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 Берліні: доля шедевра.*

*(1875–1958).*

## THE FIRST CHURCH OF RUSSIAN EMIGRATION IN BERLIN: THE FATE OF THE MASTERPIECE

*Zherdiev V. The First Church of Russian Emigration in Berlin: The Fate of the Masterpiece.* This article dwells upon the tragic history of the architecturally unique Russian Community House with a church. It was built by the design of an architect Nikolai Vasilyev (1875–1958). The presentation of the material in the article begins with the history of the Orthodox embassy house churches in Berlin. Despite the long historical and matrimonial ties between Russian and Prussian Reigning Royal Houses, there was no separate capital Orthodox church edifice in Berlin. The rector of the embassy church A. Maltsev advocated the construction of it, but the First World War interfered with the plans to build a new Orthodox church in Berlin. However, the increase of the Orthodox community after 1917 at the expense of the emigrants made the construction of a new church edifice even more essential. The design was developed by N. Vasilyev. Considering the need to create a multifunctional building, which should be located among a dense urban development and blend in style with the neighboring buildings, the architect embodied his old designs for monastery structures in the Neo-Russian style, carrying the idea of the “Temple-Castle” (designs of the Metochions of Kalyazinsky Alexander Nevsky Monastery and Feodorovsky Gorodetsky Monastery in St. Petersburg). The building, which included premises for various purposes, was crowned with a church in the spirit of Novgorod ecclesiastical architecture with an open gallery for processions. This unique architectural monument suffered a sad fate – the building was sold for debts and bought by German Labor Front (DAF). The former community house was a subject of a complete reconstruction in accordance with the plans for the administrative development of the district. However, a plot of land was allocated to the Russian community for the construction of a new church edifice, which was consecrated in 1938, but that new church was no longer as interesting and unique from an architectural point of view as the first temple. Thanks to the analysis of archival materials it was found out that the reconstruction was not completed and the former community house survived in its original form (only the domes were dismantled) during the Second World War. The building was converted to a hotel only in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

**Keywords:** architect Nikolai Vasilyev, Novgorod ecclesiastical architecture, Neo-Russian style, Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Cathedral in Berlin, Russian emigration in Germany.

1917

(DAF).

1938

1950- – 1960-

**Ключові слова:**

**Introduction.** Resurrection Orthodox church and Russian communal house was a structure which is unique not only for the German capital, but also for Russian ecclesiastical architecture. Unfortunately, the first church of Russian emigration this monument to the tragic events in Russian history and has not attracted the attention of art historians, although historical aspects of Russian emigration after the Revolution of 1917 have been well studied. Some information on the history of Russian house “am-

bassadorial” churches and activity of St. Vladimir brotherhood is in A. Maltsev’s diaries and historical reviews [1]. The main source of information on a brief history of Vasiliev’s Resurrection church and the visual data is archival materials (Bundesarchiv, Landesarchiv Berlin). Brief information about the idea of construction of the Russian church can be found in the monograph “Nikolai Vasiliev” [5] or in N. Talberg’s memoirs. Vasiliev’s original designs of “Temple-Castle” monasteries, which later inspired the architect for design of the Russian Communal House in Berlin, were presented in the architectural journal “Zodchii” (The Architect) in the beginning of 1900s. But a general art analysis of the architectural concept and the decoration of the first Resurrection Orthodox church hasn’t been done. The author’s empirical field and archival research in Germany was aimed at answering these questions. A combination of figurative-stylistic analysis and comparative analysis, as well as iconological and iconographic methods were used to determine the source of influence and the artistic level of the monument, and to ensure completeness of the research.

**Novelty.** The scientific novelty of the results obtained lies in the fact that for the first time:

- new factual and visual material on architecture and decoration of the former Orthodox church and communal house in Berlin was collected and put into scientific circulation;
- a comprehensive analysis was fulfilled of the architectural concept of the Russian church with regard to the specific site of construction in the urban environment;
- a comparative analysis was carried out of the church in Berlin with the earlier prototypes of Novgorod ecclesiastical architecture;
- the influence of architectural and decorative features of the image of the “Temple-Castle”, which the architect used to work on at the beginning of the 20th century, was analyzed.

**Historical context.** The Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Cathedral in the Wilmersdorf district was not the first Russian church in Berlin. The first “house” church was under a Russian envoy in Prussia, appointed to the Berlin court, and was sent to count A. Golovin in Berlin in 1718. It was housed in various private buildings hired for the Russian ambassadorial office. From 1741 to 1747 under the Russian envoy Count P. Chernyshev there was the “marching” church in the name of the Meeting of the Lord [6, c. 53]. In 1763 the ambassador Prince Dolgorukov requested that he be sent a church and a priest known to him [6, c. 53]. Later, in 1773, the church was listed as in the “envoy’s house” on Wilhelmstrasse. The house church of St. Prince Vladimir at the Russian Imperial Embassy on Unter den Lin-

den 7 existed since 1837. It was related to the time when Emperor Nicholas I, married the daughter of Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III, acquired this mansion from Duchess Sagan for his stops during his visits to Germany [9, c. 29]. According to the description by the Prior of the ambassadorial church, A. Maltsev, the temple was “in the ground floor, between the first and second courtyards, the five windows leaving to the 2nd backyard, with neither the cross, nor bells outside, so that by external signs it is difficult to guess its existence in the wing, having above it a hall and above them living quarters for Messrs. Secretaries” [6, c. 54]. The church could accommodate no more than 150 people. Six images for the temple were executed by an artist Baranov, who was returning to his homeland through Berlin after his finished studying in Italy [1, c. 73]. The iconostasis and choirs were made of polished oak and decorated with openwork carvings. Thanks to a photo made in the end of the 19th century it can be noted that the skillful carving iconostasis consisted of two tiers with a high central arch above the Royal Gate.<sup>1</sup> On the Gate there were two icons of the Annunciation without the Evangelists. The sections with the deacon’s doors were at an angle to the central part and adjoined to the far side sections, so the central part of the iconostasis was moved forward [11, c. 89]. In the first tier there were six icons, in the second tier there were six small icons in medallions. The local icons of the iconostasis, which were painted by a painter Malyshev on the golden background and were presented by monks of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra. The great altarpiece of the Resurrection of Christ was painted by an artist Bogatskii. The northern and southern choirs are crowned with icons decorated with openwork carvings. From the other icons, Maltsev mentioned “remarkable in the fineness” the icon of the Resurrection of Christ and the great feasts, as well as the icon of St. Nicholas in an icon-case decorated with “artistic carvings and mosaics from a multi-colored tree” and with a dark bronze delicate candlestick (it is likely that the icon of St. Nicholas was on one of the choirs) [6, c. 54]. On the southern choir there was a massive ark with a gilt bronze shroud made by G. Pankratiev from St. Petersburg [1, c. 74].

**Post-Revolution Period and the idea of a construction of a new church.** However, the small ambassadorial church could not meet the needs of the Orthodox community in Berlin and from 1895 the St. Vladimir brotherhood, headed by A. Maltsev, began to raise funds for the construction of a cathedral. But with the beginning of World War I, the staff of the embassy and the priest left Berlin. The services were resumed in the ambassadorial church again af-

<sup>1</sup> Bildarchiv Foto Marburg. LBB II, 12 393.

ter the revolutionary events in Russia and Germany and when the arrival of refugees from Russia became possible. The new republican government of Germany did not recognize Soviet Russia and the building of the Russian embassy fell under the authority of the German Foreign Ministry. From mid-April 1921 church services were conducted jointly by the Archbishop of Western Europe Eulogius and Archimandrite Tikhon (Liashchenko) (from 1924 – the Bishop of Berlin and Germany), who had an apartment at the embassy [8, c. 298]. After Eulogius's departure to Paris, the entire parish life centered around Archimandrite Tikhon. However, the political situation had changed rapidly and according to the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 diplomatic relations between Germany and Soviet Russia were restored. The embassy building had to be handed over to Soviet diplomats. With the help of Russian youth living in Berlin, Tikhon managed to remove from the ambassadorial church valuable utensils, icons and commemorative plaques and store them in a room allocated for church services in the Russian gymnasium on Nachodstrasse 10. Rooms in the Russian gymnasium and other premises that the community had been forced to rent for worship services could no longer meet its needs. Tikhon began to take steps to build a community house with its own temple. A tiny lot was bought in a dense residential block next to Fehrbelliner Platz in Wilmersdorf, a little further from the center. Using the lot as a security deposit, one of the construction firms was contracted to build a Revenue house for the Russian community [8, c. 299].

Tikhon appealed with a proposal to create a community house project to architect Nikolai Vasilievich Vasiliev (1875–1958), who was a student of the famous imperial architect L. N. Benois and lived in emigration in the USA [5, c. 311]. And this was not coincidence. The personality of this outstanding architect needs a separate narrative. Nikolai Vasiliev left a notable mark in St. Petersburg (cathedral Mosque (1908, together with A. I. von Gohen and S. S. Krichinskii) stands out among the apartment houses and public buildings created under his project), Revel (Tallinn), New York, etc. In Kharkov, the imprint of the severe “northern” Art Nouveau is carried by the building of the Merchant Bank with the Astoria Hotel (1910–1913), designed by Vasiliev in collaboration with A. I. Rzhepishevskii. They also designed “Kulakovskii's Manufaktura” in Kharkov, in which one of the revised versions of the Merchant Bank design with dominant verticals of narrow windows was used. Vasiliev also developed a competitive design for a building of Kharkov Art College (1912, not implemented). In addition, Vasiliev, already in exile, participated in competitions for designs of a building of the State Industry (Gosprom)

in Kharkov [5, c. 302–303] and the Palace of Soviets in Moscow [5, c. 352–355].

**Vasiliev's idea of the “Temple-Castle”.** The task that Vasiliev faced in the development of the design of the building for the Russian community in Berlin returned him to the projects of 1910s carrying the idea of the “Temple-Castle”, whose images the architect worked on at the beginning of the 20th century: the Metochion of the Kalyazinsky Alexander Nevsky female convent of the Tver diocese [3, . 60] and the temple design in honor of the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty at the Metochion of Theodore Gorodetsky monastery in St. Petersburg [3, . 34–36]. In the early 20th century, with its rapid industrialization and urbanization, when rows of multi-storey buildings appeared on the site of cozy patriarchal one- and two-storey picturesque buildings with their front gardens, a temple began to lose its dominant place in the landscape of the city. It became “sandwiched” among massive buildings, especially in the two capitals of the empire with their industrial base and growing population. Similarly, a human being begins to suffocate in the grip of a city. In the art of the early 20th century an image of a monster city appeared: a faceless and many-eyed mass, overwhelming all living things. Especially vividly and clearly not in favor of a human being, this confrontation is shown in the graphics of M. Dobuzhinskii (series “A City”, “Urban Dreams”, etc.), in A. Benois's illustrations to A. Pushkin's “The Bronze Horseman”. As an antithesis to a gloomy modern city, the warmth of a fairytale “Castle” (“Grad” in Russian) with its numerous picturesque domes of churches is associatively reflected to a viewer in the works of V. Vasnetsov, I. Bilibin, N. Rerich and others. At the same time, white stone walls of an ancient Castle become the embodiment of a Temple – a stronghold, a symbol of eternal values, their inviolability. There is no coincidence in a fact that in temples of the Neo-Russian style, along with elements of tower-room architecture, the features of fortification structures began to appear: covered towers with machicolations, the massiveness of smooth walls is emphasized by buttresses and narrow apertures of window-loopholes (projects of St. Sergius of Radonezh church on Kulikovo Field (1914, architect A. V. Shchusev), Fedorovskaya Mother of God cathedral in St. Petersburg (1911–1914, architect S. S. Krichinskii)) [2, . 208–209]. A church becomes a kind of a fortress, the last bastion in counteracting the secularization and lack of spirituality of a society. And just in the architectural and artistic realization of the building of the Orthodox community in the capital of the somewhat unfriendly state, the image of the “Temple-Castle” was more than appropriate.

**Concept.** But nevertheless, in realizing not only the architectural image, but also the design part, N. Vasiliev had to take into account many nuances. The building should be a complex of premises for various purposes. It was planned to place there a lower church for worship services while construction works were being carried out on the upper floors, a hall for meetings, a gymnasium, a library and apartments for priests. In the upper part of the building there was to be a church for 600 worshipers and a flat roof would become a place for religious processions [5, . 314]. In addition, it was intended to accommodate apartments for rent and shopping areas in the building, so that at the profit from the rent the community could keep the building. And the whole complex should be on the small lot among the existing residential buildings. Vasiliev carried out the project remotely, the practice is common for architects, and, besides, he could not leave the US until 1930 under the terms of the naturalization procedure [5, . 313].

The corner location of the building at the crossroads of Hohenzollerndamm 33 and Ruhrstrasse made it possible to find the original architectural solution: the Russian house was not squeezed between neighboring buildings, but it looks as if it “opens” the perspective of the streets, lily-white walls were the powerful light accent in the monotonous gray block. Moreover, the central semi-circular facade in the upper part was stylized in a spirit of sacral architecture of the Russian North, with an open gallery, and the dynamic reduction of the diverse architectural masses completed by the traditional five onion domes, which made the building dominant in the development of the district. The huge display windows of commercial premises of the ground floor and the gradually decreasing windows of the following floors enhanced the sense of monumentality of the structure. The facade became a kind of fortress, over the walls of which domes of the church towered up. The temple itself was built in the spirit of Novgorod architecture: a slender “chetverik” with gable ends under an eight-pitched roof with a central light drum completed with an arcade belt and a slender head (a similar model is in Novgorod churches of Twelve Apostles on Propastiach (13th – 15th centuries), Simeon the God-Receiver in Pokrovsky (Laying Our Lady’s Holy Robe) Monastery (1467), John the Theologian on Vitok (the end of the 14th century), Dimitry Solunsky on Torzhok (circa 1462–1463), etc. Lateral “blind” drums have a very indirect relationship to this architectural model and have a decorative function. They are decorated at the base with two, increasing to the top, keeled “kokoshniks”. The apse was complicated by an additional semicircular volume completed with a keeled “zakomar” and crowned with a decorative head. The facades were

laconic, without decor, with tall narrow three-parted windows and the side parts of the apse are cut with high single windows. The only additional decorations are relief Greek crosses on gambles of the facades of the church and in the upper part of the central facade of the main building. The architect actually managed to place the full-fledged building of the church on the roof of the communal house, perhaps for the first time introducing a “symbiosis” of civil and sacral structure.

The slender temple on the roof, which can be regarded as an independent object, nevertheless harmoniously joins the main building with two half-arches that smoothly “flow” into the silhouette of the sharp pediment of the gable roof of the eastern facade of the church. At the same time, due to the fact that the corner of the crossroads, on which the communal house was located, is precisely oriented to the east, the semicircular apse of the church repeated the semi-circular silhouette of the central facade of the entire building; and the increased height of the wall of the main facade and the flat roof of the building formed an open gallery near the eastern part of the church. Also, each of the three facades is indicated by additional slender domes: one dome crowns the apse, defining the central axis of the main facade and two side domes are installed on arched buttresses, in whose arches the bells are mounted. The side facades, adjoined to the neighboring residential buildings, are harmoniously linked to them by the floors and repetitions of the exterior elements, but contrasted by the complicated surface of the walls with abundant multi-level brick decor – a kind of reference to the “brick style” methods of the late 19th century.

**Crisis and the lost of the church.** This architecturally interesting and unique building suffered a sad fate. The financial disaster, which shook Germany in 1929, made payments on loans impossible and the building was auctioned. As the result, the new owner (the same company that financed the construction) leased part of the premises of the third floor, where the church was located, to the community. In the second half of the thirties the district of Fehrbelliner Platz was actively built up with new administrative buildings. In 1935, the building of the Russian community was bought out by the German trade union association German Labour Front – Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF). The original facade of a Russian house with a church was “wedged” between new, almost identical structures that formed the administrative ensemble of the intersection of Hohenzollerndamm, Ruhrstraße and Brienner Straße. The domes of the Russian church, raised above the Hohenzollerndamm, dominated the development of the entire Fehrbelliner Platz area and were visible from

afar. And most likely, they tried to get rid of such dominance. Probably, from the point of view of the designers, the building of the Russian communal house did not in any way fit into the look of the reconstructed area, although the residential buildings next to the Russian house were not rebuilt.

However, based on political and propagandistic considerations, the government planned to build a small wooden Orthodox church not far from Fehrbelliner Platz in place of the sequestered community building, using funds of the DAF and the Imperial Ministry of Church Affairs (Reichsministerium für die Kirchlichen Angelegenheiten). But the head of the Ministry H. Kerrl, guided by the same propagandistic goals, insisted on the construction of a stone church. The Ministry bought a lot of land near the former Russian House, and allocated a part of the estimated cost of the construction; a further part of the cost was allocated by the German Foreign Office. The DAF was obliged to pay the largest amount. Money was also donated by the Royal Houses of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and by the German Evangelical Church. In total, the German departments provided almost 88 % of the funds for the construction of the cathedral [10, . 73]. On 31 August 1936 the new cathedral was laid [10, . 72]. The festivities began with a procession of the cross from the Russian communal house to the construction site on an island bounded by the intersection of Hohenzollerndamm with Konstanzer Str. and Berliner Str. The ceremony of consecration of the foundation stone of the new cathedral was conducted by Bishop Tikhon of Berlin and Germany.

The project of the new temple was designed by a Russian emigrant, an architect S. Shostovskii; K. Shelberg directed the construction works [7, . 47]. In 1938 the cathedral was consecrated in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. The iconostasis (the gift of Metropolitan Dionysius of Warsaw) was transferred from the former Russian church to the new cathedral. The five-domed concrete building in classical forms of the “Russ-Byzantine” model was sustained in proportions of its prototypes. The massive structure is crowned by low domes, which introduces some disproportionality. The laconic volume is complemented by a small porch, the pediment of which is decorated with the same laconic and even somewhat coarse sgraffito with the Christogram and two angels (sgraffito survived though 1945, but was removed, then restored again). The building is rather squat and, although it is on a separate plot bounded by the roadway on all sides, is no longer an accent, but “dissolves” among buildings.

**Post-War Period and conclusion.** But the new owners did not proceed to a thorough reconstruction of the former Russian house. Probably, there were

still tenants in the building or the reconstruction design was under development, and then the Second World War broke out and the Labor Front was no longer up to the development of the new property. The building survived the war with no radical damages. By the beginning of the 1950s only the domes were dismantled. The archival photograph from 1950s clearly shows the remains of the steel structures of the vaults of the central dome and a completely intact central facade, but without any signs of sacred symbolism. On the ground floor, there was still a sign for the “Dom Klause” cafe. By 1956, the remains of the gable ends of the facades of the former temple were eliminated and a four-slope tiled roof was installed, in tune with the ends of neighboring buildings. The apse has survived, and even in such a “truncated” form, the building of the former cathedral represented an interesting architectural accent, already bearing the features of Romanesque architecture, fully harmonizing with the severity of the surrounding buildings. But later, in the late or after the 1950s the building was finally rebuilt, completely eliminating the signs of its previous appearance, revealing a completely faceless monotonous facade.

Despite the fact that the Wilmersdorf area was badly damaged during the brutal devastation of Berlin, many buildings near Fehrbelliner Platz were restored after the war with little or no change. Who knows, if not for the tragic coincidence, and had the Russian communal house not been sold in the 1930s, it is likely that it would have survived the bombings, as well as other buildings of the district. And the gray city would still be decorated with an unusual sacral object, which could rightfully become the architectural heritage of Berlin. Now there is a hotel in the former communal building, and only a rounded facade recalls the lost masterpiece of Nikolai Vasiliev.

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