

Abstract:

This work deals with a theme, which is increasingly becoming popular amongst scholars. It is a theme dealing with Russian pilgrims and travellers, who visited the areas of the Middle East, especially those places, such as Constantinople, the Holy Land, Mt. Athos and others. Under the designation *Russian pilgrims* we do not mean individuals belonging to a specific ethnic group, but individuals who were related to Russia understood as a political formation and state. The contacts between the south and Russia, have important consequences for the development of Russia itself, its culture, identity and history. This is also the case for the Middle East, where the contacts with Russia determined to a large extent the development and character of this area. The Russian contacts with the south should be primarily viewed in terms of the Byzantine-Russian context. These were based on cultural influences and on a shared faith and identity. The cultural and religious contacts were enabled by travelling individuals, who travelled without and with a specific goal. In the context of these journeys the prime motivation was a religious one, when a pilgrimage to such areas as Constantinople, Mt. Athos, the Holy Land, helped to build a religious identity in Russia, since before the fall of Constantinople, religion and culture were intimately linked in Russia. This work studies these contacts in the wider framework and studies them within a broader church history perspective. We look at the pilgrimage literature from its beginnings until the nineteenth century, when there is an explosion of mass pilgrimage to Palestine and surrounding areas, and numerous pilgrimage accounts emerge, offering a wealth of information in the multidisciplinary perspective, but also in the perspective of social history.

The work looks at the post Byzantine period and the development of the relationship between Russia and the Eastern Patriarchates through the perspective of pilgrimage contacts. In this regard the period after the fall of Constantinople is a radically different period than before, since whereas previously the contacts were as between partners, now we have a situation, when the Eastern Patriarchates are in a deteriorating situation, and the reliance on help from Russia is all the more important. Russia is helping these to survive and in terms of economy and other forms. The pilgrimage literature offers an important glimpse into the history of these areas and there is the phenomenon of reverse pilgrimage in that people from the south are now travelling to Russia, and are themselves involved in its development both ecclesially, socially and culturally. Regardless of the complicated period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Russian governments as well as Ecclesial authorities showed great respect to the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Members of these Patriarchates became

important players in the Russian affairs, in the Russian self-reflection which occurred especially in the period of the Patriarch Nikon. In the period after Peter the Great the pilgrimage literature is a valuable source of information, it demonstrates the cultural and political development of the Middle East, the relationship between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the inter-ethnic relations in the Middle East, and the new phenomenon of Western interest in the area. The Russian involvement among other things serves to protect the Greek element in the area. The nineteenth century is also a period of intensive interest on the part of Russia in this area of the Holy Land. We look at the Russian relation to the area of the Middle East in the nineteenth century, and we also deal with the often sporadic and unclear conceptual basis of the Russian relations with the East, when Russia was as if unsure how to deal with this area often not knowing what it could gain or lose. The Russian engagement in the area was also conditioned by the involvement of the Western powers themselves in this area. The Russian presence in the Holy Land coincided with Russia's involvement in other areas belonging to the Ottoman context. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russian interest in the area coincided with land acquisition, development of educational and cultural activities and other institutional frameworks, one of the most important of which was the Imperial Palestinian Orthodox Society. The Russian presence in Palestine also demonstrates that the relationship between the state and the Orthodox Church in Russia was not based on symbiosis or mutual dependence. The Russian presence in Palestine is not characterised by an attitude of aggressiveness and cultural superiority which characterised many of the Western missions in the area. Mass pilgrimage into Palestine opens an entire new area of research. There is a phenomenon of travelling women from Russia, and women dominate in Russian pilgrimages which is in contrast to pilgrimages from the West. Pilgrimage for the Russian women becomes a form of emancipation, when travel enables them to seek freedom from their confined situation. Pilgrimage opens up important glimpses into the Russian perceptions of the Ottomans, and analyses the complex tapestry of Palestine. The study also offers a typological approach, analysis the methodological issues related to this field of research and offers new avenues of research into this topic.

Key Words: Russian pilgrims, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Patriarchate of Antioch, Russian Middle Eastern Relationships, Byzantium, Orthodox Church, Constantinople, Mt. Athos.