

“Ethno-Phyletism” -- The Sociopolitical Context for a Pseudo-Heresy and the Religion of Clerical Bureaucracy

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In 2016, this writer published a highly controversial (2016) article, “The Heresy that Never Was: The “Ethnophyletism” Hoax, Usury and Historical Illiteracy.”¹ It was surprising to discover how many Orthodox historians had no idea of the depth of corruption in the Phanar's Balkan hierarchy under the Turks. There is no secular historian that denies that all Sees in the Balkans were bought by investors and used as cash cows. Many of these investors were not even clerics. There was even a standard list of prices for the various offices. Without the assistance of foreign hierarchs, the canonical life of the Phanar would have come to an end.

The thesis of the article above was that the “Phyletism heresy” was the creation of Phanar bankers to keep Bulgarians from taking these Sees in legitimate elections. Removing Greek investors from these sees would also remove their only source to pay off their creditors. The nascent Greek state even sent a large bribe to the Patriarch Anthemius to have them reject the Exarchate (Venediktov, 2008). The Phanar panicked at the declaration of the Bulgarian Exarchate and hence, declared it a heresy in 1872. In the above article, this author wrote:

The point of the above is that the Bulgarians created the Exarchate to escape this level of taxation and a ecclesial structure that was institutionally simoniacal. The 1872 synod was a plea from the Phanar community to maintain their taxing privileges and “ecclesial investments” and had nothing to do with the church, nationalism or “tribalism” in any way. Their motives were transparent. The Bulgarian Exarchate and its subsequent condemnation was about usury.

The point of this article is to describe the historical background that brought the Ottoman state to issue this decree in the first place and, importantly, that brought the Phanar to have such a hysterical reaction to it. One of the most important things to keep in mind is that the entire Orthodox world rejected the 1872 synod and its condemnation. The churches of Russia and Serbia, just to name two, maintained full communion with the Bulgarian Exarchate for as long as it lasted. This radical turn of events and the condemnation of “Phyletism,” strange neologism, requires detailed analysis. The Orthodox world, in English, has yet to accomplish this.

At the end of the 18th century, two Russo-Turkish wars brought the Ottoman state to the brink of disaster. The first (1768-1774) ended with the peace treaty of Kyuchuk Kaynardja on July 21. Crimea declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire and passed under Russian patronage. This extended the Russian empire to the borders of the Black Sea coast while Russian ships were entitled to pass freely through the Straits. The Danubian principalities of Wallachia

¹ The article can be found in the author's online collection of articles here: <http://www.rusjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Exarchate.pdf>

and Moldova received autonomy and pass under Russian patronage. Russia also was granted the right to advocate for the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

The Second Russo-Turkish war (1787-1791) ended with the December treaty at Iasi which brought Crimea and Georgia closer to Russia and increased privileges of Russian subjects and merchants abroad. The Ottoman decline did not end there.

In 1806 began another Russo-Turkish war which ended with the 1806 Bucharest treaty bringing Romania, that is, Bessarabia, close to Russia. It also consolidated Russia's position on the Black Sea, a fact that irritated the ever-arrogant English. The Danubian Principalities were integrated closer to Russia while Serbia was granted internal self-government. Russian dominance and moral authority was at a high point. For the first time since the Armada, English dominance of global trade flows was being seriously challenged (Paskov and Biliarsky 1984).

1828-1829 saw yet another Russo-Turkish war caused by the Greek national liberation uprising from 1821-1829. After the defeat of the Turkish fleet at Navarino, Sultan Mahmud II called for jihad against Russia. He did not do this on his own, since such a declaration would be suicidal. He was ordered into this position by the English, who had now taken the role of the "Defenders of Islam" against Russia. The war began in April 1828 and the Danube was once more dominated by the Russians under General I Duibic. On August 8, 1829, the last Turk fortress guarding the way to Istanbul collapsed. At the request of the Sultan on September 2, the Peace of Adrianople was signed. According to its terms, Russia took the mouth of the Danube and the whole Georgian coast. Greece also received autonomy in February of 1830 and rapidly developed into full independence. England and the London bankers were in a full panic

In the spring of 1828, nationalist Bulgarian militias intensified their struggle. In July, a delegation headed by Alexander Nekovic attempt to meet with Russian Emperor Nicholas I, who at that time was located in the Russian camp at Shumen. He sought to ask Russia to promote the Bulgarian cause to the same status of Moldavia, Wallachia, Serbia and Greece. Nicholas I would not accept the request.

Turkish woes were just beginning. During the 1830s and 40s, the war between the Egyptian Pasha Mehmet Ali and Sultan Mahmud II grew more violent. Ali began military operations between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt where Western countries, in a very rare move, refused assistance to Turkey. Friendless, the Ottoman state turned to Russia for help that led to a temporary truce with the Ottoman Empire. Thus, in 1833 Russia and the Ottoman Empire signed the Unkyar-Iskelesiyski Treaty of eternal peace, friendship and defense. This treaty is an important victory for Russia and strengthened its influence in the Middle East. In 1835, a militia campaign of Bulgarian nationalists sought to acquire Trnovo and declare independence. Having the moral high ground, the Bulgarian rebellion implicitly relied upon Russian intervention. The Turkish treaty made this impossible.

Regardless of Russian strategy, mass peasant riots broke out consistently between 1833 and 1850. Turkish, Jewish and Greek oligarchs prevented any meaningful land reform, once promised by the Sultan in the Edict of Gulhane, thus leading to the violence. The rebels attempted to gain international support by sending missives to Serbia and France. The uprising was suppressed in a particularly cruel way such that western Europe was outraged. Several more attempts at rebellion failed. Turkish reprisals were violent.

It should be noted that the Ottoman state had long ceased to be independent. Oligarchy and British domination meant that Turkey was now nothing other than a weak buttress against Russia. British bankers devised what became The Crimean War to break this incredible string of Russian victories. Western Europe was in mass panic over absurd press reports about a huge

Russian invasion of the west. The English and French bankers created an oligarchical alliance of the entire western elite against Russia (Sekoulov, 1934).

Suddenly forgetting their outrage against Turkey, the west collectively backed the Turkish government. Russia occupied the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldova in reply to this unprovoked aggression. New Russian Black Sea ports were assaulted by an Anglo-French naval squadron. Backed by the London elite, the Sultan demanded Russian troops withdraw from the principalities and declared war. In 1854, the Anglo-French fleet entered the Black Sea and landed troops at Varna, blocking the Russian fleet in Sevastopol. In September 1854, Russian troops withdrew from the Danubian Principalities and the war rapidly came to Russian territory. The main Russian naval base – Sevastopol – was besieged. The defense of the port went on for 340 days until September 1855.

The port city was connected to the rest of Russia by a single railroad. These were all fairly new acquisitions and were not yet integrated into the empire. However, the western press, in suspicious unison, claimed that it was the “backwardness” of Russia that led to their defeat against the combined armed forces of western Europe and the Ottoman empire. No doubt coincidentally, the westernized Russian press said the precise same thing.

In the typical faux-universalism of the English oligarchy, the Black Sea was declared “neutral.” This meant that it came under the control of the Anglo-Turkish navy. “Freedom of navigation” was proclaimed for the Danube, meaning that it became a British protectorate. The Franco-Prussian war however, permitted Russia far more freedom than the Treaty of Paris laid out. Apparently, Russia was not the only force against Britain (Todev, 2010).

England, in the first half of the 19th century, imposed “free trade” deals on the Turkish state. Only when these were signed did London become the main arms dealer to the new elite. The predatory and irrational nature of these deals strongly suggests the nature of economics at the time:

Britain was proud to abolish all monopolies and thus provide the [Turk elite] a wider freedom of production and trade; but it is obvious that in order to produce, it is necessary to be able to sell with the market price. Since as a consequence of this agreement the British products, which filled the markets of the Empire, pulled down the prices excessively, it became impossible for the domestic industry to continue production (quoted from Tanir, 130).

Typical of liberalism, what is packaged in the rhetoric of human rights and freedom is delivered in pure oligarchy. To this day, western historians cannot distinguish between rhetorical cover-stories and the public policies they cloak. “Free trade” just meant the imposition of British manufacturers on the empire and the reduction of Turkey to a prostrate supplier of raw materials. Within a generation, it meant that Britain was running the “Turkish” empire and using it as a golem against Russia and, by extension, Bulgaria.

On February 18, 1856, Sultan Abdulmecid I announced new reforms that granted equal rights to all religions in the Empire. Sultan in name only, this was an economic policy created in London. In practice, this just meant that the penetration of Anglo-French capital into Islamic areas was assured.

The Crimean War gave the Bulgarians the freedom to press their cause. Bulgarian nationalists were waiting quietly for the green light from Petrograd. Its leaders were Georgi

Rakovski and Ivan Batsov. The force amounted to around 3600 men and again relied on Russian intervention. In the spring of 1854, Nikolay Palauzov issued a circular with a proposal to organize the Bulgarian Committee of the Headquarters of the Russian army and prepared the uprising in Bulgarian lands. Odessa Bulgarians advocated the Bulgarian cause in Petersburg and Moscow. On May 12, 1856 the rebellion failed. Russian dominance was now not so certain (Boneva, 2002).

This is the context for the creation of the Bulgarian Exarchate. Russian reluctance to support Bulgaria as they had done in Romania or Serbia led to their exclusion from the defense of the Black Sea port of Sevastopol. At the same time, the war meant that Bulgarian merchants made a killing supplying western armies and navies. This did not stop Russian support for Bulgarian nationalists however, but the Turkish victories against them led to the destruction of their economic infrastructure. Crimea forced Russia to take its allies more seriously (Bojinov, 2003).

The theological and ecclesiastical developments also must be seen in this context. Turkey was no more. Her corpse was now a puppet in the hands of the London bankers who dwarfed the Phanar and no doubt impressed them. Other than opium and profits, the only thing that concerned London was Russia: the origin and focus of all global evil. Russia was the eternal “other” archetype in the English mind, especially during this era where the Jewish mark on the popular press became well-known (Trubetskoy, 2010).

Therefore, the penetration of English capital meant also the spreading of anti-Russian force, money and propaganda. It also meant that ethnic organization could not be based on mercantile interest. This is because money was increasingly centralized in English hands and was violently, militantly cosmopolitan (Tamir, 146-147).

The Bulgarian language was banned throughout the “Rum Millet.” Simoniac Metropolitan Chrysanthos (d 1857) banned it everywhere in his church. Total Hellenization was the result and the direct purpose of these destructive policies. Paisius Hilendarski (1722-1798), a steadfast nationalist, awakened the Bulgarian national spirit. Methodius of Vratsa, the Greek simoniac bishop, made it clear that he would lose money if Bulgarians took over his see. Another threatened “cleric” was Panaretos, a former circus wrestler, the “metropolitan” of Trnovo, who had bought his see in 1840. It was not merely the colonialism of Islam and the Phanar that was destroying Orthodoxy in the region, but the absurd fraud of the “clerics” using bishoprics as investments.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, the writings of French travelers through Bulgaria during this period are extensively analyzed. One of their main themes is the idea that the church, though respected, was losing its practical grip on society due to the use of dioceses as investments and tax farms. By and large, “They mentioned that the Bulgarians could only rise to secondary ranks within the church hierarchy and that the Greek clergy high in the hierarchical ranks actually bought these ranks through money attained by exploiting and swindling the Bulgarian peasants.” (Tanir, 97). The view was universal in Bulgaria at the time. Equally universal was the view that Jewish moneylenders, conspicuous in the major cities, were the main source of capital for these shady deals (Tanir, 113).

Neofit Bozveli wrote his *Lament* about the Greek control over the Bulgarian church. He advocated for a union of Bulgaria and Hilandar to remove the corruption from the Balkans. Athos alone had the moral authority to make war against the festering internal rot of the Greek hierarchy. Simoniac Greeks rejected even the most mild claims to autonomy. The most temperate

demands were rejected by the Turkic-Judaics who occupied the Slavic sees at the time. Significantly, Neofit went straight to Athos rather than deal with the illegitimate bishops of the Phanar. These businessmen knew something was amiss (Snegarov 1946).

In 1858, a Council in Constantinople articulated the Bulgarian demands. These were far from revolutionary. They sought 1) the election of bishops, 2) that church services should be in the language of the local population, and 3) the establishment of clerical salaries so as to avoid the need for money-lending and dependence on the Phanar regime. Predictably, these were rejected. The Exarchate was the reply. The Bulgarian church was reborn on April 3 1860 as a rebellion against the Phanar's corruption.

Immediately a Council was called at the Phanar to destroy it. It was to send the new Slavic bishops Hilarion, Auxentius and a sympathetic Greek, Paisius, into exile. Patriarch Joakim made concessions on the language issue, but few believed he was serious and no infrastructure existed to bring his reforms to fruition.

Sophronius III (1863-1866) and Patriarch Gregory VI (1867-1871) were prepared to make further concessions to the brutalized and colonized Bulgarian church. Greeks in Turkey proposed to grant several dioceses to Bulgarians. As if this were some sort of favor, it merely said that Bulgarians might have the right to be elected bishops of Bulgarian sees in Bulgaria. Greek oligarchs soon balked, proving that the concessions were not to be taken seriously. Phanar moneylenders saw the possibility of default on the horizon. If their faux-clerical debtors were thrown out of their ill-gotten sees, they would lose a large fortune. The Turkish *firman*, or decree, was published as a response to this circumstance in 1870. It was a clear message to the Phanar that their profits will be on hold so long as the possibility of increased unrest in Bulgaria was on the horizon. It restored Bulgarian independence and put the election of bishops in the hands of the people.

The Exarchate was not created in a vacuum. It was appointed with the blessing of the Russian synod. Initially, the Exarchate was stationed at the Russian embassy at the Phanar where both I. Karakanovsky of the Moscow Slavic Committee and Nil Aleksandrovich Popov to approve the Constitution and the election of the church Exarch on behalf of the Emperor. Continuing the panic that was being felt from Turkey to London, Patriarch Gregory VI arrogantly stated that "there is no Bulgarian nationality." However, the Russians were patronizing this movement and the Greek bishop's freedom of action was mercifully limited. The Russians, with the Bulgarians, wrote out the charter (Bojinov, 2003).

The *firman* was short and to the point. It goes out of its way to explain that this Exarch will be dependent on Constantinople and that it is a territorial, not an ethnic, organization. It is a national church, however, as all churches are. Section VI reads: "In all matters affecting the Orthodox faith, the Exarchate will receive the assistance of the Ecumenical Patriarch and his synod, which will hurry to provide necessary assistance and to send the requested answers." There was also room for expansion:

If all or at least two-thirds of the Orthodox inhabitants of other places outside of those listed and specified above, want to obey the Bulgarian Exarchate for his spiritual works and if it is found it will be allowed; but this can only be done on the request and consent of all or at least two-thirds of residents. Those who by this means they would create confusion or discord among the population will be prosecuted and punished according to the law (section X).

Thanks to the Sultan's decree of February 27, 1870, the restoration of the long-suffering Bulgarian church was made real. The Sultan of course, was far more interested in calming a major source of local unrest. The Exarchate recognized the primacy of the Phanar Patriarch and was not organized in defiance of it. Essentially, the *firman* in no way disturbed the historic rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate nor sought to make war on any ancient statute. Five sections (3, 4, 6, 7 and 9) of 11 total parts of the decree deal with the relations of the Bulgarian Exarchate in direct connection with the Mother Church of Constantinople and even decreeing its formal dependence. Needless to say, section X above proved to be worrisome to the Phanar.

According to this Constitution of the Exarchate, the synod began locally and, with the laity, created the diocesan synod. In turn, these local synods would elect delegates to the national assembly. According to the Charter of 1871, the Exarchate was divided into the traditional sub-units of the diocese, deanery and parish, each with a synodal structure. The supreme legislative body of the Exarchate was the Local Spiritual Synod that included bishops, lower clergy and laity.

On July 24 1871 the first Synodal meeting of the Exarchate was held under Russian supervision. Due to widespread, Phanar-based simony, the laity were granted a huge part in elections. Gregory VI and Joakim III sent an angry letter condemning this to the Russian synod and the Emperor. It remained unanswered. They called a council to condemn the Exarchate, but Sophronius of Alexandria walked out. He was soon followed by Hierotheos of Jerusalem. Sophronius made it very clear that “fiances” were the only motives of the Phanar and that the Patriarch was illegitimate, a mere tool of usurers and Pharisees. Russia remained in communion with the Exarchate throughout its existence, as did Serbia, Romania and most of the Orthodox world (Genchev, 1995).

The supreme administrative authorities were the Holy Synod (and Exarch and his four diocesan bishops), engaged in the affairs of a purely spiritual order, and the Council for the Laity, composed of six members, dealing with more secular issues such as finance or relations with the state. These were not sealed off from one another. Since few things are either purely religious or secular, these bodies would meet in a joint synod on a regular basis. All levels of church life would be elected, as per ancient custom.

Over the years, changes were made to the Charter. One of these was the 1883 limitation of lay involvement in synodal business. “Laity” had more than one meaning. Ideally, it referred to pious Orthodox people who were not ordained to any clerical office. However, in practice, it referred to the oligarchy (Palmov, 1896).

The Constitution of the Exarchate was therefore quite clear. It was the restoration of the lost Bulgarian church. It covered Silistriyskaya, Preslav, Turnovo, Sofia, Vratsa, Lovchanskaya, Vidin, Nis, Pirotska, Kyustendil, Samokov and Velesskaya. It included the coast of the Black Sea from Varna to Kustendje and the Sliven sanjak. In other areas with a mixed population were to hold a referendum where an official language could be declared only if two-thirds of the region voted for it (Nikov, 1971).

With the mass support of the people and the significant financial and political assistance of the state, they solved the problems of education and strengthen the national consciousness of the Bulgarians who remained on the lands of the Ottoman Empire. It was possible to achieve the restoration of schools, closed here during the Russian War of 1877-1878. The Department of Education of the Bulgarian Exarchate was the central body overseeing this mass expansion of education and the revival of Bulgarian Orthodoxy in the Balkans. Macedonia alone boasted a school system of 2266 teachers overseeing a body of almost 80,000 students. These were only

established under the Exarchate.

Exarchate members were present at the coronation of Alexander III and served with the Russians, all taking communion. The same goes for the later memorial services for Alexander II. The election of Exarch Joseph II was accepted by Russia and a representative of the Russian synod was present at his enthronement. It should almost be obvious at this point that the Anglo-French alliance was working feverishly behind the scenes to destroy this extension of Slavic power into the Turkish Balkans. The Phanar understood only what all oligarchs understood: utilitarianism, quantity and deceit. In this case, it was the worst kind of blasphemy as they were hiding under the sacred schema of monasticism. These men were not even believers, but mere investors seeking to take a rent-profit through the violent extraction of taxes from the peasantry (Markov, 1989).

The Phanar moneylenders were now largely exposed. The Bulgarian church faced a stark choice: Either the Exarchate or face total dissolution. Patriarch Gregory VI refused to stop his attempts to destroy the Bulgarian church. He was working at the behest of English capital. He strangely sought to convene a council for consideration of the Bulgarian question. This was a delaying tactic only since it was no longer a question. The Russian synod rebuked the patriarch and told him to accept the *firman* and its spirit.

St. Innocent of Kherson expressed warm regard for the Exarchate and St. Filaret of Moscow expressed his sympathy. The Russian synod's official position, written on April 19 1869, was that the canonical claims of both parties were "correct."² This was watered-down language for the sake of diplomacy. Russia was under no illusion as to the Phanar's objectives or the canonical invalidity of these "bishops." However, the good of the church would be served best by accepting the reform of the Bulgarian church and thus, the Exarchate. Under its mild language was a stern rebuke to the Greek Phanar and its usurers.

Patriarch Anthimus VI (1873) was no different from his predecessor and equally dependent on the Phanar moneylenders. Some Greeks were sympathetic, such as Agapius of Vratsa (1849), Hilarion of Crete, or Meletios of Sophia. In 1841, the Ecumenical Patriarch tried to stop the publication of a Slavonic printing of the Gospel and introduced strict ecclesial censorship over all "national" works. Sultan Abdul-Mejid visited Bulgaria in 1846 and was besieged with complaints. Many were joining the Uniats and Protestants, a fact well-known to the Phanar. The Orthodox church – that is, the Phanar – was universally seen as intensely corrupt.

This Bulgarian-Greek church dispute allowed secular France to extend its Catholic propaganda and its political influence. The oligarchs in charge of the French state cared nothing for the church and were often not Christians at all. In December 1860, Bulgarians from Macedonia, where the most intense Greek propaganda was found, led by Dragan Tsankov, signed a union to join the Catholic Church. In March 1861 in Rome, Joseph Sokolsky was ordained bishop of the Bulgarian Catholics. With the consent of the Turkish government, the arrogance of the Greeks paved the way for the Bulgarian Catholic Church as a protest. Here was firm, unmistakable evidence that the Phanar was literally destroying the church.

"Ethno-Phyletism" was a neologism concocted by British oligarchs, Turkish soldiers, and Jewish and Greek usurers at the Phanar. The robber-council, or perhaps the usurer-council of 1872 was a farce. Jerusalem Patriarch Kirill II resolutely refused to accept the decisions of the

2 For more detail on this issue, cf Snegarov, E (1929) Relations between the Bulgarian Church and other Orthodox Churches after the Proclamation of Schism. Church Archives, Vol. III-IV

1872 council condemning the “heresy of Phyletism.” The bishops of the Church of Antioch were the only ones outside the Phanar to sign the document, but the patriarch stated that its signature under the Patriarchal Council was “an expression of his personal views and not the views of the whole Church of Antioch.” Romania and Serbia continued to commemorate the Exarchate. The Exarch was supported by the Bulgarian state to keep it out of the hands of moneylenders.

Elijah Todev made the argument that the Exarchate was the origin of the modern Bulgarian state. According to the Ottoman tradition, spiritual institutions have important secular powers in the legal, administrative and financial realms. The most extensive powers can be found in the cultural and educational areas. The Exarchate was considered another “Millet” that could raise taxes and maintain a limited internal autonomy. The Exarchate was the development of a church in the germ of a local autonomic movement. In fact, Petkov (2003) argues that the Exarchate was in truth the first Bulgarian constitution.

The economic backdrop to this was the development of a small, powerful group of Bulgarian merchants at the Phanar. Monetization of the economy and a growing surplus was soon channeled into the cultural awakening that was to form modern Bulgaria. On the other hand, the revolt against the Greek oligarchs was a matter of peasant populism rather than elite discontent. Taken together, it created a complex set of rivalries in both the economic and political spheres among Turks, Jews, Greeks and Slavs. Because the Greek oligarchy was at the Phanar, the distinctions between Patriarchal policy and economic interest is impossible to distinguish. It also made it easy to justify rebellion. It also makes a quick and facile connection between financial gain and ethnic policy difficult to make.

The Phanar and its elites were firm internationalists. Capital was part of a far-flung Jewish network using Constantinople as a stopping point. The region was as cosmopolitan as human societies can get, forcing more careful historians to reconsider how quickly they can draw the line from economic stratification to national agitation. The bourgeoisie at the Phanar, regardless of their ethnic background, did not benefit from further violence in the region.

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