On the Historical Relation between the Spiritual Traditions of Samarkand and St. Petersburg (based on Russian State Historical Archives)

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ABSTRACT

The article provides archival data on the history of the Moslem cathedral mosque in St. Petersburg, the architecture of which shows some motifs of historical monuments in Samarkand in the XIV–XV centuries.

Key words: Russia, Bukhara Emirate, spirituality, Islam, cathedral mosque, mausoleum, architecture, mutual influence.

Introduction

It is known that the religion of Islam, since the expansion of the Russian state at the expense of the Tatar khanates, had become an important and decisive factor in the political and spiritual life of the country. These factors intensified after the conquest of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Despite the fact that Muslims lived in their historical homeland, congresses and congresses of Muslims of Russia were constantly held in St. Petersburg, the capital of the empire until 1918. They made decisions necessary for the Muslim population. This situation became a consequence of the religious tolerance of the Russian state, which created the necessary conditions for establishing and strengthening ties between the different confessions.

Main part

The first settlers of St. Petersburg included many Muslim Tatars, natives of Kazan, Astrakhan and Bashkiria. Under Peter the Great there was a Tatar sloboda on the St. Petersburg side, west of the Peter and Paul Fortress, near the Little Neva. As time went by, the number of Muslims in the city increased. According to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, in 1878 there were 4000 Muslims living in the St. Petersburg province (Ponchaev, 2010. - p. 12). However, they could celebrate religious services only in private flats, which were not suitable for public prayers, and on major religious holidays large houses were rented in various districts of the city.

Thus, on April 2, 1881, the Muslim community of St. Petersburg submitted a petition to the Minister of Internal Affairs, N. P. Ignatyev, requesting the establishment of a "Committee for the construction of a cathedral mosque in St. Petersburg and the collection of donations with the approval of the Statutes of the Committee". The tasks of the Committee were as follows:

1. To take possession of all the funds collected at present (and in the future) for the construction of the mosque;
2. To seek further funds for this purpose;
3. To find a suitable place for this purpose;
4. Timely elaboration of the design, estimates, drawings and plans of the mosque;
5. Obtain permission for the construction of the mosque in the prescribed manner and carry out all the necessary works.
The 10-member committee was charged with dealing with all matters in the usual way, electing a chairman, a treasurer and a secretary.

As a result of the preparatory work carried out by the Committee, it was calculated that 750 thousand roubles should be collected for this purpose over 10 years. As a result, the Minister of Internal Affairs P. A. Stolypin allowed the collection of funds for the construction of the mosque throughout the Empire. Such information is kept in the Russian State Historical Archives (F.286, op.1, d. 237; F.821, op.8, d. 648; F.789, op.13, d. 81; F.1293). Atollo Bayazitov, the author of several works on Islamic religion and the ideological inspirer of urban Muslims, was at the head of the works.

For some reasons (mainly related to the collection of donations), it took more than 20 years to settle the works related to the construction of a Muslim mosque.

On February 1, 1906, permission was received to build a mosque and under the leadership of Abdul Aziz Davletshin, chairman of the Committee, active work began. Davletshin was the most famous and respected man in the Muslim world. He visited several foreign countries, including being sent to the Asian provinces, and his appointment to the Emir of Bukhara and Khan of Khiva when the latter came to St. Petersburg - all this demonstrates the honorable and active man he was. As the Yulduz newspaper noted, "... in addition, he has a good command of oriental languages, is very tactful, influential, a supporter of progress and a religious Muslim who made a pilgrimage to Mecca" (Ponchaev, 2010. - p. 25).

In addition, the Emir of Bukhara Said Abdulakhadkhon during his visit to St Petersburg and in conversations with the Russian government raised questions about the construction of a mosque several times. After request of the Committee members to Emir Bukhara for assistance in construction of mosque, Emir Said Abdulakhadkhon allocated 321 thousand rubles to purchase land intended for mosque erection (F.821, op.8, d. 717). Later he donated 500 thousand rubles for the same purpose (Zhigalo M., Tukiyanen I. 2007. - p.268).

In June 1907 the Mosque Committee petitioned the St. Petersburg town governor for permission to purchase a plot of land along Kronverksky Prospekt with an area of about 540 square yards for the construction of a mosque. On July 2, 1907 P. A. Stolypin supported the petition of the Mosque Construction Committee, and Nikolai II granted permission for the Committee to purchase the land, which settled the question about the construction site for the Sobornaya mosque. In October of the same year, a competition for the mosque projects was announced. One of the main conditions was to create all conditions and opportunities for prayers in view of the increasing number of Muslims during religious holidays (F.789, op.13, d. 81).

The drafts were to be submitted no later than January 28, 1908. Despite the very tight deadline, a total of 45 projects were submitted.

If you pay attention to the names of submitted projects, we note that Russian architects in the project "Timur" imitated the tomb of Amir Timur, in the project "Mamluk" - architectural monument of Shahi-Zinda, in projects "Jami" and "Samarkand" also traced motives of architectural monuments in Samarkand. This shows that even in the Russian state, Samarkand was recognized as a spiritual centre. N.V. Vasilyev's project "Timur" was declared the winner in the competition. The engineer A.I. Gauguin, an architect of great experience in design and construction with a fine artistic touch, was engaged to design and build it. It should be noted that von Gauguin built a large house for the Emir of Bukhara in St. Petersburg, and according to some reports a tunnel ran from this house to the Muslim mosque. The construction and decoration of the mosque also involved the handwork of Uzbek craftsmen.
However, unfortunately, due to the unfavourable attitude of Minister of Foreign Affairs Stolypin to this case, the construction work began later, in August 1909.

On the 3rd of February, 1910, the foundation stone of the Cathedral Mosque was laid in the presence of a great number of Muslims, dignitaries and the Emir of Bukhara. This date was chosen to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Emir of Bukhara's accession to the throne (https://ru.wikipedia.org). At this celebration, the St. Petersburg Imam Ohun A. Bayazitov said: "The Quran says: "God is beautiful and loves beauty. Our mosque will be beautiful and it will serve for the glory of the architecture and the beauty of the city. There is no such mosque, which will be in Petersburg, neither in Paris, nor in London" (Ponchaev, 2010. - p.50).

Construction works were going on for three years, during which architects and builders faced a number of obstacles, such as lack of funds, construction of additional annexes, purchase of additional land, and decoration of walls, minarets, portals and domes with artistic ceramics and mosaics (F.1102, op.2, d. 197-198). Numerous narrow lancet windows of the outbuilding with small sheets of glass against the background of wide walls facing the courtyard, and a blank outer wall facing the outer world were reminiscent of Samarkand buildings, which protected themselves with walls from the hot sun and prying eyes. Additional windows were placed on its walls and on the drum of its dome to provide interior lighting for the mosque. As it was not peculiar to the architecture of the Muslim East, this was indicative of the originality of the St Petersburg mosque (Photo 3). Moreover the walls of the mosque were decorated with black granite, which was not typical of Muslim religious architecture (photo 5). The side door of the mosque, designed for women, was peculiarly decorated, but it was not so conspicuous compared to the main entrance door, which was decorated with colored tiles (photo 4). However, the skillful and appropriate use of ceramics and majolica distinguished the mosque from other religious architectural buildings, in particular from the architecture of Samarqand mosques. Artists visited Samarkand several times and made copies of Guri Emir's patterned ornaments and Shahi Zinda mosques. Such extra activities and expenses delayed the construction work, but did not stop it.

In 1913, the 300th anniversary of the Romanov house was widely celebrated in Russia, and on February 22, in the presence of the Emir of Bukhara and Khan of Khiva, the first divine service in its history was held in the mosque.

The construction season of 1914 was the last which is reflected in reports of the Mosque Building Committee (F.821, op.133, d.554). This year they tried to finish decoration works, but lack of money and the world war, which began in August, hindered the realization of these plans. The mosque was finished in post-October period. The inscription on the portal of the main entrance says that the foundation of the mosque, which was laid on February 3, 1910, was finally finished on April 30, 1920.

It is not difficult to notice in the architecture of the Mosque a peculiar trace of Central Asian Muslim craftsmanship. The dome of the mosque resembles the dome of Amir Timur's Mausoleum in Samarkand. The dome of the St. Petersburg mosque is slightly longer and more pointed (photo 1). The shape of the entrance door portal and the ornamentation are copied from the Shahi Zinda mausoleum (Photo 2). The walls of Amir Timur's mausoleum are covered with a mosaic of green, blue and white, on which Arabic inscriptions have been applied. The architect, taking advantage of the similarity of the figures, skilfully decorated large areas of the buildings. The same can be traced in the architecture of a Muslim mosque. Since Islamic law prohibits the depiction of living creatures, the walls of both mosques are rich in ornamentation (O’zbekiston obidalaridagi bitiklar, 2012, pp.129-135).
On the panel of the main portal of the entrance door of the Guri Emir Mausoleum, several hadiths of the Prophet are quoted in sullah's handwriting. In other rectangular fragments of the entrance portal arch, in kufi handwriting "Mulk – Allohniki" ("Power belongs to Allah"), "Bokiylik - Alloha xos" (Eternity - belongs to Allah), "Alloha shukur" ("Glory to Allah") is repeated three times. (O'zbekiston obidalaridagi bitiklar, 2012, p.33, 37). On the doors of the St. Petersburg mosque these same words are inscribed vertically. On the portal of the entrance to the mausoleum of Amir Timur in Samarkand several times are repeated sayings about the believer's obligation to pray and perform worship. The portal of the central entrance of a Muslim mosque in St. Petersburg also contains surahs about the need to perform religious rites (Tagirjanova, 2014, pp. 44-46).

Conclusion

On the basis of the above, we can conclude that the building of the St. Petersburg mosque was largely created under the influence of Central Asian, in particular Samarkand architectural traditions.

REFERENCE


5. F. 286, op. 1, d.237.

6. F. 789, op. 13, d.81.

7. Phys. 821, op. 8, doc. 648, 717.

8. Phys. 821, op. 133, d. 554.


APPENDIX

RGIA / (Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj istoricheskij arhiv) – RSHA / Russian State Historical Archives

1. f. – fund
2. op. – inventory
3. d.– file
4. s.– page