



A Life for the Tsar: Triumph and Tragedy at the Coronation of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia

By Greg King, Janet Ashton

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This book is the result of a long, organic evolution. Fascinated as the authors both are with the Romanov Dynasty and interested in pursuing unique and exciting aspects of its history, they stumbled upon the Coronation of Nicholas II as a potential subject quite by accident. The ceremony itself formed an integral part of Greg King's 2005 work *The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II*. In the research and writing process, Janet Ashton discovered a wealth of previously neglected materials on the subject that helped bring the event to dramatic life: so much material, in fact, that it was impossible to include more than a tantalizing hint in a single chapter. The Coronation was beautiful, opulent, and almost surreal. Wispy clouds of incense drifted upwards through golden shafts of sunshine, while the "high, clear voices of the boys mingled with the deeper bass notes of the men" intoning sonorous hymns as Russia unknowingly celebrated the coronation of its last emperor. Flickering flames of a thousand votive candles shimmered over gowns of silver brocade, flashed across gilded icons, sparkled against diamonds, and glanced on medals. This intoxicating pageant of sounds and colors, scents and sensations left onlookers "dazed." Nicholas II's Coronation in Moscow's Cathedral of the Assumption that May of 1896 was a carefully crafted piece of stagecraft, meant to transport the densely packed congregation to a realm of intense spiritual power fused to unyielding autocracy. The scene was not without irony: the imperial splendor and religious rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated a monarch who scarcely carried a drop of Russian blood in his veins. The book contains over 220 beautiful images illustrating 248 glossy pages!

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