

Rural Churches of the Don Armenians: urban planning and architectural-historical significance

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Abstract. The research of the architecture of churches in villages of the Armenians of the Lower Don (Myasnikovsky district of the Rostov region of the Russian Federation) was conducted in order to identify their urban, historical and aesthetic value and significance in the history of the Armenian Diaspora. The analysis of the stylistic features of the architecture of the churches led to the conclusion that consideration of them in problem-chronological order allows us to trace the process of searching by customers and architects of the national Armenian "style", which was relevant in the era of historicism. Urban planning analysis and characteristics of the current state of buildings indicate that the churches of Surb Astvatsatsin in Bolshye Saly village, Surb Hambartsum in Chaltyr village, Surb Amenaprkich in Crimea village are in satisfactory condition. They are important in the modern urban planning system of settlements and strengthen the identification of main streets and squares. The churches of Surb Gevorg in Sultan Saly village and Surb Karapet in Nesvetay village are in a ruined state and require work to be preserved. The article emphasizes that churches define the "spirit of the place" of the Armenian community and contributes to the maintenance of ethno-cultural identity.

Keywords. Don Armenians, church architecture of the Lower Don, eclecticism, architectural and historical environment, "Armenian-Byzantine style".

1. Introduction

The Don Armenians is the name of a group of Armenians who settled on the territory of the Lower Don in 1779. The city of Nakhichevan founded by them and its surrounding villages formed the Armenian District (Nakhichevan District) of the Ekaterinoslav province of the Russian Empire. The creation of a group of interconnected settlements of Armenians became part of the implementation of the resettlement policy of the Russian government aimed at the development of sparsely populated territories of the country. During its implementation, new towns and villages were created in the south of the empire, inhabited

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by representatives of different faiths, which made this region a contact zone of different cultures, and the fusion of architectural traditions of different nations with architectural and urban planning installations of the Russian Empire led to the formation of a unique architectural and spatial environment of urban and rural settlements of immigrants.

The free spaces of the south of the country opened unique opportunities for the practical realization of the ideas about the correct architectural and urban organization of the city that prevailed in Russia in the middle of the 18th – the first decades of the 20th century. The spatial organization of the new cities was based on "exemplary" town-planning plans, construction in them was carried out according to "exemplary" projects. Rural settlements also received a regular plan, according to which the territory was divided into rectangular blocks, which in turn were divided into rectangular estates. These layouts are still preserved in the historical part of most settlements, preserving their continuity. Thus, the value of the architectural heritage of the "exemplary" settlements of the Don Armenians can be considered based on the fact that they represent the Russian architectural and urban heritage of Modern times, the principles of which have proven their vitality. On the other hand, the problem-chronological study of the ecclesiastical heritage of these settlements makes it possible to reveal the process of searching for and ways to spread the "national" style of Armenians in the era of historicism, in the conditions of the processes of integration and self-identification of the multinational population of the south of the country that were gaining momentum.

The purpose of the research is to reveal the town-planning, historical, architectural and aesthetic value of the preserved monuments of church architecture of the Don Armenians on the basis of work with historical sources and field researches, as well as to characterize the current state of buildings and their significance for the ecology of the culture of the region.

The historiography of the architecture of the churches of the Don Armenians, built in the Modern time, is represented by a number of very serious publications, a large number of conclusions and factual data of which largely formed the basis of this research. The first researcher who described the rural churches of the Armenians of the Lower Don was O.Kh. Khalpakhchian [1, 2]. In recent years, interest in this architectural heritage has increased significantly, and several publications were devoted to the history and periodization of the construction of churches of the Don Armenians [3, 4]. A.Y. Kazaryan's research of the architecture of the churches of Surb Karapet in Rostov-on-Don [5] and Amenaprkich in Crimea village [6] convincingly showed that the appearance in the 1860s of measurements and drawings of Armenian and Georgian medieval monuments by D.I. Grimm opened up opportunities for construction in so called "Armenian-Byzantine style". The history of the appearance of the national "style" of Armenians in this period, as well as the method of the creative work of the architects in the frames of the Russian academician tradition and the nature of neostyles, based on the Western and Oriental concepts, have been studied in some latest researches [7–11]. O.V. Baeva's article is shown that the architectural solution of the Surb Gevorg Church in Sultan Saly village was based on the exemplary projects of K. Tones (1838) [12].

In our previous researches [3,4], the stages of church building in the Armenian district were revealed: 1) the end of the 18th century — the beginning of the 20th century, when most of the churches of Nakhichevan-on-Don were built in the classicism style; 2) the middle of the 19th century, when the churches are being built in rural settlements, and the church of the monastery of Surb Khach, located outside the city limits, was erected. Their unifying feature is the noticeable influence of eclecticism; 3) the 1870s — early-20th century, when eclecticism takes the form of the "Armenian-Byzantine" style. During this period, Surb Karapet was built at the city cemetery of Nakhichevan-on-Don and Amenaprkich in Crimea village.

Of all the church buildings erected in rural settlements of the Armenian district from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century, five churches have been preserved: Surb Gevorg in Sultan Saly village, Surb Astvatsatsin in Bolshye Saly village, Surb Karapet in Nesvetay village, Surb Hambartsum in Chaltyr village, Amenaprkich in Crimea village. The article presents the results of the research of this part of the heritage, represented the rural churches. They are less investigated both in architectural aspect and of the role in the settlements. They should become objects of preservation by means of repair and restoration works and the subject of protection in their relations with the historical planning scheme and architectural and volumetric environment.

2. Methods

The research is based on a comprehensive analysis of archival, historiographical sources and field research. It is based on such special methods as historical, compositional, stylistic and urban planning analysis. Such a complex interdisciplinary problem can be solved only on the basis of a deep architectural analysis and exploration of the phenomenon in question in a broad historical and cultural context.

3. Results

Before the representing the condition of the monuments and the essential criteria for assessing architectural heritage today, it is necessary to discover its role into the historical villages and architectural and aesthetic value of these rural churches.

3.1. The role of the churches in the spatial planning structure of villages

The Armenian villages created on the Don in the last quarter of the 18th century became one of the first rural settlements of the Russian Empire that received a regular layout, although it was executed very simply. The territory was divided by conditionally straight streets into rectangular blocks of different sizes grouped around water sources. Chaltyr is spread out on both sides of the Wet Chaltyr river, Crimea – Ozan River, Nesvetai – Tuzlov River, Big Saly by the pond. The configuration of the blocks, their length and width depended on the terrain and the reservoir.

Most likely, the central squares were not planned, and the settlements had a weakly expressed center in architectural terms. The churches fit into the rural landscape in a place determined by the residents themselves. All the studied rural churches of the 1850s – 1860s were erected as a replacement for the dilapidated temples of the 1790s and were built in a new place [13]. Maybe this explains that their position in the structure of settlements is different, since it was determined based on the availability of a plot that can be given over to building. In the western part of the Chaltyr village is a church of Surb Hambartsum (Fig. 1), in the eastern part of the Bolshye Saly village — Surb Astvatsatsin (Fig. 2), slightly shifted to the southwest of the center of the Crimea Amenaprkich village (Fig. 3), on the eastern outskirts of the Sultan Saly village— Surb Gevorg (Fig. 4), on the northern border of the Nesvetai village — Surb Karapet (Fig. 5).

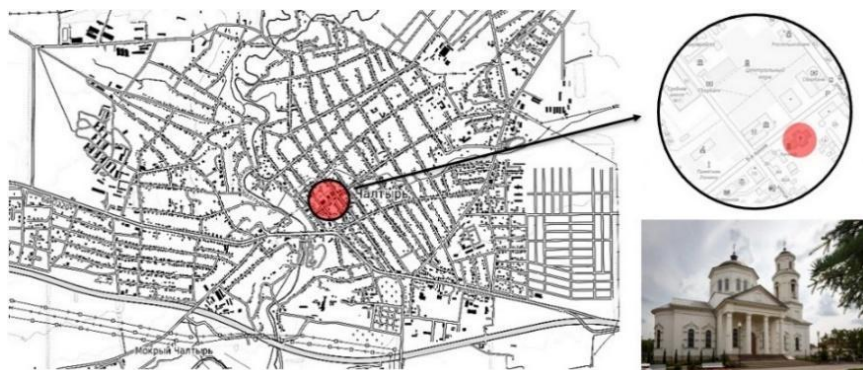


Fig 1. A – Layout diagram of the Chaltyr village. B – Surb Hambartsum Church in the Chaltyr village

Information has been preserved that the residents of the village of Bolshye Saly were not satisfied with the location of the old temple on the outskirts. It so happened that when the settlers built the first church and the first houses, they were not yet familiar with the area and its climate. Over time, the main buildings moved to the eastern part of the settlement, and the church was at a considerable distance from them [13]. In 1861, a place was allocated for a new church in the eastern part of the village.

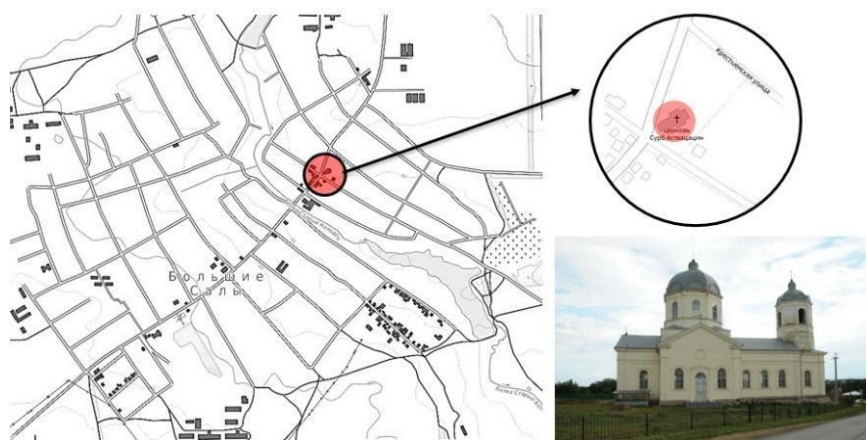


Fig. 2. A – Layout diagram of the Bolshye Saly village; B – the church of Surb Astvatsatsin in the Bolshye Saly village

The modern silhouette of the studied rural settlements is formed by low-rise buildings, the high-rise accents of which are churches and bell towers. Today, church squares in the Bolshye Saly village, in the Chaltyr village, in the Crimea village occupy part of the quarter identified in the structure of the city through the verticals of temples.



Fig. 3. A – Layout diagram of the Crimea village. B – Amenaprkich Church in the Crimea village

The Church of Surb Hambartsum is located in the architectural and urban planning center of the Chaltyr village, which was formed in the 20th century. There is a system of squares and recreational areas here. Opposite the northern facade of the temple is a park, and the temple closes the perspective of one of its central alleys. In the Bolshye Saly village, the church is in a building-free part of the quarter and the portal of its bell tower is oriented to the intersection of streets, one of which is the main one. The Amenaprkich Church in the village of Crimea is in a block, the central part of which is occupied by a city park located behind its northern facade. On the eastern side of the temple stands the building of the Palace of Culture, which significantly distorted the panorama when moving to the temple from the east and north. The significance of a block with a church in the settlement structure is revealed by the intersection of main streets, one of which is passes by the southern portal.



Fig. 4. A – Layout diagram of Sultan Saly village; B – Surb Gevorg Church in Sultan Saly village.

Thus, the churches of the villages of Bolshye Saly, Chaltyr, Crimea are the dominant element of the modern architectural and spatial environment, emphasize the importance of central avenues and recreational areas in the hierarchy of the urban system. Churches in the Sultan Saly and Nesvetay villages are located on the territory of blocks free from development. They are in a ruined state, and the surrounding area emphasizes this.

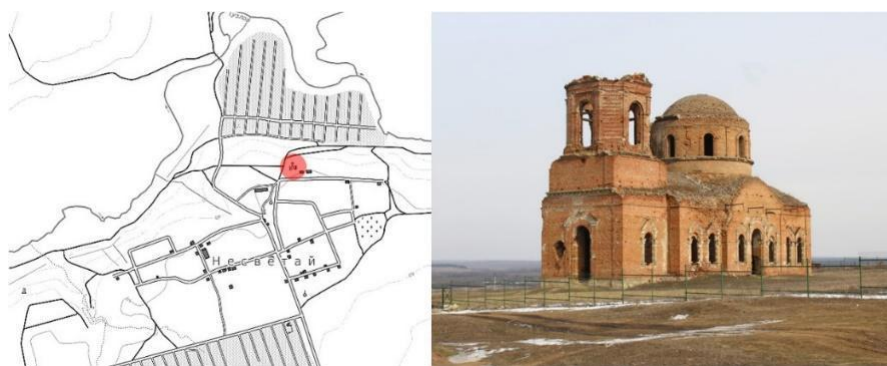


Fig. 5. A – Layout diagram of Nesvetay village; B – Church of Surb Karapet in the Nesvetay village

Both churches are located near the borders of settlements with a flat nature of the terrain and minor elevation increases, which determines their high importance in the panorama and the views opening up when approaching these villages. They are positioned so that they are visible when viewing the panorama and when approaching from distant points.

3.2. Architectural and aesthetic value of rural churches of the Don Armenians

The churches under research were built during the period of eclecticism in Russian architecture. The temples of Surb Astvatsatsin in the Bolshye Saly village, Surb Karapet in the Nesvetay village, Surb Hambartsum in the Chaltyr village are solved in the forms of early eclecticism, their architecture tends to classicist forms not only with its volumetric and spatial solution, but also with decorative design. They are a type of domed temple with a bell tower adjacent to the west. Their facades are flanked by corner pilasters, the horizontal is emphasized by profiled rods and cornices. The facades of the transverse branches of the cross Surb Hambartsum have porticos with four columns. The porticos that once decorated the facades of Surb Karapet have been lost.

Surb Gevorg in Sultan Saly village was built in the "Russian-Byzantine" style, which distinguishes it from other temples, the construction of which was chronologically close to the time of its creation. The temple is one of the unique examples of the Armenians' conversion to the Russian "national" style. In our previous study, it was shown that the church's project was based on the exemplary projects of K. Ton published in 1838 [14]. The space-planning solution of the church is three—part - a quadrangular frame, a refectory and a bell tower. The quadrangular frame of the church completes the sail vault with a bulbous dome on a small light drum. The three-tiered bell tower of the church represents rectangular volumes decreasing in height. The bell tier is decorated with kokoshniks and crowned with a tent with a bulbous dome completing it. The motif of the perspective design of portals is repeated in the solution of the semicircular window openings of the bell tower, the southern and northern facades of the refectory and the church.

The last village church of Amenaprkich in the Crimea village was built in 1895 – 1902. It is a cruciform domed building with an adjacent bell tower. The project for the construction of the church has not been preserved. In the earliest known photographs of the

church, it is depicted with the lost domes and the question of its original image is controversial among researchers. The architectural and artistic solution of the facades of the church is influenced by the Art Nouveau style and the decoration of the facades of the main volume and the drum is focused on the images of medieval temples of Armenia and Georgia: the arcature of the main volume and the drum is their most recognizable element, a garland of half-rings above the archivolt of the northern and southern facades repeats the design element of Samtavisi cathedral [5, 6].

Rural churches of the Don Armenians represent important period in the architecture of the community when the chousing of a new national style has been began in Russian Empire. So, this interesting process was started not only in the cities, but also in the villages at the same time.

3.3. Historical value, authenticity, and current state

The churches built in the 1860s–1870s were repaired in the second half of the 19th – early 20th century. A bell tower was added to the Amenaprkich Church in the Crimea village, shortly after its construction [1, 6], repeating the architectural and artistic design of the main volume. In the middle of the 20th century, churches were closed to believers and their buildings were used for economic purposes. During the Great Patriotic War and the subsequent years of desolation, they were destroyed: domes, porticos were lost, structural elements of some temples were partially destroyed. At the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, the churches of Surb Astvatsatsin in the Bolshye Saly village, Surb Hambartsum in the Chaltyr village and Amenaprkich in the Crimea village were restored and today are functioning temples of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

During the restoration, the historical authenticity of the churches of Surb Astvatsatsin in the Bolshye Saly village, Surb Hambartsum in the Chaltyr village was established due to both the preservation of the buildings and the historical photographs available. During the restoration of Amenaprkich in the Crimea village, it was decided to build pyramidal domes of the church and bell tower, although their original appearance is unknown.

During the restoration work, distortions of the historical appearance of the buildings were allowed, including partial replacement of historical window blocks and door panels. The existing churches are in satisfactory condition today, the damage to the plaster and whitewash layer found during visual inspection can be eliminated during repair work.

Two churches — Surb Karapet in the Nesvetay village and Surb Gevorg in the Sultan-Saly village are in a ruined state. The temples received the main destruction during the Great Patriotic War. The foundations of the buildings are presumably ribbon, laid out of shell blocks on lime-sand mortar. The walls of the buildings are laid out of red full-bodied ceramic bricks on a complex lime-sand mortar.

The walls of the church of Surb Karapet have through holes, and partial destruction of brickwork, both external and internal, numerous chips of bricks and weathering of masonry seams. The upper tier of the bell tower is completely destroyed and the drum of the church has partial destruction. Domes and roof are lost, porticos of the south and north, window and door blocks are lost. The grilles of the entrance and window openings are partially preserved. The decorative decoration of the main volume of the church and the bell tower is made of brick and shell stone. There are significant losses of decorative elements and cornices.

The southern wall and the roof of the refectory of the church of Surb Gevorg are missing, the western wall of the church's quadrangular frame is partially destroyed. The roof, dome, window and door blocks of the temple were lost. Numerous destructions of brickwork of internal and external walls, cornices, partial loss of fragments of decor were recorded.

Thus, without appropriate restoration or conservation of buildings, their loss is inevitable.

Cultural dominance as an important factor of the value of the church heritage of the Don Armenians. As A.S. Schenkov noted in his work, cultural dominance is becoming one of the essential criteria for assessing architectural heritage today, it increases and multiplies the significance of all other criteria. By introducing the term "spirit of place", the Quebec Declaration of 2008 refers primarily to local communities, whose heritage contributes to the maintenance of ethno-cultural identity [15] and creates an understanding of the meaning and significance of history, forms the historical memory of the community.

The role of the studied temples in the ecology of the culture of the whole region is great. The church architecture of Armenian rural settlements is part of the material and spiritual environment that has emerged in the process of interethnic/confessional interactions between residents of the region and the country (architects, customers, government representatives). During this interaction, the vital activity of the Armenian colony and its integration into the general cultural field of Russia were ensured, the utilitarian and aesthetic needs of the inhabitants were satisfied. And this determines the ownership of this heritage and its significance in the cultural ecology of the region. These issues were given attention in two previous publications: the ethnic identity of the Armenians of the Lower Don [16] and their integration into the Russian cultural space [17] were revealed.

4. Discussion

For more than two centuries, the integrity of the spatial planning structure of the settlements of the Don Armenians has been preserved, which is evidence of rational planning principles. The architectural heritage of the colony, formed under the influence of Russian legal regulations and practices, at the same time is an integral part of the architecture of the Armenian people. The fusion of the traditions of the architecture of the Don Armenians with the architecture of the Russian Empire reflected the ethnic features of the organization of space and the socio-economic living conditions of the colonists, their integration into the all-Russian cultural field. In the church architecture of rural settlements of the Don Armenians, we see both one of the rare appeals to the Russian style for Armenians, and the transition to construction in the "Armenian-Byzantine" style (the term of the historicism era), i.e., the value of the architectural heritage of the studied settlements also lies in the fact that the churches that have survived to this day clearly reflect the processes of search "national" style by the Armenians of the Russian Empire.

At the same time, the issue of attributing the Amenaprkich church in the Crimea village to the "Armenian" style is debatable, since the currently existing pyramidal completions were created during the restoration work of the 1990s. Their historical forms are unknown to us. Doubts about this were expressed by O.Kh. Khalpakhchian. He wrote that the coverings, according to the testimony of old-timers, were "the same as in Russian churches." A.Y. Kazaryan believes that it is likely that the completion of the temple and the bell towers originally had a pyramidal shape. This point of view is supported by the report of E. Shahaziz, the author of the early 20th century, that the church was built in the Armenian spirit, as well as the construction of the Surb Karapet church in the cemetery of Nakhichevan-on-Don, the administrative city of the Armenian district, in 1875-1881 in the "Armenian-Byzantine style" [6]. As A.Y. Kazaryan convincingly showed, some common features in the architecture of the churches of Amenaprkich and Surb Karapet and a common source for them — drawings of the Armenian and Georgian churches by D.I. Grimm, published in 1859, 1864 and 1866, as well as the shape and decor of the drum of the church and the upper tier of the bell tower hardly leave any doubt that during the restoration, the right decision was made to recreate the pyramidal domes [6].

It should be noted that in this case, the only possible decision was made, since the image of the temple in the "national" style was of great importance for the Armenian community. In his research, A. S. Schenkov notes that for a particular society, the authenticity of the historical form may recede into the background compared to the belief about the unconditional importance of the idea embodied in the heritage. If this idea or belief belongs to a sufficiently extensive collective, it must be taken into account [18].

5. Conclusions

The study of the church architecture of the Don Armenians is evidence of the changing preferences of architects and customers. The influence of the methods of Ton's architecture, Russian and Byzantine styles and, finally, the appeal to the "national" style are revealed in the church architecture of rural settlements.

Thus, the settlements and church buildings studied are valuable architectural, urban planning and historical heritage, bearing general information about the ideas, tastes, artistic preferences and character of previous generations, is the material basis that preserves the culture of the Armenian and Russian peoples, memory and the "spirit of the place", which should be the key to preserving the historical and cultural identity of these settlements. In this regard, Surb Karapet and Surb Gevorg are of particular concern because of their ruined condition and not being included in the modern system of squares and parks of the settlement. These buildings are in urgent need of preservation and such a method could be the preservation of objects that will preserve their current appearance. These buildings that were damaged during the Great Patriotic War can become memorials, and the territories around them can become memorial parks.

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