

# The Architecture of the Churches of Southern Urals in the 18th-19th Century\*

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**Abstract**—The subject of this paper seems to be important due to the ever-increasing interest in architectural traditions of Russia's regions. The goal of the study is to reveal features of the architecture of the churches of southern Urals in the 18th and 19th centuries. The key approach I chose for this study was historical architectural analysis and integration of data from archives and field surveys. A novel step-by-step analysis of the evolution of church design in the region since ancient times till nowadays is offered. The beginning of the process is presumed to date back to 18th c., as the active development of the South Urals by Russians began at this time. Descriptions and analyses of the region's lesser-known specimen of religious architecture are introduced for the scientific use based on the author's own in situ investigations. Lots of archival materials from Russia's central and regional repositories are considered and published for the first time. The presented study results can be used as a basis for further research in the field of religious architecture of the Southern Urals.

**Keywords**—Russian settlements; Southern Ural; architecture of churches; half-timbered churches

## I. INTRODUCTION

The urgency of the subject is determined by the fact that regional independence and the role of regions in Russia have been steadily growing in scope and nature, so that key findings of this study should be crucially important for preservation and revival of historical environment in various country's settlement. Another focus of the increasing interest has been recently the cultural traditions of various population groups in the South Urals.

The analysis of modern urban settlements architecture in Russia has drawn us to a conclusion that currently it is in the formative stage of its evolution. Early 21st c. is a period when professional architects once again came to be aware of the role of regional tendencies in architecture. Regional architecture is none the less important than the metropolitan one because the former can be called 'mass architecture',

which reflects in itself the whole picture of the country's development.

The study methodology is based on the complex historical and architectural investigation of the South Urals Orthodox churches. A systematic approach involves the use of historical-genetic, architectural and urban planning analysis (typological, stylistic analysis). It is particularly important that this approach takes into account many aspects of national, religious, ethnic identity of heritage. Peculiarities of a multi-national region's development are what demands more attention to historical architectural analysis based on the notion of social ecology. This approach relies on an ethical criterion that allows us to ensure continuity of ecclesiastical architecture's nature and qualities. It is important for the Southern Urals, population of which in all history periods was very varied. The main method of research is the historical and architectural analysis and generalization of archival materials and data obtained in situ. Many materials describing monuments, archival sources introduced for the scientific use for the first time.

The main source of data for the writing of this paper was the survey of territories in the geographic area today known as the Orenburg and Chelyabinsk regions, i.e. the former Russian imperial province of Orenburg, within the boundaries of 19<sup>th</sup> c. territorial division. Available materials in central and local archives and museums have been analysed, among them documents from the Berg-Collegium (Ministry of Mining) and the Senate, the Mining Department, the Office of General Directorate for Plants and Factories, and the Mining Bureaus in the cities of Perm and Orenburg. System approach has been selected as the key methodological principle for the study. The South Urals being a multi-national region of Russia, considerable attention is to be paid to the problem of historical architectural analysis based on the concept of social ecology. This framework entails an ethical parameter, which allows ensuring church architecture continuity in its properties and characteristics.

Most actively, the Orenburg Diocese churches and temples were studied in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, a growing interest in this subject is seen recently. First and foremost, two issues of N.V. Chernavsky's work titled "The Orenburg Diocese in its past and present" [1]

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dated back to the pre-Soviet period. This is an extensive and very detailed history of Russian Orthodoxy in the South Urals, along with data on the foundation and development of churches and monasteries. The book by I.I. Krechetov [2] is devoted to the founding, designing and describing churches based on archival documents available at that time.

Important statistical data on the architecture and condition of churches at that time can be found in the works of geographers and historians of the Russian Cossack Host: P.I. Rychkov [3], P.S. Pallace [4], L.S. Sukhodolsky [5], I.I. Archangelsky [6], V.M. Cheremshansky [7], R.G. Ignatyev [8], and F.M. Starikov [9]. There were individual church and monastery descriptions by monks, for instance, by R.A. Budrina [10].

Today, there are only a few studies focused on religious heritage of the South Urals and its modern churches. These are mostly area studies not specifically concentrated on church architecture. The most interesting works are by authors I.V. Degtyarev and V.S. Bozhe [11], V.I. Konyuchenko [12], V.D. Olenkov [13], and others offering materials and data on individual architectural landmarks.

Most interesting and insightful are the works by clerics. This is, for instance, a book by G.E. Gorlov and O.Yu. Bobrov "Spiritual vineyard of the Orenburg region" [14] where building designs and drawings are given. Interesting facts are contained in the work by N.E. Stremsky "Martyrs, confessors and churches of the Orenburg Eparchy in the 20<sup>th</sup> c." [15].

All the considered works deal with the analysis of Orthodox ecclesiastical architectural traditions in the South Urals in terms of individual buildings' history and their physical state in this or that period. The problem of identifying features of the architecture of the churches of southern Urals in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is not addressed in these works.

## II. CONSTRUCTION OF THE RUSSIAN SETTLEMENTS IN THE SOUTHERN URALS

In the 18th century on the territory of the Southern Urals appear a large number of settlements of Russian Cossacks. With the adherence of the territories of the Southern Urals to Russia, the construction of Christian churches begun in the region. This process is strongly linked to the migration of the Russian population to the Southern Urals, bringing their cultural values, including religious ones. It should be noted that the Bashkirs were the vast majority of the native population in the 9th-15th centuries; Bulgarians and Udmurts lived in the west and northwest of the regions. Another ethnic group, nomadic Turks, inhabited the south and south-east edge of the Southern Urals. Therefore, Islam in that period was a widespread religion in that region.

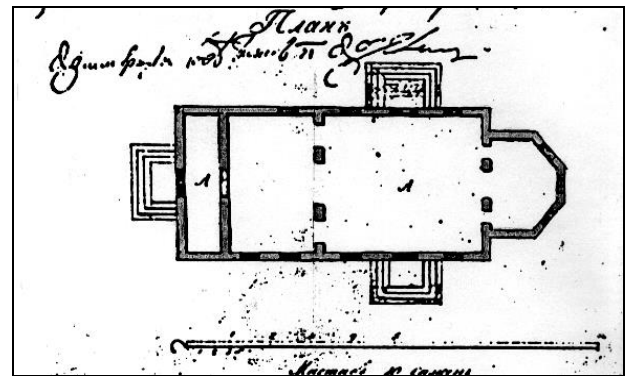


Fig. 1. A plan of the Church in Kusa.

<sup>a</sup> Source: the Russian State archive of ancient documents, f. 171, op. 3.

The first Russians came to the territory of the southern Urals to southern borders. The Ufa Russian fortress was built in the 16th century for protection from attacks of nomads. However, the first real motive for building in this region, including churches, was linked to the expansion of the central Russian government to the lands of the Kazakhs and Bashkirs in the Southern Urals, which was part of the Russian Tsar and Emperor Peter the Great during his military reforms. Further, there was a necessity for the construction of settlements in the Southern Urals in order to protect Russian borders.

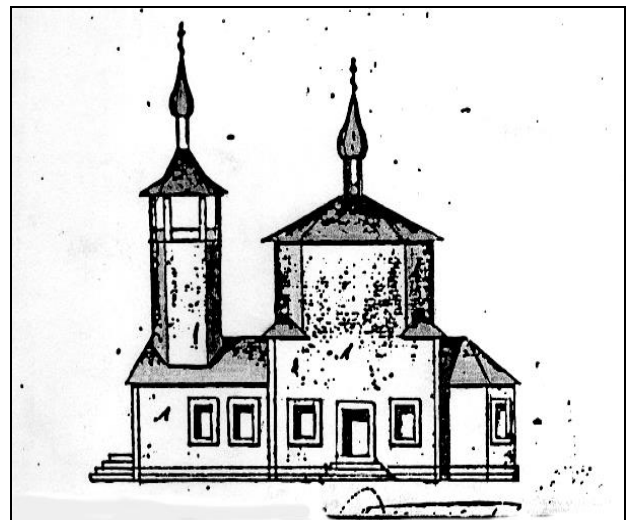


Fig. 2. The Church in Kusa, the facade.

<sup>a</sup> Source: the Russian State archive of ancient documents, f. 171, op. 3.

One more motive for building activities in the Southern Urals appeared due to the development of trade. The era of Peter the Great expanded opportunities for active trade with countries and regions of Central Asia, India, and Persia. The city of Astrakhan became the center of the intersection of routes. At that time navigation on the Caspian Sea did not attract merchants, due to a lot of robberies and dangerous phenomena of nature. All of these factors contributed to the development of the region, including its architecture.



Fig. 3. The Half-Timbered House in Quedlinburg.

<sup>a</sup>. Source: Picture of the author.

The emergence of the Russian steel industry became another accelerator for mastering the Russian Southern Urals. In the late 18th century, there was an increased demand for iron due to its exports, which resulted in the evolution of the metallurgical industry and the construction of new settlements in this region.

New phase of Russian settlements in the Southern Urals begins in the second half of the 18th century. In 1736, was founded the great city of Orenburg. After the advent of Orenburg further settlements construction goes in the southern Urals. The broad construction of temples diocesan and civil superiors encouraged rapid population growth in the region.

### III. THE ARCHITECTURAL DECISION OF CHURCHES

The most architecturally interesting building in the settlement was the Orthodox Church. As a rule, this was the Orthodox Church that consisted of blockhouses. These temples had a belfry, a refectory, the main room and the altar, which were consistently located (shown in "Fig. 1", "Fig. 2").

A typical example is the Church in the village of Kusa, which was built in the late 18th century. In this building we can observe the following: an input room, a refectory and the main hall of the Church form a single frame; an altar is attached to the east wall. The refectory is separated by the wall with three apertures. Also, the church building has three entrances [16].

### IV. ARCHITECTURE OF HALF-TIMBERED CHURCHES

The design of wooden timber-framed buildings was typical for Western Europe. Such designs were common in secular architecture of the German lands almost everywhere [17] [18] [19] [20]. Currently, half-timbered buildings survived in Germany in large numbers. In Quedlinburg, there are more than 1,600 of such residential buildings. The oldest one was built in the 14th century. It is now used as a

Museum of half-timbered houses ("Fig. 3"). The traditions of the half-timbered houses were strong in England and Normandy. In Germany and in France, there are few small half-timbered churches. A typical example is the Church of Saint Giuliano and Vlasii (Church Saint-Julian et Saint-Blaise) in the village of Longsols in Champagne (see "Fig. 4").

Half-timbered houses in Russia under the name wattle and daub or grid constructions have been known since the beginning of the 17th century. A wooden frame of pillars, beams and struts were widely used in the construction; the space between them was filled with broken brick, stones, and other materials. In addition, half-timbered buildings were erected in Moscow, for example, in the seven-ties of the 17th century in the so-called Novoinozemskoj (German) Sloboda, which was inhabited by immigrants from Western and Central Europe.



Fig. 4. The Church in Longsols.

<sup>a</sup>. Source: Picture of the author.

The fortress-city of Orenburg was laid on April 19, 1743. In the description of the city of the 19th century, it is stated that a plan of Orenburg had the shape of an oval. It was situated next to the river of Yaika: "The fortress had four gates: on the East side was found Orskie [gate], Chernorechenskie was to the West Gate, the South Gate [was called] Uraliskie, and Sakmarskie was in the North Gate. There was Water gate, which still exist" [21]. The fortress-city was growing very fast. For instance, there were 837 houses, 4 temples, a guardhouse, a drugstore, a powder cellar, a shop, customs, 44 commissaries in the trade courtyard and 131 commissaries in the exchange courtyard, built in 1743, in four years after the establishment of the fortress-city of Orenburg. To 1760, there were already 2866 houses in Orenburg [22].



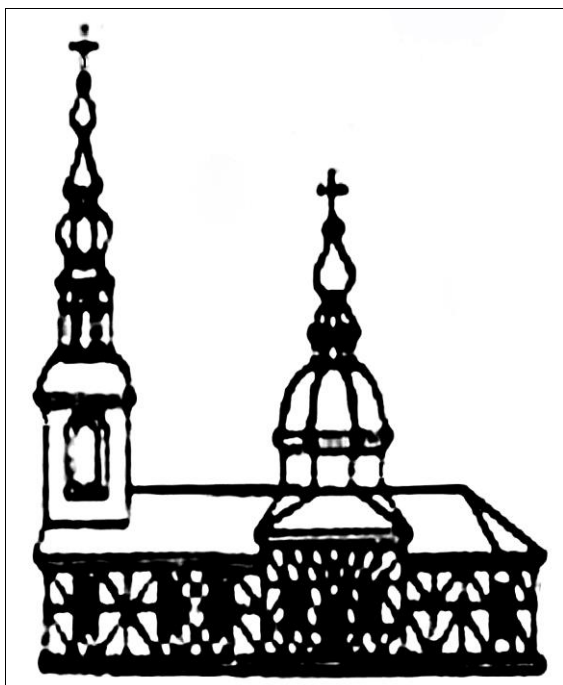


Fig. 5. The Trinity Church in Orenburg.

<sup>a</sup> Source: the Russian State Military-Historical Archive, fund 349, register 27.

Its construction was completed before the onset of cold weather; therefore, many public buildings were built with a wooden frame.



Fig. 6. The Church of St. Nicholas in Orenburg.

<sup>a</sup> Source: the Russian State archive of Ancient Documents, fund 192, register 1.

In the steppe zone, there was a lack of forest for the construction of this kind of fortresses; additionally, the quality of the forests was very low and could not be used in the construction of large buildings, which did not require a large amount of wood, because the last was used only for the frame construction.

The most interesting architectural buildings are in the fortress-city-were three churches (as can be seen in "Fig. 5",

"Fig. 6"). The first church with a frame of logs was built in just five months. In September, it was consecrated in the name of the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Unfortunately, its image has not survived. However, we may understand some details according to archival eyewitness descriptions: "Its width, according to the figures given in the explication of Oren-burg in 1751, was 4 sazhen, its length was 10 sazhen; according to modern measures of length, it is 8.52 and 21.8 meters, respectively" [23].

In 1744, the Church of the Holy Trinity was built. This church had a frame constructed of wood [24]. The length of the Trinity Church without apse stood at 17.8 meters, the width was 7.8 meters.

The Church of St. Nicholas also had a wood skeleton structure. It was a little less Trinity according to the archival drawings. Peter Ivanovich Ryčkovym sent drawings of these two churches on June 3, 1760 to Professor Miller along with other plans of Orenburg buildings [25].

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the development of religious architecture in the Southern Urals in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries went on the path of canonical schemas, using traditional construction techniques that were developed in the previous century. Analyzing the archival documents, we can observe that the architecture of half-timbered church buildings of the city of Orenburg was extremely peculiar and unusual for the whole region. These findings are particularly important, because half-timbered churches are not very common in the Russian Orthodox Church. Study of the characteristics of the architecture of the churches of the southern Urals is necessary for the modern development of religious architecture. The study of the architectural features of the Orthodox churches in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Southern Urals is necessary for the modern development of religious architecture, as well as for their conservation and restoration.

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