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Stylish Features of Christian Churches in Uzbekistan: A Comparative Analysis and Influence on Modern Design

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A B S T R A C T
This article explores the stylistic features of Christian churches in Uzbekistan within the framework of Byzantine, Baroque, Classicist, and Modern architectural traditions. Through comparative analysis, the study identifies the characteristic elements of these styles and highlights their manifestations in the regional architectural environment. Particular attention is given to the adaptation of historical stylistic traditions to the cultural and climatic conditions of Uzbekistan, which reveals the patterns of transformation and integration of these styles into contemporary architectural practice.

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Introduction

The architectural legacy of Christian churches represents a multilayered reflection of the spiritual, artistic, and cultural processes that took place in various regions of the world over the centuries. These structures not only served a religious function but also served as expressions of the aesthetic ideals of their time, embodying philosophical and theological concepts, as well as engineering achievements.

Each architectural style used in church construction developed within a specific historical and sociocultural environment. The Byzantine tradition, with its emphasis on symbolism and monumentality, had a significant influence on the development of Orthodox architecture. Baroque, by contrast, sought to create an emotional impact through dynamic forms and rich decorative embellishments. Classicism, inspired by antiquity, offered strict symmetry and rationality, while Art Nouveau opened up new horizons of sculpture and ornamentation, drawing on natural motifs and technical innovations. The architecture of Christian churches in modern-day Uzbekistan is a unique cultural phenomenon, reflecting the interaction of various traditions—Byzantine, Russian, European, and local Central Asian.

The study of the stylistic features of Christian churches in Uzbekistan is important for contemporary architectural practice. Although Christianity is not the dominant religion in Central Asia, its architectural heritage reflects the region's cultural diversity and close ties with European and Byzantine traditions [2]. A comparative analysis of historical styles—Byzantine, Baroque, Classical, and Art Nouveau—allows us to identify patterns of their adaptation in the local context and explore the possibilities of integrating these traditions into contemporary design [2].

The purpose of this article is to identify the stylistic features of Christian churches in Uzbekistan and explore their influence on the design of modern religious buildings. Furthermore, the aim of the study is

to identify the stylistic features of Christian churches in Uzbekistan based on a comparative analysis of the Byzantine, Baroque, Classicist, and Modernist movements, and to identify their influence on the design principles of contemporary religious buildings in the region.

The objectives include an overview of the main architectural styles, identifying their manifestations in the regional context, comparing them with international analogues, and formulating recommendations for architects and designers [3, 4].

A comparative analysis of the stylistic features of churches in the region with similar examples in other countries will help identify the factors in the adaptation of historical styles to local cultural, climatic, and social conditions [5].

To determine the factors in the adaptation of historical styles to local cultural, climatic, and social conditions.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in its comprehensive examination of the influence of historical and stylistic traditions on the contemporary design of Christian churches in Uzbekistan. The practical significance of the study lies in the potential application of the research results in architectural practice, restoration, educational programs, and the development of methodological recommendations.

Review of sources

The study of religious architecture in the Christian tradition in Uzbekistan is impossible without consulting works devoted to various stylistic movements—from the Byzantine tradition to Art Nouveau. The scholarly literature has accumulated significant material, allowing us to examine both the general patterns of development of religious architecture and its regional manifestations.

The book Religious Buildings Made in Byzantium: Old Monuments, New Interpretations, edited by Ivana Evtich and Nikos Kontoyannis, examines the characteristics of Byzantine religious buildings, their regional variations, and their influence on the formation of a common architectural tradition.[6]

The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Art and Architecture (ed. Ellen Schwartz) provides a broad introduction to the richness of Byzantine art and architecture, including religious buildings, their decorative elements, and their influence on later periods.[7] Mahmoud Ahmed Darwish, in his article "Architectural Planning of Byzantine Churches and Their Decorative and Applied Elements," analyzes the planning concepts and decorative elements of Byzantine churches, emphasizing their cultural significance.[8]

Archaeological research in Central Asia also sheds light on the construction of Christian churches. Anna A. Mikheeva (Kitaeva), in her article "The Christian Church at the Ak-Beshim Settlement," examines archival materials from excavations conducted in 1954, demonstrating the stages of construction of the Christian church at the Ak-Beshim settlement and its significance for understanding early Christian architecture in the region.[9]

Regarding the comparative analysis of styles, it is worth mentioning Li Xinyu and Tang Jian in their work "The Comparative Analysis of the Styles of Christian Churches in Modern Mainland China, Macau, and Hong Kong," which conducts a horizontal comparison of the architectural styles of Christian churches, emphasizing cultural exchanges between East and West.[10] The Academia.edu platform has published numerous studies on the architecture of Christian churches, examining the influence of social and religious transformations on the design, reuse, and urban positioning of religious buildings.[11]

Regarding the decorative features of religious buildings in Uzbekistan, Elena Georgievna Barsukova deserves mention. In her article "Features of Architectural Decoration of Religious Buildings of Uzbekistan," she analyzes the ornamental features of medieval religious buildings, allowing for a comparison of the decorative traditions of Islamic and Christian architecture.[12]

The main part.

The works listed above provide a basis for comparative analysis and allow us to identify how historical and stylistic features can be integrated into contemporary Christian church design.

Byzantine architecture is considered the foundation of Christian church construction. The Oxford

Handbook of Byzantine Art and Architecture, edited by Ellen Schwartz, provides a detailed analysis of the structural and decorative features of Byzantine churches, including domed compositions and interior symbolism [7]. Mahmud Ahmed Darwish, in his article "Architectural Planning of Byzantine Churches and Their Decorative and Applied Elements," focuses on planning solutions and ornamental details, emphasizing their cultural significance [8].

In Uzbekistan, the Byzantine style manifested itself in the architecture of Orthodox churches built in the 19th and 20th centuries. These buildings were typically constructed by Russian architects or based on standard designs adapted to local conditions:

- Seismic resistance: structures were strengthened with thickened walls, buttresses, and lightweight domes.
- Local materials: brick, ganch, and wood were used instead of stone, which influenced the texture and color of the facades.
- Climate adaptation: enlarged windows, ventilation openings, canopies, and galleries accommodated the hot climate.
- Ornamental influence of the East: elements of oriental ornamentation can be seen in some churches—plant motifs and geometric friezes.

A striking example of the Byzantine style in Uzbekistan is the Assumption Cathedral in Tashkent. (Fig. 1)

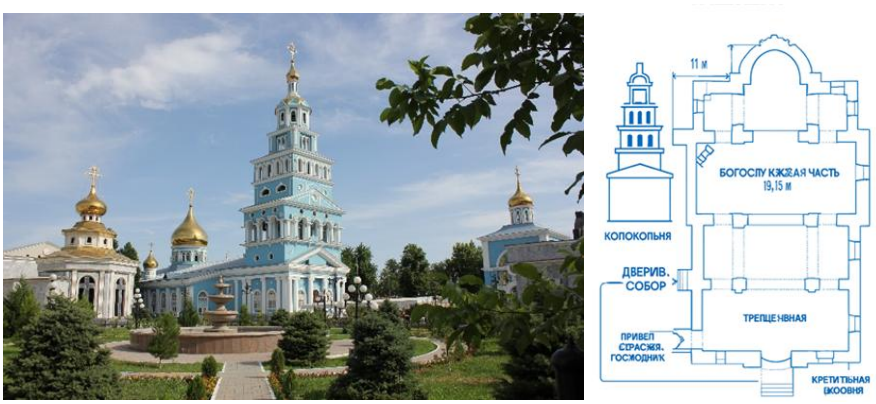


Fig. 1 Holy Dormition Cathedral in Tashkent.

The Baroque style in church architecture is explored in the works of Julia Walker (Church Architecture from Medieval to Modern Times), which demonstrates how dynamic forms, rich decoration, and theatricality of space shaped the emotional perception of religious buildings [5].

In the context of the European tradition, Baroque is viewed as a style that enhances sacredness through visual expression, which is important to consider when comparing it with the churches of Central Asia.

In Uzbekistan, Baroque did not become the dominant style, but merely complemented the Russo-Byzantine foundation. While in Russia and Ukraine, Baroque formed a holistic architectural system, in Uzbekistan it served primarily a decorative function, adapted to the local environment and construction possibilities [13].

In Uzbekistan, Baroque elements are found in a limited number of churches, primarily in decorative solutions for facades and interiors, due to the historical and cultural specifics of the region [14]. In the Orthodox churches of Uzbekistan, Baroque elements are primarily evident in the details: iconostases with gilded carvings, columns, and volutes; façade elements—pilasters, arched portals, and pediments with stucco molding; interiors—decorative cornices, paintings with Baroque compositions, and the use of chiaroscuro [15].

An example of Baroque influence is the Catholic Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Tashkent, built in the early 20th century (Fig. 2). Despite denominational differences, its architectural solutions influenced the design of Orthodox churches in the region.



Fig. 2 Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Tashkent

Baroque elements can be found in the Church of St. Nicholas (Tashkent, early 20th century), whose architecture features asymmetrical facades, elongated arched windows, and decorative latticework. The church's interior is decorated with stucco motifs of grapevines and stylized flowers—a typical Art Nouveau technique.



a) *b)* *c)*

Fig. 3 (a, b, c) Elements of the Baroque style in the religious architecture of Uzbekistan

a) Cathedral of St. Alexis of Moscow (Samarkand, 1912)

b) Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin (Samarkand)

c) Church of St. Nicholas (Tashkent)

The tradition of classicism in church architecture is explored in the research of A. Rapoport, who emphasizes the pursuit of harmony, symmetry, and rationality of form [16]. Works on the history of 19th-century architecture note that classicism in religious buildings strove for universality and strict composition, which allowed its elements to be integrated into various cultural contexts [17].

Classicism in the church architecture of Uzbekistan manifested itself as a strict, rational form, adapted to local conditions and materials. Its characteristics—symmetry, clear geometry, columned porticos, and pediments—became a symbol of order and stability in religious buildings of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Classical church architecture in Uzbekistan is distinguished by a number of characteristic features. First and foremost, the facades were constructed according to the principles of symmetry and proportionality, with the central part balanced by lateral volumes, symbolizing harmony and stability. The design utilized columned porticoes and pediments, harking back to the Doric and Ionic orders, but in a simplified form, lending the buildings a monumental quality and emphasizing their connection to European tradition.

The churches' layouts were distinguished by clear geometry and simple volumes: domes were erected on

drums without excessive decoration, reinforcing the impression of austerity and rationality. Decoration was minimal, emphasizing clean lines and light-colored facades, creating a sense of order. Adaptation to local conditions was an important element: massive walls and small windows protected the interior from heat, seamlessly blending European tradition with regional building practices.

Thus, classicism in Uzbek churches represents a synthesis of the strict forms of European architecture and local characteristics, emphasizing spiritual stability and rationality.

One of the most striking examples is the Holy Dormition Cathedral in Tashkent. (Fig. 4)

The Holy Dormition Cathedral in Tashkent can be considered one of the most striking examples of church architecture in the region. Despite subsequent reconstructions and stylistic transformations, the original structure was built in keeping with the traditions of Russian church architecture of the late 19th century. Its composition displays features of the classical movement: austere and balanced forms, symmetrical façades, and the use of order elements, which lend the building a monumental and harmonious feel.

The architectural appearance of the Holy Dormition Cathedral is a synthesis of classical techniques and traditional Russian church style. The building's composition reveals a striving for symmetry, emphasized by the use of columns and the clear, austere lines of the façade. The structure was originally erected in 1877 as the Church of St. Panteleimon at the hospital cemetery. Subsequently, the cathedral was repeatedly rebuilt and expanded, but its structural foundation retains the characteristic features of late 19th-century Russian Imperial architecture. The cathedral's architectural appearance cannot be classified as classical in the strict sense. The building only partially draws on classicist techniques—the symmetrical composition, the use of columns, and the clear lines of the façade. However, these elements are seamlessly intertwined with traditional Russian church style, lending the structure a distinctive expressiveness. Built in 1877 as the Church of St. Panteleimon at the hospital cemetery, the temple was subsequently expanded and rebuilt, preserving the characteristic features of late 19th-century Russian imperial architecture without being limited to a single style.

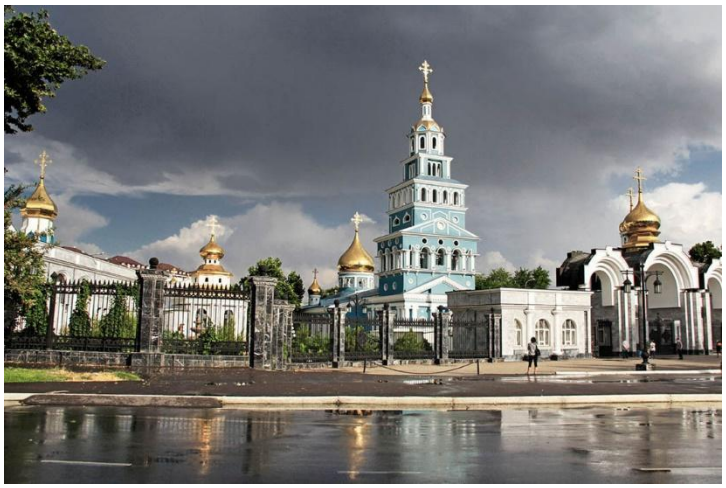


Fig. 4 Holy Dormition Cathedral in Tashkent.



Fig. 5. Church of the Holy Blessed Prince Alexander Nevsky

Other Orthodox churches in Uzbekistan also feature certain elements of classical architecture, as they were built during its heyday in the Russian Empire.

The Church of the Holy Blessed Prince Alexander Nevsky, located in the Botkin Cemetery in Tashkent, is distinguished by its laconic and austere architectural forms, which aligns it with the traditions of classical architecture. (Fig. 5) However, this building cannot be considered an example of a "pure" classical style. Its artistic appearance rather reflects features of neoclassicism, organically combined with elements of Russian and Russo-Byzantine influences, which gives the church a special expressiveness and uniqueness within the context of the local architectural tradition.

The church's architectural appearance demonstrates a combination of various traditions. The building's

façade is designed in a neoclassical style: symmetrically arranged bell towers frame the main entrance, emphasizing the balance of the composition. At the same time, the structure features elements characteristic of Russian Orthodox architecture—five onion-shaped domes symbolizing Christ and the four evangelists. Details evoking Western and Eastern traditions complete the image, as do motifs reminiscent of hipped roofs and kokoshniks at the bases of the domes. Thus, the church is not limited to a single style, but represents an eclectic mix of architectural styles, typical of church construction in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The St. Nicholas Convent in Tashkent displays architectural features characteristic of Russian church architecture, while also incorporating elements of classicism. Although the neo-Russian style remains the dominant style, the influence of classical traditions is clearly visible. The main building is distinguished by strict symmetry and balanced proportions, one of the key features of classical architecture. The structure and its annexes are built on simple, clear geometric forms, contrasting with the more decorative and complex Russian ornamentation. The façade lacks the order systems and pediments characteristic of "pure" classicism, yet the overall austerity of the lines and composition reflects the influence of this style, especially given the period of active development in Tashkent in the late 19th century. As a result, the monastery is an example of eclecticism, where traditional Orthodox elements—onion domes and the overall structure of the church—are combined with the rational principles of classicism, characteristic of church construction in the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century.

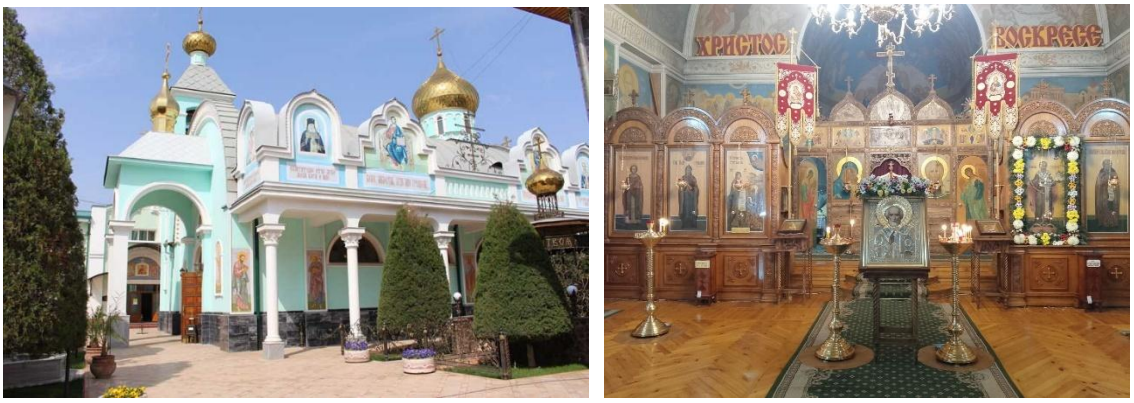


Fig. 6. St. Nicholas Convent in Tashkent

The Tashkent churches of the late 19th and early 20th centuries examined here demonstrate the influence of classical traditions, but their architectural appearance cannot be classified as "pure" classicism. Classical techniques—symmetry, strict proportions, and clarity of form—appear merely as isolated elements, organically woven into the structure of Orthodox church architecture.

The style is based on Russian and Russo-Byzantine architectural traditions, while classical motifs play a supporting role, enhancing the expressiveness and harmony of the composition. As a result, these structures represent an eclectic mix of styles, characteristic of church construction in the Russian Empire during this period.

Thus, classicism in the architecture of Tashkent churches of the late 19th century manifests itself not as a dominant system, but as a decorative and compositional accent, emphasizing the uniqueness and diversity of the region's architectural heritage. Overall, these churches are examples of the architectural style common in the Russian Empire in the 19th century, characterized by a combination of classical principles and Orthodox traditions.

Art Nouveau trends in church architecture are presented in the review "Modern Churches: 20 Examples of Modern Church Architecture (Rethinking the Future)," which showcases new approaches to space, light, and materials. Researchers note that Art Nouveau strives for a synthesis of tradition and innovation, creating religious buildings that meet the demands of modern society.

Art Nouveau emerged in the church architecture of Uzbekistan in the early 20th century, primarily in the decorative designs of facades and interiors. It was combined with the Russian-Byzantine tradition, but added the flowing lines, floral ornaments, and asymmetry characteristic of European Art Nouveau.

Art Nouveau in the churches of Uzbekistan is not a complete style, but a decorative layer added to the Byzantine-Russian base. It is manifested in: the flowing lines of the facades; Floral and geometric ornaments; stained glass and colored inserts; and asymmetrical composition. Unlike Baroque, Art Nouveau strove for a "natural" form, which meshed well with the local tradition of using ganch stucco and brick.

In the early 20th-century church architecture of Uzbekistan, either traditional Eastern decorative motifs or imperial architectural trends—primarily the neo-Russian and neo-Gothic styles—dominated. However, examples of pure Art Nouveau are virtually nonexistent among the region's Orthodox churches, as the neo-Russian style remained characteristic and predominant in Russian church architecture of the time.



Fig. 7 Cathedral of St. Alexis of Moscow (Samarkand, 1912)

One example of a church in the Art Nouveau style is the Cathedral of St. Alexis of Moscow (Samarkand, 1912), which was built during the period of Art Nouveau's active influence. Art Nouveau elements include the smooth contours of the window openings, decorative inserts with floral patterns, and the use of stained glass. Art Nouveau here does not disrupt the traditional cross-domed composition, but rather softens it.

Thus, we can draw brief conclusions about the styles of Christian church architecture in Uzbekistan.

A comparative analysis of the adaptation of styles in the temple architecture of Uzbekistan

Style	Main features	Adaptation to local conditions	Final value
Byzantium	Monumental domes, cross-domed design, mosaics	Thick walls for temperature regulation, smaller windows for heat protection	Sacred monumentality, stability of forms
Baroque	Rich decor, dynamic facades, picturesque interiors	Simplification of ornamentation, use of local materials (brick, stone), adaptation to seismic conditions	Expressiveness without overload, decorative accent
Classicism	Symmetry, columned porticos, pediments, clear geometry	Massive walls, small windows, minimalist decor	Rationality, spiritual stability, harmony
Modern	Plastic lines, stained glass, floral ornaments, asymmetry	Stained glass windows with reduced glazing area, preservation of massive walls, combination with a traditional scheme	Decorative revitalization of traditional forms, a synthesis of European trends and local practices

Byzantium: The adaptation of Byzantine tradition in Uzbekistan manifested itself in massive walls and reduced window openings, which ensured coolness and stability in the hot climate. This experience demonstrates how sacred monumentality can be combined with functional rationality, which is relevant for modern churches, where a balance between symbolism and practicality is required.

Baroque: Baroque elements in the region's churches were simplified: rich decoration was transformed into more restrained forms, and materials were selected with consideration for local conditions. This approach demonstrates the ability to adapt expressive artistic solutions without overloading the facades,

which today helps architects create aesthetically rich yet environmentally friendly buildings.

Classicism: Classicist churches were distinguished by symmetry, clear geometry, and minimalist decoration. In Uzbekistan, these principles were complemented by massive walls and small windows, which provided protection from the heat. For contemporary design, this is an example of how strict form and rationality can be organically combined with the requirements of energy efficiency and sustainability.

Art Nouveau: Elements of Art Nouveau were evident in decorative details, stained glass, and flowing lines, but were always superimposed on the traditional cross-in-square plan. An important adaptation was the limitation of glazing and the preservation of massive walls, which helped maintain coolness. Today, this experience demonstrates how decorative innovations can revitalize traditional forms without compromising their functionality.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of Uzbekistan's church architecture reveals that the Byzantine, Baroque, Classical, and Art Nouveau styles did not exist in a pure form but were adapted to local conditions. The main changes concerned climatic factors: massive walls, reduced window openings, and the use of local materials provided protection from heat and resistance to seismic loads. Baroque evolved into a more restrained decorative style, Classicism acquired rationality and minimalism, and Art Nouveau became a decorative layer on the traditional cross-in-square dome.

This transformation was necessary to preserve the functionality of churches and their organic integration into the regional environment.

For contemporary design, the experience of adapting historical styles serves as a methodological guide: it demonstrates how to integrate sacred symbolism and artistic traditions into new buildings while maintaining the requirements of sustainability, energy efficiency, and minimalism.

Thus, the results of the study can be used: in the design of modern Christian churches in Uzbekistan, taking into account historical and stylistic traditions; In the development of architectural concepts focused on preserving cultural identity and harmoniously blending with the local context; in educational programs in architecture and urban planning to develop students' understanding of stylistic features and their adaptation; in the practice of restoring and reconstructing existing churches, where it is important to consider historical style and its influence on modern perception; in the creation of methodological recommendations for architects and designers working on religious buildings in multinational and multi-faith environments.

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