

Monasteries in medieval Novgorod and its suburbs

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Monastic communities in Russia were an important factor of the emergence of Christian culture and the development of social organisation in the medieval city. The majority of known mon-

asteries in the 11th-13th centuries were concentrated in cities and their suburbs. The process of “monastic colonization” of Russia started not until the 14th-16th centuries: in connection with new land development monasteries were established far away from large city centres (Kliuchevsky 1871, 370). It could be possible that the presence of a monastic community was one of the conditions which granted settlements a city status. A large quantity of monasteries in the cities, opposite to Western Europe, could be explained by specific features of both the orthodox monastic life and social organization in the medieval Russian city. Centuries-old strong connections

of monasteries with certain families of Novgorod nobles were traced according to the written sources (Musin 2010a). Such situation made these monastic communities *ecclesia propria* или *Eigenkirche*, although there are no direct similarities because of vagueness of donator’s rights on ecclesiastical property in orthodox canon law (Stutz 1964, Stefanovich 2002, Wood 2006). Such dependence on secular element has reflections in monastic material culture.

The total number of monasteries within distance of 30 km from Novgorod reaches up to 64 (Sekretar’ 2011, 11). Today 25 of them have survived or reconstructed buildings. The constructions of 39 others were lost or demolished through centuries. Studies of Novgorod monasteries are connected with their complicated history.

An important point of Novgorod monasteries’ history is connected with the secularization of church property in 1764 that abolished the majority of them and only 17 were kept active.

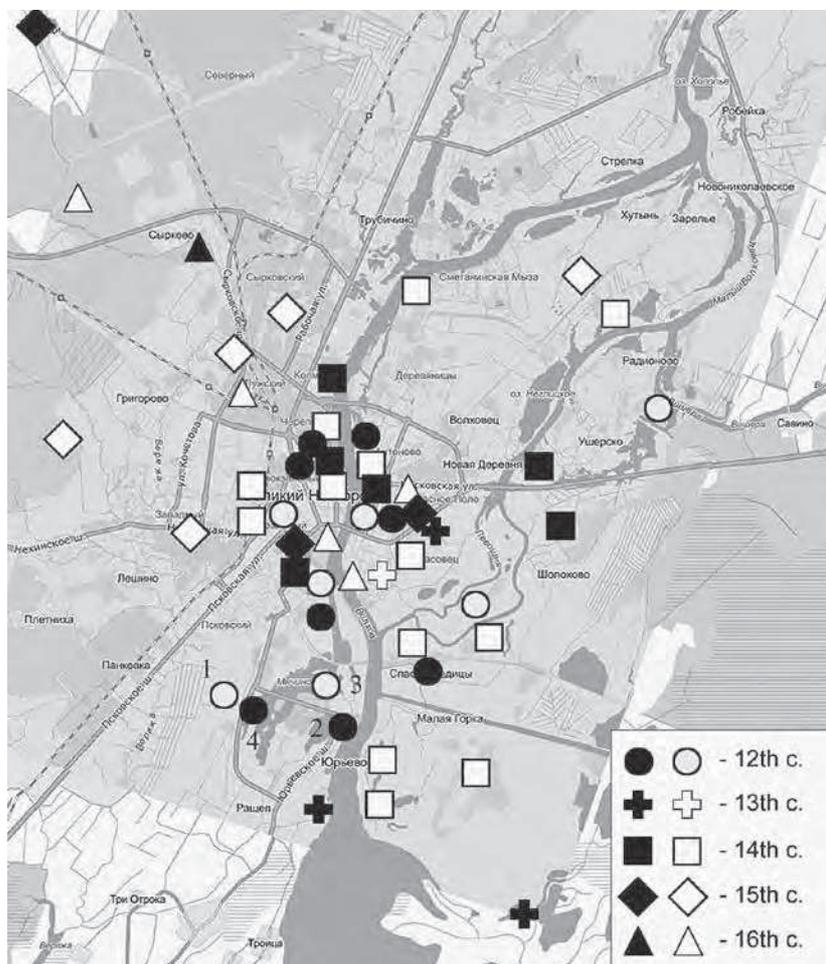


Fig. 1 Monasteries in Novgorod and its suburbs. Map shows date of establishment of the monastery in various figures. Monasteries with survived buildings are shown in black color; demolished buildings are shown in white color. Numbered monasteries: 1 - Arkazhskij monastery of Assumption; 2 - Yuriev monastery of St. George; 3 - Monastery of St. Panteleimon; 4 - Monastery of Annunciation on Miachino lake.

During the 2nd half of the 18th-1st half of the 19th century the majority of buildings in abolished monasteries were lost. The revelation of their location became a successfully solved task which based on complex analysis of written sources, maps of 18th-19th centuries and small archaeological research in several cases. Results of this work are presented on the map (Fig. 1).

all monasteries were abolished. Some churches were given to religious communities under condition of restoration and repair works. A large quantity of buildings dated back to the 18th-19th centuries was demolished for building materials. At the same time medieval monuments were protected as national heritage and transferred to the Novgorod museum possession.



Fig. 2 Novgorod. Yuriev monastery. Monastic girdles embossed with images of Twelve Christian feasts. Leather. Excavations by M.K. Karger (Archival picture by M. K. Karger).

The process of secularization allowed to start studies of culture and archaeology of Novgorod's monasteries. Part of the monasteries' sacristies was transferred to Novgorod's churches. Two volumes of the book by archimandrite Makarij (Miroljubov) were published in the early 1860s (Makarij 1860). This book deals with history and liturgical objects of survived churches and monasteries. It contains descriptions of several religious artifacts which have not survived up to modern times. Thus this book is still an important source on Novgorod's monasteries.

The next stage of studies started in the 30s of the 20th century. After the revolution of 1917

Archaeological research of monastery churches in Novgorod was started by Mikhail Karger at that time. Most important works were held in St. George church of *Yuriev* monastery. There were discovered 9 undisturbed burials dated to the 13th century. They belong to the *Riurikovichi* dynasty, local nobility and monks (Karger 1946). Several burials contain leather monks' girdles (Fig. 2) embossed with images of the Twelve Christian feasts (*Dodekaorthon*) (Musin 2010b) and *analabos* – cross-shaped shoulder straps of wicker leather (Fig. 3). They present earliest examples of such monastic habits while the same objects are known from excavated burials in the Great Monastery of the Caves (*Pechersky* Monastery) in Kiev, Moscow

Kremlin, Smolensk, Tver and are dated back to the 14th-15th centuries (Evans/Wixom 1997, 305f., 320). The girdles of this type under consideration should be compared with the description of monastic habits in the famous *Typikon* (Ecclesiastical Statute) of Patriarch of Constantinople Alexis Studios of 1030s. The original Greek text has not survived but its Slavonic translation made in the

shoulder straps were in monastic practice till the great liturgical reform, when in the 14th-15th centuries *Studios Typikon* was replaced by the statute of the Laure of St. Sabbas. Karger also held archaeological research in the monastic church of Transfiguration in Kovaliovo and uncovered there several stone sarcophagi. They contained textiles of monastic clothing and *analabos*. Results of these works were not published (Sedov 2000).



Fig. 3 Novgorod. Yuriev monastery. *Analabos*. Leather. Excavations by M.K. Karger (Archival picture by M. K. Karger).

2nd half of the 12th century in Novgorod is housed today in the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Pentkovskij 2001, 384). This type of girdles and

Military actions of 1941-1944 caused a lot of damage to monasteries situated in the battle-line. After the war large-scale restoration works were carried out in the 1950-70s although some monasteries are still ruined. Political changes of late 20th century followed with restitution of four monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church. Small-scale archaeological research was mainly connected with restoration tasks and reconstruction of frescoes.

Large-scale archaeological works were held in 1962-1963 in Arkazhskij monastery (Orlov 1962; 1963a; 1963b. Orlov/Krasnorech'ev 1967). The further text will describe this monastic complex more thoroughly.

Recent archaeological research deals mainly with suburban institutions except the monastery of Nativity of the Virgin in Molotkovo (Sedov 2004), which was included into city borders in the 14th century.

Unique liturgical utensils of a medieval altar and a burial of the 14th century were discovered in the monastic church of Transfiguration on *Nereditsa*

(Sedov 2002). Excavations of St. Nikolas church on *Liatka* raised a question on the possibility of building sacrifice before church foundation. Such tradition is known from Byzantine Empire, although uncovered horse skeletons could have other interpretation (Sedov 2011a).

Small architectural excavations were held in *Nikolo-Mostishchskij* (Antipov/Bulkin 2011), *Nikolo-Sokol'nitskij* and Epiphany monasteries, the latter on Vodskaia road (Antipov et al. 2007). Architectural studies of 15th century monasteries allowed to discuss spatial structures of late medieval monastic communities (Antipov 2007a; 2007b).

New data on monastic culture were received during excavations of closely situated St. Panteleimon monastery and Annunciation monastery on *Miachino* lake (Sedov 2008, 2010, 2011b). Important information on cemetery structure around the church was gained as a result of excavations in St. Panteleimon. Research in Annunciation monastery discovered the northern border of the monastic territory with remains of gates and gate-church. Excavations also included a part of cellars with everyday life artifacts and part of a silver payment ingot - *grivna*.



Fig. 4 Novgorod. Monastery of Assumption. Seal. Lead (Photo: A. Andrienko).

Studies of topography and history of monastic ownership of land were an important field of research in the 2nd half of the 20th century (Petrova et al. 2000. Ankudinov 2007). Several case-studies deal with interaction between monasteries and city community. Monastic administration in the 15th century is confirmed by lead seals (**Fig. 4**), documents issued by magistrates of Novgorod districts and possibly kept in city archives (Yanin 2004, 241f.). It is necessary to

mention the elective post of Novgorod *archimandrite* who controlled monastic life and took part in city government (Yanin 2004).

History of research of Novgorod monasteries shows that archaeological studies were fragmentary and mainly aimed on architectural remains. Everyday life of monasteries appears to be of peripheral interest. Thus, it is impossible to bring light on every question of the colloquium. The archaeologically most well-studied *Arkazhskij* monastery of Assumption could be an example of Novgorod suburb monastery. It was founded with building a wooden church in 1153 (Novgorod Chronicle, 21) in a distance of 2-2.5 km from Novgorod kremlin. Its founder, *begumenos Arkadij*, previously was the *begumenos* of the nearby situated (about 2 km) monastery of St. Panteleimon, which was established by prince *Iziaslav Mstislavich* in 1134. Archaeological research discovered traces of land ploughing as premonastic use (**Fig. 5**). Donations of land from the prince's domain to the monastery allow to suppose specific connections of *Arkadij* with the prince's family. The majority of the earliest Novgorod monasteries was founded directly by the prince's family or, at least, with their support. The growing power of city nobility, which started in the 2nd half of the 12th century, increased its role in monastic life.

In the 13th-15th centuries the monastery was tightly connected with *Prusskaia* street nobility (*Mikhalkovichi* boyar clan). This can be proven by various articles in the Novgorod Chronicle. The custom to take monastic vow before death became widely spread in the 13th century, as we could see during brief survey of the investigations in *Yuriev* monastery. Within the walls of Assumption monastery the founder of boyar clan, *Mikhalka* (+1206) (Novgorod Chronicle, 48), was buried. His son, *Tverdislav*, took here a vow finishing his political career in 1220 (Novgorod Chronicle, 62). Archaeological research discovered a large quantity of burials in stone sarcophagi in the area of the monastery.

Another evidence of connections between monastery and local nobility is the building activity. Building a church of stone shows both importance of a certain monastery and the role of the donator, mentioned in written sources, because wood was the most common building



Fig. 5 Novgorod. Monastery of Assumption. Ploughing traces (after Orlov 1963a, fig. 165).

material in medieval Novgorod. The wooden church of Assumption was replaced by a stone building in 1188/89 (Novgorod Chronicle, 33). *Posadnik Tverdislav Mikhalkovich* builds a stone gate-church in 1206 (Novgorod Chronicle, 48). A stone church after the Synod of St. Michael the Archangel was built in 1395 by the order of *Isak Okinfov* (Novgorod Chronicle, 167). Finally, *posadnik Iurij Dmitrievich* and his brother *Iakov* built the church of Miracle at Chonae in 1407/1408 (Novgorod Chronicle, 179).

Remains of all these churches (except gate-church) were discovered during excavations (**Fig. 6**). Church of Assumption was a small (8 x 14 m) rectangular building with three apses and western vestibule. More than thirty burials were discovered during excavations: rectangular stone shrines dated back to the 12-13th centuries and stone sarcophagi which belong to the 14th-15th centuries (**Fig. 7**). Some leather fragments, comparable to those found in *Yuriev* monastery, were discovered in these burials. Two other churches were typical Novgorod churches of republican time: church with one apse about 12

- 14 m in size. Occupation layers around churches did not conserve any monastic building, however, many objects characterizing everyday monastic life were found. They do not differ much from other archaeological material from Novgorod.

Undoubtedly, stone buildings demonstrate the level of wealth and importance of the monastery. But its economic power was based on land possessions. *Arka-zhskij* monastery owned 776.5 *obzha*¹ of land (Sekretar' 2011, 571). The monastery was in the list of 6 richest religious houses of Novgorod. More than a half of its land was situated at a distance about 200 km to the south of Novgorod; land within the boundaries

of prince's domain. This fact proves links with prince's family at the early history of the monastery. Nearby land property was rather small and, probably, was given by city government at the moment of the monastery's foundation (Ankudinov 2007, 292). Small sized plots of land possibly were a result of private donations. Such system – single large land property and several small ones – was common for other Novgorod monasteries, independently of their size and importance. Written sources of 16th-17th centuries also mention plots in the city which were owned by monasteries.

The archaeological research in Novgorod discovered specific phenomena and provided unique information on monastic life and the city (Musin 2003, 2004). It was clear that the clergy lived at several city estates excavated at Nerevsky, Dmitrievsky and Troitsky sites (Kolchin et al. 1981. Khoroshev 1982. Sedova 1994).

¹ *Obzha* is a unit of square measurement of agricultural cultivated land in medieval Novgorod. It has no exact equivalent in modern metric system but can be estimated to have been about 1,2 hectare.

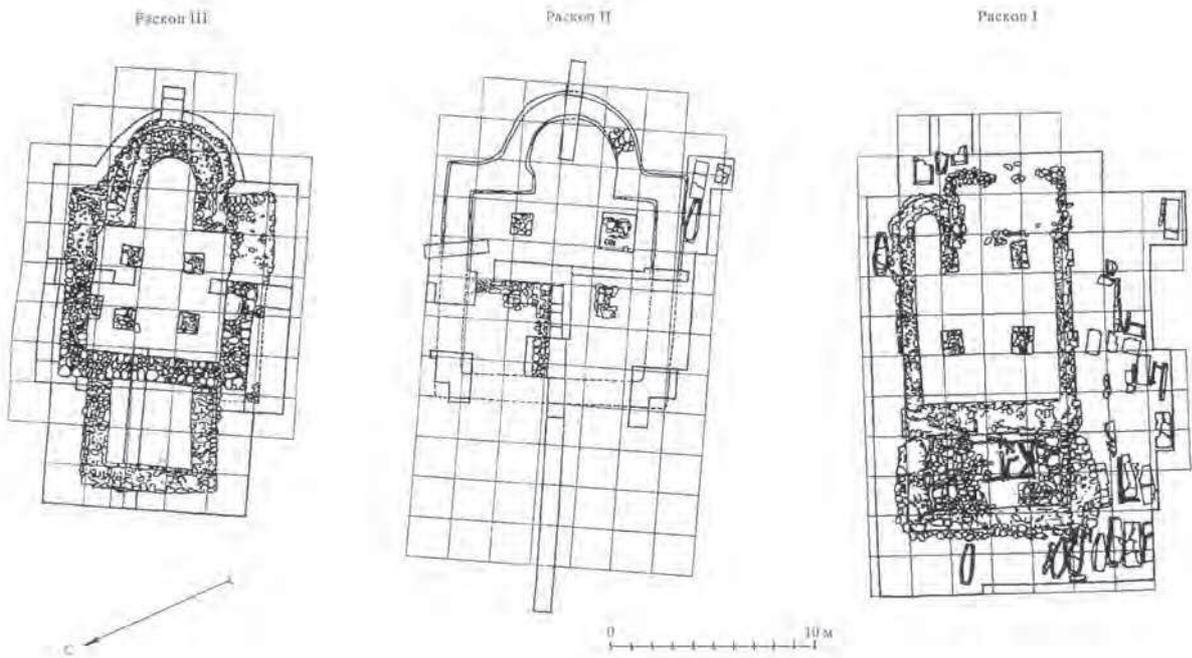


Fig. 6 Novgorod. Monastery of Assumption. United excavation plan.



Fig. 7 Novgorod. Monastery of Assumption. Church of Assumption. Seen from the west (after Orlov 1962, fig. 9).

Among a large amount of Christian liturgical and private devotional objects discovered on city estates several finds can be confidently identified as monastic objects: for example, fragments of leather girdles with embossed Christian icons, like already known objects from *Yuriev* monastery, have been found on estate E of Troitsky site in deposits dated to the 1420s (**Fig. 8**).

the 13th century. Two of them (682 (Yanin/Zalizniak 1993, 66f.), 717 (Yanin/Zalizniak 2000, 15f.)) are letters between nuns of the nearby situated St. Barbara nunnery and deal with various monastic procedures. Three letters (648, 660, 681 (Yanin/Zalizniak 1993, 44, 52, 66)) mention organization of monastic burial, various objects of monastic robes and domestic activities. Three



Fig. 8 Novgorod. Troitsky site. Monastic girdle. Leather. Around 1420 (Photo: S. Toropov, drawing: A. Musin).

Several complexes of birch-bark documents which come from various city estates show some links with certain monasteries and indicate the presence of monks and nuns in town yards. A letter (No. 605) from one monk to another with disappointment at misunderstanding and effort of reconciliation originates from estate A of Troitsky site and is dated to the early 12th century (Yanin/Zalizniak 1986, 68ff.). A group of 8 birch-bark letters from estate I (cyrillic *И*) of Troitsky site is dated back to the mid-12th to the 1st half of

other letters (652 (Yanin/Zalizniak 1993, 47), 727 (Yanin/Zalizniak 2000, 28) and 729 (Yanin/Zalizniak 2000, 29)) have liturgical content. Material culture from this estate contains several objects connected with clerical activity. All these facts evidence that estate I could be the specific city yard of a monastery where food stuff and goods were kept. Probably estate G was also connected with St.Barbara nunnery. Birch-bark letter 657, discovered here, mentions furs for the nunnery (Yanin/Zalizniak 1993, 50f.).

City estate I of Nerevsky site was probably occupied by clerics during the 2nd half of the 13th to the 1st half of the 14th century. The owner's label with inscription "(belongs to) Maria the nun" (323, end of the 13th century) was found among several birch-bark letters with clerical content (Artsikhovskiy 1963, 13). Another item linked to monastic life can be a handle of a crosier with the name "Emelyan" (*Emelianos*) (beginning of the 15th century) (Yanin 1993, 116. Kolchin 1968, 31), which could be associated to the 25th archbishop of Novgorod who accepted the name of *Euthymius* (1423-1429).

A bone signet "God's goods", dating to the late 13th-early 14th century, originates from this estate I of Nerevsky site (Fig. 9). Such object could be interpreted as evidence of trading activities of a monastic or clerical community. There is no clear indication of international trade of Novgorodian monasteries. Meanwhile, the everyday life of citizens of Novgorod, connected with the archbishop's administration and possibly with governance of monastery economy as well as that of several rural monasteries, comprised the possessing and use of some European objects (brooches, objects with heraldic mountings, ceramic and glass vessels, textiles) as archaeological finds testify (Musin 2006, 2012).

Such objects discovered within city estates can be considered as evidence of monastic living outside monasteries during the 12th-15th centuries and presumably the 11th one. All



Fig. 9 Novgorod. Nerevsky site. Bone signet "God's goods" (Photo: A. Musin).

these facts show that monastic life in medieval Novgorod was organized in a paradox manner: the interesting part of archaeological evidence on Novgorod monasticism comes not from excavations of monasteries but from ordinary urban yards where monks sometimes lived. Such city yards could be considered as property of suburban monasteries within city borders. But some archaeological data and written sources allow supposing that such yards could also be places of permanent monastic living.

There are numerous direct or indirect evidences that earliest Russian monasteries were cenobitic with acceptance of the *Typicon* of *Studios* from Constantinople. But introduction of cenobitic laws became urgent again in the 15th-16th centuries (Kruglova 2008). Groups of monks and nuns living outside monasteries but within urban estates seem to be a distinctive feature of the history of monasticism in Novgorod. Such system could be regarded as a compromise between Cenobite Rule according the *Studios Typikon* accepted in medieval Russia and idiorhythmic principles (at least the living on their own). It could be explained by close connection of monastic structures with the town community, especially with aristocratic families illustrating archaic principles of organization.

Also another explanation of at least a part of finds of monastic habits should be taken into account. The ritual of taking veil before death spread in Russian society since mid-13th century. Consequently the burial of "new monks" should be done according to monastic funeral rituals and in monastic robes. Monastic finds in urban yards could reflect such practice.

Novgorod monasteries were strongly connected with the city: city nobles established them and donated land to them; eminent citizens became sponsors of stone churches; they took monastic vows and were buried within monastery walls. Many monasteries owned city plots and sometimes monks lived at ordinary urban estates.

Loss of independence and following repressions inevitably reflected on Novgorod monasteries. Land confiscations affected not only the nobility but also monasteries. As a matter of fact *Arkazhskij* monastery lost half of its property in 1478 and about 85% of it to early 16th century

(Sekretar' 2011, 570). So the long period of decline started. The monastery suffered from Swedish occupation in the early 17th century. Written sources mention two damaged churches and 7 inhabitants (Opis 1617, 107-108). Financial support in 1626 (Opis 1617, 259, 289) shows mainly the monastery's reputation than its wealth. Finally it lost self-government and became a part of *Iuriev* monastery in 1722 (Sekretar' 2011, 571). The only stone building left in the monastery was the church of Assumption in the 18th century. All other buildings – living cells, granary and cellars – were made of wood. Also cherry and apple gardens were situated within the monastery's fence. Stable, cow-shed, windmill and threshing barn were listed outside in the inventory of 1737 (Sekretar' 2011, 571).

The monastery of Assumption was abolished in 1764 during the secularization. The church of Assumption was converted into parish church. Demolition of the church for building stone took place in 1847, its bells and stone crosses were moved to the nearby situated church of Annunciation.

That was a story about the long way of Novgorod monasteries from the glory of wealth and power to the glory of national heritage and picturesque views. However, the present survey allowed us to highlight the special features of monastic life in the east of the Hanse area and trace the main gaps which should be covered during the future investigation of monastic culture in Novgorod.

Zusammenfassung

Die Erforschung der Klöster Novgorods begann erst spät in der 2. Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die große Anzahl in Novgorod und Umgebung machte ihre Erforschung nicht leichter. Schriftliche Quellen sind selten und Ausgrabungen wurden meist nur in Zusammenhang mit Restaurierungsarbeiten durchgeführt. Die frühesten Klöster entstanden im 12. Jahrhundert mit Unterstützung durch den Fürsten. Im 13.-15. Jahrhundert wurden mächtige Angehörige des städtischen Adels zu Stiftern. Sie gründeten Klöster, stifteten Land oder Steinkirchen. Familienbegräbnisse innerhalb von Klostermauern belegen die starken Verbindungen zwischen den Bürgern Novgorods und den Klöstern. Der Vor-

steher der Klöster (Archimandrit) wurde durch Wahl bestimmt und war wahrscheinlich Mitglied des Novgoroder Rates.

Dank der archäologischen Untersuchungen wurde eine spezielle Erscheinungsform monastischen Lebens in Novgorod aufgedeckt: In den weltlichen Stadtgütern wurden Objekte klösterlichen Ursprungs gefunden. Dies sind Hinweise darauf, dass Mönche nicht in Klosterzellen sondern in Einrichtungen lebten, die nicht Klosterbesitz waren. Auch Hinweise auf monastische Handelsaktivitäten wurden in den Stadtgütern gefunden.

Der Verlust der Eigenständigkeit im 15. Jahrhundert markiert den Beginn einer langen Periode des Niedergangs, in der die Klöster ihre wirtschaftliche Macht verloren. Die Säkularisierung im 18. Jahrhundert war für die meisten gleichbedeutend mit ihrem Verschwinden. Die Klosterkirchen wurden vielfach zur Gewinnung von Baumaterial abgebrochen. Es gab aber auch Neubauaktivitäten in den erhaltenen Klöstern. Nach der Revolution wurden Klöster, die überlebt hatten, abgeschafft. Einige wurden abgebrochen, aber die mittelalterlichen Kirchen wurden später Denkmäler des nationalen Kulturerbes

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