AFTER DECADES OF NEGLECT and disparagement, in the post-Soviet era there has been a resurgence of court history concerning Russia. Renewed vitality is reflected in a plethora of publications and in blockbuster international exhibitions, with elaborate catalogues concentrating on the Romanov dynasty and its more renowned representatives. The reputation of Catherine the Great provides a case in point. Designated by Soviet scholarship for three quarters of a century, she has now regained favour in Russia. Her cultural patronage was celebrated by a large exhibition at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg in 1993 (and earlier in Memphis, Los Angeles, and Dallas), by international scholar's conferences in 1996 on the bicentenary of her death, and by another big exhibition in Moscow at the State Tretyakov Gallery, linked to the city's 850th anniversary in 1997. Russian scholars have published both serious and popular works about her and her predecessors, although these have not focused upon the court as an institution or cultural centre. Anglo-American

1 Treasury of Imperial Russia: Catherine the Great from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (1990), edited by Tatiana Reshetova, St. Petersburg, 1990.
2 Treasury of Imperial Russia: Catherine the Great from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (1990), edited by Tatiana Reshetova, St. Petersburg, 1990.
3 Imperial Treasures: The Romanovs and Their Court, created by the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Museum of American History, the Freer Gallery of Art, the State Hermitage Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, hermitage, 1990.
4 Imperial Treasures: The Romanovs and Their Court, created by the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Museum of American History, the Freer Gallery of Art, the State Hermitage Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, hermitage, 1990.
scholarship on court-related themes has also blossomed with splendidly illustrated works by Brunfelm, Worthington, Croot, Svetkivsky, Cross, and Hughes that advance synthesizing interpretations of the international scholarly literature. New primary sources have also been printed too. This new scholarship is better able to give us a clearer picture of the types of events that took place in the court of the tsarina. As long as we are able to read about the court in multiple novels or books. Russian scholarship generally falls into two unequal parts: broad legal-sociological studies based on official documentation like Veykwi's handbook of 100 or so collections of small personal accounts of the some very 500 issues in 1878–82.

Romanov court history may be approached on several levels, for the imperial court may be defined in different ways. Like many early modern courts, it proves to be an elusive and 'prototypical institution.' Building on Worthington's work, Hughes goes on to argue that the tsar was not as important as he was thought to be. He underlines the 'cultural' of its evolving combination of European norms and Russian customs, the secular and the sacred, solemn ceremony and macabre, the new calendar of official holidays and celebrity乖乖一些文化行为和文化传统, including a penetrating inquiry into Peter's notorious 'All Drunken Assembly and Mock Court.' She makes excellent use of the fascinating diary of Friedrich Wilhelm von Bergholt to convey some sense of the court's ever-changing life, while admiring the problem of elucidating its interior life in the absence of detailed accounts by native Russian observers. In the personal and biographical sense the court comprised the ruler, the ruling family as a whole, and their households and immediate entourage. 14


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language is advisable here because of the sudden emergence of women rulers, the 'Russian matriarchate' that almost monopolized the throne from 1625 to 1796. This era is seen as a foundation for the 'Oriental'empires explored in Worthington's enticingly-titled chapters. Certainly there was inherent tension in the concept of autocracy (absolute monocratic power) wielded by females—traditionally the gender sex—in the late 19th century the Peter the Great's rigorous rule. In my own research into Amazonian visions as applied to the Russian emperor-autocrats, I have been struck by the imprecise language and confused political concepts employed by Worthington and, more recently, by Whitaker and Winterschmid in discussing notions of autocracy and social groupings. 23: Citing Israel de Madagascar's seminal study, Whitaker acknowledges Russian's vague usage of the terms autocracy and monarchy, but she herself employs autocracy and the autocracy interchangingly (notice how differently the monarchy scarecounatv), and she endorses the supposedly conventional enlightenment precept that denied any significant difference between male and female rulers. 24: By contrast, the Russian aristocratic writer, historian, and political thinker Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826) distinguished Catherine the Great from Peter the Great in this regard: 'The main achievement of this unfortified queen was to soften autocracy without undermining it. Her European women's ways achieved Petrine brutality and coercion, elevated Russian national self-esteem, and hence 'democratized autocracy from the stain of tyranny.' 25: It is now well established that Catherine I did not in fact consider her authority absolute, that she nurtured reformist ideas of a 'constitutionalist bent till the last years of her long reign (1746–92), and that she ruled with minimal coercion. 26: This question of autocracy in Russia is linked to broader controversies about absolutism and gender in early modern Europe. 27: The Romanov family's female representatives proliferated from the mid-seventeenth century, as Tsar Aleksei during his long reign (1645–76) sired a total


of sixteen children: thirteen with Maria Milusovskaya (1626–69) and three with Natalia Naryshkina (1631–94). Ten of these offspring were females, five of whom survived into the 1700s and yet, in accordance with recent Muscovite custom, none married. Only three males reached adulthood (the eldest died in 1682 at the age of twenty without issue) and just one Peter (1617–1725) left any male heir among some fifteen offspring from two marriages—his grandson, Peter Alekseyevich (1671–1730). Moreover, Peter I’s half-brother Ivan (1666–96) fathered five daughters. Three lived into adulthood. All three broke tradition by marrying, two entering European princely houses. Anna Ivanovna (1689–1760), who won of marriage, regained her dowager duchess of Courland from 1710 until her surprise selection as empress of Russia in 1730. Ekaterina Ivanovna (1692–1733) — Svetlana Kishlakova to her doting mother — lived briefly in Mecklenburg after her marriage in 1716, before returning to Russia with her daughter Anna Leopoldovna (1718–46). The third daughter, sickly from youth, married a senator and general, Ivan Dmitriev-Mamonov, who predeceased his wife in 1769. The number of widows among Russian princesses in the eighteenth century is striking. Three of the four empresses who followed Peter the Great were widows: Catherine I, Anna Ivanovna, and Catherine II. Maybe the post-Petrine period should be termed the Wart of the Merry Widow.

Clearly, substantial infrastructure was necessary to house and feed the ruling family and to minister to its familial, religious, and dynastic needs. When the family’s ruling and ceremonial functions are added, the supporting structures and personnel expanded dramatically. A roster of court personnel in 1730 listed 625 persons with annual salaries of 83,527 roubles. This was minuscaled compared to the 1600 court personnel employed by the Romanovs in 1614 or the more than two thousand living at the Winter Palace in the mid-nineteenth century. Expenditure on the court, which rose about sixfold during Catherine the Great’s reign (unrecorded for inflation), totalled 10.6 million roubles or 13.4 percent of total state spending of 79.1 million roubles in 1798. As an outpost of the Tsar’s household, the court was both a public institution and the setting for the emperor’s private life — ‘private’ in a fashionised sense of course. From 1730 if not before, all court personnel had to swear an oath on the Bible and cross, with signatures, to keep secret everything seen and heard at court, and to report any abuse of the sovereign or imperial service. Naturally, gossip and speculation sought to breach the wall of silence. At the same time the official court herald’s journal began to be compiled in expanded form in Petrine times, and gradually enlarged its coverage of public functions, becoming unusually detailed under Catherine II.
Oddly, this listing omitted the post of state-dama or lady in waiting—one of the most prestigious offices for married women, usually wives of prominent statesmen. (Only one case is known of an unmarried state-dama M. S. Gudinova, a relative of the late Catherine II.) On this point Catherine II late in life wrote her long-suffering freitina Protosopa: "Having arrived at a more than reasonable age without finding her husband, her majesty preserved her with her portrait with the title "maid in waiting." There was instant confusion about this new name and internecine strife among the various women's court circles, but by mid-century they had been reduced to five main categories: ober-golferinna, gol-medienstt, stata-dama, kanter-freitina, and freitina. All were supposed to be addressed as singel osteoropovshchikine (Your Excellence). The staffing regulations of 1796 authorized twelve state-damas and twelve freitinas. Neither post had specific duties; their bearers were not even obliged to attend court ceremonies. Freitina assigned to the emperor were considered senior to those assigned to grand-duchesses, many of whom lived at court, a court-provided dacha upon marriage, which sometimes took place at court. Though courtiers dressed richly, as in France or Austria there was no standard court uniform until the nineteenth century. From 1762 karmerenka (women's crown) was worn by all until 1769; under Anna Ivanovna only freitinas were permitted to wear their hair in curls. If Catherine II struggled to reunify court life as it was in the 1780s and to discourage her women courtiers from following foreign fashions, Paul I immediately sought to undo this by demanding full European court dress at his coronation in March 1797. Both Russian monarchs and nobles liked to adopt to foreign influences, Peter I prized himself in a Russian original, English envoy Wharton reported. He speaks High Dutch pretty readily, which is now growing the court language. Such reports gave rise to the myth that Peter intended to make Dutch the official language. Even the barely literate Alexander Menshikov, however, spoke and understood German, and spent some time in Germany. A mixture of languages was used at court till late in this century, when French became more prominent among the Russian aristocracy. The coronation of Anna Ivanovna in 1739, Elizabeth in 1742, and Catherine II in 1762 were all lavishly dressed in elaborate printed and illustrated descriptions in both Russian and German. 24

27. Shepely, Tula, pp. 177–178.
30. Shepely, Tula, p. 189.
32. C. Velitchkov, The Tsar's Place in the State 1707 (Stroud Green, 1782), pp. 53–60.
34. V. Velitchkov, A Balkan Empire, ed. by D. W. McAllister (Ivanovo, 1995), pp. 99–100.

In political terms the court was identified, above all, with individual sovereigns with supposedly unborrowed personal authority. The Government is absolute in the last degree, explained Wharton, not bound up by any law or custom, but depending on the breath of the Prince, by which the lives and fortunes of all the subjects are decided. This was a venerable foreign contention. In the 1760s Macartney insisted that the government has always been despotic, is now, and is likely to continue so... but to despise Russia even her greatness and domestic tranquility, so that if ever the monarchy becomes more limited dw we lose her power and strength in proportion as she advances in moral virtues and civil improvement. If in fact, supreme authority proved to be extraordinarily fragile in the era of palace revolutions, which used to be standard western terminology for the period 1725–1801. But dynastic disaster and coup may be dated even earlier, from Peter I's sudden enforcement and disembowelment in 1682 to Paul I's equally sudden assassination in 1801. There were several lesser court scandals. These include the death under torture of tennaisy Peter II in 1718; the execution of Kanter-freitina Maria Himmelon for abortion and infanticide in 1719; the drowning of Seraphina Fedorova's boat and setting fire to a courtier for suspected theft and disloyalty in 1722; the execution of chamberlain Voin Mossov for corruption and suspected adultery with the empress in 1724. Other political surprises included Catherine I's envisagement in 1725; Alexander Menshikov's rise and fall in 1725–7; Peter I's death from smallpox in January 1728—after he and his bride-to-be stood out on the ice of the Moskva River for four hours on one of the coldest days of the year during the Epiphany ceremony; Anna Ivanovna's selection for the throne in 1730 and constitutional crisis and elite disassociation; the rise and fall of the Brunswick branch of the imperial family in 1740–1. There were more political trials and scandals during Elizabeth's reign, the inglorious reign of Peter III—180 days in 1762–3—and the turbulent start of Catherine II's long tenure. All these events sparked popular images of the Romanov court as a place of intrigues, impostures, and life and death struggles for political survival. These images became inextricable in Russian history and lore long before the execution of the last ruling Romanovs came an aura of martyrdom to the dynasty. The modem Russian court gradually took shape around Peter's female relations and, most of all, the woman who became his second wife, the foreign-born and illiterate Catherine I (1684–1725). Her robust physique is confirmed by portraits and by the parade dress in the Topkapi exhibition decorated with an Amazon motif. Wharton praised her as 'the famous Ciatta' and 'this memorable [148]
great civilization, have the court coaches to carry them about the town, and are shown everywhere generally shown to strangers.**

During her own reign Catherine I instituted regular evening receptions or court days, "Kurtdachi" [i.e., Kurtagy].** Under Anna Ivanovna the institution was described as follows: "Our drawing-room is more like an assembly; there is a circle in form, far about half an hour; then the czarina and the princesses make their party at cards, and every body that presses make their own party."** Rodeau testified to the relaxed atmosphere and the empress's ability to maintain her dignity while dissuading "all over and exhibiting so much humanity in one who has such despotic power."** Gradually growing, in size, these informal receptions became a fixture at the imperial Russian court.**

The court played a prominent part in the annual round of festivities celebrated by church and state. The Apple-harvest ceremony, or Blessing of the Waters on 6 January, was staged on the Minskii in front of the Kremlin and in St. Petersburg in front of the Winter Palace, which eventually included a permanent "Jordan Stairway" leading down to the Neva. It was both a religious holiday and one celebrated by the monarch, the court, and the armed forces. Bergholz observed in Moscow on 9 January 1722 that it began with bell-ringing throughout the metropolis from midnight and climaxing with the emperor leading 14,000 troops onto the ice as a backdrop for hundreds of clergy to bless the waters before an immense throng, some of whom, to Bergholz's amazement, even swam in the icy waters amid a snowstorm.** The Russian court became famous for its feasts, musical and theatrical entertainments and firework displays.

Among the appendages of the court was the first public zoo in Russia, founded by Peter I in the Summer Garden in 1713 with exotic animals including an elephant, a lion, and birds sent by the Shah of Persia. The elephant was a particular attraction and was fed a rich daily diet topped off by a bucket of common wine, while the lion was fed with grapes. The captive population, as attested by one that lasted a week, staged at the coffeehouse Cherep Frigate (Four Frigates) in St. Petersburg in 1713, with fifty-eight different groups of costumed reevers.**

The thirteenth anniversary of Peter's coronation in Potsdam on 23 June 1721 Bergholz rapturously described Catherine's court in the Summer Garden, concluding that "the tsarina's court is as fine and beautiful as almost all the German courts."** Similar sentiments were expressed by French prisoners of war in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1734 and the celebrations of the Russian capture of Darasugi. One quoted by Lady Rodeaue expressed great surprise at the magnificence of this court, and its politeness. And indeed they are treated with