



The Rasputin File

Edvard Radzinsky

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From the bestselling author of **Stalin** and **The Last Tsar** comes **The Rasputin File**, a remarkable biography of the mystical monk and bizarre philanderer whose role in the demise of the Romanovs and the start of the revolution can only now be fully known.

For almost a century, historians could only speculate about the role Grigory Rasputin played in the downfall of tsarist Russia. But in 1995 a lost file from the State Archives turned up, a file that contained the complete interrogations of Rasputin's inner circle. With this extensive and explicit amplification of the historical record, Edvard Radzinsky has written a definitive biography, reconstructing in full the fascinating life of an improbable holy man who changed the course of Russian history.

Translated from the Russian by Judson Rosengrant.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Rasputin File Details

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From Reader Review The Rasputin File for online ebook

Lisa says

Just a little over a year ago, I asked Santa to bring me some books on historical bastards. This was one of the treats that Santa (or rather, NikNak) responded with.

Prior to reading this, the only thing I really knew about Rasputin was that he was apparently Russia's greatest love machine (thanks, Boney M). I now know that he was actually just Russia's most persistent lech, but I also learnt a lot more (including the surprising revelation that this all happened so recently. Thanks to the ready acceptance of mystical bullshit on the part of the Royals, I'd thought this all took place in like, *olden times.*)

Born a peasant in a Russia that very much gave a shit about that sort of thing, Rasputin spent most of his youth apparently being drunk and violent, before a sudden change of heart led him to travel the country visiting holy places and like, finding himself, man. Instead of just getting a bit religious, he'd go the whole hog and soon make a name for himself through his 'prophetic visions' and performing of 'miracles'. Which would bring him to the attention of a Royal Family already prone to religious gullibility and worried for the health of their young son and haemophiliac heir.

Having already been hypnotised by another chancer into thinking she was pregnant (who explained, come her humiliation come her time of confinement and realisation that she was as pregnant as I am, that the pregnancy had disappeared due to her lack of faith), the tsarina was soon eating out of Rasputin's hand (not literally), claiming his enemies as her own and alienating everyone else around her. As the Royal Family became increasingly isolated by the rest of their own family, the court, the church and the government, Rasputin would be dogged by controversy. Especially once he reverted back to drinking.

Already prone to groping anyone he could get his hands on and visiting, sometimes in just one day, many, many prostitutes (apparently he could totally cleanse you of sin by having sex with you), he was also believed to be controlling the tsarina (although the tutor to the royal children had it right when they said, 'His prophetic words most often merely confirmed the hidden wishes of the empress herself. She herself did not suspect that she had induced them, that she was their 'inspirer'. Her personal wishes, passing through Rasputin, acquired in her eyes the force and authenticity of revelation.') But the *belief* of his influence, alongside his penchant for bragging about his connections and power whilst slaughtered, would apparently wind up the wrong people and he would eventually be murdered by two members of the Royal Family and a leading politician – a murder that would help build his legend, no doubt thanks to Prince Felix's dramatic description of the murder which read like something out of a zombie novel ("...With an abrupt, furious movement, Rasputin sprang to his feet. He was foaming at the mouth. He was horrifying. The room resounded with a savage roar, and I saw the flash of his convulsively clenched fingers. Then, like red-hot iron, they sank into my shoulder and reached for my neck...").

A big, thick book that I ripped through in a matter of days, I couldn't put this down thanks to the incredible details of Rasputin's life. Making a legend much more human (even if he was a very, um, *complicated man*), this was packed with astonishing, sometimes awful and sometimes hilarious facts (I don't know why I find this so funny, but on being challenged on why he kept taking young ladies to bathhouses, he replied, 'The society misses were so puffed up with pride, and in order to deflate it, it was necessary to humiliate them by forcing them to go to the bathhouse with a dirty peasant.').

I could have filled this review with a million of my favourite excerpts, but you really ought to read them for yourself. Go on.

Also posted at Randomly Reading and Ranting

Dorotea says

Fascinating all around. I couldn't put it down for the longest time.

Rebecca McNutt says

Hey, does anybody else recall that song by Boney M?

...Sorry. Anyway, *The Rasputin File* is quite an extensive book on this often quite bizarre historical figure, including details I never even knew. If you're into history, biographies or Russian culture, this is definitely a book I would recommend.

Steve Shilstone says

This book explains how a mystic peasant holy man debauchee came to darn near rule Russia via his tremendous influence over the tsarina Alexandra, who herself was the power behind her husband Nick's throne.

J. says

I'm just not enough of a history buff to read something quite this detailed, so maybe I have myself to blame for getting bogged down in this. It isn't a bad telling, but it is really detailed at times. And I do have to say that the severe overuse of sentence fragments is pretty distracting.

Having said all of that, the ending is a pretty serious payoff. The author describes "the facts" of what happened the evening of the murder, then tells what he thinks REALLY happened, and that's where it really gets fascinating (and a lot of the overly-detailed portions pay off.) So the ending certainly leaves a solid sense of satisfaction. So: 3 stars.

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But, although I can't really blame the author for this, I do feel obligated to point out that my copy of the book is missing about 30 pages. Apparently, one folio was traded for another during the production process, so I've got two copies of one batch of pages and, presumably, someone has my copy and their copy of the pages I'm missing. So that's really annoying. I'm going to dock a star for this. If mine is the only messed-up copy, it won't matter. But if there are a lot of busted copies, it should hurt the standing of the book, I guess. -1 star.

Maryam says

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Nathan says

Awful. Radzinsky's one strong point is his access to the titular file, which enables him to reveal information not found in other accounts of Rasputin and the Romanovs. But he is not a good enough writer to handle the information; this is a clunky, unbearably boring book, full of characters who don't do anything and events that don't portend anything and prose that barely means anything. I don't know if his choppy, fragmented style is the result of something lost in translation, but this was painful to read. Skip this, and try something by Robert K. Massie.

Laura says

I got this book as a birthday present from Nick a bunch of years ago and I have finally just gotten around to reading it. Before I even begin, let me just say that I am big into Russian history. Prior to reading this book, I mostly was interested in the Lenin and Stalin periods of Russian history, but this book definately made me want to know more about the period right before it. This book is so great because it is written so much like a novel. It's really exciting and dramatic as the author uses this secret document that he personally was on a quest for and finally discovered (also known as "The File"). This book not only describes the traditional legend of Rasputin, but also goes into detail about his influence at Tsarskoe Selo as well as his ties to his other followers. All in all, I'd say this is a great book for anyone interested in learning about one of the greatest factors leading up to the Bolshevik revolution.

ps I've also read his biography of Stalin which is also excellent...

Moon Rose says

Paganism has made an indelible mark in Christianity from the time of its birth, incorporating its antiquated mystic culture into the mainstream of its belief unbeknownst mostly to all, yet it is deeply ingrained in the tradition of the Christian thought. It has somehow created a convoluted world of endless discord in the pursuit of which is the truth, or which is the false.

The mysticism that envelops the figure of *Rasputin* during the last days of Tsarist Russia best illustrates this fusion of dark sorcery and holiness that literally brought down the entire empire to its knees as it perhaps epitomizes the oscillation of a common man between good and evil, capturing the conflict between the nature of God and the Devil in the battlefield known as the human consciousness.

Without sin there is no life, because there is no repentance, and if there is no repentance, there is no joy.

That sinfulness is next to godliness, was *Rasputin*'s famous epitaph, it was his legacy to the world from which salvation from earthly existence can be achieved even through debauchery. It was to willingly succumb into the desires of the flesh in order to exorcise the transient need from the body as a precursor step into holiness. Despite this vile and somewhat ignominious presence during his life at court, the most mysterious part was *Empress Alexandra* had remained his devout follower as multitudes of other women as well, following the Tsarina's example. This blind devotion to *Rasputin* was in itself more inexplicable and more mysterious than the mysteries that appeared to surround his character, or was it? It may simply be just an overwhelming mother's love to her sick child that made the empress bow down to him since it was only *Rasputin* who could cure his ailing son. Perhaps in the depths of her mind, she was ready to give up everything as she became consciously aware of their fall to destruction in exchange of the life of her one and only son, not fully comprehending that in saving his only son, she was preparing the foreground for their own deaths. ??

Peter says

Un libro construido a partir de los hechos y que ayudan a colocar a Rasputín en un marco histórico concreto con su historia y su circunstancia.

Este libro complementa a otros como Nicolás y Alejandra así como El Fin de los Romanov. Una persona clave y que al final de todo era un ser humano que desgraciadamente sus obras socavaron las bases de la monarquía rusa.

Un enigma del siglo XX.

Smashpanda says

I read this book for a friend and even though my interest on the topic was minimal at the beginning of the work I was completely drawn into the entire Russian empire at that time by the time I was finished. The author gives you more than just a Rasputin biography here which is the main pulling point of this work of non-fiction; he gives you a background and history lesson of the entire Russian court and all of the key players in history at that time rather than just following the path of Rasputin and examining the myths that surrounded the man. He actually DEBUNKS the myths, kind of like an early 20-th century special episode of Mythbusters, but without the funny looking middle-aged men and a lot less explosions. The report this book ends up turning into is so extensive that I had no questions remaining in my mind at the end of the book, I had a thorough understanding and even opinion on the man as well as the Russian court and man that was just something I did not expect to even want to think about at all.

?ρις says

3,5

Sera says

For a man who is incredibly fascinating, this book was a real snoozefest.

Ally says

I really wanted to like this book, but I found a some problems with it. Some of them are purely housekeeping problems. For instance, the English translation is good, but I think it sucks some of the punch out of the language. There are exclamation points where there shouldn't be, and assumptions of what the author is saying in parenthesis where there needn't be. It comes off drier than I think the original author intended.

The bigger problem is that the author promises to offer an unbiased look at Rasputin, from the perspective of those who knew him best. He accomplishes this through blaming Tsarina Alexandra wherever and whenever possible, saying that most of what Rasputin did was through his gleaning insight, and that he instinctually knew what SHE wanted him to do. When it's NOT possible, he switches tactics, and discounts the things Rasputin's friends and admirers say about him. It seems virtually everyone in Russia who was connected to the man was fat, ugly, gay, or probably gay. Or possibly had a gay husband. Entertaining to note, sure, but certainly far from the unbiased look the author promises. Tsarina Alexandra is continually compared to Marie Antoinette, and Rasputin is compared to both Hitler and Stalin, but is most commonly called, "the semi-illiterate Russian peasant." When I say 'commonly reffered as' I mean Radzinsky seems determined to remind us of his status every three or four pages. (Again, that could be the translation.) There's a line in the first section of the book that talks about life before Rasputin's birth, how many miscarriages his mother had, where it says, "like Hitler and Stalin, Rasputin was an only child, as if God had warned against that family reproducing." Then casually goes on in later pages to talk about Rasputin's own five children!

I wasn't exactly expecting sympathy for the man who is blamed for the fall of Russian Imperialism. It's a good read in that it doesn't skimp on details, and though the endings and conclusions are nothing I haven't heard before, there were lots of other little details in it that the historian in me loved. But the author promises to look at the story and the man in an unbiased way, and you can clearly see the author's own bias all through it. As he is a noted historian, I have to admit, I expected to find something a little more interesting and provocative. I have a feeling that's what the author meant to do, but in the end, even HE couldn't make up his mind, or deny his own biases.

Sasha says

My interest in anything Romanov occasionally borders with obsession so if there is a book about this subject, you can bet I will read it.

Found this one in local bookshop and of course had to buy it although at this point I am very familiar with the story, but here we have fresh files (unearthed from somewhere and sold on Sotheby's auction, presented as a gift to author), photos and less known characters.

It is a huge, occasionally very exhausting story that covers not only royal family and their inner circle but literally cast of thousands who one way or the other influenced the story, for example we have police file on everybody who has ever visited Rasputin's house, his visits to prostitutes, names of priests he clashed with, politicians who used him (and were used) and so on. Towards the end I must admit I started losing the

count who is who and perhaps the book would have benefited from some serious editing but never mind, obviously the author was delighted with access to newly discovered files and I understand the pleasure of dealing with facts instead of second-guessing what actually happened. Hm, we are still talking about the "facts" but must admit these are documents that survived communism so who knows how distilled these "facts" actually are.

At the very first, I thought this might be (finally) a fresh look at character with incredibly bad reputation and something inside still tells me there is a possibility Rasputin's reputation was destroyed by his enemies. But soon it became clear this was not author's intention - Radzinsky is not interested in explanations of how and why, he is focused on messages, letters and interviews (in itself perhaps illusionary as we don't know for sure whom were they sent and what was the story behind it - letters signed with "Darling" could but don't have been sent by Empress, for example). Another thing is, Radzinsky is very one-sided: if he decides against certain character, he will write about him/her with disgust and clearly visible contempt (see Ana Vyrubova) no matter what documents say. Communists have released Vyrubova from prison because they simply couldn't find anything against her but Radzinsky still believes she was evil incarnated and never mind the documents. The fact that woman escaped certain death almost annoys him and reader can feel his irritation with the fact that she wasn't killed in some basement.

Lots of interesting pictures and research is well done, still the writing style could have been better (or should we say, more neutral) but apparently this is a subject where everybody gets one-sided and is difficult to stay calm. I am still waiting for realistic version of Rasputin and someone who will explain his behavior from different perspective, not only as a charlatan, mad monk and hypnotist. I refuse to believe he was evil and even the stories about his drunken escapades and orgies don't make him less human (on contrary), in fact there was a certain childish innocence about him specially when (for example) he would rush to visit friends who prepared beatings (or something similar nasty) for him, not even suspecting people hate him. I say, read between the lines. History is written by winners and you can bet media can turn any of us into mad monks, charlatans and whatnot if they lack understanding of what actually happened.
