

‘After that we wrote.’: A Reconsideration of the Lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia  
Nikolaevna Romanova, 1895-1918

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**ABSTRACT**

‘After that we wrote.’: A Reconsideration of the Lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanova, 1895-1918

Althea Thompson

The tale of the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, the last Romanov emperor, is well known to history. Bloodshed, holy men, a domineering wife, and a haemophiliac son are recurring themes in studies of Nicholas’ reign. There is also a tendency to overlook the four girls in white dresses who appear on the margins of these narratives: the Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia Nikolaevna, daughters of the tsar. This thesis aims to examine the lives of these four young women using translated versions of their diaries and letters, as well as memoirs and letters written by those closest to them; essentially, it asks what exactly a Russian Grand Duchess did every day. By reconsidering the tercentenary celebrations of the Romanov dynasty in 1913 as well as their activities on the home front during World War I, “‘After that we wrote.’: A Reconsideration of the Lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanova, 1895-1918” sets out to tell Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia’s stories in their own words.

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### A Note on Spellings and Dates

Russian is a language whose words can be transliterated in many ways, although not always in the most straightforward way. While my sources vary in their spellings, I have made all spellings consistent with the Library of Congress. Thus, *ii* becomes *y*; *Ia* becomes *Ya*; *Ks/ks* becomes *X/x*; etc. All names that are familiar to a Western audience are written in their form most familiar to us: the best example being Nicholas, which in its Russian form is Nikolai.

Until 1918, Russia used the Julian calendar, which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar; in the twentieth century, it was thirteen days behind. As my thesis deals primarily with events that occurred before the Bolsheviks moved Russia to the Gregorian calendar in February 1918, all dates used in this thesis conform to the Julian calendar, unless otherwise noted.



## Introduction

*In the morning we four drove to obednya at the upper regimental church with Papa... We four walked around our garden... Returned, changed and the four of us alone went to Countess Hendrikova... Had tea with Mama and Papa... Then went upstairs where I sat with the sisters. They worked and I read to myself. Then, had dinner with Mama, the sisters, and Anya... After dinner sat and read. At 10 o'cl. Olga and I went to bed.*

-Tatiana's diary entry, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1913<sup>1</sup>

In 1928, Virginia Woolf delivered a series of lectures at Cambridge University on the subject of women and fiction; a year later, these lectures were turned into Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own*.<sup>2</sup> Those who invited her had asked Woolf to speak about women and fiction without giving her any other information; this broad subject prompted Woolf to wonder what exactly "women and fiction" meant. After a day at the British Museum archives, the fictionalised version of herself that Woolf uses to narrate the work realises that women were important enough to be written about by men in fiction and poetry, yet when she returns home and begins to look at her own bookshelves discovers that women were "all but absent from history."<sup>3</sup> This epiphany changed Woolf's approach to her lectures, which led to the central question of *A Room of One's Own* becoming: "where is she?"

Simone de Beauvoir addressed a similar question in *The Second Sex*, where she suggested that women until 1949 – when she was writing – had only won what men gave them. Beauvoir went on to say that "[women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own... they even lack their own space..."<sup>4</sup> She pushed the notion of women having no history further when she looked at history as a whole, for Beauvoir said that the main conclusion to be drawn was that "women's entire history has been written by men."<sup>5</sup> As these ideas show, while women make up half of the world's population, they have been largely overlooked in historical discourse until the 1970s, when women's history emerged as a subcategory of social history. This was a positive step forward – a step that took us away from only discussing Great Men, wars, politics, and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Tatiana Romanov, *Daughter of the Tsar: Diaries and Letters 1913-1918*, trans. Helen Azar and Nicholas B. A. Nicholson (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2015), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Read Books Ltd., 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Woolf, *Room of One's Own*, 55.

<sup>4</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 148.

history. These changes prompted historian Joan Wallach Scott in her study *Gender and the Politics of History* to claim Woolf's call to find the missing women had been answered.<sup>6</sup> I, however, disagree.

My thesis focuses on one category of women who are still overlooked in history: royal women. When I say “royal women”, I do not mean the Elizabeths, Marys, and Catherines that so many are familiar with, but the queens and princesses whose names are largely unknown and forgotten. Of course, it must be acknowledged these women made up part of the European elite. They lived in palaces, and were given lessons in music, dancing, and diplomacy; yet what more do we know about them besides which Great Men were their fathers, which Great Men became their husbands, and which Great Men they gave birth to? Even when studying women who ruled in their own right, it is men who tend to dominate the narratives of these women's reigns, making it easy to shift the focus from the queen or empress to men. It is worth repeating that it is not a new or unknown fact that for much of history women have been left out of historical discourse. At a time when women are being given a place at the table, I believe we should also make space for understudied royal women as well.

This thesis reconsiders the lives of four young Russian women named Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, daughters of the last emperor of Russia. Olga, the eldest, was born on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1895; Tatiana followed on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1897, and Maria two years later on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1899. Anastasia, the youngest – but undeniably the best known of the four – was born on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1901; her popularity will be discussed more below. For now, I use the word “reconsider” because they have largely been overlooked by history – that is not to say they have been completely forgotten, but much like their female predecessors and many other royal women, they have been portrayed as supporting actors in the drama of their era.

Historian Lindsey Hughes writes in her last book, entitled *The Romanovs*, that studies of Nicholas II could “fill several bookshelves,” while those of his ancestors are sparse, including no English-language study of the founder of the Romanov dynasty, Michael, who reigned from 1613-1645.<sup>7</sup> Thus, if we visualise the idea of shelves full of books about the last Romanov emperor, and couple it with the idea that the youngest daughter became a mythologised legend, how can we explain the overall lack of serious historical attention given to Anastasia, Olga,

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Lindsey Hughes, *The Romanovs: Ruling Russia, 1613-1917* (London: Hambledon Continuum), 2.

Tatiana, and Maria? Hughes claims that lack of space forced her to keep her own study centred on the emperors and empresses, meaning a broadening of the discussion was only possible when the author needed to “[elucidate] the political and cultural role of Romanov women, not just the eighteenth-century empresses, but also royal wives and daughters.”<sup>8</sup> She certainly makes good on this in terms of the wives, however her treatment of daughters is much as I have alluded to.

Hughes dedicates two chapters to Nicholas II. The first deals with the majority of his reign, including the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the creation of the Duma, while the second chapter covers the last five years of the emperor’s life, from the tercentenary celebrations in 1913 to his abdication in 1917. If one were to look at these chapters in terms of Hughes’ plan discussed above, the first prominently features Empress Alexandra, while only mentioning the months and years (but not the specific days) that the Grand Duchesses and Tsarevich were born.<sup>9</sup> In terms of the second chapter, despite existing evidence that shows Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia participated in most of the festivities celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Romanov dynasty, Hughes only makes one mention of “daughters” being present at the dedication of the main altar of a church that had been built to commemorate the occasion. Additionally, a few sentences later, “children” – thus all five – were honoured by the same church naming bells after them.<sup>10</sup> However, despite this short description, the diaries of Olga, Tatiana, and Maria from 1913, as well as memoirs from people close to the family, place the four girls at many of the special events. Towards the end of the second chapter, Hughes refers to the family as a whole when writing about their arrest and exile to Siberia. The only mention of the young women by name is to say that “[in] June 1918 Tatiana, Anastasia and Maria celebrated respectively their twenty-first, seventeenth, and nineteenth birthdays.”<sup>11</sup> This quotation is interesting; Olga is not mentioned since her birthday was in November, and again by not specifying birth days, the majority of readers would not know that Anastasia’s birthday is before Maria’s, hence Hughes’ listing of them in this order rather than by age.

Despite what has been said over the past few pages, it is undeniable that Hughes was one of the leading Romanov scholars. To again refer to the introduction of *The Romanovs*, the author makes mention of another renowned Romanov scholar who was “a major source of inspiration”

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<sup>8</sup> Hughes, *The Romanovs*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-235.

for her own study: Richard Wortman.<sup>12</sup> His two-volume work, *Scenarios of Power*, examines the “scenario” of each monarch from Peter I to Nicholas II, describing how they enacted their “imperial myth” within these “scenarios.” According to Wortman, the “scenarios” were “disclosed in the manifestos and ceremonies that opened each reign.”<sup>13</sup> Wortman’s influence is certainly evident when comparing Hughes’ *The Romanovs* to the second volume of *Scenarios of Power*. This tome covers the reigns of Alexander II, Alexander III, and Nicholas II, the last of whom receives seven chapters, while his father and grandfather are discussed in four each. The second chapter about Nicholas details his ascent to the throne, which also coincided with his engagement and hasty marriage. Wortman treats Nicholas and Alexandra as a unit, with much talk of how Nicholas’ childhood had brought him to see the home as the mainstay of his life. The author also describes Olga’s birth and the way in which the royal couple parented their children. For example, the Empress breastfed each of her children – an activity at the time that was viewed as decidedly middle-class – and the Emperor helped with bathing them.<sup>14</sup> Tatiana and Maria’s births are mentioned in passing, but not Anastasia’s; instead, the rest of the chapter goes into minute detail about the renovations to the Alexander Palace and the creation of the bubble that famously surrounded the family. The next time the Grand Duchesses are brought up is when Wortman discusses their father passing on his love for photography to the girls, which can be seen through the hundreds of photographs left behind by the family.<sup>15</sup>

The tercentenary celebrations are discussed in an entire chapter by Wortman, and yet Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia are only mentioned twice. The first instance is when Wortman describes the mayor of Vladimir being unhappy with the preparations for the festivities in the town, forcing one of the court ministers to organise “a champagne reception with the imperial family and a gathering for the ladies of the town and the tsar’s daughters.” On the same page, Wortman borrows from an account in the newspaper *Moskovskie Vedomosti* which describes the Grand Duchesses going on deck for the town’s residents to see them after the reception, as well as the look of awe which those who saw the four girls had.<sup>16</sup> They are next

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<sup>12</sup> Hughes, xvii.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 1:6.

<sup>14</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:334.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:364. Examples of the family’s photographs can be found online with a simple Google search.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:469.

mentioned three pages later, but only in a passing reference to the “billowing white dresses” worn by the four to a few ceremonies on May 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>17</sup>

Wortman continues to pass over Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastsia when discussing the final decade of their father’s reign. The author quotes extensively from a four-volume work written by Major-General D. N. Dubenskii about Nicholas II’s efforts during the First World War. The first volume concerns the Empress and imperial family’s role in the war, specifically “[the] empress and the daughters [work] as nurses in the Tsarskoe Selo Court Hospital...”<sup>18</sup> Whether this is the way Wortman has translated this passage, or if Dubenskii did indeed write that all four Grand Duchesses were working as nurses, the fact remains it is untrue, as the second chapter of my thesis will show. Maria and Anastasia were too young to train as Red Cross nurses like their mother and two older sisters, making this description of “the daughters” becoming nurses misleading. For this type of misinformation to appear in a study by such a respected scholar shows the scale of the problem I am aiming to remedy.

The two authors who have just been discussed stand in stark contrast to Simon Sebag Montefiore, who gives a lot of space in his work, also entitled *The Romanovs*, to the Grand Duchesses. Hughes and Wortman are undoubtedly two of the most important scholarly voices in the renewed interest in the Russian monarchy which started with the fall of the Soviet Union, and Montefiore takes advantage of this revived interest to write for the general public.<sup>19</sup> It is in his work that readers are given a true sense of the young women’s upbringing; he is the only author under consideration who explains that their mother treated the four girls as one entity. This treatment resulted in the adoption of the nickname “OTMA” by the four, and it was subsequently used as a label by the family and close friends.<sup>20</sup> As we can see in the quotation at the beginning of this introduction, the young women referred to themselves as “we four” in their own writings, reinforcing the image of a collective. Montefiore also notes that the young women frequently dressed alike, which again can be seen in the many photographs that anyone can find on the

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<sup>17</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:472.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:514.

<sup>19</sup> These are not the only three works to cover the Romanovs, with other examples being: Helen Baker, “Monarchy Discredited? Reactions to the Khodynka Massacre,” *Revolutionary Russia* 16.1 (2003): 1-46; Susan P. McCaffray, “Ordering the Tsar’s Household: Winter Palace Servants in Nineteenth-Century St. Petersburg,” *The Russian Review* 73 (2014): 64-82; Alison Rowley, “Dark Tourism and the Death of Russian Emperor Alexander II,” *The Historian* 79.2 (2017): 229-255; and Alison Smith’s forthcoming study of Gatchina Palace. Other works are cited throughout this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *The Romanovs, 1613-1917* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 540.

internet.<sup>21</sup> He goes on to reinforce this idea of a collective by giving further examples of how Alexandra treated Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia as one person rather than four separate people with distinct personalities, as well as her dividing the four into two “pairs”: the Big Pair (Olga and Tatiana) and Little Pair (Maria and Anastasia), which is again evident in the opening excerpt. The discussion of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia within Montefiore’s study is not a long one, although given the way in which they are excluded by other authors, his study is one of the few which provides more details about the Grand Duchesses which are not directly related to their father’s reign.

With that said, there are authors who have written specifically about the Grand Duchesses. One example is an article entitled “The Succession Prospects of Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna (1895-1918)” by Carolyn Harris.<sup>22</sup> As the title suggests, Harris attempts to unpack Olga’s succession prospects in relation to the laws put in place at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Paul I. Contrary to popular belief, and as Hughes demonstrates, a female ruler would not have been a bizarre phenomenon in Russia, for “[in] Byzantium, Rus and Muscovy a woman representing her absent, dead, underaged or incapacitated male relative was well accepted.”<sup>23</sup> Additionally, in the eighteenth century Peter the Great set the stage for several women to inherit the throne through his Laws of Succession, which did not exclude an heir based on their sex. However, the Pauline Laws of Succession, written by Paul I in 1797, largely undid these favourable models. His mother, Catherine II, had usurped the throne from her husband, Peter III, and was supposed to reign as empress until Paul reached the age of majority. However, she held on to the throne until her death in 1796, creating a difficult relationship with her son. Catherine’s actions inspired Paul to institute the new succession act, which favoured male primogeniture; thereafter, a female Romanov could inherit the throne only if the male line became extinct.

Thus, if Alexei had not been born in 1904, Nicholas’ younger brother Michael was next in line to the throne, even though he had not officially been granted the title of tsarevich.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>21</sup> Montefiore, *The Romanovs*, 540.

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Harris, “The Succession Prospects of Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 54 (2012): 61-85.

<sup>23</sup> Hughes, 83; Rus and Muscovy are the foundations of what came to be the Russian Empire. Byzantium (the city, which also lent itself to the name of the empire) later became Constantinople (and then Istanbul), the capital of the eastern half of the Roman Empire and the gateway which brought Christianity to Russia.

<sup>24</sup> Heirs to the Russian throne are referred to interchangeably as *tsesarevich* and *tsarevich*, with the latter being the more commonly used title. Tsarevich had been used up until Peter I’s reign as a title for any son of the tsar; under Peter, this term fell into disuse mainly because he had no sons to give this title to, but also because he began referring to himself as “emperor” rather than tsar. Paul was the first heir to receive the title of tsesarevich after his

succession question only became a concern in Nicholas II's reign after Maria's birth in 1899 because of the advancing age of both the emperor and empress – the empress' age was of particular importance as this meant there was a concern for how many more pregnancies she would be able to have.<sup>25</sup> Thus, there is a lot for Harris to explore in her article since she must explain the scholarship surrounding the topic, as well as the laws of succession and the changes that Nicholas was trying to make in order for Olga to be able to inherit the throne or to act as regent for Alexei until he reached the age of majority. Harris does find ways to bring the discussion back to Olga and how this alteration of the laws would have affected her, yet at the same time because there is so much information concerning the hows, ifs, and buts, the article reads less about Olga herself and more about how many times the Romanov dynasty came close to having a succession crisis.

Similarly to Harris, Helen Rappaport in *The Romanov Sisters* sets out to write what is meant to be a study of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, yet does not quite meet the mark.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps because of a lack of material, or who the intended audience is, this popular history blends so many other historical details together that it reads more like another chronicle of their father's reign rather than a study of the young women themselves. Further, it is interesting to note the title of Rappaport's work: *The Romanov Sisters*. Here again the four young women are being treated as a collective rather than as individual people, which is an interesting choice given that the author is claiming to be writing a narrative about Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia. Thus, even in cases where authors are aiming to tell their story, the four Grand Duchesses are still cast as one and the same. As an example, Rappaport's first chapter is dedicated to their mother's childhood and marriage, which is important in helping to understand Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's early lives, yet this information is easily accessible and could have been covered in a few pages rather than in a whole chapter. Further on, Rappaport spends many pages speculating and talking about potential marriages for Olga and Tatiana, reducing them to mere traditional political pawns in the royal European alliance game.

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father Peter III's ascension, to mark him as the heir apparent. Other children of the emperor after Peter I would be styled as Grand Duchesses/Dukes.

<sup>25</sup> In 1899, Nicholas was 31 and Alexandra 27. By the time Alexei was born, she had given birth five times in nine years, causing a lot of stress on her body in addition to chronic pain from sciatica.

<sup>26</sup> Helen Rappaport, *The Romanov Sisters* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2014). As a popular history, this work is intended for the general public.

What both Harris and Rappaport are doing is in some ways harmful and in others harmless; by making these sorts of histories available to a larger audience, they are doing Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia a huge service in opening a discussion of kings' and emperors' daughters. However, by writing history with a particular focus on discussions of marriage proposals and providing more historical context than needed, the works detract from what could truly be a history of four royal women. To keep my thesis focused on Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia and to distinguish it from these types of studies, I have omitted any reference to potential husbands and girlhood crushes. Indeed, throughout history, the role of a royal daughter was to be used as a political pawn in her father's reign. Her purpose was to marry a prince in order to solidify alliances; she acted as a sort of ambassador, representing her native country in her adopted one. Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's grandparents, Emperor Alexander III and Empress Maria Feodorovna are an example of this sort of marriage – they are an exception however as they ultimately fell in love, a rare case in the royal marriage game. Their parents married for love, which again was a rare thing. Thus, while there were occasional exceptions, these marriages most often occurred for diplomatic reasons.

An example that helps to explain my decision to exclude a discussion about crushes and marriages comes in the form of a potential marriage between Olga and the Crown Prince of Romania. In the diaries I used for my research, there is no mention of this match. However, Pierre Gilliard, tutor to the Grand Duchesses and their brother, does in his memoir. His account states that it began as a rumour with both parents being “in favour of the match, which was very desirable at that moment on political grounds also.” The passage then goes on to say that the Minister for Foreign Affairs was working hard “to bring about the betrothal” with the finalisation of the engagement to be made during the imperial family's visit to Romania in the summer of 1914.<sup>27</sup> Here we see the confirmation of Olga being expected to carry out her duty as a Grand Duchess of Russia by entering into a marriage alliance as many before her had also done. All of this, however, was unknown to Olga, who cornered Gilliard on the imperial yacht one day and asked if the real reason for the trip to Romania was because of the rumour about her becoming engaged to the Crown Prince. When he confirmed this for her, Olga explained that her father would not force her to marry the Romanian prince if she did not wish to, and that she did not want to leave Russia. When it was pointed out she could return whenever she liked, Gilliard

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<sup>27</sup> Pierre Gilliard, *Thirteen Years at the Russian Court* (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 93.



received this as a response: “I should still be a foreigner in my own country. I’m a Russian, and mean to remain a Russian!”<sup>28</sup> Gilliard reported that the day after the state banquet, “the scheme for the marriage had been abandoned, or at any rate indefinitely postponed.”<sup>29</sup>

As we know, there was no marriage between Olga and the Crown Prince of Romania, but this is not to say Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia did not have crushes. In truth, Olga, Tatiana, and Maria all had crushes on soldiers – men who were seen to be below their social standing. While Olga was not forced to marry the Romanian prince, it is difficult to imagine her parents would have sanctioned a marriage to someone from a lower social rank than the Grand Duchesses. More importantly, the diaries show Olga using code names as well as initials when talking about her crushes.<sup>30</sup> This makes it difficult for those who are not Olga to know who these men were. Further, with the circumstances of their upbringing – secluded at the Alexander Palace, which will be discussed in length later on – these crushes probably helped to provide some refuge from their mundane routine. Regardless, there is simply not enough written in their diaries or letters for this discussion to be included in this thesis. Henceforth, I will not discuss the marriage prospects and love interests of the four Grand Duchesses, as focusing on their limited love-lives does not answer the deeper question of what Grand Duchesses did every day in late Imperial Russia.

A study I was particularly influenced by that seamlessly blends women into a well-known historical narrative is *Forgotten Lives* by Katy Turton, which sheds light on the importance of Vladimir Lenin’s sisters, Anna, Olga, and Maria Ulianova, in the Russian revolutionary movement.<sup>31</sup> The author argues that their importance does not stem solely from being related to a major historical figure; instead, she places these missing women into the narrative as genuine revolutionaries in their own right and as women with life stories quite distinct from their brother’s legend. This book was instrumental in helping me to visualise how to write about “missing” women, particularly those who are so closely related to men who dominate a well-known period in history. The most important concept I took away from Turton

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<sup>28</sup> Gilliard, *Thirteen Years*, 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> See as examples the diary entries for January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1913 (50) and June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1913 (152) in Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Russian Grand Duchess*, trans. Helen Azar (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 50, 152.

<sup>31</sup> Katy Turton, *Forgotten Lives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

is “the solar system myth.”<sup>32</sup> In *Forgotten Lives*, this “myth” is illustrated by showing how many historians place Lenin at the centre of his universe as the sun, with everything and everyone else, including Anna, Olga, and Maria revolving around him, thus outshining even those closest to him. However, the author proves that this theory is in fact a myth since, as mentioned, the three sisters all became revolutionaries on their own and went on to work for the movement quite independently of their brother. This idea is especially relevant for my thesis since Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia were and are still overshadowed by their brother’s illness, which dominated life at the imperial court from the day he was born. Perhaps the clearest evidence of Turton’s influence on my writing is in the way I have changed certain wordings: where Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia are generally referred to as “the Emperor’s daughters”, “Alexei’s sisters”, and so on, I refer to them by name, as “Grand Duchesses”, “the girls”, and “the young women”, except when directly quoting from a source. Furthermore, I refer to Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra, and Alexei as “their father”, “their mother”, and “their brother”, with the same exception. Using language in this way is important not only to redress the gender imbalance that has and still arguably exists in historical texts, but also to demythologise the four young women in order to reclaim their individual identities.

Another historian who allows the sources to speak for themselves and weaves women into the narrative is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Her study, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* acted as kind of roadmap for my thesis, as Thatcher Ulrich uses Martha Ballard’s diary to tell the story of a female pioneer in early American history.<sup>33</sup> As can be guessed from the title, Ballard was a midwife who lived in Maine along the Kennebec River. Her story is remarkable in that she was a woman who was able to read and write, and who kept a very detailed diary. Thatcher Ulrich remarked in the introduction that many who had attempted to use the diary before as a historical source either scoffed at a woman keeping a diary, or omitted much of the details because the entries were too graphic. She went further to highlight the importance of keeping an open mind when reading diaries as historical sources as this ensures the reader is not missing any important details by turning their noses up at the entries.<sup>34</sup> It is important to read diaries in their historical contexts and to not impose hindsight

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<sup>32</sup> Turton, *Forgotten Lives*, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Thatcher Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale*, 32-33.

or modern values too much onto the writing. The entries can certainly be interpreted and placed alongside historical fact to give a better understanding of a moment, yet interpretation can be subjective – what one person views as unimportant may actually represent a breakthrough for someone else. Simply put by Thatcher Ulrich: “Opening a diary for the first time is like walking into a room full of strangers. The reader is advised to enjoy the company without trying to remember every name.”<sup>35</sup> These are words that guided me as I read my primary sources: the diaries of Olga, Tatiana, and Maria; the letters of all four Grand Duchesses; and the memoirs and letters written by those who were close to the young women.

Memoirs proved to be helpful tools to fill in gaps where other sources left off; however, I learned quickly that these sources also needed to be approached with caution. History and memory have an interesting relationship as the latter offers an alternative point of entry into the past, yet “lost memory is what history compensates for...”<sup>36</sup> The two began to be considered as separate entities when history became an academic field in the nineteenth century – however, this schism truly began with the shift towards the *writing* of history in antiquity. For those like Cicero, writing history was a way to protect it from being forgotten – or more specifically, the protection of the important and heroic deeds by men. It is important to remember that memoirs and memories were not considered to be solid historical evidence; memories can be biased depending on the circumstances, and authors may embellish to sway public opinion in their favour.<sup>37</sup> Jūra Avižienis summarises that memoirs “distinctly [hybridise] history and memory, telling history as memories while contextualizing the memoirist’s memories within history.”<sup>38</sup> The author continues by noting that while the past is over, the access that we have to it is mediated through memory and forms of writing. This means memoirists have a unique position in that they are able to write about events from a first-person vantage point, and are able to live events twice: the first time in the moment as the event is happening, the second time while writing.<sup>39</sup> This second revisiting of the event is where someone like myself might run into some

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<sup>35</sup> Thatcher Ulrich, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Jūra Avižienis, “Mediated and Unmediated Access to the Past: Assessing the Memoir as Literary Genre,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36 (2005): 39.

<sup>37</sup> Aleida Assman, *Shadows of Trauma*, trans. Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 29-30; 34.

<sup>38</sup> Avižienis, “Mediated and Unmediated,” 40.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

problems, for “Memory is of course a substitute, surrogate, or consolation for something that is missing...”<sup>40</sup>

As the lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia continue to be left out of historical discussions of their father’s reign from beginning to end, those who chose to write memoirs have two options in terms of classifying their memories of events from the late nineteenth century until 1918: “a vertical shift in modes (upward to pure politics or downward to personal life and affections); or a ‘horizontal shift’ in chronology.”<sup>41</sup> The latter signifies a breaking down of events into groups classified by personal impressions deemed important by the memoirist; the vertical is related to the selection of events from among the overall event that is ongoing.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the author of a memoir will remember a variation of a historical event based on their impressions and location at the given moment. In these instances, memory and memoirs can be “checked against the record and called into account” when needed,<sup>43</sup> which was done throughout this thesis.

Gleb Botkin’s memoir is an illustration of what has just been discussed. The son of Evgeni Botkin, the Imperial physician, Gleb and his sister Tatiana also followed the Grand Duchesses, their parents, and brother into exile in August 1917. As the two children were around the same age as Maria and Anastasia, this memoir allows for the youngest two Grand Duchesses – and to some extent the eldest two – to be seen through the eyes of one of their contemporaries, rather than by adults (who wrote the rest of the memoirs used in this thesis). This view is a unique one as not many people, let alone children, had access beyond the gates of the Imperial residence. Because the author provides details about Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia from the point of view of someone closer to their own ages, the reader is given a description of the four girls’ personalities that, most importantly, is not setting them up to be their father’s future political pawns. Through Botkin’s writing, the four girls are allowed to be children, rather than daughters of the tsar. There is an innocence to Botkin’s memoir that is difficult to find in other writings, simply because he and his sister were given privileged access that was even denied to some extended family members.

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<sup>40</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, “Introduction,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 3.

<sup>41</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>42</sup> Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 21.

<sup>43</sup> Davis and Starn, “Introduction,” 6.

With that being said, there is a significant catch with Botkin's memoir: he was a believer in the pretender Anna Anderson. As will be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis, the murder of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia – and the denial by the Bolsheviks of this event – placed a shroud of mystery around their deaths, which allowed many pretenders such as Anderson, who appeared in a German mental asylum, to come forward. This controversy rocked the world in the 1930s, as Anderson claimed to be Anastasia, and convinced not only Gleb Botkin but some surviving Romanovs of her "identity" as well. This created a huge divide within the extended family, and ultimately discredited those who believed her.<sup>44</sup> During my research, I was unable to find any information about Gleb Botkin's feelings once Anderson's claim was disproved, although it may be safe to say that after writing in support of her, discovering she was a pretender must have been a harsh thing to accept. Despite this flaw, the source's uniqueness is still worth stressing because so few people had access to the imperial children. Therefore, Botkin's memoir allows for a re-examination of the Grand Duchesses' personalities and provides a perspective that simply cannot be found in other memoirs.

A second example of memoirs used in my study is one that has already been mentioned: *Thirteen Years at the Russian Court*, written by Pierre Gilliard. He started out as the French tutor to the Grand Duchesses, and then went on to become Alexei's primary tutor, meaning Gilliard supervised not only Alexei's entire education, but to some extent the other tutors as well. As a result, this memoir has a particular focus on the heir to the throne. In the introduction, the author explains his inspiration to write the memoir stemmed from how "appalled" he was at reading some of the other memoirs that had been written about the imperial family during Gilliard's prolonged exile, which to him were all false. His hope was "To rehabilitate the moral character of the Russian sovereigns... a duty called for by honesty and justice."<sup>45</sup> It is obvious throughout

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Massie's 1995 work *The Romanovs: The Last Chapter* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995) provides invaluable details about "the last chapter" of the lives of the Grand Duchesses, their family, and four retainers, which will also be discussed in the conclusion of this thesis. Additionally, Massie discusses the DNA tests that further disproved Anderson's claim, and which were conducted to ensure the remains were unequivocally those of the entire family. For more on the first round of DNA tests, analysis, and results, see Gill et al., "Identification of the Remains of the Romanov Family by DNA Analysis," *Nature Genetics* 6 (1994): 130-135. For additional DNA tests on the bones with more advanced technology, see Coble et al., "Mystery Solved: The Identification of the Two Missing Romanov Children Using DNA Analysis," *PLoS ONE* 4 (2009): 1-9.

<sup>45</sup> Gilliard, vii. He was one of the many people who followed the Imperial family into Siberian exile in August 1917. However, Gilliard and a few others were separated from the Romanovs in Ekaterinburg and were eventually expelled from the city by the Bolsheviks. After the city was recaptured by the loyalist Whites in the Russian Civil War in July 1918, Gilliard returned to Ekaterinburg to help uncover what had happened to the captives in the Ipatiev House.

Gilliard's writing that he was very fond of the family, and yet he is still able to write about the Romanovs in a critical fashion. Despite Gilliard's statement about setting the record straight, his account shows historical inaccuracies, with mistakes creeping in such as when he writes about the Emperor's abdication. Gilliard was at the Alexander Palace during the Revolution, yet he gives details about the days between the February Revolution and the abdication that are completely different from those described by people who were in the city. It is unclear from whom or where he got his information about the revolutionary events in Petrograd as the Revolution took hold. However, it remains undeniable that much like Botkin's memoir, Gilliard's is still an important source for those studying the Russian imperial family.

Readers of this thesis will notice that with the exception of the following paragraph, I make no mention of Gregory Rasputin. While Rasputin's relationship with the Emperor and Empress has been closely examined by historians, their studies show that he was much closer to Alexandra than to Nicholas. The latter tolerated him because Rasputin calmed Alexandra's nerves, which were frayed as a result of Alexei's illness. The most recent biography about Rasputin, written by Douglas Smith, only mentions Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia in passing; however, there is a lot more detail concerning the peasant-healer's relationship with their mother.<sup>46</sup> While Olga and Tatiana mention Rasputin in their diaries, it is only in later years and in the context of going to visit Anna Vyrubova, the Empress' closest friend in Russia, that he makes an appearance. The omission of Rasputin from their writings corroborates the fact that his connection to the imperial family lay primarily with Alexandra, and secondly – but more importantly – in helping Alexei. Thus, while Rasputin dominates popular culture and discussions of the Emperor, the Empress, and their son, he has no place in a scholarly analysis of the lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia.

To return to the Grand Duchesses, I must now make a note about their writings. As I did not have the foresight to learn Russian before starting this thesis, a trip to the state archives in Moscow would have been very difficult. This means I have relied on translated versions of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's writings – all of which were done by Helen Azar. However, in using these, I am also subject to her editorial choices. In the words of Carlo Ginzburg (whose statement further reiterates the points made earlier in regards to memoirs and history): "Access to

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<sup>46</sup> Douglas Smith, *Rasputin: Faith, Power, and the Twilight of the Romanovs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

the past is always mediated, and, thus, always partial.”<sup>47</sup> This certainly proved true in terms of the diary and letter translations; for example, even without reading the prologue to Olga’s diary it is clear there are entries that have been left out, and that Azar had chosen the entries to be published.<sup>48</sup> The author also acknowledges that “Only during the early years do we come upon missed entries. As Olga got older, the diary entries were kept more carefully and consistently.”<sup>49</sup> Consequently, overlooked entries and missing diaries are part and parcel of this thesis, and I have made do with what I had access to.

I was fortunate enough to visit Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and the New York Public Library to view their Romanov collections. The Beinecke holds photo albums as well as letters written by the Grand Duchesses while in exile, and schoolbooks and other books owned by them are accessible at the New York Public Library. Where I needed help with translating these documents, I was able to ask my thesis supervisor, Dr. Rowley, for assistance. Some of the things I was privileged enough to see have been worked into this thesis and with gracious permission, I have also been able to reproduce them.

The first sentence of the conclusion to Thatcher Ulrich’s study acknowledges “[that] Martha Ballard [keeping] her diary is one small miracle; that her descendants saved it is another.”<sup>50</sup> As someone using diaries and letters for the basis of her thesis, this statement really struck me. While Olga’s, Tatiana’s, and some of Maria’s diaries have survived, Anastasia apparently burnt hers when she saw her mother doing the same after the February Revolution. Another sentence by Ginzburg comes to mind when thinking of the patchwork that makes up my primary source base: “In short, even meager, scattered, and obscure documentation can be put to good use.”<sup>51</sup>

After spending hours poring over letters and diary entries, I have learnt their particular lingo and how to decode certain phrases. Another important skill Thatcher Ulrich taught me through her work was keeping an open mind when reading these types of sources. For example, Azar translated four letters written by Tatiana in late 1917-early 1918 from Siberia. Each letter

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<sup>47</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Cheese and Worms*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), xii.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Azar, “Russia and the Romanovs Before World War I,” in *The Diary of Olga Romanov: Royal Witness to the Russian Revolution*, trans. Helen Azar (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2013), xx.

<sup>49</sup> Azar, *Diary of Olga Romanov*, xviii.

<sup>50</sup> Thatcher Ulrich, 346.

<sup>51</sup> Ginzburg, *Cheese and Worms*, xxv.

was mailed to a different person: her aunt Xenia Alexandrovna; family friend Countess Zinaïda Tolstaya; Vyrubova; and the children’s Russian language tutor, Peter Petrov. The four letters all have similarities, but there are differences too, which run the risk of being overlooked if the reader is not paying close attention. All but one contains a reassurance that everyone is doing fine; the two written in the fall months talk about the roads being full of holes and wooden planks being used to cover them; and three contain instructions on how to address the letters – which needed to pass through Commissar Pankratov, the man in charge of their imprisonment – as well as the garden at the front of the house and the number of steps (120 total) it takes to walk the length of the enclosure. Petrov’s letter has the most anomalies, as it was written for their tutor – in other words, someone who was not necessarily their social equal, but someone the four girls would have felt a close connection to. As she was writing to her former tutor, Tatiana focused on the lessons she, her sisters, and their brother had, as well as mentioning the plays they would enact with the help of Gilliard and their English tutor, Sidney Gibbs.<sup>52</sup> These descriptions are fitting for a tutor, although not necessarily for someone like Countess Tolstaya. For the latter, a detailed description of the house they are staying in is provided, especially the “splendid view of the mountain, the high city and cathedral.”<sup>53</sup> The note goes on to briefly mention the church services, about which Tatiana also wrote to Vyrubova, who was an especially religious person. Thus, the third letter provides Vyrubova and the reader a much more detailed account of how the four young women and their family practiced their religion while in Tobolsk.<sup>54</sup> Her aunt Xenia’s letter also specifies their church habits, although Tatiana also writes about the farm and all the animals, which are not discussed in any other letter. This letter is the longest of the four, and provides the clearest picture of their new lives in Siberia.<sup>55</sup> In these cases, who Tatiana is writing to, her relationship to them, and how the content is tailored to that person are important considerations when analysing these types of writings. As has been discussed, the subtle nuances and tone of the letters are easier to understand and pick up on when one is familiar with the overarching narrative at play.

To return to Virginia Woolf and *A Room of One’s Own*, among the many other questions the narrator was asking of history – such as whether “missing women” had rooms to themselves

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<sup>52</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Pyotr Petrov, January 26, 1918, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 218.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. to Countess Zinaïda Tolstaya, October 2, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 203.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. to Anna Vyrubova, December 9, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 208.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. to Xenia Romanov, September 18, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 201-203.



and if they were educated or not – in my opinion, the most important question being asked was “what, in short, [women] did from eight in the morning till eight at night.”<sup>56</sup> Using the writings of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, I hope to answer this question. Through their diaries and letters as well as various memoirs written by those close to them, I aim to revise the narrative of Nicholas II’s reign to include the four Grand Duchesses. In keeping with the premise of allowing the young women to speak for themselves, each section of my thesis begins with a passage I feel best represents what is being discussed. The first chapter, “Within and Venturing Beyond the Glass Case, 1895-1913” provides a brief introduction to daily life in the Imperial household before re-examining the events of the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty and the role that Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia played in promoting the imperial image and the dynasty’s connection to the Russian Orthodox Church. Next, in “Experiencing the Home Front, 1914-1917”, I will look at the activities of the four Grand Duchesses during the First World War, before concluding with the changes and eventual exile the February Revolution of 1917 brought to their lives. The aim of this thesis is to remove the veil that Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia have been wrapped in from the time of their births into their afterlives in the hopes of allowing their own voices to illustrate their lived experiences.

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<sup>56</sup> Woolf, 58.

## Chapter 1: Within and Venturing Beyond the Glass Case, 1895-1913

*There was a [ceremonial] Exit from the Red Porch and I was walking arm in arm with Uncle Sandro. There was an obednya at the Uspensky Cathedral... picked up gold coins. At breakfast sat with Uncle Sandro... In the afternoon we 4 with Papa... looked at the house of the Boyars Romanov. Had tea 4 with Papa, Dmitri and Marie. Had dinner with Anastasia and Alexei.*  
 -Maria's diary entry, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1913<sup>57</sup>

To truly get an understanding of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, we will begin by setting the scene and illustrating the main backdrop to their lives: the Alexander Palace, which is located within Tsarskoe Selo (“the tsar’s village”). The town of Tsarskoe Selo is twenty-four kilometres south of Saint Petersburg, the capital of Imperial Russia. Originally a Finnish nobleman’s residence, Peter the Great gifted the estate to his wife, the future Catherine I, in the early 1700s. It was Catherine who commissioned the architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli to build the Catherine Palace, and from there the estate grew to encompass gardens and different sites around the grounds (Figure 1).

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<sup>57</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary of Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna: Complete Tercentennial Journal of the Third Daughter of the Last Tsar*, trans. Helen Azar and Amanda Madru (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 66.

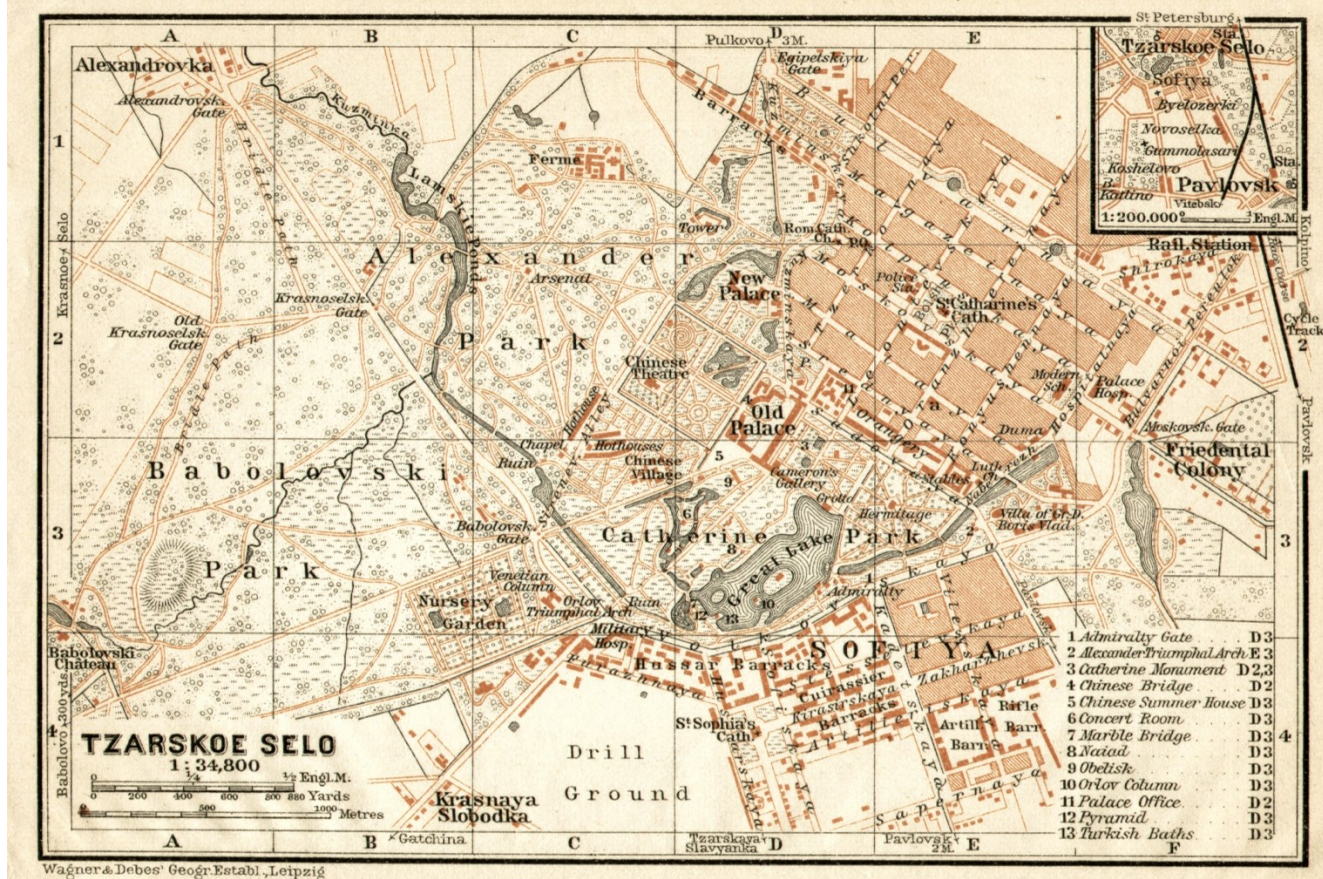


Figure 1: Map of Tsarskoe Selo circa 1914. The Alexander Palace is located at the top of square D2, titled “New Palace”. Author’s collection.

One of the additions to Tsarskoe Selo was the more modest Alexander Palace, commissioned by Catherine II, or the Great, for her grandson, the future Alexander I. The mastermind behind the project was Giacomo Quarenghi, who was known for his Neoclassical buildings, and who had been named court architect by Catherine herself.<sup>58</sup> It is said that once Quarenghi’s palace was completed, the Empress took a contingent to see it before Alexander moved in. Noticing the French diplomat was quiet, Catherine asked him whether he thought the building was impressive; she was told the architect had forgotten something. When questioned, the diplomat replied that a glass case was missing so as to protect the beauty of the building before them.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Susan P. McCaffray, *The Winter Palace and the People: Staging and Consuming Russia’s Monarchy, 1754-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 85. Catherine’s love of architectural projects and the way they served as a performance of imperial power is also described in Susan Jaques, *Empress of Art: Catherine the Great and the Transformation of Russia* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Botkin, *Real Romanovs*, 17-18.

Beginning with Alexander I, the palace was used as the summer residence of the heirs to the Romanov throne until 1905, when it became the permanent home of Nicholas II and Alexandra Feodorovna. Three years later, Dr. Botkin became the imperial physician; this appointment meant that he and his family were entitled to live within Tsarskoe Selo, hence the close and easy contact his children, Tatiana and Gleb, were able to have with Maria and Anastasia. In his memoir, Gleb reflected on the story of Catherine the Great and the French diplomat, writing:

[the] glass case had been supplied, and not only for Alexander's palace, but for the whole of [Tsarskoe Selo]. Indeed, by 1908, the imperial residence was no longer the centre of all social activities and lavish entertainments as it had been... On the contrary, it was a small world apart, a sort of enchanted fairy-land to which only a small number of people had the right of entry.<sup>60</sup>

This “enchanted fairy-land” was created by actions taken by the Empress. A naturally shy person, she had not been welcomed into Russia the way her mother-in-law or sister had been.<sup>61</sup> The Empress appeared to make missteps at every turn: her shyness affected her speech and caused her to become tongue-tied and mumble, and at social events, she took advantage of an early exit whenever possible. The Russian aristocracy viewed these episodes as snubs against them, creating a vicious circle, and which led Alexandra to become more and more reclusive. The last nail in the coffin was the birth of the Tsarevich in 1904. Within hours of his birth, it was confirmed that the Empress had passed haemophilia on to her only son. Known as “the English curse”, the disease began to plague the royal families of Europe when Queen Victoria's daughters began to marry European princes. Alexandra's mother Alice, third child and second daughter of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, was a carrier; one of Alexandra's brothers died from complications due to haemophilia after he fell out of a window. Alice in turn passed the gene to Alexandra, and as mentioned, she passed it to her son. Since Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia never married or had children, it is impossible to know if any of them were also haemophilia carriers, but it is likely at least one of them would have been.

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<sup>60</sup> Botkin, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Empress Maria Feodorovna was born Princess Dagmar of Denmark and married Alexander III in 1866; they ascended the throne in 1881 after Alexander II's assassination. Alexandra's sister Elizabeth (more commonly known as Ella) married Nicholas' uncle, Grand Duke Serge, in 1884. Both women were much loved by the Russian people, which is why Alexandra was compared to them.

The knowledge of her son's terminal illness was the Empress' undoing. She spent much of the remainder of her life lying on sofas in her boudoir or being pushed around in a wheelchair, the result of exhaustion, a number of "illnesses", and a weak heart. It is possible she was suffering from hypochondria brought on by the mental anguish caused by her son's condition. The Emperor and Empress made a drastic and fateful decision after the discovery: no one outside the immediate family and the doctors must know about the heir's illness, lest the Romanov dynasty should appear weak.

And so, after the 1905 Revolution and the move from the Winter Palace to the Alexander Palace was complete, the glass case truly came down on the village outside of St. Petersburg. This enforced isolation was the starting point for mythologizing the four Grand Duchesses. As mentioned, access to Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia was limited to only a select few, and those few barely let anything slip until later in the twentieth century when they began to write their memoirs. Since the events of 1918, the clamour to know more about the girls in white dresses has arguably intensified, resulting in popular histories that, as we have seen, could lead readers astray. This is why devoting scholarly attention to the four young women is important. While the stress is on allowing the four Grand Duchesses to speak for themselves, there are two sections in this thesis where I have insufficient material to do this properly: the period leading up to 1913 (which I discuss below), and the final moments of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's lives, which are outlined in my conclusion. Nevertheless, my focus always remains on the four Grand Duchesses, no matter how scarce the sources may be.

Life at the Russian court was "practically impossible to change..."<sup>62</sup> Every day was the same: mornings were set aside for lessons, usually beginning at nine; lunch was at one o'clock, with more lessons after and a walk or ride in the grounds; tea was served between five and six o'clock, being the "meal in which there was never the slightest variation." As the four Grand Duchesses grew up, tea-time was less a time for play than a time for work. Anna Vyubova claimed the Empress hated seeing Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia sit with "idle hands", and had them work on handicrafts such as needlework and embroidery.<sup>63</sup> Dinner was served promptly at eight o'clock, and only close friends and family were ever invited to dinner; after the meal, everyone retired to a drawing room where there were more handicrafts while their father

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<sup>62</sup> Anna Vyubova, *Memories of the Russian Court* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Vyubova, *Memories*, 43.

read aloud until bedtime, usually sometime between ten and eleven.<sup>64</sup> To reiterate, this went on every day, although there was some slight variation when the family travelled, as this letter from Maria sent to her grandmother, the Dowager Empress while vacationing at Livadia in the Crimea shows: “We go to Kharax and Ai-Todor a lot after morning lessons and lunch. We are always back at six o’clock for reading lessons. Olga and Tatiana often play tennis with Papa. Anastasia and I are learning how to play.”<sup>65</sup> Here, we can see not only that lessons are continuing, but the Grand Duchesses’ daily outdoor activities are also a feature of life on vacation. To reinforce this point, letters to Maria from Peter Petrov – the same tutor Tatiana wrote to, as discussed in the introduction – show that even if he did not travel with the imperial family, he was still giving the girls schoolwork to do. This is illustrated in a letter dated November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1909: “And the book ‘Children of the Sun,’ write to me about all that and how the girls live at the institute... Don’t forget to read ‘Frostman’ from my books, and afterwards write to me whether you liked it or not.”<sup>66</sup>

The Empress once complained to her good friend Vyubova that although “[she] was supposed to have almost unlimited power, [she] was in reality quite unable to change a single detail of the routine of the Russian Court, where things had been going on almost exactly the same for generations.”<sup>67</sup> If more evidence is needed, the former nanny to the Grand Duchesses noted the same solid silver bathtub that dated from the reign of their great-great-grandfather, Nicholas I (1825-1855), was still used in the Alexander Palace by the children of the reigning tsar, and with each birth the name of the newest family member was engraved on the tub. Additionally, Romanov children were known to sleep on hard camp cots and take cold baths every morning.<sup>68</sup>

While their lives were highly regimented, some like Vyubova found that this meant the four girls grew up to be “unassuming and natural without a single trace of hauteur.”<sup>69</sup> The

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 125-126, 130; A. Elchaninov, *The Tsar and His People*, trans. A. P. W. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 10-14; Vyubova, 42-43.

<sup>65</sup> Maria Romanov to Maria Feodorovna Romanov, November 9, 1911, in *Maria Romanov*, 9. Kharax and Ai-Todor were Crimean mansions that belonged to Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, who was married to the Grand Duchesses’ aunt, Xenia Alexandrovna.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Petrov to Maria Romanov, November 11, 1909, in *Maria Romanov*, 3. Petrov, whom the Grand Duchesses called PVP, was their Russian language tutor.

<sup>67</sup> Vyubova, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret Eager, *Six Years at the Russian Court* (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 21; Ian Vorres, *The Last Grand Duchess* (London: Finedawn, 1985), 23; Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Vyubova, 55.

Emperor told Vyubova he had “come to believe that the higher a man’s station in life the less it becomes him to assume any airs of superiority. I want my children to be brought up in this same belief.”<sup>70</sup> Given descriptions of life at the Alexander Palace, and from what can be gleaned from their writings, it can be argued that the Emperor and Empress succeeded in this regard when it came to the four young girls. And while Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia had been dubbed with the epithet “OTMA,” Gilliard wrote: “The Grand-Duchesses were charming – the picture of freshness and health. It would have been difficult to find four sisters with characters more dissimilar and yet so perfectly blended in an affection which did not exclude personal independence, and, in spite of contrasting temperaments, kept them a most united family.”<sup>71</sup> This united front can be explained by the health of the Grand Duchesses’ mother, as the four girls “had arranged such matters in such a way that they could take turns of ‘duty’ with their mother, keeping her company for the day.”<sup>72</sup> The “duty” involved sitting with their mother, reading to her, and keeping her company in general, and was still required even when the family went on vacation. When Vyubova began to join them on these trips, she took over as the Empress’ companion, which allowed the Grand Duchesses to go on excursions together.<sup>73</sup>

As a result of their mother’s frequent illnesses, Gilliard felt that Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia were behind in their lessons. He asked the Empress repeatedly to find a governess for the Grand Duchesses in hopes this would help with their education, yet their mother would not hear of it lest the governess come between mother and daughters.<sup>74</sup> Despite Gilliard’s feelings concerning the neglect of their education, it seems that the Grand Duchesses enjoyed their lessons. Maria wrote to her grandmother on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1906, saying “I am studying every day. I have Russian lessons, the Law of God, arithmetic, German, English and music. I really love music lessons.”<sup>75</sup>

Gilliard’s thoughts towards their education are interesting because he, among others, acknowledged that Olga was the most intelligent of the four girls as she learnt things very quickly and was a voracious reader.<sup>76</sup> The New York Public Library has books that used to

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<sup>70</sup> Vyubova, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Gilliard, 72.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>73</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 167.

<sup>74</sup> Gilliard, 76-77.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; Maria Romanov to Maria Feodorovna Romanov, November 10, 1906, in *Maria Romanov*, xxiv.

<sup>76</sup> Gilliard, 73-75; Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 132; Vyubova, 55.

belong in the personal libraries of Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia. Among those books are some schoolbooks, one of which belonged to Olga – her signature is on the first page when you open it – and is titled *Holy History of the Old Testament for Middle School Levels* by Archpriest Peter Smirnov. There are a few things that are remarkable about this book, namely the clear evidence that Olga was truly engaging with it. The corners of the cover are worn, the spine is cracked in a few places, and there are tears on some pages (such as page 95-96, which looks like the tear came from accidentally pulling the page down while turning), showing that the book was opened and read often. Secondly, Olga demonstrates a deep engagement with this particular book in that there are places where she has made notes in the margins (as on page 119) and even went so far as to correct some of the grammar in the text itself (for example, page 118). Many students engage with their textbooks in the same way, and for this to be a text about religion is perhaps more poignant for a young woman who grew up in a deeply religious family and had regular religion lessons from the local priest. This example as well as Maria’s letter to her grandmother both help us to understand that Olga and Maria at the very least did not see their lessons as a way to fill up their day; rather, they thought about their education in a serious and respectful way which shows they wanted to learn, regardless of how stilted Gilliard felt their education was.

Despite the refusal to find a governess, an “acceptable” stand-in for the Empress was Olga Alexandrovna, youngest sibling of the Emperor, who wrote in her memoirs:

My poor sister-in-law... was seldom able to join us. She suffered from a serious heart disorder so it was seldom that she was able to participate in parades and celebrations. When she was unwell, they sent for me – someone had to be there to ensure that the children behaved properly, stood up when necessary and greeted people as they should – and anything else there was to look out for.<sup>77</sup>

Olga Alexandrovna was twelve years older than her niece, Olga Nikolaevna, which is less than the gap between her and the Emperor, and jokes were made about Olga Alexandrovna being his “eldest daughter” when the six were out together. Their aunt represented a form of contact with the outside world before the four girls were perhaps aware of their seclusion. Olga Alexandrovna acknowledged this in her own way, writing that “[her] nieces did not have any playmates, but they had each other...” She goes on to recognise the monotonous routine and life within the

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<sup>77</sup> Olga Alexandrovna Kulikovskaya, *25 Chapters of My Life: Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna of Russia*, ed. Paul Kulikovskiy, Karen Roth-Nicholls, and Sue Woolmans (Kinloss: Librario Publishing, 2009) 74.



gates of Tsarskoe Selo, saying “they were awfully pleased when I visited them and brought some change in their daily lives.”<sup>78</sup>

The change to the daily life within the glass case that Olga Alexandrovna is referring to is the weekly excursions during the winter that the Grand Duchesses were allowed to take to their aunt’s house. Every Saturday, Olga Alexandrovna would take the train from St. Petersburg to Tsarskoe Selo, where she would usually find Olga and Tatiana finishing up their last lesson before lunch; the five would spend the afternoon according to the prescribed schedule, arriving “at the tea table every Saturday afternoon, happy, laughing and squabbling about all the dreadful things ‘the others’ had thought of.” Their aunt reflected that it must have been strange for the girls’ brother to see “us big girls romping around...”<sup>79</sup> On Sundays, the two Olgas, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia would all travel to St. Petersburg, where the first order of business was lunch with the Dowager Empress, after which they would go to Olga Alexandrovna’s in the afternoon for tea, games, and dancing with “equally youthful ‘eligibles’ to share [their] fun.”<sup>80</sup> Olga, Tatiana, and Maria’s diaries from 1913 all reference these weekends during the winter, and often include the names of those in attendance. For example, on January 20<sup>th</sup>, Olga wrote: “Went to Grandmama at Anichkov [Palace] and then went with Aunt Olga to her [house]. At 4 o’cl. dear N.P., P.A. Voronov, S. S. Klyucharev, N. N. Rodionov, V. V. Kvoshinsky, A. Shangin... and N. A. Kulikovsky arrived... [We] had tea and then ran around, played and danced to the phonograph until 6 o’clock.”<sup>81</sup> The four girls loved these Sundays so much that on a few occasions Olga noted in her diary that she “Thought a lot about yesterday.”<sup>82</sup> These weekly excursions showed them what life was like beyond the gates of the palace, giving them a taste of freedom otherwise unknown to them. Further, it also allowed the four girls an opportunity to be individual people, rather than daughters of the Emperor; they could simply be four young people acting as anyone else their own age. However, even though Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia were just a few months away from a little more freedom from the Alexander Palace with the approaching tercentenary celebrations of the Romanov dynasty, they would be called on to act as daughters of the Emperor, and their performances would be on the largest stage the Grand

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<sup>78</sup> Kulikovsky, *25 Chapters*, 74.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-76.

<sup>80</sup> Ian Vorres, *The Last Grand Duchess* (London: Finedawn, 1985), 112.

<sup>81</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 46.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Tatiana wrote something similar on February 12<sup>th</sup> after their return home: “I am so happy for this day.” See Tatiana Romanov, 10.

Duchesses would ever appear on. Thus, this tiny bit of freedom still came with some strings attached.

Other instances of the young girls experiencing freedom beyond the palace gates are written about in their former nanny's memoir, *Six Years at the Russian Court*, which was published in 1906. Margaret Eager, an Irishwoman, obtained the Empress' personal permission to write her impressions of life in Imperial Russia. The latter said to Eager that "so many untruths had been published that it would be a relief to have an account of the Russian Court which was absolutely true."<sup>83</sup> This quotation reveals an acknowledgement by the Empress of unpopular feelings towards the imperial couple, which at that point had been building up over the last ten years. Further, Eager recognised the demand for information about court life, especially about the Grand Duchesses. This wanting to know more on the part of those not only outside the glass case, but also outside of Russia, plays into the popularity of monarchy which is still arguably prevalent to this day. What attachment could an Irish, Scottish, or British person have to four young Russian Grand Duchesses? Perhaps the attachment lies in the idea that "Both the monarch and people receive: the one receives status and privilege, the other the satisfaction derived from bestowing, supporting, and perpetuating status and privilege."<sup>84</sup> Where the British monarchy, for example, was and is incredibly visible, the immediate members of the Russian royal family in its final years were hidden away. This seclusion on the part of the Grand Duchesses' parents goes against the unwritten agreement between monarch (in this case, Nicholas) and people, creating an unending cycle of demand and denial.

One story Eager recounted in her memoir which highlights the attachment to the imperial family felt by the Russian people took place in about 1903. While the family were on vacation at Livadia, the Emperor's estate in the Crimea, Olga and Tatiana spent their mornings playing on a stony beach. On their way home one day, a young officer from the *Standart*, the imperial yacht, asked what the two young girls had in their hands. Olga and Tatiana opened their hands to reveal "the little bits of green stones they had picked up, and gravely asked him to keep them if he would like to. He took a little stone from each child and when [Eager] afterwards saw them they were mounted in gold and attached to his watch chain." When asked about this, he claimed "he

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<sup>83</sup> Eager, *Six Years*, xi.

<sup>84</sup> Percy Black, *The Mystique of Modern Monarchy, With Special Reference to the British Commonwealth* (London: Watts & Co., 1953), 27.

would not part with [the stones] for any earthly consideration, the children having found them themselves, and offered them to him.” Eager went on to muse that “it was very amusing to see the way in which people regarded these little maidens.”<sup>85</sup> The memoir has other anecdotes of officers serving the family who openly sought mementos from Olga and Tatiana, or even to simply shake their hands.

An explanation for this behaviour can be traced to the idea that the Tsar was viewed as Russians’ “little father”, ultimately God’s representative on earth, for “In the minds of the people, the monarchy is further strengthened by allusions to God: God and the monarchy watch over them... Security derived from the one spreads, by association, to the other.”<sup>86</sup> At his coronation, the Emperor “celebrated the eucharist as a priest”, reinforcing the bond between Tsar and God.<sup>87</sup> To be close to any of the Grand Duchesses then places a person one step closer to the Tsar, and in turn, one step closer to God.

However, because of the enforced seclusion at the Alexander Palace, as well as a number of mishaps that have become synonymous with Nicholas II’s reign – the Russo-Japanese War, the Bloody Sunday massacre, and the 1905 Revolution – a disillusionment was beginning to creep into ordinary people’s minds. Russians were beginning to realise that their little father might not be as divine as their emperors were supposed to be. Above all, the Emperor’s “failure... to make appearances at ceremonies and festivities and to prevent breakdowns in the organization of public events... appeared as derelictions of his symbolic obligations. Such lapses cast doubt on the monarch’s superhuman capacities and portended a broader loss of authority and control over the political order.”<sup>88</sup> Further, as David Cannadine notes in the introduction to *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*: “[as] societies become more complex... the distribution and the nature of power, and the functioning and substance of ceremonial, must and do change and develop.”<sup>89</sup> Eric Hobsbawm pushes this idea further by emphasising that changes in society at any level called for “new methods of ruling or establishing bonds of loyalty.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, 1913 was an opportune time for the Emperor to re-

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<sup>85</sup> Eager, 119-120.

<sup>86</sup> Black, *Mystique of Monarchy*, 29.

<sup>87</sup> Montefiore, 498.

<sup>88</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:4.

<sup>89</sup> David Cannadine, “Introduction,” in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. David Cannadine and Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>90</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 263.

establish “bonds of loyalty” between himself and his people, and Their Imperial Highnesses Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia would play a large role in this undertaking.

In 1598, Tsar Feodor I died without an heir, ending the Rurikid dynasty. His death brought on what is now known as the Time of Troubles, an era characterised by pretenders to the throne and threats of foreign invasion. In late 1612, a *zemsky sobor* (Assembly of the Land) was called, and on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1613, a sixteen-year-old boy named Michael Romanov was elected tsar. A delegation of boyars (the leading aristocrats) left Moscow in search of the new Emperor, who was at the Ipatiev Monastery in Kostroma with his mother, the nun Martha. Initially, Michael refused the offer; however, after praying before the Feodorov Mother of God icon, Michael finally accepted the throne, founding the Romanov dynasty, which remained on the throne for 304 years.

How did Russia maintain an autocracy for just over three centuries? If we consider Percy Black’s psychological study on Canadian attachment to the British monarchy and apply it to the Russian case, autocracy under the Romanovs was only able to persist

because people derive vicarious satisfaction from it: *the kingship depends on them*. Without the people, royalty could not be... The people encourage and support the monarchy because the monarchy has a ‘high-and-mighty’ status embellished with the glamour of ancient continuity and the garniture of past splendour. It matters little whether or not the monarchy does in fact possess these attributes; what counts is that the people believe it does.<sup>91</sup>

As mentioned, at about the time the Russian people were beginning to lose sight of their Emperor and the origins of autocracy, the tercentenary anniversary arrived and provided the perfect platform for a reconnection with the rest of the population. In essence, as Wortman explains, the tercentenary celebrations “were mass gatherings, rivalling or exceeding in numbers the coronation celebrations, that allowed the tsar to make direct contact with the people.”<sup>92</sup> As has been alluded to, especially with Eager’s anecdote written about earlier, the four Grand Duchesses would also be allowed to come into direct contact with people from all walks of life.

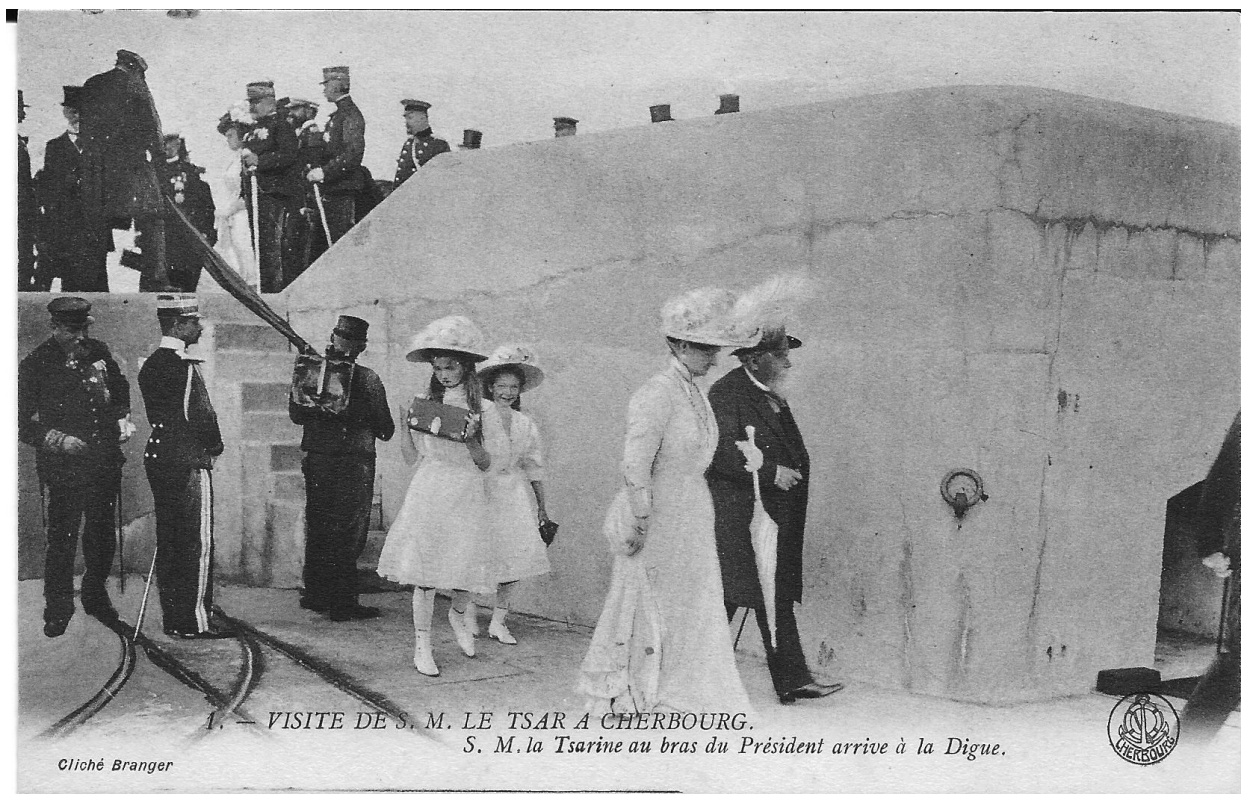
While the events of 1913 were not the first time the Grand Duchesses, in particular Olga and Tatiana, were called on to act as supporting actors in the narrative of their father’s reign, the

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<sup>91</sup> Black, 24-25; emphasis in the original.

<sup>92</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:13.

other occasions were different. At just six months old, Olga accompanied her parents to France, where she and her nanny at the time were met with huge popularity, before travelling to England to visit Queen Victoria, Olga's great-grandmother; in 1909, she returned to France with her parents and Tatiana in a lesser known trip abroad,<sup>93</sup> as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Postcard of Olga (left) and Tatiana in matching white dresses and hats, walking behind their mother (also in a white dress and hat) in France, 1909. Courtesy of and reproduced with permission of Alison Rowley.

What is significant about this image is that the postcard caption makes no mention of Olga and Tatiana, despite them being directly behind their mother. Instead, it specifies that the card commemorates the visit of the Emperor to Cherbourg, with the subheading describing the Empress walking arm-in-arm with the French President. Thus, the shroud of mystery reaches even the international stage.

In another instance, all four Grand Duchesses were present for the reciprocal visit their father paid to England in 1909 after Edward VII and Queen Alexandra's visit to Reval a year

<sup>93</sup> Alison Rowley, "Feminine Majesty on an International Stage: French Postcards and Russian Empress Alexandra Feodorovna," in *Empresses and Queens in Courtly Public Spheres from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Marion Romberg (Brill: under review), 14-15.

earlier. As Matthew Glencross notes: “The return state visit of the Tsar was also unique amongst those Edwardian state visits to Britain in that Nicholas came to the Isle of Wight, not to Windsor or to London, and yet... it was fully publicised.”<sup>94</sup> This strange meeting place was chosen by the British monarch, who also heavily orchestrated the visit as Edward hoped to portray his nephew by marriage in a more favourable light than the British public saw him at the time. Glencross explains the unpopularity of the Emperor in England was a result of the harshness of the ruler towards his people, which was viewed as unnecessary.<sup>95</sup> These sentiments are in stark contrast to the Emperor’s early popularity in France, which stems from the Franco-Russian Alliance instituted by the Grand Duchesses’ grandfather, Alexander III – although it must be acknowledged that the French also began to view the girls’ father more negatively after the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution. The orchestration of the visit to Britain extended to “the Tsar being kept away from people as much as possible to prevent him from being insulted in any way.”<sup>96</sup> What this highlights is that despite being on a public state visit, the Romanovs were still tucked away, out of sight of the public, much like they were in Russia. In the same vein, there is not much information about the Grand Duchesses’ movements during this visit, except for Olga and Tatiana being allowed “a heavily guarded shopping trip...”<sup>97</sup>

To reiterate the point made earlier: the four Grand Duchesses were for the most part kept within Tsarskoe Selo, with only occasional chances to venture beyond the gates; however, even when brought on state visits, there was a large degree of control over how the four were displayed, if at all. With the tercentenary celebrations in 1913 and their mother’s ill health, the Grand Duchesses were suddenly going to be placed front and centre in ways they had never experienced, nor ever would again.

The celebrations began on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1913, three hundred years to the day of Michael’s election. The day before, the imperial family moved from the Alexander Palace to the Winter Palace, “the last royal residence constructed in the heart of a major European capital...”<sup>98</sup> While Peter the Great founded St. Petersburg in 1703 and cast it as Russia’s new capital, it was

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<sup>94</sup> Matthew Glencross, *The State Visits of Edward VII: Reinventing Royal Diplomacy for the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 199.

<sup>95</sup> Glencross, *State Visits*, 200.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

<sup>97</sup> Montefiore, 544. This was also the only time Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia met their cousin, Prince Edward (the future Edward VIII); for more on his impressions of the Russian visit, see Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 169-170.

<sup>98</sup> McCaffray, *Winter Palace*, 5.

Empress Elizabeth who would oversee the building of “the supreme architectural symbol of Russia’s autocratic government,”<sup>99</sup> meaning the Winter Palace. The architect Bartolomeo Rastrelli “received the greatest commission of his long, illustrious career when Elizabeth decreed on January 1, 1753, that she would build a new ‘winter home’ on the banks of the Neva.” This announcement came at a time when the trend amongst Europe’s royalty was to build extravagant palaces away from their capitals, the best example being Louis XIV’s Versailles. In contrast, Elizabeth’s palace was to be “in the very heart of town, unprotected from passersby by either fence or gardens.”<sup>100</sup> What the Empress and her architect did not foresee was the adaptability of the ground in front of the palace, which came to be known as Palace Square. The Square was a gathering place for the public display of the bond between tsar and people, where the emperor performed royalty for the urban population. It was this place where the people gathered to be greeted by the autocrat on the balcony of the Winter Palace in times of national emergency, such as the declaration of war in August 1914. Due to the lack of protective barriers around the structure, the city encircled the palace to such a degree that not only could people “stand right in its shadow,” but if any of the Romanovs decided to leave, the people “could watch them do it.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, this space would force Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and their family out of seclusion and into the public eye.

The Grand Duchesses and their family enacted the ritual described above when they left the Winter Palace and drove in carriages to the Kazan Cathedral for a *Te Deum*, or a thanksgiving service.<sup>102</sup> The easy access to the Winter Palace meant that crowds formed along the road between the palace and the cathedral, and even with lines of soldiers, the people were attempting to swarm the carriages containing the imperial family. The carriage carrying the Grand Duchesses was at the end of the procession, just ahead of the rear guard; according to Olga, her father and brother were at the head, just behind the front guard, and her mother and grandmother were in the middle. Afterwards, they all returned to the palace, where the girls had breakfast with the Dowager Empress, their father, and a few other family members while their mother lay down in her room.<sup>103</sup> After the meal, the Grand Duchesses dressed in traditional

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<sup>99</sup> McCaffray, *Winter Palace*, 3.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 237; Montefiore, 559; Vyrubova, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 237; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 65.

Russian gowns, the preparations for which started a few months in advance, and then they attended a reception.<sup>104</sup> Tatiana noted proudly that the dresses she and Olga wore had trains for the first time; given Maria and Anastasia's ages, their dresses would not have been floor length yet. In addition, they each wore the red sash of the Order of St. Catherine with the diamond star attached. The reception lasted from 3:45-5:30; once out of their ceremonial dresses, Maria and Anastasia attended a tea at the children's monastery, Olga had dinner with her father and aunt Ella, and Tatiana went to bed with a headache.<sup>105</sup> Unknowingly, Tatiana drank something made with contaminated water and contracted typhoid, forcing her to miss the rest of the St. Petersburg celebrations.<sup>106</sup>

The next morning at eleven o'clock, the three healthy Grand Duchesses attended what Olga simply called a reception, but Maria called a "baise main", with "all the relatives" (except their mother).<sup>107</sup> The latter translates as a kissing hand ceremony, where guests would kiss the hand of the monarch; perhaps in this context it was merely a reception to greet the imperial family. Later that evening, Olga and her parents went to the opera to see *A Life for the Tsar*, which she called a "folk play". The diary entry goes on further to say that her mother "left after the first act because she was not feeling well at all and was tired." Despite the empress' ill health, Olga noted "The whole city was celebrating, masses of people."<sup>108</sup> As the celebrations continued over these few days in St. Petersburg, and as we will see with the May celebrations, the more the Empress was too ill to attend ceremonies, the more Olga acted as a stand-in for her mother. Olga would not have been completely left alone, as she had her grandmother and aunts to look to for guidance; however, in 1913, Olga was 18, meaning she was certainly old enough to take on the responsibilities of a senior royal woman.

The third day of festivities, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, began similarly to the one before: the three Grand Duchesses attended a reception (or "baise main", depending on who is writing) for the

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<sup>104</sup> On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, Olga wrote: "At 10 o'clock, tried on the Russian dresses", which could have been a final fitting for the gowns. Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 65-66; Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 26-27; Tatiana Romanov, 12. Interestingly, the girls did not mention the Order of St. Catherine; it was remarked upon by Vyubova, 68 and mentioned in Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 238.

<sup>106</sup> Vyubova, 69.

<sup>107</sup> The different terms used is interesting in that the modern Russian translation of "kissing hand ceremony" is церемония поцелуев, while the translation of "reception" is прием, demonstrating the very high chance that Olga and Maria used different terms to describe the same gathering. Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 27; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 237; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 67.



ladies-in-waiting with their grandmother, the Dowager Empress. Neither Olga nor Maria remark on this further, perhaps because the big event of the day was a ball hosted by St. Petersburg's nobility at the Assembly of the Nobility, which Olga attended alone with her parents. The occasion was made extra special for her as she wrote in her diary it was "[her] first ball." Once at the Assembly where there were "Masses of people", "Prayers were chanted, speeches made, and bread-and-salt served... After that the dancing started. [Olga] danced a lot" and she goes on to emphasise the evening "was such fun." Tatiana was meant to go, but she was too ill to attend; Maria makes note of Tatiana's illness by name on this day, illustrating the doctors only diagnosed Tatiana with typhoid two days after she started to get sick.<sup>109</sup> Sickness or not, as Wortman notes, the Emperor and Empress failed to give their own ball while in the capital, something that did not go unnoticed by the nobility. The last time the couple hosted a ball was in 1903, and it was felt that considering the anniversary that was being celebrated, the Grand Duchesses' parents should have organised something. Instead, their decision not to do so added to the pre-existing negative feelings that many in St. Petersburg society held towards the imperial couple, particularly the Empress.<sup>110</sup>

Tatiana's infection kept them all in St. Petersburg for longer than anticipated, which facilitated Olga, Maria, and Anastasia spending their Sunday in standard fashion: first to church, then after breakfast with their father, they left for Olga Alexandrovna's, where there were plenty of young people, games, and tea. After their return to the Winter Palace, Maria and Anastasia ate supper together, while Olga accompanied her parents to a dinner with the rest of the extended Romanov family, where again "there was music and masses of people." For the third night in a row, her mother was too ill to take part in the festivities, and she spent the evening on the couch with Vyubova by her side.<sup>111</sup> This was the last event of the St. Petersburg festivities for the tercentenary, and the Grand Duchesses and their family ventured back to Tsarskoe Selo a few days later.<sup>112</sup>

The return to the glass case meant going back to the monotonous routine of lessons and daily exercise outdoors, but it also provided a chance for Tatiana to recover. Her next diary entry comes on March 26<sup>th</sup>, just over a month after her last entry from the capital. She writes that she

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<sup>109</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 67-68; Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 28; Tatiana Romanov, 12-13.

<sup>110</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:464-465.

<sup>111</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 28; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 68-69.

<sup>112</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 29; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 70.

was forbidden to write because of the typhoid, and describes her journey back home: “They transferred me to the station in a motor... At the station the soldiers carried me. Here [the Alexander Palace] they separated me from the sisters and I live with Shura in a room between the playroom and Sonia Orbeliani’s room.” Alexandra Tegleva, or Shura, was Anastasia’s nursemaid who stayed on as part of the Grand Duchesses’ retinue once Anastasia outgrew the need for a nursemaid. Tatiana also explained that her mother visited her every afternoon.<sup>113</sup> Gradually Tatiana regained her strength and was allowed to venture outside; by mid-May when the next round of the tercentenary celebrations began, Tatiana was completely recovered.

On Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, the four Grand Duchesses, their parents, and their brother passed the day as per the perpetual Romanov itinerary, then “At 7 o’cl. 10 min. left for the train.”<sup>114</sup> This was the beginning of the tercentenary tour that Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia would be undertaking with their parents and brother, which took them to many of the ancient Russian cities.<sup>115</sup> Ultimately, the plan was to travel to Kostroma – while stopping along the way – in order for the Romanov family to retrace Tsar Michael’s journey to Moscow, where the climax of the anniversary celebrations would be taking place. Having left in the evening, the immediate imperial family travelled all night and the next morning before arriving in Vladimir, where they were greeted by large crowds. While the Emperor greeted delegates on the platform, the Grand Duchesses sat in the train with their mother, who received some people on board. She stayed behind while the Grand Duchesses and their brother accompanied their father to the city’s cathedral. While their brother went back to the train, the four girls then travelled by car with their father to Suzdal, about 36 kilometres from Vladimir. In Suzdal, they went to the cathedral where ancient artefacts were on display, and then to two monasteries. Before the day was done, the party travelled to another city, Bogomolovo, and the cathedral there. According to Olga’s watch, the day ended at 8:05.<sup>116</sup> This was just a preview of what this trip would look like for the four Grand Duchesses. As Wortman sums up: “In each town they heard a service in the cathedral, received the dignitaries of various estates, and gave dinners for peasant [elders]. They also visited historical sites and, at the empress’ request, monasteries, ten of which are listed in the

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<sup>113</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 13; Sonia Orbeliani was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> Hughes, 219.

<sup>116</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 60; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 117-118; Tatiana Romanov, 18. Olga notes which regiments acted as honorary guards throughout her entries.

itinerary before they reached Moscow.”<sup>117</sup> It is interesting to note that it was their mother’s special request to visit monasteries, when according to Olga, Tatiana, and Maria’s diaries, she spent the majority of her time on the train or the steamer.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Wortman references some unhappiness with the planning of the celebrations early in the trip, and the “champagne reception... and gathering for the ladies of the town and the tsar’s daughters.”<sup>118</sup> There are two significant points here; the first is the last part of the statement, where the Grand Duchesses were the ones called on to attend the gathering with the noble women. As has been mentioned and will be discussed a little more in depth later, the four, especially Olga, were often called on to stand in for their mother, and Wortman’s example is a perfect illustration of this. That a specific gathering was organised especially between the four Grand Duchesses, or “the tsar’s daughters” as Wortman calls them, and ladies of the nobility demonstrates not only the awareness the court ministers had of the Empress’ indisposition, but also that the Grand Duchesses were now the perfect candidates to replace her without having to call in the Dowager Empress or Olga Alexandrovna. Secondly, the diary entries for this day make no mention of this reception; if they do, then their mother was present because Olga, Tatiana, and Maria only make reference to tea with the nobility, but not any special meeting with just noble women.<sup>119</sup>

The second day was spent in Nizhny Novgorod where they arrived around ten o’clock in the morning. As at Vladimir, a guard of honour was at the station, although unlike at Vladimir, the entire family attended the service in the cathedral. In the afternoon, the Grand Duchesses changed and went to the Assembly of the Nobility, where they had tea; from there, they all went to the pier first to watch their father greet a deputation on a barge, and then the four girls and their family transferred to the “awfully cozy steamer”, *The Mezhen*. It was at this point that 50 other members of the Romanov family joined the Grand Duchesses, their parents, and their brother in a flotilla that would be sailing to Kostroma.<sup>120</sup>

The arrival of the Romanovs at Kostroma happened two days later on May 19<sup>th</sup>. Hughes notes that “Appropriately, Kostroma represented a mix of the old Russia and the new, its 21

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<sup>117</sup> Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:467.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:469.

<sup>119</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 61; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 120; Tatiana Romanov, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 61; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 119-120; Tatiana Romanov, 19; Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 238; Hughes, 219.

textile mills indicative of 300 years of progress under the Romanovs.”<sup>121</sup> Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, dressed in white, followed a procession of the icon to the Ipatiev monastery, where their father was blessed and kissed the same icon that had become mythologised through Michael’s story. It is said that once Michael accepted the throne – the ultimate act of self-sacrifice – his mother Martha blessed him with the Feodorov Mother of God icon, the same he had prayed to after being offered the throne. It was this icon that the current emperor was blessed with in what Wortman calls “the emotional climax of the morning’s events.” In addition, descendants of the delegation sent to find Michael were present, bringing the Romanov story full circle.<sup>122</sup>

Despite the significance of the event, highlighted by the number of Romanov family members and the descendants of instrumental figures in attendance, Olga and Maria only note going to the Michael Romanov museum. They make no mention of their father kissing the same icon as Michael, nor of the people in attendance. In addition, there was a dinner aboard the *Tsar Michael Feodorovich*, the specific steamer built for receptions and dinners; Olga does reference the dinner in passing, and goes on to say that she, Tatiana, and their father went to the river bank to watch the fireworks. It is likely that Maria and Anastasia were not present at dinner, given their ages.<sup>123</sup> Regardless, the diary entries are interesting to read side-by-side with the historical narrative, as the four girls’ perception of the events provides a different lens with which to see this monumental event in their lives.

From Olga’s, Tatiana’s, and Maria’s writings, it is clear that their mother continued to be too ill to attend events, although she did make the effort to be at the larger evening ones, even for a little while. While their diaries do not betray any disappointment, Vyubova names one instance in particular where the Empress being missing in action hurt her feelings. Vyubova’s paternal side hailed from a town named Pereslavl, which was where the tour stopped the day before arriving in Moscow. When the cavalcade arrived, the Empress was “confined to her bed on the Imperial train” much to Vyubova’s disappointment because many of her relatives were taking part in the celebrations in the town.<sup>124</sup> As in St. Petersburg, the Empress’ absence meant the Grand Duchesses, Olga in particular, were placed front and centre in order to support their

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<sup>121</sup> Hughes, 219.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 220; Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:472-474.

<sup>123</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 63; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 122; Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:467.

<sup>124</sup> Vyubova, 69.

father. Maria's diary notes who she sat with at different meals, showing that even the younger two Grand Duchesses were being introduced to court life, for being able to make small talk with guests at meals was an important asset for any royal, female or male. In this, the four were acting as emissaries of the Russian Emperor, a role the Grand Duchesses needed to master given the family they had been born into. Generally, this role would be carried out on a journey outside of Russia and in the case of a marriage to a non-Russian royal. However, in 1913, being between the ages of twelve and eighteen, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia were introduced to the true royal experience for the first and last time – although they could not know this at the time.

The much anticipated arrival in Moscow happened on the afternoon of May 24<sup>th</sup>. Once the Romanov clan arrived, they made a ceremonial entrance into the Kremlin, attended a service in one of the cathedrals, and had a quiet evening. The next day was the biggest day, as Maria's diary entry at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates. Crowds of people turned out to see the Grand Duchesses and their immediate and extended families make an appearance on the Red Balcony (or Red Porch), and yet there is a repetitive nature to the Moscow festivities, which also makes them rather similar to the events that had already taken place. The main differences are the visit to the Romanov boyars' house – which both Olga and Maria mention in passing – and Olga and Tatiana attending “a massive dinner” in traditional Russian dress with a fireworks display afterward. Besides this, they visited churches and monasteries, much like they did elsewhere on their tour.<sup>125</sup> The next few days in Moscow are the same, and it is worth mentioning again that given their ages, Maria and Anastasia were absent from many of the evening events that took place, such as a ball at the Moscow Assembly of the Nobility on May 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>126</sup> However, Maria's diary is proof enough of her and Anastasia's presence throughout the anniversary demonstrations and the significant role they played alongside Olga and Tatiana in representing the Romanov dynasty.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1913, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, their parents, their brother, and the members of the court who had gone with them all returned to Tsarskoe Selo. They had been gone for just under two weeks, but as Olga, Tatiana, and Maria's diaries show, the days were jam-packed with travel, religious ceremonies, and receptions. Both Olga and Maria's diary entries for the day show an immediate return to their monotonous routine, with the exception of lessons.

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<sup>125</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 66; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 131.

<sup>126</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 133.

The four girls attended church in the morning, had their meals with their parents, and went out into the garden. No visitors, just the family and their retainers. Additionally, they returned inside the glass case with the knowledge and an admission by the Duma that the celebrations had been successful; the Emperor was “convinced that he had made contact with the Russian nation”, the Empress was happy to be home, and in Olga’s own words: “As for me, I would have done it all over again.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 239; Wortman, *Scenarios*, 2:479; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 134.

## Chapter 2: Experiencing the Home Front, 1914-1917

*My precious Papa! I congratulate you with the victory. We went to Aleksei's train today. Saw a lot of wounded. ... Rather serious wounds... Then we rode to the Grand Palace hospital, the large one; Mama and the sisters changed dressings, and Maria and I stopped by to see all the wounded, spoke with each one... At 6 o'clock we returned to the Small Hospital and sat there until twenty to 8... Your loving daughter, 13-year-old God's Servant Nastasia  
-Anastasia to Nicholas II, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1914<sup>128</sup>*

The end of the tercentenary celebrations in 1913 brought the return of the monotonous routine to the lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia. According to the available diaries, the four young women return to their lessons, outdoor activities, and summer vacation. Life continues as if the tercentenary celebrations had never happened. As the harsh Russian winter turned into spring, the Grand Duchesses, their family, and members of the imperial retinue returned to Livadia in the Crimea.<sup>129</sup> May quickly became June, which brought a bright, warm summer across Europe. The middle of June was significant in Russia not just for the “blue and cloudless weather”, but also because “the first British Battle-Cruiser Squadron, under the command of Sir David Beatty, anchored just outside Kronstadt, and every day in the following week was filled with entertainments and banquets.” Meriel Buchanan, daughter of the British Ambassador to Russia, also remembered “The Emperor and Empress, with their four daughters, [lunching] on board Sir David's flagship...” Her most significant memory of this naval visit, however, was that “scarcely a week after the British ships had sailed away, the Arch-Duke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated” while visiting Sarajevo.<sup>130</sup>

That fateful day was remembered as “a gorgeous day across Europe, typical of the glorious summer of 1914.”<sup>131</sup> It brought about a month of uncertainty as many waited to see how

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<sup>128</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, September 21, 1914, in *Maria and Anastasia: The Youngest Romanov Grand Duchesses in Their Own Words. Letters, Diaries, Postcards*, trans. Helen Azar (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 8-9.

<sup>129</sup> Gilliard, 91.

<sup>130</sup> Meriel Buchanan, *Ambassador's Daughter* (London: Cassel & Company Ltd., 1958), 117-118; Kronstadt is the naval base just outside of St. Petersburg.

<sup>131</sup> Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 23.

the Austrians would react to the assassination of their unpopular heir and his wife.<sup>132</sup> In the end, Franz Ferdinand's reputation made no difference – the Austro-Hungarians decided to retaliate against Serbia. It was an acknowledged fact that the only way in which Austria-Hungary could engage Serbia in war was with German backing, because Russia would intervene on Serbia's behalf. Historian Sean McMeekin notes the Austro-Hungarian army alone was no match for that of its eastern neighbour.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, the French president Raymond Poincaré paid a visit to Russia in order to solidify the Franco-Russian Alliance. While the meeting had been confirmed in January, the timing could not have worked out better given the course of events. Poincaré and the French delegation anchored at Kronstadt at two o'clock in the afternoon of July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914. The next day, the British ambassador Sir George Buchanan enlightened the French president of the rumour concerning the impending ultimatum to Serbia.<sup>134</sup> The atmosphere of the visit shifted drastically – the solidification of the Entente became much more important, as did establishing Russia's intentions regarding war in Europe.

Two days later, the Russians put on a military parade for the French. With the Emperor at the head, "cheering broke out again spasmodically as the carriages with the Empress, the French President, the Heir Apparent, and the young Grand Duchesses passed slowly by." Meriel Buchanan remembers the crowd cheering for "the smiling faces of [the] young girls" wearing "flower-wreathed hats..."<sup>135</sup> Despite the excitement surrounding the parade, talk of war continued to be the dominant feature of the French visit. When the French left, the message was clear: France and Russia would be in this together, and through the alliance France held with England, the Triple Entente would band together against Germany and Austria-Hungary in a European fight.

A text that has become central to understanding Russia's role in the war is Dominic Lieven's *Towards the Flame*.<sup>136</sup> Written in 2015 after the Russian Foreign Ministry archive opened, his study centres on the idea of the role of empire. In order to understand the First World War and its origins, Lieven posits we have to understand the population's mind set, which had

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<sup>132</sup> The Austrians frowned upon Franz Ferdinand for entering into a morganatic marriage to Sophie Chotek, a former lady-in-waiting to the woman he was meant to marry. Upon his marriage, he was forced to renounce the rights to the throne for any of his children with Sophie. The assassinations were seen by Emperor Franz Joseph as "divine punishment... that had... cleansed the Habsburg line of dynastic impurity." See McMeekin, *July 1914*, 23; 25-30.

<sup>133</sup> McMeekin, *July 1914*, 47.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 145, 155.

<sup>135</sup> Meriel Buchanan, *Petrograd: The City of Trouble, 1914-1918* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1918), 10.

<sup>136</sup> Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2015).



empire at its heart. This is especially important when we remember Europe boasted six empires, five of which were geographically centred on the continent itself.<sup>137</sup> They relied on one another to keep each other's ambitions in check. To Lieven, "empire" means that "Unless a state is (or at least has been) a great power, it cannot be a true empire. But empires are great powers with specific characteristics. These include rule over huge territories and many peoples without the latter's explicit consent."<sup>138</sup> Fairly straightforward, most historians and laypeople are likely to agree with this definition. From here, Lieven added a second point, which defined imperialism as "simply the ideologies, values, and policies that sustain the creation, expansion, and maintenance of empire."<sup>139</sup> Taken together, these two intertwined definitions created the global makeup before 1914, and are important for understanding the mentality of those living at the time.

One topic not discussed by Lieven or many scholars of the Eastern Front is the situation on the home front. It has been acknowledged time and again that the First World War had a huge impact not only on society, but on women in particular. There exists a plethora of studies about women on the Western Front, but there are far fewer for those located within the territories of the Eastern Front. Additionally, there are scarce studies of royal activities on the home front; both of these contribute to the gap in my own thesis on this topic, although I am aiming to open an academic discussion about royal women in wartime.<sup>140</sup> Gail Braybon explains that women's role in the war is often overshadowed because of a particular image of World War I that is fed to us through the popularity of English war poets and contemporary films and books. The war story is the soldier's story, and "women's wartime history was, and often still is, overlaid with myth. They have their own stereotypical roles to fill."<sup>141</sup> While Braybon is writing about the Western Front, this idea is easily applicable to the Eastern Front as well. Further, she writes that the interest in women's various roles during the First World War can be attributed to exploring

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<sup>137</sup> The sixth empire is the United Kingdom, which is separated from the continent itself by the North Sea and the English Channel.

<sup>138</sup> Lieven, *Towards the Flame*, 4.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> As mentioned, there is a treasure trove of historiography about women on the Western Front in the First World War. For some examples, see Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Toronto: Longman, 2002); Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), to name a few.

<sup>141</sup> Gail Braybon, "Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story," in *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, edited by Gail Braybon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 87-88.

“those who did something *different* as a result of war, and in some way challenged the existing social order.”<sup>142</sup> This quotation encapsulates exactly what this chapter sets out to do.

In traditional discussions of women and war, the theme of war liberating women and giving them rights previously denied to them is reiterated. In many ways, the war “proved [women] could be like men.”<sup>143</sup> However, the perception that women were given the exact same roles as men during the war is false:

Rather, they were hired in certain sectors that were temporarily reclassified as appropriate for women. They were barred from highly skilled and supervisory positions and were, ostensibly because of the duress of war, given incomplete training and made to work without proper safety precautions.<sup>144</sup>

To borrow an analogy, the First World War demonstrated that regardless of who took the first step in a dance, it was inevitably men who would still lead. Women took a step in the direction of liberation from the home by working on the home front, only to be led back to the home after the Armistice.<sup>145</sup> While women and men alike were made to return to their pre-war activities after the end of hostilities, men had not tasted freedom in the way women had during those four years. This is particularly relevant for Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, who, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, spent the majority of their lives cloistered away. Russia entering the war gave them access to a new version of their world within the palace gates, as their wartime activities allowed the Grand Duchesses to interact more directly with various people from outside Tsarskoe Selo, further breaking the barrier of isolation from the society they experienced prior to 1913.

There are fewer accounts of how women in the East experienced and participated in the war, yet what is known is that as in the West, women on the Eastern Front volunteered and took up positions traditionally held by men, although the majority enrolled in nursing. One work that deals with nursing – both in the rear and at the front – in the East is *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Bandaging Men's Wounds* by Laurie Stoff.<sup>146</sup> This is an

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<sup>142</sup> Braybon, “Winners or Losers,” 88; emphasis in the original.

<sup>143</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, “Rewriting History,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 23.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret Randolph Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, “The Double Helix,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>145</sup> Higonnet and Higonnet, “The Double Helix,” 35.

<sup>146</sup> Laurie S. Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More Than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

exhaustive study of Russian nursing during the First World War; consequently, I have relied heavily on Stoff's work for theorising Olga and Tatiana's nursing activities. While there is a particular emphasis on the women who served at the front – something Olga and Tatiana would never have been able to do – Stoff's research provides enough information to piece together the role these two young women played in the war. *Sisters of Mercy* is almost encyclopedic as the author has left almost no stones unturned, yet there is no in-depth analysis of Olga and Tatiana's nursing activities, which are discussed below.

I will also be covering subjects left untouched by Corynne Hall's 2014 popular history about royal nursing.<sup>147</sup> *Princesses on the Wards: Royal Women in Nursing Through Wars and Revolutions* focuses on royal women who have ties to Queen Victoria, which greatly limits the scope of the study. However, this means that Olga and Tatiana are featured in the chapter on World War I, as they were great-granddaughters of Queen Victoria; despite this, Hall makes no mention of Maria and Anastasia. The author reminds readers that her study "is not a history of nursing, nor of the Red Cross, but the story of several queens and princesses who volunteered to help their fellow human beings."<sup>148</sup> Thus, Stoff gives the history of nursing on the Eastern Front in the First World War, and Hall focuses on a small, specific group of women; in this thesis, I fill in the gaps of both authors' works.

There is no denying Russia blundered into the First World War unprepared both economically and industrially despite its place in the Triple Entente. This is partly a result of the Russo-Japanese War which ended nine years earlier, but Russian industry had lagged behind the rest of the modern world long before hostilities with Japan started in 1904. With that being said, helping a fellow Slavic country against threats of Austro-Hungarian and German aggression was something that seemingly had to be done. The war affected the inhabitants of the Alexander Palace just as much as it affected those across Europe. To Gleb Botkin, Tsarskoe Selo "had become unrecognizable." Every available space – including the Boktin residence – was transformed into a hospital or a convalescent home.<sup>149</sup> People close to the imperial family marvelled at the way in which the Empress seemed to forget all of her long-term physical ailments and answered the call to war. While the men were marching off to the front and the

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<sup>147</sup> Corynne Hall, *Princesses on the Wards: Royal Women in Nursing Through Wars and Revolutions* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014).

<sup>148</sup> Hall, *Princesses on the Wards*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> Botkin, 114.

Emperor was headed to army headquarters,<sup>150</sup> she organised an extensive hospital system, which included plans for new hospitals and sanitary trains, that snaked across the country.

The Empress' personal hub was Tsarskoe Selo, but she made frequent trips into Petrograd and other cities across Russia to inspect hospitals and warehouses.<sup>151</sup> By the time Vyubova returned to Tsarskoe Selo after seeing her brother off to the front, the Empress' "plans were so far matured that ten sanitary trains, bearing her name and the children's, were in active service, and something like eighty-five hospitals were open, or preparing to open..."<sup>152</sup> As is well known, the Grand Duchesses' mother's involvement in the care of the wounded would further extend to her training as a Red Cross nurse, something Olga and Tatiana also did. Maria and Anastasia, too young for nursing duties, were still expected to be active on the home front. It is these First World War activities, among others, of the four Grand Duchesses that will be described in this chapter.

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On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the first tally of hospital beds showed that there were 6,628 beds in various towns across Western Russia. This information was used to create an evacuation plan for the wounded from the front to the rear, which was approved in mid-September 1914. It is unclear what role the Empress played in creating any formal plans of this scale, however there is no denying that she did act quickly to establish hospitals and sanitary trains. The plan "emphasized the necessity of a common organization for the relief of the wounded... [and] dealt with the creation of registration centers, army canteens along the railway lines, [and] the adequate equipment of hospital trains..."<sup>153</sup> As the war progressed, the country had to adapt to the new demands for caring for the sick and wounded. For example, by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915, the number of beds in Petrograd had grown to 19,334, and on the same date of the following year, the number had grown again to 25,298.<sup>154</sup> The increasing toll of the fighting on the soldiers and the country was indicative in the scale of the casualties.

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<sup>150</sup> Russian General Headquarters was known as *Stavka*. When Nicholas II assumed command of the troops in August 1916, Stavka was moved to Mogilev, now in modern Belarus.

<sup>151</sup> Nicholas II and the Imperial government renamed St. Petersburg to Petrograd at the outbreak of war on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1914, and was thus known until the death of Vladimir Lenin in 1924.

<sup>152</sup> Vyubova, 74.

<sup>153</sup> Nicholas J. Astrov, "Public Health," in *The War and the Russian Government*, ed. James T. Shotwell et al. (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 199.

<sup>154</sup> Astrov, "Public Health," 209.

The most important link connecting those wounded at the front to the hospital beds in the rear were the sanitary trains. These trains, also called hospital or medical trains, were outfitted as mobile hospitals. Every train consisted of a permanent section of eight or nine carriages, which included quarters for the staff, a surgery car, kitchen, a dispensary, stores for equipment, and beds for the wounded. The permanent section was then supplemented by another thirteen to thirty carriages, with the total number of carriages depending on where the train was located in relation to the front. For example, a train working close to the front would have a supplemental section of twenty-four to thirty carriages, as this type of train needed to evacuate around 700 soldiers on each journey to the rear. Trains working farther from the front were often shorter, carrying around 400 wounded men each. Typically, outfitting a sanitary train cost between 22,000 and 26,000 rubles.<sup>155</sup> Thus, donations and fundraising efforts were essential for ensuring that the trains remained properly equipped with necessary supplies.

In certain instances, members of the aristocracy asked for permission to name a train (or hospital) after a member of the imperial family. This helped attract sponsors, who purchased subscriptions or made donations, which in turn allowed them to feel a connection to whomever the train was named after. For instance, Countess Fekla Georgievna Orlova-Davydova, wife of a Duma member, named a wagon-infirmery after Olga, who attended the consecration of the wagon with Tatiana and their mother.<sup>156</sup> The diaries and letters of the four girls often describe trips to see their trains, as well as their brother's and Olga Alexandrovna's. One such instance was on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1916, when Olga, Maria, and their brother went to inspect the former's hospital train.<sup>157</sup> The inspections were informal, and included chats with the medical staff and the engineers, as well as hearing how the trips were going and what sorts of operations were taking place on board. The visits would also have been a good opportunity for the staff to put forward various requests to the sponsor – in this case, one of the Grand Duchesses – for more medical supplies, bed linens, or whatever else may have been missing or running low.

As stated previously, the Empress set up sponsorships of sanitary trains on behalf of herself, the four Grand Duchesses, and their brother at the outbreak of war. However, visits to the trains by the Romanovs were not limited to the arrivals of one of their own. The appearances

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<sup>155</sup> Astrov, 202. As of September 2019, this would cost about \$366,000-\$432,650 CAD.

<sup>156</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 181.

<sup>157</sup> Olga Romanov, *The Diary of Olga Romanov: Royal Witness to the Russian Revolution*, trans. Helen Azar (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2013), 60.

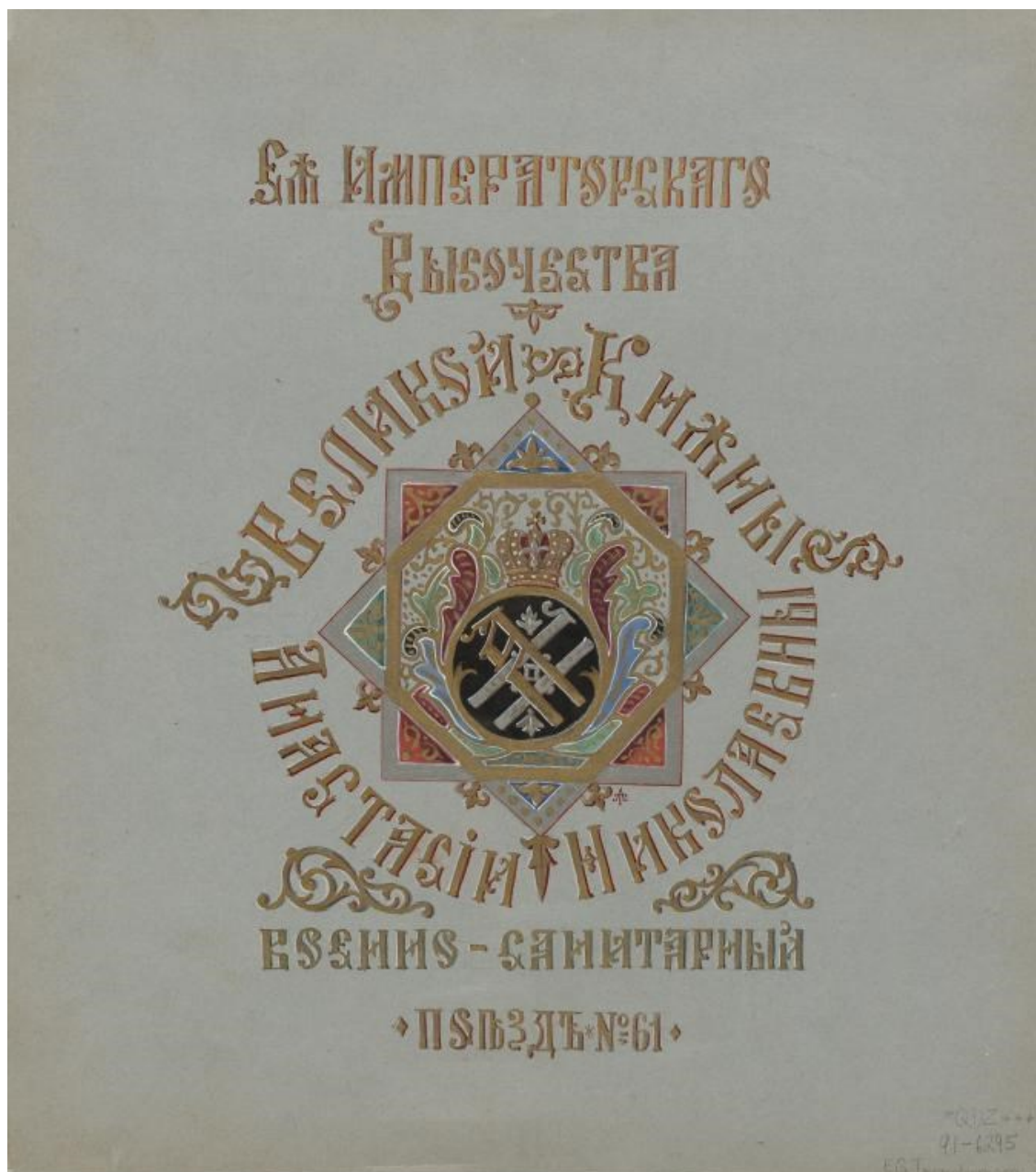
were important to keep up the morale of the wounded and everyone who worked on board. Sponsoring the trains as well as hospitals meant the Grand Duchesses were greatly, and often directly, involved in fundraising efforts and collection of donations. Olga and Tatiana did this quite often, and given Maria and Anastasia's ages, there were probably people who supervised the management of trains and hospitals on their behalf; for instance, their mother noted in her letters to her husband when she attended these types of meetings.<sup>158</sup> The four young women and their mother frequently mention Olga and Tatiana going to Petrograd to collect donations. While the writings never specified for what, it can be assumed that the donations were for the various committees that the young women headed, as well as for their hospitals and trains.<sup>159</sup> The constant fundraising highlights the immense cost of the war and the demand for funds, as well as the importance of the efforts undertaken by the Grand Duchesses.

Sometime in 1915 or early 1916, Anastasia was given a presentation copy of an illustrated album commemorating her sanitary train, No. 61 (see Figure 3). This is an incredibly valuable resource that allows for a better understanding of the impact the medical trains had on the war effort.

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<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, March 7, 1916, in *The Complete Wartime Correspondence of Tsar Nicholas II and the Empress Alexandra: April 1914-March 1917*, ed. Joseph T. Fuhrmann (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 402.

<sup>159</sup> For example, on April 17, 1915, Olga collected more than 2,000 rubles in donations while in Petrograd, but her letter does not specify what it was for. See Olga Romanov to Nicholas II, April 17, 1915, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 27.



**Figure 3:** The front cover of the album. In person, the gold paint shines very brightly and adds depth to the letters and borders. Courtesy of and reproduced with permission of the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

The cover is embellished with gold, and the sketches made by the artist for the lettering are still visible. The pages of the manuscript give many details about the train, and the artist used paintings, drawings, and photographs to commemorate the train's activities in its first year, 1914-1915 (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Page two of Anastasia's album, which provides statistics of the train's activities, especially the number of soldiers the train carried from the front, as well the distance covered by train #61 in 1914-1915. According to this page, Anastasia's train travelled 65,145 *versts*, which is the equivalent of 71,659.5 kilometres. Courtesy of and reproduced with the permission of the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

A map is included on the third page (Figure 5), with photographs of the medical staff following immediately after.





**Figure 5:** This hand-drawn map shows the route of train 61. Petrograd is close to the top, just under the body of water slightly to the right. The insignia is Anastasia's monogram, with the train number just underneath. Courtesy of and reproduced with permission of the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

Other photographs show some of the soldiers on board the train, and the last few pages are illustrations of various activities, such as a nurse helping a soldier out of bed during the night (Figure 6). When taken in context, this work is not only invaluable for highlighting the importance of hospital trains, but also for appreciating royal patronage during the war. Without patronage, the number of trains as well as the volume of supplies and donations would very

possibly have been much lower – meaning Russia would have struggled to bear the cost of the war.



**Figure 6:** A sister of mercy helping a wounded soldier. Note that Anastasia's monogram appears again at the top. Courtesy and reproduced with permission of the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

With that being said, not all trains were privately sponsored and equipped, or bore the names of the Romanovs. In September 1914, it was decided that the Union of Towns would assume responsibility for equipping the sanitary trains that did not fall into the previous

category.<sup>160</sup> This included finding medical staff, providing appropriate tools and supplies, covering laundry costs, and supplying food for all on board, in addition to paying for railway charges.<sup>161</sup> In both cases, whether a train was outfitted through public or private funds, there were many volunteers involved who worked to ensure the train was properly equipped with bandages and medicines before leaving the station. This work was carried out in warehouses near the hospitals and clearing stations, and four rather distinct volunteers could sometimes be found in the warehouses around Tsarskoe Selo.

While at the warehouse, the Grand Duchesses were expected to abide by the rules, “[wearing] white coats and kerchiefs like everyone else...”<sup>162</sup> The work was a way for the young women to come into contact with people from outside the glass case. In September 1914, Olga wrote that she and Anastasia had visited a warehouse where six ladies were working; Anastasia described that going to work at the warehouse was “fun and various lady acquaintances are there.” Interestingly, Olga also used the same word to describe another trip to the warehouse on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915: “Today we worked a lot and long in the warehouse. It was quite fun, and we rolled a large amount of bandages.”<sup>163</sup> A few days earlier, their mother wrote to their father that “yesterday all 4 worked in the stores- bandages...”<sup>164</sup>

Olga and Tatiana had more time to work in the warehouses at the beginning of the war, before their nursing duties truly began.<sup>165</sup> However, when they went on tours with their mother, the itinerary often included a stop at a warehouse, as on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1914, when the three arrived in Moscow and saw “four infirmaries and a warehouse.”<sup>166</sup> This demonstrates that although Olga and Tatiana slowed down their warehouse work once they became nurses, the four young women were still engaged in all types of war relief work.

The plan for the strategic evacuation of the wounded also called for the establishment of clearing stations in some of the bigger cities in Russia, such as Petrograd and Moscow. The stations served as conduit points for redirecting the wounded to other cities. They were also

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<sup>160</sup> The Union of Towns was created in early August 1914 as a voluntary association on the municipal level to help with medical relief, hence its responsibility for equipping sanitary trains.

<sup>161</sup> Astrov, 201.

<sup>162</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, June 13, 1915, in *Maria Romanov*, 64.

<sup>163</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, September 24, 1914, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 12; Olga Romanov to Nicholas II, September 22, 1914 and June 16, 1915, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 10, 35.

<sup>164</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas, June 11, 1915, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 136.

<sup>165</sup> See Tatiana Romanov, 55, 69.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

where officials from the Red Cross, the Ministry of War, and the Union of Zemstvos and Towns oversaw the collection of data from other cities and towns in terms of the availability of empty beds, then redirected the wounded soldiers to ensure they were properly treated. At clearing stations such as the Warsaw and Finland stations in Petrograd, the soldiers were assessed, had their wounds cleaned, their belongings disinfected, and were bathed and fed before being sent off to their final destination for further treatment and convalescence.<sup>167</sup>

It was also not uncommon for Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia to be seen at the clearing station in Tsarskoe Selo, where the wounded had been redirected from Petrograd. In fact, when they wrote about visiting the trains, it was this particular clearing station they went to. The first mention is made by Maria on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1914, when she wrote to her father that she and her sisters had been “to the train with the wounded.”<sup>168</sup> A few days later, Tatiana’s diary entry indicates that she had been on the train that brought the wounded.<sup>169</sup> As she and Olga had started studying for their nursing exams by this point, it is fair to assume that the head doctor had brought at least Tatiana – if not Olga as well – on board to help tend the wounded who had just arrived from the Petrograd clearing station. From Tsarskoe Selo, the men were then sent to one of the hospitals within the imperial hub, including those sponsored by the Grand Duchesses. These soldiers would be the men that Olga, Tatiana, their mother, and Vyubova nursed until early 1917.

Further, going to the station allowed the four young women a glimpse of the ravages of war. In March 1916, both Maria and her mother wrote to the Emperor about the three sanitary trains that had just arrived in Tsarskoe Selo, one of which was Maria’s. The trains brought 300 wounded soldiers, who would only be directed to one of the hospitals a few days later. Maria, Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia went to the station to see the wounded “whilst half full still”, and presumably helped in any way they could. Olga and Tatiana would have been able to dress wounds, while Maria and Anastasia could walk around the station and platform talking to the wounded. Their mother noted for their father that as soon as the train was emptied in the evening, it immediately left for the front once more.<sup>170</sup> Bearing in mind this entry was recorded

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<sup>167</sup> Astrov, 199-200, 208.

<sup>168</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, September 21, 1914, in *Maria Romanov*, 48.

<sup>169</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 57.

<sup>170</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, March 14, 1916, in *Maria Romanov*, 93; Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, March 14, 1916, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 413-414.

in 1916, it is evident that the level of fighting on the Eastern Front was still incredibly high, necessitating the continuous journeys of the sanitary trains.

Another form of charity that involved all four Grand Duchesses was an annual bazaar. The bazaars sold things such as handicrafts to raise money for charity and took place in all belligerent countries, with royal women often contributing and selling their own wares. In Britain, for example, Queen Mary turned a room of the St. James Palace into a work space and warehouse, where things were collected and women could work to create more items for the sales.<sup>171</sup> While Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia make reference to working in warehouses, specific references to creating things for the bazaars are fewer in number. Nevertheless, the popularity of the bazaars in Imperial Russia is evident in a letter written by their mother: “The exhibition-bazar (sic) goes very well, the first day there were over 2000, yesterday 800- our things are bought before they appear- beforehand already people write down for them...”<sup>172</sup>

The same day, Olga wrote a letter to her father that also described the bazaar: “The exhibition is still very successful and rather interesting. The most pretty infirmary department is Marie’s and Nastasia’s. All our work was sold, so we are working again. Mama and the little one are especially trying hard.”<sup>173</sup> According to her mother, they were all able to turn out “a cushion or cover daily each”.<sup>174</sup> Countess Sophie Buxhoeveden, a lady-in-waiting and friend to the Empress, remembered Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and their mother “were all expert needlewomen”,<sup>175</sup> a comment that runs through many memoirs and is perhaps evident in the rate at which their works sold. Olga’s letter also shows that it was not just the imperial women who were selling things at the bazaars, but others as well. This demonstrates the communal aspect of wartime charity that the Grand Duchesses were able to participate in, as it was an acceptable form of interaction with those from outside the palace gates. In all, the funds – regardless of who made the items being purchased – helped the war effort immensely.

Royal patronage in the First World War also extended to committee work. These organizations usually had some (minimal) governmental ties in order to receive funding. Olga

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<sup>171</sup> Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 180.

<sup>172</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, June 16, 1915 in *Wartime Correspondence*, 149.

<sup>173</sup> Olga Romanov to Nicholas II, June 16, 1915, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 35-36.

<sup>174</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, June 16, 1915 in *Wartime Correspondence*, 149.

<sup>175</sup> Countess Sophie Buxhoeveden, *Left Behind: Fourteen Months in Siberia During the Revolution, December 1917-February 1919* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1929), 31.

and Tatiana, in addition to their other activities, added extra duties by heading one committee each: Olga became vice-president of the Supreme Council for the Care of Soldiers' Families and Families of the Wounded and Dead, and Tatiana was named president of the Tatiana Committee for the Relief of War Victims.<sup>176</sup> Both young women chaired weekly meetings for their committees, and once again helped raise money through donations and fundraisers. This participation took them to Petrograd at least once a week. In one instance, Tatiana wrote to her father explaining that the day before, she had been “to Petrograd to a central distribution center for refugees, seeking asylum... then drove to the Gutuevsky Island where accommodations for refugees have been set up in a former boarding house, then also to the Land Customs. There they also set up a space for 300-odd people.”<sup>177</sup> Here we see Tatiana in her capacity as head of her committee, ensuring that plans are being carried out and moving along. This portion of Tatiana's letter also shows exactly where the money she raised was going; as discussed, not all of it went to trains and hospitals, some was set aside for the home front as well.

The frequent visits to Petrograd were also noted by Maria, who wrote: “tomorrow Olga and Tatiana will go to Petrograd, the former for charities, and the latter for a committee.”<sup>178</sup> As can be seen, depending on the week, one was collecting money for the charities associated with her committee, while the other was attending a committee meeting. According to Tatiana's diary entry for September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1914, it was normal for the two to attend their functions separately: “at 1 o'clock 20 minutes, Olga, Isa and I travelled to Petrograd, to the Winter [Palace], there was a *moleben*, and then my committee to provide temporary assistance to victims of military disasters. Then, while Olga collected donations here at the Winter, I sat at Marie's and had tea. Returned at 4.20.”<sup>179</sup> Since Olga and Tatiana had limited time in the city, it was important for them to split up for their various causes. These actions show the seriousness with which the young women viewed their wartime work. Across Europe, the war placed “unprecedented demands on royal philanthropy, as it did on philanthropy generally,” yet all four of the Grand Duchesses readily

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<sup>176</sup> Paul P. Gronsky, “The First Year of the War. The Year of Public Aid for the Wounded and other War Sufferers,” in *The War and the Russian Government*, ed. James T. Shotwell et al. (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 30; Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>177</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Nicholas II, September 6, 1915, in *Daughter of the Tsar*, 127.

<sup>178</sup> Maria Nikolaevna to Nicholas II, December 1, 1915, in *Maria Romanov*, 70.

<sup>179</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 54. “Marie” in this case refers to Maria Pavlovna the Younger, a member of the extended Romanov family, and a fellow World War I nurse.

embraced their roles.<sup>180</sup> Despite the demands, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia did all they could in order to do their part on the home front.

The official name for Russian nurses was “sisters of mercy”, which is a reference to the religious aspect of the occupation.<sup>181</sup> As Stoff explains, “[the] origins of Russian nursing lie in women’s participation in charitable and religious traditions... The impetus to participate in charitable work came largely from Russia’s Orthodox religious traditions, which stressed self-sacrifice and giving, especially for women, as the primary means for them to express devotion.”<sup>182</sup> As we have seen, in addition to the notion of the tsar being God’s representative on earth was the basis of Russian autocracy, the entire royal family regularly participated in religious ceremonies and acted according to the faith. Thus, it seems natural for a family who were expected to put on public displays of piety, and whose members were naturally deeply religious, to participate in nursing.

By becoming sisters of mercy, Olga and Tatiana were participating in a long history of royal nursing. Of numerous other examples – but most important for Olga and Tatiana – both of their grandmothers were active in caring for the sick. When her children and husband fell ill with diphtheria, Princess Alice personally nursed them before contracting the disease herself, which led to her death in 1878. Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna benefitted from the formation of the Russian Red Cross in 1867 by becoming a nurse during the Russo-Turkish War, and went on to become president of the organisation in 1880 after the death of her mother-in-law.

The creation of the Red Cross through the Geneva Convention allowed many royal women to become nurses; further, for younger royal women, nursing allowed them a break from their everyday routine, offering a chance to experience life beyond the palace gates, as well as providing a space in which to be unchaperoned.<sup>183</sup> Maria and Anastasia, who visited hospitals multiple times a day on their own despite being considered too young to become nurses, are two examples of young royals who benefitted from being able to go back and forth to these spaces unchaperoned. In their roles as sisters of mercy, Olga and Tatiana were not exempted from the hardships experienced by non-royal nurses. Along with their war-relief activities, they both needed to pass the course set by the Red Cross to qualify as sisters of mercy. While neither make

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<sup>180</sup> Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 175.

<sup>181</sup> Throughout this chapter, I refer to “sisters of mercy” and “nurses” interchangeably.

<sup>182</sup> Stoff, *Sisters of Mercy*, 18.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

mention of which day their courses started, Vyubova claims that she, Olga, Tatiana, and their mother “immediately enrolled under a competent woman surgeon, Dr. [Gedroits], as student nurses, spending two hours of every afternoon under theoretical instruction, and the entire hours of the morning in ward work in the hospitals.”<sup>184</sup> Dr. Vera Gedroits was from a princely Lithuanian family, and studied medicine in St. Petersburg and at the University of Lausanne; she qualified as a doctor in Russia in 1900 after presenting her doctoral thesis on hernias. Dr. Gedroits was in a unique position in Russia, as she was one of the only practicing female medical doctors in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>185</sup>

Olga, Tatiana, their mother, and Vyubova were all training to be “wartime sisters of mercy”, a classification created specially as a result of the intensity of the fighting and to offset the growing need for nurses. This also meant that the length of regular nursing courses had to be cut down to two months in order to meet the demand; these shortened courses began in September 1914, which helps to gauge the timeline of Olga and Tatiana’s training. However, the first mention either of them make to Dr. Gedroits is August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1914, when Tatiana recorded in her diary that the doctor had given a lecture at six o’clock.<sup>186</sup> It is possible that the two Grand Duchesses and their mother initially decided to undertake the standard nursing course, and changed when the shortened one became available. The minimised course dictated that prospective sisters of mercy undertake theory and practical courses, followed by exams. In order to progress to the practical component, students had to pass the theoretical exam in anatomy and physiology.<sup>187</sup> Olga, Tatiana, the Empress, and Vyubova all qualified as nurses after taking their final surgery exam on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Two days later, the four, along with thirty other women, “received awards, crosses and certificates” that designated them as wartime sisters of mercy.<sup>188</sup>

They began working in the hospitals on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1914, which entailed the very basics of nursing and was meant to introduce the students to the demands of a hospital.<sup>189</sup> Two days later, Tatiana wrote in her diary: “At 10 o’clock Olga, [Vyubova] and I rode to the palace hospital’s detached barrack. There, we took turns changing dressings for each patient. ... Then

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<sup>184</sup> Vyubova, 74.

<sup>185</sup> Hall, *Princesses on the Wards*, 66.

<sup>186</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 46.

<sup>187</sup> Stoff, *Sisters of Mercy*, 54.

<sup>188</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 71.

<sup>189</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Nicholas II, August 10, 1914, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 180.



we returned to them, took their temperature, pulse, checked their breathing. At 12 o'clock, walked back home." The next day, they returned, and Tatiana bandaged the same patient she had taken care of the day before, as well as assisting others. As previously mentioned, an entry from August 13<sup>th</sup> also demonstrated that she and Olga were present at a lecture by Dr. Gedroits.<sup>190</sup> Prior to becoming qualified sisters of mercy, a typical day for the royal trainees consisted of attending church and arriving at the hospital for nine o'clock. After washing their hands, they washed and bandaged the soldiers who had just arrived from the sanitary trains. On the days the nurses met the trains, Vyubova writes that it was easy to work from nine until three without a break.<sup>191</sup> Tatiana's diary allows the reader a glimpse into her life in those early days of the war, yet as of September 1914, she also had a school lesson prior to arriving at the hospital. Before their day was done, Olga and Tatiana often returned to the hospital later in the evening to prepare for the next day.<sup>192</sup> As their mother summarised: "The children have lessons or are in hospitals."<sup>193</sup>

While their older sisters tended the wounded, Maria and Anastasia visited the soldiers in the hospitals around Tsarskoe Selo. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914, in a letter to her father, Maria wrote that she had been going to her "infirmary every day. The last train brought some rather seriously wounded."<sup>194</sup> Maria's and Anastasia's letters as well as a few diary entries show them spending all their free time visiting the wounded not just in their own hospital, but in their sisters' as well. The four had specific terms to differentiate their separate infirmaries: "the Grand Palace", "Grand Palace Hospital", or "Big Hospital" for Olga and Tatiana's, and Maria and Anastasia's were "Small Hospital" or "Little Hospital". Even when they were not visiting their little infirmary, Maria and Anastasia accompanied Olga and Tatiana to the Grand Palace – or Catherine Palace – as on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1916, when Anastasia wrote: "We will now accompany the sisters to their infirmary and ride back for our lessons."<sup>195</sup>

The establishment of a new infirmary in 1916 to replace Maria and Anastasia's original one created a lot of excitement around Tsarskoe Selo. The new Little Hospital was located near

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<sup>190</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 45, 46.

<sup>191</sup> Vyubova, 75-76.

<sup>192</sup> For examples of Tatiana recording lessons before arriving at the hospital, see the entries of September 9-12, 1914 in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 48-49. On July 17, 1915, Tatiana and Olga went to the infirmary and sewed compresses with the chief nurse, Valentina Ivanovna Chebotareva. See Tatiana Romanov, 119.

<sup>193</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, January 23, 1915, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 70.

<sup>194</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, November 26, 1914, in *Maria Romanov*, 53.

<sup>195</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, May 27, 1916, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 86.

the Feodorovsky Cathedral, “next to their old one,” and the girls spent most of June 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> helping to set it up.<sup>196</sup> On Maria’s seventeenth birthday (June 14<sup>th</sup>), she told Nicholas: “Unfortunately I cannot write a lot to you as I am very busy. In the morning we went to the infirmary and dragged all the wounded over to the new infirmary. We had breakfast just now and now we all must go to the consecration of the new infirmary.” Two days later, Anastasia was “writing out of turn as I did not have a chance to write because we were going to our new infirmary a lot.”<sup>197</sup> The young women helped transfer three officers and ten men from the lower ranks on the first day alone, so it is safe to assume that there were many more who were moved either from the old hospital or brought in off the sanitary trains as the shift to the new building continued. Anastasia noted they “had a real housewarming. We went to our infirmary 3 times, alone in the morning, in the afternoon with Mama and the sisters, and in the evening again alone, to a concert.”<sup>198</sup>

This constant back and forth to the hospitals in Tsarskoe Selo demonstrates a strong attachment to the soldiers felt by all four Grand Duchesses. In the case of Maria and Anastasia, they frequently describe the things they did when visiting the hospital, as well as who they had spoken with, and were able to remember which regiment the soldiers belonged to. In a letter to her father, Maria wrote about giving a soldier one of her bracelets, as he could not speak yet loved to play with jewelry. The same letter also describes three soldiers who could not read, as well as one who had learned to read a little, suggesting that she and Anastasia had taught him during their visits.<sup>199</sup> In a similar fashion, Olga and Tatiana also noted the names of the officers they bandaged or whose surgeries they attended in both their diaries and letters to their father. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1915, Olga wrote that she “Changed bandages for Sychev, Gumanuk, and Emelyanov, of 21st Sibirsky Shooters Regiment of Mama’s, he is very sweet, left shoulder is fractured.”<sup>200</sup> Tatiana proved to be a born nurse, and often assisted Dr. Gedroits in surgeries, one of which she describes in her diary on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1916: “Drove to the infirmary. Beresnev had surgery. [It] only started at 11.30. Before this was with Iedigarov. Handled the instruments.

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<sup>196</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, June 14, 1916, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 503; Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, June 9, 1916, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 94.

<sup>197</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, June 16, 1916, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 97.

<sup>198</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, June 14, 1916, in *Maria Romanov*, 121; Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, June 16, 1916, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 97.

<sup>199</sup> Maria Nikolaevna to Nicholas II, October 29, 1914, in *Maria Romanov*, 50.

<sup>200</sup> Olga Romanov, *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 21.

Bandaged Polyakov, Natarov.”<sup>201</sup> Despite not being trained nurses, Maria and Anastasia would also note surgeries at their infirmary, such as on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1916 when Maria recorded in her diary that a soldier “had an operation because of a burst artery.”<sup>202</sup>

To some, the letters to their father as well as all the diary entries by Olga, Tatiana, and Maria appear repetitive, as they constantly speak of visiting the soldiers or going to the hospitals to do work. As discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter, monotony ruled their lives, and their experiences on the home front quickly conformed to a new monotonous model. These hours spent among the soldiers and nurses were some of the only contact with the outside world that the Grand Duchesses were allowed; their interest and care appear very genuine, and it is impossible to ignore that they took their duties to the soldiers seriously.

Something that disrupts this new monotonous routine appeared as of late 1915 in Olga’s diary entries: her writings about tending patients at the hospital start to peter off. Her entries and letters to her father show that she still went to visit the soldiers at her and Tatiana’s hospital, as well as others around Tsarskoe Selo, yet she was not performing her nursing duties. There are conflicting stories about what happened. Some like Vyubova claim within two months of the start of the war Olga was unable to carry out her work as a nurse as a result of being “too exhausted and too unnerved to continue”. Then there are those like the head nurse, Valentina Cheborateva, who noted on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1915 that “Poor Olga Nikolaevna is really sick-developed severe anemia, they put her to bed for a week, but with permission to come to the infirmary for a half hour for the arsenic injections.”<sup>203</sup> Chebotareva’s comment is corroborated by the Empress, who telegraphed and wrote a letter to their father saying “Olga’s condition [is] still not famous”, and she “only got up for a drive & now after tea she remains on the sofa (*sic*)... she must lie more, as [she] goes about so pale & wearily...”<sup>204</sup>

The first mention Olga herself makes to any sort of illness is in a letter to her father on October 29<sup>th</sup>, in which she explains she was injected with arsenic at the infirmary before teaching the wounded to play a game.<sup>205</sup> The way in which Tatiana mentions this is also interesting, as in a letter to her father she simply says she “[works] alone at the infirmary now.” Four days later,

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<sup>201</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 167.

<sup>202</sup> Maria Romanov, *Maria Romanov*, 108.

<sup>203</sup> Vyubova, 75; quoted in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 48.

<sup>204</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, October 31, 1915, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 279.

<sup>205</sup> Olga Romanov to Nicholas II, October 29, 1915, in *The Diary of Olga Romanov*, 49.

she reports that Olga “started to come to the infirmary again for half an hour, but does not work yet.”<sup>206</sup> There is no mention of why Olga cannot work or why Tatiana suddenly starts working alone; despite how others talk about it, neither of them appear to think much about the change to the routine. One would have to be in the know to understand what was happening, as with many other things happening in the glass case.

Vyrubova’s description – which reports Olga becoming ill two months into the war, contrary to Olga’s and Tatiana’s writings – can be explained by memory and trauma theory, a little of which was touched on in the introduction of this thesis. While writing down memories is valuable for recording history, it is important to remember that “Life stories and personal tales depend on time, if for nothing else, because they undergo additions and subtractions with each day of the narrator’s life.”<sup>207</sup> This creates an urgency to record memories; Vyrubova was unable to do so until she was settled in exile in Finland as of December 1920. The sense of urgency to write things down is heightened when trauma is involved, as “traumas are naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor’s sense of well-being.”<sup>208</sup> This is particularly apt when a cultural trauma is suffered, which happens when “an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole.” Further, cultural trauma can be seen as an overall “threat to some part of their personal identities.”<sup>209</sup> In Vyrubova’s case, she was experiencing cultural trauma both on an individual level and as a member of a group that was targeted by the Bolsheviks: the incredibly intimate circle of the imperial family, thus affecting her memories without realising.

To re-explain a concept discussed earlier, the way memories are organised depends on the way in which an individual person breaks down their memories in relation to major events (the “horizontal” structure). That structure then pivots onto something “vertical”, where many events are happening at the same time. The creation of a chronological timeline by Vyrubova meant she chose specific events on which to centre her memories, such as the beginning of the war.<sup>210</sup> For someone who suffered humiliation at the hands of the Bolsheviks and witnessed first-

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<sup>206</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Nicholas II, November 4, 1915 and November 8, 1915, in *Daughter of the Tsar*, 136-137.

<sup>207</sup> Portelli, 60.

<sup>208</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Neil J. Smelser, “Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 38, 40.

<sup>210</sup> Portelli, 21.

hand the vilification of the Grand Duchesses' parents, Vyubova's memories may have manipulated or altered themselves in order to heal a wound left by psychological trauma.<sup>211</sup> Small errors such as misrepresenting Olga's illness are part of the gamble of working with memoirs, particularly those recorded long after the events happened. Vyubova's memoir certainly reads like someone who is trying to keep the memory of her second family alive; many of the memoirs used for this thesis also have a tone of nostalgia. Regardless, working with memory is important for history in that memories remind us of the emotional and individual aspects of experiencing history.<sup>212</sup> Tatiana's diary is evidence that despite not carrying out the full workload of a sister of mercy, Olga was still helping with tasks such as preparing instruments and materials for the next day.<sup>213</sup> Her actions serve to reinforce the seriousness she, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia felt towards their roles as Grand Duchesses on the home front.

Along with the frequency of their visits to various hospitals, the four young women had another role to play which predated the start of the First World War. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1914, Tatiana wrote a letter to her father in which she included a copy of *The Invalid*, a military newspaper. She was excited to share this with him because it featured a picture of the Voznesensky Ulans, a military regiment.<sup>214</sup> The significance of this lies in the fact that one of the most important duties each member of the immediate Romanov family had was to serve as the honorary commander-in-chief of an army regiment. Despite never having fought in battle, the Emperor favoured military duties to dynastic ones, which is arguably reflected through his active lifestyle and donning military uniforms on a day-to-day basis. The routine and all that the army stood for – the values and traditions – were qualities that the Grand Duchesses' father appreciated in life, and were learned from the time he was commissioned into the Preobrazhensky Guards at age nineteen.<sup>215</sup> As heir and then emperor, their father had a very close relationship to the military, something which was also fostered by other members of the Romanov family through honorary commands. Tatiana, Olga, Maria, and Anastasia spent the first three years of the war keeping track of their regiments, as well as begging their father for news of their comrades.

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<sup>211</sup> Portelli, 26.

<sup>212</sup> Aleida Assman, *Shadows of Trauma*, trans. Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 34.

<sup>213</sup> See for example Tatiana's diary entries of May 23, 1916 and June 14, 1916 in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 168, 171.

<sup>214</sup> Tatiana Romanov, 72.

<sup>215</sup> Hughes, 201; Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II* (London: John Murray, 1993), 37.

These titles were given as an honour by the reigning tsar at his discretion. In terms of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, their father awarded them honorary commands on their fourteenth birthdays. During the war, the four girls proudly signed letters to their father using their regimental titles: Olga signed as “Elizavetgradetz” (for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Elizavetgradsky Hussars); Tatiana as “Voznesenetz” (8<sup>th</sup> Voznesensky Ulans); Maria was “Kazanetz” (for the 5<sup>th</sup> Kazansky Dragoons); and Anastasia was given the command of the 148<sup>th</sup> Kaspian Infantry, and began signing as “Kaspiyitz” as of June 1915.<sup>216</sup> Of the four, only Olga received a second honorary command: on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1916 she was awarded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kubansky Plastunsky Battalion. This was a random act, as her father revealed in a letter to her mother that he “remembered that two [regiments] had no chefs, so it seemed good to give [her] the 2<sup>nd</sup> bat....”<sup>217</sup>

Olga was having tea when she received the telegram, which she copied into her diary. It read: “Today, you are appointed the Chief of the Second Kubansky battalion. I congratulate you on this appointment and hug all of you. Papa.” She went on to write she felt “so joyful and happy and proud, can’t even describe it.”<sup>218</sup> The Empress recorded Olga’s reaction in a letter on December 7<sup>th</sup>, telling the Emperor he could not “imagine Olga’s joy when she received yr. telegram- she got quite pink & could not read it aloud... she felt & her sisters as tho’ it were her birthday. At once she sent off a wire to the ‘Plastuni.’”<sup>219</sup> Two days later, Tatiana went on to say: “It is such a pity that you did not see Olga’s face when Your telegram arrived. It became dark crimson and immediately she would not say a word, and just smiled foolishly while showing the telegram.” She also wrote that Olga had received a telegram back from the regiment, which “welcomes and congratulates the young Cossack Scout with a thunder of ‘Hurrahs.’ She was terribly pleased.”<sup>220</sup> Olga’s reaction demonstrates the pride which she – and no doubt Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia – felt in being an honorary colonel-in-chief of military regiments.

This exchange of telegrams between the battalion and their honorary commander is demonstrative of the relationship the awards fostered between the army and the Romanovs. Communication between Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and their regiments extended to congratulations on the regiments’ feast days – usually the regiment’s patron saint’s name day –

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<sup>216</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, June 18, 1915, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 36.

<sup>217</sup> Nicholas II to Alexandra Feodorovna, December 6, 1916, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 661.

<sup>218</sup> Olga Romanov, *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 73.

<sup>219</sup> Alexandra Feodorovna to Nicholas II, December 7, 1916, in *Wartime Correspondence*, 661.

<sup>220</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Nicholas II, December 8, 1916, in *Daughter of the Tsar*, 187.

as well as on victories and to send condolences. The last two show that regular information was being provided to the four young women by either their father or someone within the regiment. This is illustrated by Tatiana, who added a postscript in one letter informing her father that she had received a telegram from her commander saying he will send her a report on the losses in the regiment, for which she was “waiting impatiently.”<sup>221</sup> The salutations on regimental feast days were also extended from the soldiers to the Grand Duchesses. An example is from Maria’s Dragoons, who telegraphed her on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914: “On this day of regimental holiday the Kazan Dragoons of His Imperial Majesty, raising prayers for the dear health of their beloved Chief, faithfully offer their congratulations and announce a greeting to the chief leader Lord Emperor and our August Chief.”<sup>222</sup>

Further, the contact between the young women and their regiments also extended to personal meetings with officers, as highlighted in a letter from Anastasia to Nicholas on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1915. She tells her father that the day before she received one of her officers named Sladkopevtzev, who brought a report which Anastasia found “very interesting.” The letter goes on to say Sladkopevtzev told her that “luckily now the wounded officers are starting to return to the regiment, but that there are two wounded in Petrograd.”<sup>223</sup> About a month later, Maria wrote describing her visit with “a young officer from my regiment... [who was] wounded in the leg in the 25<sup>th</sup> September attack. He said that lately the regiment has all been on horseback.” This was an officer Maria had already met when he and two other officers were presented to her after their graduation from the Nikolaevsky Cavalier School on June 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year.<sup>224</sup> While the October meeting was not a formal one, it did allow Maria a way to sustain a connection with an officer she had met only a few months earlier.

In fact, direct contact between honorary commanders and the regiments predates the war. In 1913, Olga and Maria both recorded Olga’s and Tatiana’s preparations for and participation in regimental parades, the last time they would do so. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1913, Olga wrote that she happily received news about her regiment and tried on her uniform; presumably Tatiana would have done the same (Figure 7).

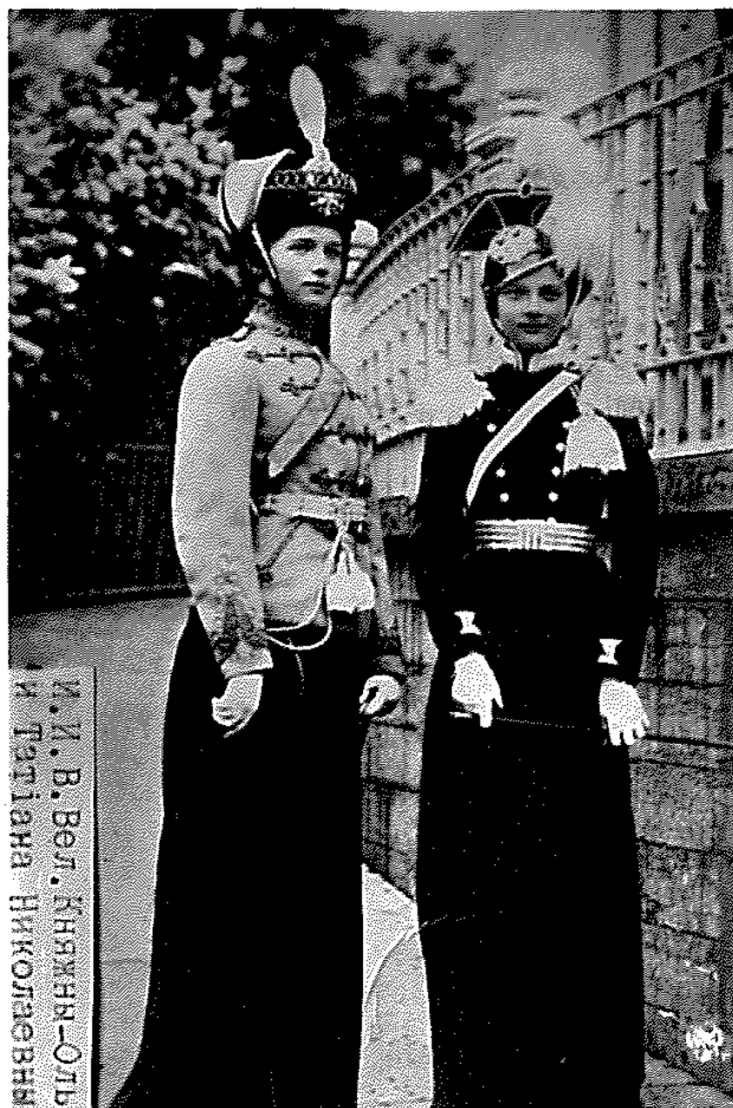
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<sup>221</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Nicholas II, March 9, 1915, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 105.

<sup>222</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, October 22, 1914, in *Maria Romanov*, 48.

<sup>223</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Nicholas II, September 4, 1915, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 43.

<sup>224</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, October 7, 1915, in *Maria Romanov*, 69. The Dragoons fighting mainly on horseback is significant, as Dragoons would typically ride into battle and dismount to fight on foot.



**Figure 7:** A pre-revolutionary postcard of Olga (left) and Tatiana in their regimental uniforms. There is one photo of Maria in her regimental uniform, however she and Anastasia never participated in parades as Olga and Tatiana did before the war. Maria was named honorary commander as the preparations for the 1913 parades were underway, and Anastasia received hers while the war was going on, making it impossible for such an event to take place. Courtesy of and reproduced with permission of Alison Rowley.

The same entry describes how on a ride in an equipage with “Ulan”, Olga steered it herself.<sup>225</sup>

This is the first time one of the Grand Duchesses refers to the other by their regiment name, and demonstrates that Olga’s mind was beginning to think of the regimental review that was coming up. Between this entry and July 13<sup>th</sup>, there is no description of the preparations as the Grand

<sup>225</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 138.



Duchesses and their family went on their annual sailing trip. Thus, on July 13<sup>th</sup>, Olga writes that she and Tatiana rode on horseback as further preparations for the review. For many days after, the two went horseback riding, and Olga notes they ride the same horses – further indication that they are preparing for the review.<sup>226</sup> On July 29<sup>th</sup>, Maria and Anastasia joined them, so the four “rode horses on [the] training ground, practiced entrance.”<sup>227</sup> Two days later, Olga and Tatiana went to Krasnoe Selo, the village next to Tsarskoe Selo where military manoeuvres took place. They had breakfast with a regiment and watched their exercises; then they went to visit the military hospital, after which Olga notes: “At 4 o’cl. went to the military field where Tatiana’s and my regiments had exercises. It was very nice. I was so happy to have a close look at the regiment.” The two young women stayed for dinner with their officers at seven o’clock where “All the commanders introduced themselves... Returned home a little after 9 o’cl.”<sup>228</sup> In the days leading up to the parade, Olga and Tatiana rode their horses over to Krasnoe Selo and rode around the field; on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, they donned their regimental uniforms and practiced around the garden. Finally, the military review took place on August 5<sup>th</sup>:

At 10 o’cl. 35 min. we 2 went to the training grounds in uniforms. Rode on horses: I rode Regent, T- Robino. Uncle Nikolasha rode with me to my regiment. Martynov met me with a report. Then galloped to the trumpet playing, greeted each squadron and met Papa on the right flank. Then I followed him around the front again. I was very nervous about the entrance, but it turned out fine. The parade was nice and beautiful. My wonderful Elizavetgrad regiment marched very well.

Directly after, there was a breakfast and group photos were taken in front of the Catherine Palace. The breakfast would have allowed the two young women, as well as Maria and Anastasia, contact with the entire regiment, which was not as common. Being able to see and speak with all ranks of soldiers undoubtedly helped to solidify the bond between the honorary commander and their regiment, in turn reinforcing the bonds between the Romanovs and the people. While there are no writings from Tatiana about this event, Olga’s feelings are very apparent and best summed up in the last line of the entry: “I am so unbelievably happy with today!!!”<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 182-184. On July 15<sup>th</sup>, Olga rides a horse named Korbo, but the other entries show she mainly rode Regent, the horse she ultimately rode in the parade.

<sup>227</sup> Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 96; Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 193.

<sup>228</sup> Olga Romanov, *Journal of a Grand Duchess*, 194.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 196-198; “Uncle Nikolasha” refers to Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich. Maria notes in her diary that she attended the review, but does not give any impressions about her sisters’ performances. See Maria Romanov, *1913 Diary*, 99.

As mentioned, meetings between men of the higher ranks and the Grand Duchesses were more common, particularly in wartime. One such instance took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1916, when Maria received her new commander for the first time. He “told [her] lots of nice things about the regiment, so [she] was very happy...”<sup>230</sup> Olga also recorded two instances where she encountered men from the Elizavetgradsky Hussars. The first on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1915 noted she saw a recently recovered officer on his return to her regiment.<sup>231</sup> This indicates that he was visiting his honorary colonel-in-chief before returning to the front lines, which appears to be standard practice as the Empress also received officers returning to the front after they convalesced in Tsarskoe Selo. The second instance recorded by Olga was much more unusual than any other written about by the Grand Duchesses. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915, she told her father that she met her milk brother, who was a volunteer in her Hussars regiment.<sup>232</sup> As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the Empress shocked many people when she insisted on breastfeeding her children. For Olga to mention a milk sibling indicates that at some point, her mother was unable to continue breastfeeding her and hired a wet nurse, as milk siblings were breastfed by the same woman, usually the mother of one of the babies. It is difficult to know if Olga’s milk brother knew of her personal connection with the regiment before enlisting, or if this was just a random placement. In any case, neither Tatiana, Maria, nor Anastasia record encountering their milk siblings, which reinforces the significance of this meeting.

All these forms of communication between the Grand Duchesses and their regiments broke down gendered barriers between imperial women and the army in that the role of honorary commander provided this particular group of women with unique access to the military. While they were not helping to draw up battle plans or going into battle themselves – something any woman until the formation of the Battalion of Death would have been denied – it is difficult to ignore the knowledge the honorary commanders had of their regiments’ affairs.<sup>233</sup> To further reinforce this, the bond between the honorary commander and her regiment was a distinct one, as evidenced by the pride and attachment the Grand Duchesses felt in being honorary Commanders-in-Chief through meeting with soldiers, and by sending telegrams to acknowledge important

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<sup>230</sup> Maria Romanov to Nicholas II, September 12, 1916, in *Maria Romanov*, 150.

<sup>231</sup> Olga Romanov to Nicholas II, September 1, 1915, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 44.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, November 7, 1915, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 50.

<sup>233</sup> On the Women’s Battalions, see Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia’s Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

moments. These relationships between an imperial woman and the army generally only ended when she died. In the cases of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, the bonds were prematurely broken by their father's abdication.

### Conclusion: Coming Full Circle, 1917-1918

*Give my love to all who remember me.*  
-Olga to Anna Vyubova, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1918<sup>234</sup>

The winter of 1917 was exceptionally cold for Russia, with ceaseless winds, piles of snow, and rumours circulating around Petrograd that the city was about to run out of bread. February 23<sup>rd</sup> was the warmest day that winter, reaching 8 degrees Celsius, prompting women who worked in different factories across the city – in particular the Vyborg district – to go on strike in response to food and fuel shortages.<sup>235</sup> In the West, it was March 8<sup>th</sup>, otherwise known as International Women’s Day. The story is fairly well-known: the female protesters took advantage of the break in the weather, and as days passed, convinced their male counterparts to join them. Eventually, even the troops stationed in Petrograd joined the demonstration after initially refusing to shoot at the crowds. The entire city was shut down as the protests continued.

Away at General Headquarters in Mogilev, Emperor Nicholas II was poorly informed by the ministers in Petrograd as to the real situation that was unfolding. Laura J. Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva argue that “Women’s protests were often more successful than men’s and resulted in fewer repercussions for the participants, because officials were embarrassed to admit that they could not control disorderly women.”<sup>236</sup> This can be seen in the way men were easily swayed to the cause and by the troops who defected to the revolution, as well as in the government’s complete loss of control in Petrograd. When it became evident the situation was much worse than initially thought, the Emperor’s departure for Tsarskoe Selo and the hopes of quelling what is now known as the February Revolution were too late. Stopped at a train station in Pskov on March 1<sup>st</sup>, the Grand Duchesses’ father was made to realise the only option to restore peace in Petrograd was his abdication. When two ministers of the hastily formed Provisional Government (made up of some self-selected members from the Duma) met with the Emperor, their plan was

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<sup>234</sup> Olga Romanov to Anna Vyubova, January 22, 1918, in *Memories of the Russian Court*, 212.

<sup>235</sup> Richard Pipes, “The February Revolution,” in *The Russian Revolution: 1899-1919* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 272-273; Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 69; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 44.

<sup>236</sup> Laura J. Olson and Svetlana Adonyeva, *The Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 3.

to leave with twelve-year-old Alexei as tsar and his uncle, Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich, as regent. Never did they imagine Nicholas would abdicate for himself and Alexei, nor that Michael would refuse the throne. In mere days, dreams of a Russian constitutional monarchy were destroyed; instead, a power vacuum had been created. These actions paved the way for the Bolsheviks to seize power in October 1917 and install a Communist dictatorship that lasted for the next seven decades.

While the protests were raging in Petrograd 20 kilometres away, Olga and her brother came down with the measles. On February 9<sup>th</sup>, between working at the infirmary with Tatiana, she writes that she had a cold and a headache, and for most days after, readers of Olga's diary can see the progression of her illness.<sup>237</sup> Tatiana was the next to fall ill; then Anastasia; and finally Maria.<sup>238</sup> Each had varying side effects of the illness: Tatiana suffered from an earache so severe she lost her hearing for a few days, and had to have the news of her father's abdication written out for her.<sup>239</sup> Maria had perhaps the worst symptoms, as she contracted pneumonia on top of measles. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, she wrote to a family friend that her left lung was still inflamed, keeping her in bed. She also explained "Every day they put a compress on my side, and spread iodine so my skin is peeling. [I] tried to walk but [my] legs are like rags and I am swaying awfully..." The iodine was to help with the rash caused by the measles, and as can be seen in the rest of the note, her recovery was slow. Maria goes further to say that "we all talk loudly" as a result of various earaches.<sup>240</sup> Anastasia and Tatiana recovered much more quickly, as the former wrote on April 10<sup>th</sup> that she and Tatiana go walking with their father and brother when the weather is warm.<sup>241</sup> A month later, we see that the four young women have more or less recovered because they "all go out in the garden daily."<sup>242</sup>

Their father's abdication brought many changes to life in the Alexander Palace. Before they knew what was happening, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's lives went back to the

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<sup>237</sup> Olga Romanov, *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 85. A few days later, on February 13, 1917, Olga writes she "slept terribly, had an earache..." and her temperature being 37 degrees Réaumur, which when converted into Centigrade is a dangerous temperature of about 44 degrees (pg. 85-86). The rest of her entries for February record her temperature as being high; for more, see page 86 in *Diary of Olga Romanov*.

<sup>238</sup> We do not have exact dates for when Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia fell ill, although their father's diary entries for March after his return to Tsarskoe Selo record the progress of the younger two Grand Duchesses. See Nicholas Romanov in *Maria Romanov: Third Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 185-187.

<sup>239</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 437.

<sup>240</sup> Maria Romanov to Lili Dehn, April 2, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 187.

<sup>241</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Lili Dehn, April 10, 1917, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 146.

<sup>242</sup> Maria Romanov to Lili Dehn, May 3, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 187.

monotony they experienced before the tercentenary celebrations in 1913. Since then, the four young women had travelled across Russia as special dignitaries of the Romanov dynasty, and experienced life on the home front during what we now call the First World War. Both events provided the four Grand Duchesses with a taste of life outside the glass case and brought them into contact with people they otherwise would never have met. Thus, the abdication brought the lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia full circle.

Giving up his throne meant their father became a “regular” citizen, now known as Nicholas Alexandrovich Romanov, or Colonel Romanov. He and his wife were placed under house arrest by the Provisional Government until a decision could be reached about what to do with them. The prisoners, their son, and the former Grand Duchesses were relegated to the palace under heavy guard – both for their own safety as well as to keep an eye on them. As Count Paul Benckendorff, the Grand Marshal of the Court, wrote: “All of the doors of the Palace were locked and sealed with the exception of the kitchen, where a post of entry and exit was established, and that of the main entrance...”<sup>243</sup> Originally, the former imperial family were barred from going outside; at the insistence of Count Benckendorff, a section of the Alexander Palace park was designated as a backyard, where the prisoners – both the family and the retinue – could go for walks and do other outdoor activities, such as cutting wood (one of the ex-emperor’s favourite pastimes), and building a vegetable garden.<sup>244</sup>

During the summer of house arrest at Tsarskoe Selo, the garden was the biggest form of entertainment for the new prisoners, who created it from scratch starting on April 28<sup>th</sup>. A few days later, Maria wrote to Lili Dehn, a close friend of the former Empress, that they “are planting a vegetable garden. It is really fun to dig the soil and cart it around, I already have blisters on my hands.”<sup>245</sup> By June, the seeds were in the ground, the new gardeners were taking turns to drag water over from a tub to water the vegetables, and on June 8<sup>th</sup> Maria announced to a friend “We have already eaten our radish and onions, it was most pleasant and they seemed very delicious.” According to Gilliard, they “[had] every imaginable kind of vegetable, and five hundred cabbages.”<sup>246</sup> In July, Tatiana’s note to her aunt demonstrates the garden was a success, writing

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<sup>243</sup> Count Paul Benckendorff, *Last Days at Tsarskoe Selo*, trans. Maurice Baring (London: William Heinemann Limited, 1927), 32-33.

<sup>244</sup> Benckendorff, *Last Days*, 33; Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 443, 456.

<sup>245</sup> Benckendorff, 80; Maria Romanov to Lili Dehn, May 3, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 187.

<sup>246</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 456; Maria Romanov to Ekaterina Zborovskaya, June 8, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 188; Gilliard, 230, 231.

“now we have a very nice garden from where we get the vegetables to eat. There are 60 beds in all.”<sup>247</sup> While a very small thing, this vegetable garden represented a form of freedom and independence not only for Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, but for their father and brother, as well as the other captives and the soldiers, who were said to have helped build it.<sup>248</sup> In a world that had become much smaller as a result of their house arrest, any activity that helped to break the monotony of their reality was highly valued. Similarly, helping their father to chop wood was also a form of entertainment, however bizarre it may sound. Gilliard recorded in his diary that this began on June 15<sup>th</sup> after the prisoners received permission to start; this new activity was partly for something to do, but also to prepare a stockpile of firewood as the Alexander Palace had experienced a wood shortage towards the end of the previous winter.<sup>249</sup> Tatiana wrote in two separate letters about cutting down trees, demonstrating how much this activity became part of the young women’s everyday routine.<sup>250</sup>

Besides outdoor occupations, the prisoners busied themselves with lessons. The question about lessons arose as a result of Gilliard bringing up the former tsarevich’s stilted education on April 29<sup>th</sup>. At this impromptu meeting with the former emperor and empress, it was decided the education of not only their son, but of Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia would resume since they were all healthy again. As some of the tutors were unable to get to Tsarskoe Selo, the lessons were divided up amongst those who were already at the palace: their father taught History and Geography; their mother Religion; Baroness Buxhoeveden took on English; Catherine Schneider was in charge of Math; Dr. Botkin taught Russian; Anastasia “Nastenka” Hendrikova gave art lessons; and Gilliard acted as headmaster while also teaching French.<sup>251</sup> Olga had finished her formal education, but seems to have either taken part in or helped with the lessons. Maria wrote to a friend she “had a history lesson with Olga... in the corridor...”<sup>252</sup> She could have been sitting in on the lessons, however this small extract is vague enough that it makes one wonder if

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<sup>247</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Xenia Romanov, July 20, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 199. Tatiana also specified in this same letter that they “made the beds [themselves]...”

<sup>248</sup> For examples of the soldiers’ help, see Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 456.

<sup>249</sup> Benckendorff, 37; Tatiana Romanov, 196; Gilliard, 231, 230.

<sup>250</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Countess Zinaïda Tolstaya, July 17, 1917 and Tatiana Romanov to Xenia Romanov, July 20, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 198, 199.

<sup>251</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Xenia Romanov, July 20, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 199; Benckendorff, 79; Gilliard, 227.

<sup>252</sup> Maria Romanov to Ekaterina Zborovskaya, June 9, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 189.

Olga would have been teaching in some capacity. Regardless, her participation is to be expected in order to stave off boredom.

There were other little disruptions that occasionally distracted the former Grand Duchesses. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, Anastasia had her ears pierced by her sisters.<sup>253</sup> While not much more is said about this event in Anastasia's life, it can be imagined that this caused the right kind of drama to entertain the young women for a night. Towards the end of June, after their hair had started falling out because of the measles, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia shaved their heads. As Tatiana wrote to her aunt: "Now we four shaved our heads because our hair had fallen out- it is a horror but now we feel [more] comfortable."<sup>254</sup> Afterwards, the four young women would wear scarves on their heads to protect their scalps from the summer sun. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, while out for a walk, Gilliard got ready to take a photo of them. At the last second, Olga gave a signal to her sisters, and they all removed their scarves. Surprised, Gilliard tried and failed to have them put the scarves back on. This prank left the four excited to see their parents' reaction when the photo was developed, again giving them something to look forward to.<sup>255</sup>

The biggest disruption to this new monotonous life at Tsarskoe Selo came in the form of an announcement by Alexander Kerensky, the new Prime Minister of the Provisional Government. On August 11<sup>th</sup>, Kerensky arrived to tell the former emperor that everyone should be prepared to "leave within a few days and should take plenty of warm clothes with them."<sup>256</sup> Between five and six in the morning of August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1917, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, their parents and brother, as well as a small group of loyal retainers boarded a train disguised as a Japanese Red Cross Mission train complete with Japanese flags.<sup>257</sup> Without knowing, they were heading east into Siberia, never to return to their beloved Tsarskoe Selo.

The final destination, chosen by Kerensky himself, was Tobolsk. Miraculously, this managed to stay a well-kept secret between Kerensky and three others. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, the train arrived in Tyumen, where the four young women, their parents and brother, the retinue, and all their luggage transferred to a boat for the next leg of their journey, which took two days. However, the house they were moving into was not ready, so all were forced to stay on the ship

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<sup>253</sup> Anastasia Romanov to Lili Dehn, June 5, 1917, in *Youngest Grand Duchesses*, 148.

<sup>254</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Xenia Romanov, July 20, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 199.

<sup>255</sup> Gilliard, 231-232. This photo is fairly popular and can be found with a quick Google search.

<sup>256</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 468.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.



for about a week. The family moved into the governor's house, a two-story white building; Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, their parents, and their brother occupied the second floor.<sup>258</sup> Maria wrote to a sister of mercy at her and Anastasia's hospital: "We live in one room all 4, so it is not lonesome." Their window looked out onto the street, offering an opportunity to watch passers-by. As previously discussed, Tatiana recorded for her aunt they had "a beautiful view of the mountains and the upper town, where there is a large cathedral." Again, she described the part of the front yard that had been fenced in, which is where their new garden was; apparently it was so small that the 120 steps it took to walk the length of the enclosure was three minutes. According to Maria, "Here in the garden we only have rutabaga and cabbage."<sup>259</sup> This is a big change from the bountiful garden they left behind.

What followed Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia to Tobolsk was the monotonous routine. They passed the days with lessons, walks around the enclosure, reading, and writing. The large number of letters the four had sent from Tsarskoe Selo proved problematic for their jailors, as Count Benckendorff explains: "On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Colonel Kobylisnki, our new commandant, came to see me... He complained a little of the enormous correspondence of the young Grand Duchesses, which took up a great deal of his time and prevented him from delivering us our correspondence."<sup>260</sup> As can be gleaned by this quotation, all correspondence, whether going out or coming in, needed to be read by the commandant at the time. For the young women to be writing so much that it occupied a large chunk of the commandant's day speaks to the amount of free time and boredom they were feeling, particularly after close to three years of relative "free" movement. The quantity of letters written as well as their importance to Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia is evident in the notes sent by them from exile in Siberia, where the four often wondered why the recipient had not written to the sender in a while.<sup>261</sup> To receive a response would mean another chance to write back, giving them something to do.

The letters also repeat the same variation of "There is not much to write about... we live as usual."<sup>262</sup> Tatiana herself used the word "monotonous" in a letter to Petrov, who became their

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<sup>258</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 468, 469, 473-474.

<sup>259</sup> Maria Romanov to Vera Georgievna Maltseva, September 20-21, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 192; Tatiana Romanov to Xenia Alexandrovna Romanov, September 18, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 201-202; Tatiana Romanov to Countess Zinaïda Tolstaya, October 2, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 203.

<sup>260</sup> Benckendorff, 95.

<sup>261</sup> See for example Olga Romanov to Rita Khitrovo, February 19, 1918, in *Diary of Olga Romanov*, 141; Tatiana Romanov to Valentina Ivanovna Chebortaryeva, November 29, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 206.

<sup>262</sup> Maria Romanov to Vera Georgievna Maltseva, October 15, 1917, in *Maria Romanov*, 193.

former tutor because of the abdication: "... the day goes by very quickly- mainly because it is monotonous."<sup>263</sup> Where life before 1913 was monotonous because of an enforced isolation from within the glass case, life beginning in March 1917 became monotonous because of external factors. Writing letters as well as having lessons were two of the limited activities allowed in the prison regime. If the young women felt life was stagnant in Tobolsk, their next move would prove to be even more stifling.

In October 1917, Kerensky's Provisional Government was overthrown by the Bolsheviks in a coup at the Winter Palace. This takeover sparked a civil war between the Reds and Whites, with the latter fighting for a restoration of the monarchy. The eventual Bolshevik victory meant the regional Soviets had full power in the country; one of these, and perhaps the strongest, the Ural Soviet, demanded the former emperor be transferred to their capital, Ekaterinburg. With the war going on, Nicholas Romanov was the last thing on Moscow's mind.<sup>264</sup> In April 1918, the Ural Soviet was putting such pressure on Tobolsk for the transfer of the Romanovs that the Central Executive Committee in Moscow directly intervened and assigned a new person to act as commissar, Vasily Yakovlev.<sup>265</sup>

Yakovlev is an important figure in this part of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's lives, as he was in charge of moving the four young women and their family from Tobolsk; however, their brother had fallen ill, so moving him became impossible. Yakovlev adjusted his plan to comply with the Central Executive Committee while protecting the young boy; he decided to take only the former emperor away. When told he would be taken away from his family, the young women's father initially refused; however, after discussing the matter, the former imperial couple decided to leave together. Taking this cue, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia decided to send one of the four with their parents – Olga was too ill herself; Tatiana was needed to take charge of the house; and Anastasia was deemed too young. This left Maria, who accepted the responsibility of accompanying her parents to an unknown destination.<sup>266</sup> The departure was quick – Maria and her parents were to leave the next day. This was not the first

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<sup>263</sup> Tatiana Romanov to Piotr Petrov, October 23, 1917, in *Daughter of the Last Tsar*, 204. Baroness Buxhoeveden also used "monotonous" in relation to their daily routine. See *Left Behind*, 32.

<sup>264</sup> With the Bolshevik takeover, the capital was moved to Moscow, the capital of Imperial Russia before Peter the Great built St. Petersburg.

<sup>265</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 495; the Bolshevik Central Executive Committee put Russia on the Gregorian calendar on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918. This meant Russia went from January 31<sup>st</sup> to February 14<sup>th</sup> in order to implement the change. All dates in the conclusion from this point are now based on the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 496-498; Gilliard, 260-261.

time the young women were separated from each other and their parents. As we have seen, their father was often away during the First World War; additionally, Olga and Tatiana accompanied their parents on a state visit to France in 1909, and went with their mother on short trips around the home front during World War I. This time was different, however, as no one knew how long the separation would last, or where the final destination was.

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Maria and her parents arrived at the Ipatiev House, named after the merchant who was evicted by the Bolsheviks, in Ekaterinburg. Known as The House of Special Purpose among the Soviets, it had been taken over and converted into a prison for the Romanov family, hence part of the “special purpose” of the house. Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia first heard of the safe arrival of Maria and their parents in Ekaterinburg a few days later; letters then began to fly back and forth between the two houses.<sup>267</sup> Despite this, Buxhoeveden wrote of “the real prison regime” brought on in Tobolsk by the separation. The guards that had travelled from Tsarskoe Selo were replaced with a band of Soviets who subjected the former Grand Duchesses to a daily roll call and forbade them from closing and locking their doors, including at night.<sup>268</sup>

The separation lasted less than a month, for on May 20<sup>th</sup>, the three young women, their brother, and the rest of the retinue boarded a ship to begin the journey to Ekaterinburg, which took about three days. At the Ekaterinburg station, Olga, Tatiana, Anastasia, their brother, and his attendant got off the train – Gilliard and the rest of the group were barred from following them. Gilliard, Buxhoeveden, the former English tutor Sidney Gibbs, and Dr. Derevenko, the other Imperial physician, watched as the three young women, particularly Tatiana, struggled to carry their luggage through the mud. The small retinue had no idea this was the last time they would see Olga, Tatiana, Anastasia, and their brother.<sup>269</sup>

In The House of Special Purpose, the three young women were happy to be reunited with Maria and their parents. However, this celebratory mood did not last long: the treatment Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia had experienced during their last few weeks in Tobolsk was a preview of life in Ekaterinburg. The twelve people in the house were spread across five rooms: the reunited young women were in one room as at Tobolsk; their parents and brother shared another; and the five retainers were divided based on gender.<sup>270</sup> It is at this point that we lose the voices of Olga,

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<sup>267</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 506.

<sup>268</sup> Buxhoeveden, 63-64.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 73; Gilliard, 265, 269-270.

<sup>270</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 509.

Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia, and I believe this is a reflection of the more literal prison regime moving to Ekaterinburg brought to their lives. The writings we do have are left from testimonies of the guards, collected when the loyalist Whites took over Ekaterinburg and conducted an investigation into the fate of the former Grand Duchesses; their parents and brother; Dr. Botkin; Anna Demidova, the former Empress' lady-in-waiting; Ivan Kharitonov, the cook; and Alexei Trupp, the head footman.<sup>271</sup> The days from May 23<sup>rd</sup> until July 16<sup>th</sup> passed with much more monotony than anything Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia had experienced in their young lives: "Except for a walk in the garden every afternoon, family activity was limited to what could be done within the walls of their rooms." The four young women embroidered and knitted, and sang hymns with their mother. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia passed their day "normally".<sup>272</sup>

Sometime in the early hours of July 17<sup>th</sup>, after being woken up by a Soviet guard, Dr. Botkin woke everyone else and told them to get dressed because they were to be moved again as the Whites were closing in on Ekaterinburg. About an hour later, the four young women, their parents and brother, Dr. Botkin, and the three retainers walked down to the basement. The House of Special Purpose was about to reveal the true reason for its moniker. Within minutes, gunshots rang out and brought on years of questions, pretenders, and mythology. Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia's murders were not acknowledged by the Bolshevik leadership until about a year after it happened. Despite the evidence uncovered in 1918, many had difficulty accepting what happened to them. The demolition of the Ipatiev House – done in order to discourage pilgrimages and bring unwanted attention to Russia's former imperial family – demonstrates there was still a demand to know more about the family, just as during their lifetime.

First in the 1970s, then in the 1990s, a mass grave was found in Pig's Hollow, not too far from the House of Special Purpose. The remains of Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia were found along with those of their parents, Dr. Botkin, Demidova, Kharitonov, and Trupp. Maria and her brother were discovered a decade later, after the rest of their family and the retinue had been reburied in the Peter and Paul Cathedral. Even after further DNA tests, the Russian Orthodox Church refuses to recognise Maria and her brother's remains and bury them with the rest of their

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<sup>271</sup> Massie, *Nicholas and Alexandra*, 520.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 510.

family.<sup>273</sup> Despite this, the four young women have been canonised by the Orthodox church, ensuring the perpetual memorialisation of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia.

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As this microhistory demonstrates, examining the daily lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia provides us with plenty of information about the Russian monarchy in its final decades, and helps us to understand what a Russian grand duchess did every day. One result of their secluded life was a social distancing from Russian high society, which ultimately resulted in a disintegration of the relationship between the Emperor and the nobility, as well as a disruption to court life. The tercentenary celebrations were seen as a way in which to bridge this gap, and the four Grand Duchesses were called on to perform their roles as daughters of the emperor for the first and last time. Placing them in the spotlight was meant to highlight the deep religious connection of the role of the imperial family, in particular the Emperor in his role as “little father” to the Russian people. In being freed from the glass case in which they lived in, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia were often called on to stand in for their mother at daytime celebrations, further enabling them to act their roles in the imperial drama. However, the rift between the Grand Duchesses’ parents and the nobility – and eventually, large segments of Russian society too – could not be healed, and this truly took form in the final years of the First World War after the Emperor took control of the army and as the country headed towards revolution.

The brief moment of freedom that 1913 provided for Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia came to an abrupt end with the end of the tercentenary celebrations and the return to the same monotonous routine. With the outbreak of war came a new call to duty, when the Grand Duchesses took on new charitable roles. This thesis has contributed to a new understanding of the way in which these particular young women exhibited the charitable aspect of royalty, particularly in relation to the sponsorship of sanitary trains. Maria and Anastasia’s activities

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<sup>273</sup> Massie, *The Last Chapter*, 25-37, 38-48, 61-69. Because of the canonisation, the main issue with burying Maria and her brother is that all of their remains would become holy relics – hence the Church’s hesitation to accept the DNA results. For more on this, see Neil MacFarquhar, “Russian Orthodox Church Blocks Funeral for Last of Romanov Remains,” *The New York Times*, February 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/14/world/europe/russian-orthodox-church-blocks-funeral-for-last-of-romanov-remains.html>.

during World War I have been largely overlooked because of their ages, but as my thesis has shown, even they wholeheartedly took part in the limited home front activities they were able to engage in. Regardless of their social status, the four Grand Duchesses took their wartime work on the home front very seriously and no doubt would have continued to participate had the February Revolution not disrupted their lives.

In the case of these particular royal women, their monotonous lives reveal a sense of normalcy within the palace gates that helps to demystify one of the most well-known royal families. While their lives were cut short, we should not leave Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia to be forgotten by history or only to be remembered for the way in which they were murdered. Their short existence was shrouded in mystery, and their afterlives have been caught up in all kinds of mythology. Much as this thesis has done, it is important to re-examine the lives of royal women to better understand the role of monarchy within society. Virginia Woolf was looking for the missing woman in history, yet since the 1920s royal women are often left out of the equation within academic scholarship. Royal women of all ages often played larger roles than we are aware of because they have been relegated to the margins, a process which my thesis has demonstrated and hopefully altered through a reconsideration of the lives of Olga, Tatiana, Maria, and Anastasia Nikolaevna Romanova.

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