

# Genuine renaissance in the land of castles

State programme plans restoration and conservation of around 40 ancient fortifications in Belarus

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Few realise that foreigners once called Belarus 'a land of castles'. In the days of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, several towns and settlements had their own castles and fortifications. Being situated at the centre of Europe and on the crossroads of trading routes, Belarus was the arena for numerous battles, inspiring the construction of fortresses. As many as 120 castles once stood, or more, with the first walled fortifications built between Brest and Mogilev in the early 13th century.

Sadly, the Livonian War, the 1812 War and the two world wars of the 20th century, reduced most of these unique architectural monuments to ashes. Those that have survived continue to impress tourists and Belarusians with

their majesty and beauty. The castles of Mir and Nesvizh (both on the UNESCO World Heritage List) are most well-known, but tourists are also attracted by the ancient fortifications in Grodno, Lida, Novogrudok, Krevo, Golshany and other Belarusian cities.

Of course, not all Belarusian castles are in the same condition as Nesvizh and Mir, needing restoration. Accordingly, the state's *Castles of Belarus* programme — recently adopted by the Council of Ministers — aims to restore around 40 sites, funding ongoing conservation. By 2018, Kamenets Tower should have a new roof, and Sapegi Palace-and-Park Estate (in the Pruzhany District's Ruzhany) will have its East Wing restored, to house a museum. In addition, Gedimin's Lida Castle and the castle once belonging to the Kishki and Radziwill fami-



Old castle in Grodno to undergo major reconstruction

lies (in the Novogrudok District's Lyubcha) will be restored.

Belarus' Culture Ministry, overseeing the work, is particularly excited about the restoration of Grodno's Stary (Old) Castle, which is found near the EU border; foreign tourists visit there even more often than to Minsk. "We hope that — after restoration — the Old Castle will look as it did in the time of Stefan Bathory: the Great Duke and King of the Rzech Pospolita," explains Igor Chernyavsky, the Head of the Culture Ministry's Department of Historical-Cultural Legacy Protection and Restoration. "We plan to open a large museum there, featuring items from Vytautas' times and from the 13th century: the age in which the first stone forts were built in Belarus."

Of course, not all ancient fortifications will be able to regain their former appearance, as Mr. Chernyavsky explains. "We lack documentary proof for all castles and, of course, architects cannot invent or introduce their own vision. With this in mind, the fighting galleries won't be restored at Krevo Castle, as we know nothing of them. However, the remains of such a gallery exist along Lida Castle's southern wall, so we can restore this to its original form."

Among other partially preserved castles being conserved are those in Novogrudok, Krevo (Smorgon District), Golshany (Oshmyany District) and Bykhov. "Even semi-destroyed castles — ruins really — attract tourists," adds Mr. Chernyavsky. "With this in mind, we'll conserve these sites.

It's quite possible that investors — domestic and foreign — will one day show interest in our ancient sites and will fund full reconstruction, to attract tourists."

The Culture Ministry is treating the restoration of historical sites very seriously, using historical data and involving technical experts and historians, with the aim of keeping sites authentic. This involves recreating construction materials — such as making bricks to 'old recipes'; those used at the Avgustovsky Canal, and Mir and Nesvizh castles were manufactured at a Belarusian factory.

Of course, it would be a challenge indeed to restore every such site across Belarus quickly. However, the efforts of recent years indicate that a new period is beginning: a time of true renaissance.

## Our beauty among amazing beauties in Southern Palmyra

By Sergey Sokolov

Belarusian Natalia Trofimova among top three at international competition *Mrs. Europe-2013*, held in Odessa

The title *Mrs. Europe* and the winner's crown were given to the Russian entrant, with second place belonging to the participant from Austria; third place went to Belarusian Natalia Trofimova.



Natalia Trofimova

In all, 17 beauties from 15 countries took part, all being married (with or without children). The beauties not only took part in the contest but had time to admire the wonderful sights of Southern Palmyra, and to join in charitable events. For the forum, Natalia prepared Belarusian gifts for the participants of the competition, as well as for children from social shelters. She presented a special souvenir to the mayor of Odessa.

## Films from golden collection

By Andrey Sokolov

Days of Kazakh Cinema hosted by Mogilev

Kazakh cinematographers recently returned to hospitable Mogilev, screening *Sky of My*

*Childhood*, directed by Rustem Abdrashov. It tells the biography of Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev: the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The best Kazakh films featured ancient customs and leg-

ends, while showing how warmly and respectfully the country treats its national culture and traditions. Cinemas in Mogilev screened such golden classics as *Mustafa Shokai*, *Courageous* and *The Promised Land*.

## Traditions of tea ceremonies

Visitors to Nesvizh can now learn about the history of the samovar and tea traditions in various countries, thanks to the castle's museum exhibition, entitled *History of Samovars and Traditions of Tea-*

*Parties*. Samovars and bouillottes are on display: 51 unique items from a private collection, with most from the 19th century (the 'golden age' of samovars). Many factories have designed their own samovars

over the years, resulting in a wide range. By the late 19th and early 20th century, samovars had been given common names denoting from what they were made — such as tin or glass.

## Vernisage in black-and-white

Well-known composer Dmitry Shostakovich's grandson presents photo-suite in Vitebsk



Dmitry Shostakovich with his father at the exhibition

By Vladimir Samsonov

*Tatlin's Dream. A Photo Project by Mitya Shostakovich*, is on show at the Vitebsk Centre of Contemporary Art, featuring about 20 black-and-white photos shot two years ago. It coincides with the 25th Ivan Sollertinsky international music festival, being held in Vitebsk.

Mitya notes that all the shots are interconnected, explaining "The collection tells of Tatlin's dreams of fighting evil. It begins with *Simple Invigorating Musical Sounds*, then culminates in *Storm* and the defeat of evil in *Youth-Beauty-Strength*, be-

fore finally fading out." The streets of Moscow inspired the works, supplemented by a shot called *Before the Attack*, taken in the south of France, at the Maginot Line.

Vitebsk is the first town to host the entire collection, as only separate works have been previously exhibited. Mitya tells us, "I'm in Vitebsk for the first time, as well as making my first exhibition here. It's a welcoming place so I think I'll return with a more optimistic project."

The photographer's father, well-known Russian conductor and pianist Maxim Shostakovich, was present at the opening.