

CELEBRATING THE TERCENTENARY OF THE ROMANOVS IN ST. PETERSBURG

by Daniel Brière



«The Tercentenary Jubilee of the Reigning House of Romanov»

1913 drawing by G. R. with an old medallion representing the «Election of Mikhail Feodorovich as Tsar», published in *Novoe Vremya*, No. 1320, February 16 /March 1, 1913.

(Author's collection)

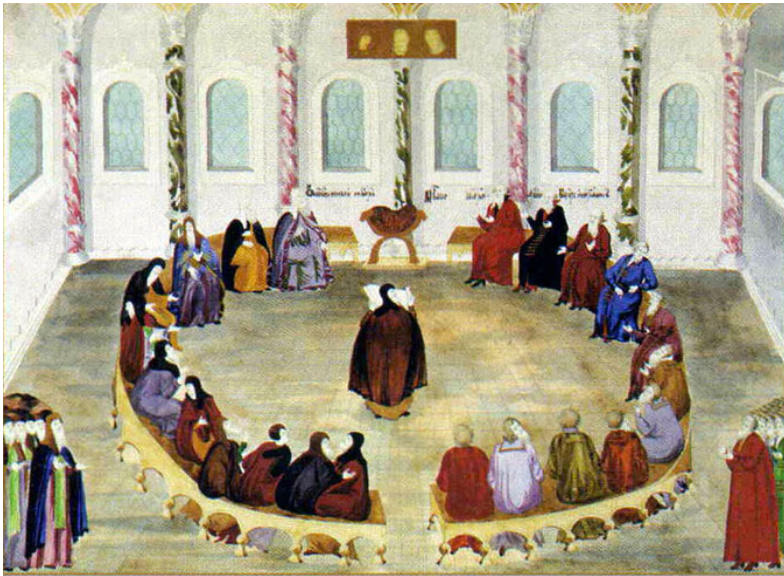
In “Celebrating the Romanov Tercentenary with Fabergé Imperial Presentation Gifts: A Review” (*Fabergé Research Newsletter*, Fall 2012) Roy Tomlin described the preparations of the celebrations for the Tercentenary of the Romanov Dynasty and explained the reasons why the first part of the festivities were to be held in St. Petersburg¹ in February 1913 O.S.² He also included a brief account of the events that were held later in the year. Since Russia is currently commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the House of Romanov, I would like to offer a more detailed account of the celebrations held in the capital of the Russian Empire in February 1913.



Prologue: Moscow, 1613

But first, it is worth remembering why February 21, 1913, had been proclaimed a holiday in the Russian Empire. Three hundred years earlier, an event took place at the Moscow Kremlin that would change the history of Russia for centuries to come. In January 1613, less than three months after the liberation of Moscow from the Polish-Lithuanian occupation, a *Zemsky Sobor* (Assembly of the Land) was summoned to elect a new tsar. It is said to have been composed of more than 800 representatives of the Church, the Boyars and other nobility, Cossacks, merchants, townspeople and peasants delegated from 58 towns. On February 7, they voted in favor of the 16 year-old Mikhail³ Feodorovich Romanov. Before announcing who had been elected, the *Sobor* send emissaries to the Russian towns to see how their choice would be received by the Russian people. Having received positive feedback, the *Sobor* confirmed its vote on February 20. On the next day the Muscovites assembled on Red Square confirmed the election of Mikhail Romanov by acclamation. They immediately swore allegiance to their new tsar.

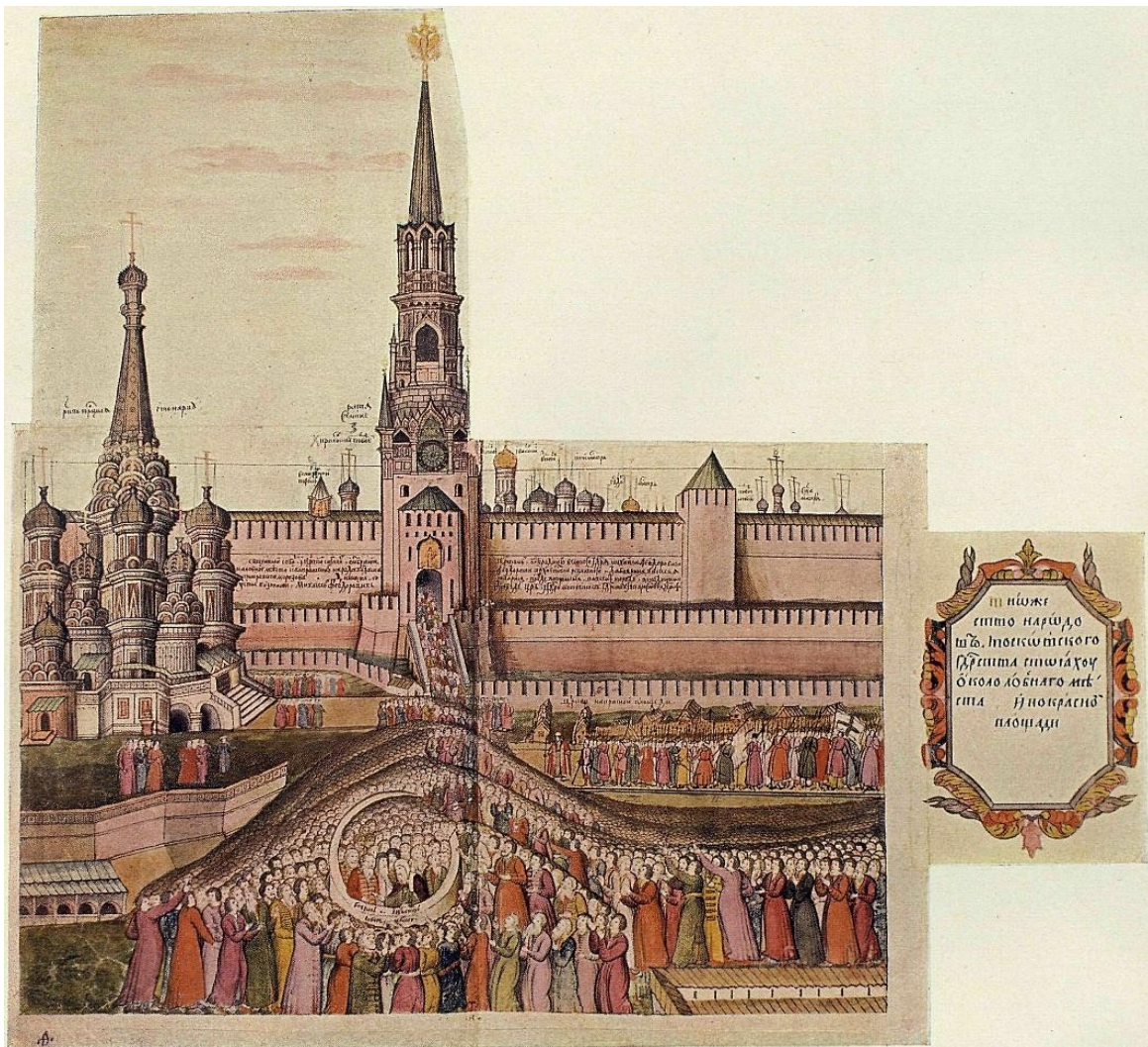
Moscow Kremlin, February 20-21, 1613



Election of Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov as Tsar of Russia
(<http://pro100-mica.dreamwidth.org>)



Proclamation of the Election Results
(Wikipedia)



«The People of Moscow swearing allegiance to their newly elected tsar Mikhail Feodorovich»
Original color photo of the miniature, painted in 1673, taken by S. Prokudin-Gorsky in 1911
(Wikipedia)

1913: The first Jubilee

It seems the Romanovs had never thought of celebrating their Jubilee before 1913. In 1713, Tsar Peter 1st was at war with Sweden and at odds with his only son and heir Alexei. In any case, there was not much of a «dynasty» to celebrate as it had only been established by his grand-father and its future did not look too promising. In 1813, Emperor Alexander 1st was at war with the French Empire, had no son, a reluctant heir, and his mind on other things than celebrations. So, in the 1910s, it was decided to celebrate the Tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty with great fanfare. Some hoped it would cement the bond between the Tsar and its People that had been weakened by a disastrous war and a revolution which had nearly led to their demise.



“Memento of the Tercentenary of the House of Romanov”
(http://iconexpo.ru/c4_0187.php)

Tsarskoe Selo, December 11, 1912: A Lesson in History



"Tercentenary Jubilee of the House of Romanov"
(www.ruscarts.ru/)

While the preparations for the Tercentenary of the House of Romanov were under way, less than two months after having nearly died in Spala, the still ailing eight-year-old Tsesarevich⁴ Alexei resumed his daily lessons.

His first assignment from his history teacher was to write the names of the eighteen Romanov monarchs with the length of their reigns. In his lined exercise-book, he began: "House of Romanov: I. Mikhail Feodorovich, 32 years." It ended with: "XVIII. Daddy. Nicholas II Alexandrovich".⁵ Some day he would become the 19th Romanov to sit on the Throne of Russia so he had to learn the history of his predecessors before the celebrations began.



Tsesarevich Alexei with his tutor P.V. Petrov
(www.gazeta.lv)

From Tsarskoe Selo to St. Petersburg, February 19, 1913: Moving back to the Capital City

Having learned about the events leading to the election of the first Romanov as tsar in 1613, and the history of the dynasty of which he was heir, the young Alexei Romanov and his family left Tsarskoe Selo for St. Petersburg. Before moving into the Winter Palace, the Imperial Family drove directly to the *Domik* (small house), the first residence built in the city for Tsar Peter the 1st, a modest log cabin. It is represented as such on one side of the 1903 Fabergé Easter «Peter the Great» Egg:



Miniature showing the Winter Palace in 1903



Miniature of Tsar Peter's cabin as it looked in 1903

Peter the Great Easter Egg – Lillian Pratt Collection (Courtesy Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond)

In 1723 Peter the Great ordered the building of an open stone gallery with a roof to protect «The First Palace». By order of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, part of the *Domik* had been turned into a chapel where was preserved the icon of the Savior Not-Made-by-Human-Hands (*Spas Nerukotvorny*) given to Tsar Peter by his mother. This icon was highly venerated by inhabitants of the capital as it had accompanied Peter the 1st during the founding of St. Petersburg and, a few years later, at the battle of Poltava.⁶



Tsar Peter's *Domik*, c. 1910
(nevsky-prospekt.com)



Tsar Peter's Icon of the Savior
(www.preobragensky.ru)

The public had not been notified that the Imperial Family would visit this Chapel, but Rasputin must have been told as he showed up. When the Romanovs arrived, the small place was hot and crammed as a service was under way. With some difficulty, the Romanovs managed to find their way, unnoticed through the people in prayer, and kneel in front of the icon of the Savior. But they were quickly recognized by those inside. Alerted by the presence of imperial automobiles, a crowd had assembled outside and when the Imperial Family walked out people fell to their knees, trying to grasp their hands to kiss them.⁷

The official celebrations were set to begin on February 21, 1913, on the 300th anniversary of the proclamation of the election of the first Romanov sovereign. Days before, the city had already been decorated with flags and banners, crowned portraits and monograms of Tsar Mikhail and Emperor Nicholas II.



The St. Petersburg City Hall on Nevsky Prospekt decorated for the Tercentenary, February 1913
Niva, No.10, 1913.

[\(http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/illabes/post84921600/\)](http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/illabes/post84921600/)



The State Bank on Ekaterininsky Embankment, St. Petersburg, 1913
www.hellopiter.ru/Old_photos2.html

Thursday, February 20, 1913: Remembering a Dynasty

The next day, as ordered by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, a *Panikhida* (memorial service) was held for the deceased Romanovs in all the churches of Russia. So, in St. Petersburg, at 3:00 PM on the eve of the 300th Anniversary of the Romanov Dynasty, the Imperial Family left for the Peter and Paul Fortress. In remembrance of the first Romanov sovereign, Nicholas II had chosen to wear the uniform of His Majesty's 13th Leib-Érivan'sky Grenadiers, the oldest regiment in the Russian Army (originating from the first military unit organized as a regiment by Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich in 1642). All the extended Imperial Family had assembled inside the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral, the burial place of the Romanovs since Peter the Great.



Interior of the Ss. Peter and Paul Cathedral, c.1890
Lost temples of St. Petersburg; unique photos of XIX-XX century.
(<http://lost-temples-of-st-petersburg.gatchina3000.ru/>)



Interior of the Ss Peter and Paul Cathedral
Watercolor by V. Ya. Reinhart, 1881
(www.hellopiter.ru/The_peter_and_paul_fortress_pic.html)

The memorial service was presided over by high ranking foreign clergy officials – the Patriarch of Antioch⁸ and the Metropolitan of Belgrade – along with Russian hierarchs. At the end of the *Panikhida*, with his deep basso profundo voice, the Archdeacon chanted the prayer ordained by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church:

Give eternal rest, O Lord in blessed repose, to the souls of your servants the Departed Parents of the first tsar from the House of Romanov – The Most Blessed Patriarch Filaret and Nun Marta – to the Most Pious Sovereign Tsars Mikhail Feodorovich, Alexei Mikhailovich, Fyodor Alexeyevich, Ioann Alexeyevich, the Most Pious Sovereign Emperors and Empresses Peter I, Catherine I, Peter II, Anna Ioannovna, Elizabeth Petrovna, Peter III, Catherine II, Paul I, Alexander I, Nicholas I, Alexander II and Alexander III and all family members of the Tsars and Grand Dukes of Russia from the House of Romanov who have departed this life, and make their memory eternal.

To which the choir added: *Eternal memory. Eternal memory. Eternal memory!*⁹

Friday, February 21, 1913: Ceremonies of Thanksgiving and Congratulations



At 8:00 AM, those who were still asleep in St. Petersburg were woken up by the sound of a 21-gun salute from the Peter and Paul Fortress. It marked the 300th anniversary of the proclamation of the election of Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov as Tsar and it announced the official beginning of the Celebrations of the Tercentenary of the House of Romanov. A Decree from the Council of Ministers, approved by Nicholas II, had ordered Friday to be a Holiday throughout the Russian Empire (with all establishments selling alcoholic beverages to be closed “except 1st class restaurants”).¹⁰

As Tsar Mikhail’s 17th successor recorded in his diary, on that day the weather was nice and mild, “almost like spring”, forgetting rain had poured all morning on people waiting for him on the streets. In the morning he received the members of the Palace staff who came to offer their congratulations. One of them, Nikolai Alexandrov, had volunteered to fight the Turks during the 1877-1878 War and won the Order of St. George. After the war, he had joined the Palace Police and risen to become its Deputy-Chief with the rank of State Councillor. But The Chief of Police did not like him and the Emperor knew about it. That morning, after having thanked this brave old man for his long and loyal service to his grand-father, father and himself, Nicholas II told him: “Now I grant you what your family is missing” and gave him the Cross of St. Vladimir 3rd class which brought hereditary nobility to the recipient of the Order. Having repaired an injustice, Nicholas II went for a walk in the Palace Garden.¹¹

According to the Ceremonial for the Celebrations of the Tercentenary, on that day an Imperial Manifesto was to be proclaimed, followed by a Te Deum, with the customary prayer for the health of the Sovereign and his Family, and a Procession of the Cross. This was to be done in all churches of Russia.¹² Services of Thanksgiving were also to be held in temples of other faiths.

By 10:00 AM in St. Petersburg, some 4,000 invited guests - the elite of the Russian State, the Diplomatic Corps, representatives of the military, the nobility, the urban estate and peasant elders, all dressed for the occasion - were starting to arrive at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan for a religious service before the Te Deum. An unknown peasant, dressed in black clothes with a magnificent Russian tunic of crimson silk and a gold chain with a pectoral cross, had already occupied one of the seats reserved for the members of the State Duma: Mikhail V. Rodzianko, its Chairman, went to see the intruder: he immediately recognized Rasputin, who would not budge, saying he had been invited by “Higher Authorities” while showing an invitation card. A furious Rodzianko insulted Rasputin and ordered him to move away, which he finally did, shooting a very angry look at Rodzianko on his way to the exit.¹³ Later, during the Liturgy, the rumor of Rasputin's presence would spread throughout the Cathedral: gossip would be exchanged and heads would rise up to catch a glimpse of him, in vain, as he would already be gone.¹⁴

At 11:00 AM the religious service got under way in the great Cathedral. As Miriam Kochan described it:

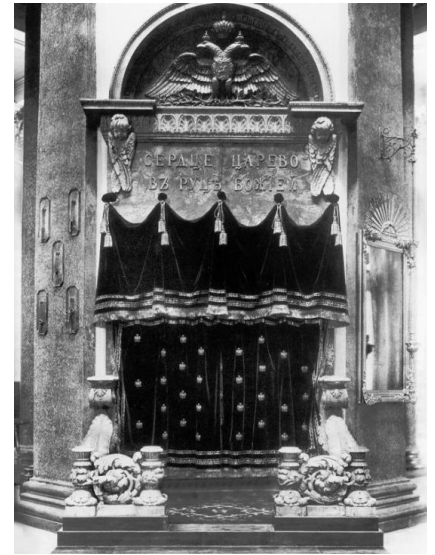
*Never had the singing been so beautiful. Never had the glory of the Cathedral shown to greater advantage and sparkled with such an array of jewellike colors: the silver iconostasis, the golden icons, the green, purple and crimson vestments of the priests, the varied brilliant uniforms of the military and diplomatic members of the congregation, the flickering lights of the hundreds of candles, and the 103 tattered flags, emblazoned with the imperial eagles of Napoleon's Grande Armée, which hung between the fifty-six granite Corinthian columns, with their bronze bases and capitals.*¹⁵



Pre-1918 photo of the
Iconostasis of the Cathedral¹⁶
(bukharapiter.ru/content/view/450/)



Icon of the Kazan Mother of God
(Courtesy kazansky-spb.ru)



Pre-1918 photo of the
Tsarskoe Mesto
(Wikipedia)



GD Maria Alexandrovna
(www.gogmsite.net/the-bustle-eras-1870-1890/subalbum-grand-princess-mar/maria-alexandrovna-of-cobur.html)

With the exception of a few grand dukes living in exile, the extended Imperial Family had arrived at the Cathedral before the Emperor: even Alexander II's daughter, Grand Duchess Maria Alexandrovna, Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, had made the trip from Germany. She arrived at the Cathedral with Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna who, upholding the old traditions of the Russian Court, rode in her carriage pulled by a team of horses, with a coachman dressed in Russian style, and her footmen who sat on boxes covered with crimson velvet and gold ornaments. Prince Gavriil Konstantinovich saw them arrive and thought it was quite a nice spectacle to see.¹⁷



Portrait of GD Maria Pavlovna
by Boris Kustodiev (detail)
(lizotchka-russie.over-blog.com/1-categorie-11118065.html)

After the Liturgy, the Archdeacon proclaimed the Imperial Manifesto:

Высочайшій Манифестъ.
БОЖЕЮ МИЛОСТІЮ
МЫ, НИКОЛАЙ ВТОРЫЙ,
ИМПЕРАТОРЪ И САМОДЕРЖЕЦЪ
ВСЕРОССИЙСКІЙ,
ЦАРЬ ПОЛЬСКІЙ, ВЕЛИКІЙ КНЯЗЬ ФИНЛЯНДСКІЙ,
И ПРОЧІЕ, И ПРОЧІЕ.
Объявляемъ всѣмъ вѣрнымъ Нашимъ подданнымъ:

(...) With the combined labors of Our crowned predecessors on the Russian throne and all the true sons of Russia, the Russian State formed and grew strong. Our Fatherland repeatedly became subject to trial, but the Russian people, firm in the Orthodox faith, strong in their warm love for the Fatherland and the self-sacrificing devotion to its Sovereigns, overcame misfortune and emerged renewed and strengthened. The close boundaries of Muscovite Rus' expanded and the Great Russian Empire now stood in the ranks of the first powers of the world. In constant union with our beloved people, we hope to lead the State in peaceful building of our national life (...)

The text did not include the Duma in this nation building: Nicholas II had stricken out a sentence about the participation of the elected representatives of his people in Russia's political process.¹⁸ As expected, it announced an amnesty would be granted. Later in the day a decree was published, remitting some debts owed by peasants, forgiving some offenses and reducing some jail sentences by a third. On the whole, it was much less generous than the previous 1904 amnesty (for the birth of the Heir) and created some discontent. The Manifesto ended with this prayer:

*May the Lord's benediction upon Us and Our dear subjects not grow scantier than it is now. May Our Lord the Omnipotent, strengthen and glorify the Russian Land and grant Us strength to hold high and steady the glorious banner of the Fatherland.*¹⁹

Outside the Cathedral, awaiting the Imperial Cortège's arrival for the Te Deum, were hundreds of members of the clergy and monarchist organizations who had walked in various processions of the Cross through the streets of Petersburg bearing flags, banners, crosses and icons. They stood in a semicircle before the cathedral, holding their flags aloft during the entire service. Across Nevsky Prospekt, members of the clergy held crosses and gonfalons. The religious processions had taken on the aspect of a political demonstration in behalf of the tsar.²⁰



У Казанскаго собора.
Торжественное празднованіе 300-лѣтія царствованія Дома Романовыхъ, 21 февраля с. г.,
въ С.-Петербурѣ. По фот. А. Оцупа.

Arrival of a Procession of the Cross at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, February 21, 1913
Photo by A. Otsup, published in *Niva*, No.10, 1913. (<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/arhiv/59942.htm>)

Meanwhile at the Winter Palace, the empresses and grand duchesses Olga and Tatiana put white formal gowns on, tiaras, jewels, sashes and orders blazing with diamonds. Nicholas II and his son Alexei donned the Russian peasant-style uniform of the 4th «Imperial Family» Guards' Rifle Regiment. At 12:15 PM the Imperial Cortège left for the Kazan Cathedral to attend the Thanksgiving Service. Riding on white horses, the trumpeters from His Majesty's Own Cossack Escort (the *Konvoi*), in long scarlet Circassian tunics, opened up the procession with a fanfare and were followed by a *sotnia* (squadron) from the *Konvoi* on black horses. Behind, came the Emperor and the Heir to the Throne in an open caleche drawn by a team of white horses. Three of His Majesty's aides-de-camp galloped after them. They were followed by the two empresses in a Russian Court carriage, drawn by four white horses, with two tall *Kamer-Kazaki* (Cossack attendants and bodyguards) standing on its rear platform. The four young grand duchesses rode behind in a landau, followed by the Emperor's Retinue and the Empresses' Maids of Honor in cars. Another *sotnia* of Cossacks closed the cortège.²¹

On each side of Morskaya Street and Nevsky Prospekt, cadets from military schools and soldiers from Guards' regiments stood, two rank deep, to protect the Imperial Family and render military honors along the way. As Nicholas II and his family rode to the Cathedral the air was filled with shouts of hoorahs, the playing of military marches and the national anthem by various regimental bands along the way. In the background the ringing of church bells could be heard all the way to the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.²²



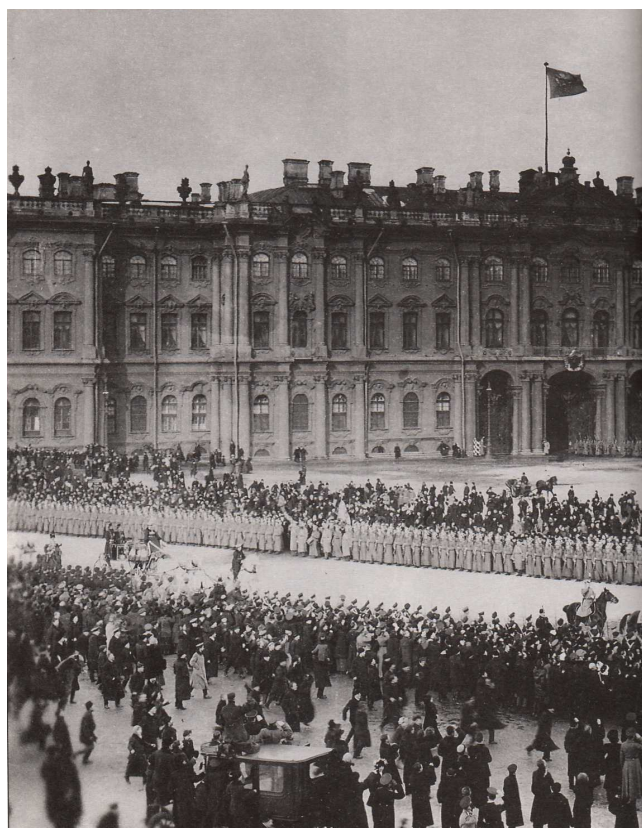
The Imperial Cortège leaving the Winter Palace through the Garden Gates on February 21, 1913
(<http://www.rcforum.ru/showthread.php?p=734914>)



Coat of Arms of the House of Romanov
in an old style cartouche



The Emperor's caleche followed by his Aides-de-Camp
 Photo taken by K.Bulla on February 21, 1913, published in *Ogoniek*, March 3, 1913.
 (<http://www.ihronograf.ru/periodicals/numbers/articles/show-126.html>)



The Empresses' Court carriage
 (From a photo taken by Karl Bulla, in *The Sunset of the Romanov Dynasty*, M. Iroshnikov et al., 1992, 298-299.)



The Emperor's caleche



Crowd in front of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan

Photo taken by K. Bulla on February 21, 1913, published in *Ogoniek*, March 3, 1913.
<http://www.ihronograf.ru/periodicals/numbers/articles/show-126.htm>



Military officials awaiting the arrival of the Emperor at the entrance of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan

Photo taken by K. Bulla on February 21, 1913, published in *Ogoniek* on March 3, 1913.
<http://www.ihronograf.ru/periodicals/numbers/articles/show-126.htm>



Arrival of the Empresses Maria and Alexandra at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, February 21, 1913
(Невский Проспект. История Санкт-Петербурга в фотографиях. Конец XIX - начало XX века, 2003.²³)



Arrival of the four daughters of Nicholas II at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, February 21, 1913
 Photo published in *Niva*, No.10, 1913.
<http://cherbien.livejournal.com/699856.html>

At its arrival at the Cathedral, the imperial party was greeted at the entrance by Patriarch Gregory IV of Antioch and Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga. Their Majesties and the grand duchesses walked inside, followed by their «Kamer-Pages»²⁴, but Alexei – the future of the dynasty – looking thin and pale, was still unable to walk and had to be carried by a tall Cossack from the *Konvoi*. A murmur broke over the crowd when they saw him. The sight “was inexpressibly sad” wrote a witness “because it proved the truth of what had been whispered ever since the autumn, that the Heir to the Throne was still suffering from disease”. Nicholas II and his family proceeded to take their place to the right of the cupola, at the *Tsarskoe Mesto* (Tsar's Place)²⁵, a sumptuous marble throne adorned with crimson velvet drapes. Under these words carved in the marble stone, “The Life of the Tsar is in the Hands of God”,²⁶ the Emperor stood still, with his mother at his right, “with tears filling her beautiful soft eyes”, his wife and son, in an arm-chair, at his left.²⁷

During the Thanksgiving Service, as some witnesses reported, Nicholas looked troubled and Alexandra was visibly nervous, constantly looking at her fragile son. Anna Vyrubova (a friend and confidante of Empress Alexandra – and Rasputin) was puzzled when she saw the Emperor and his son “raise their heads and gaze long at the ceiling”. She adds that, afterwards they told her that “two doves had appeared and had floated for several minutes over their heads. In the religious exaltation of the hour this appeared to the Emperor a symbol that the blessing of God, after three centuries, continued to rest on the House of Romanoff”.²⁸ At the end of the *Te Deum*, the Archdeacon chanted the very impressive *Mnogaya Leta* praying God to grant “Many Years to the Most Pious, Most Autocratic and Great Sovereign, Our Emperor Nicholas Alexandrovich of All Russia, his Consort, the Most Pious Sovereign Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, his Mother, the Most Pious Sovereign Empress Maria Feodorovna, the Most Worthy Sovereign Heir Tsesarevich and Grand Duke Alexei Nikolaevich and all the Members of the Reigning Family”.²⁹

As the choir sang “Many Years! Many Years! Many Years!”, the bells of all St. Petersburg churches tolled, the cannons of the Fortress fired a gun salute and the soldiers assembled outside rendered the military honors.³⁰ After having venerated the miracle working icons brought from various St. Petersburg churches and monasteries, the Imperial Family left the Cathedral under the acclamations of a crowd, which had doubled in size since their arrival, and rode back to the Winter Palace.³¹

Later that evening Nicholas II would write: “we were in a happy mood that reminded me of the Coronation.”



The Emperor and the Heir leaving the Cathedral, followed by the Commandant of the Cossack Escort
Photo taken by K. Bulla on February 21, 1913, published in *Ogoniek* on March 3, 1913. (oldsp.ru)



Departure of Their Majesties Empress Maria and Alexandra
 Photo taken by K. Bulla on February 21, 1913, published in *Ogoniek* on March 3, 1913.
 (<http://www.ihronograf.ru/periodicals/numbers/articles/show-126.htm>)

Meanwhile similar Thanksgiving Services were held, not only in all the Orthodox churches of the capital, but also at temples of other faiths such as the Grand Choral Synagogue (the second largest in Europe). The St. Petersburg Buddhists and Moslems held their first service in their own new temples. At the Buddhist Temple (the first in Europe), the *Pandido Kambo Lama* (Head of the Russian Buddhists) Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov officiated (he was later to become famous for the lifelike state of his undecayed body).



The Buddhist Temple, St. Petersburg, 1915
 (<http://www.marhotin.ru/marhotin-datsan-eng/>)



Pandito Kambo Lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov
 (Wikipedia)



Interior of the Buddhist Temple, 1910s
 (<http://www.marhotin.ru/marhotin-datsan-eng/>)

The new St. Petersburg Mosque (the largest in Russia) was to be inaugurated on the 22nd but a Thanksgiving Service was held there on the 21st, with a sermon in Tatar and Arabic, followed by prayers for the Emperor in Arabic. In attendance were Isfandiyyar Bahadur, Khan of Khiva, and the last direct descendant of Genghis Khan, the colorful and very rich Mohammed Alim Khan, Emir of Bukhara, both guests of Nicholas II at the Tercentenary celebrations.³²



St. Petersburg Mosque, circa 1914

(http://dum-spb.ru/sankt-peterburgskaya_sobornaya_mech)



Isfandiyyar Bahadur, Khan of Khiva

Photographed in color by Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky in 1911

(Wikipedia)



Alim Khan, Emir of Bukhara

In the afternoon, Their Majesties were to receive congratulations at the Winter Palace. At 3:45 PM the extended Imperial Family assembled in the superb Malachite Room. The Empresses looked magnificent in their Court dresses, diamond tiaras and necklaces. Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatiana went to the reception wearing long Russian dresses for the first time. As Olga wrote, they had not worn these dresses before.³³



Empress Alexandra in Court Dress
Photo by Boissonnas and Egger, 1906

(www.tumblr.com/tagged/alexandra%20feodorovna%20romanova)



Olga and Tatiana in their new Court Dresses
Photo by Boissonnas and Egger, 1913

(www.freewebs.com/stormriderj/olgatatianathebigpair.htm)

In his memoirs, the young Prince Gavriil Konstantinovich would later recall that Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich asked the Emperor if they could wear the Tercentenary Badge³⁴ which he had just bestowed upon them: Nicholas II graciously consented. Then the gilded doors of the Malachite Room were opened and the Imperial Family made their grand entrance into the Concert Hall to receive congratulations of the Court officials. They proceeded further to the large Nicholas Hall. Members of the Imperial Family occupied a whole corner of the room, Their Majesties standing in front, with the Tsesarevich and the senior members of the Imperial Family sitting in upholstered chairs next to them. The younger crowd of Romanovs stayed behind in order to escape the rigors of Court etiquette and, as Prince Gavriil put it politely, they “compared notes with each other” while watching the old ritual called «Baisemain» (hand-kissing).³⁵ Everyone who came to congratulate Their Majesties first approached the Emperor, the men bowing and the ladies making a Court curtsy, then shook His Majesty's hand. They then moved on to congratulate the Dowager Empress, bowing or curtseying: she extended her hand and everyone kissed it. The same ritual was repeated with Empress Alexandra.

In all, some 1,500 people came to pay their respects: members of the Senate, the State Council, the Council of Ministers and the State Duma, high officials and heads of various departments, heads of the military, along with representatives of the nobility and merchant estate.³⁶

Having learned the State Council was to present Their Majesties with an icon, Chairman of the State Duma Mikhail Rodzianko decided to do the same. A beautiful old icon of the Savior was bought in Moscow. To it was added an old twenty yards long embroidered tapestry depicting the return of Patriarch Filaret from captivity (he had been held for nine years by the Poles) and his triumphal reception in Moscow by his son Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich in 1619. Rodzianko presented both gifts during the Reception of Congratulations and made a

speech. In response to the Imperial Manifesto, which made no mention of the Duma, its Chairman reminded His Majesty that the Tsar himself had called upon the elected representatives of His people to assist him in His legislative work.³⁷



Chairman of the State Duma Mikhail V. Rodzianko
in his uniform of (honorary) Master of the Court, 1910
(Wikipedia)

This long procession of courtiers, civil servants, officials and delegates from all the Empire exerted its toll on the Imperial Family. Some witnesses report that, oddly enough, the Emperor did not pay much attention to the Descendants of the signers of the 1613 Charter inviting Mikhail to be tsar (among them, members of Russia's oldest aristocracy), nor to the representatives of the noble and merchants estates. As Richard Wortman wrote: "Nicholas stood chatting with the adjutants of his suite, leaving the estate representatives feeling perplexed and offended. Men who had journeyed to the capital for perhaps their single opportunity to meet the tsar were filed past rapidly, many of them unable even to glimpse his face. The aristocratic scions of the illustrious figures of 1613 felt snubbed."³⁸

Fortunately, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna saved the day. She felt it was her duty to be present at all official events and, despite her age and a persistent lumbago, remained standing until the end of the reception. In stark contrast with Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, she talked easily and animatedly in her "quick rather husky voice, never missing a point, never forgetting a face or failing to say the right thing to the right person".³⁹



Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna in Court Dress
Photo by Pasetti, 1880s (Wikipedia)

Alexander Gershelman, a Kamer-Page in attendance, recalls that Alexandra and Alexei looked exhausted: for Tsesarevich Alexei, still wearing his child-size uniform of a sub-lieutenant in the «Imperial Family» Guards' Rifles, this ceremony was particularly tiresome. It was quite tedious for a lively boy like him to sit still in a chair having to watch a seemingly endless procession of people he didn't know. At first, Alexei enjoyed the colorful parade of officials in full-dress uniforms, with shining orders and medals, and Maids of Honor in Court dresses with glittering jewels, so he stayed quiet alongside his parents. But when the men from the Duma, and other people in dull civilian clothes began to file past, he quickly lost interest and became restless. He turned towards his sisters a few times then began to prod his mother's long Court train with his miniature sword. The Empress signaled him to stop but, after a few minutes, he started again. Finally his game attracted his father's attention: turning towards his son, the Emperor sternly ordered: "Alexei, Stop it!" The Heir looked quite chagrined.⁴⁰



Nicholas II and his son Alexei in the full-dress uniform of the 4th "Imperial Family" Guards' Rifles they wore on Feb. 21, 1913
dokonline.com/dokumentalnie-filmi/-nikolay-ii-sorvannyi-triumf-2008.html
www.liveinternet.ru/users/3251944/post241738393/

That night, Count Ivan Tolstoi, Master of the Court and Nicholas II's former Minister of Education, wrote these unflattering words in his diary:

*Two steps from the tsar stood the empress Maria Feodorovna openly and graciously smiling, having a young look despite her sixty-five years, thanks to heavy makeup. Then somewhat apart, about ten to fifteen feet from the dowager, the young empress sat on an armchair, in a pose of exhaustion, all red, like a peony, with eyes that were almost mad. Next to her, also sitting on a chair, was the unmistakably weary heir in the uniform of the Rifles of the Imperial Family. The group had a most tragic look.*⁴¹

Anna Vyrubova concurred: "So long and fatiguing were these ceremonies that at the end the Empress was literally too fatigued to force a smile. Poor little Alexei also, after being carried through the rooms and obliged to acknowledge a thousand greetings, was taken back to his room in a condition of utter exhaustion."⁴²

Alexandra Feodorovna went to bed early, as did Tatiana who had a fever (it was later diagnosed as typhoid; she missed all the other festivities). Nicholas II had supper with his daughter Olga and his sister-in-law Elizaveta Feodorovna who was leaving the day after for Moscow.

Afterwards, alone with his thoughts about the future of his dynasty, the Emperor looked through the windows of his private apartments. He saw the searchlights on top of the neighboring Admiralty performing a strange ballet in the sky of Petersburg as if they were looking for yet unseen enemies. In the distance he could see some of the illuminations installed on various streets and buildings of his capital.



The temporary Rotunda erected on St. Isaac's Square
with the illuminated German Embassy in the background
February 21, 1913
(Wikipedia)

While the Emperor was spending a quiet evening at his Palace, the society of his capital was celebrating at City Hall where a concert by Russian artists was offered, followed by a superb banquet. On Nevsky Prospekt and Bolshaya Morskaya St., great crowds gathered to see the illuminations and expressed their enthusiasm by singing the national anthem.⁴³

For the ordinary people more simple entertainment would be organized farther away from the city center, as we will see later.

That evening, Nicholas II ended his diary entry without commenting about this momentous day; he only reported strong winds over the city⁴⁴. After what seemed to have been a day of triumph, he certainly could not have foreseen that much stronger winds would soon sweep away the old Europe, Russia and his own throne.

Thus ended the 300th year of Romanov rule. The 301st year would begin after a good night sleep.

Friday, February 22, 1913: More Receptions and an Evening at the Opera

The next morning, Empress Alexandra, still suffering from exhaustion, stayed in bed. At 11:00 AM Nicholas II and his mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, went to the Winter Palace Concert Hall to receive congratulations from delegates of the nobility, the *zemstva* (elected local self-governments established by Alexander II), the towns and learned societies of Russia. In the afternoon the Emperor received the Foreign diplomats and their wives. At 8:15 PM, accompanied by his wife and his eldest daughter Olga, he left for the Mariinsky Imperial Theater.



The Mariinsky Theater decorated for the Tercentenary
(<http://upsya.livejournal.com/5039308.html>)

On the program for the evening, a gala performance of Glinka's patriotic-heroic tragic opera «A Life for the Tsar». Although composed in the 1830s, it was the perfect opera for a Romanov Jubilee as the action takes place in 1612-1613 when Russia was still fighting Polish and Lithuanian invaders. It emphasizes the heroism of Ivan Susanin, a logger working in the forest near Kostroma, who sacrificed his life in order so the young Mikhail Feodorovich Romanov could live to be crowned Tsar of Russia. Whatever the truth in this story, Susanin became a Russian national hero and a symbol of Russian peasants' devotion to their tsar. Even children new about Susanin, as did an eight-year-old boy named Alexei Nikolaevich Romanov who played with a paper theater depicting the opera «A Life for the Tsar»:



«Жизнь за царя» (A Life for the Tsar), Paper theater that belonged to Nicholas II's children, 1904
(Courtesy of the Russian Academy of Education, Art and Pedagogical Toy Museum, Sergiev Posad)⁴⁵

In preparation for the Tercentenary the Tsarevich had written about Ivan Susanin heroism in his history exercises:⁴⁶

Before he was elected to reign Mikhail Feodorovich had lived with his mother in the village of Domnino [near Kostroma]. At that time a band of Poles was scouring about the countryside. They wanted to ruin Mikhail. The Poles wanted to get to the village, but they did not know the way. There was a thick forest around. So they demanded that the village elder show them the way. Ivan Susanin saw what they were after. He sent his son-in-law Sobinin to Domnino to warn Sister Martha [Mikhail's mother] of the danger. And he himself led the Poles through the forest. He brought them to a thicket in the very heart of the forest so that it was impossible to find a way out. Susanin stopped and said: "Nobody will get out of here". So the Poles sabered him to death ... but they, too, all perished.



« Life for the Tsar », Chromolithograph by V.V. Vasilev, 1886
(archive.gelos.ru/month/2007/sep2007/karti.html)

At the Mariinsky, a dazzling array of diplomats, officials and military officers in their richly embroidered uniforms with glittering decorations, and ladies and young women in splendid evening dresses covered with jewels, awaited the Imperial couple. The Parterre was occupied by members of the Senate, members of the State Council, Court officials and other high-ranking officials. Young Kamer-Page Gershelman recalled the bright picture composed by successive rows of colorful uniforms: the Senators in red, State Councillors in green and Court officials covered with gold. Tiers of boxes were filled with more colorful uniforms, those of the officers from various elite Guard regiments: the Chevaliers Gardes, Horse Guards and other Cuirassiers, Hussars and Lancers, along with various Infantry and Artillery regiments. In separate boxes, the Ladies in Waiting and the Maids of Honor, in their gold-ornated Court dresses, trains and *kokoshniki* tiaras, unchanged since the reign of Nicholas 1st, were scouring the audience through their lorgnettes. It was, wrote Gershelman years later, one of the most beautiful spectacle he saw in his entire life.⁴⁷

Their Majesties arrived with their Kamer-Pages and were met by the other members of the Imperial Family in the Lobby of the Main Imperial Box, as Prince Gavriil Konstantinovich recalled in his memoirs. As all the Romanovs could not fit in this central box, only the senior ones would sit with Their Majesties. The others would occupy the other Imperial Boxes on each side of the stage⁴⁸ (where all the grand-dukes usually went

anyway to get a better look at their favorite female singers and dancers). Some special guests of the Emperor were also in the side boxes: Their Highnesses the Khan of Khiva and the Emir of Bukhara, along with their retinue. All dressed in their bright-colored richly adorned silk *khalats*, they almost stole the show.

Along with his mother Maria Feodorovna, the Emperor, in the red and gold gala uniform of the Horse Guards, entered the Imperial Box first. Empress Alexandra, wearing a white velvet dress with the blue sash of the order of St Andrew across her breast and a parure of turquoises glowing in the light, followed on the arm of Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich. She appeared pale, her face expressionless. Her eyes seemed “fixed on some secret, inward thought that was certainly far from the crowded theater and the people who acclaimed her. Not once did a smile break the immobile somberness of her expression”.⁴⁹ Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna, in her white and pink Court dress with the silver-edged scarlet sash of the Order of St. Catherine, stood not far behind. The orchestra played and the choir sang the *Bozhe Tsarya Khrani!* («God Save the Tsar», the national anthem), which, at the crowd's request, was repeated several times and met with loud “hoorahs”. It was followed by a resounding ovation.⁵⁰



The Imperial Box at the Mariinsky Theater
Detail from a 1889 drawing by M. Zichy
(Courtesy: State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

But the rest of the evening did not go quite as well. The great Feodor Chaliapin, who was supposed to sing the leading role of Ivan Susanin, called in sick and had to be replaced: rumor had it he did not want to sing for the Romanovs.⁵¹ Then, at the end of Act I there was a stir in the Imperial Box. Next to it sat Meriel Buchanan, the daughter of the British Ambassador. She saw the fan of feathers the Empress was holding in one hand trembling convulsively, that a dull, unbecoming flush was stealing over her pallor, and she could almost hear the labored breathing which made the diamonds which covered the bodice of her gown rise and fall, flashing and trembling with a thousand uneasy sparks of light. It seemed to her this emotion or distress mastered her completely. Alexandra Feodorovna whispered a few words to her husband, rose and withdrew to the back of the box, to be seen no more that evening. She adds that a wave of resentment rippled over the theater.⁵² In fact she left the theater and went back to the Palace. The Emperor stayed until the end. In Act II, he watched his former mistress, prima ballerina assoluta Matilda Kheissinskaya, dance the mazurka along with Anna Pavlova.⁵³



Cover of the Program of the Gala at the Mariinsky Theater, February 22, 1913

Chromolithography by Levenson with an old Coat of Arms in the style used by Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich

On the bottom, two cartouches inscribed with dates according to the Byzantine Calendar:

left: «From the Creation of the Word 7421» (i.e. 1913) and right: «From the Creation of the World 7121» (i.e. 1613)⁵⁴

(In Iukhimenko, E.M. & Falaleeva, M.V., *Русский Парадный обед. Меню из коллекции Государственного Исторического Музея* [Russian Gala Dinner. Menus from the collection of the State History Museum], 2003, 71.)

During the entr'actes, everybody came out of their seats and boxes and went to the buffets in the Foyer to have a snack, a drink and, no doubt, some chit-chat. The Imperial Family too left their box with their Kamer-Pages close behind. The young Gershelman was so impressed by the two giant sentries, sailors from the Guard's Crew, who stood still at the doors of the Imperial Box, that he approached them. Based on his own height, he estimated these handsome fellows were more than two meters tall ! He also recalled being much less impressed by the singing: most artists, although famous, were getting old and their voices and looks had aged quite a lot. When old tenor Yakovlev missed a high note, he saw Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna grin with horror.⁵⁵

The opera ended with its usual triumphant Epilogue and, for the first time, the rule prohibiting a member of the Romanov dynasty to be depicted on stage was lifted. The famous singer Sobinov appeared in the mute role of Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich being acclaimed by his enthusiastic people to the chant of *Slav'sya* (Glory, glory to our Russian Tsar!) Although the singers and the crowd sang «God Save the Tsar» again at the end, according to some witnesses, the enthusiasm of the crowd of spectators seemed even more fake than the one of the singers and actors. Chief of the Court Ministry's Chancellery Mosolov found the evening dispiriting. That night he wrote to his father "I was at (...) 'the gala performance' (...). I inserted inverted commas because the

performance was not at all gala. The singers were vile and played without any enthusiasm. In general, no enthusiasm was evident anywhere. We clearly live in those times when faith, and love for the the tsar and fatherland have died out.”⁵⁶

In her memoirs Anna Vyrubova, came to the same conclusion, writing that the crowd greeted the performance with the usual tumult of applause and adulation but, for all that, she felt that there was in the brilliant audience little enthusiasm, little real loyalty. She saw a cloud over the whole celebration in St. Petersburg, and was almost sure the Empress shared the same impression.⁵⁷

Saturday, February 23, 1913: Yet more Receptions and a Grand Ball

At 12:30 PM both empresses were supposed to receive the ladies of the Court and of St. Petersburg at the Winter Palace for yet another «baisemain», but Alexandra was too tired to go. Her mother-in-law Maria Feodorovna went alone, no doubt enjoying having all eyes on her.



Left: Empress Maria Feodorovna, by Vladimir Makovsky, 1912
(Courtesy: State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg)



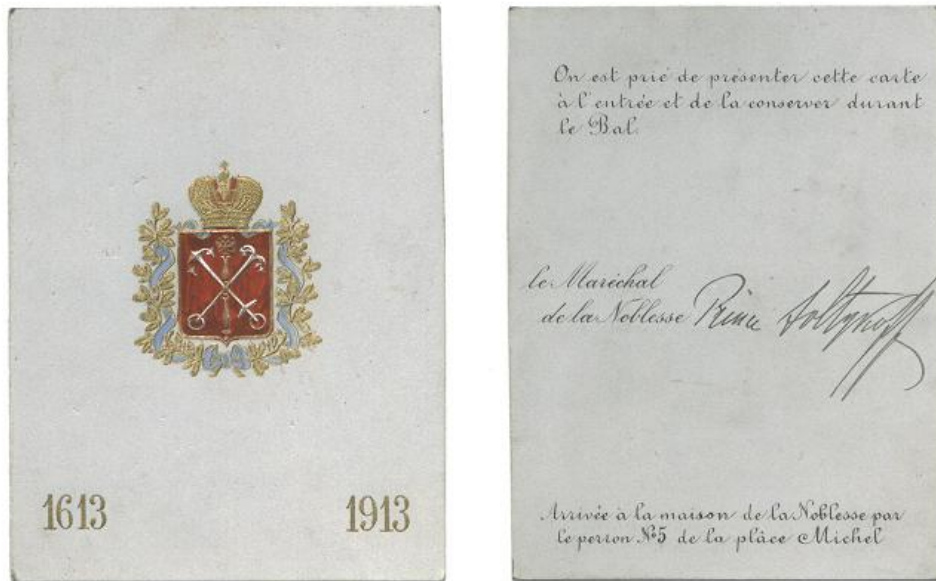
Ladies of the Court. Drawing by Grand Duchess Tatiana Nikolaevna
(www.freewebs.com/romanovsisters/mementos.htm)

Meanwhile, accompanied by his ministers, Nicholas II received the peasant elders along with representatives of rural establishments and various nationalities of the Empire, most of them in colorful traditional costumes. If newspaper reports are to be trusted, this time the Emperor paid attention to the peasantry by greeting them as “the representatives of Great Mother Russia” and declaring that “Our Russia grew strong from faith in God, and love of the tsar for the people, and the devotion of the Russian People to the Imperial Throne”. The eldest peasant thanked the Emperor for his kindness and prayed God to “bless the Tsar and Tsarevich”. Then he added, “And believe, Sovereign, that our life is for You. Believe that at Your first summons we stand as a firm wall and give our lives for You, Tsar, like Ivan Susanin, for Your valuable life, for Your family, for the glory of the native land.” Nicholas kissed him and left to shouts of “Hoorah!” and the strains of *Bozhe Tsarya Khrani!* played by the Preobrazhensky Guards' Band. They were treated to a formal Lunch, served in the «Lower Corridor» (Rastrelli Gallery): on the menu, traditional fare such as *borscht*, *pirogi*, chicken and dessert.⁵⁸

Little did they know that, in July 1914, from the same palace, he would summon them to give their lives “for the Tsar and the Fatherland”... by the hundreds of thousands.

After supper, Nicholas II, along with his wife and Olga, got ready for the Gala Ball given by the aristocracy of the Capital. It was to be the only ball of the festivities. At 9:15 PM they left for the Assembly of the St. Petersburg Nobility on Mikhailovsky Square. It was their first appearance at a ball since the famous Masquerade Pageant of 1903.

Nicholas II chose to wear the very elegant Ball Dress uniform of His Own Guards' Hussars, with its white beaver trimmed pelisse, as did his «comrades» from the same regiment, Boris (Vladimirovich) and «Nikolasha» (Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, under whose command «Nicky» had served in the regiment while Heir to the Throne). His wife Alexandra wore a white and silver gown with a magnificent diamond tiara on her fair hair and cascades of diamonds rippling over her shoulders. Olga, who was making her debut, was looking forward to have a good time and chose a simple but elegant and modern looking pale pink gown with a single string of pearls adorning her neck, her hair bound with a silver ribbon.⁵⁹



Invitation Cover and Entrance Card for the Ball, signed by Prince Saltykov
(<http://www.angelfire.com/pa/ImperialRussian/royalty/russia/1913.html>)

Awaiting the arrival of the Imperial party in the imposing Hall of Columns, ablaze with hundreds of electric light bulbs, was a huge crowd of aristocrats, officials in richly embroidered costumes, Guards' officers in colorful uniforms and ladies in magnificent evening dresses with glittering jewels, beautiful fans and purses with their «carnet de bal» in which they, no doubt, hoped to inscribe the names of a few grand dukes.



Queen Mary's Fan – Henrik Wigström, c. 1912
(Courtesy Royal Collection Trust /HM Queen Elizabeth II)



Carnet de bal – Henrik Wigström, 1908
(Courtesy Christie's London)



Ode in Honor of the 300th Anniversary of the House of Romanov,
 « N. Boborykin. Music by Cui. Art by N. Samokish »
 Chromolithography and gold paint, 75 x 35 cm, 1913
 (ohsoromanov.tumblr.com/tagged/tercentenary)

Along one wall, a huge red velvet covered box had been installed for the Imperial Family. Their Majesties were met by the Grand Marshal of the Nobility of St. Petersburg, His Serene Highness Prince Ivan Nikolaevich Saltykov, Member of the State Council, who proudly wore the new epaulettes and aiguillettes of Major-General attached to His Majesty's Suite he had received from Nicholas II on the same morning. In the beautiful Great Hall of Columns he presented Their Majesties with the *khleb-sol*, the traditional symbol of Russian hospitality: over a richly embroidered towel, a silver plate with a round bread and a silver salt cellar on top. He made the expected speech expressing loyalty to his imperial guest of honor and stated that “the St. Petersburg Nobility firmly believes that Russia's future prosperity can only be achieved through close unity between its People and its Autocratic Tsar.”

Before the Imperial Anthem, the orchestra and choir played a new «Cantata for the 300th Anniversary of the House of Romanov», composed by Cesar Cui with words by N. Boborykin (see photo at the left).⁶⁰

After this prelude, everybody lined up according to Court etiquette for the traditional «Polonaise» from Glinka's opera «Life for the Tsar»: the Emperor gave is arm to Madame Somov, behind him came Empress Maria⁶¹ with their host Prince Saltykov, then Empress Alexandra with the Marshal of the Nobility for the District of St. Petersburg, Master of the Court Sergei M. Somov.⁶² A procession of grand dukes with ladies of the nobility followed in executing the solemn polonaise, more a promenade around the ballroom than a dance really, moving slowly round the room and changing partners at the end of each round.

After the Polonaise, “the dancing began and Olga danced a lot!”⁶³. She had the honor of opening the ball, waltzing with Prince Saltykov. Everyone speculated as to which grand duke she would eventually marry and commented on her charm. With her fair hair shining like burnished gold, blue eyes sparkling, she danced every dance with obvious enjoyment.⁶⁴ There were a number of quadrilles, mazurkas, and waltzes.

«To the Sound of the Waltz»



A Ball in the 1910s by modern Russian artist Vladimir Pervuninsky
(Nicholas II can be seen at the right)

(<http://s7.postimg.org/toupyslez/000028.jpg>)

As Kamer-Page Alexander Gershelman recalls in his memoirs, a number of cotillions were also performed with fresh flowers imported by train from the French Riviera: he remembers how beautiful the cotillions looked with the dancers holding white, red and pink flowers in their hands, spreading their fragrances around the dance hall. Commenting on the ball, he writes that all the members of the Imperial Family conducted themselves with much tact that evening and participated in all dances, mingling with the crowd. He adds that most grand duchesses danced during the evening, the younger unmarried ones dancing quite a lot, often with officers from various Guards' regiments who had been selected for their dancing skills.

Gershelman tactfully fails to mention that, as usual, Alexandra Feodorovna, left after a short while. "She looked distant, haggard, and left early, inflicting more wounded feelings" reported another witness. Having worked herself into a hysterical frenzy, she barely managed to attract the attention of the Emperor who was talking at the other end of the room. He quickly led her away, preventing her from fainting in public, but once out of view, she collapsed in his arms.⁶⁵

Many in the crowd resented Their Majesty's failure to give their own Court Ball. Rumor had it Alexandra Feodorovna did not want any as she hated them but the merriment went on, almost without another hitch. The young Gershelman explains that, as the ball was not a Court function, the duties of the Kamer-Pages were less strenuous than at the Palace. For instance, they did not have to carry the long train of Court dresses as their grand duchesses did not wear any (as they are too cumbersome to dance with) so, as they were not allowed to dance, the Pages spent most of their time standing behind columns waiting for the commands of the ladies.

They had to remain vigilant though, as a potentially embarrassing incident demonstrated: during the evening, Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna Sr., who was sitting in an armchair chatting with people around her, was startled by something happening in the Hall and, as if wanting to check out what was going on, suddenly stood up. Her Page, Prince Barclay de Tolly-Weirman, thinking she wanted to leave, pulled her chair away from her. But the Grand Duchess began to sit down instead. Her Page, realizing she was not leaving, quickly pushed the chair back towards her and she barely managed to land on its edge. She turned towards Prince Barclay: frowning, she scolded him in French with a "Vous êtes fou?!" (You're crazy?!) Little did she know that if her Page had not reacted instantly, she would have landed on the floor! Red-faced, poor Barclay whispered to Gershelman: "Fou, that's a bit much!"⁶⁶

As Princess Vera Galitzine wrote, the ball was magnificent, the most beautiful celebration – and the last one – she ever saw. That evening, Princess Irina Alexandrovna who looked “charming” made her debut, with her suitor, the young Prince Felix Yusupov, in tow.⁶⁷ Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna was also enjoying herself immensely. In her diary she wrote: “I danced a lot – it was so much fun. A ton of people. (...) It was so beautiful. I danced a quadrille with Zinoviev, a mazurka – with Oleg K, and other dances with a lot of officers. My first ball.”⁶⁸ She could have danced all night but her father decided to leave at a quarter to midnight and, as Cinderella, she had to go, before the supper (*vechernyi stol*) thus upsetting a lot of people.

Here is a photo of the quite extraordinary painting depicting the ball, of one the last of Imperial Russia. It is by Dmitry Kardovsky and it took two years to finish. It is not huge (89 x 133 cm) but it is so precise that everybody who was “somebody” can clearly be identified. The scene looks like a tableau vivant or one of those Victorian photomontage still in vogue at that time, as almost everybody is facing the spectators so they can be recognized. Looking at us, as for a photo shoot, frozen in time, the crowd of onlookers and dancers who just started to waltz around, a few moments after Olga opened the Ball with Prince Saltykov.



“Ball at the Petersburg Assembly of Nobility, 23rd February 1913”, Dmitry N. Kardovsky, 1915
(Courtesy State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

Olga seems to be the real star of the evening as the artist placed her in the centre of the painting, at the forefront, with some other young Romanovs waltzing away not far from her. The artist might have wanted to show that the Romanov dynasty would still be around for a long while. This would explain why he chose to depict the most important guests, the older generation of Romanovs, at the back of the scene. Oddly enough, they look isolated in their box, petrified as statues, impotent witnesses to a world changing under their eyes.

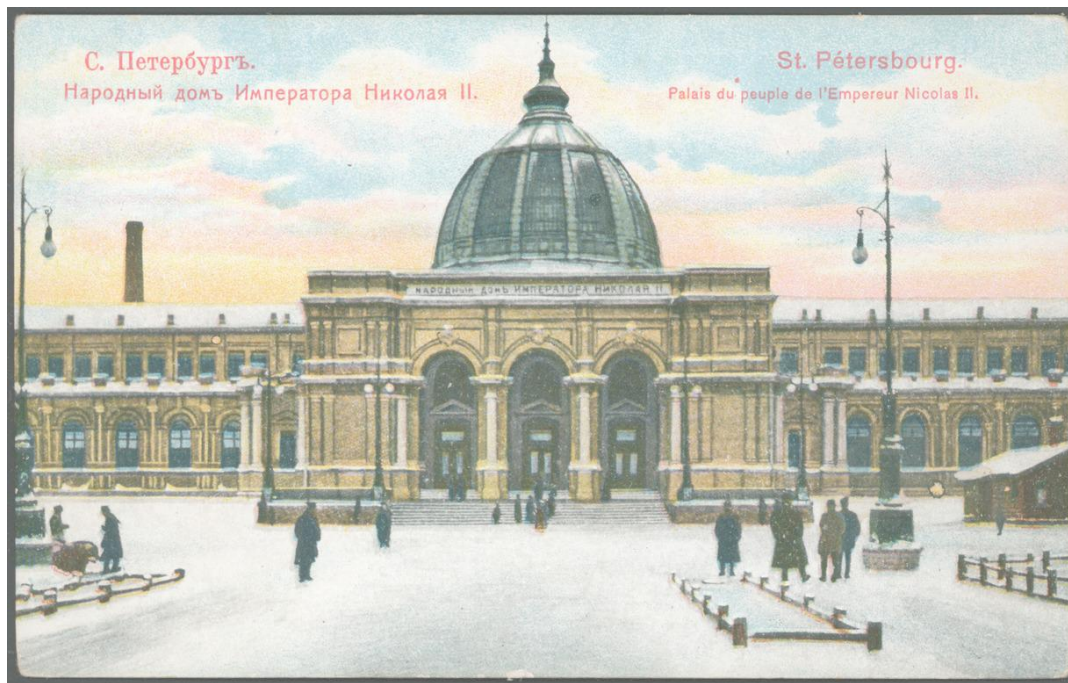
Long after that evening, Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna (Nicholas II's sister) would say: "I had an odd feeling that though we were carrying on as we had done for centuries, some new and terrifying conditions of life were being formed by forces utterly beyond our control".⁶⁹ With the whirlwind of dancers circling around them, the older Romanovs, encaged in their box like an endangered species at a zoo, look like the eye of the storm that was soon to sweep Imperial Russia away. Unknowingly, Kardovsky had painted the backdrop for the swan song of the Romanov dynasty...

Sunday, February 24, 1913: From the People's Palace to the Winter Palace

The last day of the Tercentenary festivities began with the Sunday liturgy. At 11:00 PM, on the way to church, the staff from the Court Stables and the suburban Imperial Palaces presented the Emperor with icons and the *khleb-sol* plate of bread and salt.

The Tercentenary Committee had planned some festivals for the «lower classes» of St. Petersburg inhabitants to be held throughout the week, but had sought to avoid large concentrations of people which might encourage political demonstrations. To avoid a repeat of the Khodynka catastrophe (at Nicholas II's coronation), public distribution of free food or souvenirs was prohibited. Instead, meals were served in people's cafeterias and tea with sugar in lodging houses. So the authorities organized subdued gatherings, under heavy security, at six sites far from the center, such as the Ekaterinhof Park and the Volkovo Airfield, where entertainment with plays, panoramas, and magic lantern pictures from the history of the Romanov dynasty would be provided. In the evening there would be fireworks.⁷⁰

After lunch, the Emperor went to one of these sites, the Nicholas II's People's Palace (*Narodny Dom Imperatora Nikolaya II*)⁷¹ where 4,500 people had gathered in two theaters to watch free entrance productions of «A Life for the Tsar» and a historical play about the accession to the throne by the Romanovs.



Nicholas II's People Palace, circa 1910
(humus.livejournal.com/2790123.html)



The Narodny Dom decorated for the visit of the Emperor, February 24, 1913
 (humus.livejournal.com/2790123.html)



Прийздъ Его Величества Государя Императора къ Народному дому 24-го февраля.

<http://oldsp.ru>

Emperor Nicholas II and Minister of the Imperial Court Baron Fredericksz arriving at the People's Palace
 Photo taken by K. Bulla on February 24, 1913, published in *Iskry* on March 3, 1913.
 (oldsp.ru)

The Emperor sat in each theater for one of the acts, and during the entr'acte spoke with members of the public: students from various educational establishments. He then returned to the Winter Palace at 2:45 PM.⁷²



Nicholas II leaving the People's Palace, February 24, 1913
(oldsp.ru)

In the evening all the members of the Imperial Family, in Court Dresses or uniforms, gathered in the Malachite Room to get ready for the last event of the St. Petersburg Tercentenary celebrations, a Court Procession called *Bolshoi Vykhod* («Grand Sortie»), followed by a Gala Banquet held for the upper ranks of the State, the Church, the Military along with the Marshals of Nobility.



Kamer Page
A. Gershelman
1912-1913



The Malachite Hall (private Reception Room of the Imperial Family)
Watercolor by Constantine Ukhtomsky, 1865
(Courtesy State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)



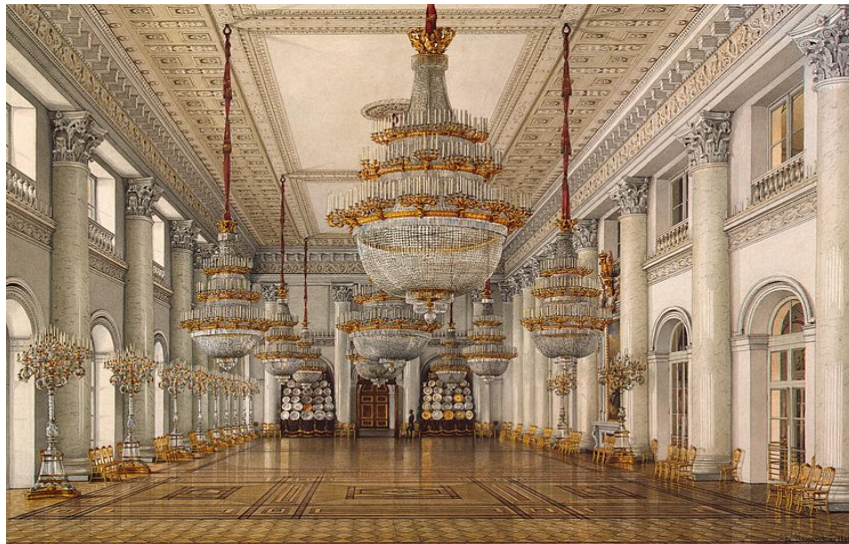
Grand Duchess
Olga Nikolaevna
1913

At 7:00 PM the Grand Master of Ceremonies struck the floor three times with his ivory staff, and announced the entrance of Their Imperial Majesties. Two huge «Court Negroes» in exotic costumes opened the doors and, behind Their Majesties, as Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna put it, all the grand dukes and grand duchesses «trooped in, two by two, just like a team of well-groomed, well-trained poodles to parade in front of a crowd at some fair».⁷³



Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna in Court Dress
Photo signed in 1908 but probably taken in 1906
(<http://allday2.com/index.php?newsid=17812>)

That evening the doors opened to a crowd one could indeed have met at a country fair. As the Imperial Cortège began its solemn procession through the State rooms of the Neva Enfilade and entered the Nicholas Hall, it encountered some of the 1,300 members of right-wing monarchists organizations – most of them peasants – who were lining the rooms the Great Procession would go through.⁷⁴ They greeted their *Gosudar* (Sovereign) by shouts of “Hoorah!” and the singing of «God Save the Tsar!». The muzhiks returned to their villages their eyes and heads filled with unforgettable memories!⁷⁵



The Nicholas Hall (the largest in the Winter Palace)
Watercolor by Constantine Ukhtomsky, 1862
(Courtesy State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

The St. George's Hall (Large Throne Room):



Watercolor by Konstantin Ukhtomsky, 1862
(Courtesy State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

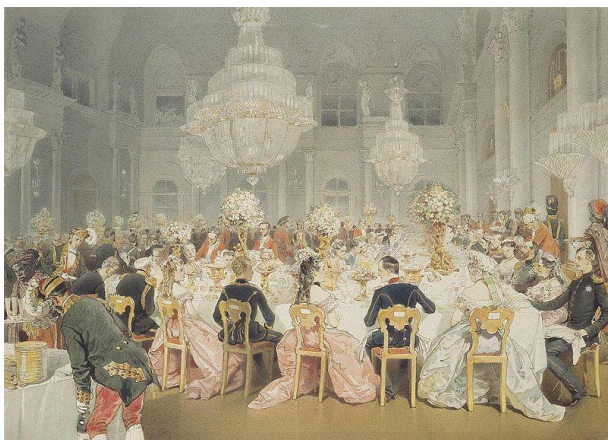
Two of the other rooms used for the Banquet:



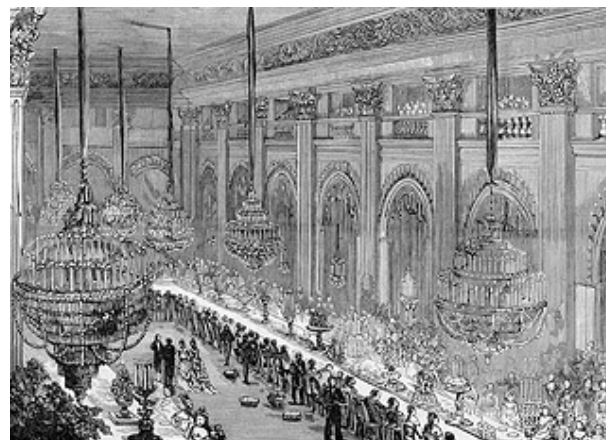
The War Gallery of 1812-Hau,1862
(State Hermitage Museum)



The Armorial Hall - Watercolor by Edward Hau, 1863
(State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)



Dinner at the Winter Palace, 1873
Zichy (Hermitage Museum)



A Banquet in the Nicholas Hall circa 1874
(Wikipedia)



Epilogue

On April 14, 1913, seven weeks after the end of the St. Petersburg celebrations, the Imperial Family, as all Orthodox believers, celebrated the great feast of *Paskha*, the Russian Easter. As usual Fabergé had delivered two of his extraordinary Easter eggs. The first one, intended for the Emperor's mother, was a beautiful egg announcing Spring. The other one, for Empress Alexandra, was a special egg commemorating the Tercentenary of the Romanov Dynasty.

The Winter Egg presented to Maria Feodorovna (Private collection)



Fabergé, workshop of Albert Holmstöm, St. Petersburg, 1913, designed by Alma Pihl
(<http://viola.bz/carl-faberges-masterpieces/>)

This remarkable egg is made of carved Siberian rock crystal as thin as glass embellished with engravings on the interior to simulate ice crystals, and ornamented with platinum and diamonds, to resemble frost. The egg rests on a detachable rock-crystal base designed as a block of melting ice. The surprise is a platinum Easter basket of exuberant wood anemones made from white quartz, nephrite, gold and garnets, which emerge from moss made of green gold. The egg was the most expensive ever made by Fabergé.

It was designed by the young and talented Alma Pihl, already famous for her series of diamond snowflakes. As Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm recently wrote, this egg “reflects the budding spring and awakening of nature. It was important for Alma that an Easter gift clearly express the idea of resurrection connected to the time of the year. In Northern Europe, Easter falls at a time when the snow and ice are gradually beginning to melt.” Also living in the North, I have to agree with Dr. Tillander-Godenhielm: “The Winter Egg depicts this time of the year superbly”⁸⁰ as we can almost see and hear the snow melting away to let those long awaited flowers appear.

Other sources: <http://mieks.com/eng/1913-Winter-Egg.htm>;

<http://www.jamestwinning.com/learn-more/the-double-eagle/art-of-the-double-eagle>.

Tercentenary Egg presented to Empress Alexandra
(State Armory Museum, Moscow)



Fabergé, workshop of Henrik Wigström, St. Petersburg, 1913
(Courtesy State Armory Chamber – Moscow Kremlin Museums)

(Additional photos: <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/4793461/post220449225/>)

This egg, as Roy Tomlin stated it, “is an incredible testament to the longevity of the Romanov dynasty” and is “decorated with Vasilii Zuiev’s watercolor portraits of all 18 rulers” framed with rose-cut diamond borders.⁸¹ They appear to be supported by gold double-headed eagles and topped by either the Cap of Monomakh worn by the tsars, or the Crown worn by the emperors, although they do not always match the ruler depicted. The height of this enameled translucent white egg on a guilloché gold field is 190 mm; its diameter, 8.5 cm. It rests on a pedestal in the form of a three-sided Imperial eagle often seen on various official buildings, a device used so the eagle would appear to be double-headed from all viewpoints. Supporting the pedestal is a circular gem-set purpurine base mounted in gold which is a miniature copy of the Russian State Shield used at coronations.

The top part of the egg opens to reveal its surprise: a revolving steel globe made of steel, varicolored gold for landmasses and dark blue enamel for oceans. It is divided in two sides, one representing a map of the Eastern hemisphere and Russia as it was in 1613, the other, as it looked in 1913 when the Russian Empire reached the peak of its expansion.



Mikhail Feodorovich
1613



Nicholas Alexandrovich
1913

Large diamonds are set at either end of this egg, the one on the top covering the dates 1613 and 1913, while the triangular diamond at the base covers the monogram of Empress Alexandra:



(<http://kraeved1147.ru/fabershe-yaytso300-let-pomanovym/>)



Alexander III (1881-1894)

For more information, see: <http://mieks.com/eng/1913-Romanov-Tercentenary-Egg.htm>
and www.alexanderpalace.org/palace/1913egg.html



One month later, in May 1913, the Imperial Family would embark on a Pilgrimage retracing the first Romanov tsar's voyage from Kostroma to Moscow, where he was to be crowned. But, this is another story...

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Notes

- 1 The official name of the capital of the Russian Empire, chosen by Tsar Peter the 1st in honor of his patron saint, was Saint Petersburg (old spelling: **Санктъ-Петербургъ** – Sankt-Peterburg). I will use the abbreviated form of St. Petersburg and sometimes Petersburg, as most Russians do. Inhabitants of the city also refer to it simply as “Piter”. When World War I started, Nicholas II changed the “German” sounding name of Sankt-Peterburg to the more Russian one of Petrograd («City of Peter»).
- 2 Old Style: all dates are given according to the Julian calendar used in Russia at that time. In the 1900s it was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. It was March 6, 1913, in the West on February 21 in Russia.
- 3 With the exception of emperors, first names and patronymics will usually be given in their Russian form.
- 4 Although the son of Nicholas II is usually referred to as “tsarevich” (son of a tsar), the official title of the Russian Heir to the Throne was “tsesarevich” (**цесаревич**), which I will generally use.
- 5 Bokhanov, Alexander et al., *The Romanovs, Love, power & tragedy*, trans. Lyudmila Xenofontova (1993), 217, 246.
- 6 Communication from Galina N. Korneva and Tatiana N. Cheboksarova, St. Petersburg, Russia.
- 7 Alexandre Spiridovitch, *Les dernières années de la cour de Tsarskoe Selo* (1928), 2:314-315; Anna Vyrubova, *Memories of the Russian Court* (1923), 98.
- 8 The Russian Church had no patriarch at the time. In 1721 Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate and replaced it by a Holy Synod of Bishops with the Emperor as Supreme Head of the Church. Gregory IV, Patriarch of Antioch, had been invited by Nicholas II to preside over the religious ceremonies of the Tercentenary.
- 9 Andrei Kvalin, «Поминайте правителей ваших» («Remember your Rulers»), http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2012/12/21/pominajte_pravitelej_vashih/; Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, *Дневники Императора Николая II* (*The Diaries of Nicholas II*), Shatsillo, K.F. ed. , 1991, Feb. 20, 1913; Olga Nikolaevna, Grand Duchess of Russia, *The Diary of Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaievna 1913*, ed. Raegan Baker, trans. Marina Petrov (2008), Feb. 21, 1913.
- 10 *Правительственный вестник* (*The Governmental Messenger*), Feb. 17, 1913.
- 11 Nicholas II, *Diary*, Feb. 21, 1913; Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:315.
- 12 Kvalin, *op. cit.*
- 13 M.V. Rodzianko, *Le règne de Raspoutine*, 1927, 105-106; Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of power: myth and ceremony in Russian monarchy*, 2:461.
- 14 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:316.
- 15 Miriam Kochan, *The Last Days of Imperial Russia*, (1976), 163-164.
- 16 The iconostasis was made of silver which had been looted by the French and taken back by the Russians during the 1812 War. The silver was presented to the Cathedral by Field-Marshal Prince Kutuzov (Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army who was later buried in the Cathedral). One of the most venerated icon in Russia, the «Miracle Working Icon of the Mother of God of Kazan» is encased in the left part of the iconostasis.
- 17 Gavriil Konstantinovich, Prince of Russia, *В мраморном дворце. Из хроники нашей семьи* (*At the Marble Palace; from chronicles of our family*), 1955, ch. 20: <http://www.rummuseum.ru/portal/node/1584>
- 18 Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:462.
- 19 Translation of these excerpts are from Bokhanov and Wortman, *op.cit.*
- 20 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 346; Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:461.
- 21 Nicholas II, *op. cit.*, Feb. 21, 1913; Spiridovitch, *op.cit.*, 2:345-346.
- 22 V. Dzhunkovsky, *Воспоминания* (*Memoirs*), (1997), 2:18-19; Iulia V. Kudrina, *Императрица Мария Феодоровна Романова* (*Empress Maria Feodorovna Romanova*), (2001), 138.

- 23 *Невский Проспект. История Санкт-Петербурга в фотографиях. Конец XIX - начало XX века (Nevsky Prospekt. History of St. Petersburg in photos. End of XIXth - early XXth century)*, (2003), n.p.
- 24 А «Kamer-page», literally «Page of the Chamber», (Камер-паж) was as a cadet from the senior classes of the elite Corps of Pages. During Court ceremonies, these Pages served as personal attendants to Their Majesties or to other members of the Imperial Family, according to their marks at school. It took two Pages to carry the empresses' long and heavy Court trains.
- 25 Nowadays, at the same place where Nicholas II stood, and Alexei sat a hundred years ago, the *Tsarskoe Mesto* has been reconstructed, but without its inscription. There are no more velvet drapes but a large icon of the “Saints Martyrs Tsar Nicholas and Tsarevich Alexei” both standing in front of God for Eternity.
- 26 Greg King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, (2006), 393-394; Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:462.
- 27 Virginia Cowles, *The Last Tsar*, (1977), 136; Count Paul Vassili (pseud. of Princess Catherine Radziwill), *Behind the Veil at the Russian Court*, (1913), 404.
- 28 Vyubova, *op. cit.*, 98.
- 29 Kvalin, *op. cit.*
- 30 «Правительственный вестник» (*The Governmental Messenger*), Feb 23, 1913.
- 31 Spiridovitch, *op.cit.*, 2:316.
- 32 Kvalin, *op. cit.*; «Санкт-Петербургские ведомости» (*St. Petersburg Bulletin*), Feb. 23, 1913; Wikipedia.
- 33 Olga Nikolaevna, *op. cit.*, Feb. 21, 1913.
- 34 See Roy Tomlin «Celebrating the Romanov Tercentenary with Fabergé Imperial Presentation Gifts: A Review», *Fabergé Research Newsletter*, Fall 2012)
- 35 Gavriil Konstantinovich, *op.cit.*
- 36 Gavriil Konstantinovich, *op.cit.*; Alexander Gershelman (von Hoerschelmann), «Моя служба камер-пажем при дворе Императора Николая II» (My Service as Page of the Chamber at the Court of Nicholas II), (1998): <http://www.xxl3.ru/kadeti/pazheski.htm#gershelman>
- 37 Rodzianko, *op. cit.*, 103-106.
- 38 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:317; Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:463-464.
- 39 Kudrina, *op. cit.*, 138; Meriel Buchanan, *Dissolution of an Empire*, (1932), 41.
- 40 Gershelman, *op. cit.*
- 41 I.I. Tolstoi, cited by Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:464.
- 42 Vyubova, *op. cit.*, 99.
- 43 Galina Ulyanova, «Двухсотлетие Петербурга, Полтава, Бородино, Трехсотлетие Дома Романовых» (Bicentennial of Petersburg, Poltava, Borodino, Tercentenary of the House of Romanov), from chap. XIV of her book *Национальные торжества (National Celebrations)*, (2002): http://galinaulianova.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90%3Atrista-let&catid=38%3Abooks&Itemid=60&lang=ru#g04
- 44 Nicholas II, *op. cit.*, Feb. 21, 1913.
- 45 Paper theater «Зизнь за Цария» (A Life for the Tsar), Russian Academy of Education, Art and Pedagogical Toy Museum, Sergiev Posad; photos from the exhibition catalogue *На детской половине. Детство в царском доме. ОТМА и Алексей (In the children's quarters. Childhood in the tsar's home. OTMA and Alexei)*, 2000, 74-75.
- 46 Bokhanov, *op. cit.*, 244.
- 47 Gershelman, *op. cit.*
- 48 Gavriil Konstantinovich, *op. cit.*
- 49 Buchanan, *op. cit.*, 36-37.

- 50 Gavriil Konstantinovich, *op. cit.*; Irina Lukyanova, «Царственная пышность» (Royal Splendors), Фонд Русский мир (Russkiy Mir Foundation), 03-07-2013:
<http://www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/ru/magazines/archive/2013/03/article0006.html>
- 51 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:318.
- 52 Buchanan, *op. cit.*, 36-37.
- 53 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:318.
- 54 Dates are given according to the old Byzantine «Era of the World» Calendar in use in Russia until 1700. Year one of the Creation of the Universe being September 1, 5509 BC to August 31, 5508 BC, adding 5508 + 1613 years = 7721. As in Latin, the Slavonic language used letters instead of numbers.
- 55 Gershelman, *op. cit.*
- 56 A.A. Mosolov, cited in Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:464.
- 57 Vyrubova, *op. cit.*, 99.
- 58 *Московские Ведомости* (*The Moscow Bulletin*), Feb. 24, 1913. Cited in Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:465.
- 59 King, *op. cit.*, 396-397; Kochan, *op. cit.*, 165.
- 60 A rendition of Cesar Cui's Cantata Op.89 can be listened to (and downloaded) here: <http://classic-online.ru/ru/production/37180>
- 61 According to Russian Court Etiquette, a Dowager Empress had precedence over the wife of the ruling Sovereign.
- 62 Ulyanova, *op. cit.*
- 63 Nicholas II, *op. cit.*, Feb. 22, 1913.
- 64 Kochan, *op. cit.*, 165.
- 65 King, *op. cit.*, 397.
- 66 Gershelman, *op. cit.*
- 67 Princess Vera Galitzine, *Réminiscences d'une émigrée*, (1925), 199.
- 68 Olga Nikolaevna, *op. cit.*, Feb. 22, 1913.
- 69 Ian Vorres, *The Last Grand Duchess* (2001), 122.
- 70 Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:465-466 ; Ulianova, *op.cit.*
- 71 Built in the Alexander Park (behind the Peter-and-Paul Fortress), a resort popular with the «lower classes» of Petersburg, the *Narodny Dom* was a huge cultural and recreational center which provided low-cost entertainment and enlightenment for the less-fortunate population of the capital. It opened in 1900 with an exhibition pavilion and a building housing a theater and a concert hall. In 1911 a 4,000-seat opera house was added to this complex named after Nicholas II.
- 72 Nicholas II, *op. cit.*, Feb. 24, 1913.
- 73 Vorres, *op. cit.*, 90.
- 74 The Imperial Cortege of Romanovs, accompanied by their Pages of the Chamber, was preceded by the principal dignitaries of the Court. Minister of Imperial Court Fredericksz walked alone, on the right of the Tsar and a few steps behind him, followed by the three aide-de-camps to the Emperor on duty that day. Behind the members of the Imperial Family walking in pairs, came the ladies of the Court, and other Court and military dignitaries. The Procession went from the Malachite Room through the «Neva Enfilade»: the Concert Hall, Nicholas Hall and Great Antechamber, then turned right into the Eastern Enfilade, passing through the Field-Marsals' Room, the Small (Peter the Great's) Throne Room and the Armorial Room, turned left in the 1812 Gallery and finally entered the Great (St. George's) Throne Room.
- 75 Spiridovitch, *op. cit.*, 2:317.

- 76 Wortman, *op. cit.*, 2:465.
- 77 Galina Ulyanova, *op. cit.*
- 78 Olga Nikolaevna, *op. cit.*, Feb. 24, 1913.
- 79 Nicholas II, *op. cit.*, Feb. 24, 1913.
- 80 Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm, *Jewels from Imperial St. Petersburg*, (2012), 249-250.
- 81 Roy Tomlin, «Celebrating the Romanov Tercentenary with Fabergé Imperial Presentation Gifts: A Review», *Fabergé Research Newsletter*, Fall 2012: www.fabergeresearch.com/downloads/fall2012featurestory.pdf