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Russian Imperial Church Policy in the Black Sea Region (1856 – 1914)

For nineteenth-century Russia the Black Sea was an area of rich historical memories, and a birthplace of classical works of Russian literature and fine arts. The present article provides a new view on Russian policy in the Black Sea region during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. What role did this area play for Russia in the context of the Eastern question? How did diplomacy and Church policy act among the Christian population of the Black Sea region? Some recently discovered documents concerning these relations, rom unpublished archive sources, shed light on the character of Russian policy in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans during the "long nineteenth century."

1 The Black Sea Region in Russian Policy before the Nineteenth Century

The Black Sea region has played an important role in Russian history since the Middle Ages. The famous trading route "From the Vikings to the Greeks" ("*Iz variag v greki*"), from Kyiv and Novgorod to Constantinople, passed through there. One of the traditions of Prince Vladimir's baptism is also connected with Chersonesus in the Crimean Peninsula.[1] Merchants and pilgrims from the Russian lands travelled to the East following the western Black Sea coast, and the reverse path was taken by clergymen from the Christian Ottoman lands who went to Moscow in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to gather donations.[2] The Eastern route, mountainous and more dangerous, was normally avoided. These contacts were fertile ground for the future political and military steps of the Russian tsars in the eastern Mediterranean.[3]

Since the late seventeenth century the Black Sea coast became an object of Russia's direct political aspirations. Peter I undertook several expeditions against the Ottoman Empire, and captured the town of Azov (Ottoman: Azak). In the second half of the eighteenth century Catherine II started several campaigns against the Ottoman Empire

1 Andrzej Poppe, *The Rise of Christian Russia* (London: Variorum reprints, 1982); Gerhard Podskalsky, *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiever Rus' (988 – 1237)* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1982).

2 Nikolai F. Kapterev, *Kharakter otnoshenii Rossii k Pravoslavnomu Vostoku v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh* (Sergiev Posad: Elov Bookshop Publishers, 1914); Sergei M. Kashtanov, *Rossiia i grecheskii mir v XVI veke* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004); Ekkehard Kraft, *Moskaus griechisches Jahrhundert: Russisch-Griechische Beziehungen und metabyzantinischer Einfluss 1619 – 1694* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995).

3 On the period under Peter I, see Nikolas Pissis, *Russland in den politischen Vorstellungen der griechischen Kulturwelt 1645 – 1725* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2020).

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(1768–74, 1787–91), which resulted in joining to Russia vast southern territories and the whole northern Black Sea coastline. In 1783 the Crimean Peninsula was also annexed by Russia.[4] The territorial acquisitions were followed by wide-scale Greek emigration to Southern Russia. The Church organization of these provinces was entrusted to the learned Greek prelate Eugenios Voulgaris, appointed archbishop of Poltava in 1775.[5] The spirit of the Enlightenment and profound interest in Ancient Greek culture was characteristic for the court of Catherine.[6] It led to the hellenization of the topography of the Black Sea: The names of the towns of Odesa, Kherson, Feodosiia, and the newly founded Sevastopol drew on glorious Antiquity. Catherine's political projects were aimed at further penetration into Ottoman territory and in a large-term perspective at conquering the Ottoman capital, Istanbul. During the last decade of the eighteenth century the "Greek" projects were abandoned, but not forgotten.[7]

2 Different Facets of the Eastern Question: Practical Aspirations and Church Policy

The nineteenth century brought a new period, first a series of Russo-Ottoman wars, and from the late 1820s on the competition between the great powers for domination in the Middle East, known as the Eastern question. Its political side was focused on two main issues: the domination in the Straits connecting the Black Sea and the Aegean (the Bosporus and the Dardanelles), and the competition between Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and later Germany for dividing the Ottoman territory into

4 Matthew Smith Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 1–27; Nikolai F. Dubrovin, *Prisoedinenie Kryma k Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences Typography, 1885–89); Alan W. Fisher, "Şahin Girey, the Reformer Khan, and the Russian Annexation of the Crimea," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 15, no. 3 (1967): 341–64. For a brief overview of the political events in the eighteenth century: Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 139–86. See also Isabel de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (New York: Phoenix Press, 2002).

5 Steven Batalden, *Catherine II's Greek Prelate: Eugenios Voulgaris in Russia, 1771–1806* (Boulder: East European Quarterly/Columbia University Press, 1982).

6 On the Enlightenment in Russia see: Simon Dixon, *The Modernization of Russia 1676–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Vladimir F. Pustarnakov, *Filosofiia prosveshcheniia v Rossii i vo Frantsii: Opyt sravnitelnogo analiza* (Moscow: Institute of Philosophy RAN, 2002).

7 Olga P. Markova, "O proiskhozhdenii tak nazyvaemogo Grecheskogo proekta (80-e gody XVIII veka)," in *Problemy metodologii i istochnikovedeniia vneshnei politiki Rossii,* ed. Alexei L. Narochnitskii (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1986), 5–46; Petr V. Stegnii, "Eshche raz o grecheskom proekte Ekateriny II: Novye dokumenty iz AVPRI MID Rossii," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* 4 (2002): 52–78; Grigorii L. Arsh, "O grecheskom proekte Ekateriny II," in *Rossiia i borba Gretsii za osvobozhdenie: Ot Ekateriny II do Nikolaia I. Ocherki* (Moscow: Indrik, 2013), 35–52; Maria A. Petrova, *Ekaterina II i Iosif II: Formirovanie rossiisko-avstriiskogo soiuza, 1780–1790* (Moscow: Nauka, 2011).

spheres of influence.[8] All great powers exploited local nationalisms and the struggle of the non-Turkish nations for independence for their own interests, combining economic, cultural, and religious levers of influence. The religious component in Russian policy, neglected in the scholarship of the twentieth century, played a leading role in relations with the East. For centuries, the shared Christian Orthodox faith made the difference for and gave the advantage to Russian policy in the region over the influence of the Western powers. The messianic image of the Russian tsar-liberator and military success in the wars against the Ottoman Empire created a favorable platform for further geopolitical penetration into the Middle East. The treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774) became the new start of a long-term perspective for Russia's interference in Ottoman affairs as protector of the Orthodox population.[9] In the nineteenth century, the Church remained the main basis of Russian soft power and cultural diplomacy among the non-Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire. By educating young people in Russian theological academies and universities, financing churches, monasteries, and schools, and sending books and church items, Russia, similar to Britain and France, created clienteles among the population. After the treaty of Adrianople (Edirne, 1829), Russia had obvious advantages in the Eastern question, combining political means with the traditional material and diplomatic support of the Orthodox churches of the Ottoman Empire. In 1818 the Jerusalem dependence in Moscow was founded, followed by those of the Patriarchates of Antioch (1849) and Alexandria (1856).[10] These institutions guaranteed a stable income for the relevant churches in the East. Sizeable material aid was sent in the 1830s and 1840s to a number of Slavonic, Greek, Moldavian, and Wallachian churches. The Church institutions of the Danube Principalities (under Russian control between 1829 and 1834), enjoyed special attention from the Russian authorities: All attempts of the local administrators and landowners to shorter the privileges of the Church before 1853 were neutralized by Russian diplomacy in Istanbul.[11]

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8 From the vast bibliography on the Eastern question, see Benedict Humphrey Sumner, *Russia and the Balkans, 1870 – 1880* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1962); Anderson, *The Eastern Question;* Norman Rich, *Great Powers Diplomacy: 1814 – 1914* (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 1991); Alexander L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774 – 1923* (New York: Longman, 1996); Lucien Frary and Mara Kozelsky, eds., *Russian-Ottoman Borderlands: The Eastern Question Reconsidered* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 2014).

9 On the discussions and perceptions of this claim, see Victor Taki, *Contested Protectorate: Holy Places and Orthodox Christians in Russian-Ottoman Relations, 1815 – 1853* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015), 5; Victor Taki, *Limits of Protection: Russia and the Orthodox Co-Religionists in the Ottoman Empire* (Pittsburgh P. A.: Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 2015).

10 Olga E. Petrunina, Lora A. Gerd, and Kirill A. Vach, eds., *Aleksandriiskii patriarkhat i Rossiia v XIX veke: Issledovaniia i materialy* (Moscow: Indrik, 2020); Lora A. Gerd, "Russian Sacred Objects in the Orthodox East: Archive Evidence from the 18th to the Early 20th Century," *Museikon, Alba Iulia* 4 (2020): 227 – 36.

11 Barbara Jelavich, *Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State, 1821 – 1878* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Lora A. Gerd, "Sekuliarizatsiia imenii vostochnykh monastyrei i tserkvei v Valakhii i Moldavii v nachale 1860-kh godov i Rossiia," *Vestnik Pravoslavnogo Sviato-Tikhonovskogo Gumanitarnogo Universiteta,* Ser. II, 61, no. 6 (2014): 7 – 34.

3 After the Crimean War: Russian Church Policy in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

The Crimean War of 1853–56 was a turning point in Russian policy in the Middle East and the Black Sea region. Russia lost its favorable positions and had to face a completely new situation in the Ottoman Empire. With the edition of the *Hatt-i Hümayun* of 1856, a series wide-scale reforms was incepted in the Ottoman Empire.[12] The Tanzimat aimed to modernize and secularize the state: The non-Muslim communities were placed under state authority, with the intention that they would gradually lose their independence and economic power. The reforms envisioned a common Ottoman identity and a kind of equality before the law between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Orthodox Church was also under transformation, and after the new regulations were issued in 1860, its laicization began.[13] On the whole, this trend was not welcomed in Russia: Ambassador Butenev characterized the *Hatt-i Hümayun* of 1856 as a "lying and not very well composed document which was created and imposed on the Turks by the Western powers more out of their hatred for Russia and fear of her political and ecclesiastical influence in the East than out of their real concern for the Christian population in the Ottoman state. It has become the beginning of great confusion in the Patriarchate of Constantinople."[14] Quite unfavorable was the attitude of the head of Russian Church policy, the metropolitan of Moscow, Filaret Drozdov. Other conservative-minded politicians, such as Ober-Procurator Aleksandr Tolstoi, were not well-disposed to the Church reforms either. In fact, the reforms in the state and Church clearly diminished both the Church's independence and the Russian influence in the Empire, which was strongly based on the Orthodox Church.[15] In the age of nationalism and reforms, Russia faced a new political situation in which the traditional means of influence by material support could not work well enough; new ways had to be found.

12 Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963); William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

13 Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Metarrythmisi kai ekkosmikeusi: Pros mia anasynthesis tis istorias tou Oikoumenikou Patriarheiou to 19o aiona* (Athens: Alexandria, 2003), 77–152.

14 *Sobranie mnenii i otzyvov Filareta mitropolita Moskovskogo i Kolomenskogo po delam pravoslavnoi tserkvi na Vostoke* (St. Petersburg: Typography of the Synod, 1886), III.

15 *Sobranie mnenii i otzyvov Filareta:* 9, 14–15, 20, 29. About the position of Ober-procurator Alexander Tolstoi, see Lora A. Gerd, ed., "'V delakh Vostoka pervoi zabotoi nashei dolzhna byt Sviataia Tserkov…': Dve zapiski ober-prokurora Sv. Sinoda A. P. Tolstogo po greko-bolgarskomu voprosu s kommentariiami Alexandra II. 1860 g.," *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 2 (2003): 49–61.

4 Russian Policy in the Eastern Pontus Region (1856 – 1914)

The Russian influence in the Eastern Pontus region, inhabited by a mixed population of Greeks, Armenians, Georgians, and Turks was traditionally strong due to economic, social, and cultural links. As early as 1821, during the Greek struggle for independence, the archimandrite of Sumela Monastery, Ioannikios, escaped persecution and brought the relics of St. Christopher to Suhum-Kale. After his death in 1825, another monk, Pachomios, transferred the relics to the Greek monastery in Balaklava. In early 1839, the abbot of Sumela Paisii addressed to the Russian Holy Synod the request that the relics be returned to the monastery. His wish was fulfilled.[16] Around 1843, the abbot of St. George's Monastery, Hutura of Gümüşhane (the Greek Argyroupolis) Seraphim, wrote a letter to the Russian Synod requesting permission to gather donations. After some doubt, in 1845 the Russian authorities issued permission for one year.[17]

The *Hatt-i Hümayun* of 1856 officially put the Ottoman Christians on an equal footing with the Muslims: Among other freedoms, now they could officially practice their religion. As a result, hundreds of crypto-Christians from the Eastern Pontus, who had forcibly Islamized in the seventeenth century, decided to openly declare themselves Orthodox Christians.[18] The Eastern Pontus region was not greatly influenced by the main stream of the national struggle of the non-Muslim Ottoman population of the second half of the 1850s: Unlike the Western regions, the Christians here did not aim for autonomy with the perspective of political independence, but sought a Russian protectorate and prepared to join the territory of the Russian Empire.

After 1856, a campaign to join Orthodoxy was launched under the aegis of the Russian consul in Trabzon, Aleksandr Moshnin. He was convinced that the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire would soon be joined to Russia and considered it his task to prepare this development by supporting the local Orthodox and crypto-Christians. This population had already had long-term economic contact with the Southern Russian provinces and the Caucasus, working as masons in the towns. Now the opportune moment arose. About 16,000 Greek inhabitants of Kromli (Gümüşhane region) declared themselves officially Christians. The Russian ambassador in Istanbul, Apollinarii Butenev, advised Moshnin to act together with the consuls of other Western powers, but he refused, referring to the fact that they spread active Catholic propaganda among the

16 Extract from the decision of the Holy Synod, October 16/20, 1839, No. 133. Russian State Historical Archives (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Archiv, furtherafter RGIA), fond. 797, op. 9, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 25633.

17 Extract from the decision of the Holy Synod, November 7/28, 1845 RGIA, f. 797, op 15, 2 otd., d. 36300.

18 On the influence of the Tanzimat over the Eastern Pontus region, see Konstantinos Fotiadis, *Oi exislamismoi tis Mikras Asias kai oi kryptochristianoi tou Pontou* (Thessaloniki: Adelfon Kyriakidi Editions, 1993), 349 – 407.

local Armenians.[19] Some stories of the Kromli families are reported by Moshnin: Suleiman Bairamov from Trabzon had worked in Russia for a number of years and had adopted Orthodoxy and Russian citizenship. On returning to the Ottoman Empire, he openly declared himself Christian and was attacked by fanatic Muslims. Heavily wounded, he sought asylum in the Russian consulate, and Moshnin demanded from the Vali (provincial governor) that the guilty party be punished. A few days later a fight broke out between Suleiman's son Charalambos and the Muslims, and one person was killed. The consul demanded an independent investigation of the case and a fair trial for Charalambos and his opponents. Another case concerned a Greek woman who was kidnapped from her husband by a certain Muslim and forced to adopt Islam; Moshnin also granted her asylum in the Russian consulate.[20] In another report, dated 1861, Moshnin tells the story of two more people. The first was a man whom the consul helped move to Moldavia, and the second was a girl (Greek Orthodox on her mother's side) from the village Platamon who escaped from her father. The consul promised her protection from the pasha. She was later baptized in the house of a Greek, and Moshnin helped her leave for Georgia.[21]

Moshnin considered an important demonstration of the rights of Christians to be ringing bells in the church of the Metropoly. In 1857 he had already managed to obtain a three-hundred-ruble donation from the Russian Synod for the new Greek church in Trabzon,[22] where he managed to persuade the cautious Metropolitan Konstantios to install a bell. The re-conversion of the Kromli provoked indignation from the Muslim authorities and was regarded as a betrayal of Islam. Hundreds of them were imprisoned and died of hunger and typhus, and in Giresun the *zaptiye* (gendarmes) broke into the church during the liturgy. Some of the Kromli left the Ottoman Empire for Russia and settled in the region around the town of Poti on the Black Sea. Meanwhile, the Ottoman government recruited most of the young male population as soldiers. By 1859 the persecution had ended. Despite the repressions, Moshnin reported, about 16,000 Kromli were officially recognized as Christians and the Sublime Port had to support the Orthodox schools in Trabzon and Gümüşhane.[23]

The success of his mediation in the Kromli affair encouraged Moshnin to undertake another campaign concerning the Lazy population of the Batum region. "The Pashalık of Lazistan is inhabited by a completely different population than that of the

19 The first documents on the re-conversion are dated to May 1856 (Reports by the Greek vice-consul in Trabzon K. Kipriotis, see: Konstantinos Fotiadis, ed., *Piges tis istorias tou kryprohristianikou problimatos* [Thessaloniki: Adlefon Kyriakidoi Editions, 1997], 69–70). Report of Alexander Moshnin about 16,000 Kromli joining Christianity. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 341.

20 Report of Alexander Moshnin on 16,000 Kromli joining Christianity. RGIA, f. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 341.

21 Alexander N. Moshnin to Sergei N. Urusov, April 17, 1863. RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311.

22 Extract from the decision of the Holy Synod, November 18/December 1857. RGIA. F. 797, op. 27, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 401.

23 RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311. See also the thanksgiving letter of Metropolitan Konstantios to the Russian Synod (May 10, 1859). RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311.

Turks, Greeks, or the Armenians. They are Lazi, whose customs and traditions are similar to those of the traditions of the Hurians [...] A significant part of the region are Ajarians who are secretly practicing Christianity, like the Kromli," he reported.[24] On this occasion, he began negotiations over the construction of an Orthodox church in Batum. He regarded this act as even more important than the building of a Russian church in Trabzon. Moshnin's proposal was supported by the Metropolitan of Petersburg Isidor, who stressed the presence of crypto-Christians in the area of Kobuleti: They visited the half-ruined chapels in the mountains, where they lit candles.[25] In 1862 Moshnin travelled to the Caucasus and visited Batum, donated a bell to the church and on his return wrote a detailed report about Batum's perspectives as a future Russian harbor.[26] The Ajarians, however, had not reconverted to Christianity at the time; some of them later became Orthodox, after this territory was joined to Russia in 1878.

Moshnin's activities were greatly appreciated by the Russian government: He was invited to Petersburg and received an audience with the Empress Maria Alexandrovna. The tsarina herself donated to the church in Trabzon a set of ecclesiastical utensils and vessels; they were received by the consul in Istanbul and solemnly in Trabzon: The Metropolitan served a Slavonic liturgy to mark the occasion and granted permission for further Slavonic services in the town once every two weeks.[27]

Surprisingly, less than two years later Metropolitan Konstantios wrote a long complaint about Consul Moshnin to the Russian Synod, accusing him of not supporting the Orthodox. Moshnin was forced to defend himself. The reason for the complaints was clear: Some time earlier he had managed to reveal a massive contraband of weapons from the Ottoman Empire to the Caucasus. The British and Belgian consuls also participated in this affair, as well as some Greek merchants. One of them, Konstantinidis of Giresun, a Russian subject, was held for some time on a Russian naval vessel. This fact provoked indignation of the Metropolitan, financed by Konstantinidis.[28]

Apart of this, Moshnin offered the Russian foreign ministry detailed reports on the state of the Greek schools of the region, with information on the sums given by every church for the Trabzon Greek school.[29]

The persecution of the Christians in the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire led to their mass emigration to Russian territory in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1864 some of them arrived in the Caucasus together with their priests, without any documents. A few years later, the question arose as to whether their priests could celebrate the liturgy

24 Alexander N. Moshnin to Evgenii P. Kovalevskii. August 10, 1861. RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311.
25 Metropolitan Isidor of Petersburg to S. N. Urusov, September 9, 1861. RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311.
26 Alexander N. Moshnin to Sergei N. Urusov, April 16, 1863. RGIA, f. 797, op. 31, 2 otd., 2 st., d. 311.
27 Alexander N. Moshnin to Sergei N. Urusov, May 1/13, 1862. RGIA, f. 797, op. 32, 2 otd., d. 119.
28 Alexander N. Moshnin to Petr N. Stremouhov, June 28, 1862. RGIA, f. 797, op. 32, 2 otd., d. 119. The Greek merchant mentioned was possibly Captain Georgi Konstantinidis (1828 – 1906), later mayor of Giresun (1889 – 1906).
29 Report dated December 4, 1865. RGIA, f. 797, op. 36, 2 otd., 3 st., d. 1.

without papers from their bishops. On July 3, 1870 the Russian Synod, on the basis of Orthodox canon law, prohibited this, and Archbishop Theophylact demanded that they receive other Greek priests who already had Russian papers. The conflict was solved by the intermediation of Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolaevich, then governor of the Caucasus. He explained that the emigrants lived in remote areas, and at the same time they trusted their own clergy and there could be no doubts concerning their legal status. The Synod finally rescinded its decree.[30]

A different situation was presented by the sons of these priests, who wanted to combine the advantages of their stay in Russia with the privilege of dependence on a bishop abroad. Some of them travelled to the Ottoman Empire, and after being ordained there aspired to serve the liturgy in Russia among their compatriots. Here the Synod showed no mercy and demanded that they study in ecclesiastical schools as the sons of Russian priests.[31]

Refugees from the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces regularly tried to collect donations in Russia without official permission, presenting themselves as clergymen; repeated prohibition by the Russian Synod shows that such attempts endured.[32]

The annexation of Batum and the Kars region to the Russian Empire in 1878 marked the further penetration of Russia into the eastern part of Asia Minor. This was followed by another wave of contacts with the Orthodox population and institutions in the east of the Ottoman Empire, favorable for Russia's influence in the region. Most attention was paid to the largest monastery, that of the Virgin Sumela. In early 1888, the abbot Parthenii sought the Synod's permission to gather donations among the Greeks of Southern Russia, bringing the venerated icon and relics of saints. Permission was granted in early 1889. "Taking into account that the monastery is the mainstay of Christianity in the region and contributes a lot to the spiritual life of the local population, by the foundation and financing of schools in the villages, as well as an ecclesiastical school for priests, and is in poor condition because of its debts," it was allowed to collect money not only among the Greeks, but also among all the inhabitants of Southern Russia. Later, this permission was extended to the entire territory of Russia and prolonged twice, for two more years.[33] The Sumela monastery was also allowed to collect donations in 1902 and 1912. The other Pontus monasteries also enjoyed this right more than once, for example the monastery of St. George Peristera in 1897, 1898, and 1913.[34]

In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the East Pontus became the subject of intensive study by Russian Byzantinists. Russian Byzantine studies had been

30 Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich to Dmitrii A. Tolstoi. Borzhomi, June 27, 1871. RGIA, f. 797, op. 41, 2 otd., 3 st., d. 147.

31 RGIA, f. 797, op. 51, 2 otd. 3 st., d. 378.

32 See the Synod reports and restrictions: RGIA, f. 797, op. 48, 2 otd. 3 st., d. 18; op. 45, 2 otd. 3 st., d. 9, etc.

33 Extract from the decision of the Holy Synod, January 18/22, 1889, No. 81. RGIA, f. 797, op. 58, 2 otd. 3 st., d. 66.

34 RGIA, f. 797, op. 82, 2 otd., 3 st., d. 385.

highly encouraged since the 1880s, as part of the mainstream conservative universalist ideology of Alexander III's reign. The first to discover the heritage of the Pontus monasteries was the Greek scholar Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kerameus, who visited the Sumela and Bazelon monasteries in 1884 and made a catalogue of their manuscripts. Kerameus later moved to Russia, where he published his works.[35] He also brought with him from the Vazelon monastery an important manuscript on the economic life of the province during the early Ottoman times. After his death, this manuscript was given to the Imperial Public library in St. Petersburg and is the only preserved manuscript from the monastery.[36] Soon after the foundation of the Russian Archeological Institute in Istanbul, his director Fedor Uspenskii undertook an expedition to Trabzon (1895)[37] and Aleksei Dmitrievskii, professor of the Kyiv Theological Academy, visited Sumela in 1896. Apart from studying liturgical manuscripts, Dmitrievskii discovered and made a copy of the Itinerary of Arsenii of Elassona, who followed Patriarch Jeremy II to Russia in 1586 and 1588. The manuscript contains "Memories from Russian history" and the life of Archbishop Arsenii.[38]

5 During World War I

In early 1916 the Russian army successfully advanced on the Caucasus front and occupied a vast territory in the east of the Ottoman Empire. Trabzon was captured on April 5. Evgenii V. Maslovskii, a witness to the events, described the triumphal entry of the Russian troops and their enthusiastic meeting by the local Christian population.[39] Another witness, the protopresbyter of the Russian army and fleet Georgii Shavelskii, left a more realistic account: The Russian army arrived in the eastern Ottoman Empire soon after the genocide of the Armenians in 1915. The Greek population, however, re-

35 Chryssanth Loparev, "Afanasii Ivanovich Papadopulo-Keramevs," *Vizantiiskii Vremennik* 19 (1912): 188 – 212; Igor P. Medvedev, "Neizvestnii katalog grecheskikh rukopisei Vazelonskogo monastyria, sostavlennii A I. Papadopoulo-Keramevsom," in *Arkhivy russkikh vizantinistov v Sankt-Peterburge*, ed. Igor P. Medvedev (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1995), 430 – 44.

36 Later, Russian scholars prepared an edition of the text: Fedor I. Uspenskii and Vladimir N. Beneshevich, *Vazelonskie akty: Materialy dlia istorii monastyrskogo i tserkovnogo zemlevladeniia v Vizantii VIII–XV vekov* (Leningrad: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoi publichnoi biblioteki, 1927).

37 The results of this short visit were published in: *Izvestiia Russkogo Arkheologicheskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole* 1 (1896): 25 – 29.

38 Probably, the original manuscript was lost, and a copy plays the role of the original (Russian National Library, f. 253, op. 1, d. 280). See the publication in Russian translation: Alexei Dmitrievskii, *Arkhiepiskop Elassonskii Arsenii i memuary ego iz russkoi istorii po rukopisi Trapezundskogo Sumeliiskogo monastyria (s fototipicheskim portretom (ikonoi) Arkhiepiskopa i ego faksimile na russkom iazyke)* (Kyiv: St. Vladimir Imperial University, N. T. Korchak-Novitskii editions, 1899). A Greek edition after Dmitrievskii's copy: Fotis Dimitrakopoulos, *Arsenios Elassonos (1550 – 1626): Bios, ergo, apomnimoneumata. Symboli sti meleti ton metabyzantinon logion tis Anatolis* (Athens: P. Kyriakidi Editions, 2007).

39 Evgenii V. Maslovskii, *Velikaiia voina na Kavkazskom fronte: 1914 – 1917 gg.* (Moscow: Veche, 2015), 318 – 19.

mained almost untouched. In Erzincan they met a priest, who reminded him more of a beggar than a clergyman. He preferred Trabzon and described the Russian activities in the town: The buildings around the church of Panagia Chrysokephalos had already been demolished to make room for a square. Shavelskii paid special attention at Metropolitan Chrysanthos and praised his education and abilities. After a personal meeting with the prelate he commented that nothing could be expected from him as far as Russian interests were concerned, especially taking into account his German education and Greek patriotism.[40]

The Russian occupation of the Trabzon region gave new opportunities for research work. Academician Fedor Uspenskii spent a few months there (from May to September 1916) ahead of an expedition. This time he made a detailed study of the churches and monasteries inside the town and undertook a trip to the monastery of St. George Peristera. He paid another (shorter) visit to Trabzon in 1917.[41]

6 The Western Black Sea Coast: Panslavism, Church Policy, and Cultural Diplomacy

The Tanzimat period brought strong inspiration to the national struggle of the Slavonic peoples of the Balkans on their way to Church and political independence. This tendency was accelerated by the government of Alexander II, which was looking for new ways to pursue its policy in the Balkans; the idea of Slavonic unity replaced the previous pan-Orthodox ideology and Panslavism became the official ideology of Russia. Meanwhile, events in the Balkans were taking a dramatic turn, most difficulties being provoked by the Bulgarian case. In the late 1850s, along with other provinces, the Bulgarians sent delegates to the Church-national assembly in Istanbul. The Bulgarians demanded Church autonomy from the Greek Patriarch, the appointment of their own bishops, and service in the Slavonic language. In fact, the Church struggle was the only legal path to future political independence. The famous Greek–Bulgarian question became the central controversial point in the Balkans during the second half of the nineteenth century. It ended in the proclamation of the Bulgarian exarchate in 1870 and the Bulgarian schism in 1872, which split Eastern Orthodoxy for sixty-seven years.[42]

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40 Georgii I. Shavelskii, *Vospominaniia poslednego protopresvitera russkoi armii i flota* (New York: Chekhov Editions, 1954), 189.

41 Uspenskii's expeditions and their scientific findings are presented in a series of articles by Anna G. Tsypkina: "Trapezundskaia nauchnaia ekspeditsiia 1916–1917 gg.: Novye arkhivnye materialy," in *Prichernomorie v Srednie veka*, ed. Sergei P. Karpov (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2015), 212–37; "Opis materialov Trapezundskoi ekspeditsii F. I. Uspenskogo (1916–1917)," *Vizantiiskii Vremennik* 100 (2016): 197–212.

42 From the vast bibliography on Russian Panslavism and the Bulgarian question, see Hans Kohn, *Panslavism, Its History and Ideology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953); Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric, *Panslavism and National Identity in Russia and in the Balkans, 1830–1880: Images of the Self and*

Between 1856 and 1877 Russian policy in the Balkans was contradictory. On the one hand, the Russian politicians aimed to preserve the unity of the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, after the Crimean War the government of Alexander II took the course of supporting the separatist movements of the Balkan Slavs, with a final end of creating a Slavonic state dependent on Russia.[43] In the framework of this policy generous material support was sent to the Slavonic churches of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia, and wherever possible Russian diplomats supported the Slavonic clergy against the Greek bishops. This line can be well traced in the Bulgarian lands close to the Black Sea. The majority of the Christian population in the towns was traditionally Greek, while the rural areas were inhabited by Bulgarians.

Tensions ran particularly high between the Greek and Bulgarian communities in the largest (and primarily Greek-populated) town of Varna on the western coast of the Black Sea. The Greek Metropolitan resisted the introduction of Slavonic liturgy in one of the churches, acting with the help of the local Ottoman authorities. In his report dated December 3, 1860 the Russian consul Aleksandr Rachinskii wrote:

> The supreme spiritual and political needs of the area and the perspectives of our influence on the Bulgarian people demand the introduction of Slavonic language in the Bulgarian churches. As our ministry does not intend and finds it impossible to apply material force and means in the Bulgarian question, and in the present-day aspirations of the Bulgarians towards a national hierarchy, the church path remains the only one for approaching and influencing them.[44]

Supporting the Bulgarian Church movement, according to Rachinskii, was especially important, taking into account the danger from Catholic and Protestant propaganda, and the activities of the Russian Old Believers who found refuge in the Danube delta. After more than six months of service in the vice-consulate, he succeeded in opening a Bulgarian school in Varna, and the Greek Metropolitan Porphyrios allowed a Slavonic service in St. George's Church on Saturdays. Nevertheless, Rachinskii found reconciliation between the Greeks and the Bulgarians impossible and proposed the foundation of a pure Slavonic church in the town. For this purpose, he suggested renting St. George's Church in Varna, or consecrating a church in the building of the Rus-

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Others (New York: Boulder, 1994); Jelena Milojkovic-Djuric, "The Balkan Crisis of 1875 – 1878 and Russia: Between Humanitarianism and Pragmatism," in *Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century: Setting the Precedent*, ed. Alexis Heraclides and Ada Dialla (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 169 – 96; Vera Boneva, *Balgarskoto tsarkovno-natsionalno dvizhenie 1856 – 1870* (Veliko Tarnovo: O pismeneh, 2010). In recent years, new approaches have analyzing the national movements of the Balkan peoples: Dimitris Stamatopoulos, ed., *Polemos kai epanastasi sta Othomanika Balkania (18s–20s ai.)* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2019).

43 Comprehensive research on Russian policy in the Eastern Mediterranean in the period 1856 – 1914 with respect to the national movements of the Slavonic and Arabic peoples is still a desideratum. An initial approach (with regard to the Bulgarian case) has been made by Denis Vovchenko, *Containing Balkan Nationalism: Imperial Russia and Ottoman Christians, 1856 – 1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

44 RGIA, f. 797, op.30, 2 otd. 2 st., d. 367.

sian consulate. Rachinskii's proposal was rejected by Metropolitan Filaret Drozdov of Moscow, then the main authority concerning church affairs in Russia. He stressed that unlike the Catholics or the Protestants, Russia could not afford to act regardless of the local Greek hierarchy, as this was against Orthodox canon law. He also supposed that supporting the Bulgarian case in the conflict would not contribute to church peace. The hopes for reconciliation, expressed by Filaret, were in vain, however: during a pastoral visit Porphyrios was accepted only in four out of sixty-four Bulgarian villages.

In 1861 the question was solved in line with Rachinskii's proposals: In February 1861 the consul had an audience with Alexander II. The initial financing of the church, arranged in the house of the consulate in 1862, was secured thanks to donations from private persons. Countess Elizaveta Vorontsova gave 5,000 rubles, and later sent an annual sum of 1,200 rubles. Other noblewomen donated the interior decoration: Countesses Bludova and Protasova the vestments, vessels, and utensils, and Tatiana Potemkina the iconostasis. Later the private donations were replaced by a subsidy from the Russian Synod (eight hundred and four hundred rubles). The church was visited mainly by Bulgarians from the villages around Varna and could accommodate about two hundred people. The priest, Archimandrite Filaret, served the liturgy according to the Russian traditions. Some years later Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow seemed to have changed his opinion, because in 1865 we see him among the defenders of the church, which faced serious financial difficulties.[45] He stressed the role of the Russian church against the propaganda of the Unia. After the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877/78 the Russian consulate in Varna was closed, and the church moved to the house of the priest. Obviously, now that Varna was on the territory of the Bulgarian Principality, there were no more political reasons for keeping the church open. Alexander II decided, however, to keep it to commemorate the Russian soldiers who had been killed in Varna during the campaign of 1828/29. Hence it was financed by Russia until the construction of a new cathedral in the town.[46] The Greek-Bulgarian controversies did not cease in all Bulgarian towns with Greek communities until World War I; they became especially intensive in 1906.[47]

The last decades before World War I were marked by extreme tension in all controversial issues concerning the Eastern question. The central question, that of the Straits, attempts to create a league of the Balkan or Slavonic Balkan nations under Russian aegis against the Ottoman domination, attempts to pacify the Balkan peoples—these were the main trends in the Western Black Sea territories. In the eastern part, after the Batum, Kars, and Ardahan areas were joined to the Russian Empire in

45 RGIA, f. 797, op. 35, 2 otd., d. 3.

46 RGIA, f. 797, op. 46 , 2 otd., 3 st., d. 38.

47 Maria Hristemova, "Antigratskoto dvizhenie v Asenovgrad prez 1906 g.," *Godishnik na Istoricheskia muzei v Plovdiv* 2 (2004): 102–13; Iura Konstantinova, "The Anti-Greek Movement in Bulgaria (1906) in the Perception of the Bulgarian Political Elite," *Études Balkaniques* 3 (2009).

1878, further aspirations were aimed at the "Great Armenian" territories of the Van, and attracting the non-Chalkedon Christians to Orthodoxy.[48]

The question of the Straits ("the key to our home," in the terminology of some Russian politicians), always of the utmost importance, became especially hot during World War I. The secret treaty of March 1915, promising Russia Istanbul and the adjacent territory, opened a large perspective for political dreams in the Russian press. Most authors concentrated on the messianic discussions concerning the cross over St. Sofia and the liberation of the ancient capital of the Christian Empire, while others argued that after the war all of Asia Minor would be Russian territory and the Black Sea should become a Russian lake.[49] The advance of the Russian troops in 1916 and 1917 encouraged the authors of these ideas, but the revolution of October 1917 put an end to the imperial ambitions of the time.

7 Conclusion

The long nineteenth century, from the Russo-Ottoman wars of the 1800s until World War I, created a huge complex of interconnected problems in the context of a larger issue, the Eastern question. The Black Sea region became the main area of Russia's geopolitical ambitions. The need to protect its southern borders was combined with aspiration for further penetration into the Ottoman Empire and further territorial acquisitions. Apart from direct military campaigns, the Russian politicians used a wide range of diplomatic and cultural means, and the pressure of "soft policy" and "cultural diplomacy" was applied by both the foreign ministry and the Holy Synod. The Church and the Orthodox faith shared with the Greek and Slavonic population remained the traditional solid basis for the fulfillment of political aspirations. Balancing between the Ottoman authorities and the local non-Muslim communities in their conflicts with each other, the Russian Empire made its way towards the realization of the universalist imperialist idea, aiming for control over the entire Black Sea basin.

48 Here a significant success was several hundreds of Nestorians from the Lake Urmiah region joining Russian Orthodoxy in 1896. These activities by Russia provoked strong counteraction on the part of British diplomacy, which had its own claims to and aspirations for the Eastern Ottoman and Western Persian territories. See Lora A. Gerd, "Anglikanskia i russkaia pravoslavnaia missii k nestorianam Turtsii i Persii v kontse XIX veka," *Khristianskoe Chtenie* 2 (2015): 137–57.

49 A. Iashchenko, *Russkie interesy v Maloi Azii* (Moscow: A. I. Mamontov Typography, 1916). For further details, see Lora A. Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878–1914)* (Warsaw: De Gruyter Open, 2014); Lora A. Gerd, "Rosika shedia gia tin Constantinoupoli to 1915," in Stamatopoulos, *Polemos,* 313–24.