

## Travels of Russians to the Holy Land in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Abstract

*This article focuses on three main aspects: the presence of the Holy Land in the Russian literature of pilgrimage, the creation in Palestine of Russian institutions, and the representations of the Holy Land in Russian architecture. By doing that, this article aims at analyzing how personalities of the Russian cultural, literary and religious world spoke about the Holy Land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the so-called 'Russian Palestine'), while pointing out the value of pilgrimage to the Holy Land for the Russian Orthodox tradition and also recalling the important element of the representation of 'Jerusalem outside Jerusalem'.*

- Introduction
- Russia, the Holy Land and its Representations
- The Holy Land of Writers
- 'Russian Palestine'
- Conclusions

### Introduction

The link between Russian Orthodoxy and the Holy Land is of ancient origin, dating back at least to the XII century when a new literary genre, the *palomničeskaja literatura* [literature of pilgrimage], appeared in Russia. It was also referred to as "literature of palmists," from the palm branch, symbol of peace, which the pilgrims who went to Jerusalem used to take with them. Most of the early Russian writings on Palestine were descriptions of the pilgrimage, as Derek Hopwood pointed out in his classic *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine*, over forty years ago.<sup>1</sup>

The first example of this genre is Daniil's Diary.<sup>2</sup> Daniil, "hegumen of the

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Hopwood, *The Russian Presence in Syria and Palestine 1843-1914. Church and politics in the Near East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Žit'e i chožen'e Daniila, Rus'kaja Zemli igumena. 1106-1108 gg.*, ed. Michail A. Venevitinov, "Pravoslavnyj palestinskij sbornik" Vol. I, Issue 3, Book 3 (1883) and Vol. III, Issue 3, Book 9 (1885). The diary has been recently published again by Gelian M. Prochorov, with a commentary and a parallel text in modern Russian: *«Choženie» igumena Daniila v Svjatuju zemlju v načale XII v.* ed. Gelian M. Prochorov (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd. Olega Abyško, 2007). See also the *Introduction* to Daniil Egumeno, in *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, ed. Marcello Garzaniti (Roma: Città Nuova, 1991), 9-59. By the same author, on the historical development of the Byzantine and Slavic model of pilgrimage, see Marcello Garzaniti, "Viaggio dell'egumeno Daniele in Terra santa. Un pellegrino della Rus' in Palestina nel XII sec.," *Studi e ricerche sull'Oriente cristiano*, 2 (1985): 93-135; Id., "Modelli di culto e devozione nella Rus' medievale attraverso le

Russian land,” as he called himself, made a travel to the Holy Land at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. But it was only starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the phenomenon of Russians’ travels to that region increased considerably. Personalities of the Russian cultural, literary and religious world spoke about and represented the Holy Land in works that contributed to spread the image of the holy sites among an ever increasing public.

In fact, pilgrimage to the Holy Land had a deep historical value for the Russian Orthodox tradition: traveling to the sources of Christianity was a vote expressed not only by clergy, but also by many secular people. According to the historian Vasilij Ključevskij, the practice of pilgrimages was considered one of the distinctive elements of Russian national character.<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem, for its unique religious and spiritual values, constituted in this sense the destination par excellence. An effective representation of the meaning of the Holy Land for Orthodox pilgrimage was given nearly thirty years ago by Michel Evdokimov:

Pilgrims who go to the holy sites realize a meeting on three different levels. First of all with ancient Jerusalem, the antique center of the world where the holy temple once was; then with the city over which Jesus cried, and where He had to go, after coming down from Mount Tabor, to accomplish all things; finally with the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal city of which the earthly one is a model or copy in this world.<sup>4</sup>

### **Russia, the Holy Land and its Representations**

The central role of Jerusalem for Russian Orthodoxy was such as to justify the building of the magnificent monastery of *Novyj Ierusalim* [New Jerusalem], planned at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Patriarch Nikon on the Istra River, near Moscow’s territory. It was a copy of the main monuments of the Holy City and, above all, of the Holy Sepulcher, thus reproducing the model of

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testimonianze dei pellegrini a Gerusalemme e a Costantinopoli,” in *L’età di Kiev e la sua eredità nell’incontro con l’Occidente*, eds. Gabriele De Rosa, Francesca Lomastro (Roma: Viella, 2003), 113-134; Id., “Il pellegrinaggio medievale nella Slavia ortodossa. L’Itinerario dell’egumeno Daniil in Terra santa” (XII sec.) and “Libro Pellegrino di Antonij (Dobrynja Jadrejkovič), arcivescovo di Novgorod (XIII sec.)” in *L’Europa dei pellegrini*, ed. Luciano Vaccaro (Milano: ed. Centro Ambrosiano, 2004), 441-457; Id., “Alle origini della letteratura di pellegrinaggio della Rus’: modello bizantino o modello latino?,” *Itineraria*, 5 (2006): 171-200; Id., “Il pellegrinaggio nel mondo bizantino-slavo,” in *La bisaccia del pellegrino: fra evocazione e memoria. Il pellegrinaggio sostitutivo ai luoghi santi nel mondo antico e nelle grandi religioni viventi*, eds. Amilcare Barbero, Stefano Piano (Ponzano Monferrato: Centro dei Sacri monti Calvari e Complessi devozionali europei, 2010), 249-256.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Tomáš Špidlík, *L’idea russa un’altra visione dell’uomo*, translated from French by Stella Morra (Roma: Lipa, 1995), 236.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Evdokimov, *Pellegrini russi e vagabondi mistici*, translated from French by Giovanni Ferrero (Milano: Paoline, 1990), 27.

Jerusalem both in terms of measures and topography. (Figure 1, 2)<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 1: The monastery of Novyj Ierusalim, 1912



Fig. 2: The monastery of Novyj Ierusalim, 1912

The foundation of such a complex was based on the vision of Moscow as a New Jerusalem. In the popular consciousness, Moscow was perceived as a

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<sup>5</sup> Figure 1, 2: The monastery of *Novyj Ierusalim*, 1912.

In <http://www.n-jerusalem.ru/photo/text/30602.html> (accessed 1 December 2013)

*Russkij Ierusalim* [Russian Jerusalem], the city that rose on the mountain “between land and sky.” The realization of sites that copied Jerusalem’s sacred topography was not an exclusively Russian prerogative; however, it is significant to note that in this case such a tendency was combined with the notion of a holy nation, attributed to Russia.

The idea of Moscow’s holiness – connected with that of New Jerusalem and its complementary town, Moscow, as being the “Third Rome” – was present all over the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was strengthened by the direct experience of those pilgrims who were coming back from their travel to the Holy Land.<sup>6</sup>

The building of *Novyj Ierusalim* offered to Russian people who could not go to the Holy Land the chance to do a pilgrimage to a ‘represented’ Jerusalem at only 45 kilometers from Moscow. The historical Jerusalem, located in far Palestine, was not to be exalted except for its symbolic value, which recalled the heavenly Jerusalem. As Rosanna Casari observed, “as Russia abounded, in a certain way, of ‘Jerusalems’ that referred to the archetype (always represented as the historical city and at the same time as the heavenly one) and that were tied to the model through *upodoblenie* [similarity], the concept of ‘Russian’ Jerusalem was privileged (...). [And] between the two components of Jerusalem as a powerful symbol and archetype, that of the historical, ancient and contemporary city, and that of otherworldly prototype, (i.e.) the heavenly Jerusalem, realization of God’s Kingdom, there was the tendency to privilege the latter,” and this explains why a copy of Jerusalem was built close to Moscow.<sup>7</sup>

The author herself pointed out how the symbolic reference to Jerusalem vaunted an old and consolidated presence in the Russian tradition. The archpriest Lev Lebedev stated on this subject:

The idea the Russian land was an image of the Promised Land, of the Kingdom of Heaven, of the New Jerusalem, and the development and incarnation of such idea in visible architectonic forms and in toponyms, constitute the most amazing characteristic of religious, theological, popular Russian consciousness from the X to the XVIII century.<sup>8</sup>

The title of ‘Russian Jerusalem’ belonged to Moscow – the “Third Rome” and the ‘New Jerusalem’ – but afterwards it was also applied to Saint Petersburg and to the monastery of Valaam, ‘the Northern Jerusalem’, placed on an island

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<sup>6</sup> On the topic, see Rosanna Casari, *La montagna, i bassifondi, la bohème. Letteratura, arte e vita quotidiana a Mosca nel XIX secolo*, in Rosanna Casari, Silvia Burini, *L'altra Mosca. Arte e letteratura nella cultura russa tra Ottocento e Novecento. Introduction by Gian Piero Piretto* (Bergamo: Moretti e Vitali, 2000), in particular 19-64. See also Daniel B. Rowland, “Moscow. The Third Rome or the New Israel?,” *The Russian Review*, 55/4 (1996): 591-614.

<sup>7</sup> Rosanna Casari, “Pietroburgo – una Gerusalemme ‘sul sangue’,” in *Pietroburgo – capitale della cultura russa*, ed. Antonella d’Amelia (Salerno: Università di Salerno, 2004), I, 80-81.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 77.

of the homonymous archipelago in Ladoga lake. Between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the southern part of the archipelago the hermitages of the Resurrection and of Gethsemane were added to the first monastery, dedicated to the Transfiguration, built between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Their toponymy referred to the places of the Holy Land: Mount Zion and Mount of Olives, the Kidron Valley, Getsemani, Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

As to Saint Petersburg, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood was built on the site where in 1881 the emperor Alexander II had been killed, once again the reference model was Jerusalem. As a consequence of the comparison between Alexander II and Christ, the site of the murder became Jerusalem thanks to the potent symbology applied to this church.<sup>10</sup>

However, the site that best presented Russia both as the image of the Promised Land and as another Holy Land was the already mentioned complex of *Novyj Ierusalim*. On its large territory, around the Cathedral of the Resurrection, located in the center on a hill called Zion, several hermitages and churches dedicated to different episodes of Christ's life were set up: the Mount of Olives, the Church of the Ascension, the Monastery of the Virgins called Bethany. Some other holy sites were created in the surroundings: Galilee; the valley through which the Istra river flew, renamed Jordan; Mount Tabor; the Nativity Church. The conformity with the Holy Land archetype was considered fundamental. In 1820 the landscapist Maksim Vorob'ëv went to Jerusalem in order to reproduce the views of the Holy Sepulcher. He was sent there by the Grand Duke Nikolaj Pavlovič, who wanted to restore the main Cathedral in Novyj Ierusalim making it more similar to the original one.<sup>11</sup>

In his speech concerning his travel to Palestine – it will be widely addressed in the next pages - the writer Andrej Murav'ëv referred to this “Jerusalem outside Jerusalem” by stating:

Russia retains in its borders the precious model of this temple [the Church of the Resurrection], and Novyj Ierusalim (...) is a priceless treasure for the believers, who are glad to find in their motherland the copy of the sacred objects they saw in Palestine. Even those who have not visited Jerusalem might have a clear idea of the Holy Sepulcher, so often described, in Voskresensk.<sup>12</sup>

Murav'ëv followed up his account concerning the Holy Land with a new work

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<sup>9</sup> Giovanna Parravicini, “La Città Santa nell’arte e nella cultura russa,” Paper presented at the 34th European week of Euro-Mediterranean Religious History (III), *Una Città fra Terra e Cielo. Gerusalemme le Religioni – le Chiese*, Villa Cagnola, Gazzada (Varese), September 3-7, 2012 (unpublished).

<sup>10</sup> On this issue, see Casari, “Pietroburgo – una Gerusalemme ‘sul sangue’.”

<sup>11</sup> Parravicini, “La Città Santa nell’arte e nella cultura russa.”

<sup>12</sup> Andrej N. Murav'ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu* (Moskva: Indrik, 2006), 187.

dedicated to Russian holy places,<sup>13</sup> where it was possible “to find again the holiness and grace characteristic of the archetypes.” Actually, he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in order to “comfort his heart with the sacred similarity.”<sup>14</sup>

The theme of Jerusalem crossed the Russian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not only as a memory of the real city, its historical events and holy sites, but also as a reminder of its existing representations on the Russian territory. The Holy Land also constituted a reference not only for those who concretely went there on a pilgrimage, but also for those who did not have the chance to visit it. According to Russian Orthodox authors, the Holy Land value was so meaningful because it was the crib of Biblical history, the land where Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived and died. In this sense, an example of this literary representation of the Holy Land is provided by the great Russian poet Michail Jur’evič Lermontov who frequently used biblical images in his works, even though he had never visited the Holy Land. The most famous poem on this subject, entitled *Vetka Palestiny* [The Palm Branch of Palestine], starts with a palm branch given to him by the writer Andrej Nikolaevič Murav’ev after his return from the Holy Land. Palestine, Lebanon, “Jordan’s silver billows,” Jerusalem are the places sung by the poet.<sup>15</sup> The religious objects evoked and the atmosphere of prayer and meditation that emerge from his poetry create a feeling of “peace and consolation” [*vsjo polno mira i otpady*] that pervades the entire poem.

Lermontov’s lines are here recalled for the literary fortune they had among Russian writers who, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, concretely visited the Holy Land. Among them there are several famous authors, such as Dmitrij Vasil’evič Daškov, Nikolaj Vasil’evič Gogol’, Andrej Nikolaevič Murav’ev, Avraam Sergeevič Norov, Ivan Alekseevič Bunin. Their writings offer a precious point of view concerning perceptions, representations and narrations of Russian pilgrims to Palestine, and contribute to pointing out common themes, words and images on the Holy Land.

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<sup>13</sup> Andrej N. Murav’ev, *Putešestvie po svjatym mestam russkim* (Sankt-Peterburg: Tipografija III otd. Sobstv. E. I. V. Kanceljarii, 1836).

<sup>14</sup> In Casari, “Pietroburgo – una Gerusalemme ‘sul sangue’,” 81.

<sup>15</sup> “Palm branch of Palestine, oh tell me, / In that far distant home-land fair, / Wast rooted in the mountain gravel / Or sprung from some vale garden rare? / Once o’er the Jordan’s silver billows / Fond kissed with thee the Eastern sun? / Have the grim gales ‘neath starry heavens / Swept over thee from Lebanon?” Michail Ju. Lermontov, “*Vetka Palestiny*,” *Stichotvorenija* (Sankt-Peterburg: tipografija Ilja Glazunova, 1840), translated from Russian by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, “The Palm Branch of Palestine,” *Russian Lyrics* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1916), 54.

## The Holy Land of Writers

The first Russian writer who went to Palestine as a pilgrim was Dmitrij Daškov, a fine diplomat who was second counselor of the Russian Embassy in Constantinople. He travelled to the Holy Land and in Greece in 1820. Just before the Greek revolution in 1821, he was in charge of collecting detailed information on the political, military and religious situation of those lands, first of all Jerusalem, where the Czarist government was willing to open its own consulate.<sup>16</sup> The results of his travels were two essays: *Afonskaja gora. Otryvok iz putešestvija po Grecii v 1820 godu* [Mount Athos. Extracts of his travel across Greece in 1820] and *Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalime. Otryvok iz putešestvija po Grecii i Palestine v 1820* [Russian pilgrims in Jerusalem. Extracts of their travel across Greece and Palestine in 1820], both published on the literary journal *Severnye cvety* [North Flowers], respectively in 1825 and in 1826. Daškov was reviewer, translator, polemist, and was among the founders of the literary club *Arzamas*, which counted among its members poets such as Aleksandr Puškin, Vasilij Žukovskij and Pëtr Vjazemskij.

Daškov's travel presents a characteristic that is common to other 'cultured' pilgrims: besides the private reasons to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they also had an official task to fulfill, either for the state or for the Church. But even when they had no particular task, at least in the Near East they were considered representatives of the Czarist state.<sup>17</sup> The essay *Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalime* represents an example of Russian travel literature, written by an educated traveler. In fact Daškov was able to quote passages from Virgil's, Milton's, Petrarch's and Chateaubriand's works either translated or in their original language.<sup>18</sup>

As Peter R. Weisensel and Theofanis G. Stavrou pointed out,

Russian travelers to the Near East enjoyed a certain cultural affinity and sensibility about the Orthodox East oftentimes lacking among their Western counterparts. Understandably, they focused their attention on phenomena to which they could relate culturally, and they saw things through the Orthodox prism, a dimension conspicuously absent from Western accounts.<sup>19</sup>

In this sense it is possible to speak of a 'Russian Orthodox' literary model for travels that were carried out to the Near East, in which

Russian travelers (...) frequently referred to the region as the Christian or Orthodox East

<sup>16</sup> Viktor M. Guminskij, *Norov v Svjatoj Zemle*, in A. S. Norov, *Putešestvie po Svjatoj Zemle v 1885 godu* (Moskva: Indrik, 2008), 279.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>19</sup> Peter R. Weisensel, Theofanis G. Stavrou, *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1986), XXVIII.

despite that from the seventh century onwards it had become gradually Islamized and Eastern Orthodoxy was a minority religion in the area. This rather romantic appellation, the Orthodox East (...), underscores a fundamental and enduring cultural link between Russia and the region under consideration.<sup>20</sup>

According to Daškov, the Holy Land was “important in history of humane genre, rich in miracles and in great events, (...) [the] crib of Christian faith, (...) [the] land where the traditions of the New and the Old Testament live together, where every hill, every valley, every ruin talks of Prophets’ and well-known Heroes’ works.”<sup>21</sup> As others would comment later on, he pointed out the deep gap between the Christian Holy Land’s past greatness and its miserable present condition:

You cannot image anything sadder than the surroundings of Jerusalem: mountains, cliffs, bulks without grass, almost without trees, everywhere covered by round stones; a rain of stones seemed to have fallen down from the sky on this criminal land. At midday, exhausted because of the heat, we went up, and we saw in front of us a series of walls and embattled towers (...). At first glance close to these ancient walls – David’s, Herod’s and Geoffrey’s town – thousands of memories, one more alive than the other, one more sacred than the other, crowded in my soul. Rational peoples may laugh at believers’ enthusiasm! Here, at the foot of Zion, everyone is a Christian, everyone a believer, who has but retained an ardent heart and a love for the majestic!<sup>22</sup>

Comparison between Holy Land’s past and present also emerges in *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu* [Travels towards the holy sites in 1830] by Andrej Murav’ëv, a work that resembles Dmitrij Daškov’s book a lot. It is not by chance that Aleksandr Puškin, in his unfinished review of the first edition of Murav’ëv’s work, referred to Daškov, even though without mentioning him. Puškin spoke of “another Russian traveler” and cited the final part of his over-quoted and already mentioned passage “Here, at the foot of Zion, everyone is a Christian, everyone a believer, who has but retained an ardent heart and a love for the majestic!”<sup>23</sup>

Murav’ëv was a religious writer, a poet and a playwright, and he visited the Holy Land twice. *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam* – a milestones of the Russian literature concerning the Holy Land – is the report of his first travel, made in 1829-1830; the second one, that took place exactly twenty years later, brought him to the Holy Land, as well as to Greece, Mount Athos, Asia Minor, Constantinople and Syria.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dmitrij V. Daškov, “Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalime. Otryvok iz putešestvija po Grecii i Palestine v 1820,” *Severnye cvety* (1826): 216-217.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 225-226.

<sup>23</sup> This episode is reported in Guminskij, *Norov v Svjatoj Zemle*, 280.



Why did Murav'ëv visit the Holy Land? According to Puškin, the young writer had made his pilgrimage “neither for the vain desire to acquire colored emotions for a poetic romance, nor for the restless interest of a tired and weakened heart to find violent emotions. He visited the holy sites as a believer, as a humble Christian, as a simple crusader longing to bow down in the dust in front of Christ the Saviour's grave.”<sup>24</sup> The “crusader” image would later be adopted by Murav'ëv himself in his memoirs, where he presented himself as being “imbibed with crusaders' spirit.”<sup>25</sup>

Actually, besides what was asserted by Puškin, political and literary interests were not unknown to Murav'ëv. According to Puškin, it was during the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that Murav'ëv, who at that time was a 24 years old soldier, “became interested in the keys of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, forgotten by Christian Europe.”<sup>26</sup> Just after the Treaty of Adrianople, he didn't go back to his homeland, but decided to visit the Holy Land, traveling through Constantinople, Syria and Egypt. A contemporary scholar of the Holy Land, Nikolaj Lisovoj, remarked how “in the East Murav'ëv discovered his authentic vocation and identified a fortunate creative niche: being both a knight and a cantor of the Holy Land.”<sup>27</sup>

He came to Jerusalem on the fifth Sunday of Lent, on the eve of the Holy Week. The description of his arrival is probably one of the most suggestive pages of his entire work:

Who will be able to express all the feelings that move somebody's heart as the Holy City suddenly appears? (...) Suddenly, as if emerging from the ground, it appears to one's troubled eyes on the slope of the same mountain whose surface people have just climbed (...). The Mount of Olives with the clear rays of the evening and the desert of the foggy Dead Sea limited the sacred horizon behind it, and I remained silent, in ecstasy, losing myself in my sad memories. I entered the city, I looked around and the enchantment disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

In the Holy City the young writer was treated almost as if he were an official messenger of the Russian government and he was offered the chance to become acquainted with the most relevant personalities of the political and ecclesiastical world living in Jerusalem. Such a network of relationships would allow him, in the following years, to be considered one of the greatest Russian experts of Near Eastern affairs and to become a reference point for both the

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<sup>24</sup> Aleksandr S. Puškin, “Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam A. N. Murav'ëva,” *Polnoe Sobranie sočinenij*, XI (Moskva, 1949), 217.

<sup>25</sup> Note of November 30th 1827. In Andrej N. Murav'ëv, “Moi vospominanija,” *Russkoe obozrenije*, 5 (1895): 67.

<sup>26</sup> Puškin, “Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam A. N. Murav'ëva,” 217.

<sup>27</sup> Nikolaj N. Lisovoj, Introduction to Andrej N. Murav'ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu* (Moskva: Indrik, 2006), 10.

<sup>28</sup> Murav'ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu*, 144.

Russian government and the Synod<sup>29</sup>. On this regard, the above mentioned Lisovoj stated: “If at the beginning Murav’ëv’s travel was transformed, despite his own desire, into a *political event* now, when he writes about his pilgrimage, it becomes part of the Russian literature. Now he is the author of a renowned book, which has become an event (...). In a short time, A. N. Murav’ëv’s work has become the *document of a historical period*.”<sup>30</sup>

Actually Murav’ëv’s work was very successful and became considerably widespread not only among Russian educated audiences, both secular and religious, but even among common people, so that the Russian literature referred to him as “Murav’ëv phenomenon.” In this respect it is worth quoting the account of the Pëtr Simonovič Kazanskij, professor at the Moscow Theological Academy: “I clearly remember what a great impression this book produced on me. The liveliness of its language, the expressiveness of its images, the ardent feelings of devotion (...). Since the time I had this book, I couldn’t sleep at night unless I had read it.”<sup>31</sup>

Another example confirms how much Murav’ëv’s work was known not only within religious clubs, but also among secular elites. In 1892 Vasilij Nikolaevič Chitrovo wrote a novel, *K Životvorjaščemu Grobu Gospodnju. Rasskaz starogo palomnika* [Towards the Life-giving Holy Sepulcher. Novel by an old pilgrim], pretending that its author was Vasilij Nikitič, a farmer. According to the novel, before starting his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the main character Vasilij (Vasja) goes to the pope of his village, Father Ioann, in order to get recommendation for books concerning the Holy Land. The pope suggests him to read Murav’ëv’s book and tells him: “Vasja, look at the book I am giving you: the entire Holy Land is described; Mr. Murav’ëv was there, and whatever he saw, he has described it». Afterwards, Vasja says: “I took the book; I read it in a week and, after reading it, I decided, without further delay, that I would go to Jerusalem.”<sup>32</sup>

The Holy Land that Murav’ëv describes was part of a larger ‘East’, dominated by the Ottoman Empire, with an increasing Russian influence. “Our name – he writes – has never been so powerful and glorious in the East as it is now.”<sup>33</sup> On his way to the Holy Land, he notes that “Car’grad [Constantinople] too in

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<sup>29</sup> Lisovoj, introduction to Andrej N. Murav’ëv, 11-13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 14 (Emphasis in the text).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Vasilij N. Chitrovo, *K Životvorjaščemu Grobu Gospodnju. Rasskaz starogo palomnika*, V ed., Sankt-Peterburg 1892, now in V. N. Chitrovo, *Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, vol. 1, *Pravoslavie v Svjatoj Zemle*, ed. N. N. Lisovoj, (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd. Olega Abyško, 2011), 279.

<sup>33</sup> Murav’ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu*, 73. For the notion of “Christian East” referred to “those areas associated in Russian thinking with the origins of Christianity, Orthodox culture, and the geographic jurisdiction of the Eastern Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem,” see Weisensel and Stavrou., *Russian Travelers to the Christian East*, X.

1830 had the real aspect of Russia's southern capital; (...) it seemed to me that the future of the Ottoman Empire would not be decided in the deserted great buildings of Ramis-Ciflik, where the sad Sultan was hidden, but in the yard of the Russian embassy."<sup>34</sup> The expectations towards Russia, according to Murav'ëv, had increased even in Jerusalem, where he was received "as the chief of a powerful platoon, sent to conquer the Holy Land." Most probably, the main reasons for such an attitude were both "the fear for the name of Russia, (...) increased by the glory of our victories on the Ottomans," and the opinion, "ingrained in the people," that one day Russia would free Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup>

As Daškov had already done before him, Murav'ëv highlighted the contradiction between the holiness of the visited sites and the condition of Palestine under the Sublime Porte: "Everything has disappeared, everything has changed in Jerusalem, but the mission itself of the places."<sup>36</sup> Along the 'Way of the Cross' he was resentful not only because of the aloofness with which Arabs and Jews went along the roads that saw Jesus' last hours, but above all because of the attitude of Christians themselves: "What hurts my heart the most is that nowadays thoughtless Christians walk up and down this big street with indifference as if it had not been covered with His blood; and extraneous, selfish thoughts distract their mind, while their unworthy foot tramples the footprints of Our Saviour's sufferings!"<sup>37</sup>

The Holy Sepulcher is the symbol of the contradiction between the Holy Land deep spiritual values and the hardness of its current reality. This is how the writer describes his arrival to the Holy Sepulcher:

Here I embraced the stone over which the body (...) of the Son of God made man laid down; I remained on the rock that had been entirely enlightened by the rays of His resurrection (...). Tears of tenderness and gratitude started to flow out of my eyes. But they were transformed into bitter tears when (...) I remembered the shame of the Holy City and of all its eminent places; the shame of the Holy Sepulcher itself, which was once redeemed with the blood of thousands of people, and today has remained alone, forgotten in the wild deserts of Palestine, due to Christians' disagreements and Muslims' persecutions, like the stone that builders rejected!<sup>38</sup>

Murav'ëv draws on the old literature of pilgrimage, starting from hegumen Daniil's diary, and his work resembles Daniil's emotions for visiting the places of Christ's earthly life and the hegumen observations concerning the Holy Land current conditions. It is not by chance that Murav'ëv doesn't use the word "pilgrimage" [*palomničestvo* or the older *choždenije*], but refers to his journey

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<sup>34</sup> Murav'ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu*, 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

as a “travel” [*putešestvie*]; therefore, he makes comments on political and social issues, in addition to spiritual and ecclesiastical reflections. As Evgenija Ju. Safatova pointed out, “Murav’ëv gives a new interpretation of the theme of pilgrimage, since it combines both the spiritual tradition of pilgrimages and the secular tradition of ‘travels.’ The deepest religious feeling, which permeates his work, is conjugated with the analysis of a secular observer, who minutely examines and values what he observes.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in Murav’ëv’s work spiritual reflections are strictly connected to those dealing with political and diplomatic aspects; for example when he regrets Europe’s lack of interest in the fate of the holy sites, and in the meantime exalts the providential role reserved to Russia in the region:

Who has never been to Jerusalem as a pilgrim is not able to imagine the disastrous conditions of its holy places. Whoever has been there and has prayed on the Saviour’s Sepulcher among the infamy and dishonor (...) cannot understand Europe’s indifference concerning the founding stone of its salvation. (...) The days of blood have passed, the time of treaties has come, and the Western powers have given up Jerusalem, while Russia, chosen by Providence for the Islamic downfall, has intervened (...). It is the only country that can relieve the destiny of the Holy Land.<sup>40</sup>

The reason why I have dwelt upon Murav’ëv is the literary success he obtained both in terms of audience and critics: he was greeted as the “Russian Chateaubriand” and his work became a milestone of Russian literature on travels to the Holy Land. Subsequent narrations about the Holy Land were somehow forced to keep into account Murav’ëv *Putešestvie*, sometimes expressly quoting it, some others only referring to it.

It is the case of another Russian traveler, Avraam Sergeevič Norov, statesman, historian and writer. In his *Putešestvie po Svjatoj Zemle v 1835 godu* [Travel across the Holy Land in 1835] Daškov and Murav’ëv influences are clear: the pilgrimage time framework, the itinerary chosen to reach the Holy Land, the places visited and the people met are quite similar. However, there are deep differences in the way the Holy Land is represented, depending on these authors’ diverse point of view and personalities.

As Viktor Guminskij has observed, Daškov was first of all a diplomatic and a scholar, while Murav’ëv was first of all a romantic writer and only secondly a pilgrim, and Norov was a cultivated pilgrim, “who believed that the Holy Land had provided him with answers to the questions he was worried about both as a scholar and as an Orthodox.”<sup>41</sup> Norov’s Holy Land was the Biblical one and

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<sup>39</sup> Evgenia Ju. Safatova, “Tradicii palomničeskoj literatury v tvorčestve A. N. Murav’ëva,” *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 356 (2012): 39-43.

<sup>40</sup> Murav’ëv, *Putešestvie ko Svjatym Mestam v 1830 godu*, 201.

<sup>41</sup> Guminskij, *Norov v Svjatoj Zemle*, 287.

quotations from the Bible were numerous, reported exclusively in Church Slavonic. On the contrary, Murav'ëv poetically paraphrased passages from the Old and the New Testament, while allusions to the Holy Scriptures were absent in Daškov's work. According to Vasilij Chitrovo, Norov's text is better than the one by Murav'ëv "for his culture, for his, so to speak, soft and gentle style, and for his sincerity."<sup>42</sup>

Norov opens the Introduction to his book with Dante's famous quotation "In the middle of the journey of our life," thus explaining the reasons for his travel to the Holy Land: his interest in a personal and spiritual meeting with places, specifically Jerusalem, where Jesus had spent his earthly life. The period he chooses for his travel is not accidental; it takes place during the Holy week, as it had already happened with Murav'ëv's travel. Another similarity is that also Norov does not use the religious term "pilgrimage" [*palomničestvo*], but the secular one *putešestvie* [travel]: "The idea of traveling to the Holy Land was hidden in me for a long time; I was quite curious of seeing the splendid East, but Jerusalem strengthened my firmness: the consolation of kissing the Saviour of the world footprints in the same places where he fulfilled the mystery of humanity's redemption made me overcome many obstacles."<sup>43</sup>

He explicitly refers to Murav'ëv's work by stating that many readers had already known Palestine thanks "to the beautiful pages of Mr Murav'ëv's book (...) [that] had put them in contact with the Holy Land and, of course, had driven many people's hearts towards the Church of Jerusalem, which was suffering under the [Ottoman] yoke."<sup>44</sup> Apart from the spiritual reasons that have brought him to the Holy Land, Norov points out other explanations, such as his archaeological interests: comparing the geography and topography of Palestine to the text of the Holy Scriptures in order to "facilitate (...) the reading of many passages of the Old and New Testament." Even though the list of the authors he presents in his text is relevant (among them, Francesco Quaresmi, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt and François-René de Chateaubriand), the main source is the Bible itself: "The Bible is the most reliable guide to the Holy Land, and I consider myself lucky that I had only the Bible with me for the greater part of my travel."<sup>45</sup>

His arrival to Jerusalem represents the culminating moment of his pilgrimage, the strongest of several intense emotions, since he is meeting the Holy Land, the origin of Christianity, where every Christian feels as if he were at home:

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<sup>42</sup> Vasilij N. Chitrovo, *Egipet i Sinaj. Bibliografičeskij ukazatel' russkich knig i statej osvjatych mestach Vostoka, preimuščestvenno palestinskih i sinajskih* (Sankt-Peterburg, 1876), now published in Chitrovo, *Pravoslavie v Svjatoj Zemle*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> Norov, *Putešestvie po Svjatoj Zemle v 1885 godu*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Going up from mountain to mountain, I was in the restless expectation of discovering Jerusalem (...). I started to feel discouragement because I hadn't seen the Holy Land in the daylight (...). I kept walking, and suddenly Jerusalem appeared! I abandoned my horse bridles and threw myself on the earth with tender tears. I also recognized the Mount of Olives (...); my sighs closed my breast (...). Despite being a son of the far North, I entered Jerusalem as if I was entering my own homeland.<sup>46</sup>

Norov's Holy Land is that of the Holy Scriptures, from the prophets to the Revelation up to John, with the Holy Sepulcher at their own center. Hence the pain for such a sanctuary being in non-Christian hands, but also the conviction – which distinguishes him from Murav'ev - that behind such a circumstance there must be a providential meaning.<sup>47</sup> In the same way, he perceives the division among Christians: “almost more painful than the Muslim yoke”; yet, rather than limiting himself to simply condemn it, he perceives such a situation as a challenge to the faith until they reach unity.<sup>48</sup>

Norov's descriptive capacity makes the readers soak in the atmosphere of Palestine at Jesus' time. For instance, he focuses on the 'Way of the Cross': “here there is the Garden of Getsemani; there the road from Bethany starts, and the climb towards the Mount of Olives starts here;” he describes the places where Jesus spent his last hours with a great number of details, starting from the Gospel itself.<sup>49</sup>

The representation of the Holy Land the end of his work synthesizes his perception about the places he has just visited. Despite the decadence to which they are exposed, they recall the image of the Promised Land:

Jerusalem; the wild, destroyed and pastoral Bethlehem; Nazareth, forgotten in the mountainous fog; the scattered loads of Israelite towns; the deserted streets of the Promised Land fulfilled all my hopes! After seeing the Holy Land, I knew all the vanity of what I had seen so far, and had I started my travel to the East from Palestine, I would have not visited the colossal magnificence of the ancient Egyptians!<sup>50</sup>

The theme of the difference between the Holy Land past and present is crucial also in other authors. For instance, Nikolaj Gogol' – who traveled to the Holy Land in 1848 – asked himself how it was possible to recognize “the land flowing with milk and honey,” when “you can hardly notice five or six olive trees on all the slope of a mountain (...), when only a thin layer of moss and occasional spots of grass appear in this bare and bumpy field of stones.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. On this subject see Guminskij's reflections, *Norov v Svjatoj Zemle*, ibid., 290-291

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>51</sup> Letter by Nikolaj V. Gogol' to Vasilij Žukovskij, 28 February 1850, *Sobranie sočinenij i pisem v*

Gogol' did not dedicate a specific work to his travel to the Holy Land, but his impressions and perceptions are traceable in many of his novels, in particular in *Mėrtnye duši* [Dead Souls], and above all in the letters addressed to his friend, the writer Vasilij Žukovskij. In this correspondence it clearly appears the great writer difficulty to juxtapose the representation of Palestine in the Gospel to the desolation of the places he has visited. For example, this is what he writes to Žukovskij who was asking for some descriptions of Palestine in order to include them in his work *Stranstvujuščij žid* [The Wandering Jew]:

What can those places, which the Savior step on during the 'Way of the Cross' and have now been collected under one Church roof, tell us today (...)? What can current Judaea, with its monotonous mountains, similar to endless grey sea tides, tell the poet and the painter? (...) Imagine Jerusalem in the middle of such a desolation; Jerusalem, Bethlehem and all the eastern towns [are] similar to loads of stones and bricks put together in confusion; imagine the Jordan, dry in the middle of bare mountainous, covered here and there with little bushes of willows.<sup>52</sup>

As Guminskij noted, Palestine appeared to Gogol' differently from the way he had imagined it while reading the Gospel, just as Jordan was different from the river surrounded by a luxuriant vegetation represented by painter Aleksandr Andreevič Ivanov in *Javlenie Christa narodu* [The Apparition of the Messiah to the People]. Gogol' had that image in mind, since his friend Ivanov had included him among the characters who were close to Christ in the painting. Moreover the landscape reproduced Rome surroundings, where Ivanov had conceived his work.<sup>53</sup>

Due to the "desolation" of Palestine, only the faith eyes could see what the Gospel pages described: "What can I tell you about these places, if you do not see with your mind's eyes the stars over Bethlehem; the dove that descends from the skies wide over the trickles of Jordan; the awful day of the death on the cross over Jerusalem walls when all around it became dark and [there was] an earthquake; or the bright day of the Resurrection, whose brightness would cover all surroundings, the present and the past?"<sup>54</sup>

Some decades later, also Ivan Bunin would point out the contrast between the glorious Biblical past of this region and the present situation, marked by poverty and decline. Jerusalem, "sung by David and Solomon, once shining with gold and marble, surrounded by the gardens of the Song of Songs," now lies in a state of "Arabic indigence."<sup>55</sup> "The place of Jesus' grave is overcome

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<sup>17</sup> *tomach* (Moskva – Kiev: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskoj Patriarchii, 2009), XV, 303-304.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Viktor M. Guminskij, *Putešestvie Gogolja po Svjatoj Zemle v kontekste razvitiija palomničeskoj literatury*, <http://www.voskres.ru/literature/critics/guminskiy1.html> (accessed 3 December 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Letter of Nikolaj V. Gogol' to Vasilij Žukovskij, 28 February 1850.

<sup>55</sup> Ivan A. Bunin, "Iudeja," *Ot Solovkov do Svjatoj Zemli. Palomničeskie očerki russkich pisatelej*,

by temples with black domes,”<sup>56</sup> while Judaea recalls images of death: “In Zion, behind David’s sepulcher, I saw a grave that had disappeared, thickly covered by poppies. All of Judaea is like this grave.”<sup>57</sup> What remains of the Promised Land is only a memory: “Besides Bethlehem there is the desert (...). Yet this is really the Promised Land, a land that today merely produces wild poppy.”<sup>58</sup>

The Biblical Holy Land, the “promised land” and the “birthplace of Christianity,” on one side, and contemporary Palestine, a desolated land in the hands of the Ottoman sultan, on the other, are therefore the poles between which, despite different tones and nuances, it is possible to include Russian authors representations and narrations of the Holy Land across the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### ‘Russian Palestine’

Pilgrimages constituted only one aspect of Russian presence in the Holy Land in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A network of ecclesiastical, political and diplomatic relationships connected Russia and the Holy Land starting from the 1840s giving birth to the idea, developed by literature and press, of a ‘Russian Palestine.’

In those years, all the great and most powerful European countries turned their attention towards Jerusalem and the Near East, often hiding their political aims under a religious cover. The reflection on the need of a Russian orthodox presence in Jerusalem had been stimulated by other Christian Churches’ activities: an Anglican bishop in charge of the Jerusalem diocese was appointed in 1841, and the Latin patriarchate was re-established in 1847.<sup>59</sup>

‘Russian Palestine’ was of course a literary concept, but also a concrete reality made up of a series of places – churches, monasteries, representative buildings – planned and carried out by personalities of the ecclesiastical, cultural and governmental world, with the intention of strengthening the Russian and Orthodox presence in the Holy Land.<sup>60</sup> Russians’ participation in the life of the

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edited by the Publishing Council of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moskva: Artos Media, 2012), 596.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 598.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 600.

<sup>59</sup> On this topic see Paolo Pieraccini, *Gerusalemme, luoghi santi e comunità religiose nella politica internazionale* (EDB: Bologna, 1997) and Giorgio Del Zanna, *I cristiani in Medio Oriente (1798-1924)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> On the formation of ‘Russian Palestine’, see among others: *Russkie učreždenija v Svjatoj Zemle i počivšie dejateli Imperatorskogo Pravoslavnogo Palestinskogo Obsčestva. 1882–1907 gg. (Iljustrirannyj podaročnyj al’bom)* (reprint Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 2003); Ritta B. Butova, Nikolaj N. Lisovoj, “Formirovanie sakral’nogo prostranstva Russkoj Palestiny (po materialam dnevnika archimandrita Antonina Kapustina),” *Religii mira. Istorija i sovremennost’*, 2008; Aleksej A.



Holy Land contributed to the creation of an ‘Orthodox image’ of Palestine in the Czarist empire through a network of state and ecclesiastical structures. Institutions, journals, newspapers inspired by political personalities and members of the Church acted as amplifier of the ‘Russian Palestine’ fame in Saint Petersburg. The first institution was the *Russkaja Duchovnaja Missija v Ierusalime* [Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem], established by Nicolas I in 1847 as a permanent delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Eastern Patriarchies. Its first members reached the Holy Land in February 1848.<sup>61</sup> In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century other institutions followed: the Committee for Palestine (1859-1864), the Committee for Palestine by the Department for Asia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1864-1889); the Orthodox Palestine Society (1882-1917, which replaced the Committee in 1889, adding title of ‘Imperial’.

The Society driving force was its secretary, the already mentioned Vasilij Nikolaevič Chitrovo. He was one of the main inspirers of the Czarist policy in the Near East and in 1881 he opened the journal that would later become the Society official publication, *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij sbornik* [Orthodox Palestine Digest]. Issued in Saint Petersburg once or twice a year, it collected accounts of pilgrimages, but also historical essays on the Holy Land. Chitrovo was an ardent expert of the Holy Land, particularly of Jerusalem, which he describes as the “City of Judah,” and “the ring of conjunction between earth and heaven, between God and the human beings.”<sup>62</sup> However, this did not prevent him from feeling “a sort of disappointment” when he entered the Holy Sepulcher: “I expected to see a piece of heaven; on the contrary, in front of us there was nothing more than a work made by human hands.”<sup>63</sup>

‘Russian Palestine’ was strictly connected to the activity of the Romanov House, both from an ideal point of view and in terms of concrete actions, i.e. the creation of a Russian space within the Holy Land. In fact, since its first contacts, the Orthodox presence in the Holy Land – as in general in the whole Near East – was conceived first of all as an engagement of the ruling dynasty (and consequently of the state) even before it became a project of the Church. The link between Russia and the Holy Land was considered “a matter of heart” for the Romanov family, as the emperor Alexander II explained to Prince Dmitrij Aleksandrovič Obolenskij, president of the Committee for Palestine. This behavior was an element that would characterize Russia’s action

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Dmitrievskij, *Dejatel' Russkoj Palestiny* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd. Olega Abyško, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> On the history of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission since its foundation, see Nikodim (Rotov), *Istorija Russkoj Duchovnoj Missii v Ierusalime* (Moskva: Serpuchovskij Vysockij mužskoj monastyr', 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Vasilij N. Chitrovo, *Russkie palomniki Svjatoj Zemle. 39-oe čtenie. Ierusalim i ego bližajšie okrestnosti (I)*, Sankt-Peterburg 1900, now in Chitrovo, *Sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, vol. 2, *Stat'i o Svjatoj Zemle. Iz istorii Russkoj duchovnoj missii v Ierusalime. Iz istorii Russkogo polomničestva v Svjatuju Zemlju*, 331.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 340.

in the Holy Land in the long term.

The Romanov travels to the Holy Land contributed to strengthen and promote the image of 'Russian Palestine' thanks to the attention that these pilgrimages received in the press and literature. In 1859 the first members of the imperial family visited the holy sites: the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevič Romanov, czar Alexander II's brother, together with his wife Aleksandra Iosifovna and his son Nikolaj. They could see the Russia-owned properties that formed the first core of 'Russian Palestine'. In particular, they visited the site in Jerusalem, not far from the Holy Sepulcher, where the Church of Saint Aleksandr Nevskij would later be built, and the area in the north-west of the Old City where the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission had been set up. Around this place, in is still called *Moskobija*, some guest houses for pilgrims would also be built.

Other Romanovs followed, among whom Grand Duke Nikolaj Nikolaevič Romanov, in 1872.<sup>64</sup> His travel details are known thanks to several memoirs: those written by his aide-de-camp Dmitrij Antonovič Skalon, who escorted him along the tour in the Near East;<sup>65</sup> the writings of Grand Dukes Sergej Aleksandrovič and Pavel Aleksandrovič, emperor Alexander III's brothers, published in May 1881; and those of Grand Duke Aleksandr Michajlovič issued in January 1889.

Sojourns of imperial family's members in the Holy Land, above all in Jerusalem, were characterized by inauguration ceremonies of new churches and buildings, which reinforced the Russian presence. As Skalon wrote in his memoirs, in October 1872, during Grand Duke Nikolaj Nikolaevič Romanov's visit, the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity was solemnly consecrated by the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem, Cyril II. It was the main place of worship inside the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission and the most important church of the entire 'Russian Palestine'.<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that, both in its structure and in its internal decoration, it was meant to become the symbol of the Russian imperial presence in the Holy Land, in order to corroborate the idea of a universal mission, by stressing the continuity between the Christian history of the Holy Land and that of the Holy Russia. On the Cathedral columns both Fathers of Eastern monasticism (Anthony the Great, Theodosius the Cenobiarch, Sabbas the Sanctified, Gerasimos of Jordan) and saints of the Russian Orthodox tradition (ranging from the founders of the Caves Monastery in Kiev, Antonij and Feodosij, to Saint Serge of Radonež, Dimitrij of Rostov, Tichon of Zadonsk) were represented, one next to the other, thus

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<sup>64</sup> Nikolaj Nikolaevič Romanov is called 'the Elder' [*Staršij*] not to be confused with his son, Nikolaj Nikolaevič himself, referred to as 'the Younger' [*Mladšij*].

<sup>65</sup> Dmitrij A. Skalon, *Putešestvie po Vostoku i Svjatoj Zemle v svite Velikogo knjazja Nikolaja Nikolaeviča v 1872 godu* (Moskva: Indrik, 2007).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

creating an ideal and spiritual bridge between the two realities, the Holy Land and the Holy Russia. As Nikolaj N. Lisovoj noted, “this close-knit platoon of ‘personalities’ from the universal and Russian Orthodoxy on the columns of the main Ecclesiastical Mission temple was the best way to mirror the idea of the indivisible unity between the Holy Russia and the Holy Land.”<sup>67</sup>

Under the archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin), head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission for about thirty years (1865-1894), other important estates were bought in different corners of the Holy Land.<sup>68</sup> Among them, the site on the Mount of Olives where the Russian female monastery of the Ascension would later be built; a spot in the ancient village of Ein Kerem, where the Gorny Monastery, tied to the memory of Mary’s meeting with Elizabeth, would later arise; some land in Hebron, that according to the tradition hosted the biblical Oaks of Mamre, where the Monastery of the Holy Trinity would be established; and finally sites in Jaffa, Jericho and other places of religious interest.

‘Russian Palestine’ was visited every year by thousands of pilgrims coming from all over the Czar’s Empire. In 1857, just after the Crimean war, over 500 people came to the Holy Land, going up to nearly 800 the following year. The number of Russian travelers would increase year by year, amounting to a total of over 75.000 in the period between 1865 and 1899.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusions

The period between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be considered as a sort of ‘Golden Age’ in the history of the Russian Orthodox presence in Jerusalem in the pre-revolutionary period. The great flow of pilgrims coming from different corners of the Russian Empire; the ownership of sites of great biblical and spiritual value; the long presence of the Mission in the center of Jerusalem; the building of churches and monasteries; all of that allowed Russian Orthodoxy to play a relevant role in the Holy Land compared to the other Christian communities, including the Greek Orthodox one. At the same time, there was the deep attraction that the Holy Land exerted upon Russian Orthodox Christianity, an interest that strictly depended on images and representations conveyed by writers and travelers.

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<sup>67</sup> Nikolaj N. Lisovoj, “Chramy Russkoj Palestiny,” *Rossija v Svjatoj Zemle. Dokumenty i materialy*, (Moskva: Mežnunarodnye otnošenija, 2001), II, 593-594.

<sup>68</sup> In the first four years Antonin directed the Mission as a temporary administrator [*upravljajuščij delami*]; only in 1869, on Filaret’s death (the metropolitan of Moscow who was defensor of Leonid’s prerogatives), he was officially called chief of this organism. On him, see the biography of the archimandrite Kiprian (Kern), *Otec Antonin Kapustin, archimandrit i načal’nik Russkoj Duchovnoj missii v Ierusalime (1817-1894)* (Moskva: Krutickoe podvor’e, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> Petr V. Stegnij, “O rossijskom konsul’skom predstavitel’stve v Svjatoj Zemle,” *Rossija v Svjatoj Zemle*, I, 7-8.

All this would face a deep crisis soon after the dissolution of the Russian Empire. The 1917 overthrow of the Czarist power and the consequent collapse of the imperial system would have a direct effect also on the survival of these structures that had worked as a spiritual, religious, cultural, political and diplomatic bridge between Russia and the Holy Land. The Holy Land disappeared from the Russian (now Soviet) cultural and literary horizon. While Russia entered a new painful and tormented page of its history, the experience of 'Russian Palestine' was closing down, at least temporarily.

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