



Russell Martin. *The Tsar's Happy Occasion: Ritual and Dynasty in the Weddings of Russia's Rulers, 1495–1745.* Ithaca: Northern Illinois University Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press, 2021. 378 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5017-5484-5.

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There are few comparative studies of royal weddings in Russia before the accession of Peter I “the Great” in 1682. Historical scholarship concerning the importance of royal weddings in early modern Europe usually focuses on dynastic marriages where the festivities were arranged to impress a foreign audience as well as a domestic one. From the wedding of Vasili III to Solomonia Saburova in 1505 to the wedding of Peter the Great to Evdokiia Lopukhina in 1689, Russian rulers did not select consorts from European ruling houses, instead usually choosing brides from the lesser nobility and elevating a previously obscure family into a position of prominence at court.

This relative isolation from dynastic marriage networks in Europe may contribute to this general absence of Russian royal weddings in comparative analysis of early modern royal weddings. In *A Bride for the Tsar: Bride Shows and Marriage Politics in Early Modern Russia* (2012), Martin examined the bride shows where early modern Russian rulers chose their consorts, placing these events within the context of the court factions and political conditions of their times. In *The Tsar's Happy Occasion: Ritual and Dynasty in the Weddings of Russia's Rulers: 1495-1745*, Martin exam-

ines the wedding festivities themselves, describing how royal weddings were celebrated for a domestic audience rather than a foreign one: legitimizing new dynasties, furthering the political and religious goals of individual rulers, and integrating royal consorts and their families into the ruling elite.

Martin's analysis of royal weddings provides fresh insights about the personalities and political goals of Russian rulers and their consorts. Following precedents set by past royal weddings was essential to establishing dynastic legitimacy when a new ruler with disputed or nonexistent familial relationship to previous rulers claimed the throne. Chapter 1, “Time to Attend to the Wedding’: Origins and Traditions” discusses the wedding ceremonial for Vasili III's second marriage to Elena Glinskaia in 1526, which served as a template for subsequent royal weddings.

Chapter 2, “A Canonical Marriage for the Uninterrupted Succession to Your Royal Dynasty’: Royal Weddings and Dynastic Legitimacy,” describes how the first Romanov ruler, Mikhail I, modeled his own weddings on the precedents set by Vasili III and Elena Glinskaia, emphasizing continuity of royal ritual at a time of dynastic change.

The chapter includes a fascinating range of evidence including notes and “worksheets” by conciliar secretary Ivan Gromotin and his scribes, who choreographed the festivities. Martin observes, “The Romanovs would rule for 304 years, in no small part due to their successes in bootstrapping their legitimacy through the cunning use of ritual. Royal weddings as much as any other ritual were essential to that success” (p. 60).

As the Romanov dynasty became more secure, Mikhail’s son, Aleksei I, and grandson Peter the Great made significant changes to royal wedding ceremonial, which reflected their own personalities and interests, as discussed in chapter 3, “And Unlike Previous Royal Weddings, There Was Not the Usual Royal Ritual’: Continuity and Change.” The pious Aleksei I removed pre-Christian customs from the wedding festivities, including the sprinkling of hops at the door of the bridal chamber while, as discussed in chapter 7, “‘Delight in Exposing the Old Methods of the Country’: Transfigurations and Parodies,” the reform-minded Peter the Great parodied some of the old rituals, even celebrating a dwarf wedding at the same time as the wedding of his niece, the future Empress Anna.

The Tsar’s Happy Occasion does not only focus on Russian rulers and consorts but their extended families as well, demonstrating that the definition of the ruling dynasty was an expansive one, incorporating the descendants of royal cousins. The marriages of recognized royal relatives, no matter how distant, were considered politically significant, with potential to make valuable alliances with noble families and even neighboring powers in Europe and Asia. Chapter 4, “‘To Live Together in Holy Matrimony’: Orthodox and Heterodox,” discusses the challenges that ensued when Russian royal rituals intended to reassure a domestic audience of the legitimacy of the union and the wider dynasty were combined with rituals from other courts and religious denominations.

The analysis of the weddings of the First False Dmitrii, who claimed to be the youngest son of Czar Ivan IV “the Terrible,” and Polish noblewoman Marina Mniszech in 1605 (the Catholic ceremony) and 1606 (the Orthodox ceremony) provides a powerful counterpoint to the orderly ceremonial of Mikhail I’s subsequent weddings. The False Dmitri did not follow the accepted ceremonial and Martin observes, “The ritual atonality of these rites undermined their meaning and, indeed, turned them into weapons in the hands of the False Dmitrii’s enemies” (p. 132). Just as Mikhail I’s careful study of the precedents set by Vasili III contributed to the legitimacy of the Romanov dynasty, the First False Dmitrii’s blending of wedding and coronation rituals and Orthodox and Catholic customs contributed to his overthrow and death just weeks after his second wedding ceremony.

The chapter concerning Peter the Great notes that he was not the first Russian ruler to make dramatic changes to royal wedding rituals, as his elder half-brothers, Feodor III and Ivan V, celebrated their own weddings with abbreviated ceremonial, most likely due to their delicate health. Peter’s reforms are placed in historical context as critiquing and even parodying old rituals were part of his process of introducing new practices, including the revival of dynastic marriages for senior members of the Imperial family. The final chapter, “‘There Will Not Be Any Direful Reversions’: Heirs and Successors” quickly sketches royal weddings that took place in the twenty years after the death of Peter the Great on February 8, 1725, concluding with the wedding of Peter’s grandson Peter III to Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst, who later reigned as Catherine II “the Great” from 1762 to 1796.

While this last chapter highlights the significance of royal weddings that are comparatively little-known today, such as the wedding of Peter III’s parents, Grand Duchess Anna Petrovna and Karl Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp on May 21,

1725, this part of the book would have benefited from additional historical context concerning the German princely houses that provided brides and bridegrooms for eighteenth-century Russian grand dukes and grand duchesses. There are also a few errors in this final chapter concerning the relationships and dates of death of some of Peter the Great's family members. For example, Anna Petrovna's "aunt Natal'ia Alekseevna" is described as being present at her wedding, but this aunt had died in 1716 and it is more likely that Anna's niece, also named Natal'ia Alekseevna, was present at the wedding (p. 220) as she was alive at that time. Peter the Great's first wife, Evdokiia Lopukhina, is described as still alive in 1740 but she had died in 1731 (p. 226). These occasional errors regarding relationships and dates in the final chapter do not detract from the overall analysis of change and continuity in royal wedding rituals.

The Tsar's Happy Occasion complements other recent scholarly works such as *Succession to the Throne in Early Modern Russia: The Transfer of Power* (2021) by Paul Bushkovitch by analyzing the political significance of key events in royal domestic life such as weddings and the presentation of royal children to the court and wider public. This approach to the study of the royal life cycle highlights the importance of women to the legitimacy of the dynasty and the transfer of power from one generation to the next. Martin devotes much of chapter 5, "'To Serve without Regard for Place': In-laws and Courtiers" and chapter 6, "'To See Your Royal Children on Their Thrones': Brides and Gifts," to the role of women in these rituals, presenting gifts at court and integrating their families into the courtly elite. These chapters note the moments in the festivities where women exercised agency and became central to the ceremonial rituals.

The Tsar's Happy Occasion is an important addition to the study of women in early modern Russian court culture. The seclusion of elite Russian women in the terem in the sixteenth and sev-

enteenth centuries and the dismissive comments about the sisters and daughters of early Romanov rulers by certain foreign diplomats initially obscured the significance of royal women during this period. In recent decades, there has been important scholarship illuminating the complexity and influence of elite women's roles, including the work of Lindsey Hughes, Nancy Shields Kollman, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Natalia Pushkareva. Martin's well-researched analysis of royal wedding rituals provides an essential contribution to this rediscovery of the central role of royal women in court ceremony and dynastic legitimacy in early modern Russia.

Note

[1]. See Lindsey Hughes, *Sophia: Regent of Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Nancy Shields Kollmann, "The Seclusion of Elite Muscovite Women," *Russian History* 10, no. 2 (1983): 170-87; Natalia Pushkareva, *Women in Russian History: From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); and Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia 1700-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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