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Abundant, newly discovered sources shatter long-held beliefs

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 revealed, among many other things, a hidden wealth of archival documents relating to the imprisonment and eventual murder of Tsar Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra, and their children. Emanating from sources both within and close to the Imperial Family as well as from their captors and executioners, these often-controversial materials have enabled a new and comprehensive examination of one the pivotal events of the twentieth century and the many controversies that surround it.

Based on a careful analysis of more than 500 of these previously unpublished documents, along with numerous newly discovered photos, The Fate of the Romanovs makes compelling revisions to many long-held beliefs about the Romanovs' final months and moments. This powerful account includes:

- * Surprising evidence that Anastasia may, indeed, have survived
- * Diary entries made by Nicholas and Alexandra during their captivity
- * Revelations of how the Romanovs were betrayed by trusted servants
- * A reconstruction of daily life among the prisoners at Ipatiev House
- * Strong evidence that the Romanovs were not brutalized by their captors
- * Statements from admitted participants in the murders

The Fate of the Romanovs Details

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From Reader Review The Fate of the Romanovs for online ebook

Helen Azar says

When I first read it, I was very excited about this book because I thought, here was some unique, "revolutionary" (no pun intended) information, so different from anything I have read before on this subject! Which is why it turned out to be so disappointing when I learned that the claims to have the "new" and "contradictory" information about the last days of the Romanovs fall short as soon as you follow up on the sources provided in the book. Alas, you find that many of them just don't measure up to the grandiose claims made by the authors. Sadly, this seems to be a case of some "creative referencing", not historical facts. Not to mention the fact that when I actually asked the authors about this (on a discussion forum) I got attacked for trying to "ruin their reputation"... I was not the only one who questioned this book's assertions, and this of course is easy to confirm - so don't just take my word for it - check out the sources of the more controversial claims, if you do end up reading this book. But until you confirm the sources, please take any and all "new" information in The Fate of the Romanovs with a grain of salt...

Belle Meri says

If I could give this book two different sets of ratings, I'd be very happy to do so. The first roughly 350 pages of the original hardcover edition are an excellent, well-researched history of the final days of the Romanovs based on extensive historical documentation. There is only two truly controversial points during that first section: the first regarding the trip the three Grand Duchesses - Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia - took on the steamship *Rus* to Ekaterinberg; the second regarding Marie's actions on her birthday during the final captivity of the family. With regard to the trip on the *Rus* and Marie's birthday, and why how both events are reported in this book is so controversial, I do believe much of the controversy has to do with the hagiography of the family which developed after their murders.

My personal thoughts on the controversies around this book are behind this spoiler space: (view spoiler)

For all that the first half of the book is terrific, the second half detailing what happened after the deaths through the various investigations and up through the discovery, exhumation, identification, and eventual reburial of the remains of nine members of the family seems to fall apart. The latter half of the book rambles and, perhaps due to the sources they were working from, contradicts itself in places. This is, in my mind, positive proof of the controversies, contradictions, and hagiography which developed over the course of the twentieth century around the Romanovs, especially in the West where the memories of, and eventually books about, the final years of Imperial Russia heavily relied on escaped survivors hoping to recapture their lost glories.

Sara says

This took me forever to finish, but after awhile it was a pride thing. I would not let it defeat me. More detail in this book than a layperson like myself required, but it was fascinating to read about the final months of the family, living in the Ipatiev House in Eckaterinburg, their murders, and the governmental and church battle to claim the family's remains for their respective sides. Makes me want to read up on Anna Anderson, who

claimed to be the lost grand duchess Anastasia.

Marianne says

Rather lurid account of the final days of Tsar Nicholas and his family. Obviously, there are more details here than in previous books because this book was written post-Glasnost and the authors had access to more information about the royal family than authors have had in the past.

If you like true crime, this will definitely keep you turning the pages up to the murder and through the cover-up. The book loses focus after that, rambling on and on about the difficulties of getting credible information and making speculations with what little info they had. With the recent discovery and identification of the final two sets of royal remains some of the book's conjectures are proven false. If you like biography, well, this is one more viewpoint about the Romanovs, albeit not the most charitable one.

My opinion: the book succeeds in conveying the tragedy and ultimate meaninglessness of the murder of the royal family much more so than previous works. The haphazard and horrific manner in which each met their end, the disgusting way their bodies were mistreated and finally disposed of, the subsequent cover-up of not only the crime but of their very existence from modern Russian history -- it's all such a dreadful comedy of errors, a comedy of the blackest kind, ending in the inexplicable modern day canonization of the family -- you couldn't make this stuff up! And that's why I enjoy reading history.

Matt says

The recently-deceased theologian Richard John Neuhaus once wrote: "We are born to die. Not that death is the purpose of our being born, but we are born toward death, and in each of our lives the work of dying is already underway."

I picked up this book because, like every other human who has walked, is walking, and will walk this earth, I am going to die. It is the greatest journey, one with no survivors. What people dismiss as morbidity is actually curiosity: what's out there, beyond this vale?

I mention this, because *The Fate of the Romanovs* is the story of the death of a family: Tsar Nicholas II of Russia; Empress Alexandria, his wife; and their children: Alexei, Anastasia, Tatiana, Olga, and Maria. The book is, for the most part, shorn of historical context. In the grand scheme, the death of the Romanovs is a mere footnote. By the time they died, their contribution to history was already complete. The Russo-Japanese War was over; the 1905 Revolution was over; Russia had withdrawn from World War I; a civil war between Reds and Whites had erupted; Rasputin was dead; and Nicholas had abdicated. Yet the fascination remains. It's the story of a family who once had everything - the world's largest empire - and ended in a basement, shot and bayoneted by peasants. Then there's the whole Anastasia thing. I don't believe that people are interested in the Romanovs' execution because Anastasia was reputed to survive; to the contrary, I think people wanted to believe in Anastasia because the Romanovs' fate is so incredible. We don't want to believe an entire royal family can disappear; we need to believe there was a Job, that one alone escaped to tell the story.

The Fate of the Romanovs is a micro history of sorts. The first half of the book is a moment by moment,

bullet by bullet account of the execution. The historical context is broadly drawn. If you want to read all the ins and outs of what led Nicholas to his death house in Ekaterinburg, you'll do well to go somewhere else (I recommend Massey's *Nicholas and Alexandra*.)

I enjoyed the first half, focusing on the captivity and murders of the Romanovs. The execution itself is told in riveting detail: the family, some seated, some standing, riddled with bullets; the hemophiliac Alexei, the boy who brought down the throne, being smashed with rifle butts; bullets bouncing off Maria's chest, because her mother had sewn the royal jewels into her dress; "chubby" Anastasia shot in the head as she cowered in a corner; one of the murderers fondling the Tsarina's breasts. It is all very hideous and gripping.

Then comes the second half of the book, which was putatively about the lingering myths and legends of the Romanovs, especially the Anastasia. The book goes into the Anne Anderson and the whole Anastasia myth. This is odd, I thought. Just twenty pages before, the authors had described Anastasia being shot, gangland style, in her head. Now, for whatever reason, the authors appeared to be discrediting their own account, which was based largely on the so-called Yurovsky Memoirs. It got more shocking. Apparently, the authors don't believe Anastasia was killed in that basement (despite describing a scene in which 1. she was killed; and 2. no one could have escaped). They base this on the fact that little Anastasia was not found buried with the other family members, nor in the area.

Long story short, I got duped into reading a crazy Anastasia-is-alive book. Which is bunk. The authors completely discount the Yurovsky Memoir, in which Yurovsky said two of the children were buried some distance away. Guess what? Last year, he was proven right.

Anastasia died that day, along with three sisters, a brother, and her mom and dad. Now she can rest in peace. And you don't have to read this book (though you might want to read the first half, just for its grim detail, which is a superior retelling than Massey in *Nicholas and Alexandra* and *The Romanovs: The Final Chapter*).

Shawn says

What to make of Greg King & Penny Wilson's co-authouring of *Fate of the Romanovs*...

Well it's one of the most detailed and historically accurate/inaccurate depictions of the Romanov Family, Nicholas II, his wife Alexandra and their five children. King and Wilson, basically write what so many people already know about, the Murder account specifically is very brutal and gory, and I recommend if someone who reads this book doesn't have a strong stomach, do not read that chapter or the book really.. I like the pictures, and some things King & Wilson said.. but mostly was appalled by the way they characterised Nicholas and his family.

Still it's a good read.. for all Romanov fans

Bearhorn66 says

Good book though after extensive research accuracy doesn't hold up very well. Especially the chapter on yurovsky.

Johnny says

This has to be one of the most detailed and footnoted books I have every come across. The appendices, footnotes, bibliography, and index runs to over 100 pages. Mind you the book itself runs to over 600 pages. This give an incredibly detailed and at times confusing look at at the last days of the Russian Imperial Family. It helps if you have pen and paper to keep track of all the players. This is not for someone just wanting to read a quick history of the Imperial Family's murder. One of the most interesting things about the book is the showing both the positive and good of the Imperial Family and of the men that help them. The authors take great pains to show that the men that were guarding the Imperial Family while did do some horrible things to them, many were young boys just picked at random from the local factory and grew admire and have some empathy to the Romanovs. The authors pulls no punches in describing the "deification" of Nicholas and his family in the intervening years and especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. On the whole, I would recommend this book but caution that this is not for a casual reader of the Romanovs.

Amy says

I am just not a very enthusiastic nonfiction reader, but I am trying to be better about that, thus my resolution to read one nonfiction each season. I've always been really interested in the Russian Imperial family before and after the revolution, and this book has some new information about their imprisonment and murders.

I found it pretty dry. There was a lot of bureaucracy involved both in the events of 1918, and in the 1990s when the bodies were exhumed and identification was attempted. All that little nitpicky bureaucratic stuff was described in painstaking detail--resulting in whole chapters when I would have been happy with a few sentences. They also repeated one detail (about the demographic makeup of the guards) so many times that at one point I swore I was going to put the book down if they repeated it again. This also made me unsure if other incidents happened more than once, or if they were repeating themselves again. Maybe it is harder to organize details like that with dual authors, but a good editor should sort that out.

The chapter describing the murders was described in lurid detail, and I did think it was very interesting to learn how the Bolsheviks planned to have one executioner for each family member and servant (the Romanov's doctor, maid, cook, and valet voluntarily went into exile and were executed with them), but everybody ended up just shooting willy nilly--first they all shot at Nicolas, then whoever they could see through the thick smoke of the guns. Because they thought they were just being moved, the grand duchesses and empress had concealed a lot of their jewellery on their bodies, which blocked bullets and bayonet blows. More than once, the killers were surprised to find them still alive.

The burials were also botched due to trucks that kept breaking down and too many participants, many of whom were too excited or drunk to do an efficient job.

The last third or so of the book focuses on modern attempts to find the bodies and examine accounts of the murders to determine what really happened. I was surprised to learn that the mass grave wasn't discovered until 1972, and wasn't fully excavated until the early 1990's. According to most accounts by the killers, two of the bodies were burned and not buried with the rest, to confuse attempts at identification (definitely Alexei, and then American experts think Anastasia, but Russians think Marie or Tatiana). Apparently, it

would have been impossible for the bodies to have been burned to ashes, especially in the 90 minute time window that they apparently had. All attempts to find bones, ash, or any other remnants of those bodies have failed to this day. The book doesn't mention this possibility, but I have to wonder if it was possible for one or more of them to have survived and crawled out and away from the mine shaft where the bodies were left for almost two days while a more suitable location was being found.

I did learn some things, and I think this was a good pairing with Nicolas and Alexandra, (a book I found much more readable, BTW), which focuses on the Romanovs prior to the revolution, and has very little information about what happened to them after they went into exile. I'm glad I'm done with this one and can read some fiction now, though.

Arianne says

I've had this book for over two years, and just barely finished it. This book was really interesting, but it's long (over 400 pages), and written like a research paper. I would recommend this book to anyone who is already familiar with the Romanov family, because this goes into fantastic detail about their captivity, murder, and the discovery of their bodies. Background knowledge is essential to understanding this book.

Staci says

I decided to read this book as a compliment to one that we're reading for book club (Silence of God). I wanted something that would give me a bit more information about Russia during the first world war. I think I found it.

While some of this was long-winded and I found myself skimming for multiple pages, I was fascinated at the political and religious influences on what should have been a very carefully handled scientific investigation. But that's me talking as an American.

I had multiple passages that I had to share with my husband - often after he'd gone to sleep or just as he was waking and I'd spent all night with the details invading my dreams. I'd have to open it back up and see if I'd read things correctly.

This is a very thorough evaluation of what happened to the Romanovs - both in what lead them to captivity and in what happened after they were dead.

Well done!

Jennifer says

LONG REVIEW AHEAD!! I've been reading this book over a span of two years (well, with month long gaps in between...) so I've spent a lot of time with it. Hopefully this review will help me get my thoughts out. I'll split this review up into a Pros & Cons section, because I really do think it has both and that's why I chose to give it a 3 star rating.

PROS

1) Information on revolutionaries + guards

-> There are so many books on the Romanov family that at this point they have little new information to offer. And since I first became interested in the Romanovs almost ten years ago, I've read *a lot*. However, I really did not know much about the revolutionaries with whom the Romanovs interacted. Granted, information about Kerensky and Lenin is easier to come by, but other revolutionaries are only briefly described as 'drunkards', or, in the case of Yurovsky, as 'cold'. The information provided on Avdayev and Yurovsky was quite interesting, but I especially enjoyed learning about the young soldiers (in their late teens and early twenties) who guarded the family. The most enjoyable chapter in the book is called "A Happy Hour with the Grandest People in the World". Even if you opt not to read the book, I suggest you read that chapter.

2) Attention paid to N&A's flaws + examination of white army

-> Reading the memoirs of white émigrés obviously influences one's perspective on the Romanovs, as does the dichotomy of their fairytale like lives and their nightmarish end in Ekaterinburg. This book does a good job of exposing the royal family's flaws, even the children (though, ofc, their 'flaws' were more a result of simply being human). For example, prior to this book I didn't know of Nicholas' anti-semitism. The book also describes the brutality of the White Army during the Civil War, which is a topic I hadn't seen addressed before but was glad to see brought to light.

3) The servants

-> One of the big pluses for this book, IMO, is getting to know more about the "side players". The Romanovs' servants - even those who died with them - are rarely given much attention. This book devoted more time to them, as well as to their fates after their murder alongside the imperial family. It's very saddening that class-structure lives on and they have not been given the same respect as the Romanovs, despite the fact that their loyalty was the reason for their deaths.

4) Learning about the aftermath

-> I'd actually not read much about the aftermath of the murders. Lucky me, half of this book is dedicated to just that. It turned out to be overkill IMO, but the book did explain the Russian Church's stance (it still refuses to accept the bodies found in 1991 as those of the Romanovs). FOTR also explains the DNA work done as well as the differing opinions of the American and Russian teams (i.e. was Anastasia missing or not?) Unfortunately, I did feel the authors were REALLY against the Russian team and devoted way too much time to trying to persuade readers to share their opinion. It felt rather one-sided and was somewhat annoying...which brings me to the cons.

CONS

1) Controversy over new information

-> I checked the notes at the back of the book periodically to see where the authors were getting their information. There have been a lot of questions as to the reliability of the sources and/or the translation of those sources. Threads on the Alexander Palace Forum go into more detail on this. Ultimately, this is ofc the biggest problem with the book - with allegations of betrayal among imperial staff, the rape of OTMA on the Rus, an affair with a guard at the Ipatiev House, and the authors' clear favour of Yurovsky & other revolutionaries over the Romanovs, you're obviously going to need strong facts to sway your readers. Otherwise, it all just falls apart. The controversy about the sources also goes hand in hand with my next point...

2) Repetition

->Yes, I know this is non-fiction, it's not designed to be a page-turner. Still, there is something to be said for readability. The second half of the book is extremely hard to get through. In addition, the authors seem more concerned with persuading readers to share their opinions than in allowing them to reach their own, and this is probably why everything seems so repetitive. Again, it felt like rather than letting the facts speak for themselves, the authors were determined to get readers onside with their views. It was fine at first - obviously authors write to share their opinions - but just got to be too much later on.

*BONUS: Try and count how many times they use the phrase "the fate of the Romanovs" I know how hard it is to reword things, but if you find yourself repeating a phrase more than a handful of times you should really just cut it...by then the audience has usually got your point.

3) Gruesome descriptions

->Obviously, this depends on the reader's tolerance, and there is always the option to skip (I just have an annoying need to read *all* of a book), but the chapter describing the murder was extremely graphic. This might not count as an official con, and I can definitely see the academic value - but as this is a review of my personal thoughts, I'm putting this down. Be warned.

Overall, I can see why this book wasn't well received. For non-Romanov buffs, there's just too much information to wade through without some background knowledge. Many sections of the book are meant to challenge the established facts without having fully described them first, leaving an unbalanced narrative for 'newbies'. For Romanov 'fans', the book seems to be a personal attack (the authors repeatedly scorn those interested in the royal family). As I said above, I can agree with some of their points, and now that I'm older than I first was when I became interested in the Romanovs I can appreciate a more flawed description of them. However, I really do think that this wave of 'idolism' described by the authors is typical of anyone with a newfound obsession (I'm thinking of myself and other HP fans who have slowly been disillusioned by JKR). It's easy to be drawn to this beautiful family with a tragic fate...and having lived so long ago it's easy to turn them into something like fictional characters. Eventually though, as one reads more, one's view becomes more nuanced. Having said that, it's hard to swallow the authors' dislike for the royal family when contrasted with their obvious sympathy for Yurovsky. Again, it comes back to the whole persuasion thing...it's fine working a little in, but non-fiction should be more facts than anything else.

If there's one thing this book teaches you, it's that history is a headache. With so many conflicting stories, it's hard to figure out the Truth. I don't regret reading it, and despite my problems with it I did still like it and think it does have a lot of good stuff to bring to the table for any seasoned Romanov buff. Try it and see what you think!

C Beard says

Had this one for a while but have only just got round to reading it.

It was one of those books that was hard going in places but was well worth the effort in the end.

Describes in detail : the imprisonment of the royal family, uncovering new circumstances, dispelling myths and reinforcing truths; the full horror of the execution and disposal of the bodies; the 'discovery' of the remains and the ridiculous way they were exhumed; the petty jealousies and squabbles of two teams of scientists from Ekaterinburg and Moscow; the determination of the Russians not to accept conclusions drawn by American scientists; the eventual and much delayed burial of the remains and the controversy that

provoked; and the guilt of the main executioner, a man who became a pariah even to members of the Communist party.

Even though it was published in 2003 (and therefore was prior to the discovery of the further two bodies in 2007 and additional DNA tests, completed only this year), it is an excellent work and a very good read.

Jen says

I visited Russia in 2006 and became fascinated with the story of the deaths of the Romanovs. This book detailed the decline of this Russian dynasty and the last days of the Romanov family. As there were many things occurring during this time in the history of Russia, the book is very long, and addresses many events and introduces you to many people. It can get a little confusing but keep plugging away as it is very interesting.

Simon says

Very good writing and research combined with a gripping story. I am by way of being a Romanov-nut, and Penny Wilson and Greg King have come up with a definitive look at the last months of Nicholas and Alexandra, their five children and assorted servants.
