

# How to Transfer "Holy Russia" into the Holy Land?

## Russian Policy in Palestine in the Late Imperial Period

Elena Astafieva

Russia's official presence in Palestine can be traced back to 1847 with the creation of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. This was part of a larger process: the large-scale installation of the leading European powers – Prussia, Great Britain, France, and Austria – in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. What Henry Laurens has called the “invention of the Holy Land” took place after the 1839 Egyptian invasion of Syria and the first plan for the internationalization of Jerusalem under the aegis of the main European powers.<sup>1</sup> This process also appears as a reaction to emerging secular ideologies – liberalism, socialism, and nationalism – that challenged the religious values of Western societies. It was also at that time that Palestine, part of the Arab periphery of the Ottoman Empire and land of the three Abrahamic religions, became a battleground for the leading European powers' conflicting religious and political interests.

However, Russia's installation in Palestine also responded to logics specific to the political and religious developments of the Russian Empire itself, such as the central place of religion (specifically the Orthodox Church) in the county's self-perception; relations between the state, the Orthodox Church (“first and dominant”), and other religions; relations between Orthodoxy and science; and so on. It is in the nineteenth century, particularly its second half, that the idea of “Holy Russia,” conceptualized in medieval texts and presenting Russia as the “Second Jerusalem” or the “Third Rome,” was revived and given new expression.<sup>2</sup>

After the Crimean War in 1856, in order to reinforce the Russian position in the Levant and Europe after its military defeat, the Russian Empire decided to open, in 1858, the Russian consulate in Jerusalem and, in 1859, the Palestine Committee under the patronage of Grand Duke Constantine, Alexander II's

brother and head of the imperial navy. In 1864, the committee became the Palestine Commission, reporting now to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These Russian institutions prepared the ground for the Orthodox Palestine Society, created under the patronage of the Grand Duke Sergei in 1882 (and renamed the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in 1889), and its various activities, particularly its scholarly work and the organization of pilgrimages of the Orthodox faithful to the Holy Land.<sup>3</sup>

This article will concentrate attention on these activities of the Palestine Society in the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the period when the idea of the “Holy Russia,” became a key element of the imperial ideology and policy.

More particularly, this article will show: How with its archeological excavations near the Holy Sepulchre – begun by Russian diplomats in the late 1850s, supported by members of the imperial family in the 1880s, and completed by “Orthodox Orientalists” (with the help of some European Orientalists) – the Palestine Society sought, despite the constraints of the Ottoman administration and the protests of the various Christian authorities, to appropriate for itself and for Russia the most important sacred symbols and spaces of Christianity in order to leave a Russian Orthodox mark on the Holy Land and to transfer “Holy Russia” to the Holy Land; and how, with its campaigns in Russia for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the society transformed a religious duty of personal fulfillment into an instrument of policy in order to create an imaginary space that transcended the political bounds of the Russian Empire, and thus to integrate the Holy Land virtually into “Holy Russia.”

## **Archeological Excavations near the Holy Sepulchre**

The idea of creating the Orthodox Palestine Society was expressed for the first time in the late 1870s in correspondence between Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, and Vasili N. Khitrovo, at that time a senior official at the Ministry of Finance.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Khitrovo suggested creating a private Palestine Committee, on the model of the British Palestine Exploration Fund, Archimandrite Antonin, in his proposal to found a Russian Orientalists’ society, referred rather to the experience of German scholarly societies, particularly the *Deutscher Palästina-Verein* (German Society for the Exploration of Palestine). Antonin proposed to call on not only the best Russian Palestine experts, but also members of the imperial family – including Alexander II’s wife and the grand dukes Constantine and Nicholas Nikolaevich – to be honorary members of the society, just as members of the German imperial family were of the *Deutscher Palästina-Verein*. With this patronage, wrote Antonin:

according to circumstances (war, peace, abolition of serfdom, renaissance of the Orient, intrigues of the Occident, hopes of Orthodoxy, the task of all-powerful Russia, the position of the Great Russian Church within the Orthodox world, the dawning of the Union of all believers under the Cross of Golgotha against agnosticism, etc. etc.), we shall need to publish appeals to all the Russian Orthodox faithful [to create this new society].<sup>5</sup>

However, it was not until 21 May 1882 that the Palestine Society was officially established, in the context of Alexander II's assassination a year earlier, the pilgrimage of redemption to Jerusalem by part of the imperial family, the first wave of Jewish migration to Palestine after pogroms in the Russian Empire, and the launch by the French Assumptionist Fathers of a massive Catholic pilgrimage conceived in the spirit of what some in France called a "Ninth Crusade" against irreligion and secular republican values. Vasili Khitrovo, who had become the president's assistant after the society's creation, in a speech entitled "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy Svyatoy Zemli" (The Tasks of Scholarly Research in the Holy Land), proposed his vision of the scholarly work to be undertaken by Russia in Palestine. Khitrovo sketched out the current state of research into the Holy Land completed by scholars of the various Christian confessions, from antiquity to the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> He distinguished between two types of scholarly work devoted to the Judeo-Christian East: "Work that can be done in the silence of one's study and work that must be done in the Holy Land."<sup>7</sup> The Holy Land could be considered, from a scholarly point of view, "a huge museum, a catalog of already collected knowledge that needs to be put in order."<sup>8</sup> The work was to be given "to us Russians," Orthodox scholars, and not to Catholics or Protestants. He justified this allocation by the fact that the Holy Land had "belonged to the Byzantine Empire from the earliest years of Christianity, and Orthodoxy was, as it were, at home in that empire."<sup>9</sup> For this reason, the Orthodox were and continued to be the guardians of the ancient traditions concerning the Holy Land, unlike the Latins, who since the Crusades had identified and placed their mark on each site "on the basis of not only the canonical scriptures but also apocryphal texts and legends," and unlike the Protestants, who, under the influence of "cold skepticism," "have fallen into the other extreme," refusing all traditions and claiming to construct their ideas solely on the basis of scientific principles.<sup>10</sup>

"Scholarly work," said Khitrovo, should be accompanied by work in the field; according to him, Russia should carry out excavations near the Holy Sepulchre, on the "Russian domain" (*russkoe mesto*) that was bought from the Copts in March 1859 by P. Mansurov, an official close to Grand Duke Constantine, and the Russian consul V. Dorgobuzhinov. Knowing that the plot contained historic remains, the consul decided to implement its cleaning. Two years later, V. Dorgobuzhinov wrote a report to Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich on the "archaeological discoveries" made on the "Russian domain" in the course of the cleaning. He pointed out that "to the north-east of the Russian site lie the ruins of porticoes and propylaea being part of Constantine's basilica of the Holy Sepulchre."<sup>11</sup> He underlined the symbolic significance of the geographical situation of the "Russian domain" – "only 50 steps away from the altar of the Church of the Resurrection" – which emphasized the importance of "Russia's future place in the Orthodox world," but also "the need for the Russian pilgrims to have a shelter," since they had to wait, "chilled to the bone" after nocturnal divine services at the Holy Sepulchre, for Jaffa Gate to be opened. Subsequently, he proposed to purchase more land close to the "Russian domain."<sup>12</sup>

The ultimate goal of this territorial extension was the creation of an architectural complex composed of a "hospice for the pilgrims" and a "consular house" with a "home

church” (*domovoj khram*). According to V. Dorgobuzhinov, this church would be built on “the ruins of the ancient basilica of the Emperor Constantine,” by “the energetic hand of a man of action [*deiate!*]” – namely Grand Duke Constantine – who “attracted the cordial attention” of the sovereign on the problems of the Russian pilgrims in the Holy Land. This construction would thus “immortalize the memory of all that has been done by the Russians in Jerusalem.”<sup>13</sup> Although some parts of land that Dorgobuzhinov suggested be acquired were indeed purchased according to the grand duke’s instructions, the idea of erecting a consular building along with a church as a tribute to Constantine – the emperor and the grand duke – was abandoned for some time, as was that of undertaking archeological excavations.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Khitrovo’s first text on the tasks of Russian scholarly research in the Holy Land and his many memoranda addressed to Grand Duke Sergei brought about the opening of new excavations on the “Russian domain” in March 1883.<sup>15</sup> Grand Duke Sergei asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for permission to re-open the digs on the “Russian domain,” offered 1,000 gold rubles for that purpose, and invited Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, still head of the Ecclesiastical Mission, to carry out the excavations together with the German architect of Jerusalem, Conrad Schick.<sup>16</sup> This is a perfect illustration of the interactions between “Orthodox scholarship,” represented by Archimandrite Antonin; Russian diplomacy, since the land still belonged to the consulate; and imperial authorities, who provided the funding for the archeological investigations and used the results to mark the presence of the Orthodox empire in the region.

It is also significant that the “Orthodox archeologists,” society officials, and Russian diplomats, working together in Jerusalem, were obliged to defer to local constraints imposed by the Ottoman authorities and other religious representatives on the spot – Catholic, Protestant, and even Orthodox.<sup>17</sup> The Russian ambassador to Constantinople, Alexander Nelidov, in his secret memorandum on the affair, emphasized that discretion was necessary with respect to the Ottoman authorities and also because the excavations might arouse “delicate religious problems with the Catholics as well as the Turks,” as rumors were circulating that “the Russians have discovered a gate to the Holy Sepulchre, one of the three that existed in Antiquity,” which would enable them “to have a direct entrance to the Holy Sepulchre” from the “Russian site.”<sup>18</sup> In his conclusion to the memorandum, Nelidov added that the projects of the grand duke and the Palestine Society were to proceed without great fanfare emphasizing their political and religious importance, “which would not, however, preclude making the work public after it was completed, and even more, drawing all the advantages from this affair, whether political, scholarly, or religious.”<sup>19</sup> Nelidov did not mention another local player who might conceivably be affected and concerned by the large-scale Russian archeological digs: namely, the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem, for whom major discoveries by the Palestine Society would risk attracting pilgrims’ attention to the *ruskoe mesto* and “diverting” some of the donations of the Orthodox faithful to the Russian religious institutions erected beside the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>20</sup>

Only nine months after the excavations began, the grand duke wrote:

Although the excavations are not yet completed, they have been highly successful. Not only have traces of the Second Wall of Second Temple Jerusalem been found, which confirms the authenticity of the place of Jesus's burial, but there has even been discovered on the Russian domain the Gate that led from the City to Golgotha.<sup>21</sup>

In volume seven of the *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik* (Orthodox Palestine Collection), published in October 1884, Archimandrite Antonin and society officials confirmed, largely based on the earlier research by the non-Russian scholars mentioned above, the grand duke's statements and declared that they had discovered "the threshold of the Gate through which Christ climbed to Calvary."<sup>22</sup> With these discoveries, widely publicized in Russia and other countries, Russia wished to take symbolic ownership of two of the places most sacred to Christianity, the Way of the Cross (Via Dolorosa), and the Holy Sepulchre adjacent to the "Russian domain."<sup>23</sup> This ownership was to be crowned by the construction of a major edifice on the *russkoe mesto* – probably a monumental church to be called the "End of the Way of the Cross" – for which the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the church launched an "appeal to the Russian people" in January 1885.<sup>24</sup> The archeological excavations and discoveries, and above all the idea of erecting an edifice near the tomb of Jesus Christ, imagined and supported by the imperial family, diplomats, and ecclesiastical scholars, were integral parts of imperial Orthodox Russia's policy.

Indeed, as Richard Wortman shows in his analysis of the construction of the Cathedral of the Resurrection in St. Petersburg at the exact site of Alexander II's assassination, Alexander III's reign represented a new landmark in the construction of the Russian monarchical myth.<sup>25</sup> From that time forward, the Resurrection and Jerusalem became the starting point of the sacred narrative of the Russian monarchy; what is more, Golgotha was transposed directly into Russia. But, as the history of the excavations on the "Russian domain" and its aftermath show, the imperial power also aimed to occupy the religious and political space in Jerusalem in order to transfer "Holy Russia" into the Holy Land, coveted at the time by all the major European powers and Christian confessions. This project met the Russian desire for a dominant role within the Near Eastern Orthodox world.

However, the findings of the excavations were contested in Russia. Boris Mansurov, one of the senior officials of the former Palestine Committee, now the Palestine Commission, expressed his doubts in his writings in 1885–1887, asking a crucial question: "Has the Palestine Society produced irrefutable evidence that the historic traces it has discovered date to the period before Jesus Christ . . . ?"<sup>26</sup> He held that this question needed to be answered accurately and confidently "in order to leave no room for debate and doubt, because it is a matter of recognizing the authenticity of the Christian Holy of Holies."<sup>27</sup> Mansurov also stressed the need to ask the Orthodox Church for its position on this question, to be expressed by more than the mere presence of clerics on the board of the Palestine Society.

Mansurov's remarks aroused discussion among Orientalists and Palestinologists and, more widely, among Russian archeologists and historians. Grand Duke Sergei himself requested an expert opinion from the Society for Archeology.<sup>28</sup> This internal debate within

Russia, and local pressure from the Ottoman authorities, other confessions, and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Jerusalem, prevented the society's officials from erecting on the "Russian domain" an "imposing edifice marking the End of the Way of the Cross," as originally intended. But they succeeded, nevertheless, in building the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky on the *russskoe mesto* in the 1890s, dedicated to the memory of another Alexander – Tsar Alexander III, creator of the society – as well as buildings for the use and support of Russian pilgrims.

## **“Readings on the Holy Land” Meetings and Russian Orthodox Pilgrimage to Jerusalem**

While scholarly research was a major part of the society's work, at least at the start, over time organizing pilgrimage to Jerusalem became its main activity. To alert the Orthodox faithful to the situation in the Holy Land and persuade them to travel to Jerusalem, the society's leaders founded a number of publications intended for various audiences, from the *Orthodox Palestine Collection* for the social and intellectual elite, to *Readings on the Holy Land (Chtenia o Sviatoj Zemle)* intended for illiterate peasants, as well as *Conversations about the Holy Land (Besedy o Sviatoj Zemle)*, *Palestine Papers (Palestinskie Listki)*, and so on.

I shall analyze the collection of brochures entitled *Readings on the Holy Land*, produced for that section of the population that was either literate but poorly educated or totally illiterate. By the turn of the twentieth century, the collection comprised more than one hundred brochures on various topics: sacred history; pilgrimage to Jerusalem, especially Russian pilgrimage; sacred geography and the route to Palestine; the present state of the Holy Land; the presence of other countries and confessions in the region; and so on. These brochures “for peasants” were not, in most cases, used directly by the peasants themselves; rather, they served as material for the presentations made during meetings called “Readings on the Holy Land,” organized by the society's local departments.

The idea of these reading-meetings came from the peasants themselves: the tradition of conversation-meetings with a returning pilgrim was widespread in Russian culture in the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The society adopted this principle, extended the meetings, and laid down how they were to be run in its “Rules for Holding ‘Readings on the Holy Land’.” The “Readings on the Holy Land” meetings were only to be held during a clearly defined period of the calendar, beginning on 1 October and ending in the sixth week of Lent. They were held in churches and public buildings such as schools; admission might be free or might require an entrance fee. Local newspapers and priests were required to announce in advance the dates of these meetings during services.

The specific feature of “Readings on the Holy Land” meetings was that the participants (the population of a village or town district) were educated not by the written text, but by its presentation and interpretation under the leadership of society representatives. The “Rules for Holding ‘Readings on the Holy Land’” specified:

the session leader, inspired by his ardent love of the Holy Land, must force his listeners to travel in their minds to a place where most of us will never go – the cave where Jesus Christ was born, or the Garden where He prayed to His Father – to contemplate His Tomb . . . The one leading the session, moved by his convictions and the desire to see Orthodoxy triumph in the Holy Land, will arouse in his listeners' hearts by his sincere, strong, and true words a deep feeling of regret and compassion for those born in that place, true sons of the Orthodox Church, who have succeeded in keeping the faith of the apostles in its purity to this day, despite the yoke of the Muslims and heterodox propaganda, and who need material and spiritual support and the fortification of expiring Orthodoxy, by the construction of schools and churches . . . As he tells the stories of the most famous pilgrims, the leader must arouse among his listeners a desire to fulfill the dream of praying at the Tomb of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, to more effectively carry out the mission of “showing the sad state of Orthodoxy in the Holy Land,” to “force” people to “fulfill a dream,” to “possess the hearts” of the Russians, to “prepare for the triumph of Orthodoxy,” the leaders of the reading-meetings appealed to their listeners' imaginations, and helped them “see, hear, and feel the Holy Land.”<sup>31</sup> In this way, the representatives of the society virtually prescribed the words that future pilgrim would utter at the meetings.

Analysis of local department officials' reports on the reading-meetings reveals that the organizers paid close attention to the type of audience (“better prepared/less well prepared”). For example, the report from the Vyatka region (now Kirov Oblast), where there were not only Russians living, but also Cheremis (Mari) recently converted to Orthodoxy, notes that “for the Russians, the department chose the topic of the current state of Orthodoxy in the Holy Land; for the Cheremis, stories from Sacred History.”<sup>32</sup> In the report from the Volhynia department, the authors wrote, “The organizer simplified some of the brochures to make them accessible to the peasants.”<sup>33</sup> Study of the reports also shows that the speech about the Holy Land was often given in solemn surroundings, a church or official building, with the presentation of images, often very simple ones – a tree, an Orthodox church in Palestine – “enlivening” the narration, arousing “agitation, remarks, questions,”<sup>34</sup> and pictures of member of the imperial family projected by “magic lantern” to the national anthem played by the orchestra, bells, prayers, hymns, and popular chants.<sup>35</sup> The meeting leaders used all these rhetorical devices to arouse strong emotions – feelings of “joy and pride” in being Russian, Orthodox, and a subject of the Russian Tsar, “sadness for oppressed Orthodoxy in the Holy Land,” deep antipathy to Protestants, Latins, France, and hatred toward Muslims – that produced “sighs,” “tears,” “heart palpitations,” “softening of hearts,” “sorrow,” “regret,” “upset,” and “shock.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to describing emotions and feelings, the reports reveal the geographical and political imaginary of the peasants attending the “Readings on the Holy Land” meetings: Before the reading, “some peasants were convinced that the Holy Land lay within the power of the Russian Tsar, and were amazed, indeed would not believe, that it came under the authority of

the Turkish Sultan, a Mohammedan; this news shook their religious feelings.”<sup>37</sup> These conceptions can also be found in pilgrims’ stories, with revealing anecdotes, such as the Russian peasant from Voronezh who tried to pay with kopecks in Jerusalem and could not understand why the tradesmen in the shops did not speak Russian or accept kopecks.

Analysis of the “Rules for Holding ‘Readings on the Holy Land’” and people’s reactions described in the reports prove that this staging of the Holy Land had three effects. By providing the audience with practical details and precise historical and geographical information about Palestine and how to get there – obviously with the aid of the society – the reading-meetings tended to destroy the illusion that the Holy Land was some mythical place outside geographical and political space; on the contrary, this land was now fully accessible, thanks to the Palestine Society and the work of its representatives in Russia and on the spot. The meetings brought this land psychologically close by enabling each listener to take possession of it through strong feelings: the nearness was not only geographical, but, even more, symbolic, because the Holy Land represented the heart of Orthodoxy, with Russia as its protector. Through this effect, the leaders extended the imaginary space of the Russian Empire outside and beyond its actual territory, integrating the Holy Land into “Holy Russia.”<sup>38</sup> The sensations and emotions – individual, but shared – aroused by the organizers at the reading-meetings strengthened the participant’s feeling of belonging to a community that was first religious – Orthodox – and then political – the Russian Empire as a great power in opposition to the Ottoman Empire and the other European great powers, especially France.

The Palestine Society held reading-meetings on an impressive scale: for 1902–1903 alone, there were some 30,000 reading-meetings in 5,000 different places in Russia, attended by over five million people.<sup>39</sup> The same year, the society sent out to its local departments 49,210 copies of *Readings on the Holy Land* and distributed free of charge 644,540 *Palestine Papers* and 640,000 plates of images and pictures representing the Holy Land, a total of 1,333,750 publications that reached every region in Russia.<sup>40</sup>

This pilgrimage awareness campaign, and the creation in 1883 of the “pilgrim’s card” that reduced the traveling cost, had impressive results.<sup>41</sup> A growing number of pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem as the decades passed: from 1,500–2,000 in the 1870s–1880s to 6,000–7,000 at the turn of the century, and 10,000 in the 1910s.<sup>42</sup> “The simple people” (peasants and the poorest town dwellers) were 90 percent of the pilgrims, with the clergy making up 3.5 percent, and members of the nobility 3 percent. Most of the pilgrims were women (66 percent). The regions of central Russia – the governorates of Voronezh, Tula, Kaluga, Oryol, Kursk, Tambov, and Penza – provided the largest contingents, nearly 32 percent of the total.<sup>43</sup> Of these, Voronezh sent most, but society members were unable to explain why. As Vasili Khitrovo noted: “neither by its demographic or economic dimensions nor by its piety does the Voronezh region differ from the others, but the number of pilgrims from this region is considerable . . . Tambov, which is second, comes far behind.”<sup>44</sup>

These 6,000 to 7,000 Russian Orthodox believers appeared to be millions to the Catholic *La Croix*, the newspaper of the French Assumptionists, a congregation that, as mentioned earlier, had begun to organize mass pilgrimages in 1882 in the hope of

asserting “the religious values under threat in France and the Catholic faith in the Holy Land, against the Muslims and the Orthodox ‘schismatics’.”<sup>45</sup> To seize the imagination of European Catholics, *La Croix* claimed that “Russia is spending millions to buy the land next to the sanctuaries.” These comments show, however, that the fear of Russian pilgrims was mingled with a certain admiration. Similar ideas can be found in the German press.<sup>46</sup>

The Russian pilgrims aroused concern not only in Catholic circles but also, and not least, in European diplomatic circles, especially French ones. In the France-Russia contest to send most pilgrims to the Holy Land, Russia was well ahead. French diplomats on the spot – the consuls in Jerusalem and Beirut and the ambassador in Constantinople – expressed anxiety at the arrival of “whole regiments” of pilgrims and the appearance of Russian schools in the region, perceived as a real threat to French influence.<sup>47</sup> The extent of their anxiety can be seen in the proposal to backpedal the rapprochement between the two countries that had been laid down in a large number of diplomatic agreements in the 1880s and 1890s. In other words, the rivalry between France and Russia in the Near East was so strong that it might affect cooperation between the two countries on the European scene.<sup>48</sup> However, the two powers had a common enemy – Germany – which by the late 1890s was staking out its positions not only in Europe but also in Palestine-Syria. This became especially clear after Kaiser Wilhelm II’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1898, in the name of the interests of both Catholics and Protestants. Consequently, for all the suspicions and rivalries in Jerusalem, the understanding between the Russian Empire and the French Third Republic in Europe was not broken.

## **World War I and the Fate of the Society**

The Palestine Society’s activity in the Arab periphery of the Ottoman Empire was halted by war in 1914, but as early as the end of 1914 and early 1915 its senior officials began to prepare its return to the region, as evidenced by a series of projects presented to the Holy Synod and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time. The projects were summarized in the collective report presented under the name of the person responsible for Russian institutions in Palestine, P. I. Riazhsy, titled *Voprosy, svjazannye s vosstanovleniem dejatel’nosti Imperatorskogo Pravoslavnogo Palestinskogo Obsesva v Svjatoj Zemle po okontchanii vojny s Turciej* (Questions Relating to the Reestablishment of the Activity of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in the Holy Land after the War against Turkey).<sup>49</sup> In the report – which begins with the significant sentence, “Russia must prepare to make a peace worthy of her great sacrifices”<sup>50</sup> – the society’s officials requested, among other things:

- I. The formal recognition of the Russian Government’s right to protect the Orthodox Church, all its religious, charitable and educational establishments and its right to safeguard the autonomy of these establishments with respect to their internal affairs;

- II. The full, practical application of the principle of tolerance pursuant to the 1908 Act, not only toward the various Christian confessions, but even toward those Muslims desirous to convert to Christianity . . . ;
- IV. The resolution of the Greek-Arab conflicts and the assertion of Russian interests in the Tomb of Jesus and the other pilgrimage sites in Palestine.<sup>51</sup>

The report's fifty pages contain a number of other requests relating to the Russian society's legal, economic, and financial position in Turkey after the war. It reveals Russia's fears and hopes for the future: the fear of being overtaken by "minor Orthodox countries claiming to protect the Orthodox Church in our place," and of seeing a weakening of "Russian power and consequently of Orthodoxy";<sup>52</sup> and the hope of being able to say "Divine Service officially in Slavonic in the Holy Sepulchre and throughout the Holy Land."<sup>53</sup> The hope of being able to carry out missionary work without restraint among the nomadic population of Turkey, "people who call themselves Christians, Muslims, or Druze but belong to neither Christianity nor Islam."<sup>54</sup> The hope that after the war, "the Holy Land may become the land of peace, Christian freedom and mutual respect."<sup>55</sup>

The society officials' dream of returning to Palestine after a "victorious war" came to naught. The collapse of the Russian Empire, the October Revolution, and the aftermath of World War I shuffled the cards in the region and the whole world. Russia's relations with the Holy Land were interrupted. The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem remained until 1948 under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia. As for the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, it became the Palestine Society of the Soviet Academy of Sciences with the sole aim of pursuing scholarly research on the Near and Middle East.

*Elena Astafieva is a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CERCEC, CNRS-EHESS, Paris). She works particularly on relations between religion and politics in the Russian Empire from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 Henry Laurens, *La question de Palestine, Tome Premier, 1799–1922: L'invention de la Terre Sainte* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).
- 2 See Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), vol. 2.
- 3 Theofanis George Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine, 1882–1914: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1963); Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine, 1843–1914: Church and Politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969); Nikolai N. Lisovoï, *Russkoe dukhovnoe i politicheskoe prisutstvie v Sviatoï Zemle i na Blizhnem Vostoke v XIX–nachale XX v.* [The Russian Religious and Political Presence in the Holy Land and the Near East in the 19th–Early 20th Centuries] (Moscow: Indrik, 2006).
- 4 This correspondence was partially reproduced in Alekseï Dmitrievskiï, *Imperatorskoe pravoslavnoe palestinskoe obshchestvo i ego dieiatel'nost' za istekshuiu chetvert' vieka (1882–1907)* [The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and Its Activity over the Past Quarter-Century (1882–1907)] (St. Petersburg: V. F. Kirshbauma, 1907), 125ff.
- 5 Dmitrievskiï, *Imperatorskoe pravoslavnoe palestinskoe obshchestvo*, 133–34.

- 6 Vasili Khitrovo, "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy Svyatoy Zemli" [The Tasks of Scholarly Research in the Holy Land], in *Otchet Pravoslavnogo Palestinskogo obshchestva za 1882–1883 gg* [Report of the Orthodox Palestine Society for 1882–1883] (St. Petersburg: Ministry of National Education, 1883), 39–60.
- 7 Khitrovo, "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy," 50–51.
- 8 Khitrovo, "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy," 51.
- 9 Khitrovo, "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy," 51.
- 10 Khitrovo, "Zadachi nauchnykh issledovaniy," 52–55.
- 11 *RNB, DM, F.253, op. 1, D.40, 210–11 (verso).*
- 12 *RNB, DM, F.253, op. 1, D.40, 210–11 (verso).*
- 13 *RNB, DM, F.253, op. 1, D.40, 210–11 (verso).*
- 14 However, in the 1860s and 1870s, Russian diplomats granted non-Orthodox scholars, such as Melchior de Vogüé and Charles Clermont-Ganneau from France and Charles William Wilson and Claude Reignier Conder from Britain, permission – either personally or as representatives of non-Russian institutions – to excavate and describe the sites.
- 15 See, for example, his note dated November 1882: *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 1–3.*
- 16 *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 4.*
- 17 *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 5.* Schick, an architect from Württemberg, was asked not only because of his technical and scholarly talents, but also because, as the official architect of the city of Jerusalem, according to one of the Palestine Society's officials, he could "be useful in case of any conflicts with the Turkish authorities that might be initiated by neighboring landowners." However, as a member of the *Palästina-Verein*, the society officials asked him "to maintain confidentiality about any discoveries made."
- 18 *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 15–18.* The search for a gate – whether the secret gate to the Holy Sepulchre, as here, or the gate leading from Jerusalem to Hell, or the underground entrance to the direct route from Russia to the Holy Land – was a common topic in popular literature of the period, related in pilgrims' stories. See, for example, the monk A. Botchkov, *Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalime* [The Russian Pilgrims in Jerusalem] (Moscow: [unknown], 1875), 30. See below concerning the discovery on the *russkoe mesto* of the gate "through which Christ climbed to Calvary."
- 19 *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 18.*
- 20 The story of the patriarchate's reluctance to erect a church and a building for Russian pilgrims on the *russkoe mesto* some years later reveals the strained relations between the "three Orthodox-ies" in the Holy Land – Greek, Arab, and Russian.
- 21 *AVP RI, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, 54–55.*
- 22 See more the Antonin's explanations about the archeological excavations and discoveries: *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik 7* (1884–1887): 1–38.
- 23 The findings of the excavations were discussed in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 7* (1884). See in particular the article by one of the supervisors, Conrad Schick, "Das altchristliche Taufhaus neben der Kirche in 'Amwas,'" *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 7* (1884): 15–16.
- 24 Boris Mansurov, *Russkie raskopki v Svyatom Grade Ierusalime pered sudom Arxeologičeskogo Obščestva* [The Russian Excavations in the Holy City Jerusalem before the Court of the Society for Archeology] (Riga: [unknown], 1887), 12.
- 25 Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 2, 246.
- 26 Mansurov, *Russkie raskopki*, 10. In addition to *Russkie raskopki*, Mansurov's best-known books include *Bazilika imperatora Konstantina v sv. gr. Ierusalimě* [The Basilica of the Emperor Constantine in Holy Jerusalem] (Moscow: I. N. Kushnereva, 1885).
- 27 Mansurov, *Russkie raskopki*, 10.
- 28 *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik 7* (1884–1887): 157ff.
- 29 On this subject, see: T. A. Listova, S. V. Kuznetsov, and Kh. V. Poplavskaja, *Pravoslavnaia zhizn' russkikh krestian v XIX–XX vekov* [The Orthodox Life of the Russian Peasants in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries] (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 2001).
- 30 *Pravila provedeniai Tchtenij o Sviatoj Zemle* [Rules for Holding "Readings on the Holy Land"], *Soobshcheniia Imperatorskago Pravoslavnago Palestinskago Obshchestva* [SIPPO, Bulletin of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society] 13, appendix 6 (1902): 134–35 (in Russian). Each year, the Society's local departments were required to present a report on the reading-meetings (detailing the number of meetings, audience, and so on).
- 31 In the report from the Volhynia local department can be found the following descriptions: "Father Daniel asked the peasants who could not travel to the Holy Land to visit and prostrate themselves before the Tomb of Christ in their imagination, in their thoughts and to give a few kopecks for the Orthodox believers in Palestine and the pilgrims to the Holy Land." *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 426.
- 32 *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 429.
- 33 *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 427.
- 34 It was these images that gave the participants the impression of really being in the Holy Land and made it visible. *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 444, 459, 467. Often the of the Holy Land, distributed free of charge during and after the reading-meetings, were framed by the peasants

- and placed in the “red corner” of their homes, next to icons. *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 425, 459.
- 35 These were specially selected according to “topical” themes.
- 36 *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 387, 392, 402, 417–18, 426–28, 431, 449, 456–57, 461–62, 464–65, 467–68, 474, 558, and so on. According to some priests and officials’ reports, these meetings were a way of bringing some peasants back to the church. *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 396, 427–28.
- 37 *SIPPO* 11, no. 4–5 (1901): 474 (rapport from the local department of Chernigov).
- 38 Mikhail Soloviev, “Sviataia Zemlia i Rossia” [The Holy Land and Russia], *Tchtenia o Sviatoj Zemle* [Readings on the Holy Land] 55 (1894): 30.
- 39 *SIPPO* 15 (1904): 14.
- 40 *SIPPO* 15 (1904): 14.
- 41 According to Khitrovo, the creation of this “pilgrim’s card”, which in 1883 cost on average 75 rubles (prices varied by departure point in Russia and traveling class), enabled pilgrims to save 35 percent of the cost of travel. Concerning the earlier periods in the history of the pilgrimage, see: Eileen M. Kane, “Pilgrims, Holy Places, and the Multi-Confessional Empire: Russian Policy toward the Ottoman Empire under Tsar Nicholas I, 1825–1855” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2005).
- 42 For more detail on figures for 1860–1900, see: *SIPPO* 11 (1900): 131. For later years, see the society’s annual reports.
- 43 These are the data for the financial year 1908–1909. See *Otchet Imperatorskago pravoslavnago palestinskago obshchestva, 1908–1909* [Report of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, 1908–1909] (St. Petersburg: Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, 1911), 99–109.
- 44 *SIPPO* 11 (1900): 143. However, it should be noted that comparison of the various statistics shows that even in the regions that provided most pilgrims, the figure amounted to only 0.014% of the population.
- 45 For more detail on this subject, see: Catherine Nicault, “Foi et politique: les pèlerinages français en Terre sainte (1850–1914),” in *De Bonaparte à Balfour: La France, l’Europe occidentale et la Palestine, 1797–1917*, ed. Dominique Trimbur and Ran Aaronsohn (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2001).
- 46 For more detail on this subject, see: Elena Astafieva, “Das Selbstbild und das Bild des Anderen in den Veröffentlichungen der Kaiserlichen Orthodoxen Palästina-Gesellschaft (1882–1917),” in *Europa und Palästina, 1799–1948: Religion – Politik – Gesellschaft*, ed. Barbara Haider-Wilson and Dominique Trimbur (Wien: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2010), 157–180.
- 47 The French ambassador to Constantinople, Paul Cambon, in a 15 August 1898 letter to the French minister of foreign affairs notes that “in Russia, alongside the Government’s official action, there is almost always that of irresponsible forces . . . As far as the Levant is concerned, this force is the Palestine Society . . . thanks to them [Russia] has spread in this country a propaganda that is both religious and political, greatly to the detriment of our influence . . . The Palestine Society would only listen to an order from the Tsar, and it is hardly likely that His Majesty would impose such an order on his brother-in-law, Grand Duke Sergei, president of the Society.” See *Documents diplomatiques français (1871–1914)* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1929–1959), series I, vol. 14, n. 292, 453–54.
- 48 See the “virtual” discussion between two top-level diplomats in the telegrams sent by Gustave de Montebello, French ambassador to Saint Petersburg, and Paul Cambon, French ambassador to Constantinople, concerning the rivalry between Russia and France in the Levant and the need to keep the peace on the European stage. *Documents Diplomatiques français*, series I, vol. 13, n. 16, 30; vol. 14, n. 14, 25; vol. 14, n. 247, 368; and elsewhere. See also the consular documentation in the Center for Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nantes: f. “Ambassade à Constantinople” and f. “Consulat général à Jérusalem.”
- 49 Pavel Riazhskij, *Voprosy, svjazannye s vostanovleniem dejatel’nosti Imperatorskogo Pravoslavnogo Palestinskogo Obshchestva v Svjatoj Zemle po okontchaniu vojny s Turciej* [Questions Relating to the Reestablishment of the Activity of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in the Holy Land after the War against Turkey] (Petrograd: [unknown], 1915).
- 50 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 1.
- 51 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 2–5, 10–27.
- 52 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 3–4.
- 53 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 24.
- 54 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 5.
- 55 Riazhskij, *Voprosy*, 41.