
TENDENCIES IN CHURCH ARCHITECTONICS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS IN VI-XVI CENTURIES

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Abstract

The ideological basis for the formation of regional-ethnic peculiarities of church architecture is presented by different variants of religious contaminations of worldviews of North Caucasus nations. The reasons of religious contaminations were the following: remoteness from Christian centres, activity of missionaries of different confessions, maintenance of generic structures, complex political situation, and processes of ethnogenesis. The consequences of religious contaminations were the appearance of regional variants of 'folk' Christianity, complicated by pagan ritualism, which were reflected in the peculiarities of church architecture: landscape location, spatial organization, external architectural forms, constructions, decor plastic.

Keywords: Christian architecture, North Caucasus, traditional culture

1. Introduction

The beginning of fragmentary study of the Medieval Christian architectonics refers to the XIX century, to the time of 'Christianity recovery period in Caucasus' by the Russian Empire, when the Caucasus researchers P.S. Uvarova [1], V.F. Miller [2], V.M. Sysoev [3] published, for the first time, on some monuments of Christian architecture of the North Caucasus and North Black Sea region. The tradition was the basis to form the peculiarities of the Christian culture in this region. The peculiarities of traditional culture are determined by the commonness of its main constituents for numerous ethnic groups of population in North Caucasus, concerning the bases of pagan world outlook and behavioural norms, connected with them. In traditional culture of the nations in the North Caucasus, there existed both basic sources and ideals, contributing to the formation of originality in the Christian culture, while the universality influenced on adequate perception of Christianity. The first ones involve the patronymic structure of the society, while the character of natural resource use, the nature worship and the predominance of naturalistic paganism accompanying it. The second ones involve the hierarchic structure of god pantheon, headed by the main god-demiurge, the presentation of three-part structure of the Universe and the moral values. The introduction of Christian

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culture only by missionary activity promoted its smooth adaptation to the traditional culture, as a result of which, a number of mythological sources of the world outlook was preserved; at the same time, the innovative tendencies appeared, and regional ethnic variants of church construction were formed.

2. Literature review

P.S. Uvarova contributed much to the study of Christian heritage of the North Caucasus. She described and introduced into scientific use many monuments of Christian architectonics of Abkhazia and Transcaucasia, made their photofixation, expressed a thought, for the first time, about the inclusion of Abkhazia cross-dome churches to Byzantine culture. V.F. Miller examined, described and measured some Christian monuments on the territory of Ossetia and Ingushetia. V.F. Miller paid special attention to the study of traditional culture of mountain-people, their customs and rituals, cult ceremonies, held near temples and sacrariums. He was the first, who came to the conclusion, that the Ossetians, as well as the other nations of the North Caucasus, from the earliest times had the notion of one god. V.M. Sysoev fulfilled the archaeological investigations on the river Teberde, river Indysh, near the auls Kart Dzhurt, Uchkulan Khurzuck, in Ullu-Kama clove. He published the plans and photographs of the cross-dome churches of the North Caucasus - Zelenchuk, Shoanin and Sentin, as well the plans of some small Christian churches of Alania. Christian churches of the central Alania are briefly presented in the works of I. Bentkovsky [4], N.I. Veselovsky [5], G.U. Klaprot [6], K.M. Petrelevich [7], Y. Reinggs [8] and K. Stal [9]. The measurement diagrams of several projections of the cross-dome churches of Alania were, for the first time, executed by I. Bernardatsy [10]. Thorough investigation of the Sentin church complex was made by I.A. Vladimirov [11] and A.N. Dyachkov-Tarasov [12], who made an attempt for the first time to reveal its specificity. The churches in foothill of the North Caucasus (Upper Dzhulat village) were described by I.A. Guldenshted [13]. A. Firkovich published the detailed reports on his routes along the cloves of Balkaria and Karachay, with enumeration and description of all monuments of Christian culture, indication of their sizes and peculiarities of location in the landscape [14].

In the Soviet period, the architecture of Christian churches of the North Caucasus was fragmentarily studied by the historians-archaeologists, thoroughly examined separate monuments. E.P. Alekseeva [15], O.M. Miloradovich [16], T.M. Minaeva [17], E.I. Krupnov [18], V.I. Markovin [19] made up the detailed descriptions of both churches themselves and rising material, providing the analogies with the raising material of the other monuments and regions and suggesting their own substantiated variants of dating. Special attention of the investigators, the same as in pre-Revolutionary period, was attracted by the cross-dome churches of Alania, located on the territory of Karachay-Cherkessia. The works of fine art experts V.B. Besolova [20] and L.A. Perfilyeva [21] are devoted to them. The experts were particularly interested in the problems of

genesis of the cross-dome churches of Alania. Fundamental investigations of the cross-dome churches of the Low-Arkhyz ancient settlement were carried out by V.A. Kuznetsov [22], the Sentinsky church was studied by V.I. Markovin, D.Y. Beletsky [23] and A.Y. Vinogradov [*An essay of history of Alan Christianity in the X-XII century*, www.mzh.mrezha.ru]. It is necessary to mention the names of many other researchers, who contributed much to the study of separate monuments. Some medieval Christian churches of Ossetia are described and introduced into scientific use by the historians V.K. Tmenov [24], R.G. Dzattiat [25], E.V. Khvorostova [*A report on excavations in Zrugsky church*, Archive of IA RAS, F.R-1, f.6664], the architect M.A. Mamiev [26]; the churches of Ingushetia were studied by the archaeologists L.P. Semenov [27], M.B. Muzhukhoev [28], the architects I.P. Shcheblykin [29], V.A. Kuzmin [30]; the churches of Kabardin-Balkaria were studied by L.N. Sitnikova [*A report on results of archeological survey in the neighborhood of Sochi*, The Archive of Archeological Institute RAS, R.1, f. 4387], I.M. Chechenov [31]; the ones of Dagestan were studied by G.G. Gambashidze [32], M.G. Magomedov [33]; the ones of the Krasnodar Territory were studied by M.N. Lozhkin [34], B.B. Ovchinnikova [35].

There is a rather narrow circle of specialists, suggested in their works some generalizations, concerning the church architecture of separate regions of the North Caucasus. L.P. Semenov classified the Medieval monuments of mountain Ingushetia, distinguishing the monuments of religious character (column-shaped sacrariums and temples); thoroughly studied the peculiarities of forming of the Ingush charnel houses, distinguishing 7 types; mentioned general features of religious and charnel architecture of Ossetia and Ingushetia, assuming the sources in old and deep-rooted cultural communication of nations; assumed, that the Ingush church architectonics reflects the change of three religions, gradually replacing each other (paganism, Christianity, Islam) and mentioned that the monotheistic religions could not replace paganism, that is why they existed in parallel, what was reflected in the monuments of architecture. I.P. Shcheblykin and E.I. Krupnov factually agreed with L.P. Semenova in their works. M.B. Muzhukhoev became an opponent of the abovementioned authors. From his point of view, the Christian objects of Ingushetia and Ossetia involve only those churches, that have the apsis, the other ones, including large churches with inner space, are referred by him to pagan culture. V.K. Tmenov executed a great work on systematization of medieval monuments of the North Ossetia. He suggested the classifications of pagan sacrariums and charnel houses constructions; he made an analysis of metrology of the charnel houses and towers; revealed the decor peculiarities in Ossetian traditional culture. He also brought forward the thesis that the paganism of the Alans, and, later, Alan-Ovses existed in the unchanged view throughout the whole medievalism, undergoing insignificant influence of Christianity, what was also reflected in cult architecture. The monuments of church architectonics, having the obvious features of the Byzantine or Georgian culture, in his opinion, are built by foreign masters from Byzantium, Abkhazia

or Georgia. R.G. Dzattiatta brought forward a thesis about mutual entwinement of paganism and Christianity in traditional late medieval culture of the Ossetians, reflected not only in cult architecture, but in obsequies, towers, charnel houses and decor.

V.A. Kuznetsov made a detailed analysis of historical facts, referring to the history of Alans Christianization [22]. For the first time, the monuments of Christian architecture of the VI-XII centuries on the territories of Ossetia, Ingushetia, Kabardin-Balkaria, Dagestan, the Krasnodar Region, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya are presented in one investigation (not a full volume) according to his suggested territorial division as of the period of Alania existence. The dating of some of them was made based on private archaeological investigations. The historical facts of missionary activity in the North Caucasus by the representatives of the Byzantine, Georgian, Rome-Catholic Churches were revealed and analyzed. V.A. Kuznetsov distinguished the groups of monuments of the Medieval Christian church architectonics from North Caucasus according to the spheres of influence of Christian states (Byzantine in the West Alania, Georgian in the East Alania, local in the intermediary mountain area). He suggested his view on the genesis of some types of churches (cross-dome churches, one-apsidal churches). He was the first, who determined the direction of future investigations of the Christianity in the North Caucasus, as a 'national' one, keeping the layer of paganism and as 'religious substrate'.

A general picture of the Christian architectonics of the North Caucasus as per the stages of territorial-spatial reclamation of the region is given in the investigations of the G.V. Esaulov [36].

Making a summary of the architectural-historical studies of the church architecture of the North Caucasus, it shall be noted that, despite the number of thorough investigations, devoted to Christian and traditional cult architectonics, the systematic study of the Christian architecture in the context of traditional culture was not carried out up to the present moment.

3. Discussion

The formation process of variants of folk church construction had its own peculiar traditionalism, general in its universals and refined in ethnocultural variants.

In the VI-IX centuries, Christianity comes to the Black Sea regions of Zikhiya and makes the first steps in the foothills of the North Caucasus. Christianity still did not touch deep layers of pagan world outlook, but contributed to contamination of paganism and Christianity. In religious contamination of the world outlook of the X-XII centuries, the share of paganism was minimal, and it is this period, that is characterized by the following to 'higher' samples of Christian architecture, that preconditioned the appearance in the North Caucasus of all types of churches, existing in the Eastern-Christian culture. The religious contaminations of the XIII-XIV centuries were formed on the basis of world outlook ideals of enumerated

currents of Christianity, traditional mythology, and, sometimes, Islam, at domination of aggravation processes of ethnic distinctness over the assimilation processes of universals, of the Christian culture. The religious contamination of naturalistic paganism and reminiscences of Christian culture of the Cossacks (the fourth stage, the XV-XVI centuries) was formed due to the absence of contacts with the Christian centres, on the basis of peculiar principles of Christian world outlook, extreme peculiarities of the way of life, reclamation of nature and original social structure, developed in the previous period.

Each flash of missionary activity activation in the region promoted the beginning of definite stage of architectural formation of Christian architectonics. Besides, the fourth stage existed - the stage of reminiscences, the original existence of Christian culture in conditions of episodic contacts with the remnants of material culture of former confessional centres of the Eastern-Christian church. Each stage formed new types of churches in the North Caucasus, within the number of features, which are in line with general tendencies of Christian architecture, but always differing with large share of regional originality, conditioned by the peculiarities of religious contaminations. At the same time, each stage was connected with the penetration of Christian culture to the new territories.

The character of reclamation of the land and traditional use of natural resources become the constituent of community of traditional culture of all nations in the North Caucasus. That is why regional peculiarities of Christian churches architecture from the North Caucasus in whole were brightly revealed in church location, in the settlement structure, its interconnections with the landscape and natural environment. Throughout the whole studying the period from the VI to XIV centuries, the North Caucasus felt the mutual interaction of primary bases of traditional spatial culture, presupposing close connection with nature, and introduced devices of other 'higher' cultures, having predominantly urban development.

Naturalistic paganism, nature worship, as an integral element of traditional culture of nations from the North Caucasus kept strong positions throughout the whole studied period. It became a reason to form the traditions of church organic inclusion to the natural-landscape context, as well as preservation, and even priority of its exterior perception (despite the actualization of inner space, connected with 'interior character' of the Christian ritual). The location of church in the structure of settlement was not subject to the canons of the Fathers and was a prerogative of local population, as a result of which, the objects of Christian culture in the North Caucasus were located according to pre-Christian views about the location of sacrariums in the system of land reclamation. The implemented of Byzantine territorial-spatial principles of church construction (church location directly in the settlements, the perception of church as a burial place) were added by traditional ones (church location on high hard-to-reach places in the point of visual mapping, consideration of natural factors - solar motion, clove direction, ensemble character and unity of natural and artificial). Sometimes, new regional

principles were formed on the basis of their interaction (the hierarchy according to patronymic structure of the society, church inclusion to the system of defence constructions of the settlement). The strongest manifestation of the mentioned tendency was marked on peripheral (in relation to formed cultural centres) territories of the North Caucasus.

In the considered period from the VI to XIX centuries, each of the formed Christian cultures was subject to the pressure on the part of confessional centres, in order to 'unify' them into one culture of church construction of one or another direction. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a conclusion about the originality of churches' architecture of Central, Eastern, Western Alania, Zikhiya, Dido (Serir), Khazariya, Nakhche, Dvaletiya, Digoriya, Tmutarakan. Regional-ethnic variants of Christian architecture, in the course of mutual existence on this territory, were subject to changes, getting some general features. However, they all preserved their cultural identity thanks to the stability of initial traditional ideals.

A new, Christian worldview was brought to the North Caucasus with the church samples. At that, previous system of world understanding was not rejected, but was rethought by means of Christian teaching. Throughout the whole studied period in the North Caucasus, there was an interesting process of creation of proper versions of Christian culture by means of specification of Christian dogmas according to real life conditions, peculiarities of thinking and subsequent introduction of traditional cults to the Christian church service. Nevertheless, the nations of the North Caucasus understood the main thing - the meaning of Advent and understanding of his godhead, reflected in liturgy, the symbolics of saving - a cross, Eschatological perception of time (as distinct from the cycle character of pagan world view) and the necessity to strive for passing to the Kingdom of God after death, the hierarchical pattern of world building. It was manifested in ceremonial and charnel ritualism, in the eparchies and metropolitan cities of Byzantine, Roman Catholic and Georgian churches, functioning in the territories of the North Caucasus, in architecture. The ideological-spiritual orientation of people, self-actualization of their belonging to one or another, but, namely, Christian organization against the background of integrity and isolate character of separate spheres of world outlook, providing an opportunity to refer these complex alternative variants of ethnic culture to Christian culture and to consider the church architecture in the North Caucasus of the VI-XIV centuries, as a complex of regional variants of Eastern-Christian church architectonics. In architectural-spatial compositions of churches from different periods, any direct succession cannot be revealed, but the internal space of the church always had a priority meaning in these variants; it was conditioned by the liturgy and determined the belonging to the Christian culture

The universality of Christian culture penetrated to this territory due to the tendency of local customers to preserve and to repeat in the church the whole internal space of the sample, brought from the confessional centre. The church was perceived as the internal world, limited by the walls of liturgy, it was the main, and its form had a primary importance for the missionary and the faithful.

Deep bases of Christian culture and church construction were laid in the second period of Christianization of the North Caucasus (X-XII centuries), when the construction, as per the iconographic sample, was of top priority in state policy of church building. The churches of different compositional types, constructed in that period in the North Caucasus (cross-dome, Basilical, one-apsidal hall), in whole corresponded to the samples of confessional centres. Alongside with that, all mixed-mode architectonics of that period was united by the similarity of sample regionalization process, which lied not in creative development of its architectural characteristics, but in the 'perception' of the possibility of church limited integration to the context of traditional culture, in the desire 'to see' the traditional features in one or another sample, to develop and to add them.

The peculiarities of church construction according to the samples in the North Caucasus in XIII-XIV centuries were connected with concretion of symbolic thinking. As compared to the previous period, the samples could not be used due to specific confessional centre - the multiplicity of influences conditioned the plurality of suggested samples. The selection of sample was directly connected with the problem of faithful, and, due to subdivision and lack of strong centralized states in the territory of the North Caucasus in that period, separate mountain communities and patronymic communities acted as customers. At the same time, the multiplicity of Christian cultures influences, Muslimism and actualization of traditional convictions, connected with the increase of the role of traditional patronymic community, formed new view about the church. However, on the other hand, few Christian churches, turned into holy places by that time, were built in the territory of mountain communities. In their layout structure and graphic presentation, they did not correspond to the new views about the church, that is why they could not be copied, but, nevertheless, they were the samples for the newly constructed churches. Extinction of the copying tradition meant the search for new language of self-identification, using architectural means in the changing culture, based on the actualization of pagan principles of world outlook. Separate formal borrowings of sample peculiarities took place: mystic perception of its standard, which got the sacral meaning by that time; imitation to the separate constituents of spatial organization (division into parts by means of arcs); repetition of details of liturgical atmosphere at another scale and in another places (altars, niches, benches). Objectively, there was a process of division of the sample into parts, and then the synthesis of several graphic features with transformation and addition of elements from another cultures.

The views about measure, demarcation module of the church, were in direct connection with the peculiarities of construction as per the sample. The executed module analysis showed that in the North Caucasus, the measure values were in compliance with the ones used in Byzantium (i.e. orgyes equal to 6, 7, 8 and 10 foot), the same as a method of church marking in compliance with macrolinear module, divisible by one of the abovementioned orgyes. Another assumption was also proved: the module of plan construction in the

North Caucasus and in the North Black Sea region was a value of the most graphically significant element of the Christian church itself - the side of under-dome square or the depth of altar apsis. The module size matched the 'measure' of iconographic sample. The revealed sample of using the identical 'non-standard' module in the number of cross-dome churches, such as an 'inscribed cross', proved the thesis, that if the church was constructed in newly reclaimed lands in confessional relation, the 'revelatory' sample itself and its measure were of top priority, but not the measure system widespread in the Byzantium world at that time.

In XIII-XIV centuries, there was another understanding of measure to construct the sacral space. In homebuilding architectonics, there was a peculiar tradition to use the equivalent sizes, once established models for different elements of the building, to form their own sacral measure instruments in each community. It contributed to the sacralization of measure of the previously constructed Christian churches. The spatial-planning layouts of these churches were not in compliance with the demands of 'new' church services (the traces of late devices, found in some objects, testify about it), but the sacral measure, laid in them, was used to construct new churches and cult complexes. In this connection, the division module, equal to Byzantine orgy, which was only the measure for sample in the previous period, gets a sacral meaning in the studied period, and it is recorded in the special measure instrument, kept in cult complex, as a sanctuary.

In different regions of the North Caucasus, in each studied period, there were own peculiarities of functional-spatial organization of churches, connected both with peculiar understanding of Christian church service, the source of Christianity penetration and with addition of pre-Christian ritualism.

In each of studied period, the definite areas of distribution of one or another church service were revealed: the location of fontal function in side-chapels, attached to the one-apsidal church from the North or South, consisting from two or three-enfiladed located rooms (catehumenium, delubrum, consignatorium) (from the basin of river Mzymta along the coast of whole Black Sea and further up to Caspian Sea); the church service was held near a large stone cross, set in the altar part of the church (mountain regions of Pre-Caspian, Balkaria, Svanetiya, Caucasus Albania, Armenia, VI-IX centuries); separation of the altar from the prayer hall with the blind wall, even without opening (Central Alania, X-XII centuries); under-altar rooms with the outside entrance through the dromos (Foothills of the North Caucasus, XIII-XIV centuries); cult complexes (a band of Sunny Valleys, XIII-XIV centuries); the combination of three main functions in one hall - Eucharistic, memorial, baptismal - presented a typical function of church service organization of space in the churches of North Caucasus. A special attention shall be paid to the problem of division structure in the church: in compliance with number of patronymies (Ingushetia, XI-XIV century); the altar, the naos and the peribolos (Alania, X-XII centuries, Balkaria and Ossetia, XIII-XIV centuries). Altars, sanctuary screens, ambons, synthronons, altar niches and benches presented the

integral belonging to Eucharistic function. All these elements, put together on single ones, existed in the churches of the North Caucasus from the VI to XIV centuries.

It was established, that the main factors, determining the influence of church service function on the spatial organization of the churches from North Caucasus, are variants of liturgy and ritualism combination, as well as the form of ritual ceremony inside or outside the church walls. Ritual additions are present in two variants: Christian ritualism, and connected with the influence of different Christian cultures and pagan ritualism. In the period from X to XII century, the types of Christian ritualism, held inside the church, were widespread. Pagan rituals also existed, but they were held outside the church walls. The main was to hold the full liturgy, mainly of Saint John Chrysostom, predetermining the presence of altar and narthex in the church and detachment of spaces for frontal and memorial functions. In early Christian period and in the period from XIII-XIV centuries, there were similar tendencies in holding of different variants of pagan rituals not only outside, but also inside the churches (for instance, the feast with sacrificial animal).

In each studied period of regional Christianization, the builders solved actual problems of constructive-tectonic implementation of building of the new type (Christian church) and its symbolic-sacral imagery (a wall - an arc - the supports - the tops). The search for new imagery in each historical period contributed to elaboration of new constructional devices, based on both traditional and foreign construction engineering. At that, the prevalence of large share of traditional tectonic devices was facilitated by the lack of construction personnel in the centres of Christianity outspread and the resulting necessity to create international construction brigades, with the assistance of regional masters.

An important factor, influencing on formation of constructive principles of church-building in the North Caucasus, was the absence of antique culture traditions, whereas in Byzantium, Transcaucasia and North Black Sea region, from where Christianity penetrated to the North Caucasus, these traditions existed, and the construction technology of antiquity was used in the first Christian churches.

The exterior of the sample was important in rare cases of its direct copying, then, the external forms were reproduced in that construction technique, which was available to the masters who built the church. At that, almost in each church, in conditions of drive for construction copying, but with limitation of opportunities, original construction solutions were formed. The forms of church symbolic parts were reproduced by the ways available to the builder. Sometimes, due to impossibility to repeat the volume-spatial characteristics of the sample (due to insufficient level of construction technique), new typological and constructive schemes appeared on its basis.

During time, alongside with the conservation and archaism of traditional forms, has appeared a tendency to blend in church building the constructive-decorative devices of nations, of different ethnic groups and confessions, both

aboriginal and migrant, as well as to elaborate, on the basis of tradition, the devices of church building, peculiar in each ethnocultural area and forming the original church face.

Thus, two interconnected influence tendencies of constructional-tectonic systems on architectural formation of churches were developed in the North Caucasus. On one hand, the necessity to add the churches a definite imagery-emotional expressiveness in the periods of different ethnocultural situation frequently resulted in sacralization of definite structural elements and forms, which became traditional, in their acquisition of ethnocultural meaning. On the other hand, the Christian culture, introduced in different variants, contributed to the search for new construction solutions, frequently based on the experience of tradition, developing and enriching it. An important factor, promoting the formation of this tendency, was the creation of international construction brigades of masters from Eastern-Byzantine provinces and Caucasus region to build the sacral constructions - churches, towers, chanel houses.

The subjects of church architectural decor (capitals, slabs for floor, sanctuary screens, altars, curtain rods, carved plates to decorate walls, crosses, steles), sculpture and wall painting presented the elements from North Caucasus, that reflected the traditional culture. Alongside with that, in the course of centuries, the Byzantine, Georgian and Nestorian motives were preserved. This process of many-sided cross-cultural interaction contributed to formation of originality in these types of art. However, definite stylistic direction was unable to be developed due to discreteness and impulsivity of external influences of Christian culture.

The influence of traditional culture and originality of regional-ethnic variants of church building in the XIII-XIV centuries were obviously shown in the exterior forms of churches, conditioned by the use of sacralized decorated elements (step-pyramidal tops, crests, generic morions, handprints, petroglyphs, sculptural images of spirit animals).

The similarity of the stylistic forming of architectural decoration and painting, based on combination of elements of Christian and traditional cultures, with predominance of the last one, allows making a conclusion, that the unity of traditional culture was preserved in this sphere in the period of Medievalism. A consequence of this tendency was the sacralization of details of decor and ways of church finishing, formed as a result of culture synthesis, and shift of these elements to the other sacral objects - chanel houses and towers.

4. Conclusions

On the subject of the place of Medieval Christian architecture from North Caucasus in the architectural culture of the Christian world, the opinion was formed, that this architecture is provincial, and presents a reflection of extinction of high samples. This statement is unfair even for the monuments of X-XII centuries, due to the number of features, compared with the architecture of high samples of Byzantium and Georgia. The term 'peripheral', but not

‘provincial’ is appropriate for this architectonics. In rather short terms, it responded to the innovations of capital architecture, it was formed as a result of its own artistic process, had its own tendencies and generated the traditions. Besides, in this territory, several centres distributed Christianity. It was one of the reasons of the impossibility to refer the majority of objects of Christian architecture from this region to the architectonics of one of the adjoining confessional centres. The features of architecture of all centres can be found practically in every object; it was an object for discussion of many investigators throughout many decades. Another reason lies in the peculiarities of traditional cultures of the considered period, having general mythological sub-base and being based on the priority significance of patronymic structures. It is this circumstance that impeded the universal replacing of paganism by Christianity and contributed to the penetration of traditional culture elements to church building. Thus, Christian architecture of the region presents a combination of asynchronous regional-ethnic variants of national architectonics, which, due to originality, cannot be evaluatively compared with ‘high’ samples.

The impossibility of this comparison, the originality of architecture of the majority of churches in the North Caucasus indicate about the penetration of Christianity into the masses. Patronymic, coenobitic customer ‘saw’ the image of Christian church through the prism of his own worldview, reflecting the religious contamination of Christianity and paganism, peculiar in each ethnocultural community. At that, the samples of church architecture of confessional centres were not the determining, but guiding factor, as there was practically no state policy of church building. The tradition was the determining factor. That is why, one of the general features of formation processes of national church building variants was a peculiar traditionalism, general in universals, and refined in ethnocultural variants.

Informative bases of worldview, having deep historical roots, same for all cultures of the North Caucasus, preserved their inalterability throughout the centuries. It added commonness to all mixed-mode architectonics of the North Caucasus in such aspects, as territorial-landscape location of churches in the context of natural surroundings and decorative-constructional elements. On the other hand, all variants of medieval Christian architectonics of the North Caucasus joined several universals of the Christian culture, which got the subject matter of generally significant ideals, and rooted so firmly, that they indirectly held ground up to the end of XVI century.

In the North Caucasus, throughout the whole period of Christianization from the VI to XIV centuries, there was a model of the Universe, traditional for mythological thinking - correlation of world and church, as a movement, a way from one constituent of this model into another in order to achieve the superior purpose of being united with God. Deep traditionalism and impulsivity of Christianity outspread in the studied region contributed to transformation of this movement from one-directional (from pagan world to Christian church) to reciprocating, typical of the North Caucasus, becoming the main reason to form here the original Christian church building. A consequence was a definite-

historical limitation of separate architectural forms, appeared as a result of periodic influence of Christian cultures, what, at first sight, provides an idea about fragmentation and motley of Christian architectonics of the North Caucasus. However, the commonness of bases of mythological thinking and traditional devices of space reclamation, unchanged throughout the centuries for all ethnical cultures of the region, found the reflection in architecture, as well as the single reciprocal forming of Christian cultures testifies about some integrity and uniqueness of the medieval Christian architectonics of the North Caucasus.

The revealed peculiarities and originality of Christian architecture of the North Caucasus provide an opportunity to express some ideas concerning the problem of preservation of this unique constituent of historical-cultural heritage of the region. Despite the fact, that, at present, the majority of population in the North Caucasus worships Islam, all studied objects are respected by local residents as the holy places of traditional culture. Alongside with architectural objects, the majority of regions preserved worship of deified natural objects - holy forests, boskets, mountains, cloves. Thus, conservation of existing system of architectural-natural cult complexes is an urgent task both from the viewpoint of monument preservation, creation of protective means from negative anthropogenic influence for mountain ecosystems, and from the viewpoint of unification of the nations in the North Caucasus.

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Russian churches often have various recurrent elements in their architecture. The onion dome is for example a recurrent and important element in the architecture of Russian churches. Often Russian churches have also multi-colored filigree ornamental elements. Furthermore the colour white plays an important role in the style of Russian churches. In the past, Russian churches were made out of wood. Many Russian Orthodox churches are distinguished by their verticality, bright colors and multiple domes