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## RUSSIA'S POSITION TOWARD OTTOMAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

### AN 1816 INSTRUCTION FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY

Theophilus C. Prousis

Documents on tsarist policy in the Near East offer suggestive detail, subtle nuance, and firsthand commentary on the proposed if not actual state of Russo-Ottoman affairs regarding specific issues between the two neighboring autocratic empires. These features, to varying degrees, are manifested in this translated directive of June 1816, from Foreign Minister Karl V. Nessel'rode to envoy Grigorii A. Stroganov in Istanbul, dealing with Russia's attitude toward the sultan's Eastern Orthodox subjects in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna. The Foreign Ministry's instruction merits attention by scholars of Imperial Russia's involvement in the Eastern Question as a reminder that primary sources on particular aspects of the Russo-Ottoman nexus warrant closer scrutiny and critical commentary.

The Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (AVPRI) holds extensive records for the study of Russia's contacts and connections with the far-flung regions of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup> The Foreign Ministry dispatch presented here provides but one example of the wealth and variety of AVPRI records, published and unpublished,

1 For an introduction to AVPRI's rich resources, see the archival guide of I. V. Budnik, ed., *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii: Putevoditel'* (Minneapolis: East View Publications, Inc., 1995). Because Western scholars have had full access to this institution only since 1990, identifying some of the actual collections provides a useful research tool for specialists in the field. For a sampling of AVPRI holdings on tsarist interests in the Near East, see Theophilus C. Prousis, "AVPR (Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossii) and the Orthodox East," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 12/13 (1996–97): 473–503, and idem, "A Guide to AVPRI Materials on Russian Consuls and Commerce in the Near East," *Modern Greek Studies* 16/17 (forthcoming).

that deserve a more prominent place in scholarship on Russo-Ottoman relations in general and on the religious dimension of tsarist policy in particular.<sup>2</sup> Russian scholars in the Soviet era certainly utilized AVPRI's treasure trove for their important works on Russian activities in the Balkans, Greece, and the wider Ottoman world.<sup>3</sup> Yet they generally downplayed or neglected the religious element in tsarist ties with the Greek or Orthodox East, the term often used for the Eastern Orthodox lands and peoples under Ottoman rule that were formerly part of the Byzantine Empire. The most promising development to fill this gap, and symptomatic of Russia's recovery of religious identity, is the recent publication of two volumes of AVPRI materials on Russia's diplomatic, economic, religious, and cultural presence in the holy land during the late Imperial period.<sup>4</sup>

2 Ministerstvo inostrannykh del SSSR, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii XIX i nachala XX v.: Dokumenty Rossiiskogo ministerstva inostrannykh del*, 16 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1960–1995), hereafter cited as *VPR*, with published documents on Russo-Ottoman border disputes, treaty agreements, trade, shipping, and consular affairs.

3 Examples of Soviet scholarship based on AVPRI materials include Avgusta M. Stanislavskaiia, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia i problemy Sredizemnomor'ia (1798–1807)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1962), idem, *Rossiiia i Gretsiiia v kontse XVIII-nachale XIX v.: Politika Rossii v Ionicheskoi respublike, 1798–1807 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976); Grigorii L. Arsh, *Eteristskoe dvizhenie v Rossii. Osoboditel'naia bor'ba grecheskogo naroda v nachale XIX v. i russko-grecheskie sviazi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), idem, *I. Kapodistriia i grecheskoe natsional'no-osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie, 1809–1822 gg.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976); Anatolii V. Fadeev, *Rossiiia i vostochnyi krizis 20-kh godov XIX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1958); and Vitalii I. Sheremet, *Turtsiia i Adrianopol'skii mir 1829 goda: iz istorii vostochnogo voprosa* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975). Additional works, by Georgiev and Dostian, are cited below.

4 N. N. Lisovoi, ed., *Rossiiia v Sviatoi Zemle. Dokumenty i materialy*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2000), with an introduction to Russian activity in Palestine by editor Lisovoi, I: 12–17. The vast majority of these records describes the endeavors of the Russian consulate-general in Jerusalem (1858–1914), the Palestine Commission in the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Ministry (1864–69), the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (1882–1918), and the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem (1847–1918). Useful earlier studies, though they did not draw on AVPRI sources, are Theofanis G. Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine: 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 Press, 1969); and Stephen K. Batalden and Michael D. Palma, "Orthodox Pilgrimage and Russian Landholding in Jerusalem: The British Colonial Record," in Stephen K. Batalden, ed., *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Iden-*

This collection of documents should serve as a model and a prompt for the publication of additional AVPRI holdings on Russian activities in the Ottoman Empire and the Orthodox East, and the enlarged resource base will no doubt facilitate research on all aspects of tsarist policy.

A common Orthodox faith and a shared Byzantine civilization opened various avenues of religious contact and interaction between Muscovy and the Ottoman-ruled Orthodox East in the 16th and 17th centuries. Inspired partly by the Third Rome theory, Moscow's tsars and church hierarchs distributed alms and other forms of assistance to the patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch; to Greek clergy and monks who traveled to Muscovy; and to custodians of the sacred places of Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem. From Muscovy a steady stream of pilgrims, clergymen, and monks journeyed to Orthodox shrines and monasteries in the Near East, often returning home with Byzantine religious artifacts and manuscripts. Greek educators, translators, and churchmen who migrated to Muscovy brought with them elements of Greek learning and scholarship, which helped fuel the reform efforts of Patriarch Nikon to purify Russian church texts and rituals. Orthodox brotherhoods in Nezhin and Lvov, funded partially by Muscovite, Greek, and Balkan merchants, founded schools and churches to defend Orthodoxy against Roman Catholicism in the embattled Ukraine. Such were the most salient features of Moscow's religious link to the Orthodox East before the Imperial era.<sup>5</sup>

*tity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 251–63.

5 For an introduction to the extensive literature on these religious ties, see Boris L. Fonkich, *Grechesko-russkie kul'tur'nye svyazi v XV–XVII vv.: Grecheskie rukopisi v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977); idem, "Russia and the Christian East from the Sixteenth to the First Quarter of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 7 (1991): 439–61; Nikolai F. Kapterev, *Kharakter otnoshenii Rossii k pravoslavnomu vostoku v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh* (Sergiev Posad: Izdanie knizhnogo magazina M. S. Elova, 2nd ed., 1914); idem, *Snosheniia ierusalimskogo patriarkha Dosifeia s russkim pravitel'stvom (1669–1701)* (Moscow: Tipografia A. I. Snegirevoi, 1891). On Russian travelers to the Greek East, many of whom recorded their impressions and observations

Religion continued to figure prominently in Russia's relations with the Near East during the 18th and 19th centuries, when Russian interests formed part of the larger European rivalry known as the Eastern Question. Beginning in the reign of Catherine the Great, the question of great power expansion and penetration at the expense of the Ottoman Empire became a complex and multifaceted issue for Russia, as the pursuit of military, commercial, and diplomatic aims combined with the defense of Eastern Orthodoxy. The landmark Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji (1774) granted Russia not just unrestricted trade access to the Black Sea and the Levant and consular representation throughout the Ottoman Empire but explicit rights of interceding for the sultan's Orthodox subjects who resided in Moldavia and Wallachia. Additionally, Article Seven articulated the Porte's promise to "protect constantly the Christian religion and its churches" in the Ottoman realm, while Article Fourteen permitted Russia's diplomatic mission in Istanbul to build an Orthodox church in the Galata quarter, the enclave of European embassies and residences, and to safeguard the clergy and caretakers of this one particular church.<sup>6</sup>

The Kutchuk-Kainardji Treaty not only widened the parameters of tsarist endeavors in the Near East but often concealed Russian

of holy shrines, see Theofanis G. Stavrou and Peter R. Weisensel, *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Columbus, Oh.: Slavica Publishers, 1986), and K. Urguzova et al., eds., *Sviatye mesta vblizi i izdali: Putevye zametki russkikh pisatelei I poloviny XIX veka* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, RAN and Shkola-Press, 1995).

6 An English translation of the treaty appears in Jacob C. Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record. Volume 1: European Expansion, 1535-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd ed., 1975), 92-101. Also see Roderic Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility: The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered," in Roderic Davison, ed., *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923: The Impact of the West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 29-50; and Elena I. Druzhinina, *Kiuchuk-Kainardzhiiskii mir 1774 goda: ego podgotovka i zakliuchenie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1955). On the broader import of the treaty for the Eastern Question, see Matthew S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966), and Vladimir A. Georgiev, et al., *Vostochnyi vopros vo vneshnei politike Rossii: konets XVIII-nachale XX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978).

interests under the guise of "religious protection." Controversy erupted almost immediately over the interpretation of Articles Seven and Fourteen, a debate prompted by the allegedly vague or ambiguous wording in these two religious clauses. As Roderic Davison contends in his meticulously crafted research, however, the phrasing in both articles expressed unequivocally clear and precise terms. The treaty confined Russia's right to mediate on behalf of Ottoman Orthodox Christians to two specific areas: the Danubian Principalities and the newly sanctioned Russian church in the Galata district of Istanbul. Everywhere else within its dominion the Sublime Porte remained the rightful protector of Orthodox Christian worship, churches, and clergy. Yet a manifesto of Catherine II in 1775 spoke of advantages Russia had secured for Christians throughout the Ottoman Empire and put forth the general notion that Russia had a right to protect all Orthodox subjects from oppression.<sup>7</sup> Many of Russia's rulers, diplomats, officials, and writers, as well as most segments of the public, clung to this elastically defined meaning of the two clauses. By doing so, they perpetuated the widely held but spurious idea that the treaty gave Russia an ill-defined prerogative to intercede for all of the sultan's Orthodox Christians.

The assertion of a comprehensive protectorship evinces the amalgam of religion and politics that characterized Imperial Russia's Eastern strategy. Orthodoxy constituted an integral component of the ideology of autocracy, elevating tsars to divine-right stature and underscoring their duty to defend Orthodox Christians both at home and abroad. More generally, religion permeated the monarchical moral code which compelled tsars to uphold treaties, even misinterpreted ones, as sacred obligations. Autocracy's sweeping claims of guardianship also built on a tradition of Russia's close religious and cultural bonds with Orthodox brethren in the Greek East, a connection that endured during the Ottoman era. Moreover, Islam's general tolerance of Christianity and the Ottoman Empire's theocratic structure, which divided the sultan's sub-

7 Davison, "Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility": The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered," 37.

jects into *millet*s (nations) based on religion, enabled Orthodox Christians to preserve their identity and to look upon Russia as their coreligionist patron and bulwark.<sup>8</sup> Greeks, Serbs, Bulgars, Romanians, and other Orthodox Christians, historically tethered to Russia by a common faith and Byzantine culture, solicited tsarist financial, educational, diplomatic, and military support to deliver their homelands (both real and imagined) from Ottoman hegemony in the 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>9</sup>

Russia's pronouncements that treaties morally and legally bound her to intervene in Ottoman affairs on behalf of Orthodoxy served as a convenient rationale and pretext for the quest of tangible strategic aims, such as security along the porous Russo-Ottoman frontier, diplomatic leverage in the Balkans, and commercial gain in the Black Sea and the Levant. Ambitious schemes like Catherine the Great's unfulfilled Greek Project, calling for her appropriately named grandson Konstantin to govern a revived Greek kingdom from Constantinople, manifest the intersection of religious and political designs in Russian approaches to the Eastern Question.<sup>10</sup> While the regime never precisely defined the exact nature or form of Russia's sponsorship of Ottoman Orthodox Christians, this support included the disbursement of alms and material aid to

8 Richard Clogg, "The Greek *Millet* in the Ottoman Empire," in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, 2 vols. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 1: 185–202. This two-volume work contains additional essays on the Ottoman *millet* system.

9 Barbara Jelavich has written extensively on various facets of the strained relationship between tsarist Russia and Balkan national movements in the 19th century: *Russia's Balkan Entanglements, 1806–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), *Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State, 1821–1878* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), *Russia and the Greek Revolution of 1843* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1966), and *Russia and Greece during the Regency of King Otho, 1832–1835: Russian Documents on the First Years of Greek Independence* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1962).

10 On the Greek Project, see Hugh Ragsdale, "Russian Projects of Conquest in the Eighteenth Century," in Hugh Ragsdale, ed., *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1993), 82–102, and idem, "Evaluating the Traditions of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project," *Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no.1 (1988): 91–117.

churches, monasteries, patriarchal sees, and other sacred sites of the Greek East. Russian patronage also encompassed diplomatic appeals in defense of broadly interpreted, if not fabricated, treaty rights. Of course, for the Sublime Porte, guardianship over a significant portion of its subjects proclaimed by any foreign power, let alone a traditional and mighty foe in territorial proximity, posed a direct political challenge.

Alexander I hardly rejected or diminished the importance of Russia's presumed religious rights as a factor in shaping Eastern policy, as seen in the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–12, a conflict mainly provoked by disagreements over the status of Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the tsar adopted a seemingly moderate and prudent course in Near Eastern affairs after the epic clash with Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna peace settlement. The Concert of Europe, a system of conference diplomacy devised to ensure great power consensus, sought to resolve contested issues, uphold the balance of power, and preserve the political and territorial status quo in Europe. Moreover, the tsar hoped to fortify the Concert's cooperative spirit with his concept of an ecumenical Holy Alliance, a league or fellowship of Christian states founded upon the precepts of monarchical solidarity, fraternal peace, and Christian brotherhood.

In line with these principles of moderation and accord, the tsar and his joint foreign ministers (Karl V. Nessel'rode and Ioannis A. Kapodistrias) took a cautious and conciliatory approach in official affairs with the Ottoman government.<sup>12</sup> On several occasions in 1816, they instructed Russia's new envoy in Istanbul, Grigorii A. Stroganov, to cultivate cordial ties with the Porte; to refrain from

11 On the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–12, see Irina S. Dostian, *Rossia i balkanskii vopros* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 42–79, and Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements*, 1–24.

12 On the views and careers of Kapodistrias and Nessel'rode during their stints as foreign ministers in the Alexandrine era, see Patricia Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I: Political Attitudes and the Conduct of Russian Diplomacy, 1801–1825* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 194–286, and Harold N. Ingle, *Nesselrode and the Russian Rapprochement with Britain, 1836–1844* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 1–26.



threats when negotiating disputed points regarding Moldavia, Wallachia, Serbia, and Black Sea merchant shipping; and to comply with provisions of existing treaties. Above all, the ambassador had to act with restraint, patience, and forbearance in all of his discussions with Ottoman officials and European envoys about Russian interests in the region.<sup>13</sup>

As for the specific matter of Turkey's Orthodox Christians, the ambassador had to assure the Porte that Russia's intercession was neither incompatible with the stability of the Ottoman Empire nor harmful to the concerns of other European powers. The Foreign Ministry exhorted Stroganov to demonstrate, through his words and deeds, that Russia sought friendly relations founded upon genuine trust, shared principles, and identical interests.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the tsar rejected the misguided assumption that Christian subjects could actually better their lot through acts of rebellion against their legitimate sovereign. Instead, the emperor hoped that the Porte, without resorting to force of arms, religious abuse, or administrative misrule, could find ways to remove cause for discord among Ottoman Christians and thus make them loyal and obedient subjects.

Furthermore, according to the same directive from the Foreign Ministry, Alexander I had no plans or intent to undertake hostile actions against the Ottoman government; on the contrary, the tsar anticipated that changes in Ottoman treatment of Christian subjects would in fact strengthen the cohesion and stability of the Ottoman Empire. If aggressive designs, bent on exploiting Ottoman weakness, actually guided Russia's policy, the tsar would not attempt to allay Ottoman fears or to eliminate sources of friction within the sultan's realm. He would simply allow disagreements and problems between the two neighboring states to fester, thereby increasing the likelihood of war. Instead, Alexander I wanted to preserve the peace with Turkey, and for this end placed his trust in the wisdom of the Ottoman government.

13 VPR 9 (1974): 168-76, 207-12, 704-07. On tsarist policy in the Balkans and the Near East after the Congress of Vienna, see Jelavich, *Balkan Entanglements*, 24-41, and Dostian, *Rossii i balkanskii vopros*, 129-95.

14 VPR 9 (1974): 170, 172, 174-76.

Such is the general spirit and tone of the document presented here, Foreign Minister Nessel'rode's instruction of June 1816 to envoy Stroganov on the topic of Russia's attitude toward Ottoman Orthodox subjects, or "Christians of the East."<sup>15</sup> The tsar's stance, motivated by the "immutable principles" of moderation, consensus, and reciprocity, underscored the importance of three factors: previous treaty agreements; Russia's "moral obligations"; and "the genuine interests of Turkey itself." By showing more respect for the religious and civil rights of Orthodox Christians, the Porte would win their allegiance and loyalty and thus reinforce the realm's internal security, order, and well-being. In accord with the tsar's position and aims, Stroganov had to intercede amicably but repeatedly on behalf of Russia's Orthodox coreligionists.

A second issue raised in the Nessel'rode communiqué concerns the current status of the age-old and seemingly intractable "monks' quarrel" over the major Christian battlegrounds of sacred memory. This bitter dispute between Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and other Christian sects dealt with Ottoman Jerusalem's holy places, most notably the Church of the Resurrection, also called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built over the tomb of Christ. By the start of the 19th century, the sultan's government had awarded preferential worship and custodial privileges to the Catholics and the Orthodox, the two primary antagonists, but the latter had assumed control over a larger portion of the Church of the Resurrection. After a fire in 1808 damaged the shrine's wooden dome, Franciscan monks and Greek church officials competed to win Ottoman permission for the right to repair the church, a pivotal concession in view of an unwritten rule governing and indeed exacerbating the conflict: the Porte recognized as the "owner" of a particular holy spot any religious community that gained the sultan's favor to restore, wash, or sweep that site.<sup>16</sup>

Understandably, by virtue of Russia's Orthodox connection to

15 *VPR* 9 (1974): 187–90.

16 For an introduction to the scholarly literature on the holy places' dispute, see T. V. Nosenko, "Konflikt vokrug Sviatykh mest v Ierusalime i politika Rossii (konets XVIII–XIX vv.)," in Lisovoi, ed., *Rossii v Sviatoi Zemle. Dokumenty i materialy*, 2: 613–25;

the Greek East, including alms from state and church sources for the upkeep of monasteries and holy places, Greek hierarchs turned to their coreligionist advocate in St Petersburg. Another impetus for soliciting tsarist help came from the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji, not just the controversial religious protection clauses but the Porte's pledge in Article Eight to allow free and unimpeded passage for Russian pilgrims who traveled to the holy sites. Patriarch Polykarp of Jerusalem petitioned Alexander I, several government ministers, and the Holy Synod for monetary assistance to defray some of the actual reconstruction costs. Russian relief would also reduce the debts of the holy city's patriarchal see, incurred when hierarchs had to proffer tribute and gifts to Ottoman officials in return for authorization to construct or renovate churches. Though the Greeks' position as custodian of the Holy Sepulcher improved as a result of their eventual restoration of Christianity's paramount shrine, Roman Catholics and Armenian Christians continued to press their own claims for worship and upkeep rights in the Church of the Resurrection and at other sacred places. Thus, in his appeals to Russian patrons, Patriarch Polykarp summoned tsarist mediation to shield Orthodox believers from harassment and interference by rival sects.<sup>17</sup>

The renewed controversy over the Holy Sepulcher sparked the attention and support of the tsar, as Nessel'rode asserts in his directive to Stroganov. Russian aid and donations for the Greek church

Amos Elon, *Jerusalem: Battlegrounds of Memory* (New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 1995); Thomas A. Idinopulos, *Jerusalem: A History of the Holiest City as Seen Through the Struggles of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1994); Francis E. Peters, *Jerusalem: The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). On the Church of the Resurrection and its various chapels, alters, and passageways commemorating the sites of Christ's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, also see Charles Coüasnon, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

17 On Polykarp's appeals for Russian aid, see *VPR* 9 (1974): 702–3, and Alexandre Popoff, *La question des lieux saints de Jérusalem dans la correspondance diplomatique Russe du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. 1<sup>re</sup> partie (1800–1850)* (St Petersburg: Imprimerie Russo-Française, 1910), 1–7. The patriarch of Jerusalem resided in Istanbul; he was thus in close proximity to the Russian embassy and channeled his aid requests through tsarist envoys.

in Jerusalem included the tsar's grant of twenty-five thousand rubles in banknotes, a sum placed at the disposal of the Foreign Ministry and earmarked for the envoy's safe delivery to Patriarch Polykarp. Stroganov also had to convince the Porte that Orthodox Christians should be allowed to perform their rites of worship at all the sacred places without any encumbrances or restrictions from other denominations. Once again, the Foreign Ministry advised the ambassador to press home this point on the basis of the underlining principles of tsarist Eastern strategy—moderation, concord, goodwill—and to remind the Porte of the tangible benefits it stood to gain. By guaranteeing the protection of Orthodox subjects, the sultan's regime would have every right to expect gratitude from the empire's largest single Christian community, a prospect that would serve the interests of both justice and the Ottoman state.

Subsequent communiqués to Stroganov from the Foreign Ministry continued to address the quandary over the holy places and to suggest ways to settle the feud once and for all.<sup>18</sup> In a memorandum of December 1818, Foreign Minister Kapodistrias informed the envoy that Alexander I's abiding concern for the status of the Holy Sepulcher was inspired by his feelings of Christian piety and brotherhood, his protection of Orthodoxy, and his duty toward the sizable numbers of Russian pilgrims who trekked to Jerusalem every year. The tsarist perspective, according to the dispatch, called for resolving the dispute through negotiation, reconciliation, and coexistence. In talks with the French ambassador in Istanbul, Stroganov should emphasize that newly acquired custodial privileges for Orthodox Christians at the Lord's Tomb by no means excluded worship rights for other Christians. Indeed, the foreign minister wrote, "the gifts of divine mercy, manifesting themselves in the virtue of true piety, will hardly dry up if they extend to all believers" who gather in the same church to venerate the exact same site. Christian harmony required that Catholic and Orthodox faithful share fully and equally the right to perform worship ser-

18 See Popoff, *La question des lieux saints de Jérusalem dans la correspondance diplomatique Russe*, 14–146.

vices; and under no circumstances should any denomination seek to exert exclusive control over the Holy Sepulcher, a notion that was misguided as well as "incompatible with the spirit of peace and meekness that must permeate all Christians."<sup>19</sup> Armenian Christians were to be treated fairly so that they would no longer have grounds for complaint or try to usurp the prerogatives of other believers. Finally, Russia's envoy had to use all means of persuasion and influence to win support from Greek Orthodox hierarchs for the anticipated settlement of this conflict over Christianity's central shrine.

The "monks' quarrel" went unresolved and remained a source of friction between Russia and France on the eve of the Crimean War in the 1850s. More broadly, Alexandrine policy toward the Porte after the Congress of Vienna, predicated on the precepts of moderation, accord, and reciprocity, faced obstacles and dilemmas that called into question the viability of this approach. How to uphold Russia's alleged right to protect Orthodox subjects and how to maintain cordial ties with the Porte invariably clashed during Balkan unrest, such as the Greek Revolution of 1821, when Ottoman reprisals against Orthodox clergymen and shrines forced the tsarist regime to walk a fine line between neutrality and intervention.<sup>20</sup> This duality would be tested in subsequent crises and disputes related to the Eastern Question, with Russia often precariously poised between war against the Porte or restraint and compromise for the sake of Europe's balance of power. The tension between these choices would be all the more acute when the obligation to defend Orthodox Christians beckoned as an opportunity to pursue strategic gains, albeit at the risk of great power hostility and

19 *VPR* 10 (1976): 598–602, 829–30, 833–34.

20 Theophilus C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), 26–54; Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements*, 49–75; and Dostian, *Rossii i balkanskii vopros*, 196–237. For a political scientist's perspective, see Matthew Rendall, "Russia, the Concert of Europe, and Greece, 1821–29: A Test of Hypotheses about the Vienna System," *Security Studies* 9, no.4 (2000): 52–90. On the holy places' dispute and other factors that contributed to the Crimean War, see David M. Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (New York: Longman, 1994).

at the expense of human and material resources in Balkan wars that often produced paltry dividends for Russia.<sup>21</sup>

Examining AVPRI materials, both published and unpublished, may not profoundly alter the main contours of our understanding of tsarist Eastern policy. Yet new details will inevitably deepen our knowledge, suggest new lines of inquiry, and remind scholars and students alike of the multiple facets of Russian involvement in the Eastern Question, including religion and philanthropy.



In preparing this document, I have relied on the published French original and its Russian translation and aimed to render the work into clear and idiomatic English without modifying its essential spirit or meaning. Though I have made slight changes in sentence structure, syntax, punctuation, and wording for the sake of fluidity, I have generally remained faithful to the particulars of the document's style and perspective. My own emendations appear in brackets, and I have added an occasional explanatory note.

**“A Supplementary Instruction from Karl V. Nessel’rode  
to Envoy Grigorii A. Stroganov in Constantinople,”  
13/25 June 1816<sup>22</sup>**

The detailed instructions which the emperor deemed necessary to provide his envoy at the Ottoman Porte, informing him of the immutable principles that His Imperial Majesty firmly intends to follow in all of his relations with this bordering state, indicate clearly enough the general point of view required to examine the attitude of Russia toward the Christian subjects of the Porte.<sup>23</sup>

The right to protect them openly through active and friendly intercession with the Turkish government rests on

21 Barbara Jelavich's *Balkan Entanglements* remains the best introduction to tsarist Russia's complicated, and rarely rewarding, involvement in Balkan affairs.

22 *VPR*9 (1974): 187–90. In the 19th century, Russia marked time by the Old Style Julian calendar, which was twelve days behind the New Style Gregorian calendar used in the West and adopted in Russia in 1918.

23 On this “general point of view,” see *VPR*9 (1974): 168–76 (cited above in note #13).

sufficiently solid grounds and on equally legitimate considerations. Such grounds can be found in the texts of the treaties themselves and in the nature of our previous relations with the Sublime Porte.<sup>24</sup> The specified considerations emanate from the moral obligations assumed by Russia toward the Christian peoples of the East and from the genuine interests of Turkey itself.

Indeed, one cannot but recognize that the more the Turkish government undertakes to respect the civil rights and religious privileges of the Christians under its supreme authority, the more reason it will have to expect their allegiance to their native land through ties engendered by their well-being and security. These principles constantly guided the policy of His Imperial Majesty during the recent events that changed the face of Europe, and their application with the support of his most august allies produced quite favorable results during the European settlement in general;<sup>25</sup> hence, His Imperial Majesty does not doubt that powers friendly to Russia and the Porte will observe with satisfaction as [the envoy] insinuates the very same precepts of [this] moderate policy to the Turkish government in a congenial way. The emperor thus cannot retreat from this course in his empire's subsequent relations with the Sublime Porte. Consequently, he urges his envoy, Baron Stroganov, to devote the most assiduous attention to that part of his entrusted mission that deals with protecting Christians of the East and to display special interest in guaranteeing and restoring their legitimate rights, privileges, and benefits. All these questions, in an essential way, pertain to the concerns of religion [in general] and of the predominant Christian denomination in Turkey [in particular].

The pressing and repeated appeals of the Jerusalem patriarch to the Most Holy Synod of the Russian church helped draw the explicit attention of His Imperial Majesty to this

24 Subsequent Russo-Ottoman pacts, such as the Treaty of Jassy (1792) and the Treaty of Bucharest (1812), reaffirmed the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji. For the texts of these later agreements, see Hurewitz, ed., *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, 105–9, 193–97.

25 A reference to the Congress of Vienna peace settlement.

subject.<sup>26</sup> Upon learning in great detail of the misfortunes that have recently beset the cradle of Christianity, His Imperial Majesty reached the conclusion that two basic reasons explain the onerous position in which the [Greek Orthodox] church of Palestine finds itself:

1. lack of monetary resources, which could have alleviated the burden of debts incurred during the reconstruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher;
2. harassments and all sorts of impositions, by which the adherents of other faiths strive to gain exclusive possession of the Church of the Resurrection and of [other] holy places in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

To help remedy the first difficulty, apart from numerous collections of donations which he authorized and deigned to promote in his empire, His Imperial Majesty expressly instructs his envoy to transmit to the Jerusalem patriarch, as secretly as possible so as not to compromise this ecclesiastic, twenty-five thousand rubles in banknotes, a sum attached to this dispatch and placed at the disposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>27</sup>

As for the second obstacle, arising from the intrigues and arbitrary interference that constantly imperil the church of Jerusalem, His Imperial Majesty directs envoy Baron Stroganov to make this issue the object of amicable and repeated representations to the Sublime Porte. By conveying to the Turkish government the satisfaction His Imperial Majesty would feel if [the Porte] extended protection to the majority of Ottoman Christian subjects during the observance of their rites of divine worship in Jerusalem, [and] by comparing this system of protection to the relationships between the various denominations that prevailed until the past decade, Baron Stroganov will manage to convince the Ottoman ministry that Russia's mediation stems from the most disinterested motives, fully coinciding with the actual interests of the Sub-

26 A reference to Patriarch Polycarp's appeals, cited above in note #17.

27 Popoff, *La question des lieux saints de Jérusalem dans la correspondance diplomatique Russe*, 7–8, quotes this exact figure, twenty-five thousand rubles in banknotes.



lime Porte. As proof of this truth, the envoy should make use of the general principle set forth above and apply it to the internal situation of the Ottoman Empire. For obviously, by rendering just protection to Christians of the Orthodox faith, the Porte gains from this [action] the right to their gratitude and [thus] advances its own interests. On the contrary, by allowing the unjust claims of outsiders and by assisting them, the Porte only brings harm to its true interests and security and derives no benefit from a tolerance as objectionable to *raison d'état* as to justice.

The envoy of His Imperial Majesty should put forth these reasons in the most favorable light, without neglecting at the same time to give them proper legal form, so that Christians of the Orthodox faith will obtain once and for all the privileges they have enjoyed from time immemorial in Jerusalem and its environs.

Every time the opportunity arises for His Imperial Majesty's envoy to make an official or indirect appeal on this point, he must take care not to overlook the importance of protecting individuals and of not jeopardizing the safety of anyone who might provoke the suspicion of the Sublime Porte.

The envoy must pay heed to all questions of a similar nature relating to the [religious] or civil rights of Christians dispersed in the rest of Turkey. His Imperial Majesty relies entirely on the zeal and good sense [of his envoy] in the endeavor to reconcile all viewpoints and to realize the aim of an intervention as beneficial as it is legitimate.