



From Splendor to Revolution: The Romanov Women, 1847--1928

Julia P. Gelardi

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This sweeping saga recreates the extraordinary opulence and violence of Tsarist Russia as the shadow of revolution fell over the land, and destroyed a way of life for these Imperial women

The early 1850s until the late 1920s marked a turbulent and significant era for Russia. During that time the country underwent a massive transformation, taking it from days of grandeur under the tsars to the chaos of revolution and the beginnings of the Soviet Union.

At the center of all this tumult were four women of the Romanov dynasty. Marie Alexandrovna and Olga Constantinovna were born into the family, Russian Grand Duchesses at birth. Marie Feodorovna and Marie Pavlovna married into the dynasty, the former born a Princess of Denmark, the latter a Duchess of the German duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

In *From Splendor to Revolution*, we watch these pampered aristocratic women fight for their lives as the cataclysm of war engulfs them. In a matter of a few short years, they fell from the pinnacle of wealth and power to the depths of danger, poverty, and exile. It is an unforgettable epic story.

From Splendor to Revolution: The Romanov Women, 1847--1928 Details

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From Reader Review From Splendor to Revolution: The Romanov Women, 1847--1928 for online ebook

Marsha Altman says

I admit I'm grading this on a bit of a scale, because I also just read "The Romanovs 1613-1918" and "Former People: The Final Days of the Russian Aristocracy" and this book was not as good as either of them. That may seem unfair, but we have to consider that I was super fresh on the material for this time period but I still had trouble following it. The author said in the beginning that she would rely on nicknames to sort out all of the Maries and Olgas, but then she doesn't, so I had a hard time keeping the characters straight, even with dynasty and family trees in the introduction. Since this book was mostly about Romanov women and how they interacted, it relied more on me being able to tell them apart than Russian and global politics, which I find easier. Still, it was interesting.

Kris Mehigan says

Excellent moment-to-moment description of the Romanov women. Clearly the author did an amazing amount of research. A must read for anyone interested in turn of the century monarchies.
Note- would have rated 4.5 stars... only wished some of the sequence of events were specified by date rather than merely month, though I understand the calendar differences would have been complicated. Otherwise excellent.

Mary says

My biggest problem with this book is that it tried to cover too much. Perhaps if the author centered on two of the ladies instead of four. She also wrote chronologically and while this usually works best, she jumped from person to person without sometimes finishing the part she jumped from. Also the names were confusing, as usually happens with European royalty. The names are used repeatedly from person to person, and even adding the patronymics didn't always help. Then there is the use of titles. She also discussed minor characters whose names were similar as many of them were cousins or children or grandchildren. I would like to see Ms. Gelardi write a biography of one person. It is only the confusion of characters which ruins the book. I had another book by her on my Wish List, but since it also involves multiple main characters of the same family, I have removed it.

Michael Llewellyn says

Author Julia P. Gelardi travels much-visited territory in From Splendor to Revolution, The Romanov Women, 1847-1928. She nonetheless manages to bring a fresh and captivating point of view as she unfolds the lives of four extraordinary women: Tsarina Marie Feodorovna, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, Maria Alexandrovna, Duchess of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and Olga Constantinova, Queen of the Hellenes. Richly detailed and served up in a style vacillating comfortably between scholarly and gossipy, their stories reveal a

dynasty rushing toward oblivion albeit with plenty of warning signs along the way. As with any family, the Romanovs endured internecine squabbling and power struggles, often exacerbated by the ever-meddling Queen Victoria, but theirs played out on a grand, larger-than-life stage because it held the destiny of the largest country on earth- Russia. Their internal dissent reached epic proportions after Tsarina Marie's son, Nicholas, married Alix of Hesse and By Rhine, better known as the Empress Alexandra. When Alexandra's obsession with Rasputin and domination of the milquetoast Tsar Nicholas II sped Russia on its course to implosion, the otherwise benevolent Dowager Empress Marie was driven to declare, "Alexandra Feodorovna must be banished. I don't know how, but it must be done....Let her enter a convent or just disappear!" As everyone knows, Alexandra indeed disappeared, taking her husband, five children and the 303-year-old Romanov dynasty with her. That incredible, stranger-than-fiction story is splendidly recounted in *From Splendor to Revolution*.

The author must be credited for heroic effort to simplify a world inhabited by endless Maries, Alexanders, Olgas and Vladimirs connected with a spider web of royal and noble weddings. She achieves this with the use of nicknames and titles and provides five enormously helpful family trees. With 16 pages of photographs.

Lauren says

This was a fascinating book. It was an incredibly rich, well researched look at some very important women, who can be overlooked by many history books. The period examined was one that was incredibly important to Russian and European history. The changes experienced by that society in such a short amount of time were unbelievable. If you're looking for a detailed examination of the fall of the Romanov empire as viewed from within the royal family, this is a great book for that. Also, the author truly has a way of making this non-fiction read so well. It was never dry or dull at all. I can't wait to read more by her.

Frances Johnson says

I loved this book. There is quite a bit written about the unfortunate last Tsar and Tsarina but not as much about the other royals of Russia. Great details about the Romanovs, their rich balls and celebrations, the many arguments between the aunts and uncles, it's all here in glorious details. You get to know the family and their lifestyle.

Rebecca Huston says

This one rolled in today on my doorstep and like I always seem to do with a Russian history book, I jumped right on it. Looks at the lives of four women of the Romanov dynasty -- Empress Marie Feodorovna (Dagmar of Denmark) and Marie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, who married Romanov men, and Queen Olga of Greece and Marie Alexandrovna, who married foreign princes. As there tends to be not very much written about Queen Olga, this should be interesting.

Ok, all done now. Very good, very interesting, terrific photos, if a touch too small on some, along with the usual ancillary stuff of genealogies, bibliography and the like. Four stars overall and a recommend.

For the longer review, please go here:
<http://www.mylot.com/post/2944723/rev...>

Kathleen says

This is the second book I have read by this author and both have had me pulling hair by the end. This one deals with four royal Romanovs and it is just three too many to keep straight. Back and forth between Russia, Germany and Greece and throw in England now and then and sometimes using proper names and sometimes nicknames and sometimes--it all was very confusing. None of the subjects gets developed in any depth (if they had any depth to start with- just being royal doesn't always hack it). The book did make realize that terrorism and suicide bombers are nothing new to our generation. I think I'd like to see what the author could do with a biography of one strong personality.

Bridget says

An interesting book. I'm always fascinated by the lives of the lesser known Romanovs and this book gives a good depiction of their lives and times.

Bethany says

It's been a while since a book really wowed me, and I certainly didn't expect that the next book to keep me up at night to be nonfiction on Russian history. This was a real page-turner and I learned a lot about the Romanovs, especially the four formidable women this focused on, even though I've read quite a few books about the family. This also illuminated a lot of European history that I was pretty unfamiliar with. My only complaint is the author's constant harping on the faults of Alexandra Feodorovna. She was certainly a flawed tsarina, but it's a gross oversimplification to blame her for all of Russia's woes. Fortunately, since she wasn't the focus of this book, the harping wasn't too overwhelming.

Okay, maybe one other complaint that is not the fault of the author: The plethora of Maries, Olgas, and Alexandras in the Romanov family made it quite difficult to keep up with who was who! Not to mention all the Nicholases, Alexanders, and Georges...

Jaylia3 says

Covering the years 1847 to 1928, From Splendor to Revolution chronicles the grand but difficult lives of four women who were born or married into the Romanov dynasty: an empress, a grand duchess, a queen and a duchess, each a generation older than Russia's final tsar, Nicolas II. By this time England's monarchy was constitutional, and Queen Victoria's political power came from her cunning, and her skill at marrying her children and grandchildren into strategically important European royal families. Russia, however, was still ruled by tsars who believed their autocracy and duty to serve were divinely commissioned. The royal family lived in unimaginable grandeur before the Russian revolution, but even in those high times political unrest meant they had to cope with well-founded fears of death and mutilation, and the shockingly brutal murders

of some of their dearest family members.

Marie Feodorovna, or Minnie, was the last tsar's mother. Originally a Danish princess she married and moved to Russia at 18 where her engaging personality helped make her popular with the people, and she became the empress only fifteen years later when her father-in-law Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. Minnie was a voice of reason when her son and daughter-in-law were under the destructive spell of Rasputin, but later she could never bring herself to believe that Tsar Nicolas II had been murdered along with his wife and children, even though she lived a decade after their deaths.

Marie Pavlovna, or Miechen, was Minnie's sister-in-law, married to her husband's brother Vladimir, and Miechen was a highly skilled, savvy and ambitious socialite. Pious and sweet Olga, who became the Queen of Greece, was the daughter of Alexander II's brother Constantine. Marie Alexandrovna was the sister of Alexander III, and so the sister-in-law of Minnie and Miechen. After the early death of her sister, Marie Alexandrovna was the only surviving daughter of Alexandra II, and was so beloved and spoiled by him that she might never have been persuaded to leave her father's side if he hadn't angered the family by taking a mistress, who he eventually moved into the palace with their born out of wedlock children. As a means of escape, Marie Alexandrovna married Queen Victoria's wayward son Alfred, brother of King Edward, and through him became the German Duchess of Coburn.

The text of From Splendor to Revolution has been copiously, even distractingly, footnoted throughout the book, but that means you can check the original sources when you find something particularly fascinating, something that happened to me a lot. This book will be well loved by most anyone interested in the Romanov family.

Jennifer says

Really, really well done. Engaging writing style, a lot of information I've not read before. Julia Gelardi is fast becoming one of my favorite historians. Hope she doesn't switch to historical fiction like so many others have, real life is frequently more interesting than anything that can be made up!

Kay Wahrsager says

Totally derivative, nothing new here for devotees of the last generation of Romanovs. Merely a compilation of stories previously covered in a vast array of more serious accounts.

Dorothy says

Few epochal events exemplify the vagaries of Fortune's Wheel like the spectacular demise of the Romanovs. The enduring fascination with this story is due to its representation of all almost human emotions and motivations: love and hate, bathos and bombast, sacrifice and cruelty, generosity and avarice, kindness and indifference, greatness and pitifulness, strength and weakness, success and failure and of course, life and death. Births celebrated and deaths by the most soulless executions and assassinations.

Through it all four women born into or married into the Romanov clan experienced all of the Wheel's rotations as the world and the Royals collided with the 20th century and its Great War and Russian revolution. Born into royal entitlement and believers in autocracy these women were perched on a pinnacle doomed to fall to an increasingly enlightened world struggling to find a way between socialism and anachronistic oligarchy. The ever reactionary obstinacy of the autocracy created the perfect climate of Nihilists cum social revolutionaries cum hardened Bolsheviks. Thus the tumultuous stage is set upon which our four heroines will spin in Fortune's Wheel.

Sometimes charming, always regal, these women were also ambitious, greedy and oblivious to the people they ruled. Blind by birthright to the penury of the peasants who comprised 85% of the Russian empire they were unseeing champions of an obsolete world order. They bickered over jewels, precedence, who threw the most lavish balls and had the most beautiful gowns. They also set up hospitals and nursed fallen soldiers and provided them with succor and money to ease their wounds. Fervently religious they believed in the afterlife and the supremacy of god's will. They were related to every Royal family and meddled happily and unhappily in world affairs and wars. Once allies thence enemies thence allies again they shared the celebrations of marriages and the heartbreak of casualties to war, not always on the same side.

Loving mothers all of them, their children were of course pawns in marriage games. Divorces and marriages to commoners resulted in banishment and exiled. Always royals, the children were indulged while admonished on responsibility amidst unsurpassed wealth. The Romanovs were the wealthiest family in the world and the Tsar the wealthiest man.

The bravery these women manifest during the revolution and its aftermath is all the more remarkable given the smallness of the isolated worlds in which they spent most of their lives. Captives afraid for their lives while their family members were summarily executed they remained loyal to Russia and the belief that they would be restored. As the Whites fell to the Reds and hope leached away, these women stoically stood up to physical and emotional deprivation as one after another of their family members perished and they were moved from one deplorable condition to another.

The author is even-handed in her treatment of a rather prickly assortment of royal women and does a serviceable job of laying the historical context for their splendid falls. Even those expert in this area will find new perspectives and perceptions from this book.

So, I have read too many books about the various royals from this period to count and I am pretty clear on who is who and I do have one BIG gripe: the author, I guess to reduce naming fatigue, switches up the appellations for the characters from sentence to sentence and I find myself having to stop and figure out who the hell she means. One character will be referred to by her full name, then her royal title, then a nickname, followed by her relative status--such as cousin or sister-in-law of someone else so that the reader is sifting endlessly among unnecessary naming nonsense. Give the editor a whack for not fixing this. It ruins an otherwise very good multiple biography.

Louise says

Born to Rule: Five Reigning Consorts, Granddaughters of Queen Victoria, also by Julia Gelardi, stands out in my memory as one of the best books I've ever read. The complex subject matter was made into a page

turning narrative. The history was a back drop, and the focus was on the granddaughters of Queen Victoria who also became queens. If Amazon permitted seven stars I'd have awarded them.

This book on four contemporaneous Romanov matriarchs, while very good, does not equal the other in readability or focus. In this new book, there is more detail on history and the portraits of Marie of Romania and the Tsarina Alexandra (subjects of the earlier book) are a bit long for this occasion. Despite this, and a sometimes awkward insertion of direct quotes from primary sources, the book is very good and an achievement for the author.

Of the four portraits, that of Empress Marie Feodorovna (Dagmar/Minnie) dominates the others in this book, as she, herself, probably did in life. She is every bit the Empress. Her sister-in-law, Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna, had substance beyond her "life of the party" persona and had plenty of reason for "I told you so" dating back to Nicholas II's early days as Tsar. I wonder how an alternative history, with her husband Vladimir as Tsar, would have played out.

Queen Olga of Greece, the daughter of Alexander II's brother Constantine experienced the upheavals in her native Russia as well as her adopted Greece. Marie Alexandrovna, the only daughter of Alexander II to survive childhood, married Queen Victoria's son and thereby became the Duchess of Edinburgh and eventually through her husband's inherited throne, the Duchess of Saxe-Colburg-Gotha.

These matriarchs spent far too much time plotting marriages that never seem to yield fruitful alliances and too much energy on objecting to love matches with commoners and divorcees. Those in Russia were blithely unaware of the conditions in their country. For instance, they decked out in jewels for the first meeting of the Duma, as though it would be something like a "court" event. They may have thought they could impress the commoners with the accoutrements of royalty. They did not seem to even glimpse that their imperial life-style depended on a system that essentially guaranteed poverty to others. Their acts of charity, particularly during the war, while commendable, were merely band-aids for a system not designed to consider the needs of the everyday soldier.

I've read a number of books on this period in Russia, but this is the first time I've been impressed with how many times Nicholas II was warned about the influence of Rasputin. Many royals and their staffs envisioned the collision course they are on and wrote in their diaries or otherwise recorded the disaster for Russia that they saw brewing. Nicholas II, in his ineptitude, is a poster child for the folly of autocratic monarchies. He even botched his abdication by not checking with his named successor.

The author makes excellent use of many sources, and the text is well documented. This is a great addition to research on this era and I highly recommend it for those interested in Russia and the Romanovs.
