



The Tsar's Doctor

Mary McGrigor

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Born in Kincardine in 1767, James Wylie became one of the most celebrated doctors in Europe and the centre of two of the most fascinating and enduring conspiracy theories in Russian history. Having performed the first tracheotomy operation to be carried out in Russia on Count Kutaisof, one of the Tsar Paul I's favourites, Wylie was made the Tsar's personal doctor. When the Tsar was assassinated in March 1801, Wylie made his first steps into infamy when he signed the death certificate, mysteriously giving apoplexy, in place of strangulation, as the cause. Wylie went on to serve the Tsar's son, Alexander I, devotedly for twenty-four years; he was with him at Tilsit, when he concluded a treaty with Napoleon and was as a field surgeon at the battles of Austerlitz, Jenna and at Borodino where he reputedly carried out 200 operations on the field. Tolstoy is thought to have made him the doctor who features in "War and Peace". Following Napoleon's defeat, Wylie accompanied Alexander on his triumphant entry into Paris and subsequently went with him to England, where the Prince Regent knighted him at the Tsar's special request. Following the Treaty of Vienna, Alexander returned to Russia before travelling to the Crimea - where he contracted Crimean fever. In spite of Wylie's protestations, the Tsar refused to take any form of medication and died soon afterwards. Once again Wylie signed the death certificate, but rumour soon spread through the Empire that the Tsar, who had become intensely religious, had escaped to live in Siberia where, some time later, he emerged as a visionary monk. In "The Tsars' Doctor", Mary McGrigor unravels the many mysteries surrounding Wylie's life and his involvement with the Romanov dynasty, using contemporary evidence and Wylie's own diaries to examine the details of his great achievements and his participation in several of the most momentous events in 19th century Russian history.

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