

*Andrey Andreev,
Assoc. Prof. Dr. of Russian History
at “St Ciryl and St Methodius” University of Veliko Tarnovo
Eurasia center VIA EVRASIA*

**RUSSIA’S POLICY TOWARDS THE BALKAN ORTHODOX
CHRISTIANS IN THE 17TH CENTURY**

After the restoration of the Russian state in 1613, and the enthronement of the Romanov Dynasty the ruling circles in Moscow had urgent problems to solve. It was necessary to secure the election of Mikhail Romanov for a tsar, to settle the relations with the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and Sweden, to rebuild the state apparatus destroyed during the “troubled times”, to restore the country’s economy. In the sphere of the foreign policy the most important tasks were the making of peace treaties with the least possible territorial losses and also the counteraction to the claims of the Polish Crown Prince Vladislav on the Russian throne. He had his reasons for the latter – in 1610, the seven boyars that ruled the country handed in to Poland official charters in which they recognized Vladislav’s rights over the Russian throne. On their withdrawal from Moscow the Polish troops took the insignias of power of the Moscow rulers with them. The problems were solved, though with difficulty, and during the 30s of the 17th century the Russian state was stabilized both politically and economically. In the new situation new foreign-political tasks stood before the first Romanovs. In the middle of the century, the situation was opportune for the annexation of Ukraine lands at the expense of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. This happened after the uprising of the Ukrainian hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky which broke out in 1648. After a prolonged war with Poland, a peace treaty was signed on 20th of January 1667. The annexation of Eastern Ukraine was an important success of the foreign policy for Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich Romanov. Achieving it was not easy. Here we allude not only to the military but to the economic efforts as well. In entirely political aspect Russia still defined its priorities with difficulty. This fault could be noted down even in the 16th century during the long military conflict of Ivan IV with Sweden, Lithuania and Poland. The Russian politicians hesitated between lasting establishment at the Baltic Sea and the launching of energetic activities against the Crimean Khanate, a vassal to the Ottoman Empire. A defeat of the Crimean Tatars would have created a convenient stepping-stone for an active penetration in the Balkan Peninsula.

This was justified ideologically on the basis of the Russian aspirations for the heritage of the Byzantine Empire and enjoyed popularity among the Russian aristocracy and the clerical circles. In the middle of the 17th century the experienced diplomat Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich succeeded to reconcile the two tendencies formed among the Russian diplomats and to force the solving of the problem with the Ukrainian lands¹.

After a prolonged Russian-Polish war, the two countries concluded a truce in 1667. The concessions that Russia gained drew it nearer the Balkan region.

In 1677, a war with the Ottoman Empire began. The conflict was for exerting influence in Ukraine. The Turks were already seriously troubled by the territorial expansion of the Moscow state. In spite of the capture of the town of Chigirin by Turkish and Tatar units they failed to continue their offensive towards Kiev. Their advance was blocked by numerous Russian and Cossack armies under the command of voivode Romodanovsky and hetman I. Samoylovich. After negotiations, in 1681, the Bakhchisaray peace treaty was concluded. The Ottoman Empire recognized the Russian possessions to the east of Dnieper River and Kiev's belonging to Russia. An uninhabited zone between the rivers Dnieper and Bug was established. It was clear after the treaty that Russia's getting a firm and permanent foothold on the Black Sea coast had to be achieved through a war with Turkey and the crushing of the Crimean Khanate – a problem solved a century later.

In 1686 Russia and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth concluded a “perpetual peace”. The failures of the Polish in the war with the Ottoman Empire made them compliant. All the conditions of the Truce of Andrusovo of 1667 were recognized. Thus Russia joined in the Holy League (Poland, the Habsburg Empire and Venice). The Russians promised to wage war against the Crimean Khanate. Two unsuccessful campaigns under the command of Prince V. V. Golitsin were launched in 1687 and 1689. At the end of the century, two campaigns were led by Peter I – in 1695 and 1696. During the second one the Russian army took the fortified town of Azov².

In the 17th century Russia settled important issues of foreign policy concerning the country's interests orientated westwards. There were no treaties referring to the Balkan region, and no military campaigns too. This is understandable. Russia had first to recover from the crisis of the beginning of the century, to establish itself firmly in Eastern Ukraine and to exert pressure on the Crimean Tatars. A determined intervention in the Ottoman Empire was

¹ Андреев, Й., Андреев, А. Великите князе, царете и императорите на Русия. В. Търново, 2001, pp. 236–241, 255–258.

² Моряков, В. История на Русия IX–XVIII век, т. I. С., 2007, pp. 209–213.

possible only during the second half of the 18th century. At the same time Russia followed particular policy towards the Christian population in Turkey. The Orthodox idea was leading, deeply rooted yet in the previous centuries. With the propaganda of Orthodoxy and the charity towards the East Moscow aimed at popularizing Russia among the Christians in the Balkan Peninsula. The idea “Moscow – the Third Rome” was the ideological basis of this propaganda.

The idea “Moscow – the Third Rome” was formulated in the 15th century on the basis of important events from the Russian and the world history that were situated within a short historical period. The beginning could be related to the Florentine Union of 1439 which was not recognized in Moscow. The metropolitan bishop Isidor who signed the union and who probably was of Bulgarian origin, was punished and had to leave Moscow. The Russians replaced him with Jonah who held episcopacy without the blessing of the patriarch of Constantinople. That rupture of the relations between Moscow and Constantinople was quickly overcome all the more that there was not time for sanctions on the side of the patriarch – in 1453, Sultan Mehmed II captured the Byzantine capital. In 1480 the great Moscow Prince Ivan III entirely threw off the dependence of his country on the Tatars and Russia became the only independent Orthodox country. Those events had a decisive significance for the state. The successes of the Moscow rulers and the subjugation of other Orthodox peoples raised the self-confidence of the ruling circles. The circumstances thus created could be explained with the fact that the Russians thought of themselves as chosen of God as well as with the sins of the “Greeks”. Thus in Russia it was formed the view that Moscow was the legitimate spiritual successor of Byzantium and also the protector of the true Christian faith. This concept put its mark on the relations with the subjugated population in the Balkan Peninsula.

The term “Third Rome” was used for the first time in Russia by the monk Philotheus in a message to the Great Moscow Prince Vasily III (1505–1533). Such messages were standard model of the Russian medieval publicism. This was not a personal letter to the monarch but a work intended to be read in public. Usually the ruler was advised how to protect the purity of faith. But at the end of his message Philotheus has written that two Romes had fallen because of their sins and the third one was Moscow because it was the protector of Christianity. Moscow’s retreat from the latter would bring the world to an end. The idea that Moscow was the successor of Byzantium was grounded on a series of legends as for example the legend about Monomakh’s hat, “The Saga about the Princes of Vladimir”, in which it was asserted that Rurik (the first Russian ruler) descended from Emperor Augustus, and the legend about the white mitre from Novgorod, etc.

For the adoption of the idea “Moscow – the Third Rome” political grounding was also necessary and it was connected with Bulgaria to a great extent. In 1547, Ivan IV (1547–1584) was crowned king. “Tsar of the Bulgarians” was part of his title. One could only conjecture on who those Bulgarians were that Ivan IV wanted to rule as their tsar. Some authors assert that in this way the Russian claims on the Kazan and the Astrakhan khanates were marked. In the first khanate the territory of Volga Bulgaria was included. But another version is also possible – that Ivan IV had in mind Bulgaria on the Danube. If so, it was a question of strive not for political domination but for a real medieval authority. Since Ivan IV the Terrible was the first recognized (by the eastern patriarchs) Russian ruler with the title of a tsar, it was possible that he wanted to increase his authority as an Orthodox ruler. The name of Bulgaria was still popular among the intellectuals of the Grand Principality of Moscow (Muscovy).

The next important moment in the development of the idea “Moscow – the Third Rome” was the recognition of the patriarchal dignity of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. As a Prime Minister Boris Godunov made every endeavour in this direction. In 1588, the patriarch of Constantinople Jeremiah paid a visit to Russia. After long negotiations on 26th of January 1589, at an especially convened church council, Jeremiah raised into the dignity of the Patriarch of Moscow and the Whole of Russia the then Moscow metropolitan bishop Job. Specially invited ecclesiastics from the Orthodox East were also present at the council. The council’s statement was signed also by Yonisiy, the Tarnovo metropolitan bishop, and by “the Grevena metropolitan bishop and the archbishop of the Bulgarian lands Kalistrat”³. The latter most likely was the archbishop of Ohrid. Of course, both of them were Greeks but they acted as Bulgarian metropolitan bishops and were representatives of Bulgarian eparchies from the Orthodox East. In the 16th century the policy of the Greek clergy, the one that we know from the epoch of the Bulgarian National Revival still did not exist. The title “archbishop of the Bulgarian lands” does occur neither for the first nor for the last time in Russian archival records. As a rule it was given to the archbishop of Ohrid or the Tarnovo metropolitan bishop, i.e. they were senior among their colleagues in the Bulgarian eparchies, a kind of an intermediate section between Bulgaria and the Oecumenical Patriarchate. This title was preserved until the 60s of the 17th century. It could be maintained that for a long period of time an archbishop subordinated to the Patriarch of Tsargrad stood at the head of the Bulgarian eparchies.

The forming of this concept presupposed an active policy towards the Orthodox East. The first activities became a fact already in the second half of

³ *Муравьев, А. Сношения России с Востоком по делам церковным. СПб, 1858, pp. 232–239.*

the 15th century. The impossibility for exerting political and military pressure brought to the fore the contacts with the Eastern patriarchs, with Mount Athos and other renowned monasteries within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. The common religion and the Russian charitable activities created conditions for propagandizing the role of Moscow as the centre of the Orthodox world and a spiritual successor of Byzantium. Thus for example the relations of Bulgarian monasteries with Russia after the coming of the Ottoman Turks dated already to the middle of the 15th century. In 1466, the Russian Monastery of St Pantaleon on Mount Athos made a contract with the Rila Monastery including financial help too. Through the mediation of the same Russian monastery the Zograf Monastery received 160 gold rubles from the Great Prince Vasiliy III (1505–1533). Ecclesiastics from the Orthodox world, including the Bulgarian lands, were frequent guests to the Russian capital. As it was mentioned above, for the constitution of the Moscow Patriarchate in 1589, a delegation arrived in Moscow consisting of the following members: Dionysius, Tarnovo metropolitan bishop, Kalistrat, the archbishop of Grevena and the whole of the Bulgarian lands, and Methodius, the archimandrite of the Transfiguration Monastery⁴. The good relations of the Transfiguration Monastery with Russia are impressive. The records register regular visitations and the receiving of donations for the monastery for a long period of time. In 1645, archimandrite Jonah received a generous donation and in 1712, archimandrite Leontiy visited Moscow and collected donations for the rebuilding of the monastery burned down by the Turks. This was an ordinary practice in the early 17th century. A great number of Bulgarian monasteries received resources. In 1718, Peter I personally welcomed the abbot of “St Peter and St Paul” Monastery and except for the generous funding presented the monastery with a Gospel with a silver facing⁵.

The beginning of the 17th century was extremely hard for Muscovy. Actually from 1610 till 1612 it ceased to exist as a state after the Polish took Moscow. The favourable outcome of the crisis confirmed the conviction that the Russians were chosen of God people. The coming to the throne of the Romanov Dynasty gave political stability to the state. The first half of the 17th century was a time of economic prosperity. The foreign-political successes were quick to come: Russia concluded favourable peace treaties with Poland and Sweden and in the middle of the century showed aspirations towards the Ukrainian lands as well.

The idea “Moscow – the Third Rome” developed and Russia already laid claim not only to the spiritual but to the political heritage of Byzantium as well.

⁴ РГАДА (*Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts*), ф. 153 (Духовные российские дела), д.1, л. 1.

⁵ Христов, Х. Културни и политически връзки между манастирите от Великотърновския край и Русия през XVI–XIX в. Сб. Руско-български връзки през вековете. С., 1986.

The economic and cultural prosperity of the state in the 17th century contributed to this as well as the political stabilization after the enthronement of the Romanovs. This was signified by the title of the monarch which became more and more magnificent. In the reign of Mikhail I Fyodorovich its shortened variant was the following: “Tsar of the Whole of Great, Little and White Russia, and Autocrat, Great Prince of Lithuania, Volhynia and Podolsk”⁶.

The second tsar of the Romanov Dynasty, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645–1676) thought of himself as of a direct successor of the Byzantine emperors, protector and liberator of the Christians subjugated by the Turks. As such he was mentioned by the Eastern patriarchs in solemn church services. In fact this was a continuation of a tradition that was established already in the middle of the 16th century. It was exactly at that time that Patriarch Ioasaph ordered that the name of Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible should be mentioned during solemn church services. It was officially approved that Moscow was the Third Rome, that the tsar of Moscow was the support, the protector of the whole Oecumenical Orthodoxy and a legitimate ruler of all the Orthodox Christians, and that the Russian piety was the highest and the most perfect in the whole world. The state propaganda emphasized on the legitimacy of the title of the Moscow ruler, the independency of the Patriarchate since 1589, and the bringing to Moscow of great number of Christian relics from the Orthodox East⁷.

Those contacts brought political prestige and financial support for the Eastern bishops but they were dangerous too. In 1658, the Oecumenical Patriarch Parteniy was hanged by the Turks exactly because of his relations with Moscow. Later, in 1726, Patriarch Jeremiah in a letter to Saint Petersburg declared that he had been threatened with death again for maintaining similar contacts⁸.

The charitable activities of the Moscow rulers were the main means for the formulation and the propaganda of those ideas. The giving of “alms” to bishops from the East, to monasteries, and also to ordinary clerics was widely practiced during the entire 16th century but during the 17th century it became an official state policy. In 1633, Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov issued a decree determining the way of receiving alms collectors from the Orthodox East and the giving of alms to them. This act could be defined as a state regulation of the Russian propaganda as far as the Christian population in the Balkan Peninsula was concerned. Cares were taken in order no one, even the low-standing

⁶ *Зеньковский, С.* Русское старообрядчество. Духовное движение семнадцатого века. Мюнхен, 1970, p. 247.

⁷ *Каптерев, Н. Ф.* Характер отношений России к Православному Востоку в XVI–XVII вв. Сергиев посад, 1914, pp. 24–25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

applicants to leave without receiving alms. When the applicants became quitenumerous a special order was introduced. The voivode of the frontier town of Putival, a main point for entering Russia, received a charter from Tsar Michail which authorized him to give alms to ordinary monks on behalf of the ruler without it being necessary for them to travel to Moscow. The way for visiting the Russian capital was also specified. The voivode of Putival had to send by a messenger a list of the applicants who were waiting at the border. In the Ambassadorial Department it was decided who ought to receive alms from the voivode and who ought to be admitted to Moscow. After their arrival in the capital the applicants were obliged to present themselves at the Department and to tell about their journey – how they had travelled, what they had seen, what meetings they had realized, etc.⁹

The visitors to the Russian capital were left amazed by the solemn ritual of welcoming. Many of them expressed their surprise at the remarkable and ostentatious religiousness of the court. In their desire to persuade their guests that precisely they were the protectors of the true Christianity the Russians were extremely zealous when visiting religious services. The duration of the latter impressed even the ecclesiastics from the East. It was common practice to keep a close watch on the applicants in order to check their religiousness. Deacon Pavel Alepsky, who visited Moscow twice during the 50s and 60s of the 17th century, declared this as a member of the suite of the Patriarch of Antioch Macarius¹⁰.

The increased self-confidence of the Moscow rulers and their clearly formulated claims on the entire Byzantine heritage was evident in the 17th century at the ceremonial receptions in Kremlin. Patriarch Macarius of Antioch was received for the first time by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich on 12th of February 1655. The address of the patriarch was quite demonstrative: he wished and predicted that the throne of Constantine the Great would be succeeded by the Russian ruler, and not only by him but by his successors as well. The metropolitan bishop of Gaza Paisiy Ligaridis called Tsar Alexei “the genuine ruler of the enslaved Christians”, and also “protector and liberator..”¹¹ Obviously the two bishops understood well and supported the Russian policy towards the Christian subjects of the Sultan.

In the plans for a cultural and political expansion towards the Balkans the Russian Orthodox Church had to play a role of paramount significance. The

⁹ Ibid., pp. 104–105.

¹⁰ *Алепский, Павел* Путешествие Антиохийского патриарха Макария, т. IV. М., 1899, pp. 108–109.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 129; Дело о патриархе Никоне. СПб, 1897, pp. 74–79.

ambition of the Moscow rulers to establish themselves as protectors and rulers of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire “by God’s will” needed the active policy of the Church. The common religion, the fact that the only sovereign Orthodox monarch was the Russian ruler, the generous support for the Eastern bishops and monasteries gave the Russian Church great opportunities for propagandist activities. The state of the latter as well as a number of differences in the liturgical practice and the religious books did not allow the Church to play the role it was supposed to for a long time. This was the reason for the church reform undertaken by Patriarch Nikon in the 50s–60s of the 17th century. The aim was to make identical the holy books and the liturgical practices of the Russian Church and the Eastern patriarchates. The reform was conducted brutally, in a rush and led to the splitting up of the Russian Orthodox Church. The political motives of Tsar Alexei and Patriarch Nikon had their roots in the forthcoming annexation of Eastern Ukraine to Russia but also in the clearly expressed striving for the exertion of Russian influence over the Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire. The existing religious differences were impressive and the ruler was forced to hurry. The Tsargrad Patriarchate was chosen as an example for the church reform¹².

During the preparatory period and the first years of the changes a great number of books from the monasteries on Mount Athos and Bulgarian eparchies were acquired in different ways. They were brought by the monk Arseniy Suhanov who had been specially sent to the Orthodox East to secure samples for the forthcoming church reform. Suhanov travelled twice – in 1649–1653 and in 1653–1655. He prepared a detailed report including an index of the books and information about his debate on religious issues with monks from Mount Athos. Inventories of the books brought to Moscow were made twice – by A. Suhanov himself and by the clerks from the Secret Department in 1660 in connection with the preparation of the legal proceedings against Patriarch Nikon. The inventory was attached to the records of the proceedings of the church council of 1660¹³.

What draws the attention is the discrepancy between the two inventories. In the first, the one prepared by Suhanov, 498 titles are enumerated. In the second, the one compiled by the clerks, 55 titles are missing. It is also divided into two parts: in the first 395 titles are enumerated, and in the second – 48 titles. The manuscripts included in the first part are in Greek and those in the second part –

¹² Андреев, А. О реформах и расколе в русской православной церкви (середина XVII века). – *Bulgarian Historical Review*, No 3, 1995, pp. 14–32.

¹³ Сочинения Арсения Суханова с предисловием С. А. Белокурова. ЧОИДР (Чтения в Обществе истории и древностей российских), 1894, кн. 2, pp. 1–283.; Деяния собора 1660 г. (Московского). М., 1875–1890, т. II, pp. 126–141.

in Slavonic. According to the description of some of them it could be asserted that those were Bulgarian books and translations of Greek works.

It is difficult to locate exactly the monasteries that those books were received from because Suhanov has not given information about all the books that he had either bought or received as donation. Except to Mount Athos he travelled to the Bulgarian lands as well. He probably visited the Rila Monastery and certainly passed through Tarnovo and met the Tarnovo metropolitan bishop.

Part of the books could be defined according to the information in the two inventories. From the Holy Monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos Arseniy Suhanov received 156 books and they are enumerated in the inventory. Their great number and the attitude towards the monastery are not surprising. This was the favourite monastery of Tsar Alexei who paid it a generous yearly maintenance and also endowed it with lands with serfs near Moscow. There are some works of true merit among the books such as a collection of orations by Gregory of Nazianzus, works by Dionysius the Areopagite, instructions by Theodore the Studite, an oration by Saint Basil the Great on asceticism, and even the “Odyssey” by Homer. Obviously the Moscow monk took everything he was presented with. There is information about books received from the Hilandar Monastery and the Pavlovski Monastery. Thirteen Bulgarian and seven Greek manuscripts were received from the first monastery. One of the Bulgarian sources is a copy of 1263 of “Hexameron” by Joan Exarch. The Pavlovski Monastery also presented the monk with a copy of “Hexameron” dating to the 15th century¹⁴.

During his mission to Mount Athos Arseniy Suhanov debated on religious issues with Greek monks. The occasion for this was the burning of liturgical books, probably Russian, a property of hieromonk Damascene, a Serbian who lived on Mount Athos. This was done under the orders of the Patriarch of Constantinople Parteniy in 1649, and in the next 1650, besides Damascene his pupils Roman and the novice Zachary were arrested.

At the debate Arseniy Suhanov presented the finished version of the theory of the superiority of the Russians over all the rest as far as the issues of faith were concerned and the rights that the latter gave to Russia. The legend about the conversion of the Russians by Apostle Andrei, the first disciple of Jesus Christ was also presented. The Eastern patriarchates were accused of “Latin heresy”, etc.¹⁵

The propaganda among the Balkan peoples of the concept that Russia was the supporter of Orthodoxy and the legitimate successor of Byzantium gave

¹⁴ ВОИДР (Временник общества истории и древностей российских). 1852, кн. XV, pp. 96–118.

¹⁵ Кантепов, Н. Ф. *Op. cit.*, pp. 388–392.

results. The popularizing of this concept was addressed towards all the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire without dividing them into ethnoses. In the 17th century, people still identified themselves with their religion and not with their ethnic origin. In Moscow they did not make a clear difference between the peoples living in the Balkans except as far as their religion was concerned. In the Russian records of that period still all the Orthodox Christians were designated as “Greeks” with the only exception of the Little Russians. In this case not the ethnic but the religious affiliation was taken into consideration. The Orthodox Arabs were also entered as “Greeks” and this once again testifies to the religious meaning of the term¹⁶.

The propaganda of the Orthodox idea gave good results for Russia. The Moscow tsar was perceived as a protector of the Orthodox Christians by the common population and by the educated people too and by those of them that could lend their important support to the Russians. Such was the case with the Bulgarian Ivan Petrov Tafrali who descended from a well-known family from Arbanassi and served for a long time as dragoman at the Sublime Porte. He voluntarily offered his services to Russia proceeding from the view that there the centre of all the Orthodox Christians was.

In the 17th century, an especially important task for the Russian government was the collecting of information about the situation and the developments in the Ottoman Empire, in its capital as well as in the country. Except for the notes by travellers the Russian government was given information by Christians who held offices in the Turkish administration, persons in religious orders, merchants, etc. In the middle of the century, Ivan Tafrali played the part of a peculiar “resident” in the Turkish capital. Actually many bishops from the Orthodox East were Russian secret agents and even, though it sounds absurd, the Eastern patriarchs were such. They periodically sent detailed information to Moscow but Tafrali acted really professionally. The Ambassadorial Department annually paid him large sums of money in gold and furs to organize and keep a wide net of informers and couriers, and probably to bribe high dignitaries. Thanks to his post at the Supreme Port Ivan Petrov had an access to important information about the intentions of the Turkish government. The Bulgarian collected information for the large towns in the Ottoman Empire that was sent to him by Orthodox bishops who willingly helped the Russians. The courier net included monks, alms collectors and merchants.

The fact that Trafali was sent on a secret and important mission to the camp of hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky testifies to the confidence in him. At the camp he had to prepare the negotiations between the hetman and the Moscow

¹⁶ *Андреев, А.* Отношението на Руската православна църква към „гърците“ през първата половина на XVII век. Сб. Източното православие в европейската култура. С., 1999, pp. 171–175.

government aiming the annexation of Ukraine to Russia. Such a task could be assigned only to an experienced diplomat and a person loyal to the Russians¹⁷.

In the activities of Ivan Petrov Tafrali one could see the incarnation of the idea that the Russian tsar was the legitimate ruler of all the Orthodox Christians as well as one of the few possible ways for resistance against the Turks in the 17th century.

The charitable activities of the Russian rulers gave results. The Orthodox idea was warmly welcomed by the common population. Having in mind the important role of the Orthodox Church in propagandizing the Orthodox idea, it is not surprising that the first individuals who fell under Russian influence were people in the religious orders. Contacts were sought with the Eastern patriarchs, with quite many bishops and archimandrites of well-known monasteries, but common clerics and smaller monasteries were not ignored too¹⁸.

But the most ardent propagandists of the Russian idea became the ordinary monks who collected alms. Numerous, practically constantly travelling across the whole Balkan Peninsula, to and back from Russia, and in contact with the common people, those monks contributed most to the popularity of the Moscow tsars and their state. The mendicant monk who usually travelled on foot, spent the night in the village or town where darkness overtook him. He usually stayed as an honourable guest at the home of the local priest or, in case of lack of such – at the home of the village notable. After thanking for the dinner the guest usually told his hosts where he had been and what he had seen. Often he presented his host with some trifle (a small icon, a cross) – one of the many with which the Russian authorities generously supplied the alms collectors. Such a visit became an important event in the life of the host – either a priest or a layman. The stories of the monk were repeated time and again and thus the village notable enhanced his authority among his fellow-villagers and if he was a priest – among the other priests. The stories could be misunderstood, half-forgotten, framed up etc. But the most important moments of them were preserved: far away to the north there was a large Orthodox country with a patriarch, an Orthodox tsar and Christian army. That powerful tsar was an enemy to the Turks. There was only one step from this image to the idea that the enemy of my enslaver and oppressor is my natural friend and ally.

Thus gradually among the intelligentsia of the Christian population in the Ottoman Empire a stratum was formed that saw in Russia their natural ally and in its ruler – a legitimate Christian monarch. Usually those people had a

¹⁷ Кантерев, Н. Ф. *Op. cit.*, pp. 189–197.

¹⁸ Андреев, А. *Аспекти на идеята Москва – трети Рим. – Епохи, В. Търново, 1999, кн. 1–2, pp. 15–24.*

considerable authority among the local population. During sermons and in everyday conversations they could exert influence in the desired direction.

In the 17th century, the Russian state still could not carry out active political or military campaigns in the Balkans. Only at the end of the century it began to exert pressure on the Crimean Tatar Khanate but in the context of the struggle for influence in Ukraine. This does not mean that Moscow did not pursue its interests in the peninsula. Moscow relied on the Orthodox idea formed in the previous period whose propaganda aimed at popularizing Russia as a guardian of the Christian values and a natural political centre of all the Orthodox Christians.

The claims of the Moscow tsars to succeed Byzantium were laid already in the 15th century, but the ambitions for its political heritage were finally formed in the 20s of the 17th century. It was then that the first purposeful steps for exerting Russian influence in the Balkan Peninsula were taken. The decree of Tsar Mikhail Romanov of 1633 transformed the charitable activities in favour of the Orthodox East into an official state policy. Russia's position favoured such an undertaking. Because the ruler had the title "tsar" and the head of the Church had a patriarchal dignity, because of the independence of the state and the charitable activities, the Moscow rulers enjoyed high authority among the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire. The idea was established that the only Orthodox monarch was the Russian tsar and that he was the legitimate ruler of all the Orthodox Christians. The subjugated Balkan population gradually began to accept the Moscow ruler exactly as such and also as their protector and liberator.

Those ideas were spread in all the Balkan Christian lands of the Orthodox East but they were especially well received among the Bulgarian population. In the first place the closeness of the languages contributed for this. One should not ignore the fact that the books presented to Russia were available for the literate Bulgarians. The usage of the Old-Bulgarian in the liturgical books created the feeling of oneness with the greatest enemy of the Ottoman Empire.

The popularization of the Moscow state got an additional impetus in the following centuries. The successful wars of Russia with Turkey in the second half of the 18th century confirmed the hopes of the Christians that their liberation would come with Russian help. These processes were observed among all the Balkan peoples. Definite differences could be found only in the 19th century when the processes of formation of nations and national states in the Balkans were almost finished.

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RUSSIA BETWEEN THE SOVIET PAST AND THE EURASIAN FUTURE

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