The problems of autochtonity of church construction in the Don region

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Abstract. The architectural features of the Orthodox church of Don region being the main subject of the article are considered in the historical, cultural and comparative perspective. The Resurrection Military Council and the tent belfry of Starocherkassk are presented as the examples of the original forms and solutions that are typical for the temples of this region. The problem of influence of other architectural and artistic styles is touched upon, the creative assimilation of which did not lead to the loss of the traditional forms and autochthony of the Orthodox churches in the Don region.

Introduction

The Don region has a rich cultural and historical heritage. Its territory was inhabited by representatives of different nationalities, beliefs and cultures. Their interaction formed the unique features of the civilizational and cultural image of the region. Features of aboriginal mentality and worldview were expressed in folklore, lifestyle, works of art, house-building and religious architecture. As for the latter, this article is devoted to the architecture of the Orthodox Church building, depicting these features in a symbolic form.

Orthodox churches were the center of religious and social life of the Don Cossacks. They baptized the infants, married, read the burial service, prayed for victory and health, blessed the banners, weapons and rewards. Committing military rituals and the assignment of ranks were also associated with the village orthodox churches.

The research on this topic is complicated by the fact that in the Soviet period many churches were destroyed or transformed into production facilities. The ongoing process of revival of the Don Cossacks and its traditions has led to the need for the construction of new churches and the restoration of the old ones. In this regard, the Rostov Diocese initiated the collection of historical materials for the chronicle of the Don Cossack churches.

Cossack village churches were built on the basis of General principles of spatial and social organization of the Cossack settlement. The Central place of it was occupied by the Maidan (city square) – a place of General meeting of Cossacks – a Circle. Next to the Circle there were huts of
noble Cossacks, the Cossack village temple (Church) with a bell tower and a chapel. Thus, the planning structure of the Cossack settlements was circular, it had many similar elements with that of the nomadic people of the Great steppe.

The temple was the "heart" of the Cossack village, its main building, which was assigned not only a spiritual function, but also a military one. The temple was a well-fortified fortress with strong gates, windows like loopholes, surrounded by a brick fence. The architectural composition of the temple assumed its use in case of need for military purposes. Therefore, the military functionality of the temple and the ability to withstand the siege was the main focus during its designing.

Main Part

Historians have reliable information about the first temples in the don Cossack settlements and villages built in the XVI century. The most ancient of them is the temple of the Holy Virgin in Razdori (now the village Razdorskaya) on bank of the river Don. In Cherkaessk (St. Starocherkasskaya) there were chapels built in the first half of the XVII century, and in 1652 a wooden Resurrection Cathedral was constructed. It is possible to assume the existence of a large number of wooden chapels and temples in small Cossack settlements about which no data remained. They either were lost in the fire or were rebuilt at a later time.

In ancient Cossack villages great importance was given to the external beauty of the temple, the height of the bell tower, the shape and shine of the gilded dome and cross which indicated the well-being of the Cossack village and its inhabitants.

You can get an idea of the architecture of the most ancient Cossack chapels and temples examining the preserved historical artifacts as well as Old Believers' chapels and churches. The village chapel built in the form of a rectangular frame (log construction) had much in common with the architecture of the Moscow small wooden chapels. They were covered with a gable roof topped with a "carrot" dome with an eight-pointed cross. It is known that the Don Cossacks sympathized with the persecuted old believers. Partially the highest ranks of the old believers' priests fleeing from persecution of the authorities settled on the southern border in the Cossack villages. By 1700 many settlements and villages of the Don Cossacks were already with their old believers' priests [1].

Following the tradition of Old Believers churches were built of wood as a stepped construction of three or more octagonal log-house set on each other and tapering upwards. The space of the Don temple was divided horizontally into three parts: "altar", "muzichnik", "babnik". These parts had different degrees of holiness which decreased with distance from the altar. A wooden carved iconostasis separated the altar from the rest of the less sacred space of the temple. The historian E. Saveliev considered that Cossack iconography of temples, Royal gates and the ornament were from Novgorod by their style, not Byzantine like in Kiev or Moscow.

Academician E. M. Oznobishin established the similarity of wooden Don churches with those in Novgorod in the middle of the XIX century. From his point of view, the main unifying feature was the storeyed structure, but Novgorod churches were built following the type of "Byzantine" centric composition and do not have a clear division into “babnik”, “muzichnik” and the altar.

E. P. Saveliev also admitted the possibility that the original model for the wooden Don churches was Novgorod churches with their octagonal frame and storied structure. Temples built in the Novgorod style featured an octagonal frame which had three to five layers of the same shape, gradually narrowing upward, and topped with tent-shaped domes. The top one was onion dome with eight-pointed cross.

Researchers believe that the temples of the Don Cossacks were mainly of two types – in the form of a cross like Byzantine or Greek churches were built and – in the Novgorod style. The latter was distinguished by a certain freedom in choosing the shape of the domes. We share the opinion of G. Pavlutsky that the wooden Orthodox churches of the South of Russia have the original architecture
that incorporates elements of several styles which is not reduced to either Gothic or Baroque, or to the style of The Renaissance [2].

Major Don temple was host Resurrection Military Cathedral in Cherkassk erected in 1719. This nine-domed Cathedral with a height of 49 meters belongs to the type of temples with a centric cross composition. It is a more complex version of the previous wooden churches of Cherkassk which inherited their characteristics. The central dome is located above the central passage and four towers with onion domes are precisely oriented East - West, North - South, the other towers with domes are placed diagonally "Greek cross".

Construction materials were either imported or local. In Cherkassk bricks of big size (280 x 140 x 70 mm) were made. For masonry walls they used lime mortar mixed with egg yolk. The thickness of the walls in the main part of the Cathedral is two meters, and in the aisles - up to 1.5. Window frames and doors were carved in Cherkassk. They are made from the local wood of the Northern areas of the Don. The Cathedral is covered with a thin layer of lime, not plaster, so the brickwork is clearly visible. The white color really allowed to reveal the beauty of the cross-dome system, volume, which strayed stripes (plinth) of "Byzantine, Balkan and Kiev-Chernigov churches" [3]. The study of the foundation of the Cathedral confirmed the correctness of the legend that it was built on marshy soil using piles.

The Cathedral and the hipped bell tower show the unity of the design concept of all the constituent elements of the Maidan the asymmetric planning of which was consciously applied as a means of artistic expression. We find a prototype of this traditional style in the Russian Kremlin of the XVI - XVII centuries. As V. D. Sukhorukov noted, the Starocherkassk bell tower repeats the characteristic features of the towers of the Moscow Kremlin [4].

Architecturally and artistically the bell tower is designed in the same style as the Cathedral - on a high octagonal base mounted on a quadrangle. There is a basement under it which played the role of storage. The thickness of the walls exceeds three meters.

The bell tower has a spiral staircase leading to the sightseeing platform. There are niches in the walls of the bell tower that were lit during the festive illuminations. The layers of the quadrangle have a carved porch with decorative elements borrowed from the traditional housing architecture typical for the Cossack settlements of the Don. Their use was dictated by the business, administrative and ceremonial functions of the area.

Friezes in the tower of the Cathedral in its plastic unity are the main motif of decoration. Eight arches with pediments create a harmonious transition from the octahedron to the bell tower. The upper dome is very small comparatively to the octagonal tower and the base of the bell tower. This disproportion gives it a peculiar beauty. In its upper part there is a stone tent of bulbous shape. The cross of the XVIII century is topped with a crown indicating the religious belonging of the building and its state status.

The unity of the artistic and decorative design of the monument is achieved by repeating the same architectural motif at different levels, subordinating all the architectural elements of the vertical structure. The religious meaning of the bell tower is in the connection of the earth with the heavens. However, the bell tower performed not only a religious function, but also served as a military watchtower. It also functioned as a fire tower having a special bell and duty guard in the amount of 2-3 Cossacks.

The autochthonous temple architecture of the Don army region of this period differed from that which was typical for the Northern and the Central regions of Russia. The question of the possible impact of different architectural styles on it remains debatable. Preserved architectural monuments dating back to the XVII century and earlier periods are not enough to draw final conclusions.

The time of construction of the Resurrection Military Cathedral coincided with the heyday of the Don Cossacks, when the monumental architecture and art reflected national ideas and aspirations. There is a point of view that the architecture of the Resurrection Cathedral belongs to the Ukrainian
Baroque. We can not agree with her despite the arguments that the prototypes of most of the Don churches were Ukrainian churches of XVI - XVII centuries.

With a more thorough analysis of spatial and decorative solutions it is possible to establish the borrowing of stylistic forms from Russian architecture of wooden churches. The methods of combining tetrahedral and octahedral planning are similar to the plans of southern Russian churches and churches in Ukraine. Cathedral basement, decorative design of the porch and veranda are typical for Russian Baroque. Similar to the Resurrection Military Cathedral architectural solutions can be found in Chernigov temples of the XVII century. Nicholas Cathedral in the city of Nezhin (1650) is one of the possible prototypes of this type of architectural style. It is an amazing example of a combination of Ukrainian Baroque and traditional forms of folk architecture [5]. The same combination can be seen in the architecture of the Resurrection Military Cathedral. However, these borrowings are so organic that we have good reasons to consider the Resurrection Cathedral to be the first and the unique monument of its kind.

The national color of Russian wooden architecture and Baroque trends in Russian and Ukrainian architecture of that time being united in the architecture of the Resurrection Military Cathedral created a unique piece of Orthodox Church architecture. It became an architectural expression of ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-political identity of the Don Cossacks, the "spirit" of the Don land.

Orthodox Don church building was influenced by various cultural, architectural and artistic styles the study of which is possible taking into account the wide historical context and geographical features of the area.

Speaking about the autochthonous Orthodox Church we pay attention primarily to the main forms of cultural influence and the relationship with the surrounding landscape. Canonical architectural styles are complemented and creatively transformed. Their canonical "rigidity" is inferior to the pressure of external forces adding new elements to the traditional model. Creativity of the architect, consistent with the wishes of the customer and accepted canons, inevitably goes beyond specific traditional forms. Architectural form in this case, of course, retains canonicity in the sense of its symbolic content and in the external appearance of the temple but some elements that give it originality may appear.

By the middle of the XIX century the main three-part structure of the Church loses its original functional meaning which was given to it in the Old Belief. This is probably due to the relaxation of the strict observance of the old believers' canons at that time. The hipped bell tower remains a distinctive and stable element of the temple architecture on the Don. We find its prototype among the wooden Cossack churches of the XVI-XVIII centuries, which was later slightly changed under the influence of Baroque trends. The hipped bell towers became widespread not only in the cemetery churches but also in all the Cossack churches of the Don region by the beginning of the XX century. The fact that the bell tower was given secondary importance in the temple architecture was the reason for the preservation of its traditional pattern which were copied almost unchanged.

The appearance architecture of classical examples of Imperial style after 1812 along with the hipped temple was associated with the settled way of life of the Don Cossacks and the attaching the status of military force of the Russian Empire to it. Classicism was considered an expression of the Imperial style, which introduced other principles of the organization of the architectural space of the temple and the forms of its decor. This led to the transformation of the "kumpol" octagon in a round rotunda, porticos and cornices with dentils that began to decorate even the early built temples. Such a traditional element of the Don Church building as side entrances-porticos used to be done according to the order.

Styles changed and decorative elements changed also, but the three-part structure of the Don Stanitsa Churches remained. Among all the varieties of exemplary projects offered to the Cossacks they chose the closest to the traditional, autochthonous temple in their spatial construction. The construction bell tower –refectory – temple replaced the construction "Babnik"."Muzhichnik"- the
altar. Such a method of creating the volumes became the primary for the village churches of the Don Cossacks in the XIX - early XX centuries. Despite the strong penetration of classical and Byzantine styles, the Don Church building has retained its autochonous traditional elements dating back to the era of wooden churches. Complex interweaving of styles belonging to different epochs and traditions was expressed in the architecture of the Orthodox Don Church originally combining the uniqueness of the original forms and style universalism introduced in the course of historical development.

Summary
In the twentieth century the tradition of temple building for known reasons was interrupted. The culture and identity of the Cossack ethnic group have been lost in some ways. At the end of the twentieth century there was a revival in the construction of churches in Russia and particularly in Don region. Constructed churches no longer bear traces of the former autochthonous identity. Most of the new churches are guided by the traditional style of the Moscow or Pskov-Novgorod architectural school.

The loss of continuity in the church building and the change of the customer of the temple were the main reasons for the oblivion of identity in the architecture of religious buildings in the area. This state of affairs does not contribute to the revival of Christianity on the one hand and on the other hand – it is one of the reasons for the antagonism of new churches. Taking into account the above, we consider it is possible and necessary to revive the construction of temples, taking into account their history and autochthonous formation.

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