HISTORY

Research article

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN NORTH AFRICA IN THE 20th CENTURY

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ANTOSHIN Aleksey Valerievich, Dr.Sc. (History), Professor, Department of Oriental Studies, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-6093-2219. E-mail: alex_antoshin@mail.ru

Abstract. The article is devoted to the problem of the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the countries of North Africa in the 20th century. The author focuses on the history of the emergence and functioning of Orthodox parishes in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. The source base of the article was ego-documents, primarily the memoirs of Russian clergy and parishioners in the region. It is proven that, despite the fact that North Africa belonged to the canonical territory of the Alexandrian Patriarchate, the Russian Orthodox Church was present in this region. The article analyzes the history of the emergence of parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in North Africa and highlights the issue of building Orthodox churches in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. It is proven that the emergence of the phenomenon of Russian Orthodoxy here is associated with the consequences of the 1917 revolution and the Civil War, when thousands of so-called "white" émigrés found themselves in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. Particular attention is paid in the paper to the activities of the most significant church leaders of the ROCOR in the region. It is proven that it was the Orthodox parishes that were the main centers of consolidation for Russians who found themselves in exile in the four North African countries. Staying in exile strengthened the faith of these people, since Orthodoxy was considered by them to be one of the most important elements of national identity. The article also highlights the issue of strengthening the international activities of the Moscow Patriarchate after World War II, which led to jurisdictional conflicts among Orthodox believers throughout the world, including in North Africa. The author comes to the conclusion that the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the North African region has a solid historical foundation laid in the 20th century.

Keywords: North Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Orthodoxy, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Moscow Patriarchate, Russian émigrés

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the position of the Moscow Patriarchate has strengthened on the African continent. This is connected with the formation of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa by the Holy Synod on 29 December 2021. This event has posed the problem of turning to historical experience and determines the need to identity the prerequisites of the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa.

In the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, the 20th century was an epoch of severe trials, a time when in the USSR churches were destroyed, parishes closed, and the clergy subjected to various persecutions. Due to the atheist ideology of the Soviet state, it could not fully use the potential of Russian Orthodoxy abroad. Nonetheless, these circumstances did not mean that there were no Russian Orthodox parishes in Africa in the 20th century. Such parishes were created by Russian émigrés, appearing abroad as a result of the 1917 revolution, the civil war, and other cataclysms. Lacking support from the Russian state, these people were not only able to preserve their Orthodox faith but also to build churches and monasteries in various parts of Africa [Hayes 1996]. The largest such parishes were in North African countries. The present article is dedicated precisely to understanding the functioning of Russian Orthodox institutions in this region over the last century.

This theme has repeatedly attracted the interest of researchers [Pronin 2000; Popov 2007]. Among various general works, one cannot fail to mention that of Hegumen Rostislav (Kolupaev), who currently serves in North Africa [Hegumen Rostislav 2004]. His work is distinguished by the use of varied sources, including the church archives located in the region.

Researchers have also examined this theme using materials from individual countries. So, the history of Russian Orthodoxy in Tunisia is actively being studied. Thanks to the efforts of K.V. Makhrov, a general work was published in 2008 on the emergence and evolution of Russian émigré society in Tunisia [Makhrov 2008]. Also well known is M.A. Panova's work, which is based on materials from Russian state archives and the personal collections of émigrés living in Tunisia [Panova 2008]. Recently, E.N. Eltsova and S.A. Beshanova, lecturers at the University of Carthage, have also been occupied with this subject [Eltsova, Beshanova, 2020].

The principal specialist on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Morocco is N.V. Sukhov, whose works show the multifaceted image of the Russian community in this country [Sukhov 2016; Sukhov 2019]. An article by Iu.V. Maksimov has shone light on the fundamental stages of Russian Orthodoxy's history in Africa.[1] The history of Russian Orthodoxy in Egypt has been discussed by V.V. Beliakov and G.V. Goriachkin [Beliakov 2001; Beliakov 2003; Goriachkin 2012].

The subject has also attracted the attention of European and American researchers. Naturally, French authors have turned their attention to the question of Russian émigrés in the Maghreb, an important part of the French Empire. E. Menegaldo, a French literary scholar of Russian provenance, has touched on the construction of Orthodox churches

[1] Maksimov Iu.V. Orthodoxy in Algeria. *Pravoslavie.ru.* 2007. (In Russ.). https://pravoslavie.ru/put/070207105518.htm?ysclid=m77qdes33a904617383 (accessed: 12.02.2025)

when discussing the presence of Russian naval émigrés in Tunisia [Menegaldo 2015]. An interesting review of relevant archival documents preserved in Toulon can be found in an article by the Russo-French researcher M. Thimon-Rudkovskaya [Thimon-Rudkovskaya 2005].

We should also note the work of the American political scientist H. Psomiades [Psomiades 1957] dedicated to an analysis of the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Middle East after the Second World War. Using the approaches characteristic of American Sovietologists during the Cold War, Psomiades considers the patriarchate as an instrument of the USSR's foreign policy and as a "base for Russian expansion," seeing here continuity with the efforts of the Russian Empire in the region.

In modern scholarship, much attention has been dedicated to the use of historical sources like egodocuments. The active use of letters, diaries, and memoirs allows for the implementation of the modern humanities' orientation towards anthropological research, with the emphasis being placed on studying the internal world of the individual. The history of Russian Orthodoxy in North Africa can also be accessed through such sources. Some have been published [Letnev, Khokhlova 2002; Flam 2006; Eltsova, Beshanova 2022], while others are kept in the archives. Among the largest of these sources, one should highlight the works of Bishop Mitrofan (Znosko-Borovsky), which contain a detailed narrative about the situation in the Orthodox parishes of Morocco after the Second World War.[2]

THE ORIGINS OF RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY ABROAD IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The legal basis for the formation of the structures of Russian Orthodoxy abroad was ruling no. 362 issued by the Patriarch, the Most Holy Synod, and the Supreme Church Council on 7/20 November 1920. It declared: "If a diocese, due to the movement of the front, border changes, etc., is unable to communicate with the Supreme Church administration or if the Supreme Church administration itself, headed by the Most Holy Patriarch, ceases its activities, the diocesan prelate should quickly enter into communication with the prelates of neighbouring dioceses on the subject of organising a higher church authority for several dioceses in the same condition."[3] Furthermore, the ruling emphasises that this was an "imperative duty"[4] of the most senior bishop in these dioceses.

We must undoubtedly take into account the historical conditions in which this ruling was promulgated. The White movement in southern Russia had suffered defeat: parts of P.N. Wrangel's army were evacuated from the Crimea to Turkey. The ruling of the ecclesiastical authorities *post-facto* legitimised the Supreme Church Administration (SCA) of southern Russia, created in Stavropol in May 1919 for territories under White control. After the evacuation to Turkey, the SCA was headed by Metropolitan Anthony

[2] Mitrofan, bishop (Znosko-Borovsky). Chronicle of One Life. Memories and Sermons. *The ABC of Faith*. (In Russ.). https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Mitrofan_Znosko_Borovskij/hronika-odnoj-zhizni-vospominanija-propovedi/ (accessed: 12.02.2025)

[3] Patriarch Tikhon's Decree № 362. *Drevo Encyclopaedia*. (In Russ.). https://drevo-info.ru/articles/6102.html?ysclid=m6 qjvkziuz224031710 (accessed: 02.02.2025)

[4] Ibid.

(Khrapovitsky) of Kiev and Galicia: he was an authoritative hierarch who, before the 1917 revolution, had been the rector of the Moscow and Kazan' ecclesiastical academies. He quickly moved to Sremski Karlovci in Serbia [Sologub 1968].

However, the unity of Russian Orthodoxy abroad did not last long: a number of individual branches formed, some of which are directly connected to the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in North Africa.

The first of these branches was the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), which arose on the basis of the SCA headed by Metropolitan Anthony. For quite some time, the Most Holy Synod of the ROCOR was based in Sremski Karlovci. Until 1926, it united all of Russian Orthodoxy abroad; subsequently, however, the Western European Orthodox Archbishopric, founded by Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgiyevsky), split from it. Ultimately, this archbishopric entered the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople. The main position taken by Metropolitan Eulogius and his colleagues was the special mission of their branch of Orthodoxy abroad: it was represented not as an émigré church but as a centre for spreading the Orthodox faith in western Europe. To a considerable extent, it relied on the cultural potential of "Russian Paris" [Johnston 1986].

In parallel with the Western European Orthodox Archbishopric, the North American diocese also left the ROCOR: the origins of this jurisdiction go back to "Russian America" at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1970s, it became the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of America [Popov 2005: 258].

The loss of these two branches of Orthodoxy abroad dealt a strong blow to the ROCOR, but nonetheless it continued to wield a considerable amount of spiritual authority, which it used to support many Russian émigrés. After the Second World War, the Synod of the ROCOR moved to the United States. At the end of the 1980s, this jurisdiction contained around 150,000 believers, 330 parishes, and 24 monasteries across almost every continent [Nazarov 1992: 166]. Until 1948, it owned the property and plots in the Holy Land that had previously belonged to the Russian Empire. In 1981, the ROCOR canonised the family of Nicholas II, shot in the Urals in 1918, as martyrs and confessors.

After the Second World War, the Moscow Patriarchate intensified its activities abroad. Its parishes (with around 4–5,000 parishioners before 1991) [Nazarov 1992: 172] constituted an alternative branch of Orthodoxy abroad. It should be noted that the celebrated theological scholarship of several leading church hierarchs, such as Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) and Archbishop Vasily (Krivoshein), is connected to the Moscow Patriarchate's foreign parishes.

Such was the complex jurisdictional situation in which the Orthodox believers and hierarchs who found themselves in the countries of North Africa had to act.

THE LEGACY OF THE RUSSIAN SQUADRON: THE ORTHODOX IN TUNISIA

The most important centre of Russian emigration in North Africa was Tunisia. The origins of the Russian community here relate to the evacuation of Wrangel's White Army from the Crimea to Turkey in 1920. Ships carrying troops and civilian refugees were directed to the Tunisian port of Bizerte, the location of the largest French naval base in

the region. More than 30 ships arrived, which is why Bizerte is often known as the last station of the Black Sea Fleet. More than 6,000 Russians arrived in the northern-most port of Tunisia (and of Africa itself) between the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921. Here the Naval Cadet Corps renewed its work, graduating four classes in Tunisia [Kuznetsov 2024: 40].

The history of the Russian squadron's stay in Bizerte ended in the autumn of 1924 with France's recognition of the Soviet Union. On 29 October 1924, the flag of St. Andrew was lowered for the last time on the battleship *Georgii Pobedonosets*. Gradually, Russian émigrés left Tunisia for France, Czechoslovakia, Algeria, Morocco, and other countries. By 1926, around 1,000 Russians remained in the French protectorate. In the second half of the 1920s and 1930s, émigrés actively pursued naturalisation, taking French citizenship.

As K.V. Makhrov justifiably remarks, "the Church occupies a special place in the history of the Russian emigration. Being the focus of spiritual life, it became a centre that unified émigrés" [Makhrov 2008: 28]. Liturgies were organised for Russian refugees in both Bizerte and Tunis, the protectorate's capital.

In Bizerte, services were initially held in a chapel in a casemate of the Jebel-Kebir fortress: they were organised for the lecturers at the Naval Cadet Corps and their families, who were living in the camp of Sfayat. Here was founded the church of St Paul the Confessor, to which were transferred icons and liturgical apparatus from one of the ships of the squadron. It is estimated that around 500 people visited these services.

The spiritual leader of the refugees in Bizerte was Archpriest Georgii Spasskii (1877–1934). As his successors justly remarked, Father Georgii was distinguished by his excellent education and oratorial talents: "He communed with his flock during his constant movements around Tunisia—from ship to ship, from camp to camp, going by foot with a pilgrim's staff in hand" [Lukonin, Novikov 2001: 82]. At the beginning of the 1920s, his "Letters from Africa" appeared in the Belgrade émigré newspaper Novoe Vremya (New Time), containing vivid depictions of the history of Russian Orthodoxy in Tunisia.

"I arrived some time in February at the camp of Ain-Draham," remembers Spasskii. "Situated high in the mountains, above the clouds, shrouded in constant fog in winter, and distant from the squadron (about 250 kilometres), this camp, it seemed, was covered by the huge grey wings of the spirit of despondency. In the morning, I gathered everyone for the liturgy in a large empty barracks, which the French commandant kindly provided to us… I summoned with the summons of Christ: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me.' I offered confession and the Eucharist to those who desired it. Those who had not been to confession for ten years approached the great sacrament with excitement in their souls. I confessed from 9 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon. A young woman, the wife of a naval officer, approached with tears in her eyes and whispered: 'Father, I am a Lutheran, I thirst for the holy Eucharist and confession, but there are no [Lutheran] pastors here. I pray to you, do not turn me away… I yearn to be with Christ.' And she had such a mournful look…" [Letnev, Khokhlov 2002: 82].

Spasskii's "Letters from Africa" thus convincingly demonstrate that it was precisely the conditions of emigration and refugeehood in which Russians lived that strengthened the Orthodox faith among them.

The families of the émigré naval officers lived on the battleship *Georgii Pobedonosets*, and faith played a very large role in their lives as well. This is mentioned several times in the memoirs of A.A. Shirinskaia (1912–2009), the daughter of the commander of the destroyer *Zharkii*: over the course of many years, she became the principal keeper of memories about the Russian squadron. Thanks to her work *Bizerte: The Last Station*, modern Russian society has been able to learn about the Russian presence in Tunisia. Remembering her life on board *Georgii Pobedonosets* at the beginning of the 1920s, Shirinskaia remarks: "On Saturday evening and Sunday morning, tables were folded away to clear the deck for the vigil. It was rare that anyone missed the church service…" [Shirinskaia 1999: 128].

After the end of the Russian squadron and the closure of the Naval Cadet Corps in Bizerte, Orthodox liturgies continued to be served. At the close of the 1920s, a chapel was set up in one of the rooms of Father Ioannikiy (Poletaev's) apartment. Finally, a collection was announced in countries where Russian émigrés lived to gather funds for building an Orthodox church in Bizerte. The church of St Alexander Nevsky was built in 1939 in a neo-Russian style using designs by the military engineer Colonel N.S. Soukharjevski [Menegaldo 2015], but the building suffered greatly from bombardment during the Second World War. Hegumen Feodosii characterised the condition of the church at the end of the 1940s in this way: "The holy church, wounded, covered in holes, partially destroyed, was orphaned, like a forgotten and abandoned lighthouse standing amidst ruins. At one time, during the evacuation, it served as shelter for nomadic Bedouins, who carried away the remaining liturgical equipment, part of the iconostasis, vessels, and even stone slabs" [Eltsova, Beshanova 2022: 212].

The émigrés undertook considerable labours so that this symbol of Russian presence in Tunisia was restored. A vivid description about the significance of this church was left by Rear Admiral A.I. Tikhmenev, former chief of staff of the Russian squadron in Bizerte: "In Bizerte, there was built a humble church, a monument to the last ship of the Russian imperial fleet; the banner of St Andrew was made the Curtain of the Royal Doors, and a marble plaque with the names of the squadron's ships was placed in this church-monument' [Shirinskaia 1999: 195].

In the city of Tunis, an Orthodox church was located in the medina of an Arabic palace from 1922. Its iconostasis and several icons were brought from *Georgii Pobedonosets*. The services here were performed by Father Konstantin (Mikhailovskii), who, according to a remark by Iu.V. Lukonin and S.S. Novikov, "commanded sympathy not only from his compatriots but also from local Arabs and Greeks" [Lukonin, Novikov 2001: 81]. In 1938, the Russians living in the protectorate's capital celebrated the 950th anniversary of the baptism of Rus in this church.

After the Second World War, the parish's rector was Hieromonk Feodosii, who arrived from France. He quickly managed to gain authority among his parishioners. Feodosii was also the initiator of a plan to build a new Orthodox church in Tunis. A building committee was established, which gathered funds from Russian émigrés living across the world.

The foundation stone was laid on 11 October 1953, while Tunisia was still a French protectorate. The ceremony was performed by Bishop Nafanail (V.V. Lvov, 1906–1986), the administrator of ROCOR parishes in North Africa. As remarked by A.V. Zernin,

former senior navigator of the transport *Kronshtadt* and a well-known figure among Russian émigrés in Tunisia, the place for the church was allotted by the municipality free of charge "in one of the best boulevards […] in the hope that this church would beautify the city" [Eltsova, Beshanova 2022: 222]. The ceremony was attended by representatives of the bey of Tunis and the French resident.

In 1954, the Synod of the ROCOR transferred Bishop Nafanail to Europe, which had a negative impact on the life of the parish. As Zernin notes, "the creative impulse summoned by the bishop immediately collapsed, and donations to the construction of the church ceased" [Eltsova, Beshanova 2022: 225]. Nonetheless, the project managed to arrive at completion: the church was consecrated in June 1956, shortly after Tunisia achieved independence.

The Orthodox parish in Tunis undertook considerable social work: care for the cemetery was organised, a library was formed, and help was provided to orphans, people without friends or relatives, the old, and the severely ill. The means for these campaigns were gathered from parishioners, and some financial assistance was provided by the government of Tunisia.

However, the situation in Tunisia was extremely unstable. Zernin describes the atmosphere in the country in 1957: "Because of the general political situation, it is like living upon a volcano that can erupt any minute. A careless gesture can cause passions to flare up, and only hope in the statesmanship of the people in power allows us to live and work as if in a calm environment" [Eltsova, Beshanova 2022: 228–229]. In the 1950s, during Tunisia's struggle for independence, Russian departure for France was hastened: by 1956, the number of Russians in the country was estimated at 300–380 people [Makhrov 2008: 28]. All this led to the end of Tunisia's role as an important centre in the Russian emigration.

Since 1992, Russian churches in Tunisia have been part of the Moscow Patriarchate. Among these are the church of the Resurrection and St Cyprian of Carthage in Tunis and the church of Alexander Nevsky in Bizerte.[5] In the opinion of Metropolitan Konstantin of Zaraisk, historical Russian parishes have a special place in the structure of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa entrusted to him [Konstantin 2025: 88]. Originating with the presence of the Russian squadron in Tunisia, these parishes continue to protect their spiritual heritage. For example, on 17 January 2024, for the 145th anniversary of the birth of Rear Admiral M.A. Berens, a Russian priest served an Orthodox *panikhida* in the Russian part of the Christian cemetery of Borgel in Tunis.[6]

THE PATH FROM PARISIAN THEOLOGY TO THE MOSCOW PATRIARCHATE: RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY IN MOROCCO

Another significant centre of the Russian emigration in North Africa was Morocco. The formation of the Russian community here in the 20th century was the result of the arrival of Russians from Tunisia, although people also came from Turkey, Egypt, and

[5] The Russian Church in Tunis. *The Coordinating Council of organizations of Russian compatriots in Tunisia.* (In Russ.). https://ksorstn.org/russkaia_tcerkov/ (accessed: 13.03.2025)

[6] A memorial service was held in Tunis at the grave of Rear Admiral M.A. Berens. *The Moscow Patriarchate.* 18.01.2024. (In Russ.). https://mospat.ru/ru/news/91261/ (accessed: 13.03.2025)

other countries. However, this community was small: at the end of the 1930s, it only counted several hundreds of people. Officers serving in the French Foreign Legion made up a transient part of this Moroccan Russian community.

As Iu.V. Lukonin states, "the Russian 'Moroccans' were mainly united by Orthodoxy" [Lukonin 2001a: 60]. The first church was located in Rabat in a barracks that had formerly served as housing for construction workers. It is interesting that the initiator of the parish was Metropolitan Eulogius, who sent Father Varsonofii (V.G. Tolstukhin, 1887–1952), formerly of the Valaam monastery, to Rabat. It was Varsonofii who, in 1927, prepared a set of regulations for the Orthodox parish that were confirmed by the French authorities. He also began the building of an Orthodox church in Rabat, the means for which were gathered with the help of philanthropic campaigns. The church of the Resurrection in Rabat was consecrated in 1932; Metropolitan Eulogius came especially from Paris for this event [Lukonin 2001a: 60].

The connection of the Rabat parish with the branch of Orthodoxy abroad personified by Eulogius is confirmed by documents from the local church archive studied by Hegumen Rostislav (Kolupaev). The documents contain information about the participation of the parish in financing the Institute Théologie Orthodoxe in Paris. In its turn, Paris sent methodological literature to Morocco [Rostislav 2004: 79].

There was also an Orthodox parish in Tangier (the house church of St. Cyprian of Carthage) and a chapel dedicated to St Sergius in Marrakesh; in the latter, Metropolitan Eulogius served a liturgy in 1932.

A surge in immigration from Russia to Morocco occurred after the Second World War, when the influx of Russians exceeded two thousand people [Sukhov 2016]. In this period, Morocco was interested in land surveyors, specialists in irrigation, and other engineering and technical personnel. The arrival of this large group of Russian émigrés in Morocco was de facto organised by the anti-communist organisation the National Workers' Union (NWU), which hoped to use the political potential of these people in case of an escalation of international tensions during the Cold War. In Morocco, they were considered stateless people (apatrides) temporarily residing in the country. Arriving from Europe, these Russian émigrés created an enterprise in Morocco that received government orders for land-surveying projects in various distant regions of the country, including the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara Desert.

A large quantity of Morocco émigré memoirs were published in the anthology *Fate of the Generation of the 1920s and 30s in Emigration*. I.V. Korolenko, whose memoirs can be found in this book, shared his first impression of the country: "Morocco met us bleakly: it was drizzling, cold, and uncomfortable. Our people kept saying: is that what a nice country would be called?[7] They took us to the Bournazel camp on the outskirts of Casablanca, where during the war the Americans had kept Italian prisoners. They put us into long barracks, which we initially partitioned somehow with blankets…there was no water in the barracks, so we had to go with a bucket to a common tap outside…it was cold in the rainy weather, and we froze in our drafty barracks. We cooked on primus stoves. We washed ourselves in basins" [Korolenko 2006: 74]. In Bournazel, the house church of the Holy Trinity was established in one of the barracks.

[7] "Morocco" in Russian sounds similar to the Russian word морока (moroka), meaning "hassle," "trouble."

The anti-communist parts of Russian émigré society in Morrocco were drawn towards the ROCOR in church matters. The key figure here was Archpriest (later bishop) Mitrofan (Znosko-Borovsky, 1909–2002), the rector of the Assumption parish and the Trinity church in Bournazel, as well as the dean of the ROCOR's Moroccan district.

A graduate of the University of Belgrade, a master in theology at the University of Warsaw, and the rector of Orthodox churches in Europe, Africa, and America, Father Mitrofan was a strong, if contradictory, personality. A vivid portrait is given by Admiral A.I. Rusin, one of the most authoritative figures in the Russian navy in exile (he had been the chief of the Russian Empire's naval staff in the First World War). Living in Casablanca after World War II, Rusin characterised Archpriest Mitrofan as "a person who perfectly grasped literary Russian, a highly talented preacher and a man of fervent prayer who attracted with his prayers and services even those who had long been distant from the Church and prayer." [8]

On the other hand, Hegumen Rostislav (Kolupaev) states that the "second wave" of emigration brought to Morocco "politicised churchmen" [Rostislav 2004: 156], meaning here precisely Archpriest Mitrofan. In his memoirs, Mitrofan himself recognises that his appointment in North Africa was facilitated by former parishioners in a displaced persons camp in Mönchehof, Germany.[9] Mönchehof was one of the key centres of the NWU's anti-communist activities in the second half of the 1940s.

Mitrofan's memoirs show that practically throughout his stay in Morocco, he had to endure a tough struggle attempting to overcome the clashes between different groups inside the Orthodox parishes. Even Admiral Rusin, who later gave such a positive account of the archpriest, initially stood against giving Mitrofan substantial rights in managing the parish in Casablanca. Mitrofan's relations were also difficult with the leadership of the local branch of the National Organisation of Russian Scouts (NORS), an émigré youth group opposed to the idea that its members would be, in Mitrofan's words, "under the roof of the Church."[10] Finally, the Russian General Military Union (RGMU), the main association of Russian military émigrés, believed that the archpriest spent insufficient time in his liturgies remembering the leaders of the White movement. Mitrofan also recalls "slanderous denunciations" to the police and "whisperers" who advised him not to deal with some émigrés accused of pro-Soviet inclinations.[11] On the whole, as is demonstrated by Mitrofan's memoirs, the religious situation of the Russian colony in post-war Morocco was extremely complicated.

Summing up Mitrofan's activities in Morocco, it is our opinion that one important circumstance should be marked. A.V. Popov, the noted historian of Russian Orthodoxy abroad, underlines: "Despite the fact that Bishop Mitrofan was the author of a range of books defending the Russian Church Abroad, in the last years of his life he consistently acted for the unification of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad with the Russian

[8] Library of Congress. Manuscript Division (LoC. MD). Poushkin Society in America records. Box 2. Folder "General correspondence. 1951–1952". A.I. Rusin – B.L. Brazol. 29.04.1951.
[9] Mitrofan, bishop (Znosko-Borovsky). Chronicle of One Life. Memories and Sermons. *The ABC of Faith.* (In Russ.). https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Mitrofan_Znosko_Borovskij/hronika-odnoj-zhizni-vospominanija-propovedi/ (accessed: 12.02.2025)
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which he considered the Mother Church" [Popov 2005: 70].

Among the key lay figures in the Russian Orthodox community in Morocco, a special place is occupied by Admiral Rusin. As the Russian émigré G.A. Rar remembers: "We had two churches: one was a small house church in the city itself on Avenue de Lorraine that had long existed, while the other was a new one in the barracks in the Bournazel camp settlement, where the majority of newcomers lived. There was one priest, Father Mitrofan Znosko-Borovsky. And when he served in the church on Avenue de Lorraine, Admiral Aleksandr Ivanovich Rusin was always present there. He stood at attention throughout the entire service. He knelt when the priest remembered 'the leaders and soldiers who placed their bodies on the field of battle for Faith and the Fatherland' and the murdered members of the imperial family" [Rar 2011: 224].

In the already-quoted letter by Rusin, which was written in 1951 to B.K. Brazol, the head of the Pushkin Society in America, the admiral remarked: "In Morocco, there are another two archimandrites who crossed over to the Soviet patriarch Alexy: I and the majority of parishioners left them and asked Metropolitan Anastasy [head of the ROCOR] to appoint to us Archpriest Znosko-Borovsky.' [12] A similar situation is mentioned by G.A. Rar in his memoirs, who remembered how he once attended a vigil in the Russian Orthodox church in Rabat. "During this," he notes, "three monks performed the service who had been compelled to abandon Valaam due to the Finnish government's coercive introduction of the new (Gregorian) calendar… the Valaam monks in Rabat remembered [in the litany] the Most Holy Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus Alexy I (Simanskiy, 1877–1970). However, Father Mitrofan Znosko and the Valaam monks Varsonofii (Tolstukhin) and Mitrofan during the litany and the Great Entrance remembered 'blessed Christopher, Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa,' and only then, in second place, 'their own' primates, either Patriarch Alexy or Metropolitan Anastasy" [Rar 2011: 227].

Thus, in Morocco, as in other countries where Russian émigrés lived, a struggle broke out between the different branches of Orthodoxy abroad. The Moscow Patriarchate's postwar international activities encountered resistance from the anti-communist émigrés, who usually gravitated towards the ROCOR. And for all the participants in these polemics, an important factor was the authority of the patriarch of Alexandria.

However, the relations of this hierarch with Archpriest Mitrofan, the leader of the ROCOR parishes in Morocco, also were not untroubled. The fact that North Africa was part of the Patriarchate of Alexandria's canonical territory could not but influence the position of Russian émigré parishes. Father Mitrofan received a letter from Patriarch Christopher II of Alexandria forbidding Mitrofan from performing the liturgy in the patriarchate's territories without special dispensation. In his reply, Father Mitrofan emphasised that he was a ROCOR clergyman and would only fulfil instructions that came from Metropolitan Anastasy, head of the ROCOR [Попов 2005: 78].

[12] LoC. MD. Poushkin Society in America records. Box 2. Folder "General correspondence. 1951–1952". A.I. Rusin – B.L. Brazol. 29.04.1951.

The extremely relevant problem of relations between Russian parishes in North Africa and the Patriarchate of Alexandria is also touched on by Hegumen Rostislav. He notes that the existence of these parishes on the patriarchate's canonical territories was regulated by concrete agreements between hierarchs, but "the poor and antiquated Greek structures in Africa were compelled to recognise the right of the Russians to an independent religious life in diaspora" [Rostislav 2004: 89]. Rostislav also shows that "mutual understanding and support" was established between the Orthodox Russians and the French living in Morocco [Rostislav 2004: 91].

According to I.V. Korolenko, the majority of the Russians who went to Morocco after the Second World War lived in the country for around eight years. This was due to the fact that the situation in Morocco became heated: "under the influence of extremists, the struggle for independence from the French protectorate was accompanied by bomb explosions and the murder of Europeans" [Korolenko 2006: 78]. As a consequence, Russians began to leave Morocco.

By the end of the 20th century, the church of the Dormition in Casablanca continued to exist. However, the priest (Archpriest N. Semenov) went to the church from Brussels (where he was rector of the church-monument of Righteous Job the Long-Suffering) only once over the course of several years [Rostislav 2004: 122].

A new impulse to Orthodox parishes in Morocco was given by the establishment of Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa. Metropolitan Konstantin of Zariask, head of the exarchate, visited the Dormition church in Casablanca in 2024, where he met with Archpriest Maksim Massalitin, the rector of parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Morocco.[13] The church of the Resurrection in Rabat is active, organising a charity drive to help those who suffered from the earthquake in Morocco in September 2023.[14] Parishioners regularly mark church holidays and there is a Sunday school in the parish.[15]

SHARING A COUNTRY'S TURBULENT FATE IN THE 20th CENTURY: ORTHODOX PARISHES IN ALGIERIA

Some Russian military émigrés moved from Bizerte to Algeria in the 1920s. In the capital of the French overseas department, the first Orthodox church was built in 1928 and dedicated to St Andrew the First-Called; the rector for many years was Archpriest V.V. Shustin (1886–1968). Somewhat later another parish, that of the Holy Trinity, arose: here served Archpriest E. Logodovskii/Lagodovskii.

From 1931, the Algerian parishes were within the jurisdiction of the ROCOR. However, as in Morocco, they maintained connections with the Russian exarchate in Paris and the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute (*Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint-Serge).*

[13] Metropolitan Konstantin of Zaraisk met with the rector of the parishes of the Russian Church in Morocco and served a liturgy in the capital of Burkina Faso. *The Moscow Patriarchate.* 22.10.2024. (In Russ.). https://eparchia.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6167155.html (accessed: 30.04.2025)

[14] The parish of the Russian Church in Morocco provided assistance to earthquake victims. *The Moscow Patriarchate*. 16.12.2023. (In Russ.). https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6084570.html (accessed: 30.04.2025)

[15] Christmas was celebrated at the Church of the Resurrection in the capital of Morocco. *Patriarchal Exarchate in Africa.* 09.01.2024. (In Russ.). https://exarchate-africa.ru/novosti/rozhdestvo-hristovo-otmetili-v-voskresenskom-hrame-v-stolicze-marokko/ (accessed: 30.04.2025)

A severe blow was dealt to the Russian émigré community in Algeria by the war for independence between 1954 and 1962. The atmosphere in the country at this time, as well as during the first years of independence, was such that the overwhelming majority of Russians (like the French) left. As a result, by the end of the 1960s there were only 12 ROCOR parishioners in Algeria; by the end of the 1980s, there existed only one Orthodox church, which lacked a priest [Maksimov 2007].[16] The civil war in Algeria in the 1990s, which was marked by a surge in terrorist activities by extremist groups, led to the final end of Orthodoxy in Algeria. The Moscow Patriarchate attentively followed politics in Algeria in the 1990s and 2000s, expressing concern about the persecution of Christians and the closure of Orthodox churches.[17]

A new stage in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Algeria began later in the 21st century: in October 2023, an Orthodox parish was opened within the Russian military mission.[18]

RETURNING TO THE BOSOM OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH: ORTHODOX PARISHES IN EGYPT

The origins of Russian émigré communities in Egypt are connected with the defeat of the White armies in southern Russia during the civil war. Wounded soldiers and officers from A.I. Denikin's army were evacuated to Egypt in 1920 and formed there the basis of a Russian colony. In total, around 4,350 Russians arrived in Egypt in this year [Beliakov 2003: 138]. They were housed in camps in Tell El Kebir, Sidi Bishr, Ismailia, and other places. Many of the Russian refugees were young people who hoped to move from Egypt to Europe [Riabova 2005]. As such, the Russian colony in Egypt gradually grew smaller: as of 1944, there were only 1,800 former Russian subjects present [Beliakova 2003: 186]. However, the colony continued to exist up until the Egyptian revolution of 1952.

As G. V. Goriachkin notes, "in Egypt, as elsewhere, when Russian colonies arose or groups of Russians settled, the first matter was always establishing a church or, at least, organising rooms for the performance of the liturgy" [Goriachkin 2012: 85]. Several churches existed in the camps in Tell El Kebir and Sidi Bishr; to these were transferred liturgical objects from the Russian House in Alexandria, where the workers and nuns of the Russian Spiritual Mission were evacuated from Palestine after the end of the First World War. However, there were not enough such objects, so some were made in Tell El Kebir [Lukonin 2001b: 29]. The running costs of the churches were covered by donations from the parishioners; the priests received no salaries. However, not all the wounded soldiers and officers of the White Army were attracted to the activities of these churches: as the sources attest, there were several cases of indifference towards the liturgies being performed [Beliakova 2003: 157].

[16] Maksimov Iu.V. Orthodoxy in Algeria. *Pravoslavie.ru.* 2007. (In Russ.). https://pravoslavie.ru/put/070207105518.htm?ysclid=m77qdes33a904617383 (accessed: 12.02.2025)

[17] Human rights activists are alarmed by the closure of churches and the persecution of Christians in Algeria. The *Moscow Patriarchate.* 04.07.2021. (In Russ.). https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5825729.html (accessed: 13.03.2025)

[18] An Orthodox parish on the territory of the Russian Military Mission (Algeria). *The ABC of Faith.* (In Russ.). https://azbyka.ru/palomnik/ (accessed: 13.02.2025)

There was another Orthodox church located on the banks of Lake Timsah near Ismailia in the early 1920s: this was located in the tent camp of the Don Cadet Corps. Housed in a tent, the church was served by Father Dimitrii Troitskii. There was also a choir and a church wind orchestra, both of which toured in Palestine.

In 1922, an Orthodox church was established in a rented apartment in the Heliopolis suburb of Cairo; this was continually visited by Russians living in the city. Using funds from the Russian Charitable Association, a church of St Nicholas was built in the same suburb (12 Abu Simbel Street) in 1957: its parishioners were part of the ROCOR.

The Russian émigré community was also touched by the conflict between the various branches of Orthodoxy abroad. In June 1945, during a trip around the countries of the Middle East, Patriarch Alexy I of Moscow visited Egypt. He was received by King Farouk I and met with Patriarch Christopher II of Alexandria and all Africa. Alexy also visited the Orthodox church of St Alexander Nevsky in Alexandria, which was founded in 1922 in the former Russian consulate (32 Saad Zaghloul Street) after being moved from the camp in Sidi Bishr. Hieromonk Aleksei (Dekhterev), the church's rector, received the patriarch together with the clergy and flock belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate. Soon after this, Hieromonk Aleksei received Soviet citizenship.

However, not all Russian émigrés in Egypt supported the move to the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1947, on the initiative of Grand Duchess Milica, a church was opened in a rented apartment in Alexandria: Hieromonk Zosima, the confessor of the princess, served here. In 1954, the church was moved to a rented villa, but it was closed in 1961, and its property was transferred to the aforementioned Russian church in Heliopolis in Cairo. In the mid-1980s, following the depletion of the Russian community, this church was transferred to the Greeks.

The church of St Alexander Nevsky in Alexandria continued as part of the Moscow Patriarchate from the 1960s to the 1980s. In the 1960s, its rector was Archpriest M. Stadniuk, who vividly described the atmosphere of the church in the pages of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. Noting that in the church prayers could be heard for "the success of the Egyptian nation in building a just and happy life," Stadniuk pointed out the great impression that the Aswan dam and General Abdel Nasser's other projects had on him.[19] He also recorded that believers from the Greek parishes of Alexandria also came to celebratory liturgies in the church.[20]

Archpriest Ioann Smirnov, the rector of the church in the 1980s, called the church an "ecumenical meeting place."[21] According to him, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians, Copts, and the people of other ethnicities and confessions visited the church to pray. Representatives of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and leaders of the Greek and Syrian-Lebanese communities were also present at celebratory liturgies. Archpriest Ioann had brotherly relations with representatives of the Armenian and Coptic Churches and participated in the annual ecumenical prayers held by the Council of Churches in

[19] Stadnyuk M., archpriest. From the life of the Alexander Nevsky Parish in Alexandria. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 1965. № 12. P. 31. (In. Russ.)
[20] Ibid., p. 28.
[21] See: Orlov I., Archpriest. In the patriarchal church-metochion in Alexandria. *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 1982. №. 9. P. 6. (In. Russ.)

Alexandria.[22] Thus, the existence of Orthodox parishes in North Africa facilitated the integration of Russian émigrés into local society and helped them establish a dialogue with the ethnic and religious communities there.

In recent years, the Moscow Patriarchate has continued its cooperation with the Coptic Papacy: for example, in 2019, within the framework of a commission for the development of relations between the two churches, a delegation from the ecclesiastical schools of Moscow headed by Archbishop Amvrosii of Vereia visited Egypt[23]. The hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church visit the church of St Barbara and the convent of St George in Cairo,[24] while delegations of monastics make pilgrimages to places connected with the origins of Christian monasticism.[25]

* * *

Our analysis of the sources and literature demonstrates that the Russian Orthodox Church had a presence in the countries of North Africa in the 20th century. Despite the fact that this region is traditionally the territory of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, some clergy and believers in the area were already part of the Moscow Patriarchate's jurisdiction by the middle of the century. A significant phenomenon was the appearance of parishes in North Africa that were administered by the ROCOR. These parishes were created by Russian émigrés who left Russia as a result of the 1917 revolution, the civil war, and other political cataclysms.

Located far from Russia, these people kept their Orthodox faith and built Orthodox churches in various towns in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt with meagre means. They emphatically remained loyal to the historical traditions of Russian Orthodoxy. Orthodox parishes were the key centres for the consolidation of Russian communities in the region, while the churches served as the main symbols of the presence of Russian culture in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. The acceptance of mutual canonical communion by the ROCOR and the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007 means that the activities of the parishes created by Russian émigrés in North Africa have become part of the common spiritual legacy of the Russian Orthodox Church in the region. As this history shows, Russian culture and religion have deep roots in North Africa.

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[22] Ibid., p. 7.

[23] A delegation of Moscow theological schools visited Egypt. *The Moscow Patriarchate.* 14.05.2019. (In Russ.). https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5435349 (accessed: 30.04.2025)

[24] Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk arrived in Egypt. *The Moscow Patriarchate.* 07.11.2022. (In Russ.). https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5974591.html (accessed: 30.04.2025)

[25] A delegation of the monastics of the Russian Orthodox Church visited Egypt on a pilgrimage. *The Moscow Patriarchate.* 18.11.2024. (In Russ.). https://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6175313.html (accessed: 30.04.2025)

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Научная статья

РУССКАЯ ПРАВОСЛАВНАЯ ЦЕРКОВЬ В СЕВЕРНОЙ АФРИКЕ В XX ВЕКЕ

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АНТОШИН Алексей Валерьевич, доктор исторических наук, профессор, кафедра востоковедения, Уральский федеральный университет, Екатеринбург, Российская Федерация. ORCID: 0000-0002-6093-2219. E-mail: alex_antoshin@mail.ru

Аннотация. Статья посвящена деятельности Русской Православной Церкви (РПЦ) в странах Северной Африки в XX в. В центре внимания автора – история возникновения и функционирования православных приходов в Тунисе, Марокко, Алжире и Египте. Источниковой базой статьи послужили эго-документы, прежде всего, мемуары русских священнослужителей и прихожан в регионе. Доказано, что, несмотря на принадлежность Северной Африки к канонической территории Александрийского Патриархата, Русская Православная Церковь присутствовала в данном регионе. Проанализирована история зарождения в Северной Африке приходов Русской Православной Церкви за границей (РПЦЗ), освещен вопрос о строительстве православных храмов в Тунисе, Марокко, Алжире и Египте. Доказано, что возникновение феномена русского православия в этих странах связано с последствиями революции 1917 г. и гражданской войны, когда в Тунисе, Марокко, Алжире и Египте оказались тысячи представителей так называемой «белой» эмиграции. Особое внимание уделено деятельности в регионе наиболее значимых церковных иерархов РПЦЗ. Доказано, что именно православные приходы являлись главными центрами консолидации оказавшихся в эмиграции в Тунисе, Марокко, Алжире и Египте россиян. Пребывание в эмиграции укрепляло веру этих людей, поскольку именно православие рассматривалось ими как один из важнейших элементов национальной идентичности. Освещен вопрос об активизации международной деятельности Московской Патриархии после Второй мировой войны. Автор приходит к выводу, что присутствие РПЦ в регионе Северной Африки имеет прочный исторический фундамент, заложенный в XX в.

Ключевые слова: Северная Африка, Египет, Тунис, Марокко, Алжир, православие, Русская Православная Церковь за границей (РПЦЗ), Московская Патриархия, русская эмиграция

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