Photographic Documentation of Architectural Monuments in the Siberian Republic of Buriatiia

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The article surveys the author’s photographic documentation of architectural monuments in the Republic of Buriatiia (one of the Siberian territories of the Russian Federation), as well as in the Buriat enclave within neighboring Chita Province. Although settled by Russians as early as the seventeenth century, these areas also display the rich cultural heritage of the Buriats, a people of Mongolian stock. In architecture, this merging of Russia with Asia is reflected not only in religious and secular architecture created by Russians (with the assistance of Buriat craftsmen), but also in surviving Buddhist temples and monasteries from the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Russian architecture, Buriatiia, Siberia; church architecture; Buddhist architecture; vernacular architecture; wooden architecture; architectural photography

Russia’s engagement with Asian peoples and cultures forms a topic whose boundaries have yet to be thoroughly explored. Nevertheless, it is clear that one of the most complex interactions occurred beyond Lake Baikal in an area now centered on the Republic of Buriatiia, part of the Russian Federation. Related to the Mongols, the Buriats are one of the major indigenous peoples of eastern Siberia, with relatively large populations to the west, south and east of Lake Baikal. While those closer to Mongolia generally led a nomadic existence with an easily transportable form of yurt (a tent or wickiup), those in the forested uplands created settlements based on a yurt made of logs (Figure 1). Indeed, it is quite possible that early Russian settlers introduced the concept of log dwellings, which the Buriats then modified to their own conditions. As described by one specialist, the Buriat log yurt “was raised from horizontal logs with notches joined at the corners. In plan the yurt could be octagonal, hexagonal, or square, with a diagonal as long as ten meters. The hearth was placed in the center. A flat or sloped roof, with an opening for light and smoke, was supported by four posts.”

The initial development of Russian settlements in the area to the south and east of
Lake Baikal (known as Transbaikal or, more broadly, Dauria) began in the middle of the seventeenth century. At this early stage, Cossacks and others under service contract to the state (sluzhilye liudi) explored new trading routes to China and, more immediately, sought tribute in the form of furs (particularly sable) from local populations such as the Buriats and the Tungus. The earliest Russian fort (ostrog) in this great territory was founded in 1648 on an arm of the Barguzin River, some forty kilometers from the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The Barguzinsk fort was initially subordinate to the voevoda in Yeniseisk, who at that time was the colorful, ruthless Afanasii Pashkov. For a few years, Barguzinsk served as the de facto center of Russian expansion beyond Baikal. In 1654, Moscow designated Pashkov as the voevoda of the new administrative territory of Dauria, and in the following year he set forth with a group of cossacks and others (including the exiled religious dissenter Archpriest Avvakum) far beyond Barguzinsk to found a settlement that would become known as Nerchinsk, in present-day Chita Province.² Although Barguzinsk exists as a small town to this day, the direction of Russian settlement in western Transbaikal quickly shifted to the south, along the more convenient Selenga River (Map 1).

The Selenga, originating in Mongolia and the main river emptying into the eastern shore of Lake Baikal, served from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries as a major conduit for trade and settlement to the east. It soon became clear that the primary strategic location on the Selenga was its confluence with the Uda River, and at
that site, on a bluff above the merging rivers, the fort of Udinsk was established in October 1665 as a wintering outpost.

During the final decades of the seventeenth century, the importance of the Udinsk settlement as a grain distribution point increased, as did the size of the fort, despite the nominal superiority of the Selenginsk fort (see below) located closer to the Chinese border. The Treaty of Nerchinsk, concluded between Russia and China in 1689, required Russian withdrawal from large areas along the Amur River, but led to increased stability for the remaining Russian settlements such as Udinsk that benefited not only from trade, but also high-level diplomatic travel to China. The settlement’s first church, dedicated to the Most Merciful Savior, was built of logs in 1696.

The growing importance of Verkhneudinsk (“Upper Udinsk”), as it became known in the eighteenth century, derived equally from its role as the administrative center of the western Transbaikal region and from its position on one of the most important oriental trade routes from Irkutsk to the towns of Kiakhtinskaia Sloboda and Troitskosavsk on the Mongolian border (see below). By 1780, the town had two
annual trade fairs in late winter and midsummer. Like other Russian provincial towns during the reign of Catherine the Great, Verkhneudinsk was provided with a highly ordered city grid plan, approved in 1793. Although the plan was modified in 1839, many of its features remain to this day.

The growing economic activity of Verkhneudinsk ultimately enabled the completion of the town’s first masonry church, the Cathedral of the Hodigitria Icon of the Mother of God (Figure 2), begun in 1741 at the site of a log church of the same name built at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In a pattern typical of brick church construction from the Russian north to Solikamsk to Yeniseisk and Irkutsk, the structure was constructed in two stages. The lower church (for use in the

**Figure 2** Cathedral of the Hodigitria Icon of the Mother of God, Ulan-Ude. South façade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
winter) was completed in 1770, with an altar dedicated to the Epiphany. The upper church, with the main altar, was consecrated only in 1785.6 Not surprisingly, the basic design and the exterior detail of the Cathedral of the Hodigitria Icon suggest connections with earlier churches in the Irkutsk area, such as the Church of the Miraculous Icon of the Savior in Irkutsk itself (1706–1710, with bell tower from 1758–1762) and, more closely, the Church of the Miraculous Icon of the Savior at Urik (1775) and the Church of Archangel Michael (or Saint Kharlampii) in Irkutsk (1777).7 (All three of these churches are illustrated in Visual Resources, 19, no. 2 (2003), pp. 112, 123, 122.)

In view of the fact that the upper part of the Hodigitria Cathedral was not begun until after 1770, its style can be clearly related to the “Siberian baroque” of other

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**Figure 3** Cathedral of the Hodigitria Icon of the Mother of God, Ulan-Ude. South façade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
monuments from the 1770s. The arched pediments over the windows and the articulated window surrounds (Figure 3) are characteristic of church design from the Urals eastward at a time when neoclassicism had already assumed dominance in the area between Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Additional baroque features include the volutes bracing the drums beneath the main and altar cupolas, as well as the oval windows at the roofline. The large bell tower at the west end conforms to the usual octagonal shape, with a large covered stairway and porch descending from the upper level of the cathedral. Entrance to the lower, winter church was from portals on the left and right facades on the ground level of the bell tower. A similar plan and decorative style were applied on a smaller scale to the town’s second masonry church, the Most Merciful Savior, built 1786–1800 to replace the log church of the same name. The Savior Church was demolished during the 1930s.  

Verkhneudinsk was not, however, the only center of masonry church construction in the western Transbaikal region during the final quarter of the eighteenth century. The first monastery in the area was the Trinity-Selenginsk, located in the Selenga River valley approximately midway between Udinsk and the river’s outlet on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The monastery was founded at the command of Tsar Fedor Alekseevich in 1681, who intended to establish an outpost for Orthodox missionary activity in Dauria. When hegumen Feodosii arrived with eleven others he found an area already under extensive cultivation by Russian settlers (since the 1670s), with the protection of the nearby Kabansk and Ilinsk forts.  

The earliest brick structure in the monastery did not appear until a century later in 1785 when the Trinity Church (sobor) was rebuilt with the support of a certain Major Karpov. Smaller than the Hodigitria Cathedral, the Trinity Church was built on one level, although the main structure has two tiers of windows (Figure 4). The array of low-relief decorative figures on the facades and the octagonal drums supporting single cupolas over the main structure and the apse are typical of church architecture in the Yenisei region. The low refectory served as a winter church and culminated in a bell tower at the west entrance. During the Soviet era, the cupolas and bell tower were dismantled, although there is hope for their restoration with the return of part of the monastery to church use.

Later masonry structures at the Trinity Monastery include the Gate Church of Archangel Michael (Figure 5), built in 1832 in the neoclassical style. Concurrently with the construction of the gate church, the monastery walls were rebuilt in brick between 1831 and 1850 with domed towers at the corners of the main (south) wall. The final major brick structure in the monastery is the Church of Saint Nicholas, built 1900–1903 to a standardized design provided by the Holy Synod.

The most distinctive example of late eighteenth-century Orthodox architecture in Buriatiia was built for the Transfiguration Monastery, located in the village of Posolskoe on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The origins of the monastery were complicated by disputes with the nearby Trinity-Selenginsk Monastery, whose monks
Figure 4 Church of the Trinity, Trinity-Selenginsk Monastery. South facade (Photograph: William Brumfield).

Figure 5 Gate Church of Archangel Michael, Trinity-Selenginsk Monastery. South façade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
were given the land and fishing rights along that section of Lake Baikal as part of their holdings. By the end of the seventeenth century, the treasurer of the monastery, Makarii, had built a small chapel to commemorate the site of the murder in 1661 of Erofei Zabolotskii, the tsar’s emissary to Mongolia, whose party was attacked by local Buriats. From that time the site was called “Posolskoe,” after the Russian word “posol” (ambassador).

However, Metropolitan Ignatii of Siberia and Tobolsk decided to expand the memorial and in 1700 issued a charter stipulating the addition of an altar to the chapel, thus creating a full church dedicated to the Icon of the Virgin of the Sign. The maintenance of this church led to the establishment of a separate monastic institution, supported by two edicts (in 1707 and 1713) from Peter I over the opposition of the Trinity Monastery, which saw its holdings suddenly lessened by the division. During this period, the new monastery at Posolskoe had the active support of Grigorii Oskolkov, a prominent merchant associated with the trading center at Kiakhhtinskaia Sloboda. Oskolkov, who was buried at the monastery in 1714, had provided substantial contributions toward construction of the monastery’s main church (sobor) dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Savior. This support included the preparation of some 300,000 bricks and other building materials, but the project for a brick church was halted when Peter I banned all masonry construction outside his new capital, Saint Petersburg. Instead, the Transfiguration Church was built of logs and dedicated in 1722.

Paradoxically, the fate of the Transfiguration Monastery improved after a fire in 1769, which destroyed both its wooden churches as well as part of the monastic housing. Despite a downgrading of the monastery’s status during the reign of Catherine the Great, the means were found to revive the project for a brick church, particularly since the bricks gathered by Oskolkov some sixty years earlier were still at hand. Work on the Church of the Transfiguration (Figure 6) began in 1773 and concluded in 1778, perhaps with the help of masons from Irkutsk, accessible through a relatively direct crossing of Lake Baikal.

In its plan, the Transfiguration Church reflects a typical Siberian composition containing a ground-level church (dedicated to the Icon of the Sign) for use in the winter and an upper church with the main altar and two levels of windows. From apse to main structure to refectory and bell tower, the arrangement of components and their proportions resembles that of the Hodigitria Cathedral in Verkhneudinsk. The facade ornamentation, however, is of a different order. Unfortunately, the Transfiguration Church was severely damaged during the Soviet era, when the domes over both the main structure and the apse, in addition to the entire upper part of the main structure, were dismantled. Nonetheless, enough remains of the facades to reveal the intricacy of the church’s ornamental brickwork (Figure 7). Even the Hodigitria Cathedral falls short of this level of embellishment, despite the general similarity of outline between the two churches.

The deeply profiled windows of the Transfiguration Church, with terra cotta pilasters and linked scroll pediments above the second level, are complimented by a robust, if naive, dentilation that separates the two levels of the structure. Similar motifs
Figure 6 Church of the Transfiguration, Monastery of the Transfiguration, Posolskoe. Southeast view (Photograph: William Brumfield).

Figure 7 Church of the Transfiguration, Monastery of the Transfiguration, Posolskoe. Southwest view (Photograph: William Brumfield).
are present in other Yenisei River basin churches, specifically in Yeniseisk itself. The more intriguing comparison, however, is with contemporary church architecture in Irkutsk, specifically the Church of the Elevation of the Cross (originally the Church of the Trinity), built 1747–1760. For example, the intricate terra cotta relief figures on the corners of each of the structural components of the Transfiguration Church remind one of the stylized humanoid figures on the corners of the Church of the Elevation of the Cross (see Visual Resources, 19, no. 2 (2003) p. 117).

The most remarkable feature of the Transfiguration Church is its elevated west portal (Figure 8), with a uniquely elaborate profiled frame. To be sure, there are direct comparisons with such Yeniseisk monuments as the Church of the Trinity, whose basic structure was built during the same period (1772–1776), but whatever the similarities with the surviving fragments of the west facade of the Yeniseisk Trinity Church, the west portal at Posolskoe displays a far more flamboyant use of this framing technique, culminating over the door in a burst of space defined by a curved pediment. This complex form of outlining in depth also appears in the windows of the main structure of the Church of the Elevation of the Cross. The north and south portals of the Irkutsk church, however, show a different resolution—remarkable in its own way—conveyed through the use of elaborate terra cotta ornament. Furthermore, the original west portal of the Irkutsk church was obscured by later rebuilding and extensions.

Figure 8 Church of the Transfiguration, Monastery of the Transfiguration, Posolskoe. West facade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
Thus the portal of the Transfiguration Church at Posolskoe presents an unusual form by virtue of its state of preservation and the degree of its decorative elaboration. The impression created by the ensemble of the west façade—portal, profiled frame and relief figures on each corner—is far from typical in Orthodox architecture. Indeed, the extraordinary, archaic force of the design is unsettling, as though creating the entry to a temple of some obscure rite. As with the related forms and ornamental motifs on the facades of other churches in the Yenisei River basin, there exists the possibility of oriental derivation at Posolskoe, even though the Transfiguration Church lacks obvious Buddhist references such as the Dharma wheels at the Church of the Elevation of the Cross. Indeed, Buddhism, in its Indo-Tibetan variant, is not the only possible source for the ornamentation, particularly in view of the artistic component of Buriat, or even Yakut, culture.

At the same time, the question of architectural derivation at Posolskoe is a matter for speculation. One specialist has stated unequivocally that the Transfiguration Church and the Church of the Elevation of the Cross were built by the same architect:

A close study of the architecture of [the Church of the Transfiguration] enables one to confirm that it was built by the architect of the Church of the Elevation of the Cross. In the architecture of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior, the motifs that had been developed in the amazing Irkutsk temple are not only repeated, they are reworked in a new way, and—the main thing—they are applied with a convincing economy and logic.

Yet in purely formal terms the west, main facade of the Posolskoe church is closer to that of the Trinity Church in Yeniseisk. Is it possible that the same master (or masters) was involved in the construction of all three churches: Irkutsk, Yeniseisk, Posolskoe? And how well did the master (or masters) know the patterns of Asian ornament? Certainly the Yenisei-Angara-Baikal waterway provided a ready conduit for ideas, people and materials, while the Selenga River continued the path toward Mongolia and China. However, in the absence of documentary evidence, this position remains hypothetical, as does the possibility of ornamental influence from Buddhist or other indigenous Asian sources. It is, nonetheless, reasonable to assume such influence, particularly in view of the primary mission of the Transfiguration Monastery: to propagate the Orthodox faith among the Buriats. In this regard, the entrance to the Transfiguration Church would have projected a striking image of Orthodoxy in Asia.

At the other end of the Selenga River in Russia, an unstable border with Mongolia was patrolled from the Selenginsk fort, founded in 1665 by Cossacks from Barguzinsk. For much of the remaining century, Selenginsk (not to be confused with the Trinity-Selenginsk Monastery) faced the possibility of attack from Mongolia, such as the siege of January–February 1688 by the forces of a Mongolian feudal lord whose forces were estimated at 5,000. Indeed, the successful defense of Selenginsk, bolstered by the troops of the Russian envoy Fedor Golovin and the exiled Ukrainian hetman Demyan Mnogogreshnyi, may have persuaded the Chinese not to demand further Russian concessions as part of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed the following year.

Despite its remote, exposed location, Selenginsk remained an important outpost, particularly after the establishment in 1704 of a shorter route for
state caravans to China that led via Selenginsk to Mongolia, rather than through Nerchinsk and Manchuria. Further development occurred following the death of Peter the Great (January 1725), when the Russian plenipotentiary Count Savva Lukich Vladislavich-Raguzinskii suggested attempts to relocate or improve the fort. Little came of the various projects and surveys, including one involving a reluctant Lieutenant Abraham Hannibal, great-grandfather of the poet Aleksandr Pushkin. Indeed, treaties negotiated by Raguzinskii with the Chinese in 1727 obviated the need for extensive fortress expansion and led instead to the establishment by Raguzinskii of a flourishing border trading center known as “Kiakhtinskaia sloboda” (see below).

With the stabilization of relations along the Mongolian border and the abolition in 1755 of the state caravan system for trade with China, Selenginsk gradually declined in importance, although it remained a local administrative center with a garrison. In 1780, two disastrous fires leveled most of the town, whose buildings, including its churches, were entirely of wood. Nonetheless, a few years after the fire, resources were found to build the imposing Cathedral of the Miraculous Image of the Savior (1783–1789), the town’s first masonry structure (Figure 9). The design of the cathedral has been attributed to one Vorotnikov, a self-taught craftsman from Tiumen, and there is indeed resemblance to western Siberian church architecture (both Tiumen and Tobolsk) of the same period, particularly in the placement of small, ornate baroque

Figure 9 Cathedral of the Miraculous Image of the Savior, Selenginsk. Northwest view (Photograph: William Brumfield).
cupolas at the corners of the main structure. In other respects, the design represents a variation on regional predecessors such as the Trinity Church at Trinity-Selenginsk Monastery. The facades of both churches have cartouche-like ornaments that suggest Mongol or Buriat origins. At the same time, it should be remembered that cartouche ornaments, although of different configuration, can also be found on the facades of contemporary churches in the Russian north, particularly in Totma and Velikii Ustiug.25

Ultimately, the Savior Cathedral would become the only substantial structure left from the original settlement of Selenginsk. In addition to the town’s waning significance, its vulnerability to destructive flooding led government authorities to insist in 1840 on relocating the town to the opposite, left bank of the Selenga River. The original site, now uninhabited, eventually acquired the name Staroselenginsk (Old Selenginsk), while the new site, Novoselenginsk, became a regional administrative center (see below). Only a small brick Chapel of the Holy Cross and a monument to V. V. Yakobii, the mid-eighteenth century voevoda of Selenginsk, stand near the Savior Cathedral. Nothing remains of the wooden churches and houses of Staroselenginsk.

Indeed, the log churches that formerly stood in every Transbaikal settlement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have almost entirely disappeared. A notable exception is the Old Believer Church of Saint Nicholas (Figure 10), built of logs during

Figure 10 Old Believer Church of Saint Nicholas, near Ulan-Ude. Southeast view (Photograph: William Brumfield).
the late eighteenth century in the area of Verkhneudinsk. As elsewhere in Siberia, Old Believers sought relatively remote locations where they could practice their faith and raise their families without subterfuge or constant fear of oppression. Although this particular church adheres to the time-honored form of octagon over square, the design shows local variations, such as the decorative window pediments, similar to Buriat designs above the windows of log houses. (In contrast to churches, many log houses in the area still exist from the late nineteenth century, as will be seen below.) Even the basic cuboid structure has neoclassical pediments and projected facades that give the impression of vernacular architecture.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, neoclassicism had become the dominant form for church architecture in the Transbaikal region, as elsewhere in eastern Siberia. One of the earliest examples, with lingering traces of provincial baroque, is the Church of the Trinity (Figure 11), built 1798–1809 as the third masonry temple in Verkhneudinsk. A relatively simple, low-pitched structure, with secondary altars on either side of the vestibule and a bell tower at the west end, the Church of the Trinity is a typical example of modest parish architecture in eastern Siberia. At the same time, the location of this cemetery church on a promontory to the east of the town’s main market created an effective visual point of reference, rivaling the larger Hodigitria Cathedral.

More interesting examples of neoclassical church design were built in smaller settlements such as Tvorogovo, located in the Kabansk region near the Selenga River delta. Although abandoned and stripped of cupolas, the imposing form of the Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God (Figure 12), built 1809–1835, still serves as a beacon to the surrounding villages. Begun in 1809, the basic structure was rapidly completed, and the altar of the lower, “winter,” level was dedicated to Saint Paraskeva in 1811. The main altar on the upper level, however, was not dedicated until 1835. The linear development of the church, from apse to bell tower and entrance porch follows a pattern from the previous century, yet there are new developments, such as the classically inspired rotunda of the bell tower. This vertical dominant at the west end is echoed in the semicircular form of the two-storied apse in the east. (The typical apse design of this period in eastern Siberia adhered to a polygonal shape.)

The most impressive concentration of neoclassical churches in the Transbaikal area appeared during the nineteenth century in the linked towns of Troitskosavsk and Kiakhtinskaia Sloboda, which have been known since 1934 by the single name of “Kiakhta.” The primary impetus for the founding and development of these settlements located on the Kiakhta River occurred in August 1727, when Count Savva Vladislavich-Raguzinskii concluded the Burinskii Treaty establishing a border between China and Russia. A further treaty regulating trade was signed in October of the same year. Yet even before the signing of the treaties, work had begun in June 1727 on the New Trinity Fort, which included the eponymous Church of the Trinity, with altars to the Trinity and to Saint Savva of Serbia. (Raguzinskii was of Serbian origin and the second altar honored his patron saint.) In 1805, when the area around the fort was granted the official status of town, these two altars provided the name of “Troitskosavsk” (Trinity-Savva).
Concurrently with the building of the New Trinity fort, the adjacent trading district of Kiakhtinskaia Sloboda was established near a corresponding Chinese trading point known as “Maimachen.” By the 1760s, the Kiakhta Quarter had become the primary border point for trade with China, and the population and prosperity of both settlements increased accordingly. Of particular importance was the revoking in 1762 of the state monopoly on the fur trade, an act that greatly increased the number of merchants engaged in private commerce. At the same time, the state continued to regulate certain aspects of the China trade, and Kiakhta benefited from this as well. In the words of one specialist: “By 1772 Kiakhta had become the sole point for conducting legal Russo-Chinese trade.”\textsuperscript{31} During the eighteenth century, the structures of both settlements were of logs.
The increasing significance of Troitskosavsk at the beginning of the nineteenth century led to a decision to rebuild the Trinity Cathedral in brick (Figure 13). With donations from local merchants, work began on the cathedral in 1812, and in 1817 the structure was dedicated with three altars: the Trinity, the Nativity of the Virgin, and Saints Peter and Paul. In its basic plan, Trinity Cathedral conformed to the usual linear design, from apse to main structure to bell tower in the west. The main structure of the cathedral did not, however, have the lower level dedicated as a “warm” church, for use in the winter. Instead, the one-story refectory was substantially widened to include the two secondary altars (on the north and south sides) each of which stood in a heated space. In 1870, the refectory was expanded with the addition of a second story that rivaled the height of the main sanctuary and contained two additional altars dedicated to Saint Innokentii of Irkutsk and the Icon of the Virgin “Surety of Sinners.”

In its expanded form, Trinity Cathedral created an impression of unusual size, with two competing volumes: the main church, culminating in a large drum and dome, and the refectory, marked by neoclassical pediments. The spacing and proportions of the arched windows along the entire length of the church further enhanced a perception of the building’s scale. At the western end, the large bell tower, which had two altars of its own, repeated the arched window motif in the openings for the bells. The bell tower spire provided a vertical counterpoint to the horizontal massing of volume of the main cathedral structure. Closed after the Revolution and converted to a museum in 1934, Trinity Cathedral stood in its original form until a fire in 1963 gutted the interior.
Since then the walls have stood as a monumental, still impressive, ruin whose large windows show through to the sky. This effect is unusual in Russian church ruins that typically had roof vaults of brick or other masonry forms that often remained even after an intense fire destroyed the interior. The Trinity Cathedral, however, had a roof structure of large wooden beams that were destroyed, along with the entire roof and dome, during the 1963 fire.

If the Trinity Cathedral represents a simple, if idiosyncratic, interpretation of neoclassicism, the Church of the Resurrection (Figure 14) displays a more mature, late neoclassicism in which all of the components are carefully integrated into a single whole. Begun in June 1830 to replace a log church of the same name in the Kiakhta trading quarter, the Resurrection Church was supported by donations from local merchants and built to a design by the Moscow architect Grigorii Gerasimov. With the completion of the church and the dedication of its three altars in 1838, Troitskosavsk could claim two of the most impressive churches in the Transbaikal region, a tribute to the town’s commercial significance as one of the main shipping centers for the China tea trade. Further evidence of this wealth was provided a decade later with the approval by Archbishop Nil of Irkutsk for the construction of a magnificent iconostasis (not extant) placed before the main altar. Designed by the Irkutsk architect A. E. Razgildeev, with icons by the artist E. Reikhel, the structure of the icon screen consisted of bronze and crystal with Royal Doors (in the center of the screen) plated with silver.
In its plan, the Resurrection Church represents a complex, almost baroque, synthesis of volumes within the rigorous frame of late neoclassicism. On the exterior, the main structure is defined by Doric porticos on the south, east and north facades. The portico pediments provide a visual transition to the massive central drum—marked by arched windows and attached columns—and dome, which is in turn surmounted by a lantern, orb and cross. The dome is also marked by lucarne windows at the points of the compass. The corner bays of the main structure extend upward in square towers that support subsidiary domes and crosses. All of these elements are carefully calculated, both among themselves and in relation to the bell tower attached at the west end of the vestibule. And although the overall effect does not equal the work of the greatest Russian masters of neoclassicism, the exterior unquestionably shows the hand of a skilled master of the Moscow school.

The interior bears some resemblance to the tradition Russian cross-inscribed plan with four large piers supporting the main drum, but beyond the piers, the elongated side bays suggest the alcove spaces of elegant town houses in Moscow. A similar elongated plan applies to the winter (heated) chapels placed on the north and south sides of the wide vestibule and dedicated to the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God and to Saint Nicholas, respectively. In this case, the semicircular niches in the east contained the chapel altars, a functional resolution that also worked to conserve the heat from the ceramic stoves during the winter. In a broader sense, the repeated use of complex curved spaces suggests a baroque sensibility merged with the neoclassical.

Figure 14 Church of the Resurrection, Kiakhta. Southeast view (Photograph: William Brumfield).
One can only regret that so much of the interior of this important monument was lost, both from the savagery of the civil war in this area and during the Soviet era.

The final component of the ensemble of masonry churches in Troitskosavsk was the Cemetery Church of the Dormition, constructed 1884–1888 to replace an adjacent log church that continued to stand until its destruction in 1942. Indeed, the wooden Church of the Dormition, rebuilt in 1836 to replace a still earlier church, was an excellent example of wooden Empire-style neoclassical architecture. Painted dark red with white trim, the compact, single-domed church with porticos and bell tower followed a pattern of late eighteenth-century parish churches in Moscow. Although the architect is unknown, this church was one of the best examples of an urban architectural style in wood. The masonry Church of the Dormition (Figure 15), built

Figure 15 Cemetery Church of the Dormition, Kiakhta. South façade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
with the support of the local merchant Ya. A. Nemchinov, also has neoclassical elements such as the porticoes that define the facades, but the basic design corresponds to an eclectic, Russo-Byzantine style widely applied to church architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century.  

A similar Russo-Byzantine pattern, with fewer classicizing elements, appeared in the Cathedral of the Ascension at Novoselenginsk (Figure 16), located on the left bank of the Selenga River midway between Troitskosavsk-Kiahtsk and Verkhneudinsk to the north. Work on the cathedral, which replaced a log church of the same dedication, began in the early 1880s under the supervision of Filipp Nevolin, a builder from Troitskosavsk. Many of the construction details were entrusted to local Buriat masters. The main altar was dedicated in 1888, and two additional altars were consecrated in 1895, at which point the building was completed. Despite the church’s standardized Russo-Byzantine design, distributed widely throughout the Russian provinces, the compact vertical form of the structure, with its central facade arches and white stuccoed brick walls, creates a clearly visible dominant on the dry plains surrounding Novoselenginsk.

The town possesses another religious monument, in the literal sense of the word: an obelisk that commemorates the work of the London Missionary Society in this region from 1820 to 1840. Led by Edward Stallybrass (ca. 1793–1884) and William Swan (1791–1866), the small group not only engaged, with little success, in Protestant missionary activity among the Buriats, but also published a Mongolian grammar and

**Figure 16** Cathedral of the Ascension, Novoselenginsk. South facade (Photograph: William Brumfield).
dictionary by Robert Yuille. Opposition from the Russian Orthodox Church led the Russian authorities to expel the group in 1840, and they returned to London the following year.40

Paradoxically, the remote location of Novoselenginsk on the fringe of the Russian Empire led to the creation of an unusual and substantial manor house, built for Dmitrii Startsev around 1850. The design of the house (Figure 17) has been attributed to the nobleman Nikolai Bestuzhev, exiled for his implication in the Decembrist revolt of 1825.41 In general form, the structure resembles the wooden neoclassical estate houses that both men would have remembered from the central Russian provinces. The compact two-story house, which now serves as a museum devoted to the Decembrists and to local history, has an Ionic portico, also of two stories with a
balustrade on each level. Although the basic structure is of logs (as usual in Russia), the entire surface of the house’s plank siding displays painted rustication to suggest the appearance of masonry construction—a device applied in Russia since the time of Peter the Great. As an echo of the faded glory of Russia’s nobility, the Startsev house is one of Siberia’s distinctive monuments.

Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta remained, however, the dominant town in the southern part of Dauria and its steady, if modest, growth was reflected in the expanding town plans of 1797, the 1820s and 1859. In 1829, their combined population (4,380) made the two settlements for a brief period the largest Russian community in the entire Transbaikal region. In 1862, the population reached 5,430. Soon thereafter, other towns beyond Lake Baikal rapidly outstripped Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Chinese tea bound for Russia and Eastern Europe increasingly went by sea to the port of Odessa rather than over the arduous land route through Kiakhta. Even the building of the Trans-Siberian Railroad that reached Verkhneudinsk in 1899 did little for the commerce of distant Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta, which to this day remains without a rail link.

Despite its economic decline, the former commercial significance of Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta is evident in the imposing dimensions of its Merchants Court (Gostinnyi dvor), located near the Resurrection Church in the Kiakhta Quarter. The first, wooden variant of the Merchants Court, begun in 1728, was one of the earliest structures in the Kiakhta Quarter, and was soon replaced by a larger version. Plans for an expanded brick compound were discussed at the end of the eighteenth century, but produced no results. The proposal was revived in 1828 by Aleksandr Lavinskii, who served in Irkutsk from 1822 to 1833 as the first Governor-General of Eastern Siberia. Yet even his support led to no specific action until the idea was supported in 1834 by Yegor Kankrin, the Minister of Finances in Saint Petersburg. Work began in 1837 under the supervision of A. A. Medvedev, a military engineer, and construction of the complex was completed in 1842.

The general design of the Kiakhta Merchants Court consisted of an enclosed double square, whose exterior was marked by arcades, as well as porticos in the middle of each facade. Despite changes in function and modification of design in the many decades since its completion, the Gostinnyi Dvor has retained some of its main components (Figure 18) that serve as reminders of its size and importance as one of the main points in the Russian tea trade. It also reminds one of the adaptability of an austere form of neoclassicism for commercial structures throughout the Russian Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The area’s other major commercial complex was the Trading Rows (also known as Gostinnyi Dvor), located in the center of Troitskosavsk. In 1825, discussions began on the need to replace the late eighteenth-century wooden Merchants Court on the edge of town with a new brick complex, but little came of the idea until a fire in 1843 destroyed much of the trading district. Construction began in 1847 and the complex was completed in 1853. The Troitskosavsk Merchants Court (Figure 19) was considerably smaller than the Gostinnyi Dvor in the neighboring Kiakhta Quarter that served as the main conduit for international (primarily Chinese) goods.
Troitskovsk, by contrast, was legally limited to internal trade, for which there was only limited demand in this sparsely populated region. The main structure, rectangular in form, consisted of trading stalls in two rows, back to back under a single roof. Each row looked toward an arcade that extended the length of the north and south facades. The simple neoclassical detailing imparted the appearance of regulated trade, as it did in so many other provincial Russian towns.

The quiet merchant prosperity of Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta at the turn of the twentieth century is perhaps best expressed in its wooden houses, many of which still stand. Most of these dwellings are built entirely of logs, usually covered with milled siding, while others have a brick ground floor with a log upper story (Figure 20). Despite their
Figure 19 Troitskosavsk Trading Rows, Kiakhta (Photograph: William Brumfield).

Figure 20 Wooden house, Kiakhta (Photograph: William Brumfield).
modest size, the houses typically have sturdy carved window frames projecting from the log facade (Figure 21). In this wooden environment, the occasional masonry house is all the more visible. The most notable example is the A. M. Lushnikov house (Figure 22), begun in the middle of the nineteenth century as a single-story brick dwelling in the Kiakhta Quarter. Lushnikov, a cultured and generous host, was frequently visited by the local intellectual elite, including exiled Decembrists such as the brothers Nikolai and Mikhail Bestuzhev, as well as the noted explorer Nicholas Przevalsky.46 (As a major point of entry to Mongolia and China, Kiakhta attracted a number of specialists in Asian studies.) The house was expanded in the 1870s with the addition of a second floor, also of brick, to which were added wooden service wings. This and a few other masonry houses were isolated exceptions in the nineteenth century.

The last major architectural project in Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta before the Revolution was a large complex of brick buildings known as the “Red Barracks,” completed in 1910 at a time when the government of Nicholas II was actively expanding its military presence along the southeastern border of the empire. Consisting of over twenty large structures, including officers’ housing, a church and a power plant, the Red Barracks at Troitskosavsk adhered to a functional brick style typical of factory design. The barracks gained grim renown during the Russian Civil War that unfolded with particular savagery in the Far East. As revolutionary forces pushed White armies out of western and central Siberia in 1919, prisoners with suspected leftist sympathies from
various Siberian towns were transferred to the barracks, then under the control of the Cossack ataman (high commander) Grigorii Semenov, who for two years ruled the Transbaikal area from Chita with support from the Japanese. The growing threat of a revolutionary offensive at the end of 1919 led Semenov, who displayed psychopathic harshness during his months in power, to order the execution of the prisoners, and on 1 January 1920, 700 (perhaps as many as 1,600) were slaughtered at the edge of the barracks compound.

The retreat of Semenov’s forces toward the Far East in 1920 did not mean the end of atrocities in the Transbaikal area. In the spring of 1920, forces commanded by Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg occupied much of Mongolia and posed a threat to border areas, including Troitskosavsk-Kiakhta. Indeed, these forces seized the nearby Chinese settlement of Maimachen, located across the border in Mongolia. However, the appearance of Soviet and Comintern support for the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party undermined the base of von Ungern-Sternberg’s forces and led to an attack on the Maimachen garrison in March 1921. An ensuing fire completely destroyed this once thriving Chinese settlement, which was not rebuilt.

The advent of Soviet power in Transbaikal area ultimately transformed the urban environment of Verkhneudinsk, whose name was changed in 1934 to Ulan-Ude (Red Uda, in reference to the Uda River). Yet even with the political transformation, the town maintained much of its nineteenth-century merchant ambiance, including the

Figure 22 A. M. Lushnikov house, Kiakhta (Photograph: William Brumfield).
Trading Rows and the facing Merchants Court, both built of brick. The latter building was launched in 1803 by an assembly of merchants who commissioned the Irkutsk architect Anton Losev (1765–1829) to design a quadrilateral containing 196 trading stalls, a large interior courtyard and an attached arcade to protect the shop entrances (Figure 23). Work began on the south (main) side of Merchants Court in 1804, but intrigues and a lack of financing halted construction until 1825. The south half was finally completed in 1830, although the cornice details and iron roof were not added until 1856. The north half of the project was never built; its site was taken by a more modest structure known as the “Small Trading Rows” (not extant). The surviving south half has been restored to contemporary use as a bazaar, and the details of its rusticated arcade and entrance arch have survived reasonably well.

The nearby Trading Rows display a similarly utilitarian neoclassical style, although its center is occupied by a more imposing two-story structure, defined by a portico of eight paired Corinthian columns and a balcony (Figure 24). Built in the early 1830s with the support of a wealthy merchant, Mitrofan Kurbatov, the Trading Rows had far less rentable space than the Merchants Court (only sixteen shops), but served well to project the prestige and wealth of the Kurbatov family. Even the one-story extensions on either side of the main building were marked by a row of Ionic columns that supported a flat roof over the walkway extending the length of the structure. In the 1950s, the building was adapted for use as a clinic, and a second story was added in 1957 by the architect A. P. Vampilov.
Apart from the few churches and major administrative and commercial buildings, most of merchant Verkhneudinsk was characterized by log houses, with or without plank siding and often decorated with carved window surrounds (Figure 25). Some of the more elaborate examples, such as the house at 22 Pochtamt Street (Figure 26) constructed around 1900, are a tour-de-force of decorative art. However, unlike the large wooden houses of Tomsk, the dwellings in central Verkhneudinsk tended to be of one story, occasionally with a small attic level visible from the back. Some of the wooden houses, such as the one built in 1909 and formerly located at 67 Lenin Street, were built for apartments and rented rooms arranged along a corridor and with a row of closely spaced, sturdy windows along the main facade (Figure 27).

A number of these wooden dwellings, as well as a substantial part of the new brick commercial buildings in Verkhneudinsk, belonged to members of a burgeoning local Jewish community. Although much research remains to be done in this area, it should be noted that many Jews were able to escape the onerous restrictions applied in the western part of the Russian Empire by moving to the Transbaikal area, where local administrators frequently welcomed their skills and enterprise. To be sure, the Imperial bureaucracy’s regulations and restrictions on Jewish property ownership and residence beyond the Pale of Settlement still existed, yet they were applied in a contradictory, haphazard fashion in Siberia, where the desire for an investment of capital and talent ensured a modicum of protection and stability. As a recent monograph on the topic notes:
Figure 25 Log house, Banzarov Street 15, Ulan-Ude (Photograph: William Brumfield).

Figure 26 Log house, 22 Pochtamt Street, Ulan-Ude (Photograph: William Brumfield).
[Jewish merchants] deliberately began with small enterprises and workshops of one or two workers and a rapid turnover of money. These were calculated on a quick and painless curtailing of work in case of expulsion from the town. The process of financial investment by Jewish merchants in the sphere of production stabilized only when there appeared the certainty that a prolonged period of residence in a given settlement and the established reputation of a person as useful to the town, as well as the ownership of real estate, would serve as a definite—if not complete—guarantee against unpleasant surprises.54

As such conditions were increasingly met in the Transbaikal area at the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish investment grew not only in areas of production and the professions (particularly those related to medicine), but also in the area of real estate. The latter development is evident in the number of buildings constructed and owned by Jews in towns such as Verkhneudinsk and Chita. In Verkhneudinsk, for example, a survey of the owners of buildings along the main Bolshaia Nikolaevskaia Street and its extension, Bolshaia Street contains names such as: Elik Fleisher, Odessa Fleisher; Olga Gertman; Lazar Samsonovich; the Irkutsk merchants Judah, Aron, Moses and David Samsonovich; Isaiah and Jacob Tsygalnitskii; Naftolii Kapelman; David Merkel; Bassa Rozenshtein; and Samuel Rozenshtein. 55 According to the 1897 census of the Russian Empire, Jews comprised slightly over 11 per cent of the population of Verkhneudinsk (908 out of a total of 8,086).

Even though the structures built by Jews in Verkhneudinsk were nationalized with the establishment of Soviet power in Buriatiia after 1922, and most were subsequently
modified or razed for later development, the record of Jewish building activity and investment during the two decades before 1917 is clear. Perhaps the ultimate symbol of the Jewish community in Verkhneudinsk was the synagogue, one of at least five officially sanctioned prayer houses in the Transbaikal area. Located a block from Bolshaia Nikolaevskaiia Street on Bolshaia Naberezhnaia Street, the synagogue was built of brick in the early 1880s. All Jewish houses of worship were closed in the early Soviet period, however, and the Verkhneudinsk synagogue subsequently underwent modifications that largely obscured its original form, including the removal of a helmet-shaped dome over the central prayer area. Indeed, a much better preserved synagogue can be found in the smaller town of Kabansk (on the Selenga River northwest of Ulan-Ude), which also had a substantial Jewish community (Figure 28). It should also be noted that one of the best preserved wooden houses in Kabansk is the Eidelman house, built at the end of the nineteenth century.

Following the advent of Soviet power in the Transbaikal area, Verkhneudinsk became the capital in 1923 of the newly formed Buriat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (renamed the Buriat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic from 1958 to 1992). With new administrative authority and the influx of Buriats from the countryside, the population of Verkhneudinsk rapidly grew from 28,000 in 1926 to almost 126,000 in 1939, by which time the city had been renamed Ulan-Ude. Housing became a particularly acute problem despite a modest increase in one-story dwellings during the mid-1920s. Wooden, two-story barracks, usually sponsored by factories,
made a spartan contribution toward alleviating the housing crisis; but in the latter part of the 1930s more durable ensembles of multistory buildings were erected, such as the Sotsgorodok (socialist town) sponsored by the Ministry of Heavy Industry.\(^59\)

The most important architectural landmark in Ulan-Ude before the Second World War was the House of Soviets, which served as the republic’s central administrative building. In 1926, planning began for the structure to be located on an elevated site at the culmination of what had been Bolshaia Street, and after a national competition, the project was awarded to the prominent Leningrad architect Andrei Ohl.\(^60\) Built 1929–1931—a relatively short time for such a large project—the House of Soviets displays the characteristics of monumental Constructivist architecture that had been aggressively developed in Leningrad during this period.\(^61\) The main facade of the building is defined by an asymmetrical grouping of basic geometric forms (including a curved, projecting stairwell block), devoid of ornamentation and marked by horizontal window strips. This use of simple fenestration to segment the facade and define a proportional system provided an economical way to managing the large volume of the building, which includes not only a main facade 115 meters in length, but also a large quadrilateral with an interior courtyard extending from the back of the building.\(^62\)

By the end of the 1930s, the austere style of the House of Soviets had been superseded by a more grandiose approach to architecture promulgated throughout the Soviet Union. Emblematic of the Stalinist concentration of power in a few party and state institutions, these buildings from the late 1930s were marked by the heavy application of classicizing elements. A prominent example of the style in the center of Ulan-Ude is the Building of the Buriat Regional Committee of the Communist Party (Obkom KPSS), located on the north side of the newly formed Square of Soviets and perpendicular to the House of Soviets. Designed by the architect V. Sidorov and built 1939–1941, the Obkom Building is marked by attached polygonal Corinthian columns that rise three stories above the dark rusticated masonry of the ground floor, or socle (Figure 29).\(^63\) The main entrance is situated within a concave corner at the intersection of the south and west facades. Imposing yet functional in design, without luxurious display on either exterior or interior, this building is one of the better examples of pre-war state architecture in Siberia.

A decidedly more ornate version of triumphal architecture appeared in Soviet cities after the victory in the Second World War, and Ulan-Ude was no exception. Although the Soviet victory is usually associated with the war against Nazi Germany and its allies, no less important for Siberia was the confrontation with the Japanese on the long front from Mongolia to Korea. Six years of uneasy peace were broken in August 1945 when, as agreed at the Yalta Conference, Soviet forces attacked the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria. The lightning Soviet advance resulted in large numbers of Japanese prisoners, many of whom were used in construction projects in Siberia including, apparently, a number in Ulan-Ude.\(^64\)

The most significant monument of the late Stalinist period in Ulan-Ude is the Buriat Theater of Opera and Ballet (Figure 30). With its combination of Buriat motifs and panoply of Stalin-era decorative elements, the Theater of Opera and Ballet
represents the florid hybrids created in the national republics in the early 1950s. Planning for the theater actually began in the mid-1930s, when a commission for a Buriat Musical and Drama Theater was awarded to the architect A. N. Fedorov, who offered a design in a stripped neoclassical style. Although construction had already begun, local opposition to such an austere design—particularly for a national theater—led to cessation of work in 1938, with the requirement that the architect revise the plans in favor of a more ornamental approach.65

The outbreak of war prevented the immediate realization of these plans for the theater, and work resumed only in 1945. The complex demands of the project impeded a rapid completion, and Fedorov’s death in 1950 complicated matters further. The building was finally completed in 1952, with the participation of the architect V. A. Kalinin and the artists G. I. Rublev and B. V. Iordanshki. A highly uneven triangular site, located near the Square of Soviets, imposed a number of limitations on the design of the building, whose grand entrance faces a small square rather than the main Lenin Street that runs along the side of the building. Therefore, the design required a highly articulated side facade in order to maintain the prestige of the theater on Lenin Street. Furthermore, a steep drop at the southeast corner provided the opportunity to create an elevated terrace with a short neoclassical arcade.
The difficulty with this assemblage of components is that while each might be admirable on its own, the general effect is confused. Only the main entrance, framed by two massive pylons, is given heroic definition. The pylons support an equally massive entablature, above which is a statuary group composed of two rearing horses (sculpted by A. I. Timin), with a male and female rider symbolizing the Buriat people. This vertical accent is echoed by the ornamental, crenellated towers at the four corners of the high rectangular structure above the stage area.

Other examples of ornate Stalinist architecture in Ulan-Ude include the early 1950s office building at Lenin Street 59, which houses Buriat State Radio and Television and forms the western boundary of Square of the Soviets (Figure 31). Designed by Liudvig Minert and A. R. Vampilov, the State Radio Building follows a decorative scheme typical of Moscow and other major Soviet cities during that period, but also includes Buriat decorative motifs, particularly along the cornice.

The Square of the Soviets received what some would consider its culminating element—certainly its most unusual—in the fall of 1971 when the Monument to Vladimir Lenin was unveiled. Among the thousands of monuments to Lenin produced during the Soviet period, this is one of the very few that can lay any claim to originality (Figure 32). Instead of the usual pedestrian version, with right hand outstretched (irreverently known as “Lenin hailing a cab”), the sculptors Iurii and Georgii Neroda chose to create a gigantic head of the Soviet leader, mounted on a pedestal that
expands from square to rectangle at its base. The outsized dimensions of the detached head—7.5 by 4.5 meters—serve to dominate and unite the diverse architectural elements of the Square of Soviets. (The modest plaza at the base of the monument was designed by P. G. Zilberman.) The general features of the head on Lenin conform to the standard official depiction, yet the view from certain angles suggests something of a Buddha-like appearance. Although there could be no question of overt resemblance, the Buddhist component of Buriat culture might have exerted a subtle influence, both in details and in the decision to sculpt the head without a standing figure. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a monument of this design appearing in any of the other former Soviet republics.

No survey of architecture in the Transbaikal area—and particularly those areas inhabited by Buriats—would be complete without attention to the regions’s distinctive Buddhist architecture. If certain eighteenth-century churches in the Irkutsk region contained motifs of Buddhist origin, the territory to the southeast of Lake Baikal would provide during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries equally intriguing examples of Buddhist religious structures whose design is based on co-existing and complementary architectural systems. Unfortunately, many of the area’s best examples of Buddhist architecture were destroyed during the Soviet period (especially in the 1930s), and those that remain are in need of major restoration work. Nonetheless, they provide a clear view of the typology of local Buddhist architecture.
As Tibetan Buddhism—previously referred to as “Lamaism”—spread during the eighteenth century among the Buriat population in the Transbaikal area, examples of the Buddhist monastery \((\textit{datsan}, \text{from the Tibetan “court of meetings”})\) also began to appear in the area, presumably as early as the middle of the eighteenth century. With the development of the monastic system for education and meditation, the \textit{datsan} gradually replaced the prayer yurts that had served as devotional sites for the Buriat population. By the middle of the nineteenth century, 34 Buddhist monasteries existed among the various Buriat clans in the Transbaikal area. Within these compounds, Buddhist art and sacred ritual were joined with Russian building patterns in creating the primary architecture of the Buriat \textit{datsan}.\textsuperscript{67}
The influence of Buddhism in its local interpretation extended throughout the process of constructing the datsan. As defined by a contemporary Buriat historian:

Burjat religious art is organically tied with the developed world view at the base of Buddhist culture in Central and Eastern Asia. Burjat Buddhism took into itself the cult of spirits—the guardians of place, the cults of trees, of waters, etc. For example, the placement of monasteries within the landscape and the selection of a place for construction were linked to the burial rites of Burjatis, with the cult of ancestors, of the earth, of trees, of mountains. ... These distinctive beliefs and conceptions had an impact on the orientation, form, and structure of religious buildings.68

Astrologers and lamas were consulted at the earliest stages of the datsan, where construction “began with the selection of a site that answered all the necessary positive attributes and signs acceptable both to Buddhist deities and to local spirits of the earth, the water and plant life”.69

The Tibetan Buddhist practice of geomancy led to the search for sites where the energy of the earth, the balance of male (sky) and female (earth) elements, reached an optimal level.70 In 1923, A. P. Barannikov noted:

the datsan is placed primarily in hollows protected from the winds, and near a river or lake. ... Usually near the datsan there are more or less high summits, on which are arranged an obo, or places for the veneration of mountain spirits. When seen from one of these hills, the datsan usually represents a settlement of very strict plan: the regular intersecting streets go from east to west and north to south, so that the territory of the datsan presents an oval of slightly irregular form. ... The main temple—the tsokshin datsan—is situated in the middle of the oval, and near it ... a few other temples. ... Finally, along the sides of the temples and primarily to the east and west, there are the yurts—the dwellings of the monks.71

In addition to the main temple and secondary temples (lhakan) dedicated to specific deities, other structures within a large datsan might include: a temple or temples for instruction in sacred texts and the healing arts; stupas (suburgan) for the preservation of sacred relics; and structures dedicated to preparations for major holidays. Other service buildings, as well as small houses for the lamas, were typically located beyond the immediate confines of the datsan.72 With the recognition in 1853 of Lamaism as an official religion within the Russian Empire, the accumulation of wealth and valuable objects within the monasteries increased, as did the number of structures.73

The focal point of the datsan was the main temple, the construction of which was itself seen as a sacred act related to geomancy and a reverence for nature. In certain cases, the period of prayer and sacrifice in preparation for construction might last fifteen days:

At the day designated by the astrologers for the start of the building, all of the material was on site. In the early morning, worship began. Bringing sacrifices, the lamas consecrated the place of the future temple. The content of the prayers involved requests to the deities for the protection of the newly erected temple and for the expulsion of any unclean spirits that ruled over the site. In the rites of sacrifice to the master spirits of the place, there was a section of repentance for sins against the spirits of stone, of wood, and
earth, that is for the loss inflicted upon them during the cutting down of trees, the excavation of stones, etc.\textsuperscript{74}

The form of the main temple (\textit{tsokchen-dugan}) as developed in the Buriat \textit{datsan} has been compared to early Indian temples whose design followed a centralized plan representing the sacred mandala.\textsuperscript{75} Buriat temples, however, developed local, distinctive traits—such as the cuboid main structure, with superimposed ascending levels—that can be related to Mongol temple architecture, as well as to Orthodox church architecture. The link to Orthodox architecture applies particularly to masonry temples, the earliest of which were completed in 1808 and 1816 at the Aninskii and Aginskii \textit{datsans}, respectively.\textsuperscript{76} Despite the destruction during the twentieth century of some of the most significant examples in the evolution of Buriat temple architecture, the few remaining monuments provide evidence of the basic forms.

Perhaps the most important of these surviving ensembles is the Gusinoe Ozero \textit{datsan} (also known among Buriats as the Tamchinskii \textit{datsan}), which in 1809 became the center of Buddhism in eastern Siberia, a position that it held until 1930.\textsuperscript{77} Its predecessor in that role, the Tsongol \textit{datsan} (not extant), was situated on the Chikoi River that flows into the Selenga River near Staroselenginsk. The Tsongol \textit{datsan} had an elaborate wooden main temple that was constructed 1758–1759 and still stood at the turn of the twentieth century. With its decorated porches extending from the points of the compass, the early temple at Tsongol \textit{datsan} might have been influenced by the forms of Russian wooden churches; yet no specific evidence exists for this assumption, and the destruction of the temple itself represents a major loss for the study of Buddhist culture in Buriatiia.\textsuperscript{78}

The origins of the Gusinoe Ozero \textit{datsan}—situated some 25 kilometers to the west of Staroselenginsk—are undoubtedly related to its location near the shores of Gusinoe Ozero (Goose Lake), a body of water whose blue color is all the more vivid in contrast to its arid setting within a large basin formed by hills to the south of Ulan-Ude. The first wooden temple at the \textit{datsan} appeared in 1750 and although smaller than the slightly later temple at Tsongol \textit{datsan}, it is considered to have been the earliest stationary temple among the Buriats.\textsuperscript{79} With the realignment of influence in favor of the Gusinoe Ozero \textit{datsan}, the rebuilding and expansion of the main temple was only a matter of time. The first expansion occurred shortly after 1809, when an enlarged wooden temple with several spires was constructed.\textsuperscript{80}

Almost fifty years later in 1858, work began on a new main temple befitting the status of this primary \textit{datsan} in eastern Siberia. In a pattern increasingly typical for large Buddhist temples in this area, the main floor of the \textit{tsokchen-dugan} was of brick, with two upper stories in wood (Figure 33). The primary entrance on the south facade is defined by a portico with six large masonry columns, in contrast to the usual practice of Buriat and Mongolian temple architecture where the columns of the portico are of wood.\textsuperscript{81} A contemporary account identified the construction supervisor as a Russian (Voronin) from Novoselenginsk, but noted that the builders were Buriats, who since the eighteenth century had rapidly assimilated the building crafts imported by the Russians.\textsuperscript{82}
Although 1870 is usually given as the date of the temple’s completion, work on the richly decorated, colorful interior continued until the end of the century. The main feature of the interior was an altar with a large gilded bronze statue of the Buddha symbolizing Mount Sumeru, the central locus of Buddhist cosmology. As Liudvig Minert has noted:

Lamaist temples in Mongolia and Buriatiia always placed their main part toward the north, the contemporary location, according to Buddhist teaching, of the Shigemuni-Buddha. The middle part of the north wall is given to space for the main burkhan [deities]—sculptural representations of Buddhas, Boddhisattvas and Dharmapalas.

Unfortunately, the persecution of Buddhism during the Soviet period and the closing of the Gusinoozersk datsan in 1938 led to the almost total loss of the interior of the main temple.

Only the exterior of the tsokchen-dugan still provides a view of its intricate symbolism, reflected in the ascent of receding levels suggestive of the stupa form. The first level, with its decorated portico, contained the primary space for worship, while the upper levels defined a more remote sanctum closed to lay worshippers. The second level contained ritual texts and vessels, and the third—the most holy, known as the "gonkan"—was dedicated to the temple’s guardian spirit, or Dharmapala. The upper levels were surrounded by galleries that supported curved, decorated roofs and
accommodated ritual processions. On exterior as well as interior, the choice of color reflected the complex interpretations of the mandala.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Gusinoe Ozero datsan contained at least 18 temples, of which only two have survived (another small temple, the Devadzhin, has been rebuilt for display near Ulan-Ude). Perhaps the most revered of the lost temples was that dedicated to the Boddhisattva Maidara (Maitreya), built in the late nineteenth century and decorated in brilliant red, symbolizing the color of life. Among the few surviving temples at the Gusinoozersk datsan, the Dugan Choira served as a school for the study of Buddhist philosophy, the primary, but by no means only, area of instruction within Buriat monasteries, which were of the Shaddha type. As the educational center of the monastery, the Dugan Choira (Figure 34) was second in size to the adjacent main temple, the tsokchen-dugan. The Dugan Choira consisted of a brick main story containing a single hall large enough to accommodate the monastery’s students and a wooden second story dedicated to the guardian spirit.

Although seemingly simple in design and architectural ornamentation, the Dugan Choira embodies an integrated system of structural logic, subtle proportions and the symbolic use of polychrome decoration. In the words of one specialist:

All the architecture of the building is polychromatic. The predominant colors are white for the masonry walls and dark red in the painting of the wooden siding of the second story and the wooden frieze of the first. The painting of details uses bright-red, green,
blue, yellow, and their shades. Frequently elements of the same type in a horizontal row have a specific alternation of different colors.\textsuperscript{88}

On the interior of the temple, the polychromatic emphasis continued in the requisite iconic images of the Buddha in painting and sculpture along the north wall. The gradual restoration of the Gusinoozersk datsan temples and shrines offers hope for the return of the major historic center of Buddhism in the Buriat Republic.

The most active Buddhist center in the Buriat Republic is the Ivolginsk datsan located near the settlement of the same name on the Ivolga River. Founded in 1946 after the destruction or closure of previous Buddhist monastic communities, the Ivolginsk datsan was situated 25 kilometers to the southwest of Ulan-Ude and appears to have served as a propaganda gesture for the Soviet regime.\textsuperscript{89} Nonetheless, its temples, shrines and libraries follow regional Buddhist principles in structure and decoration. The most notable example is the main temple, or tsokchen-dugan (Figure 35). Although built in the late 1940s with light-colored engineering brick, the temple displays proportions and ornamentation on both exterior and interior that adhere to Buddhist traditions. The monastery’s ancillary structures are for the most part built of wood and include a smaller temple to the west of the tsokchen-dugan. Although more modest in design, a number of these wooden structures are also painted in polychrome patterns.
The two other major Buriat centers of Buddhism that have survived from the pre-revolutionary period—the Aginsk and Tsugol datsans—are located in the Aginsk Buriat Autonomous Region, now a part of Chita Province. The Aginsk datsan (also known as Agin-datsan) was established in 1811 at the outskirts of the Aginsk settlement, whose name derives from the shallow Aga River. Although the steppes of this area are devoid of trees, the monastery itself is situated in a sacred pine grove planted by monks in the nineteenth century. Together with the Tsugol datsan, established on the Onon River in 1801, the Aginsk datsan became a center of learning among the Buriat people, with specialists in Tibetan Buddhist medicine (manba) and the system of Buddhist religious thought known locally as “tsannid” (in Tibetan, mtshan-nyid). By the early twentieth century, the Aginsk datsan had also become the foremost publisher of Buddhist literature in the Buriat territory.

The Aginsk monastery’s first temple is one of the earliest Buriat masonry temples and the oldest still standing (Figure 36). Built in 1816, the two-story cuboid structure with cruciform details suggests the influence of Russian church architecture at a time when Buddhist temple construction was still limited by tsarist authorities. The design represents a distinctively local mixture of Tibetan Buddhist motifs and Russian building methods, which had been thoroughly assimilated as early as the eighteenth century by Buriat craftsmen. Nonetheless, the forms of the roof, the main portal (on the south facade) and the interior clearly suggest Tibetan Buddhist sources. Although the Aginsk temple is still in active use, the design type exemplified in this early, and rare, nineteenth century masonry temple would be supplanted a few decades later by patterns of more specifically Tibetan and Chinese origins.

The primary example of Buddhist architecture at the Aginsk datsan is the subsequent tsokchen-dugan, built in 1878 to accommodate the substantial growth of the monastery. This imposing structure, 16 meters in width, displays a tripartite structural ascent that also symbolized the sacred mountain of Sumeru. The tripartite form is generally similar to that of the main temple at the Gusinoozersk datsan (see Figure 33); yet the Gusinoozersk temple, built 1858–1870, is considerably more modest in scale. The entrance to the Aginsk tsokchen-dugan is framed by a wide portico of six large columns, whose positions are echoed on the interior by the spacing of five rows of six columns that support the main area for worship and study.

The space above the temple portico serves as a platform for an enclosed wooden gallery, whose dark surface contrasts with the white stuccoed walls of the main structure. The gallery front is marked by five apertures (four windows and one door) situated with perfect symmetry within the spaces defined by the six columns below. The gallery was also encased by a balustrade that allowed the lamas egress to the space above the portico. This functional and harmonious design is delineated horizontally by the ornamental cornices and by rooflines with curved corners supporting figures of dragons. The peak of the gallery’s double-pitched (or gambrel) roof supported golden forms of the Dharma wheel, symbol of the “Eightfold Way,” flanked by two figures of deer—one male, one female—representing innocence and submission to the spiritual teachings.
If the second level of the temple served as a space for manuscripts and religious literature, third level (the gonkan) served in the traditional pattern as the inner sanctum devoted to the guardian deities. Built entirely of wood, the gonkan was surrounded by an open gallery that allowed ceremonial processions around the entire sacred space. The columns of the gallery supported the decorated cornice and eaves of the temple’s culminating roof, also double-pitched. In accordance with Buddhist tradition, the ridge at the top of the gonkan gambrel roof was surmounted with a ganjir, a stupa-like figure representing a lotus flower from which extends the conical form of a bhumba vessel supporting yet another such vessel. These ascending forms offer a reprise of the Mount Sumeru motif. Also on the ridge, on either side of the

Figure 36 Temple (1816), Aginsk datsan, Aginsk (Photograph: William Brumfield).
ganjir, were two vessels known as “chintanami” (jewels), which typically contained fragments of holy texts.\textsuperscript{96}

The entire temple exterior was elaborately decorated with carved brackets, guilded copper disks and depictions of holy figures such as Padma Sambhava, the Indian yogi who is considered the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. As with other major temples, the rich polychrome ornamentation can presumably be linked to color symbolism based on the sacred mandala, where green signifies north and the Guardian King Vaishravana, yellow signifies south and Virudhaka, white signifies east and Dhritarashtra, and red signifies west with Virupaksha.\textsuperscript{97} In 2000, the Aginsk tsokchen-dugan was in the process of a fundamental restoration (Figure 37) undertaken with the aid of Chinese craftsmen as part of the revival of the monastery. As at other large datsans, the main temple at Aginsk was surrounded with structures (primarily of wood) that included a Maidara (Maitreya) temple with a fifteen-meter high statue of the Boddhisattva and a Dugan Choira for religious studies. Most of these structures were destroyed in the late 1930s.

The Aginsk tsokchen-dugan signaled a new wave of major temple construction toward the end of the nineteenth century in territory inhabited by the Buriats. The rival of the Aginsk monastery in terms of administrative importance and scholarly accomplishment was the Tsugol datsan, founded in 1801 near the Tsugol and Onon
Rivers in the eastern part of what is now the Aginsk Buriat Autonomous Region. Although a fire in 1887 severely damaged its masonry tsokchen-dugan (originally built 1865–1868), restoration proceeded rapidly and the temple was re-opened the following year. Work on expansion and enhancement of the Tsugol tsokchen-dugan continued into the 1890s, at which point it was considered one of the most imposing temples in eastern Siberia, very close in design to the main temple at the Aginsk datsan.

Indeed, such highly placed tsarist officials as Anatolii Kulomzin, a proponent of Russian colonization who toured the Transbaikal territory in 1897 as head of the powerful Committee of the Siberian Railroad, expressed grudging admiration for the cultural level of Buddhist lamas and the beauty of their temples. Kulomzin, of course, supported the expansion of Russian Orthodoxy as a cohesive element for the expansion of Russian settlement. The great tragedy is the extent to which Buriat religious architecture, as well as so many Russian Orthodox shrines, would be destroyed within four decades of Kulomzin’s inspection.

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Notes


On the Savior Church, see Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 31.

On the establishment of the monastery, see Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 111; Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 17. As this author had occasion to observe, the monastery is currently used as an asylum for the mentally ill.


A complete listing of all Trinity Monastery structures is contained in N. A. Petunova, ed., *Gosudarstvenny spisok nedvizhimikh pamiatnikov istorii i kul’tury Respubliki Buriatii* (Ulan-Ude: Ministerstvo kul’tury Respubliki Buriatii, 1999), 64.

For a detailed analysis, with plans, of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century structures of the Trinity Monastery, see Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 116–119.

The slaughter of Zabolotskii’s group, which included his son, is recorded in Georgii N. Rumiantsev, *Sbornik dokumentov po istorii Buriatii XVII v* (Ulan-Ude: 1960), 192. On the commemoration of Zabolotskii, see Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 17–18.


Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 123.


On the missionary activity of the Transfiguration and Trinity Monasteries, which included the translation of religious texts into Mongolian, see Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 23. The other surviving brick church at the Transfiguration Monastery was dedicated to Saint Nicholas and built 1802–1812 to replace a log church assembled after the 1769 fire. This small church had little exterior decoration and was also much disfigured during the Soviet era.

On the founding of Selenginsk, see Artem’ev, *Goroda*, 64–65; Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 83–84.


On the Totma decorative elements, see V. P. Vygolov, “Arkhitketura barokko v Tot’me,” in *Pamiatniki russkoi arkhitketury i monumental’nogo iskusstva*, ed. V. P. Vygolov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 119.

The Church of Saint Nicholas has been restored and moved to the Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of Transbaikal (Petunova, *Gosudarstvenny spisok*, 42).

The north altar of the Trinity Church vestibule was dedicated in 1818 to the Intercession of the Virgin. The south chapel, added four decades later, was dedicated in 1856 to Saint Innokentii of Irkutsk. See Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 25; Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 30–31.

The Tvorogovo church is described in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 131–132.


[32] On the altars, see Minert, *Pamiainiki*, 60; Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 42. The Trinity Cathedral was not the town’s first masonry building: in the latter part of the eighteenth century, work had begun on a Merchants Court, or gostinnyi dvor, but without substantial results.

[33] The 1870 addition is noted in Minert, *Pamiainiki*, 61; Popova, *Kiakhta*, 17.

[34] On the construction of the Church of the Resurrection, see Minert, *Pamiainiki*, 63; Popova, *Kiakhta*, 18; Mitypova, *Pravoslavnye khramy*, 43.


[38] The masonry Church of the Dormition is examined in Minert, *Pamiainiki*, 70–71; Popova, *Kiakhta*, 20.


[48] Very little has been published on the Red Barracks. For a general view taken in 1913, as well as an account of the Civil War executions, see Popova, *Kiakhta*, 38. The barracks are listed in Petunova, * Gosudarstvennyi spisok*, 60.


[50] The checkerboard construction history of the Merchants Court, with a general plan, is presented in Minert, *Pamiainiki*, 26–28. See also Gur’ianov, *Po Bol’shoi*, 67–69, with an excellent photograph taken in 1917 from the tower of the Administrative Building (*Prisutstvennye

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mesta; now substantially rebuilt) and including both the Merchants Court and the Trading Rows. See also T. S. Proskuriakova, “Ulan-Ude (byvshii Verkhneudinsk),” *Arkhitekturoe nasledstvo* 31 (1983), 76–88.

[51] The Trading Rows construction and alteration are described in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 28–29. For further information on the Kurbatov dynasty, see Gur’ianov, *Po Bol’shoi*, 82.

[52] The house at Pochtamt Street No. 22 has been transferred to the Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of Transbaikal. A detailed description of the house, with plans, is contained in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 35–36.

[53] See Gur’ianov, *Po Bol’shoi*, 24. As one of the best examples of its type, this house has also been transferred to the Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of Transbaikal.

[54] Liliia Kal’mina and Leonid V. Kuras, *Evreiskaia obshchina v zapadnom Zabaikal’e* (Ulan-Ude: BNTs, 1999), 79. This volume is a pioneering, detailed study of the settlement of Jews in the Transbaikal area, with extensive archival research.


[61] On monumental Constructivism in Leningrad, see Brumfield, *History*, 479–481.


[64] Although there is still no published information on use of Japanese prisoners-of-war (and perhaps Soviet prisoners as well) on major building projects such as the Theater of Opera and Ballet, this information was presented as fact by local specialists in discussions with the author.

[65] A history of the design and construction of the Theater of Opera and Ballet is presented in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 44–49. For brief commentary on other buildings of the same period, see Zhimbiev, *History*, 61.


See Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 160. As Minert points out, the Russian Orthodox Church sharply opposed this official status, which was issued primarily as a means of controlling Buddhism; but the result only increased Buddhist authority among the Buriats. For a more detailed view of relations between the tsarist government and local Buddhists, see K. M. Gerasimova, *Lamaizm i natsional’no-kolonial’naia politika tsarizma v Zabaikal’e v XIX i nachale XX v* (Ulan-Ude, 1957). See also Vashkevich, *Lamaity v Vostochnoi Sibiri* (St Petersburg, 1885).


On the prototypical Buddhist forms, see Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 151–153. See also Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 132.


See Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 149.

The original Tsongol temple is discussed in Yumzhapova, “Vliianie,” 268. See also Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 12 and fig. 2.


Plans of the original and rebuilt wooden main temple at Gusinoozersk *datsan* are provided in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 97. See also Yumzhapova, “Vliianie,” 266–267.


Information on the builders is provided in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 98.


Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 106. See also A. M. Pozdneev, *Ocherki byta buddiiskikh monastyrei i buddiiskogo dukhovenstva v Mongolii* (St Petersburg, 1897), 37.

The functions of the various levels are explored in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 105, 154–157, 166–167. See also Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 142.

The destroyed Maidara temple is discussed in Minert, *Pamiatniki*, 98; Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 140.


The Ivolginsk *datsan* and temple are dated in Petunova, *Gosudarstvennyi spisok*, 52.

Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 137.

Baradiin, “Buddiiskie monastyri,” 82.

The relation between Buriat Buddhist and Russian (or Ukrainian) Orthodox architecture are examined in Yumzhapova, “Vliianie,” 265, although the similarities are defined largely in terms of wooden architecture. Yumzhapova (“Vliianie,” 270) notes that the highly centered designs of such temples can also be explained by the presence of East Asian elements.

Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 137.

An elaboration on these and other symbolic motifs is contained in Baradiin, “Buddiiskie monastyri,” 87. See also Badmazhapov, *Buddiiskaia zhivopis’*, 205.
For an archival photograph of the Aginsk tsokchen-dugan as it appeared around 1890, see Minert, *Pamiatniki*, Plate 6.

See Baradiin, “Buddiiskie monastyri,” 86. These forms also appear on the ridge of the similar tsokchen-dugan at Tsugol (see I. G. Vasil’eva, “K istorii Tsugol’skogo datsana na Onone,” in Khamaganova, *Orient*, 126). Vasil’eva notes that during ransacking of the datsans in the late 1930s, participants mistakenly believed the chintanami to contain actual jewels or other valuables and inevitably smashed them in the search for loot, only to discover fragments of sacred texts.

Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 141, 143.

For a history and description of the Tsugol datsan, see Vasil’eva, “K istorii Tsugol’skogo datsana,” 121–135. Vasil’eva notes that local missionaries considered the fire of 1887 to have been deliberately set by the lamas in order to avoid lengthy bureaucratic procedures for the major reconstruction or expansion of a temple. See also Liudvig K. Minert, “Tsugol’skii buddiiskii monastyr,” in *Pamiatniki istorii i kul’tury Sibiri* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978), 147–52. On the destruction inflicted on the Tsugol and other datsans in the late 1930s, see Yumzhapova, “Razmeshchenie,” 123–24.

For archival views of the Tsugol datsan, see Minert, *Pamiatniki*, Plates 5, 98.