Modern Church Construction in Urals. Problems and Prospects

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Abstract. The article analyzes the problems of the modern Orthodox church architecture in Russia, special attention is paid to the problems of the Ural region. It justifies the importance of addressing to this issue connected with the Orthodox traditions revival in Russia over the last decades and the need to compensate for tens of thousands of the churches destroyed in the Soviet period. The works on the theory and history of the Russian architecture and art, studies of the architectural heritage and the art of building of the Ural craftsmen are used as a scientific and methodological base for the church architecture development. The article discloses the historically formed architectural features of the Russian Orthodox churches the artistic image of which is designed to create a certain religious and aesthetic experience. It is stated that the restoration of the Russian church construction tradition is possible on the background of architectural heritage. It sets the tendencies and vital tasks in church construction and outlines a complex of measures to solve these tasks at the public and regional levels.

Keywords. Orthodox church construction, problems of modern church construction, Urals church architecture, Russian church construction traditions, history of the Russian architecture.

1. Introduction
Due to the historical circumstances connected with the theomachy’s coming to power in Russia in 1917 and holding the reins of power for 75 years, our people were unable to erect new churches. Religious sanctuaries created by the people over the glorious millenary history, starting from the Christianization of Russia, were ruthlessly destroyed. The question was only about a potential preservation of the historical and cultural heritage remained from the previous generations. An experimental attempt to substitute Christianity with a new religion featuring all the attributes of this religion – hallows (Lenin’s Mausoleum), ceremonial processions (demonstrations) and icons (portraits of the leading figures) were unrewarded by success. In spite of the monstrous outrages, executions of church officers and church-goers without trial, jails and camps, destruction of churches and monasteries, the Russian Church survived, and our people preserved Orthodoxy as the greatest value bequeathed to us by our forefathers. Currently, according to the recent population census, over a half of the Russians identify themselves as Orthodox. The events passing in Russia over the last decades led to the revival of the Orthodox traditions and gave a powerful impetus for the reconstruction and restoration of the churches crippled over the Soviet epoch, as well as for the construction of new churches in substitution of the tens of thousands of the lost churches. The monastic service is also revived.
2. Problems and Vital Tasks of the Modern Church Construction

Problems of church restoration can be successfully solved at a rather high professional level, particularly in metropolitan areas with historically formed strong art and restoration schools and an accumulated deep experience in the architectural and historical heritage restoration. As opposed to the restoration traditions, the church construction traditions were abandoned over the Soviet regime years, new churches were not designed and built, the historical process of the development of architectural forms in the church architecture was forcibly stopped. Currently, there are no specialized workshops and architects professionally trained for church construction, combining a deep understanding of Orthodox traditions and a knowledge of church canons, a delicacy of an artist together with architectonic and technological knowledge in the sphere of design engineering of such type of buildings. Maximum problems arise at the construction of new churches in provincial regions of our country, where the absence of qualified architectural personnel is often aggravated with the absence of sufficient funds for design and construction. The most pressing is the problem of choosing the church type and style, creation of a compositionally integral, balanced and expressive image. Absence of a deep penetration into the subject, shallow knowledge of historical regularities of the Russian Orthodox church typology development and classical form making principles lead to an interruption of the proportional interconnection of the main church parts, eclectricity and mere tastelessness. All these problems are also typical of the Ural region.

It is impossible to solve a complex of problems connected with modern Orthodox church architecture independently of the art history and works on the theory and history of architecture. Many serious scientific studies have been dealing with the history of the Russian architecture. A fundamental work in this field is “General History of Architecture”, several sections of which deal with the Russian architecture [1, 2]. The information on the most important architectural monuments set forth therein enables to track the process of the formation of the main types of Orthodox churches, their space, planning and stylistic peculiar features. Works on the history of the Russian architecture published before 1917 and, consequently, free from the atheistic ideology prevailing in the Soviet times, are of a particular interest within the framework of our research. The most complete work based on the valuable art and archive materials is I.E. Grabal’s multi-volume edition “History of the Russian Art”, the history of architecture is presented in the first four volumes [3]. Analytical reviews of the Christian architectural monuments of Doctor of Church History N.V. Pokrovsky [4], essays devoted to the Russian icon of world-famous philosopher and philologist Prince E.N. Trubetskoy [5] enable to track the formation regularities and the sacred meaning of the architecture of Christian, including Orthodox, churches. Addressing the problem of new church architecture in the Urals, it should be understood that most stone churches of our region, which survived to the present day, were erected in the XVIII–XIX centuries. Consequently, it is necessary to study the regularities of the development of the Russian architectural theory and practice of this period and the constructive methods of Russian Baroque and Classicism architects. Such studies are represented by the works of N.A. Evsina, N.F. Gulyanitsky, V.V. Kirillov, Yu.Ya. Gerchuk [6-9].

In order to find the ways to solve the problems of modern church architecture in our region, it is necessary to study the ways of the Orthodox church construction development in the Urals. Reference books, collections of statistical data about governorates, eparchial papers and works on the regional natural history allow to obtain historical and fact-based information [10-12]. Regional natural and church-historical studies, reference and statistical literature at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries contain survey information: dates of construction of churches, number of altars, guardians, church capital, size of the parish and size of the land belonging to churches. However, no information on composition, space-planning and stylistic features of churches, architects and builders was published in these sources. Scientific works of A.Yu. Kaptikov, A.A. Starikov, A.S. Terekhin, M.P. Mochalova, A.M. Raskin [13-19] deal with the study of the town-planning aspects of the Urals development in the XVIII–XIX centuries, the architectural heritage and art of building of the Ural craftsmen. It is interesting that the history of the foundation of many Ural towns and the construction of many churches is connected with the history of mining plants and patronship activities of their owners.
Major Ural plant and land owners belonged to those rare customers in the Urals of the XVIII–XIX centuries, who could afford to address metropolitan architects and, alongside with that, to train own highly skilled craftsmen. Many Ural churches have highly artistic merits and are made by true craftsmen. Following this tradition can form the basis for the church construction revival at a high professional level.

Before consideration of the problem in its architectural aspect, we must understand in detail its essence and what exactly the Russian church architecture expresses in the plastic forms. What is its peculiarity and difference from the church architecture of other Christian countries of Europe and Asia. Firstly, it is necessary to note a purely Russian peculiar feature in the church architecture – the shape of an onion dome. Why did such shape appear and what is its aesthetic meaning? A brilliant answer to this question was given by Russian philosopher Prince E.N. Trubetskoy: “A Byzantine dome above the church represents a concave covering the earth. A Gothic needle, vice versa, represents a feverish desire skyward raising stone giants from the ground. And finally, our national “onion” encapsulates the concept of a deep prayerful burning up in the skies, through which our earth becomes involved in an otherworldly treasure.” [5] The essence of the long-present Russian tradition of the church architecture is that a house of God represents an ideal, an unrealized hope of all the living beings, another reality, the tempting heavenly future, which the humanity hasn’t reached yet. This concept is perfectly expressed in the architecture of our ancient churches, particularly Pskov and Novgorod churches. In spite of the evident time gap in the church construction, the tradition of the Orthodox architecture is not lost in Russia. The tradition is kept and will be certainly developed in the near future. The efforts of our enthusiastic restoration artists (P.D. Baranovsky, V.S. Bagine, etc.), who made measurements and preserved a lot of important things for further restoration, who shared their knowledge and accumulated experience, helped to store precious historical information (for example, the Church of the Kazan icon of God’s Mother in Red Square of Moscow was rebuilt based on the measurements of P.D. Baranovsky).

The studies dealing with the history of the Russian architecture and art describe the main types of churches formed over the entire period of the Orthodox church architecture in Russia. Two lines of the church architecture development can be outlined in the set Orthodox tradition. The first one is the so-called Greek tradition absorbed in Ancient Rus from Byzantium and further developed by the connection of annexes in the form of different cruciform aisles, or with an attached or free-standing bell tower or campanile or without it. The second tradition came to us from Western Europe and was perceived in our own way, mastered and developed in Russia. It concerns the construction of rotunda churches, which were rather widespread in the second half of the XVIII – the first half of the XIX century and expressed the idea of the conciliar nature of the Church as envisioned by the Russian architects, when all the people of faith are placed in a single dome space during the church service. The image of an antique rotunda church formed the basis of the compositional searches of Russian architects of the day. However, this image, as well as the image of a Western Europe church of the Epoch of Classicism and the architectural theories of the great craftsmen of the Renaissance were not directly copied in the architecture of Russian rotunda churches. The architectural form, which was creatively modified and conceptualized in the Russian church construction traditions, formed the basis for the construction of unique Orthodox rotunda churches. The maximum contribution to the development of rotunda shapes in the Orthodox church construction was made by brilliant Russian architect M.F. Kazakov. Harmoniously uniting the national traditions with new compositional techniques, he created a rotunda church, which became most widespread. It concerns churches built according to the “ship” three-part scheme, when a bell tower, a frater house and the rotunda-shaped church itself are “threaded” on one axis. In parallel with the metropolitan areas, the construction of rotunda churches became one of the brightest and unique pages of the church architecture in the Urals. Ural rotunda churches occupied a rightful place in the history of the Russian Orthodox architecture carrying on and developing the rotunda church types formed in the metropolitan architectural school [20].
Rotunda churches are interesting to us because they exemplify the appearance and understanding of a new form, which did not initially comply with the Orthodox ritualism. Nowadays, due to the lack of land plots in big cities a vast multistory building development is used for construction. In this connection, the face of the historically developed cities rapidly changes, the church ceases to be the main architectural and town-development dominant. What Orthodox churches will be built in Russia in the near future? How will each of them be integrated into the existing building development and linked to the next one? Today, the new epoch, ever-improving construction technologies, appearance of new materials can demand new shapes of the Orthodox church. It is known that each great epoch gives birth to a new great style. Maybe Russia, which entered the post-industrial epoch, will offer something new in the Orthodox church construction to the world. Anyway, it is necessary to understand the following – mere copying of the already formed shapes, as well as searches of new shapes not based on a deep understanding of the spiritual essence of Orthodoxy, will not bring the desired result. The church image must prepare a person for a specific religious and aesthetic experience. The appearance of new shapes and new technologies will not change the most important thing. The essence of the Russian Orthodox church architecture will remain unchanged – a persistent proclivity for another heavenly reality.

Currently, it is probably too early to speak about new shapes of the Russian Orthodox church. First of all, it is necessary to revive the aborted tradition, for which purpose relevant personnel must be trained. Due to the lack of church architecture specialists it is impossible yet to create specialized architectural workshops engaged in design engineering of churches and monasteries. But it is a question of time. In pre-revolutionary Russia such workshops existed and influenced church architecture throughout the country developing and improving the church architecture. The traditions of using “pattern” projects in the Russian architecture, including church construction, are a positive historical example of “standardized construction”, which enabled the construction of many church buildings at a high artistic level in the absence of a sufficient number of architects in the province. Standardized construction brought discredit on itself in our country by panel five-nine-story houses. But the thing is not in the design and construction method but in the initial quality of standard projects, which are far from perfect. It is necessary to attract the best and most trained architects to the creation of standard designs of Orthodox churches. It is better to build a church under a quality standard project than to turn “an isle of spirituality” into “an isle of tastelessness” by an amateurish project.

There is a solid foundation for an advancement to further develop the church construction tradition formed in Russia. It is necessary to outline several types of churches by their functional designation: cathedral church (main church of the city connected with the patronal festival of dominion to the city), parish church, household church, travelers (station) church, graveyard (cemetery) church, chattel, burial vault church, bell-tower church, church over-the-gates. The appearance of institutional churches is a modern church construction trend. Many enterprises, educational institutions, army units, penal institutions and health care centers build their own churches on their territory, which can be rather conventionally referred to household churches. The functional designation of this or that church closely connected with the number of believers attending the church service must be certainly considered at its design engineering. It is also expedient to think about the creation of standard projects for mass construction of hospital, army, prison, station and other churches, whereas an absolute majority of hospitals, stations and corrective labor institutions were built in the Ural region over the Soviet years under standard projects. The time has come to access the Russian Orthodox church architecture of the last two decades in a consistent and critical manner and to raise questions to identify the modern style and form making factors complying with the Orthodox canons.

3. Conclusion
Currently, the importance of mass construction of new churches and monasteries to satisfy the spiritual needs of the Russians cannot be overemphasized. The church construction has begun and is in progress throughout the country. The main problem retarding the development of the modern Orthodox church architecture in the Urals is the absence of a uniform state program of modern
Orthodox art development in view of the regional demands. The existing problem is misunderstood and underestimated by the representatives of the legislative and executive local authorities. In spite of the fact that the Church in Russia is separated from the state, the scale of the existing problem has a countrywide nature, and whereas the Russian people have proved by their centuries-long history that they are people believing in a strong state, the approach to this problem must be considered at the state level. We need a conceptual Orthodox church construction program in our region approved by the public authorities of the Ural Federal District, especially that the country has accumulated a certain experience – starting from 2010, a joint program of the city administration and the Moscow patriarchy on the construction of 200 orthodox churches has been implemented in Moscow. It is necessary to improve the legislative base at the regional levels allowing to develop and to enlarge the church construction, to establish professional church sections at the regional departments of the Union of Architects of Russia and the Urban Councils, with the participation of the representatives of initiative groups of church-goers.

Works on the history of the Russian architecture presenting the best traditions and images, as well as regional characteristics of the Russian church architecture must form a scientific and methodological base for the modern church construction. The problem on the lack of qualified architectural personnel can be solved by the creation of Master’s Orthodox architecture programs for training of architects in the leading universities of our region. Alongside with that, it is necessary to establish architectural and restoration workshops at the regional eparchies in the Ural Federal District and a uniform information and scientific base for the development of complex standardized church construction. Taking of these high priority measures will trigger the Orthodox church construction in the Urals, contribute to the strengthening of moral principles in our society and the improvement of its social and cultural environment. An increase of tolerance, understanding and vision of further development prospects of our society as a civil society raising self-esteem of all the citizens of our multi-sect company will contribute to the development of the modern Russian church architecture.

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