

The Miracle Field in the Land of Fools

Roman Bessonov writes from St. Petersburg about the campaign to bury skeletons believed (by some) to belong to the last Romanov Tsar, Nicholas II.

Writer Aleksei N. Tolstoy, illegitimate offspring of the prominent noble family, returned from emigration to Soviet Russia in the 1920s and soon became colloquially famous as the “Red Count.” Back in the U.S.S.R., he wrote several new books, including the novel *Peter I*, reportedly ordered by Josef Stalin personally, and the Russian version of Pinocchio, known as *Buratino*.

In this fairy tale, the cunning fox and the cat lead the little boy made of wood to the Land of Fools, where money can allegedly be grown on trees in a place called the Miracle Field.

The materialistic Pinocchio did not get transformed into a normal boy, like his Italian relative. But he led other dolls, boys and girls, to the real land of happiness at the end of the story, while evil, exemplified by Alisa the Fox and Basilio the Cat, was punished.

The period of Gorbachov’s perestroika in the 1980s introduced new thinking, and a new understanding of persons and events. *Ogonyok* magazine, in the vanguard of glasnost, published the story of writer Leonid Dobychin who perished in an NKVD jail as a result of a report written by the Red Count. The image of the nobleman converting to Communism, was deconsecrated. Soon after, the founders of Communism were deconsecrated, and the Lenin Museum, in the city which lost his name, was shut down.

But the bastard count was luckier. In the spirit of Stanislav Govorukhin’s monarchy-nostalgic film *Russia We Have Lost*, assemblies of nobility and nobility balls were revived in 1990s Russia, with what human material was available. The material was as fake as Aleksei Tolstoy’s title of count. Like the figures of saints on the restored Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which appear to be made of plastic, the fake successors of the Russian noble class took up their posts, speaking from tribunes or living in mansions.

The Congress of Compatriots, designed to attract Russian emigrés to support of the newly restored “historical Russia,” opened in Moscow just a few days before the failed putsch of Aug. 19-21, 1991, which spelled the end of the Soviet Union. This conference was organized and headed by Aleksei Tolstoy’s grandson, Mikhail Tolstoy (president), and a certain alleged nobleman, Ivan Artsishevsky. Five years later, the same Mr. Artsishevsky was elected head of the St. Petersburg branch of the Support Fund for Special Services and Law

Enforcement Bodies.

At the dawn of “democratic revolution,” Mr. Tolstoy, Junior and Mr. Artsishevsky were seen in the environs of St. Petersburg’s first “democratic” leader, Mayor Anatoli Sobchak. Five years later, when the latter locked himself in a Paris flat, fleeing from criminal prosecution for corruption, Aleksei Tolstoy’s heir, along with his “enforcement” partner, are still to be seen around the St. Petersburg City Hall, busily organizing the burial of several skeletons, which have been “almost definitely” identified as the remains of the executed Tsar Nicholas II and his family.

Ironically, the group that had dug up these skeletons was deployed in 1979 by the infamous Brezhnev-era law enforcement minister Shchokolov, who, five years later, became the major victim of the first post-Stalin anti-corruption campaign, and committed suicide.

Minister Shchokolov’s motives were related to the tendency for the justification of monarchic rule, which emerged in Brezhnev’s later years, and involved a significant layer of the “creative intelligentsia,” exemplified by Bulat Okudzhava’s novel *The Travel of the Dilettantes* and Igor Volgin’s research on the last years of Fyodor Dostoevsky, published in 1981. Okudzhava, who also wrote rhymes for children, appeared to be the author of the song “The Miraculous Field” in the screen version of Aleksei Tolstoy’s *Buratino*, produced by theater manager Mark Zakharov.

The burial of the remains, supposed to be those of the last Romanov Tsar, has been scheduled for July, by decision of the since-ousted Russian government.

A memorial Mercedes

Soon after Boris Yeltsin climbed down from the tank where he took his stand against the would-be “putsch” of August 1991 — his version of Vladimir Lenin’s armored car in 1917 — theater manager Mark Zakharov became a member of the Presidential Council, and the ideologist of revived Russian historical greatness. His favorite Russian thinker, Fyodor Dostoevsky, is now carved in bronze in Volkhonka Street, replacing Yakov Sverdlov, the head of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee who had ordered the execution of Nicholas II and his family in 1918.

Just at the moment when Okudzhava and Zakharov went

into action to inspire the “creative intelligentsia” for Yeltsin’s fight against the first democratically elected parliament in 1992, leading into the year of the parliament’s destruction in 1993, a German post-modernist artist, visiting St. Petersburg, installed a Mercedes on the empty pedestal where Lenin’s armored car had been standing. For some reason, the authorities did not get the joke, though it was their own initiative to re-establish the Lenin Museum as the International Exhibition Hall.

The same fall of 1992 was when Boris Yeltsin was warmly welcomed in London, and exactly then, Prince Philip offered his blood as material for identification of the alleged monarchic remains. Philip is a close cousin of the Romanovs, on his mother’s side (see **Figure 1**).

Five years later, a great effort by the ideologists of President Yeltsin’s career, starting with Igor Chubais—the elder brother of privatization zealot Anatoli Chubais, and himself famous, first, as the most democratic Communist among Communists, founder of the “Democratic Platform” within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and then as the most monarchist democrat among democrats—was concentrated on organizing the great political event, called the Simultaneous Burial. The essence of the project, evidently imported from London, was to deconsecrate Vladimir Lenin, by burying his mummified body, which has been on display in the Mausoleum in Red Square for over 70 years, and to canonize Nicholas II, also by means of burial.

The state leadership may have been saved from the disgrace that would have attended the implementation of this project, had it really taken place, by the unknown chauffeur of a hired car, who drove off in a Mercedes with Igor Chubais’s briefcase, tightly packed with U.S. dollars, on the back seat (so says Chubais).

Veterans of the funeral battle

In 1996, Queen Elizabeth’s birthday party was attended by two monarchists from St. Petersburg. One of them, the son of a war veteran, had once been jailed for drawing swastikas in the streets on Adolf Hitler’s birthday, and the other was a retired Navy colonel.

The first, Nikolai Braun, represented the old emigré anti-Communist organization known as Russian Imperial Union-Order (RISO). Shortly before his London trip, he had been officially expelled from this organization, but for some reason, the London Monarchist Society found nobody else to represent the Russian monarchist movement. Later it was explained that Braun was the personal choice of the Tolstoy Foundation’s Nikolai D. Tolstoy.

RISO’s ex-head Pyotr Koltypin-Vallovsky, who originally appointed Braun to represent the Order in the new democratic Russia, was the very person who headed the alternative commission of experts on the Romanov bones, representing the views of the emigré Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR).

This commission opposed the official expertise, questioning also the validity of Prince Philip’s genetic material. It was not until the eve of the final decision of the Moscow “funeralists,” in the winter of this year, that ROCOR’s leadership claimed that the genuine Romanov remains are already buried in Brussels.

This last-minute scandal only contributed to the raging brawl around the reportedly genuine Romanov remains. Eduard Rossel and Vladimir Yakovlev, the governors of Yekaterinburg (where the Tsar was shot) and St. Petersburg, respectively, each insisted that the funeral should take place in his city. This heated discussion, swallowing a lot of budget funds for trips of the commission and parts (!) of the remains from Yekaterinburg to Moscow and back, ended with “victory” for St. Petersburg, due to three persons:

- Nikolai R. Romanov, grandson of Grand Duke Pyotr Nikolayevich, the brother of the infamous Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, chief of Russia’s Military Staff (which first pulled Russia into World War I, and then destroyed the Russian Army in this war);
- his friend Academician Dmitry Likhachov, a prisoner of the NKVD in the 1920s;
- their permanent partner Ivan Artsishevsky, promoter of assistance for security services and law enforcement bodies.

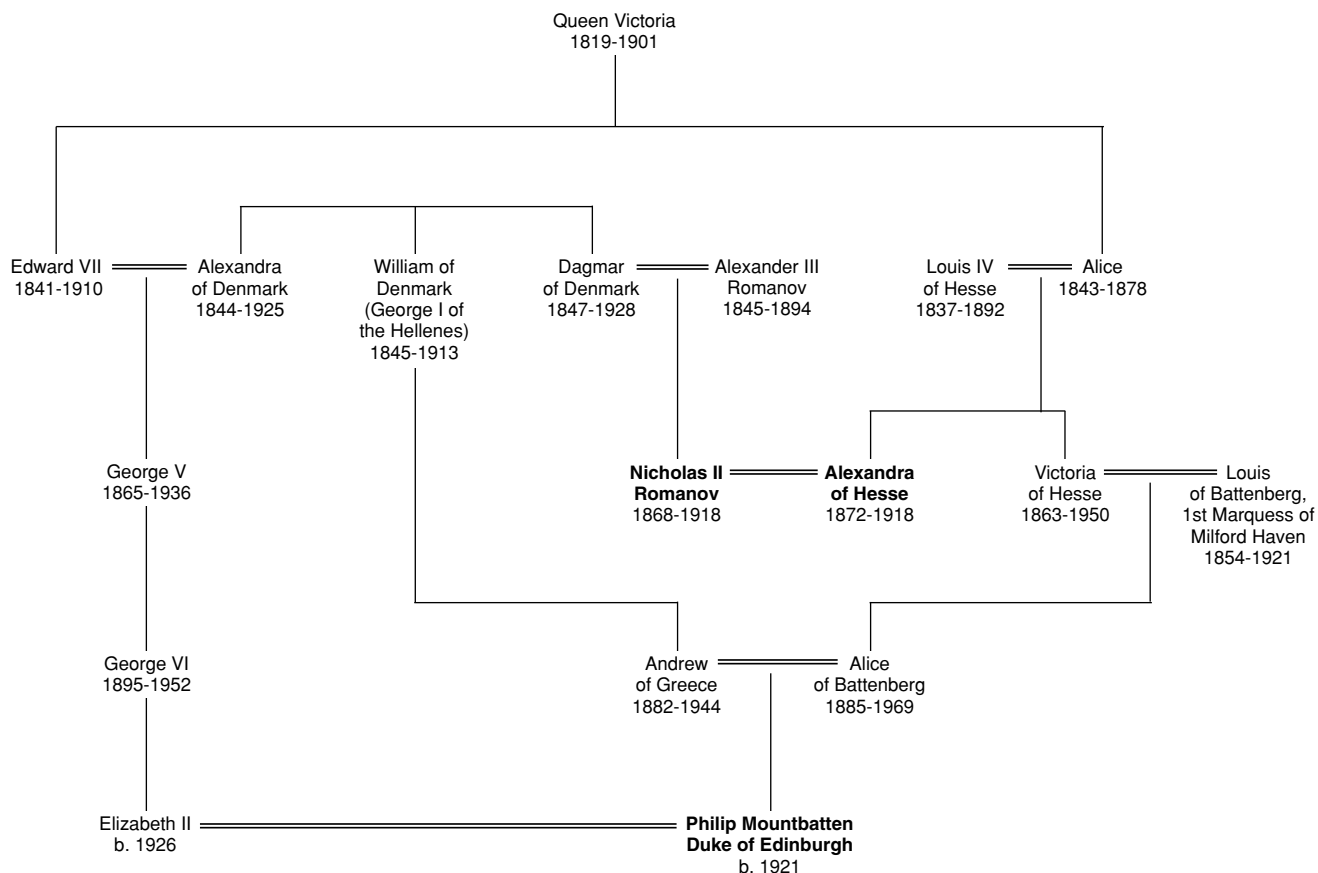
Before this result was obtained, the time for the Simultaneous Burial operation had expired—not because of the controversy between St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, and not only as a result of the episode with Igor Chubais’s suitcase, but due to the rivalry of two branches of the Romanov family, which obviously have been quarreling even since Nicholas II was alive (see **Figure 2**).

The rival branch, representing the Hohenzollern-Bagration family, intermarried with the Romanovs, and its teenaged heir Georgi, usually called Gogi by his half-Georgian mother, was the official choice of London till late 1996. It might have been at Queen Elizabeth’s birthday festivity, when the Tolstoy Foundation changed London’s sympathy in favor of the “Nikolayevichi.” In 1997 in St. Petersburg, the favorites of Academician Likhachov were represented not only by Nikolai R. Romanov, but also by his distant relative Georgi Romanov-Yurievsky, a young Swiss citizen with rich experience in military training. Yurievsky recently posed as the best friend of Bulgaria, at a Moscow event dedicated to an anniversary of Bulgaria’s liberation from the Ottomans by the Russian Army.

A third would-be King was probably the most exotic person. Styling himself as a son of the allegedly survived son of Nicholas II, Aleksei, he managed to get himself crowned, an effort in which Gogi Hohenzollern failed. The phony coronation was, moreover, performed by a phony Church, the so-called Kiev Patriarchate, which emerged from the failure of the Kiev Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko) in the rivalry for the post of Moscow Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1990.

FIGURE 1

Prince Philip and the Romanov dynasty



Prince Philip's DNA was used for identification of the "Yekaterinburg" bones. Philip Mountbatten is Empress Alexandra's great-nephew, on his mother's side, and Tsar Nicholas's first cousin once removed, on his father's side. Queen Elizabeth is a first cousin twice removed of both Nicholas and Alexandra.

A rather remarkable dialogue took place in Moscow, at one of the events organized by the fake "Nicholas III." "We are supported by Russia's military intelligence," says an assistant to the fake heir, proudly. Another guest, forgetting he is a spy of the "Kirillovichi" (Gogi and his mother), turns pale and objects: "But Russian military intelligence supports *us!*"

Most likely, the first speaker was referring to promotional support from Gen. Vladimir Platonov, better known as a deputy of retired KGB Gen. Aleksandr Sterligov in the Russian National Congress. "Law enforcement" is also probably involved, since Prof. Ivan Chabanov, representing Nicholas III in St. Petersburg, is a member of the expert council of the local Interior Ministry department.

Thighs and Kings

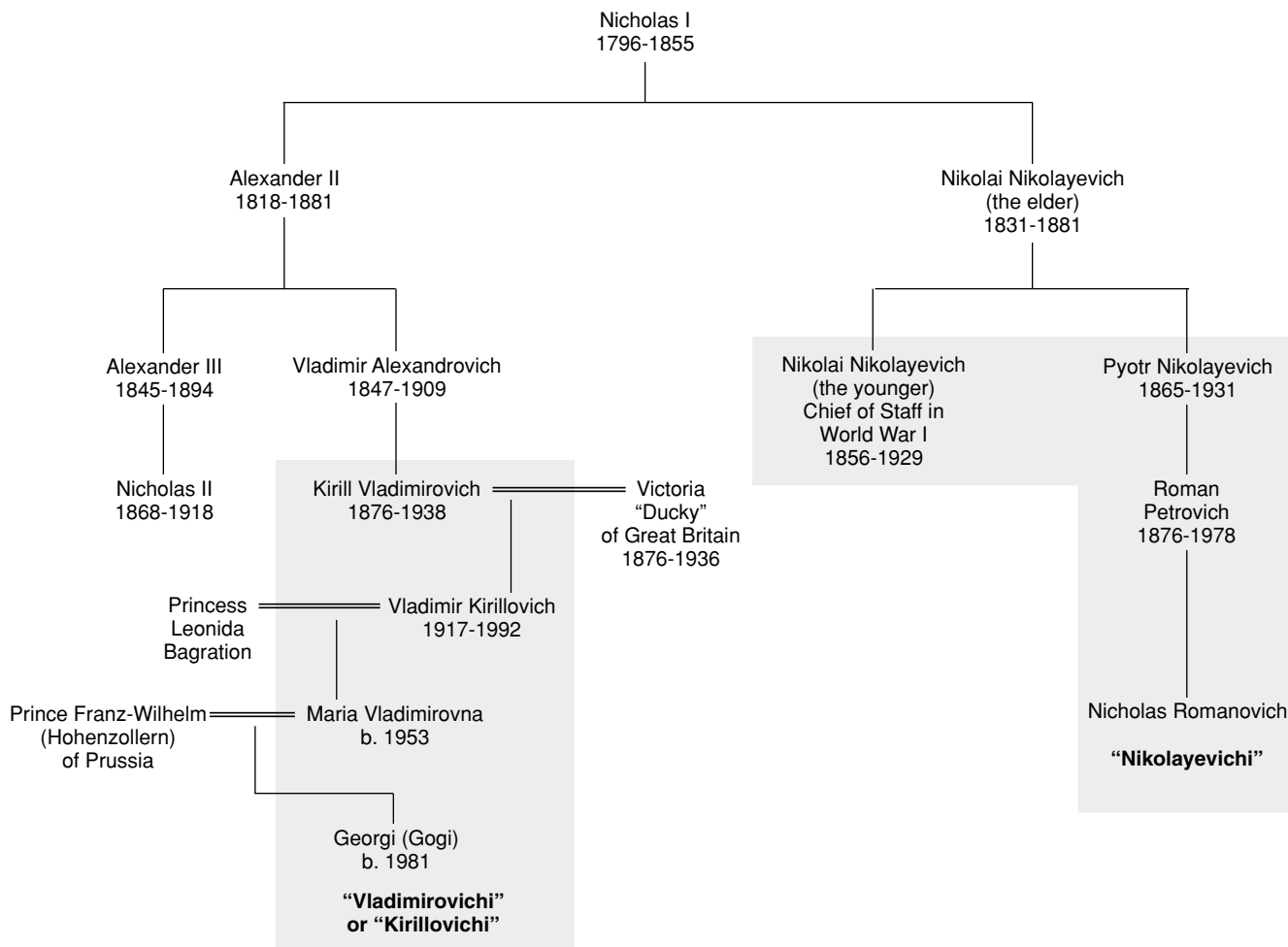
The disgrace of the Hohenzollern branch in Russia was evidently linked with President Yeltsin's support for the Rus-

sian successors of vodka manufacturer Pyotr Smirnov. It appeared that Gogi and his mother were actually on the payroll of the "foreign" (U.S.-based) branch of the Smirnovs (spelled Smirnoff).

In this way, the fate of state ideology appeared to be tightly associated with vodka manufacturing. Who could have expected that the Hohenzollerns' rivals and their official patron, First Vice Premier Boris Nemtsov, known as a strong protector of the Russian auto industry, would turn out to be engaged in a commercial activity far less patriotic than the foreign Smirnovs (who have traded their product for decades, with no harm done to domestic producers for Russia's bottomless vodka demand)!

But, no sooner had the term, site, and subject of the long-discussed burial been defined as July 17 in St. Petersburg, with interment of the Yekaterinburg bones, though they are not officially recognized as genuine by the Russian Orthodox

FIGURE 2
The Romanov heirs



At the time of Tsar Nicholas II's death, there were eight living Romanov Grand Dukes (sons or grandsons of Tsars). This diagram shows only the "Vladimirovichi" (or "Kirillovichi") and the "Nikolayevichi" lines.

Church, when a series of publications in *Novye Izvestia* exploded the last and decisive media bomb on the whole expensive effort of the monarchic revival.

Novye Izvestia's investigative team found out that Boris Nemtsov and the special government identification commission were involved in the import of U.S.-produced chicken thighs—the notorious "Bush legs" that have undercut the national poultry industry in Russia. The operations of the mysterious Committee for Promotion (!) of Burial of Monarchical Remains, existing since as long ago as April 1996, were certainly overseen by intelligence officials, in this case, through the watchdog department of the Customs Service. Simultaneously, the government's PR head Igor Shabdurasulov was forced to admit that the accounts of the State Customs Committee, officially transferred to Russia's Central Bank, are

again (or still?) serviced by Oneksimbank, which has been scandalously favored both by Russian "young reformers" (Nemtsov and Anatoli Chubais), and by Russian arms traders.

The latest results of *Novye Izvestia's* investigation solved the puzzle that was presented in the above-quoted conversation of two sincere adepts of the monarchical idea. One of the board members of the mysterious trading company, with a name almost coinciding with that of the state commission, appeared to be Nikolai Dalsky—the very person who styles himself as Nicholas III.

Another series of exposé publications featured Boris Nemtsov, accompanied by a lot of naked girls in a fancy suburban mansion owned by Oneksimbank. The whole story became known because the young reformers forgot to pay their ladies. Russian society is rather tolerant toward scandals

associated with vodka and naked thighs. But the detail that the girls were not paid, in the context of the young reformers' agitation for saving budget money, portrays the heroes in a most amusing way—and humor is the most effective weapon against ideology. So, when in several days Boris Nemtsov raised his voice against “oligarchs,” with the intention of creating his own political party, even the truce struck between him and ORT Television did not save him. Mocking the didactic revelations that recently appeared on Mr. Nemtsov's personal web page, *Kommersant* called it “*Pyzhdyr maksymar-dysh pyzh*”—a solemn Soviet-era revolutionary slogan in the Volga Tartar language, which sounds comical in Russian and made every reader burst into laughter.

The coins sown in the Miraculous Field have not grown up into trees with golden fruit. They disappeared, and not even Sister Alice and Brother Vasili can tell where they are, themselves having been fooled by more skilled Russian swindlers. Now they will have to think hard, what kind of mythology to introduce next.

Spring on Spiridonovka Street

There is no longer an Aleksei Tolstoy Street in Moscow: It is again called by its “historical” name, Spiridonovka, although nobody can tell you what landowner Spiridonov was famous for, besides being a landowner. Professional “demo-

crat” Sergei Stankevich, who used to inhabit one of the luxury flats in the area, has found his Paris in Warsaw (out of reach from Russian prosecutors, who are after him for taking bribes when he was deputy mayor of Moscow), by styling himself now as a Polish nobleman and successor of a hero of the landowners' Polish revolt. Lenivka (“Lazy Street”), which never changed its name, lazily rolls down to the glistening embankment of the Moskva River, by the gigantic plastic saint-decorated cathedral. The Moscow 800th anniversary celebrations are over, and the entrance of the cathedral is barred with wooden boards, as it was in 1918. Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich is invited to a pompous ceremony with champagne and caviar. Right before the event, he is told that it is postponed. The hall appears to be reserved for another party. Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, seeking support from a leftist electorate, celebrates the 100th anniversary of the First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. Guests applaud, and flatteringly recognize him as the leader of “Russia's left center.”

Moscow officials can't help grinning, calling the boss “a smart Buratino,” the colloquial expression being derived from Aleksei Tolstoy's materialistic wooden boy. Others remember that something of this sort has already happened with another mayor, Aleksandr Rutskoy: released from custody, where he was packed off by his former partner in the democratic revolution (Yeltsin), he posed for a photo under the portrait of Nicholas II, but later the same month, renamed his political party the Russian Social Democratic Popular Party. (Neither mask helped him to win the Presidential elections.)

In early March 1998, then-Vice Prime Minister Anatoli Chubais, whom the “revolutionary” Luzhkov ritually denounces, also felt somewhat anxious. The Vecheka, his own “evolutionary” invention, had evidently failed to fulfill its mission, in the face of the global financial crisis, and the sabotage of the IMF instructions he was supposed to implement has consequences. The very idea of using Dzherzhinsky's threatening title (Chubais named the tax collection agency with the first acronym of the later KGB, Soviet intelligence) for the task of improving tax collection did not work. Debtors just did not believe, as other Russians don't believe, in any word, gesture, or statement of apparatchiks turned democrats turned monarchists turned social-democrats, and vice versa.

A lot of clever imagemakers, running around with an important air, are of no use: All their efforts with the same material, dressed in this or that, more and more evidently appear to be a zero-sum game.

The late Bulat Okudzhava once wrote a short verse, on why kingdoms die: “not because life is hard, not because the people suffer: kingdoms die, and with more pain, the longer it takes, when people don't respect their kingdom any longer.”

At the time when this was written, its author identified himself not as a creative intellectual, not a democrat or monarchist, but just as a soldier. For that reason, he was right.

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