

Historical Source Study Of The Construction Of Orthodox Churches In Turkestan

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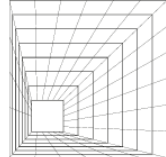
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Abstract. The article analyzes the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan from the perspective of source studies. Based on archival documents, diocesan reports and memoir sources, the territorial distribution of churches, missionary activity and their role in imperial politics are studied. The study uses historical-critical, contextual, comparative and postcolonial methods, interpreting churches not only in a religious, but also in a cultural and political context.

Keywords: Turkestan, Orthodox Churches, Colonial Policy, Archival Documents, Diocesan Reports, Missionary Activities, Postcolonial Approach, Source Studies, Religious History of the Late 19th - Early 20th Centuries

The conquest of Turkestan by the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century and the introduction of a colonial system of governance there led to fundamental changes not only in the political and military spheres, but also in religious and cultural life. In this process, the Orthodox Church entered Turkestan as one of the important institutions of the imperial ideology, and in a short time the construction of Orthodox temples began in the major cities of the region. Although Orthodox churches served mainly to meet the needs of the Russian military, officials, and the immigrant population, they also functioned as a means of strengthening the religious and political influence of the empire. The process of building Orthodox churches in Turkestan was closely connected with the general colonial policy of the Russian Empire, and this process took place within the framework of complex relations with religious tolerance, the confessional composition of the local population, and the traditional Islamic environment. The construction of churches in strategic locations, especially near military fortresses, garrisons, railway stations, and administrative centers, indicates that the empire viewed religious infrastructure as a mechanism of political and military control.

Source studies are of particular importance in the scientific study of this issue. Because the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan is mainly covered by official documents, church reports, and statistical collections created during the Russian Empire. These sources, in turn, reflect the interests of the colonial state and the primacy of Orthodox ideology. The point of view of the local Muslim population and the issues of its influence on their religious life are often left out or expressed indirectly. Therefore, when studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan, it is important not only to describe the sources, but also to critically analyze them, determine their ideological layer, and evaluate them in a historical context. Through the source-based approach, it is possible to determine the content, conditions of creation and purpose of official archival documents, materials related to the Orthodox Church, statistical data, as well as historical and literary works. Another reason for the relevance of this topic today is that the issues of religious tolerance and a multi-confessional society in Uzbekistan during the period of independence require a new historical assessment. Orthodox churches are of historical importance not only as religious structures, but also as part of the architectural appearance, cultural environment and social life of Turkestan cities. Therefore, studying the history of their construction on the basis of source-based studies serves to objectively shed light on the history of the colonial period of the region. The sources used in studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan vary in content, conditions of creation and functional orientation, and their systematic



classification is an important stage of scientific research. These sources were formed mainly within the framework of the colonial administration of the Russian Empire and the religious and political activities of the Orthodox Church. They can be conditionally divided into the following main groups.

1. Official-administrative and archival documents.

The most basic and reliable sources for the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan are official-administrative documents. These documents reflect the administrative system introduced by the Russian Empire in Turkestan, as well as the process of forming a religious infrastructure.

This group includes:

- ✓ Orders and resolutions of the Governor-General of Turkestan;
- ✓ Correspondence of military governors and regional heads;
- ✓ Documents on the allocation of land and funding for the construction of churches;
- ✓ Construction projects and estimates.

For example, the reports of the Governor-General of Turkestan, KP von Kaufman, specifically emphasized the need to build Orthodox churches in the areas where Russian military garrisons were located, which indicates that the churches were built primarily for military-political needs [1, 112–113]. Also, archival documents clearly record the land plots and amounts of funds allocated for the construction of churches in the cities of Samarkand, Tashkent, and Kokand [2, 47]. Since these sources are of an official nature, they primarily reflect the interests of the empire. Therefore, their analysis based on a critical approach in source studies is important.

2. Documents of the Orthodox Church and the Holy Synod.

The second important group of sources is the internal documents of the Orthodox Church and the decisions adopted by the Holy Synod. These sources reveal the religious and ideological foundations of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan.

This group includes:

- ✓ Decisions of the Holy Synod on Turkestan;
- ✓ Annual reports of the Turkestan and Tashkent dioceses;
- ✓ Reports of bishops and priests;
- ✓ Correspondence related to church construction.

For example, the reports of the Turkestan diocese provide detailed information on the number of newly built churches, their location, and religious activity. Documents from the 1890s note a sharp increase in the number of Orthodox churches in Samarkand and the Fergana Valley [3, 55–56]. At the same time, these documents describe with particular emphasis the “spiritual and educational mission” of the Orthodox Church [3, 61]. While these sources are important from a religious perspective, it should be noted that they are strongly influenced by missionary activity and colonial ideology.

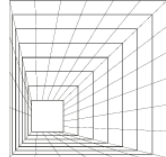
3. Statistical and information sources.

Statistical sources allow for a quantitative analysis of the process of building Orthodox churches in Turkestan. These sources contain information on the number of churches, the composition of the clergy, the size of the Orthodox population and their territorial distribution.

The main statistical sources include:

- ✓ “Obzor Turkestanskogo kraya”;
- ✓ “Turkestanskiy sbornik”;
- ✓ population registers and special statistical bulletins.

For example, the 1899 edition of “Obzor Turkestanskogo kraya” shows the distribution of Orthodox churches in Turkestan by region and their connection with military units [4, 78]. Statistical data clearly show that churches are located mainly in Russian settlements and



strategic areas [4, 82]. However, statistical sources are often compiled by official agencies and do not sufficiently cover the issues of influence on the religious life of the local population.

4. Scientific-literary and historical-publicistic sources.

This group includes scientific research and historical-publicistic works created during the Russian Empire, the Soviet era, and the years of independence. These sources interpreted the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan differently at different times.

In particular, while the authors of the imperial era evaluated Orthodox churches as a “factor of cultural development,” in the Soviet era they were interpreted as part of colonial policy [5, 134]. In the studies of the period of independence, a relatively objective and comprehensive approach to this issue is being formed [6, 29]. The sources in this group are important for historical analysis, through which one can trace the evolution of scientific views.

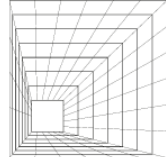
5. Memoirs and sources of memory.

A separate group of sources can be distinguished: memoirs and diaries written by Russian military personnel, officials, and priests. These sources describe the process of building Orthodox churches from the perspective of direct eyewitnesses. For example, the memoirs of military officers who served in Turkestan note the role of churches in garrison life and the importance of religious ceremonies in strengthening military discipline [7, 201]. At the same time, these sources are subjective in nature and require critical analysis.

Despite the diversity of the sources used in studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan, a number of complex problems arise in the process of their scientific analysis. These problems are, first of all, closely related to the period in which the sources were created, the author's position, and the ideology of the empire. Official documents and church materials created during the Russian Empire sought to present the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan as a natural and necessary process, which leads to a one-sided interpretation of historical reality. For example, in the reports of the Turkestan Governor-General, church construction is explained by “meeting the spiritual needs of the Russian population”, but the religious environment and attitude of the local population are almost not mentioned [1, 118].

One of the important problems in source studies is the ideological orientation of the sources. In documents related to the Orthodox Church, church construction is interpreted as an integral part of missionary activity, and this process is often evaluated as an “enlightenment service”. The construction of Orthodox churches is explicitly or implicitly mentioned in the reports of the Turkestan and Tashkent dioceses as a means of strengthening the religious influence of the empire [2, 55]. At the same time, information about the resistance or indifference of the local Muslim population in these sources is very limited, which requires a critical approach from the researcher. Another important problem is the almost complete absence of sources reflecting the local perspective. Independent documents written by local scholars, judges or communities on the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan are very rare. As a result, the historian is often forced to rely on sources created by the imperial administration or the church. In this case, the use of indirect information, that is, cases of protest in official documents, disputes over construction sites or delayed decisions, is an important methodological tool [3, 61].

Terminological problems also play an important role in the analysis of sources. Concepts such as “tuzemtsy”, “inovertsy”, “pravoslavnyaya missiya”, which were widely used in documents of the imperial period, do not correspond to the criteria of modern historiography and often have a derogatory meaning. The direct acceptance of these terms can lead to a misinterpretation of historical processes. Therefore, it is necessary to study the terms on the basis of historical-semantic analysis, taking into account their meaning at the time of their creation [4, 134]. Inconsistencies between sources also pose a serious problem in the research process. For example, there are differences between the number of churches given in statistical collections



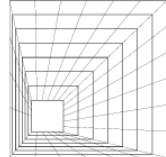
and the data recorded in church reports. According to “Obzor Turkestanskogo kraya”, the number of Orthodox churches operating in Turkestan at the end of the 19th century was given as a single figure, while in diocesan reports these figures were slightly overstated [5, 78]. This situation creates the need for a comparative analysis of sources.

Given these problems, a comprehensive methodological approach is of great importance in studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan. While the historical-critical method allows us to determine the conditions and purpose of the creation of sources, the contextual approach helps to assess church construction within the framework of the general colonial policy of the Russian Empire. At the same time, the comparative method allows us to compare the situation in Turkestan with the construction of Orthodox churches in the Caucasus or Siberia [6, 29]. The postcolonial approach, which is widely used in modern historiography, allows us to reassess the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan from the perspective of the politics of imperial rule and cultural superiority. Through this approach, churches are interpreted not only as religious structures, but also as an important element of the colonial space. This serves to shed more in-depth and objective light on the topic [7, 201]. This study serves to reveal the complex interrelations between the colonial policy of the Russian Empire and religious institutions by analyzing the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan from the perspective of source studies. The sources studied show that the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan was not a random process or one related only to religious needs, but was carried out as a component of the military-political and ideological strategy of the empire. As it was found during the study, the sources covering the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan were mainly created by the administrative departments of the Russian Empire, the Holy Synod, and Orthodox dioceses, and they have an official and ideological orientation. These sources primarily reflect the interests of the empire, while the position of the local Muslim population is often expressed in a limited or indirect manner. Therefore, a critical analysis of these sources, determining the conditions and purpose of their creation, is one of the main tasks of source studies.

Analysis of archival documents, church reports and statistical collections shows that Orthodox churches were built mainly in military garrisons, administrative centers and areas with a dense Russian population. This confirms that the activities of Orthodox churches in Turkestan were more aimed at strengthening colonial rule, organizing the socio-religious life of the Russian population and strengthening the ideology of the empire. At the same time, it should be noted that churches left a significant mark on urban planning processes, in particular on the architectural appearance of the cities of Tashkent, Samarkand and the Fergana Valley.

The source analysis showed that there are substantive and numerical inconsistencies between the available sources in studying the history of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan, which requires the researcher to use comparative and contextual approaches. Since the terminology and discourse of the imperial period differed sharply from modern scientific interpretations, the importance of the method of historical-semantic analysis was emphasized. Also, a review of sources based on a postcolonial approach made it possible to assess the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan as an important element of the colonial space. It can be noted that a relatively objective and comprehensive approach to this topic is being formed in the historiography of the period of independence. Orthodox churches are now considered not only as religious structures, but also as an integral part of the multi-confessional historical heritage of Turkestan. In this regard, studying the history of their construction on the basis of in-depth source research serves to fully and balancedly illuminate the history of the colonial period of the region.

In conclusion, it can be said that the historical source study of the construction of Orthodox churches in Turkestan is one of the scientific areas that has not yet been fully explored. In the



future, in studying this topic, it will be an urgent task to introduce local archival materials into wider scientific circulation, increase territorial (microhistorical) research, and analyze religious, architectural, and social history in a harmonious manner. This will not only enrich historiography, but also serve to deepen understanding of the multi-layered historical memory of Turkestan.

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