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Contours of V.N. Khitrovo's Worldview: on Genesis of Religious-Political Concept

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Abstract: The article is devoted to Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo, the founder of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, a renowned Palestine scholar and statesman of Russia. The author considers the problem of the formation of the foundations of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview, which has been insufficiently studied in historiography. Based on Khitrovo's memoirs and works, the stages of the formation of the Palestine scholar's worldview have been reconstructed, and the factors in its development have been determined. The starting point of his worldview formation was the 1860s, when he worked in the Naval Ministry of the Russian Empire under the supervision of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov. At that time, the contours of the statesman's worldview were initially formed: an understanding of the scope of the state tasks of the presence in the Holy Land, and the cult of science, which made it possible to improve the conditions of people's lives. Another source of the Palestine scholar's worldview was Orthodoxy learned from the family. The decisive factor in shaping V.N. Khitrovo's holistic religious concept was during the 1870s, when the confessional penetration of the West into the Holy Land accelerated. At the turn of the 1880s, in the internal policy of the Russian Empire, there was a growth of conservative religious tendencies, and the church became an instrument of state policy. V.N. Khitrovo's political ideal was tied to Byzantism, according to which the true defender of Orthodoxy is Russia, as the spiritual successor of Byzantium.

Keywords: Russia and the Middle East, the Great Game, Russian foreign policy, Byzantinism, contacts and connections

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Контурсы мировоззрения В.Н. Хитрово: к вопросу о генезисе религиозно-политической концепции

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Аннотация: Настоящее исследование посвящено личности Василия Николаевича Хитрово, создателя Императорского Православного Палестинского Общества (ИППО), выдающегося палестиноведа и государственного деятеля России. В статье исследуется недостаточно изученная в историографии проблема формирования основ мировоззрения В.Н. Хитрово. Опираясь на воспоминания и работы Хитрово, реконструированы этапы и определены факторы формирования мировоззрения палестиноведа. Отправной точкой складывания его мировоззрения стали 1860-е гг., когда он работал в Морском министерстве под началом великого князя Константина Николаевича Романова. В это время формируются контурсы мировоззрения государственного деятеля: понимание масштабности государственных задач присутствия в Святой Земле; культ науки, позволяющий улучшать условия народной жизни. Вторым источником мировоззрения палестиноведа стало православие, усвоенное в семье. Решающим фактором в оформлении целостной религиозной концепции В.Н. Хитрово стали 1870-е гг., когда ускорилось конфессиональное проникновение Запада в Святую Землю. На рубеже 1870–80-х гг. нарастают консервативно-религиозные тенденции во внутренней политике Российской империи, а сама церковь становится инструментом государственной политики. Политический идеал В.Н. Хитрово близок к византизму, согласно которому подлинным защитником православия является Россия как духовная преемница Византии.

Ключевые слова: Россия и Ближний Восток, большая игра, внешняя политика России, византизм, контакты и связи

Заявление о конфликте интересов: Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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Introduction

Relevance. Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo was a statesman, a scholar of Palestine, the founder of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS) and writer, is nowadays at the center of the scientific and cultural discourse on Russian influence Palestine and on the religious-conservative policy of Russia in the Middle East during the 19th century. This due to his role in defending Russia's national interests in the form of religious presence, a type of “soft power” in the country's foreign policy.

The intensification of Russian foreign policy in Palestine was largely due to both the failures in the Eastern War, acting as a compensatory measure to restore the prestige of the Russian state and its lack of military-political influence in the late 1850s – early 1860s. Strengthening hand in the Middle East, made it possible for Russia to reinforce international position by peaceful and indirect religious and cultural means. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this religious presence was a relevant and adequate method of defending the promotion of national interests in the region.

Elaboration of the problem. The personality of V.N. Khitrovo and history of Russia's presence in the Holy Land have attracted attention of Russian researchers. Individual aspects of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview and, above all, his activities were touched upon in the works on the history of the IOPS by: A.A. Dmitrievsky, M.P. Solovyov, N.N. Lisov, A.G. Grushev¹. The methodological problem is that the ideological aspects of his life are intertwined with the practice of creating the IOPS, which makes it difficult to individually emphasize them.

Individual aspects of V.N. Khitrovo's views and activities were analyzed by L.A. Gerd and I.Yu. Smirnova in the broad context of examining the issues of the confessional aspects of Russia's foreign policy in the 19th century².

At the same time, the history, factors, and context of the development of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview were not specifically studied. For the first time, the sources and some factors of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview were specifically studied by G.V. Aksenova, who was essentially the first to identify the problem of reconstructing his religious-conservative concept³.

The purpose of the study is to determine the factors and stages of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview.

The source base of the work is personal documents – memoirs of A.V. Golovnin⁴, V.N. Khitrovo⁵, the diary of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich⁶, publicistic works of V.N. Khitrovo⁷.

Nevertheless, when reconstructing his worldview system, other circumstances should be taken into account – it is obvious that his viewpoint could not immediately be

¹ A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo i ego deiatel'nost' za istekshuiu chetvert' veka. (1882–1907). Istoricheskaya zapiska* [The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and its activities during the past quarter century (1882–1907). Historical note] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Kirshbauma Publ., 1907); M.P. Solov'ev, *Sviataia zemlia i Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo* [The Holy Land and the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society] (Moscow: Indrik Publ., 2012); N.N. Lisovoi, "Russian presence in the Holy Land: institutions, people, heritage," *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2003): 19–37; A.G. Grushevoi, "Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo. Obzor istorii do 1917 g. [The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. An overview of the history before 1917]," in *Vspomogatel'nye istoricheskie dissipliny. Vypusk XXXII* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin Publ., 2013), 472–497.

² L.A. Gerd, *Konstantinopol' i Peterburg. Tserkovnaia politika Rossii na pravoslavnom Vostoke (1878–1898)* [Constantinople and St. Petersburg. Russian Church Policy in the Orthodox East (1878–1898)] (Moscow: Indrik Publ., 2006); I.Yu. Smirnova, "The Confessional Vector of Russian Foreign Policy: the History of Interaction Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Holy Synod in the 19th Century," *Herald of the Historical Society of Saint Petersburg Theological Academy*, no. 3 (2021): 351–360, https://doi.org/10.47132/2587-8425_2021_3_351

³ G.V. Aksenova, "Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo: Peculiarities of Service in the Naval Ministry in 1856–1863 under the Command of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich," *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 24, no. 1 (2025): 83–95, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2025-24-1-84-96>; G.V. Aksenova, "Vasilii Nikolaevich Khitrovo (1834–1903) i ego vklad v sokhranenie Russkogo dukhovnogo naslediiia [Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo (1834–1903) and his contribution to the preservation of the Russian spiritual heritage]," in *XXII Paskhal'nye chteniia. Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-metodicheskoi konferentsii «Gumanitarnye nauki i pravoslavnaia kul'tura», XXII Paskhal'nye chteniia, Moskva, 22–23 maia 2024 g.* (Moscow: Litera Publ., 2024), 3–17.

⁴ A.V. Golovnin, *Zapiski dlia nemnogikh* [Notes for the few] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Petersburgskogo Instituta istorii RAN "Nestor-Istoriia" Publ., 2004).

⁵ V.N. Khitrovo, *Nikolai Fedorovich Van der Flit. Po lichnym vospominaniam V. Khitrovo* [Nikolay Fedorovich Van der Fleet. Based on personal memories. V. Khitrovo] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. Kirshbauma Publ., 1897).

⁶ S.V. Mironenko, *Dnevniky velikogo kniazia Konstantina Nikolaevicha. 1858–1864* [Diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich. 1858–1864] (Moscow: Politicheskaya enciklopediia Publ., 2019).

⁷ V.N. Khitrovo, "Nedelya v Palestine [A week in Palestine]," in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: IPPO Publ.; St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O. Abyshko Publ., 2011), 234–254.

formed completely from existing source material, and therefore in order to solve the problem, it is important to consider the key stages of his life and the circle of like-minded people with whom he communicated and who formed and determined the semantic field of his thinking.

There is no doubt that the turning point in the formation of V.N. Khitrovo as a statesman was the Great Peasant reform, the end of serfdom, and the liberal reforms that followed it. At the same time, the analysis of V.N. Khitrovo's legacy allows us to outline the contours of his worldview and the religious and political concept which he created.

Formation of the statesman

V.N. Khitrovo began his public service in 1857 at the Ministry of the Navy under the supervision of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, who, as is well known, was one of the country's outstanding reformers, a kind of "liberal motor" for all reform activities of the era.

The Ministry of War was an experimental platform on which the principles of the future reform were tested and the contours of Russian domestic, and foreign policy were determined.

As an outstanding reformer, Konstantin Nikolayevich was able to form a consolidated group of reformist officials. It included future Minister of Finance M.Kh. Reutern, and assistant to Grand Duke A.V. Golovnin who was the Minister of National Education in 1861–1866⁸.

When characterizing the Grand Duke, one should pay attention to his program of activities, based on a combination of deep socio-economic transformations within the country occurring at that time along with the goal of solving strategic foreign policy problems.

The first serious undertaking of the Grand Duke was the preparation of the "Navy Regulations," which was carried out for a decade (1850–1860)⁹.

The need to restore the capabilities of the Russian navy prompted the Grand Duke to study the experience of Western shipbuilding and financing. Moreover, not only did Konstantin Nikolayevich get acquainted with the best examples of the Western navy during his trips, but he also sent experts who were supposed to study the experience of foreign navies. In his correspondence with Alexander II, the Grand Duke casually mentioned V.N. Khitrovo, a young official of the Ministry:

November 28. In the morning, I wrote another letter to my mother. We sent all these letters with Khitrovo, our official who studied double-entry bookkeeping abroad¹⁰.

This brief episode allows us to understand the role and place of the novice official in the civil service system. V.N. Khitrovo served at the Commissariat Department, which was in charge of supplying the navy. Apparently, he was instructed to study the issue of organizing and managing the advanced structure at that time – the Royal navy, and the Russian Navy was to be recreated in a short period of time based on these observations.

Working at the Commissariat Department, V.N. Khitrovo could not help but study the principles of the department's work introduced by the Grand Duke, its management culture. The resolution of the most important strategic tasks was a scientific approach to

⁸ V.E. Voronin, *Velikii kniaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich: stanovlenie gosudarstvennogo deiatelia* [Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich: the formation of a statesman] (Moscow: Russkii mir Publ., 2002).

⁹ T.V. Antonova, "The program of "Political novelty" by Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov," *Sholohov Moscow State University for the Humanities*, no. 1 (2010): 23.

¹⁰ S.V. Mironenko, *Dnevniky velikogo kniazia Konstantina Nikolaevicha. 1858–1864* [Diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich. 1858–1864] (Moscow: Politicheskaya enciklopediia Publ., 2019), 19.

settling matters (collecting and analyzing information), and its main focus was on public service to the Russian Empire.

In addition, the work at the department of the Grand Duke introduced V.N. Khitrovo to the circle of the ruling elite; he was entrusted with important functions. As can be seen from the above-quoted “Diary,” the Grand Duke sent personal letters to his mother.

It can be safely said that the work at the Ministry of the Navy contributed to the formation of V.N. Khitrovo’s strategic culture and analytical thinking. According to G.V. Aksenova, V.N. Khitrovo’s service in this advanced Ministry contributed to the formation of his personality and views as a future public figure capable of solving serious state problems¹¹. It was not a secret to him that the Grand Duke was seeking ways to restore the prestige of the empire – the discussion of these issues was an imperative practice.

The Ministry of the Navy became a key center of fundamental and applied science. Another quality, rare for high-ranking officials of the empire, was manifested in the activities of Konstantin Nikolayevich, as he highly valued the importance of science as a support for state policy¹².

The Russian Geographical Society and the Ministry of the Navy financed the publication of works on ethnography, geography, statistics; expeditions were equipped beyond the Urals, to the Arctic, Central Asia, and Siberia.

It can be assumed that the “cult of science” in the Ministry gave rise to V.N. Khitrovo’s style, which distinguished him among scholars of Palestine – his thorough and comprehensive analysis of any socio-cultural phenomenon.

A feature of the geopolitical situation at that time was the awareness of the country’s social backwardness by the ruling elite. Concern for the welfare of the people was not mere words in the policy of that time. In general, it should be noted that the era of the 1850–1860s in Russia was characterized by the spread of Western rationalism. Science was considered not only by the intelligentsia, but also by the ruling elite as a universal means of solving key social problems. V.N. Khitrovo understood his time as devotion to science. Included are V.N. Khitrovo’s recollections of his comrade Nikolay Fedorovich Fan-der-Flit, whom he met in the late 1860s:

We were all anxious to do something for the people, and we sought all these ideals for the realization of our desires, unfortunately, not in the thousand-year life of the Russian people, but in the West. It seemed to us then, and this was a major mistake of our inexperience, that what was good and useful in the West could not help but be good and useful here¹³.

Interestingly enough, this love for people was addressed to ordinary people as well. The work with Fan-der-Flit at the Ministry of Finance in the 1860s was aimed at satisfying the needs of small agricultural loans, which were intended primarily for the peasantry suffering from the exorbitant interest rates of usurers. V.N. Khitrovo’s “populism” was not distinguished by abstract love for the people but was the result of effective and objective policy decisions.

The widespread fascination with the West was acquiring the character of an epidemic. Recalling his work on the Tax Commission of the Ministry of Finance, V.N. Khitrovo wrote as follows:

This commission published extensive studies, which usually began with the question: what is it like in the West?¹⁴

¹¹ G.V. Aksenova, “Vasilii Nikolaevich Khitrovo,” 88.

¹² Antonova, T.V. “The program of ‘Political novelty’,” 25.

¹³ V.N. Khitrovo, *Nikolai Fedorovich Fan der Flit. Po lichnym vospominaniyam V. Khitrovo* [Nikolay Fedorovich Van der Fleet. Based on personal memories. V. Khitrovo] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. Kirshbauma Publ., 1897), 14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

Characterizing the general fascination with the West at that time, one should note another important aspect of influence on V.N. Khitrovo – this was the influence of his immediate superior at the Ministry of Finance, Prince A.I. Vasilchikov. V.N. Khitrovo noted as follows:

Prince Vasilchikov was our chairman, we grouped around him, he was our representative before the great ones of the earth, and they not only listened to him, but also fulfilled his wishes and petitions¹⁵.

The prince's program is worth noting. He was a consistent opponent of bureaucracy and the arbitrariness of officials. The question of the people's welfare was always a practical one for him. Thus, A.I. Vasilchikov promoted the ideas of a public school and raised the issue of staffing schools with teachers.

It is also significant that he developed a national model of local self-government, which differed considerably from Western European approaches. Rejecting the idea of passivity of the people, who were perceived by conservatives as a kind of "elements" convenient for management and manipulation, Prince A.I. Vasilchikov considered it necessary to develop a form of government "expressing the correct interaction of the people's will and local authorities within the law" and in the interests of the people¹⁶. Without accepting the extremes of Westernism, V.N. Khitrovo turned to religious faith, the second line of the emerging worldview, which in the mind of the thinker developed in parallel to his reformism, but it did not touch the spirit of the era.

Today, there are studies on the role of the Alexander Lyceum took as a center of high culture and education, and how it became a "forge of personnel" for the state and cultural elite¹⁷. Khitrovo recognized the Lyceum for creating conditions for a successful start on his path of state service¹⁸, but the educational and developmental aspect of the school brought Khitrovo's criticism. He noted as follows:

There was not a single outstanding personality among the professors, not a single one who would make people love science, not to mention teach them how to work. The educational aspect was even weaker; it was limited exclusively to the external, disciplinary side¹⁹.

Apparently, such criticism was caused by the fact that the main source of spiritual development for Khitrovo, as well as for Fan-der-Flit was family. "At that time, the inner, spiritual life of the younger generation was still given by family, and not so much by words, but by its entire structure, its entire environment," V.N. Khitrovo recalled²⁰. Perhaps, such a perception of the past was dictated by the active experience that Khitrovo acquired in life, and his strong-willed ability to solve the most important problems facing the Russian Empire.

¹⁵ V.N. Khitrovo, *Nikolai Fedorovich Fan der Flit. Po lichnym vospominaniyam V. Khitrovo* [Nikolay Fedorovich Van der Fleet. Based on personal memories. V. Khitrovo] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Kirshbauma Publ., 1897), 17.

¹⁶ A. Golubev, *Knyaz' Aleksandr Illarionovich Vasil'chikov. 1818–1881. Biograficheskii ocherk* [Prince Alexander Illarionovich Vasilchikov. 1818–1881. Biographical sketch] (St. Petersburg: tipografiya N.N. Voshchinskogo Publ., 1881), 46.

¹⁷ G.V. Aksenova, "Vasilii Nikolaevich Khitrovo (1834–1903) i ego vklad v sokhranenie Russkogo dukhovnogo nasledia [Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo (1834–1903) and his contribution to the preservation of the Russian spiritual heritage]," in *XXII Paskhal'nye chteniia, Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-metodicheskoi konferentsii «Gumanitarnye nauki i pravoslavnaia kul'tura», XXII Paskhal'nye chteniia, Moskva, 22–23 maia 2024 g.* (Moscow: Litera Publ., 2024), 3–17.

¹⁸ V.N. Khitrovo, *Nikolai Fedorovich Fan der Flit. Po lichnym vospominaniyam V. Khitrovo* [Nikolay Fedorovich Van der Fleet. Based on personal memories. V. Khitrovo] (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Kirshbauma Publ., 1897), 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

A.A. Dmitrievsky gives an interesting fact about how childhood and family conditions awakened V.N. Khitrovo's interest in the Holy Land from a young age. From childhood, he dreamed of Palestine, he listened to the stories about the Holy Land "by the dim flickering of a lamp." After the death of his beloved mother, "when much was experienced," he made a trip to it not as a pilgrim, but as a traveler, and it finally became reality to him²¹.

Perhaps, in the 1860s, V.N. Khitrovo began to get acquainted with Russia's presence in the Middle East. It is no coincidence that Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich was preoccupied with the issue of Russia's presence in the Holy Land. Under him, there began peaceful expansion of influence into the Middle East. The Grand Duke clearly understood the strategic importance of the Middle East and Palestine for Russia. Thanks to the activities of the Grand Duke, the Palestine issue became a state task, "pushed into Russian politics by the people."²²

The future Minister of National Education A.V. Golovnin noted:

Russia's influence in Turkey, like in Greece, was decreasing more and more. Both here and there they knew our weakness due to the lack of railways, financial disorder and the need to maintain huge armies in Poland and the Caucasus. The English and French kept explaining to the Turkish and Greek ministers these reasons for our impotence, and both clearly saw that they could not expect either benefit or harm from us²³.

V.N. Khitrovo could not help but know about the visit of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich to the Holy Land.

Thus, in the 1860s, the foundations of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview had already formed, including an intense interest in science as a means of practical improvement of people's lives. However, the core of his worldview was the Orthodox faith, which he learnt in his family. V.N. Khitrovo was one of the few who realized the perniciousness of the gap between faith and science, the imperative of serving his country.

In search of national-religious concept

Whereas in the 1860s the contours of V.N. Khitrovo's worldview just began to emerge, in the 1870s it took shape as a religious-political concept. In order to understand this transformation, it is important to consider the international and domestic political context of the late 1870s.

The Eastern issue and the attempt to resolve it during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 considerably weakened Russia's position not only in the Balkans, but also in the east as a whole. According to L.A. Gerd, "at the Berlin Congress and after it Russia found itself in complete isolation, like it was in the mid-19th century."²⁴ It became clear that Russia had gained nothing from the war. During the reign of Alexander III, not only foreign

²¹ A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo i ego deiatel'nost' za istekshuiu chetvert' veka. (1882–1907). Istoricheskaya zapiska* [The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and its activities during the past quarter century (1882–1907). Historical note] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Kirshbauma Publ., 1907), 150.

²² M.P. Solov'ev, *Sviataia zemlia i Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo* [The Holy Land and the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society] (Moscow: Indrik Publ., 2012), 60.

²³ A.V. Golovnin, *Zapiski dlya nemnogikh* [Notes for the few] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Petersburgskogo Instituta istorii RAN "Nestor-Istoriia" Publ., 2004), 117.

²⁴ L.A. Gerd, *Konstantinopol' i Peterburg. Tserkovnaia politika Rossii na pravoslavnom Vostoke (1878–1898)* [Constantinople and St. Petersburg. Russian Church Policy in the Orthodox East (1878–1898)] (Moscow: Indrik Publ., 2006), 136.

policy, but also the focus of domestic policy began to change. First and foremost, this was due to his conservative-religious course, personified by Count N.P. Ignatyev, K.P. Pobedonostsev and others.

Although Russia's confessional policy was actively implemented already in the 1860s, in the late 1870s it received new conservative-religious impulses.

The religious-conservative policy was based on close coordination of the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Holy Synod. "The joint activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Holy Synod to expand Russia's presence abroad consisted in establishing and ensuring the interaction of diplomatic and church bodies – such as Orthodox churches at diplomatic missions or embassies and Russian spiritual missions. Assistance to the foreign activities of the Russian Orthodox Church was one of the main functions of the Russian diplomatic department," I.Yu. Smirnova states²⁵. As she rightly notes, it was the intensification of missionary activity of Western countries which was a factor in strengthening Russia's foreign policy in the Holy Land. "Soft power" and religious influence were an effective weapon in the struggle for geopolitical interests²⁶. For this reason, heterodox confessions were actively established in the Holy Land and their threat to Orthodoxy was becoming increasingly obvious.

In the 1870s, there changed the emphasis of spiritual life, caused by the conservative turn in the country. There the leading role was played by K.P. Pobedonostsev.

The ideological transformation was noted in the 1880s by L.A. Gerd. In her opinion, under Alexander III, an imperial ideology was steadily established under which the idea of the "Third Rome" was embodied. The researcher writes as follows:

This is a national ideology that places the interests of the Russian people above all else in the internal affairs of the state and in its foreign policy²⁷.

This fact gave rise to the need to promote Russian national interests, including in the religious issue, to resist other national interests in the religious sphere, be it Greek nationalism in the form of Panhellenism or variants of Western heterodoxy in the form of Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, the strengthening of Orthodoxy is conditioned by opposition to the West in Holy Land. This tendency was quite objective – in the 1870s the growth of national self-awareness engulfed the whole of Europe: unification in Italy, the formation of the German Empire, the rise of French nationalism, etc.

All these spiritual changes were especially tangible in the Holy Land, which V.N. Khitrovo visited in 1871. Already in 1879, his essay "A Week in Palestine" was published, where he expressed his concerns and worries about what was happening. This essay already outlined the religious-political program of V.N. Khitrovo. What are its contours? V.N. Khitrovo considered the goal of Russia's aspirations in Palestine to be the achievement of "spiritual interests". V.N. Khitrovo wrote as follows:

We have no commercial interests in it (Jerusalem. – *Author's note*); we do not seem to pursue political ones; it means that all the activities of our representatives in the Holy City are limited to the spiritual interests of those thousands of worshipers who come year after year to worship at the holy places²⁸.

²⁵ I.Yu. Smirnova, "The Confessional Vector of Russian Foreign Policy: the History of Interaction Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Holy Synod in the 19th Century," *Herald of the Historical Society of Saint Petersburg Theological Academy*, no. 3 (2021): 353, https://doi.org/10.47132/2587-8425_2021_3_351

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

²⁷ L.A. Gerd, *Konstantinopol' i Peterburg*, 156.

²⁸ V.N. Khitrovo, "Nedelya v Palestine [A week in Palestine]," in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: IPPO Publ.; St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O. Abyshko Publ, 2011), 105.

The problem was that “until recently these interests were in the hands of the Greek clergy, who share our faith.”²⁹

V.N. Khitrovo saw several problems of Russia’s presence in Palestine. Firstly, it was the omnipotence of the Greek clergy. V.N. Khitrovo noted as follows:

To understand the essence of our church question in Palestine, it is necessary to explain that the attitude of the Greek clergy in Palestine towards the local Orthodox Arab population is the same as it is in the north of the Turkish Empire towards the Orthodox Slavic population³⁰.

He relates this to the fact that all the positions in the church hierarchy were occupied by Greeks. V.N. Khitrovo proceeds from the fact that according to its historical development, Russia “should support the desire to form a local, national church hierarchy.” V.N. Khitrovo continues as follows:

That is why we, as far as possible, had to defend the aspirations of the Bulgarians in this regard, that is why our policy in Palestine had to support the local Arab population³¹.

Characterizing the position of the leaders of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, V.N. Khitrovo writes with pain that it was often contradictory. They were forced to obey, on the one hand, the Greek hierarchs, alien to the interests of the local popular majority, and on the other hand, Russian diplomats and consuls, had a poor understanding of the specifics of the religious issue:

Having such abnormal relations, on the one hand, with the Greek clergy, on the other hand – with the consul, always being, so to speak, between a hammer and an anvil, it is impossible to do much for our followers... or to increase Russia’s influence³².

As can be seen, V.N. Khitrovo related the resolution of the Palestine issue to Russia as a whole, and he argued it was means of defense of national religious and state interests, the discrepancy between which he considered unacceptable.

V.N. Khitrovo raised the religious issue to the level of a geopolitical problem. He pointed out two religious and political challenges to Russia. The first was the French influence, which ensured the strengthening of Catholicism in Palestine. At first, it seemed that after the appointment of Valerga as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Catholic influence would be very strong, since he enjoyed the support of Napoleon III. “In 1858, it was difficult to foresee Sedan and the fact that the ‘Vatican captive’ could not deal with Palestine,” V.N. Khitrovo notes. After 1870, Catholic influence was steadily declining...³³

According to V.N. Khitrovo, a significantly greater threat was posed by protestant propaganda, which he considered as a means of establishing the political influence of the United Kingdom “for which the Euphrates Valley and its connection with the Mediterranean Sea were a matter of life or death.”³⁴ According to the author of the essay, the chronological coincidences of “the year of granting Lesseps the right to dig the Suez Canal” with

²⁹ V.N. Khitrovo, “Nedelya v Palestine [A week in Palestine],” in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: IPPO Publ.; St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O. Abyshko Publ, 2011), 107.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 108.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 109.

the intensification of England's penetration into Palestine were not at all accidental. As is known, initially the British reacted to the idea of digging the Suez Canal with hostility, since it corresponded to French interests. Later, as the enterprise expanded and Lesseps attracted British capital, the British elite were no longer concerned. It became clear that the canal strengthened the British Empire³⁵. V.N. Khitrovo notes:

England suddenly became interested in Palestine; it began a very thorough trigonometric survey, created the famous Palestine Exploration Fund, a private society under the patronage of the queen for the study of the Holy Land, and began to establish schools and hospitals and send a continuous series of scientific expeditions, constantly supporting interest in the Palestine issue."³⁶ "The United States, Catholics that learned by bitter experience are following this path. Against this background – what have we done in defense of Orthodoxy since 1858?" V.N. Khitrovo asks. The answer is modest: "Nazareth is converted to Protestantism, and Kerak, the outpost of Orthodoxy, to Catholicism."³⁷

The publicist rightfully asks about Russia's interest in Palestine. For him the answer is obvious. Spiritual interest and hundreds of publications about Palestine in Western literature speak of interest in it in West³⁸, but there are also obvious the political motives, revealing to us the political ideal of V.N. Khitrovo.

As it seems to us, two interesting ideas should be pointed out. Firstly, V.N. Khitrovo advocates the idea of Byzantinism. Let us cite his reasoning:

As for political interests, I will point out only that we are the natural heirs of the Greeks wherever Orthodoxy exists, that the Turks can be defeated not only on the Danube, not only with the support of the Orthodox Slavs, but also on the Euphrates and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, by relying on the Orthodox Arab population. Through Georgia and Armenia we almost approach Palestine and embrace Asia Minor, which alone, of course, cannot remain under Turkey or form the Turkish Empire³⁹.

It should be noted that three years before V.N. Khitrovo's essay came out, a genuine manifesto of Byzantinism had been published – K.N. Leontyev's work "Byzantinism and Slavdom" (1876), in which the author argues that Russian interests in the Middle East does not follow abstract foreign policy schemes, but protects Russian national interests. According to K.N. Leontyev, it is the people, not the upper crust of society, who are the custodians of the "national style," the Christian faith.

As can be seen, V.N. Khitrovo saw the future of Russia in the restoration of the Byzantine succession and its establishment in the South Caucasus. According to V.N. Khitrovo, the fate of Turkey should be decided, and this means that "Asia Minor cannot remain with Turkey."

V.N. Khitrovo saw the resolution of the "great game," the relationship with the British Empire in his own way. Khitrovo's ideas were original. The emphasis of Russian foreign policy was dictated by the realities of the then current Russian-British confrontation.

It is well known that the so-called Eastern question, that is, the problem of the Ottoman Empire maintaining its place as a subject of international relations, had remained rel-

³⁵ M.V. Barro, *Ferdinand Mari de Lesseps. Ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost'.* Biograficheskii ocherk [Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps. His life and work. A biographical sketch] (St. Petersburg: tipografiia Obshchestvennaia pol'za Publ., 1894), 39.

³⁶ V.N. Khitrovo, "Nedelya v Palestine [A week in Palestine]," in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: IPPO Publ.; St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O. Abyshko Publ., 2011), 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid., 110.

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

evant throughout the 18th – 19th centuries. However, it was only after the Crimean war that the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean region underwent significant changes. Although Constantinople and the Black Sea Straits remained a “bone of contention” between the powers until the First World War, the focus of British-Russian relations in Asia after the events of 1853–1856 clearly shifted towards the Middle East and then the Far East⁴⁰. The confrontation with Britain was irreconcilable, and even the hypothetical possibility of Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, could not influence its dynamics⁴¹. It is obvious that after the Crimean War, Russia’s interest in the Middle East began to steadily decline. Perhaps, it was for this reason that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not particularly care about promoting “soft power,” consistently demoting the status of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission leaders.

V.N. Khitrovo, however, had a different point of view:

The struggle for supremacy in Asia will take place not in the Hindu Kush or the Himalayas, but in the valleys of the Euphrates and in the gorges of the Lebanon Mountains, where the world battles for the fate of Asia have always ended⁴².

In this regard, one can speak about the originality of the foreign policy concept of Khitrovo, who believed that the Russian cause in Palestine was not lost. It was now important for him to convey his conviction to the political elite of the Russian Empire.

He did this by addressing Count, Admiral E.V. Putyatin, who made expeditions to Japan and China in 1852–1855 and 1857–1858, where he saw with his own eyes the desire of the West to expand its influence through religious missionary work. In this regard I.Yu. Smirnova notes as follows:

The activities of missionary societies and individual representatives of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, their scale in their effort virtually closed China and made an indelible impression on the Russian admiral <...>. It could not help but lead the diplomat to the idea of the need to take measures to spread Orthodox missionary work to the Far East, where, like in the Middle East, the Russian government took only some steps, faced with the fact of the expansion of Western influence⁴³.

He did the right thing appealing to E.V. Putyatin: only a person who had a broad state outlook and knew the problems of religious influence firsthand could appreciate the ideas of V.N. Khitrovo.

It is necessary to note another feature of Putyatin – his deep piousness. He was a man of ardent and even somewhat rigid Orthodox faith. V.I. Melnik noted as follows:

Being an aristocratic Anglophile... he was at the same time deeply pious and had extensive knowledge of spiritual literature⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ E.Iu. Sergeev, *Bol'shaia igra, 1856–1907: mify i realii rossiisko-britanskikh otnoshenii v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Azii* [The Great Game, 1856–1907: Myths and Realities of Russian-British Relations in Central and East Asia] (Moscow: Tovarishestvo nauchnykh izdaniy KMK Publ., 2012), 18.

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² V.N. Khitrovo, “Nedelya v Palestine [A week in Palestine],” in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: IPPO Publ.; St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O. Abyshko Publ., 2011), 110.

⁴³ I.Yu. Smirnova, *Mezhdz Zapadom i Vostokom: iz istorii tserkovno-diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii na Blizhnem i Dal'нем Vostoke* [Between West and East: From the History of Church-Diplomatic Relations in the Near and Far East] (Moscow: Politicheskaiia enciklopediia Publ., 2016), 393.

⁴⁴ Melnik, V.I. “Ye.V. Putyatin kak religioznaia lichnost'”. *Rossia i Khristianskii Vostok* [E.V. Putyatin as a religious personality. Russia and the Christian East], Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo, <https://www.ippo.ru/ipporu/article/ev-putyatin-kak-religioznaya-lichnost-vi-melnik-202181>

This fact was in sharp contrast to what V.N. Khitrovo saw in the highest circles – religious apathy and alienation from the “Palestine issue.” Dmitrievsky shows V.N. Khitrovo’s mood as follows:

Whatever one talks about, the answer is the same: “It is silence, but not the silence of a summer day, when all around is peace and quiet, where you feel life even in dead silence, but the silence of a lifeless desert.”⁴⁵

It is significant that, according to Count Putyatin, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich was also against strengthening the religious component of Russian foreign policy⁴⁶, and Gorchakov did not want to hear about Palestine at all⁴⁷.

Introducing Khitrovo to the highest circles of society, E.V. Putyatin changed everyone’s idea of him as a lone adventurer and prompted the elite to become concerned about Palestine. It is significant that it was Putyatin who introduced V.N. Khitrovo to heir Alexander Alexandrovich, and then “handed him over to K.P. Pobedonostsev,”⁴⁸ while his associate Pobedonostsev consistently strengthened the religious vector of foreign policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can outline the contours of Khitrovo’s connected religious and political concept. Its prerequisites were laid during the period of the Great Reforms, at the turn of the 1860s, when the future Palestine scholar became part of the political elite, which was facilitated by his studies at the Alexander Lyceum.

Working under the supervision of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, V.N. Khitrovo developed a strategic vision of national tasks and the professional skills for understanding them.

During that era, V.N. Khitrovo’s appeal to the rationalistic culture of scientific knowledge made it possible to form the ideal of national service, in which the social good of the people was the highest priority. Unlike some of the intelligentsia, Khitrovo’s unique “populism” was practical and effective, and he understood the people as an inherent historical religious phenomenon, which was due to the deep Christian source of family education.

In the 1870s, Khitrovo’s worldview became a concept aimed at protecting Russia’s national interests through a combination of religious and political activity in the Holy Land region. Khitrovo considered the Orthodox Church to be an advocate of national interests.

The political basis of V.N. Khitrovo’s ideal was undoubtedly Byzantinism, interest in which was increasingly evident in Russian society in the 1870s. He considered the British Empire to be the main geopolitical adversary of Russia, and he saw the Middle East as the future battlefield for Russia against it. His position somewhat differed in this foreign policy aspect from the opinion of many Russian diplomats and officials.

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⁴⁵ A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo*, 136.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 142.

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