

МАСТАЦТВАЗНАЎСТВА, ЭТНАГРАФІЯ, ФАЛЬКЛОР

УДК 726:2-523.4(476)

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**ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN IDENTITY
AND CONTEMPORARY BELARUSIAN CHURCH ARCHITECTURE**

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(Has been received 20.08.2013)

The development of post-Soviet Orthodox Christian church architecture was determined by seventy years of the USSR anticlerical program. Destruction of churches built before 1917 and impossibility to erect new religious buildings, elimination of the greater part of the church hierarchy, closure of the majority of religious education institutions resulted in loss of the verbally transmitted part of the Orthodox tradition and led Russian Orthodox Church to an identity crisis. «Orthodoxy identity in Russia today can only be reconstructed from a tradition that was decisively broken. Church buildings can be rebuilt and restored; the scars and blank spaces in the social psyche reach deeper. Religion comes to play new functions; traditions have to be recast and even invented» [1, p. 7].

Church architecture is a fertile ground for the invention of traditions, that «imply continuity with the past... the ‘peculiarity’ of the invented traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short these are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations...» [2, p. 1–2]. When authentic Orthodox rites are replaced by folk-Christianity and the majority of contemporary Russian Orthodox Church parishioners have superficial knowledge of the New Testament and religious dogmas, cross-in-square domical church architecture, one of the strongest images associated with Russian Orthodoxy, becomes a symbol that shapes Orthodoxy identity of those unable to underline the dogmatic difference between Orthodox Christianity and other Christian confessions. Crossed-dome church in pseudo-Russian style also serves as a visualization of the ties between pre- and post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy, thus symbolizing the revival of a religious tradition that had admittedly been broken in the 1917 revolution.

But contemporary church building practice can hardly fulfill ideological expectations of the parishioners and the church hierarchy, as architects with atheist or agnostic backgrounds or coming from families where folk-Christianity was practiced have as little knowledge of the dogmas and of church architecture principles as the rest of the Russian Orthodox Church congregation. They share common stereotypes about Orthodox Christianity and Orthodox religious architecture in particular and incorporate them into the current church typology. Some of those stereotypes, such as a popular misconception about the existence of a church building canon, provide a basis for invented traditions.

1. National identity and canonical tradition of church building. Influence of medieval Russian architecture imagery, especially that of Vladimir-Suzdal, on contemporary religious building practice can be traced in a majority of post-Soviet countries, where national Orthodox churches belong to the Russian Orthodox Church jurisdiction: Russia, Belarus and to a lesser extent Ukraine. This concentration on archetypal historical images is linked with the blend of Orthodox Christianity and Russian nationalism [3, p. 305–306; 1, p. 11] that started in the late 1960s as a reaction to forcible anticlericalism and cosmopolitanism of the USSR. Cross-influence of both discourses was explored by D. Pospelovsky,

who specifically marked out numerous appearances of Vladimir-Suzdal church imagery in the nationalist press [4]. Correspondingly, nationalism became an integral part of Orthodoxy identity not only in Russia but also in Belarus, where Orthodoxy is mainly connected with the russo-centrist version of Belarusian national identity [5, p. 30].

Syncretism of Orthodoxy identity and Russian nationalism was supported by the concept of an opposition to the West that had played the role of the significant Other since the Westernist versus Slavophil confrontation. In this coordinate system Orthodox Christians view the Western World not only as secular and profane [3, p. 303; 5, p. 24; 6, p. 54], but also as a domain of competitive Christian Churches – Catholic and Protestant – that are both secularized and heretical. Consequently, Catholic and Protestant religious architecture is understood not only as inappropriately secular, but also fundamentally inapplicable for the needs of an Orthodox liturgy. This turn of mind couldn't help but shape the major direction of the post-Soviet church building practice, where it brings about the need to underline and exaggerate the uniqueness and originality of Orthodox Christian church architecture, mainly by massive reuse of the 'authentic' historical styles, while church buildings that had been erected in 'western' fashion pass unnoticed.

The vanguard of this trend is Archhram, an official institution within the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarchy that develops regulatory documentation on church architecture, which is used both in Russian and Belarusian church building. M. Kesler, the head of Archhram, overtly states that: «we live in a godless secular world. So how can the church follow the craze of this world? On the contrary, it naturally opposes itself not to the people but to the world of evil by keeping intact what is sacred and among all kept in outer shapes of religious architecture» [7, p. 19]. Within the normative acts that regulate both Russian and Belarusian church building Archhram introduces interchangeable use of the terms 'canon' similar to iconographic and 'canonical tradition' [8, p. 4], the later meaning traditional church types and especially universal religious symbolism, though non-existence of church architecture canon in the previous epochs is mentioned. This tendency can be explained by the break in the church building tradition itself, as creation of a strict set of guidelines might be the only available way to reinstall forgotten practices that had never been properly codified or at least introduce new customs in place of the lost. An extent to which this reconstruction is based on historical facts about pre-revolutionary church building requires additional research. Another important function is symbolical unification of otherwise disintegrated church communities in «a church that has undergone a real deregulation, which is characterized by thriving localism, small-group loyalties, and individually focused beliefs and practices» [9, p. 2].

Church of the Intercession on the Nerl is considered the best model for the church building canonical tradition on the ground of its pure architectonics and modest decoration. The church of Intercession inspired N. Dyatko in the design of St. Euphrosyne (1996, Minsk), one of the first to be built in the post-USSR Belarus, and the neighboring church of the Joy of the Mourning (2012). Both buildings have white box exterior, covered by a single helmet-shaped dome, and high and narrow arched windows. The architect was precise in representation of the traditional cross-in-square church symbolism, shapes and proportions, having viewed medieval symbols as the core of church architecture canon, which for him is not to be understood as boundaries that destroy creative thought but as necessary restrictions that introduce designer to a challenging task. The church of St. Euphrosyne is itself an example of this principle. Traditional cubic proportions of the crossed-dome church were visually prolonged in vertical direction by widening the crossing and the dome drum and increasing of the drum's height.

Another important prototype for a number of contemporary Belarusian churches is the so-called 'Muraviewka', a uniform standardized church type in Pseudo-Russian style widely reproduced at the territory of Belarus in the second part of the 19th century in an attempt to strengthen the political position of the Russian Empire after the 1963 revolt. Slightly disproportionate, characterized by the marquee-shaped roof and pronounced three-segment structure (nave, altar and narthex with a bell tower above) this church came to be associated with Orthodox Christianity in the minds of a great number of Belarusian parishioners, but pure examples of contemporary Muraviewkas or other retrospectivist types are rare. Most churches in question represent an eclectic synthesis of Pseudo-Russian style with elements of Baroque, Classicism or even Art Nouveau. A. Lukyanchik, one of the most prolific contemporary Belarusian church architects, is noted for application of Muraviewka aesthetics to a number

of projects, among them the Ascension church (Fanipol, 2000) and the church of St. Sofia Slutskaya (Minsk, 2011) with elements of multilayered marquee roofs, coming from wooden church architecture of the Russian North, and classicist décor of the pediment and the cornice. Another remarkable example is the church of St. Nicholas in Chyst' near Molodechno (1996), where a typical Muraviewka outline is combined with playful Baroque pediments.

Churches designed by L. Makarevich that demonstrate a combination of Pseudo-Russian style with classicist and Art Nouveau elements are remarkable for their elegant proportions lengthened in vertical direction, rich décor and audacious use of architecture plastics. Unlike heterogeneous eclectic projects by A. Lukyanchik, churches designed by L. Makarevich represent a well-defined personal style that borders on monotony visible in churches of Alexander Nevsky (1997) and of Women Who Brought Anointments to Christ's Tomb (2007) in Baranovichi and the church of St. Michael in Bereza (2007). Other prominent examples of churches built in Pseudo-Russian style with Baroque or classicist elements are: Epiphany church (1998, Glusk, V. Baleyko) with traces of baroque in the building pediments and the décor of the facades and a catholic rose window above the main entrance, Trinity church (1996, Dostoevo, Brest district, U. Kulin), Trinity church (2000, Myadel, A. Lukyanchik), church of the Nativity (2001, Tarasovo, L. Shulaev), built in the shape of a Greek cross with facades at each end topped with classicist pediments.

2. Innovation in contemporary religious architecture. For twenty years after the fall of the Soviet Union traditionalist tendency dominated church building while proponents of progress in church architecture formed a silent minority. But patriarch Kirill's politics to make Orthodox Christian rituals more comprehensible for a modern man may lead to a shift in the balance between apologists of tradition and innovation in church architecture. A turning point was the 2011 competition for Cultural and Spiritual Russian Orthodox Centre in Paris, which had to combine traditional and canonical church imagery with contemporary design principles [10]. The discourse of a synthesis of church building tradition and contemporary architecture, which a modern person can relate with, gains acceptance on church building seminars and exhibitions as well as in the official church media. Important milestones in this process are the discussion on contemporary Orthodox church architecture on radio 'Radonezh' [11], articles «Why do contemporary churches have archaic architecture?» [12], «Should Church Architecture Be Contemporary?» [13] and «Architecture of a Modern Church: in Search of a Model» [14] in the *Neskuchny Sad* magazine, creation of a web portal Contemporary Orthodox Art and Architecture curated by the Committee of Art Criticism of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarchate and creation of the 'Church Builder' journal, a side-project of the 'Journal of Moscow Patriarchate'.

This tendency has not yet become influential in the architecture of Russian Orthodox Church in Belarus. On the other hand, Belarusian architects have spontaneously started using modernist and post-modernist language in their projects at the end of the 20th century. V. Vorobiew sharply called this unsystematic movement an 'inventory approach' [15, p. 84]. Arched windows and expressive curved outlines of St. Euphrosyne church (1998, Ivenets) and church of the Nativity of the Virgin (2000, Soligorsk) by V. Danilenko demonstrate striking visual similarities to Richard Meier's Jubilee church (2003, Rome), a distinctive example of late modernism. Like the Jubilee church, churches in Soligorsk and Ivenets explore the modernist aesthetics of spartan décor, pure white walls and airy interior space, rich with natural light that accentuates the sophisticated shape of inner walls. The architect himself describes this visual language as «architecture of its age for the land of its people» [16, p. 73]. Yet the basis of both Danilenko's churches' architectonics is the Vladimir-Suzdal imagery taken to the point of cartoonish postmodernist exaggeration. This blend of medieval tradition and modernist design principles is far from accidental. Similar patterns are easily recognized in the defined, almost canonic formal language and clear shapes of Vladimir-Suzdal style and in modernist architecture, itself guided by a strict set of rules and universalist approach.

The joining of modernism and historical styles in contemporary Belarusian church buildings may partly be attributed to the local approach to architecture education. It is still based on the schematic functionalism and universalist aesthetics of the International style of the middle of the 20th century and on the other hand draws from formal classicism, where antique architecture is understood as defined system of absolute if not canonical ratios and proportions.

Architects who explore historical church types (A. Lukyanchik, N. Dyatko and N. Emelyanova) have underlined the decisive role of regulatory documentation in their design. Though centered on the concept of ‘canonical tradition’, those normative acts are organized in a modernist methodology and according to modernist design principles: functionalist approach, strict regulations of light, acoustics and capacity. The church is perceived not only as a religious building but also as a public space, thus it must answer all the requirements of a public space.

Another prominent trait that can be traced both to current tendencies in the Orthodoxy identity and to the modernist influence is the extrovert character of the majority of Belarusian Orthodox churches, noticeable in the vast scale of the buildings, blank white outer walls and high onion domes. Church buildings are not just landmarks that enrich the cityscape; they actively if not aggressively manifest their existence by domination over the contrasting modernist surroundings of micro districts, confronting not only the West but post-modern secular world as a whole. Examples of this trend are the memorial church of All Saints (2010, Minsk, Y. Pogorelow), Resurrection Cathedral (2008, Minsk, W. Romanenko), church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (since 1998, Grodno). Relatively large windows of contemporary Belarusian Orthodox churches not just lessen the contrast of light and color between sacred inner space and profane outer space but connect inner room with the sky outside. Large openings also allow for the church chandeliers lit during liturgy to be seen at the dark time of the day, as if inviting the passers-by to take part in the service.

There are a few examples of minimalist aesthetics extending to the design of decorative elements in church interior. Plain white iconostasis in the churches of St. John the Baptist in Barkolabovo (2010, A. Lukyanchik) and of the Holy Trinity in Minsk (2010) are devoid of any additional décor. Their appearance is best described as the outlines of traditional iconostasis that have been cut out of paper.

This use of modernist design principles in Belarusian church architecture becomes even more evident in comparison with Orthodox Christian architecture of Eastern Poland. The continuity of its development didn’t break during the Soviet Period, significant church buildings were erected between 1970 and 1995. Contemporary Orthodox church architecture of Eastern Poland demonstrates predominate use of post-modern rather than modernist architecture language. It results in a surprisingly organic synthesis of contemporary and traditional elements.

Unlike their Belarusian counterparts, Polish Orthodox churches are characterized by the domination of lavishly decorated interior space over light and often minimalist exterior. Their dark inner walls fully covered with intensive wall-paintings and barely lit by natural light pouring through tiny windows, create shelter from the outer world and underline the dichotomy of the profane outside and the sacred inside. The cathedral of Holy Trinity in Hajnowka (1992, A. Grygorowicz) and the church of St. George in Bialystok (2012, E. Uscinowicz) are prominent examples of this dramatic relationship of light exterior and dark interior. Inner walls of Polish Orthodox churches are fully covered with paintings, when in Belarus the majority of church interiors is designed to remain white, while the primary spectacular effect is achieved by architecture plastics and the play of light and shade.

3. Authenticity in Belarusian church design. Reinterpretation of church building practices that had once appeared on the land that became the present-day Belarus is the least prominent trend of all distinguished in this article, yet it holds a significant potential for the development of unique Belarusian school of Orthodox Christian church architecture. Evolution of Orthodox Christian church building in the Great Lithuanian Principality and Rzech Pospolita took place on the territory of cross-influence of the East and West European cultures. It resulted in an appearance of a number of unique church types. Such West European architecture styles as Gothic, Baroque or Renaissance have been organically adapted for the needs of the Orthodox liturgy. Fortified churches are an outstanding product of the 16th century intercultural exchange. They are brick basilicas with traces of cross-in-square type built in late Gothic style with an addition of Baroque or Renaissance elements. Fortified churches of St. Michael in Synkovichi and of the Nativity of the Virgin in Murovanka served as an inspiration for the church of Virgin Mary (Minsk, 2001, A. Trukhin). Elements of fortified church – cubic shape with a tower on every rib – are combined with octagon on quadrangle church outlines, and the main dome as well as the towers are topped with tiny onion domes unlike those found in the historical prototypes. The walls are painted white, thus adding one more trait that distinguishes the modern church from the red brick proto-

types. The building is a compromise between more common church types and an experimental use of the lesser-known local cultural heritage. Another Trukhin's project, the Epiphany church (2001) contains direct quotations both from Vilnius Baroque, visible in the double towers at the front façade and a marshmallow shaped dome that demonstrates a striking resemblance with the dome of the Protection of the Virgin church in Mogilev.

The basic shape of the All Saints church in Grodno (2011, N. Emelyanova) is an upscale version of 11th century St. Boris and Gleb church. The walls are paneled with stone and colorful tiles reminiscent of the St. Boris and Gleb church brute yet tasteful mosaics. However the shape and height of the dome are different from those of the supposed prototype as well as from the architect's proposal, thus bringing a slight dissonance to the church proportions.

The straw-weaved King's Gate is an exceptional example of Belarusian craftsmanship that was spread exclusively in the 18th and 19th century Polesje region. Only two King's Gates remained to the 21st century and a copy was created for a National Art museum. The fourth, recently made King's Gate backed by the iconostasis decoration is situated in St. John the Baptist church in Dudutki (2009, A. Lukyanchik), being the only one of the four gates that is used according to its original purpose. Its' simple yet lively forms, rich with natural colors and textures introduce a contemporary alternative to the more common iconostasis created in the aesthetics of Baroque or the Russian North.

Conclusion

1. Development of late 20th and early 21st century Orthodox Christian Church architecture in Russia and Belarus follow similar patterns that are defined by common shifts in Orthodoxy identity.

2. The dominant tendency is the realization of canonical tradition embodied by Vladimir-Suzdal style for both Belarusian and Russian church architects. Pure imitations are comparatively rare, church buildings incorporate random elements of historical styles, unintentionally reaching the point of post-modern assemblage.

3. Innovation in the church building practice follows different tracks in Belarus and Russia. Typical Belarusian inventory approach is described by a mixture of modernism and 'canonical tradition'.

4. Unique trait of church architecture in Belarus is its' exterior character and rare use of wall-painting in the interior. Architects use 'Muraviewka', Gothic fortified church and elements of various historical styles as a source of inspiration, but design based on authentic cultural heritage is comparatively rare.

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ПРАВОСЛАВНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ И СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ХРАМОВАЯ АРХИТЕКТУРА

Резюме

Статья посвящена актуальной проблеме определения основных тенденций в современной православной храмовой архитектуре Беларуси. Рассматриваются направления развития белорусского храмостроения, основанные на интерпретации национальных традиций храмового зодчества и тенденций, характерных для постсоветской храмовой архитектуры Русской Православной Церкви. Исследуется вопрос влияния идентичности, доминирующей в среде прихожан и духовенства Русской Православной Церкви конца XX – начала XXI в., на формирование канона православного храмостроения.