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## *Architecture of new cathedrals in Ukraine*

### *Abstract*

The subject of this article is the contemporary cathedrals of Ukraine as an expression of the continuity of the autochthonous tradition of sacred architecture, as a space for revealing the archetypes of the Ukrainian Christian church, and as the most representative phenomenon of contemporary Ukrainian sacred architecture. Cathedrals are regarded as a space of dialogue between tradition and modernity, in which the reinterpretation of historical heritage, the formation of new architectural images, and the actualisation of the spiritual and cultural archetypes of the Ukrainian nation take place.

The aim of the study was to identify the principal archetypes of Ukrainian church architecture and to examine the ways in which they are interpreted and realised in the architecture of new cathedrals in Ukraine. Particular attention is devoted to the historical continuity of the sacred tradition, the relationship between pre-Christian and Christian worldviews, as well as to the search for a contemporary architectural language capable of expressing the spiritual essence of the church in the context of the modern world.

The research employs the historical-genetic method, the hermeneutic method, comparative-typological analysis, the architectural-compositional method, as well as cultural and phenomenological interpretations of sacred space.

The analysis covers the principal stages in the development of Ukrainian sacred architecture – from the pre-Christian cultural strata and the period of Kyivan Rus' to the Ukrainian Baroque and the National Style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. On this basis, three fundamental archetypes of Ukrainian church architecture have been identified: the Princely tradition, the Ukrainian (Cossack, Mazepa) Baroque, and the National Style of the modern era.

The study demonstrates that the contemporary architecture of Ukrainian cathedrals is developing in several directions: through the creative reinterpretation of historical archetypes, the search for new forms of expressing the sacred, and reference to universal, interreligious images and primordial forms of the sacred. It has been established that the principal challenge of contemporary sacred architecture is not the reproduction of historical styles but rather a profound understanding of tradition and the creation of an authentic contemporary type of Ukrainian church that responds to the spiritual and cultural needs of contemporary society. The architecture of new cathedrals is perceived as a unique laboratory for the search for a new Ukrainian sacred architecture capable of integrating theological tradition, national identity, and contemporary architectural culture. The study demonstrates that the sacred dimension of architecture is revealed through the architectural image of the church and the architect's personal creative revelation. This dimension is capable of transcending confessional boundaries and fostering a deeper understanding of the unity of the Christian tradition.

**Key words:** architecture, Ukraine, innovations, archetype, tradition

### *Introduction*

#### *Brief statement of the research problem – thematic, temporal, and territorial scope*

The architectural phenomenon of new cathedrals in Ukraine reveals several essential dimensions of the discourse on contemporary Ukrainian ecclesiastical and, more broadly, sacred architecture.

First, cathedrals constitute the most complete embodiment of current tendencies in church architecture. On the one hand, they remain grounded in the tradition of ecclesiastical design; on the other, they are characterised by a search for new imagery and novel spatial interpretations of traditional sacred values.

Second, cathedrals themselves serve as a continuation of Ukraine's centuries-old ecclesiastical tradition, expressing within contemporary architectural practice the autochthonous dimension of the national heritage of Ukrainian architecture.

Third, the architecture of new cathedrals often represents the finest achievements of present-day sacred design. Owing

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to the particular significance of cathedrals, their planning and construction usually attract greater attention, with projects frequently determined through architectural competitions. This process provides the opportunity to select the most accomplished solutions from a wide range of proposals.

Fourth, cathedrals are erected by the faithful across a spectrum of confessions and denominations – Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, various Protestant traditions, as well as communities of other religions. Accordingly, in this article the term *church architecture* is applied when referring to Orthodox and Greek Catholic cathedrals, whereas the broader category of *sacred architecture* is employed in reference to religious buildings of other traditions (Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, and others).

### *Rationale for addressing the topic, research aim, hypothesis*

In order to situate the contemporary Ukrainian context, it is necessary to trace, at least in brief, the historical evolution of this tradition. Its roots reach back not only to the period of Kyivan Rus' and the Baptism of 988, but also to the early centuries of Christianity, when church building flourished in the territories of the northern Black Sea region and Crimea. Equally significant for the spiritual identity of Ukrainians is the pre-Christian era, whose foundations extend to the Trypillian culture. This renowned Neolithic and Eneolithic civilization, which thrived between approximately 7000 and 2750 BCE across present-day Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania, achieved a remarkably advanced level of development and exerted a lasting influence on Ukrainian cultural identity.

Without such a deep historical perspective, it is impossible to grasp the fundamental archetypes of church architecture, which continue to find expression in the contemporary cathedral. The architecture of Ukrainian cathedrals thus provides an opportunity not only to demonstrate the richness of present-day ecclesiastical design but also to illuminate its genealogy, origins, and archetypes, which underpin the spatial composition of the modern Ukrainian sacred edifice. The following discussion is devoted to this purpose.

The aim of the article is a comprehensive interpretation of the architecture of new cathedrals in Ukraine as a spatial manifestation of an autochthonous tradition and, at the same time, as a field for the formation of a contemporary identity of Ukrainian sacred architecture. Achieving this goal requires reconstructing the continuity of Ukrainian church architecture through the example of cathedral churches – from historical archetypes to contemporary realizations – while outlining the autochthonous character of Ukraine's sacred architecture through geographical, cultural, form-generating, and worldview-related factors. These factors constitute the basis for the formation of the principal archetypal image-spatial systems that emerged during key periods of state formation (the princely era, Cossack Baroque, and the national style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), whose transformations can be traced in contemporary church architecture.

An analysis of the problem of identity in Ukrainian church architecture, considered within the context of the historical

fate of Ukrainian lands and the influence of diverse political and cultural environments over time, makes it possible to systematize current trends in church construction in Ukraine. These include both tradition-oriented approaches (based on historical styles) and innovative directions (focused on the search for universal sacred forms). New cathedrals play an important role in synthesizing tradition, theology, and contemporary architectural practice.

The central hypothesis of this research is that Ukrainian modes of perceiving and interpreting the world reveal a continuity across time. From pre-Christian beliefs, through the adoption and reinterpretation of Christian archetypes drawn from early medieval Byzantine and Moravian traditions, Ukrainians have developed their own autochthonous worldview and spatial archetypes of ecclesiastical architecture. These archetypes find their realization and reflection in the cathedrals of contemporary Ukraine.

The article therefore presents the current state of research on Ukrainian church architecture, introduces the author's own studies on the genesis and development of ecclesiastical archetypes from the Christianization of Kyivan Rus' to the present, and formulates results, conclusions, and a synthesis of broader investigations, emphasizing their scholarly novelty.

### *State of research*

In recent decades, the study of church architecture, and more broadly sacred architecture in Ukraine, has encompassed a wide spectrum of issues, particularly those aspects of Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches that had been "forgotten" or deliberately suppressed by communist ideology and state power. These include the history of the churches themselves, their architectural traditions, the identities of their architects, and the geographical patterns of their dissemination.

The Ukrainian tradition of church architecture – from its origins and typology to regional studies and contemporary interpretations – has been explored by a number of prominent Ukrainian scholars. Their research has identified sources dating back to the pre-princely and princely periods of Kyivan Rus', examined the typology of wooden and masonry churches over more than a millennium of sacred construction, and described regional schools, as well as the composition and proportional systems of churches in relation to historical styles. These studies have also addressed the genesis of Ukraine's sacred architecture and its historical and national context. The losses of history and the heritage of centuries have been compiled in encyclopedic works, while the theory of the sacred continues to develop.

A central issue within the religious landscape of Ukraine is the presence of the Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate, whose dominant position was disrupted by the granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in 2019. The enduring presence of the Moscow Church within Ukraine's spiritual sphere reflected the persistent influence of the Russian and later Soviet-communist empires on the religious life of Ukrainians, an influence that continued even after Ukraine's independence in 1991.

Against this backdrop, a key theme in research on Ukrainian church architecture has been the effort to interpret it as an expression of Ukrainian culture and spirituality – not only through liturgy, but also through its architectural and spatial form. Among the most significant recent contributions are Yevhen Dunayevskyi's doctoral dissertation (Dunayevskyi 2023), and Oksana Diachok's habilitation thesis (Diachok 2020).

Dunayevskyi's work surveys the architectural panorama after 1991, particularly in central, eastern, and southern Ukraine. It highlights the predominance of figurative and plastic explorations of form by architects whose prior experience largely derived from designing public buildings. As a result, the visual language of secular public architecture was often transposed into the image of new churches. In this context, sacrality – associated with asceticism, restraint, and inward reflection – was frequently subordinated to the architect's pursuit of monumentality, a strong visual statement, and originality.

In contrast, as Diachok demonstrates, the work of architects in western Ukraine has been marked by a greater degree of reflection and an awareness of the sacred character of the church as a spiritual phenomenon. Questions of identity, origin, external influences, as well as investigations into the autochthonous and original character of Ukrainian church architecture have been examined in the works of Bohdan Cherkes, Oksana Diachok, Jerzy Hernik (Cherkes, Diachok and Hernik 2024). Complementary perspectives, particularly concerning the genesis and development of traditional architecture across different Ukrainian regions, have been provided by historians and ethnographers such as Yaroslav Taras (Taras 2018), Volodymyr Slobodian (Slobodian 1996), and Halyna Shevtsova (Shevtsova 2017).

The archetypes of Ukrainian ecclesiastical architecture – shaped throughout the history of Christian Ukraine, and reflecting its autochthonous and distinctive traditions – are the subject of long-standing studies by Yuriy Kryvoruchko (Kryvoruchko 2001; 2018; 2019; 2020; Kryvoruchko, Podhalański 2021). His research traces the historical continuity and originality of these archetypes, underscoring their relevance for the understanding of both historical and contemporary sacred architecture.

A number of publications have emerged as a result of wartime destruction after 2014, and especially after 2022 – the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The issue of reconstruction, including that of Ukraine's sacred architecture, has been addressed not only by Ukrainian scholars – Yulia Ivashko et al. (2024), Shevtsova (2017), and Anastasiia Urakina (2022) – but also by researchers from other countries, including Tomasz Kozłowski et al. (2022), Olena Gorbyk et al. (2024), Vitaliy Molochko and Joanna Borowczyk (2025).

### *Methods*

The choice of research methods was determined by the nature of the object of study, its aims, and the thematic orientation of the inquiry. The methodology of studying sacred architecture rests upon the epistemological framework that seeks to apprehend phenomena and objects in

their multiplicity and fullness of meaning, while disclosing the interrelations and reciprocal influences that shape them. Since rational categories of thought do not exhaust the essential dimensions of what is sacred in its architectural embodiments, this study employs, alongside scientific categories, artistic and imagistic modes of cognition. These interpretive and hermeneutic strategies make it possible to approach the ineffable and the invisible – those metaphysical layers that constitute the deepest essence of sacred architecture.

The methodological orientation of this work thus proceeds in a dual register: on the one hand, it interrogates the rational aspects of sacred architectural objects, allowing them to be defined as functional urban and architectural entities; on the other hand, it preserves their metaphysical quality, inseparable from the very object and subject of study. In order to deepen the understanding of sacred architecture as both a spiritual and architectural phenomenon, the study employs the concepts of syncretic images, symbols, and archetypes. These concepts span rational dimensions (architectural ideas and concepts), sensorial ones (the artistry of architecture), and mystical ones (creativity, spirit, holiness). Together, they reflect the profound dimensions of human existence, the interrelation between humans and their environment, and form the very foundation of an approach to architecture.

Accordingly, the research adopts humanistic methods of cognition, which presuppose: the involvement of the subject in the very process of cognition; an anthropocentric orientation; self-knowledge and the identification of subject and object; an interpretive character of knowledge; the uncovering of latent, unarticulated potentials; and the accumulation of multiple perspectives on the object of inquiry, encompassing description, explanation, and interpretation of facts, as well as the formulation of conceptual frameworks. The methodology thus combines reflection, systematization, and theoretical grounding of leading approaches to the study of sacred architecture, drawing upon paradigms of contemporary philosophy.

The methodological framework of the study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines methods from architectural history, architectural theory, cultural studies, and the phenomenology of sacred space. The historical-genetic method is employed to trace the development of Ukrainian church architecture from early Christian and pre-Christian times, through the periods of Kyivan Rus', the Hetmanate, and the modern era, up to the present day, revealing the continuity of tradition. Particular attention is given to the role of the multi-confessional and multicultural character of the Ukrainian context.

A comparative-typological analysis of various types of churches and cathedral structures identifies both common and distinctive features of regional schools and confessional traditions, and enables the classification of contemporary trends in church architecture. Morphological and spatial-compositional analysis – focusing on structure, form, proportions, rhythm, and the organization of sacred space – reveals the underlying principles of the formation of archetypes. These, in turn, make it possible to identify fundamental spatial and symbolic models (such as the circle, the

square, centrality, and verticality) that embody a long cultural and spiritual continuity of historically shaped meanings.

The phenomenological method is directed towards the analysis of sacred space as lived experience – through perception, interpretation, symbolism, and theological content – allowing the study to move beyond purely formal analysis and to understand the church as a place of the presence of the sacred. The application of the hermeneutic method makes it possible to approach the interrelation between the form of the church, theological ideas, and national identity.

Overall, the methodological approach shifts the focus from stylistic analysis to the interpretation of image and archetype, from the description of form to the раскрытия of the semantics and experience of sacred space, and from isolated examples to the identification of the continuity of the Ukrainian tradition of sacred architecture.

Such a methodology enables cathedral churches to be considered as key carriers of the archetypes of Ukrainian sacred architecture, combining historical-architectural analysis with the phenomenology of sacred space and interpreting contemporary church building as a process of restoring a disrupted tradition and shaping identity within a postcolonial and wartime context.

### Results

The more than one-thousand-year history of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and the over four-hundred-year tradition of the Greek Catholic Church attest to the autochthonous character of the Eastern Christian tradition within Ukrainian culture. Yet the self-awareness of Ukrainian ecclesiastical architecture has traversed – and continues to traverse – a complex and difficult path of formation and affirmation. This phenomenon is distinctly Ukrainian within the broader context of global cultural development. The issue of identity, far from self-evident, remains one of the least explored aspects of scholarship on contemporary Ukrainian cathedrals.

Two aspects prove particularly significant. First, the Ukrainian tradition of ecclesiastical architecture confirms the indigenous character of sacred building in Ukraine, rooted in the specific geographical, cultural, and spiritual environment of its territory. The local traditions of various regions, natural conditions, building materials, and the worldviews of Ukrainians and other peoples who have inhabited these lands throughout history have all contributed to shaping this architectural identity. Such features generate a culture that is simultaneously autochthonous and transcendent, reflecting both ethnic-confessional identity and the continuity of sacred space across a historically defined territory.

Second, the identity of Ukrainian church architecture is deeply bound to the diverse historical trajectories of the Ukrainian people across its regions and epochs. Over the course of two millennia of Christianity in the territory of present-day Ukraine, numerous peoples and ethnic groups have passed through, leaving a tangible impact on the local population and its cultural forms. Thus, Ukrainian sacred architecture emerges as a capacious phenomenon, embodying within its sacred spaces and structures the millennia-long

human quest for transcendence – from antiquity, through pagan traditions, the thousand-year history of Christianity, and into the pluralism of contemporary confessions.

The epoch of late antiquity in Ukraine is represented most vividly by the Greek colonies on the Crimean Peninsula – Tyras (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy), Olbia, Chersonesus, Theodosia, Pantikapaion, Phanagoria, and Tanais – where the earliest monuments of sacred architecture have been uncovered. From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, Ionian influences (primarily from Miletus and Priene in Asia Minor) predominated; from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Athenian models prevailed; and by the beginning of the Common Era until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Hellenistic-Roman influences became dominant. The Temple of Apollo at Olbia, along with many other sanctuaries preserved in their foundations, attest to the high artistic level of the northern Black Sea region.

Following the decline of these ancient colonial cities, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards monumental early medieval and sacred architecture arose upon their ruins – among the earliest not only in Eastern Europe but also in Central and Western Europe. Early Christian churches of the proto-Byzantine period appeared within these former Greek cities, located on the northern periphery of the Hellenistic world. Significant Christian communities settled there, giving rise to strong centres of faith.

It was in this context that Grand Duke Volodymyr of Kyiv accepted baptism in 988 at Korsun (Chersonesus), located in southern Crimea. Numerous ancient sources, some dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, refer to the presence of St. Andrew the First-Called in the territory of present-day Ukraine and to the earliest episcopal sees. Archaeological evidence from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century confirms Christian communities in the Bosporan Kingdom, which by the 4<sup>th</sup> century already possessed a bishopric – its bishop Cadmus participated in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 CE. The establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century facilitated the creation of the bishopric of Chersonesus (whose bishop attended the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381), alongside the Scythian, Gothic, and Surozh (Sugdean) bishoprics.

The earliest churches on the territory of present-day Ukraine, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, were characterised by centrally planned structures in the form of a Greek cross with equal arms, reflecting the influence of East Syrian and Asia Minor traditions. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Roman-type basilicas, rotundas, single-nave churches, and hybrid solutions (basilican-cross plans) appeared (Kubiiiovych, Kuzelia and Zhukovskiy 1995, 801). The Church of St. John in Kerch (8<sup>th</sup> c.), the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul near Gurzuf (8<sup>th</sup> c.), as well as later churches of Chersonesus from the 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries, exemplify the early tripartite basilican model – a transitional form between the centralized and basilican layouts. This typology became widespread and firmly established throughout the territory of Kyivan Rus during the princely era (10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> c.) (Kubiiiovych, Kuzelia and Zhukovskiy 1995, 802).

The princely epoch in Ukraine began against the backdrop of pre-Christian religious systems – polytheistic mythologies with a rich pantheon of deities (Rod, Makosh, Lada, Perun, Dazhboh, Veles, Striboh, Semargl, Khors). Cult

statues, such as the renowned Zbruch idol, were erected in their honour, and sanctuaries were built – often circular in plan – alongside entire settlements with sacral functions and a structured priesthood. Sacred natural sites were also venerated: sunlight (the Sun), holy groves, mountains, rocks, stones, trees, rivers, lakes, and woodlands – all imbued with divine or parasacral spirits, according to the evolving Slavic mythology (Rybakov 1988, 949; Voitovych 2002).

The spread and consolidation of Christianity in Ukrainian lands is closely tied to the era of Kyi, the legendary founder of Kyiv, who, according to tradition, was baptized in Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Maurice (582–602) (Shevchenko 1995). Later milestones include the baptism of Prince Askold (the so-called “Baptism of Askold’s Rus” at Constantinople’s walls in 860), the Moravian mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius (863–885), and the baptism of Rus-Ukraine under Prince Volodymyr the Great in 988.

The first churches and monasteries in Rus-Ukraine emerged already in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Kryvoruchko 2001). The development of ecclesiastical archi-

tecture during the princely period reflected a synthesis of Byzantine and Moravian influences with local traditions. Unlike Western Europe, where Romanesque architecture gave way to Gothic, this transition was less pronounced in Ukrainian territories. Instead, sacral architecture evolved towards greater luminosity, spatial dynamism, and decorative richness. The princely period (late 9<sup>th</sup>–early 14<sup>th</sup> c.) fostered the formation of several original architectural schools: Kyiv, Chernihiv, Volhynia (Volodymyr), Halych, and Pereiaslav (Figs. 1–3).

The Mongol-Tatar invasions abruptly interrupted this trajectory, destroying thousands of wooden and masonry churches, and bringing an end to the great architectural epoch of Kyivan Rus. For several centuries, the flourishing architectural tradition of the 9<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries lay dormant.

With the rise of municipal self-governance, commerce, and communication, the Renaissance reached Ukrainian lands from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward – primarily through architects arriving from Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and other regions. This epoch coincided with renewed state-building

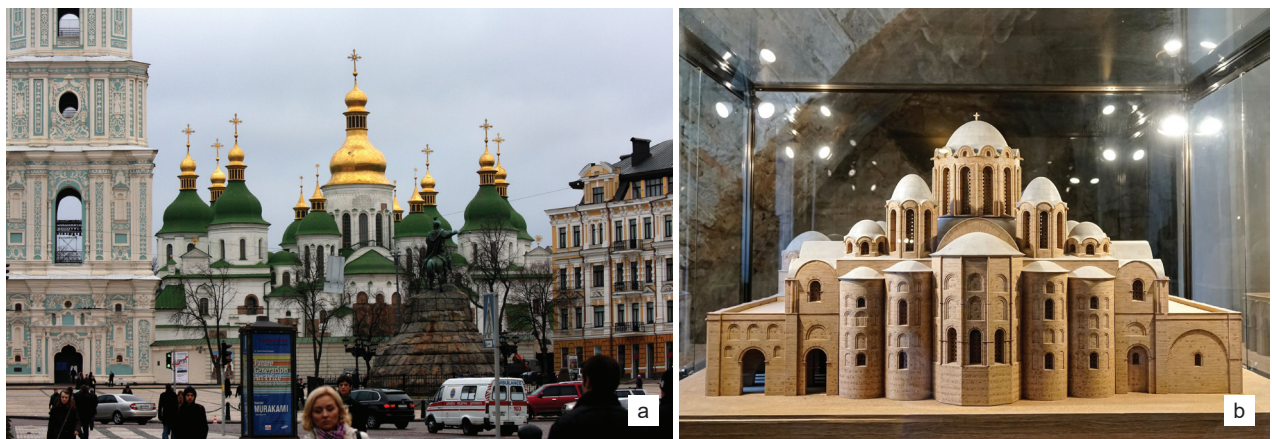


Fig. 1. Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv (11<sup>th</sup> c.): a) present condition (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko), b) reconstruction by Y. Asieiev as of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (source: Asieiev 1969, photo by Y. Dyba)

II. 1. Sobór Mądrości Bożej (Sobór św. Sofii) w Kijowie (XI w.): a) stan obecny (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko), b) rekonstrukcja autorstwa J. Asiejewa przedstawiająca wygląd świątyni w XI w. (źródło: Asieiev 1969, fot. J. Dyba)



Fig. 2. Dormition Cathedral of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (11<sup>th</sup> century): a) original appearance – reconstruction by Y. Asieiev (source: Asieiev 1969, 27), b) view of the cathedral in an engraving by L. Tarasevych, 1702 (source: Vecherskyi 2021, 120), c) present condition after reconstruction in 1997 (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

II. 2. Sobór Zaśnięcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny Ławry Kijowsko-Pieczerskiej (XI w.): a) pierwotny wygląd – rekonstrukcja autorstwa J. Asiejewa (źródło: Asieiev 1969, 27), b) widok soboru na rycinie Ł. Tarasewycza z 1702 r. (źródło: Vecherskyi 2021, 120), c) stan obecny po odbudowie przeprowadzonej w 1997 r. (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)



Fig. 3. The Cathedrals of Chernihiv:

a) Borys and Hlib Cathedral (1123), b) Church of Paraskeva Pyatnytsia (12<sup>th</sup> century) (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 3. Sobory Czernihowa: a) Sobór Świętych Borysa i Gleba (1123), b) Cerkiew św. Paraskewy Piątnicy (XII w.) (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)

aspirations during the Hetmanate, the Zaporozhian Sich, and the ongoing struggles with neighbouring powers. The rise of the Cossack elite facilitated church construction as an expression of spiritual strength and national identity. The turbulent 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, marked by alternating gains and losses of independence, nonetheless witnessed a cultural and artistic flourishing, epitomized by the emergence of the Ukrainian Baroque. Social movements, urban expansion, the quest for national and religious self-identification between Catholicism and Orthodoxy (especially following the Union of Brest, 1596), and the rise of a military aristocracy all stimulated the development of fortifications, palaces, and sacral architecture. Hetman Ivan Mazepa and the Cossack elite patronized the construction of over 55 churches, leaving a profound architectural legacy (Fig. 2b).

The failure of Mazepa's state-building project at Poltava in 1709, however, led to the definitive subjugation of Ukraine to the Russian Empire and marked the end of the uniquely Ukrainian (Cossack) Baroque. Following the abolition of autonomy in 1801, imperial authorities issued a decree forbidding the construction of churches in the Ukrainian style. From that moment until the 1990s, the so-called "synodal style" – a standardized architectural model derived from the Byzantine type – was officially imposed as the normative template across the empire. In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated the tent-roofed church type, characteristic of Russia but foreign to Ukrainian traditions, with distinct stylistic and spatial connotations. This religious and cultural totalitarianism arrested the development of Ukrainian sacral architecture as an indigenous and identity-bearing phenomenon for nearly two centuries, stifling processes of national self-determination. The long-lasting cultural expansion of Russia entrenched a historically distorted and spiritually superficial archetype of church architecture, falsely presented as

autochthonous in Left-Bank Ukraine, Polissia, and Podillia. The architectural languages of Classicism and Historicism in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with their rigidly codified orders and manipulable semantics, further reinforced this imposed paradigm (Fig. 4).

As a result, the living traditions of the princely and Baroque epochs nearly vanished from monumental ecclesiastical architecture. Creative impulses shifted primarily to rural contexts, where local craftsmen preserved vernacular traditions in wooden churches. This continuity sustained the vitality of folk architecture, culminating in masterpieces such as the wooden Zaporozhian Cathedral in Novoselytsia (now Novomoskovsk) on the Samara River. Built between 1773 and 1775 by Yakym Pohrebniak, this nine-bay, nine-domed cathedral represents the pinnacle of Ukrainian wooden architecture (Fig. 5). Wooden places of worship belonging to other confessional groups – Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish synagogues – were also widespread, and some of which have survived to this day.

The Renaissance, and later the Baroque, proved particularly resonant with the worldview and sensibility of the Ukrainian peasantry and artisan class, reflecting their joyful and optimistic perception of nature, its dynamism, the inevitability of renewal, flourishing, and fertility. This characteristic of the national spirit, first articulated in the Renaissance and matured during the Baroque era, eventually attained its full spiritual resonance – a resonance which, though repeatedly suppressed and brutally destroyed, ultimately determined the vitality and effectiveness of the Ukrainian people in history, culture, and art well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of the national movement across all Ukrainian lands, the style of Ukrainian modernism gained prominence. Its most distinguished representatives included Vasyl Krychevskiy, Dmytro Diachenko, Mykhailo Kravchuk, Volodymyr Si-

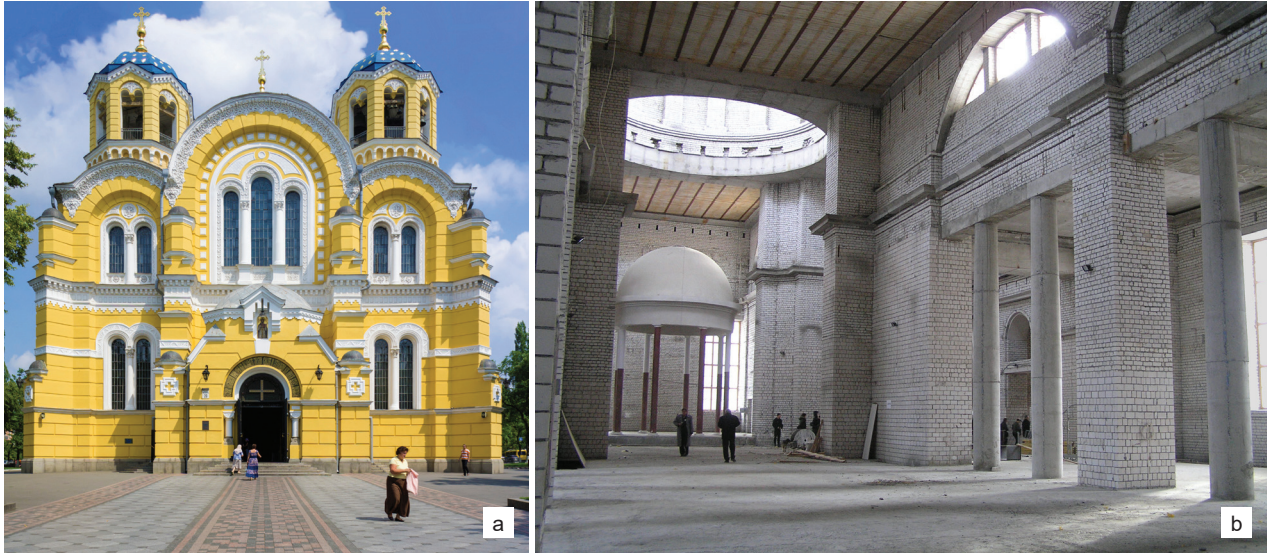


Fig. 4. Cathedrals of the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries: a) Patriarchal Cathedral of St. Volodymyr in Kyiv (1882), b) Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa, interior (1795, destroyed in 1936, rebuilt 1999–2011) (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 4. Katedry z XVIII–XIX w.: a) Patriarchalny Sobór św. Włodzimierza w Kijowie (1882), b) wnętrze Soboru Przemienienia Pańskiego w Odessie (1795; zniszczony w 1936 r., odbudowany w latach 1999–2011) (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)



Fig. 5. Traditions of wooden churches translated into stone architecture:

- a) Wooden Trinity Cathedral, Novomoskovsk (master Y. Pohrebniak, 1778, drawing by O. Slaktion, 1887) (source: Vecherskyi 2007),  
b) Protection of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, Kharkiv, 1689, c) Cathedral, Kharkiv, architect P. Chechelnytskyi, beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
(photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 5. Tradycje drewnianych świątyń w architekturze murowanej:

- a) drewniany Sobór Trójcy Świętej w Nowomoskowsku (mistrz J. Pohrebniak, 1778; rys. O. Slastiona, 1887) (źródło: Vecherskyi 2007),  
b) Sobór Opieki Matki Bożej w Charkowie, 1689, c) sobór w Charkowie, architekt P. Czechelnycki, początek XXI w. (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)

chynskyi, Volodymyr Rykov, Oleksandr Verbytsky, Ivan Morhilevsky, Serhii Tymoshenko, Volodymyr Obremyskyi, Ivan Levynskyi, Yevhen and Vasyl Nahirny, Oleksa Lushpynskyi, and Petro Hrytsai (Fig. 6).

The outbreak of the First World War, the collapse of empires, and the Bolshevik coup in Russia in 1917 abruptly terminated the evolutionary development of architecture in Eastern Europe; in the case of sacred architecture, the process was halted altogether. What followed were long decades of militant atheism and systematic destruction of churches, not only in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) but also in other communist states. Under the aggressive anti-religious and anti-Christian ideology of Bolshevism and communism, Ukraine witnessed not only

the annihilation of the majority of its sacred buildings but also the near-total eradication of the clergy as a vital institution of spiritual life. The cultural landscape and the historical character of cities, towns, and villages, shaped organically since the princely era, were violently distorted. Several generations of Soviet citizens grew up deprived of even the most fundamental freedoms. In Ukraine alone, primarily during the 1920s and 1930s, approximately ten thousand churches were demolished. The four decades of church architecture in Ukraine since 1991 represent an entirely new stage, marked above all by the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on 6 January 2019. The emergence of this new autocephalous Orthodox Church opens new realities

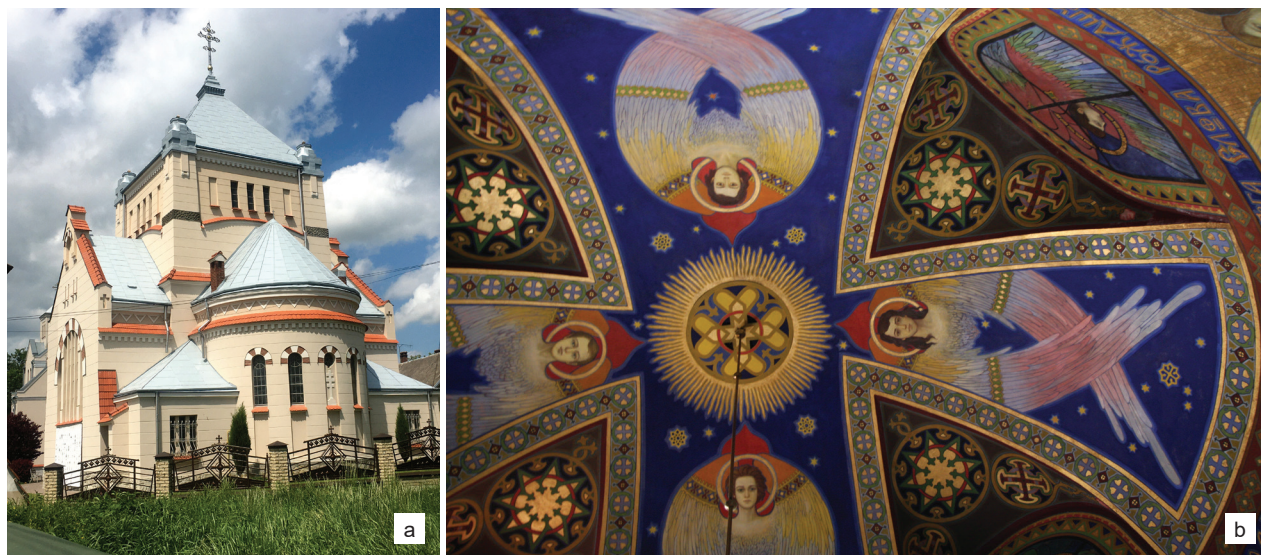


Fig. 6. Churches in the National Style of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: a) St. Demetrius Cathedral in Obroshyne, Lviv Region (1907), b) Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Zhovkva, mural by J. Butsmariuk (1931–1939) (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 6. Świątynie w stylu narodowym początku XX w.: a) Sobór św. Dymitra w Obroszynie koło Lwowa (1907), b) Cerkiew Najświętszego Serca Jezusowego w Żółkwi, polichromia autorstwa J. Bucmaniuka (1931–1939) (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)

and new possibilities for the development of Orthodoxy in Ukraine and, alongside it, of church architecture.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that the three historical epochs of Ukrainian sovereignty and state-building struggles – the era of Kyivan Rus', the Cossack Hetmanate, and the nation- and state-building processes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – generated three distinct impulses in the development of authentic Ukrainian sacred architecture. These gave rise to three architectural archetypes: the princely style, the Ukrainian (Mazepine, Cossack) Baroque, and the national style of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Contemporary tendencies in Ukrainian church architecture draw explicitly upon these three native sources: the princely, the Cossack, and the national. Each was violently interrupted – by the Mongol-Tatar invasions, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet period, respectively. The reverence towards these past styles is rooted not only in their inherent artistic and spiritual value but also in the fact that they were forbidden and systematically destroyed in earlier centuries. This sense of historical discontinuity and unfinishedness, coupled with their indisputable spiritual and aesthetic significance, their authenticity and originality, and their role in shaping not only architectural identity but also national self-determination, continues to inspire the three principal currents of traditional Ukrainian sacred architecture today: the princely style, the Cossack Baroque, and the search for a national style. These currents will long remain sources of creative exploration for ecclesiastical architects. The princely era, the Cossack legacy, and the formative periods of national identity are being reinterpreted anew, filling historical lacunae within Ukrainian culture (Fig. 7).

It must be emphasized that the issue at stake is not limited to the stylistic features of Ukrainian sacred architecture. Rather, it concerns the broader image of the sacred place: the conceptualization of liturgical space, its semantics, structure, and form; the interpretation of archetypes and

traditions; the sense of harmony and beauty inherent in the temple; and, ultimately, the theological meaning with which Ukrainians have imbued it over the centuries.

Alongside the three currents of contemporary Ukrainian church architecture – drawing on princely, Cossack, and national legacies – there is also a path of searching for universal and absolute forms: primal archetypes of the sacred, interreligious meanings, and an abstract language of spatial expression. This approach rests on the intuitive explorations of contemporary ecclesiastical architects. At its core lies the philosophy of simple figures, volumes, and geometric forms – shapes that, across many religions, have been endowed with sacral meaning since antiquity. These spatial structures are readily grasped, endowed with strong visual suggestiveness, and minimal in architectural detailing, ornamentation, and decorative stylization. They are characterised by ascetic form, absence of quotations, borrowings, eclectic juxtapositions, kitsch, spatial verbosity, or ill-considered solutions. This direction resonates strongly with the broader currents of contemporary Western sacred architecture, informed by the principles articulated by the Second Vatican Council (Fig. 8).

## Conclusions

For contemporary directions in church architecture, what proves to be characteristic and significant is not so much adherence to traditional historical styles – which, as with any form of stylization, inevitably remain superficial – but rather a profound sensibility towards Tradition itself, its deep sources, and the primordial autochthonous character of Ukrainian ecclesiastical architecture. At the same time, it must be observed that the attempt to combine the ideas of modern architecture with theological inquiry has not yet yielded clear or tangible creative results. Contemporary life demands an adequate architectural expression for sacred

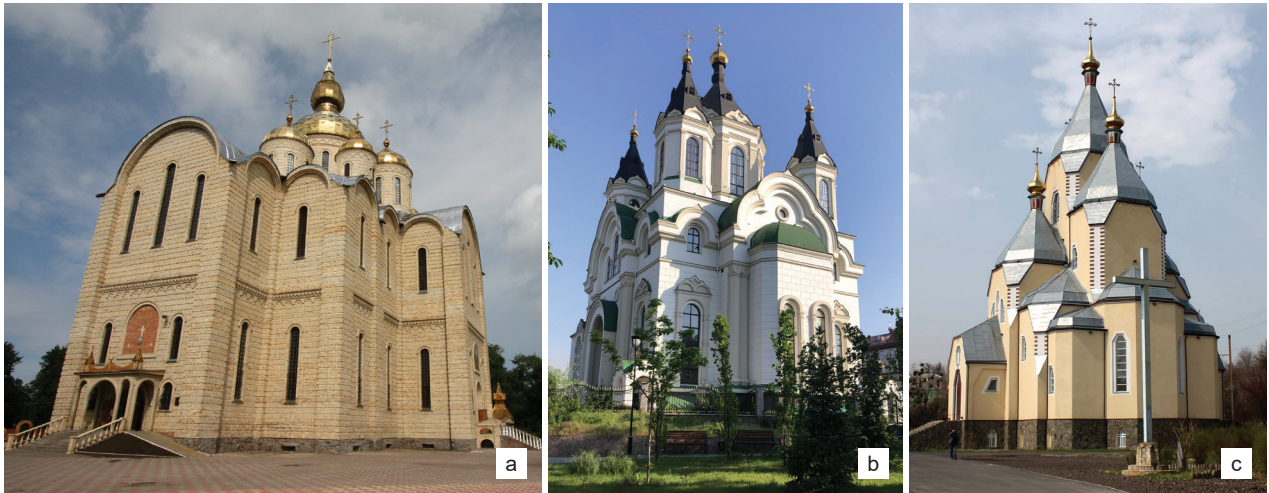


Fig. 7. Cathedrals of the 1990s:

- a) Cathedral in Cherkasy (1990s), b) Cathedral in Zaporizhzhia (1990s),  
c) Cathedral in Vyshhorod, architect Y. Losytskyi (1990s) (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 7. Katedry lat 90. XX w.: a) sobór w Czerkasach (lata 90. XX w.), b) sobór w Zaporozżu (lata 90. XX w.),  
c) sobór w Wyszogrodzie, architekt J. Łosycki (lata 90. XX w.) (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)



Fig. 8. The Newest Cathedrals in Ukraine: a) Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul in Chortkiv, architect S. Hora (2020),  
b) Patriarchal Cathedral in Kyiv, architect Y. Levchuk (2011) (photo by Y. Kryvoruchko)

Il. 8. Najnowsze katedry na Ukrainie: a) Sobór Świętych Apostołów Piotra i Pawła w Czortkowie, architekt S. Hora (2020),  
b) Sobór Patriarszy w Kijowie, architekt J. Lewczuk (2011) (fot. Y. Kryvoruchko)

buildings, particularly in newly developed urban districts, where the appearance of new churches often stands at odds with the language of modern spatial design.

It may be stated that there is, as yet, no fully developed architectural doctrine for the Christian church in contemporary Ukraine. This absence has resulted in a delay in the cultivation of professional thought and in the rarity of successful, modern examples of Ukrainian church architecture. The differences between Western and Eastern Christianity

place upon Ukrainian ecclesiastical building and architecture a particular responsibility: to preserve the phenomenon of tradition while at the same time creating an authentic, modern, and distinctly Ukrainian type of church.

Within this very field, Ukrainian architecture has a broad scope for action. Above all, it must distinguish its own indigenous tradition from external influences, nurturing the native Ukrainian church heritage and its spatial expression in forms, locations, and environments. The architecture of

contemporary cathedrals may thus serve not only as a laboratory of practice, but also as a field of reflection on a new sacred architecture capable of addressing contemporary challenges, for its role ultimately lies in pointing the way towards God.

In the personal revelation of the temple's creator, faith itself is manifested and the sacred is revealed. Such individual revelation demonstrates that in the authentic creativity of the artist, the sharp distinctions between Western and Eastern modes of expressing Christian faith begin to dissolve. For at its core, the categorical and figurative order of sacred works in both branches of Christianity draws upon the same Tradition of Revelation, the Tradition of the Gospel, and the lived experience of the Eucharist. The art of the icon and of architecture – by elevating the image to the level of eschatological reality – transcends discursive differences among the theological positions of Christianity's

various branches, and can act as a unifying foundation for mutual understanding. It attests that creativity and the sacred share the same spiritual nature.

The disclosure of the essence of the image and of the modes in which the sacred is manifested within the structure of the Christian temple, together with the personal revelation of its creator, makes possible the unveiling of the sacred dimension of architectural objects beyond the doctrinal boundaries of individual Christian traditions. A deeper comprehension among the branches not only of Orthodoxy but of Christianity as a whole is possible only through the recognition of the inherent syncretism of the Image. Such comprehension will come to fruition when believers grasp the spiritual significance of this unity.

Translation verification  
Yaryna Voronych

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## **Streszczenie**

### ***Architektura nowych katedr w Ukrainie***

Tematem artykułu są współczesne katedry Ukrainy jako wyraz ciągłości autochtonicznej tradycji architektury sakralnej, przestrzeń ujawniania archetypów ukraińskiej świątyni chrześcijańskiej oraz najbardziej reprezentatywne zjawisko najnowszej ukraińskiej architektury sakralnej. Katedry rozpatrywane są jako przestrzeń dialogu między tradycją a współczesnością, w której dokonuje się reinterpretacja dziedzictwa historycznego, kształtowanie nowych obrazów architektonicznych oraz aktualizacja duchowych i kulturowych archetypów narodu ukraińskiego.

Celem autora było określenie głównych archetypów ukraińskiej architektury cerkiewnej oraz zbadanie sposobów ich współczesnej interpretacji i realizacji w architekturze nowych katedr Ukrainy. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono problematyce historycznej ciągłości tradycji sakralnej, relacjom pomiędzy przedchrześcijańskimi i chrześcijańskimi wyobrażeniami światopoglądowymi, a także poszukiwaniu współczesnego języka architektonicznego zdolnego do wyrażenia duchowej treści świątyni w warunkach współczesności.

W pracy wykorzystano metodę historyczno-genetyczną, hermeneutyczną, analizę porównawczo-typologiczną, metodę architektoniczno-kompozycyjną oraz interpretację kulturową i fenomenologiczną przestrzeni sakralnej.

Analizą objęto główne etapy kształtowania się ukraińskiej architektury sakralnej – od przedchrześcijańskich warstw kulturowych i epoki Rusi Kijowskiej po ukraiński barok oraz styl narodowy przełomu XIX i XX w. Na tej podstawie wyodrębniono trzy podstawowe archetypy ukraińskiej architektury cerkiewnej: tradycję książęcą, ukraiński (kozacki, mazepiński) barok oraz narodowy styl epoki nowoczesnej.

Wykazano, że współczesna architektura katedr Ukrainy rozwija się w kilku kierunkach: poprzez twórczą reinterpretację archetypów historycznych, poszukiwanie nowych form ekspresji sacrum oraz odwołanie do uniwersalnych, międzyreligijnych obrazów i praform sacrum. Ustalono, że zasadniczym wyzwaniem współczesnego budownictwa sakralnego nie jest odtwarzanie historycznych stylów, lecz pogłębione rozumienie tradycji oraz tworzenie autentycznego, współczesnego typu ukraińskiej świątyni, odpowiadającego duchowym i kulturowym potrzebom współczesnego społeczeństwa.

Architektura nowych katedr postrzegana jest jako swoiste laboratorium poszukiwania nowej ukraińskiej architektury sakralnej zdolnej połączyć tradycję teologiczną, tożsamość narodową i współczesną kulturę architektoniczną. Wykazano, że poprzez architektoniczny obraz świątyni oraz osobiste twórcze objawienie architekta ujawnia się sakralny wymiar architektury, który może przekraczać granice konfesyjne i sprzyjać głębszemu zrozumieniu jedności tradycji chrześcijańskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura, Ukraina, innowacje, archetyp, tradycja

