

# The Cathedral of Tver According to the Architectural-archaeological Researches During 2012-2014: the Disputable Discovery of the Ancient Temple\*

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**Abstract**—The Cathedral of Transfiguration was built in Tver in 1285-1290. This event gave a start to the revival of stone building in Rus' in the time of after Mongols' invasion. That church was replaced with a new temple in the 17th century. It was demolished in 1935. Excavations held in 2012-2014 at the place of the destroyed in 1930-es cathedral complex gave to the researchers conducted these works arguments to say quite definitely that they succeeded in finding the temple of the late 13th century. But the doubtfulness of the suggested interpretation of the revealed architectural remains enables to state that at the place of the cathedral of the late 17th century the monument of the late 13th century does not exist. Its searching needs to be held outside of the excavation area of 2012-2014.

**Keywords**—Tver; cathedral; medieval architecture; architectural-archaeological researches

## I. INTRODUCTION

The stone Cathedral of the Transfiguration was built in Tver in 1285-1290 [1], [2], [3], [4], which gave a start of renewal of stone building in Rus' in the after Mongols' period. That church was replaced with a new temple which was blown up in April, 1935.

Architectural-archaeological researches carried out in 1992 at the place of the demolished in 1935 monument allowed to discover fragments of the altar part of the 1689-1696 temple. Using the available measurements of 1930-es and various city plans gave us an opportunity not only to reconstruct the plan of the building, but to place the construction at a landscape [5], [6]. This matter was laid in the base of large archaeological works which were made in 2012-2014 in the territory of the cathedral by the Sambian Expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian academy of sciences consisted mainly of researchers of the

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Tver Scientific Research and Restoration Centre.<sup>1</sup> The results of these studies were published in a series of articles [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12] and in museum exposition opened in early December, 2018 in Tver Regional Picture gallery.

## II. RESULTS OF THE STUDIES OF 2012-2014

Summarizing the researches of 2012-2014 the authors established that the remains of two stone cathedrals of the Transfiguration of Our Saviour — one of the late 13th century and the other of the late 17th century were found at the considerable square (1420 sq. m) of excavation area, as well as the place of wooden Kozma and Damian church was detected which was the main temple of the city before the stone cathedral was built in 1285-1290. Naturally the great attention was paid in recent resumptive article to the cathedral of Transfiguration of the late 13th century — the key building to understand ancient Russian architecture of the early after Mongols time. The authors did not suggest a graphic reconstruction of the plan of this building, but having summarized the revealed data and made on that base a plan of foundation ditches ("Fig. 1") they considered that the erected in 1285-1290 stone church had three apses, four pillared and three narthexes construction. Namely, it "belonged to the traditional for the North East of Rus' three narthexes type". "Some time" later in their opinion all the narthexes were united by galleries, that is why the Tver church of the Transfiguration obtained a three-side gallery bypass at the early stage of its existence already. Judging from the description of the southern part of the gallery the authors consider the eastern sides of the galleries were rectilinear i.e. did not have apses [14].

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Fig. 1. Tver Cathedral of Transfiguration.

<sup>1</sup> Combined plan of foundation ditches and the revealed constructions as well as the plan of “pre-cathedral” burials of the middle of the 12th–13th centuries. Published: L.A. Belyaev, I.A. Safarova, A.N. Khokhlov [13].

The really important arguments confirm the existence of the stone temple — predecessor at this place before the end of the 17th century are the fragments of white-stone carved details as well as numerous fragments of frescoes [15].<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> White-stone carved blocks and frescoes’ fragments were presented in the temporary exhibition in Tver regional picture gallery. The analogous artifacts were found in 1992 at the place of the church of the Transfiguration of the late 17th century, and then in 2012 to the north-east of it [24] [25] [26].

detected carving can be reasonably correlated with Vladimir-Suzdal’ plastic arts of the last pre-Mongol decades in style and type as well as fragments of frescoes visually prove the chronicles’ evidences about the wall-painting of the temple in 1292 and then its Presentation aisle in 1360 [16], [17]. Hundreds of floor tiles enlarge this set. Most of them could be used if the first stone temple [18].

The researchers defined an estimated length of the late 13th century church as 22mas well as its width as

16msuggested that the width of the temple together with a gallery could be 20 m. They see the under dome square side equal to 4.5 ~ 4.7 m.

The authors consider the extended eastern part of the building which is practically equal in the length to naos to be the typological feature of the church plan. Relatively it is suggested that the central eastern compartment is 8 m long, adding that the apses of the church are comparatively small [19].

Notice that the authors in the article of 2018 corrected their conclusions made in 2015. For example in the article of 2015 they considered “the main” central apse of the temple equal to 7.5 m explaining such an extension with a possible “intention to cover a space of the earliest wooden church with an altar.” In 2015 they denied the existence of not only the northern aisle of the temple but a northern gallery also assuming that “the addition of even one gallery there made the general width of construction 30-32min length which was unlikely”. They considered the general width of “the early temple according to the foundation and with two south compartments” (?) to be nearly 24m [20].

In the 2018 article the researchers also think that series of white stone-works found to the south of the gallery of the church of the late 13th century are close in time to the erection of the temple [21].

Slightly changing in 2018 the first version L.A. Belyaev, I.A. Safarova and A.N. Khokhlov supposed that the found to the south of the gallery stone-works were “a sort of lengthy opened porch (step-like terrace — socle — ?), and helped to smooth a natural difference of height as well as to support the construction of the south part of the temple” [22].

Having found at the place of the main bulk and the galleries of the temple of the 13th century practically no one fragment of the traditional for the north-eastern architecture of Ancient Rus’ foundation in situ<sup>3</sup> made as a rule of white stone blocks or rubbles the researchers considered that those constructions were partly ruined at the end of the 17th century during the erection of a new church, then in 1935 the foundations were almost completely excavated in a course of destruction of the last cathedral [23]. Additionally the authors pointed out that “after the temple of the 17th century explosion its foundations were completely removed” though in 1992 the base constructions of foundation of the central apse were found to preserve for 20 cm on the average, as well as locally about 50 cm [28]. The basic foundation constructions of the altar of the church of the 17th century were found in complete in 2012-2014 as well. It can be seen in the photos of 2010-es represented at the exhibition of Tver regional picture gallery.

It is interesting also that a whole series of foundation ditches which the authors relate to the altar part of the church of the late 13th century were not only drown into a subsoil to a proper level but even didn’t ruin burials situated under them. But taking into account light thickness of a

cultural layer at the place of the church building in 1285<sup>4</sup> the foundations of the first Tver cathedral of the Transfiguration should be dug deep enough into subsoil. Thus at the end of the 13th century architects seriously violated the technology not only made a superficial foundation but even didn’t take away burials (cut them with foundation ditches) at the place of erection of important supporting constructions. It’s also a surprise that judging on the presented at the exhibition and on the published in 2018 photos the bases of the foundations of buildings of the late 13th and the end of the 17th centuries were on very similar levels (“Fig. 2”) [29]. Strictly speaking the researchers marked in their text the depth of foundation ditches of the Transfiguration church of the late 13th century as 30-50 cm from the subsoil surface [32] which was 10-15 deeper than the foundation base of the temple of the late 17th century. Taking into account that the thickness of cultural layer in this part of Tver kremlin in the late 13th century was about 20-40 cm [33] it can be concluded that the foundation constructions of the temple of 1285-1290 were rather small and certainly unsafe. We can bring to compare the discovered in 1998 white stone towers of the Prince’s Yard which were considerably smaller than the temple of the Transfiguration, but they had the foundations dug into the subsoil for 80-150 cm (“Fig. 3”) [34]. And we talking about the buildings erected later than the Transfiguration church for 100-150 years [35].



Fig. 2. Tver. Excavations at the place of the cathedral of Transfiguration.

a. Foundation ditches and the remains of constructions of different times buildings. View from the north-east from above. Published: I.A. Safarova, L.A. Belyaev, A.N. Khokhlov [31].

<sup>3</sup> Small part of “rubble base” was found rather locally [27].

<sup>4</sup> The stratigraphic profile of the part of the south side of the excavation area published in 2017 fixes the layer of the 13th century temple’s erection as 20-40 cm high from the subsoil surface [30].



Fig. 3. The remains of the medieval towers of the second half of the 14th — the first half of the 15th centuries found during the reconstruction of the Soviet street in Tver.

<sup>a</sup>. View from the east from above. Photo by A.N. Khokhlov. 1998.

It should be noticed that the temple of the end of the 17th century had the height of the foundation no less than 1 m [36], and the bottom of the foundation ditches was condensed for solidity with piles which were hammered in some places of the foundation ditches which the authors of excavations related to the church of the late 13th century. By the way the fact that piles were at the places of the foundations of the end of the 13th century could be an additional argument for that the foundations of the end of the 13th century had a really insufficient depth. Finally even the fact that the preserved parts of the foundations of the church of the Transfiguration which would be consisted of white stone blocks or cobbles were not fixed anywhere contradicted to the 17th century tradition to preserve in a course of dismantling of an earlier church as a rule not only the foundation constructions but even lower parts of walls of the previous building.

To the fullest extent the preserved white stone works of the south porch which the researchers connect with the first stone temple contradict the version of the discovery of the Transfiguration of the end of the 13th century. The matter first of all is about the so called foundations 6 and 9, parts of which face surfaces were fronted with regular white stone blocks with a quite good processed face surface. The authors consider one of them, foundation 6 to be a south-eastern corner of the porch while “foundation 9” — to be a

perron leading to it. It is interesting that connecting both of these constructions with a porch the authors do not take the first construction (foundation 6) in quotes while the second one (“foundation” 9) they supply with inverted commas [37]. But it is obvious that both of these constructions are concerned not with the foundation but with a socle part of the building because a lower step of the perron and a lower block of the masonry 6 are at one level. The fact that the lower step of the perron and the lower block of foundation 6 lay actually on the subsoil i.e. are merely 30-50 cm higher than the base of the foundation of the church of the late 13th century does not allow to accept the suggested by researchers identification of the discovered foundation ditches and rather small remains of rubble masonry as the leavings of the church of the Transfiguration of the late 13th century.

### III. FINDINGS IN THE EXCAVATION AREA IN 2012-2014

The stated above arguments in our opinion give the reason to revise the deduction of L.A. Belyaev, I.A. Safarova and A.N. Khokhlov about the discovery of the cathedral of the Transfiguration of the late 13th century in Tver kremlin in 2012-2014.

I think the authors of these researches have really discovered a place where a wooden Kozma and Damian church evocative in chronicle under 1271 stood [38]. They are convincing in marking the territory of that temple on the base of the situated near cemetery which is dated to the middle of the 12th-13th centuries with a small exclusion. The latest burials are dated to the late 13th century [39].

It is interesting that it looks like that the authors haven't found at this place burials made after the cathedral of the Transfiguration was erected in 1285-1290, though it is known that numerous burials were made in that temple [40]. This fact though indirect but is an argument for that the stone church of the Our Saviour of the late 13th century was erected at the other place and that during its building lasted for six years the liturgy happened in the wooden church of Kozma and Damian. The latter was dismantled after the stone cathedral was sanctified in 1290. Probably at the time the burials at the Kozma and Damian cemetery ceased, and in 100-150 years its territory became a building site where a construction was erected which remains were taken for the first stone cathedral by the researchers.

Judging by that not only the lower step of the perron (“foundation 9”) but the lower blocks of “foundation” 6 also laid practically in a level of the subsoil surface the cultural layer had been cut out before constructing that building and then a bulk a socle of which was the only white stone part of it was erected there. I.e. it was a substantial in square wooden construction of which the main walls and inner piers stood on a white stone socle which actually didn't have foundations. That is why the constructions which to some degree would be similar to foundations made for a stone building were not found during the excavations of 2012-2014. I have to notice that the available photos of the eastern parts of these “foundations” (“Fig. 2”) let us

attribute them to the rounding based constructions of apses with a strained argumentation.

If to take into consideration a lack of bricks in original constructions of the socle of that building, and a coin of the Tver Prince Ivan Mikhailovitch (1399-1425) found near the upper part of the lower step of the perron ("foundation 9") [41] we can date the erection of that "chamber" to the late 14th~early 15th centuries.

#### IV. PLACES FOR SEARCHING THE REMAINS IN SITU OF THE CATHEDRAL OF TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LATE 13TH CENTURY

The absence of the Transfiguration of the late 13th century at the place indicated by the authors of excavations of 2012-2014 suggests its search at the other parts of the kremlin. But excavations made in various places have not yet revealed sites which can with certainty be connected with building of the cathedral of Our Saviour in the late 13th century. Nevertheless to some extent a direction to a building site in question is in publications devoted to archaeological researches of 2012-2014. If referring to draughts reflecting the stratigraphic situation in the south-eastern part of the excavation area at the place of the cathedral of Transfiguration of the late 17th century, it is needed to pay attention to the thickness of a building layer of the church of Our Savior noticed in the eastern wall of the excavation area. This thickness is considerably larger than the one in the southern wall of the excavation area [42]. And if this layer is really connected with the erection of the first stone Tver cathedral so the building site of the late 13th century can be moved to the east of the church of 1689-1696.

One more argument in favor of this version is a statistic of the finds of ceramic floor tiles. Their maximum number was found to the south-east of the church of Our Saviour of the late 17th century [43].

But the results gained from the excavation area of a dug-pit (2011) situated to the south-east of the cathedral of Transfiguration of the late 17th century and to the east of now existing wooden chapel [44] built shortly before the beginning of a new cathedral in the middle of 2010-es.

A thick (about 0.5 m) layer of white stone crumbs ("Fig. 4") is seen in the northern half of the situated there dig-pit which is no doubt indicates a correlation of this layer with a building of a white stone construction at this place. It's important to notice that findings from the cultural layer (fragments of glass bracelets, a fragment of glass ring, beads and ceramics) on which this building stratum can be dated no later than the late 13th century (determination by: E.A. Romanova, V.V. Danilov).



Fig. 4. Tver. Dug-pit made in 2011 in the south-eastern corner of the cathedral garden.

a. The thick layer of white stone crumbs fixed in the sides of it related to the late 13th~early 14th centuries. View from the south.

In this paper it is suggested that the remains of one of the four towers of "Powder" yard of Tver princes could lie near that dug-pit [45] but because the cathedral of the Transfiguration of the late of the 13th century was not found at the place of the church of the Transfiguration of the late 17th century, the revealed in the dug-pit of 2011 mentioned above building stratum could be previously referred to the erection of the stone cathedral of the late 13th century.

In the light of the new interpretation of the results of researches of 2011, 2012-2014 the deduction of correlation of the church of Transfiguration with the excavated in 1998 stone wall adjoining from the north to the north tower (rotunda 3) of the Prince yard ("Fig. 5") [46], [47] receives an additional confirmation.



Fig. 5. Plan of Tver kremlin at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>~the beginning of the 19th centuries.

a. The Princes' yard and some "pre-regular" objects' outlines are shown with the dotted line: 1. The cathedral of Transfiguration of the late 17th century; 3. The Princes' yard; 4. "the Big road"; 5. complex of the suggested Powder yard; 6. the wall led from the Princes' yard to the cathedral of Transfiguration.

As the matter of fact if we place the church of Our Saviour of the late 13th century to the east — south-east of the cathedral of the late 17th century the remains of the discovered in 1998 stone wall can be previously consider as a remain of a passage led from the Prince's yard to the western part (gallery — ?) of the Transfiguration church of the late 13th century. The cathedral complex of Tver kremlin reconstructed in this way is in context of series of architectural ensembles (for example Bogolubovo) where a secular, prince power was a client of a church building and where a temple was visually connected with a prince's residency.

## V. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the consideration of the results of architectural archaeological researches of 2012-2014, it can be state that in the period of excavations the authors have succeeded to find the place of the wooden Kozma and Damian church dismantled probably in the late 13th century as well as to reveal completely the remains of the stone cathedral of the late 17th century. The stone temple of Transfiguration of the 13th century has not been found. It should be searched outside the excavation area of 2012-2014 probably to the east — south-east of the building of 1689-1696 in the territory of a small garden where the wooden chapel now stands and possibly under the road led from the Soviet street to the Emperor's travelling palace.

Situation preconceived in Tver kremlin is not something extra ordinal because similar events have happened in two more cities on the Volga — Yaroslavl and Nizhny Novgorod. In both cases the earliest temples (13th~14th centuries) were found near the replaced those constructions buildings of the 17th century. Thus in Tver the liturgy could be served during the period of erection in ancient more than once repaired temple which was dismantled evidently after the consecration of a new city cathedral.

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