

Nicholas II coronation

crowded with representatives of countries from all over the world. Logan notes that "every European crown was represented, every petty principality, every republic."⁶⁵ Kate Koon mentioned the Persians, Turks, Bokharans, and Koreans there, all of whom formed the "most interesting crowd imaginable," whereas Davis described the Japanese, German, Italian, Hungarians, and Indians present.⁶⁶ However, the most interesting foreigner in the crowd, as recorded in these sources, was Li Hung Chang, the wealthiest man in the world. Both Koon and Logan considered him the most distinguished foreign guest present at the coronation.⁶⁷

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Foreigners had begun to play an even more important role in the Russian economy since the country engaged in wide-scale industrialization. Foreign investment rose from 100 million rubles in 1880 to 200 million in 1890 and to over 900 million in 1900.⁶⁸ These investments, especially those of French businessmen, provided the necessary capital to fuel Russia's industrial development. Led by Ivan Vyshnegradskii, who became Minister of Finance under Alexander III in 1887, Russia also turned to foreign nations to provide a market for goods. Vyshnegradskii expected the completion of the Trans-Siberian railroad to result in the expansion of trade with the Far East. While Vyshnegradskii waited for the railroads' completion, he resorted to exporting grain to the West. Although these massive exports of grain led to the famine of 1891, Vyshnegradskii felt the country had no option; grain was the only Russian good that had a place in the highly developed markets of Western Europe.⁶⁹

In addition to the changes in Russia's economic relationship with foreigners in the 1880s and 1890s, Russia's diplomatic relationships with foreign nations also changed. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia formed an alliance in the 1880s, but by 1890 the ties between these three nations had been severed. Russia's isolation worsened as it experienced tension with Great Britain over Russian expansion into Central Asia, which Britain considered a threat to India. In response to its hostile relationship with Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Great Britain, Russia turned to France with the Franco-Russian agreement in the early 1890s. The alliance ensured military support for either nation if attacked by Germany. By the time of Nicholas's coronation, Russia and France had developed close economic and political ties.⁷⁰

The presence of foreign dignitaries reflected Russia's economic interests and foreign policy as well as the international significance of the coronation. The attendance of Li Hung Chang, for instance, signified Russia's interest in the East. Moreover, Li Hung Chang's presence indicated that Nicholas's message about the legitimacy of his tsardom extended beyond Russia's borders into every realm of the world in the same manner that Russia's economic conditions and political

⁶⁵Logan 61.

⁶⁶Koon 22, 17.

⁶⁷Koon 21, Logan 157.

⁶⁸Riasanovsky 424.

⁶⁹W. Bruce Lincoln, *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War* (New York: The Dial Press, 1983) 16-18.

⁷⁰Riasanovsky 399-400.

position had an impact on an international scale. The foreigners' acceptance of Nicholas's legitimacy was a pillar supporting Russian autocracy just as foreign nations played a role in the Russian economy and politics.

Furthermore, Nicholas included foreigners in his coronation celebrations to make his message of legitimacy more effective. The foreigners' presence signified that the coronation was an event important enough for them to make the long and somewhat difficult trip to Russia and thus, it represented support for Nicholas's position as Tsar and Russia's position in the world. In fact, the second volume of Nicholas's coronation album included pictures of the foreign delegations from Prussia, Spain, China, Korea, Monaco, Luxembourg, Portugal, Mexico, the Netherlands, Persia, Serbia, Siam, the United States, France, and Japan among others who attended the celebrations. The album also contains an extensive and impressive list of the countries represented. Foreigners actively took part in many of the coronation events, such as the Tsar's procession into Moscow and the Imperial feast immediately following the coronation. These events, both of which are recounted in all the memoirs examined here, were designed to demonstrate Russian society's discipline, order, and wealth to foreigners, as well as to everyone else present.

Foreigners' Impressions of Moscow's Procession, Illuminations, and Decorations

The tsars, as did other European monarchs, modeled the coronation entry on that of Louis XIV into Reims in 1654.⁷¹ Therefore, the Europeans present at Nicholas's coronation recognized this element of Nicholas's ceremony. Although the foreigners may not have been aware of the evolution of the elements and significance of the coronation entry, they associated it with the strength and might of European monarchs and thus also to their claims to legitimacy. By including a procession beginning in Petrovsky Park, traversing along the length of Tverskaya Street, and ending in the Kremlin, Nicholas II put himself in the same political realm as European monarchs since Louis XIV.⁷²

Logan provides the most detailed account of the procession that took place on 9 May (21 May). He recalled that three guns fired to signify that Nicholas had mounted his snow-white horse and that the coronation entry was about to begin. Police officers and Nicholas's bodyguards led the procession, followed by Cossacks wearing scarlet tunics with silver epaulettes, blue pants tucked into black leather boots, and small, round black and silver caps. Then Asiatic princes from the parts of central Asia conquered by Russia came on horses. The next group of people consisted of more Cossacks representing the regions loyal to the Tsar and members of Moscow's nobility, after whom proceeded court footmen and courtiers, the imperial band, and the imperial huntsmen. Next came carriages carrying the two Grand Masters of the Coronation Ceremonies, the Arch Grand Master of the Court, twenty-four Gentlemen of the Chamber, twelve

⁷¹Wortman 18.

⁷²Peter II was the first Russian tsar to include a coronation entry in 1728.

Chamberlains, members of the foreign courts, the Marshal of the Court, and members of the council of the Empire.⁷³ Two regiments of the Royal Army appeared and finally Tsar Nicholas.

Logan admitted that the sight of Nicholas during this impressive entry into Moscow moved him. To describe his sentiments at that moment, Logan referred to Psalms 24:7, "Lift up your heads, O ye everlasting gates, and let the King of Glory come in!"⁷⁴ Like the King of Glory entering the heavenly gates of the Kremlin, Nicholas attempted to connect himself with divine power and the Savior. Just as Christians have faith in Jesus to protect them from the miseries of this world, many Russians had faith in the Tsar to protect them.

Even someone unfamiliar with Russian society, like Logan, recognized that the Tsar appeared like a savior during the coronation and acknowledged the power of such a depiction of the Tsar. He declared that it was impossible to say that

I am a republican; it will never do for me to display enthusiasm over a regal show.' No; the veriest socialist in the world—yes, even a deep-dyed Nihilist—would, as he glanced upon that youthful figure [of Nicholas II], have cast his theories to the wind and shouted, in spite of himself, 'Long Live the Emperor!'"⁷⁵

According to Logan, even a nihilist would have proclaimed the legitimacy of Tsar Nicholas after seeing him in the procession.

The radical spirit of nihilism took different forms after Alexander II's assassination, including in the movements of popularism and Marxism, and it persisted in the Russia of 1896. Logan's reference to nihilism reveals that radical groups were so well known as to be acknowledged by foreigners. Moreover, his insistence that even a nihilist would abandon his terrorist practices and embrace the tsar indicates the power of the image of the tsar depicted in the procession. According to Logan, the tsar in the procession was a tsar who would lead his enemies to abandon their arguments against him and to become his ardent supporters.

The coronation entry did not end with the Tsar. Kate Koon noted that Nicholas's ministers, generals, aides, dukes, and native and foreign princes surrounded him. More foreigners followed the princes, including representatives from every major nation but the United States and then the Dowager Empress and the Tsaritsa.⁷⁶ Finally, queens, grand duchesses, princesses, and legions of the Cuirassier Guards, the Lancers, and the Hussars composed the last group in the procession.

A coronation entry of this magnitude required attention to detail and a highly complex plan of organization; it represented order in a perfected form. Regardless of whether that order really existed, the coronation entry presented it

⁷³Gilbert and Phenix 62-63.

⁷⁴Gilbert and Phenix 63.

⁷⁵Gilbert and Phenix 64.

⁷⁶Koon 16. No reason for the absence of the United States was given.

as a part of the Russian way of life and foreigners such as Logan noticed and marveled at the order.⁷⁷

The order portrayed in the procession mirrored the image of Russia Nicholas hoped to present. By arranging his ministers, generals, and aides close to him, Nicholas revealed the importance of the tsar's advisors.⁷⁸ He placed them next to him in the parade to reflect his reliance on them. Rather than portraying Russia as a monarchy with the tsar standing alone separated from the rest of the entourage, the parade depicted the country as an oligarchy with the tsar surrounded by his closest advisors with whom he ruled Russia. The presence of the foreign princes represented that foreign nations affected Russian politics and that the tsar could not ignore the international realm. By placing the Dowager Empress and the Tsaritsa, two key figures in Nicholas's reign, at the end of the procession, Nicholas used the length of the parade to demonstrate the expansiveness of his power; Nicholas's tsardom stretched from him to his wife and mother and encompassed all of these parts, including his advisors, princes, foreigners, and soldiers.

Besides the order within the procession, the state of order maintained by the Russian guards despite the large crowd was thorough and extensive. Ninety-two thousand special citizen guards began to position themselves along the procession's route at 6 a.m. More soldiers came at 10 a. m. to provide another line of defense. Police took extreme measures to ensure Nicholas's protection from assassins. De Monte Alto, an anonymous resident of Moscow, offered a detailed description of these measures in an account of the coronation that contrasted with official reports. He wrote that police boarded up iron fire escape ladders on houses along the way in order to prevent possible assassins from climbing the ladders and throwing bombs at the tsar from the roof of a house.⁷⁹ The Russian government also sent approximately four thousand people suspected of suspicious activity out of Moscow. In short, the procession's organization and security were meticulous because disorder was feared.

Imagine the mass of soldiers, dukes, ministers, and princes each riding atop a beautiful, strong horse or in an extravagant carriage. The sight of those in the coronation entry with their colorful uniforms, glittering jewels, and gleaming badges of rank must have been breathtaking, yet it only mirrored the decorations of Moscow itself. In all the foreigners' accounts, one finds references to the great mix of colors in the city. Mary Hickley describes it as "so gala Moscow is a very feast of colour."⁸⁰ Kate Koon compared the candles covered with glass globes dotting the streets and the trees strung with rows of lights to paradise.⁸¹

Foreigners' accounts of the illuminations that followed the coronation also recounted a display of brilliant lights, described by Hickley as a "golden city in

⁷⁷Logan 70.

⁷⁸Rowland 359-383..

⁷⁹De Monte Alto 35-36.

⁸⁰Mary Hickley, *Gold, Glitter and Gloom: Recollections of the Coronation of Czar Nicholas II and Later Travels in Russia* (Privately published, 1997) 11.

⁸¹Koon 33.

another world."⁸² These lights served as an important medium for expressing the celebratory spirit that had captured Moscow during the coronation. Anyone could look at the lights and know that something extraordinary was occurring in the city; one did not have to be familiar with the history of the coronation, of the Kremlin, of the crown, or of Russia itself to understand the significance of the decorations and lights put up in honor of the event. The lights literally reflected the brilliance of the coronation ceremony—it was an event to be gazed upon and admired.

The presence of the decorations and lights also revealed much about Russian society. Kate Koon noticed that every home, the dilapidated as well as the pristine, put out decorations. With their flags, banners, and lights, residents of Moscow demonstrated their loyalty to Nicholas II. Koon concluded that "they [the decorations] could not help making the city very festive and the Czar feel that the people looked upon this as a great event for which they were willing to spend as much, and in many cases probably more than they could afford."⁸³

Many of the Russians living in Moscow, like workers in other parts of the country, made less than what experts considered a livable wage. They faced horrendous living conditions due to a housing shortage, widespread diseases such as cholera, typhus, and tuberculosis, and the social illness of alcoholism, prostitution, and the spread of syphilis. Although production output of heavy industries doubled or tripled between 1890-1900, the individual factory workers never saw these profits.⁸⁴ The money spent on decorations by the poor and destitute residents of Moscow demonstrated the priority these people placed on expressing their support for the tsar.

The individual residents of Moscow were not the only ones to spend a lot of money on the coronation; the Russian government allotted 110 million rubles in its treasury for the coronation.⁸⁵ This sum was substantial, especially considering the conditions of the factory workers and of the peasants who formed over 80% of the population at the time of Nicholas's coronation.⁸⁶ Yet Nicholas relied on the devotion of the Russian people to lead them to make sacrifices for their tsar. Logan's encounter with a merchant in Moscow exposes the extent of this devotion. When asked how much the decorations cost the city of Moscow, the merchant replied "It does not matter, we have placed no limitation on the expense; we are rich enough to pay the bill whatever it is, and are more than willing."⁸⁷

Logan was especially impressed with Russia and found that his visit there disproved many of his preconceived notions about the country and its people. Based upon his afore-mentioned remark about nihilism, Logan knew of the growing radical movement in Russia that threatened the Russian autocracy and all it represented. Thus, he expressed surprise at the order and the discipline of the

⁸²Hickley 25.

⁸³Koon 14.

⁸⁴Lincoln 106-107.

⁸⁵Gilbert and Phenix 7.

⁸⁶Lincoln 35.

⁸⁷Logan 90.

people displayed in the coronation and concluded "I have found upon personal observation that many of the gruesome stories I had read of Russian life were either manufactured out of 'whole cloth,' or exaggerations of such magnitude that one would scarcely recognize the original."⁸⁸

After making these observations about the Russian people, Logan developed a new respect for them and especially for Tsar Nicholas. The coronation convinced Logan of Nicholas's legitimacy with its grand procession into Moscow comparable, according to him, to the entry of Antony and Cleopatra into Alexandria, with the magnificence of the Dormition Cathedral and its powers to protect and guide Holy Russia, the spectacular sight of Nicholas's crowning, and the brilliant illuminations that followed.⁸⁹

The Imperial Feast and General Impressions

The sight of the procession, the crowning, and the illuminations dazzled Logan and the other foreigners, whereas the imperial feast astonished their senses of taste and smell. According to Logan, the coronation banquet served eighteen hundred guests with forty-five hundred servants, all of whom served the Tsar regularly.⁹⁰ The fact that there were almost three servants for every guest speaks to the tedious attention given to those who received invitations. The Imperial Feast was an extravagant event with servants dressed in gold trimmed red coats and vests, white knee breeches, and white stockings, with scroll-like menus in Russian with inscriptions and illustrations related to the coronation, with gold dishes of French foods, and with an imperial band playing throughout the course of the dinner.⁹¹

The site of the coronation banquet in the Palace of Facets only added to its formality and extravagance. Built between 1487 and 1491 by Italian architects Marco Ruffo and Pietro Antonio Solario, the Palace of Facets was the first home made of stone for the Russian ruler.⁹² It served as a secular space where the tsar received important foreigners or celebrated significant events, such as Ivan the Terrible's conquest of Kazan or Peter I's victory over the Swedes at Poltava.⁹³

By holding the Imperial Feast at the Palace of Facets, Nicholas attempted to ascribe the significance of celebrations like those of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great to his coronation. Just as those celebrations in the Palace of Facets marked important events in Russian history, Nicholas hoped that his coronation banquet at this site would be remembered by posterity. According to Logan's memoirs, the Palace of Facets made a great impression on him with its remarkable architecture, frescoes, marble floors, and its history.⁹⁴

⁸⁸Logan 153.

⁸⁹Gilbert and Phenix 61.

⁹⁰Logan 85.

⁹¹Koon 26; Logan 88.

⁹²Wortman 25-26.

⁹³Rodimzeva, Rachmanov and Raimann 154; Freeman and Berton 21-22.

⁹⁴Logan 86.

Logan recorded not only his thoughts on the Palace of Facets, but also on those who inhabited the Palace for the banquet. Only the most distinguished guests received seats in the same room as the Tsar, Tsaritsa, and the Dowager Empress while the others moved on to the Hall of St. Vladimir. Those who sat with the Tsar included the Diplomatic Corps, the Holy Synod, the high clergy, the highest of court ladies, the Grand Marshall, and the Grand Master of Ceremonies, among other high officials of the court.⁹⁵ Before Nicholas sat on his throne in the Palace of Facets and sent the less prominent guests into the Hall of St. Vladimir, the royal procession paraded in front of all guests. First came Nicholas, Alexandra, the Dowager Empress, Empress Maria, and then the Queen and Prince of Naples, the Duchess of Edinburgh, the Crown Prince of Sweden, Duchess Elizabeth, and Grand Duke Alexei.⁹⁶ This procession of Russian and European nobility was intended to impress the guests with its display of wealth and royalty.

The coronation succeeded in convincing Kate Koon of Russia's opulence. After describing the Imperial Feast, Koon concluded, "so ended the greatest day of our lives, the one to be remembered for years. We all felt that we had seen the grandest sight that could possibly be imagined and that we were pretty lucky mortals to have had everything go so beautifully."⁹⁷ The beauty of the coronation struck Koon to the extent that she believed everything had gone perfectly. In fact, her words hint at the notion of the coronation's inclusion of an aspect of the heavenly realm. She previously thought such beauty was confined to the realm of the gods—a realm that excluded mortals.

After seeing the coronation, the Imperial Feast, and the illuminations, John Logan believed not only in Russia's potential for grandeur, but also in Nicholas's legitimacy despite his awareness of those who challenged that legitimacy. He summarizes his general perception of Russia, when he writes, "Russia is just now more prosperous and more peaceful than she has been for years. The restlessness of the radicals seems to be soothed, let us hope permanently. And let us wish that all friends of true reform may find in the reign of Nicholas II the completion of all that is noble in Russian history, as well as the dawn of an era of development and advancement."⁹⁸ Logan then expounds on his hopes for the reign of Nicholas. He went beyond accepting Nicholas's claims to legitimacy to expressing his support, as well as the support of the rest of the world, for Nicholas's reign. Logan declared that

Nicholas II begins his reign with the good wishes of the entire world. Monarchies, empires, and republics, alike, united to wish him *bon voyage* on his momentous journey. From Germany, from France, from the venerable Queen who has reigned longest in the history of England's throne, from our own President, and from many other rulers of nations, great and small, he received messages of warmest greeting; and above all, the great heart of the common

⁹⁵Logan 86-87.

⁹⁶Koon 28.

⁹⁷Koon 30.

⁹⁸Logan 85.

people with a single impulse felt that it has in the kindly, smiling face of this youthful Tsar the promise of a reign beneficent and just.⁹⁹

According to Logan, Nicholas had a great opportunity to bring prosperity and much needed justice to Russia and the countries of the world would support him in his efforts as Tsar.

In contrast to Kate Koon and John Logan, Mary Hickley maintained her reservations about Russia despite her attendance at the coronation celebrations. Even when praising the Kremlin, she failed to compliment it without criticizing. Rather than acknowledging its magnificence, she wrote "The Kremlin! Nobody can forget the impression made by the first sight of that unique, grotesque, savagely beautiful and splendidly barbarous heart and greatness of the glory of Moscow."¹⁰⁰ The Kremlin, she declared, was not unique and beautiful but also grotesque and savage; it was not the heart of Moscow, but the barbarous heart. Hickley's time in Russia failed to change her opinion of the country and she continued to declare that "in this country they are addicted to blowing up Imperial trains"¹⁰¹ and that "this country is a hotbed of anarchists and Nihilists."¹⁰²

Although she never questions the legitimacy of Nicholas II's reign, Mary Hickley challenged Russia's claims to be equal to western nations as manifested in the coronation. She saw the coronation as an attempt to mask the real conditions in Russia, especially the conditions of the peasants, whom Hickley referred to as serfs. She expressed hope that the tsar would work to improve their oppressive conditions.¹⁰³ Davis also described the pitiful conditions of the peasants, whom he refers to as muzhiks. After encountering many peasants at the train stations, he explained that the

men were of a fine peasant type, big boned and strong looking with sad, unenlightened faces. They neither laughed nor joked, as loungers around the railroad stations are wont to do at home, but stood staring, with their hands tucked in their sleeves, watching the voyagers with a humble, distressed look, like that of an uncomprehending dumb animal.¹⁰⁴

Davis's comments in regard to the peasantry reveal that the wonders of the Kremlin were not the only sights at the coronation. Beneath the façade of Moscow's decorations lay social conditions that the new tsar would have to address.

The foreigners, overall, used their experiences at the coronation to confirm their opinions of Russia before they attended the ceremony. If they came to

⁹⁹ Logan 85.

¹⁰⁰ Hickley 8.

¹⁰¹ Hickley 5.

¹⁰² Hickley 11.

¹⁰³ Hickley 47.

¹⁰⁴ Davis 11-12.

Moscow without any expectations, the coronation impressed them. In contrast, those who attended the coronation after already deciding that the Russian autocracy needed to evolve to fit the country's current needs used the time at the coronation to strengthen their arguments. They criticized the celebrations for being wasteful and purposeless since they failed, in these foreigners' opinions, to address the realities of life in late 19th century Russia with all of its complexities.

Besides relaying their experiences at the procession and Imperial Feast, the foreigners' accounts also describe the peasants' role in the coronation. For instance, Logan's portrayal of the peasants raises questions about their perceptions of the coronation. Why were so many at the train stations? To what extent were they sad, unenlightened, humble, distressed, and uncomprehending and how did these characteristics affect everyone's perception of Nicholas II and his coronation? The next chapter addresses these questions.

Chapter Three

Silent Voices: The Peasants and the Khodynskoe Field Incident

Since the peasants failed to record their perceptions of the coronation, all that can be learned about their role in the celebrations comes from what other groups wrote. Much has been recorded about village life in late 19th century and by studying these sources, I gain an understanding of the material constraints of peasant life, which can then be contrasted with the extravagance of the coronation. Finally, a description of the Khodynskoe Field incident provides insight into the nature of the tsar's relationship with the peasants.

Peasant Daily Life

The peasants lived in rural areas, constituted the bulk of the military, worked as migrant laborers in cities and towns, and therefore, composed the majority of the working class.¹⁰⁵ As such a large segment of the population infiltrating so many components of Russian life (agriculture, military, industry), the peasants played the largest role in determining Russia's fate. If they wholeheartedly accepted Nicholas as tsar, the autocracy had a solid basis of support and thus, also of legitimacy.

In *Daily Life in Russia Under the Last Tsar*, Henri Troyat describes the similarity between villages with their

little church with a bulbous steeple, a well, some geese, some hens scratching in the dust, sunflowers lifting their great yellow heads above a fence, and few cabins of logs that were fitted closely together . . . Inside was a small single room with a large stove, all smokeblackened, with benches along the wall, a table and, in the corner, lit by night-lights, the holy pictures to which the visitor had to bow before greeting the master of the house. The best place to sleep was the one reserved by the moujik for himself, on the oven: it was warm there in winter and cool in summer. Sometimes he took his wife there with him, or a sick child. But mostly the women, girls and boys slept on the floor on piles of rags, or in the barn. It was not the custom to undress for the night, but the men took off their boots or bark sandals to air their feet. The flies loved this dim menagerie like stench: They buzzed in swarms around the copper samovar. Earthenware plates, wooden spoons, goat-skins hanging from nails, everything there was wretched.¹⁰⁶

Despite its patronizing tone, Troyat's account of the village provides useful and accurate information about the peasants. Historians also describe the peasant huts

¹⁰⁵David L. Ransel, ed. *Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) ix.

¹⁰⁶Henri Troyat, *Daily Life in Russia Under the Last Tsar*, trans. Malcolm Barnes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979) 196-197.

as having the large stove, benches, icons (the "holy pictures"), and the samovar. Yet, historians fail to offer the criticism embedded in Troyat's words. Within his declaration that "everything there was wretched," he judges the peasants for their way of life. They were a class to be looked down upon by foreigners such as Troyat, but also by members of other classes in Russian society.

Compare this description of a peasant's home with the previous description of the Kremlin or the Palace of the Facets. The spaciousness of these structures must have impressed the peasants immensely and probably seemed as if they were from the heavenly realm. Moreover, imagine the peasants' impression of the lavish dress and jewels worn by the royal entourage at the coronation. For the peasant women in their elaborately embroidered shirts, sarafans, scarves, and beads, the Tsaritsa in her gown was a foreign image of elaborateness. For the peasant men wearing blouse shaped cotton shirts, linen or wool pants stuck into their boots, the Tsar with his crown of diamonds was an unfathomable sight.¹⁰⁷ The world of royalty depicted in the coronation distinguished itself from the world of the peasants and from this distinction, the Russian Tsar derived some of his power. By elevating himself over his subjects, the Tsar established that he held the power to rule over them.

The Khodynskoe Field Incident

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Nicholas II also attempted to use the coronation to demonstrate to the peasants that he was not entirely separated from them. To show his love for the peasants, Nicholas planned a people's fete to take place four days after the coronation on Khodynskoe Field. Dancers, circus performers, and singers were to provide entertainment in three theaters for the nearly half a million people who came.¹⁰⁸ Actors presented extracts from *Ruslan and Ludmila*, *The Humpback Horse*, and *Yermack Timofeyevich*.¹⁰⁹ Booths were set up to distribute four hundred thousands commemorative iron mugs with red and gold traditional Russian patterns, the initials "NII" and "A" in gold, a double headed Russian eagle, and the inscription of the year 1896, and women were given silk scarves.¹¹⁰ The crowd also received more than ten thousand gallons of beer and packets of food containing sausage, gingerbread, nuts, saiki (Russian bread in the form of small loaves), pryaniki (Russian cookies), other sweets, and a book about the coronation all wrapped up in a handkerchief with the eagle and Nicholas's and Alexandra's initials.¹¹¹ Many of the packets had spoiled food, which was a considerable waste of the Russian tax money that funded the event.¹¹²

The Tsar, Tsaritsa, and members of the court were to sit in a newly erected imperial pavilion to celebrate with the peasants. Built to hold three hundred

¹⁰⁷Troyat 198.

¹⁰⁸De Monte Alto 76.

¹⁰⁹Gilbert and Phenix 14.

¹¹⁰Harrison E. Salisbury, *Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions 1905-1917* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978) 52-53.

¹¹¹Salisbury 53; De Monte Alto 76-77.

¹¹²De Monte Alto 77.

people with two balconies, carpet, and exotic plants and flowers, the pavilion provided a spot from which Nicholas II could watch the entertainment and the peasants.

Two pavilions stood on the right and left of the imperial pavilion, each with the capacity to hold eight hundred invited guests. Some uncovered seats were set up even farther away from the imperial pavilion as spots for members of the middle class willing to pay to watch the events.¹¹³

Two or three officers commanding approximately one hundred fifty Cossacks represented the police force on the field. De Monte Alto offered a detailed yet critical description of the day's events. He recounted that the few officers in charge realized that the police force was insufficient and attempted to contact the head of the Moscow police, Colonel Vlasofsky, requesting more men. But Vlasofsky replied that all officers were already occupied and that no more could be sent to the field.¹¹⁴ The lack of preparation for the people's celebration becomes especially obvious after comparing the size of the police force at Khodynskoe Field with the number of police present during the coronation procession.

The insufficiency of the police force present was compounded by the dangerous layout of the field itself. De Monte Alto included a pictorial description of the field. As represented by OO, W, and T on the second diagram on page 48, Khodynskoe Field contained multitudes of sandpits, sandholes, and wells. In front of the places of distribution of the gifts was level ground of about twenty paces in width, then a steep descent into a ravine of about fourteen feet deep on average that contained hillocks, pits, and small and large holes. The ravine served as a sandpit during an Exhibition in 1891. Since sand composed the ravine, it could not support the weight of many people.¹¹⁵ The first funnel-shaped well widened at the bottom. It was without a fence or wall blocking it off and instead, was boarded over level with the ravine and covered with sand. The ravine's width averaged around two hundred feet and the space along the ravine averaged about half a mile. Behind the ravine and ridge, the land was uneven and had holes. Another well much like the first but larger was also in this area. The people's celebration was held on Khondynskoe Field during the previous coronation, but the sandpits and wells had been built since then.¹¹⁶ The deep ditches, gullies, trenches, pits, mounds, and abandoned wells of the field made a catastrophe likely.¹¹⁷

The deplorable conditions of the site of the people's celebration did not prevent the multitudes from coming. Estimates of the number of people present ranged from one hundred thousand to half a million. They came "from the countryside, from Pskov, from the deep forests of the Kama, from Siberia and the Middle Volga."¹¹⁸ According to the account in *Black Night, White Snow*, "all of

¹¹³De Monte Alto 73-74.

¹¹⁴De Monte Alto 80-81.

¹¹⁵De Monte Alto 74-80.

¹¹⁶De Monte Alto 87.

¹¹⁷Gilbert and Phenix 15.

¹¹⁸Salisbury 53.

Russia was here—that is the Russia of bast shoes, of linen foot wrappings, of shapeless blouses, blue pantaloons, *tulupy* (greasy sheepskin jackets), heavy capes, kaftans, and worn blackcloth coats.¹¹⁹ The gathering on the field was a celebration for this segment of the Russian population of the coronation and the new Tsar it crowned. Although these people differed greatly from those who witnessed the coronation from inside the Dormition Cathedral or those who sat in the Hall of Facets for the Imperial Feast, they too had an important role in the coronation ceremony. Yet, in contrast to those who sat inside the Dormition Cathedral or the Hall of Facets, many of these peasants lost their lives or loved ones as a result of their participation in the coronation.

Their tragedy occurred once people in the crowd begun pushing forward after a rumor spread that the gifts had run out. As the crowd shifted forward, people fell into the pits and wells and the unstoppable momentum of the crowd led to their trampling. The horror of the sight was unfathomable. For example, one man in the crowd managed to raise his arms most likely in hopes of raising himself up onto the shoulders of others. Once he succeeded in raising his arms, however, the crowd surged forward and crushed him to death, carrying this “lifeless corpse” forward with the rest.¹²⁰ Others died after being smashed against the sheds distributing the gifts or after walking over the wells and plummeting to their death. Some women and children managed to survive the stampede of human flesh by being raised above those in the crowd and passed from person to person until they reached the crowd’s edge.¹²¹ Those saved were the exception. In less than fifteen minutes, the stampede ended having taken an estimated three thousand lives and injuring thousands of others.¹²²

News of the catastrophe spread quickly, but the details were vague. People began to search frantically for their family and friends, afraid that they had been among the killed or injured. Those making their way from Moscow to Khodynskoe Field shortly after the stampede occurred saw wagons and carts carrying dead bodies. Mary Hickley described the sight as “poor crushed peasants, still in their gaudy festival clothes, being driven through the city to the cemetery, followed by weeping friends.”¹²³ The contrast between this scene and that of the Imperial Feast exposes the sharp distinctions between the outcomes of the two coronation celebrations.

The dead bodies were taken to the Vagankovsky Cemetery, which had previously only been a cemetery for followers of Orthodoxy. During a mass burial for the victims of the catastrophe, however, believers of many religions—Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Protestantism—were put in a grave together.¹²⁴ The stampede and those who planned its subsequent mass burial ignored the religious distinctions of the deceased; all that was relevant was

¹¹⁹Salisbury 53.

¹²⁰De Monte Alto 82.

¹²¹De Monte Alto 83-85.

¹²²Salisbury 57; De Monte Alto 85.

¹²³Hickley 29.

¹²⁴De Monte Alto 93.

whether one was a peasant present on the Khodynskoe Field that day to celebrate the coronation of Nicholas II and Alexandra.

As the Tsar and Tsaritsa rode toward Khodynskoe Field, they inevitably passed wagonloads of corpses leaving and therefore, learned of the catastrophe. Yet they stood on the Imperial Pavilion before the crowd shortly after the stampede and never acknowledged its occurrence. Instead, Nicholas and Alexandra received the cheers of the crowd for thirty minutes as the band played the national anthem. They then made their way to Petrovsky Palace just two hundred yards from the field where they greeted fourteen delegations, including representatives of the Uspenskii Cathedral, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the Moscow Imperial theaters, the Moscow coachmen, a calvary regiment, Moscow factory workers, the official spokesmen for the Moscow bourgeoisie, the Old Believers, the decorators for the coronation, the bakers for the field celebration, representatives of the Moscow German colony, and members of the Moscow racing club.¹²⁵ These groups were the objects of the Tsar's attention, rather than the victims of the stampede.

Nicholas's attention then shifted to the feast inside the palace for the nobility and village elders. Before eating, the Tsar addressed the elders, stating that the "Empress and I heartily thank your expression of love and dedication. We do not doubt that these feelings are shared by your fellow villagers. Care for your welfare is as close to my heart as it is to that of our Father and Beloved Saviour."¹²⁶ The nobility cheered for the Tsar in response. Two orchestras began to play military music as everyone began to eat their dinner of Poltava borsch, cold white fish, veal with fresh greens, roast spring chicken and duckling, fresh and pickled cucumbers, raspberry sweet, fruits, and wines and vodka.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, two hundred yards away from the feast, soldiers laid out the catastrophe's victims. *Black Night, White Snow* described the scene as "endless corpses, laid out side by side and, passing among them silent for the most part but in some cases wailing in grief, hundreds and thousands of persons searching out their dead."¹²⁸ If Nicholas demonstrated his care for the villagers by eating Poltava borsch, veal with fresh greens, raspberry sweet, fruit, and wines while the peasants searched for the bodies of their loved ones, the villagers must look to someone or to somewhere else to protect their well-being.

De Monte Alto recorded another speech given by Nicholas at the feast that makes the Tsar appear even more callous. Nicholas supposedly stated that "I do not doubt that the nobility will always be, as they have been, a support to the throne . . . I am acquainted with the difficulties which the landed nobility are passing through. Be tranquil. I will not forget their needs in my care for the progress of our dear Fatherland."¹²⁹ Hence, Nicholas declared his loyalty to the nobility and the peasants that day, treating the nobility to a feast and treating the peasants to a stampede.

¹²⁵Salisbury 55.

¹²⁶Salisbury 55.

¹²⁷Salisbury 56.

¹²⁸Salisbury 56.

¹²⁹De Monte Alto 92-93.

Nicholas eventually addressed the tragedy of the peasants by visiting the injured in the hospitals, paying for burial, and giving between five hundred to ten million rubles to the families of the victims.¹³⁰ After completing these acts, which he felt were fitting measures for the circumstances, Nicholas attempted to proceed with the coronation festivities. He even attended a ball held by the French embassy on the very evening of the stampede.

Many foreigners thought Nicholas and Alexandra responded appropriately. Logan, for instance, believed that the tragedy showed the Russian people that their new Tsar had a "kind, a brave, a manly heart."¹³¹ Logan's assumptions, however, stemmed from his perception of the peasants. He described them as "big, hairy, unwashed simple creatures" and referred to them collectively as "Ivan."¹³² From these assumptions, Logan's condescension was obvious and led him to be naive in regard to the complexity surrounding the peasants' lives.

Logan claimed that "no other peasantry in the wide world can compare with the Russian moujik for thoroughgoing worship, for absolute, unreasoning, and blind idolatry of his ruler . . . in their eyes he [the Tsar] can do no wrong."¹³³ Mary Hickley also commented on the devotion the peasants felt towards their Tsar, or their "Little Father."¹³⁴ Logan and Hickley based these observations on the immense number of the peasants present in Moscow for the coronation celebrations. In fact, the attendance of the peasants at Nicholas's coronation was larger than at any other coronation ceremony.¹³⁵ These foreigners concluded that the peasants' love for and loyalty to the Tsar, as demonstrated by their presence at his coronation, could not be weakened by the tragedy on Khodynskoe Field. Not only did Logan reject the notion that the tragedy might strain the relationship between the Tsar and peasants, but he claimed that it "laid the foundations of a sympathy between the great under class of the Russian people and the throne. It showed the Tsar how much Ivan loved him; it revealed to Ivan how much he was loved by his Tsar."¹³⁶ Logan's comment exemplified the foreigners' misconception of the peasants.

Unfortunately, this misunderstanding of how the peasants felt about Khodynskoe Field and thus, indirectly, about Nicholas as a ruler, extend beyond the realm of foreigners to Nicholas himself. In his diary entry on the day of the Khodynskoe Field tragedy, Nicholas wrote

Up until now, thank God, everything went perfectly, but today a great sin has taken place. The crowd spending the night on the Khodinka meadow, in anticipation of the distribution of the food and mugs, broke through the barrier and there was a terrible

¹³⁰Logan 83; Gilbert and Phenix 47.

¹³¹Logan 183.

¹³²Logan 181, 182.

¹³³Logan 174.

¹³⁴Hickley 28.

¹³⁵Salisbury 53.

¹³⁶Logan 183.

crush, during which it is terrible to say about 1300 people were trampled!!

The news left an ugly impression. We lunched at 12.30 and then Alix and I went to the Khodinka to be present at the unfortunate 'popular celebration.' There was nothing in particular to see; we looked out from the pavilion over the huge crowd surrounding the platform, where the orchestra kept on playing the national anthem and 'Be Glorified.' We dined with Mama at 8 o'clock. We then went to the Montebello ball. It was very magnificently done, but the heat was unbearable. We left after supper at 2 o'clock.¹³⁷

Nicholas's reference to the tragedy as a sin raises the question of whom this tragedy was a sin against. Did he believe that the stampede was a sin against God because God had chosen Nicholas to be tsar and therefore, intended that his coronation take place in divine perfection? Did Nicholas consider the stampede to be a sin committed against him as a God chosen ruler? Or was the sin against the victims of the stampede and their families? There was also the question of who committed the sin. Nicholas failed to acknowledge that his inadequate preparations for the "popular celebration" might have partly, if not entirely, been responsible for this "sin." Thus, is it correct to assume that he believed the victims of the stampede committed this "sin"? Regardless of the answers to these questions, the labeling of the catastrophe as a sin appears impersonal and remorseless.

The diary entry's last two paragraphs also reveal Nicholas's callousness. After relaying the number of people trampled, Nicholas immediately concluded that the "news left an ugly impression."¹³⁸ In this entry, Nicholas neglected to reflect on the tragedy and its consequences for the victims' families. There was no mention of what it must have been like to witness the stampede or to have been a part of it. He lacked any sense of the peasants' perspective in his comments and did not see them as individuals; instead, they were thirteen hundred dead who left an ugly impression. Nicholas, moreover, jumped from the subject of the tragedy to his meal with his mother and the ball. In his description of the day, he mentioned the unbearable heat at the ball, yet never mentioned the unbearable suffering that thirteen hundred of his people experienced that day. If Nicholas failed to empathize with the peasants when they died, it was unlikely that he emphasized with them while they lived.

De Monte Alto, in contrast, provided a detailed account of the atrocities the peasants experienced that day and interacted with them to gain a sense of their feelings toward the Tsar. After witnessing the tragedy, he overheard people more sharply criticizing the government than ever before.¹³⁹ Many peasants no longer

¹³⁷ Andrei Maylunas and Sergei Mironenko, eds., *A Lifelong Passion: Nicholas and Alexandra Their Own Story*, trans. Darya Galy (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 144-145.

¹³⁸ Maylunas and Mironenko 145.

¹³⁹ De Monte Alto 94-95.

feared the possible repercussions of their criticisms since they had already lost loved ones, which was the worst thing that could happen to them. The government chose to ignore the peasants who complained, although they had previously sent an estimated four thousand people suspected of suspicious activity out of Moscow. De Monte Alto concluded that this boldness of the peasants held the possibility of posing a serious threat to the government if the soldiers, police, or officials became sympathetic to the peasantry's cause and hence, the government's attempt to avoid this possible conflict.

Although a conflict between Nicholas and the peasants failed to occur after the catastrophe, the stampede cast doubts on the tsar's ability to provide for the peasants. The inadequate preparations and Nicholas's reaction to the tragedy gave the impression that the peasants were dispensable; their lives and deaths provoked little concern. The tragedy, furthermore, marked the beginning of Nicholas's reign with needless and innocent bloodshed and the incident remained in people's memories throughout the extent of Nicholas's tsardom. The peasants did not lose complete confidence in their tsar, but the seeds of doubt were planted for many.

Thesis

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