Architectural features and problems of preserving the monument of Orthodox construction in Transbaikalia - the Church of the village of Konduy

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the construction of one of the little-known monuments of Orthodox Church architecture on the territory of Eastern Transbaikalia - the Church of the Kazan icon of the mother of God and the Holy Martyrs Kirik and Iulita in the village of Konduy in the Borzya district of the Chita region. The features of using building materials and architecture are described. The question of the origin of building materials is analyzed. It is noted that the Church stands out among Orthodox churches by its external decoration. The question is raised about the need to preserve such an unusual monument of Church architecture.

1. Introduction

On the Trans-Baikal territory (Eastern Transbaikalia), units of Orthodox architecture and construction of the pre-Soviet period have been preserved. Among them, Orthodox churches stand out: the assumption of the blessed virgin Mary of the village of Kalinino in the Nerchinsky district of the TRANS-Baikal territory (1712), the Archangel Michael in Chita (1776), the Holy cross Church of the village of Zakharovo in the Krasnochikovsky district (1892).

You can make an assumption about the reasons for this situation. First, the remoteness from the center of Russia, the peripheral, border, provincial position of the region determined the simplicity of the approach to the construction of the bulk of churches and chapels. In other words, there was no need for serious architectural refinements. We can observe this, for example, on the example of the Chita women's Bogoroditsky monastery of the late XIX – early XX centuries. Its architectural ensemble was incredibly simple and this despite the fact that it was located in the regional center – Chita. Secondly, the significance of the territory, the weakness of its settlement and the dispersion of settlements, caused difficulties with construction. The third component is the legacy of the 20-30s of the XX century-the time of destruction of temples. The region has lost a significant part of cathedrals, churches, chapels and houses of worship. Despite this, some of the churches built in the XIX – early XX centuries have been preserved. There are only a few restored and preserved ones left. This is Holy cross Church in the village...
of Zakharovo Krasnochikoyskoe area TRANS-Baikal territory, the Archangel Michael (also called «the Church of Decembrists») and Holy resurrection Church (former Catholic Church of Peter and Paul) in the city of Chita.

One of the monuments of Orthodox architecture of the region's pre-Soviet period is the Church of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God and Svyatytikh Muchenikov kirika I iulitty Condui in the village of Borznya district Chita region. We often find in the literature that this is a Church in honor of the Nativity of the most Holy Theotokos and the Holy Martyrs Kirik and Iulitta [3; 7; 10; 11; 12; 19 etc.]. In common parlance it is called simply «Konduy Church». Note that knowing it as such, the majority of transbaikalians do not know that this is a Church in the name of the Kazan icon of the mother of God and in the name of the named Holy Martyrs.

This article aims to characterize the architectural features of the named Church and, once again, to focus on the problem of its preservation.

2. Materials and methods
The work is based on two approaches of Russian historical science, formational and civilizational. The first made it possible to divide the history of the Konduy Church into pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. The second one made it possible to consider the Church as an expression of the Russian Orthodox civilizational identity with an unusual mixture of elements of Eastern civilization through the use of architectural elements of buildings of other cultures, which is unusual for Orthodoxy.

The paper uses the fundamental principles of historical science. The principle of historicism was given the opportunity to describe the history of the Konduy Church in its historical development. The principle of objectivity allowed the authors to start only from facts, distancing themselves from subjective assessments of various events.

The study used both General scientific and special scientific methods. The first are methods of collecting, analyzing and synthesizing material, as well as methods of induction and deduction, which allowed us to build logical chains from the General to the particular and Vice versa. Among the special methods of historical science can be called comparative-historical, which made it possible to consider the history of the Konduy Church in its development through comparison.

3. Results
In the passport of the object of the Ministry of culture of the Transbaikal region, citing data provided by the State archive of the Transbaikal territory, the Church called of the Nativity of the blessed virgin Mary [4]. According to N.P. Kradin, the Church of the Nativity of the most Holy Theotokos and the Holy Martyrs Kirik and Uliita [11, p. 172]

It should be noted that the Church of the village of Konduy has not become, until today, the subject of serious scientific study with the involvement of a significant amount of sources on its history. At the same time, individual notes appeared at different times. Perhaps the first is an article by the founder of the local history Museum in Chita, A.K. Kuznetsov, which was published in 1925. However, it is mainly devoted to the Konduysky Palace. However, the issues of removal of bricks, stone and «statues» from the territory of the Palace ruins are discussed. Under «statues», perhaps, A.K. Kuznetsov understood the sculptures of stone dragons, some of which formed the Foundation of the Konduy Church [13].

In 2002, an article by N.P. Kradin «architectural monuments of Konduy» was published, which, among other things, refers to the Church being characterized [10]. Small notes on the Church are available in the large four-volume Encyclopedia of Transbaikalia, as well as in special volumes of the small encyclopedia of Transbaikalia («Culture», «Archaeology», Architecture and construction) [1; p. 275; 10; 19, p. 346]. Mention of the fact that the material of the former Konduy town was used for the construction of the temple is also found in a number of notes of the named publications on the Konduy town [8; 9]. The main problem with all these publications is that they are small and simply repeat each other.
Despite the fact that the Church is quite well-known in the TRANS-Baikal territory, it has not received proper fame outside of it, although in architectural terms it is so unusual that it can claim an independent place in the list of monuments.

The main feature of the Konduy Church consists of two components. The first is that it is built of stone that was left over from the Konduy Palace. It is famous monument of medieval architecture, located in the valley of the Uryulyunguy river. In domestic archaeology it is known as «Konduy town» or «Konduy settlement». This is a small copy of the Palace in the capital of the Mongol Empire Karakorum on the Orkhon river. The monument dates back to the XIV century. [9, p. 377] The fact that the Orthodox Church was built from stone from the construction of pagan Mongols is surprising. The second component that makes this monument unusual is that stone statues of dragons from the same Konduy Palace were installed at the base of the Church. Actually, dragons are an element of pagan perception of the world. These are mythical creatures. There is evidence that in addition to stone and dragons from the ruins of the Palace, bricks, stone slabs and sculptures of «men» were used [15]. Also, stone circles were used for the construction of the Church, which, most likely, were the basis for the columns of the Palace. In total, about seventy sculptures were used during construction [15].

This raises a number of obvious questions. Who came up with the idea of using dragons and «little men» to build an Orthodox Church? How did the Russian Orthodox Church perceive this fact? And the most important question is, how was such a Church consecrated?

The history of the construction of the temple is complex. There is evidence that the initiators of the construction were Epov family – residents of Nerchinsk.

They also financed the construction. The Builder was Kirill Sukhanov, Archpriest of the Nerchinsky Cathedral. The beginning of construction, after the blessing of the diocesan authorities, dates back to 1806. The Blessing was given by Bishop Benjamin of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk (Bagryansky). D.E. Tsyrenzhapova writes that the Church was built by the Cossack constable N. Epov with the permission of the Nerchinsky spiritual authorities, however, what is understood by the latter is not quite clear. They write that the Church was built by the efforts of the widow of the Cossack constable Semyon Vasilyevich Epov and her son. According to some references, the Church was built in 1805 [4; 6; 19, p. 346]. The Church is located in the center of the village.

In General, the exterior of the Church building is traditional. The building of the temple is elongated due to an extension on the entrance side, a five-sided apse. According to various characteristics, the altar, refectory and bell tower or apse, the temple room, refectory, bell tower are located along the axis of the Church [4; 11, p. 172; 19, p. 346; 20]. Unfortunately, we do not quite understand what the presence of a refectory in the center of the temple means in the first case.

In the building of the Church, there are no proportions in volume. The Church is squat. The plane of the walls on the outside of the Church is divided by pilasters. They correspond to divisions within the internal space [20].

The temple is two-tiered. As noted by D.E. Tsyrenzhapova, the octagon on the quadrangle is covered by an 8-tray closed vault [19, p. 346].

The Church had two limits. One, the main, in honor of the Kazan icon of the mother of God (or in honor of the Nativity of the most Holy Theotokos), the second, respectively, in honor of the Holy Martyrs Kirik and Iulitta. The second limit was completed and illuminated in the same year, and the main limit, like the Church itself, was only nine years later. The Church was surrounded by a fence, eventually made of stone. To date, no remains of the fence have been preserved.

The Church had a bell tower. Today, it is not possible to observe this visually, but there are mentions of bells that were ordered in Moscow. There were four of them, the largest was weighing up to 500 kg. The Interior of the Church was painted by masters invited from Moscow. A chandelier brought from the same place is mentioned [15].

The most interesting element that adorns the Church is such an element of the entrance extension as columns. There are four of them. The building is decorated with semi-oval Windows along the perimeter.
The most complete description of the architectural elements of the Church is given by N.P. Kradin. He gives the number of decorative elements in the form of dragons and stone circles: 19 elements on the North side, 13 on the East side, 18 on the South side, and 14 on the West side. All named elements are arranged in two rows. One on the plinth, the second - in the middle of the walls, in special niches. There are 34 elements in the lower row and 30 in the upper row, respectively. The lower row of decorative elements is along the entire perimeter of the building, the upper one is along the part [11, p. 172]. In one newspaper publication, the total number of dragon statues embedded in the wall is 69, which is obviously not true [17].

In publications, there are sizes of dragons used in the Foundation of the temple: 76x25x25 sm [19, p. 346]. The location of dragons as a decorative element on the walls of the Church is not the same. So, on the West side there are only two statues, which are embedded in the wall on both sides of the entrance. These dragons are larger than the others. As it is assumed in the passport of the Church on the website of the Ministry of culture of the Trans-Baikal territory, these are dragons from the corners of the balustrade of the Konduy Palace [4].

The thickness of the walls of the Church is within one meter. At the time of construction, and at a much later time, this Church was the only stone and so unusual in its architectural elements. The nearest, perhaps – is the Church of the assumption of the blessed virgin Mary, currently in the village of Kalinino in the Nerchinsky district of the Trans-Baikal territory.

There is an answer to the question of how the diocesan authorities allowed coverage of such a Church. This happened only after the dragon statues were covered with clay [15]. For today, when visually examined, nothing reminds that they were covered up. This is understandable, more than two hundred years have passed. However, the Church in an abandoned state has been standing for a long time, on the walls from the outside you can see the remains of whitewash. There is reason to assume that they are from pre-Soviet times. That is, the Church with visible statues of dragons may have been working and the diocesan authorities turned a blind eye to this.

The significance of the Church for Eastern Transbaikalia can be accessed through visits by its diocesan bishops. In different years in the nineteenth century it was visited by a number of them. These are The Most Reverend Nil (Isakovich), Eusebius (Orlinsky), Parthenius (Popov), And Miletius (Yakimov) [15].

There are some controversial points about the Church. In one of the publications we meet «... they Say, all of white granite» [20]. At the same time, other data suggest that up to three-quarters of the bricks from the ruins of the Kondu Palace were used in the construction, and partially with bricks, at the expense of the organizer M.S. Epova [15].

Since there are no materials for a serious study of the Church in the public domain, it is difficult to say how much granite was used in the construction of the Church. Probably, the round bases of columns and dragons were granite.

It is known that in the 1920s the priest, for some time, was a priest Luka Epov [6]. Without reference to sources, one of the publications mentions that the Church was closed in 1929 [20]. The bell tower was dismantled in 1930 or <in the 1930s> [19, p. 346]. There is evidence that for some time the Church premises were used as a warehouse, and after that it was abandoned [5]. In the newspaper publication mentioned above, it is noted that the Church has been abandoned since the 60s of the XX century [17].

The building of the Konduy Church is an object of cultural heritage of Federal significance, but this fact does not affect its condition in any way and, quite likely, will not affect it in the near future. It is an object of cultural heritage under the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 176 of February 20, 1995 [18].

In the middle of the first decade of the XXI century, a statue of one of the dragons was removed from the wall of the Church. His fate is not known. There is a destruction of the brickwork of the walls from moisture.

It should be mentioned that stone sculptures of dragons are kept in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and in the local history Museum of Nerchinsk in the Trans-Baikal territory.
4. Conclusion
For not even years but decades, there has been talk about the restoration of the monuments of Church architecture. During the visit to Konduya, the authors of these lines heard a story about the money collected for restoration more than once. In some cases, dishonest people, in others, sincere active public figures. However, to date, no work is underway. This does not even mean restoration work, but work on creating a project for restoration or examination of the state of the building to date. At the same time, it should be noted that in 2006 under the guidance of the famous scientist N.P. Kradin, a project for the restoration of the Church in the village of Konduy was created as part of the thesis. However, in the project, the Church is called Christmas [16]. It is obvious that we are talking about one object. The main thing here is that the project was made less than fifteen years ago and it is obvious that today, it can become the basis for a new project.

It is known that a Board of Trustees for the restoration of the Church was established in the Borzinsky district of the TRANS-Baikal territory. By the middle of the second decade of the XXI century, even the amount required for restoration was called-about 40 million rubles. It was noted that after the examination, the cost may increase. However, we have not received any information about the examination as of today [2]. Alexander Lesnyansky on his page in LiveJournal calls the amount of 4 million rubles [5]. It is obvious that the first amount seems more correct.

The Church as an object of cultural heritage was included in the program of the Ministry of culture of the Russian Federation. This was stated in January 2016 by the Minister of culture of the TRANS-Baikal territory V. K. Kolosov [14]. However, it is not clear what, at least, the interim result of the work is to date. In the summer of 2020, the authors of this article visited Konduy again and can state that the situation has not changed. The only thing that distinguishes the picture from that of a dozen years ago is that a small area around the temple is surrounded by a fence that does not allow the cattle of local residents to enter the building.

The authors of these lines wrote about the Church of the Nativity of the blessed virgin Mary and the Holy Martyrs Kirik and Iulitta earlier, but nothing has changed over the years. This publication again focuses on the problem of restoring the temple and preserving it as an unusual architectural monument, such as, perhaps, cannot be found anymore.

From a scientific and historical point of view, it is obvious that the history of the Konduy Church has not been studied enough. There are many «white spots», contradictions and inconsistencies. And in General, there is not much information about the history of its construction and existence. Archival research is important here.

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