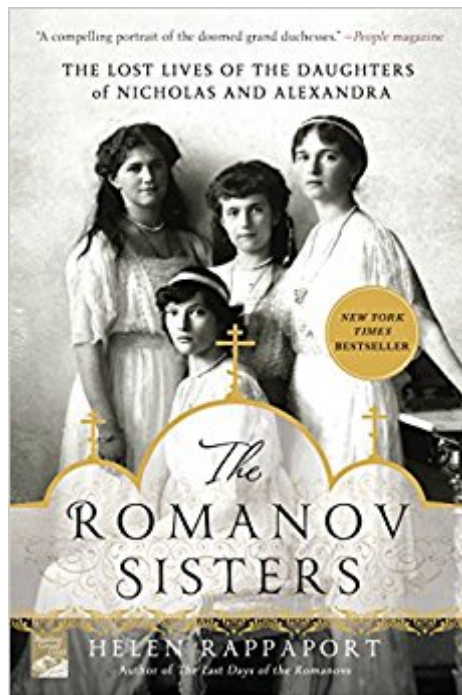


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The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives Of The Daughters Of Nicholas And Alexandra



Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller for 12 weeks! "Helen Rappaport paints a compelling portrait of the doomed grand duchesses." —People magazine "The public spoke of the sisters in a genteel, superficial manner, but Rappaport captures sections of letters and diary entries to showcase the sisters' thoughtfulness and intelligence." —Publishers Weekly (starred review) They were the Princess Dianas of their day—perhaps the most photographed and talked about young royals of the early twentieth century. The four captivating Russian Grand Duchesses—Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia Romanov—were much admired for their happy dispositions, their looks, the clothes they wore and their privileged lifestyle. Over the years, the story of the four Romanov sisters and their tragic end in a basement at Ekaterinburg in 1918 has clouded our view of them, leading to a mass of sentimental and idealized hagiography. With this treasure trove of diaries and letters from the grand duchesses to their friends and family, we learn that they were intelligent, sensitive and perceptive witnesses to the dark turmoil within their immediate family and the ominous approach of the Russian Revolution, the nightmare that would sweep their world away, and them along with it. The Romanov Sisters sets out to capture the joy as well as the insecurities and poignancy of those young lives against the backdrop of the dying days of late Imperial Russia, World War I and the Russian Revolution. Helen Rappaport aims to present a new and challenging take on the story, drawing extensively on previously unseen or unpublished letters, diaries and archival sources, as well as private collections. It is a book that will surprise people, even aficionados.

Book Information

Paperback: 544 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Griffin (June 16, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1250067456

ISBN-13: 978-1250067456

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.4 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (523 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #153,840 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #131 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Russia #318 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Royalty #356 in Books > History > Asia > Russia

Customer Reviews

I came very close to not requesting a review copy of this book. I thought there was no point. I thought I'd reached my limit on Romanov books - they rarely contain anything new, they're all drawing on the same primary source material and sadly, the Romanovs have reached a point at which they don't even really seem like real people anymore. They're more like copies of characters in some old novel. I am so glad that I went ahead and read this - not only is it one of my few five-star reads so far this year, it will probably become one of my favorite Romanov books of all time. Rappaport is a brilliant writer and researcher. She has accomplished what I did not think was possible - taught me many new things about life in Imperial Russia, about the lives of these four young women and why I should care about them and given me an eerily real sense of that long-ago time. My e-galley copy is filled with highlighted passages and notes - many of them noting places with brand-new anecdotes from previously unpublished sources. I kept coming across them with genuine delight and surprise - I've been reading about the Romanovs for twenty years and never come across some of these stories. Rappaport also has a good ear for excerpting funny, poignant and revealing passages from the girls' letters and diaries. You get a very good sense of their individual voices from reading this book. I feel as though - for the first time - I can actually tell the girls apart and that the differences in their personalities are a revelation. I have a much more nuanced understanding of the Romanov family. Rappaport also managed the almost unthinkable in getting me to feel empathy for the Empress Alexandra. I am not a big fan of hers and believe she was an utterly disastrous ruler, wife and (even) mother.

This is an incredible book, beautifully written and researched. It is also heartbreaking. I can't tell you how many times I read something about one of the four Romanov sisters, the doomed daughters of Czar Nicholas and Alexandra, that caused me to stop reading and just stare at the faces on the cover. The author brings these young women to life, and it is impossible not to grieve for the innocent, young lives lost too soon. Although the title refers to the four sisters (who referred to themselves as OTMA - Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia), the book actually begins before the marriage of their parents. Nicholas and Alexandra came to love each other very much; they were absolutely perfect for each other. They were absolutely wrong for the Russian monarchy. Nicholas would have made a wonderful country gentleman. Alexandra was very shy and suffered from health problems that limited her mobility. They were, however, warm and loving persons. How happy they could have been in other circumstances. From Alexandra, Russia expects two things - for her to give birth to a son, and for her to be a social leader. Instead, she is almost invisible except for the disappointing announcements, one after another after another, of the birth of her daughters. And

then, while the rest of the world is fascinated by the four Grand Duchesses, in Russia they are viewed as irrelevant and unimportant. The girls live in virtual isolation. The only freedom they have is when they travel, especially on their yacht. They are constantly under threat, and they are constantly surrounded by armed guards. Still, they are brought up to be loving and charitable persons. Their personalities do come across. Anastasia is often a brat. Tatiana and Maria are stalwart.

After finishing *The Romanov Sisters* I feel pleasantly deceived but deceived nonetheless. *The Romanov Sisters* by Helen Rappaport is presented as a book about the lives of the four young Romanov girls – Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia – however much of the book isn't about them at all. The book focuses very heavily on their parents, their brother Alexei and the political turmoil of Russia. The first 15%-20% of the book details the background of their mother, Alexandra, rather than introducing the girls themselves. The awkwardness of this is only compounded by the lack of background on their father, Nicholas. While I did indeed enjoy this glimpse inside the lives of the Romanov family and it does feel thoroughly and accurately researched I can't help but feel that readers who are seeking a book about the sisters (affectionately referred to as OTMA by combining the first letters of their first names) may be disappointed. It almost feels as though this book deserves two separate reviews – one for the book as described and one for the book as written. As described the book is a failure but as written it's actually a wonderful read. Considering this book, not as a book about the sisters, but rather as a book about the family and the political turmoil of their country, it is a definite success. In this book the story of the sisters is frequently overshadowed by their younger brother Alexei or by the lives of their parents. When the sisters are the focus of the writing Rappaport pays far more attention to the lives of the older sisters, Olga and Tatiana, leaving Maria and Anastasia in the shadows and nearly forgotten.

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