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High Society Dinners

Yuri Lotman, Jelena Pogosjan

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High Society Dinners offers extraordinary insight into the domestic arrangements of the Russian aristocracy, presenting nine months' worth of menus served in St Petersburg to the guests of Petr Durnovo (1835 - 1918), Adjutant-General of the Tsar's Imperial Suite, part of an important late-19th-century dynasty that included ministers and high officials. The menus themselves would be useful enough for what they reveal about culinary culture in Russia, but Yuri Lotman's commentary is invaluable, dissecting the dining rituals and the social circles of the participants. Durnovo's menus and guest lists, interspersed with extracts from family letters and the leading newspapers and journals of the day, set in context the domestic and gastronomic underpinnings of life in this group at the heart of the Russian empire. Translated by Marian Schwartz (who has worked with M. Gorbachev and translated works by Tolstoy, Bulgakov and Lermontov), the book as a whole is annotated and introduced by Darra Goldstein, Founding Editor of Gastronomica and Willcox B. and Harriet M. Adsit Professor of Russian at Williams College. The book is illustrated with paintings and photographs that give a sense of the high society milieu in mid-nineteenth-century Russia.

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