



Religious Art Transfer as an Instrument of 'Soft' Political Power during War: Russian Donations to Orthodox Communities in the Ottoman Empire

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ABSTRACT

The support and consolidation of Orthodox communities within the Ottoman Empire was an essential component of the Russian Empire's policy in the Balkans in the period between the 18th and the early 20th centuries. The emphasis on the common Orthodox identity of Russians and Orthodox Christians and Russia's role as their protector formed the ideological background of this policy.

One of the research objectives of the RICONTRANS project was to study the implementation of this patronage policy and art transfers during the numerous Russo-Turkish wars of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The study of the written and material sources (liturgical utensils, books, icons) in Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania shows that during the 18th and 19th c. Russo-Ottoman Wars, three categories of art donations were sent from Russia to the Balkans:

a) official gifts provided by state/church institutions; b) private offerings made by warriors or the clergy; c) foundation and equipment of memorial churches in honor of the fallen Russian soldiers in the war of 1877-1878.

Their analysis shows that they functioned not only as objects of worship, but also as 'tools' of soft political power, representing one of the many 'invisible' aspects of war in the modern era.