

CROWNED SISTERS:
OBJECT ANALYSIS OF COURT DRESS DURING QUEEN ALEXANDRA AND EMPRESS
MARIE FEODOROVNA'S INFLUENTIAL REIGNS

by

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Crowned Sisters: Object Analysis of Court Dress During Queen Alexandra And Empress Marie Feodorovna's Influential Reigns, Master of Arts, 2019, Elizabeth Emily Mackey, Fashion Studies, Ryerson University

Abstract

This Major Research Paper examines female court dress regulations during Queen Alexandra of England and her younger sister, Empress Marie Feodorovna of Russia's tenures as societal heads during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Through object analysis of a court gown of Queen Alexandra's from the Royal Ontario Museum, and a Russian Maid of Honour's court gown from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, this research compares how each nation utilized court dress to express wealth, and if the court dress of each nation could communicate the wearer's court rank within a foreign court. While both nation's court dress communicated wealth, the motives were different: England's court dress was highly influenced by fashion trends, whereas Imperial Russian court dress was unchanging in its appearance as its primary purpose was to display a national character. Combining the analysis of each court gown with secondary research and the theory of Thorstein Veblen regarding luxury dress, this paper concludes that each nation's court dress was highly communicative of a wearer's rank and wealth.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Princess Alexandra Caroline Marie Charlotte Louise Julia and Princess Marie Sophie Frederikke Dagmar were born in the mid-1840s at the Yellow Palace in Copenhagen, Denmark to future King Christian IX and Louise of Hesse-Kassel.¹ Born to a minor house that would quickly rise to prominence when their father became the heir to the throne of Denmark, which is a constitutional monarchy, the sisters both made powerful matches to the heir to the English throne, future King Edward VII, the son of Queen Victoria, and the heir to the Russian throne, future Tsar Alexander III. Raised in a relatively simple way, the sisters were brought up with thriftiness, liberally minded politics, and a loving family environment.² Upon moving to their new nations, both sisters were known for their sense of style and sociable demeanour and were extremely popular with their subjects. Queen Alexandra and Marie Feodorovna maintained a strong sisterly bond throughout their lives despite occasionally tense political climates between their nations.³

While the sister's life biographies share many similarities, their adopted nations were vastly different. Russia was an extremely patrimonial society without a constitutional monarchy, whereas by the late nineteenth-century England had been a constitutional monarchy for almost two centuries.⁴ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were an era of Imperialism which emphasized aristocratic ways of life led by the royal families of Europe. In this Major Research Paper (MRP) the court dress of each sister's nation will be examined to discern how the regulated dress required for court functions communicated wealth, rank, and social power.

¹ This MRP will use the French spelling, Marie, to identify Empress Marie Feodorovna.

² Coryne Hall, *Little Mother of Russia: A Biography of the Empress Marie Feodorovna (1847-1928)* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1999), 5.

³ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 226.

⁴ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), 101.



Figure 1.1 François Flameng, *Queen Alexandra*, 1908, oil on canvas, Royal Collection Trust, London.



Figure 1.2 Vladimir Makovsky, *Empress Maria Feodorovna*, c. 1912, oil on canvas, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

In Figures 1.1 and 1.2, early twentieth century portraits of Queen Alexandra and Marie Feodorovna, show each woman wearing their nation's court dress. Queen Alexandra is ethereal in a white silk gown with train, bedecked with jewelled accessories, and wearing a blue Order of the Garter sash. What immediately marks Queen Alexandra's gown as ceremonial is this sash, followed by the voluminous train. Her younger sister Marie Feodorovna is in a typical Russian court gown, which shares similarities with her sister's, such as jewelled accessories, a train, and a blue sash. However, Marie Feodorovna's sash is of the Order of St. Andrew. Despite these similarities, Marie Feodorovna's purple velvet gown could not be mistaken for a typical evening gown as her sister's could and appears ceremonial due to its unique sleeves, elaborate embroidery, train, and veil. The portrait of Marie Feodorovna features more signs of her royal status: such as the colour of her gown in purple, a hue associated with royalty, a larger tiara than Queen Alexandra's, and in the background, there is a large ermine fur which is traditionally associated with those reigning in a monarchy. Marie Feodorovna's gown adhered to Russian court dress regulations, which ruled that all gowns worn in the Russian court must share the same characteristics of velvet bodice, skirt, and train, silk underskirt, and embroidered designs on each component.⁵ While there were variants allowed in Russian court gowns, the most common difference was how much money was spent on the gown while still adhering to the court dress style.⁶ In these portraits, the distinctions between the two nations' court dress are apparent despite some shared characteristics.

⁵ Greg King, *The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), 244.

⁶ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 122.

This project explores an amalgamation and organization of the regulations governing women's court dress of England and Russia. Using the methodologies of secondary research of academic sources and museum publications, and object analysis of a circa 1903 court gown of Queen Alexandra's and a Russian court gown, c. 1900 the national court dress regulations have been researched.⁷ The British court gown regulations were highly influenced by fashion trends, whereas Russian court gown regulations had been cemented for decades, creating a distinctly national dress. Throughout this project, the component of Thorstein Veblen's theory on women's dress that will be utilized is that in which women's dress in the late nineteenth century communicated wealth.⁸ As the women came from the modest Danish royal family in comparison to the British and Russian families, the wealth they represented was both their husband's and new nation's, and increased overnight upon their marriages.

Researching both court gowns reveals the importance of the women's dress in communicating wealth and power. The effect wearing court dress in both British and Russian courts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had on wearers and viewers is also unveiled in this research. In comparing two court gowns from Western and Eastern Europe, which were connected by two crowned sisters, the hierarchy, power, and wealth



Figure 1. 3 Maull & Co., Alexandra, Princess of Wales and Tsarevna Marie Feodorovna of Russia, c. 1874, albumen print, Royal Collection Trust, London.

⁷ Queen Alexandra's court gown is from the Royal Ontario Museum, accession number 942.12.3.A, and the Russian court gown is from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number C.I.53.46 a-g.

⁸ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class; an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1934),

that women's court dress was capable of communicating proves that despite being for separate courts, each dress expresses the wearer's rank in the court.



Figure 1.4 The above image was made by Queen Alexandra to represent her Danish relatives, including her sister Marie, in the 1860s. Queen Alexandra, Collage Design of Queen Alexandra's Danish Family, c. 1866-69. mixed media. Roval Collection Trust. London.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

This Major Research Paper furthers academic literature on the topic of English and Russian court gowns at the turn of the twentieth century by conducting research on court dress regulations in the British and Russian Empires during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This review focuses on the sources available specifically on Queen Alexandra and Marie Feodorovna and their courts. The literature used for this research has come from multiple subject areas to create an interdisciplinary picture of their experience with court dress.

Sources on Both Sisters

It was not possible to locate academic sources that focused completely on the court dress of Marie Feodorovna's and Queen Alexandra's adopted nations, or on both sisters, either regarding their personal relationship or fashion. Moreover, there have been few biographies published on either woman in recent decades. The exception to this research gap is Kate Strasdin's extensive fashion studies research on Queen Alexandra's life through her dress. Strasdin's work has been key to this MRP, as it provides a framework for how a subject can be explored through their sartorial choices, while also giving new insights into Queen Alexandra's life.⁹ There are no sources applying a fashion studies approach to Marie Feodorovna; however, a biography by Romanov historian Coryne Hall and a Danish exhibition catalogue on Marie Feodorovna can provide a connection between her biography and her objects when combined. Hall's 2006 biography, *Little Mother of Russia: A Biography of Empress Marie Feodorovna*, expertly outlined the Empress's life. Additionally, a 1997 bilingual Danish-English exhibition

⁹ Such as when Strasdin revealed Queen Alexandra's scoliosis through studying the construction of her dress and it had not been mentioned in any prior literature on Queen Alexandra. Kate Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe: A Dress History of Queen Alexandra* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 46.

publication, *Maria Feodorovna Empress of Russia: An Exhibition About the Danish Princess Who Became Empress of Russia* included multiple Danish historians' work on how Marie Feodorovna's life related to wider historical trends and insight into the archival availability of her possessions. This source gave the most extensive and photographic compilation of Marie Feodorovna's clothing. However, these texts did not use clothing as a lens; thus, Marie Feodorovna is a candidate for further research in the style of Strasdin's biographical format. It was only revealed through studying Queen Alexandra's dress that she had a severely curved spine.¹⁰ As Marie Feodorovna suffered from lumbago, there is a possibility that she could have had a similar severe physical ailment which would only be knowable through analyzing her clothing in detail.¹¹ In Giorgio Riello's edited work, *Writing Material Culture History*, how material objects are physically and socially constructed within a culture speaks to the way they fit into the user's everyday life.¹² Textiles in particular are intimately connected to the wearer, and are therefore excellent biographical objects, as they can tell "the story of people, events and passing time in their physical dissolution."¹³ Thus, researching Marie Feodorovna's life as Strasdin did with Queen Alexandra could reveal more about Marie Feodorovna than is currently known.

Russian Sources: Barriers Faced

The study of objects can play a role in challenging existing historiographical notions, and thus is subject to political barriers.¹⁴ Barriers to researching Russian court dress include

¹⁰ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 226.

¹¹ Ibid, 329.

¹² Victoria Kelley, "Time, Wear and Maintenance: The Afterlife of Things" in *Writing Material Culture History*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Anne Gerritsen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 191.

¹³ Kelley, "Time, Wear and Maintenance," *Writing Material Culture History*, 191.

¹⁴ Helen Berry, "Regional Identity and Material Culture," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 144.

language, credibility, and North American availability. It is possible that there are existing resources which have not been translated into English from Russian, or Danish, resulting in fewer scholarly resources available in English. There is little written from Russia about Marie Feodorovna due to the avoidance of the Imperial family during the Soviet regime.¹⁵ Currently, the Danish Royal Archives are particularly closed off to researchers of the Romanovs and have few documents publicly available that relate to the Romanovs or their relations to the British during Nicholas II's reign.¹⁶ Secondly, the issue of source credibility created a barrier in trusting scholarly resources, in which researchers could not access Russian documents that were not released due to political reasons, or were written under a Russian government that was unfavourable to court historians. The political climate of Russia has also affected openness to foreign researchers in the later twentieth century.¹⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York curated a fashion exhibit in 1978 called *In The Russian Style* which presented both Russian court and folk dress.¹⁸ The Russian language catalogue for this exhibit spent ample time ensuring every description was politically correct in "justifying this peasant/court dress theme."¹⁹ Furthermore, sources such as *Russian Imperial Style*, written by North American researchers, and *The Art of Costume in Russia*, by Russian researchers, were published between 1980-1990 and are occasionally inconsistent with multiple later publications on the Russian court. However, this lack of primary source availability for researchers is due to the documents remaining untouched by authorities and thus unavailable, which remarkably has preserved their condition

¹⁵ If they were mentioned, it was through the lens of Marxist-Leninist theory. Aliya I. Barkovetz, "The Documentary Legacy of the Empress Maria Feodorovna," in *Kejserinde Dagmar Maria Fjodorovna: en udstilling om den danske prinsesse som blev kejserinde af Rusland*, Ole Villumsen Krog, et al. (København: Christiansborg Slot, 1997), 90.

¹⁶ Helen Rappaport, *The Race to Save the Romanovs: The Truth Behind the Secret Plans to Rescue the Russian Imperial Family* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 110.

¹⁷ Richard Hellie, "The Structure of Russian Imperial History," *History and Theory* 44, no. 4 (2005): 88.

¹⁸ Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 178.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, 178.

and existence in the Russian Federation's State Archives.²⁰ By the 1990s, in the Glasnost era, the Russian government was starting to allow more objects to travel outside of Russia, as it became economically beneficial to exhibit popular Imperial objects.²¹ Now, in the post-Soviet era, the scholarship and availability of primary sources on Russian court life has expanded with fewer political overtones and thus the overall historiography of Russian court publications is in the midst of changing.²² An example of this shift is the State Hermitage Museum exhibition catalogue *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court* (2016). Ultimately, the lack of sources available in English and the government barriers restricting scholars meant that the credibility of sources had to be kept in mind while utilizing them. These barriers also underscore the need for further academic research on Russian court dress regulations. Particularly, new research is needed that carefully translates primary sources so to establish a cohesive Russian court dress regulations coda.

The sources on Imperial Russian court dress generally focused on royal protocol regarding how to dress in court, but did not conduct close readings of court garments. However, these sources are useful in providing the context in which these costumes were worn, and how dress played a part in the hierarchy within the court. These sources, from different countries and decades, did not give consistent information of court dress regulations, providing this project with a problem-solving scenario in which information could be compiled in a way that presents a more coherent dress regulation structure (see Appendix 1). A key resource on Imperial Russian dress was *Russian Splendor*, a book created for an exhibit of Russian court dress at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg with chapters written by Russian historians. This book

²⁰ Barkovetz, "The Documentary Legacy," *Kejserinde Dagmar*, 90

²¹ Taylor, *Establishing Dress History*, 182.

²² John T. Alexander, "The Courts of the Russian Empresses in the Eighteenth Century," *The Court Historian* 4, no. 2 (1999): 142.

provides images of costumes that would otherwise be unavailable, with insight into court life, court dress rules regarding status, colour, ornament, and textiles used in women's court dress as something that is instantly readable.²³ Furthermore, Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm's *The Russian Imperial Award System During the Reign of Nicholas II, 1894-1917* provided much-needed information on Russian court hierarchy. Tillander-Godenhielm's work was difficult to locate, however it is cited by auction house Christie's and the Hillwood Museum, a well-respected Imperial Russian collection in Washington, D.C., to clarify official accessories worn by women in the Russian court. The journal article "Ceremonial 'Russian Dress' as a Phenomenon of Court Culture" by Svetlana A. Amelëkhina and Daniel Green expertly discussed the repercussions of the autocratic ruler being the decider of fashion. However, it was broad in scope and did not provide detail on one particular period or ruler. The article by Elena Madlevskaya and Anna Nikolaeva "Challenging Boundaries in The Field of Traditional Russian Costume" analyzed the role of national dress in Russian culture, but did not focus exclusively on Russian court dress. The book *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture* provoked thought on how broader European events, particularly those in France, affected Russian dress. This text led to further sources which discussed how Russia styled its national dress, and how it became unique from other nations.²⁴

Academic writing on each nation's court fashion exists; however, there were fewer academic sources than non-academic publications.²⁵ Scholarly sources on Russian court fashion

²³ T.T. Korshunova and N.I. Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes of the Russian Court in the Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries in the Collection of the State Hermitage Museum," in M.B. Piotrovskiĭ et al., *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 58.

²⁴ S. Amelëkhina and D. Green, "Ceremonial "Russian Dress" as a Phenomenon of Court Culture," *Clothing Cultures*, 3:3 (2016): 202, doi:10.1386/cc.3.3.191_1.

²⁵ This lack of academic sources applies to English royal dress as many 'celebrity' style publications were common.

lacked object analysis but did provide the regulations regarding court uniform. There may be more sources on Russian court dress due to the dramatic end of the Russian monarchy in 1917, which makes the objects rarer in subject matter when compared to the still thriving and relevant British monarchy of today.

British Sources: Gap Spotting

When reviewing sources on English court fashion, it was more difficult to discern what the court dress regulations were in late Victorian and Edwardian England. The lack of research on English court dress regulations may be due to the political undertones to court presentations, as discussed in Fiona MacCarthy's *Last Curtsey: The End of the Debutantes*, which reviews the end of the court ritual in 1958 as it was coming to negatively reflect on the monarchy as being outdated, excessive, and exclusive.²⁶

Scholar Lou Taylor believes that there are sufficiently complete wardrobes available to researchers to observe from and thus create a detailed history of court dressmakers from the 1895-1920 period, as discussed in her chapter "The Wardrobe of Mrs. Leonard Messel" in *The Englishness of English Dress*.²⁷ Taylor also asserts that it is unexplainable why there is a lack of serious scholarly work on English court couturiers.²⁸ While there have been exhibitions at reputable English museums, such as the Victoria and Albert museum, since Taylor stated this, they have not been on court dress regulations specifically.²⁹

²⁶ Fiona MacCarthy, *Last Curtsey: The End of the Debutantes* (London: Faber, 2006).

²⁷ Lou Taylor, "The Wardrobe of Mrs. Leonard Messel," in *The Englishness of English Dress*, eds. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002), 115.

²⁸ Taylor, "The Wardrobe of Mrs. Leonard Messel," *Englishness of English Dress*, 114.

²⁹ For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum held an exhibition featuring the clothing of Queen Alexandra's daughter, Maud of Norway, titled "Style and Splendour" in 2005. However, this exhibit did not solely focus on court dress, and was from a later period than when this research paper is focused on.

An essential scholar thus far has been Kate Strasdin, who has published several fashion studies and object-based analysis texts on Queen Alexandra. These publications provide new insight into how to conduct dress research, and how to research the personality of a subject through their dress. Moreover, Strasdin's work is specific to Queen Alexandra's fashion, whereas many academic publications focus on a broad timeframe and multiple British royal figures. There have been books in which Queen Alexandra was one of many subjects, such as *Splendour at Court: Dressing for Royal Occasions since 1700*, *Modern Royal Fashion: Seven Royal Women and Their Style*, and *Royal Dress: The Image and the Reality 1580 to the Present Day*. Philip Mansel's *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* is a concise resource that provides a comparison of European courts, and where European influences in dress style could have originated, and was therefore reviewed.³⁰ However, there was still a need to understand the psyche and workings of the British court. Leonore Davidoff's *The Best Circles* provides much-needed information on both the relationship British aristocrats had with their court, and the role fashion played in that relationship.

Final Remarks

The Berg publishing encyclopedias and compilations, while varied, provide analytical information on the cultures in which English and Russian fashion existed, including some of their royal court fashion, as well as other European fashion cultures. However, these sources did not directly discuss Marie Feodorovna or Queen Alexandra or focus on each respective nation's specific court dress regulations. While this lack of academic research has made the literature more varied, it does also indicate that this MRP will be filling a gap in the field with a

³⁰ Philip Mansel, *Dressed to Rule: Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2008), 53, 117.

comparison of two nations' court dress in the late nineteenth century in England and Russia. In conclusion, this literature review found a gap in fashion and court research and an opportunity to problem solve by consolidating the Russian court dress regulations available, and the need for further research on English and Russian court dress regulation, so the risk can be avoided of losing the language of a highly communicative dress.

Chapter Three: Methodology & Theory

Methodology

Object-driven studies regard things as evidence of multifaceted social relationships. The researcher has to identify and decipher these relationships.³¹ As per *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* there are two ways to analyze objects: technically, or in the art-historical mode - emotionally.³² While the biography of an object is almost always partial, it can help historians understand insights of “the interplay between the cultural meanings and values bestowed upon and through objects on the one hand, and the mechanical and physical boundaries of an object’s life and the interplay between them.”³³ This MRP employs an emotional analysis to understand a cultural practice and create a "route" to comprehending the experience of court dress in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England and Russia.³⁴

This MRP utilizes the methodology of archival research and is complementary to the secondary research conducted. This methodology brings a unique perspective to the research because it provides the potential to uncover similarities or differences in Russian and English court dress. The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met)'s collections were used to study a court gown of Queen Alexandra's and a Russian court dress, respectively. A research appointment at the ROM took place in September 2018, and at The Met in November 2018. Digital archives, such as the State Hermitage Museum (SHM) of St. Petersburg, the Hillwood Museum in Washington D.C., and The Met's were utilized as well to

³¹ Karen Harvey, “Introduction,” in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 2, 6.

³² Harvey, “Introduction,” *History and Material Culture*, 2.

³³ Karin Dannehl, “Object Biographies,” in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 134.

³⁴ Harvey, “Introduction,” *History and Material Culture*, 6, 8.

provide object-based contextualization to The Met's court gown. There was a need to analyse other Russian court gowns and related accessories to provide context for the unknown wearer of The Met's gown. Further digital research was not conducted with Queen Alexandra's gown as her biography and relation to the ROM's gown is more easily discerned.

Material objects are important to study because they are multifaceted symbolic combinations of individual and cultural meanings melded into one thing that can be touched, seen, and possessed.³⁵ The physical experience of object analysis is full of sensual data, and directly and immediately engages the user with the past.³⁶ The physicality and sensuality is an essential feature of an object, as one's "entire skeletal and muscular structures experience an impact with the material surrounds."³⁷ By placing an object at the heart of research, the historian is enabled to directly tackle issues of human agency, balance cultural and social contexts with physical facts, and allow historians to cast new narratives and possibly challenge orthodox truths.³⁸

This object analysis utilized some of the techniques outlined in *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-Based Research in Fashion*, such as slow looking.³⁹ Preparation for visiting archives included online research of objects available, prioritizing which objects to view, reviewing archival methods as outlined in *Working in the Archives* as well as object analysis methods in *Detective*, and researching texts that are focused and are specifically related to the

³⁵ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 1.

³⁶ Dannehl, "Object Biographies," *History and Material Culture*, 130.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kate Strasdin, "Empire Dressing--The Design and Realization of Queen Alexandra's Coronation Gown," *Journal of Design History* 25, no. 2 (2012): 165, doi:10.1093/jdh/eps014.

³⁹ Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim, *The Dress Detective: A Practical Guide to Object-based Research in Fashion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 7, 35. A methodological source that was of great use in consolidating history and material culture studies was *History and Material Culture*, edited by Karen Harvey. This text provided a framework of how history benefits from material culture studies, as well as integrating personal reflections into one's encounter with an object.

objects chosen. The method outlined in *Detective* outlines three steps to dress analysis. The first is that of observing (capturing the artifact's information), then reflecting (taking into consideration the embodied experience of the wearer and contextual material), and lastly interpreting (creating a link between the observations and reflections to academic theory).⁴⁰

The ROM has a c. 1901 court dress (942.12.3) worn by Queen Alexandra.⁴¹ A goal of the ROM appointment was to reflect on the overall effect encountering the dress had, which was then compared to the encounter with the Russian court dress (C.I.53.46a–g) at The Met. The encounter experience of in-person object analysis was further compared with the experience of studying photographs of other Russian court gowns. The only North American collection with a known selection of Russian court gowns is The Met in New York City, which holds two. The digital collection of Russian court gowns at the SHM is greater, but only has one photo per object available. The lack of photos limits the digital object analysis further by reducing visibility of the object as a whole. However, SHM does provide detailed information on the object's dimensions, makers, age, and in some cases, wearer. This information is useful in digitally reading the object for expressing hierarchy and wealth.

To study an object closely in person instead of through photos can bring the object to life vividly and transform it into a multi-dimensional being, as Kate Strasdin explained while studying Queen Alexandra's coronation gown.⁴² While studying photographs of gowns was necessary to place the studied objects into a cultural context, the experience of encountering a photo versus an actual gown was completely different. The impact of Queen Alexandra's gowns'

⁴⁰ Mida and Kim, *Dress Detective*, 27.

⁴¹ This gown has been studied in detail by Kate Strasdin. Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 6.

⁴² Kate Strasdin. "'Gold and Silver by Night' Queen Alexandra: A Life in Colour," in *Colors in Fashion*, eds. Jonathan Faiers and Mary Westerman Bulgarella, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 69.

luminous beading or the pristine condition of The Met's court gown would have been overlooked if this study did not include object analysis.

The visual and physical proximity to both of the court gowns had great impact on the researcher. The British dress brought to life a totally foreign society, while simultaneously connecting to the current British royal family, as was the case when viewing Queen Alexandra's gown. Moreover, it felt like a rare experience due to the gown's age and helped the researcher better understand the sentiment behind the "object survivor" idea.⁴³ An object having an identity as a survivor is in line with the researcher's opinion of the gown's rarity, but it also brings about an awareness of the complicated nature of historical subjects. Both sisters were female heads of states that oppressed large groups of people at a time when the social wealth divide was incredibly deep. When research focuses on privileged figures' dress, feelings of guilt sometimes arise when faced with the harsh realities of historical figure's actions.⁴⁴ Valerie Cumming, however, passionately writes that to study a traditionally viewed frivolous aspect of royal life, dress, is to value "the importance of the personal and collective images of royalty to contemporary observers over four centuries."⁴⁵ Cumming's words urged the continuation of research into court dress to uncover the social communicative powers they held.

Theory

Veblen's Theory: Displaying Conspicuous Consumption and Wealth Through Dress

This research topic examines an inherently hierarchical and small social setting: a royal court. American economic theorist Thorstein Veblen's (1857 - 1929) work is made relevant by

⁴³ Giorgio Riello, "Things That Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.

⁴⁴ Kate Strasdin provides her discourse on this subject in her book. Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 3.

⁴⁵ Valerie Cumming, *Royal Dress: The Image and the Reality 1580 to the Present Day* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989), 12.

the setting, whose work "is to luxury [studies] what the theory of gravity is to physics."⁴⁶ Veblen wrote two influential texts which pertained to women's fashion and social status: "The Economic Theory of Women's Dress" (1894) and *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Veblen believed that if one wore a cheap coat, the person wearing it was thus of the same value.⁴⁷ In an age of concentrated wealth and sartorially defined classes, the first principle of dress for the aristocracy is to display conspicuous wealth.⁴⁸ Veblen composed his theory during a time when court life splendour was rising in many European nation states and was embodied in luxurious items, including dress.⁴⁹ Veblen's work states that a woman's dress is less a functional garment, and is rather primarily a way to display her husband or father's wealth, and thus perpetuate a leisurely lifestyle by inhibiting movement.⁵⁰ Veblen's theories are patriarchally based and asserted that women had no agency in their dress, were frivolous for caring about their appearance, and were merely the gilding of a man's world.⁵¹ However, it is incorrect to assume that men did not care about their appearance or did not assert their class status through dress.⁵² Men did care about their appearance, which is apparent in late Imperial Russian society, in which male dress was of supreme importance due to the high value placed on military uniforms in Russia.⁵³ Joanne

⁴⁶ Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, eds., *Luxury: A Rich History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

⁴⁷ Emulation is vital in understanding how Veblen's "top-down" approach to dress, in which status and economic power are visible in dress, will be applied to court dress in which one's hierarchical status was required to be on display. Veblen's foundational texts theorized that "people's desire to emulate individuals perceived as socially superior to them acted as both cause and catalyst in the creation and consumption of new sartorial vogues." Benjamin Wild, "Imitation in Fashion: Further Reflections on the Work of Thorstein Veblen and Georg Simmel," *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture* 3, no. 3 (2016): 283. doi:10.1386/fspc.3.3.281_1.

⁴⁸ Thorstein Veblen, "The Economic Theory of Women's Dress" in *The Essential Writings of Thorstein Veblen*, ed. Charles Camic and Geoffrey Hodgson (London: Routledge, 2010), 100, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁹ This age of splendour also meant that women with access to significant funds could wear their expensive jewelry in excess at any time they chose. McNeil and Riello, eds., *Luxury*, 8.

⁵⁰ Veblen, "The Economic Theory of Women's Dress," 96-7.

⁵¹ Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 79.

⁵² Military uniforms were also a rank-expressing spectacle of dress. Brent Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 1, 9.

⁵³ Especially in the capital of St. Petersburg where uniforms were more common and preferred by male wearers, and viewers, over a plain black, and therefore seemingly dull, suit. Ibid.

Entwistle discussed dress as both communicative of one's identity, such as gender and socio-economic status, as well as a way to conceal one's identity.⁵⁴ In royal settings, fashion was both a way to “make” a person by furthering their hierarchical standing, as well as a way to “mark” them as a part of the nation’s elite royal circle.⁵⁵ Despite employing Veblen to understand sartorial expression in court hierarchy and nationalism, it is unquestioned in this research the agency that women have in their dress choices. However, while Veblen’s rationale ignores women’s agency and artistic expression, in some cases of women’s court dress it was true, particularly in the case of one Russian courtier who was unable to attend a party due to her gown, which immobilized her due to the weight of fabric and real jewels the gown was adorned with.⁵⁶

According to Veblen's theories, women's dress could display wealth and the lifestyle associated with it.⁵⁷ However, it is not necessary for the wealth displayed in dress to be the wearer’s economic capital.⁵⁸ Veblen stated that women’s dress was to have the most visible amount of money spent so to display the “pecuniary strength of her social unit.”⁵⁹ In a court setting, each member had a rank, and the patriarchal structure meant that men generally held powerful positions in society and business in which their wives and children reflected his rank. Thus, Queen Alexandra's and Marie Feodorovna's positions meant that their dress had to reflect their value. For example, as Empress of Russia, Marie Feodorovna was the head of Russian

⁵⁴ Entwistle was building off of Georg Simmel’s theories in this portion of her work. Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 112.

⁵⁵ Jennifer M. Jones, “Clothing the Courtier,” in *The Fashion History Reader*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 163.

⁵⁶ T.T. Korshunova and N.I. Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes of the Russian Court in the Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries in the Collection of the State Hermitage Museum," in M.B. Piotrovskii et al., *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 67-8.

⁵⁷ Veblen, “The Economic Theory of Women’s Dress,” 100.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 98.

aristocratic society, which centred around the court, and as Russia was an autocracy, Marie Feodorovna dominated the court's secondary function.⁶⁰ However, as they were representatives of nations, their dress needed to reflect the financial strength of their Empires. Queen Alexandra was aware of her representative position and chose to reflect her husband's position as monarch of the British Empire when designing her coronation gown, which was grandiose in design.⁶¹ Moreover, Veblen's theory recognizes that wealth is power and that wealth is expressed through dress; therefore, this research asserts that aristocratic women and their dress held power. Women reflecting or being an extension of their husband or father's rank does not equate to women being without agency or significant influence in public settings.

Group Identity and Dress in a Court Setting

Georg Simmel (1858-1917), a German sociologist, asserted that dress is a product of class distinction, and therefore results in imitation that identifies the wearer with a particular class look and its connotations, while also emphasizing the wearers' separateness from others.⁶² Moreover, many professions are expressed and associated with dress, such as military uniforms or painters' coveralls, on all class levels.⁶³ Sociologists have regarded imitation processes in material culture as an important mode of differentiation of individuals who find their identity through belonging to a particular group since the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ Objects are able to create social groups, and clothes in particular "are emblematic for the creation of collective identities."⁶⁵ The aristocratic wardrobe marked its distinction through material, form,

⁶⁰ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 305.

⁶¹ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 129.

⁶² Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *American Journal of Sociology* 62 no. 6 (1957): 542.

⁶³ Simmel, "Fashion," 551.

⁶⁴ Manuel Charpy, "How Things Shape Us: Material Culture and Identity in the Industrial Age," in *Writing Material Culture History*, eds. Giorgio Riello and Anne Gerritsen (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 211.

⁶⁵ Charpy, "How Things Shape Us," *Writing Material Culture History*, 212.

and a higher price, whereas the working-class wardrobe built and marked social identity through the work uniform.⁶⁶ Therefore dress, through its structure and form, could "actively shape and make possible shifts in the lives of men and women at times of dynamic social change."⁶⁷ Marie Feodorovna and Queen Alexandra both held positions that placed them intimately close to the top of their nations' hierarchies, the monarch, both sisters, and the courtiers below them used dress to shape their lives in their societies.

The Impact of Dressing Correctly

Almost any item can be a tool in the development of one's social identity.⁶⁸ Material objects forming social identities encourages researchers to appreciate the connection between everyday life and an object's role in it.⁶⁹ Objects are able to reveal the anthropological structures of a society in how both individuals and groups make use of objects to define and model their lives and social identities.⁷⁰ In the nineteenth century it was important to visually present in a socially correct manner as it reflected one's character, especially so for women.⁷¹ Thus, Marie Feodorovna and Queen Alexandra had to balance their appearance as belonging to their status in their social group, as well as imbuing their appearance with their taste. Dress signaled one's membership in a community that had its own values, lifestyle, and worldview.⁷² Joanne Entwistle stated that:

As clothing began to connect more closely to the body and individuality of the wearer, it was read for its 'authenticity,' arguably, the pressure of clothing to reveal the 'authentic' intention of the wearer was greater for women in the nineteenth century who [...] were

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Peter McNeil, "The Structure and Form of European Clothes," in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: West Europe*, ed. Lise Skov (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 33-38.

⁶⁸ Charpy, "How Things Shape Us," *Writing Material Culture History*, 199.

⁶⁹ Charpy, "How Things Shape Us," *Writing Material Culture History*, 199.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 121.

⁷² Ibid, 114.

constructed as the moral guardians of [religion], bourgeois culture and therefore had to be 'honest' and 'true.'⁷³

For example, Queen Alexandra was so popular with her subjects, especially during her sartorial peak in the 1880s, that the term "Alexandramania" was coined.⁷⁴ This admiration was a result of her independent spirit that influenced her clothing choices and helped shape her identity.⁷⁵ In opposition to Queen Alexandra's glamorous sartorial expressions, her mother-in-law Queen Victoria successfully gained admirers by dressing simply.⁷⁶ However, Queen Victoria's clothing was often misreported as being simpler than it was, which is because the clothes were less ostentatious than expected of those belonging to a queen.⁷⁷ Regardless of how the English Queen dressed, both women used dress to gain admiration from their subjects, and were thus upheld as examples of their nations.⁷⁸

Marie Feodorovna and Queen Alexandra were both highly popular figures within their nations, and thus influenced their societies. A great deal of their popularity came from their ability to successfully express themselves sartorially. For example, when Queen Alexandra first arrived in England wearing grey she both honoured the recently deceased Prince Albert and delighted the nation as she did not appear too solemn for a young bride.⁷⁹ In contrast, Marie Feodorovna's daughter-in-law, Alexandra Feodorovna (r. 1894 – 1917), was seen as unfashionable, unsocial, unfeeling, and subsequently unpopular with her nation, which only

⁷³ However, this does not erase one's desire to be individual from their fellow community members. Ibid, 121, 114.

⁷⁴ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 39; Deirdre Murphy and Cassie Davies-Strodder, *Modern Royal Fashion: Seven Royal Women and Their Style* (Surrey: Historic Royal Palaces, 2015), 30.

⁷⁵ Murphy and Davies-Strodder, *Modern Royal Fashion*, 23.

⁷⁶ Lucy Worsley, *Queen Victoria: Daughter, Wife, Mother, Widow* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2018), 141.

⁷⁷ Worsley, *Queen Victoria*, 141.

⁷⁸ Both Queens have been admired for their sartorial appropriateness despite their expensive clothing, as luxury is relative and it is not questioned why a Queen would have luxurious things. McNeil and Riello, *Luxury*, 5-6.

⁷⁹ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 5

upheld Marie Feodorovna as a society leader.⁸⁰ What a queen displayed reflected upon a nation: its standing in the world as perceived by its population and by foreigners. An American ambassador's wife visiting the Russian court said that the Tsar and Tsarina are like the sun, and to be understood by non-Russians it had to be seen.⁸¹ The hierarchy of the aristocracy was patriarchal, but female fashion was a vibrant feature of late nineteenth and early twentieth society, and thus a strong female head of a hierarchy was a figure of sartorial emulation, and held social influence through her dress.⁸²

Hierarchy in a Court Setting

Hierarchy is multifaceted, as it can be continuously broken down into subgroups. For monarchies, the monarch and their family are always at the top of their nation as leading social and political figures; however, how politically involved the royal family is depends upon the nation in question. For example, the English court of the nineteenth century was a way for the monarchy to remind its subjects of its rank and importance.⁸³ The English royal court was considered "the greatest house among very many great houses,"⁸⁴ thus people wanted to be presented to the sovereign as it would raise their social status.⁸⁵ Throughout Europe, monarchs used many techniques to exert the importance of their court, and court dress became a widespread and foundational method during the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643 - 1715) in France.⁸⁶ Clothes expressed pre-existing social characteristics; thus they could actively change lives of

⁸⁰ Even Alexandra Feodorovna's British relatives thought her unfeeling, suggesting a negative international opinion of Alexandra Feodorovna. Rappaport, *Race to Save the Romanovs*, 27.

⁸¹ King, *Court of the Last Tsar*, 97.

⁸² Shannon, *Cut of His Coat*, 1.

⁸³ Nigel Arch and Joanna Marschner, *Splendour at Court: Dressing for Royal Occasions since 1700* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 48.

⁸⁴ Leonore, *The Best Circles*, 24.

⁸⁵ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 52

⁸⁶ Jones, "Clothing the Courtier," *The Fashion History Reader*, 164.

their wearers by giving them the ability to appear not as they were but as they aspired to be.⁸⁷ In response to the rising attendance of wealthy people, who were not from the established nobility, attending court functions, Louis XIV of France (r. 1643 - 1715) created “an aristocratic sartorial culture that would better serve [...] his ceremonial politics.”⁸⁸ This sartorial tactic was employed throughout Europe as dress was a visible marker of rank, and not just of wealth, and therefore was a way to sort through strangers at court by quickly understanding the person's rank and role in it.⁸⁹ This readability was a “survival tactic” that allowed members to see who held respectable ranks and who was *nouveau riche*.⁹⁰ Court presentation was a way to induct members into court society, acting “as a filter to maintain the exclusivity of the upper classes.”⁹¹ Thus, dress was used to both mark courtiers as belonging to a social sect, as well as to differentiate its members from one another.

Expressing Nation Through Dress in Court Settings

Dress associated with ethnicity is a way for ideological and political entities to negotiate a connection between the way things were, and the way they want them to be.⁹² At the end of the nineteenth-century ethnic dress began to disappear from everyday wear in Europe, and acquired a symbolic role in forming national identities as a visual unifier of a group of people.⁹³ Different social groups utilized fashion at different times, but it is always used as a way “to differentiate

⁸⁷ Dependent upon whether one could afford to dress as such. McNeil, “The Structure and Form of European Clothes,” *Berg Encyclopedia: West Europe*, 33-38.

⁸⁸ Jones, “Clothing the Courtier,” *The Fashion History Reader*, 167.

⁸⁹ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 118.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Cassie Davies-Strodder, Jenny Lister, and Lou Taylor, *London Society Fashion 1905-1925: The Wardrobe of Heather Firbank* (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), 22.

⁹² Djurdja Bartlett, “Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus,” in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus*, eds. Djurdja Bartlett and Pamela Smith (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 3–13.

⁹³ Bartlett, “Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe,” *Berg Encyclopedia: East Europe*, 3-13.

that group, making it visible and its members identifiable.”⁹⁴ Considering large populations cannot all identify in the same way this identification of group ideals and a national look is problematic and perpetuates stereotypes of regional life.⁹⁵ Because dress can both conceal and reveal the wearer’s identity, national dress both identifies a wearer with a nation while concealing their own unique identity.⁹⁶

As fashionable dress is influenced by social demands, it is usually keenly felt if one's sartorial appearance falls short of social standards.⁹⁷ In the nineteenth century, the court was a social space for the monarch, who embodied the nation. Thus, when applied to national court dress, sartorial appearance was meant to instigate envy from other nations and represent their own nation’s pecuniary strength.⁹⁸ Russia is an example of a nation which utilized dress, specifically ethnic dress, to unify their vast empire visually. Eastern Europe is known for ethnic clothing with rich embroideries, and it was after the Napoleonic War that the Russian court began its long-lasting identity as ethnically Russian.⁹⁹ Russian court dress was designed to reflect ethnic and traditional Russian dress styles, and became seen as identifiably Russian and even exotic to Western Europeans.¹⁰⁰ However, European fashion trends still influenced Russian court dress and thus, it was neither authentically ethnic nor representative of any one national

⁹⁴ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 117.

⁹⁵ Berry, Berry, “Regional Identity and Material Culture,” *History and Material Culture*, 153.

⁹⁶ Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 112.

⁹⁷ Simmel, “Fashion,” 545; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class; an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1934), 168.

⁹⁸ Veblen, “The Economic Theory of Women’s Dress”: 97.

⁹⁹ Bartlett, “Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe,” *Berg Encyclopedia: East Europe*, 3-13; Aliya I. Barkovetz, “The Documentary Legacy of the Empress Maria Feodorovna,” in *Kejserinde Dagmar Maria Fjodorovna: en udstilling om den danske prinsesse som blev kejserinde af Rusland*, Ole Villumsen Krog, et al. (København: Christiansborg Slot, 1997), 56.

¹⁰⁰ Amelëkhina and Green, “Ceremonial ‘Russian Dress’”: 195; Victoria Ivleva, “Frills and Perils of Fashion: Politics and Culture of the Eighteenth-Century Russian Court through the Eyes of La Mode” in *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*, eds. Ileana Popa Baird and Christina Ionescu, (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2014), 122.

group within the Russian empire.¹⁰¹ By imitating Russian ethnic styles into court dress, the Russian court appeared both different from other European courts, but also aligned itself with the Russian colonization of several diverse nation-states.¹⁰² The combination of national dress and sartorial wealth expression was central to how a rule could assert their prowess on an international scale.

Veblen's theories emphasizing that dress expresses wealth and is imbued with power are an effective frame for analyzing court settings, which were inherently obsessed with power. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's dress was a way to express monetary prowess. Moreover, courts were social settings which were traditionally ruled by the monarch's wife. While there are caveats to Veblen's theories, the central idea that women's dress expresses power shaped how Queen Alexandra and The Met's Russian court gown are analysed.

¹⁰¹ Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁰² Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes*, 8.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Queen Alexandra's Court Gown

The Nineteenth Century British Court

To better understand the court Queen Alexandra belonged to, and in which this dress was worn, the societal structure that affected the court will be discussed. The British aristocracy is distinct from other European aristocratic societies due to primogeniture. Primogeniture is a system in which only the eldest son inherits the title and the lion's share of an estate, and thus it perpetuated an upper middle class.¹⁰³ This system gave rise to upper-middle class people seeking acceptance into the top echelon of their nation's society - the British court. Primogeniture meant that in the British class system a person could attain a higher social status despite not being born an heir. While in earlier centuries the British aristocracy was small and political, by the Edwardian era the court was exclusively a societal space.¹⁰⁴ During the nineteenth century, the number of court applications and attendance grew, which was perhaps due to greater prosperity for people born without titles, which gave more people "the opportunity to aspire to the social distinction offered by the court."¹⁰⁵ Being a part of the British court was desirable, and thus meant one's entry would require adhering to its regulations, including dress.

British Court Rituals

One would go to court to be presented and inform the monarch of prominent changes in one's life, such as marriage or a promotion, and 'Certificates of Presentation' were given by the Royal household.¹⁰⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, presentation at court became a pivotal event

¹⁰³ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 20-1.

¹⁰⁴ British Parliament is held in the Palace of Westminster, to further underline the previous attachment of a royal space as a political one. Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ When a man married in the early nineteenth century, it was expected that his wife's most prominent relative would present him. Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 25.

which connected the monarch and their court with the societal season.¹⁰⁷ Court presentation played a vital role in regulating Britain's society, and acted as "a kind of bulwark, defending an elite inner circle and securing the channels to power, influence and wealth."¹⁰⁸ Laura MacCarthy summarized the court presentation as having a decorative mask of its ceremony which covered "its serious, even ruthless, *raison d'être* in the stratification of society"¹⁰⁹ As presentation functioned to protect a social class, dress was a key tool of marking this society from others.

When a young upper-class woman was about eighteen, she would finish her education, wear her hair up, her skirt hemline would lengthen, and she would prepare for her presentation at the court or the local equivalent.¹¹⁰ Deciding upon the presentation gown and its accessories was a considerable part of the preparation process.¹¹¹ Debutantes had an opportunity to be mentioned in society newspapers and other publications if they wore the correct dress, as they gave full descriptions of especially fashionable outfits



Figure 4.1 Walery, Portrait photograph of the Princess of Wales Alexandra of Denmark wearing court dress, c. 1880s, Albumen photographic print carte de visite, Royal Collection Trust, London.

¹⁰⁷ Fiona MacCarthy, *Last Curtsey: The End of the Debutantes* (London: Faber, 2006), 11.

¹⁰⁸ MacCarthy, *Last Curtsey*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ A young woman would have had few ritual occasions to mark her life's progression thus far, apart from religious ones, that would celebrate her or affect the way she dressed. Preparations included how to gracefully board and alight from a carriage, curtsy, walk up stairs, and how to manage their long dress train, veil, tiara, and feather headdress while walking backward out of the presentation room. Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 52-3.

¹¹¹ The day of the presentation, the young lady would be the centre of a small circle of close relatives and servants who would boost her confidence by approving of her dress before she headed to her presentation with all of the other debutantes of that season. Ibid, 53.

worn.¹¹² The presentation “impressed on her that she was truly a part of the great national community.”¹¹³ Upon her departure, the young woman emerged from the drawing room, the theatre of British status, as a full-fledged societal adult.¹¹⁴

Veblen theorizes that the purpose of dress is to display wealth rather than provide protection, so much so that one would endure physical pain, allocate money to clothes over necessities, and dress inappropriately for the elements, so they could make a sartorially correct and up-to-date appearance.¹¹⁵ To not have the correct appearance was damaging, “and probably at no other point is the sense of shabbiness so keenly felt as it is if we fall short of the standard set by social usage in this matter of dress.”¹¹⁶ To dress according to societal standards by wearing or purchasing “conspicuously wasteful apparel is the head of conforming to established usage, and of living up to the accredited standard of taste and reputability.”¹¹⁷ In Veblen’s theory, women are the chief ornament of society, and wear, and thus display, their father’s or husband’s wealth.¹¹⁸ Therefore, dress has a higher purpose than to protect the body.¹¹⁹ Veblen’s theory is apparent in the amount of consideration dress was given when a young woman was to be presented at court.

British National Dress

The United Kingdom, two islands which comprise Wales, Scotland, England, and during Queen Alexandra's reign - all of Ireland, does not have a national dress that unites these

¹¹² Despite the rigorous preparation, the day of presentation was, for the most part, waiting in line, and the presentation portion was incredibly brief. Davies-Strodder, Lister and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 23.

¹¹³ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 53.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 52-3.

¹¹⁵ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 167, 168.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 168.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 180.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 168.

geographically close nations.¹²⁰ For there to be a shared sartorial expression at a national level, there needs to be a collectively stable and shared national identity; however as England rules over the three other nations of the United Kingdom, their foundation is politicized and does not foster a shared national dress.¹²¹ Thus, the court dress of England was not influenced by a traditional national dress form, but by court regulations imposed on fashionable styles.

Hardy Amies, a royally appointed designer during the mid-twentieth century, believed that the founding of English style was from the upper-class lifestyle of town and country living.¹²² Englishwomen's wardrobes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries revolved around their social calendar, and they were to wear their clothes "with an air of nonchalant confidence, derived from her innate sense of belonging."¹²³ Moreover, Englishwomen's everyday clothes were to be of the same high standard as their husbands.¹²⁴ However, Amies' assertion that 'English dress' is defined by what the aristocracy wears ignores the dress of any English person not of the upper class and is thus unrepresentative. A strong sartorial tradition developed from identification with and from an occupational dress, such as a painter or brick layer.¹²⁵ Theoretically one could consider court dress as an occupational dress. To elaborate, a Monarch's occupation is to rule a nation, and their couturiers support this position. To be a part of the British court meant that one had a role in it, and dress reflected this

¹²⁰ However, most of these individual nations have their own national dress, such as tartan and the kilt in Scotland, or the national Welsh women's dress of a "red cloak and tall stovepipe-style hat." Alison L. Goodrum, "Why Does the United Kingdom Not Have National Dress?" in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: West Europe*, ed. Lise Skov, (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 22-23.

¹²¹ Goodrum, "Why Does the United Kingdom Not Have National Dress?" *Berg Encyclopedia: West Europe*, 22-23.

¹²² Edwina Ehrman, "The Spirit of English Style: Hardy Amies, Royal Dressmaker and International Dressmaker," in *The Englishness of English Dress*, eds. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2002), 134.

¹²³ Ehrman, "The Spirit of English Style," *The Englishness of English Dress*, 134.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Dress in the United Kingdom was divided and identified by class, although all classes made attempts to dress fashionably. Naomi E. A. Tarrant, "England," in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: West Europe*, ed. Lise Skov (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 287-298.

role. Proper conduct of one's role, including dress, was a necessity in the court and was a fact of life for those who lived in proximity to the monarchy, like the Royal Household.¹²⁶ The Royal Household, appointed by the monarch, is the term for the officers who are responsible for aspects of Royal life, such as the domestic, public, and ceremonial, namely the Lord Chamberlain, whose responsibilities included court dress regulations, and Lord Steward.¹²⁷ Thus, it took social maneuvering to gain proximity to the court and to do so the method of proper conduct was necessitated and decided upon by a sub-hierarchy within the court, and each of these positions were to be reflected in the person's dress.

British Court Dress Regulations

Simmel asserts that as a product of class distinction, fashion operates as honour does and therefore results in imitation that identifies the wearer with a certain look and its connotations while emphasizing the wearers' separateness from others.¹²⁸ The wearer gains satisfaction that what they are adorned in differentiates them from those in lower classes, and feel a part of and supported by others who have the same class ideals.¹²⁹ However, this class identification through dress also means that the wearer is envious of those who are at the top of their class whom they are striving to identify with, thus establishing a relationship with the person who sets the standard of dress for their social sphere.¹³⁰ It is the responsibility of the Lord Chamberlain to decide the regulations for dress worn at court, which were applicable to the royal family as well.¹³¹ Female court dress generally entailed a gown with train, a headdress with feathers,

¹²⁶ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 8.

¹²⁷ These roles are a longstanding component of the Royal Household, as the Lord Chamberlain is a title that dates back to 1208. Ibid.

¹²⁸ Simmel, "Fashion.": 542.

¹²⁹ Ibid: 548.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 9.

¹³¹ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 63.

bouquets or fans, and long white kid gloves.¹³² The rules regarding court dress were compiled in 1908, titled *Dress Worn at Court*, as a guide for attendees.¹³³ This particular guide could not be located for this research, however a column in the *New York Times*, dated April 6 1902, outlines that year's dress regulations for American debutantes being presented at the British court (Figure 4.2).¹³⁴

There was little room for variation in colour for court dress for presentations. White was considered the most appropriate dress colour for all women and their gowns were to be adorned with foliage such as flowers.¹³⁵ Bouquet carrying was optional, and usually consisted of lilies of the valley, white may, and myrtle.¹³⁶ A whisper of pink would be allowed in dress details, however for court presentations pearls and silver were recommended as the colour of adornments.¹³⁷ For her second court as Queen in 1903, Queen Alexandra chose to wear a white satin dress with a chiffon of light sparkling silver which was adorned with her diamond accessories and the blue sash of the Order of the Garter.¹³⁸ Court presentations were not exclusive to a monarch's primary residence; some occurred in other nations, especially those with sizeable English communities.¹³⁹ An expatriate at a presentation in Switzerland was

¹³² Ibid, 59.

¹³³ Ibid, 106.

¹³⁴ "Presentations at Court: Dress Regulations Issued by the British Lord Chamberlain." *New York Times*, April 6, 1902.

¹³⁵ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 105. Mourning characterized Queen Victoria's reign for the last forty years of it. Her ladies-in-waiting wore black thereafter, but maids of honour, who were younger, were allowed other mourning colours such as white, grey, mauve, and purple (Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 61.). If a woman attending court was in mourning, but not being presented, they were allowed to wear black dresses and feathers, grey or black gloves (Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 106.). If a debutante had to go into mourning, she would no longer be presented at court that season. (Leonore, *The Best Circles*, 55.).

¹³⁶ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 63.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 105.

¹³⁹ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 84.

“shocked to find that nobody dressed for dinner except on special occasions.”¹⁴⁰ This reaction indicates that the British highly valued their dress rituals.

While the Lord Chamberlain regulated court dress in Britain, fashion trends influenced the regulations.¹⁴¹ Women's skirt sizes went through many circumference trends in this period. The late 1860s saw the front of the skirt flatten, and its volume move to the back of the skirt, which evolved into the bustle style of the 1870s.¹⁴² By the 1890s women's skirts were evolving into the "S" shape, in which the bust and the rear are both bulbous, but the bodice is flat, a style that would become associated with the Edwardian era.¹⁴³ In 1911, a year after the death of King Edward VII, Queen Mary disallowed hobble skirts at court.¹⁴⁴ Hobble skirts were terribly trendy at the time, and female courtiers were unanimously and vocally opposing this dress restriction.¹⁴⁵ Apparently when Dowager Queen Alexandra was asked about Queen Mary's banning of hobble skirts, she said that Queen Mary may have been trying to curb extravagant dress, but that she would have just as much luck in dictating what female courtiers thought as how they dress.¹⁴⁶ Clearly fashion trends were important to how British female courtiers dressed in their official attire.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 56.

¹⁴² A horsehair or wire structure supported the bustle. Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ "Costumes." *Women's Wear*, May 17, 1911.

¹⁴⁵ "Costumes." *Women's Wear*, May 17, 1911.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

PRESENTATIONS AT COURT: Dress Regulations Issued by the British Lord ...
New York Times (1857-1922); Apr 6, 1902; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
 pg. 7

PRESENTATIONS AT COURT.

Dress Regulations Issued by the British Lord Chamberlain—More Americans to be Honored.

There will be a number of presentations at court this year in London, and among the women who are to make their bows before the King and the Queen Consort will be more Americans than usual. The Lord Chamberlain has recently issued a circular to those who are to be presented, and several copies have reached America. The following is the text of one:

DRESS REGULATIONS

for THEIR MAJESTIES' COURTS.

Ladies attending their Majesties' courts will appear in full dress, with train and plumes according to regulation.

Feathers should be worn so that they can be clearly seen on approaching the presence, with white veils or lappets. Colored feathers are inadmissible, but in deep mourning, black feathers may be worn.

White gloves only are to be worn, excepting in case of mourning, when black or gray gloves are admissible.

High Court Dress.—The King has been pleased to permit that a high court dress, of silk, satin, or velvet, according to the following description, may be worn in future at their Majesties' courts and on other state occasions, by ladies to whom, from illness, infirmity, or advancing age, the present low court dress is inappropriate, viz.: Bodices in front, cut square or heart-shape, which may be filled in with white only, either transparent or lined; at the back, high, or cut down three-quarters height. Sleeves to elbow, either thick or transparent.

Trains, gloves, and feathers as usual. It is necessary for ladies who wish to appear in "high court dress" to obtain permission, through the Lord Chamberlain.

This regulation does not apply to ladies who have already received permission to wear high dress.

Lord Chamberlain's Office,
 St. James Palace.

Figure 4.2

Court gowns were costly creations even

without adornment.¹⁴⁷ For court presentations, one court dress adornment that would indicate details about the wearer was headwear. Headwear was less restrictive on the wearer than the train but was of equal importance.¹⁴⁸ During Queen Victoria's reign, all women wore white tulle veils or lace lappets; however, a married lady wore three white feathers, and an unmarried woman wore two white ostrich feathers.¹⁴⁹ Eventually tulle veils replaced lace lappets as the fashionable choice of the later Victorian era and onwards.¹⁵⁰ The train, along with the head-dress, was the feature that distinguished court dress from formal evening dress.¹⁵¹ The train

was either a separate feature of the dress or a part of the gown.¹⁵² The train was made with silk that was embroidered and padded, and attached onto the wearer's dress at the shoulders or waist, and extended behind them.¹⁵³ The train became a signifier of the hierarchy of court dress in the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁴ The train length and the number of ermine borders on it was an element of

¹⁴⁷ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 57.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 58.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 105.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 63.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 57.

¹⁵² Cumming, *Royal Dress*, 142.

¹⁵³ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ Arch and Marschner. *Splendour at Court*, 57.

court dress that was determined by birth or marriage.¹⁵⁵ In the 1870s and 1880s the English preferred to wear their separate trains either diagonally from shoulder and waist, or only at the waist.¹⁵⁶ Between 1840 and 1870 the length of the train increased from four feet from the ankles to eight feet.¹⁵⁷ In the Edwardian era, train lengths reached their pinnacle and were documented to be from nine feet to thirteen and a half feet in length.¹⁵⁸ To have a long train meant that the wearer had the income to purchase surplus fabric. Thus, train lengths were another way to display one's wealth and status as a part of the leisure class.¹⁵⁹ Being a woman with a rank that remained higher than her husband's after their marriage affected how wealth was expressed because the woman was unequal to her husband due to her gender. For example, Queen Victoria's coronation and wedding gowns differed due to her marital status. When she was unmarried, her coronation gown's train was so long it was almost unmanageable, but when she was marrying a man who was beneath her rank she adjusted her dress train so severely that there was barely anything for her attending ladies to carry.¹⁶⁰ In addition to the length of a gown train length displaying wealth, jewelry also played a role in displaying conspicuous consumption in women's dress. For women, displaying their jewelry was akin to military men displaying their medals, as it reflected their social prowess monetarily.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Amy De La Haye and Valerie D. Mendes, *The House of Worth: Portrait of an Archive* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), 77.

¹⁵⁶ Cumming, *Royal Dress*, 142.

¹⁵⁷ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 57.

¹⁵⁸ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 168.

¹⁶⁰ Worsley, *Queen Victoria*, 144-5.

¹⁶¹ Davidoff, *The Best Circles*, 93.

The Making of British Court Dress

Court dressmakers were situated around St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and like other dressmakers, there were very few workers' rights to protect them up until the First World War.¹⁶² Court dressmaking was a segment of garment making in which there was no monopoly, as there was a concentration of demand to a particular time of year, and ample amounts of cheap labour.¹⁶³ It required many people in a long and collaborative effort to complete a court dress.¹⁶⁴ While the designer was traditionally meant to follow court dress regulations, this was not always the case, as a popular couture designer, Frederick Charles Worth, was known to deviate from them.¹⁶⁵ Some dressmakers cleverly incorporated detachable sleeves into their designs, which were secured using hooks and eyes, as well as a bodice which could be turned down to adjust the *décolletage* as was needed.¹⁶⁶ These customizable features meant that a court dress could be re-worn at non-official events to the wearer's, as opposed to the Lord Chamberlain's, preferences.

It would be remiss not to mention the experience of garment workers making the gowns, court or otherwise, for society ladies. The makers had to work in appalling conditions to meet the high demands of quantity, quality, and intricacy of gowns.¹⁶⁷ The death of Mary Anne Walkley in June 1863 led to a widespread exposé on the plight of seamstress' working conditions.¹⁶⁸ Ms. Walkley worked, like other seamstresses, sometimes from five in the morning until one or two o'clock the next morning, and lived in subpar living conditions on insufficient wages, and died

¹⁶² Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 108.

¹⁶³ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 136.

¹⁶⁵ There was great care put into the making process, and it could fill an entire design house with materials for a season. When the announcement of Edward and Alexandra's coronation occurred, Paul Poiret was working at the House of Worth at the time and recalled that the whole studio was abuzz with the word "Crimson." De La Haye, *The House of Worth*, 77.

¹⁶⁶ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 63.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 68.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 69.

while working on a gown for hours on end.¹⁶⁹ The cost of creating court gowns was far more than monetary and was a topical debate throughout the Victorian era.¹⁷⁰ An area that would be considered in further court dress research would include society ladies' discussion of court dress seamstresses' experience, and if this influenced their philanthropic activities.

Object Analysis: Queen Alexandra's 1903 Court Gown

The two-piece court gown designed by French-Couturier Morin-Blossier and worn by Queen Alexandra, is of a pale yellow satin, with a hand-painted design of purple irises with



Figure 4.3 and 4.4 Queen Alexandra's 1903 court gown. Photos the author's own.

green stems, which look like watercolour in their aged state.¹⁷¹ The gown is further decorated with sequins and multiple kinds of beads, and contrasted with ephemeral chiffon inserts, all of

¹⁶⁹ These wages did not include room and board. Her wages were somewhere between 4 to 20 pounds in a year. Punch magazine published an image that featured a society lady looking into a mirror while wearing a fashionable dress, with the corpse of a seamstress slumped at a table behind her visible in the mirror's reflection. Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ For more information, see Lynn Mae Alexander, *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

¹⁷¹ Strasdin gives a wonderful general object reading of this exact gown in her book, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe: A Dress History of Queen Alexandra*, and in her chapter in *Colors in Fashion*, edited by Jonathan Faiers.

which repeated down the skirt which extends into a train. The effect of the sequins and beading is immediate and constant, as they adorn the gown entirely. The sweetheart neckline is bookended by chiffon sleeves of a bronze colour, with tassels hanging around hip length from the hem of the sleeves.

The court dress is dated to 1903 and was gifted to the Royal Ontario Museum by Lieutenant-Colonel James W. Flanagan, who remarked that this gown was possibly worn on two occasions: to a state ball that honoured French President Émile Loubet, and in a portrait. However, there is no photographic evidence to support the donor's speculations, nor of Queen Alexandra wearing the dress at these events.¹⁷² Yet this gown being worn to a state ball for President Loubet is an educated assertion, as the gown is appropriate for the time of year he visited, the summer of 1903, and the dress is of French origin. While Queen Alexandra enjoyed French fashions, she was typical of English royals in that she publicly patronized and wore English designs and materials.¹⁷³ However, the state visit of the French President would make it appropriate for an English Queen to wear a French couturier at an official occasion.¹⁷⁴

The gown is in poor condition, and is currently being stored, as opposed to actively maintained or restored due to the high amount of maintenance it would require to be publicly displayed, as beads were popping off the gown during the research appointment. The dress is unlikely to see the world outside of its archival home much more, if at all. The chiffon inserts were sometimes devoid of the fabric, and the silk was deteriorating and stained from foreign substances and the sun. The silk looks as though it would feel like tissue paper, and is incredibly thin. The dress is covered in the irises; however, they are well placed and do not overpower the

¹⁷² Accession No. 942.12.3, information from the Royal Ontario Museum External Full-Object Record.

¹⁷³ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Queen Alexandra would wear clothes to complement the people of where she was visiting, such as Ireland, where she wore green. Strasdin "Gold and Silver by Night," *Colors in Fashion*, 65.

dress as a whole, but add to the gown's overall design. There are at least five different types of beads and sequins, more if one was to differentiate by colour, one of which is of a four-leaf clover or flower design. The gown is light in weight and has ruffles on the inside skirt of the dress, which make a rustling noise as it moves. The skirt train is approximately 2.5 - 3 feet in length. Five years after this dress was worn, English court train length reached its zenith, reaching between 8.9 feet and 11.8 feet.¹⁷⁵ This train length will be compared with Russian train lengths to highlight the difference between the two court dress styles.

In describing the dress, the most challenging part is capturing the effect the sequins and beads have when viewed in person. Despite its muted colours of yellow, purple, and green, it is continuously in movement initiated by its reflective adornments. The chiffon sleeves especially, with their sequin designs and beaded tassels that continuously captured the light, were eye-catching and beautiful. Queen Alexandra preferred to wear highly embellished dresses once she was the Queen, and thus outshone all in her presence with her dress.¹⁷⁶ This preference was both a reflection on her officially being the Queen at the centre of English society as opposed to the long waiting Princess of Wales in Queen Victoria's shadow, but it also concealed her body, which had a misaligned spine, among other ailments.¹⁷⁷ In describing Queen Alexandra's coronation gown, Kate Strasdin discusses how photos fail to capture all of the components of the gown, and cannot encapsulate the dramatic impact of the garment.¹⁷⁸ Strasdin eloquently describes this drama and its effect on its early twentieth-century audience: "To see Alexandra's dress now, however, is to realize the impression then. The effect of such rich textures under candles and electric lights in its three-dimensional life is a testament to Alexandra's eye for an

¹⁷⁵ Davies-Strodder, Lister, and Taylor, *London Society Fashion*, 23.

¹⁷⁶ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, 43.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 46

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 127, 128.

occasion.”¹⁷⁹ The experience encountering the 1903 court gown reflects the one Strasdin had with Queen Alexandra’s coronation gown. However, there is also a sadness to the 1903 dress, as it is faded and seemingly deteriorating before one’s eyes.



Figure 4.5 Kate Strasdin, Court dress, satin and chiffon, made for Queen Alexandra by Morin Blossier, c. 1902. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 942.12.3, in “Fashioning Alexandra: A Royal Approach to Style 1863–1910,” Costume vol. 47, no. 2 (2013), Figure 7, 193.

Object Reflection: Queen Alexandra's 1903 Court Gown

Through the lens of court dress study this gown is reflected upon. Without the provenance that the dress is a court gown for official state occasions, it would not present itself as such upon the first visual inspection. The gown is fashionable, attractive, and appropriate for evening wear. Despite lacking a ceremonial appearance, the dress is undeniably regal. The inability to describe its lustre, even 115 years later with its deteriorating state and missing elements, speaks to its initial luminescence and the impact that it would have had on its original audience in 1903. Queen Alexandra's style was to wear elaborate evening wear as "an additional method of managing her public persona, creating a queen for evenings only."¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the regality of this gown is further emphasized when compared with the court gown of a maid of honour of the Russian court. Queen Alexandra's 1903 court gown was made with care and purpose, although it seems to lack sentimental or deeply personal design. However, it was designed by Queen Alexandra's preferred evening wear designer from the late 1890s until the end of King Edward VII's reign in 1910, Morin-Blossier.¹⁸¹ The sequins and beading are distinct features of Queen Alexandra's personal taste. The cut of the dress is fashionable; however, the muted colours indicate mourning dress, which she often wore after the death of her eldest son in 1892, and as she aged.¹⁸²

Queen Alexandra's 1903 court dress is perfectly representative of her dress from this period of her life: she was now the Queen, and enjoyed wearing eye-catching gowns with sequin components, but she was also growing older and honouring her losses while simultaneously

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 129.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 51.

¹⁸¹ Queen Alexandra shopped through correspondence, as the designers already had her measurements on file, and her patronage was not discussed to avoid criticism as shopping too frequently. Designers would send her uncoloured dress designs, which she would then fill in with her desired hues. Ibid, 8.

¹⁸² Ibid, 42.

hiding the effects of physical ailments.¹⁸³ As Kate Strasdin has proven, Queen Alexandra was a sartorial performer.¹⁸⁴ The ROM's 1903 court gown is an excellent example of Queen Alexandra's dress during her reigning years.

What Was It Like to Wear British Court Dress?

While it is unknown how Queen Alexandra experienced wearing this court gown, the experience of wearing court dress is of interest because it was not only the garment which affected the wearer but the physical requirements of the ritual as well. In place of how Queen Alexandra experienced wearing this gown, the experience of wearing court presentation gowns, a more researched area in academia, is discussed. The court ensemble, the trains especially, were considerable in weight and hung from the wearer's waist or shoulder.¹⁸⁵ At court presentations, the wearer carried their train on their left arm at the beginning of the Drawing Room, and as the wearer entered the presentation room, a royal page would be responsible for spreading the train on the ground.¹⁸⁶ The young woman would curtsy deeply to the monarch(s) and would then need to walk backwards - at one point 60 feet backwards, which would require the woman to be reliant on practicing how to maneuver the gown and train in a graceful and timely manner.¹⁸⁷ The debutante would also have to have a sense of when the royal page would be passing the train back over her arm again.¹⁸⁸ The wearer would then be able to discard their train after their presentation.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Ibid, 42, 43, 46.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 92.

¹⁸⁵ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 58.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 58, 73.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Jan Glier Reeder, *High Style: Masterworks from the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 203.

There would be exceptions in dress made for those who applied for them, such as the infirm or elderly, and would be allowed by the Lord Chamberlain's decision to wear "High Court Dress," which was a gown with a higher neckline and sleeves.¹⁹⁰ British social etiquette required different dress for different occasions, however, while Drawing Rooms were in the afternoon during the Victorian era, it was expected that evening dresses with low-cut bodices were to be worn.¹⁹¹ It was also elementally exposing to wear English court dress, as it stipulated bare shoulders and arms, "and nothing to keep her head warm but the regulation white plumes of feathers."¹⁹² Therefore the court dress style was not favoured by many, especially in cooler months.¹⁹³ While there was personalization and fashionable influence in British court dress, regulations still subjected court dress wearers to dress elements that were not in their control. In addition, the removal of some elements of British court dress would be allowed if the occasion was less formal or if it was a particular ceremony occurring.¹⁹⁴ It would not always be appropriate to wear trains or plumes at State Balls, for example.¹⁹⁵ This precedence to make a court gown less formal is of note when considering Queen Alexandra's 1903 gown, which may have been worn at a state ball for the French President, as the royal family had to comply with the Lord Chamberlain's dress regulations as well.¹⁹⁶

Unfortunately, Queen Alexandra's experience of wearing this gown is unattainable. Queen Alexandra's papers were destroyed after her death, and she did not record her relationship with dress elsewhere.¹⁹⁷ We therefore do not know how she felt about or dealt with not only

¹⁹⁰ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 106.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 56.

¹⁹² Worsley, *Queen Victoria*, 143.

¹⁹³ Arch and Marschner, *Splendour at Court*, 56.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 59.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Strasdin, "Empire Dressing": 156; Strasdin, "Gold and Silver," *Colors in Fashion*, 68.

regulations imposed on her dress, but how she adapted them to her body's needs and her desire to conceal any sign of ill health.¹⁹⁸ While we cannot know in her own words, Kate Strasdin's research has shown how Queen Alexandra used her clothing to "shield her from some of the more problematic aspects of her changing physicality when public expectations of her clothed royal body were required to mask her own corporeal limitations."¹⁹⁹ Queen Alexandra was able to effectively utilize clothing as a protective and performative tool, and applied this skill to her court dress. Due to Queen Alexandra's status as the wife of the king, she was able to express herself sartorially through numerous garments with ample adornment to meet her personal tastes. Queen Alexandra often, and successfully, utilized dress to communicate her status as Queen.

¹⁹⁸ Strasdin, "Gold and Silver," *Colors in Fashion*, 68.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 63.

Chapter Five: Analysis of The Met's Russian Court Gown

The Nineteenth Century Russian Court

The Russia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can conjure images of Fabergé eggs, Tchaikovsky melodies, the aroma of a Kusmi tea, or the words of Tolstoy. This era of "High Imperialism" (1876 - 1915) in Russia saw territorial expansion, integration of industrial technology, and vast disparities in wealth distribution.²⁰⁰ The Russian court was highly political, and irrevocably linked with the unlimited personal authority of the sovereign.²⁰¹ Symbolism was a central tactic in how Russian sovereignty was defined, as "Russian Tsars invoked and emulated foreign images of rule to elevate themselves and the state elite above the subject population."²⁰² Due to its vast empire, the Russian court's rationale for its expenditure was that they "could receive guests only in an atmosphere of extravagant opulence."²⁰³ Life at the Russian court was exceptionally formal and saw few changes following Catherine the Great's reign (r. 1762 - 1796).²⁰⁴ The Russian court made a lasting impression on visitors and natives alike. In this space, the formal uniform dress of women's court gowns, as well as male military uniforms, had communicative powers. For female Russian courtiers, the colour combinations of their gown's velvet and its embroidery signified what their rank was to society.

²⁰⁰ Dominic Lievan, "The Empress Maria Feodorovna's Russia," in *Kejserinde Dagmar Maria Fjodorovna: en udstilling om den danske prinsesse som blev kejserinde af Rusland*, Ole Villumsen Krog, et al. (København: Christiansborg Slot, 1997), 18.

²⁰¹ John T. Alexander, "The Courts of the Russian Empresses in the Eighteenth Century," *The Court Historian* 4, no. 2 (1999): 147.

²⁰² Richard Wortman, *Russian Monarchy: Representation and Rule: Collected Articles* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 259.

²⁰³ Yu V. Plotnikova, "Fashion and Style at the Russian Court," in *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court*, eds. M.B. Piotrovskiĭ et al. (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 102.

²⁰⁴ One such formality was the backing away of courtiers from Imperial family members. When Tsar Alexander III's sister, Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna, was living in the United Kingdom as the Duchess of Edinburgh, she maintained this practice with her staff. Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 122.

The role of the Tsar's wife, the Tsarina, was mostly ceremonial, but it also encompassed the responsibility of being a leader of Russian society, and thus a leader in fashion.²⁰⁵ Tsar Alexander III's wife, Marie Feodorovna (b. 1847 - d. 1928) was exceptionally well suited to her role as Tsarina.²⁰⁶ Marie Feodorovna was to lead high society and be a patron to charitable and educational institutions, roles she energetically performed, and thus was greatly popular with all classes.²⁰⁷ While Marie Feodorovna's husband was not a fan of court life, she saw value in it.²⁰⁸ The season began on New Year's morning when the uniformed Tsar and court-dress laden Tsarina led the procession of Imperial family members to the church from the Winter Palace, thus 'opening' the social season.²⁰⁹ The social court life thrived under the female dominance of the Empress.²¹⁰ How Marie Feodorovna dressed, socialized, and presented to her subjects made her a popular figure. Her daughter-in-law Alexandra Feodorovna was known to be pleasant young woman, but her life as a Tsarina changed her disposition.²¹¹ The Russian court instantly disliked Alexandra Feodorovna due to her lack of social skills, grace, and sartorial panache, which the still energetic and attractive Marie Feodorovna performed so well.²¹² Alexandra Feodorovna lacked an understanding and value of court ritual and pomp, and "had a pathological aversion to the very rituals of court life that [Marie] enjoyed."²¹³ Alexandra Feodorovna's

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 120.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 121.

²⁰⁷ While Marie Feodorovna's role was apolitical, she was politically left and was influential with her husband, and for a time, her son, the last Tsar, Nicholas II (r. 1894 - 1917). Her Danish upbringing in a constitutional monarchy was profoundly influential. Lievan, "The Empress Maria Feodorovna's Russia," *Kejserinde Dagmar*, 26-8.

²⁰⁸ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 124.

²⁰⁹ Ibid 124.

²¹⁰ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 305.

²¹¹ While visiting England, her relatives noted that other royals, Marie included, believed that they earned their position, but Alexandra Feodorovna thought this "vulgar to make overt efforts to win the support or affection of her people." Rappaport, *Race to Save the Romanovs*, 27.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

frequent and voluntary court absences created a social vacuum filled by other Grand Duchesses, which shows the importance of court social life for aristocratic Russians.²¹⁴

Russian Court Rituals

The Russian court was an outgrowth from the monarch's household and acted both as the setting of the Royal family's private life and as a public institution.²¹⁵ The Empress had her own suite of courtiers which numbered over 600 members, 240 of which were women, and their ranks were a reflection of their father's or husband's rank.²¹⁶ As outlined in Greg King's *The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II*, the Empress's Imperial Suite roster is, in order of rank: ladies-in-waiting of the highest rank; portrait ladies; personal ladies-in-waiting; ordinary ladies-in-waiting; dames of the Order of St. Catherine; and the Maids of Honour.²¹⁷ To be appointed with a court rank was understood to be an award, which not only honoured the recipient, but also her father, effectively bestowing an award to him and his entire family.²¹⁸ Maids of Honour, who made up the largest portion of female courtiers, were bestowed upon high born, unmarried young women, and they were required to attend official receptions twice a year.²¹⁹ This base category of Maids of Honour can be divided into two categories, Maids of Honour of the Suite, who had more extensive duties, lived at the palace of their lady, and were fewer in total, and Maids of Honour of the City, who had almost no duties and were not required to live with their lady.²²⁰ Generally Maids of Honour were appointed at the age of twenty, and

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Alexander, "The Courts of the Russian Empresses": 144.

²¹⁶ King, *Court of the Last Tsar*, 104-5, 108.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 105.

²¹⁸ Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm, *The Russian Imperial Award System During the Reign of Nicholas II, 1894-1917* (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2005), 35.

²¹⁹ King, *Court of the Last Tsar*, 108.

²²⁰ Marie Feodorovna had a total of five Maids of Honour of the Suite from 1894 to 1917, and there were 250 Maids of Honour of the City in 1916. Tillander-Godenhielm, *The Russian Imperial Awards*, 35-6.

once they were married were obliged to “retire” from their position.²²¹ The large number of Maids of Honour would thus result in many women wearing the same colour, which in the frame of this research is crimson, in addition to the required style of dress as many other women in attendance.

Russian court rituals developed from Orthodox Russian religious events and Imperial family milestones, and they were usually held at the primary residence of the Romanov monarch, the Winter Palace.²²² Hierarchy was an essential feature of the Russian court, especially for women. Marie Feodorovna had hundreds of Ladies-in-Waiting, but her closest and thus highest ranking or socially influential were her friends.²²³ The most important position for female courtiers was the Mistress of the Robes, who was responsible for helping the Empress dress, and was in close physical proximity with the needs of the royal’s body.²²⁴ That the most important role within the Empress’s suite was the Mistress of the Robes further underscores the importance of dress within a court setting.

Russian National Dress

Russian national dress was inspired by clothing styles from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.²²⁵ In European Russia, there were four common dress types for women

²²¹ The now married woman would retain her entrance capability into court, and would continue to wear the cypher brooch of her previous maid of honour rank at official functions for the rest of her life. This position was unpaid, but rewarded the young woman in social contacts. Ibid, 36.

²²² Events that glorified Romanov monarchy included Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, throne accession, coronations, birth, death, name days, victory commemorations. G.B. Vilinbakhov and E.A. Tarasova, “Ceremonies and Festivities at the Imperial Court,” in *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court*, eds. M.B. Piotrovskii et al. (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 10, 12.

²²³ A Lady-in-Waiting was one of the highest offices for married women, who were usually the wife of a prominent statesman, so their rank would reflect his high station. While ladies-in-waiting and maid of honour posts did not have specific duties associated with them, nor an obligation to attend all court ceremonies, it was an honour, especially if assigned to the Empress, as it meant they could live at court and possibly receive an Imperial dowry upon marriage. Alexander, “The Courts of the Russian Empresses”: 146; Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 121.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Oksana Sekatcheva, “Early Noble Dress in Russia,” in *Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus*, eds. Djurdja Bartlett and Pamela Smith (Oxford: Berg, 2010) 333-335.

based on what region they were from, but a common feature was a dress with long sleeves and a headpiece, such as a *kokoshnik*.²²⁶ The traditional dress styles worn by courtiers was abruptly stopped during Peter the Great's reign (r. 1682 - 1725), as he sought to westernize Russia and to do so, he had to "clothe new cultural ideas in a novel form through a clothing revolution."²²⁷ Peter the Great's Europeanization of his court and its dress would have a lasting and impressionable effect for the rest of the Romanov dynasty. At the beginning of the twentieth century a French ambassador recorded that he felt the splendour, luxury and wealth in Russian dress, both male and female, was a magnificent and incomparable spectacle.²²⁸ Alexander III also saw power in sartorial presentation, but did not use it to appear European. To underscore his Russianness, Alexander changed the civil servant uniforms to be more Russian-looking, with kaftans and high boots.²²⁹ Alexander valued his presentation as Russian and made sartorial changes to reflect his valuation.

Almost all of Peter's successors employed dress regulations to further their ideologies, either emulating Russian or European dress styles.²³⁰ During Catherine the Great's reign elements of traditional Russian dress were incorporated back into the official dress of military and court uniforms.²³¹ A lasting change to Russian court dress occurred during Nicholas I's reign, (r. 1825-1855) which incorporated Russian national dress into court dress because he wanted to promote his Russianness and authoritarianism to cement his hold on power during a

²²⁶ For more specifics on the traditional regional outfits, please see: Sekatcheva, "Russia: Ethnic Dress," *Berg Encyclopedia: East Europe*, 333-335.

²²⁷ Ivleva, "Frills and Perils," Baird, *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory*, 114.

²²⁸ S.A. Amelëkhina, and A. K. Levykin. *Magnificence of the Tsars: Ceremonial Men's Dress of the Russian Imperial Court, 1721-1917, From the Collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums* (London: V&A Publishing, 2008), 80.

²²⁹ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 264-5.

²³⁰ Ivleva, "Frills and Perils," *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory*, 117.

²³¹ T.T. Korshunova and N. I. Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes," *Russian Splendor*, 56.

time of Western ideological uprisings.²³² For him, Russian dress and its place in the court symbolized and upheld autocratic values.²³³ The Official Doctrine of Nationality of February 1834 outlined that the only form of acceptable women's court dress was to be 'Russian' in style, a mandatory requirement for court entry.²³⁴ Despite the traditional Russian influence on court dress, 'Russian-style' court dress was still influenced by fashion while maintaining the required look.²³⁵

A problematic feature of court dress incorporating folk dress was that "instead of maintaining cultural and tribal differences, fashion sought to break down those barriers and replace them with new views of the self."²³⁶ All of the many cultural groups, such as Tatar, Caucasian, and Central Asian, in the Russian Empire, one of the largest in history, were clumped into one nationality in terms of dress, the nationality of 'Russian.'²³⁷ Therefore, Russian dress was a tool of expressing colonial power over the nations within the Russian Empire, reminding them of their place within society and the court.²³⁸

Russian Court Dress Regulations

Russian court gowns had three components: the bodice, underskirt, and a garment, such as a jacket or an overskirt, which formed into the train.²³⁹ The overskirt, or jacket with sleeves, and train were of velvet, and usually adorned with a recurring design of jewels, embroidery,

²³² Amelëkhina and Green, "Ceremonial 'Russian Dress'": 197.

²³³ Ibid: 197, 207.

²³⁴ T.T. Korshunova and N. I. Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes" *Russian Splendor*, 57.

²³⁵ "Changes of style and fashion trends are felt more strongly in the ceremonial costumes of empresses and ladies of the Imperial family. While keeping the general silhouette of the ceremonial costume, the variety is manifested first of all in the colour palette, fashion elements, and character of ornamentation." Ibid, 64.

²³⁶ Christine Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes: A History of the Russian Fashion Industry, 1700-1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 8.

²³⁷ Ruane, *The Empire's New Clothes*, 8.

²³⁸ Ibid; Ivleva, "Frills and Perils," *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory*, 117.

²³⁹ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 244.

sequins, and pearls, and "was split from the waist down in an inverted 'V' to reveal the underskirt."²⁴⁰ The official look was designed to make the Russian Imperial court look distinct from other European courts "to demonstrate both the authority of the Tsar over the nobility and the unity that he and his court felt with the people."²⁴¹ The dresses were considered by some witnesses to be like works of art worn on the female body, and incomparable to anything they had ever seen.²⁴²

The inspiration for the Russian dress look came from medieval and folk dress, which can be seen in the cut and decorative additions of Russian court dress.²⁴³ For example, the long false sleeves hanging from the back of a gown's outer layer were a dress element from the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Russia on many different kinds of garments for men and women.²⁴⁴ The underskirt was made of white silk or satin over petticoat layers and embroidered with foliate designs in gold or silver thread, in which the embroidery matched with male court uniforms.²⁴⁵ The boned bodices were of



Figure 5.1 K. Bergamasko, Portrait of Zinaida Yusupova in the Dress of a Maid of Honour to Imperial Court, c. 1882, photograph, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

velvet with silver brocade or satin, puffed sleeves, which fell longer than the hips and opened in

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 245.

²⁴¹ Amelëkhina, "Ceremonial "Russian Dress": 202.

²⁴² Ibid, 210.

²⁴³ Ibid, 194.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 195.

²⁴⁵ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245; Amelëkhina, "Ceremonial "Russian Dress": 203.

a "butterfly wing" style in the later nineteenth century, and a low, off the shoulder neckline.²⁴⁶

This sleeve style was also seen in neighbouring regions of Ukraine and Poland in folk costume as well but became increasingly and internationally associated with Russian nobility.²⁴⁷ The sartorial influence of the long false sleeves "was a sign of Russia's power in Europe and its status as a strong, equal partner."²⁴⁸ While noble Russian garments were subject to influence from fashion, the sleeves of women's gowns remained a constant element of their court dress until the end of the Romanov reign.²⁴⁹ The popularity of this style continued to influence other European courts.²⁵⁰

The final change to the look of Russian court dress was in 1834, with legislation that outlined this three-part outfit as an attempt to quell overspending in the court, which failed.²⁵¹ This attempt at curbing expenditure failed due to the wearer being able to adorn their dress with extravagant features, such as textile and decorative gem types, which was a way to display the wealth at their disposal further. Moreover, most Imperial court dresses were to be worn only once, and even now many of the gowns are housed in the State Hermitage Museum, a former royal residence in St. Petersburg, and are not to be shown often.²⁵² The high degree of purpose and value in wearing Russian court dress was essential to the Russian monarch.²⁵³ Even when at

²⁴⁶ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245.

²⁴⁷ Amelëkhina, "'Ceremonial "Russian Dress"'": 195.

²⁴⁸ Ibid: 197.

²⁴⁹ Ibid: 196, 206.

²⁵⁰ For example, at the end of the nineteenth century the Danish showed their kinship with Marie and her Russian rank by incorporating Russian dress elements in their court garments. Additionally, Swedish Queen Sophia of Nassau (b. 1836 - d. 1913) was crowned wearing a gown with Russian style sleeves. Ibid: 213.

²⁵¹ To help put this spending into context, Alexander II had seven legitimate children, Alexander III had five children reach adulthood, and all of the children were titled Grand Duke or Duchess, with the wives of Grand Dukes gaining the status of an Imperial family member. Each of these family members could have access to the Imperial funds. Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 122.

²⁵² Mikhail Piotrovskii, "Introduction," in *Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court*, eds. M.B. Piotrovskii, M. B. et al. (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 8.

²⁵³ Plotnikova, "Fashion and Style at the Russian Court," *Russian Splendor*, 102.

a foreign court, a Russian noble had to wear Russian court dress, a style which “fit the opulence of all the formal halls that so impressed Europeans.”²⁵⁴ The money given to the Russian Imperial family’s women’s dress shows their value in expressing their economic and social power through dress. For context, a Maid of Honour purchased one second-hand court gown in 1913 for 1,360 roubles, which is approximately valued at \$13,600 US dollars in 2005.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, Queen Alexandra spent £996 on her coronation gown, and the average cost of a British court gown was £300.²⁵⁶ Thus, a brand-new British court gown averaged at the price of a second-hand Russian court gown.

The dress of the female courtier in the Russian court was as communicative as military uniforms: the colour, designs, materials, and adornments indicated the rank of the wearer.²⁵⁷ While fashion trends still influenced Russian court gown, ‘Russian dress’ visually unified Russian nobles.²⁵⁸ Female courtiers’ dress still had to conform and express rank through elements of dress such as train length, accessories, *kokoshnik* headpiece, and decorative material. The length of the train indicated the rank of the wearer: six feet - aristocratic, nine feet - an Imperial family member, fifteen feet - Empress.²⁵⁹ As mentioned, the zenith of English court train lengths was eleven feet in the late Edwardian era. The length of English court trains their zenith in the early twentieth century speaks more to a fashion trend, as opposed to displaying wealth and rank as it was used in Russian court dress. An accessory which expressed rank was

²⁵⁴ T.T. Korshunova and N. I. Tarasova, “Ceremonial Costumes” *Russian Splendour*, 67.

²⁵⁵ This conversion is a 2005 USD rate. King, *The Court of the Last Tsars*, 245.

²⁵⁶ Due to the large difference in time between the 2005 US dollars estimate and the early 1900’s Pounds estimate, a comparison in the same currency is not possible in this research. Strasdin, “Empire Dressing”: 161.

²⁵⁷ Women’s court dress regulations put them in the same position as the male courtiers had with military uniforms: to have to “conform to exacting clothing standards.” Amelëkhina, “Ceremonial Russian Dress”: 204.

²⁵⁸ “Changes of style and fashion trends are felt more strongly in the ceremonial costumes of empresses and ladies of the Imperial family. While keeping the general silhouette of the ceremonial costume, the variety is manifested first of all in the colour palette, fashion elements, and character of ornamentation.” T.T. Korshunova and N. I. Tarasova, “Ceremonial Costumes,” *Russian Splendour*, 64; Amelëkhina, “Ceremonial Russian Dress”: 204.

²⁵⁹ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245.

the diamond brooch a courtier would wear. Ladies would wear a brooch on a particular side of their bodice with their lady's initials or picture in diamonds to display their allegiance.²⁶⁰ For example, if worn on the left side of the corsage, with the blue St Andrews ribbon, the wearer was a Lady-in-Waiting.²⁶¹ A distinct component of Russian dress, both in court and folk dress, is the headpiece known best in western historiography as the *kokoshnik*. The *kokoshnik* was for festive occasions and was decorative.²⁶² While there are regional differences in the style of headpiece worn, a common distinction in all regions was whether the wearer was married or not, which affected the size, adornments, and veil.²⁶³ It was essential to Russian court ensemble to wear a *kokoshnik*, which was often embellished with jewels and pearls and had a tulle veil or ribbons flowing from it.²⁶⁴ The blue *kokoshnik* were for Imperial family members, and red or white were for noble women.²⁶⁵ For Imperial family members, they also sartorially expressed their rank through these adornments. The look of an Imperial gown would be similar in design, but made with real silver and real gold embroidery, genuine pearls sewn onto silks, and the edges of the gowns bordered with mink, ermine -- symbolic of integrity and purity, sable, or silver fox.²⁶⁶ The allowance to have their dressmakers border gowns with these trimmings were an exclusive Imperial family privilege.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ T.T. Korshunova and N. I. Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes" *Russian Splendour*, 58.

²⁶¹ If it was worn on the right side of corsage, the wearer was one of the following: Maid of Honour, Hofmeisterines, lady-in-waiting, Chamber lady-in-waiting. Ibid.

²⁶² There are five kinds of headpieces for married women, the *kokoshnik*, *povoinik*, *platok*, *soroka*, and the *shapka*. Bartlett, "Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe."

²⁶³ The *kokoshnik* originated from the Volga, central, and northern regions of Russia. Bartlett, "Introduction to Dress and Fashion in East Europe," *Berg Encyclopedia: East Europe*, 3-13.

²⁶⁴ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 246.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Amelëkhina, *Magnificence of the Tsars*, 14; King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245.

²⁶⁷ Amelëkhina and Green, "Ceremonial 'Russian Dress'": 203.

When trying to identify which rank a woman of the Russian court belonged to, there are many obstacles. For one, there are frequently two empresses, the current one married to the Tsar, and his mother, the Dowager Empress. Furthermore, the German origins of rank names has gone through two translations: first into Russian, and then from Russian to English. Appendix 1, Figure 7.1, outlines the colour combinations of dress and adornments with the resulting rank.²⁶⁸

Object Analysis: Russian Court Gown, c. 1900

The analysis of the Russian court gown from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met) included reviewing two cream silk skirts, one crimson velvet overskirt with a pleated six-foot train, one red velvet bodice with butterfly sleeves, one red velvet elbow-length cape, and two red velvet *kokoshniks* (C.I.53.46a–g). All of the garments except for the cape and the *kokoshniks* are adorned with a similar gold threading and embroidery design. One of the skirts has a larger embroidery design than the other, but both are wheat-themed, matching the embroidery on the bodice and overskirt. One of the *kokoshniks* is in much better condition than the other: one is still vibrant red, whereas the other is a darker shade, an effect that looks like it comes from age. Both measure about two and $\frac{5}{8}$ inches in width.

²⁶⁸ For the purposes of this Major Research Paper, the researcher has decided to base rank off of the ranks given in *The Russian Imperial Award System*.

The impeccable condition of the gown was a pleasant surprise, and there are no signs of alteration. The sumptuous crimson red velvet is in especially good condition and did not show any signs of shedding. The silk was in excellent condition as well and showed few signs of wear or stains. The bodice with butterfly sleeves was of red velvet with a silk panel and the red velvet overskirt extended into the train. On the inside, there was a matching silk attachment, which would be a handle for carrying the train. This area of the garment would have been in



Figure 5.2 Hook-and-eye over-skirt attachment of The Met's crimson Russian court gown. Photos the author's own.

direct with the ground, yet shows little staining or stress. The overskirt is attached to the garment by closing a hook-and-eye fastening, which thus revealed the silk skirt. The hook-and-eye attachment was hidden underneath the bodice. The cape also featured hidden hook-and-eyes to close itself. The two cream silk underskirts were both in pristine condition as well, with only some wear and tear on the inside bottom and the inside ruffle hem of the skirt, with some staining on the front of the hem, and both featured different wheat motifs going vertically down the middle of the skirt. The skirt has a centred vertical line of golden round buttons. This line continues onto the bodice by having an inch-wide piece of fabric with the same button decal that attaches to the top hem of the bodice. The buttoned fabric piece was attached to the bodice not through buttoning the piece, but through a string system, akin to corset or shoe lacing. The string

that was on the garment was of the plainest variety, and not to be seen when worn. Overall, this buttoned panel creates an illusion that the three-piece garment set is one garment.



Figure 5.3 The Met's crimson Russian court gown's lacing string. Photos the author's own.



Figure 5.4 The Met's crimson Russian court gown's button panel. The underside shows loops for the lacing. Photos the author's own

The tightness of the gold embroidery and beading are excellent, and only in a few places showed fraying, and in only small sections were beads missing. Where there are loose threads in the embroidery is near the front hem of the skirts, where the metallic casing is coming undone or has loosened around an orange thread. While inspecting the inside of the skirts, the same orange thread was visible in places where an embroiderer cast off or on. The beading is interesting to inspect, as it is debatable whether there is oxidation of the metal beads. This discolouration was discussed during the research appointment with some of the collections team at The Met, as the discolouration is in the same areas throughout the skirt design, as opposed to all of the same bead types having uniform discolouration. The *ombré* effect of the discolouration is similar to a beetle's shell. The bead types include pointed ovals of various sizes to create leaf-like designs,

small spherical beads with multiple holes in them to guide gold thread through the beads. The rest of the designs are created through various kinds of gold thread and repeats on the bodice, overskirt, and both silk skirts. Unfortunately, the label of this gown is not on the garments.

Object Reflection: Russian Court Gown, c. 1900

In studying The Met's crimson Russian gown, more questions than answers arose. The essential features of the gown, such as colour and train length, answered vital questions regarding the wearer's rank. In addition, questions arose regarding the construction of the gown and how it held the weight of an embroidered velvet train, its lacing system, what undergarments were worn, what was the order of getting dressed and undressed, and how long those two actions took. These questions could be answered not only through further archival research but through

creating a gown which approximately replicated the weight and construction of this gown. In creating a replica with similar materials, how the gown's clasp system handled its weight, and how the wearer felt, would be known to a close degree through the process of making. After research on the possible object biography of the gown, this reflection will conclude with a case as to who may have worn the gown and what their rank was. Before this hypothesis of the wearer is presented, the quantitative elements of the gown will be qualified.



Figure 5.5 The two kokoshniks which belong with the Met's crimson Russian court gown. The kokoshnik on the top is of worse condition. Photos the author's own.

The gown is of typical Russian court gown design, as it features the three components: the bodice, underskirt, and overgarment with train, and has embroidery.²⁶⁹ With Russian court gown hierarchy knowledge, the conclusion can be made that the wearer was an unmarried Maid of Honour due to the crimson velvet with gold embroidery, and the small *kokoshnik*.²⁷⁰ The small *kokoshnik* of an unmarried woman indicates that the dress reflects the wearer's father's court rank. Furthermore, the train is six feet in length, which means the wearer was from an aristocratic family.²⁷¹ The gown could have been worn during cooler months, as there is a cape, and the wear on one of the *kokoshnik* may be from rain or snow damage to the velvet. The lack of wear to the underside of the train indicates that it was not worn outdoors, and was likely carried by pages as there is minimal staining (Figure 5.6).

While the dress is beautiful and expertly constructed, it was not as ostentatious or overtly regal as was expected. The gown almost seemed modest in comparison to similar gowns viewed online from other museums, and especially so when compared to Queen Alexandra's court gown. This modesty displays the rank and wealth expressed in these two gowns: despite being for separate courts, the one worn by a top hierarchical figure is ostentatious in design, whereas the one worn by a lower ranking member is more understated. Moreover, Queen Alexandra's gown seemed to be in constant movement due to its beading. However, this gown, despite its considerable golden embroidery, seemed flat. Its main characteristic is its velvet, which creates a sumptuously muted effect of the garment. This gown does, however, express an immediate ceremonial purpose which Queen Alexandra's does not. This Russian gown could not be mistaken for a late nineteenth or early twentieth-century evening gown, and for someone with

²⁶⁹ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 244.

²⁷⁰ Korshunova and Tarasova, "Ceremonial Costumes," *Russian Splendor*, 58.

²⁷¹ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245.

interest in this time period, the uniquely Russian gown sleeves would indicate the nationality of the wearer.

Russian court gowns, even a rare second-hand one, were incredibly expensive.²⁷² The enormity of the financial strain on many Russian noble families to fulfill a season's orders of bespoke court dresses was severe.²⁷³ Charles Worth highly valued Russian Grand Duchess' patronage, as one Grand Duchess could put in an order for hundreds of gowns within a half hour, and thus they represented a



Figure 5.7 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Ensemble, C.I.53.46a–g, c. 1900.



Figure 5.6 The silk underside of the skirt train. In the centre there is a long loop which pages or the wearer could use to aid in the carrying of the train. The Met's crimson Russian court gown. Photos the author's own.

significant

source of his

income.²⁷⁴ For the crimson Met gown, the revealing of economization is made through comparing and analyzing its elements. For comparison of this gown with other crimson Russian court gowns, see Appendix 6. Embroidery was an important part of displaying wealth in Russian court dress because Russian aristocratic fashion emphasized expensive handiwork.²⁷⁵ If the Met's crimson gown shows

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid, 241.

²⁷⁴ Diana De Marly, *Worth: Father of Haute Couture* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), 157.

²⁷⁵ Other economization indicators were found in elements such as the velvet which shows no age and is of apparent superior quality. However, the discolouration of the metallic embellishments may have been by design, or it may have been a cheaper metal. The cape also reveals an economization as it is unembellished. Interestingly, the cape appropriate for wearing with other outfits, but it is likely to have stayed with the ensemble and not re-worn. Tamara

economization of embroidery when compared to gowns that belonged to wearers that wore their



Figure 5.8 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Ensemble, C.I.53.46a–g, c. 1900.

gown within Russia, it opens the possibility to the wearer being a Russian national in a foreign country. In studying a gown with a known wearer, it is possible to research how it fits into the life of its wearer, and if it is typical of them to wear such a garment or not, however this gown does not show personalization. While it is not possible to discern the personal taste of the wearer from this gown, as the wearer's personal taste was relinquished to meet Russian court dress standards, it is possible to make an educated guess as to their nationality and their monetary value of this gown. As the wearer is unknown, their economic capabilities are as well. However, it is assumed that the cost of the gown was the choice of the purchaser: either it met an acceptable minimum of adornment at the maximum amount of money available, or the purchaser did not want to allot more of their capital for a gown only appropriate for Russian nationals at official court functions.

Timofeevna Korshunova, *Russian Style 1700-1920: Court and Country Dress from the Hermitage* (London, Great Britain: Barbican Art Gallery, 1987), 34.



Figure 5.9 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Ensemble, C.I.53.46a–g, c. 1900.

Included in the object grouping of The Met's Crimson Gown are the accessories: two unadorned *kokoshniks*, and a red velvet cape. However, there are no long white gloves included despite the requirement that Russian court gowns be worn with them.²⁷⁶ Also included in the object grouping are two beautifully embellished silk skirts. The doubling of these two garments raises the question of whether this was a money-saving tactic: instead of buying two complete ensembles, have back-ups and variations. The skirts are of similar motifs, wheat, but one appears to be of a more 'grown' wheat stalk. This difference could indicate to onlookers that the wearer is not repeating their ensemble completely, or, it could represent a passage of time. Perhaps the gown was worn twice, the smaller wheat motif once in the winter, where a cape would be needed, and the more grown wheat later in the season. Another theory is that perhaps it was worn by a family member of similar measurements, like a sister, to a different official reception. Alternatively, the second skirt may have acted as a spare, or the purchaser simply wanted to have options.



Figure 5.10 This is the second skirt. As visible in Figure 5.9, the embroidery motifs are different. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Ensemble, C.I.53.46a–g, c. 1900.

²⁷⁶ It is possible that the gloves were re-worn for other events, or that they were soiled and thrown away. King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 245.

The Case for Countess Nathalie von Benckendorff-Ridley

While viewing the object at The Met, there was discussion about potential wearers. While several names were speculated, there was also a mention of The Met purchasing the gown was stored in an English bank sometime before the First World War, and it was purchased from a



Figure 5.11 [Woman identified as] *Lady Nathalie Louise Alexandrovna Ridley, n.d., photograph.*

bank in 1953. Following this unconfirmed information on the gown being held in an English bank, there was research into Russian ambassadors in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The search was set within the gown's approximate dating of 1900, and ruled out any ambassadors that did not have daughters, as the wearer has been identified as unmarried due to the *kokoshnik* size. Two Russian ambassadors fit these criteria: Egor Egorovich Staal, ambassador from 1884 to 1902, and Alexander von Benckendorff, ambassador from 1903 until 1917 (his death). Both

men had daughters: Theela Staal, who married Count Alexis Orloff-Davidoff in 1900, and Countess Nathalie Louise von Benckendorff (1886 - 1968), who at twenty-five married the Honourable Jasper Nicholas Ridley in 1911.²⁷⁷ The following discourse will focus on the possibility that The Met's gown belonged to Countess Nathalie von Benckendorff, as more information is available on her family.

²⁷⁷ Marina Soroka, *Britain, Russia and the Road to the First World War: The Fateful Embassy of Count Aleksandr von Benckendorff (1903-1916)* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011), 23.

Before being posted to England, Alexander von Benckendorff was the Russian ambassador in Denmark from 1897 to 1903. Benckendorff was close with Marie Feodorovna, and was essentially given the Danish ambassadorial posting by her.²⁷⁸ Benckendorff's appointment to England was highly favoured by Edward VII, and the family was instantly popular in English society, which further emphasizes the strong alliance marrying two Danish princesses into the British and Russian royal families created.²⁷⁹ The Benckendorff's seemed to have enmeshed themselves in England, as Countess von Benckendorff remained in England with her husband.²⁸⁰

Interestingly, in 2012, the auction house Christie's had a sale of Russian objects, including a c. 1904 diamond brooch with the initials of M and A, for both empresses, titled "A Jeweled Silver and Gold Maid of Honor Cypher." The provenance suggests that the brooch belonged to Countess Olga Alexandrovna Nieroth, and presented to her "by repute" via Count Benckendorff and Countess Nathalie Benckendorff.²⁸¹ This provenance also suggests that an ambassador had the capacity to present Imperial mementos of honour. This brooch is another example of the re-Russification of the Russian court, as the initials are in a Slavic style font.²⁸² In addition, this brooch reflects Marie Feodorovna's importance within court, as when looking at

²⁷⁸ As Marie Feodorovna's political confidant, Benckendorff was "the only Russian ambassador whose name appears in Nicholas II's diary as a family guest." Soroka, *Britain, Russia, and the Road to the First World War*, 29.

²⁷⁹ Benckendorff oversaw the creation of the Triple Entente in 1907, the alliance which would unite England, France, and Russia if war was declared on one of them. Soroka, *Britain, Russia, and the Road to the First World War*, 29, 39, 47.

²⁸⁰ Countess von Benckendorff and Ridley lived at 18 Gloucester Place, and were a part of the conservative aristocratic social circle whose last names prove influential, such as the families of Curzon, Asquith, and Churchill, among others. Ibid, 51, 262.

²⁸¹ Christie's, "'A Jeweled Silver and Gold Maid of Honor Cypher,'" By Hahn, St. Petersburg, Circa 1904, Number 201," *Christie's*, accessed March 07, 2019.

²⁸² Tillander-Godenhjelm, *The Russian Imperial Award System*, 42.

the brooch her M initial is on the left.²⁸³ Unfortunately, the ranking of the brooch as a Maid of Honour accessory is contradicted by information provided in literature and museum sources. When comparing Nieroth's brooch with the brooch in the Hillwood Museum collection, there is almost no difference between the two brooches. The highly detailed text, *The Russian Imperial Reward System, 1894-1917*, would also identify this brooch as belonging to a Maid of Honour.²⁸⁴ Yet the Hillwood Museum, a highly respected North American collection of Imperial Russian artifacts, ranks the brooch as that of a "Lady-in-Waiting," as does *Russian Splendour*, a State Hermitage Museum publication. Regardless, both of the brooches discussed would have cost between 500 and 900 roubles between 1890 and 1900, and would be worn at all official functions.²⁸⁵ The bestowing and receiving of this brooch would have been a way to signify a



Figure 5.12 Hahn, Lady-in-Waiting Pin, 18.69, c. 1907, The Hillwood Museum, Washington, D.C.

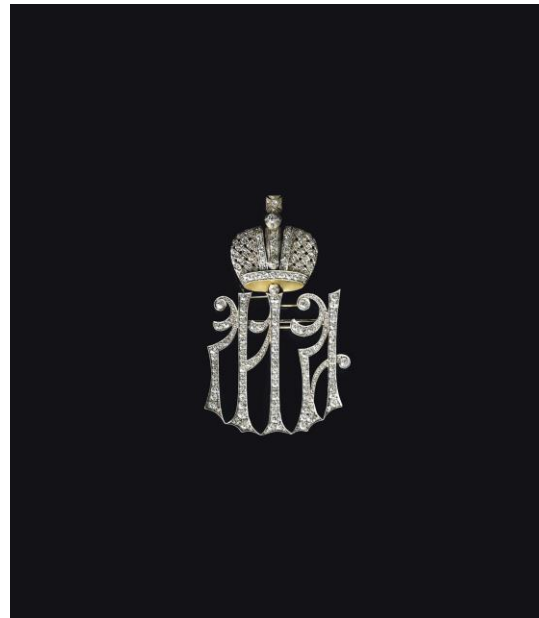


Figure 5.13 Hahn, "A Jeweled Silver And Gold Maid Of Honor Cypher," Lot. No. 21, c. 1904, Christie's, London.

²⁸³ Ibid, 42.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

cultural identity and a personal relationship.²⁸⁶ Countess von Benckendorff would have worn a similar brooch with her Russian court gown, on the left side of her corsage.

It is concluded in this object reading of the gown that Countess von Benckendorff held the rank The Met's gown expresses, that of a Maid of Honour of the City. As von Benckendorff was a Countess by birth, unmarried until 1911, and was in England due to service to the Russian crown, the rank of Maid of Honour of the City would positively reflect on her father, be appropriate for her rank, and would not require her inhabiting the palaces of the Empresses. In addition, if Countess von Benckendorff was the wearer, then a more accurate dating of 1903 - 1910 could be made. As Countess von Benckendorff married Englishman Ridley in 1911, her rank would have transformed into that of his wife, as opposed to a Russian ambassador's daughter, making her need for a Russian court gown obsolete as she would now be retired from her Maid of Honour post.²⁸⁷ The requirement of Russian nationals to wear Russian court dress at foreign courts, for women to retire their court posting upon marriage, and Countess von Benckendorff's permanent move to England after her marriage to Ridley could explain the gown's suspected existence in a British bank before being bought by The Met with funds from the Irene Lewisohn Bequest in 1953. Regardless, further research into The Met's purchases could positively identify the wearer.

Despite the above hypothesis, there could be many reasons as to why the gown potentially ended up in a bank vault. While there are many possibilities as to who wore the gown, it is exciting to speculate that The Met's gown was worn by a Russian national at the

²⁸⁶ Charpy, "How Things Shape Us," *Writing Material Culture History*, 213, 217.

²⁸⁷ The now-married woman would retain her entrance capability into court, and would continue to wear the cypher brooch of her previous maid of honour rank at official functions for the rest of her life. This position was unpaid, but rewarded the young woman in social contacts. Tillander-Godenhjelm, *The Russian Imperial Award System*, 36.

British court, meaning that it was worn in the same setting and hierarchy as Queen Alexandra. Even more exciting in the confines of this MRP is that Marie Feodorovna visited England for the first time in 34 years in 1906, which means it is plausible that if the gown belonged to a Russian national in England that it was worn in the same setting as both of the sisters.²⁸⁸ When comparing The Met's crimson Maid of Honour gown with a court gown of Queen Alexandra's, the rank of each wearer is apparent despite them existing for separate hierarchies. Where wealth and rank are expressed are in the adornments of each gown, as opposed to its measurable quantities of length and monetary value. Queen Alexandra's gown is sparkling, smooth, lightweight, and makes an immediate impression of regality despite its current crumbling state. The Russian gown appears muted, soft, durable, and of considerable weight. However, it is clear when comparing these two gowns that Queen Alexandra's was one that was worn by the top of a hierarchy due to its ornamentation which communicates a clear regality.

What Was It Like to Wear Russian Court Dress?

Meriel Buchanan was the daughter of England's ambassador in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Buchanan was a keen writer, and left many memoirs of her life experiences as an ambassador's daughter living in multiple nations. Buchanan described the effect Russian court dress had on her and other foreign nationals with eloquent prose. In Buchanan's description, the Russian women's jewels were afire, there were so many of them, and that seeing so many women in such garments would momentarily transport them back into an ancient fairy-tale.²⁸⁹ Russian court gowns and jewels created a "buzz of admiration, of envy,

²⁸⁸ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 226.

²⁸⁹ Meriel Buchanan, *Recollections of Imperial Russia* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1923), 35.

or comment and criticism.”²⁹⁰ Buchanan concluded that in comparison with Russian court gowns modern clothes were commonplace and insignificant.²⁹¹

While Buchanan’s first-hand experience of encountering Russian court dress is interesting, unfortunately no primary accounts were found of what it was like to wear a Russian court gown, least of all The Met’s court gown. It is possible to gain a general feeling that the experience was a noticeably different one from evening dress, and generally disliked.²⁹² The Empress had five maids help her dress, which created energy similar to a “beehive.”²⁹³ Marie Feodorovna referred to it as her “armour,” and her children called the outfit her “Imperial panoply.”²⁹⁴ A Russian court gown was so considerable in weight that often pages had to aid the wearer.²⁹⁵ A Russian noble was obligated to wear Russian court dress while at foreign courts, and the most expensive gown ever made by Charles Worth was for the Russian ambassador’s wife attending a court in Berlin.²⁹⁶ The gown was so heavy with precious stones that the wearer was unable to move and ultimately could not attend the event despite repeatedly trying.²⁹⁷ This instance is in line with Veblen’s economic theory of dress which stated dress had become incompatible with its functional purpose in favour of showing economic prowess of the gown purchaser.²⁹⁸ Moreover, her repeated attempts to attend the event despite the weight of her conspicuously designed gown shows how she valued being seen in her Russian court gown by foreign nationals. Meriel Buchanan remarked on Russian court gowns’ ability to make “one feel

²⁹⁰ Meriel Buchanan, *The Dissolution of an Empire* (London: John Murray, 1932), 30.

²⁹¹ Buchanan, *Recollections*, 36.

²⁹² King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 246.

²⁹³ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 124.

²⁹⁴ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 246; Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 125.

²⁹⁵ King, *The Court of the Last Tsar*, 246.

²⁹⁶ Korshunova and Tarasova, “Ceremonial Costumes,” *Russian Splendor*, 67-8.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

²⁹⁸ In most cases, it was the father or husband of a woman who would provide the capital for a woman’s purchases. Veblen, *The Economic Theory of Women’s Dress*, 97.

that just for a moment one had been transported back into some old fairy-tale where princesses still wore gold and damask and jewelled diadems.”²⁹⁹ The purpose of Russian court dress ornamentation was to convey the wearer’s wealth and power.

In conclusion, the object analysis of The Met’s crimson Russian court gown revealed much about the wearer in addition to how dress played a part in Russian court hierarchy. In analysing components of the gown and its object biography, it was concluded that because it was not overtly conspicuous and was in stable condition in a North American archive the wearer was likely an unmarried Russian aristocrat in a foreign court. In analysing The Met’s gown is concluded that the gown expresses a Maid of Honour.

²⁹⁹ Buchanan, *Recollections*, 35

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Queen Alexandra's Enduring Sartorial Impact

When researching Queen Alexandra's royal dress, the literature would include terms, phrases, and commentary that felt relevant to the discussions regarding the British royal family



Figure 6.1 Queen Elizabeth II in her first Parliament appearance since the referendum vote to leave the European Union. Her Majesty is wearing a blue monotone outfit, complete with a hat which features yellow dots that some argued represented the EU flag. Carl Court, Getty Images, June 21, 2017, London.

today. Their calculated sartorial choices reflect their personality while also balancing royal dressing "rules."³⁰⁰ If not leading fashion, they balance between current tastes and a constant style, such as Queen Elizabeth II's

consistent
monochrome
dressing. Anyone
can buy and thus

imitate what the British royal family does, such as tea or rain boots, due to Royal warrants which act as a reward to the makers and as a "mark" of excellent craftsmanship.³⁰¹ British royal dress has successfully maintained the middle ground between upper-class fashion and accessible style, which sets the royals apart from their subjects while also rendering their conspicuous consumption imitable.³⁰² One of the most influential tastemakers of the twentieth century, Cecil Beaton,



Figure 6.2 Diana, Princess of Wales, wearing Hunter rainboots, a brand with a Royal Warrant, while on her honeymoon with Prince Charles. Tim Graham, 1981, Balmoral.

³⁰⁰ Murphy and Davies-Strodder, *Modern Royal Fashion*, 6.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 17.

³⁰² Ibid, 9.

considered Queen Alexandra the start of British royals being allowed to wear what they chose to.³⁰³ Queen Alexandra was able to recognize the power in visual representation, using her dress to heighten her impact, and thus maximizing on her social power and self-expression.³⁰⁴ London dress shops celebrated “Alexandra Day” by decorating their stores in roses, and upon her death in 1925, department stores around England mourned her loss by lowering their flags to half-mast.³⁰⁵ Queen Alexandra’s place in British fashion was one of deep admiration.



Figure 6.3 Meghan, Duchess of Sussex in a sequin covered evening gown. Getty Images, January 17, 2019, London.



Figure 6.4 Queen Alexandra in a sequin covered evening gown. Alice Hughes, *Queen Alexandra*, c. 1907-8, platinum print on mounted card, Royal Collection Trust, London.

³⁰³ Queen Alexandra was undoubtedly a trendsetter in areas such as jewelry, highly tailored outfits, and the “Princess line” silhouette created by Worth in her honour. Norman Hartnell, *Royal Courts of Fashion*, (London: Cassell, 1971), 172, 180.

³⁰⁴ Strasdin, *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*. 153.

³⁰⁵ “London Stores all Abloom with Roses on Alexandra Day.” *Women’s Wear*, July 17, 1920: 47; “Retail Promotion — Store News: Queen Alexandra’s Death May Affect Retail Trade.” *Women’s Wear*, November 21, 1925.

Marie Feodorovna: A Stagnate Court

The experience of researching British monarchs stands in complete contrast to that of the Russian royal family. While the British royals seem to be a part of a continuous story, the Romanovs seem crystallized, frozen in a time of High Imperialism. Despite this crystallization, learning about Marie Feodorovna's progressiveness, which was to such a high degree she was dubbed "the guardian angel of Russia," as well as her survival of the revolution, made her social success as Tsarina more endearing.³⁰⁶ Marie Feodorovna was able to escape the train wreck of the Romanov fate, helping bring her sartorial and political influence into the light of strategic intelligence that led to her survival. Many decades after the death of the last Russian Tsar and his family, the Romanov dynasty's inspiration and contribution to arts, such as ballet, are not forgotten.³⁰⁷ The western world is attracted to Russian Imperial-era culture because of the "distinctly national affect and drama"³⁰⁸ that is unique to Tsarist Russia. The watershed event of 1917 may overshadow Marie Feodorovna's tenure, but her influence during a highly romanticized era of Russian Imperialism is undeniable.

After the Ball: The Sisters' Ends

Queen Alexandra and Marie Feodorovna enjoyed a close bond their entire lives. Furthermore, both sisters slowed their sartorial expression in their later years. One article described the sister's similar black outfits in 1913 as not having the "slightest hint of the French

³⁰⁶ Marie Feodorovna was the head of over 400 institutions and was interested in education and health. Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 142. During the time of the Russian Revolution Marie Feodorovna was not in the Russian capital, and eventually escaped with the help of Queen Alexandra via boat.

³⁰⁷ John E. Bowlt, *Moscow & St. Petersburg 1900-1920: Art, Life & Culture of the Russian Silver Age* (New York: Vendome Press, 2008), 336.

³⁰⁸ Paul du Quenoy, Paul, "In The 'Most Uncompromising Russian Style': The Russian Repertoire at The Metropolitan Opera, 1910-47." *Revolutionary Russia* 28, no. 1 (June 2015, 2015): 15.

modeste's cunning nor the English tailor's chic."³⁰⁹ However, this unfashionable appearance is due to their style taking precedence over overt pecuniary expression, although Queen Alexandra's outfit still "conceded more to ornamentation."³¹⁰ When the Russian Revolution occurred in 1917, Queen Alexandra was able to help her sister and some of her nieces and nephews leave Russia, but Marie Feodorovna's arrival in England was incredibly quiet, almost secretive, and contrasted with the fanfare of their previous visits.³¹¹ In their old age the sisters were unable to maintain the harmonious living relationship they once had, and ultimately Marie Feodorovna returned to their joint Danish property, Hvidøre, as she remarked that it was better to be "number one at Hvidøre than number two at Sandringham."³¹² This remark reflects the sisters' identification as leaders of their female domains, and thus unable to accommodate another Queen into their space, even if it was their beloved sister. Queen Alexandra's death at 81 in 1925 was the start of a sharp decline for her younger sister, who had lost so many family members in the past seven years.³¹³ Marie Feodorovna died at the age of 81 as well, almost exactly three years after her older sister.

What endures after the death of two sisters almost 100 years ago is their clothing. This study has focused on the status and associated influence communicated by their court dress. Using Veblen's theory of women's dress expressing wealth, it is apparent that Queen Alexandra and Marie Feodorovna expressed their wealth, and thus their status, in their clothes by dressing conspicuously. By doing so, the sisters heightened their social influence and asserted their nation's stature on a visible scale to foreigners.

³⁰⁹ The sisters were together when the First World War broke out in 1914. "The World's Two Most Prominent Women Eschew Narrow Skirt and All Arts of Modern Fashion." *The Evening News*, June 26, 1913.

³¹⁰ "The World's Two Most Prominent Women Eschew Narrow Skirt" *The Evening News*, June 26, 1913.

³¹¹ Hall, *Little Mother of Russia*, 327.

³¹² *Ibid*, 329.

³¹³ Patricia Phenix, *Olga Romanov: Russia's Last Grand Duchess* (Toronto: Viking, 1999), 157.

Comparing the gown of a lower-ranking member of the Russian court brings a new perspective in regards to the regality of Queen Alexandra's gown: that a Queen who asserts herself sartorially is visibly influential and of the highest rank through the ornamentation of her dress. However, in studying these two gowns, it is revealed that there is a lack of academic research specifically on the exact regulations of British court dress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as is the varied and questionable legitimacy of the literature available on Russian court dress. There is an apparent gap in the literature on court dress in this era from both of these nations that would add immensely to the discourse on communicating wealth and hierarchy through dress. The object analysis of both gowns encourages the study of the



Figure 6.5 Mary Steen, Queen Alexandra [right] and Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna of Russia at Hvidore, Denmark, c. 1911, photograph, Royal Collection Trust, London.

"language" of court dress, specifically for Russian court dress, which faces the risk of becoming a lost visual language. Further research on this subject would include primary sources on contemporary reactions towards court dress in each nation, more in-depth comparisons of similar court gowns, and more detailed analysis of how a court gown was constructed.

Appendix 1: Chart of Russian Court Gown Colour Combinations and Ranks

Figure 7.1

Rank	Velvet Colour	Embroidery Colour	Accessories / Notes	Citation
Ladies-in-waiting of the Empress	Crimson	Gold	Diamond Brooch With Lady's Initial, Worn on the Left Side of the Corsage, Blue St Andrews Ribbon. Served the Empress.	M.B. Piotrovskii, M. B., G. V. Vilinbakhov, Yu V. Plotnikova, et al., <i>Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court</i> , trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 58.
Lady-in-waiting of the Wives of Grand Dukes	Crimson	Silver	Miniature Portrait Brooch in a Diamond Frame; Worn on the Right Side of Corsage. Served the wife of a Grand Duke	Ibid.
Maid of Honour	Green		Miniature Portrait Brooch of Empress in a Diamond Frame; Worn on the Right Side of Corsage	Ibid.
Chamber Ladies-in-waiting	Green		Miniature Portrait Brooch of Empress in a Diamond Frame; Worn on the Right Side of Corsage	Ibid.
Lady-in-waiting of a Grand Duchess	Light Blue		Miniature Portrait Brooch in a Diamond Frame; Worn on the Right Side of Corsage. Served a Grand Duchess	Ibid.
Hofmeisterines	Raspberry		Miniature Portrait Brooch of Empress in a Diamond Frame; Worn on the Right Side of Corsage. Also known as "Portrait Ladies."	Ibid.
Maid of Honour	Crimson	Gold		Greg King, <i>The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II</i> (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), 245.
Lady-in-waiting	Green	Gold		Ibid.
Empresses	Usually Silver	Silver and Gold		Ibid.
Grand Duchess Vladimir (1854-1920), and Her Ladies-in-waiting	Dark Orange	Silver and Gold	Served Grand Duchess Vladimir (b. 1854 - d. 1920).	Ibid.
Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavrikiavna (1865-1927), and Her Ladies-in-waiting	Dull Yellow	Silver and Gold	Served Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavrikiavna (b. 1864 - d. 1918).	Ibid.

Ladies-in-waiting	Green	Gold		Ėrmitazh Gosudarstvennyĭ and Tamara Timofeevna Korshunova, <i>The Art of Costume in Russia, 18th to Early 20th Century, The Hermitage</i> (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1983), 21.
Maid of Honour	Green	Gold		Ibid.
Empress	Blue, Crimson, or Any Other Colour	Silver and Gold		Ibid.
Royal Princesses	Blue, Crimson, or Any Other Colour	Silver and Gold		Ibid.
Ladies-in-waiting	Green	Gold		L. V. Efimova and T. S. Aleshina, <i>Russian Elegance: Country and City Fashion from the 15th to the Early 20th Century</i> (London: Vivays Publishing, 2011), 174.
Maid of Honour	Green	Gold		Ibid.
Lady-in-waiting to Empress	Blue, Crimson, or Any Other Colour	Silver and Gold		Ibid.
Grand Duchesses	Blue, Crimson, or Any Other Colour	Silver and Gold		Ibid.
Mistress of the Court	Raspberry	Gold	Raspberry Kokoshnik	Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System During the Reign of Nicholas II, 1894-1917</i> (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2005), 32, 35, 37, 38.
Lady of Honour of the Bedchamber	Dark Green			Ibid.
Maid of Honour of the Bedchamber	Dark Green			Ibid.
Maid of Honour of the City	Crimson	Gold		Ibid.
Maid of Honour of the Suite	Crimson	Gold		Ibid.

Maid of Honour of Grand-duchess or Wife of Grand Dukes	Crimson	Silver		Ibid.
Maid of Honour of Hereditary Grand Duchess, Tsar's Daughters and Granddaughters	Light Blue Velvet			Ibid.
Empress's Ladies-in-waiting	Green	Gold	Kokoshnik With White Veil	Tamara Timofeevna Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920: Court and Country Dress from the Hermitage</i> (London, Great Britain: Barbican Art Gallery, 1987), 34.
Empress's Maids of the Chamber	Green	Gold	Kokoshnik With White Veil	Ibid.
Empress's Maids of Honour	Crimson		Kokoshnik With White Veil	Ibid.
Ladies-in-waiting	Green	Gold		Ibid.
Maids of Honour	Crimson	Gold		Ibid.
"A Young Grand Duchess"	Rose Coloured		Served a Grand Duchess.	Meriel Buchanan, <i>Recollections of Imperial Russia</i> (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1923), 35.
Grand Duchess Cyrill	Cornflower Blue		Kokoshnik With Sapphires and Diamonds. Served Grand Duchess Cyril (b. 1876 - d. 1936).	Ibid.
Older Court Ladies	Olive Green			Ibid.
Demoiselles D'honneur	Ruby Velvet		Could the velvet have been crimson or raspberry?	Ibid.

Appendix 2: Tally of Russian Court Gown Colour Combination and Associated Rank

Figure 7.2

Velvet Colour	Embroidery Colour	Rank	Tally	Citation	Accessories
Crimson	Gold	Maid of Honour	2	Tamara Timofeevna Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920: Court and Country Dress from the Hermitage</i> (London, Great Britain: Barbican Art Gallery, 1987), 94; Greg King, <i>The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II</i> (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), 245.	
		Maid of Honour of the Suite	1	Ulla Tillander-Godenhielm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System During the Reign of Nicholas II, 1894-1917</i> (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2005), 32, 35, 37, 38.	
		Maid of Honour of the City	1	Tillander-Godenhielm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System</i> , 32, 35, 37, 38.	
		Lady-in-Waiting	1	M.B. Piotrovskii, et al., <i>Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court</i> , trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 58.	
	Silver	Maid of Honour of Grand-Duchess or wives of Grand Dukes	2	Piotrovskii & et al., <i>Russian Splendor</i> , 58; Tillander-Godenhielm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System</i> , 32, 35, 37, 38.	Miniature portrait brooch in a diamond frame; Worn on the right side of corsage
	N/A	Empress's Maids of Honour	1	Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920</i> , 34.	
Crimson		<i>Ladies-in-Waiting et al. total:</i>	1	Crimson is concluded to indicate Maid of Honour.	
		<i>Maid of Honour et al.:</i>	5		
Green	Gold	Lady-in-Waiting	4	King, <i>The Court of the Last Tsar</i> , 245; Ėrmitazh Gosudarstvennyĭ and Tamara Timofeevna Korshunova, <i>The Art of Costume in Russia, 18th to Early 20th Century, The Hermitage</i> (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1983), 21; Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920</i> , 94.	

		Empress's Lady-in-Waiting	1	Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920</i> , 34.	Kokoshnik with white veil
		Empress's Maids of the Chamber	1	Korshunova, <i>Russian Style 1700-1920</i> , 34.	Kokoshnik with white veil
		Maid of Honour	2	Gosudarstvennyi and Korshunova, <i>The Art of Costume in Russia</i> , 21; L. V. Efimova and T. S. Aleshina, <i>Russian Elegance: Country and City Fashion from the 15th to the Early 20th Century</i> (London: Vivays Publishing, 2011), 174.	
		Maid of Honour	1	Piotrovskii & et al., <i>Russian Splendor</i> , 58.	
		Chamber Lady-in-Waiting	1	Piotrovskii & et al., <i>Russian Splendor</i> , 58.	
Dark Green	N/A	Lady of honour of the bedchamber	1	Tillander-Godenhjelm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System</i> , 32, 35, 37, 38.	
		Maid of Honour of the bedchamber	1	Tillander-Godenhjelm, <i>The Russian Imperial Award System</i> , 32, 35, 37, 38.	
Olive Green		Older Court Ladies	1	Meriel Buchanan, <i>Recollections of Imperial Russia</i> (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1923), 35.	
Green et al		Ladies-in-Waiting et al. total:	5	Green is concluded to indicate a Lady-in-Waiting.	
		Maid of Honour et al.:	4		

Appendix 3: Russian Female Courtier Positions and German Equivalents

Information is from Greg King, *The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), 488-9.

Figure 7.3

#	Rank Name	Other translations	Empress or Dowager Empress
1	Mistress of the Robes and Chief Lady-in- Waiting	Starshaya Ober-Gofmeisterina Visochaishego Dvora	Empress
2	Mistress of the Robes	Starshaya Dama Ober-Gofmeisterina pri Dvora Vdovstvuushei Imperatritse	Dowager
3	Ladies-in-Waiting of the Highest Rank	Starshiye Dami pri Visochaishego Dvora	Empress
4	Personal Ladies in Waiting	Kamer-Freilini pri Visochaishego Dvora	Empress
5	Lady in Waiting	Kamer-Freilini pri Dvora Vdovstvuushei Imperatritse	Dowager
6	Ladies-in-Waiting	Starshiye Freilini pri Visochaishego Dvora	Empress
7	Maids of Honour	Freilini pri Dvora Vdovstvuushei Imperatritse	Dowager
8	Maids of Honour	Freilini	Empress

Appendix 4: Russian Female Courtier Accessories

Figure 7.4

Rank	Accessories	Citation
Married woman	Kokoshnik w. veil	M.B. Piotrovskii, M. B., G. V. Vilinbakhov, Yu V. Plotnikova, et al., <i>Russian Splendor: Sumptuous Fashions of the Russian Court</i> , trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli Publications, 2016), 58.
Unmarried woman	Veil, Frontlet, <i>povoinik</i> , small	Ibid.
Empress [Alexandra Feodorovna]	13 ft train	Ibid.
Lady-in-Waiting	Diamond brooch with Lady's initial, worn on the left side of the corsage, blue St. Andrews ribbon	Ibid.
Maid of Honour	Miniature portrait brooch of Empress in a diamond frame, worn on the right side of corsage	Ibid.
Hofmeisterinnen	Miniature portrait brooch of Empress in a diamond frame, worn on the right side of corsage	Ibid.
Lady-in-Waiting	Miniature portrait brooch of Empress in a diamond frame, worn on the right side of corsage	Ibid.
Chamber Lady-in-Waiting	Miniature portrait brooch of Empress in a diamond frame, worn on the right side of corsage	Ibid.
Imperial family	Blue <i>kokoshnik</i>	Greg King, <i>The Court of the Last Tsar: Pomp, Power, and Pageantry in the Reign of Nicholas II</i> (Hoboken: Wiley, 2006), 245.
Nobility	Red or white <i>kokoshnik</i>	Ibid.
Aristocratic birth	6 foot train	Ibid.
Imperial family	9 foot train	Ibid.
Empresses	15 foot train	Ibid.

Married woman	<i>Kokoshnik</i> with veil	Ėrmitazh Gosudarstvennyĭ and Tamara Timofeevna Korshunova, <i>The Art of Costume in Russia, 18th to Early 20th Century, The Hermitage</i> (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1983), 21.
Unmarried woman	Veil, small fontlet / <i>povoinik</i>	Ibid.
Married woman	<i>Kokoshnik</i> with veil	L. V. Efimova and T. S. Aleshina, <i>Russian Elegance: Country and City Fashion from the 15th to the Early 20th Century</i> (London: Vivays Publishing, 2011), 174.
Unmarried woman	Veil, small frontlet / <i>povoinik</i>	Ibid.
Imperial family	Blue <i>kokoshnik</i>	Laura Cerwinske and Anthony Johnson, <i>Russian Imperial Style</i> (New York: Prentice Hall, 1990), 102.
Nobility	Red or white <i>kokoshnik</i>	Ibid.
Empress's Maid of Honour	Crimson <i>kokoshnik</i>	Ibid.
Empress's Lady-in-Waiting	Green <i>kokoshnik</i> with gold embroidery	Ibid.
Favoured mistress of the Tsar	Portrait brooch of Tsar worn on the bosom	Ibid.
Dishonoured mistress of the Tsar	Portrait brooch of Tsar worn on the back	Ibid.
Empresses	4.00 metre train	Diana De Marly, <i>Worth: Father of Haute Couture</i> (London: Elm Tree Books, 1980), 155.
Grand Duchesses	3.75 metre train	Ibid.
Princesses [Nobility]	3.50 metre train	Ibid.

Appendix 5: Similar Russian Court Gowns

When researching objects to analyze, there were few options available within North



Figure 7.5 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Robe, 1977.398a–c, c. 1900

America. The Met has two in its collections, and ultimately the crimson gown was chosen for its colour and bare shoulder style. The other dress in The Met's collection is green velvet with gold embroidery (1977.398a–c), circa 1900. The green gown has similar buttons and button panel for the bodice, an equal amount of embroidery and design, the trains both appear to be of the same length, six feet, and appears to be in as good condition as its crimson counterpart. The shoulders are the most noticeable difference, as

they are

covered, and the

more substantial form suggests an older woman wore this gown. It is unknown who the wearer or designer was, but like the crimson gown, its excellent condition, survival, and appearance in North America suggest that it is possible that it was a foreign visitor to the Russian court, and possibly worn to the same event. Despite their similarities, the crimson gown is outranked by the green gown in the Russian court setting.



Figure 7.6 State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Ceremonial Court Dress of a Maid of Honour to the Imperial Court, ЭPT-13137, c. 1900.

The humility of The Met's crimson gown is highlighted when compared to a maid of honour gown (ЭPT-13137) housed at the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (SHM). Even though the SHM gown is viewed online, its heightened grandeur is visible in comparison to The Met's gown. The SHM gown is from O. N. Bulbenkova's couture house in St. Petersburg and has a date spanning the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The gown is of crimson velvet, perhaps a shade or two deeper than The Met's gown, a tulle ruffle along the décolletage, has a larger gold embroidery and metallic threading, with a similar wheat or fauna design, and has the same gold spherical buttons and button panel for the bodice. The larger embroidery design makes it more apparent to its viewers that the wearer has the capital available to display their family's wealth. Moreover, the train is nine feet long which reveals the wearer was also from the Imperial family, either by birth or marriage.

The SHM also has a court gown of Marie Feodorovna from the 1880s (ЭPT-8657), thus thirty years older than The Met's gowns. The gown is also crimson velvet with gold embroidery and was made by St. Petersburg based designer, A. Laman. The bodice appears to have a slightly darker crimson colour than the skirt, the silk garments are of a bright white, and the gold embroidery and beading are also in a brighter hue. The gown also features spherical gold buttons and a button panel, as well as a lace ruffle around the décolletage similar, but larger, than the SHM lady-in-waiting gown. Marie Feodorovna's gown features extensively larger embroidery on all garments, with a four or five leafed flora, which features throughout as well as a repeated scalloped embroidery design. What is of note when analyzing this gown is that its broad date can be narrowed down by reviewing the timeline of Romanov events. For example, events such as when her mother-in-law passed and therefore allowing Marie Feodorovna to wear a longer train



Figure 7.7 State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Ceremonial Dress of Empress Maria Feodorovna, ЭPT-8657, c. 1880s.

or what her gown colour combination meant, or there could also have been a theme to the occasion, such as a red or blue theme.³¹⁴ Marie Feodorovna was Empress from 1883 until 1894, and her mother-in-law Marie Alexandrovna died in June of 1880. As the court season occurred in the winter months, it is possible that Marie wore this gown as a sign of fealty to her mother-in-law in the winter of 1880. What is interesting, is that if this gown was worn in the Winter of 1880, the train is 10 feet long, meaning one foot over the

Imperial family designation, but four feet less

than that of an Empress' train. It is unlikely the small Marie Feodorovna would choose to carry further weight than necessary. Thus, if this gown was worn as fealty to Marie Feodorovna's superior, she was also asserting herself as a superior member of the Imperial family. In reviewing two other SHM court dresses that belonged to Marie Feodorovna during her tenure as Tsarevna from 1860s to the 1880s, their train length was both ten feet long (ЭPT-8612 and ЭPT-13160). It would require specified in-depth research as to what Marie Feodorovna's train length and garment colour choices of a Maid of Honour signified.

Finally, on March 27th 2019, The Tsarskoe Selo State Museum-Preserve's Instagram account posted a photo of a crimson court gown. Using Google Translate, it was revealed that the gown belonged to Zoya de Stekl, and was donated to the Russian museum in 2014 by de Stekl's

³¹⁴ De Marly, *Worth*, 156

grandson, Vincent George Poklevsky-Kozell, who had immigrated to London.³¹⁵ This court gown possibly shares a similar story to that of the one proposed of The Met's crimson gown belonging to a Russian national living in another country, in both cases, England. This gown has more embroidery than The Met's, which would be logical considering it definitively being worn in the St. Petersburg court.



Figure 7.8 If one inspects the button panel, it is obvious that it has not been tightly laced to the bodice. Tsarskoe_selo, Zoya de Stekl's Maid of Honour court gown c. 1894-1917, March 27, 2019. Instagram. Accessed March 28, 2019.

³¹⁵ Tsarskoe_selo, Zoya de Stekl's Maid of Honour court gown c. 1894-1917, March 27, 2019. Instagram. Accessed March 28, 2019.

Appendix 6: Emily Roebling: A Woman of Two Courts

There is a dress that belongs to both the English and Russian court. Created in 1896 for American Emily Warren Roebling (1843-1903)'s presentation to Queen Victoria, the yellow silk satin gown was worn again shortly after in May to the coronation of Tsar Nicholas II and Tsarina



Figure 7.9 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Presentation Ensemble, 2009.300.941a-e, 1896.

Alexandra Feodorovna.³¹⁶ The ‘Court Presentation Ensemble’ is now housed in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009.300.941a-3) and is of yellow silk satin. The dress conveys a grandiose aura due to it featuring “opulent silver and gold embroidery on the bodice” which would have been considered requisite to be in the presence of royalty.³¹⁷ The train, of unknown length, features silk orchids.³¹⁸ While Worth was once the attributed maker of the gown, it does not bear his label and is likely American-made.³¹⁹ Roebling must have found her British presentation and coronation attendance important, or perhaps simply loved the gown, as

her portrait was completed by Charles-Emile-Auguste Carolus-Duran, a prominent society portraitist.³²⁰ Roebling's gown raises questions of the similarity between the two courts' sartorial regulations, and if there were alterations to Roebling's gown for the second court event. An analysis of images of the gown suggests that Roebling styled it for the English court as she wears

³¹⁶ Wed to the chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge, Roebling took over supervising the completion of the project during her husband's illness. Roebling was a women's rights activist, and later earned a certificate in law. Reeder, *High Style*, 203.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ The Roebling family donated the gown and portrait in 1970 to the Brooklyn Museum. The gown was later transferred to The Met. Ibid.

a white veil and a feathered headdress. The yellow colour does not keep with the general practice of debutantes wearing white to be presented at the English court, but as Roebling was a married woman in her early fifties, the muted, pastel tone would have been appropriate. Her overskirt reveals a cream silk skirt with embroidery of non-descript fauna, reminiscent but not distinctly a Russian court gown style. The train, which attaches at the back of the dress at the waist, is of a deep purple, but the ornamentation is not repeated on the overskirt, and thus not in the Russian style despite the velvet fabric. The gown does display conspicuous wealth in its ornamentation choices. Moreover, the multiple ornamentation designs suggest that Roebling's personal preference was a significant consideration in the gown design. Ultimately the gown visually belongs to neither court, but neither did its wearer.



Figure 7.10 Charles-Émile-Auguste Carolus-Duran, Portrait of Emily Warren Roebling, 1896, oil on canvas, Brooklyn Museum, New York.



Figure 7.11 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Court Presentation Ensemble, 2009.300.941a-e, 1896.

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