

# RUSSIAN MIND

LA PENSEE RUSSE

№172/3-4 (5043)  
MARCH - APRIL 2026

Russkaya Mysl  
Russian/English

Founded in 1880  
[www.RussianMind.com](http://www.RussianMind.com)

*The Middle East Knot*



UK .....	£4.00
Germany, Austria, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Estonia ...	€5.50
Belgium, Greece .....	€5.50
France, Spain .....	€5.60
Switzerland .....	5.60 CHF
Hungary .....	2290 HUF
Poland .....	26.90 PLN

# ЛИТЕРАТУРНАЯ ГАЗЕТА

Основана в 1830 году  
при участии А. С. Пушкина  
Издание возобновлено  
в 1929 году при поддержке  
М. Горького



## Дорогие читатели!

Подписаться на любимую газету вы можете  
одним из следующих способов.

### Подписка онлайн с доставкой по всему миру:

[www.eastview.com](http://www.eastview.com)

[www.nasha-pressa.de](http://www.nasha-pressa.de)

### Подписка онлайн с доставкой по России:

[www.lgz.ru](http://www.lgz.ru)

[www.podpiska.pochta.ru](http://www.podpiska.pochta.ru)

### В каждом номере:

- новости культурной и общественной жизни России;
- дискуссии известных политологов;
- интервью с медиаперсонами;
- рецензии на книжные новинки;
- обзор премьер театра и кино.

### Справки по тел.:

8 (499) 788 01 12

«Литературная газета» —  
газета для думающих людей



## EDITOR'S LETTER

# TRULY CLOSE TO US



Russia's relations with the countries of the Middle East, which span several centuries, can undoubtedly be called the history of mutual respect and cooperation. The Middle East has historically been and remains in the sphere of Russia's special interests. The motives of our Middle East policy have changed in different periods of history, sometimes radically. Russia's activity in the Middle East has had ebbs and flows, but this trend has never become secondary in Russian politics.

Today the Russian Federation is extending a helping hand to its Arab friends, realising that mutual interests with the Arab world can be invested more both economically and politically, especially since relations between the two sides are based on mutual respect, and not on the "cowboy culture", as was the case with relations with the West. As Anna Akhmatova once wrote: "The West slandered and believed itself. And it splendidly betrayed the East."

The East and mysterious Persia in particular attracted the attention of great Russian poets, who sought inspiration in Oriental motifs. These are Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Griboyedov, Ivan Bunin, Konstantin Balmont, Sergei Yesenin, Nikolai Gumilev...

Not all of them were lucky enough to visit Persia, but still it fascinated them for many years. The treasury of world poetry contains numerous wonderful poems, which transcend time – a unique Oriental casket.

Russia is one of the few countries that manages to maintain a balance in relations with the Middle East states even in the most difficult times. This is Moscow's advantage in pursuing its own policy in a region that has long become truly close to us.

In this special issue of the Russian Mind magazine devoted to relations between Russia and the Middle East we tell our readers about the outstanding Soviet and Russian diplomat Yevgeny Maximovich Primakov, who was a unique Orientalist and Arabist. He knew everything and everyone. It's no wonder that he named one of his numerous books, *Confidential: The Middle East on Stage and Behind the Scenes*.

This geopolitical region, with almost half a billion inhabitants who speak sixty languages, is called mysterious and beautiful, wise and inscrutable, great and enigmatic... But the key word for us is "near" (In Russian, the term "Near East" is also used for the area that is known as the "Middle East"). The "Near East" in every sense.

By Leonid Kolpakov

Russian Mind  
№172/03–04(5043)  
MARCH – APRIL 2026

### EDITORIAL BOARD

Anatoly Adamishin  
Metropolitan Anthony  
Rene Guerra  
Dmitry Shakhovskoy  
Peter Sheremetev  
Sergey Yastrzhembsky

Kirill Privalov

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Leonid Kolpakov  
lk@russianmind.com

### EXECUTIVE

### and PRODUCTION EDITOR

Karina Enfenjyan  
karina@russianmind.com

### HISTORY EDITOR

Vyacheslav Katamidze

### DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Konstantin Filimonov  
am@russianmind.com

### CREATIVE PRODUCER

Vasily Grigoriev  
cp@russianmind.com

### DESIGN

Roman Malofeev  
design@russianmind.com

### TRANSLATOR

Dimitry Lapa

### ADVERTISEMENT:

sales@russianmind.com

### DISTRIBUTION:

distribution@russianmind.com

### SUBSCRIPTION:

subscription@russianmind.com

### PUBLISHING HOUSE:

RuMind DOO, Jurija Gagarina 231,  
11073 Beograd, Serbia.  
Registration Number 21962945

### PRINTING HOUSE:

ArtPrintMedia DOO, Profesora Grcica 2,  
21000 Novi Sad, Serbia.

### RUSSIAN MIND (print)

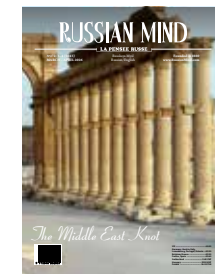
ISSN 2046-8687

### RUSSIAN MIND (online)

ISSN 2046-8695

### COVER:

Majestic ancient Roman ruins. Palmyra, Syria.



Editors are not responsible for the accuracy of the information published in news reports, promotional materials and advertisements. Editors do not have the ability to enter into correspondence and do not return manuscripts and illustrations. Editors do not provide background information. Reproduction of any materials from the magazine "Russian Mind" is impossible without the permission of the editorial board.

Cases of the absence of sale of the magazine "Russian Mind", violations of the terms of delivery and other shortcomings in our work may be reported on  
+44 (0) 203 205 0041  
or send on e-mail:  
info@russianmind.com

CIRCULATION: 7000 COPIES

## THE MAIN TOPIC

# THE SOVIET UNION AND THE MIDDLE EAST: GEOPOLITICS, IDEOLOGY, AND PRAGMATICS

*The history of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations is a complex system of interactions, where the Soviet ideology often came into conflict with its economic interests*

By DENIS FEDOROV



*The zones of influence of the USSR and the UK in Iran. 1946*

In the second half of the twentieth century the Middle East became a theatre not only of regional conflicts, but also of a global confrontation between two superpowers. For the Soviet Union this region was both a crucial arena of expanding its global influence and a test of its foreign policy strategy.

The history of the Soviet Union's relations with the Middle Eastern countries is not just a diplomatic chronicle. It is largely characterised by the state of tension and drama, in which ideology, economic interests, military strategy and the destinies of the Middle Eastern nations are intertwined.

Being an opponent of imperialism and a supporter of national liberation movements, the USSR sought to build mutually beneficial relations with newly independent states following the collapse of the colonial system.

At the same time, it was not only about the Soviet ideological influence, but also about its economic, military and political interests: access to strategic resources (primarily oil), military-political presence near the southern borders of the USSR, limiting American influence in the region and strengthening its own status as



*American Douglas A-20 Havoc aircraft provided under the Lend-Lease programme awaiting transfer to the Allies at the Abadan Airfield. 1942*

a superpower. The combination of all these factors determined the specifics of Soviet policy.

## *Soviet-Iranian Relations*

Soviet Russia was the first to recognise the independence of Persia (Iran), renouncing royal debts and concessions and concluding the Treaty of Friendship with the country on 26 February 1921. A landmark in the strengthening of Soviet-Iranian relations was the Treaty of Guarantee and Neutrality, signed on 1 October 1927 in Moscow. It obliged the parties not to participate, either actually or formally, in political or military alliances directed against the security of the other party and to observe neutrality in case one of the parties was attacked by a third country.

During the Second World War the Soviet Union collaborated in Iran with its Allies in the anti-Hitler

coalition, the UK and the USA, which supplied Western weapons and military aid to the USSR under Lend-Lease (the "Persian Corridor"). To attain these goals and protect oil fields from Germany, Operation Countenance, a joint invasion of Iran by the USSR and the UK, was carried out in 1941 (25 August–17 September).

The operation was rapid and with minimal losses. The Iranian Army offered only weak resistance. As a result, Shah Reza Pahlavi abdicated, power passed to Crown Prince Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and Iran came under Allied control, becoming the second most important conduit for Allied Lend-Lease aid. In addition, the success of Operation Countenance prevented the possibility of an Axis attack on the USSR through Transcaucasia.

After the end of the war the Soviet Union tried to secure its foothold in Iran politically and economically, but

the Western powers did not allow it to do so.

During this period, it became obvious that the Middle East would eventually become one of the Cold War fronts. It became an arena for global confrontation, as it had enormous strategic importance, primarily because of its oil resources and vital transport corridors.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1978–1979 was a watershed that dramatically changed the balance of power in the region. The fall of the pro-Western regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the rise to power of Islamic forces created a new political reality.

However, the weakening of the US position did not lead to an increase in influence for the USSR. The new regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who ruled the country from 1979 to 1989 and adopted a strict independent pro-Islamic foreign policy, was equally hostile to both socialist-oriented countries and the Western world.



*Egyptian Prime Minister Nasser is welcomed in Cairo after the announcement of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. 1 August 1956*

**The 1950s and 1960s:  
Bet on Arab Nationalism**

In 1947 the USSR supported the creation of Israel, hoping that it could take an anti-British position and believing the assurances of the founders of the Jewish state that it would be built on the principles of socialism. However, by the early 1950s it had become clear that Israel had shifted its orientation towards the West. Then the USSR abruptly changed its policy in the interests of the Arab countries.

The active USSR policy in the region began in the 1950s. As part of its strategy Moscow bet heavily on Arab countries, which, having freed themselves from colonial rule, were looking for an alternative to Western influence.

The Soviet Union offered them what the West did not give them: economic aid, industrial projects, arms transfers, and political backing for anti-colonial regimes.

Economic cooperation included supplying heavy machinery, equipment and the development of trade, while the Middle Eastern

countries exported oil, natural gas and raw materials to the USSR.

**Egypt: The Height  
of Soviet Influence**

Egypt became a particularly important partner of the USSR, with which diplomatic relations were established back in 1943, and in the 1950s and 1960s the country became the main ally of the USSR in the Arab world.

The most successful was the Soviet Union's cooperation with Egypt



*Port of Aden, a former UK colony and a foothold in the Middle East*



*Celebrating the independence of South Yemen. 29–30 November 1967*

under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who ruled from 1956 to 1970.

A charismatic Egyptian leader sought to free the country from Western influence and modernise its economy. The Soviet Union offered Nasser exactly what he needed: loans, technology, weapons, and political support.

After the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 and the crisis surrounding it, the USSR strongly supported Egypt, which dramatically strengthened Moscow's position in the Arab world. Their cooperation became systematic: The USSR was the main supplier of weapons to Egypt. Thousands of Soviet specialists worked in the country, and major infrastructure projects were implemented.

The most important symbol of this cooperation was the Aswan High Dam, built with Soviet financial and technical assistance. It was one of the flagship infrastructure projects of the Soviet "soft power" – it demonstrated the great

potential of the socialist model of development.

However, under Mohammed Anwar al-Sadat, President of Egypt from 1970 to 1981, the country was reoriented towards the West. In 1974–1975 Sadat expelled Soviet military advisers and shifted Egypt's foreign policy focus towards the USA.

**Arab-Israeli Wars:  
Tests of Strength**

Soviet policy in the Middle East was fundamentally determined by its attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The defeat of the Arab armies during the Six-Day War (from 5 to 10 June 1967) between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq was severe and unexpected.

However, the Yom Kippur War (6–25 October 1973) between a coalition of Arab states and Israel became a partial revenge, which was

made possible by massive active military assistance from the USSR.

In 1973 the Soviet Union carried out a large-scale "air bridge", supplying its allies with equipment and weapons. The USA responded with similar actions in support of Israel. The world was on the verge of a direct military confrontation between the two superpowers – it was one of the most dangerous moments of the Cold War.

**Socialist South Yemen**

The Soviet Union had a special relationship with South Yemen, or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the only State in the region to officially adopt a socialist path of development after gaining independence from the UK in 1967.

Between the 1960s and 1990 the USSR actively supported South Yemen by providing significant military, economic, and technical assistance.

The Soviet Union trained over 9,000 military specialists and supplied up to ninety percent of the PDRY army's weapons, turning it into one of the best equipped in the region. The USSR also participated in building the state's infrastructure. However, South Yemen's limited resources and internal instability prevented it from becoming a robust pillar of Soviet policy.

However, following the collapse of the global socialist system in 1991 the military-technical partnership was terminated.

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, which existed from 1967 to 1990, merged with North Yemen, creating a single state.

### ***"Arab Socialism" and Bet on Nationalism***

After Joseph Stalin's death and the beginning of de-Stalinization, Soviet foreign policy underwent a real revolution: it became much more flexible and pragmatic, as Moscow saw a powerful allied potential in Arab nationalism.

By the 1960s Soviet influence had taken on harder forms. Moscow did not limit itself to diplomacy – it was actively involved in the military sphere. The USSR supplied weapons to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, sending military advisers and extensively training allied armies.

Soviet relations with Iraq developed too, especially after Saddam Hussein had come to power. Though these relations were complicated and not always stable, the USSR remained one of Baghdad's key partners.

### ***Iraq: Partnership without Trust***

Soviet-Iraqi relations were characterised by deep contradictions. Their diplomatic ties were

established on 9 September 1944, in 1955 they were severed by Iraq, and after the revolution of 1958 they were promptly re-established. These facts alone allow us to imagine how complicated the relations between the two countries were.

In the 1970s the USSR became a pivotal partner for Baghdad. USSR–Iraq cooperation under Saddam Hussein, President of Iraq from 1979 to 2003, included massive transfers of weaponry, Soviet involvement in oil and infrastructure projects, and training military specialists.

Nevertheless, Iraq pursued an independent policy and did not become a true ally: even while being heavily aided by the USSR, Iraq, like many other Middle Eastern countries, maintained significant autonomy.

And though during the Iran–Iraq War in the Persian Gulf (22 September 1980–20 August 1988) the USSR supported Iraq by starting arms shipments to Baghdad in 1982, in August 1990 Moscow backed international sanctions against Iraq, condemning its invasion of Kuwait.

### ***Syria: A Stable Alliance with the USSR***

After Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had effectively ended the close Soviet–Egyptian alliance and moved into Washington's orbit, the Soviet Union turned its attention to Syria, relations with which stabilised and deepened following Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970. The country became the USSR's most important partner in the Middle East after the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1980, one of the articles of which read: "In case of emergence of situations threatening the peace and security of one of the parties, the parties will immediately contact each other for the purpose of coordination of their

positions and cooperation in order to remove a threat emerged and restore peace."

The Soviet Union's help was in the creation of the national Armed Forces of Syria, the deployment of Soviet military specialists to the country, the supply of military equipment and weapons, as well as the training of Syrians in Soviet military educational institutions. In addition, President Hafez al-Assad (1971–2000) appealed to the USSR with a request for an increased Soviet military contingent in Syria to protect it against possible aggression from Israel.

However, Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in the USSR, desiring to portray himself as a "peacemaker", significantly reduced military aid to Syria and began restoring relations with Israel.

### ***Superpower Rivalry***

The Middle East became a central theatre of superpower rivalry. The USA relied on alliances with Israel, Turkey, Iran (till 1979), and Saudi Arabia, while the USSR relied on Syria, Iraq, and South Yemen. This confrontation manifested itself not only in diplomatic crises, proxy wars, and the arms race, but also in such spheres as economy, diplomacy, and cultural policy. In this sense, the Middle East became a "mirror" of the Cold War, a reflection of the global conflict between two systems – capitalist and socialist.

The USSR's policy in the Middle East boiled down to expanding its influence in the military and economic spheres and establishing itself as a dominant global superpower. But, of course, there were also difficulties stemming from the instability of Arab political regimes, ideological differences, the inability to conclude stable



*Portrait of Hafez al-Assad in Damascus. 1994*

long-term alliances, as well as fierce competition from the USA.

The Soviet presence in the Middle East was not a temporary episode. It left a deep legacy on the military structures of the countries of the region, on economic relations, and political culture.

### ***Limitations of External Superpowers***

It should be noted that by the late 1970s and early 1980s Soviet relations with the Middle Eastern nations were becoming increasingly difficult. There were many factors behind this, and above all the partners' political instability: frequent coups and regime changes made those alliances unreliable.

In addition, supporting the allies required huge resources, which the increasingly stagnant Soviet economy could not effectively manage. Ideological contradictions did not help the situation either: Arab nationalism, Islamism and Soviet atheism were hard to combine. And all this was against the background of a continuous competition against the USA.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union inevitably resulted in the USA consolidating its position in the Middle East.

The Soviet Union managed to establish a substantial presence in the Middle East, became the primary supplier of weaponry to a number of countries, implemented major economic projects, and cultivated a network

of political alliances, but it failed to translate its influence in the region into a stable, enduring system. Nevertheless, it was so profound that its lasting effects are still visible in the region today.

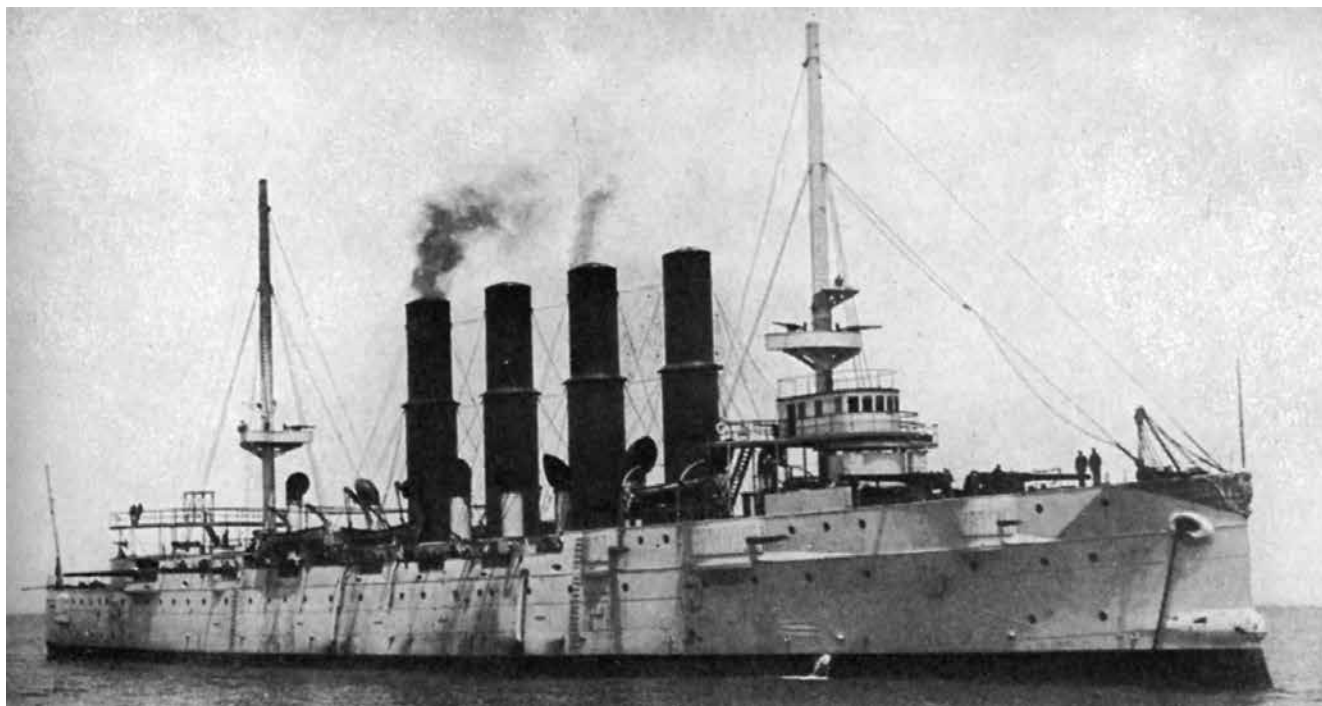
The history of Soviet–Middle Eastern relations is that of ambitions and limitations, successes and miscalculations. But above all else it is a narrative of a great geopolitical game, the consequences of which are still visible in the twenty-first century.

The Middle East has showed the limitations of external superpowers: even with military might and ideology superpowers cannot fully control a region with its own complex logic of development. The East is a delicate matter...

# KUWAIT'S SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CRUISER VARYAG

*Descendants of the first Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah I, rule the country to this day*

By VYACHESLAV KATAMIDZE



*The cruiser Varyag*

On reading the title of this article, our readers may be surprised. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the legendary Russian cruiser, which fought with an entire squadron of Japanese cruisers and destroyers during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, helped a tiny Middle Eastern country gain its sovereignty. But it was really the case: The Russian cruiser contributed to Kuwait's destiny in the early twentieth century.

But let me tell you everything in order. And let us first recall the heroic actions of the cruiser Varyag.

The 1st-rank armoured cruiser Varyag was laid down in 1898. It was built at the *William Cramp &*

*Sons* shipyard in Philadelphia. In 1900 the ship was transferred to the Russian Imperial Navy and entered service in 1901.

By this time, the Russian Emperor and the country's Government didn't have the slightest doubt that war with Japan was inevitable, so almost all the newest battleships were sent from Kronstadt to the Far East.

In 1901–1904 Varyag was part of the 1st Pacific Squadron of the Russian Navy. The captain of the cruiser was Vsevolod Fyodorovich Rudnev, an experienced sailor (during the American Civil War he had commanded one of the ships of the Russian Atlantic Squadron

sent by the Russian Government to support President Abraham Lincoln).

On arriving in the Far East, Varyag was based at Port Arthur. But from the very beginning of the Russo-Japanese War the cruiser and the gunboat *Koreets* were based in the neutral Korean port of Chemulpo to provide security for the Russian Embassy in Seoul. There were also warships of other countries in Chemulpo: of the UK, France and the USA.

On 26 January (8 February) 1904 a Japanese squadron (two protected cruisers, four armoured cruisers and eight torpedo boats) under

the command of Rear Admiral Uryu Sotokichi blockaded the port of Chemulpo. The strategic task of the squadron was to ensure a land offensive of the Japanese troops and force the Russian ships to go to the outer harbour. The next day, Uryu sent an ultimatum to Captain Rudnev: to leave the port before 12 pm, otherwise the Russian ships would be attacked there. Rudnev resolved to break through to Port Arthur with fighting, and to blow up the ships in case of failure.

At noon Varyag and *Koreets* left Chemulpo. At a distance of ten miles from the port they encountered a Japanese squadron.

Before the naval battle Captain Rudnev ordered all the officers and sailors to put on their official dress uniforms: he knew what fate awaited the cruiser.

"This is our last parade," he told the crew. "Let's hold it with pride!"

The unequal battle lasted fifty minutes. Over that time Varyag fired 1,105 shells at the enemy: one Japanese torpedo boat was sunk, and four Japanese cruisers were damaged. The enemy's human losses amounted to about thirty killed and about 200 wounded.

But the enemy's superiority was too great: Varyag received five holes below the waterline and lost three six-inch guns. The crew's losses were serious: one officer and thirty sailors were killed, six officers and eighty-five sailors were wounded or concussed, and about 100 more were slightly injured.

According to the captain, the cruiser could not continue the battle and returned to Chemulpo. There the remaining guns and equipment were destroyed, and the cruiser was scuttled. *Koreets* was blown up. The Russian steamer *Sungari* was scuttled as well.

Shortly after the death of the cruiser, materials appeared at the headquarters of the Russian

Imperial Navy, which, based on reports from the ship's captain and senior officers, showed that its scuttling had been largely influenced by the fact that its speed had been much lower than the declared specification. Rudnev reported it immediately after the campaign from Kronstadt to the Far East. Serious mistakes had been made at the American shipyard in the design and construction of the *Nikloss* boilers, and, as a result, the speed of the cruiser dropped from twenty-three knots to only thirteen knots (that is, from forty-three km/h to twenty-five km/h). It is clear that the manoeuvrability of the ship decreased significantly.

The Russian Government awarded all the participants in the battle.

But let's move on to the issue of Kuwait's sovereignty. According to historical chronicles, the State of Kuwait was born at the very beginning of the seventeenth century. Its development began with a coastal village settled by fishermen, divers and pearl traders. In time, the village grew into the city of Al Kuwait, which became the capital of the emerging small state (1613 is widely accepted as the founding date of the city).

The local population had neither an army nor a guard, and in the eighteenth century invaders from Nejd (the future Saudi Arabia) captured Al Kuwait. These were Bedouin tribes.

Later, the tribal groups (clans) united and established the settlement of Bani Khalid south of the mouth of the Tigris.

Bani Khalid quickly became a major port and established trade links with many cities of the Ottoman Empire. For some time, pearls, spices, coffee, as well as horses of a special Arabian breed were exported from here. The most profitable was certainly the export of pearls, which were in the hands of several wealthy

merchant families; one of them was the Al-Sabah family.

The influence of the settlement, which had a well-armed, albeit small, guard, became dominant in all parts of Kuwait. And in 1756 its head became the first Emir of Kuwait under the name Sabah I bin Jaber. His descendants rule Kuwait to this day.

In the early nineteenth century power over Kuwait was contested by two countries: the Ottoman Empire and Britain. Kuwait was formally part of the Ottoman Empire, and it even used its flag. But in fact, it had more significant ties with the neighbouring Arab emirates, both economically and politically. The Sublime Porte (the central Government of the Ottoman Empire) was not happy with it: it wanted to have more leverage over Kuwait, effectively ruling it with the help of its officials in its government structures. The Emirs of Kuwait strongly opposed this. In order to regain its total control over Kuwait, Ottoman military units invaded it in 1871.

The Emir immediately turned to the UK for help, which was extremely interested in establishing its presence in this part of the Gulf. It was not about oil: at that time there was no oil production either in Kuwait or in Nejd. Surprisingly, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Russian Empire became the world leader in oil production thanks to the activity of Russian scientists and entrepreneurs. At that time the UK heavily relied on its huge coal reserves needed for the steam boilers of the British dreadnoughts.

However, Kuwait was important to Britain: it was to become one of the bases of the British Navy on its way to India, the most important colony of the British Empire. The UK was creating them, endowing each with its own functions: on one of them British ships stocked up on water, on another they replenished their provisions, and



Rear Admiral Vsevolod Fyodorovich Rudnev. C. 1905

on the third – replenished shells. Britain did not have a significant oil reserve, though the former UK miner William Knox D'Arcy, having become an entrepreneur, opened a rapidly developing oil company in Persia.

Britain's flirtation with the Gulf emirates increasingly worried the Ottoman Empire. In 1875 the Sultan issued an edict, according to which Kuwait was included in the Ottoman vilayet of Basra. But Kuwait's dependence on the Sublime Porte remained purely formal: Britain's interest in Kuwait was growing thanks to its strategic proximity to India, and the Ottoman Empire did not want to quarrel with the UK, which had always backed it. But sooner or later their interests had to collide. It happened in the early 1890s, when the Baghdad Railway project was being discussed, with Kuwait as the final destination. Obviously, the project was supposed to return Kuwait to the "bosom of the Ottoman Empire".

And then Britain delivered a blow: in May 1896 there was a coup d'état in Kuwait. Emir Mohammad was assassinated, and Sheikh Mubarak ascended the throne.

A year later a British naval base appeared in Kuwait, followed by just a limited Turkish protest.

And a couple of years later, when passions around the British stocks subsided, the UK decided to bind Kuwait to itself completely.

At the very beginning of 1899, an agreement was concluded between Kuwait and the UK, according to which control over Kuwait's foreign policy and security was transferred to Great Britain. The UK paid a very small price for it: it pledged to support the Emir's family.

Thus, the issue of the British protectorate was resolved. But by that time clouds were gathering over Europe and the Middle East alike. The leaders of many countries

understood that the contradictions between the great powers were escalating, and a decade later a terrible world war would break out. Neither European nor Asian leaders doubted that both the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain would become active participants in it.

Emir Mubarak, who was nicknamed "the Great", was indeed a wise and far-sighted politician. He was aware that his small country could find itself between a rock and a hard place, turning into an arena of confrontation between the UK and the Ottoman Empire. He desperately needed to find a way to preserve his country's sovereignty at any cost. What did he come up with?

Let's turn to a historical document. The archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Admiralty of the Russian Empire, as well as the Military Historical Archive, contain secret report no. 322 dated 20 June 1901. It was sent by the titular Adviser Ovseyenko, a resident of Russian intelligence in Basra, to the Russian Consul General in Baghdad. A copy of it is kept at Al-Seif Palace in Kuwait, and this document is quoted from this copy.

"When handing over the letter, Abbas Aliev [a Russian intelligence agent – V.K.] informed me confidentially that Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah of Kuwait, longing finally to get out of the alarming and troubling situation being created for him, on the one hand, by the treacherous Ottomans, who have recently conspired through Kâzım Pasha with his enemy Abdulaziz bin Al Rashid, Sheikh of Jabal Shammar, and on the other – by importunate offers of protection by the British, who have recently been acting in concert with his enemy, Yusuf Ibrahim, instructed him, Aliev, to convey to him, the Sheikh, a request for Russian protection, as well as his willingness to allow the Russians to take the necessary measures



Mubarak Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait from 18 May 1896 to 28 November 1915



*Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber, the future Emir of Kuwait, on the deck of Varyag*

for the security of Kuwait, and, if needed, even to raise the Russian flag on the territory of Kuwait, from time immemorial belonging to the family of Mubarak Al-Sabah, independent and *not bound by any treaties*" [my italics – V.K.].

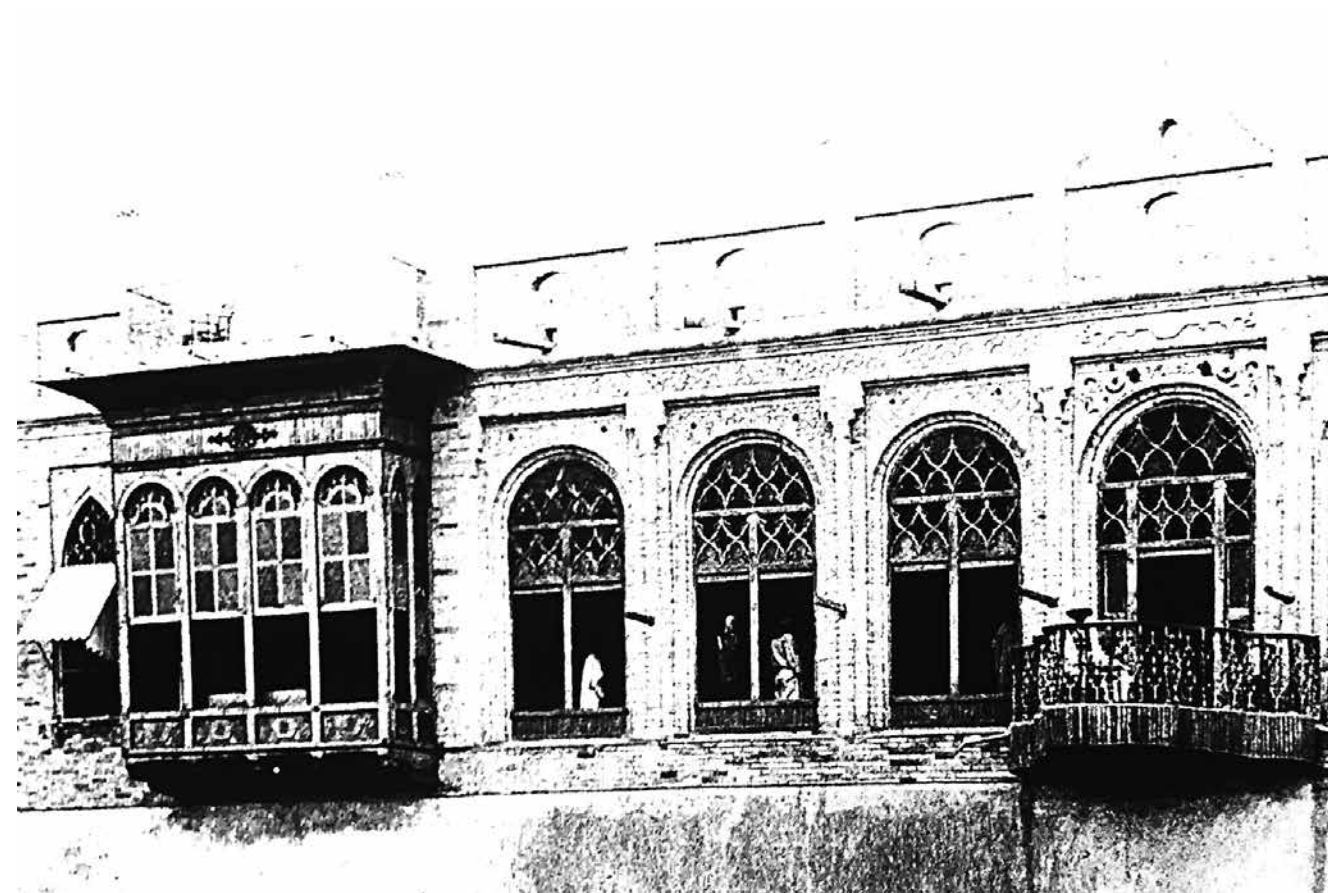
Of course, there are serious doubts that negotiations with Russian representatives on this issue could have led to real political steps in relations between Kuwait and Russia. Firstly, because Kuwait had already signed a special treaty of friendship and protection with the UK in 1899; and secondly, because the Sublime Porte, Russia's worst enemy, would never have allowed Russia's patronage over

the Gulf country, which was also formally within one of the vilayets of the Ottoman Empire. And in this, it might even have allied with the UK! Consequently, the Emir's letter to the Russian representatives was most likely intended to frighten both the Ottomans and the British by organising a leak.

But it is also possible that it was a clever move by Emir Mubarak, who aimed to preserve the sovereignty at all costs, which Kuwait could have lost under pressure from the Ottoman Empire or the British Government. If this letter had fallen into the hands of one of the parties, their rivalry would have intensified immeasurably, which would have

saved Mubarak for some time, prolonging their confrontation.

And Mubarak al-Sabah was right! For three years, both the Ottomans and the British were scheming against each other, trying to trick the enemy, accusing each other of playing a dishonest political game, and the Emir of Kuwait – of political immaturity and inability to build relations with great powers properly. For three years, the UK constantly called on Kuwait to be faithful to the treaty signed in 1899, and the Ottomans appealed to the need for Kuwait to remain loyal to the Ottoman Empire as the main guardian of Islam in the region and in the Arab world in particular.



*Al-Seif Palace in the early twentieth century*

And then the cruiser Varyag arrived at the port of Kuwait on its way to Port Arthur!

On learning about this, both the Ottomans and the British were quite naturally shocked. No wonder: they came to the conclusion that Russia had lured Kuwait to its side. Meanwhile, the visit of the Russian cruiser was just the beginning of the utilization of the port of Kuwait by the Russian Naval Forces.

Rudnev, the captain of Varyag, was not only an excellent sailor, but also a good diplomat. During the Atlantic Squadron's voyage to America, he often had conversations with US politicians and senior officers of the US Navy. There is no doubt that, while preparing to sail across three oceans, he received detailed instructions from the Russian

Empire's Minister of Foreign Affairs on how and what he ought to talk about during anchorages on the way to Port Arthur and, specifically, on relations between the Gulf countries and Russia. He visited Al-Seif Palace, the Emir's residence, on several occasions and had a frank conversation with him.

Both Ottoman and British emissaries frequented Al-Seif Palace with presents for the Emir and his family. The British were preparing to establish a permanent army base in Kuwait, and the Ottomans were preparing to station their cavalry there. But neither side had the desire to experience the fire of the six-inch guns of the Russian cruiser.

The emissaries wondered what the Kuwaitis' close friendship with Russia was driven by, and they heard the following answer: "Russia is not

threatening us with the loss of our sovereignty."

Now it was time for the Sultan's viziers and the ministers of the "Mistress of the Seas" to deliberate. They held talks and decided: "Kuwait will remain sovereign, but only formally – a part of the Ottoman Empire. And legally, the UK will remain its guarantor of security."

Almost ten years later Mubarak al-Sabah signed a commitment to give Britain the monopoly right to explore and develop oil in Kuwait.

When the First World War (during which the Ottoman Empire was completely defeated) was over, the UK easily established international recognition of its protectorate over Kuwait, which lasted till 1961. But Kuwait has never lost its real political sovereignty.

# THE PEARL OF THE SYRIAN DESERT

*The history of Palmyra is a unique example of interaction between the East and West cultures, as well as the dynamics of political and economic processes in the ancient Middle East.*

By KARINA ENFENJYAN



*Temple of Baal in 2010*

Situated in the Syrian Desert between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates Valley, Palmyra originated as an oasis settlement that played an important role in caravan trade. As early as the first millennium BC it was a trade hub and intermediary connecting Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Roman Empire. The city's geographical position was the primary driver of its

economic prosperity and cultural diversity.

The earliest references to Palmyra (then known as Tadmor) appear in cuneiform texts of the eighteenth century BC discovered in the surviving archives of the ancient city of Mari. These documents confirm that this oasis was a crucial staging point on caravan routes in the era of the ancient Near Eastern

states. The Bible also mentions Tadmor as a city fortified under King Solomon (1 Kings 9:18), indicating its strategic importance.

Palmyra reached its greatest flourishing during the period of Roman rule (the first–third centuries AD), when it received the status of a “free city” within the Roman Empire. The city became a major commercial and cultural

centre where elements of Greco-Roman, Semitic, and Persian traditions coexisted. The architectural appearance of Palmyra, including its colonnades, temples, and triumphal arches, reflects a synthesis of these cultural influences.

The history of Palmyra demonstrates the complex interweaving of economic, political, and cultural factors that shaped the development of ancient cities at the crossroads of civilisations. As an important object of scholarly study, thanks to numerous archaeological discoveries Palmyra allows its development to be reconstructed with a high degree of reliability.

Epigraphic sources over 2,000 inscriptions in the Palmyrene Aramaic dialect – provide detailed information about the city's social structure. It is known that Palmyrene society was structured around a tribal and clan-based system that played a key role in trade and politics. Alongside Aramaic, the Palmyrenes widely used Greek and Latin (the language of the Roman administration).

Palmyra's economic power was based on control of caravan trade, particularly the supply of silk, spices, and aromatics from the East to the Roman Empire. Archaeological finds, including customs tariff tables (the so-called “Palmyra Tariff”, dated to 137 AD), testify to a clearly regulated system of trade taxation and confirm a high level of administrative organisation.

The religious life of Palmyra was characterised by syncretism. The principal deity was Baal (Bel), whose cult combined Mesopotamian influence with West Semitic traditions. The Temple of Baal (32 AD) was one of the largest cult structures in the region. There were also other local deities, such as Baalshamin and Atargatis, as confirmed by archaeological and epigraphic evidence.



*Monumental (Triumphal) Arch in Palmyra*

The reign of Zenobia in the second half of the third century AD was a critical period in Palmyra's history. According to ancient sources, she was a highly educated woman who knew several languages (including Ancient Greek and Egyptian) and considered herself an heir to the Hellenistic monarchs and even claimed descent from Cleopatra. She was the second wife of Odaenathus II, King

of Palmyra, who recognised himself as a vassal of the Roman Empire in 258. Appointed commander-in-chief in the East, he assumed the title of Augustus, defeated the Persians, and annexed vast territories in Syria to the Palmyrene Kingdom.

Following Odaenathus' assassination in 267, the leadership of Palmyra passed to his young son Vaballathus, but Zenobia became the de facto ruler.



Herbert Gustave Schmalz. *Zenobia's Last Look upon Palmyra*. 1888

Amid the crisis of the Roman Empire, Zenobia attempted to create an independent state, extending her authority over significant territories in the East. In 270–271 her troops established control over Egypt and part of Asia Minor. However, her ambitions led to a conflict with the Roman emperor Aurelian.

In 272 the Roman army besieged Palmyra. Aurelian offered Zenobia peace, but the queen was confident that the Romans would not be able to take the city. Nevertheless, Palmyra's defenders had to lay down their arms before the Roman legions.

After defeating the Palmyrene Kingdom and restoring Roman control over the region, Aurelian received the titles “the Restorer of the East” and “the Greatest Conqueror of Palmyra”.

According to the *Historia Augusta*, “Defeated, Zenobia attempted to flee on camels to the Persians, but was captured by cavalry sent in pursuit and handed over to Aurelian”. During his triumphal procession in Rome, Aurelian paraded Queen Zenobia through the city in golden chains.

After its defeat, Palmyra gradually lost its importance as a trading centre. Political instability and economic decline caused the decay of the once-thriving city. Nevertheless, in Late Antiquity Palmyra continued to exist as a fortified outpost. Under the Byzantine Emperor St Justinian I in the sixth century its defensive structures were reconstructed.

In the modern era, Palmyra has gained immense significance as an important archaeological site. Its ruins, including the Temple of Baal and the Great Colonnade, have become a vital source for studying ancient architecture and the history of trade. Systematic excavations conducted by international expeditions have significantly expanded knowledge of the city. In 1980 Palmyra became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, in the twenty-first century



Temple of Baalshamin in 2010

its preservation has been threatened by the Syrian Civil War.

In late May 2015 Palmyra was seized by the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group. The destruction of its monuments became an example of barbaric devastation of cultural heritage in the twenty-first century. In summer 2015 the deliberate destruction of monuments began: on 27 June 2015 the statue Lion of Al-Lat was destroyed; on 23 August the Temple of Baalshamin was blown up; on 30 August the premier Temple of Baal (one of Palmyra's most important religious complexes) was destroyed; on 4 September three funerary towers in the Valley of the Tombs were demolished; and on 5 October the famous Monumental Arch was blown up.

The National Museum of Palmyra was looted, and the illegal sale

of artefacts on the black market became widespread. In August 2015 the renowned Syrian archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad was executed by terrorists after refusing to reveal the location of the hidden ancient treasures.

UNESCO and the UN Security Council condemned the destruction of the monuments as a war crime, an act of cultural terrorism, and an attempt to eradicate the region's history, memory and identity.

In March 2016 the Syrian army liberated the city. Russia provided essential support to Syrian government forces. Russian aviation conducted several hundred combat sorties, destroying terrorist positions.

However, in December 2016 jihadists recaptured Palmyra. The barbaric destruction continued: in

January 2017 the tetrapylon and the façade of the Roman theatre were blown up, and the ancient amphitheatre sustained severe damage. Satellite imagery confirmed the scale of destruction: only four of the original sixteen columns of the tetrapylon survived.

On 2 March 2017, with Russian support, Palmyra was finally liberated by Syrian forces, but by that time a significant part of the unique architectural complex had been destroyed or heavily damaged.

Together with Syrian and international experts, Russian specialists also participated in the initial assessment of damage to the monuments and in the creation of digital models of the destroyed structures and the possible reconstruction of unique monuments.

# EASTER GREETINGS FROM HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL

*Beloved in the Lord, Most Reverend Archpastors, venerable presbyters and deacons,  
God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!*

**CHRIST IS RISEN!**



In all the richness and diversity of human language, there are no words more joyful and more desired for the believing heart than this firm testimony of the accomplished

victory of life over death and of good over evil.

“Christ is risen!” – in this good news is concentrated the hidden power of hope and the great assurance

of faith by which people have lived since the time of their expulsion from Paradise. They lived in expectation of forgiveness, reconciliation, and deliverance – but the Lord has given

incomparably more, for in His love He “has provided something better for us” (Heb. 11:40).

The Son of God came into the world and became man, sharing with us all the burdens of earthly existence and drinking to the dregs the cup of suffering – and the bitterest of them, the cup of death. “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), He took upon Himself our sins, freely ascending the Cross.

and illumined the depths. Death is destroyed, the gates of hell are broken, and all creation that was once in darkness is filled with light,” – thus does Saint Ephrem the Syrian hymn the Saviour’s victory over death.

Has it ever been heard that death returns its prey? And even if it did, it would only be for a time, to take it back again. But Christ, having risen from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has dominion over Him (Rom. 6:9). Being the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor. 15:20), He goes before us on this path: “Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23).

God, who by His Incarnation renewed human nature and healed it from the wounds of sin, leads us by the Resurrection to still greater pastures. He not only restores to humanity what was lost, granting forgiveness and reconciliation with Himself, but also adopts us as His children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5), and to those who believe in His name gives the power to become children of God (John 1:12), even gods by grace.

Together with the springtime transformation of blossoming nature, the wondrous message of salvation once again spreads throughout the world: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen; He is not here” (Mark 16:6). The tomb is empty! The Lord is risen, as He said (Matt. 28:6)!

The Pascha of Christ is an inexhaustible source of our great joy – a joy that flows from the love of God for the human race, surpassing all understanding, by which both visible and invisible blessings are revealed to us. The immeasurable power of this sacrificial love extends so far that it conquers hell, opens Paradise, grants forgiveness, and bestows true spiritual freedom.

“Love is strong as death” (Song of Songs 8:6), declared the wise

King Solomon. But we, the disciples of Christ, bear firm witness that love is even stronger than death. It overcomes time and space, casts down sin and the power of darkness. The All-merciful Lord calls us into the Kingdom of love – and none may enter it without having love in his heart. Let us therefore forgive one another, cast off the chains of mutual grievances and sorrows, be reconciled and embrace one another. Let us show mercy to those in need and comfort the sorrowful.

Sanctified by Christ and entering into the wondrous celebration of Pascha, we transfigure the world around us with the incorruptible light of the Resurrection, bringing it into the joy of salvation for which the whole creation longs, striving to be set free into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:21). Then our very life, lived in unity with the Lord, becomes a true Liturgy – a Liturgy of truly cosmic scale, in which every creature may offer thanksgiving and praise to the Creator, crying out: “Glory to Thy Resurrection, O Christ! Glory to Thy Kingdom! Glory to Thy providence, O Thou who alone lovest mankind!”

In the world there are many spiritual paths, but there is only one – the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Only one Victor over sin and death. Only One who opens the heavens. His name is Jesus Christ, and there is salvation in no other (Acts 4:11).

Heartily congratulating you all on the feast of Pascha, I once again address to you the life-affirming and ever-encouraging testimony that:

**TRULY THE LORD IS RISEN!**

+KIRILL,  
PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW  
AND ALL RUS’

Pascha of Christ

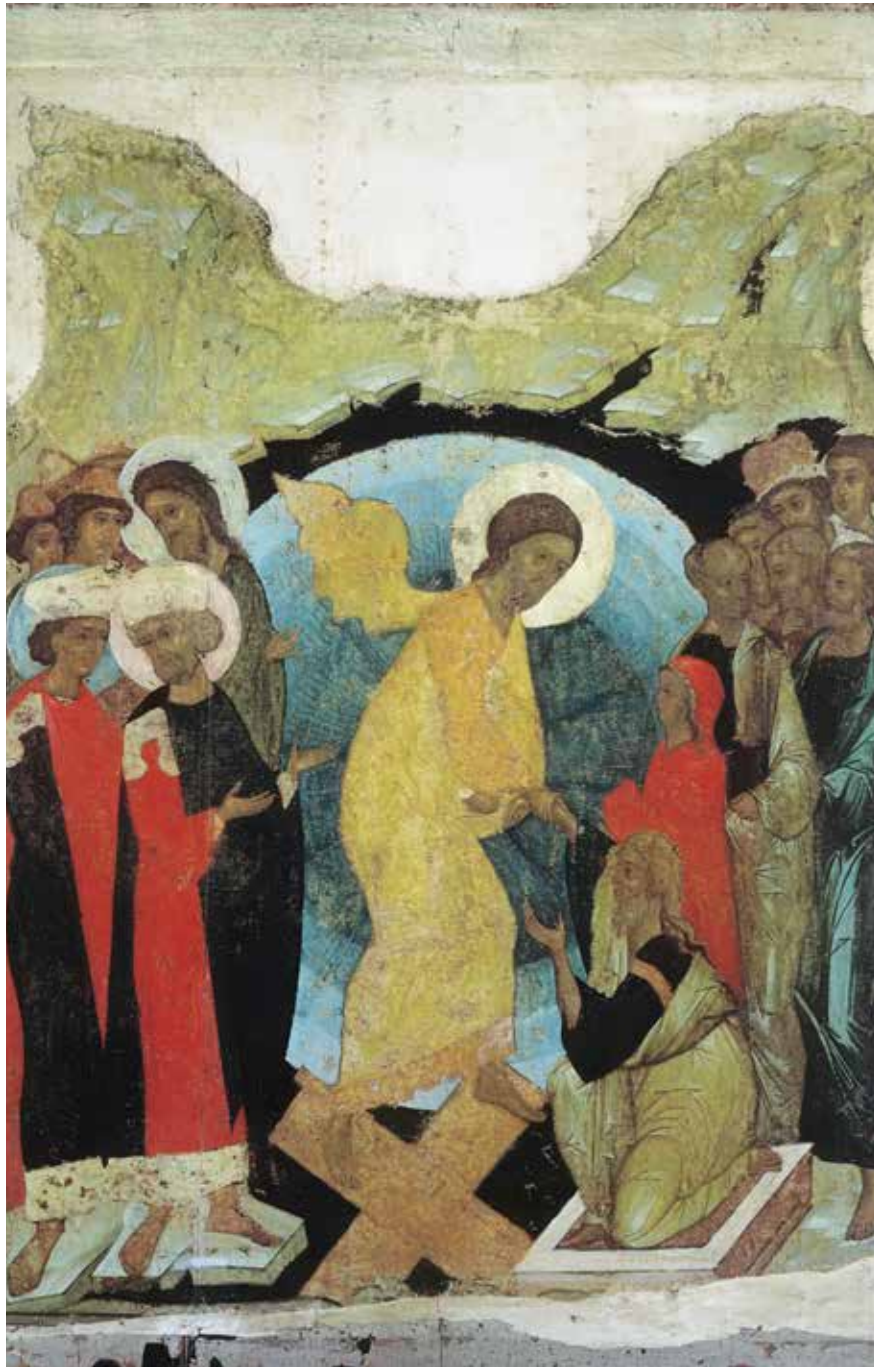
2026

But could death hold the Creator of life? Could the insatiable abyss of hell swallow Him by whose Word all things came into being? “The glory of God has appeared in the universe

# OUR EASTER LENT

*Easter in 2026 will be celebrated on April 12*

By DR. AUGUSTINE SOKOLOVSKI,  
*Doctor of Theology, Priest*



*The Resurrection of Christ. Icon by Andrey Rublev. 1408–1410*

According to a very ancient tradition of the Orthodox Church dating back to the first generations of the Apostles' disciples, the Great Lent has as its main purpose the preparation for the celebration of Christ's Resurrection. Easter in 2026 will be celebrated on April 12. This is an early celebration. It is preceded by exactly forty-nine days of Great Lent and four preparatory Sundays.

"Therefore, purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us," writes the Apostle Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians about preparing for Easter (1 Cor. 5:7).

By analogy with Paul's words about Easter, "our Passover," the Church, as a community of believers journeying through time, refers to the Easter season, the period of Lent, and the preparation for it with the festive phrase "our Easter Lent."

## *Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee*

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is the first preparatory Sunday for Great Lent in terms of the composition of the divine service. From this day onwards, a liturgical book called the Lenten Triodion begins to be used. Gradually, the Triodion will be used more and more, and with the beginning of Great Lent, it will completely replace the Octoechos, only to give way to it again at the end of Pentecost.

Regular Orthodox worship throughout the year is based on the principle of a strictly regulated alternation of eight melodies, or tones. The texts of these hymns are contained in a special liturgical book called the Octoechos in Greek. In turn, the name "Triodion" comes from the Greek phrase "three songs." This is the name given to the main part of Matins during Great Lent – the liturgical canon.

In fact, the entire liturgical year is a preparation for Great Lent, Great Lent is a preparation for Easter, and Easter is an encounter with Christ. For, as the Church Father St. Augustine (354–430) wrote, "Easter contains the Mystery." The Mystery, or the sacrament is the reality of God's real presence here and now, when in obvious and visible things, water, oil, bread, wine, and others, a person is attached to immortality. "For you were cut off from the wild olive tree by nature and grafted into the good olive tree by nature," writes the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans about the supernatural nature of the election of believers in grace (Rom. 11:24).

During the liturgy of the first preparatory Sunday, the Gospel reading about the tax collector and the Pharisee is read.

According to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 18, verses 2–8, two men "went into the temple to pray." The first, who was a Pharisee, praised himself before God, and the second, who was a tax collector, asked for forgiveness: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

This is all described in just five verses of the Gospel. These are just five verses from the Gospel, in which everything is described, the foundations of the behavior of all future humanity for millennia and many centuries are laid, and magnificent works of culture and art are predetermined. They will inspire Orthodox believers at all times,

especially those who live abroad and in the diaspora.

The parable of the Publican and the Pharisee can be interpreted in a personal moral sense. If we praise yourself, and even more so, humiliate others, we should expect condemnation. Moreover, such condemnation is not just a reproach or some feeling of inadequacy, but a profound metaphysical catastrophe experienced personally.

"A certain person, our acquaintance, friend, relative, or just someone, went to church, but then became disappointed and stopped going," we often say. Such words show no awareness of the true tragedy and no humility. In fact, we should say: "A certain person went to church, but for reasons unknown to us, God became disappointed in him." In this case, we should pray that God, through the Holy Spirit, will grant such a person grace so that he can return to the Church. After all, humility is not just some kind of applied virtue, formulated by the Church or priests for the sake of edification, but a property of God Himself, in whose imitation lies true human happiness. "My humble God" is how the greatest Orthodox prophet and spiritual teacher of Orthodox Christianity at the turn of the first and second millennia, St. Simeon of Constantinople (949–1022), referred to the Creator and Redeemer. His contemporaries called him "the New Theologian" because they considered him a holy fool.

Over time, this context was forgotten, and the nickname "New Theologian" became a glorious title of recognition. Indeed, in its nearly two-thousand-year history of holiness, Orthodoxy has honored only two saints with the title "Theologian." These are the Apostle and Evangelist John, whose Gospel begins with a magnificent testimony to the Son of God, who is the Divine Word, who became man

in Christ Jesus in history. The second Theologian of Orthodoxy is Bishop Gregory of Nazianzus (325–389), who preached the divinity of the Son of God in Constantinople against the Arian heretics.

A contemporary of St. Gregory was a great Syrian ascetic named Isaac. His hagiographers say that during the reign of the heretical emperor Valens (364–378), he went out to meet the latter when he was going to war with the Persians and predicted his imminent death for supporting heresy. In turn, Valens ordered Isaac to be imprisoned so that upon his return from battle he could execute him for what he was convinced was false prophecy. Valens died in battle and even his body was not found. This is an extremely rare occurrence and a sign of an extraordinary catastrophe.

After Valens, Emperor Theodosius the Great (379–395), who was a staunch Orthodox Christian, ascended to the throne, which enabled Gregory of Nazianzus to come to Constantinople and begin preaching Orthodoxy. It was in honor of Isaac that the most cherished place in the hearts of all Russian people, the pride of all those living in the diaspora, the greatest Orthodox Cathedral of St. Isaac of Dalmatia, was built in the northern capital of Russia, St. Petersburg. Historians claim that on the day of Isaac's commemoration according to the Julian calendar, which was May 30 at that time, Peter the Great (1672–1725) was born. Since some researchers question this date, theology comes to the aid of historians. Isaac opposed the heretical ruler, thereby becoming the patron saint of Orthodox emperors, as Russian Tsar Peter considered himself to be.

The same parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee can be interpreted in a theological, ecclesial sense. Then, from a personal moral appeal, it becomes an appeal to



Enrico Albrici. *The Publican and the Pharisee*. 1750

all believers together. The Church is the Community of Believers. Therefore, the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee is an appeal to the whole Church. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” as it is written in the Book of Revelation (3:22).

The Publican and the Pharisee represent the entire Church. The Symbol of Faith calls the Church “Holy.” The Church is indeed holy and blameless; she is literally filled with righteousness and communicates virtue. At the same time, the Church is a community of people. As the Syrian Father of the Church Ephrem (306–370) said, whose prayer “Lord and Master of my life” believers read during Lent services: “The whole Church is a Church of penitents.” In turn, the Latin Father of the Church, St. Augustine (354–430), warned that “the Church is a complex two-part body, in which one part belongs to Christ and the other to the devil.” Until history ends, sinners, and we are all sinners, must repent; and evil, at the end of history, whether it hides within the Church or outside it, will be cast into the lake of fire.

Here is the full quote from the Apocalypse: “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:13–14).

These formidable words conceal a profound optimism. For they affirm that until the history of the world is complete, the place of eternal retribution remains empty. It is prepared for hell and death. Everyone has time to repent, so as not to end



*Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt, c. 1668–1669*

up there together with these realities doomed to eternal destruction.

When the Church forgets that it is “also a tax collector,” that we must always humble ourselves and repent, God subjects the Church to crises, prosperity is replaced by persecution. If the Church forgets its supernatural nature, ceases to praise God for the immeasurable gifts bestowed upon her, which are manifested in the virtues of believers and saints – this is the image of a Pharisee – then its everyday life becomes gray. It

sinks into bureaucracy and ceases to attract people with its beauty, ceases to be missionary. During Lent, the Church, as a community of believers, will be inspired by the teachings of the Gospel.

### *Sunday of the Prodigal Son*

The second preparatory Sunday before Lent is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. During Sunday

liturgy, the great parable of the Lord Jesus is read. This is more than a parable; it is a real event in world history. From the moment Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Evangelist Luke recorded these words, moved by the Holy Spirit, the course of history changed. The course of human history changed because from then on, repentance became its foundation. The principle of crime and punishment, which had previously dominated all religions and all relationships between man and God, was replaced by the expectation of forgiveness.

Like the story of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Parable of the Prodigal Son is found exclusively in the Gospel of Luke. It is chapter 15, verses 11–32. In theological terms, this attribution of important, unique material to a single literary monument is referred to by the German word *Sondergut* (literally: “special load,” “special burden”).

God the Father welcomes the prodigal son, opens his arms, and prepares a feast for him, saying: “Bring the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet; and bring the fattened calf and slaughter it; let us eat and rejoice!” – proclaims the Gospel.

The Church is a community of interpreters. In the Orthodox Christian understanding, the true feast of faith, the supper of forgiveness and thanksgiving, is the Holy Eucharist. This means that the Heavenly Father from the Parable had another Son, unique and irreplaceable, Who, like a slaughtered calf, or rather, like a Lamb, gave Himself for the sins of the world so that forgiveness might come.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is read by the Church two weeks before the beginning of Great Lent. Thus, all believers are called to repentance and the Eucharist, two sacraments which, being the sacramental

embrace of the Heavenly Father, open the doors of His house. To enter the Kingdom, one must forget one’s former self and return despite the magnitude of one’s sins and shame. One must also be cautious. The most important paradigm of biblical behavior for a believer is not to look around and not to condemn divine forgiveness towards others, as the older son mistakenly did. And one more thing. Repentance must be genuine. It is impossible to come to church or, for example, take monastic vows, which is a real-life version of the parable of the prodigal son, for career or convenience reasons. Fake repentance is a very grave sin; the parable of the prodigal son cannot simply be imitated, it must be fulfilled once and for all.

### *Presentation of the Lord*

The Russian Church follows the old style in its worship. This allows it to preserve an amazing combination of fixed and movable feasts, which would inevitably be lost if it switched to the new modern calendar. Thus, in the Julian calendar, Easter may coincide with the Annunciation, and the Apostles’ Fast, which begins on the eighth day after Pentecost, is always preserved, even if Easter is extremely early, and in such a case, the fast itself lasts only a few days. In Greek churches, which follow the new style, such coincidences are impossible, which is extremely unfortunate. Such amazing coincidences of holidays are especially noticeable to Orthodox Christians living far from their homeland.

An example of such a coincidence or combination of movable or fixed holidays is the proximity of the Week of the Prodigal Son to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Feast of the Presentation concludes a special and very important cycle

of celebrations. It began with Advent, forty days before Christmas; it continued for forty days and ends with the Presentation. The Presentation is the bringing of Jesus to the Temple. Since the firstborn sons of Egypt were destroyed in the Old Testament, God commanded that the firstborn sons of Israel be consecrated to Him. The Feast of the Presentation is the dedication of Jesus to God. Since Mary brings Jesus to the Temple, this feast is both in honor of the Lord and in honor of Mary. In this, it is similar to the Annunciation. This is a very important and rare feature.

In his essay entitled “What is an apparatus?,” the greatest philosopher of our time, Giorgio Agamben, describes his method. He begins his reflection with one philosopher or another on whom he is working, but then, at the most crucial moment, he breaks with the latter’s original idea. This is how a new philosophical construct is born. In our discussion of the times and the feasts of the Church, we will apply a similar method to theological reflection.

The main character of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is Simeon. The event of the Presentation is described in only one of the Gospels, the Gospel of Luke, and Luke is also the only one who describes the parable of the prodigal son. Candlemas is another name for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. As already mentioned, Candlemas according to the Julian calendar is almost always celebrated in close proximity to Prodigal Son Sunday, and in 2026 it coincides with it completely. This gives the Church – the community of interpreters – a reason for special theological reflections inspired by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son describes a father who has two sons. One of these sons is righteous, and the other is prodigal. The father

accepts both, but the older son condemns his younger brother, who was prodigal, and whom his father forgave. In response, he hears the bewilderment of his kind father. “He said to him, ‘My son! You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:31–32). On the feast of the Presentation, Orthodox believers hear the continuation of this parable.

The father is not only the Heavenly Father, but also the image of every good parent who forgives here on earth and who is merciful. But mercy is not redemption. The father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son is Simeon. He grew old and outlived both of his children. He remained alone and lived near the temple. Mercy does not bring redemption. “After us there will be before. Youth turns into hardship. We keep dying until we live. We die alive to death. We are drifting toward the end. But the time knows no mercy. Time, please stop”, sings Till Lindemann in his ballad entitled “Time” (In the original German text: “Zeit”). Grieving that forgiveness does not overcome time, and that everything on earth is mortal, Simeon waited for the coming of the Messiah. It turned out that someone who was himself the epitome of genuine fatherhood also needed a real Father.

In one of the Paterikon, or sayings of the ancient desert fathers, someone from the city came to a monk to tell him about the sudden death of his father. “You are lying, my Father is immortal.” The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is the joy of the Church over these words. It is a united solidarity in prayer of praise to God for the fact that in Christ He became our true Father. “Our Father who art in Heaven,” as we repeat again and again in the beloved prayer of the Lord Jesus.

## THE RADIANT RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Easter, the most important Christian feast celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is observed on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. In 2026



A pre-revolutionary Easter postcard

Orthodox Christians celebrated Easter on 12 April.

Easter holds a special place in Russian culture and Orthodox tradition, being the principal festival of the Church year and the symbol of the victory of life over death. Just as centuries ago, this day is also filled with profound spiritual meaning and triumphal joy. The Holy Day is based on the event of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which, according to Christian teaching, took place on the third day after His Crucifixion and became evidence of the triumph of Divine love and hope for salvation. Which is why Easter is regarded as the “feast of feasts” and “triumph of triumphs”.

Preparations for Easter commence long before the feast itself with the beginning of Lent: a period of strict abstinence, prayer, and inner purification. During this season, believers try to abstain not only from certain foods, but also from vanity and fuss, focusing on spiritual life and good works. Of particular importance is the last week before Easter, when the Passion and death of the Saviour on the Cross are remembered, which enhances the depth and significance of the approaching feast.

The climax comes on Easter night, when churches are packed with people, and the joyous service is accompanied by the procession of the cross and a special sense of unity.

In Russia Easter has always been not only a Church feast, but also a vibrant public celebration that unites generations. It continues to play a pivotal role in the life of society, reminding it of eternal values and offering a sense of hope.



## THE EXHIBITION, “ICONS: OLD BELIEVERS AND THEIR WORLD”

The Icon Museum and Study Centre in Clinton (Massachusetts, the USA) is hosting the exhibition, *Icons: Old Believers and Their World*. It is the result of the museum’s cooperation with the Russian Icon Collection project and will be open to visitors till 30 August 2026.

The exhibition displays over thirty Old Believer icons from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century from Oleg Kushnirsky’s collection. Some of the icons are being shown to the public for the first time. The project is curated by Dr Justin Willson (Yale University) and Elliot Mackin, the museum curator. The exhibition highlights the importance of Old Believer icons as an artistic and theological statement crafted in response to the reforms of Patriarch Nikon and the schism in the Russian Church in the seventeenth

century. The presented icons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveal the desire of icon-painters to preserve the pre-Petrine iconographic model and the Moscow tradition of the sixteenth century, and at the same time the desire to adapt them to the aesthetic and spiritual demands of their time.

Ilya Kushnirsky, the director of the icon collection, noted: “Something very important happened to me – I received the blessing of the Russian Church for my efforts to preserve icon-painting. It means a lot to our family, to my father.”

Konstanze Runge, the curator of the Icon Museum in Frankfurt, spoke about a silent dialogue that takes place in front of icons: “The icon looks at us, whether it is the face of a saint, Christ or the Mother

of God, and we look at them. This connection is important not only for believers, but also for art critics, collectors, and historians... The icon serves as an intermediary in communication between the believer and the Divine.”

She also emphasised how icons unite the world community: “Let’s just rejoice that icons bring us together. They really bring people closer together. They are a bridge not only between the earthly and Heavenly realms, but also between whole continents.”

The exhibition at the Icon Museum and Study Centre in Clinton is a continuation of the international exhibition activities of the Russian Icon Collection project and an important stage in the popularisation of Orthodox and Old Believer icon-painting in the West.