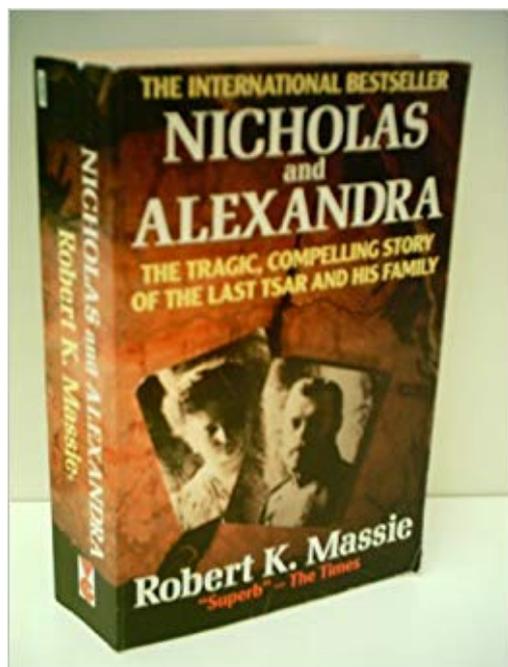


Nicholas and Alexandra: The Tragic, Compelling Story of the Last Tsar and His Family *by* Robert K Massie



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Reviews of the **Nicholas and Alexandra: The Tragic, Compelling Story of the Last Tsar and His Family** *by* Robert K Massie

Iell

As good as it gets when it comes to written history and biography: a true page turner with never a dull moment. And what a cast of characters: Lenin, Kaiser Wilhelm, Rasputin, Trotsky, Queen Victoria, Kings Edward VII & George V, plus the czar, czarina and their 5 ill-fated children. The story is told against the backdrop of WWI, the Russian Revolution and the collapse of monarchy across Europe. I started the book wanting to dislike N&A, given their ill treatment of the Russian peasants. Instead, I came away feeling genuine pity for them: They truly believed they were chosen by God to

rule, and that autocracy was the only appropriate system of government for Russia. Moreover, Nicholas was too young and unprepared when he succeeded his father. Worse yet, his handling of foreign and military matters was simply disastrous: First, he destroys most of the Russian navy in his senseless war with Japanese, motivated by a desire to seize the Korean peninsula (as if Russia needed more land!). And then, his worst mistake: coming to the defense of Serbia after its citizens murdered the heir to the throne of Austria/Hungary. His defense of the undeserving Serbs ("fellow Slavs", he called them) brought Germany into the conflict, followed by the UK, France, etc. Reading this book, you understand how all of Europe carelessly stumbled into an unnecessary world war that killed millions. Of course, hindsight is always 20-20, but if only the czar had been an isolationist, avoided foreign entanglements, and begun a process of political (democratic) and land reform, he might have made it to old age -- along with his wife and children.

Katius

I have just re-read this book after what is probably a 50-year hiatus, and I'm pleased to say that it is every bit as brilliant as it was when first published; in fact, if anything it has improved with age.

Massie traces the end of the Romanov dynasty, attributing its demise to the diagnosis of the heir to the throne, Alexis, with hemophilia and the resulting blind devotion of the Empress Alexandra to the "mad monk" Rasputin, whom she believed to be the only person capable of saving her son from the disease. Her rapture with Rasputin collided with her husband's absence to be with his troops in WWI, giving her effective control of the government -- which meant giving Rasputin almost as much control.

The tale Massie tells is a classic Greek tragedy, imbued with a dreaded inevitability. He writes dramatically but not melodramatically, and covers fascinating details as well as the broad scope of History (with a capital H).

A masterpiece in the 1960s, it remains every bit the masterpiece that it was then.

Gaiuaco

For me, points of special interest in this magnificent book were the following:

1. The depth and reach of Nicholas and Alexandra's religiosity. Deeply Russian Orthodox in their faith, this dimension of their daily lives was both profound and omnipresent.
2. The marriage of Nicholas and Alexandra...An extraordinarily loving (sensual, spiritual, and familial) partnership; admirable and enviable in their love for each other and for their children.
3. Alexi's hemophilia...Because their parenthood was primary, and because hemophilia was then such a horrid disease, Alexi's disease may well have been - in terms of their personal and political survival - the straw that broke the camel's back.
4. Rasputin....One of history's most unforgettable and unforgivable characters....A manipulator par excellence, he came, by reason of Alexi's hemophilia, to control Alexandra, who came to control Nicholas..... He may have been - we will never know - the lynchpin that brought an end to the Romanov dynasty.
5. Their life, their wealth...In many ways, until 1917, and excluding the family tragedy (Alexi's hemophilia), they lived surrounded by every comfort that wealth could provide, and yet, as far as Massie could see, they never lost their human touch....
6. The drama....Beginning in 1905 with the disaster of the Russo-Japanese War, and culminating in the Russian army's loss-after-loss-after-loss in WWI, this is ultimately and also a story of unfathomable social and political and human horror. Literally, millions upon millions were swept into this imbroglio.
7. The end....Ultimately caught and trapped in the Soviet web, the entire family, noble and lovable to the end, was murdered in the basement of a house in Siberia.

Above all, this is the story of a family, the warm, human and heart-wrenching story of a family unsuited and unprepared (who could have been prepared?) for the excruciating multiple calamities that befell them. But, beyond that, it was a tragedy that transcended them...and touched every Russian soul, and touches us still today.

What a gift to all of us this magnificent book is!

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