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Found and buy, study and appropriate, build and reconfigure: The three stages in turning the “Coptic domain” in Jerusalem into the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky (1856-1896)

Elena Astafieva

- ¹ This research¹ is part of the study of Russian policy in the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire that has developed since the collapse of the USSR and the opening of many Russian archives. From the 1960s on, English-language historians began working on the Russian presence in the Levant (Stavrou 1963, Hopwood 1969). However, like Soviet historians, they had then no access to all the Imperial Russian sources, from the State, the Orthodox Church and other religions, which would have enabled them to analyse all the political, religious, diplomatic and cultural aspects of that presence. Since 1991, Russian historical production² has been characterised by excellent knowledge of the Russian diplomatic sources but no attempt to situate Imperial policy in the Levant within a wider international context (Lissovoj 2006). However, since the 2010s, new research has been based not only on the Russian archives but also European diplomatic archives that provide a wider view of Russian activities in Palestine and Syria throughout the long 19th century (Fairey 2012; Vovchenko 2013; Iakuchev 2013).
- ² Russia marked its presence in Palestine as early as 1847, setting up the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. This was part of a process of establishment in the Arabic provinces of the Ottoman Empire. What Henry Laurens calls “the invention of the Holy Land” (Laurens 1999) began after the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War (1839-1841) and the first attempt at internationalising Jerusalem under the auspices of the major European powers (Prussia, Britain, France and Austria).

However, it was not until its defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856) that Russia conceived and implemented its “Eastern policy.” The policy became much more offensive than before, since the Russian Empire prime aim then was to recover its status as Great Power.

- 3 The purpose of this article, based on archive sources collected in Moscow and St Petersburg in the summer of 2015³ is to seek an answer to the following questions: What were Imperial Russia’s strategies for action in the Near East during the second half of the 19th century? Which institutional and non-institutional actors implemented this policy? How did their actions alter power relations between players in the Ottoman Empire and relationships between these institutions in Russia?
- 4 To that end, I examine the activities of these stakeholders in Jerusalem after the Crimean War, and present the particular case of how the Russians developed an area – the “Coptic domain” – close to the Holy Sepulchre in the heart of Jerusalem, showing that this occurred in three stages in connection with three types of action:
 - foundation of Russian institutions “in the Orient” and acquisition of land in Jerusalem (1857-1864);
 - archaeological digs and Russia’s appropriation of the main symbols of Christianity (1882-1884);
 - construction of the Russian Orthodox Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky near the Holy Sepulchre and reconfiguration of Near-Eastern Orthodoxy (1885-1896 on).

I. Foundation and acquisition

- 5 On 1 March 1857, Prince Alexander Gorchakov, Vice-Chancellor of State and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, composed a “draft instruction to the Head of the Jerusalem Mission.”⁴ His “dominant, if not sole idea” after Russian defeat in the Crimean War was the “Eastern Question.” In the draft he proposed a series of actions to be taken “in the Orient” [*na Vostoke*] after the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 18/30 March 1856. His aim was to strengthen Russia’s military and political position on the international stage, weakened as it was by the neutralisation of the Black Sea and the prohibition against the Russian Empire having warships in that sea or building any military bases south of its frontiers.⁵
- 6 Gorchakov begins his draft recognising that “at present” Russia cannot “raise once more the question of the Holy Sepulchre”, since it cannot “openly protect its coreligionists.”⁶ He refers to the fact that after the Crimean War the power relations have shifted in the Orient. Where once the Russians only had relations with “the Turks”, now “they have to deal with the Europeans.” Consequently, in his view, opening a mission in Jerusalem is the only way Russia can have an important position in the Orient. However, he is not referring here to a diplomatic mission, as one might suppose. Even more surprisingly, he never in this draft mentions any idea of creating a Russian consulate in Jerusalem even in the remote future.⁷ So what sort of mission was it? And, not least, what was its purpose to be?
- 7 In fact, Gorchakov was proposing to refound the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, first opened in 1847 and closed during the Crimean War. However, in his view, this new mission, “on new bases” was primarily to be “useful to the Orient” [*Vostoku*]. More specifically, via this mission the Russians would “take care of the three national elements [*tri narodnykh elementa*] – Greek, Slavonic and Arab – that

compose Orthodoxy,” so that these “tribes” [*plemia*] would be able to resist “the malignant temptations of Western propaganda.” Since, as Gorchakov puts it, “the Russian is loved by everyone – the Greek and the Orthodox Arab, and even the heterodox – Latins, Armenians, Copts, Syrians and Chaldeans – easily approach” him, Russia’s duty, and consequently that of its ecclesiastical mission, is to be “a peace-maker between adversaries” and, not least, “benefactor of the Arabs.”⁸ And since “the Greeks’ faith is in decline,” Gorchakov says that the ecclesiastical mission should also show to “the Franks” and all the other confessions present in the Holy Land, by the Russian bishop’s celebration of divine service in the Holy Sepulchre, “the best part of Orthodoxy, namely Russian Orthodoxy, completely unknown in the Orient.”⁹ He adds that “the splendour of the Orthodox liturgy is of greater importance in Jerusalem than Athens”, because “the Holy City is the spiritual centre not only of the Orient but also of the West”¹⁰ and thus represents the “point of convergence of all faiths.”¹¹ For all these reasons, says Gorchakov, the question of refounding the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem cannot be treated as “an ordinary question” of Russian policy in the Orient;¹² for it to succeed, it was important not to “economise our money, because money is our only weapon in the Orient now” and “no one can stop us using it, because it is a resource that is neither political nor military.”¹³

- 8 This document, written soon after Russia’s military defeat, was of prime importance for the subsequent political-religious history of Russia, and also for Slavs and Arabs. For the first time in the Russian Empire at this level of Imperial government, contrary to the conservative ideology of the preceding reign of Nicholas I, Gorchakov was suggesting, in order to strengthen the Russian religious position in the Orient, supporting not the senior Greek clergy of the Eastern Churches but the Arab “simple faithful,” “poor, uneducated and poorly treated by the Greeks.” He was proposing to revise the relations of the Russian Empire, including financial relations, with the Orthodox hierarchy of the Eastern patriarchates, particularly that of Jerusalem. Thereby Gorchakov was introducing and establishing in the Imperial Russian domain the idea of an ethnic distinction within the Orthodox Oecumene; more broadly he was introducing the national principle into the management of religious affairs. Some years later this principle would be implemented in the many varied attempts to reconfigure Slavic, Near Eastern and finally Russian Orthodoxy; this included the “Greek-Bulgarian dispute” in the 1870s, the affair of the first Arab Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch (1899) and the construction from 1884 to 1896 of the Alexander Nevsky Church on “Russian domain” in Jerusalem, to be addressed below.
- 9 Within the Imperial Russian government, Gorchakov’s action plan was not the only initiative submitted to Tsar Alexander II in the months after the Crimean War. In January 1856, Grand Duke Constantine, minister of the Russian Navy, suggested the creation of the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company¹⁴ in order to save a part of the Black Sea fleet. Under Constantine’s plan, this company would be in charge of maintaining “a significant number of large vessels” which, in case of military necessity, would be “rented or purchased by the government in order to transport troops and be converted into warships.”¹⁵ In a note written in April 1856, Grand Duke Constantine suggests that “the Company could partly replace our previous fleet in the Black Sea, at a lower cost.” Moreover, the Company “could be useful” for the development of maritime trade inasmuch as it could favour the transportation of Russian goods on Russian vessels. “Finally, thanks to permanent communication with various points in the Orthodox Orient and the transportation of a large number of

pilgrims to Palestine and Mount Athos, this company could greatly participate in our reconciliation with our coreligionists” and help Russia play an important role in “the Orient.”¹⁶

- 10 In order to avoid financial losses during the first crossings, it was necessary, according to the Grand Duke, to spread the news and “draw the attention of the Russian population throughout Russia to the practical and convenient navigation conditions in the future for everyone wishing to visit the holy places in Jerusalem and Mount Athos.” In order to raise the interest of the Russian people in the pilgrimage, he suggested writing an “Orthodox Pilgrim’s Guidebook to the Holy Places” with information on “travel, hotels, and means of communication” and on “the prices of staple foods, crossings and accommodations.” In his view, it was appropriate to use “the model of the *‘Guides des voyageurs en Europe’*,” but to adapt it to the needs of “our nobles, merchants, bourgeois, monks, etc.”¹⁷ According to Constantine, “the book [would be] likely to stimulate in Russia the desire to go [to the holy places].”¹⁸
- 11 The proposals from Gorchakov and Constantine had the same objective: to assert Russia’s positions in the Orient in order to strengthen its position in Europe. Both suggested using religious stakeholders, albeit without asking either the Eastern ecclesiastical hierarchy or the Russian Holy Synod for their opinions. Gorchakov proposed using the bishop in charge of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, and Constantine the Russian pilgrims who wanted to go to the Holy Land or Mount Athos. But whereas Gorchakov wanted to change the power relations within the Near Eastern Orthodox community, Constantine was thinking primarily of saving part of the Russian fleet. At all events, these proposals were implemented and had both immediate and long-term effects in Jerusalem and back in Russia.
- 12 Alexander II approved Gorchakov’s idea. The Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem under the bishop was refounded on 27 March 1857 and Bishop Kirill Naumov arrived in the Holy City in March 1858. The Tsar approved the Grand Duke’s project also, and the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company obtained permission to start its activity in the Black Sea and the Levant. The Company’s first crossing between Odessa and Constantinople took place on 21 May 1857. A few weeks later, on 4 July, the old warship *Khersones*, which had been transformed into a merchant ship, set sail from Odessa to Marseilles, via Constantinople, Mount Athos, and Messina. On board were the founders of the Company who wanted to open the first shipping service between Russia and France, joined by Mansurov who had been sent by Grand Duke Constantine to the Orient and Europe a few months earlier to draft the pilgrim’s guidebook Constantine had mentioned.
- 13 Mansurov stayed in Jerusalem and its surroundings between 22 January and 5 March 1857. There, he observed the living conditions of “ordinary Orthodox pilgrims” – Greeks, Armenians, and Russians – and “how poorly” the Greek clergy of the Jerusalem Patriarchate treated them in the Holy Land. These observations altered the nature of the text that he wrote in Paris in the following summer and autumn. He explains that “the results of [his] study on the lives of our pilgrims” in Palestine made it impossible to “deliver to the Russian Orthodox people” the guidebook Grand Duke Constantine had suggested,¹⁹ because “if this guidebook is successful, it might well provoke an increase in the number of pilgrims” to the holy places. However, Mansurov stressed that “it would be dishonest” to have only the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company’s financial profit in view and kindle interest in pilgrimages among “ordinary people,”

given the bad reception of Orthodox pilgrims in Palestine by the Greek clergy of the Jerusalem Patriarchate. According to Mansurov, “ordinary pilgrims” could not even imagine “the hardships they [would] be facing during the pilgrimage.”²⁰ Thus, instead of a guidebook, Mansurov drafted a report in Paris entitled “Russian Pilgrims in Palestine,” and submitted it to Grand Duke Constantine on 17 December 1857.²¹

- 14 In the report Mansurov suggests a “pragmatic” view of Russian interests “in the Orient” vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities, the European powers, and the Greek hierarchy of Eastern patriarchates. He writes: “We need to be more selfish, we must not show that we are amicable to everyone [*ne rastochat ´ uverenij v nashikh simpatiiakh*], we must love only ourselves and show that we think little of others; we must observe [the situation in the Orient] with great vigilance, we must never miss an opportunity to take advantage of others’ mistakes, we must abandon all ideas of sentimentality... we must never be satisfied with what we have gained, and must always try to seek more.”²²
- 15 In practical terms, Mansurov takes up an idea expressed by the founders of the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company and proposes opening a consulate in Jerusalem and sending an agent of the Russian Steam Company there. This would “a) protect our interests against arbitrary actions by the Turkish government; b) combat the relentless encroachments of Western powers upon our influence and our interests.”²³ However, he goes further in his projects by proposing the creation of “a Russian enclave” [*russkii ugol*] in Jerusalem with a Russian church at its centre. This new Russian construction would welcome “ordinary Russian pilgrims” independently of the Greek clergy of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, who were, as Mansurov puts it, more concerned with their own financial interests than the spiritual needs of the Orthodox faithful. Prayer alone was not enough to build this “Russian enclave” in Jerusalem and, more generally, to “prove the sincerity of the Russians’ feelings towards Orthodoxy and its glory.” It was more important “to demonstrate it through action [*delo*],” and especially through financial support, not only from the Imperial government, but from the whole Russian Orthodox community of believers: “If each of the 50 million Orthodox Christians donates 1 kopeck for this shared sacred cause, these miserable alms will provide a sum of 500,000 roubles, that is, 2 million francs annually; but if everyone gives 2 kopecks, this will raise the sum to 1 million roubles, or 4 million francs...”²⁴
- 16 In other words, Mansurov is asking the “ordinary Russian people” to help the “ordinary Russian pilgrims” transported to the holy places of Palestine, Constantinople, and Mount Athos by the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company, which was created under the patronage of Grand Duke Constantine to save part of the Black Sea fleet. According to Mansurov, this Company was “the best instrument for achieving everything that the dignity and interests of the Russian Church and policy” demand, because “the interests of our government in the Orient perfectly coincide with the interests of the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company.”²⁵
- 17 Mansurov’s proposals in his report were accepted by the Grand Duke and implemented in an imperial decree published on 27 February 1858. This decree ordered that money be collected in every church of the Russian Empire [*kruzhechnyi sbor*] and a subscription opened for building hospices [*obustroistvo*] for Russian pilgrims in Palestine. The Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company announced that it would, free of charge, take care of “the acquisition of land and the construction of the necessary facilities for the reception of pilgrims” in Palestine.²⁶

- 18 The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church several times expressed distinctly cool opinions about the collections of money made in the Empire's churches "for the hospices" and pilgrims in Palestine, especially the campaign in favour of pilgrimage, perceived as "inopportune" and even "harmful and dangerous" for the Russian people. But Grand Duke Constantine decided to send Mansurov once again to Jerusalem in the autumn of 1858.²⁷ Mansurov was accompanied by Vladimir Ivanovich Dorgobuzhinov, the first Russian consul in Jerusalem, who also acted as an agent of the Company. The goal of their mission was to purchase land for the construction of "the Russian enclave" in Jerusalem.
- 19 Six months after their arrival, on 20 March 1859, the Russian consul signed the first deed²⁸ of purchase of land belonging to the Copts close to the Holy Sepulchre "Monsieur Wladimir Dorgoboujinov, State counsellor, knight and Consul of the puissant Empire of Russia in Jerusalem bought with the money of the puissant State of Russia on behalf of that State, from the vendors, models of the Christian Nation curate George procurator of the Coptic Nation in Jerusalem and his brother Risek, sons of Tomase... all the land belonging to them and for their legal usage, which land the vendors had inherited... The price is fixed at 122,432 piastres, legal tender..."²⁹ by this act, the "Coptic domain" became "the Russian domain" [*ruskoe mesto*] and the clearing away of "centuries of detritus" began in November 1859.³⁰
- 20 Two years later, on 8 February 1861, Dorgobuzhinov wrote a report to Grand Duke Constantine on the "archaeological discoveries" made on the "Russian domain" in the course of the cleaning. He points out that "to the north-east of the Russian site lie the ruins of porticoes and propylaea being part of the Constantinian basilica of the Holy Sepulchre."³¹ He emphasises the symbolic significance of the geographical situation of the "Russian domain" – "only 50 steps away from the altar of the Church of the Resurrection" –, the importance of "Russia's future place in the Orthodox world", and also "the need for the Russian pilgrims to have a shelter" since they have to wait "chilled to the bone", after the midnight office at the Holy Sepulchre has taken place, and the Jaffa gates have been opened. Later, he proposes purchasing more land close to the "Russian domain."³²
- 21 The ultimate goal of this territorial extension was the creation of an architectural complex composed of a "hospice for pilgrims," a "consular house" with a "house church [*domovoj khram*]." According to 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 [*deiatel*]" – namely Grand Duke Constantine – who "has drawn the cordial attention" of the Sovereign to the problems of Russian pilgrims in the Holy Land. This construction would thus "immortalise the memory of all that has been done by the Russians in Jerusalem."³³
- 22 This idea was strongly supported by Grand Duke Constantine. With permission from his brother the Tsar, on 11 April 1861, he ordered "the purchase of the land next to the Cathedral of the Holy Sepulchre."³⁴ However, despite the support of the Jerusalem Patriarchate (perhaps because of that "support") and the efforts of the consul,³⁵ Russia did not succeed in acquiring all the land, which various local and European purchasers hoped to buy,³⁶ or in building the relevant constructions at that time.
- 23 Why after investing so much – diplomatically, materially and even personally – in buying these "Coptic domain" that had become "Russian, did the officials for Palestinian affairs abandon this location of both symbolic and strategic value in the

heart of Jerusalem? Some non-Orthodox scholars such as Melchior de Vogüé and Charles Clermont-Ganneau from France and Charles Wilson and Claude Conder from Britain were allowed by Russian diplomats in the 1860s and 1870s, either as individuals or as representatives of foreign institutions, to undertake digs and descriptions of the place. But why was it then filled in by Russian agents?

- 24 For the moment, two explanations may be suggested, partly from the sources themselves: one is more “visible,” rational, and economic-diplomatic in nature; the other, more symbolic, is less perceptible, less exposed, yet perhaps the more important.
- 25 What happened in March 1859 was that Mansurov and Dorgobuzhinov not only acquired the “Coptic domain” near the Holy Sepulchre, but also land outside the Holy City: first, on Meydan Square, located “10 minutes’ walk from the Jaffa Gate and 15-18 minutes from the Holy Sepulchre.”³⁷ This land was acquired partly through purchase³⁸ and partly through “concessions” granted by the Sultan on the occasion of Grand Duke Constantine’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 1859.³⁹ The Russians were not the first to buy land outside the Old City: in 1855, financier and philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore bought land west of the Old City to build housing for the poor Jews of Jerusalem. The Windmill was built in 1857, but construction of the first living quarters started later. The Russians’ arrival on the Jerusalem market and the purchase of land in the vicinity of the Holy Sepulchre and outside the Old City triggered speculation among rich Jerusalem residents, who invested in land, particularly near the Meydan, with future building operations in mind. In early 1860, Mansurov writes, “during 1859, almost all the well-off residents of Jerusalem and the monasteries began to buy land near the Meydan, which is why prices rose so incredibly. Around the Meydan it is impossible to buy a good plot and clearly the area around the square will very shortly become a new neighbourhood, the best in Jerusalem.”⁴⁰ The purchase of land and the construction of the Russian property helped boost the eventual urban and economic development of Jerusalem outside the city walls.⁴¹
- 26 The land purchased on the Meydan was on a hill overlooking Jerusalem from which one could “embrace a vast horizon from the Transjordan, the mountains of Arabia down to Bethlehem” and could feel like “having Jerusalem at [one’s] feet.” Unlike the “Russian domain” next to the Holy Sepulchre, this land, “straddling two roads” that led to Bethlehem, Nablus, Jaffa, and the Monastery of the Cross, provided an opportunity to “build on a large scale.”⁴² Inspired by the area of the acquired land, Mansurov proposed, in a text likely written in early 1860, founding a “new Russian monastery” [*lavra*] and building a Russian cathedral with a capacity of 1,000 people inside this monastery, plus a home for the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, a hospice for 300 men, another for 500 women, and finally a 60-bed hospital and service facilities.⁴³
- 27 Under Mansurov’s plans, the “Russian property” [*ruskie vladeniia*] on Meydan Square was to “be enclosed by a stone wall,” and therefore be a closed space, but the cathedral, a “central and essential element of the architectural complex,” “built on the model of ancient, Byzantine-style, monastic cathedrals preserved only at Mount Athos,” “was to be built on a hill overlooking all the surrounding area, thus dominating the Holy City.”⁴⁴
- 28 The purchase of land on Meydan Square did not involve great expenditure, despite price increases resulting from the Russians’ arrival on the Jerusalem market. However, the construction of the future “New Jerusalem” outside the “Old City” was very

expensive. Mansurov estimated that the construction would amount to 755,872 roubles (over 3 million francs).⁴⁵

- 29 Even if the Palestine Committee, set up in 1859, did have the money needed,⁴⁶ the cost of completing the Meydan Square project probably caused the development of the “Russian domain” near the Holy Sepulchre to be “abandoned.” But financial obstacles were perhaps not the sole cause, and another reason for competition between the two projects also played a role.
- 30 The building work on Meydan Square began in 1860 with the laying of the first stone of the future cathedral on 30 August, the saint’s day of Alexander Nevsky,⁴⁷ Tsar Alexander II’s patron saint. The proposal to dedicate the future church to Saint Alexander Nevsky had been made by Grand Duke Constantine in May 1860.⁴⁸ However the idea was quickly objected to by the Grand Duke’s own entourage. In a letter dated 24 May 1860, Prince A. D. Obolensky, an intimate of the Grand Duke and first director of the Palestine Committee, points out that Alexander Nevsky was “not one of the saints of the Greek Church.” He says that this might cause trouble with the Greek hierarchy. So he asks Grand Duke Constantine to abandon the idea of naming the Russian cathedral after Alexander Nevsky and to fairly quickly choose either another saint recognised by the Eastern patriarchs or some religious festival for the stone-laying ceremony for a church that would take that name.⁴⁹ So the cathedral that was finally built on Meydan Square and long dominated Jerusalem was called Holy Trinity and not Alexander Nevsky. It may be that after the failure to name the new Russian cathedral after Alexander Nevsky, some of the royal family and perhaps Tsar Alexander II were reluctant to construct close to the Holy Sepulchre, on the “remains of the Constantinian basilica” over Jesus’ place of crucifixion, a “Russian church of Saint Constantine,” patron saint of the Grand Duke.
- 31 The financial and diplomatic problems involved in the purchase of more land near the “Russian domain” were aggravated by this symbolic competition between the plans to build two churches, one near the Holy Sepulchre to the memory of Emperor and Saint Constantine in homage to Grand Duke Constantine, and the other outside the Old City of Jerusalem on a hill so that it could “dominate” the city, to the memory of the Russian Saint Alexander Nevsky in homage to Tsar Alexander II.
- 32 If these circumstances may explain the “abandonment” of the “Russian domain” in the 1860s and 1870s, they in no way undermined the Russians’ determination to impose Russian Orthodoxy, whatever the tension, in the heart of Christianity so as to leave a mark on Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

II. Appropriation, discussion and even “sabotage”

- 33 It took another twenty-five years until the Russian stakeholders involved in “Palestinian affairs” revived the idea of “researching in a scholarly manner” the “Russian domain” near the Holy Sepulchre so as to be able to use it later. This period saw a change of reign and political climate in Russia after Alexander II’s assassination in March 1881, the decline in influence of Grand Duke Constantine and his entourage and, not least, the foundation in May 1882, under the auspices of Grand Duke Sergei,⁵⁰ of the Orthodox Palestine Society.⁵¹

- 34 Vasily Khitrovo, who had become the president's assistant after the Society's creation, in a speech in March 1883 entitled "The Tasks of Scholarly Research in the Holy Land," proposes his vision of the scholarly work to be undertaken by Russia in Palestine. Khitrovo sketches out the current state of research into the Holy Land completed by scholars of the various Christian confessions, from antiquity to the 1880s (Khitrovo 1883: 39-60). He distinguishes between two types of scholarly work devoted to the Judeo-Christian Orient: "Work that can be done in the silence of one's study and work that must be done in the Holy Land." (Khitrovo 1883: 50-51). The Holy Land could be considered, from a scholarly point of view, to be "a huge museum, a catalogue of already collected knowledge that needs to be put in order." (Khitrovo 1883: 51). This work is to be given "to us Russians," Orthodox scholars, and not to Catholics or Protestants. He justifies this choice by the fact that the Holy Land has "belonged to the Byzantine Empire from the earliest years of Christianity, and Orthodoxy is, as it were, at home in that empire." (Khitrovo 1883: 54-55). 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 scepticism," "have fallen into the other extreme," refusing all traditions and claiming to construct their ideas solely on the basis of scientific principles. (Khitrovo 1883: 54-55). "Scholarly work", he says, should be accompanied by work in the field; Russia should carry out excavations near the Holy Sepulchre, on the "Russian domain" [*russkoe mesto*].
- 35 Grand Duke Sergei, influenced by this speech and other texts of Khitrovo's⁵², asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for permission to re-open the digs on the "Russian domain," offered 1,000 gold roubles for that purpose, and invited Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin, the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, to carry out the excavations together with the German architect in Jerusalem, Conrad Schick (Khitrovo 1883: 54-55).⁵³ This is a perfect illustration of the interactions between "Orthodox scholarship," represented by Archimandrite Antonin, Russian diplomacy, since the *russkoe mesto* still belonged to the consulate, and the Imperial authorities, who provided the funding for the archaeological investigations and used the results to mark the presence of the Orthodox Empire in the region. It is also significant that the "Orthodox archaeologists," 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.⁵⁴
- 36 Indeed, the Russian ambassador to Constantinople, Alexander Nelidov, in his secret memorandum on the affair,⁵⁵ emphasises that discretion was necessary with respect to the Ottoman authorities, and because the excavations might arouse "delicate religious problems with the Catholics as well as the Turks," because, according to rumour, "the Russians have discovered a gate to the Holy Sepulchre,⁵⁶ 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."
- 37 In conclusion to his memorandum, Nelidov adds that the projects of the Grand Duke and the Palestine Society were not to be announced with great fanfare, with an emphasis laid on their political and religious importance, but that this "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.”⁵⁷
- 38 Nelidov does not mention in this secret memorandum another local player who might conceivably be affected and concerned by the large-scale Russian archaeological digs: namely, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, for whom major discoveries by the Palestine Society would risk drawing pilgrims’ attention to the *russskoe mesto* and “diverting” some of the donations of the Orthodox faithful to the Russian religious institutions erected beside the Holy Sepulchre.⁵⁸
- 39 On 2 January 1884, only nine months after the excavations began, the Grand Duke declares in a rescript to the secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Although the excavations are not yet completed, they have been highly successful. Not only have traces of the Second Wall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem been found, which confirms the authenticity of the place of Jesus’ burial, but there has even been discovered on the Russian site the Gate that led from the City to Golgotha.”⁵⁹
- 40 In Volume 7 of the *Orthodox Palestine Collection*,⁶⁰ published in October 1884, Archimandrite Antonin and the Palestine Society’s officials, using their own discoveries, largely based on previous research by the foreign scholars mentioned above, officially announced that they had extended current knowledge of the Constantinian basilica, uncovered the traces of the former wall of Jerusalem (known as the “Second Wall”) and discovered the “threshold of the Gate through which Christ climbed to Calvary” (With these discoveries, widely publicised in Russia⁶¹ and other countries,⁶² Russia wished symbolically to appropriate two of the places most sacred to Christianity, the Way of the Cross and the Holy Sepulchre adjacent to the *russskoe mesto*).
- 41 This appropriation was to be crowned by the construction of a major edifice on the *russskoe mesto* – probably a monumental church to be called the “End of the Way of the Cross” – for which the Orthodox Palestine Society and the Russian Church launched an “appeal to the Russian People” in January 1885 (Mansurov 1887: 12). The archaeological excavations and “discoveries,” and above all the idea of erecting an “edifice” near the tomb of Jesus Christ, planned and supported by the Imperial family, diplomats, and ecclesiastical scholars, were integral parts of the Russian monarchy’s policy inside and outside the Empire.
- 42 Indeed, as Richard Wortman shows in his analysis of the construction of the Cathedral of the Resurrection in St Petersburg on the exact site of Alexander II’s assassination, Alexander III’s reign represented a new stage in the construction of the Russian monarchical myth. (Wortman 2000: 246). From then on the Resurrection and Jerusalem became the starting point for the sacred narrative of the Russian monarchy; what is more, Golgotha was transposed directly into Russia (Wortman 2000: 246). But, as the history of the excavations on the “Russian domain” and its aftermath show, the Imperial authorities also aimed to occupy the religious and political space in Jerusalem in order to transfer “Holy Russia” into the Holy Land, coveted at that time by all the major European powers and Christian faiths. This project met the Russian desire for a dominant role within the Near Eastern Orthodox world.
- 43 However, more time passed, because despite all efforts, after the end of the dig on the “Russian domain” the Palestine Society did not immediately manage to construct the “special edifice” intended. This time resistance to the idea came from Mansurov, who was at that point director of the Palestine Commission,⁶³ competing with the Palestine Society, and who decided to act both openly and clandestinely in Jerusalem and St

Petersburg. In other words, whereas in 1861 Mansurov had supported the idea of building a Russian church near the Holy Sepulchre, by 1884-1885 he had totally changed his mind.

- 44 In late 1884, Mansurov travelled to Palestine and spent some months there. His aim was to prepare a publication on the archaeological dig and the “scientific discoveries” made by the Society, and also to meet the main players in the “Russian domain” project, in particular the Russian consul in Jerusalem, Vasily Kozhevnikov. Analysis of previously unseen sources implies that Mansurov practically dictated the consul’s reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the “Russian domain” with a view to influencing opinion in St Petersburg.⁶⁴ In a letter dated 21 January 1885 to his mentor and former chief, Alexander Golovnin, Mansurov explains his view of matters: “Excuse my long silence... Here I have lots of work... and it is also very hard for me to act in circumstances where I am hindered by unintelligent and incompetent people. Fortunately, that period will end with the departure of Vasily Khitrovo, who has done all he could to sabotage our affair and undermine our credit here. I don’t want to write any more about it, because you have read his appeal yourself...”⁶⁵ Mansurov criticises the Palestine Society because its officials want to build “something ill-defined” [*chto-to neopredelennoye*].⁶⁶ He thinks that the idea of erecting a “special building” next to the Holy Sepulchre may be compared with the idea of “developing [*zastrojka*] as important and sacred a place as the Roman Forum”. “How could one answer someone who suggested a building [*nadstrojka*] on the remains of Julius Caesar’s basilica?” he asks Golovnin. He thinks it essential that “the ancient remains should be preserved and opened up for research, like a museum...”⁶⁷ Mansurov remains convinced that his future book⁶⁸ will “arouse a storm of indignation even in the Palestine Society, particularly since the negligence, credulity and simple unprofessionalism that went into the seventh issue of the *Orthodox Palestine Collection*, with no research on the spot, beggars belief.”⁶⁹
- 45 Back in St Petersburg, Mansurov continued his “fight” against erecting a “special edifice” on the “Russian domain” near the Holy Sepulchre. He now had not only his first book on the Russian dig in Jerusalem (Mansurov 1885), but also an “instruction” from Golovnin, still close to Grand Duke Constantine, giving the following advice: “You must personally offer your book to the Tsar, Tsarina and Tsarevich, Grand Dukes Sergei Alexandrovich, Mikhail Nikolayevich, Nikolai Nikolayevich; send a copy to Grand Duke Constantine in Crimea... offer it to Pobedonostsev;⁷⁰ send your book to the editors of the most important newspapers and journals, with no covering letter but a note on the envelope ‘From the publisher’.”⁷¹
- 46 The cancellation of Khitrovo’s laying of the first stone for the future “special edifice” on the “Russian domain,” arranged for 1885, appears to have been the consequence of this “sabotage” by Mansurov and his “network” in Jerusalem and St Petersburg.
- 47 The texts Mansurov wrote in 1885-1887,⁷² in which he expresses his doubts about the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society’s projects, raise a crucial question: “Has the Palestine Society produced irrefutable evidence that the ancient traces it has discovered can be dated to the period before Jesus Christ, at least to the reign of Herod the Great?” (Mansurov 1887: 10). He believes this question must be answered confidently and accurately “so as to allow no space for debate and doubt, because it concerns the recognition of the authenticity of the Christian Holy of Holies” (Mansurov 1887: 10). Mansurov also insists on the need to ask the Orthodox Church for its position on this question, to be expressed in some other way than the mere presence

of a few prelates among the officials of the Palestine Society. Mansurov's writings provoked discussion among "Palestinologists" and more widely among Russian archaeologists and historians. Grand Duke Sergei himself asked for an expert opinion from the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society ("Grand Duke Sergei's rescript" 1884-1887). Without further examining here these scholarly discussions, the question arises why Mansurov, involved in "Palestinian affairs" since 1857, was so dubious about the "new Russian discoveries". Did his deeply religious views, so different from some members of the Palestine Society, perhaps even Khitrovo, prevent him from placing political interests ahead of religious convictions? Or did this position conceal his personal interests as director of the Palestine Commission, neglected by Khitrovo and Grand Duke Sergei after the creation of the Palestine Society?

- 48 These questions were put at the time by M. Stepanov, a senior official in the Palestine Society, to the director of the Asia department of the foreign ministry, Zinoviev, in a letter on 21 November 1882. After examining all the possible reasons for Mansurov's resistance to building on the "Russian domain" – "the apolitical nature⁷³ of the Russian building near the Holy Sepulchre," "envy and suspicion from the Ottoman authorities, the Catholics and Patriarch Nicodemus," the incomplete archaeological work on the "Russian domain," Schick's erroneous conclusions and "the Palestine Society's plan not reflecting ground reality" – Stepanov considers that it was merely Mansurov's "personal pride" [*litchnoe samolubie*] and hostile attitude towards all the Society's activities: "But one must ask the question: is it admissible that because of one person's vanity, the idea of the Grand Duke, all the Society and the many people in Russia who responded to our appeal, should simply be forgotten?"⁷⁴
- 49 This statement by Stepanov, behind whom actually stood Grand Duke Sergei and probably Alexander III, shows that a new generation of Russian actors involved in Palestine through the Palestine Society from the 1880s on would go to all lengths to impose their conception of a Russian presence in Palestine and build "their" church near the Holy Sepulchre, namely one to Saint Alexander Nevsky.

III. Construction and reconfiguration

- 50 However, although the Palestine Society's plans did succeed, it was at the cost of many modifications – at least during discussions with the consuls in Jerusalem and the ambassador in Constantinople – to what was to be built on the "Russian domain."
- 51 In 1884 and 1885, official correspondence with the diplomats mentions "a simple edifice" or a "special edifice." In fact, the Palestine Society's leaders were inspired by Dorgobuzhinov's old idea of building the Church of Saint Constantine and were thus thinking of building a church on the "Russian domain." In 1886 and 1887, they talk, with no reference to Mansurov's writing, of creating "an open museum."⁷⁵ During summer 1887, they return to Dorgobuzhinov's earlier idea of building a few rooms for pilgrims leaving the Holy Sepulchre after the Orthodox midnight office, adding that another building will conserve the ancient ruins and over time will become a "museum of Palestinian antiquities."⁷⁶ In the late 1880s, the Palestine Society leaders defined the building as a "new house."⁷⁷ But by the early 1890s they were speaking almost openly of the church as built but "not yet consecrated." Tsarevich Nicholas, on an official tour "of the Orient" [*po Vostoku*] in 1890, was due to ask the Sultan personally for his "agreement to consecrate the church on the 'Russian domain' near the Holy

Sepulchre,”⁷⁸ but his journey to Constantinople was cancelled. On 27 November 1894, a few days after Alexander III’s death, the Palestine Society proposed “creating an eternal monument [*vechnyy pamyatnik*] to the memory of the late Tsar, founder of the Society, in other words “to found [*ustroit*] close to the most important Christian holy places the Church of the sainted prince Alexander Nevsky.”⁷⁹ This proposal was supported in January 1895 by Grand Duke Sergei, in charge of the Society: he thought that in order to “fulfil the duty of memory” to Tsar Alexander III, one should “consecrate the church of the Russian House in Jerusalem to Saint Alexander Nevsky.”⁸⁰

- 52 The Ottoman authorities, according to their own rules for constructing religious, educational and charitable buildings, did not allow the Russian diplomats to build near the Holy Sepulchre any “churches, hospitals or schools” without a *firman* from the Sultan; in practice, they were well aware of the nature of the work being done on the “Russian domain.” The Palestine Society’s representative in Jerusalem wrote to St Petersburg in October 1890 on this point: “Our building work on the dig site is giving rise to rumours in the city... Reshad Pasha, when speaking of our building there, always calls it ‘your new church’. So that shows that the Turkish authorities have long known that we are building a church there, and they perceive this with great calm...”⁸¹
- 53 However, the “calm” was deceptive, because the dig and the building work were poorly perceived and taken badly by the Jerusalem Patriarchate. Although Russia presented itself as the protector of the Orthodox faithful in the Ottoman Empire, the economic, political and spiritual interests of the Greek senior clergy and Russian agents in Palestine and Syria differed. Whereas before the role of the Greek Orthodox hierarchy in the purchase of further land next to the Russian domain between 1861 and 1864 had been rather obscure, as mentioned above, and the Patriarchate’s representatives did not openly express their disagreement with the actions of Russian agents during the dig on the “Russian domain” in 1883 and 1884, now in August 1895, Patriarch Gerasimos decided to send via the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Alexander Nelidov, a memorandum to Tsar Nicholas II and a letter to chief procurator Konstantin Pobedonostsev.
- 54 The Patriarch begins his memorandum by reiterating the canons of the Ecumenical Councils whereby it is prohibited to found monasteries and prayer-houses without the permission of the city’s bishop; he also recalls the permissions already granted at the request of the Holy Synod to build Russian churches on the canon land of the Church of Sion, even though, he writes, “in most cases these churches meet no spiritual or material need.”⁸² In the case of building a Russian “edifice” near the Holy Sepulchre, these requests have not been made. Furthermore, after presenting the edifice to the Ottoman authorities under various names, the agents of the Palestine Society have decided to turn it into a “Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky.”⁸³ Their aim, writes the Patriarch, is quite simple: “this is not in fact about building a house church in homage to the Tsar, but rather, by lies and ignoring ecclesiastical rules, to construct a splendid cathedral, a new Holy Place [*sviatynia*], another centre near the Holy Sepulchre on the land of the Patriarchate itself.”⁸⁴ So this construction is part, he writes, “of the Palestine Society’s secret programme to fight against the Palestinian Orthodox Church,” with the ultimate aim of “creating a new spiritual authority within our Holy Church, destroying the existing authority and managing the affairs of the Holy Land in order to found the new Church and act without episcopal agreement.”⁸⁵ The evidence is that agents of the Palestine Society openly declare that they intend “to buy from the

Abyssinians the authority over the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen and open up a direct passage from the basilica of the “new Russian house” to the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre.”⁸⁶ Therefore, “instead of seeking union with the Mother Church, the Palestine Society is doing everything to break all links with it.”⁸⁷

- 55 The Patriarch ends his memorandum by asking Tsar Nicholas II to “define the true limits [*pravil'nye*] of the Palestine Society” and declaring that “the Holy Church cannot recognise as such the church built without canonical authorisation.”⁸⁸
- 56 After receiving the memorandum, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided not to reply to the Patriarch, because it did not “consider it possible to officially present this document to His Majesty.”⁸⁹ It was Pobedonostsev, chief procurator of the Holy Synod, in person who answered, after 18 days’ silence, accusing the Patriarch of “accusing the entire Society of lying and engaging in an incessant fight against the Holy Church”, an “Imperial Society headed directly by Grand Duke Sergei and the Sovereign himself.”⁹⁰ It appears that by refusing the memorandum, the Russian side – Minister of Foreign Affairs, chief procurator of the Holy Synod and senior Palestine Society officials – were in practice demonstrating that the Patriarch’s resistance to the building of a church near the Holy Sepulchre as part of Russia’s policy of reconfiguration the Orthodox community in the Ottoman Empire was doomed to failure.
- 57 The Patriarch, surprised and hurt by this diplomatic non-receipt and Pobedonostsev’s letter, came under pressure from part of his own synod. Despite his attempts to protest and insist on his own conditions, the Patriarch had not the clout to oppose Russia, because Russia controlled part of the Patriarchate’s income. On 22 May 1896, the eve of the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen, Patriarch Gerasimos consecrated the new Russian church of Saint Alexander Nevsky, built in memory of Alexander III, founder of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society on the land near the Holy Sepulchre bought 37 years before by representatives of Alexander II. It joined the many churches dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky that were built during the period of the Russian monarchy’s “Russification” within the Empire and beyond its borders.⁹¹ The consecration ceremony for the new church was accompanied by the bells of the Russian Church of the Holy Trinity, originally intended in 1860 to be Saint Alexander Nevsky’s Cathedral.

Concluding remarks

- 58 The transformation of the “Coptic domain” near the Holy Sepulchre occurred in a number of stages involving actions that were economic, political and symbolic in nature, against a backdrop of permanent tensions between various Russian and Ottoman (particularly Greek) actors:
- 1859-1864, purchase of the land by the Russians and a later abandoned project to build on the “remains of the basilica of Saint Constantine” a complex of Russian buildings including the church of Saint Constantine in homage to the action of Grand Duke Constantine in Jerusalem;
 - 1880s, archaeological digs and discussions of the “discoveries;”
 - 1890s, construction of the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky.
- 59 The story of this transformation reveals the changes that occurred between 1859 and 1896 in the relations between official and religious players in the Russian and Ottoman

empires, particularly between the representatives of the Imperial Russian authorities and the representatives of the Eastern Church.

- 60 First, the transfer to the canonical lands of the Eastern Patriarchates of the model of relations long established between the Imperial government and religions in Russia. Grand Duke Constantine's proposal as Minister of the Navy to use Orthodox pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land, Mount Athos and Constantinople to provide economic support for the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company set up after the Treaty of Paris and the neutralisation of the Black Sea fleet, demonstrates the "utilitarian" attitude of the Russian monarchy towards the Orthodox Church and its faithful, whether subjects of the Tsar or the Sultan.
- 61 The same attitude emerges in Russia's attempts to appropriate symbols of Christianity, including the Holy Sepulchre, and the use of Russian churches built on Meydan Square and near Jesus' Tomb. These churches enabled Russia to "dominate" Jerusalem symbolically and thus politically to strengthen its position in the Ottoman Empire against the local authorities and the Great Powers.
- 62 Then there is the transformation of the idea of Orthodox Russia protecting its coreligionists in the Ottoman Empire: after the Crimean War, the Russian Empire continued to protect Orthodox Christians, Slavic and Arab, by diplomatic action with the Sultan's authorities and European consuls. But, as can be seen from the story of the "Coptic domain" turning into the Russian Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky and other cases, from the 1860s on, Russia began to control, and in the 1880s and 1890s even interfere in, the strictly ecclesiastical affairs of the Eastern Patriarchates in order to reconfigure the Near Eastern Orthodox community. Even though the Russians did not manage to change the power relations within the Jerusalem Patriarchate, the election of the first Arab Patriarch of Antioch in 1899, against the wishes of the Greek hierarchy, was a tangible result of the Russian policy of interference in the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

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NOTES

1. It was thanks to the Fund of the Labex Tepsis that I was able to research this work in Russia in summer 2015 and find the new archival sources I use in this article. I thank Olivier Bouquet, Marc Aymes and Ozgür Türesay for the stimulating discussions we had before, during and after the “Transfaires impériaux: Turquie, Russie” conference on 15 April 2015. My great thanks too to Oleg Anisimov, Anatole Lozowski, Michel Tissier, Antoinette Guise-Catelnuovo and Wladimir Berelowitch for their invaluable help, comments and advice. I wish also to thank the two anonymous reviewers of my text; their comments and observations were and still are of great use for this and further research.

2. The recent publication that best illustrates this is Lissovoj 2006.

3. So far, unfortunately, I have not been able to carry out research in Turkey to complement the sources found in Russian archives with those in the Ottoman Imperial Archives. But I hope that future research in the latter will enable me to critically compare sources in different language, give a “voice” to actors in the Ottoman Empire involved in this story and thus take further some of the questions addressed in this article.

4. *Rossijskaia Gossudarstvennaia Biblioteka-RGB [Russian State Library]*, Manuscripts Department, F. 148, Box 4, D. 12, p. 1-11 (verso).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 1

6. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

7. According to Gorchakov, having a “vice-consul in Jaffa (as long as he is not Greek) is quite enough”. *Ibid.* p. 2

8. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 3 (verso).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 5 (verso).

11. *Ibid.*, p. 11 (verso).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11 (verso).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 6 (verso).

14. Illovaisky, 1907; Mosse, 1954; Barychnikov, 2015.

15. *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv-RGIA [Russian State Historical Archive]*, f. 107, op. 1, d. 14, p. 1.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

17. *Rossiiskij Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Voенno-Morskogo Flota-RGAVMF [Russian State Archive of the Navy]*, f. 410, op. 2, d. 13, pp. 3-4, quoted in Vakh, 2014, p. 33.

18. *Ibid.*

19. [B. Mansurov], *Orthodox Pilgrims in Palestine*, St Petersburg, December 1857, p. 110 (in Russian).

20. *Ibid.*

21. [Mansurov], 1857. Only between 20 and 30 copies of this Report were published, without the author's name. Later, after removing some “critical” parts, Mansurov redrafted his Report as a book, published twice in 1858 under his own name and also entitled *Pravoslavnye poklonniki v Palestine [Russian Pilgrims in Palestine]*. In the present article, I use both the December Report, found in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg, and the book's second edition: Mansurov, 1858².

22. [B. Mansurov], *op. cit.*, St Petersburg, December 1857, p. 202.

23. B. Mansurov, *op. cit.*, 1858, Appendix 1, p. 5.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
25. [B. Mansurov], *op. cit.*, St Petersburg, December 1857, p. 160.
26. Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka-RNB, [National Library of Russia], Manuscripts Department, f. 253, op. 1, d. 40, pp. 82-83.
27. For Mansurov's travel impressions, see Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arkhiv Rossijskoj Federatsii - RGAF [State Archive of the Russian Federation], F. 990, op. 1, D. 32, pp. 18ss.
28. RNB, Manuscripts Department, f. 253, op. 1, d. 40, pp. 210-211.
29. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F.253, op. 1, D.40, pp. 210-211(verso).
30. According to Dorgobuzhinov, the consul at the time, the first cleaning operation lasted some months and was still not complete in July 1860 (probably the date he left). It cost Russia more than 120,000 piastres: "The 80 donkeys worked at the same time, making 13 return journeys a day." The consul explains, with details about the history and topography of Jerusalem, that "this city was and continues to be built on ruins and detritus". He claims that this "feature of Jerusalem explains why buying a plot of land, or rather its top layer, does not mean a real purchase of land with its underlying depths." It also explains the arbitrary actions surrounding the acquisition of land in Jerusalem, where the authorities are corrupt. Cleaning the plot down to "the earth" is the only way of "really possessing it" in Jerusalem. Mansurov states that between July 1859 and September 1860 the Russians spent 6,641 roubles.
31. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op. 1, D. 40, p. 279.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 280. This was 12 shops and a baker. The former consul said that buying 12 shops would cost some 100,000 piastres and the baker's much more, between 350,000 and 400,000 piastres, because the owner "expected the Russians to arrive" and had already refused to sell his land for 150,000 piastres."
33. *Ibid.*, p. 282 (verso).
34. The Grand Duke granted a sum of 23,000 roubles for all these purchases.
35. On 18 September 1861, Consul Sokolov asked the advice of Bishop Kirill Naumov, head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem at the time, on what strategy to adopt in buying this land: "either find someone local to negotiate in our name with the various owners and thus acquire the plots, if possible, quickly and secretly; or be quite open, admitting everything [vo vsem priznat'sia] with the Greek Patriarchate and straightforwardly [priamoduchno] ask for their friendly support". Either way, says Sokolov, Russian agents might face "surprises." If the Russians used a local intermediary, they might be deceived by him and the vendors. If they asked the Patriarch for help, "the Patriarchate might buy up all the land well ahead of us." Despite these fears, the Russian representatives in Jerusalem decided to turn to the Patriarch, who promised his support. In the current state of my research, it cannot be said how effective the Patriarchate's help was or whether instead they blocked the Russian acquisitions.
36. The baker's was bought for 246,310 piastres according to Sokolov (or according to Mansurov, 13,304 roubles); the cost of the 11 shops rose to 500,000 piastres (over 25,000 roubles); but even at that price they could not be bought, because the local authorities prohibited the Russian diplomats from doing so.
37. RGB, Manuscripts Department, f. 148, box 4, d. 13, p. 19.
38. RNB, Manuscripts Department, f. 253, op. 1, d. 40, pp. 213-215. This purchasing procedure was extremely complex because of the large number of intermediaries, including Count Nikolai Kushelev-Bezborodko (the first to purchase land on Meydan Square in 1857), the Italian engineer Ermete Pierotti, and several others. For more information on Pierotti's activities, see Kirill Vakh, "Ermete Pierotti in the Russian Service: New Biographical Discoveries," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (1953-), Bd. 130, H. 2 (2014), pp. 194-204.
39. RGB, Manuscripts Department, f. 148, box 4, d. 6.

40. RGB, Manuscripts Department, f. 148, box 4, d. 13, p. 25. Information on these price increases can be found in a number of sources, including diplomatic correspondence. For example, see *Arkhiv vnechnej politiki Rossijskoj Imperii – AVP RI [Foreign policy archives of the Russian Empire]*, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3359, p. 2.
41. On the 1865 map of Jerusalem's extra-muros territories, all that can be seen is Mishkenot Sha'ananim, the first neighbourhood built by Sir Moses Montefiore, and the first buildings of the *russkie podvorie*; the massive extra-muros construction began some years later, as intended by Mansurov in 1860, with the foundation of the Mea Shearim neighbourhood and after 1880, buildings for immigrants from the various Jewish communities. In the 1880s, the French also decided to follow the Russian and Jewish examples and built Notre-Dame de France outside the Old City, "to accommodate nearly 600 people." See more Lemire, 2013, pp. 33-37 (with maps); Trimbur, 1998.
42. RGB, Manuscripts Department, f. 148, box 4, d. 13, p. 9.
43. RGB, Manuscripts Department, f. 148, box 4, d. 13, p. 18.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
46. Mansurov mentions 818,623 roubles 37 kopecks which the Palestine Committee was due to collect some time around 1863. *Ibid.* p. 23. These matters will be covered in later research.
47. The Orthodox Church has two feast days connected with Alexander Nevsky: 23 November (6 December), the day of his funeral, and 30 August (12 September), the day his relics were transferred by Peter the Great from Vladimir to St Petersburg in 1723.
48. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op. 1, D. 40, p. 51.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
50. Alexander II's son and Alexander III's nephew.
51. It became the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in 1889.
52. See, for example, his memorandum dated November 1882: *AVP RI*, f. 337/2, op. 873/1 (1879-1917), D. 593 "Dig on the 'Russian domain' near the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem," pp. 1-3.
53. *AVP RI*, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, D. 593, p. 4.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 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 neighbouring landowners." However, as a member of the *Palästina-Verein*, the Society officials asked him "to maintain confidentiality about any discoveries made."
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.
56. The search for a gate – either the secret gate to the Holy Sepulchre, as here, or the gate leading from Jerusalem to Hell, or the underground entrance to the direct way from Russia to the Holy Land—was a common topic in the popular literature of the period, related in pilgrims' stories. See, for example, A. Bochkov (hegumen), *Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, Moscow, 1875, p. 30 (in Russian); and A. Medvedev (monk), *Memoirs of spiritual impressions during the pilgrimage to the East*, Moscow, 1880, pp.1-2 (in Russian). See below concerning the discovery on the *russkoe mesto* of the Gate "through which Christ climbed to Calvary."
57. *AVP RI*, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, d. 593, p. 18.
58. The story of the Patriarchate's reluctance to have a church and a building for Russian pilgrims erected on the *russkoe mesto*, some years later, reveals the strained relations between the "three Orthodoxies" in the Holy Land – Russian, Greek and Arab.
59. *AVP RI*, f. 337/2, op. 873/1, D. 593, pp. 54-55.
60. The *Orthodox Palestine Collection* was one of the Orthodox Palestine Society's press publications, launched in 1881 some months before the Society was officially founded. For more on the Palestine Society's press publications, see Astafieva 2007.

61. A number of newspapers and magazines [*tolstye zhurnaly*] devoted articles to these discoveries, such as the *Ministry of Education Magazine*, the magazine *Christian Reading*, not to mention the many publications in the *Bulletins of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society*.
62. The findings of the excavations were discussed in Volume 7 of the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*; see particularly the article by one of the supervisors, Conrad Schick.
63. The old Palestine Committee became a Commission in 1864.
64. RNB, Manuscripts Department, D. 243, op. 1, D. 43, pp. 3-11 (verso). The story of this “influence” was reported to Ivan Zinoviev, Consul Kozhevnikov’s chief, by senior officials at the Palestine Society.
65. GARF, F. 990, op. 1, D.9, p. 1. Mansurov says that the “2,000 roubles” used by the Palestine Society on the digs was a small sum compared with the 31,000 roubles he and Dorgobuzhinov had spent in the late 1850s on buying and clearing the land beside the Holy Sepulchre. In the Society’s official papers, the sum is given as 1,000 roubles.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
68. Mansurov wanted the book to be published by Mikhail Katkov, the most influential publisher in Russia at that time. If that was not possible, he even considered publishing it abroad. *Ibid.* p. 9.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
70. Chief procurator of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church.
71. RGAF, F. 990, op. 1, D. 241, p. 8.
72. In addition to his major book, published in 1885, Mansurov wrote a large number of texts on the Russian archaeological digs, of which the most relevant here is Mansurov 1887.
73. So far I have been unable to elucidate the meaning of this expression “apolitical” as used by Stepanov in this context.
74. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op. 1, D. 43, p.11.
75. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op.1, D. 42, p. 36 (verso).
76. AVP RI, F. 337/2, op. 873/1, D.20, p. 70; RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op.1, D. 42, p. 36 (verso).
77. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op.1, D. 42, p. 36 (verso).
78. AVP RI, F.337/2, op. 873/1, D. 496, p. 37.
79. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op.1, D. 42, p. 36.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
81. AVP RI, F. 337/2, op. 873/1, D. 496, p. 28.
82. RNB, Manuscripts Department, op. 1, F. 253, D. 42, p.35 (verso).
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, F. 233, D. 42, p. 40.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
90. RNB, Manuscripts Department, F. 253, op. 1, D. 42, pp. 151-153 (verso).
91. Churches dedicated to Saint Alexander Nevsky were built in Paris, Belgrade, Sophia, Copenhagen, Warsaw, Reval (Tallinn) and other cities. See Wortman 2000, II, pp. 248 ff.

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