

# IMPERIAL ORTHODOX PALESTINE SOCIETY



Past and Present  
1882-2017



## THE IMPERIAL ORTHODOX PALESTINE SOCIETY

is an international public organisation under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation.

IN 2005,

the IOPS was granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

## THE IOPS

has an extensive chapter network in Russia and abroad.

## THE MAIN AIMS OF THE IOPS CHAPTER IN THE HOLY LAND INCLUDE:

- Creating pilgrimage infrastructure, encouraging pilgrimage and educational tourism.
- Restoring pilgrim, cultural, scientific and informational sites and objects.
- Charity work.
- Studying and preserving historical and cultural heritage.
- Establishing and developing cultural, scientific, spiritual, social and other relations with the peoples of the Middle East.



*Russian Emperor Alexander III,* who approved the Charter of the IOPS on 3 June 1882



*Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich Romanov,* first Chairman of the IOPS 1889-1905



*Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna Romanova,* second Chairman of the IOPS 1905-1917

## PRESERVING TRADITION: ETYMOLOGY

Since ancient times, contact with the Holy Land has been an integral part of Russian spiritual life. A huge layer of the world's history and culture cannot be properly comprehended or interpreted without a cognisance of its cultural, biblical and Christian heritage.

The study, strengthening and building of this connection has been the main objective of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society since its creation.

The **IOPS** is the oldest humanitarian NGO in Russia, with a unique role in the history of Russian culture. The Society's name, which may today appear archaic to some, speaks to traditions passed down through generations from the days of their establishment more than 130 years ago by members of Russia's Imperial family.

**Why Imperial?** The Society was given this title by Alexander III of Russia in 1889, 7 years after being founded, in recognition of its achievements before the state and its people.

**Why Orthodox?** The IOPS has always been a secular organisation which works to spread and reinforce universal moral values. The foundation of the Society was laid by Orthodox Christians.

**Why Palestine?** In memory of the Palestine which no longer exists on the map but lives on through many historical sites and objects located in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem and other cities. In the Russian language and in the minds of the peoples of the Middle East, it lives on as "Russian Palestine". This term, created thanks to the work of IOPS supporters at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is today applicable primarily to the spiritual sphere, rather than geography.

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**Sergey Stepashin,**  
Current Chairman of the IOPS



**Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus',**  
Chairman of the Committee of Honourable  
Members of the IOPS



**Igor Ashurbeyli,**  
Director of the IOPS in Israel

**Why Society?** An international NGO brings together people around the world irrespective of their nationality or religious denomination. First and foremost, it is a union of like-minded people. As was true a century ago, IOPS members include diplomats, scientists, priests, entrepreneurs and important public figures.

Within the first year of being founded, the Society counted 13 members of the royal family among its members, including Alexander III and Empress Maria Feodorovna. All Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the Russian Empire, as well as Chief Procurators of the Holy Synod, were members of the Society at different points in time.

Today, Honourable Members of the IOPS include **Sergey Lavrov**, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. The Committee of Honourable Members is currently chaired by **Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus'**.

The Society's current chairman is **Sergey Stepashin**, former Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. The Society's Director in Israel is the well-known entrepreneur, public figure and philanthropist, **Igor Ashurbeyli**.



**Grand Dukes Sergei Alexandrovich, Pavel Alexandrovich and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna on pilgrimage in Jerusalem in 1888. Photo: Monk Tikhon**

## RUSSIAN HUMANITARIAN MISSION TO THE MIDDLE EAST AT THE END OF 19TH/EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

Throughout the centuries, Russia's political and spiritual presence in the Holy Land and the Middle East has been shaped through the hard work and dedication of various Russian institutions. But coordinating and unifying these efforts, helping pilgrims, supporting the Jerusalem Patriarchate and educational work with Orthodox Christians all at the same time, could only be done by a single organisation with clear financial mechanisms, influence with the ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Synod and other important Russian institutions.

The key aims of the Palestine Society are to assist pilgrimage to the Holy Land, study of the region and humanitarian cooperation with people living in biblical lands.

The Orthodox Palestine Society was founded by Emperor Alexander III who approved its Charter on 3 June 1882, the day of St Helena, a patroness of the IOPS, who worked hard to secure Christian holy sites in the East.

The Society's first Chairman was Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich who held this post for 23 years until his tragic death at the hands of a terrorist in 1905. The Grand Duke was one of the most prominent members of the Romanov Royal Family. He went on pilgrimages to the Holy Land on two occasions in 1881 and 1888, joined by his spouse, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, on the second trip, visiting Constantinople, Beirut, Damascus and Cairo.

As the Chairman of IOPS, Sergei Alexandrovich spared no expense to facilitate scientific research, the building of temples and compounds. He funded excavation of the Threshold of the Judgment Gate near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre through which the Saviour passed on his way to Golgotha.

His help was also instrumental in erecting the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene and the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky in Jerusalem, as well as the Sergievskoe and Nikolaevskoe compounds for pilgrims.



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و عبد الله ادراك او تصف بانه بعد كبره اجراء فرام صحت فرام مدركه  
 و عوحي اليه بيوك بايا سندق و فرستنه كندو بدرد  
 برانجه مدار معاشي اولد بغيره تكار انصار هان  
 دورك كتابي الساعده فرام مدركه كندو سدر السور  
 دوقله بيا و فرستنه فطيانا سزله مدار السور



*Easter breaking of the fast in the yard of the Sergievskoe compound of the IOPS in Jerusalem*  
 Photo: F. M. Timon. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century



*IOPS Flag and festive monogram to Emperor Nicholas II to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IOPS in Jerusalem in 1907.* Photo: F. M. Timon. 1907

Through its successful construction and archaeological projects, the Society rapidly gained public and state recognition. Supreme Decree of 24 March 1889, granted the Society full authority, assets and funds related to Russia's presence in the Holy Land and the honorary title of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society.

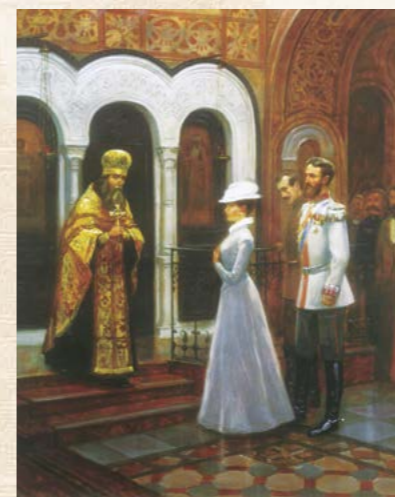
The Grand Duke was supported in his efforts by Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo, who initiated and organised the work of the IOPS and whose contribution to the Society is difficult to overestimate.

IOPS Jerusalem compounds housed up to 6,000 Russian pilgrims for the Easter festivities every year. The total portfolio of Russian property included more than 70 sites, including churches, compounds and land plots with a total value of more than 2 million gold roubles.

Following the death of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich in 1905, his spouse, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, took over chairmanship of the Society.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IOPS was marked with festivities in Petersburg and Jerusalem on 21 May 1907. Emperor Nicholas II honoured the Society's Chairman, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, with a rescript summarising the results of the Society's efforts over the quarter of a century since its foundation: "Today, with its Palestinian properties worth almost two million roubles, the IOPS has 8 buildings to provide shelter to 10,000 pilgrims, a hospital, six infirmaries for outpatients and 101 educational establishments with 10,400 students, having issued 347 publications on the study of Palestine over 25 years".

By that point, the Society had more than 3,000 members and 28 land plots (26 in Palestine and one each in Lebanon and Syria) with a total area of 23.5 hectares.



*Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich and Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna attending the consecration of the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Jerusalem in 1888.*



*Church of Saint Mary Magdalene built in Jerusalem using funds provided by the Romanov Imperial Family*

Because under Turkish law, the Palestine Society was not allowed to own property in the East (legal entities such as societies and institutions could not own land), a third of the land plots were held by the Russian Government, with the remainder held as private property. Long term plans included securing the correct recording of ownership of the Society's properties from the Ottoman Government but these ambitions were thwarted by World War 1 and the revolution, which struck a blow to the expanding Russian humanitarian efforts in the Middle East.

## IOPS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Following the February Revolution of 1917, the IOPS ceased to have the word "Imperial" in its name and Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna stepped down from her role as Chairman.

On 9 April 1917, the Society's former Vice Chairman, Count A. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, was elected Chairman. In the autumn of 1918, the count emigrated to Germany. There, he headed a parallel "Council of the Orthodox Palestine Society", a sort of "Council in Exile" without any authorisation from Russia, by bringing together some former IOPS members who had also emigrated.

The actual Council, which remained in Russia, elected one of its oldest members, Academician V. V. Latyshev as its chairman on 18 October 1918 and V. V. Latyshev held this post until his death on 2 May 1921. On 22 May 1921, the famous Russian Byzantium historian, Academician F. I. Uspensky was elected as the Society's Chairman.

In 1918, the Society dropped the "Orthodox" element of its name and became known as the Russian Palestine Society under the Academy of Sciences and, given that links with Palestine were broken for a long time, dedicated itself to scientific and scholarly activities.

On 25 September 1918, a new edition of the Society's charter was prepared, alongside documents necessary to register it. On 2 October 1918, the People's Commissar for Education, A. V. Lunacharsky, issued the instruction to "Immediately take measures to protect the scientific assets of the Palestine Society".

As soon as European countries recognised the Soviet state, on 18 May 1923, the representative of the RSFSR to Britain, L. B. Krasin, sent the British Foreign Minister, Marquess Curzon, the following note: "The Russian Government declares that all land, hotels, hospitals, schools and other buildings, as well as all other movable and immovable property of the Palestine Society in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Haifa, Beirut and other locations in Palestine and Syria, and elsewhere (*this reference was to the IOPS Saint Nikolaevskoe compound in Bari, Italy*) is property of the Russian state".



*Count Aleksei Shirinsky-Shikhmatov, Chairman of the "Council of the Orthodox Palestine Society in Exile" (abroad)*



*Vasily Latyshev, Chairman of the Russian Palestine Society under the Academy of Sciences, 1918-1921*



*Oleg Peresyphkin, Chairman of the IOPS from 1989 until 2001*

The creation of Israel in 1948 made the return of Russian property a relevant and convenient point for a Soviet-Israeli understanding. On 25 September 1950, the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued instructions to recommence operation of the Palestine Society and approve the staff of its Israel chapter.

The official representative of the RPS, M. P. Kalugin, arrived in Jerusalem in March 1951 and took up residence in the Society's Jerusalem headquarters, the Sergievskoe compound.

In 1964, the bulk of IOPS property in Palestine was sold by the Khrushchev government to Israel.

Following the Six-Day War in June 1967 and the breaking of relations with Israel, Soviet representatives, including the RPS representative, left the country.

A new turn took place in the 1980-1990s with the rebuilding of relations between the USSR and Israel and a shift away from the conventional foreign policy position which was the standard of the Soviet period.

In 1989, the Society obtained a new chairman, Rector of the Diplomatic Academy and the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the RF, O. G. Peresyphkin and academic secretary V. A. Savushkin. It was during this period that events of key significance to the IOPS occurred: the Society became independent, regained its previous name, introduced a new Charter which was as close to the original Charter as possible, and reinstated its key aims, including facilitating pilgrimages. IOPS members played an active role in scientific conferences in Russia and abroad. In the autumn of 1990, Society members were able to go on a pilgrim voyage for the first time since the revolution to participate in the "Jerusalem Forum for Three Religions for Peace in the Middle East". In subsequent years, more than 40 pilgrimage groups visited the Holy Land with the assistance of the IOPS.



*Russian hospital in the centre of western Jerusalem built during the construction of Russian buildings at the Meidan Square by the Palestine Committee between 1859 and 1864*

On 25 May 1992, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation adopted a resolution to reinstate the historical name of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and recommended that the Government take measures to ensure the recovery and reinstatement of IOPS rights and assets.

## RUSSIAN HERITAGE IN THE HOLY LAND

The Society's work in the Holy Land has resulted in the creation of a unique cultural and historical phenomenon known as Russian Palestine. Architectural monuments associated with the Society are an integral part of the historical face of Jerusalem, Nazareth, Haifa and Tel Aviv-Yafo.

The earliest element of this heritage are the **Russian Buildings**. This includes the Holy Trinity Cathedral, the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, the Consulate, the Elizavetinskoe and Mariinskoe compounds and the Russian hospital.

The wonderful **Church of Saint Mary Magdalene** on the slope of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane was built in memory of Empress Maria Alexandrovna, a long-standing patroness and contributor to Russian work in the region. The Church was consecrated on 1 October 1888, with the ceremony attended by Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich and his spouse, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna. Today, the Church, situated in the paradise of Gethsemane, holds the relics of Saint Elizabeth who was martyred at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

The heart of the Old Town, near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is home to the **Alexandrovscoe compound**, which contains the biblical Threshold of the Judgment Gate and the Church of Saint Alexander Nevsky consecrated on 22 May 1896 in memory of the Society's founder, Alexander III the Peacemaker.

وعدا لربه ادراك او تفضل بقية بعد كبره اجراء فرام صحت فرجه مدونه  
 وكونى اليه بيوتك يا باسنيك وفوسنك كندو بدور  
 براقي مدار معاشي اولم بقدره تكال الفطارهات  
 ادرك كافي الساعه فرجه مدونه كندوسم السور  
 دوفند بان ودرينه فطانا برظه مدرك السور



The Street of Prophets remains home to the **Veniaminovskoe compound** gifted to the Society in 1891 by Hegumen Veniamin (Lukyanov).

The latest IOPS Jerusalem project was the **Nikolaevskoe compound** named in honour of the last Russian sovereign and consecrated on 6 December 1905.

Situated in the centre of Jerusalem near the Holy Trinity Cathedral and the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, the **Sergievskoe compound** is rightly considered one of the most outstanding architectural sites in the city. The compound's elegant, strict shape with a round corner tower which, once again hoists the flag of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society on festive days, has become the architectural symbol of modern Jerusalem.

Named after the founder and first Chairman of the Palestine Society, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the compound combines not only the history of the Society which built it and the multifaceted Russian heritage in the Holy Land, but also that of Imperial Russia.



*Pilgrims by the main entrance of the Sergievskoe compound. Photo: Early 20<sup>th</sup>*



*Corner tower of the Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem. Modern image*



*Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem flying the IOPS Flag in 1889. Photo: Monk Tikhon*

The historic document which returned the Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem, a crucial piece of Russian property in Israel, to Russia was signed in December 2008. Reconstruction of the building has recently been completed, with the official opening scheduled for 18 July 2017, the saint day of Sergius of Radonezh. The building will be used for the same purposes as in the days of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich. This includes the opening of a pilgrimage centre, hotel, refectory, museum, exhibition halls, as well as a unique archive which was assembled with great difficulty, and many other plans.

In the process of collaboration with the councils of Jerusalem, Nazareth and Haifa, strong working relationships have been established which support continued cooperation between Russia and Israel.



*Main entrance of the Alexandrovskoe compound in Jerusalem. Modern image*



*Church in the Alexandrovskoe compound in Jerusalem from the front. Early 20th century*

وَعَالِدِيهِ اِنَّكَ اَوْفَيْتُكَ اَبْنَهُ لِيُحْيِيَ كَرِيْمًا اَبْرَاهِيْمَ وَمَرْحُومًا قَرِيْبًا مَدْفُوْنًا  
 وَرُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ يَا اَسْتَفْحِقُ وَرُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ  
 بِرَافِعِي مَدَارَ عَمَّاسِي اَوْلِيْمَقْدِسِي تَكَرُّمًا اَلْمَلِكِيَّةِ  
 اَوْزَكُ كِنَانِي السَّجْدِ قَرِيْبًا مَدْفُوْنًا كَذُوْنِ السُّوْرَةِ  
 رُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ يَا اَسْتَفْحِقُ وَرُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ



Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. Modern image

## RETURN TO THE HOLY LAND

National and property interests related to Russian heritage in the Middle East have allowed the Society to survive at a time of great social upheaval. The renewal of the Russian state in the twilight years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed the IOPS, with its eternal heritage, traditions and ideals, to carve a niche out for itself in Russia's public life and rebuild its presence in Russia and abroad.

The Russian Federation is the successor to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and this underpins the succession of the IOPS concept and operations.

The return of the Sergievskoe compound to Russia through the hard work of the Palestine Society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration has set the agenda for future efforts.

Research efforts are also continuing. Since 2015, the IOPS has been working on a monumental publishing project to prepare and release a historical documentary series called "Russia in the Holy Land" which opens with a three-volume set of documents and materials from Russian and foreign archives covering the history of Russian efforts in the region, compiled by the IOPS Deputy Chairman, a leading scholar



At an official reception in Jerusalem: IOPS Chairman, **Sergey Stepashin**, and His Grace **Anthony**, Bishop of Bogorodsky, Director of the Department for Foreign Institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate. November 2015



Russian Ambassador to Israel, **Alexander Shein**, and IOPS Director in the Holy Land, **Igor Ashurbeyli**. November 2015

of the history of the Holy Land and Russian-Palestine relations, Chief Research Fellow of the Russian History Institute under the RAS, Doctor of History, Nikolay Nikolaevich Lisovoy. The next three volumes, which are already in development, will make up the Russian Palestine Encyclopaedia, with the series later completed with a gift album called "The Treasures of Russian Palestine".

In 2015, the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society was officially registered in Israel. On 16 November 2015, at a reception to mark this event held at the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem attended by official representatives of both Russia and Israel, Sergey Stepashin, Chairman of the IOPS gave the following welcome address: "Today, the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society has begun official registration in Jerusalem, marking a new legal and historical phase in the Society's story as an international non-governmental organisation. We have taken on a gargantuan task of acting as a body that can conduct the people's diplomacy for peace in the Middle East".

The Chairman thanked the Israeli leadership for their understanding and support with returning assets formerly held by the Russian state.

In the same year, for the first time in the Society's post-1917 history, the organisation appointed a IOPS Director in the Holy Land, with the position taken up by renowned industrialist, entrepreneur, philanthropist and public figure, Igor Ashurbeyli. He represents the IOPS in Israel and sees restoration of the Society's pre-revolution greatness and significance for Russia and the Orthodox world as one of his key goals.

The "Holy Land" IOPS Pilgrim Centre was established in 2016. The centre fulfils the Society's main purpose, which is to organise pilgrimages to the Holy Land for Orthodox Christians.

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 رُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ يَا اَسْتَفْحِقُ وَرُوْحِي اِلَيْهِ يَبْرُكُ

وَعَبَّالِدِيه اَدَاكْ اَوْتَمَقْتْ اَبَقْتَه اَبُوْلَه كَرِيْم اِبْرَاهِيْم مَرَام صَحِيحْ قَرِيْب مَدْرُوْه  
 كَرِيْم وَتَوَجِي اَبُو بِيُوْكَ بَايَا سَنِيْكَ وَفَرَسَنَه كُنْدُو بِيُوْه  
 بَرَاغِيْه مَدْرَه مَعَا سِي اَوْلِيْمَقْتَه تَكْر اَنْتِيْلَارَه مَان  
 اَدُوْه كَنَاغِي اَلْسَابَقَه قَرِيْب مَدْرُوْه كُنْدُو سَمِيْه اَلْسَبُوْه  
 دَوْضَه بِيْت وَتَرْتِيْمَه فَرَطَانَا سَرَطَه مَدْرَه اَلْمَسْجِدِ



The 4th Report-and-Election Conference of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society timed to coincide with the IOPS' 135th anniversary was held at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. June 2017



Igor Ashurbeyli, IOPS Director in Israel, gifted the Society an ark with the relics of Equal-to-the-Apostles Sovereign Saint Helena, a patron of the IOPS. June 2017

On 2 June 2017, the Church Assembly Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was the location of the 4<sup>th</sup> Report-and-Election Conference of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and session to celebrate the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this international public organisation, one of the oldest of its kind in Russia. The events were headed by His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Chairman of the Committee of Honourable Members of the IOPS.

The congratulatory message from Russian President Vladimir Putin, read out by Sergey Stepashin, noted IOPS efforts to expand Russia's presence in the Holy Land and the recovery of the Society's former assets.

Russia's humanitarian mission in Israel is going through a renaissance. It is part of our history and the Society's mission is to preserve and strengthen it.

In establishing the Palestine Committee, the predecessor to the Palestine Society, Emperor Alexander II said: "It is a matter of the heart for me".

This statement became the motto which drives the IOPS' current supporters to uphold the religious and cultural traditions connected with Russia's presence in the Holy Land since reaching Jerusalem's holy sites and serving the Society's aims and ideals is a matter of the heart for them as well.



**Russian buildings in Jerusalem, a bird's eye view**

1 – Consulate;

2 – Russian Hospital;

3 – Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission;

4 – Mariinskoe compound;

5 – Holy Trinity Cathedral;

6 – Elizavetinskoe compound;

7 – Nikolaevskoe compound;

8 – Sergievskoe compound



# THE BOOKLET WAS PREPARED USING THE WORKS OF

N. N. Lisovoy, A. G. Cheremin, E. O. Slepchin

Includes fragments from the foreword written by S. V. Stepashin,  
IOPS Chairman,  
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Photographs from IOPS archives

