

René Jean-Paul Dewil

A Painting by Padovanino

Copyright Clause

Copyright © René Jean-Paul Dewil 2024

René Jean-Paul Dewil is identified as the sole author of this work. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be altered without the written permission of the author.

The book may be copied in electronic or other forms for personal use only. It may not be printed, introduced in any retrieval system, electronic or otherwise, photocopied or otherwise recorded without the prior written permission of the author.

The only system where the e-book may be retrieved from is the Internet website www.theartofpainting.be, which holds the only and original text acknowledged by the author.

Most of the historic information in the text comes from

- the on-line Wikipedia Encyclopaedia,
- the Brockhaus Encyclopaedia 18th edition of 1898,
- the book 'The Hermitage: 250 Masterworks'. Foreword by Mikhail Piotrovsky. Arca Publishers St Petersburg, Skiria-Reczoli Publications Inc. New York. 2014-217,
- the book 'Masterpieces from the Hermitage' © 1998 by the Hermitage State Museum, Saint Petersburg, published by Art Media ASBL, Brussels Belgium and Electa, Milan, in collaboration with the Hermitage Museum and the City of Udine Civic Museums and Galleries of History and Art proposed at the occasion of an exhibition of October 16, 1998 to January 17, 1999 in Brussels. The City of Udine previously housed the exhibition, the authors of the catalogue having been Irina Artemieva and Giuseppe Pavanello.

A Painting by Padovanino

The Graces and Loves (Le Gracie e gli Amorini) of ca. 1630-1635 by Alessandro Varotari called Padovanino (Padua 1588 - Venice 1649) in the Hermitage State Museum of Saint Petersburg, Russia.

1.- The Painter Padovanino

Padovanino, as his name suggests, was born in Padua, Italy. His father was a painter and an architect, called Dario Varotari the Elder. With time, probably having learned the essentials of the art of painting from his father, Padovanino started painting himself. He had the family genes. Padovanino's father disappeared in art history. Padovanino himself became eternal. His works have not all been destroyed, but preciousy conserved. His creations have not disappeared and so his name continued to be known by what he conceived and then produced by his brain and hands.

Padovanino learned much from the examples of the great Venetian painters of the sixteenth century, produced by the three great artists of that era, called Titian (ca. 1488/1490 - 1576), Tintoretto (ca. 1518 -1594) and Veronese (1528 - 1588).

Many other now well-known painters of Venice could be mentioned here, as Venice was so rich that very many wealthy merchants had built splendid palazzi in Venice and had ordered works of art to decorate their walls and wooden furniture, ceilings too, anything that could hold colour. Venice could count on at least twenty names of famous artist painters, and knew of many lesser names that decorated churches, palazzi and public buildings in the city. Wealth always attracted artists. Padovanino, the kid from Padua, lived and worked in the seventeenth century, in times of Venetian art production when the Venetian school of painting was maybe somewhat declining after the greatness of three graphic artists mentioned, but still very much alive. Padovanino first became known for being a marvellous copyist of the Italian Renaissance giants in art who had produced masterworks before him.

The artist delivered early work in Padua, his home town. He married one Caterina Mesa there in 1612. In 1614 he moved to Venice and remained working there, able to live from his art for the rest of his life. He seemed to have travelled twice to Rome in the mid-1610s and in 1625. He must have further learned the technique of painting, but foremost the ways of presenting subjects, the necessity of thinking entirely through a subject for maximum impact on viewers, and showing his own overall presentation of the theme. Art in the Renaissance and Baroque periods was foremost that for artists: to show how intelligent they were and how they could surprise spectators by their new ideas on their representations.

In Venice, Padovanino worked on the mosaics of the Basilica of San Marco and decorated the interior of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore. He could afford to set up his own workshop in Venice and won so many orders that he put to work several pupils and aides who with time also became fine painters, men such as Giulio Carpioni, Bartolomeo Scaliger, Pietro Liberi, Pietro della Vecchia and even his own son, Dario Varotari the Younger. He also had female pupils, such as Caterina Tarabotti. This last female painter worked together with Padovanino's sister Chiara (Padua 1584 - Venice 1663). I found so few pictures made by

female painters in the larger museums of our times, that I gladly add hereafter some information on her.

Caterina Tarabotti

Caterina Tarabotti, the female painter who worked in Padovanino's workshop (active until ca. 1690) was the daughter of Stefano Bernardino (1574 - 1642) and of Maria Cadena (ca. 1575 - 1649). She was the sixth daughter out of 11 children. She was born in the borough of Castello in Venice in 1615. Two years after her birth, her parents took her with them to the borough of Santa Croce, where her father ran a manufacture of sublimate. She acquired some fame in Venice, but few paintings from her hands have survived. This cannot have meant that her pictures were inferior in quality and themes, for her work was quite appreciated in her own times. Female work simply was never appreciated as much as that of the male artists. One may ask why not, but the result was the loss of many great works of painting in the passing of time. No evidence has been found of her having trained as a painter, but Alessandro Varotari appears among the best men at the wedding of her sister Lorenzina with Giacomo Pighetti in 1640, when Caterina was 25.

Caterina remained single, living from her art. Her family could not pay any marital dowry for her. She lived as of 1647 with her sister Angela, equally a spinster, of 40 years old. Their mother died that same year, leaving Caterina a yearly income of 60 Venetian ducats, enough to enter a convent as a nun. Caterina and Angela both went to live in the Corpus Domini nunnery of Vicenza, though merely as lodgers in August of 1648. Angela remained in the nunnery until her death in 1685, but Caterina left in late November of 1650 to live for some time in the Saint Anna nunnery of Castello in Venice, where another sister of hers, the writer Suor Arcangela Tarabotti, one of the first Italian feminist writers, died in 1652, probably nursed by Caterina.

Subsequently, Caterina had to fight for her heritage against her brother Lorenzo (1610 – 1661) and his heirs. In 1674, she lived at the Rio delle Chioverre in Venice, where her nephew Dario had rented her a flat at the symbolic price of 1 Ducat a year due to a debt of 850 ducats he had with her. Later still, as of 1690, she lived with a servant and heir in the small Hospital of San Giobbe. She died in February of 1693, aged 78.

Caterina Agnese Tarabotti worked chiefly in Vicenza. She painted many historical pictures, and was a well-known artist in the north-east parts of Italy. Marco Boschini listed Caterina Tarabotti among the great Venetian artists of his times. We can only regret so few pictures made by her art have survived. Her existence, however, proved the openness of Il Padovanino to all artists and art.

2.- The Graces

Padovanino's painting shows the Three Graces in full glory. These were in Greek mythology the goddesses of beauty, of charm and of nature, of human creativity and of fertility. Their names were Aglaea, meaning 'shining', Euphrosyne for joy, and Thalia for 'blooming'. They were daughters of Zeus by the Oceanid Eurynome. Aglaea has sometimes been mentioned as the wife of Hephaistos, the smith-God, the Vulcan of the Romans.

The Greek author Homer placed them as part of the retinue of Aphrodite, The Venus of Roman mythology. The Graces were generally depicted together in an interlaced group, such as in Padovanino's painting, nude or fully clothed and in dance poses. In ancient Greek mythology, the number and the names of the Graces varied, although they usually numbered three. Their Greek name was the 'Charites', after another name for the wife of Hephaistos, provided by some Greek authors as 'Charis'. The names given to the Charites differed from region to region and author by author in ancient Hellas. The major mythological role of the Graces was to attend to the other Olympian gods during feasts and dances. In particular, they assisted Aphrodite.

The cult of the Charites is very ancient, a remnant even of Pelasgian or pre-Greek origins. The Greeks dedicated several temples to the Graces, the most important of which may be the one in Orkhomenos in Boeotia, where their cult was thought to have originated. Other temples stand in Hermion, Sparta and Elis. In Orkhomenos, a city prosperous because of its fertile plain, the river Kephisos and the Akidalia spring were sacred and associated with the three goddesses. There has existed a festival in honour of the Charites, called the 'Charisia'.

For the last two millennia, the Graces have usually been shown entwined in a closed group, mostly dancing. Their earliest representations date from the sixth to the seventh century BC, in a temple of Apollo in Thermon. Also, at the entrance to the Acropolis of Athens stood a famous wall painting of the Charites. Later too, the Romans represented the Graces, for instance in Boscoreale, dated to about 40 BC. Most painters and sculptors represented them embracing and draped. The Graces formed a common theme in the Renaissance. Sandro Botticelli (1445 – 1510) pictured them in his *Primavera*, Spring painting, Raphael (1483 – 1520) in a small painting now in the Condé Museum of Chantilly, France. Of course, still later, both the sculptors Antonio Canova (1757 – 1822) and Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770 – 1844) showed them in marvellous marble sculptures.

Erwin Panofsky, the great art critic, wrote in his 'Studies in Iconology' of 1962, that Renaissance Neo-Platonism recognised in the Three Graces the three hypostases of the heavenly Venus. The Graces could also be called Beauty, Voluptuousness and Chastity.

Around the Graces in Padovanino's painting whirl heavenly children or 'putti'. In representations of women, of course, the figures of females were very often associated with images of children they gave birth to. What could be more natural than represent women with young children? Here, the little, winged children have their own meaning. In Italian, they were often called 'amoretto', little loves. And lovely they are, also in Padovanino's painting.

3.- The History of the Painting

The painting of Padovanino was first mentioned in Marco Boschini's poetic 'Carta del Navigar Pittoresco' of 1660. Padovanino deceased shortly before the publication of Boschini. Boschini described it as a picture of the Graces hanging in the gallery called the 'Great Gallery of the first Solarium', the formal hall of the Villa Widman.

Marco Boschini (1602 – 1681) was an Italian painter and engraver of the early Baroque period in Venice. He received his education as a painter in the school of Palma il Giovane. As a writer, he was the author of several publications such as the one mentioned, a panegyric

poem about Venetian painting. He also wrote guides to the beauty of Venice. Boschini earned his income as an art seller, working for instance for the Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici. He gave precious biographies of tens of the Venetian artists. Boschini was one of the rare early writers to have taken as a subject of his books the art of painting. Therefore, his name and information are important in the history of art.

The Villa Widmann

This Venetian villa, also called the Villa Widmann-Rezzonico-Foscari, stands at the shores of the river Brenta in the small town of Mira, between Venice and Padua. The palace as it exists now was built in the eighteenth century. Several successive families owned the site previously: the Sceriman, the Donà, and the Foscari. The present palace was designed in 1719 by the Venetian architect Alessandro or Andrea Tirali (ca. 1660 – 1737). The Widmann commissioned the internal frescoes mainly to Giuseppe Angeli (1712 – 1798), a pupil of Giambattista Piazzetta (1682/1683 – 1754), and to Gerolamo Mengozzi Colonna (1688 – 1774), who worked with Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696 – 1770). The villa is surrounded by cypress and chestnut trees, interspersed by stone statues of mythological gods, nymphs and cupids. In the garden stays a small church where Elisabetta and Arianna Widmann are buried. Boschini visited the villa in its first form of the beginning of the 17th century.

The Foscari

The Foscari were and are an ancient family Venetian family, which had reached their peak of fame in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, culminating in the dogeship of Francisco Foscari (1423 - 1457). In the 19th century, Count Piero Foscari married the Austrian Countess Elisabeth Widmann-Rezzonico, heiress of the lordship of Paternion in Carinthia of Austria. Other castles and large forests in Austria are owned by the Austrian branch of the wealthy Counts Foscari-Widmann-Rezzonico. Paternion Castle was part of the Lordship of Paternion (Herrschaft Paternion), together with the castles at Pöllan and Kreuzen and 8,800 hectares of forests. In the late 19th century these passed from the counts Widmann-Rezzonico to count Piero Foscari from Venice. They are still today owned by the Foscari-Widmann-Rezzonico family.

The Rezzonico

Rezzonico was the name of another better-known Venetian family. The Rezzonico name has remained famous because of the Ca' Rezzonico palazzo in Venice, which is now a major art museum of the city, the 'Museo del Settecento Veneziano'. The palazzo was built along the Grand Canal. Originally, it was formed from two adjacent houses belonging to the Bon family. In 1649, in Padovanino's times, the then head of the family, Filippo Bon, a Procurator of Venice, decided to transform the two houses into one palazzo. He asked Baldassare Longhena (1597 - 1682) to combine the two structures into one palace. Longhena died in 1682, the work unfinished, and Filippo Bon ruined himself on the building. Bon died in 1712 and still the palace was not completed!

In 1750, Bon's heirs offered the palazzo to Giambattista Rezzonico, a banker and fabric merchant from Lombardy. The Rezzonico had bought a title of Venetian nobility in 1648, during the Candia War with the Ottoman Empire. The building was sold for 60,000 gold ducats, although it had remained unfinished. Most of the structure was still a ruin in danger of collapse, so that only the rear part could be saved. The architect of the renewed building was Giorgio Massari (1687 - 1766), a well-known Venetian architect. Massari finished the façade the frescoes of the ceiling in the salons. In 1758, the younger brother of Giambattista Rezzonico was elected as Pope Clement XIII (Carlo della Torre di Rezzonico, 1693 – 1769) and Ludovico Rezzonico married one Faustina Savorgnan, a daughter of the wealthy Friuli family of Savorgnan, so that the two richest families of Venice were united. Ludovico Rezzonico commissioned other celebrated Venetian painters such as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo to paint in his palace, and he used also other painters such as Gaspare Diziani (1689 – 1767) and Jacopo Guarana (1720 – 1808). In 1759, Aurelio Rezzonico became also a Procurator of San Marco, and in 1762 Ludovico Rezzonico obtained the same position. In 1810 then, the last member of the Venetian branch of the Rezzonico, Cardinal Abbondio of Pisa, died, ending the family line of the Widman-Rezzonico.

The palace fell into the hands of several successive families. Finally it came to Carlo Pindemonte in 1832, who sold the building to Count Ladislav Zelinsky. The place was then rented out to several other well-known people: to the Duke of Modena and his family, and to the art dealer Jacopo Querici della Rovere who used it as a gallery to sell works by Rubens, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Canaletto and other old masters. In the 1880's it became the home of the painter Robert Barrett Browning (1849 – 1912), whose father, the poet Robert Browning (1812 – 1889), died there in 1889. The American portrait painter John Singer Sargent (1856 – 1925) also rented a studio in the palace. In 1906, the German Emperor Wilhelm II (1859 – 1941) was interested in buying the Venetian palace, but Browning sold it to Count Lionello von Hirschel de Minerbi, an Italian Member of Parliament. In the 1920s, the American composer Cole Porter (1891 – 1964) rented the Ca' Rezzonico. During the worldwide depression of the 1930's, in 1935, Minerbi sold the palazzo to the city of Venice, which transformed it into a museum of Venetian art. The building was restored and completed in its current form in the 1970's. It continues to honour the Rezzonico name as one of Venice's main art museums.

4.- The Marshall von der Schulenburg

Padovanino's painting was mentioned in the Widmann collection inventory of 1659 as 'Tre Grazie in grande del Padovanino'. It could be found in 1741 in the 'General Inventory of the Gallery of the Marshall of Schulenberg', dated June, 30 of that year. The picture had by then been purchased by the German Marshall.

The Reichsgraf and Marshall Johann Matthias von der Schulenburg, Freiherr von Emden (1661- 1747) was a German aristocrat and a general of the Brandenburg-Prussian region. In the 18th century, he served in the Saxon and Venetian armies, until he retired in a Venetian palace. His sister was the also well-known Melusine von der Schulenburg, Duchess of Kendall. She was famously connected to the English Royal Family. More on this connection later in this text! Johan Matthias von der Schulenburg was born in Emden, near Magdeburg in Germany.

The von Schulenburg were a very old German dynasty, known since about 1187 and living in the Mark of Brandenburg. The first known name of the family is of Ritter Werner II (1280 – 1304) who had two sons, Dietrich and Werner. Dietrich founded a family called of the Black Line, Werner one called of the White Line.

The Black Line became a Prussian aristocratic 'Herrenhaus', a house of lords, a noble line, and also a lesser nobility line called of Priemern. The Black dynasty belonged to the lower German nobility until 1734, when they were allowed to use the title of counts.

The White Line were counts since 1728 and its members founded the houses of Hehlen, Wolfsburg and Beessendorf. Another branch formed the counts of Klosterroda. More counts were born in a later or younger White Line: the families of Trampe were counts since 1786, the Altendorf were Freiherrn since 1713, the Bodendorf counts since 1798, the Burgheidingen counts since 1786, the Angern counts since 1753, the Rehnert counts since 1786. The Emden, Altenhausen and Fahmen remained Freiherrn. The families had their domains in Saxony, Brandenburg, Hannover, Braunschweig and Mecklenburg. In these families, known names were of Adolph Friedrich Count von der Schulenburg (1685 – 1741), born in 1685, and also Karl Friedrich Gebhard Count von der Schulenburg, born in 1763, who died in 1818 and was in the service of the Land of Braunschweig. Friedrich Albert Count von Schulenburg of the House of Klosterroda was a representative of Saxony during the famous Vienna Conference after the Napoleonic Wars. He died in Klosterroda in 1853.

Our Schulenburg of interest, Johann Matthias Count von der Schulenburg Erbherr auf Emden, was born in this Emden on the 18th of August 1661. He died on 14 March of 1747, aged 85, in Verona of the Venetian Republic. He was a dynamic youth, who chose for a military career.

In 1687 and 1688, Johann von der Schulenburg fought with the German Imperial Armies in Hungary against the Ottoman Armies. When he returned to Germany, he fought in the ranks of the army of the Duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg. In 1699 he became a colonel in a German regiment in the service of Victor Amadeus II of Saxony and was severely wounded in 1701. From 1702 to 1796 he fought as Lieutenant-General in the army of Saxony. He was the leader of an army corps in in the Great Northern War against King Charles XII (1682 – 1718) of Sweden. Charles XII attacked his troops several times, so that von Schulenburg suffered dire defeats in the Battle of Klissow, and in the Battle of Fraustadt. In 1704, Charles XII once more attacked Schulenburg's troops near Puniz, but the marshal could hold his positions and then withdraw in order during the night to Schlesien.

After 1706, Johan Matthias von Schulenburg fought against the French armies. He served the English Duke of Marlborough on the Lower Rhine. He fought under Prince Eugene of Savoy at the Battle of Oudenaerde and during the siege of the town of Tournay, in what is now a city in Belgium. In the Spanish Succession War, he fought at the well-known and cruel Battle of Malplaquet. He left the allied armies against France in 1713, to travel first to The Hague in the Netherlands. Later, he passed the North Sea to pursue his career in London, England. There, he supported the claims of the Dynasty of Hannover to the English throne. The German Emperor granted him a title in the German nobility for these actions.

The Marschall von der Schulenburg then became a Field Marshall of the Venetian Republic. Venice recruited him already in 1711 after the defence of Ulcinj against the Turkish armies. He really came to stay in Venice around 1716 and defended Corfu for the famous lagoon city.

For his actions, he received his statue from the Republic! In celebration of his victory over the Turks, Antonio Vivaldi composed even an opera called 'Judith Triumfants', commissioned by Venice.

Antonio Vivaldi

This Antonio Lucio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741) was probably the greatest musical genius of Venice. No one else personified the brilliance of Venetian feasts and lives as much as this composer. He was born in the neighbourhood of San Giovanni in Brogora of Venice, the San Giovanni referring to John the Baptist. He was baptised in this church in 1678, in which one can find still fine art works by the painters Cima da Conegliano (ca. 1459 – ca. 1517) and Alvise Vivarini (1442/1453 – 1503/1505). Vivaldi suffered of asthma, so he could not use wind instruments, and so chose the violin. At age 25, Vivaldi was ordained a priest in 1703. He became Master of Violin at the Ospedale della Pietà, the Devout Hospital of Mercy, and later promoted to impresario in the Teatro Sant'Angelo of Venice. In 1717 – 1718 he became Maestro di Capella at the court of Prince Philip of Hesse-Darmstadt, who was also the Governor of Mantua. In 1723, Vivaldi composed there the 'Four Seasons' symphony, his most well-known masterpiece, inspired by the countryside of Mantua. Vivaldi composed numerous masterworks of music, among which 46 operas. In 1725, he travelled to the court of Emperor Charles VI in Vienna, but died in that city shortly thereafter. Vivaldi was a well-known figure in the cultural life of Venice. The Marshall von der Schulenburg must have attended to his performances in Venice.

The later life of von der Schulenburg

Johan von der Schulenburg later fought in the wars of Austria against Italy during the two Austrian invasions of Italy, in 1733 to 1735 and in 1742 to 1747. Afterwards, he became a diplomat, securing the neutrality of Venice in further wars.

From 1718 on, the then Reichsgraf von der Schulenburg resided in the Palazzo Loredan on the Grand Canal of Venice. At the age of 63, as of 1724, he became a passionate collector of art. He purchased 88 paintings from an art dealer, works originating from the collection of the last ruler of the Duchy of Mantua, Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga (1652 – 1708), who had been deposed by the Austrian Habsburg Empire. This included works by Raphael (1483 – 1520), Antonio da Correggio (1489 – 1534), Giorgione (1478 – 1510), and Giulio Romano (1499 – 1546).

The Marshall must have become a somewhat vain man by then. Bartolomeo Nazari (1693 – 1758), Giuseppe Nogari (1699 – 1766), Gian Antonio Guardi (1699 – 1760), Francesco Simonini (1686 – after 1753) and Giambattista Piazzetta (1682 – 1754) made portraits of him. The Greek artists Panagiotis Doxaras (1662 – 1729) and his son Nikolaos Doxaras (1706/1710 – 1775) lived in his palace Loredan in the period of from 1730 to 1738. They too painted for von der Schulenburg.

The Marshall gave Gian Antonio Guardi a monthly salary during 1730 to 1736 and commissioned works from the artist thereafter. Guardi painted portraits of foreign aristocracy and of royalty, to adorn the walls of the Palazzo Loredan. Guardi, also copied masterpieces made by great Venetian past painters, works of Paolo Veronese (1528 – 1588) and Tintoretto

(1518 – 1594). Giovanni Antonio Canal the Canaletto (1697 – 1768) painted a view of Corfu for the Marshall, Francesco Simonini (1686 – after 1753) commemorated von Schulenburg's battles in a series of paintings.

Von der Schulenburg employed Giambattista Pittoni (1687 – 1767) from 1733 to 1738 to make historic paintings and used him as an advisor and restorer. As already mentioned, Giovanni Battista Piazzetta also worked for him as a painter and as an agent for buying Flemish masterpieces and genre pieces. It was Piazzetta who made an inventory of the von Schulenburg Collection in 1739, of mainly Italian works of the 16th and 17th centuries, with Flemish and Dutch works.

The Schulenburg Collection included works by Giacomo Ceruti (1698 – 1767), Michele Marieschi (1710 – 1744), Luca Carlevaris (1633 – 1730), Giovanni Battista Cimaroli (1687 – 1771), Antonio Joli (1700 – 1777), Marco Ricci (1676 – 1730) and Francesco Zuccarelli (1702 – 1788). Von der Schulenburg sent some of these works to his estates in Germany, to Emden, Hehlen, Beetzendorf and other sites.

Von der Schulenburg died childless, so he left everything to his nephew Count Adolph Friedrich von der Schulenburg-Beetzendorf with the stipulation that the paintings be kept together in the Palais Schulenburg in Berlin. This will was not honoured, so that after the Marshall's death his collection was to be dispersed. King Frederick II of Prussia bought some of the works, and a group of 150 pieces were sold at auction in London in April of 1775. Von Schulenburg owned the largest collection of paintings by Piazzetta in the world, 13 works and at least 19 drawings by this artist.

The painting of Padovanino of the Three Graces also was taken to Germany by the heirs of the Marshall. The heirs sold this picture at an auction at Christie's in London. It arrived in the Hermitage of St Petersburg after 1783. It is unknown who bought the painting for the museum of the tzars of Russia.

The Ca' Loredan where von Schulenburg lived after his retirement in Venice is the 13th century Romanesque style former palace of the Venetian Loredan Family. It stands in the sestiere or district of San Marco, facing the Grand Canal, not far from the Rialto Bridge. Together with the Ca' Farsetti, it is currently the home to the city's Municipal Council.

The Ca' Loredan was built in the 13th century for the Boccasi Family. It still houses works of art by Benedetto Caliari (1538 – 1598), Gregorio Lazzarini (1657 – 1730) and Bonifazio Veronese (1487 – 1553). The Boccasi Family died out in the 15th century. The building had been the residence of Doge Jacopo Contarini (1193 – 1280), after he retired to private life, and then it passed to the Zane Family in the 14th century, according to the will of Federico Corner (D. 1382), the richest Venetian merchant of his time. In 1703 it became the house of the Loredan Family, due to the marriage of a daughter of Girolamo Corner (1632 – 1690) and Giovanni Battista Loredan. In 1816 it became the property of the Countess Campagna Peccana in 1816 and transformed into a hotel. In 1867, it passed to the municipality of Venice.

There is another Palazzo Loredan in Venice, the Palazzo Loredan in San Cancian. This was a palace of the San Cancian branch of the Loredan family, at the Calle Largo Widmann in the Cannaregio district of Venice, near the Church of San Canciano after which it was named. The San Canciano branch of the Loredan Family produced an illustrious dynasty of Venetian

admirals and politicians such as Pietro Loredan (1372 – 1438), Alvise Loredan (1393 – 1466), Giacomo Loredan (1396 – 1476), Giorgio Loredan (d. 1475), Antonio Loredan (1446 – 1514), as well as the Duke of Candia, Giovanni Loredan (d. 1420).

5.- Melusine von der Schulenburg

Since we have been digressing, we could still push on a little farther. Johann Matthias' sister, Melusine von der Schulenburg, was also born in Emden like her brother, she on 25 December 1667. She died on 10 May 1743, aged 75. Her father was Gustavus Adolphus Baron von der Schulenburg and her mother Petronella Ottilie von Schwencken. Gustavus Adolphus was a Privy Councillor to the Elector of Brandenburg.

She was a maid of honour to the Electress Sophia of Hannover and became at the court the mistress of the Electoral Prince George Louis. This George Louis succeeded in 1698 as Elector of Hannover and then in 1714 as King of Great Britain as George I.

Melusine moved with George I to England. On July, 18 of 1716 she received for life the titles of Duchess of Munster, Marchioness of Dungannon, then Countess of Dungannon and Baroness of Dundalk in the peerage of Ireland. On 19 March 1719 she became Duchess of Kendal, Countess of Feversham and Baroness Glastonbury. In 1713, Charles VI, the Holy Roman Emperor of Germany, the one Antonio Vivaldi appealed to in his later life, made her Princess of Eberstein. Had she been married to the King of England in secret? George's wife Queen Sophia, had been kept in prison since the King divorced her in 1694.

Melusine von der Schulenburg was a very thin woman, called in Germany the 'scarecrow' and in England the 'maypole'. The Jacobines of Scotland called her the 'Goose'. In England, she mostly lived at Kendall House in Isleworth, Middlesex.

Melusine had much influence on the King in political matters. She acquired large sums of money by selling public offices and titles, by selling patent rights such as the privilege of supplying Ireland with a new copper coinage. She received from George I a vast sum of 10,000 pounds for procuring the recall of Viscount Bolingbroke from exile.

Melusine bore King George I three illegitimate children. These were:

- Anna Luise Sophie von der Schulenburg, Countess of Dölitz (1692 - 1773) who married Ernest August Philipp von dem Bussche-Ippenburg, divorced before 1714, later made Countess of Dölitz by Emperor Charles VI of Germany in 1722.
- Petronilla Melusine von der Schulenburg (1693 - 1778) who married Philip Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, a leading Whig politician. She was made Countess of Walsingham. They had no children.
- Margarethe Gertrud von Oeynhausen (1701 - 1726), who married Albrecht Wolfgang Count of Schaumburg-Lippe.

Of these, Luise Sophie and Petronilla Melusine were officially acknowledged as the children of Melusine's sister Gertrud (1659 - 1697) and her husband Friedrich Achaz von der Schulenburg (1647 - 1701). Margarethe Gertrud was officially named von Oeynhausen because she was recognised as the daughter of Melusine's other sister, Sophia Juliane von Oeynhausen (1668 - 1755).

Two other women were said to have been George's mistresses:

- Leonora von Meyseburg-Züschén, widow of a chamberlain at the court of Hannover, later married to Lieutenant General de Weyhe. She was the sister of Clara Elisabeth von Meyseburg-Züschén, Countess von Platen, who had been mistress of George I's father Ernest Augustus, Elector, of Hannover.
- Baroness Sophie Caroline Eva Antionette von Offein (1669 - 1726, known as the 'Young Countess von Platen', who, married Count Ernest August von Platen in 1697.

After King George's death, Melusine von der Schulenburg kept a raven believed to be the incarnation of the dead king.

6.- George I (1660 - 1727), King of Great Britain

George I was born in Hanover in 1660. He died in 1727. George I, with his German name Georg Ludwig, was the ruler of the Electorate of Hanover in the Holy Roman Empire of Germany from 1698 to his death in 1727. He was the first British monarch of the House of Hanover. At his birth to Ernest Augustus of Hanover, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Prince of Calenberg (1629 – 1698), and his wife Sophia of Hanover and Princess of the Palatinate (1630 – 1714), George inherited the titles of the Duke of Brunswick - Lüneburg from his father and uncles.

Sophia of the Palatinate was the granddaughter of King James I of England (1566 – 1625) through her mother, Elisabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia (1596 – 1662).

Sophia had seven children who reached adulthood:

- George I of Great Britain (1660–1727)
- Frederick Augustus (1661–1690), Imperial General
- Maximilian William of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1666–1726), field marshal in the Imperial Army
- Sophia Charlotte (1668–1705), Queen in Prussia
- Charles Philip of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1669–1690), colonel in the Imperial Army
- Christian Henry of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1671–1703) and
- Ernest Augustus of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Duke of York and Albany (1674–1728), who became Prince-bishop of Osnabrück

Three of her sons were killed in battle.

In 1682, George I married his cousin Sophia Dorothea of Celle (1666 – 1726), with whom he had two children, but he divorced her in 1694. He had the above already mentioned three daughters with his mistress Melusine von der Schulenburg. He may secretly have married Melusine after his divorce. He expanded his German domains and was ratified as Prince-Elector of Hanover in 1708. He was a Protestant descendant of the English King James VI and I, his great-grandfather in his mother's line, so he inherited the British throne following the deaths of his mother Sophia and his second cousin, Queen Anne of Great Britain. The Jacobites tried but failed to depose him and replace him with James Francis Edward Stuart, Queen Anne's Catholic half-brother.

Sophia of the Palatinate bore Ernest Augustus 6 sons and one daughter, mentioned also above.

For the first years of his life George was the only heir to the German territories of his father and three childless uncles.

George counted not only on the inheritance of his father. He looked to what his uncles could leave him. By 1675, George's eldest uncle died without issue, but his two other uncles had married. This put George's inheritance in some jeopardy, for his uncles' estates might pass to their sons instead of to George. In 1679 another uncle died unexpectedly without sons, and George's father Ernest Augustus became also Duke of Kahlenberg-Göttingen, with his capital at Hanover.

George's surviving uncle, George William of Celle had, however, married his mistress to legitimise his only daughter, Sophia Dorothea. He had no other children. Under the Salic Law, inheritance of territories was restricted to the male line. In 1682 the family agreed to adopt the principle of primogeniture, so George only would inherit all the territory of his uncles. Moreover, in 1682, George married Sophia Dorothea of Celle, the daughter of his uncle George William, thereby securing additional income that would have been outside the Salic Laws. At the Battle of Vienna, Frederick Augustus heard only then of the adoption of primogeniture, so he would not receive any part of his father's inheritance. This led to a breach for life between the brothers. Ernest Augustus was made Elector of the Holy Roman Empire in 1692, so George's prospects as the sole heir of his father's electorate and his uncle's duchy were secured.

Sophia Dorothea of Celle, George's wife, had a second child, also a daughter, named after her, but the two girls remained her only offspring. She became estranged from her husband, and Sophia Dorothea continued her romance with the Swedish Count Philip Christoph von Königsmark. In July 1694, the count was killed, his body weighed with stones and thrown in the River Leine. The murder was claimed to have been committed by four of Ernest Augustus' courtiers. The marriage of George to Sophia Dorothea was then dissolved, on the grounds that Sophia Dorothea had abandoned her husband. George imprisoned Sophia Dorothea in Alden House in her native Celle, where she stayed until her death more than 30 years later. George had three daughters, already mentioned, by his mistress Melusine von der Schulenburg and lived openly together with his beloved from 1698 until his death. He may have secretly married her.

Ernest Augustus died in January of 1698. George inherited all his possessions, with the exception of the Prince-Bishopric of Osnabrück. George thus became Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, also called of Hanover, after its capital. At his court in Hanover worked famous men such as the composers George Friedrich Händel (1685 – 1759) and Agostini Steffani (1654 – 1728), as well as the philosopher and polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716).

In England died Prince William, Duke of Gloucester, second in line to the English and Scottish thrones. By the terms of the English Act of Settlement of 1701, George's mother Sophia was designated as heir to the English throne from the then reigning monarch, William III and his sister-in-Law Anne. William died without issue. Sophia of Hanover was the closest Protestant relative of the British royal family. In the heritage line, 56 Catholics with

superior claims had been bypassed. In August 1701 therefore, George was first in line to become the new English King, so he received the Order of the Garter in England.

The nearest Catholic claimant to the English throne, the former King James died soon thereafter. Queen Anne succeeded on him. Anne (1665 – 1714) was Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland from March 1702, and Queen of Great Britain and Ireland following the ratification of the Acts of Union 1707 merging the kingdoms of Scotland and England, until her death in 1714. Sophia of Hanover was now the heiress presumptive to be the new Queen of England, already 71 years old, 35 years older than Anne. In 1705, Sophia and her heirs received their naturalisation as English subjects. An official act also detailed the arrangements for the transfer of power for Anne through a Regency Council. In that year also, George's only surviving uncle died. George inherited more German dominions. He inherited the Lüneburg-Grubenhagen Principality, centred on Celle.

After George's accession in Hanover, after the death of his father in 1698, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 - 1704) broke out. Philip, the grandson of King Louis XIV of France, was to succeed to the Spanish throne. But the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, the United Dutch Provinces, England, Hanover and other German states opposed Philip's rights, fearing the House of Bourbon would become too powerful with Spain and France united in the same family. In the war effort, George invaded his neighbouring state, Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, which was pro-French. The invasion went smoothly, and as a reward the British and Dutch sovereigns also recognised the prior annexation of George's uncle of the Duchy of Saxe-Lauenburg.

At that time, in 1706, the Elector of Bavaria had been deprived of his office and titles for having sided with King Louis XIV against the Holy Roman Empire. George of Hanover was invested as an Imperial Field Marchall of an army stationed along the Rhine. The German princes thought he had acquitted himself well, so in 1708 they formally confirmed George as a Prince-Elector of Germany, in recognition of his service. Yet, in 1709, he resigned as Field-Marshal, and left active military service. Nevertheless, in 1710, he received the title of Arch-Treasurer of the Empire, an office formerly held by the Elector Palatine. The German Emperor died in 1711, so the war ended with the ratification of the Treaty of Utrecht. Philip of Bourbon was allowed to succeed to the Spanish throne, but removed from the French line of succession, and the Elector of Bavaria was restored.

In 1707, the Parliaments of England and Scotland agreed to a treaty, which united England and Scotland into a single political entity, the Kingdom of Great Britain. The union created the largest free trade area in 18th century Europe.

In 1710, George announced he would succeed to the throne of Britain by hereditary right, as the right had been removed from the Catholic Stuarts. He hereby ended all opposing interpretations and nobody in England and Scotland openly opposed him. Sophia, the Electress of Hanover, died in 1714 at the age of 83. George was now Queen Anne's heir presumptive. He also had the English Regency Council revised, the Council that would receive power after Anne's death. Queen Anna died on 1 August of 1714, and George was proclaimed King of Great Britain and of England. He was crowned in Westminster Abbey on 20 October of the year.

Within a year of George's accession to the throne, the Whigs of Parliament won an overwhelming victory in the general elections of 1715. Members of the defeated Tory Party

sympathised with the Jacobites, who wanted to replace George with Queen Anne's Catholic half-brother James Francis Edward Stuart. The ensuing rebellion, with supporters both in England and Scotland, however, came to a dismal failure. By the end of 1715, the rebellion collapsed. George showed leniency, but distrusted henceforth the Tories. Power passed to the Whigs.

When the Whigs came to power in Parliament, George's chief ministers were Robert Walpole, Lord Townshend - who was Walpole's brother-in-law -, Lord Stanhope and Lord Sunderland. Townshend was dismissed in 1717, and Walpole resigned from the Cabinet over disagreements with the other ministers, his colleagues. Walpole nevertheless remained a powerful political figure in Parliament. Stanhope then ruled over Foreign Affairs, Sunderland over domestic matters. In 1719, Lord Sunderland's power waned. He had introduced a peerage bill that was defeated in the House by speeches of Walpole. Sunderland fell. In 1718, Walpole and Townshend were reappointed as ministers and a new, still Whig government was formed.

Then followed the South Sea Bubble. In 1719, the South Sea Company proposed to take over 3/5ths of the British national debt by exchanging government securities for stock in the company. To support this plan, the company bribed Lord Sunderland, Melusine von der Schulenburg and Lord Stanhope's cousin, the Secretary of the Treasury Charles Stanhope, to support the plan. The company enticed bondholders to convert their high-interest, irredeemable government bonds to easily tradeable stocks by offering preferential gains. These government bonds could not be redeemed without the consent of the bondholder, and they had been issued when interest rates were high. The bonds were a long drain on public finances as they were hardly ever redeemed. The South Sea Company now enticed the bondholders to convert their bonds into low interest but more easily tradeable stocks by offering preferential financial gains.

The operation was successful, drew other companies with in its booming value, though some of those were of a bogus nature. The government then stopped the market bubble. Uncontrolled selling mode began in August, so that the stock of the South East Company plummeted by the end of September. People lost vast sums; some were ruined totally. This made King George and his ministers extremely unpopular. Lord Stanhope collapsed under the strain and died after a tough debate in the House of Lords. Lord Sunderland had to resign. Sunderland's death in 1722 allowed the rise of Robert Walpole, the then First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. He brought England back to financial stability. King George managed to avoid direct implication in the company's fraudulent actions.

King George revived the Order of the Bath in 1725, enabling Walpole to reward or to win more political supporters by offering them the honours. King George rarely attended meetings of the Cabinet. He held conversations in private and exercised only larger influence in matters of British foreign policies. He and Lord Townshend ratified with France and Russia the Treaty of Hanover, designed to counterbalance the Austro-Spanish Treaty of Vienne, and thus protect British trade.

King George I died on a voyage to his native Hanover in 1727 from a stroke, on the road between Delden and Nordhorn in Germany. He was brought to the palace of his younger brother, Ernest Augustus, Prince-Bishop of Osnabrück, where he died on 11 June. His remains were ultimately, after World War II, placed in the mausoleum of Ernest-Augustus in

the Berggarten. George's son, George Augustus, took the throne as George II. George II retained Walpole in office.

George I was a reserved man, maybe cynical and selfish, but temperate and financially prudent. He did not like to be in the public light at social events, avoided his box in the opera and often travelled incognito. He knew English not so well, but communicated fluently with his ministers in French. He took things to heart, however, felt deeply and sincerely. He was more sensitive than he cared to show.

7.- The Padovanino Painting of the Three Graces

The Padovanino painting shows the three Graces nude, all in movement, forming a circle to indicate their unity, sheltering in their midst a Cupid. The Graces are shown in the full light that is diffusing through clouds. The child, the Cupid, is dressed and remains in the dark, as if hiding or being hidden, protected by the Graces.

The Graces are drawn in different poises. One is sitting, one is standing, the last is also shown in a circular movement of curves, as if somewhat apart, occupied with drawing a piece of cloth from under a trunk. Her clothes seem to have been caught by the forest floor, and she is busy trying to liberate herself. She has been caught by a branch of a cut tree, and thus she is kept nearer to earth, whereas the other figures seem to be more interested in the skies and thus seem to be more free of their movements.

The Grace standing offers a wooden staff on fire to a flying angel, often called in Italian a 'putto', a small child. There are three Graces, and also three such angels are shown, swirling around the nude female figures. The putti also seem engaged in different actions, as the Graces are. The Graces too have each something else to do, they are not engaged in a common task.

One Grace stands and points to the heavens from where the divine light diffuses onto the scene. There is no sun in the painting, the light merely shines through the clouds, comes from above, but it seems to throw the entire painting in light, without any specific direction. No shadows can be found thrown by the female figures, nor by the angels. Shadows were something keenly remarked and painted by Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) and very openly and dramatically rendered by the later Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571 – 1610). For Padovanino, however, the story of the scene was more important than the rendering of exact effects of light and shadows.

The Grace sitting to the right, as seen by a spectator, hands over a spark of fire, of light also, to the putto flying above her. The third Grace below, draws at her cloth caught by a tree trunk and the putto on the lower right is helping her get liberated. Earth seems to be wanting to keep at least her to the ground, whereas the attention of the two other Graces goes to the heavens. The third putto is on the left. This one is represented as a real small Cupid with a bow, ready to let fly the arrows of love, upwards to the skies, to the divine light above. The Grace standing holds another arrow in her hand, at the ready for the little archer, and she seems to be telling to send the arrow of love high up, to the heavenly light. The little children form a triangle when connected by virtual lines, within which the Graces are situated. Yes,

they all belong together and cannot really escape from each other. They belong to the Graces and the Graces to them.

In the triangle formed by the Graces, as if fully protected by them, sits another child. This angel is clothed, whereas the other three are flying about, show wings and do not touch the earth, whereas this protected child seems to sit. He has no wings! This child is also clothed, in real style, not nude as the little angels are. This could be the real Cupid of mythology, bound to earth as the three Graces are. He has no arrow, yet guards the earthly fire of which he may have given a spark to the Grace sitting on the right. She then, gives the earthly spark to the angel above her, as if wishing this angel to bring the fire of earth higher up. He may be representing the aspirations of the three Graces for the skies. Or he may be wanting to add the earthly light to the heavens, to add to the all-pervasive light of the picture.

The painter thus showed some of the hope, the aspiration, the attraction of the heavens on the Graces. And the Graces want to add their love to the divine above. Wouldn't they like to rather dwell in those heavens, rather than be tied to the earth? The downward Grace also shows her will to liberate herself from the restraining earth! She seems to show the connection, the grasp of the earth, from which she is trying quite in vain to liberate herself. The form of this Grace is circular, closed, a symbol of the earthly attraction. The putto on the lower right helps her, but the painter has not shown her succeeding! In the painting, the flying angels accompany the Graces. Allegedly, the Graces educated these little Cupids, so the Cupids or Putti are swirling around. The angels are not merely merciless little blind beings, armed to strike humans indiscriminately. Here, they are clear-sighted 'Amor Platonicus' beings, Amorini. They are not blindfolded and they bear even a lighted torch to represent the heavenly fire. The Graces show the angels the light of Heavenly Love descending through the clouds onto earth. They are not connected to the earth, as shown by their flight in the airs. The Graces, however, are still held by earth.

The tree trunk the lower Grace is trying to liberate herself from gives the impression of showing a massive, enormous dark phallus, pointing at the genital parts of the lying Grace in the middle right, a quite erotic scene. How many times must the Marshall von der Schulenburg had tried to decipher, to discover the meaning of the trunk and of the putti? He must have been smiling when he finally understood the erotic, carefully constructed sensual illusion. When he showed the painting to visitors, he might have been enjoyed in having found out the erotic meaning of this scene within a scene, whereas his visitors probably passed by on that meaning. Padovanino had shown the double meaning of Eros and Thanatos, the earthly and heavenly love in his painting.

The most striking colour in the painting is that of the young, unscarred flesh without wrinkles of the nude bodies of the very beautiful women. The Graces show each another part of the female anatomy. The sitting nude on the right shows her body from the front. She sits and seems to challenge the spectator in this poise. The standing nude shows a female back. In the circular form of the nude down in the frame, the painter has shown a marvellous and complete side of the female body. So, a spectator could admire all the aspects of the female, splendid, luxurious body. Wouldn't these poises also have attracted the eyes of the Marshall? He could admire all the facets of the female body at once, not just one.

The Graces are scantily clad in free cloths hanging around the women. The cloths are of different colours. They are nicely, loosely draped around the nude bodies, and hide nothing.

The Grace sitting on the right is clad in delicate red, a red altered and softened by the blank mass of the female body. A contrasting but thin tread holds the cloth around the Grace. Blue is of course the complementary hue to yellow, to the blank flesh colour of the woman. The blue line contrasts nicely with the red colour of the drapery, to a harmonious whole. This Grace also wears armbands of dark stones and the black can also be found as strips in her hair, where a splendid headlace of glistening white pearls hangs, contrasting with the black. The white pearls are a delicate jewel against the rather sombre background. The white colour suggests innocence and purity. The black colours may refer to the earth.

The Grace standing in the middle, pointing upwards, is clad in an almost transparent silk piece of cloth thrown in whirling movements around her body. In none of the Graces can be detected straight lines, all lines are curved. Round lines emphasize the soft lines of the female bodies. The red silk of the standing Grace is of a lightened red, pink colour. The cloth, as the light plays in the folds, shows also blue hues, as if the colour of the other side of the cloth is blue, an effect silk can make possible. Red, pink, bluish tones are on these draperies, announcing the blue on the back of the curbed Grace below, and referring to the red of the sitting Grace on the right. Even when the combination of the light blue and the translucent pink are generally not very harmonious, here the harmony is in the lightness of the hues, both in the blue and in the pink. The red colour of the cloth of the sitting Grace on the right can be found also in the red armband, the rubies of the jewel on the wrists of the standing Grace. In the hair of this Grace too, we can find the black thread and the pearls, though in another configuration than on the head of the sitting Grace on the right.

The lower Grace had been painted in a bowing poise, another poise altogether different from the ones of the other two female figures. The lower Grace wears delicate blue cloth on her back, and she wears a yellowish cloth that continues on the ground. The French chemist and theorist of colour interactions, Chevreul, has shown in the nineteenth century these two colours to be complementary for our eyes. A painter of centuries before, Padovanino must have remarked or known of these exact contrasts, or he must have had a correct intuition and feeling about how well these colours contrast to the human eye. Around the dark brown tree trunk grow white flowers and these colours also can be found on the wings of the lower little angel, in its wings. The darker colour of the menacing trunk makes us understand somewhat more the dark, erotic feelings.

The top left of the painting shows the origin of the divine light in the blue sky. Therefore too, we see more blue shining on the top of the cloth thrown over the standing Grace. The sitting Grace on the right looks to the skies, to the light, and she hands earthly fire to the putto. But on the upper left, the Grace standing and pointing to the sky, looks down at the Cupid-like putto, armed with bow and arrow. She would aim for the skies, but her eyes are still locked to the earth, downwards. Her hope, her longing shall be disappointed, though the arrow of the putto may succeed in getting her message of desiring to the skies. Could that not be a desire all humans share? The Graces seem to show to the little angels that the heavenly light had been given by a higher being, which may shine through the blue universe in which all things move, but which may forever remain unknown to humans and angels alike. The picture shows no sun!

The colours of the background are dark. Darkness is on a brownish bush to the right, on a dark tree on the right, on the earth. It is as if these features receive no light. The light in the painting is all absorbed by the bodies of the Graces. The pale splendour of the luscious flesh

of the Graces strikes the spectator all the more. The tree and bush are shown in all details of foliage on the branches, to, provide a picture that was fully worth its money in work of the painter. Also, the draperies on the Graces have been painted with many folds shown in changes of hues, as only the greatest masters of painting could discern and observe and render.

8.- The State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg

The painting of Padovanino now hangs in the State Hermitage Museum of St Petersburg. This museum was founded in 1764 when the Russian Empress Catherine II the Great bought several hundred paintings for her palace. In fact, the paintings had been reserved for King Frederick the Great of Prussia, but the king could not buy the collection because he had been made bankrupt by his war with Russia. Other great museums had been created earlier: the Vatican Museum already in the 16th century, and the British Museum a little earlier in 1753, the Neapolitan Capodimonte Museum in 1757. The collections in the Hermitage are impressive, showing art of worldwide origins and importance.

The Winter Palace

The Winter Palace is the palace in Saint Petersburg that served as the official residence of the House of Romanov, previous emperors of Russia, from 1732 to 1917. The palace and its connected buildings now house what is called the Hermitage Museum. The palace contains 1,886 doors, 1,945 windows, 1,500 rooms and 117 staircases. The total area of the Winter Palace is 14.2 hectares. Situated between Palace Embankment and Palace Square, adjacent to the site of Peter the Great's original Winter Palace, the present and fourth Winter Palace was built and altered almost continuously between the late 1730s and 1837, when it was severely damaged by fire and immediately rebuilt.

The Russian emperors constructed their palaces on a monumental scale that aimed to reflect the might and power of Imperial Russia. From out of the palace of Saint Petersburg, the tsars ruled over almost 1/6th of the Earth's landmass, and 125 million subjects by the end of the 19th century.

The first Winter Palace was designed in 1711 for Peter the Great, by the Swiss architect Domenico Trezzini (ca. 1670 – 1734) who 16 years later, was also to design the third Winter Palace. Several architects participated in designing the Winter Palace - most notably the Italian Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1700–1771) - in what became known as the Elizabethan Baroque style. The green-and-white palace has the overall shape of an elongated rectangle, and its principal façade is 215 metres long and 30 m high. Following a terrible fire, the palace's rebuilding of 1837 left the exterior unchanged, but large parts of the interior were redesigned in a variety of tastes and styles.

Upon returning from his Grand Embassy in 1698, Peter I of Russia embarked on a policy of Westernization and expansion that was to transform the Tsardom of Russia into a major European power. This policy was implemented in bricks and mortar by the creation of a new city, Saint Petersburg, in 1703. The culture and design of the new city was intended as a

conscious rejection of traditional Byzantine-influenced Russian imperial and public architecture, such as the then-fashionable Naryshkin Baroque, in favour of the classically inspired architecture prevailing in the great cities of Europe. With the site cleared, the Tsar then embarked on the building of a larger house between 1711 and 1712, the first Winter Palace.

The 18th century was a period of great development in European royal architecture. One of the earliest and most notable examples was Louis XIV's Versailles. Largely completed by 1710, Versailles - with its size and splendour - heightened rivalry amongst the sovereigns of Europe. Peter the Great of Russia, keen to promote all western concepts, wished to have a modern palace like his fellow European sovereigns. However, unlike some of his successors, Peter I never aspired to rival Versailles.

The first Winter Palace was a modest building of two main floors under a slate roof. In 1721 the second version of the Winter Palace was built under the direction of architect Georg Johann Mattarnovy (d. 1719). Mattarnovy's palace, though still very modest compared to royal palaces in other European capitals, was of merely two floors above a rusticated ground floor, with a central projection underneath a pediment supported by columns. It was here that Peter the Great died in 1725. The third Winter Palace of 1727, designed equally by Domenico Trezzini incorporated the second Winter Palace of 1721 as one of its terminating pavilions.

The principal or "Jordan Staircase", was so-called because on the Feast of the Epiphany the Tsar descended this Imperial staircase in state for the ceremony of the 'Blessing of the Waters'. It is one of the few parts of the palace retaining Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli's 18th century rococo style. Bartolomeo was born in Paris, but from an Italian Florentine family. The massive grey granite columns were, however, added in the mid-19th century.

On Peter the Great's death in 1725, the city of Saint Petersburg was still far from being the centre of western culture and civilization that he had envisioned. Peter I was succeeded by his widow, Catherine I, who reigned until her death in 1727. She in turn was succeeded by Peter I's grandson Peter II, who in 1727 had Mattarnovy's palace greatly enlarged by the architect Domenico Trezzini, so that Mattarnovy's entire palace became merely one of the two terminating pavilions of the new, and third, Winter Palace. The third palace, like the second, was in the Petrine Baroque style.

In 1728, shortly after the third palace was completed, the Imperial Court left Saint Petersburg for Moscow, and the Winter Palace lost its status as the principal imperial residence. Moscow had once again been designated the capital city, a status which had been granted to Saint Petersburg in 1713. Following the death of Peter II in 1730 the throne passed to a niece of Peter I, Anna Ivanovna, Duchess of Courland.

Anna Ivanovna (1730–1740)

The new Empress cared more for Saint Petersburg than her immediate predecessors. She re-established the Imperial court at the Winter Palace, and in 1732 Saint Petersburg again

officially replaced Moscow as Russia's capital, a position it was to hold until 1918. Later, ignoring the third Winter Palace, the Empress took up residence at the neighbouring Apraksin Palace. In 1732, the Tsaritsa commissioned the Italian architect Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli to completely rebuild and extend the Apraksin Palace, incorporating other neighbouring houses. Thus, the core of the fourth and final Winter Palace is not the palace of Peter the Great, but the palace of the Russian Admiral General Fyodor Matveyevich Apraksin (1661 – 1720).

Elizabeth (1741–1762)

The infant Tsar Ivan VI, succeeding Anna in 1740, was soon deposed in a bloodless coup d'état by Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a daughter of Peter the Great. The new Empress Elizabeth, whose main residence was the Summer Palace, led the court back at the Winter Palace.

During the reign of Elizabeth, Rastrelli, still working to his original plan, devised an entirely new scheme in 1753, on a colossal scale - the present Winter Palace. By 1759, shortly before Elizabeth's death, a Winter Palace truly worthy of the name was nearing completion.

Catherine II (1762–1796)

It was Empress Elizabeth who selected the German princess, Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, as a bride for her nephew and successor, Peter III. The marriage was not a success. In 1762, following a coup d'état, in which her husband was murdered, Catherine paraded her seven-year-old son, Paul, on the Winter Palace's balcony to an excited crowd below. She was not presenting her son as the new and rightful ruler of Russia, however; that honour she was usurping herself.

Catherine's patronage of the Russian architect Ivan Yegorovich Starov (1745 – 1808) and of the Italian architect Giacomo Quarenghi (1744 – 1817) saw the palace further enlarged and transformed. In 1790, Quarenghi redesigned five of Rastrelli's state rooms to create the three vast halls of the Neva enfilade. Catherine was responsible for the three large adjoining palaces, known collectively as the Hermitage, the name by which the entire complex, including the Winter Palace, was to become known 150 years later.

Catherine had been impressed by the French architect Jean-Baptiste Michel Vallin de la Mothe (1729 – 1800), who designed the Imperial Academy of Arts in St Petersburg. De la Mothe was a professor of Ivan Starov. Catherine commissioned him to add yet a new wing to the Winter Palace. This was intended as a place of retreat from the formalities and ceremonies of the court. Catherine christened it the Hermitage, a name already used by her predecessor Tsaritsa Elizabeth to describe her private rooms within the palace. The Hermitage wing was another large palace in itself, connected to the main palace by a series of covered walkways and heated courtyards in which flew rare exotic birds. Noted for its fine portico and attention to details of a delicate nature, it was richly furnished with an ever-growing art collection.

Many of the artworks purchased for the palaces arrived as parts of one lot, as the sovereign acquired whole ready-assembled collections. The Empress' ambassadors in Rome, Paris, Amsterdam and London were instructed to look out for and purchase thousands of priceless works of art on her behalf. In this way, between 1764 and 1781 Catherine the Great acquired six major collections: those of the Prussian art dealer Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky (1710 – 1775), the Polish-Saxon Heinrich Count von Brühl (1700 – 1763), the French art patron Pierre Crozat (1665 – 1740), the English writer Horace Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford (1717 – 1797), Sylvestre-Raphael Baudouin, and finally in 1787, the English antiquary John Lyde-Brown (d. 1787) collection. Catherine used the Lyde-Brown collection first to adorn the Catherine Palace and park in Tsarskoye Selo, but later they became the core of the Classical Antiquities collection of the Hermitage.

The acquisition of 225 paintings forming the Gotzkowsky collection was a source of personal pride to Catherine. It had been put together by Gotzkowsky for Catherine's adversary, Frederick the Great of Prussia who, as a result of his wars with Russia, could not afford to pay for it. Gotzkowsky in fact provided 225 or 317 paintings (conflicting accounts list both numbers), mainly Flemish and Dutch, as well as others, including 90 not precisely identified, to the Russian crown.

As the palace filled with art, it overflowed into the Hermitage. So large did Catherine's art collection eventually become that it became necessary to commission the of German origins and German-trained architect Yury Velten (1730 – 1801) to build a second and larger extension to the palace, which eventually became known as the Old Hermitage. Later, Catherine commissioned a third extension, the Hermitage Theatre, designed by the Italian architect Giacomo Quarenghi (1744 – 1817). This construction necessitated the demolition of Peter the Great's by now crumbling third Winter palace. From 1787 to 1792, Quarenghi designed and built a wing along the Winter Canal with the Raphael Loggias to replicate the loggia in the Apostolic Palace in Rome designed by Donato Bramante and frescoed by Raphael.

French became the language of the court; Russian was relegated for use only when speaking to servants and inferiors. Work continued on the Winter Palace right up until the time of the Empress' death in 1796.

The State Hermitage Museum was actually founded in 1764 when Empress Catherine the Great acquired a collection of paintings from the Berlin merchant Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky. The museum celebrates the anniversary of its founding each year on 7 December, Saint Catherine's Day. It has been open to the public since 1852.

Its collections, of which only a small part is on permanent display, comprise over three million items (the numismatic collection accounts for about one-third of them). The collections occupy a large complex of six historic buildings along Palace Embankment, including the Winter Palace. Apart from them, the Menshikov Palace, Museum of Porcelain, Storage Facility at Staraya Derevnnya, and the eastern wing of the General Staff Building are also part of the museum. The museum has several exhibition centres abroad. The Hermitage

is now a federal state property. Since July 1992, the director of the museum has been Mikhail Petrovsky.

Of the six buildings in the main museum complex, five - namely the Winter Palace, Small Hermitage, Old Hermitage, New Hermitage, and Hermitage Theatre - are all open to the public. During the time of Catherine, the Hermitage was not a public museum and few people were allowed to view its holdings.

A hermitage is the dwelling of a hermit or recluse. The word derives from Old French hermit, ermit "hermit, recluse", from Late Latin eremita, from Greek eremites, that means "people who live alone", which is in turn derived from erēmos, or 'desert'.

Originally, the only building housing the collection was the "Small Hermitage". Today, the Hermitage Museum encompasses many buildings on the Palace Embankment and its neighbourhoods. Apart from the Small Hermitage, the museum now also includes the "Old Hermitage" (also called "Large Hermitage"), the "New Hermitage", the "Hermitage Theatre", and the "Winter Palace", the former main residence of the Russian tsars. In recent years, the Hermitage has expanded to the General Staff Building on the Palace Square facing the Winter Palace, and the Menshikov Palace.

The Hermitage buildings served as a home and workplace for nearly a thousand people, including the Imperial family. In addition to this, they also served as an extravagant showplace for all kinds of Russian relics and displays of wealth prior to the art collections. The "Hermitage complex" was a creation of Catherine's that allowed all kinds of festivities to take place in the palace, the theatre and even the museum of the Hermitage. This helped solidify the Hermitage as not only a dwelling place for the Imperial family, but also as an important symbol and memorial to the imperial Russian state. In Catherine's day, the Winter Palace served as a central part of what was called the Palace Square. The Palace Square served as St. Petersburg's nerve centre by linking it to all the city's most important buildings. The presence of the Palace Square was extremely significant to the urban development of St. Petersburg, and while it became less of a nerve centre later into the 20th century, its symbolic value was still very much preserved.

In her lifetime, Catherine acquired 4,000 paintings from the old masters, 38,000 books, 10,000 engraved gems, 10,000 drawings, 16,000 coins and medals, and a natural history collection filling two galleries. Catherine's collection of at least 4,000 paintings came to rival the older and more prestigious museums of Western Europe. Catherine took great pride in her collection and actively participated in extensive competitive art gathering and collecting that was prevalent in European royal court culture.

Paul I, Alexander I, and Nicholas I (1796–1855)

Catherine the Great was succeeded by her son Paul I. In the first days of his reign, the new Tsar seemed not to be in his senses. Paranoid for his security and disliking anything connected with his mother, he spurned the Winter Palace completely and built Saint

Michael's Castle as his Saint Petersburg residence, on the site of his birthplace. He was murdered there three weeks after taking up residence in 1801.

Alexander I, the 24-year-old son of Paul I, ruled Russia during the chaotic period of the Napoleonic Wars. Following Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the contents of the Winter Palace were further enhanced when Alexander I purchased the same year the art collection of the former French Empress, Joséphine Bonaparte (1763 – 1814), Joséphine de Beauharnais, born Marie Joséphine Rose Tascher de la Pagerie. Alexander I purchased 38 pictures from her heirs. Most of these art pieces had been looted by the French in Kassel during the war. The Hermitage collection of Rembrandts was then considered the largest in the world. Also among Alexander's purchases from Josephine's estate were the first four sculptures by the neoclassical Italian sculptor Antonio Canova to enter the Hermitage collection.

Nicholas I succeeded in 1825 on his brother Alexander I. Tsar Nicholas was to be responsible for the palace's present appearance and layout. He not only effected many changes to the interior of the palace but also was responsible for its complete rebuilding following the fire of 1837. The building of the last form of the Winter Palace was conceived as a town palace rather than as a private palace within an enormous park, such as that of the French kings at Versailles.

At various times in its history the palace has been painted different shades. In the eighteenth century, the palace was painted straw yellow with white and gilded ornament. Under Nicholas I in 1837, it was painted a dull red, which so remained through the revolution and early Communist Soviet period. Following the restoration work after World War II, it was painted green with the ornament depicted in white, the standard Soviet colour scheme for Baroque buildings.

Internally, the palace appears as a combination of the Baroque and the Neoclassical. Little of Rastrelli's rococo interior design has survived; only the Jordan Staircase and the Grand Church remain in their original style. The architect Quarenghi is credited with introducing the Neoclassical style to Saint Petersburg. His work, together with that of Carlo di Giovanni Rossi (1775 – 1849) and the French Parisian architect Auguste de Montferrand (1786 – 1858), gradually transformed Saint Petersburg into a truly Imperial town. Montferrand not only created some of the palace's greatest neoclassical interiors, but also was responsible for the erection of the Column of Alexander during the reign of Nicholas I in Rossi's newly designed Palace Square.

For a long time the Winter Palace was the tallest edifice in the city. In 1844, Nicholas I gave the orders to the effect that private houses should be at least 2.13 m lower than the Winter Palace. This rule remained effective until 1905.

Interior

The Winter Palace is said now to contain 1,500 rooms, 1,786 doors and 1,945 windows. The principal façade is 150 m long and 30 m high. The ground floor contained mostly

bureaucratic and domestic offices, while the second floor was given over to apartments for senior courtiers and high-ranking officials. The principal rooms and living quarters of the Imperial Family were on the first floor, the piano nobile.

A second suite of state rooms running south to the Great Church was created for Catherine II. Between 1787 and 1795, Quarenghi added a new eastern wing to this suite which contained the great throne room, known as St George's Hall, which linked the Winter Palace to Catherine's less formal palace, the Hermitage, next door. This suite was altered in the 1820s when the Military Gallery was created from a series of small rooms, to celebrate the defeat of Napoleon. This gallery, which had been conceived by Alexander I, was designed by Carlo Rossi and was built between June and November 1826 under Nicolas I. It was inaugurated on 25 October 1826. For the 1812 Gallery, the Tsar commissioned 329 portraits of the Russian generals active during Napoleon's invasion of Russia. The artist was the Briton George Dawe (1781 – 1829), who received assistance from Alexander Vasilievich Polyakov (1801 – 1835) and the German Wilhelm August Golicke (1802 – 1848). Among the portraits is the one of the first Belgian King Leopold I.

Nicholas I was also responsible for the creation of the Battle Galleries, which occupy the central portion of the Palace Square façade. They were redesigned by the Russian artist Alexander Pavlovich Briullov (1798 – 1877) to commemorate the Russian victories prior to 1812.

Fire in the Winter Palace, 1837

In 1833, de Montferrand redesigned the eastern state rooms and he created the Field Marshal's Hall and the Small Throne Room. In 1837, a fire broke out. Its cause has remained unknown, but its spread is blamed on de Montferrand. The architect was being hurried by the Tsar for an early completion, so he used wooden materials where stone would have been better. Additionally, between the hurriedly built wooden partition walls disused fireplaces were concealed; their chimneys, coupled with the narrow ventilation shafts, acted as flues for the fire, allowing it to spread undetected between the walls from room to room until it was too late to extinguish.

To create a firebreak, the Tsar ordered the destruction of the three passages leading to the Hermitage, a fortunate act which saved the building and the huge art collection. The fire burned for several days, and destroyed most of the Winter Palace's interior.

Seeming to ignore the size of the palace, the Tsar ordered that the rebuilding be completed within a year. The Lorraine of France born Astolphe-Louis-Léonor Marquis de Custine (1790 – 1857) described the "unheard of efforts" that were necessary to facilitate this. The work was supervised by Count Pyotr Andreevich Kleinmichel (1789 – 1869), who had already gained a reputation for ruthlessness when serving in the military settlements under Count Alexey Andreyevich Arakcheev (1769 – 1834).

The Jordan staircase and the Grand Church were restored to their original design and decoration by the architect Vasily Petrovich Stasov (1769 – 1848). The smaller and more

private rooms of the palace were altered and decorated in various 19th-century contemporary styles by Alexander Briullov according to whims and fashion of their intended occupants, ranging from Gothic to Rococo. The Tsar himself, for all the grandeur he created in his palaces, loved the greatest simplicity. His bedroom at the Winter Palace was spartan, with no ornaments save for some maps and an icon, and he slept on a camp bed with a straw mattress.

The Winter Palace can be viewed as a series of small palaces within one large palace, with the largest and grandest rooms being public while the residents lived in suites of varying sizes, allocated according to rank.

In 1850, the collection of Cristoforo Barbarigo, a Venetian collection, was acquired for the Hermitage. This collection from the Republic of Venice brought into the Winter Palace further works by Titian, in addition to many 16th-century Italian Renaissance works of art.

Nicholas I, conscious of the great art galleries in other European capitals, saw that Catherine the Great's Large Hermitage was vastly expanded and transformed into a purpose-built public art gallery. In 1839, the German architect Franz Karl Leopold called Leo von Klenze (1784 – 1864) drew up the plans and their execution was overseen by Vasily Stasov, assisted by Alexander Briullov and other. Eventually, after eleven years of building and architectural conflict, the first art museum in Russia, the Imperial Hermitage Museum, opened on 5 February 1852. Actually, the original St Petersburg museum had been opened in 1764.

The last Tsars (1855–1905)

The Winter Palace was an official residence of the Russian sovereign from 1732 until 1917; however, it was their home for little more than 140 of those years. The last tsar to truly reside in the palace was Alexander II, who ruled from 1855 to 1881, when he was assassinated.

Alexander II was a constant target for assassination attempts, one of which occurred inside the Winter Palace itself. This attempt on the Tsar's life was organized by a group known as Narodnaya Volya (Will of the People) and led by an "unsmiling fanatic", Andrei Ivanovich Zhelyabov (1851 – 1881), and his mistress Sophia Lvovna Perovskaya (1853 – 1881), who later became his wife. Plans were made to detonate the bomb on the evening of 17 February 1880, assassinating the Tsar and Imperial family as they dined. Fortunately for the Romanovs, a guest arriving from Berlin was delayed, and for the first time in years the dinner was equally delayed. As the family left the drawing room for the dining room the bomb exploded. So great was the explosion that it could be heard all over Saint Petersburg. The dining room was completely demolished and 11 members of the Finnish Guard in the Guard Room below were killed and a further 30 wounded. The two conspirators were executed by hanging

In 1881, the revolutionaries were finally successful and Alexander II was assassinated as his carriage drove through the streets of Saint Petersburg. The Winter Palace was never truly inhabited again.

The new Tsar Alexander III was informed by his security advisers that it was impossible to make the Winter Palace secure. The Imperial Family then moved to the seclusion of the

Gatchina Palace, some 64 km from Saint Petersburg. By comparison with the Winter Palace, the 600-room, moated Gatchina Palace, set within forests, was a cosy family home. When in Saint Petersburg, the Imperial Family resided at the Anichkov Palace, while the Winter Palace was used for only official functions.

In 1894, Nicolas II succeeded on Alexander III. The last Tsar suspended court mourning for his father to marry his wife Alix of Hesse in a lavish ceremony at the Winter Palace. However, after the ceremony the newlywed couple retired to the Anichkov Palace, along with the Dowager Empress. There they began their married life in six small rooms. In 1895, Nicholas and Alexandra established themselves at the Alexander Palace of Tsarskoe Selo. This was to be their favoured home for the remainder of the reign. However, from December 1895 they did reside for periods during the winter at the Winter Palace. Architect Alexander Krasovsky was commissioned to redecorate a suite of rooms in the north-west corner of the palace, including the Gothic library. The final great Imperial gathering at the Winter Palace was a themed fancy dress ball celebrating the reign of Alexei I, which took place on 11 and 13 February 1903.

In 1904, Russia was at war with Japan, and the newborn Tsarevich was secretly ill. The Tsar and the Empress permanently abandoned Saint Petersburg, the Winter Palace, and the Saint Petersburg high society (considered by the Empress to be decadent and immoral) for the greater comfort, security and privacy of Tsarskoe Selo. Thus it was that the Winter Palace, designed and intended to impress, reflect and reinforce the Romanovs' power, lost its *raison d'être* over a decade before the fall of the dynasty it was intended to house and glorify.

The Fall of the House of Romanov (1905–1918)

Following the Imperial Family's move to the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, the Winter Palace became little more than an administrative office block and a place of rare official entertaining. The Winter Palace was seen not only as the home of the Tsars, but a symbol of Imperial power. In this role, it was to be at the centre of some of the most momentous happenings in Russia's early 20th century history. Three of these events stand out in Russia's history: The Bloody Sunday massacre of 1905; the opening of the first State Duma in 1906, which opened in St George's Hall; and finally the taking of the palace by revolutionaries in 1917.

The Bloody Sunday massacre was a result of the public ignorance of the Tsar's place of residence. It occurred on 22 January 1905 during a demonstration march by workers toward the Winter Palace. The massacre was sparked when a Russian Orthodox priest and popular working class leader, Father Gapon, announced his intention to lead a peaceful protest of 100,000 unarmed striking workers to present a petition to the Tsar, to call for fundamental reforms and the founding of a constituent parliament. The protesters were unaware that the palace was little more than an uninhabited icon of Imperial power, and that the Tsar no longer resided there. The Tsar was not informed of the planned protest. The Tsar's troops opened fire on the assembled people. While the number of casualties is disputed, moderate estimates average around 1,000 men, women and children killed or injured. The massacre was a serious

blunder on the part of the Okhrana, or the Guard, the Department for the Protection of Public Safety and Order, a secret police force of the Russian Empire and part of the police department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The massacre was to have grave consequences for the Tsarist regime. It was to be the catalyst for the 1905 Revolution.

In 1913, the Romanov dynasty celebrated its tercentenary, but the crowds that flocked to see the processions were thin, the Empress appeared unhappy and the heir sick. In 1914, Russia was forced to go to war as a result of the Triple Entente Alliance. As the departing troops saluted their monarch in front of the palace, plans were being drawn up to store the palace's contents and convert the state rooms into a hospital to receive returning troops.

In the initial stages of the war, Russia endured heavy losses at the Masurian Lakes and Tannenberg and it was to the Winter Palace that many of the wounded returned. Rechristened the Tsarevich Alexey Nikolayevich Hospital, from October 1915, the palace was a fully equipped hospital, its staterooms transformed into hospital wards.

The Tsar had decided to lead from the front, leaving the Empress to effectively rule Russia from Tsarskoe Selo. It was an unpopular move with both the Tsar's subjects and the Romanov family, as the Empress hired and fired indiscriminately often, it was supposed, on the advice of her favourite, Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin (1869-1916), a Russian mystic and faith healer. Following Rasputin's murder by the Tsar's nephew-in-law in December 1916, the Empress' decisions and appointments became more erratic and the situation worsened and Saint Petersburg fell into the full grip of revolution.

Forced to accept the hopelessness of both the war and the situation at home, on 15 March 1917, Nicholas II abdicated in favour of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich (1878 – 1918). The day after, the Grand Duke promptly refused to accept the throne without the support of the army and his people. A provisional Government was appointed and many members of the former Imperial family were arrested, including the former Tsar, the Empress and their children. No member of the Romanov family have lived in the Winter Palace since the abdication in 1917 and very rarely did after 1905. Nicholas II, his wife and children were all held in captivity until they were murdered by the Bolsheviks at Yekaterinburg in 1918. Other members of the former Imperial Family either met similar fates or escaped into exile.

The Seat of the Provisional Government (1917)

In February 1917, the Russian Provisional Government, led by Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky (1881 – 1970), based itself in the north west corner of the palace with the Malachite Room being the chief council chamber. Most of the state rooms were, however, still occupied by the military hospital.

By 25 October 1917, the Provisional Government was failing and, realising the palace was a target for the more militant Bolsheviks, ordered its defence. All military personnel in the city pledged support to the Bolsheviks, however, who accused Kerensky's Government of wishing

to "surrender Petersburg to the Germans so as to enable them to exterminate the revolutionary garrison."

Many of the administrative staff fled, leaving the palace severely under-defended allegedly by some Cossacks, Cadets, and 137 female soldiers from the Women's Battalion. Food ordered by the occupants of the palace was commandeered by the Bolsheviks, and, in a state of siege, the Winter Palace entered the most turbulent period in its history. According to Soviet history, five thousand sailors newly arrived from Kronstadt were deployed to attack the palace, while the cruiser Aurora positioned itself on the Neva, all its guns trained towards the Palace. One by one the Government buildings in Palace Square surrendered to the Bolsheviks, leaving the palace seemingly only hours from destruction.

With the palace completely surrounded and sealed, the Aurora began her bombardment of the great Neva façade as the Government refused an ultimatum to surrender. Further machine gun and light artillery fire were directed at the palace as the Bolsheviks gained entry via His Majesty's own Staircase. In the ensuing battle there were casualties on both sides until the Bolsheviks finally, by 2:00 am, had control of the palace. Leaving a trail of destruction, they searched room after room before arresting the Provisional Government in the Small Dining Room of the private apartments, from where they were taken to imprisonment in the Fortress across the river. Kerensky managed to evade arrest and escape to Pskov, where he rallied some loyal troops for an attempt to retake the capital. His troops managed to capture Tsarskoe Selo, but were defeated the next day at Pulkovo.

The Winter Palace was then pillaged and devastated from top to bottom by the Bolsheviks. Priceless pictures were ripped from their frames by bayonets. Packed boxes of rare plate and chinaware were broken open and the contents smashed or carried off. The library was forced open and ransacked. The Tsaritsa's salon, like all other rooms, was thrown into chaos. The Winter Palace's wine cellars fuelled the weeks of looting and unrest in the city which followed. Arguably the largest and best stocked wine cellar in history, it contained the world's finest vintages, including the Tsar's favourite, and priceless, Château d'Yquem bottles.

This revolution saw the Bolsheviks create a government led by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870 – 1924), called Vladimir Lenin and Lev Davidovich Bronstein (1879 –1940) called Leon Trotsky, to replace Kerensky's government. Kerensky fled Russia and lived the remainder of his life in exile.

The Winter Palace was now a redundant and damaged building symbolic of a despised regime, facing an uncertain future. The Storming of the Winter Palace was a historical reenactment organised by the Bolsheviks on the 3rd anniversary in 1920. With thousands of Red Guards led by Lenin, and witnessed by 100,000 spectators, the reenactment has become one of the "best known" events of the Russian Revolution. Ironically, the Red Guard actually broke into the palace through a back door that was left open, guarded by wounded and disabled reserves. This gave rise to the occasion being described as the birth of the Soviet state.

After the October Revolution. Immediately after the Revolution of 1917, the Imperial Hermitage and the Winter Palace, the former Imperial residence, were proclaimed state museums and eventually merged. On 30 October 1917, the Winter Palace complex was declared to be part of the Hermitage public museums. The first exhibition to be held in the Winter Palace concerned the history of the revolution, and the public were able to view the private rooms of the Imperial Family. The Hermitage Museum itself had not been damaged during the revolution.

Following the 1941–1944 Siege of Leningrad, when the palace was damaged, a restoration policy was enacted, which has fully restored the palace. Today, as part of one of the world's best known museums, the palace attracts an annual 3.5 million visitors.

The range of the Hermitage's exhibits was further expanded when private art collections from several palaces of the Russian Tsars and numerous private mansions were nationalized and redistributed among major Soviet state museums. Particularly notable was the influx of old masters from the Catherine Palace, the Alexander Palace, the Stroganov Palace, and the Yusupov Palace, as well as from other palaces of Saint Petersburg and suburbs.

In 1922, a collection of 19th-century European paintings was transferred to the Hermitage from the Academy of Arts. In turn, in 1927 about 500 important paintings were transferred to the Central Museum of old Western art in Moscow at the insistence of the Soviet authorities.

In 1928, the Soviet government ordered the Hermitage to compile a list of valuable works of art for export. From 1930 to 1934, over two thousand works of art from the Hermitage collection were clandestinely sold at auctions abroad or directly to foreign officials and businesspeople.

With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, before the Siege of Leningrad started, two trains with a considerable part of the collections were evacuated to Sverdlovsk. Two bombs and a number of shells hit the museum buildings during the siege. The museum opened an exhibition in November 1944. In October 1945 the evacuated collections were brought back, and in November 1945 the museum reopened.

In 1948, 316 works of Impressionist, post-Impressionist, and modern art from the collection of the Museum of New Western Art in Moscow, originating mostly from the nationalized collections of Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov before the war, were transferred to the Hermitage, including works by Matisse and Picasso.

The Hermitage since 1991

In 1991, it became known that some paintings looted by the Red Army in Germany in 1945 were held in the Hermitage. But only in October 1994 did the Hermitage officially announce that it had secretly been holding a major trove of French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings from German private collections. The exhibition "Hidden Treasures Revealed", where 74 of the paintings were displayed for the first time, was opened on 30 March 1995 in the Nicholas Hall of the Winter Palace and lasted a year. Of the paintings, all but one originated from private rather than state German collections, including 56 paintings from the

German industrialist Otto Krebs (1873 – 1941) collection, as well as the collection of the Berlin industrialist and art collector Bernhard Koehler (1849 – 1941) and paintings previously belonging to the Berlin entrepreneur and also art collector Otto Gerstenberg (1848 – 1935) and his daughter Margarete Scharf, including the world-famous ‘Place de la Concorde’ by Degas, ‘In the Garden’ by Renoir, and ‘White House at Night’ by Van Gogh. Gerstenberg’s collected paintings went to his daughter, Margarete Scharf, who stored most in the bunker of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin during the war. These were taken to the Soviet Union. Some of the paintings are now on permanent display in several small rooms in the northeastern corner of the Winter Palace on the first floor.

In 1993, the Russian government gave the eastern wing of the nearby General Staff Building across the Palace Square to the Hermitage and the new exhibition rooms in 1999. Since 2003, the Great Courtyard of the Winter Palace has been open to the public.

In December 2004, the museum discovered another looted work of art: ‘Venus Disarming Mars’ by Rubens was once in the collection of the Rheinsberg Palace near Berlin, and was apparently looted by Soviet troops from the Königsberg Castle in East Prussia in 1945. Königsberg is now called Kaliningrad and a Russian enclave in Polish territory. At the time, Mikhail Pietrovsky said the painting would be cleaned and displayed. The museum announced in July 2006 that 221 minor items, including jewellery, Orthodox icons, silverware and richly enamelled objects, had been stolen. Nevertheless, the State Hermitage Museum remains by far one of if not the greatest museum of European art.

9.- Afterword

The State Hermitage Museum of Saint Petersburg is one if not the greatest museum of European art in the world. Modern Europeans continue to believe the Russian State to be one of, if not the greatest European state, and the Hermitage the largest depository of global European heritage. Russian literature by writers such as Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Lermontov, Gogol, Pushkin, Solzhenitsyn, Chekhov, Bryusov, Pasternak, and so many other artists, are believed as belonging to the greater European art. The leaders in the Kremlin compound of Moscow of the last two centuries have, however, seemed to refuse this belonging to the greater European heritage.

The recent war of Russia in the Ukraine has showed once more that Russians perceive Western European countries rather as enemies than as friends. Yet, Nato has never shown any belligerent movements against Russia, and all historical Nazi tendencies have remained very far from the modern Ukrainian minds. The European Union is set on friendship among autonomous nations for a better common future. The Union is not out on expansion by armed conquest. Most European intellectuals consider Russian art as European heritage. Why then the controversy?

It seems the Russian leaders nurture psychological feelings against Western European economic, cultural and political evolutions. Yet, these evolutions are based on mutual respect and admiration, not on conquest by arms. One had to ask to become a member of the European club! The Russian contemporary leaders seem to suffer on the one hand from pure

megalomania, from the desire to dominate other European countries, the desire to return to the grandeur of the Tsarist regimes of previous centuries. At the same time they seem to nurture an inferiority complex when they compare the economic realisations of their state with those of the other European states and even with those of other countries of the world. They nurture envy, then hate and new imperialistic ambitions. Yet it is good, not bad, to admire art in general, also European art, the art to which too belongs Russia's very rich art, of course.

In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is the market value of all final goods and services from a nation in a given year, Russia stood recently at the 11th place, behind the United States of America and China on the first two places, behind Germany, Japan and India, behind the United Kingdom, France and Italy in the European Union, behind Canada and Brazil. Small European countries, midgets in territory and population compared to Russia as the largest country in the world, countries such as Switzerland at place 20 and Belgium at place 22, show figures not far from those of the giant Russian Federation.

In terms of Gross Domestic Product per Capita, Belgium, that smaller of the European countries, is at place 15, the European Union at place 25, but Russia at place 65! In Real Gross National Income per capita, Russia stands at about 10,000 US Dollar. In the list of other countries, Belgium is at 43,210 US Dollar these last years, or four times higher, France is at 38,965 and Germany at 44,178 with Israël at 43,655. Spain was at 27,189; still three times higher than Russia. Latvia stood at 17,511 and Lithuania at 16,202. These figures mean, and I am well aware that the reality is much more relative, that Russia is a poor country compared to the other European countries, with a long way to go in general welfare of its citizens.

Such figures cannot but feed feelings of envy and of inferiority in Russia, yet checked as already mentioned by feelings of megalomania and of imperialistic ambitions in the Kremlin. Wouldn't it be nice to have all Russian people live at the same levels of welfare as the other European countries? But can this be reached with wars?

When my wife and I drive on the roads of Belgium, we see a lot of German cars pass us by, German cars like Audi, Mercedes, BMW, Porsche and Volkswagen, French cars like Peugeot and Citroën, Italian Fiats, Japanese Honda and Toyota cars, South-Korean Kia's, Romanian Dacia's, Tsjech Skoda cars, American Tesla electric cars, and so on, never one Russian-made car! Not one of our kitchen appliances are Russian-made. Yet, Russian heads are as filled with ideas and scientific knowledge and technological know-how as ours.

It would be nice to have Russia understand and set aside its feelings of megalomania and its inferiority complexes, which all lead to nothing but misery for the Russian people. Wouldn't it be fine to have Russia within or at least closely associated with the other European Union nations, which would in economy, industrial and cultural ambitions lead to greater welfare for all citizens of Europe and of the world? Why destroy an entire country such as the Ukraine, a country of proud, freedom-loving people, eager to live in respect and companionship with their neighbours? Russia feared NATO partnership for the Ukraine. But the war brought Sweden and Finland in NATO, countries which previously were no members of that defensive union! It is not the intention of NATO to attack Russia.

Culture has always pointed the way of living well together, in all centuries. Russian culture is European culture, of course with its own subjects and manners. Russian culture is European

culture, as the Tretyakov Museum of Moscow and of course the State Hermitage amply show. As for the economic growth of Russia and its industry, countries of the European Community would be eager to help the Russian people to live better in terms of ease, welfare, money and in terms of culture. The proper culture of Russia would be a diamond more among the stars of the European Union standard, a union of independent countries. There is not currently one European citizen who does not want the Russian-Ukrainian war to end as quickly as possible. I am well aware these wishes and intentions may seem naïve and stupid to some of the leaders of present Russia, but what I just wrote are not naïve words at all and the words are not humiliating either for any citizen of any country in the world.

The suffering of the Ukrainian people, the so far over 90,000 Ukrainian soldiers, young men in their prime age and the over 200,000 Russian soldiers who died, plus many more who have been maimed for life, has been atrocious. Why would North-Korean soldiers have to kill in Europe? I wish to have the Ukraine as soon as possible to join the other European citizens fully. I would like Russia, of which no European would not acknowledge the greatness, to live in peace and cooperation with its neighbours, with us. I do not want Russia to lose its freedom and autonomy, as much as I don't want to lose my own freedom and autonomy. Why would Europeans refuse Russian products if they were as good as our own? Have a look at European highways and the many different cars that drive on them! We know very well how competition works and we welcome it. We know too well from experience that competition is part of our European welfare.

The tsars opened the ways. The ways to start could be with true cultural exchanges, the rest would follow soon and naturally, as confidence grows. All past wars were cruel errors of history, which brought us nothing but fear, pain and misery, even if sometimes we had to wage them to confirm our freedom. Nobody in Europe threatens the freedom of the Russian Federation. Still, all wars have made less victims than the victims of past autocracies and dictators. We should not repeat the errors, not the European Union and not the Russian Federation. Peace, mutual understanding, confidence, common pride to live together in one great continent of peace and well-being would be the requisite.