

Russian Museum Unhappy After Joke Report Hints Angel Statue 'Flew Away'

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A state-run museum in St. Petersburg has accused a local news agency of offending the city and its religious believers by running an April Fool's report that claimed an angel statue on top of the city's renowned Peter and Paul fortress may have “flown off.”

The State Museum of History of St. Petersburg, which oversees the fortress, described the report as “unacceptable — even as an April 1 joke,” according to a letter sent to Fontanka news site on Thursday and posted on Facebook by its chief editor, Alexander Gorshkov.

Fontanka had earlier reported that “one of the symbols of the city — a golden angel on the spire of the Peter and Paul fortress — has disappeared in St. Petersburg,” adding that the museum had so far refused to comment.

The news site also included a photograph, supposedly submitted by a reader, that showed the spire of the Peter and Paul fortress without the familiar golden figure of an angel perched on top.

“Has the angel flown off?” read a caption accompanying the photo.

But the history museum was not at all amused.

“The angel on the spire of the Peter and Paul fortress is a symbol of St. Petersburg and a sacred object for a huge number of the city's faithful, and creating an unhealthy commotion around it negatively affects the image of our city,” said the letter, signed by a museum deputy director, Sergei Kondratyev.

“The museum's administration earnestly requests that you refrain from publishing inaccurate information related to objects and exhibits of the St. Petersburg History Museum either as an April 1 joke or in any other form from now on,” the letter said.

Fontanka editor Gorshkov wrote that he had apparently “insulted believers' feelings and a symbol of St. Petersburg,” underneath a copy of the letter that he posted in Facebook.

A law passed nearly two years ago by the Russian parliament criminalizes insulting the feelings of religious believers.w

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