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## Decorative Detail in the Architecture of Krasnoyarsk in 1930s-1950s

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*The article dwells upon the general characteristic of domestic architecture of the period of 1930s-1950s years. The author gives a classification of versions of architectural details by its constructive-plastic signs; describes decorative types of details which have resulted from the transition to free sculptural plastic of forms. The paper touches upon the role of sculpture-decorative and decorative-plastic details as elements of a volume-spatial composition in the architecture of Krasnoyarsk of this period. The author sheds some light upon the value of decor in a town-planning composition and creation of architecturally-art shape of building. Versions of decorative details, the most widespread in architecture of cities of Siberia are analyzed. Symbolical elements and ornamental motifs in decorative plastics as characteristics for the architecture of the considered period are analyzed. Samples of historically developed types of the ornament which has formed a basis for the development of drawing in ornamented details are described. The author thoroughly analyzes composition methods of inclusion of decorative plastics in a facade composition and gives examples of the most expressive decorative details of facades of public and residential buildings in Krasnoyarsk (ornamented draughts, sockets, cartouches, bas-reliefs). The article features an analysis of a composition of large subject bas-reliefs; it contains illustrations of the author's photographic materials. The attention is focused on the problems of preservation of monuments of architecture and town-planning of regional significance in the cultural aspect.*

*Keywords: Facade plastic, decorative detail, architectural composition, artistic image, ornament, composition method*

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### Introduction

In any large Russian city a considerable share is made by the buildings of 1930s-50s years – a monument to a grandiose historical experiment on the creation of a model of the ideal city corresponding to representations of the specified period about the harmonious organization of a society. An unprecedented scope of construction works contributed to the emerging of stylistically and compositionally unified ensembles of

buildings forming outlooks of many provincial towns. In Krasnoyarsk buildings of this period to a certain extent determined visual environment of the historical center, buildings along major city roads and within residential communities.

Aesthetic perception and evaluation of this period varied, depending on the historical moment – from the euphoric welcome accompanying the victory in the World War II associated with the victory of the socialist

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system on the world stage, to the negation in line with the struggle against architectural excesses. Today, when we are free from ideological excesses in the assessment of the Architecture of 1930s-50s, we can view its meaning in a brand-new context.

Architecture of the period falls out of the global process of cultural development. For a long time, it was criticized for “architectural excesses” and did not receive sufficient and objective coverage in the scientific literature. The current assessment of this period is not so evident. Some representatives of the postmodern architecture expressed the judgment that the Soviet Stalinist architecture was the greatest architecture of the twentieth century, because being based on a populist basis; still it directly reflected the aspirations and the level of aesthetic sensitivity, which was not typical of intellectual elite or professionals, but was typical of the masses.

The uniqueness of the Soviet architecture of 1930s-50s lies in the fact that it fulfilled the social order which was not aimed at finding new types of buildings or finding solutions to economic problems, but was aimed at the creation of an artistic image. Among the most important social functions of architecture of the specified period was searching for solutions to representative and ideological problems, the embodiment of the new social content in monumental images of the classics.

The development of the classical heritage implies attention to the harmonization of the laws of form, its plastic expression. Rules of order architecture constructing, increased professional interest in the details, their stylistic purity and beauty of drawing, plastic expression – all that comprised the concept of architectural composition skills. Detail as an auxiliary means in architecture becomes a stylistic feature of architectural images (Donguzov, 1990).

## Examples

### *Types of Architectural Details*

The typology of architectural details of this period is rather large. Depending on the design and plastic features we can speak about three main types – structural, plastic, decorative types of details (Donguzov, 1990). The forms of architectural details, developed over the millennia of architecture’s development are the result of artistic and aesthetic understanding of structural and functional elements. The design and plastic details were formed as a result of plastic processing of the actual design.

Decorative types of details have arisen as a result of the transition to free plastic sculptural forms. Decorative and structural details play a constructive role. Examples of such details in the architecture of Krasnoyarsk can be keystones in the form of acanthus leaves, and the frame window openings with decorative moldings and carvings.

Sculpture and decorative details act as a partially loaded version of the decorative type of details (decorative sculpture). Decorative plastic details do not play a constructive role (bas-relief on the facade, moldings).

Decorative detail do not reveal the tectonics of structural elements, their role is to form an artistic image, in terms of philosophy and ideology of the society.

Up until the modern period of history we can trace the continuity in the development of constructive forms of details. The classical order, which is a perfect in its harmony architectural form, has not lost its value in our days. At the same time decorative detail in the classical interpretation is disappearing from the modern architecture. At the present time the period of 1930s-1950s in the domestic architecture can be considered to be the last, when the ornamental forms were represented in their classic version – with the use of ornamental motifs, developed

during thousands of years of the world architecture.

Since in the 1930s-1950s there was no clear definition of the “classics”, architects used a variety of forms from the antiquity to the Renaissance. Quite often there are examples of eclectic architecture, which are close to the eclectic architecture of the turn of the century.

In most cases the building's exterior was decorated with historical forms and decorative motifs. Antique and classic forms of decoration often acted as patterns, exact reproduction of which was provided by numerous publications of drawings of architectural details. During this period a large number of copies of published literature were intended for architects and specialists in the decoration of buildings. The specialized literature not only scrupulously described the smallest size and proportional relationship of details, but gave a detailed description of a technology of production of molded details with the main orientation on small-scale construction (Shepelev, 1995).

A large proportion of manual labor in the production of decorative facade elements led to a significant increase in the cost of construction, so the decoration of buildings in Siberian cities was inferior to gorgeousness of the decorative architecture of the capital. The relative simplicity of decoration is explained not only by economic considerations, but also by a strict hierarchy and coherence of a single system, both at the level of formation of the composition space of a single city and its ensembles, as well as in creating an architectural appearance of the different values of the cities (the capital – a regional center – a city on the periphery).

*Sculptural and Decorative Details  
in the Architecture of Krasnoyarsk*

For economic reasons the provincial architecture of the volume-spatial composition

of buildings is characterized by simplicity and brevity. Most of the volume of mass construction of buildings are in the form of a parallelepiped. Consequently particular importance in the shaping of the artistic image and composition of the facade was attached to architectural details of different types. Architects preferred such decorative forms, which allowed them to solve compositional and artistic tasks at the lowest cost. Now we can take a close look at the main varieties of ornamental details in the architecture of the Krasnoyarsk in 1950s-1930s.

Sculpture and decorative details are not widely used in the architecture of the city of Krasnoyarsk. The composition of buildings in Krasnoyarsk almost does not resort to decorative sculptures. The exceptions are isolated examples of placement of sculptures in the niches on the facades of large public buildings. In practice, the period under review was made to install sculptures of political leaders in the niches of office buildings. Gables, parapets and niches were decorated with figures of the palaces of culture workers, farmers, etc. In Krasnoyarsk-26 (a closed town of Zheleznogorsk) there is a preserved example of typical of the period sculpture and decorative details. This is a sculpture of a girl with a violin, crowning the top of the gable of the building, the theater club, located in the central town square. The sculpture was installed on two other corners of the pediment later, unfortunately, now is lost and replaced by bowls.

According to the project the building of the Office of the railways, a member of the ensemble of the central city square of Revolution, was crowned with sculptures (Slabuha, 2004). The massive Corinthian columns support the portico of the central broken entablature with installed pedestals for the sculptures. The sculptures were not installed, apparently for economic reasons.

Cheaper versions of the statutory and democratic and decorative details are vases. The

simplest forms of vases, not only were included in the design of parapets, balustrades, and were used as garbage bins, flower pots. Vases, decorated with garlands, ears, acanthus leaves, were intended to decorate the most significant buildings in the downtown area.

*Decorative Plastic Details  
in the Composition of the Facade*

Stucco moldings have become a mandatory element on the facade of buildings of any town planning significance. The decor of the apartment buildings often features rosettes of circular or rectangular shape. Rosettes have a simple geometric Fig. or ornamental vegetable filling in the character with a different number of petals. Simple round outlets are located above the windows, pediments and friezes on the two-storey houses of urban settlements in Krasnoyarsk, forming a series of elementary metric. More complex and large rosettes are found in the decoration of the five-story apartment buildings in the downtown area.

Often the simplest form of rosettes receives its development by the addition of high bay laurel leaves to the ornament. These curvy shapes were placed over doorways or supporting a semicircular balcony.

The most common form of decoration of the facades were the panels of various sizes and proportions. They were located in the spaces, in the window sill space, on free from other planes details of the wall. Panels were sometimes highlighted by the color of the background contrasting to the color of the main wall or were decorated with a rough surface formed by broken bricks bound to the wall by a mortar.

The architectural decoration of the 1930s and 50s widely used an ornamental cutting made on the breakup of elongated rectilinear architecture (rollers, belts, heels, etc.) with traditional ornamental motifs (Fig. 1. Decorative Plastic

Details in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s. Performed Using Traditional Ornamental Motifs). The basis of ornaments was made of historically known ornamental motifs (Fig. 2. Ornamental Motifs in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s.). The most common variants of ornament were the following: square, dentil (clove, toast), ovolo (ionics), guilloche, water lily, anthemion with palmetto, garlands, beads, beads with coils (Anthony White et al, 2005; Shepelev, 1995).

The most popular were ornamented shafts (festoons) of all composite types (Shepelev, 1995). The geometric or floral design in various combinations was often accompanied by a smooth or ornamented ribbon. Such details ringed doorways or were placed on the facade in the form of decorative rods. To achieve the plastic expression of facades of houses in the entire height of the houses were arranged massive trapezoidal bays of windows, which became very popular. Here ornamented with garlands broad horizontal rods of the facade created the effect of the mass movement in the composition.

A technique of framing windows and door openings with ionics or beads was very popular. The combination of simple geometric non-ornamented calving species with ornamented shafts used in the portals of public buildings. Similar motifs in different combinations framed windows and doors. The number of calving and the complexity of their decoration depended on the status of the building and its importance in the urban composition.

There was a multitude of different popular in the period laurel oak garlands and wreaths, which have special expression due to quirky drawings on ribbons. Garlands in conjunction with torches and rosettes decorated facades of residential and public buildings facing major urban streets and roads. Most often, wreaths and garlands were placed on the pediments and friezes. Drawings on laurel and oak garlands contributed to extra



Fig. 1. Decorative Plastic Details in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s. Performed Using Traditional Ornamental Motifs

volume and expressiveness of a broad horizontal rod.

The complex ornamental framing openings in conjunction with other types of details were often used to create a compositional emphasis in the most popular mixed scheme of detailing of the facade – the union of details in a compositionally active fragment (Donguzov, 1990). This principle of facade detailing was proposed by

Zholtovsky I. (Kirillova, L. I. et al, 1986). This method is not only compositionally expressive, but also economically viable, because it reduces the production costs of many complex details to be placed on the surface of the facade.

In Krasnoyarsk similar decorative “spots” formed by a group of details were placed on the facades of high-rise apartment buildings that encompass the main thoroughfares of the

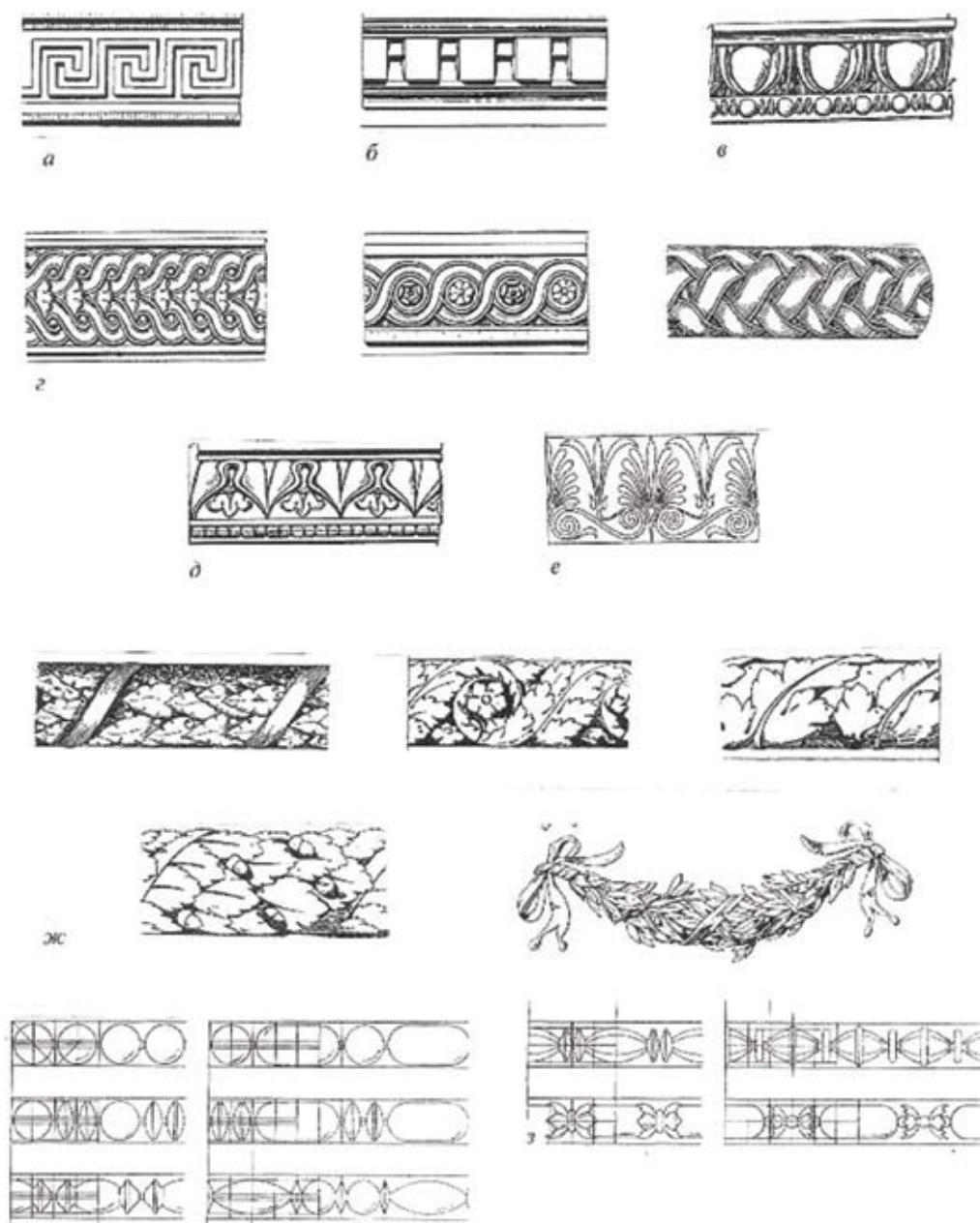


Fig. 2. Ornamental Motifs in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s: *a* – meander; *б* – dentil (clove, toast); *в* – ovolo (ionics); *г* – guilloche; *д* – water lily; *е* – anthemion with palmetto; *ж* – garland; *з* – beads, beads with coils

city (see Fig. 3. Compositional Emphasis in the Composition of the Facades of Residential Buildings). This method not only created a composite emphasis, but also contributed to the enlargement of architectural scale of buildings.

Along with the traditional ornamental motifs the décor composition contained Soviet symbols –

the five-pointed star, hammer and sickle, as well as pictures reflecting the specificity of a certain institution located in the building – musical and artistic character, scrolls and books (see Fig. 4. Bas-reliefs with Soviet Symbols).

Compositions of ears in combination with other symbols were quite popular. Bas-relief



Fig. 3. Compositional Emphasis in the Composition of the Facades of Residential Buildings



Fig. 4. Bas-reliefs with Soviet Symbols

details with Soviet symbols were placed on the facades of historic buildings to contribute to the stylistic unity of the building of the central part of Krasnoyarsk. In 1950 the building of the branch of Marxism-Leninism courses (one of the buildings of the Krasnoyarsk State Agricultural University) was renovated. Architectural details – the extended gable and a wide molded frieze, formed by thick garlands, completely transformed the

look of constructivist volume. These examples vividly illustrate the role of decoration in the creation of an artistic image.

In some cases details with Soviet symbols were inscribed into the composition of decoration on the facades of buildings of eclectic and Art Nouveau (I.G. Gadalov Trading House on Mira Prospekt, 88). At present time it is necessary to consider giving the structures related to the architectural

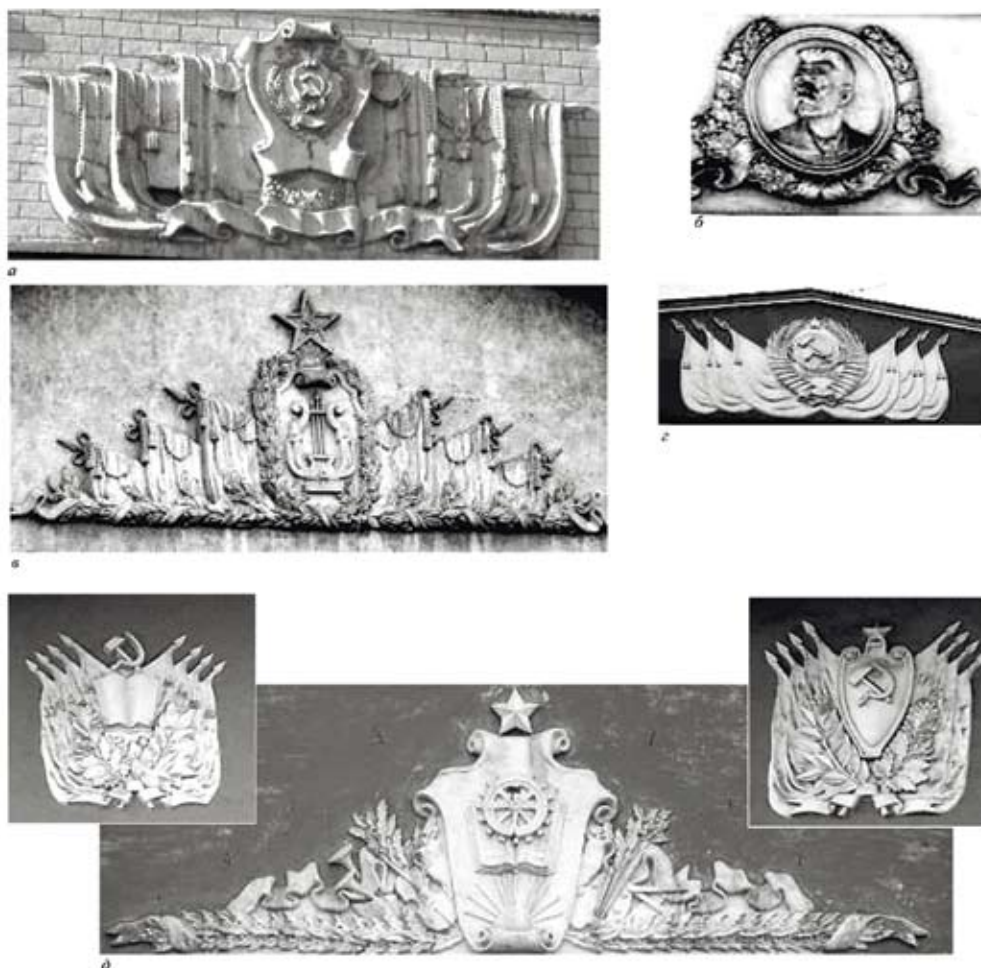


Fig. 5. Cartouches in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s: *a* – on the facade of the House of Soviets (Revolution Square); *b* – Palace of Culture named after May the 1<sup>st</sup> (Youth Street , 16); *c* – on the pediment the palace of culture of the plant «Sibtyazhmash» ( Pavlov street , 21); *z* – on the pediment of Palace of Culture named after the 30th anniversary of the Komsomol (Polzunov street , 13); *d* – Palace of Culture named after Mayakovski (Theatre for Young Audiences, Vavilov street, 25)

monuments of this period the original look. The greatest opulence and at the same rigor forms differ in the form of medallions, cartouches, scrolls, at least – shields (Fig. 5. Cartouches in the Architecture of the 1930s and 50s.). Cartouches were placed in the spaces on the friezes in the gable above the window openings of significant architectural structures.

Medallions which include bas-relief portraits of artists are placed on the facades of palaces of culture. Grand and luxury forms were attached

to the cartouches crowning the facades of office buildings. An attribute that complements the national symbols in the scrolls are rows of the banners hanging in severe expressive tails.

Narrative bas-reliefs on facades are rare in the architecture of Krasnoyarsk of the 1950s-1930s. A classic example of bas-reliefs of this type in a perfect condition can be seen on the facade of the secondary school number 21, located on Svobodny Prospekt). Multi-figured bas-reliefs are placed symmetrically on the two risolits. The bas-reliefs





Fig. 6. Narrative Bas-reliefs on the Facade of the School № 21(Svobodny Prospekt, 61).

harmoniously are blended into the composition of the facade, since they are placed on strong cornices crowning broad shoulders at the height of the third floor. We must pay attention to the mirror symmetry in the outlines of figures and their location in the overall composition of the bas-reliefs. Figures and different sculptural plots of the right and left bas-reliefs are not repeated (Fig. 6. Narrative Bas-reliefs on the Facade of the School № 21).

The depth of the relief and the proportions of the figures properly resolved in view of linear perspective and angle distortions, which are expressed in an apparent shortening of the vertical dimensions of the figures. At the bottom of the Fig. we can see compositions of the plane of the wall to half its volume in the upper details of figures addressed in the form of high relief.

Bas-reliefs on the facade of the house located in the city center (Mira Prospekt, 53) are less

successfully designed. As in the previous example the bas-reliefs are placed symmetrically on the facade, but a considerable distance between them does not form a unified composition. Framed panels, bas-reliefs are perceived as rectangular spots on the facade. Placing them at the fourth floor with a relatively small size impedes the perception of the story as a whole and its individual parts. In addition, the very image of lumbering scenes, made in violation of the proportions of the figures and without careful attention to detail, today is perceived as naive kitsch, which can cause a smile, if the general audience will pay attention to these elements of the facade.

Special attention is deserved by the city park and the sculpture of the specified period. Similar forms do not belong to architectural details, but along with the decor of the buildings they are actively involved in creating an artistic image of a building. The notorious woman with a paddle

has long been a symbol of bad taste and kitsch. However, the banality of some forms dissolves into the sound of pathos environment. Not all forms designed in line with the style of socialist realism are examples of bad taste. For instance, preserved photos show the sculpture park in Zheleznogorsk, which is remarkable for the accuracy and thoroughness of the proportions of details. Black and white photos show a sculpture, depicting an athlete who can be easily mistaken for a real person.

The scope of this paper does not allow to display all the diversity of plastic forms of architectural details, since the assessment of aesthetic qualities of the buildings' decoration of 1930s-50s can only be done with the use of more complete series of illustrations. Unfortunately, decorative plastic designed to create an artistic image of a certain historical period, dissolved in the context of the modern city environment.

### **Conclusion**

The resolution of the CPSU Central Committee and USSR Ministry Council of 4 November 1955 "On the Removal of Excesses in the Design and Construction" proclaimed a program rejection of the decoration and ended a significant phase in the development of domestic architecture.

The history of architecture has known several periods of non-classical forms; each of them resulted in the return to the expressive palette of architectural classics. These historical processes show us the necessity of careful study and careful preservation of the heritage of the past.

This problem is multifaceted and includes architectural, urban planning, social and cultural aspects. A famous American architect Henry Sullivan said that "If we replace the word "style" with the notion of "civilization", we will make a major step towards understanding of the

"value" of historical monuments" (Masters of Architecture, p.56).

It should be noted that some details are mostly not of great artistic value. Quite often standard details were used. However, in the mass consciousness of that time the aesthetic value of decor was very high, because it expressed the outlook of an entire historical epoch.

The study of the architectural heritage is not only a general theoretical interest. Elements of decorative sculpture are more than other details of the facade exposed to destruction processes; their loss can result into the irreversible loss of architectural and artistic qualities of buildings and, therefore, to the impoverishment of the environment and the monotony of the modern city.

Many elements of the decorative sculpture are lost on the general background of modern urban objects of construction, not only because of the small scale, but also due to improper care. Numerous layers of paint smooth forms and contours of the moldings and make them featureless.

Modern materials and technologies can reduce time and manual labor in the production of decorative details and make them durable. A high quality or reproduction unfortunately is accompanied by not accurate reproduction of details in the restoration work. For example, in the reconstruction of the facades of the building of the Office of the railways the proportions of Corinthian columns and pilasters have been violated, which led to a violation of the proportional relationship of the facade as a whole and adversely affected its perception.

The decor in the architecture of Krasnoyarsk of 1930s-1950s does not feature any complicated and spectacular forms, but its role in the construction works projecting cannot be overestimated. Decorative architectural details contribute to the formation of scale, creating

an architectural and artistic image, provide a stylistic unity of the building and at the same time, a clear allocation of primary and secondary elements in the composition of the facade and urban development.

The principles of decoration of buildings of the period did not follow strict canons of classicism and did not create congested details of composition, typical of the period of eclecticism. Details gradually gain symbolic significance, symbolic value, thus anticipating the principles of architectural postmodernism. Being not

overloaded with details and being brief in its forms the provincial architecture, the author's opinion, quite vividly express these trends.

In Krasnoyarsk, 1930s-50s years are characterized by the unprecedented scale of construction. The buildings of this period contributed to the formation of the historic center and the appearance of large arrays of buildings on the right bank. Today, after half a century, we can regard the buildings of the 1930s and 50s as monuments of architecture and urban planning.

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## **Декоративная деталь в архитектуре г. Красноярска 1930-1950-х годов**

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*В статье дается общая характеристика отечественной архитектуры периода 1930-1950-х годов. Дается классификация разновидностей архитектурных деталей по конструктивно-пластическим признакам. Выделяются декоративные типы деталей, которые возникли в результате перехода к свободной скульптурной пластике форм. Рассматривается роль скульптурно-декоративных и декоративно-пластических деталей как элемента объемно-пространственной композиции в архитектуре г. Красноярска этого периода. Освещается значение декора в градостроительной композиции и создании архитектурно-художественного облика застройки. Анализируются разновидности декоративных деталей, наиболее распространенные в архитектуре городов Сибири. Выявляются характерные для архитектуры рассматриваемого периода символические элементы и орнаментальные мотивы декоративной пластики. Приводятся образцы исторически сложившихся типов орнамента, послуживших основой для разработки рисунка орнаментированных деталей. Подробно анализируются композиционные приемы включения декоративной пластики в композицию фасада. Приводятся примеры наиболее выразительных декоративных деталей фасадов общественных и жилых зданий г. Красноярска (орнаментированных тяг, розеток, картушей, барельефов). Дан анализ композиции крупных сюжетных барельефов. Статья иллюстрирована авторскими фотографическими материалами. Акцентируется внимание на проблемах сохранения памятников архитектуры и градостроительства регионального значения в культурологическом аспекте.*

*Ключевые слова: пластика фасада, декоративная деталь, архитектурная композиция, художественный образ, орнамент, композиционный прием.*

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