



MAGNIFICENCE OF THE TSARS

Ceremonial Men's Dress of the Russian Imperial Court, 1721-1917 from the collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums

10 December 2008 – 29 March 2009

A display of rare and lavishly decorated costumes and uniforms worn by the Tsars and court officials of Imperial Russia, most of which have never been exhibited before either in Russia or abroad, will be shown for the first time at the V&A this winter as part of an exchange between the V&A and the Moscow Kremlin Museums.

Magnificence of the Tsars will feature more than 40 superb ensembles from the collections of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, Russia's oldest national Treasury. Highlights include outfits from the extensive gold and silver embellished wardrobe of the boy emperor Peter II, who reigned for just three years, and the coronation uniforms of the succeeding seven emperors ending with the last Russian Emperor, Nicholas II. The display concludes with a five metre long, ermine-trimmed Imperial coronation mantle identical to the one worn by Nicholas II in 1896.

The display will feature garments which have survived wars and revolutions and which have only recently begun to be studied in Russia. They show the work of the most eminent master craftsmen of the period, giving visitors a taste of the legendary magnificence and luxury of the Imperial Russian court.

In addition, there will be spectacular examples of fashionable 18th-century men's dress and uniforms of court officials, coachmen and postilions.

The display will start in the 1720s with the wardrobe of the boy emperor Peter II. Peter died at the age of 14, having reigned between 1727 and 1730. The elaborate style and cut of his clothes reflect the French influence on the Russian Court.

The collection of Peter II's clothes forms a 'capsule' wardrobe showing the range of his dress including his coronation waistcoat, breeches, stockings and underwear, and a selection of his exquisite coats and gowns. The exhibits reveal the high

quality textiles and changing fashions adopted by the upper echelons of society. They contrast with the elegant restraint of uniforms donned by later Tsars under their glorious ceremonial robes.

These costumes demonstrate the originality and skill of the finest tailors, embroiderers and jewellers working for the Imperial Court and their use of embellished silks, intricate embroidery and lace. Some reflect the influence of Western Europe on the Russian Court. Others show how 19th-century Tsars began to adopt elements of traditional Russian costume reflecting a time of rising nationalism in Europe.

The display will include the historic fancy dress costume worn by Nicholas II to the Russian Ball of 1903; weapons worn at court; jewellery (including a jewelled telescope and embellished snuff boxes); portraits of the Tsars; and illustrated books.

The Magnificence of the Tsars is part of an exchange of displays between the V&A and the Moscow Kremlin Museums. The exhibition *Two Centuries of British Fashion*, showing 18th- and 19th-century British dress from the V&A's collections, will open at the Kremlin Museums' Armoury Museum on 5 September 2008.

Elena Gagarina, General Director of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, said of the Russian exhibits: *"This collection of dress has only recently begun to be studied. The majority is kept in the museum's stores and has been specially conserved for this exhibition. By including costumes and accessories of the greatest historical and artistic significance, we have aimed to introduce the British public to the art of the finest dressmakers, tailors, embroiderers and jewellers working for the Russian Imperial Court."*

Mark Jones, Director of the V&A, said: *"This is a rare opportunity for the British public to see the spectacular dress worn by the Tsars in the Imperial Russian Court, most of which has not been on display even in Russia. These are objects of exceptional historic importance from one of the world's greatest museums. The exchange with Moscow is also a wonderful opportunity for the Russian public to see highlights from the V&A's unsurpassed collections of 18th- and 19th-century British dress."*

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

Magnificence of the Tsars will be on display in the V&A's fashion gallery from 10 December 2008 – 2 March 2009.

Admission to the display is £5 (concessions: £3). To book call 0870 906 3883 or visit www.vam.ac.uk (booking fee applies)

For public enquiries please call 020 7942 2000 or visit www.vam.ac.uk

A book accompanying the display also entitled *Magnificence of the Tsars* is written by Dr Alexey Levykin, Research Director of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, and co-authored with Dr Svetlana Amelekhina, Senior Research Officer and Curator of Imperial Court Dress at the Kremlin, with an introduction by Dr Rosalind P. Blakesley, Senior Lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Cambridge and a specialist in Russian art. The book will show detailed close-ups of the array of garments on display as well as tell the fascinating story of the men that wore them. Hardback: £30

For further information about the book contact Julie Chan on 020 7942 2701 or 07747 607 822 or email j.chan@vam.ac.uk

The V&A Shop will be stocking a range of products to accompany the display. For further information about these products contact Lee Kendall, Marketing and PR Manager, V&A Enterprises on 0207 942 2681 or l.kendall@vam.ac.uk

For further PRESS information please contact Rebecca Ward for the V&A press office on 020 7613 3306 or email press@rebeccaward.co.uk or press.office@vam.ac.uk

A selection of high resolution press images are available to download from www.image.net (Not for publication)