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# *Russian Sacred Objects in the Orthodox East Archive Evidence from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

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**RÉSUMÉ :** La tradition du soutien russe aux églises orthodoxes de l'Orient et des Balkans a commencé au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle et s'est poursuivie jusqu'en 1917. Au niveau gouvernemental, l'aide matérielle a été réduite et réglementée au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais elle a gagné en générosité après 1830, en rapport avec l'évolution de la Question d'Orient et la rivalité des grandes puissances engagées au Moyen-Orient. L'article étudie le caractère et la distribution géographique du soutien de l'Église et du gouvernement russes, tout en observant que ces traits ont évolué dans le temps et qu'ils ont été influencés par les tendances politiques de certaines périodes. Il étudie aussi les nombreuses donations privées issues des pèlerinages en Terre Sainte et faites aux monastères d'Orient, aussi bien que celles résultant des relations personnelles avec le haut clergé. La tendance générale à augmenter les sommes et les dons jusqu'à la Première Guerre mondiale a été le résultat de la montée de la tension au Moyen-Orient et dans la Méditerranée orientale.

**MOTS-CLÉS :** Église orthodoxe, Question d'Orient, politique externe russe, donations, objets sacrés.

**REZUMAT:** Tradiția sprijinului rusesc pentru bisericile ortodoxe din Orient și Balcani a început în secolul al xvi-lea și a continuat până în 1917. Ajutorul material la nivel guvernamental, redus și reglementat în secolul al xviii-lea, a devenit din nou mai generos după 1830, în directă legătură cu evoluția 'Chestiunii Orientale' și a rivalității marilor puteri pentru influență în Orientul Mijlociu. Articolul susține ipoteza conform căreia caracterul și felul în care a fost distribuit geografic sprijinul din partea Bisericii și guvernului rus nu au fost întotdeauna aceleași, deoarece au depins de interesele politice. Numeroasele donații private se datorează pelerinajului în Țara Sfântă și la mănăstirile din Orient, precum și relațiilor personale cu clerul înalt. Tendința generală de creștere a sumelor și donațiilor până în preajma Primului Război Mondial a fost rezultatul creșterii tensiunii în Orientul Mijlociu și în jurul Mediteranei de Est.

**CUVINTE CHEIE:** Biserica Răsăriteană, Chestiunea Orientală, politica externă rusă, donații, obiecte sacre.

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Moscovian Russia regularly sent donations to the churches and monasteries of the Orthodox East until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as it regarded itself as heir of Byzantium and the head of Eastern Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The character of Russian donations to church institutions of the Ottoman Empire abruptly changed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The policy of 'Westernization' started by Peter I the Great (1682-1725) was continued by the empresses who succeeded him, and Russia acted as a European power more than a part of the Orthodox Oikoumene. Russian governors, many of them of German and therefore non-Orthodox origin, were investing in the development of economic and cultural links with Western European countries, not in rising the authority of the Orthodox Empire by attracting relics and financing remote patriarchates and monasteries of the Orient.

## Tendencies of the imperial period in Russian history.

During the reign of Peter I, there was no specific law regulating these donations. They were sent more or less according to the traditional notions of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The situation changed for good reason in the early 1730s, under empress Anna Ioannovna, being determined by the case of the patriarchs of Antioch Athanasius and Sylvester: since 1723, these patriarchs had been asking the Russian Synod for a new act confirming the annual donations to their see. The new document had to replace a previous one, given to patriarch Macarius in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was lost by then.<sup>2</sup> The Archives of the Patriarchate in Moscow were thoroughly investigated, but no copy of the document was



▲ Fig. 1. Archimandrite Porphyrius Uspensky in the 1880s.  
Credits: Wikimedia Commons.

found. The frequent requests finally led to the introduction of the 'Palestinian States' in 1735, regulating the annual sum of donations to each of the patriarchal sees of the Ottoman Empire, as well as to a long list of monasteries.<sup>3</sup> The sums were rather modest: each of the four patriarchates received an annual sum of 100 rubles, while most monasteries from the list were given only 35 rubles per year. Representatives from these church institutions had to come to Moscow and collect the money every five years. However, their stay in Russia was financed by the Russian government, as before. Other requests for additional material aid during the 18<sup>th</sup> century were usually turned down and the voluntary gathering of donations on the Russian territory was strictly forbidden if it did not have the permission of the Holy Synod. This situation continued until the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when money started being transferred via the Russian ambassadors in Constantinople. It is no surprise that during the long periods of war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, contacts were interrupted and no money was sent. This is why financial sums equivalent to ten or more years were transferred in the 1830s. Normally, all requests for aids from the Palestinian States were satisfied. But there were some exceptions. For instance, the Syrian monastery of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (called *Belemend*) did not receive any donations for a period of seventy years ending in 1837. The financial aid was sent only since 1835, the year when the emperor Nicolas I issued an act on the

regulation of donations. The same was the case of the Adrian monastery in Epirus, which had not received its donations for a period of seventy-five years by 1835.

The successful Russo-Ottoman wars of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century changed the character of the relations between Russia and the Orthodox East. According to the treaty of Kiuchuk-Kainardji (1774) Russia had the official right to protect the Orthodox living in the Ottoman Empire. After the treaties of Adrianople (1829) and especially of Unkiar-Iskelesi (1833), Russia received even more privileges in the sphere of political influence over Turkey. Since the 1830s, Russia joined the competition of the great powers in the Balkans and the Middle East. Preserving and supporting Orthodoxy against Catholic and Protestant propaganda became a key element in the Russian policy deployed in this struggle. Pious donations therefore became a political instrument, the so-called 'soft power' for influence in the region. Direct diplomatic support (although sometimes provided) was difficult to obtain both in issuing the legal acts and in their practical implementation. These difficulties came first from the Ottoman authorities, next from the Catholic and Protestant competitors, and third from the Greek high clergy, whose members resisted any foreign attempts to interfere in their canonical territory. The traditional way of donations still seemed most suitable, despite its negative sides and dubious efficiency.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the material aid to the churches of the Christian East was provided by the Russian government in two ways. The main one was the direct transfer of money (to the institutions enlisted in the 'Palestinian States', and also on special occasions), or by giving permissions to the abbots of the monasteries to gather donations in Russia (according to a certain order, with limitations). The other way was to send church items: icons, vestments, vessels, décor, covers, bells, books, etc. The private donations, both in money and in church objects, also remained very popular. In fact, a great part of the sums sent through the ministry of foreign affairs or the Synod also came from private donations. This was the case of the donations made by the emperor or the empress, as well as by certain rich merchants who made donations to the Synod intended "for the Orthodox churches in Muslim territories". The interest from such donations was used to support various church projects, according to the situation.

### Between 1830s and 1853. Establishing of institutions and creating contacts.

The restoration of the Catholic Patriarchate (1847) and the foundation of a Protestant Bishopric (1842) in Jerusalem, as well as the renovation or foundation of a number of schools by the Jesuits, Capuchins, Lazarists, and other Catholic congregations, resulted in further conversions of Orthodox Christians to Uniatism or Protestantism. When the rumours about the misuse of Russian donations in Jerusalem reached Moscow and Petersburg, the creation of an ecclesiastical mission to support Orthodoxy as the basis of Russian influence in the Middle East and to control the donations became an urgent necessity.<sup>4</sup> The first step undertaken by the Russian ministry of foreign affairs was to delegate the learned archimandrite Porphyrius Uspensky to Syria and Palestine in 1843. A few years later, he became the chief of the first Russian mission to Jerusalem (1847).<sup>5</sup> Among other tasks, Porphyrius had to gather detailed information about the state of the Orthodox church in the East, both from material and spiritual points of view. In his Journals (*Kniga Bytiia Moego*), already edited in 8 volumes by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Porphyrius gave a de-



tailed description of the local churches, carefully noting all icons, vessels, and other objects of Russian origin that he had seen in those churches.<sup>6</sup> His notes are important evidence on the presence of Russian art objects in Syria and Palestine well before the systematic importing of Russian church items to the Holy Land. All these objects were brought or sent by private persons – pilgrims to the Holy Land.

To give but some examples, Porphyrius saw a Russian icon of saint Metrophanes donated by pilgrim Beketova (without a frame) in the monastery of Saint-George in Efrafa (Beit-Djala).<sup>7</sup> In the same village, he identified a Russian icon of Christ with an open Gospel, but could not find out the name of the donor.<sup>8</sup> The monastery of Saint-John in Jerusalem was mainly in ruins during the 1840s, but Porphyrius saw a silver chandelier and a large icon of saint John with a silver décor in one of the altars of the church. Both were donations from Russia.<sup>9</sup> The throne of the Holy Sepulchre chapel, where Porphyrius performed the liturgy on Pentecost 1844, was covered with a silver image of Christ and the four Evangelists, donated by the Ukrainian hetman John Mazepa and bearing the inscription: *Sumptu illustrissimis Ducis Johannis Mazepae Rossiae*.<sup>10</sup> All the icons in the iconostasis, the chandelier and the embroidered shroud of Christ in Saint-Sabbas monastery in Palestine were also brought from Russia.<sup>11</sup> Last but not least, in 1847, the Russian ecclesiastical mission to Jerusalem was founded. Soon, a Russian nun called Iulita, former abbess of Saint-Catherine monastery, brought a Russian icon of saint Nil Stolbenskii to Porphyrius. On the side of this icon, the archimandrite could read its story: “This image from Saint-Nil monastery was brought to Grand Duchess Elisaveta Alekseevna in 1801. Given by her to the colonel’s wife Marfa Bulygina in 1807. Donated to the Holy Sepulchre in 1840”.<sup>12</sup>

Having in mind such glorious examples when he described his first project of the Russian mission to Jerusalem on January 7, 1844, Porphyrius stressed that the future mission should supply all village churches of Syria and Palestine with icons, and that a school of icon painting at the mission had to be organized, among other things.<sup>13</sup> This wide-scale program was never realized. But Porphyrius made numerous donations to village churches in Palestine and Trans-Jordan during his stay in Jerusalem in 1848–1853. Thus, the churches in Lydda and Nabuluz, Spalta and Khrena received church vestments (October 10 and 30, 1852; November 24, 1852).<sup>14</sup>

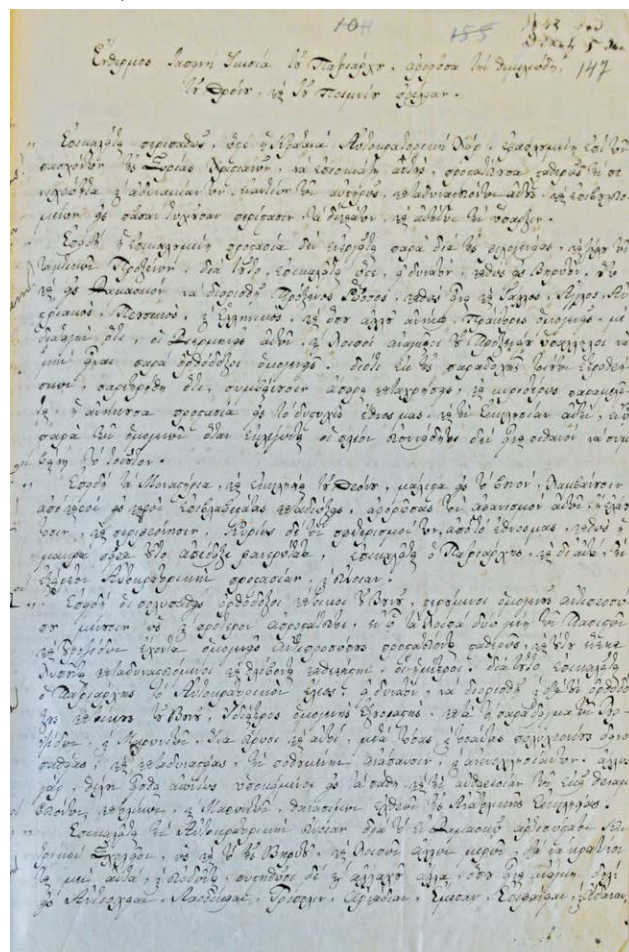
Both Porphyrius and Konstantin Basili, the Russian consul to Beirut, addressed reports to the Russian government. These reports concerned the support directed at the poorest part of the Arab Orthodox population of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, organizing of schools for them, and supplying their churches. The sums received from Russia for the Orthodox school in Beirut were controlled by the consulate. However, the donations sent by the Russian Synod came directly in the hands of the patriarchs as legal heads of Orthodox communities, and the further distribution was up to them, without any control. This led to enormous abuses: by the end of the 1850s, a sum of almost 50,000 rubles gathered during eleven years for the Patriarchate of Alexandria was stolen and distributed among the family of the patriarch, and this was not a unique case.<sup>15</sup> The practice of sending the money to the patriarchs did not change until the 1880s, because the Russian government avoided pressing any charges, for fear of being accused of illegal actions against canon law.

In 1838, the patriarch of Alexandria Hierotheus and the

patriarch of Antioch Methodius sent to the Russian Synod a petition wherein they expressed the danger coming from the side of Maximus Mazlum, the Greek-Catholic patriarch “of the three sees” and asked for diplomatic and material aid against Catholic proselytism. The reply of the Russian government was more than favourable: first, ambassador Butenev managed to obtain a *firman* from the sultan, which prohibited the Greek-Catholic clergy from wearing the same vestments as the Orthodox. Secondly, apart from the usual generous sums of money, the Russian Synod decided to send to both patriarchs a large number of church items (icons, vestments, cloth for them, vessels, etc.), which were kept in the treasuries of the Novgorod, Chernigov, and Petersburg dioceses. The archives of the Holy Synod contain detailed descriptions of all these items.<sup>16</sup> This act was soon followed by a new request for material aid from the Patriarch of Alexandria Hierotheus, who asked the Holy Synod for an iconostasis with icons and vestments for the church in Alexandria. His list of about one hundred icons contained their precise measurements and descriptions.<sup>17</sup> This time he was denied, though this request was supported by Porphyrius Uspensky and contributed to the sending of a bishop to Moscow to gather donations to be used in Alexandria.

The success of collecting money on behalf of the Patriarchate of Antioch was to a great degree a result of the

▼ Fig. 2. Request for material aid from patriarch Methodius of Antioch. December 5, 1843 (Sankt Petersburg Archives of the Academy of Sciences, Archives of Porphyrius Uspensky, f. 118, op. 1., d. 42). Courtesy of the St. Petersburg Archives of the Academy of Sciences.





[illegible][illegible]

47 *Handwritten musical notation and text in Greek.*  
 Οὐρανός, ἡ ἐκκλησία  
 Οὐρανός, ἡ ἐκκλησία  
 Οὐρανός, ἡ ἐκκλησία



presentations of consul Basili, who was on close terms with patriarch Methodius. Following his reports, the Russian Synod allowed Neophytus, bishop of Heliopolis and representative of the patriarch, to come to Moscow in 1842 and settle there for many years, gathering donations.<sup>18</sup> In 1846, consul Basili reported that about 11.000 rubles were gathered thanks to this mission and a new beautiful building for the Saint-Nicolas church of Damascus had been erected. The church was decorated with marble mosaics and a wooden iconostasis; the icons were brought from Russia and donated by countess Orlova.<sup>19</sup> In 1848, an Antioch dependency was founded in Moscow, providing stable income to the patriarchate. When bishop Neophytus died in 1857, a long list of church objects intended to be sent to Syria was made during a revision of his heritage. This became the subject of discussions between Russian church authorities and the representatives of the patriarchal see of Antioch, also pretending to keep an eye on them.<sup>20</sup>

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Eastern patriarchates received many donations from the Moscow 'compounds' or 'dependences' of the Russian government (*nod-sopbe*). First in line was the Patriarchate of Jerusalem (1818), followed by that of Antioch (1848), of Alexandria (1858), and finally the Patriarchate of Constantinople (1882). The foundation of these 'compounds' aimed to provide a more systematic and regular support for the churches of the Ottoman Empire. Since the 1860s, it partially replaced the loss of income from the 'inclined estates' of Moldavia and Wallachia, which had been confiscated under the reign of prince Alexander John Cuza (1859-1862).

Many donations of church items passed through these 'compounds'. The most interesting cases concern the temporary preservation of Oriental church items in Russia, when they were saved from persecutions in Asia Minor and the Pontus area. Two examples, among others. In 1844, priest Constantin Boyarov of Mariupol kept some silver vessels belonging to a church of the Assumption in Asia Minor, which were entrusted to his care by the local bishop, in order to save them from plundering, probably in the 1820s. Another situation is that of 1839, when the monks of Soumela monastery asked the Synod for permission to take back from the Saint-George monastery of Balaklava the relics of saint Christopher, which were kept there since they had been saved by a Greek monk of Soukhum Kale during the Greek uprising.<sup>21</sup>

In 1850, after recognition by Constantinople, the official relations between the Russian Church and the Church of Greece were finally established. The same year, aids were sent from Russia for the restoration of the church of Saint-Nicholas Rangavas in Athens.<sup>22</sup> A couple of years later, an iconostasis for Saint-Irene church, also in Athens, was delivered from Russia. When Antonin Kapustin the priest of the Russian church in Athens, presented the situation after the earthquakes in Thessaly and Corinth, a sum of money was sent to the metropolitan of Livadia. Speaking about Athens of the 1850s, two other churches should be mentioned: the Holy-Trinity Russian church (renovated in 1852-1855),<sup>23</sup> and the small Agia-Zoni church in Patissia.<sup>24</sup> Both of them were Byzantine monuments and were completely restored from ruins according to the aesthetic notions of that time, being decorated with icons and other items from Russia.

Before the 1850s, the Russian government had no certain program for the support of the Orthodox church of the Orient and the Balkans. The aids were sent more or less occasionally, following various requests. No difference was made between the Greek and non-Greek churches. Moreover, the Greek patriarchs and local bishops were regarded as the only legal heads of the church institutions, and all the money was sent directly to them, without any real control over its distribution. The first Russian institution in the East – the Mission in Jerusalem – before 1853 had no real power or influence in church matters in the Holy Land.

### After the Crimean War. Church donations as an instrument of policy.

The Crimean War was the most important turning point in the relations between Russia and the Orthodox East during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The defeat of Russia in that confrontation directed the attention of the Russian government to the Middle East. Several institutions under the patronage of grand duke Constantine Nikolayevich were created in the second half of the 1850s (the *Trade and Shipping Society*, the *Palestine Committee*). Others were revived and stimulated to pursue their activities, such as the Russian ecclesiastical mission in Jerusalem. At the same time, new consulates were established and the Russian consuls in the Ottoman Empire received clear instructions to be actively involved in the life of local Christian communities and to keep closer contacts with local bishops. Leaving aside pure Russian institutions such as that of the Holy Trinity church in Jerusalem and the Russian involvement in the construction of convents in Jerusalem or on Mount Athos, which need special attention, let us trace some general tendencies after the Crimean war.

It is well known that the policy of Alexander II (1855-1881) was based on Pan-Slavism, *i. e.* the much-desired support for the Slavic Orthodox nations of the Balkans, with the final target to create a wide Southern-Slavic state in the Balkans liberated from Turkey. This was not something necessarily new. Special attention had already been paid to the Slavic churches in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: in 1806, the metropolitan of Montenegro mentioned that he had received church items from Russia; in 1842, aids were sent to the monastery of Saint-Nicholas near Skopje; in 1843, other aids were sent to the Bulgarian schools founded by Vasil Aprilov. What made the 1856-1877 policies different was that the support of fellow Slavs had become a matter of primary attention on a governmental level.

In 1860, Alexander II made a generous personal donation of 50.000 rubles to the Slavic churches in Turkey.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, his wife, empress Maria Alexandrovna, sent a large sum of money to the head of the Russian mission in Jerusalem, with the sole purpose of providing support for the Orthodox churches in Syria and Palestine. She made further special donations to different other churches of the Ottoman Empire. Money and church objects were gathered through the Slavonic committees all over Russia and shipped to Turkey. In the journals of archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, the priest of the Russian embassy church in Constantinople (1860-1865), one may find frequent reports about boxes with church items destined to different churches of the Balkans, mainly Slavonic, but Greek as well. All the items were first stored in a special room of the Russian embassy in Pera and thereafter distributed to the final destinations. Among these objects were old icons, vestments, vessels, Slavonic books, and bells. The donations were so numerous that Antonin even intended to keep part of them in the embassy and create a museum of church anti-

◀ Fig. 3. Confirmation letter of the four patriarchs of the Orthodox East for the establishment of the Russian Holy Synod. September 4, 1723 (RGIA, f. 796, op. 205. d. 6, f. 8). Courtesy of the St. Petersburg Archives of the Academy of Sciences.







◀ Fig. 4. Copy of a letter of patriarch Methodius of Antioch to Porphyrius Uspensky. March 24, 1848. (Sankt Peterburg Archives of the Academy of Sciences, Archives of Porphyrius Uspensky, f. 118, op. 1., d. 42). Courtesy of the Russian State Historical Archive.

quities.<sup>26</sup> The same happened in the Russian consulate of Serbia. It received books, icons, etc., and had to distribute them to the churches of Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Bulgaria.<sup>27</sup> Rachinskii, Russian consul in Varna, made special efforts for the building of a church in that town, entirely supplied from Russia.<sup>28</sup> Some donations had a special political meaning in the context of the Greek-Bulgarian ecclesiastical struggle. For instance, bishop Parfenii of Poliana had to settle the question of the union in Kukush in 1860, when he received a set of Russian vestments as a personal gift from the empress, including a *sakkos*, *mytra*, and *panagia*.<sup>29</sup> Many Russian consuls in the Ottoman Empire invested a lot of personal energy in supporting the local bishops or in restoring churches and monasteries. This conferred them a certain prestige among local Christians and helped their career. I already mentioned the deeds of Rachinskii, consul in Varna, who was busy with building a local church in the early 1860s. But there was also Ozerov, Russian ambassador in Athens, who financed the restoration of Agia-Zoni church in 1857. In later decades, documentation is abundant. Russian authorities were involved in the construction of well-known buildings in Bulgaria, such as the Russian church on Shipka mountain<sup>30</sup> or the bell-tower of Virgin church in Plovdiv. And it would be a mistake to say that only Slavonic churches received donations in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is abundant archival evidence about their involvement in Greek churches as well.<sup>31</sup>

Since the late 1850s, an area of special attention for the Russian government was Eastern Turkey, close to the Russian border, in the Caucasus. Political projects could not ignore the possibility that this territory could soon become part of the Russian Empire. The primary target of Russian policy in the region was to support the Greek Orthodox population of Eastern Pontus and to encourage the return to Christianity of those who had been converted to Islam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (the so-called *Kromlides*).<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising that Moshnin, Russian consul in Trebizond, took great care to supply the churches of the town with the needed items. In 1858, he asked for a sum of money from the Holy Synod. It was used in a church under construction in Trebizond (300 rubles were sent),<sup>33</sup> and a year later a complete set of ecclesiastical vessels and vestments was sent to the local metropolitan Konstantios by empress Maria Alexandrovna. The solemn occasion placated the metropolitan into allowing the celebration of Slavonic liturgy every Sunday in one of the churches of Trebizond.<sup>34</sup> The same Russian consul provided the bells for the Metropolitan church in Trebizond, as well as for the Orthodox church in Batum, at that time still an Ottoman town.<sup>35</sup> Moshnin clearly explained in his reports that the support given to the Greek Orthodox churches through Russian donations was a preparation for the time when that region would join Russia, especially taking into account that many Greeks were already working for years in the Russian Caucasus and had obtained Russian citizenship.<sup>36</sup>

This change in attitude after the Crimean War also led to the establishment of closer ties with the patriarchates of the East. These efforts, first expressed in personal gifts to the patriarchs and bishops, but also in donations to the churches of those dioceses, were entrusted to high rank of-

ficials, such as count Nicolay Adlerberg, minister of Court; Avraam Norov, minister of Education; grand duke Constantine Nikolayevich; and others. They made a series of personal donations to the churches and the hierarchs. Adlerberg himself oversaw the construction of an Orthodox church in Karak (Trans-Jordan, since 1845). Norov sent gifts to patriarch Cyril of Jerusalem – two icons that the Patriarch did not appreciate because they were Western-European in style and not traditionally Byzantine. Norov had already started his benefaction campaign to the Eastern churches in the 1840s, when he proposed for the Synod to supply the churches of Dalmatia with books and other items from Russia. Later, he donated a lot of money to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and other institutions. The tradition of rich donations from Russian individuals to the Greek church did not stop in later decades. One of them was Tertii Filippov, chairman of the Russian State Control, who was famous for his philhellenic views and for his pro-Greek stance in conflict of the Bulgarian schism (1872). He corresponded with many of high Greek prelates and gave them gifts.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, emperors, empresses, and grand dukes made many donations on different occasions. The high Orthodox clergy of the Ottoman Empire regularly received personal gifts and awards from the Russian government, especially when they were inclined to support Russia's ambitions in that country.

After the Crimean War, special efforts were also made to supply the poor Orthodox churches of Syria with church objects. This was regarded as a part of the program for supporting the Orthodox population against the raising Catholic and Protestant propaganda, as well as support for the Arabs in their struggle for national and ecclesiastical independence. This happened because Syria became one of the main settings for the rivalry between France, Britain, and Russia in the 1850s. A large part of the population has been already converted to Uniatism or Catholicism in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, therefore French diplomacy regarded the country as Catholic. The activities of French Catholic propaganda, involved in the further Latinisation of the Uniates, met a certain resistance from their side. In 1858, the attempts to introduce the Gregorian calendar caused a large group of Greek-Catholics (*Melkites*) to embrace Orthodoxy. Russian diplomacy was strongly supportive of this tendency, and years later, when it was clear that the converted members of the 'Oriental' party of Syrian Melkites had lost many of their churches, Russia sent aids for the erection of new buildings, supplying them with everything necessary for liturgy.<sup>38</sup> In those late times, the election of an Arab patriarch on the throne of Antioch in 1899 brought once more the Orthodox Church of Syria to the attention of the Russian state. After the visit of patriarch Gregory IV to Russia in 1913 (during the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Romanov house), the Patriarchate of Antioch received a special sum of 30.000 rubles and many other donations and promises for future support. It would not be an exaggeration to say that on the eve of the First World War, the Orthodox church of Syria was under Russian control and clearly on the side of the Russian government.<sup>39</sup>

Yet sometimes, gathering money and church items for a church in the Greek or Slavic lands could also be undertaken on private level, without any political ambitions. Normally, this would happen after an individual pilgrimage to the holy places. For example, a certain Ekaterina Abramova from Moscow asked the Holy Synod in 1850 for a permission to gather aids for the church of Saint-Lazarus and for the Kikkos Virgin monastery in Cyprus.<sup>40</sup> More requests for this kind of permissions were received by the



Synod in connection with money collections on behalf of the Holy Sepulchre. The mass pilgrimage to the holy places of Palestine, to Mount Athos, and to Sinai after the 1850s was followed by a new stream of donations, which led to even more church objects being transferred from Russia to the East.

The gifts made by the Holy Synod to the patriarchs were usually conditioned by policy favourable to Russia. After the second enthronement of Joachim III as patriarch of Constantinople in 1901, a bishop carrying a silver reliquary for the relics of saint Euthymia (preserved in the church of Saint-George in the Phanar) arrived from Petersburg in 1903, since Joachim III enjoyed the strongest support of Russian diplomacy. This masterpiece of neo-Byzantine and Art nouveau style is still visible in the church today.

Its delivery to Constantinople by a bishop of the Russian church was followed by a long discussion about the canonical circumstances of the event: whether the bishop had the right to celebrate the holy liturgy in Constantinople or not, and what political effect would this visit have.<sup>41</sup>

But there was also a downside to these actions. The rapid increase in Russian donations and money collections on behalf of the churches of the East led to regular abuses. Many people were worried and attempted to limit them as

▼ Fig. 5. View of the church of Saint-Nicholas Rangavas in Athens, incorrectly described as Saint-George Rangavas in the Russian archives. Exterior view of the church. The financial aid was sent in 1850 or 1851. Credits: Vladimir Agrigoroaei.



early as the 1860s. Often, the petitions were refused. In the end, the clergymen coming to Russia in the early 1890s to gather donations were forbidden to carry any sacred objects (icons or relics) with them. This, of course, reduced the success of their missions. However, regardless of these limitations and restrictions, the number of sacred objects brought to the Orthodox East and the financial sums donated increased steadily until the beginning of First World War.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion.

The donation of money and church items to the Orthodox East was regarded by the Russian government as a lever

of political influence in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and up to the beginning of the First World War. The competition of the great powers in the Middle East and Balkans made the Russian government send increasing sums of money to support Orthodoxy against Catholic and Protestant propaganda. The changes in the political orientation – from general support (before the 1850s) to Pan-Slavism and aids mainly directed to Slavic and Arabic institutions (1850s-1877), and back to the imperial pan-Orthodox ideology (after 1878) – was reflected in the character and geographical distribution of these donations. The promotion of pilgrimage also contributed to the donations.

## Notes:

1 On the tradition of donations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Кантrepев 1914; Ченцова 2010; Чеснокова 2011.

2 Letter of patriarch Athanasius dated September 26, 1723 (RGIA, f. 796, op. 5, d. 211, f. 11-11v). A letter of Patriarch Sylvester dated September 29, 1725 (protocol of the session of the Russian Holy Synod, February 11, 1926, RGIA, f. 796, op. 7, d. 133, f. 2-4). See also Чеснокова 2019, p. 195-196. Another letter by Sylvester was addressed to the empress Anna Ioannovna in June 1731: protocol of the session of the Russian Holy Synod, November 12, 1731 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 12, d. 434, f. 1-3v); patriarch Sylvester to the Holy Synod, August 1, 1733 (RGIA, f. 796, op. 15, d. 27, f. 3-4).

3 RGIA, f. 796, op. 3, d. 289.

4 For a general overview of Russian activities in the area of Syria and Palestine, see Staurou 1965; Hopwood 1969; Meaux 2010.

5 Безобразов 1910; Лисовой 2000; Лисовой 2017. For Porphyrius' activities in the Holy Land, see Дмитриевский 1906; Дмитриевский 2009; Иннокентий 1985, p. 315-325; Stavrou 1963.

6 Успенский 1894-1901.

7 Успенский 1894-1901, vol. I, p. 399.

8 January 22, 1844. Успенский 1894-1901, vol. I, p. 404-405.

9 April 19, 1844. Успенский 1894-1901, vol. I, p. 658.

10 May 14, 1844. Успенский 1894-1901, vol. II, p. 85.

11 June 7, 1844. Успенский 1894-1901, vol. II, p. 142.

12 August 31, 1848. Успенский 1894-1901, vol. II, p. 341.

13 Успенский 1894-1901, vol. I, p. 359-360.

14 Успенский 1894-1901, vol. III, p. 317, 324, 332.

15 Петрунина, Герд, Вах 2020, p. 57-71.

16 RGIA, f. 797, op. 8, d. 24207, see especially f. 55 (the list of church objects). See also K. Basili to K. S. Serbinovich, November 10/22, 1841 (RGIA, f. 1661, op. 1, d. 473).

17 Петрунина, Герд, Вах 2020, p. 167-174.

18 RGIA, f. 797, op. 12, d. 30535.

19 Basili to Ustinov, September 14, 1846. RGIA, f. 223-226v.

20 RGIA, f. 796, op. 132, d. 2123. For the property left at the death of bishop Neophytus, who had stayed in Moscow, gathering donations for the Patriarchate of Antioch, see f. 134-136, with a list of the church objects prepared to be shipped to Syria.

21 An extract from the session of the Holy Synod, October 16/20, 1839, No. 133 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 9, d. 25633, f. 3-5).

22 Герд, Вах 2013, p. 154; Хлѣпа 2011, p. 48-49.

23 Герд, Вах 2015, p. 19-22; Жалнина-Василкиоти, Шкаровский 2017.

24 Герд, Вах 2017, p. 16-17.

25 RGIA, f. 797, op. 30, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 300.

26 Герд 2020.

27 A great number of archive documents testify to the transfer of church items to the South Slavonic lands. See, for example, the shipping of books to Nicanor, the metropolitan bishop of Montenegro (RGIA, f. 797, op. 29, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 366, 1859); for an icon painter sent from the Laura of Saint-Sergius to Montenegro (*ibidem*, d. 345); for the church items sent to the village Perasto (*ibidem*, d. 346). Also in 1861, a request for church items for the village of Osechany in Bosnia (*ibidem*, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 279). In 1863, a request from the consul of Vidin to supply the community with church items and books (*ibidem*, op. 33, 2 otd., d. 110).

28 RGIA, f. 797, op. 30, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 367 (1860).

29 RGIA, f. 797, op. 30, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 325.

30 See Герд 2012, p. 140-144.

31 For instance, Seraphim the metropolitan of Arta addressed a request to the Synod in 1866. It concerned the shipment of vestments to the churches of his province (RGIA, f. 797, op. 36, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 243).

32 On the Crypto-Christians of the Pontus, see Παρχαρίδης 1911; Φωτιάδης 1993; Φωτιάδης 1997.

33 An extract from the session of the Holy Synod, November 18/December 1, 1857 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 401, f. 4-4v). A report of consul A. Moshnin on the conversion of 16.000 Kromlides to Orthodoxy. June 14, 1859 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 341, f. 4-15v).

34 A. Moshnin to S. Urusov, Pera, May 1/13, 1862 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 32, 2 otd., d. 119, f. 5-6v).

35 A. Moshnin to S. Urusov, April 17, 1863 (RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311, f. 21-21v).

36 *Ibidem*, f. 2-5, 9-10.

37 See Герд 2006, p. 162-170.

38 See RGIA, f. 797. Op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 427 (on the request of the Syrian Greek-Uniates concerning their joining the Orthodox Church); *ibidem*, f. 832, op. 1, d. 106 (on the wish of the Syrian and Egypt Greek-Uniates to join the Orthodox Church and about building a church and a hospital for them, 1860-1861); *ibidem*, f. 796, op. 145, d. 850 (supporting the Greek-Uniates who joined Orthodoxy and the building churches for them in Beirut, Damascus, and other places), etc. On the Melkites and their attempt to join the Orthodox Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Hajjar 1962; Петрунина, Герд, Вах 2020, p. 113-122.



39 In the 1910s, the Russian government directly influenced the election of the high clergy in the Patriarchate of Antioch, and controlled the Orthodox schools in Syria. Patriarch Gregory IV brought to Russia a large number of medieval Arabic and Greek manuscripts, as well as artworks. He suggested that a special museum of Antiochian church art be founded in Petersburg. See

Pyatnitsky 2009, p. 87-118; Пятницкий 2014, p. 282-337.

40 RGIA, f. 797, op. 20, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 408.

41 See Герд 2012, p. 74-80.

42 The annual budget of Russian foreign missions surpassed 278.000 rubles in 1914. See *Объяснительная записка* 1914, p. 98-125.

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