

The Wandering Orthodox Nuns: Religion and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century Central Balkans

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Interest in Balkan monasticism, until recently, was framed within nineteenth-century Romantic nationalism. Most Balkan historiographies eulogized monks' role in preserving and sparking a latent national identity, in a teleological fashion, with particular focus on the "national-spiritual forefathers."¹ Since the collapse of state socialism, scholarly attention towards monastics and monasteries has expanded, but the topic of the roles of nineteenth-century Orthodox nuns is still obscure.² This article, therefore, attempts to rescue this neglected group from historiographic oblivion. Instead of applying a nationalist lens, it explores how nuns' mobility contributed to negotiating space for gender. The study discusses a specific type of religious travel—not pious pilgrimage to the Holy Lands—but more mundane trips performed by Eastern Orthodox sisters to beg for donations within and between three multi-confessional empires (Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian). It also raises the following set of questions: What factors stimulated the nuns to travel? To what networks did they belong, both locally and transnationally? How did gender affect such social arrangements? What were the wider economic, social, and cultural impacts of such mobility?

I position nuns' experience within a complex transnational picture: their movements "into the world" were marked by larger changes brought about by imperialism, nationalism, state (and ecclesiastical) centralism, and religious revivalism, in tandem with expansion of nineteenth-century communications and travel.³ Moreover, such spatial and social mobility was embedded within global and local patriarchal regimes. A study of the tension between these two forces sheds fresh light on the nuns' social engagement, and is better understood by combining mobility and gender as categories of analysis. While gender, according to Joan W. Scott, is a "field within which or by means of which power is articulated," mobility, according to Tim Cresswell, is also

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1. The examples include but are not limited to Paisius of Hilendar, Jovan Rajić, Dositej Obradović, Gheorghe Sincai. For a critique, see Carole Rogel, "The Wandering Monk and the Balkan National Awakening," in William Haddad and William Ochsenwald, eds., *Nationalism in a Non-National State. The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire* (Columbus, 1977), 82–83.

2. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, convents are often called monasteries. I will use both terms interchangeably. The Orthodox terms for nun are: *kalogria*, *kalugerka*, *kaluderica*, *inokinia*, and *monakhinia*. For convenience, I will also use nun and sister interchangeably.

3. Christopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004); and Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, 2014).

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“imbued with meaning and power.”⁴ Both are socially-structured relationships converging around power. Furthermore, the physical and social space wherein such interactions transpire is not neutral, but can also be instrumentalized by social actors in various ways.⁵ I argue that through travel and the use of traditional form of alms collection, nuns joined various social networks of power that provided opportunities for gender empowerment. For example, sisters’ involvement in local communities and in the establishment of schools for girls, which evidences worldly as well as pious concerns, resonated with the broader nineteenth-century trend of expanding women’s education and resulted in greater attainment of social and economic agency.⁶

Review of the process of alms collection involved various mediators: consuls, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, teachers, and ecclesiastical representatives. As recent research has advocated, rather than separating religious from secular civil society, a better approach would be to “integrate their histories.”⁷ Such engagement with state, church, and local authorities indicates women played more active roles, both religious and secular, than previously thought. The complexity of these social networks and the versatility with which the Orthodox nuns navigated them defies labels of illiteracy placed on them. While monks were ridiculed at least since Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, such constructs gained currency in the Ottoman Balkans during the nineteenth century. And they were not gender-neutral ideas. Contemporaries’ motivations for conjuring up negative representations, as will be discussed later, were shaped by both the internationalization of Enlightenment anticlericalism and notions of progress and by the prevalent patriarchal norms. It is precisely the fact that nuns possessed a level of literacy (unlike the majority of population) and economic agency that made them targets of disapproval.

Unlike numerous studies on Catholic female orders and nunneries, the topic of Orthodox convents in the Balkans seems to have eluded researchers’ attention. While there are works on monasteries established by Byzantine and Slavic medieval aristocracies and other studies about contemporary female monasticism, the nineteenth-century nuns are almost missing from

4. Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in Joan Wallach Scott, ed., *Feminism and History* (Oxford, 1996), 169; and Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York, 2006), 4.

5. Gérard Chastagnaret and Olivier Raveux, “Espace et stratégies industrielles aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles: Exploiter le laboratoire méditerranéen,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 48, no. 2/3 (2001): 18–20.

6. On the issue of “relative synchronicity of eastern and western Europe within a *longue durée* framework,” see Maria Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 147; and Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, “Women’s and Gender History,” in Irina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimó, eds., *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700* (London, 2017), 278–322.

7. Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, “Introduction,” in Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious Internationals in the Modern World. Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (New York, 2012), 15–17.

publications on ecclesiastical history.⁸ The reasons for such a lacuna are several, including the absence of a memoir/diary writing tradition among Orthodox nuns; paucity and fragmentation of sources about non-elite women in general and in convents in particular; small demographic presence; and destruction of several artifacts and entire convents due to wars.⁹ Furthermore,

8. There is a voluminous literature on Eastern Orthodox Christianity. See, for example, Michael Angold, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5, *Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge, Eng., 2006); Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1997); Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in Culture and Political Thought of South-East Europe* (Aldershot, Eng., 1994); Lucian Leustean, ed., *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe* (New York, 2014). On the Ecumenical Patriarchate, see Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, Eng., 1968); and Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *Metarrythmisi kai ekkosmikivsi: Pros mia anasynthesi tis istorias tou Oikoumenikou Patriarcheiou ton 190 aiona* (Athens, 2003). On separate countries, see Theodore Papadopoulos, *Studies and Documents Relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, Eng., 1990); Paul Pavlovich, *The History of the Serbian Orthodox Church* (Toronto, 1989); and Olga Todorova, *Pravoslavnata tsürkva i búlgarite, XV-XVIII vek* (Sofia, 1997).

9. I had difficulties in locating research on Orthodox nuns in the nineteenth-century Balkans. General histories barely mentioned them. As far as there are studies, the majority of them are focused on contemporary expressions of religiosity. See, for example, Ines Angeli Murzaku, ed., *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics* (London, 2016). On Greece and Cyprus, see Marina Iossifides, “Sisters in Christ: Metaphors of Kinship Among Greek Nuns,” in Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis, eds., *Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece* (Princeton, 1991), 135–55; Kostis Kokkinoftas, “O gynaikeios monachismos stin Kypro,” *Politistiki Kypros. Miniaio periodiko kypriakou politismou* 2 (February 1997): 52–60. On Serbia, see Milojko Veselinović, “Srpske kaludericе,” reprint *Glasa srpske kraljevske akademije* LXXX (1909), 155–235; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Women Monastics in Orthodox Christianity: The Case of the Serbian Orthodox Church,” NCEEER, at www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2003_816_20_BakicHayden.pdf (accessed January 14, 2020); Dragana Zaharijevska and Danijela Gavrilović, “Female Monasticism in the SOC—the Example of the Lipovac Monastery,” *Facta Universitatis – Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History* 15, no. 3 (2016): 119–26; on the post-WWI period see Radmila Radić, “Monasticism in Serbia in the Modern Period: Development, Influence, Importance,” in Ines Angeli Murzaku ed., *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics* (London, 2016), 201–10. On Bulgaria, see Kostadinka Paskaleva, “Küm istoriata na zhenskoto monashestvo v búlgaria,” in *Sbornik statii i studii 1967–2011* (Sofia, 2011): 327–56; Aksinia Dzhurova et al., eds., *Devicheskii manastir “Pokrov Presvitiia Bogoroditsi” v Samokov* (Sofia, 2002); Valentina Drumeva, *Monashestvoto po búlgarskite zemi (Kratko izsledvane vüz osnova na istoricheski i arheologicheski prouchvania)* (Holy Monastery of Zografos, Mt. Athos, 2006); Valentina Drumeva, *Devicheskii manastir “Sv.Vüvedenie Bogorodichno” i metosite v Kalofer* (Sofia, 1998); Antoaneta Kirilova, “Devicheskii manastir ‘Vüvedenie Bogorodichno’ v Kazanük prez Vüzrazhdaneto (Küm edna ideia za otkrivane na uchilishte v manastira),” *Minalo: Quarterly of History* 19, no. 4 (2012): 28–42; and Biliana Karadakova, “Devicheskite manastiri v búlgarskite zemi XVIII–nachaloto na XIX vek” (PhD diss., Iugozapaden Universitet Blagoevgrad, 2015). On North Macedonia, see Ruzica Cacanovska, “Female Monasticism in the Border Line (Monastery of Saint Archangel Michael—Berovo),” *Facta Universitatis – Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History* 15, no. 3 (2016): 103–18.

most Balkan nation-states curbed both male and female monasteries.¹⁰ Such reduced monastic presence in the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman Balkans was in contrast to Russia, which exhibited a rapid expansion of women's monastic communities in the nineteenth century. This surge of female monasticism is well documented and analyzed in specialized research.¹¹

This article thus seeks to add voices of less-known Balkan actors to the European chorus and to examine how nuns' long-distance mobility and resourcefulness were mutually constitutive and furthered their local involvement in schooling and boosting women's visibility. Three examples from the central Balkans: the convents in Kalofer, Kazanlük, and Gabrovo, all located in present-day Bulgaria, serve as guides into the exploration of concrete manifestations of broader social phenomena. Archival sources reveal a well-designed strategy of alms collections abroad, mostly in Russia, Serbia, and the Orthodox parts of the Habsburg Empire. Parallels (whenever possible) to Serbian and Greek Orthodox sisters rely heavily on secondary sources. While women in the nineteenth century were not so mobile, nuns seem to have circumvented such limitations. They were an exception in other respects as well: the literacy level of many sisters allowed them to communicate well with various institutions, both religious and secular, including the Russian Tsar and Tsarina. In order to provide some context, the following sections will trace Byzantine female monasticism and early modern Orthodox monks' *taxides* (travels).

Female Byzantine Monastic Legacy

In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, no monastic orders existed and each monastery had its own rules of conduct (*typikon*), usually delineated at its foundation. Generally, *typikon* regulated both liturgical and disciplinary order in the monastery. In Byzantium, of forty extant *typika* only five were written for women's monasteries by women authors, who, not surprisingly, belonged to the aristocracy.¹² All of them emphasized that monastery life

10. In Greece, in 1833, there were around 563 monasteries and *metochia*: 545 male and eighteen female, but in 1834 the Regency dissolved 412 of them. The presence of at least thirty nuns was required for a convent to exist, and so only four survived in 1858; they increased to ten by 1907. Similarly, in 1909, Bulgaria had twelve convents with 346 nuns compared to seventy-eight monasteries with 184 monks. Dimitris Stamatopoulos, "The Orthodox Church of Greece," in Lucian Leustean ed., *Orthodox Christianity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Southeastern Europe* (New York, 2014), 41–42, 217; Georgios Metallinos, "O Elladikos monachismos ton 190 aiona," at www.oodegr.com/oode/istoria/ekklisia/ellad_monax_19_ai_1.htm (accessed July 18, 2020); and Jordan Kolev, "The Bulgarian Exarchate as a National Institution and the Position of the Clergy (1878–1912)," *Etudes Balkaniques*, no. 2 (1991): 45.

11. O.V. Kirichenko, *Zhenskoe pravoslavnoe podvizhnichestvo v Rossii: XIX–seredina XX veka* (Moscow, 2010); Brenda Meehan-Waters, "Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov) and the Reform of the Russian Women's Monastic Communities," *The Russian Review* 50, no. 3 (July 1991): 310–23; and Adele Lindenmeyr, "Public Life, Private Virtues: Women in Russian Charity, 1762–1914," *Signs* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 562–91.

12. This section is based mostly on Galatariotou's research. Catia Galatariotou, "Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities: the Evidence of the 'Typika,'" *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 38 (1988): 263–90; Catia Galatariotou "Byzantine

was to be *coenobitic* (communal life encompassing eating, drinking, praying, sleeping, and working), based on equality and spiritual sisterhood, under the rule of an elected mother superior/abbess (*hegoumeni*). Since the founders were members of high nobility, the typikon established a strict hierarchical system of governance: abbess, great or angelic schema nuns, lesser schema nuns, nuns, and novices, with age, and in some cases literacy, requirements. This division was based on the type of oath and social origin of the sisters. In addition, they were divided in two groups: labor and church nuns, the latter coming from a higher social stratum and maintaining a more comfortable life.

The founding aristocrat not only endowed a substantial amount of property but also provided considerable privileges for herself, such as having a separate cell, freedom to eat and drink, servants, and the right to be visited by men. Preservation of private possessions and divisions, though, is typical for *idiorrhhythmic* (non-communal) monasticism. Additionally, economic control remained in the hands of the founder's family: the appointment of an *ephoros* (trustee), often a lay person with power to control the election of *hegoumeni*, and an *oikonomos* (supervisor of the properties and accounts). All these exceptions were noticeably subverting the coenobitic and cloister ideals, a situation that continued into the nineteenth century.¹³ Furthermore, on certain days, they invited priests or hieromonks to perform the liturgy. Some convents also had a spiritual father (*geron*, *dukhovnik*, *starets*). Thus, the subsequent involvement of outside clerical and secular institutions in the convent's functioning was ensured from the models set in Byzantium between the early twelfth and mid-fourteenth centuries.

Following the same tradition, the ruling class in Serbia and Bulgaria founded medieval monasteries. The oldest known typikon, translated into Slavic language in the tenth century, was created by Theodore the Studite, and served as a general prototype. It seems that for women's monasteries the typikon of Kecharitomeni, which in itself was probably based on some lost archetype, was the most common model. As in Byzantium, the female aristocratic tradition of retiring to a monastery continued throughout the medieval period. The example of the first Serbian nun Theodora (Princess Kosara), the widow of the martyred Prince Vladimir, was followed by other women. In similar vein, the mother of the Bulgarian Tsar John Alexander and his first wife also became nuns.¹⁴

During the Ottoman period, throughout the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, women's monasteries in Serbia decreased but some 650 nuns still

Ktetorika Typika: A Comparative Study," *Revue des études byzantines* 45 (1987): 77–138. See also Angeliki Laiou, "Observation on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 9 (1985): 59–102; and Alexander Riehle, "Authorship and Gender (and) Identity: Women's Writing in the Middle Byzantine Period," in Aglae Pizzone, ed., *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature: Modes, Functions, and Identities* (Berlin, 2014), 245–62.

13. For example, the typikon of the Samokov convent (1871) stated that it was founded as *idiorrhhythmic* monastery around 1771. Aksinia Dzhurova, "Zastüpnichestvoto na svetiite," in *Devicheskiiat manastir "Pokrov Presviatiia Bogoroditsi" v Samokov*, 19.

14. Sashka Georgieva, "Model i deistvitelnost v asketichnia zhivot na zhenite v srednovekovna Bülgaria," *Ricerche slavistiche* 41 (1994): 105–20; Veselinović, "Srpske kaluderice," 169–72; and K. Paskaleva, "Küm istoriata," 328–32.

remained. Marginal notes reveal the existence of a few scattered nuns whose work consisted mostly of copying manuscripts. In the mid-eighteenth century, there is evidence of only two convents (in Požarevac and Jazak) with a decline in the number of sisters and diminished education. For instance, in Jazak (1753) there were thirteen nuns, of whom only one was literate. By the end of the century even these disappeared.¹⁵ Other seventeenth century sources disclose that the hegoumeni of a monastery in Athens, a certain Leontia, went to the island of Zakynthos (accompanied by another nun) to collect alms. Special permits also show that the sisters traveled for donations to Nafplion (Peloponnese). Similar short-distance trips took nuns from a convent in Kefalonia.¹⁶ Female monasticism began to re-emerge mostly as a grass-root initiative with pious women asking bishops to tonsure them. Consequently, the late eighteenth century saw the existence of dispersed nuns, communities of mixed monks and sisters, and family communities often located close to male monasteries, a practice that continued throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Noting this proximity may help shed light on the impact of monks' travel tradition on the mobility of nuns, which will be discussed in the next section.

Male Monastic Travel Models

The richest monasteries, particularly the ones located on Mount Athos, had an annex (*metochion*) and needed keepers to take care of those distant properties.¹⁸ These monks, called *taxidiotes*, travelled around the Balkans throughout the Ottoman period not only to maintain these properties but also to collect alms and attract pilgrims.¹⁹ This was an important compensatory mechanism of the church to overcome its deficit finances and cadres, and gradually these travels expanded to places further afield. For instance, since in the fifteenth century some Greek monks and high prelates from the Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem ventured into western Europe: Venice, England, and Spain.²⁰ Nevertheless, this direction was not prevalent and the majority of Balkan monastics sought support in Russia, often through Wallachia and Moldavia.

15. Dimitrije Ruvarac, ed., *Opis srpskih fruškogorskih manastira 1753 god.* (Sremski Karlovci, 1903), 97–104; Veselinović, "Srpske kaluđerice," 208–20; In Cyprus, too, women's monasteries disappeared after the Ottoman invasion and nuns were scattered. Kokkinoftas, "O gynaikeios monachismos," 54–55.

16. Eleni Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, "To fainomeno tis ziteias kata ti metabyzantini periodo," *Ionios Logos. Tmima istorias—Ionio panepistimio A'* (2007): 273–74.

17. For example, the Russian traveler M. Karlova (1868) described such a situation in the village of Rila wherein around 60 nuns lived in a few homes around the church. M. Karlova, "Turetskaia provintsia i eia sel'skaia i gorodskaia zhizn'. Puteshestvie po Makedonii i Albanii," *Vestnik Evropy* 4, 5 (1870): 155; O. Todorova, *Pravoslavna tsürkva*, 141; and Veselinović, "Srpske kaluđerice," 221–28.

18. There is a substantial literature on individual monasteries and monastic life. More recently, there is an increased interest in the economics of monastic life. See, for example, Elias Kolovos, ed., *Monastiria, oikonomia kai politiki. Apo tous mesaionikous stous neoterous chronous* (Hrackleio, 2011).

19. Ivan Radev, *Taksidiotstvo i taksidioti po bülgarskite zemi prez XVIII–XIX vek* (Sofia, 2008): 5–42; Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, "To fainomeno tis ziteias," 247–93.

20. Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, "To fainomeno tis ziteias," 261, 267.

As early as the sixteenth century, Serbian monks began traveling to Moscow to beg for donations. The Uspenski monastery in Belgrade was among the pioneers; Papraća (Bosnia) and Hilendar (Mount Athos) followed suit and sent representatives in the 1550s, although such trips were rare. Gradually, the tradition of taxid (travel) expanded and many taxidiotes were sent to Russia by the bigger monasteries. Two simultaneous events had an impact on such mobility: the victory of Ivan the Terrible over the Kazan' and Astrakhan khanates (1569) and Sultan Selim III's confiscations (1568–69) of monasteries' landed property in the Ottoman Empire. The latter ended the monasteries' economic prosperity and pushed them to seek financial support in Russia, especially after the establishment of the Russian patriarchate in 1589.²¹

Such taxides became more regular after the 1620s; especially active were some of the monasteries located at Fruška gora (Serbia). Monks traveled in groups of three or four, accompanied by their servants. Once at the borders, they were not always allowed to collect alms in the rest of Russia. Moreover, they were punished if they came with appeals in which the tsar was not addressed as “autocrat” (*samoderzhets*). With time the address became lengthy and excessive in flattery.²² Balkan nuns adopted this mode of address. For example, in 1849, Eftimia, a nun and a teacher and her forty female students thanked Tsar Nicholas I, the “*Samoderzhavnii Tsar vsia Rossiia*,” for his support of their school in Veles (North Macedonia).²³ An additional model of traveling abroad that influenced the Balkan sisters most probably derived from the women's convents in Belorussia. The latter, around the 1650s and afterwards, also began to send nuns on regular trips for alms to Russia. Some of them, like the monastery of Kutejno, were allowed to make two trips annually because they described themselves as religiously oppressed.²⁴ In the next section, I will depict the alms collection strategies of their Balkan counterparts who began such practices in the nineteenth century.

Nuns on the Road: The Convents in Kalofer, Kazanlük, and Gabrovo

By the late nineteenth century, women's physical mobility in the Balkans was still quite limited with the exception of some teachers, pilgrims, merchants' wives, and the spouses of new professionals such as engineers and doctors. Orthodox nuns were among the few peripatetic female groups whose trips were socially acceptable. Sisters' movements were often determined by economic purposes; especially cloth production and collection of alms for education, charity, and livelihood.

As mentioned, the nineteenth century was marked by an impressive growth in Orthodox female monasticism in Russia as part of a broader

21. O. Todorova, *Pravoslavnata tsürkva*, 132–33; Elizabeth Zachariadou, “Mount Athos and the Ottomans c.1350–1550,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, Eng. 2006): 166–68.

22. Rogel, “The Wandering Monk,” 84–89.

23. Bülğarski istoricheski arkhiv pri Natsionalna biblioteka “Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodii” (hereafter BIA-NBKM), IIA 5332, 1–3.

24. Sophia Senyk, “Women's Monasteries in Ukraine and Belorussia to the Period of Suppressions,” *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 222 (1983): 78–79.

“feminization of European religion.”²⁵ By the 1820s, the women’s monasteries throughout Russia followed an idiorhythmic model, meaning the convents were “relatively unstructured, uncloistered, and pliant on the question of property.”²⁶ Upon entering the monastery, sisters would buy or build a cell, which was considered their own property. As O.V. Kirichenko has argued, this was not only a mass religious but also a socio-cultural movement representing all social strata, predominantly peasants. As could be expected, the high clergy supported it and women’s religious communities were gradually transformed into coenobitic monasteries.²⁷ Such a shift was not an exception, as the nineteenth century saw a move towards “ecclesiastical centralization” across the world.²⁸

By contrast, the Ottoman Balkans offered women’s monasteries less potential for growth but a high level of autonomy and physical mobility (Catholic observance of enclosure and *stabilitas loci*, or remaining in one place, was not strictly applied in that period).²⁹ The expansion in Russia, however, had direct and indirect impact on female monasticism in the Balkans. A note is in order here: primary sources often called convents *metochs*.³⁰ Although the metochs were legally dependent on the bigger monasteries, women’s convents, which are described below, were independent of local metropolitans, bigger male monasteries, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.³¹ In general, most convents’ organization followed the Byzantine model, adjusted as the support of nobility disappeared during the Ottoman period, and adopted some Russian practices.

There were four metochs located within Kalofer (Plovdiv region), a small but prosperous mountainous village specializing in animal husbandry and related products, such as *aba* and *şayak* (types of woolen cloth). It is, therefore, not surprising that this settlement had four convents and one male monastery. The early generation of nuns received their education in Russia, mainly in Kiev and its surroundings.³² Most of them kept their strong

25. Simon Dixon, “Nationalism versus Internationalism: Russian Orthodoxy in Nineteenth-Century Palestine,” in Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious Internationalism in the Modern World: Globalization and Faith Communities since 1750* (New York, 2012), 152. While the number of Russian monks rose from 5,122 to 7,189 between 1840 and 1890, female numbers jumped from 2,287 to 7,306 for the same period. Ivan Preobrazhenskii, ed., *Otechestvennaia tserkov’ po statisticheskim dannym s 1840–41 po 1890–91 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1897), 15.

26. Meehan-Waters, “Metropolitan Filaret,” 311.

27. Kirichenko, *Zhenskoe pravoslavnoe podvizhnichestvo*, 13–17, 88–96; Meehan-Waters, “Metropolitan Filaret,” 322.

28. Bayly, *The Birth*, 338–43.

29. Kanitz corroborates that “claustration” was not as severe as among Catholics. Felix Kanitz, *La Bulgarie Danubienne et le Balkan. Études de voyage (1860–1880)* (Paris, 1882), 168.

30. *Metoch* (Bulgarian) derives from the Greek *metochion* (*metochia* in plural); it is a term with multiple meanings. It could be a small monastery or landholding and other property that belongs to a bigger and distant monastery. The term often designates small convents.

31. Drumeva, *Monashestvoto*, 330.

32. Nikolai Zhechev, “Kievi bŭlgarskoto devichesko obrazovanie prez Vŭzrazhdaneto,” *Istoricheski pregled* 3 (1992): 58–59; Senyk, “Women’s Monasteries,” 138, 185.

connections with Russian convents. Many sisters brought back a lot of Russian books and opened schools in different localities. Around the 1870s, there were approximately 160 nuns in the four female monasteries. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78, the metochs in Kalofer were destroyed, and in 1881 the remaining sisters and properties were merged in one female monastery.³³

The oldest convent, “Nativity,” was built around 1730, it was called the “Lower Metoch.” It grew out of a monastic community that emerged at least fifteen years earlier. It received land on which a few cells were built, a donation from the father of one of the nuns. As could be expected, his daughter became the first hegoumeni. Between the cells, a small church was erected, which was rebuilt in 1868–69, mostly with alms contributions.³⁴

The second convent, “Presentation,” called the “Upper Metoch,” was set up around 1738 by the same community of nuns that organized the Lower Metoch; namely, a few of them moved out. The brother of one of the nuns built a few cells and a little church. Again, his sister became the first hegoumeni. Although the Upper Metoch was destroyed twice at the turn of the eighteenth century, during its nadir in the mid-nineteenth century, it had around 85–90 nuns. It was known for its educated nun-teachers and became the richest of Kalofer’s four convents, owning fields, gardens, and a water mill.³⁵ Similarly, its church was rebuilt in 1862 with some Russian financial aid. Russian influence was especially evident in their Russian-type garments, which the nuns wore until 1947.³⁶

The increased crowding from the larger number of sisters probably led to some of them moving out and establishing the third metoch in Kalofer, which was called “Holy Trinity.” It was small and had only three nuns in the 1870s. Kalofer’s fourth convent was known as the “Little Metoch,” with just a house and a church. Again, it had only 3–4 nuns in the 1870s, but also owned fields and pastures.³⁷

Another convent established in 1828 in the neighboring village of Kazanlŭk (Plovdiv region) was also called “Presentation” after the Upper Metoch in Kalofer because the first nun, Sosana, was tonsured there.³⁸ It began with a religious community located in the home of a local merchant and gradually expanded in numbers and ambition. The sisters wanted to build a church, which was completed in 1866, and a few years later a school for girls was added. To this end, they needed Ottoman authorization and permits in Russia and Serbia for alms collection. Thus, in 1862, they addressed two Bulgarian representatives in Constantinople to get a *ferman* (imperial decree) from the High Porte.³⁹ They were also successful in obtaining the Russian permission.

33. Nikola Nachov, *Kalofer v minaloto* (Sofia, 1990), 171.

34. Drumeva, *Devicheskiat manastir*, 23–24.

35. Khristo Gandev, “Predania za dva bŭlgarski manastira,” *Izvestia na istoricheskoto druzhestvo XIX–XX* (1944), 171–75.

36. Drumeva, *Devicheskiat manastir*, 24–35.

37. Nachov, *Kalofer*, 178.

38. Kirilova, “Devicheskiat manastir,” 28.

39. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 6366. Building churches was generally prohibited but often the repair of old ones was possible. Yet there was a long and complex procedure for getting a permit, including proof of its “oldness”; other limitations included the height

The last convent under consideration, “Annunciation,” was founded in the village of Gabrovo in 1836. The initiative belonged to Archimandrite Iosif Sokolski, who was *hegoumenos* in the male Kalofer’s monastery earlier, and sent two girls from Gabrovo to be tonsured in Kalofer’s Lower Metoch (1830). When they returned, they received a donation from a local notable (*çorbaci*) and built cells and a church.⁴⁰ Sokolski, who lived in Russia in the 1860s, continued to guide the sisters. In two letters from 1862 and 1863, he recommended they work hard, avoid contacts with lay women and peasants, and stay in the convent. Sokolski also sent them four booklets with (Russian) rules about tonsuring nuns.⁴¹ It seems that that the archimandrite was trying to “discipline” the peripatetic nuns by transferring rules from the Russian convents, which were already subjected to the Synod’s monitoring.

The starting point for the Russian permit, unlike the early taxidiotes, was the Russian consular system in the Ottoman Empire. The consular organization in “Turkey-in Europe” was expanded in the mid-nineteenth century, and consuls of the two rivals—Austria-Hungary and Russia—were involved locally by executing social policy initiatives, such as support for schools, churches, and hospitals. The Habsburg Foreign Ministry began hiring consuls with knowledge of local languages.⁴² Russia’s Asiatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even dispatched Bulgarians who studied in Russia. Such was the case with Naiden Gerov, who started his service in 1857 as vice-consul in Plovdiv. The extension of consuls’ networks and prerogatives also speak to the shift in Russian policy after the Crimean War (1853–56) toward favoring Slavic cultural and religious initiatives in the Balkans.⁴³

The next step of nuns’ interactions with the bureaucracy was the Synod’s authorization, with the requirement to have a bound book to record each name and donation; the time was limited to one or two years with possible renewal in a few years. It is within this context that the abovementioned vice-consul Gerov became a vital figure not only in attaining approval but also in transmitting paperwork, money, books, icons, and church silver plates (*utvar*). Indeed, the sisters’ trips for alms collection in Russia benefitted from the intermix of both Russian traditional coreligionist support and its

of the building and the bell towers. The steps required three types of permits: one by the Sultan for allowing an inspection in situ, another by the local *kadi* (Muslim judge) for details about the building, and a third by the imperial council for carrying out the repair. Rossitsa Gradeva, “From the Bottom Up and Back Again until Who Knows When: Church Restoration Procedures in the Ottoman Empire, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Centuries (Preliminary Notes),” in Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., *Political Initiatives ‘From the Bottom Up’ in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII* (Rethymno, 2012), 149–51, 160–161.

40. Petür Tsonchev, *Iz obshtestvenoto i kulturno minalo na Gabrovo. Istoricheski prinos* (Veliko Tŭrnovo, 1996), 256–57.

41. Dŭrzhaven Arkhiv Gabrovo (hereafter DA-Gabrovo), 669k, op. 1, a.e. 1, 29.

42. V. M. Khevrolina, “Doneseniia rossiiskikh konsulov v Bosnii i Gertsegovine kak istochnik po istorii ikh diplomaticheskoi deiatel’nosti (1856–1874),” in V. M. Khevrolina, I. S. Rybanchok, G. A. Kuznetsova, eds., *Vneshniaia politika Rossii. Istochniki i istoriografiia. Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1991), 45, 57; Holly Case, “The Quiet Revolution: Consuls and the International System in 19th Century,” in Timothy Snyder and Katherine Younger, eds., *Balkans as Europe, 1821–1914* (Rochester, 2018), 111–18.

43. S. A. Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety v Rossii v 1858–1876 godakh* (Moscow, 1960), 27; Maria Todorova, *Anglia, Russia i Tanzimatŭt* (Sofia, 1980), 126–43.

expanding cultural and political aspirations to unite the Slav brethren under foreign domination.

In sum, three aspects are worth mentioning: first, the involvement of rich local merchants, often relatives, in establishing a convent's material basis. In the medieval period, sponsorship derived from nobility; its disappearance in the fifteenth century left a vacuum. The latter was gradually filled in during the nineteenth century by the rising mercantile class. Such patronage commitments, which continued as the century unfolded, are not surprising. The Ottoman Empire's integration into the world economy and modernity pressed it to respond in multiple ways, notably the Tanzimat reforms (1839–76). Consequently, these reforms created a new clientele ravenous for foodstuff and clothing (*aba*) and they opened new administrative and economic prospects to non-Muslim middle classes. Many of these people originated from villages such as Kalofer, Kazanlık, and Gabrovo, and managed to accumulate wealth through *celepçilik* (trade in sheep and cattle), import-export commerce, and tax farming.⁴⁴ Such opportunities encouraged more social and ethnic groups to relocate. Many traders and artisans from these villages moved to Constantinople, Kiev, Odessa, Bucharest, and Braila. The nuns' travel itineraries included all these cities.⁴⁵ Second, the Tanzimat edicts alleviated some travel restrictions and limitations on church renovation. Third, the growth of travel and mass communications in the nineteenth century led to religious revivalism, and the Orthodox sisters became part of this global mobility.⁴⁶ The interconnectedness between all these factors, which boosted nuns' moves, will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Social Origin, Living Conditions, and Economic Activity

Nuns originated from humble backgrounds as well as from the middle classes. In addition to the already mentioned male benefactors, some women also managed their own property. Evpraxia, the abbess of the Upper Metoch in Kalofer, is an example. She belonged to the affluent Geshov family with branches in Vienna, Constantinople, and Manchester. She inherited money from her brother and contributed to the renovation of the convent in the 1860s.⁴⁷ Other women's monasteries owned orchards, rose gardens, plots, meadows, and mills. The Gabrovo convent's documents are especially informative about land

44. Evguenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants (1780s–1890s)* (Leiden, 2013), 45–77.

45. It is difficult to discern what means of transportation were used by the itinerant sisters. The extant sources provide sparse information, but indirectly, it is known that merchants, *hajjis* (pilgrims), and female students from these locations traveled by wagons, carriages, and oxcarts. Usually, a caravan was organized to Marmara or Black Sea ports, and from there passengers were transported by sailboats to Constantinople. There was a regular maritime connection between Constantinople and Odessa. In Russia, most nuns traveled by the commonly used troika. Tsonchev, *Iz obshtestvenoto i kulturno minalo*, 486–92; Rada Kirkovich, *Spomeni* (Sofia, 1927), 23–26; Drumeva, *Devicheskiiat manastir*, 99.

46. Bayly, *The Birth*, 330.

47. Nachov, *Kalofer*, 170–75.

ownership and circulation, which included donations, sales and resales of fields, and exchanges of various plots with intent of agglomeration.⁴⁸ In some cases women were also expected to make contributions in order to become nuns. This was explicit in the ledgers of the Arbanasi's convent "St. Nicholas," wherein there is a list of such donations in the 1830s and 1840s.⁴⁹

Another indicator for internal social stratification is the information about individual nuns lending money at interest, as revealed by the dispute in 1860 between sister Theofania of Kalofer and the local council. In her old age, she lent them 2,000 *guruş* in order to live on the accrued interest.⁵⁰ The deal was confirmed by the Ottoman authorities in Plovdiv, although later she decided to take her money back and wanted the accumulated interest, which was disputed by the notables (*çorbacı*). Theofania threatened to address the Ottoman court. Both the nun (who also lent money to sisters and other denizens) and the *çorbacı*, tried to find allies among the Plovdiv notables.⁵¹

Information about cell ownership confirms not only the diverse social background of the nuns but also the prevalence of the idiorrhymic model in the nineteenth-century Balkans. Usually, there were two sisters in a cell—one elder and one novice, often related. A detailed picture of such social disparity is provided by the ledger (1871/72) of a well-off merchant from Samokov whose mother and two sisters were nuns in the local convent. It discloses that he bought a cell located across from the church from another sister for 2,500 *guruş* and exchanged it for his mother's old cell.⁵² Those divisions were also depicted by Georgina Mackenzie and Adelina Irby, both seasoned Victorian travelers, who visited the convent in Samokov in 1862. They mentioned that the "journey to Jerusalem is the event," but that not many were able to go there because the nuns were socially divided and some were "comparatively rich, others poor."⁵³

Similarly, many sisters in Kalofer lived in significant deprivation. Two letters from 1849 are quite instructive in this respect. The abbess of Kalofer's Lower Metoch asked one Russian representative in Constantinople for financial help. In response to his questions the sisters explained that the convent was ruined by fire and soon after was flooded. "We need money to repair it," they stated, for "maintaining not only our health but also the health of the virgins who come here to get an education, learn weaving, and achieve spiritual

48. There are multiple notes indicating a range of transactions made by the nuns: from selling a garden to buying an orchard to exchanging dispersed fields. The sisters also bought half a watermill and half a fulling-mill. DA-Gabrovo, f. 186k, op. 1, a.e. 25, 1–24.

49. For example, Melania bequeathed 300 *guruş*, Tekla 2,000 *guruş*, Theokista bestowed fields valued at 2,000 and 3,500 *guruş* in cash. Dürzhaven Arhiv Tŭrnovo, f. 726k, op. 1, a.e. 27, 9–11.

50. *Guruş/kuruş* a silver coin, was a standard unit of account until 1844; it was called *piastre* in European sources.

51. Davidova, *Balkan Transitions*, 120.

52. Ivan Patev, "Devicheskata obitel Pokrov Presviatiia Bogoroditsi v Samokov (dokumenti i predania)," in *Devicheskiat manastir "Pokrov Presviatiia Bogoroditsi" v Samokov*, 65.

53. G. Muir Mackenzie and A.P. Irby, *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, vol. 1 (London, 1877), 147.

peace.”⁵⁴ Even though they work hard, their handwork was not enough to support forty-five sisters, and they never ate meat. This dire situation was corroborated a few years earlier by Viktor Grigorovich during his travels in the Ottoman Balkans (1845).⁵⁵

Other documents mentioned nuns within the context of the putting-out system—whole convents participated in the production of woolen cloth. For example, in 1869, Sosana, the abbess of the Kazanlük metoch wrote that they borrowed 20,000 gurus̄ at interest in order to produce şayak.⁵⁶ In the case of Kalofer, all four convents were commissioned large quantities of woolen fabric by merchants from Plovdiv and Constantinople, and in such a manner they were involved in proto-industrial production.⁵⁷ The nuns often traveled to Plovdiv, the *sancak*’s center. Thus, in 1858, the abbess informed Mihalaki Gümüşgerdan, one of the main entrepreneurs in the region, that the sisters had just come back. Often, he supplied them with raw materials, but the nuns traveled to approve the quality of the wool. The casual writing about such business relations suggests that short trips to Plovdiv were a common occurrence. Moreover, this was a “personalized” business: the sisters stayed in Gümüşgerdan’s home and sent gifts to his wife “*kokona* [lady] Mariola.”⁵⁸ In addition, most convents were known for producing fine quality wool socks (*çorapçılık*). This was a typical “gendered” business for women in various locations who received raw materials from a local entrepreneur and knitted socks at home for regional and distant markets.⁵⁹ These cases were usual for putting-out production and demonstrated women’s vulnerability to issues of liquidity, which plagued the economy.⁶⁰ While aba production and *çorapçılık* were a source of income for the convent, the nuns were exploited by both suppliers and merchants. This production and the related “business trips,” though, put them in contact with networks of entrepreneurs and traders who facilitated their travel at home and abroad.

Travel and Social Networks

Nuns’ travels consisted mainly of three types: regular short-term “business trips,” as mentioned in the previous section; specialized alms collection

54. BIA-NBKM, IIA 1356/2; IIA 5357. All translations are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

55. V.I. Grigorovich, *Doneseniia V.I. Grigorovicha ob'ego puteshestviia po slavianskim zemliam* (Kazan', 1915), 182.

56. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 231, 3.

57. Davidova, *Balkan Transitions*, 120; Svetla Ianeva, “Female Actors, Producers and Money Makers in Ottoman Public Space: The Case of the Late Ottoman Balkans,” in Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, eds., *Ottoman Women in Public Space* (Leiden, 2016), 58; and Andreas Lyberatos, “State and Economy in Late Ottoman Thrace: Mihalaki Gümüşgerdan and the ‘Woolens of the State,’” *Turcica* 46 (2015), 205–36.

58. Tsentralen dürzhaven arkhiv, f. 161k, op. 3, a.e. 1037, 1, 6, 12.

59. Kirkovich, *Spomeni*, 2–4; Vasilis Kremmydas, *Emporoi kai emporika diktya sta chronia tou eikosiena (1820–1835). Kikladites emporoi kai ploiktes* (Athens, 1996), 93.

60. Between 1780s and 1850s, prices increased by between twelve to fifteen times. Şevket Pamuk, “Prices in the Ottoman Empire, 1469–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 3 (August 2004): 456.

by a few sisters; and rare pilgrimages to Jerusalem, as noted by Irby and Mackenzie. Their physical mobility was indicated in one epistolary guide (1815) that provided a sample for writing a letter to the abbess by another sister.⁶¹ Such examples are uncommon but they serve as evidence that nuns' movements and possession of some level of literacy were expected. The main destinations for collecting donations from abroad were Russia, Serbia, and to a lesser extent, the Habsburg Empire (See [table 1](#)).⁶²

The written records of sisters Zinovia and Kapitolina from the monastery in Kazanlük offer an illustration of their diverse travels. They went to Moscow (1860) and collected 560 silver rubles for the building of the already-mentioned new church. In fact, it is known that Zinovia was visiting relatives in Braila (Wallachia) the previous year for the same purpose. Both nuns used the commercial network of various merchants from Moscow, Odessa, and Constantinople to send the money home safely.⁶³ Since the permit for Russia lasted for one year only, in 1862 they ventured to collect donations in Serbia.⁶⁴ In preparation for this trip, they asked one Bulgarian entrepreneur in the Ottoman capital to submit their letter to the Serbian representative there. The sisters requested permission to seek alms there, as they did in Russia. They also instructed the trader to go in person and to convince the Serbian representative for a favorable answer to their request.⁶⁵ The nuns were not only aware of the process, they also tried to influence it. Other sisters from the same convent in Kazanlük traveled to Bessarabia and Kherson province in southern Ukraine in the late 1860s, seeking alms to renovate the convent and girls' school.⁶⁶

In a similar fashion, the nuns of Gabrovo monastery traveled (in pairs) to Kiev in 1867.⁶⁷ Correspondence suggests that they were in regular contact with Russian religious circles. An interesting detail is revealed in a letter by a Russian sister from Kiev's Devichii monastery who sent her photograph to the Gabrovo nuns in 1871. It appears that there were often communications between the two convents and several of the Gabrovo sisters had visited Kiev multiple times.⁶⁸ In addition, Odessa merchants encouraged the

61. BIA-NBKM, IIB 9910, 29.

62. The Table includes only specific mentions of trips; various sources note many other traveling nuns but without names and/or years. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 6160; IA 6262; IA 6289; BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 5, a.e. 65, a.e. 231, a.e. 251, a.e. 321; BIA-NBKM, IIA 1356/2; DA-Gabrovo, f. 717k, op. 3, a.e. 23; f. 669k, op. 1, a.e. 10; Nil' Popov, *Ocherki religioznoi i natsional'noi blagotvoritel'nosti na Vostoke i sredi slavian*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1871), 97; Drumeva, *Devicheskiiat manastir*, 37–38, 72–95; Nachov, *Kalofer*, 170–78; Đoko Slijepčević, *Mihailo, archiepiskop Beogradski i mitropolit Srbije* (Munich, 1980), 427–28; Veselinović, “Srpske kaluđerice,” 231–32.

63. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 6262.

64. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 6289.

65. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 289.

66. Popov, *Ocherki religioznoi i natsional'noi blagotvoritel'nosti*, 97.

67. This model was practiced by early 18th-century nuns from Athens. They travelled either in pairs or a single sister was accompanied by a male cleric. While in the Greek case male trustees monitored the alms, the Bulgarian nuns controlled their funds. Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, “To fainomeno tis ziteias,” 274.

68. Unfortunately, such hints at developing some form of spiritual mentorship or friendship are rare. DA-Gabrovo, f. 717k, op. 3, a.e. 23.

Table 1. Nuns' Itineraries of Alms Collections

Location	Year	Convent	Nuns	Destinations	Specific stops
Kazanlık	1859	"Presentation"	Zinovia	Romania	Bucharest
	1859		Kapitolina	Romania	Braila
	1860–1861		Zinovia		
			Kapitolina	Russia	
	1861		Zinovia		
			Kapitolina	Serbia	
	1865		Zinovia		
			Kapitolina	Russia	Moscow
	1867–1869		Zinovia		
			Kapitolina	Russia	Bessarabia Kherson Kiev Moscow
	1866–1869		Ekaterina	Serbia Austria-Hungary (1867)	
	1869		Two nuns		Constantinople
	1871		Ekaterina	Serbia	
Kalofer	1864–1867	"Lower Metoch" "Nativity"	Nikofora	Serbia	Skopje Tetovo Prizren Peć Veles Belgrade
			Evdokia		
Kalofer	1871	"Upper Metoch" "Presentation"	Nikifora (?)	Russia	
	1861–1863		Charitina	Russia	Odessa Kishinev Bolgrad Kiev Bessarabia Kherson St. Petersburg Moscow St. Petersburg
			Evdokia		
	Mid-1860s		Charitina	Russia	St. Petersburg
			Evdokia		
	1878–1880		Charitina	Russia	St. Petersburg Moscow
			Evdokia		
	1879–1881		Makrina	Russia	St. Petersburg Moscow
			Efrosinia		
	1883		Makrina	Russia	St. Petersburg Moscow
	Efrosinia				
	1891		Makrina	Russia	
Gabrovo	1867	"Annunciation"	Two nuns	Russia	Kiev
	1869–1870		Zinovia		Kiev
			Elisaveta		
	1873		Zinovia	Russia	
Peć	1860–1870	X	Katerina	Romania	Bucharest
			Simić	Banat Austria-Hungary (1867)	

Gabrovo abbess to send two nuns to Russian convents to study embroidery of ecclesiastic vestments.⁶⁹ Thus, the Gabrovo sisters used a double system of communication: directly with Russian nuns and with the Gabrovo emigrants who lived in southern Russia and Ukraine.

The Kalofer nuns also traveled to Serbia and Russia. The Lower Metoch had fewer nuns but they were active in begging for alms. In 1864, the Russian vice-consul in Plovdiv recommended to the Russian consul in Adrianople the two sisters Nikifora and Evdokia, who were going to Serbia. Another letter by the convent's hegoumeni addressed to Mihailo, the Belgrade Metropolitan, asked him to give the nuns permission to travel. The letters disclose that they were successful in securing the support of both secular representatives and religious hierarchs because other correspondence from Skopje (1865) revealed their itinerary: from Tetovo to Prizren, and the monasteries in Dechani, Peć, and Veles.⁷⁰

Equally, in 1861, the sisters in Kalofer's Upper Metoch dispatched two nuns, Evdokia and Charitina, to seek alms in Russia. They sent their donations back through the Russian Synod and the Russian consuls in the Ottoman Empire. Multiple notes indicate that the convent received varying sums of rubles through the vice-consul Gerov in Plovdiv.⁷¹ In 1863, another letter confirmed that the two nuns were in St. Petersburg and lived in the house of Diashleva, but letters to them should bear the address of the Asiatic Department wherein they are known.⁷² This case is noteworthy because unlike their male predecessors who were usually housed by Russian monks, the sisters skillfully combined private philanthropy with institutional support.⁷³ Charity, which played a prominent role in all religions, was deemed in significant moral duty in Orthodoxy. Moreover, elite women were active participants in social, religious, and political voluntarism.⁷⁴

All these examples show that the abbesses made use of various commercial, religious, and consular networks to support other traveling sisters in widening their contacts. Such adept mobilization of various webs for building churches and schools was also eased by the expanse of nationalist projects in the 1860s that constructed similar and overlapping systems of communication.⁷⁵ Furthermore, nuns also instrumentalized family connections. For example, the hegoumeni of the Little Metoch was Vice-Consul Gerov's aunt and often urged him to arrange transferring money, correspondence, and packages in the convent's favor.⁷⁶ Two nuns from the Upper Metoch were likewise relatives of his wife, who belonged to a rich merchant family with connections in Wallachia.

69. DA-Gabrovo, f. 669k, op. 1, a.e. 10.

70. Nachov, *Kalofer*, 176.

71. See, for example, BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 5, 81.

72. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 321, 1–2.

73. Rogel, "The Wandering Monk," 88.

74. Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1996), 10.

75. Marie-Janine Calic, *The Great Cauldron: A History of Southeastern Europe*, trans. Elizabeth Janik (Cambridge, Mass., 2019), 283.

76. For instance, in 1868–1870, Ekaterina sent through him 200 *chervonets* and church objects, collected in Serbia and Austria-Hungary. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 5, 194–195.

The latter was important because the early stops of the sisters' itineraries included Bucharest, Braila, and Galați. Next, they would pass through the governorates of Bessarabia (Kishinev), Kiev, and Kherson (Odessa), where colonies of Bulgarian merchants had lived since the Russo-Ottoman wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, both Charitina and Evdokia, the pair of regularly traveling nuns from the Upper Metoch, had distant kinfolks in those cities. The other route was via Constantinople where many of the sisters also had relatives among the merchants and artisans. The latter gave them letters of recommendation to traders and even to Archbishop Inokentii in Odessa, who was the trustee (*popechitel'*) of the Bulgarian Society of Odessa, which was collecting donations for schools and churches.⁷⁷

The nuns' story was inextricably implicated in the larger political context of the Eastern Question. Hence, sisters also benefitted from the growing Russian interest in supporting cultural and religious initiatives amongst the Slavs under Ottoman and Austrian domination in the mid-nineteenth century. There was increased concern about the advancement of Catholic and Protestant missions in the Ottoman Balkans and the educational reforms by Midhad Pasha in the Danube province, and Russian consuls lobbied to support education for Bulgarian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin girls as a counterbalancing strategy.⁷⁸ Consequently, during the Crimean War (1853–56) and particularly in its aftermath, several Russian organizations were established: the Slavic Benevolent Committee in Moscow (1858) with branches in St. Petersburg (1867), Kiev (1869), and Odessa (1870); and the Damskoe popechitel'stvo (Ladies Benevolent Society) by Princess T.V. Vasil'chikova, countess N.D. Protasova, and countess A.D. Bludova. Not surprisingly, all of these voluntary associations were in close contact with the Asiatic Department. The Moscow Committee secretary, Professor Nil' A. Popov, as well as others, argued for increasing the financial aid allocated to Balkan Slavs. Based on his examination of the Holy Synod's annual reports, Popov advocated for rebalancing the assistance for Slavic coreligionists and fellow tribesmen (*soplemenniki*) who until the 1870s were neglected, and 90% of all funding went to Greek monasteries.⁷⁹ Such suggestions were influenced by the growing Slavophile and Pan-Slavist support for the Bulgarian Exarchate (1870), established by the Ottoman government, which subsequently contributed to ethnicization of Orthodoxy in the Balkans. In 1867, the Slavic Congress in Moscow gave an additional boost to Russian philanthropy. All these developments created a supportive climate for alms collection. The Balkan nuns were aware of these changes,

77. Drumeva, *Devicheskii manastir*, 37–39.

78. Popov, *Ocherki*, 86; Konstantin Pobedonostsev, *Vsepoddanneishii otchet ober-prokurora Sviatishhego sinoda po vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedania. . . za 1885 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1886), 286; Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety*, 111; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, *Domestic Frontiers: Gender, Reform, and American Interventions in the Ottoman Balkans and the Near East* (Amherst, 2013), 67–68. The Ottoman state also considered that the "missionary problem" posed considerable challenges. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London, 1998), 112.

79. Popov, *Ocherki*, 89–98; Nikitin, *Slavianskie komitety*, 155.

and the convent in Kazanlūk and the Upper Metoch in Kalofer were among the recipients of aid from the Synod.⁸⁰

On the other hand, there was a mounting support for the establishment of schools for girls at convents in Russia; this trend was noticeable as voluntary in the 1840s and became mandated by the Synod in 1866. Furthermore, the tsar and his wife and children visited more than fifty monasteries in 1861 alone, with a special interest in the monasteries' hospitals, orphanages, and schools.⁸¹ It is thus not a surprise that the empress was listening to the nuns from Kazanlūk and Kalofer. They were particularly adept in navigating the upper echelons of Russian nobility, especially the wives of princes and generals, as well as aristocratic volunteer nurses during the Russo-Ottoman War (1877–78). Three of the latter each donated 3,000 rubles. Other Russian benefactors gave individual donations as well. A special trust was established in 1877 and the Kalofer monastery received annual rent from its accumulated interest until 1917. Sister Charitina visited Princess Ekaterina Cherkasskaia; Sister Makrina was an acquaintance of Ekaterina Ignatieva, the wife of count Ignatiev, and countess Orlova-Davydova. It was through the latter that Makrina was able to obtain an audience with Empress Maria Aleksandrovna. The tsarina later bequeathed a gold-framed "Mother of God" icon, decorated with pearls and diamonds, to the Kalofer monastery. The convent also received four bells, silver vessels, vestments, and in the 1880s books by Metropolitan Isidore of St. Petersburg and other ecclesiastical dignitaries.⁸²

Women monastics thus were not only recipients of financial aid but were also presented ritual objects, and there was a material dimension to their mobility. It was already mentioned that they offered socks, gloves, and fine woolen fabrics for blankets and cassocks. Their male forerunners were bringing medieval manuscripts to Russia.⁸³ The sisters may have done the same, but liturgical books usually traveled in the opposite direction. Nuns were also known to have maintained close relations with several convents: the Kiev Pecherskaia Lavra; the Troitsko-Sergieva Lavra, Novodevichy, and Nikitskii convents in Moscow; and the Aleksandr Nevskii Monastery in St. Petersburg. From these monasteries sisters adopted Russian-style habits. Of interest were the opulent wedding dresses, which the nuns brought to Kalofer. It seems that they benefitted from an old Russian ritual of donating used wedding dresses to churches. The luxurious silk was used to cut tunics (*stihar*), stoles (*epitrahil*), and cuffs.⁸⁴ This repurposing of secular clothes and their transformation into sacramental items sheds new light on "gift economy" and ecclesiastical material culture. Such interactions, however, also reinforced cultural center-periphery asymmetries. And yet the sisters also gained some strength by claiming proximity to imperial power. For example, the Kazanlūk nuns asserted that their convent (with the girls' school) was Russian, and therefore, immune to local (male) interference.⁸⁵

80. Popov, *Ocherki*, 97.

81. Kirichenko, *Zhenskoe pravoslavnoe podvizhnichestvo*, 235–37, 244–48.

82. Drumeva, *Devicheskii manastir*, 72–95.

83. Rogel, "The Wandering Monk," 85.

84. Drumeva, *Devicheskii manastir*, 95.

85. Kirilova, "Devicheskii manastir," 28; and Kanitz, *La Bulgarie Danubienne*, 178.

The question that arises is: how was it possible that a few nuns from the central Balkans were able to get access to the highest milieu of Russian society? Multiple factors shaped the nuns' success: first, since Russia was isolated after the Crimean War, its policy embraced a pro-Slav (and Pan-Slavist) focus, which intermixed both secular and religious institutions.⁸⁶ Second, sisters were very skillful in cultivating contacts in the Balkans, on their route, and while in Russia. For example, the convents maintained their connections with Russian Slavists throughout the nineteenth century. As mentioned above, Viktor Grigorovich, later a professor in Kazan' and Odessa, visited two of the Kalofer convents in 1845. A good illustration of this ability in nurturing contacts is the case of two nuns who were servants in the house of Lieutenant-Colonel S.S. Spokoiskii-Frantzevich in Lovech (1877); Spokoiskii-Frantzevich later became benefactor of the Kalofer monastery.⁸⁷ Third, the sisters were adept at offering both material and symbolic gifts (offers to pray for the donor and their family).⁸⁸ They were also not above exaggeration in describing their miserable living conditions, as the previously-mentioned letters of 1849 demonstrate. Moreover, some of them (Evdokia, Charitina, and Makrina) were known to have studied in Russian convents; Evdokia and some others also studied in Serbia. Their familiarity with Russian language and culture explains their ability to successfully navigate among a variety of secular and religious institutions; the same holds true for the Serbian context wherein the nuns were able to receive scholarships. Lastly, the expansion of philanthropy in Russia also offers insights into understanding gender empowerment for Russian aristocratic and upper middle-class women and the Balkan sisters, respectively. Indeed, charity not only encapsulates the intermingling of various strata but also reflects the essence of the Russian "woman question" in its early phase—education for women.⁸⁹ Besides, by blending the idiom of Orthodoxy and women's schooling, such philanthropic networks, a form of gendered "soft power," enabled the imperial civilizing task to percolate into non-colonial settings.

Education, Local Conflicts, and Gender Autonomy

All the convents described above were engaged in providing education for girls. The Kalofer metochs were known for educating more than thirty teachers

86. During the Cold War, there was a multitude of studies about the Pan-Slavism, the Eastern Question, and Russian policy in the Ottoman Balkans. For still relevant surveys see Barbara Jelavich, *Russia's Balkan Entanglements 1806–1914* (Cambridge, Eng., 1991); M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (London, 1965); and Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism, 1856–1870* (New York, 1956). For a Russian perspective, see Khevrolina, Rybanchok, Kuznetsova, *Vneshniaia politika Rossii*. With reference to religious policy, see Eileen Kane, *Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* (Ithaca, 2015); for a comparison between the Russian and Eastern Orthodox hajj, see Valentina Izmirlieva, "Christian Hajjis—the Other Orthodox Pilgrims to Jerusalem," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 322–46.

87. Drumeva, *Devicheskii manastir*, 101.

88. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 232, 2, 4; IIA 1356/2.

89. Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge, Eng., 2004), 117; Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice*, 125.

who taught in secular schools for girls in many towns.⁹⁰ Archival documents attest to active engagement in women's education, both locally and internationally. For instance, the previously-mentioned nun Eftimia from Veles not only received a Russian donation (1848) for the local girls' school but also sent a "thank you note" to Tsar Nicholas I: "Your generous gift will stimulate the progress of the Slavo-Bulgarian people [*slavenobolgarskii rod*] and especially women [*zhenskii pol*] in learning and would help us to blend in with the other enlightened peoples."⁹¹ While the letter exhibits praise for Russia's *mission civilisatrice*, the connection between "progress" and education also shows gender aspirations and possible (belated) Enlightenment sentiment. Similar ambitions about learning were shared at the Lower Metoch in Kalofer by sending female students to study in Belgrade's High School for Women, with a stipend provided by the Serbian government. When Metropolitan Mihailo wanted to send them back because they were often sick, the abbess and other nuns insisted that the students should remain and "improve their education."⁹²

The case of the Serbian sister Katarina Simić provides another interesting example. After becoming a widow, she established a girls' school in Peć in 1855. Mackenzie and Irby visited and praised her school, which had twenty-seven students in 1861.⁹³ Katarina was persistent in seeking support and traveled to get it. For instance, she went to Shkodra to meet with Alexander Gil'ferding, the Russian consul, and requested financial aid. In Belgrade, Katarina asked Metropolitan Mihailo for a recommendation to acquire contributions in Srem, Banat, and Bačka. In 1866, she went to Constantinople to get permission from the Russian ambassador for alms collection and later visited Jerusalem. In 1870–71, she was in Romania, together with a younger sister, Kata, and managed to successfully send money and several packages with books to Peć.⁹⁴ Katarina's high physical mobility was intimately connected to the girls' education and she established social relations with local and foreign benefactors, both religious and secular.

In Serbia as well Bulgaria at the end of the nineteenth century, nuns were replaced by trained women teachers in the girls' schools. However, they still participated in improving women's education. For example, for the building of a girls' school in Kalofer in 1870–71, the Upper Metoch donated 312 *guruş*, the Lower Metoch 208 *guruş*, and one sister 60 *guruş*. Also, some nuns, including the well-traveled Charitina and Evdokia, subscribed to provide geography books. Again, Charitina and another sister were among the donors to the women's association in Kalofer.⁹⁵ This continuous interest in promoting women's empowerment via education and associational life seems to be impacted by the nuns' peripatetic experience in diverse urban milieus wherein they were exposed to such models.

90. Virginia Paskaleva, *Bŭlgarkata prez Vŭzrazhdaneto* (Sofia, 1984), 21, 42–43.

91. BIA-NBKM, IIA 5332, 1–3.

92. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 5, 196.

93. Mackenzie and Irby, *Travels*, vol. 2, 41–57.

94. Veselinović, "Srpske kaluderice," 227–33; Slijepčević, *Mihailo, archiepiskop Beogradski*, 420, 427–28.

95. Nachov, *Kalofer*, 173–74.

The influx of so much money to the convents also created, as might be expected, various types of local conflicts. The most significant one happened in Kazanlük. Its council was divided into two factions that ended in physical brawls between the two leading notables. Both, however, were against building the convent's school. Another source of tension in Kazanlük was the unusual independence of sister Ekaterina, who travelled to Serbia and Austria-Hungary twice by herself to beg for alms. This was not well received. Metropolitan Mihailo asked the Russian vice-consul in Plovdiv to forbid Ekaterina from going to Serbia because she "brings dishonor to the Bulgarian name." She was considered "willful" and was kicked out of "Austria," according to the metropolitan. According to other information, however, she intermingled among various social strata, possibly including Prince Milan Obrenović.⁹⁶ As a result, the vice-consul sent two letters: one to the convent and another to Kazanlük's council, pressing them to take measures. Furthermore, the stops of Ekaterina's return trip were closely monitored—it was known that she left Belgrade, went to Niš, Pirot, and Sofia.⁹⁷

While the correspondence exchanged between these two men of power reveals obvious gender asymmetries, it also illuminates the relationships between Eastern Orthodox nuns and broader social groups both at home and abroad. In 1870, when Ekaterina came back to Kazanlük, the council confiscated her money and chests with books and silver objects. The notables also took the convent's seal and stated that "they wish neither a monastery nor a school." When Ekaterina tried to keep her possessions, they undressed her and threatened to put her in chains. Indeed, the municipal council wanted to appropriate the sisters' possessions in order to build a secular school for girls. Consequently, Ekaterina and two other nuns visited the Russian vice-council in Plovdiv and managed to keep the money and their properties. In addition to highlighting the violation of the donors' will, the sisters also employed a veiled threat of involving the Austrian consul.⁹⁸ Furthermore, it is worth noting that "willful" Ekaterina continued to fight for exonerating herself and for retrieving some of the money she had sent to Gerov from Serbia, but was not delivered to the convent. After the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78, she lodged a complaint to Prince Aleksei Tseretelev, a Russian Consul-General in Eastern Rumelia.⁹⁹ While the outcome of the subsequent investigation is unknown, it appears that her self-confidence was reinforced by her prior experience of navigating various spatial and social landscapes.

The Kazanlük sisters also used various other means to protect their interests. In 1868, when Zinovia and Kapitolina were in St. Petersburg, they sought both Russian and Bulgarian allies. For example, they visited hieromonk Gerasim and asked him "with eyes full of tears" to help stop the intervention of the local council and priests in the monastery's governance. The notables were taking their money and tried to dispossess them. Zinovia and Kapitolina wanted to get a Russian letter, but the hieromonk dissuaded them because

96. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 251, 3–5.

97. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 5, 224; a.e. 251, 1.

98. Kirilova, "Devicheskii manastir," 28–33.

99. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 55, 2–3.

it was a “shame to say what is happening in Bulgaria.”¹⁰⁰ Not surprisingly, a moral argument was used to suppress their autonomy. It seems, though, that the nuns received some formal Russian support because the convent also sent two other sisters to Constantinople to get 300 rubles and a decision from the Russian embassy.¹⁰¹ It is unclear, however, to what extent the convent became materially dependent on Russian patronage.

Sister Katarina Simić also had issues with Peć’s notables. After coming back from alms collection in 1865, she left 400 ducats to Metropolitan Mihailo, and he put it in a fund to accrue interest. The council wanted to use her collections for the municipality’s needs. Katarina used to give them part of the money and they established another school there. In return, the notables helped her with the Ottoman local administration to get a permit to travel to Constantinople and Jerusalem.¹⁰² This case seems to provide evidence of a more symbiotic relation between the local council and Katarina’s school.

In another example, the Kalofer municipality tried to seize the school building that belonged to one of the small metochs. When the council’s rules were established in 1857, after the Hatt-i Humayun in 1856, the council won control of the schools and male monasteries, but not the female ones.¹⁰³ Thus, the idea to combine the two small convents and appropriate their building for a school was part of a process of property redistribution (as in the case of Kazanlŭk and other villages) with the intent to eliminate any manifestation of women’s economic autonomy.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the newly-established Bulgarian Exarchate (1870) cooperated with the local municipality and supported the merger of the two monasteries and the elimination of the Little Metoch.¹⁰⁵ This concerted effort was not successful but it readily subscribed to the nineteenth-century trend of institutional, including church, concentration of power. It was also a local manifestation of another largescale tendency of curtailing any forms of women’s self-development and autonomy.¹⁰⁶

The above described experiences disclose attempts at economic control and seizure of convents’ possessions by their respective local municipalities. Most sources reveal some internal town fights for power over education that tried to deprive the sisters of their assets and responsibility in women’s instruction. While these conflicts may suggest a larger process of secularization, they also seem to demonstrate serious gender inequity. The negative comments in the press and correspondence at the time often reflected the interests of certain groups of notables and thus elucidate processes of social reordering and local power competition. It is within such traditional framework that the view of nuns’ illiteracy was circulated and employed to serve diverse agendas. Yet there was also a critique deriving from a modern standpoint.

100. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 65, 4.

101. BIA-NBKM, f. 22, a.e. 231, 1, 3.

102. Veselinović, “Srpske kaluderice,” 231–32.

103. Khristo Khristov, *Bŭlgarskite obshtini prez Vŭzrazhdaneto* (Sofia, 1973), 136–37, 153.

104. Indeed, this was a wide-spread phenomenon. See Maria Bucur, “To Have and to Hold: Gender Regimes and Property Rights in the Romanian Principalities Before World War I,” *European History Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (October 2018): 601–28.

105. BIA-NBKM, f. 6, IA 8996, 74–75; IA 8999, 719–721.

106. Gisela Bock, *Women in European History*, trans. Allison Brown (Oxford, 2002), 116.

Consider Dora d'Istria, a popular writer and cosmopolitan European aristocrat of Albanian origin, who in 1855 published a critical book on Orthodox monasticism.¹⁰⁷ In the preface she stated that it is “incompatible with the development of modern societies.”¹⁰⁸ Although she does not attack nuns directly, d'Istria popularized the image of the ignorant and backward Orthodox monk who hinders the “grand reason for human progress.” Thus, it is not surprising that around ten years later, M. Karlova, a nineteenth-century Russian traveler who visited the Ottoman Balkans with Gil'ferding in 1868, also took a critical stance towards all representatives of the Orthodox Church. In Berovo, she visited a convent with four or five sisters. Their appearance was similar to that of Russian nuns, although they were remembered as having an unfriendly attitude.¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, one strand of the negative prejudices against Orthodox monastics came from the Enlightenment's perspective, articulated by very educated secular women.¹¹⁰

The ignorance argument was also cast by the Bulgarian (male) national activists who were acrimonious about the fact that Russian donations were supporting village convents and girls' education instead of secular schools in big towns. For example, Gerov sent 800 rubles to the Kazanlúk nuns, but retained 298 rubles (37%), which were donated by Countess Protasova for the convent's school. His decision was based on the assumption that the sisters would not spend the money according to Protasova's will. In an earlier letter from 1862, his resentment was expressed even more bluntly: Gerov challenged the idea that anyone would send their daughters to learn from the “ignorant nuns.”¹¹¹ The quote suggests a mixture of anticlerical sentiment and patriarchal condescendence. Therefore it is not surprising, as Milica Bakić-Hayden has contended, that the negative stereotype of nuns as “persons from backward and rural areas, poorly educated” persisted even in socialist and post-socialist Serbian society.¹¹²

An interesting aspect of the attempt to quell women's autonomy is revealed in another letter (1864) from Archimandrite Sokolski to the Kievan Metropolitan Arsenii. The Gabrovo sisters had asked for permission to go to Russia. Sokolski, who was the founder of their convent, opposed to their taxid because it was “humiliating for the Bulgarian people.” Moreover, he noted the example of Kazanlúk's nuns, whose alms did nothing “useful for the community,” instead the sisters became “independent from the community.”

107. Antonio d'Alessandri, “Orthodox monasticism and the development of the modern Romanian state: from Dora d'Istria's criticism (1855) to cyclical reevaluation of monastic spirituality in contemporary Romania,” in *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, 173–75.

108. Dora d'Istria, *La vie monastique dans l'Église orientale* (Paris, 1855), I–IV.

109. Evguenia Davidova, “Gender and Culture in the Turkish Province: The Observations of a Russian Woman Traveler (1868),” *Aspasia. The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 6, no. 1 (March 2012): 82.

110. Similarly, at the turn of the nineteenth century, several Serbian writers wrote novels criticizing illiterate monks who could not even read the Scriptures. Radić, “Monasticism,” 201.

111. Kirilova, “Devicheskii manastir,” 29, 35–36.

112. Bakić-Hayden, “Women Monastics,” iii.

It would be more beneficial for the Russian government to give scholarships to young (male) Bulgarians than to give to charities.¹¹³ Hence, secular and ecclesiastical criticism toward the sisters' involvement in supporting women's autonomy coalesced. Furthermore, the quotes that lamented the shaming of the "Bulgarian name/people" speak to a broader dissemination of nationalist discourses. And yet religion did not lose its relevance but became both a marker and an instrument of national mobilization.¹¹⁴

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Balkans faced profound economic, social, political, and cultural changes. The Ottoman Empire's incorporation into the world economy, the intensification of the Eastern Question after the Crimean War, the development of nationalist ideologies, and the expansion of education put more social and ethnic groups on the move and contributed to the higher mobility of the sisters. Equally, the accumulation of commercial capital in the hands of non-Muslim entrepreneurs spawned the emergence of a local middle class that sponsored those women monasteries.

The peripatetic nuns adopted new patterns of sociability and interacted with representatives of clergy, bureaucracy, aristocracy, and the "middling sort." By becoming more adept at navigating complex inter- and intra-imperial institutional mazes, the sisters' travels "into the world" combined secular elements of business trips, accounting and communication skills, and enriched the social meaning of their religious missions, both locally and transnationally. While their journeys were pious and traditional in form, they grafted modern values onto that form. Instead of contemplative and ascetic Orthodox practices, they served in an "activist" manner by providing women's education and by supporting other initiatives that empowered women, which was more needed in their local environment than traditional charitable service.

This article has sought to examine Orthodox nuns through the lens of mobility and gender within broader social issues, such as the expansion of secular education, modern administration, and the market as well as concomitant social reshuffling. The specific activity of alms collection, a mobile and transformative social practice, was a subject of constant negotiation and put them on the larger imperial and transnational maps of church, state, and society. Consequently, by encompassing rich social interactions, the nuns' story presents gender imbalances in more palpable form and embodies wider experience of nineteenth-century women who strove to achieve self-development and to assert social visibility.

113. Cited in Todor Ikononov, *Memoari* (Sofia, 1973), 73–77. Emphasis added by author.

114. Calic, *The Great Cauldron*, 287.