

Elena Kulchinskaya

The Protection of Architectural Monuments in Russia during the First World War

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On 1 August 1914, Russia entered the war, a more brutal and destructive war than any before it. New types of weapons, long-range artillery and aerial bombing did not leave much hope for the architectural monuments of cities under attack. By this time, the issue of the protection of historic and artistic monuments was already under discussion. Recalling the Great War today, we realise that it was the most significant timely and critical threshold in the life of European civilisation. All the values of civilisation, including humanitarian values such as respect for the heritage of the past, can be seen especially clearly against this background.

The attitude to the heritage, in my opinion, is an excellent key to understanding the state of society at different times and in different social periods. The heritage can become a cult, as Alois Riegl wrote,¹ on the attitude towards Antiquity and antiquities. At different times, it can also be an object of admiration, or maybe a source and investment of financial resources, or a symbol of national identity, or a symbol of the hated past.

It has to be said that a well-composed system for monument preservation had already been developed in Russia by the start of the First World War. In 1862, a circular was issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs which demanded the inspection of architectural monuments and collection for a general Code of Monuments.² In practice, this was the

¹ A. Riegl, *The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin*, *Oppositions*, 1982, no. 25, pp. 21-51.

² *Полное собрание законов Российской империи 2*, V. I, no. 794, 1862, С. Петербург.

first half-hearted attempt in Russian history to create a national Code of historic and cultural monuments.³

The Imperial Archaeological Commission, set up in 1859 and funded by small contributions from the treasury, became the single body which coordinated this work, and which was responsible for the protection of ancient buildings and for monitoring archaeological excavations. In 1864, the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society was established. In 1869, during the First Archaeological Congress, the issue of the development of legislation for the protection of monuments was raised. The congress was organised by the Commission for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. After 1901, when the Restoration Commission was set up under the Archaeological Commission, it became the foremost institution in the field of expertise in projects and methods for restoring architectural monuments. The leading expert and organiser of this work was Petr Pokryshkin.

The turn of the century saw the establishment of numerous public historical societies and institutions. These organisations were still active on the eve of the war. An important event which demonstrated the turning of society towards the issue of protection was the creation of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in 1909 in St Petersburg, with branches in Tula, Orel, Kazan, Vilnius, Yaroslavl, Smolensk, Rostov Velikiy, and other places.⁴ The chairman of the society was the eminent historian and archaeologist Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, and the vice-chairman was the artist and art historian Alexander Benois. Central to the founding of the society were the most prominent figures in Russian arts and culture: Petr Veyner, Nikolai Roerich, Sergei Makovsky, Baron Nikolai Wrangel, Igor Grabar, Pavel Muratov, Aleksei Shchusev, Georgy Lukomsky, Ivan

³ О. Щенкова, Памятники и реставрация в первой трети XIX века. *Памятники архитектуры в дореволюционной России: Очерки истории архитектурной реставрации*, Москва, 2002, p. 82.

⁴ А. Щенков, Отношение различных слоев общества к охране памятников, *Памятники архитектуры в дореволюционной России: Очерки истории архитектурной реставрации*, Москва, 2002, p. 349.

Fomin, and others. The society remained independent, and often opposed government protection bodies.⁵

In 1910, an announcement signed by Nikolai Wrangel was published in the journal *Старые годы*. It read as follows:

Without the assistance of society, without drilling deeply into it the awareness that the state has to look after and love its country, the matter cannot be helped. Attentive care is needed from all of Russia for the country's artistic and cultural treasures. In every large town we need devotees to get together to study historic monuments in the outskirts. And in order to preserve them, we need these devotees to watch keenly over their future. A network of these unions spreading across the whole country could become a strong force against vandalism, ruin and foreign export.⁶

Thanks to the Russian lawyer Fyodor Martens, in 1907, Article No. 56 was implemented in The Hague Convention, which prohibited 'all seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art and science is forbidden, and should be made the subject of legal proceedings.'⁷ This article was soon fundamentally violated by the Austrian and German armies.⁸ The whole world shuddered after the bombing of Reims, which was shortly repeated by the ruin of Belgian cities, Venice and other areas of military activity.

With the start of the war, the question of the military destruction of monuments became important in Russia as well. The Imperial Archaeological Commission raised the issue about accountability on the German

⁵ Е. Кульчинская, *Власть и архитектурное наследие (1917–1941 гг.)*, *Власть и творчество. Архитектура в истории русской культуры*, 4, Москва, 1999, pp. 154–164.

⁶ Ю. Жуков, *Становление и деятельность советских органов охраны памятников истории и культуры. 1917–1920 гг.*, Москва, 1989, pp. 26–27.

⁷ Conventions II of 1899 and IV of 1907, Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Art. 56, *The Hague Conventions and Declarations of 1899 and 1907*, ed. J. B. Scott, New York, 1915, p. 127.

⁸ The Hague Convention was to become the permanent international law; however, its principles were violated immediately during the First World War. According to article 247 of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Germany was obliged to compensate for Belgium's cultural losses. This was done with books from German libraries and the return of six panels of van Eyck's famous altar, which had been bought legally by a Berlin museum in the 19th century.

side for the intentional destruction of monuments. Aleksei Shirnsky-Shikhmatov pointed out that, in view of the systematic and particularly brutal annihilation of monuments on captured territory, it was necessary to define the extent of the losses in detail.⁹ Grigori Kotov, another member of the commission, opposed him, saying that it was rather hard to define what was done with malicious intent and what was the result of a military accident. And what was really the sense of establishing these facts? It was decided that information would be gathered carefully from local governors, Church authorities and the Warsaw Society for Heritage Protection about the monuments destroyed and the reason. An expedition was organised to areas of military activity, and considerable funds were allocated for supporting this expedition.

In 1915, a new institution was established, the Commission for the Study of Damage Inflicted on Monuments of Architecture during Military Action from the Beginning of the First World War. Petr Pokryshkin, an architecture academic, a member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission since 1902, a theoretician and experienced restorer, was appointed chairman. The commission carried out the jobs of both evaluating and photographing damage to historical monuments. It was precisely at that time that aerial photography was used. In mid-1916, resources were allocated to the Moscow Archaeological Society for the protection of monuments in the southern region during the Caucasus campaign, where military clashes between the Russian and Ottoman empires were taking place.

Petr Pokryshkin went to the military zone in Bukovina, Volhynia and Galicia, where he stayed from January 1916 to April 1917, surveying and photographing architectural monuments (he took more than 300 pictures). At the start of November 1917, he was sent from Petrograd to Moscow to document damaged architectural monuments in the Moscow Kremlin, which had been inflicted during shelling in the Bolshevik October Revolution. Around 20 negatives have been preserved until

⁹ А. Щенков, *Практика реставрационных работ 1890–1917 гг., Памятники архитектуры в дореволюционной России: Очерки истории архитектурной реставрации*, Москва, 2002, p. 365.

now, with the date when they were taken clearly marked: 10 November 1917.¹⁰

The issue of military destruction, the loss of great works of humankind, unjustified and blind brutality, worried Russian society. In 1914, when Germany unleashed war on Europe, the artist Nikolai Roerich renounced his title as a member of the Viennese Secession.¹¹ He published influential articles pervaded with pain from the ruination of Leuven and Reims caused by German troops:

A war against works of art, books, paintings, statues, architectural monuments [...] Can the human mind possibly imagine anything more monstrous and loathsome! And these are not the actions of savages, but of Germans, who have always boasted of their level of culture.¹²

In September 1914, he sent a telegram to the president of France, expressing great pity for the country's irreplaceable losses:

Indignant at the latest act of vandalism by our barbaric enemy, the destruction of the beautiful, incomparable cathedral in Reims, I beg you, M. President, to accept the expression of my deep regret for this irreplaceable loss. I have the honour of being a member of the academy at Reims, and I have been authorised to convey to you the same feelings from the council of professors of the School of the Imperial Society for the Promotion of the Arts, the World of Art Society, and the editors of the newspaper *Russkoe slovo*.¹³

Condemning the war and the destruction of cultural valuables, Roerich designed a poster *The Enemy of Humankind*, and painted a pic-

¹⁰ During the revolution, Petr Pokryshkin headed the newly created Department of Monumental Architecture of the Russian Archaeological Commission, which investigated the preservation of churches in Petrograd and architectural monuments in Tsarskoe Selo, Pavlovsk, Novgorod and Moscow. In 1920, having realised the futility of his efforts, he renounced his status as an academic, and left for the monastery of Tikhonovsky Lukoyanovsky, where after three years he caught a disease while giving communion to a sick patient and died. The Tikhonovsky Lukoyanovsky monastery existed until 1925, when it was wiped off the face of the earth. The church where Pokryshkin's funeral was held has not survived, nor has the cemetery with the remains of the gifted architect, the founder of scientific restoration in Russia and a notable pastor.

¹¹ *Пакт Рериха. Знак триединности*, сост. А. П. Соболев, Санкт Петербург, 2005, p. 5.

¹² Разрушение Реймского собора. Протесты, *Русское слово*, 10/23 September 1914, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

ture entitled *The Glow*. Six thousand copies of *The Enemy of Humankind* were printed and sent out to military areas, where they were stuck on prominent buildings.¹⁴ A destructive vandal figure stands in the centre of this image, surrounded by medals with pictures of the ruined cities. In this way, a pictorial representation of the protection of cultural monuments was introduced into the public domain.

At the end of 1914, an exhibition entitled *The Art of the Allied People* was held by the Society for the Promotion of the Arts, and presented over 300 works from different schools of painting: French, Belgian, English, Polish, and others.¹⁵ These paintings came from private collections, including Roerich's own. In 1915, he approached Tsar Nicholas II, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, and the senior politicians of several countries, with a call to provide international legal protection for cultural valuables, which later developed into Roerich's Pact.¹⁶ In the face of the unparalleled destruction of the First World War between 1914 and 1917, in the light of the ruination of Leuven and Reims, he turned to the high command of the Russian army, urging the protection of the cultural heritage.

In this way, the attitude to the heritage and monuments, as it was customary to call it in legislation in Russia, became an extremely important subject in international relations. It also says much about the thinking and the state of society at the time. No less important for an understanding of the state of society was the people's attitude to the war itself. When speaking about Russian society and the pre-revolutionary period of the Empire, it is difficult to rely only on documents and official papers. The official discourse divided objects into 'black' and 'white', but

¹⁴ Н.К. Рерих, Письмо от 6 декабря 1935 г., In: Н.К. Рерих, *Письма в Америку*, Москва, 1998, p. 88.

¹⁵ *Искусство союзных народов*, каталог, Петербург, 1914.

¹⁶ This idea was developed further by Roerich, after he completed his famous expedition to Central Asia in 1929. In collaboration with a number of European lawyers, he prepared and published his 'Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments' in 1929, addressed to the governments and people of all countries. Roerich's work found widespread support among governments, and scientific, artistic and educational institutions around the world. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1929.

this division in a society which prepared and undertook the bloodiest revolution and civil war in the history of mankind is as pointless as dividing between 'red' and 'white' in discussions of the ensuing Soviet period. There is more chance of reaching an understanding from memoirs and from the press of that time.¹⁷

Art created by artists from different countries, not after but during the time of war, often tried to raise the fighting spirit and justify the nightmare of misanthropic butchery. Everyone had to justify their own side. However, it has been noted that even the most sensitive artists preferred to exchange their brushes and lyres for weapons, sacrificing themselves and trying not to dwell on the meaning of the sacrifice. Art also had the function of reflecting on meanings. As the Austrian writer Hermann Bahr wrote in 1916:

Never has there been such a time which has been shaken by such horror, by such mortal fear. Never has the world been so deathly mute. Never has joy been so far and freedom so lifeless. Need screams out, man calls to his soul, time becomes a cry of need. Art joins its howl to theirs.¹⁸

From the point of view of the generation who by the start of the war belonged to the adherents of the past, of old times, the war brought only evil, death and destruction. Death to people also meant destruction to architectural monuments. It is difficult for me to assess the reflections of the serious historiosopher Nikolai Berdyaev on the fate of Russia. In his collection of articles written in the years of the war, full of dramatic effect, he predicted that 'the great discord of war' will lead to 'the creative spirit of Russia finally taking the position of a great power in the global spiritual concert.'¹⁹ But many enlightened Russians knew that in this war everybody would lose.

A particular role was played during the war by the Petersburg (later Petrograd) journal *Старые Годы* (The Old Years), a 'monthly

¹⁷ Е. Кульчинская, Музеификация наследия. Инерция и прообразы 1917–1921. *Памятники архитектуры в Советском Союзе. Очерки истории архитектурной реставрации*, Москва, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁸ В. Турчин, *По лабиринтам авангарда*, Москва, 1993, p. 72.

¹⁹ Н. Бердяев, *Душа России*, Москва, 1915, p. 1.

publication for lovers of culture and antiquity'.²⁰ The paper lasted from 1907 to 1916, with a small break at the beginning of the military action. From the day of its founding, *Старые Годы* turned to lovers of antiquity, and formulated a new attitude in society towards monuments from the past. A regular column in the journal was called 'On Vandalism'. It described the crimes of the authorities, both secular and spiritual, which, mostly through ignorance and for 'beneficial' reasons, disfigured old monuments.

During the First World War, the journal featured a regular column entitled 'A Reflection of the War'. The Russian word for 'reflection' (*отражение*) has two meanings, 'to reflect like a mirror', and 'to repel' and therefore to drive away the enemy. The enemy was the war itself, with all of its consequences, bombardments, fire and destruction, plunder by both the enemy and also at times by the local population, the evacuation of museums' treasures, and pointless sales and auctions, which took place in great quantities, both in the capitals and across all of Russia. In this context, the journal reported the loss of artistic valuables on both the Eastern and the Western fronts.

The founders and authors writing in the journal were founders and members of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity: Alexander Benois, Nikolai Wrangel, Georgy Lukomsky, Petr Veyner, Nikolai Roerich, Pavel Muratov and Nikolai Oettinger. They were the so-called 'golden youth' of Petrograd, glorified not only for their serious achievements in protecting and studying monuments of art, but also for their lively and at times rather dangerous frolics, literary hoaxes, risky jokes, and tricks on their own circle. 'Lively, elegant, tall, monocled,' is how the artist and art historian Georgy Lukomsky described their appearance, as if they were heroes made for the aesthetics of

²⁰ The journal wrote about auctions and private sales of works of art in Russia and abroad, including pictures and prices, and familiarised readers with the activities of museums. A lot of attention was paid to issues of preserving monuments of art and antiquity of Russia and of St Petersburg. The journal tried to draw the attention of communities and authorities to the problems of damage to monuments and unskilled restoration work. It reported on the activities of the Museum of Old St Petersburg, and published articles on the history of St Petersburg.

Art Nouveau.²¹ Their Futurist contemporaries called the group ‘Adams in plastrons’.²²

The most active member of this circle was the founder of and contributor to the journal, Baron Nikolai Wrangel, who was an exceptional figure. He wrote a multitude of academic works on the history of art. His work was published in newspapers, he organised exhibitions, gave lectures at the Institute of the History of Art, worked in the Hermitage and the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in Russia, and collected Russian drawings, paintings and sculpture. Wrangel was one of the main founders and the secretary of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in Russia.

Wrangel saw the global butchery, which bore the ruin of an entire cultural age, as an inescapable test imposed by God. On the day of the proclamation of the tsar’s manifesto on the war, Wrangel wrote his first entry in his diary:

I think that the approaching war, in which all the Great Powers are taking part, is the destruction of the eternal question of the struggle between two principles: divine and human. Let’s pray to God that the terrible war has given life to the first principle, for only that is both life giving and varied, and only that has no end.²³

During the first days of the war, together with other employees of the Imperial Hermitage, Wrangel prepared the museum’s valuables to be sent to Moscow. He writes in his diary of the mood of the capital’s inhabitants, of the rumours about German spies, and of the waves of people preparing to go to Siberia. All previous jobs and plans ceased to be important.

Ashamed ... Again, the feeling which I now experience from my enforced inaction. I feel like some sort of parasite which doesn’t have the right to live. It’s ter-

²¹ Г. Лукомский, Венок, *Мир и искусство*, 1931, по. 13, р. 15.

²² В. Пяст, *Встречи*, Москва, 1928, р. 144.

²³ Барон Н.Н. Врангель, *Дни скорби. Дневник 1914–1915 годов*, Санкт-Петербург, 2001, р. 15.

rible, but those interests which we have lived by up to this moment now seem completely trivial, and our former values are not worth anything.²⁴

Shortly after this, Wrangel started working for the Red Cross in the Northern Region, spending the days at the train station, where he met medical trains and sent the wounded to the capital's infirmaries. In October 1914, he volunteered to leave for the war as an authorised representative of medical train No 81 named after Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna. In April 1915, at the suggestion of the head representative of the Red Cross in the Northern Region, Wrangel wrote an essay about the activities of the organisation in the first year of the war. With a view to collecting information, together with his friend Sergei Bertenson, the baron surveyed Red Cross institutions in Vilnius, Jelgava, Polotsk and Vitebsk, and visited the front line. In May they returned to Warsaw, and set about writing a book. At the same time, Wrangel started working on a book about Warsaw architectural treasures. He researched the Lazienki Palace and its gardens. Soon afterwards, however, he fell seriously ill, and died on 15 June 1915. The baron's sudden death, not yet aged 35, in the Warsaw military hospital shocked his friends and contemporaries.

In every issue, *Старые Годы* reported on cultural events, news about the occupied territories, and sites of military action. It covered the latest articles and lectures on monument protection, such as Sergei Noakovsky's lecture 'Art for the Benefit of Old Belgium', which was accompanied by slides of semi-destroyed monuments of architecture.²⁵ The paper reported that 100 chests of treasures had been taken from Echmiadzin to the Vozdvizheniya Moscow Armenian Church.²⁶ The journal wrote about exhibitions which were collecting donations for those who had suffered in the war, such as the exhibition called Paintings of Old Western Masters for the Benefit of Victims of the War! or the exhibition to help Serbia and Montenegro.²⁷ It also reported that Lvov had

²⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁵ *Старые Годы*, March 1915, p. 56.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

escaped being attacked and plundered, affirming that it was not important to whom the town might fall in the course of the war, the key thing was that the ancient Russian relics of Galicia should not be lost.²⁸ The paper stated that work on the restoration of St Basil's Cathedral and the Ferapontov Monastery was being continued, despite the war.²⁹ *Старые Годы* also wrote about the 6,000 roubles from the Council of Ministers which had been set aside for the preservation of the relics in Galicia, the decision to allocate 100,000 roubles for the preservation of monuments in the Privilyskiy region (the fact that by then only 10,000 roubles had been assigned was not bad, because in all of Russia only 48,000 roubles had been earmarked for heritage protection).³⁰ When Kovno (today Kaunas) was badly affected by military action, the journal wrote in detail of the destruction of the Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul, the seminary and other buildings, and about the necessity to set aside funds for their restoration.³¹

Measures being taken in Venice for the preservation of its treasures were also reported, as well as how the horses of San Marco had been seized. A few issues of *Старые Годы* discussed the loss of the Tiepolo frescoes in Santa Maria degli Scalzi, and of the bomb which fell extremely close to St Mark's, but which miraculously did not destroy the cathedral, killing only a large number of pigeons on the square.³² Precious monuments of European culture, cathedrals, libraries and palaces, were reduced to ruins, including Reims Cathedral and the castle at Podgórze in Poland. A bomb fell on the Mausoleum of Theodoric in Ravenna, but fortunately on the west wall. Looters raided museums, and sold masterpieces to American collectors. Ancient manuscripts were moved from Kiev-Pecherskaya Lavra to Kazan.³³

²⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁹ *Старые Годы*, April/May 1915, p. 103; *Старые Годы*, 1916, February/March, p. 104.

³⁰ *Старые Годы*, July/August 1915, p. 100.

³¹ *Старые Годы*, January/February 1916, p. 56.

³² *Старые Годы*, November 1915, p. 58.

³³ *Старые Годы*, 1915, October, p. 46.

The journal praised the noble commander of the German zeppelin called Matta, who would not bomb St Paul's Cathedral in London, even though an anti-aircraft squadron was on his tail.³⁴ Meanwhile, a German restoration specialist was sent to the destroyed Belgian towns of Leuven and Ypres, but according to the report 'this might have been more dangerous than the bombing ...'³⁵ At the same time, the Steiglitz Museum in Petrograd was turned into a workshop for anti-gas bandages and dressings.³⁶ The journal condemned the changes in the renaming of Russian towns: Oranienbaum to Menshikov, Shlisselburg to Orekhovets ... The editors of *Старые Годы* also noticed a great disrespect for the past in this process of historical renaming.³⁷

They were wonderful people who published *Старые Годы*, and they wrote wonderful articles. Soon a terrible wave of Russian revolutions was to shake them up and sweep them away. Most likely, there was not a single member of the Russian intelligentsia who would not discuss the actions of the government at that time, who was not indignant at the poverty of the people, and at the failures on the front line. Society was waiting for change. In the Academy of Arts, people discussed the destruction of ancient iconostases in Novgorod, they talked of the clear signs of spiritual ruin. Many people at that time were talking and writing of the destruction of the 'old world'.

At the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, shortly before the abdication of the autocrat Nicholas II, the Emperor of All Russia, homesteads and estates that had been abandoned by their owners were already being ravaged and burnt. The increased incidents of 'vandalism' worried the public. The newspapers wrote of the necessity to draw up a law 'for national, inviolable monuments, and to entrust them [...] to special bodies with national authority'.³⁸ The power structure of the state, however, fell apart, while attempting to grab at everything it had control over.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Старые Годы*, December 1916, p. 51.

³⁶ *Старые Годы*, October 1915, p. 47.

³⁷ *Старые Годы*, June 1915, p. 53.

³⁸ В. Лапшин, *Художественная жизнь Москвы и Петрограда в 1917 году*, Москва, 1983, p. 55.

In certain respects, the year 1917 can be considered a frontier in the periodisation of the history of Russia. The Great War had still not finished, but it was a critical year, since people shattered the structure of history. When on 2 March 1917 the emperor signed his abdication, the architect Aleksei Shchusev, a member of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, sent a letter to his colleague Alexander Benois congratulating him on 'the good future of the republic'. He wrote that 'the whole structure has fallen to pieces, somehow without even a cloud of dust, and very quickly.'³⁹ The joyful tone of the letter was shared by Benois, a member of the Society for the Protection and Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquity in Russia. Is it not a paradox that this joyful feeling came from the most celebrated defenders of ancient structures?

³⁹ Letter from A. Shchusev to A. Benois on 30 March 1917, Russian State Museum Manuscript Department (Ф. 137, Д. 176, Л. 29).

Elena Kulčinskaja

Architektūros paminklų apsauga Rusijoje Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais

Santrauka

1914 m. rugpjūčio 1 d. Rusija įsijungė į Pirmąjį pasaulinį karą, žiauresnį ir destruktivesnį už bet kokią kitą karą žmonijos istorijoje. Institucinė praeities paminklų apsaugos sistema Rusijoje buvo išvystyta iki karo pradžios, o istorinių ir architektūrinių paminklų apsauga jau buvo tapusi viešų diskusijų objektu. Požiūris į paveldą yra geriausias būdas suvokti visuomenės būvį skirtingais laikotarpiais ir socialiniais tarpniais: paveldas gali tapti praeities kultu, tautinio identiteto ženklu ar nekenčiamos praeities simboliu. Svarbus įvykis, rodęs visuomenės dėmesį paminklų apsaugai, buvo Meno ir praeities paminklų gynimo ir apsaugos draugija, įkurta Peterburge 1909 m., kurioje pagrindinį vaidmenį vaidino iškilios rusų meno ir kultūros asmenybės Aleksandras Benois, Piotras Veineris, Nikolajus Roerichas, Sergejus Makovskis, baronas Nikolajus Vrangelis, Igoris Grabaris, Pavelas Muratovas, Aleksejus Ščiusevas, Georgijus Lukomskis, Ivanas Fominas. Draugija buvo visuomeninė ir nepriklausoma, dažnai oponavo valstybinėms paminklų apsaugos institucijoms.

Nors 1907 m. priimta tarptautinė Hagos konvencija 57 straipsniu draudė „bet kokią užgrobimą, griovimą ar žalą [...] istorijos paminklams, meno ir mokslo kūriniams“, Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais šis straipsnis buvo sulaužytas. Visą pasaulį šturpino Reimso, vėliau Belgijos miestų Liuveno, Ipro, taip pat Venecijos bombardavimas. Rusijoje 1915 m. buvo įkurta speciali Komisija, skirta karo metais nukentėjusių architektūros paminklų tyrimams, jai vadovavo architektūros restauracijos teoretikas ir praktikas Piotras Pokryškinas. Karo niokojamais kultūros, meno paminklais ypač rūpinosi dailininkas Nikolajus Roerichas, sukūręs šia tema plakatą, ne sykį kreipęsis į Rusijos vadovybę bei Vakarų politikus, siekdamas tarptautinės paminklų apsaugos legalizacijos karo sąlygomis.

Karinių griovimų problemos, didžiųjų žmonijos kūrinių praradimas, nepateisinas ir aklas žiaurumas, kurį aprašė karo įvykių liudininkai, jaudino Rusijos visuomenę. Ypatingą vaidmenį karo metais suvaidino Peterburge (vėliau Petrograde) leistas žurnalas *Старые годы* – „mėnesinis leidinys kultūros ir praeities mylėtojams“. Jis buvo leidžiamas nuo 1907 iki 1916 metų su nedidele pertrauka karo pradžioje. Nuo pat įkūrimo leidinys formavo naują visuomenės požiūrį į praeities paminklus. Karo metais žurnalas spausdino nuolatinę kiltį „Karo atspindėjimas“. Rusų kalboje žodis „atspindėjimas“ (отражение) turi dvi reikšmes – „veidrodinis atspindys“ ir „atremimas“, taigi rubrika reiškė ir priešų atmušimą, įveikimą. O priešas buvo pats karas su

visais jo padariniais – bombų atakomis, gaisrais, griovimais, plėšimais (kuriuos vykdė ne tik priešai, bet sykliais ir vietiniai gyventojai), muziejinių vertybių evakuacija, meno kūrinių spekuliacijomis ir varžytinėmis, kurių daugybė vyko sostinėje ir visoje Rusijoje. Šiame kontekste žurnalas raportavo apie meninių vertybių praradimus Rytų ir Vakarų frontuose. Žurnalo įkūrėjai ir tekstų autoriai buvo Meno ir praeities paminklų gynimo ir apsaugos draugijos nariai. Įstabios asmenybės, rašusios įstabius straipsnius – netrukus visas jas nušlavė baisi Rusijos revoliucijos banga.