Romanticism and Russian travel literature: Dashkov's tour of Ottoman Palestine, 1820

The prospects of travel, adventure, pilgrimage and trade in the Levant fascinated generations of Russia’s men and women from the twelfth to the early twentieth centuries. The storied sacred sites of Jerusalem in particular attracted the curiosity of countless Russian travelers: monks and priests, officers and diplomats, writers and artists, scholars and tourists, poets and pilgrims, and many of these visitors recorded their impressions of places, peoples, and landscapes. This article shares passages from the virtually neglected account penned by Russian writer and diplomat Dmitrii V. Dashkov (1784-1839), who toured Ottoman Palestine in 1820. His work merits attention for its firsthand observation, local color, and vivid commentary on a range of topics; the narrative also exemplifies some of the defining traits and features of the Romantic travelogue.

Dashkov belonged to the generation of gifted young writers who, as members of the Arzamas literary society, championed the style and language of Nikolai M. Karamzin and forged a new path in the history of Russian literature that led to Romanticism. Like numerous literary figures who participated in the cultural ferment of the Alexandrine era, Dashkov was also an enlightened state official for most of his adult life, including a six-year term (1817-22) as diplomatic adviser and secretary at the Russian Embassy in Istanbul. In 1819 Ambassador Grigori A. Stroganov (1770-1857) assigned Dashkov to inspect Russia’s consulates in the Levant as part of the embassy’s effort to upgrade the conduct

and competence of a poorly trained consular staff. The expedition entailed a stop in Palestine, where, as part of his itinerary, inspector Dashkov had to gather concrete information on the seemingly endless "monks' quarrel," the dispute between Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and other Christian denominations over the right to control various holy places in Jerusalem, most notably the tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. While Dashkov's unpublished correspondence with Stroganov and Levant consuls deals in great detail with the investigation of mismanaged consulates, his published descriptions of the excursion relate impressions and observations of Mount Athos, the Topkapi Library, and Palestine.

Dashkov chose wisely when he submitted his travel narratives to *Northern Flowers*, Russia's foremost literary almanac of the 1820s and early 1830s, edited and published under the direction of the poet and critic Anton A. Del'vig (1798-1831). The almanac featured an assortment of works by major and minor Russian writers of the day, including the Pushkin Pleiad, the constellation of talents who contributed to the golden age of Russian poetry. Most but not all of the eclectic offerings in Del'vig's anthology — poetry, prose, essays, literary criticism, historical sketches, travelogues, translations and adaptations from Chateaubriand, Byron, and other contemporary authors — were inspired by Romanticism, the predominant style of the era. Dashkov's passages on Palestine reso-

