CONCEPTS "EAST" AND "WEST" FOR BELARUS: THE CULTUROLOGICAL ASPECT

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Abstract

Position of Republic of Belarus on border of the West European and East Slavic civilizations is analyzed. Examined the history of the Belarusian culture in the way of interaction of the East and the West, and its relationship at various times. The religious architecture is characterized.

The Republic of Belarus borders on Russia in the East and Ukraine in the South, Poland and the West and Lithuania and Latvia in the North. Area of Belarus 207,600 square kilometers. Population 10 million people, besides in the urban areas surrounding cities exclusively cultivated crops, like in many other European countries. Belarus has a very high urbanization rate more than 70% of the population is native Belarus (81%), with some representatives of Russians, Ukrainians and Poles. Since declaration in 1991, the country has had two official languages: Belarusian and Russian.

History of Art in Belarus

The history of art in Belarus can be traced back to Byzantine influences, which saw the emergence of economy and monumental construction. The Christian religion was reaching east in the end of the 10th century and in her renewed life culture. Eastern and western traditions changed to form Western, East Slavic in flavor in the growth of development of our land. With the advent of Christianity the written language was formed (cyrillic), especially in the way to do and maintain the culture of the public. Very soon, monumental stone architecture appeared (church).

Even in the beginning of the 10th century in the Kievan Rus there were several state formations on the territory of the present day Belarus. The most important ones were Principalities of Polotsk and Turov. These principalities were parts of the Kievan Rus, which was an integral very important political, where the relations between the princes were based on treaties and marriage. During the 10th-12th centuries some of the major principalities actually became completely independent and were being ruled by local dynasties [1].

From the middle of the 13th century up to the end of the 18th century, the Belarusian lands belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the GDL). The Duchy passed through two main stages in its state and political development: 1) from the middle of the 13th century till 1569, when the GDL existed as a fully independent sovereign state; 2) from 1569, when the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland formed the Polish Commonwealth (Rzecz Pospolita), till the end of the 18th century.

The formation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th century provided favourable conditions for the development of culture. [2]. The Old Belarusian language was the official language of that state as stipulated by the provisions of the second wording of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Statute in 1566.

The situation of Belarusian cultural development changed dramatically in the second half of the 16th century. As the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was devastated by frequent wars with the Moscow Principality, it decided to unite with the Polish kingdom. It took place in 1569 after the signing of the Union of Lublin, which established a large federation called Rzeczpospolita (Commonwealth). It seemed to us though nothing had threatened Belarusian culture in the beginning. Positive results were achieved in all spheres of spiritual life, though preceded by some difficulties, but the leaders of the Rzeczpospolita launched a resolute campaign against the moral values of the Belarusian people at the beginning of the 17th century. Its major attack on Belarusian culture began with the adoption of the law by the General Confederation of the Rzeczpospolita nobility in 1696 on banning the Belarusian language from its official use in all the matters related to the state, administrative and judicial bodies, substituting it by the Polish language.

Retrospectively, the state system of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the end of the 16th century to the 18th century was an early form of the democracy, the first step to the civil society. After its incorporation into the Russian Empire, Belarus lost its status as a state. The change found reflection in its official name: from 1840 it was named "the North-Western Lands." No special laws were issued regarding Belarus, which could have treated it as a region with a special legal status.

The situation to preserve and develop Belarusian culture after the annexation of Belarusian land to the Russian Empire after the three divisions of the country (1772, 1793, 1795 respectively) did not get any better. Russification (Russian cultural domination), discreet at first, was later added to already existent polonization.

On the 25th of March 1918, under the conditions of occupation by the German troops, the Belarusian Peoples Republic was proclaimed, as a national bourgeois-democratic state. It failed, however, to turn into a fully-fledged state: it had no Constitution, no state boundaries, it had no armed forces of its own, the financial system and other attributes of statehood were not formed.

On the 1st of January 1919, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialistic Republic (the BSSR) was formed, in which political and economic life was under control of the central authority.

Belarusian culture enjoyed favourable conditions in the 1920s, at the time of Belarussization policy. Belarusian schools were opened. The Belarusian Culture Institute was established in Belarus, that was transformed into the Belarusian Academy of Sciences in 1929. However, since the beginning of the 1930s this positive process was put an end to, due to the ideological control in all spheres of cultural life. A lot of Belarusian culture and science activists were subjected to repressions. Harsh conditions for Belarusian cultural development were also set forth in Western Belarus.

In 1941-1943 Belarusian culture suffered greatly from the war. A number of Belarusian writers, scientists and culture activists were killed in the war, in its fronts, partisan detachments, and underground movement.

organizations. But even in the terrible conditions of the occupation there still existed some cultural and educational establishments, such as theatres, schools, museums, newspapers. There were also religious services.

Belarusian cultural development took place within the ideological pre-determinism and the Communists party control after the war and till the 1980s. Nevertheless, there appeared quite a number of talented post-war writers, artists, painter, sculptors. There was a whole net of cultural establishments in the country; all sorts of cultural activities were also popular.

On the 27th of July 1990, the "Declaration of State Sovereignty" was adopted. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus had declared independence on 1991. Since 1996, Belarus has been negotiating with Russia to unify into a state union called the Union of Russia and Belarus, but up to present Belarus is independent state.

Belarus enjoys a rich cultural and artistic heritage that dates back many centuries, taking in several significant schools of art and architecture and producing many unique musical and literary works. All surviving masterpieces are now officially protected by the state. The largest collection of works of art are in the National Museum of Art, which actively promotes national art. Exhibitions by local artists are regularly held here. Other prominent museums across the country are the Vitebsk Art Museum, Mogilev regional Art Museum and the Polotsk art gallery.

Religion

Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy is the most ancient Christian denomination which spread across the territory of Belarus. The first Orthodox eparchy – the Polotsk eparchy was founded in 992. As of early 2009 there were 1,473 Orthodox communities and 1,274 Orthodox churches in Belarus, with another 152 under construction [3]. The 1990s witnessed the revival of religious organizations. As of early 2009 there were over 60 Orthodox associations in Belarus, including monasteries, brotherhoods, sisterhoods and centers for charity and education.

Roman-Catholic Church. Catholicism is one of Belarus' traditional religions. It started spreading widely in the territory of Belarus at the end of the 14th century; it contributed considerably to the formation of the characteristic features of Belarusian cultural traditions. At the beginning of 2009 there were 467 registered Roman-Catholic communities and 451 Roman-Catholic churches in Belarus, with another 35 under construction.

Protestant Churches. The forms of Protestantism, Lutheranism and Calvinism have been known in Belarus since the 16th century. Today there are 27 registered Lutheran communities in Belarus, with most of the believers being ethnic Germans. The Evangelical Christians denomination has its own organizational structure. In terms of the number of followers, this is Belarus' biggest Protestant organization in the country.

Uniate Church. The Uniate (Union) Church is one of Belarus' Christian religious movements (Greek-Latin, Greek-Catholic, Orthodox-Catholic). In 1596 the Brest Synod officially announced the Union of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. According to the Uniate, the Belarusian Orthodox Church acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope but preserved eastern customs and traditions. In contrast to many other Belarusian religious organizations Uniate Church does not enjoy strong support from abroad and is not very popular in Belarus.

Judaism. Judaism followers appeared in Belarus in the 9– 13th centuries. The largest increase in the Jewish population was seen in Belarus between the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century. Jews were settling in big and medium-sized towns and in villages depending on their professions and

activities. The active revival of Judaism, which started in the 1990s, has been slowed down by emigration and an internal religious split.

Islam. Islam spread in Belarus between the fourteenth and sixteen centuries mainly due to the Grand Dukes of Lithuania who invited Tatars-Muslims from the Crimea and the Golden Horde to protect the frontiers of the State. Beginning from the 14th century, the Tatars were offered ranks and positions in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By the end of the 16th century more than 100,000 Tatars lived in Belarus and Lithuania, including those who were given jobs or resettled and prisoners of war.

Today the local Tatars are the followers of the Sunni branch of Islam. The Shiite branch of Islam is professed by the Diaspora of Azerbaijanis and Iranians by birth. As of early 2009 there were 25 Muslim communities in Belarus. There are six mosques in Belarus; another mosque is being constructed in Minsk.

Architecture of Belarus

Influences of both eastern and western cultures are reflected in the diverse architectural styles of Belarus churches, castles, palaces and fortresses. Artistic movements and religions have played their part in shaping the architecture of Belarus, with fine examples of Romanesque and Gothic, Baroque and Classicism, Modernism and Eclecticism to be found across the country. Despite its turbulent history of war and destruction, many architectural treasures and attractions of Belarus have survived to tell the history of this fascinating country.

Christianity made a significant influence on the development of architecture. St. Sofia Cathedral, St. Euphrasinia Church, St. Boris and Gleb Monastery in Polotsk and many other churches were built in the 11th-12th centuries. The celebrated Polotsk goldsmith Lazar Bohsha made a filigreed religious cross for Euphrasinia Polotskaya, that was so fine and precious, that it was regarded as the most beautiful cross in Eastern Europe.

St. Sofia Cathedral in Polotsk was one of three Old Russian temples devoted to St. Sofia. (The others are in Kiev and Novgorod.) Polotsk was founded in 862 and not only is it the oldest town in the country, it is one of the oldest in the whole Slavic region, making it a popular tourist attraction in Belarus.

St Sophia Cathedral is situated on the highest bank of the Western Dvina. The cathedral was built in the eleventh century. Duke Vseslav of Polotsk invited professional architects from various countries to construct the cathedral. Polotsk became the centre of Christianity during the first Russian state of Rus. The town was a birthplace for the first Belarusian canonized woman Euphrosyne, Belarusian first printer and enlightener Frantsysk Skorina was born here as well.

Some of the oldest buildings of Belarus date from the Middle Ages. **The Mir Castle complex (Mirsky zamok)** is an outstanding example of 16th-century fortification art. The construction of this Belarus' Gothic style castle was started in the 1520s. In 1568 the castle came into the hands of Mikolay Radzivil, who completed it in Renaissance style. A three-storey palace was built along the eastern and northern walls of the castle which had forty fretted rooms. Earth walls were built around the castle with bastions at the corners, surrounded by a water moat. An Italian garden was laid to the north of the walls and an artificial lake was established to the south. The Radzivills owned the castle for several centuries.

A subsidiary of the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus was located in the castle in 1992.

The main attractions in the Minsk region are architectural monuments found in the town of Nesvizh: **Nesvizh palace - park complex** (16th – 19th Century). Nesvizh church of the Divine Body, an example of baroque architecture (1584-1593). Nesvizh Palace is considered the country's most beautiful palace by the people

of Belarus. Its richly diverse architecture and attractive gardens make it one of the most popular tourist attractions in Belarus. The estate and town was acquired by the Radziwił family in the middle of the 16th century. The foundation stone of Nesvizh Palace was laid in 1584. It was rebuilt many times and as a consequence has features of many architectural styles including: Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Classicism, Neo-gothic, Modernism. In 1994 the estate was designated the national historical and cultural reserve and in 2006 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Conclusions

The Belarusian people have always been notable for their industrious and original culture. The Republic of Belarus is situated in the centre of Europe. The geopolitical specific features of Belarus' position are connected with its location on the boundary of East-Slavic and West-European civilizations. The territory of Belarus was always perceived its neighbors as well as local residents as a cultural border zone on which different interests of the neighboring peoples frequently faced. For Poland the Belarusian lands earths were «the Eastern Frontier», and for Russia and the Soviet Union Belarus served as «Western Gate». The Byelorussians themselves do not consider its boundary position as a problem, considering it as the natural advantage for variety of cultural and economic relations with neighbors. Belarus essentially defends the idea of good-neighborhood and does not consider any state, civilization or culture as a potential opponent.

Sources

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