. Brumfield’s efforts to disseminate information about Russia’s architectural heritage through print and electronic resources.

Keywords: W. C. Brumfield; American historians; Slavists; preservationists; architectural photographers; Russia; Russian architecture

This tall, stooped man, with the face of a typical Anglo-Saxon, walks through our streets with broad steps, attentively looking at all sides. He seems to be measuring the land and constantly headed somewhere. In this manner he has in some 45 years covered, it seems, the greater part of the Russian expanses... His name is William Craft Brumfield, and he is a professor at Tulane University in New Orleans (Louisiana) and a research scholar in various aspects of Russian culture, especially architecture.

Such immersion of many years in seemingly distant areas of world civilization is a remarkable phenomenon, characteristic of a man with a system of values constructed by himself, values which he unswervingly follows. Brumfield’s works are highly valued in Russia. He is the only American scholar who is simultaneously a Foreign Member of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences and an Honorary Member of the Russian Academy of Arts. Regardless of prevailing political winds, when he is not teaching at Tulane University, he spends most of his time in Russia, where, as part of the project mentioned earlier, he examines yet more regions, studying historical sources and tirelessly using the camera to document architecture. And always a new book is born. On site he is met with sincere support from all sides and acquires new friends.

William Brumfield is a deeply rooted southerner. He was born on June 28, 1944, in Charlotte, North Carolina, a state on the east coast of the USA. His ancestors resettled in America in the late seventeenth century after leaving behind the limited agricultural lands of northern England, covered with fields of broom and often given over to sheep grazing. In the New World the Brumfield settlers and his ancestors on the maternal side overcame
material difficulties, took root and eventually contributed to the growth of a rural educated stratum. (His mother’s maiden name was Craft, probably derived from the word “croft”, or “small farmstead”, particularly in Scotland.)

William’s father, Lewis Floyd Brumfield, was born in April 1895 in a small town in southern Mississippi. During the First World War his father served in the United States Marine Corps and participated in major campaigns on the Western Front in the late summer and fall of 1918. Following the armistice of November 11, 1918, he participated in the occupation of the Rhineland (Cologne and Coblenz bridgehead) into 1919. When William was a boy his father told him of his experience seeing interned Russian soldiers who had been part of a Russian contingent serving in the French army. (As a consequence of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917, these troops were considered politically unreliable and placed in internment camps under primitive conditions.) William particularly remembered his father’s expression of compassion for the harsh, unsanitary conditions of the Russian soldiers, who “were our allies”. These sentiments were especially surprising to the young boy because they were expressed in the early 1950s, a time of intense anti-communist attitudes in the U.S. because of the Korean War.

After leaving the Marines, his father studying agronomy at American universities (Mississippi State University, Cornell University, North Carolina State University) and wrote a master’s thesis on poultry farming. In the 1930s during the Franklin Roosevelt
As his school years in the small Georgia town of Gainesville (north of Atlanta), William often spent time in the public library, where he began reading works of Russian literature, first Tolstoy, then Dostoevsky. He was also interested in the history of the Civil War (1861–65), many of whose battles took place in Georgia in 1864. Memories of the war remained, and William connected his reading of that history with the work of Tolstoy, particularly War and Peace. The 1950s and 60s were also a time of campaigns in the South against policies of school segregation and racial discrimination. This social upheaval raised profound moral questions, and William discovered that Russian literature (particularly the great novels) addressed similar questions of social justice and moral principles. It should also be noted that William's interest in American Civil War history later stimulated an interest in Russian military history, of which he has an extensive knowledge. This proved an important component in his deep understanding of the Russian people.

William began his study of Russian in 1962 at The Johns Hopkins University. The choice seemed almost accidental, because William, like so many other, entered Hopkins with the expectation of studying medicine. When this direction failed to interest him, he noticed the few Russian courses and remembered his interest in Russian literature. His parents were surprised but did not oppose the decision, particularly since the Soviet Union had become a major force in politics and science. The flight of Yury Gagarin was especially important in this regard. The successes of the Soviet Union in science and particularly in the exploration of space stimulated the government at the end of the 1950s to open a new direction in education devoted to the study of Russia. Thus, for the young William Brumfield there opened real possibilities for mastering the Russian language and literature.

However, Johns Hopkins did not offer a degree in Russian, and in 1964 William transferred to the new Russian program at Tulane University in New Orleans. His decision was motivated in part by a desire to see the region of his father’s family. He was not disappointed in New Orleans, which has a rich culture perhaps unique in America. Nonetheless, his continued interest in Russia required a transfer to a prestigious graduate program in Russian studies. With that goal in mind William was accepted in 1966 into the Slavic Department at the University of California, Berkeley, one of the best graduate programs in the United States. After seven intensive years of study at the university (and at Leningrad State University), Brumfield received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of California, Berkeley, with a specialization in 19th-century Russian history and literature.

In his graduate studies Brumfield gave priority to the epoch of Dostoevsky and the “writers of the sixties” (shestidesiatniki), among whom one of the most prominent was Vasily Sleptsov, who had a notable influence on Russian intellectual life during the Era of Great
Reforms. Although Sleptsov’s work is almost forgotten in Russia today, Brumfield has published a number of articles on the writer’s life and works in English and Russian (e.g., Brumfield, 1976, 2014, 2015a; Brumfield / Брумфилд, 2009a, 2015), and played a role in the publication of the first translation of Sleptsov’s major work, *Hard Times (Trudnoe vremia)* into any language. Translated by Michael Katz, the English edition was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press as *Hard Times: A Novel of Liberals and Radicals in 1860s Russia* (Sleptsov, 2016), with an extensive introduction by Brumfield. This excellent edition is a validation of Brumfield’s dissertation work.

In the course of the twenty years after receiving the doctorate, Brumfield held visiting appointments at the Universities of Wisconsin and Virginia, and was an Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University. He also received fellowships from major scholarly foundations, which enabled him to perfect his knowledge as well as expand the sphere of his creative and scholarly activity. He first came to Russia as a graduate student in the summer of 1970, when he participated in a teachers’ exchange program administered by Moscow State University. Russia’s cultural wealth soon became the field of his tireless work and began to be explored in all its fullness. He completed graduate study at Moscow and St. Petersburg (Leningrad) State Universities, as well as the Russian State Institute of Art History. He also has achieved a thorough knowledge of the Russian language. While not abandoning his literary research, Brumfield became more and more inclined to the study in depth of Russian architecture and its development, which reflected the high spiritual culture of a unique civilization. As part of his study of Russian architecture, he began a comprehensive, professional project to document Russian architecture through photography. Brumfield is now the leading authority in the West on Russian architecture.

Among the major publications written by Brumfield and illustrated with his photographs are a number of books that have appeared in the USA since 1983. Of particular note are: *Gold in Azure: One Thousand Years of Russian Architecture* (Brumfield, 1983); *The Origins of Modernism in Russian Architecture* (Brumfield, 1991); *A History of Russian Architecture* (Brumfield, 1993); *Lost Russia: Photographing the Ruins of Russian Architecture* (Brumfield, 1995); *Landmarks of Russian Architecture: A Photographic Survey* (Brumfield, 1997). *A History of Russian Architecture* proved to be a capital, fundamental monograph with 644 pages of text and hundreds of illustrations, most of them the author’s photographs. This magisterial work represented an English language encyclopedia of Russian architecture and was designated a Notable Book of the Year (1993) by the *New York Times Book Review*. In 2002 the Moscow publishing house Tri Kvadrata released a Russian translation of *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (Zhilishche v Rossii ... / Жилище в России ..., 2001) co-edited by Brumfield and Blair Ruble, director of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies (Russian housing ... , 1994).

Also published by Tri Kvadrata in recent years is Brumfield’s series “Discovering Russia”, devoted to the architectural heritage of various regions. This project was initiated in 2007 with the support of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, part of the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars in Washington, DC. The books in the series, which now has fifteen volumes, are encyclopedic in format and are published in editions of 1,000 copies. The volumes range from 100 to 130 pages in length, and most of them have parallel Russian and English texts, with scholarly footnotes. They are comprehensively illustrated with the author’s excellent color and black-and-white photographs, each of which has a precise date for documentary purposes. Among the series volumes are Irkutsk, Tobolsk, Solovki,

In 2015 Duke University Press, one of the most prestigious university publishers in the U.S., released a book of which Brumfield can be justifiably proud. *Architecture at the End of the Earth: Photographing the Russian North* (Brumfield, 2015b) is beautifully produced in large format, with some 200 of the author’s color photographs, also precisely dated for scholarly, documentary purposes. The substantive, elegant text awaits a Russian translation and publisher. The printing costs for this lavish volume received the support of the Seattle real estate developer and philanthropist Richard Hedreen.

The basic part of Brumfield’s photographic archive, which consists of tens of thousands of color and black-and-white negatives, slides and digital images, is held in the Department of Image Collections at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The Library of Congress also has a substantial collection of Brumfield’s work. Many of the photographs from this enormous collection have been exhibit in Russia and the United States. Thousands have also been published as internet resources. The William C. Brumfield Collection continues to perform a great service in discovering Russia (see also: Zakharov / Захаров, 2014).

**Photographic works of William C. Brumfield on internet sites:**

1. *Documentary Photography from the William Brumfield Collection*. Created by the Information Section of the Vologda Regional Cultural Department (Russia), with original support from the Vologda Regional Library. Contains a photographic archive with images of over 30,000 photographs by Brumfield, a gallery with several hundred black-and-white photographs by Brumfield, numerous article texts in Russian and English, and bibliographies of works by and about Brumfield: http://www.cultinfo.ru/brumfield.

   English version: http://cultinfo.ru/brumfield/index_e.htm.

2) *William C. Brumfield Collection*. Primary collection of photographic work, held at the Department of Image Collections at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The collection archive includes some 60,000 digital images by Brumfield. The NGA also has on long-term loan approximately 40,000 B/W negatives, of which some 10,000 have been printed as 8”x10” study prints. This material is accessible at the study center in the West Wing. (Registration required). Only a small fraction of this material is currently online. There are three slide gallery special features via the following links:

   - http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/features/brumfield_murom.html;
   - http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/research/library/imagecollections/features/brumfield_torzhok.html.html;

3) *The William C. Brumfield Russian Architecture Collection* is a collaboration between the University of Washington Libraries and William Brumfield to digitize and catalog 30,000 of his photographs of Russian architecture for preservation and study. Developed with the support of a major grant awarded in 2006 from the National Endowment for the Humanities: http://content.lib.washington.edu/brumfieldweb/.

4) *William C. Brumfield Collection*, created at the Library of Congress as part of the “Meeting of Frontiers” digital project (http://frontiers.loc.gov). Currently contains over 1,100 color photographs. Accessible through main page (http://frontiers.loc.gov), press “digital collections”, then “photographs”, then “William C. Brumfield Collection”:

   http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfdigcol/mfdcphot.html#a_eng.

6) Discovering Russia. Site within Russia beyond the Headlines (foreign web project of Rossiiskaia gazeta. Ongoing bi-monthly series of articles and slide galleries; currently contains over 4,500 photographs by William Brumfield: http://rbth.com/special/discovering_russia.

7) William C. Brumfield Site. Contains some 1,300 images displayed within the site Temples of Russia (Khramy Rossi; http://temples.ru) dedicated to Russian Orthodox churches. Also contains an interactive map showing the geographic range of the displayed photographic work: http://temples.ru/photo_stat.php?ID=1287.


10) William C. Brumfield Collection at Clemson University is devoted to photographs of Jewish monuments and sites of memory in European Russia and Siberia: http://tigerprints.clemson.edu/brumfield_collection/.

About the author
Born in 1944, Nikolai Glushchenko graduated in 1968 from the Bauman Higher Technical School with a specialization in instrumentation technology. He worked at a construction bureau creating flight guidance systems at the Research Institute of the State Planning Committee. In 1965, while still a student, he entered the well-known patriotic club “Rodina”, created by the renowned architect-restorer Petr Baranovskii and the artist Ilia Glazunov. This organization was the forerunner of the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments (VOOPIK). Glushchenko worked on the architectural restoration of various sites under the direction of Baranovskii and his disciples. Since 1983 he has worked as a professional journalist specializing in architectural preservation and cultural history. His articles appeared in leading newspapers and journals. In 1990 he began publishing the quarterly “VOOPIK News”, and was editor of the well-known publication Monuments of the Fatherland (“Pamiatniki otechestva”). He has also participated in the publication of several books, some of them co-authored by his spouse, Zoia Zhilkina, senior instructor in drawing at the Moscow architectural Institute.

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Открывая Россию: Книги Уильяма Брумфилда о русской архитектуре
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Статья написана по итогам нескольких встреч Уильяма Крафта Брумфилда и Николая Дмитриевича Глушенко, журналиста и историка культуры. В ней представлен взгляд защитника памятников русской архитектуры на деятельность американского историка архитектуры, слависта и фотографа. Автор уделяет особое внимание усилиям У. К. Брумфилда по распространению информации об архитектурном наследии России через печатные и электронные ресурсы.

Ключевые слова: У. К. Брумфилд; американские историки; слависты; защитники памятников архитектуры; фотографы архитектуры; Россия; русская архитектура

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