

IMPERIAL ORTHODOX PALESTINE SOCIETY



Past and Present
1882-2019



THE IMPERIAL ORTHODOX PALESTINE SOCIETY

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

IN 2005,

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

THE IOPS

has an extensive chapter network in Russia and abroad.

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

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



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



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



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

PRESERVING TRADITION: ETYMOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sergey Stepashin,
Current Chairman of the IOPS



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



Igor Ashurbeyli, Chairman of the Board
of the IOPS in Israel

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Easter breaking of the fast in the yard of the Sergievskoe compound of the IOPS in Jerusalem

Photo: F. M. Timon. Late 19th century



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

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

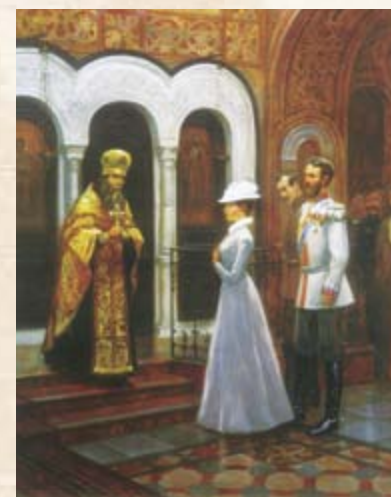
The Grand Duke was supported in his efforts by Vasily Nikolaevich Khitrovo, who initiated and organised the work of the IOPS and whose contribution to the Society is difficult to overestimate.

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

IOPS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



Oleg Peresyphkin, Chairman of the IOPS from 1989 until 2001

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

RUSSIAN HERITAGE IN THE HOLY LAND

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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



Main entrance of the Alexandrovskoe compound in Jerusalem. Modern image



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

KEY DATES

- 1859**
Foundation of the Palestine Committee
- 1864**
Committee becomes Palestine Commission
- 1882**
Foundation of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society
- May 1886**
Land plot acquired for construction
- October 1886**
Ceremonial laying of building foundation
- 20 October 1889**
Consecration of the Sergievskoe compound
- 1922**
British mandate begins. British Administration recognises the Society and becomes a protector of the OPS and the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission
- 1951**
M. P. Kalugin, authorised representative of the Russian Palestine Society arrives in Jerusalem from the Soviet Union. Kalugin's staff housed in the eastern section of the Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem up until the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967

RETURN TO THE HOLY LAND

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

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

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

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



Sergievskoe compound today.

Medal designed by Igor Ashurbeyli issued to commemorate re-opening of the Compound



Prayer service before the opening ceremony for the Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem

In the same year, for the first time in the Society's post-1917 history, the organisation appointed a IOPS Director in the Holy Land, with the position taken up by renowned industrialist, entrepreneur, philanthropist and public figure, Igor Ashurbeyli (IOPS Board Chairman as of July 2018).

He represents the IOPS in Israel and sees restoration of the Society's pre-revolution greatness and significance for Russia and the Orthodox world as one of his key goals.

The return of the Sergievskoe compound to Russia through the combined efforts of the Palestine Society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Administration played a key role in shaping the work of the IOPS Representative Office in Israel.

The Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem has a 130-year history. The land plot in the heart of Old Jerusalem was acquired in 1886, with construction overseen by Antonin Kapustin and completed three years later. The works were partly funded by the first Chairman of the IOPS, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich.

The Sergievskoe compound quickly became the centre of Russian life in the Holy Land. The Russian Empire managed its properties in Syria and Palestine from here and major religious figures stayed at the Sergievskoe compound on their pilgrimages and visits.

After the Russian Revolution, the Compound lost its special role for many years. In 2008, thanks to the involvement of President **Vladimir Putin**, the Building was officially transferred to the Russian Federation. This marked the starting point of a diligent effort to restore the facility over a period of years.

The Sergievskoe compound was officially opened on 18 July 2017, the saint day of Sergius of Radonezh.



*The opening ceremony for the Sergievskoe compound was led by **Sergey Stepashin**, Chairman of the IOPS, **Igor Ashurbeyli**, Chairman of the Board of the IOPS in Israel, **His Grace Anthony**, Bishop of Bogorodsky and **Ivan Serditov**, Acting Director of the IOPS in Israel Main Directorate for International Cooperation (RF Presidential Affairs Department)*

Prior to the opening ceremony, His Grace Anthony, Bishop of Bogorodsky consecrated the Compound together with Archimandrite Alexander (Elisov) of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission.

More than 150 guests attended the festive occasion from the clergy, Russian diplomatic corps, senior officials from Israeli ministries and departments, Knesset members, the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, representatives of charitable and public organisations, the country's technology and cultural elite and leading businesspeople.

Thanks to the dedication of Igor Ashurbeyli, IOPS Board Chairman in the Israel, the Compound is in constant use. Over the 2 years since its opening, the Compound has hosted a multitude of official and cultural events, including celebrations of the 170th anniversary of the foundation of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Victory Day and the Open Houses architecture festival.

In March 2018, the Compound was used as a polling station, allowing Russian citizens resident in Jerusalem to vote for Russian President. In June, the Compound was used to host a reception to mark Russia Day.

In July 2018, the Sergievskoe compound was used to host events commemorating 100 years since the death of the Holy Royal Martyrs.

Thanks to the work of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission and the IOPS Representative Office in Israel, the famous Antoninov readings have recommenced and a Sunday school is in operation.

The Pilgrims' refectory in the Sergievskoe compound is once again a meeting point for the Russian-speaking intelligentsia and the hotel welcomes pilgrims as it once did 130 years ago.

KEY DATES

17 October 1964

Orange Deal signed. The name "Orange Deal" comes from the fact that Israel paid in Jaffa oranges and textiles. The Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission building, the Sergievskoe compound and the Holy Trinity Cathedral were not sold

1967-2008

Complex negotiations over the return of the historic IOPS building to its rightful owners

April 2005

Vladimir Putin visits the Sergievskoe compound during a visit to Israel, thereafter dispatching two messages to the President of Israel requesting that the Compound is transferred to Russia

28 December 2008

Final decision to transfer the Sergievskoe compound to the Government of the Russian Federation

23 March 2011

Tenants partially vacate the Compound and the Compound is transferred to the Russian state

November 2011

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev allocates \$10 million for restoration of the Compound

17-22 August 2012

Israel's Environmental Protection Society vacates northern structures in the Sergievskoe compound

August 2012

Full scale reconstruction commences following the vacation of the northern structures

18 July 2017

Official opening of the Sergievskoe compound in Jerusalem



Igor Ashurbeyli (Chairman of the Board of the IOPS in Israel), Sofa Landver (Israel's Minister of Aliyah and Integration), O. Viktorova, Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel's Prime Minister) with his spouse and Anatoly Viktorov (Russia's Ambassador to Israel) at the diplomatic reception to celebrate Russia Day in Jerusalem. June 2018



Performance by Svetlana Bendikova (soprano), Winner of Israeli State Awards, in the Sergievskoe compound. March 2019

The Compound is home to a guide club, a museum, a library of Russian literature, a large shop for Orthodox icons, jewellery and souvenirs, as well as a restaurant. Monthly classical music concerts, exhibitions and other events are hosted here. Plans for the near future include the opening of an office centre with the consular department of the Russian Embassy as one of the tenants.

In 2017, the “Sergievskoe compound: Past, History and the Future” monograph was published.

The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society's scholarly work is ongoing. Today, the IOPS is engaged in a crucial publishing project: preparing and publishing the “Russia in the Holy Land” documentary series, starting with a three-volume publication of documents and materials from Russian and foreign archives detailing the history of Russia's presence in the region, prepared by the Deputy Chairman of the IOPS, a leading Holy Land and Russia-Palestine historian, Chief Researcher at the Russian History Institute under the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of History, Nikolay Nikolaevich Lisovoy.

The next three volumes, which are already in development, will make up the Russian Palestine Encyclopaedia, with the series later completed with a gift album called “The Treasures of Russian Palestine”.

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

Efforts are continuing to recover other sites in the Holy Land formerly held by the Russian Empire. This mission is pursued in close cooperation with the Jerusalem, Nazareth and Haifa municipal authorities.



Russian buildings in Jerusalem, a bird's eye view

1 – Consulate;

2 – Russian Hospital;

3 – Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission;

4 – Mariinskoe compound;

5 – Holy Trinity Cathedral;

6 – Elizavetinskoe compound;

7 – Nikolaevskoe compound;

8 – Sergievskoe compound

THE BOOKLET WAS PREPARED USING THE WORKS OF

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

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Photographs from the archives of the IOPS and the SOCIUM-A

