



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

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**Ottoman and Russian Migration Management Policies in the Black Sea Region,
1768-1829**

Introduction

The following report is based upon four months of field research in Sofia, Bulgaria and four months of field research in Moscow, Russia. In Sofia, research was conducted at the National Library "Kiril and Metodii (in the Main Reading Room and the Bulgarian Historical Archive) and the Bulgarian State Archives. In Moscow, research was conducted at the Lenin State Library, the State Public Historical Library, the State Archives of the Russian Federation, and the Russian State Military History Archive. This eight month field research period is part of a larger dissertation research project which will continue for two more months in Moscow and will involve a six-month field research period in Istanbul, Turkey in 2008.

This report will be divided into two sections. The first section will provide a summary of my research findings concerning the broad topic of population movements and the spread of disease between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The second section will detail the preliminary conclusions from my research.

Summary of Research Findings

This section will be divided into five parts: the legal aspects of migration into the Russian Empire in the early nineteenth century; the epidemiology of the spread of disease in the Black Sea region in the early nineteenth century; the construction of quarantines lines and border management in the south-western part of the Russian Empire; the position of the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia) as a “middle ground” between the Russian and Ottoman Empires; and the human dimension in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century population movements in the Black Sea region.

The Legal Aspects of Migration and Settlement – the Russian Empire

In the Russian context, there are two legal aspects of migration and settlement upon which I have focused during my research – documentation and the question of subjecthood and citizenship. First, migrants and refugees to the Russian Empire in the early part of the nineteenth century were issued a variety of travel documents to ensure their safe passage to and settlement in the south-western part of the Russian Empire. I have uncovered original versions of these travel documents in the Bulgarian and Russian archives. Termed alternately passports or *bilets*, a wide variety of Russian authorities (military, civil, and consular) were authorized to issue these travel documents. While many were standard in form and content some of these passports and *bilets* were individually produced and referenced the original petition by a Bulgarian migrant to leave the Ottoman Empire and take up residence in the Russian Empire. An analysis of these travel documents, over the course of a roughly fifty year period, offers some insights on the evolution of the Russian states’ understanding of migration in the transition from the early modern to modern periods.

The second issue in the legal dimension of migration and settlement into the Russian Empire which I have explored revolves around the notions of subjecthood in the early modern period and the evolving concept of citizenship in the modern period. This is a very complex topic and a lot has been written about subjecthood and citizenship in both western European and Russian historiography. It is my goal to make a small contribution to this historiography through an examination of Bulgarian migration into south-western Russia in the early part of the nineteenth century. For example, on December 29, 1819 Tsar Alexander I issued an imperial *ukaz* (proclamation) in which he outlined the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of foreign settlers in Bessarabia¹. This proclamation, subsequent legislation, and communications among Russian Ministry of Interior officials contain some interesting references to the similarities and differences between migrants and the local population in terms of rights. Additionally these official government documents and correspondence outline ways in which migrants could “naturalize” in to subjecthood. They also reveal that Russian officialdom did not have a standard idea of the concepts of subjecthood and citizenship. Through specific discussions concerning Bulgarian migration into the Russian Empire, one can see how Russian officials (imperial and local) were beginning to work out a clearer vision of what it meant to be a subject, and ultimately a citizen, of the Russian Empire.

¹ The Treaty of Bucharest, which concluded the Russo-Ottoman war of 1806-1812, ceded Bessarabia (a strip of land between the Dniester and Pruth rivers which conforms roughly to modern-day Moldova) to the Russian Empire. Bessarabia was the main Russian territorial acquisition in the Treaty of Bucharest.

Epidemiology of Disease and Methods of Transmission

Migration and the spread of disease (bubonic plague) are the two “transnational” issues I will use to compare Russian and Ottoman border management and notions of territorial sovereignty in the north-western Black sea region (from the Danubian estuary to the Crimean Peninsula) in the early part of the nineteenth century. Through my research I have learned that as an insect-borne bacterial disease, the etiology of the bubonic plague revolves around a flea-rat nexus in which fleas transfer the disease from plague-infected rats to humans. Textiles and hides constitute a particularly conducive breeding environment for both rats and fleas. Thus the primary method for the long-range spread of the disease among human populations has been through trade in wool, silk, cotton and via the personal effects (i.e. clothing) of couriers, merchants, soldiers, pilgrims, deserters, refugees, seasonal workers, and nomads. The virulence of the plague is promoted by warm weather (between 50°-80° Fahrenheit) and particularly virulent strains of the plague carry a case mortality rate of 60-90%. These two etiological characteristics of the plague (the hosting of infected fleas and rats in textiles and the need for temperate weather) combined with the meteorological conditions and increased trade connections around the Black Sea region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made the Ottoman-Russian frontier a particularly active zone for the outbreak and spread of disease.

The Construction of Quarantines Lines and Border Management in the South-western Part of the Russian Empire

It is apparent that Russian authorities linked migration with the spread of disease and the suppression of disease became a question of controlling migration. It is equally apparent that Russian authorities viewed the Ottoman Empire as the main zone for the incubation of disease and the Ottoman-Russian Black Sea frontier as the main conduit for the spread of disease into the Russian Empire. Under the Tsarist government, the Ministry of Interior was charged with dealing with the national security threat posed by un-checked immigration and the spread of disease into the Russian Empire. An examination of the Russian Ministry of Interior’s monthly journal (for the years 1829-1831) has revealed that the creation of quarantine lines and reinforced border points were the Ministry of Interior’s main institutional response to these perceived national security threats. Starting in the late eighteenth century, the Russian Empire embarked upon a concerted program of quarantine construction in their Black Sea ports and along their shifting riverine borders in the south-western part of the empire. These efforts at enhanced border control increased significantly in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

The Danubian Principalities and the “Middle Ground” between the Russian and Ottoman Empires

Competition for influence in the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia) constituted one of the main flashpoints between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Additionally, the Danubian Principalities were one of the main conduits for the transmission of bubonic plague from the Ottoman and Russian Empires and the Russians were consistently frustrated in their attempts to enlist the support of Wallachian and Moldavian elites in suppressing this threat to their “national security”.

From a historiographical standpoint, discussions of the Danubian Principalities have generally been consigned to diplomatic history. By applying a frontier analysis, I have been able to see the difficulties both the Russians and the Ottoman had in dealing with Wallachian and Moldavian elites and establishing political influence in this “middle ground” between the two empires. My research has revealed the complexity of Russian and Ottoman relations at their mutual “Danubian” frontier and relations between a constellation of Russian officials, Ottoman agents, and local elites concerning migration and the spread of disease between the Ottoman and Russian Empires in the first part of the nineteenth century.

The Human Dimension in Migration

Prior to my research in Bulgaria and Russia, I had hoped that, through an examination of the personal correspondence contained within various archives, to uncover individual migration histories and add a human dimension to my research on population movements and the spread of disease between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I have been successful in uncovering a variety of letters, memoirs, and accounts penned by migrants and other travelers that will allow me to leaven my historical, state-focused approach with an individual voice which echoes the experience of migrants and refugees today.

Preliminary Conclusions

This section will be divided into four parts: an outline of conclusions derived from my development of a case study of Bulgarian population movements to and from the Ottoman and Russian Empires, respectively, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; the importance of quarantine posts in the Russian state’s overall migration management and border regime in the early nineteenth century; the development of notions of territorial sovereignty at the Russian-Ottoman Black Sea frontier in the early modern period; and a brief discussion of the similarities between the early nineteenth and early twenty-first century state-migrant nexus.

Bulgarian Population Movements - Case Study

As a result of my research phase, I have been able to develop a detailed case study of Bulgarian population movements to and from the Ottoman and Russian Empires in the early part of the nineteenth century. The prevailing historiography concerning Bulgarian population movements during this period is one that focuses primarily on a one-way migration of Bulgarians from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire. However, I have discovered that many Bulgarians, after only a two or three year stay in Russia, returned to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the Bulgarians offer a good case not only for exploring Russian migration and settlement policies but also for examining Ottoman migration and settlement policies. This two-way dimension to Bulgarian migration during the period in question is one of my main preliminary conclusions.

An additional conclusion derived from my Bulgarian case study concerns the motivation behind the Russian state’s pro-immigration policy towards Bulgarian migrants. Generally, historians have focused on notions of Slavic-Orthodox brotherhood as the driving force behind Russian recruitment and acceptance of Bulgarian migrants. These conclusions generally place the Russian state in the position of the protector of Slavic-Orthodox populations in the Ottoman Balkans. However, my research has led me to

conclude that the Russian national interest towards Bulgarian migrants was more material than it was ideological. A close reading of Russian legislation and official communications between Russian officials at the imperial, provincial, and local levels reveals that Russian officialdom actively recruited Bulgarian migrants in order to settle and develop recently acquired Russian territory in the south-western part of the Empire. Thus, economic motivations informed Russian immigration policy in the south-west. Additionally, the establishment of Bulgarian settlements and the formation of Bulgarian military-volunteer regiments were viewed by Russian officialdom as a potential buffer against Ottoman territorial designs on the under-populated south-western part of the Russian Empire.

Quarantines, Migration Management, and Border Control

Quarantines, of course, are constructed in an effort to combat the spread of disease and, from a historiographical standpoint, are generally discussed within this context. However, through my research, it has become clear that quarantines, at least in the Russian context, rapidly evolved into all purpose border posts where trade goods were inspected, customs collected, criminals and fugitives surveilled, and, most importantly for my research, migrants and refugees registered and provided with travel documents. The construction of quarantine lines was not only the primary Russian institutional response to the spread of disease but a fundamental part of the Russian state's migration management regime. Quarantine lines, therefore, constituted the main Russian border control initiative in the early modern period.

Territorial sovereignty in the Early Modern Period

In my research this past year, I have focused on two “transnational” issues (migration and the spread of disease) and have tried to ask how a focus on these issues can help us to understand the concept of territorial sovereignty in the early part of the nineteenth century. This focus has produced many questions and a few conclusions. What can an examination of migration and the spread of disease tell us about the saliency of border control in an imperial setting? How strong was the Russian and Ottoman state at the far reaches of their respective empires? What role do transit countries play (in this case the Danubian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia) in affecting migrant routes? How do migrants react to changing state policies and shifting borders? And does migrant agency erode the territorial sovereignty of empires?

From an historical perspective, one conclusion that I have been able to draw is that migrant diasporas and the formation of migrant networks erode territorial sovereignty as much in the past as they do today. Many Bulgarian migrants settled in the Danubian Principalities in the early part of the nineteenth century and formed strong structural connections (trade, communication, two-way migration) with their co-nationals in the Russian Empire. These structural connections reduced the efficacy of Russian border management along the Pruth River, which divided the Moldavian Principality from Russian-controlled Bessarabia and formed the nominal border between the Russian and Ottoman Empires in the period 1812-1828.

The first few decades of the nineteenth century were a particularly dynamic period in the evolution of international norms concerning the nexus between a state's territorial and political sovereignty and transnational issues of the spread of disease and migration. Historians and political scientists have generally analyzed the extensive “inter-national”

discussions and negotiations conducted at the Congress of Vienna in the context of nineteenth century diplomatic and military history. Yet, the presentations and speeches given by and to the statesmen gathered in Vienna concerning the potential benefits of coordinating responses to migration and disease have been under-analyzed. I speculate that the new concepts and norms raised during these discussions in the period from 1813-1815 resonated in Russian and Ottoman initiatives to communicate about and at times coordinate their responses to the spread of disease and migration. Additionally, I speculate that formal (i.e. imperial level diplomacy, treaties, and conventions) and informal (i.e. local level and frontier initiatives) Russian-Ottoman communications concerning the spread of disease and migration contributed to the Ottoman Empire's incorporation into the Concert of Europe in the post-Napoleonic period.

Historical Continuity in the State-Migration Nexus

While conducting my research in Bulgaria and Russia I have been consistently struck by the similarity between the experiences of refugees/migrants then and now and the similarity in the debates among government officials about how to manage migration. My research has uncovered many examples of this continuity (indeed universality) of the state-migration nexus. Some of the most interesting examples of the similarities between then and today revolve around discussions among Russian officials concerning immigration. Charged with protecting the security and stability of the Russian Empire, Ministry of Interior officials consistently advocated for tighter border control measures and longer quarantine periods. Concerned with the possible disruption to international commerce and economic development which these measures might cause, Ministry of Finance officials argued strenuously for more open borders, shorter quarantine periods, and less stringent documentation for merchants. Ministry of Finance officials were supported in their pro-immigration position by owners of large agricultural and manufacturing enterprises who viewed migrants as a ready source for agricultural and factory labor.

By way of conclusion, I would like to quote two sentences in my original research proposal written in late 2005 – “Twenty-first century nation-states confront the same issues of migration management which perplexed imperial officials in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” and, both historically and today, “The need to coordinate with neighboring states, whether hostile or friendly, on migration management issues is an important part of bi-lateral and regional negotiations among nations at the local and state levels”. As a result of my research in Bulgaria and Russian in 2007, I can conclude that, at least in the context of Russian-Ottoman relations in the Black Sea region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these points remain valid.