

Pilgrims and Profits

The Russian Company of Steam Navigation and Trade, 1856–1914

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Abstract

The Russian Company of Steam Navigation and Trade (Русское общество пароходства и торговли, or ROPiT) during the second half of the nineteenth century was more closely connected with national politics than any other merchant marine in the world. Politically, ROPiT enabled the Russian state to penetrate the tangled web of rivalry and prejudice that epitomized this era of European imperialism. Commercially, ROPiT improved the empire's international trade and communications, while providing a foundation for the training of sailors. ROPiT also performed crucial postal services and yielded a useful fleet of transport vessels for public and private use. Based on company records and passengers' reports, this paper focuses on the functioning of ROPiT as an aspect of the upsurge of pilgrimages to the sacred places of the Orthodox East during the late imperial period. It argues that ROPiT helped assert Russian influence and generate a sense of community within the Orthodox realm, from the Neva to the Nile.

Keywords

Imperial Russia – the Black Sea – the Holy Land – pilgrimage – commerce – steam-power

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Odessa/Black Sea-based Russian Company of Steam Navigation and Trade (Русское общество пароходства и торговли, or ROPiT) was more closely connected with national politics than any other merchant marine in the world. Tsar Alexander II's resolution, in 1856, to develop the company compares, in significance, with the decision in the 1890s to construct the Trans-Siberian Railway. Politically, ROPiT

enabled the Russian state to penetrate the tangled web of rivalry and prejudice that epitomized this era of New Imperialism. Commercially, ROPiT improved the empire's international trade and communications, while providing a foundation for the training of sailors. In strategic terms, the construction of a merchant marine with metal-plated steam-powered vessels provided an extraordinary reserve in case of military need. ROPiT also performed crucial postal services and provided transportation for thousands of Christians and Muslims on pilgrimage to the Holy Places. Thus, by developing a Black Sea merchant marine, Russia modernized its system of commerce and laid the groundwork for a Black Sea navy, while providing a special link to Russian political space in the Middle East and beyond.

Numerous studies conducted on the Russian economy, its navy, foreign policy, and pilgrimage, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, only mention ROPiT and the merchant marine in passing. Few of these works probe, in depth, the company's history, despite the existence of abundant research materials.¹ Drawing on published records, including the accounts of pilgrims and passengers onboard ROPiT vessels, this essay sketches the origins, growth, and development of the company until 1914.² It benefits from the recent upsurge of studies related to pilgrimage in late Imperial Russia and contrib-

1 The book by Sergei I. Il'ovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk piatidesiatiletiiia Russkogo Obshchestva Parokhodstva i Torgovlia* (Odessa, Tip. Aktsionerov Iuzhno-Russkogo Obshchestva Pechatnogo Dela, 1907) chronicles the company's finances; two articles by W.E. Mosse, "Russia and the Levant, 1856–1852: Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich and the Russian Steam Navigation Company," *Journal of Modern History* 26 (1954): 39–48; Mosse, "The End of the Crimean System: England, Russia and the Neutrality of the Black Sea, 1870–1," *The Historical Journal* 4.2 (1961): 164–190, sketch the setting. The most recent study is that of K. Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias stin Hristianiki Anatoli to 190 kai 200 Aiona: I Rosiki Atmoploiki kai Emporiki Etaireia (1856–1920) kai i Aftokratoriki Orthodoxos Paleistineia Etaireia (1882–2008)* (Thessaloniki: Adelphon Kyriakidi, 2011). See also, T.G. Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine, 1882–1914: A Study of Religious and Educational Enterprise* (Thessaloniki: IMXA, 1963), 40–41; "Iz istorii flota: ROPiT i Chernomorskii Flot," *Morskoi flot*, no. 3 (2007): 90; and Iu.N. Trifonov and B.V. Lemachko, *Russkoe Obshchestvo parokhodstva i torgovli (ROPiT): 1856–1932* (St. Petersburg: LeKo, 2009).

2 According to T.G. Stavrou and P.R. Weisensel, *Russian Travelers to the Christian East from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1986), at least nine pilgrimage accounts mention ROPiT. Western travelogues also contain interesting reflections on ROPiT. See e.g., Stephen Graham, *With the Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London: Macmillan, 1913); Arthur R. Arnold, *From the Levant, the Black Sea, and the Danube*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1868); and W.E. Curtis, *Around the Black Sea: Asia Minor, Armenia, Caucasus, Circassia, Daghestan, the Crimea, Roumania* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911).

utes to this body of work by exploring the operational aspects of ROPiT and the logistics of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.³

Russian/Rus' contacts in the Black Sea date to medieval times. Commercial interactions with Byzantines, Khazars, and Arabs stimulated Russian interest in commercial hubs, such as Constantinople and Trebizond, and enticed merchants to seek their fortunes in the ancient cities of the eastern Mediterranean. The rise of the Ottoman Turks in the fourteenth century threatened traditional avenues of profit and forced Russian tsars to re-examine their strategic interests. Although initially considered a peripheral power, Russia, by the eighteenth century, had become the preeminent force in the Black Sea. Military victories under Catherine the Great transformed the sea into a "Russian lake" and opened a window onto the Mediterranean. Several trading ports became major centers of exchange and provided people with incentives to join the empire of the tsars. By the first half of the nineteenth century, the newly founded port of Odessa was the world's largest commercial grain exporter.

Russia's political and military domination of the Black Sea created new opportunities for Russian entrepreneurs and strategists. The Crimean War (1853–1856), however, altered the historical trajectory of Russian trade, navigation, and military planning in the region. The naval challenges confronting Russia after the defeat were colossal, for in the course of the war the empire lost most of its Black Sea fleet and experienced threats to Kronshtadt in the Baltic Sea, Solovki in the White Sea, and Petropavlovsk in the Bering Sea. In strategic terms, the neutralization of the Black Sea was perhaps the most significant consequence of the Peace of Paris (1856), which prohibited Russian warships

3 Two articles stand out here: Nikolaos Chrissidis, "The Athonization of Pious Travel: Shielded Shrines, Shady Deals and Pilgrimage Logistics in Late Nineteenth-Century Odessa," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 28/29 (2012–2013): 169–191; and Robert H. Greene, "Bodies in Motion: Steam-Powered Pilgrimages in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian History* 39 (2012): 247–268. Recent studies of Russian pilgrimages after the Great Reforms include Christine D. Worobec, "Commentary: The Coming of Age of Eastern Orthodox Pilgrimage Studies," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 28/29 (2012/2013): 219–236; idem, "The Unintended Consequences of a Surge in Orthodox Pilgrimages in Late Imperial Russia," *Russian History* 36 (2009): 62–76; Simon Dixon, "Nationalism versus Internationalism: Russian Orthodoxy in Nineteenth Century Palestine," in *Religious Internationals in the Modern World*, ed. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 139–162; Roy R. Robson, "Transforming Solovki: Pilgrim Narratives, Modernization, and Late Imperial Monastic Life," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 44–60; and Chris J. Chulos, "Religious and Secular Aspects of Pilgrimage in Modern Russia," *Byzantium and the North/Acta Byzantina Fennica* 9 (1997–1998): 21–58.

and barred the construction of coastal fortifications.⁴ With the new influx of commercial vessels under the flags of Austria, Britain, France, the United States and other countries, Russian maritime and trading relations became entangled in the precarious web of confrontation that epitomized the industrialized and assertive era of imperialism. If Russia were to remain a major power it needed, at a minimum, to be able to defend its coastline from the fleets of European powers.

As competition for international markets and raw materials increased, the development of steamship technology and its companion, the railway, overlapped with the Russian Foreign Ministry's security objectives.⁵ Like Europe, the expansion of steamship technology in Russia took place during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Long-distance steam navigation became a technological possibility during the 1830s, as paddle-wheel vessels began to cruise major water bodies such as the Volga River and the Barents Sea. The application of the steam engine to navigation introduced three concepts that altered Russia's maritime communications: speed, reliability, and regularity. Leading officials in the Russian Foreign Ministry, including Chancellor Aleksandr M. Gorchakov (1798–1883), argued that if Russia aimed to compete for political power and trading privileges in traditional markets and expand into new ones, it had to exploit the advantages offered by regular, dependable, and swift communication. Regularity and speed, above all, differentiated the steamship from the sailing vessel. As soon as the steamship became a practical form of maritime activity, makers of Russian foreign policy sought out its obvious advantages. The result was Tsar Alexander II's decision to sponsor ROPiT, which in peacetime was designed to promote communication and commerce, but, in the event, could also supply the backbone of a revamped navy. Consequently, ROPiT was intimately bound up with national politics from its foundation.

Established in 1856, under the personal protection of the emperor, ROPiT became one of the biggest companies on the St. Petersburg Stock Exchange.

4 For the diplomatic details, see L.I. Narochnitskaia, *Rossīia i otmena neitralizatsii Chernogo moria 1856–1871 gg. K. istorii Vostochnogo voprosa* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989); Sinan Kuneralp, ed., *Ottoman Diplomatic Documents on "the Eastern question"*, vol. 1, *The London Conference on the Revision of Certain Stipulations of the Treaty of March 30, 1856 Concerning the Neutralisation of the Black Sea, 1870–1871* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2009); and Gabriel Noradounghian, ed., *Recueil d'actes internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman*, 4 vols. (Paris: Librairie Cotillon, 1897–1902), 3: 1–90.

5 On railway construction during the post-Crimean War decade, see Alfred J. Rieber, "The Formation of La Grande Société des Chemins de Fer Russes," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 21.3 (1973): 375–391.

Based on the experience of the Russian-American Company (founded in 1757), ROPiT was a creative and promising response to the limits imposed by the Paris Peace Treaty. Similar companies, already well-engaged in international commerce, helped solidify the Russian elite's conviction to devote resources toward the construction of a steam-powered merchant fleet: the Austrian Danube Steam Navigation Company, Lloyd's of Trieste, and the P&O Company, based in London, were the prime models.

The idea of founding a great commercial steamship company was not new. Starting in the 1830s, the Russian state had experimented with steam-powered vessels and purchased several steam frigates from England.⁶ The expansion of steamship technology to the Russian shores of the Black Sea was impressive and relatively swift. Before the Crimean War, only one steamship – the *Odessa* – offered regular service in the Black Sea, making stops at Nikolaev and Odessa. In 1833 the first steamship society on the Black Sea was founded, the *Chernomorskoe Parokhodnoe Obshchestvo*, which existed for a decade under the guidance of the Governor-General of Novorossiiia, Mikhail S. Vorontsov (1782–1856).⁷ Under his leadership, the company acquired, from Great Britain, four frigates of 250 horsepower each. When they arrived in 1843, the steamships opened lines between Odessa and Constantinople and between Odessa and Galati. Two years later, the eight steamships cruising the Black and Azov Seas became part of the newly founded *Novorossiiskaia Parokhodnaia Ekspedit-siia*. By the 1840s, regular steamship service linked Odessa to Constantinople, although the frequency of the voyages was limited.

After the Crimean War, the various steamships (that had belonged to these pioneering Russian companies) were bequeathed to ROPiT. In addition, the Ministry of the Navy gave the company the military transport vessels *Kher-sones*, *Dunai*, *Prut*, and *Reni* for conversion to civilian use. Meanwhile, the Austrian Lloyd's of Trieste began regular Black Sea tours, and several other companies, such as the *Service maritime des Messageries impériales* of Marseilles, entered the field. These companies elevated the commerce and prestige of their home countries. St. Petersburg aimed to emulate their achievements, while stemming the tide of foreign influence in a geopolitically sensitive zone.

That Alexander II realized the high priority of naval matters, in the wake of the Crimean defeat, is evident in his appointment of his brother, the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich (1827–1892), to the new post of “General-

6 On the British connection, see David Saunders, “Charles Mitchell, Tyneside and Russia's First Ironclads,” *Northern History* 48, no. 1 (2011): 75–95.

7 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 1–3. See also, Anthony L.H. Rhineland, *Prince Michael Vorontsov: Viceroy of the Tsar* (McGill Queens University Press, 1990), 112–113, 176.

Admiral." The grand duke was integral to the founding and success of ROPiT.⁸ After visiting France and England in the 1850s (already an ardent sailor and lover of the sea), the grand duke became a keen admirer of steamship technology. He intended to modernize the Russian fleet by replacing wooden vessels with steel and ironclad steamships outfitted with western European artillery. Under his leadership, the Russian navy in the Baltic Sea and the Pacific became among the finest in the world. Although the Paris Peace Treaty restricted the construction of a full-fledged Russian Black Sea fleet, he oversaw the reform of the nineteen new naval vessels allowed by the treaty.⁹ It was only logical that his spirit of reform extended into the merchant marine, and he helped energize the initial stages of ROPiT.

The other key figures in ROPiT's early development were the company's main director, Admiral Nikolai A. Arkas (1816–1881), one of imperial Russia's last great naval war heroes,¹⁰ and Nikolai A. Novosel'skii (1825–1902), the company's

8 On Grand Duke Konstantin, see the excellent collection of essays titled *Velikii kniaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich i Russkii Ierusalim: k 150-letiiu osnovaniia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2012). Also see, V.E. Voronin, *Velikii Kniaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich: stanovlenie gosudarstvennogo deiatelia* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 2002); "Spodvizhnik Tsaria-Osvoboditelia, velikii kniaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich," in G. Dzhanishiev, *Iz epokhi velikikh reform*, 5th ed. (Moscow: Tipografia A.I. Mamontova, 1894), 560–588; and N.P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii, "Velikii Kniaz' Konstantin Nikolaevich. Biograficheskii ocherk," in his *Sochineniia*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. M.M. Stasiulevicha, 1910), 2: 304–372.

9 See Nikolai Arkas, "Nachalo uchrezhdenie rossiiskogo flota na Chernom More i deistviia Chernomorskogo flota s 1755–1856 g.," *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Odesskogo Obshchestva Istarii i Drevnosti* 4 (1860), 261–309; 5 (1863), 846–904; 6 (1867), 368–444. On the post-Crimean naval reforms, see A.P. Shevyrev, *Russkii flot posle Krymskoi voiny: liberal'naia biurokратиia i morskii reform* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1990); Jacob W. Kipp, "The Russian Navy and the Problem of Technological Transfer," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881*, ed. Ben Eklof (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 115–138; Jacob W. Kipp, "Consequences of Defeat: Modernizing the Russian Navy, 1856–1863," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 20.2 (1972): 210–225.

10 Born in Nikolaev to a family of Greek extraction, Nikolai was the son of Lieutenant-General Zakharii Andreevich Arkas (from Litochoro in Thessaly). As a 12-year old, Nikolai volunteered to serve in the Russian Black Sea fleet during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1828–1829. He took part in the Bosphorus expedition of 1833, and toured the Caucasus shores and Aegean archipelago under the Captains Evfimii V. Putiatin and Vladimir A. Kornilov. His experience at foreign ports resulted in his first military encounters. In his notebooks about the excursion, he described in detail the current condition of the Ottoman, Greek, French, and Neapolitan fleets, including the number of vessels involved, their cruising speeds, crew, command and cargo capacity, as well as the number of artillery on board, and the proper methods of employing it. Arkas described in detail the erstwhile adversary's captains, their crew, and uniforms. He also provided information about sailing around Constantinople and entering the Golden Horn. Impressed with the modern

principal spokesperson in Odessa, the effective headquarters of operations.¹¹ As the company emerged under the leadership of this trio, Odessa became a city with the best amenities, not only in Russia, but in the whole of Europe.

quality of the Ottoman fleet, his notes based on his experience on board Ottoman vessels underscore that the fleet's overall construction was excellent. Arkas's findings obviously set the minimal standard for the Russian fleet to follow.

By 1841, Arkas reached the rank of captain first class. In 1843, he went to St. Petersburg to serve on the committee for the construction of steam navigation in Russia and experimented in the following years with ironclad ships in the Caspian Sea. While on a mission to England in 1848, Arkas observed the construction of steam frigates including the Russian *Vladimir*, which he commanded to Sevastopol. In 1852, for the excellent condition of the steamship, he was named commander of the Baltic Fleet by Tsar Nicholas I.

During the Crimean War, Arkas studied ship designs in Finland, Berlin, Hamburg, Brussels, and Holland. Returning to Russia in 1855, he worked on improving the fortifications on Kronshtadt. Thus, upon the founding of ROPiT, Arkas was well qualified to supervise its affairs. In 1871, he was named vice-admiral and commander of the port of Nikolaev and military governor of the city. With the transformation of the Black Sea flotilla into a fleet in the same year (due to the abrogation of the Black Sea clauses), Arkas was named the leading commander of the Black Sea fleet and ports. In this position he was promoted to general-adjutant, with the rank of admiral and the order of St. Alexander Nevskii. He died in Nikolaev in 1881.

Arkas's *formuliarnyi spisok* in the Archive of Naval Ministry is printed in *Kronshtadtskii Vestnik*, no. 67 (1881) and *Russkii biograficheskii slovar* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskago Russkago istoricheskago obshchestva, 1896–1918), 2:290. See also, S.R. Grinevetskii, et al. *Chernomorskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Mezhdunar. Otnosheniia, 2006), 112–113; F.I. Muratidi, *Grekii – admiraly i generaly voenno-morskogo flota Rossii: biograficheskii spravochnik* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2007), 30–33; N.G. Sergeeva, *Rossiiskii flot, 1720–1917: bibliograficheskii spravochnik Izdanii morskovo vedomstva* (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo BLITS, 1995), 95.

- 11 Novosel'skii was the chairman of the town Duma, the city mayor (1867–1878), and one of the most important figures in the city's development (later he reached the rank of privy councilor and even travelled to Northern Palmyra in Syria). He initiated essential reforms in the municipal economy and helped change the way of life in Odessa by transforming the patriarchal town into a bustling port with Turkish coffee-houses, Greek restaurants, and Italian wine stores. He promoted the construction of market squares, imitating the centers of ancient towns, and his initiatives helped transform the former huge grain barns into profitable hotels and entertainment establishments. Under his tenor as mayor dirt roadways were paved, the harbor was cleaned, and a railway connected the "Odessa Island" with the continent. Equally as important, the waterless town received the Dniester water main in 1873. A few years later, a horse-driven railway and a steam tram facilitated transport; a canalization system and gas lighting reached the central part of the town, as well as the suburbs. The number of charity establishments increased remarkably.

For Novosel'skii's career, see K.A. Skal'kovskii, *Satiricheskie ocherki i vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A.S. Suvorina, 1902), 302–313; and A.I. Kirpichnikov and V.N. Ligin, *Odessa 1794–1894. Izdanie Gorodskogo obshchestvennogo upravleniia k stoletiiu goroda* (Odessa: Tip. S. Shul'tse, 1895), 86, 96, 98, 196, 220–223, 265. See, also, Patricia Herlihy, *Odessa: A*

The plans for the steam-ship company moved forward in April 1856. By May, the Cabinet of Ministers outlined the main foundation of the enterprise, which was approved by Tsar Alexander II in August. In the opening discussions, the original name of the company was to be the *Imperial Russian Steamship and Trading Society*, although later the name was adjusted and “imperial” was dropped, due to its overtly political implications.¹² In August, the company statutes were signed and the main voyage lines sketched. The planned eleven lines were to be opened by degrees, until, in five years, the whole system would be in operation linking Russian voyagers and their cargo to various ports in the Black Sea, as well as Constantinople, Alexandria, Marseilles, and beyond.¹³

The original capital foundation of the company consisted of 35 million silver rubles (approximately 5.8 million pounds sterling) in 20,000 shares at 300 silver rubles each, only half of which was due immediately from investors. As a further special encouragement, the state subscribed for one-third of the original shares and promised dividends for the first five years. Moreover, the state provided one million of the original capital as an annual subsidy.¹⁴ According to the foundational statutes, the main business of the company was trade with coastal ports, in which, by the existing laws, foreigners were not allowed to participate. Thus, ROPiT was to maintain something of a monopoly on trade at certain Black Sea ports. The stricture that only Russian subjects were permitted to become shareholders in the company further bolstered the protectionist spirit of the enterprise. The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also retained strong links to the company through membership on its board of directors.

Besides the state subsidy, the government provided 2 million silver rubles to purchase ships abroad over the next five years. The government was to pay 64,000 silver rubles annually, for twenty years, for repair of the steamers. The company received an exclusive right to the production of anthracite coal mines on the banks of the Don. The state also ordered all military and civil governors, and Russian consuls abroad, to give the company their highest support and

History, 1794–1914 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1986), 152, 222, 342. On the economy and demography of Odessa at this time, see A.A. Skal'kovskii, *Zapiski o torgovykh i promyshlennykh silakh Odessy. Sostavleniia v 1859 godu*. (St. Petersburg: Tip. V. Bezobrazova i komp., 1865).

12 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 9.

13 A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo i ego deiatel'nost' za istekshuiu chetvert' veka, 1882–1907* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo Olega Abyshko, 2008), 92–108.

14 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 10; “ROPiT i Chernomorskii Flot,” 90.

protection.¹⁵ The first directors, Arkas and Novosel'skii, received 1,000 silver rubles per month, and, at the end of five years, each were to receive a grant of 330 shares in the company from the state. Overall, therefore, the company had access to a capital foundation of at least 35 million silver rubles from its origins in August 1856. The governing board of the company included six directors (two of whom were nominated by the government), who were elected to leading positions by vote. Other officiating procedures were outlined in the company charter, which contained tables of estimated costs of travel between ports, and the potential cargo, taxes, and profits involved.

The organization of the company, on paper, was completed in the summer of 1856, followed by the purchase of steamers; other necessary arrangements were made. During the first year, the head office was located in St. Petersburg, but in the following years the main business of the company was transferred to Odessa. Throughout the early stages of this process, the Minister of the Economy, Petr F. Brok (1852–1858), oversaw each detail; apparently, it was his idea to remove the “imperial” from the company’s name.¹⁶

An interesting aspect of the founding of ROPiT is contained in an imperial order (*ukaz*) of 1857, which provided that the company employ naval conscripts from the Black Sea region in its operations. The one-paragraph decree was printed rather unobtrusively, towards the end of the official news, in the *Morskoi sbornik*.¹⁷ The naval conscripts would receive five years of training on the company’s steamers, which counted as service in the Imperial Navy. By 1858, a quarter of the company’s sailors were conscripts; the commanders of its ships were usually officers of the Imperial Navy.¹⁸ As in the past, a lack of suitable personnel forced the government to invite foreigners to work as machinists and mechanics, although (according to the Russian historian Sergei Ilovaiskii), these individuals were not as reliable as the Russians.¹⁹ In contrast to technical specialists, the first captains and officers were almost all from the Russian navy. Like European companies of similar stature, ROPiT had strict rules regarding its staff’s uniforms and ranks.²⁰ However, ROPiT had more of a military aura to it:

15 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 18; *The Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register*, vol. 16 (London: 1861–1862), 729–731.

16 Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 52.

17 “O naznachanii vol'nykh matrosov na voennia suda i na suda obshchestva parokhodstva i trgovli,” *Morskoi sbornik* 33.1 (January 1858), xiii.

18 “Ochet Direktora Inspektorskago departamenta Morskago Ministerstva,” *Morskoi sbornik* 41, no. 5 (May 1859): 1–56.

19 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 33.

20 “Forma odezhdy dlia chinov, sluzhashchikh na parokhodakh Russkago Obshchestva Parokhodstva i Torgovli,” *Morskoi sbornik* 25, no. 12 (October 1856): 79–82.

some of its vessels went on to have illustrious naval careers, such as the *Nikolai I*, which participated in the First World War, transported anti-Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution, and ended service in Britain during World War II.²¹

Besides setting the groundwork for Black Sea activities, the founding fathers of the company considered other technical details of operations, including Russia's role on the Danube and the other major rivers depositing into the Black Sea. According to the first company outline, ROPiT was to retain the right to establish steamships and tugboats on the Danube, Dnieper, Bug and Don, and along the coastline. It could also open an insurance department for the protection of any merchandise conveyed on its vessels. Steamers, hitherto employed by the state in maintaining postal and commercial communications, were sold to the company at value, and the amount was to be paid in five installments, interest free. The statutes stated that unoccupied government lands (that could be used as wharfs, quays, warehouses, and so on) would be granted rent-free. Finally, the company planned to establish schools for the education of its pilots, engineers, and mechanics. The company was to rank as the first guild and was to receive extraordinary rates of subsidy.

The launching of ROPiT was celebrated at a large dinner (*obed*), in Moscow, on 12 September 1856. The well-known entrepreneur and merchant Vasilii A. Kokorev gave a toast in which he stated that "The Russian Company of Steam Navigation and Trade will bring us closer to Europe and provide us with the possibility of easily and quickly exporting our products to her, as well as receiving all that we need from her."²² After the celebration, Kokorev invited several of the guests to purchase stock in the company, immediately leading to a collection of 250,000 rubles. The *Odesskii vestnik* reported that "in such a way, thanks to the elevated thoughts of Russian subjects, entrepreneurs, and businessmen, the 12th of September 1856 should go down as the beginning of a great epoch in all the history of Russia."²³

The operations of ROPiT were accelerated in the spring of 1857, when the first five vessels (ordered from England), arrived in Odessa, including the 200-passanger *Nikolai*.²⁴ As stated in its opening charter, the goal of ROPiT was "for the development of commerce and steam navigation in the southern area of

21 See the catalogue compiled by Trifonov and Lemachko, *Russkoe Obshchestvo parokhodstva i torgovli* (ROPiT).

22 Ilovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 25; Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 55–56. On Kokorev, see Paula Lynn Lieberman, "V.A. Kokorev: An Industrial Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-century Russia" (Ph.D. diss, Yale University, 1981).

23 *Odesskii vestnik*, no. 109 (29 September 1856).

24 "Izvestiia o puteshestvii Gosudaria Velikago Kniazia Konstantina Nikolaevicha," *Morskoi sbornik* 29, no. 6 (June 1857): 91; "ROPiT i Chernomorskii Flot," 90.

Russia, as well as for the exchange of commercial goods and postal communications with foreign ports.”²⁵ The modest wording of the charter, published in the *Morskoi sbornik*, masked more extensive ambitions. By founding ROPiT (as a close coadjutor of Grand Duke Konstantin made clear in his private papers), Russia was seeking: “ways of acquiring lost influence, or renewing and strengthening our ties with the Orthodox peoples in the East, and of having the biggest naval means in the Black Sea.”²⁶ The founding charter contained the rules and restrictions behind the company’s protocol for establishing new ports of call, including the times and hours of projected voyages. Skippers were to maintain strict schedules at a “European standard.” Except in unavoidable cases, the company was to pay a fine of 12 silver rubles for each hour it delayed in starting, and a 1000 silver ruble fine for stopping at ports outside the itinerary.

The company began operations in May 1857, with five ships and regular service between Black Sea ports and those of the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt. The first captains, officers, and crew, came from the Imperial Russian Navy.²⁷ Arkas and Novosel’skii began promoting the company, in earnest, through various advertisements in the press.

Launching a major international steamship company was not without its difficulties. ROPiT experienced huge challenges throughout its first decades of operation. Initially, the most urgent order of business was building a large enough fleet to meet the demand for long distance routes. Additional problems consisted of finding skilled personnel, suitable repair stations, and proper docking facilities. Other problems affecting ROPiT’s Black Sea activities were the migration of Muslim Circassians from their homeland, in the Caucasus, to the Ottoman Empire and the proliferation of pirates, due, in part, to the absence of the Russian Black Sea fleet.²⁸

25 “Ustav Russkago Obshchestva Parokhodstva i Torgovli,” *Morskoi sbornik* 25, no. 12 (October 1856): 56–78.

26 A.V. Golovnin, *Materialy dlia zhizneopisaniia tsarevicha i velikogo kniazia Konstantina Nikolaevicha* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo “D.A.R.K.,” 2006), 104; also quoted in Saunders, “Charles Mitchell, Tyneside, and Russia’s First Ironclads,” 80.

27 Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo*, 374.

28 E.F. Shniukov, *Piraty Chernogo Moria* (Kiev: Muzeinym sovetom NAN Ukrainy, 1995), 78–113. During the Paris Congress in 1856, the British demanded the partial division of Cherkassia according to the Anapa-Kuban line. A.P. Butenev (1787–1866), the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, was the main person in charge of the transfer of population. Meanwhile, in August of 1856, Imam Shamil (1797–1871) capitulated to Russian forces, thus freeing the eastern banks of the Black Sea from potential anti-tsarist movements. By November 1859, the struggle for control of the Caucasus was over. Among the consequences was the flight of thousands of Muslims to the Ottoman Empire, many of whom

In the summer of 1857, the first ROPiT steamships arrived in Sevastopol. From 1857 to 1859, many ships arrived in Sevastopol for repairs. At the end of 1857, ROPiT maintained steamships, among them the 3900-ton *Tsesarevich* and the 3600-ton *Kornilov* (both of which could be easily armed and used as cruisers). The society maintained internal lines of communications between the Black and Azov Seas; international communications were maintained between Odessa, Constantinople, and Marseilles. In 1858, ROPiT released another 10,000 shares of stock at 300 rubles each. In 1859, Inkerman, a city on the Crimean peninsula, became a port of call.

Despite its initial challenges, the company was profitable during its first decade. Between 1858 and 1859, the company transported more than 200,000 passengers and 6 million puds of merchandise. It began publishing an Odessa periodical, *Listok Russkago Obshchestva Parakhodstva i Torgovli*, which provided readers with detailed charts of miles traveled, rates, cargo, and passengers. By 1860, the company employed 35 steamships as its main cruising vessels, 6 steamships for transport purposes, 10 steam-powered tugboats, and 20 barges.²⁹ Eleven lines were designated between cities such as Constantinople, Athens, Smyrna, Rhodes, Beirut, Jaffa, and Alexandria; daily services existed between Odessa and various ports on the Azov Sea and along the Caucasus coastline. Eighteen times a year, round-trip steamers traveled from Odessa to Sicily, Naples, Livorno, Genoa, and Marseilles.

Further energizing the company's activities was Lieutenant Commander Nikolai M. Chikhachov, who became the most active hands-on leader from 1862 to 1884.³⁰ Numerous lines were added, and in 1862, the total capital of the company reached approximately 15 million silver rubles. In 1863, a new line opened connecting Odessa and London, as well as a new link from Odessa to Constantinople and Alexandria. At this time, the company began transporting Russian wheat to the Ottoman capital and animals to Egypt in exchange for raw cotton. In the same year, the company began transporting passengers and mail to Berdiansk, Kerch, Galats, and various ports on the shores of the Caucasus. Under the guidance of Chikhachov, the company gave stockholders reasonably decent dividends of around 20 rubles annually.

booked passage on ROPiT vessels. According to the data of the Russian consul in Trebizond, 50% of the refugees died from various ailments during the passage; the remaining 15%, the majority of which were women and children, were sold into slavery. See, N.A. Smirnov, *Politika Rossii na Kavkaze v XVI–XIX vv.* (Moscow: Izd-vo sotsial'no-ekon. lit-ry, 1958), 223.

29 *Morskoi sbornik* 25, no. 12 (October 1856), 81–82.

30 Illovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 74–75.

The company's expanding activities in the 1860s led to the demand for more trained personnel. The Sevastopol Admiralty began qualifying workers and mechanics, providing the means to becoming registered master technicians. By 1868, Sevastopol not only repaired ROPiT ships, but it began building them. Part of the territory of the Lazarevskii Admiralty in Sevastopol, once used by the Russian navy for building ships and storing supplies (but which had been destroyed during the Crimean War), was transferred to ROPiT for the creation of a base of repairs. This allowed for the reconstruction of the devastated areas of the admiralty without great state investment.

The activities in Sevastopol became large enough to warrant the construction of a school for the children (aged 10 to 14) of mechanics (it was closed to workers). Eventually, ROPiT developed a fine body of trained mechanics, engineers, and workers at the Sevastopol Admiralty and the Luganskii Factory in southern Russia. ROPiT's Sevastopol school maintained around 200 pupils per annum when it was transferred to Odessa at the opening of the twentieth century.³¹

The Russian state's initiative in the 1870s to launch the Railway Line of Odessa (Одесская железная дорога) and the South-Western Railway Lines (Юго-Западные железные дороги) stimulated further activity in ROPiT. The government offered investors special opportunities to buy discounted stock in both railway lines. Cotton from Bombay began to reach Odessa on ROPiT steamers, and from there it traveled on rails to Moscow for processing. The expansion of the company led to the construction of new buildings in Odessa. In 1874, the fleet reached 97 ships for a total of 92,650 tons.³² In the same year, a new charter was published.

In brief, ROPiT succeeded in its mission to enhance the commercial and political presence of Russia in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic. Russian-Ottoman contacts, in particular, led to the opening of a Russian bazaar in Constantinople. ROPiT even experimented with service to the Persian Gulf.

Despite the progress of the company and the railway, the 1870s was a challenging decade. The outbreak of revolt in the Balkans was bad for Russian trade, and the government's abrogation of the Black Sea Clauses of the Paris Peace

31 A descendant of the Luganskii factory was still in operation in 2014, specializing in cartridge manufacturing for the Ukrainian military. ROPiT also increased the number of well-trained engineers, some of whom found careers as naval specialists during the First World War and after. See, Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 62.

32 Illovaiskii, *Istoricheskii ocherk*, 135–150.

Conference, ironically, impinged upon ROPiT's activities. For example, in 1876, pursuant to the peace conference, the company was forced to sell 12 of its best ships to the government (for almost 400,000 rubles), thus reducing the size of the fleet to 79.³³

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable rise in Russian contacts in the Holy Land. Already in the 1830s, a significant number of Russian imperial subjects, mostly from educated and urban classes, embarked on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for personal and scholarly reasons.³⁴ The incidence of pilgrimage from other classes, including peasants, grew significantly after the Great Reforms in the 1860s, and especially after the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. The popularity of pilgrimage was in part as a consequence of increased social and legal mobility, and in part due to the improvements in transportation that ROPiT provided. Pilgrimages became an important Russian institution that served as a symbol of Russian nationalism, the profound spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the uncorrupted Russian peasantry. The state was willing to promote pilgrimages abroad since they helped bind the mystical union of the tsar with his people. Already in 1859, the government was releasing detailed information about hostels, guides, and other services available to prospective travelers.³⁵

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- 33 An interesting aspect the role of ROPiT in Russian state affairs consists of the company's participation in the Russian-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. Whereas the military aspects of the war have been explored in depth, the naval component of the Russian campaign remains neglected. When war broke out between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1877, Arkas organized the conversion of ships in the service of ROPiT into military vessels. Equipping the twelve light and four heavy steamships with artillery was easily accomplished. The navy also prepared twenty steam-powered paddle-wheeled vessels for transport. The successful naval encounters during the war owed much to the experienced staff and communications network established by ROPiT. Although the war brought a complete cessation of Black Sea commercial activity, under Arkas's leadership, the logistical lines to Russian armies in the Danube and Caucasus fronts remained uninterrupted. See K. Skal'kovskii, *Russkii torgovyi flot i srochnoe parakhodstvo na chernom i azovskom moriakhi* (St. Petersburg: A.S. Suvorina, 1887), 508–554; V. Chubinskii, *Ob uchastii moriakov v voine s Turtsieiu 1877–1878 gg.* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Morskago Ministerstva, 1899), 116–117; V.A. Zolotarev and I.A. Kozlov, *Rossiiskii voennyi flot na Chernom More i Vostochnom Sredizemnomor'e* (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 1989), 81, 89.
- 34 Izabela Kalinowska, *Between East and West: Polish and Russian Nineteenth-Century Travel to the Orient* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 104–142.
- 35 "Spem pozhertvovanii na ulushchenie byta pravoslavnykh poklonnikov v Palestine," *Morskoi sbornik* 41, no. 5 (May 1859): 257.

The expansion of pilgrimages enhanced Russia's role in the diplomatic and foreign policy of the Ottoman Near East. The increase of pilgrims led to the establishment of consulates, a special spiritual mission to Palestine, and the expansion of ROPiT facilities. In addition to its economic and political significance, the shipping company acquired a new social role: it helped sponsor Russian tourism.³⁶

In 1864, ROPiT began transporting Russians to Mount Athos, an activity that demanded Russian involvement in the development of the main port of Dafni on the Holy Mountain. The activities of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IPPO) and its former manifestations, which endeavored to construct churches and educational establishments in the Holy Places, increased the numbers of voyagers on ROPiT vessels.³⁷ Tsarist efforts in the 1860s to purchase and refurbish a church dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra (one of the most popular and beloved Orthodox saints) in Asia Minor, reflected both religious and political agendas.³⁸ ROPiT advertisements about pilgrimage routes to such locations appeared in Russian journals and newspapers, which also printed notes from travelers (such as the well-known diplomat, writer, and philosopher Konstantin N. Leont'ev [1831–1891]) about their experiences onboard the company's steamers.³⁹ Links to the Aegean led to a fresh influx of Greeks to Odessa, including some major merchant families, as well as sailors and educators. Some Greek immigrants became workers in the company yards, which employed more than 20,000 individuals in the early 1860s.⁴⁰ As the symbol of the Russian monarchy, two of the company's finest ships were present at the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869; in the next year the company inaugurated service between Russian ports and those of India and China. A vivid description

36 Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2002), 165–166.

37 Dmitrievskii, *Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo*; and Stavrou, *Russian Interests in Palestine*. For an analysis of the numbers of pilgrims, see V.N. Khitrovo, "Otkuda idut v Sviatuiu Zemliu russkie palomniki," in *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, ed. N.N. Lisovoi and L.V. Mel'nikova (Moscow: Imperatorskoe Pravoslavnoe Palestinskoe Obshchestvo; St. Petersburg, Izd-vo Olega Abyshko, 2011–2012), 2: 269–284; and Khitrovo, "Kakimi putiami idut russkie palomniki v Sv. Zemliu," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2: 285–300. Almost all Russian pilgrims (98.5%) traveled on ROPiT vessels. Khitrovo, "Kakimi putiami," 291.

38 Lora Gerd, *Konstantinopol' i Peterburg: tserkovnaia politika Rossii na pravoslavnom Vostoke, 1878–1898* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 360–395.

39 See, for example, K.N. Leont'ev, "S Dunaia," *Odesskii vestnik*, no. 201 (14 September 1867), no. 202 (16 September 1867), no. 223 (12 October 1867), no. 27 (6 February 1868), no. 67 (28 March 1868).

40 Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 63–64.

of the conditions, at this time, is contained in the travel notes of the Russian engraver, N.S. Molosov, who voyaged on a ROPiT vessel to the eastern Mediterranean, including Cairo, Porte Said, Jaffa and Jerusalem.⁴¹

The company's pilgrimage routes transported thousands of Russian Christians and Muslims to the Holy Land and Mecca during summer months. With government support, IPPO began producing *palomnicheskie knigi* (pilgrims' booklets) of coupons that verified pilgrims' fare for third class travel on ROPiT. Like many of today's company's, ROPiT encouraged business by offering prices, at a discount, for certain types of customers and trips:⁴²

- Round-trip tickets were sold at a 20% sale price
- Family tickets (at least 4 people) received a 10% discount
- Children from 2 to 10 years old paid half price

Also similar to today's transportation, people who purchased their tickets onboard paid a 10% extra surcharge, and there were strict rules regarding smoking and lights-on in cabins after 11:00 p.m. For pet lovers, tickets could be purchased at one-third the cost of individual passenger ticket. The company employee manual contained information on other topics, such as rules for stopovers, quarantine procedures, ticket exchange and refunds, types of luxury accommodations, gift certificates, and filing and managing complaints.

Several published pilgrimage accounts recorded the experience of travel onboard ROPiT vessels. A book by the military surgeon Aleksandr V. Eliseev (1858–1895), described the procedures associated with arranging a pilgrimage to Mount Athos and Palestine, as well as procedures and facilities associated with voyages from Odessa to Constantinople.⁴³ An article titled "Letters from the East," by Dmitrii D. Smyshliaev (1828–1893), appearing in the *Permskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti*, provided details about the ROPiT ship *Lazarev*.⁴⁴ An essay signed by the Russian observer, "Ierusalimskii putnik" (appearing in the newspaper, *Novoe vremia* in 1890 and titled "The Inconveniences of a Voyage to the Holy Land") offered valuable insight into what appear to be typical conditions. Highly critical of the company's organization onboard, the author, who joined on the passage at Jaffa after an enjoyable sojourn in Palestine and the Holy Places, argued that the crew treated Russian passengers shabbily, espe-

41 N.S. Mosolov, "Iz Kaira v Ierusalim. Piat' dnei iz putevogo dnevnika," *Russkii invalid*, no. 3 (4 January 1870), no. 4 (6 January 1870).

42 *Putevoditel' po Chernomu moriu 1899 g.* (Odessa: ROPT, 1899), 7–17.

43 A.V. Eliseev, *S russkimi palomnikami na Sviatoi Zemle vesnoi 1884 goda* (Ocherki, zametki i nabliudeniia) (St. Petersburg: Tip. Kirshbauma, 1885).

44 D.D. Smyshliaev, "Pis'ma s vostoka," *Permskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti* (1886) no. 8, 131–138; no. 9, 145–154; no. 12, 209–228; no. 13, 233–254; no. 21, 393–404; no. 22, 413–426.

cially in comparison with Turkish and Armenian voyagers. The traveler complained of the unsuitability of conditions for passengers in second class, and the horrible conditions among the third-class passengers, whose quarters were like prisons. The crew was singled out for its lack of leadership: "The captain never made an appearance on deck." Although originally all water services were advertised as free, the author lamented that passengers were forced to pay for hot and cold water, and no receptacles were provided for drinking tea. What's worse, the "putnik" accused the officers of skimming from the profits by preventing the supply of other necessary items. However, the author admitted that medical facilities were available on the ship. Overall, traveling with ROPiT was not recommended.⁴⁵

Detailed, equally critical appraisals appeared in four separate articles written by Leonid A. Korobov, a correspondent for *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti*. Korobov emphasized the need for greater control over Russian pilgrims in the Holy Land and of their bad behavior, including debauchery and drunkenness. He also described the appointment of Greeks as local ROPiT agents, resulting in indifferent service toward Russians.⁴⁶ In contrast, the Russian monk Neofit praised the work of ROPiT during his voyage from Odessa to Jaffa in 1912.⁴⁷

Western travelers also commented on the ROPiT experience. British traveler, liberal politician and author, R. Arthur Arnold (1833–1902), in his 1868 book *From the Levant*, detailed the challenges of purchasing tickets and passport control in Odessa, while sketching portraits of the people onboard, including "immensely fat" Russian bureaucrats, "ferret-eyed" officials, "little, ugly" Tatars, and a "stolid soldier, whose broad features and long, grey overcoat with green facings, recalled pictures of the hosts which formed our Crimean enemy." Whereas his description of passengers was less than flattering, Arnold praised the handsome cabins and the soup, caviar, and white Crimean wine served at dinner. In contrast, the staple food of the deck passengers "was the black bread of Russia, which is much like rich gingerbread in color, but in taste it is coarse, with a sour flavor."⁴⁸

45 "Neudobstva plavaniia v Sv. Zemliu," *Novoe vremia*, no. 5217 (7 September 1890).

46 "Rezultat bezprizornosti russkikh palomnikov v Palestine," *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti* [hereafter *SPVed*], no. 283 (1899); "Russkie v Palestine," *SPVed*, nos. 51, 87, 91 (1900); "Russkoe obshchestvo parokhodstva i trgovli," *SPVed*, no. 38 (1900); "Sovremennoe polozhenie Palestiny i Sirii," *SPVed*, nos. 191, 205, 212, 225, 262, 297, 329 (1899), nos. 11, 22 (1900).

47 "Ot Odessy do Iaffy i obratno," *Soobshcheniia Imperatorskogo pravoslavnogo palestinskogo obshchestva* (1913), no. 3, 355–373. See also, V.V. Tarasov, "Rossiia v Palestine. Iz vospominanii o puteshestvii v Sv. Zemliu," *Kolokol*, no. 1542 (21 May 1911); and "Russkoe pravoslavnoe delo v Palestine (Iz vospominanii o Sviatoi Zemle)," *Zemshchina*, no. 605 (2 April 1911).

48 Arnold, *From the Levant, the Black Sea, and the Danube*, 2: 161–166, 215.

In his 1861 account *Around the Black Sea*, the American journalist William Eleroy Curtis (1850–1911), related that the “passengers were a perfect babel, representing all the races and speaking all the tongues of the East, with several Europeans mixed in, each wearing his own peculiar costume.” As for the conditions in third class, the individuals “who occupy the open deck, make themselves as comfortable as possible with big bundles of rugs and blankets and pillows, which they spread out wherever the boatswain will let him Everybody except the women wore brilliant colors, and they were shut off from observation as much as possible by blankets pinned to the canvas awning so as to make screens.”⁴⁹ Each third-class passenger carried a basket of provisions, remarks Curtis, and a jug of water which they carried to a samovar under the control of an old man.

In the book, *With the Russian Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, published in 1913, Stephen Graham (1884–1975), a well-known specialist on Russian matters and an author of several popular works dedicated to Russian history, recorded his impressions of travelling on a Russian “pilgrim boat.”⁵⁰ Graham vividly detailed the experience onboard, with an emphasis on the religious passion of his companions: “The peasant pilgrims were everywhere. Four hundred were accommodated in the parts of the hold unoccupied by cargo. I went down the dark ladders into the bowels of the ship and saw how they lived there. I had not as yet found a place for myself and cold nights were in prospect. The hold was something never to be forgotten for the crush there, the darkness, the foulness, and the smell As far as eye could see looking into the dark depths of the hold were bundles and pilgrims, bundles and pilgrims to the last rat-gnawn timbers where were ikons and holy pictures before which gleamed little lighted candles.”⁵¹ Various pen-portraits of individuals accompany the description of the vessel’s slow journey from Constantinople to Jaffa, with stops at Mount Athos, Smyrna, and Alexandretta. The book provides palpable impressions of the rituals, celebrations, and everyday challenges of the voyagers; it retains its value as a source on popular piety in late tsarist Russia.⁵²

49 Curtis, *Around the Black Sea*, 3, 9–10.

50 The book was serialized in the *English Review* and *Harper’s Magazine*. On Stephen Graham, see Michael Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia: the Life and Times of Stephen Graham* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2014).

51 Graham, *With the Russian Pilgrims*, 34–35.

52 See, e.g., Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (London: Phoenix, 2011), 367, 387–388; Christine D. Worobec, “Miraculous Healings” in *Sacred Stories*, 42; Hughes, *Beyond Holy Russia*, 76.

Challenges characterized the final decades of ROPiT, although the burst in the number of pilgrims continued to stimulate the demand for voyages. Economic problems and the channeling of much-needed capital into other enterprises impeded expansion. (Part of the problem stemmed from the departure of Chikhachov, who was promoted to Minister of the Navy). Nevertheless, its progress and prosperity were by no means broken: in 1899, when the company boasted an income of 8.360 million rubles and expenses of 6.493 million rubles, each investor earned approximately 37 rubles. Its policies appeared to be successful, at least for the investors: in 1900, the company's revenues totaled 9,391,750 rubles, and its expenses totaled 7,417,750 rubles, providing each investor a 39 ruble dividend.⁵³ By 1901, according to American and British newspapers, ROPiT's fleet included 72 steamers; its vessels carried thousands of passengers; and its freights amounted to 67,654 gross tons.⁵⁴ On the eve of the First World War, ROPiT was engaged in further expansion. Throughout its last decades, ROPiT remained one of the largest companies on the Russian Stock Exchange. However, the unwillingness of investors to reinvest their dividends into company stock impeded the success of the company.

ROPiT's official proclamations and statistical tables published in nineteenth-century journals, such as *Ezhegodnik Ministerstva Finansov*, *Trudy Odeskogo statisticheskogo komiteta*, and the *Odesskii vestnik*, provide data on the volume of freight, expenditure, revenue, and types of goods exchanged. Based on the estimates of published sources, during the first fifty years of its existence (1856–1904), the company's ships sailed 36 million nautical miles, transported 30 million passengers and 1.870 billion puds (16.38 kilograms each pud) of cargo. It also maintained a profit: total income was 269 million rubles, and expenditures were 250 million rubles.⁵⁵

As a crucial link in the empire's communications system, ROPiT maintained postal offices throughout the Mediterranean and northern Europe. Hundreds of tons of domestic letters and packages were exchanged each year via ROPiT vessels. To a certain degree, the company served as the eyes and ears of an empire. Proving its significance, ROPiT survived the Russian Revolution of 1917 and remained in operation (under different names) until 1922. Its successor, the Black Sea Shipping Company, during Soviet times, held the title as the largest shipping company in the world.

53 Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 86–87.

54 "The Russian Mercantile Marine," *The New York Times* (22 December 1901).

55 Papoulides, *I Politiki tis Rosias*, 91.

The main object of ROPiT was obviously to create, under the guise of a commercial company, large fleets of government ships and transports in the neutral waters of the Black Sea. At the same time, by setting high tariffs, ROPiT imperial state managers aimed to prevent foreign competition.⁵⁶ Thus, its aim was to keep traffic in the entire region in Russian hands or under Russian surveillance. Moreover, as this essay has shown, ROPiT served as an important means of fostering Russian contacts within the larger Orthodox world. The company facilitated the interaction among the various peoples who resided, traded, and traveled in the Greek or Orthodox East: that expansive domain encompassing Eastern Orthodox lands and communities from the Neva to the Nile.

Through primary sources left by observers, especially those eyewitnesses who conveyed their experiences in a lively, interesting, and generally reliable manner, the study of ROPiT demonstrates the curiosity the Russian people had in the Holy Land. In addition, the experiences of the pilgrims, sailors, and workers involved illuminate a rare example of large-scale, quasi-private enterprise in imperial Russia. The alliance between imperial-state and private enterprise, during this time, may be considered a success, and, as a result, ROPiT made travel across the Orthodox world much more common.

In conclusion, the history of the Russian Company of Steam Navigation and Trade encompasses a wealth of newly available archival and manuscript documents on commerce, diplomacy, philanthropy, pilgrimage, piracy, education, culture, and more that await researchers poised to make their own discoveries.

56 Foreign observers recognized this immediately; see *The Bankers' Magazine and Statistical Register* 16 (1856), 731.