

# Byzantine symbolism in sacred architecture in Eastern Galicia at the turn of the XIX-early XX century

## Abstract

Sacral architecture in Western Ukraine, first of all in Galicia, since the beginning of the twentieth century defined by the obvious search and articulation of local identity, arose in terms of the general process of political nations in Eastern Europe. The long break both in the continuity of generations and in the practice of sacred buildings design between periods at the turn of XIX–XX and at the turn of XX–XXI centuries, led to significant losses in the theoretical and practical use of the experience of the galaxy of Galician architects of the Austrian and Inter-War periods, which formed morphological basis of the architectural definition of a church in Ukrainian-Byzantine tradition.

Keywords: byzantine symbolism, sacred architecture, Eastern Galicia

## Treatment of the main material.

Although the first attempts of social groups in Galicia to explore the ideology of the modern Ukrainian nation had occurred since 1870s [1], almost up to the beginning of the twentieth century it was in a close synergy with the comprehension of the cultural and political significance of the native peasant population of Galicia, identity of which was weak and blurred among newly appeared nations. [2] Long existence of the ethnonym “Rusyn” within the Ukrainian national discourse in Galicia can be considered as an evidence of its isolation from the context of the Russian Empire and its focus on its own source material.

In this point of view should be considered first artistic efforts with regards to promote the national identity, made by galaxy of Galician artists at the turn of XIX – XX centuries, the union of which first was called the “Society for Prosperity of the Russian art” [“Товариство для розвою руської штуки”] and then “Society of Supporters of Ukrainian science, literature and art” [“Товариство прихильників української науки, літератури і штуки”] headed by architect Vasil Nagirnyi [3]. Leaving aside from the article more detailed overview of the artistic context and searches for the national character of the Ukrainian (Russian) identity, it should be focused on the works of Vasil Nagirnyi that become the determining factor and a kind of starting point for the development of vision of the semantic characteristics of sacred buildings in Ukrainian-Byzantine tradition in Galicia.

Vasil Nagirnyi was educated in Lviv and Zurich, and gained experience in project work in Switzerland. From the very beginning of his practice in Galicia he has positioned himself as an adherer of the Eastern Christian (Byzantine) tradition. In

this tradition he saw not only the necessary set of semantic features required for positioning of the “Russian art” in terms of political and financial dominance of the Latin Catholic, but functional benefits of the liturgical character, which to him, in some cases, were more important than structures of the national genesis [4].

However, his attraction to Byzantinism faced the existing ideas about the sacred building among his customers – Greek-Catholic rural communities. Despite significant attraction to historical styles in early projects of the architect, the heritage of folk architecture created the main basis for the shaping of churches by Vasil Nagirnyi.

Limited financial capacities of communities – customers of his projects – mostly forced the architect to focus more on the search for archetypal tectonics and general geometry of Ukrainian church. As a result, the laconic, mainly neo-Romanesque, decor received minor symbolic role, giving way to experiments with the traditional combination of rectangular and octagonal volumes, as well as to adaptation of folk wooden traditional methods to the stone building.

At the same time, in the design of the churches by Vasil Nagirnyi, Ukrainian national identity is shown in parallel with confessional and pure Galician regional components. In

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a highly competitive environment with a Polish project and still presented at that time exposures of clerical- Russophile groups, an important task was to demonstrate a clear difference of Ukrainian Galician identity both from Latin semantic archetypes and Russian ones. At that time, these two competing trends existed in the form of reflection of ideological utopias about the medieval origins of the national spirit. On the one hand the Austrian-Polish discourse was based on the Latin pre-Protestant romanticism of the Middle Ages, it stood like a historical ideal of humanity led by the church. On the other hand, during the conservative reigns of Alexander III and Nicholai II in Russia was revived the aesthetics of pre-Peter Moscow empire, as the period of a perfect unity of the tsar and of the orthodox people, who voluntarily submits to and serves the regent [5]; Byzantine style transforms to the side of the ancient and Moscow-Russian exemplars of church architecture, it uses bulbous cupolas, eastern ornaments and dome dominant system.

Analysis of Vasil Nagirnyi's projects suggests that the unique image of the "national" church in Western Ukraine (especially in Galicia) was the result not so much of the author's own creative world view, as his close cooperation with churches congregate that contributed to meaningful of images of the national architecture. In a number of projects, such as, for example, the St. Peter's and St. Paul's Cathedral in Sokal town, St. Church of St. John the Evangelist in Sukhovoliva village, St. George's Church in Verkhvata village, or the Church of the Archistratigus Michael in Komarno town indicate the author's natural orientation to an academic interpretation of sacred forms with Greco-Roman classics. Such projects almost did not possess any specific national markers and reflected the cosmopolitan culture of the era of European Empire style.

As a result of the interaction with the communities, and the study of folk architecture, there was gradually formed a distinctive set of techniques, reflecting new nation-forming contents in sacred art. Actually, during the creative work of Vasyl Nagirnyi it was difficult to even talk about the true Ukrainian identity associated with a national project of the modern nation by Drahomanov and Hrushevskyyi, however, it professional work with folk material was very important, thus it become liquid to the discourse of the Ukrainian nation.

It is worth noting that the very nature of a nation in Eastern Europe was a part of the German-Italian scheme, where such ideas as the memory of the line length ("nation"), its rootedness on the land and unique symbolic attributes of the line played a primary role. In this context a unique folk tradition of Galicia was a crucial achievement, the mastery of which by the Ukrainian project provided to it later a decisive advantage. Thus in the works of Vasyl Nagirnyi it was formed a number of features that become the main attributes of Ukrainian identity in the sacred architecture of Galicia.

First of all the noteworthy is the dominance of *centric approaches* with the leading role of the central dome, which under the influence of folk architecture is mainly of octagonal shape and repeats in stone the geometry of domes of folk wooden churches.

Secondly it should be mentioned the use of *helmet-shaped top*, more corresponding with the samples of Eastern-Christian tradition mainly of Byzantine origin. In the architecture of churches by Vasyl Nagirnyi, we almost do not see moving away from the helmet-shaped geometry, even when there are expressive baroque motifs, the elements of which are deeply intertwined with the practice of the national constructions.

Another important sign of Churches by Vasyl Nagirnyi was laconism in decor and the development of abstract geometry with a combination of simple forms, allowing developing the archetypal architectural morphology qualified with expressive semantic content. Such *archetypical church* looked as a cross on a plan structure with a tent roof crowned with an octagonal top with helmet-shaped dome. This simple scheme was only relatively supplemented with simple band of blind arcades that with equal probability can belong to both the Roman and the folk styles. The result was a universal archetype building that expressed not only a particular national identity, but the authentic nature of the area, providing a huge advantage to this approach over other ones. In addition, the geometric simplicity and clarity of such a scheme opened the possibility of its imaging both in the absence of sufficient funds (which was fairly typical for the time) and in the absence of professional architects.

Fundamental studies of Vasyl Nagirnyi's works had not been carried out, so within this article we can not clearly define the nature of stylistic searches, in which attempts were made to use a purely Byzantine and classical motifs. We can assume that they are related to significant closeness; in the prevailing conditions of the confessional and national positioning, as well as problems of traditional suspicions the Greek-Catholic population belongs to non-European provincial circle.

It is also worth noting that the experience of the searches for sacred forms by Vasyl Nagirnyi also included wooden buildings. Here the architect took almost completely made up in the framework of folk architecture a set of tectonic techniques and decorative tools without attempting to interpret them in the Byzantine or in the academic spirit. Obviously, a significant factor of this approach to wooden churches was an opinion of rural communities that was closely related to certain semantic clichés, but, on the other hand, self-sufficient phenomenon of folk architec-

ture of wooden sacral buildings fully met the key requirements to the formation of new identity meanings.

Experience of Vasyl Nagirnyi became the initial impulse for the further search for Ukrainian national attributes in the design of sacred buildings. Gradually, a galaxy of architects appeared, who in their work involved the plenty of tools for reflection of national and religious identity, in particular, such people as L. Levynskyi, O. Lushpynskyi, S. Havryshkevych, I. Dolynskyi, T. Obminskyi, Ye. Nahirnyi, Y. Barvik, M. Kovalchuk, M. Holeiko, O. Pezhanskyi.

This relatively small group of authors (quantitative contribution of which to the design of sacred buildings in the Western Ukraine is unequal) designed and built hundreds of churches, and gained experience was the basis for the further continuation of the development of religious architecture in Ukrainian-Byzantine tradition in the diaspora and, starting from the 1990s, in Ukraine.

To ways of reflection of the national religious identity worked out by Vasyl Nagirnyi were added other ways resulting from more trailblazing experiments with material and tectonics of buildings. Some attempts of Vasyl Nagirnyi to return to the practice of building of stone churches Byzantine cross-domed schema with diagonally disposed tops, has been superseded by a tectonic approaches that were closer the experience of wooden folk architecture. Almost the same trend can be seen also in the gradual abandonment from the curved shape of a dome and walls. The total volume-spatial composition takes the form of reflection in stone of geometry the folk wooden church only supplemented a bit with stylized (Romanesque, less classical) decor.

A striking example of such architecture and its close connection with the sacral building in western Ukraine after the 1990s years could be the St. Nicholas' Church in Livshits village, Horodotskyi district, Lviv region. The project of this church was developed by the architect Oleksandr Pezhanskyi (in collaboration with the engineer Yu. Piasetskyi) in 1929, the construction began in 1938 and was terminated due to the inclusion of the Western Ukraine to the USSR and, accordingly, the termination of any sacred building. At the beginning of the liberalization of the atheistic Soviet control in 1989 the construction was completed, almost without any major deviations from the original morphology [6]. The architecture of the church is the representation in stone of tectonic geometry traditions of folk wooden architecture with a few contour decor from simplified Greco-Roman classics. Besides parts of the coating and the top, it is worth noting the completion end of the transept in the form of faceted log buildings typical for wooden tectonics (this approach, for example, was not typical for projects of Vasyl and Yevhen Nagirnyi).

In the context of this presentation, the regard should be paid to the morphology of the so-called Ukrainian Cossack Baroque and its place in the search for national identity conducted by the galaxy of Galician architects in the early XX century. Unlike, for example, Volyn, where Russian authorities built a memorial in honor of the Battle of Berestechko with the use of morphology of Cossack architecture of XVII–XVIII centuries, in Galicia there were no approaches as above. (As cer-

tain exceptions can serve a couple of projects of a native of Chernigiv region Serhii Tymoshenko in the style of Ukrainian Naddnipryanskyi modern style). There is no such direction in Galician sacred architecture at the turn of XX – XXI centuries.

In this regard, we can talk about several main considerations. First of all, it should be noted that in the conditions of formation of modern nations the key moment is the identity of the new political nation with indigenous (*autochthonous*) folk population. The masses acquiring individual rights of liberty and equality are able to transit to the status of a political entity, but it is not enough for the right to occupy a certain territory. In this sense of the main importance is the status of autochthonous – the eternal residence of ancestors of some new political nation on a given territory. That is why in the environment of fierce competition between different national projects in Galicia the most important were identity markers as a cultural form of autochthonous population. In this context, the development of wooden folk architecture was more fundamental and top-priority. (Especially considering that the Ukrainian Cossack Baroque was, in turn, also the reflection of Naddnipryanska form of wooden architecture in the stone material with addition of order decor).

In addition, it should be emphasized that ontologically, Naddnipryanska tectonic was associated with Volyn and Galician archetypes of single-store and sometimes three-stores churches, which were subsequently developed in the lateral and vertical directions connecting both morphological variations in a single array in terms of national semantics.

To some extent, we can speak about a kind of narodovska (narodovtsi – is a political movement in Galicia closest to the concept of modern Ukrainian nation) determination of the nation formation in the Western Ukraine and the lack of a clear vision of the political nature of its shaping. For the same reasons in the Galician we do not see direct encounter reproductions or architectural samples of time period of Rurik dynasty- Kievan Rus and Galician Rus, which on the one hand could be considered as Russophile signs, and on the other hand symbolized autochthony and nationality – the two main priorities of the nation. Analysis of the latter – the pre-war stage of formation of national identity in the sacred architecture of the early twentieth century in Galicia, suggests the further strengthening of

the tectonics of folk wooden architecture as a leading identifier of forming Ukrainian nationality. In the works of Yevhen Nagirnyi these motifs are just reflected (e.g. the St. Nicholas' Church in Busk town), or become the main base for the three-dimensional schemas. Some exceptions, such as the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin in Bircha village with massive Byzantine dome, can be attributed to a desire to strengthen religious identity in religious heterogeneous environment. Stylistic details and decor are reduced further, which also can be attributed to the influence of folk architecture. (Although it should be mentioned the ruling functional and rational discourse). Discovered in the works of Vasyl Nagirnyi archetype of the church with an octagonal tower and the helmet roof starts its way to repetition and memorial approval (e.g. the Church of St. George in Isaia village).

In his projects of wooden churches Yevhen Nagirnyi, as well as his father Vasil Nagirnyi, repeats almost unchanged all found in the folk architecture techniques, without any stylistic or tectonic additions or innovations. The only exception is an attempt to underscore the central cross via its overall increase, including in height (the church in Oryavchuk village).

Also, to Yevhen Nagirnyi's individual features in his work can be included a revival of baroque dome motifs typical for Naddnipryanskyi Cossack Baroque, as well as the development of monumental properties of open masonry, not often found in folk and more professional prototypes taken as a basis for Ukrainian-Byzantine churches. As a result, we can say that on the territory of Galicia appeared its own archetype of the sacred object of the national identity on the basis of wooden folk architecture, to which in each case, a variety of compositional and construction – technical modifications was applied without disrupting the overall awareness of construction identity. The galaxy of Galician architects on the basis of experience of Vasyl Nagirnyi was able to solve some of the key tasks of the national symbolization, namely – difference from the Latin traditions, associated with Poland; delimitation of the Russian parallelism to the cultural forms of official nationality of the Russian empire (actual up to 1917); consolidation of the Ukrainian Church building tradition of autochthonous (indigenous) population of the region; professional development synthesis morphology of wooden architecture in the stone building.

### Conclusions:

1. It was outlined the scope of tasks set for the Galician architects at the turn of XIX – XX centuries in the context of the local attributes of national identity, the main of which was the need for simultaneous separation of Ukrainian Galician identity both from archetypes of the Latin and Russian semantic. At that time, these two competing trends existed in the form of reflection of philosophical utopias about the medieval origins of national spirit.
2. Analysis of Vasyl Nagirnyi's projects suggests that the unique image of the "national" church in Western Ukraine

(especially in Galicia) was the result not so much of the author's own creative worldview, as of his close cooperation with the masses of parish of rural churches that contributed to understanding of images of folk architecture.

3. It was established that in the works of Vasyl Nagirnyi was formed a number of features that became the main attributes of Ukrainian identity in sacral architecture in Galicia. First of all it is worth noting the dominance of centric approaches with the leading role of the central dome; use of helmet-shaped top, more similar to the initial samples of the Eastern-Christian tradition mainly of Byzantine origin; the development of "Galician archetype" endowed with a distinct semantic content. This archetypal church looked like a cross on a building plan with a tent roof topped with octagonal top and a helmet-shaped dome.
4. It was discovered that the galaxy of Galician architects (L. Levynskyi, O. Lushpynskyi, S. Havryshkevych, I. Dolynskyi, T. Obminskyi, Ye. Nahirnyi, Y. Barvik, M. Kovalchuk, M. Holeiko, O. Pezhanskyi) based on the experience of Vasyl Nagirnyi were able to solve several key problems of national symbolism – namely difference from Latin traditions associated with Poland; delimitation from the Russophile cultural forms of parallelism to official nationality of the Russian Empire (up to 1917); consolidation of the Ukrainian churches building tradition of autochthonous (indigenous) population of the region; development of the professional synthesis of morphology of wooden architecture in the stone building.

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