

CRITICISM AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Research paper

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BOOK REVIEW:

Vinogradov A.Yu. Essays on the architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus. Moscow: Publishing House of the Higher School of Economics, 2023. – 488 p., ill. + 32 p. with colour photos. ISBN 978-5-7598-2372-8, ISBN 978-5-7598-2408-4 (e-book).

Abstract. The new book, dedicated to the Christian architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus, will undoubtedly attract the attention of a wide range of specialists and everyone interested in the culture and architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus, and the entire Christian East. Despite the fact that a lot of monographic studies on the Christian architecture of the Caucasus and Byzantium have been published in recent years, this book is an original, large-scale and scientifically significant work on the Christian architecture of the Caucasus and Byzantium, which highlights little-researched and debatable problems and issues. The book, against a wide background (more than a thousand monuments of church architecture of the 5th-12th centuries were involved), considers a wide range of topical and problematic issues of Christian architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus.

Keywords: Byzantium, Caucasus, Christian architecture, temples, churches

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КРИТИКА И БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ

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Исследовательская статья

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РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ:

Виноградов А.Ю. Очерки архитектуры Византии и Кавказа. М.: Изд. дом Высшей школы экономики, 2023. – 488 с., илл. + 32 с. цв. вкл., ISBN 978-5-7598-2372-8 (в пер.), ISBN 978-5-7598-2408-4 (e-book).

Аннотация. Новая книга, посвященная христианской архитектуре Византии и Кавказа, несомненно, привлечет внимание широкого круга специалистов и всех интересующихся культурой и архитектурой Византии и Кавказа, всего христианского Востока. Несмотря на то, что в последние годы было опубликовано немало монографических исследований, посвященных христианской архитектуре Кавказа и Византии, данное исследование представляет собой оригинальный, масштабный и научно значимый труд по христианскому зодчеству Кавказа и Византии, в котором освещаются малоисследованные и дискуссионные проблемы и вопросы. В книге на широком фоне (привлечено более тысячи памятников церковной архитектуры V–XII вв.) рассматривается обширный круг актуальных и проблемных вопросов христианского зодчества Византии и Кавказа.

Ключевые слова: Византия; Кавказ; христианская архитектура; храмы; церкви

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Since 2021, the Higher School of Economics has been publishing the notable *Polystoria* series, developed by the HSE Laboratory of Medieval Studies. The initial volumes have generated genuine interest among both specialists and a broader readership dedicated to the history and culture of the Middle Ages.

In 2023, the series released the monograph *Essays on the Architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus*, authored by the renowned Russian Byzantinist, archaeologist, and architectural historian, Andrei Yuryevich Vinogradov [1]. Although numerous monographs on the Christian architecture of the Caucasus have appeared in recent years – including works by Vinogradov himself, co-authored with D.S. Beletsky [2; 3] – this study stands out as an original, large-scale, and academically significant contribution. It highlights under-studied and contentious topics within the field.

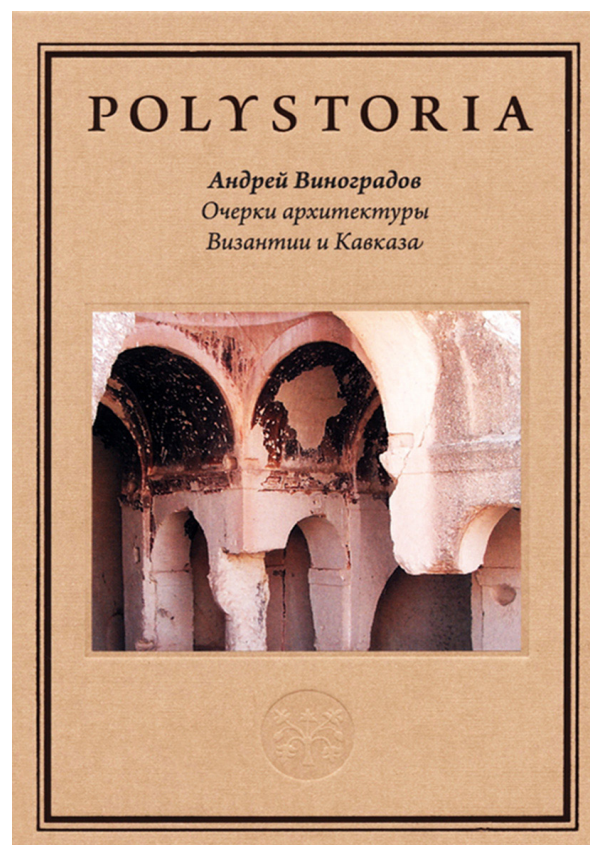
Notably, comprehensive works on Byzantine architecture have been virtually absent from post-Soviet scholarship; the last major studies appeared in the 1980s within general summaries of Byzantine culture (A.I. Komech [4], A.L. Yakobson [5]).

This gap in the literature largely underscores the novelty and relevance of the present volume. It is also worth noting that in 2022, the author published the detailed *Lectures on Byzantine Architecture*, which similarly focused on ecclesiastical architecture [6].

This monograph, covering a broad spectrum of issues in the history of church architecture in Byzantium and the South Caucasus (Georgia, Abkhazia, and Armenia), demonstrates the author's impeccable knowledge of architectural theory, encompassing the nature of architecture, its general principles, and the theory of composition. The author skillfully employs methods of structural and comparative analysis (including the study of proportions and graphic reconstruction) against the backdrop of the military-political and cultural-historical context to clarify numerous questions in the field. Of particular note is the author's first-hand familiarity with the material; he has studied most of the monuments *in situ*, especially those in the Caucasus, for which he relies not only on photographs but also on direct architectural measurements.

The book comprises a brief introduction and two main sections, each addressing current and under-researched topics in the Christian architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus. Each part is meticulously structured, with subdivisions dedicated to specific problems and themes. This review will not attempt to summarize the content of every chapter; such an endeavor would exceed the scope of this text. Instead, interested readers are encouraged to turn directly to the book, which offers a compelling and accessible read.

Drawing on a vast corpus of over one thousand monuments dating from the 5th to the 12th centuries, this work addresses a wide spectrum of critical issues of the Christian architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus. The author investigates the genesis and evolution of diverse spatial and structural typologies – ranging from common forms to rarer configurations such as cross-in-square churches, cross-in-square triconchs, gate churches, and domed basilicas. Beyond typology, the analysis extends to layout, design techniques, construction methods, and materials, allowing for the identification of specific architectural styles, workshops, and regional traditions. The book further traces the complex web of mutual influences,



emphasizing the impact of Constantinople on the Christian East. These issues are situated within a broad geographical and chronological framework, where historical dynamics and military-political events are shown to have shaped the developmental stages of the architecture. The sections detailing the resurgence of church architecture in Georgia, Abkhazia, and Armenia following the Arab conquests are particularly compelling, as are the analyses of Vaspurakan brickwork, the structures of David Kuropalates, and the churches of the Varzahan Monastery.

The dating and chronology of Christian architectural monuments constitute a central theme of the book, serving as a necessary foundation for addressing questions of origin, evolution, influence. The author approaches this task with meticulous care; however, given the limitations of the source material, certain questions inevitably require further research, and a number of the author's conclusions remain necessarily hypothetical. Nonetheless, even these more speculative observations are supported by a substantial and well-established body of evidence. Indeed, each section systematically examines the historiography, current debates, and available sources relevant to its topic, thereby clearly defining the research objectives.

This new monograph by A. Yu. Vinogradov is of high scholarly significance, addressing complex and contentious issues in the Christian architecture of Byzantium and the South Caucasus. The volume fills a critical gap in the study of the region and Western Asia more broadly. Future research in this field will be incomplete without reference to the propositions, conclusions, and hypotheses advanced here. The author has successfully met his objectives, demonstrating both methodological rigor and a profound knowledge of the subject matter.

The book contains some primarily technical errors and shortcomings that might have been avoided with more rigorous editing prior to publication. Although the volume is accompanied by an extensive and high-quality series of illustrations, comprising both photographs and drawings, issues regarding scale remain. In several instances, scale bars are absent, or the scaling of plans and sections for specific monuments is inconsistent. Examples include Fig. 2.4 (Church of Agios Nikolaos in Kyriakoseliya), Fig. 2.5 (Church of Agios Georgios Asclepius in Karella), Fig. 2.11 (Church of St. Michael in Ston), Fig. 2.12 (the church in Shirakavan), Fig. 7.1 (Church of Uchayak in Cappadocia, near Taburoğlu), Fig. 8.9 (the Fisandon Church), Fig. 8.17 (scale; the plan of the cruciform church in Thiel appears to be distorted), Fig. 9.4 (Samshvilde Zion), Fig. 10.3 (Kvelatsminda Church in Vachnadziani), Fig. 11.4 (Oshki Cathedral), Fig. 11.5 (Ishkhani Cathedral), and Fig. 11.7a (Church of St. George in Armazi), among others.

In my opinion, the title would have benefited from greater precision regarding the study's thematic focus – for instance, *Essays on the Christian (or Ecclesiastical) Architecture of Byzantium and the Caucasus*, given that the text does not address civil, defensive, or engineering architecture.

Furthermore, the monograph does not examine the Christian monuments of the Eastern Caucasus, Caucasian Albania. While the author likely had specific reasons for this omission, it should ideally have been addressed in the preface to clarify the geographical limitations of the study.

Finally, the monograph would have been strengthened by a brief concluding chapter that not only summarized the findings but also outlined future research directions and identified outstanding questions for the study of Christian architecture in the Caucasus and Byzantium.

These minor points, however, in no way diminish the profound scholarly significance of A. Yu. Vinogradov's monograph. The book is certain to capture the attention of a wide range of specialists and enthusiasts interested in the culture and architecture of Byzantium, the Caucasus, and the wider Christian East.

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