

# Basilian Order Monastic Temples Architecture on the Territory of Belarus in the 17th – First Half of the 19th Centuries

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**Abstract**—In the terms of figured out and studied architecture materials by the author, the development of Belarusian Basilian temples volume-design structure is contemplated. Herewith, the description and images of numerous disappeared temples are introduced to the scientific circulation along with dating and possibility of graphic reconstruction for the first time ever. Tendencies of stone churches' architecture and the influence of West European construction and stylistics are found out. The architecture of each temple analyzed in the article has special artistic-stylistic characteristics. The reasons of such a phenomenon are studied.

**Keywords**—*architecture of Basilian monastic temples; domed temples; two-tower and towerless basilicas; the Early and "Vilno" Baroque; Baroque Classicism*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The appearance and existence of Greek-Catholic temples on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a consequence of the Union (1596) official proclamation on the Synod in Brest. In spite of the tattered Union conclusion idea of Orthodox and Catholic confessions reconciliation, the foundation of Eastern Catholic Church was beset by a religious-political conflict. Actually, such a complicated phenomenon as the Union cannot be estimated explicitly. So, a number of surveys show that the Union saved Belarus from religious conflicts, which overwhelmed numerous countries of the world and contributed to a national self-image presentation. On the other hand, the establishment of Church union instead of Orthodox independence reinforcement, in effect, formed the third Orthodox confession, having brought polarization and confrontation between the Catholic and Orthodox Christians on the area of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania Greek-Catholic Christians got a monastic organization in the catholic order of Byzantine sacramental which is attributed to St. Vasily the Great. Basilian order was founded in 1617 on the base of monasteries, which adopted Brest Union. In the middle of the 18th century the order consisted of 195 monasteries and more than 1000 of monks. Basilian monastic architecture was closely related to the activities of affluent Uniate

metropolitans. So, Polotsk Basilian nunnery was established by I. Kuntsevich [1]. In 1624 I. Rutsky formed a friary and a convent in Novogrudok. F. Grebnitsky contributed to the development of 88 Basilian monasteries on the territory of Belarus during the period of his reign [2].

Numerous historians suppose that the Basilians were a Polish squall of the Eastern Catholic Church [3]. But, according to Eucharist rubberstamped by St. Vasily, the presentation of the iconostasis in the interior of a temple remained "for border of Great altar, was occluded..." [4]. Actually, the iconostasis was preserved in monastic temples of the Union period. The iconostases of parish churches, by contrast, were not widespread.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GREEK-CATHOLIC TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Totality of monastic temples' architectural concepts was determined by a number of factors. First of all, there was inter-subordination of temples in the system of Basilian monasteries control and general hierarchy management which included construction activity. Secondly, monastery groups' territory-geographical close location had an effect. Finally, the key role in addressing to the newest European artistic samples in the process of temple construction and targeted invitation of high-level artificers belonged to bishops.

The erection of Greek-Catholic temples was performed in accordance with the common tendency of style development on the territory of Belarus. It took guidance from the best examples of West European architecture.

Belotserkovsk monastery's church of St. Trinity in the village Cherei (Vitebsk region) and Uspensky temple in the village Nay Sverzhen (Minsk region) belong to the ones of the earliest known monuments of the first half of the 17th century. The construction of both temples was financed by magnates. The first structure was sponsored by the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (knyaz Leo Sapega) [5], the second one – by the Radzivils [6].

These two temples had common volume-design concept and were the samples of Early Baroque in combination with structural and decorative elements of Gothic stylistics development. Such a tendency of asynchronous styles mixture was characteristic of Belarusian temples in the first half of the 17th century (see “Fig. 1”).



Fig. 1. Facades and plan of the Church of the Holy Trinity in the village Cherei. 1599. Graphic reconstruction of the author. Plan from the book of T. V. Gabrus.

<sup>a</sup> Early-baroque single-temple temples of the hall type.

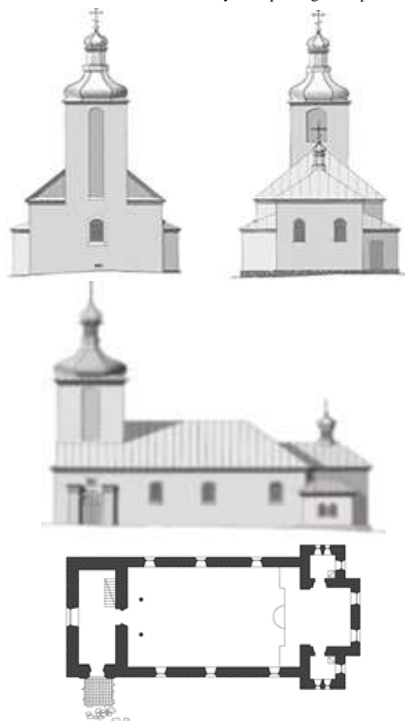


Fig. 2. Facades and the plan of the Yspenskaya Church in the village of Nay Sverzhen. Early XVII century. Drawings of the archive BGANTD Minsk (Belarus).

<sup>a</sup> Early-baroque single-temple temples of the hall type.

The analyzed temples because of its volume-design structure belong to hall type structures with a tower façade concept and projecting apses with separate volume surrounded by sacristies. In both cases the towers were massive altitudinal centerpieces, specifying the contour of the whole structure. Baroque division into tiers represented in three-tier quadrangular frame tower of Trinity temple is opposed to the laconic concept of one-tier square tower of Uspensky, where the only one decoration is renaissance niches with semi-circular copestone (see “Fig. 1”).

Gothic traditions were more brightly reflected in the structures of Trinity church. It is relevant to load distribution from a cylinder vault thrust to buttresses, the appearance of angle buttresses perpendicular to each other, perspective portal type main entrance solution. Early Baroque stylistics turned up in the appearance of a barrel vault with spandrels, semi-circular apse, and the order composition of the front. Gothic traditions response affected Uspensky and Troitsky temples hall nave space, which snapped in a lower level presbytery (see “Fig. 2”).

St. Spirit monastic church in Minsk, built in 1650 [7], got absolutely untemplated architecture solution of Belarusian lands. The temple, according to stylistics, belongs to Early Baroque with Gothic and Renaissance elements. The choice of such concept was connected with the desire to specify Byzantine sacramental monastic church of Catholic order among other numerous stone catholic temples of the city. Its extravagance lied in the in the original plastic solution of a towerless front. Gothic structure of St. Spirit church rectangular (in the ground-plan) with an enclosed five-can’t apse interior buttresses and big lancet windows on the side walls, and from the opposite side is combined with Baroque tiered main façade composition (see “Fig. 3”).

One more conception of the development of Basilian order stone monastic construction of the 17th century was represented by two temples of Zhyrovichi monastery in Grodno region. Basilian monks appeared there in 1613, and a stone church (future Uspensky cathedral) was put up approximately in 1620 or, according to other lights, in 1644, due to donations of Yan Meleshko (1610), Danila Soltan (1620) [8] and Yan Dulovich [9] (see “Fig. 4”).

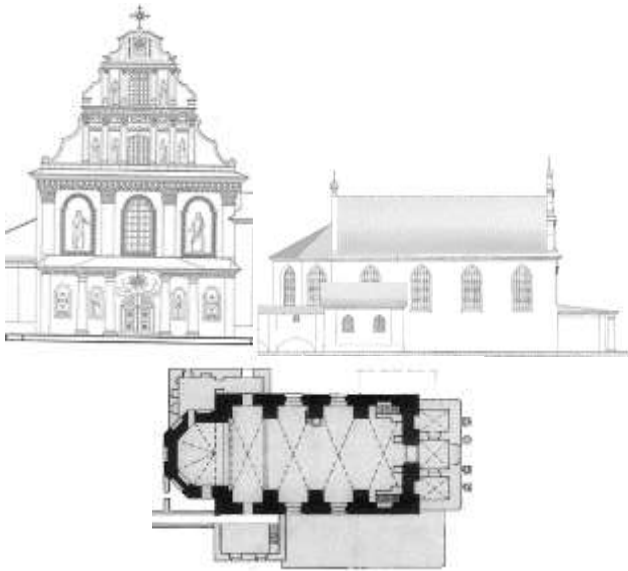


Fig. 3. Facades and the plan of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Minsk (St. Spirit church in Minsk). I half of the XVII century. Drawings of the archive BGANTD Minsk (Belarus).

a. Reckless temples of early hall baroque and cross-dome type.

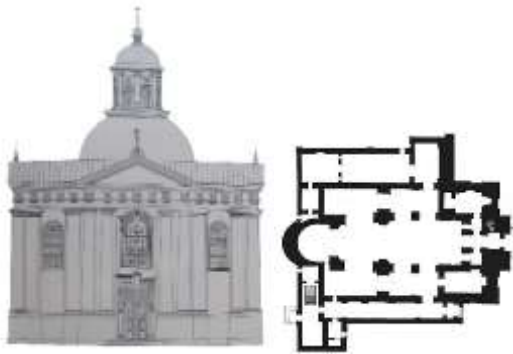


Fig. 4. Uspenskiy Cathedral in Zhyrovichi. 1620-1644. Reconstruction of the XIX century. Drawings from the book of V. A. Chanturia.

a. Reckless temples of early hall baroque and cross-dome type.

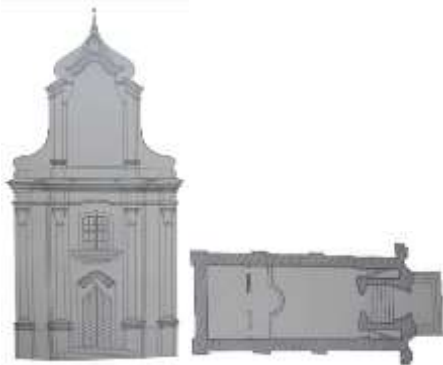


Fig. 5. Bogoyavlenskaya Church in Zhyrovichi. 1672. Reconstruction of the XVIII - XIX centuries. Drawings from the book of V. A. Chanturia.

a. Reckless temples of early hall baroque and cross-dome type.

It is difficult to figure out original appearance of Uspenskiy cathedral. According to historical documents Church architecture was characterized as old-world [10].

This term related to pre-war art (1654-1667), and suppositional temple appearance, apparently, belonged to Early Baroque, where constructive and decorative features of Renaissance and Gothic were preserved.

The earliest information about the appearance of a church, dating back to the end of the 18th century, states that the façade was towerless. Moreover, the existence of a big roof light with eight windows in the center of a temple formed a cross-domed structure [11].

According to historical documents, it is possible to suppose that originally volume-design structure of Uspenskiy cathedral was a centric cross-domed system. Allegedly, in the 18th century stone narthex appears. It gave Basilican shape to the church. At the same time, towers on the main façade come into existence [12]. But the tower was also overbuilt in the center except for two towers aside the main façade of Uspenskiy cathedral. All three towers had pyramided perfection and were topped by iron crosses [13]. This three-tower concept of Uspenskiy cathedral may be imagined due to the survived picture of Zhyrovichi monastery on the illustration of Napoleon Orda, made in 1865 [14].

The second temple of Zhyrovichi monastery (17th century) is Theology church, built in 1672 [15]. A small, in size, temple-chapel is an elongated rectangle with towerless Baroque façade. Its composition is divided by a highly profiled cornice and two-tier entablature, whereas the top one is a narrower eminent plastic pediment. A dome appeared on a wooden faceted drum of the chapel during the reconstruction in the 19th century (see "Fig. 5").

The analysis of Greek-Catholic temple architecture of the 17th century has shown that during the period of its development (since the beginning of the 17th century), the techniques, worked out in West European architecture and applied in the catholic churches construction on the territory of Belarus, were in a range of artistic means. The examples of Uniate stone construction have demonstrated that none of volume-design schemes was chosen as an example to follow. Preference was given to hall structures with separately projecting faceted or semi-circular apse completion when choosing the design. Single-towered or towerless structures were met in the composition of the front. A special example is the erection of a cross-domed temple.

### III. THE EFFLORESCENCE OF THE 18TH CENTURY GREEK-CATHOLIC TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE

The first half of the 18th century is marked by the appearance of numerous landmarks that continued the development of a cross-domed Basilican temple, preserving the traditions of Orthodox architecture on the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, the development of Greek-Catholic temple architecture was closely related to the noonday of Baroque.

The first stone temple of the beginning of the 18th century was the church of St. Trinity (village Byten, Brest region), constructed in 1711, with the assistance of Nickolay Trizna [16]. Being one of few domed temples, Trinity church,

that was originally centric volume, turned into a six-columnar two-tower domed basilica due to the further amplification in the second half of the 18th century. Perhaps, proximity to Zhyrovichi monastery, whereas the closest analogue was lost original appearance of Uspensky cathedral, influenced the choice of Trinity temple's solution. Equal dome construction of both temples in the shape of faceted eight windows roof lanterns testifies this.

A domed temple of St. Trinity had one more unique technique. It is triconch in an apsidal perfection that was distinguished only in the interior construction, while exterior volume of the church was in the shape of an elongated rectangle (see "Fig. 6").

Trinity temple (village Byten), the landmark of Early Baroque architecture, just began receiving its plasticity and sophistication of facades' compositional concept in its artistic-stylistic solution. Flanking the main façade's traditional three-tier towers have no drop-offs, vertical plains do not obtain concave-convex surface, and order treatment of tiers does not have circular contours.

Nativity of Mary church was built in Grodno, continuing the tradition of cross-domed construction in monastic temple architecture of the first half of the 18th century. It was built approximately in 1720 at the expense of metropolitan Leo Kishka. The church had a cross structure with a big cupola in the center [17]. The unique character of this volume-design solution is not only in its combination of Basilican construction plan and a cross-central one. Two side cupolas are not traditional as they are in the form of towers, which placement is supposed to be in narthex, aside the main façade. But, they remain on the same axis with a dome, bringing a new approach to a conventional composition of design concepts of Belarusian ceremonial structures (see "Fig. 7").

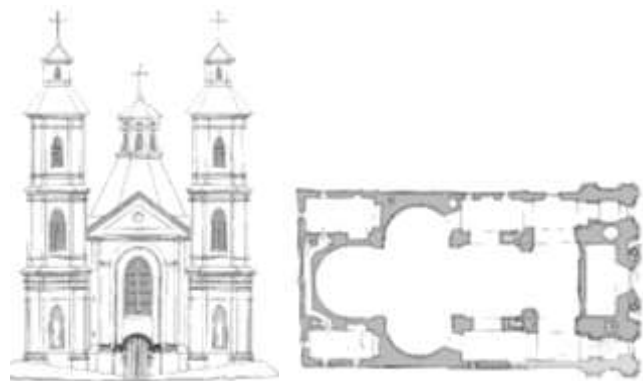


Fig. 6. Dimensioned drawings (archive LVIA Vilnius (Lithuania)) and author's reconstruction of the main facade on the Church of the Holy Trinity of the XVIII century in the village of Byten. 1711.

<sup>a</sup>. Cross-domed basilica temples of baroque.

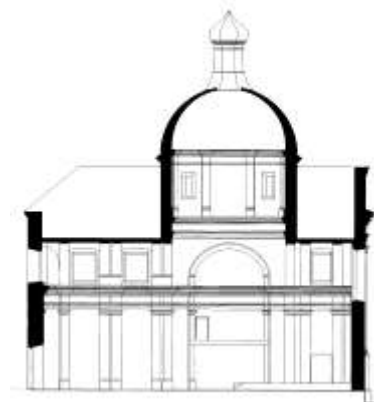
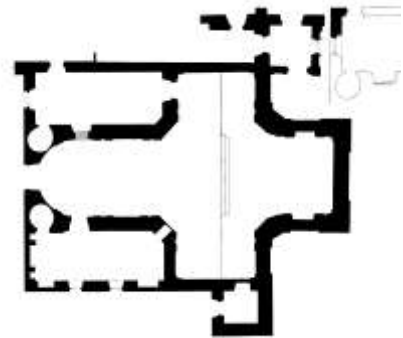
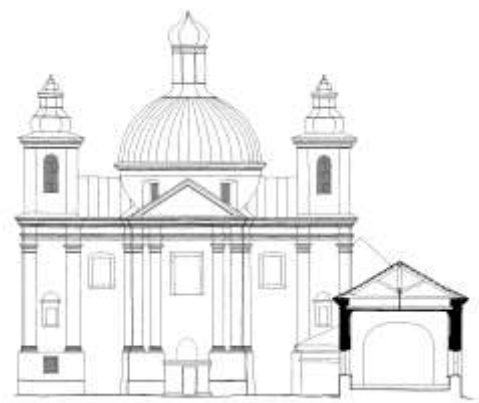


Fig. 7. Facade and plan of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Grodno. 1720. Drawings of the archive BGANTD Minsk (Belarus).

<sup>a</sup>. Cross-domed basilica temples of baroque.

The development of cross-domed basilicas in Greek-Catholic architecture was interrupted by Polotsk metropolitan Florian Grebnitsky who interfered into the construction activity. He redirected it to the best samples of catholic architecture. The reconstruction of Polotsk Sophia cathedral became a model of construction at this period of time. Grebnitsky invited architect Y.K. Glaubitsa (from Vilno), who brought “Vilno” Baroque on the territory of Belarus. The distinguishing feature of this style became three-space basilica with two multi-tier laced towers aside the main façade and a curvilinear pediment with typical convex-concave plains between them. The samples of “Vilno” Baroque architecture are characterized by delicacy of proportions and order plasticity of façades created by layered pilasters, semi-columns, clear-cut entablature and cornices, responsible for horizontal division. The fronts obtain three-tier composition due to this horizontal separation.

The temple of St. Sophia was reconstructed by the supervision of the master of stone-mason guild from Warsaw, Blazhey Kazinsky. The author of this article found in the Russian Federation State Archive a document-contract between F. Grebnitsky and the master of stone-mason guild. The agreement was concluded in spring, 1738 [18]. It testifies that the new appearance of St. Sophia cathedral does not date back to 1750 as it used to be regarded conventionally, but to 1740. Thus, reconstructed Polotsk church is the first landmark of “Vilno” Baroque on the territory of Belarus (see Fig. 8). The main Greek-catholic temple of Polotsk episcopate was projected by the best architect of that time and realized by the supervision of the highly-qualified Polish artificer. The erection of the temple was run by the metropolitan.

Also, a stone monastery with St. Peter and Paul’s church appeared in Berezvechie (1756-1763), the architecture of which was similar to the image of St. Sophia cathedral, due to F. Grebnitsky. Baroque pediments’ crosses end, the main and yard pediments were additional emphasis (see “Fig. 9”).

The architecture of St. Sophia cathedral set high professional level to all further structures of Polotsk episcopacy. The church in Berezvechie became the last bright embodiment of metropolitan’s ideas in the realization of Unite temple image. The influence of “Vilno” Baroque stylistics was so enormous, that monastic churches of Polotsk -Vitebsk region followed predetermined traditions during the second half of the 18th century.

Pokrovsky church in Orshawas constructed due to the assistance of Smolensk archbishop Joseph Lenkovsky in 1758 [19]. The volume-design structure of the building, which model was the temple in Bezvechie, belonged to three-space two-tower basilica that formed Greek cross in the upper section. Crosses’ ends were completed by convex (in plan) curvilinear pediments, doubling in its composition the pediments of the main and back facades. Side towers concept differs from analogue altitudinal dominant ideas of “Vilno” Baroque by its originality. First of all, it is related to the absence of reach-through window apertures. They are superseded by flat pilasters and niches. And only corner pilasters of towers have style characteristic projections,

which were placed at an angle to the plain and have clear-cut volute completion (see “Fig. 10”).

The example of “Vilno” Baroque landmark is Trinity church in Volno (Brest region). Its construction was affected by local construction school. It was restructured from the older building in 1768. Common Baroque character of two-tower basilica is overset by coming into existence stepped buttresses, withstanding cylindrical vaults thrust on wall arches. The projections buttresses appear even on the main Baroque façade. Side chapels are designed in unusual way: they are much lower than a central nave. As a result, Greek cross is not shaped in the upper section. But the perfection of chapels is still represented by curvilinear pediments. Created new artistic-stylistic concept of St. Trinity church, laconically combining Gothic features and “Vilno” Baroque stylistics, is the only one example of this sort (see “Fig. 11”).

Tolochin Pokrovsky church (1786) relates to the late period of “Vilno” Baroque. It was built at the expense of Princess Barbara Sangushka [20]. The time of temple’s construction in the second half of the 18th century left a mark on the creation of its artistic image. The tiers of towers are deprived of delicacy and abundance of details such as layered pilasters, curvilinear volutes, window apertures and niches. The main façade becomes two-tiered and simpler because of reduction of decorative, constructive details and the appearance of numerous smooth plains. Intensification of plasticity takes place due to concave façade space and jutting out towers that cross the front. Such new treatment of “Vilno” Baroque is explained by the influence of Classicism, bright embodiment of which is rustication of a pedestal in the underpart of narthex.

Above-contemplated Basilican temples built in the 18th century show that three-space basilicas with two-tower perfection along with cross-domed solution got predominant significance. Individual search for artistic-stylistic solutions of “Vilno” Baroque, the brightest samples of this style have place in terms of this design scheme.

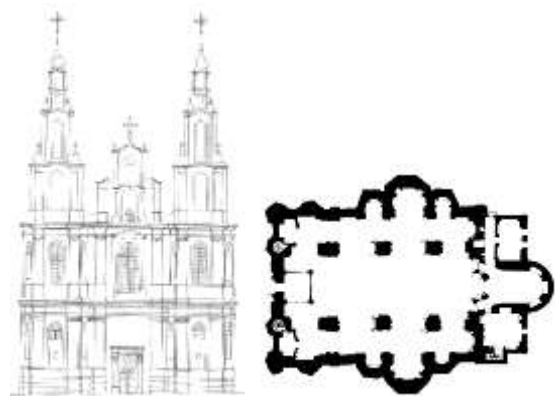


Fig. 8. The facade and plan of the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Polotsk. 1740. Drawings of the archive BGANTD, Minsk (Belarus).

a. Double-tower basilicas of the vilenskiy baroque.

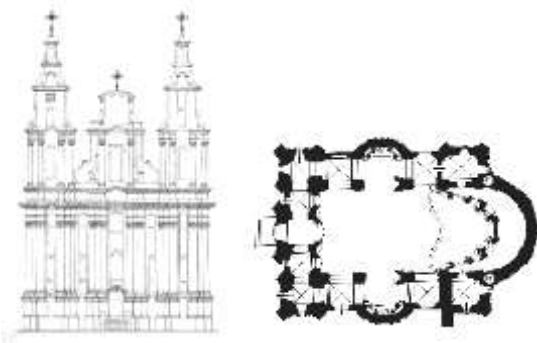


Fig. 9. The facade and plan of the Petropavlovskaya Church in Berezvechie. 1756–1763. Drawings from the manuscript department of Vilnius University (Lithuania).

a. Double-tower basilicas of the vilenskiy baroque.

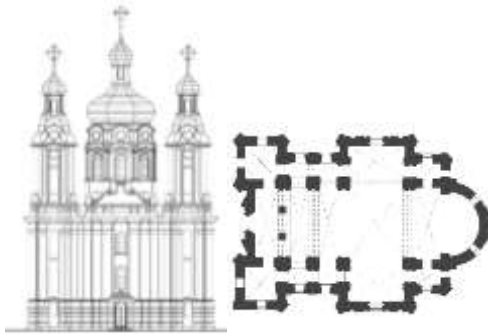


Fig. 10. The facade and plan of the Pokrovskaya Church in Orshawa. 1758. Graphic reconstruction of the author.

a. Double-tower basilicas of the vilenskiy baroque.

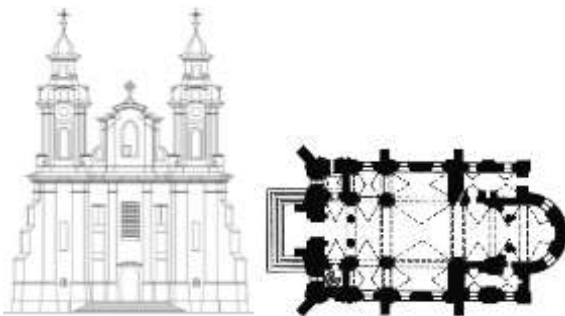


Fig. 11. The facade and plan of the Troitskaya Church in Volno. 1768. Author's graphic reconstruction of the facade. Plan from the book of T. V. Gabrus.

a. Double-tower basilicas of the vilenskiy baroque.

#### IV. THE ARCHITECTURE OF GREEK-CATHOLIC TEMPLES OF THE END OF THE 18TH - THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURIES

The divisions of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lead to the changes in the life of society. The role of Greek-Catholic confession wavered significantly. Originally tolerant attitude towards Uniate church was guaranteed by the Russian Empire. Desire to persist on the joined to Russia territory and confirm its historic right of existence lead to the reconstruction of wooden churches into stone ones in the end of the 18th century. Stone temples appeared over the

monasteries in Lyady (1792-1794) (see “Fig. 12”), Ruzhany (1784-1788), Rakov (1793), Brest (after 1788) and other. The second tendency of construction related to the reconstruction of existing churches while new structures also came into existence. It stemmed from stylistic preferences of Classicism epoch. For instance, Uspensky cathedral (1743-1785) and St. Spirit church (1792-1793) in Vitebsk underwent reconstruction. So, the landmarks of “Vilno” Baroque obtained domes in its plan structure, and they became three-place basilicas with typical triangular pediments.

The construction in the style of Baroque Classicism of St. Nickolay Onufrievsky monastery’s temple in the village Selets (Mogilev region) is related to the end of the 18th –first half of the 19th century. It was sanctified in 1804 [21]. Its volume-design structure belongs to the hall construction with an enclosed to the main volume, of almost equal width and with common roof semi-circular apse. Narthex, being the base of five-tier tower, as a separate element was joined to the temple.

The influence of Baroque is traced more in the plan of St. Nickolay church, while the composition and the plasticity of facades are attracted towards the stylistics of Classicism. Profiled cornices engirdle the perimeter of a construction and each level of five-tier tower dynamically diminishing upward. Double pilasters and rusticated ones facing of a high pedestal foundation, are typical of Classicism (see Fig. 13).

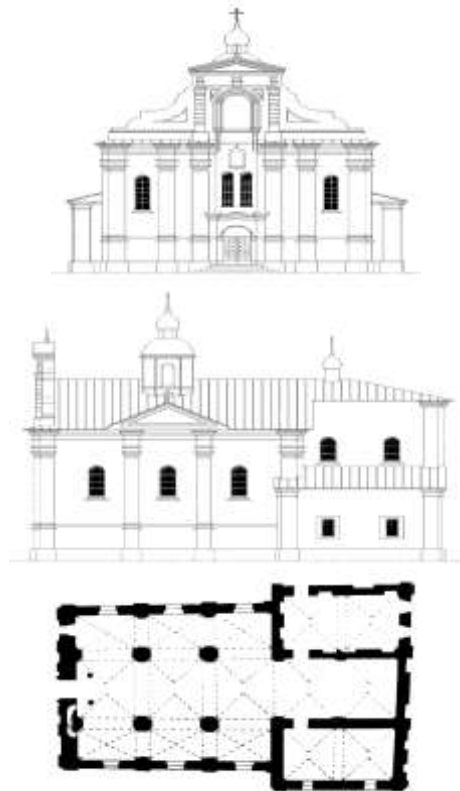


Fig. 12. Facade and plan of the Blagoveshchenskaya Church in Lyady. 1792-1794. Drawings of the archive BGANTD Minsk (Belarus).

a. Basilicas of baroque classicism.

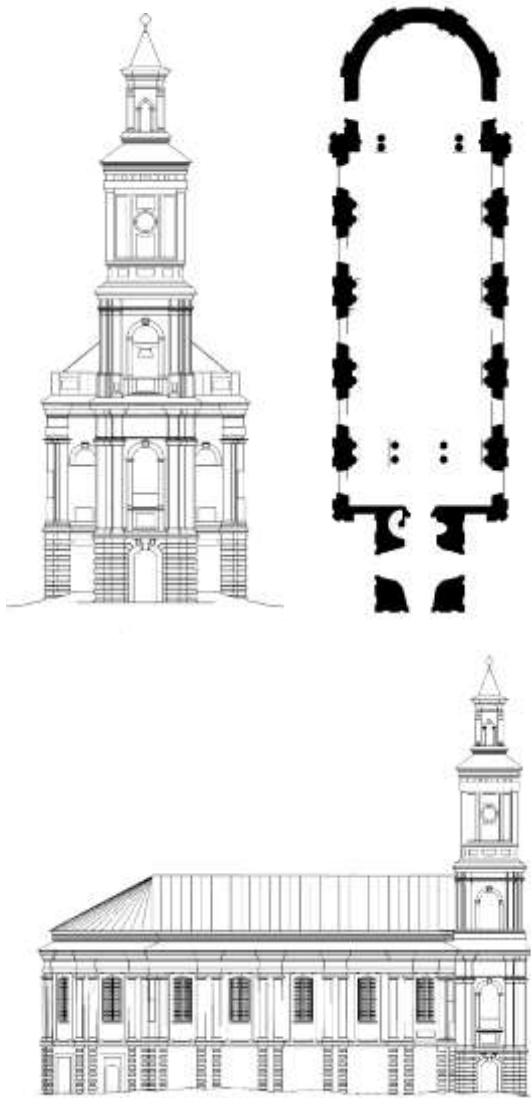


Fig. 13. The facade and plan of the temple of St. Nikolai in the village Selets. Late XVIII – first half of XIX centuries. Drawings of the archive BGANTD Minsk (Belarus).

<sup>a</sup> Basilicas of baroque classicism.

The front of St. Nickolay church is also of interest. The appearance of St. Nickolay church with one dominating tower on the main façade is a rare compositional method contrasted with Basilian construction with two-tower structure of the past century. All this shifts us into an earlier period – the beginning of the 17th century. The compositional solution St. Nickolay temple's in Selets is closely related to the Trinity temple of belotserkovsk (Chereisk) basilian monastery (1599). But addressing to the traditions of the past century could be connected with established small width of a temple. As, for example, the appearance in Zhyrovichi (1760) belonging to "Vilno"Baroque, is explained.

Also, St. Peter and Paul's church of Druya monastery (Vitebsk region) may be an example of one-tower one-space

volume-design solution of the end of the 18th century. It was connected with small volume of a structure.

On the one hand, the change of political situation accelerated the process of Greek-Catholic stone monastic temples erection, stimulating the search for artistic-stylistic means for new architectural items in the end of the 18th century. On the other hand, it laid the foundation of Basilian Churches' reconstructions in order to adapt to Classicism's modified stylistic preferences. It will become cardinal restructuring with total change of the original appearance in the first half of the 19th century.

## V. CONCLUSION

During Basilian order monastic temples erection on the territory of Belarus, a key factor remained centuries-long: search for new techniques in volume-design, compositional, constructive and decorative aspects. Nevertheless, this search did not lead to the appearance of common stylistic conception that would become recognizable in Uniate temples' identification. But all above contemplated temples had unique artistic-stylistic characteristics. Its unicity is in the adaptation of Baroque and later- Classicism on the territory of Belarus, combination with established principles of Basilian construction. The highest noonday of "Vilno" Baroque gets maximal embodiment of all aesthetic and emotional means, affecting a human being. Catholic architecture and management of metropolitans (addressed to the invitation of architects and top-line artificers) had the biggest influence on the development of Uniate architecture.

Temples, the architecture of which tended to be a model (Uspensky cathedral of Zhyrovichi monastery, St. Sophia cathedral in Polotsk, Uspensky cathedral in Vitebsk) came into existence on different Belarusian areas during concrete time lines. But historical situation leads to the fact that in 1839 Greek-Catholic confession as well as Uniate temples' construction ceased to exist.

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